

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Robert J. Carter
Waist Gunner, Army Air Forces, World War II
2004

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Carter, Robert J., (b. 1925), Oral History Interview, 2004

User copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca.80 min); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono

Master copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca.80 min); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Robert "Bob" Carter, a Madison, Wisconsin resident, discusses his experiences as a waist gunner in the 8th Army Air Force during World War II. Carter was born in Brewer (Maine) but grew up in Quincy (Massachusetts). He recalls hearing of the Pearl Harbor attack on the radio and overhearing his father and uncles debating the political trouble in Germany. He briefly mentions that his cousin's college classmate joined the German-American Bund (American Nazi movement). In 1943, after graduating high school, Carter wanted to join the Naval Aviation, but was not accepted. Carter explains his father wanted him to attend West Point, but he did not score well on the entrance exams. He did, however, pass the exams for the U.S. Aviation Cadet Program in the Army Air Force. After working at a milk bottling plant for the summer, Carter reports he went to Fort Devens (Massachusetts) for cadet training. He remembers taking a train to Greensboro (North Carolina) for basic training. Carter details his basic training which involved obstacle courses and KP duty. Carter states he was the second fastest to complete the obstacle course out of approximately 220 men. Carter explains he decided to attend gunnery school after being told he would make sergeant quickly and would no longer be assigned KP or guard duty. He goes into detail about his gunnery training at Kingman Air Force Station (Arizona). The troops had to assemble a .50 caliber machine gun in twenty minutes wearing gloves and blindfolds. Next, Carter describes oxygen training which involved removing airmen's oxygen masks at increasingly high altitudes to test endurance and illustrate the dangers of blacking out. Carter relates that his training also involved skeet shooting, which he excelled at (despite his lack of prior experience) because he listened carefully to the instructor. At gunnery school, Carter was injured in the face by a brass round that backfired when another airman incorrectly removed a cover plate. Carter states this was his only injury during the war. After gunnery school, Carter was assigned to a B-17 crew and shipped to Lincoln (Nebraska) and Ardmore (Oklahoma) for more training. He recounts practice maneuvers and a time when he became sick in the back of the airplane. In October, 1944, Carter was sent to England to finishing training with the 8th Air Force. He claims the gunners practiced by targeting whales and porpoises off the coast of England. Carter describes waiting in repo depots (replacement depots) in Glasgow (Scotland) and later in Marcianise (Italy) because the Air Force had extra waist gunners. Carter volunteered for missions in Germany at Kassel, Munster, Kaiserslautern, and along the Rhine River. Carter describes an incident when his plane was under fire and he rescued a buddy whose oxygen tank had gotten disconnected. Carter describes numerous air raids in Dijon and Lyon during the Southern France Campaign, as well as raids in the Alsace-Lorraine region. He provides detailed descriptions of combat with German Me-262 and Me-109

jets. He mentions earning various medals including the Toujours En Danger badge from the French. Carter portrays German soldiers as fighting better than French soldiers. He also characterizes the Air Force and his commanding officers as very “democratic.” He explains how, on the ground in Germany, troops built make-shift tents and stoves out of stolen or excess materials. Carter outlines numerous accidents during training and explosions of aircraft on the runway. He states he felt disappointed when the war in Europe ended because he was young and wanted to see more action. His request to be transferred to the Pacific was turned down. Carter describes being stationed in Florennes (Belgium) in 1945 where he encountered ovens in an area the Nazis had used for human medical experiments. Carter outlines his long journey back to the U.S. across France, Wales, Iceland, Greenland, Labrador (Canada), and New England (United States). Upon his homecoming to Westchester County (Massachusetts) in August 1945, Carter learned his mother had died in July. Due to the confusion of travel, Carter never received word of her death from the Red Cross. Carter spends time discussing his upbringing as a Christian Scientist. He describes how his religious views changed when he joined the Air Force; seeing men wounded and infected during a spinal meningitis outbreak at basic training led him away from Christian Scientist beliefs. Carter states he converted to Catholicism in the 1950s after meeting his wife. He discusses at length various types of airplanes, and he criticizes the Air Force because they kept increasing the number of missions required to earn discharge. After the war, Carter worked briefly delivering mail in New York City before studying economics at Amherst College (Massachusetts) on the G.I. Bill. In the summers, Carter worked on family farms in Massachusetts. He discusses playing team sports and college life at the forestry fraternity house. He recounts taking a semester off due to tinnitus (ear problems) resulting from his skeet shooting training in the Air Force. Carter explains that he finished up his degree at Penn State University in 1949. After college, Carter lived in New York City and worked at Macy’s, at a rug factory, and as a vacuum-cleaner salesman, among others odd jobs. During this time, Carter was in the Air Force Reserves at Newburgh and Beacon (New York) which he characterizes as “tough towns.” He was called up to active duty in 1950 during the Korean War. Because of his high test scores, the Air Force sent Carter to electronics school in California where he operated and repaired the APQ-24 navigational and bombing computer system for the B-36s. Carter mentions joining the American Legion briefly after World War II but states he was not active during college. Eventually, Carter became a steel salesman for various companies in Detroit (Michigan), South Bend (Indiana), and Minnesota. He mentions retiring from Precision Steel Warehouse in 1991.

Biographical Sketch:

Carter (b.1925) was born in Brewer (Maine) and grew up in Quincy (Massachusetts). He joined the Army Air Force in 1943 and served as a gunner in France, Italy, and Germany during World War II. Carter attended Amherst College (Massachusetts) on the G.I. Bill and was a career steel salesman at several companies in the Midwest, retiring from Precision Steel Warehouse in 1991. Carter currently lives in Madison (Wisconsin) and has four children and six grandchildren.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, 2004.
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, 2004.
Transcript edited by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2008.
Abstract by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2008.

Interview Transcript:

John: Well, this is John Driscoll, and today is May 13, 2004, and this is an oral history interview with Bob Carter, a veteran of World War II in the United States Army Air Forces, and we are at Bob's home on the west side of Madison, and Bob, good afternoon, and thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview. Why don't we start right at the beginning. Would you tell where were you born?

Robert: Where has that [the microphone] got to be? Anyplace?

John: Yea, it's fine where it is. It's very sensitive. That's why it's got a battery in it. Where were you born, and when?

Robert: I was born in Brewer, Maine, May 25, 1925.

John: I will ask every now and then, do you know how to spell that? Brewer?

Robert: B-r-e-w-e-r.

John: Okay.

Robert: I was born in a brewery.

John: That's good. How about your family, any brothers, sisters?

Robert: I was the fifth of five children.

John: Okay, the day again? I was talking, I should have been listening.

Robert: What, the birthday? May 25, 1925.

John: And your family? What did your dad do?

Robert: Well, my father, for most of his working life, was a salesman for a paper mill.

John: Okay. How about education? Elementary school?

Robert: Well, I went to first and second grade in Waltham, Massachusetts, and then I went to third through twelfth grade in Quincy, Massachusetts.

John: Okay.

Robert: And after that was when I went in the service.

- John: Okay. What do you remember about Pearl Harbor Day?
- Robert: It was, we had come home from church, and I was with my sister, Frances, in the living room, and we heard it on the radio. And we came running out to tell my father. And he said, "I don't believe it! They wouldn't dare do that!" And of course, they announced it some more, and then he got the word, and then he had to believe it, too.
- John: You probably had the same reaction we had. "Where is Pearl Harbor?"
- Robert: Oh, I knew where it was.
- John: Oh, did you? How about leading up to that. You know, there was trouble in Europe. Do you remember any of that and any concerns?
- Robert: Well, my father and my uncles got together sometimes and were talking about the trouble with Germany, and one of my cousins went to Northeastern University, and he had a friend there, I guess you could call him, a fellow student, who actually joined the German-American Bund.
- John: Oh, I remember that.
- Robert: And they got in some arguments about it, and I guess not long afterwards, they kind of split apart. Now, this was probably like 1938, '39, around that time, '37, '38. I think he probably graduated from high school in 1935 or '36, and then he went to Northeastern.
- John: Okay. You were how old when Pearl Harbor happened? You were sixteen?
- Robert: Sixteen and a half, about.
- John: What did you do before you went into the service?
- Robert: Well, actually, in the spring of '43, before graduation, I went into Boston and I wanted to join the naval aviation. And something came up in that situation where I was not accepted. I forget what that was about, really. So, then I figured, I'll just join the Navy, you know. Now, this was about May, April or May, of '43, and I had at least a month more school. I came home and my father says he is not going to sign that for the Navy. I didn't really care, because I didn't really want to go in the Navy right now. Or go in the Navy, period. And then I decided I'll join the U.S. Aviation Cadet Program, for the Army Air Force. So I took the mental test, and I passed that fine. And I took the physical, and I passed that fine. And then in

the meantime, my father decided it would be a good thing to see if I could get into West Point.

John: Oh, okay.

Robert: So, you get, each congressional district gets an appointment. So I took the physical, and I passed it, and I took a competitive mental test, and I passed it, but not by an awful lot. At least, somebody beat me, did better than I did. So they were made the appointment. In the meantime I had sort of a deferment from being called in because of this West Point thing, examination and so forth. So all that summer, I would go about four or five miles from home on my bicycle and work in a milk company, delivering milk trucks. They were going to deliver milk to people's homes. They had milk delivered at the home a lot.

John: I remember that.

Robert: And I was making exactly a dollar an hour, and I think I worked four hours a day, five days a week. I got twenty dollars a week, which was a lot of money for me, at that time. Because the most money I had made before that was like paper boy, four to five dollars a week, or shoveling snow, and that sort of thing, you know.

John: Yea.

Robert: One day, however, in the milk company, next to the bottom box was off kilter, so I always had to leap a little bit on my toes to pull the top one off. The whole thing came crashing down, and what happened, I remember, ninety-two bottles of milk broke. One of them, I think, broke on my head. But it didn't do any damage. I always kid about it. If you hit me on the head, I'm fine. I had that experience of running into other people head first when I was running, and they would always come out second best. My head was like real hard. And the manager came running out. And he discovered I wasn't hurt, and that was fine. He was upset about the milk, you know. So, then, at the end of the summer, early in the fall, they called me in. And first I had to go to Fort Devens, Colorado, or Fort Devens, Massachusetts.

John: Now, they called you into the Cadets? You didn't get drafted.

Robert: Yea, the Cadet Program.

John: Okay. I got you.

Robert: My father drove me to Boston, my father and mother. And I had to get a train, I believe, to Fort Devens. And we were only there a very short time. They issued us

some of our uniforms and we took a train down to Greensboro, North Carolina, for basic training. While I was there, they had an obstacle course, for one thing, which was very interesting to me, in my situation, because I prided myself on some of my physical abilities, you know. Every young man tries to. And after going over the thing a few times, there was a lot of running, a lot of crawling under things, and jumping over things. In fact, there was one eight foot wall that you had to run to, and then leap up, put your hands on the top of it, and then try to get over it. Well, after I had done it a few times, I was able to leap up, put my hands on top of it, and then just vault over it. And zoom! Without having any loss of motion. And then they started timing us to see how fast the guys were. There must have been two hundred and twenty guys in this thing. And out of the two hundred and twenty guys that were in this thing, I was second fastest. Some guy in front of us was in his freshman year in college, on the track team, was first, and I was second in the timing, and everything. And another thing that happened in basic training was kind of interesting in a way, was a corporal would march us around to all the various assignments for the day, like training. And one day at the end of all of our training for the day, he said, "Hey, two people to sweep out the theater. Everybody is going to be on K. P. These two guys will be off K. P." I already had been on K. P., and I knew I hated it. So I leaped forward real fast. Another guy did, too. And so we swept the theater out that night after all of the shows were over with. The next morning around three or four o'clock in the morning, that's when K. P. starts, real early, they come to my bunk in the barracks and they say, "You're on K. P." So I says, "No, I'm not. I swept the theater out last night." And the guy says, "No, your name is right here on the list." So, you know, you're stuck, in the military. So I go there and do my K. P. Came after breakfast, like when I knew the orderly room would be open, so fortunately the mess hall was pretty close to the orderly room. So I walked over there real quickly and I talked to the first sergeant, and the lieutenant was there too. And I told them the situation. I said, "My leader told me if I swept the theater out last night, I wouldn't be on K. P. today." And I kept using the word "leader." "I believe in my leaders, so I volunteered to do that. And here I find myself on K. P. anyway. Now, I can't understand how that can happen, when my leader told me I wouldn't be on it." And after that short conversation, they said, "Okay, go back to your barracks. You're off K. P."

John: Works.

Robert: So I won. So then we were shipped, well, one day they talked to us, kind of an interview. They said, "Would you go to gunnery school?" My answer to that was, "Well, I want to be a pilot, number one. I want to be a navigator, number two. And a bombardier, number three." And they said, "Would you go to gunnery school?" And I said, "What's the alternative?" And they said, "Well, we don't know. General duty." And then they said, "Well, if you go to gunnery school,

you'll get in an air crew, and you'll make sergeant real quickly. You'll never have to do K. P. again." That sounds good. "You'll never have to pull guard duty again. In fact, they'll never give you dirty details again, never. And all you have to do is go to classes, go to briefings, fly, practice, whatever there may be. And go to critiques after missions, and so forth." So I said, "Okay, I'll go to gunnery school." Well, in a couple of days, so after that, off to Kingman, Arizona. So while I was out there, one of the things, I was not much into mechanics because I wasn't raised on a farm. I didn't have much chance to work on equipment, like some guys did, you know. Well, one of the things you had to do was take a .50 caliber machine gun apart and put it back together, and put it back together in twenty minutes, blindfolded, and with gloves on.

John: Yea. I didn't know about the gloves.

Robert: Yea, we had gloves on, too. When you are up in the air, you can't touch bare metal with your skin.

John: That's right.

Robert: That one I had a real hard time with. I just barely made it. Everyone else was doing much better. It seemed like everyone was doing better than me. So in gunnery school, you went to oxygen school to learn how to handle oxygen, the equipment, what it was like when they took you up to thirty-eight thousand feet, actually in the chamber, like, you know. And so you had the air pressure you have in the chamber. And around ten thousand feet, they'd say, "Take off your masks." Well, ten thousand feet, nothing. And then fifteen thousand feet, "Take off your masks." Well, for me, it wasn't much of anything. It got to about seventeen, eighteen thousand feet, you started to feel it a little, quite a bit. Some people feel it more than others. And then you get much higher, you start passing out. And they put the mask back on you. So, that was the end of that kind of business. And I noticed one thing. When my oxygen ran out, I felt like somebody punched me in the middle of the chest. So that stuck in my head, you know. Which turned out fine later on. And in gunnery school, I had fired one BB gun once in my life. That's it. So I was a great one for being a gunner. One shot. Shooting skeet, in my group of guys, twenty, twenty-five guys. Some of them lived in various sections of the country where they did more hunting and everybody was bragging how they were with guns, how they knew everything. I didn't know garbage. But I listened to the instructor, what he had to tell you. When you are shooting skeet, you have to have the gun down here, and then you say "pull," or "mark," or whatever. You pull the gun up and you follow the bird and from behind. You catch up and go past it and, depending on your angle off, you go past it a certain amount. The more sharp the angle off, the more you go past it. And you never stop. You squeeze the trigger while you are still moving.

John: Okay.

Robert: Guys were shooting down as little as eight or ten, maybe even less. I was shooting down seventeen, eighteen.

John: Oh, wow.

Robert: And the guy told them, "You know why he is doing better than you guys, you, and you, and you? Because he listens. You think you know everything already, and he don't."

John: That is a good point.

Robert: You can't point. You got to, and in some ways it's like throwing a football to someone who is running, you know. You figure where he is going to be, rather than where he is.

John: Okay. That's good.

Robert: So, when I got through with gunnery school, they shipped us all, well, some of us, anyway, I guess, to Lincoln, Nebraska. And that is where we got out crew together, a B-17. We didn't get our plane there, they just assigned us to the various crews. In fact, I don't remember meeting my crew there, but they all were assigned, actually. And then we went by train to Ardmore, Oklahoma. And at Ardmore, we flew, and shot. Well, at gunnery school, you shot at stuff in the air, you know, sleeves being dragged by B-26's, and you were flying a B-17. For a while there, in fact, in gunnery school, I forgot to tell you something else. They told us, if the gun jams, don't lift up the cover plate right away, because it is going to be hot, and maybe a round will cook off. So, while one guy was shooting out of the waits gun at these sleeve targets, the other guy would have to stand there and hold the belt up because they didn't want to feed in too well, there was too much weight hanging there, you know. And I am laid over the gun and immediately the gun stopped firing, he opened the cover plate and a round cooked off, and I had brass all over my face.

John: Oh, man.

Robert: That was my only injury in the war. But I was bleeding all over the place. A lot of little sticky things. And then they shipped us out to Ardmore, Oklahoma. By this time, it was April of 1944 when we got to Ardmore. Just about the beginning of April. And we flew and shot at targets in the air, and shot at sometimes targets on the ground. And I remember one time we were shooting, we were flying at a real

low altitude and I am in the tail, and at low altitude, the air was bumpy. And I am shooting back there, and I am getting sick. So I would b-r-r-r-r, a couple of bursts, or so, and b-r-r-r-p, and then another burst, b-r-r-r-r, and then b-r-r-r-p. And I called the pilot and told him I was getting sick back here, and he said, "You want to come forward?" And I said, "Well, I'll come when I finish my rounds." And I finished all my rounds by alternating back and forth, and when I came forward, he had me sit in his chair and fly the airplane, you know, with the co-pilot next to me. And I flew it for maybe ten, fifteen minutes, I don't know. And then when I went overseas, from Ardmore, we went up to Nebraska, Kearney, Nebraska. And there we got our airplane. And we were there for maybe a week or so. Didn't do much training there. It was a matter of getting a plane and getting going when everything was ready. So we flew from Kearney to Dow Field, Bangor, Maine. By this time it was like early July, right after the 4th of July. From Dow Field, Bangor, Maine, you fly to Gander Field, Newfoundland. And then from Gander Field, Newfoundland, you fly to near Belfast, Northern Ireland. I remembered, I thought I remembered, Nutts Corners.

John: Okay.

Robert: N-u-t-t-s Corners, but I'm not positive about that. There, we were only there for a short time, and we went across the Irish Sea to Liverpool, England. And my thing about Liverpool, England, was, "Man, this town was ugly." Old, beat up ugly buildings, and streets, cobblestones, not too clean, and with the plumbing outside the building.

John: Okay, okay.

Robert: Then from there, they took us by, I think by trucks, over to the Wash, they call it, which was on the northeast coast of England. And there we fired at targets from the shore, to targets out on the water with .50 caliber machine guns. And what we were hitting out there was whales and porpoises. Too bad.

John: Oh, yea.

Robert: Offshore, there. We were whale killers. So, from there we went to Diss, England, D-i-s-s. That was going to be our air base. The 490th Bomb Group. I can't remember my squadron. I just remember the group, 490th.

John: Okay.

Robert: We were there, at the beginning, we were there as a crew, flying as a full crew, and we flew a few missions, and then the order came through to fly. Doolittle had taken over the 8th Air Force that spring, I think it was. And he decided you only

needed one waist gunner. If you had a plane here, and there was a plane here, you didn't need this waist gunner, and this one didn't need that waist gunner. Away from other planes. And I was by far the youngest man in the crew. I had only one schooling, gunnery school. Everybody else, except the ball turret gunner, had been to either armory school, or radio school, or engineering school. So the pilot, and he thought he was doing me a favor, which I didn't like, really, he decided that he was going to take me off the crew and take one of those waist gunners, and make him the tail gunner. So, from that point on, instead of living with my crew, I lived in a Nissen hut with about twenty other guys who were in the same boat I was in, extra gunners. So that went on for maybe a couple of months that way, and then one day they came in early in the morning, real early, and they said, "Need a gunner." And for a little while, it was totally silent. And then I says, "I'll take it." And the guys were saying, "You're crazy." So I went, and met my crew, and it was my old crew.

John: Oh, yea?

Robert: What had happened, I don't know if I should say this or not. The person was in London, and you can delete this if you want to, and he was doing something naughty with another man's wife, and they heard him coming home, so he jumped out the window and cracked a bone in his foot. So now I am taking his place, flying as waist gunner. And on that mission, the target was Kassel, Germany. And we got over the target area and there was flak. What happened, we got a real close burst. Hit hear the top of the plane, but off a little bit. And I think what happened, myself, was the top turret gunner, he got hit by one small piece, very minor injury, but I think what he did, when he pulled his head when this thing was happening, and he pulled himself off oxygen.

John: Oh.

Robert: Now he is off oxygen, and he is laying down there right in front of the bomb bay, because he was right behind the pilot and co-pilot. And right in front of the bomb bay area, unconscious. Because you can't stay off oxygen. By the time you take your second breath, you are unconscious. At twenty-eight thousand feet, you take one and you'll get a boom!

John: Like you said earlier.

Robert: Yea. The second breath, you probably are going to go out. So, the bombardier always calls for an oxygen check after a bomb run. So he starts with the tail, the furthest guy away. "Roger, okay," you know. Then the ball turret gunner, he checks in, he's okay. And then there is only one waist gunner, that's me, I check in, I'm okay. The radio gunner is right in front of me. He checks in, he's okay.

And now we get to the top turret gunner, no answer. So, the navigator went back to help him, you know, to find what was going on. And, foolishly, he took his glove off and he touched the bare metal, and he got a freeze burn. So, he quit, and went back to his position again. So then the radio gunner said, over the intercom, "Okay, go back to the tail wheel and get the heated blanket and bring it up to the radio room." So I had to get a walk-around bottle and to back to the tail wheel and get the heated blanket, and bring it up to the radio room. But when I got on the way back again, I see the radio man is sprawled out on his back, you know. sprawled over the ball turret. There is a step down from the radio room to the waist area and he must have had a long step and goofed up, or something. I don't know what really happened. So he is unconscious, laying across the ball turret. So now I have to pick him up. And he was a stocky kind of a guy. But, I guess, when you need it, you have the strength. And I was young. I was just nineteen. So I put him back in his chair in the radio room, and put him back on the regular oxygen system again. And then just at that moment, I felt like someone had whacked me in the chest. So I pulled myself off that walk-around bottle and plugged myself into the regular system. Then I had to get another walk-around bottle and help him when he got acclimated just a little bit, a minute or so, go through the cat walk, which is a little narrow area between the bomb racks. They got a little area about that wide.

John: Yea, yea.

Robert: And go there and get him, and bring him back, and lay him out on the floor. And I said, "We better put him on free-flow oxygen." If you go on demand oxygen, and he is not breathing, nothing is going to happen. So I did free-flow oxygen, and it took about less than a minute, and he came around again. Now, this time, however, he had been off oxygen for at least five minutes. He could die. You could die, even, because the oxygen in your brain is down too far. But he ended up having no ill effects.

John: Wow. That's miraculous.

Robert: Yea. And then, because the plane had some damage, not too much, but just enough to screw it up a little bit, and we had strong head winds. And the plane is less efficient when you have strong head winds. We couldn't make it back to England. We had to land at an air base about eight or nine miles from the front line, in Belgium someplace, I think it was. And by this time it was October, '44. And the invasion had already taken place and they had got that far, you know. And we stayed there overnight and we got the plane fixed and also refueled, and late the next day we flew back to England again. By this time, I had been awake from about three o'clock in the morning the day before and now it is about six or seven o'clock p. m. the next day. As we were walking back to either where we

were going to get a ride or I forget now, I leaned up against a fence and fell asleep.

John: I can believe that.

Robert: Then I flew one more mission with that crew. The same deal, they came through looking, "Need a gunner!" And I was the only one that said, "Okay, I'll take it." We went to Münster, Germany, and bombed that, and we didn't have any big incidents. We had flak. No fighter planes. I never saw fighter planes attacking our group when I was flying in B-17s. They did attack the B-17s in other groups. There'd be five hundred airplanes up in the air going over. Sometimes more.

John: Yea. Yea.

Robert: So, they'd attack some places, but not necessarily where you were. So then they shipped us, about four or five hundred of us out of the 8th Air Force. I figured they needed some gunners on B-26s and I think some of the guys might have ended up on B-24s, down in Italy, with the 15th Air Force. So we went up to Glasgow, Scotland, by train. Another ugly town, very ugly. And took an English ship all along the coast until we get to the Mediterranean Sea, and we went through there, and landed at Naples. And then they took us in trucks, to Marcianise was the name of the place, near Caserta, Italy, north of Naples, twenty miles or so. They used to call these places repo-depos. You know that expression?

John: Yea. Replacement depots.

Robert: And then they asked some questions, what you would like. And I said I would like to fly in medium bombers. I was a little dis-trustworthy of being up on the oxygen system when things are going on. And maybe a week or so later, I am on a C-47 flying up to Lyon, France, from Italy. The Invasion of the south of France had taken place in August, now this was November, and we landed at Lyon, and we stayed there maybe one or two nights in a French fort with German prisoners. They did all the K. P., the cooking, bus boys.

John: They were probably happy to do that. Let me run this forward and turn it.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

Okay, German POWs. Waiters and bus boys. Probably the happiest German soldiers in the war.

Robert: They were captured down in the invasion of southern France, and brought to the area, and used. We got to, then they shipped us by truck, I think, I'm not sure, to Dijon, France.

John: Dijon.

Robert: Dijon mustard. I didn't know that then. And within about two days after I got there, I was on my first mission, as a tail gunner on a B-26. And we were bombing on the southern side of the Rhine River, this side of the Rhine River and the other side, both. Various places, like Kaiserslautern, Germany, and Weissach, Germany, and Isenburg, was in France, actually. And some towns near Strasbourg, and that area, and Offenburg, and Lahr [?], Germany, and so forth. And one of the things we were doing, we were helping the French 1st Army, which was down there in what they call, the line was like this. And the French Army, it was bulging way out.

John: Okay.

Robert: I can make a comment.

John: I know what you mean.

Robert: One German soldier equals seven French soldiers. So we were bombing to help the French over there, and one of the targets for us was a big railroad bridge over the Rhine River at Busach [?], and they were using that to resupply their troops on the west side of the river. So, they told us when we went over there the Germans had really decided they were going to protect that bridge. They said there were going to be ninety-six 88 millimeter cannons there shooting at you.

John: Oh, wow.

Robert: And we were going to go over that thing at ten thousand feet, about thirty-six B-26s, and bomb this bridge out. Well, what happened, I don't think we lost any airplanes.

John: Oh, yea. Oh, wow.

Robert: But, out of thirty-six airplanes, they all had holes. Okay? And we did knock the bridge out, I guess. We hit our targets, actually, more, in the B-26s than in the B-17s did. I didn't realize at the time but I found out later on how often they hit.

John: What was the bomb load of a B-26?

Robert: Four thousand to six thousand pounds. Less distance than a B-17. There was as much bomb load as a B-17 carried, but we couldn't go as far. B-24s had about eight thousand pounds, at least, and they could also even go further. But, anyway,

on New Years Day, 1945, that is when we were bombing Kaiserslautern, I mentioned before, we lost our commanding officer of our squadron, shot down by flak. His name was Major Gillespie. A very nice, democratic kind of a guy. Things were pretty democratic in the Air Force, anyway. Particularly in combat crews, and so on. We could practically, the enlisted men, we could practically do no wrong. We couldn't get into trouble if we tried. They'd always excuse us. But, before that, we had a mission over Germany, what was it near? It was near Offenburg, I think, or one of those other towns over there in Germany. And I had myself and one, two, three other guys in our tent. We had like a four or five man tent. Which you built with wood frames. We stole the wood from an officer's club. Midnight requisitions.

John: Midnight requisitions.

Robert: Built the frame and the floor off the ground. It was all mud, otherwise. And tent then we hung over this framework rather than over the poles they gave us. Every body knew we were stealing. And then you had a stove, pot belly kind of a stove. Whatever you could locate one. And then enough tubing out of airplanes out on the field, German airplanes or whatever they would be, and a pinch thing. And we used jerry cans to put aviation fuel in the jerry cans and then have that drip into the pot belly stoves and you'd put it on at night. Let a little gas flow into the bottom of the stove. You'd throw a match in there and the thing would get red hot. And then when you left the tent for the day, or anything, you made sure you put it off.

John: Okay.

Robert: One tent burned down completely. While the guys were in it. They had screwed up and gas was flowing and they didn't realize it was flowing. And they threw a match in there and zoom! They all escaped but they had a blaze going.

John: They were fortunate. Wow.

Robert: And the French government gave us all a badge and it said on it *Toujours en danger*. Which is French for always in danger. For doing what we did for the French. And, of course, we also won as part of our military decorations was, the ETO [European Theater of Operations] with four battle stars, and the Air Medal with five clusters.

John: Oh. Wow.

Robert: And I had a couple of Unit Citation things. Nothing to do with me, it was the whole unit. And then around March of 1945, the Germans started attacking us

with Me-262 twin-engine airplanes. They first appeared in September for some groups in some places in Europe, and so forth. And I think the first time they attacked us, we didn't lose any airplanes because they broke off their attack too soon. But the next two times they attacked us, and particularly the last time, we had thirty-six B-26s on a mission over a town near Nuremberg, and a number of these things jumped us, and they knocked down four B-26s out of thirty-six, and damaged two others. One, his name was Philip Remington Cook. I didn't even know him at the time. He was in the same group but a different squadron, and all of the squadrons were in different locations. They didn't want us all together in case the Germans decided to come over and bomb us. And he was a "toggelier," actually. You know, we had that expression. It's a bombardier who is not really a bombardier. He's only a staff sergeant or a tech sergeant, and he didn't go through bombardier school. He is a gunner, actually. But all he does, when the bombardier in the lead plane opens the door, the bomb bay doors, he opens his bomb bay doors. And then when he sees the bombs start to drop off, he lets his go too.

John: Okay. So he was a toggler?

Robert: Yea, Toggelier, they called it.

John: Okay, I get it.

Robert: So his plane got hit by a Me-262 in the rear of the engine, one of the engines, came out the front of the engine, through the cockpit area, and out the other side of the cockpit area, but it did not explode, fortunately. He wouldn't be here. I didn't know him until after I got into college. I went to a small college, Amherst College, after the war and he was assigned as my roommate, and my second semester, I think it was. And then he moved into Beta Theta Pi fraternity house. He was my roommate for one semester.

John: The Me-262, was that the jet?

Robert: Yea. Me-262, twin-engine jet. So we were attacked by Me-109s twice, in December, '44. And we were attacked by Me-262s three times in March and April, '45. The last time was April 25, 1945. I still remember it because it was my brother's birthday, and that is when they really shot down the four and damaged two. Which is probably the heaviest loss I was ever on, on a mission. And very late in the war, because the war was all over on May the 8th. And while I was there in Dijon, I could, I don't know if I want to bring up any people I met.

John: Sure. [section deleted]

Robert: When I got discharged, when I came back from overseas, first they sent us from

our base at Dijon to Florennes, Belgium. This was just transportation to get away from. The French did not want soldiers, as soon as possible, in France any more.

John: Okay. Before that, though, what was the reaction among you fellows when you heard that Germany had surrendered?

Robert: I was happy for a lot of people, but I was also sad, for me. I wanted to fly some more missions. Young, stupid. I didn't have enough yet.

John: That's good.

Robert: In fact, I went, with another guy, named Jonathan Conn, right after the war ended, we went in to see this Lieutenant Colonel Foster, who took over in January of '45, after the other one got shot down. And I asked him if he would send us to the Pacific Theater, now. We wanted to go over there now. We didn't want to be stuck fooling around here, doing nothing. China-Burma-India, wherever, in a medium bomber group. And he didn't do it. Either he didn't want to, or maybe he didn't think he had the authority to do it. He was a West Point man, however. So then they shipped us to, they had us for a little while when the war ended. Going to classes, taking trigonometry, and other things, and we played a little baseball, right there on the grass. And then they shipped us to Florennes, Belgium, and at this base, there were some ovens, small ovens. What the Germans were doing were using this particular area to experiment with various medicines. And one of the things they were experimenting with was a cure for venereal diseases like syphilis, gonorrhea, whatever they may be. And they'd give these people the disease and they would see if this worked or that worked. And when they died, they put them in the little oven and burned them.

John: Wow.

Robert: So, that would be the end of them. And then they sent us to, this was like transportation towards home, you know. In fact, while we were at Florennes, we did a little bit of flying, just to, I think I only flew once or twice. But one crew went up training, flying, and the guy was shooting at some targets. The top turret gunner was shooting at some targets. And when you are shooting with the top turret gun, you got the vertical stabilizer, it gets in the way. But you have a cam mechanism is supposed to shut the gun off when it goes right by there. Well, it didn't do it and he shot the vertical stabilizer, and the plane crashed and they were all killed. All the war, and they shoot themselves down. That kind of thing. We went to Amiens, France. We were there for a few days. Amiens. They had a little base thing there. And from there to La Bourges, which is, you know, part of Paris. From there, we flew on a C-47 to Wales, near, I thought it was Valley, Wales, but I'm not positive. And then we were there a little bit. You always got socked in by

weather. The weather over there, you know, that northwest part of Europe, is kind of stinky. So we stuck there for a little bit. And then we flew from there to Iceland on a C-47. And then you are stuck there for a little bit. And while I was there, I saw these guys playing softball, fast-pitch softball. Eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock at night, because they have double daylight saving time, and of course, you were way the hell up north. It didn't get dark. So then from there, we went to Greenland, Meigs Field, Greenland. And then from there we went to Labrador. Goose Bay, Labrador. And from there we went, in another C-47, the same plane, I guess, to Connecticut, some base in Connecticut. And then from there they took us by train to Fort Dix, New Jersey. And I was there for just a couple of days or so, and then I got a pass. What I really got was my three-R. Recovery, recuperation, and something else. Well, we got thirty days. It did not count against your leave. I had never had a leave, in fact. It was kind of a goofy thing. When we left our base at Ardmore, to go over seas, we actually left there. We weren't quite through with out training. They wanted to get us over there to help, after the invasion at Normandy. They said, no leave. Well, I hadn't had one, so I didn't get one. So I had never been home from the time I went in until I got home again, from Fort Dix. And by this time, it was August, from the time I actually got home, it was August of '45. And I found out when I got home, kind of late at night. I took a taxi. I had never been to this home because they had moved from Quincy, Massachusetts, to Bronxville, which is up in Westchester County, in the summer of '44, while I was over in England. And took a taxi from the train station in Bronxville and I got home. My father and my sister Madeleine came to the door and we talked for a couple of minutes or something. And I said, "Where's mom?" And they told me my mother had just died, in July. July 16, I think it was.

John: Oh, wow.

Robert: It was about a month by the time I got home.

John: That is something.

Robert: They had notified the Red Cross but they didn't notify them properly. Because this was the situation. We were nominally Congregationalists, when I was growing up. My father's family had been Baptist. My mother was Congregationalist. We were old Americans, related to the pilgrims, actually.

John: Oh, yea?

Robert: My eighth great grandfather was Miles Standish.

John: I'll be darned.

Robert: Who came over as the leader from England to the Netherlands, to Plymouth. And then my father got sick in 1931 with ulcers. He had just started working as a salesman for a paper mill, and his brother, an older brother, had already changed over to be a Christian Scientist. So my father changed over. Got sick. Didn't have an operation but then he turned over to become a Christian Scientist. And so, naturally, you as a child with a family, I had a brother eight years older than me. This is when I was eight years old. So my brother would be sixteen. Then there was a daughter, a girl, ten, twelve, and fourteen. Every two years. And you go to Sunday school from the time I was eight years old until the time I was eighteen years old. For ten years, as a Christian Scientist. And there, of course, what they believe in is there is no such thing as sickness and sin and death, and so forth. Everything that is is made by God therefore everything that is is perfect, so there can be no imperfection, because God would not make anything that was imperfection. Therefore, sicknesses are not there, really, and if you understand that very strongly, they won't be there. That's pretty much what it is all about. And I really believe that, quite a bit of that. And there was a Scientific Statement of Being that I had to memorize and go through, and so forth. But, when I got in the service and saw some of the things going on in the service, even at basic training, we had so many sick people with, it turned out to be spinal meningitis and other things, they took a whole section of the base and made it into a hospital. A barracks. All these barracks were a hospital. And some of them were dying from spinal meningitis. And just before we went overseas, the pilot came to me one day and he said, "If you are hurt on a mission, will you let us help you?" And I said, "You bet." "I'm glad to hear that." Any hard struggling against me being aided. So, really, by around that time I was getting to the point where, "Nah, I don't believe in it." So, when I came back, and I didn't go to church at all, really. All the time I was in college, I never went to church, period. Any church. So, from 1945, well, from 1943, when I went into the service, I never went to church. And when I came back, in 1945, until 1950, I never went to church. And in 1950, I started going to Protestant churches. And I started learning some things that I really didn't understand before. Being that way. Who Jesus really was. Who we really were. And why He was here. And then I met my wife. And she's a Catholic. Mother and father both came from Poland, down near Krakow, southeast of Krakow.

John: Okay.

Robert: And then when I became very fond of her, and fell in love with her, finally. In fact, I fell in love fairly soon.

John: Okay.

Robert: Finally, we were going to get married. So I figured, I'll study her religion. And all

I wanted was, if I feel it, if it falls into the Christian tradition of beliefs, I will join her church. And I'd rather be in her church and go to church with her and bring our children up the same way.

John: Yea.

Robert: So I studied the religion for a few months, and then when we got married, I entered in the church. So that is how I became a Catholic. From a Congregationalist to a Christian Scientist to a nothing to being a fundamentalist Protestant, really, to being a Catholic.

John: Yea. You worked your way through it. Most people don't do that. Thinking, finding.

Robert: Most Catholics are born Catholics. There are some converts. So many of them are born.

John: You mentioned a lot of the guys with spinal meningitis. My older brother died of from spinal meningitis.

Robert: Your brother?

John: My older brother. In the late '30s. Yea. When you were over there, I assume you were living in tents. The winter of '44-'45 was very cold. That was one of the coldest on record.

Robert: Oh! A lot of snow.

John: What did that do for living conditions, and that?

Robert: Well, we had army cots, and we had four of them in there. The guy that was killed was Sergeant Joe Armstrong. He was killed on a mission over Kaiserslautern, no before Kaiserslautern, December 23, 1944. Two days before Christmas. Then another guy, Paul Hott, was another one who was my tent mates. Another guy was Edward M. Cole. I used to call him E. M. "Enlisted Man" Cole. And then me. And then when Joe Armstrong was shot down and the plane was just riddled. An Me-109 bore in and didn't stop until his plane. And he was firing back at the Me-109, too. But the Me-109 won.

John: Yea, yea.

Robert: Our escort, when we were flying B-26s, our escorts were P-47s. When I was flying in B-17s, our escorts were P-51s. The reason for that was P-51s could fly

further because they had wing tanks, and so forth. And they were probably better at higher altitude than P-47s were, anyway. They did a fairly good job for us, anyway. Because before escorts, the losses to German fighter planes in '42, '43, and the first about three or four months of '44, even, to fighter planes, was pretty high.

John: Just within the past couple of weeks I was reading something about air crews. The army air crews lost more men over Europe than the Marines lost all across the Pacific.

Robert: I know.

John: Yea. The losses were just...

Robert: Well, that was the 8th Air Force, alone.

John: Yea, okay.

Robert: That was the 8th Air Force, alone. I didn't realize, you know, when I got there, in B-17s, you had to fly thirty missions. Before that, it had been twenty-five, originally. And then, as things were not quite as bad, probably about late spring of '44, they changed it to thirty. And then, about August or September, around that time, notice came up on the board, and it says, if you don't have eighteen missions in as of this date, the new number is thirty-five missions. When I left England, it was still thirty-five, for B-17s.

John: That's bad inflation.

Robert: Yea. For B-26s, it was more, because you missions were shorter.

John: Yea.

Robert: The other difference between B-26s and B-17s, however, was B-26s had big, big engines, and it was kind of a heavy airplane. It is the same size, looking, as a B-25, more or less. But it is a lot heavier, and the wings on a B-26 were awfully too short.

John: Oh, yea?

Robert: Oh, sixty-nine feet from tip to tip, something like that. In order to get off, you had a tricycle landing gear. In order to get off the ground, you had to get to an air speed of at least 150 miles an hour, which was pretty fast. B-17s could take off about ninety miles an hour, and they could, they had big wide wings, and fairly

long, too. And then the runways that we flew from at Dijon were concrete for maybe four thousand feet, and then they had to add on another three or four thousand feet to make it longer. They made it out of steel mat.

John: I remember my mother worked for a company that made that mat.

Robert: And when you got to those steel mat runways, sometimes they would cut your tire and you're going maybe a hundred and fifty miles an hour, and this tire over here gets cut, boom. So, we'd lose airplanes. We did not lose too many people on the airplanes, only now and then. Somehow or other they would all get off, before the thing exploded or burned, or whatever. Once or twice, though, they didn't get off. And, in fact, I remember one time, we were waiting our turn to go, and we were hardly in the airplane yet. We were still way back. And a plane crashed up near the end of the runway. And I could, I decided along the way, I better hit the ground. Just as I hit the ground, the ground came up to meet me. Because they exploded. And me and the ground met each other. It didn't hurt me or anything. I was too far away from it. But the plane blew up. So, we lost, I would say, every time thirty-six airplanes took off, we would lose one to either a crash on take-off, and sometimes to crash on landings. Because you had to fly a B-26 in at a good speed. You couldn't flop it in at kind of a low speed. You had to fly it right into the ground. So, once in a while, either the power was lost, or the pilot screwed up. Maybe, I don't know, and they would lose air speed, lose air speed, the plane would bump!

John: I heard it was a hard plane to fly because the wings were short. Yea. They used to train pilots at Tampa, at McDill Field.

Robert: The guys that trained there in B-26s, they had an expression, "One a day in Tampa Bay."

John: That's what I was going to say.

[End of Side B to Tape 1.]

Okay, now you came back to the States about when?

Robert: August of '45, when I hit the States. The bomb on Nagasaki, or Hiroshima, the first one, I think about that time, we were on our way to Labrador.

John: That was my birthday. August 6.

Robert: Yea.

John: Now, were you coming back to get discharged, or were you coming back to go to the Pacific?

Robert: Well, being in the Air Force, they weren't going to discharge people in the Air Force until the war was over, period. I had points to become discharged because, in the Air Force you got medals more often than most people did.

John: All right.

Robert: In fact, my brother-in-law, who was in the Infantry at the same time I was over there, he went in on D-Day plus 1 or 2, with the Second Infantry Division, and he was already about thirty-two years old.

John: He was an old man.

Robert: He says, "You guys in the Air Force," this was after the war when we met, he says, "you guys got a medal every time you go to the toilet." So you had to have eighty-five points during World War II. That was going to be the first bunch to get out. And some guys had more, that had been there the longest. I had exactly eighty-five points so theoretically I could get out. So when the war did end in the Pacific, I was let out. I came back from my thirty day leave in September of '45, went down to Greensboro, North Carolina, where I went to basic training, and I got discharged. And I was discharged September 27, I think. So I got out early because I had the points.

John: Then what did you do?

Robert: Well, the rest of that fall and the winter, Christmas time, I remember, I delivered mail. Had a job with that. And went into New York City a couple of times. I met another lady and I dated her, and we went horseback riding a couple of times. She was real good at it and I was scared getting up on that damned thing but I had to go with her because, Ann Rivers, her name was. Shoveled a little bit of snow, and that kind of thing Went to a show in New York. In fact, I went to see *Show Boat*.

John: Oh, wow.

Robert: That was playing in New York around that time. And I went with this girl, Ann. And then in February of '46, the semester started at Amherst College, so I went up there to start school.

John: What was your field?

Robert: Well, I majored in economics.

John: Okay.

Robert: So I had to take, while I was there, I had to take economics, or course. Political science, history, English, French, math as far as trigonometry, analytic geometry, statistic analysis, and differential calculus. That was all part of the economics program. And I had to take several science things like biology and geography. That was a real easy course.

John: Oh, yea, you had been to half of those places. You had the G. I. Bill, didn't you?

Robert: Yea.

John: Did you use it for your education?

Robert: Oh, yea.

John: Did you use it for anything else?

Robert: No.

John: Okay. How about, well, I'll get to this in a minute. But, after college, what did you do?

Robert: I graduated, I was supposed to, I could have graduated in June of '49. I was in the class of '49. But I went to summer school in '46 and that put us in the schedule of '49, but in the spring of '48, I talked to C. Scott Porter, who was the dean, and I told him I would like to take a semester off, because I was having a lot of ear aches. What I had, as it turned out later on, I had pretty bad tinnitis from shooting skeet out in Arizona.

John: Oh, okay.

Robert: The guy came around and got too close to me. And it was giving me ear aches. And I went to, in Boston, Chelsea Naval Hospital, and I had a couple different operations, and it helped a tiny bit, but not much. So I went back to school again in the fall, and then I had to go to school at Penn State University the summer of '49 to make up for the semester I lost in '48. Then, when I got through there I went to New York. I thought I was going to hit the big time. And I lived in Brooklyn, actually, and I interviewed for various jobs, and I worked in a rug factory. I had to have something because I didn't have any money. I think when I left Penn State I had \$50 in my pocket and a suitcase and a tennis racket. I played a lot of tennis when I was young. And that was my whole fortune.

John: That was it.

Robert: Yea.

John: Well, it was easy to carry.

Robert: I had a driver's license. I got my driver's license in '47. I was twenty-two years old before I got a driver's license. And I went to New York and I worked. And then I worked at Christmas time at Macy's department store as a floor walker, sometimes, and sometimes as pricing art. Which I don't know anything about art. "You're going to price art." Okay. And then I sold Electro-Lux vacuum cleaners, door to door. No car. Carry it with you, and you get on busses, subways, whatever, with that thing, and get to a neighborhood, someplace in Brooklyn. And I think I'll try this one. It would be a big apartment building, you know. So, your would ring some door bells and you'd get some negative responses at the door bell. And some of the people, they are afraid of you, I think.

John: Well, that makes sense.

Robert: And they would say, "Get away from my door or I'll kill you!" So, I would say, "I think I'll leave this one." And I'd go to another one. My best customers, I sold more vacuum cleaners to black people. If I got in the door, if they let me in, if I could demonstrate it, then my chances of selling it were maybe sixty, seventy percent.

John: That's tremendous.

Robert: Yea. We got paid \$35 for each machine. The machine only sold for \$69.95. I still remember the number. \$71.15, with tax, And I would always sell an automatic cord winder with it and that was like \$14.50, or something like that. Our commission rate was pretty good. And then I was very generous. I would always give them one or two bags, to go with it. So I took different jobs. Then the Korean War came on in 1950. In 1948, I had joined the reserves, the Air Force Reserves. That summer, I went on a two week tour to Stewart Air Force Base in New York. And that was up by Newburgh and Beacon, New York. I don't know if you know anything about that. Newburg and Beacon were, by the people of the East, was the Barbary Coast of the East.

John: Oh, yea?

Robert: Kind of tough towns. And in 1950 I was back in the Air Force again.

John: Oh, yea? You got called back?

Robert: And they gave me a whole bunch of tests. And, of course, I had been out of college not too long, so, naturally, you are going to score pretty high in these military tests. So, they had various categories, you know. Administrative, something else, something else, I don't know what they all were. And electronics. Well, I scored high in everything. The highest you could score was a nine, I think. I think I had eights to nines on everything. Well, I should have at that point in my life. So they wanted, if you could score high in electronics, that's what they wanted you to be. So I was sent off to electronics school. So I was, they had the APQ-24 navigational and bombing computer system on B-36s, which was a four-engine pusher prop engines, no, six of those and four jet engines for take-off. So I was assigned to them out of California, after I went through school. And you had to pre-flight and post-flight the equipment, and fix it if something was wrong with it, you know, that sort of thing. And then you would be on part-time flying status. You would be on flying status this month and then not for another few months, and then flying status again, and you would be there in case something happened to the equipment. Well, depending on what unit went bad, you could fix it. But some of the units, outside the airplane, like the antenna, too bad.

John: How about vets organizations? VFW?

Robert: I did join, let's see, what did I join? I think the American Legion. My brother-in-law did, after the war. But then when the year was up, I didn't bother, because I was in college and I couldn't be bothered with a lot of these side effect things. At first, in college, my first semester, I went out for the basketball team. I had never played basketball in high school but I had played on what the called "nut leagues" in the YMCA. All the teams were named after some nut: peanut, coconut.

John: Okay.

Robert: That's true. I was on the peanuts, I think. And so I played basketball, doing that. And picked up basketball, so I decided I'd go out for basketball and I didn't get to play very much because the first semester, the guys were already there and played more than you did, so then when spring came around, I went out for spring football that year. And then in the summer, I didn't do anything but work. I'd go to school. What we did, we would work on potato farms and tobacco farms. The wrapper tobacco for the cigars up the Connecticut River Valley, they had those farms up there. So you'd be out there hoeing on the tobacco farms, and sometimes the potato farms. Those were the two big farm crops in that area. And then we also dug a big long ditch for a professor who had a house built. We dug it for his pipes and everything that came to the house from the street and that was a lot of digging. And in the fall, I went out for football again. I got hurt, needless to say. I

weighed a hundred and sixty-nine pounds. I was the lightest guy. I was an end. And I was the lightest guy out for the line, by quite a bit. There was some guys about a hundred and eighty-five, also ends. Everybody else was, oh, one ninety-five to two eighteen. I mean, they weren't that big as they are now but they were bigger than I was.

John: Yep. Yep.

Robert: Nowadays, they'd say, hey, "You're too small to be the water boy." And then I didn't get any support from home, at all. I lived on the G. I. Bill plus what I could earn myself, and what I had saved in the military service while I was gone. And after about three semesters of college, that money ran out, you know, that I had. So now it was all, I worked in the dining hall, every meal, seven days a week. I actually ended up working forty-two hours a week in the dining hall as a bus boy, and you got paid fifty cents an hour. Every week I'd get \$21. I did that the whole rest of my time. So I kind of quit all the athletic crap. I couldn't do both.

John: Sure.

Robert: And until my senior year, and I thought, I want to do this, and baseball, too. You know. So I went out for baseball. And I hadn't thrown enough. I had a good hook and a good in-shoe, as I called it, or a screwball. And I hurt my arm. Right in here. And I had to leave that. And then I got better just before school was out and I played on a western Massachusetts semi-pro team.

John: Oh?

Robert: And what they did, not much money involved in it, well, very, very little money. Meals, free travel. And then I had to leave and go to Penn State University. So at Penn State I went back to playing tennis that summer. And I worked in the Beta Theta Phi fraternity house, washing pots and pans. They had a school there for children who had speech impediments, or whatever, and this woman, very highly religious woman, hired me to do pots and pans. So I did that that summer. And I played a lot of horseshoes.

John: Oh? Okay.

Robert: We lived, I lived most of the time I was there in the forestry fraternity house.

John: Okay.

Robert: Right outside the back of it, they had one horseshoe pitching place. And it was wood platforms, you know, and the posts, and clay. The clay was kept damp and

burlap bags, and beautiful. I was all by myself, practicing. Well, I had played a lot of horseshoes from about twelve years old until I was eighteen years old. In fact, when I was in junior high and high school, they used to have 4th of July horseshoe pitching contests, mostly for adult men. But I would get into it. Well, my problem was, I could beat all the adults. At the age of thirteen, fourteen, I would practice. I would throw a hundred shoes, I would have thirty-five ringers, at that age. When I was at Penn State, I was practicing for a couple of weeks. You got to get your turn correct, and then you got to get your azimuth and your distance. You get it all going together, I would throw forty-five out of a hundred.

John: That's tremendous.

[Discussion with Bob's wife.]

John: Okay, what did you do as a career, Bob?

Robert: Oh, when I was released from the service, first thing I did was the steel business. With United States Steel Supply Division. Working in the office, in the pricing department. You had to price steel, f. o. b. points [free on board] to where it was going to go, depending on which was the best f. o. b. point for it to be shipped to, and you had to pro-rate freight rates. Then I left them and went to Ryerson, and I was there in the inside sales for about three years. And then I left them and I went to Indiana to work for a company that was from Detroit but had a branch plant in South Bend. And I was an outside salesman for them for almost five years. And left them and went to A. M. Castle and Company as an outside salesman. And they sent me to Minnesota, first. I was only there six months, and they sent me down here. And I was with them until 1970 and then I left them and went to the last company, Precision Steel Warehouse, in October, 1970, and I was with them until I retired at the end of March, 1991.

John: Okay. Looking back, you know, now this is what I ask all the guys and gals, you were a young person. You had a life, good, bad or whatever. And then they came and they dragged you out of it, and they sent you in harm's way. What is your reaction to that?

Robert: For me? At that time?

John: Yea.

Robert: Foolishly, I wanted it.

John: That's not unusual.

- Robert: A lot of guys did, that I knew back then. Friends and acquaintances, they wanted to go into combat. Particularly the guys who wanted to go in the Air Force. There were some guys who went in the Marines, quite a few of them. What do you expect? Paratroopers, some guys, "I'm going to be a paratrooper." So we were, a lot of us young guys at that time were foolish and very eager to get into this thing.
- John: Now that I have the time, I write. And one of my good friends, he just passed away. I think I told you on the phone, Stephen Ambrose. And his description was, "You guys were giants."
- Robert: What?
- John: You were giants. You went off and saved the world.
- Robert: No.
- John: Yea, you did. What a remarkable story. That is great. Well, I'll tell you what. I'll shut this off. Anything you want to add?
- Robert: No, I guess not. Four children. Two girls, two boys. And we have six grandchildren.
- John: That's great. And, as you said, they are all within the neighborhood here.
- Robert: Ah, two, three of the kids live right in the area here. The one lives in Brampton, Ontario, which is just this side of Toronto. That is the oldest son. But the other ones, the next son, the younger one is here in Oregon. And a daughter is in Verona. And another daughter is up here, just two miles over us.

[End of Interview]