

Lindsley - WWII and Undergraduate Bio

September 1940 to June 1948

In September 1940 I entered Brown University as a freshman to attain the degree in electrical engineering. The family plan was to train as an engineer but at a liberal arts college. Join a fraternity. Meet all the right people. Build social skills and become a highly paid sales engineer. Richard Fink, my stepfather, was a top salesman for Cook, Dunbar, and Smith manufacturers of rolled gold plate. He often took me on his sales visits when I was in High school.

At Brown I was in the class of '44 and undisciplined. I drank too much, pledged Zeta Psi fraternity and with my piano playing buddy, Phil Simpson, sang duets all night at fraternity parties. I fell asleep in 8:00 AM classes, having slept not at all the night before. I got either the highest grade in the class (Analytical Geometry) or the lowest (Advanced Calculus). If I loved it, I exceeded. If I hated it, I flunked. There was no middle ground! The war escalated in Europe. High school friends joined the merchant marine on the Murmansk run. Others joined our US Marines. One was a Navy flier. I thought about joining the war effort every day. I envied uniforms and combat ribbons and WINGS!. My heart was in flying a spitfire as an American volunteer for the Royal Air Force over England and chasing Messerschmitts back to Germany. I would rather die in air combat, a hero, than sit here in Providence in a lecture seat.

In January 1942 the US Army Air force dropped its age requirement for cadets from 21 to 18 years. I immediately joined and was in class 42J Aviation Cadets at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama. I went through preflight at the top of my class, but washed out in June on a flight physical eye exam with prism divergence to exceed 6 diopters. The medics giving the physicals urged us to erase the check marks on the examination forms we carried from exam post to exam post. Some of the cadets did erase physical problem checks. I chose not to erase my prism divergence check. I was so young, naive, and moral that I thought the physicians knew more than I did. I did not want to take 9 men on my crew to their death because I wanted silver wings. So I left the check mark on my form, and was washed out. The ophthalmologists said my eyes were not good enough to be a navigator or bombardier. My eyes were not even good enough for glider pilot school! I was discharged from Cadets. I was ashamed to go home as a civilian, so enlisted in the Army Air Corps as a private at Maxwell field. In July the Air Corps found there were not enough perfect eyes in the country to fight the war, so they dropped vision requirements for flying. Prism divergence dropped from 6 diopters to 12! Mine was 8 diopters! I was so young and inexperienced that I did nothing about it. I let them assign me to the military

police and be a guard at the main Maxwell Field gate, because I had been top in my cadet preflight class I really could polish brass, buttons and buckles, stand ramrod straight, and salute smartly.

I got promoted to corporal, and drove a jeep on night patrol around the air base perimeter. I still love the throb of that little flat head four engine. I got caught by the officer of the day while laying on the hood of that MP jeep with a beautiful young nurse and counting the stars while on duty! They sent Juanita to combat in Africa and busted me to private and put me on the back of a GI truck cab with a sawed off shotgun guarding prisoners while they picked up paper along the Birmingham highway fence. I was now a prison chaser! I started drinking too much beer, spending every night in town with an MP pass. One day I fell asleep on the truck cab under my umbrella. When I looked up I saw only 3 of my 4 prisoners. The fourth was running towards the airfield fence. I yelled halt three times, pumped a shell into the shot gun, aimed in the direction of the prisoner now running faster, and pulled the trigger. A buck shot hit him in the leg. We put him in the back of the truck and drove him to the base hospital while the other three prisoners swore at me and pledged that they would get me some day for this.

On the advise of older, peace time, GIs, I had been going about once a week to both Provost Marshal and Base Chaplain complaining that I had Army general classification test scores above 150 and should be better used than as a prison chaser. The combination of these appeals, my test scores, my year and half college engineering experience, and the shooting got me sent to airplane mechanics school at Keesler Field, Biloxi Mississippi I studied hard and became a student instructor who went to class an hour before the other students, and then taught a squad of about 15 students the topic of the Day. I graduated first in a class of about 800 and was awarded my certificate and engineers badge by the Major General in front of the entire school student body massed at attention. As a reward for being top in the class, I was being sent to Helicopter Engineering Officer school at Twenty Nine Palms while all the other graduates were off to gunnery school at Tyndall Field, Florida to become combat flight engineers. The first sergeant came running out of the orderly room yelling, "Lindsley, We've got to cut you a new set of orders! We have to restencil your barracks bags! You can't go to Twenty Nine Palms! You're on detached service from the 831st Military Police Company and have to go back to Maxwell!"

Back at Maxwell I wasn't even in the air force any more. The 831st Guard Squadron had been transferred out of the Army Air Corps into the Army Military Police Branch and made the 831st Military Police Company. We no longer wore a propeller and wings on our uniforms, but wore crossed pistols! And I was an airplane mechanic! I had blue triangle with a gold rotary engine

insignia sewed on my right sleeve! I got teased by the former cops in the company. They would bend over, point to their butt and say, "Hey! Engineer! Come over here and check my oil!"

I went back to my Provost Marshal and Chaplain monthly bitching and soon got transferred back into the Air Force 82nd training squadron on Maxwell Field as a flight engineer on B24 bombers. I worked up to be crew chief for Major Buttman on Army 00, The Flying Goose, the squadron commander's ship. Soon our squadron was transferred to pilot transition training at Smyrna Field, Tennessee. An instructor pilot, and an engineer took up two rookie pilots just out of twin engine flight school, shot a few landings by each student pilot, then the instructor got out. The flight engineer stayed while the student pilots learned to fly the heavy four engined B24 bomber. We would shoot 30 to 60 landings a day! Landing and take off accidents were common. I was flying every day, but not in a spitfire over England chasing messerschmitts back to Germany.

Tech Sergeant Perez, a former peace time ground machine gunner at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, had volunteered to switch over to the Air Corps and lay on his belly in the back of an early B17 and fire a flexible 50 caliber machine gun out of its sawed off tail becoming one of the B17s first tail gunners. Perez had flown a tour of duty in the pacific, told great war stories, and wore an air medal with oak leaf clusters and a yellow and red Asia-Pacific combat ribbon with several battle stars. I admired Perez. He really knew the Air Corps enlisted flight crew life. We were good drinking and woman chasing buddies. One day just as I landed with two rookie pilots, the B24 in front of us went off the end of the runway and nosed down, twin tail sticking up in the air at a 45 degree angle. A little smoke rose out of one of the starboard engines. We taxied over to operations while civilian fire trucks raced to the nosed up B24. The waist windows were closed and jammed shut by the fuselage twisting from the crash. You could hear the men inside yelling and pounding the sides of the aircraft. Flames were now coming from the starboard engines. The civilian crash crews had forgotten their asbestos suits and a truck raced back to the hangars to get them. Just then there was a terrible SWOOSH and a wave of hot air as the plane went up in flames from the spilled 120 octane gas.

Back at operations, my student pilots asked who were the student pilots in that plane? I asked who was the engineer? The operations officer replied, Tech Sergeant Perez. I shouted, "S--t! Not Perez! Combat in the Pacific, and now ashes at the end of a runway in Smyrna, Tennessee!" I went into Nashville, to our favorite bar, got drunk, and refused to fly. The flight surgeon made me come to his office every day and sign a yellow sheet under the words, "I am yellow. I refuse to fly for my country." I did but each day I added "with rookie pilots in Smyrna. I want to fly in

combat!" above my signature. After about 2 weeks of this, I was sent to gunnery school at Tyndall Field, Florida.

I went through gunnery school at Tyndall, air crew makeup and assignment at Savannah, GA, and staging for high altitude bombardment at Langley Field, VA. We flew our factory new silver B24-J from Langley to Newark, NJ; to Bedford, MA; to Bangor ME; to Gander, Newfoundland; the Azores; Marrakech, Morocco; El Aouina, Tunisia; to the US air base in Lecce, Italy. We were a replacement crew to the 415th squadron, 98th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force. Major Habegar, our new squadron commander, took our shiny new plane for his own crew, leaving us to fly as replacements in battle scarred, patched, veteran ships from the African campaign. I was shot down with a crew that I had never seen before on my first real combat mission to the Asta Romani oil fields in Ploesti, Rumania on 22 July 1944.

After parachuting out over the North Albanian Alps we were traded by partisans to the Croatians for guns and then handed over to the Germans in Dubrovnick, Yugoslavia. We were interrogated by the Hungarian Gestapo in Pestvideki Prison in Budapest and imprisoned in Stalag Luft IV in Gross Tychow, Pomerania, between Danzig and Berlin. In January of 45 our guards marched us from Luft IV to Hamburg across northern Germany to keep us away from the advancing Russian Armies. We had only two bowls of hot soup in 63 days. I went from 175 to 114 pounds. When we were temporarily in Stalag 11B, Fallingbostel, I sneaked through the wires into the French prisoner's compound as my fellow Air Force POWs were marched back into Germany. A few days later dressed as a French POW I escaped from a wood picking up detail in the forest with 2 French POWs. We went through the German front lines to the Queen's Regiment, British 2nd Army. I escaped rather than be marched back into Germany with the rest from stalag Luft IV. I was afraid that when Germany was only a few hundred kilometers wide, there would be no room for hated prisoners of war, and we might all be machine gunned as we marched.

Mary Elizabeth Moore and I married in early November, 1945 while I was still in the Air Force. I had dated her a few times before the war, and we dated while I was recovering from malnutrition and avitaminosis and Pleurisy at Cushing General Hospital in Framingham MA. I got discharged on points in November 1945 and we went back to Brown University on the GI bill. Mary got a job as a secretary in a Lawyers office. We had a small basement apartment on George Street in Providence. Having difficulty back in advanced calculus, I chose taking courses that I enjoyed with content that I liked. Most of these courses were in Experimental Psychology and Biology, so that meant dropping out of engineering. I had a double undergraduate major in Experimental Psychology and Histo-chemistry. I had been influenced by Flanders Dunbar's

book, "Psychosomatic Medicine." I planned to personally solve the mind-body problem by becoming expert in both. I became president of Zeta Psi fraternity and helped fill the house with returned combat veterans. Notable among them was Dick Check, former chief quartermaster on the aircraft carrier Bunker Hill. I also was proud of getting the first Jewish man into our chapter by blackballing the whole delegation until his box passed with all white balls. Unfortunately he did not even keep a single Jew in the following class delegations. With Ben Latt, whose dad was a union organizer, I started the Lincoln Society with its motto of "Fellowship Without Fences." I became interested in liberal causes and folk music, and learned to sing and play a six string guitar. I graduated with Highest Honors in Psychology in June 1948. I did not make Phi Beta Kappa or Cum Laude because Brown averaged in my grades and incompletes (which had become E's) from before the war!

Among the many things I learned from my war experiences were that authority is often wrong, and that on your own you must assert yourself to correct their errors. I learned that luck is often good, but sometimes bad. When it is bad, you just have to sweat through it. And, that if you just keep slugging on, and watch for every opportunity, you can survive almost anything! I was a survivor and knew how to do it!