

Interview of Roger Johnson

Roger Johnson: Now, you're going to start questioning and then I will take over or what?

Interviewer: Yeah, I'll ask you a couple of question and you can talk as long as you want.

Elizabeth: You want to talk as if you're having a conversation with rick as opposed to reading -- what was your rank, Rodger?

Roger Johnson: Flight officer. That's 12 grades below a private.

Interviewer: We're glad to have you come to KUED studios today, Rodger, all the way from Ephraim and we appreciate you being here. We appreciate your service to our country. Were you born down in the Ephraim area?

Roger Johnson: I was born in Ephraim, Utah, in 1920. I'm approaching 90 years old.

Interviewer: And you look mighty good, I'll tell you that.

Roger Johnson: You're kidding.

Interviewer: And you're wearing the same, is that shirt --

Roger Johnson: This is part of the summer uniform, it's not complete, but it's part of my summer uniform.

Interviewer: And you're still wearing it, that's pretty dog gone good. Tell us about where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor and how you got into the service.

Roger Johnson: Okay, at Pearl Harbor, my flight instructor and I were down at Las Vegas to an air show, and they come over the PA system that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, and then we flew down there. And this was in the afternoon; they told us that everybody was grounded. And we had to get back to Utah, so we got up early in the morning and took off and didn't get a shot down. Got back to Utah.

Interviewer: So you were in Las Vegas on Sunday December 7th, they said everybody was grounded?

Roger Johnson: Yeah, they grounded all the airplanes.

Interviewer: And so you guys took off early --

Roger Johnson: We weren't at home and so we snuck out and got the airplane going and away we went.

Interviewer: That's a pretty good story.

Roger Johnson: Yeah, we went home.

Interviewer: You got home and had you ever heard of Pearl Harbor before?

Roger Johnson: I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay, and take it from there. What did you do, what happened next?

Roger Johnson: Well, I got home. I was in the process of learning -- or not learning how to fly, but going through various flight courses. These, I better start at the beginning.

When I was a kid in 1910, I heard something go over Ephraim and it was an airplane and that was the first airplane I ever saw. Then around 1941, I was at Snow College, and they had a flight program.

Interviewer: Hold up just a second. I think your daughters are outside. Go back to where, you're a young boy and looking up in the sky at the airplane.

Roger Johnson: You want me to start now?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Roger Johnson: Okay. When I was in 1930, when I was 10 years old, I heard this thing going over Ephraim, and it was an airplane. It was the first one I'd ever seen, and it landed west of Ephraim and we all run down and looked it at and it was a huge airplane. It had four wings and a big propeller and everybody was all excited. In 1930 -- 1940, I was at Snow College. And, they had a flight program going on, it was called, "CPT," Civilian Pilot Training, and I had some friends that were in that course and I went down to Mount Pleasant where the flying was done.

And I watched them and I decided I wanted to learn how to fly and I would get in the next class, but I found out later that I had to pass a 20/20 vision test, which I couldn't do. So I proceeded to buy my flying time. I spent what money I had saved up and then my parents paid the rest. It cost about 2,500 dollars, at least. There were various courses, and the first was a student pilot. Your instructor taught you for about 8 hours, and then you soloed and you had a student pilot's license. The next one up was a private pilot's license, and that was somewhere around 30 hours solo and 10 hours dual. The next up was commercial license; that was 200 hours solo and a bunch more dual instruction. Then, you were a commercial pilot.

Now, I was aiming for flight instructor because the war was on and they needed lot of flight instructors. And, so I went on flight instructor. That was more instruction

time, then I got to be a flight instructor, and flight instructors were in great demand at that time. The war was just getting going and a lot of planes were being built and they needed pilots, so I got to be a flight instructor, and I immediately went to work. I instructed at Salt Lake City for awhile, then Price, Utah, Richfield, Cedar City, then I went down to California to a more advanced -- it was an Army training school called Calero. While at Calero, I instructed Army Primary and Army Basic. And, I don't know how to go about this. Stop it just a minute.

Interviewer: Well, that's okay. Is that background noise too much?

Elizabeth: Ask Will. Do you hear anything strange?

Roger Johnson: Did you hear that?

Interviewer: I guess Will's not there.

Elizabeth: I think we are okay.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay, so you are talking about your basic flight instruction.

Roger Johnson: Yeah, but I didn't get an important point in here.

Interviewer: All right, well go back and get it.

Roger Johnson: Are we on now?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Roger Johnson: Okay, while I was instructing at Richfield, I had the most important thing happen to me in my life.

[Baby cooing].

Roger Johnson: I was in a little apartment and I hear that we were getting --

Interviewer: I'm sure we're picking that up.

Elizabeth: We're picking that up.

Crew Member: What are you guys talking about? I can't hear a thing.

Elizabeth: You don't hear a baby cooing?

Roger Johnson: Me?

Elizabeth: No, no. I'm talking to him.

Crew Member: Not really.

Elizabeth: Okay. Let us know if you do.

Interviewer: Okay. Sorry, Roger.

Roger Johnson: When I was instructing at Richfield, I lived in a small apartment, and I heard I was getting neighbors. And the next morning I got up to go to work and out of this next apartment come a one beautiful woman. Wow. And I smiled and said, "Hello." And she did and I engineered it so I'd get home before she did in the afternoon and she got home and said, "Hello" and I smiled and said, "Hello." And I thought, "I better take some action on this deal here." This was too good to pass up. And so I said, "Would you like to go to the show tonight?" There was a good show. And she said, "Yes." Well that started things out, and this was an emotion that I never felt before. And I had no control over it.

Fortunately, she felt the same way and we were totally in love. Well, she was working at the hospital and she wanted to get home for Christmas, then she was going in the Army Nurse Corps. A little later on, I got my courage up and I asked her if she would marry me and she said, "Yes" but we decided it could not be done till after the war. But I managed to get a ring on her and she was now my fiancée. And we went home to Ephraim to meet the folks, and

my father was there and LaRue showed him the ring and he looked at me and he says, "Small, isn't it." Well I didn't have much money at that time, and that's all the money I had, and admittedly it was quite small. We then went to meet her folks and then we went back to Richfield. And that takes part of the story, I will return to that later on.

When I got down to Calero, I instructed Army Primary and Army Basic. Before that, the Army was drafting instructors, and we needed instructors. And I had joined the Army Reserves so I wouldn't get drafted. Well, now after Calero, I went to Long Beach and got in the Air Corps. There, we did ferry work. It was called the "Ferry Command." We flew airplanes all over the country. And, when they got enough civilian instructors, they shipped us off to Deming, New Mexico, where we took an instrument course and a twin engine course. When we got back from Deming, when we graduated, we were made flight officers. Now, going back, the Army had promised us a second lieutenant. And, true to their word, they made us flight officers which is one rank below second lieutenant, which didn't take us too happy.

At Long Beach, I flew ferry work. Then I went on Army Airlines for about four months, then I went to Reno to a C-46 school, and this was one of the best schools I ever went to in the Army. We flew about 60 hours in C-46s, and I had good ground school. And, this was a little before Christmas. Now, in the mean time, my wife had gone to the South Pacific, and she had made two trips. And then on the third trip over, she stayed in New Caledonia for 14 months. And she just got home and she come up to Reno, and she stayed in the nurse's quarters. And when I wasn't flying, we went into town and had a good time.

And, now, maybe I shouldn't tell you this. But my wife didn't drink, and I got a letter from her when she was overseas. She says, "When I got back, we're going to tie a good one on." And so we went into Reno this one night, and we did tie a good one on. I have a picture of that.

It was almost Christmas then. We went home for Christmas, and visited the folks and then we caught a ride with some people going to Los Angeles. We had to get back. Well, we were in the back seat and there was another couple plus the driver in the front seat and we were sitting in the back seat. And, we were very much in love, and I guess annoyed the people in the front. And we were hugging and kissing and we got talking about getting married. Now, we had decided not to do that till the war was over. But, one thing led to another, and I was trying to talk her into getting married and she was getting along pretty good, and then I said, "Well, now, if you don't want to, we won't." And then she said, "You don't love me anymore." And then she started to cry and I said, "Of course I do." And I said, "If we can get a room in Las Vegas, we'll get married." And she says, "Okay." Well, there weren't any rooms in Las Vegas. But they stopped and we went into a -- I went in the hotel and no rooms. And as I was walking out, the guy hollered and said, "We got a room, do you want it?" And I says, "You bet." And so I went out and got her, and then we proceeded to go get a license and go up to a little marriage place called (inaudible). And we got married. And that was that.

We then got up the next day and went to Los Angeles, and we were there for about three days. On the fourth day, at night, we went to a Hollywood play and we danced till about 3:00 and I was going to get a room in the Biltmore; there were no rooms. So the fourth

night of our honeymoon, we slept in the lobby with about 100 other military personnel. And I got a bench for her to sleep on and I slept on the floor. The fourth day of our honeymoon, we went out to the Rose Bowl and watched the Rose Bowl game. Then I put her on a bus and she left for her new station, and then I went back to Long Beach and I was ordered to Nashville.

I got back to Nashville and got checked in and we did a little more ferry work. One of the things we did, we went up to Louisville and got a bunch of C-46s and took back to Nashville. And, another trip, I took a C-47 out to the Bahamas. This was part of the lend-lease program that we had with the British. We were supplying them with all kinds of things for the war effort. We weren't in the war at that time. But I took the 47 down there and left it.

Then, possibly I should not bring this up, but in the states at that time, whiskey was hard to come by. You could get gin or something, but down at Nassau, it was probably subsidized. And you get all the whiskey you wanted. Good stuff for two dollars a bottle. So, we -- me and my co-pilot filled our bags with whiskey and then flew back to Miami and we had to get a ticket there back to our base. And the gal at the ticket office says, "Are you on whiskey run?" And I said, "Yes." And then they red tagged our bag because previous to that time, they had thrown a bag in the baggage compartment and broken a lot of the bottles.

So, that was the whiskey run. When I got back to Nashville, everybody knew we were on that run and all the boys were there to get what they wanted.

Interviewer: That was legal to go down to the Bahamas and bring back whiskey?

Roger Johnson: Yeah, it was legal, you bet.

Interviewer: And they just wanted to tag your bags so they didn't break them when they --

Roger Johnson: Well, you couldn't have all that booze running around the belly of the airplane.

Interviewer: That's true.

Roger Johnson: Okay, from Nashville, I was ordered to go to Fort Wayne, Indiana to get a C-46 and a crew. And they had secret orders, but we kind of knew what was up. And, our planes weren't ready, so we thought we'd go in to where they were manufacturing the plane and look at it. Well, at that time, most of the men were off to war. And we went in there and normally, men whistled at girls. But there were all girls in there and they were whistling at us. And, needless to say, we had to watch out and escape that before we were harmed.

Anyway, we got out. Got the planes and took them back to Nashville.

Interviewer: All this time, your wife was serving as a nurse in the Army, is that correct?

Roger Johnson: Yes, she made two trips across the Pacific from New Caledonia to San Francisco. And on the third trip, they took the nurses off and gave them permanent duty in New Caledonia. And, so she was in New Caledonia. But she got back, and we got together at Reno, and then we did this other stuff. And now, I was going overseas. Now, I'll just run through these stops. At this time, we didn't have long range airplanes. The C-46 was the

biggest twin engine airplane in the world at that time, but its range was only about 1,800 miles. So, I'll just give you a few of the stops. We went from Fort Wayne to Atlanta, and there was a thing called "RON." That means, "Remain overnight." We RON'd at Atlanta, West Palm Beach, Nassau in the Caribbean, and where we flew through the Bermuda Triangle, which had a bad reputation. But, there was nothing to it. It was just beautiful.

The next stop was in British Guiana, then down to Bolen, Brazil. On the way down, I flew over Devil's Island and I wanted to see that. That was a penal colony the French had. From Bolen, we went down to Natal. That was the farthest east point of South America. We stayed there for a day or two while they checked the plane and over and got it all serviced. Then we started for Ascension Island. This was a little island down in the South Pacific about 1,500 miles out. Now, you had to hit that island. And when you got out there, you only had about an hour's fuel left. And, my navigator had made this trip many times before, and he wasn't paying much attention to it because it was kind of boring to him. But I was trying to navigate. I could navigate a little, not as good as a real navigator.

But, I detected that we were quite a ways off course. And so I called him up and said -- we had about an hour's fuel left. And I said, "Now, I'm going to change 30 degrees to where I think we should be, and if I'm wrong, you can change our course back. We'll still have enough gas to get to where you want to go." Well, I had changed course and in a half hour, we hit Ascension. We landed, and I took my navigator off to the side. Now, he out-ranked me two ranks, but the pilot's in command. And I chewed him out, and I said, "From now on, the rest of this trip, I'm going to do the navigation and you track me."

And that's the way we went on. From Ascension, we went over to Liberia and Africa up to Casablanca, and I loaded our -- you always hauled a load over when you were going. Then we went back to a place called Marrakesh. That was a staging area. And from there, we stayed till they got enough planes for a flight. And, we -- they got us up in the middle of the night for the next flight, which was up to Land's End, England. And, this was quite a long flight. And when we got to Land's End, we were kind of tired. We'd been up all night. But they gave us some gas and said, "Get going." And they sent us across England up to north east England place called Snetterton Heath. That's where we were to deliver the airplane.

Well, at that time in the war, they had 1,000 plane raids over in Germany. The bombers were over there. And, when we got up to this base, the bombers were just getting back, and they were shot up, some of them. And they had wounded and dead on board and my flight was, I don't know, 60 planes or something. They didn't have radio control. They had just light guns. And your procedure was flying to the end of the line and get in line and follow the line in end and land, which I did. And as soon as I landed, I got off the run way because there was a plane right behind me. I taxied into the parking area, and there was a procedure when you delivered the plane. It was called, "You sold the airplane." I sold the airplane, and then they processed the crew. I never saw any of my crew again, never. Strange thing. I then went to London, where we -- they furnished transportation. And we were headed for India. And, we went into London and had a few days layover and saw the town. Then, the next one, we went to Paris. Laid over one night and went into town and saw Paris a little bit. Then we went to

Marseille and then to Naples, Italy, and we had a layover in Naples and I got to go down to see Pompeii and also saw Mount Vesuvius, which was still smoking. It had had a little eruption.

Interviewer: What year was this, Roger?

Roger Johnson: It was in '45.

Interviewer: After the war was over basically in Europe. You landed in Paris after --

Roger Johnson: The war was still on, but Paris had been freed.

Interviewer: Freed, I see. Okay.

Roger Johnson: Well, from Naples, we went down to, I forget the island out in the middle of the Mediterranean. We stopped there and gassed up and went on back to Africa to Tripoli and then on east to Cairo. And in Cairo, we had planned to stay in separate hotels, which was very -- the best one in Cairo. We couldn't get in, so we had to stay at a little hotel. But that night, we went out to a night club, and I had never seen a belly dancer. And this was a high-class night club and they had these acts and had a belly dancer on. And this was quite a thing for a kid like me watching a belly dancer in Cairo. But across the room at his quarters was the King of Egypt, King Farouk. And so, I can say that both the King and I watched the belly dancer together.

From Cairo, we went on up through the holy land and up Jordan and across Syria, and across Iraq and into Iran, where we landed at a place called, what was that called. Abadan. There, we refueled, and it was really hot there. And they gave us white canvas gloves to go out to the plane or it would burn your hands. We then flew on to Karachi, India. And we got there in the middle of the night and I had to wait till daylight to get to operations. From

there, we flew to a place called Agra, that's where the Taj Mahal was. And that was a very beautiful thing to see. From Agra, we went farther east into India to a place called Chabua. That was the headquarters of the air transport command, the ferry command there in India. Then, at Chabua, they reassigned us to our permanent base. My base was Sucretine. And there's where I stayed for about 11 months or something like that, and then I flew the hump from there.

Interviewer: All right, now, we hear a lot about over the hump. Tell us exactly what that means if the audience doesn't know what it is.

Roger Johnson: The Himalayan Mountains run across the north side of India until they get over by Burma, and then they turned south. And we flew over from India to China over the mountain range that turned south. As you went north, the mountains got higher. But we flew between India and China over those mountains, and it was called The Hump. So we flew over The Hump. I had, well; you had lots of different experiences. I should emphasize at this point that in time of war, any time in life, I guess, you have to have luck. In time of war, more so. And many times, luck pulled me through bad places.

Now next, I better tell you about the bad flight that I had. Went down to operations, got my crew, and there was pressure on us to get stuff to China all the time. Just keep it going. We flew around the clock, irregardless of weather or anything like that. And I went down to operations, got my crew and we all had duties to perform. One of mine was to check with the weather. And, the weather guy said, "It's kind of -- it's about normal. It's pretty bad in places." And, at the end of the briefing, he says, "China's closed." And I said, "It will be open when I get there." And he says, "No, China's closed with thick fog and you'll go halfway to

China and call for clearance and they'll send you back to India." But there was pressure on to get stuff into China, so, I said, as I left I said, "That's a hell of a way to run a railroad." I knew then that I was going to fly half way to China, do a U-turn, and go back to India.

Interviewer: From the airport that you left, right?

Roger Johnson: Yeah. Feeling pressured to keep going, and as soon as that fog lifted in China, the planes were half way across and then they went on in. Well, we took off. Went down, got the crew, went out, got the airplane, and took off. And, when we got to -- it was kind of stormy. It all was bad on the hump.

We got half way to China to a place called Payashan, that's where we called China for further clearance, and in about 15 minutes, China said, "Go back to India." Well, I knew this was going to happen before I took off. So, they cleared us on another course, a higher course, higher mountains. And we headed back for India. They give us a different altitude, and I climbed to that new altitude, and when I got there and was leveling off, there was a flash of fire on my right engine. And, immediately, I started taking action. I checked the manifold pressure, and it had dropped from 35 inches to 13 inches, which indicated to me that there was bad trouble in the engine. So I got the engine shut off to avoid fire and feathered the prop, and then I put full power on the other engine, and you all was headed south when you were in trouble because the mountains were up north. So, I headed south and told the boys, the crew, to go back and throw the load out. And this load was 30 caliber ammunition in 80 pound boxes. And they went out and started to throw the load out, and I called another plane and told him of our troubles. And he, on the hump, when someone got in trouble, you called another plane and everybody else shut up

and wouldn't interfere. Anyway, I told him we were over Yuen Long heading south towards Pei Shan.

Interviewer: And this was a B-25?

Roger Johnson: This was a C-46.

Interviewer: Oh, a C-46. Two engines.

Roger Johnson: Two engines, and it was the biggest twin in the world at that time. Okay, we were heading south and we were losing altitude and I had the wide engine wide open and our speed was reduced and the engine kept getting hotter, and pretty soon I could tell we weren't going to make it. And I yelled to the crew, "We're going to bail." And then as soon as I looked back there, they were ready. I yelled, "Bail." And I ran back for the door and we went out. 1, 2, 3. Just got out of there fast.

In the meantime, the airplane got the nose down and picked up a lot of speed. And then with the power on one side, it made a U-turn and headed back for us. And just before it got to us, it turned a little more and hit a mountain and blew up. And I had about a thousand gallons of gas on board, and all the load that they hadn't thrown out. Well, when I went out the door, the plane was going so fast that I just barely missed going under the tail. If the tail had hit me, it would have killed me. And it was dark and stormy, and as soon as I popped the chute, we were going pretty fast and it just about knocked me out. You went from 200 and something miles an hour down to 20 miles an hour, just like that. Anyway, I was lucky. You couldn't see the ground. And I landed in a rice patty. I couldn't tell when I was going to land, but my two crew members landed a ways back on a side hill and they were both hurt pretty bad.

In the mean time, the Chinese on the ground had heard all this noise and we landed pretty close to this little village, and they come out and found us and helped us back into town. We had to make a stretcher out of my parachute and a couple of poles to carry the radio operator. He was really hurt bad. His leg was thrown out at the knee and he had a bad gash on his -- his leg was thrown out at the hip and he had a bad cut on his knee. And the other guy hit his head on a rock when he landed and he was cut up pretty bad.

They took us into town, and we got in there and in your backpack, you had Sulfa. At that time, that was the popular drug. And I tried to clean their wounds out and pack Sulfa in there, and I did that, and I was no doctor. But, they didn't get infection. The strangest thing I ever saw. I guess I got so much Sulfa in there it killed everything out. Okay, we got into this village of Shenyang, and got the boys into bed. And in China, they had a radio system. Radios all over China, little hand crank radios. And I couldn't speak Chinese, but the radio guy knew roughly what I wanted. And so I told him, I gave him our clearances with our names and so forth. I didn't know that he was going to be successful in contacting our bases.

So, about 10:00 at night, I decided that I could either sit there until they found us, and that might be a week or so, or I could walk out to Pei Shan, and there was no point in my staying there. So I got a couple of guides, a couple of Chinese soldiers, and I started walking at 10:00 at night, and I walked all night and when it got daylight, the soldiers went back and I was on a trail that would lead to Pei Shan. Well, I walked and walked and walked. These mountains were steep, and I walked from 10:00 at night till about 6:00 in the afternoon.

And when I got just about to Burma Road, I saw some people off to the side down below me. I was on the trail. And at that time, they were called bandits. These were people that were living off the land and they'd kill ya and just take your gun and your clothes. But I was pretty close to Burma Road and I wasn't worried about that, I watched all the way in, walking in. But they start shooting at me. And immediately, being a Utah deer hunter, when a bullet went by, you always dropped to the ground. So, that's what I did. And I crawled into a little gully and then went down as fast as I could and I never saw them again. I got into Burma Road and flag down a Jeep and pretty soon, we saw an ambulance come and we stopped it and they were going to go to where I thought my crew were, and there was a major in there. A doctor. And I had a bail out map, and I gave the doctor the bailout map, and told him where my crew was. And they couldn't go in the way I come out, but they went around and come in from the other side of Shenyang. And so they went in and got the crew and got them out. And I guess that's the end of that thing.

Interviewer: So, you had a crew of three and the other two guys were able to --

Roger Johnson: They had a carry the one guy out in a rescue party.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Roger Johnson: But they got him out and we all got out okay.

Interviewer: Well, that's great. And that Burma Road was filled up with U.S. military vehicles all the time, I guess.

Roger Johnson: Well, a little bit before that, the Japanese had taken ran goon and they come up and cut the Burma Road. That's why we were flying material over there. And, they got pretty close. They got within 80 miles of my base, the Japanese did, then they got

stopped. And, then a road was constructed from -- it was called the Ledo Road. It went over the first mountain range and down into Burma and connected with the Burma Road and then towards the end of the war, they got able to use it. But, we'd already supplied them with everything and that was about the end of that.

Interviewer: So how many missions did you fly over the hump?

Roger Johnson: I flew, pardon me. I flew 65 missions over the hump, plus some other odds and ends. And, one of the trips, incidentally, the hump was closed down when the war ended. We flew through September, and then we were transferred to Calcutta, and then they had C-54s there. That was a four engine airplane, a really good airplane. And, you rotated according to your flying time. And while at Calcutta, I was walking down to operations one day, and a couple of guys yelled at me. There was a chief pilot and another guy. And they were building their time up and they just got back from a trip over the hump, but they wanted more time. And they says, "Why don't you come with and give us a little rest?" Now this was a flight that I really enjoyed. So, we got the plane and headed towards Kunming. We had to stop off at Lashio and drop some gas off there. That was in Burma, then went into Kunming.

Well, just as soon as we got in the airplane before we took off, they put me in front in the pilot's seat and one of the guys helped me get it off and then they went back and went to sleep. Now, I called them to help me land at Lashio. And then I wised up a little bit. So I beat them to the bunk, and they flew it on to Kunming. And we were going back to Calcutta, but some strange orders come through to move some stuff to Shanghai, which was clear across China. Well, they got me in the seat again and helped me take off and then I flew clear across China at night in a -- well, flying is easy, but it was a strange airplane. And I flew clear across

China, and that was one of the best flights I ever had in my life. There, I was all alone. Strange airplane. And clear across to Shanghai.

Interviewer: How many hours did that take?

Roger Johnson: Well, the entire flight, I think took 30 something hours. The whole thing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Roger Johnson: When we got into Shanghai, they come and helped land, but this was another instance of luck. When we got our stuff out at Shanghai and re-fueled, and I was bushed. And I went back in the bunk and they got it out and I always liked to watch the take off whether I was flying or not. And, they went out and checked the airplane over and when I saw they were about ready, I went up front to watch the take off.

Now, I should have caught this. But they definitely should have caught it. You had a check list that you went through before you took off. And, they lined up and pulled the cord to it and away we went. And when we got to the end of the runway, doing 110 or something like that, the pilot yelled, "The controls are locked." Well, I was down on the floor and there was a handle and you could pull a pin out, and then raise the handle and unlock the doors. When he said that, I was by the thing and I unlocked it and got it going. And just as soon as I did, we were at a runway and he pulled back on the stick and we were flying. Had I not gone up there, had I just gone to bunk, we'd all been killed. Just that simple. Just luck.

Well, the war was over now. We were in Calcutta, and I did a little ferry work out of there. But, now that we were all pilots, and should be treated like pilots. But, they

had a damn boat there, and they got about 600 pilots. Put us on that boat, and we went down around the tip of India. We went across the Bengal, then the tip of India across the Indian Ocean, into the Red Sea, through the Suez Canal, closer to the Mediterranean, past Gibraltar, clear across the Atlantic to New York. 29 days for pilots. That was bad. Then, they put us on a troop train. And that was seven days from New York to Salt Lake.

When we pulled into the station at Salt Lake, I had been able to communicate to my wife that that's when we'd be in there. And as we pulled into Salt Lake, the train was about to stop. It was rolling a little bit. But I looked out the window, and there was this beautiful little gal. This wonderful little thing, my wife. And before the train stopped rolling, I tossed my bag out and I jumped out and I run over to her and she run to me, and there was lots of people there watching and we just hugged and kissed and didn't care about anything else. And people would look at you and laugh a little bit. But this was another case where someone was coming home to their wife.

And, so, we went out and got a taxi. She had us a room in the Hotel Utah, and I told -- he says, "Where do you want to go?" And I says, "Hotel Utah." And so, we started out for the Hotel Utah, and that's the end of my story.

Interviewer: We don't get to hear anymore?

Roger Johnson: No more.

Interviewer: Well, that's pretty good. Now, flying over the hump was a very dangerous situation. And it's called, "The Aluminum Highway" because so many planes went down.

Roger Johnson: Yeah, that was an exaggeration. There were a lot of planes that went down, but they either went down into the jungle or smacked them in the mountain like we did and there was nothing left of the plane. It was called the Aluminum Highway, though.

Interviewer: And was it just the weather that mainly brought them down? Were you ever shot at or attacked by Japanese aircraft?

Roger Johnson: When I got over there, we had driven the Japs down through Burma and they were no longer a menace. But the monsoon season was on. It started somewhere in May and went till fall. The air was violent all the time, we lost lots of planes. Well, we flew by instruments. And if your plane got tipped too far over, you lost half your instruments. Then you got what was called vertigo and you didn't know which was up or down and you are up in the sky with a loaded airplane and lots of people got vertigo and died. And we went into the jungle, if they went into the jungle, you hardly ever got out, or if you hit a mountain. But lots of us bailed out and worked our way out. A lot of crews got out.

Interviewer: Just like you did that time.

Roger Johnson: Yeah, we were -- we were lucky.

Interviewer: Well, Rodger, that's a great story. Elizabeth, have you got any questions?

Elizabeth: Well, yeah. I wanted him to describe that bailing out again from the perspective of -- how scared were you when you bailed out and saw that plane coming back?

Roger Johnson: You didn't have time to get scared. Too much going on. I was really happy when I got that chute open, because then I thought I was home free. I didn't

know whether we were going to hit the mountain before I got the chute open. But things worked out fine.

Elizabeth: So when you saw the plane turn, what did you think?

Roger Johnson: Well, at that time, I reached up for the shrouds on the one side of my chute. If the plane kept going towards me I was going to collapse the chute. And I didn't know what happened after that, but I wasn't going to let that plane hit me. But, it turned and hit the mountain and blew up and so we got out of that okay.

Interviewer: How did you first hear of the atomic bomb?

Roger Johnson: We build out on August 4th, 1945; and they dropped the bomb on August 6th, and I think I was back at the place at Shenyang. Anyway, I was back at a base, and we heard the news come through then. And, of course, everybody was happy. I was back at my base, everybody was celebrating, and then they dropped the next bomb and then the war was over. And, of course, we had to run the hump for another, oh, 45 days to supply over there and evacuate people.

Interviewer: Well, that's an interesting story, Roger.

Elizabeth: What were your living conditions like on the base?

Roger Johnson: The humidity over there was almost 100 percent. And it was hot. Consequently, everything that you weren't wearing -- your extra shoes and clothes and your mattress on your bed, it would all mold and mildew. And you, each one of you had a servant, and oh, once or twice a day, the sun would get out and they would rush all your clothes out and get them into the sun and try and dry them off and then they'd rush them back in when it started to rain again. But, as I recall, for quite awhile, we slept naked and laid there and sweat all night. And our mattresses were wet, and they stunk, and we stank.

Interviewer: Did the enlisted men have servants, too, or just the officers?

Roger Johnson: I don't know anything about the enlisted men. We -- I stayed in a quarter. It was called a Basha, and these were all pilots in the Basha. And each one of us had a servant because we were gone quite a bit, and the servant would take care of things.

Interviewer: The local native person from the village, I guess.

Roger Johnson: Yeah, we had, I can remember my servant was a funny little guy. He was cheerful, and they had funny names. One was Domo, and the other was Buck. And my name, my guy was named Salami Bologna. I don't know who named him that --

Interviewer: And these were the names that the servicemen gave their servants, I guess. Buck would not be a --

Roger Johnson: That was a --

Interviewer: Well.

Elizabeth: So, let's ask him about the whole impact of how important this effort was.

Interviewer: Well, ferrying these supplies to China, kind of go over how important that was to that Pacific war.

Roger Johnson: Well, the Japanese cut the Burma Road, and the Japanese had about a million or a million man Army in China, and for the war effort, they wanted to keep China in the war. And so when they cut the Burma Road, they immediately started -- this was in about '42, I believe. They started flying stuff over the hump. Now, the first project to do was to meet the Doolittle Raiders and give them some gas so they could get out of there again. They were supposed to come in to some of the fields that we had, advanced fields. They never made it, though.

But, we started flying stuff over. We flew bombs and gas and food and ammunition. Anything they needed to run an Army. And, the pressure was on all the time to keep that Army going so we could hold that Japanese Army. Otherwise, they would have been out in the Pacific. And, let's see, if I recall correctly, the most we hauled in one month was 73,000 tons; if you can imagine that. That all went by air.

Interviewer: That's a lot of stuff. And that supplied the Chinese Army as well as the U.S. Army.

Roger Johnson: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Elizabeth: Tell me about turbulence and flying the hump. What was that physically like? Did you ever get sick?

Roger Johnson: Pilots get sick, we didn't believe that.

Interviewer: Talk to me.

Roger Johnson: Okay. In the monsoon season, you were flying instruments all the time. You couldn't see these big clouds that were building up. They're called cumulonimbus clouds. That's the big ones. And there's lots of lightning and violent air, and you just flew through it. And either you went through it, or you didn't. That's about what it amounted to.

Interviewer: Did you have radar that showed you if you were heading towards a mountain?

Roger Johnson: We had no radar. We had what was called homing stations, and we had an instrument in the plane that was called ADF. An Automatic Direction Finder and it had a dial with 360 degrees, and then it had a needle. And when you flew, when you tuned in the station, if you were within, oh, 30 miles or so, the needle would point to the station. And

that's how you navigated. But if you had too much static, it wouldn't work. So you would fly heading so long, and then ETA, estimated time of arrival, at that point. And then you'd change your course to the next station. And lots of times, you were lost. And there were mountains there. We lost a lot of people.

Interviewer: What percentage of casualties were there on those pilots flying over the hump?

Roger Johnson: I don't know the exact number. But, I think we lost somewhere around a thousand airplanes. Now, this was not a big thing like Europe or Asia. And, I guess 700 crews were killed or something. Something like that.

Interviewer: And that's without any enemy action. That was just bad weather and tough flying conditions.

Roger Johnson: Another thing that was bad. Our maintenance, we couldn't get parts that we needed. And when a plane would crash by an airport, if it didn't blow up, then the mechanics would rush out and strip the good parts off of it.

Elizabeth: So, describe when you hit one of those air pockets.

Roger Johnson: Well, they were called up drafts and down drafts, and later on, they had more technical names for them. But, we hauled -- one of the main things we hauled was gas, and it was in 50 gallon drums. And, if it got so violent, it might break one of those drums loose. And you had to get it out before it banged into some others. And if that happened too much, that's where some of those airplanes went. And, you'd go back and throw the drum out the door. And, the air was violent. It was -- you just, you went, and as I say, you had to have luck. And the pilots, we -- without boasting, I guess we were the best in the world. There is no doubt in my mind, because we were fighting Mother Nature all the time. We didn't have the

dangers that the other crews had that were being shot down. I take nothing away from them. But we were fighting Mother Nature, and it was just tough.

Interviewer: It would be. And is that right that you just had a crew of you and two others?

Roger Johnson: Yeah. A pilot, co-pilot and a radio operator.

Interviewer: And so if a gasoline drum got loose, you would just send the radio man or the co-pilot back to --

Roger Johnson: Send them both back. Oh, and another thing that happened with a drum, they would fill it up not clear full. There was a little air in there. And when you take off and climb to your altitude, occasionally, there would be a little leak in the drum. And you could go back and you would inspect it. I would have the radio operator watch them all the time. But a little stream of gas would come out, and then it would evaporate. And, you either got that out of your airplane, or you blew up. Those 100 octane fumes, they were bad.

Interviewer: And the cabins were not pressurized, so it was cold --

Roger Johnson: That was another thing. We had heaters. They were called Janitrol heaters, and we had two 100,000 BTU's for the cabin, and the cockpit had a 40,000 BTU. Now, the procedure was, you turned the thing on. And you pushed a button, which heated up a little unit inside the heater. And you did that for about a minute. Then, you turned the gas in there. That's 100 octane gas, and a lot of times, it would explode in there. And a lot of people were scared to use the heaters. And lots of times, they wouldn't work and then you got in your heavy flying suit and sat there and just about froze to death till you got to your destination.

Interviewer: What was your average elevation?

Roger Johnson: Well, we had various courses. They were named, well, we had an alphabet situation. Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy, Fox, and so forth. We flew from Sucerteen on the easy course. And we flew; this was the lowest course they'd fly. We were down south. And we flew at 14,500. And then coming back, we were empty and we'd get on the Charlie course at 20,000. And, in this violent air, we had midair collisions. And you were assigned an altitude, you couldn't hold the altitude.

Or, another thing I should tell you about. When you pull into China, you call China for a clearance when you're about 15 minutes out. And, they would put you in the stack. It was called a stack. The planes were stacked up, and the separation was only 500 feet, there were so many planes. And they would clear you in at 20,000 and there were 20 whatever. And then, as the bottom plane would make it's let down, get out of the way, then the whole stack would move down 500 feet. And that's the way you let down. And if you happened to miss on your final approach, and you pulled out and climbed up to 20,000, you would be at the top of the stack again.

Interviewer: You were behind everybody. How much down time did you have between missions?

Roger Johnson: Oh, you went out, I guess, every 36 hours. It wasn't definite; it depended when they had planes ready to go. A couple days, maybe.

Interviewer: And did you fly a different plane each time you went?

Roger Johnson: Yeah, mm-hmm. Whenever a plane was loaded and fit to fly, they had the crew down there, and when they got the okay, the crew went out and they went irregardless of weather, day or night. And this was incidentally the first mass air movement of

materials to supply an Army. This was the first it was ever done. Now, they are flying all over the world and it doesn't even bother them.

Interviewer: Well, Roger. We sure appreciate you coming up here today. Hope the ride wasn't too long for you. You got your story down pretty good. Thanks so much for coming and thanks for your service.

Elizabeth: Is there anything he'd like to add?

Interviewer: Do you want to add anything else that you can think of?

Family Member: Can she go out in this hallway there?

Elizabeth: Yeah, she can go out in that hallway there.

Roger Johnson: I liked to fly, and as far as I'm concerned, if you had to have a war, I had a pretty good war. We had problems, of course. Everybody had problems, the guys that were on the ground, the infantry, they're the people that had it bad.

Interviewer: Well, we've had some -- interviewed several from CBI theatre, and they were mighty grateful to you guys flying the supplies and the food and gasoline and ammunition to them, you know.

Roger Johnson: Yeah. Oh, there is one thing I would like to bring up. You had one Army nurse--

Interviewer: Ora May Hyatt.

Roger Johnson: Yes. Now, it's kind of coincidence. My wife went to the hospital 21st South. I forget what the name was. But, she was in the -- they had four classes. She was in the top class, and Ora May was in the bottom class. My wife went to New Caledonia and Ora May went to Okinawa, and there was another strange thing. I went to school with Ora May.

Interviewer: Did you?

Roger Johnson: Yeah, so, lots of coincidences.

Interviewer: And Ora May's husband was in the CBI theatre.

Roger Johnson: That's another thing. I flew over him. Every trip I went to China, I flew over him.

Interviewer: Is that right?

Roger Johnson: He was out on the first ridge running a crew.

Interviewer: Yeah, we had another veteran. Doug Howard, did you ever know him?

Roger Johnson: I don't know him.

Interviewer: Served in Kunming and was in the jungles down there.

Roger Johnson: Yeah, that -- those jungles. They were terrible.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Roger Johnson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, thank you again. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Roger Johnson: Oh, I guess that's it. I'm glad to come up.

Interviewer: We appreciate you coming up.

Elizabeth: We're glad to have you come up.

Interviewer: Thanks again for your service. It was real interesting. That --

Break in recording.

Interviewer: Every time I got into one of those airplanes, did that ever bother you?

Roger Johnson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. You had a good crew. Oh, man.

Roger Johnson: Everybody in the service.

Elizabeth: So you guys just took it, huh?

Interviewer: We get a few bumps on a commercial flight, can you imagine these up and down drafts these guys had?

Elizabeth: No, I can't.

End of recording.