



*Oral  
History  
Program*



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Bob Weiss

Interviewed by Alyssa Kammerman  
12 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.

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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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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

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Abstract: The following is an oral history interview with Bob Weiss, conducted on April 12, 2019, at Hill Aerospace Museum, by Alyssa Kammerman. Bob discusses his life, his memories while serving in the United States military, and his experiences while serving on the Heritage Aerospace Foundation Board.

AK: Today is April 12th, 2019. I am here with Mr. Bob Weiss, speaking with him about his life and his experiences with the Hill Aerospace Museum. My name is Alyssa Kammerman and I'll be conducting the interview today. So thank you so much again for visiting with me today. My first question is when and where were you born?

BW: I was born in Fredonia, New York. It's between Buffalo and Erie, Pennsylvania, right on the lake. Terrible, terrible winters [laughs].

AK: What year were you born?

BW: I was born in 1930, which makes me a bit older than you.

AK: [laughs] A little bit. So what were your memories of growing up in Fredonia?

BW: Miserable winters. But we had five acres right in the middle of town and we had good pheasant hunting all around us. And it was big grape country. The concord grape was developed not far from where I grew up. And other than the winters, it was a delight living there. But the winters were terrible [laughs].

AK: What did your father do for work?

BW: My father was a businessman. He owned an automobile agency.

AK: And your mother? Did she do anything for work?

BW: In those days, women didn't work. They were housewives and mothers.

AK: And what were their names?

BW: My mother's name was Le Ora. And my father's name was James, Jim.

AK: So what do you remember of the Great Depression? Were you too little?

BW: Well, I remember we all had victory gardens and-- Well, no, that wasn't the Depression. That was after the war. I don't remember hardly anything of the Depression. I'm old, but I'm not quite that old [laughs]. But, I can remember World War Two and rather vividly. But the Depression, no.

AK: So you would have been about eleven years old when Pearl Harbor happened. Do you remember that day?

BW: You know, I do. Not vividly, and not with any dramatic flair. But I remember "those dirty Japs," and "Bombed at sea" and that type of thing. Of course, I didn't know what Japs were or Japanese or Japan for that matter. But yeah, I can remember when that happened. I remember when it was over too. We had a street dance. And the whole town turned out and the first prize was a ballpoint pen. Ballpoint pens were very unique at that time. And the young girl I was dancing with and I won the ballpoint pens. 'Course the first thing they did was leak all over my shirt, but we won!

AK: So do you remember how the war affected your childhood and teenage years?

BW: Well we built, or I suspect it was subsidized by the government, but we put up a new-- it was called the "Kneeling Plan." Kneeling is when you harden steel. And I remember growing vegetables and saving aluminum cans and doing all the things that civilians did to try to help with the effort. But when you're that young, life goes on and the thread wasn't broken and my family was still my family. So

there wasn't an awful lot of change that I could see. Obviously, there was a great deal of change that I didn't see. But, that was a long time ago.

AK: It was. How many siblings did you have?

BW: I have an adopted sister who is living back in that area now. She is widowed and living with her offspring.

AK: Ok. What do you remember of high school?

BW: An awful lot of sports and very little study [laughs]. High school was fun. I didn't get my biggest first burst of growth, actually, until I was in college. I played baseball and football and got generally beat up [laughs]. I remember not studying enough. When I finally got to college, I found I was woefully behind in, well, everything actually. I didn't do much work in high school. I partied a lot and kinda dated a lot. In Colorado there were a lot of swaths in that dimension. When I got to college, I wished that I had done a little bit more real honest work. And I remember I worked in construction every summer and enjoyed it. We had a group of guys; We all knew each other and we worked for the local bricklayers and it was a good time, good time to grow up, I guess.

AK: Which college did you go to?

BW: I went to a small school, Hobart College, in Geneva, New York. I played a little baseball there and thought I was far better than I was, so I transferred to the University of Tennessee, hoping that would be my entree to the board, and I found out that perhaps I was better suited in the academic field than I was in the athletic field. [laughs] So I graduated from the University of Tennessee and then graduated from University of Tennessee Law School. And I passed the bar in

New York State, which shocked the hell out of me. And then for some strange reason, I decided that I needed--I'd just been living off the fat of the land and I really thought I needed to test myself. I didn't know if I had any net value and I didn't know what it was, I didn't know what I was capable of doing. So I decided that before I went into the practice of Law, that I would kind of find out some things about myself. And so I decided to join the Marine Corps. I found out a lot of things about myself and it was a wonderful experience. Difficult, but wonderful. And one day on a weekend, we were advised that there would be some training aircraft at the Quantico Marine Corps Air Field that Saturday, and if any of us had ever thought about flying, this was an opportunity to go meet some instructor pilots there. And so I went and I flew four times [laughs]. I just ate it up. I mean, I literally ate it up. And I was dating and attending a girl and as I say, I got a pretty good swath in high school and in college, but Maryanne was a girl that I really thought that I would like to marry. So we talked it over and I said, "I'd like to go to flight school. Would that be alright with you?" And as she did all her life, she said, "Whatever you want." And so we got married.

We have this thing in the Marine Corps that all Marine officers are infantry officers no matter what else you do. And you go to six months of what is called Basic School after your commission and this is to teach you battalion and company tactics. You've already learned platoon and squad tactics in the officer built up training and now you're moving up. And so we got married at the conclusion of basic school and our honeymoon was enroute to Pensacola for Naval flight training. And it was the best time in the whole world. We look back on

it, everybody there was of the same relative age. I had gone to law school so I was maybe three years older, but we all earned the same amount of money, we all were of the same age. Pensacola was a wonderful and charming place. White sands, I mean, it was just gorgeous and we had a lot of fun.

And I guess the rest is history. I got my wings and I was fortunate. As I say, I had over one hundred carrier landings and a hundred successful catapult shots and it's nice when the two match [laughs]. Otherwise, it's not a very good day. And we just worked our way up. I commanded two fighter squadrons and I commanded another group of four squadrons and I retired after twenty-eight years.

By that time, both of our families were gone. Maryanne is from Tennessee, of course, and I was from Western New York. But our families were gone and we had the option of retiring anywhere we wanted. And when I was a squadron commander, my group commander, I didn't know it at the time, but his wife was from Ogden and we kept in touch and we visited Ogden for about four days and I am absolutely convinced that there is no place in the United States that is better living than Ogden, Utah. None. If you like the outdoors, you've got trout fishing, fly fishing all over the place. You've got big game hunting in the mountains. It's the most exquisite place. I mean here we sit at the base of the most exquisite mountains you've ever seen. The only trouble is sometimes we have late springs [laughs]. But transportation is good here, Medical facilities are good, the schools are good. It's just, I think, the best place in the United States, without question. But anyway, Maryanne said, "Make me a promise. If I don't like

it after a year, we move." I said, "Fine." And she, you couldn't get her away from these beautiful mountains; Save your bottom dollar.

I retired in 1982, and John Lindquist and I became very close friends. We'd fly fish together one day a week for twenty one years. We had our own private stream--well, John had his private stream and I was allowed on it, but I tied all the flies and made his success possible [laughs]. But I never went back to work formally. I mean, I played the market. I was not greedy, but I knew when to get out and I knew when to stay. And if you study it a little bit, the people who lose money in the stock market are the ones who get greedy. And I never aspired to becoming a billionaire. But John became a very, very close friend and we had a lot of fun together. And that brings us pretty much up to the present. Now, I'm an old man with one knee [laughs]. What can I say? Just lucky to be alive.

AK: Going back a little, I'd like to know what kinds of airplanes you'd fly?

BW: Well, of course, I went to the training command. But right out of the training command, I flew F-9, F-8 fighters. That was the Navy staple aircraft during the latter part of the Korean War. The second year I was a naval aviator. I got orders to exchange duty, which meant I flew as a Marine officer in an Air Force squadron for two years. And I was in the first squadron of F-106s and we set the world's speed record in the 106. I went back to being in a Marine squadron and started flying F-4s. Flew F-4s until I retired and we set the world speed record in the Air Force. So I was a witness to two world records, which was kind of interesting.

When I got here to Ogden, as I say, I did a lot of hunting and fishing and I was asked if I would like to join the board at the Air Force Museum. And I thought it would be a great opportunity to meet some people. And it truly never dawned on me until you called that I was the only Marine, and the only Naval aviator that's ever been on the board of directors. And it was seamless. I never thought about it. I never thought, "those guys in blue," or any different. We just had a job to do on the board and we did it. It kind of struck me after you called that, yeah, there's never been another. I'm the only non-Air Force or civilian hire that's ever been on the board. And yet I didn't think much about it. We just did the same job. And as I say, it was a very seamless transition. And I enjoyed being on the board. And boy, let me tell you, we've tried for twenty years now, that I know of, to open the museum up to the Salt Lake-Logan community. I think it's probably because it's on a base and there's a fence there and I think that holds down the traffic a bit. But it is a marvelous museum and it's well worth what they spent there. But we've tried every way in the world to get it more and more into the open.

I even went over to Weber State University, got one of the, I guess it was community relations, professors to take it as a project with the students. "How do you open this up? How do you tell the world about this marvelous museum out there?" They fired ideas at me, but I didn't get hired the second year, so [laughs] I don't know if there was a correlation there or not [laughs]. "Stay away from that one [laughs]." So that's kind of my involvement. But I swear, up until most recently--really, since I talked to you--I never thought about it before, but there's

not been a-- I'm the only non-Air Force type that's ever been on board. That's pretty neat. And it was seamless, they treated me well [laughs].

AK: What year did you join the board?

BW: I have no idea. You know, when you get to be my age, time either goes too fast or too damn slow [laughs]. You don't know which.

AK: I was more wondering, do you have memories of what it took to get the museum up and running? Because I've heard it was pretty rough going when it first started: There was not a whole lot of, you know, air conditioning and whatnot.

BW: Well, it's like any project. You start first with an empty building and then you fill it. And I don't think it was any more difficult, perhaps, than any other thing of that nature. We had John Lindquist behind us and that was a strong emphasis. And John could afford to show a good bit of largesse and get it started. He was a very successful businessman. He was ten years older than I was and, to me, I think he represented the big brother that I always wanted and never had. John and I have had a lot of fun together. We went to Peru fishing and we did a lot of things. And I'll never tell where the bodies are buried [laughs].

AK: [laughs] That's awesome. So were you part of the effort to get the airplanes to the museum when you first started collecting?

BW: Well, we had a group of retired maintenance personnel who did all of the heavy lifting, really. And we had a lieutenant general who was a long time president of the board and sadly, he ended up with Alzheimers, much the same way my wife did. But, we had a lot of push there in those two individuals. There were about three people who got this idea, "let's build a museum," but it was those two who

did the ultimate effort that was necessary. And of course, when you deal with Air Force bureaucracy--and I say Air Force bureaucracy, but it's no different than Naval bureaucracy, or any other bureaucracy. And there were a lot of agreements that had to be signed and a lot of, I'm sure, a lot of infighting that I'm not aware of and wouldn't comment on anyway. But it's a marvelous place, if somehow it could be brought out into the open. And it's the best kept secret in Northern Utah by far. We worked on that one for a good many years.

AK: You mentioned that you tried a lot of things to get the community aware of the museum. Besides the Weber State Class, what were some of the other efforts that you were a part of?

BW: Well, I started to advertise, you know, hoping people will read the backs of buses, and nobody seems to [laughs]. We would occasionally get some free air time and somebody would come down from Salt Lake and do a piece on it. But, you know, I think that there is a fear of things that are behind fences. If we could move the whole thing, put a big parking lot out front and put a billboard up and say, come see this museum, we probably would have done a lot better, but we've come about as far down that road as we could. But it was an interesting time and I enjoyed all of the people that I knew on the board. And as I say, it comes as a very much a shock to me that I'm the only non-Air Force person to serve on that board because I never...you just accept a job and you do it, you know? You don't question things like that.

AK: Do you know why they chose to have the museum on base the way that they did?

BW: I think it was the only available facility. And see, we didn't--I don't know how it is now--but we didn't pay for the electric bill and such. We got a certain amount of maintenance from the base and it was an economic necessity. There is no philanthropy involved in museums, unfortunately. But where else would you go, you know? Who would turn over a building and maintain it and heat it and pay the electric bill? You take what you can get and hope for the best.

AK: Absolutely. Were there any parts of the museum that you specifically were in charge of overseeing as a member of the board?

BW: No. We kind of spread what little talent--some people had a lot of talent--but we just spread it out and did the best we could. All I can do is claim that I was there. I didn't do anything extraordinary. I wasn't in charge of cleaning the guns on a B-24 or anything like that.

AK: So were you around when they first started the education program at the museum?

BW: We had it in a much more [motioning with hands to show "small/compact"] manner. And as I was leaving, my wife's health became more of a problem and I had to resign. But that was the time frame when the education program was built and it's really superb now. But we had buses from all of the schools all the time, even back before the educational push. I kept telling everybody on the board that's where the money is. So I helped with some of the education portion, because if you wanted some state help just mention the word "education" and their ears perk right up and it turned out to be correct. That's probably my lasting contribution is "follow the dollar." [laughs]

AK: I know there are often people from all around the world that come and see the museum. Did you get to have any contact with people from other countries?

BW: No. I just stuck with my little American group. [laughs]

AK: [laughs] OK. So mainly you had a lot of involvement with financial efforts to keep the museum going?

BW: You can't be involved with the board without being involved in the money situation, because that's what keeps it afloat. We always had a museum director who was part of the Air Force bureaucracy and some were very unsatisfactory. And until Rob was actually hired, that position didn't exist. We had some very, very difficult times with leadership personnel and as a Marine officer, I didn't hesitate to call attention to that fact.

AK: [laughs] Good for you. So what about the museum are you most proud of?

BW: I think you have to take it as an entity. I don't think you can single out any portion of it. You'd be hurting and stepping on a lot of toes and hurting a lot of feelings if you did that. And I don't think that's what we want to do at all. There are stronger portions and there are weaker portions. But everybody recognizes where the strength lies and the weaker elements are. We have tried like the devil to bring them up to the quality we wanted. And I think by and large, it's pretty impressive. We thought that we could have an art museum up on the mezzanine floor there inside. A couple of us went to Washington and we shipped back a lot of Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps art and it didn't sell. And it was more expensive to ship than people who viewed it, so that was an abortive effort, pretty much a failed effort. But everything's in place. The best equipment possible, the hanging

spaces and everything. The lighting is superb. It's a shame, but a lot of people won't walk upstairs to see all of the airplanes downstairs and I can understand that. If I was a 15 or 14 year old, I wouldn't want to either. So, you know, there are mistakes made, but we all make them.

AK: So then I guess a better question would be, what part of your involvement with the museum are you most proud of? Anything that you achieved, for example.

BW: I just think that being a part of the board and working together with everybody else is what I enjoy most. And I certainly can't take credit for anything in particular. I just felt I was there, had been asked to be on the board, and I enjoyed my association.

AK: Excellent. Are there any other stories you'd like to share before we wrap up, then?

BW: Nope, I've probably said too much already.

AK: Oh, no. You were incredibly humble. I think one last question that I want to ask, if you're ok with this, is how do you feel that the museum has impacted the community or the people who visit it?

BW: Well, it can't help but give you a historical perspective on military air power. It would be a stronger perspective if we had all the money in the world. You could have Naval Aviation represented and have a carrier deck there. But it's an Air Force Museum and you have to be aware of that all the time. But it's impossible not to go through that building and be impressed. I mean, it is. Even if I had never flown on a mission in my life, I would still feel the same way. It's kind of a

thrilling experience for a young boy or girl to go through and see that. Don't change what works.

AK: Yeah, that's a good philosophy. OK, one last question: What do you hope that visitors to the museum take away from their experience there?

BW: Well, we have an enormous military budget, and if we're going to maintain our position as the strongest country in the world militarily--and aviation is certainly a major portion of that--you have to be able to justify it. And I think the museum helps to justify it. And I think it's kind of necessary that we keep that in the forefront.

AK: Are there any last stories or memories you want to share?

BW: Now that I look back and recognize that I was the only non-Air Force type that's ever been on the board, I'm kind of proud of the fact that I shared the experience with the other people.

AK: How do you feel that your experiences with the Marines helped with your service on the board? Do you think that gave you a different kind of perspective?

BW: I was able to fire a couple of ineffective people [laughs]. I was always the strong, loud mouth on the board. I sat on the front of the table, but I never thought of it in those terms until you called me and I started to reflect back. I just helped as one more aviation-oriented individual on the board. And I guess that's how it should be. What can I say?

AK: That's perfect. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

BW: Oh it was my pleasure.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW AGREEMENT

This Interview Agreement is made and entered into this 12 day(s) of April, 2019 by and between the Weber State University, Stewart Library, Oral History Program (WSUSLOHP), Hill Aerospace Museum, and Bob Weiss, hereinafter called "Interviewee."

Interviewee agrees to participate in a recorded interview, commencing on or about 1 pm time 4-12-19 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

[Handwritten Signature]
(Signature)

[Handwritten Signature]
(Signature)

(Printed Name)
Robert Weiss

(Printed Name)
Alyssa Kammerman

(Address)

(Address)

