

OH-3011, Part 1 and Part 2, Clarence Stearns, 4-22-2014, Wilson,  
WY In Flight

Q: [00:00:00] OK, today is the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2014. My name is Mark Junge and I'm in the home of -- give me your full name, [Stearnie?].

STEARNS: Clarence Grover Stearns.

Q: Clarence Grover Stearns.

STEARNS: And nickname is Stearnie.

Q: OK. And your wife, who I just met, is -- her name is --

STEARNS: Dorothy Stearns. They call her [Dottie?].

Q: What's her maiden name?

STEARNS: Dorothy Ralph.

Q: R-A-L-P-H?

STEARNS: Mm-hmm.

Q: OK. And you just brought out a document for me to look at, and this is just -- this seems very rare. But it's a handwritten diary. And the pages are brown and the ink has turned brown. But it says, "Isaac Stearns Junior, born June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1750. Son of Isaac [00:01:00] and [Sara Abbott?] Stearns of Billerica, Massachusetts. Married December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1777. Mary [Crosby?] of Billerica. They moved to Ashburnham -- A-S-H-B-U-R-N-H-A-M -- in 1778. He was a sergeant in the Revolutionary War and died April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1807. His widow died October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1838. Eleven children. Isaac

Stearns was one of the Minutemen who rallied at the first alarm, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1775, and was also one of the intrepid band of 40 men led by Ethan Allen that took Fort Ticonderoga. He was a soldier in the siege of Boston for eight months, and participated in the Battle of Bunker Hill. Colonel Prescott and Sergeant Stearns stood side by side in the Redoubt as the British Soldiers marched up the hill. The question was [00:02:00] how near should they be allowed to approach for the fire to be most effective. This conversation passed between them. Prescott: 'Stearns, are they near enough?' Sergeant Stearns: 'No, not yet.' Prescott: 'Are they now?' Stearns: 'Not quite.' Then: 'There! That will do.' And the order was given to fire, with the result so well known. Sundays, the saddle and pillion were put on their one horse for the trip to church." And then there's a letter attached to this. And this is to Clarence Stearns, Post Office Box 426, [Zambrotta?] Road, Alpine, California. April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

"Dear Clarence and Dorothy, In a few days I will mail you that chest, on which I have done some small repairs, and with it [00:03:00] a very valuable historical book. Isaac Stearns, [his day?], book, starting May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1788. Our genealogy says that this man was one of the Minutemen who rallied at the first alarm, April 19<sup>th</sup> 1775, that was one of

the 40 men led by Ethan Allen that took Fort Ticonderoga, and as a sergeant, was the aid to General Prescott at Bunker Hill, advising him when to give the order to fire. I do not know just what should be the next resting place for this book, which I have had for 50 years. If the Zumbro Valley Historical Society finally has a home where books like this can be kept under glass and preserved, I would be glad to let them have it. It would be lost in the archives of the Minnesota Historical Society. The decision will be up to you. Because of him, I am -- and you could be -- a member of the Sons of the American Revolution. We have quite a heritage." [00:04:00] And there's no signature. Who wrote you that?

STEARNS: That's my dad.

Q: Your dad wrote you that.

STEARNS: Yeah, in the later years. A place in Alpine, California.

Q: OK. And then there's a little note attached to that letter that says, "Note: This book was evidently used by several people, including Jessie Stearns, father of I.C. Stearns, who moved to Zumbrota -- Z-U-M-B-R-O-T-O, or A? -- Zumbrota, Minnesota. See top of last page."

STEARNS: Yes.

Q: So, let's see if I spell that "Zumbrota."

STEARNS: Z-U-M-B-R-O-T-A.

Q: OK. And this booklet is bound in leather, but it looks like a leather that's -- it's not really very finely finished. It's about 4 inches -- I would say, 4 inches wide and about, oh, 14 inches high. And there's what looks like about [00:05:00] 20 pages or so, and it's all handwritten.

STEARNS: It looks almost like rawhide.

Q: Yes. That's exactly right. It is a rawhide cover, front and back. And the pages are just -- I mean, obviously I shouldn't even be touching this without gloves.

STEARNS: Well, I had it wrapped in paper towels. I didn't know how -- or tissue paper. I didn't know how to send it. I thought maybe just through the post office, but with their special mail where it gets handled only instead of getting thrown.

Q: Oh, I wouldn't mail it if I were you.

STEARNS: How would you send it?

Q: Oh my gosh. Before I sent it anywhere, I would have somebody at the -- maybe the Jackson Hole Historical Society copy it or scan it. Photographically scan it, so that nothing in it is lost. And then, if it can't be hand-carried out [00:06:00] there, then -- I'm not sure if FedEx can handle that or not. But this thing is -- let's see,

1797, 1896? This thing is 225, 230 years old. And that's a rare document. But a curator -- I mean, a museum curator, the man in charge at the museum, can tell you best what to do with this. Because if you just send it in the mail without copying it, it's gone forever if it's lost. And nobody will have the benefit of it.

STEARNS: I talked to a friend of mine in Zumbrota. He said he would be happy to get it into the museum there.

Q: OK. Well, you don't want to put it in just regular mail. I mean, I wouldn't do it that way. Are you ever going to go back there yourself? Do you foresee that?

STEARNS: No, I don't. I can't travel other than flying, and then I go -- like, [00:07:00] when I go down to Tucson and somebody goes with me, and I go as a handicapped -- so they wheel me all around in a wheelchair. Which is a wonderful service. I was going to call the local historical -- there's a [road over?] -- well, 39 that goes through the [sea?] area. It was known as [Rabbit Row?]. And Dottie and I were at a party here a while back, and almost got in a big argument with a guy because there's Rabbit Row Motors over there and then there's a little sign that says Rabbit Row Lane. And he insisted that was Rabbit Row. Well, what happened, in the early days, there was a house right there where the parking lot is, just as you cross the bridge.

And buses would go in there. Anyway, there was a house there and there was a family that lived [00:08:00] there with four kids and a girl. And across the highway was a family with four boys. And then up across again was a (inaudible) family, and one of the boys made another [cot?] subdivision over here. Over on this side was the [Lynn?] family with four boys and a girl. And then there was another family just above them with a lot of kids. And up by the Aspens there was another family with a whole bunch of kids. So that was known as Rabbit Row because all the kids were living -- born along there.

Q: How do you have such a good memory, Stearnie?

STEARNS: Well, I was just there when I was here, when I first came.

Q: OK. Well, let me ask you this: What date were you born?

STEARNS: I was born yesterday in 1920. [00:09:00]

Q: The 21<sup>st</sup> of April, 1920.

STEARNS: Yes. I was 64 yesterday.

Q: Well, happy birthday!

STEARNS: Well, thank you. Actually, we celebrated Saturday because all of my family was going to be able to be here. And we had a big celebration. A wonderful surprise. One of the biggest surprises -- my son has two daughters. One of them is in Wyoming. And she showed up. There just

happened to be somebody coming here for Easter, so she got a ride with them. And then my youngest daughter, who is just a freshman in school, and quite a skier -- but she showed up with a new boyfriend that we'd never seen before. And I called [Horace?], my son, the next morning, and he says, "Oh, I've never seen him before either!" [00:10:00] And she brought him. And then I was asked to go out on the deck. Everybody was out there. And my youngest daughter, who has our store now -- she got a divorce last year, very happy divorce. Sold her house in town for \$300,000, more than they paid for it about nine years ago. And she bought a condo up at the Aspen development up there.

Q: And this is in Wilson?

STEARNS: Well, it's about five miles north of Wilson on the road to the ski area. And then she has a new boyfriend -- just happy as can be. This guy works out at Arco, at the atomic site, as a chemist, cleaning up out there and whatnot. And then he's a hydrologist, so he worked on the water system in Idaho Falls. They met through email somehow. And [00:11:00] he's a wonderful guy. He can repair anything. He's got a little ranch out by Rigby with four horses, a bunch of chickens, and a [coal?] plot for growing plants, vegetables. He brings us fresh eggs all the time.

Q: This is in Riggs?

STEARNS: This [is out in?] Rigby, Idaho.

Q: Where were you born?

STEARNS: In Rochester, Minnesota.

Q: Were -- can you tell me who your parents were?

STEARNS: Yeah. My father was Clarence Stearns, Sr., and my mother was Hedwig Stearns. She's the German side. My father was the English side. But it was rather interesting in that my father -- well, first, my uncle played in the (inaudible) [symphony?]. And in the summer they went to Yellowstone and played. And my mother, her younger sister [00:12:00] was quite a singer. And she would go out and sing with them. She'd practice singing all morning and take real long hikes in the afternoon and then sing to the tourists at night. This was about -- oh, 1903 to 1909, something like that. She would go back to Chicago, where they were from, and she taught singing there. And she was paid to sing in the Jewish church early in the morning. And then she would sing in our church, a congregational church, later.

Q: What was your mother's maiden name?

STEARNS: Hedwig Nurnberger.

Q: Nurnberger? How would you spell that?

STEARNS: N-U-R-N-B-E-R-G-E-R. And then [have a see?]. Yeah, I think that's right. [00:13:00] N-U-R-N-B-E-R-G-E-R.

Q: Was she -- did she speak German?

STEARNS: I really don't know. I was just 13 when she died. She had cancer in her [back?] somehow. And that was before the doctors in Rochester knew much about it.

Q: So were you raised on a farm or in town?

STEARNS: Well, right on the very edge of town -- first, in Yellowstone, there were -- my mother was a beautiful lady. And we have a diary of hers. And there were two people -- one was the head architect who designed all the buildings in Yellowstone -- in Old Faithful --

Q: Robert Reamer?

STEARNS: Yes. And he was after my mother to marry him. And there was another fellow, too, that gave her a very expensive Christmas present. And he wanted her. And then there was my dad, and my dad won out. [00:14:00] But we've got a book of Robert Reamer's, and it tells something about him going after my mother. And then my mother discovered that he was an alcoholic. And that cut that off. So then --

Q: You mean, her -- the one that she chose -- not your dad.

STEARNS: My dad, yeah. Well, my dad, at that time, was working for F.J. Haynes, who had the stage line down to Old

Faithful. And he had three photo shops, one at Mammoth, one at Canyon, and then Jack Haynes, who I later worked for, ran the one at Old Faithful.

Q: OK, now your dad or your uncle worked for him?

STEARNS: My dad worked for him.

Q: What did he do?

STEARNS: Well, ran the photo shop at Mammoth, my dad did. And knew a little about photography. And then George Eastman came through and hired my dad -- of Eastman Kodak [00:15:00] -- hired my dad to go on the road demonstrating the old wet plates. And he married my mother and they moved back to Zumbrota first, where my dad had been born and raised there on a farm, which is now a supermarket in the center of town. And, anyway, and in there, my mother's diary, it mentioned that he was away so much because he was still working for Eastman Kodak traveling with these plates.

Q: What did he -- did he have any opinions about F.J. Haynes? Frederick J. Haynes? Or did he talk about him much? Or did you know Haynes?

STEARNS: I didn't ever know F.J., but I knew Jack Haynes, his son who ran the shop down at Old Faithful. So then, after the war -- [00:16:00] I had worked at Yellowstone just summers, but when I got out of high school in 1938 I

applied for the air force. But you had to wait about three years. And one of those summers, I got my call that I'd been offered a job in Chicago working for a -- in a factory turning out metal turning lathes for France and Belgium and Holland. And -- so I told them I didn't want to go in then. And they said, OK, if you change your mind all you have to do is retake the physical. And in the meantime I also got two years of college you had to have. So, anyway... And I went back to this factory and started working, and got caught in a very early draft. And [00:17:00] I applied for the [sea tubes?] and they put me in the medics. And, well, I was in the medics a short while. And Pearl Harbor happened, and they needed pilots in a hurry. So I got transferred over to the Air Force right away and was sent out to Santa Ana, California, which was sort of a gather place. And they put you through a lot of tests and they flunked out about 60% of those that applied. And then the rest, I always figured, the smart ones they made navigators out of and the -- some that were somewhat agile they made pilots out of. And the rest were bombardiers. And then when I got into primary at Hemet, California -- this was still pretty early, and it had been a training field. We lived in [00:18:00] little log cabins and the ground instructors were military but all of the air

instructors were just private teachers that [Ryan?] had [taught?] there before. So I learned to fly in a little open cockpit Ryan.

Q: In a Ryan?

STEARNS: Yeah. In a low-wing Ryan.

Q: Was it a biplane or a single?

STEARNS: Single, low wing. And I was so happy because it had a wide wheelbase, where the Fairchild, what was that, the other one, it was a much more popular biplane, it had narrow wheels so they were [round looping?] a lot. And we never had that problem.

Q: Do you remember your solo flight?

STEARNS: Yes, [Derry?], definitely. Because this pilot was -- well, he was sort of a daring guy to begin with. He was a motorcycle [00:19:00] rider that had an [accident or something?]. He'd come up on these little heels, and he'd come "Put, put, put" (makes noises). And then down over the other side. And we'd go out over Lake Elsinore, where we'd see a fisherman. And he would [on about?] take his head off, and turn around, the guy would be standing up, shaking his fists at you. And -- anyway. I was sort of a slower learner. I guess I had about eight hours. At most, everybody -- I think there were three of us under this instructor, three or four. And they had all soloed and I

hadn't. And one day he took me up and we went over to [an adjoining?] dirt field, over there. He had me make, I guess, one or two landings. And he said, "Well, if you're going to kill yourself, I'm not going to be with you. I'm getting out of here." [He said,?] "Take off." And I [00:20:00] took off, and I was scared to death. Came in, made a landing, and he waved for me to go around, and I went around and made another one. And I came in and he said, "Congratulations." And...

Q: Were you worried?

STEARNS: Oh, I was -- Well, I didn't know if I could do it or not! But I didn't have any problem. I just -- it's a little like -- I have a [I built an?] airplane -- a really nice plane, it's in the new light sport category. And I had it up north where I have an isolated cabin 75 miles from the end of the road. And I have Kevlar floats on it. And it has a little Austrian engine that burns five gallons of auto gas an hour while cruising at 90. And there's no carburetor heat, no mixture control. To start it you just pull the (inaudible) and turn a key. [00:21:00] And it's side-by-side seating, so you can fly it from either seat -- two throttles, one on each side. And the foot pedals both work. And the stick in the middle. And it lands at about

40 on floats. And with one person you get off the water in 12 seconds. And...

Q: You say you have this plane? Or you used to have it?

STEARNS: Well, yes and no. I have it, or used to have it.

Anyway, and then up there, there's no other planes to look for, there's no traffic pattern, no radio calls. And you always land into the wind, so there's no crosswinds. And it was the most enjoyable summer I ever flew. Ever had.

Q: When was this?

STEARNS: This was about four years ago. And I came back, and I was flying with the fellow that helped me build this [00:22:00] plane -- well, I was very lucky to begin with. I was building another plane down here that was all composite. And I had about 5000 hours in on it. And the composite work was just about done, but I thought, "If I'm ever going to fly, I've got to get one that's flying now." So I ordered this plane called a BushCaddy out of Quebec. They're supposed to be ready to fly. And they said, I'll get it from a new dealer down in Morgan, Utah. And you'll save the freight. So I made this deal, gave them \$25,000. And he -- I went down with Gary Lusk, who was a research pilot over there.

Q: Gary Less?

STEARNS: Gary Lusk.

Q: Oh, Lusk. L-U-S-K?

STEARNS: Mm-hmm.

Q: OK.

STEARNS: And he flew me down. And the first thing he noticed, the welding was awful in the engine. And this guy said, "Oh, that's just a prototype. I'm having a real good welder in Salt Lake make one for me." [00:23:00] And also, I wanted a nose wheel instead of a tail wheel, because it would be stabler in a cross wind, and -- knowing my reflexes were slow. And he kept telling me these stories that -- they seemed like they could be true, but were they? He said he'd never had it to a show, and I found out he'd been to Las Vegas with it, and a show up in Washington State. I just caught that because he had a rip in the tail feathers, and I said, "How'd that happen?" "Oh, I got it taken out of a trailer." (laughs) And then my daughter and I went down to see it. I told him we were coming. And then, the next day, he said, "Oh, I've got to go to Salt Lake, but I'll be there." And I called him from Evanston, and he said, "I'm still in Salt Lake, but I'll be up there." And I think he wanted us to leave. But we got there and he wasn't there. [00:24:00] And we waited. And he finally came. And he had told me that he had an expert painter paint this plane, who had painted a lot of planes.

And -- but he came and he said, "Oh, I've got a \$20,000 contract with some people, I've got to go out and talk to them for a couple hours." And I said, "Can't we get a key to the hanger and go look at it?" "No, it's a friend's hanger. I couldn't let you do that." So he left. And he came back very shortly. He said, "Oh, they left already." I said, "Well, let's go look at the plane." Well, it was right next-door in a two-car garage. And the paint was all peeling off of it. And it was obvious that he had painted it and he hadn't put a prime coat on it or anything. So in the end I said, "Either you deliver the plane, as much as you got done, the parts, to Driggs, Idaho, or there's going to be a lawsuit. [00:25:00] Or you're giving me my money back." And lo and behold, he delivered the parts. And Jim Jackson, over there, who had built -- taught kids in north Chicago aircraft technology, and they had built three planes -- and one of them he takes to Oshkosh with the kids' names on the side, and he put it right out by the front gate where people can see it. And, anyway, he helped me build it, then. Having been a teacher, he worked right beside me, showing me what to do. And this is a wonderful little plane. It's all metal -- I wanted metal so the [bearers?] wouldn't tear up the tail feathers.

Q: So the bearers wouldn't tear up the tail?

STEARNS: Yeah, like, pulled up a beach, I had seen two Piper Cubs that had been pulled up, and their bearers had ripped the tail feathers, the cloth. So this was metal. And Jim actually had taught [00:26:00] aircraft technology, and he had awards from the EAA and the FAA and the school, and with other teachers, had an audience with President Clinton. So, anyway, he taught me as we went along and finished this. Otherwise I'd still be building on it.

Q: What's the name of the plane?

STEARNS: It's called a Bush Caddy.

Q: C-A-D-D-Y.

STEARNS: Yes.

Q: Bush Caddy. And, OK, let's take a step back, now. That's more recent than what I wanted you to talk about, if you would, Stearnie. And that is your military career. Getting drafted and becoming a pilot, and then what?

STEARNS: Well, I'll just finish this one more line. When I couldn't fly anymore, I turned this over to my son, who's down at Pinedale. He feeds elk there in the winter. And he has a cattle camp way up at 9000 [00:27:00] feet where there's a landing strip where he looks after 500 cattle in the summer. But he's taken over the plane and is having a wonderful time flying it. So, anyway, in the military, then I finally got through with Primary at Hemet, and I

went up to Bakersfield where we (inaudible) through the old (inaudible). Noisemaker. And I remember flying there. And I don't know how I flew, but I flew solo. And one night, I'm [cross country?] and I remember looking down and thinking, "Oh, there's an airfield." And then I realized it was the main street of a small town. Anyway, I got back somehow. I don't know how. But what I do remember, they had a French chef cooking for us, and boy, that was the best food I ever had in the [00:28:00] military. Wonderful food. But then I went to [La Hava?], Colorado, where we flew the twin-engine planes for the first time. And we lived in cold little huts with a coal stove and a big lister bag hanging outside which was our water supply. I flew an old Curtiss plane, a metal one of some kind that had a nose like a fish, a twin engine. It was just cold as the devil, I remember. And then another -- what did they call that thing. It was a Fairchild, cloth-covered, twin engine. And it was a pretty good plane.

Q: Were these open cockpit planes?

STEARNS: No. The primary one, the Ryan at Hemet, was the only open cockpit. And that plane [00:29:00] had -- I've forgotten what they call it, a tube that you talk through. And I remember that (inaudible) pilot instructor blowing peanuts through there. (laughter) Anyway. Also, we

learned to do a few instruments. And one night, one of these planes was up with [a fellow flying?] instruments under the hood. Another fellow watching. And I don't know what happened, but they crashed into a lake and both were killed. That was at [La Hana?], Colorado. And then I finally graduated from there, class of '43 B. February of '43. And then I was first introduced to the B-17 up at Boise, Idaho in Gowen Field. [00:30:00] And we had a horrible schedule. We'd have four hours of ground school and then just four hours to rest and then four hours of flying. And so you could never get more than four hours of sleep at a time. And, so, there. And then we went to Walla Walla, Washington, where we first flew at real high altitudes. Of course, I remember that, because the cockpit smelled awful, when all those gases started coming out of your system. And then we were assigned to a special Squadron X, and sent to Blythe, California. It was all a secret.

Q: Now, wait a minute. I don't understand. You were flying at altitude where gases were coming out of your system or the plane's system?

STEARNS: No, out of our systems. All the farts coming out, and everything. (laughter)

Q: What caused that?

STEARNS: The lack of pressure at 30,000 feet. [00:31:00] It let everything come. (laughter)

Q: Oh boy, that's funny. Well, OK, were you --

STEARNS: We were sent down to Blythe, California, under this secret special Squadron X. And it was about the time of the submarine scare off the west coast. I figured it always had something to do with that. But it never did materialize into anything. It was so hot down there, and one reason they chose Blythe is because they had almost 364 days of perfect weather. And we'd be out on the desert with just shorts and tennis shoes on, taking salt tablets just to try to stop from drying out. And we'd get in our planes, and it was so hot you didn't dare touch anything. And then we'd get up to about 10,000 feet and start putting clothes on again. [00:32:00] But then I was sent back, as copilot, with this crew, to Dyersburg, Tennessee. And we were slated to go overseas. We flew around there, we did a little bomb practice with bags of flour, and so forth. But I was just the copilot. And then the pilot of another crew chickened out. Said he wasn't going to go. And this major took me up, had me make three landings. I'd hardly ever made a landing. And --

Q: In a B-17?

STEARNS: Mm-hmm. And he said, "You're taking over this crew to go overseas." Well, I felt moss behind my ears. And here was this crew, who was all sergeants or tech sergeants -- they'd been instructors -- and I was green as can be. And the copilot didn't like it because he thought he should be the first pilot, then. [00:33:00] But I was so lucky, because that crew I had been on was sent to Africa, and we soon got word they were all killed. That was the first of four times that I just lucked out. Faced death but didn't quite make it. And then I was -- I'd never made a night landing, and I came in there one night, and the crew was in the radio room playing cards. And I bounced that thing so hard it jarred your teeth out. And I poured [the coal?] to it and went around. And the next time I came in and touched down, it was so smooth you couldn't tell when we were on the runway. And I got down to the end and turned off, and one of the gears collapsed. And the crew said I checked to make sure they were all OK and then I fainted. But they came out and said, "We've been having a lot of trouble [00:34:00] with these gears." And two or three weeks later, I was sent to Lincoln, Nebraska, and we were soon on our way, flying overseas.

Q: The guy that fainted -- that wasn't you? That was the other guy --

STEARNS: That was me.

Q: -- It was you that fainted?

STEARNS: Yeah. (laughter)

Q: OK, keep going.

STEARNS: Anyway. So then, the next time my life was saved we went to Newfoundland. And I got a crazy Right Waist Gunner named Ted [Corrigan?], who was from Wyoming. But he had been busted for being drunk two or three times, and whatnot. Was sort of worthless. But he was sleeping in the plane, and I was in this -- what they call a provisional group, a fill-in group of planes, and waiting for favorable winds to go direct from [00:35:00] Newfoundland to Ireland. And he smelled gas and discovered the hard rubber T fittings in the fuel tanks were leaking. And he smelled it. And I never did get those. But the group took off one night with favorable winds, and two of the planes, last they heard from, were on fire and went down in the Atlantic. They'd had the same trouble we'd had, only Ted had smelled the gas. And I never did get the T fittings. Spent about three days in Newfoundland, enjoyed paddling around the lakes in [my?] canoes. And then I flew up to Labrador and then over to Greenland. And they briefed us very carefully about getting into Greenland, because there were three fjords, and if you --

we were supposed to go in the center one, but if you got into the wrong one, you couldn't turn around in there.

[00:36:00] So I went in there, and we landed uphill on steel matting. It was the first time I've ever landed on steel matting. And then [we gunned?] it and got off the landing strip. And spent the night there. And it's the first and only time I ever heard Northern Lights. They sounded like somebody swooshing a megaphone around in the air. And later, I talked to somebody who's spent a lot of time in Labrador, stationed there. And he said they heard them frequently there. And I've got a book of Northern Lights back at our cabin in Canada, and it tells about how you can hear them.

Q: I've never heard of that.

STEARNS: Mm-hmm. But anyway, I took off the next morning, downhill and out over the dock. And you had to climb to 8000 feet before you could turn and go out [00:37:00] over the ice cap. And I was running into rough air up over these clouds between Greenland and Iceland. I thought, "Well, I'm going to let down and see if I can get under this." And I let down, [kept?] letting down, until I saw those great big waves on the north Atlantic and I climbed right back up again. And then I got into Iceland. It was real cold. We slept in Quonset huts. And I remember Ted

Corrigan, he'd been reading these western stories, and I suppose he had been drinking. And he got up and rolled up his sleeping bag and went out and through a rock at the door, and said, "I'm heading west." In the morning, we got up, and they had heaters on our engines. It's the first and only time we ever saw them use propane heaters under the engines. But then we took off [00:38:00] and got down to Scotland. And there they relieved us of the plane we'd flown over. And --

Q: Now, this wasn't -- Corrigan wasn't the famous "Wrong Way Corrigan," was he?

STEARNS: No, but it was about the same time. And he always said, "I am Right Way Corrigan." And then, after a little bit of ground school, I was sent to the 384<sup>th</sup> group at Grafton Underwood, which was near [Kettering?] city up in the midlands. About 60 miles north of London. And then, the very first mission, nothing happened. I had the squadron commander with me, showed me what was to do and happening and so forth. And the second mission wasn't bad. The third mission, [00:39:00] we were assigned to Norway. (inaudible) and what led to (inaudible). They put in metal for hardening. But the group took off and my plane was not refueled yet. So I had to wait for them to get the plane fueled. And then I took off and burned up extra gas

catching up with the formation going to Norway. And then we got up over Norway, and we come down this long fjord. And the bombardier navigator couldn't spot this mine, and there'd be about one burst of flack. And we'd swing around, go back up again, and come down. And we did that about three times, burning up more gas all the time. And we finally dropped our bombs. I don't know if we ever hit anything. But then I was low on gas. And I discussed -- I mentioned something about, "Maybe we should go to Sweden," [00:40:00] where they took in -- a neutral country. And they kept -- what they did was kept the enlisted personnel there and secretly flew the pilots back to England. And the crew all said, "Let's go to Sweden. Let's go to Sweden." And I said, "Oh, I think we'll make it back." So we threw guns and all the weight overboard. And the radio operator was sending out mayday signals so they could follow us. And we got back into Scotland all right. And -  
-

Q: Barely.

STEARNS: Mm-hmm. That -- anyway. So, that was the 3<sup>rd</sup> mission. But then I (inaudible). Well first, when I got to England, I said, "How many missions do we have to fly?" They said, "Don't worry, you'll never be [get?] through." There was 25 missions and they were taking 10% [00:41:00] losses.

And you figured 10 missions and your number was up. But I was pretty lucky, I guess. And -- well, one mission was -- I think it was Bremen. We were supposed to hit some submarine pens. And as we came up on the target, I looked out and here was this great, huge umbrella of black flack exploding, and right at our altitude. And we were led by a General Travis. I thought, "Geez, it takes guts to turn into that." And we turned into that, and we came out with our nose shot off and the pitot tubes shot off. And my bombardier was wounded and the radio operator was wounded. And here it was, 50 below, and we're flying at 150 miles an hour. I don't know what chill factor that would [00:42:00] be. And [Colplow?] and I were taking turns flying, swinging our arms. And I ended up freezing my fingertips. But the same Ted Corrigan went up front after we got the bombardier and navigator out of there, and popped a parachute over the front bulkhead and stopped that wind from coming through. You see, I didn't dare let down where it was warmer. The fighters would pick us off right away. And, so, then, coming back, we came over and went out over the North Sea. And I spotted this airfield ahead and flew down alongside. And we fired red flairs, indicated landing and our wounded on board. And I swung around and was dragging it in, because the pitot tube was shot off.

Q: A torpedo tube?

STEARNS: It tells how fast you're going.

Q: Oh. What do you call it, the pitot tube?

STEARNS: [00:43:00] P-I-T-O-T. So I was dragging it in, just flying by the seat of my pants. And we got down to the end of the runway and they met us with an ambulance. And they said it was just lucky that we landed there, because there was a big general hospital right close by. And the radio operator had been hit in the kidneys and he would've died if we hadn't landed there. The bombardier was just hit in the groin and limped ever after, but he was OK. And -- but they all -- both of them made it to several crew reunions we had later, and got through OK. And then Doolittle moved in, took over the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force from [Eaker?] and was much more aggressive. And he said -- [00:44:00] he raised it from 25 to 30 missions. Well -- but it was pro-rated, meaning I just had to fly extra ones. And also, by that time, I was just flying lead plane when our group led the -- squadron led the whole group. And -- which was about once out of every four missions, I would fly. And in the lead plane, I always carried an air commander with me in place of the copilot. And -- well, like, I flew to Berlin with Colonel Smith, who was our group commander. And we went by to the southeast and then turned, came back in.

And we were bombing a tank factory. And it was the first and only time I saw smoke camouflage [00:45:00] -- put smoke over the whole area so you couldn't see it. But we dropped our bombs. I didn't think it was a bad mission at all compared to some others, but this Colonel Smith later wrote what an awful mission it was. He was a big tall West Pointer and -- [then?] when they got back, the lead crew, they always took a picture of you after you landed. So I've got half a dozen pictures of different targets I led. And -- but then, as I mentioned. Doolittle, when he took over, raised it to 30, but it was pro-rated, meaning I just had to fly one extra one, or 26. So it was kind of fucked up from the beginning, in that they -- first, this air commander was a young fellow, he was just a first lieutenant, [00:46:00] as I was. And I started arguing with him because he didn't have his parachute harness on. In the cockpit we just wore the harness, and then we'd shove the suit like a football underneath the seat. And then I thought, well, he outranks me as air commander, so I let it go. And then when we got hit, they had a -- well, first the Germans pulled a trick on us that really worked. They took three fighter planes and they went over to another group, way off in the distance, for them to attack at. And our escort all followed them over there. And

then, all the sudden, here came a whole bunch of fighter planes. And we called the escort, and they said, "We'll be back soon." But here came about 20 fighters, head on. And -- hitting mostly the low squadron. [00:47:00] And they'd come in, and I'd see these -- shooting at us. They're going -- we're going 150, and they're going, probably doing 250, so you imagine the speed. And shooting. And then they'd roll and go back up and come back and make a second attack. Well, the outcome of it was that they got a lucky hit on our number three engine. They set it on fire. And then I saw we couldn't get it out. I told the crew to bail out. And some of them went out the nose hatch and some of them out the rear door. And -- but this air commander then went down in the nose looking for his harness. And he never -- I was waiting for him -- and the controls had burned away, and we were in sort of a big flat spin. And I looked back and saw all these flames coming up around the bombs. And I thought, [00:48:00] "I've got to get out of here." So I dove out headfirst, out of the bottom hatch. And I was going end over end. And then I got going butt first. And I looked down, my eyes would water, and I'd look up and they'd clear. And -- but I didn't want to open my shoot right away, because they could just watch you floating down and wait for you. Anyway. And then -- it

seemed like I fell a long time, but you pick up a maximum velocity of 130 miles an hour, so I couldn't possibly have fell more than a couple of minutes. And finally I thought, "Oh, geez, those woods look pretty dark, and I'd better pull this thing." And I pulled the ripcord and it flashed out in front of me. And I swung twice and hit the trees. And I [shimmied?] up a tree and got to the ground. And it was two [00:49:00] in the afternoon in April. And I thought, "Gee, what a nice country this is. What an impersonal war. The trees are all trimmed up, and it was so mellow and nice." Then I thought, "Gee, are they coming after me with horses and sleigh bells, or what? And then I realized, the plane had blown up right after I left, and there was pieces of metal coming down. And then I ran looking for a place to hide. In the open forest there wasn't any place. And finally I came to the edge of the woods. There was a small grove of young trees. And I squirmed in under there and pulled my coveralls up over my head. And they went right by me, with dogs and everything. And I could hear when they found my parachute, exclaiming. But I waited till dark and started walking. And I was -- I had on flight boots, oversized, which had belonged to my radio operator. [00:50:00] He had big feet, too. And they said [householder?] on the side. And I couldn't walk in

those. And I had GI shoes inside. So I buried those under a manure pile -- and wondered what the German farmer thought when he dug those up. But then I couldn't walk in the woods. I'd run into stuff. So I took to the roads. And I went right by people on bicycles. And I could tell soldiers when they went by. And women -- and then it was starting to get light in the morning, and I was going through a little town. And I thought, "Well, I'll take to the woods and hide out for the day." But I could hear this girl coming down the walk. I could tell by the sound of her heels. And I thought she might recognize me, so I crossed the street and went over there. And a couple blocks further on, these local police came up behind me on bicycles. And I didn't know German, they didn't know English. But I heard them mention [00:51:00] Norwegian, or French. But they thought I was a forced laborer on the loose, because they would take our flight coveralls and give them to the forced laborers to work in. But then they took me up to the police chief. It was about four in the morning. And then they found my dog tags and they knew what I was. And the police chief's daughter, I remember, spoke a little English. But she saw those concentrated [D?] chocolate bars and her eyes just bulged out. Chocolate. She hadn't seen any, all during the war. But

they took me down to the police station. [An old?]  
(inaudible) and the very first words were, "Heil Hitler."  
And then they put me on the train. I was handcuffed, of course. But that morning, I got up about four, and I just -- didn't take my pajamas off. I pulled my pants up over my pajamas, and then the coveralls. [00:52:00] So I got into Heidelberg, and they marched me right down the center of the street, everybody watching. My damn pajamas were slipping down inside my pants, and I was reaching in there and trying to pull them up. But they put me in jail there. And that's where I first saw my crew members. Some of them had been burned a little, but none of them were hurt. They were all OK. But the air commander never did get out. And the Germans said he dove out -- that is, he got out, but without a parachute. The Germans said he dove out so he wouldn't become a prisoner of war. And, so, anyway, then they sent me to Frankfurt, where they first put me in solitary confinement and tried to scare me a little. And they asked me about Grapefruit. Well, Grapefruit was a [glide bomb?] we had practiced with. [00:53:00] We had to go over one of the west coast seas. And we would be in formation and we'd dive, picking up speed real fast. And then the lead plane would fire a flare and we'd let these bombs loose. They looked like little P-38s, two under each

plane. And they had -- they would drop, and then seem to pick up speed and glide. So the idea was that you didn't have to get over the target. But they were very inaccurate. And the Germans knew a lot more about them than I did. I just told them I couldn't tell them anything. So then they sent me to Barth, up on the Baltic Sea, to a prison camp there. I remember we rode on a train most of the time, and then we were in a bus once. And when I first got to England, I thought, [00:54:00] "Geez, the people in the United States hardly know there's a war on compared to the way they live here." When I got to Germany, got on this bus -- it was an old wood-fired bus running by steam somehow. And they were out in the field plowing with ox, and I thought, "Gee, the people in England hardly know there's a war on compared to the Germans." But I got up there, Barth on the Baltic. And there were 5000 British and American officers as prisoners. And I was placed in number four compound. They were divided in different compounds. And I was lucky, because they put me in the head room, just four of us. Most of the rooms had 12 fellows to a room, and they just slept on one long bunk below and another second one. And -- but -- [00:55:00] (phone rings). Oh, nuts.

Q: Wait a minute, let me pull this off you here. (phone rings)

STEARNS: Nobody there. It does that every once in a while.

Dottie has the -- oh, maybe she got it in there. The walk around phone. This is a hard of hearing phone. I have to take my hearing aid out and then I can hear [off?] it. But anyway, so I got there and -- I was very fortunate in that most of the time it was run by the German Air Force. One fellow had -- a [Hauptmann?], a captain, had been a pilot for Pan American Airways. And another corporal was a sculptor on the Rockefeller Memorial in New York and had a daughter born in Orange, New Jersey. And -- [00:56:00] of course, some of them, we hated their guts.

Q: Some of the Germans, or some of your fellow Americans?

STEARNS: Well, these were Germans. Officers guarding us. And -- of course, we didn't suffer too much other than for lack of food. Of course, the Germans weren't getting much food either. But when Red Cross parcels came through, once a month, our morale would go way up. And if they didn't come, our morale would go way down. And in there were some cigarettes -- I think, three packages of cigarettes, amongst other things. And there was one fellow that smoked. And I told him I'd give him all my cigarettes for the duration -- we didn't know what the duration was -- for

\$85. And after we were [00:57:00] liberated and got back to the States for a couple of months, [Ser?] gave me a check for \$85. And -- but -- also, one of the funny things. Well, first, there's -- (inaudible), this corporal, would come about once a month on a search. We'd be shuttered in. But he'd come into our room and visit with us and show us pictures of his sculpturing and so forth. And then, "Well, my time's up, I'd better get out of here." And -- supposed to be searching, all this time. And we did have -- one of the compounds had a secret radio. It was in the walls. And we used to trade cigarettes with the guards, and whatnot, though they weren't supposed to. And they'd say, "No more trading until we let you know!" And we'd know they were short a piece for the radio or something [00:58:00] like that. And then they'd publish --

Q: So the Germans knew you had the radio.

STEARNS: No, I -- well, they may have known it, but they'd never find it. Then they published a little newsletter. And we got the German news in the barracks. And it was less propaganda than the British BBC that we got secretly over this radio. The Germans -- if it was things going bad for them, they just left it out of the news. And we kept maps. And maybe a couple weeks or a week later, we'd see that the map line had moved back, and we'd know the Germans

had been retreating. And -- but at Christmastime, we decided -- there was a rain barrel out in the hall. And we decided we'd make some whiskey. So in this rain barrel, [00:59:00] we put potato peelings and raisins and everything else [added?], and it turned out pretty good. But they pulled a search on us. And one guy, quick, dumped his pants in there and pretended he was washing. And we got it -- it finally tasted pretty good. Of course, you went blind for a couple of days afterwards. But then the Russians started coming towards us. And the first were the -- they looked like Mongolians on horseback. And they said, "We're just heading west till we hit the water." They didn't know the geography or anything else. And then the Russian troops started coming through, and they appreciated the trucks and things we had given them so much, they drove in cattle and pigs and we had to beg them to stop because we [01:00:00] couldn't handle it all. And then they drove in a barge load of vodka. And we'd drink with them. They're great drinkers. And we'd go out and stick our finger down our throat, and go back in and drink with them some more. But we were there for maybe two weeks. But about three days before they came through -- by that time we were guarded by the old German Wehrmacht that could hardly carry a gun. And about three days before the

Russians came, they all disappeared and headed west because they didn't want to be captured by the Russians. They wanted to be captured by the western Allies.

Q: Why is that?

STEARNS: Well, they knew the Russians were very bitter and they would kill all of them the minute they saw them, if they were there. And, in fact, the Russians did murder a lot of them, local residents of the little town of Barth.

[01:01:00] I remembered walking out on the -- sort of a dike along the sea, down going towards town, and there was a woman and a couple children lying dead, that the Russians had killed. And they were very bitter towards the Germans. Of course, the Russians lost more than them, lost more than anybody else during the war.

Q: So, do you remember the day that the Wehrmacht took off and the Russians came in? Do you remember that day?

STEARNS: No, the Wehrmacht took off, but it was about three days before the Russians came. They knew they were coming.

Q: What did the Germans say to you as they were leaving? Or did they just take off?

STEARNS: No, they just took off from the prisoner of war camp. And the small town of Barth was right, just really close to it, right there. And -- then, when the Russians finally came through, they were so good to [01:02:00] us. But we

sat there for a couple of weeks. And we were beginning to think we were going to have to go out through Russia. And, finally, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force flew in with B-17s -- there was a little airfield next to us -- and picked us up and flew us out to [Lahalle?], France. We sat there for a long time, waiting for a boat, getting very restless. And Eisenhower came down and talked to us, and told us how they were doing the best they could to get us. And we finally -- I went to Paris, I remember, and had a good time for a few days. Then they finally got us on this boat. And it was so full, you would sleep for eight hours in a bunk and then somebody else would move in and sleep eight hours, and then somebody else would sleep eight hours. And then -- we went there. [01:03:00] And then I had a leave, for a month or two, I forgot how long. And I -- I stayed in the service for a year. And you had a choice: you could get out right away, or you could [sign up?] as undecided, or you could make a career out of it. But I stayed in the service, flying out of Boca Raton, Florida. And there was -- the Boca Raton luxury club was our headquarters. And we'd go to Fort Lauderdale. We can leave and have a big party at the bar and whatnot. And I -- we had to get our flight time in. I remember taking out a B-17 and flying to Scott Field up across from St. Louis, and having a weekend. And took a B-

25. Oh, that was the first place I ever [01:04:00] flew a (inaudible). And I flew a B-25, and oh, gee, what an easy plane to land, this is. But I remember taking a B-25 and going into Andrews Air Force Base, which was run by the military then. You'd see all these different planes, some with three stars, for some general. And I remember I saw one little AT-6, it was a popular training plane, with just one star on it. Apparently this general liked it, so... I flew a C-47, which was the easiest plane I ever flew. And I was in charge of the officer's club for a while. And I took a C-47 and flew to Cuba and picked up a load of whiskey for the officer's club. And I came back and cleared customs at West Palm Beach. And we weren't supposed to bring any [01:05:00] sugar or any whiskey into the company -- country -- and they'd come on board and see these bucket seats folded up and all these cases of whiskey, and they'd say, "You got any sugar?" "No." "OK, go ahead." (laughs) But that's -- yeah, flying that C-47, that was the easiest plane I ever flew.

Q: Now, who was concerned about the sugar?

STEARNS: What?

Q: Who was concerned about the sugar? Why were they --

STEARNS: Well, during the war, there was a shortage of sugar.

And it was rationed out. And that restriction was still on.

Q: So it was OK to be flying --

STEARNS: The US government was concerned about it, as well as whiskey. But it was interesting, because when I lived in Rochester, Minnesota, there was a doctor that lived next door who was at the Mayo Clinic there. And he [01:06:00] moved back to Scotland. And he was head of the medical school at Edinburgh. And twice, I had (inaudible), which we got every ten missions. And I'd stop and see him. And he gave me a brown medicine bottle full of basic scotch before it was blended. And the bombardier and I would go on north, and climb around the [moors?] up there, stay in a little old inn, and had a real good time at (inaudible) for -- I think we had a week off. And I remember the bar was just (inaudible), and you could try to get what little you could there. And then we slept. And they put a heavy pottery jug full of warm water in the bed to warm it. Called it a Dutch Maid. And it felt wonderful, but in the morning you woke up, it would be ice cold. [01:07:00]

Q: Going back to you prisoner of war camp days, Stearnie -- did you guys get enough to eat?

STEARNS: No, that was the main thing, we didn't get enough to eat. Of course, the Germans weren't getting enough either. And that's why we worshipped the Red Cross parcels when they came through once a month. Because they had -- oh, they had -- let's see. They had B Bars and cigarettes. But then they also had spam, and foods like that.

Q: Why didn't the Germans just appropriate those and not give them --

STEARNS: Well, some of them did, once in a while, and we didn't get them. And then our morale would go -- they came through Sweden. But our morale would drop if we didn't get them. And then, when Roosevelt died, I don't know why, but the Germans made us all wear a black ribbon on our [01:08:00] sleeve in respect for Roosevelt.

Q: They respected Roosevelt?

STEARNS: Mm-hmm.

Q: This was when you were at the prisoner of war camp?

STEARNS: That's amazing.

Q: Mm-hmm. It was unusual.

STEARNS: Very unusual. Oh, also, knowing that the Americans were hero worshippers, they brought Max Schmeling, the champion boxer, around, and passed out these photographs. And all of us -- our urinals, a long trough of (inaudible),

and that was lined with pictures of Max Schmeling.

(laughter)

Q: What is that squeaking, there?

STEARNS: Oh, sorry, that's my hearing aid.

Q: Oh, OK.

STEARNS: But these -- I was out last week and they adjusted these, but they set them too loud. So they're way too loud. So I got this one in, but I did -- and also, I have to take this out the minute I [01:09:00] answer that hard of hearing phone.

Q: Yeah. I liked the story about Max Schmeling. Did people die? Did some of your fellow servicemen die in that camp?

STEARNS: No. I wouldn't say -- there were -- I guess one or two of them that committed suicide thinking they'd never get out. I guess the Germans said, after the invasion, they said, "Oh, they're all being driven back to the sea. You'll be laying bricks the rest of your lives." And then when they had that battle of -- what was that, (inaudible). Where again, the Germans said, "Oh, they're all being driven back into the sea." And, "You'll never get out."

Q: How did these folks kill themselves?

STEARNS: I really don't know, unless they hung themselves. But they were, I [01:10:00] suppose, of weak character and

couldn't stand the thought they might be prisoners the rest of their life.

Q: You had to have a strong character to survive?

STEARNS: Yeah. And I -- of course, I've always been skinny, but I did lose about 25 pounds. And when I came back, I went to the [Mayo Clinic?] for a checkup, because I couldn't -- my stomach was upset and I couldn't eat much, and -- I remember I was a major. And they put this tube down my throat, and here I was, in uniform, crying like a baby. They finally said it was just a nervous stomach from not having enough to eat for so long.

Q: What did you drink? Did they have good water?

STEARNS: Yeah, the water -- I really can't remember the water. But it was -- the water was very close to the surface, being it was right on the Baltic Sea. And it was all sand. [01:11:00] And we couldn't really dig tunnels successfully because you'd hit water. But we would try to, and we'd line them with boards from our bed -- bed boards that we slept on. Well, to begin with, also, when they set this air commander with me, they also pulled my bombardier and my navigator and the radio operator. Because they were behind -- they were from another crew, the ones they sent with me, from another crew. And they were behind in their missions. And they were trying to catch them up to another

crew. So, consequently, I didn't have my regular bombardier, who was a wonderful fellow. And he was the one I went hiking with up in the moors and whatnot. And he [01:12:00] later became group bombardier, the head bombardier for the whole group. And then the bottom turret gunner wasn't there. But...

Q: Did you try to dig a tunnel, did you say?

STEARNS: Did we try what?

Q: To dig a tunnel?

STEARNS: Oh, yeah. We would try to dig tunnels, and we would have air pumps, to pump air in, made out of tin cans. And one of them was hid, I remember, under a stove [at the entrance?]. And when we were through digging, we'd move the stove back over the entrance. But the Germans seemed to find most of them. They had seismographs on the fences, and... I remember one of them, they'd call us out twice a day for roll call. And the old German [01:13:00] Hauptmann was calling us out for a roll call one day. And he'd give us a big salute, and step back a couple of steps. And he stepped on one of those tunnels, and it caved in with him. (laughs)

Q: So nobody could make a great escape. Nobody could escape.

STEARNS: Well, early on, I think a couple English men did escape. But they were captured very shortly. Never did get home.

Q: Did they kill them?

STEARNS: No, but later, towards the end of the war, Hitler gave the order that if anybody was caught trying to escape, they would be shot. And there were some officers from another camp that were shot trying to escape.

Q: How do you [01:14:00] survive something like this?

STEARNS: Well, it's just a day-to-day thing. And you're grouped all together, sort of reinforcing each other. It was a little scary in that, maybe a month before the end of the war, they took all the Jewish prisoners and put them in a separate area. And I thought, "Oh, boy, maybe they've seen their end." But nothing ever happened to them. And then they -- I never -- when I got home, I never did call the father of this air commander that was killed.

(inaudible) Because it was his own fault, and I didn't want to tell the father that it was his fault he was killed. But here -- a year or two, now, a girl [01:15:00] called me, [someday?], and she had picked up email, through my daughter that has email, my name. And she was a niece of this air commander that was killed. And she said her father, who was the brother, was right there in a wheel

chair, but she wouldn't dare tell him what had happened. But she was so grateful when I told her what happened. And she sent me a picture of her family. She was a schoolteacher. And she highly appreciated it, knowing what happened after all these years.

Q: You just felt it was time to say something.

STEARNS: Yeah, and I didn't mind telling her, as the niece.

But anyway, it amazed me how grateful she was that I told her what happened.

Q: You talked about all these ways in which you survived [01:16:00] possible aircraft crashes and death. Don't you -- wouldn't you include that prisoner of war camp experience in with those?

STEARNS: Well, you never forget the prisoner of war camp. But I feel how lucky I am, just to have faced death so close and sort of stepped away from it, four different times.

Q: How do you account for that?

STEARNS: I was blessed. I'm not religious, I'm not intelligent. Not wealthy, not smart. And even today, I think of my bomber crew at [ten?], I'm the only one alive. And I think, "Why me? I stand alone." And I have a hard time realizing that 71 years ago, I was a 23-year-old kid flying four engine bombers. It seems like a different lifetime. It's hard to believe. [01:17:00]

Q: What a story.

STEARNS: But I -- here a year ago, a fellow called me one night. And he said, "Can you be ready to fly at nine in the morning?" And what it was, he picked me up, took me over to Driggs, where he had a twin engine plane. And he flew me to [Bozeman?], where I got to fly on a B-17 free for about an hour. But I went up to that plane and put my hand on the tail feathers. And I thought, "Geez, this is an old friend I haven't seen for 70 years." But I -- I didn't get to fly, but I [stood?] behind the pilot and the copilot. And the pilot has more time in a B-17 than anybody else. And I came down, I told my daughter [Janice?], and she says, "Yeah, but he wasn't getting shot at." (laughs)

Q: Did you take a lot of flack? [01:18:00]

STEARNS: Oh yeah, we -- I very -- I've got a record of, somebody made me, just a couple years ago, with the missions I flew. You can see the different number planes I flew. And you would know I didn't fly the one from the mission before because it was being repaired from flack or something else. And, of course, the early planes were all painted a [olive?](inaudible). And they all had the (inaudible) on the front of the wing. The first thing they do is take those [de-icers?] off, because they'd get shot

up and weren't any good. And they took all the paint off, because it just added a lot of weight and slowed you down. And the only paint was on the nose, so it didn't reflect when you were flying formation.

Q: OK. Weren't those B-17s -- I don't know if I was in one or not. There's a Confederate [01:19:00] Air Force --

STEARNS: Oh. Well, I have a doctor friend that lives in Mesa, Arizona. And he sent me this -- he wants me to get together when I get down to Tucson, he has a brother there. But here's a whole thing on the Confederate Air Force B-17. It flies out of -- he says it flies right over his house, taking off, and he takes kids over there, and they let him go through it. Or I go to the Pima Air Museum down in Tucson, and they won't let you go inside anymore, but -- the fellow that was there, used to sit under there. He was the lone survivor in the tail plane of the day I was shot down. He'd sit there and tell war stories. And I visited him just a year and a half ago, down there. He came over to [Big T Truck Store?]. And [01:20:00] Dottie and I had coffee with him for -- oh, we visited for a couple hours. And he had diabetes. He was walking with a walker but still drove his pickup. And he said, "I'm going to get well and throw this walker away and sit under the nose of

that plane and tell war stories again." But he died a couple weeks later, after we were there.

Q: You know, I think I was in a B-17 or a B-24 in Cheyenne when the Confederate Air Force had a show. And this was probably 30 years ago. And the plane, whatever it was, was like a tin can. It made a lot of noise, and inside, you could hardly hear yourself think.

STEARNS: Of course, that was true of all -- both the B-17 and the B-24. I was introduced to a fellow in a hanger over at Driggs. He was a machinist. And I was introduced as a B-17 pilot, and the [01:21:00] very first thing he said: "How's your hearing?" (laughs)

Q: Did you have headphones on?

STEARNS: Yeah, but they weren't any good. I mean, as far as protecting your ears. And we had a throat mic that just fastened around and would sit on your throat. And you talked that way, through the throat mic.

Q: Just the vibrations would come through there?

STEARNS: Yeah. It had an elastic strap on it, and you fastened that on. But the B-17 -- they made a lot more B-24s than they did B-17s. But the B-24 was a lot tighter and -- wasn't crew-friendly at all. Of course, it was made by the Ford plant in Dearborn, Michigan. But it wouldn't take the beating, either, that the B-17 would. It would go higher

and faster, and I think they carried [01:22:00] a bigger bomb load, but they just couldn't stand the beating that the B-17 did.

Q: How many of those -- how many bombs would that B-17 carry?

STEARNS: It carried -- what was it? It depends on the size. I think it was 6000 pounds of bombs.

Q: These were 500-pound bombs?

STEARNS: Well, they could be 500, or they could be clusters of smaller bombs. Smaller bombs were usually used to set fires when they hit, [where?] the larger bombs were explosives.

Q: Did you ever -- in the air, did you ever know that you were being successful when you dropped your bomb?

STEARNS: No, but I flew one mission -- we were supposed to drop on an airfield, and it was all clouded over. And then our secondary target was clouded over. And it was before the invasion. And we couldn't [01:23:00] drop -- we couldn't pick a target of opportunity in any country other than Germany. And I had a Colonel [Buck?] with me as air commander. And we spotted this little town ahead. And I had two navigators and a bombardier [in the nose?]. And this town had a -- little town with a great big building. And it was right close to the border. I can hear this Colonel Buck today, said about three times, he said, "Boy,

that better be in Germany or I'm going AWOL tonight and you'd all better follow me." And I could hear him saying that. Well, we dropped our bombs, and the bottom turret gunner said, "Oh, we got a [shack?] right in the center of that big building." And the reconnaissance photographs the next day showed that that was a big -- in Germany, right on the border -- and it was a bit railroad [01:24:00] roundhouse that we had bombed. But...

Q: Did you -- here, that thing is making a racket. Did --

STEARNS: I don't hear that at all.

Q: (laughs) I can hear it, but that's all right.

STEARNS: I hear this one. But these are [settable?]. I didn't know you could until last week when I was in Pocatello and saw the doctor, and they set them too loud. I thought it was fine, but you can't change -- I mean -- even when I turn it as low as I can, with this, it's still way too loud. So I'm going to take them to -- call a doctor over here and see if she can turn them so they aren't so loud.

Q: When you had gunners in your B-17, and -- do you remember being attacked? And seeing some of these German planes close?

STEARNS: Oh, sure. Yeah. And -- [of course?], we would see them. What they liked to [01:25:00] do was come in out of the sun where you couldn't see them. But... we had, in the

later planes -- the first ones were E model. And they didn't have any hydraulic boosters. And when they went to take evasive action to move the plane around, it took a lot of strength. But then the G model came, that had hydraulic boosters and took all the fun out of it. Because it was easy to move the plane. But also, the E model, on the nose, just had a machine gun out, 50 caliber this way, and one this way. And the bombardier fired one and the navigator fired the other. Where the G model had a -- 250 guns in a turret, right there. And the bombardier fired that. And then right behind us was the top turret, where the top turret gunner [01:26:00]... and when he fired dead ahead, that thing just made a horrible explosive racket in your ears. In the radio room, just behind, there was a single 50-caliber in the ceiling that the radio operator could fire. And then, just behind him, was a -- or just behind -- wait a minute. Yeah, there was a top turret there behind us. Then the radio op. Then there was a bottom turret, which a little guy crawled into. And then they closed the hatch, and then he could steer it all around with this gun. It seemed like an awful position, and he needed help to get out of there. But it turned out that that -- over the war, it was the safest place in the plane. Then, [01:27:00] behind that, there were a waist

gunner on the right and one on the left, firing a 50 caliber gun. You had to be careful there, because after they'd been -- well, they had to be sure they didn't fire it too fast or the barrel would get too hot. But all over the floor were these empty cartridges, rolling around. And then in the stern, in the tail gun, there was -- I think this [one 50?] to begin with, and then they put a turret in there that had two 50s in it that the tail gunner used. And he called me up one day, and he was a young Mormon boy from Provo, Utah. I think he was only about 17. And he said, "Sir, my electric suit's on fire. I'm going to have to go up and get the boys to help me put it out."

[01:28:00] And a while later, he called, "Sir, it's all out and I'm back in position. Everything's OK." And...

Q: Did you score any hits on any fighter planes?

STEARNS: Yeah. Not a lot, but I know Ted Corrigan, the waist gunner, claimed he got a couple of them. And -- well, they always wrote down if you got -- when we first got back [to?] the lead plane, they'd take our picture. And then they'd take us in and give us some whisky, [the real access?]. And then they'd interview us on what happened, and enemy fighters, and enemies shot down. And so forth.

Q: Was the enemy reluctant to attack a bomber because it was so heavily armed?

STEARNS: No, I wouldn't say so. But there's a wonderful book, the best book I ever read, [01:29:00] out now. It's about this German fighter pilot who [flew?] 400 and some missions. And he flew into Africa when Rommel retreated west. And it says in there, he knew then that the war was lost. That's two years before the end of the war, a year before the invasion. But also, the book starts out, opening, after the war, he was in his ragged clothes, but still wearing his old fighter boots, and he went to this brick factory trying to get a job to support his mother. And the employer said, "Get out of here." And the guys in line all said, "Get out of there." And this pilot says, "See this scar on my head? Where a [50?]-caliber bullet just missed me?" He says, "Well, when I get [01:30:00] mad I get upset." And he grabbed this employer, and they called the police and hauled him off. And the reason was, the Germans thought the fighters didn't do a good job and they let the bombers get through to bomb their cities. So they blamed the fighters for it. But later, in a later chapter, it told, these three guys hauled him off, took him down an alley. And one of them was a sergeant from the Air Force. And he knew exactly what happened. And he let him go. But -- also, it tells in this book, about -- he was training two fighter pilots on his wings. And we had heard

about people bailing out, and then the fighter plane coming around and shooting at them. And he told these two guys, "If I ever catch you shooting at a guy in a parachute, I'm going to shoot you down." (inaudible) of [01:31:00] humanity. But the main gist of the whole book -- it's been out seven times, two of them I have loaned out -- one to a doctor in town right now -- and, he was on the ground, and he saw this shot out B-17 go over. And he took off and got behind it, noticed the tail guns were hanging down, and he knew the tail gunner was either dead or wounded. And he got up alongside -- the top turret wasn't working. And he was [mooshing?] into this shot up B-17 -- [it would?] try to go to Sweden, which was just a short distance, and they'd be safe. But they didn't get the message. And they turned to go out over the North Sea. And along the coast from France to Denmark was very heavily armed, and they flying low. And they knew they'd be shot down. So he got right close to them with his [01:32:00] fighter plane so they wouldn't shoot at it, and they got over the North Sea. And they gave him a friendly salute and turned back. And he later moved to Canada and was working in a logging camp, and he kept looking for this -- he checked different bomb groups, and none of them had any report of this plane coming back. And -- it did get back, and the pilot was

living in Miami. And this German pilot searched for him for five years. And the guy in Miami put a little ad in German in a paper, and the guy up in British Columbia, Vancouver, saw it. And they got together. And they were like brothers. So -- getting together after five years of searching. It's just the best -- It's called *A Higher Call*. It's the best book I've ever read. [01:33:00]

Q: Did you get together in reunions with fellow servicemen from your wing?

STEARNS: Yeah, well, I never did go to a group reunion. I don't know, I wasn't interested for some reason. I should have been. But there was a German schoolteacher -- we had several crew reunions. And one of them was in Las Vegas where my bottom turret gunner stayed in the service and finished there. But we went to Las Vegas, and I stayed in one of those big hotels. And Sunday morning they had a champagne brunch. I thought, well, I'll treat my crew. And I treated them all to this breakfast. And they checked out. And the charges on my credit card never came through. [01:34:00] But...

Q: How many -- so, quite a few of your crew members did survive.

STEARNS: Oh, yeah, they all survived except the air commander.

Q: Who didn't have a 'chute.

STEARNS: Yeah. They all got -- some of them got burned. And, of course, some of the original crew weren't there because they put in fill-in members to take their place, like the bombardier.

Q: Yeah. So, did you stop flying, then, after you -- when did you get out of the service?

STEARNS: Well, when I got back to the States, we had a choice. You could sign up to get out immediately, or undecided, or as a career. And I signed up as undecided. So I stayed in for a year, flying all around. Different airplanes, getting my flight time in and so forth. [01:35:00] And all the sudden, Truman decided to cut down on the military. And all of those who had signed "undecided" were released right away. And so it was a year later that I got out, then.

Q: Do you remember what year that was?

STEARNS: Yeah, that was 1946. The war ended in '45...

Q: So you never were in the Air Force. You were always in the Army Air Corps.

STEARNS: Well, it was the Air Force. They changed it to the Air Corps from the Air Force.

Q: In '47, I think.

STEARNS: Well, I thought it was before that.

Q: Maybe.

STEARNS: Yeah, I thought it was when I first went in that they changed it. But I may be totally wrong.

Q: When you got out of the service in '46, what did you do then?

STEARNS: Well, it was kind of interesting, and -- it's another story, but I went back to Yellowstone, [01:36:00] where I'd worked summers. And Jack Haynes, head of the company, said, "Come work for us and you'll never regret it." And I never will. He was such a great guy. And -- but -- I started working there, and I would go around first thing in the spring -- summer -- I'd go to Old Faithful, open the main store there. And then Fishing Bridge, and open that, and Canyon, and open that. And then I'd run the general store at Tower Falls. And in the meantime, my wife Dottie came to work at Old Faithful, and we went on a picnic or two. And one afternoon, she showed up about five o'clock. And I didn't have a car. We weren't supposed to have cars. And I thought, "My God, she's got to be at work at Old Faithful tomorrow morning. And she can't sleep here, they wouldn't allow that." [01:37:00] And, "How am I going to get her there?" So I called my friend in Mammoth that ran the warehouse, and he came out. He had a car. He came out after I got closed up at eight o'clock. And he hauled us into Mammoth and cleared out Old Faithful. And

(inaudible). And, anyway, Dottie and I became friends. In the wintertime -- well, in Mammoth, first, Jack and Mrs. Haynes didn't get along too well. She lived in a house next-door and Jack lived in an apartment behind the Mammoth shop. And in the wintertime we moved into Bozeman. But when I first went there, here I was, a pilot and a major in the Air Force, and one of the glory boys. And Mrs. Haynes -- oops, here comes my (inaudible) to treat me already, [she would do [01:38:00] at noon?]. Anyway, as a result, I got called in in the fall. And Mrs. Haynes -- hello!

\_\_: Hi!

STEARNS: Come in. I'll be through in just a minute.

\_\_: No problem.

STEARNS: Anyway. Jack -- I worked in the winter, in the office downstairs. And [Doug?], this other guy, worked in the warehouse. But at the end of every day, Jack would have us upstairs. And he was the grand old man of Yellowstone. He'd pour us a drink and tell us [your?] stories of Yellowstone. The Park Service wouldn't know anything about Yellowstone; they would go to him. But also, he liked [us?], and at the end of being there in the winter, he'd give us a raise. We never asked for one. But that Christmas, Dottie and I went back to St. Paul and got married. And then we came back and I ran the store again

at Tower Falls, and that -- I went in that fall, and Mrs. Haynes called me. And [01:39:00] she said, "Clarence, you've made some mistakes when you were doing the inventory. And you and [Doug?] got Jack to give you a big raise every year." Well, we never asked for one. He just liked us and gave us a good raise. "And you did not ask my permission to marry Dorothy." And that's how I moved to Jackson Hole. We kept track of her, and she was in a home in Bozeman. And they wheeled her out in this wheelchair, and Dottie said, "Mrs. Haynes, this is Clarence and I'm Dorothy." And she said, "Oh, Clarence, you were such a fine young man. And what ever happened to that wife of yours?" (laughter)

Q: Who is this? I'm Mark.

LINDSAY: I'm [Lindsay?].

Q: Lindsay, do you need to do some tests with him, or...

LINDSAY: We're just going to do some working out. I'm a physical therapist. We're just going to work out for a bit.

Q: OK. Why don't we cut off, and you go ahead and do what you have to do. Yeah. Because he did say that you were going to come [01:40:00] at 11 o'clock. So we'll just cut off -- I'm doing an interview with him about his military career and his life --

LINDSAY: Cool. Very cool. Well, do you want me to -- I could come back another time, if you guys are -- would you rather have me come back another time?

STEARNS: Well, you have to leave at noon, don't you?

Q: I don't necessarily have to leave at noon.

STEARNS: She'll probably be, what, a half hour?

LINDSAY: Yeah. About a half an hour.

Q: Well, why don't I just hang on, then, and just wait?

LINDSAY: OK.

STEARNS: Yeah, you can do that.

LINDSAY: Yeah. We won't go very long, today. We'll just do about a half hour. Maybe we'll do a little longer on Friday.

Q: All right. I'll just shut this off.

STEARNS: [Gale?], I asked her how she got here. She said, "Oh, I'm a ski racer." And I like Jackson Hole. And she came in and interviewed me first, and went back, and where Taylor made a program for me. And she gives me exercises that they don't do in a regular -- [01:41:00] over there in the hospital, or another place where I went for treatments. And they're entirely different. She got a doctor and physical therapy in Seattle. And -- just a terrific (inaudible) for different exercises.

Q: OK. Well, let's stop this for a second.

[END OF AUDIO PART 1]

STEARNS: [00:00:00] Successful, now, as a nurse midwife. She comes clear over here for ladies that want have babies. Last one got her a motel to live in while she was waiting.

Q: What's your daughter's name? The midwife?

STEARNS: Heidi. Heidi Stearns. She kept her maiden name. And her husband is Woodie [Barrymore?], who -- he started out logging, with horses. And then they built -- they worked down at Elk Mountain for a wealthy fellow that wanted to clean up the forest there. He's from a San Francisco paper -- he owns. And then he sold them some land. Actually, out in the open, 35 acres. Or maybe he gave it to them. But it's pretty windy [00:01:00] there, but they build a real nice little log house with heat in the floors and solar panels and so forth. And they lived there for quite a while. And now that's for sale. And they're going to live in this house over at Lander, where they've got lots of room. And it was all furnished, and they bought it for, I think, \$385,000 with five acres of land that can be developed. But eventually, they'll move over -- they call it (inaudible), but [Verse?], which is the other side of [Dubois?], is about 13 miles, where -- his father has some

acreage in there. And Woody has a shop there and another little log cabin. But they'll build a nice home there -- out of logs, which is his business, now. He builds [00:02:00] log homes and then -- small ones -- and then he hauls them to Colorado or Nebraska, wherever they want them. He's got a big crane for lifting logs.

Q: Did you ever tell me how you came to Wyoming?

STEARNS: Yes. Well, no. Yes and no. I told you because I used to work for Haynes and -- well, I came here because of my dad and mother, originally. Jack Haynes -- his winter headquarters were in St. Paul. And when I got out of high school, he took me up there -- my dad did -- and introduced me. He said, "You know, you're real young to work for us. They don't usually take anybody as young as you are. And you have to empty the ashes in the stove and do everything." But gave me a job working summers for them in Yellowstone.

Q: How old were you? [00:03:00]

STEARNS: I was eighteen at the time. Of course, that was the same time I signed up with the Air Force.

Q: Yeah. So, you came out to Yellowstone to work in his store?

STEARNS: Yeah, so I worked just summers, then.

Q: What did you do? What was your job?

STEARNS: Well, I worked at a little store at Camp Roosevelt, where there's a road goes out to the northeast entrance. I worked there selling photographs. But it was also sort of a small general store where we sold ice cream and stuff. And then I worked under the manager of the store at Tower Falls, where we sold, of course, all kinds of photographs and postcards. Haynes' photographs and postcards and that. This was all before the war. And then -- [00:04:00] of course, I came back after the war, and I was just sort of going through as a tourist after I got out of the service. And that's when Jack Haynes said, "Come work for us (inaudible) you'll never regret it." And of course, I never will. I got wonderful memories, and Jack was good to us, and -- but it's...

Q: So where did you live -- did you live in the park, then, for years?

STEARNS: Yes. I lived in the -- well, in the building behind the Mammoth shop. I lived upstairs there. And then in the winter in Bozeman, where I worked in the office downstairs, and we had an (inaudible) [that does that?], a friend of mine, that ran the warehouse. He and I had an apartment upstairs in the big place, in Bozeman, the big two-story -- there was an art gallery there, and a warehouse. [00:05:00] But it was interesting, it had one section that

was full of display of famous Haynes photographs. And I hadn't realized at the time, but Jack Haynes was worth a lot of money when he died. And they gave a lot of scholarships to the University of Montana. And in Helena, the state capital, there's a whole wing that's called the Haynes Wing. Shows all the Russell paintings he had, and famous photographs that he took.

Q: Did you ever meet any of those guys? Russell, or any of those people?

STEARNS: No, they were all before my time, pretty much. But...

Q: Yeah. So now, you lived in Bozeman because that's where Haynes lived during the wintertime?

STEARNS: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Q: OK. And what did you do there in the winter? Run the store?

STEARNS: Well, I worked in the office downstairs [00:06:00] doing inventory. See, they had 13 shops in Yellowstone, and they all had to be inventoried. So I'd be counting postcards and photographs, camera film, and everything under the sun.

Q: Did you have to actually stock it? Bring it to the store and stock it on the shelves?

STEARNS: Yeah, they brought everything in by truck from the different shops, all bundled up. And then -- I counted thousands of postcards that were left. And...

Q: So they didn't leave the stock in the park over the winter?

STEARNS: Well, we wouldn't go into the park -- well, we -- interesting enough, [Doug?] that ran the warehouse -- and I went up there one March -- we kept going up weekends and testing the snow. And then we went out to Tower Junction, where they keep that road open, then out to Cooke City. And we'd go up there testing the [00:07:00] snow. And then one weekend we took off. We told Jack we were going to take off. And we went up over Dunraven Pass on skis. And up there, where the wind had blown -- clear the hillside -- there were about a dozen elk that had wintered there on the grass. And then, down in the canyon. And I had known a fellow, Ed [Niles?], who was winter keeper there. And he delivered the mail on the east side of the park in the summer. And he put us into a little cabin there. We'd have a good hot fire in the stove. And the cabins were just single boards. You'd wake up in the morning and it'd be zero in there. And then, coming back, we were ahead of schedule. And of course our skis were sticking something awful. We were scraping them off and rubbing paraffin on them. But we were early. So we went up [00:08:00] the

mountain there with -- I forgot what they call that. I should know. To the lookout on top. And it was just etched with ice.

Q: Strawberry Mountain?

STEARNS: No. Dunraven Pass... maybe it's Dunraven... no, it wouldn't be Dunraven Mountain. I forgot the name of it. But anyway, it was quite a scene. And I've got a picture of it somewhere. All etched with this.

Q: I wonder if you ever met my old boss. When I went to work for the state, I went to work for Ned Frost. The Frost family, out of Cody? Have you ever heard of the Frost family?

STEARNS: Yeah. Out of Cody?

Q: Yeah.

STEARNS: Frosty -- the Frosts. Or was it [Freeze?] It seems like he's been a football player or something [00:09:00] at Wyoming. He was quite a --

Q: No, that was Frosty -- I know who you're talking about. But -- and I'll think of that, too. But Ned Frost was an outfitter. And he took his groups, or parties, through Yellowstone. A [thoroughfare plateau?], places like that.

STEARNS: Oh, that's interesting. That's what my oldest son does now. As soon as the waters retreat, he packs

fishermen into the headwaters of Yellowstone on weeklong trips.

Q: I'll bet that's good fishing, too.

STEARNS: Uh huh. And it's -- two years ago, Yellowstone was still too high, and they fished the American River, which was good with Yellowstone cutthroat spawning up there. And they had wonderful fishing. And then in the fall, he came down -- or, that summer, he also [00:10:00] ran a long [pack?] trip for a doctor and some people from the hospital here. They went all the way from Brooks Lake over to Cody. And some of them even rode back. They had their own horses. But then in the fall, he packs out of Brooks Lake into Cub Creek, where he sets up his hunting camp and packs hunters in there. Elk hunters. He's got, I think, 13 mules and a bunch of horses.

Q: This is your son?

STEARNS: Yeah. My oldest son.

Q: What's his name?

STEARNS: [Forrest?].

Q: How old is he?

STEARNS: Forrest is 60, now.

Q: And he's still doing this?

STEARNS: Yeah.

Q: OK. Going back to your adventure up on Dunraven Pass: Did you guys plan to spend a couple of weeks up there?

STEARNS: Oh, no. We were just in there, I think, two nights, at the falls. And then -- [00:11:00] [Ed Niles?] was the name of the winter keeper. He was a (inaudible), I think. And so we knew he was there. And he had invited us to come in.

Q: How many miles was that trip?

STEARNS: Oh, I don't know. It isn't so many miles as it is effort, when that snow was sticking so on our skis. Didn't know how to wax in those days. It was mostly paraffin. But that overlook that overlooks all of the Yellowstone River and that country beyond, and way south. I remember the [South Canyon?], too, we saw some buffalo in there that wintered there, on that plain there.

Q: Not the Lamar Valley?

STEARNS: No, though [00:12:00] when I was working at Tower Falls, we used to go up the Lamar just a little ways and then cross the river. I remember cutting a great big tree down, it was strictly illegal, to get across the river on. And then we would fish in there. But there's also a wagon road that I understand is still there, that goes to Grizzly Lodge, I think they call it. Which is a summer camp. And it's just outside the park, but you have to go across

Slough Creek and by wagon train, up there, to get to it, for where the guests go.

Q: Did you know any [00:13:00] of the superintendents of the park?

STEARNS: Well, that's interesting, because Mrs. Prior had a general store in Mammoth where she sold everything, and a coffee shop there right up close to the liberty cap. In fact, next to her coffee shop was the judge's. And Judge [Meldam?] was the old judge there, and he was a friend of my folks. So when I was 7, 1927, we went out there. And I remember they wanted to visit with Judge Meldam. I mean, he was a friend of theirs. So we went over there. And he put me in jail in the back of the house. Mrs. Prior, who had the coffee shop and the general store there, and the shop at Canyon, another store, and -- she liked me, [00:14:00] and when we got married, I remember she gave us a couple Hudson Bay blankets as wedding gifts. But she called me in one day and she said, "Clarence, you know, Edmund Rogers, the superintendent, is going to be retiring one of these days. Why don't you become superintendent of Yellowstone?" Well, he was the last of the political appointees. A real nice guy. But also, they had their own license plates in those days. They were green with white numerals. And Edmund told me about, he was in Chicago in a

traffic jam, and this policeman was up there on horseback, and he saw his license plate and he said, "Come on, governor! Come on, governor!" Edmund was a friend of my - - he was a real nice guy. I always liked him.

Q: He was the last of the political appointees. [00:15:00]  
From then on it was done professionally. You rose through the ranks. Is that right?

STEARNS: Mm-hmm. But it was interesting in that Jack Haynes, for years, operated in Yellowstone. He would go to Washington to negotiate his shops there. And [he wouldn't get it?] and he'd come back pissed off. And he'd say, "The damn communists, they want to take over my stores and everything else." And he said, "The only person that knows anything there is that little clerk, Connie Wirth." Well, Connie Worth ended up by being superintendent of the park service later on. And he had a son who married a girl right here, down the road. His last name is Wirth but I can't remember his first name. [00:16:00]

Q: Wirth is W-I-R-T-H.

STEARNS: Yeah.

Q: Conrad Wirth.

STEARNS: Mm-hmm.

Q: Yeah. I remember the name.

STEARNS: But the son did all the exterior architecture on [Moose?] and some of the other park service places. And made quite a name for himself. I didn't think it was worth very much.

Q: Was [Crandall?], Harrison Crandall, a competitor of Jack Haynes?

STEARNS: No, I wouldn't say so. I think Harrison was later. He had a shop at Jenny Lake and lived right up there. And he had a -- was it a son, that was there and later moved to -- I think Cheyenne? He had a Model T, I remember. No, this guy was married to Harrison's daughter, [00:17:00] I think. But -- well, I wouldn't say Harrison was a competitor. Most of Jack's work -- not all of it -- was in Yellowstone, where Harrison was down here --

Q: In Jackson Hole.

STEARNS: -- in the Tetons.

Q: Yeah. What did you think of Haynes's work?

STEARNS: Oh, I thought there was some of it that was wonderful. And some of it I -- there was a famous one of the Tetons that, I didn't think much of that. It was more or less flat light. I don't know when he took it. But he had so many of -- unusual ones, too. There was one number, 130, 40, which was the plume of Old Faithful. And after the war, well, we would sell boxes of 50 cards. But after the

war, [00:18:00] all the cards were changed. They found out, the more blue you put in them, the better they sold. (laughs) So they all had a blue tinge to them.

Q: I'll be darned. Well now, how did you get from Yellowstone Park to Jackson Hole? We're here at Wilson.

STEARNS: [Well?], of course, I got here because I was fired up there. By Mrs. Haynes.

Q: What's the story behind that?

STEARNS: Well, that was when I running the general store at Tower Falls. But then I came down here, and my first job was night clerk at the (inaudible). And I would rent about three rooms a night to salesmen. There weren't any tourists. And then we made the mistake of going back to Minnesota for Christmas, and came back, and they had shut the desk down and were renting the rooms out over the bar. So I was out of a job. And [00:19:00] then I got a job as copilot on a big rotary snowplow. That was before the main road was (inaudible) going north. And we'd plow into Jenny Lake, and then turn around and plow our way back out. And --

Q: Did you know the [Worth?] brothers?

STEARNS: Yeah. John and [Jess?]. When I worked on the desk, I got through about 11 o'clock at night. And I'd go over and lay down on the sofa until about six in the morning. But

Saturday nights, after they closed the bar, John and Jess would come out with [Mike Yokel?] and -- what was his name -- the guy that had the [Flame Motel?]. And they'd sit there and play cards till daylight, so I couldn't go over and rest on the couch. But John was quite congenial. Jess was pretty tight, [00:20:00] and wasn't quite so friendly. But I remember Steve [Barteck?] ran everything, and the slot machines, and everything else. And they had some guy that was raising Cain in there, so Steve slipped him a mickey and John went over there. And this guy said, "This is a hell of a drink, John." And John picked it up and chugalugged it, and he said, "Not bad." And Steve came over and said, "John, get to your house as quick as you can." (laughs) Got up in the morning, and he puked in his pants, and he threw them out in the yard with a \$100 bill in the pocket. (laughs)

Q: Steve Barteck was the bartender at the [Worth?].

STEARNS: Yeah. And he took care of the slot machines and everything else.

Q: What was it like when gambling was up here? Was there any problem with that?

STEARNS: Well, [00:21:00] yes and no. Not at the time -- well, I guess there was a murder or two, I can't remember exactly. But when we first came here, my Dottie worked in

the law office for [Ed Amschel?]. And Ed himself was the Chamber of Commerce. He took that job just so he'd have an office. And he was also in charge of [Milward Simpson's?] law branch here. There was a wing. So he was part of Simpson's law. And Dottie worked for him at that time, in the law office, just for about three hours a day. I remember Ed said once, "Why don't you two get a divorce so we have something to do?" But Ed also was married to Mary -- something [00:22:00] -- out of [Sheraton?]. A girl there -- a fellow there. But she married Ed. I think he'd been a navigator during the war. But he was always criticizing them. The niggers. And he moved to California. He had to take the bar exam about three times because an attorney here, the only other one, blackmailed him, and... Because Milward was governor, he did away with gambling. But Ed didn't enforce it as the attorney here.

Q: How do you spell Ed's last name?

STEARNS: A-M -- is it -- C-H-S-E-L? A-M-S-E-L, maybe. (phone rings)

Q: Wait, I think she just got it. Yeah. Dottie just picked it up. [00:23:00]

STEARNS: Good.

Q: Yeah. She picked it up after two rings, I could tell. OK. So how did Amschel or -- how did you spell his last name?

STEARNS: I think it's A-M-S-C-H-E-L.

Q: C-H-E-L. Amschel?

STEARNS: Yeah. But he moved to Hemet. And people have been trying to buy this -- upstairs [at the corner?]. Quite an area. And this [woman?] didn't want to sell it. She never would. And Ed talked her into a [nine-year?] lease on it. But, as I mentioned, he had been -- always talking about the awful niggers. And when he moved to California he had a flat tire on the freeway and all these people kept zooming by. And here came a carload of niggers that helped him change the tire. And he changed his mind then.

[00:24:00] He's long gone now. I think he was a navigator during the war. But his son, Eddy, had a law business there. And also -- and he's stopped to see us a time or two here.

Q: Did -- let's see. Did you know this guy that wrote the *Cocktail Hour in Jackson Hole*? Hough? What was his name -- first name? Hough...

STEARNS: Oh, yeah. Was it John Hough? Anyway, on our honeymoon, we came through and we stopped at the Worth. And we just had, I think, \$20 left. And we paid for the drinks. And Hough came over. And we met him, and we were talking to him. And he got ready to leave. And he started to grab for our change. And Dottie grabbed it, and said,

"That's all we've got to get to Bozeman on." (laughs)

[00:25:00] But then he wrote another book that wasn't nearly so successful as the *Cocktail Hour in Jackson Hole*.

Q: So, Jess and John Worth wrote -- ran the Worth. I talked to Wilma Taylor. Did you know Wilma Taylor?

STEARNS: Yeah, I knew her. Not personally, like I did Steve. But also, there's a book -- well, it's here. You may have seen it. A coffee table book by Charlie -- oh, Jesus. Two brothers that were [grizzly?] (inaudible).

Q: Oh, the [Craigheads?].

STEARNS: Yeah. And [the son?] wrote this book called *The Worth Hotel*. And it tells all the history of the Worth brothers and -- (inaudible) works out on Jenny Lake, (inaudible), and about the fire and everything else.

Q: The fire at the hotel.

STEARNS: Yeah.

Q: Were you around when that happened?

STEARNS: Yes and no. I lived here [00:26:00] but I was in Canada at the time.

Q: What kind of people were Jess and John Worth?

STEARNS: Well, they were -- John especially was pretty nice. Jess was more, I suppose, a very tight business person. They talked about -- they put a window in the curve of the bar there that you could -- with the lights off you could

see what was going on and nobody could see you. But when they first put it in, Jess didn't know how to work it. He was standing back in there with the lights on, and they could look from (inaudible) could see him moving all around trying to look out that window. (laughs)

Q: Did -- who put in the silver dollar bar?

STEARNS: Well, they did. Jess and John. They put that in. And it's amazing that it didn't burn during the fire. That missed [00:27:00] it. Missed the bar. And there's even silver dollars in the table in the restaurant. I frequently go there to eat because it's very quiet and I can hear there. It's...

Q: Did anybody lose a fortune there, or was it just all petty gambling?

STEARNS: Well, there was all kinds of gambling. I suppose somebody lost -- there were roulette wheels and everything else.

Q: Craps table?

STEARNS: Yeah. And then, when they finally -- it was outlawed -- they moved downstairs for a while. And then they had gambling on a boat in Jackson Lake.

Q: That was legal?

STEARNS: Yeah.

Q: As long as you were on water? You weren't on land?

STEARNS: No, you were in a boat up -- of course, it was still illegal, but...

Q: Did you ever go out to the boat?

STEARNS: No, I didn't. Just heard about it.

Q: Did you gamble?

STEARNS: No. I used to. I would watch the -- in the [00:28:00] lobby they had the machines right across from the desk. And I would -- so I would know when one of them was about ready to pay off. And I'd go play it for a while.

Q: Did it pay off?

STEARNS: Yeah. But we also had the -- in the officers club at Boca Raton we had slot machines. And two of them paid off. But every night, they'd pay off and then we'd move them to a new location. And people didn't know that. And they'd come back the next night, where they had been, and play those machines. And at the end of the year we had thousands of dollars. And we had -- if we didn't spend it, we had to turn it in to a central fund in Washington. So I was writing checks for thousands of dollars for furniture. And we flew big name bands down from New York and had a dance. Just doing everything to get [00:29:00] rid of that money so we didn't have to turn it in to Washington.

Q: This was in Boca Raton?

STEARNS: Yeah.

Q: Tell me a little bit about Steve Bartek. What's his background?

STEARNS: I really don't know. Steve had a real nice wife who came here as a nurse and then -- three of them came here at that time. They were skiers, and I was a professional ski patrol when -- the [only one?] -- [first one?] on [Snow King?] that ever got paid there. But I would see them [up] skiing. And Connie, Steve's wife -- he married her, she was one of the three -- and they lived over there, maybe a block from the hotel, to the south. And I remember -- couldn't help but remember -- she had a great big [00:30:00] Canadian [Thistlewood Flower] in the garden that she liked, and cultivated it. But there was also a fellow, [Russ?] Robinson, who sort of managed the hotel along with Steve. Steve handled the bar and the machines, but Russ, he had worked on a ranch upcountry. But he was always getting along on practically no sleep. I don't know how he did it. But he'd go for -- it seemed like about four hours a night, and then go for two or three days and not sleep. I don't know what ever happened to him. But then there was another fellow, [Bud New?], that was working there before I -- and he got me the job working there. He'd been [00:31:00] in high school a year behind me, actually.

Q: Working where?

STEARNS: At the Worth. And then he was managing the -- it was the Holiday Inn, it was called, or the Heidelberg that's here now. But he lived in a little cabin down before that, there. And he was always coming to parties and bringing flowers. And then I found out he left the [county?] owing the florist all kinds of money for flowers. But he moved to California.

Q: Yeah. How did you -- you say you were the first ski patrol person hired on Snow King Mountain?

STEARNS: Yeah. On Snow King. There was a fellow -- there were two main stockholders. One of them was -- oh, I can't remember his name, now, but he had been a -- he did canoeing [00:32:00] back east with a guide. And he talked to me about canoeing, because I was interested in canoeing. And he drove a Jeep and he had a license number 59. And when he got ready to trade that jeep in, he wasn't going to replace it, and he told me about it, so I got that jeep along with license number 59 that I still have on one of the cars. But he and a dentist that was here were the major stockholders in Snow King Mountain. And he was the one that got me the job there.

Q: They started Snow King Mountain?

STEARNS: Pardon me?

Q: Did they start the ski area?

STEARNS: Well, it was also going, but -- it was started by a fellow named Neil Rafferty. I think it started along, about '49, [00:33:00] actually. And he had put in an old cable chairlift from a mine. Just a single chair and wooden towers. And so I got a job working for Neil Rafferty that ran it. Spent most of my time shoveling snow, it seemed like. But also, Neil was going to have an area on the backside because it was so damn cold on Snow King [when?] -- and he'd call it Sunlight Basin. And [he'd?] put poles up. And I remember another fellow and I drilling holes, put an axel in there and then a car wheel to carry a top [row?]. And this other guy had worked in the mines in Idaho. And he'd hold up about twice as long as I would [00:34:00] drilling those holes. But for some reason, Sunlight Basin never took hold. It was open one winter and nobody used it.

Q: At that time, the area -- the ski area up the road was not operating. What's it called? The big ski area up here?

STEARNS: What about this one?

Q: Well, Snow King was the only skiing area.

STEARNS: Yes, though very early in the winter, and sometimes up till Christmas, Snow King operated a rope tow up on top of the pass here. It was hooked up with an old military

vehicle with a rope running around the tires. One rope going down and another one going up. And that was quite popular. And you could ski there until they got enough snow in town. And then they would shut that down. But then, after Targhee started, nobody came here to see it. They all went to Targhee. [00:35:00] [It didn't?] go up on the pass. So they didn't have it after that. But the first two years at Teton Village -- I patrolled up there. They didn't have a tram going, the first year, it was just an (inaudible) the mountain to the north. I'd patrol there. And then the next year they opened the tram, and I patrolled on the tram. But about that time -- there were two partners that had the ski area. One was Paul McAllister, and -- oh geez, what was the other guy's name. I visited him out at Bend, Oregon. We had meetings of the Olympus Patrol there afterwards. Anyway, Paul took the credit cards and went to Europe. He didn't have any idea how much [00:36:00] money they -- but this other guy didn't have any money to spend, so he came up with the idea -- if you bought a [lot?] for \$10,000 up there, you got a lifetime pass. Or for \$1000 each you could buy a lifetime pass. You didn't have to buy any property. And Dottie had two insurance policies that had just matured for \$1000 each. And she said, "Well, the kids may have to go without

shoes, but I'm getting each of us a lifetime pass." And I -- of course, it was the best investment we ever made. The season pass costs more than that, now. And -- so we skied there for a long time. And then when Targhee started -- there was a farmer that came over here from the road at the bottom over there, had a farm, [00:37:00] and sold me eggs. And he said, "I wish you'd come over and see Fred's mountain behind my farm there. We want to see if it would make a ski area." And he kept begging me, and I said, "OK, I'll come over next Thursday and bring the guys I ski with." And this [Larry?] Engen -- one of the famous Engen brothers -- lived here then. I skied with him. And [Doc MacLeod?] used to be here. And the three of us went over. And they had all these farmers on snow shoes packing trail. And the bishop of the church. And halfway up they had a hot lunch for us. And we put our ski climbers on and climbed on up and had wonderful skiing. Well, [Sevary?] had the first ski (inaudible) I ever knew. And he did a lot of photographic work for him. And I think maybe he was a Mormon, too.

Q: What was his name?

STEARNS: Sevary Engen. [00:38:00] It was three Engen brothers that were quite famous. One of them was down at [Alda?].

Another was a coach out in Idaho somewhere. They came over from Norway.

Q: How do you spell Engen?

STEARNS: E-N-G-E-N. They were actually ski jumpers to begin with. But anyway, so, Sevary was highly enthused and did some photographic work for them. And Doc Macleod said, "Well, if the bishop of the church gets behind it, I think it'll go." And I said, "Oh, I think it's ten years premature. It's too far from a big city." Well, they started up three different times and went broke before it finally took off.

Q: Is this Targhee you're talking about?

STEARNS: Yeah. So that was the start of Targhee. And people from over here -- two of them I knew of invested money in it. They weren't skiers, but they [00:39:00] put money in it and they all lost it. Because it had to start up three times before it --

Q: What about Teton Village? Did that take off right away?

STEARNS: Yeah, that pretty well took off. That had been there -- ranch road -- and the fellow that was in charge, running the Snake River Ranch, this was a big ranch up there -- was county commissioner. And he got [it changed?] from Farm to Market Road and improved it a great deal. And then, I told

you about Rabbit Row. People started moving in. The land was available and reasonable.

Q: Did you know the Hansons pretty well?

STEARNS: Well, not pretty well. But Cliff Hanson, who was later -- well, he went to school with Ed Amschel, that I told you -- and he said, "You watch Cliff. [00:40:00] He's going to be senator someday." And actually, Cliff started out with quite a stutter. And his mother put him through some special training and he got rid of that. But Cliff, for some reason he was always on the winning team in politics. He maneuvered around. And I sold him an [Ashley stove?] once, and every time I'd see him, he'd: "Oh, I've still got that wonderful Ashley stove. Oh, it's working so good." But there was a fellow that had done Cliff a favor, and Cliff owed him quite a bit. So Cliff actually gave a valley over there, where the Journeys School is, up in there now. But he gave it -- traded it, you might say. He owed this guy a favor. But Cliff came out way ahead on it, because [00:41:00] the property was worth so much more than -- I mean, the favor was worth so much more than the property. And then Cliff also put a conservation easement on the south end of his ranch. And he got a lot of credit for that in the newspaper and everything. What they didn't say was that they paid him millions of dollars for it.

Q: Were you here when [Wallace Barry?] and Cliff Hanson and a bunch of ranchers rode their horses over the valley floor to protest --

STEARNS: No, that was just a little bit before. But when I was rangers up at Arizona Creek, I was down at [Maran?] one day and Cliff and Bruce Porter were driving their cows across the dam there. And there weren't many -- hardly any tourists in those days. But a tourist car came along and tried to work their way [00:42:00] through these cattle crossing the dam on the road. And one of them picked up a rock and threw it at that car. "You damn tourists, get out of here!" (laughs) But also, it was Cliff and somebody else, they maneuvered -- when they -- I don't know how it came about, when they built that dam. So Idaho has control over it and gets all the irrigation water out of it.

Q: For the potato fields.

STEARNS: Mm-hmm.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

STEARNS: But Cliff was always on the winning side, it seemed like. In politics...

Q: Who was Doctor MacLeod?

STEARNS: Oh, Doctor MacLeod was a wonderful doctor. A family doctor. And the other was a surgeon. And Doctor MacLeod, at that time, [00:43:00] brought practically all the babies

into the valley. And he was very practical, and everybody almost worshipped him. He had a nurse that really took care of -- and [Jesse Lundy?]. I'd go into his office, for something, I don't know why, and there'd be a whole bunch of people. And he wouldn't schedule calls, just first come first serve. And Jesse would see me and rush me right in ahead of everybody else. And I'd feel guilty as could be. So anyway, one day we were having a town race on Snow King. And we had it all arranged ahead of time. And John Morrigan, who was actually crippled on one side -- he'd been a flyer in the Navy -- came down with a thrombosis and it paralyzed one side of him. But he was on the mic in the old log building there. And he was [00:44:00] into the scheme. And Doc MacLeod was in the race. And he came down and he was all arranged with him. And he fell right near the point of the trees. Another patrolman. And I went out and -- and John went on the mic, said, "Oh, I think Doc MacLeod broke his leg." And we put a big wooden old splint on it. And then John says, "Oh, I think he broke the other leg too." So we put a big splint on that. And then we hauled on down in the toboggan. And everybody came racing out of the log shelter. And [Don?] stands up right there. (laughter) But... I skied with Don a lot. And skied on the pass, and whatnot.

Q: Yeah. Who was the guy that [tied flies?]? I talked to him years ago. Joe...

STEARNS: That was the -- oh, Christ. [00:45:00]

Q: I can't remember. I talked to him about 25 years ago.

STEARNS: Well, he's still around. Dale -- no, what's his name? Dennis? No.

Q: His son was John.

STEARNS: Jack, Jack. Jack. Anyway, he took over the old log building for a while, that my store had been in. And he'd pay the people, and they'd come over to cash their checks, but they all bounced, so we wouldn't cash them anymore. Jack Dennis.

Q: Oh, Jack Dennis. Yeah.

STEARNS: Then he got a bunch of flies from [Orvis?]. But he -- the tie flies, a bunch of feathers. But he used them all up and sold them to somebody else.

Q: No, I was talking about this old timer, Joe something or rather. He ran a little tackle shop and made his own humpies. Tied his own humpies.

STEARNS: Oh. That's -- the famous humpies were [00:46:00] -- geez, where is my memory going. This (inaudible) -- his -- her husband (inaudible; overlapping dialogue) managed the Crescent H Ranch and took fishermen out. And she tied

flies. They got a divorce. They had a shop at [Moose?].

And -- oh, geez, what's his name.

Q: Well, [Boots Allen?] was one guy.

STEARNS: Well, Boots Allen was one of the first fishing guys of note. In fact, he loaded chairs on the ski lift in the wintertime.

Q: Really?

STEARNS: But it was interesting, also, Jack [Yokel?], who lived in Wilson, had the very first float trips I ever knew. And he would come in the store and buy chicken and take people on float trips to (inaudible) island and cook chicken for them. I don't know how often he went. [00:47:00] I suppose maybe three times a week or something.

Q: Jack Yokel?

STEARNS: Jack Yokel. He had the first float trips I ever heard of.

Q: What about Dave Hanson? I thought he was early.

STEARNS: He was later, as I remember. But Boots Allen, of course, was the first noted -- first guide on the river, of any note.

Q: He told me he used to work on the Jackson Lake Dam when it was first being built.

STEARNS: Well, that's interesting, because Neil Rafferty, who first ran Snow King, and did for years, was in the CCCs

working up there when they were cutting trees and getting stumps out before the dam was built. So he was a real -- sort of -- should be given a lot of credit for what he did at Snow King, actually.

Q: Did you ever deliver the mail on skis?

STEARNS: [00:48:00] No. But there were some people -- Mrs.

[Raynes?], who used to deliver the mail up to [Maran?] and over Teton Pass -- and later her son Jimmie [Raynes?] did that. Delivered the mail.

Q: And you said you had a store in Jackson? What kind of a store was it?

STEARNS: Well, this was in Wilson. It's where I started Hungry Jack's General Store in 1954. It was just a rundown little grocery called a Wilson Market. And [Rangee Scofield?] had it. And she'd sit there with one light bulb, ironing, most of the day, and didn't want to sell it. And all the sudden, one day -- I'd had several jobs around the valley in the meantime, and she decided -- the creditors had the best of her, and she sold us the store. And so we [00:49:00] -- it was called Wilson Market, and we ran it there for maybe five years. And then we weren't getting along with the landlady. So that was when -- we had bought this land across the street and build this store over there. And my dad, who had a cabin near Hungry Jack's Lake

in northern Minnesota, said, "Why don't you call it Hungry Jack's General Store?" Which we did, and right away sales came in. "Where did you get that name? When it was Wilson Market, nobody paid any attention to it. Now everybody wants to know where Hungry Jack's General Store is."

And...

Q: Did you sell everything there?

STEARNS: No. When we first went there, all it was was groceries. It was a Wilson Market. And then I put in -- oh, we sold horseshoes and [00:50:00] nails. And then Levi's. We started with Levi's. Oh, and I also sold canoes. Grumman canoes were all you could get in those days. And I've got a picture of that store with two Grumman canoes out. And my boys were little kids, standing there. And -- but... And then, pretty soon, I found Old Town. I could start selling Old Towns. So I took those on, and Mad River canoes too. And I sold quite a few canoes. But it wasn't really a good thing in that you would get them in the middle of the winter -- like, I'd get 40 canoes in on us. (inaudible) And I'd store them upstairs. You'd have to go up a ladder and pull them up. And then you'd have to pay for them in May. [00:51:00] And by May you hadn't had hardly any time to sell them. So you had to have a certain amount of capital. And then when

[Janet?] took over the store -- well, first, there was a guy who was a district ranger at [Maran?]. And he moved back to Isle Royale in northern Minnesota, where they used [to portage?] from the Great Lakes up to Pigeon River and into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. And he was in charge of that -- I visited him there. And -- but he had been a district ranger there at Maran. Boy, at one point he stopped some car going out east, and it was a stolen car, and the guy put a bullet into him. And he showed me the bullet they had taken out of [00:52:00] him. But then I was here and -- I always wanted a wood canvas to display, but they were well over a thousand dollars, and expensive. So I didn't have one.

Q: A wooden cabinet?

STEARNS: A wood canvas canoe.

Q: Oh, a wood canvas canoe. Oh.

STEARNS: So then one noon I was up here, and they said he was down there and wanted to sell this canoe. So I tell, "Come on up, and bring your wife." I was up here for lunch. And he came up and he told me about this canoe. He said, "It's getting too heavy for me now." It was a beautiful red canoe, he said. So I told Kevin -- I said, "Well, how much do you want?" And he said, "Oh, maybe \$100." And I said, "You're crazy. Those canoes are so expensive." Well, he

ended up saying he wouldn't take over \$300. [00:53:00] So I told the fellow that was running the store for me, I went back to Canada, and he brought it over. And he said, "Oh, it's a beautiful canoe. It's got high ends, and it's got the Grand Portage labels on it, and there's extra paddles, and an extra seat, and life vests, and everything. I said -- he gave him the \$300. So I went to a banker I knew up there, and I got a silver coin with a queen on one side and -- a silver dollar. And a [paddlers?] on the other. And it was the first year of the dollar gold coin they called a loonie. It had a loon on one side. And I got one of each of those. And I sent them to this fellow -- oh geez, where's my memory going. Anyway -- and he came back, all excited. He said, "I took that gold coin [00:54:00] -- gold colored coin -- and I had a pin soldered on the back, and I wear it on my lapel and everybody thinks it's gold. And they think I'm a rich bitch." (laughs) And then I had that -- when Janet took over the store, she didn't want that canoe, so I had it hanging in my shop next door. And then one day she came over. "Do you suppose we could get that canoe and hang it over the produce case?" So it's hanging over there now.

Q: Janet? Who is Janet?

STEARNS: Janet is my youngest daughter that has Hungry Jack's now.

Q: Oh, OK. OK. When did you get out of the business?

STEARNS: Oh, I got out in 1990. I retired after 35 years. And she took over. But she leased it from me. And she [sent?] me -- at first it was five, and [00:55:00] then as it got very successful I kept reducing the rent -- 5% of the gross. Then I think in the end it was only 2%, as -- growing in business. But anyway, she put that canoe up. And I have a sign on it, that it had belonged to the ranger at Moose and so forth. Superintendent of Boundary Waters. And it's not for sale. Some guy has pestered me three times: "When you get ready to sell that, let me know!" He's willing to pay all kinds of money for it. But...

Q: But it was decoration.

STEARNS: Pardon me?

Q: It was decoration. She didn't want to sell it.

STEARNS: No. And I said it's not -- the sign said it's not for sale. But...

Q: What's this community of Wilson like?

STEARNS: Well, Wilson is hard to say. There's a sign that I put up [00:56:00] -- it was there before they put the road through. And it says, "Population: 54." Well, with the outlying area, there's all kinds of -- I don't know. It

would be 300 or 400 now, at least. The brand new school, with that many kids in the school.

Q: Has it changed? The town?

STEARNS: Oh, yeah. It --

Q: People were, maybe -- I'll bet that people in those days were a little bit closer -- a little bit more friendly towards each other?

STEARNS: Well, and there were an awful lot of ranchers that came in. I sold oats and everything else to begin with. And maybe I'd have a \$50 day, and we would net about 3%. You can see what we'd make. But then, when Janet took over -- well, by that time I already had Sorel boots, which were a big item for us.

Q: What kind of boots? [00:57:00]

STEARNS: Sorel. Winter boots that are made in Canada, with rubber bottoms, and the tops are -- actually, these slippers were special made by Sorel. You can see...

Q: Yeah.

STEARNS: But the boots have a [lug?] sole and rubber up to about there, and then they're leather on up. And then they have a liner you can -- a felt liner you can pull out and dry and put another one in. So I sold a lot of those boots. It was a big item. And also, I would take a third on them. And the stores over town all took 40%. And --

one over there, especially, was good to us: Wyoming Outfitters. And the minute they ran out of a size, they'd send the customer out to us to get that size. And then [they?] put in -- of course, Carhartt pants. These are Carhartts. [00:58:00] They come in a blond and a black. I just put -- the black ones I got first, for up north. We had a forest fire go through that just missed our cabin, but anything it touched got black. So I got these black Carhartts that didn't show that.

Q: Did you know the mayor of Jackson, Abi Garaman?

STEARNS: No. Well, I always knew of him. He's quite a businessman, but... The present mayor -- he and two or three others OKed that Walgreens store.

Q: Dottie, we're about done here. You sure we're OK?

LINDSAY: Yeah. I've done more reading this morning than I've been able to do in ages. I love it.

Q: (laughs) OK.

STEARNS: Well, we went through our massage [00:59:00] and then we started in again.

Q: (laughs) So, you know the current mayor.

STEARNS: Well, he is not thought too well of. He -- just automatically OKed Walgreens. He and two or three others. And some resisted. And I wrote a letter to the editor. I said, "Here is another chain moving in. And all of their

profits are going outside of Wyoming to be spent, where they're across the ways, Stone Drug, a locally owned and operated store. And all of their profits are spent in Jackson or Jackson Hole. And they have been in business for 30 years, and there hasn't been a day they've been closed. You can -- on national holidays they were still open for at least five hours, so you can always fill your -- so I [01:00:00] actually wrote a letter against Walgreens coming in, in that respect.

Q: Isn't -- I took a drive down towards Hoback Junction and just past there, and back. And I was shocked at all the buildings and the houses and the trailers. Is Jackson Hole getting out of control?

STEARNS: Well, yes. But the problem with Jackson Hole is that it was discovered by the rich. The people that come in here and just build a second home or something and spend time here. They don't live here. And they -- they have set up different levels of society, where it used to be, you knew everybody in town and they were all just one friendly group. And now there's people that won't even speak to other people. The higher society groups.

[01:01:00] There's one fellow that actually was head of the land trust that I belonged to, when I was serving on it. And I asked him -- he was going to South America,

(inaudible), and I said, "Oh, what airline is it?" "Oh, I take my own plane." And later, he told me he took it -- he took his plane and flew to the west coast of Europe, got on his boat, went down the west coast of Europe, around in the Mediterranean, and then on down the west coast of Africa, and then across the south Atlantic there to South America, then had his pilot pick him up down there and fly him back. And there was a bank here that wasn't doing very -- that had a poor rating. And he bought the bank. And it's got a good rating [01:02:00] again now. It's right across from where that landslide is. But I asked the fellow, the stock broker, for me. I said, "Is there anybody that's got as much money as he has?" And he said, "Oh, there's all kinds of people like that." But that's part of the level that's moved in here. And now there's even quite a group of them that come here, and they'll operate their business out of an office in their house, but the business will be way back east or someplace else.

Q: Do you know [Jerry Spence]?

STEARNS: Yeah, Jerry is quite respected because he always represented the underdog. And he came in my store, and I got a call. They said, "There's a guy down here that wants a canoe." And I went down and sold him a canoe. It was Jerry Spence. And then [01:03:00] he was broadcasting in -

- what was it? Was it that famous murder of one of the basketball players, was it, or something? And I saw him in the airport in Salt Lake. And I said, "How are you doing, Jerry?" And he says, "Oh, I'm having a hell of a time. I've got a cold and I'm supposed to be broadcasting." But he really has retired, and built a new house down south a ways. I don't think he's around in the winter. But he always had a [respected?] living representing the underdog and fighting the insurance companies, that kind of thing.

Q: Yeah. He did a flip. He used to represent the insurance companies, and then he had a change of heart.

STEARNS: Yeah. The insurance companies...

Q: Yeah. Dick Cheney? Have you met him?

STEARNS: Who?

Q: Dick Cheney?

STEARNS: Well, no. I'm not a Republican and I'm down on Dick Cheney, frankly. [01:04:00] I figured he's -- as vice president he steered Bush all the way through. Bush didn't. And they went into Iraq. And it was proven they didn't have any weapons of mass destruction, but they still went in just for the oil. Cheney talked him into it. And they went in for the oil. And it's been that way, where Cheney was guiding him all the way through. And, of course, he has a home here. And when Bush was elected one

of those times, he said, "I gave Wyoming to Bush." Because he -- but what he didn't say, Teton County here, his own county, was the only county in the state that didn't go for Bush. We've got too many smart young people that see through what's going on. And then there's the girl that hauls Dottie around, real wonderful gal. [01:05:00] Just as a friend, because Dottie and I don't drive. And she lives right next door, up there, to Cheney's daughter that ran for politics.

Q: Liz?

STEARNS: Mm-hmm. And we had a -- what was that sticker?

Something about "Liz needs a Dick" or something like that. And I said, "You ought to slip next door and put one on the bumper." She said, "Oh, yeah, the Secret Service would have me right away, then."

Q: Are you a lifelong Democrat?

STEARNS: No, I've always been an independent voter. I voted for senior Bush, and I thought he did a real good job. I thought he was a great guy to have there. He knew what was going on, and he thought what was best for the country. And he did it. But so many of them, now, they just vote what the party does or what [01:06:00] somebody's paying them a lot of money to do.

Q: Were your parents Democrats or Republicans?

STEARNS: No, I think they were Republicans. I think my dad became quite a famous photographer, and he -- in Rochester. He was a friend of the Mayo brothers at the Mayo Clinic. And they would send him these patients to get their photographs taken. And he took Coolidge and Roosevelt, and all kinds of notable people. They came to his studio. And he had Jack Dempsey and Knute Rockne there together. And Jack had had an operation for varicose veins, and Knute for (inaudible). And they said, "How should we have our picture taken together?" And Jack says, "Let's have it taken looking at each other's operation." (laughter)

Q: Who was the photographer?

STEARNS: My dad was the photographer.

Q: What was his [01:07:00] name?

STEARNS: Clarence Stearns, senior. But he became very well-known. He was president of the Photographer's Association of America and made quite a name for himself.

Q: Did he know all the great old -- Steichen and Stieglitz and all those guys?

STEARNS: Mm-hmm.

Q: He did?

STEARNS: But of course, being a friend of the Mayo brothers -- especially Charlie Mayo was very friendly, and he would go out on their boat with them on the Mississippi. And Will

Mayo just lived a block from us. And I went back and my dad built our house -- it was out in the country then, in 1918. And I went back and it was just a block from Will Mayo's. From where he lived up on the hill. And in front of our house now, there's a plaque that says, "One of the historic homes on Pill hill." Because all the doctors live around there now.

Q: Pill hill? [01:08:00] That's pretty funny. So what did you -- what happened to your dad's collection?

STEARNS: Well, part of it is -- it sort of disappeared out of sight. And then I found out that the son of my dad's best friend has a lot of these photographs that were taken by my dad. And he's putting them into a museum back there in Zambrona.

Q: Did he use the wet plate or dry plate process?

STEARNS: Well, both, actually. Of course, in later days, it was different. And he had a developing business for Kodak film he worked awful hard at. They'd bring film in by five and he'd work real late at night and have prints out at nine in the morning. He'd dry them out on cloth.

Q: Did you have to help him?

STEARNS: No. He wanted me to [01:09:00] become a photographer, but I wasn't interested. All I did was polish the floors with a dry mop, and that kind of, so...

Q: Yeah, is that -- because of your photographic experience, or your dad's experience, is that how you got a job with Haynes?

STEARNS: Well, it was because of my dad having worked for Jack Haynes. I mean, he worked for F.J. Haynes, the father, but then Jack was running the business in -- out of St. Paul. So my dad took me up there and introduced me and got me started at work there. But that was just selling photographs and film.

Q: Did your dad work with F.J. Haynes? Or did F.J. Haynes, did you say, hired your dad?

STEARNS: Yes. He worked for F.J. Haynes. And at that time, [01:10:00] F.J. had the photo business, three shops -- as I mentioned, one at Canyon, one at Mammoth, and one at Old Faithful. And Jack, the son, ran the one at Old Faithful, and my dad ran the one at Mammoth. And the one at Canyon by somebody else. But Jack had quite a sense of humor, and temper, too. But he -- I remember he was on the phone, one day, and they put him on hold. And [Doug?] that ran the warehouse and I were standing there in the doorway and all the sudden he got mad and he hit himself on the head with the phone. And then, on the other hand, he was working at his desk one day and he was getting upset, and breaking pencils, and the secretary was standing there, and he

dropped something on the floor and bent over, and then sat up and said, "Did you kick me?" He had a real sense of humor. [01:11:00] And then this -- he told me about this guy out -- running the shop at Canyon at that time, when he was in charge, Jack was in charge -- and the guy brought in some film to be developed. And the guy accidentally exposed it. And the guy was sore as hell. And he was going into Mammoth to see Jack. And he called Jack, the guy that ran the shop, and told him what happened, so Jack knew he was coming. And he said that he saw the guy drive up out in front. He came through to the inner office, and came right in to where Jack's hallway led to Jack's -- was right there. Jack looked up and he said, "Take your hat off! Nobody wears their hat in my office." And that -- [stunned?] the guy right there. Then Jack offered to haul him all around the park, [01:12:00] taking photographs, but he ended up giving him a whole bunch of the famous photographs.

Q: Oh. Now, your dad didn't work in the park. You worked in the park.

STEARNS: Well, my dad worked there in [18, 19, or, about 1905?], through there, for F.J. Haynes.

Q: Oh. Was he taking pictures for F.J.?

STEARNS: Yeah. And running the photo shop at Mammoth.

Q: Well, so some of those F.J. Haynes pictures were your dad's, do you think?

STEARNS: Well, not many of them, I don't think. But... He just, more or less, sold them, you might say. But Jack Haynes used to tell me about -- my dad had a [particular?] walk. He said, "I can just picture him walking across the walk in the park, there. Going over." But, of course, that was where my dad met my mother when she was singing there...

Q: [01:13:00] In the park?

STEARNS: Yeah.

Q: I suppose more than one couple met in the park.

STEARNS: Mm-hmm.

Q: Had a romance in the park.

STEARNS: Yeah, in fact -- of course, that was the very early days. And everybody seemed to like my mother. And there's one place in her diary, said, "Had dinner with Teddy last night." Which was Teddy Roosevelt. That was going through... Of course, he was responsible for setting up Yellowstone. But...

Q: Yeah. I suppose Hiram Chittenden was ahead of your day. Chittenden?

STEARNS: Yes, although I've got a book by him right up there.

Q: On the fur trade?

STEARNS: On Chittenden.

Q: On the park?

STEARNS: Yes, mm-hmm. And then there's that famous Chittenden Bridge across the Yellowstone, going to the falls of the Yellowstone.

Q: And there's Chittenden Locks up in Seattle, [01:14:00] where you can watch salmon going up river. Or from one level to the other. But he was an engineer and a historian.

STEARNS: What was it? I heard on the news the other day, about one of those dams had a crack in it, and they were worried about it. But...

Q: Uh huh. Well, listen. We have gone on and on and on. Do you know how long we've talked?

STEARNS: Pardon me?

Q: Do you know how long we've talked?

STEARNS: No.

Q: Over three hours.

STEARNS: Oh. Well, when it comes to war stories, it seems like the older you get, the more you tell. There's a guy that is a computer expert down here, has a lot of computer inventions. He's got a contract with the Marines scientific branch right now. It's interested [01:15:00] in one of his projects. Another guy that has a [Swiss

chalet?] down there that was president, or he was vice president, of the chemical company. And when I saw his house plans, he said, oh, his wife's in Japan! And she works for Corning Glass! She's vice president of Corning Glass. And the next thing I knew, it became Dow Corning Glass company. And then they had an open house -- well, first I said to him, "You're going to be ready for a lot of money when you retire for inventing this silicon they're using on all the airplanes." "Oh, I am retired," he said. And then his wife was in Japan showing them how to run the business the American way for Corning. And she was back at the open house. [01:16:00] And I said, "Well, it's going to be nice when you re--" "Oh, I am retired. I just retired." So they must be worth a lot of money. But it's the nicest looking house in Jackson Hole. It's a Swiss chalet. And they -- they like hiking and skiing and getting out and really appreciating the country.

Q: This is a Swiss chalet, isn't it?

STEARNS: It's the last house on the left before you turn off this road.

Q: Last -- OK.

STEARNS: Right across from the Heidelberg, on the left side.

Q: OK. This house is a Swiss chalet.

STEARNS: No. This is just a modified A frame.

Q: You built this?

STEARNS: Yeah. Well, the architects had this A frame, and it said how to build a house for \$5000 and I didn't have any money. Of course, I changed it a lot. Like, I built that overhang so it would have some depth. [01:17:00] And then all the upstairs windows were thrown off. They just don't go to a peak. But they go in at odd angles, which gives it some character. And then I added these windows so we didn't have tunnel vision all the time out here. Of course, in the wintertime there's a tunnel there of ice that comes off the roof.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. You know, Lindsay -- this girl that came in to give you exercise and stretching -- she told me that you hadn't told -- you tell these stories about World War II. But she said that last mission -- you were on your last mission when your plane got shot down.

STEARNS: Yeah. They were -- see, they were -- when they were pro-rated, they were supposed to be 30 missions, but they were pro-rated. And being I had 20 in at the time, I just had to fly one extra one, or 26. And [01:18:00] -- of course, Schweinfurt was a mission. The ball bearing plants were pretty important. And so I flew 25 and a half and got shot down on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

Q: What do you think about that?

STEARNS: Well, I think Doolittle is responsible for my getting shot down, because he raised the missions. But no, it was -- it was a mistake, in a way, in that they put so many substitute people in on my plane, too. The bombardier and navigator and the radio operator and...

Q: Why was that a mistake?

STEARNS: Because another crew, they were behind the crew in the number of missions and they wanted to build up their missions to catch up with their other crew.

Q: But if you'd had your original crew, what would the difference have been?

STEARNS: No, it wouldn't have made any difference. It just would have been -- see, I ended up [01:19:00] with prison -- living with the navigator and the bombardier that weren't part of my crew at all.

Q: Oh. What did she -- Lindsay also told me something about how you corresponded with people back home.

STEARNS: Oh, yeah. Well, I would write -- we were permitted a letter a month. And in order to let them know where I was, I would change the middle initial of my dad every month. So for Barth on the Baltic I'd put a B in, and an A in the next letter. So they'd know where I was. And... but yeah, that was kind of funny. And then, of course, the first report was just missing in action. And they were worried

until they found out -- the War Department, I guess, let them know I was a prisoner of war [01:20:00] and wasn't dead.

Q: Yeah, that must have been tough on them.

STEARNS: Mm-hmm. Well now, I suppose it was even tougher on this air commander, who -- I didn't know -- I guess the War Department probably notified them I was killed. But it was...

Q: Well, did you -- you never stepped foot in a B-17 after that, except for that one incident you told me about.

STEARNS: Well, not in combat, but getting my flying time in. I flew them in the States here when I was in the Air Force. I'd just fly one up to Scott Field for the weekend, just getting my flight time in.

Q: After the war?

STEARNS: Yeah. Let's see. I stayed in for a year, and...

Q: Did you ever get injured?

STEARNS: No. I was very lucky. Because we were shot up badly, many times. [01:21:00] There was one time a piece of flack came right up between the pilot and the copilot, through the floor, and went out through the roof. And there were planes -- we were shot up. I came in once, back to England, and our hydraulics were all shot off. And I knew I didn't have any brakes, so I waited for all the other

planes to get in, land first, because I didn't know what was going to happen. Then we landed on this runway. But there was a road across here where the limies used to line up and watch us coming in. And I waited for all the other planes, and then we cranked the flaps down and we were flying along like this, and then way out, I had the copilot signal with the light, "No brakes." And I said, "No, wait until we get up close! I need the practice." Well, all these [01:22:00] limies lined up were just running like crazy. And we came in and touched down. I rolled to the end of the runway and ran up the outboard engine and spun around and just hit a pile of dirt and broke a little glass under the bottom turret. But that's all the harm it did. Of course, there were other times -- there was a time, going in, that I lost the controls and had a [runway prop?]. And the bombardier had had it happen before and wanted to jump out over France. And I said -- the nose was all shaking, the whole plane was shaking so, with this [flap?] whirling around. And I said, "No, stay with us. I think we can make it." And I got him out of the nose in case the prop broke. And then it would get so hot it would freeze. [01:23:00] And everything would be quiet and peaceful. Then it'd cool down and break loose again. So I went into [Manston?], which was the closest point to

France. And there was a runway there, but it had been shelled by the Germans, and they were landing on the grass alongside the British spitfires. And there were Polish flyers flying them. But anyway, I landed in there. And then, the minute we landed, we always cut the inboards and taxied with the outboards. And I cut the inboard and the limey came running out. And he said, "Geez, you lost the other one right after you landed." But we took all the weight out of the plane, then, and the crew went back by truck, and I -- the copilot and I took it off there on three engines, then [threw?] it back to [01:24:00] our base. And -- but these Polish flyers were bitter, reckless fighters. Boy, they would get an alert, and they'd run out and jump in their planes and down the [swale?], and up they'd go after the enemy that had been reported coming in.

Q: They did not like the Germans.

STEARNS: No, they hated them. Of course, they had invaded Poland, and --

Q: Yeah. So when you say inboard and outboard, the inboards are the two inside engines?

STEARNS: Yeah.

Q: And the outboards are the outside.

STEARNS: Mm-hmm.

Q: OK.

STEARNS: It was the inboard that got hit, too, that was on fire when we had to -- when I got shot down.

Q: Go ahead and have a sip of that. It's been two hours.  
(pause) Before I leave here, I want to know how those Germans treated you in that prisoner of war camp. Did you say there were some that were good and some that weren't so good? [01:25:00]

STEARNS: Mm-hmm. Well, we were lucky, because there were those two -- the one that had been a pilot for Pan American Airways -- he was one of them, a Hauptmann, a captain, that was in charge of guarding us. And then there was the one that had been a sculpture in New York and had a daughter born in Orange. Just got caught over there somehow. So we had pretty good respect for them. Mutual respect. But then there were others -- I remember there was one that had been a hairdresser in London, and we hated his guts. If he saw we had more than five bed boards, he'd take one, and that kind of sucked.

Q: So there was such a thing as a Nazi. A true Nazi, who -- in the worst sense of the term.

STEARNS: Yeah. But this book I told you about [01:26:00] -- the author was -- first, he saw this bomber pilot in Florida, in Miami. And then he said, "You go interview this fighter pilot, German fighter pilot, first." And the

author was afraid to see him because he had never talked to a Nazi before. Well, it turned out this fighter pilot and his father weren't Nazis at all. They were flying for Germany but not for Hitler. So he ended up having a -- they spent a whole year researching this book, and... So...

Q: Yeah. Well, you were -- this Barth place on the Baltic was way away from Goering and Hitler and all of his kind of -- you know, all of his cronies.

STEARNS: Mm-hmm. But it also tells in there -- [the?]

[01:27:00] Goering that was head of the German Air Force. But he favored the fighters. And he was on drugs and everything else, and did a horrible job of running the German Air Force, and would give support to the fighters but nothing to the bombers. I'm going to look for something over here, just a minute.

Q: OK. (pause)

STEARNS: He spoke English, and he said we could get a hotel room, or you can live in my house, or something. And we knew he'd feel hurt if we didn't stay with him. So we stayed with him. And he said, "There's a fellow down here by where your plane crashed -- he didn't want to [01:28:00] meet with you at first, but I think he will." So we went down there, and it turned out, this fellow was ten years

old at the time. A boy. And his father, I think, was a policeman, and possibly one of those that captured me. Maybe he was afraid of me. But he lived over his cabinet shop, and he had a beautiful garden across the way with flowers. And it was April, and nice. And his wife had fixed coffee and three fancy desserts. And she was all dressed up. And Dottie told us -- a schoolteacher -- asked her if her husband sent her to Paris to get her clothes. And it was quite a -- laughter. Of course, he didn't speak English and I didn't speak German, but we had the friendliest vibes [01:29:00] between us. And when we got ready to leave, he gave me a piece of my plane, full of bullet holes. And the schoolteacher wanted to know if he could have half of it. I said, "Sure," so he sawed it in half. And he took half. And then he -- when I got back to the States, about a month later, he sent me this photograph of a couple that was married at the time. And her wedding dress was made out of my parachute.

Q: Really?

STEARNS: Yes. (laughs)

Q: I'll be darned. Who are these -- these people that found your plane, who are they?

STEARNS: Well, there was this young lad that -- well, the one that knew where it was was the schoolteacher that had done

research and knew of several planes that had crashed in the relative area. [01:30:00] In fact, also a B-51 that (inaudible; overlapping dialogue) --

Q: Did anybody save anything off -- I mean, apart from what you saved? Or that you were given?

STEARNS: I don't know, because -- it was interesting. First, a guy in Rochester, New York called me, and he said, "I think I got a picture of your plane after it crashed." And I said to myself, "Well, that's impossible, because it blew up." But he sent me this picture. It's just of one engine cell with a bent prop. And right alongside there it says [Rum Pot?]; that was the name of the plane. I hadn't named it, but somebody else had.

Q: How do you spell that? Rum Pot?

STEARNS: R-U-M-P-O-T.

Q: OK.

STEARNS: Anyway... I was just looking... I had a picture of that couple who -- maybe it's back on [01:31:00] my desk.

Q: Well, let's -- I'm going to wrap this up. Is that all right?

STEARNS: Sure.

Q: OK.

END OF AUDIO PART 2