

Oral Memoirs
of
Charles Whittington

An Interview Conducted by

Joseph Morris

November 18, 2011

Linda McKnight Batman Oral History Project

Historical Society of Central Florida

Museum of Seminole County History

Copyright 2011

This material is protected by US copyright. Permission to print, reproduce or distribute copyrighted material is subject to the terms and conditions of fair use as prescribed in the US copyright law. Transmission or reproduction of protected items beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the copyright owners.

Interview Histories

Interviewers: Joseph Morris

Transcriber: Savannah Vickers

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Museum of Seminole County History, Sanford, Florida.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Charles Whittington is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on November 18, 2011.

Abstract

Oral history of Charles Whittington, conducted by Joseph Morris on November 18, 2011. Whittington was born in Sanford, Florida, in March of 1938. In the interview, he discusses his childhood in Sanford and Charleston, celery and gladiola farming, working on a farm, his father's service in the Navy, his mother and sister, how Sanford has changed over time, his employment history, his world travel experiences, his activities after retirement, his work with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), his wife and children, his service in the Army and in the Air Force, and the Apollo 8.

Charles Whittington

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Joseph Morris

November 18, 2011

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Morris This is an interview with Charles Whittington. This interview is being conducted on the 18th of November, 2011, at the Museum of Seminole County History. The interviewer is Joseph Morris, representing the Linda McKnight Batman Oral History Project for the Historical Society of Central Florida. Sir, could you tell us about where and when you were born?

Whittington Yes. I was born in Seminole County, in Sanford, at the old Fernald-Laughton Sanford Hospital, and that was in March of 1938. The building is still standing, and the last time I was by there, it was used as a – I believe it was a halfway house of sorts. I'm not really sure, and I'm not well-informed on that, but that was my understanding. But it is still there. It's across from the old Sanford library.

0:00:56

Growing up in Sanford and Charleston, South Carolina

Morris Okay, sir. And can you describe the place where you grew up?

Whittington Yes. My dad owned a Sinclair [Oil Corporation] gas station on the corner of [South] Park Avenue and [East] Second [Street], and we had a little home on Oak Avenue.

When World War II broke out in 1942, my dad was offered a job as a machinist in the Navy shipyard¹ in Charleston, South Carolina. And we moved up there, and my dad worked in the division of the shipyard that later became the test bed for our first nuclear research into nuclear-powered ships. And it was highly classified and very structured, and he didn't understand why at the time. and I didn't either, until later, realized that no wonder was it top secret – I mean, because this was our first involvement in nuclear research for, you know, powering anything.

And then, in the latter part of 1943, my dad had saved enough money to come back here and buy a farm. We bought a little 13-acre farm on Richmond Avenue, and moved down there. And my dad – it was sort of a lifelong dream for him – went into farming. And at that time, primarily we grew celery, and corn and cabbage, other crops that could be shipped up north.

¹ Charleston Naval Shipyard.

But the days of the small farmer in Seminole County, toward the end of that decade—the end of the '40s—was starting pretty rapidly to come to an end. The soil was worn out, and much of the farming had moved to the Everglades, to the area around Lake Okeechobee. And my dad hung on, and tried to make it, and he finally realized that we were going under, and this just wasn't going to do it for us. And we sold the farm, and moved to Pasco County, down near Tampa, and he got back into the poultry industry there and did, you know, quite well.

But I hated to leave. I loved Sanford. I loved being raised on a small farm, and it was a big disappointment for me to leave Sanford, especially in my sophomore year in high school. The two schools were just as, you know, much different as night and day—the high school here and the high school down there. The one down there wouldn't come anywhere near the quality of what we had here in Sanford, and I missed that very much. And I come back to Seminole County as often as I can, and that's why I'm here today, for this interview and also to meet with some former classmates. And I still feel like this is my hometown, but it's also, if anyone asks me where I'm from it's always Sanford, not Zephyrhills.

0:04:33

Father's gas station

Morris Okay, sir. And you said your dad, prior to World War II, he ran or owned a...

Whittington A Sinclair gas station.

Morris A gas station. What happened to that when he moved to South Carolina for the machinist job?

Whittington Okay. He sold it to someone else, and the station now is the office of Edward Jones Investment Agency, and Bill Kirchhoff had that, and I believe he has been here and talked to you folks. And he and I are good friends. Matter of fact, I've got a tractor radiator cap for him. I've got to get to him after our interview.

Morris Okay, sir.

0:05:13

Celery and gladiola farming

Whittington But his dad was involved in the overall agricultural structure of Seminole County during the time that we had the farm on Richmond Avenue. He raised gladiolas in Florida and also in New York, and I think he even had some farms on the West Coast, and he would, you know, follow seasons. And also there was a problem with a little microbe in the soil here called a "nematode" that was not present in the soil of New York, because, you know, the soil freezes up there in the winter and kills these things. And here it doesn't freeze, and these little guys do pretty well, and they really wreak havoc on both celery plants and gladiola bulbs.

Morris These were nematodes, you said?

Whittington Nematodes. Right. It's a little microbe, and they attack the roots of the young plants.

Morris How did you counter those when you were farming?

Whittington You would flood the area. You would dam in a little area of the farm that would be the area for the seed beds, where the young celery plants were growing, and flood it for about two and a half weeks. And just keep, you know, a couple inches of water on it, with the well running in there, you know, all the time, and keep the water in there for about two and a half weeks. And that would kill the nematodes in this area, and you would raise your young celery plants in seed beds in this area. And once the plants caught up to, you know, a height of like three or four inches, they could deal with these little bugs. But it was the little bitty plants that they would go after.

Morris And when they were the little bitty plants, that's when you flooded, or did you flood and then plant?

Whittington No. You flooded, then planted.

Morris Okay.

Whittington You would flood, drain it, and form the seed beds, and plant those. And I've got pictures I'll send you too. You had to put muslin covers over the seed beds, because when the plants first came up, they were very sensitive to sun. So you had to keep them covered during the hot part of the day, and in the afternoon you would open the side of the cover, along all the way, halfway through the field, and let air, fresh air and sunlight in, with the sun over here, and in the morning, you would open, you know, the back side, other side, west side, and get air and sunlight in there. But not direct sunlight, because they were very, very – a celery plant is a very tender little guy when it's, you know, when it's an inch high.

Morris Okay. And the sun would just be too strong for it early on?

Whittington If you just opened it up, they couldn't handle it.

Morris Did you have to do that when they, when the little celery grew up, or...

Whittington No. Once the celery got to a height of maybe two or three inches, then you could take the cover off, and it was okay then. But it was just when they were first starting, first coming up, that they were so sensitive to the sun.

Morris Okay. What other kinds of problems did you have while raising celery, other than the sunlight, and other than the microbes? Was there any other kind of difficulty that you found out about?

Whittington Well, the main difficulty would be weather during the, you know, winter months, when you planted celery – typically wasn't an issue. But the real issue was the market price of the celery when you harvested it. You know, if it was good, why, you did okay. And if it was bad, you know, it was just another bad year.

Morris What affected these – what would change from year to year that would make it a good year or a bad year for selling celery?

Whittington Well, just the market price in New York. That was where we shipped. We shipped from the Sanford [State] Farmers' Market, usually to New York and that – you know, the New England area. And it was just the price of celery up there that, you know, was whether you made it that year or not. And we had too many of the had-not years.

Morris Oh, really?

Whittington Yeah.

0:09:55 **Working on a farm**

Morris Okay. And what was your involvement? Like how old were you when you moved to the farm? And what was your involvement while you lived there?

Whittington Well, I was five years old when we moved there, and we started farming. We started farming with a pair of mules. *[laughs]* Now this is how far back it goes. We used mules for plowing and discing and so forth.

And after this, we bought a Model F Fordson tractor. I've got a picture of this, and there are several online now. And my dad would let me drive it, but it was so hard to steer, until I was about 12 years old, I could not turn it around at the end of the row. It took that much power to turn the steering wheel. And also, I didn't weigh enough to push the clutch in. The clutch was the lever that stuck out of the transfer case, and you had to press down on it, and I could stand on it, and it wouldn't go anywhere. *[laughs]* So, obviously, I couldn't operate the Fordson by myself.

Morris Right.

Whittington We later got rid of that and got a Model 8N Ford, and that's the radiator cap for the one I have in my car, and it was, you know, had power steering and the hydraulic lift in the back, and so forth. And so, I did a lot of plowing, and discing, and running the tractor. That was, you know – 10 years on, I did a lot of it. That was my part of helping.

Morris No planting or harvesting necessarily?

Whittington No. We – for harvesting the celery crops, we usually used crews of labor that we would hire locally. And they would plant the celery, and also cabbage or couple other plants that required – you know, physical planting – and then they would also do the harvesting and packing. And you contacted a crew leader, a team leader, and contracted with him to do the harvesting in your field. And we were just responsible really for, you know, making certain that the celery – if it was celery, or whatever the crop – was sprayed, in case there was any kind of a blight or a fungus, or some sort of an insect problem, that we sprayed it with the proper spray, and that we fertilized it, and also cultivated the rows to keep the weeds down, and it was a very labor-intensive occupation.

And I was very upset with my dad, especially in the later years, because he could've stayed on forever. He already had his foot in the door in the nuclear – the government nuclear involvement in the Military, and he didn't even know it. I mean, he knew he was under a very tight security environment, but he didn't know why. But he was an excellent machinist. He was moved up shop chief in no time at all, making good money, but his dream was always to come back to Sanford and own a farm. And, I mean, it was quite obvious by the end of, you know, the '40s, that the farming here was in trouble. And, you know, in later years, I thought, "Why couldn't you have just stayed in Charleston with the Navy?" And, you know, gotten a civil service retirement. And we wouldn't have, you know, been in the situation that we found ourselves in here. Although, like I say, I do really love Sanford, and loved growing up here.

Morris Okay. A little bit of a catch-22.

Whittington Yeah. That's a very good comparison there.

0:14:07 **Father's service in the Navy**

Morris Now, you said you moved here – you moved to Sanford when you were five.

Whittington Uh huh.

Morris How long was your dad a machinist for the Navy? Because I know when he moved up to South Carolina, you must have been only a couple years old.

Whittington Right. Well, I was born in '38, and we moved up there in '42.

Morris Okay.

Whittington And he worked for about 18 months, and put everything aside. And that was enough to buy that farm, and so we came back. And that – and plus he had sold the gas station by this time, and he had some income from that, and so he put it all in that farm and getting some equipment, and...

Morris Mules.

Whittington Yeah. Mules. He had mules, and then the Fordson and then the Model 8N Ford, which I'm trying to find – got a couple leads on it – but I'd like to learn how to get some pictures of it.

Morris Okay. So I'm kind of surprised, because when you moved to Sanford, World War II was still going on.

Whittington Right.

Morris And they didn't have a problem, coming from a very heavily secured area, and during World War II, an able-bodied man – I'm surprised they just – that he was able to leave his job and become a farmer.

Whittington That's an excellent point, and I would be surprised at it except that farming was a fairly high-priority occupation, as far as the government was concerned, because you were feeding, you know, you were feeding the population, and providing some foods that could be used in preparation of foods for the – you know, our military. So that was effective. We came back here, and we're going into farming wasn't a problem. And he had – my dad had served in World War I in France.

Morris Oh, okay.

Whittington And he was past the draft age. So that was something else too. I mean, he was too old for, you know, for required military service.

Morris Okay. And what was the cap at this time for age? The age cap before you could no longer be drafted?

Whittington Joe, I don't remember exactly. I think somewhere in the 30s – like 35?

Morris Oh, okay.

Whittington I believe that was it. I'll do some checking, get back to you on that.

Morris All right. Thank you, sir.

Whittington I believe that was in, you know, mid-30s.

Morris I was a little surprised they'd let such an excellent machinist, you know, leave so easily.

Whittington Well...

Morris Unless they put up a fight trying to entice him and keep him to stay. But it just seemed, during World War II, to let him go to farming – I mean, maybe they didn't have any say in the matter, as well. That's just where my question was going.

Whittington Right. And I really wish that, of the many things you want to go back and ask your parents, something I'd really like to talk to my dad about is why you left. I mean, was farming that important to you, that you would leave, you know, a high-tech, high-paying, secure job like that, and go back into something that, you know, almost going in it was a known gamble, because there was problems with weather, insects, and, you know, always the market fluctuations?

Morris Did he like his career as a machinist?

Whittington Yes. He did. I mean, he liked that very much, but it didn't have the pull that, you know, being his own boss in farming did.

Morris I guess maybe it could have been just his own culture growing up, attached significance to farming and independence.

Whittington Right. Well, he was raised on a farm in North Carolina.

Morris Oh, okay.

Whittington So, you know, that was his—where his roots were. He wanted to get back into it down here. And, of course, you know, in the '30s, Sanford couldn't produce enough celery. I mean, it was the celery capital of the world.

Morris Right.

Whittington And some of that aura sort of hung over for quite some time, that, you know—“Oh, get a farm and get celery growing. You'll get rich.” Well, that didn't always work out that way.

Morris Shoot.

Whittington But, anyway, that was...

Morris How long did your family own the farm?

Whittington We sold the farm in 1950, and he leased another farm, and we stayed on 'til 1953, and at Christmas that year, my sophomore year in high school, we left and went to Zephyrhills.

Morris So how long did you live, then, in Sanford, from the first farm up until that, 1953?

Whittington Okay. I was born here, and we lived here until we left in 1942, and then—the early part of 1942—and then toward the latter part of 1943, we came back. So I was only gone, like 18 months.

Morris Okay.

Whittington And then we stayed here until 1953, and I was a sophomore in high school at that time.

0:19:29 **Parents and sister**

Morris Okay, sir. Then, I know we talked a little bit about your father. Could you tell me more about your parents and any kind of siblings?

Whittington I had one sister that was 17 years older than I was, and she graduated from Florida State [University], which was Florida [State] College for Women back then, with a degree in education. And she went to Melbourne and got a teaching job there, and when World War II started, the City of Melbourne offered her the directorship of the USO that they'd built in Melbourne for the, mainly the sailors, because there's a lot of Navy and Coast Guard. You know, all these war activities at that time in that area. And so, Melbourne built a USO and offered my sister a job to run that, and she took it and did that until the war ended.

And my dad had a couple years of mechanical engineering at NC [North Carolina] State [University], and that's why he did well at Charleston, because he had that – already had some college training in, you know, the math end of mechanical engineering. Well, it's primarily math. But, the, you know, his roots in North Carolina – being raised on a small farm – just were too strong, and he wanted to go back to it. Plus, he just – he had the problem that a lot of folks have of not wanting to work for somebody else. That's why he ran the gas station is because, you know, he was his own boss there, and, you know, he could hire somebody else to help him, but he didn't report to anybody else. He was his own station, and he ran it the way he wanted to.

Morris Okay. And what about your mother, sir?

Whittington My mother helped my dad a lot. I mean, farming was sort of a family thing that you got into, because, I mean, there was just so much work to be done, that my mother frequently would help, not only, you know, taking care of running the home, but she would actually physically help with some of the labor on the farm itself. And I didn't like that. It just seemed wrong that a woman should be, you know, having to make ends meet, to have to work, you know, on the farm. Even though it was not really heavy labor work. It was the fact that she still had to chip in and help us to make it. That bothered me. But she did, and never complained about it. But it was, you know – it was something that many families here did. The whole family was involved in farming. And I didn't mind, you know, running the tractor at all. I liked it. I mean, that was [*laughs*] – especially the Ford that I could handle, not the big Ford, but the little one that was newer.

0:23:04 **How Sanford has changed over time**

Morris Well, sir, how has Sanford changed over the years, from...

Whittington Sorry?

Morris How has Sanford changed over the years?

Whittington How's it changed?

Morris From when you grew up to how it is now, sir.

Whittington Oh, okay. Well, the change that I noticed when I first came back was the decline of the downtown area, which is so typical of many small towns. The shopping moves out to shopping centers in the suburbs, and that has happened to me – that Downtown Sanford's the perfect example of it. Because we had, downtown, we had a Firestone store and a JCPenney, and Lerner Clothing Store, and a McCrory's Five and Dime [Store] – I can't think of – two hardware stores, some regional area chain department stores, and two banks. And it was just, you know, it was a very functional little downtown area.

And you could see that starting to go. You know, stores would close and be empty, and then somebody else would try something else in it. It wouldn't make it. Now, it's a lot of antique shops down there, and that's about it. I mean, that's that whole main street, is antique shops. And I didn't like to see that. The old telephone company was over the JCPenney store. There was an old manual switchboard with operators on the second floor of the JCPenney building, and then there was the Thudson[?] Drugstore on one corner, and the Roman Anderson[?] Drugstore on the other. There were no Target or pharmacy or CVS, any of those. You know, there were none of the chain stores. The Eckerd chain was the first one down here – Eckerd and Walgreens. But, you know, during my growing up years, those two were places that you hung out, and you could get a hamburger and a malt, or, you know, whatever. And, also, there was a pharmacy there. And I hated to see those go, because that was, you know, that was just a very active part of Sanford.

0:25:44

Employment history

Morris Okay, sir. And where have you lived over the course of your life?

Whittington Well, after I got discharged from the hospital following that jet accident in the Air Force, I immediately went right back to the Cape [Canaveral] and applied to NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] and got on. This was during the Gemini program.² I got on at the flight simulator over at the Cape. And I worked the NASA contracts. I was at Houston[, Texas] twice. I was in Ecuador for one time, and then a tracking station in the Smokey Mountains, and was there through, well, after the end of the Skylab program. When that ended, and the shuttle program wasn't yet, you know – we'd gone to the Moon and done that thing with the Apollo series, and the shuttles weren't flying it, so there was a massive layoff. I got caught in that.

² Project Gemini.

And I got into the telecom industry, and followed that all over the country as a contractor. And I found that I could – of course, you weren't building any pension or retirement – but I found that I could make more money than a company employee. I could make more money as a contractor if I was willing to move around. And you just had to discipline yourself, and put aside what otherwise would have been your retirement from the company. And I did that and did all right. And I liked to travel. But I ended up in an ISP [Internet service provider] Internet hosting outfit in Seattle[, Washington], and was doing that when I retired in 2001. You know, the travel and, you know, the change, the challenges of new jobs, and being able to go to a new area and move into the new company and a new job – that part of moving around was attractive to me.

Morris What kind of places did you move, sir? For example?

Whittington Okay. I was in San Francisco[, California], and was there during the earthquake, and was in Los Angeles[, California], and then in the Seattle area for about 10 years. and then, prior to that, I had moved around just for, like, a few months at a time, in various places all over the U.S. – Indianapolis[, Indiana] and Chicago, Illinois] – you know, for like maybe six weeks or two months at a time on just a contract job. And, it was interesting, but I was single then, and just pull up and move without any real concern. It was okay.

0:29:05 **World travel experiences**

Morris You said you liked to travel, sir. Have you ever traveled outside of the country? Or – vacation travel?

Whittington Yes. Yes. I have. I've traveled to, well, the South America travel was mainly as a function of the Military and NASA time. But I've traveled to England, and done the Hawaiian Islands, was in Israel in Tel Aviv for five weeks for a company school. And that was an eye-opener. That really was. I mean, I got a good look at the Holy Land. It was [*laughs*] – it was a lot different than I expected. It really was.

Morris How so, sir?

Whittington Well, those people have got an unreal – I'm talking about the Israelis – have got an unreal work ethic. I mean, if they are asked to work 24 hours a day, and there's a need for it, they'll do it, and no griping. You don't find that very much in the U.S.

I mean, they are very, very much – uh, I can't really express myself here – loyal to Israel, and to their faith, and to the country. I mean, just, you know, they've got a country, and they're going to hang onto it now. And the [*laughs*], the guys around them had better not mess with them. I can say that from being there, and being in the technology. I know what they've got. And they can – the guys around them can end up a big smoking hole in the ground over there, if, you know, they push Israel too hard.

Morris All right, sir.

Whittington They might hurt Israel too, but they'll come out the losers.

Morris And have you travelled anywhere else, sir, for work or vacation? You said South America. What countries in South America?

Whittington Okay. I've been over a good bit of England, and I was in Alaska, and was in the Army up there. I liked that, but I've been back just as a tourist with my wife, and took my in-laws up there. And the Hawaiian Islands several times. I've not done China. I'd like to see China. I really would. And that's kind of the feeling I got, because there was a contract. The Chinese were going to completely replace their aging landline system with a...

Morris Towers?

Whittington With a tower network.

Morris Okay.

Whittington Yeah. With towers, and cell phones. And several different companies had some pretty good contracts over there, if you'd go and stay for as long as you could take it. But, some of the places I heard about, you know, they were all right, and some were pretty Spartan—I mean, food and accommodations. And you having been there, you probably would validate some of that. I don't know.

Morris Some of it, sir. When was this going on? When were these contracts for landlines or...

Whittington Okay. The contracts for China were, like, in the mid-'90s.

Morris Okay, sir.

Whittington There was some openings there, and that kind of moved around. It would change a lot, and I never could get somebody to, you know, sit down with me and say, "Okay," you know, "here's what we can offer you, and here's when you leave." And I never was able to find it at that point. Perhaps it's a good thing. But anyway, I've not been there. I've met a good friend my wife worked with in San Francisco and Seattle that is from Ethiopia—not Ethiopia. [*sighs*] Can't say it. Starts with "E," and it's part of the Soviet Union. Oh, fiddle.

Morris Is this in Africa or Asia?

Whittington No, it's in...

Morris Oh, is it Estonia?

Whittington Yeah. Estonia. [*laughs*]

Morris Oh, okay.

Whittington I couldn't say it. And he's gone back to Russia several times, and the pictures and so forth. And the stories I got from when I would talk to him afterwards, I don't really have any desire to travel in Russia. And that's not one of the things I want to do. I want to do Europe first, and really work it over really good, and Hong Kong and Japan. Those are ones that I really wanna [laughs]...

0:34:06

Retirement

Morris They're both very nice. Sir, are you still working right now?

Whittington No. I'm retired now.

Morris Okay. How long have you been retired, sir?

Whittington I retired in 2001.

Morris Okay. And what have you been doing to, you know, kill your time since then, sir?

Whittington Okay. I'm very much into researching my ancestry – into genealogy. I've got a solid trace back to, now, I don't if you've ever heard of this, the story of Dick Woodington and his cat.

Morris No, sir.

Whittington But this was a guy who was Lord Mayor of London four different times. And anyway, he was a far-distant cousin, and I've gone 200 years past him, with a solid trace back, and that was a lot of fun. And I think I've got my own family tree built now. I'm working my wife's, and just anybody else that pops up. I thought, "Well, let's just see what," you know, "theirs looks like." That's a lot of fun.

I've been in ham radio for, since, well, it was 11 years old, and that technology keeps advancing. I mean, we were digital before digital phones were, you know, the thing. We were bouncing, you know, signals off the Moon, communicating that way. We've got a whole bunch of satellites up. Not our satellites, but we've got ham radio, we would piggyback on a lot of satellites that are up there. So you can send up with a little handheld and talk to somebody on the other side of the earth. And that, to me, is fascinating. So that's been something that's kept me really busy with my time – is ham radio.

And my wife and I like to travel, and, you know, if we get a few days that we can see we can get away to do something, we get in the car and go. And that's, you know – we had a great big map when we were in California, a huge, plasticized, ceiling-to-floor map of the whole state. And when I was there, I was able to take off, you know, and be gone for a week at a time, with no charge against any

vacation time, because I was on-duty 7 by 24 out there. They didn't require that much support, but I had to be there. So if I wanted to leave, they'd fly one of the managers out there to watch my equipment, because it was a little vacation for him to San Francisco, and we'd take off. And we went to little towns that we'd just find this map and say, "Let's go there this weekend." And we'd go to little towns in California that the average Californian had never heard of, and go spend the night, or sometimes not spend the night. Just go, come back. The travel was a big thing out there, especially in the mountains. Of course, California's got a lot of them, and that was an interesting thing.

0:37:15 **Working with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)**

Morris Okay, sir.

Whittington I was involved in the Voyager aircraft project that flew around the world, non-refueled, nonstop. It was the bird [Burt] Rutan designed. Canard, weird-looking airplane. And I worked on that for about two and a half months, or two and a half years, as a volunteer on the staff for the world-record flight, and they wanted me for my NASA background, because I knew how to solder without putting a lot of weight in the airplane and solder. Because they proved that if you improperly – if the crews that built the big Saturn [inaudible] spacecraft that we used to go to the Moon – they used too much solder – you could end up with five tons of solder in the spacecraft, that it would never get off the pad. And, so there's a very finite point in soldering where you can, you have just barely enough but not too much solder, and I had instructors for hand-soldering for, you know, air space flight hardware. And the Voyager crew wanted me for that reason, because I could keep the weight down. We put something in the plane in the wiring – in the way it's hooked up.

Morris And when's this again, sir? Like, can you give me a time frame?

Whittington This was from, like, '84 through, the plane flew in '87. It was those years.

Morris Okay, sir.

Whittington And they were up for just under 10 days, but they flew all the way around, you know, nonstop, from Edwards Air Force Base, back to Edwards Air Force Base, in California, nonstop and non-refueled.

Morris Did you enjoy working for NASA and with NASA projects?

Whittington Oh, yeah. Yeah. I was very much into that, and I also enjoyed the work when I was assigned to Patrick [Air Force Base] over at the Cape, because we were supporting the NASA effort, and we were right on the cutting-edge of everything there. And that was extremely, extremely fascinating and challenging. And it was the kind of a job you'd go into early, not to be on overtime – 'cause you couldn't just go clock in arbitrarily – but just to be part of it. And I worked the midnight shift, and a lot of times I'd still be over there at

noon just hanging around, watching stuff. You know, just to be part of it, and, you know, you'd realize, "Hey, I've got to go home and get some sleep." And sometimes they'd run you out, when there were too many of us hanging around, but it was extremely fascinating.

0:40:11

Wife and children

Morris And, sir, you mentioned your wife. How long have you been married, and who is she? Where did you meet her?

Whittington Okay. My first wife I met here locally. She was from Plant City, and we were married 16 years, and got a divorce. I was divorced 12 years, and I met my second wife in Zephyrhills, and she was with a company in California that provided mortgage insurance – was part of this thing. It kept the housing bubble sort of going, because it allowed you to buy a home with mortgage insurance instead of a much larger down payment. And it was a good concept. There was nothing under-handed about it. But anyway, she had 20 years with them, and she was in charge of a team that would go to the various offices around the country and underwrite, you know, maybe 500 loans at one time. They'd be there a week, and as such, you know, they flew constantly, and we always had a whole stack of frequent flyer tickets on the dresser. And we flew to England, to Ecuador, to Hawaii, to Alaska twice, on frequent flyer passes [*laughs*]. And took her folks to Alaska. And she enjoyed her work and enjoyed the travel, and I enjoyed being able to grab those tickets and say, "Let's go to jolly old England." [*laughs*]

Morris That must have been very convenient.

Whittington It was.

Morris And do you have any children, sir?

Whittington Yes. I do. I have a daughter and two boys. And my daughter lives in Brooksville, and the boys are in the Atlanta[, Georgia] area.

Morris What are their names and ages, sir?

Whittington Okay. My daughter is 46 now, and the oldest boy is 44, and the youngest one is 37. So they're getting up there.

Morris Are they all from the first marriage?

Whittington All from the first marriage. Right.

Morris Okay, sir. And, okay. Are they doing anything similar to what you did?

Whittington No. My daughter worked as a – she did hematology studies for Smith Klein Beacham in veterinary medicine. And I thought she was going to stay with it, because it was, you know, an excellent field, and she got out, and got into, of all

things, running a business, and she's got a fairly large one. But have you noticed on the freeways, you'll see a large load being hauled on the freeway, and there's a truck ahead of it with a flashing light?

Morris Mm-hm.

Whittington Called a pilot car?

Morris Yes, sir.

Whittington Well, she has a pilot car operation in Brooksville, and she's the biggest company east of the Mississippi. And she covers the whole country, because she's got contract drivers for her all over the country. That one driver can take the load from here to there, and then somebody else picks it up and goes on. And she even had a contract with NASA to escort those solid rocket boosters from the West Coast to the Cape. *[laughs]* And, you know, this was — she said, "Well, Dad will be proud of this." And I was. And she asked — they would always — when they would ship these boosters back, they would send two engineers from the plant with them, because they were very critical insofar as temperature and pressures and so forth went, even though they were solid fuel. And one of the engineers told her one time, he said, "If you see smoke coming out of the casing for one of those boosters, run." And she said, "Right, sir! But let me ask a question: which way?" *[laughs]* And I thought her sarcastic humor was a little bit funny, because, really, which way is it gonna go if it pops, you know? But, anyway, she does that.

And the oldest boy, regrettably, had a stroke a couple years ago, and his, you know — he won't be working anymore. And the young one works for a granite quarry in Atlanta — the north side of Atlanta — and is driving a truck, a dump truck. *[laughs]* So...

Morris Very eclectic.

Whittington Yeah. But he's still — even in this economy, he's still staying employed. So, you know, more power to him. *[laughs]*

0:45:25 **Serving in the Army and the Air Force**

Morris Definitely, sir. Could you tell us a little about your military experience?

Whittington Military experience. The first one — I was in the Army, and they sent me to Indianapolis for court reporter training, and I thought, "Wow," you know, "A court reporter!" And after four months there, learning to transcribe, you know, court proceedings, they sent three of us to Alaska, and we got up there, and they had civil service court reporters and no need for us. So they assigned me to the Army dock in Downtown Anchorage[, Alaska], and it was one of those dream tours that you get one of in the service. There were seven of us assigned there.

There was a captain, and two NCOs [non-commissioner officer], and the rest of us were enlisted.

And during the summer months, when the port was open and—you know, real busy, you'd work sometimes 36 hours straight, and during the winter months, when it was froze up and closed, you'd pull secure watch for 24 hours and, you know, you were off 48. Well, it wasn't missile science for us to get together and say, "Hey guys, let's pull it for a week straight and take two weeks off." [laughs] So I lived to ski though. I did. I loved skiing, and during winter months, you know, I'd work my week and then that was it. They wouldn't see me again until two weeks' time went by.

Morris You would have to be awake for a week straight, sir?

Whittington Oh, you wouldn't have to be awake. You'd just have to be on-duty there. The place was closed up and frozen over really. And you just had to be there and answer the phone. That's all.

Morris Okay, sir.

Whittington And also pull fire watch, and whatever.

Morris No. I understand.

Whittington But you didn't do anything. There were only two TV stations in Anchorage at that time. [laughs]

Morris Got a lot of reading done, sir?

Whittington Yeah. You did a lot of reading.

Morris Caught up on world events?

Whittington [laughs] But anyway, I should have stayed in. I mean, I was—I made E[nlisted Rank]-4 after 18 months. and I had my private license at that time, and if you had any college at all—I had one year at Southern—Florida Southern [College]—you could apply for the warrant officer program, go to Fort Rucker, Alabama, and get helicopter training. And I always wanted a rotary wing rating. I mean, I wanted a chopper rating. But some little voice said, "Don't do it." Because if I had, I'd have been one of the first Huey pilots in [the] Vietnam [War].

Morris Yeah.

Whittington One of the first, 'cause this was in 1959, and I would have gotten through warrant officer school and flight training by about 1961, and Vietnam was just starting to stir about then. And a good friend from high school here was the first commissioned officer killed in Vietnam, Terry Cordell. First one killed over there. And I knew Terry. He was our football captain, and he was a senior, and I

was a freshman. Just a real nice guy. But flying an observation plane, got shot down. That was the end of Terry.

Morris And then you got out of the Army. What after that, sir?

Whittington Went out of the Army in 1959, and enlisted in the Air Force in '62, and was in there until July '64, when I got the medical discharge. And I was actually [laughs] – I don't even like to tell people about it, but in – when I saw the end of the NASA thing coming, the Army had a program at that time called "Stripes for Skills," and they offered me an E-5 and choice of assignment, which I took Denver, Colorado – but based on my NASA background. They wanted somebody that had some satellite experience, and so the deal was that I go through a little three-week refresher basic, and then would be assigned to Denver, Colorado, as an E-5. And they enlisted my wife at the same time. This was my first wife. She had court reporter experience, and they would put her through the same program, and she would have to go through the full wide basic, but they would assign us to both to go to the same base, and as much as they could, you know, in the military, would keep us together.

But at that time, I'd had a medical discharge, I had three kids, I was overage, I had all kind of disqualifiers. And a retired general and old-timer [inaudible] there where I was working for NASA, said, "Go to the Pentagon." And, like a dummy, I climbed in the car, and we headed off to the Pentagon, and got there at eight o'clock in the morning, and got in with the crowd that, you know, was going into work, and I fell in with this bird colonel, and he said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Well, I need to see the Army G2." And he says, "Oh, yeah?" [laughs] He couldn't believe this – me and my wife and three kids. I mean, it blew him away so badly, that he took us and signed us in, and he says, "Stay right here." And finally, somebody from that office came down, and saw all of us kind of sitting there, and he said, "What do you want?" I said, "I want a waiver for the disqualifiers that are keeping me out of the Minuteman program." And I talked to the guy for about an hour, and I've got the letter that waives my disqualifications to go back in the Army. [laughs] You know, this was after a medical discharge, three kids, and overage.

But anyway, I went to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, went through this little basic training, which was kind of fun – learning the new weapons and new techniques and stuff. And then, everybody else left, and no assignment. Another guy and I were by ourselves in the outfit, and just the cadre people were still there, and finally, they came through and they said, "We hate to admit it, but the Army has enlisted about 10 people in that career field for every slot we have." And he said – this was the [inaudible] – said, "We can't offer you Denver, Colorado." Or Fort – can't think of the base there now – but he said, "We can offer you Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and E-3, and no concurrent assignment with your wife." And I said, "Or what else?" And he said, "Or a discharge." And I said, "Let's go with plan B." [laughs] So, I mean, I had a very short second enlistment in the Army.

Morris After all that trouble.

Whittington After all that trouble, you know.

Morris Shoot.

Whittington But I didn't really like the changes I'd seen in the Army either, at that time. I just don't know. It just – there was a change in discipline, and attitudes, and stuff, that I would have had trouble with, because of coming from the Army of the late '50s to the Army of the mid-'70s. And, I mean, there were guys, even in the training barracks, sitting in the dark smoking pot, and it was – I mean, I'm not that much against pot, but it was against Army regulations and against common sense. And to think like that, I was just this lad, and it didn't work out, because I'm sure that would have gotten me in trouble, complaining about it – those kind of issues later on. So it's just as well that I didn't end up in that.

Morris Okay, sir. And was that the end of your military experience then?

Whittington That was the end of it.

0:55:04 **Apollo 8**

Morris Okay. Are there any historical events that come to mind, over the course of your entire life, sir? Like anything in your life that you felt like stands out or was, you know – that just changed your world, I guess I could say?

Whittington Well, being on the biomed[ical] council at Houston for the flight of the Apollo 8, the slingshot flight around the Moon, that to me was, it was just sort of a highlight in my life, because I was part of something that it was a first for us, for the U.S., that we were going to the Moon, and I'll be in a small part. I was part of it. And I was just so impressed with the guys in the spacecraft. I was watching all their, you know – their biomedical functions, and I had no medical training at all. I was there being able to feed the biomed data that was being stripped out of the calorimetry to anyone in mission control that needed it for any reason. All they did was call me and say, "Give me biomed." And I could patch that data to them, and I had to keep the equipment that stripped it out of the calorimetry downstream, had to keep that up and running, and it was real fussy stuff, because it was built very hurriedly. But, I was watching all of their, you know, their vital signs, and Frank Borman – Colonel Frank Borman – the mission commander's pulse at T-2 was 80, and mine was way over 100. I mean, I was wound up. We're going to the Moon! And, here he's up there, "Okay, let's – gonna go?" You know. And I was – I thought, *Wow. The ultimate test pilot.* You know, the thing could blast into a million pieces. You know, he was ready to take a chance on it.

Morris Okay, sir. That's interesting.

0:57:01

Closing remarks

Whittington That was, that's sort of a highlight, and the time in Israel was, that too was a definite attitude-adjuster for me because, you know, seeing the way those people live, the way they felt about their country, and their faith and everything, it just – and I felt that every American Jew, really – they can't now, because of the mess over there – but I felt that back then, they should spend some time in the Holy Land and see, you know, where they came from, and get an experience with the people who still lived there. The attitudes over here are a lot more lax and whatever than they are in Israel.

Morris Definitely, sir. Is there anything you'd like to discuss that we haven't covered?

Whittington That's about it. It's been a real pleasure discussing this with you.

Morris Thank you, sir. It's been a pleasure.

Whittington And, you know, if you can send me a CD or something, I'd love to have it for the record.

Morris I will definitely do that, sir.

Whittington Okay.

End of Interview