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Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Joseph Rosbert
Conducted by Stephen Maxner
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Transcribed by Tammi Mikel

NOTE: Text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Joe
2 Rosbert on the 13th of April, 2001, at approximately 9:30. I'm in Lubbock, Texas and
3 Mr. Rosbert is in Katy, Texas. Sir, why don't you go ahead and start by telling us when
4 and where you were born and where you grew up?

5 Joseph Rosbert: Well I'm Joe Rosbert, and I was born January 19, 1917 in
6 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I grew up in Philadelphia, went to a Catholic grammar
7 school and Catholic high school and in high school for scholastic achievement I was
8 awarded a four year contract to Villanova College just outside of Philadelphia. I was
9 very fortunate because the scholarship was only awarded every four years. I graduated in
10 1938 with a B.S. in Chemical Engineering and just before the graduation ceremonies a
11 group of Naval aviators came from the Philadelphia Navy Yard to show a film,
12 'Pensacola, the Annapolis of the Air' and to interest people in the...that flying program
13 that was actually fairly new. It was started in 1935. After they showed that picture I
14 went and signed up to go to Pensacola. That was in 1938, and I was called in 1939 and
15 went through elimination base at Philadelphia and after one month of that I soloed and
16 went to Pensacola in 1939 and went through the training program and received my wings
17 in 1940 as a Naval aviator and ensign and my first assignment was in a patrol plane out in
18 Seattle, Washington. After almost a year of that operation we delivered our airplanes to
19 Pensacola to the training school and went to San Diego and picked up new patrol planes

1 and at that point I was told that a new squadron was being formed in San Diego and
2 would I like to volunteer to join that squadron, which I did almost immediately. Then,
3 we were patrolling the west coast because there was some suspicion about the Japanese
4 and in the course of those patrols I came back there as they told me that there was a
5 retired Naval officer coming on the base and he was going to talk to us about flying
6 fighters in China. Well I came back from patrol the next day and he was there and I went
7 and listened to the story about flying P-40s which I had never seen, never seen a P-40,
8 never heard of the man they told me was going to be the commanding officer of the
9 group, Claire Chenault, but the idea of going to China and flying fighter planes had really
10 intrigued me so I went and signed up and actually I had to go through a lot of gyrations to
11 get accepted because they didn't want any more patrol plane pilots but I managed to get a
12 trip up to San Francisco and talk to the recruiters and told them my extreme interest in
13 going and I think I was the only pilot who was then sent to Riverside, California, Naval
14 Aviator, that was signed up at a United States Air Corps Base to go to China. There were
15 a couple other guys there who were being signed up which I later met in Burma, but that
16 was...this all occurred pretty much in June of 1941 which was the time that I resigned
17 and got ready to go to San Francisco and cross Pacific to China. That's pretty much how
18 I got to my career in aviation in China.

19 SM: Let me take you a step back for a moment, ask a couple of questions about
20 growing up. Of course you grew up in the midst of the Great Depression, and I was
21 curious what things were like for you in Philadelphia during the Depression years, and if
22 you remember the stock market crash and whatnot.

23 JR: I'll tell you, when you're a kid growing up, there isn't much you have as a
24 base to compare it with something else. So actually, yes, we did hear about a market
25 crash and people saying that afterwards you could buy stocks for ten cents a piece and so
26 forth but nobody had ten cents anyway, so it didn't make much difference. But growing
27 up in the Depression I was able to go to elementary school and of course that led to high
28 school without too much difficulty and then the scholarship really overcame any
29 difficulties with finances during the Depression. The only real impression that I could
30 tell you that I have of the Great Depression is afterwards, looking back on it. During the
31 Depression, for instance, we kids some of our families lived in New Jersey. We'd go

1 there for the whole summer and work on the farm. We thought that was normal. You
2 just went and worked all summer.

3 SM: What did your family, your parents, do?

4 JR: Do for what?

5 SM: What did your parents do for work?

6 JR: My mom went to work as a telephone operator in a telephone company, and
7 my father worked on the Pennsylvania Railroad. There were several men in the family
8 who were lucky enough to obtain work on the Pennsylvania Railroad, and that was a big
9 employer at that time.

10 SM: What did you enjoy most in school? You obviously achieved quite a bit,
11 and I was curious what subjects you enjoyed.

12 JR: Well I enjoyed mostly science and mathematics. I was fortunate in that some
13 how or another I was lucky to be very proficient in mathematics and that helped me in the
14 physics and chemistry activities, so I always concentrated, especially all through high
15 school and then later on and in college in chemistry, physics, and mathematics.

16 SM: And when did you become interested in flying?

17 JR: Well of course in those days that's one of the results of the depression. We
18 didn't think too much of it. But, nobody had any money to take flying lessons or
19 anything like that. But, we were able to engage in making model airplanes and going to
20 meets where we could display our [?] so flying, for me, was a model airplane operation,
21 and I had never made a flight or been in an airplane until I went to the Philadelphia Navy
22 Yard and went to that elimination [?].

23 SM: Were you able to see flying shows, things like that, when you were growing
24 up?

25 JR: Yeah, [?] Air Field in Pennsylvania had shows every now and then and when
26 we got a chance we went to it. We didn't have much chance to do many activities like
27 that.

28 SM: And how about movies and books?

29 JR: Movies?

30 SM: Yes, sir.

1 JR: We would manage to get ten cents a week to see the Saturday afternoon show
2 and I can tell you, most of it wasn't about flying, it was about cowboys and Indians.

3 SM: And how about...did you have an interest in reading about flying or
4 anything like that?

5 JR: Very little. I didn't...my reading activities were pretty much confined to
6 books related to my education and school books. You can imagine that I had to maintain
7 a certain level of proficiency in going over in order to keep that scholarship so the studies
8 were really long. In those days we went six days a week to school. On Saturdays we had
9 laboratory. So, it was confining in a way during the school year that we did almost
10 nothing but study.

11 SM: And how did your parents react when you decided to go into the Navy?

12 JR: Well, because of the depression we were all spread out. We would, like I
13 said, get together in the summer and then go to work on the farm but they thought it was
14 the greatest thing, especially when I came home with that uniform on! They thought it
15 was terrific. Now you have to remember that when I went to the Philadelphia Navy Yard
16 for that elimination based training, we had to sign up for a month as a seaman second
17 class and in those days I think they paid \$20 a month.

18 SM: Now, was that considered good money?

19 JR: It didn't cover very much. It didn't help you to start thinking about a family
20 or anything like that.

21 SM: Yes, sir. Now when you first went into the Navy, of course World War II
22 had already broken out in Europe. Were you concerned at all about having to potentially
23 go to war?

24 JR: Not a bit. We thought very little about the war. I can tell you I was so
25 happy...as a matter of fact, I told those Naval aviators that came from the Philadelphia
26 Navy Yard when they showed the movie and explained what was happening, I said, 'You
27 mean to tell me that you're going to take me into the Navy, you're going to teach me how
28 to fly, you're going to pay me besides?' and they said, 'Yes,' and I thought they were
29 crazy. But, that's what happened and of course at Pensacola the pay went way up, \$75
30 per month, so we were happy about that. Actually, I thought it was a pretty good life
31 until something else came along later on.

1 SM: Now did you think that we were going to be entering the war when you
2 entered the Navy?

3 JR: Not when I went to Pensacola, and not even when I went out to the fleet on
4 the West Coast. Now there was a feeling when word came and I think they were doing
5 the same thing of course in the Navy on the Atlantic Coast, too, but on the West Coast,
6 there was something done about the Japanese finances in the banks and things like that
7 that they were looking at they put us on these patrols where we would go out from San
8 Diego and fly a patrol a certain line up as far as the state of Washington and come back
9 and overnight in Alameda, California and then we would go back up north as far as
10 Washington back down the coast to San Diego and we'd do these patrols, they were
11 going on every day, to try to see if there was any activity of Japanese ships along the west
12 coast. That did...when we got the word that they were offering us a job to go to China to
13 fly fighter planes, they told us that we were there to see that the Burma Road kept open
14 and that supply line to China was kept open because it was very vital and that the Chinese
15 had been fighting this war with the Japanese since 1931. So, yes, it did give us a feeling
16 that something was going to happen. One indication was that they told us that if we shot
17 down any Japanese planes they would pay us \$500. We thought they must be pretty
18 interested in getting us over there and getting into this fight in China for some reason, and
19 we didn't know until later on that we were really the only ones that were actively
20 engaged with the Japanese until later on.

21 SM: Did anybody shoot down a Japanese fighter that you knew of?

22 JR: Shoot down a Japanese fighter?

23 SM: Yes, sir.

24 JR: Well, we shot down 300.

25 SM: No, I mean early on.

26 JR: Oh, I see. There were a couple of scares. We knew that there were Japanese
27 planes in Thailand and we were over in Burma which is right next door and when we did
28 see an observation plane one time. Nobody shot down a plane before Pearl Harbor. Our
29 first engagement was in [?] in January, I think it was January 21st, I mean December 21st
30 of 1941.

1 SM: Let's talk for a moment about the training you received when you went to
2 Pensacola. Was the training...what did you think of the training and did you feel like
3 you were prepared when you finished training, then?

4 JR: We received very extensive training in all types of airplanes in Pensacola.
5 They have different squadrons of course that you went through step by step, the first one
6 being the basic training, even though we had taken 10 hours training at elimination base
7 and I soloed during those 10 hours and then they sort of started out anew in Pensacola
8 and it was another session of 10 hours to really renew that soloing. You had to solo
9 again. Then, we went into observation planes and operational aircraft and then of course
10 I went into patrol planes and we had a squadron for instrument flying. So, we figured the
11 training was pretty extensive. Now, also, we went out into the fleet and did a lot of
12 observations during that couple of years. Most of our guys came from the Navy but 1/3
13 came from the Army Air Corps and their training also was very extensive and some of
14 those people from the Army Air Corps had some training in B-40s but we figured after
15 we got over there and had a chance to make comparisons and check with what was
16 happening with other people that our training was pretty much of the best.

17 SM: Okay, and let's see, you mention that you were trained on different kinds of
18 aircraft. Could you tell me what kinds there were?

19 JR: The basic training was in the [steerman]. In Philadelphia it was a similar
20 airplane but in Philadelphia they had an aircraft factory and they put out a version of that
21 steerman so they used that version for the basic training in Philadelphia but it was the
22 same airplane in configuration and operation, and so we went through that training in
23 Pensacola first and then the operational airplanes that we flew were mainly...the Navy
24 did a lot of work with [?] so the training planes and the operational squadron in Pensacola
25 where [?] airplanes, all by-planes. The only mono-plane that we flew in Pensacola was
26 the instrument plane which is known as the SNJ or the BT-13 in the Air Corps terms, and
27 of course the PBY was a single wing airplane. We had extensive training in the patrol
28 plane. Now just before I went to Pensacola, the training also included, regardless of
29 where you were going to be sent for your assignment, included fighter planes and they
30 had Boeing fighter planes that they used for training. But, as I went along on my training
31 in Pensacola, they decided...they began to think about this war in Europe I guess and

1 they figured in order to get people through Pensacola more quickly they better cut out the
2 squadron where they weren't going to operate. In other words, if you weren't going to a
3 fighter squadron, you weren't going to get fighter training. So, my specialization was in a
4 patrol plane.

5 SM: What was the most challenging aspect of that training for you, personally?

6 JR: I think the most challenging was that first of all the instructor I had in basic
7 training in Pensacola was a pretty tough guy and along about in his first ten hours, after
8 about seven or eight hours when we got back from a flight they would chew your ass out
9 about everything. You weren't any good at anything because in those days the Navy
10 didn't really care too much about whether you busted out or not. You see, out at
11 elimination base I had 10 students in my squadron and only two of us went to Pensacola
12 and later on that second guy, he busted out. So the instructor said to me, when we came
13 back from this flight, he said, 'I don't know how I'm ever going to allow you to solo!'
14 and I spoke up and I said...you see, you didn't have to solo to go to Pensacola. Unless
15 the instructor checked your file, he probably wouldn't pay much attention to whether you
16 soloed or not. He didn't care. So, he didn't know much about my background in
17 Philadelphia so I figured I'd better speak out and tell him. I said, 'Sir, I'd like you to
18 know that before I left Philadelphia I soloed up there,' but he didn't say a word. He kept
19 quite. Then, after the 10 hours he said, 'Well go ahead.' I had one other challenge.
20 When I got to that operation squadron, I got it down on one of my check rides. After you
21 got it down, you had to fly two ups and in between you got a couple of hours of
22 instruction, but I can tell you that was very nerve-racking for me going through that
23 period where I had to take the instruction and get two ups. In other words, I had to fly
24 two more checks to accomplish the same thing. But, eventually I got through the two
25 checks okay and went on.

26 SM: Okay. Now when you were flying patrols along the Pacific Coast, you
27 mention in your book that you did come across a Japanese ship, didn't you?

28 JR: Yes, a Japanese ship. It was a commercial ship, and we could see the captain
29 standing there on the ship. Let's see, we were about I guess about three...over three
30 hundred miles out from San Francisco and he was headed west. I don't know if he had
31 been into San Francisco or what but yes, we did see that one ship and we immediately

1 reported it, about how big it was and what it looked like. We spotted the name of the
2 ship and turned all that information in, but that was the only activity we saw during that
3 period.

4 SM: When you did finally decide to transfer from being a Naval aviator to
5 working eventually for the flying tigers, in your book, and I should say that you have an
6 autobiography called Flying Tiger Joe's Adventure Story Cookbook that you wrote and
7 published yourself. In that book, of course, you relate the story of how you heard about
8 the recruiter coming in to talk to Naval aviators about what was happening. At that time,
9 did you know what was going on in China?

10 JR: No, very little. We learned most of what was going on in China after we got
11 there. This was a completely different kind of a picture entirely from living in the United
12 States and even the expensive activity that we were doing in the Navy which was
13 different from working on a farm in New Jersey and we thought that was different. But
14 when we got on those ships, that was an experience going across the Pacific and hitting
15 all those countries in the far east, and then being put down in the midst of a Chinese
16 civilization which developed over so many thousands of years. It was completely
17 different, and very strange, and we knew nothing really about it until we got there and
18 lived with those people.

19 SM: Now when you did transition, you said you did resign from the Navy, is that
20 correct?

21 JR: Now what?

22 SM: Did you resign from the Navy in order to fly?

23 JR: In order to join the AVG you had to resign from the military. As this applied,
24 they were going to recruit 100 pilots because they had 100 B-40s and there was an
25 international technicality of agreements, especially with Japan, that the United States
26 would not send any kind of a military operation to China to interfere with their campaign
27 that they were waging to take over China. It was impossible to do that. So, Roosevelt
28 being on the highest level, he approved this secret arrangement that...you see, Chenault
29 insisted on having military trained pilots for the B-40s. They agreed to that, but they
30 said, 'However, these people will have to separate themselves from the US military;
31 otherwise, they can't go to China.' So, we all had to resign. Everybody that signed up

1 with the AVG resigned from the military. We were told – and they wouldn't put this in
2 writing, of course – that after this...you see, we signed a year's contract but after the
3 year's contract, if we went back into the service or whatever we planned to do, that the
4 time that we spent in China and the AVG would count on our military record. Now later
5 on the military renigged on that. They said, 'No, they did not promise that,' and it took
6 50 years to finally convince the military that this was approved by Roosevelt and that it
7 was an American military operation and it was planned to be that right from the
8 beginning and that we had to go really undercover as different trades going to China, as
9 experts to advise the Chinese, and when we got there we became part of the Chinese Air
10 Force. In other words, we supposedly, during our operation in China, had no connection
11 with the US military.

12 SM: And why don't you go ahead and describe the trip over. When did you
13 actually get introduced to the B-40 as a pilot? When did you first fly?

14 JR: Well I'll tell you about the trip quickly first. We gathered in San Francisco.
15 Most of the trips left from San Francisco but there were one or two that left from Los
16 Angeles. However, we gathered in the Bell View Hotels and we were ten pilots and 25
17 ground people in the group. Now they said that we were going on Dutch ships and that
18 the Dutch were at war with the Germans and the Germans had raiders in the Pacific and
19 they were after any enemy ships and they considered the Dutch enemy and they were
20 after the Dutch ships and they said that therefore we can't tell you when the ship's going
21 to leave but you will be advised. So one night they said, 'You have your baggage down
22 below early in the morning,' and we were going to sail. So before we left the room, the
23 [?] guy, the company that was handling the paperwork and everything, said, 'Now we're
24 going to...in order to get you over to China we have to appoint somebody to be in charge
25 of the group,' and he said, 'Your man in charge of them is Joe Rosbert.' Well hell, I
26 looked around to see who Joe Rosbert was because nobody had said a damn word to me
27 about being in charge of the group. But anyway, I wound up being in charge of the group
28 and I was told my mission was to get the group over to China in one piece, which I did. I
29 had a little bit of trouble getting there. I explain in the book about the biggest trouble was
30 never had any warning about it at all but when we got to Singapore the person said, 'The
31 captain wants you to know that you're getting off the ship here because this is as far as

1 we go. We don't go to Rangoon.' In other words, we were going to Rangoon and they
2 were going over to Saran. We didn't want to go to Saran, of course, we wanted to go to
3 Rangoon so they put us off the ship and I had to go and find a ship to get us to Rangoon
4 and didn't have any money. The out of pocket expense took all the small change they
5 gave me in San Francisco and I had to go to the Chinese Consulate and the American
6 Consulate and eventually I got the American Consulate to send the message to Chenault
7 in Rangoon saying we were stranded and we had to have some money because those
8 people in Singapore knew nothing about our group. Besides, we were in prison on the
9 Dutch ship because our guys owed so many bar bills they wouldn't let them go. So, sure
10 enough they got an answer back from Chenault to pay the bar bills and whatever extra
11 money and we had to sit down and each guy had to sign away his money to pay his bar
12 bill. But anyway, that's what happened when there was no coordination, if somebody got
13 put off a ship at a certain place nobody knew what to do! But anyway, I got the money, I
14 got them paid off, we got in hotels, and eventually we found a freighter and we got up to
15 Rangoon. Now they had had trouble with...these are all young guys you know, 20, 22,
16 23, 24 years old, and when they'd get into port they'd raise hell, and that happened when
17 these groups would get to Rangoon so they decided they wouldn't allow any more groups
18 to stay overnight in Rangoon. They put them right on a train up to [?] to get them out of
19 town. But, I had to stay overnight and go over the accounts with the accountant there.
20 Then finally, the next day I went up alone on the train. But, my first impression arriving
21 at the train station is everything was blacked out, completely black. Pretty soon there
22 was a knock on the door of the train and here came a couple of guys from my squadron
23 and I had already been assigned to the 1st Squadron so there were three or four guys that
24 came to pick me up. We drove out in the dark to [Tangoo] and I was introduced to an
25 Army cot with a mosquito net on it. That was my first impression of this new home I was
26 going to have. I got in under the mosquito net and then got to sleep and didn't see
27 anybody really until the next day. Then, I was driven out by Harvey Greenwell who was
28 the aid of Chenault who the air strip, which was formerly an RAF airstrip...and a lot of
29 these guys I knew in the Navy and hadn't seen them and didn't...you see, they accept in
30 your own Naval air station, nobody who was going over to China from any other station
31 or any other base. We met in the middle of Burma at this little air strip and that's where

1 we got to know each other and that's where Harvey Greenwell said, 'I'm going to take
2 you in and introduce you to Chenault,' and that's when I first saw Chenault and like I told
3 you, I never knew him before; never knew his background. I found out about him as time
4 went on. But, he had a very fierce appearance which was completely different than his
5 personality. He was actually a gentle guy. He was not rough in any manner that I could
6 ever experience with him and the first thing he said was, 'Well Joe, I heard you had a
7 little trouble getting the group over,' and I said, 'Yeah, well, that [?] group, they stranded
8 me in Singapore,' and he said, 'Well that's typical,' and he didn't always have a good
9 result from the [?] handling these groups coming over so he understood that I had some
10 difficulty and he was very appreciative that I had gotten everybody over there in one
11 piece. Then, of course, I went and was assigned...and naturally as we drove onto the air
12 strip, here are these P-40s all lined up near the end of the runway in that area where they
13 would just scramble and take off, and I'll tell you, that plane to me looked like I'd made
14 the right decision then and of course my squadron mate Bob Little was a B-40 pilot and
15 he gave me this little pamphlet on the P-40. It wasn't a manual or anything, really. It just
16 told where the air speed indicator was and a couple of other essentials and I read it over
17 that night and the next morning he said, 'Come on up,' and I got in the cockpit and he
18 looked over my shoulder and he said, 'Well, you read the pamphlet,' and I said, 'Yeah, it
19 looked like a tourist thing to go to the Bahamas on a cruise ship,' and he said, 'Well I
20 can't tell you anymore,' he said, 'You've had your training,' and he said, 'This is the
21 airplane.' When I got out there on the end of the runway and gave that thing the throttle
22 and before I knew it, it was in the air and within a few minutes I was at 10,000 feet. I
23 looked down and I said, 'I really made the right decision.' Then of course very shortly
24 thereafter when Pearl Harbor happened and we all said, 'Boy, we're in this thing and
25 we're right on the spot now.' Then we really knew we made the right decision. But, all
26 the guys that I met over there, with very few exceptions, were all terrific and they all had
27 pretty much the same kind of an outlook of being in that outfit as I did. In other words, it
28 was an extremely interesting experience. We couldn't have had a better opportunity when
29 the war started than to be right there on the spot, and of course we had great success
30 against the Japanese and that was very gratifying.

1 SM: Now what did you understand your mission would be as P-40 pilot working
2 out of Burma?

3 JR: Our stated mission was we were to protect the Burma road and see that it was
4 kept open for the supplies to get to China. But then Pearl Harbor happened and Churchill
5 prevailed upon...well, he told Chenault that he wanted all three squadrons in Rangoon
6 because that's where the strategy lay because if we were going to protect the Burma road,
7 that's where all the ships were coming in. Chenault talked to the General [?] and they
8 decided well, they would send one squadron to Rangoon and the other two squadrons, as
9 was planned, would go up to headquarters in Kunming and then from then on every two
10 or three weeks during that Rangoon campaign we rotated the squadrons. The third
11 squadron went down first, and then the second squadron went and then my squadron, the
12 first squadron, went down last.

13 SM: Now while you were flying out of Burma and flying over China, how much
14 were you aware of some of the conflict, the diplomatic conflicts, between say
15 Ambassador Stillwell and General [?], what did you know about some of the intricacies
16 of those relationships?

17 JR: You mean the Stillwell operation?

18 SM: Yes, sir.

19 JR: I'll tell you, this was a hectic time, that first couple of months, until we got
20 through the Rangoon campaign. You see, we went up the [?]. We had the first paddle
21 with the Japanese, and then they never came back again. See, they used these Chinese
22 cities for target practice and they weren't going to risk anything. They were surprised at
23 [?] and that's why they never came back to Kunming while we were there. So, the
24 exciting thing was that we were rotating through Rangoon where all the activity was
25 taking place because as you know the Japanese started out down around Singapore and
26 moved up through the Malay Peninsula and into Thailand which was right next to Burma
27 where we were and it was only a matter of a couple of months where all these places that
28 we had visited on the ships coming over were...the British were all confident that
29 everything was going to be great. They all fell to the Japanese, so we were really fully
30 occupied during that couple of months. Now things began to settle down after Rangoon
31 was lost and the Japanese started to move up to Burma and we moved back into China

1 and really worked on our mission to keep the Japanese from taking that part of China,
2 especially coming in that back door from Burma and crossing the [?] river into China.
3 We stopped them there and the whole situation changed in the battle with the Japanese in
4 Burma. We didn't hear about the Stillwell thing until later and I think it was by the end
5 of March or the beginning of April that we were in Kunming and they said, 'There's a
6 couple of B-25s going to come in here, and this general who's in charge over there, in
7 Burma, General Stillwell, is coming.' But, we all sat around the alert shack and waited
8 and pretty soon there came these two B-25s and out stepped this strange character. He
9 was in one of those campaign hats and he looked like he had [?]. We thought he was
10 kind of a boy scout operator or something and then we found out that he was the
11 commanding general of the forces there in the Burma and the China theatre. In those
12 early days we didn't...first of all, didn't know anything about Stillwell. We didn't follow
13 what he was doing. We only found out about Stillwell later on as things developed, but
14 knew very little of his maneuverings while we were there. We did go...we had
15 operations down over in Indochina and back to the southwest and across the [?] River and
16 that area against the Japanese. I told you the Japanese bombed these cities for target
17 practice. Now they originally scheduled Kunming for the winner because the weather's
18 beautiful in Kunming but then there was no activity after we knocked their asses off of
19 over Kunming. So, nothing was happening until pretty soon in the spring the weather
20 started to improve in [?] and [?] new experience now the Japanese are going to bomb [?]
21 during the spring and summer season. So, we all packed our little bags and went up to [?]
22 and we were just getting settled when Chenault got word from the Chinese intelligence
23 that instead of bombing [?] the Japanese were going to start bombing [Guay Lin]. So he
24 said we're going to send the first squadron down to [?] to arrive there just before dark and
25 be on the alert at dawn before daylight, which we did. We flew down to [?], we got the
26 airplanes parked at the end of the runway all ready to go, and the next morning before
27 daylight we got up in the [?] where the operations and the communications center were,
28 and pretty soon here come a report that the 18 bombers had taken off from Indochina
29 headed for [?]. Well, after they moved those we were pins on the chart a few
30 miles...Chenault said, 'Well, this is about right. You'll be up above them when they start
31 approaching [?],' and that's exactly what happened. We spotted them coming in before

1 they got to [?] and once again, we knocked their asses off and they never came back to
2 [?] while we were in China. We moved over to [?] and had some operations out of there,
3 but you see Stillwell, after Pearl Harbor the military, especially the Army Air Corps,
4 didn't know exactly how they should handle our group because the top brass knew that
5 this was an operation approved by Roosevelt. So, they didn't want to meddle into this
6 thing too much and get themselves in hot water. Now, Stillwell of course was an Army
7 guy and he wasn't very diplomatic. They decided that there was going to be some outfit
8 of the Army Air Corps which was going to be there in China because our group was
9 being disbanded in July. So, they had to figure out what to do with Chenault. So, the
10 first thing they did, if the Army Air Corps had had it's way they probably would have
11 sent them home, but they didn't do that because of the political situation vis a vis
12 Roosevelt. So, they made him a general and he was to command the new Army Air
13 Corps operation, whenever it happened to be, that was going to be there in China. So,
14 they sent a guy by the name of Bob Scott over to Chenault and they said, 'This guy will
15 be the first temporary head of the 23rd fighter group. There will be three squadrons, and
16 they are basically the three squadrons that you have here in China, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd of
17 the AVD. So, Bob Scott was the first commanding officer of the 23rd Fighter Group
18 working for Chenault and of course we had a couple of guys, Ed Reckner and [?] who
19 took their turns as commanding officers of the same group, and shortly thereafter Scott
20 left and the thing continued on with Chenault and the people that they sent him to replace
21 our guys that were leaving. Now one of the things that is very interesting, I covered it in
22 the book, but I'll tell you that this General Bissel who had I think one or two days
23 seniority over Chenault was sent over there with the [?] mission of being in charge
24 of...seeing that our group was recruited to go into the Army Air Corps. Now Chenault
25 was the guy who formed the group and ran the group for all the time we were in
26 operation there and I never could understand why they didn't just tell Chenault, 'You're
27 responsible for recruiting your own people,' but they made a big mistake, and Bissel got
28 us in a hole in [?] and one of the things he said was, 'If you guys don't sign up with the
29 Army Air Corps, you're going to be drafted when you set foot on United States soil. And
30 besides that, you're going to have trouble getting home.' Now mind you, we had a
31 contract with [?] that was round trip. But, he controlled the transportation from the far

1 east to the United States and as it turned out our guys were in a hell of a lot of trouble in
2 getting home. Many of them had to get their own money and go on a ship, and it was a
3 damn shame because as a result of his ultimatum to our group there in [?], they only
4 signed up five pilots. They had a group of, oh, I would say at that point about 70-75
5 experienced combat veterans against the Japanese and they couldn't recruit but only five;
6 the most ridiculous thing I ever saw while I was in China. But anyway, that's the way
7 they worked it out and all of our guys went home and some signed up with their own
8 service when they got back in the States, and everybody went it's own way. So, Pan
9 American was very smart. They had just signed a contract to fly supplies from India to
10 China for Chenault and they sent a vice president out to the little base up in [A Sam
11 Valley] in India where we were landing on the way to Calcutta from our mission in China
12 when we left and he recruited 17 pilots right there on the spot, just by handling the thing
13 in a much more efficient and diplomatic way. But anyway, that's one of the sidelights of
14 the story.

15 SM: Well why don't you go ahead...well, hold on a second. I was wondering,
16 would you go ahead and describe your first contact in the air of fighting against the
17 Japanese?

18 JR: Well naturally when...we had like I said two squadrons. The second
19 squadron had their alert area and we had in the first squadron our alert area at the north
20 end of the runway in Kunming and the first thing was there was an alert that the Japanese
21 had 10 bombers approaching Kunming and the crew chief said, 'This is our first
22 experience, huh?' and the crew chiefs had the engines running up and we all ran out to
23 the planes and jumped in the cockpits and waited for instructions. First they were going
24 to send a group from the second squadron up to encounter these ten bombers and there
25 was some difficulty with one or two airplanes and getting the thing together and my
26 group was all sitting on the end of the runway with the engines going so they said, 'The
27 First Squadron's go!' and we took off. It was a very nervous situation. We had never
28 experienced anything like that before. But we got in the air and we got up to, oh, I guess
29 around 18,000 feet and here we spotted the ten bombers coming in from Indochina so our
30 squadron leader got a little mad. The pilot that I was flying with, [?] both and I were told
31 by the squadron leader that we were to fly top cover while they went down and engaged

1 the airplanes, but we wanted to get into the thing, too. But anyway, we said, 'Okay,' so
2 we got up above and it was like a movie scene. Here are these ten bombers, and of
3 course they dropped their bombs in the mountains and turned around and headed back in
4 formation to Indochina and our planes were making passes at them individually and we
5 watched that for a while and [?]'s getting more impatient and nervous all the time and he
6 finally said, 'Let's go!' So we had been watching the whole activity and now we got
7 down and were able to make two or three passes on the bombers. I must say that even
8 though we sat down [?] bombers right there in that area, they kept flying formation and
9 were headed home. Now we did what we were trained by Chenault to do, and that was to
10 go down, dive on the plane, make a pass, shoot at a target we picked, and then break
11 away and pull back up and get out into advantage again to make another pass, and like I
12 said, we made two or three passes. Then gasoline was really becoming a problem, so we
13 were told to break off and head back to Kunming and at the time that we broke off and
14 left the Japanese...I counted six Japanese planes. In other words, four of them were not
15 there. We understand...we only confirmed those four airplanes. When we got back from
16 combat, they took the combat reports immediately and there was confirmation that we
17 had shot down four. Now I understand from Chinese intelligence that none of those
18 airplanes were ever able to fly again. However, when we got back on the ground,
19 Chenault thought the thing over and talked with his squadron leaders and he said since
20 this was the first engagement and everybody was so nervous and anxious...as a matter of
21 fact, he gave [?] and me hell for getting down into the thick of the battle when we were
22 supposed to fly top cover. He said there might have been fighters around but fortunately
23 there were no fighters. But anyway, the upshot of it was that they said, 'Look, there was
24 so much activity and nobody really knows who was responsible for shooting each
25 individual plane down so we will divide the four airplanes up among the guys who were
26 on the mission. So that was our first engagement.

27 SM: Okay, now how long did you fly the P-40s?

28 JR: We flew up until July 18th. You see, our group was supposed to disband on
29 July 4th and about a week before that Chenault sent a message out, he said, 'The Army
30 Air Corps is not ready to take over on July 4th and we're asking for volunteers by our

1 people to stay on for another two weeks,' and I volunteered along with several others. So
2 we actually stayed until July the 18th.

3 SM: While you were there, do you know if the OSS was active at all? Did you
4 guys support any OSS activities?

5 JR: Well we knew something about the OSS but nothing specific. We really did.
6 I would say we knew practically nothing.

7 SM: So what did you do after July?

8 JR: Well I was going to, in spite of what that General Bissel said, I was going to
9 try to make my way by military transportation back to the States and of course the first
10 thing was they were taking us to [?] and [?] and then down to Calcutta and we understood
11 of course from there that we were going to be on our own. Now my buddy [?] had gone a
12 few days before me and was recruited in [?] to sign up with [?] and he got word to me, he
13 said, 'I already signed up with Doc Witchers,' which was our flight surgeon, 'and a
14 couple of others and we got an apartment in Calcutta,' and he said, 'The vice president
15 will meet you in [?] and you can decide what to do.' I can tell you after he explained the
16 proposition to fly the hump, to fly supplies. I signed up right there because I didn't want
17 to be faced with that difficulty of trying to make my way back to the States and some of
18 our guys got stranded in Bombay and had to get money from wherever they could get it
19 to get a ship and get back to the States. So I signed up with CNAC and one of the things
20 they told us, and they kept their promise, was they said, 'We can't send you home right
21 now but we've got a schedule with Douglas Aircraft that they're producing these cargo
22 versions of the DC-3,' designated C-50 it later became with the cargo door, the C-47. He
23 said, 'We are getting those planes from the factory. As we get them from the factory
24 we're going to schedule you guys to go on leave and pick them up on a rotation basis,'
25 and they kept their promise. Now that was July of '42 and I got to leave there after flying
26 my missions for about five months, and go back to the States and pick up one of those
27 airplanes.

28 SM: So from that point you flew for CNAC?

29 JR: Yeah, until...well, I flew until March because that's when I had that crash in
30 the Himalayas.

31 SM: Why don't we go ahead and talk about that.

1 JR: You want to talk about that?

2 SM: Yes, sir. Why don't you talk about your introduction to fly for CNAC and
3 then what happened in the Himalayas?

4 JR: Well I went to the States to pick up an airplane and Eric Shilling was there to
5 pick up one. We went down to West Palm Beach and flew these two C-53s to Miami and
6 got all set, flew down to [?] Brazil, went across this ancient island and then into West
7 Africa. We got the planes to Calcutta and started flying the hump again on a regular
8 basis. Now that was the change in weather from the cold winter weather to the monsoons,
9 where they have a lot of rain and bad flying conditions. I think it was the second or third
10 month when I was back there that I went on this flight from Kunming and the idea of
11 flying the hump was that if you could get halfway across you just continue regardless and
12 just get to Kunming. If you couldn't get halfway, you turn around and come back. Now I
13 was [?] terrifically and I couldn't hold altitude and I wasn't halfway so the upshot of it
14 was I turned back and we were almost clear of the mountains but we were flying on
15 instruments and all of a sudden here's this big dark object in front of us and I said, 'My
16 God, there's a mountain,' and we stomped on the controls to avoid the mountain and I put
17 pressure on the rudder on the right and pretty soon there was a horrendous scraping noise
18 on the bottom of the airplane and then a big thump on the other side. Whereas the snow
19 and the ice had been beating on the airplane, when we stopped everything was so quiet
20 you can't imagine. We just sat there. Actually, my co-pilot got out of the seat and was
21 out. You see, we hit this thing with no gear down and we were right flat on the snow and
22 my co-pilot got out the back door and was standing outside and was saying, 'Let's get the
23 hell out of here before this thing catches on fire!' Well we were almost out of gas and I
24 had all the switches turned off and everything and I said, '[?] you better get back inside
25 before you freeze your ass off,' because it was cold up there! We were at about 13,000
26 feet and of course then no more oxygen and unfortunately my radio operator had been
27 standing in the passageway trying to get communication and he was killed in the crash
28 and we got in the back of the airplane and you never know how much material is in a
29 parachute until you open it up inside of an airplane. We opened a parachute and it filled
30 the whole back of the airplane and that way we could keep warm. As it turned out, we
31 stayed seven days in the airplane on top of the mountain. The next day, although we had

1 avalanches during the night and a lot of wind and everything and the airplane shook, we
2 thought it was going to blow off the mountain, it was clear and sunny the next day and
3 we could look back from where we had come when we turned around to head back to [?]
4 and we could see there were two peaks back there joined by a ridge and apparently we
5 were headed towards one of the peaks and avoided that and hit this ridge between the two
6 peaks which slowed us down enough to hit it in the snow and stop in front of another
7 peak.

8 SM: Wow, that's lucky.

9 JR: So in a few seconds they said, 'You really did do a good job getting that
10 plane down,' and I said, 'Hell, I didn't do anything. It was just a few seconds and there
11 we were on the ground and of course when we got back to the airplane and we just sat
12 there and looked at each other as if...what the hell happened.'

13 SM: What did you do for food? Did you have some rations?

14 JR: Well, we had some rations but we didn't know what was involved in time
15 and what we did in the beginning, I had a cache of coke syrup that I was taking to a
16 friend up in Kunming that we had picked up in Miami and we made what we called Snow
17 Cokes. We dipped a cup out in the snow outside the airplane and put some coke syrup on
18 it and that's what we survived on for most of that seven days because all we had...since
19 the airplane crashed everything was smashed up quite a bit, we had some concentrated
20 tubes of soup which were mostly salt, of course, and a couple of wafers and we decided
21 to hang onto those until we left the airplane. Of course when we did leave the airplane on
22 the fourth day...see, I had a broken ankle and I had taken some plywood from the
23 airplane and some of the parachute material and tied it up, but after we struggled through
24 the snow about half the day, we looked back and that airplane looked so close and
25 comfortable that I said to [?], 'If we don't make it down below the snow line we're going
26 to die in the snow, and we'd better go back,' so we decided we'd go back to the airplane.
27 We stayed another three days before we were fit to make our way better down the
28 mountain and it was on the seventh day that we finally got out and left the airplane for
29 good and by nightfall we did get below the snow line and then it took us another seven
30 days before we found any sign of life. We slept on the ground every night and we tried to
31 get a few leaves put together to soften the blow but it was always kind of rough and we

1 often wondered why we never caught pneumonia or a cold or anything and the answer
2 was there were no germs up there. So we survived without any medical problems, and of
3 course my ankle just knit in the broken position and we struggled along for that other
4 seven days until we finally came upon a bamboo hut where when we made our way into
5 the hut we found that there were a bunch of old blind women taking care of the kids of
6 the families of the people that lived in that area and we stayed with them for a few days
7 before they contacted some of the men who came up to have a look at who we were and
8 what was going to happen. Then we had been writing down words of their language and
9 were getting along pretty well and got the unfortunate news, they said, 'The only way to
10 get to this next hut is to walk and it'll take you all day.' So we finally abandoned that
11 place with the kids and the old women and made our way onto the next hut where most of
12 the people in the area lived. It was a big hut, and there were men and women living there
13 but no kids. They always sent their kids up to be taken care of by the old ladies. Of
14 course once we got inside that hut I said to [?], 'I don't care if I ever get anywhere, I'm
15 not going to walk anymore.' Well, that was the hollow promise because eventually the
16 natives contacted a couple of henchmen who contacted a British scouting party which
17 was headed back to India and they brought their helpers with them and came up to where
18 we were and the head officer was a doctor and he took a look at my ankle and he said,
19 'Well, we're going to leave it the way it is,' and he said, 'I'm sorry to tell you that we're
20 10-15 days from India and the only way to get out of here is walk unless they can send an
21 airplane in, which we don't think there's any place for the plane to land.' Of course that
22 was the days before the helicopters, so we were faced with another couple of weeks of
23 walking. But we finally did follow along with that British scouting party and make it out
24 to India and a little airstrip called Sedia which was a short flight over to [?] where our
25 base was. by the time we got back it was 47 days from the day we took off.

26 SM: How surprised was the rest of your group there, when you showed up all of
27 a sudden?

28 JR: When the guy went down on the hump they were very practical. They didn't
29 take any trouble to send any of the stuff that belonged to the guys home. They just
30 divided it up. That happened to Ridge and myself. But then word eventually got back
31 that we were coming out and when we arrived we got our stuff back but it wasn't our

1 stuff. They'd made a big scramble all around collecting stuff that they thought was ours
2 that they'd taken and when actually it belonged to somebody else. But anyway, we did
3 get a few things that we could dress up with and our doctor, Doc Richards, he said, 'Hey,
4 you got to burn your flight jacket and all these clothes. They got varmin in them.' Well
5 hell, I could have taken care of that. We put them all on a bonfire and then burned up our
6 clothes, which was pretty sad. I hated to lose my flight jacket. We got back to Calcutta
7 and the apartment and here [?] has my records of that collection that I had brought from
8 the United States and he refused to give them back to me. He said, 'No, that's a product
9 of war and this is a done deal.'

10 SM: He never gave them back?

11 JR: No! Anyway, we've been friends for 60 years.

12 SM: Oh that's hilarious.

13 JR: Yeah!

14 SM: How much weight had you lost during...

15 JR: Oh jeez, I calculated that I had gone down probably between 130 and 135
16 and normally I weighed about 155 and I lost all that weight and mainly because we just
17 didn't have anything to eat. When we got with the natives they had a good staple. They
18 had corn, and I'll tell you we ate corn three times a day or four times a day. We ate it
19 popped over the fire or we ate corn mush. So, we were full of corn! But, we made it and
20 that was the most important thing. They sent me to Curachi to be examined and they
21 said, 'No, we can't do anything with that ankle here.' They sent me to New York and I
22 went to a hospital there and they said, 'Hey, there's a guy in Seattle, Washington where
23 you were stationed that invented these metal splints, and he's an expert on this kind of
24 restructuring,' so I said, 'Okay, let's go.' So, I went to Seattle. I was 30 days in the
25 hospital and they took my ankle apart, put it back together, put this erector set around it,
26 and within about six months I was walking again, so there was a happy result.

27 SM: Yes, sir. Have you had any problems with it since?

28 JR: Well I used to do everything but recently I can't engage in any big activity
29 because of the ankle. But, I've got other problems that are worse than that so I really
30 don't pay any attention to that ankle anymore. It's pretty good.

31 SM: I understand.

1 JR: Incidentally, after 50 years the Air Force recognized our service in the AVG
2 and we got the DFC and our ground people got the bronze star and it was awarded to us
3 by General Fogelman who was the commanding general of the US Air Force. Shortly
4 thereafter, Pan American had managed to get recognition for the services of their
5 personnel who operated under contract of the US military and of course CNAC was a
6 subsidiary of Pan Am so they included that in this group and we all got military credit for
7 that time and we got the DFC for flying the hump.

8 SM: Well it's about time. Congratulations.

9 JR: Huh?

10 SM: I said that was long overdue, congratulations.

11 JR: For some reason the US government seems to like to wait 50 or 60 years
12 because then only 15 or 20% of the personnel are still living and it doesn't cost as much.
13 That's a little bit cynical.

14 SM: I understand. So when did you go back for duty after your ankle was
15 healed?

16 JR: I decided not to go back because it took me over a year before I could go and
17 get my license back for flying. Now the war is moving along and I decided I'd stay in
18 Los Angeles for a while and see what happened. Now at that time Harvey Greenwall had
19 settled in in Beverly Hills and he had quite a few good connections with the movie
20 industry and we used to get together and he said, 'Joe, there's a job that they wanted to
21 give me but it would be interesting for you because you flew a hump.' He said, 'It's a
22 movie called Calcutta that has Alan Ladd and William Bendicts and it's about flying the
23 hump,' and he said, 'How would you like that job?' and I said, 'Sure.' OF course I
24 would take anything at that point. I was working at Paramount Studios and Bob Prescott
25 tracked me down at the studio one day and he said, 'I've located a dozen cargo airplanes
26 which the Navy has turned down.' Of course mind you, the war is still on. You couldn't
27 buy an airplane anyway. Nowhere could you get an airplane, but these 12 airplanes he
28 found out that they became available. Of course we didn't know why the Navy turned
29 them down until we go the airplanes, and then we found out. but it was a means to get an
30 airline started and Prescott said, 'I'm looking for ten of our ABP guys to put in 10,000
31 dollars each and we're going to form this airline.' He said, 'I got some California

1 businessmen and they'll match our money for starting the airline.' He said, 'Can I count
2 on you?' and I said, 'Sure!' and when I hung up the phone I said, 'Where the hell am I
3 going to get 10,000 dollars?' I think I had four or five thousand dollars in the savings
4 account. I called up [?] and I said, 'Did Prescott contact you?' and he said, 'Yeah,' and I
5 said, 'Did you put in your 10,000 dollars?' and he said, 'Yep.' And I said, 'Well I'm
6 short about five or six thousand dollars,' and he said, 'I can help you.' He said, 'Meet me
7 at the Bank of America tomorrow.' So we went to the Bank of America and we got a
8 little piece of paper that was an IOU with no interest or anything and it said, 'I owe you
9 [?] 6,000 dollars,' and that's the way we both got into the flying [?] line. Of course I paid
10 him back not too many years later, but anyway, we did get those airplanes, we did get the
11 airline started in the face of opposition by all the big airlines, especially American
12 Airlines appointed the vice president, Jim Wooten, to see that we didn't get off the
13 ground. You see the airlines controlled the servicing of the gasoline of most of the
14 airports in the United States so they could stop us almost at every turn. However, we
15 overcame all the obstacles and wanted to get through that because the airline was
16 successful and we got a contract to fly the Pacific and then in the spring of 1946 along
17 came our old boss, the [?] field and we got together to see if we could work out this thing
18 that I mentioned to you and I covered in the book, but the idea was he had a franchise for
19 an airline in China and I told him I would like to be in the executive end but I would fly
20 for the airline for a year if necessary, so with that we made a deal and of course Prescott's
21 brother being shot in [?] on a mission to check on this operation either killed every idea
22 of Flying Tiger line and CAT getting together which incidentally would have been a great
23 operation, but it didn't come to pass so [?] and I went to Honolulu anyway. When we
24 arrived there just before New Years in 1946 Dick Rossi met us. He had been sent from
25 China to Honolulu to see that we got these 17 C-46s. They were brand new and they'd
26 been [?] in Hawaii from the end of the war and of course they had to have all that goop
27 taken off them and flight tested and all the equipment on the planes tested so we were
28 there for a couple of months really on a vacation getting the airplanes ready to go and
29 then we flew the airplanes from Honolulu to Johnson Island to Guam, the Philippines and
30 to Canton, China. Rossi and I and [?], we delivered the first C-46s to Canton and the

1 next day we took one of those three C-46s and flew it into Shanghai to celebrate the
2 beginning of the airline.

3 SM: Now earlier you mentioned the aircraft that were turned down by the Navy?

4 JR: Well, they were trying all kinds of things to save on aluminum and they
5 found this...incidentally from my home town of [?] Manufacturing company which
6 manufactured stainless steel Pullman cars for the railroads and they thought, 'Well, gee,
7 if they can make an airplane out of stainless steel it probably would have certain
8 advantages and would save on the aluminum.' So that's what happened. Now the normal
9 procedure for the Navy is to make a tentative contract for 17 airplanes and of those 17
10 airplanes they take delivery of 3 of them to test them. Now nobody knew the results of
11 the test but the Navy did and they turned down the other 14 airplanes. Now Prescott was
12 able to get his hands on I think it was a dozen that were ready to go at Marietta, Georgia,
13 and we started flying it. it had a ramp on it that came down out of the back and you could
14 put a vehicle in the airplane. It was pretty practical except for one thing; the engineers
15 apparently neglected to take into proper account the metal fatigue on the stainless steel
16 and the [?] brackets and things like that used to break and of course they would break in
17 flight with them, most of the pressure was put on them. [?] and I were taking a plane out
18 of St. Louis going down to Mexico with some communications gear and on take off we
19 lost the [?]. We had to bring the airplane around back with the engines and finally got it
20 down. But, one of the best things that happened was the end of the war because then GIs
21 could get in line and buy a C-47 for 1,000 dollars. So these GIs lined up in Prescott,
22 Arizona and [?] Arizona and then two other places in that area and you could go buy a C-
23 47 or a C-54 for practically nothing. So, flying target line lined up some C-47s and a few
24 C-54s and then C-46s that became available, so we were able to replace the [?] airplanes.
25 But, I put one down New Year's Eve on a golf course in a snowstorm in Bluefield, West
26 Virginia because the thing iced up and it wouldn't hold altitude.

27 SM: Now how many aircraft did Flying Tiger Airlines eventually have total?

28 JR: In the beginning we had 12 [?] airplanes and we operated those pretty much
29 up...let me see, we started the airline in June of '45, the war started to wind down
30 towards the end of '45, and going into 1946 they started to make those military airplanes
31 available. So we flew the birds until early '46 and then we had negotiated a contract to

1 fly the Pacific so we had to get some C-54s so we got those. I forget the number that was
2 required for that contract but they were available and we would fly those from Arizona
3 up to Alameda where they had an overhaul station to put them in good operation and then
4 went on that contact across the Pacific. But, we only had the 12 birds in the beginning
5 and then we gradually acquired the C-47s and the C-54s and they didn't get any '46s until
6 after I left and flew back to Honolulu and then flew back to China, but they did get quite
7 a few C-46s. Now as the airline developed, Prescott worked out a deal for a aircraft
8 manufacturing company in Canada to make a plane that was known as the [Canadare]
9 and it had a swing nose on it and they bought quite a few of those to get the airline
10 developed.

11 SM: When you went over, you were flying with a couple of people and Felix
12 Smith was one of them, correct?

13 JR: What?

14 SM: When you were flying over initially, Felix Smith was with you, wasn't he,
15 from Hawaii? When you were flying out of Hawaii?

16 JR: Well we just made the trip from Hawaii to Canton. Well you mean when we
17 were testing the airplanes?

18 SM: Well when you were testing, Felix Smith was flying with you at some point
19 wasn't he?

20 JR: Dick?

21 SM: Felix, Felix Smith.

22 JR: Oh, Felix [?] room for you in [?] in the Molano Hotel. The Molano Hotel
23 was one of those old, dirty, wooden structures right on [Y ke ke] beach and we went
24 down to [?] and we had a room together and then Dick Rossi said, 'I'd like you to come
25 over to the room and we'll go over a few things here,' and we walked into that room and
26 it was cluttered with nothing but suitcases and footlockers with photographic equipment.
27 I said, 'What the hell is this, Dick?' and he said, 'That's my roommate Felix Smith. He's
28 a photography fan,' and that's when I first met Felix. Felix went on that first trip out of
29 Honolulu to Canton. Yeah, that's when I first met Felix and we've been good friends
30 every since.

1 SM: I was wondering if you could just tell me everything and anything you
2 remember about when the French ended the war in 1954 in Indochina and where you
3 were and what you knew about refugees that left north Vietnam.

4 JR: Well very little. We of course were established in the head office in Taipei
5 until I left in 1959. In other words, I was in that office from 1950 when we left the
6 mainland until I left the airline in October of 1959. So, the year that you're talking about,
7 1954, yeah, I was in Taipei. Now as far as evacuation in north Vietnam, I don't know
8 much of the details of that at all.

9 SM: Had you heard about Operation Cognac?

10 JR: Oh yeah. But, you see, when we would hear about something like that that
11 would come in on the communications messages and unless I had been brought into the
12 thing as say part of an operational duty I wouldn't pay much attention to it. In fact, I
13 think I mention that most of those names now escape me as to the details of what the
14 operations entailed.

15 SM: Okay, good enough. Let's go ahead and step back a little bit further then. I
16 guess it was in 1946 that civil air transport was created?

17 JR: October.

18 SM: Why don't you go ahead and...let's see, you had mentioned earlier that this
19 was a creation out of C-N-R-R-A, CNRRA Air Transport. Why don't you go ahead and
20 describe that transition real quick and why it occurred.

21 JR: Well, you mean from CNRRA to civil air transport?

22 SM: Yes, sir.

23 JR: As we got through the first year of operation and were nearing October of
24 1947, they had to think about renewing that franchise because it was a one year franchise
25 from October of '46 to October of '47 so they started working with the mainly the CAA
26 counterpart in China which would be our Civil Aeronautics Administration and we had
27 some pretty good connections within that organization and also of course as the ultimate
28 solution Chenault had that inn with General [?] and all the help that he gave China during
29 the war. So although we had opposition, you see, there were two other government
30 airlines, CNAC and CATC and they were against this airline in the first place and of
31 course they were against any renewal but because of the record that we had shown during

1 that first year the outcome was that the thing was renewed and it was decided that we
2 didn't have to confine the operation to the program under UNNRA and we could drop the
3 name CNNRA and call the airline Civil Air Transport. So, that's what happened and we
4 did...the operation was not interfered with and we continued on through '47 and '48, and
5 of course in '49 the communists really started their push on the Chinese mainland and
6 that's when we started evacuating stations. You know, we had serviced more than 50
7 stations on the Chinese mainland, all the way over to Chinese Turkistan. We covered the
8 whole country so as the communists came we had to start thinking about evacuating each
9 station and taking care of the personnel and the equipment and that was the development
10 from then on. We had to confine our operations naturally to the areas where only the
11 nationalists held control. But, the eventuality happened that the communists crossed the
12 Yang Se and then headed for south China and we left Shanghai and set up our
13 headquarters in Canton and later in Kunming until the communists took Kunming also.
14 So, we were chased incidentally to [?] with our surveillance plane, which is very
15 interesting because that was our last base in China. We had that base down on the
16 southern part of Hainan Island. We had our LST and our airplanes and our personnel, we
17 thought maybe the nationalists would hold out on Hainan Island but the communists
18 came across that strait and took [Haitau] in the north and pushed towards [Sanyon] and
19 that's when we had to leave and get over to Hong Kong and eventually to Taiwan.

20 SM: How many bases were there that you'd evacuate?

21 JR: We had all different sizes of bases. There were about 50 and they were all
22 over China and of course some of them just had a little...we made a deal with a travel
23 service that was set up by the government in China and a lot of those remote places. Our
24 representative from the airline would be from that travel agency; I forget the name of it
25 now, but it was a well known outfit in China and they were pretty much all over the
26 place. So, some places we didn't set up any full-fledged station but we would have a
27 station operation.

28 SM: About how many total in terms of personnel?

29 JR: Total company personnel?

30 SM: Yes sir.

1 JR: Oh jeez. I'd have to guess, but it seems to me like if you don't count the
2 expansion into Vietnam, we got up to more than 400 pilots in Vietnam but that wasn't the
3 normal size of our airline. It's pretty hard for me to judge now because you know we had
4 a big backdrop of Chinese personnel. In other words, say it gave you a figure of at that
5 time when we were operating all over the mainland and eventually had to move to
6 Taiwan we had say 1500 Americans, we would have maybe ten times that in Chinese
7 employees.

8 SM: What were the roles that your Chinese employees played? What did they
9 do?

10 JR: What jobs did they do?

11 SM: Yes, sir.

12 JR: Well in the maintenance and all those technical jobs usually were headed by
13 Americans and the Chinese worked for them, but here and there we had Chinese who
14 would head up this department depending on what it was but in the maintenance field it
15 was mostly the Americans. In the administrative field they did just about anything and
16 everything. As an example, we had one Chinese who was the vice president so if it
17 weren't something real technical like the maintenance, they could handle any job.

18 SM: What did you think about the Chinese people? How did you get along with
19 them?

20 JR: We got along real well. Of course if you were somebody in the AVG, they
21 thought you were a big hero. You know it's interesting that even today the Chinese
22 communists on the mainland have set us up as heroes with an air museum and everything.
23 They considered that we worked for China so China is one country they maintained all
24 the time. But we had our guy – I haven't been back to China – but we had our guys go
25 back to the mainland. They say it's terrific with what they've done and how they
26 consider the AVG. Now the CAT people weren't quite as well known because as I said,
27 there were two other big airlines in China so there were Chinese out in the [?] and an
28 airline guy with an airline guy. They really didn't pay too much attention as to which
29 outfit they belonged to.

30 SM: And how much did you like being in China and in foreign countries?

31 JR: Do what?

1 SM: How much did you like, enjoy, being in foreign countries in China? Was it
2 something you enjoyed?

3 JR: Oh I thought it was terrific. It was a political thing but if it hadn't been for a
4 couple of the CIA people in the way they handled our old guard in the CAT I probably
5 would have stayed there until the liquidation. You know, eventually the congress got to
6 thinking that...especially when the CIA airline operation started to concentrate a lot on
7 Air America. You see, Air America being an American franchise was open to more
8 scrutiny in the United States than Civil Air Transport ever was. The media and people
9 like that were frustrated in China because they couldn't get any information about CAT
10 and it's connection with the CIA. I mean, that just wasn't available to them and they
11 were, like I say, frustrated. But once they started to branch out in Vietnam and that war
12 and everything, the congress started to get wind of this proprietorship and it was
13 eventually decided by the CIA that they would divest themselves of all ownership of
14 airline operations and so it was decided on a liquidation of CAT and all the equipment
15 and everything and I think that finally...see, I left in '59 and I think the liquidation, the
16 final stages of it were completed in about 1972. But anyway, from then on the policy of
17 the CIA was not to own any airline operation.

18 SM: Now why don't you go ahead and discuss what you can concerning the role
19 that the CIA eventually came to play with Civil Air Transport?

20 JR: Well, you asked me about the OSS. I do know when they formed the Central
21 Intelligence Agency that naturally they had looked to all the veteran OSS people to form
22 the nucleus and so a lot of the people in those days in the CIA were former OSS people.
23 Our first president under the CIA ownership, Al Cox, was an OSS guy and of course
24 what's his name, Smith, the guy that was...I'm trying to think of his name now, I'll think
25 of it...Donovan, Donovan was an OSS guy and the reason we got in with these OSS
26 people besides the CIA ownership of the airline was the defection of those two airlines
27 when the communists took the mainland and they flew their airplanes to Hong Kong and
28 it was a big court battle from 1950 on to the end of the war when it was finally decided
29 that those airplanes should not go to the communists. But they engaged Donovan and his
30 law firm - they were in the OSS - and a few others in New York to help with the court
31 case in Hong Kong and later in London. They finally had to take that court case to

1 London because the Hong Kong government was scared to death to rule in favor against
2 the communists so they wouldn't make a decision and the decision was finally made in
3 London that all these airplanes would not go to the communists and of course the CAT
4 organization was set up to handle that. They took care of the removal of the planes from
5 Hong Kong and the eventual sell of them. They made one stipulation; that the airplanes
6 not go to [?] because they didn't want to get into too much trouble with the communists.
7 You see, the British recognized the communists right away in 1950 to protect their
8 business interests in China. We've got all our people in the States saying, 'Human rights!
9 Civil rights!' and all this stuff in China. The Chinese don't pay any attention to that.
10 That's a ridiculous situation. You can't get anything from China by saying they've got to
11 change their civil rights practices or their human rights practices. You can't do that.
12 Anyway, the whole thing is that in the days that the mainland was falling there was
13 sympathy to the idea that especially when they looked into what Chenault's airline had
14 been doing in China and in the Korean War and now starting now in Vietnam that this
15 might be a good instrument to perform some of the operations that they had in mind for
16 the Chinese mainland and any other thing that cropped up around the world. We went to
17 the Bay of Pigs in Cuba, you know, so it was one of those things where they thought
18 there was a use for an airline operation in many places in the world. So, the meetings
19 were held in Washington with the top brass and Chenault with the CIA. In other words,
20 all of this was done very quietly and the airline was purchased without any fanfare or any
21 word being put out about what was happening but the actuality was that although we
22 continued to operate as Civil Air Transport, a Chinese franchise, everything was owned
23 by the CIA. We took all...I used to make trips back to Washington. We'd have
24 meetings in a hotel there with the CIA people to go over some of the things that they
25 wanted to do.

26 SM: Now how much change when the CIA took over Civil Air Transport?

27 RJ: Well it wasn't apparent to too many people but they thought it was due to
28 Willhower's health and Chenault's health, but the big change that took place was that
29 Chenault and Willhower were out. Willhower went to an ambassadorship in Central
30 America and Chenault, he was made chairman of the board and of course unfortunately
31 he got cancer and he had to spend a lot of time getting treatment in the States and would

1 only come out when it was a very critical thing to be taken care of by the top people in
2 the government, especially John Kyczech. You see, even the top guys in the CIA didn't
3 have much weight with [?] and that frustrated them and especially this one guy who was
4 really in charge of the airline operation. He was a former Pan Am guy and he ostensibly
5 ran our office in Washington D.C. You see, in Washington D.C. for all the
6 administrative work we set up CAT Incorporated which was not a Chinese company.
7 That was an American company that handled the administration work to be done in the
8 United States hiring people and things like that. So, he was in charge of that but he
9 would come out to China now and then. One of the first people they installed when the
10 CIA bought the airline was when Chenault was boosted up to chairman of the board they
11 made Al Cox the former OSS guy and CIA agent president of the airline. So, that was a
12 big change and I worked directly for him instead of for Chenault.

13 SM: What about the mission for CAT? How did that change?

14 JR: The what?

15 SM: The mission, the actual operation.

16 JR: Well of course everything was up in the air in the far east with the Korean
17 War and the Vietnam War and of course I mentioned Cuba. That didn't last too long but
18 that was during the end of the Eisenhower Administration and beginning of the Kennedy
19 Administration. That was a big change because in the Eisenhower Administration they
20 set up an excellent plan to get control through the anti-Communists in Cuba and one of
21 the things they looked to was some help from the Navy and some help from the CIA with
22 the airline operation. When the administration changed to Kennedy and they got new
23 people into the CIA, the CIA said to Kennedy, 'Hell, you can't do this! They'll get your
24 ass for this if you do a thing that big down in Cuba!' They cut down [?] which was a
25 small part of the picture. They had eight or ten pilots in mind to join that [?] down there
26 but in the end when that thing finally went off there were only two in the operation and
27 that followed through with Navy assistance and everything else so that when the Bay of
28 Pigs Operation finally went into operational form, it was so small it was insignificant and
29 of course Castro won and took over Cuba. Now the changes in the head office as far as I
30 was concerned they got...the CIA didn't like Cox so much so they got rid of him and
31 they put in Hugh Grundy who was actually the head of maintenance for CAT and he

1 stayed president until the airline was liquidated. But, those were the apparent changes to
2 the people on the scene that these things were happening and of course some of them
3 knew why and others had no idea why the changes were being made. Of course the CIA
4 had a lot of interest in putting their people in the legal and the accounting departments in
5 the airline so that they knew what was going on and really had control.

6 SM: You mentioned Korea. What did Civil Air Transport provide in terms of
7 support during the Korean War?

8 JR: Well in June of 1950 Lou [?] and I were down visiting our operation in Hong
9 Kong and we had a room together in a hotel there and they had this thing come over the
10 radio that the North Koreans had invaded South Korea and that a war had started there.
11 Well at that point Chenault and Willhower were living in Hong Kong because we were
12 still in the transition of going to Taipei and Chenault and Willhower had not moved up to
13 Taipei and as a matter of fact, by the time Willhower left he had never moved out of
14 Hong Kong but Chenault did later on. But anyway, I got in touch with Chenault and
15 Willhower right away and said, 'The war started in Korea and I'd like to come over to
16 talk with you about it.' Well it was just by chance that I happened to be in Hong Kong so
17 we got together and Chenault said, 'You get [Russalow],' and we went up to [Tachikowa]
18 in Japan and talked to the commanding general of the Air Force, 'And tell them that
19 we've got airplanes that we can help in Korea,' and of course they had the CIA people
20 working on paving the way for us to get in on the operations. Anyway, we went up there
21 and it was a damn shame because we said, 'What happened to all the airplanes the United
22 States had after building up the biggest Air Force in the world during the war?' and he
23 said, 'We don't have any airplanes out here.' We said, 'Well we can get some C-46s,'
24 and he said, 'How many?' and I said, 'We can probably get about 35 C-46s' because we
25 thought we could work with the Chinese Air Force and get some C-46s that they'd
26 brought from the mainland that they weren't using and we said, 'It's going to take a little
27 bit putting these airplanes in operation. When do you need them?' and he said, 'I needed
28 them yesterday.' That put the pressure on us! I got together with Willhower down at
29 Taipei and we talked with Hugh Grundy who was running the maintenance department at
30 that time. We said, 'Look, we got...' he was a very meticulous maintenance guy and he
31 didn't want to put the airplanes out fast. He wanted to do a good job. I said, 'Look, this

1 is a war and we've got to do the best we can with what we've got.' So he gave us a
2 schedule which satisfied the general and we eventually sent over 30 C-46s up to Korea
3 just in time to evacuate all of Korea pretty much down into that Pusan pocket when the
4 Chinese Communists crossed the [?] River and took all of Korea. Most people don't
5 remember what happened in Korea. You see, Macarthur kept telling them, 'You've got
6 to bomb the Chinese bases on the Chinese mainland because they're going to get into this
7 war,' and everybody said, 'Oh gee, we can't start a war with the Chinese Communists.
8 That would be terrible!' Well what happened, the Chinese communists took it upon
9 themselves to take all of Korea and they finally listened to Macarthur and they performed
10 the mission where they split Korea in half with that [Enchon Landing] and we wound up
11 with the same situation we started with in Korea; north and south Korea divided by the
12 38th parallel. In other words, we lost the war.

13 SM: I'm curious what you think about the road between Macarthur and President
14 Truman because of course Macarthur didn't want to just bomb, he wanted to use nuclear
15 weapons against the Chinese!

16 JR: Well, I'll tell you something. I'll give you a parallel case. First of all, the
17 commander in chief is not a military man. That's what he's supposed to be, he's non-
18 military, and he is supposed to be smart enough to use these generals that he's got to the
19 best advantage. Now Truman threw that to the wind and just decided, 'This guy is not
20 going to listen to me and I'm going to fire him,' and he fired him, and everybody said,
21 'Well, he's the commander in chief, he can do that.' Well in one way he can do it, yes,
22 and in another way he can't do it now. I'll give you the parallel example; Eisenhower
23 was criticized up and down because of Patton but he said, 'Patton is the best tank man in
24 the world and no matter what you say I'm going to use Patton even though he's a difficult
25 man. I'll take care of that, I'll work it out,' and he used Patton to the best advantage and
26 that's what you're supposed to do. But Truman, he was stubborn, and I disagree with a
27 lot of people – maybe with you, too – that he should not have fired Macarthur. He should
28 have used him to the best advantage, and being a politician, he should have been able to
29 do that.

30 SM: I have no opinion one way or another. I was just curious what you thought
31 about the use of atomic weapons against China.

1 JR: Well in a war you use what you can and they used this argument, you know,
2 'The American forces wouldn't have lost all those people.' They put out the numbers and
3 everything and that wasn't right, but I think it is right that when we try to take some of
4 those small islands on the way to Japan we lost thousands of people and you can imagine
5 what would have happened if we got into a campaign to invade the Japanese mainland. It
6 would have been terrible for our people. Those two atomic bombs just cancelled out all
7 that.

8 SM: So you think we should have used them against China during Korea?

9 JR: Against Korea?

10 SM: Against Chinese targets during the Korean War.

11 JR: No, I think we should have bombed Chinese targets from Korea before they
12 invaded across the [Alla] River. But the criticism in the States was like I told you, that
13 was going to start a war with the Chinese communists. Well, they took advantage of our
14 weakness and they invaded Korea and took it all.

15 SM: Now you mentioned Japan, the Japanese bombings in Japan. Earlier before
16 we started the interview, you mentioned that CAT, Civil Air Transport, was also active in
17 Japan. Is that correct?

18 JR: They were also what?

19 SM: Active in Japan?

20 JR: Who?

21 SM: Civil Air Transport.

22 JR: Oh, yeah. We were a big factor in helping the Japanese get Japan Airlines
23 started.

24 SM: Okay, would you describe that real quick?

25 JR: Yeah, so we had a big operation out of Tokyo and especially between Japan
26 and Korea and we were instrumental in getting Korean Airlines started. You see, some
27 of our pilots went with Japan Airlines and some of our people worked for Korean
28 Airlines in the beginning. It was an effort to get them established in the airline business
29 both in Japan and Korea.

30 SM: And how did this happen? Was it just personal initiative?

1 JR: Yeah, it was personal contacts with people who...you see, Japan had no way
2 of starting the airline. It was also forbidden that they get into the airline business, so they
3 had to have somebody that could help them and we were the ones that could do it.

4 SM: Did you participate in that personally?

5 JR: We worked with our area people up there. We had several people who
6 worked on that operation and they of course worked under us in Taipei. I made many
7 trips to Japan and Korea during that period.

8 SM: What was your primary job at that point? What were you doing for Civil
9 Air Transport?

10 JR: I was mainly working for the president to coordinate just about any type of an
11 operation as to where I was needed. In other words, if I had to work with [Russalow] I
12 would work with him on what was going on. If I had to work with the maintenance
13 people to set up something for the US Air Force to get maintenance in [Tainan] I would
14 work on that. Where it was something that they wanted done with the Japanese or the
15 Koreans on an airline operation, I would work on that. It was mainly with our people and
16 the indigenous people involved. In other words, I would work with our area personnel
17 and the Korean people on the Korean Airline operation in the same way in Japan with the
18 Japanese. So we worked with the local people on that type of an operation.

19 SM: And how about the relationship between Civil Air Transport and the United
20 States Air Force? You mentioned earlier that initially when you went to Asia, the
21 relationship between Chenault and the AVG, that it was not very good, it was a little bit
22 strained between you and the Army Air Corps. Was the relationship better between CAT
23 and the Air Force?

24 JR: Yeah. The thing is that you see, Chenault's bad blood with the Army Air
25 Corps went way back before World War II and it surfaced and festered during those early
26 days in China, even after the AVG left. In other words, there were people in the Army
27 Air Corps from that generation that were always against Chenault. I mean, Chenault was
28 a lousy administrator. Hell, he was one of the best administrators I ever worked for! But,
29 according to the Army Air Corps he was lousy, he didn't know anything about supply, he
30 didn't know anything about this, he didn't know anything about that, but he set up the
31 whole organization for the AVG and I'll tell you, it was a masterpiece. And now, you

1 come to the far east Air Force which was the one that was headquartered in Japan. This
2 is a different generation of Air Force people and as a matter of fact, it's not Army Air
3 Corps anymore, it's US Air Force. So our relation with those Air Force people was
4 excellent after the war because we were with them quite often and the top brass knew that
5 we were supposed to be given assistance in negotiating these contracts. The people that
6 we negotiated the contracts with never really knew about the CIA connection but there
7 were a few people in the higher echelons that were briefed on what was going on. So, if
8 any difficulty came up, that thing was smoothed over. Now the thing with Chenault and
9 Willhower and any of the old people in CAT that came up after the CIA bought the
10 operation, that was an entirely different story. The two key people in the top level of the
11 CIA, those were the two people that were against anything that Chenault and Willhower
12 wanted to do. In other words, whatever they had done before on the mainland, whatever
13 they were trying to do now, they didn't know what the hell they were doing. In other
14 words, Chenault and Willhower were just lucky that they had a successful airline
15 operation – this is according to them – and so their whole idea was to get in a CIA
16 organization to replace Chenault and Willhower. That applied not so ostensibly, but it
17 applied to me, it applied to Lou Burrige, it applied to Russalow, it even applied to the
18 secretary of Chenault, Sue Hacker, that we were not people that really belonged in this
19 CIA operation. So, they eventually got their way. I mean, Chenault and Willhower left
20 and we old guys we all left, so they were free to run the thing from the top in Washington
21 the way they wanted. It was a bureaucratic set up and that was the way they were going
22 to run it. Incidentally, they never fired any of these people. They always maneuvered
23 things around so that eventually they just left. They're very good at doing that. Am I
24 getting across?

25 SM: Yes sir, absolutely, absolutely. Now I was also curious about the role as you
26 understood it and what role you played with regard to Civil Air Transport pilots helping
27 with the Bay of Pigs invasion.

28 JR: I considered it a rather small thing. You see, anything that the CIA wanted to
29 do with the airline was okay with us because they saved us from complete liquidation
30 when the Chinese...you see, the two government airlines, they just went out of existence
31 and we would have been next if it hadn't been for the CIA. Taiwan could never have

1 supported an airline operation like we had, so the savior was the CIA for us. Anything
2 within reason was okay with our airline people and the specifics of the Bay of Pigs
3 involved only a handful of pilots and like I told you, only two really went on the mission
4 when it finally got going. There was never any negative thought about the role of the
5 pilots in the Bay of Pigs.

6 SM: What was their responsibility during the Bay of Pigs, those two pilots?

7 JR: From the air they supported the people who were making the landings on the
8 beach. They bombed and [?] targets that they were given.

9 SM: Just out of curiosity, can you tell me who the pilots were?

10 JR: Can I what?

11 SM: Can you tell me who the pilots were? Do you recall?

12 JR: Yeah, you're not going to go and question them are you?

13 SM: Let me put this on pause for a moment.

14 JR: To be specific about your question, if it had been eight or ten the airline
15 would have felt the same thing. They would have sent the eight or ten pilots and they
16 would have participated and it wouldn't have made any different whether it was two or
17 ten.

18 SM: Again, without divulging their names, do you still have contact with the two
19 pilots that were in the Bay of Pigs?

20 JR: Oh yeah, sure.

21 SM: Well let me ask you this, again something we talked about before we started
22 the interview; where you were, and what you witnessed in terms of the creation of air
23 America. I thought it would be good for you to go ahead and discuss that real quick.

24 JR: I'll tell you, I sat in with all the far east Air Force contract officers and their
25 personnel, whether it was in Hong Kong or in Japan, to negotiate the contracts. Usually
26 it was in Hong Kong in a hotel. After that first year, and like I said, we made some good
27 bids and offered good equipment and good service and we performed well under the
28 contracts. Now, as the first year came to an end, airlines in the States began to complain
29 and the two that complained the most were the Flying Tiger line, my old outfit, and
30 Northwest Airlines. They said...now they're doing this all in Washington, they're
31 saying, 'We want to get in on these contracts.' Well the CIA immediately squelched that

1 situation by standing the franchises and they found this franchise that permitted them to
2 perform contract operations. They acquired this franchise and it turned out to be Air
3 America. They didn't have any operating airplanes, they didn't have an operating
4 company, it was only a name to cover these operations that we were carrying on. Now as
5 those operations expanded, Air America started to get personnel in Vietnam that they
6 were told that they were Air America because of this franchise. I guess they thought that
7 for the cover story there'd better be some Air America people. Up until that time, and
8 even until I left in 1959, I never saw evidence myself of an Air America airplane
9 operating. Now today on the internet you can get pictures and numbers of airplanes and
10 everything and pull them up on the internet with Air America's name painted on them,
11 and I just assumed that later on things like that happened, but all of the employing and the
12 administration work was done by CAT Incorporated in Washington and I think that
13 maybe later on in the Vietnam War as it developed some people that were hired in the
14 United States by CAT Incorporated were told that they were going to go on an operation
15 known as Air America. I think that happened, but not while I was there. I didn't know of
16 any distinction being made that people that went down to Vietnam were working for a
17 company called Air America. It just didn't happen. Now we had plenty of CAT pilots
18 who went down to Vietnam and operated on the CIA operations and were actually
19 stationed there and assigned to what some people later on called Air America operations.
20 But, there was no concept of an airline operation like Civil Air Transport or let's say even
21 Continental Airlines which later on got in on some contracts in the islands out in the
22 Pacific. Continental Airlines operated as Continental Airlines on contract of the Air
23 Force and I never knew that Air America even had an administrative organization that
24 worked like that with CAT. However, the people that came later to Vietnam apparently
25 were told they were on an Air America operation and today they still figure that that was
26 the usual type of airline operation that the CIA used. We only had one head office and
27 that was in Taipei and it was Civil Air Transport. Now the thing is the Air America
28 people, the ones that are convinced that they were in an outfit called Air America in
29 Vietnam, well that's their privilege. They just figure that and they will even tell you,
30 'Yeah, I was hired for Air America.' I say, 'What was it?' Well, they really don't know
31 what it was.

1 SM: In essence, what you're saying is that Air America was CAT?

2 JR: Of course. Well, I would give them a little bit more than that and I would say
3 that the whole thing was a CIA airline operation.

4 SM: Right, it was all CIA.

5 JR: The main company from the beginning that they bought to start this airline
6 operation was Civil Air Transport, and I understand that this little franchise that they
7 bought in the States to cover all those contracts up in Japan was a legitimate franchise,
8 but it was not an operating company. Anyway, it's a very small point, but today the
9 people that worked on those CIA operations in Vietnam have an association called Air
10 America Association, and more power to them there. They're younger than we were and
11 they fit together better than the Civil Air Transport Association people do because ours is
12 a small outfit and it's just as well that they're separate but it doesn't reflect the actual
13 operating situation that existed at the time.

14 SM: What did you think about the CIA's creation on paper of Air America?

15 JR: The what?

16 SM: What did you think when the CIA created Air America on paper?

17 JR: They didn't create Air America on paper. They scanned the franchise to get
18 a franchise as a cover for these Air Force contracts that we were negotiating, to answer
19 the criticism of the American airlines that they wanted to get in on that business, and it
20 worked very well.

21 SM: Okay, so you had a positive opinion of what the CIA did?

22 JR: Oh yes, yeah.

23 SM: You mentioned earlier that there were Civil Air Transport pilots flying
24 operations in South Vietnam.

25 JR: Yes.

26 SM: What were the primary responsibilities for those CAT pilots?

27 JR: Well one of them was Fred Walker and he was the chief pilot down there.
28 He was originally a Civil Air Transport pilot and he flew on the Mandarin jet operation
29 and then when the CIA started the thing in Vietnam they decided that he would go down
30 there as the chief pilot. He never considered himself an Air America employee, he was a
31 CAT employee and what can I say?

1 SM: But in general, what was CAT doing in Vietnam? Was it mostly resupply
2 and transport?

3 JR: Oh, what were they doing?

4 SM: Yes, sir.

5 JR: Oh my God, we used to make a joke but in a way it was true. We used to say
6 when we first went down there that CAT did all the operations in Vietnam that the Air
7 Force didn't want to do. In other words, there were operations that the, for some reason,
8 the US military didn't want to get known that they were doing these operations. These
9 planes would...maybe they belonged to the US Air Force but we would go down to let's
10 say on a certain method of doing this operation we'd go down to Clark Field and they
11 would take some Air Force airplanes and take all the markings off and then they would
12 go on these operations, they'd come back, and they'd go back in the Air Force operation.
13 So, when you say, 'What did they do?' They did anything that the CIA had in mind that
14 they thought they could do better or that the Air Force just wouldn't do. There were all
15 kinds of scary operations, I could tell you.

16 SM: Could you give me an example real quick?

17 JR: Well, I'd rather not because, like I say, we operated in compartments. The
18 guy who scheduled the crews and knew the details of all of these operations was Bob
19 Russalow. Now later on I mentioned Fred Walker and his [?] down there in Vietnam he
20 would do scheduling and carry out the operations that the CIA wanted done. But outside
21 of that, Russalow, up until the time he left, was the one that did it. Now Russalow did
22 leave in the early '60s and after that then CAT pilots performed a lot of the duties that he
23 had taken responsibility before. Incidentally, just to give you an idea of Russalow, he
24 came back to the States. He went to work for Slick Airways in San Francisco and Bob
25 Six, the president of Continental Airlines, got onto him because he was another guy who
26 wanted to get in on this contract business in the Pacific and he did everything in the
27 world to get Russalow to come to Continental Airlines, and finally he made an offer to
28 Russalow that was just impossible to turn down and Russalow went to Continental
29 Airlines and helped him, during his tenure there, to work out quite a few contract
30 operations.

31 SM: Do you know who...

1 JR: Did you notice that Continental Airlines plane was the one that picked up
2 those 24 people at Hainan Island?

3 SM: I did, I did. Who replaced Russalow, do you know, in Vietnam?

4 JR: Well I know that Fred Walker was one of the chief pilots. Now whether they
5 appointed a counterpart of Russalow which would have been the vice president for
6 operations, that was his title after he was promoted from director of operations, I don't
7 know for sure.

8 SM: When did you...you left Southeast Asia in 1959? Is that correct?

9 JR: Yeah, I left in October of 1959.

10 SM: What did you do when you left?

11 JR: I went to Spain for 13 years.

12 SM: Now what did you think about the involvement of the United States in
13 Southeast Asia, especially in the late '50s just as you were leaving? As the CIA presence
14 was increasing, we had aircraft, air assets, flying operations in South Vietnam, what did
15 you think we were trying to accomplish there?

16 JR: Well you know how Americans are, and I'm not much different, I guess
17 when it comes to military in wars, especially in this modern day, we think we're
18 invincible and I think that at that time when the CIA took over we just had the confidence
19 that they knew what they were doing and anything that they proposed and carried out
20 would be beneficial in that whole campaign down there. So, I think to answer your
21 question, my opinion was that hell, we're going to win this thing unless some big
22 conflagration happens where the Chinese and the Soviets and everybody else gets into it,
23 how in the hell could we lose in the small country like Vietnam? Well, as it turns out,
24 there was a way to lose. But when I was there, like I say to answer your question, I was
25 confident that as Americans they were doing the right thing and they knew that their
26 evaluation was good.

27 SM: And did you think that this was just part of the anti-Communist strategy, the
28 Domino Theory and containment and all of that?

29 JR: Yeah, I sort of thought that. Now the one thing that I was always doubtful
30 about, and it started out in China, and even to this day they work on a similar thing, and
31 that is they talk about this in Iraq, is a lacking of third force. Now when you have

1 dictatorship, especially an organization like the Communists have with the commissars
2 and everything, there is no way that you can promote a third force and make the thing
3 successful in bringing down the government. It just can't be done. If they couldn't do it
4 with a war in Iraq, how in the hell are they going to do it within Hussein's own
5 [bailiwick]? So my point is that in China, and in Vietnam, backing any kind of a third
6 force was futile. If you couldn't win by backing the second strongest party in the thing,
7 like say the Communists and the Nationalists in China and getting the Nationalists over to
8 Taiwan and building that up like was done and that was successful, if you can't do that
9 don't do the third force thing. It won't work.

10 SM: Good enough. Now how much did you keep up with what happened in
11 Vietnam while you were in Spain?

12 JR: Not too much. The one thing that happened of course was Magoon lost his
13 live while we were over there.

14 SM: Yes, sir. Did you know him well?

15 JR: Oh sure. You see, in Shanghai we had a...well, all over China we had what
16 is known as the CAT houses. They gained a reputation that really wasn't what it was
17 supposed to mean, but anyway he was around all the time. He was a good guy and good
18 pilot. He didn't have to lose his life. We had pilots following him on that fatal crash and
19 told them that they were in touch with the helicopters and that he should pick a place and
20 bail out and that he would get picked up, and he said, 'Hell, I was a prisoner of the
21 Communists before and I don't want to do that again.' He was fairly confident that he
22 could get the plane back but of course unfortunately he didn't.

23 SM: Yes, sir. This will end the interview with Mr. Joe Rosbert on [tape ends].

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Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Joseph Rosbert
Conducted by Stephen Maxner
April 17, 2001
Transcribed by Tammi Mikel

1 SM: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Joe Rosbert on April
2 17th, 2001 at approximately ten o'clock. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Rosbert is in
3 Katy, Texas. Alright, sir, why don't you go ahead and discuss briefly the impact of your
4 reading during the Great Depression. You just mentioned that you used to go to the
5 library and read other materials.

6 JR: Okay, you tell me when to start.

7 SM: Right now.

8 JR: Oh, okay, we're on now?

9 SM: Yes sir.

10 JR: During those early days when I was going to high school and Villanova
11 College one of the activities that I engaged in quite frequently was the local library which
12 was free, of course, and I went there mainly to pursue my studies but one of the
13 publications that interested me most was the National Geographic and I used to look
14 forward to reading that and of course had a lot of the adventure and romantic names we
15 never usually think of like China and India and the Dutch East Indies and Rangoon and
16 Shanghai and names like that so that always interested me and served me in a little way
17 later on when I did go to the far east.

18 SM: Was there any other periodicals that you enjoyed looking at in terms of
19 maybe their international coverage?

1 JR: No, not really. I was always interested in history and besides my science and
2 mathematics studies and that. I used to follow history quite a bit, but other than that I
3 was pretty occupied with my studies.

4 SM: Were you at all interested in any of the muckraking journalists at the time?

5 JR: No, not really. Actually, because of the strenuous schedule at Villanova and
6 the studies and all that, my education in world affairs and media and correspondence and
7 things like that was sadly neglected.

8 SM: You left Southeast Asia. You went to Europe, and you spent quite a few
9 years in Europe, is that correct?

10 JR: Yeah, 13 years in Spain.

11 SM: How much about what was going on in Southeast Asia did you hear while
12 you were in Spain?

13 JR: When we were in Spain?

14 SM: Yes, sir.

15 JR: Well naturally we communicated on a regular basis with friends back in
16 Taiwan and kept up fairly well with what was going on. But, other than that, we didn't
17 even read too much about the Vietnam situation and things like that so mainly our contact
18 was with people in CAT.

19 SM: Were you at all concerned about the way the United States was conducting
20 it's policies in Southeast Asia and in particular as the Vietnam War escalated?

21 JR: No, we didn't follow it that much to where we examined the thing closely
22 and tried to form an opinion about what was going on. I think I mentioned before that we
23 sort of had the confidence in what the US government was doing. Now I mentioned
24 critically the idea of helping a third force, but other than that the only criticism that we
25 had was the fact that the United States, especially in the state department, did not
26 understand the Communist system and how it worked very well. Naturally we had
27 experts who studied that somewhat, but the general idea of for instance even having
28 sympathy with the Soviet system in Russia and of course that followed into China with
29 people thinking that that revolution had any merit whatsoever and that always bothered
30 me about the feeling in the United States towards Communist regimes. They didn't seem
31 to get the idea that those regimes, first of all in principle, wouldn't work and second of

1 all, that the only way they could install them and propagate them was through liquidation
2 and I never could understand why people would be sympathetic with a system that just
3 killed people to continue their system that was false in the first place.

4 SM: Now have you ever read The Ugly American by Linderer?

5 JR: Yes, I don't remember all the details of it now, but yes, I did.

6 SM: Was that before or after you were in Southeast Asia?

7 JR: No, that was when we were in Spain.

8 SM: It was in Spain? Okay.

9 JR: Of course the title is misleading because it doesn't really follow closely what
10 the story is. When we hear the title 'Ugly American' we think it's kind of a nasty story,
11 when actually it isn't.

12 SM: I was just curious if that had influenced at all your perspective concerning
13 the US involvement in Asia.

14 JR: No, not really.

15 SM: Of course you're coming to this with a rather unique perspective in that your
16 wife is a white Russian, correct?

17 JR: Well, I can tell you I learned a lot about the communist system from my wife
18 and of course her mother was a white Russian and her father was in the Imperial Army so
19 they taught her a lot. Now you know that she was never in Russia or the Soviet Union.
20 She was born in Manchuria when they arrived escaping across Siberia. The Chinese
21 government gave refuge to the people escaping from the communist revolution in Russia
22 and the first place they landed and established was Arbin, Manchuria and that became
23 sort of a haven for people coming from the Soviet Union.

24 SM: I know you talk about it in your book, but just so that it is also part of this
25 interview for the people who might be interested in hearing about it, could you explain
26 how you met your wife?

27 JR: Sure. I was living in Shanghai of course and flying for CAT at the time in
28 1947 and at first stayed with my old buddy Dick Russy who had an apartment there and
29 in the course of that stay he said, 'Joe, I got a good friend down in the [Broadway]
30 Mansions.' Now the [Broadway] Mansions was a big hotel down near the Bund in
31 Shanghai and the military had taken it over and they had – the military had – about the

1 first ten floors of that building and the media, the correspondents, had the next three
2 floors up, and the top floor was sort of a club and place where the correspondents
3 gathered and Russy said, 'I got a friend with Life Magazine that lives down there and we
4 should get together and have a couple of drinks with him,' which we did and we started a
5 friendship which lasted many years. His name was Mark Coffman who was a well-
6 known photographer for Life Magazine and he said, 'Joe, I got a couple of friends, a
7 couple of lady friends, and I'd like to go out to dinner one night if you'd like to come
8 along,' and I said, 'Well sure!' So he set up a date with two Russian gals and we met in
9 the Café Mansions and when they came in, and I pointed this out in the book, when I first
10 spotted Lil, beautiful woman, it was basically love at first sight which I never believed in
11 before that but it hit me right there and then and from then on it was just all uphill. That
12 was my meeting with her and of course her mother and a couple of relatives lived in
13 Shanghai. Her father had recently died, if you can imagine from a strep throat. In those
14 days they didn't have any sulfa drugs or anything like that so he died of a simple malady
15 so he wasn't on the scene when I met Lil.

16 SM: Was it reciprocated? You talk about in your book how you felt very
17 powerful, almost electric attraction, and I was just curious later on when you were talking
18 with your wife had she felt that same attraction on your first meeting?

19 JR: Oh yeah, sure. Yeah, we've had a terrific relationship and I must say that my
20 wife went through that Japanese occupation in Arbin, Manchuria when the Japanese first
21 came in about 1931 and took over Manchuria and her father arranged through some
22 friends to escape from there to Shanghai. They thought they were getting away from the
23 Japanese and then of course the Japanese moved down into China and then took over
24 Shanghai, so the rest of the war she lived under a Chinese administration in Shanghai
25 until finally the American forces moved in at the end of the war and took over. So I
26 moved a lot from her because she struggled through not only Russian school but she went
27 to German school where she learned English and she could speak English as good or
28 better than the average American.

29 SM: Did she remember very much from her time in Manchuria and then her early
30 life under the occupation of the Chinese?

1 JR: Oh yeah, she remembers her early life in Arbin very well. Apparently she
2 and her father were not only close as mother and daughter but really as friends and she
3 talked about her father a lot.

4 SM: Let's see, I couldn't recall if there was anything else that we failed to discuss
5 about your time in Southeast Asia. Was there anything else that you could think of that
6 you wanted to talk about today with regard to just your time in China and Asia, Southeast
7 Asia?

8 JR: Well we covered the CAT – Air America relationship didn't we?

9 SM: Yes sir, we sure did.

10 JR: Like I said, or maybe I didn't cover it closely enough, but it really always
11 seemed to me, even after I left, that you see, the original idea when the CIA came in,
12 here's a great way for us to have an air operation and own it and run it completely the
13 way we want and the best feature of the cover is that it's a Chinese government franchise
14 and not subject much to scrutiny by the media and curious people because the Chinese
15 government, of course they've been fighting the communists for a long time and they
16 were very wary of anybody trying to dig into what they were doing. So we had, in my
17 opinion, a perfect cover situation for the CIA. Now when they started to move away
18 from that there were several excuses I guess they would use instead of good reasons that
19 the Chinese government shouldn't own the airplanes and the airline. In other words,
20 when things started to calm down and get pretty day to day in the operation on Taiwan,
21 they began to delve more and more into the commercial aspect of the airline operation
22 and of course an international airline is supposed to be own by the nationalists of the
23 country and that means that they would own the equipment that the airline had. Well,
24 there were a couple of people in the CIA that didn't like that idea, even though around the
25 world the CIA gave away just about everything and every program they had. They didn't
26 have a commercial operation that was supposed to make money, but that's the way they
27 began to think about the airline, that it should make money and in respect to the
28 ownership of the airplanes they began to move that ownership into American interests
29 and the Air America thing became more prominent and I always was of the opinion that
30 as that American franchise became larger and then more important, that it became subject
31 to scrutiny by the people in the United States, especially the correspondents and so forth.

1 Of course the congress began to take an interest and finally asked the question, 'What is
2 the CIA doing owning an airline?' Of course there were other aspects of the CIA that
3 they didn't like and that they changed a lot of policy in the CIA about agents operating
4 and how they operated and it produced the negative effect on the CIA as far as being
5 really productive in the intelligence field. So I always felt that those couple of people in
6 the upper level of the CIA that felt that way, that they kind of ruined the prospect of that
7 ownership continuing and of course eventually it was decided that the CIA would not
8 engage in airline operation directly and eventually resulted in the liquidation of the whole
9 idea of CIA ownership of airlines and the liquidation was completed I think around 1972
10 and that was the end of CAT and Air America and any other operations in the airline
11 business that the CIA had.

12 SM: What do you think about that as a result of the moral oversight, the senate
13 oversight and the congressional oversight?

14 JR: I think that it's too broad and I think that it throttles us a lot in dealing with
15 intelligence situations that occur like in Iran and places like that and that they're not
16 nearly as effective as they used to be before. Now one of the excuses they use is that
17 somebody has to watch them and I agree with that in a way except that they need the
18 watchers to be a little more delicate about how far they go in restricting operations of the
19 CIA.

20 SM: So there's a difference between oversight and restrictions?

21 JR: Yeah, there definitely is and they have to have people in that oversight group
22 and they have been up until now. I think the CIA is really [?] in a lot of ways in their
23 operations around the world and intelligence.

24 SM: Now when you were in Spain, did you hear about some of the more
25 controversial CIA activities like the Phoenix Program and stuff like that?

26 JR: Like which one?

27 SM: Phoenix, Phoenix Program, in Vietnam? That was the Viet Cong
28 infrastructure assassination and removal program.

29 JR: Oh, no.

30 SM: You didn't hear about that?

31 JR: No, I'm not familiar with that.

1 SM: What do you think contributed to the increased desire to reign in and restrict
2 the CIA activities?

3 JR: Well, you have to tell me a little bit about what was at fault there because that
4 was one of the things that I was removed from in Spain and I don't know anything about
5 it.

6 SM: No, I mean in terms of like you said before, the CIA was basically restricted
7 and they couldn't run anymore airlines. They couldn't create a CAT or another Air
8 America anymore; that era is over. Why do you think that decision was made?

9 JR: Why do I think what?

10 SM: Why do you think the decision was made to prevent the CIA from creating
11 CATs and Air Americas in the future?

12 JR: Why it would prevent that?

13 SM: Why did the senate and/or the congress decide to restrict the CIA in that
14 way?

15 JR: Well, I think that the more the...you see, this was – for the CIA – this airline
16 ownership operation became a sore spot that the people in the congress noticed right
17 away. It was the thing that stood out when they started looking into what the CIA was
18 doing. I just think that they figured that, like I said, what the hell is the CIA doing
19 running an airline? I mean, this is not a business that our intelligence people should be
20 doing! Well, maybe they weren't qualified or right in that statement. I think that the
21 airline operation offered a facility to the CIA that they don't have anymore. You see,
22 they can charter airplanes and things like that but they can't run the thing the way they
23 want it so they are restricted just like with the operation of intelligence agents. They'd
24 been restricted quite a bit and that makes the CIA less effective in the main jobs that they
25 have to do which is intelligence.

26 SM: And do you think that that will ever change?

27 JR: Do what?

28 SM: Do you think it'll ever change back, where the CIA will be able to?

29 JR: No, I don't. I think, I hate to say this, but I think it could only get worse.
30 They do have a little bit of control when they charter an airplane, but not very much. The
31 airline, you can imagine, like that Continental Airlines plane that went to Hainan Island.

1 They chartered a plane, the airline says, 'Okay, it'll take us so long and we'll pick up the
2 people so-and-so,' and they tell the CIA what they can do and how it's going to work and
3 the CIA can only say, 'Well, the Chinese have these guys released and they'll be waiting
4 for you at the airport,' and that couldn't be a more simple charter operation as far as
5 airline is concerned. So, I just don't think that the way things develop in Washington can
6 ever be reversed, and maybe it shouldn't be. I only lived through this one period where
7 it's the only time that the CIA did own an airline operation and maybe it was good for
8 that period and wouldn't be good again. You never know.

9 SM: Now when you were working for CAT, didn't CAT make a profit?

10 JR: Well, that's a question that's hard to say. I used to go to the board meetings
11 and especially the one that occurred every month where the budgets came out and there
12 was always the argument about how much money should be applied to the administration
13 of the airline. In other words, here's a complex that overall costs so much money to run
14 and the military operations and the quasi-military operations share a certain portion of
15 that administrative costs and then the airline shares another portion. I always used to
16 argue with them about how little they would apply to the airline and therefore they would
17 say, 'Well, it's not making a profit.' I maintained it with the proper application of the
18 administrative costs that it did make a profit. That was a conflict that was never really
19 resolved except the higher-ups and the CIA naturally had their way and they could say,
20 'CAT's not making money,' and I don't know how they could say Air America was
21 making money because it wasn't in the commercial business and it was pretty difficult to
22 come out on the bottom line showing that Air America made a profit and I don't think
23 they ever tried to do that.

24 SM: Although that is a statement that I've heard before, that Air America made a
25 profit.

26 JR: That's only because they applied so much administrative costs that they
27 could work the books around. They had control of everything so they could make it
28 come out the way they wanted.

29 SM: Are you saying they might have cooked the books?

30 JR: No, but you had to have...it was something that they had to...in other words,
31 the application of the operating costs was not a cut and dried formula, so decisions had to

1 be made about how much money would go here, how much money would go there, and
2 they could...if they cooked the books they could make the operation of Air America look
3 like it made a profit when they presented this to the boss in Washington. That wouldn't
4 be very difficult, especially in a time of conflict like it was in Vietnam. Know what I
5 mean?

6 SM: Yes, sir, I sure do. Basically what you're saying is they controlled every
7 aspect.

8 JR: What I'm saying is that I wouldn't say strictly to the term of cooking the
9 books – that's what they did – but you could also make the point that yes, that's what
10 they did do.

11 SM: Yes, sir, because they controlled every aspect of it.

12 JR: They controlled everything.

13 SM: Well that makes sense.

14 JR: Huh?

15 SM: That makes a lot of sense. What did you think about, as you learned and
16 heard about what was going on in Southeast Asia after you left, and especially after the
17 major build up and when the United States did leave Vietnam in 1973, that is our major
18 military ground troops were removed, what did you think when Vietnam and South
19 Vietnam did fall to communism in '75?

20 JR: What did I think about South Vietnam what?

21 SM: Falling to communism in 1975.

22 JR: Well, I thought it was as ridiculous situation and it made me lose faith in my
23 original opinion, like I said, that I thought that we were going to do the thing the right
24 way to make the victory sure and that we would come out on top. But instead, the way
25 we ran the thing and I always said that I thought that the Vietnam War was run by the
26 politicians and not by the military and that you can't do that, and that's an example of our
27 trying to do that and we lost the war, and I was very disappointed in the way the thing
28 went.

29 SM: What do you think we should learn from that experience?

30 JR: Well I think we should learn that first of all, we don't get into a conflict
31 unless we examine it closely and we're sure that we're not going to lose like Bush did in

1 Desert Storm. In other words, you get a general and you sit down with him and his
2 people and you say, 'Is this 100% sure or 110% sure that we're going to win?' and when
3 the answer comes back not only that, 'Yes, we're going to win, but this is how we have to
4 do it and we don't want any interference in that plan,' which I think Schwartzkopf did,
5 that we're going to win, and I think that lesson was learned from Vietnam.

6 SM: Is there anything else that you think we should learn from, for instance, your
7 experiences with CAT and with the Flying Tigers and other airlines that you worked with
8 in Asia?

9 JR: Well of course you asked me whether I thought that the CIA could go back to
10 an airline operation, I don't, and the other thing is that there can never be another AVG.
11 It just...the way the feeling and the bureaucracy has developed in Washington, there is no
12 way that a guy like Chenault can come along and go to Washington and talk to the
13 President and say, 'We want 100 pilots and 100 airplanes from the military to go to a hot
14 spot,' where internationally it's against the law; it just cannot be done. So, you have to
15 work these things in another way. Now, I point out Desert Storm and in Desert Storm
16 Bush was able to get our allies together and formulate a plan that would get back Kuwait
17 and accomplish that mission. Bush has always been criticized later on as saying, 'Why
18 didn't we go and take Saddam Hussein and get him out of there right at the time?' If we
19 had presented that to the allies, we would have gotten a negative reaction and we
20 probably wouldn't have even been able to get them together on what we did do in Iraq.
21 So, you not only have to learn from Vietnam but you have to learn when dealing with the
22 groups that you're working with on the scene like the UN and NATO. Unless you come
23 out with the right answer, you're going to fail. As I've said many times, you've got to
24 use your experts and your generals to get the best out of each one of them that
25 collectively will produce the success, and I think it's kind of a principle that works in
26 most situations.

27 SM: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about today?

28 JR: Well, if we were sitting around having a drink I probably could! [laughs].
29 Right at the time, like later on I thought about that National Geographic. After we talk,
30 sure, I think of things, but right now I think we covered the main points and I think that
31 Chenault and the AVG group you mentioned, that was a good example of what can be

1 done if it's allowed to be done under the circumstances with people that are qualified and
2 you get them their hand. You see, Chenault was sort of like a Macarthur. He was really
3 hated in the upper echelon of the military. They said all kinds of terrible things about
4 Chenault and they said they never would have appointed him general in China with the
5 US Army Air Corps if President Roosevelt hadn't been behind this thing. So, I mean they
6 do terrible things and I often say this, there's two sins that you must not commit in the
7 military and you can make this a matter of record, and one is that you never tell the
8 higher ups not to do, but the worst sin is that you don't go out and prove you're right!
9 When you go out and prove you're right, you're going to be crucified for the rest of your
10 career, and this happened many times, especially with Billy Mitchell, with Chenault, with
11 Macarthur, and for some reason that's a thing that's forbidden in the military. Chenault
12 was guilty of both of those sins, you know.

13 SM: But as a leader, was Chenault a very forgiving man?

14 JR: Was he what?

15 SM: Was he a forgiving man as a leader, if you made a mistake as a pilot
16 working for him?

17 JR: Of course, yes. Like I said in that first mission, we were supposed to fly top
18 cover and we didn't follow that instruction after a point and he just pointed that out very
19 strongly that you can't do that because something bad could have happened, and it could
20 have, but under the circumstances we evaluated the situation and we didn't think it was
21 going to happen and Chenault would always appreciate that feeling about his pilots and
22 he would tell the pilots, and all of us, in his experience, how to fight the Japanese. He
23 knew that when we got in the airplane we were on our own pretty much, and that paid off
24 of course. You see, he was not on the scene in most of these places like Rangoon and
25 operations in Thailand and things like that. He was on headquarters in Kunming but we
26 were able to follow out what he had taught us. He handled...he was a school teacher, and
27 he handled us like a bunch of school kids. He sat us down in the classroom and said,
28 'Look, this is what the Japanese have. This is what they do, and in order to beat them,
29 this is what you have to do.' When he finished passing on all of his experience and
30 expertise, then we were pretty much on our own. So, like I say, that paid off.

1 SM: It seems like he also was very flexible and allowed you a certain amount of
2 latitude and initiative. Is that correct?

3 JR: Oh yeah. You see, like when they finally agreed to rotate the three squadrons
4 down into Rangoon, each squadron that went there was run by the squadron commander
5 and he had a free hand to...you see, we worked with the RAF and the RAF had the
6 communications set up and they had the intelligence set up and we conferred with them
7 every evening about what the situation was and then our squadron commander worked
8 out what we were going to do, so what Chenault got as a result of that was reports
9 everyday from the squadron commander of what he had decided and what actually was
10 accomplished. Very seldom, in fact, I don't recall specific instances where he chewed
11 out the squadron commander for what he did. He more or less always agreed that he had
12 done a great job, and Chenault always acted like a school teacher in that respect. In other
13 words, he taught us what he knew and he took the consequences or the fame for the
14 result.

15 SM: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

16 JR: Like I said, if we had a cold beer I could talk to you for a couple hour more!
17 No, Steve, I think for what you're trying to do, I've covered pretty much the story and my
18 thinking on things, and I don't have anything more to comment on really.

19 SM: Okay, well let me go ahead and end this officially. This will end the
20 interview with Joe Rosbert. Thank you very much, sir.