



*Oral
History
Program*



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Walt Gould

Interviewed by Alyssa Kammerman
11 April 2019

Oral History Program
Weber State University
Stewart Library
Ogden, Utah

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Mission Statement

The Oral History Program of the Stewart Library was created to preserve the institutional history of Weber State University and the Davis, Ogden and Weber County communities. By conducting carefully researched, recorded, and transcribed interviews, the Oral History Program creates archival oral histories intended for the widest possible use.

Interviews are conducted with the goal of eliciting from each participant a full and accurate account of events. The interviews are transcribed, edited for accuracy and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewees (as available), who are encouraged to augment or correct their spoken words. The reviewed and corrected transcripts are indexed, printed, and bound with photographs and illustrative materials as available. The working files, original recording, and archival copies are housed in the University Archives.

Project Description

Hill Aerospace Heritage Foundation oral history project is a series of oral histories documenting the life stories and experiences of the board members of the Hill Aerospace Heritage Foundation. Board members recall their time in military service, as well as their memories of starting the foundation in 1983 and opening the Hill Aerospace Museum in 1987. Each interview begins with a brief life sketch of the individual board member, then moves onto their memories of the early days of the Hill Aerospace Museum. They discuss ongoing efforts to make the museum the premier location for preserving Utah's Aviation and Air Force history and name important figures on the Board of Directors, base command, and museum staff who helped to make the museum an important influence in the community.

Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account. It reflects personal opinion offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Abstract: The following is an oral history interview with Walt Gould, conducted on April 11, 2019, at Hill Aerospace Museum, by Alyssa Kammerman. Walt discusses his life, his memories while serving in the United States Air Force, and his experiences while serving on the Hill Aerospace Heritage Foundation Board. Sarah Tooker, the video technician, is also present during this interview.

AK: Today is April 11, 2019. We are at Hill Aerospace Museum with Mr. Walt Gould, speaking with him about his experiences here. My name is Alyssa Kammerman and I'll be conducting the interview, and Sarah Tooker is on the camera with me as well. So, Walt, thank you so much again for meeting with us today.

WG: You're welcome

AK: First I want to start out with: when and where were you born?

WG: I was born in Pocatello, Idaho in May of 1941.

AK: Ok. That's right at the beginning of World War Two.

WG: Just before. The attack on Pearl Harbor was in December. My birthday is in May, so it was just before the war really got going

AK: Were your parents involved in the war at all?

WG: My Dad worked in a shipyard in Vancouver, Washington and they made escort aircraft carriers there during the war. They made fifty of them if you can imagine that.

AK: So, did you end up spending your childhood in Washington, then?

WG: Yeah. After the war was over, we moved to Ephrata, Washington where I consider that I actually grew up. It was from the time I was about five years old till the time I went away to college.

AK: What are your memories of living in Washington?

WG: It was really neat for a child. We first lived in what had been an Air Force Base during World War Two. They took the hospital and divided it up into apartments for government employees and my dad qualified so we moved into one of those apartments. So there was a whole bunch of kids that were crammed into a really small area and we really had a ball.

AK: Did your dad continue to work in the shipyards after the war?

WG: No they closed the shipyard down.

AK: Which elementary school did you go to?

WG: I went to an elementary school and high school in Ephrata. It was a town of about 5,000 people and there was a large government contingent there that was working on the Columbia Basin irrigation project. And that's where my dad worked and why we stayed there until, well, my parents stayed there until after I left home.

AK: Ok. Do you have any siblings?

WG: Yes, I have a sister. She passed away about five years ago.

AK: Just the one sister?

WG: Yeah.

AK: Was she older or younger?

WG: Younger by two and a half years.

AK: Did you have a high school job growing up?

WG: No. I didn't really get a job until I went to college.

AK: What did you study in college?

WG: Electrical engineering.

AK: Which college did you go to?

WG: Washington State University in Pullman, Washington.

AK: Ok. So is electrical engineering mainly like wiring in buildings and houses?

WG: It can be. There are three major emphases in electrical engineering: There was electronics, then there was commercial, and then there was electrical power which was transition lines going into houses and such.

AK: Which one did you specialize in?

WG: In Commercial.

AK: Commercial. Ok. Interesting. When did you meet your wife?

WG: Well it was about 1962. We were both students at Washington State. We met at a Lutheran student association and then one thing led to another and we got married.

AK: What was she studying?

WG: Social Studies.

AK: Which year did you graduate college?

WG: 1964

AK: Ok. What did you go on to do after that?

WG: Well, when I was in college I was also in the ROTC program, so when I got out of college I got a commission in the Air Force and then went into navigator training at James Connelly Air Force Base, Texas.

AK: Interesting. And this was during the Korean War, is that correct?

WG: No, this was the lead up to Vietnam.

AK: Oh ok. As a member of the ROTC during the lead up to Vietnam, did you see any animosity towards the military yet or were things still pretty calm?

WG: Things were pretty calm still. That sort of thing didn't really happen until, oh, 1968, 1969, something like that.

AK: What were some of the things that they had you do in the ROTC?

WG: Well they kinda had two things: They had what they called Leadership Lab, which was basically marching and teaching other cadets to march. Then they had Academics, which started off with Air Force history and then went into navigation and other various classes that are associated with aviation.

AK: Ok. Would they ever have you get into airplanes while you were in college?

WG: Just once.

AK: Just mostly book and classroom learning then?

WG: Yeah

AK: That's interesting. What made you want to join the ROTC?

WG: I'd always been interested in airplanes and the Air Force and at that particular moment in time Washington State University was a land grant college and all the land grant colleges had to provide ROTC and you were required to take it for your first two years in school. So I had to either take an Air Force or Army ROTC anyway. So I took Air Force for the first two years, which is the basic program. And then I got selected to go into the advanced program which is the next two years. Then if you finished all that successfully, you got a commission in the Air Force when you graduated.

AK: And were you commissioned as First Lieutenant?

WG: As Second Lieutenant

AK: Ok. So you said after you graduated and were commissioned, you went on to be a navigator? Is that correct?

WG: I went through navigation school and when I finished that I got selected to go on to an advanced school. That was the Electronic Warfare school at Mather Air Force Base, California.

AK: What was the training like back then for electronic warfare?

WG: We spent a lot of time in the academics and in training. We did some flying but not a lot.

AK: Ok. So I'm just trying to understand: What was electronic warfare like at that time? Was it kind of like today's satellite kind of warfare or like precision warfare?

WG: No. At that point electronic warfare was divided up into two major areas. One was electronic reconnaissance, where you fly around the perimeter of an unfriendly country and record all the signals of their radars. And then the other major area of emphasis was bomber defense and that's what I went into. With bomber defense your job is to defend the airplane against ground air missiles, fighters, and ground to air artillery

AK: That's fascinating. So what was some of the training that you received on that? I'm trying to think of what kind of technology you would have at the time, basically.

WG: Well mostly it was just operating equipment, jamming equipment, and dropping flares or dropping chaff which is shredded aluminum foil that makes a return on the enemy radar. So you spend a lot of time learning how to do that right.

AK: Did you continue to do that throughout your Air Force career?

WG: No I did that for five years in B-52 bombers during the Vietnam War. When I finished up with that, the Air Force sent me to graduate school at Oklahoma State University.

AK: What did you study there?

WG: General Engineering, which is kind of like systems engineering in some schools.

AK: Were you wanting to continue with the Air Force? Is that why you were studying that?

WG: Yeah. When I got selected to go to grad school I was either gonna go to grad school or I was going to get out, and the graduate school opportunity came first. So at that point I kind of made up my mind that I was gonna make it a career.

AK: That's interesting. How long were you in the Air Force for?

WG: Twenty years.

AK: Ok. So after you graduated from Oklahoma State, where did you go from there?

WG: I went to Thailand because the Vietnam War was kind of winding down, but they still had a requirement for aircrews to complete a one year Permanent Change of Station (PCS). I had not had such a tour yet even though I was in B-52s for three Temporary Duty Tours (TDY). I still had to pick up that PCS tour and so they sent me to Korat, Thailand.

AK: How long were you stationed there?

WG: A year.

AK: Ok. What were some of your duties while you were in Thailand?

WG: Mostly I was an air crew member. The EB-66 is a reconnaissance airplane so rather than bomber defense, our job was to record enemy radar signals and then get all of their technical parameters so that the targeteers could figure out how to attack them.

AK: That's fascinating. And you mentioned you had flown over to Vietnam a number of times during the war?

WG: Well I ended up going over three times. The first time was for sixty days and then the last two times were for six months a piece. So I spent what, twelve, fourteen months flying over there before I went to grad school.

AK: Why wasn't that counted as a tour?

WG: That's just the way they had the rules. The rule was that no air crew member would go back for a second tour until everybody had gotten a single tour. That didn't really pan out. But they had their rules and because I was in TDY status rather than permanent change of station all that TDY time didn't count under their rules when I initially got there. Later on they counted it and I ended up coming home after eight months rather than doing the full year.

AK: Did you have any kids at this point?

WG: Yeah we had two. A boy and a girl.

AK: So how do you feel that the Vietnam War affected your corner of the world? Were you still living in Oklahoma?

WG: No, we had moved on. I think the Vietnam War didn't affect Air Force personnel as much as some others because, first thing, we were generally older than most of the Army guys. We were also--how do I put this? I don't think it really affected us

as much because we weren't in really, really close combat for most of our service. For example, our B-52s bombed from 30,000 feet and so you didn't have that close connection with the enemy that the Army guys did so it didn't seem to affect us as much as the Army and Marines.

AK: Ok, that makes sense.

WG: Good [laughs]

AK: [laughs] So after you came back from Thailand, where were you and your family stationed?

WG: When I came back from Thailand, because I'd gone to graduate school, I had a commitment to the Air Force, so I went to Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts to work as an engineer. And I worked as an engineer really from then on for the rest of my career. I kind of got out of the airplane business.

AK: What did they have you do as an engineer?

WG: We were a procurement organization. We were coming up with the design and development of what was then called Advanced Airborne Command Post. It's now called the E-4B, which is a 747 that's been modified to be a command post in the sky in case a war breaks out.

AK: That sounds really interesting. So you worked on building that?

WG: Well, we worked with a contractor to develop it and get it produced.

AK: That's really cool. Is that still in use today?

WG: Yes. They're planning on modifying it I think but it's still in use.

AK: How long did it take you guys to build that--from beginning planning stages to completion?

WG: Oh a long time. It had already started when I got there and it was still going when I left. Generally speaking, to design and develop and qualify a weapons system takes ten years, or something like that.

AK: Ok. So about 10 years for that one as well then?

WG: Mm hm

AK: Interesting. What year did you retire from the Air Force?

WG: 1984

AK: Ok. Where did you go from there?

WG: Then I went to work for TRW, later purchased by Northrop Grumman here on base. Hill Air Force Base was my last military assignment and so when I retired from the Air Force I went across the street and signed up for TRW, which was a big contractor, and their job here was to support the Minuteman weapon system.

AK: What was some of the work that you did with them? Like, what was your specific job description?

WG: Well, a lot of our time was spent coming up with replacement parts for stuff that had aged out to the point that you couldn't go buy those parts any more, so you had to come up with a part that functioned exactly like an old part that was twenty-five years old. And that turned out to be a bigger challenge than you might imagine.

AK: How so?

WG: Well, you kind of get into the mindset of "you can get anything if you need it." And a lot of these old parts were state of the art when the Minuteman weapon system was fielded in the 1960s, but now they just aren't available and so you sometimes

had to go to other countries like China, for example, to get new parts that would work.

AK: So you were in charge of finding where you could buy those parts?

WG: Yeah, for the ground system. I worked on the ground system, not the missile.

AK: Oh Ok. Gotcha. So did that include a lot of public relations, having to reach out to countries who could help you find those parts?

WG: No, it was more of a research job. You know, trying to find a part that has the right technical characteristics to fit in to where you need it to go and not mess things up.

AK: Ok. How long did you do that for?

WG: Twenty-two years.

AK: That's a long time.

WG: Yeah it was fun, mostly.

AK: What are some of your favorite memories of the things that you got to work on with that job? Like different projects and such?

WG: Well, we had to replace some parts in the Minuteman system consul, the launch consul, when the launch crew members actually launched the missile. Anyways, some of that equipment had gotten to the point that we couldn't procure parts for it anymore so we ended up having to go out and design a box that would replace and work just like the old one but had all new parts in it. So we had good subcontractors that helped us with that. But that was kind of the last thing I worked on.

AK: So there would be a lot of thinking outside the box then, having to think of how to make old things work with new?

WG: Mm hm

AK: That's really interesting. You said you were at that job for twenty-two years; did you move onto another job after that one?

WG: No, this became my job after I left Northrop Grumman. I'd known that there was a museum here for a long time and I like hanging around old airplanes and people that like old airplanes so I came out and volunteered out here

AK: What year was that?

WG: 2008

AK: Ok. Did you watch any of the museum's progression as it was built from the beginning to 2008?

WG: Only as a spectator. I wasn't working out here then. I came here in 2008 and it's pretty much the same now as it was then. Although the various artifacts have been shuffled around some, it's still basically the way it was

AK: What are some of the things that you've been able to help out with since you've been with the museum?

WG: Well, when I first came to work out here at the museum, I was helping to restore the T-29, which is one of the training airplanes that we have here at the museum. It was the airplane that I trained on when I went to navigation school so I had somewhat of an emotional attachment to it. We still don't have it finished yet, but it's getting there. That's about the only real restoration effort that I've really been involved with. The rest of the time that I spend out here I'm usually one of the tour guides or information people

AK: What were some of the restoration aspects that you were involved in with the T-29? Did you help with painting or putting it together...?

WG: Painting it, taking a lot of the equipment out and cleaning it up, and then getting it refurbished and putting it back in.

AK: Where was it donated from?

WG: The T-29 that we have came out of the bone yard, or that's the way we refer to it. It's the deposition facility in Tucson, Arizona. They were actually able to get permission to get the airplane and then fly it up here. They got permission from the FAA for a one time ferry flight and they flew it up here and parked it.

AK: So you mentioned you had to clean some of the equipment that was in the airplane: Did you have to take it apart pretty extensively and then put it back together?

WG: Not really. We just cleaned the exterior so that it looked good but it wouldn't be functional.

AK: What year was this T-29 from?

WG: That was about 2010.

AK: Oh I mean, when was it originally built?

WG: Oh, uh early 1950s. 1952, or 1953, something like that.

AK: Ok. So is that an on-going project?

WG: More or less, yeah.

AK: What work are you doing on it right now?

WG: I'm not doing anything on it right now. I've gotten to the point now where I'm kind of brittle and so I don't climb around airplanes as well as I used to.

AK: Gotcha. Ok. So you mentioned that a lot of what you do now is being a tour guide in the museum. What have been some of your favorite experiences with that?

WG: Just meeting people from all over the world.

AK: What countries have you met people from?

WG: Oh we've had a lot of people from China recently, but we've had a lot of South Americans, Central Americans, Europe, Australia, just all over.

AK: How do you feel that these people react to the museum when they come visit?

WG: Most of them are really impressed with the collection and how well it's maintained. And the size of the collection--that usually surprises people. Even people that have driven back and forth on I-15 for years and years are often really surprised about how big the collection is and what we've really got to show.

AK: Do you feel that the museum has become an important part of the community?

WG: I do. We get school groups out here all the time and it's about the only place in the public school now where they really cover the history of aviation or of really the United States, so I think it's a great learning tool for the community. Well, not only the public school system but the private and charter schools.

AK: Absolutely. Do you have a favorite memory from your time here volunteering?

WG: Uh no, not really. It's all fun to one degree or another.

AK: Are you a member of the board now?

WG: Yes.

AK: When did you become that?

WG: About four years ago.

AK: What are some of the things that you've been involved with as a member of the board?

WG: Oh, just functioning with the other board members on working budgets and planning. Right now we're involved in trying to get funding for another gallery for the museum and that's going to take a lot of money and therefore is going to take a lot of effort to get that. Robb Alexander, for example, just spends a lot of time working with the Legislature to try and come up with funding.

AK: Do you have any special responsibilities as a member of the board that you specifically are over?

WG: No.

AK: Ok. Do you have any last memories or stories that you'd like to tell from your life or from your memories on the board at all?

WG: No, I don't think so.

AK: Ok. Final question: Of all the things that you've accomplished, either in your life or with the museum, which achievement are you most proud of?

WG: I think the thing I'm most proud of is probably my last assignment at Hill Air Force Base when I was on Active Duty in the Air Force. We were working on the development tests and evaluation tests program for the ground-launched cruise missile. We ended up flying the missile out on the West desert range but it was the one time that I was able to see pretty much from start to finish the full progression of the program. So it was a lot of fun.

AK: That's fascinating. Well thank you so much for your time and for sharing your story with us. We really appreciate it.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW AGREEMENT

This Interview Agreement is made and entered into this 11 day(s) of April, 2019 by and between the Weber State University, Stewart Library, Oral History Program (WSUSLOHP), Hill Aerospace Museum, and Walter Gould, hereinafter called "Interviewee."

Interviewee agrees to participate in a recorded interview, commencing on or about _____ time 4/11/19 date, with Alyssa Kammerman.

This Interview Agreement relates to any and all materials originating from the interview, namely the recording of the interview and any written materials, including but not limited to the transcript or other finding aids prepared from the recording.

In consideration of the mutual covenants, conditions, and terms set forth below, the parties hereby agree as follows:

1. Interviewee irrevocably assigns to the WSUSLOHP and Hill Aerospace Museum all his or her copyright, title and interest in and to the interview.
2. WSUSLOHP and Hill Aerospace Museum will have the right to use and disseminate the interview for research, educational, and other purposes, including print, present and future technologies, and digitization to provide internet access.
3. Interviewee acknowledges that he/she will receive no remuneration or compensation for either his/her participation in the interview or for the rights assigned hereunder.
4. WSUSLOHP and Hill Aerospace Museum agrees to honor any and all reasonable interviewee restrictions on the use of the interview, if any, for the time specified below, as follows:

Interviewer and Interviewee have executed this Interview Agreement on the date first written above.

INTERVIEWEE

INTERVIEWER

Walter D Gould
(Signature)

Alyssa Kammerman
(Signature)

Walter D Gould
(Printed Name)

Alyssa Kammerman
(Printed Name)

(Address)

(Address)

