

BURTON HILL

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[SIDE 1]

I: Okay Burt, give me your full name and the year you were born and how old you are.

BH: Okay. Full name is Burton Joseph Hill, and I was born in 1922. And I am eighty years old. [chuckles].

I: Okay, now were you born here in _____?

BH: No, I was born in a little town in northern Utah by the name of Tremonton, Utah. That was my grandfather's home, and I was born in the parlor of his home by an attending physician that came out in either a buggy or Model-T Ford. [laughs].

I: Ah-ha! You didn't have-- what uh-- the woman--what did they call the women that delivered the babies?

BH: Ah, no.

I: You had a doctor.

BH: They had a doctor.

I: Oh, that's great!

BH: Yeah, a full-fledged doctor.

I: So, how long did you live there?

BH: Lived there 'till I entered military service for World War II, and I did that on October the sixth of 1942.

I: Ah-ha.

BH: And I-- I managed to even it up after three years. I was discharged on the same date, October the sixth of 1945. [chuckles].

I: Were you injured?

BH: No.

I: Oh, thank goodness. Thank goodness.

BH: No, no, no. Oh, not seriously. You know I flew thirty-four combat missions over Germany. And there was a time or two when I got my turret blowed out and a little bit of sprinkling of Plexiglass in the side of my face and things like that but nothing serious, not to warrant a Purple Heart. [laughs].

I: What do you think of the war that's going on right now?

BH: I think it's a necessary war, and I really kinda hate to see it going on because I have a grandson mixed up in it in the 101st.

I: So do I. I got a grandson in the Marines.

BH: Yes, yeah.

I: But I agree with ya. I think it's necessary.

BH: It has to be done. I-- I just don't think that we can allow a person like that to continue on. That's the way I felt during World War II. We had to get Hitler out of power.

I: That's right.

BH: And I guess we did the job. I don't know.

I: Well, I think we'll do the job there, too!

BH: [laughs]. That's right.

I: So when did you decide to move to La Grande-- I mean to C--?

BH: What happened after I got out of the service in 1945, my father had already moved to La Grande because he was raised here in La Grande from the age of seven 'till he was twenty-two.

I: Oh.

BH: Out in Summerville, Oregon.

I: Oh.

BH: And so I came up to help him do the final move because he had his Utah place sold, and he'd bought the one here in Cove, Oregon. And so, I also wanted to know what he liked so well about Oregon 'cause-- because I was considering maybe stayin' in Utah and gettin' a little farm down there. But when I got up here, why, I never did return. [laughs].

I: You fell in love with this valley like all of us did!

BH: [laughs].

I: Definitely! This valley, I tell you it's so wonderful!

BH: Yeah, it is.

I: Well, what's some of your first memories--

BH: What's what?

I: as a-- a little-- little kid?

BH: Some of my first ones?

I: Uh-huh.

BH: Well, probably about the first memories I had was we were in the horse-and-buggy age. And we-- we had a car that I can remember when I was just a little guy. But the only thing that I remember about that car it was a 1924 Model-T Ford, and it never did run that I know of. And my cousin, Joe Woodruff, was a self-made mechanic in those

days, and he was working on the engine. And then my dad every so often would hook a team of horses on it. And Joe would get behind the wheel, and they'd try to start the engine. But I don't ever remember of it ever starting! [laughs] .

I: Oh, that was discouraging, wasn't it? Oh-- [chuckles].

BH: So, Dad just had to rely on the horse-and-buggy and wagons and whatnot for transportation. We had saddle horses too that I learned to ride at a very young age. I don't even remember when I learned to ride. [chuckles]. But in 1929 I think it was, my dad managed to buy a used 1927 Model-T Ford with a rumble seat and it ran! It was a good _____. [laughs] .

I: Oh, great!

BH: So, I remember him pickin' us up from school when he bought it and haulin' us home. And that was really-- [laughs].

I: Quite a thrill to be picked up at school!

BH: It had side curtains and everything that went with 'em. [laughs].

I: Oh my, gosh! Now, did you have brothers and sisters?

BH: Yes, I had six brothers and one sister.

I: Oh, marvelous!

BH: Yeah, there was seven of us in the family.

I: Where are some of them?

BH: And so Clinton is the oldest one. He's still alive, and he's in Mesa, Arizona. Wendell is the next one, and he's in Kaysville, Utah and still alive. Ralph is here in La Grande, and he has Alzheimer's. And he's in--

I: Yeah, I know Mariam.

BH: Wildplot-- uh, Wildflower.

I: Mariam's in my-- Mariam's in my family home evening group.

BH: Mm-hmm. And I'm the next one. I'm number four. And I was definitely supposed to be a girl, but it didn't happen. [laughs]. So, the next one after me was a girl, and that's where the girl fit in. And then there was two more boys.

I: I bet she got spoiled.

BH: Yeah. [laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: Yeah, she did. We picked on her, too!

I: Yes, all those brothers pickin' on her. Oh! What-- what do you remember as some of your pranks and things, when you were young, that you did?

BH: Oh, I'm sure I was full of mischief at a very young age, but I don't remember anything too dramatic until I was in grade school. I had a friend by the name of Deverle Manilow, and the two of us would get together every time we got a chance. And most of the time Deverle would come down to our farm because I had to milk cows and things like that. And so, it was Halloween time, and we felt like that we'd been cheatin' ourselves because we hadn't been gettin' in on any of the mischief. And so we proceeded to put our neighbor's machinery in a kind of a drainage ditch.

I: [laughs].

BH: [chuckles]. It must have been very evident who did it because he got a hold of us, and he told us, "You put 'em in. Now you get 'em back out!" [laughs].

I: Was there water runnin' in it?

BH: Yeah! [laughs]. So, I got-- I-- by that time I was old enough to take

care of the horses and so forth. And we had a gentle horse that we cultivated with, and he'd pull by himself. He didn't have to have a teammate. And so we took him up there and pulled all the machinery out and put it back. [laughs].

I: Wasn't quite worth it, was it? [laughs].

BH: [laughs]. No.

I: Oh! Now, did you--

BH: Just about cured me. [chuckles].

I: Did you go through the prohibition times?

BH: Did I go through which?

I: The pro-- prohibition of liquor?

BH: Yes, uh-huh. It was prohibition time when I first remember as a young man. And I remember that my older brothers, they was with a group of kids, and they were always tempted to go to these moonshine places and see if they could get some of that. [laughs].

I: Ah-hah! They weren't successful, huh?

BH: They didn't do too well! [laughs].

I: Well, they had to be so careful that they probably didn't want no kids around. They might let 'em know where they were!

BH: Yeah, I remember when-- let's see, I'm tryin' to think. Well, Heber J. Grant, I'm sure was the prophet. And that's when they demolished prohibition.

I: Oh!

BH: And so, I had an uncle that was very adamant that prohibition was a good thing. And so when-- I think it was kinda sanctioned and endorsed by Heber J. Grant because the-- it proved to be that we's

better off without prohibition than we was with prohibition.
[chuckles]. There were too many people dyin' from rotten moonshine and things like that. But anyway, it was abolished, and I remember that. I was still a pretty young guy.

I: So you're a member of the LDS Church?

BH: Yes. Oh yeah, yeah.

I: And have been all your life?

BH: Yeah, I was born under the covenant.

I: Uh-huh! Well, that's-- that's great, I think.

BH: I guess one of my early recollections about the church was our Sunday school teacher took us-- the class, the whole class-- and there's about thirty some of us and put us on the bus. And we went to Salt Lake City, and went to the old Hotel Utah which is now the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. And we stayed down in the ground floor lobby and waited. We lined up there, and we waited for President Heber J. Grant to come down. And we filed past him, and he shook every one of our hands.

I: Aww.

BH: And I was just tellin' 'em yesterday when I bore my testimony in church that that is my earliest recollection of testimony. I-- I knew that he was a prophet.

I: Oh, that was wonderful!

BH: Yeah. I had a tingling goin' up my spine that you can't believe.
[chuckles].

I: Oh, I believe it! I believe it!

BH: Yeah.

I: Well, let's see, these are some questions that are just to trigger your

memories. Did you have pets?

BH: Yes. We had a saddle-horse that we called him, Old Spot. And he's a Tennessee Walker and American saddle-horse cross. But he'd got his foot injured in a wire-cut. They used to get their feet in barbed-wire fences, and he had a severely cut down in the hoof area. And so it grew back kinda--

I: Crooked?

BH: Crooked, yeah. And so he was a good ole stable horse for all us young guys to learn on, and so we rode him. And Dad's only thing that he told us about ridin' a saddle-horse, he says "You can ride him all you want to, but if he starts limp in I want him-- want you to quit and put him in the corral so's he can rest up." [laughs].

I: Ah-hah!

BH: So then we branched out from that. And of course, being innovative and wantin' to try something all the time, why, we took turns breakin' the work horses to ride. [laughs].

I: Oh! [laughs].

BH: And the smaller workhorses.

I: You could hardly straddle them, could you? [laughs].

BH: Yes, the smaller work horses made pretty good saddle-horses, a lot of them. [laughs].

I: Oh, I'll be darn. I used to stay at my sister's ranch, and we would get on the horse, mind you, in the stall in the barn.

BH: Yeah.

I: And just kind of ride him around in the stall!

BH: [chuckles].

I: He got sick of it, and it-- my cousin was sittin' facin' his rear!
[laughs]. He starts bucking and bucked her off and broke her rib!
[laughs].

BH: Oh, no. [chuckles].

I: Teach us, huh?

BH: Yeah.

I: Some of the things we do.

BH: But we-- we did an awful lot of things. All the-- everything we did in
the farming game was with horses.

I: Oh, yes.

BH: And my dad was a very good teamster, and we never, ever had a
runaway until later on in life. I was probably twelve, fourteen years
old, and what they call, brain fever, hit our herd's head-- our herd of
horses, and it took every one of 'em except Old Spot.

I: Oh, for gosh sake!

BH: We lost-- we had five work horses that I remember at the time, and
they all died of brain fever.

I: Oh, how tragic!

BH: So, we-- so, we had to-- and it happened just before the sugar beet
harvest in the fall of the year. And we had a neighbor that had a lot of
horses, and he lost a lot of horses to brain fever, too. But he managed
to get enough of 'em through so he got his sugar beets harvested, and
then he loaned his horses to us to harvest our sugar beets while we
accumulated some more, so--

I: I was just gonna ask you what you-- what you raised on the farm, or
what you did?

BH: Yeah, we went out and got new horses and so forth, and some of 'em

Dad had to buy just at the auction in Ogden Stockyards, you know. And I remember one of 'em that was a real runaway.

I: Oh.

BH: And we-- we didn't have any problems with him to start with 'cause our dad knew that he was that type of horse. And so every morning before he'd put him to work in the field, why, he'd take and put him on the hay wagon with another horse, and he'd run 'em round and around the field. [laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: Get him good and tired!

I: That's smart, very smart! Well, how big was the ranch?

BH: It was eighty-five acres of irrigated land, and we grew a lot of sugar beets. We-- before I was born, why, they was still raisin' sugar beets. And of course there was only three that were big enough to help Dad top 'em and thin 'em, and that was all hand labor so they was raisin' about twenty or twenty-five acres a year. And when I came along and got so's I could thin also, why, we increased it to about thirty-five acres of sugar beets--

I: Great.

BH: that we had to thin and top--

I: Great.

BH: every year. And that was--that was quite a chore!

I: Yes, I'm sure it was!

BH: [laughs].

I: So, when he sold out while you were in the service and moved here to the Cove area, what did he-- what did the farm do here?

BH: He bought the farm below the one where we're sittin' right now.

I: Where you just were?

BH: Well, no. That's the-- across the road from it. Right down on this same side of the road, he had the farm there. And he bought that from Royal Allen, and the next spring I was lookin' desperately for a farm, too. And so we came up here to Herman Allen which was a brother to Royal Allen and talked with him. And he decided that he would sell his farm.

I: Great!

BH: So, coming out of the service and not having very much money, my-- my dad had some money from the sale of the one in Utah. And so he made the arrangements for the purchase of the farm, and so I just rented it from him for the first three years I think it was. And then I started buyin' it from him.

I: Now how big was that place?

BH: The one that he had was a hundred and forty acres, and the one that I bought here was a hundred and twenty acres.

I: So now have you ended up with your father's?

BH: Ah, no, I-- when Father's-- my father's place come for sale, why, I was sawmilling at the time for the Fir Pine Lumber Company. And I had decided that I could make more money with a fifty-dollar's worth of tools in a toolbox than I could buyin' expensive machinery and spreadin' out on the farm, so I chose to turn it down, let somebody else buy it. So I kept the farm that I had, but I-- I was-- I'd just-- by that time I was off workin' for sawmills. And I never did quit workin' for sawmills until I got laid off and got hired by the Union Pacific Railroad. [laughs].

I: Ah-hah! About what year was that?

BH: That was in 19-- let's see, 1960.

I: That you started workin' for the railroad?

BH: Yeah, that's the year that our youngest son was born. And so I moved off the farm when I went to work for Union Pacific Railroad and moved into La Grande, but I came back out. I drove out here and farmed it. And then my older children kinda had to take over 'cause I was out of town more than I was in town. [laughs] .

I: I can imagine!

BH: Yeah.

I: I can imagine. Well, let's see-- let's get back to like the first day of school. Do you remember that?

BH: Yeah, I do remember the first day of school. [chuckles]. I was pretty young. My birthday wasn't 'till November, and I started in September so I was five-plus. I wasn't six years old, yet. And I really liked to play. [laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: And I can remember the first day in school. I had a terrible time settling down. The teacher kept sayin', "Burton, now if you and your playmate down there will-- will uh, give me your attention, why we'll see if we can teach you something." [laughs].

I: Did they use the ruler on ya or anything in those days?

BH: No, no, no. They'd kinda got past that. I think oh, my-- my granddad had a ruler used on him. He went to the first grade, and he got a little bit unruly. And the teacher raised this sharp ruler up and had his hand layin' in her hand. And she was comin' down with this ruler, and it woulda cut him. [chuckles]. And he was just like any normal child.

I: He jerked it!

BH: He jerked his hand out of the way, and she cut hers. And he didn't stop to see what was goin' on. He bailed out the window!

I: [laughs].

BH: And that was the end of my Grandfather Woodruff's education.

I: Oh! Oh!

BH: He never had another day of school.

I: He never went back, huh?

BH: No. [chuckles].

I: Oh, that's too bad.

BH: So, he couldn't really read or write real good, you know. He learned enough to get by, but he-- he had to have people write letters for him and read them.

I: So did his wife?

BH: His wife did, yeah.

I: Yeah.

BH: Yeah, she came from Denmark. And she'd joined the church over there along with her mother, and they migrated to Salt Lake. And then it was after she'd-- she'd migrated to Salt Lake, somehow or another Granddad and her got together and got married. [laughs].

I: Ah-hah!

BH: My granddad, he was a-- he was a rough cowboy-type, and he'd always break horses. And a lot of times it was on Sunday afternoons that the whole area around Tremonton would congregate there and watch him ride these buckin' broncos.

I: Oh my.

BH: And so that's how he met my grandmother. He was uh, breakin' one of them buckin' broncos, and she was walking down a lane.

[chuckles]. And this bronco took off runnin', and he couldn't get it stopped. [chuckles]. It went runnin' past her and almost knocked her over! [laughs] .

I: Oh my, gosh! [laughs].

BH: And she says, "That awful man!"

I: [laughs].

BH: She says, "I'll never marry a man like that!" [laughs]. And she did!

I: I'll be darn. [laughs].

BH: Later on, she married him! [laughs].

I: I'll be darn.

BH: But she-- she was a nice little-- what do you call it, Denmark lady?

I: Yeah, yeah.

BH: She spoke English pretty good, but her mother never did learn to speak English. She used to sing Danish songs to me. And I-- I still-- I memorized 'em, and I still can sing 'em today. [laughs].

I: Oh, that's wonderful! Really?

BH: Yeah. [chuckles].

I: Oh! My-- my-- my family was Czechoslovakia.

BH: Yeah. [chuckles].

I: Yeah. Do you remember school bully? Almost every school has a bully!

BH: Yeah, we had several school bullies. I-- I wasn't really bothered too much by the bullies because I was really athletic as a young man. And if I couldn't lick 'em, [chuckles] why, I could outrun 'em!

[laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: And I was pretty feisty, too. [laughs].

I: Well, that's good! "They're not gonna pick on me," huh!

BH: [chuckles]. No.

I: Okay, these are just-- let's see, uh--
[recording clicks - no interruption]

I: Okay, let's-- let's get to your courtship and your marriage!

BH: Okay. Uh, I had a real good friend, boyfriend, by the name of Vay Jensen. And when we were probably sophomores in high school, why, we both decided that we wasn't as bashful as we thought we was, and we got mixed up in a few of these tag dances at the high school and got to really likin' dancin'. And so then we were a couple of guys that we wanted to show the girls that we wasn't hung up on any girl, so we tried to see how many girls we could date at the-- [laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: And I don't-- I lost track I dated so many! And we thought it was pretty macho to take a different girl every time! [chuckles].

I: _____?

BH: Until about-- let's see, junior year I had a boyfriend from Howell, Utah, and-- that had a Model-A Ford. And he drove all over the country, and that was a big deal for us at that time 'cause we-- if we got a chance to drive the old Model-T, why, we were lucky!
[chuckles].

I: Oh, yeah!

BH: And so he dated quite a bit of the young agin'. And he had three cousins that lived out there in Howell, and my wife, Eileen, was one

of them. And so he tried to keep them all busy. He was rotatin' 'em.
[laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: And he brought Eileen. That's my wife now, Eileen Cutler. He brought her to the Red and White Dance which is the Bear River High School's annual dance and our colors was red and white. And she was from Box Elder High School, and their colors was purple and white. So when he brought her up to the dance, why, we traded dances on a dance card, and we traded several dances that evening. And when the evening was over, why, I decided that I liked her pretty good, so--
[laughs].

I: Ah-hah!

BH: So, I started datin' her a little bit more seriously. And-- and this boyfriend of mine, [laughs] he used to-- when we'd walk around up at Bear River High School, why, he used to say, "I'm mad at you! You cut my grass!" [laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: "You stole one of my girlfriends!" I says, "You can't handle all three of them!" [laughs] .

I: No! You don't need that many, huh?!

BH: So, I went with her quite steady for awhile, but I also had another girlfriend that I had a crush on from my little home town that also went to Box Elder. And of course I was still playin' the field and datin' a lot of 'em besides. And so, along came World War II!

I: Ah-hah!

BH: And it kinda changed the whole picture in the _____.

I: Now when you go out on dates then, did you go to the movies? What did you do?

BH: Yeah, we went to the movies, and we-- we danced an awful lot. Oh, there was a lot of dances! Every dance that either the high schools had or our local dances in our town, why, we'd always get a girl and go to those dances. And so, we-- we got so's we'd rather dance than eat. [laughs].

I: Well, yeah I would _____. Did you have box socials?

BH: Yes. Yeah we had box socials. We had quite a few of these where, let's see, how did that work? Anyway, the girls all brought a-- a lunch box.

I: Mm-hm, decorated it.

BH: And then the boys-- I don't think we bid on 'em, not at that young age. I think we'd draw-- drew lots to start with. And whatever name we got out of that--

I: Tried to find out the name of the-- the box of--

BH: [laughs]. Yes. [laughs].

I: the girl that you wanted to be with--

BH: That's right. [laughs]

I: ahead of time! [laughs].

BH: [laughs]. Yeah, we-- we had lots of that type of socials, and we were busy gettin' to socials. It's interesting, this friend that I mentioned I had by the name, Vay Jensen, they had a big dairy farm. And we had about seven or eight milk cows, and we milked 'em by hand. And they had a milkin' machine 'cause they milked about twenty or so. And so we-- we-- we were active in church, and we'd always go to church. And one of the reasons that I went to church so steady is my dad was a little bit inactive, and my mother, she was the one that seen that we go to church. And so this Vay Jensen was pretty faithful and my friend. And then I had a girlfriend by the name of Loreen Jensen, and she was pretty faithful in church too. So we always made sure that we went to our Sacrament Meetings. And the way we'd work that

out-- he lived about five miles from me, and our transportation was bicycle. So we would-- when we'd get through with our early morning meetings at church, why, then we'd go home, and generally we'd come down to my place to play for the afternoon. And when it got milkin' time, why, they were pretty fussy about when they milked the-- the dairy herd-- regular hours. So it didn't matter at our house. Dad'd let me get away with milkin' em early or later! [laughs]. So we'd milk my cows, and he'd help me hand-milk those cows. And then we'd get on our bicycles and ride over to his place, and then we'd use the milkin' machine on that dairy herd.

I: Ah-hah!

BH: And we'd get them all milked and get cleaned up just in time to go to our sacrament meetings, and they were at night.

I: Oh, they were at night!

BH: They-- yeah, they were seven-thirty in the evenings.

I: Oh, for gosh sakes!

BH: [laughs].

I: Oh!

BH: They were that way for years!

I: Ah-hah!

BH: I think clear up until-- they were here in Union too when I moved up here. When they came out with what they call the block plan, the three-hour block plan, that's when they changed them to day time.

I: Ah-hah!

BH: [laughs].

I: Of course, as a convert I didn't see any of that.

BH: Yeah. [chuckles].

I: Now let's see, what about the war? Uh--

BH: Yeah.

I: Tell me something-- some things about the war.

BH: Well, I had another friend besides this Vay Jensen that was a pretty close friend, and his name was Clare Anderson. And he was about a year older than I was, and-- and the war was pretty exciting to us at that time. We thought that we really ought to be involved in it. And so I tried to get my dad to sign for me. I was only eighteen years old, and you had to be twenty-one [chuckles] before you didn't have to have a signer. So-- so, I tried to get him to sign for me to go into the Air Force. I wanted to fly a jet!

I: [chuckles].

BH: Or, not a jet. A-- a--

I: A plane.

BH: a plane, a pursuit plane!

I: Ah-hah!

BH: And I wanted to be my own boss up there flyin' a plane, and I was gonna go get 'em, you know. And so [chuckles] anyway, this Clare Anderson, he uh-- he decided that if my dad wouldn't sign for me to go fly a plane, why-- why, didn't I go be a-- go to Airplane Mechanics School? There was openings for airplane mechanics. And so, he-- he said, "I'll-- I'll go sign up with ya." So, as young as we were, why, we thought that if we signed up together, why, we'd probably stay together, you know. [laughs]. So we went down to Ogden, and we signed up. And we was gettin' our physical, and the ones that passed their physical, why, they-- they were in the Army. And the ones that failed, why, they went back home. And so I went down there, and of course I file-- passed my physical with flyin' colors, but Claire Anderson didn't! [laughs].

I: Oh, he didn't? I'll be darned!

BH: So, I was in the military, and he went home! [laughs].

I: [laughs]. For gosh sakes!

BH: So anyway, just to show you a little bit about what a young guy gets himself into there, I hadn't been away from home all that much. And so when I got through with my physical and all that stuff, why, I was taken to Fort Lewis. Oh, not Fort Lewis-- Fort Douglas, Fort Douglas, Utah. And given a bunk and they issued me some clothes, err, for a new recruit, you know? And I stayed there overnight, and the next evening we were taken down to the Ogden Railroad Depot and loaded on a troop train. And the troop train didn't stop! [chuckles]. I-- I had some choices where I wanted to take my basic training. And I looked at the paper wrong, and I thought it said Boeing Field. And I knew that Boeing Field was in Seattle, Washington, but it said Bowman Field. [laughs].

I: Oh! And where was that?

BH: And Bowman Field was in Louisville, Kentucky! [laughs].

I: Oh my, gosh! [laughs].

BH: So I went to Louisville, Kentucky for basic training, and that was the first time that I'd been anywhere near that far away from home. [laughs].

I: Got pretty homesick, didn't you?

BH: [laughs]. Oh, I got home-- you know, I remember how homesick I got! [laughs].

I: My son did too, yeah.

BH: Oh, I got so homesick that I even considered goin' AWOL! [laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: But I knew what would happen if I did, so [laughs] I didn't get far.

I: So then, the-- your dad never did sign, or you were able to that without his signing?

BH: Yeah, I was able to do that without his signature.

I: Uh-huh!

BH: Well, wait a minute. No, I was not because that's right, he-- he said that he would sign for me to go to Mechanics School. I had that, and so he did sign the papers.

I: So you-- then you learned to be the mechanic and--?

BH: And so I went to Gulfport, Mississippi after I got through with basic training, and that's where I went to Airplane Mechanics School.

I: Ah-hah! But then you got to fly, didn't you?

BH: Uh, well [laughs] it's a long--

I: Did you become a pilot?

BH: No.

[END OF SIDE 1]

[SIDE 2]

I: Okay, so you didn't get to be a pilot, but--?

BH: No. I'll go back to the rest of the story on that, I guess. I-- I went on from-- I got through airplane mechanics school. And during the time that I went to airplane mechanics school I had a wisdom tooth that was bothering me one night, and so I went and had the wisdom tooth pulled out. And I was green enough that I figured I had to be to all of my classes. And I felt pretty rocky, and so I-- I didn't go to dinner that night. We was goin' to night school. And so I laid down in a airplane there and tried to get a little rest during that time. And it was in the wintertime, and it was cold and clammy. And I got exposed a little too much, I guess. And I got what they call a dry socket--

I: Oh dear.

BH: in that wisdom tooth.

I: Oh dear.

BH: So, the next morning, why, I was really feelin' bad so I got one of the soldiers to go get me a bottle of Orange Crush. I figured I could drink that, and it'd be pretty good stuff. So he got that, and it almost made me upset to my stomach. And so I knew I was burnin' up with fever, and so I asked one of 'em if they'd go get the commanding officer and tell him that I needed to go to the hospital. So they brought the commanding officer in, and he quizzed me a little bit about how was I feeling and what was the problem. And I told him I had a wisdom tooth taken out the day before. So he said, "Well, are you feeling really bad? Do we need to haul you to the hospital, or do you think you could walk to the hospital?" And I said-- [chuckles] I said, "I think I could walk to the hospital." [laughs].

I: Oh! Burt!

BH: So I got up off the bed, and I headed for the hospital. And I didn't know exactly where it was, but it was about a half a mile across the base. And I remember walking towards the hospital, and the farther I walked, why, the more I felt like I wanted to lay down and go to sleep. And the last I remembered of that deal, why, I walked in the hospital door, and they admitted me into a bed. And then I-- I didn't remember anything at all for about three days.

I: Oh, my!

BH: And I woke up looking up, and I looked in the face of the dentist that had taken my tooth out and some surgeon and a nurse. And they were talking about what they was gonna do with me, and I finally realized that what they was talking about was trying to get that to open up without havin' to have surgery. And so, then they-- after their conference, why, they left a message there that I was supposed to gargle with hot salt water I think it was every half hour or something like that and try to break that loose in there. And so I did that for the rest of that day, and then the next morning, why, they came in and

quizzed me and wanted to know if there was any drainage in there. And my face was all puffed up by then on the side where the tooth had come out. And I said, no, I couldn't tell that there was any drainage. And so they decided that they would operate on me. So they put me on the rolling stretcher--

I: Gurney?

BH: and rolled me to a operating room. And I remember the operating process really well because they operated on the side of my face here by doin' it with Novocain. And they'd cut the side of my face there until it felt just like what it was.

I: Oh my, gosh!

BH: They were cuttin' me with a knife, and I about turned the hospital bed over. They had me all strapped down. [laughs]. And when they'd see me wince like that, why they'd give me another of that--

I: Another shot, huh?

BH: another shot of Novocain. So they finally got me operated on and sent back to the bed, and I recuperated from that fairly fast. And so then they gave me some-- what was it they put on there? They put something on that wound. They've made it in a crease, see it--

I: Uh-huh.

BH: layin' in there? They made it in a crease so it wouldn't show so bad later from the scar. And so they put silver nitrate on it, and that kinda burned it and caused it to heal a little bit more completely. And I was feeling good enough then to be up and around, and so they gave me a chore to do. And they had a lot of-- there was about thirty people in each one of those hospital rooms. And so they found out that I could roll things up and down the-- the aisle. And so they gave me a cart and had me go down and get the trays and stuff for everybody to eat and bring it down. Then I'd eat there with 'em, and then when it was all through, why, I'd roll the trays back. [laughs]. So that went on for about a week, and as I'd go up and down the halls, why, people'd look at me. And with that silver nitrate burnin' down across here it looked

like my throat was cut! [laughs].

I: Oh my, gosh!

BH: And they'd stop and say, "What happened to you?" And I said, "Oh, I just had an operation." [chuckles]. "It looks like you had your throat cut!" [laughs].

I: Felt like it too! [chuckles].

BH: So anyway I got over that and got back out of the hospital, and then I went back and finished up airplane mechanics school. [chuckles].

I: Ah-hah, and so then you got to be a gunner.

BH: No, from there they didn't-- I didn't have a choice on this next move. They just automatically moved me off to Chanute Field, Illinois. That's by Rantoul and Champaign-Urbana, and they have a college there. And so we went to an airplane instrument school that was taught by the Army also in a barracks there and so forth. And so I graduated as a Instrument Technician, they called it. And from there I was sent to Holyoke, Massachusetts. Westover Field was the name of the field. And I hadn't-- I'd been in schools and things like that. And I had been away from home now from the time that I left and was so homesick. I'd been away a full year. So I'd pretty well got over the homesickness, but I hadn't gotten over wantin' to go home. So--so they gave me a ten-day leave of absence then. And that was my first furlough after I'd--

I: _____ lifted?

BH: been in the Army. And when I graduated from Airplane Instrument School, why, I became a Corporal. I got two stripes. [laughs]. So then when I got through with my furlough I went back to Massachusetts and was assigned to a P-47 outfit, and they moved us from Holyoke, Massachusetts to Norfolk, Virginia, the whole outfit. And we were in phase training at Norfolk, Virginia for awhile.

I: Got to know the United States, didn't you?

BH: Yeah, and I-- I tell everybody that during World War II, and it's a fact, I was in every state in the union.

I: Ah-hah!

BH: During World War II because Hawaii and Alaska were not states then. [laughs]. So, on a troop train, but it-- I did a lot of travel. And so when I got down there at Holyoke, I mean down at Gulfport, Miss. Whoops! Wrong place again! Uh, Norfolk, Virginia, that's known as a Navy town. But we were down there on-- on a little base, and they had a flight strip there for flyin' these P-47's. So I proceeded to try to do my job. My job was supposed to be that I'd get on each one of these airplanes and check their instruments and see if they were all functioning right, and if they weren't functioning right why we were just told to take the old instrument out and replace it with a new one. So I started tryin' to do my duty, and I'd get on the-- these airplanes. And the very first one that I got up there in the cockpit and was checkin' the instruments, why, the crew chief hollered up and said, "Hey! What are you doin' in my airplane?!" And I said, "Checkin' the instruments." He says, "Not on my plane, you don't!" And I said, "Well, I'm the Instrument Technician. That's what I graduated in, and I'm supposed to check all the instruments." And he, "Not on my plane, you don't check!" [laughs].

I: Ah-hah! He didn't believe you could do it! [laughs].

BH: Well, I tried-- tried another plane or two, and I got the same kind of reception. So-- so I was kind of between and betwixt. And so I went to the commanding officer, and I asked him, did I have a job in this outfit, this fighter outfit? And I'd learned that they were scheduled to go to France, and so I thought, if I don't have a job, why, I'm not goin' with 'em if I can help it. So he said, "Well, he didn't"-- I-- he said, "Well, why do you ask that question?" And I told him. And he said, "Well, I really don't know for sure what's goin' on there, but I'll find out. And I'll have an answer for ya in a couple of days." So I said, "Well, okay." I said, "I haven't had-- I haven't been able to get a leave of"-- I mean, not a-- what do they call it-- a-- a pass. "I haven't been able to get a pass to go off the base. So, do you suppose that while you're finding out that I could go over to Norfolk, Virginia?" And he says, "Yeah, see your First Sergeant. He'll give you a pass."

[chuckles]. So I saw the First Sergeant, and he gave me a pass, and I went over to Norfolk, Virginia. I went-- I went over to Newport News, Virginia across the bay.

I: Oh!

BH: They had to go by a-- a ferry. And when I got over there, before I ever got on the base to look around, why, right there at the gate they had guys there with a book, and they was signin' everybody up. They was signin' their names, and so I said, "What's goin' on here?" And they said, "Oh, we're signin' up for Cadet training." And I said, "Well, I'm with an outfit across the base over here." Told him what outfit it was, and I said, "I just found out that I don't seem to have a job with that outfit, and they're-- they're gonna ship over one of these days. Is there a chance I could sign that paper?" And he says, "Anybody can sign it!" [laughs]. So I signed the paper, and-- and never thought too much about it. And when I went back to the base, why, instead of me goin' in to see the commanding officer, why, he called for me to come in and see. And so I was at attention, and he started in. He says, "What is it that you want, soldier?" And I said, "What do you mean, sir?" And he says, "Well," he said, "When you went over to Newport News, why, I see that you signed up to be a Cadet!" And I says, "Yes sir, that's what I always wanted to be, you know, is a Cadet!" [chuckles]. He says, "Well," he says, "You spoiled my whole day." And I said, "I'm sorry, sir." [laughs]. I saluted him. [laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: And he says, "Well," he said, "Get your stuff packed." He says, "I'll have a jeep over here to pick you up." And he said, "I-- I-- I've got to get a Jeep out of the-- the enclosure over there where they keep the mechanical stuff. And I've got to get you down to the ferry and get you over to Newport News, and you're-- you're leavin' us, soldier! You're no longer with us." [chuckles].

I: Well, great!

BH: I said, "Well okay, I'll get packed then." So-- so, I left, and I went and packed up. And there was the jeep, and they took me over. And they just--oh, the base over there at Newport News was just full of guys

runnin' around there with stripes on like I had, Corporals and whatnot. And I thought, well, what's goin' on? So, I didn't have to wait too long, and they-- they started givin' us tests. And they gave us tests every day for a week.

I: Oh my, gosh!

BH: I didn't know that they had so many tests in the Army. And so what they were after, they were having a terrible time getting gunners. And so that was their way of opening things up so that they would probably get some gunners. And they gave tests to everybody on the base for a week, and at the end of the week they published a list on the bulletin board of the scores that we got. And it says, "In order to go on to Cadet training you must have a score of 74% or above." [chuckles]. So I hurried and scanned the list. [chuckles]. And I found my name, and I couldn't believe what I saw. I had 73. [laughs].

I: Oh! One point less! Oh!

BH: So I got washed out just like if I'd of got a 1, you know what I'm saying? [laughs].

I: You haven't got it?

BH: No. Here I was on a troop train again, and they sent us off to another base in-- in North Carolina. And--

I: To be a gunner?

BH: Well no, I could see what was goin' on. They-- they don't force your hand that much in the military. They-- they let you make decisions, but they [phone rings] put you in a position where you don't have too many decisions. [laughs].

I: Oh.

BH: So they gave me a-- [phone rings] started givin' me basic training, and that was strange because here I was a Corporal. I'd been in the Army now for well over a year, about a year and a half. And so they started drillin' us just like we were new recruits, and here most of us in

there were Sergeants and Corporals and so forth. And we kinda resented bein' marched up and down the field by a Private, you know. So we started flexin' our muscles and chewin' gum in ranks and talking in ranks and things that are forbidden, you know. And so the day that we got pretty active with this, why, we went to the Chow Hall, and we was standin' in the line waitin' to get fed. And here come all the brass I'd seen in a long time, and boy when they came up there, why, we all stood at attention and saluted. And he said, "I understand that you guys are giving your drill Sergeant a bad time." [laughs].

I: Oh!

BH: And it got just as quiet as a mouse, and he said "Well," he said, "I'll tell you something. He's your drill sergeant, and as long as he's your drill sergeant you will take orders from him. And if those stripes are botherin' you we can soon take care of them." [laughs].

I: Oh dear! [laughs]. Oh!

BH: So, he said, "Now, you get that? I hope you do because if you don't, why, you gonna be seein' more of me." [laughs]. And so we went back to drillin', and they only drilled us one more day. And then they just give us a lot of time off.

I: Oh no.

BH: We had nothing but time on our hands. And so, they had a big fancy day room, they call them, where you can go in there and write letters and all that kind of stuff. So, I got real busy and started writin' all kinds of letters to my folks and anybody I could think of, my girlfriend back home and all that kind of stuff. And so, the day room was just-- it was wallpapered with beautiful posters of a guy with stripes all over his arms and campaign ribbons and a set of wings. And it says, "Go to Gunnery School and get your wings tomorrow and get your stripes soon after," or something like that. [laughs].

I: Really programming you!

BH: And so I knew that I was the guy that was out in limbo, and if I didn't get myself reassigned, why, somebody was gonna reassign me. And

so I didn't go in the Army with the idea of goofin' off or anything, and so I wanted to get actively involved again. And so, I just went over, and I signed the paper to go to Gunnery School. [laughs].

I: Ah-hah!

BH: And I signed it along just before the sun went down, and by sundown I was told to get all my belongings together. I was shippin' out. [laughs].

I: Oh!

BH: So, I crammed 'em all in a duffel bag, got back on a troop train, and I wound up at Panama City, Florida--

I: Oh, for gosh sakes.

BH: at a place called Tyndall Field. And that was Gunnery School.

I: Ah-hah.

BH: And Gunnery School was only about six weeks long, and they gave us every opportunity to wash out of Gunnery School. They didn't want any wimps for gunners.

I: No, I don't suppose.

BH: So, they had one test done. It was a toughie. We had to learn to field-strip a .50 caliber machine gun blindfolded in four minutes.

I: Oh my, gosh.

BH: And you could do it pretty easy in four minutes if everything went like clockwork 'cause we'd taken these apart and put 'em together so many times that we knew the hang-ups. And worst hang-up was what they called, getting the breech-lock put back together. And if you didn't get that just right, why, it wouldn't slip into place, and that would get you washed out of Gunnery School. And nobody wanted to wash out of Gunnery School at that point.

I: Yeah.

BH: And so everybody tried really hard to pass that. And there was some that didn't pass it, but they were given second and third chances, I think. But anyway, I-- I made it. [laughs].

I: Oh.

BH: And so, I got my wings, and I got one more stripe right there after I got through with Gunnery School. So, I became a Buck Sergeant. [laughs]. And let's see where did we go from there? We went to Sioux Falls, South Dakota by troop train again. Well, that was a holding place for getting crews together.

I: To go fight?

BH: And what they did, they gave us what they called, travel orders, and our travel orders was from Sioux Falls, South Dakota to Tucson, Arizona. [laughs].

I: When did you get to go to the war?

BH: So, I went to Tucson, Arizona, and on the way to Tucson, Arizona these travels orders had it fixed so that you could pick your crew. They had the crew's numbered with your name with that number on it, and you was supposed to find who was the other members of your crew by that number.

I: Oh!

BH: So, we studied that for awhile goin' along on the troop train headed for Tucson. And it wasn't too long 'til we got it all figured out, and we started lookin' for our crew. And one by one we found the crew and found what his name was, and then we put a star by it so we could make it up on this piece of paper what our whole crew was. And we'd get acquainted with 'em that way and remember who they was. So, by the time we got to Tucson, Arizona, why, we knew exactly who our crew was, and they were scattered all over the country. My pilot was from Indianapolis, and so was my co-pilot. And the navigator was from Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts. The bombardier was

from Pennsylvania. And I was the top-turret gunner, the engineer gunner, they call 'em. And I was from Utah at the time, Bear River City. The radio operator gunner was from Whitman, Massachusetts. The ball-turret gunner was from Savanna, Georgia.

I: How many gunners they have?

BH: They had-- there was eleven of us on the crew. Four-- what do you call 'em, commissioned officers? And all the rest of us were what they called, non-commissioned officers. So, there was eleven on a crew of a B-24.

I: Now, how many were gunners?

BH: Uh, six.

I: Okay.

BH: Four-- four commissioned officers and six non-commissioned gunners.

I: Okay.

BH: And they all had different positions according to-- small gunner wound up in the tail, and we had a guy from Norfolk, Virginia. The ball-turret gunner was generally a fairly small guy, and he had armament training. And he knew more about machine guns than anybody else did, and so he was the ball-turret gunner. And he was from Savannah Georgia, yeah. And the waist gunner was-- he was just a gunner, and he came from Buford, Georgia. [laughs].

I: My goodness!

BH: So, we were a pretty diverse group.

I: Yeah!

BH: And so, the way we started out flyin' B-24's right off the bat the pilot and copilot had to go out, and I went out with 'em because the pilot and copilot don't go anyplace in an airplane without an engineer-

gunner. So, we flew two missions for them to get acquainted with the B-24 'cause they'd never flown a B-24 before. They'd-- they'd graduated as pilots, but they--

I: Yeah, I know.

BH: flown out of--

I: There's nothing like firsthand experience.

BH: No. We-- we flew missions then, and oh, that lasted about two and a half months. And we really did a lot of flyin'. And of course, we'd already had our training for shootin' at TOE targets [Targets Of Evaluation] and stuff when we's in Gunnery School, and so we knew how to operate our turrets and all that kind of thing. This B-24 had a Martin turret that I manned, and it had a sit-down seat. You'd get there, and you'd pull the seat up under you. And then you'd ride on your mission in a sit-- sit-up-- sit-down seat.

I: Didn't they all have sit-down seats?

BH: No.

I: Oh, so you were lucky, huh?

BH: Yeah. [laughs]. Well, I was at that point. Well we trained in the B-24's, and we really didn't-- none of us liked that B-24 that well. We had all kinds of nicknames for it, and they wasn't very nice names. [laughs].

I: [laughs].

BH: So anyway, we graduated from our, what we call our phase training, and we headed east again on a troop train. Went to Lincoln, Nebraska and got our overseas clothes all issued to us and so forth. When they were all issued to us, why, the whole crew moved to Camp Myles Standish back by Boston. [laughs]. Again we were held for awhile 'til-- 'til we got the shipping orders, and they wouldn't let us off the base. We were stuck to the base. So, that was almost two weeks, I think, and of course by then we were gettin' pretty antsy. We knew

that we was goin'--

I: Ready to go fight!

BH: goin' to war. And we wanted to get there and see what it was all about 'cause we was green as a gourd. We didn't have the slightest idea what we was walkin' into. So anyway, on December the 12th of 1944 we marched on the USS Wakefield which used to be the luxury liner Manhattan four abreast. And we marched on about four o'clock in the afternoon, and they continued to march four abreast on to that ship until midnight.

I: Oh my, gosh!

BH: [laughs]. And uh, that was one big troop carrier, I'll tell you. And we headed out in the North Atlantic about 2:30 I think it was, out into the North Sea. And we got into a storm out there, and I mean it was rough! We were right below deck, right where the anchor when it would swing out in the rough water, it'd come back and hit the side of the ship.

I: Oh my, gosh.

BH: Sounded like a great big rough bell, you know. [laughs].

I: Oh!

BH: Well, there wasn't hardly anybody in my area there that didn't get seasick.

I: That's what I was wondering.

BH: And we was layin' there in bunks that were so close together, tiered bunks--

I: Claustrophobia.

BH: that if we-- if we turned over, we would bump the guy above us and below with our hips.

I: Oh my, gosh.

BH: [laughs]. And here we was--

I: And if you had to throw up--

BH: here we was seasick, so naturally we couldn't stay in the bunk for too long. [chuckles]. And so, I got up, and I went into what they call the latrine there. And they had a big metal box-type thing that-- what it was was a holder of dish-- no, not-- wash pans. They had just regular wash pans that were-- you just set 'em in this here big trough and everybody washed in there. [chuckles]. So this was a faulty one, and they'd taken it off the wall. But they hadn't got it out of the ship, and so it was just layin' upside down there. And so, I was so sick that I couldn't hardly hold my head up, and I noticed the guy had got on that trough. And he was sicker, I think, than I was. And the ship was so rough. And the water and stuff had accumulated in the latrine area there, and he was riding that trough back and forth.

I: Oh my, gosh.

BH: And it would hit one wall, and he'd hang on. And then it'd hit the other wall, and every time it done that why it'd splash that stuff all over. [laughs].

I: Oh my, gosh. [laughs]. Sicker!

BH: I was too sick to help him! [laughs]. So, all I could do was watch him. But anyway, I was sick. It took us fourteen days to cross the ocean, and now that's a fast ship. It could do it in four days if it-- if it didn't do a zigzag course, but we had no escort whatsoever. We were out there on our own. And they wouldn't let-- let us off above deck because they was afraid somebody would strike a match, and it'd give our position away.

I: Oh my.

BH: And they knew how long it took a submarine to line up to fire a torpedo at ya, so they run what you call a zigzag course from--

I: Oh, my goodness.

BH: from the east coast to England. And that's why it took fourteen days, and furthermore--

I: Why you were so sick!

BH: Yeah. Furthermore, they decided that it'd be better that-- just about everybody on board the ship was deathly sick, you know, and they couldn't really do much for 'em. So-- so, they went south--

I: Couldn't fight much!

BH: paralleled-- paralleled the coast until we got down to the Gulf Stream, and it was a lot quieter. And then we did that zigzag course all the way to England, landed at Liverpool.

I: Were you still sick by the time you landed?

BH: Well, I was sick right up until we landed, but I wasn't quite as sick the last two days as I had been previously. The only thing that I ate from the time I left the East Coast was soda crackers, and very few of those. [laughs].

I: Oh! I bet land looked wonderful.

BH: And so, when I-- when I walked off the gangplank I was no longer sick. I-- I went and--

I: You had your land legs, huh?

BH: I went to food, and I ate a lot of it. [laughs].

I: I'll bet! So, how long were you at war?

BH: We were at war from-- what they did, they sent us to a base. We landed at Liverpool, and they took us again [chuckles] by English train this time. That was a new experience. They took us to a base quite a long ways from Liverpool, way south down towards-- we were ninety miles out of London and awful close to Cambridge, England.

And they assigned us to a base there at Ridgewell. And it was a 381st Bomb Group. It had four squadrons in it: 5-- let's see, 532nd, 533rd, 534th, and 535th. Well, we were the 532nd. So then, lo and behold, we found ourselves after all that training in B-24's, on a B-17 base.
[laughs].

I: Isn't that typical?

BH: So-- so the pilot, copilot, and myself all had to go to a couple of days of schooling to learn the features of a B-17 'cause they were quite different from a B-24. And know all about transferring fuel if we got to where we had to transfer fuel from one tank to another. And all the mechanical features in case we could do something in flight that would help us out mechanically and that sort of thing. And then, after we'd done the ground school there then, the pilot, copilot, and myself started the flying. And--

[END OF TAPE]

[TAPE #2 - SIDE A]

Transcribed by Micheal L. Minthorn (10/17/2007)

Transcription revised by Paula Helten (12/06/2011)

I: It is going!

BH: Oh, is it going?

I: No. Okay. So you--

BH: Well, I'm gonna-- I'm gonna wrap this up fast, but we got- we got so that we could fly. We were sent out almost immediately on our first mission, and uh, that was a real frightening experience because we didn't have the slightest idea of what to expect. And we had been hearing the ones that had flown their full-tour missions talking in the barracks, and they were telling all these experiences that we thought were totally exaggerated, you know? [laughs].

I: [laughs]. They're not!

BH: So uh, we flew number one, two, three, four. We flew four missions, and I think the reason that they were as calm as they were, they were

what we call PFF missions. [Precision Formation Flying]. That means that we had cloud cover,--

I: Oh?

BH: and the Germans could not see us to shoot their 88mm's at us accurately. And so, on the fifth mission we had a clear mission. And the mission was Berlin.

I: Oh my!

BH: And we knew that they amassed everything that they had in the way of guns whenever there was a mission into Berlin. And so uh, we headed in there, and like I said it was a clear day. And you can-- you can see everything. We was flying in formation at 27, 500 feet. That's about seven miles up. And still we could see the ground very plainly from anything like a flash or somethin' like that. Well, we would go in, and as we went in on a mission, why, they would call out that we were on the IP, the initial point. And when we got to the IP, every mission we flew that meant that you was on automatic pilot. And I'm makin' a noise. [chuckles]. On automatic pilot, and you was uh, flying straight ahead at the same speed, direction and everything. Nothing was varied. And it was-- the automatic pilot was tied into the Norden bombsight. And we flew into the target, and the uh, bombardier dropped his bombs at that time. And when he said, "Bombs away," we were on intercoms so's everybody could hear what was goin' on. Why uh, the--

I: Then you're having-- you were having to watch for the other German planes?

BH: Well, yes. Uh, we-- we happened to be, uh, fortunate enough that uh, we didn't have very much fighter opposition at all. We were only attacked, out of thirty-four missions we were only attacked five times by enemy fighters. And so flack was our enemy. I mean, we-- we feared that a lot more than we did enemy planes. We were attacked three times by ME-109's and twice by German jets. That was-- the Germans had jets long before we did. [chuckles].

I: Ah-hah!

BH: I mean, it was in the battle.

I: Yeah!

BH: They put 'em right into battle. And uh, on both of those occasions when we were attacked, it was just a single jet. One time it was a-- a one-engine jet, and one time it was a twin-engine jet. And they attacked us from the rear. And I was in my gun position, and-- and had uh, wings framed on 'em and everything and was just ready to pull the trigger. Boom. It was gone just like that. I mean, they're that much faster than-- the proceed plane.

I: Oh, I see.

BH: the proceed plane.

I: I see.

BH: And so, I never did fire on a-- a jet because they was just too fast. But we fired on the ME-109's, and as far as I know we didn't-- we didn't hit 'em too much. But we wasn't all that worried about fighters. But the flack was really bad.

I: Oh, I'll bet.

BH: And uh, it was thick enough up there you could get out and walk on it we used to say. And it was black as a ace of spades. When it blew up, why, it was just a great big black puffball.

I: Oh, my.

BH: And we was, uh, about ready to drop our bombs, and our lead plane-- we fly in V formation, and the lead plane it just disintegrated right in front of us.

I: Oh, gee.

BH: We had to take evac-- evasive action. And had to take over before we got in on the target, uh, to keep from losing our airplane down through the mess, you know. And then they went back to-- to the, uh,

automatic pilot and put it on bombsight to drop our bombs after that incident happened. But that's--

I: _____.

BH: that's the one of the most frightening things that ever happened to me in the whole war was that incidence because I swear to this day that I saw the top-turret gun position go floatin' past us with the gunner in it.

I: Oh, well you probably did. Oh!

BH: And so uh, there with-- there was no parachutes came from that airplane. It just totally blew it apart, so.

I: Oh my, gosh. Well, we gotta get ya back home.

BH: Yeah, but uh, we-- we flew thirty-four missions, uh, over Germany. And uh-- and then uh, we had a choice. Our pilot and co-pilot needed to advance one more rank in order to get to the rank that they was supposed to be. So, they didn't have that in place. And so they told the enlisted men that they could take a 10-day leave of absence, or we could fly with another crew and fly our last mission, had to fly thirty-five missions. And we definitely did not want to fly our last mission with a strange crew so-- so, we took the 10-day leave of absence and went to Scotland. And while we was up there the war ended.
[laughs].

I: Oh, good! Good!

BH: So we came back--

I: And you got to see Scotland.

BH: Yeah, we came back to the base after the 10-day leave of absence, and I flew two missions with uh, a captain in our outfit. The first mission was to take ground troops in to the Ruhr Valley we call it, on the Rhine River. Uh, so that they could see some of the destruction that took place 'cause they had promised 'em that they would do that when the war ended if they did a good job with their takin' care of the

airplanes. So, I went on one of those missions, and then I went on one mission to pick up prisoners of war. And they were English flyers that had been in the prison camp for probably up to four years.

I: Oh my! What a--

BH: And uh, they were just skin and bones.

I: Oh!

BH: We loaded thirty-five of 'em in this B-17 on a short brick runway.

I: I bet they were so glad to see ya.

BH: And uh, yeah. And we-- they took 'em off. And uh, uh, we had to-- we had to lock the brakes on the B-17 on the very end of the runway and turn uh, the engines clear up to full speed, and just as we took off we kicked in the exhaust-driven turbines to give us extra power. And we just barely able to raise off that short brick runway with the-- those uh, prisoners.

I: Because you had so many extra people?

BH: Yeah we-- we had uh, thirty-four people was uh, more load than what we had when we had the-- the ammunition and so forth.

I: Oh!

BH: And there was only uh, twelve of us on there.

EH: [Eileen Hill]. Tell about meeting this guy in Las Vegas.

BH: So anyway, there was a guy, an English flyer on that plane that he said to me, "Uh, do you think I could fly this?" And I said, "Well, I don't know. I'm just the engineer-gunner, you know, but I'll ask the pilot." So I got down by the pilot, and I said, "There's a guy here that wants to fly the plane. Is that possible?" [laughs]. And he got up, and he stretched. And he turned to the co-pilot, and he says uh, "Watch this guy, he's gonna fly." He says, "I'll take-- I'll take five." So he-- the plane was so loaded that the pilot had to kind of trade places with this

guy, and I was right there too. And I was all crunched up there with all these guys. And so that guy took over, and he flew for about ten minutes. And he was just ecstatic! I mean, he-- he just-- _____!

I: He'd never flown before?

BH: Well yeah,--

I: Yeah.

BH: he'd-- he'd-- he-- he was a Sterling pilot.

I: Oh! Okay.

BH: A big four-engine English bomber when he was shot down--

I: Oh?! Uh-huh.

BH: and taken prisoner of war. So anyway, uh-- so-- well, it was just four or five years ago that we were in Las Vegas, Nevada. And uh, they brought a bunch of English people over to kind of pay 'em back for them, uh, givin' us all this party at the 50th Anniversary of the 8th Air Force in England. And we was in the memorabilia room where we was talkin'. Where they keep all the stuff that you wanna look at and pictures and. And this guy was a-talkin', and he was tellin' about bein' liberated from the prisoner of war camp. And when he got to a certain place, why, I knew that he had to be the guy--

I: Flew the plane?

BH: that asked me if he could fly that plane.

I: And so you got to talk to him?

BH: Yeah, and I said uh, "Let me finish the story, will ya'?" And uh, he looked at me kind of funny. And I says, "I'm the guy that you asked if you could fly the plane." "You are!!" And he just--

I: Oh!

BH: had a great big smile. [laughs].

I: Oh, for gosh sakes!

BH: And so, it turned out that after all those years here was this guy. And he didn't-- you know I remembered him as uh, a very, very skinny guy with a potbelly. And he was pretty handsome lookin' guy.

I: Oh!

BH: And uh, so it was-- it was quite a reunion, and I-- I just couldn't believe somethin' like that would happen.

I: That was wonderful.

BH: Yeah.

I: It certainly was.

BH: Yeah.

I: Well I gotta get ya back livin' here in Cove!

BH: Yeah, so, yeah, I come back from the war. My dad had sold his place and moved up here. And so I, uh, was told to get the horses together down there 'cause we still wasn't in the full tractor age back then, and plow the sugar beets. And my dad had a hired man that he'd left behind that was the truck driver and overseer of the Japanese people that uh, topped our sugar beets that fall. And they-- there was a big bunch of those Japanese people, and they could really work hard and top a lot of sugar beets. And so, I rounded up them horses. And there was some of 'em that was quite old, and some that were almost colts. And I uh, started to plowin' these sugar beets. And I'd plow long days, and I couldn't keep ahead of those Japanese. And the poor horses they hadn't been workin', and they was just about meltin'.

I: Oh.

BH: So uh, the hired man said to me. He says, "Bert," he says, "you-- they can't keep enough sugar beets plowed for 'em." And I says, "Boy,

I'm givin' them horses all they can stand." So he said, "Well, we gotta do somethin'." So he uh, says, "I'm gonna look. There's people that--." We had a little tractor there, but it wasn't rigged up so's we could put a beet puller on it. So he says, "There's people that's using these beet pullers behind the little tractor, so I'm gonna' see how they're doin' that." So he did, and-- and so on the weekend when we wasn't toppin' beets, why, we slipped that puller on to that little tractor. And it got so that I could plow enough sugar beets with that tractor more than what I could plow with the horses. That I could plow uh, just a regular day from daylight until a while before dark, and keep plenty of sugar beets plowed for 'em. [laughs].

I: Oh wasn't that great? Well--

BH: So, we finished them. And Dad came down, and he was makin' the final move. And so he had a truck and car that needed to be driven back here. And we pulled a four-wheel uh, trailer back and brought all of his remaining stuff. I drove the truck, and he drove the car. And my wife, Eileen, we got married after we come back from World War II. Uh, she loaded in with me, and we came up to Oregon. And we had already decided that.

I: That was what year?

BH: That was 19, uh '45, in the fall.

I: Okay.

BH: Uh, just a while after I got out of the military and-- and plowed the sugar beets out of the. And uh, 'course we didn't have a place to stay here so we moved in with Mom and Dad. [laughs].

I: Uh-huh. Oh, yes.

BH: And we stayed there 'til the next spring, and we got this place that we live on now and uh, moved out. And she was a very happy girl as no girl wants to be a newlywed livin' with--

I: Oh no, it's hard to live with in-laws!

BH: [laughs].

I: Very hard! I've been there, done that. [laughs]. They wanted me to ask you, um, what you knew about the Hendershotts.

BH: Uh--

I: That's who had this place originally, isn't it?

BH: All I know is that uh, the reason that I'm sure that we got this place is because uh, the Allen's had got this place after the Hendershotts had long since built it and so forth. And when we came up to talk to Herman Allen about buyin' the place he uh, said that, uh-- that this was really a well sought after place because of havin' this Hendershott house on it. And uh--

I: How many acres?

BH: There's a hundred-- well, it was a hundred and fifty acres then.

I: With the house?

BH: With thirty of it across the road, and a hundred and twenty here with-- by the house. And uh, so he said that uh, after talkin' with us that uh-- well, it turned out that Eileen uh, was talkin' with Mrs. Allen. And she says, "Do you know why you was able to buy that place?" And she says, "Uh, no. Why?" And she says, "Well," she says, "When I looked out the window and saw your husband Burton--" Uh, they had a son named Everett, and he was killed in a railroad accident in Nampa. She said, "When I looked out the window I saw my dead son."

I: For heaven's sake.

BH: And so she said, uh, when Herman came to the house she asked him, "Who was that out there?" And he-- he said, "It was Mr. Hill and his son Burton that's just come home from the war." And she says, "Uh, we're gonna sell 'em our place, aren't we?" And he says, "Yes, Marie." [laughs].

I: Oh, for gosh sakes.

BH: So uh, that's uh-- that's how we happened to get this place. I don't know that we woulda got it, but--

I: Otherwise, huh?

BH: it-- it-- it was something.

I: But you brought your son that had just got back from the war, and that cinched the deal, huh?

BH: Yeah, she said that I looked just like Everett--

I: Oh my, gosh.

BH: when I stood up.

I: Oh my, gosh. That's wonderful.

BH: Yeah.

I: So, um--

BH: But it's been a good farm.

I: How many kids have you had here?

BH: We had six.

I: Okay. And-- and you say uh, are some of them workin' the farm?

BH: Nope.

I: Just-- just you and Eileen, huh?

BH: The-- the-- yeah. What happened uh, when-- 1961, I was workin' for the railroad here in La Grande, and I was asked to become uh, the electrical supervisor for the Idaho division headquartered in Pocatello, Idaho. And I almost turned that position down 'cause I couldn't see

how that I could possibly-- we had uh, rental property in La Grande and was living in La Grande and farmin' the farm by remote control. And so I said, "Eileen, what-- what do ya think? I can't take that job, can I?" And she says, "We're gonna take it."

I: Ah-hah, good for her!

BH: And I had to-- I had to tell my boss that I either wanted the job or I didn't want it. So, I phoned him and told him that I decided I'd take the electrical supervisor job. So, on uh, our wedding anniversary date in 1970, uh, I found myself headed for Pocatello, Idaho to get queued into be the electrical supervisor. And so I went down and got some training and became the electrical supervisor of uh-- of Idaho from 1970 to 1981.

I: So Eileen moved there, didn't you? You guys lived there?

BH: Yeah. Eileen-- Eileen sold our property and rented the property that we didn't wanna sell here. And she moved down there, and we lived there from _____--

I: Oh, so you sold the ranch that you'd bought?

BH: No, we didn't sell the ranch. We sold the property in town.

I: In town? Oh, okay.

BH: I had our rentals and all that stuff, but we kept the farm.

I: Well, remember when you was there on Adams, and-- and you had the _____ place? Is that one of the ones you sold?

BH: Uh, no. We bought that one after we came back from Pocatello.
[laughs].

I: Oh, was that after you came back? That-- that big ole stone house?

BH: We set up her magic mill business--

I: Yes.

BH: in that. And we still was farming the farm by remote control because Tony Pedro farmed the farm until we got back, and then we took it over. Started-- still livin' in La Grande, and I was still working for the--

I: Yeah.

BH: for the railroad when I came back because I quit management and went back to the ranch.

EH: No, you worked with Sylvan Sawyer.

BH: Yeah, the last guy that ran this was Sylvan Sawyer, and Tony Pedro was the first guy.

I: Ah-hah!

BH: So, they were--

I: So, Sylvan ran the ranch you mean?

BH: Mm-hm.

I: Ah-hah, okay.

BH: And uh, so then we took over after Sylvan. And uh, what we did then-- we put the-- the whole farm in the Soil Conservation Reserve for ten years. And uh, that was--

I: What does that mean?

BH: just-- just-- we just planted it to grass. And we-- we had to kept the weeds out of the grass and leave it in grass for that period of time.

I: So you didn't get any income off of it?

BH: Yeah, we got income. They paid us, uh, fifty dollars an acre.

I: Geez. [laughs].

BH: [chuckles]. Put it in a soil bank. That was supposed to help the wheat farmers out so that it wasn't so much--

I: I remember that. Yeah, I remember that.

BH: Yeah. And so then after that come out of the soil bank then we rented to uh, a, guy by the name of Edwin Troyer who belongs to the Mennonite religion. And there have been a lot of them move into Cove.

I: Oh yes, nice people.

BH: And uh, nice people. And they uh-- he was a real good farmer too. And he farmed it, uh, then for uh-- how long did Edwin farm this Eileen?

I: Six.

EH: Six years.

BH: Six years. And uh, then uh, Edwin has-- he-- he had bought my dad's old place uh, from Bob Hill that bought it from--

EH: Your mom.

BH: my mom.

I: Bob and Jolita?

EH: Yes.

BH: Yeah, Bob and Jolita.

I: Yeah?

BH: And uh, so, Ed-- Edwin then bought it from Bob and Jolita. And then uh, he found out how much he could get out of his farm so he put it up for sale. And he got the money. And so he sold his farm. And-- and then Tern, his boy had been helpin' him farm, and so we're signed up

with his son Curtis now. And he rents uh, the main farm here, a hundred and twenty acres, uh, year by year. So we don't know _____.

I: So you're-- you're getting rental?

BH: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

BH: So, we get the--

I: Well I thought-- I don't know. In-- in my mind I thought you had cherry orchard.

BH: Yeah, it's uh, right here part of it. We-- we didn't rent the-- the house. There's four acres here that we kept off that hundred and twenty.

I: Yeah.

BH: And then uh, my brother Ralph's in the nursing home, and so I'm takin' care of his thirty acres. And I have twenty more acres over there myself. [phone rings].

I: Uh-huh.

BH: So that's what we--

I: I was just gonna say your house is so unique.

BH: Yeah.

I: 'Cause-- 'cause its--

BH: Yeah, this Hendershott now, they haven't said a lot about Hendershott. But James Hendershott and Dunham Wright are two of the old pioneers back in the 1870's that were developing this uh, land here in the Grande Ronde Valley. Up 'til about that time, why, it was pretty much lake, and they just farmed the, the east side and the west side of this big lake.

I: Oh!

BH: And uh, so this Hendershott was in politics quite a bit. And-- and he uh, was uh, oh, either a Senator or a Representative for a while down in Salem. And uh, so they decided they was gonna dig what they call the big ditch. And it uh, goes and takes Catherine-- no, it takes Grande Ronde. How does that work? Anyway, it takes the water from-- from what was the lake area of the Grande Ronde Valley straight through and dumped it back in the Grande Ronde River. And that-- that helped it a whole bunch for the flooding because prior to that time the Catherine Creek and the Grande Ronde River came down into this valley. And the only way out was the winding Grande Ronde River that had to wind around, and there was only fourteen feet of fall from one end to the other.

I: Oh!

BH: That's only one foot per mile.

I: Is that when they started working on that river?

BH: Yeah, and so they-- they wanted to dig that big ditch. And so Hendershott bid the contract on the big ditch. And it sounded like he uh, was gonna get a lot of money. And I don't know what happened whether he got all of the money or not. But anyway, it was uh-- I think it was about eleven thousand dollars that was allotted for diggin' that ditch. And he happened to have access to equipment, and so he took the bid.

I: And this was in the 1800's?

BH: That was about um-- well, it was-- it was-- yeah, it was in the 1800's, probably about 1880-something. And he took the bid for that ditch, and he was able to-- to build it for about what half of what the bid was.

I: Why yeah, 'cause that was quite a bit of money in those days.

BH: Yes, yes. So, anyway he made some good money on that. And it was in 1870 that uh-- that he was building on this house. And uh, my son Allen is a, uh, quite a historian, and he did a real in-depth study. And--

I: I think they have a--

BH: And he's a--

I: They have access to your son's, uh--

BH: Yeah. They-- he-- I think he puts the date when this house was completed at 1878. It was built by Hendershott, and this house according to abstracts and so forth cost approximately eleven thousand dollars to build. [laughs].

I: Oh my, gosh. And what is it, a hundred and what years old now?

BH: It's uh--

I: Hundred and--?

BH: Well, that'd be 1877 'til--

I: A hundred and five, isn't it?

BH: 'til now, yeah.

I: Yeah.

BH: Yeah.

I: Well, isn't that something?!

BH: A hundred-- hundred and five, yeah, yeah.

I: Well, it's-- it's--

BH: But it's uh-- it's gothic architecture, and it's registered in the National Archives in Washington, DC. And we found that out from, uh, Conrad Head and uh, another historian in La Grande here at the

college. Uh, that it was registered because Conrad had said he used to take tours through here, uh, from the college. They'd bring a busload out and take 'em through here. And he got to thinkin', I have seen that house someplace before. So, he went back to the college and researched, and he found that they had the blueprints of this in the college over here--

I: Oh my, gosh.

BH: because it's registered in the National Archives. So, he gave us a copy of the-- of the blueprints. So, we have--

I: Oh, how wonderful!

BH: we have the actual blueprints for this house.

I: Gee.

BH: And-- and there was some changes made in this house when it was built from the blueprints because it showed a straight staircase going up through this dining room which is the center of this house to the upper story. And he decided that he wanted a circular staircase.

I: Oh!

BH: So, he took part of this, what was supposed to be the dining room area, and uh, made a circular staircase that-- that uh, goes up. And the-- the uh, dome of it ends up in the attic of this. And it was built, uh, round up at the top because they cut little short boards--

I: Yes.

BH: and made it round. And then they used a lathe, the wood lathe--

I: Yes.

BH: and-- and molded it around that. And so they've got a perfectly round staircase here. So--

I: So, is that staircase still here?

BH: It's just-- it's right here, yeah. It's still here.

I: I'll be darned.

BH: It-- it's where you come in. When we get through here, why, you can take a look at it.

I: Yeah.

BH: But it-- it circles right up to the upper floor, and when we get in the attic, why, we can look down on the dome of it and so forth.

I: How many bedrooms are there upstairs?

BH: There's a big bedroom up there now that uh, we've changed it a little bit. And we've made a, uh, clothes closet out of part of it and a bathroom out of the other part of it. And it's still a-- a big room. It-- it was built so large. And they used it for a dancehall, believe it or not. [laughs].

I: Oh, for gosh sakes!

BH: Back in those days.

I: So, there was plumbing up there that you couldn't make-- get-- get access?

BH: Yeah, no, we had to-- we had to take the plumbing up through from here. And that's-- we've uh, had to put a false ceiling in this dining room to hide the--

I: Plumbing, I suppose.

BH: plumbing and so forth. Yeah

I: Well, I think it's marvelous to have such a--

BH: It is. It's a pretty unique building.

I: such a treasure.

BH: And when-- when you see uh, how they had to do some of the lathe work and-- and some of the architecture of this back in there. We'll--

I: Okay.

BH: we'll take a look at that. This-- this uh, thing that's real fancy there in the bay window?

I: Yes.

BH: Uh, see there's some lathe work on that thing, and they got that lathed over in Union. Union had access to some wood lathe. And uh, the curvature of that was made by taking a planed pine one-by-six and sawing little notches in it--

I: Oh my, gosh, yeah.

BH: so they could bend it. And-- and uh, that's what forms that arch there. And uh, so this house has got lots-- lots of what we call gingerbread on it. And we've tried to keep as much of that intact as we could. It used to have wood gingerbread down the-- the ridge-roll, and it rotted out completely. And so rather than uh, rebuild that, why, we had a metal one that looks similar that will last forever.

I: That's smart, that's smart.

BH: And then the chimneys are the old style chimneys that hung on the walls. And uh, they got condemned a few years ago, and-- and so uh, we had 'em rebuilt because they was in pretty poor shape. Just so's uh, it would save the architecture of the house, and then we capped 'em. We don't use 'em anymore. And we've uh, taken part of what used to be the, uh, dressing room. It was a long, uh, area here. And we used it for quite a few years when we first moved here. It was just a big long bathroom, had a shower and a bathtub both and so forth. But we took the back end of that and made it a furnace room--

I: Oh.

BH: in-- in the front part of it now.

I: How could they heat this originally?

BH: They heated it with wood stoves. And uh, they had--

I: Ah! That's why all the chimneys, huh?

BH: Yeah, see there's a-- there can be a--

I: Yeah, this one right here?

BH: a pipe go into that chimney from that room and this room and this room and--

I: Oh, I see.

BH: and the bedroom, and upstairs there's places where ya can get into 'em from the upstairs rooms too. So they--

I: That's a lot of fires to keep going!

BH: they had-- oh, they had fires. If they wanted to keep the whole house they must have had to have one, two, three, four, five, six. They had to have at least six fires.

I: Uh-huh. Isn't that somethin'?

BH: [laughs]. Wood fires, yeah.

I: Okay.

BH: But it had--

[END SIDE A - NO SIDE B]

[END TAPE #2]