

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES 'BUDDY' J. LINER

FOR THE
VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WAR AND SOCIETY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

INTERVIEWED BY
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CYNTHIA TINKER: Okay, this begins an interview with Charles J. “Buddy” Liner on November—I mean, September 23, 2015 and we’re at the Center for the Study of War and Society on the UT campus. And my name is Cynthia Tinker, I’m the program coordinator with the Center, and also joining me today on the interview is our graduate assistant ...

RYAN GESME: Ryan Gesme.

TINKER: And thank you for coming. Also sitting in on the interview are Mr. Liner’s wife, Dixie, daughters, Beverly [Stansell] and Nancy [Cordell]. So they may chime in from time to time, I don’t know. But okay, like I said, we’ll start from the beginning and do you want to tell us a little bit about your background, maybe your, what your parents and where you grew up?

CHARLES ‘BUDDY’ LINER: Well, my—everyone refers to me as Buddy. When somebody calls me Charles, I know they don’t know me very well.

TINKER: (Laughter) How did you get the nickname “Buddy”?

LINER: You know, I’ve had people ask me that, and my mother said that I named myself, so I must have heard somebody say it and say “Mom, I like Buddy,” and she said “Well that’s what we’ll call you”. So, but I was born in Athens, Tennessee, and went to the schools in McMinn County. Went not only to the elementary schools, but to McMinn County High School. And after that, after that period, the war was beginning to warm up a little bit, and I had planned to go on to college then, but ...

TINKER: Well wait, before you get too far, you’re jumpin’ on me. I’d like—I thought it was interesting, your mother’s, your mother at that time, actually, didn’t she own a business?

LINER: Yes, an insurance business.

TINKER: Yeah, now how did, how did she come to own an insurance business?

LINER: Well, she married a person that—my mom and dad unfortunately got a divorce and she married a fella that owned an insurance agency. And so, it was called the Dodson Insurance Agency, and it had been around for a long, long time. And ...

TINKER: Survived the Depression and everything?

LINER: ... Yeah, yeah. And we got through all that. And finally, we sol—they sold it to a larger agency, the agency that I’m with now.

TINKER: Uh huh, uh huh.

CORDELL: But you had ...

LINER: And then, well I won’t jump.

CORDELL: Tell them about your blended family, Dad. I mean, when you and, you and ...

STANSELL: Grandmother.

CORDELL: ... Grandmother got married, I mean when Grandmother and Granddaddy Dodson got married, she had two children ...

LINER: Yeah, and we had two boys, Jimmy ...

CORDELL: Your brother.

LINER: ... Everybody called him Crow, C-R-O-W ...

TINKER: Crow?

CORDELL: They called him Crow.

LINER: ... and so there, instead of being three, two, then there was five.

CORDELL: Siblings.

LINER: And I used to tell the story that back when sugar was rationed, Eddie, who was my step-brother and I were the culprits in most of the problems we had. And we would slip down at night, and Mom had five jars of sugar—and sugar was rationed, and it was very difficult to get. And we would take a little of each one of ‘em’s sugar, and pour it in our glass and they would come down, and a day or two, and they’d say “You know, my sugar’s missing,” and we’d say “We don’t really know anything about that.”

TINKER: (Laughs)

LINER: So we did lots of things like that, but we were real close to that family, still. We all grew up together, and my mother was a, at least she demanded the right thing. Whatever it was, it had to be done the right way, and she had asked us, she said, “Do you and Eddie know anything about the sugar?” and I said “No ma’am, we do not. No, we wouldn’t do that.” But we’d come in, we’d maybe come in 10 or 11 o’clock, at night, when they were sleeping ...

TINKER: Right.

LINER: ... And I’d say “Eddie, don’t pour too much in there, now! Somebody’ll catch us or” ...

TINKER: Just pinchin’ a little off of the top! (Laughter)

LINER: But things were rationed, and if you’ve not been through that experience of rationing food, it’s a little bit tough ...

TINKER: I bet.

LINER: ... And you had to really plan very carefully. And so I graduated from—I played three sports at McMinn: football, tennis, and basketball.

TINKER: Did you stay in touch with your dad, after the divorce?

LINER: Oh yes. Yeah, I sure did.

TINKER: Do you know why they got divorced?

LINER: Yeah, he was an alcoholic.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

LINER: And he was a restaurant man, and a great man. And ...

CORDELL: And a barber.

LINER: ... And we came to live with a great man, too, the guy that was our step-father. But we saw Dad on a regular basis.

TINKER: Did you? Yeah he was the barb—was he the only barber in town?

LINER: Well no, there—they used to, in those days, they had one big barber shop, and everybody wore a tie and a dress shirt.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: To be a barber. And that was—I can remember that I was telling somebody that story the other day, I said it's unbelievable that they would not go to work unless they had that dress shirt and tie on.

TINKER: That was a serious profession then.

LINER: Yeah, oh yeah. (Laughs) And but then ...

TINKER: Were they originally from Athens? Both your parents?

LINER: Yeah, yeah. They sure were.

CORDELL: Well my grandmother, didn't she grow up in Decatur?

STANSELL: Decatur, Meigs County (Tennessee).

CORDELL: She was from Meigs County. Grandmother was.

LINER: Well, oh, yeah.

CORDELL: Yeah. Her family was from Meigs County.

TINKER: And they moved then to Athens.

LINER: Yeah, they—I used to go over and stay with ‘em periodically.

CORDELL: Her family.

LINER: And my grandmother made a cake one day, and she said—and I’m named after my grandfather, and I wish I was just half the man he was. But he was a mail carrier, and he’d take me first of all, he would put me in the buggy and we would go all the way to a place called Ten-Mile deliverin’ the mail and everybody knew him, and his name was Charlie Johnson. And I would ride with him, and we were comin’ back one day, and it was hot, and he said, “Charles, I’m gonna let you have the reins for old Ned down here at the creek, so he can get some water.” Well I’d—he’d never let me do that before.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: And so we got down there, he handed me the reins, and we sat there for probably two or three minutes, and he said, “Charles, you’re gonna have to let the reins go so Ned can duck his head to get the water.” I never would think ...

TINKER: (Laughter) You were nervous!

LINER: Oh, I was holding on! And it was—I’ve thought about that, but, and then the other thing ...

TINKER: Well are we still—back then, how old, do you remember how old you were?

LINER: Probably ten, nin—eight to ten, eleven years old.

TINKER: So that would have been about around 1940?

LINER: Yeah, yeah.

TINKER: And they was still delivering by horse?

LINER: Oh yeah, yeah. And ...

TINKER: Was it like a buggy, or what was it?

LINER: ... No, it was an open buggy, but it had a top on it.

TINKER: Okay.

LINER: And then my grandmother, it's amazing that I'd remember this, made a cake. She brings me in the little dining room, and she said "Now Charles, do not touch the cake!"

TINKER: Of course. (Laughter)

LINER: Back then, when you sat down, Daddy Johnson, the grandfather, got first pick of everything. After the prayer was said, and I remember he used to say about gravy, he'd say one word: "Sop," And you knew that he wanted the gravy. So we'd sit there and wait until he, 'till he finished, but at any rate, back to the cake. I got to thinking about that cake, and the barn was about 150, 200 yards away, and I thought, "I've got to have some of that cake." She said "Don't do it, don't mess with it", so I slipped back in there, and I took my hand and raked off a big batch of cake ...

TINKER: Oh no.

LINER: ... And put it in two napkins, and took off to the barn and got up in the barn loft. And then with, maybe 15, 20 minutes, she called, "Charles! Where are you?" And I'm jamming that cake down, just as fast as I can get it. And so finally, I had to come back, and she said, "What did I bring you in here for?" I wanted your granddaddy to see that cake first, and I said, "I just got a little of it," but I really got a chunk of it.

TINKER: Yeah. (Laughs)

LINER: Isn't that funny that you'd remember those kind of stories? But I used to ride with him in the buggy. Everywhere he went, delivering mail. I loved to go with him.

TINKER: I bet that was fun.

LINER: Oh yeah. And he was—he didn't hear well, but everybody knew him.

TINKER: Yeah. Well then everybody knew you.

LINER: Well yeah. So my growing up years were, I guess my mother harbored us, my brother and I, because she went through a—the divorce was not difficult, but it was a divorce.

TINKER: Yeah, yeah.

LINER: So, and she said, "I want you all, you and Jimmy both, to see your dad regularly." And so we spent as much time with him as we could. And he was really—I remember Scott Mayfield, Mayfield Dairy Farms, telling me one time, he said, "You know, your dad probably is the friendliest man I've ever known." And he liked people, and shook hands with 'em when he saw 'em, whether he'd cut their hair or not.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: And he was a barber throughout his entire professional life, and so when we came to live with Mr. Dodson, there were five of us, now that changed the picture a little bit.

TINKER: Yes.

LINER: And then Eddie and I started lifting a little sugar 'cause we thought we needed more. And, but the girls are, we're still close, and in fact we just talked to them the other night.

TINKER: Oh that's nice.

LINER: One lives in Johnson City and one lives in Knoxville. And so we're in touch with them, and ...

CORDELL: And two of them have passed away.

TINKER: Yeah, oh. Okay.

CORDELL: His brother and then one of the, and then Eddie, the one he's talked about just passed away.

LINER: Yeah, he was a station manager at WCRK for years, in Morristown and he died.

TINKER: And y'all were close your whole life?

LINER: Yeah, yeah. The whole family was. It was really just real close. So ...

TINKER: Well did you enjoy your school years, at elementary school?

LINER: Oh yeah.

TINKER: What was your favorite subject?

CORDELL: Sports.

LINER: English, uh, yeah. (Laughter) English, I guess. My mother was an English major, and she spent a lot of time, uh, any time that you had a grammatical error in front of my mom, you'd know right then.

STANSELL: She would correct you.

TINKER: Really?

LINER: Oh yeah. (Laughs)

CORDELL: Doesn't matter who it was.

LINER: That's right. And so, consequently I never really had a lot of problems writing and expressing myself. And that was big for me, and the further I went, the more difficult it came to try to put things into words, particularly in graduate school. But I finally, we decided at the end of our senior year, there were four of us, and at that time, the Army had a rule that said if you join—if we draft, if you are drafted, you must be in the Army. And we didn't want to go to the Army. So four of us joined the Air Force.

TINKER: Well what were your memories of World War II?

LINER: Well ...

TINKER: I mean, besides the rationing. Did you, did that affect your family at all? Did you have family members?

LINER: No, because Mom had everything—anything that was hard to get was rationed to us, in jars.

TINKER: But did you know friends or family members that had served, or was killed in action, or ...

LINER: Not, no, not a lot.

TINKER: Do you remember your family following the news of the war?

LINER: Pardon?

TINKER: Do you remember your family following the news of the war?

LINER: Oh yeah, yeah.

TINKER: And how did you get most of your news?

LINER: They, Mom read the paper, Mr. Dodson read the paper and that's where I learned how to read the paper. I'm a big paper reader.

TINKER: And would they then talk to you, or did you read it on your own?

LINER: Oh, I'd read it, and then if I had a question, I'd ask 'em.

TINKER: Okay.

LINER: "Why are they doing this? Why are they, why are we fighting with countries across the ocean?" And I had a feeling for it, but I knew that when we graduated, that sooner or later I was going to have to go into military, and my mom pitched a fit!

TINKER: Well they still had the draft, too.

LINER: Yeah, yeah, and we did not want to go to the Army. So I just told her, I said “Mom, I gotta do this.”

TINKER: Yeah, your buddies, you said you went with three friends?

LINER: Yeah, and it’s in that story there.

TINKER: Dumpy Boyer, Eddie Dodson, your step-brother, and John Milton.

LINER: Yeah, and two of those guys are, Eddie and Dumpy, are deceased.

TINKER: Now how did poor Dumpy get that name?

LINER: (Laughter) Can you believe that?

CORDELL: And you know what the real name is, Swan. His real name was Swan.

LINER: Swan Boyer.

TINKER: Well he probably liked Dumpy better! (Laughter) Swan?

STANSELL: Dad, when was the Battle of Athens? Don’t you have memories of that?

LINER: Yeah, I’m gonna tell ‘em about it. I’m gonna tell ‘em about that one.

TINKER: Oh yeah!

STANSELL: ‘Cause that was before you left, right?

LINER: Yeah.

TINKER: Oh yeah, we have an interview with a gentleman that was down there.

LINER: Well, what happened, the GIs came back, and while they were gone, the—there was a machine. It had just ...

TINKER: A political machine.

LINER: ... Yeah, but of Democrats. And I don’t have, I have lots of friends that are Democrats, but I’m a Republican.

TINKER: Me too.

LINER: But they had, they would, if they caught you on the street with whiskey, they just beat you with a gun. On the head, take you to jail. And that went on for some time, and when the GIs came back, we had an election, and the deputies stole some of the returns. So the GIs then said ...

TINKER: Like a box-full, of ballots, right?

LINER: Yeah, right. And they said “We want those ballots,” and they said, “You’ll have to come after ‘em.” Well these guys had just gotten back from combat, and they—I never will forget this. There were these, us four, they said, “Okay, we’re gonna—we think that they may come from Etowah [Tennessee], and if they do, when they cross that bridge, they’ll be in the water.” So they gave us, they went out to the National Guard Armory, and broke in and stole a bunch of weapons. And so we were down there, we didn’t even know how to shoot these things, ‘cept pull the trigger. And they gave each one of the five of us a carbine and they said, “Now we want you to climb up on top of Riddle Drug Store,” which is right on the corner, downtown Athens.

TINKER: So you were one of the ones with a gun?

LINER: Yeah! (Laughter)

TINKER: Oh my lord!

LINER: And so there was a big concrete, kind of a curvature in it, and they said, “When they come across that bridge, you boys need to fire these weapons”. And so we thought we were big dogs. Not a one of knew how to shoot.

TINKER: (Laughs) You didn’t grow up learnin’ how to shoot?

LINER: No and my mother did not know, she thought, she did not know I was there.

TINKER: I bet she ...

CORDELL: She would.

LINER: You’re right. I did not grow up learning how to shoot. And the GIs absolutely, they had to send the National Guard in there, they absolutely, as they caught these deputies that had been beating people openly with their, with the butt of their guns and this sort of thing, they did everything, but kill ‘em.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

LINER: And that changed the whole complexion of that county and it moved from being a Democratic county to a Republican county, heavy Republican. And, but I never will forget that. I said “Boys, now when they come across that bridge, let’s pour it to ‘em”. Well they never did come.

TINKER: Oh, so you never had to actually fire?

LINER: Well, the deputies, then they started after the deputies. And they had, you know, to my knowledge, the state never did anything about that. They were going to, but the GIs had just come back from being shot at and hurt and damaged, and they didn't want any more of that. They said, "We want free elections. We don't want 'em stuffin' ballots," and that changed the whole complexion of McMinn County.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: And it was a ...

TINKER: It was basically just a dirty political system that was running the county, right?

LINER: Yes. That was—I saw a guy ...

TINKER: And they were benefiting from it?

LINER: Yeah, I saw a guy walking down the street that was probably, he was probably intoxicated, and I saw a deputy go up and hit him in the head with the butt of [a] gun. And I saw that.

TINKER: Wow.

LINER: And then he called somebody and they put him in a car and took him in jail, and put him in jail. That stopped. All that stopped, and McMinn then was ...

TINKER: Was free.

LINER: ... Was free, with their GIs. They thought they might send the Army in there to try to quell it, because they, by breaking in the State Guard Armory they, you shouldn't, you can't believe the stuff they brought outta there. And they know how, and they knew how to use it.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: So that was called the Battle of Athens and it had national attention. And ...

TINKER: Historians are still studying that.

CORDELL: Mm hmm.

LINER: Is that right?

TINKER: Oh yeah. Sometimes we get phone calls and they want to see that man's interview, wantin' it. 'Cause he was of the veterans.

LINER: Oh was he? Really?

TINKER: I wish I could remember his name. I bet you might remember ...

CORDELL: He probably knows him. Or knew of him, I'm sure.

TINKER: I wanna say his last name was White, but I'm not sure. I can look it up when we get done.

LINER: Right, but then we decided, well let's join the service, and my mother pitched a fit. And I said "Mom, I wanna go, I don't want to go in the Army. I'd like to go to the Air Force, if I could," and she reluctantly signed off and we joined.

TINKER: 'Cause you weren't 18 yet.

LINER: No and they, as strange as this may sound, we went through basic training together and I never saw 'em again. Each one of 'em went to a different division. And I was later, they decided to put me in the Strategic Air Command, which is heavy bombers and this sort of thing. And I, and then they sent me to school and ...

TINKER: Well what do you remember about basic training?

LINER: Oh yeah.

CORDELL: Your first day there, Dad?

LINER: I'm glad you asked that question.

TINKER: It was fun, wasn't it?

LINER: We went to San Antonio, and you cannot believe how cold it was out there. Well we had topcoats, I mean we thought, "Well, we can send these topcoats home," and we walked in our barracks, there wasn't no—and then we found out there wasn't a barracks, you stayed in cots, slept on cots. And well we thought, "What in the world?" This was the last time that I saw these guys, was when we went through that experience. And we stayed, about the third day; they came to get me, they being the Air Police. And they said, "Okay, we want you to come with us." They put me in a jeep, and took me about two miles. Understanding now, that the weather, the wind, it was unbelievably cold in the low 20s. And they said, "Okay, you see this building?" Building was about 50 yards wide and maybe 150 yards long, fenced and they reached in here and handed me a stick that was about that big. (Gestures with Hands) And they said, "We want you to guard this all night, and if somebody gets in, you got a problem," and I said "You, are y'all serious?" They said, "Yes, and we want you marching completely around that facility all night long." And I thought, "What in the world have I gotten into here?" That was my first visit into the military. So I did that. I guarded that all night long and not a sound.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: And they'd come back about every two hours and they'd say, "How are you doing?" I said, "I hadn't seen anybody yet." (Laughs) So the next morning about 6:00, they came in, picked me up, and they said "We want the stick back," and I said, I started to say, "You've been doing this before, haven't you?"

TINKER: (Laughter)

LINER: That was my first indoctrination into the military, is that they do stuff like that to get you ready and toughen you up a little bit. So I then went to Biloxi, Mississippi, to an electronics school. And the intent was to be a radio operator and it turned out to be a little something more.

TINKER: Did you get to pick that position, or did they just decide?

LINER: No, they looked at my ...

TINKER: Your test.

LINER: ... My test scores and that sort of thing, and they thought, "This guy would be a good radio man," so I—you know I went through that class and that school and ...

TINKER: Did you find it difficult?

LINER: Oh yeah. Yeah, it was ...

TINKER: I mean, you're learning—yeah.

LINER: ... Morse Code, learning it and they would say, at the end of the day, "Okay, you're good for half the alphabet, you gotta get the rest of it in two days." You gotta learn it, listen to us and they'd right up next to you, so, and you'd wanna just pop 'em, but you couldn't.

TINKER: Yeah.

LINER: So I went through that training in Keesler [Keesler Air Force Base], and it was tough. That was a tough ...

TINKER: And did you have to learn like, wiring systems and avionics and all that, too?

LINER: No, I didn't have, no I didn't.

TINKER: 'Cause you're just doing the radio operator.

LINER: Yeah, I was, but that didn't last long. Because my next assignment, when I was getting ready to leave Biloxi, they said, "We're gonna, we've expanded this situation a little bit, and we're going to make—see if we can't get you involved as an Electronic Countermeasure Operator," and I said, "What is that?" And they said, "Well, we're gonna tell you more about it

when you go to class.” So basically what I became was what they call an ECM operator, an Electronic Countermeasure Operator, and on my first mission, when we go back to when I first went overseas, they—I didn’t stay too long in the States. And they sent me ...

TINKER: Yeah, how long—do you remember how long you were at Keesler? Was it just a few weeks?

LINER: I’d say six weeks.

TINKER: Six weeks?

LINER: Six weeks, and we were glad to get to Keesler, because that dadgum San Antonio was so cold, you could ...

TINKER: I can’t believe it was that cold there.

LINER: Oh, you would—the way ...

TINKER: That must have been an unusual cold slip.

LINER: I get cold even thinking about it. (Laughter) But we—they sent me then after I had finished the radio school, they said, “We’re gonna put you in ECM,” and I said, “What is that?” They said, “That’s electronic countermeasure and we’re gonna tell you what it does, we’re gonna”—So they sent me to a quick refresher course, and I knew, I had a feeling that they probably were getting ready to send me overseas, but I didn’t know that for sure. And so I learned everything I could about electronics and what happens when you jam a signal and this sort of thing. So I was then sent to the 304th Bomb Wing in Okinawa. And from there, we were in—they were building barracks and the tents, they had us in tents, but the barracks weren’t ready. They were about two or three weeks away. So one of my buddies comes running down one night, or it wasn’t night, it was late afternoon, and he said, “You’re flying tonight.” I said, “Wait a minute, I just got here two days ago!”

TINKER: Mm hmm.

LINER: He said, “You got to go to briefing.” I didn’t hear a word they said. I went, but I didn’t hear anything they said.

TINKER: Nervous? Scared?

LINER: Yeah. Yeah I was scared, I sure was.

TINKER: Now and this, was this, this was 1951 still?

LINER: Yeah, yeah.

TINKER: Was it toward the end of '51? It had to have been, if you were at Lackland [Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas] and then Keesler [Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Mississippi].

LINER: Probably. Yeah, yeah, yeah and ...

TINKER: Did you have any down time between Keesler and going to Okinawa?

LINER: No.

TINKER: You just went straight to Okinawa?

LINER: No, they sent me straight over there, and we had seven ECM operators for about twenty-five planes. B-29s. Had two bomb wings in Okinawa and one in Japan. And so I went to briefing, didn't hear a word, except the crew. So I came back and was sitting on the side of my cot again, and my buddy comes running down, he said—see, we flew at night, and we're up 30,000 feet, I didn't know that at the time, but they said—he said, "Your plane is gonna be one of the first ones off," so I said—he said, "You need to get down there!" So I said, "Well I thought I'd have a little time". So I got my stuff and got down there, and when I got there, the gunner was, had his head out the door, and he said, "Well you must be Mr. Liner!" I said, "Yes, sir, I am." and he said "Well get your ... up here, 'cause we're ready to go!"

TINKER: Oh! They were waitin' on you! (Laughs) Oh, man!

LINER: (Laughs) They were waitin' on. And they never did ...

TINKER: Were the engines running too?

LINER: Well this story even gets better, because they never did let me live it down. I flew with 'em a couple of other times. I got in there, and he said, "Do you know where your equipment is?" I said "I know exactly where my equipment is." And he said, "Well you don't have anything to do, 'cause we're gonna take off from Okinawa, fly across the water, and go into South Korea and then North Korea and then you got something to do."

TINKER: Okay.

LINER: And so I really was, just kind of dozed off just a little bit, and the .50 caliber machine guns started going off. So I grab my parachute and start toward the door, and the gunner says "Where are you going?" And I said, "Well they're shootin' at us," and he said, "No, we're just test-firing the 50-caliber machine guns!" (Laughter) They never did let me live that down.

TINKER: I'll bet they did not!

LINER: It's unbelievable! They'd say, "Get Buddy's parachute! He's outta here!" So ...

TINKER: I bet that followed you a long time! (Laughter)

LINER: Oh, it did! It did. And so we, as I say, we didn't draw the same crew, but most of the crews were good at what they did. The Strategic Air Command has one, one final say, and it's real simple: know your job. You don't have to worry about another soul on that aircraft, but your job. Don't worry about them, they can get their part done and I always remembered that, and so, and then we started flying and as—missions lasted from seven to twelve hours.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

LINER: And I was kinda one of the guys, they liked to have an ECM operator because you'd, in briefing they'd throw their hand up to the intelligence people, say "Am I going have an ECM operator?"

TINKER: Right.

LINER: And most of them ...

TINKER: 'Cause they didn't want get shot down.

LINER: Yeah! (Laughs) That's right! And what happens when you, with that equipment, it jams the enemy anti-aircraft guns and searchlights that are shooting by radar and so this means they just got to shoot in the air. Well, you're still, you're still at risk ...

TINKER: At risk, yes.

LINER: ... even at that, but I, and I—the crews were extremely nice to me and ...

TINKER: Now you're the, your equipment, was it—you had to carry it from aircraft—It got moved from aircraft to aircraft, right?

LINER: Yeah. Right, right.

TINKER: It wasn't built in to the aircraft.

LINER: No, no.

TINKER: 'Cause it was still so new.

LINER: Yeah, they, we were gonna hit a large target one night, right at the Yalu River and they selected me and they sent some special equipment over from the States, additional equipment to use on—because they, we didn't want get in a confab with China. And it was right on that Yalu River between North Korea and China.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: And so they said, “Buddy, you’ve really got a good deal.” I said, “What’s that?” They said “You all are gonna fly a figure-eight orbit out here about 50 miles from the main target and you’re gonna use that special equipment to jam all those signals, ‘cause there’ll be 200 anti-aircraft guns and 250 searchlights.”

TINKER: Yeah, ‘cause you all were going after the dams, right?

LINER: Yeah. Oh, dams and airfields, and—the story here, you’ll see that we hit a bridge one night, with another crew and knocked nine spans out of it, and the next day a train was running across it. So, what our people did—said, “Okay, we’re gonna start putting timed delays on the bombs, and let the bombs go down into the ground and six hours later, they’re gonna explode.”

TINKER: Oh, okay.

LINER: That’s how we solved that bridge problem. Because we, you see, intelligence, and I’ve always been infatuated with the intelligence people, they know exactly who did what and how it was done. They was really good at what they did and we knew—they’ll tell you “You’re gonna be in range of 30 anti-aircraft guns and 25 searchlights.”

TINKER: Yeah.

LINER: They’ll tell you exactly, even to the minute, how long you’ll be in the—and we sacked. They used to tell you, “Now the plane …” We flew like this. (Gestures with Hands) “The plane in front,” they used to say “If you’re a minute and a half behind, and the other boy is a minute and a half ahead, he’s goin’ get bombs dropped on him, so you gotta be precise.”

TINKER: Mm hmm. Yeah.

LINER: That’s what I say about the Strategic Air Command, they, you just, everybody just does what they’re supposed to do. And somebody asked me in a briefing that I had some time ago “Were you scared?” And I say, “What would you think?” “What would go through your—well that would scare me a little bit.” And I said, “Even though I was trained well and I knew my job, I knew that there could be a point in time when I may be blown out of the sky, or I may have to bail out.” And when I started, and you’ll get a kick out of this, parachute training, they laid a parachute out there and hooked me to it.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

LINER: And the wind blows New Mexico, or any of these places you are and they said, “You’ve got to get up. Once you hit the ground, you gotta get up.” Well guess what? I didn’t get up (Laughter) and the chute probably drug me 150 yards before I could get up.

TINKER: Yeah.

LINER: And, and then one of my instructors came over and he said, “Are you goin’ be able to get up from now on?” I said, “Yes siree! I’m not goin’ go through this again.” (Laughter)

CORDELL: And he's an athlete! I mean, he was an athlete, you know.

TINKER: 'Cause the wind, the wind is so strong, yeah, it'd just jerk you.

LINER: Oh, I mean, yeah. You can't explain to people how strong that dadgum wind is! And, but you know, I mind it, I told some of my buddies, I said, "Guys, the one thing that I'm going to do, I'm gonna learn my job. And my job, and I will get my part of it done, and the rest of you guys have to do the same thing." And the crews were, unfortunately for us, we didn't get to know the, a lot of the crews real well because we have the

TINKER: Because you jumped back and forth.

LINER: ... the seven for the 25 planes. So they'd stair-step you sometime and let you fly with—and we're coming back on our 14th mission and I'm thinking, "I'm 'bout two missions away from going home." And we're 100, about 100 miles from the front lines. We'd dropped some bombs on a marshaling yard, a railroad center and all at once, the navigator says, "I don't have a clue where we are." And I thought "What, what did he say the ..." Before I could even think that, I guess, the aircraft commander said, "What did you just say?" He said, "I don't know where we are." And I thought, "Lord have mercy! Help me!" (Laughter) And the clouds, he couldn't get a fix off the clouds because, and he couldn't get a fix on the shoreline.

TINKER: Oh, Mm hmm.

LINER: Well now, here we are up there, in that big B-29, and in about 15 minutes, here came two fighters. I'm glad they were propeller driven and we messed with them for a while. And we flew in to a little base, finally got back to the line at South Korea and flew in to a little place called Itazuke, Japan, and Itazuke was a fighter base (Itazuke Air Base) and now here we've got to set that big B-29 down on that fighter base. We hit the runway, our runway—gravel, probably 250 yards before the concrete ever showed up. It's the only way we could get it down. Either that or we were going to have to ditch it.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: Ditch the plane—ditch meaning get out and float for a while (Laughs) and so we went in and I never shall forget this, they gave us ham, sausage, eggs, biscuits, toast, the whole thing for a dime. And so we crawled back on the plane and came back. The next day, the day after our bombing mission, then you met with the intelligence people and they told you what kind of damage you did, but this day, the Colonel shows up, the boss, the big boss.

TINKER: Yeah.

LINER: And he said, "I want Lieutenant So-and-so to come up here and stand right by me. At attention."

TINKER: Was this the navigator?

LINER: Yes and he came up here, and he said, “Let me tell you all a quick story. This guy nearly cost us thirteen lives last night. Now I could send him back to the States and retrain him, but I’m not goin’ do that. We’re goin’ teach him here.” So, about two and a half weeks goes by and we had a—ECM had a real small office and I was walking up to the office, and I see this guy coming down with some books and it was this lieutenant. So when I got close to him, I saluted him and I said “How you doing?” And he said “I tell you one dang thing, I’ll never get lost again!” (Laughter)

TINKER: Yeah, yeah, called him out.

LINER: So, yeah and Strategic Air Command, those are mistakes that you can’t, you just can’t make.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: That’s just all there is to it. He got lost and he couldn’t, and I thought, “Lord, we may be flyin’ toward Russia!”

TINKER: Well yeah, you’d a been in trouble!

LINER: Yeah, yeah.

TINKER: Now you said y’all messed around with a couple of prop planes. Were those enemy aircraft, you mean?

LINER: Yeah, yeah and they came over, and we, they, we shot at ‘em and this—I didn’t go get my parachute that time! But they knew we were up there, and we were the only ones, everybody else was already gone.

TINKER: They get shot down, or just leave?

LINER: Yeah, no, they left. They’d already ...

TINKER: Did you ever encounter MiGs?

LINER: No.

TINKER: You never did?

LINER: Not that I know of. The—my position in the plane was about right there. (Gestures) Right, there’s a gunner, a gunnery window on the other side, and I had about maybe five sets, sometimes there’d be six.

TINKER: Right, how often were you accompanied by, you know, American fighters for protection?

LINER: None. We never did have ...

TINKER: So, because the ECM was—wherever the ECM was, then the fighters were with the ones that didn't have the ECM.

LINER: That's exactly right. I was just ready to tell you that and, but I had 18 missions, and somebody asked me, said, "Were you scared?" And I said, "Really, I don't guess I was smart enough to be good 'n scared." But you knew one thing about Strategic Air Command, everybody knows their job. They know what they're supposed to be doing, and you very rarely ever found a situation like what this guy did. I couldn't, I couldn't believe of all the planes. We sent 21 planes that night, and I get the dang guy that says, "I don't know where we are". And the feeling was, I was just devastated, but I couldn't say anything.

TINKER: Right.

CORDELL: Dad, tell them about that, your friend that had that encounter with the German. The friend that was a pipe smoker.

DIXIE LINER: Ralph, Ralph Peremski, or something. Had the, had his pipe in his pocket.

LINER: Oh. When I came back I got just extremely lucky and I was assigned to a crew at the 509th Bomb Wing, which was the wing that bombed Nagasaki and Hiroshima and I got the crew, the best crew I could ever possibly get. I just got a big break and they, they didn't want an ECM operator, but they wanted a radio operator and so they interviewed me and selected me. And I walked around with a guy by the name of Ralph Barajas. He was a flight engineer, Master Sergeant. B-A-R-A-J-A-S and I spent a lot of time with Ralph, because Ralph knew a lot about things. And I was young, and I'd already been ...

TINKER: And he'd been in World War II.

LINER: Yeah and he walked across Germany, forty-two and a half miles. And he was tellin' me this story one day when we were together, and I said, "Well what did you do at night?" And he said "Well, I'd sleep in a barn loft, or I'd go out in high grass." And I said "Ralph ...". So, and I accepted that, and I said—he said, "Sometimes," he said, "I kept my shroud lines with me because when I got up in a tree, if it had, if the foliage was pretty heavy, I'd get up in a tree and I'd hook my shroud lines around the limb so if I just fell out, I wouldn't fall to the ground."

TINKER: So you mean he, like, after the war, he just decided he's gonna walk across Germany?

LINER: No, no. This was during the Second World War.

TINKER: This was during the war?

LINER: Yeah, yeah.

TINKER: And he was, would sleep up in the tree?

LINER: Yeah, yeah and I mean, it was an incredible story, and what I'm getting ready to tell you, you won't believe.

TINKER: (Laughs) 'Kay.

LINER: He was smoking his pipe one night, and put it where it always stays and it inadvertently dropped out into the snow and a German came by. Now he's tellin' me this story. A German came by and saw him, or saw the pipe, looked up and captured him. Well, we're walking on down the road, and I finally got up the nerve, I said "Ralph, what about the German?" And he looked at me, I can see it like it was yesterday, he said, "I killed him."

TINKER: Oh, wow.

LINER: And I mean, my, I like—I mean I wasn't ready for him to say that.

TINKER: Yeah, at least so bluntly.

LINER: But he said, "Buddy, I had to kill him." And I said, "Well then what did you do?" And he said, "Well, I went in more barn lofts and got under the hay." But he walked forty-two and a half miles. Now, he was the guy on the crew that I was assigned to, and if we went out to do a special training flight, three or four hours, the aircraft commander would say to Ralph, after he worked on the engines and everything, we thought everything would be ready. If he said, "Number three's got an oil leak in it, I don't think we outta go, turn the plane around, take it in."

TINKER: Mm hmm, Yeah.

LINER: And that's all it took for the, even though we might've known to get the flight in, he wasn't about to go up when Ralph Barajas said, "No." I'd give anything in the world to find him. I doubt if he's alive, but I never shall forget that look he gave me when he turned to me and he said, "I killed him." And I thought, "Gracious to Betsy." So, but I was treated about as well as you could be treated.

TINKER: Yeah.

LINER: They asked me when I got ready to leave, they said, "Would you consider staying in?" The base commander came down there because our pilot was hooked in with the base and he said, "Would you consider staying in?" And I said, "Yeah, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll do it if you make me a major." And they laughed about it and they said, "Well we can't make you a major, but we can get you ready to be a major." But I said, "Guys, I gotta go to the house, I need to go home. I need to see my people."

TINKER: Right.

LINER: So Dixie and me, Dixie's a retired RN (registered nurse) and we been married close to 50 years.

CORDELL: You've been married 59.

TINKER: Close to 60.

LINER: I mean 59 years, and I'll say to her every once and a while ...

CORDELL: Time flies.

LINER: ... "Honey, did you ever think how lucky you are to have me?" And she said, "You better turn that around!" (Laughter) So ...

TINKER: Did y'all meet when you got back, or you already knew, already each other?

DIXIE LINER: Oh yeah. I'd known him my—I lived in Kentucky, but my aunt lived in Athens next door to him.

TINKER: Oh, okay. So when you'd come to visit.

DIXIE LINER: Mm hmm. I really thought his brother was the cutest.

TINKER: Oh, but you had to settle for Buddy! (Laughter)

LINER: So, yeah. We have four children. There are two of 'em, and we, and we're close, we're real close with the children.

TINKER: I was going to ask you, what was Okinawa like?

LINER: Well ...

TINKER: Was there anything there? Just ...

LINER: Nah, not much.

TINKER: ... Huts and ...

LINER: And you really—you know I was there to fly, and you couldn't get your mind off that. You had to pay attention.

TINKER: Right. And you were so young, then, too.

LINER: Yeah, I sure was. And I never saw my other three buddies during the entire ...

TINKER: Again, didn't they know where they went to write to 'em or anything?

LINER: No.

TINKER: What about when you got back home? Did you see ‘em?

LINER: Well, I, yes.

DIXIE LINER: Well one of them was his brother.

TINKER: Oh yeah that’s right.

LINER: Yeah, and, but it was amazing that we joined together and I never laid my eyes on ‘em again, but I had some big, the biggest, the best break that I had was getting that crew at Roswell [Walker Air Force Base, Roswell, NM]. And every time the base commander needed to go to Andrews [Andrews Air Force Base, MD], he would pick our crew, because it was an air refueling. And we changed to a KC-97, from B-29s. We were the first crew to be charged on the KC-97. Now that was good duty and I’ll be honest about it. I was treated in the Strategic Air Command, if you do your job and do it right, there’s just lots of good things that could happen to you, but I didn’t want to stay in the service.

TINKER: Well what was the B-29 itself like? I mean, did—wasn’t it cold up there?

LINER: No.

TINKER: 30,000 feet, and you weren’t cold?

LINER: No, no. We ...

TINKER: Your feet weren’t even cold? (Laughter)

LINER: No, I never did, I was, my eyes—thinking they’d got, your intelligence people would tell you, “You’re going to be in the range of 110 anti-aircraft guns,” well you think “Well what if one of those happened to hit us? What are we goin’ do?” You always had that thought, but you never did talk about it.

TINKER: Mm hmm. Oh yeah.

LINER: You know, you just didn’t do it.

TINKER: Did anybody on the crew have, like, or did you have like, lucky, somethin’ lucky you carried with you, or like some routine you know?

LINER: No, but I tell you what I did do and I did it every single flight I had, I prayed. I carried this ...

TINKER: Before or when you got on the plane?

LINER: No, before, as I was—this was, I carried this little Bible.

TINKER: Oh, this is the one you actually kept with you?

LINER: Yeah.

TINKER: They gave this to you?

LINER: Yeah, and I had a zipper here, at the bottom of my flight stuff and one at the other bottom and I had a .45 in one side and that Bible in the other.

TINKER: Oh! Your mom gave this to you!

LINER: Yeah.

TINKER: (Reading the inside cover of the Bible) May 21, 1951.

LINER: You can read it if you want to. I mean, you can read what she said.

TINKER: Well, uh “Dear Buddy, God will guide and guard you through the days which are to come. Give the best you have to your God, your country and your fellow man. The best will always come ... ” I can’t make that out.

CORDELL: “Back to you” I think is what it ...

TINKER: Yeah, “The best will always come back to you. Lo—“Does it say “Love,” something? Love and love?

LINER: Yeah.

CORDELL: Lots of love.

TINKER: Oh, “Lots of love, Mom.” Aw.

LINER: I carried that with me.

TINKER: That’s wonderful! Yep.

LINER: I still got it, and probably need to read it every once and a while. (Laughter) But my military career did not have a lot of hitches in it. I did exactly what I was asked to do and supposed to do, and I did ...

TINKER: What about aircraft trouble in the beat? Did you ever have any maintenance trouble out of the B-29?

LINER: Yeah, yeah. Now, I didn't have that in combat, but every once in a while we'd have to, what they called feather an engine.

TINKER: Yeah, yeah.

LINER: And you have to, that's the reason that Ralph was such a great guy. We didn't have a lot of it, but we had some of it.

TINKER: Yeah.

LINER: And when he said, "Turn this thing around," he meant exactly what he said. To have a master sergeant say that to a major is a little bit—generally the major in most case will say, "If it's just a small leak ..." Ralph said, if he said, "We need to go back in," that's it, decision made.

TINKER: 'Cause they knew he knew, right.

LINER: And I'd give anything ...

TINKER: So the B-29 held up well, then, after World War II?

LINER: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, yeah.

TINKER: 'Cause I was reading, it said they were, they decommissioned a lot of, retired a lot of 'em.

LINER: Yeah, oh yeah. They—and we, I mean, we were there to fly, and that was our job. And every once and a while, they'd get the flight crews together. They would say, if it was going to be a big target, they'd say "Now you're goin' be in range of a lot of searchlights and anti-aircraft guns, and you gotta get ..."

TINKER: And your equipment never failed? Your ECM equipment never ...

LINER: No, no.

TINKER: Wow. That's really somethin'.

LINER: Yeah, I was lucky and I thought ...

TINKER: You never even had to, like, hit it one time?

LINER: No, no. I didn't even have to hit it. (Laughter) Yeah, because they were told, the ECM people were told, "These machines have gotta be at 100% capacity," and you gotta get—you keep them, the guys know how to do it that are ECM operators.

TINKER: Yeah.

LINER: But we only had seven of us.

TINKER: Yeah, yeah.

LINER: And that was as ECM ...

TINKER: But then there was other people that would, like, do the repairs and maintenance and all that.

LINER: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, yeah. If you had a problem with a—now we lost an engine coming back one night over the ocean, but nobody was concerned about it because it was a good crew.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: And they decided just to cut it off. I just leaned over to one of the crew members, and I said, “Now, I hope that we can fly on three engines!” (Laughs)

TINKER: Oh, yeah. You still got three good ones, you’ll be all right.

LINER: So, let’s see if there was ...

TINKER: So you decided to get out and come on back home?

LINER: Yeah, I ...

TINKER: Did you know what you wanted to do when you came back? Or were you just ...

LINER: Well, I decided to go back to school and I went to school and graduated from Tennessee Wesleyan [College].

TINKER: For? What did you have in mind to do?

LINER: I really wanted to be a superintendent of schools. Dixie and I talked about it. So I—we just, you know, you just do what you have to do and I said—Mom said “I tell you what I’ll do. I’ll make you a deal. I’ll send you to graduate school. And where do you want to go?” So after I graduated from Wesleyan, and so I went to Peabody. We call ‘em, I’ve got some Vanderbilt friends, and I say ...

TINKER: Now where’s Peabody at?

LINER: It’s in Nashville. George Peabody College and they, it used to, it was a great graduate program. And I call these Vanderbilt people, when I see ‘em, “Peabody-Vandy” and they said, “No, Peabody’s not” and I said, “Oh, yes it is!” (Laughter)

TINKER: You went to graduate school for education, that right?

LINER: Yeah, and I got my MA and decided I wanted to be a superintendent, and then I got in coaching.

TINKER: Okay.

LINER: And I coached at the high school, where else did I coach? Um ...

TINKER: What sport?

CORDELL: ... ball.

LINER: Basketball and football. I was assistant coach and did all the scouting for McMinn County High.

DIXIE LINER: He had the B-Team.

TINKER: Okay.

LINER: And was there, what, two or three years? And then ...

DIXIE LINER: Went to Wesleyan. Then you went to Wesleyan.

LINER: Yeah, went to Wesleyan and got my degree and then went to Peabody.

TINKER: Okay.

LINER: And then came back, thought I wanted to be a superintendent and I decided—my family was still in insurance business and I decided I'd get in insurance business.

TINKER: Yeah, so you graduated Peabody in '56. Well it says you used the G.I. Bill. How much, do you remember how that worked?

LINER: I really don't.

TINKER: You don't?

LINER: No, but we ...

DIXIE LINER: It wasn't a lot.

TINKER: It wasn't a lot?

LINER: No.

TINKER: Yeah, mine wasn't either. Oh! And you already had one child when you were going to college.

LINER: Yeah, yeah. We've got a great family. I mean, it's, I'm serious, it's—the good thing about it is I have to ask Dixie every day, “Okay, what's happened today with our crowd?”

TINKER: Yeah. (Laughs)

LINER: We got so many, and she'll generally fill me in on who's doing what.

TINKER: That's sort of how my family is, I call Mom and say, “Well, is there anything going on I need to know about?” (Laughter) My mom's side of the family is pretty big.

CORDELL: Dad was on the first Board of Regents. You can talk about that.

LINER: Yeah, I've been on the—I was on the Tennessee State Board of Regents. I was on the first Board. Appointed by [Governor] Winfield Dunn, and ...

TINKER: Now how did that come to happen?

LINER: Well I'm a pretty strong Republican and I knew his people real well. He called me in, personally.

TINKER: How did you know his people? Just ...

LINER: Yeah, when they'd visit Athens. I would say “Hello” to 'em, and that sort of thing. But I'm, I've been on the city school board. I was a member of the Tennessee State Board of Regents and, you know, it's—and that was the first Board of Regents that was appointed and we did a lot of good things and I enjoyed that experience.

CORDELL: Hall of Fame? The Tennessee—weren't you, wasn't there Softball Tennessee Hall of Fame?

LINER: Yeah, I'm in the Hall of Fame at Tennessee ...

TINKER: What? Really?

LINER: Athletics, and ...

STANSELL: Statesmen.

TINKER: Like, you're in the Tennessee Softball Hall of Fame? I didn't know we ...

LINER: Yeah.

STANSELL: Statesmen. He's one of the statesmen.

TINKER: Oh really?

LINER: They have a yeah, they have a Hall of Fame, and I was just appointed—I guess it was last year, wasn't it?

CORDELL: It was a couple of years ago.

LINER: But I used to play everything. Softball, baseball, anything that was out there.

TINKER: Oh, wow.

LINER: Anything that was out there, I played. So ...

TINKER: Um, you said you all did some good things, Board of Regents ...

LINER: Oh, yeah.

TINKER: Like, you wanna give us a couple examples that you're proud of?

LINER: Well, the Board of Regents was the board that governed all the schools that were not the UT system and that was a major challenge, 'cause you got the community colleges coming down the road.

TINKER: Yes, right.

LINER: And our board was involved in that process, and it was ...

TINKER: Of bringing more community colleges along?

LINER: Right, yeah. It was a big task.

TINKER: I bet.

DIXIE LINER: The Med [Medical] School at East Tennessee State? The Med School at East Tennessee State?

TINKER: Oh, you helped get that going?

LINER: Yeah.

TINKER: Excellent.

LINER: Well, I'm, I do a lot of, I don't put this out on the street, but I do a lot of fundraising and I really like to do it. And if I see somebody, I've got some buddies, I've got about fifteen of 'em, and the chief of police came to see me the other day, and he said, "Buddy, I need some help on some money". So, when I call my buddies this is the way the conversation goes, I'll say,

“How you doin’?” and he’ll say, “How much you need?” and I said, “Well wait a minute! I just called just to see how you are!” (Laughter) He said, “You’re lyin’ like a dog, too!” And so ...

TINKER: We need to sign you up! (Laughter)

LINER: Well I like to raise money and don’t want credit for it, but it’s just something I like to do.

CORDELL: And he still goes to work every day.

TINKER: Do you still go to the insurance company?

LINER: Yeah. Bob Goodfriend, I know you probably have heard that name.

TINKER: Yeah?

LINER: Bob was in our office yesterday, and he said “Buddy, for a man in his 70s, I be danged if you haven’t—if your health’s good,” and I said, “What if I told you that I’m 84 years old?”

TINKER: Yeah. (Laughs)

LINER: And he said “You gotta be kiddin’ me! You can’t be 84.” Dixie and I get up every morning, except Sunday, unless there’s rain and if it’s not much rain, we walk. We been walking thirty years.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

LINER: And you know, I hope somebody says, “Now you’re 101 now, are you ready to go?” (Laughter) So, but I kinda like this life. I like raising money and doing things, and people know in Athens that I don’t want credit for it. I don’t want them to do that.

TINKER: Yeah. That’s funny. You’re, you don’t meet many people that actually enjoy raising money.

LINER: Yeah.

TINKER: It makes a lot of people feel awkward.

LINER: Well, I’ve got a state legislator who came to see me and he, we’re real close friends, and he said, “The one thing that I don’t like to do is raise money, and I want you to help me” and I said, “Well I’ll raise it for you.” His name’s John Forgety, and he’s been over there for some time. He says—and he used to coach. Great guy, isn’t he?

TINKER: But it’s easier to raise money if it don’t have anything to do with you, you’re just trying to help somebody else.

LINER: That's exactly right. And they'll say, "How much you need?" and I'll say, "Well, I need \$250 from you" "How much did you ask 'Ol' John for?"

TINKER: Oh then all have to check, see who is giving what, right? (Laughs)

LINER: Yeah, but I really don't have any major reason, I thought, "You know, they may not know that I graduated from college." So that's the reason I brought that, and there's the release from the government. (Showing papers)

TINKER: Now is that a copy we can keep? It's a copy?

LINER: Yeah, oh, you should have it.

TINKER: Okay, good.

LINER: And here I am, I don't know whether you have this. I brought this, rather than bring the shadow box.

TINKER: Oh, yeah! This is your shadow box?

CORDELL: We had a shadow box done for him, with all his stuff.

TINKER: Now there's a Bible in there. Was that another one you carried?

STANSELL: Yeah, we're not really sure about that. (Laughs) Because that's the one, we think, that he really carried. That's the one that's ...

TINKER: Yeah, it looks a little more worn.

LINER: Yeah.

TINKER: But I'm sure you took that one with you.

LINER: And here's, we had a—they had a function at the church, trying to raise money, and Mom asked me if I wanted to give 'em. And I said, "Yeah, I'm gonna send this. Take \$45 out of my check each month and give it to the church." And I didn't know they were gonna write that.

TINKER: Oh yeah, you sent \$45 every—now how much did you make each month? Do you recall?

LINER: I don't have ...

TINKER: Must have been pretty good with your flight pay, and ...

LINER: Yeah. This is, this is the guy that tried to talk me into staying in the service. (Showing pictures)

TINKER: Oh, okay. I got that.

LINER: He said, "We want you to stay in."

TINKER: Oh, okay.

LINER: But I learned how to, I'll just be honest about it, I learned how to be a man in the service because it's pretty serious stuff when you're in a war.

TINKER: Colonel James MacDonald.

LINER: Yeah.

TINKER: 307th Bomb Wing.

LINER: I believe that's in your file.

TINKER: Yeah, so you had black hair?

LINER: Yeah, and I put, I've had enough peroxide on my hair when I was growing up to even have one thread left. (Laughter)

TINKER: Well thank you for all these copies. This will go really well with the interview.

GESME: So I just have one question. Um, you talked about going to Okinawa directly after your basic training. How did you get there? Did you fly, take a boat ...

LINER: Yeah. Air Force flies you.

GESME: Was that like, was it a long flight, was it a short flight?

LINER: Yeah, it's a pretty good flight. I, see, I didn't realize that I was going there. I thought I was going to be staying in the States, and they decided that let's just send him on to Okinawa. And we didn't have then but three ECM operators, and I mean we flew at night. Did all of our night flying stacked. And as I tell people, "If this guy's a minute and a half slow, and this guy's a minute and a half fast, somebody's going to get some bombs dropped on him." So they warn you, be careful, you have to be precisely. That's the reason I like Strategic Air Command, they, when they give you a charge like that, they mean exactly what they say. So yeah, I flew over—I probably flew over, to be honest about it, by commercial flight. Probably, but I don't remember that for sure.

DIXIE LINER: Well there are some pictures of you, there are some pictures of you in Hawaii. I don't know if that was you're going over ...

LINER: I think that was probably coming back.

TINKER: Well you would've had to stop.

CORDELL: Take a little vacation.

TINKER: Yeah, I'm sure in Hawaii, before you went to Okinawa.

LINER: Yeah, going over, going over was ...

TINKER: Yeah.

LINER: It was ...

TINKER: Well what was it like when you came home? Was there, I mean, did you—was your readjustment easy? You know ...

LINER: No, it was not. I didn't ...

CORDELL: Did you go back to live with Grandmother? Did you move back in with Grandmother?

LINER: Yeah, I moved back in with her, and my mom was such a wonderful person. She had, every once in a while would sit down and say, "Do you miss your buddies?" and I said "Yeah, I really do." I said, "Mom, I've spent four years with this, and I'm sorry that we had to bomb people." I remember the one flight that really concerned me was the flight close to the Yalu River, because of China, and this figure-eight orbit that I was selected to jam. We had all kinds of ECM equipment in there, and we had probably twenty—thirty planes hitting the North Korean side, but if one of those bombs dropped on Japan [China], and I said, and I was trained in that additional equipment, and I said, "I'll do it, yeah. I'll be happy." They asked me if I, I said, "I will do it, yes sir." And we set out there, that was the longest flight I had. Now I think it was like ten hours. That's a long time to stay in the air.

TINKER: Did you ever, when you got back home, did you ever have second thoughts about having gotten out?

LINER: No. No, because ...

TINKER: You missed your buddies, but you wouldn't a went back?

LINER: Yeah, no. I don't think so, because I was treated as well as I could possibly be treated and I guess it was because I was an ECM operator. That was a new era in there, and that's ...

TINKER: Yeah it was. It was brand new.

LINER: Yeah, it sure was. And we, these flight crews would come in the next day, and the thing that used just to amaze me is the intelligence people would tell you exactly what you hit. It's unbelievable. They'd say, "You got 85% of this." and you say, "How sharp are those people?"

TINKER: Right.

LINER: But they would tell you how much damage you did. So, any rate.

TINKER: I guess 'cause those level reconnaissance planes would fly over and take pictures, is that right?

LINER: Yeah, probably so.

TINKER: Did they ever show you photos of the aftermath?

LINER: No, we never did.

TINKER: They would just tell you?

LINER: Yeah, they'd let us know and, but over there, most of the airmen were there for one reason and that's to fly and the mechanics. They kept those planes ... good shape. Sent good mechanics over there. Any rate, this little thing right here stayed right with me.

TINKER: Your little Bible.

LINER: And I thought to myself, "If I'm shot down, I hope I can use the Bible side and not my .45 size, side!" (Laughter) I kept that .45 there.

TINKER: Did you? You really thought that?

LINER: Yeah. You know, you always think, "Well what if we were shot down and I had to parachute out?" And I've got, and we go through that treatment, survival ...

TINKER: Yeah, survival training.

LINER: And it's tough. But you learn how to ...

TINKER: Yeah, I've always heard it's, that survival training's though.

LINER: Yeah, but at any rate, I got a big break coming back, and got a great crew, and I just couldn't ask anything to be—so I decided I want go back and get my education and finish everything and I ended up not being a coach, or a superintendent.

TINKER: Yeah, you ended up in insurance. (Laughs)

LINER: And I've been in insurance business all these years. (Laughter)

TINKER: And you've enjoyed it? The business?

LINER: Oh yeah. Yeah and I have a, you know, my son and I, he used to be president of this agency and then we broke off and stayed about eight or nine years and they called and said, "We want you and Chris back. Y'all need to get back up here".

TINKER: Yeah, mm hmm.

LINER: So, and it's a big agency. We've got thirty-five people.

TINKER: Oh wow, yeah.

LINER: Oh, it's a big agency and the guy, the president, is a friend of mine, and in fact, I hired him when I was president. He said, "I tell you what we're going to do. I know you like to fundraise, and I know you like to do PR [Public Relations] and don't want credit for it, so we're going to set you up in office and you just do what you need to do." So that's what I'm doing.

TINKER: Well good.

LINER: If I want to come in at 10:00, well, I come in at 10:00. But ...

TINKER: After your walk.

LINER: Yeah, after our—the walk ...

DIXIE LINER: And we walk at 6:30.

TINKER: Yeah. Oh my Lord. You walk in the dark.

LINER: Oh yeah. (Laughter) Yeah, yeah. That's exactly right, but it's, this part of my life was just—I just didn't have any hitches in it.

TINKER: That's good.

LINER: I treated people the way I would want to be treated and it was good. I wish I could find some of them.

DIXIE LINER: Well, one of the fellas that he went in with lives down the street from us now in a retirement village.

TINKER: Oh, which one?

DIXIE LINER: He's not in the best shape, so he doesn't get out and walk, but ...

TINKER: Which one was it?

DIXIE LINER: Johnny Milton.

TINKER: Oh, really?

LINER: Johnny.

TINKER: Well nice.

LINER: Yeah, Johnny, Johnny's not in good physical condition, and ...

TINKER: But he remembers you?

LINER: Oh yeah! Yeah, he likes for me to come see him.

TINKER: Well good.

LINER: And, but then ...

TINKER: What did he end up doing? You found out later, right?

LINER: Well, his family owned a beer distributorship, and they had a lot of money. A whole lot of money. Johnny, I never saw, after ...

CORDELL: And his last name his Miller?

DIXIE LINER: Milton.

TINKER: I mean what did he end up doing in the service?

LINER: Oh, well, see, I don't kn—I should know this, but those other three I never laid my eyes on them again in that four years.

TINKER: Yeah.

LINER: And I don't ...

DIXIE LINER: Eddie.

CORDELL: Except Uncle Ed.

TINKER: Yeah. What did your ...

DIXIE LINER: He never went overseas, though, did he?

LINER: No, I don't think so.

TINKER: Oh, he didn't? He stayed stateside?

LINER: No, no. Yeah, but ...

TINKER: He must of got an office job or something.

LINER: Probably and he's a—his health is not good, but he's a good man.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

LINER: But I don't, you know I learned a lot time ago you'll see in one of these things, my momma use to tell me this, "Pray, pray hard" and I did do that. By myself. And then, and some of the crews I was assigned to, I was only assigned to for that mission.

TINKER: Right.

LINER: So I didn't have to stay with the same crew and after I got back, I had the same crew, and it was a joy. Absolute joy. I loved it.

TINKER: Now I noticed in your, on your questionnaire that your father passed away not too long after you graduated college.

LINER: Right.

TINKER: Like, 10 years or so after?

LINER: Right. Let me tell you what happened. I go through four years of that, and my brother and I one Sunday afternoon were on our way to Philadelphia, Tennessee, and in the old road, Highway 11, there's a hill. And our car came around a car on top of that hill, and hit us head on, and I hadn't been out of the service probably two weeks.

TINKER: My word.

LINER: I hit the windshield and my brother's, if my brother's arm had not come across to try to brace me, probably it would have killed me and I said, "I spend four years in the Air Force tryin' to get back ..."

TINKER: Flying, yeah.

LINER: "... and dang if I don't nearly get killed." And it broke my nose, I think what, thirty or forty stitches in here. And I asked the guy, he was from Athens, I said "Why did you do that?" and he said "I was tryin' to impress my girlfriend." And I said "If my brother's arm hadn't come across, I'd have gone through the windshield, I'd probably a been killed."

TINKER: Yeah, you probably been dead.

LINER: So ...

TINKER: So what happened to your dad, though? How did he end up passing away?

DIXIE LINER: He had a stroke.

LINER: Dad, unfortunately was an alcoholic and his health just ...

TINKER: Just poor health?

STANSELL: He had a stroke. 'Cause we were ...

LINER: And he had a stroke, didn't he?

CORDELL: Yeah, he was ...

LINER: Great guy.

STANSELL: We were, what, I first or second ...

TINKER: That's sad.

DIXIE LINER: That's the funny part of it. They brought his dad to the hospital that I was working in.

TINKER: Oh.

DIXIE LINER: Well I was seeing somebody else, but Buddy came around and so that's how we ...

TINKER: That's how you got reacquainted?

DIXIE LINER: Yes.

TINKER: 'Cause your dad had the stroke, went in the hospital?

LINER: Yeah, and I ...

DIXIE LINER: And I was at UT Stat [Emergency].

LINER: And I told her, I said, "You know, she's pretty impressive, I need to talk to her!"
(Laughs)

TINKER: So, he stole you away from whoever you ...

DIXIE LINER: We had, you know, gone to school together, lived next door, my aunt lived next door to his family.

TINKER: Well see how things work out?

LINER: Yeah, frie—family. We got the same issues in our family that anybody, any other family has. But we're at least civil enough ...

CORDELL: Sometimes.

LINER: ... that if there is a disagreement we can get it worked out.

TINKER: Civil's good, yeah.

LINER: Yeah and it's been ...

TINKER: Now I noticed your dad was born in 1898, that is that average age for people that went to World War I. Was there a reason that he ...

LINER: He didn't go.

TINKER: Was there, I mean, he didn't get drafted?

LINER: No and I don't—I never did ask him why. But he was really ...

TINKER: I wonder if he had a medical condition or something.

LINER: I betcha he did. I bet you, you knew that.

DIXIE LINER: 'Cause there weren't, four or five of the brothers?

LINER: Yeah. Erbie.

TINKER: Yeah, because 1898's the average birth year for World War I servicemen.

CORDELL: Wow.

TINKER: I noticed he didn't go in.

LINER: But it amazes me that when we were talking to—what was, what's your guy's name?

CORDELL: Jerry.

LINER: Jerry.

TINKER: Oh, yeah, Jerry.

LINER: Was talking to Jerry, I said, “Jerry,” he said, “Buddy, we can’t find people that were in the Korean War. They’re dying. They’re gone. And it’s a tragedy. ‘Cause we really would love to hear these stories.”

TINKER: Mm hmm.

LINER: And I said, he said, “Would you think about this?” and I said, “Yes, sir. I sure will, I’ll be willing.”

TINKER: Well I’m glad you did.

CORDELL: I have one question. And I don’t think I was clear, the—Jerry mentioned this interview going to the Library of Congress, in Washington ...

TINKER: Well it can.

CORDELL: ... But I think is it an on-camera interview, or I wasn’t sure if there was two interviews.

TINKER: No. I mean, anybody can donate, like, I’ll give you a copy of this, you know, on a CD or whatever. And like, if you want to donate it, like from the family to the Library of Congress.

CORDELL: Yes.

TINKER: It’ll be there as well.

CORDELL: Okay.

TINKER: But we do have a few there. I remember we sent quite a few up there, years ago, but our collection is separate.

CORDELL: Okay, that’s what I was thinking.

TINKER: You know, like, that’s just more of a public, yeah. The public can, like somebody at home could sit and interview their family member and then send the copy to the, yeah.

CORDELL: Right, and send it, I see.

TINKER: But anyway, well I guess we’re done, right? Thank you, thank you for coming.

LINER: Well I had a wonderful experience in the Air Force.

TINKER: Well I did, too! I admit, I had a hard time readjusting when I got out. I missed all my buddies. (Laughs)

LINER: (Laughs) Yeah. Where you from, originally?

TINKER: Gatlinburg (Tennessee).

LINER: How 'bout that. Well, thank you so much.

TINKER: Thank you.

-----END OF TAPE-----