George Augustus Vaughn, Jr.
Veteran

Interviewed on June 28, 1972
by The University of Texas at Dallas
McDermott Library

Interviewer (I): This is an interview recorded with George Vaughn, 17th Aero Squadron dated June 28, 1972. It's all yours.
GAV: Well, what would you like me to say?

I: If you would start with the beginning of your service career and carry on through your training, anything that happens to stand out in your mind.
GAV: The beginning of my service career was when I was a student at Princeton University and the world was coming along, and we had a thing called the Prince of Flying Club. The Prince of Flying Club had no airplanes, and had nobody who really knew anything about airplanes, but we subscribed to a lot of magazines that described what was going on airplane-wise and so forth. It was just another one of the college clubs but eventually, before we got into World War I−because this would have been in the Spring of 1917, June−there were about twenty-five people in the Prince of Flying Club who were interested in learning to fly and who wanted to join the military Air Force at this point. So, one of the alumni of Princeton, a fellow by the name of Marshall Mills, got together a group of alumni and they bought for the Prince of Flying Club three Jenny airplanes, and they rented a field between Princeton and Lawrenceville where there was enough space so that we could learn to fly on the Jenny airplanes. They also hired three mechanics and two flight instructors and paid them to work for the Prince of Flying Club. This was before anybody was in the military service at all. So, we went out to this field, which was between Princeton and Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and by this time things were getting so serious that our scholastic problems were eased off by the University, who sort of gave us a little time off to go to the flying school. And it finally ended up, that at the end of 1917 which would have been in the beginning of June, we were given credit for all the courses we were taking there, even though we hadn't passed the examinations or anything, because we had been attending flying school in the meantime. And then along about July, the first of the group got to the point where they could solo, and each one of the group was allowed to solo just once. And having soloed once, they were graduated from the school. [Unclear] That was it. And there were about twenty-five of us, I guess, who graduated by virtue of having soloed once. We were taken by Marshall Mills down to Washington, D.C. where he had some influence, he thought, with General Squires who at that time was Commanding Officer of the Signal Corps. And at this time the Aviation Service of the United States was under the Signal Corps; it was the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. So, Marshall Mills took us down to Washington. In the meantime, we all went across the street, Nassau Street, and we bought tacky uniforms, and we bought hats, we bought shirts, we bought britches and everything else that went with it, so we looked like soldiers when we all went to Washington. Marshall

Mills said, "Here are all these people−they have all flown an airplane." Each one had had one solo flight. Anyway, they had all flown an airplane. "And here we have produced, from Princeton University, the vanguard of a great organization that is going to be the nucleus of the Air Force." Air Force wasn't the word in those days−the Aviation Service of the United States. So, General Squires said, "Well, this is fine, but how old are these people?" Well, I think there was only one of us who was over twenty-one at the time. That was Elliott Springs, if I remember. The General said, "This is fine, but there are two requirements in the Signal Corps. One, in order to have a commission to the Signal Corps, you have to be more than twenty-one years old; and two, in these days to be qualified for aviation training, you have to be a college graduate." We were neither of these things, so we had to retreat from Washington with our tails between our legs. We had no status at all. General Squires said, "No, they were a nice bunch of boys but they can't do us any good because they don't have the necessary qualifications."

So, we went back to Princeton again. At this time, they were establishing ground schools all through the United States' universities, patterned after the ground schools that had been in existence at Oxford and Cambridge and places in England−Schools of Military Aeronautics they were called. And so, General Squires said, "Well, we can't immediately commission all these people and make them fliers. We will have to first establish a ground school at Princeton, a School of Military Aeronautics, and these people will constitute the first class at the School of Military Aeronautics, which will be established at Princeton University. So, we did this, and this was about May or something, 1917, and they sent down to Princeton University a young officer who had recently graduated from West Point, who was to be in charge of the School of Military Aeronautics at Princeton. His name was Gilkeson. He was a very nice fellow, relatively young, but brought up in the ways of West Point−stiff back, stiff neck, stiff everything else. Wiping fingers across the top of doors with white gloves on to see whether there was a little dust there. But anyway, he was the Commanding Officer of the first group that went to the first School of Military Aeronautics that started at Princeton University. Although the threats were dire and anything that we did including allowing dust to accumulate on the top of the doors of the closet threatened to have us thrown out, they never did throw any of us out. We all graduated eventually. The School of Military Aeronautics was six weeks if I remember, and was taught at this point under Major Gilkeson, who was a West Pointer, who was sent there for disciplinary purposes and so forth. Some of the university instructors were made instructors at the School of Military Aeronautics. One of them I remember was a fellow by the name of Ken Condor, who eventually became Dean of the School of Engineering at Princeton. At that time, he was an instructor in the internal combustion engines and he gave us internal combustion engine instruction, and we had somebody whose name I've forgotten now who was an instructor in military tactics. It was somebody who knew history. He was one of the history professors. Then we had a few people who had been assigned by this time, believe it or not, from the Royal Air Force, who had sent over some instructors to tell us about what actually went on in Europe in the way of machine gun operation and things of that kind. And we were taught to disassemble a machine gun, particularly the Lewis gun.

We were taught little poems that went along with this, like, "The gun weighs approximately 96 pounds and the capacity of the magazine is 97 rounds," or something like that. [Laughs] Anyway, this sort of a thing−this may not be accurate−but there was a little poem that went along with it. We were taught all these things at the same time being subject to a great deal of military discipline West Point-wise. If we didn't salute the Commanding Officer, Major Gilkeson, as he went by us, maybe, two blocks away, we shook in our boots for the next two weeks. We were afraid we were going to get thrown out of the place. Anyway, we all survived this thing and then in August we graduated from the first class of the School of Military Aeronautics which was held at Princeton University. We were the first class to graduate. We were given our choice. We had all flown. We had all had one solo flight which meant that we were accomplished pilots. But there was nothing else for us in the U.S. because we had flown Jennys. The only thing they had in the US−Jennys. They said, "Well, you now have to go overseas and be trained on combat-type aircraft."

So, the plan was that we should go either to England or France or to Italy to be trained on combat-type aircraft. They were the only people who had combat-type aircraft at this point. And so, a lot of us−this was in September−a lot of us who were thinking of the cold winter to come and what-not, decided that we would go to Italy for training because Italy would be a good place for the winter. We all volunteered to go to Italy−not all of us−some wanted to go to France. Nobody at that point had volunteered for England. So, we were all sent at that point out to Mineola, Long Island, where there was a concentration of flying activity−Jennys, nothing but Jennys. Hazelhurst Field, I think they called it at that time. It later became Mitchell Field and Roosevelt Field. I think they called it Hazelhurst Field then, and we were put in the barracks there awaiting transportation to Italy, because that's where we were all supposed to go. In the meantime, I was given the opportunity to fly Jennys at that field after having been checked out by one of the Army instructors and I did a little flying out there−maybe two or three flights around−and then came the day when they said the Italian detachment, which at that time was what we were called, has been ordered overseas. This meant that the following morning at dawn we all marched out, we got aboard a train in Mineola, Long Island, we were taken by the train down to Long Island City, N.Y. where there were piers, and we were unloaded from the train, and loaded on to large tugboats which had come up to the Long Island City piers. We were taken by these tugboats down the East River, round the Battery of New York, up the North River to the Cunard Line piers where there was moored the SS Carmania, a British ship, which was a commercial, a civilian ship at this time, not an Army transport, which is where we were unloaded from the tugboats. This was a very, very secret sort of thing. Security was fantastic, we were not allowed to tell anybody anything on the way. I was not even allowed to mail a letter on the way down there to tell my parents that we were on the way, because this was very, very secret. When they got us to the Carmania, they didn't take us over the docks, they let down rope ladders over the outside of the Carmania−on the river side−so that the people on the New York side couldn't see us. We all clambered up over these ladders to get into the Carmania. So, with the [unclear] of the SS Carmania, we clambered up these ladders

and we climbed aboard and we were pushed immediately down in the hole because no one was supposed to see that there was anybody in uniform on this ship at all−this was very secret. And we were pushed down below decks, and the Carmania set sail. We went down New York Harbor. We were not allowed on deck all the way down New York Harbor because it was a civilian ship. No one in uniform was allowed to show.

After we got out of New York Harbor we were allowed to come up from the hold and we discovered that we were sailing for Halifax, and at this point the first interesting decision came, because at this point we were cadets, which meant that we were halfway between enlisted men and officers, and enlisted men on the ship were all assigned to third class quarters in the hole and officers were all assigned to first class quarters upstairs. And finally, after a lot of argument, we as cadets were assigned to first class quarters upstairs. This is where we stayed on the Carmania; they were first class quarters. Course there were four in a stateroom and all this sort of thing−it wasn't very plush−but at least, although we were Privates First Class and being paid as such, we were supposed to be cadets, so we had officer status as far as the accommodations were concerned. This was a little bit difficult because we also had a lot of straight enlisted personnel aboard, one of whom was Albert Spaulding, the famous violinist, and there were several other quite famous people aboard who were enlisted men, and they were consigned to the steerage as they used to call it in those days; third class I guess you call it now. We had a little bit of a break there, we had good quarters, and there was a group of nurses aboard, Army nurses, who were also being sent over, and they had good quarters too. So, we all had quite a nice time up there in the first-class quarters, and we headed out to sea, and finally ended up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we were supposed to assemble and join a convoy which was to go to Europe from there. We anchored in the Halifax Harbor for a number of days. In the meantime, troop ships began to arrive from all directions, particularly New Zealand troops and Australian troops and people of [unclear]and we all got together at this River of Halifax and finally there were twenty-one ships that got together there−some were New Zealand's, some were the Australian's, some were the American's, and we finally set sail from Halifax−probably three or four days after we arrived in Halifax Harbor−across the Atlantic. Across the Atlantic, of course, there were submarine watches at all times. Those of us who were in the aviation cadet category were assigned to submarine watches on the deck up in the crow's nest−the top. We were given rifles. We were supposed to shoot at any submarine that appeared [laughs], and we had to stand this watch, but even this wasn't enough to keep us really busy on the way over, so they decided that since we were going to Italy, we should be learning something about the Italian language. It happened that after we got to Halifax, we discovered that we had a Commanding Officer assigned, and we had a Supply Officer assigned, and we had a Finance Officer assigned. It happened that the Supply Officer was a man by the name of Fiorello LaGuardia, who had become a Captain by virtue of the fact that he was a Congressman at the time, obviously Italian extraction. So, Fiorello LaGuardia instituted a series of Italian lessons for us as we went over. In typical military fashion, Mr. LaGuardia gave us lectures, and then he divided the group up into small groups, for individual instruction in Italian. By this time, I had been elevated to the rank of Corporal,

and as a Corporal I was assigned a group of ten people to whom I was supposed to teach Italian, having learned this from LaGuardia, having read the book and so forth, never knowing anything about Italian, but we had Italian classes on the ship every day until we got out into the mid-Atlantic, a little past the mid-Atlantic. Twenty warships in the convoy and this was the way the crossing went. We had Italian lessons, we had submarine watch, we had the nurses aboard which made the thing a little bit more interesting.

Finally, we came practically to just outside of the British Isles, and there was a submarine attack on the convoy at this point. Several of the ships were sunk. They did not hit the Carmania, fortunately, so instead of moseying along at about half speed, which we had done all the way across the Atlantic because everybody had to go at the speed of the slowest member of the convoy and there were colliers and things of that… All of a sudden, they said, "Full speed ahead for the Carmania into Liverpool," so we all went full speed ahead into Liverpool, and we arrived at Liverpool and when we got there somebody came aboard and said, "You're not going to Italy at all." Their situation down there wasn't very good. The Italian government was faltering at this point, I think There was some question whether the Germans were going to take over the whole picture down there. "You're going to stay in England, you're not going to Italy." So, having learned all the Italian and everything, we were told we were going to stay in England. We got out at Liverpool. We were all put aboard trains.

We didn't know where we were going, but we finally landed up at Oxford University. And at Oxford University, there was a school of Military Aeronautics for the British Air Cadets and we were assigned to the School of Military Aeronautics at Oxford University. And it so happened that the school we went to there for six weeks was exactly the same thing as we had gone through at Princeton University, because the Princeton University School had been copied, obviously, from the one at Oxford. But anyway, we went through the same courses all over again. We stayed there for six weeks. [Laughs] We had a lot of fun there. We became acquainted with some of the British people. This was a new viewpoint, and they were gay and a lot of fun, and everybody had a lot of fun there and so forth. And we, at this point, put white hatbands on our heads, which we hadn't had before−we just had an enlisted man's uniform. But now we became cadets with white hatbands. And so, for six weeks we stayed at Oxford University. Our group happened to be assigned to Christ Church College. There were two hundred of us altogether, one hundred fifty that went over with the so-called Italian detachment and another fifty that had gone over on a convoy just before. They had come over from some New England schools, headed by a fellow by the name of Bim Oliver, who I remember very well, he was a pilot. And so, we had a lot of fun around Oxford−this was September 1917. The time wore on, we finally got into October. And after the six weeks, then finally we got into November and then they decided they would assign us all to flight schools in England.

They couldn't take this whole group of two hundred in any flight school, so they divided us up. And I happened to be in a group that went to a school in Stamford in Lincolnshire, which was a primary flight school. We were all assigned to quarters in the poorhouse in Stamford, Lincolnshire, but they were quite comfortable, and everything was fine. And when we got out in the field to see what we were going to fly, lo and behold there, we had Jennys. That's what they were equipped with over there for primary flying. The only difference was that the Jennys on which we had flown in ground school in New York had the so-called depth control, which was a wheel control thing with a yoke, and the Jennys that they had in England had been adapted for the stick control, which the European aircraft all had. So, we had to fly the transition between the wheel−depth control−which we had learned to fly in the U.S., and the stick control. As soon as they determined that we were adequate at the stick control thing, we were turned over to British Avros which were the primary training things that they had−rotary engines, larger wingspan, more maneuverable, nicer to fly than the Jennys and capable of doing all the maneuvers that we were supposed to do in primary training. Although in those days we were not taught at the school or any school, I guess−we were not taught acrobatics by way of dual control. We were told what you could do if you wanted to loop a Jenny, and then you went up there and you did it. And one of our boys, this was the first casualty we had, as I remember, among this group, went up to follow instructions to try to loop the Jenny. He didn't pull out soon enough and the wings came off the Jenny. I've forgotten the man's name. He was the first casualty I think that we had in Stamford, because he didn't come out of the loop soon enough. And they told us how to spin. They said you go up there and you do this, and to get out of the spin you push the stick forward and pull on the right rudder and so forth and you'll come out of the spin, but they didn't go up with us. They told us about these things. So, we survived these things and we graduated from Jennys to Avros. And then after we'd had a certain amount of time up there−this was an interminable amount of time because all the Britishers there, the instructors, were people who were back from the front. They'd been out there since 1915. This was 1917 and they were not in a hurry to do anything at all. They were great guys and we had a lot of fun, and there was no pressure to get us through in a hurry. And, we were in a hurry because we thought for some reason or other that we ought to get out of there and get into combat-type airplanes. Anyway, a lot of us were frustrated down there because things didn't go as fast as we thought they should. Eventually, around Christmas time, we graduated from the Avro thing in Stamford, and we were sent to schools where we were taught to fly combat-type aircraft. I happened to be sent to Hounslow Aerodrome, right outside of London, where they were teaching people to fly SE5s. So, all through December, the early part of December, I was down in Hounslow and we learned there to fly SE5s after a fashion. We had to take something like ten hours on an SE5 and then we were told, "Now you're proficient in flying a combat-type aircraft, and you have go down to learn actual tactics in aerial fighting."

We were transferred from there to the School of Aerial Fighting at Ayr, Scotland. At Ayr, Scotland, they had a lot of people who were there from overseas who were supposed to teach us the actual tactics of aerial fighting, dogfighting and that sort of thing. And

every Monday, they would divide the camp up into two sections. One would be the reds one would be the blues. They didn't call them that at the time, but anyway… So, these two formations would go up. They would approach each other; they were equipped with camera guns, and when you got all through, you were supposed to have a lot of indications on your camera gun that you'd shot down a lot of airplanes on the other side. [Laughs] And this was quite a business because these people were not particularly proficient pilots at this time having had only a few hours training, so every Monday when this show happened there were numerous casualties, always, collisions in the air, people cracking up on the ground and so on. Anyway, that's the way we learned. There was no fighting. We had a lot fun up there in the air because these were a lot of people that had come back from overseas. They were Scottish people; they took us into their houses up there. I particularly had a lot of fun up there because Elliott Springs was there at the time, and he and I left Princeton at the same time and had gone overseas together. When I was a Corporal, as I say, when we were teaching Italian, he was a Sergeant. He was a past master at mixing certain kinds of American cocktails and drinks which the British didn't know anything about. They thought this was a great party situation and I could play the piano a little bit at the time, so between this Elliott Springs mixing his drinks and myself playing the piano, we were invited to a great many places in Scotland where people liked to have fun, parties were going on and so forth. So, we stayed in Scotland, I guess, a little bit longer than we normally should have because of this. They didn't want us to leave−we formed the entertainment for the British up there.

So, in the meantime, the first crack-up that I ever had happened up there when I took off with an SE5 on the Aerodrome in Ayr, which was a racetrack. They drove up to the Aerodrome [unclear] racetrack. I took off from the racetrack and the engine conked out on the SE5 and fortunately, I had been told by all of these people never, if the engine stops on takeoff, try to turn back, go straight ahead. Otherwise, you'll spin to the ground. So, I went straight ahead. This involved going over the top of some houses in Ayr and taking off a lot of telegraph wires and chimney tops and things of that sort and landing in an apple orchard on the other side of these houses. This cut off all communication between Ayr and Scotland for several days because it took all the telegraph wires out. It wasn't a very popular thing, but nevertheless I walked away from the crack-up, which was the most important thing as far as I was concerned. I came back to Ayr−I came back to the field−with only bruises, and finally was graduated right at that point and sent down to what they called the Ferry Pilot's Pool in England−in London. The Ferry Pilot's Pool was a pool of people who had graduated from all the service-type flying schools in England, but had not quite gotten ready to go overseas. They were assigned the job of going to the aircraft factories and flying airplanes from England over to France for delivery to the Squadrons on the front lines. Of course, being an SE5 specialist at this time, I was sent out to Brooklands where they had an SE5 factory out there−a Royal Aircraft factory−in Brooklands, not too far from London. And for quite a long time, my job was to fly SE5s from Brooklands down to a place called Lympne, which was down, well just almost to the Cliffs of Dover, not quite, but down there where you cross from there over to England, the British Channel. So, I made several trips from Brooklands

down to Lympne, and then over to the aircraft depot in France, where they assembled all these aircraft that came over from England and sent them from there over to the various Squadrons. Lympne was, as I say, right on the British Channel, just east of the Dover Cliffs, and most of the time was shrouded in fog so it was very hard to get over the Channel because of course, we didn't know anything about [unclear] flying or anything like that in those days. You couldn't fly if it was foggy, so we spent more time down in Lympne playing millions of these British pool tables waiting for the fog to lift, than we did anything else. And one very important thing that I remember of this business was that when the British airplane was delivered at Brooklands, for instance, it had a clock−a watch−in the upper right hand corner of the dashboard, I guess it was−of the instrument board. And you had to sign up for the airplane−sign your name that you had received one airplane−and you also had to sign that you had received one watch which was the thing up on the right-hand side of the instrument board. Because this was the thing, every time you landed the airplane, people swarmed into this and tried to steal that watch for some reason or another. I don't know why it was, but you had to sign up for both of those things, one airplane and one watch. So, we took these airplanes over to−after we finally got away from Lympne through the fog−a place called Marquise over in France which was the place where they were sent down to the Squadron, and there we would get a receipt for one airplane and one watch [laughs], if we still had the watch which we damn well did because this was a very important thing. And then we would return. You had your choice−you could either fly back a partially washed-out combat airplane, which was going back to England for repair, or you could go back on the boat, which was a channel boat. As far as I was concerned, I went back on the boat each time because there were no aircraft that I had learned to fly there. They were all bombers and things like that, that they were sending back. I went back on the boat each time.

Then finally, and this became May 1918, they decided to send some of us who had been on this duty over to the so-called Pilot's Pool, a place called [unclear], in the northern part of France, where they gathered people who had had all the training they could give them in England. By this time, I had quite a lot of training. I think I had accumulated at least ninety hours by this time, in all kinds of airplanes, which was a lot for those days−quite a lot. But with the ferrying and with all I'd done at Princeton and with the things I'd done in England and Scotland and all the rest−about ninety hours altogether. I went out to this place and there you waited for an assignment to a Squadron at the front. This was in Northern France, and this was the time the flu epidemic of 1918 was rampant, and I for some reason or another accumulated the flu in this place−[unclear]. I was sent away to the hospital and I went to a hospital in a place called [unclear], which was on the coast of France, and I was there for two weeks, when all of a sudden one night [unclear] warning and the Huns came over and bombed the place for some unknown reason which I've never quite known. But anyway, they rained bombs on this thing for what seemed like hours at the time. One would come over, then another would come over, then another would come over−in the meantime, we all had a fever of 104 or something at this point. And we were all getting out onto the beds and all this kind of thing, and it really was a shambles. They really did a job on this place; they really

washed it out. It happened to be that they were not, I think, bombing it because it was a hospital, but it was adjacent to a large military road center that obviously was a good place to have a hospital because people came in, but it also was a good place for people coming the other way. This is, I think, the reason the Germans bombed it, not because it was a hospital. But anyway, there were many casualties in the hospital that night, including doctors and nurses. When we went outside the next morning we found the bombs right outside the hut that we were living in that hadn't exploded and all this sort of thing. They came down and machine-gunned the place and it was really the first strafing that I'd ever had, except we had a few [unclear] raids but they didn't amount to anything. We just got out in the middle of the street when they blew the whistles and watched to see what was going to happen. But this was the first time…

Break in recording

And then from there, the hospital, I finally went back after I got over the flu−this was about three weeks, I guess−went back to [unclear] and was assigned almost immediately to 84 Squadron, which at that time was located at Bertangles, just north of Amiens. And this was [unclear] Douglas' Squadron. And I was assigned there and I went there as an American officer attached to the Royal Flying Corps, which it was in those days. For all practical purposes I was just like an Englishman; they treated us the way they treated their own people and that was it. That's how I got into the war.

From there on, it's a pretty much well-known situation. I was with the 84th Squadron from May until August, I guess, and thrown in the regular patrols with my Flight Commander who was a fellow by the name of Dingbat Saunders, and we had some good calls. We got in quite a lot of fights. I got [unclear] for a few aircraft. The first one was the most exciting one of course, which it always is, because this was the result of pure stupidity really. [Laughs] On our patrol I think it was only about the third time I'd been out, with Dingbat Saunders leading the patrol. I wasn't conscious of anything in the air at all. All of a sudden I was conscious of it−a lot of clatter behind, a lot of putt-putt-putt-putt-putt, this sort of business. I looked around and there was the great yellow nose of a Pfalz airplane sticking practically in my cockpit, but fortunately he had only peppered the tail of the airplane and hadn't allowed the nose to hit me, and so I squirmed away from him somehow or other, and when I came around, I saw him headed toward home. So, it was the first time I'd ever seen a German airplane. I thought, "Well, you were supposed to shoot these things down." He was going home, and I followed him around, after him, because there was no damage to my airplane although there were holes in the tail later. Just he and I, that's all, because in the meantime Dingbat Saunders and the rest had seen some more aircraft coming over, and they decided to bring the whole thing off, but I couldn't think of anything except this guy who had tried to strip me down and so I followed him all the way down into Hun land and got him in my sights, and I finally shot him down when he was on his way home. But, by this time I was all by myself, way out, much too far from the lines, so I turned around and came back, and of course there was a lot of dogfighting in between, but I got back all right. And of course, when I did get

back, Old Man Saunders couldn't have been more annoyed about this thing because I shouldn't have broken off and followed this fellow way up because the chances that I should have been shot down myself were unbelievable. But, it just happened that nobody did follow me out there, that's all, and I finally got back all right. So, this was the first time I ever shot down an airplane. And only because, if he had been a little more clever, he would have shot me down before I'd ever seen him. But he was just a little short, and they all went through the tail of the airplane instead of through me. And, as I say, this was the first airplane. The first Hun I ever shot down. From then on it was just a matter of a routine business which you all know about, that was written up in all the stories. From here on, there isn't very much to tell otherwise.

I stayed with 84 until August, I guess, 1918, and then 17 Squadron had had some bad times and they needed some more pilots. Sam Eckerd, who was Commanding Officer of 17 Squadron at the time, knew that I'd been down with the 84 and he'd been there for a little while when I first−because he had his first experience in 84 too−knew that I had been there so he called up [unclear] Douglas and he said, "How about sending Vaughn up to me? I need a new Flight Commander. I've had everybody shot down." By this time, I was a Deputy Flight Commander of the British Squadron in 84 and Falkenburgh was the Flight Commander. Dingbat Saunders had gone back on leave at this point. And so, Douglas said, "Sure I'll send him up if you want him, because he's American and you've got an American Squadron." So, I went up to 17 and of course 17 had Camels which I'd never flown before. I'd never even seen a Camel before. I'd been flying SE5s all this time. So, the first problem was being able to fly a Camel, but I managed to get in a Camel and get it around a few times and get a little practice on it, and the first thing I know, I was a Flight Commander in 17 and off we went. And you have that history as well as everybody else from there on. That's it. Thank you very much.

I: Let me ask you a few questions here. First of all, when you mentioned the group from Princeton, who were some of the fellows in that group besides Springs? You mentioned Springs.
GAV: Frank Dixon was one of them, John Donahoe, Denny Holden, let's see there were twenty-five people there altogether, Paul Nelson, who went to Italy finally, a fellow by the name of Cronin, a fellow by the name of Tabor, a fellow by the name of Rafferty, Bostick, those names are all on record. I can't remember them all now, but they were all in the same boat. The only one that you would have heard of probably was Elliott Springs, who finally came out, as you know, and wrote Warbirds.

Elliot Springs was a son of a very affluent South Carolina cotton mill owner, who would later become a Senator, a U.S. Senator. And Elliott Springs was, as everybody knows, a playboy from way back and he had a Stutz Bearcat automobile, which in those days was the ultimate, and which you would now probably call a hot rod or something like that. That was in. He and I rode down in that Stutz Bearcat, I remember, when we left Princeton and went down to Mineola, as I say, to the place where we finally sailed away. And the night the word came that we were going overseas, Elliott Springs was out in the

Stutz Roadster in the big town of New York and somehow or other he called up the Squadron. He didn't go on this trip from Mineola to the tugboat around the Carmania. He was over in New York at this time or something. He parked the Stutz Roadster on 42nd Street, left it there, dashed over to the Carmania, got aboard and left for overseas. [Laughs] Eventually his father, who was a Senator, who worked for the New York Police, I guess picked up the automobile. Got the license number and so on to find out who it was. Eventually somebody collected it. Anyway, Elliott Springs left the Stutz Roadster parked on 42nd Street and left for the war. [Laughs]

I: Last summer, when I was down in Texas, I visited Martin Usecke. Now, did he go over at the same time that you did, or was he before or after?
GAV: I don't anything about him. I never knew him until I arrived at the 17 Squadron. There he was. I don't know anything about him. Except, I know him well now because I've seen him... How he arrived at this point I don't know.

I: The reason I brought that one up was when you mentioned the story about going across on the Carmania, and having a detachment of nurses, he told me that when he went across they also had a detachment of nurses…
GAV: Common practice, I think

I: …and he said that his group went quite, quite well and as a matter of fact I guess they were pretty well soused all the way over, and by the time they got to Liverpool, by the time they had gotten there, they had finished the last of the ship's store of all spirits, medicinal or otherwise.
GAV: Well it was the same sort of a deal, but it was a different…No, he was not in the group that I went with, but apparently went through more or less the same channel.

I: Did you by any chance know an Earl Hammer?
GAV: Yes, I did. Earl Hammer was an American who was attached to the 84th Squadron at the same time I was. No, I guess it was just before I got there. Earl Hammer was shot down or killed while he was with the 84th Squadron. I don't know anything about the circumstances. I wasn't there at the time. I think this was just before I got there. I knew Earl Hammer at Oxford. He was one of the group that went through there as I remember. But he got to 84 somehow or other before I did, and he was shot down while he was with 84, or something happened before I got there. I don't know the story about Hammer. But I remember him at Oxford and he went over on the Carmania; he was one of the Carmania people I think.

I: Now would you mind relating the story on Alex Matthews, again, you told about how he was killed and anything else.
GAV: Alex Matthews. I don't know how Alex Matthews got to the 84th Squadron. Because, as I remember it, he was not a member of the group that went over on the Carmania. But he might have been. At any rate, he was at the 84th Squadron and he and I were tent mates at the 84th Squadron. Two officers in the tent−he was on one side and I

was on the other. Just almost as soon as I got there, I think it wasn't very long after I got there, he'd been there for longer, came this evening when there was an Australian concert party giving a show at the Aerodrome, which was just across the railroad track from where we were at Bertangles. I've forgotten the numbers of the Squadron, but there were two British Squadrons there, one was a British Fighter Squadron; I'm thinking one was a Dolphin Squadron, as I remember. I've really forgotten the names of the Squadrons that were on the other side of the railroad tracks, but anyway, they had more or less permanent hangars over there, or they had hangars that had a structural framework and so forth, and so it was a good place to give a show. They had a stage in these hangars.

Break in Recording

To continue this, on the other side of the railroad tracks from the location where the 84th Squadron was, was [unclear], there were two Squadrons, one I think was a Bristol Fighter Squadron and the other, I think, was a Dolphin Squadron−I've forgotten−it might have been a Camel Squadron. I think it was a Dolphin Squadron. Anyway, there were two Squadrons over there, and they, on that side of the railroad tracks, had more or less structural hangars rather than just poles and tents the way we had on our side. Therefore, they had a means of putting up a stage at the end of one of these hangars and so forth for putting on a show. And at Bertangles, which was just north of Amiens, was the area which was held by the Australian Infantry, and the Australians had what they called a concert party, which was a show situation. They were putting on a show at the hangar on the other side of the railroad tracks, and they had fellows dressed up as girls and all the southern business. It was quite a show. Very corny, but nevertheless, amusement for everybody. And we all went over there, and Alex and I went over together and we sat together in about the third row−I remember exactly where we sat−and there was a fellow playing, finally the show went on; there was a fellow that gave a piano concert. He was playing a Rachmaninoff−dum, dum, dum, boom, boom, boom, boom [sings notes] −just at the last part of one of these booms, was a terrific boom in the hangar right next to us, and fire and smoke, and everything else. A bomb had hit this place. So, of course, the concert party was out. Everybody dashed out of the hangar in all directions, and what happened, really, nobody knows. I dashed out and a Hun aircraft by this time was down machine-gunning the place, machine-gunning the Aerodrome, because the adjacent hangar had blazed up so they could see everything; everything was lighted by now. So, they were down machine-gunning the Aerodrome and everything else. I dashed out there into the middle of the Aerodrome and there was a big hole there which one of the bombs made, so I tossed myself into the bottom of this hole, followed by two or three people of this Australian concert party. I'll never forget−one of them was still in a women's costume and was on top of the pile. [Laughs] When we finally got out, the whole thing was over, this fellow on the top of pile, still in the woman's costume, had a great gash on his back all the way up where a piece of shrapnel had gone across his back. I took him over to one of the hangars on our side of the road, which was still standing. They bombed the other side of the railroad track, but I took him over to our first aid station there, and they fixed him up. He had this great cut on his back. And it was over there

that I learned that Alex Matthews had been killed. He had run in the other direction or something. We were sitting together at the party, and when I took this Australian over to our camp, because their camp was gone, they told me over there that Alex had been killed. How or anything like that I don't know. As I say, he just ran in another direction.

I: Now while you served as a ferry pilot, what were some of the aircraft that you flew back?
GAV: All SE5's.

I: SE5's while you were a ferry pilot, nothing else. Okay, now while you served with 84 Squadron, how many victories were you credited with during that period of time?
GAV: Oh, I've forgotten; this is a matter of record.

I: I can probably check into it.
GAV: I have it home.

I: You probably came up against the Fokker, but what were some of the other German aircraft that you encountered or scored victories over?
GAV: Pfalz, Halberstadt, Rumplers. I've forgotten what some of the two-seaters were they had. Halberstadts, I guess most of the two seaters were. Quite a number of two seaters were in this deal and the first guy, the one I told you, he was a Pfalz. He was a great big yellow-bellied fella, I remember that very well. The rest could have been almost anything the Germans had, some Fokkers, some Pfalz, some Rumplers, some Halberstadt. I can't think of any other names.

I: Albatros?
GAV: Albatros−yes, some of those we had.

I: Of the German fighter aircraft, which one did you consider to be the toughest to go against?
GAV: Oh, the Fokker 87 was by far the better aircraft.

I: Did you ever have an opportunity to fly one after the war was over?
GAV: No, I never did. I flew a Pfalz.

I: What did you think of it?
GAV: It was sort of a lumbering thing; I didn't think it was particularly good. It was a captured one that I flew. It wasn't as good an airplane as the SE5−not the Pfalz. I think the Fokker was a better airplane.

I: In your switchover from the SE5 to the Camels, what did you think of one against the other−your opinions of the two?
GAV: Well, as you know, the reputation of the Camel was terrible. Some of the RAF people wouldn't get near a Camel; they called it a suicide airplane, that sort of thing. So

obviously, I wasn't enthusiastic about this, but this was it; there was no choice. Nobody said, "If you want to do this, or don't do this." They said, "Here you go," so you did−that's it. [Laughs] I got to like the Camel, eventually. I got to like it very much. I didn't object to it all, finally, because when you got used to the animal it was a quite a nice thing to fly and you could have a lot of fun with it; you could do things with it that you couldn't do with an SE5. But it wasn't as comfortable as the SE5. The SE5 was a very comfortable airplane to fly. The Camel was like riding a tightrope all the time you were on it; you never quite knew what it was going to do. The SE5 you could sit there and do nothing, and it would just go on and on and on like the present-day airplanes−a very stable airplane.

I: After you'd gotten to the 17th, of course flying the Camel you got stuck with quite a number of low-level missions, whereas on the SE5 you were mostly flying the high patrols. What did you think of that?
GAV: We had some low-level missions with the SE5's too. When we were at Bertangles, we were there at the time just after the Huns came through at a place called [unclear] which was right in front of Avion, and we were given grounds dropping missions there, with small bombs and all−the same thing we did with the Camels. We did it with SE5's too.

I: What did you think of that sort of thing, the low level? I imagine they weren't all that popular.
GAV: No, they weren't popular, obviously, but it was just one of those things. We were there at the time when the Huns were about to break through at [unclear] when we were up there at Bertangles, just north of Amiens, there was grounds dropping there with SE5s and twenty-five pound bombs on the bottom.

I: I think, like you said, as far as your victories go and all that stuff, that's a matter of record and can be looked up. To finish this out, would you mind relaying rather briefly your transfer from the British sector down to the American sector and the Armistice and up to the point where you were sent home?
GAV: Sure, there was nothing very much about this. We were transferred, as you know, on x date−I've forgotten what it was, late October I guess, from the British sector down to the American sector and assigned to Tulle Aerodrome. We didn't fly our airplanes down there; we went down there on a train and they took everybody down and when we got down in Tulles we were assigned to the [unclear] group with Charlie Little, I think, as Commanding Officer. They told us, "You're now going to fly Spads." Course, I'd flown SE5s for 84 and I'd learned to fly Camels with the … and they said, "Now, you're going to fly Spads," so we said, "Fine, we'll fly Spads," and so we had to go down to [unclear] which is the place they showed in the movie today out there to get these Spads. We all went out to [unclear] to get the Spads and flew them out of Tulles but the Spads had no guns−the Spads−so we couldn't fly the things over the lines because we never had guns for them all the time we were there. While we were there, well practically nothing went on at Tulles. We were just there; we were waiting for guns to come for the Spads; we

couldn't fly them over the lines because they had no guns on them at all, we went out and looked at the lines occasionally, but with no guns there was no point in doing anything but this. We came back and we learned about the Spads−it was a nice airplane−they were all right, no great problem. Then the Armistice was signed before we ever flew a patrol over the lines down there at all, because there was nothing to fly with. They were getting us−there was some question as to whether we would have Marlin guns or Vickers guns. I've forgotten what the story was. They were going to get us Marlins−that was it−and they didn't have any Marlins, so they couldn't put them on these airplanes. We never flew over the lines down there at all except just to look. That's all we did and then of course, I'd been out there so long by the time the Armistice was signed, practically an hour afterwards, I started clamoring to go home. I just wanted to go home. I didn't want to be part of any army of occupation or anything like that. I had enough seniority by this time, so I got home about February 1919 by one way or another.

I had a British DFC−Distinguished Flying Cross−of course, I hadn't been there to actually get it because if you get a British decoration it has to be pinned on by royalty, the King or somebody like that. You just can't go get it, it has to be done properly. Vestiture [unclear] so I never went back to England. Of course, I wanted to get home in a hurry. After I got home, I went back to Princeton, which I did to finish out. I left my sophomore year there. I went back to Princeton and finished up. Later, I got a letter from the British Embassy in Washington saying that you have a Distinguished Flying Cross that's never been properly bestowed, because it has to be bestowed on British territory and by the King, but the Prince of Wales is coming over to New York on the Battleship Renown, HMS Renown, and he will be prepared to bestow these honors on Americans who won them. So, I went down to New York. The Battleship Renown and the Prince of Wales, then Prince of Wales, now dead as of a few weeks ago, was there. This was British territory and this was a representative of the Crown, so this could be done, so I went out on the Battleship Renown, which was moored in the Hudson River, walked down the red carpet like all the rest, and was duly presented with the Distinguished Flying Cross by the then Prince of Wales, who later became Edward King and then married the gal from Baltimore. [Laughs] Just as simple as that.