

**Oral History Interview with John “Johnny” Charlton**  
**Interviewed 7 October 2010**  
**Interviewed by Carson Aden Wilkie**  
**For the Florida Atlantic University Oral History Project and Digital Archives**

**Edited Transcript**

CW: Today is October the 7<sup>th</sup> 2010. This is Carson Aden Wilkie interviewing Mr. John Charlton. Good Afternoon and thank you helping me with this project today. We are in the hanger of the Mr. Charlton’s... what is the plane behind you?<sup>1</sup>

JC: It’s an R-V four.

CW: R-V four okay, in Felda, Florida. Mr. Charlton was a B-24 pilot in the Second World War in the European theatre and we will be discussing his life and involvement in the war. You’re very kind to sit down with me today. Ready to get started?

JC: Yea, you’re welcome.

CW: Okay. We spoke briefly over the phone about your, about your long family history. Can you, can you tell us a little bit about that?

JC: Yes I can tell you that , it makes me nervous to be descended from a lot of great people, I feel like I don’t back ‘em up that well. I should be running the country or doing something more than I’m doing you know if they if they helped start it. But I - I don’t, I don’t like to see people bothered with or discuss their predecessors because it’s a--it causes a big social problem. [CW: um-hm] And it’s destroyed all the social, bases of all the Atlantic coast cities from Savannah all the way up to probably Jacksonville up through all the way up through Boston and New England. Those people have ... have such a record of their ancestors and they have set themselves aside as superior, to the rest of civilization and that’s detrimental and they’ve driven off—a lot of people can’t live in some of those cities any more or even in those families. I have first cousins that left Savannah, they couldn’t stand the society there which was—well they wouldn’t talk to anybody that hadn’t lived there for hundred years, things like that. But, my ancestors were located at the time of the Revolution to be of a lot of service. I had two major generals in my background, one was General Greene and one was, was General

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<sup>1</sup> For transcription purposes, “CW” identifies Carson Wilkie and “JC,” John Charlton. Time is indicated in minutes and seconds only, so an hour and a half into the tape is indicated by 90:00 not 1:30:00.

Johnston, who was in charge of the Georgia forces. And they haven't done anything for me and I don't feel like they've given me something that they haven't given you. That's where I am w-with ancestry. But, they were, they were in a position to do a lot at that time. General Greene was lost in history for a time until recently, they finally found him again, he'd been lost all his career, when was living' and, spent \$40,000 of his own fortune to buy ammunition for his army that they never would—congress wouldn't pay him back because [interference] the president, the second president, I can't remember his name—and this will attest to an old memory pretty bad, I can't remem- remember his *name*, but he was always against—always at odds politically with Greene and he kept him from getting his money back that he spent on the winning the war. , I don't want to get that involved in all of that but , , in fact that's probably enough on ancestry, because as I said ancestors don't really do anything for you at all, it's an individual thing.

**[Time: 3:51]**

CW: [Coughs] What about your parents?

JC: HEH?

CW: Your parents. Can you tell me about your parents?

JC: My, my parents were, my father was the...when he died his professor from Georgia Tech had [wind blows against the hanger doors] gotten in touch with him every year [interference] to tell 'em that nobody had topped his score in chemistry, and I don't know enough about school, being a poor student, to know whether it was organic or inorganic, but it was the one that was the hardest, he had , a perfect score for one semester at Georgia Tech and as long as he lived—he died at 61—but as long he lived, it had never been topped, or never been matched, but he was a highly respected land surveyor and engineer in Fort Lauderdale and the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society had a couple publications on the work he did on the —two things he had a running argument with the historian that Roosevelt employed—appointed in charge of a history when Roosevelt, Franklin went into office, he appointed this guy as the end component in all history discussions [interference] that he had at Lake Mable down there in ... lake ma- just north of Miami, just north of Biscayne Bay that was —called, no not Lake Mable excuse me that's at Lauderdale—Dumbfounding Bay! So, there was a big argument about whether it was Dumbfoundling Bay or Dumbfounding Bay and dad has a rather a comic run with this guy through the guy, the guy in charge of the canal in

Jacksonville was, can't think of his name either. Colonel, the colonel in charge of the Army Engineers, and I'll think of it, tomorrow when this is all gone. But anyway he had this argument he would write him back and tell him what he thought it was and it was a kind of a comical thing but he did a story on that in one of the publications and another one on his eh um, he estimated the [interference] value, way back in time of some little island at where ya'll are from right there at Deerfield or Boca Raton. Some Island in the waterway there that they made a park or something out of. And the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, the guy in charge, talked to me and on the phone and sent me, you know, an issue of it. But they were fascinated with the way he went through that island [phone ringing] and told 'em it was, told 'em what it was. Excuse me [answers cell phone].

**[Time: 6:40]**

CW: No problem, just want to make sure we're back in business here.

CW: Okay, um, when and where... I'm sorry, I didn't follow up about your mother—you told me about your father.

JC: Oh. And mother was oh, mother was a girl from Thomasville at from a family of Hopkins family that we'd remember that her predecessor was [indecipherable interference] from Savannah when the Revolution broke out. He got tarred and feathered because he was a—he was disrespectful to the patriots at the end of the war, you know in a bar somewhere. So he had to move out of the country, and go to— anyway that's a long story. But her family was- were farmers, they had two hundred slaves, two hundred servants or slaves in their end and Thomasville, and they were in Rice and Indigo, down at Dary and two- two hundred slaves. And at the end of the war or I think I don't think anybody else did that but my great uncle Willy Hopkins was mayor of Thomasville for forty years, but he had, his father told him that he had to house all of those people so when they were free he built each family a house and [interference] on a piece of land they had in Thomasville.

That put the family in a big political position; my first cousin had been a representative in the state of Georgia all his life. He said he could run anything in Georgia and get it because those people remember it. They come by and do yards and do anything for the family that they can do. They all—those former slaves. Big story. Long story. That's enough of it.

CW: Okay.

JC: But , she was, was extremely, devoted to the Episcopal faith and she ran me through it as hard as she could but I didn't respond that well and found that I could I could not g- I could avoid Sunday school, which she was teaching, by—and go sailing if I would go to early service first. So at 7:30, I went to church and was outta there and sailing all day long on Sunday, you know which is advantage that Episcopalians had that the other religions don't [CW: laughter] But , she was would be pleased to death that, if she knew that I had a Episcopal minister, living, renting a space from me over here. You know that would j- that would roll her over in the grave.

CW: Um. When and where were you born?

JC: I was born in Savannah, in 19—January 20<sup>th</sup> 1919.

CW: January 20<sup>th</sup>?

JC: Yea, 20<sup>th</sup> 1919.

CW: Ok.

JC: And we moved to-- dad was a Savannah river lumber company um, timber surveyor, he used to walk, and got all the timber for the lumber company, but he moved to Fort Lauderdale, he came down twice, he moved down here before my birth in 1916 and started surveying with- in Fort Lauderdale, he was with the first surveyor there. He and A.C. Davis started surveying in Broward County. And, they did a spectacular thing they had county money, but they put their time in and their effort and they relocated all the square mile markers that had been put in 1850 by the Army Survey there on the east half of Broward.

CW: And this was when?

JC: This was in ...they did this in the somewhere in the teens or twenties. Twenties I think, because dad didn't come back down until '24 he was there in '16 and they had my older sister there in Fort Lauderdale, but there wasn't enough business for him to stay [interference] and he went back in Savannah, and then he [interference] came down in '24, that's when we moved down here.

CW: When he moved...

JC: When he moved down to Fort Lauderdale in '24, we lived a block from Las Olas, a block from Las Olas and a block from the Ocean. Out there in a, in a house with rain tank on it. Didn't have a well, had a rain tank, 500 gallon rain water tank, and , so you bathed in a number three wash tub in you had a bathroom but you bathed in the washtub in there. All three kids, we used to, whoever had the bathtub and the soap in the first go around, the others had to use that same soapy water. You didn't have enough water for everybody to have a double bath; you know a soap and a rinse.

CW: Um. What do you mean by number three?

JC: Number three is the big tub, [interference] and we washed in [interference] [makes motion to indicate size of tub]

CW: About that size?

JC: About that big around. Yea, big enough for a kid to bathe in.

CW: Can you tell me about your childhood? Did you have any siblings?

**[Time: 12:36]**

JC: I have two sisters. I have one two years older and one three years younger, the one three years younger's still living. And we had, well I had a bad time with 'me because they were both students, they studied their lessons which I didn't, which I never did do. I went to thirteen years of High School to get out. And summer school every year. And that's how interested I was in what I was supposed to be doing. So, they were kind of, you know, or I was kind of always, , in between two people that that *did* work and I was not working and it was a bad, kind of a, a bad feeling to be that much of a *bum* you know? But that's , the way I found growing up I found that I was, not really successful in life until I got into flying, and I went I went through the first part of my life , feeling like a loser. I raced sailboats with two friends of mine and we had different boats so it wasn't all my fault but I was number three or two in a race of three people for about three years, and that'll give you a real downer, you know if you know you're number three or you know [laughs] you're not number one. And so that that I think that kept me realizing that I really didn't amount to too much, through that period. And [interference] it turned around when I started...when I got into flying, I got into what I was really tooled up for because...I had--

it's like the ancestor thing—I had so much luck when I flew, through my entire career that I now have 38,000 hours logged, and . It's been such a successful program for me to fly that's it's *embarrassing*. It's hard to tell people that that I was the first, I wasn't the first to solo in primary and, I went to the air force it was the Air Corps in forty, forty-two when I went there. And they put me in training because I had we had--back up. We had bought a small airplane. I had bought one with a friend of mine from our labor, our work. And, it was, it was a little Taylor craft we had it was a [interference] hundred and 725 bucks we paid for this thing it was only a couple years old. And I flew seventy hours on that and all around for a couple of years so, I knew that I needed instruction and an instructor cost two bucks an hour and didn't have enough money to pay two bucks an hour for an instructor to learn, everything you need to know about flying. So, I went to-- I went up and moved in with my aunt and uncle up in Mulberry Florida on their grove and studied and, in the summer of 1941 [CW: 1941 how...] for the entrance exam. In for the Air Corp [ CW: um-hm] and train- flight training and I passed that and was accepted in July I think anyways, I was that took the place of two years of college it was a two year college equivalent exam [interference] and so, I had already learned to study the last year , last year of high school, I had all A's on everything I had cause I found out geometry really had some use and we using it in the surveying, I was surveying from the time I was sixteen I was surveying and I found out this stuff is really worthwhile. So, from there I learned, if I had to study, I could study. Anyway I got in the I got accepted and the class that they were going call me in in—I've for gotten whether it was January or March, for the class, but when the war broke out, , I was I was working on the survey in the waterway in from [indecipherable] on the hill down 85-foot house boat. And the war broke out, that was just before it broke out, when it broke out, they called me in the next few days, and they sent me up to, Maxwell Field, and started my training up there. I [yawning] I started training in January, of '42 in a class of forty-two G and they s—I've forgotten what month it was, but we were in Bennettsville and we had, I think we had 320 people—kids in that school and they, they used to call down about seventy-five percent, they didn't keep but about twenty-five percent of the people, they were all choice, college graduates, nationwide basis. When it came time to solo, I didn't tell I had 70 hours in that little airplane, but I didn't want them to prejudge me. And it was handy because I came through and the instructor [interference] was real pleased with my work and he waited at first to solo, the first to solo was a industrial pilot from Bill Sheffry [sic] [burp, indecipherable] from Mississippi, and he soloed in four hours and fifty-five minutes, which is a short time, but not for a

guy that's been flying a little bit. And I soloed, but my instructor waited to see what they were going to solo him at. But he got all the glory, he was the first solo. But the next day was my solo, with five minutes left. In four hours and fifty minutes. So, like I said it's everything I did in there worked so well that I was no longer a loser. I got through at Moody Field, I was kept at Moody field as an instructor, there was six of us, I was kept there because, and made instructor [interference] and sent to war training which they were doing in B26 and [indecipherable due to interference] two at a time about once a week, out there on that B26, they were the first class to go into it. And they didn't know how to fly it. Nobody knew how to fly it. And what was getting 'em was—you don't want all this aviation information do you?

**[Time: 19:42]**

CW: Well, let me back up real quickly, um...

[Background radio]

JC: We gotta go turn that off.

CW: do you wanna pause for a second?

JC: HEH?

CW: Do you want to pause for a second?

[Pause]

CW: Okay how old were you when you first started flying?

JC: I first learned to fly, I was nineteen. When I went into the Air Corps I think I was twenty-one.

CW: You were twenty-one okay.

JC: Yep.

CW: Now you said you logged seventy hours before you went in-

JC: I had logged seventy hours, yes.

CW: So, you started flying, about a year before that...

JC: At night. Yea, I started flying when I was nineteen which would have been which would have been, it would have been, forty--, thirty-eight.

CW: What do you remember about the day that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?

JC: It, well it was just the biggest event in everybody's life. But I don't remember where I was. I'm 92 now. If I remembered it, it would be lost by now. I remem—it was it was like the blowing up of the buildings up here, it was the biggest thing you had happen in your life. [interference]

CW: And you already in the Air Corps [indecipherable]

JC: No, No. I had been accepted, on my exams, but I hadn't entered yet.

CW: Do you remember...

JC: But that speeded up my...I got a telegram, couple days after that to report to [indecipherable] field.

CW: So you were already in the process?

JC: Heh? Yea.

JC: I'll try to cut this down some, we don't need all that flight information.

CW: I'm scratching through questions right now.

Um, can you tell me a little bit about how you got to fly the B24s?

JC: About it, what about it?

CW: How did you come to fly the B24? Was that, is that something you requested, is that something you were assigned to?

JC: Yea. But it had, I had been, I had had a fifteen-day [interference], a fifteen-hour instructor course on the B24 and I was doing other things. Let me slip through some of that, that training program, because I trained as a training instructor down at Moody Field for a year and half, then I moved down to Buckingham. [CW: um-hm] and instructed on AT18s down there, for another length of time, I've got those dates. But , while I was there we went up to be checked out in this AT18 which was killing eleven people every week on all the gunnery training bases because they had people in there



that didn't know how to fly 'em. So they took 'em-group of instructors that had been instructing, up to Goldsboro, North Carolina, trained us, and then we were coming back home to train these local people at Buckingham and when we passed they gave us a- a bonus they took us to Maxwell field and check—and gave us fifteen hour instructor course in the B24. So I was a qualified instructor in the B24 and he brought it down at Buckingham they killed so many people on those AT18s that South East Command said no more check outs on anything on Buckingham so they bought B17s in there to train the gunners and all of us that had been instructing up there and had that course—were flying co-pilots for beginners on the B17s but we got then shifted after, we didn't do that but about three months and then we got shifted to um Kenlow field up in Panama City, and I stayed up there three months and I was checked out there—as soon as I got on the base I ran into one of the old instructors I knew that was on the base up there he said , “what are you doing in that co-pilot seat,” and I said “I'm flying here.” So he said “come with me.” And we went out and he checked me out in the B17. So I checked out, copilots, they were checking-- making gunnery runs in they were all the gunners in position on the B17s and firing at targets and that, and while we did that we check, we gave co-pilots their training, so we checked out co-pilots in the B17s for about three months, up there so I had a background on both airplanes [CW: Right] while we were waiting. Most of the guys wanted to go on that B17 and I said “no I think I'll, I'd rather be in that B24.” It has more range it has more fire power in the nose for protection and ...

**[Time: 25:00]**

CW: Had you heard any stories about the B24s when you started training for it?

JC: Oh yea we had, I've got a story in my book about that. [CW: Um-hm] I cover that thoroughly in that little book that I got, I've got one here you can take with you right now. It was blowing up on takeoff. Everybody, nobody knew anything about aerodynamics but they said well it's must be must have a—it had a Davis Airflow on it that was shaped more like this [shapes hand to demonstrate] than like this you know like a cup or a B17 shape it was flat on the bottom, but this was round on the bottom. They said oh well that round on the bottom that's making the negative thrust and that's keeping that sucker on the ground and that was the *rumor*. [CW: um-hm] Didn't make any sense aerodynamically. And that wasn't the problem. It was the ...what caused it to do blow up on takeoff was that they had trained all the army pilots

to tap the breaks before they pulled the gear up and they weren't off the ground yet, cause they had these long, long folio struts on the main gear and you were flying if you had a load on there you were flying for a while. And so you tap the breaks and your wheels are still touching the ground [indecipherable due to interference] they'd hang down about two or three feet still hanging on the ground but you were flying. So they lost, hundreds that way, B24s with that problem. And usually it was loaded ones they had a bomb load on 'em and that's in that story anyway, in that book, so I won't get into that.

CW: That was during the missions that these fully loaded planes wo- wouldn't [JC: Yea] take off.

JC: Yea we'd see one a week up at the 460th six miles up the river we'd see an explosion every week. And we had one, we had one happened to us, just before we found out what it was and I tapped the brakes and 'bout lost ours but I snatched it off the ground and got it going and we survived it. [CW: Wow] but I've got I've written that story in my, in my little book. I'm not going send that book with you because she already has a copy of that in her files, its B24s, not B24s at war, it's the *Stories of the Great Air War*.<sup>2</sup>

CW: I think I've seen that one.

JC: [Removing pictures from his box] That's my wife I'll put that out there. We'll get around to that. That was her as a stewardess. [Interference]. Excuse me I shouldn't have gone through this now but I...

CW: That's alright.

JC: That's not timely. This is um this is where that story is covered and she's got one in her files, so I'm not going to send you this one I got.

CW: Okay, Okay, fair enough.

JC: I've run out of copies. They didn't sell but I gave 'em all away.

CW: Now for the record can you tell me tell me what um bomb squadron and group you were part of?

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<sup>2</sup> Charlton refers to Dr. Patricia Kollander as "she"

JC: I was in the 782nd um squadron in the 465<sup>th</sup> Group and, 55<sup>th</sup> wing. [CW: Wh-] 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

**[Time: 28:35]**

CW: Now you said some of the advantages of the B24 was its range and its firepower, were those the two deciding factors that...

JC: Yes it had, it had two fifty-caliber guns in a proper gun turret in the nose, the B17 never had a proper gun turret in the nose. For a while they carried 130, where the navigator could, or the bombardier could use that, but that would be, never with any accuracy, it had no, really, no, never had any nose firepower. And later they got a chin turret, but it never was a—I don't *think* it was a self-computing turret, like the B24 [interference] it computed where the bullet was going, no matter where you, I mean, if you put the sight on the target on all those turrets on all those airplanes, the bullet would hit the target, no matter what your slip was. It would, it would figure your slippage, the turret would. And, so, it had great protection there 'because, forward you had an upper turret, and a ball turret and a nose turret, shootin' forward. In the B17, had those two top and bottom, but they didn't have that nose thing—never had that nose turret. And, as I said they didn't have the range—the speed didn't matter because they ran the air force all the time a 160MPH statuate, no matter which airplane it was, they were always in formation. So, that didn't matter. Speed didn't matter. But, the [interference] the B17 had some advantages on the B24. When they would ditch, the B24 would break up, *in half*, and that's the only thing was, that would stop it, you know, if it was going in the water, you're going to break the airplane in half, and lose a lot of people. That was the only *disadvantage* that the B24 had, the B24 was the better airplane for the job. And, the thing that nobody knows, history does not know, is that the B24, there were twice as many of them as there were B17s, that's true in both air forces, 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. They were, they were two-thirds of the load, but they never got credit for being in the air, in the 8<sup>th</sup> air force. But I'll get into that later that's not what you want right now.

CW: Ok.

JC: But it's good I slipped it in there [smiles].

CW: Can you tell me about some of your fellow crew members?

JC: Yea. Let [indecipherable due to interference] right here [reaches for photograph]. Now I can't see it.

CW: Let's move the camera [interference].

JC: Now this, this was um. This was the flight engineer was-, is still livin' he and I are the only two livin' in the crew. And that's Howard Pitts. From Tennessee, he's still up, just out of a, just in Tennessee. And, this is King. He was a radio operator, and he's passed on too. And this was, Chuck Walters. And Charles Iseminger, Chuck Walters was top gunner and Iseminger was the tail gunner—Charles Iseminger, and Wade Good—there was the guy that wrote that material that you've got in there in thirteen was a armament, was in charge of armament, armament arming the— seeing about the bombs, making sure they were in there right and everything was right on them, and he was the ball gunner, and Harold was the, Harold Glasser's the one that she's [Dr. Kollander] writin' a book about, was the bombardier and , , Otis Scott was the co-pilot and, probably, yea I wrote that somewhere in that piece of material there— probably as good a pilot as they had in the air force *anywhere*. He had that kind of coordination, eye to muscle coordination, where as much formation as I had been flying, in instructing for four years, and all that stuff. I could seldom ever see myself out of position, but [interference] a few inches a foot, something like that after a seven-hour trip, I might have slipped out that far [shows with his hands about a foot in length]. He never did. You know it was just a just a natural thing, he was just a just a whale- whale of pilot—didn't have much time at all, not much experience, but he was a whale of a pilot on the airplane. And that's me [CW: um-hm] and that's Herb Tallon. And I'm not going say anything about Herb because Herb and I were friends on the ground but, we never made it in the air. And , and that's where we are and he was pianist and ranger for Charlie Spivack's orchestra and he was a great entertainer in the officer's bar at night, played Jazz real good, and he was great. But we were not, we were at odds at all times in the airplane at all times. And, it was um, it was ...

CW: What was the reason for that if you don't mind me...? [JC: Heh?] What [interference] was the reason for that?

JC: The reason was...that [severe interference] Herb was he was an instructor—and I don't think we want to print this but I don't think we want this printed, but for *your* information. He was a navigation instructor for a year and half in Boise, Idaho, and he picked me because I had a lot of t- flying time, as Harold did and came on board with

me to go, outta Boise, to go to combat cause they told him this time he had to pick somebody and he picked mine. But in his training, and in navigator training, they had made a movie for navigators that showed 'em that they were supposed to be in charge of the dang airplane from the time the gear came up until they put it down again. And *anybody* knows that's wrong. But Herb never did understand it. And he got on the airplane when we got our crew, the engineer came to me and he says, "hey!" he says [severe interference] he has told all of us that when the gear comes up that he is in command of the airplane, until the gear goes down again. And he never outlived that. He thought that was true when he was flying combat, but Scotty and I had to get 'em back to home, every time we went on a navigation mission, he didn't know where he was. He never knew [CW: Hm], but he wanted to be in charge. That's where it was. And, and—you can't print this—he doesn't have any children, his wife is still livin', he's dead, his wife is still alive he has no children. But, it's not something you want to print.

CW: Okay.

JC: But, I wanted you to know because there *was* a reason.

CW: Now did you stay with the same crew throughout your deployment?

**[Time: 36:15]**

JC: No. , the, they, Herb went, Herb went and moved in, the Colonel—as soon as he got over there, he got over there before I did in the squadron, and he told him how, how qualified he was and the, the squadron navigator was about to run out of time and he put him in his, he moved him in his building. So when we got there, Herb said—they had my crew listed as Herb Tallon crew. When I got overseas, about, Harold and I got in there about four days after they did. And, he said "I won't be flying with you fellas anymore, I'm going be flying lead navigator." "Say, Herb that's fine. We're happy for you." So he had straightened himself out and he was gone, and we were happy as hell. But it didn't last long. He came back, we built a little two feet stone, building [severe interference] a duplex out of stone. And, had a little connecting-- not a toilet, but a connecting wash basin installed, and stuff like that. Anyway, when we started building *that*, he came over and he wanted a place in there so we accommodated him, so he moved back in with us. But anyway, I kept telling—I was operations officer after about five trips in there and they promoted me up a little every little bit further every time until I flew, until I got to be lead pilot. And, I told the op—I was in charge of the

operations, the ay, ay enlisted men there, and I told them I don't want this guy flying with me, ever. You need to find me another navigator. But he was the squadron navigator right on. And when they had an important trip like [interference] lead we were [indecipherable due to severe interference] because they liked our work. That was wing leader, wasn't any more than that, you didn't lead but one group at a time, anyway. But anyway, we would be wing lead, and I flew that twice. And this, the first time I flew it on March, on March the first. They had Herb in there as my navigator. Had the colonel down from wing, as an observer sitting in the seat. And Herb is telling me all the way—we had an undercast and Herb couldn't see the ground, but he's doing piloting, in other words he's looking at the ground to see where he is, and he's got another navigator with him that's figuring dead reckoning with a pencil and he's got a ra- radar navigator and Herb's tellin' me, on the interphone he says, "turn one degree to the right I think you may be too close to a flak position [interference]..." and I said, "Herb, I saw that hole on that mountainside, the only thing you've seen on the ground since we left the Adriatic and I know you don't know where you are exactly, so I'm going ask the radar navigator where we are. So I asked both of 'em. And the dead reckoning navigator says, "well I think you might wanna turn—if you turn anywhere, you may want to turn a degree to the left." And the radar navigator said, "look straight ahead." So we went straight ahead. So that was the kind of thing we did, and see I'm trying to keep the formation packed in by not turning. I'm going be straight as a-, straight as an arrow all the way up that whole leg, that's my program, I'm not going turn the airplane, unless we really are hav- really *do* have a problem. I don't want any maybe problems. So, we went straight, and I said, "just tell me when to make the next turn" we're going have a point of turn and you can turn me early or late but, when you make that- when you get there, figure that out and turn me when you want me to, and we'll turn at that point. Not before. So, what he did, —I got into, I got into a bad one here, it's a long one, long story—what he did, he got up there and I didn't know this til fifty years later when this navigator told me 'cause he was with him, that wrote these letter, Eli Reckon He was with him. And, I picked that—we had an undefended target and it was covered so we couldn't drop because, we couldn't drop w-, [hesitates] through the clouds anymore, near the end of the war. So we couldn't drop. So I said, "colonel what do you want us—where would you like for me to go?" He says, "that's totally up to you, I've got nothing to say about it." So, I said, well let's go to Moosbierbaum that's the last oil r-, synthetic oil refinery in operation [interference] so that's what we did. We turned around to gain another thousand feet and came back to Moosbierbaum, which is the only refinery still

putting out any oil. And, this navigator, Herb, identified the wrong target, so he gives the bombardier the wrong target. Bombardier recognizes it and he says, "that's not it, I'm not going to drop on that." So, the rest of our group, there were two more boxes behind us, for six planes boxes, or seven, they saw the error and they went to the target, and dropped their load on Moosbierbaum. We dropped ours on some target erst-a-way down the way or whatever. And totally wast-, and they missed, totally wasted, our bomb run. But that got Herb off my airplane. When we got back, I don't know how it happened, I wasn't at the meeting but , he had misidentified and anyway he [interference] the last four or five missions I had jam-up navigator and bombardier and we had *really* successfully four or five trips, the last four we made.

CW: What was his name? The Nav..

JC: The navigator was , Hegel, was Bob Hegal, but that's all, that's all, in that book, written in that book, you don't need to, don't need to do that. So he and , and I had lost Harold as a bombardier 'cause he was tryin' to finish up and get home to his family and they gave me an ace of a bombardier as well so I had a real good package with the three of us, you know, working together. Let's get back to your work. We're getting off on...

CW: That's fine, that's fine. Um, can you describe for me the bomb dropping sequence when you were over a target, what were commands [severe interference] that were issued and that whole process?

JC: The , well it may not come out the way you're asking but, you came over an initial point, about seven minutes out from a target which was supposed to be [bird chirps], get you lined up , into the wind where you'd be slowed down [coughs] and not drifting. And it didn't always work you would have a drift and be going off—anyway, you came over that initial point, you had about seven minutes where you, the bombardier would line up, the bombardier would run the airplane with the Nordyne bomb site, it was hooked to the autopilot, and it would take over and run the, run the airplane. In all cases except in mine —Harold and I agree that I could have the airplane I'd run a two degree correction back and forth, over what he, what we figured the course was, for that seven minutes and that way we would have the enemy sighting guns we'd be off, something like 350-500 feet depending on our speed. By time he sighted, and it took forty-five seconds for that bullet to get up there, we had gone and changed our course and gone somewhere else so he missed us, and so we did that, and—anyway, I'm getting off on something else—we rode down the bomb, the bomb

run for about seven or eight minutes and the bomb sight tuned on to the target and turned the bombs loose. They could be done in a salvo, all at once, or they could be done, in a timed order, you know let out so many e-every second, or however they were set by the bombardier. But, what I didn't [interference] I'm getting in to so much stuff that you're going be snowed.

CW: Where were the majority of your targets?

**[Time: 45:25]**

JC: There on a map in this book. And there out of the range of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air force, they were built down there in Poland and in , maybe one in Czechoslovakia, they were—and this is small scale it's hard to read, and you've got a copy of it at home, but its , they're marked [shuffles through materials] some of the in here and there named and you can go through and find the marking but, you've got into a bigger research problem than you realize when you came out here I think. Because a question like this, could take us several hours [interference] to go through and mark them but, the [CW moves chair to see map] the , the Figmans were Brux and I can't read that well so I can't find it, but up here in Austria, is where they put most of 'em. But I don't know where Brux is. It may be in Poland, Poland and Austria, and up in here, I don't know whether these circles have some of 'em, but there was Brux and , I have to look in the book to find the name of the other one, but around Vienna, there were several of 'em and um Moosbierbaum was the last one[interference] wiped out , there weren't that many big ones, but they were all in this area, where the 8<sup>th</sup> air force couldn't reach 'em. And that's why they sent the 15<sup>th</sup> down here, --was for these oil refiner—but we wip- we wiped that out on 'em. We didn't do it, because we missed, but our other group, some other boxes and some more, several of the other groups hit Moosbierbaum on the first day of August<sup>3</sup> of '45 and put 'em out of business, and that's where the last gasp was made that the Germans had, [CW: Hm-um] they had stores around, you know they had stores, but they had no more in production from the fifteenth of August<sup>4</sup> except maybe Moosbierbaum came in for a day or two somewhere, then we hit it again, you know and it gotten going 'cause they were geniuses about gettin' that stuff, gettin' that oil refinery going.

CW: Is that what they describe as a "milk mission," in some of the accounts?

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<sup>3</sup> JC means to say April instead of August

<sup>4</sup> April



JC: That's not a milk mi- that's not a milk runner, that's, a milk runner is when they don't shoot at you.

CW: That's a pretty important target.

JC: That's that that those things were *defended*. And , if you didn't do , what Harold and I were doing, and I did that with every trip I ran, [interference] when I ran lead, and I never had all that flak I'd go over a heavy defended target and I'd see flak over here— see it over here [motions to either side of himself] but I never had it whenev-, but I never had it, I never had flak in the group, and one other thing I did was I'd, supposed to be, a minute behind the group ahead of me but if I was going into a heav- heavily defended target, I would be a thousand feet above or below that group. I would get up right behind 'em. I'd bring my group up out of formation—too close [interference] and the gunners would think [interference] that I was- that it was all one group so we're a thousand feet off of where they're cuttin' their fuses and they're not going get a shot in our group. We'd go by clean and then they got the other group is way-they got two minutes to work on the other group behind us, but we have gotten by clean because we cheated a little bit and got up right behind the other group—Those two things...

CW: You mean behind, you mean below? On top?

JC: No we were either a thousand feet above them [CW: Right]—or below them, but we were behind 'em where nobody's bombs were going drop on anybody else. Our bombs would be clear of them. But we looked like the same bunch of people. We looked like the same group of airplanes. And, that was a real winner for me, and I figure...I figure the —and here goes too much talk again but—I figure that the reason, the reason it, [interference] the reason you got, you got shot down in lead was because you were a whale of good pilot and were [soda bottle opening] and were on course for seven minutes and they could track you and get your course and get those shots in close. But the thing that saved a lot of people, they weren't that good on judging drift. So they'd turn on the bomb run and they'd have six or eight degrees of drift so they're adjusting their heading for that seven minutes and changing—so the worse pilot they were the safer they were [low laugh] the best pilot they were the more trouble they were in. Which is what happened to ... Edzel Richardson was the guy that was in there with us who was had more time in than any of us he had —he and I had more time than most of the generals that was in there—more flying time. But he had 3400 hours—I don't think you could find a general in the air force other than Do- Doolittle who had that kind

of flying time at that time [interference] but he was he came across Vienna on the 22nd of March and, got shot down because he was doing that good a job and he wouldn't turn into the baker box up here cause he didn't want to give them a problem, didn't want to crowd 'em which he should have done to clear the target. He's supposed to turn right but he went straight ahead and they *got' em*. Blew his wing off.

CW: After the drop.

JC: Yea, yea. Right about at it. I think. [Wind blowing against the hanger doors]

CW: Did you change the way that you that you flew after that?

Oh no that was near the end of the war. I was already...I was flying that way ever since, since I started leading. And I think it saved me from getting busted up with flak all the time. Like most people were. I don't how to cut this down. Every time we get on something I gotta give you a whole bunch of...

CW: That's fine

JC: ...information you probably don't even need.

CW: What was it like flying these bombing missions over Europe?

JC: What was it *like*?

CW: Yea...

**[Time: 52:28]**

JC: Well, it was enough to scare the devil out of ya. Because you knew that you had about a fifty percent chance of gettin' maimed or *killed*. But it had to be done. And that was the thing with everybody that I think , I don't know what the percentage was but maybe fifty or whatever percent, people that were over there doing this, were... were going do, were going do what they could to destroy the German war machine. And another percent was just going go there 'cause they had to be there and they were going put in their time, but they weren't going go out of their way to do anything. There's break over there somewhere, a percentage, but that doesn't need to be in there. But, it was it was a thing that [interference] people differed by their nature, it would not bother some people at all— I shouldn't say at all cause it scared the devil out of you. and you had to- everyday when you went out on a trip you had to prepare

yourself for death. It was, this was a day when you had a damn good chance of getting killed. A *real* good chance. And so you had to go out prepared for that. You had to be ready for that. You had to understand that would happen, and it would be alright because you had to be there. You needed to be there. *Somebody* had to be there. And that was the attitude of um, a great number of, a great percentage of American GIs in World War Two. It's why we were successful. And the others, couldn't bring themselves—couldn't psychologically get to that point where they could accept it. [interference] They were just in such a sweat. They were doing mentally damage [interference] and they would have post traumatic syndrome, syndrome, whatever they call it...like we had .... One of the greatest guys I knew over there was a colonel. We're not going say that... and he was, he was war weary, which people I had, people *do that*. As I said some do and some don't, but he was having nightmares all night long he couldn't sleep. They would get him drunk and put 'em on the airplane and send 'em out with some pilot who was going fly him and he would just sit in the seat—stoned—for the whole day you know he'd be, s-sobering up by the time he got off the target and came back but...

CW: Now was he an observer or a co-pilot?

He wa- he couldn't fly. He's stone-drunk. Nicest guy you ever met. You know. He wo- you couldn't meet a nicer guy but it was just the way that he ...that the [interference] combat affected him and a lot of other people. But he couldn't sleep at night, and they wouldn't relieve him, they wouldn't, you know, they should have send him back home. But being a colonel they couldn't. They had to go ahead and punish him. But. This does not want to be published. This is as good a friend as I ever had, and lot of admiration for him. It was just a psychological thing with it with the individual, the individual make up that he couldn't come to terms with death, on a daily basis. You had to do that when you went on a trip. If it was a bad trip [interference] which you knew it when went down for briefing. You had to be ready to die. And you had to accept it. [Interference]

CW: How did you prepare for death—how did you prepare for your missions?

JC: I didn't prepare for it I jus-you know it was just there, we were going and I was going and there was nothing else going happen but we were going and you could die or you could get back. It was one or the other.

**[Time: 56:32]**

Like I said, I cheated a little bit and got a system that defended me and I came out, I got shot at and sho- and I got close shots on me before I was in lead. We got, we got shots where they moved the airplane. Eighty-eight went off underneath our tail and raised the airplane, put a 128 holes in the airplane and but that was when I, before I was leading, when I was leading I never got anything like that. Never got near me.

CW: What are some of your more memorable missions during the war?

JC: The best I had were in that book, that's what I wrote the book for. These had story value, one bad, because I had a crew that was —miserable crew, was flying somebody else's crew, th-, they were just a miserable, miserable trip...

CW: Is this when you were group leader or before that?

JC: It was , just when I was coming up on it I was leading a leading a Charlie box, this guy Eli was my navigator, and I didn't know him, and he's written on this same trip, and that' one of 'em, that's one of the one's I'm going s-send back for Kollander to have. But he's a- he's written the same trip up, and I've written the trip up there bu- mine's in here and his is in the letter. And, everybody saw everything different. , saw the same thing different, everything that you saw from a different point of the airplane, if you're a ball gunner you saw the war, a different way than the pilot did and that was a different way than the navigator [interference] But, I'm kind of ruining you with material, there's no reason to have all that stuff.

CW: You said that you would see the war a little differently depending on what...

JC: You see the war differently, you see... the Navigator has-and this is why I like these letters so much—the navigator has the most information on the target, and on the route, and where we're going and he's got a lot of written material that the pilot doesn't even have. I'm flying him up there and I don't know a lot of stuff that he knows about the target. I know where it is, and can usually see it, but not always. But- So his perspective is entirely different fr—when he writes a letter home about the battle he's got, you know, and I write one home, I'm going write 'em about, we had smooth air and the formation stayed in and everything and that's my part. And he's going write 'em and tell 'em all about [interference] the intricacies of getting to the target, through the flak and stuff I didn't even know about. It's a diff- it's a different ball game where we are, and the ball gunner, he's going see the target, he's going see all that stuff, he's got a different perspective. More like the rest of the gunners.

CW: Tell me about some the things that would be proper to your perspective as pilot.

JC: Would be proper? [CW: um-hm] Well the thing that I saw was wrong was wrong with the leads that were over there, was, they had been made leads, they didn't have enough experience in formation to have been made lead pilots in the beginning. They had not flown in the back of the formation enough to know what the problems were with the guys that were following 'em. And, that was the replacements that went over there, that's what we saw. Well these guys that are pulling so much power that nobody can stay in formation with 'em. They're burning the engines up on the airplane. And running 'em out of gas. All this stuff because, they hadn't been in the back, long enough. That was the biggest thing I saw in there, and I'd say—the other thing I pointed out earlier was—seeing the drift, a pilot with a lot of experience can turn on to a new heading and say, I've got two or three degrees of drift and then turn three degrees and kill it. And go straight and where he wants to go. And that would have got 'em killed. Being that good, would have got him killed as a lead pilot. But that was, that was a — here we got too much information [wing blowing] you know, he was just there. He was either good, and killed himself, or he was mediocre and did this [zigzags with his hands] all the way down the bomb run [laughs] and he didn't get hit. [CW: Hm]

CW: Were there any drawbacks to flying drift, or drifting while flying?

JC: Not, not seeing drift, well no, if a guy if the guy couldn't see drift he couldn't fly very well, so he saved his life. But he may have missed the target, because they may have been making so damn many turns he couldn't get lined up in time to hit the target [CW: ok] You know.

CW: Yea, thank you for explaining that. Um, have you ever had difficulty talking about the war?

JC: No I- no. The war's never bothered me.

CW: hm, so you spoke to your family about it when you came back?

JC: Eh, if they were interested. They've never been interested. My kids don't know what the war was. Never studied it in school never kn—never heard of it. No it just missed history. 'Til real recently, and it's only now coming into colleges I don't know think they teach World War Two in High School. It's too much material. They see movies, they've seen movies of it now, but, that show [indecipherable due to interference]

**[Time: 62:18]**

CW: Now for the more, for the more difficult one, um. You never saw the people that were killed during your missions; um you mentioned different perspectives of w-

JC: I, never, anybody—you're talking about the people we dropped bombs on?

CW: Right.

JC: No. You weren't connected with those people. [CW: Right], and as far as we we're concerned, they were connected with Adolf Hitler and —whether they wanted to be or not—it was their problem. And, where we went, —which was a difference in the American air force, and the British air force, that's a long story. They , the Brits were going, see Harris in charge of the British bomber command, would never do daylight bombing, which is what it —here we go- which is what it took, to break the German air force [interference] before they could put the ground troops on the ground. They had to kill off the German air force. And the American bombing of Europe is what did that. The Brits never built a long-range fighter. You never saw a Spitfire over Germany, 'because it wouldn't go there. We had to build all the long-range fighters and we had to fight that battle *alone*. They were up there bombing, and blowing up cities all night long, but they were just trying to kill off all the Germans to get 'em, and make 'em surrender, and that was their program. That was not our program, and they talked us into doing some of that, you know, in their area of the 8<sup>th</sup> air force, not the 15<sup>th</sup>, they went over—we went over in the daylight and kept bombing s- firebombing some of their cities to help 'em, burn 'em up, they'd burn up whole cities with thousands of people in there. But, that was not the intent *ever* of the American air force, except when th- those British generals talked us into doing daylight raids over what they had burned last night. There, in Cologne I think, and maybe two or three others. [Interference] But, what we, were killing over there, was mostly by mistake, you couldn't throw all the bombs in the—you couldn't get all the bombs in the area you wanted 'em in, but he had like, we had twenty-eight airplanes in a group, when we went over a group when we went over Hatvan rail yard we put every bomb in the rail yard except two that landed out in a field, and I have a picture in there of that, but I don't know—it's in the other book [indecipherable, low voice]. But we weren't bombing people intentionally. The Brits were. 'Cause they were mad, they had bombed London—Hitler had bombed London early on--that was his mistake and so. That was their whole program. [interference] And they never did understand that in order to win the air war over Europe—we're in

another subject now—that you had to kill off the German fighter command before you could put people on the continent. And, Doolittle’s the one that did that.

CW: Um, there are historians today who are publishing on the issue of the “good war” this idea that the Second World War was not as good a war as what historians tend to remember from it.

JC: No it wasn’t. It was a banker’s war like all the rest.

CW: It was a what?

JC: A *Banker’s war*.

CW: Hm. Can you go into that a little more?

JC: It’d be, you don’t have time.

CW: Ok, ok, that’s fine.

JC: But all wars in the last two hundred years, except maybe the Civil War, were banker’s wars. They still are today. They’re fought to sell arms and ammunition. [Interference] to make money. For ammunition people and all the rest. That’s the way it is around the world. And that’s a radical thought, but it’s true. They fought World War Two, and the, you know, it’s kind of camouflaged you think we fought it to save the Jews from getting cooked, and gassed. But, we really fought it to sell ammunition [dog barking].

[Nephew interrupts with dog]

CW: Shall we pause here?

**[Time: 66:51]**

JC: Yea, that’s my grandson, he’s going make--. Yea we can move if he’s—we can quiet him or move...

[Pause]

...international banks and over here, Dulles, and in England, I forgot who the guy was right at Churchill’s side, but they were all bank representatives, and they were all selling ammunition. And that’s where they’re making all their money. That’s why you have

wars. You know unless you end up with a—the Civil War, you know I don't think is in that category. The rest of them all were. And they were fought, *just* to make money. And I thought you knew that. [CW laughs] That's kind of a well known thing [smiles]. Anyway. There is no good war, and that wasn't a good war, but they had a they-- had the, misbehavior of Hitler and his people was so great that [Nephew: I like that Mustang/ CW: Thank you I appreciate that] That it could [interference], talk us into having a reason, more of a reason, for a war. And in World War One, they never had a reason they could *sell*. They didn't have to—you know the people of that era were, used to think it was great to go to war. It-you would get glory and all this kind of stuff you know, and it was a glory thing. That—

CW: Hm-um. Was that ever a motivation for you?

JC: That was never a motivation in World War Two for *anybody*. We had seen the, the people running around with lung damage from the gas in the trenches, and had all the news of World War One that that, the impossible situation it was. And, that's why everybody got in the air force; we didn't want to be in a trench. So we chickened out of the trenches and got in- and got in the air force. [Sniffs]

**[Time: 68:58]**

CW: One of the things that historians cite when they're talking about this idea of "good war" World War Two as the good war, are the bombing missions, now you said the Americans never targeted targe—[JC: No they didn't] They targeted...

JC: Well they did a couple times, the Brits talked 'em into helping 'em burn up Cologne and maybe one or two other places, and they went along with it.

CW: You weren't involved with those missions?

JC: Oh no, that was the 8<sup>th</sup> air force.

CW: Ok, so would you be in agreement with the historians today that sort of revise our conception of World War Two as a just, good, honorable war?

JC: Oh yea, I don't think there's been one.

CW: You said [interference] your last bombing mission was in August the first.



JC: No, No that's- No. I, I didn't get over there until September of '44 and the last bombing mission I had was in April of '45.

CW: April, ok.

JC: I don't remember the date; it was up there in the twenties. But I have it written down somewhere.

CW: Can you tell me about that last bombing mission?

**[Time 70:00]**

JC: The last one was against the German troops in —and supplies, in north-west Italy, as they were pulling out we were bombing with frag bombs, twenty pound bombs that went off over head twenty feet in the air and it killed everybody that was around there and spiked all the guns and ruined all the equipment. And the mission we ran in there was...I don't know the name of the place [interference] but it was the second time I led the wing, we went up to, beyond the lines and dropped—across our lines, and they'd send up colored flak, so we'd see where the lines were, and I had that good navigator, and good bombardier, and we dropped frag bombs on that whole batch of German troops and whatever equipment they had there. And, if they were in someplace, in a hole, they might have been alright, but frag bombs were pretty, pretty bad tools they'd clean out everybody and everything that was out there. They couldn't use any of their guns or any of their equipment or anything else after that happened. We had a whole air force out there, twenty-one groups up there bombing the whole German front lines, that's why they moved out of there so fast and ...

CW: Ok. [Turns page] Before we go on to [interference] the end of the war and afterwards, is there anything you wish to contribute or to discuss.

JC: That's where all my material is. So.

CW: Ok, I figured no-

JC: We don't have time for it.

CW: Well, we certainly have some time now if you want to introduce some of that material.

**[Time: 72:14]**

JC: , what I, what I'd like to introduce is what my what my thrust is, is that this war, the air war over Europe, it's not even considered a war, it's a separate war, but the Americans fought it, basically alone. The Germans<sup>5</sup> were killing populations, all-night bombing. And they would not go over in the day time and challenge the German fighters. They said that couldn't be done. So they stayed out of that, they didn't join us, and they never made a long-range—so, it's a touchy subject, you don't want to throw that out to the public, but that's the way it was. It was an American battle, an American victory and it says that—states that in this book *The War in the Air*, that's [coughs] been very unpopular because nobody ever thought the air war did anything, so they threw 'em all in the trash, til this guy wrote it. But he was in intelligence, and he's got all the facts and figures on, the, the air war, that [looks for book] are things that, you gotta talk your organization into buying this book, if it's available. It's out of print, and this is by Gurney, *The War in the Air*, and I'm going show you while we've got it—I'm going show you the copies, that I copied [coughs] which [interference] probably, in college they think that's plagiarizing, but I copied his pages so I could carry 'em with me when I went to our squadron meetings, all around the country and he's got, he's got all the information on World War Two , he's got, he did, he's got the committee that Roosevelt organized to study the results of Aerial bombing, which is totally unknown to history, nobody ever printed it, 'cause it was in this book. And, I want ya'll to, I don't know whether you can take it, since it's been plagiarized—I copied the pages [CW: laughs] Does that make ya'll unable to carry it?

CW: No.

JC: Ok. An , this is a whole study [interference] of what we're talking about, this is, this is the , [moves chair, shuffles papers] the disagreement between the American generals and the British on what we're going do—they aren't going go to war in the day-time 'cause it can't be done. And neither the Brits nor the Germans, would go over a country in the day time, in their airplanes, they said it couldn't be done. They had already tried it and failed, and they couldn't get their pilots up—couldn't get the airplanes up, in the day time. Anyway. These are pages that I want ya'll to have, if you'll take them.

**[Time: 75:32]**

CW: Absolutely.

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<sup>5</sup> JC means the British

JC: And, and this gives the whole story that you're talking to me about now, and [coughs] these are the American generals talking to the British generals about how they're going [interference] and Roosevelt asked for that to be done. And, this is the book that you want to try to get, because it has a lot of other—all the facts of this war of all the air, going on in the war. And the interesting thing to me was that, he put in there—and I could be off about 10,000 people but— The Americans lost, missing in action, 732 that may be off a few, thousand. People—in the time we were there, we were there half the time the Brits were. [CW: You said...] We lost 732 within—several thousand—missing in action, out of that heavy bombardment and the fighters that that were conducting them, but that particular maneuver ---.<sup>6</sup> That wa- that many, that's big loss! [Coughs] That's a lot of people. They didn't' all die but they were in POW camp if they didn't die.

CW: They were missing in action.

Missing in action. And, the Brits lost within ten or twenty thousand of that same number but they were up there years longer than we were—I think a couple years longer.<sup>7</sup> But it's interesting that the two countries lost the same amount. But what we accomplished with that loss [coughs] was that we killed off the German fighter command, by being there in the day time. Whether we did anything else or not, [coughs] we got rid of the German fighters so we could land there. That was the whole purpose that, that the American generals understood that the Brits didn't, you can't go there if you, if you got airplanes there. So, Spaatz, was the general in charge of the 8th—these are yours—[CW: Ok] Spaatz was the general, was our general in charge of the 8th air force and he had a sign on the board when in [interference] in the fighter command, 8<sup>th</sup> air force fighter command, he had a sign up on the wall that said that the job of the fighter pilot is to defend the bombers. And Doolittle came in, he took that air force over, and said, “who in the hell put that up there?” And the fighter general says “well that's what that's what Spaatz made me put up there,” he was all against it, that's what Spaatz made me put up there. He says, “Take that down, and put up a new one.” And it says, “the duty of the f-, the duty of the fighter pilot is to *kill* German fighter pilots,” and three months later, didn't have enough fighter pilots to get off the ground. They had killed out 700, they had—gotten rid of 700 German fighters. They were coming up there, having a laughin' good time, they'd shoot at a bomber, and go home. But now they had 18 P-51s

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<sup>6</sup> Around 78,000

<sup>7</sup> Within one thousand

following 'em home, and they *always* got shot down. They never got up and got down again [interference]. So they just eradicated the German fighter command.

**[Time: 78:57]**

CW: And that was to the fighter's credit, in, in addition to your bombing mis-

JC: Oh yea, yea. They were...but that's what changed the war. It was in '43 and I've forgotten, but, within three months, after Doolittle took the 8<sup>th</sup> air force over, with that with that, statement, he had won the air war. , and when I got over there they had been beaten down so that the fighters couldn't get us any way—they didn't have enough- they had sixty fighters in our whole area-we got 700 heavy bombers and 300 fighters going out every day, and they never attacked us, 'cause they knew they'd get-they wouldn't get home. They would fly by, but they wouldn't wo- make a pas- they did a couple a times, they shot down over Friedrichs- they shot down over Friedrikshaben, they shot down over eight B24s in fifteen seconds in our group, and most of 'em in our squadron. That's all published here; you don't have to write it down. [CW: Ok] But, like I said, you've got too much material to even deal with, it's, this was a big war, we were only one group outta-I'm saying it was twenty-two, it may have been, it may have been eighteen, but I've got a thing here that shows the total number, that were involved, and [looking through materials] probably can't find it, but it's in here. It was in this book, I took 'em out so I could find 'em easier. Anyway we better let you go ahead and get anything else you want; you're going to run outta time.

**[Time: 80:51]**

CW: Ok

JC: You gotta be home for quitting time.

CW: [laughs] So how did you find out the war was over?

JC: The war in ...

CW: The war in Europe.

JC: ...in Europe. Well, we knew it was going be over, it was almost over for a bunch of weeks in there they tried to blow up Hitler and failed and they, and we knew it was coming-we knew it was at an end, but we just, when they will quit, you know.

CW: When you started your mission in, your bombing mission, it was in 1944 correct?

JC: I started in September of 1944

CW: Ok. You were pretty well aware this was the beginning of the end?

JC: Well, we knew the fighter command had been destroyed- the German fighters had been destroyed, we didn't have enough fighters to worry about, except when we came home by ourselves, as singles when we lost an engine, and got out of formation over Germany, oh they would come up, couple of 'em [interference] come up and make you surrender, throw your gear out and land somewhere up there—or shoot you down. So.

**[Time: 82:03]**

CW: How long did you stay in Europe after the end of the war?

JC: I think we came right home.

CW: Ok. How did you get home?

JC: We got home on the *Admiral Eberly*, it was a troop ship they had just made—an air conditioned troop ship that-top of the line, it was pretty fast. We came to Trinidad and they put us in the South American operation, they were big down there, bringing all the airplanes were flying home from Europe. And, they really, they put they took those of us e- I was a major; they put seven majors in operations at Georgetown. We didn't need but one, through the way we only had but one, they were trying to get a general, a guy a promotion from colonel to general, they put seven majors in there on duty, to sign clearances for airplanes coming through—it was no job at all. It wa- just a reason to be there.

CW: Ok. How long did you do that?

JC: Three months. [CW: Three months ok] Till the Japanese war was over.

CW: Ok. So in August you were discharged, August or September?

JC: forgotten, well I've got it, I've got it in my , in my papers, but I don't remember, it was not August, it was more like [coughs] it was more like, somewhere around October, I think, [indecipherable]. But ... [looking through materials]

CW: That's fine, we can check on that date later. Um, what did you do right after you were discharged?

**[Time: 83:43]**

JC: , I came back home and bought a Steerman [coughs] [interference] I bought , with some friends, with some service friends I bought a , twin-eng- twin engine Sesna Bobcat, held five people and I was going do charter work, flying around. And that didn't make any money, so then I went to work for National Airlines, when I found an opening, but it was about a year, I didn't go to work 'til I was about—no it wasn't a year , I was officially out of the air force in December, they ran my pay through December, and I went to work in , I had already tried that charter business and failed, lost all my money by March, I went to work in March on National Airlines.

CW: Now were you still in Georgia at this time?

JC: No I was in Fort Lauderdale?

CW: Oh that's right, Fort Lauderdale, that's right. So you were based out of Fort Lauderdale with National Airlines.

JC: Out of Miami.

CW: Miami, ok.

JC: Yea, they only had a Miami and a Jacksonville base. And they had New York later on but that where I was Miami.

CW: How'd you meet your wife?

**[Time: 85:01]**

JC: I met her on the airline they had...I got that story in the airline in the airline experience. [CW: um-hm] but , we met flying on a DC-4 in Newark and New Orleans on a four-day trip and married two weeks later.

CW: That's, that's pretty quick, um...

JC: Well, she was 23 I was 27 and I had been through a war. And, that's a long time to be away from any kind of dating or any females. We were—nobody but males down there in Italy. [Coughs]

CW: [interference] W-what had your wife done during the war? [interference]

JC: She was working with the ship yards, in Jacksonville, building, the liberty ships.

CW: Can you tell me a little bit about your wife's family? Her background?

JC: yea. She was from, Molina, Florida, which is, just north of Pensacola. And she was raised there. Her family-they they were farmers, they were Irish, they came over- her ancestors came over because they ran out of potatoes over in Ireland, in about 1850, and they were, they were, they had a- er their dad was a real entrepreneur he had been, he'd tried everything to make a livin' he had a little store there and in the Depression he had, ended up amassing a hundred-thousand dollars in , money which was a real winner [interference] at that time, you know nobody had a hundred thousand dollars, except bankers [CW: laughs] And anyway, she was raised there in Molina and she left, well she got out of High School, she went o Jacksonville where her brother was working, and , got a job with the-over at the ship yard, and she worked at the ship yard until it was folded up and she went to work with National about nine months before I did. She went in-she went in '45 sometime in '45, and I went in '46, parts of '46.

**[Time: 87:25]**

CW: And was she a stewardess, what was her...

JC: She was a stewardess, yea. And that's her picture [shows a picture of his wife in uniform] standing there in Jacksonville terminal.

CW: She's very pretty. The uniforms have changed a little.

JC: Yea.

CW: Did you stay in touch with the members of your crew, from the war, do you keep...

JC: [Interference] There's only one.

CW: I'm sorry?

JC: There's only one. [CW: I'm s-] There's only one crew member left.

CW: Did you, did you stay in touch with them immediately after the wa-

JC: No, we didn't. No, we didn't know where anybody was for forty years [CW: Wow]. [Coughs] Yea they found me forty-five or fifty years after we quit the war. We didn't have any interest in the war, we were raising a family, making a livin' [CW: hm-um] And I was going, as I said I was- I built two sail boats and went back and forth to the Bahamas every summer with the family, we had property over there and spent, two to six months over there every year, we made, for- forty-one trips.

CW: Tell me a little bit more about your family if you would.

JC: About *our* family? [CW: hm-um] They were—I brought some pictures in here—but they were—I've got, my oldest is a son, and the, and the second and third are daughters. And, great bunch, I think I brought some pictures over here [looking through materials] I- I'm on your material now, so I've forgotten everything about mine so. But yea I got, if I can find 'em, I've got pictures of 'em in here somewhere in this place. Maybe they're in here. But this is , I'm going send this with you, this is my, my first eight-eighteen years, I want her to have that in her files [CW: Ok] And , this is , this is the airline experience when we came back, this is —covers about thirty years with the airlines—there's a little bit of our family in there, not a whole lot, and , [interference] this is , all of our, these are all of our trips, to the Bahamas, and all of our-the-not all of 'em but that's , those are select trips to the Bahamas. [Shuffling photographs and notebooks] Let's see what's in here. And that's un—that's unpublished and it's , it's got such bad spelling that it's difficult to read, in parts it's almost impossible—I couldn't read it myself. But this is one of the- this is a little motor sailor I made, we went over there sev- we made over there seventeen trips over there trips over there in that one. Seventeen years. [CW: Oh wow], and I think that, I think I got my kids in there.

[Background chatter, indecipherable]

[Bird calling]

[Setting up additional camera when the other ran out]

[Dog barks]

**[Time: 91:26]**

CW: Now you said that your children never asked about the war too much...

JC: No. But the-



CW: I just met your grandson Joel?

JC: Yea, he doesn't know anything about the war, neither does his daddy. But here's his, here's his daddy, that's my oldest son, the other girl's are in there.

[Interference]

JC: I need to find 'em for you.

[Looking through materials]

JC: I've got some loose pictures somewhere in here, I don't know what I did with them.

CW: How long were you with National Airlines?

JC: Thirty years.

CW: Thirty years, wow.

CW: Many soldiers today talk about um, post-traumatic stress disorder, you mentioned that earlier, about how, some of your crew members faced that *in* the war...

JC: We had we had one case on the crew, it was our, was our nose gunner, was Biondo. [CW: -h] And he passed away about three years ago, but he was the only that had it on our crew. And, he was psychic, he had a premonition that he shouldn't fly anymore, he was up screaming at night. And Pitts, the engineer, was kind of the boss of the enlisted men, he kind of ran their business and he called me down there to talk to him and, he was going get off the mission and I told 'em I said, you know, you may get killed tomorrow, but, you, you're going get off and leave all these guys to get killed, [interference] they may get killed too. But you're going get off [severe interference] and I talked him into going on the trip and he lost an eye—flak came through the front and—he was right, he had a premonition, he lost his right eye, with a piece of flak, and that's in that story in that book that I gave her. , Wade Goodwright wrote that up, he took care of it. So, he was all-after the war he never did want to be with the crew anymore, he got mad at me for talking him into going, which is, reasonable [severe interference] and , so right at the end he got [indecipherable] the last year before he died but he never came back with us, we met every year all of us, except , the navigator and the nose gunner [interviewer's cell phone rings] So, but he was the only one that had that, that [indecipherable].

CW: How do you think the war affected you?

**[Time: 94:20]**

JC: It was not something that...I don't think it had any real affect on me, at all, I see a lot of other people I was there with that had been, lot of lead pilots that never got any affect, [interference] but it was something that I wouldn't have done without- couldn't have done with- wouldn't have wanted to have been without doing, but it was something I would never do again.

JC: I don't know what I did with those pictures of those girls, I got... [Severe interference].

CW: You said you were glad to still be in the air?

JC: Glad to still be in the air when?

CW: After the war.

JC: Oh yea, I figured that you could fly an airliner around through a few thunderstorms and not get shot at, that would just be hunky-dory.

CW: Have you been back to Europe since the end of the war?

JC: Yea, yea I have, I've been, I've been, to I've been to Italy, and, Europe.

CW: Have you visited some of the places that you were stationed, or toured while you were stationed there?

JC: Yea, we went back and looked up the ole base, the squadron did, and a lot of the group did, and I didn't go with 'em, on that, but they filled me in, on how it was.

CW: When was this?

JC: I don't remember.

CW: Did you go with your family; did you go with your wife?

**[Time: 96:07]**

JC: Yea, th- yea. Like I said, we went to Italy and I didn't have much interest in going back to where we were--it wasn't even that attractive of a place it was, down near

[indecipherable] where they raised the best olives in the world. [Coughs] But, I hadn't seen anything that I admired that much when I was there. You know about the, the 8<sup>th</sup> air force museum I was going bring you this so that you would know about it but you don't that, you can have it if you want it, but [CW: yea] It has the address on it, but I don't think anybody in your organization should ever go through the next year without going up there. Checking that, and making that trip.

CW: I'll be sure to pass that on.

CW: Well, um, you're, um 91 years old...

JC: Yea I'll be 92 in January.

CW: Be 92 in January ok. You said before we started the interview that the last time you flew was three months ago because of the engine in the plane is...

JC: Yea, it's being rebuilt.

CW: And you'll be flying again s-soon? As soon as the engine...

JC: Yea, we're waiting to fly my grandson when we get going again; I'm going training him on it.

CW: Ok, very good. Is that Joel-Joel...?

JC: Yea.

CW: Ok. Can you tell me a little bit about this place, about your home about your hanger here?

JC: Yea, well we came out here in '61, 1961 and we've been here, we had a 160 acres, we got rid of a fe- a few acres but we've got about 142 now and, in the cattle business mainly and, we're- we're doing a lot of re-doing and re-working on that right at the present, but, that's what we've been doing just been out here. We've got dairy goats, the wife's been showing dairy goats for, since the '70s we we're- we started in '73, I think and she's had a lot of winners over in Palm Beach at the South Florida Fair, and Tampa, at the State Fair. And right now we're—she and I are milking a goat a piece twice a day over there and , we've got, we've got goat milk in the box and about seven people come in and pick it up whenever they feel like it [CW: That's nice] And , some of 'em need it, and [interference] some of 'em just like it. Now that we're down on cows I

don't have but about ten right now and I'm not waiting for my cowboy to get some more fence-building done, we've just pulled a bunch of Brazilian peppers off the place , Ag-Ag department helped us with that and we're- got to re-fence and get more cows in here , but that's what we do.

CW: Um, Do you do anything else w-with the goat milk?

JC: I make cheese. [CW: You make cheese] I make farmer's—I'm waitin' for culture right now, I don't have any to show you but I make a real good cheese with a farmer culture and a- a aciphilic culture which is the kind they make normally goat cheese, soft goat cheese with. But I've been making it a little different, and, we've been doing it a long time 'cause um, she made, she showed about four cheeses up at Wisconsin that-at one of our annual goat shows, lasts about a week and she won top prize in the soft cheese over professional cheese blends, and, and then she's got second and third in a couple more-more varieties.

**[Time: 99:47]**

CW: Very good. Well Mr. Charlton it's been a pleasure to meet you today and I have really enjoyed the opportunity to sit down and talk to you, before I run out of too much tape I guess we better wrap things up. [JC: alright] Are there any last thoughts that you want to leave me with today?

JC: Yea, Yea. [CW: Ok, good] About fourteen hours of it.

CW: About fourteen hours ok [laughs].

JC: here's the here's the records here that go a while back that show [pulling through materials] a couple of things they show. This is the, this is the roughest target in Germany, where we shot down the most [indecipherable]. And what it proves, what I've got this for is to prove the difference in how many B24s and how many B17s were working in the air force [indecipherable due to interference] the number of B24s that were, that went over that target, and a number of B17s, they're added up at the bottom.

CW: I see that.

JC: These are, that's, that's from our, our, our group records; I want you to have that. Or if you, you can't take a picture of it?

CW: Yea, I can take a picture.

JC: Yea why don't you take a picture and leave it with me then.

CW: Ok, will do.

JC: And, and the other thing is these are, records off of our group tape. Which I have- I have two tapes which I took off of it. This is bombing accuracy which I may, I've added some, unnecessary remarks on it. I wanted you to have that, and, that was before I got there. These, this is another page on the same subject, and what I had was, I had one that shows how many groups are there. Ah that's the one! I think. That's the one that shows the groups. This shows-and I don't know B17 groups from B24s but, I had had a total of twenty-one, but you may count 'em again, I may not have the right count, I may have eighteen. But that's how many groups could put up, they could put up, thirty-in a normal effort they could put up thirty-two airplanes a piece [CW: hm-um] That's how many groups there went out every day. Out of the 15<sup>th</sup> air force, it was *about* the same size as the 8<sup>th</sup> I think, but these are all groups and wings and groups, and that came off our tape, so that's not plagiarism.

CW: [Interference] Ok. I'd like to get copies of these if you don't mind?

JC: Yea, that's what I was wanting to—I was hoping you would. I'm trying to put some of my stuff on you. The other thing is, is the Ruthie Dear letters. This is, this is, this is that navigator that, Patricia needs to decide on whether she needs to [shuffling papers] what he's done—I talked to the kids last week and I told 'em I was going talk to ya'll and I let 'em know—but what he's done, before he died it was, he wrote about these letters—and I think that's wrong, and that that, that's a decision that, that's a decision that, she's gotta make if she wants to do anything with this book. This would be the finest, the finest book on World War Two ever written, have most—most interest—and the most knowledge of what went on. And, the best written it just a shame that he never did find a publisher that would publish just the letters, but if he's written about it—that maybe or that maybe not just as good, you know, because I don't like to see an author, tell me the reader what went on, or why it went on, I want to analyze that myself. I want to read *what was said*. [Wind] And decide on how it went and what it was, I don't want to be *taught*, and it's a teacher thing you well they say, this is the reason this happen—I want, I want to decide why it happened myself. So ... [interference] I think this is the one. He flew with me, and I think I've got this article in

my book, that was the worst mission I ever flew, and , he's got it in his [indecipherable due to shuffling papers and low voice] and he's, got the bomb strike and everything. But, this needs to go to Patricia to see whether she wants to do anything with it or not. [CW: Ok.] And, looks like I'm missing a...

**[Time: 105:25]**

CW: Did you want me to put that with the documents that I'm taking and Xerox those and get those back to you?

JC: This ...Yea, Yea, if you can [interference] Well, I still haven't found those pictures of my daughter that I was looking for. I know they're here, but they're lost. You see I've got seven of his letters here, and I've marked 'em on here—I told the kid [indecipherable due to interference] to mark it copyrighted and then its copyrighted you know because it has a date on it. So, I he we got together here I don't know when, he said well—January first 2006, and he died about that time so, so I marked that on there, so it would be protected and, and he's going mark the rest of the works and there's four kids there and they don't really understand I don't think—Eli did—what they needed to do, to get that published. And I don't think he should have written a *thing* about it, the letters explain themselves, and he should have just sent all the letters and[interference] Patricia should go through his letters and they're willing to let her decide, they like—they need somebody like that, to decide, and she can part that work out to any of ya'll she wants to, I just wanted her to have first shot at—I like what she did with that Korf book [CW: Korf, yea] I like what she did there. And I think she's good, and she may have some of ya'll that she would trust to do that same thing, so whatever she does with it, , I could care less, I want her to—I want to see if it can get handled—it needs to be published. This is the best reading that anybody could ever read [CW: Hm-um] and it's a personal thing so, the guy has a—the guy's a great author, and, about their arrangements their—what they did on the ground and everything else.

CW: Ok. Very good. Well, let me take a little time to read through these and get these Xeroxed and I will get these back to you when I, when I give you final copy of everything [JC: Yea ok] the final transcripts [JC: Ok] extra copies. But if I could go ahead and conclude the interview I'd like to go ahead and take some pictures of these documents.

JC: Yea.

**[Stop at 107:44]**