

Texas City / World War II Oral History Project

Audited Transcript

Interviewee: John W. Hart DDS

Interviewer: Rebecca Snow

Date of Interview: May 23, 2012

Place of Interview: Hart residence, 3802 17th St N, Texas City, Texas 77590

Recording Format: MTS

Recording Time: 52:58

Transcriber: Rebecca Snow

Audio audited by: Vivi Hoang and Luke Alvey-Henderson

[0:00]

R: And my name's Rebecca Snow and I'm here for Moore Library, and I'm here to interview Mr. John Hart about his experiences during World War II, and today's date is May 22 —23 , 2012. And thank you very much for giving us this chance to see you.

J: Well, you're quite welcome.

R: Okay. So you were telling me that you actually—I know you're not actually a long-time Texas resident. You came in the '60's?

J: No, I was born in Texas. I've been here all my life.

R: Right. But up near Dallas, or something, right?

J: Yes. Jacksboro.

R: Jacksboro.

J: Near Fort Worth, Graham, Wichita Falls area.

R: It's a beautiful place. I just looked at some pictures.

J: Lived in Gainesville two years before I graduated. Went off to Texas University for a year, and then returned and went to the service.

R: Wait, I'm sorry. So you actually grew up in Jacksboro. And then you went from there to college, when you finished high school?

J: No. Well, yes, but I went to—moved to Gainesville, Texas, the last two years of high school.

R: Your family.

J: Mm-hm.

R: Yes.

J: And went to Gainesville Junior College for a year, before I was old enough to go to service. And then—

R: So the war had started. Pearl Harbor happened when you were still in high school?

J: Yes, yes.

R: Junior or senior year?

J: Well, I guess you'd say senior year. I graduated in '42.

[2:16]

R: Okay. Can I ask you about, what was your family's reactions, or what do you remember about that time, about hearing about Pearl Harbor and people's—of course you were young, young man, eighteen—

J: Yes. Seventeen—

R: Seventeen.

J: —and I turned eighteen of course, after the war started. And I finished that year in Gainesville Junior College, because I had taken my Air Force exam—

R: So you were anxious to go.

J: Yes.

R: From the word "go," you wanted to go.

J: Everybody was ready to go.

R: Even before Pearl Harbor?

J: No, after Pearl Harbor, when the war got started, we had taken the test for the Air Force, my friends and I.

R: Okay.

J: One of them didn't make it, but Eddie Smith, a friend of mine, we went to service together. He ended up flying a C-47, and I went into bomber training.

R: C-47. Was that like for transport?

J: The twin engine. Like the old commercial airlines used to be, those twin engines jobs.

R: Yes. So it was an older plane.

J: Well, it wasn't an old plane—

R: No.

J: —at the time, but it still is an older plane nowadays. You see several of them flying, still. And uh—

R: Can I ask why did you want to join the Air Force? The Army Air Force?

J: Every young man wants to fly.

R: Okay. But you had never flown before.

J: Well, I had flown with a cousin of mine, who was an instructor for cadets. He took me on my first rides, in an old Super Cub.

R: Really. So, when you took the test, you weren't hindered that you hadn't had physics, or a lot of math, or did you have to be good in those things for the test?

[5: 05]

J: No, I suppose not. I don't recall having to say I had physics, or such as that. I made good grades in high school, and I'm sure they looked at those.

R: So after you took that exam, then you were ready to wait until you were a certain age—you had to be 18?

J: No, they started us right off primary. We went to schooling, went to—that's the way I got my time at Texas Tech, was a year in school. And then went to Santa Ana, California and went right into more training.

R: So the training in Texas Tech, was that at all in the plane, or was it just—

J: School.

R: —instruction, schooling?

J: Yes.

R: Okay.

J: And—

R: And California? What was that—

J: Most of my training was done in California. Primary was at King City. That was a little single engine plane that we flew. And then I went into Basic, a bigger plane in Chico, California.

R: I know Chico.

J: And then I went to twin engine flying in Douglas, Arizona. That's where I got my wings, there.

R: But when you—when did you first fly solo?

J: In primary, which was in King City.

R: In King City, with the single engine.

J: Yes.

R: And did everybody pass that? Was everybody able to do that?

J: To my knowledge, yes. I didn't know many of the students in school, as such, at Primary, because we were stationed in little barracks along the King City area. So you didn't know a lot of people, because you had your work to do, which was flying. After you soloed, you had an instructor who taught you how to fly the plane and how to land it. And then you had a routine of flying to places around and coming back, in Primary. And then in—

R: So you didn't have to wait for the plane. Everyone shared the planes, though, right?

J: Yes. You would have a plane assigned to you for this day.

R: Wow.

J: You would fly it maybe for four to six hours around the country, to different little settlements. Many, many times you'd just chute landings, teaching you to get the plane down on the ground safely.

[8:40]

R: What is chute landing?

J: Well, if you're flying around here, and you come down and make a landing, they call that chute landings, so in other words—

R: And did you even land places—but you always landed where there was a landing strip?

J: Well, we did when we were flying there, we had places to land. And we might be off in California there, they had auxiliary fields that were not in King City, but we'd go there and chute landings.

R: Do you remember your first experiences up? Well, you'd already been up before, but when your first time flying alone, do you remember that? Was that scary? Or you weren't scared?

J: Well, it wasn't scary, but I made—I could see my instructor. He was standing with some guys watching us come in. And the first time I came over the field, I couldn't land that time. So I had to go around and "squeak." That was what we called it. He was watching the whole thing, and when I started to go around again and come back and

land, why, he was still watching. (Laughs.) He wanted to know why I didn't land the first time. I told him I just couldn't get my plane to land, you know, the first—

R: Right. And you made the right decision, if you weren't—

J: I wasn't comfortable, so I went around.

R: Yes. So it was okay.

J: Oh, yes. Yes.

R: So you didn't have any kind of social life there in California, much?

J: No—

R: Did you go into town with the other guys, did you have any car, or bus?

J: Well we went to King City, we didn't go to town there. It wasn't much of a town.

R: Nothing much there.

J: But when we got to Chico, one of the guys was a guitar player, and we got with a bunch of Mormons, and met some nice young ladies, and so we had a social life there, also.

R: That's nice. That's great. So you were a couple of years, or a year at California, do you think, roughly?

J: Well, I'm not sure about how much time we were, but we were in like Basic three or four months, and then we went to twin engine and we were there for—

R: In Chico.

J: No, King City.

R: Still King City for the twin engine, okay.

J: No, for the twin engine, we went to Douglas, Arizona.

R: Oh, that's Arizona. Okay, I'm sorry.

J: We flew twin engine planes. And I remember one that I couldn't get the landing gear down. It wouldn't come down. And I had to crank it down. We had a crank in there, you could put it somewhere and crank—

R: Manually do it.

J: Manually.

R: You mean it was like the fuse was busted, or something?

J: I don't know what was wrong with it, but I had to crank it down. It took two hundred and forty cranks to get that, the wheels down.

R: Whew. But you weren't flying when you were doing that.

J: Well, either I was or the other pilot was—

R: The other pilot, yes.

J: —because there's usually two of us flying twin engines.

R: Okay.

J: So I had to crank the wheels down, and land.

[13:01]

R: And so you were still pretty excited about being in the service, even though it took quite a while to get trained.

J: Yes, I—

R: Were you worried about getting over there in time to still fight?

J: I didn't even register on my mind to worry about getting over there, because as soon as we got out of the twin engine flying, why, we went into B-17 flying.

R: In Douglas.

J: No, no. We flew out of Las Vegas.

R: Wow.

J: And we had partying there.

R: You did. In Las Vegas. That was a big enough town.

J: Oh yes. Because—

R: But did you gamble?

J: No, not much. I'm not a gambler.

R: That's good.

J: But we had lots of, we could go in—where now if you go into a place, you never know who's going to be there to entertain you. So we could make those for free. And now if you go to Vegas, you have to pay to go in and see the shows. But in those days, why, we didn't pay.

R: And did you get to come home at all? Come back to Gainesville?

J: No.

R: Christmas?

J: No. I don't suppose that I, from the time I got in the Air Force, I didn't come home at all.

R: Even before you got shipped over? I thought there was something before you got—

J: No, no, I probably got to come home after I got my wings.

R: And what is "getting your wings?" What does that mean?

J: Well, the ceremony where you graduate! From flying. And they pin a set of wings on you, you know.

R: And you're a pilot.

J: Yes.

R: Yes, I saw them over there. (referring to wings displayed) And how old were you then?

J: Well, I was about nineteen, I guess, eighteen, nineteen.

R: Wow.

J: Because I was in—actually I went in the service at eighteen. It took me a year, I guess, to get my wings. I was flying missions by the time I was nineteen.

R: Right. And that's a big responsibility. Did you train with, was your friend—you said Edwards [Eddie]—was he still with you? Or did you guys get separated?

J: No, he went into—

R: Oh, you said he went in—

J: Yes. Flying—as we used to tell him, he was flying nurses and Coke bottles around.

R: Nurses and Coke bottles?

J: Nurses and Coke bottles, in his transport. (Rebecca laughs.) He didn't get much combat training.

R: And so you became a pilot, so you were not going to be a bombardier, or a navigator?

J: Well, we went to classifying school, which they decided, with your schooling and so on and so forth, whether you made a navigator, or a bombardier, or pilot training. So I made the pilot training program, which I wanted to do.

[16:51]

R: And you were not a co-pilot, you were a pilot?

J: That's right.

R: And then you became like lieutenant, or—

J: I'm a colonel.

R: You're a colonel now.

J: I'm a lieutenant colonel.

R: Well, when you first got your wings, what was your rank?

J: Oh, it was second.

R: Second lieutenant.

J: Then I got first lieutenant, and then I got captain, then a major, then lieutenant colonel.

R: Wow. Wow.

J: And I was commanding officer in the military of Army veterans who are working for retirement in Bay City. I was commanding officer of that for several years while they finished their time and service.

R: I see. So that was after you came back from the war.

J: Yes, yes.

R: And you still—

J: I was still active. I put in, I think, almost twenty-two years in the Reserve Program. In Active, and Reserve Program.

R: So you were active—oh, so you didn't go right back to civilian life.

J: Well, no. I did, but I flew actively out of Grand Prairie, I don't remember what the field was. But I flew military there for the three and so years that I was in dental school.

R: Oh, that's right. You became a dentist, yes.

J. Yes.

R: And so, did you form a team before you went over to Europe?

J. No.

R: You did not. And did you fly there, or did you go by ship?

J. I went by Liberty ship, and I flew home, however. Went from Italy down to Casablanca, had an engine go out. So I had to land in Casablanca and we spent a week there, I guess, and they fixed the engine. Said, "You can go now."

Well, we went to Marrakech. That's way down South Africa, down that way. And there's miles and miles of desert you're flying over. And the engine went out again. So we got down to Marrakech. And we were there for two weeks, I guess. Couldn't go to Marrakech because the Arabs were giving everybody problems in those days, or the—whoever they were, I don't know. There was a B-24 and a B-17 taxiing out to the runway,

and they hung wingtips and dashed into front of each other, so they took all those crew members and put them on a C-54, a big airplane, and flew them back to the states, while we—they took an engine off of that B-17 that crashed, and put it on my B-17, and we flew from there to the Azores Islands, and then into Gander Field, Newfoundland, and then on into Maine, Bradley Field, I believe.

[20:49]

R: Bradley Field. Yes, I'm from Maine. So when you went over on the ship, where did you leave from? When you first went over?

J: I went to the same place my father and my brother sailed from. That was Newport, out of Virg—

R: Rhode Island.

J: Out of Virginia.

R: Virginia, okay.

J: Newport News.

R: How did you get there, by train, or bus?

J: We got there by train. We traveled in the U.S. by train, because we were—when you've got thousands of people getting on ships, going somewhere, they're not going to fly, not many, they wouldn't fly any of us there, because they would just put you on the train and send you that way.

R: Right. I wanted to ask about your family, did you have brothers and sisters?

J: I had a brother.

R: Older brother or younger brother?

J: Older brother. He went to—he was blind in one eye and he was on limited duty, but he was in the finance department. And he spent—I don't know, a couple of years in Paris.

R: Wow.

J: And he, in the Battle of the Bulge, why, he had to get a gun and go in for awhile. And after the Bulge was over with, he went back to Finance.

R: So your family, your mom and dad, they really had you to worry about, mostly.

J: Well, they had both of us, of course, because he was over there, where all the action was, and had been in the Battle of the Bulge, and was back in Paris.

R: Did you write your parents?

J: Oh yes.

R: Regular?

J: Yes. Sure.

R: And then was your mom— (sound of equipment being bumped)

R: Sorry about that. Your parents, they must have been proud to have you go, even though they were—

J: Well, I'm sure they were, but as all parents, they would hate for their children to have to go off to war.

R: Right, right.

J: So, anyway—

R: So when you went over on the ship, then you landed in England?

J: No.

R: No?

J: I landed in Italy. We went through the Straits of Gibraltar and went on to Naples, and got off at Naples and took a truck over the mountains to Foggia. That's where we were stationed.

[24:09]

R: So was Italy out of the war by then?

J: No, no. It was—we bombed up around the Po Valley, and so forth.

R: So when you were travelling, to get to your base, there was actually still enemy—? No, not enemy—

J: Oh, yes, there were still enemies in Italy. And they—but the 5th Army and so forth, they were fighting, I don't know, about Cassino, up that way. And we made a mission or two in Italy, but most of our flying was up in Germany or Austria, on oil [installations and refineries] and—

R: And when you got there, what did you think of Italy? What did you think of the barracks? Was it pretty different from Las Vegas?

J: When I got into Foggia, I lived in a tent. And I later took the tent down and my roommate and I built a shack, as we called it, out of belly tank crates.

R: Really!

J: And the windows, we had big nails holding the windows that we could open them and close them. And we made closets and put a bar across them to hang our uniforms on, out of ammunition boxes. On the outside we had a belly tank crate that we filled with water. We had a faucet in the building where we could have water running.

And we had a barrel of hundred-octane gasoline outside our tent, and we piped it in and we made, out of a ration can, we put copper tubing in it like this, and we punched little holes in the copper tubing, and we turned the gas outside on, and when it would start dripping in the bottom of the tank, that portion would have a little flame that would heat this portion above it, and in just a minute, when that got hot enough, it was just like natural gas. (Makes a whooshing noise.) And we—

R: Wow.

J: So that's what we had, a belly tank, we had runway—

R: Where'd you get the tubing?

J: I don't know where we got it—

R: Maybe right there.

J: —probably from it a wrecked airplane or something. We were good friends with the carpenter, and he could get some things for us. But we had runway matting for our

floor, which was steel plates for runways, so you'd land on them, you know. They hooked together, so they wouldn't move. And that was our flooring.

R: Wow.

J: So we had heat in the winter, and it did get cold. We had heat, we had running water, and so forth.

R: Just you and your roommate? One other person?

[28:34]

J: Yes, but we were just one in a long line of tents, and so forth.

R: And where was your roommate from?

J: He was from New Jersey! (Laughs.)

R: But, you really knew how to take care of yourselves, then.

J: Well, we did a good job of it.

R: I wonder how many young men would know how to do that kind of thing now, you know?

J: I don't know.

R: That kind of innovative—

J: Well, we had fine heat, because when that copper tubing—we had punched holes in it, drilled holes, little holes in it, and when it would heat the one up here, then it would volatilize the gas coming out, and it'd be just like natural gas.

R: Exactly how they designed it. Right. And so that was in Foggia. Now, were you there for several months? A year? As long—

J: Yes. Yes, I guess almost a year.

R: Did you ever have a birthday there? Did you say, "Oh, today it's my birthday, let's celebrate?"

J: Well, I probably did, but—

R: Just wondering. You had time to do some building, but didn't you have like mission, mission, mission or did they give you a rest?

J: Yes, we'd have three or four days between missions. By the time I got there—of course, you didn't always fly a mission, as such. You might not even fly one for a couple of weeks or something, you know, but then you'd be back into missions. I flew, I believe, about fourteen missions, and then we flew home.

R: I was reading a book about flying B-17's, they talked about in Europe how they changed their approach—but these were people coming out of England, might have been a different group. Where they instead of going in to drop the bombs in a zigzag pattern, they'd go in straight.

J: Well, uh—

R: Or even go in in daytime, to make it easier to drop the bombs, but then you got more—I mean, those kind of decisions were coming down from the top, right?

J: Well, we never zigzagged into any target.

R: No.

J: We had—did you see any of those things I had? I had some flight things—let me look and see if I have some here. I'm looking for flight—

R: The flight patterns? Yes, I think probably "zigzag," that's just out of the top of my head.

J: Let's see, that's my B-17 there, the bombs falling. I was looking for a, kind of like this. (Looking through papers.)

Tish (wife): Can you stop? Can you pause?

R: Oh no, I don't have to pause. That's fine.

T: Because there's a—

J: Here is one of our handouts that they gave us in briefing, and you can see everything's straight line to the target.

R: So just go right in. Okay. Then I don't know where I got that information.

J: Anyway, when you get up here, there's an IP here somewhere, then you would start your trip into—these are bad flak areas here, heavy flak. Then you would take your initial point, and from there you would make your trip over the target.

R: Yes.

J: And my friend, I think he must have died this past year or so, General Hewitt. I flew tail gunner with him one time. Now, you know, from the cockpit of a B-17, you can't see who's behind you—

R: Okay.

J: —obviously. And I used to wonder how he could be pilot of the lead, the General was—how he could see everybody back of him, and if somebody would begin to lag off to the right or something, he would quickly call their name, and tell them, "What are you doing out there? Get your ass back in here!"

R: Wow.

R: I couldn't understand how he could see that, but when I flew tail gunner with him, I understood. Because you're sitting in the tail end, with the two tail guns—

R: You actually flew in the gunner position?

J: Yes.

R: Once in a while, or just—

J: No. That was a special deal. There's a—had to be a pilot in the tail of the plane.

R: Okay, I didn't know that. Okay. So you weren't the gunner.

J: No, I wasn't the gunner.

R: No, I wasn't—

R: But you were just the pilot there, I mean, not "just"—

J: I was a pilot, but I was substituting as a tail gunner, watching the other—the airplanes were, there was three, and three more.

R: Three—and three. Yes. So you're saying, that when you were the tail, then you saw how he could—

J: I could understand it. If someone started getting too much out of line, or dragging their tail end out or not staying in close. Because you had to stay close, because the lead bombardier would be the one that targeted the target on the ground, and when he released his bombs, everybody released their bombs.

R: Really?

J: Yes.

R: Ooh.

J: We bombed as a group. And so, unless you were in a tight contact with the crowd, your bomb—if you drifted off to the side, then it wouldn't do any good. So he would say, "Let's get out of here." Well his words were, "Let's get the hell out of here." And that's what I heard him say out of fourteen times. We would rally, because the gunners would be shooting at us, and the flak was on its way up, at a certain altitude. When we would drop our bombs, we would rally left or right. In doing so, when the general would say, "Let's get the hell out of here," we would drop 2,000 feet fast, and go (unintelligible) direction.

R: So, sort of like under the flak? No—

J: Yes!

R: A little bit. I mean, when you had to drop, you had to come down to a certain—

J: We would—

R: You'd have to come down to drop them, right? You couldn't fly to—

J: No, no. We could drop bombs at any time.

R: Really.

J: Yes. A lot of times, we'd have a bomb that would stick in the bomb bay. And we'd get out in the back, and flying over some village way below, and kick those bombs out. I imagine the people were wondering what in the world those idiots were doing.

R: Did you actually physically kick them out?

J: No, you'd just fix them so that you could just drop them, with the bomb release thing.

R: Right, because I'd read something about where there was a plane that had to fly back to England, a B-17, they had a bunch of bombs still—they carried them back, because they couldn't release them.

J: Yes, but we didn't like to carry bombs back.

R: But then he had to, he had trouble, he couldn't put his landing gear down, like you said. I'm sorry, this is right in the way. (Adjusting microphone.)

J: I'll keep my hands away from it.

R: But then he couldn't land easily, because he didn't have his landing gear, and then he couldn't just land, crash land, with the bombs.

J: Uh-huh. No, that wouldn't—that would have been a bad idea.

R: Gosh. (Laughs.)

J: I know we would drop down fast, because there's lots of shells already fired down on the ground, headed up toward us. So when we would do that rally to the right or to the left, we were getting out of where the shells were going to be exploding.

R: Right.

J: You know, those shells—did you see those little pieces of flak?

R: I saw the piece of them, yes.

J: They come out of my airplane.

R: Looked pretty innocent.

J: They looked innocent, but they—there's our general, right there. (Showing photograph.) Tish and I visited him several times, up in—

R: Yes. He's good-looking.

J: Yes, he was. He was, uh—anyway, I thought I had flak, where there—all of this is flak. (Showing photograph.)

R: Wow.

J: You can see, if there's that thick up here, and you rally left, go drop down 2,000 feet to the side, either way, why, you get out of that, because those are already on the way up, and they're going to be exploding after they get up there. The flak.

R: Right. But then you must have had times when the flak hit the plane, you lost—did you lose your crew?

J: No. You didn't—all of these explosions were pieces of flak flying in all directions. It would embed; it would go right through your B-17 into the radio room. My radioman had a piece; I don't know how long it was, about so long and so big, that come through the side and landed on his radio table. He had a nice piece. All of my crew members are dead. They've all died.

R: But they were not killed in the war?

J: No, no.

R: So it was not a time of real—

J: No, we visited a lot of them, Tish and I. I had one that said, "You know, I've got a cousin that's a pretty good musician." His name was Mancini.

R: Huh. Henry Mancini.

J: Henry Mancini was his first cousin.

R: My gosh.

J: Yes.

R: So when you were up there, dropping bombs, you were not agonizing about: "Am I going to get home?"

J: No, unh-uh, hells no.

R: "Am I going to get killed?" Of course you were nineteen.

J: Yes, you never even—you don't think about that. Really and truly, flak was flying everywhere, you could see all the flak bursting.

R: And you weren't scared?

J: Well, you were real uneasy.

R: Yes, yes.

J: I won't say I was scared, but—

T: (Wife interjecting.) The cabins were not heated.

R: Oh, yes, how about the temperature? I heard that. It could get terribly cold.

J: Very cold.

R: Fifty-five below, something like that?

J: I'm sure, I don't know how cold it gets up there, but my feet almost got frostbitten one time. I limped around the base there for a week, I guess, because my feet got so cold. Almost got frozen.

T: And your breath.

J: Oh yes.

R: And you could see your breath.

J: Yes. When you're breathing, your exhaust or your breath has moisture in it. After a bit, you could just pull a big hunk of ice off of your chest.

R: My gosh. But even though you had a nice flight jacket?

J: Yes. We had—

R: Gloves?

J: We had sheepskin, at one time. And then we kind of quit using them, because they were hot.

R: (Laughs.) Too hot.

J: And you know when the war was over, they took those sheepskins and just ripped them and threw them in the fire.

R: Really. Well, when you were making the runs, did you bomb Berlin then, too?

J: No. I had a —(asking Tish) you know where that one is that I had a picture of, had a little outline of everything I had bombed?

R: Well, I can maybe get that later, too. And that can be a supplement. So that's not—
But, did you have a feeling for like the war being won? Did you have a feeling for that?
Or you were just—

J: Just doing the job.

R: Just going and doing it. Just the job.

J: You see there's a big hole in a B-17. Captain Butts was the pilot. And that's when the German first came out with a jet, ME 262, twin engine jet, and it came through firing rockets.

R: I heard that. Yes.

J: And the rocket went in inside here, and blew—that's all out.

R: Whew.

J: It blew and killed one waist gunner. We thought he was going to break in two, before we could get home. But it stayed together.

R: That was in your plane?

J: No, no. Captain Butts.

R: Captain Butts. That was part of your formation?

J: He was a lawyer, in Florida. He's dead now.

R: Well, I won't keep us, keep going a long time. I just wanted to know—when we had victory, where were you then, you were still in Italy?

J: Yes.

R: VE day?

J: Yes.

R: And how did you celebrate?

J: Well, I don't remember, but I'm sure we had a little nip or two.

R: Right, right.

J: We had an officers' club right on base.

R: Did you learn to speak Italian?

J: No, I didn't learn any Italian.

R: Of course, you were doing your job, and you were speaking English all the time, right?

J: Well, you know, we had to go into Foggia by—there's the lady that I was — (showing photograph) went to Isle of Capri for rest camp. And met her, and I even corresponded with her for a while.

R: What was the rest camp for?

J: Well, they felt like you needed a little time off to recuperate from flying ten missions. When you flew ten missions, why, you got a little break.

R: And so how do think actually being in the service—it really changed your life, didn't it?

J: Well, it could have. Did you see this?

R: No.

J: Well, let's get around here so you can see it. (Moving position.) We had the—before the Po Valley push, they dropped thousands of paratroopers up there to start the big battle in the Po Valley, northern Italy.

R: Mm-hm.

J: And they were parked like this, along the—that's the crash strip (showing photograph) on all these, as far as you could see. That's a C-47. One of the guys coming in was crippled and he was coming down, trying to land on the crash strip. And these are some pictures that we took running —

R: Wow.

J: —to the wreck.

J: And these are a series of them.

R: Oh my gosh.

J: Killed two young men, sitting in the nose of one of these planes. See where the wing went through this one?

R: Yes.

J: Anyway, that's what killed them. They were sitting in the cockpit, watching us come in, the landing come in.

R: Well that's—yes.

J: And the next day, that's what was left of the B-17.

R: Wow. Well, that's an amazing record. Yes. You've really captured a lot there. Your things are great. So, I'm going to just—so, you didn't feel like there was any big aftereffect, shellshock and not being able to sleep—

J: No.

R: And not being able to focus in your civilian life, when you became a dentist?

J: No.

R: No? That's good. Well, it's a long time ago, now. But now we think about this shellshock, and what happens to people in war, you know.

J. Yes. Well—

R: What's your feeling about that?

J. We were always glad to get back home, or to the base camp, you know. We would be interrogated, and then we could go to officers' club, or whatever.

R: Well, I thank you for your time, Mr. Hart. I've learned a lot, and I'm really glad you were able to share what it was like actually being there—

J: Well, it wasn't—

R: Being a pilot, it's hard to imagine it. I thank you for that.

T: Tell her about when you came back home, you were going to train for that other plane.

J: Well I came home—

R: After D-Day, yes.

J: After the war in Europe was over with, I came home early, or as soon as they could get us home, to check out in a B-29. I got back home, and they said, "Well, we really don't need pilots now because we've got them running out of our ears since the war in Europe is over." But I was supposed to check out in a B-29 and go to the Pacific, because I just had flown fourteen missions. I went ahead and got out of the service, and was back in the University of Texas, when the war was over in Japan. So I didn't have to go into B-29 training—

R: Good. Or were you regretful? Did you want to keep going with it?

J: Well, at that time, I kind of wanted to fly, go ahead to B-29 training. But like they said, "We've got pilots running out of our ears, so we don't need you, if you want to get out." So I got out and got back to school.

R: Well, I'm glad to hear it. But I'm glad—it sounded like you made really good use of your flying experience too, and your war experience, in your civilian life too.

J: Yes, I really enjoyed flying. After I moved to general practice in Palacios, down the coast, I had a friend that had three airplanes. He and I used to fly with our wives, we've been to Mexico, all over. I've always had one of those airplanes at my disposal.

[Camera lost power, interview concluded at this point.]