

# Armiger Jagoe

August 27, 2020

Interviewed by Leah Cohen

Transcribed by YouTube

Edited by Martin Billheimer & Teri Embrey

Web biography by Emma Pierce

Produced by Angel Melendez

Jagoe: And one of the reasons I love being old, you have time to go back remember and appreciate much more what your parents did. Because when the [Great] Depression hit, my father had been president of the banks and resigned three months before because the banks would [have] loose lending policies, and in the following years he became a hero. My mother one time said, "If they'd listened to Dad there wouldn't be a Depression." [Laughter] All of a sudden in a flash, we lost everything we had except the house which my mother refused to put up for collateral. We had the house, my father, uh, we began doing some consulting work and then our senator from Mississippi asked father to come to Washington to head the currently ... the division of the currency and so it meant that, so he moved to Washington by himself. He did, it was real quick. He knew that life would be much different in Washington. So he went, he moved to Washington and so we only got together twice a year which was really a tragedy of my youth. But the sacrifice they made, that they wrote every day, and it was that, was the only sad thing in my life with my father not being there.

Cohen: Yeah.

Jagoe: Anyway, but though when the Depression hit, my mother got a job having rent, rentals for a one-woman real estate firm. My older sister is five years older, got a job as secretary to the president of a junior college in town, and at [age] eleven, I started delivering newspapers and so we all pitched in. And it's amazing, we were poor and didn't know it, no. We didn't let go, we still had our cook and our yard man and one day my mother heard Eunice the cook in the kitchen. She said that there was a lot of shuffling for the fewness of the food. [laughter] Also we took in two schoolteachers to board with us, to cover the expenses of the cook and the yard man and they became like members of the family. So but really it wasn't, the Depression was not a *depressing* time for us at all. We sailed right through with it, with head high.

Cohen: Wow!

Jago: And then I got a job after high school. I got a job working in a men's store every afternoon and that introduced me to the business world, and I made some really lifetime plans there.

Cohen: Would you like to tell the story about how you got accepted to Harvard? I believe your uncle your uncle started the ball rolling ...

Jago: I had a wonderful bachelor, very wealthy uncle, my mother's first younger son [i.e. brother], and he was visiting. He was on a visit to New Orleans on behalf of President Roosevelt and came over to spend the day with us and when he left, he told my mother, he said, "If you can get that boy into Harvard, I'll pay his way." Before the car was out of the driveway to the beach, mother was calling the superintendent asking about all of it. Harvard was so desperate to get boys from the South and the West they made a stupid ... Look you can't believe this, they made a rule: any boy who's in the high seventh of his class, across the size of the class, could get to Harvard *without* an examination! Can you believe it? He did the checklist records, and I was number nine, but since I was dating the superintendent's daughter, I became number seven. And I got to Harvard without an examination. I didn't know, I didn't know how to spell *Harvard* but let's go there!

Cohen: Well you mentioned earlier that you enjoyed everything about Harvard: the people, the environment. I think in the book<sup>1</sup> you mentioned the cultural life. How did you manage with the studies?

Jago: Well, not well at all. I was on and off probation as often as I took the streetcar going into Boston. And after I was there for six, uh but the ... it didn't bother me [Laughter]. But I made such wonderful friends. I of course, you know it's amazing, I cannot remember one class I took in three years other than my writing classes. Isn't that astounding? Because, but I had, I was so fortunate because I had this young professor named ... uh, I'll think of his name in a second, and he encouraged me to write very much. Wallace Stegner<sup>2</sup>, the writer, he was my professor. And one day invited me and another student to come over to his little dinky apartment because Robert Frost<sup>3</sup> was coming for a visit. And he and Robert Frost sat and talked, and we boys sat on the floor with our ears [makes gesture of ears pricked up]. I still remember the conversation. But then the other remarkable man I met there who was at Harvard, was trying to figure out what the hell was the matter with me. So, there were two students that couldn't learn, it was Pete Saltonstall, whose father was governor of the state<sup>4</sup> and me. So they hired a pioneer in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Mr Jago's book is entitled *Southern Boy: A Grown Up*.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace Stegner, 1909-1993, well-known American novelist. He was also an environmentalist and historian. His best-known book is probably *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Frost, 1874-1963, famous American poet and Poet Laureate for Vermont. Frost was the only poet every to receive four Pulitzer Prizes for his work.

<sup>4</sup> Leverett A Saltonstall, 1892-1979, served two terms as governor and twenty years as a senator.

learning area called Dudley Cloud and Dudley and I became very close friends. He was caring with me, you know, "What guy do you read with, what do you dream about?" and so forth. Such close friends.

And after the war, when I came back, I took advantage of, was going to have a GI Bill of Rights so I went to Harvard and I stayed for ten days and left because I, no way could I sit pretending. See, that's in a classroom all day, after having flown in combat and but I visited David [last name unclear] in his home and his wife was working for the *Atlantic Monthly*. So, the *Atlantic Monthly*, he wanted me to be able to take a job with him as a writer, but the magazine people would give David, give him all the scripts they had rejected to see which ones he thought were worth considering. And one day we were having drinks, he said, "You know they sent me one today they turned down because they said people don't want to hear about the war anymore. And so take it and read it." And I said I agreed with him and they published it and it was [James] Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*<sup>5</sup>, which he discovered, and they published it.

Cohen: Oh, my goodness!

Jago: Then, I had worked as an office boy for the Hartford Insurance Company for, uh, six months before I went into the service and when I came back, I found Hartford wanted me and because it turned out that I was so well known that during the war, they had published in their national magazine the letters that I sent back to my office. So I was, uh, my fame had preceded me. And so then I went to Hartford and I worked in the corporate world for three years, teaching and traveling with them. Then, I moved back to Washington to start my own one-man business. I had fifteen hundred dollars I'd saved up which was, it was like fifteen thousand today, and so ... And then I don't know how it happened, but I was, I was amazingly lucky and then thirty years later, I sold the business to my employees and today it's the largest insurance agency in Washington, still doing extremely well.

Cohen: Oh my goodness!

Jago: Then after that, I formed a partnership with two friends to work with all, with organizations that wanted to buy or sell insurance companies which is completely different. And I always believe that change is so important in your life

---

<sup>5</sup> James A Michener, 1907-1997, popular American novelist and travel writer. He won the Pulitzer in 1948 for the novel *Mr Jago* helped recommend.

and so I did that for three years and then I stopped to finish a book and I didn't get back [laughs] so that was it.

Cohen: Wow, so I'm gonna—just thanks for the overview—I'm gonna jump back a little bit, to Harvard [14:01] and I'm wondering what motivated you to obtain your flying license when you were there? Why did you decide to get, to become a pilot?

Jago: That was a childhood dream, because when I was about ten years old—this would have been 1931—we had an air show in Gulfport, [Missouri]. Boy, that was a big event. We all went out this open field and that was the first time I saw a plane and I said, “That's for me.” So I always had in the back of my mind to do that, and then, uh, not spending time, not spending time with studies at Harvard, I had time to go to the beach and learn how to fly. And but you know, you can't believe it, in those days you spun your own prop[eller]!

Cohen: Oh, my goodness!

Jago: See, you had this little fifty horsepower flying machine type of cub. First, you'd put the break on, push the throttle forward and then you go out front and you spin the prop and things. You had, then you had to spin and lean, so you had to lean backwards, but if you fell into it you might cut your head off. You go back and you start, then as soon as it began to spin, you had to run like a rabbit to get in the plane to take the break off. And one day, one of my fellow students forgot to pull the break off and after he spun the machine, it took off. He hit the ground and the plane flew out over the sea and never was seen again. So it was amazing, you know. I think of how primitive it was. We just thought it was very advanced. It was great. [16:17]

Cohen: That is amazing. You also mentioned in the book an interesting event, where you're trying to land and you saw a French ship, USS *Normandy* [i.e. SS *Normandie*] ...

Jago: That that was astounding. I was popping around over the sea in a plane and I saw a *tremendous* ship coming in from the left and so I went out to look at it and I got near it and then it began flashing lights for me to get away, so I did. And it turned out it was the USS *Normandy*, it was the world's largest passenger ship, French ship, that had escaped the German U-boats, had come over and it's on the way to New York and it's going to be transferred and transformed into a troop ship and ... But that was that was such a big excitement to see that tremendous ship going out.

Cohen: Did you and your friends like, talk about you know, what later was called the Battle of the Atlantic? Like were people aware that there were German submarines there?

Jago: It was true that we had Long Beach there. Even down North Carolina, they still have the pillboxes<sup>6</sup> that are on the beach and they would, we had Lights Out too. If you lived within ten miles of the coast, you had to shutter your lights every night because the U-boats, the U-boats would be out there. And as our transport ships were going in, the lights and the coast would reflect on it. So, that's why the coast had to be under dark and no headlights, nothing on the coast. That was interesting, like wearing a mask today, yeah.

Cohen: That's right, that's right. It's also just by the by, interesting for me because I realize now that most of the people whom I interviewed from the World War II veterans were from the Midwest and you of course were right in Boston, right? Right on the Atlantic coast.

Jago: I'm competing with [unintelligible]. I'm the river of the United States, right? I'm the most southern guy you got; the rest of them were swimming. [Laughter]

Cohen: [Laughs] Yeah. Um, what was the impact of the attack on Pearl Harbor for you and your peers?

Jago: Just sheer shock. First, first we didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. And we had no, we really had no, I had ... We knew the war was going on. We were very much on the side of England. And I saw [Winston] Churchill when he was in Washington trying to convince Roosevelt to do it ... Imagine! And later about twenty of us walked on the grounds of the White House, right up to the White House and began cheering and Churchill came out on the balcony and he talked to us. He had a cigar in his mouth and then uh, then he ended up with a victory sign<sup>7</sup> and we did too! But we were aware of the war, but we in the Pacific, we knew nothing about it at all. I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was and that we had a fleet there, so it was a sheer shock and shock and awareness and so on.

Cohen: What motivated you to to enlist? And the second half of the question is, why did you choose, in particular, the Army Air Corps Glider Division<sup>8</sup>?

---

<sup>6</sup> Concrete military guard posts, usually equipped with loopholes for small arms.

<sup>7</sup> The famous gesture of two fingers held up for V for Victory.

<sup>8</sup> Airborne infantry operations which used gliders to insert personnel and equipment behind enemy lines. Originally developed by Germany in the 1930s, they were widely used by all side in WW2. The US discontinued the use of such units in 1948 and they are no longer used by any modern military.

Jago: [Laughs] Well first, I wanted to lick the Germans. That was number one, and number two was, um, that was money. Flying and money. It turned out they were they were going to try out this glider corps and, but they couldn't get anybody to enlist [laughs]. You would automatically be a Staff Sergeant with flying pay which made you get the same salary as the Second Lieutenant. So I signed up as a glider corps pilot and uh, I had a wonderful six- month experience and I went out to a place called Tucumcari, New Mexico, which has a lot of flat land and I spent a month, spent three months there, it was wonderful. The procedure was [laughs], you're in a little uh, higher power, eighty-five horsepower piper and with a strip on your right, and you'd be flying out over the desert, and you cut the engine and then the ball was in your court. You had to make a dead, deadstick<sup>9</sup> landing with motor and then figure out where to land. And so you would do that and then through the ground, the wheels touch the ground, and you'd turn on the switch and you'd go up again and you do that about five times, but it was, it was challenging because in addition to flying the plane, you had to keep trying to look out for what might be a landing spot. I said that we used to have a game called the Musical Chairs where you circle around and then when the music stops, everybody grabs a chair and so that was the same way: every time. You cut the switch; I'd be looking for a landing place ...

Cohen: So, the instructor would—um I don't know the mechanics of it—would somehow like stop the plane so that you would be descending, and you had to land it right away; that was that the idea?

Jago: Yeah, you had to. He cut it [the engine] off, that meant you're going down, and you hope you wasn't going down like this [makes hand gesture of a nose-dive], nose down. But that was a very good experience. I enjoyed that. So I think that helped me too when I became, uh when I was leading the squadron on bombing missions because you had to figure out where you saw the enemies, you were gonna shoot last [and] next and you had to call the base of action for the squadron. So all those things built up.

Cohen: I think so too. I mean I know in the in your memoir, you were very modest about your navigational abilities, but I feel too that, I mean a lot of it involved skill, you know, as well. That was my impression when reading it. So I'll just sort of recap a little bit, for the sake of completeness because you know, I am a librarian [laughs]. So just to say, I understood that you were recruited around 1942, then

---

<sup>9</sup> A landing without propulsion, usually forced. The 'stick' in the term does not actually refer to the flight controls, but to the propeller, which is 'a dead stick' now that it is without power.

there were about six months until the program was getting set up where you were working at various jobs. Then I believe you were um, you were ordered to report to Langley Fields in Virginia in September 1942 and then as you were saying before, you were assigned to an air force base in New Mexico called Tucumcari. Was that, was that the flow of events?

Jago: Yeah, first I got in service and then it was Tucumcari and then when they founded a glider corps, then I switched. They wanted me to be a bombardier navigator. I moved to Albuquerque to Kirkland Field [New Mexico] and I was there for a year until I finished that and got my commission.

Cohen: Before we go on, do you want to talk about your family's reaction to the fact that you were going to be in the glider corps?

Jago: [Laughs] I gotta laugh. My brother-in-law was a colonel in the air force. He knew how stupid that was and he said, "That's more dangerous than the paratroopers and you are [unintelligible] idiot!" But he didn't, but my mother swore in the Bible, and she was a very devout Christian Scientist and so she decided to *pray* the corps out of existence. And by that, she did it [laughter]. I lost out on my glider's license and the Air Corps people said, "This is stupid as hell", so they cut out the whole program. I give my mother credit for canceling the glider corps! [laughter]

Cohen: Absolutely! Um, just as an aside okay, one thing that surprised me is that there were some gliders that were used in the invasion of Normandy.

Jago: Yes, they did, they did. They used them for transporting troops and so the jetty, they lowered it, loaded them up, then get a big plane to pull them up and cut them loose; and also they made no noise, so the enemy could not shoot at them. And so that the silence of them is really the reason why they thought the glider corps was great. So they used that in North Africa. And then I was part of the invasion of [Normandy] in France on the right side and for some of the missions there, and I looked down and I said, "Thank God, I didn't go in a glider." And the Germans had put a log sticking up in the ground so when gliders landed, they crashed right away. And I looked down, I saw those crashed gliders. I didn't dare go out there ... But I was glad I pulled out; it was really ... that it was a no-go from the start.

Cohen: Yeah, so your mother's prayers worked!

Jago: They sure did. Never underestimate a prayer. Boy...

Cohen: So, would you like to talk about your training as a bomber and as a navigator at Kirkland Field, here in Albuquerque, [New Mexico]?

Jago: Right. So, I had a wonderful, wonderful year there and it was uh, we did, I did night navigation when we had to, at night we fly from Greenville, North Carolina west to uh, probably the direction of Chicago and then down to Florida and back. So, I'd have to do these triangles and I laughed one time because we already had, we had our own crew then. But I ... it was, that was a good experience.

Cohen: Yeah. Was that where you would have learned how to use like a Norden bombsight<sup>10</sup> and what was that like?

Jago: Well, I'll tell you what, [laughs] it was on the size of a small washing machine. It was it was a big bulky machine right in the nose of the ship and we did so much practice bombing, uh mock-up bombing, to get used to it but it was, it was a wonderful machine. Very accurate, as accurate as could be. You could pinpoint a target with it and then you would ... You had a bombing mission which sometimes that lasts uh, oh maybe twelve seconds. Isn't that amazing?

Cohen: Yeah...

Jago: Because the thing is, when you fly at this level, the Germans down here could catch you in range, and so the longer ... the shorter the range, the shorter that, the better chance you had to get out. So you had to really be, as soon as you zero in on a target, you'd press a button, and the bomb bay would open, and the bombs would drop.

Cohen: So well, it had to be very very quick?

Jago: Oh, sure did, then of course during the mission, I was in charge for everything except the ten minutes of the bomb run because the bombardier was crouched in the nose of the ship with me and once, we got sight of the target, I turned it over to him. There's a navigator, a navigator ... but a bombardier, the bombardier was really only on duty about oh, ten minutes until when you got sight of the target. The bombardier would take over on this side on this, and control the plane, the pattern of the plane and then when he was over, in sight of the target, he'd press a button and then the bombs would drop—the bomb bay would be open—and I would take over again. It was real fast: zoom, zoom.

---

<sup>10</sup> Norden Mk. XV. A mechanism to locate targets which also inputted the bomber's direction and air speed. It used an early analog computer and was considered the most accurate such mechanism to date. It was used by the USAAF in both World War II and the Korean War.



Cohen: And what was the uh, not the rule, but were there any tools that the navigator used? Like how would the navigator know how to lead the plane?

Jago: Well no, no only um ... you really, you really had a device where you could for example, flying over flying over to Ascension Island<sup>11</sup> our radio went out—boy, that Ascension Island is like a pinpoint in the ocean—but I used the bombsight to determine the wind by the waves. And then I'd figure out right or left, depending on which way the waves were going. So that was, it was very primitive. Like taking off your shoes to count your toes. It's very basic but it worked, so ...

Cohen: Would you mind explaining it a little, a bit more for the uninitiated like myself, like were you observing how high the waves were or how low or the direction?

Jago: Yeah, yeah ... I can't remember how I did it, but that was the only thing you had to determine: the wind and direction. So but it was, but I think I said when we hit Ascension Island I turned to Craig or whoever ... I felt like, it was like, remember with Dracula, how he had this bat that flew over the over the horses to tell which way to go? So I think I had a bat ahead that got us to Ascension Island. It was one of my, my tail gunners said, "If you don't hit Ascension, your wife gets a pension!" [Laughter]

Cohen: [Laughs] Oh my goodness, well we'll go back to this, that whole adventure real soon, I think though after the training at Kirkland field, you mentioned that there was some gunnery training in Arizona? Would you like to describe that please?

Jago: No uh, the training after that was in North Carolina. It was in North Carolina at Greenville, North Carolina and then that's when they put the crew together for the first time, got us working as a team and we, then we uh, if we finished that they flew us down to Palm Beach to get our B-25 [bomber] and then we flew all the way down the east coast of South America to Natal<sup>12</sup> and then we went over to Ascension Island and then to Africa.

Cohen: Would you like to talk about the crew? I mean I understand that people's lives depended on each other, but I had the impression that it was an extremely close crew.

Jago: That's one of the things I want to point out. The mystery of the war was that all of a sudden, you took three, six men, three officers and three enlisted men who

---

<sup>11</sup> Ascension Island, isolated volcanic island in the South Pacific. It was used in WW2 to augment anti-submarine warfare. There was even a US base on the island.

<sup>12</sup> Former province of South Africa, 1910-1994.

had never known each other before—different parts of the country, everything different—but they all, you meld it into a family which is closer than your own. And you were so dependent on one another, and we became one and it was uh, it's one of mysteries to me. But I remember when we got to go out on flying missions and after our fifth mission, they wanted to break in a new bombardier and so they took me off the crew and put another man in. And I went crazy, but I also knew, realized that they were flying I wasn't there with them, and I absolutely went out of my mind. I went out in the woods; I screamed and I really ... that was the most desperate moment of my life. And so that's the only mission that we didn't all fly together.

Cohen: Wow. So, yeah, like you feel that degree of connection ...

Jago: It's amazing, uh also the mystery of the ... a couple of missions too. I can't comprehend the mentality, the way of life in the squadron because, yeah, they were, there were probably thirty people in the squadron, thirty men and we were all so close and yet when one of them was shot down, you never mentioned his name again and it actually was as if he never existed. And you got drunk on that night or any other time and it was and it ... and there was no unwritten, there's no written rule about it, and also after he was shot down, in one hour all his possessions were taken away as if he never existed. And uh it was uh ... and I in that one year, I can't remember *one* violation of that rule that you never mentioned his name again. And we had, we were based in a very small little French village with about oh, ten houses and one of them was a private house on the second floor. We took the largest room and made it into our office club and so every night when there's not a mission, the next day we all went up there and had a party and got drunk as fools. And uh, but I really think it was alcohol and not remembering that really got us through. You know, it wasn't one of these movie things about how you send balloons up you know, in memory of you, all that crap. No, we ... and I say it's, it's a mystery to me how we did it without anybody telling you to do it. It just happened.

Cohen: Do you think it was and it means ... sorry ...

Jago: It has strange to think that all the men would have this uh, the same concepts and the same behavior and nobody ever, nobody ever questioned it at all.

Cohen: Yeah, do you think it was like a mechanism to go on? That if they start thinking about their losses and people, they miss ...

Jago: Yes, they never did. Yeah, you know I had, I think it was uh, it was my third or fourth flight, but the thing is I can't uh, reckon ... I say you want to figure out who you have been, you have to be familiar with who you are today, you have to get familiar with who you have been, and I can't get familiar with that fella at all. I never once lost a moment of sleep worrying about the mission the next day. But it was obvious that it was excitement I was looking for, anticipation, and that the, my biggest shock—mental shock—was after the war when I uh, my mind wouldn't adjust back to craving danger and I nearly went crazy with a routine of an ordinary life and that was really the most miserable period of my life, a couple of months there.

Cohen: Interesting.

Jago: It's amazing how your mind works.

Cohen: Life seemed less exciting or meaningful ...

Jago: Yes. I remember sitting at the dinner table my... and I'd be screaming inside while my mother talked about the rations and father talked about bus schedules. And I was sure that if I was going to sleep, I wouldn't wake up, I was so desperate and ... But it worked itself out. But I really also I have such sympathy for the veterans today, because those are coming back from Afghanistan and Iraq. Back then you came back, you were a hero: everybody welcomed us, and now these poor fellows come out and they have to tear them away... from I'm going to the store, you know? That's why there's so many suicides among veterans coming back, so I lucked out.

Cohen: Did you talk with other veterans? Like maybe your parents you know, could not quite get it, but would you, when you would go to pubs and you would socialize, would you have a chance to talk about the war with other veterans who you became friendly with?

Jago: You know, I never did. Not once, no. I was the only only, uh ... One of the questions someone asked me was, "Did you keep in touch with the crew?" And my turret gunner lived in New Jersey right, near the New York-Washington turnpike, so every time I was in New York I stopped to have lunch with him. And he had a rather dull life and he loved to really relive the war. Then, the about... Oh um one time, I flew out to San Francisco and I spent a weekend with my two pilots, and we had a wonderful time [laughs]. We stayed in a hotel at the airport and the manager learned about us being there and he set aside a cubby in a

corner of the lobby, where we could talk and eat, and we talked with two ladies. But that was the only contact I had after the war.

Cohen: Would you like to describe the other roles of the crew that you were either the bombardier or navigator? There were the two pilots; I believe the first person you mentioned was a tail gunner. Would you like to describe the other roles?

Jago: Sure. Our boy who was a tail gunner, his job, he sat in the tail of the ship looking where we were going with his guns. And he was the old man: he was twenty-eight years old [laughs]. We were calling him the old man, but it wasn't because of his Boston accent [laughs]. He was very funny. But I remember, uh we, were flying a mission and the Germans had our range exactly right, and we were going this way and they were shooting, *boom boom boom!* And so I was listening over the intercom, he said, "Hey boy, they got our range. Get us out of here!" Yeah, and then they went, *boom*, and he came back. "Hey boy, I'm not kidding, you're going to shoot my ass! Now get us out of here!" That last one was so close it shook the ship and then I heard it. I heard him say, "House?!" [laughter]. That had gone over to the mid-gunner, he was in the middle of the ship, and he had the machines on either side so if we were flying, if we were flying lead, he had to cover both sides, but if we're flying left wing, he'd have to cover the right. So, it was reversed; he had to move around. And our turret gun was also our engineer and he was, uh, he was so capable. For example, after the bomb dropped, occasionally a bomb would not drop, and so he had to be sure it dropped out of the plane. And so he had to lower himself down to release it. And we always, we always laughed at the one time he did that, and he slipped, and he was just holding on to the plane with one hand. He managed to put himself over the... with his other hand and he dropped the plane with the other hand, he had a screwdriver, we always kidded him about that.

Cohen: [Laughs] My goodness! So I was, okay when you were in Greenville Air [Force] Base, you were intending to fly to North Africa, but in the book you mentioned that there was this ongoing engine trouble. Would you like to describe that and why it led to all these different stops along the way?

Jago: Yeah, we had, we were ... they flew us down to Palm Beach to get our plane, a B-25 and on our test flights over Palm Beach, the engine would cut out and the engineers there right away corrected it. But we were occasionally having that trouble, but also engines were cutting out, and so we went back, and the ground group said, "No, nothing wrong with the plane. Go on down to South America,

that's fine" And then I think it's very funny, we were flying across the mouth of the Amazon river which is about a hundred miles long and they warned us ahead of time, "If you have to crash, don't crash in the water because you're piranha food[laughter]. They say they can strip a cow in fifteen minutes!" So we um, we were flying along, and the engine cut out. We got lower and lower, and I heard, "Boys..." it was hysterical, "Hey boys, let's get out of here", he said, "we're flying so low I see a whole school of little fish following us with our mouths open!" [laughter] And then we got to, we got to the town and they said, "No, there's nothing wrong with the engine, but they got better engineers in Ascension Island," so we flew the ship over to Ascension Island and we got there to Ascension Island and people said, "Nothing wrong with the plane. Take it to Dakar<sup>13</sup>, with the better mechanics there." So we had on all our trips South America, we had this sputtering plane and then at Dakar, the engineers said they checked and there were machine filings that had been put in the oil at the laboratory. Probably, somewhere, maybe by a saboteur—I don't know, but that occasionally would cause the engines to cut out. So it was scary at moments.

Cohen: Yeah, and I'll just connect what you said before that the um, that the radio had gone out when you were flying to Ascension Island and that the island I believe you said, it was only thirty-four miles all together. So and that was the one where I believe you said you had navigated through observing the waves?

Jago: Yes, that's right.

Cohen: So, what was it like in in Dakar?

Jago: Oh, I had a *wonderful* time in Dakar. I was there, the first foreign city I've ever been in. So, I went berserk. It was just great, and I had a I formed a uh, wild animal hunting trip for we three officers and that was a great experience. We by chance, we ended up at a Foreign Legion post in the in the desert and had spent the day with a foreign officer; they had learned about that life. And I was fascinated with Dakar. It's a wonderful city for everything that was going on there, so we had ... I really enjoyed Dakar; it was pretty. The only casualty that happened in Dakar, I bought a uh, a parrot and, confined to Casablanca, the first

---

<sup>13</sup> Dakar. Capital city of Senegal. Dakar became involved in WW2 when De Gaulle sought to use it as a base for his Free French forces, contra Vichy (Senegal had been under French colonial occupation since 1776, which included slavery). See also the Battle of Dakar: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Dakar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Dakar)

place we landed, they sprayed the plane with DDT <sup>14</sup>and killed my parrot. The only catastrophe I had so ...

Cohen: Yeah. How did you get from Dakar to Casablanca?

Jago: It was, uh, the... we were we were standing there for two weeks and because they're waiting for a plane that could take six passengers and there just wasn't any [planes]. So but I had my second trip into the town. Boy, I had my time! I was picked up by the military police overdue, out of out of bounds and with a forged pass which I typed it myself [laughter]. So they said I had to report to the commanding officer the next day, so we got back to the base at midnight and I went to the control office and I said, "Do you have any planes going to Casablanca?" "Yes, we have one at six in the morning." And I said, "Can you take care of a crew?" They said, "Sure we can". So I didn't sleep that night, so I woke up at five in the morning. They said, "We're going, we're going! Don't ask any questions. That's it. We're going. That's it!" [laughter] And so at ten o'clock this morning, when the commanding officer is waiting for me to show up, I was in Casablanca. So I covered my tracks.

Cohen: Oh, my goodness! So, out of curiosity, where was the rest of the 428<sup>th</sup>? Like, where was where were the other planes of the 428<sup>th</sup> at that time?

Jago: Oh, they were all on Corsica, though the others were B-26—there was a B-26 squadron. We were about oh, thirty miles south of ... about ten, ten miles south of Bastia, the town. We were right on the coast and we had the B-25s here, and the B-26s were there [gestures]. So we didn't know one another. They were in a completely different town all together.

Cohen: Okay, so you're in Casablanca with your crew um, but with no plane right. Because your old B-25 didn't work, so what happens next?

Jago: Right. So, we had a picnic. Yeah, because they gave us a very lovely apartment [laughs] and we had it. It was wonderful after the trip to have that time there and the ... it was, it was then that I was walking in the park one day and these three delightful young boys came up, and I gave him candy we became friends and that became a lifetime friendship with one of the boys. It was great.

---

<sup>14</sup> DDT, Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane. Originally developed as an insecticide, the compound became infamous for its terrible environmental impact. It was first synthesized in 1874 and later used extensively during WW2 to limit the spread of malaria and typhus. See especially Rachel Carson's 1962 bestseller, *Silent Spring*.

Cohen: Okay that, this was in Corsica. I was wondering sorry; I was wondering about—

Jago: Well, Casablanca, was your answer...?

Cohen: Oh, sorry, I think I got a little mixed up. I think I'm a little mixed up. I was wondering whether you met the boys in Casablanca or a bit later in Corsica?

Jago: No, no, the boys ... We were we were in Corsica. We just arrived in Corsica. Right.

Cohen: So, how did you get from Casablanca to Corsica? Like where did the Army send you?

Jago: Yeah, they sent us to Naples and then we waited in Naples and until they could find a B-25 for us and then we then we flew to Corsica.

Cohen: Okay and I think you mentioned that that you're in Naples when there was a German bombing of the city and what was that like?

Jago: Oh, I didn't know. We arrived and we were not very welcome because uh, the Corsicans had a hell of a rough time during the war because they were occupied by the Germans and then uh, and the Germans left and just when we came in, and we got misinformation as the Germans had stored ammunition in the family vaults, because on the hill outside the city there was all the family vaults and so we bombed the vaults and it turned out that [there were] no, just no bombs there at all, and so but that irritated the Corsicans very much. So when we arrived, a little ... they were a little hostile to Americans at the beginning because of the bombing.

Cohen: Oh, okay, and you said shortly after that, you met the three boys?

Jago: They were wonderful boys; they became my family. And uh it was, we were ... it began my forty year friendship which was wonderful. Yeah.

Cohen: Do you want to talk about what their mother asked of you when you met her?

Jago: Oh, she said when the boys, the first day I met the boys in the park I gave them candy we visited. And the second day I was there by myself and he said, "My mother wants to have you for tea", and so there was a good experience. I went there and they'd been very well-off before their home had been bombed, and they moved into a real dinky apartment, and it was a mother, the father, a daughter, Josie, who was sixteen and uh, they really just took me in like a member of the family. It was great, it was, I had ... six months later in our

squadron, the squadron doctor came, he said, “Do you have a family in Corsica?” I said, “No.” He said. “Well, a strange thing happened”, he said, “Two days ago a little boy and his father walked to our hospitals in the area to find out if you were there, because he had a dream that you were injured.”

Cohen: Oh, my goodness!

Jago: We're that close and it was, it was great. And then Andre, the oldest, he said I'd set an example. So, he joined the French air force, and he was stationed in Texas. So, he came and spent Christmas with us. He was such a delight. He was he was so attractive in his French uniform, boy he wowed everybody! He was just great, but I remember he was trying to be so American. I heard him shaving and he was it was Christmas time, he said “Rudolph *o avengni*<sup>15</sup> red nose..!” [Laughter]

Cohen: That's cute! [Laughs]

Jago: Then he fell in love with a wonderful girl in Texas and they were married, and I visited them several times during his lifetime—godfather's oldest son—and so we then, I guess it was thirty years later, my wife and I were spending the summer in Spain. We went to, I took her back to Corsica to revisit the sites and we spent a whole day trying to find Mama, which was quite an adventure. And we were fine, they told us she was visiting her daughter in the city, so we went to the daughter, “Mama's out shopping”, we waited on the street and Mama saw me already a block away. She dropped the groceries; we all embraced, everybody crying and laughing! [laughs] It was really wonderful.

Cohen: Oh my!

Jago: That was a great expansion of my family.

Cohen: Yeah, how wonderful that you got together again on several occasions and that your wife met them ...

Jago: Nothing, nothing, but happy memories. It was wonderful.

Cohen: Yeah, so I think on Corsica, I believe you were on two bases, Bastia and Serragia. Would you like to talk about them?

Jago: I'm sorry, I can't hear...

---

<sup>15</sup> Phonetic transliteration. Perhaps Corsican colloquial for reindeer.



Cohen: I'm sorry, I believe when you were at Corsica, you were on two bases Bastia and later probably ...

Jago: Yeah, I came back, and I wanted to get my celestial navigation<sup>16</sup> record and I wanted to go to the Pacific to be in the Pacific War, so after when I came back, I came back the day Roosevelt died, I still remember that so clearly. But then I went, I had ten days recuperation [laughs] which is not hard to take at Atlantic Beach, Miami Beach! And then I went to Monroe, Louisiana. We had an air, there was an air base there where I studied navigation until the war ended and that ended my career.

Cohen: Okay, so you had flown, and you had been part of seventy-four missions. In your book, you wrote that you remember six, but you also found the description of some of your missions in letters to your father, as well as some notes that you had written as a bombardier. I guess I'm wondering which missions stand out in your mind?

Jago: Now, you know one that sticks out was ... Oh, years after the war my wife and I were going up to Prince Edward Island for the summer and my boy said, "Before you leave, Dad, while you're up there you have time to write about the war which you don't talk about. "So I said, "Okay", so I brought every book I could think at the library about how to write an autobiography and the first afternoon, I went out on the porch and I got the magazines, and I threw them all away because it was like teaching someone wants to be creative writer how to write by numbers. So I just threw it away and that's when I realized that the mind erases things that are not ... that are dangerous, and I could only, out of seventy-four missions, uh which is a record in our squadron, the seventy-four missions, I could only remember four. But with my typewriter, after every mission I would type it up, so I had mission notes of all the missions but [it was as] if they were written by someone in the war of 1812. It meant nothing to me, absolutely nothing to me. It's amazing how your mind works.

Cohen: Would you like to talk about the missions which you do remember?

Jago: No, I really don't want to.

Cohen: Okay, okay, of course.

Jago: It still chokes me up ... I don't want to talk about it.

---

<sup>16</sup> Celestial navigation is the discipline of determining one's location by the stars, rather than by estimated position or dead reckoning.

Cohen: No, I understand. Um, you mentioned that you had written different types of letters to your mother and sister, than to your father.

Jagoe: That was a farce! [laughs], But I was my father was very, very interested in uh, and wanted to be involved so I'd write to him and—you could only talk about a mission that was ten days old—but I would write to him tell him about the missions, which he just loved hearing about. And then I sent them to his office and then, to my mother I'd write a letter that sounded like I was a college student enjoying the year abroad! [laughter]

Cohen: I think you also found a letter that you wrote to your father, that General [Mark W] Clarke<sup>17</sup> congratulated your ...

Jagoe: Yes, oh boy we ... Our squadron, the 428<sup>th</sup>, was *really*, we had quite a reputation. And we were all in the mess hall, we all had a hoot when they read General Clark's letter congratulating us for being outstanding squadron in the war. And when we went over there, see the Germans were still south of Rome and we were pushing them north, and so we were involved in the battle of Monte Casino, south of Rome. And I still remember seeing the monastery now, that we were bombing all around and it was, so our main job was to trap the Germans. So from Rome all the way up to the end that we knocked out bridges and tunnels everywhere: that was our bombing mission. And we um, I remember about a few years ago, my son was living in France and said, "Dad, we're going to spend the month in a town called Remedie [not sure of spelling]. You want to go up?" I said, "Yes. I bombed it." [Laughter], and all the towns up there. The squadron did an amazing job and we uh, the only time we hit, we went after troops was in the battle of Rome where we dropped these flag bombs which were you know, horrible things, they hit and hit the ground like hand grenades. And we killed thousands of Germans with those things. What is so amazing though, with your mind ... you weren't, they weren't human beings; they weren't school kids or teachers or parents: they were Germans, so they had to be killed, *zoom*, like swatting a fly. You didn't think about it.

Cohen: Yeah, it was the enemy.

Jagoe: Yeah, that youth, you know, not once I had a pang of glory, a pang of uh, remorse for killing Germans, um ...

---

<sup>17</sup> General Mark W Clark. Controversial US general who served in WWI, WW2 and the Korean War. During WW2, he commanded the Fifth Army and is especially remembered for leading their capture of Rome in June of 1944.

Cohen: Yeah, it's a necessary. Um, you know, I once heard an interview from an army infantry man who said, "The only part of the war I saw was about a yard in front of me." It seems to me that in flying in the air corps there's, there's a little bit more information. So I guess my question is, aside from the specific missions that you were assigned to, were you given information about a bigger picture? Oh, this is part of Operation Anvil<sup>18</sup> or Operation, you know, Strangle<sup>19</sup>? Like were you given a bigger scenario?

Jago: Before every mission, we had an intelligence briefing, which was quite good because they explained the purpose of the mission, where we were, and it brought us to be up to date with the war before we went on a mission. And then after the mission, we would have a debriefing session where every crew member would describe where he saw, so that kept us in touch with the war in general, in the Pacific ... I mean, the war in the Mediterranean.

Cohen: Oh well, so, you were getting really quite a bit of information.

Jago: Oh, yeah, very much. We were very much, were very well informed about the war.

Cohen: So you would have heard like, about D-day and the Normandy invasion and other—

Jago: Yes, right. Yeah, we knew about that, right. And we took part in the uh, the other side of France, that would be what, the east side of France? The other, the rebound, the Normandy thing was, I mean the invasion from England, was here and we hit them from the south. I mean, the squeeze play.

Cohen: One second please ... I also had the impression that you're serving at a very auspicious time in the war, that things are beginning to turn, and you know, you know, Italy is no longer under German occupation and the Allies are progressing gradually north. Did it feel at the time like it was an auspicious moment or a turning point or anything like that? Like did it feel to you when you were serving that it was at a pivotal moment in the war itself?

Jago: Oh sure, yeah. We, we felt that we were the most important person in the war. It was very seriously, and also we had that sense of pride that we were we were doing something positive, and we were uh, killing those Krauts, yeah ...

---

<sup>18</sup> Code name for the Allied landing in southern France, June 1944.

<sup>19</sup> A series of Allied air interdict missions aimed to stop German supply lines in northern Italy.

Cohen: Yeah, that's the impression I had from the letters you had written to your father.

Jago: Yeah, my father would say, "Put my name on one of those bombs!" [laughter]. We were chasing them, we were chasing them and killing them so ...

Cohen: I think you've also mentioned that you wrote letters to your former colleagues in the insurance company?

Jago: Yeah, that was the luckiest thing on earth. When I worked at the office, boy I became very close friends to the ah, twenty people that worked for the insurance company. And when I came back, one of the jobs I was going to consider was going back to the insurance [company], which was the Hartford Insurance Company so when I visited the home office, I found out I was already a celebrity because during the war they would publish in the national magazine my letters to the home office with pictures, so I walked into open arms, because of those letters. There's this great [skill] with a little typewriter that I had that served a good purpose.

Cohen: Yeah, an ability to communicate.

Jago: Right.

Cohen: Yeah, um, I don't know if this is some topic you wish to address and if not, we'll move on, but I remember one interview with a man who was flying B-17s from England who said flak was my bitter [enemy] ...

Jago: No, that was an interesting time. The only mission that I really remember sensing fear uh it was a December day— you know, I think when you're *cold* you're more sensitive—anyway, that was first time I've ever really felt scared as hell. We had to hit a target, at a port at the north right corner of Italy and so we flew across Italy and then right up the sea and we were over the sea and I looked ahead, and I saw ten Messerschmidt fighters coming to get us and I was cold, and I was a nose of the ship and the roar of the fighter jets ... They would just shoot out the nose of the B-25, that was their target, [shoot] out the nose of the B-25. And when they were oh um, I'd say uh a quarter mile away coming towards us from the right, came a squadron of a B ... B30, I think B-38s, fighter planes with ah, B-10, [B]-12s, they chased them away. But then, when after I finished my missions in Corsica, they sent me to Naples to wait a couple of weeks to get transportation going back, and I had, there were all of the fellows there they were playing cards, I went sightseeing and this one very attractive officer, a man of color, asked if as he could join me. So the two of us went sightseeing every day and became very close. One night, after afternoon on one after our

sightseeing trips, we were having a drink at a bar and uh and we were talking about which missions do you remember, and I talked about that one, and turned out he was a lead pilot! [laughter] You know, that was a hell of a coincidence we both laughed about that. We were, we'd be on the same mission without knowing one another.

Cohen: Oh, that is an amazing coincidence.

Jago: It was it was great. He was such a delightful [guy]. We went to Pompeii; we did all these things together it was fun having good company.

Cohen: The other story I wonder if you'd like to share is about um the mission to bomb the Brenner Pass<sup>20</sup> and how Jerry um, tried to help you?

Jago: I'm sorry, I missed that one. Try again.

Cohen: Oh, sorry about that. I was wondering if you would like to tell the story about the mission to the Brenner Pass and how Jerry tried to be helpful to you? The mission to the Brenner Pass ...

Jago: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah That was uh that was one of the bravest acts I've ever seen. It was a - it was one of the most important missions we were to fly, because there was to be a mass attack on the on the Brenner Pass, because so you know, Italy went up and through the mountains all-around of the coast there was one little narrow passage called the Brenner Pass and that's where the Germans were bringing all the supplies in, and so our job is to knock out the Brenner Pass. And the biggest squadron, one of the most important missions of our time and because of that, I was to be the squadron navigator, I was quite a navigator for the group and the squadron bombardier master was going to sit with me in the nose of the ship for the first time because the bombing was so important. So we got there and boy, the Germans were waiting for us. It was the worst uh, most dangerous flight I've ever seen. You really almost flew into a cloud of explosions and the rule was that on a normal flight, I was navigator to get us there, then the bombardier was in charge for about five minutes, and he left the nose of the ship. So it happened there, and I turned, I got to the target and tuned it over to the bombardier um, Jerry Baron, who was squadron [leader] never took over and he, as soon as he said, "Bombs away!", then he was supposed to get out. And so he said, "Bombs away!" and he kept saying it and I said, "Get out of the plane, Jerry," and he said, "No, you get out!" and I said, and this [unintelligible], we're organizing it. He screamed at me, said, "I'm the captain and you're a

---

<sup>20</sup> The Brenner Pass is a mountain pass through the Alps that forms the border pass between Italy and Austria.

lieutenant and I'm ordering you to get your ass out of this nose!" So I did and so for the next five minutes of hell we started ... like, I was standing in back with the pilots and if it had been hit, I would be the first one to get out because I could hook my straps on and jump and then, but he had risked his life—no way could he get out, right—but the next day I tried to congratulate, to thank him and he said, "No, I was just thinking about myself. I didn't want both of us scrambling to get out at the same time. I wanted you out of there." But that wasn't the truth; he would have sacrificed his life just to save mine. But really, it's choking me up here ... it's one of the most important sacrifices I've seen in my whole life. So that's it.

Cohen: Wow. So, one thing that I, that you mentioned in the high school yearbook was that you were described as the most personable classmate and just reading through your book, I was sort of struck by your ability to connect to a lot of different people from different countries, from different walks of life and also to enjoy life. So I was wondering if you want to talk about some of what you called "the pleasing aspects" of being based in Corsica. I think you mentioned some pleasing aspects like, like teaching English to Italians ...

Jago: Yeah, that was in our squadron tent. We had two Italian prisoners of war and they were very attractive young guys [laughs] and we became friends and so I started teaching them English and uh, so then several months later they said to me in that broken English, you know, "We have no gift to give you. Only thing we can give you is we know how to hypnotize a cat." [laughter] So I said, "Okay" so they taught me how to hypnotize *a cat* and I thought [this is] no use. And uh, one of the things that I thought was interesting when I was being job interviewed at the Hartford [Insurance Company], in Hartford Connecticut, the vice president invited me to come to spend the weekend with his wife at the mountain home, and it turned out they really wanted me to play bridge because they had a widow and needed to form a bridge<sup>21</sup>, but one night after playing bridge we were sitting in the living room with a fireplace there and their pet, this big old alley cat named Old Tom, Old Tom was lying at the floor there. And so uh, being a show off, I said, "You know, I know how to hypnotize a cat." And they go, "Oh wow, come on, come on do it!" So we woke up Old Tom and I put him on my lap and the technique is if you put a cat on his back so he can't move, and every time tries to move you catch his whiskers and after a while, the cat realizes he's not in control: the cat *literally* goes into a trance. And so I tried out with Old Tom and it

---

<sup>21</sup> i.e., she needed a partner across the table to play the game.

worked perfectly. His eyes open became all white and he just became stiff as a board and so everyone said, “That’s wonderful! Now uh, wake him.” But they didn't teach me how to wake up again! [laughter] So but for ten minutes, I thought there was a dead cat in my lap and finally, finally I coached him back into life. But really, it was, I was serious ... I still remember my thinking, “Oh God, I've killed their cat!” But that was my one experience. I've never done since and I don't encourage you to do it—for the cat's sake! [laughter]

Cohen: Okay, you also mentioned that you had a dog called Sally. Where did you find Sally and how did you take care of her?

Jago: Oh, that was the most amazing dog I had. I used to track, I was the one guy in the squadron who loved to track through the woods and I was tracking through to the woods one day and I found a little dog, a miniature uh, German Shepherd type dog, just cowering. Like it could be because the Corsicans are very rough on dogs, and this dog was so battered and so I took her, took Sally, took her back and back then there was, the Germans every day had a radio show called ‘Axis Sally’<sup>22</sup> and she was she was an English woman who had her own music show and so we always listened to Axis Sally, so I named the dog after her and then, but Sally gradually became a friend. What fantastic dog! And one day I took her out to the hard sand with me and there was a plane, a Beechwood<sup>23</sup> taxies, and she went out and chased it! I said, “Boy, she’s made it now!” [laughter]. She had guts.

But the most remarkable thing about that was the dog was so psychic that when I came back there, when I came back from an easy mission, I couldn't find the dog, and when I came back from a rough mission, she was waiting there, and she went crazy—I'd have to hold her and caress her. It was later on, I would take Sally on a mission, I would take Sally with me in the jeep out to the plane and I would leave her with the ground crew and back then, they had—during our three-hour mission, they had no idea how things are going and you know, but they would watch Sally and when we were over the mission, if it was things were easy she slept the whole time, but if we were shot at, she began to whine and turn around in a circle and they couldn't get near her. And they timed it and it

---

<sup>22</sup> There were actually two women who broadcast under the moniker of ‘Axis Sally’ – Mildred Gillers and Rita Zucca. Both broadcasted out of Berlin, but both women were Americans. Mr Jago is probably confusing their nationality with another even more notorious Nazi propaganda broadcaster, William James, AKA ‘Lord Ha Ha’, who was indeed an Englishman. He was executed for treason after the war. Gillers did ten years in prison for treason and Zucca did nine months, convicted in Italy for collaboration.

<sup>23</sup> i.e., a Beechcraft Model 18 aircraft.

turned out it was the exact time we were over the target. It was just incredible. And later on in my late sixties' missions, one time I came back and they said that the commanding officer wanted to know how the flight was going and he came out to see how Sally was behaving! [laughter] It was amazing. Amazing story.

Cohen: It is amazing. What happened to Sally after you ...?

Jago: After, when I finished my missions, I went to I went to Naples for two weeks. I was waiting for transportation back to the coast, I got word from the commanding officer of the squadron that Sally is moaning, Sally's hurting the morale of the squadron, so he said we're flying her to Naples to go back to the United States, which is fine. But the day they were to fly back, she got killed chasing a motorcycle so that that ended Sally's life. But that was great.

Cohen: Amazing.

Jago: I love that Jewish statement, *besbert*, 'It was meant to be' because it would be rough getting her back into the States and that it was meant to be, to end her life that way.

Cohen: Yeah, yeah, no that makes it make sense.

Jago: Yeah.

Cohen: You also mentioned there was a woman who lived in a mountain village called Mama who would make dinners for people, and I kind of even wondered how she even procured food at that time?

Jago: I don't know, it's amazing. See, we were, to give the picture, we were on the coast and way up we could see the distant mountain and near the top of the mountain was a village and the squadron had made arrangements in the village for this wonderful little woman to cook dinner for us, but you had to make a reservation. You take five people, you make a reservation, and you spin up, you drive up the mountain in a jeep to have dinner at Mama's. That was a highlight of the month. And uh, one day when my crew was not flying, my crew is not flying, they're bringing another company to try them out, and so I had a whole day to myself and so I thought, "Well, Sally and I will hike up the mountain." So Sally and I hiked up which was a lot rougher than I thought it was going to be. And at dark, I finally got to Mama's and she said, "Oh you poor thing!" So she put me in the in the dining room in front of a fireplace with a bottle of red wine and some of the village men came in to talk to me and an hour later when my crew arrived at dinner, they were so shocked. They said I was leading a hot argument



in French and I was leading the group. And I thought later, if back at Harvard, if they served red wine during the French class, I would have done a lot better! [laughter] But I still I was thinking in French completely and arguing with them. But that was a wonderful event to have.

Cohen: Cheerful! Had you studied some French in the United States before the war?

Jago: Yes, I did. You know, I tried, I had a smattering of French and uh, I had Latin in high school and then French at Harvard. I remember my French professor saying, "I have lived in America for twenty years, but I still do not know how to say 'post office' "[Laughter.] My French is quite bad, but I was loud, so I was bullying them into the conversation, I think! [laughter]

Cohen: That's great! Did you have, did you receive the *Stars and Stripes*<sup>24</sup>? And was it, did you read it a lot?

Jago: No, no, we never saw it. Never saw it.

Cohen: Never saw it, okay. It's probably not relevant, but I'll ask you anyhow: our museum, the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, will have an exhibit on the cartoonist Bill Maulden<sup>25</sup> ...

Jago: Oh sure, I knew of him. He was great.

Cohen: So uh, and I was wondering if there were any cartoons of his that you like or or what you liked about them?

Jago: Everything, really. We liked him very much.

Cohen: Now the other thing that I found fascinating was, because you're located in in such a fascinating part of the world you had the opportunity to go on R & R to some fascinating places ...

Jago: Yeah, they were so smart, America was. First, uh after you flew oh, it was after you flew ten missions, they would send you to rest camps—called Rest and Relaxation—R & R. The first R & R was to the isle of Capri, which was fantastic. And then the next I think was uh, I went to southern, southern France to the Riviera, oh that was wonderful! But the highlight was after fifty missions, you could spend a week in Cairo and oh that was *fantastic*, discovering Cairo. And

---

<sup>24</sup> US newspaper published by the Department of the Defense and headquartered in Washington, with an emphasis on foreign-stationed military personnel. It began publication during the Civil War and continues to this day.

<sup>25</sup> William Henry Maulden, 1921-2003, popular syndicated cartoonist, best known for the bedraggled GI characters of Willie and Joe during WW2. This exhibit is slated for 2021.

then we were in uh, after we spent a week there, we went to fly back, and they found our plane was not in good shape, so we had to stay another ten days in Cairo. So I had a wonderful lifetime experience in Cairo

Cohen: Oh wow, wow. So, did you, were you on the same B-25 for all of the seventy-four missions?

Jago: Yes same one. You know, it's astounding to think what a fantastic flying instrument that B-25 was. We had after one every one of our rough missions, the next day our ground crew said, "We worked all night, but we had over 115 hits on your plane. "And we were flying, I think we're about, I forget the altitude, a pretty low altitude, but it was, they were tough tough ships. But you know another thing that's interesting was after we hit Italy we'd have to fly to the sea to get to Corsica, and if a ship had been injured going over and you couldn't make it, the crew would bail out over the sea and the plane would crash. But the [US] Navy had boats down below, so that when anybody bailed out you would relax because they're going to be picked up in fifteen minutes. Yeah, that was a standard procedure and you realized you'd never see him again, but you never mentioned the name again so ...

Cohen: Did you give the plane a name?

Jago: Oh yeah, sure did. The first one the first one, the one that we got in Palm Beach, I called 'Always', because that that was a theme song of my true love and me: "*And we knew always...*"<sup>26</sup> So I named the ship 'Always', but it was *always* cutting out on the engine, so we were glad to get it back and so we finally got our second plane in Naples. I named it 'The Bouncing Bachelor', so all of our missions were flown in the Bouncing Bachelor.

Cohen: Did you guys paint a picture on the plane?

Jago: Yeah, you know, the turret gunner, the one that I visited in New Jersey, was an artist. He taught art so he painted the picture on the front of The Bouncing Bachelor here. [laughter]

Cohen: And so I believe that after seventy missions you were told, like, "That's okay, like that's enough", but you had a desire to continue on.

Jago: Yeah, yeah, it's so strange. Before they had, when I hit the seventy [missions], they said, "You hit a record; you've got to quit", but I didn't want to quit and, but they said. "You have to." So than a week later they said, "You know, we hate to

---

<sup>2626</sup> Mr Jago refers to the 1925 Irving Berlin standard, "Always". Berlin wrote the tune for his wife.

call you back, [but] it's a very important mission. We want you to fly another mission", and I was *overjoyed!* I was so excited, and I sent for my pilot and he said to me, he said, "Well thank God you're back to your normal self! You've been an old wet hen for ten, for a week. Now you're normal again!" {laughter} So I then, I flew three more missions but on the seventy fourth mission, all of a sudden, I realized that if I got shot down my family would never understand because I'd written to tell them that I'd quit and so I was scared. It turned out it was an easy mission, but I was scared sick and then I got back, and they said, "That's it. *Period.*" So its seventy-four, so let the record stand. So that's that. [laughter}

Cohen: Absolutely! So after that, were you sent to, I think to Italy before being shipped back to the United States?

Jago: That's when they took me back, I spent two weeks in Naples waiting, waiting for transportation and that's when I had the experience with the B-38 pilot that sightsaw with me for two weeks. That was my last trip during the war overseas.

Cohen: Yeah ... how did you get back home?

Jago: They flew me back in a passenger plane they had, and we were about uh, an hour away from the States I got the news that Roosevelt had died, and the shock was, I said I lose a member of the family because twelve years ago, I was about twelve years old, I'd been at his inauguration in Washington—the first one in 1931. And he had had so many vice presidents, [there] were so many, so I said, "Who was the vice president?" I had trouble remembering [Harry] Truman's name so ... It was a real shock, and it had a little bit of a dampening effect on my getting home, but not much. But yeah, because he was sick and old, so he realized that he served twelve years and that was a great service.

Cohen: Yeah, just as an aside, you mentioned that when you had a furlough home, I think after basic training, you met another very famous ...

Jago: Oh, that was one of the shocks of my life. When I, after I got my wings and my officership, it was in December, so they gave me ten days at home for Christmas and I went to my family's apartment. It was on Connecticut avenue, 3000 Connecticut avenue, and two blocks south of us was the Wardman Park<sup>27</sup>, a very elegant hotel and my uncle George had a suite there, and so Christmas afternoon mother said, "Let's go down and talk to and visit with Aunt Mary,

---

<sup>27</sup> Now the Marriot Wardman Park, built in 1918. The original Wardman Tower still stands and is on the national registry of historic places. For many years after it opened, it was the largest hotel in DC.

Uncle Jed's wife, who has the flu." And so mother and I walked down to their apartment and we were in a bedroom talking, and the doorbell rang [laughs] and I said, "I'll go get it", and I opened the door. And of course during my military service, they taught me how to respect the senior officer you know, the salute, but they didn't tell me what to do when you open the door and there was General [Dwight D] Eisenhower in a red oar shirt. So I froze, absolutely froze, and he came in and picked up my left hand, "Congratulations, lieutenant! Glad to meet you!" [Laughter]. It turned out that the Eisenhowers' had an apartment up in the next floor and they're very close friends with Uncle George and Aunt Mary, and he had come back to spend Christmas with [his wife] Mamie but uh, after he left he came—we had about a half hour visit with him in Mary's bedroom—but then after he left, a secret service man came in to my mother and me and said, "You cannot tell anyone you've seen Eisenhower for ten days because if the Germans knew he was here, they would know the invasion was not permanent, was not planned." So that was no fun that we would have to, we went back, and we didn't even tell father or anybody about it. But it was a quite a, quite a shock and then I became a great fan of Eisenhower's after that and when he was a candidate for the presidency, I was in charge of the Vets For Ike nationwide and so I really admired him so much. Then later on it turned out that I was assigned to manage his farm in Gettysburg, which i did for a year which was a great experience. But I never saw him again. But it was a very very close to him, second hand so ...

Cohen: Wonderful, so you're back in Washington I guess, living at your parents' home. Do you want to recap briefly what happened after that?

Jagoe: Of course. I had been I'd been a bachelor, I was thirty eight years old and a bachelor and *Cosmopolitan* [magazine] put out a magazine featuring Washington and they had a section on bachelors in Washington and they picked a senator and a diplomat and me and ...[Laughter] Boy, news spreads fast and I began getting letters from women who wanted to get married [Laughter] and one of the funniest ones was this woman who said she wanted to talk about insurance, and my secretary realized it was a sham, so she wouldn't leave us alone, but she came in and she even had her financial statement for me to look at it! [Laughter] But my secretary got between us, so she protected me. But Ava, from Barcelona, had for several years, she served as the ground hostess in Barcelona at the airport for dignitaries who would show up. So they gave her a reward for a trip anywhere in the world free, and some friends, some diplomatic friends of

the family that were living in Washington, they asked her to come to Washington and she did.

So it was about thirty-eight<sup>28</sup> on Christmas Day, my mother said, “Miss Conner”—who's a wonderful, a ninety-year-old friend—“she's giving a cocktail party. You've got to come.” I said, “I will not go to the White House or Christmas Day for it”, but Miss Connor called back twice and said, “Jay's got to come, he's got to come”, and she said, “there's a little Spanish girl I want him to meet!” [laughter] So we got Miss Connor's apartment, and she told Maria, told her, “Now make eyes at him!” but she ignored me completely, like I didn't exist, and she spent time talking with my sister and my brother who'd been to Spain, but near the ... later on at the party, the State Department people that she was visiting said, “We've got to go home and fix dinner” and then—my *beshert*<sup>29</sup>—I said I'll drive her home. We hadn't talked at all in the party at all, and then driving her back home, we weren't talking and all of a sudden, I had a funny feeling: I was at *ease*. It was a funny thing; we weren't talking, we were ... I was so comfortable, and that's the first time I realized [that] there's something about her, “I don't know, what the hell, it is something about her ...” And so we then for the next six months, we gradually began dating slowly, then permanently, and then the father made her come back so she, and the night before she was leaving, I proposed to her. I said, “Look, I said, “You're giving up a very very luxurious life to marry a guy who didn't have doesn't have two cents and so think it over. Don't let me know until September one.” So I spent a miserable two months waiting for September one, when I got a one-word letter saying, “Yes!” [Laughter].

I remember years later uh, about twenty years later, I told a psychiatrist, “You know, I've only been married to Ava and never ever in my life have I thought that I wanted to be married to anybody else.” He said, “That's impossible”. So I said, “Well, that's the end of you, Brother!” And after sixty years, it's still true. She's the best, most important person in my life. She's wonderful.

Cohen: Oh, that's ... that's so wonderful. How many children did you have?

Jagoe: We had four kids, boy girl boy girl, and we're so blessed because all of them turned out to be wonderful, wonderful people. And it's a shock to me to be only

---

<sup>28</sup> Mr Jagoe has perhaps transposed the time, i.e., the time was 8:30, Christmas Day evening.

<sup>29</sup> *Beshert*, i.e., ‘it was meant to be or ‘foreordained soul mate’. Quoted earlier as a Jewish [Yiddish] word by Mr Jagoe.

a hundred years old and to have a sixty-year-old son. I'm too, I'm too young for that! [Laughter]

Cohen: Of course! Do you have a message to either the young or ...?

Jago: Oh sure, yeah, the one thing is: no regrets. The one saddest thing in your life is to see a senior who says, "I wish I had ... "or "If I had done this ..." And the thing is, I made more mistakes in everything I did than anybody can think of, but I have no regrets. So, I tried them, they worked, or they didn't: no regrets. And the other is to change, change is a daily thing with me because I, also at ninety-nine [years old] I was ready for a change. I moved to Chicago, [where] I'd never been, and it's the most wonderful experience I've ever had. I love Chicago and everything new and different and exciting and we have a fantastic mayor and the ... And also I do, in my office every day, I change the focal picture, I change a picture in my office to look at every day and every week, I study a different music composer. It was Tchaikovsky, last week, it was Mussorgsky this week and next week it will be another. Change, change, change—no two days should be the same. And that's the uh and planning ahead. I've already made reservations when I'm 101 to back to Mardi Gras. Oh well, how much fun that was, wow! I say that Mardi Gras is like Christmas and New Year's and your birthday all wrapped up into one week—that's great. Come and join me next year.

Cohen: That's wonderful. Yeah so, so our museum and library is dedicated to the Citizen Soldier. What does the term, 'Citizen Soldier', mean to you? 'Citizen soldier'.

Jago: Nothing. [laughter]

Cohen: I think the idea that every citizen has the responsibility, you know, to defend or serve the country ...

Jago: Oh Sure, yeah. I have ... you know my uh, my seventh life is to devote, to enrich the lives of other seniors and I have a newsletter called, *I Love Being Old Club*, and I have 1200 members of that every month I've got monthly newsletter out to them, and I end up with an assignment for them for the month and it just means to be involved and enjoy life. And then it comes, after the newsletter is published the next day, I get a flood of letters from all over the world ... New Zealand, a lot of followers in New Zealand, and Italy and France with a lot of a ... big, big clan of mine is in London so we all keep up together it makes a very small world. It's wonderful. But we seniors have a, I have it ... I always say that the older ages turned out to be the best, the best days of my life. I love everything

about being old. You can remember this, you can learn you can glow, glow with the past. That's great.

Cohen: This is wonderful. Is there anything that you would like to talk about regarding your military service that we didn't bring up during the interview?

Jago: No, I think you did a *damn* good job. Wow, you're as good as you're pretty and you're damn pretty, so you did a good job! [laughter]

Cohen: You are wonderful! Really, I feel like you have a lot of life's lessons for all of us.

Jago: Yeah, yeah, I feel sorry for everybody in the world who's not me. I'm sorry for you, but I've had so much more fun than you all! [laughter] Go on, seek it! Try it out! [laughter]

Cohen: Well on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, I will thank you and I also will show a picture of the book that Mr Jago has written, *Southern Boy: A Grown Up*, that I had referenced a lot through the interview we thank you for your service and for your time today and we will send you as a token of our thanks, a challenge coin in the mail.

Jago: Wonderful! And I want to say for everybody who's listening, Hooray for Leah! Hooray for you! [laughter] Hooray for you for a great job! That's the nicest interview I've ever done, thanks to you.

Cohen: Thank you so much. I have a little true confession: I realized I didn't hit the record button for the first, I'd say three to five minutes. It sounds funny, but would you mind if I introduce you again and just ask the first three or four questions again?

Jago: Go to it. I'm ready.

Cohen: Okay, thank you. Sorry about that ... Today is August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020. My name is Cohen and on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, I have the honor to interview Lieutenant Jago. He served as a bombardier and navigator as part of the 428th bombardment squadron, which was part of the three ... excuse me, part of the 310th bombardment wing; he flew in astonishing seventy-four missions. Welcome!

Jago: Thank you!

Cohen: And I thought we would begin at the beginning and to ask you where and when were you born?

Jago: I was born on April 27th at a good date, April 27, 1921, and in Okolona—not Oklahoma— *Okolona*, Mississippi, which is about as big as from here to the grocery store. And then when I was two years old, we moved to... down to the Gulf Coast of Mississippi at Gulfport, where my father was a banker and so I had a wonderful eighteen years living on the on the Gulf Coast. As I grew up, I never saw a house across the street; we were right on the beach. Right on the street I could go over and see, I'd see Mexico and whales and sailing ships. It's a wonderful place to grow up as a kid and I had a sand beach that was twenty-six miles long. So, it was great.

Cohen: Did you have any siblings?

Jago: Yes, I have a wonderful older sister, who's five years old than I. But the thing is, but I think the five years, you're in different groups altogether but we, we really didn't become friends until I was in high school—we kind of ignored each other in the meantime. So but she's well, she was one of the best sisters anybody could ever have. That's great.

Cohen: Wow. And did you enjoy school?

Jago: I loved it, as I said about that, as I said about Harvard, I liked everything about school except academia. I loved lunchtime and I loved the sports and I played in the band and uh, but it was a very happy time of my life, and I worked every afternoon, I worked in town at a men's clothing store. They gave me time off from school—I only went to school in the morning and then went to work downtown in the afternoon, so I got to know the town. And oh, it was a wonderful life.

Cohen: That's, that's wonderful and I think that's where we, that was the gap, you know that missing.

Jago: Okay, great okay.

Cohen: Great, I really thank you so much. We'll be sending a transcript, like a written transcript of the interview as well as a short biography for your review. Then after that, the production will work on their part of the video and audio and then we'll, let's just say in the fullness of time, we'll post it on the website. And the only other thing I can think of is that if you would like a copy, like a DVD of the interview we would be happy to send you to send you one.

Jago: Oh. You are very kind. Thank you so much, that's great.

Cohen: Thank you that's great, thanks again!



Jago: You're wonderful, thank you! It's been my pleasure. Have a wonderful day and live it up, live it up! Go for it!

Cohen: Thank you! Bye!

Jago: Bye, dear!

**END OF INTERVIEW**