Transcription: Bob Englert

My name is Tom Cengle, and I'm with the Texas General Land Office. Today is August 7th, 2009. It's approximately 1:35 in the afternoon. I am interviewing Mr. Robert Englert by telephone interview. I am located at the General Land Office and Mr. Englert is at his home. The interview is in support of the Voices of Veterans Program of the state of Texas Veterans Land Board. The purpose is to create a permanent record of military service experiences of veterans. Mr. Englert, as you know, I am about to interview you relating to your military experiences. The interview is by telephone and I will be using a tape recorder to record this interview. The interview will be transcribed and made into a permanent record at the Veterans Land Board office in Austin, Texas. Does the Veterans Land Board have your permission and consent to conduct this interview and make it a part of the permanent records of the Veterans Land Board?

Bob Englert: Yes it does.

OK, the purpose of this interview is to record your recollections of your military experience. We will follow somewhat a question and answer format, but please feel free to expand on your answers and add anything that you think may be helpful in refreshing your recollections so that future generations will have the opportunity to know what it was like for you during your military life and how those experiences shaped your life since then. We understand that some of your experiences may be difficult to discuss, and if so you are free to limit the interview to the extent you are comfortable in relating the experiences. We'll start off with some basic background information. First, if you'd give me your full name and address.

Bob Englert: Yes, my full name is Robert, middle name is George, Englert, and the name is spelled E-N-G-L-E-R-T. My address is 2600 West 35th Street, Unit #8, Austin, Texas, zip code 78703.

OK, would you care to give your age?

Bob Englert: I am 86 years old.

OK, I'd like for you if you would to provide me with some family background information, your immediate family, starting with your parents and where you grew up and things such as that.

Bob Englert: My parents were Nellie Englert and my father was George. My father was born in Germany, immigrated to the United States as a young man. My mother was born in western Illinois on a farm. She was the youngest of 11 or 12 siblings. Her parents died when she was a teenager, and consequently I have no family history beyond her experiences and some of her brothers and sisters, my aunts and uncles. My father was born in Germany. At the time he came, and I was a child growing up with his family, he chose to become an American and speak only English, and he never did speak of his family in Germany. I knew he had one sister in New York, but he never spoke of that and the sister once told me that he never had written to his family after he left his family. His mother became widowed and his new stepfather, she remarried and the new stepfather and he were at odds, and that occasioned him to leave and never turn back.

And where were you born?

Bob Englert: I was born in Chicago.

In Chicago, OK, so was I.

Bob Englert: Knowing you're from Chicago, and you ask what school did you go to, without thinking you answer your high school.

OK, and what was that?

Bob Englert: My high school was Bowen High School.

Oh, I remember it well.

Bob Englert: If you know the high school, then you know all about a person. You know, it's like a Dunn & Bradstreet report.

OK, did you have any brothers or sisters?

Bob Englert: I'm an only child.

OK, did you grow up in Chicago?

Bob Englert: Yes, I lived in Chicago until I was married and when I was 27 or 28 years old, and after that I lived in a metropolitan Chicago area all my life until 1980 when I was 56 when I moved to Austin, Texas.

OK, and how old were you when you entered the service?

Bob Englert: I joined the service when I was a college student under a program called Enlisted Reserve, but my active duty started about six or eight months later. I joined in 1942, so I would've been 20 years old then, but when I went in the service I was 21 in April of 1943. I was 21 when I went on active duty.

OK, and what college were you going to?

Bob Englert: I was at the University of Chicago when I went into the service. And prior to that I had been three years at George Williams College, named after the founder of the YMCA movement.

And so you were the only child, and in 1943 you enlisted.

Bob Englert: I enlisted in a program that the military had where they guaranteed, they didn't guarantee but they promised that we would stay in school until we got our bachelors degree. They also promised that if we were called up we would immediately go to officer candidate school and unless an emergency arose, and of course once they got everybody signed up, the emergency arose. So in 1943 we were all people that had been at some level in college maybe sophomore, junior level, some senior level.

And what were you at the time?

Bob Englert: I was about my third year. I had three years at George Williams and I had about, University of Chicago was on a quarter system and I think it was probably the second quarter that I realized I was going to go in. I got notification that I would go in.

How did you not end up going to officer candidate school?

Bob Englert: Well, we got down to Fort Sill and we took our training, basic training, and then the commanding general of the field artillery school came and had us all in assembly and I remember his opening statement, he looked out at us and said this is the finest group of officer candidates I've ever had the pleasure of addressing. However, there are only two openings in officer candidate school.

Ah, the promises, promises.

Bob Englert: So anyway, and one of the two was taken by my bunk mate, the guy sleeping next to me who was from Michigan and he was on a football team that Tommy Harmon was the big star, and the Senator Vandenburg was the military senator, he was in charge of that Armed Service Committee, and so this guy was one of the two candidates that got accepted. However, the payoff was that when I was in China, a year and a half or almost two years later, my orders came through to go to officer candidate school at Fort Sill and I went back. But when I got home, I left Chicago and we had a delay en route, and on the way, the night I had to take the train to go down to Oklahoma to the school, the war ended, and our class never did materialize. And most of us had been overseas and the school our class was made up of people who had been overseas for the most part, and so we had points that would qualify us for discharge and it was a matter of a month or two.

What were you studying in college?

Bob Englert: Well, I don't know what I was studying in college. I went to George Williams because it was essentially a YMCA training center at one time, and I thought I'd like to work at that as a career. While I was there, I also worked in a YMCA and I realized I didn't want to do that for the rest of my life. Then when I transferred to the University of Chicago, I already was classified in the draft as I think 1-A was the classification. Anyway, I knew I'd be subject to going into the military, so I took some courses that I enjoyed taking except for French. I took that because it was required. I didn't enjoy it particularly. And I took algebra again just to see what the mystery of that was, and I still didn't discover the mystery of algebra.

Many of us haven't to this day.

Bob Englert: But I had a free period and they ordered the course, so I could go and did all the homework, did everything and I still didn't know what the hell was going on.

OK, so you were about 18 when the United States entered the war.

Bob Englert: Yeah, in 1941, my birthday is late in the year in November, so I would've been, let's see, probably 18.

Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor occurred?

Bob Englert: Yes, I think I was on a radio in my parent's livingroom.

Were you shocked, or did you anticipate something like that?

Bob Englert: No, I didn't anticipate anything like that and I didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was when I heard that announcement. Of course later, pretty soon the whole news teams of the radio stations came on and I soon learned where Pearl Harbor was, but when it happened, when I heard the announcement, I had no idea where it was.

You were in college at that time?

Bob Englert: Yes, I was in college.

Did you at all consider just leaving school and enlisting?

Bob Englert: No, I tell you they had this program, I knew people when I worked at the YMCA I had a coworker who went into the Navy under one of these programs. He was a little further along and he expected, I think he was in his senior year, so I think he was deferred and of course that would be in 1942, so I think his deferment, he might've been able to stick with it long enough to get his degree. The friend of mine that I was in the service with who, I didn't know at the University of Chicago, but we were together through basic training, and he just passed about two years ago. He wrote a book and we went all through everything together including working together in China. I think it's in his book that he said that he, too, was a student at the University of Chicago, and he was somewhere along the line they mailed him his degree, and he had left in mid-semester, but apparently he was at a point where they must've felt comfortable in giving him a degree for the courses he was in. We went in the middle of a quarter so that he wouldn't have completed everything in a normal thing, but for some reason, and he sounded in the book it sounded like he was kind of surprised that they sent his degree. But anyway he got it.

OK, so you were 21 when you went active, and you went to Fort Sill?

Bob Englert: Well, I went first to Fort Custer for the initial where we got a physical exam and -

Where's Fort Custer?

Bob Englert: Fort Custer is in Battlecreek, Michigan. I had a friend who was from the south and she was someone that we were talking about, and oh, there's a house on the campus at the University of Texas here that was Fort Custer's headquarters, that was it. It's right there on Martin Luther King near the Stadium. And I said oh, that was Fort Custer's headquarters. She said wrong side.

OK, all right. So did you go for basic training at Fort Sill?

Bob Englert: Yes, I took basic training at Fort Sill. We were there, they extended the training period another 4 weeks. They weren't ready to accept us anywhere.

So that was a total of -

Bob Englert: It was 17 weeks at Fort Sill.

17 weeks, that was a long time.

Bob Englert: Well, you know how the Army is. They find something for you to do even though they had no program set up for that. It happened the platoon leader we had was a surveyor, a professional surveyor before he went in the service, and so he just went out and checked some transits out and we did surveying just to learn how to do surveying.

So you were there for about 17 weeks. What were some of the things you did there?

Bob Englert: Well, I was in a training company that dealt with the range finders, the instruments to determine the distance between gun positions and the target.

So it was an artillery type thing.

Bob Englert: It's an artillery thing. We had it, and it was a 105 Howitzer artillery that we were dealing with.

So your basic training wasn't just learning to be a soldier per se, but you were learning how to be an artillery man.

Bob Englert: Well, I don't know, the artillery is a triangle problem, it's a geometry problem because the guns are in one position, and on the face of a clock, they viewed 6 o'clock, the enemy is at 12 o'clock, and the spotter at the observation post may be at 4 o'clock on the clock face, and so the idea is to find the distance from the gun at 6 o'clock to 12 o'clock without dropping a shell in the middle of the infantry that's a little short of 12 o'clock.

OK, so your training then was not to be a basic infantryman, but to be an artillery man.

Bob Englert: That's correct.

Do you have any particular fond or un-fond memories of your basic training?

Bob Englert: No, I found that the basic training, I didn't particularly know if I'm under to that discipline that they, that I was subjected to. I found that it was a little unnecessary, but I didn't have any, it was a by the numbers type of thing. I always remember that the sergeant would give us instructions on doing these mathematical problems, these geography problems of finding the distances of one side of the triangle, and they had a way of doing it with logarithm tables and just by the numbers. But we had one of the men in our outfit was about a third year student in mathematics, and he was from the University of Chicago as well, but he would be sitting there asleep. Then when the sergeant would catch him sleeping, he'd call on him immediately and of course he would pop out the answer, but he didn't do it the sergeant's way step by step. He used some magic formula, algebraic formula or something, but he always had the answer and it infuriated the sergeant because in the first place, he couldn't teach that formula because he didn't know it.

Was there anything that you particularly missed from civilian life?

Bob Englert: I don't know that I did. I'll tell you the truth is for me as a child and as a teenager, and an only child, I was dealing with someone just yesterday, that my parents were both older than a lot of parents were, and they didn't have a lot of things that they participated in,

and we didn't have relatives that came by, and we had really no family, direct, and the family didn't live – we had one uncle that lived in Chicago and that was it. The uncle had one son who was about 10 or 12 years older than me, and we saw them infrequently, like they would come over and have dinner or something but that was about it. So I really enjoyed being with the people. Part of being in the service, I worked at a summer camp for 5 years and I really enjoyed that and I started when I was 14, campers were 16, but I had to play the bugle and the guy that hired me didn't want to get up in the morning and play the bugle, so he found out that me and my buddy as well we both played the bugle. But I enjoyed that association with other people. I found that to be the same in the military. I think that was one of the things that I really liked about the military.

Camaraderie and stuff like that?

Bob Englert: Yeah.

How about anything else you disliked besides being overly disciplined?

Bob Englert: No, I don't know that I disliked, I guess maybe there were some things you say that a person giving the order doesn't really know what he's doing, or that kind of thing where you think you know more about it than the other person, but I don't know, I don't think – I was no expert in any of the stuff, and the people at the academy there, they were more expert than me, so I didn't really have any business thinking that they were not smart enough to do their job or anything. Once in a while there would be maybe in some social like situation it might be, but it wasn't in connection with the training and all, I don't think I had any particular problem.

Did you have any concerns or trepidations about what was going to happen to you once you get out of basic?

Bob Englert: Well, I'll tell you what, there were about 70 in our platoon, in our training platoon, and of the 70, only 7 went overseas. There were 25 people, 12 from Texas A&M and 12 from Colorado A&M that were third year ROTC students, and they were sent back to their schools to finish up their last year, and then I think they were supposed to get a commission after that. I'd lost track once that basic was over. Then there were two things that I could've gone for. One was the Air Force, and the other was they had these programs in universities and colleges around the country, and they had of course engineering type courses. I mean that's subjects that would be suitable for an engineering degree. And I just figured that I was not gonna be comfortable since I hadn't figured out, I took algebra three times and still didn't know what it was, that I just wouldn't be comfortable in -

Pursuing engineering –

Bob Englert: Well either one, and I knew the Air Force would be the same thing. There would be math involved in the thing, which was not a subject that I was particularly interested in, and I was probably poor in when it got down to doing something really significant. So I decided I'd just wait and see. Oh, I did have one thing that I thought might materialize. The University of Chicago gave a course, just a short course before we were inducted, but it was long enough, I think we got a 3-hour credit or something for it, on map reading and aerial photography interpretation, and they had a specialist there and this guy had recommended me to a colleague of his who had been I guess a teacher in that subject, somebody he knew who was a colonel in some unit, I think it was Air Force connected in Colorado. So he recommended me to that

colonel and I did have some correspondence with him. I thought I might get transferred. He kept saying he would have me transferred. But I realized later when he didn't get me transferred that if they only had 7 people out of 70 from that training thing, that ground forces probably weren't too interested in transferring some guy into an aerial photography unit. So I just rolled with the punch.

So you finished your basic training after 17 weeks. Did you feel at the end of that time that you were a real soldier?

Bob Englert: Oh, I don't know that I ever felt like a real soldier.

OK, you were one of those who thought they were just doing their thing that they had to do.

Bob Englert: Yeah, I think so. I always see, you know, Tom Grufaw said, wrote about us being the greatest generation, and I chose to say we were the obedient generation.

There you go.

Bob Englert: Because we were.

Yes, very much so.

Bob Englert: We got beat down so much, you know, the Depression was a bitch, and so almost anything that we were asked to do, we did.

OK, so what happens after the 17 weeks?

Bob Englert: Well we had a short delay en route, and then we went, I was assigned to Fort Ord, California. They had opened up the ground force replacement depot at Fort Ord. They opened up two depots, one at Fort Mead, Maryland, and the other at Fort Ord. There is a side bar in my training at basic training. I was just telling someone the other day that one of my military experiences, it seemed that the first sergeant, no matter where I went, and I always ended up as bitter enemies. For some reason, there was some kind of a natural thing where you know, like I naturally had a problem with them, and so what happened was in the basic training, the man who was on the roster just ahead of me on the alphabetical roster, his name started with El, and mine was En – he was sucking up with the first sergeant, and he and the first sergeant got along, and so the first sergeant was putting him in, they got a request for somebody to go as permanent candidate at Fort Mead, Maryland. The problem is the first sergeant put my name on the order instead of his, and so when they posted the order, of course everybody knew he'd been sucking up to the first sergeant, so they got after, he shot over to the first sergeant and they changed that order. So anyway, I went out to Fort Ord.

So that meant Pacific instead of Europe.

Bob Englert: Yeah, and we were in the first group at Fort Ord.

Where was that located in California?

Bob Englert: At Monterrey. It's closed now, but it's on Monterrey Bay.

Lovely country.

Bob Englert: It's a beautiful place and they had a service club there that was just magnificent. It was just I think Stilwell had that Army that he was commanding before he went to China, was located there and I think he might have been the one that got in at the service club. Stilwell, well he was a classmate of George Marshall and they probably pulled strings to get a nice service club there. But we were there, and we were the first ones. There wasn't enough food, and we would sit at tables, and they served family style. So they put the food on the table and I think there were about 10 people to a table. So the first one would get the serving dish and take half of it. Then he would pass it to a friend of his and the friend would take the other half. The friend would pass it to a friend of his who would run up and get seconds, and then the guy that had the seconds would take half of that and give it to a friend of his. So only 4 people ate out of that dish. The rest was – again, now not every serving dish got, we would get parts of some serving dishes, but the fact is that we would go down to the PX and buy those little sandwiches, all pre-wrapped, just to have something to eat.

Because they weren't equipped yet to -

Bob Englert: No, there wasn't enough food. And in any event, the new commander, the new general in charge of the Army ground forces was a General Weir. Now he had a reputation, he was called "Yoo-Hoo." I mean he wasn't called Yoo-Hoo to his face, but the name Yoo-Hoo came because he arrived at a new post and the entire caddery was out there to meet him, and when he dissented from the plane, he was wearing officer pinks, and someone in the crowd yelled "Yoo-Hoo," and he wanted to know who did that. Of course it would be suicide to confess so no one did. So he broke the whole caddery, all the enlisted men got reduced to private.

Is that right?

Bob Englert: That's what the story was. I wasn't in that unit, but anyway, that was the story about "Yoo-Hoo." Well Yoo-Hoo was the new director of the Army ground force, and he came and when he went to the PX, he saw all these guys buying sandwiches right after dinner. So he approached them and asked what was going on, and so they unloaded on him about the food. I don't know what he did, but we had more food the next day than you could shake a stick at. I don't know, it's like he opened a spigot. We never had that problem again. So I guess he was tough enough to break the caddery of a new unit.

But he fed them well.

Bob Englert: He was tough enough to get the food there, and I imagine he was one of those guys that maybe his reputation as Yoo-Hoo was the thing that did it, but it was unbelievable. I couldn't believe the food that was on the table, more than enough.

It takes the right person.

Bob Englert: In any event, at Fort Ord, I think what they probably wanted us to do was to run our butts off so much that we would be happy to go overseas, because it was unbelievable. They would wake us up in the middle of the night, we'd go out on ___. They would have one company would have to be under the fence and dig in, and the other company would be offensive company, would attack, 2:00-3:00 o'clock in the morning there would be some damn attack and

at first we were given little bags of white powder, and the idea was that you would hit somebody with the white powder and he was out. That was the bullet that killed him. But the fact is, that when people run out of bags, the first thing they picked up some stones, and then the stones got heavier and heavier, and pretty soon they were digging a foxhole and they would have a whole pile of big rocks next to it, and as soon as the attack came, the rock barrage would start.

It sounds like a bunch of kids.

Bob Englert: They finally stopped it because there was too many injuries.

While you were there, did you have any idea what was going to happen to you or where you would be going?

Bob Englert: No, we were just there. We had no idea what we were going to do.

And nobody was about to tell you what they thought was gonna happen.

Bob Englert: I'm not so sure anybody knew. See, we weren't connected with any unit. I think we were just gonna be replacements, and that's how I went overseas as they called us a casual replacement.

So how long were you at Fort Ord?

Bob Englert: Oh, we were there a couple of months I guess. I had a kidney infection. I think it was from lying around on that cold sand. The sand was damp and I was in the hospital for maybe 10 days or so, and I was probably there for, it might've been a couple of months. We went out every day. We went to the range and we shot every gun that the Army owned. We went out and had at least some morning or an afternoon, we'd march out there and get the stuff. We went through the obstacle course on the way out and on the way back, with or without full pack. And at night they would have these night maneuvers until they finally stopped them.

So they were training you pretty good. It was not an easy life.

Bob Englert: Oh, it was a mean son of a gun. They were mean out there. I have a picture of our platoon. Well, I have a newspaper, Panorama, I think was the name of the paper, and I have the paper of our platoon marching, and my friend Frank Evans, he had big eye glasses, and his face was very prominent. I couldn't find my picture on there. But the first lieutenant was in charge of the platoon, and he was a mean little bastard, and I think Watts or something like that was his name. At any rate, they really were tough, and I think as I often in talking about that experience, I think they wanted to get us so that we were so ticked off about the whole thing that we were ready to go anywhere.

And were you?

Bob Englert: Yeah.

Were you anxious to get out of there?

Bob Englert: Oh yeah.

Were you looking forward to a combat type experience, or what was on your mind?

Bob Englert: I didn't have any idea. I didn't know what the experience would be.

Like you said, you were a generation of obedient fellow, where they sent you is what you did.

Bob Englert: Yeah. From Fort Ord we went down to Camp Anza which was near Riverside, California, and that was the most depressing looking place because they had some sort of camouflage paint on the thing so it would look like the dry earth that was all around there. But we didn't have any, that was just a port of embarkation, so there's not much going on there, but I know it was near Riverside because I went into town. As I remember, Desi Arnez was a special service guy, and Lucille Ball used to come out with some of her young women in the movies. I don't know whether she was a movie star by that time or not, but they would come out and do a little entertainment. It wasn't an organized thing like USO, it was just something that she would bring the girls out there and they would sing and dance. I think they were probably all aspiring to be singers and dancers in the movie business.

So eventually they told you you were going to go on a ship somewhere, or something.

Bob Englert: Well, they just put us on Thanksgiving Day of 1943, we were called out, and put on a truck and they took us down to the harbor in San Pedro. They didn't tell us where we were going or what was going on. However, the boxes and crates that were being loaded on the ship had numbers on them, and so the people working on the docks all knew what the numbers meant. They knew that we were going to India. And so we knew that much, but we were about a day and a half at sea before they came around and gave us a little, books that the Army used to give and maybe something on India and all of the customs of India and so that when we get there we would have some idea of it.

So until you were on the ship and underway, you had no idea where you were going or what you were going to be doing.

Bob Englert: Well we had an idea only because the stevedores who were working on loading the ship told us where we were going.

Did you ever know in your wildest imagination when you got into the Army believe you were going to end up in India?

Bob Englert: I'll tell you, I never believed that I would go around the world before I was 25 years old.

Those were special times.

Bob Englert: I would have never believed it. But our ship went out, and what they did was on this liberty ship, they put a wooden box, a wooden shelter. It was just a frame big enough to hold four triple-decked beds, and that's where we stayed. That was our quarters on the boat deck.

So you were above the hold on deck.

Bob Englert: Oh yeah, we were up there. They had the P-40 planes wired down, strapped down on the deck. They had, we didn't see them load, most of the ship had already been loaded, all the holds were, there was only one hold open when we got there and that was the one at the very rear of the ship. So we were told by the merchant crew that was on the ship that everything else down below was all bombs and some sort of explosive.

Oh wonderful.

Bob Englert: Yeah, the steward on the merchant crew had been on merchant ships that were sunk, and he would sleep up and he would go right up at the bow and sleep right there because the theory was if the ship got hit, he would get blown off in the air and land in the water someplace. So he had a cot up there and slept with a lifebelt on, a life jacket I should say.

If he was going to get hit and blown off, he would at least be ready.

Bob Englert: He'd fly out there.

So how long were you on the ship? Do you remember the name of the ship?

Bob Englert: I think it might've been Pelham. Now the reason I say it might have been, later in life I had a neighbor that had the name Pelham, and I may have the names identified with my neighbor. But I think it might've been the Pelham. Now my friend Evans who wrote the book did not identify the ship because we were together on that ship.

So how long were you on the ship?

Bob Englert: Almost two months. We took a circuitous route down and we stopped, we were on Christmas Eve, we were in Tasmania, in Hobart, Tasmania.

That was your first stop?

Bob Englert: Yeah. We only had one stop, I mean other than the end of the line at Karachi, India. But the one stop was in Hobart. We were there overnight. We left on Christmas Day and we went out into the Tasman Sea and we were in the god-damnedest storm that you can ever imagine. That ship almost stood up on the stern and then would flop down. You know, those liberty ships didn't have a good reputation. There were some that just cracked and sank as they were launched, and just visualize that thing breaking up out in the middle of that storm.

Liberty ships were a transport, not a large size -

Bob Englert: No, they were a relatively small ship.

And they made tons of them.

Bob Englert: I think they turned them out something like one a day. They really made a lot of them. The Kaiser Company was involved in making them. But they had a steel mill and they had everything out there. And there was someplace in California north of Los Angeles, I've forgotten now, I used to know one of the places where they would launch those things. But in any event we were at sea for about 60 days. I think it might've been a little short of 60. It might've been more than 30, but it was New Years' Day is when we left San Pedro and arrived

on Christmas Eve in Hobart. We left on Christmas Day and we arrived in sort of mid to late January.

Did you get ashore on that one stop?

Bob Englert: Yeah, we got ashore. As a matter of fact, my friend had been married during that delay en route we had before going to Fort Ord, and so as we were getting ready to go ashore, he took a $20 bill and he put it in his wallet behind his wife's picture. He said you know, we get on shore we'll probably be doing some drinking and I don't want to lose, we might need some money when we get back so we'll have this $20. So the next day on Christmas Day, I woke up and Frank's wallet was laying on the floor and it was flopped open. His wife's picture was torn in half and the $20 was gone. He must've needed that $20 really bad.

Wow. So it was one day is all you got.

Bob Englert: One night. We had to be back on the ship like at midnight or something.

So what did you think of being a sailor?

Bob Englert: Oh, the sailing part was all right. That was fine. It was monotonous, but we were, compared to when a lot of people went overseas, we were on kind of a luxury cruise because we ate with the crew. So we ate the regular food that they had on there. The only problem, the quarters weren't particularly good. There was one of these wooden houses that we occupied and then across on the other side in the same relative position, there was a second house and in that house they had Chinese pilots. They had been trained in the United States and they were on the way back to China, and they were objected because they felt that they should have better quarters and they shouldn't be living in the same squalor that the enlisted American soldiers were in. And the Navy had little rooms that the sailors, the gun crew slept in, and the Merchant Marine of course had nice rooms, or nicer than the box on deck, so they went on a hunger strike, but no one knew they were on a hunger strike except them. So after a few days of starvation, they decided to go to eat. The steward who was the guy that slept up in the front of the ship, when the cook cooked more food that day because he had 12 more mouths to feed, they ate in the officer mess. In fact the steward backed the cook up against the stove and accused him of stealing food. Now he's in the middle of the Pacific. Even if he stole the food, what would he do with it? I think the steward was taking little pills to medicate himself as well. That was probably part of the deal.

So you were having a little bit of an international incident there.

Bob Englert: Oh, it was an international incident when these guys finally got over their hunger strike and all that, and the realized nothing was going to happen to benefit their living place, but they had some pistols with them and you know, we had an albatross that followed us all the way across the ocean. He was just up there floating. So they came out and they decided they would shoot that albatross, and you talk about an international incident, the merchant crew were ready to throw those people overboard because the albatross, I mean that's a myth of the albatross, but in real life what it means is if the ship sinks, that albatross may be the only meat you're gonna get if you can catch that albatross.

So they weren't very happy with the Chinese boys out there having a good time shooting.

Bob Englert: Oh, they were more than unhappy, they were really upset. I think it even involved the captain coming down and putting an arm on the Chinese. We never saw the captain, so I think there must've been the captain came down.

So 60 days out on the ocean. Did you ever fear getting torpedoed or bombed?

Bob Englert: Well, I tell you, the only time the fear I had was that if we did meet an enemy ship, the Navy did a couple of shots, they put some, a raft of some sort out on the ocean and shoot at it, and then they couldn't come anywhere near that thing, and so my fear was that if we did see anything, meet anything, then the gun crew, were they gonna be any good. It's hard enough to get anywhere near a target when the gun is stationary, but here the gun is going up and down with the waves. It was literally impossible to get it. But in any event, yeah, I guess we might've had some -

But you never had any incidents of running into –

Bob Englert: No, the story was that they went so far out of the way that it wasn't cost effective for the enemy to try and find the ship. They say that one of those liberty ships went every day with the same group, like 12 people, well 2 houses, so there would be about 24 on the deck. Let me put it this way, there was some apprehension and mostly the people who seemed most concerned were people in the merchant crew who had experienced a ship sinking. I remember one of the crew told about how he was on a ship when the captain, they had a meeting saying not to abandon ship until he gives the order, and I don't know where he was when the ship was hit, and the captain and some others got into a lifeboat and took off, and then they could hear this voice calling "abandon ship" and it was the captain way out, he was the first one off. And I don't know if that's a true story or not, but they believed it.

OK, so eventually you get to Karachi, and what happened then?

Bob Englert: Well, we went to a camp. We went out on the desert and they called it Camp Malare. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine who just passed away a year or so ago, he went back and forth to Karachi a few times in recent years, and he said the city is built out almost to that camp. But it was out in the desert and they had sort of stone buildings out there with big rooms about maybe 6 beds or so in each room, and we were just there, and we ate outside. We ate with mess kits, and you could tell where the food was because they had these vultures or buzzards, I'm not sure which they were, they were flying around the food and they were like a cone with the tip of the cone down low and you could just look out over that desert and you'd see a flock of buzzards going around and you would just follow over there and that's where the food was. There were stories of these birds coming down and picking food right out of the mess kit. I never had it happen to me, but there were a number of people who said it either happened to them or they saw it happen to somebody in line.

What were your first impressions of India?

Bob Englert: Well, India was, I guess it was the poverty that impressed me. Then also the Indians are big on begging, and the bashees is their term, and many of them have open sores. It looks like they just keep them open to make, elicit sympathy from people. But the begging going on all over, I often comment that the Indians, I don't know if they're into stealing or not, but they were really into begging. The Chinese were big on stealing, but they would lose face if they begged.

Interesting.

Bob Englert: I didn't hear any war stories about stealing in India, but I wasn't really that way. I went through India both going in and out of, you know, when we got there and when I went home in '45, I went through that same place in Kurachi. The time there was all set. They didn't have time zones, at least the military didn't, and maybe none of it did, but the time zone was established in New Delhi, the headquarters, so in order for us to see a movie, we had to set up an outdoor movie and we'd have to be up until 11:00 or 12:00 o'clock before it was dark enough to read to see the movie, and then in the morning, we ate breakfast in the dark because of the time zone thing So there was a private movie theater of some sort where you'd pay to go, but the one I talk about where you just go and sit out and see the movie, that was a military deal. You could pay to go to a movie and sit in a lounge chair and see a movie, and they had I think some sort of sweet drinks that you could buy there.

Were they American movies?

Bob Englert: Oh yeah. Oh we got American movies from wherever they came from through the special service I guess.

But they even had those in the private theaters.

Bob Englert: Yeah, they had movies. I'm not sure, they could've been British. It's been so long I don't recall that.

How long did you stay in Kurachi and what did they tell you you would be doing?

Bob Englert: Well, in Kurachi we got assigned to different places, and there were actually 11 of us that were raw recruits I call 'em, just came out of basic training and then went through the replacement system. There was one sergeant from the Air Force that was on the ship and lived in our little wooden house aboard the ship, but his duty was with the airplanes that were on board the ship. So when they unloaded the planes, he went with them, and he serviced them and whatever his duties were, he was all tied up with working on the planes. But the rest of us were just there and we waited to see, for the roll of the dice, and two of our men – either two or four – were assigned to Ceylon, and we never knew what happened. It was Mount Bed and had some headquarter down there as well I think so they went there. We I think were maybe, I can't remember exactly, but there were I was thinking maybe at least four of us were assigned to Z Force in China, and in order to get to Z Force we had to take the train across India to Calcutta, and then from Calcutta up to Assam Province where they had the ___ to play over the Hump, so they put us on a train in Kurachi. Those trains, and I see on the TV recently a story of India is still the same. People are riding the trains all the time. They were on top of the car, on the side of the car, hanging on the back of the car, they were all over the thing. Well, that's the way they moved around. There were people all over the train. They gave us a couple of boxes of K-rations. Do you know what the K-rations are?

Yes.

Bob Englert: All right. And we had two or three boxes of K-rations, so that was our food, and we got in there. Now we commandeered a first class car. We had one Indian guy on there. He was dressed in a business suit, and when he got off at his station, the station platform was full of

people to greet him that had flowers and a band was playing, so he must've been some sort of a big shot. But I don't know if he spoke English or not. If he did, he didn't volunteer anything. But anyway we locked ourselves in the car, and of course they were pounding on the door trying to get in, but we wouldn't let anybody else in. So we had a first class car to ride all the way from Kurachi to Calcutta. We thought we wanked it off in La Hor because it's a scenic place, and maybe we were attracted by the name anyway. But we did get off the car with the idea of maybe catching the next train, but I think it was not an original thought because they had a lot of MP's in the station who just grabbed us and put us right back on that train. So we gave up that sight-seeing thing. So we just were on there and we got to Calcutta. We were put in a hotel that the Army had taken over. It was an MP company in there. They enlisted us in going down to the dock and standing guard over the watch that the people unloading ships, I guess they would steal stuff coming in on those ships. So we were down there and they gave us a .45 to strap on our belt and we would stand around and look like guards, so we did that. But it wasn't a demanding thing, we were just putting in time. And in Calcutta you could really see the poverty because in Kurachi, we were stationed so far out of town that it was a special thing to get into town, but this hotel that we stayed in was right in town.

This is in Calcutta.

Bob Englert: In Calcutta. And they had one of those Army stoves that had about a 3-foot square cooking surface on the top, and they cooked bacon in that 24 hours a day because these MP guys were coming in at all hours of the day and night, coming on duty and going off duty, and so they could stop and have a bacon sandwich. It wasn't bad. We would always have something there.

Did you know at this time where you were headed for?

Bob Englert: Oh yeah, we knew once we got the orders to go to Z Force, we knew that Z Force was in China, so that we knew that we would be going and we knew in order to get to China we had to go up to Assam Province up above Calcutta.

Because everything below that was pretty well controlled by the Japanese, isn't that right?

Bob Englert: Assam was right on the edge of the Infall plain, the Japanese made a shot at the Infall plain in 1944, and the British stopped them. I'd forgotten about this, but my friend that wrote the book said that we were issued ammunition and guns with the idea that we might have to defend that thing, and we did get one of those little battle stars you put on your campaign ribbon. It was worth 5 points on discharge, and I think we might've gotten a per diem fall deal. I'm not sure because they were pretty close, that thing was pretty close. But we went from Calcutta we just went by train, and there was one river place where we had to get off and go on a river boat for a while. They we had to get off the train at one point. The gauge of the railroad changed from the standard gauge to a metered gauge, so we had to change trains going on. But we ultimately got up and the closest village to us was Dibragar, and I've seen on the maps every once in a while, I take the National Geographic and I think there was an article about the Ledo Road. That was the road they built from India into the northern part of Burma to open up the Burma Road, and I saw they had Dibragar on that. But it was just a little, we were in sort of a clearing in a jungle. We lived in, they had tents, sides to the tent and each tent held I think about four people in a tent. And we had a mess, but one of the magazines I think was Carter's magazine had written an article, they surveyed Army mess around the world, and some of the mess at Chebwa is what they called the area where the airport was, they said that was the worst

mess of the whole military installation. But we didn't have that problem because there was a railhead that came up from Calcutta and it just ended up there, so what they did, and that was the Japanese attack coming across Infall was to cut that railroad, and that was to stop the supplies going to China. So they had all this stuff that was unloaded and so we would go over there, mostly on a volunteer basis, and we'd go over there and they would bring in coolies and we would have them file the cases of tomatoes with tomatoes and potatoes with potatoes, and get it organized and they put it in warehouses, well they were just bamboo poles with a palm frond type of roof on it. But they would put it in some sort of order so that as the Indians unloaded the trains couldn't read English for the most part, they just unloaded everything. So we would do that. But then when the truck would come to get us, we would load up the truck bottom with all of the food that we were gonna need at our little mess and so we had gourmet meals in the mess because we had whatever was over there in that big depot. There was plenty over there.

So far you haven't lived too badly in this military.

Bob Englert: No, we didn't have too much of a deal. And then we flew the Hump, of course they just called us, they had room in a plane and they would call us and fly the Hump. Now I flew over the top in the sense that we flew up about 20,000 feet and then went through some passes, because the mountains were higher than that, but we'd go through some passes and then descend in Kunming. My friend who wrote the book went on a hospital plane and I think he'd been sick, but he had recovered but I think he had been in some hospital in India up there in that Chebwa area and so he went on a plane. He flew right to almost treetop there and his description of course of going over was the beautiful rivers and the scenery. He didn't get shot down. Well, I think they had it identified as a hospital plane in some way. In any way, it was a way of going south, but most people went over the top and I think it took about three hours to go from India to China, but most of it was climbing up on the west side of the mountains.

So you were going to Kunming.

Bob Englert: Yeah, we landed in Kunming.

And that was a big staging area, was it not?

Bob Englert: That was THE entrance to China. That was the only entrance to China. And when they opened up the Burma Road, when the road was being built, the original Burma Road came in through Kunming, in other words it came straight up from Rangoon and then went on about a 45 degree angle up through the mountains to Kunming. They built the Ledo Road to come in from India across the top to join that road that came up from Rangoon right at the juncture, that place they…[*recording stops suddenly*]

OK, I think where we left off when our machine konked out last time was that you had flown I believe over the Hump to Kunming which was your introduction into China, and would you tell us what Kunming was at the time that you were there.

Bob Englert: Kunming was the window to the outside world for the Chinese and for the military, both the Air Force and ground forces in the U.S. military.

After you arrived there, what kind of things did you do?

Bob Englert: I was assigned to a unit called Z Force. Just briefly, General Stilwell was in charge, second in command under Wiedemeyer in the China-Burma-India theater. He was the highest ranking American general, and his theory was, he was a gong force general. He organized three forces – X, Y, and Z – and it was all designed, X and Y were designed to recapture northern Burma so that they could open the original Burma Road and send supplies to China. Z Force was down in southeastern China with the idea of opening up a pathway to the coast so that the American troops in the island hopping would have access to the mainland of China, and also to protect the air fields that were out there. So that was my initial thing. I was a casual replacement in that. When I got to China, I was assigned at first on detached service to Y Force to receive the goods that came in over the Hump and transport them to warehouses in Kunming.

At this time, things coming in over the Hump were coming in by air.

Bob Englert: That is the only way they came in.

OK, because the Burma Road was not open.

Bob Englert: The Burma Road was closed. The original Burma Road would be a road that came straight north from the coast at Rangoon and straight up to the northern part of Burma in a town called Mishinaw, and then it went on a 45 degree angle to the right up to China and went into China on a road through the Himalaya Mountains. So the idea was the American engineers built a road from India to Mishinaw, about a 45 degree or 30 degree I think to the left, and coming down they called it originally the Ledo Road. Later is was named the Stilwell Road. And that road would terminate at Mishinaw so that now you had like a Y, and now the supplies could come down from India to Mishinaw and up the road into China and that was the strategy in this whole thing. Y Force was to open up that eastern part of the road.

And that took a lot of fighting before that transpired.

Bob Englert: Well they introduced, they brought in an island savvy troops, organized the troops and it was called Merrill's Marauders.

A very famous unit.

Bob Englert: Very famous, named after General Merrill who was their leader. Then later it became known as Mars Taskforce. But they came there and as a matter of fact they were effective because in the capture of Mishinaw, the Merrill people would capture Mishinaw, turn it over to the Chinese, the Chinese would lose it and they would have to go back in and capture it again. Stilwell was kind of severely criticized because he pushed the Merrill's taskforce and they just were decimated in those battles because they were outnumbered by the Japanese and and if it was not for their tenacity and skills that we would never have, they wouldn't have succeeded. But it was a very, very difficult campaign.

OK, but at the time you arrived at Kunming, the Ledo Road was not completed nor was the Burma Road open, so everything from India had to come what they called over the Hump by airplane.

Bob Englert: That's right. As a matter of fact, they had a seminar on the CBI at the Nimitz Museum here about five years ago, and they had an Air Force historian speak, and it was

interesting that he pointed out that the plans for air use of the Air Force in World War II did not include any significant amount of transport, and mainly they thought of the Air Force as fighter planes and bombers. And it was the China thing that opened their eyes to the fact that they could keep a whole country alive with just air transport, and as a matter of fact it was the birth of things like the Berlin air lift and various other things, and it's being used today by transporting troops and materials all over the world in a matter of days rather than months. So in any event, I was in China with Y Force -

OK, approximately when was it that you got to Kunming? Do you recall?

Bob Englert: Probably it was just at the beginning of the monsoon season that we left India and so that would've been maybe in April or May, probably May in 1944. We arrived in January, I arrived in India in Kurachi in January of '44, late in January. Then we had to go across and were not a direct thing. We were in a clearing in the jungle in the upper Assam province in India just waiting until there was room for us on a plane.

You didn't stay in Kunming very long did you?

Bob Englert: Well, I was back and forth to Kunming. I was in Kunming probably just maybe three months at the most, and then I went on the extension of the Burma Road, and there's some conflict among people who served there whether that was called the Burma Road or not, but in any event it was a continuation of the road that came out of Burma that meandered through the mountains and went down into Kwelin. So we went by truck convoy.

OK, from Kunming to Kwelin.

Bob Englert: The spelling we had for it was Kwelin. The Chinese changed those European things and now they call it Quilin, something along that line.

OK, and why did you go there?

Bob Englert: That was the headquarters of Z Force training center.

Were there air fields there also?

Bob Englert: Oh yes. And they even had when the B-29's came operational, they had B-29's flying out of an air field nearby to Kwelin.

OK. And what did you do at Kwelin?

Bob Englert: Well that's an area where I don't have a great deal of memory because I don't think I was there very long. In the summer of 1944, the Japanese came down and they captured the areas where they had those forward air bases. There was no ground forces available. Those who read the history of the war in China and Burma and India will realize that the Chinese government, the nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek was not interested in having strong ground forces because while Chiang Kai-shek was the leader of the country, he was not the power leader that people like Stalin and Hitler, Roosevelt, Churchill were to their countries. He was a powerful warlord, but there were other warlords who had power as well, and he did not want to have ground forces in the hands or under control of these other powerful warlords because it might challenge his authority as the country's leader.

And one of those warlords was Mao Tse-tung and the Communists.

Bob Englert: Well yes, that was their principle problem. There were other warlords. The story was that the Unan warlord in Unan province only knuckled under to the authority of Chiang Kai-shek because it was the entry for supplies and materials and personnel for the Allies had to come in to China. It was the only door to China was Sukan Ming. So that's Unan province and a friend of mine told me that toward the part that Chiang Kai-shek ordered the provincial army in Unan province down to Indo-China and then he occupied with the old nationalist troops while they were away to kind of solidify his power in post war. But the main enemy that they had were the Chinese Communist groups, and that's one of the things that happened. They stockpiled much of the material that was then used for ground forces was simply squirreled away in mountain caves and in storehouses around the western China with the idea that after World War II was over, then the war in China would really heat up because then the nationalists would have to go and eliminate the Communists.

So much of our supplies that were flown in or brought in on the Burma Road really ended up being set aside for use after World War II as opposed to fighting the Japanese.

Bob Englert: Yeah, as a matter of fact, Theodore White wrote a novel called The Mountain Road and it's the story of the evacuation of Kwelin by an OSS group and on the way out they blew up the supply depots that they encountered on the way out because they were now pretty much the same way I went out to, although I think they went by motor vehicle. But they went out Tubek to Kunming but on the way they destroyed these supply depots that the nationalists had been storing material.

And the major intent of this Japanese push at that time if I'm not correct was to push back these bases, these air fields because of the range of the B-29 made it possible for those bases to be used to actually bomb Japan.

Bob Englert: Well they bombed Japan and they also bombed the sea lanes in the Pacific that served the island installations that the Japanese had.

So you were kicked back to Kunming, and what transpired then?

Bob Englert: Well, in Kunming we were put into a hostel, right close to the city of Kunming.

Was that hostel?

Bob Englert: Yes. I think it was called Hostel 5 if I'm not mistaken. We were right across the street from Hostel 1 which was the headquarters of Y Force and when he was in Kunming it was Stilwell's headquarters as well.

Did you ever run into him?

Bob Englert: No.

Did you ever see him?

Bob Englert: I think yes, I just saw him driving by in a jeep on a street out somewhere in Kunming as I recall. A friend of mine who was, we went together from basic training all the way to China, he's the one I told you he wrote the book, 600 Days in Kunming China, and he not only met Stilwell, he bumped into him as he went around the corner of a building and they collided. After that he was nicknamed by his colleagues as Vinegar Joe. That was Stilwell's nickname, they called him Vinegar Joe Stilwell. So my friend Frank, his friends all called him Vinegar Joe from that point on.

OK, all right now, so far you've flown, well you were on the ocean for 60 some days or 60 days, you had to go through all of this stuff through India to get to a place where you could fly to China, and you flew to China and got involved in moving equipment and things like that. So at this time you had seen no combat.

Bob Englert: No.

Was that disappointing to you? Was it a relief to you?

Bob Englert: No, I didn't have any feeling. I probably was relieved that there was no combat. I've never known, like for example now, I don't own a gun and the reason I don't own a gun is I'm afraid I'm not brave enough to kill anybody. That's my main, I consider that the main purpose of owning a gun is to kill someone, and maybe under addition, and not only that, I think that if I owned a gun, the only gun I ever had was when I was in the service when I was assigned a gun or was temporarily given a gun to do a thing, and I did spend a lot of time with guns and I learned how to take the gun apart and put it together again while it was under a blanket so I couldn't see the parts.

But you were never comfortable with it.

Bob Englert: Well I wasn't uncomfortable putting the gun together and doing that sort of stuff, but what I was not comfortable with was the idea that I might have to use that and shoot a person.

Yes. So you're then I won't say satisfied, but you were, well let's use the word, satisfied that you were serving your country by doing all of the things that you had to do and didn't feel the need that you had to go killing people to take care of your service and do your part in the war effort.

Bob Englert: Well I don't know that I had a feeling that I was doing my part. As I mentioned to you the other day, I consider that my generation could may be the greatest, but it was also the most obedient generation and we just did what we were told. So I followed orders because that's what you do in the military, and had I been instructed to kill somebody I might've had to do that. I don't know, I didn't have to face that problem. But the fact that I was, I guess I might have been obedient enough to do what I was ordered to do. We never did have at that time. We did do a good deal of bombing that happened. As a matter of fact, in Kwelin there was a Japanese plane, a bomber was shot down, and the only evidence of how it was disabled was the .30 caliber bullet in some vital part of the mechanism, the motor mechanism, and so Z Force people there took the credit for that because the only weapons they had were .30 caliber carbines and the M-1's, they didn't have any anti-aircraft equipment or anything that would shoot bigger than a .30 caliber bullet.

So some soldier shot it down.

Bob Englert: Well that was the story and there was a woman who spoke who played American records on broadcast from Shanghai, and she was the same as Tokyo Rose, who was famous for that, but this woman was from Shanghai. I think she might have been from a prison camp or something. She would broadcast and she would tell us. So she started talking about us, how in Z Force we had shot down the plane and so we're going to come and see you tonight and we'll drop a few bombs on you, and you can see if you can shoot another plane down. And so she carried on a one person type of dialog as though she would, and telling us what -

Did you listen to her a lot?

Bob Englert: I didn't have a radio, but if I overheard her or someone nearby had a radio we could hear that.

So the scuttlebutt two would pass it around what she said today or yesterday –

Bob Englert: Yeah, some people had little radios. Well in a later time at the artillery center there were Signal Corps people, there were two men that were I think non-commissioned officers, but they were staff sergeant and so they had been in the radio and television repair business in private life before they went in the service, and we were out about 25 miles or so east of Kunming, and sometimes a plane would take off from the airport in Kunming and try to make an emergency landing on the little airstrip in front of our training center, and if they missed that they hit the mountain right behind the strip. These two guys would run over there and they would rip out the radio equipment from the plane, and it's amazing how many radios they could make from one radio from an airplane. The major in charge of the signal unit had no idea about it. That was not his field. He didn't know anything about radios, so a good deal of those radios had the U.S. material in there, you know, because these two guys would take it off the shelf and make little radios and sell them to the troops.

A little side business.

Bob Englert: A side business. So there were radios like that, but I don't think there was, you know, later on there were portable radios and little handheld radios, I don't think those were in existence yet.

All right, sir, you were chased out of Kwelin, went back to Kunming, and then you moved around for a while.

Bob Englert: Yeah, I just kind of moved. I didn't really do much there. I think at that point I worked on the switchboard in one of the units I was in, and then I got transferred, always by myself it seemed, and I think what they were doing is they took, they looked at the spec number that I got from basic training, and I think eventually I ended up at the field artillery center because my specialized training number was an artillery number for surveyor and range finding and finding the distance to the targets from various observation posts.

Was this field artillery place that you were at, was that in Kunming, or around it?

Bob Englert: No, the field artillery place was about 25 miles east of Kunming. Interesting, in 2005 we were invited, a lot of us were invited back to China to celebrate the end of World War

II, the 65th anniversary, and it was really a terrific program and everything was paid for by the Chinese government.

Really?

Bob Englert: The president spoke to us. We were in the Great Hall at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, and the president of China came and spoke. There was a peace conference combined with that.

This was in 2005 and you made the trip?

Bob Englert: Yeah, I went. My stepdaughter went and my wife went, and the only expense we had was a $1500 airfare for my wife and I think $1500 for me, and I think my stepdaughter had to pay more, $2200. A little less than $3000, more than $2000. But for that, we were transported around China and the Chinese put on enormous celebrations at that place we went. We had banquets every day, frequently. We got tired of getting dressed up for banquets because they liked that. They were all dressed in dark suits, and so we brought dark suits and we also brought a sport jacket and slacks and so eventually between the two outfits, we had some sort of banquet every day just about.

Wow, that was quite a trip.

Bob Englert: We stayed in the finest hotels every place we went, and they had college students who were generally junior or senior, most of them were in their final year of college, who were with us as interpreters, helpers. On the buses they had doctors and nurses.

And how long did this trip last?

Bob Englert: About three weeks.

Wow, so you at least got some kind of reward 65 years later for your service in China.

Bob Englert: I'll tell you, there was one man on the trip whose plane was shot down and so they took him separately to look for that plane, because the Chinese are big on excavating things and restoring things, like you know, those soldiers that they have at Cian, you know. Well they found the wheel of this man's plane. It even had the tire on it and they could read the name of the tire company, American tire company. I don't remember the name now, but something like Goodyear. So they had him, and he had his wife and I think a couple of his, I don't know, his party was probably four or five they took in separately to that town and special program for them to see how they were unearthing that plane and they promised him that they were going to dig that thing out of the ground and get it put in some kind of condition, and so he was planning to go back with his entire family the following year to see that location and see that plane. But we went in one town, I had never heard of it before, Zejang. When we got there, we landed, we were the first plane to land at the airport. The airport was brand new, and there were thousands of people there at the airport in costumes, little girls in ballet costumes, little girls and boys in uniforms, and they had colorful uniforms, and they danced and played, and in that town they have a really great museum dedicated to the 14th Air Force, or they called it the Flying Tigers.

Really?

Bob Englert: Big portraits of Chenault and pictures of the people that were in the 14th Air Force, and it was unbelievable. Every place we went, we went from our hotel to the destination nonstop police escorts, sirens blasting, went through every red light that we ever encountered, just went nonstop as though it was some sort of a presidential parade.

I never realized this occurred. Do you know how many Americans were there?

Bob Englert: There were about 100 people and about a third of us were veterans from that period, and about maybe it was a third to a half were veterans and the other were family members. And it was not the first time this has happened. There's one guy that was in the American volunteer group. That was the group that Chenault organized before we were in the war. They were mercenaries. They had one guy that was in there, and he was about 90 some years old, and he'd been to China I think his wife said six or seven times by this thing. There's a fellow in California, in Los Angeles, that organizes trips to China for, just before we went he took some astronauts to China on a similar type thing. I don't know who pays for this. It's some Chinese-American agency.

A good will gesture of some sort.

Bob Englert: And he calls himself, his email is Burma – name is Green, he's an ex-Marine. But I think it's Burma Joe or something like that. I know he has the name Burma in his email thing. But he called me about maybe a year and a half, two years ago just to see how I was doing. But yeah, and they had medical things. I use a C-pak machine, you know, that breathing thing?

Yes.

Bob Englert: My machine broke in Beijing, and they took it over and got one of theirs from the hospital, brought it to me for the night, and repaired mine. They even made a new cord that would fit the electrical outlets in China.

So your second trip to China was a lot nicer than your first one.

Bob Englert: Well, actually it was about my fifth trip to China. I've gone back a few times. I went once before that. My late wife and I went to China back in the 80s when it was still pretty primitive, and it was always interesting to see the bicycle population versus the automobile population. Last time there was hardly any bicycles around, all automobiles.

Times are a-changing in China.

Bob Englert: But the first time there was no automobiles at all – all bicycles. But the first time was sometime in the 80s, and then my current wife and I went on an elder hostel trip in western China. We went from Unan, from Kunming up to some of those smaller communities along there in southwestern China and ended up in Chendu and then went to Tibet for a week.

OK, I hate to take you away from these great travels that you've had lately, but -

Bob Englert: I just wanted to mention that.

That's terrific. But let's go back to what happened in '44. You were with this field artillery outfit.

Bob Englert: Yeah, it was a training center for field artillery.

And what were your jobs there?

Bob Englert: We had to use a .75 mm pack Howitzer, and we had Chinese interpreters, and we would explain the nomenclature of the gun and how it worked and teach them how to use the gun. There were also people that had the courses in maneuvers, typical types of maneuvers and conditions that would be used. They were teaching these people because the Chinese soldiers were recruited right off the street. When they came into our center, they came tied up with a rope, I think it was around their neck, and they would just, and then they came with armed guards bringing them in, and it didn't look like they came in voluntarily. They weren't singing "Over There" or any of that kind of stuff. They were bound in some way and I can't remember. I shouldn't say it's around their neck because I can't recall, but it seemed to me it might have been around their waist or something. The rope was around their body, not on an arm –

Certainly not true volunteers.

Bob Englert: That's right. They were handcuffed volunteers.

So this was mostly for training Chinese.

Bob Englert: I didn't see the people, oh yes, that's all we were for. That was the mission of X, Y and Z Force, was to train Chinese and then go into the field with them as advisors, and go out with these armies, much the same way things started in Vietnam.

So in China, during the second World War, it's safe to say that we never had a land army there.

Bob Englert: No.

These were just units who were basic advisors. We supplied the Chinese with equipment and arms and things, and we supplied them with advisors for training their soldiers in fighting the Japanese. That was basically the China-Burma-India corridor of the war.

Bob Englert: Of the ground force part of the war.

Right, OK.

Bob Englert: And ___ force of course had their own thing, and the Air Force was treated better, they had their own thing and they had their own supplies. My friend who worked at the airport said that he was dealing with all the trucks he was using were old 1940 and '41 Chevrolet's that he was using, and the Air Force had all brand new 6x6.

Air Force always got the best.

Bob Englert: Yeah, well I remember one time I was meandering around and I saw that they were passing out ice cream in one place, and so I got in line to get some ice cream, and when I got there they asked me when was the last time I had ice cream? I said about a year and a half

ago. And they told me to get the hell out of there that I wasn't in their unit. What they were asking me is did I have some yesterday!

So you never got your ice cream.

Bob Englert: I got no ice cream. But that's what happens to the finagler, he doesn't always get his.

OK, you had some other duties you kind of like volunteered for while you were at this field artillery base, didn't you?

Bob Englert: Well, let me tell you, the reason I got to that story about 2005 is one of the places we went with that group was back to an air field which was restricted by the Chinese now, but it had a lot of old planes on it, and I almost positive, it was the location of the field artillery training center. The mountain back there and the landing strip and the whole thing, and the village at one end. I was almost positive, but there was no one there old enough to ask, no Chinese old enough to ask. Anyway, back to that. I think the most significant thing I had, mostly it was just make do for me, but then when I was at the training center in the field artillery, after coming back from Kunming from Kwelin, I was just kind of doing miscellaneous type things, but then eventually I was sent out and assigned to the field artillery center outside of Kunming, and at that time the Red Cross, they had two Red Cross girls who maintained a library and I don't know what else they did because shortly after I arrived, the commanding officer had authorized the creation of an enlisted men's club where they would serve liquor, so the Red Cross girls weren't going to be out there with a bunch of drunken GI's running all over the place, so they went back to Kunming and got reassigned in headquarters. So the commanding officer appointed me to take their place. My most important duty was to save a seat for the commanding officer at the movie when they had a movie night. And I had one person tried to take my job from me and he made the mistake of not saving the seat for the colonel, and he lost out on replacing me. But I not only maintained the library, but it developed and just by coincidence that they began bringing the Burma Road opened up, and so they began bringing in supplies over that road, and so I started getting messages from Kunming from the headquarters of the special service unit in Kunming that there were things available – sporting goods equipment, softball equipment, baseball equipment, tennis equipment. So I went in and I got whatever they would give us for my unit – shotguns to go hunting in the hills. So I got that stuff in, and one of the things that happened with the sporting goods equipment, I got some softball equipment and one of the GI's in our unit who I didn't know before, because I was new to this artillery training center in Kunming, but this guy had been a professional baseball player, so he talked about organizing a team. So he organized a team, he recruited the players. I got some Chinese coolie help and we laid out a softball diamond for them, and we developed a pretty good team, and one of the reasons we had a good team is whenever this one person, the professional ball player would pitch, he could pitch a shutout. Whenever he would bat, he would hit a home run no matter where the outfielders played, he could hit the ball farther.

The rest of the team could sit and pick daisies and he'd win the game for them.

Bob Englert: So we ended up having a pretty good record, and I think we were entered in a league as I recall. But General Chenault was also interested in softball. He pitched for the 14th Air Force team, fast pitch softball. So one night, Chenault approached my commanding officer who was a colonel, at the officer's club in Kunming, and told him that the 14th Air Force was gonna play our team from the training center, and of course he jokingly said they're gonna cream

you, we're gonna clean your clock at that game. Well, the commanding colonel knew nothing about our softball team. He was busy riding around on his horse. So he got back and the next day he called in whoever was what I would call company commander, but I don't know, we weren't organized like a company, but he called his major in and asked what was this softball team all about, and come to find out that it was being run by a technician 5th grade at corporal level. Well, that wouldn't do if he's gonna play Chenault's team, so he assigned a captain and two or three sergeants, I think I ended up like fourth or fifth in line all of a sudden because of the rank involved. So what happened at that point, I went in the hospital. I got yellow jaundice what they called it, infectious hepatitis, and my skin all turned yellow and I went to the hospital, and my orders to go back to Fort Sill to the officer candidate school came through while I was in the hospital in Kunming. So I went directly from the hospital home, so I never did find out what happened to the softball game.

Oh, what a shame.

Bob Englert: My hope was that, see they really wanted to play baseball, this team wanted to play baseball because the guy that was the professional ball player would play softball just because he wanted to play that kind of a game, but he really wanted to play baseball because softball threw off his timing for baseball. He wanted to do that. So he was going to organize a baseball team before the game, and so it was always my fond expectation now that they had that whole captain and three or four sergeants in charge of the whole thing, and I had been reduced down, it was always my fond hope that the softball players had deserted the team and gone for baseball and embarrassed the colonel.

But you never know what happened.

Bob Englert: I don't know what happened. But there were one or two other things that were really interesting, I've been thinking about it, and it made me feel really good about the military. Christmas Eve of 1944, Hostel 1 was across from our place and we were invited over for Christmas Eve, and they did all they could to have a terrific meal. They had cold beer. That's the first beer we had in China that I had at all in China. They had cold beer, you had to stand in a long line to get it. And then they had Chinese entertainers – acrobats, and you know the Chinese have a lot of dances that are like mock battles, a pairing, a thrust and a pairing and they're blocking with these long rods, and so they had some of that. And the military really went all out to have some kind of a Christmas for us. And music, Bing Crosby singing White Christmas on the loudspeakers, constantly, just kept going over and over, and endless track. But I thought it was really nice. It showed that someone out there cared. Then another thing, the colonel called me in and said he'd like to have a dinner dance for our group, and he made arrangements for me to go into Kunming and meet with this Chinese man and talk to him about arranging the dinner dance. So I went in and the Chinese guy lived in, you had to drive through just a terrible slum area. You wouldn't have wanted a dog living there. But you finally came upon this vast compound. It had guards in there with armed guards, and you had vicious dogs running around snarling at everything, and so when I got there, at the gate the guard got the dogs under control and put them in a cage of some sort and then let me in, and we went in and this guy had just a mansion in Kunming. I don't know who he was. He must've been really up there in social economic field, and he offered me a drink. So at 11 o'clock in the morning we're sitting drinking some Johnny Walker Black Label, not Red Label, but the good stuff. And then we talked about the kind of party we would have, and he picked up the phone and made a couple of phone calls and we had the party in a bank building, in the lobby of a bank building in Kunming. It was one of those old banks where the ceiling was about three stories high, way up, tall ceiling,

and it had a balcony, offices off of a balcony so that it was open in the center. It was a fabulous buffet setup, and the one problem I had to do was monitor the women who came to the party because the women that were coming to that party were going to be the cream of Kunming society, so I couldn't let anybody come in with some prostitute from the United Nations café that was the home at Kunming. And I never knew how these women who led such sheltered lives would be able to identify a prostitute but apparently they had that ability. But one of the persons I met in Kunming was a dean, he may have been the dean, of a university that was there and these people from the university had walked in from the coast. I'd forgotten where the university was originally, but they walked in ahead of the Japanese and they set up their university in Kunming. This dean was a graduate of the University of Chicago. I had been there for part of my last year at that university in the States at the University of Chicago, and they were sending me a little newsletter. It was reduced size. It was like an 8-1/2 x 11 newsletter and it was reduced down to about a half of the page, I mean they reduced it photographically or something. But you could still read it. And so I brought the newsletter to him and he really enjoyed it because while he may not have known anybody, I don't know if he knew anybody who was mentioned there, mostly it was little blurbs about people from the university and where they were stationed in the world during World War II, but he was appreciative of that, so when we had this party I called and invited him to send some of the girls from the university and he said he would, and he said he would arrange to have two busloads of girls to come to the party. Well, the party came off and the busloads never did come. I have no idea what happened. So I called him the next day and I said there must have been some problem that they didn't come. He said well I didn't think you would have the party because your president died yesterday. That was the day that President Roosevelt died.

Oh wow, and you hadn't heard.

Bob Englert: We didn't know that, and the communication was such that the following day right after that phone call, there was an announcement made that President Roosevelt had died and there would be no social events or anything to honor his memory.

That was the day after the party.

Bob Englert: That was the day after the party. But this guy of course heard on the radio, he had a radio and heard that he died and he knew we wouldn't have a dance. So it was kind of a thing, although I'm glad we got the party under our belt. It might seem a little crass to say that, but -

Anything to relieve the tension and what have you that you had to live with.

Bob Englert: Well, it's not something that I, I mean the communication, I had no way of knowing anything about it, and I'm not so sure, unless we got communication along with the order, then to cancel all the parties and social things, that would've been enough to stop it, but if I just found out that, if the dean had contacted me somehow and said Roosevelt died, we're not sending the girls in, and I didn't think you're going to have the party, then I might have had to make a decision on my own of whether we'd have the party or not, but I didn't have that problem. But it was kind of interesting. Also at that same time, we had a military group that put on the musical Oklahoma, and we were in the business of constructing an amphitheater type of thing for outdoor, to see outdoor entertainment, and we had the stage constructed, and so I had that rushed along and put some stones and rocks in there for people to sit on, not rocks, I should say blocks of stones for seats, and we saw the best version of Oklahoma that I've ever seen. They were all GI's, but I think maybe the female parts might have been, I think they had women

singing, but they were probably either people in the special service or a nurse or somebody, but it really was very good. But that was all part of that, and I still saved a seat for the colonel at the movies.

OK, so you ended up getting hepatitis.

Bob Englert: I got hepatitis and I was in the hospital.

How long were you there?

Bob Englert: Oh, I don't know, two or three weeks I guess.

That's certainly a long time.

Bob Englert: Then the doctor came in and said he had these orders for me to go to Fort Sill. That's the promise they made when I joined.

Right, we're going to make you an officer two years before, or a year and a half.

Bob Englert: So I came home alone and –

When would that have been?

Bob Englert: That was in the summer of 1945.

OK, so the war was coming to a close because it ended in the end of August.

Bob Englert: Yeah, it was coming down, I'm not sure. I got held up in Kurachi because I didn't have a yellow fever shot, although I was leaving the area where there might be yellow fever exposure. I guess they figured there might be yellow fever rampant in the States.

So you went back the same way you came in.

Bob Englert: No, I went back the other way. I went back by air.

I mean you went back to Kurachi.

Bob Englert: Yes, I went to Kurachi, but from Kurachi I went through the Middle East, we landed in Persia, and sometimes we would land and then just take off after the plane was fueled, but we landed in Egypt and stayed a couple of days, so I went into Cairo with a couple of people.

Was the war in Europe over at that time?

Bob Englert: Yes, the war in Europe was over.

So it was over. The only thing left was the war against Japan, so you were going back through the area that had previously been part of the European theater, but was now at peace.

Bob Englert: Right. Well we went across North Africa. We went I think it was Buzurky where they had all the ships in the harbor had all been sunk in some area that we went that way, we

stopped in Casablanca for a few days, we went to the Azores, and then after Casablanca we had a flight that went to the Azores, Bermuda, and ultimately Miami. And in Miami -

All the time you were getting ready to be an officer and a gentleman.

Bob Englert: Well, I was going to have a delay en route before going to Fort Sill for the officer candidate school. In Miami, I had an interesting experience. I went down, we got paid and of course in all this travel I had a backup of pay, so we got some sort of a partial pay, and so I went down and asked a cab driver to take me to a place where I could have a good steak dinner, and surprisingly he did that, and I went to this restaurant that had two lines. One line was outside stretched right down the street for people to get in. The second line was inside. They had tipped the maitre d and they were still standing in line. I had went in and had a drink, and I asked the bartender about getting a seat, and in a few minutes he came over and said you know, if you don't mind sharing a table, this gentleman here would like to eat and you can go right in. So I said that's good enough for me, so we went in, sat down and the waitress staff just sort of came to a halt and started waiting on us. Man oh man, they brought everything, and they just couldn't be more attentive. So finally I said to this guy, it's got to be you because I never get this kind of treatment in a restaurant. He said listen, I'm the black market meat operator in this town, and if these sons of bitches don't treat me right, I'll have the place closed.

The most important man to the restaurant business.

Bob Englert: So I went to that restaurant every night I was in Miami. They all thought I was a friend of this guy's, I went right in and got a nice seat. The wait staff was all nice to me.

Welcome back to the United States.

Bob Englert: And I never saw him again. But I went home, I was in Chicago, and the night I was to leave to go to Fort Sill, the Japanese surrendered.

The night that you were to leave Chicago to go down to Sill to be an officer and the Japs surrendered.

Bob Englert: So I went. I called down there, like I'm not thinking, delay it somehow, but who I was talking to, they just said you got to come down, so I figured there was no use screwing up at the end. So I just went down and I got a couple of bottles of whiskey because Oklahoma was dry at that time, and so I got on the train and went down and then we got located, all of us in this class, now most of us had been overseas, so the commanding general spoke to us and he said if anybody flunked out or quit, he would be immediately, his stripes would be taken away. We were all noncommissioned officers. His stripes would be taken away and be sent back overseas to his unit. And I was able to get out legitimately because my physical was too old. In other words, I needed a more current physical, and I managed to fail the second physical. There was one other guy that was out because he failed the IQ test, and they gave him his IQ test and he answered three out of four questions wrong, and he only missed it by about one point, so the next time he answered two out of four wrong to make sure he would miss it. So he was out, but the rest of them when they decided not to go, they were busted to private and they were put in a special area with the idea of going, they were going to be sent back overseas according to this general. Well, one of the members of that group was the husband of the society editor of the Columbus Ohio newspaper, and she was friendly enough to broach this problem that her husband had, he was sitting there ready to go overseas as a private, and back to Guadalcanal. He was

down in Guadalcanal for about three years. So she broached that and talked to Senator Prither and I think Burton who went on the supreme court, I think there were two or three people that were in the Senate and high places in the government were from Columbus, and she knew them because of her reporting work. So the general in charge of Fort Sill, not the commanding officer of the OCS, but the commander of Fort Sill got a telegram from George Marshall to investigate the case of Frank Tate. That's the guy who got busted, the society editor, they all got their stripes back and they got relieved of the burden of going back to their units. Then we were flooded with investigators that the commanding general and probably the general from Fort Sill sent over to see what was the connection here. How many people had connections in high office that were going to get them in trouble. Of course, Harry found out what happened. We loaded them up with all kinds of misinformation. But that was about it. I got out and I had the discharge thing, and I think I told you earlier that I always had a problem with the first sergeant? And on my discharge papers that were sent over, the first sergeant had forged the colonel's name and he wrote on there not recommended for the good conduct medal.

Aw, you're kidding.

Bob Englert: So I got the papers and I says, and of course the guy wrote like a 3-year-old, and nothing like the colonel's signature was signed off in a lot of places. So I told whoever it was at the separation desk there, said look at this idiot, he's forging the colonel's name on here with this notation. So they said well, you could prosecute him if you want, but you have to stay in to do it. I said don't bother. I'm not sticking around to prosecute this guy. So he scratched that out and he gave me a good conduct medal, too.

Well, it chased you right to the end, didn't it?

Bob Englert: That's right.

OK, so you mustered out where, at Fort Sill?

Bob Englert: Fort Sill, yeah. The end of my military career and the start of my career on the GI bill which was absolutely fabulous.

Yes, and what did you do with that? You became what?

Bob Englert: I became a lawyer with that.

You became a lawyer. Well that's what I am.

Bob Englert: I don't think I could've afforded to go to law school. I might have. I first paid my own way to college and living at home with my parents, but that GI Bill was unbelievable.

And where did you go to law school?

Bob Englert: At De Paul University.

De Paul in Chicago, wonderful. And did you practice law in Chicago after that?

Bob Englert: I was with Chicago Title most of my career, about 30 years.

Is that right? Wow.

Bob Englert: And then I retired from there early and I came to Texas because I got a smattering of teaching. I was teaching at a community college on a part time basis, one night a week, and I kind of enjoyed that, so I decided at 30 years, I was at Chicago Title maybe 31 years -

Do you recall what year was it you left?

Bob Englert: Chicago Title? 1979. I was 56 then. So I came to Austin and I decided on Austin. We started coming to Texas. My wife had a sister in Conroe. I had a friend, we both had a friend who was here in Austin, and then we had a friend in Dallas. And so we come down at Christmas time and we hit those three places, and I decided on Austin because they have a lot of universities here and that's where I wanted to teach. And I was very fortunate, I came down in 1980, I moved permanently in 1980, on Labor Day weekend, and on the Tuesday after Labor Day, I got a phone call from the man in charge of the real estate program at ACC, and he asked if I could come in and teach, and I said sure, when? He said 10 o'clock this morning. And I was still in bed! So I went there and I taught at ACC about 7 years and 16 years down at Texas State, what is now Texas State.

Is that right? Wonderful.

Bob Englert: And I retired about 5 years ago from that. I really enjoyed it.

OK, it's been great talking to you, and you certainly had a very interesting experience in the service, and what I'd like to do now if we could is just go and ask you a few questions, a few final observations that you could help us with in terms of having a finalization of this interview. The first thing, looking back, how do you think your military service affected your life?

Bob Englert: Oh, I don't know, I'll tell you the truth. When I was in the service in my case was the first time that I had room and board and disposable income. I even go with $50 a month as a private. I didn't have any other, I got all my clothes from the military, got my bed, I got my food, I didn't have to spend anything on any of those. I could just squander that $50 a month or save it, and it was really the first time that I had that because in the Depression, times were really very tight. I'll tell you, I always saved, I was always a saver because I wanted to go to college, and I wanted to go to college because my father worked in a steel mill and he came home tired. And I decided when I was just a boy that I wanted to get a job where I could be in an air conditioned office in the summer and a heated office in the winter, and not be working physically and coming home just exhausted.

And from a family of steel workers, rightfully understand what you're talking about.

Bob Englert: So that was it, that was really intense. So one of my problems with not having, hell, I didn't have a car until I had a full time job at Chicago Title. I was 26, 27 years old before I bought a car. But of course in Chicago you don't really need a car as much, and once you have a car you have no place to park it if you go anyplace. So it wasn't expected to have a car like it is here. Hell, you got to have two cars here or you're nothing. So that was part of it, but I still saved a considerable amount even on $50 and later $60. I think corporals got $60 something a month at that time, but I put a little away. And then the GI Bill, I got $70 a month, plus all the fees and tuition, everything. So that was having a rich uncle. But I did live at home with my parents still because right after World War II, there were no apartments available.

How long after the war did you get married?

Bob Englert: I married in 1949. It was interesting. The girl I married I met in college in 1941. The problem was I didn't have a car, and her family lived in the Fostmoor, the suburbs of Chicago, and I knew I couldn't go out and date her by having to walk a half a mile to the train station and take the central train someplace. So we never did date. And then I was in through the service and through law school and through everything, and I went with a friend of mine down on East 63rd Street where they had all those bars with jazz musicians in them. I listened to some jazz music and she was sitting there with a girlfriend. Her grandmother lived about a block away and the girlfriend was visiting her grandmother's girlfriend from Minnesota, and the two of them were there.

And you recognized her.

Bob Englert: I recognized her, I asked her for a date. We dated for a short time but that was all in one year. We were married. We both were ready to get married. So it was good. She was a terrific wife. We were together 40 years. She got lung cancer from smoking what was her downfall.

And that was how long ago?

Bob Englert: 1989. I got remarried to a person that we both knew. We met, my late wife and my current wife were both volunteers at the LBJ library, and my current wife is in charge of the volunteer program there, and when her husband died, he died two or three years before my wife died, but after he died she was still a volunteer and they asked would she like to work there, they needed someone in that office, and so she took the job. She's about 8 years younger than me, but I always wanted to marry someone close to my age. I don't want to have to explain every damn story I tell to tell them who Nixon was or who Franklin Roosevelt was, you know. So it was nice. But anyway, that was it. We have four children. They're all adults now.

That's great. OK, what would be your greatest memories of military service? What are the things you'd most like to forget?

Bob Englert: Well, as time goes by you tend to make light of things you might want to forget. I guess as far as my memories, one of the things about the military that bothered me, but it also has happened in life and it might be my fault more than anything else, is this business of being alone in the sense that Z Force was not an organization that was longstanding. It was just something that was put together in order to send people over to train the Chinese. So these people had come from various units, and so they were not cohesive although they were together. Some get together, but I don't even know how long they were together before they went overseas. I think I did mention they were assigned to Z Force and their ship was under attack in the Mediterranean and they lost some of their personnel. I don't know if the ship sunk or not, but at least they were, I know we had a couple of sessions where people who were on that ship told about what happened, and a lot of the casualties were people who were just trampled on the stairways as they were trying to get down the stairs and they'd fall down and nobody would stop to pick them up. They would just walk over them. So it was that type of casualty. So I'm not so sure, I don't think the ship sunk, but they had the radio, that these German radio controlled bombs were being shot at, and they had a British gun crew on there who are really sharp shooters and knocked those bombs right out of the air, but still a lot got through. So that's how I ended

up in there because they lost personnel. But I guess the fact that there was, I never, when I got out of the service, that's another thing, I never really did join anything. There was a VFW right across from the first apartment my wife and I had in 1949. I went over there for a couple of meetings, and hell, there were guys from World War I and they had been sitting there in the bar all afternoon drinking, and they would get up there at a meeting and they would be drunk and slurring their words, and then they would get in some damn argument and the meeting was just a disaster. So I decided I'd rather be home with the good looking girl that I married than be over there with them, so I never did go back. And I never went in for the American Legion and that stuff. Finally, when they had this CVI veterans Chain of Veterans Association was in existence, and I saw a friend of mine had a CVI insignia on his lapel pin, and I saw that at a luncheon and I asked him about that and he told me they were meeting out at Bergstrom. So I started going to the meetings and I enjoyed the group. And so the CVI veterans association disbanded. The charter was limited and so they went out of business in 2005. They figured everybody would be dead by then. So we still get together once a month, those of us who were here in Austin, and we go out to Rudy's on Brodie, I think it's Brodie, out in Oak Hill. They we go a couple of times a year to the Salt Lick out in Driftwood. Jim, I can't think of his name, the father of the guy that owns the Salt Lick was in the CVI. He's dead now but his wife is still alive. As a matter of fact she came to our meeting. We meet the first Monday. She came to that last month. So we just get together for lunch and chew the fat, and not much. Stu Dakrew is the one who put me on to you, he's very active in that and of course he's the one that goes to all these conventions. He goes to the B-29 reunion, with the Berlin Airlift, Oanapa, that airlift, the China units, so he goes to a lot of this kind of stuff. He's big on that. But I never did, was much for joining that. Now as far as bad memory, I think what happens with a lot of things, you have a bad memory just aside not from the military, but an example, I left Chicago Title in the 1950s and I started a title company in Springfield, Illinois. Then I was with this group, local investors and me, I was the only guy who wasn't a local guy, and I got fired on New Years' Eve after the company started operating. At first I was really upset about that whole thing, but actually in retrospect it's the best thing that ever happened to me because I realized that I'd better do something on my own, and that's when I started investing in real estate investments, mostly in single family homes, but sometimes in a piece of real estate where you could divide up and partner, and we bought some apartment buildings from the county in Woodstock when the county was getting rid of them. They used them for office space. And we bought those and then decided to sell them because the city engineer indicated there were a lot of problems then. I told my partner and were both from Chicago and that means that either the city engineer was on the take to get some money, the table money, or he was going to be a zealot and make us bring those old apartments that were built in the last, in the 19th Century, bring them up to 20th Century standards and that's impossible. So we sold the contract and made some money on it, but we, the guy that bought it, and then we found out that city engineer was a crook. He was under the U.S. Marshall's protection program.

Good old Chicago. OK. I'm going to ask one final question before we go, and that's this. Is there anything else that you would like to add so that future generations who will hear these interviews have a fuller understanding of what your generation went through at the time that you were in the service?

Bob Englert: Well, I think as I often indicated to you, and it's one of my mantras, that we that went into the service during World War II are flattered by the designation of the greatest generation that Tom Brokaw gave it. But I tend to think that we also, we were great because we were obedient, and we did what we were told. We'd been beat down by the Depression. We had, were just anything we could get we were willing to accept, and that's not true of other later generations. But I think that influence, I think the thing that influenced us was that financial

disaster in the 1930s, the early 30s, that just kind of molded our lives, but in some cases it was good and some cases it's for bad, but it's something that we lived with, and part of it was being in the military. I think we accommodated to the military because we were obedient. I don't know that we accommodated there because we had any heroic notions. I think if someone had tapped me on the shoulder and said you can be excused from duty for some reason that would have been fine, however socially it was important to be part of the military. Those people who did not become part of the military were frequently kind of suspect in their community. Mothers wondered why their son was in the service or their son was injured or killed and the boy next door who seems to be perfectly healthy is still out there sleeping under the tent of the backyard, that type of a thing developed. I remember the little story of the little bakery in Woodstock, Illinois. The woman was in there telling how wonderful it was, the war, because she had a job in a war factory and was making all this money, and about that time there was another customer in the store who had a son who had been killed recently, and she just got one of those gold stars standing in the window. She picked up a cream pie and pushed it in the woman's face and walked out of the store. And that type of feeling where you never knew who was, how they were affected. And also I think the thing that impressed me that everybody was involved in World War II. My father was evicted during the German, in south Chicago. The city plowed up a bunch of vacant lots and then he was in charge of a small booth and people came and volunteered and planted their own gardens, and he didn't have, all he did was kind of assign spaces to them, and I think he was able to call on the city if they needed services of some sort that the individual gardeners couldn't provide, like plowing up the lot. The city brought in a person with a tractor and a plow and dug up the earth so they could make a garden there.

But everybody was doing something.

Bob Englert: Everybody participated. There was a certain amount of black market thing going on because everything was rationed, but everybody really participated and I think the entire country was involved in World War II. I think if we had something like that now, we would probably have, and of course the press was different, we didn't know that Franklin Roosevelt was finagling around with his secretary, or whoever the hell that woman was who was with him when he died. That stuff wasn't out there. And we didn't know Jack Kennedy was such a horny guy running after every skirt. There were stories about it once in a while but it wasn't a big thing. But now, every little move that is made by somebody, an opponent will pick it up and make a big deal out of it, and it becomes fodder for meetings and they make jokes about it. A person like Dan Quayle, a kind of figure, didn't have any feeling one way or the other for Dan Quayle, but what was it, the word "potato" that he spelled wrong?

Yes.

Bob Englert: And you know, all of a sudden that's with him now. He's just dumb Dan Quayle, too dumb to do anything, doesn't even know how to spell potato. And Nixon is the same way. Nixon had a fabulous record in foreign affairs, and it's all erased by the Watergate. Of course Nixon was not a likable type of guy, but he was still, I think one of the most astute presidents that we had. I'm not in favor of him. I never voted for him and I didn't like a lot of the things that he did, but he was still a terrific person in the area of foreign affairs, he was just fabulous. I guess that's one of the things about the greatest generation is that at least World War II, it brought out the best of everybody.

Yes, commonality and one purpose that we don't see much anymore.

Bob Englert: That was really very important, and I think we've lost that in this country. I saw an interesting program on television one night, was by the president of Yale, and he's talking about getting people back to work, and he says you know, it wouldn't be any problem to stimulate working in this country. Every state has a program of some sort that they can use more help, so we can employ people in those state programs. It might be building a bridge or building a park or doing something, cleaning up a river, but Congress wants everything, Congress wants his name on the thing. So they're not doing anything, giving anything to the states to encourage employment by the states. They want everything to be something that the Congressman can identify as his. It's his bridge, his road that he's paying for, he's creating these jobs, new jobs because of that. And that's it. We fool around, we're playing games with this thing, when the fact of the matter is, we could solve immediately lots of unemployment just by helping out and contributing and bringing people to work -

Common efforts. Maybe that's the real lesson of World War II for this nation is what common effort can do if people are willing to do that.

Bob Englert: Well, if we have a goal, I mean I think the space program, that's another thing that is we have seen that, although I never knew what was happening with the space program. They shoot something off in the sky and it costs millions of dollars and billions, so I think it's a little suspect there, but there was no suspect about World War II. There was probably lots of money lost. I met a man one time just as I was traveling and I met a man and his job, he worked for the government, and his job was to investigate companies that make government contracts, and what his job was to investigate to see if they had the equipment and the talent to do the job they make a bid on. So he would go off and they were taking bids on making widgets, and people in the widget business would make bids and how many what it would cost the government, and then the successful bidder had the equipment and this guy's job was to go there and see that there was in fact a factory there that made widgets, and they had equipment in there to make enough widgets to fill the contract under the terms of the contract. Well, we let the financial institutions go ahead and bid on all kinds of phony securities without anybody going over there to see what they are. AIG was writing insurance and they had no money to pay for the damn thing if there was a claim. So it cost billions of dollars to bail them out, so there's not a financial disaster with these things. Now that would never happen if AIG was in the widget business. They would've made a bid to build widgets and they wouldn't even have a machine or a place to build them in. When it came time for the widgets to be delivered, they didn't have 'em. So we don't have that. I don't know, for some reason we've decided that we can let things kind of slide by and people will do it out of the goodness of their heart.

Never happen.

Bob Englert: It doesn't happen that way.

Well Mr. Englert, I certainly appreciated the time spent with you in doing the interview. I think we're just about complete. I want to thank you on behalf of Commissioner Jerry Patterson of the General Land Office, the Texas Veterans Land Board, for allowing us to conduct the interview, and thank you also for your service to our country.

Bob Englert: Well thank you. Let me just take a look and see if I have that Niemeyer's address.

I'm going to have Mr. Crabtree contact you about that so he can tell you some more about the transcription and everything of this and what we're doing, and then he can get that information from you.

Bob Englert: OK, that'll be fine.

I might get back to you one of these days, too, to see if we can go out and have a beer somewhere.

Bob Englert: I told my son that I made this recording, and my recording is about twice as long as MacArthur's.

There you go.

Bob Englert: And my stepdaughter was here one night and I said, I think it was Tom, you said go ahead and talk, say something, I think your time – she said oh-oh. I could talk the leg off of her. All right, well thanks a lot for calling.

OK, you take care. Bye bye.

[End of recording]