

Ernest Jones

Clarksville, TN

September 19, 1924

Interviewer: What branch of the service did you serve in?

Mr. Jones: I was in the Army Air Corps.

Interviewer: What type of primary unit did you serve in during your time in the Air Corps?

Mr. Jones: I was with the command that jumped the 182nd Airborne on D Day in 1944, June 6.

Interviewer: What were your parent's names?

Mr. Jones: Will and Myrtle Jones.

Interviewer: What were their occupations?

Mr. Jones: My mother was a homemaker. My father was a mechanic; an automobile mechanic.

Interviewer: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Jones: I have one brother who is deceased. He was four years older than I.

Interviewer: Did you both make it through high school or how far did you make it through school?

Mr. Jones: I made it through high school; actually, after I came home from the service I finished high school and then went to vocational school in Memphis, TN, William R Morris School of Technology.

Interviewer: What were you learning there?

Mr. Jones: Automotive mechanic and drafting.

Interviewer: Do you have any recollections about the Great Depression?

Mr. Jones: I knew it was a very difficult time for my parents, of course having been born in '24; I was six years old during the Depression. I knew that there wasn't much material for anybody, and everyone had to work to get the necessities. Having been that age, I often tell people that in order to have dessert we had to go out and pick blackberries, and

used to often wonder why my father would get up early to go squirrel hunting before he would open up his mechanics shop. I asked him one day and he said for us to have meat on the table he had to go squirrel hunting. So these certainly were difficult days for everyone.

Interviewer: You said that you went to the vocational school. Did you have a job before you went into the service?

Mr. Jones: No, I was 18 when I went into the service. Six months after I turned 18 I was inducted into the Air Corps.

Interviewer: Do you ever remember hearing about the Germans or the Japanese before Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Jones: Oh yea. It was quite knowledgeable in my mind that I was probably going to be entering the service very soon because of the conflict that was going on and the movement of the German troops and Hitler's objective and then the Japanese, who later laid their sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. Being at that age of expecting to be called into the service and being a part of this great conflict; yes, it was quite knowledgeable in my mind that we were entering into quite a conflict.

Interviewer: Did you and your father read the newspapers? Did your father subscribe to the newspapers?

Mr. Jones: No, it wasn't by way of newspaper it was by radio; it was somewhat popular at that time. Most of our information came by radio, or my information was through radio. As we discussed earlier, it was actually quite an expense to subscribe to the newspaper, so we did not have a newspaper coming into our home.

Interviewer: Do you remember where you were when you got word of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Jones: Very well; my father had already moved to West Tennessee to work at the Milan Army Ammunition Plant. As this installation was being built for the purpose of trying to have part in stopping , there was quite a surge of people and workers that were moving into the West Tennessee area. So we moved there when I was a junior in high school in Carthage, Tennessee. He uprooted me to West Tennessee where he was employed at Milan Army Ammunition Plant. On the day that Pearl Harbor was attacked, I remember that we were on our way home from the Carthage area coming to the West TN area; Sunday evening around seven o'clock. It flashed to all the airwaves by way of radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Interviewer: Did you hear FDR's speech the next day, the Day of Infamy Speech?

Mr. Jones: I don't recall listening to his speech, but naturally I heard about it. I can't say that I listened to it first-hand, but I did hear it shortly thereafter. Naturally I think it was

one of the greatest speeches I've ever heard. This was understandable because I had never been exposed to something like that and I thought very highly of FDR and his leadership. With his physical condition, I was in great sympathy of what he had to address because of the world getting into the war.

Interviewer: Did you ever in your wildest dreams imagine that war would come to the shores of America at that point in time in your life?

Mr. Jones: No, it was truly a shock. We knew that something like this had occurred, whether we heard about it or read about it in our high school days, but it was a shocker that it was brought to America.

Interviewer: When did you realize that there was a possibility that you would be drafted?

Mr. Jones: It was quite obvious that there was a concern and a need for soldiers. I can say that my friends were being drafted, because I was apart of that group at that particular time, and I think it was one of the youngest groups at that time. There were some of my friends in the high school in Carthage that had volunteered and gotten into the Marine Corps. A couple of the services were allowing volunteers, and these individuals had already finished high school so they volunteered. I knew that it would eventually come to me. I was in vocational school studies and I wanted to get as much of that as I possibly could before I entered the service, so I just waited a few days and then I was drafted.

Interviewer: Did you have a preference about which branch you wanted to serve in?

Mr. Jones: Not really; as they told me at the recruiting center they had spots for all branches, and having been physically fit, they offered me the option to go into any branch of the service and I told them they had brought me this far, so they could put me where they wanted me. So thank God that I wanted to do Air Corps. I'm very proud of it.

Interviewer: When did you receive the papers that you had been drafted?

Mr. Jones: That was March 17, 1943, and I was asked to report to the Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia. I left Carroll County on March 23 and I was sworn in March 27.

Interviewer: When you made it to Fort Oglethorpe, did they give you any IQ tests?

Mr. Jones: Yes we had something like the ACT test. They gave you quite a few tests, and they did this to see where I would be best fitted; to see what particular branch I would be going into.

Interviewer: Do you think your training at the technical school had any effect on you going into the Air Corps?

Mr. Jones: I'm sure it did because in this training there were some airplane mechanic requirements to cover and also in communications at the vocational school. There was some radio work to be done and I was in communication in my assigned area, and I served as a radio scholar and radio operator on the plane, as a substitute to relieve the regular crew.

Interviewer: Where did they send you from Fort Oglethorpe to basic training?

Mr. Jones: We went to Greensboro, North Carolina. We were the first group that went there after it was constructed; reason I remember that so well is because there was a lot of debris we had to pick up that was left behind by the construction crews.

Interviewer: Were you selected for any kind of specialized training?

Mr. Jones: Well I was sent from Greensboro to a technical school in Missouri, which is a communication school. That's where I got the telephone installation and repairing training and also the radio operator training before I was assigned to a regular outfit. So I went from Greensboro in basic training to Camp Roberts in Missouri and from there I went to Fort Wayne Indiana to be assigned to a regular Air Force unit to start my training and to serve as a unit.

Interviewer: What was your impression of your fellow recruits?

Mr. Jones: I was impressed. I can remember that most of those that I was associated with were high school graduates, individuals who loved their country and loved their fellow man. I was impressed with them.

Interviewer: Was that the first time you had been a great distance away from home?

Mr. Jones: Yes, Memphis was the farthest I had ever been prior to that.

Interviewer: Did you participate in any maneuvers stateside?

Mr. Jones: Yes; our primary responsibility with the Air Force was to air jump with the 82nd and 101st Airborne so we started immediately training with them, and a lot of our responsibility was making supply runs and go on maneuvers and lay communication lines and jumping with troopers. This was part of preparing ourselves and training ourselves to go overseas.

Interviewer: How well do you think that training prepared you for what you were going to face overseas?

Mr. Jones: We were very prepared. It was very in depth, of course time was of the essence; it was all done in a hurry-up kind of situation because of the immense job we had.

Interviewer: What were the living conditions like in those camps?

Mr. Jones: Under the circumstances I would say it was very good. We all were highly disciplined and we each knew what our job was and put forth the effort to see that it was done in a manner that was pleasing to our superiors.

Interviewer: What was your impression of the 82nd and 101st as you participated in jumping with them?

Mr. Jones: They were a tough group of people who were being highly trained to do a very important job and fulfill their assignment.

Interviewer: After all of your training was over, what kind of unit were you placed in?

Mr. Jones: I was placed in the 440th troop carrier command and I was a part of the 97th squadron. My unit was made up of four squadrons; we had the 95th, 96th, 97th, and 98th squadrons and I was assigned to the 97th. Each squadron had somewhere around 350 and 400 recruits, with each having a special job to perform.

Interviewer: How did you travel overseas?

Mr. Jones: I went by boat out of Camp Shanks, New York in February of '44.

Interviewer: How long did it take?

Mr. Jones: Fourteen days; it seemed like a lifetime. That was the first experience I had riding, and it was a Louis Pasteur troop ship that we were placed on, and the way that we had to go and maneuver took us longer than normal, but that was for security reasons. We landed in Scotland and a few days after went to England where we started assembling our equipment to prepare ourselves for the future.

Interviewer: Do you remember how many troops were on board the Pasteur?

Mr. Jones: There was something like 1800.

Interviewer: You said it was 14 very long days. Tell me about that. How was the food?

Mr. Jones: Well, if you've ever been seasick, the food was nauseating. You didn't want any food, and I was sick. I got sick the second day out and I tell people that I stayed sick until the day we landed. I made it fine the first couple of days until I was a crew member that was sick, and that impressed me very much so I got sick and stayed sick with them.

Interviewer: Was the weather rough?

Mr. Jones: Well it being February it was. They said the weather was unusually rough on the Atlantic at that time.

Interviewer: You said you had to take the long way around. Do you believe that was because of unusual activity?

Mr. Jones: Yes for security reasons, we didn't want to get into areas where there had been submarine activity, so we had to go around those areas.

Interviewer: When you landed, you said they moved you to England. Did they put you in temporary or permanent barracks then?

Mr. Jones: They were little huts that we were assigned to. Hitler at this time was using a lot of their buzz bombs; that was unmanned airplanes, to destroy or try to destroy England and we were called out of the area we were staying to go to a bomb shelter. It seemed like every hour on the hour planes were coming over and I told myself that we wouldn't be asked to fly tomorrow because we were being disturbed all night, but it didn't work that way. We still had a job to perform.

Interviewer: Were you allowed to have any civilian contacts or were you very close to a major city?

Mr. Jones: No we were very busy getting everything consolidated and we weren't on the same base with the 82nd and 101st Airborne but we were in contact with them. We were setting up communication equipment to communicate between the two units because we were going to be making very close contact shortly. Of course we weren't aware of all this, but we knew we were very busy preparing for it.

Interviewer: You stayed in the 97th the whole time you were there?

Mr. Jones: Yes.

Interviewer: What was your impression of your NCOs and other officers?

Mr. Jones: They became just like family. I'm not familiar with the service today, but I had a dear friend that lives in New Jersey and he was of the Catholic faith and I'm Protestant and we met in Missouri when the Calgary was forming for the outfit and he kind of took me under his wing as a father approach and we went through all of this together and became very good friends. He was my best friend, but like I said everybody was somewhat like family.

Interviewer: What kind of things did you do to prepare in the camp while you were in England?

Mr. Jones: Well we had our own communication department and we had our own assignment and as I said mine was primarily telephone installing and repair and switchboard operator and once we started preparing ourselves and flying, the regular

crew members had so much flying they had to do so they used me as a radio operator on the plane to relieve the regular crew members, and that existed throughout the war effort.

Interviewer: Did you do any training with weapons or anything?

Mr. Jones: No, on our particular plane all we had assigned to us as far as ammunition was a 45 automatic. Our plane was the C47; Looney Bird was the nickname for it. Of course they use helicopters now, but we used C47s and C46s and inverted B24s. The initial move was to drop the troopers, then come back to base and get supplies, and carry supplies up to where we dropped the troops. We had the Glider Infantry that we had to tow and carry them up to the front and release them. The Glider was a motor less aircraft that was used for towing troops up to the war effort.

Interviewer: Do you remember your first mission overseas?

Mr. Jones: Yes, it was a gasoline supply mission to the troops. We didn't encounter any problems. It was an interesting trip because I was privileged to see what had transpired during the D Day operations. I did not go on the D Day mission because the regular crews were assigned to that and my job was to fill in and relieve the regular crew.

Interviewer: But your squadron did participate in the D Day mission?

Mr. Jones: Yes and the whole group participated on D Day June 6, 1944.

Interviewer: What was your major assignment on that day?

Mr. Jones: On this particular mission, it was as a radio operator.

Interviewer: Did you do anything on the ground during D Day?

Mr. Jones: On that D Day it was just the normal routine because the area we were stationed already had communications intact. It was ready a few days prior to that D Day so it was just another day at the office, so to speak.

Interviewer: Tell me about your impression of what you had seen as you were flying the gasoline to the army.

Mr. Jones: Well, I was really introduced to what war is all about then. I could see the devastation, because everything looked like it was destroyed, of course it wasn't just a clean sweep but it was almost a clean sweep.

Interviewer: How would you describe the togetherness of your unit?

Mr. Jones: We were united. Each individual was willing to do the job that he was assigned. It was a very impressive time. We acted like we knew exactly what we were supposed to do and we did it.

Interviewer: Did you have any real close friends inside your unit?

Mr. Jones: Yes, the one I spoke of earlier. We keep in real close contact still. He lives in New Jersey. All of the rest of them became just like a family member. We they hurt, you hurt. Of course you have your special individuals that you share your aches and pains with and he was one that I was able to do that with.

Interviewer: Did you have any free time?

Mr. Jones: Yes we were given time from Atlanta to Liverpool, from Liverpool to England, from England to France, and from France we went to Germany. During different segments of this time we were able to go back to England on what they called combat leave. I jokingly tell people that I was in more danger in London than I was in France because of the buzz bombs. We weren't in the front lines; our job was to fly the 101st and 82nd Airborne into combat so we entered the combat. We were privileged to go to London and Paris on different occasions.

Interviewer: What did you do on those trips?

Mr. Jones: Well Glenn Miller; you've probably never heard of him, but Glenn Miller and his troops were responsible for entertaining the troops. They had their own band and they were in England at the same time I was in the 9th Air Force and they were assigned to the 8th Air Force, so the 8th and the 9th were in England at the same time. Maybe others were there too, but these two I remember very vividly. They entertained the troops in England and after my outfit got to France, Miller's band was sent over to Paris to entertain the troops, and this was when Glenn Miller became dislocated and they never found him. To this day, they don't know where he is. His plane went down and we don't know why, but the band continued on in Paris and we were privileged to go to Paris and see him and other USO troops entertain.

Interviewer: Did you play any cards or read or play sports with some of your fellow crew members?

Mr. Jones: Yes to pass time we would play checkers and Blackjack and Pinochle. Having gotten married just before I went overseas, all of my compensation went to my wife, so we didn't have much money to go see the world so that kept us near the base.

Interviewer: Did you write a lot of letters home?

Mr. Jones: Yes I tried to write a note; just a paragraph or two everyday, and she would relay information to my mom and dad, and I would write to them also.

Interviewer: How often did you receive mail?

Mr. Jones: It came sporadically. We would get a lot of letters at one time on a monthly basis.

Interviewer: Did you ever have leave to come back home?

Mr. Jones: No I stayed in Europe the whole time. It wasn't all that long; I got to Europe in February of '44 and I was discharged November 14, 1945. I landed in Boston, Massachusetts November 9th; I guess the reason I remember that was because that is my wife's birthday. I came from Boston, Massachusetts to Camp Atterbury, Indiana and was discharged November 14. I took a train from Indiana to Tredworth.

Interviewer: When you were overseas, did you fly any missions where you came under fire?

Mr. Jones: No sir. I wasn't exposed to actual combat.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of your...?

Mr. Jones: Some of my buddies who flew missions on a daily basis and who were apart of D Day, they were in an aircraft and damage was done to their plane. Some were shot down; their motors were shot out and it crippled them but they were able to land. I was very blessed and very lucky that I didn't have that exposure.

Interviewer: What kind of rations did you receive there?

Mr. Jones: C-rations; I called them dog food.

Interviewer: You said you stayed in huts in England. How were the sleeping arrangements?

Mr. Jones: Well there were initially fourteen soldiers in each hut, then later on we had our own tents that we put up, but primarily we used a lot of the French quarters that they had vacated for our particular needs and use.

Interviewer: Did you ever feel overworked or sleep deprived?

Mr. Jones: There were times, yes, that our assignments required us to not get the amount of sleep we needed, but it was understandable. It wasn't a real problem.

Interviewer: How far into Germany did your squadron go?

Mr. Jones: Frankfurt; in dropping the troops after D Day we would fly, but the infantry and all the other resources that we had at the time, they had already cleared the area for us to land and unload supplies and then we would take off and come back to our home base. It wasn't like you were going into artillery fire every time you went out, cause the other armies had already covered this territory and somewhat made it safe.

Interviewer: What were some of the air bases you were stationed at in between England and Frankfurt?

Mr. Jones: In England we were at two different air bases called Bottesford and Exeter. This was near London. From there we went over to France and set up quarters at Reims, which was the capital champagne center. Then we went to Orleans, France, and then we went into Frankfurt, Germany. We didn't do too much moving, as far as moving the entire outfit. We would pick up occasionally and go to certain areas; I did not go on this particular mission but the Calgary outfit went down to Southern France and stayed for six weeks to stage the Southern France invasion. We were credited with the 7th major invasion, and in order to stage those we had to go to different areas a lot of times.

Interviewer: Were you ever promoted during your time in Europe?

Mr. Jones: I went in as a private and came out as a sergeant.

Interviewer: Did you feel the promotions you received were deserved?

Mr. Jones: Certainly, but that really wasn't a priority. Getting the job done and getting home was the top priority. There wasn't much of a celebration over promotions. It wasn't like in the business world where you were striving to get promotions or get assigned to another job, you just did what you were assigned to do and became satisfied with that and did the best job you knew how to do.

Interviewer: Did you ever get a sense of the big picture or the strategy of the war?

Mr. Jones: No; that didn't hit me until I became a mature adult. Being as young as I was and not having a formal education had something to do with that, the attitude about the strategy of the war. I never was privileged to study about it, even before I was placed in this position.

Interviewer: Did you realize how big your squadron's participation was then or after the war?

Mr. Jones: Not at the time that it was going on; after it was over with we had time to think about it. We felt that we played an important role in the effort.

Interviewer: Looking back on it, how would you describe your years in the service?

Mr. Jones: It was awesome and educational. It matured me quickly; because I thought I was put on my own at a young age under strict leadership, I was able to accept and appreciate it. If every young man and young lady could go through some of the discipline that I went through I would recommend it. Of course, I know that is not

possible. Whoever made out the training curriculum knew what they were doing and we followed it to the T.

Interviewer: So you think your experience was vital to your success later in life?

Mr. Jones: Absolutely; some may question this, but I think it certainly made me a man. It prepared me to face the future in the business world; regardless of what capacity I was working, it matured me. Most of all it made me appreciate America.

Interviewer: You said you took a train back from Indiana to Tredworth, Missouri. How met you at the train station?

Mr. Jones: My wife and my father-in-law.

Interviewer: What was it like to be home?

Mr. Jones: I didn't hardly believe what was happening; I knew that the future was before me and becoming a family man and having a family, but by the grace of God it worked. We've been married 59 years. We have one child and two grandchildren.