Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Paul Taylor on the 28th of January, 2002 at approximately 10:10 in the morning. I am in Lubbock, Texas and Mr. Taylor is in Ora Valley, Arizona. Sir, why don’t we begin with a brief discussion of your early life and if you would, tell me when and where were you born?

Paul Taylor: How do you spell your last name, Steve?

SM: My name is Maxner, M-A-X-N-E-R.

PT: Okay. Yes, I was born in the Township of Dunker, which is Stoughton Wisconsin on 10 May 1921. I was born at home in Dunker but it’s Stoughton Wisconsin.

SM: How long did you live there?

PT: Until I was 15 when my father passed away. I was 15 and I left home. I went for six months to the CCC, and I left school and a couple of years later I went back and completed school at Stoughton High School in 1941.

SM: Now what do you remember about growing up during that time period? Of course the stock market crashed in 1929, the Great Depression quickly ensued. Do you remember a lot about that?

PT: Yes, I do. Things were pretty tough, but it was, again, not near as tough as it was for the city kids. They had to have this money invested in Stoughton Wagon Company and of course they went broke and lost all of that money. Then in 1932 when
the banks closed, my dad and my aunt had their money in the bank and that closed. But, living on the farm wasn’t so bad because we always had plenty to eat and we had some income. We had a dairy farm, and we had some income so that we survived very nicely.

SM: Now was that your father’s principle occupation while he was living was dairy farming?

PT: Yeah, well originally he had a place in South Dakota as a kid. He had, oh, what do you call it; he had a place. He homesteaded in the Black Hills and he traded that for 640 acres around Winner, South Dakota. Then when his father died [it was his brother] my aunt asked him to come back and run the family farm, which he did.

SM: And that was in Wisconsin?

PT: Yes.

SM: Now when you were growing up, did you have a lot of relatives living with you, near you? You mentioned your aunt was the one that asked your father to come back. Did you have a live in grandmother or other grandparents or other relatives that lived with you?

PT: [My Great Grandfather died in the Civil War. My Great Grandmother drove a horse and wagon to Madison each moth to collect $8 widows pension.] [Note: Where we lived was an original land grant to Daniel Webster who sold to Thomas L Taylor who sold to Luke Stoughton then my grandfather bought the farm from him.] Oh, about ten or 15 miles away in Edgerton I had an aunt and my grandfather on my mother’s side, my grandfather on my [Father’s] side had passed away he was buried the day before I was born. My grandmother on that side had passed away years before that. [Grandmother Taylor’s maiden name was Upton. Her Father was a Governor of her home state back east. My father also had two sisters back east. These I never met but saw pictures of them.]. The only one I ever met when I was a kid was my grandfather on my mother’s side, and I had a lot of aunts in Stoughton and cousins. There’s a lot of relatives around Monroe, Wisconsin, Edgerton, Wisconsin, and in Stoughton. There were many in Stoughton.

SM: Now what was it like growing up on the farm? What did you enjoy, or did you enjoy anything about growing up on the farm?
PT: Well I especially enjoyed the days when it would rain and we had a day off, we couldn’t work. On the diary farm we had to work every day, whether it was Christmas, New Years, or whatever. Ice-skating in the wintertime, we didn’t have any fieldwork. It was just taking care of the animals, and I enjoyed hockey and I enjoyed going to school.

SM: What did you like about school?

PT: Oh just about everything. I did a lot of reading. I’ve read everything we had in the school library. I liked the teacher. Our teacher had graduated from high school, had taken a three-month course in the summer, and started teaching that winter and she was probably the best teacher I’ve ever met. She had very little education, though she probably got more along the way, but she was really only a high school graduate and she taught all eight grades and all subjects.

SM: What subjects did you enjoy most yourself?

PT: Mathematics and history. I do have…you know, we had the Christmas program and we were all singing and the teacher was walking around with a very puzzled look and she finally tapped me on the shoulder and she said, “Paul, we want you in this program, but would you mind just moving your lips and not singing?” Later, she was about 75 I visited with her and I told her that and she said, “Did I really do that?” and I said, “Yes, ma’am, you sure did!” But, she was a great teacher.

SM: When you were 15 and you went off to the Civilian Conservation Corps, what led you to that decision?

PT: I don’t know. I was pretty close to my dad and I was just lost I guess, and so I left high school and went to the Civilian Conservation Corps.

SM: Where did you go for that, and what did you do?

PT: Danbury, Wisconsin, by the Minnesota border.

SM: What kind of work did you do?

PT: Oh, mostly just cleaned out some of the forests there, the underbrush and burned it. When it was more than 20 below zero we didn’t go out, which was great. We could stay in and play pool and things like that, we had those things.

SM: Were there a lot of other young men like yourself doing this in that area?
PT: Yes, I especially remember one kid. He was from Chicago and he was so happy and he came laughing and everything and said, “Hey, I just found out how to tie a bow tie in my shoelace!” and he was about 5’8”.

SM: Oh my goodness. About how many other young men were doing this in the same area as you there in Danbury?

PT: We had about 100 I guess, and we were supervised by the forest service rangers.

SM: How long did you do that?

PT: Six months.

SM: Where did you go from there?

PT: I went back to high school and I worked on different farms around the area.

Then, I settled with the Moe’s [A Norwegian farm family] which had been our neighbors and I lived there and worked for them. A lot of work that I really remember was in the tobacco fields. There were three of us and we got every third weekend off with nothing to do.

SM: Now were there a lot of tobacco fields?

PT: The Moe’s had the largest tobacco field in the state of Wisconsin. I still get a backache when I think about it.

SM: It’s backbreaking work isn't it?

PT: It was real tough work, but they were also in the dairy business so it was something that I’d been used to since I was a kid. I started when I was about four years old. I got an easy milker and about every year after that I got one more. We did it all by hand in those days.

SM: When you were working in tobacco, did you guys hang it as well?

PT: Yes, we had the sheds and we’d hang it and it would dry out and then wait for what they called case weather which was foggy weather so it would soften up so that we could…then we’d strip it and then bundle it and sell it, and one of the reasons I didn’t enlist until the first of January was we were busy stripping tobacco and I didn’t want to leave them until we got finished with it.

SM: Were you raised in a particular church?
PT: I was baptized in the Catholic Church because my wife was [mother was] Catholic but my aunt that had the farm there where I grew up took us to the Universalist Church, so that’s where I went when I was a kid. [My aunt drove; my mother did not so Aunt Carrie took us to her church.]

SM: Was that a pretty consistent ritual for you, going to Sunday church?

PT: Yes.

SM: What do you remember most about hearing the attack, the Japanese attack against the United States at Pearl Harbor and what was the atmosphere like there where you were growing up, especially with regard to the potentiality of war with Germany?

PT: Well to begin with, when Germany started, I remembered talking with my friend and saying, “Well I guarantee you it wont be too many years until we’re going to be involved in this war,” and then the attack on Pearl Harbor, like I said, we were in the middle of stripping tobacco. So, I didn’t leave until we finished the job and then me and several other friends got together and went to Milwaukee and enlisted.

SM: Now was there a significant German population, American-German population around where you grew up?

PT: There had been sometime in the past, I read the history. The Norwegians and the Germans used to get together and get drunk on Saturday nights and have big fights, but where I grew up it was mostly Norwegian.

SM: Now when you went to enlist, why did you choose the US Army Air Corps?

PT: Well, that’s a good question. All of us had went. We all decided that’s where we wanted to go. I was interested in airplanes, even though I had never flown or anything like that, but I was interested in mechanics, like fixing things. I remember my dad used to say, “If something is broken, get Paul, he’ll fix it.” So, that’s where I went into aircraft mechanics in the Air Corps.

SM: Why don’t you go ahead and describe where you went for your initial training, basic training, and then what your initial impression was of being in the active duty service?

PT: I went from Milwaukee to Fort Sheridan and then from Fort Sheridan I went to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri where I had an appendicitis attack in the middle of the night. My friends called the ambulance and sent me to the hospital and they operated on
me early in the morning. Some corporal gave me a spinal that didn’t work, and so I tell
you, that was really something, going through an appendix operation without any…I
begged the doctor for some ether or something and he says, “I can’t do it. You just
relax.” No way I could relax! It was a terrible experience.
SM: You had an appendectomy with nothing?
PT: They had given me a spinal but it didn’t work. All the spinal gave me was a
backache for a few months.
SM: Oh my goodness!
PT: Yes! Then when I got finished the doctor said, “You want to walk back to
the ward, you better take out the appendix.” I couldn’t even stand up! I was so tired
from standing [the operation]. I could have got my hands out of the straps, but then I put
them back in because I knew I couldn’t afford to stop there anyway, and he wouldn’t give
me anything. Then he said, “Give him some oxygen, I think he’s going to pass out.”
SM: Why would passing out be a bad thing?
PT: I would have liked to.
SM: Yes, my goodness!
PT: Anyway, from there I got a ten day leave and I came back and all my friends
were gone and I got back and I checked in a day early and they quarantined Jefferson
Barracks for spinal meningitis so it was quarantined for about 38 days I think and
everybody checked in. If I’d had waited until the next day, they’d have just sent me to a
hotel in St. Louis but I checked in a day early. The next day they wouldn’t let anybody in
or out, so then all of my friends were gone and then when the epidemic was over I got
orders to Glendale, California. I went to Curtis Wright Technical Institute as an aircraft
mechanic.
SM: Couple of quick questions about your recovery; how long did it take you to
recover from that surgery?
PT: Not very long. I remember there were several of us that had the same
operation and everything, and Judy Garland came to entertain us and after she finished
her program there were about three or four of us stayed there. She sat on the piano and
talked to us for maybe a half-hour after the program. We got our pictures in Life
Magazine talking to Judy Garland!
SM: Do you remember what issue that was?

PT: Well, this was around sometime February or early March in 1942. I did have a copy of it but somewhere in the moving and everything I’ve lost it and I don’t know exactly which one it was. I did get my picture in Life Magazine again at Travis when that 747 [707] from Pan Am caught fire and they came to Travis to land. I arranged for a hanger space to put the airplane back together and as I’m standing on the airplane looking at it another Life Magazine [photographer] took a picture and I got my picture back in Life Magazine!

SM: That’s funny. Also, another question about the operation itself; do you know how long that lasted, how long did it take them to do the appendectomy?

PT: I don’t know, it seems like hours but I know it was only maybe a half hour. I really got a big kick of the doctor saying, “Do you want to walk back to the ward? The guy I operated on yesterday morning did!” Man, I was so worn out I just couldn’t move. He had to carry me back [in a wheelchair].

SM: About the quarantine, the spinal meningitis quarantine, did anybody actually come down with it?

PT: Yes, they had, and I don’t remember how many people they lost but they called it an epidemic and they did quarantine the base.

SM: You said that lasted about 35 days?

PT: I think it was 38 days.

SM: 38 days?

PT: Yeah. From there I went to California to Curtis Wright Technical Institute, a civilian training school for aircraft mechanics.

SM: Now did you ever go through what is the equivalent today of basic training?

PT: Well I had basic training, yes, at Jefferson Barracks.

SM: For those 38 days?

PT: I remember the guys that were in charge of giving us the military training gave us a break and said, “You can smoke if you got them, and if you got them, give me one!” That was the, you know, the guys that were in charge of military training.

SM: Gotcha. What kind of weapons training did you receive when you were there?
PT: I don’t remember having any weapons training at all. I do remember the weapons training that we got in California when they had the submarines shell the coast. They had us all out, they restricted us to base, and they gave us broom sticks to use for guns and gave us weapons training with broom sticks and they kept us on base for about two or three days, and then all of a sudden they said, “It would be good for the civilian’s morale to see people in uniforms, so if you can, ya’ll go to town as much as you can.”

SM: And were you well received in town?

PT: Yes, very well; in fact, we couldn’t even walk across the highway without somebody stopping to give us a ride or wanting to take us to dinner or take us out to entertain us, all kinds of things. I just can’t believe how well we were received and how well we were treated by the civilian population. When I came back from overseas I remember trying to, instead of waiting for…I couldn’t catch transportation home until the next day and trying to hitchhike and nobody would stop. It was a complete difference between then, how great we were treated. Red Skelton came to entertain us and invited us to come up and use his swimming pool. Being close to Hollywood, we had quite a few people come out to entertain, but he’s the one I particularly remember because he stayed and talked to us and invited us to come over to use his swimming pool anytime we were in town. [Two big guys, John Wayne and John Payne, they were not very friendly.]

SM: Now what kind of aircraft did you learn maintenance for while you were at Curtis Wright?

PT: Well they had liberty engines from World War I; we had some P-12s and some old 047’s aircraft that we could work on. It did teach us some fabric patching and things like that, which by the time I got around to the military aircraft, well, they had trainers they still had [Fabric] but I never worked on any of the trainers.

SM: How long was your training there?

PT: I think about three months.

SM: Now while you were there, was this just basic maintenance or did you guys do complete engine overhauls, things like that?

PT: No, it was just training us for mechanics. Actually, before I went there, at Jefferson Barracks I’d applied for pilot training but somewhere along the way they lost my records so when I was at Curtis Wright I applied again, so when I finished mechanics
training I was sent to Lowry Field and I was supposed to work in mechanics there until I
	got orders for pilot training, but they sent my records to I think Fort Leonard Wood and I
	went to Lowry Field, and so I was there about three months before my records showed
	up.

SM: What did you do while you were there?
PT: Well I found that all the old guys down at the hanger would only let
	graduates from mechanic school fuel the airplanes and clean them. So, I met a guy in
supply and I got him to request me to be assigned to him, so I worked in supply while I
	was at Lowry.

SM: Then when your paperwork caught up with you, did you go to flight school?
PT: Yes, and when I went to flight school… first I went to Nashville, Tennessee
	for classification and there I did so well in mathematics they thought I should go to
	want to go to pilot training,” so I did. But while I was at Nashville somebody left the
barracks door open and I woke up and I was covered with about two inches of snow and I
	woke up about half frozen and closed the barracks door, and then I got what they called
pneuminitis and they gave me a ten day leave. I went back to Wisconsin for a few days,
	and when I came back. I had orders to Mobile, Alabama. So, I went in and I said, “Hey,
I’m on orders, I want to go to pilot training or pre-flight,” and they said, “You can’t
leave, you haven’t been paid. We don’t let anybody leave here until they’re paid,” and I
	had two months pay coming. So, they wouldn’t let me go and so I stayed there for a
couple more weeks and then I got orders to Santa Anna, California which as far as I was
	concerned, that was pretty great to go to California instead of Alabama.

SM: And that’s where you went through flight school?
PT: I went through pre-flight.
SM: I’m sorry, pre-flight.
PT: Then from there I went to Tulare for primary and Chico for advanced [Basic]
and then back to Luke for advanced training.

SM: Now what was your pre-flight training like? What did it involve?
PT: It involved a lot of schooling on different things with aviation, plus a lot of
basic training, a lot of marching and things like that.
SM: I’m sorry, go ahead.

PT: Yeah, it was more like classification and just a lot of preliminary training in aircraft things, weather training, the altitude chamber, and things like that.

SM: Was it kind of like ground school?

PT: Yeah, except one of the big things was the altitude chamber to get you used to what it was like to be up high in the air, things like that.

SM: What was the most challenging aspect of pre-flight for you?

PT: I don’t remember anything being real difficult as far as pre-flight was concerned.

SM: But at this point you’re not in an aircraft?

PT: No.

SM: That happened at flight school at you said Tulare?

PT: Tulare, yeah, Tex Rankin Academy, civilian flight school, steemans.

SM: These are of course tail draggers, correct?

PT: Yes. In fact, there were a lot of people ground looped those things, and I came close and when I saw it I taxied in and the instructor said, “What’s the mater, don’t you want to fly?” and I said, “Yes,” “Well, then get out of here then!” I came so close to ground looping that I thought maybe he’d want to ground me.

SM: Was there the kiss of death so to speak; if you ground looped, were you out?

PT: I think by the time I soloed, I think 50% of our class had been washed out and either gone to other things, some of them went to navigator, some of them went to bombardier, I don’t know, some of them just went back to the Air Force, whatever they were doing.

SM: What was the principal reason for being washed out?

PT: A lot of it was getting sick, a lot of it was the instructor. Actually, I think I had more time before I soloed than anybody else. I had an [the same] instructor that I met another guy in Korea that had the same instructor and I think he was a nervous nilly. I never landed the airplane because he was always on the stick moving it and so I didn’t do anything until he said, “Well,” he wouldn’t solo me so he put me up for a wash out ride which they did, and I think I was the first one that the flight commander had passed in the whole class. Like I said, about half of them were gone. They’d give them a wash
out ride and if they didn’t pass his ride…but he passed me. But, I lucked out; the first
landing I ever made by myself was on the wash out ride and I made a perfect landing, and
so he passed me. Then the Army, they had Army pilots there and I was happy, I had my
parachute on my back leaving and he called me back and says, “Hey, the Army guy
wants to ride with you, and he wants to see what kind of people wash out that I pass.”
But I realized once the flight commander passed me, there’s no way in the world they
would wash me out at Tulare, so I had it made but I didn’t realize that, so I went up with
the Army and boy, I just couldn’t get that airplane on the ground with him! I did fine in
the other, but he said, “Well, I’m going to come back and check you in a few hours.” He
said, “You might well be working to be a navigator or bombardier,” is what he said, but
he never did come back, and I knew since [Flight Commander] fall had passed me that
there’s no way I would wash out in primary. I went to basic, I was about the second or
third guy to solo in basic and when I went to advanced they patented the time and I was
the first guy to solo in advanced. It was a lot different in primary. I was the last one to
solo in primary in my class, and about half of them were already gone.

SM: How long was, first of all, your pre-flight? How long did that last?
PT: Each one was about three months, pre-flight, primary…

SM: Basic, and advanced?
PT: Basic and advanced.

SM: When you finished your primary which was principally with the steerman,
what did you fly in basic?
PT: BT-13s.

SM: What were the biggest differences between the two?
PT: The BT-13 had a wide gear and a little more power, and it was all aluminum.
Actually, it was an easier airplane to land, take off and land. I do remember my
instructor was Buchanan and he had the kid Brendizzi and we took off and landed in
formation in the BT-13 when we got into the formation flying part of it, and every time
we’d land Brendizzi would pass us up and the instructor finally figured out why he was
doing it. He’d put his hands up. We had a hand crank flap. He’d put his hand up five,
ten, 15, how many turns we were supposed to put on the flap. He’d put his hand up for
five and Brendizzi would be down there cranking down five, and then by the time he
went ten, 15, Brendizzi was looking again but he only had five turns and we’d have 15
and we’d land, he’d pass us up. I could tell stories if I thought of things.

SM: Right, so that was easily corrected in just the communication between the
two?

PT: The instructor watched him and figured out why he was doing it and told him
to wait until he got finished and that solved the thing.

SM: Was there anything particularly challenging about your basic flight school?
PT: Not particularly. It was an easy airplane to fly and it was…there was a lot of
ground school, too, that went with it.

SM: Now was this at the same place? Where was your basic training, your basic
flight?

PT: My basic was at Chico, California. That was a military school.

SM: How about advanced?

PT: Advanced was at Luke Field, Phoenix, or Glendale, Arizona. That was in
T-6s. [Out of the whole class I was selected to fly for a movie. They called it Air Cadet
and they wanted someone to spot land in front of the camera.]

SM: T-6? And how was that as a change over?

PT: I really liked the airplane. It was a real narrow gear, and all the guys that
ground looped the T-6 were sent to P-40s for some reason… my instructor all through I
guess had recommended that I be made an instructor. I think they liked my attitude or
something and they thought…so, I didn’t know it. I wanted to get into fighters and
everything and I remember after I graduated I went to Williams Field. I was supposed to
go to Central Instructor’s School, but a couple of guys tried to throw me in the swimming
pool when we were having our physical training and I jerked away and I landed on the
edge of the pool and I wound up with a cyst. So I went to the hospital and they kept me
there because it just didn’t heal up. I was in the hospital for 40 days at that time. I went
to the hospital the day of graduation, but I flew my last night cross-country standing up in
the airplane because I couldn’t sit down and I wouldn’t go to the hospital because I was
going to finish that flight training no matter what for graduation before! So, I graduated
the first guy in my class at seven o’clock in the morning and then I went from there to the
hospital. They gave me a special graduation ceremony.
SM: It obviously finally went away?

PT: Well, they finally gave up and let me go. I was supposed to go to Central Instructor’s School at Randolph. I had orders. But, since it was 40 days later I had them call training command and training command says, “No.” It was in the middle of the class so they changed my orders to Williams Field. I went over there as an instrument instructor and I knew nothing! Because they had lost a whole squadron out in the Pacific because they got into [bad] weather and they lost the whole squadron and nobody knew how to fly instruments, so they decided they were going to have instrument training for pilot trainees. They had to get an instrument card before they could graduate. I had never flown things like the radio beam and so I asked…well, first I went out and the commander, squadron commander said, “I’ll fly with you,” he says, “But I’m busy today, come back tomorrow, and I’ll go out and check you out.” So I came back the next day about two or three in the afternoon and he says, “I’m too busy today, I can’t do it. Come back tomorrow,” so I did. The third day he says, “I’m just too busy, you come back tomorrow.” I came back tomorrow and I had two airplanes and four cadets and I was an instructor. So, I asked the other instructors where the…I spent a lot of time reading up on instruments and radio beams and all this sort of thing and I asked him, “Where’s the radio station?” and they told me and so I took the students and the first lesson was to fly them around and explain the signals and things like that, and I did. As the lessons went along, I did real well, but it was real funny deal that I had never had any training in that and all of a sudden, here I’m instructing it.

SM: So in advanced flight, you didn’t have any instrument training?

PT: We had some instrument training, but it was needles, bass, and airspeed and they had the flight indicator but nobody knew what it was…they knew it was for some reason something to do with instrument flying but our instructor said, “We don’t know really how it works,” and I found out when I got to be an instructor.

SM: Now when you were going through primary basic and advanced flight, were there any accidents?

PT: Yes. We lost [a buddy of mine] on our night flying the weatherman said, “The weather’s all settled down. It’s okay,” and then the [fowl] weather moved in and we had one guy bailed out because he couldn’t fly in the weather. Another guy spun in I
guess or something. We lost one of the guys, and they lost some guys over at Williams Field. A good friend of mine that I’d been through primary and basic with was killed over there. I think there were about three killed and one guy bailed out. I know when I ran into these clouds, it kind of scared me because I had the passing light on and all of a sudden it looked like you’re hitting a brick wall. But, they called us all back. I got as far as Ajo, AZ and then turned around and came back. But, the weather moved in and the weatherman said it wouldn’t and we had all these guys out and it was almost a disaster [for some] I would say.

SM: And you mentioned that part of the impetus for creating this new requirement, this instruments requirement was a major accident in the Pacific?

PT: We lost a whole squadron out in the Pacific.

SM: Now do you know what aircraft they were flying?

PT: I think it was P-39s or P-40s, I’m not sure.

SM: Was it because they hit weather as well?

PT: Yes, they hit fowl weather and none of them were able to fly. You know, one thing you have to learn in instrument flying is you get a funny feeling. You can be in a steep turn and you think you’re upright and if you fly by your feelings, you’re lost.

SM: Did you know anybody that ever suffered from vertigo or any other?

PT: Almost everybody suffers from vertigo, but you have to force yourself to believe the instruments and not believe your feelings when you get into weather.

SM: And how about navigation techniques, in particular celestial navigation?

How much instruction did you receive on that?

PT: We didn’t get any in celestial; it was all navigation was by radio and by dead reckoning.

SM: That included nighttime flying?

PT: Yes.

SM: Was that pretty much for the entirety of your flying career? You never really had to rely on celestial nav?

PT: That’s right. Later when I got into like C-130s and was flying in Europe or flying to Southeast Asia or something we had a navigator and [he] could do that, but by
that time we had some pretty sophisticated nav equipment in the aircraft. They did do
that. The navigators were taught that but the pilots pretty much were not.

SM: How long did you teach instrument training?

PT: I checked into Williams Field and the colonel director of flying said,
“Lieutenant, you want to instruct?” and I said, “No, sir.” He says, “What do you want to
do?” I says, “Sir, I want to fly P-51s,” so they came. I was there, I only did one or two
classes. I think I did two classes and they came and said, “We have room, and I
understand you want to fly P-51s. We have an opening for two guys and would you like
to volunteer for P-51?” and I said, “Yes, put me down!” Okay, what do I get? Orders to
Chico, California as a basic instructor, and that’s the way they used to do things back in
those days. They’d lie to you to get you to volunteer. So anyway, that’s what it was. It
wasn’t P-51s, it was basic instructor at Chico.

SM: For crying out loud!

PT: So I went to Chico and I instructed a couple classes there and they closed the
air field and I had enough time in then, so the only thing I could volunteer for was either
to go to another place as [Basic] instructor or to go to P-39s as an instructor. So, I got the
P-39s and I got about halfway through the courses instructing P-39s and they got rid of
the P-39s and we got P-38s and I got about halfway through that and they pulled a bunch
of us out for P-47s to go to the Pacific to escort bombers in the Pacific, and P-47s. So,
we went to Bruning, Nebraska and checked out P-47s and we got about ten hours and off
we went to Hawaii. On our way over they decided we didn’t have enough experience so
they exchanged a P-51 outfit and we were to go to Iwo Jima. Well, the P-51 outfit went
instead of us. We took their place on submarine patrol and all kinds of things like that in
Hawaii, and they got to Iwo Jima and the Japanese kamikazeed them and wiped out
almost one complete squadron and about half of another one. So maybe we were lucky.

SM: Yes, sir, maybe. Now when did you leave the US, the Continental US to go
to Hawaii for the P-47 bomber escort duty? [To the 508th Fighter Group the commander
was Col Lande from Stoughton]

PT: Oh, I was on my way over there in I think it must have been New Years ’44.
I was on my way back in New Years ’45. I was onboard ship. Then from Hawaii I went
to the 413th Fighter Squadron [Interceptor Group] in Ie Shima, right off Okinawa, and we
were flying to Japan. But, the Japanese were saving all their airplanes. I remember
Captain Novaresi, he was later General Novaresi, commander of 4th Air Force, but he and
I chased some airplanes all across Japan and we finally got up there close enough to see
they were P-47s. But, the Japanese were saving all their airplanes. They had over 5,000
of them. They had them in underground hangers and things like that waiting for the
invasion and we were in the front lines for the invasion of Japan, and had it not been for
the atom bomb most of us probably would have never gotten back home. I think it saved
an awful lot of people, and I know they sent out and they dropped all kinds of leaflets and
told people to get out of town, they were going to wipe out their town. They didn't
believe it because I guess the emperor wouldn’t let the Americans do that or something,
so they didn't leave. A lot of them died, but a lot more of them would have been wiped
out; in fact, there were more people wiped out by the B-29s in Tokyo than there was in
Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.

SM: You're talking about the incendiary bombing raids of Tokyo?
PT: Yeah, the P-29 bombing raids. It wasn’t all incendiary. The outfit I was in
were the first ones to drop napalm in Tokyo [Japan]. Those we had were painted yellow.
Tokyo Rose came out and said, “You yellow nosed bastards, you go down to Japan
you’re dead!” and we got a big kick out of it, really. But, I don't know. They might have
been serious about it, I don’t know. I don’t think they were doing things…but anyway,
that’s what she said.

SM: When you were diverted away from the assault on I guess it was Iwo Jima
and the P-51s went in instead, you said that you guys went on was it anti-submarine
duty?
PT: We were submarine patrol, but I’ll tell you what we did mostly. We went
out and intercepted lost airplanes coming in from the United States to Hawaii and
navigators messed up and we’d go out and intercept them and lead them into Hawaii, but
that’s the main thing we did.

SM: Would you estimate how many aircraft you guys went out and brought in
that were lost?
PT: I don’t know, it seemed like it was about one every day. Somebody would
get lost and miss the island.
SM: And when you were on your submarine patrols and things, did you actually encounter enemy naval vessels?

PT: No. One thing I did though, you know a good friend of mine we lost, we had a guy that was pretty weak on formation flying and he lost his formation in a turn and came back in and hit my friend and broke the wing off and he went tumbling down and he bailed out. I followed him down, but this guy [was] just nothing but pieces and I saw the dye marker where he hit. The other guy was in the ocean and I went and got a ship and flew across it and went out rocking the wings and did this a few times and finally got them over and they got over and picked him up. Later this kid that we lost, his friend [brother] came and he says, “My mother thinks he’s still alive somewhere because he was never found,” and I told him, “Yeah, I was there. You tell your mother he’s gone, and that’s for sure.” So, anyway, I don’t know if I should tell this but the best thing I could think of. At the time I was at Mocoleya we had a little hut and we used it for a club. I went over and bought him a couple of beers and then a phone call came in and said, “Your airplane is leaving Hickham and you better be on it!” so I got the ops officer and we had a T-6 we used for instruments, and so I flew him over in the T-6 and just made it. They were on the runway running up and I pulled up beside them and he jumped out and ran over and jumped on the airplane and left. But, we usually had something like that for instruments and I was always the one that got to give the instrument check, do things like that.

SM: Now what do you remember most about the buildup and the lead up to the potential invasion of Japan? Where were you?

PT: I was at Ie Shima. They had moved up a P-51 outfit from the Philippines and I don’t know what all they had moved up in Okinawa, but we had the whole island was full of airplanes. We had three runways and we had P-38 outfits, three P-47 groups, and a P-51 group. Just out of interest, this P-51 group, the first two airplanes came up from the Philippines and I think they were showing off a little bit because they came in right on the deck and just peeled off real tight and the first guy came in kind of in a stall and plunked down. The second guy stalled out and spun into the coral pit off the end of the runway and then bounced up on the runway and they hauled him off in an ambulance. He was up there with one wing and part of the cockpit had landed on the end of the
runway! It was quite a show they put on. Then we also had Joe Parker from Republic
because we were complaining, we had one guy had plunked into the ocean and we gave
him up and after a long time up he came! His canopy was closed and he couldn’t open it
so he stayed on 100% oxygen until the cockpit filled with water and then he pulled the
thing open and came up, but we thought he was gone! He played it pretty smart, I guess.
Then Joe Parker came and he got us all together and we were all complaining. Actually,
we were overloading the airplanes to get them to Japan with armament and fuel and all
this, and we were short runway. We’d get off and then they’d use a ground effect until
we got fast enough that we were able to climb up and get on course. Joe Parker was chief
test pilot for Republic and he got us all together and he said, “There’s nothing wrong with
this airplane, it’s just you stupid Army pilots!” The next day he was going to show us a
few things. We were out watching, he was flying General Owles airplane and he landed
in the rocks and the thing that the P-47 book says and Republic needed a new test pilot.
That was Joe Parker, but I’ll never forget how he said, “There’s nothing wrong with the
airplane, it’s just you stupid Army pilots!” The next day he does the thing that we were
all complaining about, getting that airplane off the ground. But, he said we didn’t need
full power in water to do it, and he was going to show us how and it didn’t work.

SM: Well he paid the price.
PT: Yes.
SM: How did you ever overcome that, that problem with having too much
ordinance and materials on the aircraft? Would you just continue using the ground effect
to gain speed?
PT: Yes, but we used full power and water injection to get it off the ground and
then we used ground effect to get enough speed to start climbing out.
SM: What do you mean by water injection?
PT: Well they used water that they would inject into the cylinders to keep it cool
so that you could get more power out of it.
SM: In other words, to prevent the engine from overheating?
PT: From detonating.
SM: From detonating [laughs]?
PT: Yeah! You could get a lot more manifold pressure without it detonating, you know. If it starts detonating you'd just lose power.

SM: Gotcha. What do you remember about hearing that the United States, instead of having to launch this massive invasion using conventional air and ground forces, and naval forces, that instead we’d use these new unconventional weapons, atomic bombs?

PT: Well first when we were going out to Japan they had five red spots on our intelligence maps and we were not to fly within any of those areas in Japan. We had no idea what they were, but after they dropped the second one, we knew exactly what they were. They had five targets picked out and they only used two of them. Of course the first one, the old Japanese general thought we only had one so he refused to give up but when they found out we had more than one they decided to quit which was great, saved an awful lot of us, I’m sure. One interesting thing, we were up there out and in the Sea of Japan was a ship, cargo ship, supposedly. Our flight leader said, “Last eight ships, go down and get him.” Well, I thought about that later, “What in the world do you think a cargo ship would be out in the middle of Sea of Japan, in the middle of the day, no way!” So when we went to get him, they threw off all the covers from the cargo [compartments] and it was nothing but guns. It was a big gunship. But, I lost one friend there and another one very interesting thing, you never saw fire out of one place but he said, “I got full throttle and I’m only indicating 140,” and somebody said, “Well I’ll look at it,” and he said, “You’re missing about two or three jugs off the bottom of your engine!” and he’s still flying. He flew out to the submarine and bailed out and he came back and the rest of the war he wore nothing! They gave him these black shoes and blue dungarees, all dry clothes, but they were Navy issued and he wore that the rest of the war, and nobody ever said a word to him about it!

SM: That’s funny! Now this ship that you guys went after that was supposed to just be a cargo ship…

PT: Our flight leader said, “Hey, cargo ship!”

SM: What were they firing at you when they started using their guns?

PT: I don't know. It looked like a solid mass because every few rounds they’d have one that would light up.
SM: A tracer? [Plus shells exploding]
PT: A tracer so they could see where they were firing. But, we heard later it was beached. We had rockets and the T-47 had eight 50’s that I know of. When I went after...I let go all the rockets and let go of the eight 50s all the way down until I turned out.

SM: How many rockets would you carry?
PT: We carried four.
SM: What size, do you recall?
PT: Two inch.
SM: And how many rounds of 50 would you carry?
PT: I should know that, but there was a lot of them. Right off I’d have to go back into the P-47 thing. I know the wings were compartments and full of ammunition.
SM: Oh, how reliable were the guns, the 50s? Any jam up problems or anything?
PT: They were pretty reliable. Of course they use a fire range to set the guns so that they were all aimed properly and things like that.
SM: What was your preferred altitude for attack? What was the lowest you wanted to be to be both accurate but also hopefully...
PT: Mostly with the P-47s in because by the time I got there, and I was probably lucky that I spent so much time getting there, all those things had held me up along the way, but most of what we did was ground support so it was low altitude and it was only certain places where they had enough guns to have...of course the bombers stayed pretty high because of course around Tokyo there was a lot of anti-aircraft. The only real anti-aircraft I saw was out of that ship.
SM: Did you get a lot of range time, or was it pretty much most of your gun training and weapons training basically on the job, so to speak? You were spending your weapons.
PT: We had gun training, and we took turns towing a target. Different airplanes had different colored bullets so they could tell who hit the target and that sort of thing. But, we did take turns in firing at the target and take turns towing the target. That’s one job I didn’t like was towing the target because some of those guys would come in and the firing would be pretty close to where you were riding in the target ship.
SM: You’re talking about surface level targets?
PT: No, we did some surface training in bombing, dive-bombing and things like that with practice bombs. We also did some air to air, take an airplane and tow a target.
SM: Behind your aircraft?
PT: Behind, and then you come in and you’d fire at the target.
SM: How far behind you?
PT: How far? Oh, a couple hundred feet.
SM: That’s still awfully close!
PT: Yeah! Some of the guys, if they’d get pretty close and still firing, you could see it going by you. I don’t know of any target ships that got shot down, though. I remember, though, one mission out of Hawaii and we were over at Kauai. We had some practice bombs and we did a roll with a formation and somebody left the oil cap off on Niesen’s airplane and of course he got his windshield all covered with oil and he thought he was losing an engine. The Navy was running a [mission] thing out of there and they were about every 15 seconds they were taking off an airplane. The rest of us in the flight got down there at real low altitude so they couldn’t get the airplanes on the runway and we went in trail round and around until they stopped and we got Nissan landed. One of those practice bombs fell off on the runway and you should have heard what the Navy Admiral called to our group commander about what a terrible bunch of guys he had and how they’d dropped a bomb on his runway and on and on! I’m sure he didn’t know why we did it, but we knew why we did it. Actually, he didn’t think he was going to make it home; he thought he was losing an engine and it was just an oil cap that was missing. Somebody forgot to put it on. [This was 508th. Our Group Commander was from Stoughton; at the time he flew a B-36. For his grandfathers funeral our neighbor on our farm, I was working for his uncle at that time, he hit a seagull over Lake Michigan and covered the windshield with it.]
SM: Well where were you when they did drop the bombs and what was the discussion like amongst the pilots and other people that you had contact with?
PT: I was in Ie Shima.
SM: Ok, you were still in Ie Shima.
PT: Yeah, that’s where Ernie Powell was killed in Ie Shima.
SM: Did you ever meet him?

PT: What was that?

SM: Did you ever get to meet Ernie Pyle?

PT: No, he’d been killed before I got there. I know there’s a big memorial right off there in Ie Shima for Ernie Powell. Anyway, yeah, as far as I could tell everybody was pretty darn happy. Of course when the first one went, but when Japan went then we were really happy. When the first one went, we didn’t know anything about it. We didn’t know what it was or anything but we heard that it had really wiped out the city. Then when the second one in Japan quit, that’s when we were in the celebrating mood.

SM: How much longer did you stay in the Pacific before you came back to the United States?

PT: Well, I stayed until right about near the end of December, and they told me if I would sign up and stay longer they would give me a promotion and I said, “You give me a promotion before I get my orders to go home and I’ll sign up for another six months,” and they said, “Oh, we can’t do that.” So anyway, I went home and like I said, I was on board ship going home and on New Years and I had been on board ship on New Years a year before going overseas, and the next year I’m on board ship going back home at the end of the war. Anyway, we went out on landing barge and climbed up the rope ladders to get on the ship and I remember thinking, “Boy, I’m glad I’ll never see this place again!” but guess where I was next time I went overseas; back into Buckner Bay. But, by that time they had docks set up and we just walked off from the gangplank. It was a little different. There was nothing there when I left there but when I came back it was pretty fancy set up.

SM: Well I forgot to ask you, while you were out there for just about a year that you were out there flying, did you get into any air-to-air combat yourself?

PT: No, in fact by the time I got there the Japanese had put all their airplanes away waiting for the invasion, and we would have seen a lot of aircraft if it hadn’t been for the atomic bomb, I’m sure.

SM: What was the trip like coming home as far as the atmosphere on board the ship? Were there a lot of other guys that were say ground combat guys, Marines, whatnot, that were coming back as well?
PT: Yeah, I think it was all returning servicemen on board that ship. So I went over on the old Matsonia and I came back on one of the Army transports. No, I came back on a Navy they called an APA. As far as I know, other than the crew, we were all Air Force guys. We ran through a typhoon and [it was the] big discussions we had, I don’t remember much discussion about the war or anything, but we were wondering how far that ship could tilt before it tipped over because when we first hit it, we had a big wave come across the deck and we were on the main deck and a big wave came right through our quarters and it got all the bottom bunks and some of the baggage. I remember some B-4 bags sloshing up against the side, and some guys jumping up and closing the bulkhead and tightening it down. We didn’t get out for about three days but when we first started hitting it I remember the tables and everything in the dining room, they were sliding all over the place and things were sliding off! The next time we went in they had them all lashed to the side, and then the next time we went in they were welding them to the deck so they wouldn’t move! By about the third day there was only two of us out of the whole bunch that went in to eat. I remember me and one other guy.

SM: You could eat through that?

PT: Yeah, we had to sit on the deck. They tried serving on the tables and everything but the tables and chairs and everything had to go all over the place. [They] lashed them down!

SM: I mean you could actually stomach it? You could digest?

PT: Most of the guys, even though an awful lot of them were pilots, they still couldn’t stomach that. It was really rough. I know some years later I flew through a typhoon with the radar and everything you could fly through with no problems. But boy, that ship was really something the way it was…nobody could get on deck because the waves were coming across the deck. So, we had to stay inside until we got through it, which was about three days. With the airplane it’s about 30 minutes or so.

SM: Yes. Well, so where did you arrive in the US?

PT: Well first we arrived in Washington and then they discharged some people from there. [Stopped overnight in San Francisco.] We went on to San Pedro. I remember it was a pretty tough ride, almost as bad as the typhoon because going parallel to the shore with the waves the way they were, but I do remember in Washington they had a
notice on the board there that it has come to our attention that some of these returning
servicemen, they’d taken their A-2 jackets away from them and they said, “This practice
will cease because we think those guys have earned them,” which I thought was pretty
good.

SM: Would you please explain what that is?

PT: A-2 was a leather flying jacket that Army issued. Back in those days, they
called it the A-2. The Army name was A-2 for it, but it was a…

SM: It was the nice, heavy leather jacket with the heavy collar?

PT: No, the one with the heavy collar had another name. [B15]

SM: This is the lighter one?

PT: They had some of the winter flying. These were more or less summer flying
jackets, just kind of a plain, leather jacket.

SM: How much longer did you have in the Army Air Corps before you got out?

PT: I was Army Air Corps until 1947, and they switched to US Air Force and I
stayed in. Well, actually I went home on leave after the war and I had a discharge date
and everything but I went home and my brother and all of his friends, they said, “Boy,
there’s nothing to do around here! [My brother had been wounded in the Battle of the
Bulge and evacuated before the Germans took over, then just killed hostages. They could
not at that time take prisoners with them to Germany. I always told him how lucky he
was to get wounded early instead of dead in the snow.] I wish I’d have stayed in the
service,” and they were collecting that 52-20 club. Remember, they had the 52 weeks,
they give them 20 dollars a week for 52 weeks for all the veterans? So, I went back and
asked to be changed to indefinite status from the discharge date, and as a result I stayed
in. They approved it, and I stayed in.

SM: Okay. This will end interview number one with Mr. Paul Taylor.

SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Paul Taylor on the
28th of January 2002 at approximately 3:15. I am still in Lubbock and Mr. Taylor is still
on Ora Valley, Arizona. Sir, why don’t we go ahead and talk briefly about your time
from the Second World War to Korean War and if you would tell me what you did,
principally new aircraft maybe that you were being trained on, things like that?
PT: Well yes, the first thing, there were so many of us they didn’t know what to do with us. Since I had some maintenance experience I started out at McCord Field in Washington. They assigned me as crew chief to one of the airplanes. This didn’t last very long because they had a vacancy so they assigned me as base recruiting officer. I was a lieutenant at the time and I attended the staff meeting. Colonel Bostrum didn’t think lieutenants should be in the staff meeting but there wasn't anything he could do about it. Oh, by the way, Colonel Bostrum was the guy that landed the B-17 at the Kahooko Golf Course in Hawaii during the Japanese attack. When the Japanese attacked, there was a whole lot of B-17s that were on their way to Hawaii. Then, personnel officer, I talked to him and I said, “I’d like to get assigned to the reserve units,” and he said, “No possibility,” but about a day after he said there was no possibility Colonel Hern who was organizing the reserve unit at McCord came and asked me if I would be willing to join his organization, which I did. They had T-51s and T-6s and those twin-engine beach craft. Then I got to fly the T-51s finally. That’s the first chance I had, and I instructed them, but I would not check out anybody in a P-51 that hadn’t flown them during the War. One of the instructors we had checked out a B-24 pilot and he wrapped a P-51 up in pieces without getting off the ground. Then of course I stayed with the reserve unit and then I applied for the aircraft maintenance officer school at Shanoot and I went through three different courses there. Aircraft maintenance officer’s course was ten months and then I went through the maintenance/administrative and the maintenance analysis course. [The commander of Mobile Training Unit requested me to be assigned to his outfit but I must have an overseas assignment before another interior assignment. The commander had checked and found I was the top student and asked if I would work for him.] Then I was shipped overseas to Okinawa and of course I was then aircraft maintenance.

SM: Before we talk about your time overseas again, let me ask you; why did you make your decision about not checking out anyone in the P-51 that hadn’t flown it?

PT: Because P-51s were just not an airplane for kids to fly in. Like I said, like this colonel that talked one of the instructors into checking him out, he didn't get off the ground with it. He lost control with it. He was a B-24 pilot. I would not even attempt to
check out anybody in a P-51 because it just wasn’t an airplane for kids to fly. It was very
difficult to keep it under control.

SM: What was it that happened do you think with this novice pilot that was being
checked out and crashed? [Not a novice but he was a 4-engine bomber pilot, experienced
pilot, but this was his first single engine since primary and basic. Had he flown the T-6 its
possible he would have made it. He did advance in twin engine and just was not prepared
for the P-51.]

PT: What was that?

SM: What was the problem? What was this that was so hard about handling that
aircraft?

PT: Well the airplane had an awful lot of torque and it was really difficult to keep
it under control and keep it straight on the runway. Unless people were familiar with that
I didn't think it was worth my while to try to check them out in a P-51. Let them fly, if
they were bombers, ex-bomber pilots, let them fly the twin engine that we had, and if
they flew other fighters besides the P-51 they could fly the T-6 in order to stay current
and get the reserve credits.

SM: What was the best way of training up a pilot to fly the P-51 if all that other
experience might not work well?

PT: If I take somebody out in a T-6 I’d be sitting say in the backseat and I’d hold
my hand against the mixture control because some of these guys hadn’t flown for a while
and they’d pull the mixture back instead of the prop control, things like that, and if I
didn't watch them they’d cut the engine off right after takeoff, and the same way with the
P-51. I checked out in a P-51 and it was certainly a lot different than flying the P-47 or
the P-38, P-39, the other airplanes that I’d flown. But, I’d spent a lot of time in fighter
aircraft and a lot of these reserves coming back had spent very little time, some of them
in bombers, and no way would I try to check them out with P-51 if they were multi-
engine qualified.

SM: Now when you went to Okinawa, what were you flying?

PT: Mostly T-6s but not very long. I was in the 51st Fighter Interceptor. Captain
Bailey and I, of course when the Korean War started, we asked Colonel Celonis to check
us out in the F-80s so we could get our missions in and go home, and he said he wouldn’t
do it. He said, “You old guys have no business flying these things,” and he said, “I have
to because I’m the commander of the unit,” so he refused to check us out. So, we had to
stay with the other aircraft. We had C-46, C-47s, T-6s, and F-80s. But, he wouldn’t do
it. They found out later in the war that the old guys did a lot better than the young guys,
but he didn’t think that…he thought we were too old for getting into fighters and he
wouldn’t check us out.

SM: How old were you at this point?

PT: Korean War, 1950, I was about 30 years old I guess, wouldn’t you say, 1921
to 1950?

SM: Right, you were 29 or 30. That seems like a young man to me.

PT: I thought so! But, he refused to check us out in the F-80. Anyway, I flew
some search missions and things in T-6s and I also had the recovery for downed aircraft.
When we got to Korea, I had reclamation they called it for aircraft maintenance, I had a
very interesting trip into a place called K-38. They said, “Do not land here after two
o’clock because it will thaw out and it gets muddy and slippery.” The Greeks of course
were part of the UN Forces in Korea and this Greek crew slid off the runway and they
had the Marines there, so they got the Marines out to pull them back onto the runway.
So, the Marines took and threw a cable around the tail end of the airplane. When I landed
there, I looked and there’s this P-47 sitting there with the tail section was removed from
the aircraft and it was still off the runway, and those guys stood there and watched them
throw a cable around the tail section and go to pull them back onto the runway and they
just pulled the tail section off it. What I was doing there, I went to check out an F-80 that
had force landed there and he’d slid off the end of the runway and about halfway into a
creek. When I got to the aircraft the seat was laying off in the rocks in the creek bed. I
said, “What happened here?” and he said, “Well a couple of Marines were playing pilot
and one of them was sitting in the cockpit and he squeezed the handle.” Of course the
canopy had been blown off so he squeezed the handle and ejected and landed in the rocks
out in the creek. He said his buddy was standing beside him and the thing hit him and
busted his jaw and the guy got busted up and they were both in the hospital! That’s just
one trip. I had another trip up to when they were evacuating from the reservoir, [we]
landed at a place they called it Hazardous Municipal. [Hazardous was on the beach but
the sand was fairly firm. It was not an airport, just a code name for the beach.] Some
sergeant said, “If you want to see some dead Chinese, just go to the other side of the wire
there,” and we landed on the beach. They were firing overhead with all the cruisers and
everything out in the bay there and the sergeant said, “You bring us mail and beer, and
we’ll just stay right here.” Okay, what else? That’s about all I did in Korea, some search
and some support missions, and mostly aircraft maintenance. I did the aircraft
maintenance and got a commendation medal for the maintenance in Suan in Korean, F-
80s.

SM: Were there any particular maintenance problems you remember about that
aircraft or about working in Korea generally?

PT: There was an awful lot of dirt and dust blowing up, but mostly the
maintenance problems were wrecked aircraft. As far as the maintenance on the F-80, it
wasn’t bad at all. It was a fairly easy aircraft to maintain. It was a very dependable
engine that they had. One of the young lieutenants in my tent was flying and a MiG
jumped him, but he could outturn the MiG so he kept outturning and outturning and the
MiG kept trying to get him and finally the MiG ran short and had to go home. By that
time he didn't have enough fuel left so he had to force land the airplane, which he did
right off the coast and made a water landing right off the coast of Korea. That’s one of
the interesting things. Another thing we used to have Bed Check Charlie come around
about every night and we used to just watch him to see where he was going to drop his
bombs and things like that until I had a piece of shrapnel hit about two inches from my
foot and after that I started going into the foxhole when Bed Check Charlie came by! He
also posted a notice that we would not shoot at him. We thought it was great to just get
out there and shoot at Bed Check Charlie. But, they posted a notice that we would not do
this anymore.

SM: Now here’s a guy dropping bombs on you. Why couldn’t you shoot at him?

PT: They thought it was dangerous, more dangerous for us to be firing at him. I
guess maybe it was, but we didn’t think so; we thought it was more dangerous. In fact,
he dropped a bomb into the maintenance yard and we thought there was some more
bombs going off. It was a settling oxygen bottle down there that exploded and all the
gunners start firing and there’s nobody there. He’s already gone, but they start firing like
crazy because they thought he was there bombing. They couldn’t see him, but they
started firing anyway. It was a lot of funny wars going on.

SM: Yes, sir. Now the guy that had to ditch his aircraft because he ran out of
fuel, you said he made a forced water landing?

PT: Yeah.

SM: That aircraft was not recoverable, was it?

PT: No, but back in Okinawa we did recover an aircraft that had been water
landed, though by the time we get it out of there the salt water had done so much damage.
But, there were parts that could be recovered and used. [The 51st commander bet we
could not get this aircraft out of the ocean. He lost. We all would make trips to Japan and
sign this commanders name when purchasing alcoholic beverages. Guess they never
checked it. He made full Col. At 24 years of age and after 30 years of service he was still
a full Col.]

SM: Also, did this pilot that you’re talking about that made the forced water
landing, did he actually fly the aircraft into that landing, or did he eject at the last minute?

PT: No, he flew it into the landing. It was right off shore. It was in shallow
water. The airplane was pretty good about landing. In fact, going back to P-47s, I
watched a friend of mine in a P-47 make a forced landing out in the ocean. The only
thing is, maybe he didn’t have his harness locked or something because I flew around and
watched him and after he landed he didn't move and the airplane floated for about 30
seconds or so and then he just went on down with the aircraft. Okay, back to Korea.

SM: Yeah, back to Korea. This guy did survive, obviously, the guy that you’re
talking about in Korea?

PT: Oh yeah, he got out of it fine. He was back home within hours.

SM: Was there anything else that you remember about your time in the Korean
War, any other interesting or important experiences?

PT: No, most of it was pretty routine aircraft maintenance, recovering wrecks and
that sort of thing.

SM: You said that you did fly some recovery. Did that include downed pilots,
going in and picking up pilots who had been shot down?
PT: No, just search missions. You couldn’t go down to pick up anybody with a
T-6 or even C-47 unless they were somewhere close to an airport.

SM: So you would go search for them?

PT: Yeah, they’d use helicopters and things like that to pick up stranded and
aircraft.

SM: Did you yourself get fired upon in these types of situations?

PT: What was that?

SM: Did you yourself get fired upon in those situations by the enemy? Did you
get shot at?

PT: Not to amount to anything in Korea. We were pretty far behind the enemy
lines most of the time, though we did get to the point where we could stand and we could
see all of the land that we still owned in Korea or still had, and so we all evacuated back
to Japan, and I went as advanced party to set up housing for all of the 51st troops and so
forth. From there we stayed in Japan, but back to Korea later on where we were R&Ring
supposedly out of Korea. We’d send the airplanes over to Korea. They’d refuel and then
go on a mission.

SM: What did you think about the Korean War yourself, personally? What were
your thoughts on why the United States was there? Did you think we were going to
accomplish anything?

PT: I never did figure out a real good reason for it, but I guess there was reason to
do it and I didn’t question it, but I couldn’t really understand that. I thought I hated to see
Macarthur get fired. He wanted to go into…now that was later.

SM: That was in Korea.

PT: Was that Korea?

SM: Oh yes, sir. You’ve got it right.

PT: He wanted…when we took back all the area back to the 38th parallel he
wanted to go on to China I guess and Truman didn’t agree with that.

SM: What did you think about Macarthur being fired?

PT: Oh I thought that was a terrible thing, but after reading all about it and
understanding it all, I guess it wasn’t all that bad. I think it was better that they got out of
there, but it’s been such a mess every since that I’m not sure. Maybe they should have
tried to finish it then instead of waiting and going back in Vietnam and things like that, and it’s still more or less up in the air. But, I think wars are kind of stupid. I didn’t think that back in World War II, but since then I’m kind of thinking that they just don’t make sense. But then again, there’s so many people that will do things that cause wars to start and make them necessary, like this last thing in New York.

SM: What did you think about some of the commentary concerning the use of atomic weapons against targets in China during the Korean War, and people that thought we should use atomic weapons against China and even North Korea?

PT: I don’t think the Chinese were all that powerful, they just had an awful lot of people. Like the sergeant said, “You want to see some dead Chinese, just go to the other side of the barbed wire. You bring us mail and beer and we’ll just stay right here.” So, when the Chinese hit, I was up at the North Korean capital and the Americans were coming south so fast, they got so far ahead of the Chinese they couldn’t send scouts out to even find them. But, the traffic was so heavy it took me a long time just to cross the road there in Pyongyang, the highway coming through Pyongyang. There was a lot of interesting things, but pretty generally that’s about all the Korean War amounted to as far as I was concerned.

SM: What did you do after Korea? You said you went to Japan, is that correct?

PT: We went to Japan and then I went back to Korea like a TDY sort of thing to support the R&R of the 51st Fighter, planes like Suwon and things like that. After Korea I went to airavac at Mobile, and that was probably one of the most interesting assignments that I had. I spent a lot of time in airavac.

SM: Why don’t you go ahead and describe what you did there?

PT: In airavac? We went to almost any place that had an airport that was big enough to land an airplane. I went to probably all over the US at one time or another. We’d go to Mobile and we’d work out of Washington for about three days and then we’d go to St. Louis and work out of there for three days. We’d go to Denver and work out of there for about three days. It was a very interesting assignment. We’d go pick up any military that had been injured, either at their base or automobile wrecks and whatever it was. We carried flight nurses and medical techs and I picked up one guy that I talked to. He was a major. He couldn’t get the canopy open. He’d made a forced landing and he’d
blown himself through the canopy, but he was in really bad shape and he told me he was
going to die and I guess he did. I only had one die on the airplane and that was going into
San Antonio. There’s a lot of paperwork for that if you came with a DOA, dead on
arrival, but I only had one in all the years I flew airvac.

SM: What kind of aircraft were you flying for this? [I had son of Eddie Ricken
Backer for my co-pilot one trip to Denver. He was later upgraded to flight examination
and gave me a check ride for my annual instrument card.]

PT: C-47s and then later we got convairs. I went with the airvac just out of
attached for flying with the convairs at Travis, but mostly C-47s. [From mobile I was
drafted by Mats Hg to San Antonio continental division Hg where I continued to fly air
evac now out of Brooks but a lot of TDY to many SAC bases. Then to Canada. Mobile
was ‘50-‘51-‘52 or ‘51-‘52. Not to sure of this.’52 to ’54 Kelly AFB] Then when I left
airvac I went to Canada and the Air Force assigned me one of the old C-47 airvacs so I
had my own airplane in Canada for four years.

SM: And you flew airvac there as well?

PT: Yeah, we flew airvac or anything, but mainly my job in Canada was to
support maintenance for US aircraft from the US border to the Alaskan border.

SM: And what kind of aircraft were you providing maintenance for, basically
anything in the inventory?

PT: All different kinds.

SM: Pretty much the inventory, the Air Force inventory?

PT: The main ones at the time were F-89s they had in Alaska at that time and
those were the main things. They were taking them back for overhaul and bringing new
models back up and things like that. One of them took off from Alaska when the runway
was covered with ice. He set his brakes and went up and waited for the rest of his flight
to join him on takeoff and they told us later that he was kind of skidding around but
apparently he hit the afterburners and didn’t release his brakes, so when he landed at
White Horse he got rid of both wheels, both tires, and right on down to the brakes! So
we put that aircraft back together again and we had the captain at White Horse and he and
I volunteered after we got the airplane back together to take it and deliver it down to
Ogden, which we did. Then when we got there we delivered it to them. We could have
taken the aircraft all the way but we felt it better to get rid of it and we did, and then we
heard the airplane taking off for Wisconsin. I could have gotten a ride back home if we’d
have kept that aircraft, but they asked us to take a new model back to Alaska, which we
did. They said we could fly the airplane and get some time over the weekend. So, we
got down to Phoenix and I picked a lot of grapefruit and oranges and put them in the tail
of the aircraft and I got back to Edmonton where I was stationed and the customs officer,
told him, “Hey, would you like some fresh grapefruit and oranges?” and he said, “Did
you clear agriculture with those?” and I said, “No, I never thought about it,” and he said,
“I better not take any.” That’s as far as that went.

SM: Now when did you go to Canada? When did that tour begin?

PT: I’m having a little trouble hearing you.

SM: I’m sorry, about when did you go to Canada approximately?

PT: I went to Canada in 1954 it was.

SM: So you only spent about a year at Mobile, Alabama?

PT: I was in Mobile, when I came back from Korea, I was there at Mobile from I
think in 1952-'53-'54. [50-51-52 and sometime in 52 to San Antonio Kelly AFB.]

SM: Okay, and then you were in Canada from ’54 until when?

PT: ’54 to ’58.

SM: Where did you go then?

PT: I went to Waco, Texas and I was flying convairs and I was maintenance
officer. I had 72, those convairs, 240s, 340s and 440s is what they called them, but twin-
engine convairs. I had about 72 of them I was senior maintenance officer for and I also
flew them pretty regularly. It was a navigator training base and I flew quite a few of
those missions. Some of them were to Bermuda and some to Puerto Rico, and mostly
just local out of Waco.

SM: What did you think of the convair?

PT: I really liked the convair. By the time you got off the ground, you had single
engine speed, which was great! I was remembering the P-38, when we’d get off the
ground we’d drop the nose and take it up to 135 so we’d have single engine speed. It’s
the first airplane that I had flown that you would have single engine speed on takeoff. By
the time you got takeoff speed you could continue if you had to on one engine.
SM: Wow, which is nice for emergencies?

PT: Yes.

SM: Did you ever have any serious emergencies in any aircraft you flew? [Also made a emergency landing with A P47 just made the runway down wind. This was the closest to wreaking an aircraft ever for me.]

PT: I did back in the P-39. I didn’t tell you about that, but I had an engine quit. My parachute was in for repack and I made a forced landing with it. In the 30 days before that we’d lost four guys trying to make forced landings with P-39s so I knew I had to keep up enough speed so that I wouldn’t spin. The airplane had a real high wing loading. But, I had borrowed a kid’s parachute because mine was in for repack and he was about twice my size and I started to eject and I got a picture in my mind of going right through the harness so I stayed with the aircraft. It turned and I could see the airfield and I thought, “Oh, I can make the airfield, no problem.” I just barely made it. I leveled out and put the gear down and hit right on the end of the runway, and about the most beautiful forced landing you could imagine. I rolled it right back into the parking place where I’d taken it out earlier because we’d parked in the middle of the airfield and there was 10,000 foot runway, we’d take off on half of it and land on the other half and parked on the inactive runway because you couldn’t taxi in hot weather with the airplane very far. It would overheat and you’d have to shut it down to cool it off. So, we parked them out on the runway and we didn’t have to do that.

SM: But that was very lucky, your landing. What happened to your engine, do you know?

PT: Yeah, the assessor drive had broken in it.

SM: Do you know if that was the problem with the aircraft that had also malfunctioned?

PT: With that Allison engine, they had a lot of problems.

SM: Well, let’s see, what were the big maintenance issues with the convairs when you were in Waco?

PT: Probably the biggest problem was the torque indicator in the nose section of the airplane. We had a lot of trouble. We’d have to pull the nose section completely off the engine and rebuild the…because unless they had so much torque, they wouldn’t take
the aircraft. It wouldn’t take off. If they couldn’t get the required torque indicator on the
gauges, then that was it. But, it was real good. They had the 2800, Pratt and Whitney
2800. The old aircraft had a 97 and the new ones the 99-W. It was a real good engine; in
fact, that’s what we had in the P-47s, the 2800. The Navy used them a lot in the F-6 and
the F-7, things like that. It was a real good engine, very little problems with it.
SM: And how long did you stay in Waco?
PT: I stayed in Waco from…no, I came there in ’58 and then I left there in it
must have been about…I was there for, oh, a good three years or so and they came in
there looking for people with multi-engine experience. Of course I had a lot of time,
airavac, so I had what they wanted and they were looking for 130 pilots at Travis and so I
volunteered for that.
SM: Were you at Travis during the Cuban Missile Crisis?
PT: You know, I don’t remember exactly where I was when the Cuban Missile
Crisis came up. I’m familiar with that. Let’s see, Kennedy was President. Right off, I
can’t even remember what year that was.
SM: It would have been ’62.
PT: When?
SM: October of 1962.
PT: Yes, I was at Travis. I was also when Kennedy was shot I was in Waco TDY
out of Travis, and we were just going out to load the aircraft to go back to Travis from
Waco when we were just clearing operations and we got the word on the radio that
Kennedy had been shot.
SM: Do you remember if you were on a heightened state of alert during the
Cuban Missile Crisis at Travis?
PT: Let’s try that again.
SM: I’m sorry. I was wondering, in October of ’62 when you were at Travis, do
you know if you were at a heightened state of alert because of the Cuban Missile Crisis.
Do you remember anything about that?
PT: No, we were not at all involved in it at Travis.
SM: Now what did your missions involve in flying the C-130s? What was the
principal role, principal mission for your unit?
PT: Well, when the Indians thought the Chinese were getting ready to invade India, I flew a radar unit over to New Delhi for the Indians to use [myself] and one other aircraft flew a couple over there. Then I read in the paper…on my way over to Vietnam with a load of reconditioned World War II bombs that I’d picked up at one of the depots I think in Washington. I read in the paper that McNamara says that there’s no shortage of bombs in Vietnam except they were waiting for us to come with the bombs by air so they could load their airplanes! So, I learned long ago not to believe everything that the government tells you [laughs]! Another mission I had I picked up some nerve gas, and that’s all I had on the airplane. I had two guards, one in the back of the airplane and one in the front of the airplane, and if one of them fell over the other one is to alert us to go on 100% oxygen. So, I picked that up and went to McCord. But, the winds were too strong. I couldn’t get enough fuel on the aircraft to go to Hawaii, to take it to Hawaii. I was there, and they were getting all upset because for some reason they seemed to think we were liable to wipe out the base! So they finally got me cleared to go down to Travis and when I got to Travis they parked us way out in far left field, but when we cleared for takeoff, pulled the gear up and the up line broke and we didn't get the gear up and so we had to fly around and the weather was bad, and we flew around the holding pattern and they kept calling us wanting to know if we were okay. We were sitting there taking turns turning the autopilot and eating our flight life that we’d bought to eat on the way to Hawaii. We got back in. They had the whole base all upset! Apparently this stuff was real bad stuff. I don't know exactly what it was but I know when we got to Hawaii the Navy met us and they put it on a trailer. I asked them what they were going to do with it, "Well, we’re going to carry it out and dump it in the ocean a few miles out.”

SM: Did they say why?

PT: No, they didn’t. I didn’t ask them why, but I know they were going to do this to get rid of it. That was the idea of the whole thing, and that’s all I carried all the way over. After we unloaded there was not too much fuel left and we were going to Hickham to spend the night and refuel and go back to Travis. So, my co-pilot, I told him the only time the aircraft commander had to fly was if there was any passengers, any cargo, or anything on the aircraft. Well, we had no passengers. Our guards took off with a load and there’s just he and I on here and I said, “This is your leg,” so he said, “Do you
mind if I make a maximum performance takeoff?” and I said, “No, you’re flying it. Go
ahead.” So, he set the brakes full throttle and took off. We hit the glide slope to
Hickham right over the middle of the field, but we went almost straight up and then
turned and the guy in the tower at Barber’s Point said, “Magnificent!” We hit the glide
slope and on into Hickham, and of course nothing more eventful. In fact, everything
wasn’t…we weren't as concerned as the people on the base were.

SM: How long was the flight over?
PT: Over to Hickham?
SM: Well, the flight from the US, from Travis to Hawaii?
PT: It took somewhere – usually because of head winds – it usually took around
ten hours.
SM: That’s not too bad.
PT: No, not too bad. Our regular mission was from Travis, once supporting the
Vietnam War and things like that, our regular mission was one load I took over, they had
the big thing going on in Vietnam. I had a whole aircraft load of plague serum but when
I got to Saigon they wouldn’t let me land because they had a coup going on. So, I went
to Bangkok and the next day I was going to take it back to Saigon and they said, “No,
you still can’t land there,” so I said, “Well what do I do with this cargo?” and they said,
“Well we’ll offload it and when everything clears up we’ll get somebody to haul it back
to Saigon.” So, we offloaded and went on back to Travis. But, we flew missions over to
Japan. I had one mission when they had the war games going on in Europe, I hauled a
load of troops over to Germany and at Lagos the weather was really bad and the winds
were so strong we couldn’t take off but we sat at the end of the runway waiting for the
winds to die down and the weather was really socked in. It was about as nasty as I’ve
ever seen. After about 30 minutes sitting out there, they finally said, “The winds are
okay for takeoff,” so I went, and on the way back I picked up a Navy airplane to fly home
and when the general wanted us to go out and find out why the Navy had so much better
on time departures than the Air Force did, I told the general, “We don’t have to go out.
They were going to send me and some other guys around the world to find out.” I said,
“I already know. I’ve flown a Navy aircraft. If you have trouble starting it, cycle the
recondition lever or the condition lever,” which if it was Air Force, like I said, if that was
an Air Force aircraft they wouldn’t take it. But, the Navy was flying it and of course I
didn’t mind flying it. If they could fly it, I could. I understood maintenance and most of
the guys that were flying didn’t. It was a complete mystery to them.

SM: You mentioned earlier that you had taken some reconditioned bombs to
Vietnam.

PT: Yes.

SM: When was that, do you recall?

PT: Yeah, they were World War II reconditioned bombs.

SM: But when did you take them to Vietnam, when?

PT: Oh, sometime. ['64/ '65] They had a shortage of bombs over there and we
were flying them over by air and that’s when McNamara said, “There’s no shortage of
bombs in Vietnam.”

SM: I didn’t know if you know approximately what month and year?

PT: Yeah, I think it’s about ’64 or ’65, somewhere in there.

SM: Early in the war?

PT: Yeah. I remember we used to go into Saigon. We’d stay high and make a
steep approach because people would be shooting at you right off the runway there in
Vietnam. If you tried to fly a regular traffic pattern or something, there’d be guys out
there shooting at you. We’d come straight in, high, and make a steep approach into
Saigon.

SM: And this was on C-130s?

PT: Yeah.

SM: How did you like that aircraft?

PT: Oh, I really liked that airplane. It was the greatest airplane I think I’ve ever
flown.

SM: What attributes did you like most?

PT: In the 130-E you could synchronize the props and it was real quiet. The
eyearly models were real noisy inside, but the E model, I picked a couple of them up down
at Marietta from the Lockheed plant, and Lockheed gave me – which I have here – a
model of a 130. When I got 1,000 hours in the airplane they gave me a model. I don’t
know. I liked the worldwide flying that we were doing and the Pacific, mainly the
Pacific, but the Atlantic was nasty, flying across the Atlantic. The weather was terrible. Usually even if there’s weather in the Pacific it wasn’t bad. I flew through a typhoon one time going out of Wake Island and my radar was out and Red Snyder came in right after me at Wake so we got the controller there to clear me behind him and I told him, “Set your radar down a little bit. We’re going through this typhoon,” and he was telling me what settings are going through there to miss the real bad weather, which he did, and I’d wait about five seconds and then I’d turn to that heading. We went on through there, beautiful. I got to the Philippines and I asked him to block my radar so that I could go, because the typhoon went overnight and I had to go through it again and they wouldn’t do it, so they kept me there until they fixed the radar. But of all the times I was there, I only had two delays and that was one, in all the time I flew 130s. The other one was when fleet service ran into the prop at Travis when I was getting ready for departure. I had a delay while they changed the prop. The airplane, as far as I knew, was very dependable. It was a very comfortable aircraft to fly and I really liked it.

SM: Well, sir, this ends interview number two. This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Paul Taylor on the 30th of January 2002 at approximately 10:10 Lubbock time. I’m in Lubbock, Texas and Mr. Taylor is in Ora Valley, Arizona. Sir, why don’t we go ahead and continue the interview by discussing your transition from the Air Force to Air America, and if you would describe the circumstances that led to that transition?

PT: Well I just went through it, but you want me to go ahead with it?

SM: Oh right, yes sir, please, on the recording.

PT: I was working for a colonel, maintenance at Travis, and he wanted me to ground myself so I could work full time in the maintenance and he and I didn’t see eye to eye. They asked me to stay in the service from the command military air transport service, but since I didn’t have any choice, either work for this guy or leave; I left and joined Air America. I asked Air America to give me a couple of months off and they said, “No, we need you right now. We have you reservations on Pan Am to Tokyo on day after tomorrow,” or something like that. I met a lot of people because there was about ten of us going to Air America. We went to Tokyo and then down to Taipei for some preliminary training, some schooling, and they put us up in the Ambassador Hotel
in Taipei. [The were making the movie *Sand Pebbles* while we were in Taipei. Steve Maqueen was on the elevator going up as the ambassador. I kept trying to figure when I knew this guy then after he got off it came to me who it was.] After a while there they put us on an airplane to get some flying time in and to renew our visas over to Hong Kong and back. It was quite an operation. Then they wanted me to go over to Tainan to work in maintenance but I said, “No, I want to fly airplanes,” so I turned that down and went to Bangkok. We were there in Bangkok when they had the...what do you call it? The sun disappeared and people were out beating drums. What do you call it, when the moon came between the sun and the earth?

SM: Oh, and eclipse?

PT: Eclipse, yes. People were out beating drums. I guess they thought it was the end of the world. It was really quite a show there in Bangkok. We had to renew our visas and so forth but when we finished the preliminary training in Bangkok three of us decided rather than to fly up there we’d take the train just to see the country around Thailand. I’d flown over it many times, but wanted to take the train. What a miserable trip! We got there. It was dark and they told us we shouldn’t cross the river, but we did, and some cab was waiting to take us into town and we were stopped about three times going into Vientiane by troops that came out of the...they turned out to be friendly troops. They checked us out and let us go. We were put up at the Lido Hotel; an old French hotel in Vientiane and it was pretty miserable where they put us. We did then start to work soon and started in 123s which the 123 is, as far as I was concerned, were pretty good airplanes. When they put the two jet engines outboard on them I didn’t want to fly them anymore because it took two guys to operate the throttles and I just didn’t feel that was safe. I know one of the guys lost a jet engine on takeoff and he went right through the T-28 ramp. It just happened the T-28s were out on missions. If they hadn’t have been, it would have been a real disaster. I realize this and I thought that was the kind of an airplane, after they put those jet engines on it and it took two guys to handle the throttle, I didn’t want anything more to do with it. Well, actually I got into the 130 program. They had 130-As and I flew 130s but we had to fly another airplane. So, I was checking out in the Porter which was a little stall, short take off and landing, turbo prop aircraft. On my checkout we went up to Lima Site 185 and it was up on top of a
mountain. It cut off one peak for a runway and then a bridge across to another peak and cut out room enough to turn around. We landed there and General Vang Pao was there, and we told him, “We cannot come back here. This is very dangerous, and very likely to wreck an airplane.” He looked around and said, “See all these guys on these stretchers? You have to come and get them. If you don’t, they’ll die.” So, we flew all day, carried those guys all back to the hospital where...did you ever hear of Pop Beal?

SM: Yes.

PT: Yeah, Pop Beal was in charge at what they called Lima Site 20 and they had a hospital there. So, we brought them all back. It was really some rough...this runway went up at a pretty steep angle and then you turned around and took off downhill. The winds were so bad that it was very difficult to keep the airplane on the runway, but we managed and we got all those guys out and in between we hauled ammunition and stuff and dropped it to Vang Pao and he told us where he wanted it dropped but when we came up with the first load he said, “We moved up a couple of miles so I want you to come over here to make your drop.” Well, it all turned out fine. We didn’t direct the airplane or anything. In fact, I’ve flown for about 30 years and I’ve never even scratched an airplane, which I’m pretty proud of that. I have made a couple of forced landings, but I made them without any damage to the aircraft.

SM: Let me ask you a couple of questions real quick about some of your earlier experiences there with Air America, I guess the first of which would be how did you even hear about this organization?

PT: I had a friend that was working for Air America. In fact, I just visited him in Phoenix a few days ago. We kind of discussed the fact that we’re 80 years old and we’re still around and most of our friends are gone, very few of them left. So, yeah, anyway, I did, I called and they had...Red Dawson was doing the hiring for Air America and I called him, and he really put the pressure on me to get in here and get over there right now. We did have guys higher come in, get off the airplane at Vientiane, look around, and say, “When’s the next airplane leaving?” and they’d just take off and leave. You know, we did have company quarters I never stayed in. I stayed in the Lido Hotel with quite a few other Air America people, and we’d go over to the company quarters to eat. An old Chinese, old Papa Chieu did the cooking, and if he got enough of us together he’d
do a big Chinese dinner. It was quite enough. They had open sewers and the place stunk real bad. They had the USAID gave them a bunch of generators and that’s what they had for electricity for the town. Every once in a while they’d turn off part of the town because one of the generators would be out. It was quite an experience.

SM: Yes, sir. What did you know about Air America, their mission, who they were actually supporting and working for prior to your employment with them?

PT: I really didn’t know that much about them. I just knew that they were hiring pilots and that they were paying pretty good and that sort of thing.

SM: Did you know you’d be flying…

PT: I read a lot in the newspapers later old Jack Anderson called us mercenaries and working for the CIA and all kinds of things. They had a lot of articles in the newspaper. He seemed to know a lot about it. I found there was a lot of people there working for the military. In fact, I went to a reception by the ambassador and the Americans were lined up all the way through the compound and out the gates and I said, “Boy, this many Americans over here, these guys must be in trouble!” I found the guys from the State Department, they said, “Well we’re doing a real good job here,” and I says, “Well I’ll give you another three years at the most and the communists will be taking over and you guys will be out of here!” Actually that’s about what it turned out to be. I found out an awful lot about it. In the 130s, we flew complete radio silence and we had to stay within a course that was within very low limits and times. We didn't file a flight plan but we had somebody probably from the CIA that came and filed our flight plans for us. We just got in the airplane and flew. We had to take everything out of our pockets, identification and all that. We sanitized and we went to the CIA compound at Takhli. Everybody called it Mickey Mouse, but you had to have a real top-secret clearance and everything to get in there and they had to know who you were before you could get in. I ran into a crew that I was flying with at Travis and I asked them, “What are you doing?” and they said, “Flying.” They were on the same instructions we were; you don’t talk to anybody, you don’t tell anybody anything. If you do, you’re in trouble.

SM: This particular mission you were describing where you had to empty your pockets, sanitize yourselves of any kind of identification…
PT: We flew those pretty regular. Once a month they’d bring a 130 over from Okinawa and it would say US Air Force and they’d park it out on the ramp at Takhli. The next morning we’d come out to fly it and there wouldn’t be any markings on it at all. I think they used water based paint or something and cleaned it all up and there’d be just three numbers on the tail. So, the only radio transmissions we made were calling the tower to get clearance for take off. Now out of Vientiane we flew probably a few hundred flights everyday with no air control. We did all of our own air control by just radio contact between aircraft. Every once in a while we’d tell people where we were. We’d get on course. We’d fly North at one altitude and South at another altitude and with all these, I don’t know, thousands of flights that were made with no air control, we never had an accident or aircraft running together. It’s amazing because they can’t even do that with all the fancy air control and radars.

SM: What were the unwritten rules of etiquette in that respect? Was it aircraft landing and taking off? What kind of…

PT: That’s right. If we were near the airport and if we were on…until we got to altitude and everything, we’d keep calling and telling other aircraft where we were, like we’re on take off at Vientiane and we’re climbing out on such and such a heading and so on, but we did have places to climb out to get on course and the same way for landing. But, whenever we were in that situation, we would keep contact on the radio, find out if there was any other aircraft around, tell them where we were, and that sort of thing. We did real well, like I said, thousands of flights with no air control, and in weather, too. A lot of it was in weather and in the smoky season, you couldn’t see anything. The whole country was covered with smoke. It was very difficult navigating. We had very few radio aids or anything like that. Most of it had to be done by either visual contact with the ground or by time and distance, that sort of thing.

SM: Now when you went on those special projects, the missions that you discussed where you sanitize everything, were those considered special projects?

PT: Yes, that was a special project. Even people that we were working with didn’t know what we were doing, and other people were doing…I’ve heard some of them made missions to Tibet and all different places. I know one old guy was flying in and taking these teams into China and picking up them with a flying boat, and he was an old
retired Navy guy and he was flying this thing. I didn’t know what he was doing. I knew he was doing something funny. Some of the other guys that were doing something, I understand they were flying into Tibet and things like that.

SM: I’m sorry, into what?

PT: But nobody could tell anybody else what they were doing. It was like if you did, you were in serious trouble. The same way with the guys that were flying the old farmers out with their poppy opium. They were told if you try to fool around with any of these drugs, you’re history. In other words, you do it our way, or else. I’ve heard a lot of rumors about Air America dealing in drugs and the CIA dealing in drugs. They really didn’t, and all of the crews were warned that they didn’t or else. So, anyway, when we weren't flying the 130 would come from Okinawa. They’d park it on the ramp. The next morning it would be…it didn’t say US Air Force anymore, and we’d fly it for a week or ten days, bring it back, and the next day they’d have US Air Force on the airplane and they’d fly it back to Okinawa. When we weren't flying, we did have at Lima Site they called it 20 alternate, it was...

SM: Long Ching?

PT: Long Ching, yes, we would go out and we’d operate the tower for them when they came in for landing. I was up there one day. I was supposed to take the tower and the weather was bad and the 130 wasn’t flying. So, I got in with Clarence Dtriver. We had one black pilot and I got in with Clarence Dtriver and I flew with him all day and I thought he did a beautiful job. He was flying the Porter, dropping rice and things like that. So later Clarence was carrying a pig and he had a Laos corporal flying with him and one of the pigs got out of the sack and the corporal, the Lao soldier, was wrestling with the pig and they hit the door and fell out. So, Clarence was grounded and we got this guy from the CAB came because we’d had so many accidents and everything. He was Doug Dreyfus, was from the CAB and he was running our flying safety, so Clarence was grounded. They had a flying evaluation board and they decided that it was a faulty mechanism and not his fault, so they cleared him, but he had to take a flight check. He went out with Pete Parker on a flight check and Pete cut the engine and they couldn’t get it air start so they landed in the rice paddy, so Clarence was grounded again for another accident. They decided it wasn’t his fault and they changed the procedures on cutting the
engine that they would just simulate it and the guy would go through the procedure. So, they turned Clarence loose, took another flight check, and he got cleared. His first trip out he stalled out about 50 feet and drove the gears, it was so funny, so he was grounded again and while he was grounded he was driving a motor scooter and a taxi driver didn’t see him, turned into him, and ran over him, and Clarence was in the hospital all broken up! He was there for quite a while. My son and I went to visit him a couple of times. Clarence and I got to be pretty good friends. So, about to release him and they took x-rays and they found a bone chip there so they took him in to clean that out and he’s back in the hospital for a while and when he got out he decided that well, he was grounded physically for quite a while and he worked in operations, and then when he got cleared again he decided he didn’t want to fly those little airplanes because he was kind of stiff and everything from all the banging up he’d had, so they checked him out in the 123, and his first trip out as captain he came in, turned the airplane around, and knocked down a telephone pole with the wingtip and he was grounded again! I came to visit about that time and I told Clarence, “I think you were snake bit! Why don’t you just quit and get out of here?” and he said, “Well, maybe I should.” The next thing I heard, Clarence was missing. He was shot down. Actually, our intelligence wasn’t doing too well. The Chinese had moved some big guns down and within a few minutes they shot down two 123s and Clarence was one of them. Now I understand they know where the airplane is. They’re trying to find out if they can get to it. But, he was missing and while they were searching for him our chief pilot was in one of the volpars, which was searching, and got his leg shot off. So, he was running around with a wooden leg and I understand he had his own airplane there in the hanger but they wouldn’t let him fly the company aircraft. I just heard recently where he’s passed away. [Aircraft accident.]

SM: Yes, sir. This is Jim Ryan, correct?

PT: Like we were saying, most everybody that we really knew and liked are gone. So anyway, I was going to say I talked to these guys from the State Department and I told them I didn’t think too much of the operation and the way it was going. Of course the CIA handled 100% of the USAID in Laos and we spent a lot of time hauling refugees out and hauling rice in and feeding them and of course supplying General Vang Pao and his Army. I don't know. I was up, they had the plateau out of Savannakhet and
whenever...actually, I think the big secret was to keep this from Time Magazine and those guys that come out and try to find out what’s going on, to keep them out. They would not let any of them into Long Ching and up on the plateau. The Australians would fly these reporters in. The US wouldn’t do it. But, they had some holes in the runway up there right across the middle and whenever they knew a reporter or something was around they put a fence right across the middle of the airport so they couldn’t land. There were so many funny things going on. But, it looked to me like they were losing the war there.

SM: What gave you that indication?

PT: Well, the way they were operating. I spent one night up at Lima Site 108 and they had a bunch of Americans up there and they said, “Well, you know, we can’t fire past this hill, and if they come on this side then we can shoot at them but we cannot shoot at anybody on the other side of the hill,” which they pointed out. [These guys were military and could have been Green Berets or any other organization of military they did not say.] I said, boy, if they’re going to fight a war like that, all they’re doing is a little defense and no offense, and they’re never going to win. That’s what I tried to talk to the State Department and tell them that there’s no way that you can win if you’re going to operate like that. Of course the ambassador wouldn’t let us fly North of Vientiane at night and I know I came into Vientiane with a load of Thai troops and I read in the paper, “[Kitta Kicharn] says there’s no Thai troops in Laos,” and we had two airplane loads of Thai troops taking them up as the replacements for the other Thai troops that were already there. Another thing that happened right after I spent the night up there at Lima Site 108, the Pathet Lao came in, killed the guards, and that’s where Nixon had to admit we’d lost an American in combat in Laos because this captain came running out of the barracks or out of the quarters to see what all the firing was going on and they killed him. So, like I said, Nixon had to admit, “That’s the guy that was killed in ground combat in Laos.” So let me see, there’s some other things. I flew in with Kevin Cochran, he’s gone now. But when I resigned and left, I tried to tell the chief pilot that this guy is dangerous. He doesn't know where he is, he doesn’t know what he’s doing, and you better check him out. I said, “I’ll tell you something that you ought to know if you think it’s worthwhile,” and he said, “Oh, I don’t think we’d bother with that,” and not long after that Kevin flew
into the mountain and killed everybody, wrecked the 130, and I was just thinking, “If the chief pilot had listened to me, that could have maybe been prevented,” but a lot of my friends were on that aircraft, people I flew with. The guy that bailed out of the airplane and was prisoner down in Central America, Nicaragua, I flew with him. He was from Wisconsin, a good friend of mine, was, and he was prisoner down there for some time.

SM: Who is this now?

PT: I’m trying to think of his name. Now, the guy that bailed out over Nicaragua and was held prisoner there for quite some time. No, it wasn’t…I’ve got his name here somewhere. I can’t remember it right now. I’ve got a little problem with remembering everything.

SM: These are things that happened so long ago.

PT: Yes, Gene Hosenfeust, and he was from Wisconsin. Of course I was from Wisconsin, so I flew with him there in the 130s with Air America.

SM: Well I meant to ask you earlier, when you’re flying the sanitized aircraft, what were the typical types of missions you flew there. Were they just supply missions?

PT: In the 130s?

SM: Yes, the sanitized 130s that had the markings removed?

PT: We flew a lot of the things like Tip Tang Sin and the ammunition, guns, all kinds of stuff like that into Long Ching, and they had T-28s there, which was a fighter aircraft. In fact, there was a couple of guys that I had flown with either at Travis or out of Okinawa and they were there as Mr. So-and-so, but they were flying in the T-28s with the Lao and sometime back the Air America was flying T-28 combat missions but they had an accident and they stopped them. But, they had several of the guys kept current in the T-28 and they’d fly them on the weekend for a couple of hours. They’d pay them $50 dollars an hour to stay current in the T-28 but I don’t think they ever but Air America in [combat again.] But there were some guys I knew from the US Air Force that were flying with the Laotians in the T-28s.

SM: Now when they were flying with the Laotians, do you know what their principal responsibility was?
PT: I think their primary responsibility was just to check the Laos out in the
T-28s. [I do think they did go on combat missions. One I flew with at Travis the other
checked me out in the 130A]

SM: They were just checking out the pilots? They weren’t actually flying
missions? [The major and the captain were listed as civilians at the Air Force attaches
office.]

PT: One American was in the T-28 that went down in the river. They never did
find him. He went down in the Mekong in a T-28 with a Laotian and an American on
board. I know I crossed the Mekong, and it’s real funny because when I started to cross
there was this…well, I don’t know what they called them, Buddhist priests or what it
was, and I asked him if he wanted a ride and we got out in the middle of the river and
there’s a flood stage and we’re drifting down the river, the engine quit, but I worked on
the engine because it was an old Model A engine in there and I was familiar with them
because I had a couple of Model A Fords when I was a kid and I got the thing started and
I said probably the only reason we got across the river is because I gave this…what do
they call them in the yellow, the monk?

SM: The monks?

PT: The yellow robe, I gave him a ride across the river.

SM: Did you have a lot of contact with civilians, with Laotian civilians?

PT: I got to know some of the police. Of course the guys that were operating the
whole town, I got to know them quite well. Ordinarily we didn’t have much contact with
civilians except when we were off duty.

SM: Do you remember any interesting or unusual missions or special projects
that you flew, and not just your standard resupply, whether it be guns or food or
whatever, but anything that struck you as just weird or unusual that you can think of?

PT: I just figured that they were going to lose because of the way they were
operating and I talked to these guys from the State Department and told them that they
were going to lose, you’re losing, and they said, “No, we’re doing a great job here and if
you don’t think so, you shouldn’t be here,” and I said, “You know if I had any good sense
I probably wouldn’t be.” If I’d have stayed in the Air Force, I’d have probably retired as
a full colonel I was pretty sure unless I goofed up somewhere along the way, and I would
have done better. But, I had my family in Bangkok and knew some of the neighbors there and some of the people that were there and the guy that owned the apartment building my family was in, I got to know him pretty well. We even were going to go into business after I left Air America. We were going to go put in a car wash on his grandmother’s property, but she wouldn’t let us use her property for a car wash! I had my brother in law was selling car washes. He had a car wash in Walnut Creek and he was going to come over and set the thing up for us and everything like that and we couldn’t get the property to do it.

SM: Now while you were serving in Southeast Asia, did you fly most of your missions in Laos or was it a combination of countries?

PT: For quite a while I flew out of Udorn over to Takhli, which was where they called the Mickey Mouse. I don’t know what all we were hauling over there, but I was thinking some interesting missions like the… I’ve got to think of his name, but he’s the guy that had all the pickled ears.

SM: Tony Poe?

PT: Tony Poe, yeah, you know Tony. Yes. We’d go up there where he was and he’d be out there so drunk, he’d be trying to direct us in and we’d be real worried we were going to run over him! But, I understand that the troops that he had there that he was supervising was required to go out and kill a communist and bring the ears in to prove it, so then he’d give them rations for their family. He had something else behind his bunk. I don’t know what it was, a head or something behind his bunk. He was a real character, and I got to know Pop Beal pretty well. Pop Beal came over on his own to begin with and after he’s there working for a while got to know the Laotians pretty well, I think the CIA convinced him that he should work for them and supervise this area of Laos. So, Tony Poe was quite a character. Of course when the word got out, he had to leave, but he changed his name and he says, “Tony Poe is no more,” and he went down to Thailand and he was in the place they called Pitts Camp where they did the training of troops for the Sneaky Pete missions, that sort of thing. But he was still there working.

SM: What was it called again, Pitts Camp?

PT: Pitts Camp.

SM: Is that P-I-T-T-S?
PT: Yeah, that’s the name we had for it. I don’t know.
SM: This is where they were training? Were they training Thai or Americans or both?
PT: They were training Thai troops there as far as I know. I knew where it was and everything. [In fact we flew in there with a C-123.]
SM: Was this their jungle-training center?
PT: I think so, yes.
SM: Do you know if that involved the Paru, the P-A-R-U, the group that Bill Lair helped put together. Did you know Bill Lair?
PT: I’ve heard the name. Let’s see.
SM: Do you know if it involved the Thai police?
PT: No, I don’t. I know that they had the training camp there and I think it was for the Thai troops.
SM: Thai military?
PT: Yes, I think it was Thai military.
SM: That’s interesting.
PT: They didn’t talk about things.
SM: Right, because it was so secretive.
PT: Everything was a secret. What we did was a secret, what the other guys were doing was a secret. The only thing that was out in the open was the rice supply and the moving of the refugees around, picking them up. I know there was about 1500 refugees that were leaving and the Pathet Lao was telling them to turn around and they killed a bunch of them and everything and we did everything we could to support them and see that they got to where they were going. I remember one guy was down and it was a C-46 and he shut down the engine and all of a sudden the mortar shells started coming in. He was out having a cigarette. He said you never saw a guy move so fast to get the airplane started so quick to move that thing out of there. They didn’t get him but they came pretty close.
SM: Did you come under fire very much when you were flying your missions?
PT: Not really. When the Tet Offensive was going on…
SM: In ’68?
PT: Yeah, I was down in Vietnam and I was up on top of the airplane watching
the fight going on and the mortars blowing over on the other side of the airfield. I don’t
know, I was probably pretty dumb, but I sat there watching and the only tassel that they
had in Air America was some people having a party watching the Tet Offensive and they
were up on the second floor and the railing broke and one of the dependants, one of the
ladies was killed. That’s the only casualty we had. So, they had a real tough time, and a
lot of them had to stay at the airport. They couldn't get in or out, a lot of the Air America
people.

SM: Where were you during Tet, what airfield? Is this Tan Son Nhut you’re
talking about, or Bien Hoa?

PT: No, I guess Khorat. [It was Saigon.] I was down, we went down to pick up
one of the aircraft coming back from overhaul and I had a friend, Charlie Tolton, and I
stayed in the company quarters for a couple of days but had a guy that kept lighting one
cigarette for another and every morning he’d wake us up about four o’clock with his
coughing. So, I went over and stayed with Charlie a couple of days downtown Saigon,
and he had about ten weapons with about ten clips under each one. Charlie’s back in
Sacramento now, I think Fair Oaks or somewhere like that. He and I used to go down to
the Chinese bar just to see what was going on.

SM: The Chinese bar?

PT: Well, where the Chinese communists hung out.

SM: Where was this?

PT: In Vientiane. Oh, another thing, the Pathet Lao did their R&R in Vientiane.
Vientiane was an open city and we’d go by the Pathet Lao compound. They’d be out
playing volleyball and if we walked by and stopped to look at them, they’d all run and
hide. One time, oh, this is very interesting, this lady was shopping and right after the
Pathet Lao had hit the ammunition dump and killed the guards and everything, this old
gal that had a stand there apparently her son was one of the guards and was the one…and
Herman Hines, he was real upset when he heard about it, but the Pathet Lao came over
into the morning market to pick up some things and as soon as she realized they were
Pathet Lao she took a meat cleaver and she hit one of them and really messed him up. So
they went back and got guns and the Royal Lao troops came there and there was quite a
battle going on. She had bought some things and she left it at one of the stands, asked them if it was okay if she leave it there, and when all this firing and shooting started, Angela said, “I decided I better leave, but I had to go and get my things,” so she went back in and got her purchases that she’d left at this stand and all this shooting was going on. Old Herman was really upset when they found out Angela had gone back in there to pick up some of her purchases while all this shooting and everything was going on. That’s one of the real interesting things that happened while I was there.

SM: Was there much fighting in the cities, in Vientiane or other cities?

PT: No, it was an open city. The communists, Pathet Lao came in there for R&R and they stayed at a compound right across the street from where the morning market was. They pretty much stayed in the compound. Usually if you went by there they would be out playing volleyball but if you stopped to look at them and they thought you were going to take a picture or something, they’d disappear.

SM: Did anybody ever take pictures of them?

PT: I don’t know. I really don’t. I never got a picture. Whenever we’d stop they’d run and hide. They’d be playing volleyball, but they’d run and hide. SM: Did it become kind of a prank of sorts; you’d just walk by so you could watch them?

PT: Oh yes. Whenever we’d go by there we’d stop to look at them and then they’d take off. They’d be playing volleyball, but they’d take off. There was another thing, Shower Shoes Wilson, did you ever hear of him?

SM: No, sir.

PT: He started out right after World War II flying C-47s. He probably flew C-47s I think about 30,000 hours. When Doug Dreyfus got there he found out he didn’t have a [US] pilot’s license so he had to go back to the US and get a pilot’s license with about 30,000 hours of flying under his belt. [Dick Jones also had to go back to the US for license as he was flying unlicensed.]

SM: What was his name again?

PT: What’s that?

SM: What was his name again?
PT: They called him Shower Shoes Wilson. In fact, there was a story. The ground school was giving survival training classes, and old Wilson was sitting up front there with his shower shoes on and so the guy points to him and says, “How far do you think you’d get with shoes like that if you go down in the jungle,” and Art says, “It didn’t bother me the last three times I walked out.” Another thing, the chief pilot then told Art Wilson he had to wear flying boots, so he’d put on the flying boots, check through operations to get in the airplane, take off the flying boots, put his shower shoes on, and away he’d go. The guys that flew with him, they said he’d brief him. “You just sit there. If I want you to do anything, I’ll let you know,” and he did everything, like he was flying solo. They didn’t want to fly with him, but the company required he have a co-pilot. They said they didn’t like flying with him because they just sat there with their arms folded and watch him fly. He never let them touch it. He wouldn’t let them touch anything. He’d reach right across them and do the cowl flaps, things like that. Oh, there was another story about him. He had a Laos’ wife and I think he had a Chinese wife and I think he also had a Japanese wife. Okay, his Laos wife, and they decided they had bad spirits in the house. So, they got these guys to remove the bad spirits and while they were doing it they came over and they stayed at Lido Hotel and Steve Wortz and I used to sit out in the front there and talk to him in the evening and he usually drank about a bottle of vodka every night, but he was raring to go the next morning, no problem. But, they stayed there for over a month at the Lido Hotel. Then, they got word that the bad spirits had been moved from the house so they moved back over to the house. He was just, you know, like doing this for his Laos wife. I was in Bangkok when they threw Kita Kachorn out and I tried to get into the military hospital but it was full. So, I went to the Florida Hotel across the street and Dick Joyce was there and she’s since passed away. He and I stayed there and I got the taxi driver to take me downtown and all these guys, you know, were riding busses and beating on drums, they were throwing the police things and garbage and stuff in the street and burning it up. I got one taxi driver and I said I wanted to go downtown and he said, “You go, I’m not going,” but I found one guy that took me and I got down there and I went into the store. We had to go in the alley because in front they had it all locked up in the front but you could get in the back. It was real interesting. It went on and I thought these guys were kidding. He came in and told the people in the
hotel that they were killing people downtown and it turned out it was. They had the
troops firing on them, but when they’d start firing everybody would lay down and when
they stopped firing they’d get back up. Pretty soon…this went on for about three days
and then it got to the point that the troops refused to fire on the civilians anymore and
when they did they all would get up and say, “We want a new government.” They gave
Kita Kichorn a chance to carry whatever he could, get in the airplane, and leave, which
he did. So, it lasted about three days and I think they filled a hospital. It seemed like
they killed about 80 people, that sort of thing. The troops refused to fire at them
anymore. The government left. The husband of the lady that owned the apartment house
that my family lived in Bangkok became the new prime minister of Thailand. Of course
my kids all went to school there, but they went to American schools, international school,
things like that.

SM: Now so you yourself were never shot down?

PT: No, in fact I got shot at an awful lot. For some reason, I figured, “Well,
they’re not going to hit me.” Like I said, I was out with Jack Cavel on the Ho Chi Minh
Trail looking for the CIA team and Jack said…because they used flashlights. They’d
form a letter that we would identify so we’d know who they were and then we’d try to
drop at night, the darker the better and everything else so that the enemy wouldn’t see
where we were dropping. Of course they had to have toilet paper and tennis shoes and all
kinds of stuff out there. It was very important items that we’d carry out and drop to them,
flashlight batteries. Jack says, “Hey, is that our signal?” and I said, “No, Jack, those guys
are there firing at us,” and that’s probably the reason that night we couldn’t find the guys
to drop because there was enemy troops so much around where they were. Like I said,
while I was there I think we lost about 30 pilots and aircraft but I know one guy, his name
was Bell, he got bullet holes through both gas tanks and he just barely made it in before
he ran out of fuel, running out of the bullet holes.

SM: What was the largest weapons fired at you that you’re aware of? Was it
typically small arms?

PT: Mostly it was small arms and that was the thing. They lost Clarence Driver
and Barbara’s husband, George Ritter. They lost two airplanes. The Chinese had moved
some heavy guns down. They called it the Chinese…they were building a highway down
through Laos to Thailand and these guys flew over the highway and our intelligence
wasn’t aware of these heavy guns moving down, so within a few minutes they shot down
two 123s and that’s what happened to Clarence Dtriver.
SM: Did you fly many missions in support of operations when the Lao forces
under Vang Pao controlled the PDJ?
PT: Well, we flew a lot of missions supporting General Vang Pao and his troops.
We carried a lot of...we also supported the T-28s that were flying out of Long Ching.
One interesting thing is you go into Long Ching, there was a big carst right at the end of
the runway and there was room to turn around just right at the end of the runway. To go
in there, there was a hill and you just go down the hill and you’re right close to the hill all
the way down to the runway. Well, this 123 that was sitting down at the bottom of the
carst all wrecked, pieces of 123, had came in for landing and somebody pulled a
bulldozer out in front of him and he started to go around and then decided he couldn’t
make it and he was going to try to land and he couldn’t do that so he hit the carst and
when the wing came off, one of the load masters, kickers we called them, went flying out
of it and lit in a tree, got really busted up bad. He went back to the states for about six
months, got all patched up, came back and started flying again. But the 123 parts were
sitting there at the bottom of the carst, very interesting. The 130s, we used to go in
and...actually we only stopped long enough...by the time we landed, the kickers would
have the cargo. We’d have 30,000 pounds. We’d get into this turnaround, stop the
aircraft, full throttle, go, and 30,000 pounds of cargo sitting on the ramp and we’d just
keep going and swing onto the runway and take off. By the time we got off the guys
would have the back end closed up and we were on our way. We used to log one minute
of ground time and offload 30,000 pounds of cargo. But, the interesting missions were
the supply missions at the Ho Chi Minh Trail at night. When I was there, we lost I think
about 30 pilots.
SM: Now the resupply missions that you just mentioned over the Ho Chi Minh
Trail, were these to typically American teams or combination American-Laotian?
PT: Yes, CIA teams that were observation teams on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
SM: This was part of road watch?
PT: I guess they were road watching and whatever. It was very important that
the enemy didn’t see where the supplies were being dropped to them, so it would be late
at night at low altitude. We always had…we got down below the hills. In case we lost
an engine, it was very important we have an escape route so we could maybe fly out of
there with luck. A lot of the areas were not mapped. They were unmapped and we had
to figure it all out. A lot of flight planning to be done on those missions.

SM: And how would you evaluate, how would you rate the flight information
you would receive before a mission? Other pilots that I talked to that flew for Air
America indicated that the intelligence you guys had for those types of missions was very
good. Would you agree with that?

PT: I thought it was quite good. Of course when these guys were shot down over
the highway there that’s something the Air America intelligence missed. They didn’t
know about it. They were not aware of them moving big guns into that area. But, pretty
much they knew what kind of opposition we’d run into and what kind of fire arms were
in the area and they were pretty well up on it I thought.

SM: And of the various C-130 aircraft flying in country, do you know if there
were any C-130 gunships flying in Laos?

PT: I don’t…I think some of them were up in Laos. The commander of the 123
outfit at Nakhon Phanom was an old friend of mine and also one of the navigators there,
both of them gone now, but Frank Bailey was the commander of that outfit and he was an
old friend that I’d known for many years, and they were flying some missions up into
Laos, but I don’t know exactly what they were doing. As far as I know, the 130s weren't
up in Laos, the gunships. I know they had them down in Vietnam, but I’m not aware of
any of them being up in Laos.

SM: Did you yourself ever fly one?

PT: I never flew one of the gunships. I flew the 130s for a few years out of
Travis and it was all pretty much cargo or personnel. I flew a load of troops over to
Germany for maneuvers and things like that but it was cargo or troops. I was there and
the ones flying out of Takhli, we were carrying mostly cargo. It was support of Vang Pao
and the T-28s, sometimes a load of tip tanks or external gas tanks for the T-28s, all kinds,
and a lot of guns and ammunition and whatever.
SM: Now when you say weapons, guns, did that ever include light artillery, small artillery?

PT: The guns we carried pretty much were small arms.

SM: Personal weapons?

PT: Yeah, and that’s one of the things about, again, about flying a little airplane. I decided I didn’t want to do it. We were carrying all these little guys around and we were supposed to disarm them and do that, but if we did that it would take us about an hour and we just didn't have time to do it. These guys would come in and they’d have their guns and you’d be flying the airplane and they’d be banging you on the head, moving their rifles around, all kinds of things. One of the airplanes, it was a helicopter that got blown up on takeoff and they thought maybe one of the troops had pulled a grenade. At first they thought it was a mortar had hit them and they found that wasn’t so, so they figured it blew up from inside and maybe one of those kids that they were carrying had pulled the pin on a grenade. I thought it was more dangerous carrying those Lao troops than it was getting shot at.

SM: Yes, sir. You mentioned earlier the drug issue, the opium issue, and I was wondering if you yourself ever knew or were ever aware of these Lao soldiers who at times were paid with opium and personal…

PT: I had heard that General Vang Pao made a lot of money in that business, but I’m not sure about that. When I met General Vang Pao, he was slim and trim and wearing coveralls and he had a cap and he looked like a real fighting man, and he was out actually in the field with the troops. I have heard since then some rumors that he was pretty heavy into the drug business. I know nobody in Air America that was in the drug business but I know somebody from Air America that tried out of Mexico and got caught and finally lost everything he had; his car, his house, his boat, all that. Crazy Neil Hampson we called him.

SM: Crazy Neil?

PT: We called him Crazy Neil. He was with Air America and he went down and was flying out of Southern Texas into Mexico. I went down there because I heard they were paying real good and when I found out what they were doing I decided they
couldn’t pay me enough to do what those guys were doing. I lost some friends down there trying to duck the radar and hitting heels and things like that.

SM: Yes, sir. Well also, you mentioned that you would go to one of the bars where the Communist Chinese would hang out. Did you ever see any Soviets?

PT: I didn't see any Soviets in there. There were people from the Chinese embassy and things like that. We were just curious; we used to go out just to see what they were doing.

SM: If you would, what was it like having your family living there in Bangkok and Thailand? What were the living conditions like and what was the economy like?

PT: Living conditions were really nice in Bangkok and the schools were real good. My wife was president of the American Women’s Club. There was a lot of Americans there, and a lot of others. The Philippine Ambassador’s son used to have his driver come and pick my daughter up and take her to school because he was kind of smitten with her I guess. I was invited to the Philippine Ambassador’s Christmas party and things like that. I got to know quite a few of the people from other countries, Philippines, and I got to know quite a few of the Lao people, too, and the Thai people. I got to know a lot of the Thai people and they sold me there on what they call STO, scheduled time off, and I’d go to Bangkok.

SM: How frequently would that happen?

PT: Every month we’d get a few days off.

SM: When you weren't at home visiting with your family and you were either in Laos or I guess Udorn…

PT: Udorn, yes.

SM: What were the living conditions…

PT: Takhli.

SM: Takhli, what were the living conditions like there?

PT: They weren't too bad. I had kept a room at the Lido Hotel in Vientiane. It was kind of a rundown old French hotel. I kept a rope in my room in case it caught fire because it was all wood. In Udorn they had some cabins out behind the hotel and I had one of the cabins and I had an old guy I flew with at Travis that was one of the occupants and also Jack Cavel and I, there were three of us stayed in there. I rented it and then I
sublet to those guys. But, I kept it all the time and then I kept the room in Vientiane and I kept the cabin there. The living conditions weren't bad at all. There at the hotel in bad weather there’d be a bunch of kids homeless, and whenever I was in Udorn I used to take those guys [kids] over to the little outdoor restaurant that they had across the street and buy them something to eat, and got a big kick out of one of the Samlo drivers. He was bumming a cigarette and I went to give him a Salem and he said he didn't want a Salem…maybe it was the other way around, whatever I gave him he wanted another kind, and when you’re bumming, “The heck with you!” and I just put them away. I’m glad I quit smoking though. My brother died from too many Camel cigarettes.

SM: I’m sorry to hear that.

PT: Yeah, it was pretty sad, but he laughed about it and said he’d quit someday or was thinking about it.

SM: What kind of cigarettes would you get in country? Were they American cigarettes or local cigarettes?

PT: Yes.

SM: Which one?

PT: I got American cigarettes. They had them at the commissary. In Lao we had the embassy commissary and I think it was a military commissary, I’m sure it was, in Bangkok. They had a military officer’s club. There was a lot of Americans around over there, a lot of troops, and a lot of airplanes, military, and of course Air America.

SM: Now the troops, these were predominately in Thailand and Udorn and Takhli, or were they in Laos as well?

PT: Well, we had some guys that were with the T-28s up in Laos and most of them were listed as mister or civilians. They didn’t show any of the military troops there. But, they had mostly American troops supporting the T-28s. The mechanics and everything were Americans. After the Pathet Lao hit the compound up at Lima Site 108 we had to go in every day and fly the Americans out and then bring them back up again the next morning. After that fiasco there, they wouldn’t let any of the Americans stay up country. So, it was one of Air America’s missions to pick them up, bring them out, and then take them back the next day.
SM: Now when you were there, or any time either before or immediately after, did you hear about Project 404?

PT: 404? No, never heard of it.

SM: How about White Star, Operation White Star?

PT: No. General Heiney Atterhol was there running some kind of operation, I don’t know what it was exactly. It had to do with Air America and I got to know Heiney pretty well because he and my old buddy down in Florida were working together a lot and his wife and Heiney were setting up medical teams to go down to Central America and different places and Heiney kept an office there and I got to know him pretty well when I was visiting with Frank and his wife.

SM: When you say Florida, are you talking about Hurlburt Field down at Fort Walton Beach?

PT: I went with Frank to the reunion for the… I forget what you call them.

SM: The air commandos?

PT: What?

SM: The air commando?

PT: Yeah.

SM: Was that this past year?

PT: No, Frank’s passed away.

SM: I’m sorry.

PT: He and I’d been buddies for years. I did some things that I don’t know if I even want to publish!

SM: Were these things in Southeast Asia?

PT: Well he was commander of the 123 outfit at Nakhon Phanom and of course I didn’t see very much there because I was in other places. But, one thing I got a big kick out of is like Steve Works and I were there one night, we were on our way to Bangkok but we stopped on the way. We were passengers, so the flight line snack vehicle sold beer. Steve and I each had a beer out there on the runway at Nakhon Phanom. That’s the only place I’d ever seen where they would sell beer out on the flight line.

SM: What were the rules regarding Air America pilots drinking?
PT: George Van-Heusen and I rented a place in Vientiane. We took it over from Dave Jenkins when he got fired and he went to work for Air Asia down in Bangkok. But, George was a drinker. I got to the point where I wouldn’t put anything to drink in the house because if I did, George would drink it and it was against the rules. One night I knew he had an early morning takeoff and about midnight I went out looking for him and I found him. He was out with Chang Kai Shek’s son boozing it up and I told him, “You’d better get on home and get some sleep. You’ve got an early morning takeoff,” and he says, “Oh, I’ll make it. Don’t worry.” So, I left him and went back. He came in about takeoff time, put on his uniform, went out there, and checked in. In the meantime they’d gotten somebody else to take his flight and he checked in with the chief pilot, got fired, and left for the states. Some guy that used to be with Air America sent a letter saying George showed up at his house and said, ‘Oh I used to know you in Air America and you drank all my booze and left,’” and the next thing I heard George had put a shotgun in his mouth and blew his head off. He was a Van-Heusen. He was a graduate of Stanford. He was from the Van-Heusen shirt family. His drinking just got him, and it got him fired, too.

SM: My goodness! So obviously drinking was very harshly dealt with?

PT: Yes. Art Wilson used to drink about a fifth of vodka every night but by morning he was ready to go. I know another guy that I flew with when I first got there that did about the same thing, but come morning he was ready to go. He was sober, seemed perfectly sober and ready to go.

SM: What was the role of alcohol in these men’s lives do you think? Was it just escapism? Was it just a thing to do? What role did alcohol play? For American soldiers in Vietnam, that was a lot of it; they drank because they just wanted to forget what they were doing.

PT: Yeah, and I think maybe a lot of it was not much else to do. But, I think a lot of the guys that hired on to Air America had a drinking problem before they got there, but I didn't see a lot of problems with it. There were just a few like Van-Heusen that just I’m sure that the reason he left the Air Force and came out was because of a drinking problem and thought he could get away with it out there in Asia.
SM: Were there any incidents that you were involved in that involved animal life, wildlife? I have heard a lot of families had exotic pets and things like that.

PT: Yes, a lot of the guys had monkeys. I got a cat that was really wild and got it tamed. It was a little kitten, and it was completely wild and you couldn’t get near it. But after it got used to it, I’d come home and that cat would hide and come running out and hit me! I taught him not to use its claws. Then it would run and hide, it just wanted to play. Then the neighbor kid, his mother was from Laos [Wisconsin] and his father was a Chinese, [Graduate of Notre Dame and sent his sons there late on.] and he came over and said, “Oh, your cat fell in the pond and drown. I’m sorry I pulled it out, and here it is.” Did you ever hear of a cat falling into water and drowning?

SM: No.

PT: No. I figure the kid hit it with a rock or something and then it fell into the water. Anyway, the Chinese guy, his name was Lampson and they had the Lampson shopping center down the street where he was working and running a Japanese store in the Lampson shopping center. I thought it was quite interesting this Chinese guy was running a Japanese store. No, I didn’t, what you asked. I remember quite a few people having monkeys, and that’s about the only thing that I knew as far as pets.

SM: Was there much of a black market there in Laos and in Thailand from what you saw?

PT: There probably was. I didn’t get into anything that I was really aware of. I know that I’d see a lot of the USAID markings on stuff in the stores, so I don’t know how they got it but they got a hold of it someway. I got my car, I told my wife to sell it before she left Hawaii but she didn’t. The sergeant there told her, “Well no, take it to Thailand and you can get twice as much for the car over there, so ship it,” so she did and I got it over there and they wanted 100% duty for it, so I left it sitting there in the lot and I got this guy from USAID and he told the guy working for him, “Put this car on a shipping thing to destination Laos,” and in Laos they had 50% so I shipped it then, or they did. They had it come in on a ship. It was actually in the lot there.

SM: It never left?

PT: It never left, so they had it come in on another ship and destination Laos so I was able to pick it up and take it out and drive it to Laos and after I got to Laos with it I
got the consulate there to give me a visit to Thailand for six months and then it got down
to where it would only go three months and then I got to the point where I’d been back
and forth across the Mekong and checking through with the customs and I found out they
never checked the car. So, I left the car in Bangkok and I’d just go get the paperwork and
go across and they’d stamp the paperwork and the car stayed in Bangkok all the time.
But, I shipped it from Laos back to Thailand, but never took anything but the paperwork.
But, there was a lot of stuff like that that was, I don’t know, I guess if you couldn’t get it
legally you could buy it or pay them off.
SM: Or find a way around it?
PT: Yeah, find a way around almost anything.
SM: Yes, sir. How did your kids and your wife enjoy being in Bangkok?
PT: They really enjoyed it. They hated to leave, but I don't know. I just decided
they’d been there for too long and decided to get them out of there. When my youngest
daughter dropped some tableware on the floor and told the maid to pick it up, I thought
they’d been there too long.
SM: Okay, so you were able to have house servants?
PT: We had a chauffer [and two maids] and the kids had some stables there and
the kids had horses they had to take care of, and paid for the use of the horses. Oh, I
don’t know. Like I said, my wife was president of the American Women’s Club and
there was a lot of people from different embassies and things that the kids knew or the
kids from there and she really liked it, and I think the kids did, too. I just thought they’d
been there too long and it was time to get out. Like I told the guy from the State
Department, “You guys are going to lose this country and it won’t be too long,” and my
old teacher from high school was over there and I never did run into him, but I found out
that he’d been there. He was working for the king setting up schools for the Laotians and
for some reason I never ran into him while he was there. I got to talking with him. When
I got back home I went over to his house and was talking to him and I mentioned Laos
and boy his wife came running in, “Did you say something about Laos?” They thought
Laos was great. They wanted to go back but he said he was a little too old and they
wouldn’t take him anymore.
SM: Did you or any of your family members pick up the language, Thai, or did you pick up any Lao?

PT: Yeah, I could count to 100 in Thai! I could tell the taxi driver where to go, straight ahead, and things like that. But, my family picked up quite a bit more of it than I did; of course they were there all the time and I was only there for a few days a month. [They] took French in school, too, so when they got back to California the teachers in the school had them his assistance in teaching French to the French class and that sort of thing.

SM: You said that they went to a school where predominantly Americans went?

PT: Well, no, it was an international school. All of the kids from all the different countries, the embassies and things like that and the people that were there and the USAID people, whatever. So, they were from…but it was all in English. Of course that’s the international language now and I guess that hurt the French when they changed from French to English for the international language.

SM: Yes, sir. I understand that you were critical of how the war was being prosecuted and the tactics and whatnot that were being employed or not being employed, but what did you think overall of the American decision to try to do what we were doing in Southeast Asia, both in Thailand and Laos and Vietnam, the overall strategy of the US policy? What did you think of that?

PT: Well I’ll tell you. We were at the hotel and this lieutenant came with kind of an Aussie hat on and uniform and asked if he could get a ride out to the airport and I said, “Sure, come on. No problem.” He got in the van and I asked him, “Where are you from, lieutenant?” “Oh, I just came up from Vietnam.” I said, “You been fighting the war down there?” “Yeah.” I said, “Did you fight it out of an air conditioned hotel?” “Yeah, what’s wrong with living like a white man just because a war’s going on?” But there were a lot of troops that had a hard time that spent time out in the jungle. But, for every one out there it seemed like I read there was somewhere five to ten people supporting them. Of course this guy was putting on that he was a big war fighter and all that sort of thing, which he wasn’t as far as I could tell from talking to him. Now I didn’t think too much of the war. I don't think too much of wars anyway. Back in World War II, I’m sure I killed a lot of Japanese without thinking anything about it by firing at them with
eight 50s and rockets and stuff like that, and at that time war was, as far as I was concerned, that’s the place to be and that’s what to do. But, unless you’re going to really get in it and fight it to win, then I think it’s pretty darn silly to get in there just to try to hold like they were doing in Laos, and that’s what I told them in State Department, “There’s no way in the world that you guys are going to keep this country by trying to fight this war and putting all these limitations on what can be done,” like this guy told me at Lima Site 108, “We’re not allowed to fire at anybody if they’re past this hill,” which is about two miles out. So, they weren't fighting it to win. They were just…I don't know what they were doing, and I don’t think they knew what they were doing. Unless you’re going to get in there and fight it to win, there’s no sense in even getting into it.

SM: Speaking of guys that were out there in the bush, Americans that were out there in the bush, do you know if you ever provided support for American Special Forces in Laos, American Green Berets?

PT: No, we didn’t, not in particular. We supported mainly..

SM: The CIA?

PT: What I was doing anyway was supporting Vang Pao and the refugees and feeding some of the people out in the villages, dropping rice and doing things like that.

SM: Were you aware of any American Green Beret Special Forces in Laos when you were there?

PT: No, in fact I didn’t see any of them. All I saw was…well, I knew that some people that I knew from the military were there and they were listed down at the office as mister so and so and things like that, but that’s the only ones that I knew of.

SM: I see. Is there anything else about your experience in country that you’d like to talk about?

PT: I know it’s pretty regular getting shot at and I know we lost a lot of people there, like I told you about Cotton Davis, only one bullet hit him. We lost a lot of airplanes, but a lot of them were wrecks but a lot of them were shot down. This helicopter I think some kid [Laos soldier] had pulled the pin on the grenade and blew it up just as they were a few feet off the ground. It wasn’t the real great place like I told them. They said, “Well if you don’t believe in what we’re doing, you shouldn’t be here,”
and I said, “If I had any sense, I guess I wouldn’t be here.” I’m not a big supporter of war but if it’s necessary then I think you ought to go all out to win it.

SM: When did you leave?
PT: My last day on the payroll was Christmas Day 1969, so I was there from ’65 to about ’70.

SM: What did you think about what was happening back in the United States? I assume that you were getting news as far as newspapers and magazines and maybe news coverage on TV and radio, anti-war protestors?
PT: What did I think about it?
SM: Yeah, what did you think about all that stuff going on back in the United States?
PT: That’s about…what I thought about it was I shouldn’t say exactly but I was not happy at all about what I was hearing about what was going on. What I’ve heard about Willy and then he gets to be president, I just couldn’t believe it.
SM: You’re talking about President Clinton?
PT: Yes, it’s just amazing to me. There’s something wrong with this country that people can and will do these things. Right now it’s pretty sad what the kids in the colleges are doing, but of course there’s an awful lot of drugs involved in it, too. It’s pretty sad. The college students want them to be friends with the terrorists. You make friends with them and they won’t be terrorists? I don't know how they can even believe that.
SM: When you did leave, did you come straight back to the United States?
PT: Yes, in fact I went back to Wisconsin. My kids liked it but my wife just didn't like it at all and she wouldn’t go out of the house when the wind was blowing and it was raining and cold and I said, “Well, I guess you’re going to have to go to California,” and she said, “Glad you said that,” and she jumped in the car, took the kids, and took off for California.
SM: This is your wife of many, many years? [35 years]
PT: She passed away, had cancer.
SM: I’m sorry.
PT: She was, at that time, was my wife.
SM: When were you married to your first wife?
PT: In 1943 I think it was.
SM: Yeah, because it was when you were…
PT: Yeah, it was about late 1943.
SM: So she and the kids got in the car and went to California? What did you do?
PT: Well one of my sons and I cleaned everything out, took the pets, took them over and gave them to some of the nephews and nieces and things like that. I had a pickup truck and Bill and I drove the pickup truck back to California. [and towed a car]
SM: When you left Air America, was that part of the…you’d mentioned earlier that you thought that your children had spent enough time there, your family had spent enough time there, and it was time for them to leave. Was this part of that calculus?
PT: It’s just like I just felt that I’d been there long enough and probably too long. It’s like I told these guys at the State Department, I said, “If I had any sense, I probably wouldn’t be here,” so I decided that it was time for me to leave. Like what I did, I tried to talk Clarence Dtriver into leaving and I wish he’d have listened to me and [if] he’d left. He’d still be around, I’m sure.
SM: Okay, did you maintain very much contact with other of your Air America friends after you got back to the United States and to the present?
PT: Yeah, I’ve gone to some of the reunions. After I came back to the states for a few years I was able to give them the aircraft out of McClellan and I’d go over there and spend two or three weeks. I took a friend of mine over that had never been in Southeast Asia and I took him up and introduced him to some of the people in Lao and he got a gun club patch from the Lao shooting club or skeet club and he was real proud of that. I could get onto the 141 that was taking the replacement troops over for the radar picket ships and all I had to do is take my baggage over there on one knee and when takeoff time came, just go over there and get on the airplane. I’d get into Thailand without being chopped into the country and then I’d have go to the consulate and get them to fix me up with the proper entry into the country. But, all those sort of things could be done. You could get about anything done in Southeast Asia if you knew how to do it and knew where to go, or if you wanted to pay for having it done.
SM: How many times have you been back since you left in late ’69, early ’70?

PT: I think I went back there three times. Last time I went back there the Pathet Lao, they’d settled the fighting and the Pathet Lao was moving into Vientiane. So, I only stayed there one day. Dick Jones was there checking out all of the Lao in some of the aircraft and everybody was leaving and the Pathet Lao was moving into the barracks out by the airport, and I figured, “Boy, this place is finished,” and when I heard Vang Pao had left the country and things like that I knew Lao was finished; it’s exactly what I told them at the State Department, “That’s what’s going to happen. You guys are all going to be out of here.” So, I’m glad I quit when I did.

SM: What did you think when you heard about what was going on in Vietnam, say with the Paris Peace Accords in 1973 and then the Fall of Saigon in April of ’75?

PT: I had a friend down in Saigon; well, I had a lot of friends down in Saigon, a lot of the Air America guys. Herman Heinz, when I was visiting him, he says, “I want to show you what I got for flying the last airplane out of Saigon,” and he goes out to the garage and there’s a big black Lincoln there. He says, “This was my bonus for flying one of the last airplanes out of Saigon.” He told how it was, and I’ve read about it in different places. The ramp was all littered with burning airplanes. They couldn’t refuel. They were lucky to get out of there with the aircraft, and some of them didn’t have enough fuel to go where they were supposed to go so they went to Bangkok to refuel, that sort of thing. It was pretty hairy. The ambassador, I don't know, he held out until the last minute. They had a band and a lot of people that they should have taken out that were committed and working for the Americans. But, I don’t know why they held it up or why he held it up. I wasn’t really impressed with the ambassador or the State Department out there. I thought they were a bunch of…in fact, I thought they were a bunch of socialist or even worse. I had very little respect for them at all.

SM: I failed to ask you, did you ever conduct operations into Cambodia?

PT: No, but I had some friends that did. They told me about going in there to kill somebody.

SM: Kill Cambodians?

PT: No, some people that were a thorn in the side of the Americans, and that I don't suppose is for public issue. They told me that’s what they were doing. They went
in there to eliminate somebody that was a thorn in the side of the Americans. A friend of mine Phil Snyder was married to a Cambodian girl and they had him in jail down there and then they turned him loose, but they never did [turn his wife lose]…he worked with Pop Beal there with the refugees there and everybody that came out, and he’d keep asking them about his wife, if anybody knew her. He never was able to find out what happened to her. They probably eliminated her for having married an American.

SM: What a shame.
PT: They don’t have a lot of sympathy for people or a lot of respect for life.
SM: What did you think about Pop Beal?
PT: Pop Beal? I liked Pop Beal.
SM: What do you remember most about him?
PT: Oh, I think he was a really good guy until he started working for the CIA and then we had a poker game and guys that wouldn’t play with him he’d ask not to send them up into his territory, only the guys that he liked. He was a pretty good old boy I thought. Last time I saw him he said, “I’m not going to be around much longer,” and the [owner of] Tiger Ryberg’s bar down in Bangkok said, “I’m not going to be, either,” and it wasn’t long after that that Pop was down to Jeffery’s place in Alabama and did some hunting and fishing and a little bit after that he was gone. But, he said he wasn’t going to be around much longer the last time I saw him, and he wasn’t. I guess he knew he was coming to the end of his rope.

SM: Yes, sir. You mentioned somebody else, Ryberg?
PT: Tiger Ryberg, he was in Air America but I don’t know why, he had the bar in Vientiane or in Bangkok. He had the Tiger’s Den he called it and I think a lot of the Air America guys hung out there. In some way or another he came to the reunions, probably as an invitee from some of the Air America guys.

SM: What was the most important thing you took away from your service in Southeast Asia?

[Met a retire Air Force General here. He has a Step man Aircraft and tells of working for General Aderholt in Southeast Asia and flying for Air America, being paid and having to turn the check over to military finance.]
PT: I guess probably the most important thing is understanding how the
Americans can mess up in some of these countries when they just don’t have the…
SM: Want to take a break?
PT: No. I got a flag and a certificate and I got a CIA Certificate of Appreciation
for Air America and I got the flag that was flown over the White House on Ronald
Reagan’s inauguration day by Goldwater and sent to me with a, “Presented to Paul
Taylor, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF Retired, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Soldier of
Fortune, Air America Five Plus Years.” It’s real impressive, and, “In grateful
appreciation from your close comrades,” and yeah, Barry Goldwater had it flown over on
the occasion of the inauguration of Ronald Reagan, 40th President of the United States.
“This flag is flown at the request of the Honorable Barry Goldwater, United States
Senate, for presentation,” and so forth. It’s a lot of impressive things that I have from
different things that I’ve done here and there. I don’t look like a soldier of fortune when
I’m riding around here. I’m meeting people that I’ve known and I don’t think…[they
think I’ve had this background]…but I enjoyed everything I did. I really did.
SM: What do you think about how the United States has been approaching
Southeast Asia more recently, especially with normalizing relations to Vietnam?
PT: Well I have a little bit of reservations about the relations with Vietnam and
China and everything, but it’s not all bad. If they can get away with it, I just wonder.
Right now I listen to the president talking and what he had to say about North Korea, of
course I spent quite a bit of time in Korea and I’ve been back there since. I flew missions
into Korea out of Travis and the place sure has changed from what it was like when I was
there back in the Korean War; just South Korea, I guess North Korea is still a mess.
SM: What do you think we as a nation should take away from our experiences in
Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia?
PT: Well, you know, again I say I think we should learn that we should not be in
a war unless we have to be, and if we have to be, then we should be in it to win and not to
do just fooling around like they did in Laos and Vietnam and things like that. All the
guys that lost their lives and everything just doesn’t really give them what they deserve.
SM: Is there anything else you’d like to talk about today?
PT: You know, I might when I get the bull session with some of the guys. I’ll think of a lot of things that I talk about, but it’s a bit difficult to stop and think about, “What should I talk about?”

SM: I understand. I just didn’t know if there was anything that was on the top of your head that you might want to discuss today.

PT: No, as far as I can remember I’ve recovered most everything. I know there’s quite a few things that I’ve missed, some different missions that go on and things like that.

SM: As you remember those things we can always conduct additional interviews and if you want to write them down as short stories and send them to me, we can add them to the oral history. As you remember things and as you talk to other people or as you reminisce…

PT: Are you going to send me a transcript of this? When I go through it maybe I’ll think of some things that I haven’t already talked about.

SM: Yes, sir. Let me go ahead, since there’s nothing else we can talk about right now, let me go ahead and put an official end to this interview and then we’ll talk more about that.

PT: Very good.

SM: This will end the interview with Mr. Paul Taylor. Thank you very much, sir.