

Transcript of Interview with Dr. Otto F. Smith
Interviewed by Kathy Bradford November 11, 2008, Brigham City, Utah
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Kathy Bradford: Today is Tuesday, November 11, 2008, and I'm speaking with Dr. Otto Smith at his home in Brigham City. First I would like you to tell me about where and when you were born, your family, things that happened in your life before you went into the military.

Otto Smith: I was born in Randolph, Utah, August 4, 1921. My mother was a daughter of pioneer families that settled in Randolph. There were Rexes and Broughs. My mother's maiden name was Brough. We're related (second cousin or so) to Clayton Brough, the weatherman on Chanel 4.

KB: Are you related to the Rexes here in town – Ron Rex and his family?

OS: Yes, he's a second cousin, too. In those days jobs were kind of hard to find. My father had been a shepherd, farmer and rancher most of his life. Then we moved to Evanston. We had an uncle who worked for the Union Pacific Railroad in Evanston, and he asked my dad to come up there. He came up and took a job as a machinist's helper. That was when I was 3 or 4. It was before I started school. During the slack times on the railroad, he would go back down to Randolph and work for a fellow by the name of Billy Kennedy. He was a sheep raiser, and there were big old horns on the rams. My dad would shear them and brand them and fix the fences when they would break down. I followed him out into the corral one day, and he told me, "Don't you come in here! These animals are dangerous."

I went in anyway, and my dad was in with the dog. One of the buck sheep started to back away from me. I just watched him. I don't know how old I was, maybe 3. He just came and hit me right square in the abdomen and knocked me down. I got up on my hands and knees just in time to get knocked down again. The third time it knocked me out. My dad and some of the helpers came and rescued me and took me into the ranch house. I remember them putting me on something. I said it was an ironing board, but it was a table of some kind until I came to. Apparently I didn't have any ill effects from it, but I learned a lesson to stay away from the buck sheep. Intermittently he would work in Randolph, and then he would go back and work in the shops there in Evanston.

KB: Did you live in Evanston all the time?

OS: This I think was before they even bought a house. We lived primarily wherever he could find work. We didn't have a house then. He came back to Evanston, and they bought a little house in North Evanston for \$1700 on a 30-year contract. He got a job there as a machinist apprentice, and he went through his apprenticeship there in repair shops. It was in the Union Pacific reclamation plant. They brought motor cars in and engines and track tools. They'd manufacture them and fix them up. He was mostly a gas engine repairman.

I started school in Evanston. I went to the Brown School about three doors away from our house, which went through the fourth grade. We had two teachers – one teacher would teach the first and second grade in one class, and the other teacher would teach third and fourth grade in the other half of the

school.

KB: Did you have siblings?

OS: Yes, I'm the oldest of five. I had a brother born about 3½ years after I was born, then a sister born about 3½ years after his birth. Then in about 3½ years another brother was born, and finally 12 to 14 years later my folks had a "catch colt". So there were four boys and a girl.

KB: So you probably didn't walk to school with any of them.

OS: No, I didn't walk uptown across the tracks until I started the fifth grade. We would take our dime to buy a bottle of milk and take a sack lunch. I went to high school in Evanston, and during the Depression, the railroad, instead of laying off all of their workers, let all of the workers work ten days a month. Then the rest of the time they didn't have a job. So my dad mined coal and was paid in coal, which he sold for cash. We sheared sheep for mutton. We raised chickens in the back yard. We had our own eggs and chickens and usually a few "old biddy" ewes that we were feeding, and we'd have mutton the year round. We'd also go out and hunt game for wild meat.

We built an ice house out of railroad ties, just like logs. The log ice house was filled with sawdust. The railroad had ponds on the southern part of Evanston where they harvested ice for the refrigerator cars, and they would ice the cars there in Evanston. We'd go skating on these ponds in the wintertime. When the railroad was through harvesting the ice, the city people could go out there and harvest what they wanted, or go skating on it. We cut the ice, and we'd load it into wagons. We had teams of horses to haul the ice down to our ice house. We would help other people, so there was a big bunch of people that would harvest ice at the same time. They'd fill our ice house, and then they'd fill somebody else's. We would use the ice to put in the icebox. We'd put a large cube of ice in the top, and it would keep the refrigerator cool. As the ice would melt, water ran down a tube, and we had a pan to catch the water underneath the ice box.

KB: Do you feel that you had a good childhood?

OS: Yes, I thought it was a great childhood. We were poor, and my parents didn't have any money to spare. We were just like everybody else. We'd go out and peddle handbills for the theater for a show ticket to see the Saturday matinée. We had a big back yard, and my dad had the best garden in North Evanston. We raised all of our own potatoes, beets and carrots. We would put the carrots in a big barrel of dry sand, and we would have fresh carrots all through the winter. Mother was a big canner. She canned bushels of peaches, apricots, and apples and made jelly and jam. I inherited a little of that desire to preserve food, I guess. That's why my leg hurts so much; I just canned some applesauce. Norm Anderson brought me a bushel of apples, and I stood up most of the day canning about half of them.

I went to high school in Evanston. I was never very athletically inclined. I couldn't catch balls; I couldn't dribble; I was always the last one picked to play on the teams. So when it was time to go to high school, I either had to take P.E. or the band. I took the band and played a trombone. The kid that played first trombone lived in my neighborhood, so he taught me, and then the teacher would teach us a little bit. I learned most of it from the first chair. We were a marching band, too, and we'd always come

down to Ogden for the Pioneer Days and march in the parade. We went to Price, Utah one year. We had white duck pants and kind of a purple satin blouse type with kind of a high collar and long puffed sleeves, and we wore a little tam. They were homemade uniforms, but they were nice. We were at Price for kind of an intermountain band contest, and we won the marching prize. When we got up there to play, we had to play some impromptu music without having seen the score. We had about 15 minutes to look it over. The band teacher told all the good players, "Watch it here. Watch it here." He told all the rest of us who were just in the first year of band, "I don't want you guys to even make a peep. Just put your horn up and pretend you're playing, but don't make a noise." We won the impromptu competition, but it wasn't due to me.

KB: I had cousins who lived in Evanston. You might know them. My uncle was Kenneth Morgan who had a little store on Summit Street. His wife Maude was my dad's sister.

OS: Yes, that Morgan Store was just right across from the new high school that they built. My ninth grade class was the first class into it. After that, just the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades went to the high school. I was in the first class which went to high school in the ninth grade. I liked high school. I liked building. I took all the architectural drawing and shop work I could because I was planning to be an architect. I got to shingle the outhouse and do a few minor projects at home. After I'd had some shop classes, I built some wardrobes in the bedroom for my mother. I had planned to go to the University of Wyoming and take architecture. In fact, I attended one year before the war.

KB: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

OS: Actually I was at my girlfriend's home. I didn't have enough money to go to college. My parents didn't have enough money to send me to school the year after I got out of high school in 1939; and therefore I worked for the railroad on a section gang out at Wasatch. We'd go out and change rails and repair the tracks and make sure that the tracks were suitable for the trains to go over without derailing. We'd do all the repair work and go in and clean the cinders out of the tunnels. I graduated in '39 and my wife June graduated in '40. I started dating her when she was a senior; she was born and raised in Evanston. I saved my money and bought an old Model T Ford sedan for \$12.50 and two more tires for \$12.50. I drove it to Wasatch to work every day. I saved my money so I could go the next year to college. On the way out to work one time, I had it floorboarded, and I was going about 50 miles an hour. When I heard loud banging in the engine compartment and saw smoke coming out, I stopped and raised the hood. The engine had thrown a rod right through the crankcase, and the rod had just hooked right onto the hole that it made. I just pushed the car off to the side of the road; after work I hitchhiked a ride back into Evanston. My dad came out, and we towed it back in and put it in the back garage we had out by the ice house. I helped my dad change engines in it. I was his helper with the engine-repair work that he did for the neighbors.

I didn't go back to college until the 1940-41 school year. I went to the University of Wyoming at Laramie. I took all of the engineering courses, but you had to take all of the other courses, too, like psychology, sociology and English. I got good grades in all my engineering courses, but I didn't get very good grades in the others. I even had to take a basic chemistry course for a couple of quarters, and I got D's in them. I thought, *Engineers and architects don't need to know anything about chemistry*. Learning chemistry was lowest on my priority list.

When I went to the university, I worked in the Commons washing dishes (Commons was a student cafeteria) with a friend from the wrestling team. I did have to take P.E. at Laramie, and because I couldn't play any of the ball games, I took wrestling. I was good at wrestling, and I won in my weight class the first year I was there. I was 6' tall and 135 pounds. I couldn't beat the national champ who was 135, so I had to go up to 145 pounds. I weighed 135 pounds, but would wrestle at the 145-pound weight. I got the letterman's sweater, and I was a good wrestler. I finished that year, and then I went back to work for the railroad again. I saved money to go back to college the next year. Later I was able to get a job as a blacksmith helper down in the blacksmith shop where June's dad worked.

KB: Were you already dating her at that time?

OS: I was dating her from '40 to '42. In December of '41, one of my aunt's died – my mother's sister. She discovered she had cancer just about the time she found out she was pregnant. She was an RN, and she insisted on carrying the pregnancy to term, and had a nice little boy. She only lived about a year and a half before she died. So when I came home from Laramie for her funeral, rather than going home, I walked up to where June lived and knocked on the door. She came out in her housecoat and threw her arms around me. I gave her a big hug. She was so warm and steamy I thought, *Gee, this is great!*

In December of '41, I was at June's house listening to the radio when they announced the attack at Pearl Harbor. I had always wanted to fly, and I'd taken maybe one or two lessons in a Piper Cub from a fellow that had a local air service, Lawrence Madula. Shortly after the war broke out, I noticed an article in the paper that the Army Air Corps were accepting cadets with less than two years of college. Before the war, you had to have two years of college to apply for the cadet program. After the war began, we could take an equivalency examination in lieu of two years of college. If you passed that you could enter the Flying Cadets program. My cousin, my best friend and I all went to Cheyenne for the exam. All of our parents had train passes, so it didn't cost us anything to go to Cheyenne. There must have been about 200 kids there taking the test. Out of the 200, about 35 to 40 passed the exam. The next day when we had our physical examination, there were only about 11 of those who passed the equivalency exam who also passed the physical exam.

KB: Did your friends make it along with you?

OS: They did. All three of us got in. They put us on what they called “an indefinite leave” and just sent us back home. We'd had to register for the draft prior to that. My friends were home about six weeks, and they got called up to go down to the Central Training Command at San Antonio's Kelly Field. They went down there and took their primary training, but I didn't get called. So I just continued to work at the blacksmith shop. I was working nights at the time, and would sleep, play and date during my “off” hours. June and I had talked about getting married. We had decided to wait until the war was over; then the next day we said, “Well, we should plan something now.”

We finally decided to get married on May 2, 1942. So we set that date and got married in June's home. My uncle Bill Price was the Bishop, and he married us. My parents were there along with her parents, her sister, her brother-in-law and her best friend. That was the size of the wedding party. My dad let us borrow his car, and said, “You can go to Salt Lake and have a honeymoon.”

We went to Salt Lake for two days. When we got back, June's friends gave her a wedding shower; they'd planned to give the shower the day we came back, and they did. I was just Mr. Gofer all day long – with hot rolls, fixings for sandwiches and drinks. The next day, I got the telegram stating that I had to report to Cheyenne the following day.

KB: So how many days had you been married when you had to report?

OS: Five days. I went to Cheyenne where they issued us uniforms and put us on a troop train that took us out to Santa Ana, California to start the ground school portion of the flight training. That's where you take silhouettes of planes and ships and learn what they call "ship and aircraft identification". They'd flash them on the screen, and you'd have to tell them what type of ship or airplane it was. We learned that, and we also learned to take and send Morse code. In the six weeks we were there, we had to learn to send and receive 15 words a minute; that wasn't really too difficult when we got to the end of that course. We had finished the course there in Santa Ana.

Our squadron was what they called a "fill-in squadron". They'd take two or three guys and send them to one school and send two or three more guys to another school. They did it all alphabetically, and when they got down through the M's, they ran out of positions in existing schools. So they said, "You guys will have to stay another six weeks, and we'll see that you get put in the first class that goes out. You'll all be together; you won't be scattered around."

We thought that was great. We had to learn to send and receive Morse code at 30 words a minute, which was hard, and to learn more naval identification, aircraft engines, navigation and map reading. Those were the ground courses that we had to take.

KB: Did you enjoy doing all that?

OS: Oh yes! It was great. I loved every minute. I could hardly wait to get in a plane. When it came time to send our squadron off to the first flight class, which is called Primary, we were sent to Fort Stockton, Texas, which was a beautiful little town. It had a large free-flowing well that came out of the ground, and it just filled the canal. Stockton had a nice park, a swimming pool and a music box. The water that came out of the ground to drink had all kinds of salts in it, including Epsom salts. We couldn't drink the water in any of the drug stores or restaurants unless they had special filtered water there for us to drink. Otherwise everybody would get diarrhea.

We still had to take more aircraft and naval identification and more navigation, and then we'd go out and fly with an instructor. Most of the instructors were civilian pilots who had gone into what they then called the Army Air Corps. It wasn't until halfway through the war that they changed the name to the Air Force. We were under the auspices of the Army; that's why they called it the Army Air Corps. Most students were expected to solo by the time they'd had ten or twelve hours of dual training, and most of us did.

KB: That must have been exciting to solo!

OS: Oh yes, it really was! Those planes had open cockpits, and we used the Stearmans. We wore the leather helmets where you plugged on a piece of rubber tubing. They called them Gossport tubes. Then that tubing would run up through the frame of the airplane to the instructor, and he'd have the same thing, too. For the tests as you went along, they had Army Air Corps pilots take you out on your check rides to see if you had learned everything you should have and if you were proficient enough. If you didn't pass, you'd be sent back to being a navigator or something else. I had passed the 20-hour test with no problems, and I'd soloed about the time one usually solos. I think it was around 12 hours. We came to the 40-hour check, and I was scheduled to have this Major "So-and-so", who was to do my check ride. All the guys said, "Oh, too bad you got him. He's terrible. He washes out most guys."

So we got out by the plane, and he told me what he wanted me to do. We got in and started the plane, and I took off and flew out of the traffic pattern. I had to make a turn to the right and then a 45-degree turn to the left and move away from the people that were flying around the field. He turned around in the seat and had this funnel hooked on to the rubber tube that hooked into my ears and was hollering into this funnel and pointing. I just shook my head. I couldn't hear him. I hollered back in my funnel that I couldn't hear him and what he was saying to do. I had been with my instructor just the hour before, and we'd gone out and practiced the things I should know – some lazy S's back and forth across the country road and fence, forced landings, spins and stalls and all the other things we had to learn to do. So I just pointed at my ears, "Sorry. I can't hear you."

He wanted me to do a Chandelle maneuver. That's where you come flying down the bottom part of a loop and then you get up on top of the loop. Then you turn over and don't finish the loop. You just fly straight in the opposite direction; I did that. All the time he was pounding on the side of the plane and shaking his fists at me. When I finished, he circled his fingers like it was an okay maneuver. I did several others, and he reacted the same way. If I'd been able to hear, I would have been scared to death. and I would have washed out immediately. I kept flying, and he would mimic a maneuver with his hands showing what he wanted me to do next. I'd go do it, and he'd go through the same thing hollering as loud as he could and banging on the side of the airplane. When I'd get through, he would give me the "okay" sign again. We were up flying around about an hour and came back in and landed at the field. He got out and said, "Smith, you've given me the best 40-hour ride I've ever had. In fact, I'm going to sign you off on the 60-hour ride. You won't have to take that test."

But he just scared the devil out of me while he was doing it. I didn't care; I couldn't hear him.

Later we went to Pecos, Texas, and my mother and June came down on the train after I arrived there. It was kind of a nice little town. It was a little farther east and north of Fort Stockton where we had been. A group of wives got together and rented some rooms in a little hotel in Pecos, Texas. They'd go down to a soda fountain and get their meals. We'd get a weekend pass and go into town to see them on weekends but, but we couldn't stay in town. We had to be back on base by 11 o'clock. In Pecos we flew a metal airplane. It was called a BT-13-A. It was metal, and it still had two cockpits, but you had a canopy, so you could pull the canopy over, and you didn't have to wear goggles. We had to do essentially the same thing with that airplane that we had to do with the Stearman. It was just a bigger plane with a lot stronger motor. Then we had to start taking "cross-countries" where we flew from Pecos out to El Paso in the daytime. Then after it got dark, we'd fly back to Pecos at night. This was in the days when we were still using the old "A" and "N" beam. In Morse code, A is a dot dash, and then the N is dash dot. So if you've got a transmitter that's sending it out, it will send an A out to one

quadrant and it will send an N out to the next quadrant. Right in the middle the signals kind of overlap each other. The dot covers the dash, and the dash covers the dot -- so you get a solid signal. It goes zzzzzz instead of the Morse code. We had to follow that back until we got to Wink, Texas. Then we were supposed to pick up a light. At that time, they had these circling lights about every ten miles for the airlines. A light would flash out a Morse code signal for Wink, like a WK in lights. So it would be a long dash and then a short dash of light, so you'd be able to distinguish letters. Then we had to turn left and go north up to Pecos.

One of our friends got to Wink and missed the turnoff. He didn't notice Wink, and so he just kept flying on down the air line until he was about out of gas. It was a fairly bright moonlight night, so he just went down and landed in a farmer's field, and then called the base. They went down, picked him up, and had some instructors go with some gas and fly the plane back the next day. I don't know whether you've heard of Wrong-Way Corrigan. He was flying from Florida to someplace up in the northeastern part of the United States, and he ended up in Ireland so they called him Wrong-Way Corrigan. This kid was named Foster Renwick, so we called him Wrong-Way Renwick.

We were there at that Basic school for about six weeks, and then they separated us into whether you wanted to go into a multi-engine school or to be a fighter pilot. They liked to have the fighter pilots small because they were kind of confined in a small cockpit, but for the bomber and cargo pilots, size didn't matter. Bomber and cargo plane cockpits are big enough that anyone could fit into any of them. I decided to go to multi-engine school. In addition to being six feet tall, I figured planes with more than one engine were likely to be safer than those with just one engine. We moved to Marfa, Texas, and because the town of Marfa was probably about 95% Mexican at the time, the Base Commander wouldn't allow any of the wives to stay in Marfa. When we got to Marfa, he said, "There's a real nice little town up in the Davis Mountains called Alpine. I'm sure you'll be able to find a place for your wives up there."

In Alpine they had a "normal school". In those days they called them normal schools, but they were schools for teachers to get teaching certificates -- about a two-year school. A widow lady was the Alpine postmistress, and she had a big house and didn't have anybody to stay in it, so she put up about nine or ten of these wives in her home, like a boarding house. We would go into Alpine and see them on weekends. Our training there was to fly two-engine planes. The first one was a Cessna fabric-covered plane. We flew that one for a little while. I think it had a fixed landing gear. That means the gear was down all the time. Then about halfway through, we went into what they called AT-9, which had retractable landing gear. The AT-9 had a different kind of flaps, and it had pitch control on the propeller, so you could turn the propeller to take a bigger bite of air or a smaller bite of air. You always had to have it at a low pitch to take off, so you'd have a lot of power and high rpm. It was a real nice plane to fly. One day I was taking my check ride with another Army pilot, and I took off. The pattern was such that after you took off, you had to make a turn to the right and then gain about 500 feet, and then make a 45-degree turn to the left. That put us right over the foothills of the Davis Mountains. As I was going, I could feel more and more pressure on the wheel. I just kept pulling harder and harder, and the plane just kept wanting to go down to the ground. The plane has a trim tab on the elevator. They have them on the elevator -- the flat part of the back part of the plane. They have a little tab there, and you can turn it up, or you can turn it down to trim the airplane so that it will fly straight and level with hands off the controls. I could see this wheel turning down out of the corner of my eye. The instructor

was over there reeling the trim tab. He was heading me into the mountains with the trim tab. As soon as I saw what was happening, I just put my hand down on the trim tab, and he stopped turning it. I trimmed it back up. He didn't mention it afterwards, and neither did I. He just did it to see if I was on the ball, to see that there was something going wrong with the plane, and I had to figure it out.

I was in Marfa, Texas up to Feb. 6, 1943. When I graduated from "Cadet School," got my "wings" and Second Lieutenant Bars. The Air Corps then assigned me to a troop carrier squadron that was stationed in Austin, Texas, teaching us to fly the old Gooney Bird, the C-47. These were the airliners of the time. The C-47 was the Air Force designation, but they were the same airliner airplane all plushed out inside. Some of them had sleepers, and others had nice plush, velvets seats. They were called C-53's. Most of the planes that we flew there in Austin were private planes from the airlines that the Army Air Corps had commandeered. We had to learn to fly them.

KB: Wasn't that a lot more difficult to fly than the small planes?

OS: Oh yes, I'll say. I guess the planes that we flew in advanced flight school had about 450 horsepower engines, and these had close to 1,000 – about 950 horsepower per engine. They're supposed to be able to fly on single engine. They don't do it very well, but they will. I tried it once. We had to go up and do a lot of instrument flying with actual instruments rather than in the "Link trainer". If you've been down to the Hill Air Force museum and seen that little yellow and blue box that you get in, that's the Link trainer. You get in there, and it's all actuated with hydraulics and air pressure. Then it will make a track on a sheet with instructors out here watching. They'll tell you, "Now make a 60 degree turn to the right." And you do that. "Now you've got to hold your altitude and your air speed and your amount of turn not get steeper or shallower." Those were the Link trainers. We utilized Link trainers or flight simulators at every level of our flight training.

In Austin one day, we were doing steep turns. The instructor would take five students. We were second lieutenants by that time, and each one of us would have an hour of flying on instruments, where they would put a blinder up on the windshield so you couldn't see out. We had to fly just by the instruments. We were all doing steep turns, and it was a really hot day with lots of thermals, and the airplane was bouncing around. We'd taken half of the test in the morning and the other half after lunch. I'd eaten a big lunch and after we got up there, we had to sit in the back while the other guy was flying his hour up front. The airplane was bouncing around, and I finally got airsick. The plane had a dispenser for the "urp cups", but there was nothing in them. The closer we got to finishing the flight the sicker I got. I finally took my cap off and unfolded the peak that was on it (it was one of those cloth caps), and I just unloaded my stomach in that cap. It barely held everything. When I got out, my cap and its contents were dropped into the garbage can. That was the only time I ever got airsick.

After we spent about six weeks in Austin, we reached the first time June and I got a chance to live together. We rented a little upstairs apartment not too far from the Capitol. We didn't have anything to cook with, so we just went to a hardware store and bought some cheap stuff. We bought one of those 9"x12" cake pans out of glass. We were sure it was Pyrex, or oven proof. I said, "Let's make a peach shortcake tonight. I haven't had one of those in a long time." She didn't know how, so I just made it from scratch and put it in the oven. In about a half hour I heard this Bang like a rifle shot. I went over and looked in the oven, and the dish had split right apart and tipped back and dumped all of the cake

batter down in the bottom of the oven. What a mess! We cleaned it up, and after that, we made sure we had Pyrex if we were going to have anything to bake.

When we finished the Austin, Texas, school, they sent us to Columbus, Georgia. That's where the first operating troop carrier unit was that I joined. It was the 314th Troop Carrier Group, and I was assigned to 32nd Troop Carrier Squadron. We would go out and learn to fly formation -- tight formation, where we were right behind the other guy's propeller, and one on each side. We'd haul paratroopers who were learning to jump. We would have to slow the plane down to about 95 miles an hour, so it wasn't too fast or too much wind for them to jump into.

KB: Did you have anyone crash during that time?

OS: Not there -- to my knowledge. Not at all. We didn't fly that tight of formation. When we eventually got to England and had to do a lot of night flying in formation, they put little blue lights on the top of the wing. Then they would cover them up with a hood, so if you got too up high you couldn't see the light, or if you got too far out to the side, you couldn't see it. You had to be right at the 15-degree angle to be able to see that blue light, which meant you were in the proper formation position. Each engine had an exhaust stack so that you couldn't see the blue flame from the exhaust coming out and because they disguised the flames with a muffler on each exhaust stack.

KB: When did you go to England?

OS: That was in March of 1944. I remember I took several boxes of oranges along, even though our plane was overloaded, because I knew the people up in England were rationed and didn't have any oranges, so we just gave them to people.

In May 1943, the whole troop carrier wing flew over to Africa after we went through a certain amount of training and maneuvers, and our squadron took off from West Palm Beach in Florida to Puerto Rico on May 10, 1943. That flight took us almost nine hours, something like that. We stayed there overnight, and the next day we flew from Puerto Rico to Trinidad, which took eight hours. There was an air base there. We would go to the mess and get fed. We would gas up our planes and check them out to make sure they were okay. Then the next morning we took off and flew from Trinidad to Natal, Brazil. It was the farthest point east on the tip of South America. We stayed there overnight after flying almost ten hours. We flew from there and landed on a tiny little island in the middle of the Atlantic called the Ascension Island. That's where they had just shaved off the top of a volcano and made a runway. We landed going uphill a little bit and then back downhill a little bit. The island was crowded with planes because that was the only place planes could stop in the middle of the Atlantic and get refueled. I had been issued an Elgin wristwatch when I started. I got halfway to the Ascension Island and looked at my watch, and it was had stopped. Of course, we had clocks on the instrument panel, and the other pilot had a watch. The crew chief, the radioman and navigator had watches. I shook my watch and couldn't hear it tick. I told the radioman, "Bring your instrument kit up here."

I put a towel across my lap and took my watch apart. I found a little ruby jewel that had come off the balance staff and was just lying there loose. I picked it up and asked the crew chief, "Have you got any gasket shellac?"

He said, "I think so."

So I took hold of the little ruby jewel and dipped it in a little daub of shellac, put it in place and held it until the shellac set up. I put the watch back together, and it worked fine. I had to turn it back in at the end of the war because it was still running.

KB: How did you know how to do that?

OS: I'd done that since I was seven or eight years old. I've never had a dollar watch that I haven't taken apart dozens of times and put back together.

Then we flew from the Ascension to Accra. That's in Ghana on the Gold Coast of Africa. That flight took us just a little over nine hours. We flew from Accra to Dakar in Senegal. Each leg took anywhere from 8 to 10 hours of flight. For us to fly that long, they had to put auxiliary tanks in the cabin. We didn't have just one door; we had double doors that opened so we could maneuver to get a jeep and a trailer in the plane. We had four extra gas tanks in there. They were hooked together and hooked into the fuel plumbing on the plane. Each tank would hold 200 gallons, so we had 800 gallons of gasoline in addition to the wing tanks that we normally had on the plane. So we could fly for 12 to 15 hours if we had to. From Dakar we went across a portion of the Sahara Desert, bordered on the north by the Atlas Mountains. We were heading for Marrakech and a nice beach area on the sea side. The winds were so strong, you could look down and ten minutes later -- almost see the same spot. We were all running low on fuel, and so we landed at this place called Tindouf in Algeria. That was an old French Foreign Legion post. We stayed there overnight and got gas. They took us out to a night spot and served us dinner. They had booze, and then they had belly dancers come out and do their little trick. They stripped right down bare.

KB: Wasn't that kind of a shocker?

OS: Yeah, it was a shocker, I'll tell you! She was dancing around shimmying her bareness. You've seen these caps that pilots wear. They're just kind of sloppy and floppy and have a soft leather bill. She was dancing around the front row and grabbed a guy's cap, wadded it up into a cone and shoved it up between her legs. Everybody was mortified. He threw the cap away. It was kind of funny.

That day flying into Tindouf we flew through clouds of locusts. The sky was black with locusts, and it was just like flying into a hailstorm. They'd just bang against the leading edge of the wings and against our windshields and smash, and you'd get a big "splatter" of locust juice. I don't know whether they were the 14-year locusts, but I had never seen so many locusts in all my life. After we left Tindouf, we went to Marrakech in Morocco.

KB: Were any of these combat areas?

OS: No. These areas had all been taken by Allied landing parties and by the Navy before that. Marrakesh, Casablanca and Oran were all coastal communities, and they were all places where the armed forces unloaded the ships. Then we would transport supplies by air in our planes closer to the

front. If runways were bad, the Seabees would come and lay down metal mats. They'd make a runway out of mats as wide as a runway. They'd just hook together like Legos. When you'd come in and land on the mat, it sounded like you were landing on a kettle drum. We were first stationed at a little place between Marrakech and Casablanca; it was called Oujda, and that was right out in the desert. They just sort of bulldozed off the sand and made a straight runway where we took off and landed. There were no barracks or tents. We just rolled our sleeping bags out underneath the wings of the airplane, and we'd sleep on the ground. The next morning when we'd get up, we would shake our sleeping bags, and we would shake anywhere from three to four scorpions out of the bag, that had crawled in with us at night to stay warm. There were scorpions all over there. We'd just shake them out and roll our bedrolls back up and roll them out again the next night.

This was all going on while the Allied land fighting forces were up taking Tunisia, which was still under German control. We would keep flying supplies up and fly wounded back. The planes were equipped so you could put maybe eight litters in them. You've seen the canvas litters that have a long pole on each side? They were fixed in brackets so they could just put a guy up at the top and another one in the middle and another one at the bottom.

KB: Did you ever move unwounded troops from place to place?

OS: Lots of them. We moved troops, equipment, gasoline, maps – all those things. When the Allies had finished taking Tunisia, we moved up to a place called Kairouan. That was farther north out of Morocco up into Tunisia, and we did more of the same, just ferrying things back and forth from Casablanca or Oran or Marrakech. Whatever cargo they needed up at the front we would ferry it back and forth.

KB: Wasn't that pretty exciting for a boy who grew up in Evanston to go to all these exotic places?

OS: Yes, absolutely, because flying across North Africa at night is flying into a black sky. There are no lights on the ground. If there's no moon, you're flying instruments even though there's not a cloud in the sky. We did a lot of flying by the maps because we had no radio or navigation communication, nothing that we could use there.

As we got farther north, we started doing more training, dropping paratroopers so they would learn what they were supposed to do, what we were supposed to do, and not fly too fast. We had to drop them in the right position. They would have flares on the ground where your drop zone would be. It would be a smoke flare orange or the smoke flare red, yellow or blue. You'd do your sand table briefings before you went on maneuvers, so you'd know what you were supposed to do. The Allies finally took control of Sicily, and so we moved over there. We moved from Kairouan over to Sicily to a place called Castelvetro. When we were there, we flew a lot from there back to Africa hauling wounded back and supplies in, usually. We would fly and move the airborne troops closer to where they were fighting.

When we were in Sicily, apparently it was a big fighter pilot base when the Germans had it, and there were a lot of wrecked airplanes around. We hadn't been in any real missions. Well on the invasion of Sicily we were; we dropped paratroopers. When we went into Sicily, the U.S. Naval Landing Force

was in one particular area where they were off landing troops, and making a big assault all at the same time. They'd get it all coordinated, and we were supposed to drop paratroopers inland to blow up bridges. But the winds were different than they had predicted, and the weather turned bad, and some Germans came over and strafed the naval landing party. We followed the Germans right on across. We didn't know they were in front of us. It was dark at night. They didn't have any lights on, and neither did we, except we had one amber light on the bottom. It was supposed to represent that we were a friendly aircraft. All of the naval ships were shooting at the German airplanes that were flying over. Of course, when they heard more airplanes coming, they started shooting at the troop carrier planes. Lots of planes went down in the drink, and gliders went down. The pilots were being shot at. They'd reach up and disconnect the glider. The poor glider was sitting back there wondering, *What did I do?*

KB: Were some of those people killed?

OS: Lots of them. It was probably one of the biggest faux pas they've had in the history of naval and airborne maneuvers. But our flight leader Frank Falkner was a captain and Head of Operations and was leading our flight. When the Navy was shooting up at you, about every fifth bullet is a tracer, and at night you can just see it like fireworks going off. You see all these fireworks going off in different directions, and you know that between every one you see, there are about ten more bullets.

KB: You must have been terrified!

OS: I wasn't. I thought it looked neat. But we went in and dropped our paratroopers and eventually came back to our squadron. Our squadron was one of the few squadrons which dropped their men where they were supposed to be dropped. Then we came back. We just dropped down to a lower altitude. Then they can't see or hear you until you're right on top of them, and it's a lot harder for them to shoot at you. We didn't have any armor in our planes, but after that mission, they got Patton going with his armored tanks and stuff. We went around through these old wrecked airplanes, trucks and things looking for armor-plate metal. We cut some out with an acetylene torch just about the size of our chair seat, lifted the cushion off and then put it down and put the cushion back on top of it. We didn't want to get shot in the butt! We did that with most of our planes. We put some armor plate under those cushions where we sat down and on the floor under our legs.

We spent the winter in Sicily, and it was really cold there. We still had to fly people around. The airborne would have to move from one station to another, and they had them bivouacked out on kind of a grassy spot. They had a grassy runway for us to take off. They were all given K rations for their lunch, and they had these cheese cans that you'd open with a key – making a “cookie cutter” out of what's left. These guys would just throw them out. If you'd run over them with your airplane tires, they'd cut a cookie out of your tire. It happened to mine. I had about 18 paratroopers and all of their baggage and chutes. The runway was not too long; it kind of went downhill and then just ended at a big cliff overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. I just about had flying speed, and I heard this bang. I looked out my window, and I could see the air just gushing out of the tire. It was a big rip in the tire from one side to the other. So I just put down the flaps, gave it more power and forced it off. Otherwise we would have run off the cliff and landed in the sea. We took off and then cruised around the airfield and called and told them that I'd had a blowout on takeoff, and I would just hover around until everybody else had taken off. The wind was kind of crossways to the runway, and so I came in the direction and

held it off just as long as I could with full flaps so that the wind would hit against the rudder, the tail. Instead of ground-looping toward the blowout, the wind would help turn me in the other direction. I guess we rolled about 50 to 75 yards and stopped. Nobody got hurt. But I had run over one of these cans; they'd opened the cheese can and had just thrown the empty can out there. I ran over it, and it cut a piece of rubber out of the tire, and it blew up.

KB: Did you have time to be afraid or were you too busy figuring out what to do?

OS: I never, ever was fearful when I was in flight. Even flying across the desert through a thunderstorm one time, I had St. Elmo's fire, which was a big ball of static electricity about the size of a basketball that formed out on the end of the wing. It's a fire, and it just went rolling along the wing and up across the windshield and down and out onto the other wing. It didn't scare me. I just told the radio man, "Put out your trailing antennae." That's where you have kind of a lead fishing bob on a cable, and you just reel it out several hundred yards. That drains the static electricity off the plane, and the St. Elmo's fire went away.

KB: They trained you for every eventuality, didn't they?

OS: Oh, I'd never been trained for that, but I knew what it was. I'd read about St. Elmo's fire and what guys had done when they ran into it. We got involved on the invasion of Sicily and Italy, dropping paratroopers. I never did tow gliders in combat, but I had a lot of practice towing them..

KB: Tell me what their survival rate was – the paratroopers.

OS: Well, they had a pretty good survival rate except when they went in on the invasion of Sicily. We'd had, not in my plane but in other planes, paratroopers get up off the seat, go and hook up their static cord and jump out -- leaving a puddle of blood on the seat they'd been sitting in with a hole in it. So you know that he was a casualty when he went out the door.

KB: How did you deal with that?

OS: Well, I'm up driving the airplane. I didn't deal with that. I heard those stories after I landed. They're the stories that came out in the bars.

While we were there, we got to go over to Naples and see where they had excavated the mummies from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius many years ago. We got to go down to Barry, Italy which was a nice swanky vacation place on the beach. They had taken over one of the big hotels as an officer's club, and served dinner there. The waiters would come with towels over their arm, and we had cloth napkins and everything. They brought out a bowl of soup, and we tasted it. Gosh, it tasted great. I could see a couple of little pin feathers in it, and I carefully picked them out and set them on my plate. Then we asked for an encore of the soup. They took the soup bowl away and brought out the main course. It was two little dead sparrows! That was our main course. I said, "I can't believe this." I wrapped them up in the napkin, shoved them in my pocket and took them back to the base to show everybody.

Every hotel over there has sparrow traps in the back to catch sparrows, and they cook them with heads

and feet on after they had eviscerate them, take whatever feathers they can get off and just throw bird, head feet and all, in the soup pot. It made good-tasting soup! I didn't know that until after I ate it, or I wouldn't have liked the soup.

All this time the Allied troops were fighting northward in Italy, but they needed our troop carrier organization in England because there were planning D-Day someday in the future. So we had to fly up there and take what we could in the planes. Again we had the long-range fuel tanks. That was in March of '44; we had to fly back down to Marrakech, down the west coast of Africa. We just kind of waited our turn to fly up to England because they'd only fly you up at night. The Germans would come out flying across the Bay of Biscay and shoot you down into the ocean if you were flying in the daytime. We had to fly out to the 11th Meridian and then turn north. We were supposed to fly at about 7,000 feet, and when we got up at 7,000 feet, we were still in the "soup" – like flying in total clouds. We went up to 10,000 feet, and it was still "soupy" there. Our best predicted wind was at 7,000 feet, so we figured if we were going to have to fly instruments, we might as well do it where the winds were best. We were flying on what we called long-range cruise, where you have the power setting way back to where it was just barely flying. When you have them set like that, you can get fuel burned about 50 gallons an hour. If you had it up to 165 mph. or 180 mph, you'd be burning about 100 gallons an hour. You could cut your gas consumption in half by setting your controls on long-range cruise. The automatic pilot in our plane wasn't working so we had to hand fly it; it took us about 14 hours. As soon as the sun came up, the navigator could get a sun shot with his sextant and gave us a little course correction. We made landfall on Ireland about four miles off of where we'd planned to make landfall, after 14 hours of hand flying.

We found our base in England and made all the preparations for D-Day after that. We would take airmen into Nottingham on weekend passes. We were stationed in the Midlands between Nottingham and Leicester, and they had a nice big dance hall in Nottingham. All the guys would go in and stay for the weekend, and we would go in as convoy officers to bring them back to the Base at the end of their pass. Even though we were on flying status, we still had to take care of some of this scutwork, like being the weekend officer in charge of the command cars that were taking guys in for weekend passes. That place was so foggy – just terrible! I would have to ride standing out on the running board hanging on with one arm, and shining a flashlight on the ground with the other arm, trying to find the side of the road. The driver would just creep along. I enjoyed England. It was a fun place. We got to fly into London several times. One of my friends went down with us one time, and after a night on the town, we were supposed to take off from the London Airport before 12 o'clock. My friend made it to the airport after hitting a few bars. His group didn't get back in time, and we got there just as he was taking off. He took off alone, intoxicated. He couldn't hit a bottle with his hat. He was the only one in the plane. He left his whole crew and everybody else there in London while he flew all the way back to the base. He found the airbase, landed, and no one was the wiser. The rest of us all flew back in the remaining plane.

As D-Day approached, we did more maneuvers with paratroopers and gliders and supply packs. We'd have things that would hook onto the bottom of that airplane, and then you could release them from inside by pressing a button. The item would drop off, and a parachute would open up and take it down. I actually didn't get to fly on D-Day. The weather was too bad. I went in on the day after D-Day. We just flew in supplies in parachute packs, which were pushed out of the door of the planes or released

from the bottoms of the planes.

When we flew to France for a later drop, the Allies had already moved inland. Patton was making such headway; he was running out of gasoline and maps. For several days all we did was fly five-gallon gasoline cans-- the plane loaded with those. We would pull off the runway and park. We'd have a couple of the crew up in the airplane, and they'd hand you a couple of five-gallon cans of gas. You'd carry them over to a truck where a group of colored servicemen loaded them into these big trucks with cattle-grate sides. Then the next flight we'd bring maps for Patton. We did that every day for many days -- fly gasoline and maps to Patton's men -- because they were running out of them faster than we could fly them in.

Later the Allies advanced into Holland, and we were on a resupply mission there. Like D-Day Invasion was called "Overlord, this one was called "Market Garden." We flew in and dropped our loads. There was a lot of small arms fire coming from the farms around, and if you were flying 500 feet in the air, you made a pretty good target. So we just went right down on the ground and hedge hopped out. That's what we called it when you'd come to a row of trees, go over them, and then go right back down to the ground. We went across one field, and the flight in front of me scared up a whole flock of crows. Of course, he'd run by them before he even knew about it, but I followed close behind, and there they were right in front of me. One of them hit the leading edge of the wing on my side, and I could see two more coming right at me. We had flak vests on along with flak helmets. They're bigger helmets than the metal helmets the soldiers wear now. I just ducked my head down as the glass flew off my helmet and off my flak vest, and the crows rocketed down the aisle and splattered against the rear of the plane. The radio man came up later and said, "Sir, do you know what that one crow said when he went by?"

I said, "No."

"He said, 'If I had any more guts, I'd do it again.' The other one came by and said, 'That's me all over.'"

We flew back across the English Channel and landed at the first airport we saw. We got some duct tape and crisscrossed it, covering the holes. We took off again and went back to our base, flying the plane from the co-pilot's side.

Just before Christmas in '44, I got a telegram from the Red Cross stating that my sister was deathly ill with sub-acute bacterial endocarditis. It's a bacterial disease of the valves of the heart. She'd had rheumatic fever when she was about four. It leaves the heart valves damaged, and they get bacterial colonies growing on them, resulting in a serious infection. At that time, the doctor was able to get 900 units of penicillin from Fort Douglas, and that's not even a drop in the bucket compared to what they use now. The military gave me a compassionate leave, and I was eventually supposed to go back to my unit. I flew into Washington D.C. on Christmas Day of 1944 and got orders to ride a train out of there the next day. I got off at Evanston, and they gave me some more leave time then. My sister died about the middle of January, and I stayed around for the funeral.

Instead of returning me to my unit in England, they sent me out to an R & R place (rest and rehab). It was on a beach in Santa Monica, California. Through my brother-in-law, I was able to buy a '40 Mercury coop that had been up on blocks. It was a beautiful car! Oh, it was lovely; I borrowed all my

relatives' gas coupons along with those I was given, and June and I drove out to California. Every time we'd get to the top of a hill, we'd turn the engine off, coast to the bottom, and then start it again at the next hill. We had a great time in California. They wine and dined us and took us to all the shows. I'd left June pregnant when I left to go overseas, and my son was 13 months old when I first saw him. He turned 65 yesterday (Nov. 10, 2008).

KB: That must have been hard to miss 13 months of your child's life.

OS: It was. June stayed with her mother, and her mother really helped a lot. She had a grandmother there who helped, and my parents lived nearby; so he had all kinds of attention. She took 8 millimeter movies of everything he did, so I got all the movies and pictures.

From the R & R station in California, they sent me to San Angelo, Texas, and I was just there to do anything they needed done. I would occasionally get a chance to fly, but not much. I finally did get a chance to lead a flight of Stearmans, which were the two-wing, open-cockpit, primary trainers. Another fellow and I led a flight of ten of them down to Orlando, Florida from San Angelo. It took us about five days to do that. We'd fly about 200 miles, and then we'd stop overnight.

Later, they sent me up to St. Joe, Missouri to Rosecrans Field, and I went through an officers' training unit there to learn to fly the C-46. That's a bigger model twin engine with much bigger engines. They used it to fly material over the Hump in India. I went through that instrument training school. Then instead of sending me over to fly the Hump, they kept me as an instructor. I was an instructor at St. Joe until the end of the war. I was mustered out in September of 1945. I was able to fly as much as I wanted. In fact, when I was in St. Joe, they said, "Well, if you want to fly for TWA, we can get you a job with them."

After the war, the guys stopped fixing planes with wrenches, and were fixing them with pencils. They'd say, "Check and found okay." And they'd put their initials on it. I had five students and took a plane out to take off, and all the way taxiing it out – the landing gear light flicked on and off. It has a red light which means things are unsafe; it has an amber light between the red and the green. The amber light means that there's something wrong, but they don't know what it is. The red light says, "You don't take off with this plane." The green light is "safe."

So I took it back to the line and said to the line chief, "These landing gear lights are not working right."

He said, "Oh, it's just a micro switch. Go ahead and take it. It will be all right."

I said, "Go get a parachute. If you'll come with me, I'll take it."

He said, "Well, I can't do it."

I said, "Well, I can't fly it either."

So I wrote it up and excused my students. I went up in the tower and helped direct traffic the rest of the afternoon. When that plane's number was called to take off, I said, "Watch this plane. I just red lined it

because the landing gear lights aren't working properly.”

It took off and had no problems. After a couple of hours it came back in. I recognized the number, and I said, “Watch this.”

So we watched it, and as soon as the wings could no longer hold the plane up, one landing gear collapsed and spun off the edge of the runway, curled up the prop, and ruined the engine.

I just told them, “I turned that plane down because the landing gear lights weren't working right.”

I had wanted to be an airline pilot, but I decided right then, *You guys are going to get out and you're going to go to work for the airlines. If you're going to fix planes with pencils, I don't want to fly the planes.*

KB: Then you had a successful medical career.

OS: Well, I lived with a flight surgeon when I was in England. While I was at the University of Wyoming the first year, I rented a room in the basement of the university veterinarian. I'd much rather thumb through his medical books than economics or political science or something that I didn't want.

KB: Sometime I would like to interview you about your medical career because I'm sure you have a lot of stories to tell about that. This history of your war experiences has been excellent and something I haven't heard before. Thank you for your service in the war and for talking with me here today.