

Interviewer: State your full name and when and where you were born please.

Ralph Sisson: Ralph E. Sisson, born in Covington, Oklahoma, July 21st 1928.

Interviewer: And uh, what branch of service were you in?

Ralph Sisson: I was in the United States Air Force.

Interviewer: And do you know what unit you served in?

Ralph Sisson: Uh, I don't remember.

Interviewer: Okay, what were your parents' names and their occupations?

Ralph Sisson: My dad's name was Merrian Albert Sisson, and he was an oil refinery pipe fitter.

Interviewer: And your mother?

Ralph Sisson: My mother's name was Lillie Al Sisson, she was a housewife, she never did work in an industry.

Interviewer: Uh, do you have any brothers and sisters?

Ralph Sisson: I have 2 sisters, Norma Lee Kenzie, Boulder City, Oklahoma.....Melissa, Texas.

Interviewer: Uh, what kind of recollection do you have of the Great Depression?

Ralph Sisson: Well, um, I remember the, the main thing I remember was uh, poverty level of everyone that that we, that my family knew, there were no jobs and uh, uh, the only employment there was, was in the mid-30's, there were, sometimes there were jobs on the Work Progress administration or the WPA, and some of the people in my area worked on those jobs, but people lived on farms and raised whatever food they had and that was all they had, there just was no money.

Interviewer: Did you live on a farm growing up?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, I lived on a farm until I was 14, almost 15.

Interviewer: Was that in Covington or in Perry?

Ralph Sisson: Most uh, I lived in Perry until I was 14, well on a farm outside of Perry, and then I lived inCity, and dad worked in an oil refinery then.

Interviewer: What kind of jobs did your dad have you do on the farm growing up?

Ralph Sisson: I drove a tractor through the summer, and I started out when I was about 10 years old. My dad hired his tractor out to the neighbors, to help, to pull his combine and he sent me with it to drive the tractor, and pull the neighbors combine through the summer harvest season, I started when I was 10 doing that. And uh, our own work at home I did tractor work with the plowing and the work that was done with the tractor and of course morning and night I milked the cows and take care of the milk, run the separator, did general farm work.

Interviewer: Did you ever uh, find time to have recreation?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, in the winter time, there were families that would have kids my age and we had ball teams and boy stuff that usually kids have and uh, but uh, harvest season and through the spring and summer we were busy all the time. I mean it was, I would run the tractor during the day time, doing the plowing, my dad would work all night doing the stocking, getting ready for the harvest, and uh, we worked together like that to do the work.

Interviewer: What about your sisters what kind of jobs did they do?

Ralph Sisson: They didn't do any outside, it was just the practice in those days, the women, the girls stayed in the house, course all the work was done, all the cooking was done from scratch every meal because we didn't have any refrigeration and we couldn't butcher the hog or anything because it would spoil in the summer time, it wouldn't keep, so we would have to kill a chicken, the women would have, to have the new meal, and uh, cook from scratch, we had our garden, we raised all the food that we ate, ad uh, my mother made the bread, we didn't usually buy flour but that was about the only thing we bought , flour and sugar, but we was, the farm people were mostly self sustaining. They uh, they lived on what they had, there were no jobs, but everybody was the same way, we just never was around anyone that had anything different, and of course the houses didn't have, we used wood for heat, and later on why we were able to get coal, that was a big deal because it was easier to haul and easier to handle, but in addition we'd burn wood, and the neighbor scheduled me 3 or 4 weeks in the fall to haul lumber and to cut it up into firewood size and haul it to each house for the people working on the project, and we'd heat our houses with wood and do the cooking.

Interviewer: So, the wood would be brought to your house, you didn't cut it in the back.

Ralph Sisson: No, we did. We used to have, we had one saw mill and all the people that worked on it would share and take it to their houses, with a horse and wagon of course, we didn't have any motorized...

Interviewer: So it was a community saw mill that was portable?

Ralph Sisson: Well, usually 3 to 5 families would work on it, it wasn't a total community project but it was, it would be 3 to 5 men from families would work on it.

Interviewer: Was there other things on the farm that 3 to 5 families would go in on to make things easier?

Ralph Sisson: Um, not uh, sometimes, well the farmers helped each other a lot, one year one of the farmers had trouble with his tractor after he got a tractor and he didn't get his front work done in time for the planting and dad sent me with our tractor to go up and prepare his ground, to get it ready, farmers helped each other but they didn't have other, sometimes they would when they butchered the hogs in the fall when it first got cold, there might be a couple families join in it but not a big community project. Uh, so uh, that's, it was a matter of just helping each other, if somebody needed something they would always provided it for each other. It was, it was really great because there were times when everybody would need help, so they would provide for each other.

Interviewer: What uh, how old were you when you first got your first job?

Ralph Sisson: Well uh, that one, that one where I drove the tractor to pull the neighbors combine through the harvest, that's the first job I had away from, I did the work on our own farm, but that was the first time I hired out to do it, course I was about 10, and uh, the neighbor he didn't make a whole swing up north like you'd think of, he did maybe, maybe a month of combining around within 50 miles of where we lived. We didn't go up north like you'd think, they make a harvest swing in movies, anything like that, just the local area and I went with him and drove the tractor and pulled the combine. It was a good experience for a kid because it taught him responsibility. A kid likes, I did and other kids liked to do man things, and by doing them, and of course they're teachable because they are trying to learn, and trying to be a man and with a dad like I had, dad had, would take the time and effort to teach me, it was a good thing, taught me to be responsible, how to work and be responsible, so looking back I really appreciate it and it's an advantage a lot of city kids don't get because their dad is working like I was away from home and I didn't have time, the condition was not right for me to teach him how to use farm equipment I wasn't even on, so I had a real advantage, I really did.

Interviewer: Uh, do you recall Pearl Harbor day?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, I recall, I don't recall the very day but I recall the first part of December when the news broke and uh, and uh, everybody started following the news as closely as possible, of course you didn't have TV in those days and you had a 15 minute news broadcast, I think morning noon and night on the radio. But you didn't have an all-day access to it like you do now, but we knew, we knew how bad it was and we were kept up to date on such things as the casualties that had been inflicted on us, damages done to our fortress and all that.

Interviewer: So would this normally happen at night time, the family gather round and listen to the radio?

Ralph Sisson: There was an early morning broadcast through that period of time somewhere around 6:30 or 7, and the news would come on for 10 or 15 minutes and of course I was going to school, but I think, I know there was another news broadcast at noon, and another one in the evening but it wasn't a constant barrage like now for sure, but you could keep up today. We knew there were on Normandy Beach head they were losing 3600 men a day, we knew that back then.

Interviewer: Uh, do you remember FDR's speech that was about the day we shall live in infamy, were you there for that?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, I heard all those, all his speeches and I remember that one on through until, right on through because everyone was glued to the radio when Roosevelt made his speech because he was quite an eloquent man, everyone, well most people had had family members in and so they were just glued to it you know because of their personal family involvement. Yeah, and Churchill, whenever he spoke nobody missed that either, well he was an eloquent man.

Interviewer: So do you uh, did you like what FDR was doing during the Depression?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, there wasn't hostility and rivalry during the Second World War as there is in this Iraqi War. You know, if there had of been, party of power would have been more of a threat to the nation and the Nazis' but uh, yeah the moral was good uh, and everybody was for the good of the USA, you know, it wasn't like now, it just wasn't like now at all. You didn't hear all this stuff about firing all the members of the cabinet and impeaching the President and on and on and on, you just, it just wasn't there. People were loyal to their leadership, and uh, even the opposing political party was, there just wasn't any criticism of the leadership. You had to respect them in those days they were, they meant to do the best thing for America. It's different today when you just want to win an election. I don't know if that ought go on the camera.

Interviewer: Oh no, that's absolutely, you can say whatever you want. Um, now let's talk about your service, you uh, when did you join the army?

Ralph Sisson: Well, I joined the reserves in uh, I think it was October of uh, see it's on the plaque that you made for me but I was only in the reserves, in active reserves, I didn't attend the weekend meetings like the active people did, I went on active duty the 6th of December, I mean of February of 52' and I remained on active duty then until the 4th of February in 56', 4 years and then of course a total of 8 years active and inactive duty.

Interviewer: Now when you, when you joined originally in the Army and then you transferred...

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, I was in the Army Reserves and then I, when I went on active duty I chose the Air Force and uh...

Interviewer: And what was your reasoning for that?

Ralph Sisson: I knew people who had been in every branch of service, I knew them first hand, I worked with them, I talked to them, I didn't want to carry a bazooka across your, pure and simple, and uh, so I joined the Air Force and uh, I mean man there was some stories that came back, sheesh, I tell you sometime, when the cameras turned off.

Interviewer: Uh, what were you tested uh, how did the process go, you went and got a physical at a certain place and then the Air Force signs you up?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah well, I signed up there locally with the recruiter, of course they sent me down to get the physicals and all that.

Interviewer: Where did they send you?

Ralph Sisson: Huh, Oklahoma City.

Interviewer: Ok.

Ralph Sisson: And then, when I went on active duty, it was in Oklahoma City and I ended up in...Air Base is where I started my basic training.

Interviewer: So, were you married at this point?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah.

Interviewer: You got married in uh...

Ralph Sisson: Got married in 49'.

Interviewer: In 49', and when was your son born, Grant?

Ralph Sisson: He was born in February of 53'.

Interviewer: 53', so he was born after you already joined?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, he was born a year after I was in.

Interviewer: And so you went down to Oklahoma, got all your tests, did they do any aptitude test or was it all...?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, they gave me, they gave me several test and uh, I never did see any results from them, they just signed me up, sent me to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Then in 10 days they sent me up to uh, Wichita Falls, the first one was Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado.

Interviewer: Is that where you did your basic training, Colorado?

Ralph Sisson: Well uh, I did my basic training, started in Lackland and did some more in Wichita Falls, and uh, then the, after I got in the uh, special field, Air force intelligence, they sent me to Lowry field in Colorado.

Interviewer: Now how did, so the beginning, how long was the initial part that everybody goes through?

Ralph Sisson: I don't think I have uh, sheesh uh, February uh, I don't think I had but about 8 weeks of basic training, that's about all it was.

Interviewer: And that was spilt between...?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah. Lackland and Wichita Falls.

Interviewer: And when did you know you were going to be going to, I mean what kind of stuff did they do, shoot a rifle, march, they had ya'll march, what other kind of stuff did they have you do there?

Ralph Sisson: Well, they had such things as a uh, what do you call them, Rangers, where you qualify, where you climb over the see I can't remember what you call those...

Interviewer: Like an assault course?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, and uh, and then you would march day in and day out. Go on, sometimes you would go in at 2 in the morning and get off at 10 at night, and then we, there was an old walk way across the sand, no creek or anything, just a walk way like you would expect to be out over, we went out, we got to watch that all night long with a scrub brush, that concrete was just uh, you got into that probably didn't you?

Interviewer: Oh yeah, I little bit.

Ralph Sisson: Well, but it was wiped clean.

Interviewer: Now, so it was basic soldiering kind of stuff?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Basic Airman kind of stuff, the stuff that you needed to know how to do if you know, the Air Force had no planes.

Ralph Sisson: Had what?

Interviewer: Had no planes. You know, that kind of stuff that the Army was doing they had you guys doing, uh.

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, and of course we had our rifle range, we spent time down on the rifle range and uh, the generals, General Footsta and uh all the hollering and screaming that goes with it.

Interviewer: Now you were telling me a story a couple days ago about a rifle range story, do you want to share it?

Ralph Sisson: Ready on the right, ready on the left, ready on the firing line, ball ammunition lock and load, ready, phew, phew, phew, phew. The tar started exploding and the old Sergeant started screaming and yelling, who in the hell fired them shots, oh that was so funny, to see all those targets out there near exploding and he hadn't even given the fire order yet. The sergeant about choked, I think he had a minor coronary eclusion. That was funny, that was so funny. That story was told over and over again the next few days.

Interviewer: So, you graduate, did you have a graduation after, at Wichita Falls and then go to...

Ralph Sisson: Uh...

Interviewer: ...and then go to Love Air Force Base in Colorado?

Ralph Sisson: No, I don't think there was a graduation exercise, just transferred up to whatever field we were training in, whatever field we were put in and uh, went up there and attended the school, uh, it lasted until, I think it was until the 25th of May, when I got out of that and I got there in uh, about 6 or 7, about 6 or 7 weeks.

Interviewer: Now, Air Intelligence you were studying at Love Air Force Base in Colorado?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you give us an idea of what that means?

Ralph Sisson: Well, uh, the main they concentrated on was the identification of aerial photos that are taken by the recognizance and we spent an awful lot of time learning to identify photos and uh...

Interviewer: Like identify things on the photos, like this is uh...?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...this is a building, this is a bunker...

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, and the top insulation it was, and that taught things, how radar works, what radar is, now most of the people on the street today don't know what a radar is, but uh, they just, general information that we needed, basic to do what we were going to do, I was finally assigned to a squadron and intelligence, CEO and one of them would be a mission, we would brief the

pilots on every infor..., all the information we had on the topography, the land they were going to fly over, even such things as the maneuverability of the aircraft that they were going to be facing and if there was anything known about the favorite tactics, the commander of the opposing that they were going to meet, well we would tell them uh, what those opposing tactics were and then bring them back, we were going to interrogate them to try and get information that the next crew would need, and uh, that's what, that's what I spent my time working, I was in Squadron 11 and uh, your question?

Interviewer: Yeah uh, I wanted to know, you said you were at Love Air Force Base for like 6 to 8 weeks, doing these uh, recognizance uh, photo analysis, did you learn how to brief during that time period and interrogate and debrief pilots?

Ralph Sisson: No uh, we didn't learn that and we didn't, we studied aircraft recognition and that was another thing, we were to keep the pilots briefed on aircraft recognition, we had photos and models of all the enemy aircraft so they would know the exact performance characteristics of all the enemy aircraft so if they go up they know what they are going to meet in the way of aircraft type, they would know its capabilities, the maneuverability factors, they would know special tactics it might be the favorite of the commander of where they were going to meet, everything we could tell them on what they were going to meet when they got in the air, that was our job, of course again whenever they came back to get whatever information we could to pass on to more crews.

Interviewer: Um, let's see here, do you remember any fellows in, in this uh advance training that you know, became a lifelong friend or was quite funny or...?

Ralph Sisson: Well, in the military, you already know there's a level of comradery, you were friends with whoever you with, you know I had close friends, some of them grew up in the Bronx in New York, that's as far removed from my background as you can get, they were personal friends, you know I just trusted them and they trusted me, it's not like that in civilian life, uh, this is so exaggerated, my old first sergeant, Sergeant Snider, down at Birchman Field in Austin, came back in after he'd been out a while, he's been a policeman, I talked to him about why he came back in, he said because of the friendships you develop in the military, and he's right, uh, Richard Calfratna, my old partner that grew up in the Bronx, I never met a finer friend than he was and uh, Bill Cauts, Chicago born, it didn't matter what their background was you just formed friendships well and now you know that now, and uh, that is, that was one of the main things that I missed out of the military. And it has to be that way, people have to work together as you now know. And uh, so yeah, I haven't, one of them called me down in New Orleans, he lived up North of San Francisco and how he got my name, my location and my phone number, I don't know it, he called me one night and talked for a long time, Bill Mane was his name, grew up in California, and his background wasn't really too much different than mine, his dad was a, ah, he grew uh, he had a citrus grove I think and he had a huge tomato field and that type of thing, but the boy, he grew up that was his background, that was very similar to the

way I grew up but still, he wasn't any better friend than old Richard Calfratna, I know you know now, there's comradery in there that you don't find any place else and again as I said it has to be, you can't be fighting with the guy that you depend on him to save your life, and uh, it was an interesting experience at the time, I wasn't really military minded, I thought it was a little bit too regimented but when I got out and got to work in oil refineries, I found out they are more regimented than the Air Force was. Just because I went in as a young man and I hadn't gotten used to the uh, market place as you call it, yet.

Interviewer: Now when did you rejoin your wife, you know you had gone down to basic training...

Ralph Sisson: Well, uh, she was with me while I was in Colorado a couple months, and I came home from there and she stayed with my parents in Oklahoma, until I was in Georgia Air Force Base, about 100 miles East of Los Angles, out in the Mohave Desert, uh, she came there, I went there in August, and uh...

Interviewer: August of...?

Ralph Sisson: ...she came uh, in the fall. And then your dad was born in the end of February of the next year.

Interviewer: So you're saying you went to this Air Force Base in California in 52', in August of 52'?

Ralph Sisson: Uh...

Interviewer: She came in the Fall of 52', and then your dad, then my dad, sorry...

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, yeah. In the Fall of 52', she came out there and I got uh, a motel, we lived in a motel, and then uh, then in February he was born, and then that next August is when they sent me to Goose Bay, and uh, I took your dad, which is just what from February to August, 6 months, I took her and your dad back to Ponca, and left her there, found her a motel, and then she stayed there a while and stayed with my parents for a year. I was gone to Goose Bay for over a year, that was a year.

Interviewer: So you were at this Mohave Desert place, what was the name of it again?

Ralph Sisson: Georgia Air Force Base.

Interviewer: Georgia Air Force Base, yeah ok, and for how long?

Ralph Sisson: I was there from I think it was August of 52' to August of 53'. And then that's when they sent me to Georgia, I mean Goose Air Force Base in Labrador, or Goose Bay, Goose Bay is what they called it.

Interviewer: Now, what were you doing at the Georgia Air Force Base, was that more training or was that...?

Ralph Sisson: That, that was, no I was assigned to an active duty squadron, I worked with them and of course, the pilots were training, they weren't flying at the time, combat missions of course, when a lot of that time, I was assigned to uh, the field office to, uh, to keep piles of records and things like that, of course we weren't briefing any pilots, they weren't doing any combat missions but that's what I did as long as I stayed there, when I went to Goose Bay that all changed.

Interviewer: Let's talk about Goose Bay.

Ralph Sisson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where, where is that?

Ralph Sisson: It's right across on the North American Continent from Nova Scotia, and it's not very far north, when you look at the map between Greenland and uh, the continent, there's a wide water expanse there and water comes down between the continent and Greenland and it's the same temperature zone there in Labrador as it is up in Northern Greenland because of that current, it stays 30 degrees, 28 to 40 degrees below zero at night. Winter starts early, well before, sometime in November is when the really cold weather starts.

Interviewer: Is it called Goose Bay Air Force Base?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: In Labrador?

Ralph Sisson: Labrador, yeah.

Interviewer: And um, what kind of missions were they forming there?

Ralph Sisson: Well, this was a staging base, when the bombers would be sent from North America to Europe they would come over Goose Bay and what we were prepared to do, what I did up there was to, we maintained maps, and all the information that pilots would need if on missions in what was then Russian territory, and those maps would come in on a day to day basis and we would file, we would file them all in our filing system, in big cabinets, would look like a big city library, and then, one of the bombers, if there had been a war, one of the bombers, the bombers would fly through, we would provide for them what they need needed to fly the mission, that's what I did the whole year up there.

Interviewer: August 53' to August 54'?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah uh, yeah, yeah. August 53' to August 54'.

Interviewer: Uh, so you were a contingency in case Russia wanted to maybe you know, go into a folded gap, you guys were going to fly missions into Russia?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah. We were providing the necessary information they needed to navigate whatever to fly.

Interviewer: Was there ever a time when they thought they were actually going to do a mission?

Ralph Sisson: Not then, of course you during the Cold War, apprehension, people wondering is this it, is this it, is this it? And of course I got out before the human episodes, so no we never, we never got what you would call an alert, we just uh, we just didn't know when it was going to happen, of if it was going to happen.

Interviewer: So you were always on like a status to where like it could happen but...

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: ...it just happened when you were there it never did.

Ralph Sisson: It never did, no.

Interviewer: Um, did you do your job, did you brief pilots on the area of a map and what they could expect and things of that nature?

Ralph Sisson: No, we just had this huge warehouse with this big library full of, it looked like a library, and we had all this information, and we could've provided it, for whatever area they would want to go to but we didn't have any actually contact with the pilots, uh, none of us did in that particular facility, we just stored and had it, of course we naturally had to be able to provide at an instants notices, so we had to keep ourselves fully informed, and uh, but fortunately it didn't drop while I was there, course that wouldn't have been hit anyway, poor guys flying over into it.

Interviewer: What level of classification was those maps?

Ralph Sisson: Top Secret.

Interviewer: So you had top secret clearance?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Were you in, you said you were in Air Intelligence...

Ralph Sisson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that like considered Military Intell., like in the Army, is that considered like Military Intelligence, is that what the Air Force calls their...?

Ralph Sisson: They call it A2, Air Force Intelligence.

Interviewer: So you, what was the process you had to go through to get that top secret clearance, did they have a huge extensive background...?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, they talk to my Aunt Mary, and talked to neighbors all around where I lived, my parents said that all the neighbors told them that they had been there and quizzed them, and talked to the places where I had worked, the oil refinery and uh, they did that background check, I didn't personally talk to the neighbors but, the neighbors at one time or another told my folks that they had been there asking questions about whether I was a spy guy or not.

Interviewer: Now uh, was this a hardship tour, where you didn't have your family at uh, Goose Bay?

Ralph Sisson: There weren't any families up there, they just didn't have the facilities.

Interviewer: So, you didn't uh, Grandma Alta and dad stayed home in Oklahoma?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So how long had you been apart from them at this point, at the end of your tour in Goose Bay?

Ralph Sisson: Well, let's see, a year up there and uh, I had been away from them for about 18 or 20 months probably, by then, and when I came home, I went down to Birchman Field, well uh, I went from Georgia Air force Base to Goose Bay, then came back home in August of uh, 54', and then I went Birchman Field in Austin, Texas and I stayed there from August 54' until I got out in February of 56'. But uh, at Birchman Field, I was doing essentially the same thing I had done at Georgia Air Force Base, same ..., and uh, so uh, it was just a continuation of what I was doing at Georgia Air Force Base in California.

Interviewer: Now did you, could you explain maybe how, what's a squadron and what's above a squadron and how it's all kind of put together?

Ralph Sisson: Well, there would be usually in the fighter squadrons, let's see the fighter squadrons there would be 16 or 18 pilots, and uh, there would maybe about 3 squadrons to a group, and I dealt with the squadrons in a group, made contacts with the group intelligence people from time to time, and uh, I forgot now, I think we uh, I think we uh, there wouldn't be, the group would be the high stuff, organizational step would be on the base, usually a wing would be comprised of several groups, made up from several bases, but a wing is an enormous conglomerate, I had forgotten how many planes, how many piles would be on a plane, but it's a massive crew.

Interviewer: So was there 16 to 18 planes in a squadron, is there one pilot per plane or is it...?

Ralph Sisson: Well, I didn't really have any association with, I didn't have, that wasn't part of my scope of responsibility, I don't know, I really didn't work with anybody, like in uh, maintenance system, I don't know, how many planes they had there are a continuous basis, but I know, the main thing I did during that period was help the operations people keep records on time flown on each pilot, and uh, just basic operations and field officers work, but I don't know how many planes they would have had access to in combat, I was thinking somewhere around 16 to 20 for a squadron.

Interviewer: How did your particular section, how was it set up, did you have a couple NCO's in charge and then was there like a whole Air Intelligence company or...?

Ralph Sisson: No, I was the Air Intelligence NCO, squadron level and it grew, they had uh, I think it was Sergeant and they had uh, we had an officer in charge, which he would be, he would usually be a captain, Captain Snow there in California, but I'd be the only one squadron level, so I was uh, actually part of the squadron, chain of command, I didn't deal on a day to day basis with the intelligence people group, so I had probably a little less hour by hour, military regimentation, I wore the outfit, member of a group but I was only NCO in Intelligence at the squadron level that I was assigned to, I was the only one.

Interviewer: So you did all the filing yourself?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, I did everything, everything was done in my field.

Interviewer: So they didn't have anybody else work with you, it was just you?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, just me and one of the pilots was assigned the errands, the squadrons officer but I knew who he was and I just didn't deal with him, he never, he didn't uh, I didn't have any interaction with him.

Interviewer: He never bothered you...?

Ralph Sisson: No, no interaction at all, which is another good thing too. It was a good field to be in, I just, you didn't have much of a choice, they just put you where they needed you, I don't know, maybe they still do that, but it's true that that was one of the ones that we could bid on was that field and try to get, I got the one I asked for but they just put people where they needed them, that's the way it's always been. Promotions came by availability, when they needed people, I knew people that were really good people that wouldn't get promoted for almost a whole hitch, and uh, I got three strikes the first year but that was just because of there were vacancies and if there's a vacancy, they probably do it the same way, they send in front of the board of officers and then raise you Air Force specialty code or your MOS as you would call it, raise your Air Force Specialty code so that you had your proper level, I went through that evaluation board about a year or so after I got a 7 level, which was qualified me to make a tech sergeant.

Interviewer: Now that would have been an E6, right?

Ralph Sisson: Um, let's see E3, yeah that would have been an E6.

Interviewer: You got out as an E5 of staff sergeant, right?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, yeah I was Staff, but I had uh, 20470, which is the qualifications to make tech, I already had passed the board and qualified...

Interviewer: So if you would have stayed in maybe 6 months more, you would have been a tech sergeant?

Ralph Sisson: Probably, probably so depending on the need for one at the time, but probably yeah.

Interviewer: What was the pay like?

Ralph Sisson: Uh, I remember I got 270 dollars a month including my family allowances, form staff sergeant, that included the family allowances again, but they made in about 72', they made a major change, increase in military pay, and I knew a man that had been in near a lifetime, he lived there at the end of Delta, where you did, down there at Muras, and he had been in, he'd been a measure, and the reason I know is because we were talking one time and he was telling me about the pay increase, the measure made the same as I was making on my job and uh, working for Gulf War there you know, which was an immense raise in pay from what it had been, when I was in, 275 dollars a month wasn't, you could just barely hang on with it.

Interviewer: Did Grandma Hamilton, did your wife have to work?

Ralph Sisson: No, your dad was uh, just a little bitty guy and we went down there and she never did work while he was that little.

Interviewer: So you sent, when you were in Goose Bay you sent money home for her?

Ralph Sisson: Well, yeah, but the military her the allowance money, and uh, I didn't personally have to take it and send it to her, they sent it right to her and uh, and of course with her staying with my parents, she didn't have to pay rent, I think she paid some grocery bills but she didn't have to pay rent and uh we were able to hang on that way.

Interviewer: Now when you came back from Goose Bay to Birchman field, is that right, is that how you pronounced it?

Ralph Sisson: Uh, yeah, Burgstrum, it's closed down now, it doesn't exist.

Interviewer: Did Grandma move down to Burgstrum Field, Austin, Texas?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah.

Interviewer: To Texas with you. So you were there another year and a half before you got out, another year...

Ralph Sisson: Yeah another year and half at Burgstrum, that's correct. August of 54' and February of 56', yeah.

Interviewer: So, what was it like living there, was it a good feeling to have your family back with you?

Ralph Sisson: Do what?

Interviewer: A good feeling to have you family back with you?

Ralph Sisson: Oh my, yes, it really was.

Interviewer: So during that time at Goose Bay you didn't come home at all, that whole year you were...?

Ralph Sisson: I got to fly, well, I developed eye trouble, and they put me on, I went on sick call and they checked me into the hospital and kept me on KP for a week, they called me and asked me how my eyes were, and I could see, they thought I was putting it on, you know so I told them my eyes were better so they let me loose and I got a flight on the 36 and came home, and uh, got my eyes tested, got glasses, didn't have any more after I got my glasses, but I came home and uh, in early February of 55' but that was the only reason, I had to get those glasses. All they were going to do was leave me in the hospital on KP, and that wasn't helping a bit. Oh, that upset me.

Interviewer: Now uh, what kind of planes was the enemy using at this point?

Ralph Sisson: Well, uh, we didn't have any involvement with that uh, German Jet, that wasn't uh, I had, I'll tell you sometime when you're up there, I'll show you, I have an enormous number of uh, if they haven't become destroyed of uh, pictures of the air equipment that was in those days, sometime when you're up there I'll show you. Uh, but uh, most of the time, like when I was out at uh, down at Burgstrum the last year and a half, uh, I just showed up the operational people and helped them with things, I didn't get into air recognition quite nearly in the depth that I had expected to, but I was kind of a farmed out to the operations department to help them with their records. It would have been a lot different if they would have gone into combat, I would have gone back and done the things that I described here that I was trained to do, but don that year and a half at Burgstrum Field, I was just kind of a outsourced as they call it these days, to the operations department, and uh, course in that period of time that wasn't one of the hottest periods of time, the was right before the Bay of Pigs and before the big threats were really shown, you know, there was obviously intercontinental rivalry, and we , we knew the depth of the conflict, during that time it wasn't like they were going to strike any men, so we uh, I got outsourced.

Interviewer: What kind of stuff did you do in the operations department?

Ralph Sisson: Well, all the pilots, they keep detailed records on how much they flown, how much night time they've got, and how many landings they made, and just on and on, on the details on their flights, and uh, I would help the operations people with uh, keep all those records uh, and then uh, and then all they would uh, they would pass down every two weeks I think, group intelligence and I would from time to time, have a meeting with all the pilots, and I would pass down whatever information had come down from the magnificent high so to speak, I would pass it on to the pilots in a group setting, and uh, but very, very little contact with my own department I had, which was from the stand point of being a temporary military man and getting out in four years, and that was the greatest, best thing that could have happened to me though.

Interviewer: So you were excited to get out?

Ralph Sisson: Oh, yes. I was like a kid with a new bicycle. Oh my, yes I was excited, yeah.

Interviewer: What had you dreamed to do when you got out of the Air Force?

Ralph Sisson: I was going to go back to school, and I took test down at the University of Texas, to determine the aptitude to determine and had everything set up, I was going back to school and your grandmother was going to work, and we had her plan made, and uh, I was going to quit my job at the refinery, which I went back to it, but I was going to quit soon as she got done with her business school and I was going to college.

Interviewer: So she was going to business school?

Ralph Sisson: Yeah, she started to it but she, every time she'd pick me up she'd say Grant, he cries full moon, every place we leave him, he cries full moon and we ain't going to let that happen, and it went on for a while, I said you just go down and quit, that little boy is more important then college, so she quit and I never went to college, I went part time, whenever I went into the Air Force, I was going to night school, uh, and working 8 hours at the refinery, and of course my name came up on the draft, and I didn't want to let them draft me so I signed up for the Air Force. Oh, wait a minute, wait a minute, I've got my story twisted here a little bit, before I went in I was going to school, night school, I worked, geeze I haven't been over this in my mind for so long I got a little chronology backwards there, before I went in I was going to night school, and then when I got out is when we put Grant in Daycare and she went to her school, I was working at the refinery, that's the way it was, and then she quit when we couldn't make an adjustment at the daycare center, and I continued to work and later on, got the job that you know about.

Interviewer: Um, we're about at an hour, normally at the end of this I will leave a little bit of time for...

Ralph Sisson: What?

Interviewer: I said we're about at an hour in the tape, I said normally at the end of the interviewer I just let the interviewee just kind of have a few minutes to say whatever they will about their experiences in the military, and so the floor is yours.

Ralph Sisson: Well, at the time, I just never did think I adjusted to military ways, but a few years later I was glad I spent my time in, I learned a lot I couldn't have learned any other way, I had some exciting experiences, you know, one experience I had and the type of thing that really turned me on was I got me a nose barrel hop on a B36 a few times and one time we were flying between Maine and Labrador some places, I don't know a few hours outside of Labrador, when you're up above the cloud at night and the moon shines down on the clouds, there's no fuzz at all, you know, now you don't realize it but there's a fuzziness if you look off into the distance but up there if you look out on a cloud, it's solid, it's solid as that wall there you know, there's no haziness at all, and one time I got this particular flight, I got, they just put you in whatever seats vacant and I didn't have a gun, so they put me up in that big bubble up on top, right above the wing, you know got those big 6 pushers, turbo props and then the jet pods out on the end of the wing, and I was able from that vantage point to see out and see the tops of the clouds from I don't know 6 or 7 miles high, and uh, it was the most beautiful I've ever seen in my life, things like that uh, up over the north land it looks different than it does down here, in 84' when they had the Worlds' Fair, at New Orleans, I went to it 7 or 8 times, and when I went to the Canadian 7, because it reminded me of what I had seen up there, and you see hundreds of lakes every place and they don't have a stream in and a stream out just a hole in the ground full of water you know, and it's just you don't see that down here on the continent, I mean down here, it's just different, so different, so fascinating, but things like that were uh.....(end tape).....