

Archilla, Eliel Interview 12-31-94

[Speaker 2]

This is a taped interview with Mr. Elio Archilla of Dallas, Texas at 10 o'clock, 31 December 1994. Lasting about an hour, survey will be distributed, etc., etc., ad nauseam. And, well, I guess we'll start off about 1945, late, early 1945, and the question that I normally start off asking is where you were when you first heard that Roosevelt had died.

[Speaker 1]

I was in Paris, France, on leave. I was still stationed overseas, of course. I didn't get into Europe until V-Day plus 28.

So I was stationed up in North England with the 8th Air Force Squadron, and we flew three missions across the channel supporting the invasion. This was after the D-Day, that type of thing. And then they transferred us to our outfit of France.

We were assigned to a base at Sherbrooke, which is right there in the peninsula of France. And we started flying from there, supporting our troops that worked their way through France and into Germany. And our main responsibility was to support Patton's Third Army.

We were assigned to the southern part of the French invasion, of the invasion of France through the southern end of it, where Patton was very, very strong. And so we started supporting it, and this was 1945. And while on a three-day pass that I had, we went into Paris.

And while we were in Paris, we hear that Roosevelt, President Roosevelt had passed away, and that Harry Truman, of course, was immediately sworn in as our new president. Of course, there was a shock. The commanding chief and Roosevelt were so well known among the military, and reputedly a good president for us.

But then the reins were taken over by Truman, and the only communication we had with the world then was the newspaper put out by the military, Stars and Stripes. And then we caught once every few days, they gave us a newsreel. And all we heard, of course, was what the newsreel had presented.

And it was several days after that that we saw the funeral and the marching of the military during the funeral of the president. And the war kept on. There was no interruption.

I can't remember personally having any greater thought beyond that. We just kept flying our missions and doing our job.

[Speaker 2]

So Truman was... I would assume y'all didn't know much about Truman. Didn't know anything about him.

[Speaker 1]

Now, you got to remember one thing, Tim, that 95%, 98% of the boys over there were very young. They had very little experiences at home. Previous to that, besides school or dropouts or whatever they were doing.

It was following the Depression years, and nobody had very much. We were a family of nine in my family. I quit school when I was 16 years of age and went to work.

And so I hadn't even had my high school diploma when the war broke out. So all of this was a factor in my life. And so I went into service, and luckily I passed the examination to go into flying and aviation cadet training and even with that high school.

And so I went into the military, and that was my life. That was my dream since I was a kid, to fly. We built model airplanes and flew them home.

So my whole life was around flying, and I would die to get into, to be a pilot. And then when the war broke out, it was an ideal situation for me to attempt that. And luckily I went through it, and I became a pilot in the Army Air Corps and went overseas and accomplished my missions, and that's it.

[Speaker 2]

Well, I noticed in the Hydrotex article it said you continued flying after V-E Day. And I was wondering, were you scheduled to be in on the invasion of Japan?

[Speaker 1]

No, the Japan-Japan war. See, when I came back from Europe in 1945, I was released from assignment after 98 missions with our group. So I ended up going back to London for departure out of England back to the States.

And while we had just loaded on, got on board one of the troop ships coming back, and while I was there, that morning they announced that the victory in Europe had taken place. The Germans surrendered officially. So we missed all of the big celebrations in England, in London especially.

And so all of the troop ships, of course, took off, and we headed back toward Boston. And in Boston, when we arrived in Boston, of course, then I was going to be reassigned to another mission. And before then, I was given two weeks R&R, regression and recuperation thing.

And I was given a leave of absence for two weeks, and I ended up going to Atlantic City. They had a military R&R outfit there on the beach. While we were there, of course, as soon as I boarded, I landed in Boston Harbor.

I called my wife in Texas, and she came up by train to meet me. So we spent those two weeks together. Then I was going to be reassigned.

So my assignment was to go back down to Texas and be a fighter transition instructor because we still had a war going on in the Pacific. The war in the Pacific was soon to be over. The war in Europe was in May, I think, if I remember right, and the war in Japan ended three months later.

I think it was in August. I was stationed at Moorfield, which is in Mission, Texas, flying training because the cadet program was still going on. After the VJ day, I was then assigned to Williams Air Force Base in Arizona, and I was there about three months, and the war then had ended in Japan.

So all of the troops, both in the Pacific and the Atlantic theaters, were being returned. A lot of the facilities that we had overseas had to be rotated. They brought back a lot of the troops, but then they sent some new ones over there to replace those facilities.

Then I got my assignment to go to Guam in 1946, late 45.

[Speaker 2]

So you were planning to make flying a career?

[Speaker 1]

I had applied for a regular career officer commission. I took an examination for that in California while I was stationed there in Stockton prior to going overseas to Guam, and I didn't hear about it until almost a year later when I was stationed at Guam. I was called in for an interview by the commanding general of the base and several of his staff, and I was interrogated, literally.

They asked me many, many questions about my life and what ambitions that I had for the future, what I felt I could contribute to the military, to the American people by staying in the military as an active and full-time commissioned officer. I didn't hear a word from them until I think it was 60, 90 days later, and then I received a letter that they appreciated my attempt and my interest in becoming a regular Army commissioned officer, but they had had so many others that they had to glean only the most favorable to them, and so I was rifted out. So I received my request to leave active duty a little while after that.

I tried to get my family over there, but it didn't work out. So you lived in Guam all that whole year plus two months? By yourself.

Yep, and I was assistant operations officer there at the field, so we were taking care of a lot of troop carriers going back and forth, and at that time they were still bringing some dependents, started coming over there, and they started building some quarters for them. They built Quonset Hut homes, and they were very nice, and some dependents and the children started coming, and as a matter of fact it got so close that we even got orders to have my wife and my son Elliot, who was then born, go to the base and have their shots for assignment overseas. I mean it was that close, and then apparently they, Washington decided that they needed to cut the military establishment for monetary reasons, and they just started chopping down, and I was one of those that was released.

[Speaker 2]

They were getting, about the same time they were getting ready to start what we know today as the Air Force.

[Speaker 1]

That's right. In September of 1947, the Department of Defense was established. Right.

So all of the branches were established through the law, I think. Yes, it was law. By law.

By law. So instead of the Air Corps, the Army Air Corps, then we were then classed as the Air Force, the U.S. Air Force. So we were a separate branch of the military service, and I was still unwound when that happened.

I had just three weeks or four weeks after that I was released from active duty, and yeah, I remember that very well.

[Speaker 2]

Do you, I guess the word I'm looking for, do you resent what happened? Did you? Resent because I was ready?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, because you were ready. In a way I was very disappointed. Yeah, you bet I was.

I wanted to stay in the military. It was a good life for me, and surprisingly I enjoyed it. I enjoyed all of my military experiences.

People say, hey, do you mean you enjoyed fighting and killing people and dropping bombs? And I said, well, I didn't enjoy that part of it, but I was 20 years of age and it was an excitement, and I never one moment remember having a horrible fright that I was going to be killed or I was going to not make it. Things like that just, at least most of the fellows I've ever talked to, those things never came up.

So it was a totally different world and a different climate, and it was part of my life. When I say I enjoyed it, it was just the excitement of it, especially overseas, something happening all the time. You didn't have a chance or time to do anything.

You slept and you flew and you prepared, and every month or so we'd take a couple of days leave and go somewhere. I usually went to Paris or we went back to London sometimes if I could hop an airplane across and just got away from it all. Sometimes we'd just commandeer a jeep and then drive out of the country for a couple of hundred miles, just driving around and getting away from the base.

But we came back and we were right there on schedule again and they got us on the next mission.

[Speaker 2]

I know you flew ground support missions. What did you think about when you first heard about the atomic bomb? You were in the Air Force and they were an integral part in developing the atomic bomb.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I remember the very first bomb, I was in Hiroshima. I was stationed at Williams at that time, just right before the VJ day thing. And it was excitement.

I mean, everybody was shocked to begin with, but yet they weren't... At that time, I can't say that we felt sorry for the Japanese who were killed. This was a thrust to end the war and the feeling was that it had to be done in order to save many, many more lives down the line because we were ready to invade Japan.

And we were ready, we were prepared to do it. And this was one stopgap to it. And I remember talking with Sue, of course, and very close friends that we've had during the military and we all felt the same way that we had to do it.

We just had to do it. It was a shame that so many people killed the civilians, but it was the only way to get Japan to surrender. And that was the beginning of it.

[Speaker 2]

That's really interesting. One fellow I knew that I've interviewed, he talked about, he flew PBVs for the Navy. He said he messed with all types of ordnance and everything and he remembers asking his crew chief or something like that, he said, what the hell is an atomic bomb?

He'd never heard anything about it before. He said he really didn't know anything about it until later on in the 50s when all the testing and stuff like that.

[Speaker 1]

You had some briefings on superweapons that we were, the armament people, had already heard about. Like the Nazi rockets and things like that. Well, see, we heard about this in Europe when we were in 1945.

And as a matter of fact, on one of my missions, we shot up several of the new ships, you know, that the Germans had, the jets. And we were on one mission, I remember it well. We were going out on target and it was a cloudy, broken cloud day, and fog and everything combined.

We were flying around 8,000 feet and we were heading out toward our target and suddenly I saw two ME... 109s? No, not the jets, the...

262s? 262s, the twin jet. Just coming straight down this way.

Just, shoom, just like that. They didn't see us and we didn't see them until I spotted them because it was real thick, broken clouds. And we never did see them again.

I mean, they just, shoom, just came right at us. It looked like about 500 yards away. And, but I was leading, I was leading my flight out and they came down.

They were about 500 feet below me, about 500 feet out to the right. And I could just see them flashing right behind me. But they were most definitely the jets.

So they were very, quite operational back then. As a matter of fact, we had one of our guys shot two of them down. He got DFC, well, shooting two of those jets, 262s down.

But the Germans were so advanced that they were working on atomic energy and the whole thing. So we were hearing some of these things. So it was no major surprise, you know, that we weren't working, that we were working on it.

But we didn't know that our government was working on atomic bombs until almost right at the time it was dropped. You know, it's so secret.

[Speaker 2]

Well, the Hydrotech article said that you stayed, you retired as a lieutenant colonel in the reserve. So would you talk about how you stayed on in the reserve? And I want to know, how did you avoid servicing Korea?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, I was assigned when I came out of tactics in 1947, in October. I went on a reserve status. So I aligned myself with the reserve group in Fort Worth.

And we met, we had meetings, you know, every week. And the military was still quite strong back in 1947. And even though the active role was out, there was still a lot of outfits that went into a reserve status.

So the military kept the reserve situation. Now, knowing what was going on also in the Pacific is because we already knew that we were having problems with the Chinese. And smart enough, you know, to really keep very alert about this.

Well, I stayed in the reserve unit. I was going to two-week summer camps every year. And I was getting little income for it, you know.

We all were actively being paid. So that was a plus because nobody really had any money back then. And I had just started working.

I came out in 1947 with no experience. So I ended up going to Fort Worth from Lubbock and went to the Texas Employment Commission in Fort Worth. And they gave me a test to see which job, you know, I would best be suited for, profile thing.

And so they told me that I would be good working with people and this sort of thing and supervisory capacities. So they set up an interview for me with Montgomery Ward in Fort Worth. And they hired me.

And I ended up being the department head within a year after I was employed there in the credit department. And that's where I stayed. Now, kept active in my unit.

Let me catch it. I was in the reserve unit in 47, 48, and 49. And then about that time, Korea, the Korean conflict erupted.

And almost immediately, then some of our pilots, our World War II pilots, started being recalled. The reason they were being recalled, we had guys that flew P-51s and P-47s, both. The P-51 pilots were hot.

They needed them first. So they started recalling a lot of P-51 pilots who were on the reserve status. And by this time, I had three children.

And going through GI Bill school, and I guess the dependents kept me from being recalled. All the fellows who got recalled had no children or married singles or whatever. One of them had one child, and so they were immediately recalled and sent overseas.

Flew P-51s for a while, and then they went into the jets, the F-80s, which I would like to have done. But anyway, I never was recalled, never enlisted, or requested active duty. By this time, I've settled it with a full family, so I just couldn't.

[Speaker 2]

Do you remember if any of those veterans resented? Did they feel like they shouldn't have been called up?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. They sure did. Most of the fellows that I talked with did not want to be recalled.

A couple of them did. They loved the idea of, by that time, the first operational jet came into play, the F-80. And they really wanted to go into jet flying.

So they were glad. They were pleased to go back in, and one of the guys was single, so he had everything in the world for them. But by and large, some of them who were settled and married and so forth, resented having to pull out again from good jobs that they had gotten into.

This was, of course, four years after World War II, and some of these boys had gotten their education, their degrees, and were ready to settle down with some good positions and, of course, being yanked out again. So they resented that. Did they all come back?

Do you know? I have no idea. I lost track of all of them.

No, no, no. There was one guy that came back to Fort Worth a year or two later that I recall and visited us at the Reserve Unit and had gotten into the F-80 and had a ball, had a ball. And they did a lot of ground support work like we did in Europe.

And he relished the break, and he's the only one I remember talking with back in the late 40s.

[Speaker 2]

You mentioned the GI Bill. Let's talk about that. I know you were married and you were in the Reserves.

When did you start? In 47.

[Speaker 1]

I applied for GI Bill rights training, schooling, when I got into Fort Worth. See, I had no education. And so I got my GED in Guam, as a matter of fact.

So I was thinking of going to Texas Tech when I came out of service in 47. And I had a family, and it just didn't appeal to me at the time. When we moved into Fort Worth later in the fall of 47, early 48, I decided I needed to get some schooling.

And so I needed some business training. So I went to TCU, had night courses. And I took public speaking.

I took business, English, of course, math. I took public speaking, psychology, bookkeeping, everything that helped me in the business world. And it was a business institute.

And I did that for two and a half years. I appreciated the government supporting that. Of course, here again, none of us were making very much income here.

And if you have any sort of a family, by this time I'm having three children. And the income plus the support that I could continue being able to go to night school and have an income from that to further support me. In essence, we who did it that way, of course, it was income more than anything else.

Because I was able to work during the day and go to school at night. Now, these fellows that were not working any jobs at all and went full-time schooling, of course, the GI Bill was just a magnificent program for them. And many of them never would have made it without it.

In my case, it was a great aid, temporary aid for me for a little over two years. You wouldn't have gone to school without it? Probably not.

Probably not. That's right. It was a great incentive to go to school.

And I remember that very vividly. It was a great incentive for me to get into further education. So that was a big factor.

What kind of degree did you get after two years? I didn't get a degree.

[Speaker 2]

I got a certificate after two years. Well, that's really interesting. I think that the GI Bill is perhaps some of the best thought-out legislation.

And the philosophy behind that, I don't know what you remember. I know you grew up in New York. But in the Depression, the World War I veterans were rather agitated and they had the whole fiasco down at Anacosta Flats in the middle 30s.

And I think that the GI Bill has accomplished what it set out to do and that was to reconnect these veterans, men like you who had been away three and four years from the United States, back into civilian life and integrate them so successfully that they would never have the problems with the bonus marchers and other things.

[Speaker 1]

Well, it did more than that, though, Tim. Again, remember that we pulled boys out of schools to get into the military. And here were the 18 and 19-year-olds who never would get into college at this point.

Some of them in college that were yanked out. They had one-year, two-year college, and they were yanked out and pulled into the military service. Now, the government owed those men, it's my thinking, the government owed those men something after they came out of service and to just throw them back out without any support whatsoever.

So this, again, connected them, like you're saying. But I think the whole crux of the matter was that these men, their whole life was interrupted. And so the government, I think, felt the law people in Washington, the lawmen felt that there was an obligation to give them this support, to throw them back into the civilian realm that they came from and give them that support.

The Depression was a terrible time. Nobody could afford to go, very few people could afford to go to college. World War II comes along, and right after the war, World War II, there were very few jobs available, very few jobs.

So there was a transition period of a year to two when everything, the war machine had to be changed and converted back to civilian. And then a lot of the factories started changing, they started making goods, washers and refrigerators, on and on and on, many, many things, and that put people into work. Now the educational part of it again comes into play.

People needed education, they wanted education. World War II was a vast, 45 years in there of revolutionary technology. So here you have guys who were technically, they had been trained, we went to school, we went to pilot schools, we went to radar schools, we went to gunnery schools, technologies were just unbelievable.

Jet school, jet engines started. And so these men came out of service with all this technology, what are you going to do with it all? So we have to put that into play.

Everybody wanted to continue learning and doing more of the same things. So the education process needed the support. So the military allowed, Washington allowed us to give us financial support so we could accomplish some of these things, going back to school.

[Speaker 2]

Do you think that, the Republicans now are talking about redoing the system of, I guess what I want you to do is compare, would you compare and contrast what the GI Bill is with like say, the student loans that Evan and I get, do you think that there's still the same need for the training and education?

[Speaker 1]

Oh yeah, I bet it definitely does. I think the student loan program has been just as good a program as we had right after the war, frankly. Because it gives a guy, the difference is that we didn't have to repay the GI Bill.

[Speaker 2]

Well not directly, you pay taxes. Yeah. They speculated, I read somewhere a government figure that by 1970 they would have made \$140 billion in taxes off it.

[Speaker 1]

The income, the additional income that we would gain by having better education. Yeah, those are the intangibles though, indirect results. But, not everybody did.

Even though the guys did get their education, doesn't mean they made it, many of them did not. But you're right, when you're equipped to go out into the field of work, and you have a degree or you have better training in it, you're going to obviously regain more money from it, and then you're going to pay more taxes. But the tax structure back in those early years wasn't that big deal.

No, it wasn't. So, I can't relate to that at all. I think the programs today gives a guy at least the opportunity to get his education.

And in today's markets, you can recoup that loss fairly quick. And we couldn't do that back in 47, 48, 49. We didn't have that at all.

[Speaker 2]

I want to sort of shift gears on you now. I know that your family is originally from the Basque region of Spain and was rather a prominent family and then immigrated to Puerto Rico, which was where they were also rather prominent. And then your family, your father immigrated to New York, and you're technically Puerto Rican now.

But I was wondering, when you went into the army in the 40s, did you have any problems with, one, I know growing up in New York, you grew up around a lot of different people, but did you have any problems with minorities, i.e., blacks in the armed services? And did you experience any type of prejudice against you because you were, you didn't have a last name like Smith or Jones or an American name. You had Archulet, which...

[Speaker 1]

I don't remember that. I do remember one, one very sad, and it stayed with me all these many, many years. We had a Cuban fellow that went into the glider pilot training like I did and from New York, and he was a little dark-casted, and he had long fingers and perhaps even a little flat nose.

And I remember so well this captain, when I was shipped over into Columbus, Ohio, from when I enlisted in the army, I was assigned to a replacement depot in Columbus, Ohio where all these glider pilot trainees were grouped together and then they were shipped out to various locations after that. But while we were there, we were doing just normal military things, you know, KPs and all of that. So I was called in by a captain one day to the orderly room, and this captain was asking me questions about this Cuban, and he was asking me whether this Cuban, if I knew this Cuban was black or not.

And I said, I said, no sir, I don't think he's black. He said, well, don't they have black Cubans? I said, well, I'm sure they do, sir.

And he knew I was Puerto Rican. And he brings out the long fingers, and he says, he looks black, you know, he knows his hands, he's got those black fingers and all that. Very biased guy.

And come to find out he was from Jordan. And so, you know, I tried to cover for this kid. And lo and behold, he was shipped out after that.

I never did see him or remember him at all. But I remember that incident, that incident, where this guy asked me whether this, I thought this guy was black, and I never had seen that boy again. He did not go through that program.

Beyond that incident, incident, I never remember any bias of my name or anything else. You take a look at the roster we had in my group, we had every conceivable name in the world flying with us. But there weren't any black people in Europe?

No, not a one, not a one. Now, there was a black squadron in Europe, and they did very well. As a matter of fact, they had a number of kills.

I read a story about them not too long back, and there's a book out on it. But we had no blacks whatsoever in any of our groups or squadrons. I don't remember any bias.

So you wouldn't have any religious...

[Speaker 2]

Overall, you would say that your experience in the military has been one that would be prone to break down racial, racial barriers that would be set up here, you know, in civilian life.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, we had no problem with that, at least not in my area of assignment.

[Speaker 2]

So how did you view the civil rights, the marches and the... I thought they were horrible. You thought they were horrible, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

I have a little bias about the blacks. My children have nearly the bias I have with the blacks. I'm so-called a minority myself.

Right. But I've seen blacks do, you know, things that are just typically black, and I do have slight resentment with some of them about that. Others are fine.

Very dear friends of mine are black, and I have no problem with that. But I think it's almost bred in this... We had more bias against the Jew than I had...

Oh, really? New York City when I was a kid. We used to chase the Jew boys and throw stones on them and everything else too.

I mean, we had more bias with the Jew than we had anybody else.

[Speaker 2]

Well, I want to switch gears on you again here because of the time. You're the only veteran I have come across so far that's active in a group, in a veterans group. I know you still have a relationship with the members of your squadron, but that's not the same as the American Legion or the VFW.

No, this is just a unit association.

[Speaker 1]

You look forward to going to those? Just got a letter from the P-51 outfit, a friend of ours who lives in Tucson, Arizona, and we're having our next reunion of the P-51 squadron in Denver, Colorado, next year. And the P-47, we're having a reunion in New Orleans, so I have association with two units.

[Speaker 2]

When did you get started in this group and why did you get started in... Granted, you worked and served with these guys, but why didn't you join something, say, like the American Legion or the VFW or what's that, Veterans of America, that small one that they...

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, good question. I don't know why I never joined the American Legion or the AMVETS or all of the associations. They're great.

It wasn't until the last four years that I started having a nostalgic feeling about the war. The older you get, you start remembering, and I started getting that. And we kept thinking about my friend, friends of ours, and particularly this little Jewish friend of mine.

See, I had a bias against Jews, and my best friend flying with me was my wingman. He was a little Jewish boy, just a real fine kid. And I kept thinking about Marvin Abramovitz over the years, and, of course, Zubiun, because she was in service with us.

And he went overseas with me, and his name being Hayes, we were assigned together everywhere we went. And about four years ago, I started hearing about all these reunions, that all of these groups, the Navy and the Air Force were all having reunions, and you see these caps these guys were wearing, you know. And so I started getting that feeling, and started looking at papers and seeing units that are being recalled or having reunions.

And suddenly I got a communication from an old friend that flew with me, and he wondered where in the world I was. They'd been trying to get in touch with me for years, you know. And so that evolved.

And before long, I started getting letters from everybody, both squadrons, both groups. And then I joined, I heard about the Jug Outfit, which is a P-47 outfit, a national outfit, and got some letters from them, and so I joined the Jug Outfit, and I started joining all the associations. And then we got communicated to Marvin, finally got a hold of me, and we went on the first reunion with him.

And then I saw guys for the first time I hadn't seen in 45 years.

[Speaker 2]

What was that like?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, it was a wonderful feeling. Just, you know, embraced, and you start talking about the old days, and a lot of it you forget, and then you start talking about it, and then you remember little things, and a little bit of that and a little bit of that, and before long you start really recollecting some of the missions, and guys got killed, and so forth. And the times we went to Paris, and went to London, and the buzz bombs dropping over our heads in London, walking around the Piccadilly Square, and these things were, you know, quite memorable, but you had them back here, in the back of your head, and now all of this thing, it comes up as you talk about it.

So I got really involved, and all whipped up about it. And then, of course, this 50th anniversary of D-Day just really brought everything up into the front.

[Speaker 2]

Would you say that's really the, you might have, this has been the first time in all, you know, 40 years or whatever you really had thought about the war and those experiences?

[Speaker 1]

It's the first time in about 45 to 50 years, that's right. Now this year, in 95, we're having our 50th anniversary of V-E Day, the Victory Year. So see, during this time, here a few weeks ago, the Battle of the Bulge was talked about, and it was Channel 13 had an excellent thing about it.

Well, I was supporting that unit. I was dropping supplies during that very severe winter. That was a very memorable time for me.

I remember that very, very well. You were supporting my grandfather on the ground. Is that right?

I have a friend of mine that I'm doing business with in Las Cruces. He was on the ground too. He was a GI, and he thanks me.

He said, you probably saved my life. I said, well, I don't know about that, but I flew eight, nine missions supporting the Battle of the Bulge. And the weather was absolutely horrible.

We were flying above the ground, you know, above the deck. Clouds over us 500 feet, and we were just dropping anything we could drop with stuffing.

[Speaker 2]

I read in Mrs. Archilla's letter, family letter, that she sent out this past Christmas that you were able to go up in a P-51 in San Diego. Oh, you went up in it. Okay, you went up in it.

She said in a Mustang, and I was like, okay. We didn't fly it, but we got into it.

[Speaker 1]

What was that like? Oh, it was a thrill. We were having lunch.

The host was our commanding officer, and he ended up being a major general in the Air Force when he retired. So he was our host in San Diego, and he had secretly made an arrangement to have a P-47 flown down to where we were, and it was a museum unit. So we were having lunch at this restaurant by the little airfield, and suddenly we hear this engine, this big old Pratt & Whitney with four blades on it and very distinctive noise.

Once you hear it, you'll know what it is, and we hear it chirping above us, and then suddenly, doesn't that sound like a P-47 engine? And so we all ran out right in the middle of eating. We all went out and showed up.

We see this P-47 surfing around. He's making his base leg and comes into the approach and lands at this strip, and he circles around and comes over there to where the restaurant was and parks right there because we're all running out. And we, of course, just take ingenious pictures with it, and I got in the cockpit again and had a couple of pictures made up.

But it was a thrill to see it. It was to see it fly, just the one flying 50 years. This is absolutely crazy.

It had, of course, most of the armament had been pulled out of it, but it still had the four 50-caliber machine guns on it, and it was in great shape, good flying shape. It ran pretty hard. Yeah.

So that was quite a thrill. Let me stop this. It was, you might say, a sub-hero type of thing, where I had done 98 combat missions.

I had got some medals and got the Distinguished Flying Cross, and 12 air medals and all of that, and I felt like I was quite something. And then when you come out, you're nothing. So you got to settle into that.

It takes some time. It took several years for me to really get into it. Another thing is that I came out of service making good money.

I remember so well that my last paycheck was \$466.20. That's good money. It was excellent money. Well, I ended up starting to work at Montgomery Ward for \$178 a month.

That's less than half of what I was making. That was a depressing thing, because I had a wife and a child by that time soon. So she started working part-time to keep going.

And I got promoted. Of course, my income rose pretty well. In six years, I was making about \$500, \$600 again.

But things were slow moving back then. To get a \$20 a month increase was super. And it took several years to bring myself back up to making the kind of money I was making for five, four years in the service.

Five years. So that was depressing. But after that phased out, then I just settled into living.

By this time, we had three children. And everybody's in the same boat, you see. Every one of our friends.

We associated ourselves with church. We had great friendships with people. We have family connections.

We have picnics, weekends with other friends of ours, and their children, their babies. The baby boom exploded. Everybody had the children.

And so we had a very successful little life. We were happy. We didn't have much, but we were happy.

Got the GI Bill house. I was able to buy a house under the GI Bill. I paid my payments, \$52 a month.

Paid \$5,600 for the house. Still living. Still up in Fort Worth.

We sold it not too long ago. And it gave us a starting line. Our kids were happy, and we were very happy together.

Those were good times. Good times. We always had enough to eat.

We were like everybody else was. We were buying TVs. Television came out in 49, 50, right in there.

We bought our first set, and that was excitement. We'd buy our refrigerator. That was exciting.

Everybody was paying it out on time. So much money. I was working for awards, so it was easy for me to buy things.

And life went on, and our kids got into schools, and we progressed, and we started making a little bit more money, and I got a better position. I was then working for a jewelry company in Fort Worth, and got an increase there, and making a nice bonus at Christmastime. And we bought a new car in 55, an old Buick Special, paid \$2,680 for it.

Beautiful little car, but red and white. I remember that so well. And Sue started working the markets in Dallas, so she was coming over during the markets and enjoying that.

And then before long, our kids were growing up in school, high school, and suddenly we got this opportunity to transfer to our Hydrotex company that I've been with these many years, and gave me a good increase, and we moved here, and our kids went through school here in Lake Island. And just kept living and rising, you know, in a position, and having a nice home, and a lot of good friends. The Lord blessed us, you know, in many ways.

So, I grew through the Depression years. I remember we buried... I used to have holes in my shoes, because we didn't have money to re-sew them.

And father died when I was 12, and we were orphaned, and I remember quitting school to help support the other two that we had left in the family. And then the war breaks out, so I went through all of these phases. And I think life, when you look back, I think life just deals you segments of living, and you make the very best you can with them.

And war, of course, was a major factor. Everybody grew up in the war, from nothing to something. And whether that's part of the war effort or part of life in the war era, I think so.

I think the same thing could be said in World War I. If you were interviewing anybody in World War I, you would find that they had nothing prior to the war, and then suddenly it changes everybody's life, and they start a new phase in living, and better than the other one. And this is the way we all are.

Your life with your family when you were born is different than it is today. So everything is a phase in life.

[Speaker 2]

So you would say definitely my standard of life was a lot better looking at the year 1935, 1945, 1955. Absolutely. It's gone up.

Absolutely.

[Speaker 1]

Absolutely. Better than your parents. Definitely.

Very definitely. That's what I'm saying. I think every phase improves.

The era improves everybody's status. And outlook in life. And economically, and physically, and emotionally, and all that.

It's a very big part of it. Religion plays a very large part. Religion played a very big part in World War II.

Worlds of people did a lot of praying. And as part of the trauma, whenever you have trauma, then people turn to God.

[Speaker 2]

Do you think with all the ballyhoo with Clinton, and Rush Limbaugh, and the special interests in Congress, and we got this group over here in government, and this group over here in the state government, it seems like we're being pulled in different directions. Do you think that we could use as a nation a good dose of that unity that we had? Absolutely.

[Speaker 1]

Nothing unifies a country or people than trauma. And somebody trying to get to us. And it's an unfortunate thing to say, but sometimes the war is good for a country.

And it obviously was good for us. If you look at it from that standpoint, somebody gets hurt. We had to kill a lot of people in order to get through with it.

But that's it. People are expendable. Whenever you have two conflicts, two major people fighting each other.

But it changes people, and everybody, I think, is being better for it. Do you think we've gotten too far away from that now? I think we have.

I agree with you. I really do. They get divided among themselves.

I don't think there's the unity in our country that there was when I was a kid, for sure. Even during the war years, which is a big moment here. From 41 to 46, almost six years of great unity.

And then it started disintegrating. And in Korea, unifiers came for a while. And then that fizzled.

And then Vietnam was a horrendous problem. And that really split us. What did you think about Vietnam?

I thought it was a horrible problem. We never should have been over there. It was just a fiasco.

And that cost us 50-some-odd thousand lives and billions and billions and trillions of dollars that we never should have spent, in my opinion. Korea was a different situation. We had a very definite commitment there.

And even though we couldn't cross the Yalu River, at least we accomplished that mission. And we got them out of South Korea. Now we're back into the problem again.

But I don't think we'll ever see a conflict like we had in World War II. Because of nuclear weapons.

[Speaker 2]

It'll never be that way. I'm once again shifting the gears on you. Excuse me.

Let me... I specifically have one question. I guess in order to wrap this up.

Did you ever think that you would see the end of the Cold War with the Soviet Union? And was that a surprise?

[Speaker 1]

I was hoping that it would happen. I remember the airlift into Berlin that followed that very close. And I thought we would end up fighting Russia.

And little by little, they started negotiations. And the thing ended up changing. But again, it's the people change.

I see, even today, I see other poor countries in the world, third world countries, that are having these same problems. Sure, they see television. They see what's going on in other parts of the world.

Hey, we want some of that. We want this kind of thing. And I think the Russian people were the same way.

They had gone through a war. They lost millions of people. And they wanted to get away from that.

And I think eventually it got to the leadership in Moscow. So the Cold War ended, eased out. And then the major change, of course, with Stalin getting out, moving away.

It's a scary country, very scary. We would have had a horrible, horrible time fighting Russia, and we still would.

[Speaker 2]

I think that's probably where we should stop off. I do want to, on tape, I do want to ask you a few things about the film. I was looking at the trailer on it.

It said it was released on the 23rd of February of 1945. Can you just sort of, I want to have this on film, so when we go to make a header, in addition to what the header's on that film, describe what's the contents of that.

[Speaker 1]

Well, this was gunnery film. Every few frames of the camera, this camera was mounted in the wing, right next to the right wing, on the inside of the four machine guns, nestled in the wing. And every so many firings of the gun, you'll have a triggering of the gun camera.

And that was the only way that our military had of keeping track of the damages that we were doing, either air-to-air combat, or strafing and dive-bombing targets on the ground. And so that's what all of this is about. Every mission that I had, and there were 98 of them, and they, unfortunately, the film we got is not the best film we had.

I remember shooting up several locomotives, you know, and the puff smoke, and me flying through it and all of that. And these are some of the films that you see in some of the better movies and whatever that they had back right after the war. But it's...

Yeah, that's combat film. It's all from you. Oh, yeah, it's all mine.

That's all my combat film. And like I said, I wish I had some of the better films. This is the film I picked up in Paris when I was released from...

[Speaker 2]

I want you to type that in.

[Speaker 1]

Okay. Well, it's just... What was your main question there?

Well, I was just saying that... Oh, the film, the combat film, yes. That is just a small segment.

You can imagine how many rolls of film that we shot after so many missions, you know, and that's just an interim period of missions that I had. That's not the combat film for all my missions. What the library in Paris did, they just reviewed a lot of this combat film and pulled out some that they thought the newsreel people back home would like to look at and edit and show to the American people to show them what a great job we were doing, you know, shooting up the German.

But this is strictly strafing, and these are what you'll see. And once in a while, you'll see someone ahead in front of us coming up, and I have some other film that... Not combat film necessarily.

Yeah, I do have a... Marvin, a little wingman, had also some combat films, very small piece of it, that he showed me, and I don't know if he sent it to me or not, along with some other stuff that I have. But it's just representative of what we were doing, and basically that's all it shows, and it's not a very good film.

Of course, that's so old, you know. Did you see any of it?

[Speaker 2]

I haven't seen it, but inspecting, just inspecting the film, it looks like it's going to be really transferable. I'm amazed it's even good at all. Anything that's good will make it on a videotape.

[Speaker 1]

And it's got my name, of course, you know, 2nd Lieutenant Elliot R. Chiller, and it has dates on it. And my first mission was in...

40... in July... August of 45.

Early August of 45. And the last one was into May of 46. Okay.

That's a short period of life, but a lot took place. You know, that was from D-Day all the way up to E-Day. I think that reel starts in February.

February, let's see. It starts in February. Will each loop that they have in there start with a trailer like that that states the date?

It may have some, but I haven't seen that film in many, many, many years, so I'm not sure.

[Speaker 2]

This is taped interview with Mr. Elliot R. Chiller of Dallas, Texas, at 10 o'clock, 31 December 1994. Lasting about an hour.

Survey will be distributed, etc., etc. Ad nauseum. And, well, I guess we'll start off about 1945.

Late, early 1945. And the question that I normally start off asking is where you were when you first heard that Roosevelt had died.

[Speaker 1]

I was in Paris, France on leave. I was still stationed overseas, of course. I didn't get into Europe until V-Day plus 28.

And so I was stationed up in North England with the Eighth Air Force Squadron, and we flew three missions across the Channel supporting the invasion. This was after the D-Day, that type of thing. And then they transferred us to...