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Charles Yeager

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SOCIETY OF YEAGER SCHOLARS

TAPE 3

October 14, 1987

AN INTERVIEW WITH: Brig. Gen. Charles Chuck Yeager

CONDUCTED BY: Michele Shank

TRANSCRIBED BY: Michele Shank

TYPED BY: Michele Shank

10-14-87

Brig. General Charles E. "Chuck" Yeager (1923 -)

This interview took place at the Yeager suite of offices in Old Main on October 14, 1987 - the fortieth anniversary of his barrier breaking flight. In this interview, General Yeager speaks of his early life in West Virginia and his Air Force career. He defines leadership and the meaning of courage. He also outlines his expectations for the Yeager Scholars.

An oral interview by

Michele A. Shank

Michele: This is one in a series of taped interviews on the history of Society of Yeager Scholars. It is October the 14th, 1987. My name is Michele Shank, and I'm in Huntington, West Virginia in the Yeager Scholars suite interviewing General Charles Yeager. (There is evidently some loss of tape here. General Yeager comes in in the middle of a sentence.)

Gen. Yeager: So that's where the book came from.

Michele: So your book came from an oral history?

Gen. Yeager: An oral history program. And it was. . . we just gave a manuscript to Bantam and it was natural. . . just printed.

Michele: Just zipped it right out, huh?

Gen. Yeager: Yep.

Michele: That's great. Tell me. . . tell me a little bit about when you were growing up in West Virginia. I know a lot of people ask you a lot of questions about West Virginia.

Gen. Yeager: Well, the main thing I think. . . like Hamlin was a very rural area, at least it was back in the late 20's and 30's, when I grew up out there. I was born in '23 and moved to Hamlin, oh, probably in 1927 or 28. And then I was raised out there and we were basically part farm people, but Dad was a natural gas driller, but we did have cows and hogs and kept a rather large garden. We had to hoe corn, you know, do things like kids do and then go to school. And then we'd also hunt on the weekends or evenings or any chance we got away.

Michele: So what were the toys like?

Gen. Yeager: Well, you know, you just had to do them. That's part of your job.

Michele: No, toys. Not chores, toys.

Gen. Yeager: We didn't really have toys. We made our own toys. For instance. . .

Michele: Did you play. . .

Gen. Yeager: Rubber guns. Yeah, we made rubber guns. We'd take and carve guns out of wood boards, then cut truck tires up for rubbers and we'd make repeaters rubber guns and slingshots. Everybody had slingshots. In fact, I hunted with them a lot.

Michele: Really?

Gen. Yeager: Yeah.

Michele: What did you hunt? Birds? Uh. . .

Gen. Yeager: Quail.

Michele: Really?

Gen. Yeager: Well, not quail. Squirrels, primarily. Rabbits.

Michele: Did you eat the squirrels?

Gen. Yeager: Oh, sure. Always.

Michele: Skin them and soak them in salt? Is that what mama did?

Gen. Yeager: Yeah. Then stew them with dumplings. Basically, the school was . . . some parts of school was interesting. Grade school I don't really remember an awful lot about. I did play in the band, the school band, a trombone. And then by the time I got

into high school, I was playing football and basketball. So sports, we got involved with that and we had trips with the band. And oh, the interesting classes to me in school was geometry, algebra, and typing. Everything else was a drag. And it was reflected in my grades, like English literature, history. Things like that. Always typing, and geometry and math, I always made straight A's. They were fun. That was about it.

Michele: O.k. So basically, when you were growing up as a boy, you were. . . do you have neighborhood boys to play with and brothers? Did you have brothers and sisters?

Gen. Yeager: Yeah, I had an older brother about year and half older than me. We played a lot together. But you did. You had other guys. . . other kids in town you palled around with. Fished and swam in the river. Did things like that.

Michele: Skinny dipping in the river?

Gen. Yeager: Yeah. We didn't own a bathing suit.

Michele: That wasn't a worry. (Laugh)

Gen. Yeager: Nope. (Laughing)

Michele: O.k. How old were you when you entered the Air Force?

Gen. Yeager: Eighteen. We finished high school in June, 1941, and I bummed around town there for a couple of months. September of 41 I went ahead and enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

Michele: Is that what the boys were doing or were you motivated some other way to do it?

Gen. Yeager: Well, that was the thing to do then, enlist in the military, because we were mobilizing and the Army recruiters were probably better than the Navy recruiters. So I joined the Army Air Corps.

Michele: Um-hmmm. And I understand from listening to one of your biographical tapes that you. . . the first time up, you got sick.

Gen. Yeager: Well, yeah, and you see, I didn't know anything about airplanes. And I was trained as a mechanic and worked on them as a G.I. in 41, 42 and got selected for pilot training. And then started flying. Then once you get involved, you know, it's just from then on like driving a car.

Michele: Joe Engles said he couldn't imagine why anyone wouldn't love . . . what is there not to love about an airplane. Do you feel that same way?

Gen. Yeager: Yeah. It's a way of life. Just like anything, you know, new and high performance. You enjoy flying it.

Michele: Did you think about breaking the sound barrier forty years ago?

Gen. Yeager: No. You don't think about nothing. You know, people who talk about predicting things are blowing smoke up your fanny. It's just. . . the thing is you live day to day and you work with

equipment you have and especially as a scientific guy, later on when I became a test pilot, you don't predict things. You just see them happening. And I had no idea about being a test pilot when I came back from the war. I was a maintenance officer and then was selected for test pilot school and attended that. And then started working on test programs - you know, just the right place at the right time. Really not a . . . to me, this so called career planning is a waste of good talent. God dammit, you should take advantage of what you . . . you know, it's things as they come by, and take advantage of them.

Michele: What advice have you given this weekend to the Yeager Scholars when they've asked you questions about careers. . . ?

Gen. Yeager: We haven't talked to the Yeager Scholars at all yet.

Michele: That's this afternoon? Yeah, o.k.

Gen. Yeager: Yeah, that's this afternoon. The only time I've met them was last night for the first time, you see, and only socially and just for a few minutes.

Michele: So you still have some things to talk over with them.

Gen. Yeager: Well, primarily ask them questions. I think the one thing. . . and they are already getting the word, hey, there's not a hell of a lot a person can tell an individual like a scholar that would effect his thinking. The main thing is that you've got to train them and get them to thinking for themselves and getting them to take advantage of things as they come along.

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Michele: This program is supposed to make or create leaders. What would be your definition of leadership?

Gen. Yeager: Well, primarily, it's a kid who has a well rounded education, not necessarily academic, but socially, and learning what the rest of the world's like. And how people live in the rest of the world. And the academics just to give you some tools to work with. And then you should really get with the program and start making decisions on your own and become independent.

Michele: O.k. When did you hear about the scholarship program here at Marshall? What was the first time they said something?

Gen. Yeager: Like I said last night, Joe Hunnicutt. . . you know, they called and said we've got this program we'd like to initiate and we'd like to use your name. And what do you think? And I said, well, what are you going to do? You know. And how are you going to do it? And it just so happened that I was coming back to see my sister, I had to do something somewhere. Anyway, I landed at 4:00 in the afternoon and Joe Hunnicutt and a couple of others from the Marshall University here said, well, we'll pick you up and take you to Hamlin, or to your sisters, and talk to you on the way, because I was really pressed for time. So I said o.k. And I got in the car and Joe Hunnicutt explained what they intended doing with donations and

get enough of a fund to perpetuate their. . . live off the interest for the rest of the . . . time and the twenty scholars, picking the best, and the type of education they wanted to give them was, you know, a well rounded education. Not let them major in any thing. Just make them be good in everything. And in thirty minutes it took to drive from the airport down to my sister's house, we stopped and they kept talking and I kept listening. Then we went in Pansy's house, she fixed a cup of coffee, we sat there and I said, yes, sounds like a fair deal to me. Press on. And then they said, well we'd like to make this video tape up there at the Space Museum about the need for a better educated individual. And I worked it in with the trip to Washington and we did that. And then the thing snowballed and got out of hand (laughing).

Michele: (Laughing) And here you are.

Gen. Yeager: That's the way it works.

Michele: What did Glennis think of this? Did she. . .?

Gen. Yeager: She thought it was. . . once she read the . . . see she gets and I get a thousand wild proposals and schemes every day. So you look at. . . you begin to become, you know, a real pessimist when some guy is trying to sell you a bill of good. And she was a little apprehensive about this, until she read and got involved. And then she realized it was a high quality

type of program. And she said, that's great. And she's all for it. And that's the way everybody's looked at it.

Michele: She's been wonderful, I understand, in supplying information and organizing.

Gen. Yeager: Yeah, and it was her idea to give them our memorabilia. It's a good idea. And it does something.

Michele: Did you think that adding your name to this program would make it successful?

Gen. Yeager: I don't think.

Michele: You don't think? (Laughing)

Gen. Yeager: That's what I said. . .

Michele: Is that the secret to your success (laughing).

Gen. Yeager: Didn't I tell you about predicting things and breaking the sound . . . hey, I don't because really, if you don't have any control over something, forget it. It goes by itself.

Michele: Good. People say how courageous you are, and what a hero you are. Were there any heroes in your childhood that you remember?

Gen. Yeager: Well, it's like I said in my book. My heroes were guys that were good with their hands, making furniture, shake, gun, good shots, good hunters. That's the only people you knew. Then later you. . . guys like General Doolittle, to me was . . . anybody that demonstrates professionalism in what they do is a hero to me. Like Joe Engle and his lean and mean crew that

went up and picked up the Hughes satellite and repaired it and put it back into orbit. It shows professionalism. They do a good job. Those are what you might classify as heroes.

Michele: Can you define what courage. . the word courage means to you?

Gen. Yeager: Courage. . . no, in my opinion. Courage is an expression that is a result of a dedication to duty. And people mistakenly call, I think, duty courage a lot, because dedication to duty to a military guy is that you do something regardless of the outcome because it's your duty. And that's the same way it happened in World War II, as a fighter pilot. You go over, your job is to shoot down airplanes. You know half of you are not coming back. But what the hell. That's your duty and that's the way you look at it. The same way with the X-1. It doesn't take courage to fly the X-1. It takes dedication to duty. And that's the way you'll see most military guys involved in stuff like research flying. It's your job. You've got to do it. And that's what you do.

Michele: After you flew in the X-1 and came back to normal life, how long was it before we were able to publicize that you had broken the sound barrier?

Gen. Yeager: Well, about a year before they publicized that we'd broken the speed of sound, or flown faster than sound. And then of course, we classified the whole program, primarily, we

classified the data that we got, you know about flying tails and things like that. We never released that to the rest of the world for, oh, five or six years.

Michele: So, really, did very many people think Chuck Yeager was a hero back in that time?

Gen. Yeager: It didn't make any difference whether they did or not. The guys who were involved in research flying with you know what you are doing because they are doing it too. And the rest of the world you can care less about. So that's not the reason you do it, you know.

Michele: I know there for a time, your career. . . the way your career was going, did you have a lot of speaking engagements or this just after the book, or. . .?

Gen. Yeager: Oh, sure, almost every guy. . . you know. When I came back from the war, even before I became a test pilot, sure, I had a lot of speaking engagements. That's because I was an Ace and I'd shot down a lot of airplanes and I knew a lot about being a fighter pilot. I was West Virginia's leading Ace, for crying out loud, before I even got involved with the X-1. Yes, I gave a lot of talks and briefing on air combat tactics and World War II. Then the X-1 stuff, after summer '48, you were involved in a lot of, oh, civic organizations talks, and that was some good and some bad. You know, politicians, when they get involved,

Christ, it turns to crap. Unfortunately (laughing). But just like at Rotary Clubs, or Lions Clubs or Kiwanis Club would call their senator, you know, in Washington, and how about getting Chuck Yeager to give a talk at our school, or at our meeting, you know. And if he's on the military Appropriations Committee, call the Chief of Staff, say I want Yeager, well Yeager's busy. Up to his hind-end in alligators, doing test work at Edward's. He can't, you know, we can't spare him. Well, you want money for your Air Force that, you know. . .

Michele: The squeeze (laughing).

Gen. Yeager: I remember one time. I was never so mad in my life. You know, Air Force came out to Edwards, said you have to go to a certain state to a Kiwanis Club and give luncheon talk. I say, hey, man I'm flying eighteen hours a day, I can't . . . Well, the Chief of Staff says go. And this was very important, you have to go. I said, o.k., where do I go. Close certain hotels at 12:00 in this town, and I took off from Edwards about 4:00 in the morning, busting my tail getting there in a jet, roll the uniform up and stick it in the gun bay and get there and change in the crapper. And you know, show up, you are a captain in the air force military. You must be on the program. Yeah, yeah. So they set you down at the head table and Christ you eat and nobody knows you. And finally some guy sitting next to

you lights a big cigar and says, say, hey, son, you a captain.
. . . Yes, sir . . . I'm supposed to introduce you today. What
are you famous for? You know, you feel like getting up and
walking out, because that's the way people try to use you.
That's the way it was in the old days. And yes, we got exposed
to a lot of abuse, not abuse, because you've got to look at it
as your job. It's part of selling the Air Force. But I
learned real quick how to handle people like that.

Michele: That's part of your personality, I'd think.

Gen. Yeager: Yeah, right.

Michele: That's great. An old West Virginia boy. What was the most
valuable lesson that your mother taught you?

Gen. Yeager: It didn't in one lesson. It's the way you're taught. It's
your dedication of, you know, if you've got a job to do, then
do it. Oh, the morality environment that you are raised in.

Michele: Are you a religious man?

Gen. Yeager: Well . . . the point is, what does being a religious person
mean? Does a religious person have to go to church all day and
pray every night and morning? No, to me, if that's the
description of a religious person, then I'm definitely not a
religious person. But that I definitely know right from wrong,
you know, and what honesty is and because you were taught that
in your family. But you don't have to believe that there is

such a thing as a God who controls everything that happens because you are trained as a scientific guy, you know. You know. . . there are a lot of things, like you use the expression, the more I practice, the luckier I get.

(Laughing) And that sort of thing. And no, I'm not what you would describe a very religious individual, of spending a lot of time in a church. Because to me I've got other things to do.

Michele: Alright. Now, let's talk about Chuck Yeager's personal time for a second. The mountains. Golden trout. Is that where you run away?

Gen. Yeager: No. I can run away in the middle of a city, as far as that's concerned. If I want to turn something off, I do. No, we just go back in the high country like Bud Anderson and I, backpacking, because we enjoy the country and the fish are excellent eating. It's a lot of fun, good exercise and we do that. We hunt a lot together. I go Alaska and other places. Basically, it's not getting away. I can have fun doing anything.

Michele: But private time. . . private time at home with Glennis. What do you do - watch T.V.?

Gen. Yeager: Well, no. I've got a lot. . . I've got guns to clean, I've got to work on the car, I've got to build something, or cut wood and split it. I've always got something to do, you know.

Michele: I understand that the waters pretty cold up in the Rocky basin of the Sahara and . . .

Gen. Yeager: In the high Sierra's.

Michele: Yeah. And you explained that at a formal dinner at the Smithsonian to a lovely lady in a sequined dress one time.

Gen. Yeager: It wasn't lovely, it was. . .

Michele: So I'd like to hear what that . . . uh, your explanation was of cold water. (Laughing)

Gen. Yeager: (Laughing) That's Joe Engle's story. You should get him to tell you.

Michele: (Laughing) You're not going to enlighten me on that one?

Gen. Yeager: No, no. It was just one of those typical dinners when you get bored with somebody, if you'll pardon the expression, that's all tits and diamonds. (Laughing)

Michele: So you gave her a good country boy. . .

Gen. Yeager: We kind of put them in their place.

Michele: Chuck, the students here, I know you'll be getting to know them and you have been working for the university just great. You are not just a figurehead, which surprises a lot of people. They thought only your name was coming with this. And you have proven to be such a wonderful supporter and you've been out talking and doing and recruiting and all that. Do you have any special expectations for the Yeager Scholars?

Gen. Yeager: Well, no. You see, I've been exposed to some pretty talented individuals in my life. You know, guys have to be very talented to survive like in research flying and combat flying. And you pick up their traits. And the main thing that you notice amongst like those twenty scholars. And last night, for the first time, you know. They are brand new here in school and you present them with the pin. I don't know if you noticed last night, everyone of those kids did exactly the right thing at the right time. When they came up, they took the pin in the left hand, they shook hands with the right hand, they looked at the camera, and did exactly. . . now that's very unusual for a collective group of kids. And so you can see, they are talented, they've got good heads on their shoulders. And obviously, they don't let anybody blow smoke up their fanny.

Michele: Chuck Yeager, we love you and thank you for being gracious enough to give me this time. And congratulations on your fortieth anniversary.

Gen. Yeager: Thank you.

BRIG. GEN. CHARLES "CHUCK" YEAGER
October 15, 1987

History of the Marshall University Yeager Scholars Program

Yeager, a native of Hamlin, West Virginia, [Lincoln County] gives a brief history of his family ^{life} ~~history~~, growing up in Lincoln County, his service in the Air Force, and breaking the sound barrier. He then discusses how he was asked to be the "namesake" of the Yeager Scholars program at Marshall, Joe Hunnicutt, former president Dale Nitzschke, the first group of Yeager scholars and his work with them.

REVIEW RELEASE

I, Charles E. Yeager, have reviewed by oral history
interview made on 10-15-87 and with my signature below give
permission for the use of my interview as agreed upon in the release
agreement.

x Feb. 24, 94
(DATE)

ADDRESS:

PHONE:

x Charles E. Yeager
(SIGNATURE)
Po Box 128
Cedar Ridge Ca 95924
(916) 273-8681

To be completed by interviewer or secretary.

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Interviewer: Michelle Shank

ADDRESS: Ashland, KY
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Michele: So your book came from an oral history?

Gen. Yeager: An oral history program. And it was. . . we just gave a manuscript to Bantam and it was natural. . . just printed.

Michele: Just zipped it right out, huh?

Gen. Yeager: Yep.

Michele: That's great. Tell me. . . tell me a little bit about when you were growing up in West Virginia. I know a lot of people ask you a lot of questions about West Virginia.

Gen. Yeager: Well, the main thing I think. . . like Hamlin was a very rural area, at least it was back in the late 20's and 30's, when I grew up out there. I was born in '23 and moved to Hamlin, oh, probably in 1927 or 28. And then I was raised out there and we were basically part farm people, but Dad was a natural gas driller, but we did have cows and hogs and kept a rather large garden. We had to hoe corn, you know, do things like kids do and then go to school. And then we'd also hunt on the weekends or evenings or any chance we got away.

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Michele: Skinny dipping in the river?

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Michele: That wasn't a worry. (Laugh)

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Michele: O.k. How old were you when you entered the Air Force?

Gen. Yeager: Eighteen. We finished high school in June, 1941, and I bummed around town there for a couple of months. September of 41 I went ahead and enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

Michele: Is that what the boys were doing or were you motivated some other way to do it?

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Michele: O.k. When did you hear about the scholarship program here at Marshall? What was the first time they said something?

Gen. Yeager: Like I said last night, Joe Hunnicutt. . . you know, they called and said we've got this program we'd like to initiate and we'd like to use your name. And what do you think? And I said, well, what are you going to do? You know. And how are you going to do it? And it just so happened that I was coming back to see my sister, I had to do something somewhere. Anyway, I landed at 4:00 in the afternoon and Joe Hunnicutt and a couple of others from the Marshall University here said, well, we'll pick you up and take you to Hamlin, or to your sisters, and talk to you on the way, because I was really pressed for time. So I said o.k. And I got in the car and Joe Hunnicutt explained what they intended doing with donations and

get enough of a fund to perpetuate their. . . live off the interest for the rest of the . . . time and the twenty scholars, picking the best, and the type of education they wanted to give them was, you know, a well rounded education. Not let them major in any thing. Just make them be good in everything. And in thirty minutes it took to drive from the airport down to my sister's house, we stopped and they kept talking and I kept listening. Then we went in Pansy's house, she fixed a cup of coffee, we sat there and I said, yes, sounds like a fair deal to me. Press on. And then they said, well we'd like to make this video tape up there at the Space Museum about the need for a better educated individual. And I worked it in with the trip to Washington and we did that. And then the thing snowballed and got out of hand (laughing).

Michele: (Laughing) And here you are.

Gen. Yeager: That's the way it works.

Michele: What did Glennis think of this? Did she. . . ?

Gen. Yeager: She thought it was. . . once she read the . . . see she gets and I get a thousand wild proposals and schemes every day. So you look at. . . you begin to become, you know, a real pessimist when some guy is trying to sell you a bill of good. And she was a little apprehensive about this, until she read and got involved. And then she realized it was a high quality

type of program. And she said, that's great. And she's all for it. And that's the way everybody's looked at it.

Michele: She's been wonderful, I understand, in supplying information and organizing.

Gen. Yeager: Yeah, and it was her idea to give them our memorabilia. It's a good idea. And it does something.

Michele: Did you think that adding your name to this program would make it successful?

Gen. Yeager: I don't think.

Michele: You don't think? (Laughing)

Gen. Yeager: That's what I said. . .

Michele: Is that the secret to your success (laughing).

Gen. Yeager: Didn't I tell you about predicting things and breaking the sound . . . hey, I don't because really, if you don't have any control over something, forget it. It goes by itself.

Michele: Good. People say how courageous you are, and what a hero you are. Were there any heroes in your childhood that you remember?

Gen. Yeager: Well, it's like I said in my book. My heroes were guys that were good with their hands, making furniture, shake, gun, good shots, good hunters. That's the only people you knew. Then later you. . . guys like General Doolittle, to me was . . . anybody that demonstrates professionalism in what they do is a hero to me. Like Joe Engle and his lean and mean crew that

went up and picked up the Hughes satellite and repaired it and put it back into orbit. It shows professionalism. They do a good job. Those are what you might classify as heroes.

Michele: Can you define what courage. . the word courage means to you?

Gen. Yeager: Courage. . . no, in my opinion. Courage is an expression that is a result of a dedication to duty. And people mistakenly call, I think, duty courage a lot, because dedication to duty to a military guy is that you do something regardless of the outcome because it's your duty. And that's the same way it happened in World War II, as a fighter pilot. You go over, your job is to shoot down airplanes. You know half of you are not coming back. But what the hell. That's your duty and that's the way you look at it. The same way with the X-1. It doesn't take courage to fly the X-1. It takes dedication to duty. And that's the way you'll see most military guys involved in stuff like research flying. It's your job. You've got to do it. And that's what you do.

Michele: After you flew in the X-1 and came back to normal life, how long was it before we were able to publicize that you had broken the sound barrier?

Gen. Yeager: Well, about a year before they publicized that we'd broken the speed of sound, or flown faster than sound. And then of course, we classified the whole program, primarily, we

classified the data that we got, you know about flying tails and things like that. We never released that to the rest of the world for, oh, five or six years.

Michele: So, really, did very many people think Chuck Yeager was a hero back in that time?

Gen. Yeager: It didn't make any difference whether they did or not. The guys who were involved in research flying with you know what you are doing because they are doing it too. And the rest of the world you can care less about. So that's not the reason you do it, you know.

Michele: I know there for a time, your career. . . the way your career was going, did you have a lot of speaking engagements or this just after the book, or. . . ?

Gen. Yeager: Oh, sure, almost every guy. . . you know. When I came back from the war, even before I became a test pilot, sure, I had a lot of speaking engagements. That's because I was an Ace and I'd shot down a lot of airplanes and I knew a lot about being a fighter pilot. I was West Virginia's leading Ace, for crying out loud, before I even got involved with the X-1. Yes, I gave a lot of talks and briefing on air combat tactics and World War II. Then the X-1 stuff, after summer '48, you were involved in a lot of, oh, civic organizations talks, and that was some good and some bad. You know, politicians, when they get involved,

Christ, it turns to crap. Unfortunately (laughing). But just like at Rotary Clubs, or Lions Clubs or Kiwanis Club would call their senator, you know, in Washington, and how about getting Chuck Yeager to give a talk at our school, or at our meeting, you know. And if he's on the military Appropriations Committee, call the Chief of Staff, say I want Yeager, well Yeager's busy. Up to his hind-end in alligators, doing test work at Edward's. He can't, you know, we can't spare him. Well, you want money for your Air Force that, you know. . .

Michele: The squeeze (laughing).

Gen. Yeager: I remember one time. I was never so mad in my life. You know, Air Force came out to Edwards, said you have to go to a certain state to a Kiwanis Club and give luncheon talk. I say, hey, man I'm flying eighteen hours a day, I can't . . . Well, the Chief of Staff says go. And this was very important, you have to go. I said, o.k., where do I go. Close certain hotels at 12:00 in this town, and I took off from Edwards about 4:00 in the morning, busting my tail getting there in a jet, roll the uniform up and stick it in the gun bay and get there and change in the crapper. And you know, show up, you are a captain in the air force military. You must be on the program. Yeah, yeah. So they set you down at the head table and Christ you eat and nobody knows you. And finally some guy sitting next to

you lights a big cigar and says, say, hey, son, you a captain.
. . . Yes, sir . . . I'm supposed to introduce you today. What
are you famous for? You know, you feel like getting up and
walking out, because that's the way people try to use you.
That's the way it was in the old days. And yes, we got exposed
to a lot of abuse, not abuse, because you've got to look at it
as your job. It's part of selling the Air Force. But I
learned real quick how to handle people like that.

Michele: That's part of your personality, I'd think.

Gen. Yeager: Yeah, right.

Michele: That's great. An old West Virginia boy. What was the most
valuable lesson that your mother taught you?

Gen. Yeager: It didn't in one lesson. It's the way you're taught. It's
your dedication of, you know, if you've got a job to do, then
do it. Oh, the morality environment that you are raised in.

Michele: Are you a religious man?

Gen. Yeager: Well . . . the point is, what does being a religious person
mean? Does a religious person have to go to church all day and
pray every night and morning? No, to me, if that's the
description of a religious person, then I'm definitely not a
religious person. But that I definitely know right from wrong,
you know, and what honesty is and because you were taught that
in your family. But you don't have to believe that there is

such a thing as a God who controls everything that happens because you are trained as a scientific guy, you know. You know. . . there are a lot of things, like you use the expression, the more I practice, the luckier I get.

(Laughing) And that sort of thing. And no, I'm not what you would describe a very religious individual, of spending a lot of time in a church. Because to me I've got other things to do.

Michele: Alright. Now, let's talk about Chuck Yeager's personal time for a second. The mountains. Golden trout. Is that where you run away?

Gen. Yeager: No. I can run away in the middle of a city, as far as that's concerned. If I want to turn something off, I do. No, we just go back in the high country like Bud Anderson and I, backpacking, because we enjoy the country and the fish are excellent eating. It's a lot of fun, good exercise and we do that. We hunt a lot together. I go Alaska and other places. Basically, it's not getting away. I can have fun doing anything.

Michele: But private time. . . private time at home with Glennis. What do you do - watch T.V.?

Gen. Yeager: Well, no. I've got a lot. . . I've got guns to clean, I've got to work on the car, I've got to build something, or cut wood and split it. I've always got something to do, you know.

Michele: I understand that the waters pretty cold up in the Rocky basin of the Sahara and . . .

Gen. Yeager: In the high Sierra's.

Michele: Yeah. And you explained that at a formal dinner at the Smithsonian to a lovely lady in a sequined dress one time.

Gen. Yeager: It wasn't lovely, it was. . .

Michele: So I'd like to hear what that . . . uh, your explanation was of cold water. (Laughing)

Gen. Yeager: (Laughing) That's Joe Engle's story. You should get him to tell you.

Michele: (Laughing) You're not going to enlighten me on that one?

Gen. Yeager: No, no. It was just one of those typical dinners when you get bored with somebody, if you'll pardon the expression, that's all tits and diamonds. (Laughing)

Michele: So you gave her a good country boy. . .

Gen. Yeager: We kind of put them in their place.

Michele: Chuck, the students here, I know you'll be getting to know them and you have been working for the university just great. You are not just a figurehead, which surprises a lot of people. They thought only your name was coming with this. And you have proven to be such a wonderful supporter and you've been out talking and doing and recruiting and all that. Do you have any special expectations for the Yeager Scholars?

Gen. Yeager: Well, no. You see, I've been exposed to some pretty talented individuals in my life. You know, guys have to be very talented to survive like in research flying and combat flying. And you pick up their traits. And the main thing that you notice amongst like those twenty scholars. And last night, for the first time, you know. They are brand new here in school and you present them with the pin. I don't know if you noticed last night, everyone of those kids did exactly the right thing at the right time. When they came up, they took the pin in the left hand, they shook hands with the right hand, they looked at the camera, and did exactly. . . now that's very unusual for a collective group of kids. And so you can see, they are talented, they've got good heads on their shoulders. And obviously, they don't let anybody blow smoke up their fanny.

Michele: Chuck Yeager, we love you and thank you for being gracious enough to give me this time. And congratulations on your fortieth anniversary.

Gen. Yeager: Thank you.