A Veterans Oral History

Heritage Education Commission
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Marshall Moore
Narrator

Linda Jenson
Interviewer

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LJ: Please state your name and your branch of military.

MM: **I'm Marshall Moore and I served in the U. S. Air Force.**

LJ: What year did you go into the Air Force?

MM: **My first contact with the Air Force was with the North Dakota Air National Guard in 1947.**

LJ: I just want to backtrack. First of all, I want to ask where were you were born and raised?

MM: **I was born in Forbes, North Dakota, but moved to Fargo before I started school. Attended grade school, high school and graduated from Fargo Central and then went on and graduated from North Dakota Agricultural College, which is now North Dakota State University.**

LJ: What was it like at that time in your life to go into . . . ?

MM: **At that time we were very accustomed to the draft because when I was in junior high school and high school, we got into World War II. During that period of World War II, I had uncles drafted, I had a brother drafted. And all of us were very accustomed to that was the mode of transportation. When I graduated from high school, the draft was still on, if you didn't continue to college, you'd have been drafted into the military.**

I went to NDSU but at that time, North Dakota State, which was Ag-AC, required freshmen and sophomores to take military training under ROTC

program. Every male student had to do it and I don't know when they quit doing that, but they don't do it, anyway. So the first two years you were committed to take those military classes.

LJ: And that was right on campus?

MM: **That was right on campus.**

LJ: After you got done with your two years on campus with that training, where did you go?

MM: **I chose to take Advanced ROTC, which goes on through your junior and senior year; but requires you're committed to go into the either the Army or the Air Force. I was committed when I took Advanced ROTC to go into the Air Force when I graduated from college. You receive your commission, when you graduated, as a second lieutenant; and then I went from college to pilot training right out of college.**

LJ: Where did you go for your pilot training?

MM: **I went to pilot training in Malden, Missouri, which is a small town right down in the Bootheel of Missouri on the base that had been used as a glider pilot training base during World War II. It was just reopened when I went there for basic training and flight training. There was a real push to add pilots to the Air Force because of the Korean War, so they were opening bases and adding schools and so forth.**

LJ: What was that flight training like?

MM: **It was interesting, because I'd never flown an airplane before in my life when I went so it was quite intense. You were always in fear of being washed out. If you didn't either perform in ground school or in the air, why you were gone in a hurry.**

LJ: A lot of pressure.

MM: **Yes.**

LJ: What was it like that first solo flight?

MM: **Well, I guess it was so long enough ago that I don't remember; but I'm sure it was fairly nervous. It was a great feeling once you got up and got down.**

LJ: Got up and got down safely.

MM: **Yes.**

LJ: Did you realize at that time how dangerous it was?

MM: **I doubt it very much. As you look back and I think we all need to understand that the military, whether it's the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, whether it be in war or non-wartime, perform some fairly dangerous tasks and are using cutting-edge equipment. As equipment changed they've got new equipment … always had bugs in it. We should appreciate our military people whether they were in during civilian – during non-war time or peace time or cold war time or what; in other words some of the chances that they took. And most of that's because most of the people are young, so they don't really think about some of the chances they're taking until later.**

LJ: What was the very first aircraft that you flew?

MM: **It was a North American AT-6, which was a radial engine, fairly powerful single engine plane with two seats. The instructor would be in the backseat and the student in the front seat under normal conditions, and that's where you learn to fly.**

LJ: How did the planes change in your course of your career, obviously technology?

MM: **We had a dramatic change before we even got through flying school because the first six months of your pilot training was basic, which was ground school and with the AT-6. My second six months or the second half of the year before you graduate, I went to Williams Air Force Base at Phoenix, Arizona, which is now private. It's closed and is a private base – Allegiant flies in, if you're familiar with that.**

And then we trained. We started, initially, there again on the T-6 for the first six weeks, and then we transitioned into F-80s, which is a jet. F-80 really the first commercially built jets in mass numbers of them. So it was new and it was exciting, and that was the aircraft of the day.

LJ: What was your military training like? I mean obviously it was intense but were there good friendships forged during that time?

MM: **Oh, sure. You met a lot of people for a short period of time. Then in the military, you scatter in a hurry because we didn't all go to the same place. About half the people in basic went to single-engine jets and the other half**

went to multi-engine, so half the people you knew there left. When we finished and went to Williams and finished our final flight training, then we scattered more than that.

As we finished pilot training and got our wings, that's at the time a great feeling that you made it through. You were selected to go to different locations and most of the pilots at that time went to either Luke Air Force Base in Phoenix or Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas to either F-84s or F-86s for gunnery, and then we would proceed to Korea.

There were about 10 of us that were selected to go to different locations and some of it was because of our academic achievement and some of it was because there were different options that we could take. We thought we were going to go to F-89s but that didn't work, so we ended up going to Moody Air Force Base in Albany, Georgia, for instrument training to learn how to fly when you can't see the ground. We spent six weeks there and then we went to Tyndall Air Force Base at Panama City, Florida, for our air-to-ground gunnery and then we scattered from there. I'm not sure that there were more than one or two of my class from flying school who were with me. We all got scattered. We went to Turner Air Force Base in Georgia to the Strategic Air Command to further train for their mission.

The primary mission after about the first year I was there was to fly aircraft and carry an atomic bomb to targets selected in Russia. This was during the Cold War, which was during the Eisenhower administration. At that time, we didn't have all these small conflicts going around the world. It was the USSR and the United States opposing. I suppose we were both preparing and daring the other one that they'd better not start something. And, fortunately, it didn't happen, as those things happen. As I think history has shown us, in other words, that when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it ended that war. I don't think anyone wanted to start another one with an atomic bomb but each one, I suppose, thought that if we weren't prepared and they probably knew that we were preparing, as well as we probably knew they were preparing, then it wouldn't happen. So we were the deterrent.

This was in the time when we didn't have the technology yet to send a missile, either air-to-ground or air-to-air, which now in North Dakota we know we've had missiles. In fact, they're almost obsolete now but we were going to do it with flying an airplane carrying the bomb, just like they did at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, drop it, and then return.

Our particular mission was to fly to Norway, if the call came. There the ordnance we pick up the bomb, two airplanes; one airplane was to fly cover.

In other words, would be available to go up because we were going in low level. We fly at 500 feet about 500 miles an hour, into the bomb target site that we had, drop the bomb and then we would return to the Baltic. We were too far from Norway to where our target was in Russia to go with fuel that we had aboard so we had to in-flight refuel between Norway and Russia, drop the bomb. We needed to have those in-flight refueling airplanes there, on the way back, in order to make it back to Norway.

LJ: What's that like? That sounds so very dangerous, in-flight refueling?

MM: **I don't think at that time you even think about that. Remember General Doolittle in a famous flight that really started the end of the war in Japan was when they went off aircraft carriers with B-25s. I'm not sure that they knew that they were going to get these airplanes off the carriers because of the power. Flew to Japan, dropped their bombs and then had to go into China because they couldn't make it back. First of all, they couldn't land on a ship, but a B-25 couldn't land on a ship and there was nowhere else, so they went into China and ditched or landed. They had a much riskier thing than we're talking about. We planned that those refueling airplanes would be there on the way back.**

If not we were supposed to look at all the options, one to go into Finland, which you might not make with the fuel, the other would be to go into a landing field in East Germany or in Russia and take the chance you had or ditch in the Baltic, ditch in the sea, or bail out or hopefully get close enough to someplace on the other side, on the west side that you could bail out and make it.

LJ: None of the options were really great were they?

MM: **Well I guess you always thought that those airplanes would be there to refuel you on the way back. I mean you, that was what you had to plan on happening. It was interesting and I don't think I mentioned it before but in our training for the mission, we went to a secure top-secret site. And we weren't supposed to tell anybody any of the information about our mission, what our target was, where it was, and so forth. And we didn't know the targets of anybody else in the squadron, just the two of us, which target we had.**

If you think back about it now, this gave us a signal that maybe it was going to be dangerous when they each had to select a poem that we would memorize. If we did get captured and were in a prison, when we wrote back to family we should take a line out of that poem and intercede it into the

letter someplace so they could identify who we were and where we were if that was the only information they had.

Yes, I can remember a couple of lines in the poem, it was interesting. They also wanted us to write to someplace, a post office box in New York if we couldn't do anything else. If they wouldn't let us write to our family, try to write an anonymous letter to this post office box and that was the things they had. We had survival training. We were sent to Stead Air Force Base to take survival training and taught us how to be interrogated and so forth or taught us what we should do if we were interrogated. That was our primary mission.

The bomb was about twice the size of the bomb that was dropped at Hiroshima or Nagasaki, certainly powerful enough to do a tremendous amount of damage. You went in at low level, threw it up in the air, and then it came back, and you reversed your direction and were hopefully four or five miles away from the blast before the bomb came down.

Our other missions along with that, our squadron and wing had an air-defense capability commitment in Japan so we would rotate people over for 90 days in Japan. I spent 90 days in the northern edge Japan flying air defense and this was right towards the tail end of the Korean War. The Korean War hadn't been settled, but it was starting to quiet down … I never was actually in Korea. But we flew air defense in the northern island which isn't a long ways away. The Russians had airplanes in the tail end of the Aleutians, the part of the Aleutian chain that still belongs to Russia. It doesn't belong to us. Those airplanes we could see on a clear day, taking off and then we'd go home and they'd come back. They'd come back on a cloudy day over the ocean. Our radar would pick them up and they'd scramble us and we'd take off. By the time we got in the air, they were gone home. So sort of a cat and mouse game, just to keep the other guy awake.

LJ: Checking on each other.

MM: **Checking on each other and letting them know that we're there. They did – not in our tour, but they did in one of the tours, they intercepted I think it was a Russian photo reconnaissance airplane over Japan and they chased them out of there.**

LJ: So what was the time like? You said 90 days in Japan. What was that like post World War II with the relations that we had with Japan?

MM: **The relations with Japan were really great. In other words, the people of Japan, once Hirohito surrendered, he told the people of Japan to stand down.**

This was 1953, so this was seven years after the surrender, there was no problem with civilian population. The civilian Japanese, who maintained the base that we were on, did the laundry for the base and came in and did all the maintenance in the barracks. The base we stayed at in Japan, which was Misawa Air Force Base, was a Japanese kamikaze base.

Now I don't know whether everybody knows about a kamikaze pilot. That was a Japanese pilot that was taught how to take off but didn't know how to land and they were actually just a guided missile. They were the guidance for the missile and they were flown out and attacked many of our ships. In other words, they were just a flying bomb. It was a one-way trip.

LJ: Like a suicide bomber.

MM: **That's right. That's exactly what it was. That's the same as the suicide bombers we have carrying them, only they were sitting in their airplane … flying into the ships. If you see the photos of World War II, you see a lot of them. They were taken from ships. They took the pictures of those. It was supposed to be sort of the cream-of-the-cream basis, because they treat them real well when they're going to be sacrificed for their country. To us it was an all right base but it wasn't . . .**

Saw my, heard my, felt my first earthquake there.

LJ: What magnitude did it turn out to be?

MM: **Oh, it was nothing. It was just a tremor but it wasn't a tremor to me because my bed. I remember woke up my bed was jumping up and down.**

LJ: Oh, scary.

MM: **So . . .**

LJ: The local people were good people?

MM: **The local people in Japan were very kind to all the U.S. service men. They were very good at a lot of crafts. A lot of people bought a lot of things over there and brought it back … a lot of souvenirs.**

LJ: So after 90 days in Japan, then where were you given orders?

MM: **Then I came back to Georgia and continued our mission – sitting ready for our mission, in case we had a confrontation with Russia and we would have**

to move to that next [unclear]. Fortunately, I think there were more than one of these type operations going. I don't know how many. I have no idea because we weren't privy to that as to how many wings or how many airplanes they have ready and how many bombs they have ready to go in action.

The bombs weren't on our base. They were going to be transported to Norway or were already in Norway, which we didn't know and so that is the way it went. I went to Las Vegas to school on the weapons so I knew all the technical things about the weapon and how to arm it and how to disarm it.

LJ: What was the last plane you flew?

MM: **The F-84F, which was the swept-wing version of the 84. It was supposed to be out and ready to go into Korea. But because of some things about the engine which I don't know about, they couldn't ever get it on line to fly until later on, so we got it after the Korean War was really over. It was at that time, a fairly fast airplane but it didn't stay in the inventory very long because there were newer airplanes that came out that superseded it. So they moved some of those to the National Guard or they moved some of those to our European allies.**

They changed airplanes a lot faster during that period of the '50s, than they do now because the things in the jet aircraft were advancing so fast that one was obsolete before it was finished being built.

As we went to jet, mostly now all the airliners are jet aircraft, either jet with a prop, turboprop or pure jet. Prior to that time, they were still mostly prop commercial aviation, until a little later than that.

LJ: So in that last plane that you were trained to fly in, what was the speed on that?

MM: **I suppose we would cruise somewhere between 450 and 500 miles an hour. It would go through the sound barrier but only when you pointed the nose down and went through. It wasn't supersonic, which like a lot of the future ones have been, but it was at that time it was a pretty fast aircraft.**

LJ: What happened when did you leave the military?

MM: **I left the military in November of 1955. Then went to Wisconsin and worked for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation for five years and then moved back to Fargo.**

LJ: Then you started a business in Fargo?

MM: **Started a business with my brother, who was also a pilot in the Air National Guard and also a civil engineer. We started Moore Engineering Incorporated. It started in Fargo and now is in West Fargo.**

LJ: Wonderful. Do you still have any contact or reunions with military people?

MM: **No, I've looked for reunions but I had never seen one with any of the outfit. Probably somewhere I missed one of our flying school class. I remember, my wife mentioned that one of the ground officers who contacted me. He went on the Internet and found my name and called me here a couple of years ago. None of the others I have had any contact with. We all left piecemeal because one would leave here [unclear] anything, left and went home and we were from all over the country.**

LJ: Well that's too bad. You hear about that on the news.

MM: **I've gone on the Internet looking for a couple of people and I haven't found them yet. I think I should go on the Air Force Reserve one and see if I can find it.**

LJ: How did you feel about leaving the military after all those years?

MM: **I left in Wisconsin, I had a partial intent that I would to retire in the Air Force. I received a regular commission out of the Air Force, which was a little different than most. I was a distinguished student out of college so I had a commission that was equivalent of West Point or a naval academy. My number was a different numbering system than the others in the Air Force.**

LJ: That's amazing.

MM: **Well it was amazing that I didn't catch on for a while after I was in then. When they saw my serial number, they automatically gave me extra duties, because they thought that I was a West Point or naval graduate.**

So you got assigned some extra duties just because they wanted to make you work a little harder, so I didn't catch on to that for a while. I left because I was in the outfit and we were gone a lot. I had a family then and I was just gone more than I wanted to be, so I decided it was time to, you know?

LJ: So from the time you started to the time you left the military, how many years was that?

MM: **I joined the National Guard originally in 1947. Then got out of the National Guard because of ROTC, and went into active duty until 1955, from 1951 until 1955. Then joined the Air Force Reserve until about 1962 when I was back to Fargo, I went back into the Air National Guard until about 1975; and served about three years in the Selective Service Reserve, which was the part of the service that handled the draft. There wasn't any draft, but they still had a small cadre of Selective Service Reserve prepared, if they instituted the draft to take it over.**

The one duty we got was when Ford had the amnesty program for those people who went to Canada. They sent us out to review those people to see whether they were following up with their commitment that was to be when they came back to get the amnesty. In North Dakota we didn't have any, so I went to Michigan and a couple of the other people from the Fargo unit went to New York; and it was an interesting time.

LJ: You put in a lot of years.

MM: **Yes, so then I retired, I think in about 197 from the reserve. I had my 20 good active years for retirement so I receive a military retirement.**

LJ: Wonderful. Good for you.

MM: **Plus also I receive a medical benefit called TRICARE, which is a supplement to Medicare.**

LJ: Good for you. That's great.

MM: **They promised that to the military people in the 1950s and it didn't come about until about the year 2002.**

LJ: A long time.

MM: **We didn't believe it when they told us. When we went to the Grand Forks Air Force Base to hear the instructions on it and they said you can just drop your other coverage. We didn't believe that for a while but it's a great benefit.**

LJ: Good for you. Well deserving.

MM: **Yes, well, I think that I got a lot of wonderful experiences from the military and certainly whether I deserve the benefits or not why it's.**

LJ: Good for you.

MM: **And there are a lot of other benefits that I got from this country other than that.**

LJ: Any final stories or thoughts that you want to leave with us?

MM: **Well, I guess, anybody who's listening, I'd like them to be particularly proud of the country [unclear]. Be proud of the military and to be proud of all the military people whether they be in during civilian times or wartime, peacetime or whatever it might be because they made some sacrifices and they certainly take some risks.**

I have a grandson that just got out of the 82nd Airborne. He probably saw more risks than I saw during my tenure. He spent a tour in Afghanistan and so you never know what period of time. And he did it voluntarily. There was no draft. No pressure. He did it because he chose it and that's what he wanted to do. And that's a wonderful part of right now. All of our forces are purely voluntary. Some of us, we think we went in voluntary, but we had a little pressure there that if we didn't do what we do, we might get drafted.

LJ: Right.

MM: **So. . .**

LJ: Well God bless them all.

MM: **Yes.**

LJ: Marshall, how would you like to be remembered?

MM: As a good father and family person.

LJ: That's great.

MM: **Yes**.

LJ: That is the best. Well, thank you very much for your time and for your story.

MM: **Okay, well thank you.**