

Eugene McLaren
Veteran

Mengyu Chang & Stacy Chen
Interviewer

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Q: Hi, I am Emily.

EM : Emily, yes, I remember you.

Q: Okay, so I guess the first question is just your general information about at what time you serve in the military and also why did you decide to join?

EM: I joined the military in 1942. I had turned 18 years old just a little while back after we were now basically in World War II, I — and many of my friends — decided it was time for us to do all we could to help. So I went down to the recruiting station and signed up. I signed up when I was 18, in the fall of 1942, I guess.

I had graduated from high school earlier that year and had started college in Albany. But I decided joining up the military at the time was probably more important, so I went down to do that. I did stay in college though, because when I first signed up, I got assigned to the Reserve — the United States Army Reserve — and this way I was to be called up to active duty later.

In the meantime, I spent a year in college at the State University. It was the State Teachers College at Albany. And so I was there. Actually, I got one year in there when I was 17, I guess, before, and then the second year I turned 18 and then I was eligible for the Army. So I went down and joined and got assigned to the Army Reserve Corps.

During that fall also, I saw a notice on the bulletin board at college about a program that trained meteorologist for the Air Force, the Army Air Corps. And so I applied for that. And I got accepted into that and was called to active duty to be assigned to New York University — the Meteorology Program. And so I went into active duty in the spring, early spring of 1945, I guess it was. So that's how I got in.

I had filled out all the papers or so. Then I spent a year at New York University in their Master's of Meteorology program. I was about the youngest guy there. Many of the others in that program had already graduated from college and had degrees. They were awarded master's degrees at the end of the program. Since I didn't have a bachelor's degree, I got a certificate. But anyway, that's how I got in. I spent the first year of my military service at New York University.

Q: Was meteorology something that you were originally interested in at all, or was that just because of the poster that you saw?

EM: When I went to college, my first year I was only 17, so I hadn't... But I was interested in science and mathematics, so I enrolled in college with a double major in science and mathematics. And when I saw this opportunity for meteorology in the Army Air Force, I thought that might help me stay in science. So I signed up. That's why I applied for the meteorology program.

Q: I want to ask about a specific event about Pearl Harbor. Do you remember where you were when you heard about it, and how did you feel about it?

EM : Yeah, I do remember. As an incident, I think anybody who lived through it will remember. I remember exactly. I was a freshman at college, and I commuted between my home near Troy and Albany on a bus. I was on the bus going to college in Albany on the morning that Pearl Harbor was announced. On the bus, when the information came through on the radio, it was on the bus. That's when I heard it. And I obviously was greatly overwhelmed. I don't remember much about what I did the rest of the day, but I did go to college. I was only 17 at the time. I said I might as well continue going to college until I got to be 18, when I could enlist.

Doug McLaren (Son): Spending so many years here in Troy, Gene grew up halfway between Emma Willard School and here and actually spent some time on the tennis courts at Emma when he was a kid. They were along

EM: Maple Avenue. You know where Collins and Maple Avenue come together? You walk up that hill, there was no road down there. It was just a walkway path. And then you came to the southern gate of Emma Willard. Elm Grove Gate. And right behind the gate, inside the gate of Emma Willard, was the tennis court at that time. And I used to go up with a friend, sneak in and play tennis.

DM: When you came, do you know where Moxie's Ice Cream is? So did you come by that on the way here? So his house is on the Emma Willard side of Moxie's Ice Cream, about a half mile down. If you go back that way, it's on the right. Well, that's an earlier house. But anyway, it's so, anyway, Gene is local here in Troy.

EM: When I went up to Emma to play tennis, I lived on Collins Avenue then. On Collins Avenue, on the hill going down across from School 16. That's where I lived.

DM :Anyway, a little connection with Emma.

Q: Yeah, it's a deep connection.

EM: That was a long time ago. A hundred years.

Q: Our next question, our next question is, did you fly over the hump? And do you have anything to share?

EM : Yes. I was not a pilot, so I didn't fly as a pilot, but I ended up—since they had more meteorology people than they needed—I ended up being an operations officer. That meant that I had to sign off clearance and make sure the planes were ready, that the pilots knew what they were doing, and sign the map routes and everything.

When I first got into India, I was very new at it. I didn't know much about it. I made some pilot friends, and I'd fly with them occasionally just to see what the routes were like and get to understand it better. This included when I was at Jorhat, up in the Assam Valley. Most of the planes there left from India into China directly over the Hump. And in order to be familiar with that route, I went with one of my pilot friends. They had no passengers—just carrying gasoline, equipment, food, and other things for the Chinese. They had only a pilot and a co-

pilot, and I had joined them a couple, not more than two or three times, actually, because I didn't especially want to go that route—it was pretty dangerous.

But I would then be able to sit in the crew chief's seat, which was a little behind and between the pilot and co-pilot, so I could sit up in front and listen to the radio, hear what was going on, and see all the scenery underneath—mainly the mountains.

I did that a couple of times, two or three times, during my stay at Jorhat in the Assam Valley. And most of the flight centers flew into China, either Kunming or Luliang, the other airport.

Those were the only two airports available. Nobody could tell the weather at the time because we didn't have communication—we didn't have radio communication from China to India. So we had to do the best we could from pilot reports of the weather over the Hump. They were actually deciding whether to clear planes or not depending on that kind of information. But yes, I did make the trip a couple of times, just for familiarization.

DM : I got to interject here. I don't know if you all know of this new book — relatively new — *Skies of Thunder* . And if you're interested in that Indo-China route and the people that were flying over the Hump, and the statistics of the numbers of pilots that didn't make it, this is a fascinating book. It talks, when they first start, about trying to make roads through the jungle, where people would carry piles of rubble back from where they're chipping through the mountains. And they would carry it back miles and dump it to make roads. The war effort is just fantastic. I recommend this book.

EM: Those are the people that really deserve a lot of credit. I was there and saw a lot, but I never had to go through that kind of hardship. These guys were building the road up through forests and over swamps, smaller mountains and everything. They had no way of getting supplies in except by airplanes. We had to drop food to them in the jungle so they could do this kind of work.

Q: So for our next question, were you ever bombed or attacked by the Japanese troop at all?

EM: Not directly, no. Japanese planes would sometimes fly overhead, but... so, they left us alone, by and large, because they had more important people they had to go after — the Flying Tigers, for example. I was in the Air Transport Command at Luoyang when I stayed in China. We had some of the Flying Tigers based on the same field, on the opposite side of the runway. I got to see a few of them and know a few of them. They were taking off more near the end of the war, but the Japanese were much more worried about what was going on down in the South Pacific. Most of what they had — ammunition, bombs and such — they reserved for that. I think I may have written that in this little summary. The only time that I got close to actually fighting in the war was at the end of the war, when peace was proclaimed. Then, a lot of the warlords in China, who were basically in line with the Communists at the time, not Chiang Kai-Shek, were trying to take over the American military bases to capture the equipment and everything. So just before we closed the base at Luoyang, where I was stationed then, we had sort of an emergency. The closest we got to combat, a couple of pilots took up cargo planes and kept circling the field to see what was coming on, waiting for people to come. I, including everybody else on the base, whether they had combat training or not, had to sleep with rifles at bedside in case the warlords — the Chinese — attacked us and we had to defend the base. That's the only thing. It never happened, though. We finally got all evacuated to Shanghai without any actual firing.

Q: So you mentioned about the Flying Tigers, what were your memories about the Flying Tigers in general?

EM: Well, it started out as a voluntary group of United States pilots who got some planes together and volunteered to fight the Japanese before the United States was ever officially involved. The Flying Tigers got known because they painted the face of a tiger on their airplanes. Once the United States officially joined the war, they became part of the United States Army Air Corps. So then they were part of the same army that I was a member of at the time — but that was later, a lot later in the war, not early on. Early on, it was just the volunteer group. I never directly worked with the Flying Tigers. I got to meet a few of them. Some were stationed at the same air base I was, but I never really got to know them very well.

Q: My next question is, were there a lot of mosquitoes, malaria, dengue fever, and so on? And did you ever end up catching any of those?

EM: Well, I was stationed in India. Agra was the central end of India. And there, the biggest problem was heat. Some days the temperature got up to 110, 115 degrees. The airplanes got so hot in the sun that the mechanics had to wear gloves to work on them. So the heat was the big problem. There was some malaria all over India. That didn't get really bad until I got up in the Assam Valley, which is northeast of Calcutta. That's where the last takeoff place was to fly the Hump. I was living in a tent, which was essentially at the edge of the jungle. And there, mosquitoes were unbelievably bad. We tried to use these gas bombs to kill them and keep the tent clean, but they weren't too good. They smelled terrible and probably weren't good for your health either. But we had Atabrine — it was an anti-malarial drug. There was water — we couldn't drink regular water around there. The water was too contaminated. So they had special water that had been purified by the health people in the military, and we had to drink that water. Right next to the drinking fountain for the water, there were two little containers. One contained Atabrine tablets, anti-malaria. The other contained salt tablets so you could get enough salt in your system. And we had to take those all the time. But a lot of people did get malaria and were down sick for a while. For most of them, fortunately, the Atabrine kept it down so that after a month or two, they could come back and work as normal. But it was a lot of... a lot of the men did get it. It was a lot worse up in the Assam Valley and eastern India than it was in Agra. Calcutta was a little more controlled.

Q: When you came back, did you run into any typhoons at all? Or any bad weather?

EM: Well, we had the normal. The weather in India was basically what you'd expect for India. During the fall, we had — I forget exactly what they called it — the monsoon season, I guess. We went through those. But the really bad storms that we worried about weren't after the war; it was during the war, flying over the Himalayas. They had a lot of thunderstorms, and literally hundreds of our planes are still in those mountains, where they fell because of the storms in the Himalayas. That was always something I had on my mind as an operations officer, because when you're sending pilots out over the Himalayas, you really had to worry about the weather. Although, at the time, we didn't have much control over it, or even much knowledge of it. So the weather was bad over there, but I wouldn't say it was unusual compared to storms in this country now — you know, hurricanes and everything. Those kinds of storms were pretty normal in the Himalaya region back then, more so than in most other places.

Q: After you were discharged, did you attend school under the provisions of the GI Bill?

EM: Yes, I did. I benefited very much. I was luckier than clever in a lot of things in respect to the war. That was one of the really good things. After the war, I had four years of the GI Bill available, and I used almost all of it. I used two years to finish my undergraduate studies, one year to get a master's degree, and one year to spend in Basel, Switzerland, as a graduate student under the University of Maryland program. I was able to do that because of the GI Bill of Rights, which gave me that opportunity. Later, I went back to get my doctoral degree, and fortunately, I had a fellowship by then and didn't need the GI Bill anymore.

Q: Then after you were discharged, did you stay in touch with anyone you served with during the war?

EM: I did for a few years, but those things gradually died out. Right now I have a hard time remembering them even. That was maybe during the late '40s and '50s I was in touch with a number of them, but... and that was about 70 years ago, and I sort of lost touch with them gradually over time.

Family member reminded : Sylvia?

EM: Sylvia, one of the friends I made in Shanghai in 1946 or so. Kept in touch with her, as Matt knows, and her family. By coincidence, unbelievably, she married a classmate of mine at Washington University. He was Swiss. He went back for Christmas holiday one year and met Sylvia, and he told me about this. I showed him a picture of the girl he was going to marry before he had ever met her. And I kept in touch with Sylvia and Peter all the time until she died just about three or four years ago. They came to this country and spent their lives here. I have a picture of them on two of her ponies out in front here. But I kept in touch with her right up to a couple of years ago. Most of the people I just lost touch with. That was unusual because she ended up marrying a classmate of mine at Washington University.

Q: Did you attend any kind of reunions after the war or anything like that?

EM: One time. The meteorology college from NYU. About, I think, ten years after the war, one of the people organized a reunion down in Long Island someplace, and I did attend that. That's the only one I ever attended. It's the only one that was ever held by them. Otherwise, I'm not any. I have joined the VFW relatively recently here in Poestenkill because I had a lot of friends, VFW friends I hadn't known during the war at all, but now I'm there, and I did join the VFW. But I unfortunately didn't do very much activity with them because I got tied up with other town activities. I was on the planning zoning board and town council and things like that. So I never did a lot with the veterans' associations after the war.

DM: And understand, young ladies, when he says he joined the VFW here in town relatively recently, that probably means forty years ago. Right? Probably maybe fifty years ago.

Ms. Sue McLaren (SM): What about, you didn't mention you and your brother using your money from the GI Bill.

EM: My brother and I — my brother was a year older than I was — but we both graduated from college at the same time, 1948. The GI Bill didn't pay for your vacation time, but New York State did that year. That year we both got a bonus from New York State for, I think, \$200, and he and I decided we were going to spend the summer after we graduated touring the country.

He had an old Model A Ford, and we took that Model A Ford in the summer of 1948. During the months of June, July, and August, we traveled something like 14,000 miles. We went down the East Coast along the mountains, along the South Coast and the Gulf Coast, up north

into the western area of the (unclear) National Parks, Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone and all the national parks. We went down to Mexico City on the highway there. Boy, that was tough. We had flat tires with nobody around. But then we went back north again, up through California and Oregon, Washington, and southern Canada, and back down across northern New York State, back home. We spent over 14,000 miles on that trip. It was close to three months doing it. And it's very memorable because... and that whole time we had sleeping — not sleeping bags — we had jungle hammocks, jungle sleeping hammocks. We slept in them at night in different places, mostly in parks or national forests, but sometimes just along the road tied to a farmer's fence or something. And during that whole time, we did not sleep inside a single night. We stayed outside every night for the whole time.

SM: That was your first activity after getting out of the war, both of you.

EM: Right, right, yeah.

DM: And again, the context of it is hard to imagine. So that was what year?

EM: 1948.

DM: So that's fifty-two, seventy-seven years ago. It's been a long time. The average speed is maybe thirty or forty miles an hour.

EM: The maximum speed that Model A would go is 40 miles an hour.

DM: So you're not 70 miles an hour and for example, when's the last time you had to change a tire in your car? How many times would you say in that three months would you have to change a tire, repair a tire?

EM: Not more than three or four. The Model A was great. It didn't have much to repair. It didn't even have a gasoline pump in it. Gasoline was gravity fed into the engine.

DM: I thought you had to stop with a lot more flat tires over that time.

EM: No, not many. Not more than three or four. But anyway, it was a great time. But as I said, we didn't spend a single night inside. We spent every night in our jungle hammocks outside. World War II. Jungle hammock. Army surplus. To be honest, I don't think anybody could do that anymore. Not because of a lack of ability, but because of the change in traffic. We had no interstate. Most of the road was two-lane. The number of cars on the road was 10% of what it is today, very few. So we could do all this traveling on roads where there was very little traffic. At nighttime, we could tie up to a farmer's fence several times and there wouldn't be more than one or two cars all night long pass by, you know. It was a different situation. People could not do it today.

SE: Did the \$400 last you the whole trip, Gene?

EM: It did. Wow. We cooked our own meals. We had a little Coleman stove, gasoline stove. Gasoline is only about 12, 15 cents a gallon. We didn't buy food and stuff that we needed. We cooked our own meals. The only thing we spent money for, stores I think, we'd stop in the morning, stop at some store (unclear).

SM: During World War II, I was ten years younger than Gene, and I was in elementary school, buying war stamps, helping my mother give out certificates for gas, or sugar. Those things, you know. Rational things.

DM: A lot of this history is forgotten.

SM: Once a week, 25 cents, we bought war stamps.

EM: I remember coming home from — I was at NYU the first year. I'd leave a couple of times and come home for Christmas or something. I remember my father had a ration book. He had to get to work every day. And he got a little extra if he could prove he needed to get

to work. But for all other purposes, they had a ration book — three gallons of gasoline a month.

SM: We also went out and collected milkweed pods. Did you hear that story? They had us children collecting milkweed pods. At one time, they thought the white puffy thing — the seed pod — would be good for life-saving, for preserves, life vests. Life vests, before they had a chance to come up with the proper thing they were using.

EM: And before, no such thing as plastic in those days.

Q: I think one thing I learned about our textbook back when I was in Taiwan, I remember that because our government was really thankful for the U.S. help and they would print the U.S. flag and then image of how the U.S. armies are helping us on rice bags and different kinds of products.

Q: So, can I get into more details about, like, what did you do after the war or after you got discharged from the service?

EM: After the war? Yeah. After I got discharged? I never really got completely discharged from the army. I'm still a retired Reserve Officer of the Army. I'm still on the retired list. I carry a card showing I'm a member of the Armed Forces.

Family Member: I didn't know that. No wonder you get that discount at Home Depot.

EM: But anyway, I'm still a major in the United States Army — Army Air Corps, except it's now called the Air Force. Anyway, what I did after the war is what most of my friends did who had quit college halfway through it. I finished my college career first at Albany State Teachers for a bachelor's and master's degree. Then I went to the University of Basel for a year of post-graduate study. And then I came back and taught a couple of years.

DM: Where did you teach, Dad?

EM: I taught at Albany State Teachers College, my old alma mater. And then I was given information. My boss, who was also a good friend, said I really ought to come back and get a doctorate if I ever wanted to go on in the teaching profession. Right — college teaching needed a doctorate degree. So I quit teaching and went to Washington University in St. Louis, where I got my doctorate in physical chemistry. Then I came back to Albany and taught two more years, met my wife Sue, and got married. For a honeymoon, we took a trip out west and ended up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where I spent three years working in a geochemical laboratory. I was getting bored there and wanted to go back to teaching, so I ended up going back to Albany State, which is now the State University of New York. I helped build a new campus there. I very modestly say I not only helped build the campus, but I also helped build all the graduate programs and the doctoral programs at the university in the sciences and mathematics because I ended up — for whatever reason, I don't know — I ended up as the head of the science and mathematics division at Albany. **SM:** And meteorology, too. ASRC, back to meteorology.

EM: And the meteorology ones. I also helped establish with Vince Schaefer, who was the primary guy that established the well-known atmospheric sciences research center at Albany. Anyway, that's what I ended up doing. Then I retired when I was 65.

Q: You get to do the things that you like.

EM: That is quite a life as you look back at it. I don't particularly go for interviews like this. In some ways, it does make me think back a little — how much I did enjoy all the things.

Q: That kind of brings us to our last question. What do you think your life would look like if you hadn't enlisted and how do you think you've changed because of your experience?

EM: I don't know for sure, but I think if I hadn't enlisted and served in the Army, I might not have gone on as far as I was able to in college and such, because I didn't have the money to do it. It was the G.I. Bill of Rights that really helped me after the war get started in directions that I might never have gone in. I probably would have ended up doing similar things, but in different ways. That's because I was interested in science and math, of course — from high school days on up. So I would have ended up doing something in science and math, but how it would have worked would probably be a lot different.

Meg McClellan: Gene, did your parents ever talk about college as something you should do?

Because they did not go to college, did they, your parents?

EM: Neither one of them went to college. My father had wanted to go to law school, but he didn't make it. He had to go to work. My family didn't have much money at all. He had a hard time going through the Depression years in the late '20s, early '30s — very difficult times. So he ended up as a chauffeur. But the one thing that they did, both of them always told me, was that I really needed to go to college. That was the one thing that they said. Otherwise, they had very little to tell me because they hadn't had experience themselves in that way. My mother, she helped support the family — she was a really good pianist, and she helped support the family by working, first of all, in some dance groups around the city of Troy and such. And secondly, for 20 years, she served as the organist of the United Presbyterian Church in Troy. And so, that way, she was making a little money to help support us. But she was always a musician. That was her lifetime — piano. She was really good at the piano.

SM: She told me, too, she used to play with a silent movie. Alice, whatever it be.

EM: That's one of the other jobs she had. She played for silent movies before. Because she could change keys and instantly go from one rhythm to the other. Depending if somebody was singing, she could arrange it so it was just the right thing. She had an ability that very few people have, actually, musically. But I remember when I was young, maybe five, six, seven, she wanted me to learn to play the piano too, and I never did. I couldn't. But one of the things we did then — the piano was in the living room down Collins Avenue, down near Emma Willard. In one of those little houses on the side there, they had a piano in the living room. And the kitchen was out another room away around the corner. And we used to have a game. She'd have me go in and hit any one, two, or three keys on the piano at a time — white or black keys — and she would call in and tell me the name of those keys. She did it correctly all the time. Isn't that amazing?

SM: She still could do that at 90.

DM: Dad, you remember the story you were telling me about your flying into the foggy airport? I bet they'd love to hear about that. It's my favorite story. Almost died.

EM: Probably one of the many times I was very lucky. It was one of those familiarization flights. I took over the Himalayans with a pilot friend of mine who fortunately was a very good pilot. He was flying Air Transport Command. Planes over the hump normally, you know.

SM: What was the load?

EM: Gasoline, food, Yeah, it was close enough. All kinds of stuff they needed in China were flying over from Luliang into China. And so I took a familiarization flight with them. I got orders to do it. You couldn't take passengers without official orders. As an operation officer, I

got orders to do that as a familiarization. And so we took off, and at the time there was no direct weather reports from China. There were two places you could land in China, Kunming and Luliang. I was stationed at Luliang later, but at the time I wasn't. So we were flying from Luliang to Kunming. And we got over the mountain, an absolutely gorgeous scene at the top of the mountain and everything. But we got over the China side with the gasoline. The pilots used to always argue with the operations officer how much gasoline they could have. And you'd get more or less depending upon what the weather prediction might be, what might happen. And we didn't have a lot of extra gas, but we got over the... Kunming didn't land, and it had no... The mountain ranges, it's like New Mexico, we have plateaus and such, and above the plateaus you have mountains all around. And both Kunming and Luliang down lower than the high mountain peaks around so you had to be careful when you're flying. We got over to Kunming where we were going to land and it was completely socked in. What came down was just about the level of the mountains around and we got in touch with, radio touch, with the tower there so we almost hit the tower... told us more or less what direction we were in. The only radio contact we had was the tower voice and they heard the plane up there but couldn't see us and we couldn't see them. And so we started down. We couldn't go to Luoyang because the gasoline supply was too low to get there. So we had to land there. So using the tower, this pilot was a good pilot fortunately. Kept circling around and kept close enough so the tower could hear us all right. That one was probably away from most of the mountain peaks.

DM: And you're completely sightless. You can't see a thing. You're in the clouds. You're flying blind.

EM: Couldn't see a thing. We were circling over this place, completely blind, staying within hearing range of the tower. Kept going down lower and lower because the tower said there's about a two or three hundred foot ceiling. If we got down that low, we could probably see. So we kept going down. Finally, we were getting down — if the altimeter was right — we were probably about 400 or 500 feet, but still couldn't see the ground yet. And so I was sitting there between the pilot and co-pilot, looking out, trying to see something, you know. Couldn't see a thing. But I heard all the radio. I had earphones on because here's the tower radio. And just as we were getting down about this level, the tower started yelling at us: "Turn right, turn! You're heading right at the tower!" So we took this plane — the pilot took the plane — put it up about 45 degrees on one wing, made a sharp turn, didn't want to get too far away either. Did the same thing the other way, at the same time going down a bit. And then at about 300 feet, he said, "I see a runway! I'm going down!" He dove down again and landed the thing shortly. Everything worked out well. It turns out it was not the runway — it was a taxi strip he landed on.

SM: But you made it. What kind of airplane was it, Gene?

EM: It was a C-55. DC-4, DC-3 I guess — DC-3, C-54. It was a big four-engine plane. It wasn't a simple plane. C-54. I think it was a DC-4, I guess DC-3. C-54 though. C-54 is the military name of it. Cargo plane. But I tell you, that's about as close as I ever came to not living another day. At the time, it was exciting. Didn't take too much, but I went into Kunming and spent a couple hours in the city, came back and stayed the night, and then turned around the next morning and flew back. That was probably one of the most exciting times.

SM: One of the things that I picked up that you have been talking about with World War II was that no matter where you were, you said that the people were good and friendly, and you

could talk to anybody. And you liked to, when you had time, explore around the area and go to the post office and buy stamps and things.

EM: When I had free time, I used to like to run around. First overseas was Agra, which is where the Taj Mahal is. I could get to the Taj Mahal by bicycle. I used to bicycle down, walk through the Taj Mahal and all, get to know the territory and the people. I've got a picture sometime I've got to find it again. A little old Indian guy, he had a white beard at the time, somewhere near Agra, I came across him while riding my bicycle. I stopped to see what he was doing because he had things pulling back and forth on a big block of granite. I stopped, and he chatted with me a little bit.

He said, "Yeah, I'm sawing a block of some granite. We're building a new Jain Temple here. This is going to be part of a Jain Temple." I liked to see how he was sawing that block of granite. It wasn't granite; it was limestone, marble, I guess. The way he was doing it, he had a thing like a saw — you know, a regular saw — but instead of a blade, it had about a tenth of an inch of a small cord, some kind of cord like a rope, except the rope was very small. And he had a pot of water and some sand next to him. He sawed this block, and every few minutes, he'd go down with his hand, take some of the water and some salt, and put it in the groove that he was working on. Then he'd go back and saw again for a while. He said he'd been sawing that block for a year and a half or so.

I asked them when they expected to finish that temple. There were a lot of other people around there doing other stuff, working on it. This was 1946, I think it was. I asked them. They said, "It should be done around... we hope it's done by the late 1990s." And he was sawing this block of limestone marble with sand and a cord, sitting there going back and forth, taking about a year to get one block done. I have a picture of him yet, I gotta find that again. He said it was okay to take his picture.

But I used to like to travel — Calcutta, Shanghai, Luliang — all the cities. And I liked it when I had free time. I like to walk around the outskirts of the town and see how the people lived, not just in the center of town. And I really found all the people I came in contact with — Chinese, Indians, and all the cities — the country people as well as the city people, I didn't see any difference between them basically. The American people, it's over with. They're all kind, friendly people I came across.

Q: Do you remember being in Beijing — Beijing or Peking?

EM: Oh yes. After the war, as I say, we evacuated Luliang rather rapidly. I got sent to Shanghai, where I worked at the Shanghai air base. Well, Dum Dum it was called, the air base. Then after the war, a lot of people started to go home. I wasn't one of the first people to go home because I hadn't been in service long enough. But anyway, George Marshall — he was the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Army during the war, and Secretary of State after the war — he came with a small delegation to Peking and had a delegation there working with Chiang Kai-shek, the president of China. They were trying to find some way to make some kind of peace deal between Chiang Kai-shek's army and the communists who were trying to overthrow it. So I got sent up there. When he came over, they needed some people to help staff his headquarters, and I got sent up from Shanghai to Peking. I was only there a few months, because then I got discharged and came home. But I was there a few months, and during that time I got to get around Peking a lot. I was able to get a jeep to ride around the countryside a little bit too. It had shoulder patches on — it had in Chinese, "Make Peace Man." So presumably, anybody who saw that was supposed to let you alone and not bother you.

SM: Didn't you have a medal then?

EM: Oh yeah, what not. But during the time I was at Peking with General Marshall's headquarters, Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese president, had an appreciation evening for the American service people there. And they put on a Chinese opera, and before the opera, they had an hour — a cocktail hour. At that time, Chiang Kai-shek, all the people there — he was personally awarding a Chinese medal for the service. Later, I got it officially. He sent it to the Army headquarters. The Army headquarters forwarded it — mine to me — when I was told I was entitled to wear it on my uniform. It's the Order of the Flying Banner of the Chinese Army. I still have that. But as I say, it happens to be being in the right place at the right time. I didn't do anything terribly important in Peking except take care of what needed to be done for the Staff Marshall's headquarters.