

**Arthur Lawrence Smith
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke
Interviewer**

**New York State Military Museum
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WC: Today is the 24th of February, 2012. We're at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, NY. My name is Wayne Clarke. Sir for the record, would you please state your full name and date and place of birth please.

ALS: Arthur Lawrence Smith. I was born in Troy, New York. I am trying to think of the exact date.

WC: I have you down as the 29th of December, 1916.

ALS: December 29, 1916. That's right. I will get it right yet.

WC: Did you attend school in Troy?

ALS: Waterford. I should mention that I am a little hard of hearing.

WC: That's fine. Did you graduate from high school?

ALS: Yes.

WC: What year did you graduate?

ALS: 1934.

WC: When you graduated from high school, did you go on to college or go to work?

ALS: No. I would have loved to [have gone to college] but it was the middle of The Depression and I came from a family with my mother, my grandmother and myself. I had to go to work.

WC: Where did you work?

ALS: I started working for a textile company. It doesn't matter the name, anyways, for five cents a dozen. I ironed men's boxer shorts. If you worked your tail off, you might have made four dollars a day. When they changed the rate on it, I got disgusted and quit. I had several other jobs. I worked for New York Power and Light for a while. And Construction. I finally went to work for an operator of a garage with a gas station too. Collar City Garage in North Troy, New York. He specialized in tune-ups, carburization and ignition. The boss was a graduate. I am trying to think of the name of the school. It was in the middle west. He was one of the three recognized operators for that kind of work in the area. The biggest one was Roemer and Zeller in Schenectady. And then there was Jack Troy in Troy. That wasn't his name, but he took that name anyway. I was at North City Garage in North Troy at 113th Street and 5th Avenue. What we did primarily was rebuild carburetors and check out electrical systems for somebody who was unhappy with how their car was operating. And they suspected it was carburation or ignition, which it usually was. We corrected it. Mostly I pumped gas, changed oils, fixed flats. But I was also learning the business from Ray Farmer who was my boss. He was good.

WC: Did you do that right up until the time we got involved with the war?

ALS: Yes. As a matter of fact, in 1938, I got the idea of enlisting. Looking at what was going on in Europe, it was a pretty much drawn conclusion that you were going to be involved in it sooner or later. On November 10, 1939, I went down to Albany and signed up.

WC: You signed up for the Air Corps.

ALS: Yes.

WC: What made you pick the Air Corps?

ALS: When I was ten [years old], Charles Lindberg flew across the ocean. It had an effect on me. I wanted to know what it was all about. My father gave me a copy of the book that he [Lindberg] first wrote, called *We*, [1927], which meant he and the airplane. I read all about it. One thing and another.

WC: Had you ever flown in an airplane before that?

ALS: No. Well, yes. My grandfather took me to a field in North Adams when I lived there. I got a ten minute hop or something like that.

WC: Was it an old bi-plane?

ALS: Yes. It was what they called the New-Standard. But the New-Standard was a 1929 [plane]. [laughs]

WC: Where did you go for your basic training when you went into the service?

ALS: Mitchel Field, near Hempstead, New York.

WC: You had basic training there?

ALS: Yes.

WC: What was that like?

ALS: As a matter of fact, having enlisted on November 10, it was not exactly warm. And the first three or four weeks of basic training involved marching around outside and learning how to march and salute. I wouldn't say it was unpleasant, but it was not a stroll in the park. We also had times when we sat around and listened to senior officers who explained military courtesy and what to expect you would be in for and all that stuff. It was interesting.

WC: Was that your first time away from home for a long period of time?

ALS: Yes.

WC: Once you completed your basic training at Mitchel Field, did you go to an advanced school?

ALS: I went to several. They had a six month course at Roosevelt Field.

WC: Down on Long Island.

ALS: Yes. Mineola, Long Island. It is the same field from which Lindberg started his flight. The six month course was basic Air Corps mechanics. You had several weeks on propellers, power plants, aircraft systems, structures and all that sort of thing. It took six months. It was quite an extended course. I graduated in August. Went with what they called return to duty. I went back to my squadron and became a ground crew member.

WC: Was that still down on Long Island?

ALS: Yes. Still Mitchel Field for a while. In October or November the following year, we moved to Langley Field in Virginia. And there, we did the same thing.

WC: What did you do at Langley?

ALS: I was still a crew member in a crew of mechanics. I did whatever I was told to do.

WC: Any flight time at all?

ALS: No. I had this idea from the very beginning of getting flight training some way or another. The first thing I thought of was the military because I wouldn't have to pay for it. However, to be selected for flight training in the military, you had to meet certain conditions. The first thing, you had to pass a physical which was pretty complex. And you had to have what they called, two years of an accredited college or university or its equivalent. I didn't have that, of course. If you didn't have that, you could take a written examination. If you passed that, you were eligible to submit your name for when they picked anybody. I spent the first several months at the post library studying previous examinations. Of course, the examination I would get if I was chosen wouldn't be the same one I got there. They had questions and answers that gave you an example of what you would have been up against on the written exam. When I thought I was ready to pass it, I submitted my application. This was at Langley Field. Subsequently, I was told to report to the base hospital for a physical exam. I flunked the physical which ended my military career as a pilot. I flunked the physical on insufficient red green perception. [points to his eyes] [laughs] I have to laugh at it because when I went to take my driver's test, you had to identify different colored lights. I never knew I was color blind. I look at something and [see it] as red, green, amber. It still looks red, green and amber to me. I don't know how other people see.

While I was there, after that, I was picked to go to a specialist school in Rantoul, Illinois, Chinook Field. I had a two month course on instrumentation. How to work on altimeters, air speed indicators, that sort of thing. When I came back, I went right back to work as a ground crew member. Only then, I was a specialist. [laughs] I got six dollars a month extra.

WC: Do you recall approximately when that was? Was that before Pearl Harbor?

ALS: Oh, yes. Let me recap that in my mind for a minute. The first six months...well, it ended in August of 1940. So I guess it started six months before that.

I can tell you about Pearl Harbor. I remember. I was at Langley Field. It was Sunday morning and several of us were at the PX having coffee. Actually, it was afternoon. It was morning in Pearl Harbor. We got the news that the Japanese had

attacked and bombed Pearl Harbor. Of course all of us looked at each other and asked, where the hell is Pearl Harbor. We didn't know. [laughs] We found out later though.

WC: Did things in the military change immediately after the attack?

ALS: Yes. They sure did. Five days later, we were on our way to California to Muroc Dry Lake. Are you familiar with it?

WC: I have heard of it.

ALS: Edwards Air Force Base is close by. At that time all it was was one seven thousand mile concrete strip and a few buildings. Of course, now it is a big deal. We set up operations on the flat lake bed. Muroc Dry Lake, when they say dry, they are not kidding. When it is full of water, it has a depth of about four inches. But big enough for B26's to land and take off there and have enough room left to do it again. One of our pilots had the bright idea to land a B26, not touch the brakes and see how far it would roll. After he got to five miles, he said, the hell with it and stopped. That dry bed was amazing. It looked like mud that dried in little patches. It is as hard as a rock.

WC: I think they used to race cars there.

ALS: Oh, yes. They still do, I think. That and the Salt Flats in Utah, they race cars. Anyway, for a month or so was shoreline patrol on the coast of California looking for the possibility of Japanese submarines. There were a couple of cases where two man Japanese subs that actually made attacks. We never saw any.

On January 31st, we boarded a troop ship and took off. Twenty five days later, we landed in Brisbane, Australia. We were there for slightly over a year. Then we moved up to Port Moresby in New Guinea.

WC: What did you do in Australia? Was it mostly training?

ALS: Once the aircraft arrived, we started warfare, I guess you would call it. I went on my first mission on April 8, 1941.

WC: What was your job on that mission?

ALS: My title was, I forget what they called it. But I was a tail gunner. That was the one, I think I showed you. We moved from Ipswich near Brisbane to Townsville, Australia, about five hundred miles north. From Townsville was where we started to fly our first combat missions. Which meant you had to fly

from Townsville to Port Moresby and start the mission from there. Because that was sort of the headquarters in New Guinea. We took off and started up. We made land fall, but we were not sure if Port Moresby was east or west. We tried to raise them on the radio, but there was no reply. We knew it was New Guinea of course, but we didn't know exactly where we were. As it turned out, we were near Kerema. The captain decided to fly for five minutes this way and if he didn't find anything, he flew five minutes that way. In the meantime we were running out of fuel, time and daylight. Not dangerously, but the captain decided to put the airplane down before it got dark or before we ran out of fuel. To make a long story short, he came in from the sea, touched down on the beach where it was sandy and then into the undergrowth. Not the jungle but the shorter stuff. And that is where we wound up. Nobody was injured. Just a few minor cuts and bruises.

WC: What about the plane?

ALS: The plane is still there. [laughs]

WC: Is it really?

ALS: So they say. At least it was when that guy by the name of [Michael] Claringbould wrote that book that I have here. I remember reading it when he said all the crew was rescued, but such and such number of airplanes are still there. What was he thinking? That he could take off without any props. [laughs]

WC: How long were you there before you were rescued?

ALS: Eleven days. We went out in Kerema, but we were only in Kerema overnight. The next morning, a gentleman, I call him that anyway, a black in a sort of uniform came running up and handed our captain a message. It was from Lieutenant [Francis, Frank Herbert] Moy of the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces]. It said, from where I was, I observed your approach and crash. I will be with you at noon. Sure enough, he came. He had with him several other blacks. They were carrying all kinds of other stuff. He was taking material and supplies up the Fly River to a rubber plantation. We joined him and walked from where we were in Kerema up the Fly River to the Rubber plantation. Took most of the day. That was where we stayed for several days.

WC: What kind of accommodations did you have there:

ALS: It was a rubber plantation and somewhat primitive. Actually, we had a shower. A tank that caught rain water up on the roof and it came down through a sprinkler. [laughs]

WC: How were your rations there? Food?

ALS: Let me explain that to you. We had food, but one of the things that I learned was that the natives of the country had what we would call a bread substitute. It's called, I forget. It is the inside of a palm tree mashed up and mixed with water and put inside a hollow bamboo tube and then roasted over a fire. It came out like a big long pretzel. Somebody asked me one time, did you eat any of it. I said, yeah, I tried some. They asked what it tasted like. I said it tasted like the inside of a palm tree. Sago, that's what it is. Because it comes from the Sago palm. [laughs] Other than that, we had eggs, very little meat, and lots of fruit. Mangos, ordinary fruit.

WC: How did you get back to your base?

ALS: That's interesting too. The people back in Australia sent a ninety foot coastwise steamer up near to where the airplane was with a salvage crew. They went in and stripped what they could find that was worth anything off the airplane and just left the hull there. They brought us from the Rubber Plantation back to Port Moresby. We stayed there overnight. The next day, we got a ride back to Townsville on a [Short] Empire flying boat. A four engine flying boat. I am trying to think of the British company that made them. With the inside taken out, we just sat on the floor. We landed in Townsville Harbor. And they...I keep saying [the word] they. I don't know who they were. Whoever was in charge of the power boat that brought us to shore.

WC: Did the pilot get into any kind of trouble?

ALS: Hell no. It was the whole crew of us. The pilot and everybody else. Perhaps I should explain. The reason we couldn't contact Port Moresby was because they were under attack. And when they were under attack, all communications that could have been read by the enemy were shut down. Even the thing called an NDB [Non Directional Beacon] which is what we were supposed to be homing on. We couldn't receive it because it was shut down. All that happened while we were deciding what to do. So when we got back to Townsville, the whole crew was given leave. Not a long leave, but a three day pass. I went into Townsville to the Great Northern Hotel, which was attached to the Great Northern Railroad. The hotel was alright. I should mention, I had a few beers the night before. The next morning, I was as sick as a dog. I thought I had a hangover. I finally got showered and dressed and went out. I was sitting on the curb when one of our trucks came in from the airfield. A fellow I knew was driving it. He asked what I was doing. I

said, I am sitting here sick. He said, get in. I have to go pick up some rations. I will give you a ride back to the post. I got back and turned myself into a medic. They said I had a fever of one hundred and four. I went right into the hospital. I had dengue fever.

WC: Oh, jeez.

ALS: What the Australians called break-bone fever. Because you felt like your arms and legs were broken.

WC: How long were you in the hospital?

ALS: About eleven days. The treatment was ABC. [Avoidance, Barrier repellents, Control of mosquitoes] I don't know what it stood for, but it was three elements together. If it was malaria, they used quinine. I had malaria later, but that was something else.

WC: Did anybody else in the group come down with dengue fever?

ALS: I don't think so, no. But, of course, New Guinea was overrun with mosquitos. And the mosquito that carried dengue fever is the infected aedes a-e-g-y-p-t-i [mosquito], however you say it. Also known later as the Stegomyia. It is not the one that carries malaria. That is the anopheles and only the female carries it. But anyway, I spent, I don't know, how many days in the hospital recovering, went back to my unit and that was that.

WC: Where did you go next?

ALS: We next moved from Townsville to Port Moresby. We set up at the fourteen mile. Port Moresby, as the name implies, is right on the shoreline practically, the city. Lalibu-Pangia is a string of white strips. The first one is the five mile. The second one is the seven mile which was where the most activity took place. Then they go on, twelve miles, fourteen, seventeen and thirty miles. We were at fourteen miles for a while and then at seventeen miles.

WC: Were you a flying crew member as a tail gunner at that point?

ALS: Yes.

WC: And that was on the B-26?

ALS: Yes.

WC: Any contact with the Japanese at all?

ALS: Yes.

WC: Want to tell us about that?

ALS: [laughs] Our captain told us, I don't want any of you crew members to try and be heroes and get yourself a reputation for shooting down the enemy. Just keep them the hell away from this bomber while we make our run. We all took that as good advice. In other words, I never managed to shoot anything down, but I shot at the Japanese quite a bit. The only time I am convinced that I may have killed a Japanese was not shooting down an enemy airplane, it was strafing a troop barge on one of the rivers on our trip back. I used to say to all my buddies, the rest of the crew wanted to see where we were going. But I wanted to see where we had been. In the tail, when you sat there, you were almost outside when you put that thing down. [gestures half circle]. When you leaned forward, you felt the breeze on your head.

WC: Did your plane ever get hit with any flak or bullet holes?

ALS: Not that I know of. No. I want to make it clear, I was not in combat very long. A combination of malaria and other things. And I had my eye on a different job and wound up with it. Finally, I wound up as the group maintenance inspector. That was a really good job. I worked in an S4 office and had my own jeep.

WC: So you were basically inspecting the work done by the mechanics?

ALS: Right. I had to inspect one airplane per squadron per month. You usually got one that just finished the one hundred hour inspection by the crew. After which, they called their squadron inspector and had him go through and see if he could find anything wrong with their work. Then they called S-4 and said they had an airplane ready for group inspection. Then I went and inspected it.

WC: What rank were you at that point?

ALS: Technical sergeant. Finally. [laughs]

WC: What kind of living quarters did you have:

ALS: Pyramidal tent.

WC: Besides the dengue fever and malaria, any problems with snakes or scorpions or anything like that?

ALS: Just mosquitoes. The area we were in was not noted for scorpions. There was an area where some of the guys did duty in Australia, not New Guinea, where they had scorpions. I can't think of the name of that area. Only two squadrons went up there. My squadron didn't go.

WC: Any contact with the natives?

ALS: Yeah.

WC: How were you guys treated by them?

ALS: They treated us like Gods. They were black. They were Melanesians. Some of them spoke a little English but not much. They came into the camp area. We moved from Port Moresby. The first place we moved to was Dobodura which is near Lae. That was a nice camp. I liked that. One of the things that I liked to get a hold of were limes. That was not what the natives called them. If I can think of it. Muri, m-u-r-i. That means lime.

WC: Did you trade cigarettes and candy with them?

ALS: Yes. What they wanted was cloth. I had a thing that was issued to me. It was called a mattress cover. Something to put your mattress in, zip it up and protect it. But I never used it. I never used the pillow either. I used a leather jacket like this. I rolled it up for a pillow. I had to have the jacket with me anyway, I might use it.

WC: So, you had a leather flight jacket?

ALS: Yes.

WC: Do you still have that jacket?

ALS: No. There is another tale about that. I played pool a lot. One of the bars I went to a couple years back, I had the jacket on the chair like this. I was playing pool and when I came back, the jacket was gone. Not only was the jacket gone, but my car keys and house keys were in it. Fortunately, I was not that far from home. There was another fellow there that I knew. He gave me a ride back home to get the spare keys.

WC: Was your jacket decorated?

ALS: Just with my name and the squadron group identification.

WC: Any painted insignia on it, like some of the decorated jackets?

ALS: The bartender said there were a couple guys there that they hadn't seen before. I figured one of them lifted it and it is long gone. I remember saying, the jacket [being gone] I can live with, but what the hell are you going to do with my car keys? [laughs]

WC: Did you get much time off when you were over there?

ALS: We had a lot of time off, but where were you going to go? Periodically, you came due for leave. The first leave that I got was to a town south of Townsville but not down as far as Brisbane. It was Mackay. M-a-c-k-a-y. That was a nice place. It was almost on the shore. The Great Barrier Reef. You probably heard of that.

WC: Yes. Did you see any USO shows or entertainment like that?

ALS: Yes. The guy with the big mouth.

WC: Joe E. Brown.

ALS: Yeah. He was there, he came. And also Bob Hope. And the singer, the girl. Can't think of her now. They were always welcome. They did quite a job, those people.

WC: Were you in the area when the war ended?

ALS: No. I was home by the time the war ended. See, they had something called rotation. They took people who had been in a war area for a certain length of time and shipped them back to the United States.

WC: How long were you overseas before you got shipped home?

ALS: Three years.

WC: Oh, you were there that long.

ALS: Yes. I was finally tapped for rotation in April or March, 1945. I was on the troop ship. By that time, we were in the Phillipines. Somewhere between there and San Francisco the captain announced to all US personnel that he had the sad duty to report that your President had died. That was April 15, 1945.

WC: What was the mood of the ship when you guys got that news?

ALS: It depended if they were Democrats or Republicans. Most all of us realized that regardless of who the president is, that he is the____

WC: Commander-in-Chief.

ALS: The supreme commander, you know. If you are wondering, I am a Democrat and never wanted to be anything else but.

WC: Where were you when the war in Europe ended?

ALS: I am trying to think of that. We got the news, of course.

WC: Were you home on leave?

ALS: No. I was still overseas. Oh, wait a minute.

WC: Let's see, Roosevelt died in April.

ALS: When did the war end?

WC: The war ended in May.

ALS: of 1945.

WC: Yes.

ALS: I was home, yes. What's the matter with me? I got married on May 10 on leave.

WC: When did you meet your wife?

ALS: In high school.

WC: Did you go with her all the time you were in the service or correspond with her?

ALS: We were in the same class, the Class of 1934. But she was smarter than me. She was a year younger, but in the same grade. I had known her for several years. See, I had cousins who lived in the town when I lived in Massachusetts. I used to visit them during school vacation. We went swimming. There was a place in the Hudson River where we all swam. And this girl and her sister used to swim there too. So I knew them. When my grandfather died in 1931, I was just about to enter high school. I just finished grammar school in North Adams. I expected to go to Drury High but I never got there. My grandfather died and we moved back to New York state. My mother, grandmother and myself and I went to school there. Maria, my wife, was in the same class. So, I got to see her every day, practically. I never really thought and I don't think she thought either that we were going to be a pair for a while. [laughs] But, I was still in the Army. I got a leave, after the war, to go home. Oh, I know. She had written to me when I was going to mechanics

school. She read in the paper that I had joined the Army. She wrote to me, what's the matter with you? Are you crazy, you could get killed doing that. [laughs]

WC: Do you want to hold up that wedding picture? When was that taken?

ALS: [shows wedding photo] May 10, 1945.

WC: And you were a sergeant first class at that point.

ALS: Tech sergeant.

WC: You got married. Did you get a chance to honeymoon before you went back?

ALS: Yes. I was on leave. When I came back from overseas, they gave me what they called a delay en-route. It was a furlough, but it didn't detract from your furlough time if you ever had to use it again. The delay en-route specified that the Army had to return you no matter where you were to where you enlisted. Or course, I was on Angel Island off the shore of San Francisco when I was going to be sent home. So they had to put me on a train to get me to Albany. I never got to Albany anyway, but I did get to Grand Central Station in New York and I had a day there. Oh, yeah, I came home and had my two weeks vacation. And on May 10th, Maria and I got married. We spent a couple days in New York. Then my orders said I was to report to Atlantic City to the Ambassador Hotel for R&R. I took my wife with me and down we went. They separated married personnel from single personnel, for good reason. [laughs] While we were there, I got news to report to the first sergeant. They had a first sergeant right on the floor of the hotel we were in. I went down to where he had his little desk. I reported and gave him my name and everything. I said, what's up? He said, what do you want, in or out? I looked at him and asked, what are you talking about? He said, do you want to stay in the Army or do you want to be discharged? I said I wanted to be discharged. He handed me a paper and said to get signatures on all the departments and report here at eight o'clock tomorrow morning. You are going to Fort Dix. He said get your wife and all of your stuff out of here before that. My wife and I put in quite a day getting everything ready. I finally saw her off and she was carrying her suitcase, the record that we bought and a little wind up phonograph. [laughs] She finally made it. I went to Fort Dix and was there overnight. They had to give you a physical. They found a busted ear drum in my left ear. I asked the doctor, why didn't you find this three years ago? I never would have had to go to Australia. [laughs] I was just kidding. They gave me a ten percent disability. Not for the ear drum, but for having malaria. It didn't last

long, maybe a few months. It was like twenty nine dollars a month. I could buy stamps with it.

WC: You were discharged before the war with Japan ended?

ALS: Yes. I was discharged June 9, 1945. The war didn't end until August after Nagasaki.

WC: Once you were discharged, did you make use of the GI Bill or use the 52-20 club?

ALS: No. I was eligible for the GI Bill. I thought first about going to college. But this is funny, I was working by that time. I was working for Behr-Manning. I operated a pilot plant and made sandpaper. I was on vacation in Lake George with my wife. While we were there, there was an operator on a Piper Cub on floats. I saw the plane tied up. Are you familiar with Lake George at all?

WC: Yes.

ALS: It was where the main street was and the street where they parked the boats. Right in there. The Piper Cub was there and I went in and talked to the guy. I asked if I could get a ride. He said with the ordinance in the town, he couldn't take up passengers. He said he could give lessons. I said, ok, give me a lesson for a half and hour. My first half hour was on floats. It was a gimmick. It was their way to hop passengers. I got back from vacation and went back to work. I was talking to my wife one day and said I still remember my ride in that cub up there. I am gonna go to the Troy airport and see what they have going on up there. I went up and they had a class. I signed on for after work and weekends. The nephew of one of the proprietors was one of the instructors. I started flying with him, side-by-side in a Luscombe airplane. I got to be friendly with him, we were out having a few beers. As a matter of fact, we were watching the Monday night fights on a six inch television. He said, my uncle would shoot me for telling you this because you are paying money. Don't sign up for any more time. There is something called the GI Bill. We put in an application to run a flight school and we should hear any minute now. I will call you the minute we have authorization. He did and I was the first one signed up at the school. I went through that. I got a private license, a commercial license and an instructor [ticket]. The day after I passed my flight check for instructor, I was hired as a part-time instructor at the airport. [laughs] It was like the blind leading the blind.

WC: How long did it take you to get your ratings?

ALS: I started around August of 1945. I am trying to think when I got my private [license], it was September. No, it couldn't have been September. It took longer than that. It wasn't very long, anyway, for my private license. It meant you could fly and carry passengers, but not for hire. Then I started on getting a commercial license. That is longer, it is one hundred sixty hours of instruction. After that you can be any kind of pilot you want, as far as commercial. You can't be an airline pilot, that is up to the airlines. Forty more hours, and then I got my instructor ticket. Then I went to work part-time at the airport. I still kept my job at Behr-Manning until 1949. Then I went to work at the airport full-time. Then the GI Bill petered out and fell apart. It wasn't too good, so I left for another kind of job. While I was working at this other job which had nothing to do with flying, there was a phone call from a woman. I went in and answered the phone and this girl said, Art, do you remember me? She gave me her name which I forget now. She worked for the FAA where I had been several times to pass my examinations. She said I was the only one in the area who is a pilot and knows the area. We have a job opening and I am looking for a pilot to be an instructor. I told her where I was working, I wouldn't be too shy about leaving. Where is the job and what does it pay and all that? It was in Poughkeepsie. I thought about it and said ok. She gave me the guy's name. Guy Phillip Elsworth. I will never forget him. He's gone now. A couple days later on a Saturday, I borrowed a Luscombe and flew down to the Dutchess County Airport. Met Ellsworth, he hired me and I went to work there. While I was there, you know IBM, the company. IBM bought its first airplane and hired a big shot pilot to be the aviation chief. The odd part of it was, when they hired him, they said they ordered an Aero Commander plane from Oklahoma. He came from the west and was to stop and pick up the airplane and fly it to Poughkeepsie. He got as far as Buffalo and for some reason, he decided to land at Buffalo. Maybe it was bad weather or something. He landed and the nose wheel collapsed. He stayed there and had to have it repaired.

WC: I am going to stop you here. I have to change tapes. Ok. He had to have the nose wheel repaired.

ALS: Yeah. [laughs] I had a trip out to Buffalo. Leiber Wheeler, the guy at the fixed base operator at Buffalo Aeronautical [Corp]. He asked if I was out of Poughkeepsie and asked if I knew I was going to have a new tenant. I said I had heard something about IBM. He said, he's here. He had a nose wheel collapse and we had to fix it. But, it's ready to go now. He thought it would be a good idea if I met him. So, I did. He said he didn't know the area and it looks like the weather isn't going to be great. He said he would like to fly the airplane to Poughkeepsie

on an instrument flight plan. He asked, how would I go from here to Poughkeepsie? We got out the Jeppesen chart and I showed him how I would go. Down over Binghamton. That was it. When I got back to Poughkeepsie, I told Phil that I had met the new pilot for IBM and his name was Chuck McKinnon. He used to be a United Airlines pilot. He came down and talked to Phil. One pilot and one airplane. You should see it now. They have three jets and I don't know how many pilots. That was then. He had a trip for the company near Boston a few days later and he wanted someone to go with him as a co-pilot. He asked Phil if he could take one of his men. So, he took me. He had me fly the airplane, an Aero Commander. I had never flown one. We got over there. And he said, for the heck of it, let's do an ILS [Instrument Landing System] approach. I did one. He said, would you like to come to work for IBM? Of course, it looked a lot better than what I was doing. I said sure. It will be a little touchy. I will have to take you away from Mr. Ellsworth and he won't be happy about it. I said, you talk to him and see what he says. I think what happened was, Chuck called the head man at IBM who was going to be his boss. He asked who this person is that you are talking about. Does he have this, does he have that? Is he a college graduate? To make a long story short, Chuck got a hold of me and said the top brass said, no dice. They don't want to hire you. So, I never got to work for IBM.

WC: Because you weren't a college graduate?

ALS: That and there may have been something else. I think he probably didn't want to get in the wrong with the proprietor of Poughkeepsie Aviation. While I was there, must have been a year or more later, IBM now had a DC-3 and had hired a few more pilots. One of the pilots, I'm trying to think of his name. He is dead now. We got kind of friendly, and he asked if I liked it here. I said I like where I live and my wife has a good job with the Spackenkill School teaching fourth grade. He said, I don't know why, with your background, that you don't get a job with the airlines. I said, I am thirty-some years old. Airlines don't want new hires at thirty-some years old. He said, no. United, American, TWA will. Do you know what a non-[unclear] 1.07.06 airline is like? I said, you mean a non-certificated air. Sure. He said he used to be chief pilot for Trans-Ocean Airlines. I know their east coast representative and gave me his name. He told me to file an application. So, I filed an application and eventually got a phone call and they wanted to know if I was still interested. I said sure. He said, can you be over here in Windsor Locks, Connecticut tomorrow? I went over and signed on with them. He said to wait around because a plane was coming in and the captain on it usually does the check rides. I said the biggest plane I ever flew was a Grumman

Widgeon which weighed nine thousand pounds. I asked what a DC-4 weighs. He said seventy three thousand eight hundred pounds. [laughs] Anyway, I went up with the guy and passed his check ride. There wasn't any way to flunk the check ride because they needed pilots. [laughs] All you had to do was three take offs and three landings.

WC: Do you want to hold up that photograph of you in the pilot seat? When and where was that taken?

ALS: [shows photograph] This was en-route between LaGuardia and Miami.

WC: How old were you in that picture?

ALS: About forty-one. It was 1957. I was born in 1916.

WC: How long did you fly with them?

ALS: About a year. I didn't quit. They more or less went out of business.

WC: Then you moved on to the next airline?

ALS: I was still working part-time for Poughkeepsie Aviation. I went down to Peterborough where there is an outfit called Pilot Employment. I went into their offices and told the lady there that I was looking for a certain person. I heard that he might be hiring. He wasn't there, she said he was in Canada. She asked if I was looking for work. She said there was a company looking for a co-pilot and asked if I ever flew a C-46. I said I hadn't but I knew what they were. To make a long story short, she called him and he hired me over the phone. I had to go home and get ready. He said to drive up to some airportdon't tell me I've forgotten. Well, anyway, I drove up to the big airport in Quebec.

WC: Montreal

ALS: I drove there and found this guy was working out of another airline. They had one airplane, two captains, one co-pilot, one dispatcher, one maintenance and that was the whole airline. [laughs] I was going to be the second co-pilot. They were based in Trenton, New Jersey, called Coastal Cargo. I asked why they called it that. He said that was how they started. They were flying flowers from Miami to New York. He told me about the DEW Line [Distant Early Warning Line airplane]. I didn't have the faintest idea what it was. This was during the Cold War and there was always the possibility that the Soviet Union might decide to send intercontinental ballistic missiles into Canada or the United States. I don't know who decided this was a possibility. It didn't make much sense. But in order

to compensate for that, they decided to build across Canada, above the 68th Parallel, a series of radar stations approximately fifty nautical miles apart. Starting on the west coast with number one and all the way over to the Baffin Islands [Canada] to number forty-two. A distance of some three thousand miles. It was nearly impossible to do fifty nautical miles apart because there is a lot of water that intercedes. But they did it the best they could. This was what we were going to be doing. We were supplying them. This was March 15, my first day. In talking about the weather, they warned me to bring heavy clothing. So, we started operations. First of all, we had to get a place to operate from, which was [unclear] 1.15.47. It is almost at the end of the peninsula up there. We could look across the St. Lawrence River. From there, across the open water to another place. He said we were going to operate out of there for the time being until we moved to Frobisher, which is quite a ways up. About five hundred miles. From there we moved to Foxe Basin and that was Site 30. We operated from Site 30 and covered from 30 to Site 25 going west bound. And Site 30 to Site 42 going east bound. Supplied them mostly with drums of kerosene. Because up there, they depended on kerosene and lots of it for heat, light and aircraft. The airplane carried thirty one drums of POL, they called it. POL stands for Petroleum, Oil, something...

WC: Lubricants.

ALS: But it was kerosene.

WC: So you were an airline pilot for thirty five years total? You worked for Trans-American, Aetna Life, Anheuser Bush.

ALS: Yup. Louisiana Land and Exploration and International Paper, IP.

WC: How long ago did you retire?

ALS: 1980.

WC: How many hours all together?

ALS: A little over eighteen thousand. A long time.

WC: Once you retired, did you continue to fly small planes like a private pilot?

ALS: One of the things I did when I retired...my wife and I decided to leave New York and go someplace warmer. We ended up in Gainesville, Florida and bought a house there. But we kept a summer place on a lake in northern New York. What was the name of the lake? Doesn't matter anyway. When we got to Gainesville, I went to the airport and talked to the Fixed Base Operator. I told him that I was a

retired airline pilot and I flew for several private companies. I had a Type rating on two airplanes. A Grumman Gulfstream and I can't think of the other one. It's an old one, goes back a ways. I also said I was qualified as a second pilot on a Falcon 20 which is a five hundred mile and hour jet. I said I could be of some help if somebody was sick or you needed a pilot right away. He said ok. I put my name in but nothing ever came of it. Then my wife had heart trouble. When she had her second heart attack, he said I had to get her out of what he called the eagle's nest, which was our cottage on Glenn Lake. It had thirty two steps going up and he didn't like that. I had to sell that and find a place to live temporarily, so. I rented a place in Saratoga.

WC: So you haven't flown in a number of years?

ALS: As a matter of fact, I flew a little bit last year with a friend of mine who is a pilot.

WC: He lives in the area?

ALS: Yes.

WC: What is his name?

ALS: I am terrible about names. Jim [ponders].

WC: That's alright. What airport did you fly out of?

ALS: Glens Falls. He works part-time out of there. His real business is a place that sells cars. He and his brother. [His name is] Jimmy Barrett. He has been an instructor for many years. He is younger than me. As my buddy would say, who isn't. [laughs]

WC: Did you join any veteran organizations? Like the VFW or the Legion?

ALS: I joined the VFW for a while to just sort of figure it out.

WC: Did you attend any reunions? You were part of the 5th Airforce, 22nd Bomb Group, right?

ALS: Yes.

WC: Any reunions with them?

ALS: Yes. The 22nd Bomb Group held three reunions which started in 1948, I believe, in New York. I went to the first one and a few others. But not every year.

The last one I went to was in Florida. Trying to think of where. I think that has petered out. Most of them have died.

WC: Did you stay in contact with anyone you were in the service with?

ALS: I stayed in contact with one, but he died. As a matter of fact, when we went to Gainesville, that was where he and his wife were living. I talked to him on the phone and told him I was looking for a place to live. His name was Al Sesskin [?]. He said he would shop around and see what he could find. He called back and said he had just the place. He described it and everything. I said, Al, tell him I will take it and I will be down there. Everybody kids me. The only guy that bought a house without ever seeing it. [laughs] It turned out to be fine. It was a few blocks from where he lived.

WC: Is your wife still living?

ALS: No. My wife died in 1999.

WC: Do you have any children?

ALS: No.

WC: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

ALS: It certainly made me more tolerant of a change in condition, then I had been before.

WC: Do you think you would have pursued an aviation career had it not been for the service?

ALS: Probably not. I learned a lot in the service even though I wasn't a pilot. Being on the airplane...the Air Corp was kind of a funny thing. Enlisted personnel and officers did not intermingle very much except as duty calls. The Air Corp was a little different. I don't know why. Just like you and I, I talked to the captain of our bomber that went down in Kerema. Also, the major who was the head of, I am trying to think of what department he was in. S4. I don't know what the S stands for. When I was an inspector, he was my boss. I talked to him just the way I talk to you.

WC: Did you ever get back to Australia or New Guinea?

ALS: No. I suggested it to my wife one time. John Scott [?] was another friend of mine in the Army. He went back and talked to me about it. I said I would kind of like to go back. My wife looked at the whole situation. She said the New Zealand

airline, Qantas, states that from San Francisco to Christ Church is fourteen hours on an airplane. My wife said no way will I get on an airplane that won't land for fourteen hours. So, we never went. I would have liked to go back to see some of the people I knew in Australia. No way did I want to go back to New Guinea. I didn't know anybody there except for a few mosquitos.

WC: You wouldn't want to go back and check on that airplane that you guys crashed?

ALS: [laughs] And see if we could fly it out of there.

WC: Any other stories that you would like to tell us? Do you want to hold up one of those other books?

ALS: [shows a book called *The Forgotten Fifth*.]

WC: Any photos of you in there?

ALS: No. This guy's name, Michael John Claringbould, I got a way to communicate with him. He told me about his books for sale and I bought three of them. The 5th Air Force had the reputation, at least among the 8th and other Air Forces in Europe, of being way out in left field, forgotten, you know. We often thought we were forgotten, but I don't think so. We had the supreme commander, MacArthur, in the Pacific.

WC: Did you ever see him?

ALS: Yes. From a distance, not close up. Colonel Richard [Walker] Robinson was our CO and of course I talked to him. [thumbs through a book and points] I saw and occasionally talked to this guy, George C. Kenney, who was a general. He was the commander of the 5th Air Force. [shows photo]. [Thumbs through a book] I never met [Ennis] Whitehead. He was the head of ADVON [Advanced Echelon], whatever the heck that stands for. I don't remember anymore. But, Kenney was the head of the whole Airforce, Whitehead was head of ADVON. The 5th Bomber command, which we were in, was Colonel [Jarred V.] Crabb. This guy. [points to a photo in the book] I never met him either, but I knew about him. He flew his own B-25. I say his own. But it was the one assigned to him.

WC: Thank you so much for your interview.

ALS: You are entirely welcome.