

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALBERT L. GILL  
FOR THE  
VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
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INTERVIEWED BY  
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TRANSCRIPT BY  
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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Albert L. Gill on March 29, 2005 with Kurt Piehler and ...

KEVIN GITTENS: ... Kevin Gittens.

PIEHLER: ... At the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Tennessee, and we would really want to thank you for coming ... and I want to first ... begin by asking ... you were born in 1921 ... in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and uh, I guess could you start off by telling me a little bit about your parents.

ALBERT L. GILL: Okay, My uh, mother lived in Columbia, South Carolina, and my father was at Camp Jackson during World War I, and they met on a blind date, and He—after his discharge from the service he went back to Missouri, which was his home, um, [He] proposed and they were married, and after marriage moved to Fort Smith, Arkansas, where I was born. We stayed there about six months, and I think my mother ... didn't like Fort Smith too well, she wanted to get back to South Carolina, so we moved to Charleston, South Carolina and my father worked for the Thomas and Howe Wholesale Groceries there. He ... died ... December the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1930, on my ninth birthday, and uh, my mother and I moved to Columbia to live with my grandmother. I finished high school, went to work with, a concrete construction company, we did a job down in Jacksonville, Florida at the Naval Air Station, then I was sent up to Washington D.C. , where I registered for the draft. When Pearl Harbor happened, I wanted to join the Air Corp at that time but my mother wouldn't sign for me because I wasn't twenty one. But, as—closer to twenty one she decided to agree to it, and I was sworn in ... the Aviation Cadet Program on November the 11<sup>th</sup>, 1942, and they were parading down main street in Columbia celebrating Armistice Day--from World War I. I went home and waited for the call to ... active duty, which was ... to report February the 1<sup>st</sup>, in 1943 to Miami Beach for Basic Training, and that lasted about 30 days, we reported in the beach hotel, umpteenth of us to a room, but, ... it was stripped down, it wasn't fancy, after that we ... went by troop train to Knoxville, Tennessee, to the University of Tennessee, ... for what is called College Training Detachment, some of us were there for thirty days, sixty days and ninety days, I happened to be on of the ninety days fellows. We arrived ... by train ... outside the Neyland Stadium and marched up to the girl's dormitory and cafeteria at 2:00 in the morning. And they'd been waitin' on us since uh, 9:00 and the girls were hanging out the windows hoopin' and hollerin' , we thought we'd come to the right place. (Laughs) Only to find out that the, first thirty days we were quarantined. Some of the guys were married and their wives had come in there, but they couldn't see them. (Laughter) We enjoyed here at Knoxville very much. I met my wife on a blind date, and we corresponded from that time on after I left. After leaving Knoxville, we went what was called a classification center in Nashville Tennessee, there you classified, graded either pilot, bombardier, or navigator, or some of 'em were washed out. My classification was pilot—and with that I was sent down to Maxwell field, in Montgomery, Alabama for preflight training. From there—we were down there by the way ... in July and it was hot ... in Alabama.

From there I was transferred to Jackson, Tennessee for primary flight training, and um, you had to be able to solo in the first ten hours, and my instructor didn't think I was ready so I was washed out. Which was a big blow to me, 'cause I really looked forward to being a pilot. Uh, my next classification happened to be navigator, so I was transferred to Selman Field, Monroe Louisiana, and went to Navigation School, 'bout halfway, then were transferred down to Buckingham Field, in Fort Myers, Florida for aerial gunnery, when we completed that we received our gunner's wings and went back to Selman field to finish up navigation. I graduated in May of '44, as a second lieutenant was ... given a little time delay, went home, that was my first trip home. ... Then reported to Fresno, California, and from there we reported to Walla Walla, Washington, which was where the crew was formed. We were in training then, crew training, Flying formation, bombing, navigation. And I was the last member of the crew to arrive. And, they accepted me in a way, I was riding along for passage there for a while, 'til we had a day/ night navigation trip, which was to check me out. And I made it all right, we arrived on our ETA, didn't get lost and the crew accepted me at that time. Um, upon completion of that were given ten days delay in route—from Walla, Walla to San Francisco. So I went home. I flew all the way to Chicago, Nashville, go to Chattanooga and a WAC pulled me off, she had a higher priority than I had. (Laughter) So I had to make it by bus from Chattanooga to Columbia. Arrived back in San Francisco, we were given a brand new B-24J, which we flew to calibrate the instruments and check it out. And after that we took off for we didn't know where. We flew over the golden gate bridge, and just the very tips of it were showing through the fog, San Francisco was famous for its fog. After we passed that, our pilot opened our orders and we were headed for Townsville, Australia. First stop was Honolulu, in Hawaii. It was the first time over water for any of us. Of course it was all on me that we got there right. I had nervous engineer, kept asking me about time and he worried about the fuel. But we made it. And spent two nights and a day in Hawaii. Our next stop was Canton Island, it was a very small piece a land to be looking for in that big ocean. And from there went to Tarawa, where the Marines had an awful battle. Uh, then to Guadalcanal, and then to Townsville, Australia. Let's pause.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay—it's your interview we'll ... answer questions when you stop or whenever you want to stop.

GILL: Okay. ... Townsville was ... a little town that reminded me of our western movies. It was—dirt streets, there's wooden sidewalks. They were behind times down there. Anyhow, they flew us up, left our new B-24 in, uh Townsville and the flew us up to, uh (Majab ?) , New Guinea, where went into pool there to be determined which outfit we were going to. And we were assigned to the 424<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the 307<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 13<sup>th</sup> Air Force. There were two air forces working in Southwest Pacific, that was the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup>. From (Majab ?) we went to Wewak, um, spent the night, and then into Noemfoor ... which is off the coast of New Guinea, and from there were started our missions. The first on to Balikpapan in Borneo, oil instillation, and it was a 16 hour mission. We went ... sixteen hours with two bomb bay tanks of gas and two bomb bays of bombs. So, bombs were cut in half because of needing the gas. The idea was to eliminate the Japanese access to oil for the forthcoming invasion of Leyte, Philippines. We flew several more missions out of Numfor, and

then went to Morotai. And uh, Morotai was ... shaped like a tadpole, it had a mountain and then you had the long peninsula, and we lived out on the peninsula which was in a coconut grove. And there was a bay between our island and Halmahera, ... about the distance of 30 miles. And the Japanese were over there big time. If you flew over there, they shot at you. There were still Japs in the mountains on Morotai. So I ... finished my mission there which was forty three [missions], finished up in April of '45. ... Went up to the Philippines, and Leyte. ... Before us, everybody was flying home. In my case, we went on a ship. So, we took a ship back, and docked in San Diego, took a troop train to Atlanta Georgia. And I went up to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and was given a thirty day leave, went home.

PIEHLER: Well, I want to go back and we have lots of follow up questions and I get a sense that your father was thinking of making the Army a career. Is that ...

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: No.

GILL: Uh, uh. He worked for ... Railway Express.

PIEHLER: Okay, so that's why [he] was in ... Fort Smith.

ALBERT L. GILL: Right. ... As I said, I'm sure mother didn't like it, that why we ended up back in Charleston.

PIEHLER: Okay, so he was in the Army in 1918 but then got out, and then was in Railway express, and that's how you ended up...

GILL: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... ended up in Arkansas ...

GILL: Right.

PIEHLER: ... Fort Smith, Arkansas. What did your father say about—I mean, even though he didn't go overseas, what did your father say about Army life? Did he ...

GILL: Well, you know, I was just a baby. So I ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GILL: And uh, he died when I was nine and there was no real discussion about it at that time.

PIEHLER: So, he didn't join the American Legion or ...

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: No. And you mentioned that your parents met on a blind date. I have a feeling there's more of a story on who set up this blind date. Did they ever tell you?

GILL: Well, I don't believe I ever found that out. I don't know how it came about. In my case, ... it was a friend ... we were close and, he had met my wife-to-be and then came along and introduced me. And uh, she passed away in uh, February 19<sup>th</sup> of last year. And I found a little date book. And uh, she had in there that she had dated Jeff Foster. He's was the fella that introduced us. (Laughter) ... Jeff Foster was scratched out and put Albert Gill there. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you'd never seen this date book before?

GILL: Excuse me?

PIEHLER: You hadn't seen this date book before?

GILL: No, no.

PIEHLER: Now um, your earliest memories of growing up is Charleston. I was just in Charleston for the Society for Military History meetings.

GILL: I love Charleston.

PIEHLER: Yeah ... What are your earliest remembrances of Charleston, as a boy?

GILL: Well, one of the biggest things was we lived uh, several blocks off the battery. And there was a lake—more like a pond. But it was affected by the tide. So it went up and down. And also there was streets uh, made of cobblestone, and uh, three or so blocks about the size of a brick. Well, they tore up a street, and my father got a bunch of these blocks to burn in the stove. Well, we had a high tide, and it flooded up to the top of our steps. And all those blocks were floating all over the neighborhood. (Laughter) And I remember—did you go down on the battery?

PIEHLER: Um, I think very briefly.

GILL: Well, you know there's a park and they have ...

PIEHLER: Yes.

GILL: ... these old cannons there?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GILL: Well, used to play on those cannons and I have great memories of going back there all the time. ... We moved then up to the northern part of ... Charleston. There's the Citadel. And that was interesting, to see those cadets parading uh, just a few blocks away from there. So uh, I uh, used to go back in the summer time and stay with some friends I grew up with.

PIEHLER: This was when you were in Columbia, when you moved to Columbia?

GILL: ... Yes.

PIEHLER: You would come back to visit your friends?

GILL: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: What did your father do, you mentioned he was in the grocery ...

GILL: Well, he was a bookkeeper. Uh, I don't know how he made the transition from the ... Railway Express uh, to bookkeeping but uh, that was the job that he took when he went to ... Charleston. And the owner was uh a fellow by the name of William and he and his son and I were good friends, still are. Were still ...

PIEHLER: You're still in touch?

GILL: Still in touch, yes.

PIEHLER: So you've really kept roots in Charleston?

GILL: Oh yes.

PIEHLER: I mean ... that's a long time, you know, to still ...

GILL: Well then, more roots in Columbia because I have two cousins that live there now. I mean they've always lived there -- and they're more like brothers to me because I was the only child. ... We go down to the Carolina-Tennessee games—and other activities.

PIEHLER: ... What happened to your father that he died so young?

GILL: He had meningitis, which you know, that doesn't kill people today ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GILL: But they didn't have the things then to take care of it. Um, Mother went on and had my birthday party on ... the 1<sup>st</sup>.

PIEHLER: Even though your father ...

GILL: Even though he was in the hospital, very sick, and died on the 3<sup>rd</sup>—I remember he spanked one time.

PIEHLER: The only time ...

GILL: The only time I can remember.

PIEHLER: ... What had you'd done that's the only spanking?

GILL: I had a little small bicycle and I was out riding it and I was called to come to dinner. ... I was called several times and on the last time I said, "Oh you and your old dinner!" Well, he met me at the door when I arrived. (Laughter) As I said, that's the only time I remember that he spanked me but I got a little brash there. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did ... your family when you were living in Charleston, did they own their homes or did they rent?

GILL: They rented.

PIEHLER: Rent. Did you rent a house or an apartment?

GILL: It was a house.

PIEHLER: A house. ... Both by the battery and ...

GILL: Yes. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Did you have any help that came in? Did your mother have a maid or ...

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: No. Your mother worked for the South Carolina Board of Health. That was after your father passed away?

GILL: He passed away, and then we moved to Columbia. My grandmother, my grandfather died and they had always rented and that was the first thing she did after he died was buy this old house in Columbia. And I don't remember now why but she had come down to stay with us, when it happened. So we all moved back, the three of us, to Columbia in that house. ... My father had some life insurance. This was Depression days you know, things were very, very tight and she took a course on ... typing and so forth, and got on with the Health Department and stayed there until she retired.

PIEHLER: And so it sounds like your grandmother, when you came home, was it your grandmother that was at home?

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And your mother was at work?

GILL: Right. I was raised by (laughs) by the grandmother and mother and uh, my mother's sister uh, husband, who was my uncle. He was very good to me since I didn't have a father. And he and his father owned this concrete construction company that I went to work for. And uh, after the war was over and I came back uh, he had sold the business and was into something else. So there wasn't a place for me to be in. And uh, I contacted Thomas and Howe, Mr. Williams, and he hired me and sent me to the plant they had in Allendale, South Carolina. And I worked there in the warehouse and uh, then they transferred me to Augusta, Georgia. And I became a salesman for them, I had half the city. And um, Augusta is on the Savannah River. It's below the water and they had built dikes uh, to keep the water out. And they used these Chinese coolies back there. So these Chinese stayed and they opened up little grocery stores, all over in ... certain sections of Augusta. And you'd go in to call on one of them, they'd use one of those ...

PIEHLER: Abacuses?

GILL: Yeah, you know they'd flip those, you know figure out what I was quoting them and talking Chinese back and forth. (Laughter) And uh, one of my biggest customers was a fellow that had a supermarket and he was a good customer. After I left, it turns out they was in the newspaper, he was the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan for South Carolina.

PIEHLER: Really?

GILL: Had no idea.

PIEHLER: You had no ...

GILL: No. But it was in the paper after we left that something came up that exposed him.

PIEHLER: ... He was not Chinese this ...

GILL: Oh no.

PIEHLER: This was another ...

GILL: Yes.

PIEHLER: Just so when ... we don't ...

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And you were really stunned by it.



GILL: Oh yeah, I remember one evening the Ku Klux Klan had a big rally in the park in Augusta.

PIEHLER: ... What year was this roughly?

GILL: Well we were married in '45, [in] Allendale about a year, so it was '46, '47. Less than '48. ... My wife and I drove down by this place, you could see all these white robes down in there. She said, "Let's go down closer" I said, "No, it's not gon' get any closer than this." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Do you know ... why the rally?

GILL: No. Didn't want to find out! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... I don't know Charleston very well, ... My wife and I on their vacation when we first moved down here and I was at this conference but, how would you compare the Charleston you knew as a boy versus the ... Columbia you knew as a boy, the differences between the ... two places.

GILL: Well, Charleston ... you know, it's updated a lot but it's still the same old Charleston.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GILL: And the old homes that they take of and tourists go through them ...

PIEHLER: So you remember tourists ...

GILL: Oh, yes.

PIEHLER: ... growing up as a boy?

GILL: Sure, yeah,—There was a restaurant called Henry's. That was the place at that time. It's now gone and the old slave quarters is now a market where they sell a little bit of everything, ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GILL: And they have women that are weaving these baskets. ... I just never get tired of going back down there.

PIEHLER: So do you remember the market, the old slave quarters? I've seen that market. That was a market ... in your day.

GILL: Yes. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: How did it compare to Columbia? 'Cause you knew ...

GILL: Well, Columbia's the capitol, and so it has lot more state offices and so forth. And ... Charleston is limited on its growth; it's a peninsula beside the Cooper River and the Ashley. ... So Columbia is spread out and been goin'.

PIEHLER: Now ... did your parents have a car in Charleston?

GILL: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And did your mother keep a car when your father passed away?

GILL: Right. We had, I don't remember now what make it was but she and I had been to Columbia and we were going back to Charleston, part of the roads were not paved back then. And this boy ran his cow out of the field, across the road, right in front of us. And for some reason, the cow stopped. Well, mother hit that cow, on [the] hip, gashed it, ran off, it didn't kill it. But it knocked the headlight up like this. So when we drove into Charleston that headlight was going through the second story windows. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Let me make sure Kevin has a chance to jump in.

GITTENS: Um, I think he's covered pretty much everything I'd been thinking of. ... I didn't want to divert from anything he has in mind. ... When it was getting closer to the war were you and your family keeping up with events overseas? ... You know, Germany, Japan, the Africa Campaign?

GILL: Well, see I was working away from home. I went to Jacksonville and we had this job down there crunching concrete for certain parts of that Naval Air Station. So I wasn't home. ... and after that job was finished I went to Washington D.C. for the same thing, repairing concrete up there. And I ran the office at both places. All the time I was anxious to get into what was then the Air Corps. First off, it was the U.S. Air Corps. , then it became the U.S. Army Air Force, and then the U.S. Air Force.

PIEHLER: I'm curious; you wanted to be a pilot for a long time. What sparked your interest?

GILL: Oh, (Laughs) Um, I read everything I could get my hands on about aviation. I built model airplanes. And we lived about a mile over the hill from the then Columbia Airport, it was Owens Field. And I kept a bicycle hot going down there practically every afternoon that I could, to hang around, see what was going on.

PIEHLER: I once interviewed a veteran ... he actually wasn't a veteran but he remembers you know, in Newark, New Jersey, you could ride your bike and even before 9/11 you really couldn't do this anymore. You used to be able to ride your bike, and this was the 1920's and go into the ... literally hang around the planes.

GILL: Oh yeah. Well, I went further than that. There was a creek, Hampton's Creek, that was on the other side of the airport, several miles. And I'd ride my bicycle down in there all by myself. Nothing ever happened, couldn't do it today.

PIEHLER: But ... you would talk to pilots and ...

GILL: Yeah. Yes. The only thing I can't figure out is why I didn't try to work my way into getting them to take me up.

PIEHLER: You never asked them to ...

GILL: Never asked them.

PIEHLER: Never even thought you ...

GILL: Never thought about it.

PIEHLER: (Laughs)

GILL: And when I look back on it I can imagine why I didn't. But I stand around there watch ... what's was going on. But ...

PIEHLER: Do you remember the Lindberg flight?

GILL: Oh yeah. You remember Wiley Post?

PIEHLER: Yes, I've heard ...

GILL: He had a plane called the Winnie Mae. He came into Columbia, down at Owens Field. I saw him down there and that plane. Of course, Lindberg didn't but ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, did you remember the ...

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... You started school in Charleston. Did you start kindergarten or First Grade?

GILL: First Grade.

PIEHLER: First Grade.

GILL: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... What do remember of the first school you went to?

GILL: Um (laughs) let's see, I went to the Third Grade and I started of because my birthday was a half a year. So when I got to Columbia I was a half a year behind, going to the Fourth Grade. So in essence I skipped that part. But, one of the things I remember is that uh, I had a little girlfriend and I was carrying her books and this bully approaches me and hit me. And ... I went screaming home with my hand over my eye. My mother met me at the door. "What's the matter?" I pushed her aside and went to the mirror to see. (Laughter) And they had a play called Tom Thumb Weds. Well ... the girls dressed up with wedding dresses. The boy's had a little tuxedo. Well ... I had to participate in there. Which ... I wasn't too happy about it, but I did. That's about all I remember about ...

PIEHLER: No teachers stick ... out if you remember or ...

GILL: Hmm?

PIEHLER: Any teachers stick out in ...

GILL: No, no.

PIEHLER: What about going to school in Columbia?

GILL: Well ... the Grammar school was just three blocks from my house. So I was in walking distance. And uh, -- I got the nickname of "sissy", from the neighborhood boys. And that stuck with me. It became "Sis" instead of "sissy". But it stuck with me into high school. And we played ... basketball between classes and I remember a fellow asking why I was called "Sis", did I have a sister or something. ... I don't know why I got the nickname ...

PIEHLER: Since there was no reason that you can ...

GILL: No, uh, uh. I stuck ...

PIEHLER: I just stuck.

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You went to University High School in Columbia?

GILL: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: What track were you on? Did you [do] commercial or vocational or college prep or ...

GILL: I ... took business.

PIEHLER: Business?

GILL: Mm hmm. I had (unintelligible) I knew at the time that I couldn't go to college; we didn't have the money for it.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so you didn't even think that was a possibility?

GILL: I didn't see any way I could do it. ... So my first year of working, I was helping with the groceries, until my mother really got going with her job. ... It was called University High because it was in a building on the University of South Carolina campus. ... They closed it down oh, I guess maybe ten years after I left.

PIEHLER: You mentioned working ... When did you start working after school?

GILL: When I graduated from high school.

PIEHLER: High School. ... You didn't have jobs when you were in high school or ...

GILL: No. uh, uh.

PIEHLER: Not even a paper route or ...

GILL: Oh yeah, had a paper route.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

GILL: Yes, I did.

PIEHLER: When did you start delivering the paper?

GILL: I did it for about two years. We had a (?) in Columbus, and ... each paper was about that thick. And that's one time my mother helped me, she had the car, and I couldn't handle them on the bicycle, which I did normally.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. I'm curious; your parents were both Republicans in an era where there weren't a lot of Republicans ... particularly in South Carolina.

GILL: No, there wasn't.

PIEHLER: Could you just ... talk a little about that, I ...

GILL: Um, I don't really know what to say one way or the other, why it was that way ...

PIEHLER: Did ... they for example vote for Hoover in '28 and '32?

GILL: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: Did they ... well your father unfortunately passed away but did your mother keep voting ...

GILL: She voted, uh huh.

PIEHLER: ... Republican in the '30's?

GILL: Yes. She was wasting her vote back then. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: The other thing ... your parents were both Lutheran, so get ...

GILL: Well now, my father was not, he was a Methodist ...

PIEHLER: A Methodist.

GILL: ... in Missouri. But my grandfather was Stieglitz, S-T-I-E-G-L-I-T-Z, which is German. And they went to Ebenezer Lutheran Church. And my grandmother married him, she was a Methodist. And she's joined the Lutheran Church. So, I've been Lutheran all my life.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm ... There's some ancestry, German ancestry, the Lutheran connection comes from.

GILL: Yes, right.

PIEHLER: And that's on your grandmother's side.

GILL: She was Methodist.

PIEHLER: The connection to Lutheran, come[s] from which side of the family? Your ...

GILL: Grandfather's.

PIEHLER: Grandfather on your mother's side or your father's?

GILL: ... Mother's side.

PIEHLER: Your Mother's side.

GILL: Right.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GILL: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: ... Which church did you attend in Char- ...

GILL: St. Matthews. ... There's a great big building called the Citadel ... in north Charleston, and St. Matthew's is right across from it. It has a big spire. As I said my father's joined there and he was very active in Sunday school and so forth.

PIEHLER: And how about your mother? How active was she in the church?

GILL: Same thing.

PIEHLER: Same thing. And when you moved to Columbia, you continued ...

GILL: Yeah, well my grandmother, after she bought that house, she moved her membership to Ebenezer to Incarnation which was just in the neighborhood, so that's where we went there.

PIEHLER: Do you remember what synods the Lutheran Churches you belonged to, were they ...

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: ... Were they ... Lutheran Church Missouri?

GILL: No, no.

PIEHLER: No.

GILL: That's a separate identity altogether...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GILL: ... Even to this day.

PIEHLER: Yeah, No, No, I know. That ...-- How active were you in the Church, besides attending Sunday school?

GILL: ... We had vacation Bible school, and I joined the Boy Scouts but right off the bat they were asking for money for this, that, and the other, and we didn't have it, so I didn't even take tenderfoot, I just dropped out.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm, and it was sponsored by your church?

GILL: Mm hmm. I might tell you that while I was in the service, the Pastor Metz (sp?), he was the minister, would send out a bulletin, -- at least once a month to all the men that were in the service. He would say who was where and so forth. Well, I saved most of mine and, oh about ... 10 years ago he decided he would like to put together a little booklet about that. So, I just tickled him to death that I had all ...

PIEHLER: You had saved ...

GILL: Saved them. And he used them in the book he put together.

PIEHLER: And this was pastor you had ... in Charleston, Pastor Metz.

GILL: No. no. Columbia.

PIEHLER: Columbia. Excuse me. Yeah ... he was the pastor you that when you had when you had your catechism, confirmation.

GILL: Yeah, Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: ... That's a long time to stay in touch!

GILL: Yes.

PIEHLER: That's fifty plus years!

GILL: ... He's still living. And he was the chaplain for the state senate in the legislature in Columbus.

PIEHLER: You graduated in 1938 from high school but before I ask that, you talked a little bit about what you did for fun in Charleston, ... growing up what other did you do for fun?

GILL: Well, we put together a baseball in the lot. They didn't have organized baseball then. I had a basketball goal in the field next to our house. We played basketball. Kicked football in the street. Ride bicycle.

PIEHLER: How about the movies in Charleston and Columbia?

GILL: Well, in Columbia, ... Saturday afternoon was the theater open the cowboy show. My next door neighbor, he'd come home for lunch, I'd get a ride back to the downtown to see movies.

PIEHLER: And what about, you mentioned going back to Charleston for summers to stay with your friends, where did you travel let to work? ... Because you'd probably had been traveling when you started to work.

GILL: We would occasionally go to Charleston and to the beach in the summer time. Not every time.

PIEHLER: Yeah.



GILL: Two summers.

PIEHLER: ... How far north had you gone before 19- ...,

GILL: Hadn't.

PIEHLER: Hadn't, How about west, how far?

GILL: Hadn't.

PIEHLER: Hadn't gone west of Columbia really?

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: And south, Florida or ...

GILL: Really, ... when I went to work down in Jacksonville, that was my first time I really left the womb.

PIEHLER: ... It sounds like would you have even have left South Carolina. Did you play any sports in high school?

GILL: Yeah, I played on basketball.

PIEHLER: Basketball Team.

GILL: And I lettered in basketball.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And what about the sort of social life of the high school, did your high school have a fraternities? What about ...

GILL: I didn't have a car. I wasn't dating.

PIEHLER: So you weren't dating?

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: So you didn't go to the school dances or ...

GILL: I went ... (Laughs) we had ... a prom for the graduation and a bunch of us went without dates. A fire engine went by and we went out and followed them to the fire!  
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: Now you graduated in 1938 and ...

GILL: By the way, high schools only went to eleventh grade.

PIEHLER: It stopped ...

GILL: At that time.

PIEHLER: So you had three years of high school?

GILL: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: So when you started ... most schools didn't have kindergarten?

GILL: No. uh, uh.

PIEHLER: So ...

GILL: We had grammar school. Then we had junior high for two years. And I had a teacher in junior high who taught math and she was as crazy as strict. We was really, I'd say scared of her, we had to buckle down. And we would meet at different homes and study together. Algebra, in particular.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE-----

PIEHLER: It got—I got just a little bit of that cut off but you were saying this one teacher, You really were ...

GILL: She was so strict, we ... really buckled down and learned ... Algebra and ... when we went to high school head and above the other students coming from another junior high.

PIEHLER: I'm sort of struck because, how well did you do in math?

GILL: Well, I did well and I did not have anything above Algebra.

PIEHLER: You didn't have trigonometry or ...

GILL: So when I got to Navigation School, I had a rough time, because of that—lack of that. And I teamed up with a fellow that had some college. He helped me and we got through together. The theory of navigation was really tough.

PIEHLER: Well because it's so ... mathematical. But it sounds like that Algebra did come in handy.

GILL: Yeah, It did. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned earlier how you got this—your first job. And you worked for several years before you went into the service. Could you talk a little bit about— I mean because you did work at Florida and you did work in Washington D.C. area, ... what do you remember? One, your first job, but also this—sort of this experience of traveling and ...

GILL: My job in Columbus basically was [a] shipping clerk. And I would take the phone calls on the concrete to be delivered. We also had ready to mix mortar for bricklaying. And even later on we had building material. So I was responsible for taking orders and shipping them out. We had some old trucks, thankfully. They were Mack's and they were chain driven. Instead of an axle, it was a chain driven truck. And there was this one black fellow named Mack, who drove a Mack truck. ... One day He had to go out on a—out in the country and told him to get the mileage because we were going to charge him extra for the distance. So, he came back in and he brought the mileage out and the mileage back, and the mileage back was shorter than the mileage out. And I said—his name was Hart. I said Hart file was at—you got a shorter trip coming back. Well Mr. Gill that was 'cause I was empty, I came back faster. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you—how long were you in Columbia ... doing this shipping clerk [job]?

GILL: Well, I was there from '48, June of '48.

PIEHLER: '38?

GILL: '38 to when I left to go into the service in February of '44.

PIEHLER: But you also mentioned you'd had these jobs up in Florida and Washington.

GILL: Yeah—the one in Jacksonville was in (unintelligible) and then—after that was over went to Washington and I believe I went in (unintelligible) December—January the 1<sup>st</sup> ... '42, lasted about 6 months. I came home and joined up.

PIEHLER: ... It sounds like your mother was very reluctant to see you ...

GILL: She said when she signed for me; she thought she was giving me my death warrant.

PIEHLER: Really? She said that

GILL: Yep. Her idea was that in that I had office experience that I become a clerk in the Army. Well you know how well that went over with me (Laughter) and the chance of it happening were slim to none. So I did want any part of that.

PIEHLER: You really wanted—it sounds like you thought this was your shot for aviation.

GILL: Oh yes. I don't know whether I've got that down or not but in—when I was sixty eight years old I went back to over hear to the Island home(?) and took lessons and got my private license.

PIEHLER: So you did eventually solo?

GILL: I eventually soloed. I did.

PIEHLER: At—one might say an age most people stop flying.

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Let me—even though it's a little bit out of order 'cause you mentioned that, when you said you had about ten hours of instruction ... do you have any sense of why you got washed out?

GILL: Yeah, I just didn't have a feel for it.

PIEHLER: So you—was it just that you needed more time or ...

GILL: Oh yeah, right. One of the biggest aces in the RAF(Royal Air Force) during World War II, he—it took him about twelve or thirteen hours to solo, and he became one of the biggest aces. But this instructor I think saved my life, I think if I'd gone on it would have been a whole different story. Even though it was disappointing, it all turned out for the best.

PIEHLER: So in the long run you did not—even though you were disappointed.

GILL: Yeah. I could have got to be a crew member and fly and once I got to crew session(?) getting on a plane and flying was just like driving an automobile, It was just second nature. But I couldn't have the feel of it at first.

GITTENS: Did you have a preference between becoming a bomber crewperson or a fighter pilot before you ...

GILL: Well I hadn't gotten that far.

PIEHLER: I mean—I guess what kind of ... when you wanted to be a pilot, what kind of pilot did you think you might want to become?

GILL: I really didn't think about that.

PIEHLER: You didn't have visions of being a fighter pilot or ...

GILL: Not necessarily.

PIEHLER: No ...

GILL: (?)

PIEHLER: And whatever that ... (Laughter) I guess you had to register for the peacetime draft.

GILL: No, no.

PIEHLER: Well before ... Pearl Harbor.

GILL: No. I registered in Washington. That was in 1942.

PIEHLER: No you—you said I registered while working February 12<sup>th</sup> 1941.

GILL: '41? Okay.

PIEHLER: So, I mean ... before Pearl Harbor did you think you would go to war or ...

GILL: No. I remember Sunday afternoon listening to (Case Iser ?) on the radio when they announced Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Immediately I was ready to go.

PIEHLER: But you weren't expecting this?

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: And you mentioned in your—a little memoir you wrote that you—it was not until December 1<sup>st</sup> 1942 your mother finally gave you permission to join and it was in October that--1942 that you applied for the aviation cadet program.

GILL: Yeah. 'Cause she knew that when I became twenty one I was goin' go, I had already told her that. She finally—I'd been after her all this time to let me go but she wouldn't.

PIEHLER: One of the things that you mention in your memoir is that you had a hard time passing the physical.

GILL: No, not a hard time I was over—under weight for my height and when I took the test at Fort Jackson I passed the written exam alright and every thing was fine 'til they got to my weight and I was underweight. So they said go home and put on some pounds. Somebody told me that they gonna give you a tetanus shot and sometimes that puts weight on people. So I went to ... our family doctor and he gave me the tetanus shot. I ate bananas and everything I could think of. So when I went back I was still four pounds under weight.

PIEHLER: After all that?

GILL: After all that. They gave me a waiver and I was four pounds under weight the whole time, every time I came up for a physical to stay on flying status, I still had that waiver four pounds.

PIEHLER: You never put on weight?

GILL: Mm mm. Before we were married I had a malaria attack and that knocked me down even more. I was yellow in color and lost weight. My wife, she weighed more than I did then. She wasn't fat or anything. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You initially reported to Fort Jackson. How long did you stay at Fort Jackson?

GILL: You see that's just outside of Columbia. That was just the place to go for the exam and written test.

PIEHLER: And then they sent you to Miami Beach and you mentioned going into the hotels. What do you remember of you know ...

GILL: Well they had stripped them and put in four—two double cots in each room ... we were looking out on the ocean. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: ... How long were you in Miami?

GILL: About a month.

PIEHLER: About a month.

GILL: Then we had to line up for shots. We go down the line, one would hit you on one arm another would hit you on another arm. Some of the fellows would just keel over. (Laughter) So I got another tetanus shot. (Laughter) That first one didn't make any difference. (Laughter)

GITTENS: They didn't ask you if you'd had it before?

GILL: No, they didn't pay any attention to you.

PIEHLER: What else did they have you do in Miami Beach?

GILL: March, cadence (?), exercise, PT. We were fed in regular mess kits. You ever seen those?

PIEHLER: Yes.

GILL: (?) They'd plopped down the potatoes, put the chicken on top of it, and it be a big ole drumstick, we swore they were seagulls they were so big. (Laughter) And then at the end of the line was your dessert, ice cream went on top of that. (Laughter) We weren't fast in getting down there.

PIEHLER: ... Where were people from, when you were in Miami Beach, in your group?

GILL: All around, all around.

PIEHLER: Any friends sort of join you going into the Air Force?

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: You didn't join with a ... friend?

GILL: No, it was by myself. There was a group of us, like this Hawkins fella, several others that were rooming together. My (intelligible) to U.T., then to classification, and that's when they spread it out. And in classification in Nashville there was a lot of hurry up and wait. We would pick up pebbles and pile 'em up in one pile and then the next day scatter them, waitin' for things to move along and examination. So we were in this, tarpaper shack, that's all you could call it, bunks—just beds close together and they were metal bunks. And were got in a pillow fight one day, two three of us fightin' with pillows, knockin' around. And one of 'em hit me and I lost my balance and I hit on the corner of the metal bunk right here. Well, it wasn't long before that swole' up to about like that.

PIEHLER: Several inches ... It swelled up several inches.

GILL: So when I got to have a—showed it to the doctor, the doctor said, Hey come in. Look at this one! Looked at me and then they started on me. When's the last time you had your period? (Laughter) Well they put me—they admitted me into the hospital and the first nurse said Lord what's goin' happen to you boys next. They put hot packs on it, brought it to a head and lanced it. I got out. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: When we first started talking before we started the interview you mentioned you know, the Aviation Cadet Program which I did not realize we had an Aviation Cadet here at Tennessee during the war. You were coming to Knoxville—I get a sense that was a big reason why you're in Knoxville today.

GILL: I didn't know Knoxville from anywhere else 'til we got here. We went through regular freshman classes. Took PT, that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: So you were in the regular course work?

GILL: Yes.

PIEHLER: What course do you remember taking from that ...

GILL: I don't know why but English stuck out in my mind, Freshman English. That's kinda tough isn't it?

GITTENS: Yeah, it was. Depends on the teacher but ... One—actually [of] the two parts that I took, the second half was harder. The first half was ... alright.

GILL: I was used to flat country in Columbia and they put us down in the stadium dorm. So we had to climb all those steps go up to Ayers Hall and so forth. And I got Charlie horses in my legs. They sent me to the trainer and I'd sit in the athletes' whirlpool bath to work that out. One other thing, for a while it looked like everywhere I went I had to go to the hospital or something. Well, I came down with a cold here, and lo and behold they sent me to St. Mary's hospital. Put me in a ward there with a whole bunch of other guys and they had these little nurse's aids running around and I liked the looks of one of 'em and I was following her up the steps one day, ran into one of the nuns. She wanted to know where I was goin'. (Laughter) She marched me right back to where I was supposed to be! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Now as part of the Aviation Cadet [Program], you took regular classes. Did you take them with civilians or were you in your own separate ... classes?

GILL: No, regular classes.

PIEHLER: Regular ...

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you did not march to class as a unit?

GILL: We marched to classes, yes.

PIEHLER: But then you were intermingled with ...

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... Beside class how much other contact did you have with civilian students?

GILL: ... We marched down to Gay Street one time, with Simpson Theater. We had—once we started (?) then we mingled with the co-eds and got to know 'em. One time we rented into a—we called it a you push it, a car and went up to Gatlinburg and they were old clunkers, we didn't have any trouble with it, thank goodness. We did do that.

PIEHLER: That sounds like that was a big day.

GILL: Yeah, it was.



PIEHLER: ... You came here in spring so there was no college football.

GILL: No, the football players, they were just being called up. I remember one of 'em he had a little date book he was passing out to some of the fellas. And they went down to it was purported to be Biloxi, Mississippi. After the stadium dorm they moved us up to the Alumni gym and they had double bunks, rows and rows of those in double bunks, in the gym itself. I don't know why they moved us out of the stadium but they did that.

PIEHLER: And this program—you were here until they sent you to Nashville in May 29<sup>th</sup>.

GILL: About 3 months.

PIEHLER: What do we—you mentioned earlier your blind date with your wife. Where did you go? What was the blind ...

GILL: Do you recall a little, gray, two story frame house across the street from Ayers(?) Hall, on the left side of Cumberland? They tore it down last year and built a parking lot down there?

PIEHLER: I think I vaguely ...

GILL: Well, they rented rooms there, and she was visiting a friend. That's where we met, was in that building. And as I said they just tore it down last year. I went out to her house, she lived in (Holsten ?) Hill, went out there and we went to Mrytle(?) Springs, that was a dance pavilion then. 'Bout third a day of ...

PIEHLER: Of dates.

GILL: ... Dates. But we had a great time.

PIEHLER: Now was she your date when you went up to Gatlinburg?

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: No. So that was earlier in ...

GILL: I think it was just the guys.

PIEHLER: Just the guys went to Gatlinburg. You went to Nashville and you were classified for pilot training and that's when you went to Maxwell Field in July of 1943. For your ...

GILL: Yeah, we called it pre-flight.

PIEHLER: Pre-flight.

GILL: We had a few studies and a lot of P.T. They had a run of several miles called the Burma Road. And it was a—nothing but a big gully. Which is an up and down (unintelligible) and this was hot weather now. Well, our class was last class to have upper class, hazing. They did away with it after us. And again, I ended up in the hospital. I went to fit call(?) and they said you've got the mumps, had them on one side. They sent me back to the room and told me to report to the hospital the next day. So I crawled up on my bunk, stretched out and an upperclassman came in. When they came in you were supposed to pop to attention and everybody in the room did but me and he said what's wrong with you mister? I have the mumps, sir. Boy, he took off. (Laughter) They were afraid that they would quarantine us you know and I don't know how I got 'em, nobody else did.

PIEHLER: But they didn't immediately quarantine you?

GILL: No, they sent me back to my room. I don't know why they did that. But then I went to the hospital, got out of the hospital now, after I don't know how many days I was there and the next day I had to report to P.T. And we went out into the field and worked with dumbbells, exercise in the hot sun. Naturally, I was in a weakened condition having been in the hospital and they called us to attention to march off and I blacked out, it was as black as it could be. I couldn't see a thing. But I kept with the rest of 'em and I came to just before I fell out. (Laughter) Now they shouldn't have done that but they did.

PIEHLER: How rigorous was the discipline at Maxwell Field, did you have a lot of—you mentioned the upperclassmen.

GILL: Yeah, they were on you all the time.

PIEHLER: Did you have to eat at squares?

GILL: Yes, all that stuff.

PIEHLER: And shine your shoes a certain ...

GILL: Oh, yes. I don't know why they stopped it but they said I would be the last ...

PIEHLER: The last that had that kind of ...

GILL: Another time, right after a long run the instructor—we had barracks with an open space in the ceiling. And after a long run he had us line up and dash between the buildings. There were fellows who got Charlie horses and what not. He got in trouble over that so that wasn't the thing to do after a long run is to have dashes.

GITTENS: How good did you get at eating at the square?

GILL: Well you got good right quick! (Laughter) 'Cause the upperclassmen were right on you all the time.

GITTENS: I've read about it and it sounds impossible.

PIEHLER: ... Is there anything else you remember about Maxwell Field, before we leave it because I feel there's a story or two more that ...

GILL: Oh, They had an air show for us. Some Army planes, I think were P-47's. We did an awful lot of marching, standing out there at attention. If you locked your legs when you were in a formation, it was very easy to black out. (?) You couldn't move but you needed to keep your legs from being locked together. Some of the fellows would fall out, fall on their face. I don't remember much about going into town in Montgomery.

PIEHLER: As opposed to Knoxville.

GILL: Oh yeah, it was quite different.

PIEHLER: What about in Miami, would you be able ...

GILL: No, uh uh. You wouldn't go anywhere there.

PIEHLER: Even though sort of, you were in the heart of ...

GILL: Friend of mine went to Navigation School in Boca Raton, Florida. Pan-American Airways, they had a school there for Navigators. He said that was a special club there. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: After not making—becoming a pilot they sent you to Navigation School and where did you go with that?

GILL: Selman Field.

PIEHLER: Near Jackson, Tennessee?

GILL: No, Jackson, Tennessee is primary. Selman Field is in Monroe, Louisiana.

PIEHLER: So actually, maybe I should back up. You had pre-flight in Montgomery but your actual—then basic aviation training for pilot was in Jackson, Tennessee. How long were you there then? That was in October of '43.

GILL: Oh about thirty days.

PIEHLER: Thirty Days?

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you weren't there very long at all.

GILL: No, uh, uh. We worked with training for primary a lot longer than that, But if you hadn't soloed in ten hours that was it.

PIEHLER: That was it. You didn't ...

GILL: We flew biplanes. Open cockpit steering 'em(?). It was pretty cool and I got a crick in my neck, that didn't help me any. My instructor—the fellow was from Mississippi and he told me I hate to flunk you and pass these Yankees but goin' have to. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So he didn't ... as they would say there was nothing personal about this. He just had to do it.

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: In fact, it sounds like he would have preferred to pass you if that was a possibility. And then so after Jackson—Selman Field, where did you go to next.

GILL: After Selman Field?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GILL: I went to Buckingham Field in Fort Myers, Florida, Gunnery School. Where we learned to take the 50 caliber machine gun apart, and fire it. We had track—oval track that were rode on the back of a truck and they would shoot the skeet and you had shotguns to shoot at that. That was teaching you to lead your shot. Turret operation, then we had aerial gunnery, went up in a B-17, from the waist shot at a tow target off in the distance. We were rated gunners and given wings—gunners wings. So, if I had failed navigation I would have been a gunner, an enlisted man.

PIEHLER: Had you had experience with firearms before gunnery school?

GILL: Oh, one or two rifles.

PIEHLER: Had you gone hunting as a—growing up?

GILL: No, ... but I had occasionally used a .22 BB gun.

PIEHLER: So you had a BB gun growing up?

GILL: Oh yes. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How long was Gunnery School? Do you remember?

GILL: Six to eight weeks, something like that. It wasn't too long.

PIEHLER: You had—coming from Maxwell Field, which was very spit and polish, ... how strict was the discipline both at the field in Jackson and then in Gunnery School?

GILL: Well, it wasn't real loose but at the same time wasn't rough. We had our formations to meet, but the main thing was getting to class, studying. And then, we started flying. But first, flying low over Louisiana and Texas. It was—lot of bumpy and lot of 'em got sick because of that. And then at nighttime flying over the oilfields, you'd see the lights, you get confused thinking it was a city coming up and it was an oilfield with gas (?).

PIEHLER: And after Gunnery, you went for Navigation. Was Navigation your second choice or—not bombardier?

GILL: No, bombardier was last.

PIEHLER: Last. And where did you go for Navigation training?

GILL: That was Selman Field.

PIEHLER: Selman—so you went back to ...

GILL: Back to Selman field, training center.

PIEHLER: You mentioned earlier that you had not had a lot of math in high school. You had not gone back—while you had learned your Algebra well—had you had geometry?

GILL: No

PIEHLER: You hadn't had geometry or trigonometry or calculus.

GILL: Mm mm.

PIEHLER: So how did you keep up, because I've often interviewed people who were math majors who did this and ... you know?

GILL: Well, it was tough ... I really had to buckle down and study hard, I used—stay with the fellow I teamed up with, he helped me a lot, because he'd had some. By the way, he ended up in B-29's over Japan. We corresponded and that's when they first ran into the air stream—jet stream. At 200 miles an hour, he said they didn't teach us anything like that in Navigation School. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: They literally didn't know.

GILL: Didn't know about it, so it was a surprise.

GITTENS: I was reading about it. Is it having planes too fast over the target or you'd have to ...

GILL: Well, you couldn't go crosswind, there was no way you could track in enough drift to compensate 200 miles an hour so you had to go down down then. And goin' upwind that made you slow over the target and anti aircraft and fighters would get you then.

PIEHLER: The person you mentioned, sort of helped you get through Navigation, who was he and where was he from?

GILL: He was from Cleveland, Ohio; name was Ted Rimes (?), we corresponded at home. Fact is he came down here for the World's Fair.

PIEHLER: Knoxville World's Fair?

GILL: Yeah, and he was goin' to Florida one time and called us and we met him at the motel and chatted. He died about three or four years ago, he had kidney dialysis, it finally got him.

PIEHLER: And had he—what was his educational background?

GILL: I don't remember other than that he had two years of college. So he'd had some geometry and so forth. And that—see the celestial navigation, that was the hard part, the theory of it. I don't have any—not a whole lot of trouble with doing it. But the theory of how it worked and so forth was very tough.

PIEHLER: Could you talk about a little bit about both learning to navigate and then—and actual navigating because one of the things—I've just been reading a memoir from someone who served in the Pacific and he talks about—he describes it once, I was not paying attention really when I was navigating, he did not have a navigator and he got very lost and had to go back to base and scrounge up some scarce fuel from this other base and they were not too pleased to see him. You could get lost. I mean you could really get lost I think even ...

GILL: I think test was really flying my plane to Townsville and flying over water for the first time. So one thing I did—we had a drift meter, I would read drift off the crests of waves. Knowing which way the winds blowing you and how fast and so forth was the ultimate of the navigation, that's what you need. They had a radio ship, always sit about halfway that set off a radio signal so we had that to work from. I shot a sun line that told me I was somewhere on that line. To have a fix you got to have another shot coming crossways, with stars you do that to make three of 'em, and where the three cross, that's where you are. Then they had the radio beacon in Hawaii, so those were the things I used going across and flying on missions we would take off at two o'clock in the morning and so I used celestial then and the map that they had the islands weren't very accurate so you didn't pin a whole lot on that. So you had the piloted, then you had your celestial, and your radio. Our plane was equipped with LORAN, which was—you had to have patience to read the fixes off of 'em. Of course, you didn't have any stations over there where the Japanese were so LORAN didn't help us at all.

GILL: One reason I ask you, partly I think is I learned a few years ago from a colleague of mine that the Navy doesn't even require celestial navigation anymore.

GILL: Right.

PIEHLER: Every navigator I've interviewed and everything I've read, you really have to navigate in World War II.

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What—you mentioned ... you passed what you think in some ways is described the big test, you made it to Australia. But as you were learning in the states, what was that process like?

GILL: ... I guess we were just formation flying so as a navigator I was following who ever was the lead, same way on bombing. Then we had navigation flight which was a day/night, we started out in the daytime and came back at night. That was our final test for the navigating and when we did that we flew over Reno and everybody on the crew was after the pilot saying lets ... fake an engine problem and go down to Reno. (Laughter) But he wouldn't have any part of it, so we didn't get into any trouble. The—right out of Walla Walla was a (?) and that was a no-no, you didn't fly over that. (?) Except, that the people working there bought enough bonds to buy a plane so when they did that they had a big ceremony and we flew in formation over the (Laughs) after we were close we did it in formation but we were ordered to do it.

PIEHLER: But it was clearly marked off, do not fly.

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But you didn't know why ... just that it was a secret?

GILL: Just knew it was a (?) just like Oak Ridge you know.

PIEHLER: Yeah, well in fact you were here in ... Knoxville when they were starting to build.

GILL: I don't remember even hearing about Oakridge until I was here.

PIEHLER: What—did you know, particularly in Navigation training any accidents that were the result of training?

GILL: I know there were some, but I did not witness any. We didn't have any. The planes that we used were old war weary planes. The nose turret had a spot-a space that wide on each side, it was open. And at 20,000 feet and that air is coming through there it was cold over Walla Walla, Washington. And you had the heavy gear, gave me an idea what the fellas in Europe had to go through, and they flew in much, much colder weather.

GITTENS: Did they give you electrically heated suits?

GILL: No, we didn't have—but we had leather jackets and fur on. But I think I'd have froze to death if I'd gone to Europe.

PIEHLER: You met your crew in the states and you were the last to join the crew. The way you described it you almost you were a little bit of the outsider.

GILL: Yeah, they all knew each other and they had flown together see, before I got there.

PIEHLER: What had happened, it sounds like—just the Air Force never got around to putting a navigator in or had someone not made it?

GILL: No, there was a bunch—not a bunch, a few of us from Selman Field that reported to Walla Walla at the same time. It was just ... but it wasn't a big gap it's just the fact that they had all gotten together and knew their names.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like this was a matter of weeks or days or ...

GILL: Well, it was about several weeks before I got my chance to show what I could do. Once I did that I was accepted.

PIEHLER: Could you maybe talk a little bit about the crew, particularly your first impressions and then what as they develop over time.



GILL: Well, first place I'm still in contact with my pilot and bombardier. We were close friends. We've visited each other in our homes and I still keep in touch with them. The pilot was a fellow that went by the book, that's why we didn't land at Reno, Which is good. He had a rule that nobody fired up cigarettes 'til the engineer had checked for fumes. The B-24 was (unintelligible) for having fumes and blowing up. I flew with another crew, the pulled the wheels up on take off and fired up cigarettes at the same time, they didn't check anything. And overseas we had a accident that happened that—we had a bomb bay tank of gas and we took off and the vibration caused the hose to pull loose from the pump. So we had a hose swishing ...octane fuel in the bomb bay and it was creeping up into the cockpit area. I noticed it first, told Crawford the pilot, he and the bombardier got their heads together and they decided that it was so wet with gas that we didn't have to worry fumes. And so they opened the bomb bay. There could have been a spark, there could have been fumes but since it was all wet nothing happened and we salvaged the bombs and then came around ...

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

PIEHLER: This continues and interview with Albert Gill on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

GITTENS: ... and Kevin Gittens.

PIEHLER: And you mentioned that after you landed—it cut off, you kissed the ground. And I just observed that just one spark and that would have ...

GILL: Oh yes.

PIEHLER: That would have been it.

GILL: We have a—B-24 had a hatch which was up on the flight deck right behind the pilot. I was—my desk was behind the pilot, radio operator is behind the co-pilot, and we opened that up to let the fumes suck out of there. Even so, the radio operator all but passed out from the fumes and everything was soaked ... and somebody just failed to tighten up the hose on the pump.

PIEHLER: And this accident occurred where again, just to be specific?

GILL: Out of Morotai. We were going on a mission. Then Crawford got called on the carpet to explain himself 'cause he didn't go on to the target. (Laughter) (unintelligible) I thought. He had to report ...

PIEHLER: And explain why.

GILL: Yeah, right.

PIEHLER: How—this aborted mission, how many missions was this into your ...

GILL: How far along?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GILL: I don't know, I guess about halfway.

PIEHLER: Oh, so this was not early on.

GILL: No, uh uh.

PIEHLER: So your pilot was very by the book, but it also sounds like a cool—he did not panic in this.

GILL: Oh, no, no.

PIEHLER: He was a real ...

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What about the co-pilot?

GILL: Well, that was a different story. (Laughter) He was a little fella, and he had been single engine trained, so he thought he was going to be a fighter pilot. Instead he got co-pilot of a B-24 and so he wasn't happy. He could hardly see out the forward windows and for him, he was a flight officer and I don't know why he didn't get 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant but he was a flight officer. And for him to get promoted he had to check out in the left seat as pilot. So, I flew one mission with two co-pilots, he was one of them, and another co-pilot. And on take off we drifted off to the left, I thought surely we were going to hit something, something before we got up, airborne. (Laughter) But we didn't. [We] made it alright.

PIEHLER: Where was he from, the co-pilot?

GILL: Minnesota, We've tried and tried to locate him and ...

PIEHLER: You've not been able—you never found out what happened to him after the war.

GILL: Mm mm. We located the nose gunner, he lives in Colorado. One of the waist gunners came here to U.T. He was a teacher up in Michigan, came down here for some class. So I saw him, then lost contact with him. And one other, I located an address of one of the fellows down in Florida and wrote to him and his mother answered, but she to be getting up there in age.

PIEHLER: How long ago was this?

GILL: Oh, we started doing it about six or seven years ago.

PIEHLER: Oh, so his mother was still alive, six or seven year ago.

GILL: Yes she was, and she said he had died about two years before that and that she was so sorry he wondered what had happened to us and he hadn't made any attempt to contact us but he was wondering (Laughs)

PIEHLER: ... What—you mentioned the bombardier, where was he from, was he ...

GILL: California. He and Crawford, the pilot went to college after they got back, and he married and worked for a oil drilling company, supplies for oil drilling. He spend some time out in the Pacific, out ... in the area we had bombed.

PIEHLER: ... He must have told you some stories about—I mean what was like to ... did he ever tell you what it was like to go back?

GILL: Well, I don't remember that he actually went back to a target that we had, he was just in that area ... they like it, they had good time out there.

PIEHLER: What about the radio operator and the gunners, what do you remember about them?

GILL: Not a whole lot. No. We had a engineer, he was a nervous guy, I could say he was very nervous, particularly on the way to Hawaii.

PIEHLER: Yeah, ... you said he kept asking about the fuel.

GILL: One time we had the—were up over the Philippines and the Japanese made a head on attack with us. We were flying left wing on the lead plane and they had, what we think was railroad tracks fixed under their wings and they came at us head on and pulled up and released that. And it just came tumbling ...

PIEHLER: This is literally a railroad ...

GILL: Railroad track.

PIEHLER: Literally?

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Not a cut out but ...

GILL: Yeah. And they knocked the lead plane down and my job over the target was to get down in the well and spot the bombs over target and I saw this stuff flying underneath us and I thought Dwight the nose gunner shot planes, blowing up. And one piece came close enough to knock off our aerial from the back to the tail. That's how close it came on that. These fellows bailed out and the guerillas picked them up and hid them from the Japanese and about a month later, we were back up in the same area, on the end of the island and we saw this flashing mirror off of the sun and we reported it to the (unintelligible) orbited near our targets all the time. They went in and picked those fellows up. They were back before we got home. (Laughter) They interviewed them and sent them home. They didn't want them to fly anymore and be captured by the Japanese; you know tell about the guerillas. So they got home early.

PIEHLER: Though it sounds like they had quite a harrowing ...

GILL: Yeah, it did.

PIEHLER: Could you maybe, to sort of flesh out ... once you got deployed. You mention your first destination was Australia and you mentioned it was, as you described a little like the Wild West or at least how you imagined ...

GILL: Well, that's like I saw in the old movies.

PIEHLER: Yeah, could you talk a little bit more about the ...

GILL: Well, all I remember was that it was behind times and thank Sydney wasn't. Why we spent Christmas of '44 in Sydney. They gave us a rest leave and we went down there and arrived on Christmas Eve and spent ten days during the time they were bombing the heck out of our island and they were passing tough targets, we took the right time to be off. (Laughter) Anyhow, what was I ...

PIEHLER: You said it was—even Sydney was, as you described was a little backwards or primitive.

GILL: Yeah, they were.

PIEHLER: What was sort of different or backward about ...

GILL: They just seemed like they were maybe ten, fifteen years behind us in their cars, or whatever. You know. We had good time down there.

PIEHLER: How did the Australians treat you?

GILL: Very well, very well. You go to a theater and they play the anthem, we stand at attention and then the show would start.

PIEHLER: Which anthem did they ...

GILL: What is it, Hail to the queen?

PIEHLER: Oh, they would play God Save the King.

GILL: God Save the King, yes.

PIEHLER: And so everyone would stand up.

GILL: Yeah. Yes, just like we would the Star Spangled Banner. And for the first quarter(?) we were down there, we saw people just running down the street and then they made a turn down the corner, “Well let’s go see what’s going on.” What they were doing was going down there to catch a ferry to go across to the Bondi Beach, in the bay. See, that’s the summer time down there in December. So we went over there, (Laughter) all in the crowd.

PIEHLER: Did any of the men in your crew go on dates, date Australian women?

GILL: Yeah. yeah. The four of us—the four officers we got an apartment and I don’t remember now just where the enlisted men stayed, but we all had dates. One date I had she invited us to—myself and ... I think it was Crawford to her own house. And she had another girlfriend and we rode the trolley for a long ways to the end of the line and then we walked quite a ways, we got to her house and she was the champion highland fling dancer of Australia and she had trophies all over the place and they served us cheese and crumpets. (Laughter) So it was a mild evening. (Laughter)

GITTENS: I was reading an account by an airman who went on leave in Sydney, who was saying that he was on a date and he was going down the street and there was some Australian servicemen going the other direction and they’re all giving him nasty looks across the street. Did you have any thing like that happen to you?

GILL: No, I didn’t. I corresponded with one of the girls for a while and I went back on a second trip, on what we call a fat cat run. We went down there to get supplies and I don’t remember how I was picked but I was the navigator on the crew that went down there for several days. When we were down there on leave we were allowed so much booze, it was rationed. But on this trip down for the fat cat we didn’t have that. So were trying to find some ourselves and this fellow said the he knew where we could get some ... so we got a cab and we drove up to this building, this is how dumb we were, and it was empty, it was this sized building. He gets out and walks around the side of the building with our money and you know what happened.

PIEHLER: He just kept walking. (Laughter)

GILL: Kept walking, we never did see him. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How long were you in Australia initially, when you first flew in from ...

GILL: Oh, maybe two nights.

PIEHLER: Oh, so you were really just ...

GILL: Yeah. They took our plane—now they needed new planes up in the squadrons badly. But they took our plane and they installed between the in-board engine and fuselage on both sides this rack to hold a thousand pound bomb. Now they held up the planes quite long to do that. They got it up to the squadron and somebody figured out right quick, they couldn't get off the ground with that thing, with the other load in the bomb bay, and the fuel and all. And they took them off.

PIEHLER: So you had waited in Australia for this to be installed?

GILL: No, we didn't, the squadrons were waiting on them so they ... had planes all shot up, in bad shape. But, they flew us in a C-47 up to (Majab ?), New Guinea.

PIEHLER: So you didn't fly with your ...

GILL: We left our own plane.

PIEHLER: You left your plane behind?

GILL: Yeah, yeah, and they put those racks on then when they came up to the squadron they took them off because they couldn't take off. (Laughter)

GITTENS: I had read that the B-24, while it was fully loaded, was very—you couldn't seem to get it off the ground.

GILL: It was, yeah. It ... carried twice the bombs and much longer distance, and faster than a 17, but the 17 made all the notoriety.

GITTENS: Yeah. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Could you talk—after leaving Australia you were flown to your first base, where was that?

GILL: We spent I don't think but a night at Wewak. Next base we was sent was Noemfoor, which was off the coast of New Guinea and Morotai was further west and about halfway between New Guinea and the Philippines.

PIEHLER: And you arrived, you and your crew arrived on base. When did you ... get a plane?

GILL: Well, back then we didn't fly the same plane all the time.

PIEHLER: Really?

GILL: So we didn't have one all painted up with ...

PIEHLER: You didn't have the ...

GILL: Uh, uh. No. ... different times.

PIEHLER: And the base, how were the creature comforts? (Laughter)

GILL: Well—that's another crew, there we are making ice cream, I don't know how we found it or how we got it but the Navy CT's were there, we worked a deal to get a freezer and made ice cream and drew a big crowd. That's our tent, sitting on half a tank—barrel, metal barrel, cut in half. Had a floor, and we had four cots in there and mosquito netting. As you can see we were in this coconut grove. The facilities were in a mound with a screened in open area, you had no privacy. (Laughter) This is a piece of metal that—we went on this mission in my story to Murrien(?) Borneo and ... this big tank blew up under us and that piece of metal lodged into the nacelle of the engine, just enough to stick there, but it didn't hurt the engine. (Laughter) We had holes all over the plane, and they came that close to knocking that engine out. And this—the one on the left is the shower down on the wharf.

PIEHLER: And washday.

GILL: We had a outdoor theater.

PIEHLER: Now these—are curious about, these look like ...

GILL: That was at Noemfoor ...

PIEHLER: That's a different ...

GILL: Different, that was our first camp and it was very temporary, see we were on the ground there. And we had native come around all the time.

PIEHLER: Morotai too?

GILL: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: And did you hire them for doing work?

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: Did you do any trading with them?

GILL: No.

GITTENS: Did you have to wear a helmet walking around because of the coconuts.

GILL: Well, no, but it would have been a good idea. (Laughter) Sometimes they did fall. That's our crew picture.

PIEHLER: This person here is he—what ...

GILL: That's the co-pilot. (Laughter) And that's the pilot and bombardier. And there's me.

PIEHLER: And those are the ...

GILL: And those are the enlisted men, gunner.

PIEHLER: So you four ... bunked together in the big wall tent and then the enlisted men ... You mentioned seeing movies, how often did you get a movie?

GILL: Well, quite often. They weren't always the best you know, but it didn't make any difference and we had one—we were right behind Bob Hope going over. He was ahead of us there all the way, never did see him.

PIEHLER: He was always ...

GILL: Just ahead of us. Later on, we had a touring group, they were kind of second raters but we enjoyed having them. We had some comics and girls dancing and so forth.

PIEHLER: But you missed the Bob Hope Show?

GILL: Yes.

PIEHLER: How often did mail come?

GILL: Pretty regular.

PIEHLER: ... Just so I get this straight, you were—was Morotai—your missions were they all from Morotai or did you ...

GILL: Well as it—I flew forty-three, I think maybe 3 or 4 of those were of Noemfoor and the rest of them Morotai.

PIEHLER: Morotai, okay.

GILL: They started, after MacArthur took over the Philippines, they started moving up into the Philippines.



PIEHLER: Mm hmm, at that point you were rotated home.

GILL: Yes, mm hmm.

PIEHLER: You've already described some close calls, ... the line rupturing, the picture you showed of this huge piece of metal that had essentially gotten attached to the engine, but didn't damage it. Which is pretty—people won't see it on the transcript but it's a substantial—it's sort of amazing that it ...

GILL: Well, you know, I guess a little bigger, or a little heavier it could have knocked that engine out. We don't know whether the—we had delayed action—we were at 200 feet over these targets and we had supposedly, delayed-action bombs. So that we could drop them in there and just pass them before they went off. Well, we think Dwight, the nose gunner fired on a tank and that probably caused it erupt—the fuse really. And we had photographer. It was his first mission, he'd been on the ground and the ground personnel were there for the duration, where we rotated because we got points for the missions. So he had checked out as a photographer, thinking he'd fly some missions and get to go home early. And this was his first one. And after the first pass, Crawford asked him if he got any pictures, he said, "No, the camera doesn't work this low." We went back around up a little higher, it turned out; he never took the cap off the camera. (Laughter) When he got back home, he turned it in, he went back to his job on the ground. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Oh, that's a great story. What was your closest call or the vivid memory you have ...

GILL: That and surviving the gasoline. Over Balikpapan and over the Philippines, we had occasional fighters and anti-aircraft but they were running out of pilots and planes and fuel at this time. They were still tough on the ground, you know.

PIEHLER: So there was lots of flak ...

GILL: At Balikpapan, it was heavy.

PIEHLER: What about ... navigating, how well did you do in these different missions or did you in a sense just follow the lead ...

GILL: No, we took off and you wouldn't see the other planes, although we were headed for the same place. We had a rendezvous point.

PIEHLER: So you did not fly like in the Eighth Air Force, they fly in these big formations.

GILL: No, no.

PIEHLER: You had a rendezvous.

GILL: We'd rendezvous, then we went to the neutral point and then to the target.

PIEHLER: So you really had to navigate.

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Because it's interesting that when I interview Eighth Air Force navigators, they usually said that unless they were the lead navigator, in a lot of ways their backup, you know, but ...

GILL: You read that story about that plane that crashed in the desert in Africa?

PIEHLER: Yes.

GITTENS: Yes.

GILL: Well now there was a case where the guy following the lead ... navigator and they got separated and he was lost and coming back they flew over the coast and they didn't know it, until they ran out of fuel. So, he didn't do his job.

PIEHLER: Did you—all your rendezvous, were they all successful?

GILL: Yes, yes, got them together. It was amazing to me they could—left the same place, and going to the same place and yet you wouldn't see them, until you got close to rendezvousing, then they started coming in.

PIEHLER: Did you have a chaplain?

GILL: Yes.

PIEHLER: What denomination?

GILL: He was a—I think he was a Episcopalian and we had service—chapel services, they had sunrise Easter service. I have a story about a sailboat I mention in there and one of the three of us, He promised the Lord he would go to Church if he got out that.

PIEHLER: Well, what had happened?

GILL: (Laughs) And once we got back I never did see him at Chapel (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... Since you've hinted about a sailboat story, what about a sailboat? Did you ...

GILL: Well, we built one

PIEHLER: You built one? Where did you get the lumber for the ...

GILL: We took plywood, gas—tropical(?) gas tanks and somebody had already cut out the center section and we took a tent pole, made for the mast, canvas from the tent for the sail. We had oxygen bottles about that big around, like that, and put on the outriggers on either side. And we had sort of a paddle for rudder. We working on this in-between missions, we didn't fly everyday. And so when we got ready we took off, went out into the bay and right quick found out we could go up or down the peninsula but we couldn't come back in. We couldn't tack. We didn't have a centerboard. We weren't sailors by any means. (Laughter) So a fellow came by with a motorboat and pulled us in, we worked on it, tried to make a centerboard down on the side and that didn't work either. So when we tried it a second time and it didn't work, we were going up and down and a ship came in and anchored, the guys were getting ready for a movie on the fantail, waved at us. Nobody came to our rescue. (Laughter) Got dark, we were out there floating around. Now thirty miles is the other island which was Japanese.

PIEHLER: There are Japanese on that island?

GILL: Yes, and all of sudden a searchlight came up and it found us and what it was, was a Australian corvette, which is a small destroyer, anchored out there and they had picked up on radar, those metal oxygen bottles. But when they saw us, they thought we were natives, so they just shut the lights out and ...

PIEHLER: They didn't come and look ...

GILL: Mm mm. So we thought we'd better head for that ship, because the wind would let us go that direction. And we got within hailing distance of it and they came and threw out a life preserver with a rope on it, and we had boards for paddles and the three of us were paddling it and it looked like every time we got close to that life preserver, they'd pull it. (Laughter) So I got the bright idea of jumping over and swimming to it. Well, as soon as I hit the water I found out what it was. It was the current. It was a strong current going. But I made it to this life preserver and they—the other two kept paddling and we finally got put together and they brought us onboard, and notified the base that we were there. And they sent out—we spent—couple of the officers gave us their bunks, and gave us something to drink, spent the night, they sent a boat out for us the next morning and the CO left word, he went on a mission, that he wanted to see us. (Laughter) So went to see his adjutant and explained to him what had transpired and he said, "Well, I'll tell him and if he wants to see you he'll let you know. Well, we never heard anymore about it. But two, three night later another guy by himself, he ended up on the buoy, which was between the point of the—our island and Halmahera, and he spent the night on that buoy.

PIEHLER: Literally on the ...

GILL: Literally, and if he hadn't, he'd gone out into the ocean you see. So—which we would have to if we hadn't made it to the ...

PIEHLER: the Australian Corvette.

GILL: And with that, word came down that there were no more sailboats. They were to be destroyed. There was no more. That was a close shave there but it had nothing to do with the enemy! (Laughter)

GITTENS: You mentioned your CO, what was he like?

GILL: Well, he was a nice fellow. He stayed in the ... Air Force for a long time, my pilot was recalled for Korea and ran into him in Japan. And I've been in contact with him, and corresponded.

PIEHLER: Kevin, you should—you have a lot of questions that you ...

GITTENS: You know, I figured I'd bring up information as he ... you know, kind of goes over it. (?)

PIEHLER: ... How formal or informal was your squadron?

GILL: Very informal. No dress code.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like the sailboat incident, it was mainly because you guys could really get hurt, that they put the no sailboat ...

GILL: Yes, yes.

PIEHLER: Otherwise, this would have been fine. What else did you—I mean you had your ...

GILL: We didn't have anything to do. You know.

PIEHLER: Yes.

GILL: It was too hot for athletics; some of them played volleyball, that sort of thing. Really, there wasn't a whole lot to do. We did swim a little, after ten, ... you could get crud in your ears and that wasn't good. They had one prescription for it and it was that—some type of purple medicine that they swabbed you down with. (Laughs)

GITTENS: Did the informal air carry over to like, officer and enlisted men interactions?

GILL: It was very informal. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: What—I'm curious about the Seabee—you were trading for the ice cream machine, There was a Seabee—what are the ...

GILL: Well, the Navy had everything and I mean they had the top food and plenty of it and the Seabees were part of the Navy. And I don't really remember how we got a hold of that freezer and the ingredients and all, but know there was trading going on.

PIEHLER: Yeah, ... that was not the standard issue.

GILL: They sure didn't know it was from the Seabees, but they know that we had it. Everybody wanted some of it. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What about the food, when you were ... (Laughs) what was your typical ...

GILL: Powdered eggs, spam, fruit cocktail, wormy bread, and some cheese. We would have to—I know one time we dropped a can of spam over the target, hoped we hit a Jap on the head. (Laughter) That's the first thing I told my wife, said I don't want spam there when I got back.

PIEHLER: Did you have any mutton from Australia?

GILL: Yes, I couldn't get it past my nose. (Laughter) Terrible. And after a fat cat run, and get some fresh eggs and so forth, we'd eat a little better then. But it wasn't good.

PIEHLER: How many fat cat runs were done while you were there?

GILL: I don't know. That's the only one I was on. I know that there was some others. But that was the only time I ...

PIEHLER: But they were pretty infrequent, it was mainly spam and the powders in the can?

GILL: That was a long way, down to Sydney just for that.

PIEHLER: Yeah. And how long did it take you to get to Sydney?

GILL: Oh, I think twelve, thirteen hours, something like that.

PIEHLER: How would the weather sort of affect your ability to navigate?

GILL: That's was rough, particularly flying at night, we didn't have radar and we just bowled throw a big old thunderhead, up, down, thousand feet, lightning right off your wingtips. You just plowed on through. There was one 24 reported on a mission that it was upside down, going up and the never heard of them again. You could get into these currents going up and down, and flip you over.

PIEHLER: How many planes in your squadron, while you were there, were shot down?

GILL: Well, in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, which was one night(?) time to fly, the Japanese big battleship was in there, Yamato. And everything that could fly was being sent up, Navy and Air Force. And our squadron sent six planes which was our (unintelligible) flight, and we lost three out of the six over that battleship, and they were all three brand new crews, and it was their first mission. There was some loss at Balikpapan, I don't remember how many. And every now and then there would be one down and we have to be looking for it coming back. I was awful hard to pick up anything in the ocean it was, you know, so wide and that and all. Only thing we saw was that flash of those fellows on the island.

PIEHLER: So crews that were shot down over the ocean or crashed, they were gone, you never ...

GILL: Most of the time. The B-24 didn't land well in the water.

PIEHLER: What did they tell you to do if you were shot down behind enemy lines or did they tell you anything?

GILL: They didn't tell us much. They warned us over Borneo, that there were headhunters down there and they gave us (corduroys?), civilian clothes but I would think that would have been more for Europe than the Pacific. The average flyer that was captured by the Japanese was beheaded, some of them were eaten.

PIEHLER: Did you know this at the time?

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: Then you learned this after the war?

GILL: We just knew, you know that they didn't take prisoners.

PIEHLER: But you knew it wasn't ...

GILL: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: But didn't know at the time that they were beheaded?

GILL: No, on the island of Palawan, there was a group of prisoners, forced down into a cave, and poured gasoline on, and set fire. We saw that after it happened. But, they were pretty bad.

PIEHLER: There was a picture you showed earlier and you even identified the plane, it was the one you have in the frame. And ... it's a very vivid picture. Could you explain—this was mission on October 14, 1944 and you can clearly see the ground and on the left of the picture, you could see two planes, and one of them is your plane. But a huge smoke ...

GILL: See, it was our group the 307<sup>th</sup>, had four squadrons, each squadron had six planes and so we were in formation over this oil refinery going this way. And we bombed, and the group was staggered, you had a high, two in the middle and then a low, tail end Charlie, and we were tail end Charlie. So, we knew we were one of these two planes, I'm not sure which one. This is at 19,000 feet, so that is how quick it came up after bombing it, we went here and came back around. This picture is large to about like this.

PIEHLER: Yeah, it's a much larger ...

GILL: It hangs ... on the wall at the Air Force Museum.

PIEHLER: In ...

GILL: Daton, Ohio.

PIEHLER: Did you or anyone on your crew have any superstitions? (Laughs)

GILL: Not that I know of.

PIEHLER: No lucky ...

GILL: The "Thirteenth" didn't bother us. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Besides the mission with the gasoline ... did you have to abort any other mission?

GILL: Yes, we lost an engine after take off, but we got airborne but then the engine failed. We turned around and went back in. Other than that, those were the only two.

PIEHLER: Those were the only two. You never had to abort a mission because of weather.

GILL: No. Mm mm. We started out in one plane one time and the nose wheel, this was bad to do this, collapsed and the plane went down on its nose. We got out and got into another plane and flew the mission and we came back, they had bulldozed that plane into a ravine. They had plenty of them then, they didn't even try to fix it. And I saw a picture of an island called Biak, which was near Noemfoor, after the war and it was just covered with B-24's packed in just as close as they could get them. Until somebody got them and melted them down.

GITTENS: When you were on base, were there ... who provided base security, was it like, infantry units or ...

GILL: Well, there was a detachment Army there, Morotai because there were Japs still up in the mountains. And every now and then they would try and come down, they were starving. They try to come down to get food. So they had a perimeter that they were taking care of.

GITTENS: Did you ever speak to them?

GILL: No. Mm mm.

PIEHLER: Did you actually ever—while you were deployed overseas ever actually confront a Japanese, POW or ...

GILL: Mm mm.

PIEHLER: So you really, I mean they were below ground?

GILL: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... I mean it sounds like a basic question, but what did you think of the enemy when you were overseas?

GILL: Well, I hated them and it takes a awful lot now to ... (Laughs) When you think about them, what they did. Of course, the young people today, they don't know that, because the Japanese government doesn't teach anything, the real facts of the war and what they did. And far as the atomic bomb, I was certainly for that. Because anybody that was heading in direction was to invade Japan, they were tickled to death to see it.

PIEHLER: Did you have a sense that you would make it through all of your missions or did you ...

-----END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE-----

PIEHLER: You were saying you ...

GILL: I look back on and I feel often in my life, somebody was looking out for me. I feel strongly about that.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so you think—yeah, there was a higher ... When you got to go home, ... how did you fit in with the rest of the crew, did they have enough missions or ...

GILL: Mm hmm, the pilot and the bombardier stayed over, and he became squadron leader, and he the bombardier—squadron bombardier, and they flew a few more missions and they got another raise to captain and 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant.

PIEHLER: You did not want to do that?



GILL: No, they went to Saigon right after I finished and I could have gone with them and I thought well, you don't know what's going to happen over there. They had to land at Palawan, and refuel and then take off again. It turned out to be a milk run and with the Vietnam War I wish I had gone, just to say I had been there. But I didn't. Oh, I was through and ready to go home. Then when I got home they told me I had enough points to get out ...

PIEHLER: So, you didn't even have to do stateside duty?

GILL: I didn't have to, but I wasn't expecting it, I didn't have plans yet. So I didn't take it. I went on home and had thirty days, then I went to Miami Beach for R&R and my wife was mad at me that we didn't get married and take her down there, (Laughter) But, one night standing on the corner the wind blew from the everglades out and mosquitoes were all over the place. And they really worked on me and I've always thought that's where I got the malaria but I don't know for sure.

PIEHLER: So you don't think you got it from—you didn't have any symptoms when you were in the Pacific, you think you may have ...

GILL: And I took—we always took atabrine ...

PIEHLER: So you were conscientious about taking your atabrine.

GILL: Yeah, we had mosquito net over us at night. So I wasn't conscious of being bitten on the island, but I sure was at Miami Beach. But they say chance are I got it overseas and it didn't hit me until ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Although there are cases of malaria in the states. Yeah, so its not—your theory isn't ...

GILL: But you see, I was on—out, really. I've been separated, and I had thirty more days. So ... I was married in my uniform because you couldn't buy clothes like that in ...

PIEHLER: Where did you get married and when exactly did you get married?

GILL: We got married at First Christian Church ...

PIEHLER: In ...

GILL: Knoxville.

PIEHLER: ... What was your wedding date?

GILL: October 18<sup>th</sup>.

PIEHLER: 1945?

GILL: '45.

PIEHLER: And what did you do on your honeymoon?

GILL: Chattanooga. (Laughter) Gas was rationed and then we headed to Columbia and then went Allendale and so forth.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of using the G.I. Bill?

GILL: No, my first house Soon(?) built alone and the one I'm now I had it built and I got a four and a half percent loan. So I never needed to use it. I did use the—they had a fifty dollar a month on the job training and I used that when I got into the real estate and mortgage loan business.

PIEHLER: ... But you didn't think of going to college?

GILL: Well, I was married; I had to have a job, so I just didn't.

PIEHLER: I'm curious and I should have asked this in order but—you were flown over to theater—to the Pacific ... but you came home on a troop ship. What was that like coming home on a troop ship?

GILL: Well, I don't remember a whole lot about, it just took a long time it seemed to me and we were by ourselves and they didn't seemed to be worried about the Japanese subs or anything.

PIEHLER: How crowded was the troopship, what were your quarters ...

GILL: Well, they were fine, but it wasn't like they were sending them over for combat it was more of a leisure thing. And I had a shared stateroom.

PIEHLER: So, you had a stateroom?

GILL: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Was this a troop ship or a converted liner.

GILL: I think it was a converted cargo ship.

PIEHLER: When you came home did you join any Veteran's organizations?

GILL: When I was down there in Allendale I attended a few American Legions, I didn't really join there. Actually, it was in the '70's before I knew that our Bomb Group had an association and they had a meeting in Nashville and that's where I first learned about it. So, I joined then and I got Crawford and Edgar to join. We went several times (unintelligible). I became a member—they had Thirteenth Air Force association and became a member of that and that's about it.

PIEHLER: So, it really been the air force that you're particular Bomb Group and air force not so much to the general veterans.

GILL: No, no.

PIEHLER: ... You stayed in touch with ... your pilot ...

GILL: And bombardier.

PIEHLER: ... basically continuously.

GILL: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You never lost ...

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: ... never lost touch with them.

GILL: Well, there was a few years there when they were in school and I was just starting work, then we started getting together more. They'll call, I'll call. Bombardier's wife she emails me a lot of things and I do her.

PIEHLER: Have you ever been back to the Pacific?

GILL: No, there was an advertisement some years ago for a trip to Sydney, Australia, then you go up to Guadalcanal, they was going go around Morotai, then they were going to go to Shanghai, Hong Kong. And I remember (Socoma?), down town Socoma club, there I met a fellow that was in the Fifth Group and he was on the tail end of his mission when I first arrived, we didn't know each other until we met Socoma. So I talked to him about going and he wasn't too receptive and then I read the fine print that if there wasn't enough people, they could decide not to go to a certain place and I could see that happening to me. If they didn't, they'd just go sailing by Morotai and that where I'd want to go, to see where it was. So, I didn't do it and haven't thought about it since.

GITTENS: Did you have an opinion when the Air Force became an independent service?

GILL: I was glad to see it, really was.

GITTENS: ... When you were in the Air Force was there like a feeling that it should be an independent service or ...

GILL: Well, you see out there in the Pacific, MacArthur was head dog (Laughter) and we were MacArthur's Air Force. And the Fifth Air Force general was his right hand man so his Air Force got notoriety. Then they made it combined and called it the Far East Air Force Combined, so we got very little recognition and still don't get any.

PIEHLER: Well, we were commenting that before the interview, ... particularly Kevin in doing background research that ...

GITTENS: There's not much specifics, like when I looked into the records ... they say when you changed bases, when you're doing a move. But there's not a lot of mission detail.

GILL: No, and the Navy got the biggest of all. You see the Navy was in control moving down the central Pacific, MacArthur was coming down the South and if—you all watch this Survivor, thing on TV?

PIEHLER: I've heard of it.

GITTENS: You mean the reality show?

GILL: Yeah.

GITTENS: I haven't watched it, I've heard about it.

GILL: I don't watch it but I happened to see that this time they're on the island (Palalui?) , which was in the Central Pacific and the Marines took that island. They had a terrible battle, lost a lot of people and then they never used it. ... Now MacArthur would have passed by. just like passed the Halmahera's and other islands and just left them sitting there and the Navy wanted go to Formosa which is now Taiwan and not go to the Philippines. MacArthur wouldn't have that, he said I going to return, I promised those people I was going to do that and he did. So, that's the kind of thing that we feel like we didn't get enough recognition.

PIEHLER: When you were you ... at your base ... in some ways very isolated base, how much of the war did you know ... what war news did you get and just general news?

GILL: Well, we had a news broadcast and you know we had—they had the music they played for us. We listened to a lot of Tokyo Rose, she played good music. (Laughter) Well, we about run down?

PIEHLER: Were pretty much, just a few more questions. ... You were in real estate for a long time.

GILL: Well, my father in law was (Arrin ?) Perrin, and he was in the real estate and mortgage loan business. He operated at Arrin Perrin Company and Tennessee Mortgage Company. So I after several years down at ... Augusta I didn't feel I was getting anywhere and the only hope for advancement would be in a manager's position and they were few and far between, so I contacted him asked him if he had any thoughts as to what was available up there and he invited me up and suggested I come with him, because he was by himself. So, I did that. So that was—we came up here in August of '48 and I went to work with him and he died in 1961, I took over the business and then my son came in, and he's running it now since '82.

PIEHLER: And this son—you have several, you have three sons which ...

GILL: This is Bert.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm, he's been running the ... And your other children, what do they do?

GILL: Well, the oldest is Nancy ad she works at (Sea rate?), then Bert, and then the next is Bo and he is an industrial engineer with a subsidiary of Johnson and Johnson in Cincinnati, he was over in South Dakota, and California and we finally got him this side of the Mississippi River. (Laughter) And the youngest is Hank and he's a police man in Greensboro.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

GILL: So, they're all within four hours now of here and we like that very much, very proud of them.

PIEHLER: And none of your children served in the military?

GILL: No, Bert I guess is the closest with Vietnam, but he was going to college at the time so he was exempt. The other two, they had no inclination to do it. Now Bo has a real bright young man—son, who's ten years old. And he's going to a private school in Cincinnati. Sharp as a tack, he's on honor roll all the time and crazy about airplanes.

PIEHLER: So he's gotten the family gene. (Laughs)

GILL: ... Crazy about them. And if he doesn't make pilot I don't know what will happen. I will hopefully see—I'd like to see him go to the Air Force Academy. But there would be some fact that his grandfather was in the Air Force. Of course, his studies would have to be up to snuff but I think he's doing fine on that part. So, we'll just have to see.

PIEHLER: Well, something—I guess one of my closing things is the point that coming to aviation cadet training really did change your life in the sense that you probably would have never have really come to Knoxville.

GILL: No.

PIEHLER: I mean, much less live ...

GILL: Oh, no. no way. I'd like to add that I have a grandson who is twenty seven and he is a pilot for Pilot Oil.

PIEHLER: Uh huh, okay.

GILL: And he's flying the jets for them.

PIEHLER: So, the aviation ...

GILL: And my son in law Frank Wilkins, he has a plane and he tows banners. That's not his full time job. And (?) is getting ready to get clearance to have a light—a sign underneath the plane to fly at night and advertise. But if it ever gets through the FAA okay I think it would be a big plus for ... So this has been an aviation ...

PIEHLER: So you continue ... I mean you mention also taking pilot lessons when ... you were sixty eight when you took ...

GILL: I just wanted to try it one more time to see if I could do it. There's nothing like that solo flight.

PIEHLER: Really, that was ...

GILL: There's nothing like it. You get up there and you—"I got to get this thing back down". (Laughter) ... It's something else.

PIEHLER: Well, was there anything we forgot to ask you? Well, it's been a great interview. I really appreciate it. It's been real ...

GILL: I've enjoyed it. I imagine you have some pretty good stories.

PIEHLER: Well no, you've had some pretty good stories to add to them, so ...

GILL: (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Well, ... we hope you'll come to some of our lectures over the years. Well, thank you, thank you again. It's very much appreciated.

GILL: You're welcome.

----- END OF INTERVIEW -----