

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

Question: Before we get started, I don't want to miss any of this because you're going to give me all the gems before I get going. But let me have you give me your name, first and last, and the correct spelling, just so I have that on tape.

Answer: Okay. Ben Sandmeyer, S-A-N-D-M-E-Y-E-R.

Question: Great. And you're from Sequim.

Answer: Sequim.

Question: Yeah.

Question: So let's start with that. Where were you and what was happening when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Answer: Well, we had -- like I say, we had gone to Seattle and had the wife's sister and her husband with us. And they had a brand new Dodge convertible. And we're driving around Lake Washington. Turned the radio on and all of a sudden they said Pearl Harbor's bombed. So I said well, you know, I'm classed 1-A, I guess I'd just as well get in. I wanted to go in the Air Force anyway, so I went down on Monday and enlisted in the Air Force and then I went to Seattle about a week later. We was over there in line for about, oh, started out about 7:30 in the morning and finally got in, sworn in, about 9 o'clock that night. And we lined up clear down the sidewalk. And when we went in, they'd call out about 20 names at a time and they'd examine them. Quick examination. And I'll never forget. They had one guy come in there and he said -- he said, hey, Captain, this guy has got -- his feet aren't flat, they're round on the bottom. He says, ah, pair of GI shoes fix that up real good.

But then we went to -- after that they -- went by train over to Tacoma and then we went from -- got in a Army six by six, heading for Fort Lewis. Well about the first turn he made I thought I'm never even going to see the war, the way this guy drives. But we got there and, oh, this is midnight. And been up all day and so we go out and get a couple of shots and then they go down and go through the clothing. They say -- these guys must have been working 20 hours a day -- they said don't give any sizes until you get to the end, give your shoe size, that's it. And when you go back to the barracks, start trading, see if you can find something that will fit. That's the way it was. So we got back and tried to trade around and it gets to be about 1 o'clock in the morning. Said they're going to give you a -- an IQ test or whatever, see where you are, and you had to have at least 110 to go to OCS or to go into flight or bombardier and so on. So they gave us -- lot of them were timed tests, too, and you look around at 2 o'clock in the morning, this guy's sound asleep. So then we had a -- notice on the bulletin board next day, it said your test scores, if you're not satisfied, go to the orderly room and re-take the test. Realized that we'd been up that long. I took one look at mine and I says I do better asleep than I do awake. So I just left it the way it was. I had test score high enough I could do almost -- whatever I wanted to do.

And then we -- from there they put us on the train and headed us down to Sheppard Field in Texas. And we were -- the train, of course, the curtains were all pulled down, especially at night. And then we got down into Texas, Sheppard Field, and we had a pretty good indoctrination there. The guy -- it was a corporal -- was telling us where we're going to go. And he said you all see that water tower down there? And we said yeah, we can see it, we're in the Army. And he said you going down there and you'll going to walk. Let's go, we're healthy. Oh, it was funny indoctrination. I went to the -- went through the air mechanics school. And it was in 11 phases. They had -- there was ten phases and then the last phase of the school was to, after going through structures, hydraulics, props, engines and instruments and all those things, then you were to apply these things on the planes out on the -- on the ramp. On some planes we had out there. And get your hands-on experience. So we -- I was

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

halfway through, I was in the engine branch, and somehow or other, we were in town on a weekend and the meantime I get -- I told the wife to come on down, I said I'm getting \$21 a month, we just as well get married down here. We did. So --

Question: So you weren't married -- you were engaged before you went --

Answer: Yeah. I was engaged to be married in February.

Question: So now how old were you?

Answer: I was 26.

Question: Twenty-six. So you were an old man then?

Answer: Wife was 19. So --

Question: Okay, so what was -- you discovered you were making 20-some dollars and you told your fiancée come on down --

Answer: Yeah, get married.

Question: Didn't she say you're nuts, you're going into war, or what was the discussion like?

Answer: Well, wife's dad disowned her. And I don't blame him. And so she went out to mother's and told her that she was going to go down, we lived in Yakima. And so my mother said well, what you're doing is very foolish to her, and said, but, if I were in your place, I'd do the same thing. So they told her, said well, if anything happens to me, our home is your home. So that made it nice. So, but then finally her dad broke down and he came over to Yakima -- he was from Seattle, to my folk's place where my wife was -- future wife was staying at the time. So he told her, well, he couldn't talk any sense into her head. So uh, she was right, in a way. But then she said, to her dad said, would you buy me a wedding dress, and he said if he wants you that bad he can buy it himself. (laughs)

Question: There went that \$20 a month.

Answer: Yeah, boy. But, you know, after that, we were very, very close, her dad and I. And he come over and -- he was a builder. He come over and built our house, after the war.

Question: So what was the wedding like? Now it was in Texas?

Answer: It was on Sunday, and I had -- a couple that was there from Cotton Plant, Arkansas, he was in the same barracks I was, so we went down on a Sunday morning, that's the only time we had. Went down on a Sunday morning to the -- to the First Christian Church, and we got married down there. And then we went -- spent the afternoon out, oh we went out to a restaurant and ate and so on. But I had to go back out to Sheppard Field that night. And I didn't get to come in for a week. And I was going through school at that time. But right in the middle of the school where I was in the engine branch, about the tenth phase, or Class 10, Class 10. So I was in town on the weekend and they come out at the theatre and said everybody in the 419th Scoot Squadron, report to Shepherd Field immediately. So it was awhile before I got out there and about that time the train pulled out. I was the only guy in the barracks that night. They pulled our whole outfit out and shipped them out, too. They made a mistake. They.. supposed to have taken the class out of 10th and 11th phases which

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

had finished the training and was in the hands-on experience. And they were going to go to Inglewood, California to be, instead of crewing on the other planes, they'd crew them on the B-25s, which they were going to be assigned to. Well, these guys were only half way through the school. And instead of sending the 10th and 11th phases, they sent Class 10 and 11. Left a big vacancy in the school. So they got in some real trouble over that. The colonel.

Question: So what happened to you now, cause you're there all by yourself?

Answer: Oh, it was great -- in the middle of school, there was quite a bunch of us guys that had gone home and come back again and so -- there was a small group of us. And they had to speed up, condense the classes to five days instead of ten. So, and so we could fill in that void that they could catch up. So anyway, we finished the school, and when we finished, they had -- we were all out on the ramp, Class A uniforms, hotter than Hades, over a hundred degrees. So once in awhile you'd hear a plop, somebody would go down with the heat. They kept calling out names. And so they called mine out and said, the following names was to be taken out for instructors. So I'd never taught anybody in my life. So after that they sent me to engine specialist school and then they sent me to instructor training. And then uh, so I taught in the engine branch for quite awhile. Then they sent me to visual aids training, Bell & Howell at that time, see we had Bell & Howell machines. So then we -- on the -- I was doing all the visual aids. And, but, oh, that got boring, oh boring as all get out. So I finally got another civilian -- we had civilian and military instructors both. And so I traded of with the civilian there, he was quite heavy and he was about going to have to give up, his feet was bothering him. So I said, man, I get a chance to trade, I'd get back into the training. So we did that. And --

Question: So you were still in Texas?

Answer: Yeah, oh, yeah, I was in Sheppard Field all that time.

Question: So now you're been through the initial training, now you're an instructor. Did you get to go see your wife at all?

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah, we'd come in on weekends. And at that time, you know, we had -- we'd take a garrison hat and put your -- your pass in that and you go through the bus, you just show them your pass. I used a Social Security card for a pass. So I would go ahead on a Wednesday.. sometimes go down on Wednesday and use that social security card for a pass, they didn't look at it to close.

Question: What was your wife doing all the time that --

Answer: Well --

Question: Cause here's this 19-year-old bride --

Answer: Yeah. She was trying to find a job down there, and oh, jobs just were not -- weren't there. So, you know, \$21 a month didn't go very far, and but money, I sold the car and everything. And so she took a job with, oh, up there with, Proctor & Gamble, I think, or one of them. Handing out handbills. And she got \$15 a week for doing that. Come in on weekend, boy, her face was just red as a beat. She'd been out in the Texas sun. So, yeah, she did what she could down there, and then of course I went up in rank some as we went along. And that helped. And then they were going to dissolve the air mechanic school. So they picked up a group of us out of different branches, the AM school, and went over to form the flight engineer training for the B-29. That was the first plane that had the pressurized and

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

had a full flight engineer's panel where you had all the throttles, mixtures, prop, controls, speed, flaps, everything. Cowl flaps and the whole works. So it was -- they picked a group of us out of there and sent us into the flight engineering school. And we set -- we set up the flight engineering school. And we had to -- we had to write our own material. There wasn't a lot of material on that plane yet. It was real new. We were the charter members of the 20th Air Force there. So we got -- we're sitting up to start the training program and I was to go into the engine branch again. And in flight engineering school. So then the wife took civil service exam and she got a job. Where did she get a job? Flight engineering school. Where I was. Which was very nice. And we moved up to Smoky Hill Air Base in Salina, Kansas, and then we finished up the training on the B-29 ourselves, as instructors. And after we finished they gave us appointments as a flight officers. And I, by the way, had three serial numbers in four years. So I was a -- when I took the physical they found I had a hernia. So I couldn't pass the physical. So meantime we went to Lowry Field in Denver. And there they -- I went into the hospital and that was an experience. I was in there and they come down with a gurney and they said, hey, said, douse the cigarette and put pajama tops on. He said, going to surgery. I said I just got here. And he said, I can't help that. Put me on the gurney, going down, just turned into the surgery, he said you'll be back here in 30 minutes, an appendectomy don't -- I said wait a minute, hold everything, stop. He said what's the matter with you? I said I don't have appendicitis. He said, -- I said -- he said what's the matter? -- I said I got a hernia. And he backed up the gurney and he looked down, seven... oh, you're room nine. Get off. Go back. And that close to get my appendix out.

Question: Boy things were pretty -- hectic -- I mean from the time you signed up and 12 hours to wherever and you taking the test and they're wheeling you here and there -- it was an active time?

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah, we were -- we were moving around. We were in the technical training command. That's what the -- branch I was in, until I went into the B-29 program and then that was -- they set up the 20th Air Force for the B-29. So I was into the 20th Air Force at that time. So I taught the flight engineering school for, oh, I was in Denver for about 20 months.

And then they decided that -- they were having problems. General LeMay took over the -- the 20th Air Force and the 21st bomber command on Guam, headquarters in Guam, Marianas Islands. So they -- we went over to Guam, where their headquarters was. And then we went to -- then we were assigned over to Tinian. And they'd been flying at 30,000 feet, high altitude, over the targets. Weren't having very good luck. They were doing heavy bombing for rail yards and all kinds of things and engine works, airplane works and so on. But at that altitude, not knowing wind conditions and so on, wasn't very good. And then LeMay come over, and he had experience with this fire bombing in Europe. So he decided to go over and go in at low level. Well, our primary purpose, of course, was training. And they were having problems of trying -- they were using 6800 gallons of fuel for that round trip and that was 3,000 mile round trip. Fifteen hundred miles out and 1500 back. And they were dropping a few in the water because they were running out of fuel. Flight engineers were - we were sent over to update the newest material and methods and ways of getting miles per gallon, what it was, with all the new technical information. So that's what we were sent over there for, and we were -- went over there to help -- to help to update the flight engineers. And they were still doing some high altitude, but LeMay come over, they changed over. And then went -- they went in at the -- had a big meeting on Guam and told the people there they were going to go in at, oh, 4500 feet on the first wave, 5000 feet on the next one, 5500 on the -- fire raids. Course the further back they are, the longer that fire goes, the more thermals they're going to create over that area. So they had problems there. But they'd come off of that high altitude, bombing, not entirely, but they cut it down. So like I say, that was our purpose, to get over there and train the flight engineers to squeeze out a few more miles per gallon so

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

that they could -- and especially if you lost an engine, you know your fuel consumption would go up about 18, 20%. So what to do, what power settings to use, altitudes, and light and fly the step and so on. And so that as our -- our primary purpose was in the training of these flight engineers.

Question: Boy that's interesting because that's not -- that's not a part of the war that you think about because you had all this brand new technology so you were inventing stuff --

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: Somebody come up with an idea and you stuck somebody in a plane and --

Answer: Yeah, yeah, it was higher on purpose. You know, that is also where the term jet stream came from. They were flying at 30,000 feet for a long time before they started the fire bombing at low altitude, they were flying at 30,000 feet, 32,000. And one time they were -- one crew was out there and they could see the island, and then pretty soon they didn't see it. So they came back to the base and told them. They said oh, you guys better take some R & R. And so they said no, it happened. So wasn't too long after that that another crew came back, the same thing. They'd gone up to a little higher altitude and -- and they said they were going over Japan about 30 miles an hour. They said that wasn't too good. So they finally got a weather crew, some weather people from the States out there, and they flew -- scientific people, and people that were versed in weather. And they took them out there and they flew and that's what they found was up at that altitude, it varied, and that's where the term jet stream came from.

Question: Huh.

Answer: They said this is the -- jet stream out there, altitude, so, had some terrific head winds out there, a couple miles an hour.

Question: Course pilots must have thought the Japanese had a new secret weapon?

Answer: Yeah, hiding the (laughs)
So you left from, was it Kansas, to go over? Is that where --

Answer: No, we went to the Lowry Field in Denver.

Question: So where did you leave your bride?

Answer: I left her -- our oldest son was born in Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver, and I left just exactly two weeks after he was born.

Question: How -- I bet that had to be -- I mean, were you aware that you were going to be going over to --

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Question: So what was that like? I mean here is this newlywed,

Answer: Very, very traumatic. It just, you know. When you go, you don't know, am I coming back? But that can happen any day, you know, when you take off, you know, something can happen. But going over there, of course we knew that what our job was -- was

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

primarily into training. But still that was what I thought, you know. Am I going to see them again?

Question: So how old was your son?

Answer: Two weeks. Right to the day, right to the day.

Question: Boy, that had to be --

Answer: Yeah, it was -- it was --

Question: Did you discuss it a lot with your wife, or was it a thing that you just --

Answer: We finally adjusted. There was a lot of people in the same boat, you know, we were all about in that same age group and so we took it along with the rest of it. You know, this is something we were into, had to get it done. And when they -- the day that they sent -- that they dropped the first atomic bomb, I was over to the 509th Group, and it was about noon. I went there to see how they were getting along, and all of a sudden I see the Enola Gay coming in. Didn't pay any attention to it, just another plane, you know. And I see a lot of brass around the area. Something's happening, or something's going to happen pretty soon. I thought the invasion. And then couple hours later we found out they dropped the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. I said let's drop 12 more, I want to go home. It -- it was something new out of the blue. And then two or three days after that, why Sweeney dropped the second one. And that's the only thing that -- that process, I think it saved over a million lives, both sides, maybe more than that. Because fighting on the -- on their homeland, would be something else. They had 10, 11 year old kids they were training with everything, bamboo sticks to whatever. And you can imagine what it would be like if you tried to go in and face those people on their home soil or home ground, they'd fight back till the death.

Question: So when you saw the Enola Gay, was it returning or just getting ready to go?

Answer: No, it was just coming in, landing.

Question: So it had already dropped the bomb?

Answer: Yeah. They dropped it, yeah.

Question: How long did it take you to find out that that's what that plane was?

Answer: Oh, it was -- probably, kind of hard to think back. But I think probably a couple hours, time they come out and give the -- they sent the information I guess back to the president. And also to -- it got all over the island we were on. There was -- there was -- I read an article not too long ago. There was a guy that had been over in Europe, Infantry, and he was waiting for the invasion. He said he knew that he wasn't going to make it this time. And they dropped the atomic bomb, he was really elated, you know. Maybe I'll live.

Question: Once you heard the news that it had been dropped and you saw the plane, did you have any idea what a part of history you were at that time?

Answer: Not at the time, no. Just -- it never dawned on me until later that we were a part of a very critical moment in history. And that -- as I say, it never dawned on me at all until -- and it took a long time to realize that. What can you do? And but -- in the meantime we had Doolittle, General Doolittle had moved up to Okinawa, up on Cadena Air Base up

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

there. And so they took a group of us instructors and sent us up to give Doolittle a hand, 8th Air Force. And, but in the meantime, the second atomic bomb was dropped and the war ended. But the orders were already in the mill so we went to Okinawa. But it wasn't anything for us to do over there. And I think, looking back, you know, Doolittle said that -- well, we were 1500 miles from Japan when we were. But in Okinawa, they was only about 350 miles from Japan. You could take about two or three hundred 29's over there and carry double the load they were carrying before, they could wipe Japan clean. In fact Doolittle made the statement, said that if Japan doesn't surrender, it will be a nation without a city. And so, but I still think it took the atomic bomb to actually bring the war to an end. There's a real good book out called War's End, by Charles Sweeney. He flew both missions of the atomic bomb. But it was a -- it was four years that I wouldn't particularly want to do over again, but.

Question: Did you have contact with your wife and news from home? Did you know what your wife was up to and --

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah, we -- fact we got all of our letters. I don't know a couple hundred of them, I guess. I'd write every day. And of course she did to. She was staying with my folks and with our son and so we stayed there. When I came back I got back about -- well I got out the day after Thanksgiving, November of '45, and I came home and my wife's dad come over and said, buy a lot and I'll build you a house. We bought a lot and built our house. We stayed with my folks for about 17 months till we got the house built.

Question: How old was your son when you came home?

Answer: He was about -- let's see, June, be about six months old. I wasn't gone all that long. About five months, six months.

Question: Yeah, but still, that's -- I mean, to leave -- I mean what was that like, coming home -- so your wife was over in Yakima at this time? When you came home.

Answer: Yeah, she stayed with my folks.

Question: So you had to make this journey home and get all the way to Yakima or did she meet you somewhere else?

Answer: No, I went to -- back to Lowry Field in Denver and got discharged there. Only took a couple of days. Then I got on the -- on the train and came back to Yakima and they met me at the station. It was -- I can remember walking in and seeing her and had the -- our son in a little, they called it teeter babe at that time, kind of a little triangle thing on the seat -- that's the first time I really seen him. Because she was -- at that time she was in the hospital about ten days at Fitzsimmons. And I was -- when I went into the Army I enlisted, number 19074114. Well flight officer, I was T223613. When I'm overseas and moved up to Okinawa and here a letter of promotion came along. I'm 2nd lieutenant. So we had nothing over there but tents. And I told the colonel, I said hey, this letter had followed me around for a couple months. I got up and I said hey, I don't want this. I said I want to get home, get out, go back to civilian life. He said well -- that's another thing, too. As a flight officer I get 20% for overseas pay and for flying pay I get 50% of that. I said I'm losing 15% if I take this. He said no, there's Army regulation that you won't do that. You don't take an increase in rank and a decrease in pay and put it on your pay card. And I said well, I said, you know, I said, I really don't want to take this. He said do you realize how much work you're going to cause me? I got to write the Pentagon and tell them why you don't want this. I said well if it's going to cause you a lot of trouble. I said where am I going to get out here and buy 2nd lieutenants bars. He said if you sign this, he said, I'll go get them for you. So he didn't want

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

to write a letter -- do all that correspondence, so I went and said well, if you want to go get the bars and so on, I said, I'll sign it. But he didn't tell me the bottom line, I had to serve ten years in Reserve. So I did, served ten years in the Reserves after that, but it was a great experience. And we kept -- when I was gone we kept in very close contact with the wife and I. But which we had at that time was mail, that was the only thing at that time. But we made it okay. We were very happy to get out.

Question: Getting mail, did that make you homesick? I mean did you get mail saying that your son was doing this, he was crawling or he was --

Answer: Well, yeah. All the things he was going through and teething, he was doing this and doing that. Yeah, it struck home, yeah.

Question: Was that the type of thing that all the guys wanted to share and --

Answer: Oh, sure.

Question: --and hear about your family, or was that too hard --

Answer: Oh, yeah, no, we did. In fact a friend of mine, old -- he was from North Carolina, old Chick Pressler, he's dead now, too, but we decided to, in the meantime, he'd write to my wife and I'd write to his. Tell them what he was doing and he'd tell her what I was doing, and how we was getting along, so it made kind of a cross correspondence. And that helped. His wife would write to me and my wife would write to Chick.

Question: Did you meet up after the war then, the wives and everybody, ever?

Answer: Yeah, we did. Let's see, I didn't -- we corresponded for years, all the time. He went back to -- he wound up in Taylorsville, North Carolina. And he turned out to be a radio minister. And quite a reverse, by the way. But we corresponded and one time about, just before we left Yakima over there, about 12 years ago, now, 13. Got a letter that was kind of crumpled up like he carried it in his pocket for awhile and finally mailed it. But the next Christmas we sent him a letter and came back no return address, no -- and so I think what happened, the two of them, I'm going to guess that they probably got in an automobile accident or something where they were both -- both wiped out. Both killed. So I assume - I never did find out. There's no way to find out. But we did that when we was overseas there. Why I'd write to Hazel and my wife would write to him and so we kind of cross-corresponded. We just thought that up between us.

Question: What a special way of bonding.

Answer: Yeah, oh, yeah.

Question: Because she gets an honest, you know you get to say Chick's doing this and that, rather than Chick saying oh, you know, I'm doing okay or whatever. Well, Chick's doing okay and Chick's doing this.

Answer: Yeah.

Yeah, I've got -- I had -- my experience was -- I was kept out for instructor in AM school in Sheppard Field, a little side opinion here. And we were up to drill some of the new recruits and students, Saturday morning, went up on the ramp and come a Texas rain, just soaked to the skin. In the meantime the instructors were supposed to be put into a separate barracks because they had different hours than the new students coming in. So I was the only

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

instructor in the barracks with all these new students, upstairs. So I come in soaking wet, I was right about the middle, the left-hand side of the barracks. And there I'd taken all my clothes off -- I don't have one thread nowhere on me. And it was Saturday. I never noticed they were all in Class-A uniforms, it was inspection. So the 1st sergeant, the barracks chief come up with the captain, and called everybody to attention. Well, what do you do? Obey the command. I was standing there, nothing on, not even a stitch. Not even a thread. First thing he says, what the hell's going on here? (laughs) I bet he's told that story a thousand times. Oh, it was -- (laughs)

Question: (laughs) At ease, soldier. (laughs)

Answer: And everybody, Class A shoe shine, and I'm standing there, right in the middle, nothing, not a thread on.

Question: Had another little humorous incident there. I was at Lowry Field in Denver and we were using barracks temporary quarters for school. And had a big old potbelly stove in the middle. And everybody had finished, I had a class, all officers. And carbon tet rags, used at that time, believe it or not, for cleaning. So they left, I opened up the stove, grabbed a red hot coal, and take this carbon tet, threw in the hot coals and just then I realized what was going to happen. Phosgene gas. I closed the door, went outside, and here's this white smoke coming out, little heavier than air. I was standing there watching that. Major come along and he said, Lieutenant, he said what's -- what's that? I said, "That, Major, is phosgene gas." I said I threw a bunch of carbon tet rags into that stove. I didn't -- my mind was about ten minutes behind my actions. And he looked that -- it began to dissipate about that time. And he looked at me, quite a little bit, he said, "Say, did you ever think about joining the other side?" And he walked down the sidewalk shaking his head. (laughs) So there were some humorous incidents, too.

Question: Well, that's the interesting part of the war, too. I mean, even though it was this amazing tragedy --

Answer: Yeah, it wasn't all --

Question: -- there were a lot of positive things that -- that came out of it.

Answer: Oh, yeah, lots. I made many friends from all around the country, you know, north and south and east and the west, New York to Alabama. All around the country.

Question: You'll have a bond with those people that I'll never ever have the potential of having because of -- I mean as I learn more about --

Answer: Yeah. There was a close -- there was a closeness that you were in and uh, it uh -- some -- you know, you don't forget them feelings of the closeness and the bond that you make with people that you work with. You're all in the same boat and we never know from any day what your orders are going to be far as what you might be doing, it can change in no time at all.

Question: Do you think that there's a message that should be left for the great, great great grandchildren and the future generations that you'll never meet about World War II?

Answer: I don't know. It's -- what it used to do, I would be someplace, maybe a dentist or a doctor or anyplace, and conversation, World War II, after the war. And somebody said, oh, I had -- I had a brother in the Air Force, too. And then later on it got to you, the doctor or

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

dentist or somebody would say, oh, yeah, my dad was in World War II. You know what I hear now? Oh, my granddad was in the service, too. That's what you get for living that long, it's about the third generation now. But a lot of people -- I don't think would know where Okinawa and Guam, Saipan, Tinian, Kwajalein, all those islands are out there in the Pacific. But we didn't know either. It was all news -- new to us, too. But, yeah, I think we need to update the World War II picture of what we were and what happened to us and that we survived, regardless. Made out real well.

This other deal, I was -- in the flight engineering school when I was assigned over there, to the engine branch, and Kerth who was a civilian came around to me and said well, he said, the man -- civilian from California, was supposed to come out and take over the introduction to the flight engineering school. First phase and engines followed that. And he said, he used your - my name was Sandy in the service. Always had Sandmeyer -- everybody shortened that to Sandy. Kerth said, "Sandy", he said, "tomorrow morning we start the school and you take the first class in thermodynamics." I said would you show me how to spell it? (laughs) He said, well, you got to do it. I said okay. I'll tell them it will work out. And I -- the class came in and they always -- at that time I was still a buck sergeant and these guys were all -- had 31 officers, major on down. But I explained the situation to them. You know, gentlemen, I'm teaching you in the second phase in engines and I do have a little bit of background in relations, to heat and energy and things. I said -- went in, well, he said, we just make this a discussion thing between us. You don't just take over -- and so we did. I got three years of thermodynamics in ten days. But it was a great feeling -- it was good. Nobody -- I didn't try and bluff anybody. I just said -- and it was a great experience. And one of those -- the major that I had in that first class, well, about, when we finished up, why he was put in charge of the school. And he was one that went and -- and got my wife to work in the school. She's had quite an experience there, too, working on the field. She --

Question: We'll get her next.

Answer: She taught the -- she did all the typing of the material that we were writing.

Question: Oh, boy.

Answer: Yeah, she was typing probably part of mine and she typed Carl Wela, who was in - I forget what it was, oxygen and so on, that survival, that type. She got to type all of his material. And so.

Question: While I think about it, in your pictures, you had a picture of you and another gentlemen and you had some skulls and stuff. Where was that?

Answer: Oh, that was in Okinawa.

Question: What's the story behind that?

Answer: Well, we were -- they had a typhoon over there and the tent was not a good place to be in a typhoon. It didn't take long that we dumped the tent right down on the ground and was just right out in the open. And they had one of the worst typhoons that had ever hit the island in Okinawa, it come right up the eye of the typhoon, we got right into it. And so it -- some of the guys, the only place to go was to -- they had a ravine down there and they had a medical deal down there in a Quonset hut. Nothing was finished there -- nothing -- everything was half way and half constructed. And so one of the guys went into those tombs, right into the side of the hill, and they have -- they're made with blocks, and they got a water diverting system on the top so that the water'd run down. And they had -- those holes aren't very big. You get inside of there and they have a big shelf goes clear around inside of there.

Ben Sandmeyer

Tape 1 of 1

They got these urns in there, the bones or remains of the people in this family or group or clan or whatever, and all sitting up on there. So we thought it would be pretty neat to get the skulls out there, and put them on there and take pictures. Wasn't too well accepted. I don't blame them, either. But lot of the guys to get out of that typhoon, went into those. At least it was safe in there. It just wiped that island clean. There wasn't nothing. They had some hangers that had just started being built, and it -- that 160 mile an hour wind just twisted them like the was tin. And -- but that's where we got down in -- got into those tombs.

Question: Tourists on Okinawa -- little sight seeing in Okinawa.

Answer: Yeah, yeah. (laughs)

Question: Great.