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KURT HEILBRONN

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Kurt Heilbronn
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This is an oral history interview with Mr. Kurt Heilbronn at his home in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania on the ninth of March, 1993. The interviewer is Mack Teasley of the Eisenhower Library.

MR. TEASLEY: I'll just start by asking you to indicate where you were born, when you were born and when you came to the states.

MR. HEILBRONN: All right, I was born in Germany in 1910, December 28th to Louis and Matilda Heilbronn. My father was a butcher, and I had a brother, Paul, who was four years older, and the years spent in Germany were enjoyable, until the era began where I noticed that I was somehow treated differently. Later around the ages of eight and nine years old, I learned that being of a different religion was not acceptable in Germany at that time. It was pretty tough to spend a happy youth from there on. My father saw that the era of Germany, after the first World War, was turning toward something other than a country that would tolerate certain groups of people. He had the foresight to see things going from bad to worse. My mother had a sister in America, and we wrote to her. She sent all the necessary papers, and in 1924 we all came to America via Cuxhafen, near Hamburg. We came over on a ship, came over to America. We brought most of all of our household goods with us, and some of them are still here in my home, and they're approaching the hundred-year mark.

We landed in New York, on the S.S. Hamburg, on Memorial Day, of all things. The funny thing was, my uncle and aunt were there to receive us, and when we came onto the dock, I asked my uncle why all the flags were out in America? "Why all these flags?" He said, "That's because we told them that you were coming from

Germany." [Laughter] Later on, I found out that it wasn't so.

So we came to Philadelphia, originally, and lived with my aunt and uncle for about, oh, I would say almost a year, until, my father and brother had jobs. My mother was taking care of a household. I found a job in a bakery where my brother was working, wrapping bread on a night shift, and happily making money. One night a truant officer came and informed me, through a interpreter, that I had to stop working because I was underage, and I had to go to school. And so, I went to a school for foreign children, of all sorts, and no one spoke any English except the teacher. I stayed there, until I think it used to be at sixteen years you could stop going to school, and then I resumed work. We needed to work because, funds were essential.

And as soon as possible then, I went into a candy factory, and I learned the candy business, and became a candy maker. I worked there, I don't remember exactly the amount of years, but I would say seven or eight years. Then I realized that I didn't want to work for people all my life, so I borrowed some money, and I went into the candy business and started a candy store of my own. My brother went in with me. He ran the store, and my mother helped me with the candy making and the preparations. As we progressed, and got a little more solvent, I decided that in my spare time I should do something. A friend of mine who had a paint store had an airplane, an airplane with the open cockpit. He took me up to a place called Sommerton Airport, which was owned by a German fellow by the name of Ernst Buhl. He took me along on a flight while he

was taking pictures, and gave me the airplane saying, "This is what you do, turn left, and hold it straight." I then knew this was what I wanted to do, rather than be a candy maker and have all the grievances with customers who complain about this wasn't right and that wasn't right. So, I pursued the aviation career, and soloed after approximately ten hours and

Q: Do you remember what year that would have been? When you soloed? You've got it in your log somewhere.

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, 1938, somewhere it's in the logbook, I don't exactly know the date.

Q: But around 1938?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes. I soloed, and then, of course, after soloing, by that time I had the disease of wanting to just continue flying. I found several fellows who were in the same boat as I was, money-wise. We pooled our resources and bought an airplane from Ernie, it was a Fairchild 22, an open cockpit airplane. We shared the expenses, and gradually worked our way up into a private license, which gave us the chance to take up friends, but nothing for hire, because you have to have a commercial license for that. To get a commercial license, you had to accumulate, I believe it was 250 hours. After we attained that, why then, of course, we took people, here and there, made money, and paid for the airplane.

Then it got to be to the point where we got into the conflict with Europe. In 1940, I got a letter from the government that

said, "We are giving free instructions in your area at the DuPont Airport which you can sign up for. The government will pay for it, and you can get your instructors rating, and your commercial license." I immediately grabbed it, took all the necessary tests, and went down to Wilmington, Delaware, x amount of times. I think it was two or three times a week. We pooled a car, and we drove down, which in those days was quite a feat, because we didn't have the highways as we do today. We went through the pilot training down there, and all of us passed our instructors ratings and commercials. And, lo and behold, nothing is for free, is it? In 1942, when we went into the war, entered the European conflict, I got another letter from Uncle Sam, it said, "Now that we have paid for your training as a flight instructor, and a commercial pilot, we want you to pay us back by being an instructor for us in a primary school. You are to report to Bennettsville, South Carolina on such and such a date to take a flight check in an PT-17, a Steerman. If you pass this, you will be assigned as an instructor pilot to teach cadets to fly." And that's what happened.

I took my flight test with Lieutenant Jepson, a navy pilot, and I never will forget when we got up in the air and did all the things he wanted me to do. We would get up to about, I think it was 5,000 feet or something like that, and he'd call back and say, "Have you ever been on your back?" I said, "No," and he said, "You're about to be on now." With that he slow-rolled the airplane, stopped it on its back, and I grabbed everything in sight, I thought I was going to fall out. But we had chutes on,

and, of course, strapped in. That was my first indoctrination into acrobatic flying, combat flying. He did slow rolls, snap rolls, and loops and Cuban eights, and you name it, everything in the book. By the time I got back on the ground I was as green as the grass. But that disappeared later on.

Q: Had you become a citizen prior to this?

MR. HEILBRONN: Oh, yes. Yes. Oh yes, I became a citizen in the allowed time, I think it was five years after being in the country. And I couldn't wait to be a citizen.

Q: So that was sometime before. So when you tested out, then did you get sent off to a school for training?

MR. HEILBRONN: No, the training was done right in Bennettsville. An instructor pilot then took you over and gave you the "how-to teach the cadets" and what they should learn and how to evaluate what they were doing. You had to go through that test to learn the procedures, and that took a week of intensive flying. Then I was assigned five new cadets, and taught them from scratch how to fly. Some already knew how. Some came in who already had previous instruction--had probably taken lessons somewhere in a field, but then you had to undo what they already had learned, and we didn't want in the military. So, that worked out pretty well. The school expanded, and got bigger and bigger and we couldn't handle any more airplanes. We then, some of us, were asked to transfer to a place called Jackson, Tennessee. They had a new flight school there

called McKeller Airport. It's still there, and it's now a commercial field. We had Steermans there.

Q: How do you spell McKeller?

MR. HEILBRONN: M-C-K-E-L-L-E-R. We had at least, in the traffic pattern never less than thirty airplanes. Sometimes fifty, all flying the traffic pattern. I used to have a favorite thing that I used to impress my cadets with. I said, "What's your neck size on your shirt?" Say, for instance, fifteen and a half. I'd say, "Well, when you get out of here, before you graduate, I want to measure your neck, and I want it to be sixteen and a half, because if you don't keep swivelling your neck to look for all the other airplanes to avoid collisions your life insurance is worthless." I said, "I want your head on a swivel constantly. The best insurance you've got is right between your shoulders." And that used to impress them, that there was no relaxation when you're out there with all those airplanes. Yet there were times, several instances when you send them out for the first solo flight, mistakes would occur. I've seen a cadet land one on top of the other airplane, and it was just one of those things. Since the Steerman was a ground-looping airplane, it was very hard to handle. It had a small tail wheel, and when you got it on the ground too soon, with too much speed, or you got a gust of wind, why it would just take that tail and swoosh it to one side, what we call a ground loop. Invariably with thirty-five, forty airplanes landing to the left and to the right of you at the same time it was

possible to collide with others, and just wreck them. That occurred frequently.

Then, I don't know what the year was, '41 or the beginning of '42 I believe, all of a sudden we almost had enough pilots. We had trained so many pilots that they were scaling down the amount of instructors they needed. So, I decided to go to Memphis and apply to, it was called then Chicago and Southern Airlines. It was a small airline that flew strictly from New Orleans to Chicago, with intermediate stops at Greenville, Mississippi and Biloxi and all these different places, I forget what they were. I got on as co-pilot and flew for, well, maybe a month or so, and then the Air Transport Command came in and--confiscated is not the word--acquisitioned the airplanes that they needed to transport materials, troops, and all that. They took most of the airplanes away--they only had maybe four or five airplanes left out of, whatever they had, maybe two dozen. I tried then with American Airlines, and that didn't work out too well, so I decided to go back to the Air Transport Command and apply for a job there. And I did. I went across the field, took their tests, and got into the Air Transport Command

Q: This was at Memphis?

MR. HEILBRONN: At Memphis, and I was then a flight officer, after I got through the schools. My main function was to ferry airplanes to the various parts of the world, battle fronts, and there were all types of airplanes. In those days, the check-out rate in a

airplane simply consisted, most of the times, of one day of ground school, and maybe three or six take-off or landings in the daytime, and maybe half a dozen at night. After that you had the airplane, it was yours, and you learned by trial and error enroute, but it all worked out all right. We were not allowed to fly in weather, because they didn't want to lose too many, and also we did most of our flying in daylight. So I ferried B-25s, 24s, B-29s, 17s and all different big airplanes wherever they were needed.

Q: And where were you based? At Memphis?

MR. HEILBRONN: I was based in Memphis, at the 4th Ferry Group.

Q: And did you travel to North Africa?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, via South America at Casablanca, and across Ascension Islands, into Accra [Ghana], Africa and then into India, New Delhi, somewhere along that route, and finally ended up delivering B-29s to Chiculia outside of Calcutta, probably a hundred miles from Calcutta, India. We would then wait there for a war-weary B-29 to be brought back to the base, and it was sometimes just full of holes and tears, and you couldn't pressurize it. It would be made ready by our crew chiefs, and then we would work on it to make sure that we had halfway decent radios. We ferried that airplane back, and the round-trip was usually fifty hours to seventy-five hours to deliver one and bring one back. The airplanes were then delivered to Texas, I believe it was San Antonio, where they then took them apart, repaired them, and then

we would take them back again. We always flew with a spare engine in each airplane to build up the stock of spare engines at the other end of the ride.

Quite a few incidents happened. You had to be very careful over there because of the Indians, especially in New Delhi. There were a couple of mishaps where the workman, and some of the other people, would run across the runway in front of the landing airplane. They believed if they could kill their shadow, why, they would live forever. But most of the time it was a fatal thing for them, and this was bad. They used to run all over the place just because of their belief, whatever it was, I'm not sure. We had an incident where we had a B-29 that we were flying back, and right after take-off the crew chief got on the intercom and said that we had to land immediately. We had to shut off all the electric systems in the airplane because we had such a bad fuel leak, and the whole belly of the airplane was full of fuel. So we shut everything down, and we hand-cranked the bombay door open, and all the fuel spilled out. One of the connecting pipes to the tank had burst or split open, so it was a lucky break we didn't blow up. That's for sure, I'm still here. When I came back from one of those trips I found out that I was slated to be transferred from the 4th Ferry Group to Karachi where the B-24 tankers used to fly from over the Himalayas to China with fuel. I had friends of mine there, and they never came back. It was one of those hazardous routes. You either couldn't make the altitude to get over, as the plane was too heavy, or you would be intercepted by the Japanese

enroute and shot down. So I had help at the 4th Ferry Group, and got myself assigned to Europe.

Q: So you were transferred to the European Command. Where did you report over there? England?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, I flew a C-54, when did I fly to Scotland? I think I wrote it down here. Flew April the 19th. I picked the airplane up at Gravelley Point, which is now called Washington National, it was then Gravelley Point. We flew the airplane through Scotland and landed in a place called Stornaway, I don't know exactly how its spelled. It had a stone wall around the entire airport, approximately four feet high. It's still there, because I've landed there since. From there we refueled, went to London, and delivered the airplane to Bovington, which was then a military field. From there I was transferred to Paris, to Orly Field, and I went with General Eisenhower. I was assigned to him, and wound up in Frankfurt, Germany.

Q: When you went to Europe and you were transferred to the European Command, how did you actually become associated with Eisenhower's air crew? And this was in April of '45?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, April of '45. I don't remember, I believe I was told that I was replacing a Dick Leib who was then mustered out, he went back home.

Q: Was he a co-pilot or was he a . . . ?

MR. HEILBRONN: He was a pilot. I don't know whether my knowledge of Germany, and my knowing the language, had anything to do with my selection, because I'm sure there were other people more qualified than I. But thank my lucky stars, I was picked. So I reported to Frankfurt, and then met the General and all the associated crew members, and Major Hansen--I believe he was Captain, or was he Lieutenant? Whatever, it doesn't matter. And there was another gentlemen by the name of Russell Ketchum, with whom I flew for a while, but he also left. He was married, he's still married, in fact, I've seen him a few times since. He was married to one of the DuPont girls, in that DuPont family.

Q: So you first reported to Orly.

MR. HEILBRONN: To Orly Field, headquarters was at Reims. Then, of course, we didn't stay there too long after we went then

Q: After V-E Day then

MR. HEILBRONN: We then went to Frankfurt, and operated from the I.G. Farber Building. I was still a flight officer, after quite a while, and it caused me to feel uneasy, because wherever we landed I would have to request from somebody, not give orders, but tell them what was needed, and they could be maybe two or three ranks higher than I. I made my discomfort known, and they decided I should get my air force wings. So, in typical military fashion I had to go through the whole procedure to learn to fly an airplane, and take a flight check, which Captain, probably Lieutenant

[Charles I.] Bennett then gave me. And after that I got my wings, and became a second lieutenant and life got a little bit easier. The times with the General were just fantastic.

Q: You flew several different types of aircraft there?

MR. HEILBRONN: Well, we had the C-54 and two C-47s and we had a B-25, it was a "stripped 25," for real fast trips but only held two people and two pilots. We could put a jump seat in, but we never did. And we had several small L-4s, I believe they were called, used to be a Cessna, made by Cessna. We had a small air force. We had crew chiefs that took care of the airplanes. We had three navigators, the names aren't important I guess, what all the peoples names were. We had various duties if we didn't fly. We knew about the flights quite in advance, but when we were not flying we had different things we could do. We either trained on the airplanes, or if we had a flight to make that was coming up, we would sometimes fly the entire trip just to familiarize ourselves with the terrain and the airports that we could use in case we had a problem. And, also, to coordinate the time that we should be enroute and arrive. That's still being done today, even with the President's airplane, everything in advance is worked out. Because the General would go to various military functions, and we always made sure that we arrived exactly at the time that it was scheduled for him to be there. If we had tailwinds, or we got there too fast, we would either throttle back, or go sight-seeing for five or ten minutes. Then we'd come back on course just to make sure that

he got there at the time he was supposed to be.

Q: Did he ever come up to the cockpit?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, he used to like to come up, and talk, and see what was going on. And sometimes he'd sit up there. If we had a trip that was long, and he wasn't busy in the back reading one of his favorite Zane Grey cowboy books. His right-hand man, Sergeant Moaney, supplied him with westerns and always made sure that he didn't read the same book twice, because he would remember it if he'd read it. He'd say, "Oh, I've read this one."

But, another incident which always endeared him to us, was that whenever we got to either where we were based, or any other place where we landed he would go into the flight operations. When he saw a "Purple Heart" GI he would immediately go over, shake hands, and introduce himself. He'd ask the GI's name, and "where are you headed," and "where were you," "how did you get your Purple Heart," and so forth. If he was going where we were next scheduled to fly and if seats were available in the airplane, whichever one we were at the moment operating, there would be a seat for that particular "Purple-Hearter" or two or three or four depending on how many seats were empty there. These were just some of the things that made the man--just characteristic, just sweet habits, I would call them, inbred in him.

He just liked people and he had a smile for any situation, most of the times. I remember one time we were going to Berlin for a conference, and several of the top generals were to join us at

Y-74, which was our homebase. It later became the Rhein Main. I think take-off schedule was seven o'clock in the morning. The General was already in the airplane, and so were the other gentlemen. The only one missing was General Moses. At seven o'clock the General looked at his watch, and sent Sergeant Moaney up to the cockpit. Moaney was to tell us to come back, close the door, and start the engines. Said, "We were scheduled to leave at seven, we're leaving at seven." As we were rolling for take-off, why, there came General Moses' car at high speed, onto the ramp, and we just never reduced throttles, we just put them right up to take-off, and took off. We left him right where he was. I think that he probably learned. [Laughter] Oh, you've heard about the General and punctuality?

Q: Yes. You talked too earlier about how when you landed the General always came up to cockpit before he left the plane and made sure that you were okay.

MR. HEILBRONN: Well, not that, but he never left the airplane until the crew was outside, standing at attention, and then he came down the steps. Before he left the ramp he would always inquire of whomever was there to greet him, or meet him, if the crew had proper quarters, transportation, and everything that was for our comfort. Being reassured he would thank us for the trip, and then he would say, "You will either be notified by phone" or "Such and such a time is when we want to go back to wherever we were next going to be." And this was another one of his nice traits that

came with the makeup of the man. His consideration of the staff.

Q: I was going to ask, did he ever take control, take the controls of the aircraft? You know, he was a frustrated, he wanted to be a pilot himself.

MR. HEILBRONN: Oh yes. Well, he had a pilots license, as he had at one time flown a light plane. He would come up and sit in, but most of the time he'd just sit and look at the instruments but he never stayed that long. Most of the time he had things to do in the back, and things to arrange.

But coming back to when we weren't busy flying, I went and did all the investigating. We had thousands of letters from German Americans delivered when we were in Frankfurt to inquire about their relatives, and aunts and uncles, and sisters and brothers, and whatever. And these letters were all given to me, because I was elected to do the investigating and find out where these people were, whether their homes were still there. I had an automobile in the garage where we were billeted, near the Farber Building, and it had no wheels. It was then what they called the Daimler-Benz, which is now the Mercedes Benz. The motor pool came and they put wheels on it, and got it in shape. I put one of General's flags on it, and I had blanket orders that I could go into all the occupied territories of the French, the Russians, and the English to look for these people. I would be gone sometimes for three or four days, sometimes a week. I'd write a report on it, and then each one of these letters, if we found out where they were, were

answered either with the information in it, or not, if we weren't able to find any trace of these people. That was part of the staff's work that we had going there. Everyone got an answer, it was never ignored. One other thing that came into the office were gifts from all over the European countries there. They were all catalogued, and properly documented, and thanked, I imagine, in a letter of acknowledgement, and were put into storage. Now where they are today I'm not aware of, but I guess some of them are in the Library.

Q: Some of them may well be in our museum. Did you ever do any direct translation for Eisenhower in German, I mean, he was maybe talking with some German officials?

MR. HEILBRONN: No, the only thing I did in translation was in his household. Where did he live? I can't remember the villa that he had. It was outside of Frankfurt. They had a German staff, cook and housecleaning, and so forth. I'm sure that they had been investigated thoroughly by intelligence, or whatever. But I did a lot of translating there when they had problems with not doing this or that, or something wasn't right, or they wanted to change something in the household. That part of interpreting I did, other than that, no. The other thing I used to do was when we went out, the pilots, and the other crew members like our crew chiefs and navigators, we all palled around together. The ladies out of the office, the WACs, and all of us would go into maybe a Bierstube or someplace. Whatever went on there, what the Germans were going to

do to us, what bottle of wine they would give us, which was probably watered down, I would just tell the group that this is what's going to happen now. Knowing the language, and understanding them, why, we were forewarned before we would be taken. It happened quite frequently over there, they're all trying to make a little money.

We had a household lady, her name was Mrs. Schafner, she was an elderly woman, and she liked to drink. And we, of course, had our whiskey bottles sitting in our room, and it didn't take long to find out that she was helping herself. So what we used to do was, we'd have a bottle, and we'd make a mark on it on the label, or somewhere on the glass that she couldn't see too well, where the whiskey was. Then when she had been nipping on it, why, we'd just fill it up with water back to that mark again. So it was getting weaker and weaker all the time. [Laughter] But Frau Schafner, that was her name.

They had it well where they worked, the Germans, because I think they found that the Americans were just as generous as victors, as they would be if they were living in our country here. We treated her very well, she always got coal from us and things to take home for dinner and we'd buy stuff at the PX and they appreciated it.

But still there was something there that seemed to irk the Germans. Especially our GI at the gate before you went into the Farber Building, you'd have to pass a checkpoint. There would be a GI with his necktie crooked, and his shirt opened at the neck,

and his gun loosely at his side, and maybe lounging and pointing his thumb "you're past." They just often wondered, they talked to me in German, and said, "We cannot understand how you won the war with soldiers like that." It was just one of those things that cropped up frequently that they couldn't understand. There's something here that I'm going to say that probably not many will understand. Some of our soldiers had put graffiti marks on some of the walls over there, "U.S.A." And the Germans made a joke out of that. They said, "Yes, we know that. You liked Hitler because you are commemorating him everywhere where you have 'U.S.A.' put on there." I said, "Well, what do you mean by that?" Well, in German we say that's 'Unsere Seliger Adolph'" [Laughter]

Q: "Our holy Adolph," right?

MR. HEILBRONN: "Our holy Adolph," yes. Unsere Seliger Adolph. It makes sense in German, but doesn't make sense in English. But I thought it was a cute way of being humorous.

[Interruption]

Q: Now, Moaney and the westerns, to make sure Eisenhower didn't read the same one twice, did you say that he then gave some to you?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, yes, we could get the ones that the General had read, and he would give them to us, and then he'd get them back later. I imagine he would turn them in somewhere because I don't know where he got them, whether this was some type of exchange or

not. That was one of his rituals, that we always had first choice.

Q: Did you ever experience the general's temper? I know, he could get angry, at least he was reported to be that way. As President, I mean he was fair, but he would have these bursts of temper. Other than leaving General Moses at the airport was there . . . ?

MR. HEILBRONN: No, no, I can't say that I've ever seen him be that way. No, I don't recall any time. Now maybe I wasn't at places where things were more apt to go wrong than when we were flying him. We were so careful of knowing his habits, what he wanted, how punctual he was, how particular about detail, that we did all this to make sure it wouldn't happen but

Q: What were some of the things you needed to do to follow his routine? Punctuality was important?

MR. HEILBRONN: Punctuality was important, arriving at the time that he was expected to be there. He wanted to be sure that all his things were on board that he needed. And he

Q: Was that Moaney's job?

MR. HEILBRONN: Well, Moaney was the in-between, to make sure that his clothes were there. He would then either change enroute, and there were times when he came casually dressed, and didn't want to sit there in parade dress uniform and would do it enroute. These were some of the things he was particular about. Most of the times, of course, he was accompanied by enough people to make sure

that everything would run all right, that there weren't any problems. He was quite relaxed when he was among friends and people he liked. When there wasn't any decision involved that pertained to either the occupation forces, or parades, or whatever you want to call it, or meeting dignitaries. I'll give you a for instance, we flew some generals to a place in Bavaria, called Schöngau. It was a small village known for being right at the foot of the Alps where there were Gemsbock [Chamois], what would you call them, mountain goats? He wanted one of these beards that these mountain goats have to have them made into one of these little--what do you call that? Plumes? They used to put a silver little thing on the bottom that they stuck the beard into. I'm sure you've seen them, I'm not sure what. And the green lodenhut, jagthut [hunter's hat], and he wanted to shoot the Gemsbock that it came from. Which he did. We went there, and I believe it was Generals Bradley, Clark, Moses, and Gruenther. I don't remember. We took the C-47 to a town where there was an airfield because we had to fly into the mountain passes to get into this little town of Schöngau. Everybody was more or less in a relaxed mood, nothing was said about war, and nothing was discussed. They just wanted to relax which they did. We flew them in separately, two at a time, in these L-4s until we had them all in there, and we stayed there until we were all finished and he got his Gemsbock. There was a church there, which was quite picturesque, and he took a color photograph of it. No, it was just a snapshot, and he wrote the colors down, and then later on he made one of his paintings from

that. And I have a lithographic copy of that in my home.

Q: That was at Schöngau?

MR. HEILBRONN: That was at Schöngau in Bavaria.

Q: Were there certain rules and regulation about take-off and everything, no smoking during take-off or is that just today on airplanes?

MR. HEILBRONN: That was today on airplanes. We didn't stick to that, no. He could do what he wanted to. We were not imposing any regulations on him. He was quite an easy man to operate with. We had a train in Frankfurt which stood by in case weather conditions were such that it wasn't conducive to fly. The man in charge of that "Hitler train", which was not only Hitler's, but also the top generals in his command, was Captain Craig Cannon. He was the train commander and that train would be always at a ready for him to use. He had his own quarters in there and I believe that was converted from one of their generals to our General. And the cars that we had were put into a special, what was it, wagon? Not wagon.

Q: Train car?

MR. HEILBRONN: A train car which had an automatic ramp. You drove into it, and by pushbuttons it would come out to the platform and you would drive your car on it. It would elevate the car, take it in, turn it around and park it. It had room for three cars in

that. They always had two or three depending on where we were going, and what was required. The train also had a complete dining car, a car with a kitchen, and it had a complete shortwave car on it that could be used to reach anywhere in the world. This had been used by the German command but was converted for our use. The train also had a running conveyor belt, which, while the train was enroute from one place to another, a meal cooked for a certain general, could then, by a push of a button, have the food delivered to his car. It would automatically stop there, and then, like a desk roll-top, remove the food and serve it. Each general on Hitler's staff had his own particular set of dishes and silverware, and, of course, everything was emblazoned with the swastika. Engraved in the silver, and also done in their crystal glasses, everything was custom made.

Q: I know you have some souvenirs from that train.

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, yes, I liberated a few things that I don't quite know where they are. Oh, there it is up there, on the top shelf. The tea strainer.

Q: And on your wall downstairs

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, I took that off of Hitler's personal train before we left Frankfurt to come back to the states. We all unscrewed one of their, what do you call it, insignias, the eagle with the swastika on it? Made out of some kind of pewter material, and that's hanging in my rec room.

Q: I was going to ask you about some of Eisenhower' staff and your observations. We already talked about Moaney, is there anything, what was special about him, or what impressed you about him?

MR. HEILBRONN: What impressed me about Moaney was his complete devotion to Eisenhower. All he wanted to do was live and die, with the man, or for the man. He was always present, but rarely visible. He took care of all his personal things, his clothes, his shirts, period. Everything was laid out, he knew exactly what to do. He was just like a, well, let's call it a mother-type. That's all Moaney wanted. When the General became, under Truman, Chief of staff, Moaney went too. Only a few of the World War II staff stayed with him at that time. During the Columbia presidency, SHAPE, and the White House years only General Schulz, Kevin McCann, and Sergeant Moaney remained.

I want to come back to the fact that I was born in Germany, and when I was stationed in Frankfurt, I had about a week off. My navigator Captain Leonard and I took one of the L-4s, we loaded it up with fuel, and we flew to my hometown of Plettenberg in Westfalia. I said, "Well, we'll just take a look at it, and see what it looks like." And when we got there he tapped me on my shoulder, and I think it was about a forty-five minute flight, and he said, "Hey, look down there, there's where you were born." I told him it was--I don't want to use profanity. He was a fool for trying to make me believe that that little town was where I was born. I said it was much bigger than that when I was a kid. And

he said, "No, that's it," and I recognized it was. Then I said, "Let's look for the old soccer field where I used to play soccer when I was a boy," and it was still there. It was open and lent itself for a good approach. So we landed the airplane, and we had a British garrison in the town, luckily. We walked there and got them to station soldiers around the airplane and keep an eye on it. They got fuel for us, and fueled it up.

He walked into town with me, and on the way in I stopped in at my doctor's place, the man who brought me into this world, Dr. Wilmes. He was then up in years, a pretty old man. I had brought some things along like whiskey, cigars, chocolates and things like that. I had an idea we were going to be able to land in Plettenberg, but we had an airport picked out about fifty miles from there, but we decided to risk Plettenberg because of the soccer field. Now, back to the doctor's. I rang the doorbell, and his wife came to the door. Speaking in German, she asked me what I wanted. She was quite taken aback to see somebody there, an American officer in uniform with pilot wings. I told her I wanted to see Herr Doctor, and she asked me what I wanted with him. I said, "Well, it was something, I had a little problem." So she asked me to wait, and then he came in and opened the door to his office. I don't know how many times I sat in that little office and waited for that door to open when I was a kid. When he came in he asked me what my problem was. I said, "Well, I have a little scar that I'd like you to look at," as I have a scar on my left arm from an operation he had performed when I was nine years old.

He looked at it, and he said he couldn't see anything. I said, "Well, think back," and I kind of guided him back, and then, finally I told him who I was. Well, he started to cry, and we had a good old time. We stayed there, had tea with him, and gave him some cigars and things like that. His son, Robert, with whom I had gone to school, was a doctor also, but he was in a Russian prison. They wouldn't let him come back because they needed doctors in Russia, and they kept him there. I promised the doctor that I would try to do something for his son, for Robert. When I returned to Frankfurt I talked to Tex Lee, and it was arranged that he was out in four weeks. We got him out. And later on, years and years later, when I went over there to visit the little town again with my wife and children, Robert was home, and we had quite a reunion. He couldn't thank me enough. In the meantime he has passed away so

Q: You probably saved his life.

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, yes. Well, it wasn't easy for Tex. I imagine he got the General's help, because the General was quite friendly with Zhukov. I think through him the thing kind of got squared away. From Doctor Wilmes I went to my old school teacher who used to live with us when I was a boy. He was a teacher in a Catholic school. His name was Bernard Schulte, and Bernard was then in his early seventies. He had been put out of a job as a teacher because he was not completely in accordance, or agreement with the Hitler regime. Knowing that he had lived with my parents--in the same

house with Jews--why, he automatically was pounced upon. They said he could no longer teach--that he couldn't be trusted. But he stuck it out, and I saw him for years and years later. Of course, he kept his whiskey, cigars, candies, and all kinds of things that I had packed away, and we stayed there for a few days. I went from there to a little Jewish cemetery. There were only six Jewish families when I left our town of six thousand people. I imagine it's now probably twenty-five thousand today. We went to the Jewish cemetery, which had completely been destroyed by vandals. All the tombstones had been turned over, and the place was overgrown with weeds and grass, and the fence destroyed. Captain Leonard, and I, went to the burgermeister [mayor] and I confronted him and told him who I was. I gave him forty-eight hours to get a crew in there, take all the weeds out, clean out the cemetery, and re-cement all the stones. I personally went there, and showed which stone belonged to whom. I could easily tell because of the way they were knocked over. So, our friends, and my grandparents' graves were restored. Today the German government takes care of all that. They have the town crews, maintenance crews that take care of the cemeteries. The fences are painted, and everything is in good shape. I've been there several times, and it's being taken care of. So then we, what else happened, anything? The next morning, two days later, three days later, we took off and went back to Frankfurt, to our jobs.

Q: An interesting trip home, though.

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, but I didn't find a Nazi in the whole town. They all just went along for the ride because they had to. The old story.

Q: You mentioned Tex Lee, I was going to ask you, how was it working with him? I was just going to ask you to make some observations about Tex and, was Harry Butcher still around on the staff? He left shortly after you did?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, he did, yes. Tex Lee did all the high-level arrangements, and paperwork, and ran the entire office, the financial parts. He was the right-hand man to the General after Harry Butcher departed. I guess you've been in the Farber building?

Q: Yes.

MR. HEILBRONN: How do you like that crazy elevator?

Q: I don't know that I can remember it.

MR. HEILBRONN: It's open. It has no doors on it. Remember? It's on a running band.

Q: Oh, yes.

MR. HEILBRONN: You step in, and there are no doors. And I don't know whether they have replaced it today, or not, but when I was there, stationed there

Q: I would have been there in '61.

MR. HEILBRONN: Well, you stepped in, and you got off at the floor, and then it went slow enough that you could just walk out. I rode over the top of it to see what the thing would do. Well, you got up to the top, and the whole thing turns, so it comes down the other side and faces the floors on the other side, going down. So it always comes back the same way. Amazing piece of engineering that they did on that. But you know the story about the Farber Building, don't you, don't you know how it remained intact?

Q: Intentionally so it could be used later or something?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, yes.

Q: I had heard that.

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes. We bombed right up to the street corners with the Norden bomb sight on B-17s and the Germans knew it. The people that I spoke to later on, and befriended, said, "Oh yes, you people were the only ones who would come over in the daytime. The British would bomb us at night, and you people would do it in the daytime with your shiny B-17s, never painted" I said, "We camouflaged them." But I said, "Later on we didn't have to because there was no opposition anymore." "Yes," this person said, "yes, when we had the air raid sirens going off then, and we were all rushed to the Farber Building, we'd sit on the lawn and watch you bomb around it." [Laughter] There wasn't a stone turned on that.

They bombed that accurately all around it. I think some of the pictures I gave you are from around that area that I took pictures of.

But the minute the war was over, they started to clean up. You could see the people in these bombed out buildings with little hammers knocking off all the mortar around the stones. They would neatly pile them up, and they were immediately used to rebuild. But the fuel situation was so bad, that around the Wiesbaden airport where they used to have beautiful old trees, they were all cut down, because they had nothing else to burn. So all the trees had been just simply burned up, even the green wood, just down to the roots.

Q: I notice in your flight log that you made a trip with Eisenhower to the Lucky Strike POW camp?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, and I'm trying to remember just where it was. I think it was near Cherbourg, I'm not sure. You know, the years erase a lot of your recall.

Q: Do you remember anything about that trip in terms of, did you go to the camp too?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, I'm sure we went to look at it. But the POWs were treated fairly, and they weren't--not like they did our POWs. It was a crowded camp, but nothing like a concentration camp, and I think he wanted to see personally that the camps were kept the way they were supposed to. What the reason was for the trip, I

don't remember. Talking about camps, we had newspaper people from the United States come over on one of their trips to personally visit some of the atrocity camps. I was assigned to fly to Paris and pick them up. I picked up, I'm trying to remember all their names, Sulzberger, Pulitzer, McCormick, McLean and somebody from the Baltimore Sun, and another New York Times, who was it, Sulzberger I believe. Well, they were all the top newspaper people from the United States, the heads of them. I flew them to the various camps, and I took some pictures which are in the collection that you have. Then I took them to Frankfurt where they had dinner with the General. That was arranged by Captain [Kay] Summersby, I believe she was a Captain then. She did most of the arranging for these dinners and meetings and luncheons. The next day I flew them to Paris. I think they took, who had the constellations, TWA, I believe so, back to the United States.

Q: Do you remember any of the press reaction to seeing the camps?

MR. HEILBRONN: Well, yes, I mean they were all horrified. They had been briefed on the sights that they were going to see, but I don't think they were prepared for that.

Q: Did you go through with them at that time?

MR. HEILBRONN: I went through with them that time and before that. Mr. McLean, of the Bulletin, knowing that I came from Philadelphia, would put greetings to my parents from me in his nightly report. He asked me when I left them off in Paris what my intentions were

after I finished flying for the General? I said, "I really don't know."

"Well," he said, "in case you'll be looking for a job, we don't have an airplane now, but I think in the future we should have. There's a great need for transportation in the business that we're in. You come and see me, here's my card, and we'll buy you an airplane, and you can fly for us."

And that's what I did after we came back to America. I decided not to pursue a military career, which wasn't in keeping with my background, so I decided to go with the Bulletin, which I did. We had a nice relationship, for twenty-nine years, I worked for them until the evening newspapers in America were no longer something to further our thinking. We'd rather listen to [Tom] Brokaw, [Dan] Rather, and people like that to be convinced of what we should believe, rather than read about it.

Q: You mentioned when we were talking earlier when we were talking about Eisenhower's staff, you mentioned Kay Summersby and how efficient she was in running an office. Is that your observation?

MR. HEILBRONN: My observation was that she was not only a very fine-looking person, but she was also very efficient. Impeccably neat, and very devoted to the General, just like the rest of his staff. We all wanted to do the right thing for him, and not to ever embarrass him. It was quite a happy relationship, I believe, with the whole staff, and I admired her greatly. I think she was an easy person to get along with and would never make you feel as

if we weren't working for the General, but for her, no. She was very, very easy to work with.

Q: I noticed you have her first book autographed, dedicated to you in the inscription, so you must have kept in touch.

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, we kept in touch after she came to the United States and like everything else, after thirty years you kind of lose touch with people. My saying always is, if you live long enough you're going to outlive everybody and be all alone. And that's getting to be, pretty rapidly, my case. I'm going to be here alone.

Q: Do you have any memories of the other VIPs that you carried around? Any anecdotes about

MR. HEILBRONN: Let's see, well, the only person that I ever found that was a little testy was Admiral Tower, or Towers, from Texas. He was a Navy admiral. We used to have at the evening Bulletin, we had, for years and years when the Bulletin was in business, what they called the Bulletin Forum. They always had a group of high-level people as speakers in various subjects, it was known as the Bulletin Forum and was held every year. They used to bring all these different people like Carl Sandburg, Admiral Nimitz, Admiral Tower, Admiral Anderson, who else did we have? Dick Nixon.

Q: There was a Senator Tower from Texas, that's not . . . ?

MR. HEILBRONN: No, no, he may be related, he may be a grandson or

something. But anyway, we went to pick him up at the, up here on Long Island, what is that, the navy base there, Quantico? No, that's down here.

Q: It's not Ipswitch, or something like that, it's

MR. HEILBRONN: Well, wherever, it doesn't really matter, I guess. We landed there, my co-pilot and I, and no Admiral Tower. So, we went into the ready room, and had a cup of coffee. After a few minutes, somebody came dashing in and said, "Are you the pilots?" "Yes, we're the pilots." "Well, Admiral Tower is sitting in the airplane, he's steaming." So we went out, and I introduced myself, and he said, "Young man, in the Navy when we say 1500 hours, we mean wheels up at 1500 hours." I thought that was unnecessary. I didn't speak a word to him, and I didn't ask him for an autograph or anything, which I usually did. [Laughter] I was teed off because he wasn't there when we were there, but he was a little testy. Harold Stassen was a very nice gentlemen. We flew him quite a bit when he was vying for the presidency, and in his other endeavors. He used to live right up here in Chestnut Hill for years and years. I have some pictures of him somewhere in another collection.

When the General left Europe to become Chief of Staff under Truman, we all came back, and that was quite a trip. We came through the Azores, and we were going to land at Boston Logan Field. We couldn't make it because the weather was down to the ground, so we landed at a little base other than that, a Navy base,

Squantum. It's the same level as Boston, but a little farther, the weather was a little better there. We landed there. Everything was to be shifted from Boston Logan Field to there. There was quite a rhubarb, when Bob Schulz was then handling all the ground arrangements. I think it was, Mayor Kerrigan, whoever was there, but he wanted to be top dog. Bob Schulz made some concessions to the politicians satisfaction, got it all arranged and straightened out. From there, after the meeting, we flew to Washington, and landed there, and everybody greeted everybody, I went home. And then a few weeks later, why, we're told we were to go back to Frankfurt and close out everything. So, I imagine the warehouses, and all the things that were there, came back then. I remember coming back, boy that C-54 was loaded to the gills with everything.

Q: And you brought a lot of the staff back at that point?

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes, all the staff and things. The other stuff was shipped back by ship, I imagine. I didn't know all the details. Bob Schulz was a traffic man actually, that's where he came from, and he knew what to do with all of that. So then I was stationed at Andrews Air Force Base. I was assigned to the VIP pool. I flew there for a while until he became Chief of Staff, and then those of the staff who wanted to were reassigned to Europe. I didn't want to stay in. Most of them did, some mustered out, and I took up the Bulletin offer and flew for them for twenty-nine years. I always kept in touch with everybody, which is one of my things that I like to do. I don't like to lose people. I don't like to not

ever see them again, or hear from them. Even today I pick up the phone, sometimes I even call somebody that I haven't seen in ten years or so and just see if they're still there, and converse with them. Sometimes it becomes one-sided, and you wonder why am I doing this, but it's something I like to do. So when the General became, was it before, no, he was president of Columbia

Q: Then he went to NATO from Columbia.

MR. HEILBRONN: Yes. At Columbia, of course, I saw him quite frequently. I made a lot of things which we have pictures of today, for his grandchildren, because I know he adored them, and he would get joy from them. And then when he went back to NATO, when he decided, wasn't it overseas?

Q: He was at NATO when he came back to run for the presidency.

MR. HEILBRONN: The presidency, yes. We all got together and we all felt that Washington, and the politicians, the way it was, we didn't have much faith in their loyalty. We all felt that he should not do it, and I think most everybody who loved him, as we did, advised him not to. But he felt that he owed it to the country. If they wanted him, that's what he wanted to do, and he did. I made a White House for him, I'm sorry I don't have the picture, I wonder what happened to it? I know it's someplace, but if I ever find it I'll make sure you get it. I made him a candy White House all out of icing. Exact replica. I forget, it was probably, I would imagine about two, two and a half feet by

whatever, and put it on a platform. I called my friend, Craig Cannon, and he arranged to have MATS, which was Military Air Transport Service I drove the thing to Mitchell Field in New York, on Long Island, and they flew it to Paris. I put a note in telling him that I wanted him to look at this, and that's about as close as I would like him to get to the White House. [Laughter] Then, of course, I saw him so many times later on in Washington. I was luckily invited to some of his state dinners, and the functions. It was a happy interlude in my life, and I'm quite grateful that I was able to do that for my country. It was great. I think that's about all I can cover.

Q: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.