

# Civil Air Patrol Oral History Interview

WNHC 13.83-17

MAJOR HUGH R. SHARP, JR., CAP



NATIONAL HISTORICAL COMMITTEE  
Headquarters CAP

CIVIL AIR PATROL  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interview

of

Major Hugh R. Sharp, Jr., CAP

by

Lt. Col. Lester E. Hopper, CAP

Date: 17 October 1983

Location: Wilmington, Delaware

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS:

That I, Hugh R. Sharpe, have this day participated in an oral-magnetic-taped interview with Lt Col Lester E. Hopp, covering my best recollections of events and experiences which may be of historical significance to the Civil Air Patrol.

I understand that the tape(s) and the transcribed manuscript resulting therefrom will be accessioned into the Civil Air Patrol's Historial Holdings. In the best interest of the Civil Air Patrol, I do hereby voluntarily give, transfer, convey, and assign all right, title, and interest in the memoirs and remembrances contained in the aforementioned magnetic tapes and manuscript to the Civil Air Patrol, to have and to hold the same forever, hereby relinquishing for myself, my executors, administrators, heirs, and assigns all ownership, right, title, and interest therein to the donee expressly on the condition of strict observance of the following restrictions:

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Hugh R. Sharpe DONOR  
Dated 10/17/83

Accepted on behalf of the Civil Air Patrol by L E Hopp  
Dated 10/17/83

## CIVIL AIR PATROL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Civil Air Patrol Oral History interviews were initiated in early 1982 by Lt Col Lester E. Hopper, CAP, of the Civil Air Patrol's National Historical Committee. The overall purpose of these interviews is to record for posterity the activities of selected members of the Civil Air Patrol.

The principle goal of these histories is to increase the base of knowledge relating to the early accomplishments of Civil Air Patrol members who in their own unique way contributed to the defense of our great country. Certainly not of a secondary nature is the preservation of the contributions of individuals as Civil Air Patrol continues its growth.

## FOREWORD

The following is the transcript of an oral history interview recorded on magnetic tape. Since only minor emendations have been made, the reader should consistently bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word. Additionally, no attempt to confirm the historical accuracy of the statements has been made. As a result, the transcript reflects the interviewee's personal recollections of a situation as he remembered it at the time of the interview.

Editorial notes and additions made by CAP historians are enclosed in brackets. If feasible, first names, ranks, or titles are also provided. Any additions, deletions and changes subsequently made to the transcript by the interviewee are not indicated. Researchers may wish to listen to the actual interview tape prior to citing the transcript.

## SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

In this oral history interview Major Hugh R. Sharp, Jr., CAP, recounts many of his experiences and feelings while serving as the commander of Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Base 2 during the early stages of World War II. Starting with his early exposure to aviation he continues to his association with Holger Hoiriis and the establishment of the base at Rehoboth, Delaware. He provides much valuable information on the procurement of materiel and personnel for this vital part of the war effort. He openly and with great detail recounts the successful rescue of downed fellow CAP pilot, Lieutenant Cross. This description includes the presentation of the Air Medal to himself and Lieutenant Edwards by President Roosevelt.

The information he provides on operational aspects such as coverage plans and bombings furnishes much needed data on these subjects.

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CAP ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Number WNHC 13.83-24  
Taped Interview with: Major Hugh R. Sharp, Jr., CAP  
Date of Interview: October 17, 1983  
Location: Wilmington, Delaware  
Conducted by: Lt. Col. Lester E. Hopper, CAP

H: Hugh, if I may call you that, how about starting off with just a little bit of your personal background and lead into your interest in CAP and things of that nature.

S: Well, I've been interested in aviation all my life, I guess. I remember when I was a kid, my mother was taking me up to the usual summer camp for children, and we went by a cow pasture and saw a fellow barnstorming and selling flights for a couple of dollars for a couple of minutes. I talked her into letting me go up with him. This must have been 1918 or '19, right after World War I. He took me up for a ride in an OX Jennie and that was my first experience.

H: I think everybody started in an OX Jennie except me.

S: Now as far as learning to fly is concerned, I started flying with a fellow named Ally Buck down at Bellanca Field, if you remember him, Louisa. (Note: Participating in the interview was Colonel Louisa S. Morse, CAP. Where Col. Morse comments, she is identified by the letter "M".) He was later killed as a test pilot at Bellanca. He was a great fellow who

owned an OX Waco, which charmed me. That was in 1928, if I remember. I took lessons from him surreptitiously, in order to hide my deeds from my family. I got right up to the solo point, but I didn't solo with Ally. I had to go back to school, or something interrupted it. I started the following summer in '29 and I soloed in a Warner Fleet with Richard duPont giving me my solo. Then Champ Tolliver gave me some time in his Waco F. In any event, by that time I soloed and got my license and what not. My flight time after that was intermittent. I didn't have an airplane so I was just flying when I had the chance. In college Richard duPont and I bought a primary glider and although he had more flying experience than I had we each taught each other to fly the glider. My claim to fame is, he held a world's record at one time for soaring and I'd say: That's my student. (Laughter.) I taught him to fly.

H: Pretty good claim to fame.

S: Yes, that's my only claim to fame. I started flying seriously about 1936 and I bought a Fairchild 24, no, I bought a Taylorcraft in partnership with my brother Bayard, and we had it and we also kind of kept that quiet from the family for quite a while till they found out about it and Father flew into a terrible panic. So we wrote a sign on the side of the airplane and named it "Pappy's Panic." (Laughter.) We had it for a year or a year and a half, then I graduated into a

Fairchild 24 and my "rich" brother bought a Stinson Reliant, which he flew for quite a while. My next airplane was a Staggerwing Beech, and then along came the war and I sold the Beech to the Navy. They were taking them in whenever they could get them. Then came the CAP experience. My first knowledge of the CAP was Richard calling me up one time and saying that he'd been talking to Gill Robb Wilson, who had been in Washington, and they'd talked about trying to form some sort of civilian branch flying to be helpful to the nation and all that, in the event of war. I think this was before Pearl Harbor, and I didn't really take it very seriously, the whole thing. I don't think anybody did, but as soon as Pearl Harbor came around, then the thing started to look like somebody had to do something.

M: CAP was started seven days before Pearl Harbor.

S: Yes, but the thinking was there before that. Right after Pearl Harbor, Gill Robb Wilson, I think, called Richard and got him to go down to Washington and talk seriously about CAP, and Richard was all tied up with All American Aviation and didn't have the time to do it.

H: Let's see. This was Richard duPont who developed the glider pick-up procedure.

S: That's exactly right. So they asked Richard if he could

get something started in Delaware. He said: "Yes, I think I can. I've got just the man to do it, and he's a former pilot in my company and he's grounded on account of his medical certificate. I think he has the background and so forth." That was Holger. So Holger Hoiriis was set up willy nilly as the head of the CAP in Delaware by Richard. Holger was quite enthusiastic about it. He was interested and thought it was a good idea and so forth. Then there was a meeting held, I can't remember where, that I went to, at which we discussed how we were going to get this thing started. I, at that time, was interested but I didn't see where I fit into this thing very well. I joined the CAP. I went to some of the training courses. I went to First Aid and the various things that were held out at duPont Field.

M: Let me interrupt just for a minute and ask you a question. I have the records of the serial numbers. You're in there with 28 or some early number. I can't find Holger Hoiriis on the Delaware serial numbers list at all. Was he in some other state?

S: No, he was right here in Wilmington.

M: Well, we can't find a serial number for him. That's interesting.

S: Well, he was the Wing Commander, anyhow, willy nilly.

H: He probably forgot to join.

S: He probably did.

M: He wasn't on active pilot status at that time?

S: No, he was not.

M: Well, that's probably why he forgot to join. Neither did I. I wasn't on active pilot status and they wouldn't take applications.

S: Well, we had a lot of girls in that First Aid course. My wife, Ada B., went out and took the First Aid course for CAP I'm sure. Anyhow, willy nilly, we had several meetings out at duPont Field and then came the time when Richard, or Holger, I guess, told us there was some talk about forming a Coastal Patrol down at possibly Rehoboth, someplace in Delaware, and Holger appointed me as his Operations Officer, and I was given the job of trying to find a place to put such a base, and what would we do when we got there, and so forth. Nobody had the faintest idea of what we were really supposed to do.

H: Well this was all pretty much quiet, confidential, secret and all that good stuff, wasn't it?

S: Well, yes, sort of, but I don't remember being too quiet about it. Yes, we were told not to say anything when we went down to Rehoboth the first time to look at it, and not to say why we were coming, that's true. Anyhow, Holger and I flew down to Rehoboth and landed there on the airport and we went in and looked around and everybody was very suspicious about what we were doing, because everything was sort of grounded at that time, and everybody was very suspicious of our flying around. We just kind of pretended that we had some sort of clearance to do it, and I think we really did, because you weren't supposed to fly. I don't remember all the details of that, but we went down and we decided that Rehoboth Airport was a usable place, a viable place.

H: What attracted you to Rehoboth to begin with?

S: Well, they told us that this was to be a coastal patrol idea; that we were supposed to patrol and report anything that was going on out off the shore.

M: The entrance to the Delaware River.

S: The entrance to the Delaware Bay, and it was certainly an ideal place to do it.

H: So you found the facility adequate?

S: We found the facility adequate. It needed a lot of things. We didn't know how long we were going to be there. We didn't really know what we needed, except that it was an airport, it was in the proper place, and so forth. The airport was owned by the Carpenter family at the time. It was leased out to some operator there. Old Captain Wenyon (sp.?) was in charge of it. He was kind of cool to us. When I got home I went to see Ruly Carpenter, my uncle, and told him we had something afoot, and that we wanted to use the airport, and he said if you have any problems, let me know, and go ahead. So we never did have any further problems about it. I think that Wenyon and the people who ran the airport were sort of let in on the secret so that they'd be cooperative, and they were. We really had no further problems there, but Holger and I decided that it was the place to be and so forth. Then we set out to find and try to organize a group that was willing to go down there. Holger had another meeting at duPont Field, and invitations were sent to various people who had airplanes and were interested in flying, that we thought might be interested in hearing the story of what we were going to do and see if they would come in on the idea. I can't remember how many people we got, but I think there were 6 or 7 airplanes at the beginning. I think there were 3 or 4 Fairchild 24's and a couple of Stinson Voyageurs. I think there were 6 or 7 in all. That's on the record someplace.

M: What did you have at that time?

S: I had the Staggerwing Beech, which we decided was not usable for the project. It got left home, but we borrowed a Fairchild 24 from Avery Draper, who couldn't get down. He let us have it and Al Fleitas went down in his Fairchild 24, but he didn't stay very long, and left it there. Oh, Chick duPont had a 24 that he loaned us.

M: What was the story of acquiring the amphibian?

S: Oh, that wasn't until quite some time later.

M: That was the one used in the rescue, wasn't it?

S: Yes, yes.

H: Well, when you first got down there it was pretty much make do with what you had on the base. Where did you all live, for example? How many went down initially with you? You said half a dozen? Ten? Twenty?

S: Golly, I wish I could put this together in my mind for you.

H: No problem. No problem.

S: I remember we took six airplanes down the first day, left from Bellanca Field, flew down in sort of pseudo-formation.

Bernie Mulliken flew down with me as my co-pilot or observer or whatever it was called. I remember I thought these guys are going to fly out over the water, they better get used to it right now. So I just went right down the middle of the bay. I remember Bernie turning to me and saying: You're not going to fly right down the middle of the bay, are you? (Laughter.)

H: Got them broke in early, huh?

S: Yes. Well, I took them right down the middle of the bay, and we landed at Rehoboth with no problem, and about that time, I had talked Ed Smith into coming down as a mechanic. He brought down one or two kids with him, to help him, I don't remember who. We picked up from time to time people during the first month, so we had quite a few people on the ground staff.

H: How about your radio people?

S: We had one girl from here, Jane, she later married Smedley Butler, one of our pilots. Jane, Jane. What was her maiden name? (Emma Jane Hodgson.) She was a character. But she was a radio operator in the early part, but I don't think that the girls came down right away. There was a fellow that was a superintendent in the school system here, who was a ham radio operator, and he went down and set up all the radios. I should have his name.

H: Well, that fits the pattern, because most everybody went out and found a good ham to set their radio communications up.

S: That's right. And he did a marvelous job. He set the whole thing up.

M: It wasn't Dilks, was it?

S: Yes, it was--Charlie Dilks. That's who it was. He did an excellent job. So we had, then, the mechanics and the radio men and we had five or six airplanes.

M: Did you have enough people for crews?

S: Yes, we had a pilot and an observer for each crew.

H: At that state were you the base commander?

S: No, Holger Hoiriis was the base commander.

H: You were the Operations Officer?

S: I was the Operations Officer.

H: So Holger Hoiriis was both the Wing Commander and the base commander.

S: Right. That's right.

H: That's not unusual.

S: The wing got very little attention after that, until we got moving. I think we had the first patrol the following day, if I recall.

M: You had the first patrol before Atlantic City.

S: Yes, we did.

H: That's a matter of record.

S: We always resented that they were called Base 1 and we were Base 2.

H: That's a matter of record. I think you did have it within a day or two of the establishment date.

S: Yes.

H: Do you recall how you picked up the orders for that patrol? Did they just tell you to go fly an area or pick up a convoy and follow it, or --?

S: That's all very hazy to me now. But I think we had a

general outline of what we were supposed to do. We were supposed to establish patrols from one end of our area to the other and out at sea. I don't think they put a limit on it.

M: The regulation said 20 miles first and then it was changed to 100 miles.

S: Yes, I think that's right. Yes, you're right.

M: Twenty miles wasn't far enough.

S: But the first patrol, we went out and we went up across the bay to Cape May. We went out to Five Fathom Bank Light, and we went down paralleling the coast from Five Fathom Bank to Fenwick Island light buoy, the buoy off Fenwick Island, which was the southern end of our area at that time. Later the southern end was extended to Winter Quarter Shoal, where we met the Parksley group.

H: You flew that first patrol?

S: Yes, I did.

H: And who else was with you, do you recall?

S: Bernie Mulliken was in it and I can't remember who the other airplane was, but it was another Fairchild 24. I have a

feeling it was Al Fleitas and somebody.

M: Cannon. Would it have been Harvey Cannon?

S: No, I don't think so. Al could probably tell you.

H: Again, that's really not an important issue.

S: But we flew out to Five Fathom Bank and down to Fenwick Island light buoy, and then in to the shore and then came back a little bit off the coast and came up to Rehoboth and then that was the end of the patrol. We didn't see anything.

H: Let me ask you in a little more detail what you saw during that particular period of time. Since you said you didn't see anything, obviously you didn't spot any submarines or anything of that nature. But were there any ships that had been sunk or debris along the coast? What were shipping problems up here then?

S: Yes, as I remember, we did report things that we saw in the water. I can't remember the details of what it was, but from time to time we saw life preservers. We saw pieces of flotsam and jetsam that obviously were off of ships. We saw all kinds of things like that which we always reported. Oil slicks we reported. Any boats in the area we reported, no matter that they were.

H: During that first flight, it was pretty much an uneventful flight?

S: As I remember so.

H: You didn't spot any particular thing?

S: We were all too busy being nervous to see very much.

H: I ran across an expression that the Texas people carried a bottle of engine smoothner. (Laughter.) You know it's a well known fact, with us pilots, the minute you get out over water your engine runs rough.

S: No doubt about it. No question about it.

H: So they had their bottle of smoothner in the airplane. Okay, fine. You obviously survived your first flight and things then started to build up on the base. Tell us a little about that.

S: Yes. We built up in personnel and airplanes, and we built up in facilities, and we built up in all sorts of things. Before we were finished we had a restaurant, we had a mess hall, or whatever you want to call it. We had much better radio facilities. We had a full time sort of tower operation,

so that we were in communication without any problems most of the time, continuously.

M: Did you live on the airport?

S: No, nobody lived on the airport. We all lived in town in boarding houses and what not. In a number of instances, fellows got together and rented a house. But it was all--, all the living was done off the base.

H: Now how about your reception? You had a little problem in the beginning and you straightened it out with Captain Wenyon, who ran the base. How well were you received in the community once you got your base established and going?

S: Well, I think the community thought we were a bunch of fellows trying to play like we were on a secret mission. It was pretty obvious it wasn't very secret, because they could see almost everything we did. I think they sort of pooh-poohed us some. But I think over the months that they got to like us. Some of the kids were pretty rambunctious and got into some scrapes and troubles, which we had to smooth over with the town authorities from time to time. But I don't think it was anything more than just fun. There was never any kind of destruction or any of that kind of thing down there. And it was a good bunch of guys by and large down there. We never had any real trouble. They were quite cooperative, really.

H: Give me a rough idea, if you will, what a day's activity was, after you got the base up and running. You flew dawn patrols and night patrols. How many a day?

S: Well, it was constant patrolling. We had somebody over the area all the time, from sun-up to sun-down, or daylight to dark.

M: You flew in some pretty hairy weather sometimes, didn't you?

S: Well, yes, it was pretty dreary. Particularly in the winter months. You had a lot of bad weather. But the fellows got pretty handy at flying under bad weather. Of course, the airplanes were awful slow, so it was a lot easier to fly under the weather in those days than it would be now. They got quite skillful in handling it and knowing where they were, and getting back home without problems. We didn't have any direction finders to find home again, and you had to find it on your own.

H: Needle, ball, airspeed and compass.

S: That's right, exactly. Everybody always got back. We had one seaplane land up in the bay. We started a seaplane operation because I just felt that airplanes on floats weren't

very good at sea, but they would be better than not having floats, I thought. At least they were supposed to float, and so we tried to get airplanes on floats and at one time we had four or five of those.

H: Excuse the interruption, but at some time I believe you all established a sub-base. Is that what you established?

S: A what?

H: A sub-base, a separate base for your float planes.

S: That's right, for the seaplanes.

H: And where was that, sir?

S: That was up at the head of Rehoboth Bay. Big housing development there now.

H: Was there an existing seaplane base there at that time or something?

S: No. No, nothing.

H: Oh, you just went up there and--

S: All it was, was a place where we could pull them up on the

beach.

H: Good beach, and that was it.

S: That was all.

M: At what point did you replace Holger Hoiriis? How long was he commander? Do you recall?

S: No, I don't. But it wasn't really very long. I imagine it was sometime during the middle of the first summer.

M: It was only a few months that he was commander, really.

S: And then he died while we were down there. A lot of us went up to the funeral. He was a great fellow, but he wasn't a very good organizer. Not that I was either, but he left an awful lot of the work of organizing, which is probably the sign of a good commander, to the rest of us.

H: Well, during that first period, then, you were Operations Officer and you did a combination of flying and scheduling and a little bit of everything.

S: Yes, I guess so.

H: But you relieved, at whatever date, and we can find that

from a records standpoint, you relieved Holger Hoiriis and became the CO of Rehoboth. Now back to your seaplane base establishment. You just went out and found some people who had float planes and seaplanes.

S: That's right. Abbey Wolfe was one of the people who really got that going for us. He was a devoted seaplane man, and he came down and brought a fellow named Tom Sanschagrín with him, who was a French Canadian by birth. I think he was actually born in Maine, but he was of French Canadian stock. They came down with a Fairchild 24 on floats. And then they convinced a number of other seaplane people whom they knew to come down and do it. And I think we had four or five Fairchilds on floats. But before that I had gotten the Sikorsky. I decided that something had to be done in case somebody went in the water. At least we ought to have some way to try to do something about it. I was not very sure we could do something about it, but we should try anyhow.

H: And who did you get the Sikorsky from?

S: The Sikorsky--Paul duPont owned the Sikorsky, and he, at the time, was working at the Seaford plant (of the duPont Company). They had a little airstrip beside the plant and he kept the Sikorsky over there. Of course he was grounded, because everybody was grounded. So I called Paul up one day and I said: "Paul, you got that Sikorsky over there at

Seaford?" and he said: "Sure." I said: "I wonder if you'd like to sell it." And he said: "No, I wouldn't like to sell it." I said: "Well, I'd like to use it anyhow. We'd keep it here, and in case of emergency and what not." and I said I'd like to come over and look at it anyhow--see if I can fly it. So Holger and I went over to Seaford.

M: Did you have Smitty with you?

S: Yes, I think he was. Yes, he was with us. The three of us went over. We looked it over and it looked reasonable, and so I said: "Let's see if the engine will start." So we cranked it up and got the engine going, and it sounded pretty good, and Smitty said that it sounded pretty good. We checked the mags and taxied it around to see how it felt. So we took it up to the end of the field and gave it the gun to get it started, and it was awfully sluggish to get it started, but first thing we knew we were in the air. (Laughter.) And so I said: "We're up here, so we might as well keep going." We flew around and flew around and I said: "Let's take it over to Rehoboth." And we just kept on going. And Smitty came back in the car.

H: Find out if you can land when you get to Rehoboth.

S: Yes. I said I'd rather try and land someplace where I'm familiar. So we did and we got down without too much trouble, but it came down with an awful bang and didn't bounce much. So

when we got out of the airplane and started going through it, it had over a drum, a full oil drum, a fifty five gallon drum of water in the bilge. It had rained in and nobody had ever drained it. It was mostly all back in the tail.

H: A little aft CG.

S: Very definitely, but we got that out and things cleared up much better then.

H: It flew better without that extra 300 pounds back in the tail.

S: Yes, and we got it out by punching a hole in the fuselage and letting it run out. Then Smitty put a drain plug in it. There turned out to be a perfectly good grain plug there already, but we didn't know where it was. (Laughter.) Well, anyhow, we flew just in practice for a while and Smitty said we really ought to do something about that airplane and get it in decent shape. In the meantime, Paul had sold it to me. He said we ought to put it in decent shape, so we did. Smitty and his crew took it down, stripped all the paint off, took all the fabric off the wings and recovered them. We did the whole thing on the base. They overhauled the engine from top to bottom, a real major overhaul on the engine, the whole works. When he got finished with it, it was a pretty nice airplane. It flew like a Mack truck, but it was in good shape.

H: Well, I believe at some point in the game, and I guess this is a good place to get into it, you put that amphibian to good use one day, didn't you?

S: Yes, we had an emergency where one of the airplanes went into the water, and we went out. It was down almost at the bottom of our area, down off Chincoteague.

H: To keep that thing in perspective, how did you first hear it was going into the water. Did you get a mayday or something of that nature?

S: Yes, from the accompanying airplane. We always flew in pairs. The other airplane gave a pretty dramatic story of the whole event.

H: Now, you were at the base at the time.

S: We were at the base. Eddie Edwards was standing by there, and I said: "Eddie, you and I are going out there and see what we can see."

H: Okay now, who was flying the airplane and what was the airplane that went down, do you recall?

S: Yes, it was a fellow named Town. Wait a minute, that's not

right. Shelfus was one of them. He was the observer, and the pilot was a fellow named Cross. That's right. Cross was flying the airplane and Shelfus was the observer. They had an engine failure and went in the water. We arrived on the scene as quick as we could.

H: Was this in the morning or the evening? Do you recall?

S: It was in the middle of the day, or afternoon--middle of the afternoon. It wasn't a bad day. The wind was blowing fairly hard and there was a fairly good sea running, with white caps and what not. I made a butchered job of the landing. We hit on top of a wave and fell down into the trough just below the crest of the next wave and bounced up again and finally settled down in the water on the third wave.

H: Okay now, when you first flew onto the scene what did you observe as far as the aircraft in the water?

S: Well, we saw Cross in the water, because the other airplane was circling overhead. That was the first thing we saw. Now, I'm a little hazy on this. Later Smitty put those float tanks in the airplanes, so that they would float nose down, tail in the air, so they made a good mark. As I recall it, the airplane was gone at the time we got there. So it must have been after that that Smitty put the float tanks on. But the other airplane had Henry Cross, had him spotted. He had a life

preserver on, and he was in the water. They had him spotted and they just kept circling around him.

H: But no sign of Shelfus?

S: We never did see him. He, I think, had gotten out of the airplane, the other fellows said, but he sank right away. He was gone. We found no sign of him. We landed as close to Henry as we could. As I said, I made a very bad landing and broke a wing float at the time of the landing, which was my fault. We got Henry Cross, got a hold of him quite simply. Didn't take us long. We hauled him into the plane and he had a broken back. He was in quite a lot of pain. We got him into the airplane. Eddie Edwards got him on the back seat of the airplane. I was still trying to keep the airplane afloat, because the broken float was pulling the wing down, and I was trying to keep the wing up and keep moving into the wind to keep it up.

H: Okay. You had power. You didn't lose your power.

S: No, no. Everything was fine there. It was obvious that we were very badly equipped to do anything for Henry Cross. We should have had blankets. We should have had all kinds of emergency things to take care of the poor guy. We didn't have a thing. We were all in summer uniform. We just jumped in the airplane and were gone. If we'd used our heads at all it would

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have been a much better deal. But we got him in anyhow. We turned around sort of crosswind to get headed toward shore. I could talk to the base. I had a triangular antenna, from the tail out each wing, on that airplane. I could talk to the base and I could talk to the other airplane, and we said we were all right. We've got a busted wing float, and all that kind of stuff. We can't take off again. It was obvious with all that water in that float we weren't going to get off.

H: How far off shore were you? Do you recall? Four or five miles, something like that?

S: No, we were a lot more than that. We were outside of Winter Quarter Shoal by 4 or 5 miles, and I think it was at least 35 to 40 miles off shore, if I recall. I may be exaggerating, but I don't think so.

H: I have a plot on exactly where it was. I was just interested in your recollection.

S: We were outside of that and about the same latitude, so then we started for shore. They had a Coast Guard boat alerted to come out to us, and we were in sight of land, in sight of Chincoteague Inlet when they got up to us. The question was whether we should let them tow us on in or whether we should keep taxiing in. Eddie Edwards went out on the opposite wing from the broken float to balance the airplane, and he had to

sit out there the rest of the trip, and I was in the airplane with Henry Cross, which was the worst part of the trip, because poor Henry was in agony. I don't think he was really conscious. I think he was completely out of his head. He was moaning and more. Anyway, he wasn't a happy man. We got ashore. The Coast Guard came and found us and they took us in tow. I had at first thought it would be better if they didn't take us in tow. Let us go as far as we could, but we were going so slowly, I thought maybe to get Harry in quicker we'd better let them take us in tow, although I was afraid they might pull our bow chock out or do something and we'd be in worse trouble yet.

H: Pull you through the waves.

S: So anyhow they did take us in tow and he did a good job, and he took us into Chincoteague Inlet to the Coast Guard Station there, and we got Henry out, and we were met by an ambulance that took him to Salisbury Hospital. They did all they could for him and he recovered. I went to see him once or twice in the hospital. But after he got out of the hospital, he went directly home, and I never saw him again afterwards, nor have I heard from him afterwards. I don't know where he is or anything. He had a very nice wife, who was down there with him, and they both just disappeared. Never heard from them again. There was a report that he was working as a civilian at the Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, that he was

working down there as a civilian. So he must have gotten better. But I never could find anybody at Maxwell Field who knew him or had any record of him. I don't know what happened to him.

H: Well, that certainly was a real interesting phase of your totally interesting career. So you got the airplane back and repaired it there on the beach, and eventually got it back to Rehoboth?

S: Yes, we pulled it up on the beach at Chincoteague and got all the water out of the float and straightened it around enough so that it wasn't a drag too much on the airplane. I took it off the beach just off the sand and flew it up to Rehoboth the following day. We didn't get in to the Chincoteague Coast Guard Station till, it seemed to me, quite late at night. I don't know what time it was.

H: Some of the written accounts say eleven hours of taxiing, which seems like an awfully long time.

S: It wasn't eleven hours of taxiing. We were eleven hours getting in, but I wouldn't think that more than a half of that was taxiing.

H: But it did take you a good total eleven hours to get in.

S: Oh, it took us a long time to get in.

H: Okay, you went on back to the base and started doing your routine operations, if you want to call flying over water like you all did, routine.

S: That's right. The airplane made another rescue. Tom Sanschagrín was flying it. I forget who was with him, and I can't remember who he pulled out of the water, but it was right in front of Rehoboth Beach. It wasn't off shore. It was right there. But he did a good job, didn't tear the airplane up.

M: He didn't have as big waves as you did.

S: No, I don't think so.

H: That's two crashes at sea that you mentioned so far. Did you all have others at Rehoboth?

S: Yes, I think we had three in total, wasn't it? I think it was. We had, I think we lost five people total, wasn't it? It says so on our plaque down there.

H: That's a matter of record.

S: I hate to be so hazy about things that were so important.

H: I'm not trying to collect specific details that are written someplace, I'm more interested in how you felt and how you saw it and how you perceived what went on at that time. The reading and writing someplace we can read, the opportunity to discuss it with you is not available very often. Well, not often, period. Let's go back a little bit to the more mundane, day-to-day operations of the base. How about this chief mechanic or engineering officer, whatever you called him, Smitty? He got to be one of the real famous ones, if you will, as far as engineering officers go, with his inventions and things of that nature.

S: Well, he sure--

M: Oh, he's still alive?

S: Oh, yes, he's still around. I saw him last week.

M: Where does he live?

S: He lives down just south of town, somewhere.

M: Near Wilmington?

S: Yes, I've been to his house, and I can't remember just where it is.

M: Well, we can find him in the phone book.

S: Oh, yes. Sure.

H: Well, basically, then--

S: His name was Everett Smith.

H: Well, basically, then, you kept 20 to 25 airplanes going and covering your area with two to four airplanes at all times. Did you run some north and some south, or did you run them all just in a circle?

S: It was pretty much in a rectangle. We sent them out, two at a time. At some point, I forget just when it was, they started the convoy business, and then it was a matter of meeting the convoy, staying with it for two hours, and being relieved by the next group every two hours. Those Fairchilds had about a four hour range, but we didn't want to keep the boys out there for over two hours if we could help it. So they relieved each other every two hours.

H: Now your convoy duty, you just flew parallel to the convoy and watched for submarines?

S: Yes, yes. Generally just a sort of oval pattern around. They'd change it and make figure eights, do all kinds of things

to mix it up so that if he were watching us, he wouldn't figure out our pattern.

H: Keep from getting drunk. (Laughter.) During that time did you all have any submarine sightings?

S: We had one that was definite. We had another one that was not definite. In fact, I know it wasn't definite. The one that was definite was out off of Five Fathom Bank. There was a tanker coming around the buoy and a submarine had been stalking it, apparently. He stuck his nose up. He stuck his periscope up to take a look, and one of our fellows spotted him. He dove right at the periscope. He was not very far away, and he dove right at it and apparently all of a sudden the periscope was all full of airplane, and the guy didn't take time to see what kind it was, and he dove and went down, and the rest of the story is not very definite, because we could never confirm it. But I did see a submarine under tow the next day.

H: Excuse me now. When he dove at the submarine, was that during the period of time when you were equipped with bombs, or not?

S: No.

H: Okay, that was prior to your being equipped.

S: Yes, it was prior to that. He dove and there was a lot of thrashing in the water after that, and our fellows believe that he stuck his nose in the mud, and was trying to get loose. The following morning there was a submarine under tow going up the Delaware Bay. I did not see any markings on it at all of any kind. I wouldn't have any idea if it was ours that was being towed in for some reason, or if it was the one the airplane caught. I mean the one that stuck his nose in the mud. We like to think that was what happened. The Navy would never confirm it, would never say anything about it. So we really don't know what happened, but it makes a good story to say that we stuck one in the mud.

H: Nobody is going to debate it.

S: The other one turned out to be a complete hoax. But I must say it was the most convincing hoax I ever saw. One of the fellows that reported, first he reported seeing a submarine, then he said no we didn't see the submarine, but we saw oil bubbling up from the bottom and it's moving. It isn't something coming up from a sunken tanker or some other source. It's moving. It's going ahead like this. So I went out to look myself, and that was after we got the bombs. I told him before I got there, just drop one of your bombs and just see what happens. So they did. They had two fifty pound bombs.

H: They had 100 pound bombs at the time.

S: They had four of those between two airplanes and they all had great fun watching them blow up in the water. So then I came out and flew around and I had the Sikorsky. I flew the Sikorsky because it was the only airplane on the base that had a depth charge on it. We had one depth charge. So I said I better take that out and see what happens. So I went out and sure enough this submarine was just going along as nice as you please, and it was moving right along, and then it would take a little turn to the right and then it would take a little turn this way, the most convincing thing you ever saw. So I dropped my depth charge and the submarine just kept doing what it was doing, and we kept following along and so forth, so finally I said we better do something about this. So we got two airplanes watching it and I went ashore. We called up the headquarters in New York and told them what was going on. They got a B-17 from Mitchell Field to come down and he dropped some stuff on it. Now wait a minute, the first one was the Navy in Cape May. They came down with OS2U's. They dropped some on it. The same result. And then they got Mitchell Field and the B-17's to come down. I think there were two of them, and they just blasted the whole ocean apart. Same thing. (Laughter.) So then they got a Navy vessel to come down there and they apparently couldn't hear anything, and they were the people who figured out what happened. They called me up and I went over to Cape May and they said they thought they'd solved the mystery. They told me what it was. There had been a tanker

sunk there a number of months before, and it had developed a leak, rusted through or something, and there was oil coming up and the tide was moving it down, you see, in a most convincing manner. And they figured out what it really was, but we had a very exciting day, I'll tell you.

H: Well, we dropped five pieces of ordnance on that particular oil slick. How about any other bombings, do you recall any?

S: Nothing more than just practicing.

H: How about your on shore, on land, while you were on the ground, aspects? Did you have a pretty regimented organization? A lot of drill and that sort of thing?

S: No, not really. I'm not a very regimented fellow. I'm not a very military kind of a fellow. Frankly, we were busy doing what we were supposed to do, any time off that the boys got, I wasn't going to march them around the field for no good purpose that I knew of, and so we didn't really pay much attention to that until we got several directives reminding us that we were not doing our duty, and then we'd go out and I got a Victrola with a loud speaker and a marching record, and we'd march up and down a time or two, but really our drill was not much. We had a fellow who was in charge of the guard unit, and he was an ex-Army man, and he loved to drill people, and he loved to get out there and call the commands, but nobody took it terribly

seriously.

H: You were out there to fly airplanes and not to wear your feet out.

S: That's right. We didn't pay much attention and we got called down for it several times. We also got called down about being sloppy with the uniforms and that kind of thing. I slapped their wrists from time to time but we weren't very. . . I tried to set somewhat of an example, but I wasn't very good at it.

H: Two fingered wrist slapping. Louisa is looking at her pet subject. Usually at this juncture I ask if you recall whether or not your guards wore any special insignia or anything of that nature. That's an illustration of a CAP guard patch.

M: It had two red rifles on a blue patch with white CAPG. We know the patch exists. It was illustrated in National Geographic as CAP Guard at base. We can't find any directive that prescribed it. We can't find anybody who has seen it worn.

S: I never saw it.

H: Didn't wear it at Rehoboth either. I've asked that question at several bases and they didn't know it either. Now,

while we're on insignia, a lot of the bases had a special insignia that they put on their airplanes and things. I've seen some versions of the one for Delaware with a goose dropping a bomb and several different things.

M: Blue Hen's Chicken.

H: Did you all actually have an official base insignia?

S: Oh yes, we did and we had decals of that and they were on every airplane, and I don't know if there are any decals, that weren't used. I don't, I have never seen one. Es Kimball did a needlepoint pillow, which she gave me at the time, of that insignia, and it's a beautiful thing and I still have that.

M: We have to get a picture of that.

H: If you know somebody who could make a color picture of that we'd certainly appreciate it.

S: But there must be some pictures of it.

H: There are some pictures of it, but unfortunately there are several versions of it in this little booklet, and I never was really sure which one was the correct version of it.

M: The one in the National Geographic is the correct version.

H: The second one was a little naughty.

S: And that one was done by Zack Mosley. He did that cartoon.

M: Remember your aircraft marking?

S: Yes, I remember that. Great deal of controversy about that. The original insignia had the red propeller, and I don't know what the point was in taking the propeller out. I think they wanted to differentiate us from the rest of the CAP airplanes for some reason. But I don't know why we should have been.

H: Well, there was a parallel story. At the same time the Air Force took the red center out of their star.

S: Oh, I see.

H: And it had something to do with confusion between Japanese aircraft marking and US aircraft marking. Now I've just assumed that that was the same thing on CAP.

S: Well, that's as good a reason as any.

M: We just found the directive of July of '42. It said that all planes on Coastal Patrol will have the red propeller

removed from the insignia, and it will be returned to the insignia or the insignia completely obliterated before the plane leaves service with Coastal Patrol. So no other planes but Coastal Patrol had that insignia.

H: Regressing back to your original -

S: We did pay attention to that. (Laughter.)

H: After being fussed at. Regressing just a little bit back to the Cross incident. You, of course, were, you and Edwards, got to be careful, I get him confused with my governor. You were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by President Roosevelt.

S: No, the Air Medal.

H: The Air Medal. I'm sorry, not DFC. The Air Medal by President Roosevelt. How did that come about? How did you first find out they had selected you for the award?

S: I don't really recall. I remember there were some rumors that that was going to happen. Eventually, we were called to Washington. I went over in the Sikorsky. I flew it over, met our wives in Washington and went over to the White House. We waited in the waiting room for quite some time to get into the august presence of the president. We apparently caught him a

little by surprise, because he was picking his teeth at the time. (Laughter.)

H: Good anecdote.

S: But he recovered from that very gracefully. He invited us in and he was very gracious, congratulated us and pinned on the medals. I'm not really quite clear about this either. He indicated at the time, he said this is the first time that this medal has been awarded. Now I think he might have meant this is the first time I have awarded this medal.

M: I wonder if he could have meant awarded to anyone outside of the service.

S: And we were still at Rehoboth. Eddie Edwards left about two or three months before we quit, because he said he had a chance to get in the Navy as a flying officer. And I said: "Take it, boy, and go." And he did. Then he was still in training someplace, when this thing happened, so he was called down at the same time.

H: Now back to the comment Roosevelt made. He was probably referring to the fact that you two were the first civilians.

M: It says right here it was the first time this military medal has been awarded to a civilian.

S: I think that's right. The president, I think he was confused. He said this is the first time this medal has been awarded. So we took it that we had number 1. I'm sure that's not right.

H: Well, in the case of the president, I doubt very seriously that he would award Air Medals to the military people, because it's not one of the higher military decorations. For a civilian, of course, it was about the highest there was.

M: It could have been the first time he personally awarded it.

S: I'm sure that's what he meant. But we thought at the time that we were the first people to get it.

H: Aside from that, I'm sure you had a certain degree of pride and accomplishment, not only in receiving of the medal, but the fact that you saved the boy's life, which is the net result.

S: Well, I think both Eddie and I felt that we were terribly upset that we didn't find Shelfus. We felt that we had really let the side down there. I always felt a little embarrassed that I busted up the airplane in the process. (Laughter.) We were very pleased. Who wouldn't be? To be recognized. We thought it was an awful fuss over very little, frankly, when you thought of what else was going on in the world at the time.

The only other anecdote I have about the trip to Washington was, after all the tumult and shouting had died, Eddie and I went over to Washington National where we had landed, because we were civilians and couldn't go into the Army field. We landed at Washington National and parked the airplane and went in to the White House. When we came back we were in a long conga line of airplanes going out to take off, and in front of us were several of what we thought were perfectly tremendous airplanes at that time, C-54's. One of them was cleared to Gander and one of them was cleared to someplace down in the West Indies, and another was cleared for a non-stop flight to England. The one in front of us, I don't remember where he was going anyhow, but we sat there quite a while while these clearances were given and everybody got out of there. The fellow in front of us was kind of parked, so he could see us back there. He called the tower and asked what the heck is that back there? The man in the tower said: "I'm not sure. I'll ask." So he called us and we said it was a Sikorsky S-39. The fellow in the airplane said: "Tell that fellow to take off ahead of me. I want to see if it really will fly." (Laughter.) That was the silliest looking airplane you ever saw.

H: Well, you did better with your Sikorsky than the people in Texas did with theirs when they tried to effect their water rescue. They lost it completely. In fact, they almost lost the two that were down plus themselves. But that all turned

out to be a satisfactory story in that everybody got picked up. Well, the second two did anyway. Well, you know this is always a difficult question to ask. I stumble sometimes for words, because I don't want to lead people. How do you feel personally about the contribution made by CAP Coastal Patrol during that period?

S: Well, I think that we felt that we had filled a gap. Whether the gap was really worth filling, I really don't know. The sinkings right off the mouth of the Delaware Bay did stop. We didn't have any more after that. Sinkings didn't stop, but the ones right there did. So anyhow somebody must have spread the word that the mouth of the Bay was being guarded at least. How much credit our flying should have for that, I have no idea. But if it saved one tanker, it was worth while. I think all of us at the end were thinking we had served our purpose. If the military were prepared to take over the job, or if the job had to be continued, we'd be glad to get out of it and get on to something else. There certainly was no glamour in it. There certainly was no real fun. Our esprit de corps was great, and just being there with those fellows was great. I think that shows so well in the loyalty those fellows have had for our reunions.

M: How many do you get at your reunions?

S: Oh, we get a very high percentage of the people that are

still living. An awful lot of people are gone. We had a very small reunion this year. I think there were 35 or 40 people there.

H: Good group. When you closed down Rehoboth in August of '43, what did most of your people do?

S: Well, before the base closed down, they got us all to join the Army. Everybody on the base had an opportunity to go and enlist. We were enlisted as privates in the Army. Then our duty assignment was to go back and do what we were doing. So we were in the Army at the time we quit. So everybody that was there certainly scrambled around to see what they could do, how they could better their job, instead of being a buck private in the rear rank. We all scrambled around. Almost all of the pilots got flying assignments one place or another, either as instructors or ATC pilots. I went in Air Transport Command.

H: Did some of them go into Tow Target operations or anything of that nature?

S: I don't think so. I think they either went into the Army or didn't do anything. There were a lot of people who weren't eligible to do anything.

H: There were a lot of them past the point where they could go on active duty. In closing, let me just throw it open. Is

there anything that has occurred to you that you want to throw in as a postscript?

S: No, I don't think so. Except that in retrospect, sure, you always had people that you wished would do something else, or act differently, in any organization you've got to have those things happen, but by and large, we had the greatest group you ever saw. As I said, their esprit de corps was always darn good. Of course, we had periods when we were down if we'd lost somebody or that kind of thing. But they always bounced back and they always did their jobs and there was a minimum of bitching and complaining and so forth. But it wouldn't have been healthy, if you hadn't had that.

H: No. You have to have some of that.

S: Since then, the feeling of camaraderie and so forth at these reunions is just marvelous. Everybody has a great deal of nostalgia about it and they come back and bring their kids, and even their grandchildren now.

M: I just want to point out one thing. When Les asked you whether you felt it was worthwhile, I'm sure you have read, but perhaps you have forgotten, that in Flying Minute Men there is a quote of a German submarine admiral who, in the war trials, was asked why the submarines stopped plying the east coast of the United States. His answer was: "It was those damn little

red and yellow planes." (Laughter.) So you did do the job.

S: Well, I think the fact that the sinkings right at the coast did stop showed that something happened.

H: Again, Hugh, thank you for your time and effort.

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