William Norval Walsh, Sr. oral history interview

Master Sergeant, United States Army Air Corps
World War II – Mediterranean Theater - European Theater

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Abstract: William Walsh provides his account of his service in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He recalls the structured nature of the army intelligence tests and outlines his mechanical training regimen at various engineering centers. He talks about his assignment to 43rd Squadron and runs in England, Africa, and France. He discusses his experience running and retrofitting Allied planes and gliders in preparation for major invasions over two years. He reflects on his feelings of relief and disconnection coming home following V-J Day. He expresses his regret for his colleague's death and hope that today's generation will become more cohesive for future conflicts.

Transcript Notes:

Transcriber:	Cinebar Productions
Abstract by:	Aaron Rodriguez, VWM Volunteer

Interview Transcript:

Interviewer: Okay. First thing we'll do is have you spell your name. Last name first.

Walsh: W-A-L-S-H, Walsh.

Interviewer: Okay. And the rest of that.

Walsh: William Norvel, N-O-R-V-E-L, Norvel Walsh.

Interviewer: Okay, now we'll do branch of service, rank and serial number.

Walsh: All right. I was in the Air Corps, and my serial number was 33122041, 33122041.

Interviewer: Okay. What was the highest rank you attained?

Walsh: Highest rank obtained was a master sergeant.

Interviewer: Let's start right at the beginning. When, when you joined up, tell me why you chose the Air Corps, why, why you went in it all, what your parents said, what was going on at the time, sort of that whole story?

Walsh: Well, that's a beautiful question. We didn't have anything to do with that, you were drafted and you put somewhere. I was, went in the Army with a friend of mine, and he was put in the infantry, and he fought all through North Africa. And I was putting the Air Corps. I spent the first year in school trying to find out what made the radial engines run, and how to prepare, repair them and how to do those kind of things. So, you never really didn't have anything to do with it. You were just there. And it's quite different than today, I would think.

Interviewer: Now, did you choose the Air Corps?

Walsh: No, sir. They just… they gave you little intelligence tests when you went in and they put you in a way the way they thought. If you could know a screwdriver from a monkey wrench, then they'd put you in the Air Corps. If you didn't,

couldn't tell the thing but a hammer, then it put you in infantry. I think. I don't know how that worked exactly.

Interviewer: You know, when they put you in the Air Corps, where did they first send you and what did you do there?

Walsh: The first sent me to Biloxi, Mississippi, which was an Air Corps induction center. And of course, when we got to Biloxi, Mississippi, it was, the war had just started and you believe me, nobody stayed that long. You were there a week or ten days, and it branched out to these different schools. And I went to a regular, radial engine school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: So, that's why... so, so there really wasn't much basic training?

Walsh: No, I didn't know much about that. But I had been in high school Air Corps, so I knew how to... my right from my left.

Interviewer: And then, when they sent you to the radial school… explain what that is in a radial engine and all that, because, well, kids today don't know what radial engines are.

Walsh: That's right. Well, radial engine was the first good aircraft engine. You know, the inline engines and all were too heavy. But radial engines were very light and very powerful and... now, for instance, we had R-1830s, which was a little less than 2,000 horsepower, round about 1,200 horsepower. Then later, on for the P-47 and those really heavy planes, they used R2, a thousand horsepower engines, larger engines and... but all that progressed as the war went along. They weren't really available in 1941 and very few in ‘42, but the production began to pick up after that.

Interviewer: How complex were those engines?

Walsh: Well, they really weren't that complex. Each cylinder was easily accessible. And when you adjusted your valves and one thing or another. And the only thing they taught us, taught us to do, never fool with a carburetor. But I want you to know,

when you got into Africa, you didn't have anybody else to do it. You did it yourself or it didn't get done. And so, we did the whole works. Once we were in Africa, we stayed down there a year at a place called Blida, and we flew across North Africa and up into Sicily and Sardinia and Corsica. And, and I went to one little place that I never did hear from since called Pantelleria, and nobody had ever heard of it, but they sent me there for a day and, which was interesting.

Interviewer: Now, how long were you in training on the radial engines?

Walsh: Well, surprisingly, it wasn't all together how long you on the training. They weren't available in 1942. I mean, it just weren't that many made at that time. For instance, I went to the radial engine school in, or aircraft school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Then I reported to my outfit for about three or four days and sent me off to school again, went to prop school, which was tied in with the engine school out in Kansas City. So, you went from one of these schools to the other, because the props are very important to the radial engines. There's no other thing to make them valuable but the propeller. It has to be properly balanced to the half an ounce or less than that. And, and at that time, the mechanical fella had just come in. That is, it would change from a high pitch to a low pitch, and whether you were taken off or whether you're flying high or low and all that could be adjusted. That was in the propeller end of it.

Interviewer: So, when you're in Kansas, you learn how to balance…

Walsh: Yeah, that' right. And, and it was partly an engine school, too. It was the, tied in together there and that was a good school and interesting. Yes, sir.

Interviewer: How long were you in Kansas?

Walsh: I was in a little, not quite two months, a month and six weeks, I think it was. All these schools were fast and lasted all day and some of them up into the night, really, because everybody was getting ready the fast as they could. When I got back to my outfit after Kansas City, we had two airplanes. Well, we had two airplanes, and enough men to take care of 20. But you had to wait till you got

some more. And so, that was… production in those days was vitally important of everything.

Interviewer: Now, where were you at that point?

Walsh: Where was I at that point? Well. I came back east and then, they sent me to Middletown, Pennsylvania, which was a big depot, supply depot. That was where my outfit was formed in Middletown, Pennsylvania. And that was the terminology of it was a 315th Group. I was in the 43rd Squadron. They had four squadrons made up of group, and I was in the 43rd Squadron and that was formed and picked up a few more men, but still no airplanes at that point. That was a very part of it.

Interviewer: So, how long did you have to wait before you got planes?

Walsh: Oh, it was a better part of a year, I'd say, like I said, when we got through out of one of the schools, we came back, and we had two. And then, it wasn't long before they begin to come in pretty good. And then, we got up to 14, 15, 16, and sometime, you'd have more than that. And then, they take some away from you and you give them back. And it depends upon what other groups were doing. Yes.

Interviewer: Now, what time period was this and sort of what was going on in the country?

Walsh: That was ‘42. And, of course, everybody in the country is getting ready if the truth be known. And so, we trained all during the summer and down south mostly, and this group was put together. Then we were sent up to Green Bay, Wisconsin, where we were prepared to go overseas. And we went overseas in December, which was a terrible thing to do. They told us after that to quit it, because the weather was so bad. You didn't fly all the way to England like the young people do today. We did it by steps. We left Green Bay, Wisconsin, and then we went to Newfoundland. And actually, it was the first stop I think was Northern Maine, then Newfoundland. And then, afterwards, where did we go after Newfoundland? Then we went to Iceland. And from Iceland, on over into England. And that was in December 1942.

Interviewer: Now, what were those flights like? What is the weather?

Walsh: Well, when you got to, when you got to Greenland, you about froze to death. And I never forget, they put me on guard duty in Iceland. I said, "What in the world is this for? Who and which soldier, what army is going to come up in Greenland, and snow up to your backside and, and as cold as the dickens." But that was the way it worked out. But we got away and got the things working pretty good and landed in England. Stayed there till the spring the following year. And that was '43. Then things were quiet in England then, because most everybody, you know, had gone to North Africa. They were fighting in North Africa and trying to get into Italy. And they sent us down there and we acted as, oh, I forgot to tell you, we, we were half an outfit. They sent half of my outfit to the Pacific and half of it to England. And so, we were only half an outfit when you and half an outfit you don't fit in anywhere. You just kind of an oddball. And so, we flew passengers and, and patients and everything else and supplies from one spot to the next. And, and that was one of the things that made the Americans so flexible and successful, was the ability to move fast and do something fast.

Interviewer: Now, is this while you were in England?

Walsh: No, this was in North Africa. Yeah.

Interviewer: When you, when you hit England, how long were you actually there before you moved to North Africa?

Walsh: North Africa... less than six months, four or five months, in, in the summer of '43.

Interviewer: Where were you and what did they have you doing?

Walsh: You mean in North Africa?

Interviewer: No, in England.

Walsh: Oh, anything. Just kind of marching around and getting things in line. And as I said, in England, in that particular time, things were kind of quiet. Most

everybody, like I told you, had gone to North Africa. And so, we eventually went to North Africa. They were there were a few fighter planes and a few bombers there, but it wasn't as many as it got towards the ‘44 and ‘45, of course.

Interviewer: What were the English like?

Walsh: Well, we thought they were great. We enjoyed talking to them. Of course, one thing about being in the Air Corps, you weren't downtown, so you had most of your country somewhere, out in the countryside. But you got to find a few pubs in there and, and you kind of hung out.

Interviewer: And then, when they sent you to North Africa, did you hopscotch your way down there, too?

Walsh: Yes. Not really, because we took off from southern England and landed near Casablanca, and that was just one long trip. We added fuel tanks to each airplane and we put two extra tanks in each airplane. And that made us so we could get to Casablanca. And we spent the night there and moved over to this place called Blida, which is south of Algiers. And it was an old French airdrome where they trained pilots. You know, France didn't have a room up there for training anybody, so they did it down there. But it was a wreck when we got there. The, the French had had it and the Germans had had it and then we had it. And it wasn't a very nice place to be, but we made out some kind of way, some kind of way.

Interviewer: Now, not to say that England isn't a foreign country, but what was it suddenly like being in Africa?

Walsh: Well, I tell you the truth, it's hard to describe, because all you saw was Arabs walking across the street, running across the field, trying to sell you something. And I’ll never forget, one of them brought some wine across there, one day, two or three big bottles of wine. I looked at that scandal. I said, I said, “Well, I'm not going to touch that scandal.” And I didn't. But all the other boys drank the wine and none of them got up the next day. I was the only one could get up and go to work, because I didn't drink it. They'd put something back in there, put the tin foil

on the top. Beautiful, they did beautiful work and very presentable, but not worth a hoot. And so... and then, another thing you must remember, they didn't really let us go into Algiers, in places like that, on, on leaves. You, you basically stayed there where you were, which was 50, I was stationed 50 miles south of Algiers. And of course, the Kasbah is there in Algiers, you know. And I did go through the Kasbah one time, but we had to go through as a group. We wouldn't let us go through by ourselves. If you ever heard of the Kasbah.

Interviewer: Now, what were you doing once you got there? What were the duties and what were you personally doing?

Walsh: Well, of course, personally, I was just doing maintenance on airplanes. And what were the boys doing? We were flying from Algiers over to, well, the invasion of southern Italy was beginning at that time. So, we really, as an outfit, luckily missed that invasion but because. The strangest thing happened during the invasion of Sicily was that everybody arrived at the same time. That is, the Germans and the Americans and English. And you talk about something being mixed up. That thing was really mixed up. But we finally took it, you know, and but it was, and then we used to fly in and we'd take little patients and fly them back to the hospitals and get a from a front and do things like that. And we'd send, fly up and take food and ammunition and anything else that it needed and fly back, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah. When you were over there, what did you miss the most?

Walsh: I think when you're a home boy, you miss home more than anything else. And I'm sure that that was... but you kept pretty busy, and activity was fierce. And so, you really didn't have too much time to think about it. And so, I guess, that's about it, sums up as you can be. Of course, what amazes me, these people today say, "Oh, man, I was in there for six months." Gee, I was over there for three years, and they didn't send me home. Three years, we thought, thought that was something, you know.

Interviewer: What did you do in your off hours and what did people do to sort of break the monotony and well, try to get away from the war?

Walsh: That's a, that's a good question. The thing of it is, when we got over there, in England particularly, and North Africa, they had doubled the daylight saving time. They didn't have daylight saving time like we have in the States. They had double. Well, that meant that you could do your power work and all, right up to ten, 10:00 at night. I mean, so we just were servicing planes right up to the end, and right up to the time go to bed. And so, we didn't have any work hours, just worked all the time, the truth be known.

Interviewer: And the same, same true in Africa.

Walsh: Same true in Africa. That was. That's right. And so...

Interviewer: Now. How long were you based in Africa?

Walsh: A year. Yes, sir. Now, I'm not saying it wasn't three or four, I mean, a week shy or a week over, but I really forgotten. But it was a year.

Interviewer: Now, some of the books we're looking had gliders in it. Were you guys towing gliders in any of the invasions?

Walsh: Well, it's a funny thing. There were not any gliders in Africa. And so, when we finally, they sent us back up to England and it was another base. And when we got to back to England, there was a big box sitting there as well as half as big as this room, really. And I went up to the office and asked him, "What is this box doing down there?" It was two boxes, side by side. Nobody knew anything about them or where they came from. Well, they set there a couple of days and, you know, your, your interest just built up. And so, finally I pulled it apart and there were some gliders in there. So, we put the gliders together and pulled it down the runway in a jeep and then took it back, hooked it on the airplane, put it in the air with the airplane… just swung around the airport. Well, the glider people got there about another week or two later. And you ought to heard all that fussing and carrying on. You put it together wrong and they're not going to have you going to have you court-martialed. I looked at them and I said, "Fellas, I don't work for you all. I don't care what you do. You can do anything you want to do. You're not

going to affect me." So, we had rather ridden in the glider and had some fun with it, and they finally ended up pulling gliders all over the place, and training gliders. But we did not pull gliders in combat. They took them away from us a few days or a month ahead of the invasion, and somebody else did that work.

Interviewer: What was it like riding in a glider?

Walsh: It was well, it was quite an unusual experience. For one thing, it's quiet. You don't, no engines. You can't hear any engines. You can't. Once in a while, you hear a little air, but it's quiet and nice and you sit there just like sitting in your living room and look all around and you cut that thing loose. And of course, it's got to go down once you cut it loose. But if you got a pretty good place to land, it'll slide on in. And, and so...

Interviewer: How long did they stay airborne? Sort of.

Walsh: You mean gliders? Oh, I, it, it actually depended upon the altitude you went in there, depended upon where they would go, where they were fighting. And sometimes they'd come in at 800 or 7, 800ft, well, you went down pretty quick then. But if you had a long ways to go, you'd be up 1,500, 2000 and work your way back down. But basically, it was a kind of a quick landing, because they didn't want anybody shooting at them, for one thing, and they cut loose and just dropped into open space that they could find and...

Interviewer: I understand some of those gliders can carry jeeps and...

Walsh: Oh, yeah, gliders would carry a jeep and that small field piece, could be carried in a glider. And they did. And. But mostly it was men. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, at this point the, the glider training you're doing was leading up to D-Day.

Walsh: Yes, it was. But, of course, you know, you were working. Nobody tells you anything. So, you just keep, keep plugging away and those things happen. Yeah.

Interviewer: Now, where were you? In what part of England?

Walsh: Well, when we came back in England, we were up in the Midlands. Let me see. We were down at Reading, Pennsylvania... Reading, Reading, England when we first got over there. But we weren't in Reading too much longer. Then, we went to Africa, and then when we came back to England, we wanted to see our old base that we were stationed at. They turned it into Atomic Energy section and nobody could go in. So, we didn't get to see the old base anymore, because that was Reading. Then we moved up in the Midlands and, tell you the truth, it wasn't close to any good town. Kettering was the closest town, and that wasn't a very big town.

Interviewer: Had a pub in it?

Walsh: Oh, yeah. But, but of course, people don't realize, in the States, when they got all those soldiers over, the beer would disappear. I don't mean just one pub; I mean all over the country. And so, when they got making some more of it, it would, hops be floating all around in there, but soldiers didn't care, they drink it anyway. It was a sight of it. Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer: Now, you did training. What are the things, what are the kind of flights were going on?

Walsh: You mean when we got back to England? Well, of course they were waiting for the invasion, then. So, we dropped a few paratroopers, and we pulled a few gliders. And like I said, they took the gliders away from them, gave them to somebody else. But there was strictly a training section, session. And then, nobody said about an invasion when it was going to be. But when the paratroopers pulled up on your field with 50, 100 trucks... you couldn't speak to them, you couldn't talk to him, you couldn't go where they were, but you just had to stay away. And the funny thing I saw, one boy in the paratroopers was from my hometown. And so, I went to see the leading officer and asked him, could I go speak to him? He said, "Sure, come on." And he took me over there. I spoke to this boy from Richmond, and I think he's dead now. Calvin Campbell was his name. And I never, I never have seen him since I got back home. I think he must have been killed.

Interviewer: Now, as you begin to count down closer to D-Day, did you see things changing?

Walsh: Oh, Lord, absolutely. Like I said, the paratroopers would come in by the truckload and, and everything was double duty. I mean, you had more petrol, and you had more everything. And, and, of course, then in those days we relied, when we took off, one airplane would then take off at a time. Most of them tried to take off together. And so, you had three or four planes going down the runway at one time. And so, that when they got up in the air, there wouldn't be all spread out over all creation. And that was quite an unusual thing, because you hit an air bump or air bump, someone would drop. You wonder if they'd go crash, you know. But all of them seemed to make it better. Well, yeah. Yeah. No.

Interviewer: What was going on in England and what did you hear on the radio and in the newspaper?

Walsh: Well, I can assure you, you didn't hear anything about that. And so, what was going on in England is, you really didn't know either, because you were so busy with yours. Nobody got any passes over the last month or two before the invasion. But you knew something was coming, because everything was humming and everything was, was getting geared up and one thing and another. And so, you didn't know anything, but you knew it was going to happen, but you just didn't know when.

Interviewer: Tell me what happened as you got down to June 3rd, 4th, 5th.

Walsh: Well, you then, you were lining your airplanes up on the runway and you finding what they needed. To everybody... when you're fooling with all those big airplanes, you had a million little things that had to be done. I don't know whether you want to say it was capping off gas or making sure that the spark plugs were tight, and the air was in the tires and it was just a thousand, 100 things to do. And you just kind of took care of all that stuff. But they lined up on the runway together, not separate. And so, you knew that something was going to happen pretty quick.

Interviewer: Those pilots, I mean, they put their lives in your hands every day.

Walsh: Every day. That's right. I mean, and the funny thing about pilots, you got to know them just like you did one of your brothers, and you didn't… that was the discipline in the Air Corps, you didn't salute. You just walked up and started talking to the officers, because they were there all the time. And if you saluted and went through all that military stuff you take up most of your day. But it wasn't in the Air Corps like that. In fact, the commander of my outfit was a fellow by the name of Lyons, and he lived down to Pinehurst, North Carolina. And I saw Colonel Lyons a lot after the war. I went down and seen him two or three times, and then he died a few years ago. And but he was a nice Southern gentleman, a good person, and we always enjoyed talking about the infantry, I mean, talking about the enlisted men and one thing or another.

Interviewer: Now they, they launched the invasion, but of course, then they held it for a day because of bad weather. I presume that, I mean, at that point you knew it was on. What… but it also didn't quite happen for 24 hours. How did how did that 24 hours. How did you know? What did you hear?

Walsh: Well, like I said, you really didn't know much. The infantry, the paratroopers, you didn't hang out with them, and you didn't converse with them. They were separate and of course, once they had, were put on planes, you were permitted to drive your jeep or what are you, your maintenance crew up to a plane and what you had to do, but you didn't associate with them or anything like that till after the... then, you could , right at the hour or two before the invasion, because they couldn't hide anything in the longer, you know. But and that's about...

Interviewer: When they finally got up and got loaded. I mean, here they are now loading up and flying out. What did all that look like?

Walsh: Oh, that was something to see, because the sky was full of them. And of course, when they when he got away, all you could do is sit on the side of the runway in a box and hope that they all got back. And of course, they all did not get back, but most of ours did. We lost two or three. And one of them landed in, edge of England. So, at another place, because it had been shot up and they couldn't go

any further. But anyway, that was the size of it. And of course, nothing is, something else is people don't realize that once you got them there, you had to better you better be ready to deliver some more quick, because they wanted something. You had to be there. And that was important, too. And so I'm sure that we dropped paratroopers more than one time.

Interviewer: What was it like after they flew away? I mean, now you're standing there and, I mean, that's a while for them to go away. It's such a big operation.

Walsh: That's right. We had… that's right. We had, let me see, if we had 15 and 30, 30 and 30 or 60. We had somewhere between 70 and 75 planes take off at one time, you see. And well, like I said, you're just so busy. You just… and you were young, too. That made things a little different. And it's hard to realize we're talking about 55 years ago right now. And that's something amazing, isn't it?

Interviewer: Well, when they finally went, when they're gone, then what do you do?

Walsh: We didn't do anything. We just sit there and wait and hope they got back and that's about all we did.

Interviewer: What was the first news that you got when you begin to hear something about how it was going or...

Walsh: Well, I don't know if… the thing of it is, if you had some planes that were shot up at all and some holes in them or something like you were so busy trying to get everything straight, you really didn't have much time for that kind of thing. You, the maintenance and the follow-through and all that was so important and so time-consuming, you really didn't know what was going on much. And in other words, you're such a small claw, small hole in a clog or something. it didn't amount to that much. Yeah.

Interviewer: There is the as the war began to develop in Europe and they're going through the hedge country and doing all that, what were you all doing back in England?

Walsh: Well, when the first started in, was it June, wasn't it? The weather was horrible. And so, you had two or three weeks of horrible bad weather, and you couldn't fly, you couldn't drop paratroopers, you couldn't see where you're going. And so, things were kind of just at a standstill there, for a while. Then, they broke out, and they needed some help. And like I said, we'd just as soon as we could land in France, we did, and pick up litter patients and bring them back to England, you see, because you could keep your field clean. That helped a lot. And the troop carrier played an important part in that.

Interviewer: And now, since you all were flying over, let's say with ammunition and back with patients, you don't get to fly the Red Cross on your plane.

Walsh: I don't think so. That's right. That's right.

Interviewer: You're fair game coming and going.

Walsh: That's right. Fair game, coming and going. You better believe it. Yes, sir.

Interviewer: And now, how long were you in that part of England?

Walsh: Up in the Midlands. Well, we went to Africa. We were up almost a year, because as the war began to wind down and the boys got up on the German border, they transferred us over to France. So, we had to leave our base and fly over to France. And we took up an airfield that the Germans had had, and it wasn't too bad to land on. And we, we stayed over in France for another three, four or five months before the war ended.

Interviewer: Now, where were you in France?

Walsh: Up at Amiens. And which means we was up on, real close to the Belgium, up on the German border. We weren't right in Germany at that time, but you're real close. I mean, you could walk over there. Drive over there, but that's why we stayed.

Interviewer: Now, what was that area like, and the people?

Walsh: Well, it was a good area, to tell you the truth. But I really have to tell you one thing. We didn't see much of people then, because the troops had already been through there and they were, just mutilated everything, really. And so, we didn't see many people then.

Interviewer: At the, at the base you had, was there evidence still that it was a German base? I mean...

Walsh: Oh, well, of course, when you got there, things were pretty well cleaned up. I mean, people would take what they could. And so, other than the runways and some falling down buildings, that was the only thing that you get to see. And so, we weren't, we weren't there too long before the war ended. And the colonel called me and said, “Walsh, you can go home.” I said, “Thank you, sir.” And I left. I'd already been over three years. That was enough for me.

Interviewer: Where were you when you heard about V-E Day?

Walsh: We were up at Amiens, on the airfield. And when we heard about it, I just tell you the truth, most of the boys just simply did nothing but sit down. And they were so glad it was all over; they didn't know what to do. And of course, that didn't last too long when we had to get patients out and soldiers out and one thing and another like that. But it was quite a transformation from wartime to doing nothing, you know, and...

Interviewer: And you just said, but again, when did you finally hear that you get to go home?

Walsh: Well, it wasn't too long afterwards because, like I said, I'd been there a long time. And one thing you must remember back of the escort did rotate their men. That is, if you were a flight participant or I mean a pilot or co-pilot or crew chief, they'd send you back to the States for a month, and then you bring you back. And because they felt like flying too much was not good for you, which I'm sure it wasn't. But anyway, that was a policy they, they and started and had. And the funny thing, when you got up into France and all new, new, new people were show up and you just didn't pay much attention to them. Let them get in and go.

But if you had anything working for them, everything worked out pretty nicely. But you didn't get to know them like you did the original men that you came with.

Interviewer: So, they got to rotate, but you didn't.

Walsh: That's right. They got to rotate, we didn't. That's right. Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about your journey home.

Walsh: Well, that was the biggest catastrophe I've ever been in my life. So, the colonel said, "Walsh, you can go home." I said, "Colonel, thank you." He said, "Now there's a boat leaving Le Havre in a few days. Go down and get on that thing." I said, "All right, sir." So, I went to the harbor, and surprisingly enough, Le Havre wasn't far from where we were. I mean, I was there on a train with, with three or four hours. So, that part was good. Got on a boat and it was just marvelous soldiers, of course, all the surplus ones that weren't needed would begin to send them home right then. And so, the closer we got to the States the, the one thing that caught my eye was the Gulf Stream.

And you could tell, when you're in the ocean, when you run into the Gulf Stream, because there's more fish, there's more birds or more everything. And it was interesting to watch the Gulf Stream. I've never forget, I saw one of those big old, old stingrays, the thing that swims with the wings, like, you know, you see them in the water. And then, that thing pulled up to a place called Trinidad. I said, "What in the world are they doing, putting me off in Trinidad. I don't want to go to Trinidad." Well, they put us all off and the boat took off again and so on. And there were some airplanes down there. So, I don't know, I just went over and got a box or something sitting around the airplane so the people with boxes and all wouldn't bother me. Nobody said anything to me. We stayed there a couple of months, and they called us in one day and said, "Well, you are, you going up to the States." And we just left Trinidad and flew up to Florida and that was the end of it. But that was a blow to me to get off at Trinidad.

Interviewer: Two months in Trinidad.

Walsh: And I did go to visit Tobago. And there's another island close by Trinidad. And there was a fascinating little place, because it was, one of the, whole island was practically one of these plantations. And the water was just pristine, beautiful. I mean, you stand in the water up to your neck, you could see your toenails, your foot. And it was just a beautiful place to relax a little bit. So, we enjoyed that and finally got back up in the States.

Interviewer: Now, what was Trinidad like?

Walsh: Well, of course, a lot of natives in Trinidad and. And that's about all I know. I know that when we came through into Trinidad, I got off the boat at Trinidad. All soldiers like to hide things. You know, somebody had hidden a little dog, and they brought that little thing. And soon he hit that beach. He started running, and I was so glad to get free. You know, he just disappeared. Nobody ever saw him anymore. So, there's a short distance, a snake or something bit him or killed him. But that was ended that. But that was always a little something has stuck in your mind. But we didn't associate or see much of the people, but they were all on the base trying to sell you something or get you to buy something, you know, or something like that. Yeah.

Interviewer: Did they ever explain, I mean, I've never heard anybody who left Europe and went to Trinidad for two months. That's so odd. Did they ever have any explanation?

Walsh: No, no, no, no, no, whatsoever. No, No. Nothing. Nothing. You were no longer operating as a unit, you know. And so, therefore, everything was kind of scatter brained and odd ends. And although Trinidad ended up with a few officers and people from my outfit and, and we disbanded right there in Trinidad, there was no, no more 43rd Squadron. It just dissolved right there. Well, one but a half dozen or 15 of us, anyway, so it didn't make any difference. But we left all the airplanes in France and Germany. Who flew them or took them or… we never did know.

Interviewer: Now, the next step was you flew to Florida.

Walsh: Yeah, well, the funny part about that, I didn't hardly stay there overnight. And they put me on another plane and sent me up to, let me see, Indianapolis, Indiana, where I was supposed to get out and that wasn't the right place. And then, they shipped me back to Maryland and they're going around the horn to get to the, I was in the wrong place at the wrong time every every stop, it looked like to me. But we made it.

Interviewer: Now, when you flew into Florida, where did you land? I mean, that's been the first I...

Walsh: Think it was airfield over from Miami, as I recall. It's been so long ago, really forgotten where I ever landed and the...

Interviewer: First time we were back in the good old USA.

Walsh: That's right. That's right. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Now, when did you finally get all the way home?

Walsh: Well, that took me a couple of weeks, really. As, like I said, I was in Indianapolis there, for a while, and then I met a WAC and I married her, and we're still living together. And that worked out nicely. And then I got back over to Fort Meade in Maryland and they discharged me over there, which was another two or three weeks or something like that. But it was, still hadn't gotten home to see Mom and Dad yet, but eventually I did.

Interviewer: Yeah. Now, how did that go when you finally got back?

Walsh: Oh, it was great. Yeah, that was nice. And everybody was glad to see you. Well, then it seemed to me I hadn't seen.

Interviewer: Now, were you married at that...

Walsh: Oh, no, No, sir. No, sir. No, no.

Interviewer: Had you met the WAC?

Walsh: Up in Indianapolis. They were stationed up here somewhere. Yeah. Yeah. She was from North Carolina and I was from Virginia, so we had a few little things in common. And, and we had two children and...

Interviewer: And now, when did you actually get out of the service?

Walsh: Oh, let me see, when did I actually got the service? I think it was September of 40, must have been ‘45. There you go. I have brought that thing with me. I brought some little papers with me. Maybe I'll get... it's written somewhere. Yeah.

Interviewer: Now, where were you when you heard about V-J Day and even before that? The bomb? And what did you think when they dropped the Atomic?

Walsh: Oh, well, I was at home when they did that. That was so fabulous. You really couldn't fathom the thing. I don't think we were even prepared to even think about it or so fabulous. That was the impression I had later. Can you imagine something like that being, all the people over in India, Afghanistan. Can you imagine drop by dropping atomic bomb on them? You’d kill half the country and one, one, one drop and it's so fabulous. I don't think the mind can hardly conceive of it, tell you the truth.

Interviewer: You know, when you heard about V-J Day, what was the reaction?

Walsh: Oh, I don't know. Let me see. V-J Day was with, it came later, after I'd gotten home, I think. The Japanese... they didn't send me to the Pacific, but we knew people out in the Pacific. But there just was jubilation everywhere and we were so glad it was all over. We didn't know what to say or do. But in the meantime, I'd gone back to work at Philip Morris and, and making a living and enjoyed it. Glad to be back home

Interviewer: How did the experience of the war change you?

Walsh: Well, I'm not sure. I think it gave you more confidence. You had been on your own. You had stuck up for what you had to do and do it right. And I think those kind of things are affected you, because I was so independent. I went back to work at Philip Morris, stayed there a couple, few years and quit and went to work somewhere else, which was a big mistake, in my life. But, you know, you were independent, and you didn't want to count on other people, you know. And, and so, I think that your outlook was, was different. I'm sure it was different.

Interviewer: All the people in your generation, when, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, everybody stepped up to the bat.

Walsh: That's right. That's right. You better believe that, that's true. It's for sure. It's almost as bad as what's just happened to us recently, to be frank with you. But...

Interviewer: Why do you think everybody is so universally stepped up to the bat?

Walsh: When I was there, why do I think that? Well, I think it was just the temperament of the people was a little different. And there was no, there was no TV then and no, those outside things to bother you much. And people were just more loyal than they are today. You find people today scatterbrained and don't know much about what's going on and stick up a little flag and they think that's it. But it's better than nothing, I guess. And so, that was not much of an answer. But but all I got to say and then all I can think of.

Interviewer: When, when everybody got home, it sort of took the uniform off. Hung it at the closets, went back to work. Never really talked about the war.

Walsh: That's right.

Interviewer: That's right. Why do you think that is?

Walsh: I don't know why they didn't. Well, of course, the infantry boys had a harder time than we Air Corps fellas did. I mean, of course we. I lost some of my best friends in the Air Corps in an airplane accident, and we did lose a few airplanes, but we didn't lose all of them, and we didn't lose everybody. And the funny thing about

being in the Air Corps, if we lose a man, it's just like you and I sitting here... you didn't know where they were. They weren't there. They were somewhere else where the accident or the flight or somewhere else happened. But if you're in the infantry, everybody was together. But in the Air Corps, you never saw them anymore. You'd have to go and hunt for the body, tell you the truth. And but, that was, that made it quite different. And at least from our standpoint, it was we didn't hardly ever have an accident on the field itself. And so, I guess, that's the only reason I can think of.

Interviewer: How do people react? I mean, I mean, you say you lost your best friend over there. How, how did you hear and how did you react to that?

Walsh: Well. It really tore the inside of you out. And his brother was over there, and I knew he'd contacted his brother in some way. And in his papers, I found out where his brother was and got in touch with his brother through the army some kind of way. And his brother came over and we went down to the, Cambridge where the body was. And we had we had identified it and made arrangements for the funeral and all of that. But that was one of those things that you have to do and you do it.

Interviewer: And do what you have to.

Walsh: Yeah, that's right. Glad you weren't there yourself. His name was Winfield Scott from Savannah, Georgia.

Interviewer: Sounds like a good Virginia boy.

Walsh: That's right, with that Scott name.

Interviewer: When all these tapes are edited together, they're going to put them in the schools of Virginia. I'm sure you know that the history lessons that are out there right now are a little sparse. And so when kids get to World War Two, they're now going to have CD-ROMs and they can sit down and, and go put them in and see real people talking about the real events. Knowing those kids are going to look at

those tapes, if, if you could say something to them about the war or why it was fought or what it meant or anything like that, what would you tell them?

Walsh: Well, the reason the war was fought, it was such a hideous thing going over and going on over in Germany, they had no respect for any human life at all, old Hitler didn't. And that stirred up the whole United States. I think it did. And of course, in the meantime, the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, and that started it over there. And it's surprisingly how close they were all together. And I don't think they were tied together, but as I remember, they were not. And but, that just shook up the whole world and everybody wanted to do something about it. And everybody chipped in and went to work. That's all I can tell you.

Interviewer: And it's interesting, because, as you said, the events of the last three weeks have a great similarity.

Walsh: Yeah. Yeah, that's for sure. That's for sure.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm sure your generation sort of looks at it and goes, well, now it's somebody else's turn to step up

Walsh: Well, you as an individual, I do wonder one thing, when in the world, I want to use a profanity, but I'm not, is this going to stop? It looked like to me the time you get one cleared up, another generation picks up another one. And that thing they're living in this world isn't that hard. I don't think, what I've seen of it. And so, I don't know how to explain it, but it sure as doesn't seem to be any stop to it, does it?

Interviewer: Just have to be vigilant.

Walsh: Yeah, I'm sure, that's right. And I don't know how you... we're on top. We've been on top for some time, but I don't know whether a generation of people can keep it up forever. Anyway, most of the societies in the whole world have reached a pinnacle, but they've fallen off somewhere along the line. But I think Christianity is going to hold us up better than these other people anyway, myself, I personally believe that. And...

Interviewer: It's a hard way to unify a country.

Walsh: It is. It is indeed. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you carry a good luck charm?

Walsh: No, I did not. I, I did not. I don't know. I just didn't think about it, believe in it or anything like that. So, I did not have any. No.

Interviewer: When you look back. What are the things, what are the memories that you see most clearly?

Walsh: Well. The memories are seen most clearly, as is flying to all these different places. Of course, I was in that particular end of that. You know, everybody didn't get to do that. I mean, we did because we were a transport outfit, but we went to Africa and Italy and Corsica and Sardinia and all those places, and then up into France and England. And we were just everywhere, because you had, that's where you did your hauling of your people and you officers and all this and that and the other. And every time they wanted to go somewhere, they call us, because we weren't a full group. For over, almost over two years, we were just half a group. And so, you serviced everybody. You didn't do much of anything else. But I never forget that when we went to a place called Pantelleria, which was an airfield really for the Germans, but they'd gone and run them off, one. And so they told me to get a jeep and let's go. I said, “All right, where are we going?” “Shut up.” I said, “All right.” And so, we got the jeep in the plane and tied it down and made all the necessary arrangements and went to Algiers and picked up some officers. And I think, as I recall, it was only two, one colonel and, and one captain, I think. And we took them to this place. And I said, “Well, you want me to drive for you? You want me to help you?” And he said, “No, you get inside that plane, lock it up and don't get out till I get back.” “Yes, sir. All right.” I know I did that. That wasn't hard, but he was gone three or four hours, and I think he made arrangements with the people to bring planes in there, because the next time we went by there, we didn't land, but there were fighter planes all over the place. So, we started that, or helped start that. And so...

Interviewer: So, memorable times.

Walsh: Yeah, indeed it was. And you know, the strange thing about. It all, it seems like it was yesterday. It made a very deep impression on you. Yeah. Yeah. But the thing of it is, I... but the thing that I have the hardest time with... 55 years ago? You must be kidding? I don't see or feel much over 55. Of course, I'm over 80, but, yeah.

Interviewer: Well, you all, you all definitely did your part.

Walsh: Well, we were there. I don't know what we did, but I'm sure we all meshed in together and did some things. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, I thank you very much for your time today.