

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN R. DeVAULT
Airplane Mechanic and Gunner, Air Force, World War II.

2004

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DeVault, John R. Oral History Interview, 2004.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John R. DeVault, an Indianapolis, Indiana native, discusses his experiences in the Army Air Corps in the European Theater of World War II. DeVault talks about enlisting, basic training in Texas, working on training airplanes at Cochran Field (Georgia), and learning airplane mechanics at the Academy of Aeronautics (New York). He describes the tightening of military protocol and security after the attack on Pearl Harbor. DeVault speaks of having pre-flight training at Santa Ana (California), primary training in Ontario (California), and being dropped from the air cadet program. After gunnery school at Wendover (Utah), he portrays his B-17 crew and his duties as mechanic and waist gunner. He talks about flying overseas and joining the 95th Bomb Group in England. DeVault discusses living conditions and the psychological effect of having the other crews he was living with get shot down. He states his first mission was to Berlin. DeVault describes a typical mission, being expected to practice shooting in his free time, and going to the theater for entertainment. After his plane was damaged during a mission, he recalls having to manually shut a bomb bay door in flight. He reflects on the heavy opposition from enemy fighter planes and flak. DeVault describes his thoughts when the number of required missions was raised. After thirty missions, he talks about going home aboard the RMS Queen Elizabeth and being irritated by the good treatment of German prisoners of War. At Chanute Field (Illinois) and Roswell (New Mexico), DeVault talks about learning electrical mechanics for B-29s and being discharged as soon as the war ended. He touches on moving to Sturgeon Bay (Wisconsin), finding a job and housing, using the VA Clinic in Green Bay, and becoming active in the VFW.

Biographical Sketch:

DeVault served from 1941 to 1945 in the 95th Bomb Group as an airplane mechanic and gunner. After the war, he moved to Sturgeon Bay (Wisconsin) with his wife, Margaret, and worked for Amity Leather.

Interviewed by Terry McDonald, 2004

Transcription by WVM staff, n.d.

Transcript checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Interview Transcript:

Terry: John R. DeVault, who served with the U.S. Army Air Corps, the 95th Bomb Group, during World War II. The interview is being conducted at approximately 10:00 A.M. and the interview is being conducted at 1223 Oregon St., Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin on the following date of August 27, 2004. The interviewer is Terry MacDonald. John, can you tell us a little bit about your background and life circumstances before you entered the military service?

DeVault: I graduated from high school in Indianapolis, Indiana and I took a job as a personnel clerk in that city with a steel company and I worked there right up to the time that I enlisted in the Air Force in 1941, the later part after [unintelligible]. I was in service before Pearl Harbor but it was still '41, you know. December '41 was Pearl Harbor; well, I got in in September, I think it was. And I had had basic training, we had that out in Texas, and from there I was moved to a post in Georgia where we started working on the line on basic trainers, Macon, Georgia.

Terry: When you entered the service did you go by yourself or did you have friends that entered the military?

DeVault: I had a couple friends that did the same thing I was doing. We were all working or getting ready for more school or something and we all three got together and decided we were gonna go [laughs], and it was about September or October of '41 that we went in because we were in before Pearl Harbor and that was December, so I had been in two or three months already. And by the time Pearl Harbor came I was going to school in New York City at what they called the Academy of Aeronautics; it was a privately-owned school and the government, you know, was sending their men there to learn airplane mechanics.

Terry: How did you get to go in the Air Corps?

DeVault: How did I? I don't know, it just—there was three of us went in together and we just, we talked about things and the Air Force won out in our [laughs] talk and feelings. And that was it. I had very little to do with flying. I'd never been up in the air in my life when I went into the service, but later I got plenty of it, and that's the way we—just young fellas, made a choice, you know, and we thought that would be a good place to start, and we did [laughs]. But during that first year I was in service we had basic training, of course. That's where the Air Force, you know, got you "broke in" and taught you all the rules and regulations and everything like that, and from there I was sent down to Macon, Georgia at Cochran Field to work on the line. Now that was in, what? It was the early part of '41, and we had not had Pearl Harbor yet, 'cause I can remember yet when

Pearl Harbor came that day. Well, to make a long story short, I went from Cochran Field up to this school in New York City on Long Island, Academy of Aeronautics, that was another individually-owned thing that the government was renting and sending students there. And we were in school there, and on that particular Sunday—of course, we always had the day off on Sunday, and another fella and I had gone downtown, as small city boys, you know [laughs], we go look around in the big city and that's what we were doin'. And that afternoon we were walkin', and I can remember it yet, and we were walking this way and the cab coming this way and he pulls up alongside of us and the cab driver hollers at us, "You fellas got to report to your service," whatever we called it. He says, "The Japs hit Pearl Harbor." And this guy Bill and I looked at each other [unintelligible]. [laughs] We had no indication, no knowledge and nothing, and there it was just thrown in our lap. The Japs hit Pearl Harbor. Well, that's what we did; we scurried back and got onto the base on Long Island there, the Academy of Aeronautics. And from then on life was all different, you know; the service tightened up fast and furious. You had to have a password to get in and out of our school and everything just became strict military. And that's the way it was all over. You go in a bar in New York City, somebody bought you a drink before you sat down. [laughter] It was funny sometimes, but that's how we got broke in. I was in the school and then there was a program that they had [for] air cadets and I thought that over and I thought, well, I'd like to take a shot at that and I put an application in for it.

Terry: Now what was that considered to be, an air cadet?

DeVault: Ah, just a student pilot, and suddenly I got called to come downtown and take a test in this building and I went and took the test, passed the test and they said, "O.K., you will be called." And so I maybe spent a couple more weeks there at the Academy and then I got called and I was sent to—now wait a minute while I get this straight—right, right straight out to California: Ontario, California. But first I had some pre-flight training at Santa Ana, California. And that took, oh, several weeks at Santa Ana and then right into primary training in Ontario and we had these little Stearmans, you know, two seaters and two wing, but they were fun to play around in. And I got to solo twice in them and I thought I was doing fine, but the problem with the Air Force was if they took in a hundred cadets in primary, they couldn't send a hundred primary to basic and then on to advanced; they just didn't have the facilities to do it. We all knew it and they all talked about it and everything, but it just couldn't happen. So if you did anything that they thought was out of line when you took a—we had civilian instructors, but we had military check graders, you know. And when I took my second check ride this fella come down and he said to me, "You should have cut in sooner to make your landing up there." And I looked at him [laughter] like I was dumbfounded because the instructor

never wanted us to fudge like that. But it didn't matter; that was the end of it. I was told, "Well, you're going to be eliminated from the program." And then they gave us a choice of several things that we could do. They weren't kicking us out of the Air Force, you know, just eliminated from that program. So they sent me up to Fresno, California to be inducted for gunnery school. Well, that didn't bother me; I thought, well, we're still flying. And I was up there for a while and then we were sent to Wendover, Utah where the gunnery school was. And that was up and outside of—there is a borderline where Wendover is, that's the state line. But the sand dunes up in there is where the gunnery school was located where you could shoot all the time and if you hit them sand dunes you couldn't hurt anything. But, ah, we were up there and if you could shoot, you know, anywhere's near, if you knew anything about a gun you were gonna pass that gunnery school [laughter], it wasn't that difficult, you know. But, ah—

Terry: Did they take you up in the airplanes for shooting, or was this ground-based?

DeVault: No, this was all ground shooting, all ground shooting; we had no air-to-air shooting there at all. And we had all thought about that and, well, they said it wouldn't be necessary and I guess they were right. [laughs] Anyway we were there that long and then from Wendover I was sent up into Washington State—where the heck was that? Moses Lake, Washington, and there they had taken over an airfield or something from somebody and the B-17s were kept there. And I got introduced to a pilot and co-pilot and then we were picking up our crew as we went along. A B-17 crew was ten people.

Terry: And what was your job?

DeVault: A gunner. Well, gunner and mechanic because I had been in the mechanic school. Two of the fellas were gunnery and two of the fellas were mechanics, and two of them were [laughs] something else, I can't remember. There was six enlisted men and two gunners, two mechanics, and two—ah, what was the third one; I can't even remember it. But anyway, I got introduced and we met the pilot, we met a man that was gonna be co-pilot who later on, he dropped out for some reason, we never did know why, but then we had a second guy that stuck with us as co-pilot. And we got finally ten of us together, eight enlisted men—well, six enlisted men and four officers. The two officers are pilot and co-pilot, the navigator, and the bombardier, that's the four. And then we were a crew there. And we had a lot of practice flying there, oh, several weeks of it before we got the word that we were ready to move out, and we felt that was alright. We knew everything about the gunnery and the B-17 that we were gonna know, you know.

Terry: Now the enlisted people, were they all the same rank?

DeVault: The enlisted men?

Terry: Yeah, or were they varied?

DeVault: No. We, became Buck Sergeants automatically. If you were on the crew and you had a gunnery rating, that carried a Buck Sergeant's rating. And then later on, after we had been all together there for a while, we were overseas, we made Staff Sergeant. And if we had stayed longer, we'd have been Tech Sergeants [laughs], but that's the way they worked it at that time and it never bothered us any. We got to understand the B-17. I was a waist gunner on one side and another fella was waist gunner on that side. Then there was one in the tail and I had to alternate with him sometimes; I had waist and tail. And then the other waist gunner, he did waist and something different, but you had one in the tail, two in the waist, and one in the turret, and then the radio operator gunner, and then the turret gunner, that was six. And then we had four officers; two of them were pilots and one was a navigator and one was a bombardier. So we were ready for action and then they sent us, we got the word to go out. We had an airplane at that time and we flew it all the way across the country. We had made, I know, one stop in Ohio, and then we went down Presque Isle, Maine, way up in the cold North. And then we were switched to a crew that was flyin' people back-and-forth all the time; well only four of 'em, the four officers, but our four then they just were passengers. The ten of us were on the plane. We didn't carry any bombs or anything like that. The guns were all set, everything up if we needed 'em, but we didn't and they took us over there and we landed in *Ireland*. I remember we all thought that was so crazy, but there was a field there that they put down at, and then it wasn't long from there that they flew us over to where the 95th Bomb Group was located, that was between Norwich and Ipswich in England, if you've ever been there. [laughs] Have you ever been in England?

Terry: No.

DeVault: Anyway, Norwich and Ipswich. The little, the little place where the tavern was was called Diss, and it held about two or three families plus a tavern. And, ah, that's where we got initiated into being a flying group.

Terry: Was that a fairly big base?

DeVault: Yes, quite a large base, uh-huh. I can't tell you how many it was, but it always seemed large to me. They never did give us figures, you know. During the war they were all tight-mouthed about everything; if you asked

too many questions somebody would look at ya [laughs]. But I never did know what the total capacity for that base was, but it was the 95th.

Terry: Did they put you up in living quarters in, in tents or Quonset Huts, or what type of—

DeVault: No, we had Nissen huts, Quonset huts you call them, and some of them were large, that would hold three or four crews. Well, you know, a three crew would be eighteen men, four, twenty-four, and the ones that were the best were the little two crew places; that's where we finally wound up. But we started out in a four crew place, and I think it was after our second or third mission, we came home that night and there was two crews left, the other two had gone down, and boy that told us where we were. From then on we knew we were in combat after guys you been sitting there talkin' with and got acquainted with, and then they were gone. [pause] And ah, we were in a crew, in this Nissen hut with another crew, and we all, the boys were all friendly with each other, you know, and, ah, suddenly, well, we, we, went along with our missions, we were on the first, ah, mission over Berlin, and—oh, I could name every mission we ever went for ya [sighs], but, ah, we were on the first one over Berlin, 95th Bomb Group, and, ah, then one night, we, we come back, this crew was gone, they had gone down, and, and—

Terry: What kind of feeling did that give you guys?

DeVault: Terrible feeling. But what could you do? You know, you got to the point of where you accepted it; you couldn't do anything else. If you didn't accept it, you'd report over to the doctor or somebody [laughs] and they'd, ah, decide whether they wanted to keep ya or get rid of ya. But they—we were okay that way. We knew what was goin' on. We had a good pilot and a good co-pilot and a good navigator, bombardier; they were all friendly types, there was no rank pulled, you know, or anything like that. Everybody was by his first name [laughs]. But if you had anything official, well that was different.

Terry: Can you describe something like what would be a typical day for you guys whenever you were going to go on a mission? Like what time you got up, and—

DeVault: Well, if we were going out on a mission, sometimes they'd have us up at three or four o'clock in the morning. And we'd have to—we got the word, "Hurry up, go on down, have your breakfast," you know, eat, and maybe by, ah, five o'clock we were down there in the dressing room getting our air, all our clothes on, our heavy clothes to fly in. You had a heated suit and then you had the big, heavy jackets and all that to put over it. And, ah, maybe by six o'clock in the morning you'd take off. The planes—we

didn't load the planes or anything, you know; that was all done for us. We had to get in there early, and put our gun into the plane and bring our ammunition in. It came in boxes and there was a string of it coming out that would feed into the B-17, the side panel, the loading of the thing and it was simple once you got the hang of it, but it took you a while, you know, to get acquainted, and it took you a while to know how to use a gun up in the air and all that. Of course in the meantime when we weren't doing anything, if we had a day off or no missions in sight, they'd tell us to go down and do some firing. It wasn't compulsory, but they wanted you to do that, you know; go down do some shooting. And we could go down and we could go to one place, we could shoot the machine gun, but that wasn't any fun for us. They had a dump there [laughs], and we'd go over there to the dump, we had our .45s on, we'd shoot rats [laughs]. That was more sport if we had to do somethin' like that. Fortunately we didn't have much of that, but we had some of it. And that was how we spent our time. We had a theatre there. In the evening you could go to the theatre, and once in a while there'd be some entertainment come in, you know, entertainment—

Terry: USO shows?

DeVault: Eh, what?

Terry: A USO show of some sort?

DeVault: Well, I don't remember that word "USO" getting into our territory. It might of, but there was some minor shows. It might have been minor at USO, but USO you always connected some big name with it. If you were lucky maybe you saw Bob Hope or somebody, you know, in those days. But we never got that lucky. There was a lot of minor names that we saw and heard, but that was—but we kept on flying! And we had some close calls. One time they—our, our plane got shot up so bad that, ah, on the way back, he wanted to drop the bombs, get 'em out of the plane so he knew he could land it and get across the channel. And, ah, they did open it, opened the bomb bay, and he picked out a place and dropped them. Then the bomb bay door wouldn't close [laughs]. Well, there was a crank up there that hung on the wall on this little catwalk. The catwalk was maybe a foot wide, something like that, and, ah, somebody had to go up. So the first one the pilot hollers was, "DeVault, you go up there." [laughs] I was smaller than some of those fellas, and, ah, go up there and do that. So I went up there and I laid flat on my stomach, and, and I'd reach over like this and work that crank. And I got the bomb bay doors shut! And then I hung the crank up and I got out of there [laughs]. That was a very unpleasant job.

Terry: 'Cause there was nothing, you were wide open below?

DeVault: Oh yeah. The bomb bay doors were open and by the time I got her up, all I could see was water; that was English Channel, we were on the way back. And, ah, we got her back in and that plane never flew combat again, it was so shot up you couldn't—

Terry: Was it shot up from flak, is that what you meant? Or, from—

DeVault: Fire from fighters! [laughs] Those fighters were all over us. And, ah, they were always—it just seem like there was fighters on almost every mission. I don't know where they got 'em, where they got all those fighters from, but—the FW190, the ME109, that was the two big ones that were always in our way. And then they had some odds and ends. I can't remember what they were, but—

Terry: Was this in the early part of the war?

DeVault: No, no! This was 1944. It wasn't—but the Germans were in there strong and heavy yet, you know; they weren't out of it at all. There was never what you'd call an easy mission. Oh, we had a couple, I guess, milk runs, you'd call 'em; they were factories over there in France that they had taken over or someplace that they wanted out of the way, and those were milk runs, but you got credit for a mission. The big ones were where you went in and hit Berlin. We flew the first mission over Berlin. And I don't know where [noise in background], I had that cap out here but it don't make any difference. It had an insignia on there, first B-17s over Berlin and that stuff, but that was a bad mission and we just barely got home that time.

Terry: What was it like flying into the flak? I mean, isn't that what the Germans did to shoot the—

DeVault: They were very efficient with their flak. Your plane would have holes in it, you didn't even know how they got there, you know [laughs]. And the closest I ever come to gettin' hurt was one day my left boot got ripped with flak. And I felt it, you know, it's something you—and, but it didn't, didn't break the skin or anything like that, but I just got hit in the left leg with a piece of flak, and, ah it didn't—the flying boot was heavy, you know, and they, it didn't, didn't hurt me that much. But the only hurt I ever got out of it was with my ear. When I was a real, oh, about nine or ten years old, I had had a mastoid operation, and that was in my right ear and it had all healed up and I had no repercussions from it or anything, but that ear had a habit of plugging up when we were flying and I always had to do something to try to loosen it up on the way down. And then the worst time that it ever happened I had to go over and see the flight surgeon and he run a wire or something, I don't know what it was exactly, up through my

nose [laughs] and out. He cleared it up but he grounded me for one mission. And, *oh*, that just irritated me to no end, you know. And I had to sit there and miss one mission which meant that when we got to our—well when we started out, I should say, it was twenty-five missions was the total that you flew. And after your twenty-fifth mission you were out! But after James Dolittle got a hold of the thing, he was sent over there as a big general, he threw five more missions on everybody, and oh, we could of—I'm glad he wasn't flyin' next to us [laughs], that threw five missions at us. But we did it anyway. We got thirty in, the fellas, my crew, got thirty and I got twenty nine, and I think it was the next day we had a mission and one of the crews had somebody sick or something, and I was assigned to fly with them and I did, and we made it all right, so I finished thirty missions, and that was the way it went. And after your thirty missions were up, well you had opportunities. If you wanted to stay overseas in England, I could have stayed over there, been a gunnery instructor and several things like that, but I had had enough of it; I didn't want to stick around, so I got myself back to the States.

Terry: So how did you get back? How did they bring you back?

DeVault: In the *Queen Elizabeth* [laughs].

Terry: Oh.

De Vault: We all thought we gonna get flown back, but we didn't. We were on the Queen Lizzie and I don't know whether there was a thousand troops on there or more, I just don't know. Plus a bunch of German war prisoners, and did that ever irritate us to see. They close off a lot of the decking area, and so these German war prisoners could get up and get some air I guess, and walk around the deck, and, oh, we'd see them, you know [laughs] and it was just, it's a good thing we didn't have our guns on then, we'd have probably shot a few of them. I don't know whether we would have or not, but it used to irritate us to see how they got treated so nicely and fed so good and all that. And then it was the same thing when they, when those guys got back in the States. They were given kitchen duty and this, that, and the other. Of course, it kept the regulars off of KP and all that, but these guys—**[End of Tape 1, Side A]**—were living the life of Reilly almost. They were all—but Truman, when Truman got in in place of Roosevelt, immediately they tightened some of that stuff up. I know that the life for the prisoners—[blank tape for a few seconds]

Terry: I'm talking to John DeVault about this trip back across the Atlantic Ocean on the Queen Elizabeth and the German prisoners of war.

DeVault: Well, I say it just irritated us to see them walkin' around, smokin' cigarettes and having the life of Reilly almost and, ah, we didn't know

what would happen to 'em later, but at the time that we saw them they were takin' it easy, you know, walk around the decks, smoking and they were well fed and taken care of. I know that later in their life they were put to work, a lot of them. You had POWs up here in Sturgeon Bay. I don't know how—I've read articles that they picked cherries and things and they seemed like a pretty, ah, friendly bunch with the people [laughs] in everything you read. And so some of 'em got into tough duty over here and some of 'em had pretty good duty. I would say the ones that were brought over here and picked apples and cherries were some of the luckier ones.

Terry: Where did the Queen Elizabeth land when they came back?

DeVault: Right there in New York.

Terry: At what time of year was this?

DeVault: Ahh, let's see now, December, February, March, April [speaker's voice trails off], it [sighs] must have been around June of '44. I was overseas a little bit over six months. So that was about it then.

Terry: When you got back, was there any homecoming or anything like that in New York?

DeVault: Oh, no, no. The war was still on.

Terry: Still going?

DeVault: Oh yeah, it was going strong yet. Everything was business-like and you, ah, regulation this, regulation that, you know. There was no, nothing at all, ah, relaxation. So I got processed there in New York and then I was sent out to Ros—no, wait a minute, I was sent to Chanute Field in Rantoul, Illinois. And that was to learn B-29 mechanic set-up. B-29s didn't have gunners; they had crew, but no gunners. But we was sent down there to learn to be electrical mechanics and we went through school at Rantoul, Illinois. And that was interesting. It was about six weeks, I guess, and from there we were sent out to Roswell, New Mexico. So, you know, a lot of time had progressed in there, and this was in the summer of '44, it had to be. '43, '44, yep. And I was sent out to Roswell and we got introduced to the B-29 and indoctrinated. We weren't gonna fly in it, we were gonna work on it, you know. And it was interesting to see how those things were set up electrically and all that and I was working there and I kinda liked it, but then all of a sudden, Boom!, December the 7th, you know [laughs]. And that—I don't know—it wasn't December the 7th, that was when it started. When it ended, the war ended there in the fall, and we were told that all the guys that had ribbons and points and all that were eligible for

discharge, and to line up for your discharge, and boy that was happy words for us.

Terry: So how many points did you have?

DeVault: Oh, heck, I had way more than enough to get out. I couldn't tell you exactly how many points, but you got points for your time you were in and what you did, and what you'd been doing, and the work that you had done, and had you been overseas, you got points for that, and points for your combat, and I had way more than enough points to get out. And so in the fall of '45 there I got out and that was it.

Terry: You mentioned you had some medals. What medals were you awarded?

DeVault: Ah, [long pause] I was awarded the DFC, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal.

Terry: What was that awarded for?

DeVault: It was mainly for flying on the missions and doing my thing. And it wasn't like it was just for me alone; every guy on the crew that did his thing, you know, was awarded that at the end of your combat tour. And that was for—like I told you, when we started it was twenty-five missions, and Mr. Dolittle come along and he said we're gonna do thirty, so mine was at the end of thirty combat missions, and that was it.

Terry: And the Air Medal?

DeVault: Air Medal was after, what the heck was it, five or ten [laughs], either five or ten missions, I'm not positive any more of what it was, but that was another automatic award if you were there at that time.

Terry: Um-hmm.

DeVault: And that pretty well covered it. Those others are European Mission and things like that.

Terry: So when you got out then, John, what did you do?

DeVault: Well, they asked me where I wanted to go, and I wanted to try up here with Margaret. Margaret, you know, she's my wife, and I wanted to try that.

Terry: Was she married when you were in the service?

DeVault: In the service, yeah, at Rapid City, South Dakota.

Terry: And did you meet in the service or did you know her beforehand?

DeVault: No, I met her before I went in the service. And there were, ah, there was a family from here of one of her good friends. The girl's father and mother moved to Indianapolis for work that he did and she asked Margaret one time to come down there and visit her, and Margaret did, and that's how I met her. Her friend was married there in Indianapolis, but, of course, Margaret wasn't [laughs] and this girl asked me to come over and have a date with her and I did, and that's how it started [laughs]. But a lot of that has faded out, you know, things that you wish you could remember. I'm glad that my wife had more intelligence that I did [laughs] and she saved everything, the pictures, and she put all the medals together there that you see.

Terry: And how did you finally end up in Sturgeon Bay then?

DeVault: Well, I had an opportunity to go back to work for the company in Indianapolis that I had worked for and I looked around there, and I had been up here and I liked what I saw up here, and I knew that we had good fishing and hunting and all that, and somehow—I thought, well, I'm gonna give something else a try. Well I was in a personnel office of National Malleable Steel, is where I had been. And I had several years working with them there and I had learned a lot about personnel work and that. They were a big company, but after I got up here then I just said, "Well, I'm gonna give it a try." And somebody up here at that time told me about Amity Leather, had moved up here and was hiring people. And I thought, well, I'll find out [laughs]. And I went over there and I got hired. Well, we decided to stay. By that time we had one child and we moved out of the house we had been living in with her dad and we got our own little house. You know the government homes at Cherry Circle and all that that was up there; we took one of those. The government did give us a nice break there. If you didn't make much money, they didn't charge you much rent, and that was real nice. And so we lived there for a few years, and, ah, well, that's how it all got started [laughs].

Terry: Now, just a couple more questions. You flew with these guys overseas for six months or so; did you keep in contact with them?

DeVault: Oh, yeah. Well, one. The guy that I was waist gunner with, him and I were in the waist, back-to-back, you know, and I call him, he calls me, and we just shoot the breeze a little bit.

Terry: Do you ever have any type of reunion with any—

- DeVault: No. That crew seemed like there was a couple guys in there out of California, another guy was up in the state of Washington, another one was down in Alabama. I know the fella from Alabama died, and I think the fella out in Washington, the state of Washington died. Some of the others, I have no idea. I just know where my buddy there was. He's in New Jersey, but if I want to talk to him I just pick the phone up, and that's all [laughs].
- Terry: The GI Bill became effective after the war for a lot of soldiers and sailors and stuff. Were you able to use any benefits from your service?
- DeVault: From the GI Bill? Ah—I'm trying to remember whether I ever went to—I don't recall using it, but I just want to be sure on that.
- Terry: Because Wisconsin has some pretty good benefits. Were you able to use any of the benefits out of the state of Wisconsin?
- DeVault: Oh, I've used, I go to the VA Clinic now. And you know, that used to be down in Appleton and now it's up in Green Bay, and I go over there to this Dr. Gallagher and that's a benefit of it, but I don't recall any real, strong, direct benefits that I received. If there was something indirectly that I'm forgetting [laughs] I'm sorry, but I just don't—
- Terry: When you got out, or do you now—have you joined any of the veterans' organizations?
- DeVault: Oh, I belonged to the VFW for a long time, yes, um-hmm. I've been an officer a couple times in the VFW and I've been with them for quite a while.
- Terry: What kind of impact do you think serving in the military had for you, as far as on your life? You know, at the time—
- DeVault: I know what you mean. I think it had a good feeling with me. You learned a lot of discipline and you learned that some things can work with little or no discipline, other things you have to have discipline or it won't work at all, and that's a big, big thing in a lot of people's life, you know, they don't like discipline [laughs]. But if you've been in service you know that you almost have to have it to keep everything going right.
- Terry: Is there anything else you'd like to bring up? I see you have quite a collection of material.
- DeVault: Oh, I should jump through this.

- Terry: John has a book out and he's looking through the various pictures of when he was in his uniform.
- DeVault: This was when I was an aviation cadet—well, here's a picture of the crew, in here, here—there we were getting our—
- Terry: Did you meet any famous generals, colonels or anything when you were in?
- DeVault: No, I can't say that I did. I don't remember anybody well-known or anything that stood out. [long silence]
- Terry: He showed a variety of pictures of when he was in front of his B-17 and at the base in England when he was overseas.
- DeVault: This is our full crew and that was getting along about the time that we were gonna finish up. Here's one taken air-to-air. [long silence] I'm looking here for some memory jogger. You know John Endigo[?], don't ya?
- Terry: Um-hmm.
- DeVault: He took a story on me one time.
- Terry: It showed an article from the period in the Door County Advocate on May 22nd, 1944 where he was highlighted with a—
- DeVault: It was July 22nd.
- Terry: July 22nd of 1994 where he was a waist gunner in World War II.
- DeVault: Um-hmm. [long silence] I didn't see anything that would jog—here's a VFW picture [laughs]. I was driving the jeep that day [laughs].
- Terry: Okay John. Anything else you can think of you'd like to mention?
- DeVault: Well, I'm just jogging through this book to see if it puts anything else, but I think we've covered the main parts of it. I was in for four years and that was about it. I was a airplane mechanic and airplane gunner, and, well that basically, that was the big things that I did when I was in, in the four years.
- Terry: Okay.

[End of Interview]