

**Bill Lindsey**  
**Interview 140a**  
**December 30, 1985**  
**Carolyn Elmore, Interviewer**  
**Dorothy Farley, Transcriber**  
**Retyped by Courtney Lawrence**

**ABSTRACT:** Pilot Bill Lindsey, in an interview with Carolyn Elmore, recalls his experiences as an Army Air Corps pilot from World War II until 1962. During the war he spent time training all over the United States and then flew missions over the Indian subcontinent in the China Burma India Theater of operations. After the war, Mr. Lindsey was stationed all over the world – Germany (taking part in the Berlin airlift in 1948), Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Lebanon. After retiring from the Air Force, Mr. Lindsey began working as the corporate pilot for Temple. He flew all over the country as Temple’s pilot.

**Carolyn Elmore (hereafter CE):** Do you have pictures of when you were flying in the military?

**Bill Lindsey (hereafter BL):** No, not in those days. My house burned in 1971 and I lost everything, all the pictures. All that I had early on.

**CE:** You might have forgotten about that. You don’t have any pictures then before ’71?

**BL:** I may have one when I was a cadet, flying cadet.

**CE:** Maybe not everything but – and tell me where you were born and where you were reared, all that. I want to know when you first started thinking about becoming a pilot.

**BL:** This will be almost like a soap opera. Are you ready? I was born in Emad, Allen Parish, Louisiana, Emad-E M A D. Just like it sounds and that was a sawmill town. But years ago, you have heard about “cutting out,” well, that was what they did, they cut out, all of the trees and moved. So I was born in Emad, we moved to Lufkin when I was five. Went to school, grammar school, high school.

**CE:** Graduated from Lufkin High School?

**BL:** Yes, in 1938. After that I went to John Tarleton Agriculture for pre-veterinary medicine, it was part of A&M. It was just a two-year college and after the first year I transferred to A&M. After one semester there, that’s how long it took to eliminate me. I went back to John Tarleton and finished. I had two full years there. By then it is 1940 and in 1941 I coasted. I did a little rodeoing, starting in about 1937 – Riding bulls and

bareback horse. As for a championship, I didn't threaten anyone, but in 1941 I went to Madison Square Garden and rode there. That's when the Garden was on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I don't know where it is now.

**CE:** What rodeo?

**BL:** Well, it was just the Madison Square Garden Rodeo at that time. It was held late always in the fall and ran about 25 days. It was a long time. In late '41 I applied for the flying cadet program. That was the Army Air Corps – flying cadets at Randolph Field in San Antonio where they did all the training. But I was too light, didn't weigh enough for my height, they told me to come back later. So then the War was started, in December and in April of '42 they accepted me in the flying cadets.

**CE:** Were you in the military then?

**BL:** I was accepted in April.

**CE:** In the Air Corps.

**BL:** Well, at that time it was the Army Air Corps.

**CE:** Did you have any desire to be a pilot when you were young?

**BL:** Oh, it was completely out of my thoughts, not really, my first airplane ride was in a Ford Tri-motor and this is what happened. They would fly over Lufkin and throw out circulars; some of the circulars had a free pass to ride in the airplane.

**CE:** At the airport then?

**BL:** No, the airport, at that time, was at the Old Berry Farm, at Keltys. I'll tell you, you know where Morris Frank Ball Park is, that was the airport.

**CE:** Did you find one of the free passes?

**BL:** Yes, I found one of the circulars and rode in the airplane.

**CE:** How did it affect you?

**BL:** My eyes were probably that big around.

**CE:** You couldn't wait to get out?

**BL:** Yes, it was great. Well, my brother-in-law was interested in aviation and his influence probably helped.

**CE:** What was his name?

**BL:** John Fred Kaiser.

**CE:** When was this?

**BL:** I can guess, probably in the early 30's, around 1930, 35. I have no idea. I really didn't know all the dates, we were sitting at the supper table and something was said about this. These passes on these circulars and I remember seeing that thing fall, it had two colors and I remember seeing it. The circulars were always different colors and I remember seeing that one come down and it had two colors on it. Two houses down in their chicken yard. I waited until supper was over and went over there and found it.

**CE:** When did you go into the Air Corps?

**BL:** Let's see, 1942, I was called and immediately put on leave until August.

**CE:** You were sworn in in April?

**BL:** Sworn in in April and at that time they made you a Buck Private and put you on vacation, on leave until you went in training. You know they had so many people then the War was really getting wound up. They called me in in August. I went through pre-flight at Lackland, I don't know if it was called Lackland then, or part of Kelly field.

**CE:** Is it Lackland now.

**BL:** Yes, it is Lackland now. It was just being built then and I helped scrape some of the labels off of the windows in the barracks. While in pre-flight I was operated on for appendicitis and dropped back one class. Let's see, from pre-flight to primary training in Ballinger, Texas flying Fairchild PT-19's, then from there on to basic training at San Angelo in BT-13's.

**CE:** PC?

**BL:** PC-primary training. Then I moved just south – 40 miles to San Angelo for basic training. There I was flying a BT-13. From there I went down a little farther south to Eagle Pass where I graduated from a single engine school flying AT6's.

**CE:** You graduated in May of '43?

**BL:** May of '43.

**CE:** Then you started flying the Hump?

**BL:** Not yet, everybody wanted to fly fighter planes but I was assigned to transports and went to Alpena, Michigan, along with thousands of others and from Alpena I was assigned to Atlanta, Georgia, for DC-3 training with Eastern airplanes. For the latter part

of that training we made flights to South America, but that didn't last very long. Then I was assigned to the CBI Theater of Operation – China, Burma and India.

**CE:** CBI?

**BL:** That's a theater of operations and I landed in Karachi, India. After a brief stay in the hospital there with Dengue fever I moved to Agra, India.

**CE:** What kind of fever?

**BL:** Dengue, it's a fly bite, it causes you to have a recurring fever.

**CE:** Kind of like malaria?

**BL:** I don't know about malaria. My tongue swelled up, thought I was about to die. Anyway that was when I arrived in Karachi and then moved to Agra and from Agra I was flying just within the subcontinent. Later I was selected to help establish a base at Ceylon and by the time we got a few supplies down there a C-54 arrived and the British decided to tell us to leave. So we picked everything up and moved back to Calcutta. I spent fifteen months flying from Calcutta, Dum-Dum Airport, flew supplies to the Assam valley and River Delta area. The area is now known as Bangladesh. The farthest east I got was Myitkyina, Burma, in support of the Imphal Push. That is as far and as close to the Hump as I got. Airplanes were flown from the Assam Valley over the Hump to China.

**CE:** You never did fly over the Himalayas?

**BL:** No, didn't fly over them. The mission was always down at the lower end of the subcontinent. You know the airplanes we had then didn't go very high. They did fly some DC-3's over the Hump early when they first started out. That's where they had China national airways pilots flying. (CNAC). That was the time of the Flying Tigers. But I never did go further than Burma because we were flying C-47's. Most of the Hump planes were C-46's, C-87's and C-109's. One combat mission was into Myitkyina where the landing strip was a crude dirt runway and the tower sat atop bamboo stilts. Every crewmember was on his own there. If your airplane broke down in Myitkyina, you were with it until it was repaired. One morning while I was there, everyone began to run suddenly so I did, too, fearing a Japanese raid. Later I found out that one of our P-51's had dropped a bomb from its wing while taking off. I left India in early '45 and came back and was assigned to the ferry command at Love Field, Dallas.

**CE:** Ferrying?

**BL:** Yes, ferrying airplanes. Got back from India and got married all at the same time, to Louise Brittain.

**CE:** Is she a Lufkin girl?

**BL:** Yes, she was born here.

**CE:** Do you know Jay Brittain?

**BL:** Yes, her nephew, son of Otto J. Brittain.

**CE:** What were you doing in Dallas?

**BL:** Well, it's the funniest thing, you know, I had just spent a year and a half in India flying C-47's so I came back and went to C-47 school at Palm Springs, California, to learn how to fly. Don't put that in there, that's confusing but it was a pretty nice assignment. They would check you out in a different airplane types, then 5<sup>th</sup> ferry group would pick aircraft up at the factory and deliver them where they needed to go and so they had to have everybody checked out in their way of doing things.

**CE:** They had a...

**BL:** No, that is where the headquarters to the ferry group was. The pilots were there. The nearest C-47 factory was in Tulsa. Douglas Aircraft had a factory there. They also had a factory in California. But anyway, I went to Palm Springs and got checked out in C-47's and ferried two or three airplanes and then was assigned to a part of air transport command, it was called MAT (Military Air Transport). Boy, I had some fast moves then. Louise didn't know what she was getting into. We went from Dallas to St. Joseph, Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri, and then to Denver. Yes, by the time I got to Denver the war in Europe was just about over and they were starting to move the troops from the east coast to the west coast. So every other night I would fly from Denver to Detroit. We would go to Detroit and spend the night and another crew would take over crew changes. After a little over a year out there, they started to let people get out of the service. From Denver I was transferred to San Antonio and there started flying the C-54 in the military air transport service. Which had a regular route system like the airlines have now, flying throughout the United States. I stayed in San Antonio I believe, two and a half years.

**CE:** When was this?

**BL:** I think it was two and a half years the first time. I had two tours in San Antonio and this one ended, I believe, with me going to Berlin in the airlift in 1948. We flew over in August in '48 for thirty days and I came back seven months later. From Germany I had two more quick moves. I was assigned to Tacoma, Washington to check out in the C-124 but that never happened. I went back to Kelly Field for a short stay, then to Great Falls, Montana where I was flying to Alaska and heavily involved in maintenance. Then I was assigned to Saudi Arabia and worked in the inspection office and flew transport to Tehran, Iran, Asmara, Eritrea (now Ethiopia) and Beirut, Lebanon. You wouldn't believe some of the things that happened there. At that time, Anna M. Rosenberg was assistant secretary of defense and she was Jewish. She wanted to come over and inspect the base. The Saudis wouldn't give her a Visa because she was Jewish. But finally, they gave her a

12-hour Visa. They flew her in a constellation and that woman went through the base like dose of salts. She walked right into the enlisted men's latrine and said, "clean this up." You just didn't do that over there because when you erected some thing, it became part of the kingdom. You were strictly the Saudis' guest, and they let you know it. One other episode during my Saudi tour – I was flying into Iran when Mossadegh was Prime Minister. The atmosphere was very anti-American. They had "Yankee go home" signs everywhere. We usually flew in and out in the same day. There was no navigational aid, so if you couldn't see you turned around and came back. That was in the heyday of Beirut, which was now terribly torn up, but back then it was the Paris of the Middle East, a crossroads of the world. If you couldn't speak anything but American Indian, somebody there could understand you.

From Saudi Arabia I returned to San Antonio to perform operational tests of propeller and engine combinations. Flew the Convair YC-131, the Lockheed YC-121 and the Boeing YC-97, all equipped with advanced turbo-prop engines. These tests were to select the engine propeller combination for the C-133.

Then I was assigned to medical air evac out of San Antonio's Brooks Field. In addition to military requirements they also supported the Polio Foundation, moving debilitated patients to centers throughout the country. Even though I was still flying transport my primary duty was aircraft maintenance. After a two-year assignment as assistant air attaché at the Embassy in Karachi, Pakistan, I returned to Edwards Air Force Base in California. As Commander of the Maintenance Squadron I was responsible for a fleet of Chase Planes, consisting of T-38's, F-104's and a single F-102B, where most of our support was aimed toward the X-15. I retired from the Air Force in August of 1962, never to fly again, returned to Lufkin. I stayed out of the cockpit until September 25 when I went to work for Southern Pine flying a DC-3 (C-47) and other corporate aircrafts.

I was undecided what I was going to do when I got back. We came back and I looked at a group of filling stations that my cousin had between Lufkin and Houston. Horace Stubblefield called me one day and asked if I wanted to fly for the company. I dropped everything to go down and interview with Stubby and Mr. (Arthur) Temple. That day, I flew with Stubby to Dallas, came back by Lufkin and on down to Houston where we spent the night. From that day on, it was one place after another – for 23 years and a few months.

The fleet of company aircraft grew from a single Cessna 180 to three jet aircraft and two turbine helicopters. The Gulfstream-1 was bought from the fleet owned by Howard Hughes. The Falcon 50 was purchased from a Nigerian company whose owner became a political prisoner. One of the most dramatic moments in my career came on January 9, 1978 in Acapulco, Mexico. We were going to bring Mr. Temple back to Diboll for Ben Anthony's funeral and while pre-flighting the airplane two distraught ladies came up to me and wanted to know where we were going and I told them we were going back to Houston. She said her husband was over in the ambulance over on the ramp about to die and would I take them. I told her I didn't own the airplane, I just flew it. If someone was about to die I'm sure Mr. Temple would try to do all he could. So I went over and looked in the ambulance and, sure enough, he was in bad shape.

**CE:** What was wrong with him?

**BL:** They had had a Mexican dinner the night before and he started vomiting during the night. They said he ripped the lining of his stomach. The wife had the forethought to call her husband's brother, a surgeon in Houston. He was able to come to Mexico to observe the late-night surgery, but the facilities there were so crude that they just sewed him back up. I called Mr. Temple and he said, "If it means saving a life, do it."

The patient was named Robert Smith from Washington, D.C., who was an architect and was transferred from the ambulance into the aircraft. The stretcher wouldn't go through the door and around the corner so we carried him on his mattress and laid him on two facing seats with the backs down as far as they would go. After we started flying the doctor wanted to stop in Mexico City for more blood, it was that critical. I told him if we stopped it would be unauthorized and Mr. Smith would die on the ramp before they would let us leave. He decided to try to make it. When we were within 100 miles of Brownsville, we were able to telephone Houston and reaffirm plans for an ambulance to meet us at Intercontinental and line up his surgical assistants at a nearby hospital. What they needed, as explained to me, was kind of like a balloon that they push down in the stomach and then inflate it and that pushes all the stuff back. He lived and is doing fine. It must be two years ago now, probably two years ago next month. I was sitting here wondering about him, every time the night of January comes up I think about him. I called his brother down in Houston, the doctor, and told him who I was and he said, "Well, I'll get hold of him right now" and he called me back from Washington and said he was doing just real good. I guess he is pretty successful because he has a beautiful home there. I went out to see his home.

A couple of other things that we have done that is worth thinking about – we transported two patients to Canada to see Dr. Gray, a world renowned neurologist.

Throughout my travels with Temple-Eastex I have met a lot of famous people, some of the people I have flown includes President Gerald Ford, Bob Hope, Phyllis George, the Gatlin Brothers, H. Ross Perot and former Congressman Barbara Jordan. I have also flown professional golfers to either Legends of Gold Tournament at Onion Creek in Austin to Crown Colony Pro-Am invitational tournament in Lufkin. On December 19, 1971 we had been to a Christmas party in Diboll and another party in Lufkin. On our way to Diboll we saw the reflection of a fire in the sky. We didn't realize it was our home in flames. Our friends were quick to respond to our tragedy. Mr. Temple called and said for us to reserve New Year's Eve. They threw a surprise Hangar party for us and cooked four wash pots full of chili and beans. They gave us a cash passbook and gift certificates and housewares. It was just great. I realized then what friends are.

This past December 19, we attended two Christmas parties, one in Lufkin and one in Diboll. This time after we left the company party in Diboll and passed by the house on the way to Lufkin, we stopped just to make sure that everything was okay.

**CE:** After 43 years of flying throughout the world, what does retirement offer?

**BL:** We plan to travel.

END OF INTERVIEW

**\*Taken from an interview appearing in the Free Press on January 16, 1986.**