RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FREDERICK WESCHE, III

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Fred Wesche on May 10, 2001 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and Kathryn Tracy. First, I would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. Wesche, for coming in to do the interview. We would like to begin by asking you about your family. I understand that both your parents emigrated from England.

Fred Wesche: Yes, my father was one of ten children. He happened to be the oldest, and I'm the oldest of the grandchildren, as a matter-of-fact. But my grandfather, who originally came from Germany, that's where the name Wesche comes from, of course, went to work in one of the very famous hotels in Brighton, called the (Metropole?). You may have heard of it even. His name was Fred. I'm really Fred III. My father's name was Fred and I'm Fred, but both are gone now, so [I'm] just Fred. … My grandfather, I guess, immigrated to England. It had to be about the turn of the century, 1900, that would be somewhere in there, and most of the children, his children, most of them were born in England, in either Brighton or London or this vicinity. Come World War I, my grandfather still had something of a German accent and the feeling, you know, against Germans at that time was such that he decided to pull up stakes and come to America. In the meantime, however, my father, who was the oldest of the lot …[of] ten kids, my father had to get out and go to work, or, you know, help support the family, so he wanted to join the Navy. His father, my grandfather, wouldn't sign a release for him, so he signed on as a cabin boy on a Cunard White Star Line ship. One of his first trips was to Nova Scotia, Halifax, where he jumped ship along with a classmate of his, and then he, you might say, he bummed his way across Canada, all the way to Vancouver, working as a waiter, busboy, night clerk and whatnot on the Canadian Pacific Railroad and also some of the hotels in Banff, for example. Dad had a rather checkered career. He never finished school, of course, but he, among other things, he was a semi-professional boxer in Canada. He went down to San Francisco, I remember, shortly after the earthquake down there, at one point. Anyway, in the meantime, my grandfather had brought the rest of the family over and settled in Bridgeport, Connecticut. There were some friends living there, and he had, most of the other kids were born there, of course, many of the others, I should say. … Of those, of course, there are now by count, I think there were twenty-six first cousins, of which I'm the oldest. I'm the patriarch, I guess, of the Wesche clan now. Of course, it's scattered out all over the place. Last time we had a reunion … we had first cousins, second cousins and a couple of third cousins, babes in arms. So it's really expanded, mostly in the Connecticut area. Anyway, in the meantime, my mother, who was born in London, was orphaned at a very early age, both her father and mother, and she was raised by an older sister. … Again, she never finished school, but she went to work as a maid and servant and, I guess you would call it these days, a nanny for a rather wealthy English family. … At one point, being as wealthy as they were, they traveled a good deal, and they traveled to the United States and took their staff with them, I guess, including my mother and for whatever reason … they were in Bridgeport. That's where my mother and father met, in Bridgeport. Dad had come East when the war or just before the war started to meet my grandfather and the rest of the family. So they were married, I guess, in 1915, Mother and Dad were married. I was born a year later in 1916, August, and the first, I guess, that was in 1916 up to 1922, Dad, my father was, I guess, in the, I guess, they called it the Home Guard. He was actually not a citizen at that time. He has been since naturalized, of course, but Dad could see that his job as a waiter and whatnot and with a family, or I'm an only son, I was the only child, so it was just the one of us, but he was looking around for something else, and he answered an ad for the Western Electric Company for "Telephone Engineers." Well, Dad interviewed for it and lied like the dickens about his

education. He never had any education. Strangely enough, in the meantime, when I started in high school, I … [had] to teach my father some of the basic things of electricity and magnetism and things of that sort, science that he was supposed to know. I don't think that Western Electric ever knew that, and, of course, Dad spent a good … thirty years with the company and did quite well by the time he retired. Anyway, Dad was transferred first to Chicago, to the (Hawthorne?) Plant of the Western Electric Company there in Chicago, right near, we were almost in Cicero. This, by the way, was right during the middle of the Prohibition era and the gangster area of Chicago, which you've read about, I'm sure, which is quite interesting, of course. Dad tells the story that one day in the factory there, the Western Electric Company, when they were all breaking for lunch, and they used to go to a little Italian restaurant or something across the street for lunch. He said [there were] people streaming out of the factory and here comes a moving van down the street. It's opposite this very same Italian restaurant, and little ports opened on the side and they proceeded to blast the place, so everyone hit the dirt. Dad was something of a cartoonist, too, so he wrote up a cartoon, showing the "Charter Members of the Innocent Bystanders of Chicago." Well, that's just a side story. Anyway, at some later point when the Western Electric opened their plant in Kearny, they had a big plant there, Dad was transferred back to Kearny, to New Jersey, that is, and we settled in Roselle, and that's really where I grew up. I had only a couple of years schooling in [Chicago], I think only two [years], and from 1922 to 1927, we lived there. In 1927, we moved to Roselle, and then I spent the rest of my time in going through Roselle schools, Abraham Clark High School, for example, and you're talking about music. This was always one of my, what should we say, more than just a hobby, as a matter-of-fact, I almost made a business of it. There's my group right now. [Mr. Wesche shows the interviewers his business card of "Fred Wesche's Big Band: The Billion Dollar Sound."] … When I was in college here, that was during the depths of the Depression. When I came out of high school in 1933, Dad had been laid off at the Western Electric Company, with millions of other people during the Depression, and Dad went to work again as a waiter, bartender, a bartender even when Prohibition was still on, but it was a case of survival, really. … Although money had been set aside for me to go to college, that rapidly disappeared just to keep the family going, so I had to postpone college for a couple of years. I went to work as a pageboy and a tourist guide at the National Broadcasting Company's studios in New York. We had a mutual friend who … worked over there and he got me the job, really. So I spent one full year there, and the second year at NBC, National Broadcasting Company, they were good enough to allow me to do night work there and go to school during the day. I went to extension school here in … 1935. … In the meantime, of course, being a musician, I was playing in every band that would have me. As a matter-of-fact, I was quite active at …

Kathryn Tracy: What instrument did you play?

FW: Primarily, I played trumpet, French horn, and I'm a pianist of sorts. I don't really claim to be one, but …

KT: How did you start playing?

FW: Well, when we lived in Chicago, right next door to us … lived one of the musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, a violinist. He was a cripple and he gave lessons on the side, as everyone did, and I used to go to school with his son. We lived right next door to one another,

and he offered, at one point, to give me lessons. In addition to that, my folks had an apartment in Chicago, and they leased out a couple of rooms to college students that were going to Northwestern, or I have forgotten which university or whatever, and one of them was a, you might call him a "Georgia Cracker." He came from Georgia and he was a country fiddler and, you know, the kind where you played the fiddle down here, under your chin, and I used to sit there fascinated, watching him. So one Christmas, he and his roommate bought me what amounted to a toy violin, really. It was a cheap thing, I'm sure, but I took to that and more or less, and our neighbor, of course, offered to give me lessons. I think it was only fifty cents or maybe even twenty-five cents a lesson, something like that, and I took lessons for a while. Then Dad bought a decent violin, although it wasn't an expensive one, but a proper violin, and I played in what amounted to the school orchestra there, I guess. Then when we moved to New Jersey from Chicago, I was in the high school orchestra, but it wasn't much of an orchestra, plus the fact that everyone wanted to be in the band. You don't walk up and down the football field, playing the violin. So the instructor, at that time, I could read music, the instructor said, "Well, here's a coronet," [which is a] trumpet, the same thing. "Here's a trumpet," and he showed me the fingering, that I didn't know, but I could read the notes. I knew what the notes were, so that's really the only lessons I ever had on a trumpet. … Then in high school, we had a … high school dance band, so-called, and mostly for fun, but, I think the first job I played was at, (Upsala?) College, I think, and we got, I think it was a dollar and a half and all the soda pop you can drink. That was my first job. … When I came down to school, then, of course, it was a matter of living from week to week. I don't know whether you would know what it was like during the Depression years, but everybody was scratching for a nickel, believe me. So I was waiting on tables in Winants Hall there. I had a job at one of the apartment buildings over by (Buccleau?) Park. On Sunday mornings, I had to go and shake down the ashes in the furnace and, you know, little odd jobs like that, plus, of course, playing, usually Saturday nights or something like that, in almost any gin mill around New Brunswick. … I learned my trade, in effect, that way, and as a matter-of-fact …

KT: Mr. Wesche is going through his scrapbook.

FW: This is my scrapbook. … Every year, I don't know if they still do this or not, but the Queen's Players used to put on a show and our band played in the pit for it for two seasons. The first season was, I think the title of it was "Free, White, and 21." I don't know if they can get away with that today necessarily, but that was the title of the show.

KT: That was the first musical comedy at Rutgers.

FW: Yes. Well, this is the second year, I guess. Here's the band or pictures of it, but this story on *Targum*. … There we are and there's a story on it.

SI: The headline is " *? makes debut tomorrow night*."

FW: … Well, the leader of the band was a fellow by the name of Bob Grasmere, and Grasmere was in Class of '40, I think, Bob was. He was in the cast of the show, so it fell on me to do the musical direction from the pit, and here's pictures of that, for that matter. I got to put this together properly. … This is me here, fronting the pit band. This is Bob Grasmere, who was

our, normally, our leader, but on the other hand, I was also an arranger. I still do quite a bit of that. As a matter-of-fact, I have clients all over the place. I write big band arrangements and whatnot, but back then, of course, that was a big thing, swing bands and whatnot. Well, it's coming back [now]. One year, the first year, was, I guess, "Free, White, and 21." That was so successful that they put the show on the road. At least, it went to a couple of Rutgers Clubs. One was up in Paterson. Where was the other one? [It was] down in, I guess, in the Trenton area, something like that.

KT: That was 1938, right?

FW: That was '38 and '39, that's right. I was Class of '39, as a matter-of-fact. … That sustained me through college as far as, you know, almost day-to-day expenses. [I would] make a few bucks on the weekend playing in a band and whatever else I could get out of it, plus all these other things that I had to do, which got me through. … I'll tell you something, when Dr. Clothier handed me my sheepskin, when I graduated, I knew where it came from, I'll tell you. Of course, George Reynolds and I were the only two undergraduates in physics. … Did you interview George? George was the nearest thing I have ever seen to what you would call a "genius." I can remember sitting, since we were only two of us in physics, that is, undergraduates, at least, in physics, I guess it was Dr. Greenlees used to say, "Well, I'll assign something for the week. No class. If you have problems, come and see me, and Friday afternoon, we'll have a short symposium." So I know that Dr. Greenlees [in] a couple of cases put the equation up on the board to be derived or something of the sort and, you know, complicated. Of course, mathematics and physics go together pretty much, so both of us had advanced math courses. … I'd sit there and sweat over it. "Try it. No, that didn't work. Try this, try that." I get the answer after maybe an hour or an hour and a quarter. George would sit back there, look at the board and pick up a pencil, answer. … I finally said to George, "George, how in the dickens do you come by this?" He said, "Well, it occurred to me that this was the right one," a very logical explanation, and I, finally, came to the same result myself. [laughter] … This is the commencement for Class of '39. You see there was George Reynolds and myself, Bachelor of Science, of course, but have a look at this. … George made Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year, which is a little unheard of. On top of that, here's all the honorary societies and degrees and awards and whatnot. Here's … George Reynolds, senior prizes, George Reynolds appointment as Sigma Chi, appointment to Phi Beta Kappa, George Reynolds in his junior [year]. This was really an inspiration to me, and George went on to big things, as you probably know. We still maintain contact, more or less. I haven't seen George in quite a while. Of course, he's out at Princeton now. Anyway, that got me through school, and so after college, of course, I came out holding a BS degree in my hand. The Depression was still on, more or less, but war clouds were beginning to gather. … I spent about a year playing with a rather well known band at the time called (Enoch Light and the Light Brigade?). You ever heard of it? Nope. Well, Enoch died a good many years ago, so he went out of the picture. … It wasn't in the category of Glenn Miller or something like that, but it was a rather well known band, and we did a little traveling. I could see what was coming up, and so I'd always had, of course, an interest in aviation, anyway, flying and whatnot, so I enlisted in the Air Force, or it was the Army Air Corps then, and not even knowing if I'd be accepted, but I was …

KT: Before we talk about you Army Air Corps experiences, let's talk about your high school and Rutgers years in more detail. When you were in high school, besides your musical involvement, what did you do?

FW: Oh, well, I was not involved so much in sports. I was heavily involved in music. I was elected to the New Jersey State All-State Orchestra two years going. That was in '32 and '33, I guess, and both the concerts were held on Atlantic City, at that time. I was playing French horn then. A little aside, I don't know how much time you want to take on this but, one of the required pieces was something called the "Overture of 1812." I'm sure you know that, Tchaikovsky, and there is a French horn part in there, which is rather difficult. It involves what's called triple-tongue. I don't know if you know what that is, but a few students are able to do that. My instructor was, who is himself a trumpet player, taught me quite well on that, and here I was, I think I was only fifteen … and there were eight French horns in the symphony that year. None of them except me could do triple-tongue. … Here I was playing the forth part, two firsts, two seconds, two thirds and two fourths on the part. I was the youngest kid. So for that particular piece, I was graduated the first horn part. It's a little side interest. … I was also on the State Solo Contest. There were in 1932 … six French horns. However, they didn't actually grade them by a number of first, second, third or anything like that, but we were given a critique by some rather well known [French hornists]. Among others, we had … (Percy Grainger?) [and] (Edwin Franco Goldwin?), who were the adjudicators, the judges for this, and I didn't bring it with me, but I got a rather good rating out of it. That could have put me, I think, in the first percentile or something of the sort of the group. So music has always been, among other things, my major interest except, of course … [flying]. I always had a, when I was a kid, you know, follow the exploits of Charles Lindbergh and whatnot. I was only eleven years old or something like that at that time, but he was always an inspiration to me, and I was determined, sooner or later, that I was going to go into flying. Well, I got the opportunity right after college, of course, and I did, in effect, I could see what was coming. There was going to be a draft. That time they didn't call it a draft. It was called "universal military training," I think, UMT, and so I got in ahead of that. Early on, I went into flying school. Let's see, it was August of 1940. I came out of college in '39. I spent a year with (Enoch Light?) and then entered the Army Air Corps.

SI: Before we move into the war, I have another question about Rutgers.

FW: Oh, okay, go ahead.

SI: Well, just in general, why did you choose Rutgers?

FW: Well, I guess for a few reasons. First of all, as a resident I had, what was the tuition then, it was pretty cheap, you know, and secondly, living in Roselle and there were three or four of us that used to commute daily and we shared, you know, car pooled down here. It was convenient, and I knew some other people who'd been through there, who had good things to say. Among other things, to a large extent, it had to do with cost, obviously. There were, of course, other places I could have gone to, I suppose, Princeton, but that was out of my father's range, so I guess that's one of the reasons. I'm certainly not sorry I did that. So for the first year at Rutgers here, I commuted daily.

KT: What were the names of the men you commuted with?

FW: Well, one was (Sam Buckman?), who, by the way, was an instructor here in physics, Sam Buckman … and (Wendell Compton?) was another. I don't know whatever became of Wendell to tell you the truth. I don't think he never finished. You know, we're going back sixty some odd years. My memory might be a little bit hazy here, but that's all I can remember. I can't think of the others, to tell you the truth. But then, of course, in the second year, by that time, Dad had gotten his job at the Western, so the money began to flow in a little bit, and we had a kind of a family meeting and decided, "What do you want to do? There's enough here for one semester." "Just one semester? I want to go." So I moved here into Leupp Hall, 119 Leupp, right back of here. My high school marks always turned out pretty good, particularly in the sciences. I never had too much trouble with mathematics or science subjects. Economics, on the other hand, beat me a little bit … Of course, the first year in the school here, mathematics one or whatever it was at that time was really a review of everything you learned from kindergarten up to high school in mathematics, up to calculus at least. … Until we got past calculus, then I had to dig in a little bit. I never failed anything exactly. Well, I take it back. I did, later on. Of course, I spent most of my time in Van Dyke Hall. That's the physics building. I got to tell you this story, too. One of the courses we had was on x-ray crystallography, and the x-ray machine was on the second floor and … Dr. Brasefield, at that time, was head of the Physics Department, had an office directly underneath that. … Of course, when we were working with the x-ray machine, we were wearing these lead aprons and behind the shield and whatnot and so on for that. None of us thought of it, until one day, at one of the symposiums, where Dr. Brasefield was sitting, he said, "You know, I'm sure it's December. I don't know where I'm getting this sunburn from?" George and I both suddenly realized what had happened, you know. It just the floor is … transparent to x-rays, [which] go right through while Dr. Brasefield is sitting there, so he was being exposed to that. Of course, we corrected that pretty quick, but we never let on to Dr. Brasefield, funny.

KT: Who was your favorite professor?

FW: Well, Dr. Houston Peterson. Did you know him? … You've heard of him, no doubt.

KT: What did he teach?

FW: He taught philosophy and that was one of my courses, of course, and he was a sort of a freewheeling character. He was well known as a man about town as a, well, there's a word for it, a sort of a freewheeling type of character. I know that one time, I had played a job in the band late the night before, and the class was Monday morning, the next morning. I fell asleep in class, and he called on me for something and I had to get up and say, "I'm sorry, Dr. Peterson, I haven't got the answer." So he said, "Well, see me after class. It's all right. You should have stayed home. I can't give you a passing mark for it." Lots of the times, if it was nice weather, "Let's go out on the lawn" and went out right by the canon, Queens Campus there, and sit around and discuss and whatnot. He was quite a character. [I] learned a lot from him. He taught logic and philosophy. I guess, you can say he was one of my favorites. Of course, the two professors I had, mostly in the physics building were Dr. Brasefield and Dr. Greenlees, both of whom I liked very much, both of whom were very, very helpful. Of course, we got almost individual

attention since there were only two of us, and George, of course, breezed through physics. I got through it, but I did it by some hard work, I guess. As far as sports were concerned at Rutgers … the only thing I got engaged in was I was on the fencing team. … I had the unique opportunity of being on the Rutgers Fencing Team and I fought the United States champion, or Olympic, not champion necessarily, but a medallist from the United States, who was at Princeton at that time. Of course, I lost, but I did have the satisfaction of making at least one touch on him, but that was interesting, too.

SI: Your fencing coach, was he also the coach at Princeton?

FW: Oh, yes, he was. What the heck was his name now? He was Belgian. … Fencing is not the most popular sports in the world, perhaps, but … he was in demand as a coach and he was very interesting, to say the least. I know that people look at fencing, "Well, sport?" but I know at times, I'd walk home after spending time with your legs spread, and that can really wear you out. That was the extent of my sports. I was going to go out for water polo, too, and I've forgotten the reason now, but I wasn't chosen. So that's a very demanding sport, too, for that matter.

KT: When you were a student at Rutgers in 1935, did you interview before you got accepted at Rutgers?

FW: Yes, I did. I think at some point, it was Dean Marvin. It was a relatively brief interview and, of course, I had letters from my high school teachers and my record and all that, which apparently were sufficient. I came up with pretty good marks in high school and good recommendations, so I don't recall that I had any particular problems. This is my original acceptance letter.

KT: Do you want me to read it for the record?

FW: Oh, yeah, all right.

KT: … This is to Mr. Frederick Wesche. "Dear Sir, I take pleasure in informing you that you have been admitted to Rutgers University in the curriculum of mathematics and natural sciences. Information regarding registration is enclosed. I have communicated with the University Extension Division. They are forwarding your credit to me. Very truly yours, Luther H. Martin."

FW: Right. He wasn't the one who interviewed me, of course. This was the registrar, I guess and …

KT: Did you have any interaction with Dean Metzger?

FW: Yes, I have, as a matter-of-fact. At various times, I guess, some of us came in, particularly if we had problems of a sort. He was open at almost any time. Well, I shouldn't say this, but Dean Metzger was a little bit of a stiff neck. I know that … in chapel on Sundays, quite often he'd rally against the evils of Burnet Street, which was before all the, you know, the construction went on there. That used to be a pretty low place. As a matter-of-fact, a funny thing, there was a

rather notorious, I guess is the word, bar there called Jimmy's, and there were all kinds of activities went on, some of which were hardly legal, I'm sure. But one thing that did attract some of us, Jimmy's sister was a very well known singer with the Tommy Dorsey Band, and she was often there and she'd sing with the little combo there, or something of the sort, and we used to go down and listen to that primarily. But, of course, walking into this place, and with Dean Metzger's, finally, I guess, he almost put it off limits, you might say, I guess from here. But, anyway, yes, I remember Dean Metzger. Another rather notorious place, although it was legal, was the Corner Tavern, CT, everybody knows that, and I guess, it's still there, isn't it? Well, that was a gathering place, and don't forget, this was right after Prohibition. … At that time, of course, I guess, it was twenty-one year age limit, that is, for drinking, and there was a, I hate to say it, but there was a little business going on in forging, so you could go in there and have a drink. I don't mean to imply that this wasn't, I never saw drunken orgies or anything here in Rutgers, at least in my time. Unfortunately, I've seen some things in the paper over the past few years that might seem otherwise. But on the whole, I can tell you this. Some of the best years of my life was spent right here at Rutgers. I enjoyed myself. I had to work at it, and among other things, I felt when I graduated that, in effect, I'd earned it because it was hard work, not only for the academic side of it but just to pay for the expenses and things of that sort. So I've been back to reunions and whatnot. Of course … I don't get to every one. We had our, believe it or not, our fiftieth. Boy, that was back in '89 now, our fiftieth class reunion, Class of '39. Of course, the ranks are getting thinner each time, but it was really a great experience for me.

SI: Could you tell us a little more about the traditions at Rutgers when you were here as an undergraduate? Some people have told us about freshman hazing.

FW: I did not join one of the Greek fraternities, but they had an organization called the Scarlet Barbs, Barbarians, who were not Greeks, and I was a member of that. It was a somewhat informal thing and that involved a certain amount of hazing of the freshman class and whatnot. I never went through the hazing process exactly myself, that is, from the bottom. One thing that sticks in my mind, too, I was obviously in the … University band, and during the football season, of course, we were always out on the football field. In 1938, I guess it was, Rutgers played Princeton for the umpteenth time, having won the first game in 1862, was it, or thereabouts. In 1938, we beat Princeton twenty to eighteen. I was in the band. As soon as the game was over, we marched down the field, of course, but people were congregating out on the field, and someone took the football and kicked it in the air and I caught it and stuck it under my sweater. We had a Rutgers red sweater, and I finished it out. I did give it back to the athletic department. Maybe I should have kept it, I don't know. … Oh, by the way, on the banks, see this area, that was, now there's all dormitories there.

KT: Mr. Wesche is showing a picture of the River Dorms on George Street. When was this picture taken?

FW: Taken about '37, '38, somewhere in there.

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

FW: … Quite a celebration here on campus and I won't say everyone went hog wild, but everybody knew about it for sure. I'm certain of that. The big star of the game there was a fellow by the name of Bill Tranavitch. He was a class behind me. … Oh, here we are. These are pictures of the band at that game, and this was the stadium that was dedicated in that game. I can point out where I am somewhere in there, but I'm about the third row here, the French horn section. Well, I don't know if you want that or not. … Another thing I remember at Rutgers, every year, the Glee Club used to throw a weekend, usually at Buck Hill Falls in Pennsylvania, if you know where that is, and it was a weekend affair, go up on Friday and come home on Sunday night, I guess. My band, or the band I was playing with, played for the dances and, you know, banquets and luncheons and whatnot. We also took part in the ceremony or activities, of course, and, of course, nobody got any sleep. I can remember going up there. We played Friday night until late at night. Then we went out tobogganing at something like two o'clock in the morning, came home, maybe got a couple of hours sleep, got up, had breakfast and then there were some more activities. I don't remember exactly what, and, of course, Saturday afternoon, there was activities and then Saturday night a banquet. We played for that and then Sunday, of course, in the morning at least, there was church affairs and whatnot. Sunday afternoon, they had a goodbye type of thing, and so we played for that. … We got home after a weekend of no sleep but a thoroughly enjoyable time, you know. We so much enjoyed the activities and whatnot. That was another tradition. I don't know if they still carry that on …

KT: Did the Glee Club travel around to other schools?

FW: Yes, they did, but this one was only for the Glee Club itself. The others were usually by invitation from one of the Rutgers Clubs, usually in the East somewhere. I know Paterson had a rather active Rutgers Club, and, of course, there's one even in New York City, for that matter, and I think there's one down in Trenton and various other places. We didn't get necessarily to play that, but the Glee Club went down on invitations to play a concert or something or sing a concert. … By the way, this is a, there's a tobogganing [picture].

KT: Mr. Wesche is showing us a scene from Buckhill Falls where the Glee Club went and a picture of three guys on a toboggan.

SI: This might be getting off the subject, but were you in the ROTC?

FW: Well, put it this way. The band played every Tuesday afternoon for parade, the review and whatnot, and we were, the head of the University band was the warrant officer cook and he was part of the military establishment. … As such, we had … minimal what you would call basic training, I guess, very minimal. Almost all our activities were simply performing for ROTC. I know that every Tuesday, was it Tuesday afternoon, we'd be out in back of the gymnasium. It's a parking lot out there now, I guess, is it? But there was a parade ground out there and we'd sit there and play, and I can remember playing something like "(Invercardinal March?)" over and over and over and over while they marched, and then if the instructor didn't like something, he'd stop us and let's do it again. … Of course, there were regular University concerts, and I think I have pictures of the concerts in here, too, for that matter. …. There's the University band in that year. That's me right there in the front row. I was one of the student conductors that year ...

KT: This is the 1938-1939 Rutgers University Band.

FW: Right. Yeah, Charles Cook was the warrant officer, who was the military representative. Actually, he conducted the University band, too, anyway, for that matter. Is there anything more that you can think of?

SI: How did having NJC so close affect life on Rutgers?

FW: How did I find it? Well, as I remarked before, it was a very pleasant time, I thought. There was a lot of activities, a lot of good friends that I made, and I thoroughly enjoyed my stay here at Rutgers and particularly with the inspiration I had from George Reynolds, I got to tell you. George was an inspiration to me.

KT: Did you interact with women at NJC?

FW: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes, we dated over there. As a matter-of-fact, there's probably a picture of my girlfriend here, at least at that time.

KT: What was her name?

FW: (Kay McClain?) and I got a picture of her here. … Well, anyway, we did a concert from the stage of the State Theater at one point, and (Kay?) was featured on it, among other things. Kay went on to sing with (Charlie Spivak?) Orchestra. I don't know if you recall that one. Of course, I'm going back to the '30s and that's long before your time, I know. Those are rather well known bands at that time. I lost touch with Kay. I think somewhere along the line, she married into wealth. That's all I can tell you. Whatever happened to her, I don't know, but that was my big flame at one point in college. I had a different one in high school. … Is there anything else you want to know about Rutgers here now?

SI: Do you remember around 1938 about a professor at NJC who allegedly was a Nazi? Did you ever hear of that, the Bergel-Hauptmann case?

FW: No, I don't recall that. No, I don't. Speaking of NJC, they had a pay telephone, and being, of course, as most of us were scratching … for nickels, you know, if you wanted a date over at NJC, you make an arrangement with the girl, "I'm going to call you at exactly seven minutes after seven" or something like that. So you dial the number, let it ring once. That meant, "I'll pick you up at so and so." If you let it ring twice, it meant, "I can't make it tonight." We got a way of communicating without, you know, you get your nickel back when you didn't complete the call. … One of the guys even had a more sophisticated system. He took two pieces of plywood about the thickness of a nickel from a cigar box or something, and he drilled holes in it the size of a nickel and then nailed them together. Then during the winter, you fill these little spaces with water, put it on the windowsill and it would freeze, and so what you really had was an ice nickel and you could stick that in the machine. Of course, that didn't last long, because the telephone company, when they came to collect the money, saw nothing but a bunch of water, wondering what happened, so they put the freeze on that pretty quick. Our housemother was a Mrs. Stone, who was a kindly old lady. … Of course, cooking was supposed to be prohibited in

the dormitories at that time. … What we used to do was a few of us would go down to the local supermarket, and you could buy cans of stuff where the label had come off, or you could buy two-day or three-day-old loaf of bread or something like that, and you'd get a can, literally for a nickel. You didn't know what it was, because the label had come off, and the bread, of course, was somewhat stale, but you could dip it in water or spray it with water, anything to get by. It was a struggle, and, of course, we'd sit there and cook. One of the guys brought a little electric hot plate and we'd cook up a meal for ourselves, and Mrs. Stone would come around sniffing, and say, "If I didn't know better, I thought one of you boys might be cooking." "Oh, no, Mrs. Stone." Well, we weren't out to break the rules. It was literally a case of getting through the day. That was just a side story ...

KT: Did you have a roommate?

FW: Yes, I did. Well, I had a couple. My first roommate was Gene (Mopet?), who was the class, I guess, he was class behind me, Class of '40, and then I had a graduate student. That was Bill James for one year. I'm sorry, Gene (Mopet?) was two years running and then Bill James was one of my other roommates. I lost complete touch with Bill James. I don't know whatever happened to him. Gene, I think, inherited, his father had an air-conditioning business in, I think, in Union City or West New York or somewhere up in that area, and I haven't seen or heard [from him]. I think the last I saw Gene was at our reunion in 1989 …

SI: Let's start moving into the war.

FW: After college, I think, I mentioned to you, I spent a year playing with the band, on and off, at least, I should say. (Enoch Light?) had a two week gig at the Robert (Treat?) Hotel in Newark at that time. A friend of mine, or a somewhat friend of mine, who played with him regularly, was out sick and recommended me to fill in for him. But I played a few times after that with Enoch and with a few other bands around, but I could see what was going to happen. When I enlisted in the Air Force, I wasn't even sure I'd make it, but I did and I was accepted. … They sent me to, first of all, to the primary training school in Albany, Georgia, or as they pronounce it down there, it's not Albany, it's "Albeny." Albany, Georgia, where they just had opened a contract flight school, the military had, so we had civilian instructors. Oh, they did have a tactical officer, military officer, attached, but all the instructors and the staff and everything were all civilians. It was written on as (Star Aerotech?), and they were doing pilot training by contract all over the country. So I think there were forty-five of us in the original class. There were forty-five cadets, flying cadets, so-called, in the original class.

KT: Mr. Wesche is showing to us a picture from the newspaper in Albany, Georgia. It says, "First graduates at (Star Aerotech?)." What year is this?

FW: This would have been 1940. … Of the forty-five, only, almost half washed out. That was not uncommon. That was quite common, as a matter-of-fact, that they'd wash out a lot of people. Funny thing, when I was sworn in, they swore me into the Air Force in the Newark Federal Building, the recruiting office there. They lined us all up, take your oath and then the doctor went down, you know, checking your heart, came to the fellow standing next to me who fainted right away. They took him aside and said, "Son, you better find some other profession

for this." But they sent me to Albany, Georgia, and we were the first class there and we opened the place, as a matter-of-fact, and all it was, it was just a little pasture. It was the so-called Albany Municipal Airport, but it was not much more than a cow pasture at that time, and I think there were about something like fifteen PT-17s, which is a training type airplane. As a matter-of-fact, here it is, and that's me standing by it. Now, the instructors were all, as I said, civilians, and the man who's my instructor was a man by the name of Zorns, Z-O-R-N-S, I remember that, and he was a little bit of a show-off perhaps, but the first time we went up he said, "I'm gonna ring you out." I said, "What's that mean?" He said, "First of all, buckle your seat belt, be sure," and he went through a bunch of maneuvers, rolls, loops and everything. Now, I'd been in an airplane before, but only as a passenger, you know, but this was a little harsh intro to that and he used to enjoy doing this. There was a local cemetery in Albany, in which there was a central monument and the radiating roads off it were the grave sites and whatnot. He used to take it right up over the top of that monument and do a spin, so all you're doing is spinning around like that, looking straight down at this monument and the graveyard. He took delight in doing this. However, I was, I think the second one in my class to solo. You got so much … dual training in the very basics of landing and taking off and making turns and climbing and all that, and at the end of that time, if he thought you were ready for it, he never gave you any warning. … I was one day out with him, and we shot a few landings and whatnot. He said, "Pull over at the end of the field there." So we got out of the cockpit. Of course, I'm on the front cockpit and he's in the rear, and he takes his white scarf. It was one of these white scarf, goggles, helmet, because it was an open cockpit, you know. It wasn't a closed cockpit. … He took the white scarf and tied it to one of the struts, streaming out behind. "What's that for?" He said, "That lets everybody else know, that you're, you know, give you a wide berth, since you're on your solo." So I went up. He said, "Just take it around the field and land again." So I did. I got around, and, of course, landing an airplane is a little technique that you learn, not exactly difficult, but it has to be learned. … The idea is to bring the airplane, and … a few feet off the ground, stall it. Stalling means that the airplane looses lift, and then, of course, drops only a few feet onto the ground and stays there. But if you're going too fast, it hits the ground, but it's still flying, and then you're going to be doing this, a "Chinese landing." … During earlier on … I was having trouble getting the tail down. I'd wait too long and the wheels hit first and then we get this "bumpity bump" like that, and he used some, and I won't use the same language, but he said, "For Christ's sake, don't sit … Do something." So the next time around, I was determined I was going to get the tail down. We came in over the field, maybe twenty-five or thirty feet, which was a little bit high, and I pulled back the stick and, of course, the airplane stalled, "whop, whop." It hit hard and I turned around, looked at him, and Zorn would, usually, wore his goggles like this, many did, and I looked around, his goggles were down here. He said, "Okay, just take it around again." But we worked it out. It was just funny that's all. … I was the second one, and, of course, every time anyone soloed, the rest of the class, it was a tradition, you threw him in the swimming pool, so I had my dousing in the swimming pool. Did I show you my logbook? Here I am. The very first flight was September 16, 1940, Albany, Georgia, and most of these were just simple maneuvers, plus being able to recover from unusual attitudes of the airplane, including … spins and stalls and whatnot that you might get into trouble. You had to know how to get out of that. The airplane was a forgiving airplane. It was very good as far as that went, and, of course, it was built that way. It's a trainer, you know. So we went through all of that, including a certain amount of acrobatics. … Then we went onto a regular Air Corps or Army Air Corps flight school at … Gunter Field in Montgomery, Alabama, and we were the first

class there, also. This is when you first started to get into the military aspects of flying an airplane, and part of that involves such things as gunnery, formation practice, so-called "mock combat" and other things that would have to do with the military use of an airplane. They didn't have to teach us how to fly anymore. It's now how to use the airplane as a weapon, and that lasted for six weeks and that was quite rigorous training. I mean, they were trying to emulate the West Point strictness with cadets. You got up at, what was it, five-thirty in the morning, and fifteen minutes later, you're out in front of your barracks doing the calisthenics, and then you had another fifteen minutes to shave and make your bed and get dressed and then in formation. Then you march into the mess hall, and as a cadet, of course, you sat there at the mess hall like this and you ate square meals. You know what that means? You pick up your fork, that's a square meal. These were little things that, you know, typical of a West Pointer, I might probably [say]. We were cadets, what can I say? … By the way, among other things, when we first got there, the barracks were not complete, so they put us up in the local prison ... We occupied regular jail cells. Of course, we weren't locked in, I don't mean that, but it was simply, only for a few days until they finished the barracks, [so] we had a place to sleep and whatever. That was interesting. Then after six weeks, no, almost eight weeks of that, then we went on to advanced flight training. A few got washed out, I might add, along the line. Not very many and most of them got washed out in primary training, but we went to Barksdale Field in Shreveport, Louisiana, and in this case, we were flying the AT-6, which was a more advanced trainer, and then you really got into military maneuvers. We're shooting at ground targets. We had a session down, we flew down to Eglin Field off the Gulf and did gunnery off the Gulf, shooting at a towed target. … No one wanted to do the tow target, because they had a long enough cable, I thought with this, looked like a wind sock, and every ship had a painted nose bullets, particular color, and after the session was over, they'd come back, drop the target and you could go and see how many of your hits were made. Not very many, I might add. Now, something … happened there at Eglin Field, or rather on the way home. We went down in formation from Barksdale Field, making one stop at New Orleans and then to Eglin Field. That's in Florida, not too far from Tallahassee, and then we did our gunnery and … I think we were there for three days. Then we came back through again, the same route, back to Barksdale, in formation. I think, there were something like eighteen airplanes, or thereabouts. They had two cadets in each airplane, except the lead airplane had a second lieutenant, rated pilot. None of us were rated yet. We left (Lakeside?) Airport at New Orleans bound for Barksdale, Shreveport. At the same time, there was a very strong weather front in between. Well, none of us had any instrument training, or any training in severe weather, and the second lieutenant got court-martialed on this. I don't know what his penalty was, but he led the whole eighteen ships into this, figuring, he was trying to climb over it. Well, he never got over it, and at the last minute, he decided to turn around. But when you have eighteen airplanes spread out and you try to make a turn, on skates, you know, when you have the guy on the end, gets whipped around, the guy in the middle is not moving at all. Well, that's what happens here and we were about half-way down, I think, the echelon, and all of a sudden, we were into clouds and lightning, rain, hail and very severe turbulence, and both of us were scared out of our wits. Neither of us had been on a situation like that. I was flying from the rear seat and the rear seat only had basic instruments and at the front seat was the one fully instrumented, and my associate in the front seat was a fellow by the name of Leonard (Gindrick?). … We milled around in that for about ten minutes, or so. We didn't know which way was up, down, or sideways, and we lost the rest of the formation. What I was afraid of was [we] were going to run into one another, because we went into it in formation, you know, and we

weren't that far apart. Well, actually, what happened was this. … We finally broke out at a very low altitude, still raining and whatnot, over a farmer's field. We didn't know it at that time, but we were only a few miles … east of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where we could have landed at the airport, but this situation we were in was such that we decided to get it on the ground as fast as we could. So we made a couple of passes at this field to size it up. The field was all muddy and everything else so we decided to land with wheels up. You do that, a belly landing, better than the gear down, because the gear sticks on the ground, the airplane turns over. Otherwise, it just skids along on its belly. So we finally landed it, or actually Leonard did, near the edge of the field, skidded all the way across the field, across a ditch and on into the woods. One wing almost snapped off … when it hit the trees and the airplane came to a stop. All is quiet, except they have what's called (claxon?) warning horn. It warns you if the gear is not down and locked, which it wasn't, and the horn is blatting away there. … About that time, here comes a farmer, comes running up with his son. I think he expected to pull a couple of dead bodies, but both of us were in good shape ... So he took us into his cabin nearby and he sent his son down the line, [because] he didn't have a telephone, [so] he sent his son down to the general store to call the police, or state police, or something. In the meantime, he reaches under the table and pulls out a jug, and poured us out a stiff drink of what they called a "Louisiana Lightning." That put us on our feet. On the other hand, when the police showed up, both of us sure smelled of this, and I think that the cop thought, "Oh, boy, here we got a couple of drunken cadets." But it wasn't that, and so we got back … to Barksdale Field. This was just before graduation from school. We … had to attend the court-martial of the second lieutenant. They absolved the students, you know, we were only students. We're not rated pilots. We were depending on him to do all of this and he fell down on it, but two of my buddies didn't make it. This one was a barracksmate of mine and they lost control in all of this, and the airplane went straight in and they discovered it sometime later and found the two bodies in it. So later on we had to go to the funeral for that one … There's the story on Leonard and myself, highlighted …

KT: Mr. Wesche is showing us a newspaper clipping of the incident. I'll read the highlighted section. "Cadet Leonard (Gindrick?) pilot of plane which made a forced landing in a field about two miles from the crash said that he believed the dead fliers lost all sense of direction in thick weather. He and Cadet Fred Wesche, twenty-four, of Roselle, New Jersey were unhurt in the forced landing, though their plane was practically demolished." Mr. Wesche before showed us pictures of the plane after the emergency landing in the field.

FW: So there's the picture of the airplane. The airplane was not salvageable. They just junked it.

SI: How many more accidents were there during training?

FW: That's the only one. I'll put it this way, I've had others as a result of military action, enemy action by the military, not exactly a crash but forced landings, and I'll explain that a little later maybe. But, at the moment, we're still in the cadet stage, I suppose. At any rate, it was only a few days after this that we had our graduation. … Anyway, that's when you get your wings and your second lieutenant's commission, of course. That was on April 25, 1941, and I wanted to be a so-called pursuit, when now they call it fighter pilot. Pursuit, at that time, was the title used, but the evaluating board thought I did better as a team member. I worked better with a

team, rather than all on my own, so I was assigned to the Second Bomb Group at Langley Field, Virginia. … This is, mind you, before Pearl Harbor. This is in April of '41, and here I am, a brand new second lieutenant, and it took me a while to get organized, because among other things, they had just broken off a cadre from the Second Bomb Group to form the Forty-third Group, which strangely enough, I joined at some later point. They moved that to Westover Field. We stayed in Langley Field, and I was trained in a B-17, the original B-17. As matter-of fact, I have the distinction of having, except for the prototype, which crashed, I have the distinction of having flown every model B-17 that they ever made. We had the YB-17, which is the service model. They only made eighteen of those. We had one B-17A. Then they went into production on the B-17B. I flew many of those, the C and the D, and then when the war came, and they started really full production on the E model. That's when I went overseas with B-17E. … Then later on the B-17F, for that matter, we had. When I came home, I went to a training base where I was squadron commander there and we even had the G and H models. So it was interesting to follow the course of the development of the B-17. But anyway, I was assigned to the Second Group, and since they had a very skeleton crew, the squadron commander, who was a captain, I guess, lined everybody up. He said, "Well, we need an engineering officer, we need an intelligence officer, we need an adjutant, we need A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4." … He said, "Anybody here have an engineering or science experience? Okay, you're the engineering officer." … I rushed home and went back to my barracks and got out the manuals [to] see what I was supposed to do. The next day, I went down to the hangar and introduced myself to the crew chief, who was a master sergeant with stripes up to here, you know. He was an old timer; he'd been around. … Up on the hangar wall, they have a chart for each specific airplane, showing its status or any parts that have to be replaced or any work that has to be done. If they put a red *x* in there, that means the airplane is out of service, in the meantime. A red dash merely means that it can be fixed; it's flyable. So I looked at this, [and] there was a couple there with a couple of red *x*. I went to the master sergeant and said, "Sergeant, those are supposed to be on the line." He said, "Lieutenant, can we step in the office a minute?" So he took me in the office and, in effect, because this here is a guy, he had to be fifty some odd years old. He'd been around in the military all his life. I know here am I a brand new second lieutenant. He, in effect, put his arm around me and said, "Look, let me handle things for a while." [laughter] … I was smart enough to take that advice because, believe me, in the military, it's the noncoms that are your life-blood. … We flew B-17s. We had B-25s; I flew that. The B-18, that was an ancient airplane if I ever saw one. … Then just before Pearl Harbor, the Second Bomb Group was to be moved up to Newfoundland in trade, that's a British, or rather part of the UK, in trade for fifty over-aged destroyers that we were going to give the British. They would allow us to use their bases in, not only in Newfoundland but in Bermuda, British West Indies, and, you know, things like that, and we were going to be based up there. So we sent out our footlockers, all your personal belongings, and … the air contingent was going to be flown out of Langley Field to a place called Argentia, in Newfoundland, which would be our base. We would fly up there on the morning of December the 7th, 1941. Now my footlocker had already gone up there … On the 6th of December, we flew from Langley Field to New York, to Mitchell Field, and there we were briefed by Canadian Air Force people, because Canada was at war and we were not yet, and we got signals and whatnot. … Take off being one o'clock tomorrow afternoon, I went to visit some friends that lived nearby, and we were sitting having dinner and had the radio on, and all of a sudden here comes the news, "Report of Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor." I didn't even quite know where Pearl Harbor was, to tell you the truth. … Then shortly after, it said, "All military

personnel report to your base." So we rushed back to Mitchell Field, and the place was in an uproar. I mean, it was pandemonium, to say the least, and orders were changed. We were supposed to go up to Canada. It said, "No, meet in the base here." Then we met in the base here. They said, "Your orders, now you're going out to Washington State to a place called Yakima, Washington and to run patrol." I think they expected that the Japanese fleet was going to sail into San Francisco Bay, or Puget Sound, or something, so we went out there. All I had was the clothes on my back. Everything else is on its way to Newfoundland. Of course, they shipped some other stuff to us, again. But we ran patrols off the coast of Washington, all the way from Washington to Mexico, the West Coast. We were going some 500 miles to sea and then you go straight out west 500 miles, then south for … twenty or thirty miles, then 500 miles back. Well, we made a couple of those, saw nothing, except the … North Pacific Ocean is pretty rough place in the winter time. But one of the missions we went out on, we went out in the afternoon, and by the time we started back, it was getting dark. Of course, I had a navigator and all that, and there was more a less a blackout, obviously for good reason. … At one point, since you're going through all kinds of weather fronts with changing weather directions, I said to the navigator, "Well, give me a fix," or, "Let me know where we are." I waited and waited. I said, "You got something?" He said, "You know, I can't understand it. I can't get anything on the radio." He was trying to get a radio fix. He couldn't get a shot with the sextant, because it was overcast. So I went down to the radio compartment and we went from one end of the radio to the other, nothing, static, until we heard a Mexican station, so I knew the radio was working. Finally, the one and only time I ever picked up the microphone and, in effect, SOS, it's not the word you use, it's called PAM, which means, "I need priority handling." … I repeated that several times, because we weren't sure. We were going into the coast, and here's the Cascade Mountains that go up. So in the meantime, my navigator found by the reflection of some lights or whatever, the mouth of the Columbia River, which separates Oregon and Washington State. So here we were, flying up the river at about 200 feet above the river …

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

FW: Well, to finish the story quickly. We started flying up the Columbia River, which winds around, and the navigator sitting there, you know, trying to, it's dark and we had the landing lights on, but even on low altitude, 200 feet, it doesn't show up much. But what I was afraid of [were] the mountains … on both sides of the Columbia River valley, gorge, or whatever you call it, so you had to stay pretty close to it. If we got up above that, we were completely in clouds and we would be totally lost. … Just about that time, I got a call from, I guess, it was Second Interceptor Command in California, asking what was our problem. So I said, "Wow, we have to get on the ground soon and we're without navigation aids." In effect, the guy said, "Don't you know there's a war going on?" or words to that effect. I said, "Meet me outside in back of the hangar and we'll take care of that one." So we finally found Portland, but just before we got to Portland, there's a bridge across the river, and we hadn't noticed that until suddenly the navigator said, "Oh, oh. There's a bridge up ahead." And sure enough the landing lights showed that we went under the bridge. We missed it but landed at Portland airport, and, of course, then I explained the circumstances, of course. That was one interesting sidelight of this thing. But then, that was in, I can tell you exactly when that was ...

SI: Did you have a permanent crew at this point?

FW: Well, I had a permanent crew, yes. But on the other hand, there were times when the crew went into a regular pool. I was fortunate in when I finally did get overseas, I stayed with my own crew almost the whole time, except I lost one man. He was killed and another was sent home with malaria and a third one suffered wounds and then they sent him home, so I had some replacements along the way, too. That comes later, however. Anyway, in this case, after we got back to Portland, they put us on a train back to Langley Field. We left our airplane there, went back to Langley Field, and for the next couple of months, we were doing largely anti-submarine patrol, up and down the East Coast. As you know … German submarines were sitting there and opened fire two hours or so after the declaration of war, and they were active. Of course, it was difficult to find them, because they'd stay underwater during the day and come up only at night to charge batteries. … They often met, had a sort of a meeting where the admirals or the captains would meet and plan the next day's activities, so they were on the surface generally at night. But you couldn't find them at night, until we got notice one time. They sent us up to Boston, to Boston airport, and they had a bunch of professors or engineers come out from MIT and install something in the airplane, which was then called (radex?). We know it now as radar. It was a sort of a primitive type then. This is early '42 and we were given some instructions on it, not so much the pilot, but the navigator and the bombardier were the ones given the training on it, and then we started using it at night. … Sure enough, right almost on the very first night we used it, we were running into German subs sitting on the surface, made attacks. … I think I may have been the second to have actually attacked a German submarine. We were instructed to make positive identification of it, which is a little difficult at night. So what you did, if spotted this on radar or (radex?), whatever you want to call it, run it down and drop a flare and see what you see and then make a 360, come right back, and the second time, if it is enemy, drop the bomb. Now, we were supposed to also have a sheet called "disposition of friendly forces," so you were supposed to know where all our friendly ships were, and if there was a ship not in that area, that became suspect immediately. So we bombed it. I can't say what the results were, because we made another pass, dropped another flare, came right again. All that was left was a swirl, where if he was smart, which I'm sure he was, he dove to get away from us. I don't know the disposition of it. … We also … acted to a large extent as a rescue, for that matter. In many cases, of course, we'd get out on patrol. We'd get an SOS from some ship, a tanker, for example, that had been torpedoed and was on fire and we'd run it down. [There was] not much we could do except drop a life raft to the men, radio reports, you know, back to the base, and, of course, they'd have someone out there immediately. There was a magazine called *Colliers*. Do you remember that magazine, *Colliers* magazine? The cover of the magazine was a picture that my crew took of a burning tanker, and that became quite a thing, too. So that lasted until May, and it looked to me as though this was what I was going to be stuck with, anti-submarine patrol and whatever. One night … I had gone out on a date with some girl in the *Newport News* or something, and when I came back to the barracks, there was a note on my door. … This is something like one o'clock in the morning, "Call the base commander immediately upon your return." "Oh, boy, what did I do now?" So I went up, and sure enough, the lights were on in operations office up there. The base commander was a colonel and I walked in the door, you know, expecting to be chewed out for something or other, I didn't know what. But it turns out, he said, "Okay, listen. Here's a list of available crewmembers. Pick yourself a crew and tomorrow morning, you're gonna be on your way to Sacramento, California." "Oh, boy." So, as it turned out, I didn't go for a couple of days, but I picked my crew, mostly people I had been

flying with anyway, and that was the crew I stuck with and I think there are pictures in here for that matter.

KT: Can name your crewmembers?

FW: They are listed here. Yes, I can. … I can show it to you because here they are.

KT: Mr. Wesche is showing us the picture of his crew and the names are Sergeant (?), Lieutenant (?), Lieutenant Wesche, Lieutenant (McMullen?), Corporal Rosengarden, Sargeant First Class (?), PFC (?), Corporal (?) and Sargeant (Kennedy?).

FW: That was the crew that I picked, and, sure enough … two days later, I guess it was, by the time I cleared the base and got all the other orders and whatnot, they changed them a couple of times, they had a charter, I think it was Pennsylvania Central Airlines, at that time, to fly us out to California. There were two crews, myself and one other [that] went out to Sacramento, which was the air depot in Sacramento, where they were modifying the B-17s that had come off the assembly line up in Boeing, up in Seattle. They'd fly them down to Sacramento and they did some modifications on them, according to the latest reports from the battle areas and whatnot, and we went over from there to Hamilton Field in San Rafael, just north of San Francisco. We had one shakedown run, you know, check out the engines and other things that needed adjusting. While we were in Sacramento, Sergeant (Kennedy?) who was my engineer, flight engineer, said, "We're missing some tools and whatnot. We're going to need them." So he did a little what is referred to as "moonlight requisitioning." Do you know what that means? Well, in effect, what it was, he went through the factory and snagged tools, special tools, stuffed them in his pocket, walked out the door, you know. This is called "moonlight requisitioning." This is highly illegal, of course. On the other hand, when we finally did get overseas, my crew was the only one that had some of these special tools, you know, for instruments and fine adjustments and whatnot. Of course, there's a regular tool kit that goes with the airplane, but mostly they're wrenches and the typical things of that sort. Anyway, we had the one shakedown cruise. … Then what they did, they stripped my, they just left me with … four crewmembers, myself, co-pilot, navigator and engineer. The other crew went by Air Transport Command in a regular transport airplane. Reason, because they loaded my airplane up with all kinds of equipment, wheel assemblies, spare parts all over the place, and I got worried about what's referred to as weights and balances. You know, you got to be careful where all this weight goes. So when we finally did get off the ground at Hamilton Field bound for Hawaii, in this case, we barely made it off the field. I mean, the airplane was so heavy, and, normally, the airplane cruises about at 180 miles an hour. I think we were pooping along at about 140 or something like that, which is enough to keep it in the air, but a thirteen and a half hour trip …

KT: Mr. Wesche is looking in his logbook.

FW: From Hamilton Field to Honolulu, to Hickam Field in Honolulu, thirteen hours and fifty-five minutes in the air. Now that was, among other things, that was beyond, normally, at that time, the range of a B-17. … In the bomb bay, they had tanks that would fit into the bomb bay. I think each carried 400 gallons of fuel and you could pipe that into the regular fuel tanks on the

airplane. … Back then, you have to remember that Pacific air routes were hardly developed at that time. I admit between San Francisco, or Los Angeles, whatever, and Hawaii, Pan American had been flying that fairly regularly before the war, and we were relieved half way across to pass Pan Am, so we figured, "Well, if they are on course, so are we." … We landed at Hickam Field and we were assigned to the Second Provisional Bomb Group there, and we were, originally, my orders out of Hickam Field sent me supposedly to Java in the West Indies, Netherlands East Indies then, now it's Indonesia, but that's where a good part of the war was going on. The Japanese invaded the place, as you know. But my orders were countermanded and I was held there in Hawaii. We didn't know why. This is in May of '42. So we did some patrols and other duties around Hickam Field. … Then one night, again, in the middle of the night, the charge of quarters comes through the barracks and said, "Everybody over to the base theater for briefing." "Briefing? What briefing?" So we all congregated in there. Then we learned of the breaking Battle of Midway. … I don't know if you know the history of that, but the naval intelligence was well aware of the forthcoming Battle of Midway, but, obviously, the fact that we knew … would be secret. We didn't want them to know that we knew, so it wasn't passed onto us until the last minute. So the next morning, early, we were out on the line there waiting, supposedly to be bombed up, and my bombardier supervised the loading of bombs and whatnot. … Meanwhile, we got some briefing on navigation and other items on the way to Midway. Eventually, here comes a bomb carrier truck and starts unloading "bombs." My bombardier says, "What the heck is that? They're coast artillery shells." Some of them had been stored up in the hills of Hawaii since World War I, and they didn't have the ordnance up there, the proper ordnance for us. He said, "What do we do with coast artillery shells? These are not bombs." "So, well, the sheet metal shop is going to cut out the tail fins and attach them. We will give you a few hours to go out and drop a couple for the ballistics." Normally, when you bomb, of course, you have ballistics tables all made up for specific bomb load and whatnot. So we put them in there and went out and dropped a few. I think we dropped five, of which three of them were duds, didn't go off anyway. So we came back and said, "This is impossible." So he said, "Well, unload it." … In the meantime, they had a munitions ship on its way out to Midway, so we went on out to Midway. This was a day after the major attack against the field. On the other hand, on the way out, quite a long trip to Midway from Hawaii, and we're sitting there just cruising along, all by ourselves and suddenly, the navigator said, "Hey, there's somebody in a rubber boat down there." … We looked and there was some poor Marine pilot or something floating around in a rubber life raft, so we went down and took a look at him and took his position and everything and radioed that. I couldn't help him, you know. We didn't have anything to help him with. I can't land the airplane on the water. I understood later, they did pick him up, but he was one of the casualties, or rather, not casualty, he lived, of course. When we got to Midway, the place was still in a shambles. I mean, they had the major Japanese attack on the island itself the day before, and among other things, I remember this. … Midway Island has no freshwater of its own. All the water is distilled seawater. They have a distillery there for that purpose to provide fresh water. But they hit the distillery, or put it out of action for a while, so water was strictly rationed. So guys said, "What do we do for shower or shaving and whatnot?" "There's the ocean." Have you ever tried to shave in salt water? It's not very pleasant. On the other hand, they also hit the PX, the post exchange, and you could walk around the island and pick up cigars, cigarettes, candy. Of course, some of them were melted or soaked with rain or whatnot. … The airplanes were parked in a so-called revetment. Now, a revetment is a horseshoe-shaped bunker. The airplane would go in the open end, of course, and the surrounding horseshoe protects it from

shrapnel or anything, you know, against machinegun fire, or anything of the sort. So we parked the airplane there, awaiting instructions and whatnot, and for a while, things were dull. There was no imminent attack, apparently, on the island that we could tell, and so most of us were sitting around. We had to be within a few feet of the airplane all the time and ready to go. So we put a cot down under the wing of the airplane. By the way, Midway Island in the summertime, this is in June, is hotter than blazes, and so most of us, just all you wore was just a pair of shorts and shoes, period. … We … put a cot underneath one of the wings in the shade and played poker or whatever, and all of a sudden, in the middle of this, one time, and I think a couple of the guys were in the lagoon taking a bath, if you call it that, and the air raid siren went off. Well, when the horn goes off, it's like a big Greyhound bus horn, "blat," you know, three blasts. You look towards the center of the island. They have a small control tower just made of logs, and they run up on a flagpole, I don't know what they're made of, but balls of some material or other. Some are white and some are red. If they ran up one white ball, it means a possible attack, that enemy has been sighted 200 miles away or something. Two white balls, now it's a definite attack and the attack is within fifty miles. If they ran up a red ball, attack is imminent or is in progress even, see. So in this case, they skipped a couple of them, and they ran the red ball up right away. So the rule is you get in the airplane and go. You know, they don't want airplanes caught on the ground for obvious reasons. So here we are, we all jumped in the airplane, and a couple of the guys right out of the lagoon, with nothing but a pair of shoes on, believe me. … The airplane had been sitting in that hot sun and then to touch the metal was, you ever try touching the car body in a hot sun? It was murder. So we got the engine started, got it out of the revetment and took off, and, of course, we had procedure for what to do in these cases. [We] proceeded to a certain point. The idea was to get it away from the airport or the air base, which turns out this was all a false alarm. Someone made the improper approach to the airport. So it was all over, but it was funny. I look back … most of us were sitting. I couldn't sit on the seat because it was too hot, so you sat halfway hunched up over the wheel, trying to fly the airplane. I looked back, you could see back through the bomb bay into the waist of the airplane, and all I could see were naked bodies back there. Those were some of the funny things that happened. Anyway, I have to tell you this. We … [had] three missions out of Midway …

KT: Mr. Weshche is looking through his logbook.

FW: … CM, combat mission number one, number two and number three and so on. … One of them, the weather was bad, and what they were trying, B-17s were really never meant for bombing naval targets. Naval targets, if you're trying to bomb it from any altitude, by the time you drop the bomb, he can turn right out of the path of the bomb. As a matter-of-fact, we often believed that the skipper of a ship, Japanese ship, will sit there, watching you in binoculars, and the minute he saw the bombs start falling, he'd call for full right rudder, full left rudder, and it was frustrating to see. You were watching to see the wake of the ship go like that and the bombs falling where he would have been if he had kept a straight course. Well, I can't tell which way he's going to turn. The answer to that is two-fold. Either you do it from low altitude, where the bomb only takes a few seconds to fall, or else you dive bomb it, and a B-17 is not a dive-bomber. But in this case, what they were after, there was one Japanese ship called, I think it was called the *Mogami*. … One of the Japanese ships had been crippled by submarine action and was limping away, and it was … beginning to be out of range of the Navy TBFs or whatever they were using, so they were relying on … twelve B-17s on Midway. I was one of them, of course,

and they were trying to use us to catch this before he got away, in effect. We would have the range to do it, but we went out looking for it, milled around. It turns out later that we got an improper position report for it, to begin with. It was a little off. Secondly, the weather was not that great to find it through clouds and whatnot. The Pacific Ocean is a pretty big place, so we never did find this cruiser. So on the way back, the leader of this group, I think we had six airplanes in a group, if I remember, said, "Rather than go all the way back with a full load of bombs, now we will bomb targets of opportunity," and there were plenty of those. We passed up smaller ships that we might have bombed, but a cruiser is a prize. I mean, a corvette is not much, you know, small ship. "All right, fine." So not long after that, he said, "Here's our target" over the radio, of course. I looked down and my navigator said, "There's a submarine down there." "Okay, so there's a submarine. We're supposed to bomb it." However, my navigator did, I think, say at that time, he said, "I don't have it on my disposition list." Well, our leader bombed it. We all bombed on him, and, of course, he did what a good submariner would do, he dived, got out of the way, so we went on back to Midway. We went in for debriefing and I went in, of course, with all the other crews and the intelligence officer, "Well, what was the action?" … The leader, who outranked me, he was a major, Major Sweeney, he says, "Oh, yeah. We hit a Japanese destroyer and it sank in twenty seconds." "What? That was no destroyer. It was a submarine, in the first place, see." "Oh, no, no. That was a destroyer." … I said, "No. If you take my briefing, we bombed a submarine." "Well, fine." At some later point, we got back to Hawaii, and by this time, the battle was over anyway. There was one more thing I'll tell you about in a second. But when we got back to Hawaii, after a few days, here comes the United States Submarine (*Grayling*?) limping into port, and the sailors onboard were ready to go over to Hickam Field and clean up on the Air Force, because they've been bomb by a flight of six B-17s. Well, it's a story of how mixed and chaotic things can get, of course, in the beginning. I meant to tell you one thing. This is a little gory. I hope you don't misunderstand. When we first got to Midway, as I said, the place was in a mess, and all they had done in order to clear the runway was just bulldozed debris off the runway, push it off to the side, so that they could use the runway. One of the things they pushed off to the side was a Japanese Zero. That was the first time I'd seen close up of a Japanese fighter, and the pilot was still in it. They didn't use parachutes. They were not supposed to come back alive, see, and it had sat there in the hot sun for a couple of days, and you can imagine what it smelled like, among other things. But by this time, when thing quieted down, they had a Marine patrol, I guess, detachment, come out to get the body out and bury it or whatever, and I recall this. Here's another tough old Marine sergeant or whatever. When they got the body out, he said to one of the guys, dragging the body out, he says, "See if he's got any gold in his teeth." With that I almost, you know, it's not pleasant. What we did notice, too, was the fact that here's the airplane rolled up into a ball pretty near. You could still see the instrument panel, and here on the instrument panel, here's an altimeter, altitude, Fairchild Instrument Corporation, Rochester, New York. The aluminum skin were peeled back, ALCOA, you know what that stands for, Aluminum Corporation of America. This, of course, pre-dates Pearl Harbor, I'm sure, but that was a little ironic to say the least. Well, anyway, we got back to Hawaii and we were only there a couple of days, and then my orders came through, not to Java, because in the meantime that whole Indonesian theater had folded. The Japanese just overran the place. We were ordered to Australia and a number of stops on the way down, of course, stops at Christmas Island, Palmyra, Fiji, Noumea, and finally to Brisbane, Australia, which is the first place we hit. … We were only there for a couple of days, and they sent us out into the really into the Outback of Australia to a place called Charleville, and I looked

on the map. I couldn't see it on the map, so I asked the operations officer, "Where the heck is Charleville?" He said, "Oh, it's easy to find. You just pick up the railroad track and follow the railroad track out about 250 miles. When you get to the end of it, that's Charleville." So which is what we did, down right on the deck following this railroad track to one of these big sheep ranches, I guess, primarily is what it was. … We were there for a couple of days, because they were expecting we'd have to go up to Darwin, which is on the other side of Australia, because the Japanese were threatening there, too. But as it turns out, they sent us back, and this time we arrived in a little place called Mareeba, out in Queensland, almost in the jungle area, and we were there until almost Christmas time. I was attached to the Nineteenth Bomb Group, at that time, which is the same group that had come out of the Philippine Islands with B-17s. It was MacArthur's Air Force, such as it was, and they reconstituted that with what remained of the provisional groups that we went over with and so on and put it altogether again. What we would do from Mareeba in Queensland, we'd fly up to New Guinea, Port Moresby, and we'd get there just before dark usually, land, have something to eat. Then you go get some sleep and about something like midnight or one o'clock in the morning, you were called out for briefing, and the briefing was generally to one of the biggest targets there … a place called Rabaul. You ever heard of that? As a matter-of-fact, I have a picture of that, that *Life* magazine took and there's one picture of Rabaul. This is the harbor of Rabaul. This is the town of Rabaul. Here's one of the airports. This is (Lakanai?). There's another what you call (Bunakanai?) [or] (Votacanou) airport, but that's not what I was looking for. These were pictures taken by *Life*, a *Life* photographer, during one our missions. These are all Japanese ships in the harbor. This is a beautiful deep-water harbor, and my bombs, I can point them out. Yes, my bombs were against this ship right here. Now, that's a large transport ship. Here's something interesting. In the middle of the harbor, there's a large rock, there it is right there. We referred to it as "the beehive," because it was shaped like one, but it was very often mistaken for a ship and often got bombed as a result, particularly at night when it's a little hard to identify. The Japanese, knowing that, put many American prisoners of war there, put them in barracks, or whatever, on that little tiny island, and then they could claim we're bombing our own people, which we were. … By the way, these are three active volcanoes … and a couple of dormant volcanoes surrounding this. From time to time, these erupted, not during the time I was there, but they have had some eruptions on occasions. These are dormant. Anyway, I forget where I was now. … We would go from Mareeba in Queensland up to Port Moresby, have something to eat and grab a few hours sleep, and then usually, very early in the morning, have briefing, and take off was usually somewhere around two o'clock in the morning or thereabouts, which timed you to arrive over Rabaul just about as it was getting light. In other words, light enough to see a target. Unfortunately, of course, Rabaul was far enough away [that] we couldn't have fighter escort. They didn't have the range to go with us. They could take us part of the way, but here was the target, and, believe me, this was heavily defended. So you'd run your mission over Rabaul …

KT: Mr. Weshche is looking at his logbook.

FW: … CM stands for combat mission. The others are administrative or for maintenance purposes and other reasons, but these are the actual missions flown. … As you see, most of the time, well, this one was against the north coast of New Guinea, where there was quite a battle went on with the Thirty-second Division. Lae also was one of the major targets, but most of the time these targets were against Rabaul, Rabaul, Rabaul, one after the other. … We were in the

situation of, about that time, of course, the decision had been made in the powers that be to beat Germany first, if you remember, so, in effect, the Pacific War, at least where we were, was degenerated into nothing much more than a holding war. We were not getting replacements. I can remember, ships would come back sometimes with holes in them, shot up, and they'd take tin cans out of the mess hall, beat them flat and rivet them or solder them to … patch up the holes in the airplane, so they were really scavenging. At one point, we were supporting … the Marines' landing in Guadalcanal, which was … the South Pacific. We were the Southwest Pacific Theater under MacArthur. South Pacific was a Navy operation under Admiral Halsey, but we supported their action, nevertheless. I'd been over the Solomons a few times, too, and we also supported it by Rabaul, [which] was a rear base for the Japanese, from which they mounted both. They didn't make the distinction between Southwest and South Pacific. In other words, to them, it was all one theater. So we supported the Solomons action by attacking their rearward bases, where they would mount all the counterattacks and whatnot. We did a lot of our bombing in Rabaul at night for the very reason that I mentioned, the Japanese never did develop an efficient night fighter. So all we had to contend with at night was searchlights and antiaircraft fire. On the other hand, because it was at night, you had to go in at a relatively low altitude, since visibility at night, of course, is not that great, so the lower you were, the more vulnerable you became, of course. We had several daylight missions, however, and on one of them, my bombardier was wounded. My navigator, they're both in the nose, as you know, the bombardier and navigator, my navigator calls and said, "Hey, Andy has been hit," (Bernie Anderson?). So as soon as we got clear of the target and away from enemy fighters and whatnot, I went down into the nose and Andy was lying on the floor, and he had two holes to his jacket. I thought it was two bullets. Actually, it was the same bullet [that] went in and out. It didn't penetrate the pleural cavity, but it did take out the scapula, the shoulder blade that you have back there. It tore ligaments out on that and he was in considerable pain, of course, and so we made him comfortable, gave him a shot of morphine, which we carried in the airplane, and got him home. My father took it and I don't know what happened to it, but I have a bullet that came up through the nose to the firewall in front of me, in the pilot's seat, and I felt a bump on the rudder pedal. Later on, when I looked, there's a spent bullet below the rudder pedals, and it never got through that. … I never got any wounds, or anything of the kind, but anyway, we lost Andy on that one. Francis (Sikkenger?), my navigator, was sent home with malaria. He had that for years afterwards. It kept recurring on him. Francis died a few years ago. … Then Sergeant Kennedy, of all things, was killed in automobile accident on the ground back in Mareeba. He was going into town in the back of a truck and the truck hit a rock, or something, and he was thrown off the truck and hit his head on a rock, or whatever. Well, where was I? … Now we come to the meat of things, pretty much, one that I got really involved in. There's a picture of me in the cockpit. I had hair then. There's a good many stories in here. On January 5th of 1943, I was on one of what most of us thought was a suicide mission. First of all, I want to call your attention to this one. This is a story being written by, she's writing a book on it, the daughter of one my squadronmates overseas, (Chick Olsen?). (Janice Olsen?) is doing a history of the Forty-third Bomb Group, which when they sent the Nineteenth Bomb Group home, the rest of us were attached to the Forty-third, and here is a resume of just one month. Just read the first few paragraphs. … That's absolutely interesting.

KT: "January 1943. New Year's Day started out much like any other New Year's Day for the boys at Seven Mile Strip, Port Moresby …" [copy from article]

FW: I bought a cheap coronet when I was on leave in Sydney at one point. I used to play it sometimes. … This is just a one-month history of the Forty-third Group. She is in the process of writing some more. Is this January the 5th?

KT: It says January 4th in the logbook.

FW: Yeah, okay. This is a formation of six airplanes, and I was one of them, as you can see. There's my crew. The Japanese were getting ready to mount a large expeditionary force to relieve their garrisons on New Guinea, and Brigadier General Walker, who was the commanding general of the Fifth Bomber Command there, was flying in the lead ship, and I was flying on his wing. When this was announced [that] it was going to be done in broad daylight at noontime, as a matter-of-fact, at low altitude, something like 5000 feet over the most heavily defended target in the Pacific almost … most of us went away shaking our heads. Many of us believed that we wouldn't come back from it …

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

FW: … Granted the importance of the target was very important, shall we say. No question about that. … You saw the picture there, of all those ships in the harbor and that means a major offensive somewhere along the line ...

KT: This picture was of Rabaul from *Life* magazine.

FW: … Anyway, we went over the target and all of us got attacked. I was shot up. Nobody was injured, fortunately, but the airplane was kind of banged up a little bit. We had to break formation over the target to bomb individually and then we were supposed to form up immediately after crossing the target, but no sooner had we dropped our bombs and my tail gunner says, "Hey, there's somebody in trouble behind us." So we made a turn and looked back and here was an airplane, one of our airplanes, going down, smoking and on fire, not necessarily fire, but smoke anyway, and headed down and obviously headed for a cloud bank with the whole cloud of fighters on top of him. There must have been about fifteen or twenty fighters. Of course, they gang up on a cripple, you know, polish that one off with no trouble, but he disappeared into a cloud bank and we never saw him again. It turns out it was the general. General Walker was onboard. He got the Congressional Medal of Honor for that, I might add. The rest of us came up with the Air Medal, which I'm not complaining about. … He actually had a pilot, but he was the overall air commander for the operation. He was conducting it from the astrodome, just behind the pilot's seat, where he could look out with a microphone and directing what should be done and so on. … Anyway, it wasn't until we got back that I discovered who it was, and then another airplane, one of the other airplanes, went down also, but they recovered him finally. He got partway home, and, I guess, they bailed out and into rubber rafts and they picked him up later. … The results of the raid, I'm not sure what it was, whether it was successful or not, but it certainly was a most hair-raising experience you want to go through. I mean, suddenly, you look ahead of you and see about fifteen or twenty airplanes all shooting at you at the same time, you see. We were credited with having at least partial credit with having shot down a couple of airplanes. On the other hand, when you're in formation like that, it's hard

to say, everybody shooting at the same airplane, and who actually shot it down. So sometimes, you get double reports. In other words, it sounds like there's more airplanes shot down than actually were. There was many a case that two guys thought they shot down the different airplanes [and] it was the same airplane. But, anyway, we got back all right. … Incidentally, since then, just recently for that matter, I got a call from the general's son, who has a business up in Connecticut, and he wanted to interview me, too. So I'm going up there, I don't know when, but he was, of course, interested in what his father did, and I guess I was one of the only eyewitnesses to the whole thing. Well, be that as it may, he won the Congressional Medal for that. The rest of us got the Air Medal, and, of course, he did all the planning and whatnot, too, even though many of us thought it was foolhardy, to tell you the truth. Well, in the meantime, there were raids here and there to Rabaul, and then in March, late March of 1943, came the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. Are you familiar with that? … This was the second attempt the Japanese made to reinforce their garrison on New Guinea, which is south of Rabaul. Fortunately, by that time, we had had good intelligence. The island of New Britain, where Rabaul is, was loaded with Australian coast-watchers. They were ex-planters or plantation owners, who fled back into the hills, shall we say, and with radio equipment kept reporting on Japanese movements and whatnot. So it happens, however, that I wound up in the hospital, or just shortly before that, with dengue fever, so I did not get to participate in the battle itself. But immediately after that, oh, by the way, that was an overwhelming victory for us. None of the ships got ashore and almost, I think there were fifteen ships involved. Most of them were transports, loaded with infantrymen, soldiers, who mostly drowned. I suppose some of them might have gotten ashore, but they were of no use to anybody. … However, not long after that, right after the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, I was out on patrol one day, and … my radio operator came up with a message that he supposedly got from our radio net. It said, "Here's some instructions." It ordered me to report or proceed to a certain longitude and latitude and investigate the possible convoy. But my radio operator, (Earl Rosengarden?) said, "You know, I know the guy that's at the other end of the telegraph key and that's not his," they call it his "fist." Operating the telegraph key is almost like handwriting, I think. He said, "This is a little suspicious." So I said, "Use the authenticator code." What that means, you come out with a grid, it looks like a crossword puzzle with no black squares on it, filled with letters and it changes everyday. … To authenticate something, you take any two letters in a diagonal and when they reply to that, they're supposed to use the two opposite diagonal. This authenticates the message, see, and so I said, "Authenticate it." So he did. He came back and said, "They keep sending back the same authenticator that I sent." "Ah, something's wrong here," so we ignored it, fortunately. … Of course, when we got back, I rushed up to intelligence service and said, "What's going on?" "We never went such a message." So they were no dummies either. They would have drawn me into some sort of a hornet's nest, I'm sure. Okay, I'll start to tell you the other one. This is the one that you'll see all the publicity I got. One night, we were out on what's called "armed reconnaissance," and this is right after the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. The Japanese failed to bring a convoy in, so what they resorted to, instead of using transports, they'd load a bunch of stuff on a destroyer, which is a fast ship, can go up to forty knots or better, and they'd run it through at night down to New Guinea, drop the stuff overboard on rafts and hope it floats into the shore and then get out of there before daylight, so they wouldn't get caught in daylight. However, we were out on patrol. Our intelligence had wind of this somewhat, and we were off the north coast of New Guinea, a place called (Finch Haven?), which isn't far from Lae, and a dark night, the moon was partly out, I think, it was a half moon or

something, and my bombardier said, "Hey, there's a ship down there." We looked again, sure enough, there's a destroyer. You could see it by the reflected path of the moonlight. It's about the only way you could describe it. So, all right, we made a circle and dropped a flare. It wasn't one. There were four … and here we are all alone. We were armed so we made two passes on one of the destroyers, dropped on it, and the first one, I think we had a near miss, but the second one, we hit it on the stern, I know that. … About that time, when we hit it, all of a sudden all hell broke loose, and I think you saw the picture, maybe in here, of what we suffered from it. By the way, this is the story that was on the news article. That's what they did to my airplane.

KT: Mr. Wesche is showing us pictures of the damage to his aircraft.

FW: This is a 40-mm antiaircraft shell that they hit us with, because they were flying all around, but only one hit us, fortunately, but it came in right next to the cockpit … This is the wing and the fuselage goes back this way. This is right where the wing joins the fuselage, and, of course, we didn't know what … the full extent of the damage was, but a few inches almost farther to the front and I might have taken out the main wing spar, in which case the wing would have come off, so we were fortunate. The guy made a double exposure here on that one, but this is all the damage to the airplane. … Of course, this is not only me. It's the story of a number of people, of course. In this attack, when the shell went off … my ears were ringing. I couldn't hardly hear anything. Neither of us could. The sound from that explosion is tremendous, to say the least, and at the same time, I turned around and looked. Right behind me is the top turret gunner, with the top turret, and here he was laying crumpled at the foot of the turret, so I had to wait till we got clear of the enemy. Of course, that was the first item, and I rushed back there and we got a couple of us to get him out of there and he was peppered with shrapnel. He didn't receive mortal wounds, or anything of the kind, but it put him in the hospital. They'd send him home eventually. That was Don (Rare?). Well, anyway, we all received the Silver Medal for this operation, because the next day, we, unfortunately, we were without radio, it knocked our radio out, among other things. The whole electrical system went out, as a matter-of-fact, and we landed at one of our forward bases … When we got on the ground, of course, the first thing I did was get the message to intelligence, so they sent a recon out early the next morning before light almost and found a lot of debris where we had claimed we bombed the ship, so we were credited with having probably sunk it, and I do believe we did, to tell you the truth, and, of course, they made a big fuss over that. Oh, this is another one of ours. There's a Jap ship dead on the water, had been hit. I can't say, I don't remember which one of these was my bomb.

KT: Mr. Wesche is showing us a picture of the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper and a picture of a Japanese destroyer.

FW: As you can see, it's been hit because there's an oil slick. There's a couple of them, as a matter-of-fact, and no ship's master would be caught dead on the water while he is being bombed, obviously not. But here's the, there are a lot of stories on this, that we were all alone on this. … My dad kept this book up pretty much and … some of these [were] given to me out of the Sydney newspapers in Australia, too, for that matter. … It was probably the worst combat mission I had, considering everything, because we didn't even know what the condition of the airplane was when I landed it. We had to crank the landing gear down by hand. We had no flaps, no electrical system, couldn't even reverse the propellers and whatnot to stop, couldn't

even use the brakes. We had to use, well, they had an emergency accumulator for the brakes, which did get it to stop eventually, but we got through by the skin of our teeth. … There was one other that I was going to mention to you, and I'm trying to remember what it was now. Oh, another one of these missions is earlier than this. It was a night mission to Rabaul and we got back to the base about, it must have been about four o'clock in the morning. It was still dark. What we used to do coming back to the base, instead of going directly to the base, we went to … a little point of land … ten miles up from the landing field. You circle that and they had a monitor there who would check each airplane as it went by, and then you proceed into the airport and land. So we made the circle and getting ready to land and it turns out, the monitor said, "How many airplanes went out to Rabaul last night?" He said, "Nine." He said, "Well, ten came back." "So who's the tenth?" We had what's called an intruder, and this is not uncommon. It happened in Germany, too, many times. They'd latch onto a formation. Even sometimes they'd have captured one of our airplanes and repainted it or redid it and it looked exactly like the other B-17s, just latch on and then start shooting up or do whatever they had to do. So in this case, they had us go back to Hunt's Point and circle while they try to figure this thing out. So many of us started to say, "Jeez, we can't hang around here too long. We're running out of fuel." So eventually, I don't think I was the first one, someone landed ahead of me, eventually, but to land we had to have some lights on the runway. That's another thing, too. If you have an intruder, you don't line up the target for him like a Christmas tree. So when it was my turn, we started in on the approach. We were still maybe, oh, half a mile off the end of the runway, on the final approach, and I look ahead and all of a sudden, boom, boom, boom, down the runway, bomb bursts. Well, actually, it was a little bit off the runway. He wasn't that accurate but the whole idea was that, sure enough, there was an intruder. In the meantime, I guess, they had sent up some fighters from one of the other air bases right nearby, but the guy got away, I'm told. They never did find him again. But we went ahead and landed. We had to land way over to one side of the runway to avoid running into one of the bomb craters and whatnot. That was a little hair-raising, too, to say the least. Oh, well. So I can't think of anything else. These are the major experiences. Of course, there were a whole bunch of other missions and whatnot that we flew. By the way, here are the pictures, too, of one of the crews that ran out of fuel. … They landed on the beach not far down the line and *Life* magazine did a story on them, too. … Oh, by the way, this is the crew I had overseas, when I had some replacements. … Oh, this is interesting. These were taken from a Japanese soldier. This is worthless paper money. It was printed by the Japanese. The Japanese government agreed to pay and it was to be used as invasion money. This one would have been used in Hawaii, I guess … They did a story on the Newark paper on me. Oh, by the way, there's a Rutgers magazine story, one on me there. I don't know what year that came out, but it had to be in the middle of the war, I think. That was out of the alumni magazine.

SI: When did you get your nickname Whitey?

FW: Oh, when I was a kid, my hair was quite blond. I don't know where they picked that. That was only when I was way back in grammar school, I think, that I was called Whitey. It never stuck. I've just been Fred to everybody else. Oh, here we are. This is the one I was looking for. This is the crew that went down on the beach. This is one of my squadronmates, too, and … he landed it safely on the beach. You couldn't get off again. So what we had to do, we went and

dropped steel matting. You've probably seen pictures of it somewhere, and then they finally got it off the ground, back to Moresby. This is all in friendly territory.

KT: Is this from *Life* magazine?

FW: *Life* magazine, that's right. As a matter-of-fact, so he tells me, I have no way to confirm it, one way or the other, but every time we went, of course, he was there for about a week or more, and we were continually flying over the place and we usually dropped down and, you know, wave, if nothing else, and say "hello." … (Ray Halsey?) was the pilot on this one, this is me, that was our airplane, you know, that buzzed them. I don't know if that's true or not but it is interesting. There's all my cousins [in another picture]; there were several of them.

KT: Where did your cousins serve?

FW: Okay, one of them was a POW in Germany. That's Chris and the others were in the Marines, Navy, you got it, you know, so all served. I have twenty-six first cousins. Of course, not all of them were old enough to have been in the war anyway. Well, that about does it for combat. I can't think of anything else that you might like to know about.

SI: Once you got into combat, did you find that your training held up?

FW: Oh, well, let's put it this way. As far as training was concerned, of course. Training on the airplane, I was well qualified on the airplane. As a matter-of-fact, when I went overseas, I was already a first lieutenant, and I made my first lieutenancy in November of '41. … Training, yes, I did plenty of that on the airplane. Now, the fact is, of course, that this is early on in the war, and there was still a great deal to be learned. Some of the tactics that were being used were vintage 1918, I suppose. No, that's probably not quite true, but we had to learn as we went along. As a matter-of-fact, it was my squadron also that invented, I guess you call it invented, the idea of skip bombing. You ever heard of that expression? All right, I'll tell you what it is. As you know, when you drop a bomb, the bomb doesn't go like this. The bomb, of course, goes like that. If you drop it from a low enough altitude, it's still in a flat position when it hits the water, and it will skip along the top of the water like you skip a stone. You've seen that. What we were doing was skip bombing. Particularly, transports were very vulnerable to that, because they're slow, and we do it at 200 miles an hour and about a one hundred feet altitude, drop your bomb and let it skip into the side of the ship and then explode. For that matter, most warships, destroyers, cruisers and certainly a battleship are very heavily armored, particularly the magazine portion. The magazine on a battleship is some, I don't know, two feet of steel surrounds it. … If you drop directly on top of the ship, often all it does is superficial damage to the top. You want to sink it. So usually what we did was put time fuses on it, usually a quarter to a half second delay, to give the bomb time enough to penetrate the deck and explode in the guts of the ship, which is where you want it to go off. On the other hand, of course, if you came in from the side, you've got the advantage of not having quite the same armor plate they usually put on top, so skip bombing was highly successful, very successful. … Of course, eventually, the Japanese developed as usual, anytime there's a new tactic comes up, your enemy will find out some way of mollifying it, or whatever. … Yes, one more item. One other memorable mission, and I got the second Air Medal for this I think. The Japanese were being so roughly handled at Rabaul

and in the Solomons later on in 1943, or in the middle of '43, that they started to pull back their fleet into a, further back, into a place called Kavieng. … This is the island of New Guinea. This small banana shaped one here is New Britain, and this one up here is New Ireland and then right of the tip, there's an island called Kavieng, K-A-V-I-E-N-G, and the Japanese were beginning to base their forces there. Well, we had one mission … a night mission again. … We knew that they had some warships there. We didn't think anything was bigger than a light cruiser perhaps, but I forget how many of us went out, but there was two of us, myself and one other pilot, (Art Curren?) by name, who teamed up on what turned out to be a Japanese heavy cruiser and we both hit it. He bombed it from skip bombing at almost on the deck. I bombed it from a fairly low altitude but he drew the fire for me to come in at medium altitude, and we both hit it and both turned away, and shortly afterwards the whole thing erupted on a huge ball of fire. I thought we sank it. It turned out later … it wasn't sunk, but the Japanese captain beached it, and it was out of action for several months anyway while they repaired it or whatever. I don't know if they ever did or if it ever got back in action, but both of us got the Air Medal for that one, too. … Funny thing, it's only during daylight hours that I ever had fighter attacks. The Japanese never did develop a proper night fighter and fortunately for us. We used all kinds of strange things. For example, in Rabaul sometimes, if you got caught in the searchlights over Rabaul and … tried to look down, you were blinded. I mean, those are powerful searchlights, particularly when we were down at relatively low altitude. So you either had to make another pass out of the searchlights or almost bomb blindly on the last information you had. Well, some of the guys, figured, they took along a whole case of toilet tissue, toilet paper. When we got over the target, they started throwing these things out and here comes weaving columns of toilet paper down and the searchlights all over the place, wondering what the hell it was. Another thing that we invented was the use of what were called "Daisy Cutter Bombs." … What we did was take an ordinary 500 pound demolition bomb and take some … concrete reinforcing rods, attach it to the bomb, and with an extension fuse that stuck out maybe five or six feet in front of the bomb and then wrap the whole thing with barbed wire and drop it, which meant that the bomb, instead of hitting the ground and going off, it would explode some six, seven, eight feet in the air, which has the effect of spreading the shrapnel. It does a lot more damage. You hit it on the ground, most of the force is directed upwards. So we referred to these as Daisy Cutters. … Of course, we used to listen to Tokyo Radio and we were called Barbarians, all the names in the deck. By the way, my name was mentioned several times. That was a source of wonderment to us. We go out on a mission, ran the mission, and then the next morning, we listen to Radio Tokyo. This was not Tokyo Rose. It was another guy, I forgot his name now, what he called himself, but he spoke with a pure American accent. I'm sure he was educated in UCLA or whatever, and he would make jokes, crack jokes and say, "Yeah, well, are you guys from the Sixty-fourth Squadron around last night, weren't you? However, So and So didn't come back, did he? And the next time be sure that So and So," you know, he'd mention names and say, "By the way, the clock in the officers' club is ten minutes slow." Where does this come from? He had one thing on there where he'd tell us, this Japanese announcer tells the story that FDR calls in Popeye the Sailor Man and gives Popeye … something to do over in the Pacific. He is to go out and try and find the USS *Saratoga*. Well, now, we all knew that the *Saratoga* had been very badly hit in the Battle of the Coral Sea, earlier. However, they had fixed it and it was still afloat. The Japanese thought they sank it. So [in] this little skit that he comes out with, Popeye … goes over to the South Pacific looking for the USS *Saratoga*, and someone said, "Well, you're gonna see Davy Jones." Okay, so he goes down to the bottom of the sea to Davy Jones. He used to say,

"*Saratoga*, there it is over sitting on the bottom, sunk." Well, of course, we all knew that it wasn't sunk, so they made mistakes, too. They also very often tried to foment a little homesickness and nostalgia and whatnot. I don't know how they got these, but he'd play like a disc jockey, record, you know, current records, say, "Here's the latest by Harry James," … and, "Here's his latest release," and so on. "Yeah, imagine that, you could be dancing to Harry James and his orchestra. On the other hand, probably your wife is out there with some 4-F," you know, anything to agitate [the American servicemen]. Of course, we all knew it was strictly propaganda. I hope we did, but it was a little disconcerting. On the other hand, he'd play all the latest recordings. We listened to it and whatnot. The one they didn't play that got a big play over here was Spike Jones' recording of something called ("In The Fuhrer's Face"?). You ever heard that record? It's a parody, of course, and obviously against both Tojo and Hitler. Well, that obviously didn't get played, but we used to listen to that all the time. We'd get the latest news from home sometimes. … Sending letters home was something of a chore, because they all got censored, of course, and censorship was not merely blocking out something. They'd actually cut it out with a razor blade. I don't know why, because this Japanese announcer would almost read off the roster of our squadron. He knew everybody there. My name was mentioned several times, so was about everybody else's. So they certainly knew who we were, where we were, perhaps. Of course, obviously, latest missions would be obviously secret or something like that. Well, I can't think of anything else in combat. Now what else?

SI: What did you do on your own time, in between missions?

FW: Well, a large part of the time was spent, believe it or not, in the sack, getting some sleep. Generally, you're working during the night half the time, and the rest of the time, there were all kinds of squadron duties to be done. I was, among other things, the transportation officer for the squadron, and we had to dig up a maintenance pit and ramp for vehicles and whatnot. Maintenance, of course, is a separate section for the airplanes. Oh, I got to tell you one story, too. … When we were at Mareeba, in Queensland, they carved an airport, a runway at least, right out of the jungle, pretty near, and the easiest way to put it down was, it was crushed coral, just run a steam roller up and down, and then crush it down and that was the runway. However, coral and some of the pumice that comes from volcanoes is very abrasive and the dust gets up into the air and gets into the engines and can raise havoc with the engines. So every time an airplane took off, there's a cloud of dust behind it and a large part of it is an abrasive material. So someone said, "Well, what we need to do is tar the runway or do something." Well, right nearby they had a sugar mill. Sugar cane is one of the products in that area, and here they had the molasses or whatever it was that was left over from the sugar refinery. Someone said, "Why don't you use that." So sure enough they came and they poured molasses, believe it or not, up and down the runway to hold down the dust. Well, it held down the dust all right, but it attracted every fly and mosquito and bugs in the whole Australia, which raised havoc with us. So they finally decided to tar it over. Anyway, that was a funny thing.

KT: What kind of interaction did you have with the Australians?

FW: Oh, okay. Well, we had very good relationship. Now, in Australia, most of the young men in Australia were in the First and Second Army Brigades over in North Africa. As a matter-of-fact, well, she was my fiancée at that time, but her brother, who became my brother-in-law, lost

his life in Singapore. … So there was, I guess, you would call it a dearth of young eligible men in Australia. You're either too young or too old, you've heard that song, I'm sure, and that's probably true. But people went overboard to be friendly and helpful. We'd go to, for example, local churches would run things for us and have us come over. I have to tell you a story. This is slightly off-color, not exactly, but I'll tell you the story. We had to get used to the Australian accent a little bit and what they used to call a ("Dinky Die"?) accent, and I remember going to one church affair, or something, and they had a little get-together for the American troops and whatnot. … One of the soldiers went over to one of the young ladies sitting there and said, "Would you like to dance?" … She said, "Oh, I'm all knocked up. Why don't you go ask my sister?" In American, that means something quite different. To them "knocked up" meant, "I'm tired," you know, "I'm just beat a little bit," but it had an entirely different connotation out here. … They were very friendly. … Of course, among other things, I met my future wife there. Maureen, that's my wife, was working for the American Navy. She was a switchboard operator in the Navy office there in Sydney, and, at noontime, she and a couple of her co-workers, I guess, used to go down to the local restaurant or something. … One of my buddies up in New Guinea, when I went down on leave to Sydney, gave me a letter to give, he didn't want it to go through censors, so he asked me if I'd hand deliver it to this girlfriend of his in Sydney. … We agreed to meet and it happened to have been one of Maureen's, you know, co-workers there in the Navy Department, and they all ate together at the restaurant. So I went down to meet them and gave, of course, the girl the letter, and I got talking to my wife, my future wife, and set up a date, you know, "What are you doing tonight?" At first, I didn't get very far. I don't know, but I called. I was a little insistent, and, sure enough, we went out a few times, and then every time I got back to Sydney, and several times we made hospital flights, for example, and we'd stay overnight at least, so we met quite often and corresponded all the time, for that matter. … It was almost a year later, I guess, when I was scheduled to come home. She said, "You're gonna be leaving in," whatever. Then I decided, "Gee, I don't know if I want to go." So I called my wife, or rather, I beg your pardon, I sent a telegram, I said, "Will you marry me?" When I got home, there was an answer, a "yes" telegram. So that was our courtship, such as it was, and, of course, she couldn't come immediately, because there was no transport. Transport was strictly for military or military married personnel. We weren't married at that time, so she couldn't come immediately, but when I came out of the military, I went directly with Eastern Airlines and I had pass privileges, so I went over there on a pass and we were married over there in 1946. We'd be celebrating our fifty-fifth wedding anniversary this coming October. She was a flaming redhead. … We've had a good life together, believe me. She had a little … problems. In Australia, different denominations of money are different sizes. A ten-pound note or say a five-pound note is bigger than a one-pound note, and ten-pound note is bigger than that. They're different sizes. All ours are the same with just the number on it, that's all. I know on a couple of cases, she was ready to give the girl what amounted to a twenty-dollar bill, thinking it was [less]. Well, you know, it was fun. … When I came back from overseas, I was posted to Walla Walla, Washington, and I was appointed as squadron commander.

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

FW: We were assigned to training crews, most of who were going to England. We weren't teaching them to fly. It was the same story again, teaching them military tactics and whatnot. … Then I became deputy group commander of the Eighty-eighth Bomb Group, and about that time,

the group was moved to Avon Park, Florida, the whole group, and I led the air contingent down there. I think we had eighty-five airplanes ... We made one stop in Tucson, Arizona and then over to Florida. … I did this deliberately. We flew out of our way into the Grand Canyon, eighty-five airplanes down below the rim. Of course, the Grand Canyon is tremendously wide. I don't know if you have ever been there or not, but somebody had movies of this. I never was able to find it. I would love to have had it, because it created a little stir in the paper, I know, a couple of days later. Here's eighty-five B-17s right down inside the Canyon. Well, that was fun. But the Eighty-eighth Bomb Group was, of course, again, their unit in Florida was training crews for the European Theater. … I was, just as the war ended, I was scheduled to take over a squadron of B-29s and I would have been posted to Grand Island, Nebraska. I went to College Station, Texas for indoctrination to this, and while we were there, this was going to last a week, while we were there, the war ended, and they chopped everything off right then and there. So I went back to Avon Park, Florida and then it was merely a case of signing out. I was marking time for a bit, the last job I had, was believe it or not, recruiting officer in the Elizabeth Post Office. … I made lieutenant colonel about that time. … I never intended, really, a full career out of the military, so I got out, and then I went straight to Eastern Airlines. … Of course, I was only one of thousands that came out of the military pilot training, but I had pretty good qualifications. I had a lot of time, something over 2,000 hours on a heavy aircraft, and so I spent the next thirty-one years with Eastern Airlines.

KT: Did you use the GI Bill?

FW: Yes, I did. Well, put it this way, I used the GI Bill only to come up with my civilian certificates. The military, of course, didn't issue the civilian tickets. They had what was called the "green card," which is a military card, but this is what I was after. That's my civilian license, in other words. It specifies the aircraft that I'm qualified to fly. You know what they all are? Martin 202, Martin 404, L-49, the Lockheed 1049 series, the Constellation series, Lockheed 188 is the turbo jet, Boeing 727, that was the first full jet I ever flew, DC-6, DC-7, DC-8, DC-4.

KT: Did you go to school to learn how to fly commercial planes?

FW: Well, no, not exactly. It was a case of every new airplane that you flew you had to through a course on, anyway. It didn't matter. They weren't teaching me to fly. I was fully experienced on flight. It was merely the case of each specific airplane. The way it works is this, for example, when I went through the training for the Lockheed 1011, that's a jumbo jet, I went down to, I did this in Forth Worth at one of the training schools down there, Eastern Airlines. So first of all, you go through three weeks of ground school, eight hours a day, five days a week, in which you go through all the systems and procedures on that specific airplane, and since I had never been in a jet before, I had to learn a little bit about the jet engine, too, which was the case for a good many of us, for that matter. At the end of ground school, you are interviewed by an FAA inspector, who sits down with the manual, the flight manual, and gives you an oral examination. It lasts about two hours. He queries you on just everything about the airplane that you should know, and if he's satisfied that you passed it, then he signs that part of it off. Then you take that back and you go through, we had a week in the simulator. You know what a simulator is? It's a gadget, when you climb inside, it looks like the inside of a cockpit, and it's mounted on levers and whatnot that maneuver the airplane as you maneuver it. In front of you is a television set,

which projects what you might see. … The advantage of the simulator is that you can go through a procedure, instructor sitting beside you, of course, and if it doesn't work right, you can back it up and do it all over again. You can't quite do that in the airplane out in the runway. [We would] go through this, mostly connected with emergency procedures, of course, go through the whole bit, and it even includes such things as going over to the local, one of the local, on the Biscayne Bay marinas, I guess it was, and we went through a whole procedure on the use of the life raft and, you know, other things that we needed to know in the airplane. One of the guys in the airplane, when we're getting the rubber raft, how to inflate, how to get on and so on and … the instructor said, "Now you're the captain of this life raft." One guy said, "That's fine, as a captain, can I perform a marriage?" He said, "Well, I guess so." And one of the other guys … says, "I'm not interested in that. Can you perform a divorce?" But we go through a simulator for, I guess, it was almost a couple of weeks and through the whole rigmarole, and then you sit again with an FAA inspector, who goes through it with you in the simulator, go through all the procedures. He signs that off and then you finally wind up in the airplane itself. That's about a two or three-hour session in the airplane with the flight examiner again, and in this case, you actually go out and perform it really with the airplane. There's some things you can't do, for example, in the simulator. You can simulate cutting an engine on take off, but you don't dare do that on a, boy, it's strictly an emergency procedure. … Down in Miami where we did this, they even had an airport in the middle of the Everglades, which is solely for training for all the airlines, and we did most of our work there. A lot of it was such things as instrument procedures, training, landings, maneuvers. Of course, nowadays, you've gotten to the point where you can punch a button says, "auto land," and you sit there [and] watch the airplane land itself. It's completely automated now.

KT: Was it automated when you were flying?

FW: Yes, of course, don't forget, even then, I'm going back to 1974 to '75, a lot of what went on was beginning to be automated. The airplane gets so complex to begin with, that the load placed on the pilot, particularly in a stressful situation, sometimes began to snowball into something much worst, so we rely to a certain extent on automation to handle it for us. … When you get up to cruising altitude, for example, you climb out, get up to your cruising altitude, turn on the auto pilot, and then you can set in the course headings, even where there are doglegs in some cases, set those in there and just sit back. … Of course, you're monitoring it all the time, but nobody has to, you can train a monkey to, I don't mean that really, but it doesn't take much to move controls around. … The old saying is, of course, for an airline pilot, "You're not being paid for what you do, as much as for what you know and how you handle a given situation," in a sense. Any flight from here to there is a continual set of, should I say, challenges or adjustments or decisions … Most of them are trivial, but on occasion you work for your money. Another saying was, "The life of an airline pilot is ninety-five percent pure boredom and five percent pure terror." Well, that's not quite true, but also I've been through one of the worst situations I have been through, which I didn't think I was going to come through, it was just south of Mobile, Alabama. One night … we ran into a heavy weather front, and we got tangled up. As it turns out, there was a tornado nearby. We didn't hit actually the tornado, but … the surrounding weather was terrible, and for about fifteen minutes, the airplane was tossed around like a, I used to describe it as trying to navigate a cork over Niagara Falls, not much you can do. The airplane's up, it's down, one minute you got the power off and the airplane is going up, the next

minute you got the full power and it's going down in hail. The co-pilot and pilot are shouting at one another because of the sound of the hail beating off the windshield and whatnot. That can be pretty scary, and … I tell you that for fifteen minutes … I thought we'd never come out of it. … We put it on the ground short of our destination for, you know, for having it examined, and they looked at it. The airplane was in good shape. [There was] superficial damage but nothing structurally wrong with it, which made me believe that was a great airplane, the Constellation. As a matter-of-fact, every year we have a, I'm a member of the Retired Eastern Pilots Association, and as a matter-of-fact, I'm the New Jersey chapter chairman of that, and we have a convention every year. Almost every year at the banquet, they flash pictures of past airplanes all the way from the old (Pitcairn Mail Wing?), vintage 1927, up to the very latest. Of course, Eastern is gone now, as you know, but every time they flash a picture of the Constellation, it gets a big hand. [laughter] Everyone loved that airplane. It was a great airplane. It was a great airplane, believe me. That's obsolete in effect, now. It was too slow. It was a propeller driven airplane. Everything is jet these days. Well, what more can I tell you now?

KT: What airport did you operate out of?

FW: You mean with Eastern? Newark, La Guardia and Kennedy. That's considered one pilot domicile, and … we had bidding privileges according to your seniority. … I, obviously, living on New Jersey side, I bid out of Newark, as much as possible, and for most of the time, by the time I retired, I had pretty good seniority after thirty-one years. … I could, there were a few guys ahead of me on the seniority list. It was nice to be number one. Number one on the seniority list was a man by the name of Dick (Merrill?). Well, he's kind of a legend in aviation. Dick had all kinds of records, and he was a movie star, not a star, but he married a movie star. He was the first to make a trans-Atlantic crossing, commercial trans-Atlantic crossing. He flew the pictures of King George V inauguration in the early '30s. This was hailed as the first commercial trans-Atlantic flight, and as a result of that, he was called to Hollywood and he made a, I have to admit, a class-B picture. … Dick was the first to admit he's not exactly a Hollywood actor, but he enjoyed it, I know. Dick was a real outgoing character. He married a girl, who was I think in her days, she was the Marilyn Monroe of 1936 or thereabouts by the name of (Toby Wing?). Ever see the movie, "42nd Street" with Dick (Powell?). It's been on currently. It's an old movie, of course, musical, "42nd Street." Well, she was in that and a gorgeous blond, and, of course, when Dick married her, we said, "Oh, this isn't gonna last, a Hollywood marriage," but it lasted till he died. She still comes to our meetings. She's no youngster anymore, but she's still a very handsome woman. … Anyway, I flew with Dick a couple of times, and Dick used to say, "People think I taught Lindberg how to fly," because he'd been around since World War I almost. I had some great experiences with people on Eastern Airlines. There's a cartoon strip called "Tailspin Tommy," "Smiling Jack." You've heard of that one? These are gone now, I guess. They were cartoon strips that used to appear regularly, and both of them were fashioned after one of our pilots, (Tommy Tompkins?), who I had the privilege of flying with, too, on many occasions. When I first came with Eastern, I went in as a co-pilot, even though I was, funny thing, in some cases I was more experienced than the captain, who was sitting on my left, but that didn't last that long and then I checked out on my own as captain. … What else can I tell you? These are some of my decorations. The most recent one was this one that came from the State of New Jersey. First, this is the Air Medal. That's the Air Medal with cluster. You know what cluster represents? Well, a cluster is the second citation for the same thing. They

don't give you another medal. They simply put another cluster on it. When you get five of them, then you get a silver one. That's bronze. This is the Distinguished Flying Cross, which I got, too. Here's the Silver Star. This, I'm rather proud of. This is the second highest decoration next to the Congressional Medal of Honor, so-called "for gallantry in action," you see, and, of course, we had unit citations. My unit was twice cited by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands for the defense of what was then the Dutch East Indies. This is the latest one. This is only since last November, the New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal, it was offered. Here's the citation on that one.

SI: Which of your units was in the Third Air Force?

FW: Well, that was the Eighty-eighth Bomb Group in the Third Air Force.

SI: I thought that was the Second.

FW: It started out in the Second, yes, that was, but it moved. As I said, we moved to Florida.

SI: You said you flew practically every kind of B-17. Which one did you like the best? Was there a difference?

FW: I've flown a number of airplanes, I guess, going back to the old B-18. We even had … at Langley Field, they had an old World War I bomber called the Keystone Bomber. I didn't fly it, but I flew in the observer's platform or sat up front in the open. The B-18, which was obsolete even at the beginning of World War II, which was an outgrowth out of the old … DC-2 ... The Army called it the B-18, and it was ideally adapted for, it was slow. It was ideally adapted for anti-submarine patrol, that type of thing. I flew that in many cases on submarine patrol off the East Coast. Then I've flown the B-25, otherwise known as the Dakota, and then I think, as I mentioned to you, every model of the B-17 we had there at Langley at one point or another. Then [I flew] some smaller airplanes, the P-35. That's a fighter aircraft; I flew that. Some of these were only just for familiarization really. The P-35 was an airplane that was given back to the United States. It was originally made for Sweden, for the Swedish Air Force. It was made by the Republic Aviation Corporation here in Long Island, but when the war started, the Swedes, who tried to maintain their neutrality, didn't want to, I guess, they didn't want to offend Adolf Hitler, so they turned down the order. So the Air Force simply took them over from there. We had familiarization flights in that. I flew the, well, several utility aircraft, which I can't remember. Anyway, numerous aircraft, most of them for short periods of time. I didn't pile up a lot of time in it, but the B-17, I had 2,000 hours in. The B-25, I put several hundred hours in and that was about it, I guess. B-25 was a good airplane, too. That was the one that Doolittle took over Tokyo, as you remember. But everyone was in love with the B-17, largely because it was an airplane that took a tremendous amount of punishment on occasion and still brought you home. It was very reliable and it wasn't the fastest airplane in the world. As a matter-of-fact, the B-24 was slightly faster and slightly higher, but the B-17 was much better protected. We had guns sticking out of the thing all over the place. There were, in the nose of the B-17, there's the bombardier and the navigator, and the navigator has two what we call "cheek guns." They stick out the side of the nose. The bombardier has a remote gun sight; the gun turret is below him. It's on the bottom of the nose, but he's got the sights up here, and as he moves, it moves the guns

down here. It's an automatic computing sights in other words. All of those were .50-caliber machine guns, and then right behind the pilot and co-pilot is the top turret gun and that swivels around, too. Those are twin .50-caliber machine guns, also computerized. Then behind him, of course, is the bomb racks, the bomb bay. Behind that is the radio room and the radio operator is also a gunner and he has two guns, .50s, that point up through the roof of the radio compartment. Behind that is the waist section and there are two gunners, one on either side, left and right gunners, with not computing sights but ring and bead sights, .50-caliber. Then on the tail, we started out with .50-caliber machine guns sticking out the tail. Later, they put on a 20-mm cannon back there, because many of the attacks were made from the rear and particularly in Germany. So twin 20-mm, of course, is pretty heavy weapon. Even the .50 is pretty heavy. … Then, of course, I forgot to mention, there's the ball turret in the waist position, sticks out below the ball turret, is a small gadget. We take the smallest of our gunners … and he's crunched up in there with the machine guns pointing this way between his legs, but he can move the turret all around, up and down and sideways and so on, and that's twin .50-caliber. That protects from attacks from below. So that's why they call it a Flying Fortress, it got that name, and it literally was. My crew was credited, I think, or at least partial credit, for having shot down two enemy aircraft, but as I was explaining before, we're never quite sure who shot it down. Since when you're in formation, a lot of people are shooting at the same airplane, but whatever. In any case, it's no fun to see when an airplane coming at you flashes on in front of his airplane. You just waiting, duck behind the steering wheel, the yoke, that is, hoping that nothing was coming through the windshield or whatever. Of course, the windshield is slanted back, so anything that hits it this way, it usually ricochets at an angle. It doesn't penetrate quite so easily. The first time … we had to use the guns in combat, what we had on the windshield in front of me, there's a regular Plexiglas windshield, pretty thick, heavy. … In back of that, they had a sheet of plastic with a space in between, where you could blow air, because sometimes the windshield would frost up or frost over, on the inside as well as the outside. So you could blow air through between these two sections of plastic and the windshield. Well, when the top turret gunner was checking his guns, normally he'd fire off to the side, or up, or whatever, just for checking it. But in combat, when you're looking right ahead and there's an airplane straight coming at you, he would point us dead ahead and the mussel of his turret guns were only inches above my head, although, granted, there was the roof of the cockpit in between. But the minute he fired, all of a sudden, one of these plastic windshields fell right out on my lap, and I thought for sure that I'd been hit, you know. All it was, it loosened it somehow, the concussion loosened it. Funny things happen. Among other things, I might add, I was telling you the story before, when we ran across these four destroyers and bombed one. When they hit us … one engine went out completely. The other engines go to what you called a pre-set condition. If your throttle doesn't work, the engines won't quit. They'll still be running at a pre-set speed, but there were other difficulties with various components of the engine and other parts. We lost the generators for one thing, so we had no electrical system. That was the next thing. … We still had, I think, there were two bombs hung up in the rack, and here we are, not knowing what the condition was of those things. I knew we had a hit nearby, plus we're going to have to land, and you never try to land with live ammunition on board. So my bombardier had to go back with a screw driver, open the bomb bay doors, and here's a little narrow catwalk, it's about that wide through the bomb bay and the bomb racks on either side and open air below and with a screw driver to unhook the shackles on these. We couldn't release them electrically, and we dropped them, of course, got rid of them. … That was, we earned our pay on that one, I think. As I said, we all

got the Silver Star for that one. I hope deservedly so. Well, I can't think of anything else. I've been retired from Eastern now for since 1976. There's a mandatory age, sixty, limit, at least in the United States. Several of our people who did retire, some of them went to foreign countries, where there was no such restriction, say, to South America, several of them with (Varig?) Airlines, I know. A couple wound up in the Middle East. We even had some inquiries by, I'm not quite sure what their status was, but Israeli officials who were looking for pilots during the, what was it, the Four Day War?

SI: The Six Day War.

FW: … They were getting ready to pay a healthy bonus for airplanes shot down, something like a couple of thousand dollars, or better, and I think the State Department warned us about that. They didn't want to be involved, so that if you do that, you put your citizenship in jeopardy, or something of the kind. So I don't know that anybody took them up on that, but it was attractive offer as far as money went. … On the other hand, some went to civilian airlines in South America. Some, I think one or two, went to Africa. In Europe, there wasn't such a demand, because Europe has an excellent training program, and they do at least as well as the United States as far as … training and competence of their people. Oh, yeah, it's become quite a complex business … and it takes a good deal of training. In my time, they were asking for two years of college. Well, I had four. But later on I guess, when things started, quieted down a little bit, people who were applying, they were asking for four years of college, and not necessarily, strangely enough, in flying or even engineering. One of the big things in civilian flying or airline flying is how you get along with people, teamwork, and that counts for a great deal, and we were drilled on that time and time again. … As a matter-of-fact, I wrote up something that was used in one of our training manuals on so-called "emergency profiles," and it details exactly the procedure to be used in case of emergencies, say, on take off, or at altitude, or whatever. … In the past, where we had some fly-by-night operators, and we had a few of those in the past, most of them just disappeared from the scene, but when an emergency turned up, there was utter chaos in the cockpit. Nobody knew who was doing what. In some cases, number three engine quit and they'd feather number four, so all of a sudden you got two engines out rather than just one. That's an emergency, believe me. So it was drilled into us, time and time again, you know. When you have an emergency stop, "Who is going to fly? You fly the airplane. I'll take care of the emergency. You do this, you do that, now," so everybody knows exactly what they're going to do. I used to run that through before every flight, as a matter-of-fact, because we used to alternate flying. I usually fly the first leg, or one of the legs. The co-pilot fly the next one from his seat, and that way we both get the experience. "But if anything happens, whatever happens listen to me, I'll tell you what to be doing, you know, so we don't have any confusion." … Everybody is thoroughly drilled in what to expect, what to do and how to take care of this, so it was quite an experience …

KT: Do you have any other stories you want to tell?

FW: Any other stories?

SI: Is there anything we forgot to ask?

FW: Oh, man, I can probably tell you a dozen or more. What should I say? … Well, I can tell you a funny story, not exactly had to do with flying, but it's funny just the same. Every flight, of course, on the airline, you checked in an hour before flight time to do your flight planning and get the clearances and, you know, go through the weather and all that had to be done before a flight. So the whole crew meets in the operations office with the captain. The captain and the co-pilot together look at the weather and other conditions. You read the dispatchers clearance, if there's any questions about it or anything. Finally, when you've decided what your flight plan is going to do, you turn to the engineer, flight engineer and say, "Well, we'll take so many pounds of fuel." So he goes on out to the airplane and pre-flights the airplane. Pre-flighting a simple walk around and checking certain things on the airplane, and he takes the aircraft log, the maintenance log, and looks it through. It shows the recent, past history of the airplane, written by the previous people who'd flown it and any comments to be made, or for that matter anything that had to be fixed. Some are so-called "no go" items; they have to be fixed. Others are provisional items, or sometimes referred to as minimum equipment list. Obviously, if you're going in the daytime, you don't need landing lights or something stupid like that. … He'll be performing that while the pilot and co-pilot are in doing the flight planning. The senior flight attendant comes in, "Are there any instructions, Captain? What can we expect in the way of rough weather, or anything of the kind?" … When we get through with that, she goes on out to the airplane and supervises the rest of the, there are sometimes up to seven or eight flight attendants, supervises the commissary, be sure that the meals get loaded properly. The caterer comes and loads on the meals and whatnot. … I don't see the junior girls. They are out at the airplane. Only the senior [flight attendant] comes in to the office. So we go on out to the airplane, get in the cockpit, and we, too, ran a cockpit check, so-called, with a checklist. We go through, carefully through a whole rigmarole of items to check, fire alarm systems working, things of this sort, and meanwhile, of course, they start loading the passengers. But there's a signalman down below in front of the nose of the, you've probably seen that, with the earphones, and he's plugged into the nose, he's talking to the pilot. … Finally, when the gate aids close up the doors, and he's counted for everybody, everybody is on board, and he says, "You're ready to start engines." "Yup, we're ready." "Okay, start so and so." We go through the routine of starting engines. Then [we] call the tower, taxi out, and when we get our clearance at whatever altitude and route that we selected, and then we're on our way. … As I said, most of the time, you're on autopilot but, of course, with both of us monitoring carefully what the autopilot is doing. It can do it better than I can, but still I want to know what, you know. … There's all kinds of flags, if anything goes wrong, suddenly a flag appears on the instruments, and sometimes a buzzer sounds to let you know that this thing has been disconnected or something, and then you have to fly it by hand, no problem. Anyway, once you're in flight and things are squared away, usually what happens, one of the girls will come up to the cockpit and say, "Hey, you guys want some coffee, or sandwich, or whatever." "Yeah, okay." So one time, one of the girls came over. I hadn't seen before, new girl. We often have them; there's quite a turnover. Young girls get married quite often, as you might imagine. The girl looked at me kind of quizzically, you know. She said, "You don't remember me, do you?" I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I don't." She said, "Well, you used to date my mother in high school." [laughter] Oh, that was funny. I thought that was great. But on the whole, I've done pretty well. I never had an accident to speak of. There was a little incident on the ground. I had a flat tire once on take off, but it's not a big emergency. … We've had, on one occasion, I think we shut down an engine at altitude, because only for preventive purposes. It looked like the temperature was going too

high, and we didn't want to do damage to the engine. However, anytime you shut down an engine, or something like that, you have to account for it to the FAA, because you're supposed to land at the first airport. You can't continue flight with three engines unless there's nowhere else to go. Of course, if it happens halfway across the ocean, where else are you going to go? So that's it. I've run out of thing to tell you, I think. Since my retirement, of course, I've gone back to music, which was one of my early loves, of course, and I've become quite active in that and our band has played all over the place. We've been down to Atlantic City a few times. We've been as far as Virginia Military Institute. We played one of their gigs down there. Mostly it's local, but I have many of my …

KT: What band is it?

FW: We were called the Billion Dollar Sound, Fred Wesche's Billion Dollar Sound. … I have some people there out of some well known bands. One saxophone player there was out of the Buddy Rich Band, if you remember Buddy Rich. I played, again, with (Enoch Light?). Of course, he died a long time ago, but he was rather well known then. Some of my others have played with Frank Sinatra, (Vic Damone?). As a matter-of-fact, here's a little blurb that I picked up off the newspaper ... That was a concert we played. There's the trumpet section; that's me sticking in there. Now, here's (Casey Bork?), who was in the Air Force Band. I do most of the musical arrangements, not most of them, many of them I should say. Several of our people in the band … do write music, so it's all original, not compositions …

KT: Mr. Wesche is showing us pictures of his band.

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

Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy 8/24/01
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 9/22/01
Reviewed by Drew Wesche 5/1/02