

**Tuskegee Airmen Oral History Project  
National Park Service**

**Interview with:** John H. Adams, Jr.  
**Interviewed by:** William Mansfield  
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**Edited by:** John H. Adams & Wm. Mansfield

[Tape 1, Side A.]

WILLIAM MANSFIELD: This is Bill Mansfield from the National Park Service, Tuskegee Airmen Oral History Project, interviewing Mr. John Adams in his home in Kansas City, Kansas, on June the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

Mr. Adams, we always get people to start off by having them state their name and telling us when they were born and where they were born, so let 'er go.

JOHN ADAMS: I was born December the 16<sup>th</sup>, 1918, in Hiawatha, Kansas, which is about fifty miles from Kansas City, Kansas.

MANSFIELD: First, state your name.

ADAMS: John H. Adams, Jr.

MANSFIELD: And so I guess your father was John H. Adams, Sr.?

ADAMS: Right.

MANSFIELD: Tell me a little bit about your dad. What did he do for a living?

ADAMS: My dad lived in Troy, Kansas, I believe, and he went to school in Hiawatha, and it was there that he was employed in some capacity, which I am not aware of, but he became interested in motion picture operation there from some individual who worked in the theater, and he taught my dad the art of running silent pictures. My dad had an opportunity to get a job in Kansas City, Kansas, and we came here when I was three years of age, and my dad worked at the Princess Theater, which was on Third and Parallel, until the time the theater moved to Fifth and Chelsea, and my father gave me the privilege of, when I was nine years old, to learn to do his work as a motion picture projectionist, as it's called. So I became interested in motion picture projection. I was nine years old. My dad sat me on a bench and let me rewind the film and become familiar with his machines. And I got my first job at the Regal Theater when I was in my last year in high school.

So my daddy was limited in so much of his activities, but he was a very ambitious type of individual, motivated to do many things. He studied law. He was a very good mechanic. He became interested in so many things along the mechanical line: cars and machines. But he became ill, oh, I guess in my junior year in high school. I was given the privilege of taking his job when I was seventeen years old. I became the operator at the Princess Theater at that time.

MANSFIELD: Tell me about your mom. What was her name?

ADAMS: My mother's name was Clintonia Marguerite Brooks before she married my dad. She lived in Hiawatha, as far as I know. She was just an ordinary housewife, a mother, as far as I can remember wasn't employed in any way other than till she came to Kansas City, Kansas, and she had numerous jobs, I think, in that early stage of my life, while my sister and I were in school.

MANSFIELD: So you had a sister?

ADAMS: I had two sisters. One was named Alice Loree, and one was named Wilma. My sister Wilma died when she was three years old. She died of spinal meningitis, from what I understand. My sister Alice was nine months older than I, I think it was, and she passed. She was seventy-two years old. She must have died in—she was born in 1917 and was seventy-two years old when she passed.

MANSFIELD: It must have been '89.

You grew up mostly in Kansas City?

ADAMS: Yes, spent most of my life in Kansas City other than the time I spent in the service.

MANSFIELD: Tell me about the neighborhood where you grew up. What was that like?

ADAMS: We lived at Third and Parallel, which was, I think, the greater part of my junior high school and senior high school. Otherwise, we lived in the same neighborhood within fifty feet of that particular location. We lived first at 313 Parallel. We moved from there to 2016 North

Third, which was about a half a block down the street. We moved from there to 2020 North Third, which is right across the street from the theater in which my dad worked, at the Princess. All of these particular locations were centered around Third and Parallel.

It was basically a community which was inhabited by people of color. Let's see, the most lively things there were our theater, the Princess, and the Edgerton swimming pool in the park. Transportation was based on streetcars and those who were fortunate enough to have automobiles. A relatively poor neighborhood, I would say, but close to the schools, Stowe, **Keeling**, Northeast Junior. Pretty nice little location as far as we were concerned, the people who lived there.

MANSFIELD: So it was largely an all-black neighborhood.

ADAMS: Yes.

MANSFIELD: How would you rate your family's economic status? Would you say poor, struggling, middling, comfortable?

ADAMS: I'd call ourselves poor in relationship to those who lived in certain other areas, but I didn't realize I was poor. As far as I was concerned, my dad had a job, and he worked part time in several other things, so we had basically whatever we wanted. I don't think we ever suffered for anything at all.

MANSFIELD: It's like one man said: nobody had anything, but everybody had plenty.

ADAMS: [Chuckles.] A good neighborhood, where the neighbors were nice to one another, and the children got along well with one another, as far as I can remember. As far as going to school, we had no problem, but it was all black in that particular location. I don't doubt that the discrimination and the segregation was definitely in that area because many of the schools as I grew up and came from grade school, going to junior high school and from junior high school to high school, that those who lived around us had to concentrate most of their lives on schools that were all black. Wyandotte [High School] was strictly white and other races, I assume. And my family, as far as I was concerned, attended Sumner High School as a high school student. Wyandotte was close by, but those who lived in other areas—people of color had to attend Sumner and other all-black schools, so segregation was there, yes.

MANSFIELD: You said your dad worked at several other jobs part time. What [were they]?

ADAMS: He was a mechanic. He worked for a gentleman by the name of Joe Delaney. At that time, they were making slot machines. My dad for some reason became involved in trying to do the servicing on the slot machines for Mr. Delaney, and he had his own little mechanic sideline, I would say, working on cars. Whenever people had some kind of a problem, my dad was the one they came to.

MANSFIELD: And you said your mom worked at different jobs.

ADAMS: Well, the first job I remember my mother having while we were in school was she worked as a receptionist for Dr. William Dyer. It was about three blocks down from where we lived, and she went in and took care of the office for him, answering the phone, doing whatever work she would do. I call her a receptionist, more or less, in that particular capacity. But other than that, she worked at Faultless Laundry, I believe, at one time, when I was in high school. I don't know what happened as far as employment when I was in the service, after I graduated, but mostly domestic ideas of that kind. Otherwise, she was a lady that stayed at home. Took care of the youngsters.

MANSFIELD: That's an important job.

ADAMS: Basically.

MANSFIELD: Well, now, when you were growing up, like in high school, what kind of extracurricular activities did you participate in? Like sports or student government or band or anything like that?

ADAMS: Not really. In junior high school and high school, I spent most of my time with the theater, helping my dad. I was too small to do much in the way of anything other than inter-class basketball. I played tennis a lot and swam, but as far as competition and all, I did not participate. I'm such a little guy. I could say academically I did very well, according to the school records, but sports and the like, I did not excel in anything of that kind. Tennis was not a basic

involvement as far as the students were concerned in school, but I did play tennis. I did a lot of tumbling, mat work. But other than that, I would say I was just a bookworm.

MANSFIELD: What were your favorite courses in school?

ADAMS: English, mathematics, art, typing, and I'd say gym. Yes, I participated in quite a bit of activities gym-wise, demonstrations we had in tumbling events. Otherwise, I spent the greater portion of my time after school with my dad in the theater.

MANSFIELD: So you went to work in the theater pretty soon, and you must have liked it?

ADAMS: Well, it was interesting. I always liked the work, and it was an outstanding thing to be in because, as I say, not too many people were involved in that type of work, and helping my dad was just something that I really enjoyed because he had movies at the school and when they had those, I'd always have the privilege of going up and helping him with the machine. They only had one machine, and to help him thread it and get it back on the screen for showing at a particular school was something I was involved in doing. He permitted me to do that. And the school did, as well.

MANSFIELD: Now, the Princess Theater—was that primarily for the black people in the community?

ADAMS: Yes.

MANSFIELD: Okay. Well, I always ask people, particularly those who went into flight training: Did you have any kind of interest in aviation when you were growing up?

ADAMS: Other than watching the planes come in and land down in Fairfax Airport, my dad used to take me down, and take my sister and I, down to Fairfax sometimes to watch the planes take off and land, but I used to think about the possibility of flying one day, but never the fact as far as attending a school where I could be trained to do that. I thought the expense would be more than I could possibly bear. So I just never even thought about flying, other than just watching them and hoping that someday I might get a chance to be taken up in a plane, but not necessarily fly one.

MANSFIELD: Did you, like, build model airplanes?

ADAMS: Oh, yes.

MANSFIELD: Tell me about building model airplanes.

ADAMS: Well, it was a craft that—I don't know just how I became involved other than maybe the playgrounds that they used to have in Edgerton Park, involving the students in building—I say “students.” Those who participated in activities at the park during the summer had models out of balsa wood, I believe was one project. Used to make boats and cars, and I became involved in model airplane kits that they had available at the stores that sold that type of material.

And I put several of those together with rubber bands—you know, the kind that would propel them through the air sometimes for a great distance. But other than that, dreaming of flying was something I never had a visualization ever being a part of.

MANSFIELD: Do you remember what the models were? Were they, like, models of real airplanes or were they just like airplanes designed to fly with a rubber band?

ADAMS: Rubber band deals.

MANSFIELD: Okay.

ADAMS: I never did put one together that I'd say would actually do anything other than being propelled by the rubber bands. I think nowadays they have those that are motorized, not only ones that can be manipulated or guided from the ground. But that was a dream that I never even thought about.

MANSFIELD: When you were in high school, what did you want to be when you grew up?

ADAMS: Well, I always thought I would like to be something like my dad, a mechanic. But I became involved in drafting, which I do a little bit here every now and then, and I had a coach by the name of Alexander Edwards. Took me into his drafting class and allowed me to take his college course when I finished high school training, when I wasn't going to go off to college, but he encouraged me to take a part of that and to think about it and to come back to school and

allowed me to be in his class, and he gave me his college course while I was coming to school extra, during the daytime, working with my dad at nights. But Mr. Edwards was kind enough to let me attend his class and take his college course, hoping that one day I might be an architect.

MANSFIELD: And so you graduated from high school when?

ADAMS: Class of 1936.

MANSFIELD: And after you graduated, you continued working at the theater?

ADAMS: Yes.

MANSFIELD: And taking the drafting course during the daytime?

ADAMS: Well, I had completed that with Mr. Edwards, and during the time that I took my dad's job, I was working full time at that, which was night work, and I had a lawn service, I call it, grass-cutting jobs in the daytime, but I didn't go any further than that as far as drafting was concerned. After I had been involved with that for a while, then the Army was the next thing, in 1942, October. I was inducted, drafted into the war.

MANSFIELD: Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Do you remember that?

ADAMS: [Chuckles.] On the day and the time, though. Not really. I think I was out doing yard work. The idea of the draft coming as a result of that, I was the sole supporter of my mother and father and sister at that time, so I was put in—what was it? Not a 4-F. There was one classification where they had one dependent left who was the sole supporter of the family, and I think he [sic] was put on—I don't remember what that was now. But at least it gave me draft exemption until it became necessary to, I guess, have additional individuals in the service, and that particular designation didn't leave me where I was not subjected to be taken in the service.

MANSFIELD: So you were drafted in '42.

ADAMS: Yes, October.

MANSFIELD: Did you try and get an exemption, or just accept the draft notice and go on in?

ADAMS: Well, I had an exemption, I think at the time, because of the fact that I was the sole support of the family, but I didn't request it; it just came to me, I guess as a result of knowing that that was the condition of my family. But when that become no longer a concern, then I just went right on in. Had to go, so I went.

MANSFIELD: All right. So you got drafted. You were inducted here in Kansas City?

ADAMS: Yes.

MANSFIELD: And where did you go from there?

ADAMS: Let's see, we went first to Fort Leavenworth. From Fort Leavenworth, I went to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. From Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, following those examinations, I went to Boston, Massachusetts, to the Franklin Institute of Technology. Became a part of a drafting organization, yes, it was. Franklin Institute of Technology offered a course in topographic drafting and engineer drafting. I went in as an engineer draftsman at first, and I think one of the group who had been selected for the topographic draftsmen either did not complete or his work was not satisfactory to the organization, so I was picked to take his place. So at the completion of the course, instead of graduating with a PFC rating, as a topographic draftsman, I became eligible for a corporal rating when I completed that course in Boston, Massachusetts.

I went from there—those who graduated were given the privilege of selecting where they wanted to go. I had an aunt in California, so I selected March Field, and that's where I went.

MANSFIELD: So were you in the Army or the Army Air Force at this point?

ADAMS: At that point, I was in the Army Engineers. At March Field, I was assigned to an engineer company, and we spent about, oh, I guess several months preparing to be shipped overseas. In my particular assignment as topographic draftsman, I was given the map preparation and road surveys as far as this engineering organization was concerned. But some kind of an incident on an obstacle course—I cracked the small bone in my left leg, called the

tibia, I think it was, and as a result of that, I went to the hospital, and the unit was called to go overseas at the time. But as I was injured there and my leg in a cast, I was left behind. Being assigned to one of the units at March Field base at the time, they had posted a notice of needing pilots to replace the 99<sup>th</sup> [Pursuit Squadron] and the other organizations that were in there. Cadet training became a possibility, so I applied for it.

At that time, I had been advanced from a corporal to a tech sergeant, and it seemed like an opportunity for me to do something, rather than being left at March Field, unassigned but just anywhere on the base where I could be used. So they accepted my application. Inasmuch as I had not had the two years required college education, they had dropped that requirement at the time they were recruiting individuals to become a part of the cadet program. So with that understanding, I guess they allowed me to take the exams and all. Having passed that, I was changed from the Aviation Engineers to the cadet training program.

MANSFIELD: How did you like being in the Army? How did you find that different from civilian life?

ADAMS: It was definitely something that I hadn't experienced in civilian life because you were told what to do, when to do, and how to do it, and you had certain rules and regulations to follow, but I was determined that, having taken me away from my home life, away from the life that I was living, that I would do the best that I could, and advanced as much as I could, to learn as much as I could and take advantage of the opportunity. As I said, I have been smiled upon. The good Lord looked upon me in so many ways, to go in as a buck private, and here I advanced

in only a year's time up into a tech sergeant. And now I get a chance to go into cadet training? That's a wonderful thing for me.

MANSFIELD: What about when you broke your leg and couldn't ship out with your unit? Were you relieved not to be going overseas?

ADAMS: Oh, no, disappointed. I had trained to do that job, and all of the familiarity with the group that I worked with, and p.t. training. I was given the job as a drill instructor and a calisthenic[s] director and worked with those fellows all the time.

MANSFIELD: Did you know where you would have been going overseas?

ADAMS: No. I had no knowledge. They just told the commanding officer, I guess, at that particular unit, just to prepare the company to ship out. And I found that out when I was in the hospital. No, I was very disappointed to be left behind with a group with whom you've been training with for months and months, and have to be left stranded, to be assigned anywhere they needed you. I worked in the office, though. I didn't have any type of menial job. I worked on the staff. I could type, and that was one advantage that I had. So they used me in the office wherever they could. But, as I say, there was an opportunity posted on the bulletin board for me to do what I could, find something else to do.

MANSFIELD: When did you take the exam to qualify for flight training?

ADAMS: That must have been in 1943 or early—yes, '43, I'd say.

MANSFIELD: What, late in '43? Do you remember the month?

ADAMS: After I came from—I'd say late in '43, late in '43.

MANSFIELD: What do you remember about the exam?

ADAMS: Oh, they were average. Any high school graduate—I didn't understand why it was necessary to have two years of college training to qualify as a potential cadet, because the examinations weren't difficult. I passed them, so I think anybody, an elementary school dropout ought to have been able to pass. But the mechanical dexterity, being able to move the controls and to manipulate the equipment they wanted to, manual dexterity [be]came a part of being able to qualify for that. But as far as the intelligence was concerned, they gave you examinations, physical and mental, that would allow you to show your capability of being able to understand and to follow instructions, I think. I'm sure of that.

MANSFIELD: Were you aware of the struggle that had taken place to establish a flying unit for African-American aviators?

ADAMS: No. I had no knowledge of that at all.

MANSFIELD: But you took the test late in 1943. What happened next?

ADAMS: Well, I qualified, and, let's see, they gave me a little furlough, I think. I stopped off at home and went from there to Tuskegee, my first experience with the South. [chuckles]

MANSFIELD: Tell me about that.

ADAMS: The travel was more or less segregated after you crossed that Mason-Dixie [sic] line, I guess. You had to move to a different car, different train, and they had certain places for you to sit. This was my first experience of getting off of train, walking through a station and seeing "colored" and "white" entrances, colored and white drinking fountains, and being assigned to— [chuckles] I didn't have trouble once I got into the base at all and didn't have trouble in town; but it's just being aware of these things existed. I heard about them in my youth, but I never experienced having seen them.

And I made the mistake of walking through the doorway that was for whites. [Laughs] Didn't have any problems there, but I didn't recognize the fact until I had gotten through the place and noticed the signs up above said "colored only," "for white." First time I ever had run anything of that kind.

MANSFIELD: You said you had heard some stuff about the South and the way they treated black people. What had you heard?

ADAMS: People who came from the South, with whom you went to school or places that you visited talked about you have to get off the sidewalks when you pass a white person. They had

laughing barrels where a person of color wasn't permitted to laugh. He had to stick his head in a barrel and laugh; otherwise, he would be reprimanded. Whether there's any truth in these things or not, I have no knowledge, but used to hear those things. Whether the individuals who related them were just having fun in mentioning them or not, but we used to hear about picking cotton.; they didn't have very much in the way of an education as far as the students were concerned in school; jobs were limited; they were badly mistreated. You used to read stories of lynchings and the cruelty that had been put upon people of the South in some instances. They were knowledgeable. Read them in the newspaper or hear about them on the radio at that time, and hear some people who moved from the South relate some of those stories. I became aware of it in that manner.

MANSFIELD: So when you found out you were going to Alabama, what did you think about that?

ADAMS: I wasn't exactly pleased, to tell you that. I was kind of concerned about it. But once you arrived there and were exposed to not that type of restrictions or the jeopardy of it, it more or less went out of my mind, other than the fact that I was definitely set on staying on the base and enjoying the facilities there and not necessarily going to town and being subjected to anything of that kind.

MANSFIELD: Did anybody give you any kind of warnings or instructions about how you'd have to conduct yourself?

ADAMS: No, not in the service, even though it was segregated as it was. On the bases, there were times—in theaters, they had two doorways in some of the theaters to go into: one white and one with the black. Now, however you arrived at the theater at the time—I don't know the seating inside; you could sit, I guess, in any area you wanted to. But at times, I think the seating was limited. If you didn't arrive there at a certain time and formed a line to go in the theater, whether there was any difference as to where you could sit, I don't think it made any difference there like it did in the general public, where, here at home, they had theaters up on the avenue, in particular Minnesota Avenue, I think, at the time, the Grenada and the Electric—the people of color had to sit in the upper balcony. They used to call it the crow's nest, what I remember as a youngster. But in the Army bases, even though they were segregated, you could still get in there and sit where you wanted to, but they had separate doorways for you to get into, which made no sense to me at all. You're going to get in there and sit in the same theater, but you had a separate place—they didn't have any balconies to go into. It's just the idea on an Army base, on some of those bases, that's what they had.

MANSFIELD: Okay. So you arrived by train down to Tuskegee.

ADAMS: Yes.

MANSFIELD: That was when?

ADAMS: Oh, it was still the latter part of '43, I would say.

MANSFIELD: OK. What was the first part of training for you when you got to Tuskegee Army Air Field?

ADAMS: They gave not only the physical, but they had a little apparatus where they would set it up—I think they were trying to qualify you for navigator or pilot or whatever, manipulating controls again on speed. A light would come on, and you're supposed to be able to—there's a switch—to either turn it off or turn it on. Questions about knowledge of airplanes or knowledge of flying whatsoever, they were given. Comprehensive tests.

And then they exposed you to what you call preflight training in a little Piper Cub, something of that kind, to be exposed to an instructor who took you up in a plane (my first time), but you get the thrill of flying and that sort of thing. And from that you go to the air base school, and you had information given you [on] flying, theory of flight, theory of ailerons [which he pronounces as airelons] control. All of those things were a part of the academic requirements, I guess, to be trained, as preflight. If you qualified in preflight, you went to primary.

MANSFIELD: Okay. Tell me about primary.

ADAMS: Primary, you flew the dual-wing plane. The Piper Cub was a single [wing] plane, with the wing on the top. At primary, you had that dual-wing job and an instructor who gave you the basic principles of flying in that he took you up and let you experience the controls and all. I guess after primary we were to basic, lower basic and upper basic, yes, lower basic and upper basic. Lower basic was a BT-13, fixed landing gear, and you had a certain number of hours in that. From lower basic, you went from lower basic—if you're still there, you went to

upper basic, still in the BT-13 with more hours in flight training, on ground training. What is that? Get under the hood—instrument flight. You were exposed to that sort of training as well in basic.

And after basic training, if you were still lucky enough to be around, you went into lower advanced, where you learned to fly the AT-6, which was a[n airplane with] retractable landing gear, a much better place, much faster and more maneuverable. In lower advanced, you got night flying, cross country, low-altitude cross-country flying, somewhat exposed to acrobats, formation flying.

You stayed in that—I don't know how many months it was, but if you were still able to be around and qualified for lower advanced, then you went to upper advanced, where you had increased amount of night flying, low-altitude cross-country, short takeoff and landings in special fields they had for that purpose, a lot of instrument training, flying "under the hood," so to speak.

And then they had the opportunity to demonstrate your capability of what you had learned as an instrument flying by taking you out with an instructor, and you had to close in the plane as far as the back seat was concerned, and you had to demonstrate your capability of being able to fly by the codes being transmitted from the air field. If you had been successful in doing that and not having any difficulties and completed your other activities and maneuvers, formation flying, cross-country flying, being able to solo cross country and low altitude, without being exposed to any great disadvantages, then you were able to graduate, which I did in early '45. I got my commission as a second lieutenant in '45.

MANSFIELD: That must have been exciting, to complete all the rigorous training.

ADAMS: Oh, yes. Because we started with a class of sixty people in primary, I guess it was, and in single-engine pilot training, we had twenty-three who graduated, so I felt very fortunate to have been lucky and blessed enough, I guess, to have completed the course. I never dreamed of being able to fly a plane, but had an opportunity to do so. Wonderful!

MANSFIELD: If I can, I can ask you some questions about primary, basic and advanced.

ADAMS: Mm-hm.

MANSFIELD: Do you remember who your instructors were?

ADAMS: No. [chuckles]

MANSFIELD: Okay.

ADAMS: I'll tell you one I had. The first one in the Piper Cub. The name was John Williams, I think it was. He was a person of color who had been there for some time. He worked with the Piper Cub, exposed you to a lot of the things that you were going to expect and different flying—loops and things. He put you through it, to let you see the feel of—I guess dropping through on a spin with a Piper Cub is a really thrilling experience. From 5,000 feet, you throw that airplane in a spin and then pull it out with the techniques that you need to correct that spin and do loops and

fly upside down. Oh, it was wonderful. It was exciting as it could be to me. I never dreamed of being able to do that.

MANSFIELD: I'm sorry, you were going to say something?

ADAMS: No, I was saying this fellow was a remarkable pilot, as far as I was concerned. He gave you the works to see if you really wanted to stay with it. Now, if you didn't, he'd let you know that this is an example of what you're able to have, to go through.

MANSFIELD: Well, now, the Piper Cub and the academic stuff—did that take place at the institute [Tuskegee Institute] or on the air base [Tuskegee Army Air Field]?

ADAMS: It was on the air base. See, Tuskegee barracks were located from [sic] the school itself, close to it. I remember the [George Washington] Carver statue was in front of the—

[End Tape 1, Side A. Begin Tape 1, Side B.]

ADAMS: —Tuskegee Institute, itself. You walk from the barracks from class, where they gave you instruction in aeronautics and flight training, and then you were exposed to the use of air currents over the airfoils, knowledge about, information that you didn't get before. Learned how to control the airfoils and why the plane moved in a certain position, what made it move. Those things you were exposed to in class.

Then you went from there to the field for your actual flying training. So, as I say, it was the combination of the two was what we had all within walking distance of the barracks. I can't picture that in my mind now as to what I was exposed to at that time, but locally walking into those places, we went as a class, marching in regular formation, like flight formation, with the group, either to school or to class or on into the air base, which was just locally within a few minutes' walk, I would say.

MANSFIELD: You went up in the airplane, in a Piper Cub, but you actually flew the biplane for primary flight training.

ADAMS: You had to solo in primary. That was my first opportunity to solo, after you've been exposed to a number of hours of flying with an instructor. With the Piper Cub, Mr. Williams, as I say, just exposed you to what would be expected in an airplane if you've never been up before, and I hadn't. But the bi-wing plane was the first, was primary, and after a certain number of hours, we had to solo. That was really something, too, to be able to—after being exposed to the proper training, to be able to take that plane off and bring it back down successfully and to undergo the amount of hours necessary to complete primary and then go to a much larger plane, even though it still had the fixed landing gear, but so much more maneuverable. And things that you were exposed to, to solo and go about completing whatever requirements you had.

But basic was really nice, as far as I'm concerned. Primary was a learning process, as I say, getting to be able to solo. As I say, that was one of the requirements of completing that and to watch some of the other fellows, rooting for them to do the same thing, knowing what you had gone through and recognizing the fact that some of them would come down, and sometimes

you'd see a wing dip and you didn't think they would hit the ground but they would straighten it up, and they were able to correct whatever maneuvers they had, realizing you were going to have to go through that same thing, too. It's wonderful to be able to solo, believe me.

MANSFIELD: How does someone learn to fly? I mean, I have learned to drive, and you just basically sit there and learn how to manipulate the car, maneuver the car. But when you're flying, you go up, down, back, forth, sideways. How do you learn to manipulate the controls to learn how to fly?

ADAMS: You're exposed to that on ground training. They teach you what you're supposed to do on getting into the plane, allow you to taxi the plane around, first of all, using the brakes and using the throttle and be knowledgeable about what would happen. Then they allow you to—you are told—when flying with an instructor, you're watching what he's doing. He's in the back and you are in the front. Those controls move whether it's the stick or whether it's the ailerons or the flaps move or the trim tab controls that control the ailerons and the lift of the wings and the plane, itself, and lets it go up or down. The stick forward is the down motion of the airplane because the foils lift that flap so that it makes the plane go down. Just the opposite, you pull that stick back, it shifts the aileron positions on the wing and allows that ship to go up.

The rudder controls on the right and left allow you to control whether the ship is going to the right or to the left. The coordination between the stick and the rudder controls and the trim tabs—you learn from watching from what the instructor does, observing how the plane reacts to it, and you study that in the classes. And then they give you the opportunity, when you have completed the taxi, to go off with the instructor for a certain number of hours and learn to take

that plane off, the speed you will have to apply in order to lift that plane off the ground, and how to control it up above. Traffic patterns and all those things are a part of the training.

You're taught to fly a plane as you are to drive a car. With the right instructor, you won't have any difficulty, providing you have that control and that dexterity to understand what's happening.

MANSFIELD: Did flying come easily to you?

ADAMS: Yes, I think so. As I say, being able to adapt yourself to whatever you want to do or you have a desire to do, and learning the techniques—a person who's a youngster who wants to drive a car, he's going to learn everything he can about that car to qualify himself to let his parents let him the privilege of taking that car out. So you do the same thing about an airplane. You study it, you observe, you watch others, and you try to follow the instructions you are given. And with that knowledge and your training, you won't have a difficulty.

MANSFIELD: You talked about your class started with sixty-three and ended up with twenty-three. What kind of pressure did you feel not to wash out? Were you worried about that? How did you react to that kind of pressure?

ADAMS: I really didn't have a great deal of trouble manipulating the airplane and being knowledgeable about applying what I had learned in school, what I had been instructed to do, and the more that you became involved, the easier it was, just like the number of hours you spend in a car, it's so much easier for you to learn to drive, the rules and everything about it,

as—the same with an airplane. You learn the techniques, you learn what to do and what not to do, you don't take foolish chances, you follow the rules as they are given, and you don't allow yourself to become involved [sic]; otherwise, some of the fellows—

Many times, now, accidents happened that—I can remember one. Jiles was his name. Was coming down from a landing with an instructor. Now, he was flying an AT-6, and the tail wheel usually lines up—he has no control over the tail wheel. The tail wheel will usually line up with the same direction the plane is going. But for some reason, the tail wheel jumped and turned—yes, turned horizontal to the wings of the plane; I mean, parallel with the wings of the plane and still be vertically to it, turned horizontal and just bounced along.

Now, when that plane slowed down—as I say, you don't have any control over the tail wheel. When the plane slowed down, the plane turned, and the landing gear collapsed. Now, that wasn't Jiles's fault, as far as I can see, because that tail wheel is supposed to go right along with the plane, but whatever caused it to jump sideways that way, I didn't question, but we were sitting there watching, and he just bounced right along until he stopped. And then he automatically shifted. That landing gear collapsed.

Now, I don't know if they felt it was his fault with the instructor in the ship with him now, but they washed him out. As I say, I never understood why. The rest of the class—they're watching and verified the fact that there was nothing that he could have done. Perhaps he could have increased the throttle to correct that if he were able to do it, but the instructor was in the plane, too. So at any rate, that was one of the things that washed him out.

Another [cadet], in advanced class, had an incident on night flying that for some reason he became lost, and instead of being able to follow his night light training work and coming back by using the instrument training, from the signals being transmitted from the tower, he bailed out

of the ship. He lost the plane. Now, he was a captain in advanced class. They washed him out, too, but he lost the plane to poor thinking or whatever it was.

But they had us put a map of the area on our thigh or somewhere on our body, on the ship, where we have all of the towns located on that. If you're out flying someplace and become lost—I didn't recognize until then that the buildings of certain towns have a name on it, and if you are aware of the map that you have with you, the location of that particular town and you know where you are from that particular town from the station at Tuskegee, you can automatically turn to the heading to get you back to that area. Now, why this fellow didn't use that and use his instrument training that he had at night flying or any other time, I'll never know. But he bailed out of the ship, rather than possibly trying to do that. They couldn't locate him by radio, I assume.

But that kind of incident. As I say, I'm aware of the things that happened like that, but some of them don't make it on lack of coordination, not able to make—we had short-field landings and short-field takeoffs. You're graded on how you do in your performance. If you're not able to, I say, assess yourself as to be able to comply with those things that they give you, you can't make it. If your attitude or your grades in your academic work are not sufficient, I guess they'll get rid of you for that reason.

MANSFIELD: How would attitude wash you out? What kind of attitude?

ADAMS: Well, not being able to take instructions or commands when you're supposed to, not being able to do the things that you are required to do. With some, I think, just that attitude: Well, I don't like the way he's treating me. I think I'm being used in a reason and not given a

fair treatment. And your attitude sometimes would indicate that. With some of them, that might have been one of the basic reasons why they didn't make it, but I thought more or less it was because of the fact they could not meet the demands of the flying. As I say, even on short-field takeoff and landings and being able to control—in formation flying, you had a certain amount of work you were supposed to do and be able to adhere to that. Acrobatic training.

Sometimes the guys would go off and do foolish things, I guess, on flying. Low-altitude flying—going around buzzing a town would also wash you out, too. You're supposed to fly 500 feet above the ground on cross-countries, and sometimes those guys—you used to read about them and hear about them—were flying under bridges and that sort of thing, foolish things like that, or flying too close to the tops of houses, to frighten the animals on the ground. And they'd be reported, so they washed them out for that reason. Careless and attitude that wasn't favorable to the organization, what they were trying to promote in pilot training.

MANSFIELD: How did the instructors treat you?

ADAMS: Beautifully, as far as I can say. I had no trouble. Well, I was very fortunate in the service. I went in as an aviation student with a tech sergeant rating. My five stripes meant a lot to me, I guess, as what I had earned. And in that particular capacity, I was assigned flight leader over the cadets. Now, a lot of that—I was older, I guess, because I guess I was in my twenties. A lot of those guys came in there right out of college, maybe eighteen, nineteen, twenty-one years old. And as far as I was concerned, being in charge, I was held in a position of authority so that anything that they did that did not meet the requirements of the so-called those in charge of the camp, I had to suffer for it, so I was pretty strict in trying to follow the rules and regulations.

I had to do what I'm told, and I had to abide by those rules and be able to try to be a usable [sic] leader in trying to instruct those fellows in what we must do on the training. So I didn't have any problems.

I remember in the advanced class, when they suffered—some members of the advanced class—I was in lower basic, I think, at the time, housed, almost, in the same barracks—when the advanced class got out of line—inasmuch as my knowledge of drill training and calisthenic[s] director came in handy—they would assign me the job of taking those fellows out and making them drill. I don't think that set too well in the advanced students' mind, but I guess I was being used in the capacity to serve as that person who was going to reprimand the advanced students for something they did, and I was put in a position of authority, I'd say, in drill instructor.

But I got along beautifully with them because I always told them, "I didn't ask for this. This is something I was assigned. So, now, we work together, you get your drills down. If we don't understand something, you let me know, and we'll get our drills. I'm being watched, that I'm supposed to give you drill instruction and monkey drill, anything else that will be satisfying to you guys so that you show your capability and we'll do fine." But I'm just a little guy with a bunch of advanced students, who, as I say, did not come back and put me through any type of hazing because of that.

But I was always set up in a position like that. But I say again, I think the tech sergeant rating was something that put me in a position that I knew how to do some things. I had abided by the rules and regulations. I studied enough to be able to be in that position. So I was very fortunate all through my Army career.

MANSFIELD: I was going to ask you: You said you were, what? Flight leader?

ADAMS: Yes.

MANSFIELD: Over the?

ADAMS: Over our class.

MANSFIELD: Over your class. Tell me, what were your classmates like?

ADAMS: Well, some were belligerent, some were very compatible, I'd say, in so many ways. We got along fine in most of the instances. But, as I say, the respect of the position of authority—they were cadets, and I was a student. The only difference is that the student goes in with his rating. Cadet pay is one thing, but if you go in as a student, you have—I had my tech sergeant rating plus my flying pay, which put me in a different category money wise, which was beautiful for me, too. But that was the advantage of going in as a student than as a cadet. And they advised me that when I went in that I would have my tech sergeant rating, and my flying pay would be in accordance with half of that salary being added to the regular salary of the noncommissioned officer.

So I guess, again, I'm very fortunate and very blessed in so many ways, in my position. Study and being ambitious was always something that I wanted to do. When I was on the train going back to different places, I would study the manuals, I would study how to do the drilling and watch those in a position of authority on those fields, and became knowledgeable how to put it to use. And it always worked to my advantage.

MANSFIELD: Was it because you were the flight leader above the other cadets—how did that affect your relationship with them?

ADAMS: Oh, fine. We worked well together. As I say, there was always one or two who didn't respond, I say, in the way that most of the majority of them did, but it wasn't something out of line as far as any rebellion or anything of that kind. I remember one incident where the warrant officer felt that he had been offended some way about the flight not saluting them as they went by, and he called the barracks and had me tell the—he wanted all the cadets in our flight to get up out of bed and fall in at attention so that he might inspect them. I resented that, because we had not taken advantage of anything as far as his position was concerned. I don't remember the incident he had reference to, but this warrant officer wanted everybody out of the barracks to stand at attention and to let him lecture them.

I don't remember exactly how that incident came about, but I went into the barracks and informed them this is what the warrant officer wanted and that as far as I was concerned, those that didn't want to get up and recognize that, wanted to stay in the barracks and not permit him to have that privilege—I said, "I will stand with you, that we did not show disrespect to you on the street."

But he came by the barracks, himself, and ordered everybody out and had us—I think he called the attention of the company commander, and as a result of this, this warrant officer—he would stand out in the morning as we'd go from the barracks to class, and, of course, every time that we passed him, I'd have the flight call to attention, eyes right, and salute him as we passed.

Now, I don't know what caused that, but showing disrespect to the officer was something I would never do, and I respected their position, whether he was the warrant officer or he was a regular commissioned officer. It didn't make any difference to me. And I had that experience several times during the service, where some officer felt that you were doing that out of a novelty, to be spiteful to him. But this was a Caucasian officer. We were down in some place like—

MANSFIELD: The warrant officer was a white guy?

ADAMS: The warrant officer was a person of color, on the same Tuskegee base. The other officer was in the engineer organization, and he felt like when we went by him as a group, as a flight, that we did that out of fun. They had them do eyes right, salute him, salute him as they passed, and he had me stop and come back to him. He said, "Now, you did that out of spite." I said, "No, sir, I'm just giving you recognition of your particular position, and if I'm in the same position, I hope to get that same recognition." As I say, those things happened at times and let you think that some show you that respect and some feel, well, you're trying to be smart, so I'll show him my position of authority. So I ran into many incidents like that, whether it's on the base or in the camp, but not with all of them. Most of the time, the officers were very, I'd say, amenable to many things—they know what you're going to have problems with, and they were helpful in so many ways, so...

MANSFIELD: But by and large, how did white officers respond to your ... ..

ADAMS: We had a company commander there. They were very respectful to the organization. In fact, most of the officers in Tuskegee—the commanding officers there was a Caucasian. We had several—they participated in gym and all with us. A very likeable organization, I would say. Worked well together. But they wanted the same rules and regulations followed there, and as long as you did that, we had no problems.

MANSFIELD: One of the things I have read about and other veterans have told me about is that some of the cadets who came from places outside of the South had a hard time adapting to the Jim Crow mentality of the area. Did you notice any of your classmates or any of the cadets who had a hard time getting used to the segregation and racism of Alabama?

ADAMS: On the base, no. I didn't go to town much, so I can't say about that. But on the base, I'd say no. We didn't come in contact with too many people of different colors. There was one incident on a low-altitude cross-country that I participated in. I knew that there were other flying organizations there, but I made the mistake of landing at a[n air]field, on a cross-country, that when I landed in the field and rolled up to the line to stop the plane and get out of it, I had landed at an organization that was entirely white. They were white cadets. You should have seen the amazement on their faces and mine as well, as I recognized the fact that I didn't recognize that I had landed at a wrong base because they had the same ships, the same markings, but a different field maybe within—who knows?—five or ten miles of one another. I was off that much. My timing was off. But I didn't recognize the fact that even though they were training at the same type of work, maybe in the same locale within a distance of five or ten miles, that they had to be separate organizations of that kind. I didn't get reprimanded for it, but I didn't hear anything

more about it. But I didn't realize that we have a flying school with white cadets, flying in the same state, in the same locale, but no togetherness. But that was an incident that brought it to my attention at that time.

MANSFIELD: What about your friends on base?

ADAMS: I think as a unit, we were compatible in most instances, but I think that—we had a cadet captain, and we had a staff, and we had several of those in a different position of authority around them. You can't always, as I was told, mingle to much in some ways with—individuals in some ways have different ideas of control, what they want to do, their lifestyle. Some of them wanted to go to town all the time. Some wanted to stay on the base and engage in volleyball, basketball, activities at the base and that's it. Some wanted to go to town and have fun and do whatever they want. Now, I'm the kind who stays at the base and works or studies.

MANSFIELD: Why didn't you go into town? What reasons?

ADAMS: In Tuskegee, I didn't know too much about the town, and I'd heard about so many of the things that you can be exposed to there, so, not having any actually close relatives or people who came to the base, other than the service—the service organizations used to bring the young ladies out from time, Service and Sailors Association. They would have dances sometimes at the base, and they would have a chance to participate with the young women who came to the base under the ladies who were in charge of them, to allow the soldiers there to participate in an evening dancing and entertainment. Coming in contact with one or two of those ladies, being

invited to their home to meet their parents, I'd do that every once in a while, but not with any degree of regularity. At that particular time, I was engaged to that little lady. [Indicates photo of his wife.]

MANSFIELD: Oh, so that kind of—

ADAMS: [Laughs.] I didn't have any other interests.

MANSFIELD: Your attention was focused elsewhere.

ADAMS: Yes, yes, that's right.

MANSFIELD: You said that there were some things that you could be exposed to in town that you didn't want to be exposed to. What would that be?

ADAMS: I heard those things, I said.

MANSFIELD: What had you heard?

ADAMS: You weren't supposed to go numerous places after certain hours of the night, particularly after dark. They didn't make it comfortable for you to stay there. You were an intruder. You were a soldier or a sailor or you were an intruder. They didn't particularly want you in town. So the best thing to do was stay on the base, as far as I was concerned.

MANSFIELD: They didn't want you in town because you were a soldier, or they didn't want you in town because you were a black soldier?

ADAMS: Well, maybe twice. Maybe both of those things [are] to be considered. Some soldiers, and maybe it happened in other services as well, but they have an attitude that you're there for no good and that uniform gives you the privilege of going some places, but they don't want you mingling with their daughters. I'll put it that way. If you're a man, they didn't want you part of their family life unless they knew you. I guess that prevails in so many cases wherever you might go. I just felt it's better to stay where I know where I am, know what I can expect, and that type of life which I enjoy.

MANSFIELD: Tell me a little bit more about what you did for fun in your off-duty hours. You mentioned basketball and volleyball.

ADAMS: Volleyball was one of the outstanding things. I did a great deal of reading. I did a lot of training as far as calisthenics was concerned. Practice drill. We could get a group of guys together and go out and practice monkey drill, as it's called, where you have the guys go through all types of separations, coming together, display, like they have on—not necessarily with rifles or anything, do [more than] just ordinary marching, where you show the capability of an individual in charge, making the unit move together or separate, come together, working different angles, working different designs.

MANSFIELD: Kind of like a band at half time?

ADAMS: Yes, a drill team.

MANSFIELD: You called it monkey drill?

ADAMS: Monkey drill.

MANSFIELD: Now, where'd that name come from?

ADAMS: Now, I couldn't tell you that. That's what it was called, and that's what I say I exposed the advanced students to when they acted up, and they put me in charge of a drill to go out there and punish these guys. But you make it fun when you go out and do things—and they could follow instructions, and they could follow instructions enough—if they didn't know it, if you gave them the right kind of instruction, they'd enjoy doing it. So I used that principle in trying to help, not just the standardized [way] of making them run around the block five or six times. They had them in full dress, in their regular outfits, the dress uniforms, too. You didn't want to go out there and spoil those clothes in that manner, so you'd have them do nice, easy things that would let them maneuver and bring them back a half an hour after they have done that, and they felt...

Now, the officers in charge many times must think sometimes, "That wasn't enough" after they'd watch, so they wanted to make them run. I didn't enjoy that at all, but I took them

through the monkey drill and some other drill formations, for their benefit, which was always nice and an enjoyable way to be punished, as far as I was concerned.

MANSFIELD: Well, now, where did *you* learn monkey drill?

ADAMS: Watching others and from reading about it, making the commands on the right foot and how they go about doing it. I learned that on a train, most of the time going to Boston, Massachusetts. I used to read the manuals, and I'd watch the people on the dress parades that they always had, how they maneuvered, how the commander would give those commands to let each unit move together, how they counted cadence. Just by observing others and reading about it.

MANSFIELD: Was monkey drill—did white troops do that as well, or was it mostly black troops?

ADAMS: I really don't know. I wasn't familiar with—I guess they must have been exposed to the same thing, if they had drill instructors who were knowledgeable about it. But, you see, where I was, most of the time we didn't have anything other than just the black organizations. Our companies would come out together—basic, advanced, primary—all in the same place. They would all work together, and I didn't come in contact with anybody else.

MANSFIELD: Okay. So you went through lower basic, upper basic, lower advanced—

ADAMS: And upper advanced, mm-hm.

MANSFIELD: —and upper advanced. What about your graduation ceremony? What was that like?

ADAMS: It was like they'd call everybody out on the drill field, and the organizations honor those who have graduated, and they take pictures. It's just like a dress parade that they have. Sometimes the whole company comes out, and you pass in review before the reviewing officers and then they acknowledge those who have graduated. Ours was the single-engine class. The twin-engine, I'm not sure. They were separate. But just on the open field, where they'd call all the units together, and they recognize you, and they allow the wings that they give you to be pinned on by the lady of your choice or someone else who may come there. It was a very dramatical thing, I would say, but recognizing the fact that you had been able to survive all these hours of training and receive those wings and get your commission either as a flight officer [or] as a second lieutenant. I don't know what made the difference. We had some were flight officers, and some were second lieutenants.

MANSFIELD: And you came out as a second lieutenant?

ADAMS: Second lieutenant, yes.

MANSFIELD: They separated the cadets from single-engine and twin-engine. Did you have any choice in that, or was that what you were assigned to?

ADAMS: Let's see, I think size, capability, and the desire of the person, what you wanted to go into when you were separated from single to twin. Now, they didn't have too many people of size, now, as single-engine pilots. I think most of them decided to go to twin-engine. But the smaller guys and I guess whatever certain capabilities they look for went to single engine. I guess it's much easier [for people of smaller physical size] to fit in one of the [single engine] ships than in twin-engine jobs. But I think your personal preference had a lot to do with it as well.

MANSFIELD: What was your personal preference?

ADAMS: Naturally the fighter pilot. It was then. I didn't particularly like flying big ships, and I was fascinated by the idea of flying the lighter ships, more maneuverable in the acrobatics that I had seen them do. It was a fascination, I guess. The twin-engine jobs I thought were more stable flying, straight and level and all that sort of thing. I thought the fighters had a greater responsibility to it, and I just catered to that sort of activity.

MANSFIELD: Did your fiancée come down to pin your wings on?

ADAMS: No, she was still in school. I had my cousin, I think, who lived in Hiawatha, Kansas, who was attending the nursing school at Tuskegee. She pinned my wings on me that particular time.

MANSFIELD: That must have been exciting, to graduate, to make it.

ADAMS: Oh, yes. Believe me, it was, when you stop to realize that so many of those you were working with and studying with at the time weren't there, that you were fortunate enough or blessed enough to be able to get through that.

MANSFIELD: What was it like when someone washed out? I mean, did you all have some idea that they might be wash out, or did it happen by surprise?

ADAMS: They just weren't there after certain incidents happened. We just knew—we had some basic ideas. I told you about Jiles, who came down with that bad—I forgot the guy's name in advanced class, who washed out, but he was cadet captain, and I followed in his footsteps as cadet captain. And I had problems at night flying, too. The compass, I thought, malfunctioned at the time. It may have been my poor judgment, itself, but I was on a night cross-country, and passed my time of destination at a certain point, and I had radio contact after that, calling for me. They couldn't hear my transmission back. But I recognized the fact that I had missed my arrival point at a certain place, so I turned to the new heading I was supposed to turn at, but I was off I don't know how many miles, but I was headed back to the base, and I could pick up the signals coming from the transmission tower. But I should have been in about ten minutes earlier at that particular destination on my second point, and recognized the fact that I had gone by it and located a town where I was able to pick up the name. And, knowing where I was, I started flying in a new direction to get back there.

But I recognized the fact that that's a possibility. The wind was blowing me [off course]. I guess I didn't calculate for that on time to allow me to [reach the] a point of arrival [on time]. You can't tell too much about lights over a town if you're flying at—who knows?—two or three thousand feet or five thousand feet. You have to drop down to be able to identify where you are, if you think you have become lost and have missed a point. So I still picked up my transmission signals from there, knowing the dih-dah-dah-dit coming back, going to or from in the quadrant I was in, and made it back all right.

But they checked me on the next cross-country because I was late. I should have arrived at Tuskegee at a certain time, and I was late getting there. But I answered the radio transmission when I was in calling distance back to that tower, and I recognized the fact that at night, they didn't want that same thing to happen that happened in advanced [training]. I was cadet captain at the time, and the other cadet captain washed out because of abandoning the plane. That incident popped into my mind at the time. But I made it back all right, but, I say, the next cross-country, I had to have an instructor with me to make sure I was checked out, that I was doing well in my orientation.

But in those cases, when something like that happens, poor judgment will wash you out, period. I mean, you can't abandon a plane someplace. Whatever damage it might do on the ground plus whatever thousand it cost you for that ship, and the damage you do, and having to go out and pick you up and bring you back into the base is an added expense that should not have to have been a sustained by the company, itself.

So a lot of those things that happened, whether or not I guess, were they a malfunction of the airplane or the poor judgment of the pilot, the prospective pilot, resulted in a lot of them not making it.

MANSFIELD: This disk is about used up. Have you got time to talk to me some more?

ADAMS: Yes, if you have time to listen, [and] if it's of any interest to you.

MANSFIELD: All right. Well, let me stop this.

[End Tape 1, Side B. Begin Tape 2, Side A.]

MANSFIELD: This is disk number two of Bill Mansfield's interview with Mr. John Adams on June the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2003, right here in Kansas City, Kansas.

And you were telling me about graduation ceremony, and you said you had a cousin who was studying nursing at Tuskegee, and she pinned the wings on you. What happened after the graduation ceremony?

ADAMS: We had to go to—it was Eglin Field, Florida, for gunnery training. And from gunnery training, stayed in Florida for I think it was a week or two, and from there we were assigned to the new 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, at I think it was Godman Field, Kentucky, or I think it was Walterboro, South Carolina, first and then Godman Field, Kentucky, for assignment there. We would be preparing to be shipped overseas to replace some of the old 99<sup>th</sup> members, who had been there for some time. They were going to be coming home for relief from their activities there, and we were supposed to fill in.

But then they decided that they didn't have a need for any additional pilots in that particular instance because of the fact that the war had been declared over, so they proceeded to try to offer encouragement for those who wanted to stay in the service, to volunteer to stay in for two years, which I signed to accept that sort of arrangement. But then about I think thirty days later, they came back and said two years wasn't enough; you had to stay in for three years. The word came around they were trying to get rid of you because they didn't need any more pilots of the black organization anyway, so I just decided that I would take my leave and go home and help take care of my parents again and take up my life with the lady friend and drive my little car around and take things easy, go back to my job as a motion picture projectionist at the Princess Theater. It was a mistake, though. I should have stayed in.

MANSFIELD: You graduated in March, and when you went to Eglin Field for gunnery training, what were you flying down there?

ADAMS: AT-6s on gunnery training. But I flew the P-47 was the only fighter ship actually that I flew, that seven-ton—what do they call it?—the Barrel?

MANSFIELD: The Jug?

ADAMS: The Jug, that's right. I flew a limited number of hours in that, in training, when I was in—I guess that was Walterboro, South Carolina. That was the only fighter I really had any time in at all, and it wasn't enough, other than just informational flying, becoming familiar with the ship they were flying overseas at the time. That was after they had eliminated the P-40, and they

went from there to the -47, I believe. And then later they set up with the P-51. But my limited amount of flying in the P-47 was all I had in any type of actually fighting ship that was being used in the war.

MANSFIELD: Was it difficult to make the transition from the AT-6 to the P-47? Because the P-47 was huge! It was a big airplane.

ADAMS: No. They give you cockpit training, and you have cockpit procedures you're supposed to go through every day, familiar with the ship. They gave you a manual that you were supposed to read and become familiar with it. Same flying principle. You use the stick, trim tabs. The only thing that—I don't remember different about it—I don't remember anything any different about it. Same instruments were there, same control stick, some aileron controls on the side. You just had a different airspeed. I think the red line was 450 miles an hour on that instead of the 300-and-something that's possible on the AT-6. But it's basically the same principle. I think most of them have that. I haven't been in enough ships to qualify that remark, though. But I would assume, just like cars, same principle but different actual controls in different places.

MANSFIELD: How did it handle differently?

ADAMS: I think the takeoff and landing speeds may have been different, but otherwise, it's the same basic thing once you get them off the ground. Now, it would fall out of the sky in a spin a lot faster in a Jug than it would that AT-6, but it would come down at a heck of a speed and you wouldn't try to pull it out, trying to show-off—I'll put it in that manner. You handled it sensibly,

and –it did not maneuver as easy as the AT-6, by any means. You could pop tighter turns with it, but I really don't understand the basic reason why they went to that big Jug instead of a plane similar to the AT-6. But whatever the reason, maybe it's because of its durability in some way? I really can't say. But I'm glad to know that, from what I read, the P-51 was so much of a lighter and more maneuverable plane. It was the speed that they had as well. But you could maneuver it much more easily than you could with the Jug. But I say, my time was so limited in it. And I understand they didn't last long overseas, either, when they were using it, that the -51 was a more desirable ship to have.

MANSFIELD: How was it different being a second lieutenant and a pilot than it was being a cadet? I mean, did you have a greater sense of freedom? What differences did you notice?

ADAMS: I think you had a lot more recognition if you were on the street or on the base. But I say, wearing the wings would let any individual know that you had to qualify, as a general rule, as to whether he earned those wings rather than just went out and purchased them. And being off the base, I guess there was one thing—sometimes restrictions and resentment, many times, on the base in which senior officers and newly graduated officers had problems. I remember one in I guess it was the cafeteria. I've forgotten which base it was at now. I guess it must have been in Tuskegee, though. The senior officers on the base had a certain position in the cafeteria [where] they sat, and I remember some of our class, the group who went in, having just received that type of recognition as graduates, sat at the wrong table, to the resentment of the senior officers who were there. They let us know that this is strictly for company commanders and people who are staff. You can sit anywhere else, but don't sit here. It's that, once again, not knowing the locale

as to what we were to do or not to do. I always thought that, now, as a commissioned officer, you could sit anywhere in the cafeteria or anyplace else, but they reminded us that we had certain status that we must recognize. That's the only incident I remember on the base, itself.

But in comparison to those, I say, who come back with all the—what is it?—confetti [decorations and combat ribbons] they have on?

MANSFIELD: Yes.

ADAMS: It makes a much more recognizable event that they have that qualification and have been able to be participating in those events that you have yet to earn. So that amount of respect always goes to those individuals who have it.

MANSFIELD: Well, now, at Walterboro, what was it like when you were there in South Carolina? Did you stay on the base or get off the base much?

ADAMS: I stayed on the base.

MANSFIELD: And why was that?

ADAMS: [chuckles] Once again, no desire to go. We weren't there that long. I think we were in—Godman Field, Kentucky, was much closer to Chicago, closer to Chicago or New York, and I think on weekends away from base duties and obligations there, we'd go to Chicago or we'd go to New York.

MANSFIELD: Would you fly up there?

ADAMS: Drive.

MANSFIELD: Drive?

ADAMS: Yes. A group of us would go in the car. One time—several times, went on the bus. Not flying, but, say, on the weekends we'd either get on the bus or get in a car that one had, and four or five of us would get in there. We'd shift around driving responsibilities. I was the one who didn't drink or smoke. I had the obligation of getting the fellows back in case they became a little bit inebriated or a little too much socializing.

MANSFIELD: So you were the designated driver?

ADAMS: I'm the designated driver. [laughs] Some of them were fun-loving guys, much younger. They had that type of lifestyle that they enjoyed. Most of them weren't married, that I know of. Some were married afterwards, but I qualified as the designated driver to get them back safely.

MANSFIELD: Some people have told me that at Walterboro there were German POWs there. Do you remember anything about that?

ADAMS: I have no knowledge of that at all.

MANSFIELD: Okay. I've also had people tell me that here they were, commissioned officers in the United States Army Air Force, yet they were still subject to discrimination and segregation. What kind of experience did you have with that?

ADAMS: Once again, I don't know that I was active enough going different places to become involved in that. As I say, I stayed strictly on the base, unless I went—[Clifton] Casey lived in Chicago. I went with Casey many times, stayed at his home, with his parents, or went to the theater or wherever else, with the lady friends that he was associated [with], and I didn't come in contact with any type of that type of discrimination when I was there. I wasn't a guy who went off the base looking for fun and excitement. I would concentrate on study, on writing or on reading or anything of the kind, or basketball, volleyball, whatever they had available, or swimming. Town just never did appeal to me. I had basically what I needed there, and I wasn't interested in running around.

And, you know, you used to hear many times that getting involved with some of the ladies of the evening in towns of that kind, you never know what you're running into, so you're safer being on the base, where you know what's going on. So that wasn't an appealing thing to me, and I had no interest of actually taking me away from where I was at the time, unfortunately like some of the others who differed with me [sic].

When I went places, I usually stayed at the home of the fellows who lived there, and so I wasn't familiar too much about segregation in places where we went. In those places, I think it

was theater or dinner, and I guess there were places that accepted you as you were. So I'm not too much on those type of things that the fellows may have come in contact with.

MANSFIELD: Not drinking and smoking and making sure that you didn't run across ladies of the evening, it sound like you had some pretty strong religious convictions.

ADAMS: Not really.

MANSFIELD: No?

ADAMS: I play piano by ear, and there was a piano on the base I could spend hours banging around on the piano and trying to learn new chords or learn to play—I never had the privilege, I'd say, of musical training as an individual, but I had learned, just from tinkering around on the piano, that I can play. And if you put it in front of me what I'm playing, I couldn't read it. But it's just that I can spend my whole afternoon either reading, playing the piano, playing tennis or swimming and not be involved with leaving, going, looking for fun and excitement. I just didn't have that desire.

Now, I'm a guy who likes to dance and enjoys music but only when I came to a place where the young ladies were supervised, that came out to visit the camps or you're invited at their homes, since you met them, to meet the families and all. I didn't become involved.

MANSFIELD: What kind of music did you play on the piano?

ADAMS: Most of the times jazz or blues or something of the kind. I just tinker around, trying to become familiar with—you have thirteen scales on that piano, and trying to be able to play anything you want in any one of the keys. That's a fascinating thing about piano that I haven't achieved, by any means, but it's something to work forward to.

MANSFIELD: It shows a lot of initiative, curiosity, discipline, and stick-with-it. That's to be commended.

ADAMS: I enjoy that, and I try to play the guitar as well. I had arthritis in my wrist at times. I have arthritis in my fingers now, but in playing the piano or trying to play the guitar, I forget about the pain that comes about with arthritis. But that allows me to try to enjoy something, even though it's painful, but I don't think about it at the time. I used to hear many times about putting copper bands or whatever else you might have to offset the discomfort that comes with arthritis, but I believe a lot of it is mental. But over a period of time, it lets you know that old "Arthur" is still there. But usually those means of exercise, I enjoy.

MANSFIELD: I've had some other people tell me about songs that the cadets would sing while they were marching and music on the base for training. What do you remember about that?

ADAMS: We used to do those anytime we marched from our barracks to the field or to class. It was a part of helping to keep the rhythmic aspect going and keeping in step. There were any number of Air Force songs. There's one that—what was it? [He speaks this, rather than sings it]: "Be kind to your web-footed friends because a duck may be somebody's mother. Don't treat

your friends like a tramp when the weather is cold and damp. Well, you may think that this is the end, then it is.” I remember that. [Chuckles.]

MANSFIELD: Do you remember the melody for it? Could you sing any of it?

ADAMS: Let’s see. [Now he sings it to the tune of the Sousa march *Stars and Stripes Forever*]: “Be kind to your web-footed friends because a duck may be somebody’s mother. Don’t treat your friends like tramp when the weather is cold and damp. Well, you may think that this is the end. Well, it is.”

MANSFIELD: [Laughs.]

ADAMS: And we’d be marching along like that. There were any number of songs. I can’t remember all of them, but that’s the one we used to repeat and repeat as we were walking down the street.

Oh [speaks]: “Off we go, into the wild blue yonder,” wild blue yonder. Gosh, I used to wear that one out. But the songs were a part of the regular marching that we would have to do from the barracks to the school and from the school to the field. So many of those things just won’t come to me now. I’ll think about it later on in the day.

MANSFIELD: I’ll be about twenty minutes down the road. You’ll remember a whole mess of them.

ADAMS: [Laughs.]

MANSFIELD: I feel guilty asking people to remember back fifty, sixty years ago, but sometimes they can remember and sometimes they can't.

ADAMS: That's true. Sometimes it'll come to me.

MANSFIELD: So anyhow, getting back to the training, you went to Walterboro, and then from there up to Godman.

ADAMS: Godman Field, Kentucky. That's where I got my discharge.

MANSFIELD: You were willing to stay on for two more years, but three more years would have been—

ADAMS: I thought they were going to keep asking you to volunteer for more and more, and they didn't need me, and I became bored with making the inspections that they were asking you to do and going around doing little menial jobs that didn't mean anything. If they were there to try to study the flying or being a part of the flight lines or learning about the plane—because I don't know the first thing about how the mechanics work. I would have been interested in going down to the flight line, if it were not a restricted area, learning about the plane, being able to work at some of the aircrafts, keep me busy and keep me from being bored. But they had you doing menial inspections, falling out for this, that and the other, which meant nothing, and I

became bored, and I said, *If they don't need me, I'll go back home, where my parents need me and where my little lady—I don't want somebody to run off with her, so I'll get on out of here and go home.* And that's what I did.

MANSFIELD: What kind of menial inspections were they having you do?

ADAMS: Going around inspecting the barracks, participating in—group meeting. To listen to lectures, is one thing. I don't remember what they were now. But you had to have—you were either the officer in charge of the guard or the officer in charge of some little task around inspecting the barracks, discipline of the individuals in certain areas there. Nothing, as far as I could see, was beneficial to your learning. Keeping you busy doing something about your craft. It was just to let you know that “we don't need you anymore, and if you can't abide by volunteering for two year or three years or four years, we'll ask you to take a discharge or do something else.”

And with some of the fellows, from what I understand, they put them back in their rank and their ratings as to NCOs. I don't understand how that happened, but they did. Whether they were flight officers or whether they did not complete their course in what they were subjected to, I'm not sure. But that was one of the things that I heard that influenced my leaving there. I didn't feel that there was going to be any great need for a pilot at that time afterwards. If they didn't need you then, why would they—I, of course, didn't know about other wars coming on. Those subsequent classes came after, because after 45-C, I think there must have been 46-A, -B, -C or whatever else that came about. I'm not sure about that.

But I was under the impression that there was no need for—and they had too many that were going to come back from overseas, and how they were going to place them in positions, I had no knowledge. Whether they wanted to stay in or not. And some did. Kenneth [O.] Wofford was part of the staff of the group in 45-C when I was there. He stayed in and participated in subsequent wars and went on to become—I think he's a retired lieutenant colonel now. He lives in Minneapolis, and I think he went on to become active in an airfield management there.

MANSFIELD: That's who, now?

ADAMS: What?

MANSFIELD: What was his name again?

ADAMS: Kenneth Wofford.

MANSFIELD: Wafford? W-a-

ADAMS: W-o-f-f-o-r-d, I think.

MANSFIELD: And he lives in?

ADAMS: Minneapolis, Minnesota.

MANSFIELD: We might try and talk to him.

ADAMS: Well, he's available. He was here on a speaking engagement not too long ago. But he's still active there. And he's done a remarkable job in places he has been. He comes out on speaking engagements for the Tuskegee Airmen in several meetings that they have.

MANSFIELD: At Walterboro you qualified for the P-47, and then when you got to Godman Field, were you still flying then?

ADAMS: Flying AT-6s to get you qualified—that's one other reason. You were limited to flying four hours a month to qualify for your flying pay. Now, all that time there, you only fly one day a week to get four hours—I don't know how much time they would allow you, but four hours to qualify for your flying, and that's all. I'm there to fly, and for all my training, and yet I'm making inspections. I'm bored. Some of the youngsters would say now, "I'm bored with sitting around doing nothing." I'm not flying. I'm not active in planes at all. And I'm not enjoying the life there, actually. I'm uncomfortable being in a place where I'm not at home, with friends and lady friend and activities that I enjoy. They don't need me, so I'll go home.

But when I came back to get my job, I was told that I could have that job for one year, and that's all that they could—mandatory for me to be back in my former position, and then I would have to take my chances in getting what I wanted someplace else. Fortunately, though, the people in that theater chain gave me the opportunity to go as theater manager over in Kansas City, Missouri, the Castle Theater, because while I was away, the members of the organization

called the 170-A of the Black Operators had formed a union. I left the job as non-union and came back; that job had been unionized, and they only had three theaters at the time, and there was no need for an additional projectionist, qualified or not, so they had to give up—the job that I left had been taken over by an organization that had become unionized, and they wanted to hold onto those jobs, which they did.

At the end of that particular year's time, I had to give up that job and go to Missouri as a theater manager until this union had been able to take over two other theaters that were to be given to them as an auxiliary, and they needed additional operators then, so my application was accepted, and I became the relief operator, working at five theaters until, oh, I guess a few years after that I worked up to being business manager of the group when the fellow who organized it became ill, and I took his place.

But I only had that job [as a projectionist] guaranteed for one year[,after returning from service]. If I had known that, I probably would have stayed in. I would have taken my chances with the service. But I wanted to get home for numerous reasons. My parents needed me, I thought, and as I said, I didn't want the little lady to run off with somebody else, so I decided to come home and give up that service. But, see, hindsight tells me that it would have been something to think about if she had been able to accept Army life and we had stayed together and stayed in. I liked it well enough, I think, to have been aggressive and motivated enough to be active in it and be successful in it.

MANSFIELD: But your sweetheart didn't care for Army life?

ADAMS: No, she didn't particularly care for Army life. As I say, I wasn't really thrilled about the idea of being married and being in the service, but I just thought it would be an acceptable way for ... a bird's nest on the ground, more or less, because the benefits, being in service, were so much greater than my little nickel-and-dime job, as I called it. But it was the idea of being free to do as I wanted, helping my parents, and being in an environment where there was a need for me rather where I was just excess baggage.

But I came out of there and went to art school and applied for an electronic course by correspondence, doing radio, television work, and I went to art school and got my bachelor of fine arts degree and my master's.

MANSFIELD: Wow.

ADAMS: So I took advantage of the four years, the time it took me to finish my schooling.

MANSFIELD: Where did you get your bachelor's of art?

ADAMS: Kansas City Art Institute. Then I went to junior college to get my academic credits and went back to the art institute to get my master's in it.

MANSFIELD: That's great. Well, I've been throwing questions at you for about the past hour and a half. Is there anything you want to tell me about that I haven't asked you about?

ADAMS: [Chuckles] I don't know of anything that would be of interest. It's been an amazing thing for me. I thought I was so blessed to have gone into the service as a draftee and been able to be exposed to what I was in the way of training. Unusual, I'd say. At no cost to me, I've been able to become a commissioned officer, fly a plane, learn something that I didn't think I could afford to do as a youngster, and then come back from that and achieve a goal of going to school, with only paying a limited amount of my own funds in order to accomplish the degrees that I have been able to earn.

I have encouraged those with whom I have come in contact that the Army life is a pretty good life to be a part of. If you don't have the desire to be a professional in—who knows?—in teaching or something of that kind and you can't find yourself, try service for a while and see if you can get acquainted—the training and what you can get from it as a start, is wonderful. I think it would be nice for all young people, male and female, to have a little bit of that type of structure.

I don't resent my—in fact, I enjoyed my life. I had so much—I didn't ever do KP until the time I was acting first sergeant and did not assign an individual to be on KP duty, so I put myself on KP. [Chuckles] That's the only time. Otherwise, I worked in the office. Had so many nice advantages, as drill instructor, calisthenics director, and being exposed to training all the time. It's wonderful.

MANSFIELD: Can I ask you a little bit about the pictures here?

ADAMS: Sure.

MANSFIELD: [Looking at photographs] This is when you were at—

ADAMS: Franklin Institute of Technology.

MANSFIELD: What did they teach you there? That was up in Boston?

ADAMS: Yes. Engineering drafting and topographic drafting, map reading, how you go down and survey the roads and all and make the maps for the individuals, the troops that are going to come behind you. As an engineer, the group I was assigned with—have you seen me on that group that you can identify?

MANSFIELD: Uh—

ADAMS: Probably not.

MANSFIELD: I would guess this man right here.

ADAMS: Let's see, that's Newton, that's yours truly—

MANSFIELD: Right there?

ADAMS: Yes.

MANSFIELD: That's the one I guessed.

ADAMS: That's Barker, Williams, Cletus Bardow, Williamson. Yes, I'm that individual there. That's Gene Newton, and this is Alex Barker.

MANSFIELD: What was it like being in class with all the white students?

ADAMS: We were in class together, but we had separate places to live. We had five of us, I think—no, six of us lived in one little place, in a private—it wasn't a home, but it was a private barracks, I'd say, and met these others in class only. We had a separate life. We had an instance many times to go out and socialize. They made arrangements for us to go to different places, where it was mixed. It was not segregated. I don't remember where it was now, but those in charge of the school there had certain entertainment, at times, when you'd go out and socialize, dance and whatnot. I played the piano most of the time, tinkering around, and met several of the young ladies, with whom I danced, all Caucasians. I don't remember any people of color being there.

But we were not mistreated in those instances. We had a chance to mingle and to be accepted, and I met one or two people of color while I was there, who came out—I think, again, a group of individuals who got together with maybe some club or organization of young ladies. They were to be supervised and governed, I guess, by those in charge, and they came out to be entertained and to be part of an evening for the particular students who were going to school.

MANSFIELD: What was the interaction like with the white students there? How'd y'all get along?

ADAMS: Fine. There was never any instance, to my knowledge, of misunderstanding at all. As I say, I don't know which of these Caucasians who went in the group did not sufficiently qualify to be a topographic draftsman for the work, but I had an opportunity, as I say again, to fill in and moved up.

MANSFIELD: It sounds like you managed to do well in just about anything you took on.

ADAMS: [Chuckles.] Well, I'm called an eager beaver. You see? Certificate with High Credit.

MANSFIELD: Oh, great. Man, that's wonderful. So this is the graduation program?

ADAMS: Mm-hm.

MANSFIELD: That's neat!

ADAMS: Well, I have an idea of wherever I'm put, since I've been told most of my life that there are two strikes against you to begin with, being of color, so you have to get out there and prove yourself one way or another so that you are able to qualify. You have to be better in many cases than others, whether you're competing against others—but the idea of accepting the challenge and to recognize the fact that if you want to achieve, you've got to work hard. You've

got to study, and you prepare yourself for it, and your chances of being accepted, in many cases, will be based on how you strive and how you're motivated. That's the same thing I preach to my sons: the idea that if you really want to go to school, you don't necessarily have to have all the funds necessary. If you can't qualify for a scholarship and that sort of thing, get out there and work hard, and those opportunities will come to you.

MANSFIELD: You said that somebody told you being of color, you had two strikes against you.

ADAMS: Yes.

MANSFIELD: Where did you hear that?

ADAMS: In school.

MANSFIELD: In school?

ADAMS: Yes. Parents. We went to Sumner High School, the only black high school that we could attend. Sumner has an excellent rating as far as sports and academic work, where students who attended there qualified against students who had to go to Wyandotte or Washington. The athletic association always recognized the fact that sometimes some things are so much against you that if you don't excel in it, you're not going to make it. We had a group of instructors and teachers there who stressed that: You've got to excel in what you're doing. Being lazy and

wasting your time won't cut it in a world where, as I said, you've got two strikes against you to begin with, so be prepared for that and get out there and work and study. Don't waste your time.

MANSFIELD: Did you parents and your instructors in high school—did they ever talk about the injustice of discrimination and just how it was wrong?

ADAMS: Not really. They didn't stress that so much as "we can't help what we are, but being that and realizing that—places I went to get a job when I was in the last year in high school, downtown in department stores, you stand on the line, and many others ahead of you were getting applications. They were being accepted to get an application blank, and when you came up, they said, "We don't have any place for you. You're wasting your time." Well, that's a humiliating thing, as far as I'm concerned, whether it's stock work or whatever you're doing. But recognizing that didn't stop me from doing what I felt I could do.

Now, I started a lawn service, go out here working for private families and that sort of thing. My work, qualifying—keep the yards looking nice, the trimming, the grass work and all that—so I had a business that I could work seven days a week if I wanted to. And the wealthy white families and wealthy Greek families out there—the theater chain I worked for were of Greek descent. They had four theaters at the time. I could work for any one of those families and working in that area, people would drive by and see the work that I was doing and asked me if I'd work for them. The families would recommend me, pass the word on. So many things you can do. You don't have to be stalled with the fact that you can't go downtown and apply for a job and get an application for a clerk job or a stockroom person. Get your own business going, and you can excel in that if you want to.

MANSFIELD: It sounds like where there was no way, you made a way.

ADAMS: And the good Lord smiled on me in so many ways in that manner. I was very fortunate. I feel I've had a blessed life, and this stint in the Army was wonderful for me.

MANSFIELD: Could I ask you about these pictures here? Tell me about these photographs.

ADAMS: That's an AT-6. They were taken when I was either a student there or preparing to go up in flight training, and they were either in the last part of '44 or early part of '45. I think I took these of the ship which was there for us to fly. This is an AT-6. My longest amount of time in flying was in ships of this kind. It was easy, maneuverable. I went cross-country. I spent more time in this ship than any of them.

MANSFIELD: That's a BT-13 there, isn't it?

ADAMS: I don't think so.

MANSFIELD: It looks like the fixed gear and the different tail.

ADAMS: Let's see, I think all of these are AT-6. I had some of the BT-13, but that looks like to me it's—see here? That's an AT-6. This is the same ship, CT-7—

[End Tape 2, Side A. Begin Tape 2, Side B.]

ADAMS: That's the same deal, with the tail and all, I believe. The BT-13 usually stood a little bit higher. I had some at one time, with the primary, when we were sitting down and the class—was taken when we had all sixty members, in a little book. I don't know where that is now. But that's an AT-6, I think.

MANSFIELD: When we go out on interviews, we can ask anything we want, but the one question they want us to ask is that Moton Field is now a National Historic Site, telling the story of the Tuskegee Airmen. What do you think is the important story for that Historic Site to tell?

ADAMS: I think it would acknowledge, to those who were really interested, that the group of black individuals, whether they be male or female—as far as I know, there were only males—they proved to the world who was interested that it does not inhibit a person's capability of flying just because they're of a different color. They were able to achieve, were physically and mentally were able to qualify, to be exposed to the possibility of training to become skilled enough to fly that plane and to do whatever job they were assigned to do, as far as I'm concerned.

I think about it now. You couldn't pay me, more or less, to go out and rob or kill, but flying that plane at that time, when I was in my twenties, I was gung-ho with the idea of: Give me that ship and let me get rid of all these individuals who are protesting against the peace and the serenity of those who are striving to do some things and wanted to take that privilege away from them. But the idea now and in past years, I would be killing individuals, destroying

property. That's against my thinking now. In all my experience in there, I did a lot of firing bullets at things and shotguns, learning to train for that type of preparation for flying, but I never killed anybody, I never shot at anybody, I didn't destroy any property. But at that time, I would have been more than willing to do that job.

MANSFIELD: How did you feel when you found out that the war was over, when the Germans surrendered?

ADAMS: I was disappointed. I wanted to at least get overseas to be able to fly some. When most people ask you—or you mention—I mention to most people I was with the *new* 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter group [sic; Squadron], attached to the 332<sup>nd</sup> [Fighter Group], in Godman Field, Kentucky, in preparation to go on overseas. They assume, before I say that, that “you must have been one of those who flew the Redtail -51s.” As I say, it's distracting to me that, “No, I cannot accept credit for any of that. I read about those individuals, and I'm glad to be a part of the knowledge of that history, but I did not do anything of that. I did not even get overseas. I had a limited amount of flying in a fighter ship and was exposed to that type of training, and I'm proud to be able to do that, but unfortunately, I did not engage in any type of war activities at all.”

MANSFIELD: Do you feel that you played some role in defeating racism by succeeding as a Tuskegee Airman, by succeeding as a pilot?

ADAMS: As far as racism is concerned, I don't think I contributed to much of that, either. I've done more in working with the Motion Picture Operators union, which is 170, in comparison to

179A, which is an auxiliary unit of strictly people of color who participate in projection work, and the discrimination that came along with 170, being a white organization, having rules and stipulations that they want white only can be a part of this Motion Picture Operators local. One seventy-A and all the –A locals were separate, second-hand citizens, more or less, as projectionists. Yet they were given the same opportunity to work in the theaters. Your color shouldn't be any reason for your not being hired. But not being able to get that type of training limited you. Like my dad, he learned from a Caucasian up in a small town, and he gave that same information to me as a youngster.

Now, the discrimination that came about from the local having had a national mandate to make sure that there be no more separation between white and black in any organization now made it necessary for me to be a part of that. But there were those who resented that. They didn't want to have their theaters, taking away their jobs. They didn't want that. So we had those theaters that were attended only by people of color. Now, anybody could attend these theaters, but we had access to only those five or six theaters at the time.

MANSFIELD: So you could only work—when you say, “we had access,” you mean you could go enjoy the theater or work there as a projectionist?

ADAMS: Work there as the projectionist.

MANSFIELD: So there were only about four or five theaters where you could work.

ADAMS: We had six altogether.

MANSFIELD: And they were all-black theaters?

ADAMS: All-black. Now, there were theaters on Minnesota Avenue, as I said, the Electric and the Granada—they were operated by the white local of Kansas City, Kansas, and when integration broke, you could attend—I think they may have done that before, but you had to sit in the “crow’s” nest, up in the balcony, as far as I know. Now, I didn’t experience that because I never attended those, and I wasn’t familiar with the operators in that particular organization. But when the national mandate came down, we had some knowledge about the Kansas local and the Missouri local. We were attached to the greater Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri, the local 170, which was basically dominated—all white, no others included.

Over a period of time, now, any segregation was stopped. We were accepted in part of 170 because they had to have a token representation. I’ll put it that way. And I went to—well, see, I became business agent after Mr. Parker died, became ill and died, and had an opportunity to expose all of our members to whatever bit of training we could do after the theaters were closed for regular attendance. We would have together meetings so we would be able to understand the equipment, how to handle it. As business agent, I put those things into effect, where every operator was qualified, so they couldn’t turn us down saying, “You can’t work at this theater company. We’ve got stereophonic sound here, and you’re not familiar with it. You don’t have any sound training, so you can’t work as a sound engineer. And you don’t have enough training to be qualified to work those theaters where we have experienced operators, who can do all these things.” But when we became knowledgeable about that, we learned those things and passed them on to each of us.

MANSFIELD: So you made sure that the black operators had all the instruction they needed to work anywhere?

ADAMS: Work anywhere, yes.

MANSFIELD: Did that lessen the resistance of the white operators?

ADAMS: To an extent, yes. Some were still very resentful. They didn't want you around, because you took their jobs or you've been exposed to the possibility of being given those jobs. But as I say, I had more knowledge and experience of that type of experience than I had within the service. But I don't doubt, from what I have read, many of the things that happened because those pilots weren't given the opportunity to be exposed to what they needed to be aware of. But they did their jobs of protecting [the bombers].

And I can imagine if you sent me, as a graduate from Tuskegee, to a country where fighters had been experiencing many types of obligations and experience and training, whatnot, that you wouldn't want a green pilot to start out. He'd have to learn from those who are there. So if they did not allow those individuals the opportunity to fly with some of the seasoned pilots there—and I imagine all of them were white, anyway—that they had to be more or less put to one side until something mandated that they be given that opportunity, and then they became qualified. But if they did that training while they were there to give them that experience, maneuverability and gave them the obligation: “This is your obligation: Protect these bombers. You don't go hot-rodding, trying to be a hot ace pilot and running away from what your

obligation is. You stay there and take care of those planes, as you're supposed to do, and then you can get your training. When there's a need for your maneuverability and your capability as a pilot, it'll come to fact. But you do it with a group." And they were given the command, as far as I think, "You don't do anything but stay with those bombers." And that's what they did, from what I remember.

MANSFIELD: I've really enjoyed talking with you this morning, and I appreciate you [sic; your] taking the time to share the information that you have with me. I've just enjoyed it no end. But I have to say that the information you've shared with me will be deposited in the archives at Moton Field and be used to develop the exhibits at the Historic Site and also be available for future researchers. But in order for us to have access to this information, we need your permission.

ADAMS: Definitely. Anything that can be helpful in this organization is wonderful for me.

MANSFIELD: I have a release form that I have to ask you to sign.

ADAMS: No problem.

[Tape interruption.]

MANSFIELD: This is the one in the upper left-hand corner? [Mr. Adams is describing the photographs he allowed to the Park Service copy.]

ADAMS: Mm-hm.

MANSFIELD: And that's you standing—

ADAMS: In front of the AT-6, yes.

MANSFIELD: And about when would that have been?

ADAMS: Late '44 or early '45.

MANSFIELD: How about—

ADAMS: That's the same one.

MANSFIELD: The same one. Well, you're dressed a little bit differently.

ADAMS: It's probably on the weekend, and in these particular cases, we were there either for flying duty or preparing to go out on flight training.

MANSFIELD: I see you've got that little patch on your sleeve. What's that?

ADAMS: That's merely a symbol, I believe. It has wings and a propeller. Now, I don't know whether that's typical of the Air Force. I think that's the reason it was there. It isn't something that most of us had at that time. [Patch indicates flight cadet status.]

MANSFIELD: Now, this picture on the far right. You're standing in front of the airplane, and it looks like they're servicing it. Were you getting ready to fly or just coming back?

ADAMS: Getting ready to fly. Yes, I think they're either fueling or inspecting it, and I don't know whether that's the instructor in the back or whether it's somebody checking out some of the controls. But that's preparing to leave.

MANSFIELD: And then down here?

ADAMS: Those are just pictures I [printed], I snapped at the field, but if it's Moton Field or whether it is Tuskegee Institute, as far as I can see.

MANSFIELD: I believe that would be at the Tuskegee Army Air Field because Moton Field was just grass.

ADAMS: Okay.

MANSFIELD: A grass strip. And you don't recollect training at Moton Field?

ADAMS: Not unless it happened to be with that John Williams on the Piper Cub deal, because I know that was separate from when we went to the base, itself, for flying.

MANSFIELD: But were the biplanes—

ADAMS: Primary?

MANSFIELD: Mm-hm.

ADAMS: Well, primary wasn't with concrete landing—that may have been primary and in the preflight training.

MANSFIELD: So primary wasn't a concrete airfield.

ADAMS: No.

MANSFIELD: That probably was Moton Field. Okay. Well, let me—oh, also, I've been taking pictures of everybody I interview. Is it all right if I take your picture?

ADAMS: Sure.

[End of interview.]