

Interview with Emmett Crouch
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Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection
St. Cloud State University Archives
Interviewed by John Carter

PART ONE

- Carter: Now I'm just going to start by asking you some questions, where are you from originally?
- Crouch: I live in Alabama...
- Carter: Now where are you from? Where is your home town?
- Crouch: Oh I was born in Richmond but I've lived here most of my life in the District.
- Carter: In DC? How old were you when World War II broke out?
- Crouch: 1941, I was 21 years old.
- Carter: You were 21 years old, what were you doing?
- Crouch: A machinist with the navy yard.
- Carter: Machinist at the navy yard, all right. Now, when the war broke out what did you do?
- Crouch: I stayed working because they wouldn't turn me lose, as far as that goes. But as soon as the air force dropped its requirements for college education I enlisted.
- Carter: When would that be?
- Crouch: September '42.
- Carter: So you enlisted September '42, all right but you were held from enlisting by the government then because of your job you were working.
- Crouch: Yeah. I work on the factory.
- Carter: And you enlisted in 1942?
- Crouch: September '42.
- Carter: September '42 where did the air force send you to begin with?
- Crouch: One, from here to Miami Beach where induction of the nation or whatever they call it. Actually, it is the holding area, and I went from there

to San Antonio, Texas to the cadet side there. It was the classification center they called it on one side of the road, and I did that center on the other side of the road. And the classification center, it was all kinds of tests and then later around, you took more tests, both physical and mental and everything. And that's when you earn coordination the whole bit, that's when you were rated per bombardier -- navigator bombardier. My luck was illustrating navigator and then bombardier, and if you didn't qualify for any of those three then you went back into the enlisted ranks in the air force. Then a lot of us qualified for all three, and we actually had made our choice, well almost everybody wanted to be a pilot. Then after that, I forget the number of weeks we were there, probably six weeks, spare time, you picked up rocks off the quarry and did PT and got shots and people were passing and all that sort of thing. Then we went from there to the cadet center which was across the road which is the life on the air force base now. And that's when you took all your ground school classes for your first. We took them all the way through cadet training. But you took your ground school classes, you drilled, you marched, you got basic military courtesy and stuff, and I had all that previously and a bunch of us had. So we got along pretty easy with that.

Carter: Why did you have it previously?

Crouch: I had it in Washington high school cadets, and I knew all the drills, the manual of arms and I was good at that also and I was used to giving orders to companies and battalions and regiments even, and so forth. And then I went from there to primary school in Pine Bluff, Arkansas which was a civilian operated facility taken over by the government. And all of our instructors were civilians, and our check pilots were military, but our civilian pilots were some of the hottest pilots I've ever seen in my life. They were former crop dusters, private pilots and were a little bit crazy and -- this is the god's honest truth, they were the hottest pilots I ever saw. So my instructor pilot and another one in particular had flown just about everything that had wings at some time or another, he was a year younger

than I was at that time and he could scream loud over the gospel tubes which they had from front to rear cot bed. Fitted in your helmet and he's spoken to a tube where he can blow in and blow your eardrums out if he was mad, and we were flying PT-17 it's a fair child.

Low wing, fixed gear and these guys were just good, I mean they were good. And of course -- oh no, I'm sorry, let me go back, we went from Miami Beach to the University of Florida, for cadet training there, they had a cadet program CTB they called it. And we were at the University of Florida for there again, numbers of weeks escape me right now, but quite some time. And we went to all kinds of -- in fact we took the freshman year, college freshman year studies, we had English, we had Physics we had the whole bit, but our Physics professor was also an expert on aviation engines. I mean he was good too, he had been a mechanic in his time and he knew engines like crazy, and then we went to the cadet center and so forth. And after Pine Bluff, which was a quieter field at Pine Bluff Arkansas, that was a great town for cadets, people loved us. They had things set up for us it was **[unintelligible - 00:06:00]** they invited us to their homes for dinner and everybody had girlfriends and that sort of thing if you would go for dinner. And you were flying cross country after bed you were doing the acrobatics and that's when your first soloed was there and that University of Florida we flew 10 hours **[unintelligible - 00:06:23]** and I got sick 10 times.

Carter: You get air sick all 10...

Crouch: I got air sick all 10 times, I threw up all 10 times, it come -- it come back and land, the instructor would taxi right over the hose, and I get it more suicidal plane though. Until I got sick I did fine, went to primary training the first three times in primary, I got sick. It was only after I passed my first check ride, I didn't get sick anymore. I went to basic; I got sick my first time in basic, after that I didn't get sick anymore. I went to advance school flying twin engine, I got sick the first time there because he had me re-tracking the gear on a hot summer day with my head bent down

practically under my seat pranking the gear up, then after that I never got sick on an airplane again. And the doctor said it was all psychological, it was this tension, I was trying too hard. It wasn't emotional or anything it was just I was too tensed up. Because after I graduate I never got sick on an airplane again.

Carter: Had you ever flown before?

Crouch: I'd flown one time an old ford tri motor when I was up the national rifle pistol matches in Ohio at Canterbury, Ohio. Now we took a ride a ride in the old four tri motor at the lake about an hour and that was it, but I'd always wanted to fly. I saw Limburg on my father's shore it was coming up Pennsylvania Avenue when he came back from Paris. And my true overwhelming ambition had always been to be a pilot and being an Army officer. And I read everything under the sun that was trending on aircraft, I used to buy all kinds of the aircraft magazines, **[unintelligible - 00:08:14]** air trails. In fact I have about nine of the issues of that magazine bound in three two volume. I had an aunt that was -- worked in a book binding, she bound these for me, and they are really interesting to look back and see what was a fighter plane then you know and the PT-20 **[unintelligible - 00:08:37]** 26 was new. That was our first line of hot fighter, there a Martin bomber, was a hot bomber and so forth. They were still flying a lot of twin engine stuff and -- so anyway, I went from primary to basic because at independence, Kansas and we flew BT-13s and 14s there which was a gigantic fixed landing yellow wing the plane was all metal covering. Got a little bit hotter but more of that radio equipment, had a radio campus and then I think and you know more refinements. And you got more acrobatics, you got more cross country, you got your first night flying and so forth. And then I went from there to Fredrick, Oklahoma which was just across the red river from Texas form Shepherd field, and I flew a UC78 I recall it was Cessna twin engine.

Carter: Is that the one they nicknamed the Bamboo bomber; there was one twin engine I don't remember which one it was.

Crouch: I'm not sure, I don't know that I [00:10:00] was during the war that I would agree that term but it could very well be it was --

Carter: But how many hours did you accumulated by the time you got to advance? Yeah I know there was a set number of for the basic number?

Crouch: Oh, yeah there was I know. I really recall what they were. But we flew a longer a longer flight does here time when the basic to advance and so forth. You're flying long and more crossed country, more navigational flight more night flight, instrument flight and so forth. And in fact we started instruments on basic. So were they put the hood up and then advanced and they used to put a color plash on the windows. And where wear the goggles and black out. And -- that was at the time then an advanced school when you made your choices of what you wanted to fly, when you graduate. And my first choices were A-20s, B-25s and the True carrier. I didn't put down four engine bombers there and bombers at all, because that is what I want up to now.

Carter: Why -- you didn't want to be a fighter pilot?

Crouch: No.

Carter: You didn't?

Crouch: No. I had no desire to be a fighter pilot for some reasons. I -- I never was really that good at acrobatic to be honest, I can do all of them but I can do a miss on up row but a slow row, I fall [unintelligible - 00:11:49] that's half of the time. And -- [unintelligible - 00:11:54] I can do illusion all sort of things spins out no problem, but I just -- like some of the guys that always thought of doing acrobatics, I can do them and I did but I wasn't wild about them. It was just -- I don't know because I wouldn't cut up to be that hot shot fighter pilot.

Carter: When were you awarded your wings? You got -- you eventually got.

Crouch: 43 class of 43 -- 43 or 44D. I've forgotten which it was. My memory the dates and...

[CROSSTALK]

Carter: All right that's okay I don't expect you to -- after number of years
[unintelligible - 00:12:35].

Crouch: But I think it was in -- I just try and think. I guess it was 44D, yeah.

Carter: And that is after you've finished what advanced?

Crouch: Advanced.

Carter: Advanced all right then. From advanced they sent you to --

Crouch: I broke my foot at advanced school playing basketball and -- I was held back for the following class. And the only thing that didn't break my heart board, I was one sad cookie when they put me in that hospital and told I won't finish up like graduate with my class. And when I finally did get out of hospital you know sitting around because I would have most of the ground school and all that low flying and all I did was just kill time until time to graduate. And I didn't know most of these guys; I mean I know someone to speak to same ground. But I really didn't know them well, not like my class that I've been always been with. Back one night two of them came back and a barrack and I was laying on my bunk and somebody just throw the bag and called, attention, these students spend more time walk in. And -- I started to get up and I saw they were at the door right. I laid back down on my bunk and the guy next to me, "Hey get up there's two officers" I said I know these two clowns. "Where is Crouch you" I said "I'm over here" and they followed [unintelligible - 00:14:00]. I know Joe de Santo. And I said "I'm over here walk come over." They came over, we had a bottle and brought it over we sat around drinking and talking or discussing. Geez I'm sitting there drinking with two officers you know anybody with wings and a dog you know [unintelligible - 00:14:21] God until you got them, it makes sense but it's not too hard. But I think it was 44, early 44 when I graduated. And -- then I went. That was the first time I had a real home since I had been there and I came home on a delay around, got home get time to light this I can't even swallow a strand of Spaghetti put me in Walter Reed hospital for two days and finally got rid of tonsillitis and I send a request to the new base which was Liberal,

Kansas, ask him to delay that I've been in a hospital and here you get a letter back report to this station daily ordered. So I lost two, three days of my leave that was seven to eight delaying round I think. So, I really had about four days at home and -- then I went to Liberal, Kansas and that was transition school and to B-24s.

Carter: And B-24s?

Crouch: Yes.

Carter: You did you -- you started flying B-24s is it?

Crouch: Yeah.

Carter: Right away? I've talking to you the other day this is about B-25, when did you fly them?

Crouch: I flew B-25 overseas and then I put B-25 after the war.

Carter: Okay but you started, you went from four engines back down to two engines.

Crouch: Yeah. [Unintelligible - 00:16:04] I was checked out when I'm overseas, but a friend of mind was flying B-25 and -- I flew B-25s or if he doesn't mind it's over there but then I pulled back here, she never feel and the bowling and Anders and Allen Jen and so forth.

Carter: What was your first impression when you saw the B-24? I know you've seen them before, I mean up close when you get in and started it?

Crouch: I don't really know. I know with my first -- first impression was when I flew it.

Carter: Okay.

Crouch: Damn the thing it was like handling a damn light truck. I thought I never would be able to force such thing around. It seemed like it take all the strength in my arm to turn that yoke, to pull it one way or the other. And I thought, "Oh this is going to be the worst thing in the world flying this big box car." And of course like I told you the other day, I got to work at war I can sit down, roll around the one hand like you drive sport car. I mean it was just you couldn't get control [unintelligible - 00:17:13] assisted anyway. But and it work to get taking that thing off for the first time by

myself and I had to pull back on that thing. I saw I wouldn't get it flown it back there hit it off the ground. But it was a nice aircraft and it -- it was not a quirky aircraft, it didn't have a lot of force and -- it was steady it's -- wouldn't get out to without a ladder and -- well anything below 14,000-15,000 feet, it was a good aircraft.

Carter: Lost a lot of performances involve that a simply wouldn't handle it but then?

Crouch: It's just wouldn't climb. Say, you had a Davis wing which was a high speed wing at that time. And -- it just wouldn't climb very fast and it labored. We flew it 20,000 feet on in RDU but or OTU but other than that, no.

Carter: How long did they give you to transition? How many hours in the B-24?

Crouch: We must have had -- let me see -- hardly three months.

Carter: Three months only. And when you finished your introduction transition to B-24 where were you assigned?

Crouch: At the Muroc Air Base in California which is Edwards Air Force Base now. That was the OTU and that's when you knew which way you were headed and you're up for a survey. We knew we have one of the survey when we left there because, all the planes there, had been brought back into Pacific probably most of them. And all the instructors had been **[unintelligible - 00:19:26]** back in combat there. And that way you got your crew. That's the way you were assigned your crew. They took it all on very big auditorium or not go to this island. And I know it was over pilot at one time we are not that good thing it was. And then all the gunners -- and you've never seen any of these guys before other the ones you came out with. And they called the first pilot's name, they called my name and then they called another officer that's my co-pilot. And then they called two more officers, that's my navigator and my bombardier and they all go and stand with you or sit with you, I forget whether we're standing or sitting that time. And, you know, nobody knows anybody else and you're trying to get first impressions, you know. And then they assign

new six gunners. There was your engineer and your radio operator and your engineer was always your crew-chief and that as opposed to a ground crew chief, he was always your air crew chief. And -- then one of the gunners was later assigned as a radar operator but then he took that training while we were there because the radar wasn't that great then anyways but it did work to an extent and one was your armor gunner.

Carter: And what's an armor gunner?

Crouch: He was supposed to be the one who knew the most about your guns and bombs.

Carter: Okay.

Crouch: I mean it's as simple as that and it was up to him usually to make sure that you got your armor and all ammunition abroad overseas and this was - but I don't know, and he never even checked on it because your armor people from the squatter usually took care of that anyway. And the other two were just rifle gunners; there was a ball turret gunner, a tail gunner, a nose gunner, top turret gunner and two ways gunner. And well the B-24s we had out there where old B model with the flexi glass nose and then we had the edges when they put the turret on the nose and we had 102 jet which is what we flew overseas. And that out there was when we -- that's when your crew meshed, that's when your crew had to mesh and my -- slowly other things changed, my ball turret gunner was a great, big guy about 6'2.

Carter: Good grief! He had a pile in the ball turret.

Crouch:

And he is there to pull the ball turret. While we were on an air to air gunnery mission one day, and with Walter, down with him and -- I don't know differently with the ball turret but the ball turret on 24 came up into the plane. He gets in, there's a wide strap that goes across behind him, and that's what hooked to the side and that's what he leans against, and then behind that there was a door that fetched to make the complete ball. And one of the other gunners always put that on and closed it. Well they let the

ball down and we are having P-39, I think coming on the air to air passes against us. And the door falls off of that ball turret while he's suspended down, because most of the time he was in other words on his back he'd keep it under level. And all his -- that's supporting him between there and the ground -- because they didn't wear parachutes in there, was this strap and it scared him so bad, he's waving a little flag. And the last we saw of him, he was behind the quarter mast gunner at the base, passing a calling. But I was assigned another ball turret gunner. And he was a little guy and he fitted in there like crazy and he fit into the crew very well too. He was -- he came from Texas, that was a real operator and I won't forget when we went overseas; he had all of his family sending big boxes of junk jewelry to trade to the natives over there.

So and make his point exactly that point of it. But that's the type he was but he was a big gunner. And then my bombardier, just before we were right in the ship out of New York, he had to go on an emergency leave, his wife had a baby and the baby was fairly deformed. And the baby and her wife was very critical for a while, they both lived but [00:25:00] -- so then we had to be assigned another bombardier, they used to always say bombardiers was the laziest among the air force and that most of them were frustrated pilots that had made it and so they figured well they will just go through the rest of the time. But both the bombardiers I had were good bombardiers, I mean they could do their job outside and they were both much, I mean irresponsible as a devil but we picked up another one when we went out to Hamilton field in San Francisco and he had been on another crew, and he had been taking [unintelligible - 00:25:46] and the other crew would face on [unintelligible - 00:25:48] and they left him so he had to be reassigned. But that's what RTU was, your crew had to merge and you got your first air to air gunnery, your air to ground gunnery. First time you had guns or anything, you know, or spacers.

Carter: What is RTU?

Crouch: OTU.

Carter: OTU?

Crouch: Operational Training Unit. And they trained you in the way things were done over there. And you flew long flights, and you flew a lot of long night flights and you flew long over -- flights where your navigator had to navigate and you had to follow his navigation and not look down and see a road junction or a city or something. And then you dropped bombs, practice bombs and you got training more than one bombs site, both -- everybody in the crew did that training on that but of course not as much as bombardier. And we were already trained on it but they kept them on the simulators. Now all those times you had a lot of link time and so forth and it was just to get you ready for an operation unit and all the thing was done.

Carter: Yeah when did you leave to go overseas?

Crouch: I left in -- I left New York the day after New Year's. And we went from there to Hamilton field in San Francisco and I never did really understand what the devil that was for. Then we went from there to Seattle, we were only in both places about two weeks, two to three weeks but were out in the field I guess, yeah about three weeks and the same way in Seattle. And we went over by ship. And the first night out of the harbor, we ran into a big, fat, storm, the first one we had on the coast for years. And all of us, the officers wrapped that bow compartment, and the anchor larches broke loose that night. And all night long the anchor is banging against the side of that ship and I was afraid it was going to sink and I was afraid of when we're going to sink. Because I was laying on my bunk and every time I got up I got sea sick. Well, all over there were a lot of guys and I stayed in my bunk for about the first five days and I subsided of all the peanut butter and crackers. I put a big box of crackers and a big jar of peanut butter in my bag space. And the guys were bringing back bread from the gully. Every time I would get up, I would get sick, well just stay in my bunk, laying down, I was fine. The [unintelligible - 00:29:10] one day they said, "Come on you got to get up and go to [unintelligible -

00:29:13], they'll make you feel better" so I went down to gully. This was on a attack transport we were on. And they had corned beef in can. And I watched them they're sliding around in my plate, I said, "Forget it" back to my bunk. And we were stuck three days, we three stacks in the bunks. And a little guy who was the navigator and one of the crews on the next bunk of mine, he went out on deck and coming back, he got his hand cut, the **[unintelligible - 00:29:48]** door was slammed on it. He mashed the day likes of his fingers, he never ever even got off his bunk though, we got the light. But I finally did get out on deck when it got to warm and I could lay down on the deck and it was fine **[0:30:00]**, I did go one day to see a storm at sea but second day at sea, I did go on deck because I was determined I was going to see a storm at sea and it was everything that the news reels had shown it to be worth. On the bottom of that ship I was looking up to the tops of waves. I was looking down at the bottom of the waves and it was nothing but the huge big waves as far as the eyes could see and I thought, good God, this is awesome but I never will regret that I went out there. That was a sight to see, because all I'd seen before was on news reels you know and movies. So, we went to Honolulu and they flew us from Hickam over to Kuwait and we were at barking sand on the air base in Kuwait and I don't know what you want me to digress a little bit but --

Carter: Go ahead.

Crouch: Barking sand's army air base got his name from the sand there but at night it was supposed to make sounds when the wind hit him just right or so. Like a dog barking in the distance and I have heard the sound but we had a good old time there. I mean we went all around the island and this -- two years ago this summer, my wife and I went back to the islands for the first time that I had been back, first time she'd ever been there. So we went to Kuwait and I said one day, my brother in law and my wife were together and I said, " let's drive up and find barking sands", I said, "I just want to see what's up there because it was on the map. So we drove over there,

finally got to the end of the road and it was a hot, hot day and there's a sign, barking sand's beach. This is a dirt road? I'm in a rattled voice; and said, "Forget it. I'm not going out there". When we passed the gate to the pacific missile range, which is a highly classified facility over there owned by the navy and on the way back I said, "I'm going to stop and you just ask the guard and what's up in barking sand, if theirs is anything up there?" So I pulled up to the gate, I told the guard, I said, "I realized that I can't go in that's a restricted facility " I said "But could you tell me what's up in barking sand's? "He says, "Sand" I said "Yeah, I know", I said, "But there used to be an air force base there during the war" I said, "I just wanted the same thing up there. "

He said, "Were you stay there?" I said, "Yeah", he said, "Well this is it. ", I said, "What do you mean this is it? "He said "This is where Barking sand's army air base was, pacific missile test range took it over, the navy took it over. "He points all over", send them back and he shot gun on the other side of the drive and he said, "Go in there," he said. "There's guy in there", he says, "He will want you to register if you've been stationed here" and so we went in and this man, I think he's a retired sergeant and he has a book for you to sign if you've ever been stationed there and some of them were navy names in there. You know, and I looked through it and I saw several names of guys in my group that had been there and they'd signed the book and he had a bunch of pictures in the bag of photographs taken at the time that the army air force had it and the time the navy had it and I, I really thought that was really neat. I really did get back to barking sand's and while we were at barking sand's, general Hermann who was commander in chief for [unintelligible - 00:34:02] air forces one down in the pacific between Quadling and Johnson island. Flying back from Quadling and they put on the big search mission for him and they stopped the searches I think and all kind of navy vessels. They had two carrier planes, they had B-25s, they had 24s, they had C-46's they had everything they've got PVYs, PVMs, all searching the area and so they sent some of us -- our

crews up and I had a brand new B-24, so that's 16 hours on it. When we took it and we flew it up to Johnson Island, well Johnson Island was about six feet above sea level. Nothing a crawl I told, run by the navy, we've got one runway six hours and feet long and that was from one end of the island to the other. A taxi way went around to your left at that time with the prevailing winds, he went around and everything was in between that taxi way and the other end of the runway.

The maintenance sheds, the navy headquarters, the navy quarters, all of the navy officer's club, the dispensary. All that stuff was inside of that area, so we were flying search mission out of there with general Hermann and I mean these were long search missions, we were using bomb made tank to stretch our fuel out and they would brief you every night and you were flying a grid pattern and so forth. So by the second day, I guess it was about the second day, were about the end of our pattern and starting back and we switched to the bomb made tank and all of a sudden one engine cut out, and then another engine cut out, the B-24 would barely reach the airport with two engines it would begin to lose the altitude. Three engines you could fly a long way so then one engine cut back in while in the meantime my engineer is down east checking the fuel transfer and everything you know trying to find out what's wrong and then alternately, one to two engines would cut out or we were going to lose altitude. Some of my radio operator put out a may day and these PV -- what do we call them, PV2Y2s -- PV.

Carter: PVYs.

Crouch: No, that's PVY. This is -- it was the, the navy version -- the private Tia's, the navy version of the B-24.

Carter: Yeah, the private Tia, Yeah, the once with a big high tail on them.

Crouch: PV4Y2 I think. Yeah, PV4Y2 I believe what it was. Well two of those came out at Madison and one of them went to about 10/12000 feet for homing beckon and the other stayed on our wing and we were losing altitude and we started throwing stuff out and we were still losing altitude

but we were flying then on two engines and we got under with then I would say about 50 feet of the water and I'm looking at the wave crushing everything else. Feeling I'm about to ditch this sucker and everything I'd ever had in all this ground school courses about how to ditch in the ocean down in the trough and missed the crush and all this bit was flashing through my mind and finally, the third engine cut in and the main engine cut in, we maintained our altitude then the four engine cut in, we picked up a little altitude and then another one cut out.

So we flew back in on three engines and we made a straight and approach to the field and so we turned off on to the taxi way, two more engines cut out. While we touched it right up to the maintenance stand which was well intact, cool surface by the maintenance shed and I was right across a little hill and a road from the fire department and so they checked it over and you know. I went to a meeting that night and the navy commander will seal the Island. He looked up when my co-pilot and I walked into the room and the whole navy thing you know, glad to see you aboard and then he found out then that I wanted to know what he was talking about.

I read books and said, "Where they -- you don't say that, that a real snap guys" and said, "Glad to be a board sir". I thought that was pretty neat but dumb but they found that the bomb made tank had a leak in it and was causing a vapor lock.

So the next morning we would do the fly back to Hickam where we make bomb made tanks and so then we never did find anything and General Herman never found one trace of it. As far as I know to this day there's never been trace found. None of the search planes did it, we are a lot of it. That Island was packed from end to end with air craft's, you could only walk on foot of the air craft and like I said it was either a task force was out there and all other kinds of ships had been diverted. So we [00:40:00] went and cranked the thing up the next morning to go back to Hickam and I wanted to pivot a little bit on my right wheel to get back on to the taxiway and all of a sudden the left wing tipped and our whole propeller

goes into the coral. And it's grinding the way of coral, well immediately I had to switch and scrap the engines off, my co-pilot hit the button to get everybody out with the bell to evacuate the plane. They allowed -- because we get gas paddling under the engine down there at that point in time. And the first thing I did was to reach out for the gear handle. The gear handle is on the right position so the gear held up. We got out and that main landing gear strut, hold up landing gear had bent back at about 45° angle roughly and the wheel -- the bigger those tires were the wheel would bury down to the center of the hub in a hole. Well, the upshot of the whole thing is, this was a gas valve hit that the Japs had had on the island. The navy thought they had them all plotted and put armor plate over, there were a lot of them on there but they had put armor plate on them. And this is what they didn't know about and all this thing had was two of a sixes covered with coral and oil and that 65,000 pound airplane when the wheel went through it, it went all through and so we had to set up on Johnson Island for two weeks waiting for the board to come up from Hickam and they flew up in a B-24 and that was a version that was a transporter which we flew back on. I've never been in one of those never even seen one before. It had port hole in the sides, you know. So any way the board had a hearing and everything and the upshot that was that we were exonerated of all blame and in fact I have a letter in my file that the navy commander wrote exonerating us of the blame and taking the blame on the navy etcetera.

House Guest: Hello again.

Crouch: Hey -- and when we came back up later we still did the job, so we fueled in Johnson and because I flew a replacement plane up to Saipan. They had pushed the plane over the side. The center being twisted on it and they'd scavenged everything off of it. And pushed those side, we walked up to the edge of the wood and we could see it down there and 16 hours of B-24 it had on when we got it and they'd taken everything out. Well, we'd taken

all the life rafts and survival gear and the binoculars -- we had three pairs of binoculars on there.

One pair of [unintelligible - 00:43:09] and two pairs of what they call square [unintelligible - 00:43:11] they were made by some small company in the war on the [unintelligible - 00:43:17] and I'm going to regret it I didn't get one of those pairs of binoculars because I'm sure that some navy also got them on that island and all that stuff was just surveyed but they'd taken all the instruments on the plane and everything else and -- but that was about as near as I ever came to going down in the water on an aircraft. Scared as hell, I'll tell you.

Carter: Yeah, I would be too.

Crouch: So when we moved up from there to Saipan another we were assigned the 11th bomb group, 42nd squad group and 11th bomb group, 7th air force and then we moved down to Guam.

Carter: When did you go to Saipan now? When did you go?

Crouch: February or March must have been -- must have been in March.

Carter: Of '44 that would be?

Crouch: Yeah, I'm saying we were in Guam because invading the Okinawa was in April and we were the first heavy bomb group to go into Okinawa.

Carter: Now did you support that invasion by bombing?

Crouch: No it was too far.

Carter: It was too far, okay.

Crouch: We were bombing Truck, Marcus and getting acclimated in the squadron [00:45:00] you know -- and we used to bomb Marcus a lot. Marcus has a three mile about four miles triangular shaped island that had -- as I recall they said seven heavy anti-aircraft gun zone and those guys would shoot those like you were shooting [unintelligible - 00:45:22]. And we used to have to keep the runway crated up there because that was the nearest point the Japanese could stage from the main islands or maybe even the [unintelligible - 00:45:38] down to Marcus and then bomb Guam which

was [unintelligible - 00:45:45] headquarters and so we had to keep that run way neutralized as well as runways of truck and the anchors of truck.

And of course we never did the damage to the ships and the anchors of track but the navy did but it was some of the doing but we used to get the hell shot at us over in Marcus because those guys knew right where you had to be in the sky to drop your bombs and when you leveled out on your IP, they would start shooting. Now, when you dropped your bombs, they would stop shooting and duck go into the dugouts and I mean they had that sky just zeroed in like they had a grid painted up there. Our first mission over Marcus, we went out with 10 holes in our plane. Another plane had one hole in it flying the other wing of the flight later and cut the copilots right leg off and his nickname was topping. He was a big tall guy.

[00:47:12] [RECORDING STOPPED]/AT/jr/

Interview with Emmett Crouch
February 21, 1991
Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection
St. Cloud State University Archives
Interviewed by John Carter

PART ONE

Carter: We're back on track.

Crouch: The second mission we flew over [unintelligible - 00:00:11], which was about a week or so later. We'd been to Truck in the meantime a couple of times. Second time, we were jumping. I mean we were tight as a goose up there. And we got to the IP, opened the bomb bay doors, lined up on the bomb line, and we were tense. They didn't fire a shot. Worst mission I ever blew. When I came off there, the muscles in my legs were vibrating from tension. And my co-pilot was a guy from Texas, chewed tobacco all the time. But that's another story in itself. He'd drive -- fly alone at night all of a sudden, you're half dozing while he's flying the airplane, all of a sudden he opens the side window to spit out and all that noise hits you all of a sudden. He might go through the roof while I -- I used to [unintelligible - 00:01:11] that happened in California when I [unintelligible - 00:01:17]. But he said after that, he thought he was going to swallow his tobacco. But we didn't have a shot fired at us. That was the worst mission. And we had another mission up over there with the same crew that got to co-pilot, while I was wounded. And they had our executive officer, squadron exec, flying as co-pilot. And this was a good crew. This was a good pilot, Danny Bean Blossom. And he'd been an instructor pilot [unintelligible - 00:01:51], and Beanie was a good pilot. And his crew was good. And he had -- we'd been all the way through training with him. He was flying one wing of the formation, we were flying the other, and we both got hit with flak, [unintelligible - 00:02:09]. And again, the [unintelligible - 00:02:15] came to us was we found a piece of flak embedded in the instrument panel, just behind the altimeter, I

think it was, just behind one of the instruments. The crew chief found that, that it had gone up there but it came -- come right on through, it would have probably wound up on my face. But it was a piece about three inches long, jagged metal. Beanie Blossom's crew got hit, and they lost an engine. And that was a long distance up there. It was about a 10-hour flight. We'd fly five hours, heading zero, five hours back heading 180.

Carter: Now, you flew -- when you were attacking Marcus, what did you fly from, Guam?

Crouch: Guam.

Carter: Guam. Okay.

Crouch: Fly to Harmon Field, Guam. It was **[unintelligible - 00:03:18]** by 29s.

Carter: Now, when you went into Marcus, how many airplanes were in the attacking group?

Crouch: We would fly about 12.

Carter: About 12. Was it necessary...?

Crouch: We got four flights of three.

Carter: Was it necessary to have fighter escort on that flight?

Crouch: No, no fighter escort. They didn't have any fighters that would get down that far. So this crew had to bail out, and I'll let you read the story after we're through here, because I have the complete story and the magazine was put out during the war. And the flight engineer and the pilot were good friends, as were most of us with our flight engineers. My flight engineer and I were very good friends. In fact, my son visited him a couple of summers ago in Tulsa. And they were trying to get the plane back, but they were continually losing altitude, and so they decided -- they sent out a mayday, and it was a dumbo on its way. And there was a lifeguard submarine that orbited Marcus, keeping an eye on it. And this lifeguard submarine took off for the spot, which was pretty courageous because once he was away from Marcus, he was fair game for anybody, because he wasn't supposed to be anywhere else. And they bailed out, and Bean Blossom and the flight engineer **[00:05:00]** were the last ones. And

Bean told the flight engineer, he said, “Let’s go, Brado.” He said, “All right, I’ll go with you.” So to bail out, we got down the bomb bay on a catwalk and you rolled on out, opened the bomb bay doors to roll out, helped open the bomb bay doors first.

Carter: You had it easy [laughter] **[unintelligible - 00:05:22]**.

Crouch: So Bean Blossom jumped, and then Brado didn’t. And the mistake they made was -- this was afternoon, late afternoon, and there was plenty of sunlight. It was getting dark on the water, and they didn’t realize this. Now, when the dumbo got there, they all wound up in there light fast, and I don’t think any of them wound up together. And in fact, one little guy—I think he was from Richmond—he was the smallest man on the crew and the youngest. In fact, I think he lied about his age to get in the service. He was really young, something like 17 years old or something. He treaded water for about 24 hours. And the dumbo got up there, couldn’t find them. Well, the lifeguard submarine came out and picked them all up the next day, got every one of them out of the water. In the meantime, the flight engineer stayed with the plane. And you always gave your flight engineer some [stick] time. So on an emergency, they can help fly the plane. But with those nine men out of there, there was enough weight gone, so he can make it -- the plane would stay airborne without losing a lot of altitude. So, he flew that plane back, he missed Saipan, and he saw [Tenia], which was just across the channel from Saipan. It was a big runway because we were getting ready for B-29s to fly out. And somehow, he got the gear down, the flights down, the whole routine, and lined up on the runway at [Tenia]—and this was night, we never gave our engineering United States time—and he put that thing on the ground. And I don’t know what the story says, but the story that time was that he blew a tire and veered off into the in-field and there was a big pile of coral there where they had excavated, and ran into that, and the plane exploded, killing him. And this old magazine has his story in there as one of the loneliest flights of all. So I’ll give it to you to read afterwards.

Carter: Yeah, great, super.

Crouch: So then we went up to Okinawa, and we got to Okinawa. They were still fighting on both ends of the island. And we went in -- we descended to [Yontan airstrip]. And that's where we flew our missions out of there.

Carter: Now, how many missions were you required to fly? In the early part of the war, they had to fly 25. They set numbers. Did you...?

Crouch: Yeah. We had a minimum of 35. Most of the time it was 40.

Carter: Okay.

Crouch: It just depended what time of the war it was.

Carter: Okay.

Crouch: And...

Carter: Yeah.

Crouch: I'm looking at their pictures that I took of them in Halloween. This is something else.

Carter: Where's that little group from? I saw them the other day too coming out.

Crouch: They are [unintelligible - 00:08:27] every day.

Carter: Great.

Crouch: So we flew -- it was 35 or 40 missions. It changed as the war got longer. And...

Carter: You had to fly 35 to...?

Crouch: To be rotated back.

Carter: Yeah. I say recycled, but I don't think it's quite the right word. Rotated.

Crouch: At that time you were getting points from the number of days in theater and the number of flights and all, and they had a point system to rotate back later after the war was over and all these things counted, which was much [unintelligible - 00:09:08]. But we were flying missions up to Oklahoma [unintelligible - 00:09:13] Japan, and we do missions over Nagasaki, we flew missions over Yusa, which is a town northern Honshu, USA, and that's where a lot of the things used to be made and sent over here made in USA. They were made there, in Yusa.

Carter: Oh, Yusa. Okay. Oh yeah, I've heard -- yeah, I've heard that...

Crouch: And we hit the big naval base at [Kure], and I never saw so much flak in my life as a navy, put up Japanese -- Japanese navy gunners were the best gunners the Japs had, and their flak was all different colors. It was pink, it was yellow, it was orange, it was purple. But the army gunners' always black. But the navy had all colors. [00:10:00] And we were after the battleship [unintelligible - 00:10:04] I think, which is the one Colonel Kelly was supposed to have sunk in the war...

Carter: Oh yeah.

Crouch: Well, he didn't sink it. It was the [unintelligible - 00:10:13] metal, I think. But he stayed with these planes. But it was down by the stern in the [Kure] Harbor, but it was shooting with the devil. And this was a coordinated raid. The navy came in, all of it, task force out of the sea. They came in at a low level, and then B-25s came over and then the torpedo bombers. I mean the dive bombers came down behind them, and then we came over with the 24s. And we were bombing from about 12,000 feet, which with a good-sized brick you can hit a 24 because most of all of the [unintelligible - 00:11:03] aircraft were graded 10 to 12,000 feet, 75 millimeters, 120 millimeters, and all.

And they had a lot of flak up in the sky that day [unintelligible - 00:11:14] we hit anything. My bombardier said, "Yeah, we put a bomb on the afterdeck of the [unintelligible - 00:11:19]." Right. We had a 2,000-pound bomb hanging up when they came out. So we had to drop that on our way back, and my bombardier and my engineer finally kicked it out. Literally, that's what you did, you just kicked it out of the [unintelligible - 00:11:38] with your foot. You had a [unintelligible - 00:11:41] and you kicked this 2,000-pound bomb with it. And my tail gunner said it hit in the water right off this little island, right among a bunch of Japanese fishing boats. He says, "I bet some Japanese are cussing us for a long while." We weren't aiming at them certainly, but he said that's where it hit. We blew up a bunch of little Japanese fishing boats. But speaking of Yusa, we were

flying a mission over Yusa. About the sixth of April -- no, 26th of April, maybe. I've forgotten the date.

Carter: No. That's okay.

Crouch: And we saw this big plume of smoke in the sky. I meant August. I'm sorry. I think it was about the fourth or sixth of August. And this was after the atomic bomb had been dropped in Hiroshima. And of course, before the bomb was dropped, you were warned away from the area. And we had been warned away on this day from this Nagasaki, this day on the other coast and **[unintelligible - 00:12:54]** over Yusa. And I recall it's about 120 miles from Nagasaki. When we saw the cloud, we knew what it was then, even though we didn't get word until later that the bomb had been dropped there. But we could see the emerald shaped cloud **[unintelligible - 00:13:14]**.

Carter: Mushroom.

Crouch: Yeah, mushroom cloud. And we knew what it was. But we could see it at that distance. It was that high up.

Carter: The other day when I was talking to you, we were talking -- you said you went on this mission. You went up one coast of Japan, bombed Korea, and came back. Let's relate that to...

[Crosstalk]

Crouch: This was a volunteer mission. It was one of these deals where the squadron commander gets you and he says, "We need a volunteer for a mission." And I think my first words were, "Forget it!" And he said, "Good, I'm glad you volunteered." So, we flew a night mission, with incendiaries, up the west coast of Japan, and close enough to alert the air defenses and bombed [Fusan or Pusan], whichever they call it now. And they had a big harbor there, an island in the middle, and I think it had a power plant or something on it. And it was actually pretty well lit up at night. And we sprayed incendiaries a semicircle around that harbor, and then we got out of there quick. And we came back down the east coast of

Japan and alerted defenses there. And it was about a 15-hour and 55-minute flight. We had 16 hours of gas with.

We got back in Okinawa, it was morning, and there was a squall over Yontan Airfield. We couldn't land. [00:15:00] And they sent us down to Mashanado and said contact GCA or [unintelligible - 0:15:10] I've never heard of GCA except rumor. And I'm sure that I knew what it meant, so they gave us a frequency and we contacted them. It was ground control approach. It was the first unit over there. And as controller, talked to us right on down to the squall that was over part of Mashanado, but the runway was clear. And we finally broke out and I was lined up with the runway. And the [unintelligible - 00:15:40] we started to land there, my engineer says, "We can't get the dome up," the ray dome, that [unintelligible - 00:15:48] plane. It also retracted, but it was down -- it would have bounced along the ground. It would have landed with it down. So, I was on my final approach, down pretty low. Now, it was [unintelligible - 00:16:03] the thing, and without retracting the gear, we just made a big 360. In the meantime, he's cranking the ray dome up. And we level back off, lined up with the runway on final approach again. I was still on my turn. And my co-pilot [unintelligible - 00:16:22] grab the wheel, thinking I couldn't get it out of the turn. And I flipped the wings up and -- I [unintelligible - 00:16:33] sound like bragging, but I kissed that one in [unintelligible - 00:16:36]. That was one of the best landings I think I ever made. And I barely got the wings level before. Both of the wheels touched it easy. And we turned off the taxiway -- and this was an A-20 strip or an A-26, I forgot what it was [unintelligible - 00:16:50] medium bomber strip, it was pretty short. And when we stopped and turned off the taxiway, one of my engines cut [unintelligible - 00:16:58] gas. It was that close. And we also bombed China one night, Shanghai, on a single-ship intruder mission. And that was a night of -- the first, that

[unintelligible - 00:17:22] VJ night they had or the false victory night, whatever they call it.

We picked up -- we got some hits on the plane that night, and we picked up San Francisco radio. And they were saying, "The war is over, the war is over," because we couldn't pick up over on our radio. And we were going to skip this distance thing. And the radio operator's picking up San Francisco radio and **[unintelligible - 00:17:49]**, "The war is over, the war is over." And then we were coming back with holes in the aircraft, night fighters around, "Sure, right," **[unintelligible - 00:17:58]** that night.

Then after the war, we flew the prisoners of war from Japan back down to the Philippines. Most of them were Dutch navy troops from the Dutch Indies—**[unintelligible - 00:18:17]**. And they had big camps over in the Philippines rebuilding **[unintelligible - 00:18:23]**. And we put seats on the bomb bay, wood seats. And these poor guys, we were at low altitude and it was in August or September -- September, October, I guess, and these poor guys were all in shorts and low, skimpy shirts and short-sleeved shirts and everything else. And even at 5,000, 4,000 feet, it's pretty cold up there. And we -- everybody in the group got all the blankets together we could, old coats and everything we could give them, and put on these guys because they had to be seated in the bomb bay. We just carried about 20, I think, in the bomb bay and fly them back down to the Philippines.

Carter: Did you fly all of your 35 missions in the B-24 Liberator then? And then you transitioned you said later in the B-25.

Crouch: Yeah, I flew B-25s later.

Carter: Now, that was after the war or during...

Crouch: Yeah, it was not in combat.

Carter: Now, were you involved in Korea at all?

Crouch: No.

Carter: **[Unintelligible - 00:19:35]** recalled into Korea?

Crouch: No, not at all. I was [unintelligible - 00:19:39]. I was back at the Pentagon. But when I came back to the States, I came back to Fairfield Citizen Air Force Base at Sacramento. We flew our planes back, and in fact I [unintelligible - 00:19:55] the other night, some file accepting the aircraft [unintelligible - 00:20:00] B-24 and the engineering also accepted it and so forth. And we flew back -- and I won't forget we all had scarves made out of parachutes, the white scarf. And all had these big dodos. And as soon as we landed, my engineer pops a top hat and he's sitting up there with his head stuck out, the white scarf blowing in the breeze, a real hot rock. And so we were -- then that's when they divided up the crews to send them home. And that's the last I saw of some of my crewmembers. It was when we all got split up there. And I have heard from all but two of them over the years. My bombardier, who lives up somewhere in Pennsylvania, and a bald [unintelligible - 00:21:04] I never heard from him.

But I did hear from all the others, my nose -- my nose gunner was a golf pro. He died a few years back. My tail gunner just died two years ago. My engineer lives in Tulsa. My radar operator, I've visited. My navigator lives in Ohio. I went to his wedding after the war. We corresponded. And my co-pilot I corresponded with for a while; I don't know where he is now. Last I heard he was [unintelligible - 00:21:44] running guns down to Guatemala or something, I don't know. But my military gunner married into a lot of money, and they were [unintelligible - 00:21:52] down in Texas. He married [unintelligible - 00:21:55] fortune. But...

Carter: What was the relationship between the officers and the enlisted men on the airplane?

Crouch: Very good.

Carter: Very good?

Crouch: Yes. They of course had a separate area, six of them and four officers [unintelligible - 00:22:13]. But on Guam, for example, we used to get a

liquor ration, and we would get a fifth a week. And it could be the best bottle and [bond] liquor or rum or gin. Beer was hard to come by, and enlisted men didn't get any liquor ration, of course. They got a beer ration, but they never got any liquor. Well, between the four officers, my bombardier, and my co-pilot, and my navigator and I, we each between two of us, we'd bought a fifth of a case of liquor before we left California, before we left Seattle, I guess, and chipped it over in our foot lockers. Well, the navy would have loved to have known that, but they didn't. And so, when we got over there, we each had a case of liquor between the -- we had two cases between the four of us. And none of us drank much liquor. We'd have an occasional drink.

So every week when we got a liquor ration -- and this was a dollar -- for a dollar fifth, a dollar quarter or fifth, I think. And rum and gin was a dollar. And so, each week, one of us would take a fifth of liquor [unintelligible - 00:23:41] to our enlisted men. And so they always had it. And then like I told you the other day, when we got this big load of [unintelligible - 00:23:52] on Okinawa, we took -- we had this whole, big truckload of it, and we had enough for enlisted men and us both to build a hut and all the furniture and everything else in it. And my enlisted men used to make over there at that time, they would make [squeezers]. And they got a couple of big bottles from the photo lab, the big green glass bottle like you see water used to come in, the water coolers, cleaned them up, and they would get from the cooks -- they would get some yeast, they'd get dried raisins or dried fruit of any kind, and put it in these bottles and water and sugar and let it ferment, and drink it. And it made a pretty decent drink.

One night -- they used to keep it under [00:25:00] their hut floor. One night, one of the things exploded, and they thought it was a bomb. There was that stuff all over the floor, under the floor, and it smelled like [unintelligible - 00:25:10]. But well, we had very good rapport I guess is what they use today, but good relations with our enlisted men. We got along well, all of us. And when we were in their hut, I was [EL] to them.

They would kid with me or would [unintelligible - 00:25:39] my co-pilot or would pop my navigator. My navigator was the oldest man of the crew then. He was the first lieutenant before we were because he'd been with the infantry down in the admiralties earlier in the war, then he switched over to aviation.

Carter: How old was he?

Crouch: He was probably about -- I was 24, 23, 24. He was probably 26, 27. Because I was the next oldest. Yeah, because I think my radar operator was about the same age I was. But they could kid with us off duty and in their hut, but once we were in the airplane or anywhere else, there was no kidding. It was strictly an officer-enlisted man relationship. But... we had a big court martial one time. They hadn't shown up for PT in Guam when they were supposed to. It was a formation they were supposed to follow for PT in the morning; they hadn't. And the major called me [unintelligible - 00:26:58] about it. And I said, "Well, let's give them extra guard duty." Well, our executive officer then was a real stickler. He was coming back from a date with a nurse, I think, and he decided to inspect the guards. Well, he found one of my guys curled up under the plane asleep.

There's no sense having cars on the planes down there anyway. It's ridiculous. And he found another one in a barrel or something. He was sleeping. And I forget what the other two were doing. They were playing cards somewhere or something. But they all came up for court martial, and they all got busted down a rank. Well, before the end of the war, they were all back up to what they would have been anyway. But that was my first experience with a court martial, and I felt real bad about that. I have a letter and all that. My tail gunner, who I said just died a couple of years ago, his mother wrote me, thanking me for taking care of him. But this fellow was the youngest down in my crew. He was about 17 years old. And that [unintelligible - 00:28:22] said he understood about the court marshal and he didn't hold any grudge against me for that court martial. It

was their fault. They shouldn't have been doing what they had been doing, et cetera, and so forth. So I corresponded with him and his wife, him and his wife.

Carter: One thing before I forget, as we were talking about yesterday, when you were on Okinawa how you saved the airplanes in the typhoon, I guess, they'd call them over there.

Crouch: Oh yeah. But we said to... two or three typhoons, but the big one was right at the end of the war there, just near the end of the war. And that's the one that sank a bunch of navy ships, capsized the Destroyer. And I forget the name of that one now. It just... I've forgotten the name. I'm getting mixed up with Hazel and all these we've had around here, you know, hurricanes. But this was a wicked, the worst typhoon they'd had in years over there. And we sat in the plane, the co-pilot and the pilot and engineer, to keep the plane's engines running all night. And you kept the controls pushed forward to keep the nose down. And it was tied down too, cabled down. But the winds were so strong, 165, 175 mile an hour winds, that it could have tilted those planes up. But [00:30:00] that was a long night too. And a lot of aircraft was damaged. A lot of damage on the [unintelligible - 00:30:07] I saw a freighter that I was just trying to compare it with something today, but a good-sized ocean going freighter -- and not Queen Mary type, not anything big like that, but almost the size of what the [unintelligible - 00:30:25] transport that we went over on was. And it was down at [unintelligible - 00:30:30] Okinawa, it was across the road, a highway road, up on a hill. And it was there when the war was over and the last time we were down that way, it was still there.

Carter: Just blew right out?

Crouch: It blew it right in over the water. The water must have been so high down there, and it deposited up on this hill, and that is where it was left. It was just a rusted steel [unintelligible - 00:30:57] last I saw of it, [unintelligible - 00:31:00] and everything. We came back in November. I had a chance to fly for a Chinese airline. They were signing up people.

And I mean they were giving big money and I was really tempted, but then I was supposed to get married when I got back, so I said better not. And I could have gone with [unintelligible - 00:31:33] air forces in the occupation of Japan [unintelligible - 00:31:36] Korean War. When I came home, I had 30 days' leave, I think. And I got married on the 15th of December, and we went on our honeymoon and to New York for a week. Came back, spent Christmas here, then I had to leave for North Carolina, Greensboro. And my wife went with me, and we lived in a hotel down there for about three weeks, as there was no housing. And that was just another kill time until we find something to do with you.

And from there we, were sent to Ellington Air Force base at Houston, and we lived in a room there in Houston for a bit. And then we lived down in a housing development at Galveston. And the cockroaches were about six inches long in the housing development. My wife had never seen a cockroach in a house before that she lived in. She [unintelligible - 00:32:54] Galveston, I flew -- out of Ellington I flew navigators and C47s, B25s, and whatever they were flying [unintelligible - 00:33:10] in time. Then we were sent from there up to [unintelligible - 00:33:13], Illinois. And we were all pilots in this group were sent. So, while we were there, there was another couple who had traveled with us who I had been overseas with and trained with at California. And he was just newly married too while he was on leave. So the four of us travelled together and got up to [unintelligible - 00:33:38], and we had a rule, you know, [unintelligible - 00:33:42] back from BTO, he'd been a captain in chemical warfare and got married, had a wife and a little girl there and he was going to the university. So they had a room that we rented. And we had a nice time there.

So we came home [unintelligible - 00:33:56] in Easter, and I guess this was Easter '46. We were married December '45. And we were home at Easter, we got back, there was a note waiting in the room for me, "Call Roger immediately." So I called him. He said, "You better get packed," he

said, “we’re going back to San Antonio.” There was this note that we were going back to San Antonio right away. Well, we visited over San Antonio while we were at Galveston. There wasn’t a place to be had to live in over there. And we were [unintelligible - 00:34:41] sending my wife back home or both the wives back home, going there, you know.

So while I was home here on leave, a buddy of mine, Air Force, was stationed at the Pentagon. And he told me [unintelligible - 00:34:55], “Why don’t you come get back over here at the Pentagon? I’ll get you a spot.” [00:35:00] And I told him, I said, “Forget it, John. I don’t want to be in the Pentagon. I want to be with the flying unit.” He said, “Well, anytime you want to get back here, you just let me know.” Well, I got to think about it and I didn’t feel like going back to San Antonio without my wife, newly married and so forth, so I call my father and he in turn calls this buddy of mine, and next morning, when I went out to the base, base commander called me and he says, “[unintelligible - 00:35:29] who do you know in Washington?” “A lot of people. I’m from there, sir.” And he says, “Well I’ve just got an order, a TWX to send you back to Washington immediately. Report to Pentagon.” [Unintelligible - 00:35:49] the first thing in the morning, you know.

So we packed up and we came back to Washington, and I was assigned to the Pentagon for about a year and a half, I guess. And I did a lot of flying out of Boeing and [unintelligible - 00:36:06]. I checked out P-51s and I checked out [unintelligible - 00:36:10] B-25s. And I flew some other stuff, odds and ends. The last time I flew, in fact I flew P-51 out over the - - [unintelligible - 00:36:27] soldier’s field [unintelligible - 00:36:28] football game, and that was 49 or 50. And the rumor came out of the Pentagon that they were going to force everybody out that hadn’t made regular army, or regular Air Force, I guess at that time, I think, which switched over to Air Force. And I thought good Lord, we’re going to be forced out, because I hadn’t even taken the test for the regular Air Force.

This buddy of mine did and got accepted. Also another buddy that never did, and he finally retired after 20 years at the Pentagon. They never did do this thing. But then they were going to put everybody out. That was the rumor. And I thought, well, I've got enough points to get out and everything. I might as well get out and get a job before the rush starts. So I got out. Well, in a sense, that was one of the biggest mistakes I ever made because I really love the Air Force. But, I would have been back in Japan the time the Korean War started because I was about due to be shipped out of the Pentagon. And at that time, you weren't getting your choices spots where you wanted to go. They sent you back to the theatre that you came from. So I'd have been with **[unintelligible - 00:37:49]** Air Force in Japan just about the time the Korean War broke, and I **[unintelligible - 00:37:53]** knows down in some Korean hill at this time too.

But funny thing, I was working and I tried to get into the International Guard here. They had a P-51 outfit and was later converted to F86's and so forth. And it's a good, good fighter squadron they had here, and still have a good fighter squad. So, I think it was 121st fighter, and I had two good friends there. When I was a squadron navigating **[unintelligible - 00:38:36]**, and one was a pilot. And so they took me to a meeting one night. And I was interested in joining, not as a fighter pilot, but I knew they had auxiliary aircraft. I knew they had a couple of C-47s, couple of B-25s. And so the skipper of the **[unintelligible - 00:38:57]** colonel -- I can't think of his name right now, but then I can't remember anything from yesterday sometimes. And he was a hot pilot. He has the RAF wings on one side, you know. And if you didn't believe he was **[unintelligible - 00:39:14]** tell you. But he did, he set a record from here to Chicago in a P-51, a speed record, another one across the Atlantic to England or something. Anyway, he says, "Well, you know, you don't have any P-51 fighter time." I should know. I said, "I've checked out **[unintelligible - 00:39:37]**. I've got some hours," I said, "but no, nothing, no combat time." He says well, he says, "We'll just have to get back to you," he says,

“We really don’t need you now.” I said, “Okay, Colonel. I understand that.” I said, “I just thought maybe you might need a pilot for these small engine aircraft that you have,” I said, “because I have time and all.” “Well, we’ll get back to you.” I said, “Okay.” Well, I knew that was the end of that. Well, the Korean War started, and I get a -- Millikan was his name. He was rather general. And I got this call, “We reconsidered, and would you be interested in joining the 121st?” Well, it means I might have lunch with this friend of mine in the Pentagon, and he told that the 121st was going to be called up pretty quick.

And I said, “Forget that stuff.” And so I told him, I said, “Well, Colonel,” I said, “You know,” I said, “I’ve re-considered.” He said, “Why? I thought you weren’t interested to join.” I said, “Well, I was,” I said, “but I hear now that you guys are going to be called up, pretty good, pretty quick.” “Oh,” he said, “That’s just a rumor.” I said, “Yeah” I said, “well, the rumor I got was right from the Pentagon.” He said, “Well, even if we are,” he says, “we’ll only go up to Dover Air Force Base and replace the unit there.” He says, “We’ll stay together up there as a group.” I said, “Oh, come on Colonel,” I said, “I’ve been in the Air Force long enough to know this is a bunch of baloney.” I said, “You don’t have any idea where you’re going to be here or how long you’re going to be or what you’re going to -- status is or anything else.”

“Oh,” he says, “I got the word of Pentagon.” He says, “I’ve got their word for that.” Well, 121st was called up two weeks later. They were sent out to Dover, Delaware for about three weeks for equipment, and then they were split up and sent all over Korea. They didn’t stay together as a group 20 minutes. These two buddies of mine went in different fighter outfits over there as replacement pilots. They didn’t stay together at all. I know he was trying to [unintelligible - 00:41:45] me about that, but -- but I really did. I enjoyed every minute of my stay in the Air Force.

Carter: You didn’t stay in a reserve, right?

Crouch: I stayed in the reserve, yeah. And that was -- I stayed in the reserve and I was on the active reserve. We were flying for a bit. Then they took out your flying status, you only flew on the two weeks active duty every year. Then they cut out your flying on that, and the last two weeks active duty time I put in was **[unintelligible - 00:42:20]** at the reserve centers to write emergency procedures in case of nuclear attack, in case of fire, in case of anything else.

They didn't even -- my secondary MOS—AFSE now—was as an operations officer. And all the guys in my outfit in the reserve were rated officers—pilots, bombardiers, navigators. And we all passed the course as operations officers. We took a long course on that. But do you think they would assign us as an operations officers for our two weeks anywhere or assistant operation officers? No, I still don't **[unintelligible - 00:42:59]** emergency procedures in case of nuclear attacks, in case of fire, in case of flood.

So, this got harder and harder every two weeks a year to really do anything worthwhile, and finally, we had some major personnel officer over there, and she was a woman. And she and I had a disagreement one day, and I honestly, I've had enough. I says, "Forget it." I said, "Put me on inactive status. I'm finished." And I had about 18 years by that time with my reserve time. And people said, "Well, you're crazy, you should have stayed in for 20!" Well, of course I should have stayed in for 20. I have buddies now that are retiring or going to go to retirement after 20. But you see, my father died at 50 years old, and for years I was from the convention I wouldn't live beyond 50, 51 years old.

Carter: Yeah.

Crouch: And I didn't figure out I was going to need any retirement, so that never entered in my head to stay in for retirement purposes. But I had a wife and at that time two old kids, and they took me away for two weeks in the summer and they took me away one night a week and so forth, which was -- that part was all right because I made some good friends in there.

But the reserve at that time -- what hurt me so much about it, every time you turned around they were trying to get you off active status. They were trying to get you out of the reserve or out of the Air Force. And I just got fed up with trying to hang in there. And they didn't have any flying outfit here in the reserve. Well, later they had the troop carry outfit here, which I would've looked if I'd had the time to belong to, because they flew foreign and prop planes, and then later they had Starlifters and so forth. So the [unintelligible - 00:45:07] I guess. I would have loved to flown, but they didn't have that at that time. And reserve was just a hassle. where the navy reserve on the other hand had great units here, good flying units. I had friends that went up, and they had good flying units, but the Air Force goofed off on their reserves—around here anyway.

Well, I was sorry and I regretted many times that I got out of the Air Force. A friend of mine -- I have a couple of buddies that didn't have as much combat time or -- like one of them had [unintelligible - 00:45:46] time at all. He wound up brigadier general, almost was brigadier general. And I assume I wound up a lieutenant colonel, I'm not sure.

I was a major when I got out of the reserve, and about two years later, I get a notice from Denver. "You're being considered. Your name has been put up to the board for promotion to lieutenant colonel." [Unintelligible - 00:46:22] ridiculous. I've been off active status for two years. So I wrote them back and I said I'm on inactive service. So then, about two months later, three months later, I get back a letter, "You've been passed over for promotion to lieutenant colonel. You will be -- your name will be put forward on the next promotion board." I go, "This is ridiculous." So then about six months or a year, I forget, I got another letter, you've been promoted to lieutenant colonel of US Air Force Reserve. Now, I don't believe that for a minute! /AT/es