



NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE®
Wings & Things Guest Lecture Series

The Flying Greek

World War II ace Col. (Ret.) Steve Pisanos discusses his 30-year Air Force career, including his six-month evasion of the Germans after his P-51B crash-landed during a 1944 mission in France.

Ladies and gentlemen, delighted to be here and deeply honored to be invited to talk to this distinguished group of aviators and friends of aviation, at the premises of the museum that was built on the runways that I used to fly from 72 years ago – oh, excuse me, 62 years ago. Yes, I spend time here at Wright Field at the Test Division. But the interesting part that I really like to tell you is how I got involved in the flying game where I ended up flying as a fighter pilot of two great Air Forces, the British Royal Air Force and Uncle Sam’s Army Air Force, in England during World War II.

I started to fly and I began to dream about flying when I was born in Athens, Greece. I was 12 years old, I think, when a biplane of the Greek Air Force flew over my neighborhood while I was walking – I was late that day, and I was walking to go to school, and the aircraft just did maneuvers that I have never seen before. He dove into this area where I was facing by him and believe me, it made me so captivated that I didn’t know what to do, I was just frozen right there. And as the aircraft flew away, I said to myself, “That’s it! When I grow up, I’ll become an aviator.” From that day on, books and school meant nothing to me. I used to skip way from school and walk 25 kilometers to watch the Greek Air Force aircraft fly at this aerodrome outside of Athens. I would come home late and my mother’s says, “Where you’ve been?” Well, I said, “We were playing soccer and...” lies.

On Sundays, when we had dinner with my father, he would ask ... By the way, we were six siblings, five boys and a girl. On Sunday my father would say, “What did you learn in school last week?” Well, I said, “We had geography and arithmetic and this...,” big lies, I was lying through my teeth.

I discovered the book of Baron von Richthofen in one of the bookstores in Athens, and I took – I bought that book for pennies and I took it to school. And while the teacher was teaching us something and we had to have the school books, I had the Baron’s book in front of me. I’ll never forget he came by and he spotted me, and all of a sudden he came back, “What book is that?” There was an airplane in one of the pages. Oh, you know, I didn’t know what to say. Oh, he got mad and he told my father. He was a friend of my father. That’s how crazy I was about flying.

As I was approaching the last year in high school, I was dreaming to go to the Greek Air Force Academy that produces the aviators, but then I found out the entrance examinations were absolutely ridiculous. I couldn’t do it. I was a third class student. So when I discovered that I will not be able to finish my dream in the place of my birth, I said, “I’m going to go to America.”

But how? I didn't have anybody here to help me. I didn't have any money. I couldn't speak English. But I was determined to go to America anyway possible.

I read an article in a magazine one time, how a Greek boy, stowaway on a Greek vessel and went to Egypt to be with his uncle when his father had died. He went to Egypt and he did well. Egypt had and has a quite few Greeks there now. That gave me an idea, stowaway on a ship. How? Where? My father was a motorman in a subway of Athens that drove down, all the way down to the port, and I had free passage. I would go down to the port to see what ships, you know, go to America. And I learned one day that the Italian liner Rex was coming to Greece to pick up a bunch of Greek passengers for New York. I skipped school. I went down to the harbor, and I watched the liner being docked, and people began to come down to visit Athens because the next day, it was departing for New York. I came home, I didn't say anything, and I wrote a little note to my family, "I'm sorry I'm doing this to you, but I have to." I invaded my mother's cookie jar, filled up my pockets, and the next day I was down at the harbor.

People began to arrive. They have spent a night in Athens perhaps, all the Greek passengers, but I had no idea how to really get on board the ship. All of a sudden, a truck loaded with suitcases, trunks, like the passengers, the way they travel. The truck unloaded everything by the gangway and about four or five people including a big, husky foreman evidently, began to carry those suitcases and trunks on board, and that gave me the idea. As they had really, all five of them, had to really go and up to the step ladder, to get up to the ship, I picked up two suitcases and slowly, I lowered – I had taken my father's fisherman's hat by the way. I lowered my hat and I picked up the two suitcases, and slowly I went up, I went through the security guard they had up there. He didn't say anything. So as I came around, what I had in mind, to just get away from the area, from the traffic area, drop the suitcases and try to find a place to hide. As I made a right turn into a hallway, a door opened and it almost slapped me in the face. The foreman of that boat, "Who the hell are you?" he said, "What are you doing here?" Well, I said – of course, I couldn't really... I was out of breath. I said, "I saw you downstairs, down below there, you have so many suitcases, you know, and I want to help you. Maybe I can make some tips?" "No!" He says, "We don't need you!" He grabbed my hand. We went by the security officer there, the harbor policeman, and he said, "This guy doesn't belong to us. Get him off the ship!" That's how I lost the opportunity to stowaway on the Rex.

But, I didn't give up. About a month later, we were playing soccer one day and a fellow were just sitting up there, and he wanted to join us and play. We allowed him to play and I discovered that he was a Greek-American boy from Buffalo, New York, about my age. Well, I got excited. We became friends. He was visiting Athens to be with his uncle, his father's brother. I told Harry what I had attempted to do and he told me that, "You would have never made it. You would have died in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean from claustrophobia even if you had found a good place. They would have found you, the crew, the captain or somebody." But he said, "There is another way to go to America like my father used." I said, "What is the other way?" "Get a job on a merchant ship." The Greek Merchant Marine was the biggest merchant marine in the world. Get a job.

So, that really gave me ideas. I didn't say anything to my father and even to my friends that I was thinking about that. Then I learned how to do it, how to apply for – after I have passed my

18th birthday which I didn't have to ask my parents to do what I wanted to do, I got my nautical papers, joined the Union. A month later, I got a job on a freighter, 10,000 tons, as an assistant fireman. When I ask – when I board, you know, got on the ship and I asked the two firemen that I was going to be their assistant, I said, “What do you do?” Well, he said, “Down below, there are mountains of coal.” He said, “You shovel the coal, put in the wheelbarrow, and then you pushed the wheelbarrow and drop it into a pit for the firemen below,” and that was my job. Thank God, when we left the Port of Piraeus to go to Oran in Algeria to get a load of iron ore, and we were going to Cardiff, England or Baltimore. Truthfully, truthfully, the city in America that I was in love with was New York. I didn't know where Baltimore was. And when he said Cardiff, England or Baltimore, I thought it was another city in England.

It was while we were in the Atlantic Ocean when I learned where Baltimore was, and I was asking the fireman, I said, “Where is this Baltimore?” Well, he said, “Not too far away from New York, a couple of hours by train.” And what I was thinking about, you know, maybe I can walk up there, from Baltimore to New York, you know. And then he began to tell me – by the way when I left home, my father was all excited because my father was born in Sparta and he was really in a family of fisherman, and he loved the sea and he thought that by me going to sea, I would really become a man. So anyway, he gave me – he had given me \$8.00 to take with me on the trip. Anyway, I asked this elder fireman – by the way they were brothers and for the first time they had gotten a job on a ship together. I said, “What do you do in Baltimore?” “Oh,” he says, “You know, I was in Baltimore about 10 years ago with another ship.” “And what did you do?” Well, he says, “One of the crew members wanted to go to New York to meet his uncle and I went with him.” “How did you do that?” I said, “You don't speak English.” “We don't need to speak English,” he said, “The only thing you need to know is go to the window of the train at the station, put the money on the counter there and say, “Ticket for New York.” Ticket for New York?

When I was down below shovelling coal into the wheelbarrow, “Ticket for New York. Ticket for New York,” to memorize it. Anyway, we arrived in Baltimore, good old Baltimore on a Friday evening. We docked outside the harbor; the berth that the ship was supposed to use was occupied by another ship. Saturday, the Immigration came on board, examined the cargo and the crew, they left. Saturday night, evidently the crew, the officers went out and some of the crew members, I stayed on board. Sunday morning I got up, I dressed well, my \$8.00 in my pocket, and I said, “I've got to find a way to just get off the ship and go into the city, catch the train, and go to New York.” I didn't know how to do it. I was thinking if I could really get a big plastic bag and put my clothes in it, and then hold that and try to swim, but I wasn't a good swimmer. And besides, you know, if somebody had seen me in the harbor, they would have really probably become upset, maybe a lost man or somebody. So I abandoned the idea.

Then all of a sudden, a small motorboat was approaching the ship and I couldn't figure out what this guy was trying to do. He came close to the accommodation ladder, tied up his little boat and he walked upstairs with a bunch of newspapers. Evidently, he was a newspaper guy delivering Sunday papers to the ships outside the harbor. I looked at the guy and then when he began to go down to his little boat, it dawned on me, “That's it! That's the guy who will take me out there!”

So I went over the rail and I said, “Shhh...” I didn’t want to make any noise because everybody was asleep. I was the only one and the cook was the other guy up. I looked down there, and I took a dollar out of my pocket and I said, “Shhh...” [Makes pounding sound] and pointed out. “Come down,” he said. I came down. In ten minutes, I was on American soil. I really, really wanted to kneel down there and kiss that land. It took me all day to find the railway station. I wanted to intercept the tracks, because I knew from Athens, if you follow the tracks, you’re likely to go to the station. That’s what I did. I located the station. A lot of people inside the terminal and I don’t know which window or where to go. And I saw a man in uniform which I realized that he was a railwayman. I said, “New York? New York?” He pointed at the window. I went to the window. I put my \$7.00, I had \$7.00 now, the dollar I gave to the little boatman. I put my \$7.00 up there and like I knew exactly what was I saying, I said, “Ticket for New York.” The man gave me the ticket. He took about \$3.00 and gave me some change. I got on the train, trembling. Always fearing that maybe the captain would walk up there and say, “Hey, this guy left my ship! That’s the guy right there.” But nothing happened of course.

Very soon, the train began to move. If you know geography, you know, after Baltimore, it’s Philadelphia. Thank God, there was a gentleman in front and I said to him, “New York? New York?” “No,” he was reading the paper. Then from Philadelphia, we stopped at Trenton. Afterwards, I realized what had happened, and again I said, “New York?” “No.” So when we arrived, past Newark, we did stop at Newark, we got into the tunnel and I got a little scared. And finally, we arrived at Pennsylvania station and this is where God sent a miracle for me.

I saw that movie, you know, “Miracle on 34th Street,” uh-uh, the miracle was on 8th Avenue. I got off the station. I didn’t know which way to go. And I just begun to follow people and I got down these stops on 8th Avenue and 34th Street. I don’t know where to go. I began to cry honestly and I started to walk northward. At about 36th Street, I noticed across the avenue, there was the Greek flag and the American flag in a lighted area. I couldn’t figure out what on earth that place was. I crossed, I almost got hit by a car, I didn’t know anything about traffic and things like that. I crossed the avenue. I run into a movie house that was playing the first movie that was made in Greece. I looked at it, and I had seen the movie by the way, the “Shepherd’s Daughter.”

While I was standing there watching the pictures, two gentlemen from behind, about two feet behind me, started talking Greek. One of them saying, “What do the Greeks know about movies now? Let us be honest.” The other says, “Well, let’s go inside, have a look at it, and if you don’t like it, you know, get out.” Well immediately, when I heard them talking Greek, I turned back and said, “Do you want to know something about this movie?” And the elder fellow, you know, he looked at – who turned out to be brothers from the Island of Cyprus, Greeks from the Island of Cyprus, who had immigrated to the U.S. some time ago. He said, “Well, what do you know about this movie?” Well, I said, “I saw it in Athens.” “In Athens? And what are you doing here?” I told them what I had done and I didn’t want to go back to the ship. I want to stay here. “And where are you going?” Well, I said, “I was told, you know, that maybe – I run into Greek Church or some Greeks, you know.” Now, he said, “The church won’t be able to help you. You come with us.” He said, “We live in Brooklyn.” That was the miracle that really helped me.

So I went to Brooklyn with them. Three days later, the elder fellow who was a chef at a restaurant in Brooklyn, got me a job at a bakery, 149th Street and Broadway. He told me how to use the subway. He gave me a bunch of nickels, at that time, you for pay 5 cents, no more.

My first objective was to learn English because I knew that if I want to fulfill my dream becoming an aviator, I would never be able to do it unless I learned English. But I couldn't go to a night school because of the hours that I was working. So I got hold of the Greek-English Dictionary and I began to teach myself English. Later on, I found out that there was an English school nearby, which I joined up and I went at night on my day off. Six months later, I was taking flying lessons at Floyd Bennett Field, at the small school flying J-3 Cubs about 60 miles an hour travelling. And it was a school that you didn't have to be there everyday, the way we know the flying schools today, the academies. You do that anytime you want to. I was paying \$12.00 an hour for dual and \$8.00 for solo. I continue.

I met a friend later on and he said, "I know a place in New Jersey, Westfield Airport. They have a club there where you can pay \$8.00 for instructions and \$6.00 for solo." Without hesitation, I moved to New Jersey, and I got a job at the Park Hotel in Plainfield, New Jersey, and I started to fly from Westfield Airport. I took the written examinations from the CAA. I had close to about 60-70 hours. Then, it happened, a gentleman walked into the kitchen of this big hotel. He was talking to the chef and I noticed the chef pointed at me. He came over to the pantry where I was working and he said, "Is your name Pisanos?" I said, "Yes sir." He said, "I am from the Immigration and you must come with me." I said, "Come with you, where? To Ellis Island?" "Well," I said, "do you mind if I go over to change my clothes?" "Yes," he said, "but I must come with you and I want to warn you, don't do anything because I am armed."

So we took the train from Plainfield, Jersey City, took the ferry. He didn't say anything until we were on the ferry to Ellis Island. He says, "I don't know what they're going to do with you. The Germans have already invaded your country. But we'll see what the Director will say." I was interrogated. I was asked to know whether I am a Communist or belonged to a Fascist organization. But I must really add something here, they found me because I had registered for the draft and also the Alien Registration that President Roosevelt came up with, since the war in Europe was going full speed, and of course if you remember, we had German spies here all over the place. And I think this is how the boys, you know, discovered me.

The next day, it was a big auditorium with many people and an officer in uniform was walking by, "Pisanos! Pisanos!" I said, "That's me!" "Follow me," he said. I walked into the director's office, and who was there? The owner of the Park Hotel, a German fellow who – he had arrived in America the same way I did. He was a waiter on the SS Bremen. But look what America can do to people with determination. He owned three hotels, one in Plainfield, one in Trenton and one in Newark. He came here as a waiter from the boat, from the ship, but he was discovered evidently, and he told the authorities, "Hold it, I'm going to leave the country because I can get a job on another German ship." But he came back with a vision. I didn't have a dream of doing that. I wanted to do my dream here.

So anyway, the director said, "Young man," he said, "We can't send you back to the place of your birth. The Germans are there." He said, "We have classified you as a refugee and you're

going to be given a paper, and you can go out, back to your hotel and do whatever you want to.” Was I happy? I thought this fellow Uncle Sam was really a wonderful guy.

I continued my flying. I took my flight check, which I passed with ... wonderful, even the written examination, the way I was really teaching myself English and going to a night school, you know, it helped tremendously. And by the way, while I was studying and working at the Park Hotel, I took some garbage one day over to the big garbage can, and I noticed inside, there were a bunch of menus that they had used, old menus from the day before and the week before. And I picked up a page, I noticed the manual here on the back was empty. “Hey, that’s what I’m going to do with my navigational problems for my license, and this and that, and my English,” and those were the papers that I used to learn English and learn about flying. I would copy paragraphs from the flying books I had obtained from the CAA, the predecessor of the FAA today.

Anyway, I got my license. I was very happy. In fact, I took the owner of the Park Hotel’s son up in a flight and we flew over the hotel. He was so excited and he told his mother and then this – the owner of the hotel, a fellow by the name Stender, he said, “Someday, I will go up with you. I like to be up in the air.”

Anyway, the Germans continue with their machinery, destroying everything in Europe as you know. They had occupied Greece, they were stealing fruit and olive oil and everything they could. They would kill people, and the people would be lying on the gutters in Athens, and nobody had money or the way to remove those dead bodies from the streets. And I was excited, I was so mad. I was so mad. This was about the beginning... about the middle of 1941. So I went to Westfield Airport one day and my instructor Johnny Hilton, we went out to lunch, and I was so upset and he saw me. He saw me. “Did you see the papers? The yesterday papers?” I said, “What is happening in the place of my birth?” And I must have made ... Johnny kept quiet, but he was one of the persons the British or the Royal Air Force was using to recruit Americans to join the Royal Air Force without publicity because Mr. J. Edgar Hoover didn’t like the idea of Americans going over to fight a war that America was supposed to be neutral.

So Johnny said, “Do you really want to fight the Germans?” “Oh, Johnny,” I said, “If I can only get there, I’ll fight the SOBs.” “How would you like to join the Royal Air Force?” he said. “Why? When? Where? I can’t go to England.” “No, here,” he said. “Here in America.” He said, “At the hotel Waldorf Astoria in New York, on the thirteenth floor, there is an office. Outside the door, there’s a sign ‘Clayton Knight Committee’ – Clayton and Knight were aviators in World War I. And guess who else was behind this exhibition? Fiorello LaGuardia.

So he said, “You go there and they’ll take you.” “But Johnny, I only had 170 hours and the minimum was 200 hours.” So one day, on my day off, I jumped on the train with my logbook and my license, I went to the Waldorf Astoria, I located that office, and a lady opened the door for me and she said, “Can I help you?” I said, “I was told to come here, you know, to inquire about joining the Royal Air Force.” She took me to another office and I met a squadron leader George Graves. The guy was in charge of the entire program. They had schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma with the Spartan School of Aeronautics, a school in Bakersfield, California, and another one in Dallas, and one in Glendale, California.

So I met this squadron leader and he looked at my logbook, and he said, “You only have 170 hours.” He said, “Why did you want to fly and join the RAF?” “Sir,” I said, “I want to fight the Germans.” I think this is what really did it because – you know, we had some of the Americans who joined the RAF, and I learned later on, he said, “What do you want to fly for the RAF?” “Well, I want to fly the Spitfire.” “Fly the Spitfire? Don’t you want to fight the Germans?” But evidently, I must have really impressed the man when I said I want to fight the Germans.

And about two or three months later, I was notified that I have been accepted. I was given a physical examination and flight check, and then I was sent to Polaris Flight Academy in California at Grand Central Air Terminal. The airplanes that we were flying there, the school was using, had U.S. Army Air Force markings. Some of the instructors were Army Air Corps pilots who had left the service to do that job. Anyway, I got about 100 hours military training. And when I was given the final check ride, who was the pilot? The squadron leader from New York. He was evidently satisfied the way I was flying it and I passed with colors. Fifteen of us were on this class, seven of them were now the sergeant pilots, the other eight are pilot officers, 2nd lieutenants. I was one of the pilot officers.

After the training, I went to England. I went to Officer’s Training School. I learned about how to salute, how to wear the uniform, and all of that. Then after that, I went to an operational training unit. I was taught by British pilots who had fought in the Battle of Britain, how to fight, how to fly, how to chase the Luftwaffe, and all that. Then I was assigned to a squadron flying P-51s, the P-51s with the Allison engine, because we had two kinds – with the Merlin and the Allison. And our mission was to strafe trains and anything German in Holland. So we had to fly over the North Sea. Was I little scared? You bet. Me? Flying over the sea on a single engine aircraft going to the enemy territory? But I managed to do alright.

Then a problem, the Greek Air Force in exile that had escaped from Greece had an office in London, with the King, staying at the Clarence Hotel. And one day, my flight leader said, “Pisanos...” he said, “Somebody wants you on the phone.” A Greek Air Force Wing Commander, equivalent to lieutenant colonel, got on the phone, spoke half-Greek and half-English. “Mr. Pisanos,” he says, “I’d like for you to come down to London. I need to talk to you.” He said, “We’re trying to organize a Spitfire Squadron in Egypt and we need pilots.” Evidently, many of the Greek pilots who had escaped from Greece had gone to Malta, to Egypt, some had arrived in England, and what the Greek Air Force did, you know, they went to Air Ministry and asked the Air Ministry, “Let us look on the list of pilots.” And if they could find some Greek names, bang, that’s how they found me. I wasn’t in the Greek Air Force.

Anyway, I faced this Wing Commander in London, and he says, “I’m going to take you away from the RAF and send you to Egypt to join the Greeks.” I said, “Sir, I don’t want to go to Egypt. I want to stay here because my dream is to go back to America and become an American citizen.” Well he said, “You are a Greek soldier, except you belong to the Greek government,” he was really angry because I expressed myself that way. I told him again, “Sir, I don’t want to go to Egypt. I want to stay with the RAF.” “Well, we will see what the King will say about that,” and I walked out.

But as I came up from the Clarence Hotel, I said, “My God,” I said, “How can I...?” And then I thought about my friend I had, a squadron leader Chesley Peterson who was the commander of the 71 Eagle Squadron. I located him, who happened to be in London that day and we met at the Regent Palace Hotel. We had lunch and I told him what happened. Well he said, “Do you want to go to Egypt?” “No.” I said, “I want to stay with the RAF.” Okay he said, “I’m going to Fighter Command.” Now, Fighter Command was kind of hesitant to deal with the Greeks and old Chesley Peterson was telling me later on, “I told them, you guys spent thousands of dollars to train this pilot and now you’re going to let him go to go to an outfit that they don’t even have the aircraft yet?” That’s how I saved my neck.

So the decision was made by Fighter Command Chesley Peterson and the Squadron Commander of the 268 Squadron that I belonged to. Immediately take Pisanos out of the 268 Squadron and send him Debden to the 71 Eagle Squadron. And if the Greeks want him, they’ve got to deal with Peterson. That’s how I was really – I joined the 71 Eagle Squadron. Now, this was the beginning of September 1942. The Americans have begun to arrive in England with the 8th Air Force. No aircraft yet. The B-17s began to arrive later. But General Spaatz was there and Doolittle came in later, all preparing everything. And one of the things they did, they looked with binoculars to the three Eagle Squadrons, 245 Americans or so, with a college degree. I mean, a diploma, you know, in aerial combat. So the decision was made that they’re going to have everybody from the RAF taken into the Army Air Corps, the Army Air Corps at that time, later on, they changed themselves into the Army Air Force.

So then Peterson intercepted me one day, he said, “Have you gone to London to go through the interview for the transfer?” But I said, “Sir,” I said, “I’m not American. This is for the Americans.” “They need everybody. They’re going to take you.” He says, “Go down to London.” He insisted that I go to London to go through the interview, which they had coordinated. So I went to London, I faced three Army Air Corps colonels sitting behind a desk. They asked me questions, and of course, they spotted my accent. And the middle colonel, Henry Stovall, I remember that name very well, he said, “Do you intend to go back to America after the war is over?” “Yes sir.” I said, “I want to become an American and I want to stay in America.”

So they had a little chitchat among themselves and he came back and said, “Would you accept a Commission as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army Air Force?” I said, “Oh, yes sir.” That’s how I was transferred to the Army Air Force without being an American. We continued to fly with the Spitfires. We kept the equipment, the Spitfires. We were doing strafing, chasing trains. We really didn’t dare to challenge the Luftwaffe at the time because the Luftwaffe was far superior.

Then the decision was made that we go to get an American aircraft, the old P-47. We began to train with the P-47. And while training one day, and the day was the 3rd of May 1943, I was flying with my good friend Don Gentile from nearby Piqua, Ohio. And I got a call on the radio, Pecton 39, that was my call sign, “You are to immediately pancake.” In the RAF language, pancake in the flying business means land. I said, “Repeat again, please.” He said, “You are to return to base,” the tower said. So I hurried. I told Don, I said, “Don, I’ve got to go. I’ll let Gentile in. I dove down and I landed. As I taxied the aircraft by the dispersal, Chesley Peterson, a lieutenant colonel now, he was sitting at the staff car with my squadron commander, and as I got off the aircraft, I went over. I saluted. I said, “Sir, why did they call me from my training

flight?” He said, “Get in the car.” Oh my God, then it dawned at me. Oh, Tommy Andrews who was my squadron commander, 34 Squadron Commander, he said – as he got off the car for me to get in, in the front there, he said, “Good luck.” So he began to drive towards his office. We’ve got to his office. He sat down on the other side. He asked me to sit down. “Please, Colonel Peterson...” he said, “Connect me with the Embassy in London please.” Oh my God, that’s it. The Greeks have gone to the American Embassy and told the Embassy, “This guy is not an American. He’s a Greek subject.” This is what really went through my head.

And, oh, God. “Jesus,” I said, “Why didn’t he tell me that that’s...” so then the Embassy evidently answered, and then, “This is Colonel Peterson,” he said, “Will you connect me with the ambassador please?” Now, Colonel Pete was a very good friend with Ambassador John Winant, a fighter boy from World War I. He said, “John, I’ve got the young lieutenant right here and I think you better tell him.” I knew it. I said, “Jesus, I’m going to Egypt.” I knew it right there. The ambassador answered the phone and said, “Lieutenant, how would you like to become an American citizen here in London today?” Those were the words that came through that telephone. Do you think that my heart did not come out and say “goodbye”?

So I said, “But, Sir, I’m waiting until I get back to America to become an American.” “No, no, no,” he said, “We’re going to naturalize you here in London. You better hurry down.” So then, he said, “Let me talk to Colonel Peterson.” They conversed up there and they decided. So I went to my room, put my uniform on, took the train to London. At the gate at the Embassy of course, I told them, I said, “I need to see the ambassador. They’re waiting for me.” In the office of the ambassador was a Dr. Henry Hazard, Special Envoy from the Department of Justice in Washington, to quickly naturalize a bunch of us who were serving in the Air Force at the time without – we were aliens, not Americans. And Peterson, the ambassador, when he got this signal from the State Department that the man was coming in, he thought of Peterson, because Peterson had been asking, “What do we do with this big guy? I want to make him an American,” and there was no way until this situation.

Anyway, here I am in London at the Embassy, the ambassador introduced me to Dr. Hazard, and he said, “Now this being a military event,” he said, “I think it should take place at the military headquarters,” another building around the corner from Governor Square. So we went to the other building and I walked into an auditorium just as big as this here – newspapermen, Stars and Stripes, English papers, Ed Murrow was there, and what have you. Anyway, I took the ceremony. I mean I took the oath and the ceremony was beautiful. And then Dr. Hazard said that, “Gentlemen, ladies, I’d like to introduce to you the new American.” And he said to me, “You’re going to be proud for the rest of your life, because you happened to be the first individual ever to become an American citizen outside the U.S. continental limits.” Was I proud? Am I proud? You bet your borrowed life. This is what I tell the youngsters in high school – be proud. When you look at the American flag, I said, look at it and think.

Anyway, I came back to the station the following day. I stayed in London, because Ed Murrow was a friend of Ben Lyon. Ben Lyon was one of the old actors who play on the movie that I had seen for 20 times, “Hell’s Angels,” the movie that Howard Hughes made. So anyway, Ben Lyon invited me to go to his house that night, and Ed Murrow came up there, and it was wonderful. The next day, I went to the station and everybody, honest to God, my friends and you know, Don

Gentile, he hugged me and kissed me and said, “Buddy, you’re an American. You belong to me.” And by the way, the friendship that I had created, we had created between Gentile, the Italian, and Steve Pisanos, the Greek, every time they would introduce us, they said, “Have you met the Greek and the Italian brothers?” They really considered us as those, yeah.

We continued to fight the Luftwaffe, with the P-47. I had my first victory in the 21st of May, my first mission with a P-47. I tangled up with an FW-190 and the guy was a little smart and he made a mistake, and I nailed him. Walter Cronkite visited our base and he interviewed me and another friend, and that’s how I know Walter Cronkite, who was gracious, you know, to make the best introduction to the memoirs that is coming out very soon, that I have completed.

Anyway, we continued to escort the B-17s all over Germany. I took part in that Schweinfurt mission where we lost 60 B-17s, 600 crew members. We hated – we, the fighter people, hated to take the bombers up to this point then say, “Good luck, boys, and go home,” then the rest of it was up to them. What was the Luftwaffe doing? Waiting until the fighters go back home. That’s how they used to attack the B-17s. I flew missions. I did strafing, locomotives, trains, military trains, barges from the Rhine River, especially when the Germans began to fire at our boys, the B-17 boys coming down in a parachute. That was – I mean, awful. Awful! So, I think General Spaatz spreads the word, “When you get through from the escort, get on the deck and hit anything military.”

I remember one time we were coming – we passed Frankfurt, and I show that river up there, and I saw a big barge. Few people up there, the thing was loaded, I don’t care what it had, food or what have you. I strafed the heck out of it, and I remember some of the crew guy jumping over the river, I said, “Good luck.” We continue to escort the – this is really interesting here, how do you shoot a military train to kill everybody at the same time? Now the locomotives are a different thing. You aim the locomotive, you fire and if you hit the boater, goodbye locomotive, but 10 cars loaded with German soldiers, how would you do that? The RAF taught us how to do it, particularly me, because I went to an OTU specializing on low level operations. And when the RAF flew low level, they meant below the tree top levels. That’s the only way to survive on a strafing mission, which it was the most dangerous form of combat. This is the way how I was taught how to get a train, and I’ll tell you what happened one time. We had the debriefing at the intelligence officers, they said, “Now there is a straight, you prefer to have a straight track, from this point to this point.” Now, from the timetables that they used to get from the on the underground people, they would really determine that the train leaves this city and will arrive at this city such and such time. It should be at this time, such and such time. So, we’ll take off and fly over the area. If we were early we stayed below the tree top levels up and down, but then, when the train, and you were able to see the train, by the way, from the smoke, from the smoke stack. They didn’t use electric trains, they used steam trains. So we wait until the train to come to the straight track there, then you roll up here like that, and as you turn and aim at the train, the only thing that you do is play with your rudder to establish an even platform where the nose of the aircraft will go like this. But this has to be quick, exactly like this here, so while you do that, you open up the machine guns. This way, you see, you hit anybody. I hit a train one time and I think I must have seen 50 soldiers are jumping out. How many I killed? I don’t know.

But then after the firing, you see, you see also the RAF believed that when you make a pass at an aerodrome or a locomotive, you keep on going. My friend Gabreski, we were stationed here at Wright Field together, the way they got him, he went to make a second pass at a narrow drone and then he went up like that. What do you think the gunner at the end of the train did? He followed the guy, and that's how Gabby had to jump. But anyway, this was one of the things that I always enjoy, you know, strafing. It was a great adventure.

Anyway, the P-47s were not really enough for us. We wanted to have an aircraft that we can escort the bombers to the target and then bring them home. And thank God, this fellow, Uncle Sam, brought us the P-51B, with the British engine, that was built in this country, the Parker Rolls Royce engine. But the mistake they made was to send the aircraft to England without spark plugs. So the Generals, General Kempner and Doolittle and Spaatz probably, they wanted to get the fighters up in the air as soon as possible. So they decided to use Spitfire plugs, that wasn't too good. After 5, 6, 7 hours, anyway, we come to see what happened to me later on. We got the P-51s, and to get the P-51s, our group commander, a fellow by the name Don Blexley told General Kempner ... General Kempner said, "I can't convert you to 51s. We have the Big Week coming in where we want to push the Luftwaffe out." So our group commander told the General, he said, "General you give me the most thanks, and ill be up there in 24 hours." We did it. We did it, on the 3rd of March 1944, we escorted the B-17s to Berlin, the first mission ever in the capital of Germany. After the war, just for your information, I met Adolf Gallant at the Labouchere Airport we talked about that. Ah, he says, "I was in Berlin meeting with the marshal and when we were told that the Americans came here with the bombers and fighters, we were kaput." This is what Adolf Gallant told me at Labouchere. Unbelievable, well on the 4th of March we decided to go back to Berlin. I was out of flak. I took off, and after I just put my gear up there right tank, fuel tank, just fell off the wing. So immediately I declared an emergency or something. I pulled away and let the other aircraft take off, so I didn't go on that mission.

On the 5th of March, the mission was down to Bordeaux, southern part of France, escorting B-24s. They were bombing two aerodromes, Limogeous and one in Bordeaux, that the Germans were using to Ju 88s to bomb the convoys in the Atlantic. So the British and us, you know, were determined to get them off the air there. Well, we took rendezvous with the bombers, took them over to the targets, then they got separated. A bunch went for Limogeous and a bunch for Bordeaux. I went along with the Bordeaux people. Over Bordeaux we got into a fight, I got a couple of those and damaged some more. Then we got separated, and I began to come home alone.

Over Lemans, a city of France, my engine acted funny. I knew the spark plugs would let me down. By the time I have reached the southern part of Le Havre, that engine was ... and I knew that I would not be able to make the Channel. And then at the same time, as I was coming over the city of Le Havre, I didn't want to turn with a dead engine, after my engine quit, you know, I tried to bypass the city. The Germans started to open up with their ack-ack and they just scared the heck out of me. So I said to heck with that, so all of a sudden when my engine quit, I gave mayday on the radio, and after my third mayday, I lost my radio. I said to heck with that, I'm turning right back and I'm going to bail out, south. So I guided the aircraft south, this is a long one here. I don't want to really keep you people. But it was really difficult.

We had kept the RAF parachutes and main vest. We love them because the RAF parachute you have a little button here or something, you connected the four pieces here. The American parachutes, you have to really plug each one here, each one here, and each one here. The RAF, if you had to really take the parachute off, you just turn that buckle up here, pop it, and the parachute will disappear. When we left that morning for that mission, I had forgotten to connect the cord from the dinky, to the main vest. Now, if you use the parachute over the Channel, the moment your feet hit the water, you don't need a parachute anymore. Okay, it will disappear, buckle, the parachute goes and the cord will pull the dinky, which you want. I had forgotten to connect the plug to the main vest, male to female.

Over Bordeaux evidently when I went like that, you know, something went wrong, and the thing just got stuck somewhere below my feet. At 2,000 feet after I had released the canopy, I had in mind to, you know, stand up, and of course the wind would push me back, stand up, step on the left wing and slide down. So here I am standing up trying to fight my way with my parachute on now and I looked up the cord down there, and I said, "My God, the cord!" I began to really scare, scare? I pulled the thing up; I tried to pull it and nothing to it. In the meantime, the engine was dead; the aircraft was just coming down, beautifully. I have dreamed the aircraft by a way to leave the thing in a good way. So then I sat down again and I play around with that cord, trying to pull it up, back and forth. Finally, the thing came loose, I connected it immediately with the main vest and I didn't need that anymore. I was on land now. And then I stood up again tried to step on the wing, and as I got out on the wing, I had difficulty with my parachute, I stopped on the wing, and thanked God before I was to slide down, I looked up ahead and I can see cattle and this French farmhouse. I was about 3 or 400 feet above the ground. Oh my God I said, I thought of trying to jump back in the cockpit, but again with the parachute, you know. I did not want to destroy the steak, you know.

Well the aircraft evidently came close contact with the ground and the right wing, hit the ground first, and by doing that the aircraft – I was thrown ... I was holding with all my power, that didn't help ... was thrown forward missing the stopped four-bladed prop, tumbling in the air. Now how long I stayed down there, trembling and scared like the devil and I had injured my shoulder, by the way. Few minutes later, I began to think "I better put fire on this thing and get away from here." So, I thought taking my parachute, putting it back in the cockpit, taken my scarf off, dipping it in one of the tanks, mixing it with silk after I pulled the cord, and then, with the matches that I had taken out of the escape kit which I had in my pocket, light up and get away from there. I had the parachute in the cockpit I had just dipped my scarf in there, and I was walking up there until automatic firing from down below, over my head, "Prrrrrrr ... Oh my God."

Two German soldiers, evidently, they had seen me, coming down. The next fire, it hit the vertical stabilizer, I think, over so close to my head that they scared the heck out of me. I dropped everything, escape kit. I had taken some things out, the escape map and matches and the money we had some several thousand Francs in there I case we need to use them if we were down. So I began to run, and those rascals, when I was running towards a forest nearby and those rascals were still firing and I can see the bullets, you know, hitting the ground ahead of me. I got into the forest, they got into the forest, and that was when I lost them. As I came out from

the forest, I jumped a fence, I got into another farm and as I was coming down the road for a while there, I saw the motorcycle that these two gentlemen had come up.

Anyway, for five days, I wandered all over the countryside, eating nothing but dandelions and drinking water from creeks. I made contact five days later, and the French gentleman that picked me up, the first thing he said when he took me to his house, he said, “Stefan, you parler l’anglais not like an American?” He spotted my accent, and he thought that perhaps I was the Gestapo. Did you know what the Gestapo did? Or were doing during the war. There was a branch of German-American youngsters who got trapped in Germany when the war started, they couldn’t get back here. The Gestapo recruited them and then they impersonated to be American aviators, dog tags, they had all the dog tags they want. And perhaps, but the British you know had a beautiful system, whereby if one of their pilots went down, the underground can contact England by radio, not to say, “Hey, we got John Doe down here. Is he your boy?” They use code words on the radio. “Mary had a baby five pounds, they going to baptize that tomorrow.” I mean words like that and every word had a code. That’s how they found out who I was.

Two days later, my lieutenant colonel, he was a lieutenant colonel in the French Secret Service, the guy who picked me up. He said, “So you are the Flying Greek?” That’s how they knew me in the RAF and in the 4th Fighter Group, he says, “We got word from London, and we were told to take care of you.” He hugged me, kissed me on both cheeks and he also had, he had brought a bottle of red wine. They were really wonderful. Anyway, they said, “What is it you want to do?” I said, “I want to go to Spain.” “It’s impossible.” “Why?” I went down this – you remember this here, I went down the 5th of March, just almost 3 months before the invasion, what General Ike, doing in London with all of his group? Using the underground in France to prepare to blow up this bridge, blow up this junction. Do this and do that, so when we invade, there will be delay for the Germans, wonderful. So I ended up going in Paris. How did I go to Paris? In a loaded truck with firewood. As we were driving down the highway, honest to God, I can see the German trucks, and staff cars and motorcycles, patrol to vehicles. And thank God as we left the village; I was staying south of Le Havre, a few miles farther down nearby an aerodrome – two German soldiers as we we’re coming round the small bend and we were travelling kind of slow. Two German soldiers, one of them pulled his luger and he stopped in front of the truck. He says, he came by the driver and said, “Aparri?” They want to bump a ride to Paris so the driver and the man next to me to my right. I was in the middle in the cabin; he spoke good English. He told the guy, “Let him come up.” So he put the two Germans at the top of the firewood. So as soon as we were going now. The Frenchman to the right said to me in English. Now, he said, “We going to protect that precious, that the precious cargo we have.” What the firewood? “No, no, machine guns, radios, hand grenades, pistols,” underneath the woods. Those were weapons the RAF and ourselves began to really air drop at night. How do you bring him into Paris? You don’t put them in a box and take it to the post office. You know, this was really I mean a clever idea. But when he told me that under the wood in the truck I was riding in, he had machine guns, I wanted to say, “Stop the God damn truck. I want to get out.” So we arrived in Paris, and the two Germans – one of the German you know hit the God damn roof of the cab there until they got off. I was taken to a place. I spent six months in the French capital, and I lived with 16 different families. They didn’t keep you at the place permanently because some of the French people if they spotted that there was a young fellow at this particular house back and forth and this and that, they will report you to a Gestapo. What was the price?

50,000 Francs if you can turn in an American or an English aviator. Anyway we went through that.

I lived with a family South of Paris. And this guy, an Italian Frenchman, would visit every so often and have dinner with the people. And he said to me, "Demain, tomorrow, will go to church and pray." My landlord he said, "I want you to come with me." So the next day, Sunday, we went to the church, and I saw more Germans uniform – Luftwaffe mostly – in the church. Evidentially, I really don't know whether it was ... well with the guy being Italian, French, it must have been a catholic church. So anyway, I had the fear that one of those guys will come up and tap me and said, "Hey, young fellow what are you doing here?" Normally the young people at my age would hide themselves during the day because the Gestapo would pick them up and send them to Germany for slavery. So we walk into the church and truthfully, truthfully, honestly, did I pray? You bet! I prayed to the Lord there, you know, for a way to you know get me back to England.

So after the services ... one thing I noticed about the priest, a wonderful nice looking man. He would pick up a book from here and then reach something – although I had French in high school in Athens, you know, I had learned quite a bit by that time. So he was reading and then he would put that book down then he come up here and up another book and read again. Okay. So the service is over. Everybody got up. And as we were walking out, boy, I said, "One of these guys going to tap my shoulder." That's the fear I had. We got into his Citroen and we began to drive back home. He said to me, "Did you like the service?" Oh, I said, "Yeah," but I said the, "but the Germans is in there?" "They are Christians. Don't worry." He said, "Did you notice anything about the priest?" I said, "That he was nice looking man." "No, no, no, nothing?" "Ah the priest, no priest, Intelligence!" What he was reading from the books was codes for agents inside the church. I couldn't believe it honestly. I just couldn't believe it.

On the 5th of June, I was moved to another place and a lady came in with a baby. She said, "I have the tickets." This was a part of the underground. "I have the tickets. Tomorrow we're catching the train for Brest. You're going to go there to a safe house and wait for a British submarine to take you back to England." This was the 5th of June 1944. What happened on the 6th of June? [Laughter] Everything. You should have seen Paris. The Germans were out with tanks and what have you. It was really chaos and it was pathetic. So, and the woman had taken the baby, I learned from the orphanage to impersonate to the Gestapo, perhaps, you know, because the Gestapo patrol everything.

I have so many of these stories. I have a story to tell you how I ended up in the sewer with a French Intelligence guy because he didn't want to go through the checkpoint there and to show his face. He was moving me from one place to another. He didn't want to show his face to the Gestapo, who was doing the checking. We ended up in the sewer. And when I asked the guy I said, "How did you know where we are going here?" We ended up further down at the square. He opened up the manhole, like we had gotten into and we we're in the middle of a square. Well he said, "I attended the University of Paris." He was an Intelligence guy too. "And I didn't have money so I got the job with the sewer. They were paying good, you know, and this is how I really finished my education." "You know, it's interesting," he said, "the Germans don't like to be down there because of the smell. And if it rains, you don't get down there because you're

going to be in trouble.” As I said, I have quite a few to tell you about this, but I’m not going to bother you with that.

Anyway, on the liberation of Paris on 26th of August 1944, you should have seen the place when General LeClaire. Ike evidently told our people, let LeClaire with his French soldiers walk in to Paris to make the Parisians think that they liberated Paris. Behind LeClaire was the 4th Division, Army division, our own division, with General Burton, whom I met, you know, during the coming in to Paris. Anyway, when Paris was liberated, how many aviators came out into that world? Some 7 or 800 British and Americans. My last stay with that group, notorious saboteurs, I went out with them one night. We derailed a train. I went out another night, northeast of Paris, not in the heart of Paris. We met another group, ambushed a convoy of seven German trucks that were loaded with stolen French property they were taking to Germany as they were evacuating. From the place where I was staying in the city northeast of Paris, I saw a horse buggy with four wheels, no horse up in the front, able German soldiers pulling it to go to Germany with wounded Germans they had taken from hospitals. I saw vehicles the Germans had stolen from the French, but what the French had done, they had taken the rubber from the wheels. And I remember you know that noise was so bad. Driving an automobile without tires on a cobblestone road? I said to my French friend ... You know, he spoke English and he said, “They came here, glory, you know, to capture France and look at them. Look at them.” They were really evacuating Paris. Again as I said, there are so many things here.

So anyway I got back to London, I mean to England, interrogated by our intelligence. And I had some guys they wanted to know everything because I had spent quite a bit of time with the underground. And the rule was that, if you had gone down in France or Belgium and spent time with the underground, you do not go back in combat. So I was dead, as far as I have completed by the time 110 missions and I had shot down 10 enemy aircraft.

So then the decision was that I’ll go and serve at the Wing. While I was at the Wing Headquarters, I got a telegraph from my buddy Gentile, who was here at this place. “I just learned that you returned safely. I knew you were not ready to go.” He said, “I’m getting married at the end of November. I want you to be my best man. And see if you can get an assignment to Wright Field.” Now, my general at the Wing Headquarters, he said, “As an evade, you have a preference. You can go anywhere you want.” I said I would go to Wright Field. I came here. And later on, the runway that I did test flying after I finished the Test Pilot School, they built a museum! Beautiful place. Beautiful.

I went through a Test Pilot School. Gentile and I were selected ... He had gone to school before me. Selected to do the service test of the YP-80 at Muroc, Edwards Air Force Base today. We finished up and we came back here. We did many, many tests. I had a test run one time with the P-63. I was flying over Cincinnati at about 30,000 feet. The thing blew up but I was able to bring the aircraft here and land on the east-west runway. I touched down about halfway down the runway. I slammed the brakes. I wasn’t on fire up there, other than the engine blew, and it was banging like the devil. Something inside, you know, had broken up. Where did you think I caught fire? The two wheels after the rubber was run out, the rims created sparks and banged. The fire trucks were following me. The ambulance was behind them. Staff cars were chasing along that west runway. And when I stopped at the very end of the runway, I had released both

doors by the way, both doors, thinking I might have to jump. And when I stopped the aircraft, I jumped out. And that fireman there, I don't know who on earth he was, with that hose of his and the foam, I was just completely covered up like a snowman.

Then I remember they put me on the ambulance and they brought me to the hospital here at Patterson. We don't have hospital there, a small clinic at the Wright Field. And it was then when I made the decision to leave the service and go to fly for TWA. I left here and went to Kansas City. Oh! By the way, I forgot to mention that while I was here, and when Gentile and I returned to Wright Field from Muroc, Chuck Yeager has joined us, Bob Hoover, then later on Dick Bong, Gabreski. We had six aces here and the total destruction of enemy aircraft in the Europe and the Pacific, 147. This is what Dick Bong reminded me one time while we were having coffee. The weather was bad. Anyway, I went to fly for TWA, but it was not a pleasant job. They had hired too many pilots. I had two furloughs, and then the captains went on a strike. But thank God, I met a wonderful woman in Kansas City, and in 1946, I didn't get let her away from me. I married her, and not too long ago we passed our 61st anniversary. She gave me two wonderful children, one of them is Mr. Jeff, right here. He was born in Kansas City and the other one is Diane, who is a practitioner in Denver.

Anyway, everything is wonderful. So I was on a Constellation flight to LaGuardia through Washington, D.C. I called my friend Gentile, who had left the service. He came back and he got a regular commission and he was at the Pentagon. "Buddy," I said, "I'm coming in TWA flight and so and so, how about having a coffee?" We had coffee together at National. I told him about my own happiness with TWA. "You want to get back on active duty?" "Darn," I said, "I do have a college degree. You know the Air Force requires at least any officers coming back on active duty at least two years of college." "Yes, you don't have college but you do have something that the Air Force will give a million dollars to have you. Jet time! Gentile and I were probably the few of the few who had over a hundred hours test jet time on the YP-80 at Muroc, let alone the German Me 262 we flew here under P-59. He said, "When you get back to Kansas City, I'm going to send you an application for return to active duty." "Don't send it through channels. You send it to me." Ten days later, I got a paper in a mail. "By direction of the President, you are to so and so ..." I went to the Pentagon.

Anyway, I had good assignments all over. Uncle Sam was really wonderful to me. I served back in Germany and from Germany, I volunteered to go Vietnam. I served a tour in Vietnam. I commanded a squadron out there and I flew an aircraft supporting the Army. And then on the way back home from that tour, I was supposed to go the Vandenberg Air Force Base because my wife wanted California. We have been in California before. The telegram from the Pentagon says "Because you have been promoted to colonel, your assignment to Vandenberg is cancelled and you go into this place." I was Deputy Commander for an ICBM, Titan II missile, and I controlled 18 of those rascals, and I want you to know that the country, Uncle Sam and the Air Force was really protecting you. Those rascals were looking at the best Soviet cities. No doubt they were doing the same thing to us. But if you remember that time we had to the B-52s, you know, flying at the same time so in case something happened, we were going to do it.

Anyway, from that assignment, the Pentagon called me again. They were looking for a colonel with fighter pilot background, Vietnam service, who can speak Greek. I was the only guy!

That's what the IBM and he said – the colonel, by the way, was a Colonel Tollman, who later became Commandant of Air Academy with three stars. He said, "I told my guys, you know." And he said, "They told me and they called me back." The only card that pops up on that IBM machine was this guy Pisanos." So they took me away, and I went back to the country where I was born, the place where my odyssey to America had originated. You think, my friends – my father had passed away, my mother was still alive – but my friends who thought that I was crazy, unbelievable! And I had a chauffeur. I had a diplomatic passport. And the only way to Washington, you know, I guess I was a will. I was briefed by the State Department, by the DIA, by the CIA and by the Air Force Intelligence, not to be a spy but have this open because – this was not typical Air Force assignment. This was a diplomatic and something else. Anyway, believe me it was really interesting, and from that assignment, I decided to put my uniform away.

And let me say this in closing. I am proud of the success I found in America, and I am also proud, very proud, for having become a citizen of one of the greatest countries in the world, the United States of America. But I have always felt kind of guilty, you know, because over the years, I have received so much that I will never be able to pay back Uncle Sam. I treasure highly what America did for me because there is so much that I have to be grateful. Uncle Sam helped me to fulfill not only my dream that I have from the old country, but to achieve greatness and goals that I never dreamed. I never dreamed that someday I would be a colonel, and they would put eagles on my shoulder. I never dreamed that I would go attend the Test Pilot School at the Air Force, the Air Command and Staff College, the Air War College. I never dreamed that I would earn 45 decorations, awards and decorations from four countries, most of them from Uncle Sam. My gratitude to America is too great really to express in words how I feel in my heart. For this reason I am and always will be obligated to this wonderful country of ours, your country and my adopted country. America, ladies and gentlemen is the greatest democracy on this planet and it's worth really serving in its Armed Forces, defending the country, fighting for the country and dying for this country and the American Flag. Thank you very much.