

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JAMES EDSALL
Pilot, Army Air Force, World War II
1999

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Edsall, James. (1920-2010). Oral History Interview, 1999.

Master Copy: 1 video recording (ca. 70 min.); ½ inch, color.

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

Abstract:

James Edsall, a Middleton (Wisconsin) resident, discusses his service as a pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and United States Army Air Force in World War II. Edsall describes his choice to drive to Windsor (Ontario) and enlist in the Canadian forces in 1940 as he wanted to become a pilot and the United States Army Air Force would not accept recruits without a college education. Edsall reflects on his Canadian training on a Tiger Moth, and his experiences flying other aircrafts, such as a Mosquito and Spitfire. He details leaving for Scotland in 1941 on the Queen Elizabeth ocean liner, spending time on English bases on the coast, and experiencing German air raids in London and Bournemouth (England).

Edsall describes flying propaganda missions into France as well as bomber missions. He reflects on the decision in 1943 to transfer to the United States Army Air Force, and subsequently being sent to Waco (Texas) to train on B52 bombers. Edsall describes spending the latter part of the war in Italy where his squadron flew missions into Germany and the Po Valley (Italy). He mentions his return to his hometown at the end of the war where his uncle encouraged him to take a career aptitude test. Edsall also reflects on studying architecture under the G.I. Bill at the University of Illinois and his success working as a city and campus planner in Chicago, Urbana-Champaign (Illinois) and Madison (Wisconsin).

Biographical Sketch:

Edsall (1920-2010) was born in Greenville, Michigan and joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1940 in order to serve as a bomber and propaganda pilot in World War II. He served in England, Scotland and France until 1943 when he was able to transfer into the United States Army Air Force. With the United States, Edsall served in Italy and Germany before the end of the war. Upon returning home, Edsall studied city and campus planning at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), where he stayed on as a staff member for thirteen years. He also helped develop the campus at the University of Illinois (Chicago) shortly before moving to Madison (Wisconsin) to become the first campus building planner at the University of Wisconsin in 1964.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999.

Transcribed by Lorelee Brumund, 2012/2013.

Abstract written by Mary Kate Kwasnik 2014.

Interview Transcript:

- McIntosh: Now, first thing you need, you need to, is for you to sign this saying that the, when the –and the material that you give us and you talk about is something that we can publish if we need--
- Edsall: Oh, yeah.
- McIntosh: So, when, if you'd just sign that, the state is very particular about all these details so,--
- Edsall: Where do I --
- McIntosh: Oh, right in this space right here, please.
- Edsall: Oh.
- McIntosh: Yeah, and if there's any movie rights you get your ten percent.
- Edsall: Okay.
- McIntosh: But, don't hold your breath [both laugh]. All right, now you're in good position.
- Edsall: Good.
- McIntosh: Right there, you're comfortable there?
- Edsall: Sure.
- McIntosh: Okay, James Edsall was born in Greenville, Michigan, 1920, and you entered the military service in 1941.
- Edsall: Right. Well, it was either the later part of '40 or early part of '41.
- McIntosh: Uh-huh.
- Edsall: I was still in Canada training, getting ready to go overseas when Pearl Harbor happened.
- McIntosh: What were you doing in Canada? Training?
- Edsall: Yes, for the Royal Canadian Air Force.

McIntosh: Right, now we have to start back because you have to tell me how you decided to go to Canada. That's an interesting story--

Edsall: Well--

McIntosh: In itself now.

Edsall: Well, I suppose several reasons, but one of them, of course, was I wanted to fly.

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: And the American Air Force at that time, 'cause we weren't in it, weren't taking anybody without a college education, and I hadn't completed mine. I'd only had one year of it.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Edsall: And so beyond that we had family, relatives in Canada, and, ah, I guess I was really kind of tired of what I was doing [laughs], and I decided---

McIntosh: This was an adventure not to be missed.

Edsall: Well, I probably was going to be drafted, and I didn't really want to go into the infantry. Ah, I wanted to fly.

McIntosh: Okay.

Edsall: And so, I took the --

McIntosh: You just got a train and went over to the other side of the border, and--

Edsall: Well, as a matter of fact I drove over [laughs].

McIntosh: You drove over?

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: And where, did you just go to the nearest recruiting office, or how'd you go about this?

Edsall: There was ah, a recruiting office a recruiting office at Windsor [Ontario, Canada—directly across from Detroit].

McIntosh: Mm-hm--

Edsall: And there were a goodly share of our--of the group that I was with were all Americans.

McIntosh: Oh, you went over as a group?

Edsall: No.

McIntosh: Oh, I see.

Edsall: I started from home. I was--there were four of us that were--that decided to go but the other three backed out. I said "That's the last time back they're [laughs] gonna back out," and I went.

McIntosh: Okay, and how did they receive you? Tell me about all of it.

Edsall: Oh, they were ah, glad to have the recruits.

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: Matter of fact, they had so many USAs that we used to call it the Royal Texan Air Force. But, ah, they were extremely, ah, grateful for the recruits, and they kept us for, oh, I guess about a week or so--

McIntosh: In Windsor.

Edsall: And then shipped us out to various stages. The first training was security guarding. You were sent to an airbase—

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: And you were put on guard during the night.

McIntosh: Mm-hm. You had no basic training, for you?

Edsall: No, not any—oh, you had the usual—

McIntosh: Sure.

Edsall: Marching around the parade ground, a few things of that sort, but no, there wasn't much training. Ah, after the security guard they sent us up to a school where you learned navigation and--

McIntosh: Where was this?

Edsall: Wireless, ah, yeah [laughs], where there were telegraph sort of things. And ah-

McIntosh: Where was that?

Edsall: That was in Canada. It--it was at Albert College at Belleville [Ontario].

McIntosh: Ah, okay.

Edsall: And there were, oh, I would guess, probably over fifty or sixty percent of us were US boys. I suppose many of them like myself knew we were going to get drafted sooner or later--

McIntosh: This is--

Edsall: Because they were drafting before we were in it, as you may recall. And so we then--

McIntosh: So this is 1941, yet?

Edsall: This was 19--the latter part of '40, I think.

McIntosh: Latter part of '40?

Edsall: Yeah, because it was about '41 before we got, I mean it was about January in '41 as I recall, before we were sent to a station for training on planes.

McIntosh: So, so where was your first airplane?

Edsall: Well, it was a Tiger Moth [de Havilland DH8 1930's biplane operated by the Royal Air Force primarily as a trainer].

McIntosh: Where was, is that up in this--

Edsall: It was Goderich [Ontario], just north of Port Huron [Michigan] and, ah what the hell was the, the English, or the Canadian side.

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: Ah, they flew Tiger Moths. They were an old WWI plane.

McIntosh: I know the plane.

Edsall: But these hand some Rookie (??) colors, they were [inaudible], but the man who or the officer who checked me out for solo was an old, Royal Flying Corps [RFC, the air arm of the British Army in WWI] guy--

McIntosh: Oh, oh, that was nice then.

Edsall: And he used to do a Rate One Turn [ROT; three degrees per second turn which completes a three hundred sixty degree turn in two minutes. This maneuver is useful for pilots who are out of visual contact with the ground] with a needle that never waivered. Usually, you know you went over the-- the needle went a bit like this, and settled down. Not him, [inaudible], and we used to kid that he used a file on the morning to file his teeth so he could get a bigger chunk of you [Jim laughs], but, ah, he was a, he was absolutely accurate (??).

McIntosh: So that was your basic. That was your basic training.

Edsall: That was the basic training.

McIntosh: That lasted how long?

Edsall: Well, probably about, I think I soloed--you had to solo before ten hours. And if ya didn't--

McIntosh: Otherwise they washed you out?

Edsall: Yeah. And then after that you probably had two to three weeks of cross country and other kinds of training. Then they shipped you out down-- we went down to Jarvis [training airstrip and bombing range in Ontario].

McIntosh: Jarvis in Canada?

Edsall: No, no. Centralia, [Royal Canadian Air Force Station training center between Centralia and Exeter, Ontario], Centralia because it was Jarvis that we were on security guard. And went down to Centralia on old Ansons [Avro Anson; British twin engine multi-role airplane previously used for coastal patrols and bombing]. That was a early combat bomber, or something like the B-25 [North American B-25 Mitchell medium bomber].

McIntosh: I see.

Edsall: And we spent, ah, I think, probably two, two to three months there.

McIntosh: Was that a multi-engine aircraft?

Edsall: Yes, that was a twin engine.

McIntosh: They'd already decided that you were going to multi-engine?

Edsall: Well, they didn't have, they didn't give us a choice.

McIntosh: Oh.

Edsall: They ah, I think [laughs] went down the roster and took every other one of [inaudible].

McIntosh: Okay.

Edsall: I, ah--

McIntosh: So now you're in twin engine.

Edsall: I was in twin engines. And then from there they shipped us out to ah, well, they gave us a leave and then shipped us out to Halifax [Nova Scotia, Canada] and sent us over to England.

McIntosh: You, go over by ship?

Edsall: By ship, yeah, we went over on the Queen "Lizzie" [British ocean liner Queen Elizabeth built by the Cunard Line converted to a troopship to carry, among others, troops from North America to England during WWII].

McIntosh: Do you recall when that was, please?

Edsall: Oh yeah, we had 20,000 of us on her.

McIntosh: When was that?

Edsall: Pardon?

McIntosh: What month was that?

Edsall: Oh, boy--

McIntosh: Roughly.

Edsall: Sometime roughly, sometime probably around April.

McIntosh: Of '41.

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay.

Edsall: Somewhere in that area.

McIntosh: I see. So, then what?

Edsall: I know that we went over, ah, we were so crowded that it was kind of not get the sub--, what they call submarine wash 'cause you could go up and on top of the deck and spend the evening up there then till you were relieved. Then you could sleep up there if you wanted.

McIntosh: Sure.

Edsall: But it was pretty good. But it was-- they ah, [laughs], had a mess that was way down in the bowels of the ship, and when you got done, you had mess kits, and you went by a whole series of "dips." ya dipped it, and I got trench mouth from it someway, and I spent the rest of the time-- we were seven days going across. I think I had trench mouth on the second or third day, and I couldn't eat anything 'cause my teeth were killing me--

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: And gums. So I'd get a chocolate bar and let it melt [laughs]. When I got over they tested me for everything they could think of, but finally just gave me shots with [laughs] each tooth and said "Quit smoking". By that time I'd got, had acquired something like seventy packs of cigarettes and 'cause they got for pennies on the large ship. And I was at that time a fairly heavy smoker. Anyway, we went to, ah, Bournemouth [England], from Scotland. We landed in Scotland, went to Bournemouth, and then we were assigned out of there. Ah, let's see, I think my first base was, ah, Coventry [England].

McIntosh: Were you a pilot, or is that--

Edsall: Pilot, yeah.

McIntosh: You were a pilot, okay.

Edsall: And there they had some old Tiger Moths that we flew what they are called acclimatizing over England. The maps that they were using were absolutely magnificent. They even, oh, clumps of trees were showing on 'em. And there we also learned the Morse Code, that sort of thing furthermore. They had a CO there that every morning the chief flying instructor, every morning he'd go out and test it to make sure we could fly that day. Then he'd come in and ground loop, or, not ground loops, but right off the ground--

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Edsall: If that was the--

McIntosh: In a Gipsy Moth [de Havilland DH 60 Moth; 1920s British two seat touring and training aircraft]?

Edsall: If he did that, flying was in.

McIntosh: In a Gipsy Moth?

Edsall: Yeah. Then they shipped us to, ah, Ramsbury [RAF Station in Wiltshire, England, use by both the RAF and the US Air Force], and we picked up Oxfords [British Airspeed AS.10 Oxfords, a twin engine aircraft used for training] and, well, Wellingtons [British Vickers Wellington, a twin engine long range medium bomber]. They were both twin engines. And from there we went to Scotland, and I'll be darned if I can remember the base.

McIntosh: That's all right.

Edsall: We flew--

McIntosh: Prestwick?

Edsall: We flew, ah, coastal patrol out of there, in weather ships(??), and finally got shipped back down to a base just on the border of Wales and, ah, anyway, between Bournemouth and the first [inaudible] city in Wales, and there we flew ah, where the hell did we go? We went, we flew back, they shipped us there, and we only flew a couple missions out of there. Then they shipped us back up to the Midlands, up near—

McIntosh: Nottingham?

Edsall: Near Ramsbury again--

McIntosh: Oh.

Edsall: And we flew out of there until, ah, '43.

McIntosh: What was your mission then?

Edsall: Well, mostly it was ah, 'cause I was still flying Wellingtons, mostly it was ah, recon [reconnaissance], and they used to load mines on them--

McIntosh: Oh.

Edsall: In the bomb bays went to down to the Bay of Biscay [on coasts of western France and northern Spain to stop German U-boats] and dropped 'em. And it was an interesting-- one interesting event in that period, we were coming down, we were coming back from dropping these things. You always had to worry 'cause you had to get down practically on the deck to drop 'em so that they wouldn't explode [laughs] in the surf. But if they did explode it usually was pretty disastrous. But ah, we were coming back from that, there were three of us, and, ah, we got a, we hit a, a F-Lighter [aka "Flak Lighter," a naval ferry barge used as a gunboat]. It was a two barges with a bridge over it with an 88, a German 88 [German 88mm anti-aircraft and anti-tank artillery gun] mounted on it. German 88 was one of the better--

McIntosh: Mm-hmm. I know about them.

Edsall: Guns. They could shoot anti-aircraft, they could shoot anti-tanks, they could do-- they were, they were really very accurate. Anyways, we survived that.

McIntosh: Oh, you didn't get hit. You didn't get hit.

Edsall: No, I, we got up, yes we got a hit. The Wellington was built with a, with a basket-like weave--

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: And as a result was a very, ah, strong, and we got one that didn't explode, but it went right through the, the deck--

McIntosh: Fuselage?

Edsall: Our waist. Ah, my radio operator, my navigator, and I were the only ones on board.

McIntosh: Is that your standard crew for that?

Edsall: It was to that kind of mission, yeah.

McIntosh: Three.

Edsall: Yeah, we never had any copilots in the, ah--

McIntosh: Yeah. And then you went-- before we get into that a little bit, you flew in groups of three or groups of solo?

Edsall: Well, sometimes there were singles--

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: Sometimes you were three. We flew, flew some propaganda ones--

McIntosh: Sure.

Edsall: Ones that went over the mainland--

McIntosh: Leaflets.

Edsall: Of France--

McIntosh: Yeah.

Edsall: With carloads of, cargo of--

McIntosh: Just shove 'em out.

Edsall: Pamphlets and you shoved them out and--

McIntosh: Right. How fast would that Wellington go?

Edsall: Oh, I suppose you could get maybe somewhere between ninety and 120 miles an hour--

McIntosh: Wow!

Edsall: If, that if you were, if you had a good motor on it. They ah, later back in the American Air Force I flew 24s [B-24 Liberators bombers].

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: And there we were getting about a hundred and fifty as a max, measurable when diving--

McIntosh: Yeah but that's a four engine plane, yeah.

Edsall: Pardon?

McIntosh: That was a four engine plane.

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, not 25s, you didn't fly the B-25s [North American Mitchell, an American twin engine medium bomber]?

Edsall: No, I never flew 25s.

McIntosh: Okay. Well, I don't want to get too far ahead my story here--

Edsall: Yeah, no.

McIntosh: So, you're flying--

Edsall: It—B-25 was an awfully good ship, though.

McIntosh: Yeah, outstanding.

Edsall: It was a workhorse. It—yeah, I think there's still some flying around.

McIntosh: Oh, sure. I see them up at the EAA [annual Experimental Aircraft Association convention] in Oshkosh [Wisconsin].

Edsall: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: In Oshkosh.

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: They have a lot of them up there.

Edsall: They just a, they--

McIntosh: Very durable.

Edsall: I had a good buddy that flew 'em.

McIntosh: Mm-hm. So, you're flying this Wellington and dropping the leaflets and dropping the mines, and that was your main--

Edsall: Yeah, weather recon and recons, uh, not that long they measured shore (??).

McIntosh: How far into France did you go?

Edsall: Well, probably the furthest with Wellingtons was probably, not more than I'd say, fifty to 100 miles in, because those were propaganda bids.

McIntosh: Sure, yeah.

Edsall: You flew across Britain to get into Bay of Biscay, and--

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: There were German submarines ah, pens ["U Boat Bunker" in German, designed to protect submarines from air attack; generally submarine bases in Germany and occupied countries] there--

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: And the idea was try to get beyond them and drop these. Hopefully you'd get, get one of 'em sooner or later.

McIntosh: Okay.

Edsall: But, ah, at that time even our bombsights were pretty crude as compared to what they'd been--

McIntosh: Later, mm-hmm.

Edsall: In the last part of the war.

McIntosh: So this took you along until then all of a sudden your country was at war.

Edsall: Yeah and then in 1943 we had a chance to transfer back to the American Air Force.

McIntosh: Okay, but don't get too far ahead of me now.

Edsall: Okay.

McIntosh: Tell me about the day you found out that Pearl Harbor occurred.

Edsall: Oh boy, uh, the ah, Salvation Army had canteens, and you could stop and have a cup of coffee and chocolate--

McIntosh: At your base?

Edsall: Hm?

McIntosh: At your base?

Edsall: Yeah, and we were in there when they, when the news came in that Pearl Harbor--

McIntosh: I see.

Edsall: Well, we'd been up there-- four, five six months, or something.

McIntosh: [Inaudible], yeah.

Edsall: Now I guess, I guess I was on Halifax when that, when that happened, I think we were shipping overseas. Boy! That's my, my timing, geez, I can't remember but it was something like that anyway. It was either-- I can remember it was in this Salvation Army place having a cup of chocolate, really, and the news came over. And it really was--

McIntosh: Surprise.

Edsall: Surprise. Everybody, you know, we thought, oh god now we're really gonna have problems--

McIntosh: Canada was still--

Edsall: 'Cause the west coast of Canada, they started to talk about shipping people out, our air crews out to, to Vancouver and that area, but, ah, there was a training field out there, that probably took it over—

McIntosh: Did the British say anything or the Canadians say anything about you going back to the Americans?

Edsall: No--

McIntosh: Or getting out? They assumed you were going to stay with them anyway.

Edsall: Yeah, yeah, because they, I—they-- there was no opportunity offered us--

McIntosh: Right, that's what I mean.

Edsall: At that time. Of course, they'd spent their money training us--

McIntosh: Sure, yeah, that's right.

Edsall: And most of us probably didn't think about it--

McIntosh: You were hired, you were hired help.

Edsall: And you know, we were gonna, I believe-- yeah, 'cause we were on our way overseas, and, ah, yeah something like that. Anyways, they not many, many of us probably thought, you know, we need to be heroes, and so we didn't even query about it.

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: But after two or three years, two and a half or something like that, years of combat, they were shooting real bullets [laughs] at us. I think I was ready to come back. And they gave us a chance to transfer.

McIntosh: That was in '43. Now, when you were in '41, you were--spent just a-- in that center, Midlands in England, you say. Did that-- you stayed there until how long? The end of the year or--

Edsall: We got over there, I guess, probably in February, March or April, someplace in there, ah, of '41—

McIntosh: Oh, before the war, before the [inaudible].

Edsall: And so [coughs] we got back in, I think, August of '43.

McIntosh: So it was a year and a half, then.

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. And ah your crew, did they stay with you and your plane?

Edsall: No, your crews constantly changed--

McIntosh: I see.

Edsall: Ah, one of the things in, in the Canadian RAF we were, RCAF, that's the Royal Canadian Air Force, attached to the RAF [Royal Air Force]. So we were RAF people. And ah, the RAF that was you flew until fifty percent of your squadron was lost. Then you got—

McIntosh: That was the rule?

Edsall: Yeah, and that, then you--

McIntosh: Then what?

Edsall: Then you got the opportunity to choose another plane and get a more updated one, and ah, or go in and teach ground school for six months.

McIntosh: But you could, you could stop flying if you chose.

Edsall: No.

McIntosh: Oh.

Edsall: No, well, you could go to--

McIntosh: Stop combat, yeah.

Edsall: Ground school and teach for six months. Then you went back on flying status.

McIntosh: Okay, that's all I wanted.

Edsall: But ah, 'cause I, we were just about ready to, to have our choice, and I went out and spent about six hours on a Mosquito [British DH.98 combat aircraft]. That was the plane I wanted to fly.

McIntosh: Oh, they let you do that?

Edsall: Yeah, and that's what my choice was gonna be. I-- ground school didn't interest me.

McIntosh: So you lost half your squadron to get to this status, is that what--

Edsall: Yeah, yeah we lost—

McIntosh: Most of them shot down with flak?

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Or not?

Edsall: Mostly--

McIntosh: Not fighter planes?

Edsall: Some, some in, we lost some in crashes, but—

McIntosh: Any fighter planes attack you?

Edsall: Well, out of, out of England at that time we usually had escorts of Hurricanes [British Hawker single seat fighter aircraft].

McIntosh: I see.

Edsall: Sometimes "Spits" [British Spitfire single seat fighter aircraft].

McIntosh: Mm-hm, they kept 'em away.

Edsall: But the Hurricane was a, was a better ship, than a "Spit".

McIntosh: I've heard people say that.

Edsall: Well--

McIntosh: It was more durable.

Edsall: The "Spit" was maybe faster and a little more maneuverable, but it had no really armor plating on it, and that Hurricane was a workhorse. It had armor plating on the bottom--

McIntosh: [laughs] Where it counted.

Edsall: And it was ah, a bit more reliable, I guess. I only flew a "Spit" twice.

McIntosh: Oh, you had a chance?

Edsall: And, yeah, ah, once in England and once in Italy, an old Mark X [British Spitfire Mk X high altitude reconnaissance plane with a pressurized cabin]. They had a terrible tendency to ground loop. You'd come in and-- do you want to meet my [inaudible]?

McIntosh: Yes.

Edsall: You'd come and make a landing, and that thing would--

McIntosh: Swing around.

Edsall: Unless you were really good at--

McIntosh: Paying attention.

Edsall: You'd, you'd really have a trouble landing that thing.

McIntosh: Did you fly a Hurricane?

Edsall: Very narrow, ah, landing gear.

McIntosh: Yes, and did you fly a Hurricane, too?

Edsall: No, I never did a fly a Hurricane.

McIntosh: Okay. Did you keep your same Wellington during your year and a half there in England?

Edsall: Yeah. Yeah, most of the, ah, the flying I did there were-- we had training ships were Wellingtons, Wellingtons in combat that was all.

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: I had one of my other best buddies was a Canadian boy, flew Lancasters [bombers].

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: And came back from bombing raid in Germany in a ship they said couldn't fly, and he brought it back. He got a Queen Victoria Cross for it.

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Edsall: Yeah. I went down to see him get the award at--

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: Buckingham Palace.

McIntosh: Was that because of the difficulty in--

Edsall: Yeah, he--

McIntosh: Maintaining flying?

Edsall: He brought back three wounded troop members. One of them died, and got the plane back. I don't know if they were able to repair it or not, but they could use it for parts.

McIntosh: Yes.

Edsall: But anyways, we went down to Montgomery [British General Bernard Montgomery commanded the Eighth Army, Allied ground troops for D-Day, and the 21st Army Group]-- [laughs], down to, ah, Buckingham Palace-- was getting what he was awarded.

McIntosh: Oh.

Edsall: His Purple—or not Purple Heart [laughs], the Victoria Cross was going to be given.

McIntosh: Yes.

Edsall: And of course, the center of attention was on him and it was in a kind of a garden, with steps coming down, and Montgomery was one of the heroes of the desert war--

McIntosh: Self-appointed, yeah.

Edsall: Yeah, a very conceited sort of a guy, came in, walked in with his swagger stick, you know, stood at the top of the stairs like that and looked around and nobody paid any attention to him. And I can still hear him grunt, "Ruff", turned around and walked off [laughs]. He wasn't getting any attention. But ah, Tinmouth [RCAF Flight Sergeant Anthony Wright Tinmouth] got his Victoria Cross, went back to combat--

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: And survived the war. I haven't seen him since the war.

McIntosh: No contact at all?

Edsall: No contact at all.

McIntosh: You should of maintained contact.

Edsall: Yeah. Surprisingly, I don't think other than maybe two or three from my whole experience, have we really had contact. One of them was ah, young, you know, you imagine he's dead now, was a family from Madison.

McIntosh: Hm.

Edsall: Don McKenna.

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: His father was the developer of Shorewood.

McIntosh: I know him.

Edsall: Yeah. Did you know Don?

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: Well, I met Don in England. He was in the RAF with us.

McIntosh: Mm-hm, yeah.

Edsall: Then we went to, ah, March Field together.

McIntosh: Did you fly the Mosquito?

Edsall: Did I fly?

McIntosh: You flew the Mosquito?

Edsall: Oh yeah, I, no, I only got to six hours on it—

McIntosh: Oh, I see, just—

Edsall: Then, but it was—when the squadron was being depleted and we probably had, I don't know, two, three boys to go before we could have got anyways 'bout that—and that's why I got the chance to fly Mosquitoes because we were making choices prior to it.

McIntosh: Tell me about that experience.

Edsall: Oh--

McIntosh: Compare it to your other flying.

Edsall: Oh, that was a, that was a beautiful little ship. It was a plywood ship, you know--

McIntosh: Yes, I know.

Edsall: Made out of plywood.

McIntosh: A lot of the development was here in Madison at the Forest Products Laboratory [the Laboratory performed experiments on wood construction, paper laminates and glue for aircraft during WWII including the construction of gliders and the British DeHavilland Mosquito].

Edsall: Oh, is that right?

McIntosh: Oh, yes.

Edsall: I never knew that.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Edsall: I never knew that.

McIntosh: The wood business here, you know.

Edsall: They ah, boy it, it handled, it was—

McIntosh: It'd go like hell.

Edsall: Go like hell, and it was a beautiful handling [inaudible]. We, ah, when we were checking out on it they put a sergeant with me who was a navigator, and so we were taking off and doing some night flying, and the idea was, go out and get lost, and then you'd start coming in with honing in on, on your--

McIntosh: Radio.

Edsall: Radio and compass was on, and we got lost, lost up in the clouds. It was one of those cloudy nights, and foggy and this or that, and we got sudden-- cloud broke loose. We looked down and we were over water! [Jim laughs] Well, we finally decided we were over the English Channel [laughs], and that wasn't a good place to be because if anything would come in they'd shoot flak at ya [laughs].

McIntosh: That's right!

Edsall: We had this little box on it, a radio box on the thing. You'd put an identification "friend or foe", you hit "friend"--

McIntosh: Sure.

Edsall: And we came back in, but they told us to come down, they wanted to check us, and so we had to laugh--

McIntosh: Oh [inaudible].

Edsall: At it, since we crossed the coast!

McIntosh: That's right. They'd shoot you down if you deviated, wouldn't they, no matter what ship you're in.

Edsall: And did they give us hell! Oh, oh, geez [laughs]. How the hell did you get lost over the Channel? [laughs] "Well, you told us to go out and get lost," so they didn't give us any [inaudible] but—

McIntosh: How was the food then at your British bases?

Edsall: Oh, as compared to American base, it's not very good.

McIntosh: It wasn't.

Edsall: A lot of baked beans and tomatoes--

McIntosh: Mutton?

Edsall: For breakfast.

McIntosh: Mutton? Mutton?

Edsall: Mutton? Oh, occasionally, you didn't get a lot of meat.

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: But, ah, oh, it was adequate, but I guess probably the things I missed most were milk and ice cream [laughs].

McIntosh: Okay. Did they have entertainment like movies and things?

Edsall: No, no movies.

McIntosh: Where did you, when you had a little off where did you go?

Edsall: Well, you had a-- I was a flight, a flight sergeant, and you had an officers' mess and a noncom mess. Ah, sergeant pilots were probably the king of the noncom [laughs] mess and we had a lot of billiards, and pool, and things like that to play, ping-pong and—

McIntosh: Bring in girls to entertain you?

Edsall: No, but there were, ah, there were girls on the base. I mean, there was--

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Edsall: Both the "Land Girls" [Women's Land Army, a civilian organization of women who replaced men on farms who were called up to the military] that did, oh, surveillances and things of that nature.

McIntosh: And a bar, did they have a bar on the base?

Edsall: Pardon?

McIntosh: A bar?

Edsall: Oh yeah, we always had a bar [laughs].

McIntosh: Yeah, right.

Edsall: Yeah, they had, they always had a bar.

McIntosh: There was no there a limit on your alcohol consumption?

Edsall: No, not at time, not on the base. If you went into town or something like that, why, they had limits or so because they had so much they could sell. But ah, they made a little bit of their own [laughs], too, so. But, no, the mess wasn't great. At that age it doesn't really make that much difference, but it was nice when you got back to the States, I'll tell ya.

McIntosh: Did you have any trouble getting mail when you were on the British base?

Edsall: No, not really, ah, my wife, well, no wait a minute, I may-- that was before I was married. Ah, but then my girlfriend, and my mother, and my brothers and sisters used to write me pretty regularly. I was never a great correspondent so they used to complain bitterly that I wasn't, but they didn't know what was happening. But the, ah, the censorship was very strict, and my wife still has, if I can find them, some of the letters that I wrote back. They look like lace doilies, you know [Jim laughs], [End of Tape 1, Side A] 'cause you were very conscious of the old "slip the lip," you know, "sink the ship" [American English idiom "loose lips sink ships" used during WWII meaning "beware of unguarded talk"] sort of thing.

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: Very few-- you were very conscious of it because, ah, you were also very vulnerable, and in the airbases--

McIntosh: Okay.

Edsall: They used to put up what they called a "Q site", which was usually in a wooded area where they put like landing lights in front so it looked like a runway, and at night, when night fighters would come over, why, they'd come down to try to strafe the airbase, and hopefully they—

McIntosh: Took the decoy.

Edsall: Yeah, but, you know—

McIntosh: You ever get bombed, your base never got bombed?

Edsall: Oh yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, it did?

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: By night fighters primarily, or--

Edsall: No, ah, both, there were, there were both daylight and night bombings. I suppose most of the worst bombing I ever saw was once in Bournemouth on leave when the first Ju 50, no, ah [Ju 52 'Iron Annie' a German tri-motor transport aircraft manufactured from 1932 - 1945], [thumping] the single engine—

McIntosh: Messerschmitt?

Edsall: Um?

McIntosh: Messerschmitt?

Edsall: No, this was the—

McIntosh: Oh, the Junkers [German tri-motor transport aircraft also used as a medium bomber]?

Edsall: Junk—

McIntosh: Yeah, 87 [German Junker Ju 87 or Stuka, or Sturzkempfflugzeug or 'dive bomber'] then.

Edsall: Stuka. They came-- the single engine [thumping]—

McIntosh: Stuka.

Edsall: Ah--

McIntosh: No?

Edsall: Ah, it was their latest thing—

McIntosh: Oh, Focke-Wulf 190 [Wuger 'Shrike' single seat, single engine fighter aircraft].

Edsall: There ya got it. Came in on Bournemouth, and we were walking down through this city park, and they had a long walkway of some stone walls, and they came in strafing that whole park, people were laying around the park and that sort of thing. And my buddy and I jumped behind one of the walls, and there was a couple just on the other side of the wall and a canvas sheet, and it kind of strafed through-- they had both rolled off it, and it split that, right [laughs] through that, but they also dropped some

wing bombs and ah, there was a big department store, in this downtown area that lost all its glass. People got cut with it, and some of that, but I don't recall that there were many deaths of that, in that. The other times were in London, really that's--

McIntosh: The big stuff?

Edsall: That was big stuff.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Edsall: I can remember watching 'em come in, you know, just flight after flight of them. And we stood outside the air, the air showers and watched them come in and then they'd drop tons of the stuff on 'em. Ah, that's, that's not a-- there's a book out right now about the crew and the B-24s. My wife happened to see the book review in the New York Times and got it from the, got the library in Middleton to get it. And I started reading it, and I got so I wouldn't read it at night [laughs]. I'd start dreaming about those damn things, again—

McIntosh: Well, didn't you head for the shelters when the planes started coming over in London?

Edsall: Oh, well, we were supposed to, but it, you know, it got to be such a pattern that people didn't, quite often they ignored 'em--

McIntosh: The way they were killing, they were sure that you were in the area. Is that--

Edsall: That's right. You think you're safe, but they-- you know, people would come out and watch 'em coming in, and yet they were, they were coming looked like they were going to bomb you. Well you dove for the air shelter. Either that or if you were near the "tube" [underground rail system]. You could go down in that thing. They had beds—

McIntosh: Well, the "tube" being served as a bomb shelter then.

Edsall: Yeah, they had bunks and everything down there. People used go in there and sleep.

McIntosh: Did you meet many British families?

Edsall: Oh yeah, we met quite a few of 'em--

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: Ah--

McIntosh: How were they?

Edsall: All the way, all the way from Bournemouth, which is on the south coast of Scotland [laughs].

McIntosh: So how was your experience with the--

Edsall: They were--

McIntosh: Civilians?

James. They were very good. Ah, some of the people you met out on the street saw that when, when they'd see you had "USA" on our, our jackets, you know, and they used to give us the finger, occasionally, but--

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Edsall: Yeah, ah—

McIntosh: I'd think they'd be pleased that you were helping them?

Edsall: Well, yeah, but they, they thought that this, we were being a little arrogant, as we probably were.

McIntosh Huh [laughs] can't have it both ways.

Edsall: And ah, I can't, I really couldn't blame 'em. Most of them were absolutely grateful for us being there—

McIntosh: Mm-hmm

Edsall: And, treated us very well.

McIntosh: How many Americans were ah, were on your base while you were in England?

Edsall: Oh, boy.

McIntosh: Roughly, I mean, twenty, thirty, forty, or more?

Edsall: I would say probably, probably forty, maybe one way or the other, some--

McIntosh: Out of a complement of how many?

Edsall: Oh, let's see, the base had probably, well, including the ground crew, probably had 200 to 300.

McIntosh: That's a pretty high percentage of Americans.

Edsall: Yeah, but there were an awful lot of us over there. When I got out of-- and went back over to Italy, and, ah, we were on there, but the, ah, "killer Kane's" [Col. John Kane] bomb group and they asked us how many of-- were in the RAF. And there were four or five of us that stood up. The CO said, "Your guys didn't get any training."

McIntosh: Huh.

Edsall: I thought, I thought our training was probably superior to what I got in the US.

McIntosh: It's arrogance of ignorance.

Edsall: But, ah, that was I think that was the most insult I ever got.

McIntosh: That was uncalled for. Did you, did the British give you any medals?

Edsall: No, as matter of fact, well, matter of fact they, unless you ah, were shot down, you know, or came back with, like Tony [the aforementioned Anthony W. Tinmouth] did, you're-- the medals were very few. Ah, I got one, but I think it only was, you know, because I was in the European theater. And, ah, we were supposed to get another one for the mine landing, that laying mission, but, ah, never came through.

McIntosh: Right. And the Canadian government wasn't really involved. You were really under--all you—you had [inaudible].

Edsall: Yeah, once, once--

McIntosh: [Inaudible] the RAF.

Edsall: We were in the RAF, and there were so many heroes in that group that--

McIntosh: I know.

Edsall: You had the-- you know, the battles they fought with, over the--

McIntosh: Incredible.

Edsall: The Channel [English Channel]. It was just fantastic.

McIntosh: You must have talked to a lot of those guys.

Edsall: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: And is there any good stories they told ya, that you can relate for us?

Edsall: Well, I—

McIntosh: I was-- I would think fatigue would be a big problem.

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Up and out every day and on and on and on.

Edsall: Oh, they were, you know, they'd be flying six, six, seven hours a day, in, I mean, they'd go up, come back and refuel, go right back up, come back and refuel, go right back up, and some of them flew, you know, they'd-- without sleep for twenty-four hours!

McIntosh: I don't see how you can manage--

Edsall: I don't either.

McIntosh: To fight another plane with a--

Edsall: But, ah, they did. They were, they were real heroes. But [laughs] we ran, ran into a guy, a Spitfire pilot, in a bar in London, and he had no eyelids. He got shot down over the Channel, and his plane caught on fire. The only thing that probably saved him was that he crashed into, in the salt water, which is-- later on, was a way of treating burns, and, ah, they had to remove his, well, I guess his eyelids were burnt. I can remember asking him how he slept, he says, "Not very well" [laughs], but they-- he has blinders over them.

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: But, ah he was, he was on, I think, something like his fiftieth mission or something like that, just fantastic. They, ah, they didn't have a, really a system set above the one I've told you about for giving people relief from combat. Their training, I thought, was good. They ah, at least the flying training was.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: They weren't quite as organized on coming back from a mission, giving you know, the down load [laughs] as the US was. Ah, later on when I was

flying out of Italy, why we'd come back, they'd really interrogate you for quite awhile to make sure what you knew about the target.

McIntosh: Okay, well now we get into transferring here. Tell me know that went.

Edsall: Well, ah, in 1943, yeah, 'cause I got married when I got back, ah, they gave us an opportunity--

McIntosh: I see.

Edsall: To transfer back to the American Air Force—

McIntosh: Or not.

Edsall: Hmm?

McIntosh: Or not, or not!

Edsall: Oh yeah, you didn't have to--

McIntosh: Okay.

Edsall: Didn't have to. They'd prefer you didn't, after all they'd trained you, and it's a, but a goodly share of us, Robert Kemp(?) was one of us that, one of us that did transfer, and, they sat around in London for, gosh, a month or better, waiting for the orders to come through. One of the things was their--an order had come through, no more promotions in the European theater during this period, and, as a result most of us were staff sergeants or, not staff sergeants [laughs], ah, sergeant pilots--

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: And, that were transferring out. There were a few officers, but not many, and, so here we were sitting as, you know, trying to make up our minds whether we wanted to come back as a noncom [non-commissioned officer] because there were no non-com pilots to speak of. There were some—

McIntosh: Yeah, that's what I was saying, 'cause the rank that you had with the Brits [RAF] would be comparable to a lieutenant in the American Army, I mean in the Air Force.

Edsall: Pardon?

McIntosh: The rank would be comparable to a lieutenant in the American Air Force.

Edsall: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: So how did that work?

Edsall: Well, when they finally-- after they finally got us transferred out, and we came back to the States as sergeant pilots and gave-- they gave us a rank, staff sergeant I think.

McIntosh: I see.

Edsall: And, ah, when you do, I guess they'd guaranteed that we wouldn't stay there that long. And when we got down to Miami to get reassigned they came through with a flight-- it was like a warrant officer, which was the best rank you could have because you were top of the noncoms, and you--

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: Didn't have any real duties. That was, that was great [both laugh]! And they shipped us out of Miami then, and I instructed on instruments at Waco, Texas [James Connally Air Base housing the Army Air Force Central Instructors' School], on a, what the heck was that? A Cessna? 78 [Cessna UC 78s, Bobcats]? Something like that. And they, ah, at that point, they, I'll guess that wasn't later on. Anyways, at that point I was waiting. I was training, theoretically [laughs], guys I'd flown in the RAF with!

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: And there were several of us that were maybe because of our experience at night flying—anyways, after a bit—

McIntosh: How many missions had you had? Excuse me, how many missions had you had, at this moment?

Edsall: Ah, probably around thirty.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm, in England, yeah.

Edsall: Probably about that.

McIntosh: Okay.

Edsall: Maybe more. I--

McIntosh: All right.

Edsall: They, we didn't, they didn't keep track of missions in there. They did in the US because at the time I got to Italy—

McIntosh: Get home.

Edsall: After you had fifty, why you shipped home. But that was not a part of the-

McIntosh: I see, okay.

Edsall: The bit over there. So I really don't remember, or even know how many I flew there, and I guess they may have had a classification if they did of what they were, but in any case, we, ah, were, we left Waco from that structure(?) and went out to March Field [Riverside, California airbase used to train air crews] on 24s [Consolidated B-24 "Liberator" American heavy bombers], and trained on 24s out at March Field until ah, I think might be, yeah, must have been around Christmas time in 19, ah, '55—

McIntosh: '45.

Edsall: Or, yeah, '45 [laughs]. 1945. 'Cause I remember ah—

McIntosh: Was that '45 or '44 now? You said you switched over to the Americans in '44--

Edsall: In '43, we spent--well it must have been '44.

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: Yeah, it was '44.

McIntosh: That's what I thought.

Edsall: Yeah, because we shipped out of there and got into Italy right at the beginning of '45, someplace in there.

McIntosh: Now, tell me why you went from a two-engine to a four-engine and didn't go to the B-25s [North American Mitchell B25, twin-engine bomber]?

Edsall: Ah, they were, they were after co-pilots with multi-engine, and they asked those of us who were going to go back home, ah, whether we would accept that. They were very good about that. And I said, "Well, I said it depends on the crew." And so, they gave me the crew and I liked 'em so I said, "Sure, that's fine."

McIntosh: How difficult was it to learn to go from two to four engines?

Edsall: Not a great deal more, as a copilot anyways. I don't know, I think of it. If you had-- you flew as first pilot, too, so it didn't make any difference. No, I, it wasn't a big transition. I, they, ah—

McIntosh: This was a lot bigger airplane.

Edsall: The 24 was a, was a good step, you know in a plane. It handled like a “Slippery Sam” [PV-1 Ventura] or something, you know, you-- then you did mostly formation flying, and so you-- instead of doing the things that you did with your old two engine, you know, Covington(??) [radial engine] [inaudible]--

McIntosh: None of that.

Edsall: You slid them in, and, you know, cross control—

McIntosh: So you went from Texas then to Italy?

Edsall: They had—we went from Texas to California to March Field, and from March Field we went to Italy.

McIntosh: By ship?

Edsall: Ah, yeah, the West Point. I went over on the “Lizzie” [HMS Queen Elizabeth], and came back on the Mary, went over on the West Point, which were the three biggest ships on the war. But, ah—

McIntosh: And where did you land in Italy?

Edsall: We landed at, ah, south of, south of --

McIntosh: Couldn't be south; that would be '44.

Edsall: Yeah, let's see, the south of Rome.

McIntosh: Oh, yeah.

Edsall: What the heck is the name of the place? It's enough if you can't remember things like this.

McIntosh: Well, anyway--

Edsall: Yeah but [cough], yeah I know, they put us on freight cars—

McIntosh: Brindisi?

Edsall: Hmm?

McIntosh: Brindisi?

Edsall: Gioia?

McIntosh: Brendisi, is that—

Edsall: No, that doesn't sound right.

McIntosh: I knew some--

Edsall: It was a, it was a large camp. There were a large bunch of US soldiers, and other than that they were usin' it as a feed [laughs] point. They put us on a freight car, the old boxcars, and we went all across [laughs] Italy on those damn things. And, lived in that boxcar for like, two, three days. Had to get out every so often to walk along the side of it, it was so darn slow. But ah, they, we ended up in, ah, oh boy, it was on the tip of my tongue, and I lost it. Southern Italy, it was in southern Italy.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: B-24 base. What the--boy! Hmm, I can't remember the field now, or name the of the base. It was "Killer Kane" [US Army Air Force Colonel John Riley Kane who commanded the 98th Bombardment Group of B-24 Liberators who led the low altitude attack on oil refineries in Ploiesti, Romania] who did most of the Ploiesti oil runs. It was his [inaudible] that day. It was the 15th Air Force. It was, I think, the 224th Squadron. And, ah, the war was still going pretty full bore, blast, at about that time so we were doing a lot of missions. And ah, but the idea, we were watching in the ah, intelligence offices to see what the movements of the Russians and the others were doing. Our last mission, the ah, we left the, goll, Lecce, Lecce was the base. We left Lecce and went up to Gioia, I think it was Gioia, and that's where I was when the war ended, the European war ended. We were, we flew a mission, after we knew it was going to be over, with a West Point, ah, officer, general. And the son of a-- [laughs] the son of a gun, yeah, we should have called off the mission. It was, it was as cloudy as the devil, raining and everything else, but no, he gotta get his medals, at least that's what we all thought. And started up and we got about half way up to the target, and he was flying in formation through a cloud cover that was so bad we couldn't see the planes hardly in front of us you know. So most of us bailed out of it, engine trouble, you know, and we went back. Oh, he didn't follow us. He got to target, I think, with four planes out of a box of ten. A unit's about thirty or forty planes, and they got back. I'm sure he got a medal for it, but--

McIntosh: Did you go to the Ploiesti raid?

Edsall: What?

McIntosh: Did you go to the Ploiesti raid?

Edsall: No, no, I was at-- prior, prior to my time. Our lead navigator, see in those days, in that day, you had a bombardier, we had a ten-man crew on the 24. The bombardier triggered on the lead bombardier. And the lead bombardier in our squadron was a, ah, a bombardier, the guy was a, I guess he was a bombardier in the-- on the Ploiesti raids with old "Killer Kane." He said they came in so low that people stood in the fields throwing stones at 'em. And he was doing his second tour. He was a hell of a nice guy, but as stupid as hell that's come out of a second tour after what he'd been through. But, ah,--

McIntosh: So, most of your missions in the base in Italy were over Germany or--

Edsall: Yes, ah, the main ones were, ah, Venice, ah--

McIntosh: Vienna?

Edsall: Vienna, what's the other big, oh boy. We did Regensburg [German home to the Messerschmitt Bf 109 aircraft factory and oil refinery that was bombed during the Oil Campaign] which was about a fourteen hour flip. Boy, that was a long one. They, ah, did a lot over Yugoslavia.

McIntosh: Generally, how big was your flight, how many planes?

Edsall: Ah, lets' see, three--

McIntosh: On most raids.

Edsall: We had five, they had an A box, and they had a B box, a C box, and a D box and there were three in one box [combat box is a tactical formation of a group of airplanes used by heavy bombers; also known as a "staggered" formation]. So there were about twelve to a, to a pattern, to a group--

McIntosh: I see.

Edsall: And you usually flew with about the same thing as a-- with a total. You manned with other bases, and on the [inaudible] what they call an initial point [I.P. is the identifiable land mark about twenty miles or less from the target after which the planes had to fly in straight and level in formation], and, they went over the target--

McIntosh: So we're talking about what, 200 planes?

Edsall: Ah--

McIntosh: Or not that many?

Edsall: I was trying to think who we had, say three, six, eight, twelve, probably twelve, yeah, 140. And you-- they all triggered off the lead bombardier.

McIntosh: Yes, I understand. So you had to deal with fighter planes.

Edsall: Well, we had a-- we always had cover with fighter planes. They were black boys, and they were good--

McIntosh: Oh.

Edsall: They were good boys. They made--

McIntosh: That, that Air Force, was --

Edsall: Yeah, [laughs]--

McIntosh: That group squadron was great.

Edsall: They'd get up above us, we're out of the flak [shells from anti-aircraft artillery from the German word Flugabwehrkanone which means "cannon shooting a fliers"] and they'd yell down at us "How you all like that, white boy?" [laughs] They'd see the flak come up.

McIntosh: They had red tails didn't they?

Edsall: Yeah, but, you know, they did, over Vienna, they took the radar outside the city, and they hooked all these Ju [Junker stuka dive bomber], or, yeah, then their 38s [German Flak 38/Flakvierling 20mm anti-aircraft gun], and they would set up a barrage that would probably cover this downtown area--

McIntosh: Sure.

Edsall: And you'd fly into that and fly out of it at-- we came back one time with about 121 holes in us. I still got a piece of flak--

McIntosh: So the flak was the biggest problem, then.

Edsall: Yeah, oh yeah, the fighters, we, we got a trip on, and we went up to Regensburg [home of Messerschmidt Bf 109 aircraft factory and oil

refinery located in Bavaria, Germans]. We came back with a guy that had some fighters coming in, but by that time we got cover, and they soon left us. Yeah, we went up there to bomb a jet field. They had twenty seconds of fuel, or twenty minutes, twenty seconds, something like that, they could just get off the ground and get back, and at that time, we bombed the hell out of it. The Po Valley [The Po Valley campaign in northern Italy was the last campaign in Italy and resulted in the complete surrender of the German army in Italy], we did a lot of missions in the Po Valley area with frag bombs [fragmentation bombs with casing that is splintered upon explosion and thrown in fragments in all directions]. This is not funny, but we, ah, the infantry was moving into the Po Valley area, and they had us going up with frag bombs, and you know, they were cold shell steel over a bomb of about, oh, probably two feet like that. When they exploded the chilled steel rings would go in little pieces, you know, and they'd fly all over, the deadliest got ground crews. Well, we were going up to, to the Po Valley on this particular mission, and, ah, they told us to, when they saw a low level bunch of flak, fly over that and drop. Well, some of our boys dropped a little soon, and then we were, when we came back they were a little upset. The next day, when we went up to do the same thing, that flak was about fifteen to eighteen thousand feet [laughs], and that's where we were flying!

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: They weren't going to take a chance on missing that again. So, but, but mess was good there. We had duties, ground duties. The good share of the noncoms and the enlisted men that were on the base, as ground crews, were, they had to come up through the desert, and most of them had motorcycles that they had put together from pieces that they'd picked German or Italian or everything else. And, ah--

McIntosh: That's where you went for liberty.

Edsall: Pardon?

McIntosh: That's where you went for liberty?

Edsall: Oh, no they, ah, this was on base--

McIntosh: Oh, I see.

Edsall: And, we were, we built our, what we call, what they all "casas houses" ["casa" in Latin means "house"] for a-- we built them out of "tuffi" brick [tufa, or tuff brick is a soft volcanic stone found in central Italy used in Roman construction]. They had Italian work people, workmen, that put this thing together. They-- you went out and bought the "tuffi." The Polish

boys over there at that time just sat on top of their truck with a machine gun and just had a load [laughs]. But these “tuffi” mines were found and used back in Caesar's time, they were huge, underground, I went down and saw one once, it were a big cavern and then out of that cavern were four big kind of tunnels that went on but they were up high. Then they—we’d put ‘em-- we'd go up and get a truck load of “tuffi” and break 'em. They'd come down and they'd make some-- the mortar with a little lime and mud that we—but never--

McIntosh: You had brick houses.

Edsall: Pardon?

McIntosh: Like brick houses.

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Edsall: They were, they were rough stone about I guess just like a eighteen by eight cement box. But the workmen had axes that were offset. So it--and they'd square 'em up and put ‘em up.

McIntosh: Sure.

Edsall: And they'd go and get tile, “tuffi” tile. They made a “tuffi” form (??). We had a bar [laughs]. They had a house boy who used to bring us bottles of wine [laughs].

McIntosh: You had plenty of, plenty of entertainment, too?

Edsall: Oh yeah, I used to come in the morning, singing opera, you know. And then there were married, yeah married (??), there was an officers' club which was not too far from Lecce. There was theaters and a lot of operas. Lecce had an opera.

McIntosh: The food was good there? You had good food?

Edsall: Yeah, the food was excellent.

McIntosh: Good.

Edsall: Compared to what the British [laughs] --

McIntosh: And your mail still was good? You didn't have trouble--

Edsall: Yeah, yeah, the mail wasn't too bad. If you got your letters kind of late, but--

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: From home, but kind of late, but other than that, no, I had no complaints about that.

McIntosh: Did you advance in rank?

Edsall: Oh yeah, I ended up at a first lieutenant.

McIntosh: First lieutenant, yeah.

Edsall: Yeah they-- when we got to Lecce that's the first thing they did was to give us a second lieutenant, and, ah, thirty days later made us first.

McIntosh: Right, did they award you any medals for your time in Italy?

Edsall: Yeah. Ah, I got two Air Medals, I can't remember what they're called, but with--

McIntosh: Called theater ribbons.

Edsall: Yeah, well, theater ribbons, too, but these were for--we had-- we were, when the war ended, in Italy I think we had put in about between about thirty and forty missions, and so ah, we were not too far from coming home anyway.

McIntosh: They just did a few more than they did in England then.

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Thirty there and forty in the other place; seventy missions. That's a lot.

[End of tape 1, Side B]

Edsall: Yeah. [End of tape 1, Side B] Well, it is to still be alive [stuttering]!

McIntosh: Right.

Edsall: And really I, the only time I got anything at all, I got a little nick on my neck when that piece of shrapnel came through my scarf, and bedded up in the roof of a 24.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm. The plane survived the war, too. Your plane survived the war also.

Edsall: Yes it did. The 24 that we flew our last mission on we flew to back home. We flew from Gioia, Italy, to, ah, oh Marrakesh [Morocco]--

McIntosh: Azores [Portuguese archipelago of 9 volcanic islands off the North Atlantic Ocean]?

Edsall: Out of some [laughs], out of some of Africa, ah, the bulge in Africa, went across to Natal, in South America [Parnamirim Airbase in Brazil, part of WWII Operation Rainbow], and up through Georgetown [Ascension Island].

McIntosh: On your own 24?

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, that's nice.

Edsall: We had to-- we did some modifications. We had "coffins" in the pilots' seats ["coffin seats," made of heaviest steel available, wrapped around the pilot and copilot to protect them from bullets]. They were on the plane—it looked like a coffin. It came up around--

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: They were so damn heavy, that if you happened to crash or anything, there wasn't any way you were gonna get out--

McIntosh: Get out, no.

Edsall: They'd come--, they'd pin you right up against it. So we used to put cables on them and cut 'em back, but we were bringing seventeen guys back across with us. So we took those out. We had a new navigator who-- the guy got a lot of confidence because he was down every day in that hot sun taking sun [laughs] shots—

McIntosh: So was this before the end of the—it was after the end of the war in Europe but not--

Edsall: Not-- the Japanese were still fighting.

McIntosh: So what did you do back in the United States?

Edsall: Well, we'll, let me finish this--

McIntosh: Oh!

Edsall: Just a minute. We came, when we were coming across from, ah, yah, that's something, from Africa to Natal, we got half way across and we lost an engine. All of us had collected things. I had an accordion for -- that I bought. I couldn't play it, but I'd traded something for it or other. Some ah, had a couple of P38s, ah, German pistols, which weren't very good, but I wanted a Lugar [German pistol], but I'm not gun happy, but anyways we threw all that overboard. The machine guns were still, the waist guns were still attached and the sort of thing. The turrets, guns were always disassembled, always threw them all over. We hit Natal and they had told us the radio compass would be -- it would not be accurate, and my-- the radio compass said Natal was north and along the coast, my navigator said "No, south." That's what we went. We hit Natal at 1,500 feet and coming across from, from Italy, to Marrakesh we hit an updraft on, over the desert, and we were doing, 5,000--500 feet per minute up with our plane's nose down. We hit that top of the updraft and we came down and we pulled out at about a thousand. And feet on the dash [laughs].

McIntosh: I'll bet.

Edsall: We got back [laughs], and I--

McIntosh: I'll bet.

Edsall: And so we were doubly lucky again. And we finally got back to the States, in Georgia. We all had banana monkeys, and they took 'em away from us to put them in quarantine. They knew we weren't about to come back to get 'em [laughs]. They picked them up at Georgetown and they'd sit at the bar and little monkeys would crawl out of your pocket, get up and down the bar and lick the shot glasses and pretty soon they'd weave [laughs]. We'd have to put 'em back in your pocket [laughs]. But, ah, we were quartered in a ah, base in Cuba then in to Georgia and then we got leave. Then I was-- we went back to Florida, and, ah, Petersen Field (?), and that's where the war ended.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: [inaudible]

McIntosh: You went home from there.

Edsall: Yeah, I was upset because theoretically, havin' been over twice, I didn't have to go back over again. But they weren't gonna comp 'em, my English, and so they really had me set to go to the Pacific, and I was upset

about it. I was trying to get that one taken care of 'cause I didn't figure the third time over I was gonna be lucky [thumping].

McIntosh: If the war hadn't ended, though, you probably would have lost that battle?

Edsall: I don't know. Ah, the guy that was doing the best paperwork for me was a corporal in the headquarters and he knew his way around. He was a-- he'd been a sergeant, but they'd broke(??) him a couple of times, and he knew, he was an old timer, and he was sympathetic with my problem. He was trying to get this changed around, but I don't know if it, fortunately the war did end, and I never really had to find out. I did go thank him again, though [laughs].

McIntosh: Sure. Sure.

Edsall: I told him he ended the war just in time.

McIntosh: So where did they send you then? When you got out, I mean, where'd you go?

Edsall: Oh, I came back to my hometown, Greenville, Michigan. My wife met me in Florida and we came back together.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: And then I wanted to go back to college.

McIntosh: You had the GI Bill now.

Edsall: Yeah, yeah, thank gosh, or I'd-- I couldn't have afforded it otherwise.

McIntosh: We all used it.

Edsall: You know, while the pay was good in the service, you didn't save an awful lot. But for the time, it wouldn't sound like much today, but I had an uncle who did had been with the Gibson Refrigerator [Greenville, Michigan] people, and he said, "Before you go back and decide what you want to do," he said, "go down and take an aptitude test." So I went down to Northwestern [University in Evanston, Illinois], Chicago, for two days, I guess it was three days, we did, they tested you, and then they came out, they gave you an analysis. One of the little gals that did the analysis, to me said "According to your pattern, you probably would be best in architecture or city planning." I said "What the heck is city planning?" She says "You don't think the Chicago skyline just happened do you?" I said, "It sure did!" [laughs] But I did then, so I started to write different institutions to find out which ones would have the kind of thing I wanted.

And they told me to stay away from the East coast because my vocabulary was not too damn good, and they said the Midwest would be a better place. So the only institution that really had a combination of city planning and architecture was the University of Illinois. So I went down and interviewed, and the associate dean of architecture said, "You know, with your background, and this sort of thing," he said, "I think what we ought'a do is put you in what they called "special services" for all veterans which was a way of not taking beginning courses but jumping right into different things. And that's what I did. I did it through architecture, landscape architecture, and city planning.

McIntosh: So that was, that was your career for the rest of your life?

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Well, you stuck to it then.

Edsall: Yeah. I went to work for a firm of Swanson and Saarinen in Bloomfield Hills, Detroit, but even before I left the University [of Illinois], down there, they, I was working for his-- for the man who was doing city planning for Urbana-Champaign, and, ah, they called him back up, and I'd finished up the plan for them down there, and I was about ready to leave and go down to North Carolina, to Chapel Hill, at the University down there, ah, yeah, right next door to it. It was interested in me and they had sent up, and made an offer when ah, I decided that I thought I'd go back and get an advanced degree at the University of Illinois. So I turned that down, and I went into community planning office, as a way of having some income, and was going to take an advanced degree when I got into a hassle with the building committee, not really a hassle. I was consultant to the -- 'cause I'd done the city planning, consultant to the building committee for the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, and, ah, they were going to do some things that didn't seem right to me so, and I was getting a little bit tired of the, being put off. I had taken my advanced degree. They kept finding excuses for why they couldn't reduce my time on the community planning office, and so I decided I was going to get out of there and go someplace else, and take [inaudible]. So I went down to tell the chairman, who was head of the civil engineering department, in the department. Ah, he was chairman of the building committee. I thought, I said, "I know this is presumptuous, but" I said, "I really think this is a mistake that the building committee is thinking of doing." Then I said, "I'm leaving so I thought I'd come down and tell you, at least my thoughts." He said, "You're leaving? Just wait. Rest a sec." He called up the physical plant director, who was a vice president and ah, said "You know, the guy you wanted is going to be available?" He said, "Send him over, right now!" [laughs] Turns out he'd been trying to get me released. They would start up a planning department for the campus and they

wouldn't release me. But they never told *me* about it. And, ah, so he'd kind of given up. So I didn't leave there for thirteen years [laughs] after that, and, ah, he was absolutely a magnificent boss. I don't think I ever learned anything more from anybody including my father I guess, than I did from him. And, ah, about that time the University of Wisconsin was looking for somebody, and Bill Kinney, who was a friend of the architect that I had consulted with, about ten years down there, awfully good man. He went from there to be the dean of architecture at Notre Dame [University in Indiana]. But he was a good friend of Bill's. Bill came down, and we were out at lunch, and he said, "Did you ever think about leaving here?" I said, "Yeah. I got, had a couple of offers, Purdue [University in Indiana], and I got another one down in the Carolinas that I had turned down." And he said, "Would you consider something?" I said, "Well, I guess I could", I had never said no, and so he asked me to stop by when we were on--going up north. We had a cabin in Canada where we used to spend our vacations up there, and we came right through Madison driving days. So I did, I stopped by, and Fred Harvey Harrington, we went in to see him, and he talked to me. They were looking for somebody to develop a planning office.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: We had had experience in both the Urbana campus and we did probably the only really from scratch, urban campus—

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: In Chicago, the Chicago Circle Campus. We started that [inaudible] from scratch, and I did the programs, oversaw some of the architecture that was being developed and it was under construction. We had done months, months and months of finding a site in Chicago. Mayor Daley had, regardless of your politics, he was-- he really didn't take things for himself. He was really a very loyal Chicagoan. I was going to say, "honest," but I says I know somethin' about that, but he was, and he had already decided where we going to be, but it, every time we'd find a site like at the Bay View race track, it disappeared. The forest preserve, that disappeared, the veterans hospital outside Chicago, that disappeared. Finally, my boss at that time walked in one day and said to the mayor and his assistant-- I had to attend these things so I could keep notes. He said, um, he said, "Okay," he says, "we give up. Where do you want this campus"? [Jim laughs] He said down on Congress [Street]. They were going to do a big rehab down there.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Edsall: So then, we just concentrated on that site, but it was difficult because it was, it was a very ethnic area, and, ah, I can't think of her first name, but Shala, not Shala, Shama(?), something like that, was a leader of a, of an ethnic group down there along with a couple of Catholic churches that were scared that we were going raid to a, you know, ruin their whole diocese there. And ah, she was leadin' them, and we can in one week, and somebody had dropped a bomb on her front porch. They assured us that it was *not* Mayor Daley's doing at all but certainly some of his henchmen, or er, or his ward leaders knew that's what he wanted, and they did it! Anyways, shortly after that we had the site.

McIntosh: Chicago politics.

Edsall: Yeah, he told us to come back in thirty days. We came back in thirty days and he had it resolved.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Edsall: But his, his *objective* was right.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm.

Edsall: He had-- he ringed the Loop [one of the designated community areas in Chicago which includes the commercial, theatrical, shopping and government centers of Chicago], and that turns everything back, that made rehabilitation back into the Loop. And the Loop rehabilitates like every five, ten years! It's a, it's really a fantastic plan, and he was, he was a strong--

McIntosh: Still is. Or this guy, his son is, too.

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: So how'd you get to Madison?

Edsall: Well, I came up there and they talked me into coming up here and I -- and as I told my boss in Urbana, I said, "You know," I said, "I can't, I leave with great regret." I said, "I've learned so much from you I've got to find out if I can fly. I've gotta see if I can spread my wings." And he was appreciative of it. Ah, President Henry [Circle University President David Dodds Henry] at Illinois asked me to come up and see him and he'd urged me to stay, but he said, "If you've made up your mind," he said, "I understand". Because we had done quite a chunk of work for the University of Illinois by that time. So, that's how I got up. And I retired from here.

McIntosh: Right, now you're retired. All right. That's just about it.

Edsall: Well, thank you.

McIntosh: Good story, and it's a fantastic experience

Edsall: Well, it's fun to look back at it. I wished I could remember more [laughs].

McIntosh: Yeah, I think we probably needed a map to go along with it.

Edsall: Yeah.

McIntosh: Give you the names and places.

Edsall: Yeah, you know, I never thought about that. I probably could have located a couple of those maps that we used to have.

McIntosh: Yeah. You never saved anything from your experience in Europe?

Edsall: Did I save anything?

McIntosh: Save anything--

Edsall: Oh--

McIntosh: Flight logs or anything like that?

Edsall: Not really, I guess. Oh, I've got, I've got, you know, I don't think I could even locate that. I've got my old RAF log someplace, which if I could find it I'd send it you. But I'm not, I haven't seen it in years.

McIntosh: Those are the kind of things the [Wisconsin Veterans] Museum likes, those flight logs.

Edsall: Pardon?

McIntosh: Those flight logs are the things that are valuable to a museum.

Edsall: Yeah. But we, you see, we never got our US flight log.

McIntosh: Oh, I see.

Edsall: I suppose it's someplace, but—items that [??]—the, ah, matter of fact, our flight log and the Canadian flight log I don't believe it included the one in the RAF. They were just our training logs.

[End of Interview]