

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WILLIAM A. CAROW
B-24 Pilot, Air Force, World War II.

1999

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Carow, William A., (1924-2011). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 70 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

William A. “Bill” Carow, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a bomber pilot with the 465th Bomb Group in northern Africa and Italy. Carow touches on training as a fighter pilot, being assigned to a B-24 crew in Mountain Home (Idaho), and flying his first missions out of Benghazi (Libya) before being moved to Brindisi (Italy). He states his crew had two belly turret gunners who were killed by flak. Carow discusses being covered by red-tailed P-51 airplanes and later being surprised to discover they were flown by African-Americans (the Tuskegee Airmen). He details his participation in Operation Tidal Wave: getting lost on his way to the oil fields in Ploesti (Romania), seeing the oil fields disguised with canvas, and having a month off afterwards because his plane was so badly damaged. Carow talks about the aircraft engines having problems caused by desert sand, compares American and British bombers, and reflects on the British practice of night missions while Americans primarily flew during the day. He lists cities he bombed in Germany and describes a typical mission, including inspecting his airplane before taking off and attending mass upon return. Carow comments on wearing layers to stay warm at high altitudes, living conditions in Libya and Italy, receiving Coca Cola rations, and exchanging letters with his future wife. He mentions once losing two engines, having a short runway in Italy, water supply in Libya and Italy, and flying through black clouds of flak. Carow expresses why the B-24 was a better airplane than the B-17. He describes seeing German pilots land their planes at his base to defect, talking with them, and the stripping of the German planes for souvenirs. With enough missions to return to the United States before the war ended, he states he was in the first group of veterans to attend the University of Wisconsin under the GI Bill. Carow mentions joining the Air Reserve and meeting informally with other ex-B-24 pilots. He analyzes the development of American aircraft during the war, the limited hydraulics on the B-24, and the use of parachutes. Carow talks about piloting and navigating skills he learned on the job. Given free reign in an airplane on leave, he tells of sight seeing in Cairo (Egypt) and Palestine and making a large profit by buying oranges in Palestine to sell at his airbase. Carow portrays the “no mercy” mentality of the British pilots he shared an airfield with in Italy and tells of getting a half hour of air time in a British Spitfire.

Biographical Sketch:

Carow (1924-2011) flew forty-six missions as a B-24 pilot during World War II. Born in Duluth (Minnesota), he moved to Madison (Wisconsin) at age seven and enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942. After an honorable discharge, he worked forty years at the Madison Fire Department.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999
Transcribed by Lorelee Brumund, 2011-2012
Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2012
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

Jim: All right, now. Where were you born?

Bill: Duluth, Minnesota; I left at age seven for Madison.

Jim: And you were born when?

Bill: 6-9-24.

Jim: '24, okay. And when did you go into military service?

Bill: Ah, '42, 1942.

Jim: Where did they send you?

Bill: Where did they send me?

Jim: Yes.

Bill: Went to Lackland.

Jim: That's where you went right from Duluth?

Bill: Right. Then I went to Randolph Field.

Jim: That's where your basic training was?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: When did you deviate into your specialty as a pilot?

Bill: I actually graduated as a fighter pilot, and that was in '43. And then they seemed to be running out of bomber pilots so then all of a sudden I was in a bomber, ya see, a Liberator, and—

Jim: So you never got into your fighter plane?

Bill: Oh yeah, we flew P40s in training, but then all of a sudden I was in a bomber. And why, I don't know, so I didn't care, really, you know; I loved to fly. I didn't care what it was.

Jim: Right. Where did you go from Randolph?

Bill: From Randolph? I went to, went over to Libya.

Jim: Directly?

Bill: No, I went into Mountain Home, Idaho and we went through training there for a month or so.

Jim: In a 24 [B24 Liberator heavy bomber]?

Bill: In 24s. And then from the 24s we ended up in North Africa, in Libya.

Jim: That's where you got your crew?

Bill: Got my what?

Jim: Your crew.

Bill: No, we got them out in Mountain Home, Idaho.

Jim: So you did some practice missions there, in the United States, before you—

Bill: Yeah, for a little while, and then they shipped us over into North Africa. We were at Benghazi in Libya. And I flew several missions out of there and then they moved us to Brindisi, down in the heel of Italy, across the heel from Taranto, and then we finished our missions out of there. That's where I finished them.

Jim: How many missions did you have in your 24?

Bill: Forty-six.

Jim: Forty-six? And you were a pilot?

Bill: Yep.

Jim: And your crew, did they stick with you during your forty-six missions?

Bill: Yeah, we lost two. We lost two of our crew. They were both belly turret, belly turret guns.

Jim: In combat?

Bill: Yeah, they got killed.

Jim: Tell me about those two experiences, please.

Bill: About them?

Jim: Yes. How did that happen?

Bill: Well, they got hit by flak, and ah, ah, well, there isn't much more to say about that, you know. They, they got, they got hit and they got killed, that's all.

Jim: Right. You didn't have any problems, less problem with the fighter planes?

Bill: Oh sure! Sure. The Germans were all over the place. And ah, we saw our first jet airplane, the German's jet airplane. We saw, oh, saw two of them, though. But you know, things go fast when they're coming through ya, so I only saw two. Some of the guys saw them. And then we were covered by the "Blacks" [African American Tuskegee fighter-bomber group, part of Operation Torch], in their P51s.

Jim: Oh yeah.

Bill: They flew—but I didn't know who they were at the time, and I had no idea that they were over there and that they had a fighter squadron. And I met one of them on the way home in Naples, Italy, and he was a pilot and I said, "I didn't know the Blacks had pilots," and he says, "Yeah," and I said, "Well, what did you look like?" [laughter] They always have these masks on and everything.

Jim: Right

Bill: But anyway, he said, "We had red tails on our airplanes." And he said, "That's how anybody would know who we were."

But anyway, they covered us. If we get an engine shot out or something we'd have to lag behind and then they'd cover us, you see. But it was mostly P51s that we saw.

Jim: All the time you flew in Africa, did you have fighter cover?

Bill: No, uh-uh.

Jim: That's what I thought.

Bill: None.

Jim: Yeah, right.

Bill: We didn't have any.

Jim: Yeah, that's all I wanted to get at.

Bill: There were fighters over there. You see, Africa—

Jim: No fighter cover?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: When you were in North Africa you primarily were bombing Italy?

Bill: No, Romania.

Jim: Romania?

Bill: Yeah, Romania. And there were some oil fields over there.

Jim: In Ploiesti?

Bill: Yes.

Jim: You were on that raid?

Bill: Yeah. I'm about the only one in town that was.

Jim: Is that right?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: You're about the only one that made it.

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: Tell me. I have to have that in, in any detail you can give me, that Ploiesti raid.

Bill: We, ah, we had, I think there was almost two hundred bombers took off and I think we lost about fifty. Well, one of things that people don't understand about that, we didn't have all those airplanes over there. The British sent—or the 8th Air Force sent a whole bunch of them over there. And they flew along with us, so it just wasn't the 15th, it was 8th Air Force people.

Jim: In 24s, or 17s [B17 Flying Fortress bomber]?

Bill: 24s. There weren't any 17s.

Jim: That Ploiesti raid was all 24s, wasn't it?

Bill: All 24s.

Jim: Yes. That's what I was wondering.

- Bill: But we had one runway at Benghazi and the rest of us flew off the desert floor. You know, it's, it's—
- Jim: About the same?
- Bill: It was; it was flat. See, basically Libya is flat and sandy and rocky, but that's about it.
- Jim: Um-hmm.
- Bill: Well anyway, we got hit hard but then we, we got back. And then they moved us out of there up into Italy and then the major part of the 15th Air Force flew out of Italy, flew out of—most of them were north of us, up toward Gioia and ah, I can't remember the names.
- Jim: Not important. Tell me about the raid again. You skipped over that. The raid got off what time in the morning?
- Bill: Pardon?
- Jim: What time did you get off on the raid? What time did you leave?
- Bill: What time in the morning?
- Jim: Yeah.
- Bill: Oh, I suppose 10 o'clock or so before you could get everybody assembled.
- Jim: So when did you get over the oil field?
- Bill: Oh, probably three hours later.
- Jim: Three hours?
- Bill: Yeah, we got lost.
- Jim: Right. That's what I wanted you to talk about. How did that happen?
- Bill: Yeah, we got lost. And how do you navigate over the ocean, you know, with the rudimentary navigational facilities that we had? We had a navigator, of course, but you know, you never know what the winds are gonna be over there and one of the outfits made a wrong turn and we followed them.
- Jim: Um-hmm.

Bill: But then when we got over there everything [cough], you didn't know what you were getting really, because they had the oil fields disguised to the point, you know, where they had these big canvas things over the top of 'em and you didn't really know what you were after.

Jim: How did you know when to release the bombs?

Bill: When everybody else did.

Jim: So everything depended on the lead ship?

Bill: Yes, yep, and then when this guy thought it would be the right time then we'd, then we'd release 'em.

Jim: Then we'd all turn around and head back home as fast as we could, huh?

Bill: Fast as we could, which was, ah, two hundred miles an hour, much slower than they were. [laughs]

Jim: The Germans chased you in and out?

Bill: Yes.

Jim: Both?

Bill: Yep, yeah. They knew we were coming. Well, how could they not know?

Jim: Not while there are so many out there.

Bill: How could they not know we were coming?

Jim: Right. I see.

Bill: When we got back and we didn't fly again for probably a month.

Jim: A month! Now—

Bill: Yeah. Our planes were so shot up so bad that we couldn't go.

Jim: At your field, how many planes were involved in this raid?

Bill: Well, it was all one big field.

Jim: At your base, I was thinking.

Bill: The whole of Libya. A lot of things that people don't understand about that raid, which was just another raid, really, was that they'd been, they'd been over those oil fields for a long time, for probably six, eight, ten months, you know, before we ever went over there. And they were, most of 'em were high fliers, and probably eight, ten, up to twenty thousand feet.

Jim: But wasn't this raid a lower level?

Bill: Yeah, yeah, a hundred feet, a hundred feet off the ground, two hundred feet.

Jim: That certainly would make the ack-ack really tough.

Bill: Yes, it was.

Jim: I mean, I'm surprised that more of you didn't get shot down, that's what I'm getting at.

Bill: Yeah. See, the biggest problem over there was small arms fire and 20 mm and the Germans, they had 37 mm canons, stuff like that.

Jim: How bad was your plane shot up?

Bill: We had a couple hundred holes in it; couldn't count 'em all.

Jim: Engines worked, though?

Bill: The engines were fine. We had Pratt-Whitneys. That was a glorious engine, twelve hundred horsepower apiece, and they were really fine. The one problem about flying out of the desert was that there was so much sand over there that the engines would inhale this sand and they'd get ground up, you know. So you'd figure you got a hundred hours out of an engine and you were good.

Jim: Then they had a complete overhaul of that engine?

Bill: They gotta get rid of the engine.

Jim: You mean the engine was done?

Bill: Done.

Jim: Not overhauled?

Bill: No, no, uh-uh.

Jim: That was it?

Bill: That was it. They'd bring new engines in and put new engines in.

Jim: A hundred hours if you're lucky and—

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: Could you tell as you're flying along if the engine was having trouble with the sand?

Bill: Oh sure. You couldn't keep up.

Jim: You mean it was slow?

Bill: The airplane was slow, and between the RPMs and the fuel mixture and so forth, you couldn't get, couldn't get a hundred-seventy miles an hour out of 'em.

Jim: That was an indication that the sand was getting in the works?

Bill: Yeah, when you're tugging along at one hundred and fifty—

Jim: Right, you should be going two hundred. [both laugh]

Bill: No, we never got over a hundred seventy-five.

Jim: Never?

Bill: Uh-uh.

Jim: B24 won't do that?

Bill: Won't do that.

Jim: Even after you dropped the bombs?

Bill: Yes, that's right.

Jim: That didn't speed it up that much?

Bill: Uh-uh.

Jim: I'll be darned.

Bill: They wouldn't go that fast. Unless our gauges were wrong, and I don't think they were.

- Jim: [laughs] Probably not. No.
- Bill: No, they wouldn't go that fast. And the 17s were even slower, you know. The Lancasters were, the British Lancasters were fifteen or twenty miles a hour faster than we were.
- Jim: Yeah, they flew heavier bomb loads.
- Bill: Yeah, it was a better aircraft.
- Jim: The British—
- Bill: The Lancaster was much better than—
- Jim: Did you think the Lancaster was the best of all the British bombers?
- Bill: No question about it.
- Jim: They had about three or four of them, I know.
- Bill: They had the Lancasters, and then they had the Halifaxes, the Wellingtons, the Short Stirlings, yeah. They had the whole bunch of 'em, but they weren't well-armored, and that's why they flew at night. They thought we were nuts for flyin' in the daytime.
- Jim: I'm sure people did.
- Bill: Which we were!
- Jim: That's true, they were right! [laughs]
- Bill: They were right. They'd been doing it for years before we got there, so they had it all figured out.
- Jim: So back at your base, after a usual mission, you were off how long?
- Bill: Standard. Maybe the next day, or two days, or five days.
- Jim: You never knew?
- Bill: It mostly depended on the weather.
- Jim: You mean the weather while you're at the target?

- Bill: At the target. And then a lot of times you'd get up to a target and you couldn't see it, and we didn't have radar.
- Jim: You were flying at about eighteen thousand then?
- Bill: We flew at twenty-eight thousand.
- Jim: Twenty-eight?
- Bill: Yeah, mostly, twenty-eight thousand. And then the B17s would set up above us. Higher. They were like a great big kite. And they'd be sitting up there. You see the Germans, an 88 mm canon would get up to ah, pretty near, pretty near thirty thousand feet and then to get up above that you'd have to have 105 mm, you see, and they'd go after the 17s with the 105 mm, but they had very few of them, you know. So the 88s, they'd be sitting up there and they'd be laughing at us. [both laugh] Ah, I can't say that; those guys took a pasting.
- Jim: Worse than you?
- Bill: Oh, to begin with, yeah. Flying out of England, I think they took it hard. But we got hit, went to these targets in Vienna, Munich, Blechhammer, Frankfurt.
- Jim: Generally what was your group size? On a typical mission.
- Bill: Ah, I don't know. We had, probably we had what they call a squadron, maybe twenty-five airplanes, and then there'd be a group maybe four times as big as that. But not all airplanes were functional all the time. They'd be, ah, they'd have engine problems and, you know.
- Jim: Flying out of the desert, did a lot of guys turn back before they ever got over the target because of the engines?
- Bill: Oh, yeah. I won't say a lot of 'em, but I would say some. I didn't see any.
- Jim: Um-hmm.
- Bill: But I'm sure there were some. But they'd—what they'd call it?—they'd "abort" the mission, and ah, we never did, we never aborted any. We were lucky; we didn't have mechanical problems. Just on the way back.
- Jim: Um-hmm. Before you took off, you inspected your plane yourself?
- Bill: You bet. Every inch of it.
- Jim: Tell me what was key to your inspection.

- Bill: Well, to make sure the elevators, rudders, everything worked okay, and then there was—see, inside of a 24 all of the control cables were open and you'd go along and feel them all to make sure they're all there, but we had two mechanics who'd do the same thing, but you know, you don't trust anybody, you can't, so you do it yourself.
- Jim: The bomb bay doors, you had those?
- Bill: Yeah.
- Jim: When you take off, did you worry about the fumes in the bomb bay?
- Bill: No.
- Jim: The only thing that lots of the fellows specifically said, they opened their bomb bay doors a little bit so they could pull off any fumes that might accumulate because a couple of them blew up on takeoff.
- Bill: I didn't know that; I didn't see that.
- Jim: That's not a problem you knew of?
- Bill: But the only thing that stunk bad in that airplane was they had a little auxiliary area motor in there to provide power to get the engines to go, and ah—
- Jim: To start it?
- Bill: I don't know what kind of concoction [Jim laughs] that they had in there to make it run, but it was terrible. I could have threw up every time I got in one.
- Jim: Just from the smell?
- Bill: I don't know what they were, but they stunk terrible.
- Jim: They were electric?
- Bill: Pardon?
- Jim: Electric motors?
- Bill: No, they were gasoline. Gasoline and whatever else was in there.
- Jim: How did they start?
- Bill: We had to start 'em.

Jim: You did?

Bill: Yeah. It's just like a electric generator or, so—

Jim: When you were going on a mission, what time did you get out to the airfield from your barracks?

Bill: Oh, probably a couple hours before. We'd start out early and most of the missions were probably six to eight hours and we had one fourteen and a half hours and ah, 'course, you have to realize that whenever you go on a mission and you drop bombs and so forth, you usually never, ever hit anything. We just—

Jim: Did you ever know at the time whether you did or not?

Bill: Yeah, we can look out, look out the back, and then they take pictures, you see, and you could see what you hit. But when they carpet bomb, you know, they—somebody's gonna hit something, but I can never, ever say that we ever hit anything.

Jim: Yeah. To call this strategic bombing is a laugh. [both laugh]

Bill: Yes. Yes, yes it was.

Jim: Right.

Bill: You burn up a lot of gasoline.

Jim: Right. Well, I think the only thing they proved that those strategic bombers were good at was that they were killing civilians, and they were very good at that.

Bill: It's a lot different now than it used to be.

Jim: Oh I'm sure, I'm sure. So after a mission, all the crew was off until the next day or maybe a day or two?

Bill: Yeah. First thing I'd do was go to Mass.

Jim: And say "Thank God."

Bill: I'd say, "Thank God I got the hell out of that one!" [both laugh]

Jim: Right.

Bill: I was just a kid; I was only nineteen.

Jim: Right. Incredible. And then what about eating? You always had something to eat when you got back?

Bill: Well, whenever we'd go out they'd always give us what they call K-rations, it looked like a Cracker Jack box. And at the altitude we flew it was forty-five below zero all the time. In fact, most of the injuries in the Air Force, the high fliers [cough], were from frostbite, and we used to wear like three pair of gloves, silk, wool and then leather, you know, but the gunners would wear electric suits, and as long as the electricity held out they were okay. But the pilots and the navigator and bombardiers, they never wore those suits. And I wouldn't wear one anyway, because if I got shot down, you'd look goofy walking through the Alps with a blue electric suit on. [Jim laughs] You know, it just doesn't cut it. [both laugh]

Jim: Did you have a PX [Post Exchange] on the base?

Bill: No. We lived in tents.

Jim: Tents?

Bill: Yeah, we lived in tents; the four officers lived in tents.

Jim: And your heating facilities, what were they?

Bill: Say again?

Jim: Your heating?

Bill: Heating? See, the base that we were in down in Brendisi, the Germans vacated it shortly before we got there. They took all their airplanes out and moved them up north someplace, and they—but the only thing they left was land mines and little mines you know, all over the place. But all of the barracks and all of the buildings and so forth, they never blew 'em down or burned 'em or anything. So when we got in there, there they were.

Jim: Okay.

Bill: And so they put up a little mess hall, it wasn't much, and we had the Italians work in the mess hall. We had our own cooks but we didn't eat big, you know, everything was ersatz, you might say.

Jim: Yeah.

Bill: But the Italians were all former infantry people out of North Africa, and they would come over and they worked—all they wanted was food, see, and they'd work for food.

Jim: They worked for food?

Bill: They wanted the food, and so whatever was left over they'd eat, you see. But it wasn't—I don't know, we had a mess hall, I suppose as big as this living room. It wasn't very big.

Jim: No. So how many guys?

Bill: How many guys?

Jim: Yeah.

Bill: Oh, probably—

Jim: Hundred?

Bill: Couple hundred.

Jim: Yeah. Did you eat with the enlisted men?

Bill: No. Uh-uh.

Jim: This was just the officers' mess you're talking about?

Bill: That's right. Yeah.

Jim: Where did the enlisted men eat?

Bill: I don't know. They had another barracks.

Jim: Another barracks.

Bill: But they ate the same food, though. And everything was the same.

Jim: Did you have a PX?

Bill: No, we didn't have a PX.

Jim: No booze?

Bill: No booze.

Jim: You must have complained about that sometime.

Bill: I didn't drink, so I didn't care. And then once every couple weeks they'd get a load of Coca Cola from someplace and we'd get two bottles, two bottles of Coca Cola.

Jim: Everybody?

Bill: Every couple weeks.

Jim: Everybody?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: Also the enlisted?

Bill: Everybody got the same thing, every two weeks.

Jim: How about the Red Cross?

Bill: The which?

Jim: Red Cross?

Bill: I never saw 'em.

Jim: You never saw them. USO [United Service Organizations]?

Bill: Never saw 'em.

Jim: None of that entertainment stuff. How about your mail? How was that?

Bill: Mail?

Jim: Pretty regular?

Bill: Yeah, the first letter, the first time I got mail from my wife I got nineteen letters. So how they got over there, I don't' know. Probably on a boat.

Jim: Probably, yeah.

Bill: You'd get mail, but—

Jim: Got it late?

Bill: She said she wrote every day. But I used to do the same thing.

- Jim: Write every day?
- Bill: Yeah, I'd write. And I married the girl. Been married for fifty-some years. She stuck it out; there's a lot of 'em didn't.
- Jim: Oh, I know. Yeah, yeah. It was a happy, unhappy time, you had some of both during the war.
- Bill: Yeah. But it was an experience that, I asked for it. I volunteered. And I didn't know what I was getting into. I'd never been shot at before in my life and I was—all I wanted to do was get it over with and get home, because I figured that you only win the lottery once, you don't win it twice, you know. I figured if I can get out of this mess, [both laugh] I got it made.
- Jim: Right.
- Bill: If I can get out of this mess, I'm not going to push anything too hard. [both laugh] But it's one of the—
- Jim: Did you come close to losing your plane?
- Bill: Oh sure.
- Jim: Give me one of those experiences.
- Bill: Well, when you lose two engines, when you lose two engines—
- Jim: By rifle fire, I mean by anti-aircraft fire?
- Bill: Yeah. When you, when you lose a couple engines and they're on, they're on both sides, you know, on one side—
- Jim: Then what?
- Bill: You got, you got a hell of a time keeping that thing up in the air.
- Jim: We'll all have to lean on this side of the plane, right?
- Bill: No, we used to get everybody in the crew up there to sit in the pilot's seats and ah, push on the rudder pedals because we couldn't keep the thing, we couldn't keep it—
- Jim: Level?
- Bill: We couldn't keep the thing straight. We had to push full rudder—

Jim: Constantly?

Bill: Constantly, to keep the thing in the air.

Jim: Did this happen before you dropped the bombs or after?

Bill: After. Well, during the, during that process.

Jim: I see. So how did you land that thing?

Bill: How did what?

Jim: How did you land it?

Bill: It was difficult.

Jim: Um-hmm.

Bill: But ah—

Jim: Your wheels were okay?

Bill: For the most part we'd ah—see, we used to fly those things right into the ground when we had full power. We'd, we'd fly 'em, we didn't—none of this stall stuff or anything like that.

Jim: Um-hmm. You'd bring them in full bore?

Bill: Bring it in full bore. And then, and then, ah, slam on the brakes and open up the flaps, you don't want everything—

Jim: Well, you had plenty of room, so—

Bill: No we didn't.

Jim: I thought you said the desert was—

Bill: In Libya there was plenty of room, but then when we got up to Italy, we had the thirty-nine hundred foot runway, which was barely enough.

Jim: I was gonna say.

Bill: Ya see, and then ah, then we'd usually run off the end of the runway.

Jim: Stop here. I can't see—

Bill: Is that thing okay?

Jim: I can't see it; it should still be running. [rustling and clanking sounds] Yeah. Huh. Well, I don't know what made that wanna do that. [more clanking and rustling sounds] This one seems okay; it should be running.

Bill: Has it been running? [laughs]

Jim: Yeah; well, I don't know. It's screwy. Well, I can't worry about that; this is more important.

Bill: What is that sound, too?

Jim: Yeah, yeah, so here we go. Sorry for the interruption here. Now one thing we didn't talk about is your base in Italy. What was that like?

Bill: When we were stationed in Italy? What about it?

Jim: Yeah, what kind of a base was that? You said it was a desert. You had wooden barracks and so forth?

Bill: Well, nothing's good, you know, nothing's good. You don't have showers and stuff like that.

Jim: Even in Italy?

Bill: No, uh-uh. We used to have to get water from quite a ways away if you wanted to take a shower, and then you had to put these pills in that killed the bugs so you could drink the water, and then in Brindisi some genius hooked up into the local water system. I don't know how they did it, but anyway, then they got water, but you couldn't trust the water, you didn't dare drink it.

Jim: Um-hmm. So what did you drink?

Bill: What did we drink? Well, we put these pills in it.

Jim: Oh, I see.

Bill: We'd kill all the bugs in there and we'd drink that.

Jim: Conditions weren't much better when you moved from North Africa to Italy, then?

Bill: No. We used to have to go seventy miles to get water in North Africa, and then they'd bring it in in trucks, and you didn't do much drinking of water, or I

mean you didn't do much shaving or anything like that. Of course I didn't have a beard anyway, but it was all drinking—[End of Tape 1, Side 1]—water, you know, but you had to go a long ways to get it. But I'm sure it's better now.

Jim: So you had movies once a week?

Bill: Nope.

Jim: Not at all? No entertainment at all for the troops?

Bill: Uh-uh. Nothin'.

Jim: They did better in England.

Bill: Oh yeah, that was high-class stuff, high-class organization over there. [both laugh] You see, we were the dregs. We were doing the same thing they were, but we were, like you say, we were the dregs, and ah, we flew the same airplanes, doing the same missions, but they were stuck with B17s. I thought it was a lousy aircraft, but they were in love with it, you see.

Jim: Tell me why you think the B17 is inferior to the 24.

Bill: It was slow. It was slow and it didn't carry as many bombs as ours and it didn't have the range that we had, so all in all I felt that—and it was a tail dragger, for one thing. You got a rear wheel that drags on the ground; ours was a tricycle landing gear. You could at least see where you were going when you were taking off and landing—

Jim: Oh, that's right.

Bill: —in a 24, you see. But I thought it was a better aircraft. I was—

Jim: Did you ever fly one?

Bill: Once.

Jim: Once?

Bill: Just once. And ah, I wasn't impressed. I thought it was a dog.

Jim: Uh-huh. But somebody said it was better to defend, it was more defensible than a 24.

Bill: I couldn't tell you that; I don't know. But our biggest problem was the flak, when they were shooting at ya, and they'd put up, um, thousands of rounds of

ammunition, of 88 mm shells, and every one that would explode would be black, and then you'd have to fly through that black cloud and you'd know that you were going to get pasted when you went through there.

Jim: There was stuff in that black cloud, you mean?

Bill: Pardon?

Jim: There were things in that black cloud?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: Yeah.

Bill: So, yeah. But the fighters, ah, there were fighters, of course, but if our own fighters were doing their job that they were supposed to do, they wouldn't get close to us, you see, they'd—our own fighters were supposed to pick 'em up before forty, fifty miles away.

Jim: I see.

Bill: But you never knew where these guys were coming from, and they'd, they'd come after ya, they'd come after 'ya then they'd roll over on their bellies, or upside down, because they were armored on the bottom.

Jim: The 109s, the Focke-Wolf?

Bill: They had armor on the bottom of 'em and you couldn't shoot through the engine so the, their pilots were relatively secure when they came after us.

Jim: They'd all fly upside down when they're coming in on a run?

Bill: Oh, did I see 'em?

Jim: No, I said were they all upside down when they'd come in on a run?

Bill: No, no, uh-uh. Some of them were, I suppose some of the guys that lived long enough. Some of those German pilots, we'd see 'em every once in awhile; they'd defect and—

Jim: Where would you see them?

Bill: They'd come, they'd fly right into our airbase.

Jim: Holy Toledo! Tell me about this.

- Bill: Yeah, they'd fly right into the airbase and most of them were based in the Trieste area, northern Italy, or up towards the top of Yugoslavia.
- Jim: But they were Germans, they weren't—
- Bill: They were Germans.
- Jim: People that they—
- Bill: Yeah. They'd fly in and they wanted to defect and—so like I say, we'd talk to 'em. When they'd fly an airplane into there, the first, every—they'd think that they were gonna get killed, you know, when they'd fly into our airbase.
- Jim: I don't how they made it.
- Bill: Well, they did. But our guys didn't care about them, all they wanted was souvenirs. That airplane was stripped bare in about one hour.
- Jim: I would imagine.
- Bill: Yep.
- Jim: I don't see how he got contact with your base without scrambling your fighters up to shoot him down.
- Bill: Aw, he made no contact—
- Jim: They'd pick them up on radar?
- Bill: No, we didn't have radar.
- Jim: So a single plane would come, it'd be in the sky and—
- Bill: All of a sudden it would land there, right at the base.
- Jim: By god, that's a 109 [Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter].
- Bill: Oh, we had Stukas [German dive bombers]. And ah, they'd, they'd come in there.
- Jim: So what'd we do with the pilots? You'd get them out and take his Luger away and—
- Bill: Well, they'd send 'em all over to Kansas or Sioux Falls, South Dakota and they'd put 'em to work serving dinners to the Americans. [Jim laughs]

Jim: What about your contact with them? I'd like to know about that.

Bill: Well, I couldn't understand 'em. I took four years of German in high school [Jim laughs] and I'd try to talk to 'em, but there's so many dialects that you couldn't, you couldn't really talk to 'em. But they were tickled to death to get out of that mess 'cause you know, most of the German pilots that lived long enough, some of those guys that showed up would have six and seven hundred missions.

Jim: I know that.

Bill: Lots of 'em.

Jim: The Germans and the Japanese pilots had no limits.

Bill: No.

Jim: They were there to fly 'til they're dead or the war was over.

Bill: Yeah. Well see, we had limits.

Jim: Yeah. The Japanese didn't even carry parachutes.

Bill: Yeah. But ah, I, I can remember one guy, he had, if he told the truth, he had seven hundred missions in the ME109. And he says, "I'm gonna get killed if I don't get out of this."

Jim: That's right.

Bill: So there he was.

Jim: Did you feed him right away? Feed him?

Bill: Did—oh sure. What were they gonna hurt?

Jim: Well, they're just ordinary people.

Bill: Yeah, yeah, they're no different.

Jim: He must have been just delighted to do that.

Bill: Was he ever!

Jim: Big smile, and all that?

- Bill: Yep. You know, you didn't have to grill him to find out everything he knew.
[both laugh]
- Jim: Just ask me, ask me something, right?
- Bill: He was a fountain of information.
- Jim: So he stayed there a couple days and they shipped him back.
- Bill: They shipped him over.
- Jim: Yeah.
- Bill: They probably shipped him over to England, and then they probably flew him over to the United States. Unless they—I don't know what they had over in England.
- Jim: What about the plane?
- Bill: The plane?
- Jim: Yeah, did they keep it to investigate it or anything?
- Bill: Well, after our guys got through with it you could barely fly it. 'Cause they tore all the instruments out of it, and, you know, the stick would go first, then they'd pull all the guns out.
- Jim: Why the stick?
- Bill: Souvenirs! You know. Then the clock, they'd always have a clock in there, and that would go, and then everything that they could take apart with a screwdriver would come out.
- Jim: The commandant of the base didn't object to this?
- Bill: No. Uh-uh.
- Jim: How many of these guys did you see come into your base there in Italy? Roughly.
- Bill: I think three.
- Jim: Three?
- Bill: Three, maybe four. But we used to have a lot of planes fly in there, some of our own fighter planes that would do a lot of strafing over across the Adriatic

and they'd get hit, and our base—you know, it was one of the closest ones to the Yugoslav area over there, so they'd land there. Usually the planes weren't flyable after they got through, so they'd just junk 'em. We must've had—what did they build, nineteen thousand B24s? Something like that?

Jim: Yeah, yeah.

Bill: And there's only one left? One or two?

Jim: Well, I saw one at EAA [Experimental Aircraft Association] last year, that's it, that's it.

Bill: There was one awhile ago out of Truax here, a year or so ago, or two years, but that's all that's left. But our outfit is painted on the side of it.

Jim: Oh yeah?

Bill: Yeah, yeah. I ended up in the 465th Bomb Group. I don't know how they designate these things, but ah, that's alright. But I didn't care, you know. Just a dumb kid, waitin' to get home, that's all we were.

Jim: Yeah. So you finished the war there?

Bill: Yep. I came home before the war was over. I finished my missions well before most people.

Jim: Uh-huh.

Bill: And I was glad to get home.

Jim: Did they discharge you right away?

Bill: Yep, uh-huh.

Jim: Or just sent you somewhere else in the United States?

Bill: They asked me if I wanted to fly a C54 [Douglas C54 Skymaster] they called 'em, you know. Four engine transport airplane, and I went up in it once—

Jim: DC6 [pressurized version of C54]?

Bill: Pardon?

Jim: A DC6?

Bill: Whatever it was.

Jim: Uh-huh.

Bill: And I said, “No, I’ve had enough.” I don’t know what they did with ‘em, flew them over to Japan or someplace, but I didn’t want anything to do with it. Hell, I wanted to get home. I had a beautiful little girl home and—

Jim: Right.

Bill: And I wanted to go to school.

Jim: You’d had enough. So what did you do when you got home?

Bill: I went to school. Went to the university.

Jim: Used the GI Bill, and—

Bill: Yeah. And believe it or not, there was only two hundred-fifty of us out there.

Jim: Out where?

Bill: UW [University of Wisconsin].

Jim: Oh, when you started?

Bill: When I started.

Jim: Yeah.

Bill: See, I was one of the first bunch to get back and go to school.

Jim: Right, because there’s a lot more than two hundred and fifty.

Bill: Yeah, probably twenty-five thousand. [both laugh]

Jim: Right. But you were in the first group?

Bill: Yeah. But they didn’t know what to do with us. So they said, “Well, if you need materials for studying and so forth, just go down to the co-op down there on the corner of Lake and State and take what you need and then sign whatever it was and give it to us, and so—

Jim: So you finished the UW then?

Bill: No, I wanted to be a doctor, believe it or not.

Jim: Uh-huh.

Bill: I couldn't handle the curriculum, it was too much. By then I had a wife, you see and I had a lot of obligations. And I got sixty-four dollars a month from the government, and twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents of that went for lodging.

Jim: Sure.

Bill: So I couldn't make it. So I joined the Fire Department, Madison Fire Department, and I spent forty years, five months and two days there.

Jim: That's a whole career and a half.

Bill: Yeah, and I enjoyed every day of it.

Jim: Did you?

Bill: Yes I did. Yes I did, and I was sorry I had to quit.

Jim: Um-hmm.

Bill: I picked up a cancer problem and I walked out.

Jim: Yeah.

Bill: But—

Jim: Did you join any veterans' group?

Bill: No. Just the Air Guard, you know.

Jim: Well then you got this group down, meets in Janesville; tell me about that now.

Bill: Well, that's a bunch of ah, mostly World War II guys and most of them were ex-B24 pilots.

Jim: But they're all pilots?

Bill: All pilots, yeah.

Jim: All pilots over there?

Bill: Pilots, yeah. And they have breakfast the first Wednesday of every month at a place down there, it's called the Oasis; I'm sure most people know where that is. It's a big truck stop.

Jim: Yeah, I know where it is.

Bill: You know where it is?

Jim: Um-hmm.

Bill: Yeah. So we go in there and we have breakfast, and we tell lies; you know how that goes.

Jim: Same stories over and over again. They always forget 'em from last time.

Bill: Yep.

Jim: How many in the group?

Bill: Well, they're droppin' off, but there were fifty-two in the group, the last I heard. And a couple fighter pilots are in there, one I went to school with was a Corsair [carrier based fighter bomber] pilot and—

Jim: Where's he?

Bill: Pardon?

Jim: Where is he?

Bill: Where is he? He's in Madison here somewhere.

Jim: Maybe he hasn't been interviewed.

Bill: Probably not.

Jim: I'll get his name as soon as we're finished here.

Bill: I can't remember his name. I could find it for ya.

Jim: I need that name. Corsair pilots are rare.

Bill: They're rare? And then there was a P47 [Thunderbolt fighter plane] pilot, um, he's not feeling well. He's got internal problems. And then there's—he was a P47 pilot—then there's a guy who was a F100 [Super Sabre supersonic jet fighter] pilot, but those are the only fighter pilots that I can think of that come in to that group. But the fighter pilots also have a group that meets somewhere down there in Janesville. And how many there are, I don't know.

Jim: I'd really like to talk to this Corsair pilot.

- Bill: I'll find out his name. Where do you live? You're in the phone book?
- Jim: Yeah, just about two miles away.
- Bill: Yeah. McIntosh. I'll call ya.
- Jim: Oh yeah, I'd really appreciate that. Did you take a look at those German planes that came in, look at them inside the cockpit and so forth?
- Bill: Oh yeah.
- Jim: What was your impression? Well built, or—
- Bill: What was my impression?
- Jim: Of the aircraft.
- Bill: They're a good aircraft.
- Jim: Yeah.
- Bill: They had a good engine. They had a Daimler-Benz [engine], and they had— what we didn't have, is they had fuel injection. We didn't have fuel injection.
- Jim: [unintelligible]
- Bill: They could fly upside down, where our guys couldn't.
- Jim: That's an important point.
- Bill: Technically the Germans were years ahead of us in everything that they did. And of course, we were playing catch-up. They'd been preparing for this stuff for years and years and years, and we weren't. We were playing catch-up. Look at what they'd do, build a P51 [Mustang fighter bomber] in six months, or eight months, somethin' like that. They said, "Build us a fighter aircraft that can stay in the air with the Focke-Wulf, and 109," so they came up with the P51. Which incidentally, was not powered by a Rolls Royce Merlin; initially it was powered by an Allison engine, which didn't have the snap, it wasn't as good an engine. But once it got the Rolls Royce in there—
- Jim: It became the best fighter plane in the war.
- Bill: But then there were some variations of that thing, the horsepower went from twelve hundred up to sixteen-fifty, to eighteen hundred. Well, what these

mechanics, or these engineers do to kick up that horsepower, I don't know.
But—

Jim: Did you change your engines at all? I mean, were the engines different when you finished from when they started? Was there an upgrade?

Bill: Not mine.

Jim: Not yours, same engine and—

Bill: Same engine, and um, it's as good an engine as there was. Then they came along, I think Pratt-Whitney built an engine for the B29s that was a lot bigger than what we had.

Jim: Oh, yeah. That was a troubled airplane, the B29.

Bill: Big ones.

Jim: They're still testing them when they're over there using them to fight.

Bill: I saw one once. I didn't know what it was. I was in this country and it was waaay up above us, and I didn't know what it was. But I found out later on that they called it a B29.

Jim: Right.

Bill: But it was a high-flyer.

Jim: Yes. Full of problems, that airplane, you know.

Bill: I think they had engine problems.

Jim: Well, they had problems with everything because they were rushing it to get it over in the Pacific and they didn't have time to test it so they said, "We'll test it when we get to Hawaii." Well, they got to Hawaii. "Well, we'll test it when we get to Iwo Jima," you know, and they kept pushing it so by the time they're flying it they said, "I have this to check, that to check," and so there were constant repairs on this airplane. It was rushed into service.

Bill: Another thing about the B24 was there were no hydraulics in there. The bomb bay, I mean the ball turret was hydraulically activated and I think that the flaps were, on the wings, but nothing else was hydraulic, so all of your controls, your elevators, rudders and so forth, were all hand-operated, and you could always tell a B24 pilot by the size of his arms. [laughs] They all looked like weight lifters! [both laugh] Because they were hard to hang onto, you know, and we didn't have an automatic pilot; later on they came on, but we didn't

have one, so they were a real bitch to handle. Once you got 'em trimmed up they were okay. But if you had to move them around or something like that, they were tough. But I don't know about the 17s. I think that some of their controls were hydraulically activated.

Jim: When you fly that, you sat on your parachute?

Bill: No. No. We had two different types of parachutes. One was a "chest pack," they called it, and you wore a harness all the time and if you had to use the 'chute you'd snap—we always kept our 'chutes behind our seats, we didn't have 'em on, and if ya had, if you go over a target or something we'd snap the 'chutes on and—but that was it, you know, 'cause if you get, if you get hit hard, you gotta get outta that thing.

Jim: Right.

Bill: So anyway, then they had another one called a "backpack," and we used to sit inside of a piece of steel that covered over our heads and down the sides of us, it was like a casket that they bury people in, [Jim laughs] only you cut the bottom off—

Jim: Right.

Bill: —and it, it was like a casket. But it was about a half-inch thick steel, and if you wore a backpack, it put you out about two inches in front of that steel, and I didn't want that. I was, I was scared to death that somethin' was going to come along—

Jim: Sideways?

Bill: —you know, two inches, so I wouldn't wear a backpack. So I wore the harness and the chest pack, and all of our crew did. But I've seen them come out of those things without 'chutes on.

Jim: Really?

Bill: When they're on fire, you know. Some of these poor guys would come out of that airplane, they didn't have 'chutes, they had to get outta there. I don't know what they were thinking about, but maybe they'd land in a lake or else they, they got hit hard, or, you know, they couldn't find their 'chutes. But they had to get out.

Jim: Yeah, but they were going to crash, right? [both laugh]

Bill: It was, it was difficult.

Jim: Yeah. Did you keep in contact with your crew?

Bill: Yes.

Jim: You still correspond with them?

Bill: Sure.

Jim: See 'em?

Bill: What's left.

Jim: Yeah, you see 'em?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: Great, you still do?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: Do they live around here, or no?

Bill: No, none of 'em. Ah, bombardier's in North Dakota, other pilot is in South Dakota, he's dead. Ah, top turret, dead, ah, ball turret's dead, and the only one I never kept in contact with was our tail gunner. He left and I never heard from him again, even though he drank, you know.

Jim: You had a good crew, then.

Bill: Yes—

Jim: You were pleased with them; they were good guys?

Bill: Good crew. Probably the most important part of the crew was the flight engineer, was the guy that knew the airplane inside and out and knew all the intricacies of the plane. What valve hit what valve and so forth, but we taught him how to fly the airplane.

Jim: Oh you did, yeah?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: So there's three of you that could fly it?

Bill: Three of us. Yeah, we taught him how to land it and he'd never been in an airplane before but we taught him, we—and then I used to navigate the thing,

you know, and put the—I put the navigator up in the pilot's seat and then I'd navigate the airplane.

Jim: Uh-huh. So you'd learn other skills?

Bill: Yeah, so I was just another navigator. So you know, you did different things. But we lucked out, we got back.

Jim: You think that the training you received was adequate for the job they asked you to do?

Bill: Was adequate?

Jim: Yeah.

Bill: Oh sure. Ah—

Jim: You felt that they gave you everything that you needed?

Bill: It would have been nice if you had been able to go into what I considered a complicated aircraft, if you'd had several hundred more hours in it, you know, and I had a hell of a time even taxiing the thing in, in small places, you see. It took me a month to figure out how to do it, and then the propellers had to be in a proper sequence so that you didn't shake the airplane apart.

Jim: You're getting them up to speed?

Bill: No, to get 'em in rhythm.

Jim: I see.

Bill: In a rhythm, and then they'd all be turning the same RPMs, then the plane would smooth out and it would fly very nicely. But it took me a long time to figure that out.

Jim: You had to have them all synchronized before you took off?

Bill: No, you couldn't.

Jim: After you got up, you'd be trimming it up?

Bill: After you got up, you were all over the place trying to figure it out, how to get it going.

Jim: Right.

- Bill: But those are the things that, ah—
- Jim: Experience?
- Bill: —that a guy with a lot more hours would know that, but most of our pilots were young kids.
- Jim: Right. You learned on the job.
- Bill: Right, you learned on the job. We weren't all Chuck Yeagers [famous US test pilot], I'll tell you that. [both laugh]
- Jim: Right. What commendations did you get?
- Bill: What, what?
- Jim: What awards did your group get?
- Bill: I got a Distinguished Flying Cross, I got eight air medals, and I got seventeen what they call battle ___[?], which means nothing, none of them mean a thing. The only thing that meant anything at all was that piece of paper that said you're honorably discharged. [both laugh] Medals are a nickel apiece, you see.
- Jim: Right, sure.
- Bill: And ah, it doesn't mean anything.
- Jim: No. Well, I think we've covered most of my questions, unless you can think of anything else. Any other wild stories?
- Bill: Oh, you want a wild story?
- Jim: That's what I'm here for.
- Bill: Well, after we finished our missions, they gave us an airplane. They said you can go anyplace you want to with it, within reason. So—
- Jim: What kind of airplane?
- Bill: B24.
- Jim: Oh.
- Bill: And ah, so we went to Cairo, Egypt, and—
- Jim: The whole crew?

Bill: Pardon?

Jim: The whole crew?

Bill: The whole crew. There was only one plane at a time that they'd let go. And so how they got us, I don't know, maybe because we finished our missions early. But anyway, we went to Cairo and we stayed there for about a week. We went out to see the pyramids, rode a camel, and saw the Sphinx [Jim laughs] and went through the bazaar, I think they call it, that's where everybody sells everything, you see, and then we decided we wanted to go to Israel. At the time it was a British protectorate called Palestine. So we went there. And we landed, they didn't have an airport, so we landed in a field outside of Israel.

Jim: Of Jerusalem?

Bill: Pardon?

Jim: Of Jerusalem?

Bill: I don't know.

Jim: You said you landed outside of Israel, but you don't mean outside of Israel the country?

Bill: Oh yes.

Jim: Oh, I see.

Bill: It wasn't in Israel. We wanted to go there, but anyway, they told us we could land in that field out there, it will hold your aircraft. So we landed out there and then somebody sent a bus out, maybe the British, I don't know, and we went into Tel Aviv and we stayed in Tel Aviv in Palestine for about a week. And I stayed at the Yarden Hotel. I'll never forget it. It was a beautiful little place, it only had twelve rooms, and at the time I think it was the only hotel in Tel Aviv. But anyway, we stayed there and we went to Jerusalem and we went to all these interesting places. But in Palestine, they grew oranges.

Jim: Still do.

Bill: Gorgeous, beautiful oranges, and they sold them and so we thought we could get fifty cents apiece for an orange back in Italy, we could get fifty cents; we didn't have any fruit over there. So anyway, we bought probably five hundred dozen oranges for ten cents a dozen, and the rate of exchange over there, I think it's called piasters, and we bought all these oranges and we were going to fly them back to Italy and sell them.

Jim: Right.

Bill: So anyway, we loaded up and we put them all in the bomb bay and in the back of the plane; we had oranges all over the place. [Jim laughs] So anyway, we're flying back home, and we were flying back to Italy and we got a call from the tower in Libya and they said they wanted us to come back. We were halfway out, over the ocean, by this time. I said, "What do you want us for?" And they said, "Get back here." So anyway, we landed, and this was again at Benghazi, and the bomb bay broke open and all of the oranges were rolling down the runway, a hundred and thirty-five miles an hour, [Jim laughs] and I thought, "Holy mackerel, there goes our God's gift to us." So we went out and we picked up every orange and we stuffed 'em back into the airplane and locked the bomb bay so that it wouldn't break open again. So I went in and asked them, I said, "What did you tell us to come back for?" I said, "We were halfway home." And they said, "Well, we had a report that German night fighters were over Italy at this time and we didn't want you to get shot down by a German night fighter." So I said, "Well okay, that's a good enough reason." So we got back to Italy and we sold the oranges for fifty cents apiece. We sold out in one day. And the money—that's one of my other caps there—and the money that we got paid for my new house down here, two doors down; you know, paid the down payment on my home.

Jim: How much did you make?

Bill: How much did I make? Oh God, I don't know. Twenty-five hundred dollars.

Jim: Twenty-five hundred dollars? And that was just your share?

Bill: Yeah, just selling oranges.

Jim: Everybody in the crew made twenty-five hundred dollars?

Bill: No, I wouldn't say that.

Jim: Oh.

Bill: I don't know exactly what they got.

Jim: Oh.

Bill: But some people are salesmen and some people are buyers.

Jim: Well, you must have done a good job.

Bill: I must have been a good salesman.

- Jim: You sell them to the other officers?
- Bill: We had a lot, yeah.
- Jim: They had more money, you see.
- Bill: Yeah.
- Jim: That's probably the reason you made more money than the others.
- Bill: Plus we had a lot of oranges. So we sold them and I—
- Jim: Your CO [commanding officer] didn't object to this?
- Bill: He didn't know anything about it.
- Jim: That's alright, too.
- Bill: I don't think. But he was a West Pointer [United States Military Academy at West Point].
- Jim: He would have objected if he'd known.
- Bill: He was a West Pointer and I'm sure he would have. But what are ya going to do? [Jim laughs]
- Jim: That's a good story.
- Bill: Yeah. But, you know, there's a million stories—**[End of Tape 1, Side 2]** — come out of that thing. But the best one was that I got out of it. There's a lot of 'em, a lot of my friends that didn't, you know, that went in there, they didn't make it.
- Jim: Um-hmm.
- Bill: I just thank the Lord.
- Jim: Sure. Of the original group, then, in North Africa, could you say how many you lost? About twenty percent?
- Bill: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Easy. Easy. See, the first part, the first part over there wasn't good for anybody. It wasn't, it was bad for the British, and they ah, they took a pasting, you know, but that's a different bunch than us. They've been, they've been hard at that war for a long time before we got in there. And they showed no mercy to anybody; they used to drop those bombs—the

Lancaster was the only airplane that they would fit into, they were so big. They were like four or five feet high, ten feet long, you know, and they were just filled with nothing but explosives and they didn't care where they dropped 'em. They just dropped 'em. If it was right in the middle of town, fine, that's where it went. And ah, we were what they call strategic bombing, but we never hit anything anyway, as far as I could see. I'm sure we did, but they were, they were—you see, we used to, we used to split an airfield; the British would be on one side and we'd be on the other.

Jim: In North Africa?

Bill: No, in Italy.

Jim: In Italy?

Bill: Yeah, and they'd—

Jim: Did you fraternize with them at all?

Bill: Very little.

Jim: Very little? You didn't talk to them or anything?

Bill: They were busy, and they had, they had a lot of airplanes there. And I got, I got, well, let's see, fraternizing with some of them. I wanted to fly one of their Spitfires [British fighter aircraft].

Jim: Sure, oh sure! But I'm sure they wouldn't let you fly one of those big bombers.

Bill: And they said, "Absolutely not!" [both laugh] So anyway, after about two months they let me fly one.

Jim: Oh, they did?

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: A Lancaster?

Bill: I got about a half hour in one of their Spitfires. And that was a beautiful aircraft. They had very little iron on it, very little radios, all it was was a sprint aircraft, it was a sprinter, you know. It didn't hang in there for hours at a time; their missions usually amounted to ah, probably three-quarters of an hour, so they had enough fuel to get up and back and do their thing. But they had a beautiful engine and the configuration of the aircraft was nice. Whoever

designed it—I think it might have been a guy by the name of Mitchell that designed that. Did you know that?

Jim: Oh, I didn't know that.

Bill: Oh, I did, see I—

Jim: I read a story about him.

Bill: But it was a nice aircraft. But it was small, and it was light, and most of our—like a P47 must have been two and a half times as big. [laughs]

Jim: That was a big airplane.

Bill: With a great big engine. But the Rolls Royce was a marvelous thing. The Lancasters had four of them in there.

Jim: You didn't get a chance to fly those?

Bill: No. No, I would have liked to, but—

Jim: I'd be nice to compare them.

Bill: Yeah. But I know that every once in awhile we'd see one in the air and it would fly right by us. Just go right by us.

Jim: [laughs] Oh really? No problem?

Bill: No. [laughs]. We'd have our throttles fire-walled [Jim laughs] and they'd fly right by us.

Jim: I'll be darned.

Bill: Yeah, they were good.

Jim: I've seen them up in the Hendon [Royal Air Force Hendon Museum], you know, in England, at that air museum they have up there.

Bill: Have you been there?

Jim: Oh yeah, I was there this Spring.

Bill: Oh you were? Did you go to Duxford?

Jim: Yeah, that's where I went.

Bill: They've got part of a 24 over there, haven't they?

Jim: Yes sir, yes they do, they have a 24 there.

Bill: They've got the whole thing or what?

Jim: The whole thing.

Bill: Oh really!

Jim: Oh sure, yeah.

Bill: Oh, thank God they have, it must be one of the only ones left.

Jim: It's a beautiful museum.

Bill: Oh yeah?

Jim: It's part British and part American; it really honors the Americans who flew in the 8th Air Force.

Bill: Yeah. Well that's all 8th Air Force over there.

Jim: Yeah, they've got a panel there of the names of every pilot and every crewman who flew out of that base.

Bill: Oh really? Who was at Duxford?

Jim: Yeah.

Bill: Was the runway still there?

Jim: Yeah, sure, they still use it.

Bill: Oh, they do?

Jim: Yeah, they have air shows there, yeah. Big place.

Bill: See, a friend of mine was a B24 pilot, he was an instructor pilot, and he flew out of Denver, I think flew out of Denver. He trained 24—

[End of Interview]