

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Darrell D. Gust
Navigator, Air Force, World War II
1983

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Gust, Darrell D., (b. 1921). Oral History (Self-) Interview, 1983.
User: 3 audio cassettes (ca. 180 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Master: 3 audio cassettes (ca. 180 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Darrell D. Gust, an Eau Claire, Wisconsin native and First Lieutenant, 358th Bombardment Squadron Navigator, 1st Division, 41st Bomb Wing, 303rd Bomb group (“Hell’s Angels”) discusses his experiences flying twenty-five missions in the US Army Air Force with the Eighth Air Force (the “Mighty Eighth”) during World War II, his trip home to the States, his personal wartime good-luck charm, and reunions with fellow veterans. Gust was a navigator on a B-17F “Flying Fortress” based at RAF Molesworth (England). He passed a test for the Army Air Corps Aviation Cadet (Pilot Training) Program and enlisted in February 1942. After basic training and navigation school in California he donned the bars of a second lieutenant in July 1942. Gust graduated from training on twin-engine Beechcrafts to heavy bombardment training on B-17s in Spokane (Washington). He describes the formation (Nov. 1942) of his flight crew (he was selected navigator), crew personalities, navigation modalities, and compares the types of B-17 bombers. Gust’s wedding ceremony amidst round-the-clock training flights in Nebraska and Kansas preceded his departure from an airfield in Florida—he arrived at Molesworth airbase following colorful, if at times perilous, adventures en route through South America and Africa. Gust discusses his first combat mission (April 17, 1943) over Bremen (Germany), experiences with flak and encounters with ME-110s (German Messerschmitt fighter planes), and explains the existence of action report discrepancies when flying missions. 1943 targets receiving Gust’s recounting include an aircraft factory at Meaulte (France), sub bases at Wilhelmshaven (Germany) and Saint-Nazaire (France), and a nitrate factory in Norway. He relates a mission through “Flak Valley” toward a synthetic rubber plant in Huls (Germany) and shares a vivid memory of a raid on Le Mans (France). Gust comments on the quixotic Schweinfurt-Regensburg (Germany) raid on a ball-bearings works that was to shorten the war and was the 8th’s most famous mission. Gust interpolates with his narrative colorful crew anecdotes, a discussion of acceptable loss ratios and crew longevity, and the unforgettable sight of two bailing airmen. He opines on an Air Force plane experiment (the YB-40), the reason for the demise of the Luftwaffe (the German Air Force), and the human error behind disastrous missions over Hamburg (Germany) and Nantes (France). Gust relates the downing of an ME-109 for which he received credit and recounts in detail his last mission, January 1944, to Aschersleben (Germany) as squadron navigator of the 359th, reading from his navigator’s log. Gust feels the 91st Psalm protected him throughout his service in the skies over Europe and quotes it in full with commentary.

Biographical Sketch:

Gust (b. 1921) served with the 358th and 359th Bombardment Squadrons of the 8th Air Force, US Army Air Force as a navigator during World War II. He completed twenty-five missions in the skies over Europe before receiving orders in April 1944 to return to the United States.

Interviewed by Darrell D. Gust, 1983
Transcribed by Linda Weynand, 2013
Corrected by Channing Welch, 2014
Corrections typed in by Jeff Javid, 2015
Abstract written by Jeff Javid, 2015

Interview Transcript:

[Note: This interview may have been conducted close to an airport. There are many instances of jet engine noises especially in the last section.]

Gust: The date is March 11th, 1983. The time is approximately 3:00 p.m.: 3:02, and the location is Maitland, Florida. This is Darrell D. Gust speaking, and I'm down visiting at my daughter Pam, Mrs. Anthony Gautsch. What I want to do is something that I've been meaning to do for a long time, and that is just put on tape some memories and recollections of I guess what everybody refers to as W-W II: the Big War. You know, not that my part in the war was any different than anybody else's, but I've often thought, God, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could have had taped some the tales of the veterans of Bunker Hill or Chickamauga or any of the battles of the Spanish-American War or Chateau-Thierry, you know, all of those to hear firsthand and in voice form what really took place behind the scenes. This is, you know, what I'd like to do here. I do this not with any sort of bragging on my part whatsoever but just from the standpoint of having taken part as one of the 7,000,000 Americans who took part in World War II. [momentary pause in recording] Well, where do we begin, Pam? I guess we begin at Pearl Harbor, December 7th, 1941, a date that all of us will remember very vividly. On that particular day—it was a Sunday, of course, and I had driven your mother and your grandmother out to Bangor, Maine to look at a Christmas goose or something, and in the course of the thing as we came back—this was in my dad's 1935 black Chevrolet, I remember that very vividly—and as we came back Grandpa Severson was glued to the radio and saying that the Japs had just bombed Pearl Harbor. Of course, I guess almost everybody's immediate reaction, unless they had been to the Hawaiian Islands, was, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" because it was a name at that time that was not well known. A name that now will live in history but at that time still a relatively unknown name. So anyway, it was determined that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor early Sunday morning and had very severely crippled the American fleet which was stationed there and destroyed a number of aircraft at Hickam Field and et cetera, et cetera, and they did a real masterful stroke, so to speak, from their war strategy. So anyway, back in those days, of course, the fervor of patriotism was paramount in everybody's mind. America had been attacked; we had to crush the yellow Japs, the little sneaky bastards. We had to—at that time, of course, we were not in active war in Europe although the war in Europe had been blazing since 1939, and although we were very definitely almost a participant from the standpoint of furnishing goods and materials we had no publicly announced manpower in the war. So anyway, with the flurry of patriotism, of course, everybody rushed down to the recruiting stations to enlist, and I being no different than anybody else I guess my heart swelled with patriotism, so to speak. But I

didn't know exactly which branch I wanted to go in. At one time, and this even dated before Pearl Harbor, I had thought of enlisting in the Coast Guard. I was at this time twenty years of age—yeah, I was born in '21, yeah--so I was just twenty years of age when Pearl Harbor took place. Then I don't know where I became in contact with it but I found out about the Army Air Corps Aviation Cadet [Pilot Training] Program, and suddenly the desire to enlist and wear silver wings was the greatest goal in my life up to that point. The Elks Club in La Crosse [Wisconsin]—I'm talking now about the period of January and February of 1942, immediately after Pearl Harbor—the Elks Club in La Crosse had sponsored what was known as the Elks Keep 'Em Flying Club because prior to the war—or at least until sometime probably about 1941—you had to have a college education. Then the standards were lowered. You had to actually be a college graduate, but then the standards were lowered so that if you could pass the Aviation Cadet Examining Board's exam you could qualify, and the Elks Club had sponsored this Elks Keep 'Em Flying Club, and the idea was it was a school to brush everybody up on mathematics and science so they could take this test. I heard about this right at the very end just prior to the time that the Cadet Examining Board was coming to La Crosse to give the series of examinations. There were fifteen fellows who had participated in this school through the Elks Club, and I came along as a last Johnny-come-lately, did not actually participate in the schooling whatsoever but went down and took the tests along with the other fifteen and passed them so the sixteen of us were enlisted together on February 21st, 1942. We were sworn in by a gentleman at that time looked ancient to us: a Captain Loris M. Eek who was President of the Cadet Examining Board. Our orders were issued to us on February 21st, 1942 to travel to the Air Corps Replacement Training Center, Santa Ana, California, reporting there to the commanding officer for duty. However, because there was no room for us out there they actually put us on furlough from February 21st, our date of enlistment, to March 27th, 1942. Well anyway, March 27th we all re-gathered at the Elks Club for a luncheon and a big flag-waving ceremony, and each of us signed a picture of an American flag. One of those flags is still hanging in the Elks Club today [laughs].

Gautsch: With your signature?

Gust: Yeah, with my signature on.

Gautsch: Oh.

Gust: And my signature plus the other sixteen. I'm getting a little ahead of the story, but of the sixteen of us who enlisted four of them were killed; only twelve returned. So anyway, we had a luncheon. They took us down to the old Northwestern Railroad Depot down on Third Street. We were piled on

that little “Toonerville Trolley” which was to take us up through Winona [Minnesota], and we were to—I think we were going to Albert Lea [Minnesota], if I remember correctly, where we to meet with either the Union Pacific or Northern Pacific crack east-west train, and there a Pullman car was reserved for us. We were to be on that Pullman car, or on that particular train, for three days in our travels out West. Well, most of us were green kids. You know we had never been any farther away than maybe Chicago or Minneapolis at the farthest, and all of a sudden here we are, you know, in this grand, exciting adventure of going to war and going all the way out to golden California that up to this point all we had ever heard about California was what we read or had seen in the movies. Of course, there were a couple guys in the unit who were pretty well experienced in life so the old “Toonerville Trolley” had no more than crossed the Mississippi River bridge and these guys started hauling out bottles of liquor [both laugh], and none of us, you know, drank at that time, so some of these guys--of the sixteen there were about five or six of them that really, by the time we got to Albert Lea, they didn't know where they were or where they were going. Well, to make a long story short we had one hell of a time getting on the train because the conductor—although he knew he could not have gotten away with it, but he tried it just to impress us—threatened that because of our condition or the condition of some of the group that he was not going to let us on board this westbound train. But we finally got on. So then we spent the next three days in—considering the times of 1942, early '42, the beginning of the war years—in pretty much luxury travel. We had Pullman berths, and then we went to the dining car for each of our meals. We stopped at all the—I remember major cities like Cheyenne [Wyoming] and Salt Lake City [Utah]—you know, big deal, boy.

Gautsch: The meals were all provided?

Gust: Oh, yeah, the meals were all provided. As a matter of fact, I'm quoting now from my orders. These are the orders: Special Order Number Fifteen dated 21 February 1942 from the Traveling Aviation Cadet Board, Board Number One. It says, “It being impracticable for the government to furnish cooking facilities for rations, the Finance Department will pay in advance to the above named cadets the monetary travel allowance in lieu thereof as proscribed in paragraph 3A Army Regulations 35-2580 at the rate of \$1 a day for sixteen Aviation Cadets for three days each.” Anyway, the total travel—get this—the total travel cost of the railroad fare for sixteen of us was \$845.60 [laughs]. The Pullman charge was \$82.80—can you believe that? The total cost of sending sixteen of us--of course this was GI rates, obviously--but the total cost of shipping sixteen of us from La Crosse to Santa Ana, California was \$928.40. So anyway, we arrived then in sunny California in the LA [Los Angeles] railroad station, were picked up, piled out of the train and were then hustled into what was

basically our first military formation and were loaded on—I can't recall, I think it was trucks, I'm almost sure it was. Yeah—no, no, they were busses. They were some sort of a bus that took us from the railroad station then out to the Santa Ana Air Base, and that was the big Aviation Cadet Training Center that was just under construction, and this was the reason that we had been held back because the enlistments were so far ahead of construction that they held us back for that period of time. We didn't actually arrive then until March. Well anyway, when we got there there were no barracks facilities available for us, but they had streets of tents set up. There were eight fellows to a tent: regular square-sided GI tent with wooden floors. So being sixteen of us, why, we had two tents side by side. Go ahead, Pam.

Gautsch: Do you think, looking back on it, that most of the kids that you became acquainted with on the trip were kind of in it for a lark? Do you think they really didn't understand the seriousness—as young as they were—couldn't have understood the—

Gust: No, none of us were in it for a lark, Pam. All of us were in truly because of patriotism in those days.

Gautsch: But was there any fear in you at that time where you felt nobody really knew—

Gust: No, no, because you—nobody—we were cannon fodder, but we were [laughs] being driven to the slaughter like a bunch of sheep, you know. This is so typical of, you know, the patriotism that swells in the breasts of men to defend their country or whatever it might be. Sure, we were young, and we were at that age where we wanted something exciting to happen to us from the humdrum of life. But no, we did it strictly for patriotism. No question about that, and I'm sure that went for each and every one of us. But all of us, of course, were being exposed to a very exciting type of adventure, a once in a lifetime adventure, if you will. Well anyway, Santa Ana, as I mentioned was just under construction. We lived in the tents. We had to use the latrine facilities of some of the few barracks which had been constructed on the base. So we went over there to take our showers, to use the latrines, to use the washbowls, and so on and so forth. As aviation cadets our per diem for food was a dollar a day which was three times what the regular Army allotment was in those days so theoretically we should have ate three times as good as the average GI, but the food basically was pretty terrible. It improved immensely later on, but when we were first there it was quite bad. We were in the heart of Orange County, California; saw no fresh oranges, saw no orange juice. We found out later that there was a civilian mess manager who was a brother-in-law of a lieutenant colonel who was in the Quartermaster Corps and after an undercover investigation I think the lieutenant colonel was court-

martialed, and I think his brother-in-law got a jail sentence because they were siphoning off obviously the ration funds that were to be allocated to us for their own use. But this didn't come until just before we left Santa Ana. Anyway, the—I'm going shut this off for just a moment.

[momentary pause in recording] Well anyway, at the Santa Ana Aviation Cadet Center then we learned the basic rudiments of close order drill, and every Sunday afternoon we had a big parade. Of course, we were issued our aviation cadet uniforms which were, you know, a very high-quality, almost officer-type, uniform. We learned code, and we learned aircraft identification, and we learned ship identification, naval identification. And we were taken in the oxygen chamber where they took us up--artificially, you know--to 40,000 feet. No, wait a minute—they didn't take us up that high. They took us up to about 25,000 feet I guess in this oxygen—it was a huge tank, a decompression tank, where they decreased the pressure to the equivalency of that altitude and had us take our oxygen masks off and experience anoxia—lack of oxygen—for the first time in our lives. We had a very rigorous physical examination—the second physical examination that we had to go through. I had taken my first physical examination when I enlisted back in La Crosse, and we had to take a second one out there, and I had trouble with the eye portion of that. Of course everybody, when they were sworn in, all applied for pilot training. Well, suddenly here I was faced with the fact that my eyes would not qualify me for pilot training. So I had to appear before a little second lieutenant one-man examining board and explain what I was going to do in life now that I wanted to be a pilot but couldn't because of my eyes, and did I want to be in—what would my preference be, and of course I immediately chose to be a navigator. I didn't even know what the hell a navigator did in those days. [Gautsch laughs]

Gust: So anyway, I must have impressed him, and so he qualified me to go on to navigation school. So then on July 3rd, 1942 those of us who had qualified for navigator training left Santa Ana by train, and we went up the San Joaquin Valley in the middle of July—or—the beginning of July, 1942 through this hot, arid desert, San Joaquin Valley. Oh, God, it was hot on that train. It was just absolutely so hot you couldn't believe it and dusty and dirty. When we finally reached Sacramento, California, Mather Air Force Base—Mather Army Air Corps Base, excuse me, in those days. Mather was the home of the navigators—one of the bases in the United States where navigation training was conducted--the other being Selman Field, Monroe, Louisiana and Maxwell Field, [Montgomery] Alabama. We were at the West Coast Training Center at Sacramento. Sacramento was a beautiful city then, and I presume it's still a beautiful city. I haven't been there for a number of years. The training at Mather was devoted almost entirely to the academic aspects of navigation training plus our flight training. We had classroom problems that we worked out of dead reckoning, celestial, radio navigation. Then we took our flight training in

Beechcraft AT-7s: twin-engine Beechcrafts. There were three aviation cadets to a plane and one pilot and then the navigation instructors. About every six flights—your sixth training mission you'd have an instructor on board. We started out with very simple type flights: flying up and down the—mainly from Sacramento up towards Oregon—and map-reading type missions. Then we extended those to dead-reckoning type missions where we navigated on the basis of a compass heading and airspeed reading and altitude and a temperature reading and a drift reading, and we determined our course by time, speed and distance. Then we graduated into the most difficult portion of our training which was celestial navigation where we learned to navigate by use of the heavenly bodies: the stars, the moon, and the sun. I graduated from Mather Field, California in the Class of 4215 on October 31st, 1942. There were 103 cadets in my class. We were presented our diplomas in the morning at a graduation ceremony where we wore our second lieutenant uniforms without our rank up until the time we walked across the stage and received our orders commissioning us as a second lieutenant in the United States Army Air Corps. Then when we got outside we all pinned our second lieutenant bars on one another and snapped each other a salute. How was it? The first individual that saluted you, you gave them a dollar. So we were all running around saluting one another hoping to be the first so that the guy would have to cough up with a buck. My orders after leaving Sacramento—Mather Army Air Corps Base—were to Salt Lake City. My sister Cleo lived at Salt Lake City. That was merely a so-called staging base. I was assigned to Heavy Bombardment at Salt Lake City and then was assigned [laughs]—we gotta stop this for just a minute. [momentary pause in recording] Okay, now we're back on track again. I was assigned from Salt Lake City then to Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington for further heavy bombardment training in B-17s. I think up until that time I had probably seen a B-17 from a distance, and that was about as—that was my only knowledge of a B-17. We reported on to base, of course, and there were B-17s out on the flight line so all we brand-new second lieutenants—navigators, bombardiers, pilots—as we came in we all had to gawk down on the flight line to look at these huge B-17 bombers that were sitting out there that we knew that we were going to be a part of. I went over to bachelor officers' quarters and got my room, and then I got my first verbal orders, and that was to report down to the—I was assigned to a training squadron—and then received verbal orders, for—maybe they were written. Anyway, somewhere I got orders to report down to the Operations Center for my first flight on a B-17 which was a night flight. So I walked in the Operations Center and looked around, and there were a whole bunch of new replacements like myself there, and we were being assigned by two crews. I happened to notice this one big, tall gink [slang for man] of water over in the corner, and I said, "Christ, that guy is tall." Pretty soon they started out calling out names, and it was rather unceremonious the way they assigned us to crews. It was purely by alphabetical order. So they assigned all the copilots to the pilots first, and

then the next was to assign the navigators. So pretty soon, “Darrell?” “Yes, sir.” “You’re on Lemmon’s crew.” So I looked up, and here I’m—walked over and was introduced to 2nd Lieutenant John V. Lemmon who turned out to be one of the greatest men that I’ve ever known. He was the pilot. Then we shook hands, introduced ourselves to each other, and then pretty soon a bombardier was assigned: “Stone: you report to Lemmon’s crew.” So over walked this fellow with a Southern accent and introduced himself as “Tee” Stone. His real name was Elbert—not Albert but E-l-b-e-r-t—Elbert E. Stone. But his nickname was “Tee”: T-double E, and that’s the only name anybody ever called him.

Gautsch: How’d he get a nickname like that?

Gust: I don’t know. It was “Tee” Stone. Tee was a dyed-in-the-wool Virginian, born in Virginia, raised by a black mammy, and could drink more whiskey and stand straight up than any man I [laughs] ever knew in my whole life. “Tee” and I—of course, the navigators and bombardiers always bunked together, and wherever we had to go in two in a room, as was most of the case, and likewise the pilot and copilot bunked together. So there was a great deal of familiarity, believe me, in a bomber crew. You got to know your other members of the crew very vividly. Well, the enlisted men of the crew—the gunners, the radio operator, the top turret gunner, engineer, ball turret gunner, radio operator I mentioned, the two waist gunners and the tail gunner—were assigned strictly by alphabet, and we ended up with all of the Bs. We had Andy Berzansky who was our top turret gunner, engineer. Andy was of Russian extraction from Pennsylvania. Just a minute, I’ve got a little file here that I compiled some years ago that it tells where all these people were from, and Andy was from Farrell, Pennsylvania, as I mentioned of Russian extraction. The radio operator--rather old and mature for the rest of crew, you know he was probably as old as the pilot, twenty-six years old at that time which was old to the rest of us who were just freshly turned twenty one: Caryl Zeller from Rochester, Minnesota. The tail gunner was Virgil Brown from Arkansas, and I think all Virgil ever did prior to going into the service was to drink whiskey and shoot squirrels because he was a top-notch, believe me, when it came to manning those twin .50s [0.50 inch M2 Browning machine guns] in the back of the B-17. Clayton Bagwell was the ball turret gunner. He was from somewhere in Oklahoma, and like all ball turret gunners he was a little guy because you had to be small to be squeezed in the ball turret of a B-17. Wayne Briggs was the left waist gunner from Springfield, Illinois, and Albert Beavers was the right waist gunner from Freetown, Maryland. So that composed our crew except for the copilot who did not immediately join the crew, as I recall, at Spokane but joined us I think at our next station. His name was Elmo E. Clark, and he graduated in the first—well, the rest of us were all second lieutenants--had been commissioned as second lieutenants upon graduation and got our

wings and our commissions at the same time. In Clark's case he was the first class who graduated as flight officers. Now, that was a kind of bastard rank in between an enlisted man and an officer—it was like the warrant officer of the old Army days: had all the privileges of an officer yet maintained some of the privileges that were allocated solely to enlisted men. "F.O."—flight officer--was his rank, therefore his perennial nickname was always "F.O." "F.O." had the serial number T84 so he graduated in the very first class of flight officers: a tremendous pilot. He was very, very young. He had a world of experience behind him. He was perhaps, next to Briggs, he was probably the youngest member of our crew. He was about nineteen years of age, or eighteen years of age possibly, because he had been at Pearl Harbor as an enlisted man, and this was—we're now talking about a period of time in November of 1942 so less than a year after Pearl Harbor here we were assembled as a bomber crew. Well, as a crew we trained at Spokane. The weather was lousy: it was raining, it was snowing. It was horrible weather for flying. Pilots got most of the training, very frankly, because none of the missions were long enough to get any real navigation in. The bombardiers trained at a synthetic trainer in the hangars. A synthetic trainer that moved on four wheels and by operating the Norden bombsight they synchronized on something that was on the pavement floor, a target, and then this thing was chain-driven, and in essence it was supposed to give them training in operating the Norden bombsight in this synthetic manner. Navigators had very little synthetic training if any. We used to take our sextants out and shoot the stars and the sun just to keep proficient, but really not much training. From Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington we moved then to Walla Walla, Washington. We were there just a few days at Walla Walla when we were assigned to a satellite base of Walla Walla called Redmond, Oregon. So we spent Christmas and New Year's at Redmond, Oregon satellite base. There were probably about ten or twelve B-17s stationed there with all of the support—technical, logistical support—coming from the mother field at Walla Walla, Washington some time ahead.

[momentary pause in recording] I might mention, as far as the B-17s that we flew in base training at these various fields most of them were B-17Fs manufactured in 1942, early '42. We did have a few B-17Es. The basic difference between the two of them--there was some horsepower difference, there was some armament difference. One of the major differences as far as the navigator and the bombardier was that the B-17E instead of a solid Plexiglas nose it had a sectionalized nose out of various pieces of Plexiglas whereas the B-17F had a solid one-piece Plexiglas nose with a flat piece of Plexiglas for the vision of the bombsight. The typical training mission—[momentary pause in recording] —long, grueling. Most of us as I mentioned--the navigators--did not get a great deal of training because the emphasis was principally on the pilot training.

[momentary pause in recording] After we left what was Bend, Oregon—not Redmond, Oregon—I'm correcting myself from the previous.

[momentary gap in recording] –Army Air Corps Base known as Ainsworth, Nebraska. This was on the very northern border of Nebraska, and we arrived there right after the beginning of January in 1943. I was subsequently married there to Carol Severson on January 11th, 1943, a wedding which was, as the newspapers quoted, “Ainsworth’s first formal military wedding.” In any way, the wedding was attended by the bomber crew plus some of the members of some of the other crews and their wives. Vince Lemmon was best man, and the wife of one of the other navigators in one of the other crews was matron of honor. Ainsworth was right out in the middle of the boonies, believe me: cold, snowy, horrible winter flying weather. It was so cold they would turn the props over by hand, you know, to loosen up the oil in the cylinders and attempt to start them. It was just battling the elements one right after the other. We did, however, out of Ainsworth fly a number of missions where I did get some fairly decent navigation-type training. I remember we flew on a night mission one time, and we arrived back at Ainsworth, and it was socked in. We couldn’t get in so we were diverted to Rapid City [South Dakota]. We got to Rapid City about 7:30 or eight o’clock in the morning, landed, had breakfast, went over to BOQ [bachelor officers’ quarters] and were all set. Had just climbed in bed, and the orders came that Ainsworth had cleared, to climb back in the airplane, and to fly down to Ainsworth. We had flown all night long, and so we were just dog-tired. Got back to Ainsworth and relaxed a little bit and got a call. We got back to Ainsworth, as I remember, about noontime, or something like that. About 3 o’clock in the afternoon got a call to report down at Operations, and we were then supposed to fly a night mission out to Colorado Springs [Colorado], Peterson Air Force Base. Oh, that was a horribly long, long day. We arrived at Colorado Springs sometime early the next morning of the next day. We figured that we had been up for almost twenty-four hours and were just dog-tired. The principle of all of the phase training, of course, was to cram the training that was available to the bomber crews to get them ready, preparatory for their overseas combat departures. After Ainsworth we were assigned to Salina Air Force Base at Topeka, Kansas, and this was our final training base prior to leaving the States. We knew we were going overseas--not knowing exactly where we were going, but we sure knew we were headed overseas because we weren’t being trained to sit on our hands back in the States. We had no fatalities among our training crews. We were fortunate in that respect. We were assigned at Salina the aircraft that we were to bring overseas. Now, my pilot, Vince Lemmon, while he was in cadet training had appeared briefly in a movie entitled *Thunderbirds*. Gene Tierney starred in it. I can’t remember who the male lead was. There was a shot in the movie of this group of cadets marching, and old Vince Lemmon was in the front ranks so we used to jokingly say that this was a required training film for all the crews to see this time and time again whenever it showed up at one of the local theaters. At Salina we were, as I mentioned, assigned our bomber and it

was christened obviously “Thunderbird” in recognition of the movie Vince originally appeared in. We had the thunderbird design painted on the nose of the airplane. We thought it was the airplane that we would eventually fly in combat, which did not turn out to be so. It was one of the early B-17Fs without an astrodome—or a bubble where the navigator took his celestial shots from—so I made arrangements with one of the civilians down at the center or the depot to build me a little celestial dome about the size of a derby hat that I could mount my astrocompass in on a special mount that he made for me. The guy--whoever he was, God bless his soul--was just terrific in working with me and helping to make these local designs on the airplane to fit what we all as a combat crew wanted. So then we were assigned sixteen B-17 crews into a group known as the Wheeler Provisional Group. Major Wheeler, who had been one of the early B-17 pilots in the war in the Far East in the Philippines—just a young—I don’t think he was twenty-four years old--had risen very rapidly to the rank of major and was now back in the States in charge of training, and we were assigned to the Wheeler Provisional Combat Group. From there we left Salina as sixteen airplanes and headed down to [momentary pause in recording] West Palm Beach, Florida which was our final base prior to departure. We were at Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida. We were there only, as I remember, about two days. Then we received sealed orders—each crew received sealed orders—and we were told to report down to the flight line ready for our overseas movement. The pilots were instructed not to open their sealed orders until they were five miles or three miles, whatever it was, off the coast of the continental United States. After we were airborne the pilot, Vince Lemmon, opened our orders, and the orders were to report to the Commanding General, 8th Air Force, London, England. [momentary pause in recording] This is the end of the first side of tape number one of the war experiences of Darrell Gust, navigator, United States Army. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** A tape of Darrell Gust reminiscing and recollecting on some of his experiences as a navigator in B-17 bombers in World War II. As I mentioned on the previous tape, we were to report to the Commanding General, 8th Air Force, London, England. However, this was a real surprise to us because we had been issued tropical equipment. The fighting in Africa was still going on, and we assumed for sure that we were going to become part of the Air Force in Africa. [momentary pause in recording]

Gautsch: Would it help to oil that, do you think? That wheel in there or—

Gust: No, that doesn’t matter.

Gautsch: Is there anything that—

Gust: Nah, that little bit doesn’t matter—when we left Morrison Field the date was March 2nd, 1943, and we were headed for Borinquen Field, Puerto

Rico. We arrived there seven hours later, and on the next day we flew, on the third of March, from Puerto Rico to Georgetown, British Guyana. Now, Georgetown was just a strip. All of these bases, understand—except for Borinquen Field—but most of these bases from here on now I'm going to mention were all bases that were quickly cut out of the jungle or made on the desert solely to take care, after the war began, to take of the traffic that was flying from the United States over to Africa and eventually up to England. When we got to Georgetown—they had briefed us that it was just a strip cut out in the jungle, and they were sure as hell right because we made our final approach, and "Tee" Stone and I were in the nose of the B-17 as we made our final approach, and I swear to God those branches of those trees, on our final approach when we began our flare-out, the trees were right on the very edge of the runway, and I swear to God we weren't five feet above those trees as we came in. As a matter of fact it was at Georgetown that I saw my first airplane crash. We had gathered under the wing of the airplane—it was very warm, hot and humid—and were waiting for some ground transportation, a truck or something, to come out and pick us up. This A-20 [light bomber] came in with one engine feathered; he had his left engine feathered. It was obviously an Air Transport Command pilot ferrying this A-20 over to some place in Africa, I assume. With his left engine feathered he overshot, and he attempted to go around again so he poured the coal—everything—on the right engine. He got airborne. No, I'm sorry; it was his right engine that was out. He got airborne, and whether from force of habit or what, but after he got a couple hundred feet in the air he began a turn to the left. When he did, of course, with only one engine the torque just flipped the plane right over on its back, and down it went and exploded in a big, black plume of smoke and flame about maybe a half mile from us. But it was right out in the jungle, you know, there was no possible way that we could have gotten out there.

Gautsch: How many were in this plane? Did you ever know?

Gust: There was just—I'm sure it was just—usually just one in an A-20. He was just ferrying it from one place to another. Georgetown was—I remember when we went to the mess hall there, and it was an old wooden GI—not an old, it was new, newly constructed, but it was wooden—and we had our fried bananas for dinner. That was my first experience with fried bananas. I'll never remember [forget?] Well, then the next day we left Georgetown. This is on the fourth of March, and we went from Georgetown to Belem, Brazil. Oh; incidentally, the flying time from Puerto Rico to Georgetown was eight hours. So it was quite a haul. So on the fourth of March, getting back on track here, we left from Georgetown for Belem, Brazil. Belem is right on the mouth of the Amazon River, took us seven hours and fifteen minutes flying time. We landed. Belem was a fairly populous city, Portuguese in background, and, you know, I would have to assume in

those days probably 150,000 people. We did a lot of sightseeing at Belem. We were there for six days at Belem because a German sub had torpedoed a tanker with aviation fuel in the outer harbor so we were without any aviation fuel. So all we could do is wait until the next tanker came in. So we went into town and mingled with the natives, went in some of the stores. I bought, I remember, some silk stockings for your mother, Pam, and some other trinkets. We went to the zoo--just generally loafed around because there wasn't much to do in the meantime. Well, finally the tanker did come in, and we had gas again. Then we left on the tenth of March from Belem. We went over to Natal, Brazil, Natal being the very eastern tip of South America. We had six hours and fifteen minutes of flying time to Natal. The very next day then we, on the thirteenth of March, 1943, and my recollection is this may have even been Friday, but I sure as hell remember it as being the 13th. We left--no, no, I'm sorry, I'm one step ahead of myself. On the twelfth of March we left from Natal to Ascension Island. Now, this was a long hop. Ascension Island was basically just a coral reef jutting out of the South Atlantic about two degrees south of the Equator. It was about six miles long and about three miles wide--something like that. It was a British possession and as part of the Lend-Lease exchange the Americans were given possession of it as an airbase, and its sole purpose in being was a fueling stop between South America and Africa because in those days the bombers going over certainly did not have enough fuel capacity to go from Natal all the way over to Dakar, Africa, which would have been the first stop in Africa. That was a long hop for us. From Natal to Ascension was nine hours and fifteen minutes, and I'll never forget that day because it had some humor connected with it, and I gotta tell you this. Old Andy Berzansky--our flight engineer, top turret gunner--used to sit on the base of the ball turret gunner and take his fuel gauge readings, which was part of his assigned duty was to record the fuel consumption off the gauges of the airplane periodically. The navigator was down in the nose. "Tee" Stone the bombardier--who had actually nothing to do most of the time except when we later flew combat missions--was asleep as usual in the nose, the Southern gentleman snoozing away [both laugh]. So the only guys that were really working were the radio operator who had to maintain a constant radio communications check, the pilot and even the copilot, Clark, oftentimes slept or else they alternated back and forth, but the navigator had nobody to relieve him, and this was a long hop and especially going from Natal to this coral reef 1600, 1700 miles away--nine hours flying time away--was one hell of a long trip and a destination that you as a navigator either brought the airplane there or else because there was absolutely no other place to land. In other words you had to bring the airplane to this little coral reef out there way out in the middle of nowhere. So we're a couple hours out, and Andy must have got lonesome or something up in the pilot's compartment sitting in the ball turret taking his readings so he came down to the nose. He said, "Well, Lieutenant, where are we going today?"

“Well, Andy,” I said, “we’re going to Ascension Island.” I had my Mercator chart spread across my navigation table, and I had this long thin line—about two-foot long line—on the chart from Natal [momentary pause in recording] over to Ascension Island. Andy looked at that, and he looked at one end, and then he’d look at the other, you know, and he said something about the size of the island. I told him it was about five miles long, three miles wide—something like that. He said something about, “There isn’t any other place to land?” I said, “No, that’s it, Andy. That’s where we’re going, and we gotta make it.” He didn’t say another word. He turned around, and he left, and he came back about five minutes later with thermos jug full of coffee and a couple of sandwiches, and he set them down on my desk, and he said, “Anything else I can do for you, Lieutenant?” [both laugh] I’ll never forget that, and we joked about that after the war, God bless his soul. Anyway we finally landed. I had an excellent mission where I split the old runway right down the center on my ETA [estimated time of arrival], as I remember. Nine hours of flying time and we landed at Ascension. We stayed overnight there, and, boy, they were right. Ascension was just a big coral reef jutting out of the South Atlantic. The funny part about it is—and they had warned us of this—the runway had a great big hump right in the middle. Many of the pilots who had landed there who had forgotten in the briefing about this hump that was in the middle of the runway—halfway down the runway, I should say—blew out tires and ruined brakes on airplanes because they would land and think that there was nothing over the other side of what they could see. They thought that was the end of the runway, and here they were really only halfway down it. Yet on the very far end of the runway there was right—there was nothing but a big cliff about 200 feet down to the water’s edge. But a lot of pilots had forgotten in the briefing about this rise in the center of the runway, and when they landed they threw out everything except the kitchen sink trying to stop the airplane, blew out tires and brakes and everything else, swerved the airplanes off the runway and everything else. But we were briefed on it. Vince remembered, and sure enough we landed, and it looked like we were going right over a big cliff. We got to the top, and then we rolled down the rest of the runway—maybe another half mile of runway or something like that. I remember these poor bastards, the GIs that were stationed on Ascension Island. You can imagine there was absolutely nothing to do, and some of them—this was in March of ’43, you know, and some of them had probably been there maybe even a half a year, a year by then. They came up and, you know, offered us some fantastic prices if we had any booze on board or anything like that, you know, because some of the crews I suppose did take liquor. Anyway on March 13th, 1943, then we left Ascension Island, and we were headed for Roberts Field at Dakar—I’m sorry, we were headed for Dakar, French West Africa which would have been about, oh, roughly about another nine hours of flying time. On this particular leg of the flight we would cross the Equator, and they told us that we would spot

this equatorial front which perennially hung near the Equator, and we would have to penetrate this front in order to continue on. So sure enough we were flying in sunshine, and it was bright and clear, and sure enough way up ahead we could see this huge bank of clouds. That's the equatorial front right where they said it was going to be. They had instructed us to go in between 9,000 and 10,000 feet. They said you'd fly on instruments for about ten minutes, and you'll break out the other side of it. Well, we were at this time flying in a very, very loose formation. I remember just before going into it looking out, and I could see a couple of B-17s maybe four or five miles from us because, you know, we all took off, one right after another when we departed each day and so forth. So we were in a very, very loose formation, yet every navigator was on his own. Anyway we stuck our heads in this cloud bank at 12:25. I recorded the time that approximately that we would go into it so I got a dead-reckoning position—a DR position. I had been taking my celestial sun shots because we didn't have an astrodome—a real astrodome other than for that homemade astrocompass thing that I had mentioned—I had been taking my celestial shots off the sun out of the pilot's windows up in the pilot's compartment. So when we went in this thing I was standing behind Clark who was in the copilot seat. He had his seat belt on. Vince did not because, you know, it didn't look like anything but just an innocent bank of clouds. We stuck our nose in there, and all hell broke loose. What happened is we ran right into a big cumulonimbus cloud, and the updraft of the cumulonimbus caught us, and the rate of climb indicator—and I saw this because I was standing right behind the copilot, and I could see the whole instrument panel of the airplane, matter of fact that's what my attention was riveted on because there wasn't anything else to watch when all this took place, but the rate of climb indicator immediately went up 6,000 foot a minute which was maximum for a B-17. Then we either went into a loop or we stalled off, and then we got caught into downdraft, and we went down. A B-17 was redlined at about 270, and that was supposed to be the maximum speed, and I remember looking at the rate of climb indicator which, or rate of descent indicator in this case, was 6,000 foot in a minute down which was right against the peg in the other direction, and the airspeed indicator reading about 320—which was about fifty miles over what was supposed to be maximum—headed right 6,000 foot a minute down. Then we did the same thing all over again. We got caught in an updraft, went up, stalled out, went and got caught in a downdraft. We did this three particular times.

Gautsch: Where you still standing?

Gust: Yeah, and I was standing, and when the G-force [force of gravity] when we pulled out of the these things—in our downward descent when we pulled out the G-force was so strong—well, let me—I'm a little bit ahead in my story. On board, because of the emergency of having to crash-land

at sea or something like that we had some five-gallon cans of water. They were just light tin cans filled with water, and they were only partially filled so that in case you ever crash-landed on the sea you could throw them out the window and they'd float. So I suppose they were like maybe two-thirds full of water. There was one right behind me, and when we pulled out the G-force was so strong that it just buckled my knees, and I sat right on this can, and the pressure of the G-forces was so strong—my weight plus the weight of the G-forces was so strong—that it just popped the can wide open [laughs]. We had about three, four gallons of water floating around in the cockpit there. [laughs] You know, you weren't scared. I wasn't scared at all, really, you know. We realized it was something that could very well turn out—I shouldn't say we weren't scared, but we were busy, and I know when we were going down I kept thinking—and it's funny how things like this will occur to you, and I haven't thought about this for years—but I kept thinking, gee, Carol is sure going to be surprised when they deliver that telegram. That's the only think that I could think of. You know, I wasn't perturbed or scared at all. I just thought, you know, kind of casually, gee whiz, she's sure gonna be surprised when they deliver that telegram that we didn't make it [laughs], you know. So anyway, the storm finally threw us out. We finally found a little spot of sunlight on one of these updrafts or downdrafts. It was an updraft I guess. From it we found the top of the clouds, and from seeing the sun and getting some orientation we could get a little bit of an idea of the attitude of the airplane because the thing that I forgot to mention is when we went into this thing all of the instruments went out. They were gyro-controlled instruments, and the attitude of the airplane was so violent that it tumbled the gyros so we had no artificial horizon. All we had is a rate of climb and descent indicator which under those conditions was not accurate. The compass was just spinning wildly; you couldn't even read it. It was spinning around so fast. So all the pilots had is what was called the needle and ball. This is an instrument that neither of them had used it since they had been in advanced flying school. I remember when we were in one of these gyrations Clark was saying, "We're upside down." And Vince was pointing to the needle and ball, and he'd say "No, we're right side up." [laughs] I don't think either one of them knew where the hell we were! Well, anyway, it finally threw us out on the same side of the storm that we went in on. In the meantime here I am as a navigator pointing us to this location in Africa. Thank God we weren't going to Ascension Island because we probably would have never made it being buffeted around with the winds. So I just drew about a fifty mile circle and said, "Well, you know, we're probably inside of that circle," because there was no possible way that I could have kept track of the airplane while we were in these violent maneuvers. We were in it for twenty-five minutes, in this thing.

Gautsch: Oh!

Gust: Most severe storm—matter of fact, I got an article in my scrapbook of *Stars and Stripes*—wrote it up afterwards about it. You know, nowadays nothing like that could happen because number one, the jet aircraft would fly over the tops, or if they couldn't fly over the tops they'd have radar to point out the storm cloud that we innocently stuck our nose right into. And the confusing part is that these other aircraft that went in had no problems at all. They flew ten, fifteen minutes on instruments and broke out the other side. We, just by pure happenstance, must have just ran bam! right head into this big, huge cumulonimbus thunderhead cloud. Well, anyway here we were; it threw us out on the same side.

Gautsch: Now what was your time of arrival in hours between there and the next destination?

Gust: Well, it probably would have been about an eight-hour flight from Ascension Island over to Dakar where we were headed on this trip.

Gautsch: So from the storm how much longer did—

Gust: Well, this is all part of what I'm leading up to then. It threw us out on the same side. I forgot to mention that also on board we had an old—old, he was probably forty years old, but he was a Methuselah to us at that time—guy by the name of Captain H.R. Montgomery who had been directly commissioned as a captain into the Army Air Corps based on his civilian flying experience. He was too old for combat so they sent him along to chaperone and shepherd the new crews that were going to England—the combat crews like ourself. For some reason he decided to ride with us in our airplane as one of the sixteen. He picked our airplane to ride in. So he and the bombardier were down in the nose when all of these gyrations took place. As soon as we got thrown out on the other side, why, he came up and he told Clark—in the meantime I'm standing behind him so I'm hearing all this—he told Clark, the copilot, to go down to the nose, that he was taking over the right seat. Lemmon was still the pilot, though. This guy was a captain, Vince was a first lieutenant but Vince was still aircraft commander. So Vince said, "We're going over the top." This old Captain Montgomery said, "Oh, you can't make that." He said, "These tops on these cumulus go up to 50,000, 60,000 feet sometimes over the Equator." Vince said, "We're gonna try it." So we started up, climbing, and we got up to, oh, as I remember around 22,000, 24,000 feet, something like that. We had no de-icer boots at that time, and we started to just ice up to beat the band so there was no possibility that we could do that, or we'd have lost our flying mobility with the ice building up on the airplane. So, then we spiraled down. In the meantime here I am trying to keep track of where in the hell we're going; trying to have some idea of where we're going. We're going up, down, in circles, and every which way.

Gautsch: Flipping over?

Gust: Yeah, [laughs] flipping over and everything else. So we get down, and we couldn't go over it so there was only one other course. There was no point in trying to go through it again, we knew that. So then we got right down on the deck, about 150 foot off the water, and I think that sometimes we were a lot less than that because we were right underneath this cloud—this big cumulus cloud in this front, the perennial front that lays there—and flying underneath it. So we were flying [momentary pause in recording] I'd say anywhere from 100 to 150 feet above the water. In the meantime then Vince had asked me for a course to the nearest land rather than Dakar because we didn't have enough gas to get to Dakar. So I gave him a heading to Roberts Field in Liberia which was the nearest heading or the closest land. Well, my granddaughter Kristin Amy Gautsch just walked in—hah, hah! [momentary pause in recording] Well, anyway, getting back to our story, here we are flying 150 feet underneath this crud, and we had been briefed along the way to beware of German submarines who would lie on the radio beam. They'd pick up the American radio beams and surface and then shoot down these low-flying transport planes with their anti-aircraft guns—with their deck guns. So when we were flying into Liberia I had picked up the radio beam, and we were flying in, and I was using radio navigation as part of my navigation. By that time we had probably gone up to maybe like 300, 400 feet; the ceiling was gradually rising. I'm back down in the nose again at my navigation desk. The weather was—although we were low, you know, it was—the air was not that rough or anything. All of a sudden, all of sudden somebody yells, "Submarine!" Boy, the pilot cranked that old B-17 and tipped it up on its wing, and we looked down and sure enough we could see the conning tower and the periscope of this submarine just submerging. So I called the radio operator, Zeller, and told him—first of all I got a DR, dead-reckoning, position of where it was and got the location according to my navigation chart—and called Zeller back and told him to call in the coordinates of the position to the base because we had been briefed if this would ever happen we were to do this, and then they could send out an anti-submarine patrol plane and try and depth charge the sub, see.

Gautsch: But you didn't have any equipment for that.

Gust: No! We didn't—hell, we only had about fifty rounds of ammunition on board the whole airplane on the way over to conserve weight.

Gautsch: Did they know that?

Gust: No, they probably didn't. Maybe they recognized us as a bomber instead of a transport and crash-dived or something. Who knows? But anyway, we

landed at Roberts Field then at Monrovia in Liberia. Gee, the airplane hardly came to a halt before this RAF [Royal Air Force] officer jumped out of this jeep, and he came up, and he yelled to the pilot. He said, “Where’s the navigator?” [pronounced in a British accent] Vince yelled down at me. He said, “That limey [slang for an English person] out there wants you, Darrell.” So I crawled up and stuck my head out of Vince’s window, and he said, “Bring your Mercator”—meaning my maps. “Come with me right down to Operations immediately.” So I went back in the nose of the airplane and gathered up my maps and went out of the nose hatch and jumped in his jeep and we tore up to the Operations building. They had a big map pasted on the wall up there, and they said, “Now, according to your report we have the submarine plotted here.” They had the damn thing way up in the northern Arctic Circles [laughs] someplace.

Gautsch: Oh!

Gust: What happened: poor old Zeller, he was so shook up from this storm and everything that when I gave him the coordinates to call in—and see everything had to be done by—we had a different code every day, and he had to transpose these coordinates into the code of the day and then use that code of the day—

Gautsch: Who set up the code of the day?

Gust: Well, they gave us what was called a flimsy. It was a briefing—they gave the radio one to—you know, like a two became an eight and a nine became a one—and they just changed it around to meet the code of the day, and they changed it from time to time. Well, anyway, poor old Zeller when he transmitted these coordinates of where we saw this sub he got apparently all screwed [laughs] up. So then I brought my map out, and showed them where the sub had crash dived. So they sent out a PB Y [Consolidated patrol bomber Catalina] after it—an amphibian PB Y—which took off in just a couple minutes afterwards. They said it had been the second or third time in the last couple of days that this sub had been sighted in the same general area so they were trying to bore in on it. Well, anyway, then—

Gautsch: You never knew if anything came of it?

Gust: No. So we stayed overnight then in Roberts Field. Then we took off on the 14th of March, 1943 from Roberts Field headed to Dakar, West Africa. Dakar was truly a French city. As a matter of fact, Dakar is where the Vichy French Navy had scuttled their Navy in the African campaign. Rather than surrender it to the Free French they had scuttled their own Navy there. It was just like out of a Humphrey Bogart movie, you know, when we went downtown into the city that night. This raises a point that

you had mentioned, Pam, about the money belt. I'll just quickly mention this because I'll probably use this tape to round out the balance of our trip. But before I left overseas they made me finance officer onboard the airplane. Our per diem, as I remember, was \$6 a day. No, it wasn't that much. Yes, I guess it was; I guess it was \$6 a day. Anyway, our crew, before we left to go overseas, had all had a week at home: our final leave. So everybody apparently picked up money at home, and they gave me about \$1,300, I think, in American Gold Seal money to pay the crew off periodically, and, hell, I couldn't give the money away because nobody wanted it. Everybody had enough money for their own, and besides there wasn't that much money to spend along the way. Yet we were still by Air Corps regulations entitled to this \$6 a day per diem. We paid for our meals at the officers messes as we went through, but, you know, it was like twenty-five or thirty-five cents, as I remember, or fifty cents at all these various bases that we went through. So I had all this money. When I got down in Belem [Brazil] [momentary pause in recording] There was a slight pause here. We're starting now the next day: it's Saturday the twelfth of March—forty years ago from when these stories happened. Anyway, as I was saying, when I got down to Belem, I had this money. I went down to the market, and I bought a pigskin money belt which I wore wherever I went. I not only wore the pigskin money belt, but I wore my Army .45 automatic pistol with a shell in the chamber so that if I needed it all I had to do was cock the hammer. Because I'll tell you, life in Africa, and particularly in Africa, was mighty, mighty damn cheap. If those natives over there had known for example that I had better than \$1,000 in American Gold Seal dollars on me my life wouldn't have been worth a plugged nickel. [momentary pause in recording] Getting back to the story of Dakar and the Humphrey Bogart atmosphere, as I said it truly was—it was right out of a Humphrey Bogart movie. Typical poverty and yet the French atmosphere permeated throughout. We went as a crew to a place called the American Bar and watched a couple of French sailors get in a fight. This one sailor stripped every bit of clothing off the other guy in the course of the fight except his shoes and about that time somebody started yelling, "Gendarmes, gendarmes!" So we beat it the hell out of there lickety-split. So that was Dakar, French West Africa. From Dakar we took off on March 16th for Marrakesh, Morocco. This was a tour which took seven and a half hours of flying time and took us over the Sahara Desert. As a navigator, of course, I checked the winds aloft by taking what was known as double drifts [method of wind determination]. When we were over the desert I got winds—we were flying I think at about 12,000 or 14,000 feet as I recall—I got winds that I just couldn't believe: they were over 100 knots an hour. We made our turn over the Sahara Desert at a little French military outpost called Tindouf [Algeria]. There was a French Foreign Legion garrison stationed at Tindouf. Boy, I'll tell you it was right out in the middle of the Sahara Desert. There was no two ways about that. We came in to Marrakesh by flying over the Atlas Mountains

[across northwestern Africa] which as I recall were about 14,000-15,000 feet high. We flew basically through a pass in the mountains because the visibility was such that we could see the mountains; there was no danger of flying blind into one or anything like that. It was very strange because I can vividly recall we crossed the mountain range and then immediately made our descent down to the American air base which was stationed at Marrakesh, and it was just like going over the edge of a cliff. We crossed the mountain pass, and then down in the valley down below was the city of Marrakesh, and in the distance was the ocean. Marrakesh was truly Moroccan-French in nature. We made several trips down through the city. We stayed there for four days in Marrakesh outfitting our B-17 for its final run up to England. During the course of those four days we stayed at what had been a big gambling casino and was now taken over as an officers quarters. We slept on cots; it sure as hell wasn't very fancy, but they did have an officers mess there. We got down into the market place, and Vince Lemmon the pilot and I took a very interesting tour one afternoon. I remember we toured the sheik's palace. But the market place was something else. It was camel dung and camel urine and flies and smelly and camels and snake charmers and black-veiled women, and kids—I don't know, they were half-French half-native African. It was really something else. I guess the other thing I remember about Dakar is it was very windy, and one afternoon I went out to the airplane to get something—I can't recall what it was—and old Andy Berzansky, our flight engineer, was out there cleaning up the airplane because we had eaten candy bars and gum and so forth along the way, and it was getting pretty messy inside. So Andy got a hold of a broom somewhere and was sweeping out the inside of the airplane. He had opened the back exit door to the airplane just about the time I walked up to the airplane. He had all of this paper, candy bar wrappers, tinfoil from gum, and so forth, and he threw it out the back door into the blowing sand, and there were about 200 of these black African natives around there dressed in various garb. They took off chasing this paper—the silver reflection of the tinfoil I suppose really got them going—and they took off like a bunch of gooks over the—last I saw them they were still chasing these pieces of paper. Well, we left Marrakesh after getting the airplane serviced. One of the reasons that we had to have it so carefully serviced is when we had come out of this storm flying from Ascension Island to where we eventually landed at Roberts Field, Liberia the stress on the wings had been so great that we had actually popped rivets and put tremendous strain on the wings of the airplane. As a matter of fact, the damn wings of that thing were flapping like a sea gull out there when we were in the middle of that thing. I think they were actually amazed that a B-17 could take that type of punishment. So we spent considerable time at Marrakesh having the plane very carefully gone over rivet by rivet by the ground personnel. Then we were called together, and we were briefed on the final leg of our mission which was to England. We left about ten o'clock at night, and the navigator's

course was plotted out, and we had to follow it very, very carefully. We were to fly due west until we intercepted the tenth meridian of longitude, and then we were to fly due north along that meridian and at sunrise at my ETA [estimated time of arrival] we were to make a right turn and make landfall on the very tip of England at a place called Saint Eval. This was basically, from the standpoint of the possibility of any warfare activity up to this point, was the most dangerous part of our mission because the Germans had been known to have sent out patrol planes over the Bay of Biscay—which is the bay north of Spain and west of France—and patrolled that bay partially to protect their submarines which were coming in to Saint-Nazaire and Brest and Lorient and Bordeaux and so forth in the Bay of Biscay as their home port. So even though we flew this at night there was danger that we could have been intercepted by a German night fighter, so it was a little hairy. Anyway, we took off, and it was a beautiful night. I shot fixes on the stars and the moon all night long. It was an eight and a half hour flight, which was a mighty long one. I remember I reached my estimated time of arrival from my landfall turn; I made my ninety degree turn and hoped to beat hell that I would make my navigation landfall on the very tip of England. I turned on the radio compass of the airplane just to double-check my navigation, and the needle pointed straight ahead, and when I turned it to voice I could hear the song “The Sands of Amarillo are A-Scratchin’ on my Pillow,” and I thought, hell, that has to be coming from England; none of the Krauts would ever play a song like that. [momentary pause in recording] When we arrived at this RAF base at Saint Eval--which was a relatively small base, and it was only there for its sole purpose of the incoming B-17s to land and then be funneled on to other bases—Vince called the tower, got ahold of the tower, but we were so unaccustomed to the limey speech if I can call it that—the true British accent—that he couldn’t understand what the tower officer was saying. So we start making our final approach and they’re shooting red flares all over the place on the ground [laughs], and we finally found out that we were coming in downwind so we pulled up and went around and made 180 degree turn and came back and made a proper landing approach. It was quite interesting for us then to see our allies for the very first time--some of the RAF people that came out to the airplane. [momentary pause in recording] Our flying time from Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida to England was sixty-seven hours and fifteen minutes. This is the end of this tape. The next tape will take us into combat. **[End of Tape 1, Side B]** Well, here we go as a continuation of my first combat mission, May 17th, 1943. As I had mentioned on the previous tape, as we were approaching the coast we were hit by fighters, and they were principally twin engine fighters. They were some ME-110s [German Messerschmitt heavy fighters] that began hitting the groups up ahead of us. At this point in time we got a couple of minor attacks but nothing of a real ferocious nature such as the groups ahead of us were receiving. Then we made landfall on the coast and followed the river

down to Bremen [Germany]. It was a good day for navigation because you could plainly see the coast, plainly see all of the given checkpoints that they had briefed us as navigators on. Then we got into flak, and holy balls, that was my first experience with it, and flak scares you. I don't care how many times you've ever been in it. It scared the livin' bejeezus out of us. What the Germans were doing: they obviously knew that Bremen was going to be our target or something in Bremen—in this case the Focke-Wulf aircraft assembly plant. They didn't know that, but they obviously knew we were going to Bremen so they laid a barrage flak up which was probably, oh, an eighth of a mile wide and about four or five miles long. The German anti-aircraft gunners down below, by predetermined formula, simply set their guns and timed their 88mm anti-aircraft shells to explode at a given point at a given altitude, and they just kept firing and built up this huge barrage of flak. By that time we were on our bomb run, and throughout the whole bomb run we flew right through that flak. It was just bursting all over, big black nasty puffs. You couldn't hear it, but occasionally—well, you could see the—when it was fairly close to you, you could see the red explosion, and then the black smoke from the explosion, and of course the anti-aircraft shell exploded in thousands of pieces. It was “Goodbye, Charlie” if you were close enough. I remember several times we could hear it, the spent anti-aircraft that [jet plane noise in background] apparently had been fired above us raining down on us, and you could hear it hit the airplane as we were flying along. You know, you just constantly kept flying and holding your breath. Because we were on the bomb run we had to maintain that steady airspeed, altitude, and heading hoping to hell [jet plane noise in background] that, you know, they wouldn't lay one up right underneath our aircraft or something. Well, anyway—wait till this jet—we dropped our bombs, and no sooner had we dropped our bombs of course than—well, I'm getting a little ahead of myself. After we dropped our bombs the standard procedure was to make a sharp turn out of the target area to try and evade the flak as much as possible to get clear of it and then at the same time start gradually descending. So we were building up airspeed as we were heading toward the German coast, but by the same token we were losing altitude so we became more vulnerable to the flak. We had just made our turn from the target, and over the intercom came this screaming voice, “Help! Help! I'm on fire! Get me out, get me out!” You know, we were all so tense and so nervous—scared to death quite frankly—that Jesus, when we heard that voice coming over the intercom, you know, everybody just shot right up. As it turned out—and Vince Lemmon and I talked about this many [laughs] times in the succeeding years—but Vince didn't know what the hell to do. He knew that one of the crew members was in trouble. There was one cardinal rule, and that is that you never dropped out of formation because if you dropped out of formation you were a sitting duck for fighters because the minute you dropped out of formation, boy, they pounced on you like a wolf. Not one of them, but dozens of 'em would hit

any of the stragglers that dropped out of formation when they lost an engine due to either a malfunction or a flak hit or something like that. So poor Vince told me afterwards, he said, "I didn't know what to do." He said, "I knew I couldn't drop out of formation." He said, "I knew that whoever was in trouble I'd probably have to sacrifice his life to save the life of the other nine of us on board." So Vince held it right in there. Well, as it turned out it was Bagwell, the ball turret gunner. The guy had gotten so scared on the mission that he urinated, and the ball turret gunners wore electric flying suits as did the waist gunners, and when he [laughs] urinated he shorted out his electric flying suit, and it started burning him in the hind end. So here he was caught down in that ball turret. Somebody had to open the hatch to get him out up above; you know, you couldn't—no, wait a minute, yes, he could have gotten out above, but for some reason he was down in there yelling his damn lungs off. You operated the microphone in the ball turret with the heel of one of your feet; you depressed a pedal. Bagwell, in his excitement down there, pressed down on the interphone switch and was yelling this, and when he had the switch down nobody else could talk to anybody else on board the airplane. It blocked out the intercom completely. So finally, I don't know when it was, I guess after we were well away from the German coast and descending back towards England that the guys realized it was Bagwell down there and cranked him up. He felt pretty sheeply about it afterwards. Besides that Vince, chewed his butt out but good when he got back on the ground because he had committed that cardinal sin of blocking out the intercom so that the rest of the crew couldn't communicate to anybody else. So anyway, I don't recall what our losses were at the 303rd that day; my recollection is that we lost a couple of airplanes due to flak, and then they dropped out of formation, and the fighters picked them up. In the historical aspects of the mission that I read about subsequent it indicates that there were 115 B-17s dispatched, and sixteen were lost, which was a 13.9% loss ratio, which was an exceedingly high loss ratio. The other thing that shows you the intensity of the fighter attacks, although our particular crew, our particular group, was not that heavily attacked by flak that day or by fighters. As I mentioned we did get some fighter attacks, but they didn't come through on us that particular day like they did on some of the subsequent missions I flew, but the gunners when they got down claimed—I'm talking about the total 8th Air Force now—of the 115 aircraft with sixteen lost, those that survived to come back to England, the other ninety-nine aircraft, reported that they had shot down sixty-three enemy aircraft, which was an extremely high number. The historical facts, borne out after the war in checking the Luftwaffe records for that particular day, et cetera, actually show that there were ten German fighters shot down by the bomb crews. So we were claiming six times more than actually happened. This is understandable under the circumstances. Number one, you got a hundred airplanes firing at fighters as they're coming through, and when that fighter either explodes or the pilot bails

out of it or it suddenly bursts into flame you've probably got dozens of gunners each claiming that at that particular moment in time they were firing at that particular fighter, and it was their particular .50 caliber projectile that brought the enemy down. So, then the interrogation officers have to sift through all of this at the debriefings—at the interrogations, as we called them—and try and determine exactly how many fighters were shot down, whether all of the gunners were talking about the same fighter that they saw explode, for example, and then try and determine, you know, which of the maze of gunners that were shooting at that particular aircraft actually downed it. Well, after crossing the North Sea and after the Bagwell burning in the seat episode we finally let down to our incoming altitude over the English coast, returned to Molesworth, broke off into respective squadrons and landed as individual airplanes, but from one squadron airplane following another down the final approach. After we landed we taxied back to our revetment area, and there the pilots always talked to the crew chief about any [jet plane noise] malfunctions of the airplane, or we reported to the armament sergeant any malfunction we had on the airplanes. The gunners then took the barrels out of their .50 calibers, and it was their responsibility after each mission to clean their own guns. We as officers the bombardier and I [jet plane noise] [momentary pause in recording] not to have to go through that because the two pilots, the navigator and the bombardier were picked up by truck, and then we were transported down to our group briefing room where we were interrogated by one of the intelligence officers on the base and we gave our account of the mission: what we saw, what aircraft went down that we might be able to identify how many enemy fighters we saw, what color they were, what they were firing at us if that could be determined, asking if we saw the bomb plot. In other words, did we see the bombs hit the target, and all of this. Well, anyway it was needless to say a mighty tired and tensed up ten of us that got back to our base that night. We were mighty, mighty glad to be back after our first baptism of fire as I say, although our group I said previously in the tape suffered two losses, and my recollection now that I think back I think we suffered four. I think we lost four out of the twenty-one that we dispatched. So we had a rather sizeable loss ourselves on that mission. Again, as I recall, it was principally due to aircraft being damaged in that extremely intense flak that we had to fly through and then losing an engine through flak and having to drop out of formation and try and struggle home. Your chances of doing that if you dropped out of formation were very, very remote. There's case after case history of where pilots did this, but there was more luck connected with it than anything else. Okay, then after we got back and were debriefed the weather turned absolutely sour after that for a considerable period of time. It was not until May that we flew our second mission. Our second mission was on May 13th, 1943 to Meaulte, France—that's M-e-a-u-l-t-e, France. [jet plane noise] Our target was an aircraft factory. Boy, these damn jets are just going over constantly. It was an

aircraft factory. I'm trying to think—I can't recall which aircraft factory it was, but it was in France, but it was operated, you know, by French labor obviously but German controlled. I think it was an FW [Focke-Wulf] plant if I remember correctly now. Anyway, on that particular mission there were 119 B-17s dispatched. There were only four lost that day so we had a loss ratio of 3.4. The 8th Air Force at that time operated under the assumption that they could stand up to a mission loss of six percent. Anything above that was considered to be prohibitive. A mission to France was one where for the first time we as a crew got in considerable firing at enemy aircraft. We had crossed the coast, and we had Spitfires [British fighters] as protection for just a short distance after we entered into France. The Spitfire was a wonderful escort aircraft, but it was very, very limited in range when they did escort us. Remembering then now all of this was before the days of our P-38s and P-47s and P-51s [U.S. fighters] at this point in time. So the only escort we had was the RAF. When they did escort us in, due to their limited range, it was a very, very short period of time that they actually escorted us. [jet plane noise] So, they would escort us in, leave us, and then refuel or send another wing of Spitfires to meet us on the way back. Speaking of the Spitfire escort at this point in time—this continued all the time we had Spitfire escort—knowing full well that they were our only escort, knowing that there were no American escorts, a lot of our gunners were awfully trigger happy. The minute they saw a fighter aircraft nearby they opened up on it, and the Spits had that—Spitfires had that elliptical wing which no other aircraft had a wing shaped like it. These Spitfires, when they were escorting us—especially if someone would fire at them and they could see the tracers—they would flip up their wings and extend the whole bottom of the wing towards the formation as if to say, “You dumb bastards, I'm a Spitfire! Can't you see my elliptical wing?” You know, then they'd rock down and fly straight and level again. But a lot of the gunners were really trigger happy, and I suppose the facts are that more than one Spit was probably shot down by our gunners. Anyway, on this particular mission—again, the memories of some of these missions have faded over the forty-one years—but as we were coming in to the target we got hit by FWs—Focke-Wulf 190s. I remember distinctly looking out of my navigator's window and seeing this FW about a thousand feet below us, and maybe 1000, 1200 yards out, flying in our same direction. Looking down at him and watching him and suddenly saying to myself, “Jesus Christ! That's a German fighter!” Their favorite method of attack was to do just that. They would fly below you, and then after they got up ahead of you they would increase their altitude until they got about a thousand feet above you, and then they'd do a 180 degree turn almost and then come boring in at you head on. So we got a lot of shooting that day. I remember Brown got credit for a fighter, and I could hear him in the back. Brown was an old Arkansas boy as I mentioned. I think all he ever did before he went in the Air Corps in those days was to hunt squirrels and drink whiskey. Boy, he

could handle those twin .50s in that tail as good as any tail gunner in the Air Force, believe me. I can remember old Brown banging away; you could feel the vibrations of those .50 calibers even up in the nose when they tail was firing. I can remember Brown letting out a yell over the interphone, “There I got that son of a bitch! Look at him go down!”, you know [laughs]. Anyway, he got credit when we got back for the first of the thirteen enemy fighters that we had credited on our particular crew. Okay, the next mission was May 15th—only two days later—May 15th, 1943, and the target was Wilhelmshaven, Germany. As I recall the target was the submarine manufacturing facilities. The weather was horrible that day. They sent out 193 B-17s. The 1st Wing as a unit lost five. I don’t know how many total aircraft were lost that day, but the 1st Wing lost five. Again, the weather turned sour as we were over Germany, and we had to, instead of bombing our primary target of Wilhelmshaven, we had to bomb a target of opportunity which happened to be the island of Heligoland [a small German archipelago in the North Sea] which was right at the estuary of the Elbe River. I believe it was the Elbe River as I mentioned before. Anyway, it was an island, a good-sized island, and had some manufacturing facilities. But anyway, we weren’t about to bring those bombs back, and the instructions were to dump ‘em on wherever you could find an opening as long as you knew it was over Germany so our group let them go on Heligoland. Then on May 17th you see the weather—we hit a good pattern of weather and we flew, all told here, five missions in six days. Now, wait a minute: 15th to Wilhelmshaven. Okay, the next mission then was May 17th, 1943. Here we had a new target; we went to Lorient, France, and our target was the submarine shelters. What these were, they were huge submarine caves—huge concrete caves, man-made—with twelve foot of concrete over the top of it. [momentary pause in recording] [jet plane noise] The submarines would come in off of their patrols to their bases in the Brest peninsula which were Lorient, Saint-Nazaire, Poulay, and La Pellice, and several other major cities, Nantes. They would slide the submarines into these huge concrete caves, and there they would be protected from aerial bombardment. Well, somebody got the idea—some idiot in the 8th Air Force I suppose—that we could bomb these damn things and get through this twelve-foot concrete that covered them. So the Air Force made numerous missions to Lorient and Saint-Nazaire—in this case this mission as I mentioned, was Lorient—trying to knock out those submarine shelters. After the war they found that there had been direct hits on the top of these twelve feet of concrete. Hell, all the bombs did was just explode and tear out a couple feet of concrete at the most. So they were practically indestructible. The only chance you ever had of doing any damage was if you had a bomb that landed right at the very entrance—in other words missed the top of the concrete pen [jet noise] but landed at the very entrance of the submarine pen itself—and exploded upon contact, upon hitting the water. Then there the force of the explosion going inwards would be like the force of an explosion in a

tunnel. But that's pretty risky. There were five aircraft lost that day out of the 159 dispatched, so a 3.1 loss ratio. I can't remember too much about that mission. I know we did get hit by enemy fighters, but I can't recall the specific details, except I can distinctly remember that they had some extremely accurate flak over in the area of those submarine pens and those "kraut" gunners were damned good. The weather continued good so mission number five was on May 19th, 1943. That was to Kiel, Germany, and the target was the submarine yards. There were 123 aircraft dispatched on that mission and out of the 1st Wing six of those aircraft were lost. I don't know what the total loss was for that particular day. On that particular mission I remember we came under extremely heavy fighter attack—both single-engine FW 190s, single-engine ME-109s [Messerschmitt 109s], and twin-engine ME-110s. The 110s were principally used as a night fighter, but often times they would send them into combat as day fighters. I think it was on that mission that we saw the first of a new innovative weapon that the Germans had devised, and that is that under the nose of the ME-110s, Messerschmitt 110s, they hung a rocket launcher which probably had a bore diameter I suppose of maybe five inches, something like that. This thing stuck out of the front of the airplane about eight feet as I remember seeing them in the air. What they would do, they would get behind a formation of B-17s, and you'd see them pull the nose up just like a mortar—not to that angle but maybe like a ten degree angle of elevation—and then they would fire this damn rocket. You could see it go through the air a thousand yards ahead or something like that, and it would explode. It had a proximity fuse on it—a timed fuse. Their objective of course was to drop one of those in the midst of a formation of B-17s. Reading the accounts—I never saw a B-17 knocked out of the air with it although I saw at least a dozen of them in operation where they fired this thing—I guess they did have some success with it. We lost a couple airplanes that day. I remember because that mission to Kiel was a very, very rough mission for us as far as fighter attacks. Mission number six was on May 21st, 1943 to Wilhelmshaven, Germany. Again, we were after the submarine yards. In this particular case 161 aircraft all told were dispatched, and seven out of the 1st Wing were lost. Again, I don't know the total number of aircraft, but let's say with the 1st Wing constituting most of those [momentary pause in recording]. In this particular case with six being lost from the 1st Wing—and that was our assigned wing—I'm sorry: seven being lost from the 1st Wing. [jet plane noise] That was roughly sixty airplanes. So a loss of seven out of sixty was a pretty healthy loss ratio. So as you can see, the weather in that period of time from mission number two through mission number six was good. We had missions on May 13th, 15th, 17th, 19th and 21st. Every other day we went out on a mission. Then on the next mission there was about a week went by--May 29th, 1943 to be exact. We again went back to Saint-Nazaire to the submarine pens. At that time there were a total of 279 aircraft dispatched, and the 1st Wing lost six—again, a fairly

healthy loss ratio because of the intense flak and the fighters which at that time were stationed in France. By the way, there was a fighter comparable to our wing of American fighters later on but stationed in the lowlands at Abbeville, France. They were known as the “Abbeville Kids”; we used to nickname them. They flew FWs. They had the cowlings painted with various different colors: some were yellow, some were black and white checkerboard, some were red. We knew that whenever we saw those particular FWs with those particular markings we were in for a rough go of it because they were the “Abbeville Kids,” and they were at that time reputed to be the elite of the German Luftwaffe fighter force. So anyway, I talked then about mission number seven on May 29th. Mission number eight: June 11th, 1943 to Wilhelmshaven: back to the old submarine pens again because we were trying our damndest to knock their submarine manufacturing and maintenance facilities out of existence to ease the extreme submarine menace that was plaguing the North Atlantic where they were sinking our merchant ships right and left. Again, I don’t remember the specifics of that mission except that I do know that we came under very heavy fighter attack. I think it was that mission that I saw something that I’ve never seen again and hope I never will. As we were approaching the coast of Germany—Wilhelmshaven was not too far inland, not nearly as far as Bremen—but as we were approaching the coast we got hit by twin-engine fighters. I looked out of the right navigator’s window, and I saw two parachutes going down. Now whether these were from a night fighter that had been hit and the two-man crew had bailed out or whether this was two parachutes from a B-17 that had been hit and they were bailing out, I don’t know, but I watched these parachutes, and I saw an orange glow at the top of each of them, and this orange glow continued to get larger and larger and larger which meant that the parachutes were on fire obviously. Pretty soon, you know, both the individuals, the poor bastards, who were in those chutes, down they went like rocks when their parachute burned away. It’s a sight I’ll always remember; I’ll never forget that one. I don’t have any record as to the number of aircraft dispatched that day to Wilhelmshaven, but we lost eight in the 1st Wing. Let me pause here a minute by saying that, you know, if you send out three groups of twenty airplanes each that’s sixty, and that comprises the 1st Wing, and you lose eight one day, and you lose six another, and you lose seven another, and you lose six another, the odds, as you can easily see, are pretty much against you. As I said, the average life of a combat crew was something like eight missions at this particular time. Okay, June 13th, mission number nine, back to Bremen, Germany submarine yards. Again, about all I can remember on that one is a lot of flak, a lot of fighters. We shot ammunition up in the nose like crazy. We came back—I think it was that mission, or it might have the Wilhelmshaven mission before where we had about six inches of spent .50 caliber casings in the nose that “Tee” Stone and I were wading through. Anyway, on this mission to Bremen on June 13th, 1943 there were 228 aircraft dispatched, twenty-six were lost all

told which was 11.4% loss ratio, a pretty bad mission. There were thirty-nine enemy aircraft claimed; the records after the war showed that there were actually eight destroyed. The 1st Wing that day sent out 102 aircraft, and they lost four, so we had a 3.9% loss ratio which was within tolerances. Okay, the next mission, mission number ten, June 22nd, 1943 was a very interesting mission. We went to Huls, Germany: H-u-l-s. This was down in the area of Cologne into what we called “Flak Valley.” Our target was a synthetic rubber plant that had become operational. Germany, of course, was dependent solely upon synthetic rubber, and if we were to wipe out this particular plant it would have a tremendous effect on the overall capacity of Germany to produce the necessary rubber tires that it needed for everything. Let me give you the statistics of that mission: there were 235 aircraft dispatched although they did not all go to Huls; they went to other targets as well. But of the 235 dispatched sixteen were lost which was a loss ratio of 6.8%. Now, the thing I remember—a couple things—about the Huls mission: we didn’t get too many fighters attacking us, but those that did attack us had to have been the elite of the Luftwaffe because they were just absolutely masterful pilots. We had excellent bomb results, and I remember looking back and seeing this huge column of smoke arising after we had dropped our bombs. Of course there had been bombs dropped by the groups ahead of us before we got there. But the other thing I remember is the YB-40. Now, the YB-40 was supposed to be the 8th Air Force’s answer to enemy fighters. What it was, it was a B-17 that was a non-bomb carrying B-17. It was heavily armored. It had four twin .50s in the tail instead of two. It had an extra top turret where the radio operator’s open gun hatch was, and it had an electrically driven turret like a B-24 in the nose. Then it had some extra—I think it might have had a second ball turret underneath it. Anyway, it was supposed to be just bristling with guns. Well, unfortunately, apparently they never tried flying the damn thing on three or two engines after they had fabricated, made these modifications, because it didn’t fly at all well on four engines, and if it lost an engine or lost two engines it usually went down like a lead Zeppelin. So on this particular mission we had one of these YB-40s in our formation in the 303rd. These fighters came up, and on the very first pass they knocked that YB-40 out of the sky. He started to lose altitude like a rock. We saw some chutes get out; I don’t know whether they all got out of it, but at least some of the guys got out. It was an ill-fated venture, this whole concept of a super-armored B-17 to fly “escort” with the B-17 bombers. It was a figment of somebody’s imagination, but on a practical basis it did not work. The Air Force, after a [jet plane noise] couple tragic tries, soon abandoned the idea. Okay, the next mission, number eleven, was June 25th, 1943 to Hamburg, Germany. Again, the weather was very, very bad. This was perhaps the biggest fiasco of a mission that I ever was on. As we approached the coast of Germany there was nothing but a huge cloud bank that went right straight up vertically. You could see the coastline of Germany, but shortly—maybe thirty or forty miles inside of

the coast—was this vertical bank of clouds. It went up—by God, it must have went all the way up to 60,000 feet. This idiot who was leading our wing that day, instead of aborting the mission or trying to find a target of opportunity in the visual area along the coast, the damn fool took our whole wing—I'm talking about sixty airplanes in a wing—took our wing right into this solid wall of clouds. Now, the standard operating procedures in those days when that happened is that you continued on your constant heading at your constant altitude, or if you were in a rate of climb at your constant rate of climb, whatever it is so as not to collide with one of the other B-17s. Remember now, when we went into this stuff we were probably flying, oh, you know, like, fifteen yards apart wingtip to wingtip, and this damn idiot took us in. Well, when we finally broke out into some clear we found that we were between cloud layers. There just happened to be an opening between cloud layers—solid clouds below us, solid clouds above us. Christ, we could see about three other B-17s; we didn't know where in the hell everybody was. A couple B-17s came over and hooked onto us; I don't know where they were from. They weren't from our group because we couldn't identify their numbers. I mentioned that when you were over Germany, you know, you never brought your bombs back. Every once in a while through this opening in the clouds you'd see ten 500-pound bombs come streaming down from up above; you couldn't see the airplanes, you didn't know where the hell they came from, but you'd see ten 500s in a string coming down. Pretty soon, a little while later, you'd see another string of ten 5s, or maybe two or three strings of ten 500s coming down. Well, anyway to make a long story short they should have court-martialed that son-of-a-bitch that led us into that, whatever his name was. I assume he was a full colonel, and I heard his name after that. We lost eighteen airplanes that day. It was just an absolute fiasco. We should have—commonsense would have told you that you didn't take sixty airplanes into a solid mass of cloud. Okay, mission number twelve was on June 26th, 1943. Here we took a new tack. The German fighters were kicking the livin' bejesus out of us, quite frankly, so we thought, well—the Air Force said instead of the submarine pens and instead of the factories we will make the primary targets the enemy airfields from which they're launching these fighter attacks. I think we're just about at the end of this side of the first tape. So in this particular case it was a new target for us. It was Villacoublay airdrome just, to the, as I recall, the west side of Paris. Our group went to Villacoublay. The other aircraft that were dispatched on that mission that day went to various other Luftwaffe airdromes in France in the low countries. There were 246 aircraft dispatched all told. Only five were lost so it had a 2% loss ratio. So it was a successful mission from the standpoint of loss. As I recall the weather was fairly clear. There was some cloud cover, but I think we had fairly good bomb results on the airdrome as it was our primary target area. [momentary pause in recording] Okay, two days later I flew mission number thirteen on June 28th, 1943. This mission was to Beaumont-le-

Roger airdrome at Brussels, Belgium [actually France?]. Again, it was hoped to have had the same effect as the mission flown on June 26th, my twelfth mission to [unintelligible]. **[End of Tape 2, Side A]** By the way, that mission thirteen—thirteen being an unlucky number—was a mission that caused us a lot of apprehension that day when we took off even though it was, as we knew, going to be a relatively short mission over to Brussels, Belgium. So we were mighty damn glad when we got back from that mission number thirteen. Mission number fourteen was flown the following day on June 29th, 1943. Here again we visited our friends from the Luftwaffe back at Paris, France at Villacoublay airdrome like we had previously done on the twenty-sixth of June. 8th Air Force headquarters thought that there must have been a poor job done or something, and so anyway we went back. There were 232 aircraft dispatched that day to the various airdromes which were a series of primary targets. I don't have any idea of the loss ratios. Okay, mission number fifteen was a very memorable mission. It was flown on July 4th, 1943. The target was Le Mans, France, and the target was an aircraft factory. There were 275 [jet plane noise] aircraft totally dispatched to various targets in France that day; 192 were dispatched from the 1st Wing. Other aircraft went to, I think, La Pallice and to a number of other targets in that area of France. I remember this mission quite distinctly. We didn't have too much fighter opposition until we got about sixty miles from Le Mans, and we ran into a hornet's nest. They must have put up about fifty or sixty fighters. Most of them were FW-190s. I can remember distinctly a couple thoughts from that mission. Number one, we were making a turn to the right, and the group up ahead of us in our wing had already made that turn. We were just in the middle of that turn so I could see the group off to the right of our nose, and they were under intense fighter attacks, and the German fighters, their principal armament was 20mm cannon. They had either 20mm shells that exploded on contact, or in some cases they had proximity fuses that burst after a certain time period. I remember looking up at this group that was under fighter attack; it looked just like a damn Christmas tree. There were exploding 20mm cannon shells just covering that group all over. They lit up just like little Christmas tree lights in that group. We had, as I remember, pretty good bombing results. We had left the target area, and these fighters, a number of them, then started to pick on our group. My recollection on that particular mission: we were flying on the group commander's left wing. In other words our squadron was leading the group, and the group commander usually flew with the squadron commander, and we were flying on his left wing. Anyway, Stone and I saw this single-engine FW-190 coming at us in somewhat of an unusual attack pattern. Usually they made a twelve o'clock pass at you but from slightly above so they were diving. In this particular case, this guy was coming at us head-on, but he was climbing ever so slightly. He probably started his attack about 500 feet below us. Stone picked him up when he was way out there and started firing with the twin .50s, and the

guy kept right on coming. The thing about the German fighters, when they fired the whole wing of the aircraft lit up. It just turned red because they had about three 20mms in each of their wings plus they had some, depending on the aircraft, they usually had either machine guns or in the case of the ME-109s they had a 20mm firing through the propeller. But in this particular case we could see this guy coming at us in a head-on attack and ablaze from wing to wing with firing the 20mms. He just zoomed upwards right in front of our nose. I don't think he missed us by, damn it, twenty yards I think when he passed over the front of our nose. Vince called down to Stone, he said, "Tee," he said, "what the hell did you let that twin-engine fighter get so close to us for?" "Tee" said, "Twin-engine fighter my arse; that was an FW-190." The Germans were experimenting with putting a rocket-firing device on the FWs at that time. They put these in pods underneath each wing, and what Vince saw—this guy came so close that what Vince saw was these rocket pods under his wings as he went past our nose climbing upwards. Vince saw these two pods, and he thought he was seeing the engines of a twin-engine fighter. So I distinctly remember those two particular things about that mission plus one other mission. I mentioned that on our first practice mission in England--the one where I got lost like every other navigator did on their first mission--we had another pilot flying in the pilot's position. This guy had the nickname of "Okie." I don't know why, but the thing I remember about him: he had gone to London on pass and somewhere had picked up a British bobby's helmet. It was standard operating procedure in his particular crew that "Okie" wore this British bobby's helmet on every mission that he flew. We saw "Okie" go down that day. His aircraft was hit pretty hard, and everybody knew it was his aircraft. That had a profound impact. Then the other thing—there's one other thing about that mission also gives you an idea of how close life and death are related in a combat situation. Our crew bunked in a Nissen hut [prefabricated steel; half-cylindrical] with another crew, and for the life of me I can't think of that fellow's name, but I can recall him. He was slight of build, a good pilot. They were flying our wing that particular day so they must have been in the number three position in the lead element. Anyway, they took a direct 88mm hit right underneath the pilot's compartment. The airplane didn't explode, but it's just as if—and I saw this happen—it's just as if the airplane suddenly stood still in the air. Hang on just a minute. [momentary pause in recording] Well this aircraft went down, and when it went down along went the six bunkmates of our six enlisted men. It really had a terribly demoralizing effect on the six enlisted men of our crew. Andy Berzansky told me after the war that that probably hit them harder than any other thing that happened over there was to see that crew go down because they were bunking with them. He recalls that one of the fellows came to him that morning and gave him a couple hundred dollars in English money. He said, "Andy, I just want you to have this because I just don't think I'm going to come back today." And Andy joshed with him of course and said,

“Why, sure you’ll come back.” But the guy insisted on Andy taking this money. As it turned out the crew didn’t come back. Okay, the next mission: was mission number sixteen was July 10th, 1943. Again we were after their Luftwaffe fighter aircraft. The target was Poyx, P-o-y-x, [probably Poix] France and it was an airdrome. There were 286 B-17s dispatched on that mission. I don’t know how many went to Poyx, maybe forty, and the rest of them went to other target areas. These missions against the airdromes were, of all the missions that we flew, probably the ones that we liked best even though it was like kicking up a swarm of hornets. If there were fighters there, it was like, as I say, kicking up a swarm of hornets. If you kick them up they really fought to beat hell, but the missions were not that long so you took it on the chin for a short period of time, and then you dropped your bombs and got a relatively short period of time back to the coast where hopefully the Spits would pick you up and escort you back. Also about that time we started to get some P-38 Lightning escort, and a little later on P-47s became a standard operational fighter aircraft. But the P-47s had a lot of trouble in the beginning with their auxiliary fuel tanks. They were a paper tank, and they had just all sorts of trouble trying to perfect that. The idea being it was an auxiliary tank: they would fly to altitude, and then on contact with the enemy they would drop the auxiliary tank and then be on the aircraft’s main tanks of gas. It gave them a lot longer range. Okay, the next one: mission number seventeen. By this time, of course, we were a well-seasoned combat crew. I might mention here for just a minute something I forgot to mention that after mission fifteen, that was after the July 4th mission, we were relieved from combat status temporarily and sent down to a rest home which was an old British estate operated by the Red Cross. It was just a rest and recuperative type situation. I think we were down there for about five days. Somewhere I’ve got my orders assigning us down there [jet plane noise]. The six enlisted men went to one rest home, and the four officers went to another. Oh Lord, we played tennis and rode horseback, anything we wanted to do—just getting our minds off combat for four or five days. Then it all came to an end and back to our base we went to fly more combat. In those days basically anybody who was lucky enough to make it down to the rest home, you know, was three-fifths of the way through the twenty-five missions, and you were pretty damn lucky. Okay, back to mission number seventeen, July 24, 1943: a most unusual mission. Allied intelligence had found out that the Germans had constructed on an island off the shore of Norway connected by what had been an island and they had built a road out to it so it was really a causeway on this little tip of land—they had built a huge new nitrate plant which they were using for munitions, and adjacent to it, or somewhere in the complex, was a magnesium plant. [jet plane noise]. The intelligence information from the Norwegian underground was so good that they knew exactly when this plant was going to go into operation. They knew that on the 24th of July that the shifts were changing about ten o’clock in the

morning, and during that shift there would be a big German military parade, and the workers would be out of the factory at a given specific time. So we were dispatched; 167 B-17s were dispatched. Some of them went to Trondheim, Norway to the harbor installations, but our wing went to Herøya. Unlike most missions that we normally bomb from a minimum of 20,000 to a maximum of 28,000 feet—usually about twenty-six is the standard—in this particular case we were instructed that we were going to bomb at 14,000 feet so as to improve our accuracy. They had briefed us for one or two anti-aircraft guns around the target. Well, we flew across the North Atlantic towards Norway at about 1,500 feet off the water to try and escape detection from radar, and then just before we reached the Norwegian coast we began our climb and came up on our target at 14,000 feet right on schedule. There had been one other group that had gone—I'm sorry. I forgot one thing here. Contrary to any other mission I ever flew, in this particular case we bombed by squadrons, and not by group, so each squadron of our group separated out as a distinct unit for bombing purposes. One of the other squadrons of our group had already bombed, and when our Squadron Commander, Major Mitchell, led our squadron over they determined that the bombardier could not see the target [jet plane noise] properly enough to identify it. So instead of dropping our bombs he elected to make a 360 degree turn and come in the second time. Now normally in Germany this would have been like writing your own obituary but in this particular case we were briefed—and correctly so—that we would not have to worry about fighter opposition. The only enemy action we would encounter was the flak. Well, and that was most certainly true because when we came around the second time, man they had us bracketed right down to the inch as far as our elevation. That's the first time we were leading the second element of the squadron that day, and when we came around the second time that's the first time that I ever knew for a fact that we were shot at as an individual airplane. This stuff just kept busting off in front of our nose at about 2:00 o'clock, and Vince kept pulling farther and farther left until we were almost out--we were a half a mile away from the formation, and those bastards were still shooting at us and it was still breaking right off at about 2:00 o'clock at our level which meant very definitely that they were shooting at us because they continued to shoot at us after we peeled off of our formation. Well anyway, we finally got out of range, and then Vince poured coal to get back with the rest of the formation. It was a classic storybook mission, so to speak: 167 aircraft totally dispatched, only one aircraft lost, and that aircraft crash-landed in Sweden, and I think everybody got out. The target was obliterated. They said that the nitrate plant was about 80% wiped out and the magnesium plant. The Germans never attempted to bring them back into production. Okay, next mission, number eighteen, July 25th, 1943: back to our good old friends at Hamburg, Germany again at the shipyards, the submarine pens. Three hundred and twenty-three aircraft dispatched, nineteen aircraft lost: a loss ratio of 5.9%. This was the

mission on which I was credited with downing an ME-109. It was confirmed so I got credit for it. [momentary pause in recording] You're got to remember that at this particular point in time there were no friendly fighters accompanying us on any of these missions into Germany. What few fighters we had simply didn't have the range so therefore anytime you were in that area of northern Germany and you saw a twin-engine aircraft there was no question about what it was enemy aircraft. I looked from my position over my navigator's table on the left side of the wing, and I saw this one ME-109 climbing up and staying just about even speed-wise with our formation—not exactly even because he was just gaining a little bit, but I think the pilot, whoever he was, mistakenly got a lot closer to our formation because we were on the very left side of the formation at that time because I remember very distinctly that we were on the left side. I think he simply got closer to our particular aircraft than he realized. Anyway, he was about 800 yards out there, and the effective range of a .50 caliber machine gun was approximately 1,000 yards. Every fifth round we fired was a tracer. So I saw this guy sneaking up, and I yelled to the other crew members asking them if they saw him, and they said they did. So then he started to gradually get ahead of the aircraft speed-wise, but he was slightly below us, like maybe 300 feet. I thought that bastard is up to his usual trick of flying in that manner [jet plane noise]. What they usually did was to fly parallel with us till they got a mile or two ahead of us, then they would quickly gain another 1,000 feet of altitude and then do 180 degree turn to make a diving 12:00 o'clock head-on pass. I figured that that's what this bird was up to. So I took the gun over the navigator's table, and he was remembering now that he was going in the same direction that we were going so although he was flying at a faster speed than ours it wasn't that much faster. He had apparently been throttled back or something. So I gave him a burst of about twenty rounds, and I saw that I was shooting a little bit behind him so I took a little further lead on it, and gave him another burst of about twenty. All of a sudden there was a big puff of white smoke that came out of the engine cowling. This was an ME-109, and the ME-109 had a liquid-cooled engine. So I apparently had hit the glycol tank [jet plane noise] on the liquid-cooled engine, and so he immediately—I would assume that the engine cut out when that happened, and he immediately nosed down. So I called out to the other members of the crew that I had hit this one and he was going down and to keep an eye on him. Brown reported—and I don't know whether this was factual or not or a figment of Brown's imagination—but Brown reported that he saw it hit the ground. But hell, from 27,000 feet I doubt like hell if he could have seen it. Anyway, he must have reported that when we got back to interrogation because I got credit for it. You know, in all probability the guy bailed out at some lower distance. Maybe the aircraft did hit the ground, for all I know. But anyway I was pretty sure that whoever was in it got out. But at least I got credit for it. Three hundred and twenty-three dispatched, nineteen lost with a 5.9 ratio. It was a hell of a good air battle.

That wasn't by any means the only ME-109 we saw that day. Okay, mission number nineteen, August 16th, 1943: back to Paris, France, Le Bourget airdrome. No other statistics on that about how many were dispatched or how many lost. I can't even recall the specifics of that. But the next one I most vividly recall. August 17th, 1943: mission number twenty; target: Schweinfurt, Germany; type of target: ball bearing plant; number of aircraft dispatched: 230; number of aircraft lost: 36; loss ratio: 15.7%. This was perhaps the most famous mission that was ever flown by the 8th Air Force. It was scheduled to be flown [jet plane noise] one year to the day from the 8th Air Force's first combat mission, August 17, 1942. There had been a great deal of planning which had gone into this mission, and actually the mission was to be—had it been executed as it had been planned probably would have been a masterful stroke [jet engine noise], but the old bugaboo of weather entered into it, and in spite of what history may say it was more of a horrendous loss for the United States 8th Air Force than it was any type of a victory. Let me give you the circumstances. [momentary pause in recording] The mission was scheduled to be a two-prong thrust. The 4th Division, consisting of 146 B-17s, was scheduled to go to Regensburg deep in Germany and bomb an aircraft assembly factory. The plan was for after bombing the factory that the Regensburg division would go on to Africa, which they did, and thereby establish the first famous shuttle mission from one continent to the other, namely from Europe to Africa. The second part of the mission, the other prong of the mission, was the 230 B-17s of the 1st Division who were scheduled to go to Schweinfurt immediately following, about ten minutes, following the Regensburg aircraft group or division. It was thought that if the Schweinfurt group followed immediately after the Regensburg, the Regensburg group would probably take it on the chin going into the target, but at least the Schweinfurt group would probably not because the Germans would have expended all their fighter ammunition and gas on the Regensburg group, and thus the Schweinfurt group could go in and bomb Schweinfurt and at the very worst would probably catch it on the way home. Schweinfurt was producing at that time a major part of the ball bearings being manufactured in Germany. It was felt—and this was brought out in our briefing for that particular mission—that if we could completely obliterate the manufacture of ball bearings we would shorten the war by approximately two years. This was really a flag-waving, idealistic theory, but it got everybody all psyched up. Although they knew the mission was going to rougher than hell, the end result if we could accomplish it, was going to be well worth it. Well, the facts of the situation are that the Regensburg mission was delayed on its initial take-off because their air bases were more towards the English Channel, farther towards the Channel. We were in the 1st Division. We were more inland in the Midlands of Great Britain. The fog delayed the take-off of the Regensburg mission for I think about an hour and a half over what it was supposed to be. They had a deadline: they either had to

take off in such-and-such a time or else it would have been too late, too dark to land in Africa. General Curtis LeMay was leading that division. His pilots had practiced instrument take-offs so they took off in the fog, climbed above it and assembled, and eventually got under way. The Schweinfurt group was hemmed in by this horrendous ground fog that clung to the ground in the Midlands. We didn't get off until—I'm not sure of this time, but it had to be—we didn't get off the ground until about eleven o'clock in the morning. We were initially scheduled to go about--damn, I know it wasn't any later than eight o'clock. I think it was even earlier than that. So the net result of all of this is that the Regensburg group went in first, got the hell kicked out of them. They had 146 B-17s and they lost twenty-four which was a 16.4% loss ratio, horrendous. The Schweinfurt group dispatched 230 aircraft; they lost thirty-six which was a 15.7% loss ratio, for a total combined loss ratio of both target areas, Regensburg and Schweinfurt: 376 aircraft dispatched, 60 lost, a loss ratio of 16%. Now, on this particular mission, because it was a maximum effort mission we put up every aircraft that we could in the 303rd Bomb Group. The extra aircraft were formed into a composite group which flew along in the same wing formation as our regular 303rd Group members. The 303rd Group was flying lead group, and the composite group was flying the high group, and some other group was flying the low group of that particular combat wing. It's my recollection that our particular aircraft was flying in the high group—this composite group—and that we were the—out of the 358th Squadron, to which I was assigned, was leading that composite group. Major Kirk Mitchell was Squadron Commander, and he was flying. The navigator in that lead aircraft was a little guy by the name of Mac something, and the bombardier was a guy by the name of Lawrence McCord. It seems to me that we were flying the second element of that lead squadron on that particular Schweinfurt mission. We got plenty of fighter attacks, no question about that—not nearly the extent and the severity of attacks of some of the lead groups who suffered such horrendous losses. So from that standpoint we were just plain old lucky. But we did definitely come under very severe fighter attack. As a matter of fact our gunners reported that they even saw a biplane trainer in the air. The Germans purportedly that day threw anything and everything that was flyable if not to give actual combat to do nothing more than to fly alongside of the American B-17 formations and report their altitude and direction. As we were approaching the target area the flak was not that heavy, but it was very, very accurate. We were flying at about—I don't have my log of that mission, but it was relatively low altitude—about 20,000 feet in order to get that much range and also as a secondary benefit to give us good bombing results. This lead aircraft of the group with McCord as lead bombardier—McCord was sighting in on the city of Frankfurt into the particular target area which we had been designated to hit. A burst of flak came up, and a piece of flak caught him in the stomach. It knocked him backwards onto the floor near the navigator's table. The

navigator, realizing that he had been hit, first of all I suppose checked him to see the severity of his wound, and then the navigator climbed into the nose of the airplane where the bombardier normally sat, but by that time we were well along on the bomb run and almost to the bombs away point. So the navigator used his best judgment and simply toggled out the bombs at what he thought was the appropriate spot and as a result everybody else also toggled out their bombs, and our bombing results as far as our particular group were not that good as later photo reconnaissance group in our own [unintelligible] bomb [unintelligible] which we carried proved. It was just one of those unfortunate circumstances that we had gone that far. Probably would have had good bombing results except for that stray piece of flak which cut down the bombardier. He, by the way, survived but he was hospitalized for a considerable period of time. We had had on the way in, we had had P-47 escort quite a ways into the target area. Schweinfurt was about a seven hour mission as I remember. It was our deepest penetration that we had ever made up to that point. We had had the P-47s, but again this was before their perfected belly-tank days so they just got nicely into Germany around, I believe around Aachen if I remember correctly, when they had [jet plane noise] to turn back and head back to England. As soon as they left, of course, then the German fighters had been vectored to pick us up at that particular point, and they continued with their attacks—principally the frontal attack—all the way. Just before the target area in our case they left us alone—on the bomb run they left us alone. But then immediately after the bomb run, then they picked us up again, and we had moderate—and I'll use that very conservatively—moderate fighter attacks all the way back to the point to where the P-47s again picked us up on the way out. The Schweinfurt mission by the way has been written up in detail such as you just can't imagine by a British author named Martin Middlebrook who has written a book, "*The Schweinfurt-Regensburg Raid*"; [*"The Schweinfurt-Regensburg Mission"*], and I had an opportunity to correspond with him while he was compiling data for the book. After corresponding with him he wrote me back asking me to put into a narrative form my impressions of the mission, which I did. When the book was published—he notified me beforehand that it was published—on the fortieth anniversary of the mission: in other words, on August 17th, 1983 it was published in Great Britain. So I ordered out three copies and he autographed all three copies, personally autographed, and I gave one copy to Vince Lemmon and another to "F.O." Clark when we were together a year ago in October of 1983 in Colorado Springs. In the book there are two quotations, excerpts, of the data that I sent him. So it was kind of unique. The first quotation related to a statement that I made when at briefing we were informed as to the target area. I remember vividly making the statement—or thinking it, I perhaps didn't make it out loud—but I thought what idiot at 8th Air Force Headquarters dreamed this mission up? That was quoted verbatim [laughs] in the book, and then secondly, I made some comments after we had left the target area that I

realized that our bomb hits had not been very fruitful, and I expressed disappointed to the effect that we gone all the way over there to get our asses shot off and then had such poor bomb results. That general statement was also quoted in there. So, it was kind of nice to be quoted verbatim in the book and appear in the bibliography of the book. Well anyway, we struggled back to England; it was a very long mission. Many of the crews did not get back to the home base until the next day because they landed at whatever base was available. It was late by the time we got back, almost dark as I remember, and they were struggling and straggling in from all over. One of the unique features which shows the intensity of that particular Schweinfurt mission: there were all told for the 376 aircraft which were dispatched, with the Regensburg group going on to Africa and the Schweinfurt group coming back to England, there were 288 enemy fighters claimed shot down during the running battle—the two running battles because actually Regensburg was a separate battle than Schweinfurt. Both coming and going it was a separate battle. The facts of the matter are that that figure should have been twenty-seven; this was the official figure which was resurrected from the Luftwaffe archives after the war, that there were twenty-seven. So, here again the enemy fighters claimed destroyed by the B-17s was ten times more than it factually was, but this had a great morale factor on the crews. We honestly believed these claims at that time because they were confirmed and gunners and other crew members given credit for those particular kills. We actually believed it, and as a result it helped our morale because we honestly thought that on these big missions where we suffered horrendous losses—such as the total of sixty on this particular mission—that if we destroyed 288 enemy aircraft, well, then it was just a matter of time before the whole Luftwaffe would be wiped out of the sky, and they would no longer be able to challenge us. Well, you know, history has shown that that simply was not factual in any way, shape or form. The thing that eventually brought the Luftwaffe to its knees was not the shortage of fighter aircraft. The key ingredient was the fact that they could not replace their pilots who were shot down and killed and wounded, et cetera, in action. Contrary to the principle upon which our 8th Air Force operated and to a degree the RAF—after a certain number of missions the crews were relieved of combat duty, and in the case of our crews were sent back to the States as trainers for the new crews. In the case of the RAF they were pulled out of combat and then after a period of time were assigned back to combat status again. But the Luftwaffe, those poor bastards, they were assigned to combat period, and they remained in combat until they were either killed or maimed in battle so bad that they could no longer fly. There was just no end in sight. When you think of what a morale factor that must have been to those Luftwaffe pilots it's just amazing that they had the esprit de corps and so forth that they exhibited in their attacks on us. Sure, they were a little bit of egotist to a degree in as much as they wanted to have behind their names the greatest number of Fortresses [B-17s] shot down or the

greatest number of total air victories, whatever it might have been, but they were really gung-ho pilots, and looking back now forty— **[End of Tape 2, Side B]**. Well, mission number twenty-one, following the disastrous Schweinfurt mission of August 17th, was made on August 31st, 1943. This was probably what we would refer to in combat terms as a milk run [a short, routine, or uneventful flight]. The target was the airdrome at Amiens, France—again, a Luftwaffe airdrome. After having gotten the livin’ bejesus kicked out of us on the Schweinfurt raid the 8th Air Force was pretty damn cautious about [jet plane noise] what type of targets we picked out. Recognizing that a good share of the German Luftwaffe fighters that attacked us on the Schweinfurt mission had come from the airfields in France, they suddenly became top priority targets again. So again, as I say, back to the airfields. Mission number twenty-two was September 9th, 1943. Again that was an airdrome: Vitry-en-Artois in France. In this particular case there were ten Luftwaffe airdromes attacked that particular day: 330 B-17s were sent out, two of them were lost, so it was in terms of six-tenths of one percent loss it was a highly successful mission. I believe that the bombing results were pretty good as far as our particular target was concerned. [momentary pause in recording] Mission number twenty-three: September 16th, 1943 to Nantes, N-a-n-t-e-s, France. In this particular case we were briefed that there was a ship in the harbor at Nantes which was loaded with key mechanization replacement material for the submarines. Apparently this had been relayed back to 8th Air Force by the French Underground. So this ship had a top priority, and the entire 1st Division was scheduled to go to Nantes. Now, they were not all to bomb this particular ship but they were scheduled to bomb other port installations in the harbor. The 3rd Division went to Bordeaux that day; I don’t know how many aircraft. For the entire day’s activities there were 224 aircraft dispatched for both the 1st and 3rd Divisions: eleven aircraft were lost, a 4.9% loss ratio—in terms of 8th Air Force criteria an acceptable day. But let me give you the details of that mission; I remember them quite vividly. I had previously mentioned that bombardiers were either terrifically good or terribly bad and that many of them couldn’t hit their ass with both hands. That particular day in the lead aircraft of the group—we were leading the wing on that particular mission—we had a brand new bombardier, group bombardier, who was on his first mission as group bombardier. He had flown other missions but this was his first mission as group bombardier. Now, the Norden bombsight had a feature called extended vision whereby through a series of prisms and mirrors the bombardier could look way ahead of the aircraft through the bombsight. The idea was to be able to pick up the target, you know, well in advance. But there was a special notch for this feature, and this feature was called extended vision. Now, this jerk that was lead bombardier that day used the extended vision feature of the Norden bombsight in the lead aircraft to pick up this ship in the harbor when we were miles away from it. Then the damn fool forgot to click the bombsight back into the normal prism

position. So we're coming up on the target over the city of Nantes—that was our bomb run—to the ship out in the target and, Christ, when we're a mile and a half away from the target all of a sudden the bombs fall out of this lead airplane, and of course every other aircraft was instructed to drop on the lead aircraft so every other ship in the group dropped, and the damn bombs dropped right in the heart of the city of Nantes. God knows how many Frenchmen died that day through sheer stupidity of one man. I understand that when this bombardier got back he escaped court-martial by the hair of his chinny-chin-chin. But there was just absolutely no excuse for it. So again a mission where in our particular group I don't know how many aircraft we lost—we probably lost a couple at least—and then absolutely no results whatsoever for bombing. This was the most disheartening thing of all was to go through these air battles—and literally each and every one of them was separate air battle—and get to the target area and then through human error the bombardier—whatever it was, even the navigators once in a while screwed up by bringing them in not in the direction that they were supposed to come in so the preset winds that the bombardier had on his Norden bombsight were all screwed up, and, ah, it was frustrating to say the least. My twenty-fourth mission on October 8th, 1943 was to Bremen, Germany. There again our target was the aircraft factories of Bremen. The submarine menace was beginning to diminish although it was still very critical, but as far as northern Germany the submarine emphasis had been replaced by the emphasis to go out and hit the aircraft factories where the German fighters were assembled and manufactured. There were 399 aircraft dispatched that day, thirty aircraft were lost: a 7.5% loss ratio. It was, as I say, my twenty-fourth mission [jet plane noise]. I was getting pretty nervous by that time. I flew with Vince Lemmon on that mission, but most of our crew had completed their combat missions, and except for Vince and I, had gone back home. They probably, as I recall, probably went home the month before in September. One of those previous missions, either mission twenty-one, twenty-two, or twenty-three, I flew as the navigator on a strange crew, I guess I should say. This was not the best feeling in the world because you were flying with an individual that you had never flown before—the individual who was piloting. Not all of them were as good as I felt Vince was so whenever I rode with anybody else like that I certainly wished that old Vince was back in the left seat. But in this particular case as I recall, this October 8th mission, Vince and I flew, and then we in turn had the balance of the crew. It was a composite crew. The enemy aircraft opposition was severe, and of course that's attested to by the thirty B-17s lost that day. I can't recall the bombing results of that particular mission although I believe they were good, but I'm not sure. Okay, there then became a period of time for the balance of October and all of November in which time I devoted myself principally to the training of new navigators in our 358th Bomb Squadron. Late in November of 1943 the squadron navigator in the 359th Bomb Squad was killed on a combat mission. The CO [Commanding Officer]

approached me to transfer over from the 358th to the 359th and become squadron navigator. There was one string attached to it, however, and that is that I could pick my last mission, my twenty-fifth mission. But that after flying that twenty-fifth mission and being then relieved from combat duty I had to agree to stay over for three months as an instructor and train new navigators. But that posed no problem, and for this I was promised my captaincy—I was to be promoted from first lieutenant to captain. So it had certainly the earmarkings of a good deal. So on the 4th of December, 1943 I officially transferred over to the 359th as squadron navigator and continued during the month of December to train the navigators of the new crews on Gee [a radio navigation system] and all the other navigational equipment that we had. I knew, however, that the three months period of time would toll from the time I finished my last mission so I was getting a little antsy to get that final twenty-fifth mission in. I had the opportunity, as I mentioned, to schedule my own mission. I had one mission scheduled against what was later determined to be the launching pads for the V-1 rockets against England. They were a concrete structure shaped like a ski. But the weather turned bad, and that mission was cancelled while we were still on the ground. So as January, 1944 came around I was getting pretty antsy to get that last mission over with. I was apprehensive because there certainly had been cases where crews had been shot down on their twenty-fifth and final mission, and I didn't want that to happen to me, and I wanted to get it over with. In the meantime Vince Lemmon stayed in the 358th, our crew having been disbanded, and everybody else except Vince and I, as I mentioned, gone home. Vince stayed over as squadron operations officer in the 358th which was the highest relative position below the squadron commander level. Eventually Vince did become squadron commander when Major Mitchell completed his tour and went back to the States. Vince was promoted to Major over there as the result of the assumption of those duties. I had a good friend—as a matter of fact a classmate of mine in our navigation school—by the name of Norm Jacobsen, a kid from Boulder, Colorado. Jake had been an orphan—I don't mean an orphan in the sense that we know it, but he had been orphanized, if I can use that term, by having been sick or for some reason he didn't fly a mission, and the balance of his crew who picked up another navigator for the mission were shot down. So Norm Jacobsen, by all of the freak quirk of circumstances that occur in service, ended up as, of all things, the group navigator. Jake was a good navigator so, you know, there was no question as far as his ability. But it was just strange the way that circumstances opened the avenue for him to become group navigator. So as squadron navigator of the 359th Squadron I [jet plane noise] had very close association on a professional level with Jake as group navigator. Whenever I knew a mission was coming up I would always go down to group headquarters and ask Jake if I could help him in any way plotting the mission, making out the flight plan, or whatever it might be. So on the 10th of January, 1944 I meandered down to group headquarters about eight

o'clock in the evening, I guess it was, and the teletype started rattling. The battle order for the following day's mission began coming in over the teletype. It listed the target as Aschersleben, Germany which geographically was located about sixty miles almost due west of Berlin. Up to that time we had not bombed Berlin. It told of approximately 1,000 B-17s and B-24s that were going to take part in not only the bombing of Aschersleben but several other priority targets. Aschersleben— incidentally the target area was the Focke-Wulf aircraft assembly factory there. It also told about the fighter cover which we were going to have which consisted of not only P-47s, which had been our usual fighter cover, but also for the first time that I can recall to any extent a rather extensive coverage by P-51s who were new as operational aircraft probably in December of 1943. Now, the P-51 was an absolutely marvelous aircraft, and one of its marvelous features was its range. Its range was such that unlike the P-38 and the P-47 it could accompany us by initially using belly tanks and then dropping them. It could accompany us all the way to the target, later even went to Berlin and beyond as an escort fighter. Now, the other factor is that this mission was to occur on January 11th, 1944, and one year earlier to the day on January 11th, 1943 I had been married to Carol Severson in Ainsworth, Nebraska. So I thought, man, what a grand opportunity to wind up my combat tour: number one, go on this terrific mission with all these bombers scheduled and with all this fighter cover, and not only that but to do it on the first anniversary of my wedding. Plus, and this was a real bonus, our group was leading the wing. Our Wing was leading the whole 1st Division, and the 359th Squadron was leading our group which meant that on this particular mission I would be in the very first aircraft, the very first B-17 of this scheduled armada of a thousand. Brigadier General Travis, our divisional commander, was scheduled to fly in the airplane. The pilot was Lieutenant Colonel Calhoun, and in those types of situations they always carried two navigators: the group navigator, who in this case as I mentioned was Norm Jacobsen, and the squadron navigator, which was my squadron. So it was a natural in every way possible: anniversary, a lot of bombers, a lot of fighters, and then the distinction of being in the very first aircraft of the whole unit. It started out with all of the markings of Schweinfurt by virtue of the weather. We were delayed for at least a couple of hours as I recall because of fog and low scud. Eventually all we could do was stand out underneath the aircraft's wings and simply wait for it to clear. Finally from the tower came the arch of a green flare which was shot. That green flare signified "Start Engines." No, I guess it was a yellow flare. There was a preparatory flare of some sort to get everybody back in the airplane, and then the green flare was fired to start engines. Then another flare was fired, and that's when we began taxiing. This was a maximum effort mission: every aircraft in the 303rd that could possibly fly was scheduled to fly this particular mission because this aircraft factory at Aschersleben had absolutely top priority. We were the first aircraft to taxi out of the revetment, the first

aircraft to taxi down the taxiway, the first aircraft to line up for takeoff, the first aircraft to take off, and eventually climbed above—it was still pretty scuddy low clouds—and we climbed above that. By that time the Air Force had established low frequency radio beacons at each base so the navigators and the pilots could home in on this frequency. It didn't have much range, and it did not need much range because all it was was just a local radio station to home in on. That became a very great assist in those days when the weather was bad, particularly, to fly above the clouds and just keep orbiting around this buncher beacon, as they were called, until you got the group assembled and then take off from that buncher beacon to another buncher beacon where you assembled the wing and from there you made a departure point at the coast. The aircraft were usually assembled from wing formations into divisional formations at the coast. This was a highly critical and technical step in the total formation because it meant that sixty aircraft in a wing had to be at a point at a precise period of time in order to fall in behind, or fall in ahead of, another sixty airplanes, and then there was still a third sixty airplanes to fall in with roughly the 200 aircraft to the division, although by this time the divisions were getting larger and larger—they had more and more wings. I'm sure in January, 1944 they were much larger than they had been in April of '43 when we first started flying combat. Well anyway, we departed on course and everything seemed to be going fine. There was a lot of cloud cover, but we were able to get the fixes with our Gee equipment. We took radio fixes; both Jake and I, separately, navigated the aircraft—I mean independently—plotted our positions and then compared our respective positions and compromised if we had a slight difference in the position of the aircraft at a given time from one another. Eventually got our division in proper form in flight formation and left the coast. I still have the log—my navigator's log—of that particular mission. It's basically a very prized possession. My only regret is that I found out just before I went home from overseas that I could have also had all of my other logs of my navigator's logs of my missions, but I assumed at that time that these logs were highly confidential and made no effort to get them. Boy, what I'd give today to have those logs with that detailed information of each and every one of my twenty-five missions, but suffice to say at least I got the [approx. 5 sec. pause in recording] What I said there was suffice to say that at least I got my twenty-fifth mission log. Actually, in reviewing that what I had previously taped a couple minutes ago was wrong. I had said that we were delayed in takeoff similar to the Schweinfurt mission, and in reviewing my log that certainly is not the case. We did take off on time, and we assembled the group right on our predetermined time, and we left the base at the predetermined time so we were right on schedule. We took off at 8:10 and a half in the morning. We started the engines at 7:47. We took off at 8:10 and a half. We climbed out in what was known as B Plan, which was a planned climb-out procedure through the overcast. Then we assembled the group at 9:06. At 9:18 we left the base. From then on my

log shows a series of Gee fixes to plot our positions because it was overcast over England, and we were scheduled to leave Lowestoft, which was on the coast of England, at 9:59, and we actually left at 10:01 so we were only two minutes behind at that particular point. Then we crossed the enemy coast at 10:33 and a half. At 11:50 I've got a dead-reckoning position in my log using the winds that I had previously established, and we made some alterations to the initial point and so forth. I'm reading from my log now as you well realize. We're at 20,000 feet, indicated airspeed 155, and at 11:50 I've got a DR [dead reckoning] position of 52 degrees 33 minutes north, 6 degrees 10 minutes east, and I've got a comment in the general observation column of my log: "P-47s all around." Then at 11:05 I've got another DR position: 52 32 north—we were going practically due east as you can see—7 minutes and 35 degrees east longitude. At 11:06, one minute later, I've got a comment in my log: "Fighters." What happened in between 11:50 and 11:06 is that the—well, it began happening before that. Actually, the weather—shortly after our group crossed the coast of England headed for Germany the weather began closing in behind us. There was the 2nd Division of B-24s and the 4th Division of B-17s scheduled to follow us basically on the same track into Germany but hit different targets. They got so concerned about the weather back there that they sent a signal out for these aircraft—both the 2nd Division and the 3rd Division—to abort their missions and return to base. But by that time we were well into Germany, and the General called up—I can remember this just like it happened yesterday. General Travis was a West Pointer and had been stationed up in Alaska or somewhere in the far north, and he had this wolf skin flying jacket that he always wore. I can tell you a little bit more about General Travis at the conclusion of this mission. Well, maybe I should—yeah, I'll tell you at the end of this mission. He was subsequently killed in a B-29 crash in 1949 or 1950. Travis Air Force Base in California is named for him. But anyway, on this particular mission—he was from the South someplace—he calls up on the interphone, and he said something to this effect that, [pronounced in a Southern accent] "The weather has closed in behind us, and General Anderson has ordered the 2nd Division and the 4th Division to abort the mission." But he says, "The weather looks good in front of us, and," he said, "I've elected to continue on." As I say, we were well into Germany by that time; we were right near Dümmer Lake when this message came through. I don't know to this day whether the P-47s that were around us got their signals mixed up and thought that they were to abort the mission or whether it was coincidental at that time that they had reached their maximum range and had to return, but between 11:50 and 11:06 is when the—set the stage for the subsequent action. The P-40s just did 180 degrees, and they were there one minute, and the next minute the sky was empty. About thirty seconds after that up come about fifty FWs with belly tanks. I had mentioned that rather than attacking any particular set of airplanes flying the Germans by now had long realized that the

commander of the mission was in the first airplane. So in this particular case we had a Mickey ship—that is a ship with radar bombing capabilities. Very elementary radar bombing in those days, but it had just been inherited from the British, and we were just beginning about that period of time to have a Mickey ship along with us in case we got to a target area that was socked in, and they bombed by this elementary radar. At least it was better than just dumping the bombs out over Germany in general or bringing them home. Here I am up in the nose and I look up ahead, and all I can see is silver fighters with red noses coming up with belly tanks. Just about the time they reach our flight level they dump their belly tanks, and they line up about six or seven abreast, and they come in just like a big scythe through the grass. They're coming right towards us at our exact altitude coming nose on to nose on. They're doing probably 250 miles an hour at least; we're doing 150 so our rate of closure is well over 400. When they get to that magic 800 yards roughly they suddenly light up from wingtip to wingtip with their 20mms. On the first pass they got the Mickey ship on our left wing, and they got the second element leader in our squadron which would have been the number four airplane and his wingman. So that meant out of the original six aircraft in our squadron they wiped out 50% on the first pass. To this day—and I've thought this over many, many times—to this day I don't see how in the hell they missed us. They were boring straight in, they were firing with every cannon that they had on these seven aircraft coming in abreast to abreast, wingtip to wingtip, towards us. Miraculously they didn't hit us, but as I say they did hit our wingman. They got the aircraft immediately behind us, and in turn the aircraft immediately on his right—all which began falling out of formation in various stages of distress. They kept coming, making these head-on passes. Maybe it's because our ranks were thinning or something they then began going at the low squadron of our group which was my old squadron, the 358th Bomb Squadron. We lost, out of the aircraft we put up that day, we suffered the greatest loss that we had ever suffered up to that point: we lost ten airplanes out of the approximately twenty—[approx. 5 sec. pause in recording]. Okay, I'm back on now. I just checked: we put up twenty-eight airplanes, and we lost ten that particular day out of our 303rd Bomb Group alone. The overall losses for the mission—I'll just mention this now before I forget it—there were 663 aircraft actually dispatched; the total loss for the day was sixty, or 9%. But recognizing that many of the 663 returned—so the 1st Division which was really the division of B-17s that I was in the lead airplane were the only ones really that hit the target or that continued on and bombed a target. There were 174 B-17s dispatched in the 1st Division; we lost thirty-four of that 174. We had therefore a 19.5% loss ratio. I don't know where the other twenty-six aircraft were lost. It's possible that—although I don't think I've ever read anything about it—where some of these other divisions may have been over the coast of Germany when they got their abort orders and got into some air battles on the way home or midair

collisions—whatever it might be. But the loss ratio of thirty-four out of 174, 19.5%, was just a horrendous loss ratio. So let me get back to my log to pick up the story of my final mission. I guess the reason this one is so vivid is because I still have this log. As I mentioned at 11:06 I've got the entry of "Fighters." At 11:17 I've got an entry in my log, "8-9-4 going down," and I give the coordinates as being 52 degrees 15 minutes north, 9 degrees 5 minutes east. At 11:39 we're at the IP, [Initial Point], and this is my entry in the log: "11:39, IP-bomb doors open-can see target number one plainly." Then I've got another footnote on there, "We're at 20,000 feet, indicated airspeed 155." I've got another notation on the next line, "God, this run seems slow." It seemed forever, and here's the reason why: at 11:48 and a third—I had to time this right down to the twenty second mark—at 11:48 and a third I got a notation in my log, "Bombs away." So we were on that bomb run for almost ten minutes. At 11:51 I got a notation, "Flak, damn close". At 12:04 I've got a notation, "P-51 got a fighter." I've got a further notation, "Fighters still buzzing around, red and silver with belly tanks." Then at 12:15 I've got a notation, "Big Nazi air base or sub depot northeast of Hannover; I can see the bomb pits in it." The General saw this also and wanted it plotted. At 12:25 I've got a notation, "Altering course to avoid flak." At 12:30 I've got a notation, "P-51 got twin-engine fighter five miles south of Neinburg." We're still at 20,000 feet, indicated airspeed 155. Further note at 12:32: "The General wants to plot an operational airdrome: 52 degrees 43 minutes north, 8 degrees 17 minutes east." At 13:10 we began a slow letdown. At 13:31 and a half I've got a notation, "Five men bail out of B-17, CK Squadron." Then the balance of my log is a series of notations about flak coming up and radio fixes and Gee fixes, and we finally landed back at our base at 15:05. Let me go back now and fill in a little bit of the gap here. Between the time that we were hit with the fighters and we dropped our bombs—as I say the fighters were continually hammering us—Captain Jack Fawcett was the group bombardier. He was one of those exceptional bombardiers who could hit what he was aiming at. We planted our group's bombs right smack on the FW assembly plant so this was one mission that was well worth the cost if we could time it to that extent. This comment I got about the P-51 getting a twin-engine fighter five miles south of Neinburg—that was a situation there where was a Major Howard who was flying a P-51, and somehow, according to and reading in the history, there were forty-nine P-51s that somehow stayed in the air and did escort the bombers. I think I only saw three or four P-51s; I didn't see anything like forty-nine of them. But this Major Howard must have been a real go-getter because he got five enemy aircraft that day, and it was probably him who blew up that twin-engine fighter, and let's see—I'm trying to think—I think it was at this 12:07 indication in my log: "P-51 got fighter." What happened there, this fighter was a twin-engine fighter—it was an ME-110—and it was making a frontal pass at us. I don't know whether it was going to fire rockets or 20mm or what the hell it was, but all of a sudden out of the sun

came this P-51. He nailed this twin-engine fighter, and it blew up in the air. Word was one second it attacked airplane, the next second it was just a big black smudge of smoke and within just a fraction of a second we flew through that smudge of smoke. So it was, all told, it was a hairy mission. Needless to say I was mighty damn glad to be back. One other thing I do want to mention is that that was the mission in which I saw men throwing equipment out of another B-17 in order to lighten the load. They threw out what apparently was a full wooden box of .50 caliber ammunition. They were crippled, and they were trying to lighten themselves up as best they could. They threw out this box of ammunition and it came down, and it landed right behind the number two engine of a B-17 flying below them, and it went completely through the wing. It was just a huge gaping hole in the wing, and the B-17— **[End of Tape 3, Side A]** Long interruption here. As a matter of fact I never did finish this side while visiting Pam, home in Orlando, Florida in October of 1984 but thought that I better finish it up back here back in Wisconsin. So the date is now December 1st, 1984, finishing up this recording in our home at 4510 State Road, mobile home unit number thirty-three, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601. What I'm going to try and do now is fill in a few of the gaps and so forth, and perhaps some background after I include very minor details on the twenty-fifth mission that you previously heard about. Well, just to continue that twenty-fifth mission saga: after we let down after crossing the enemy coast on the way back to England we arrived back at the base, and the weather had really socked in. They had lit a bunch of magnesium flare pots in order to guide the B-17s down the east-west runway. We almost traditionally took off and landed due to the west, and I guess the only particular thing that involved any substance about that was as we were on the final approach there was another B-17 flying almost wing-to-wing. He must have been low on gas or something. I suppose there's always a question of who was first in the pattern, but anyway, General Travis who was in the right seat as Commander of the entire mission radioed to this B-17 practically flying formation with us on the final, "This is General Travis," he said, "Pull up and go around." The pilot immediately recognizing the rank of General Travis peeled off and probably did a 360 degree turn and got back in the pattern and came back and landed it. We had aircraft scattered all over the Midlands of England after that particular mission. Some were low on gas, some were shot up, and those that had been shot up tried to head in to the nearest base that they could find that had a runway long enough to accommodate them. Many times in situations such as this our B-17s landed at British fighter bases because of the immediate necessity of getting medical attention for wounded crew members. The 303rd Bomb Group that particular day put up twenty-eight aircraft because it was a maximum effort mission, and twenty-one or twenty flew in as part of the actual 303rd group. The remaining eight formed a composite unit. Anyway, of the twenty-eight aircraft that we put up that day we lost ten, which was a very, very high loss ratio. My old squadron, the 358th Bomb

Squadron, was wiped out completely. Every one of the seven aircraft that they put up was wiped out. As I remember they were flying low squadron on our lead 303rd Group. Of course, that was the most vulnerable squadron in any of the groups from the standpoint of being subject to fighter attacks. Overall, we lost forty-two B-17s on that mission which was again an extremely high loss ratio considering the fact that relatively speaking so few planes got to the target and back. Well anyway, that was my twenty-fifth and final mission. It was always traditional there—after the war it was more than tradition. It was a historic necessity I guess that after the mission the lead crew's picture was taken standing by the aircraft. This was I suppose maintained in the Air Force historical records. As it turned out the pictures that were taken that afternoon did not turn out as far as the entire crew. There was one particular shot of Colonel Calhoun and General Travis which appears in Roger Freeman's book *The Mighty Eighth*. Let me see if I can find that particular numbered—oh yeah. Here it is; it's on page 105 of Roger Freeman's book *The Mighty Eighth*, and the caption on it is, "Brigadier General Robert Travis, left, flew with the 303rd Bomb Group [unintelligible] to Aschersleben. Back at Molesworth, smiles for the camera. Conceal harrowing experience." This is a blown-up view of the two of them standing there, but what it doesn't show is me in the background because I had just crawled out of the nose of the "8 Ball" [nickname for his plane], dog-assed tired. The combat photographer—base photographer took this picture. Right about when they published it in Roger Freeman's book they cut it down [unintelligible]. Anyway, the pictures of the entire crew for some reason or another did not turn out. So the next day, we again gathered at the aircraft, put on our combat flying [unintelligible] our flight jacket, had our pictures taken which I still have in my possession [unintelligible]. I was then issued orders relieving me from combat duty which had the net effect of saying that, "This Officer has completed his tour and therefore [unintelligible]." Well, anyway, they're in here, relieving me from combat duty. Now, as I mentioned, part of my agreement to transfer from the 358th to the 359th Bomb Squadron was to serve as an instructor [at the end of my combat duties (?)]. So I made good on that promise and stayed there as instructor on a non-combat status from January 12th when I was relieved of combat duty until April—mid April at which time I got my orders to return to the States. When I did get my orders to return I thought for sure, as had been the case with most combat returnees, that I'd be flying back in a C-54 so I shook down all my baggage as much as I possibly could. I think we were limited to seventy-five pounds. Everything that we were issued over there had been classified as expendable so when you're flying back there was a lot of things that you'd like to take back with you such as your Army .45 automatic pistol [unintelligible] and watches and things like that. So I shook down my baggage pretty much on the assumption that I was going to fly back and left my .45 behind. Oh, one interesting [unintelligible] anyway, to make a long story short there, I came back by boat. I came back on the British

liner [RMS] Mauretania which had been a British luxury liner before the war and was converted to a troopship for war services, and we soloed back from Liverpool to New York by ourselves. Trying to think of the time. I think it was about seven days if I remember correctly. The seas were very rough at this time of year [unintelligible] pretty hard storm going back. About two-thirds of the people on board were violently seasick. It didn't bother me [unintelligible] the bouncing around that you get when you fly or something. Anyway, that was a winding trip across the ocean, where we soloed in and then still because of the submarine menace still lurking in the North Atlantic. We altered course I think it was every forty-five seconds—no, it was about a minute and a half. The ship would alter course about fifteen degrees slightly. The trick to that of course was to draw down the submarine—you're synchronizing on its constant course as it lining up its torpedo plot. What I was going to say is that, before I forget it, prior to leaving the dates, just a couple days before I was going to depart, lo and behold, my bicycle was stolen, and so when it came time to check out of the base I had to pay about twenty dollars for this damn English bicycle that I issued on a statement of charges. I think it came out later that somebody over there had a—had some inside information as to which combat crews were going home and when, and basically they set up a little ring—to make a bicycle disappear. Then they'd be paid for [unintelligible] sold on the black market. Now that's a hell of an accusation to make against our fellow 303rd [unintelligible]. It was sure fishy because more than—many, many of the fellas that returned [unintelligible]. Well, anyway we landed in New York, steamed past the Statue of Liberty, [unintelligible] as I recall at Fort Hamilton. I guess the interesting thing there is that there were six of us officers.—eight of us officers in a stateroom. It was crowded, but it was sure a hell of a lot better than a lot of the other [unintelligible] on board. One of the fellows in one of the other bomb groups. He happened to be a navigator, and while he was over there he bought this English bulldog, and he named it Wilkie after Wendell Wilkie who was a 19—anyway, presidential candidate I can't think of what year [unintelligible] prior to the election of '44. Anyway he named it Wilkie, and he smuggled on board the ship over in Liverpool in a GI barracks bag, taking it over his shoulder. Matter of fact, we could have—any one of us could have smuggled plans for the invasion back to the States for all that matter, because, hell, there was security at all. You just walked up the gang plank with your G4 bag and whatever other baggage you wanted to take on board, and that was it. It was almost the same procedure on the way off the ship in New York. This fellow [—get ahead of myself—] during the course of the five or seven days whatever it took for us to get over here Wilkie's presence was discovered by the ship's crew, and they said that he couldn't have him in the stateroom so the crew confiscated him. I guess they had a good time with old Wilkie, and then this navigator pleaded with the ship's officer who let him who let him have the dog when they reached New York. I guess they

compromised. They finally said, “Well, you got damn dog on. He’s gonna be your responsibility to get it off. So back in the old barracks bag goes Wilkie. He was a true English bull—bowlegged, a pug nose, ugliest damn thing you’ve ever seen in your life. Anyway, this fellow put Wilkie in his barracks bag, throws his barracks bag over his shoulder and walked off the gangplank. So then I was processed through Fort Hamilton, got my orders and returned to La Crosse. Let me just fill you in now on just a few odds and ends that create some vivid memories—not of combat per se but of those days. Here we are, December 1st, 1984, and remembering that these incidents that I’ve mentioned on those tapes took place 1943, 1944, 1945. Ah, ’41, ’40 [unintelligible] considerable span in anybody’s life. I am now sixty-three years of age and reached that birthday last [unintelligible] and I’m looking forward to retiring from my position with Dairyland Power Cooperative as personnel and labor relations manager. God willing, if my health remains, sometime between probably March and May of this year. I’m looking forward to spending next year, looking forward to ’84 and ’85—I’m sorry—of ’85 and ’86 in some warmer climate than Wisconsin. Perhaps I didn’t mention [unintelligible] our way over to England consisted of a series of dogleg flights. We left the States at West Palm Beach in Florida on March 2nd, 1943 and flew a flight over through South America, Ascension Island, Africa, and eventually up to England [unintelligible] sixty-seven hours of flying time to get there. Some of the places that we touched along the way after leaving [unintelligible] to go to West Palm Beach, Florida were at Borinquen Field in Puerto Rico, that was our first stop, and then to Georgetown, British Guyana; then in to Belem, Brazil; Natal, Brazil; Ascension Island; Roberts Field, Liberia in Africa; Dakar northwest Africa; American [unintelligible] Morocco; finally arriving on March 20th in [unintelligible]. The other tape that I did on that particular trip goes into the details on that one. Somewhere in one of these tapes I mentioned the fact that most of our crew had gone home so there was only Vince Lemmon and I who were left of our original crew. As I mentioned I had completed my twenty-fifth mission on January 11th, 1944. Vince completed his on January 25th, 1944. The reason I’m sure of Vince’s date there is that I’m looking at a picture that was taken of a plaque—well, it wasn’t exactly a plaque. It was a listing in the Officers’ Club at the Molesworth base. The title of it is “Aircrew members that have completed twenty-five missions over enemy territory in a B-17 Fortress bomber. These men have been relieved of combat duties and are not required to go on other combat missions.” Then it’s labeled “The 25 Club, Commissioned Officers.” So my name is on there, and they got this screwed up as far as my duties ‘cause they got me as a pilot, and then Vince’s name is also on there, and I was reviewing this this morning prior to the start of this tape, and there were a lot of other names on here that sure strike a familiar bell. This is Norm Jacobsen, the navigator who was with me on my twenty-fifth mission [unintelligible] navigator completed his tour on the 25th of February of ’44. [unintelligible] Ralph Coborn who

was a bombardier, and a number of these—Don Gamble who was a pilot [unintelligible] Major Kirk Mitchell, who was our Squadron Commander in the 358th. Don DeCamp (??) Combat flying was very, very nerve-racking. In all probability the worst mental experience [unintelligible]. You're assured on one day that one of being one of three things to follow. Number one, you're gonna be back at the base after completion of the combat mission. Number two, you could be a pw in Germany someplace. Number three, you're going to be dead. Having these choices day after day it really got to a person. I used to before every combat mission I made it a practice to read the 91st Psalm. I came across this as I was reading my Bible one day over there and realized how well this psalm fitted into the situation that we were then into in. Let me just go through and as I read each verse, let me point why I feel that psalm has so much meaning. This is the 91st Psalm: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Well, that in itself, "shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" was very helpful. "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust." My fortress, the B-17 Flying Fortress. "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence." "He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day." Now, all of our missions were [unintelligible] so the [unintelligible] "Thou shalt not be afraid of the arrow that flieth by day." "Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." Now most of our missions were timed in a general sense so that many times we were over the target in a heavy combat situation at about noontime of the day. So "for the destruction that wasteth at noonday," the destruction of B-17s and being shot down all around and so forth. Now this one, Verse 7, is probably the one that gave me the most comfort: "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." That was the comfort that I took on each and every mission—scared as was everyone else, but that was a very, very comforting verse. "Only with thine eyes shall thou behold and see the reward of the wicked." "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation"; "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." "They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name." "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him." "With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation." So that particular psalm, as I say, got into combat, I stumbled across it reading the Bible. Each of us were issued a small version of the

Bible. That's where I found it. Matter of fact, I used to carry mine [unintelligible]. Okay, couple other items I wanted to quickly mention. Number one: I met my old friend Rich Carr who currently lives in La Crosse and has lived there since the war years. In [unintelligible] at our Molesworth air base, Rich originally came from [unintelligible] as a 2nd Lieutenant Quartermaster Corps, transferred to the Air Corps and was assigned to duty as personal equipment officer at one of the squadrons on base of the (??) 427th. So Rich and I, we met in the Officers' Club one evening. I just happened to sit down beside him and started talking and I asked him where he was from. He said, "Wisconsin." I said, "Oh yeah, so am I. Where about?" "La Crosse." "La Crosse? Well, I'll be darned." So we got to comparing notes and found out that Rich had graduated from Central and I at Logan and so forth. So we hit up a friendship that's lasted all these years. As a matter of fact Rich and I to this day have lunch together probably once a week, and in those times there the combat personnel were given sometimes two or three day passes for us to go out on a little rest and recuperation. So several times I went to London with Rich, and we had a good time. As I say, Rich is still a very, very dear friend of mine having met (??) after so many years. Couple other facts: the rest of the crew—whatever happened. I continually kept in correspondence after the war principally with four individuals on the crew: Vince Lemmon, the pilot; "F.O." Clark, our old copilot who ended up having his own crew; "Tee" Stone, the bombardier; and Andy Berzansky, the top turret fighter. I corresponded at Christmas time with them over the years. Vince and his sister Pat visited us in 1947. Then when I went back to service in August of 1949, recalled as a captain to be one of the navigators, navigator instructors, at Ellington Air Force Base [Houston, Texas] which was being reactivated as a navigation school. My original orders called for me to report to Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento, California where I graduated as second lieutenant [unintelligible] in 1942. So Vince was still going to law school in San Francisco at that time, and we had many memorable times together. He had an aunt who lived on Nob Hill, and he made arrangements for me to use her apartment whenever I ended being in San Francisco. We had many good times. Then we visited Vince and his family in 1956 and 1963. "F.O." Clark moved—well "F.O." stayed in and completed about twenty-one years of service, retired from the Air Force at [unintelligible] and moved to Colorado Springs, stayed in Colorado Springs [unintelligible] his last assignment, and entered the life insurance field, CLU. So we also had contact with "F.O." [unintelligible] 1970, ah, 1960. However, "Tee" Stone and Andrew Berzansky I did not have contact with for a number of years until Andy's 1976 Christmas party. He said, "Hey, are you going to attend the 303rd Bomb reunion?" Wrote back I think it was the same day. I said, "Andy, tell me about this reunion. I haven't a thing about it. So he wrote back and said that the 304th Bomb Group Association that had been formed by a small cadre of fellows who were retired and living in Florida in 1975, and they had the first

reunion in Orlando. I guess there were probably fifty to seventy-five in attendance. They formally formed the organization. They said that they would establish a reunion every other year. So Andy was referring to the 1977 reunion that was being held in Colorado Spring. So to make a long story short I immediately joined the Association, and I have the membership card that I always carry in my wallet for the Association. I flew to Colorado Springs in the summer of [1977?] for the reunion. Clark, of course, lived in Colorado Springs. Vince and his family came by car, and they camped out along the way, and both “Tee” Stone and Andy flew in. Well, I’ll tell you, that was a very, very memorable time, particularly that afternoon when they flew in on separate flights. “Tee” Stone, although heavier, was still the same old “Tee” Stone that I had known overseas: Virginia drawl, hell of a good-lookin’ guy, a gentleman’s gentleman, and could still drink more whiskey and walk a straight line than anybody I’ve ever known. He had had some heart problems, and so he had slowed down a little bit. Andy came off the plane—heavier of course like all of us, slightly bald—and God, it was good to see them land. We just had a—the five of us had an absolute hell getting together and rehashing all the old times. The next reunion following that was scheduled for Dayton, Ohio at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in 1979, but as it turned out only “Tee” Stone and I could have gone and, we decided that with only two of us that we would forego it, although I would someday like to visit Wright-Patterson. The next reunion then in 1981 was in San Diego, and my son Bryan lives in San Diego so that was [?] I was still divorced at the time, and I flew out there and stayed with Bryan, and I met—Vince Lemmon drove down from Sacramento. Clark had driven into San Diego with his motor home. “Tee” Stone was not able to make it. Much to our sadness, our good friend Andy Berzansky had retired from General Electric, he had passed away. So there was a moment of silence for those who were departed like(??) Andy Berzansky. The San Diego reunion was a lot of fun. Rich Karr flew out also with a friend, his male friend who was a veteran but not an Air Force Veteran. So the three of us stayed in the motel room together, and we had a nice time with Mary and Bryan and the kids came out to the motel room. Following the reunion, then Vince and Pat, his lovely wife; “F.O.” Clark and Ruth, his wife, his second wife [unintelligible] and I, the five of us got into Clark’s RV and took a trip down the Baja Peninsula down to Ensenada where we rented—made reservations for a motel, and we stayed in Ensenada. We just had the most wonderful time, the five of us. The 1983 reunion was held in Washington, D.C. I guess the general consensus was that who the hell wants to go to Washington, D.C. in August. So we—all of us skipped the ’83 reunion. But the upcoming 1985 reunion [unintelligible] a real humdinger. The first flight of the B-17 was made in 1935 so therefore 1985 will be the 50th anniversary of the first flight of the B-17. Boeing Aircraft is co-hosting the reunion which will be held the last week of July in Seattle. Now, this will be more than just one bomb group’s reunion; this

will be a number of bomb groups. I think there are at least three or four bomb groups, B-17 bomb groups, who are also having their reunion. Now, whether or not they'll be exactly in the same week as ours I'm not sure. I have a hunch they will be scattered throughout the summer. But anyway, with Boeing Aircraft co-hosting the reunion it should be a real wingding. My plans at this moment are, of course, to be retired and Marion and I will take our recreational vehicle and drive out there. Tentative plans are for us to meet Clark in this recreational vehicle and his wife along the way, and then the two of us going convoy so to speak from some place in Wyoming where we'll [unintelligible] to Seattle. Then following the reunion our plans are, Marion and I, to drive down through Washington, and Oregon, and California down to San Diego to visit Bryan and then come back. Those are our plans and God willing [unintelligible] why, stay healthy and all the other factors involved, why it'll be something to look forward to. I might mention that when we—Marion and I—hell, I bet I overlooked something here. In 1983 in lieu of attending the August Reunion of the 303rd in Washington, D.C. the three of us decided—"F.O." and Lemmon (3?) and I decided that we would have a little mini-reunion of our own, and we would have it in Colorado. So in October of 1983 Marion and I drove to Colorado Springs and met "F.O." and Ruth and took off in his motor home again for the thousand mile trip to Colorado. The first two days there were just the four of us. Then we met Vince and Pat on the other side of the mountain, and they joined us then for the remainder of the trip, and [unintelligible]. Then we returned them to—that's right, we returned them to their destination on the western side of the slopes, and then they took off for California. It was just the most wonderful experience, not only seeing those two wonderful fellas with wives but also seeing Colorado. The aspen leaves were absolutely golden, and we took the [train?] from Durango to Silverton and back, an all day trip. Just a most delightful experience, so we're looking forward, as I mentioned, to seeing these two fellas [unintelligible] in 1935. As far as the rest of the crew, the other enlisted men: Caryl Zeller, who was from Rochester, Minnesota died at fifty (??) He died while I was in the service the second time. I was stationed down in Houston, Texas. He was the only one really that I ever kept track of after the war. The other enlisted men [unintelligible] passed away. What happened to the two waist gunners [unintelligible]. Well, this is the end of the narrative of Darrell D. Gust.

[End of Interview]