

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
AIX HARRISON  
U. S. Air Force, World War II

2005

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**Harrison, Aix B.**, (b.1925). Oral History Interview, 2005.

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

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

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Aix Harrison, a Zeoring, Iowa native, discusses his experience as a bombardier in the Air Force during World War II. Harrison recalls hearing the news about Pearl Harbor on the street. He mentions his brother, who was already in the Air Force when the war started. He describes joining the Air Corps at age seventeen and going to junior college for a year after high school. He speaks about basic training at Shepherd Field (Texas), the College Training Detachments program at Peabody College in Nashville (Tennessee), pre-flight school in Santa Anna (California), aerial gunnery school in Kingman (Arizona), and bombardier school in Demming (New Mexico). Harrison talks about playing drums in the Army band, his classes and flying instruction, training with .50 caliber machine guns, simulated turrets, shooting clay pigeons, and being assigned walking tours for being in a plane that dropped bombs where people were working, though no one was hurt. He discusses his assignment to a B-24 crew in Muroc (California) and accidentally pulling the salvo level during their first mission. He tells of their troop ship taking a circle route to Hawaii to avoid submarines and flying in the search mission for General Harman. He describes bombing missions based on Anguar in the Caroline Islands with Kelly's Cobras of the 494<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, and he mentions a friend bombardier who was killed there. Harrison talks about being assigned to Yontan Air Base (Okinawa) and details his first mission, bombing Japan-occupied Shanghai through cloud cover, during which a friend's plane exploded though the friend managed to get himself smuggled back to the base. He remembers living in a tent with the plane's other three officers. He mentions a mission bombing the Japanese Navy that had only a fifty percent return of planes. He portrays the elation after the atomic bomb drop on Hiroshima and describes the air over southern Japan being filled with red dust from it. Harrison speaks of becoming a Special Service officer and trying to run a PX at Atsugi Air Base (Japan) and managing a baseball team during the occupation. He recalls turning down an offer to command a troop train on his way home. He describes using the GI bill to go to physical education school at the University of Illinois-Champaign, joining the American Legion, and attending bomb group reunions.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Aix Harrison (1925-) served in the Air Force during World War II. After his honorable discharge, Harrison earned his bachelor's and master's degree at the University of Illinois-Champaign and his Ph. D. at Michigan State University. He taught as a professor of health and physical education at Oklahoma A&M College for thirty-six years. He currently resides in

Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.  
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.  
Transcript edited and abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2008.

**Interview Transcript:**

- John: This is John Driscoll, and I am a Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives volunteer. And today is July 29, 2005. And this is an oral history interview with Aix Harrison who is a veteran of World War II, in the United States Air Force. Aix is here from his home in Oklahoma, and on vacation at his cottage in Wisconsin. Aix, thanks an awful lot for coming down and agreeing to the interview. And why don't we start at the very beginning. When and where were you born?
- Aix: I was born in Zearing, Iowa.
- John: How do you spell that?
- Aix: Z-e-a-r-i-n-g. And it is right in the middle of the state.
- John: Okay.
- Aix: Very small town of four or five hundred people at that time. My dad was a dentist. He had a dental office there. I spent the first five or six years of my life there, basically. I went to first and second grade in Zearing.
- John: Okay.
- Aix: And I don't remember a whole lot about that but dad had a dental office downtown. He'd jump the train about once a week and went five miles up the tracks to another town called McCallsburg and did some dental work up there. I guess that was a common thing back in those days. Had two brothers and a sister, and a grandfather, all living in the same house there in Zearing. They were all half-brother and half-sister because my dad remarried. Or married my mother in Zearing. They had moved to Zearing from Wisconsin and, or they had moved to Iowa from Wisconsin. My dad was born and raised around Wilton, Wisconsin.
- John: Okay. Sure.
- Aix: And as I understand it, he went through school there and he had two brothers and a sister lived, well, they lived in or around Wilton. When he, a few years after he graduated from there, he got into school work. I know he taught school for a year or two in that area. And I believe he had some kind of an administrative position in the schools then, in Mauston.
- John: Okay.

Aix: And he married a girl from the Wilton area, and then he came to the University of Iowa to go to dental school. And he graduated from dental school, University of Iowa, in 1916. I think he, yeah, and then he went into practice, I think the name of the town is Crawfordsville. A little town down in the southwestern Oklahoma. He established a dental practice there. For some reason, it apparently didn't turn out too well. He came to Zearing with his family at that time which was his wife and his three children, two boys and a girl. And shortly after his wife came down with a disease—I'm not sure whether it was pneumonia or something that was kind of sweeping through the country—and she died. So my dad was alone with the three kids. My mother happened to be available at the time so he married my mother, whose name was Diana Vonard. And she was living there in Zearing, so they had a house. And that's my first remembrance of the family is in the house, two older brothers and a sister. My mother and dad and a grand-dad, who was a Civil War veteran.

John: Oh. Oh.

Aix: And we were all living in the house, so I went to school the first two years of grade school, first and second grade, in Zearing. And then the whole family picked up and moved about thirty miles to the east to Marshaltown, Iowa.

John: Marshaltown. Okay.

Aix: Yeah. Central Iowa town. Between 15 and 20,000 people. Much larger than Zearing, but not a really large town. It's a county seat town. County seat of Marshal County. And my dad started a dental practice there. I went through school there, finished grade school, junior high school, and senior high school. And one year of junior college in Marshaltown. I don't know if there's anything really great about Marshaltown. It was a reasonably nice town to live in and grow up in. There were two or three commercial manufacturing plants there and one still there is the Lennox Furnace Company.

John: Oh, sure.

Aix: Their national headquarters were in Marshaltown and at the time there was a plant which was about six blocks away from our house, where we lived. So I actually spent quite a bit of time over and around the plant and the grounds of the Lennox Furnace Company. They had ample grounds there. We used to play football over there and rummage around in their scrap piles out behind the factory. You know, all that kind of stuff.

John: Yeah. Sure.

Aix: Like I said, really nothing unusual about my school years there. Pretty normal. My older brothers and sister, they were about, ranged from seven or eight years to ten or twelve years older than I was. And they graduated from high school, I think. My oldest brother may have graduated in Zearing. And the other two graduated from high school in Marshaltown. I graduated from high school there in 1942. My class still has class reunions, I guess. 1942. Getting pretty skinny any more, by the number of people who attend, you know.

John: Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Aix: Yes. Pearl Harbor Day occurred while I was still in senior high school, and I was well aware of the world situation at the time. I was a senior in high school, seventeen years old, and we knew what the world situation was. I had gone to a show there in Marshaltown at the Strand Theater. There were about three theaters in the town. And I guess it probably was a weekend, like a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. That is when I would usually go to the shows. And as I recall I came out of the theater along about three or four in the afternoon and several people were out in the streets shouting, "The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor." It struck me as being a rather unusual happening and something that would probably have quite a large effect on the war. Which at that time we had not officially been to war. But that pretty well settled it that we would be in the war, and actually we were within a few days, I believe. My, not the oldest brother but my second oldest brother, he was probably about seven or eight years older than me, had graduated from high school there and he had joined the Air Force. Was the Air Corps at that time, the Army Air Corps. He had gone to pilot training school and had graduated and was actually out flying at that time, in fighter planes, at the time the war started. That, of course, bumped him up in seniority and he immediately, I think, he was, became a captain rather than a lieutenant and he was put in command, or second in command, of some air bases, and things like that. So, throughout my career, that probably had some effect on me.

John: Sure.

Aix: The fact that I had an older brother who was in the Air Force, the Air Corps, and was flying fighter planes, and so on. So after Pearl Harbor, I pretty well was aware, I think I must have been a senior in high school at the time, and pretty well aware that I would probably need to be going into the service. I think the draft had already been started. If it hadn't, it started immediately after that. And I began to think that a year or so down the road I would be going into the service, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

John: One way or the other. Right.

Aix: So I graduated from Marshaltown High School in '42, seventeen years old. And at that time they were not drafting, I don't think they ever drafted seventeen-year-olds, but they drafted eighteen-year-olds. So I thought, well, we have a junior college here, and it is local, I can live with my parents. And I think the tuition was only \$100 a year.

John: Yeah. Wow.

Aix: My parents said, "Well, why don't you continue, go to junior college here and make up your mind as you go along what you want to do?" So I enrolled in the junior college and I went to the recruiting office. I was about seventeen and a half. And signed up. I wanted to join the Air Force, I said. And that was my choice at the time. When you were seventeen and a half, I think it was, you could join and not enter the service until you were eighteen. You could join the Navy, you could join the Army.

John: Yeah, I understand that.

Aix: Or you could join the Air Corps, or the Marines, or whatever. You had a choice. And I kinda felt that was important to me, to have a choice. And my first choice would have been the Air Force, I suppose, largely, because of my brother. But I had, at that time, I had a couple of opportunities to get into an airplane and take off and fly around a little bit at a local airport there. So my choice I felt was definitely Air Corps. If I had to go to a second choice, it probably would have been the Navy, but that didn't never become a factor. We did notice, at mid-term, in February of that year, which would have been half-way through the school year, about that time, I was going to turn eighteen. I was about half-way through that school year and the Air Force people said, "Well, you're just seventeen and a half, at this time. We're going to let you stay through the full year, finish up a full year of junior college." And that was fine with me.

John: Good.

Aix: But there was a noticeable drop in the number of young men in the junior college class at that time. We probably had a hundred or so boys in that class to start off that school year and at mid-semester, those who had turned eighteen were out. So our number of boys in that junior college class dropped down to about fifteen or twenty boys in the second semester. And most of them were probably in the same boat that I was, they had already volunteered to go into the Army or the Navy or the Air Force. So come June of that year, the official notification come. Probably 30 June, first week of June, to report to such and such a place. I had already reported to, I think, a place called Fort Des Moines, which was in Des Moines, and had a physical exam.

John: Okay.

Aix: I had already gone through that process. So the call up came then, early in June. I think they were routing me to get on a train there in Marshalltown. The Great Western came through there. Got on the train and went by train to Shepherd Field, which was in north Texas. Shepherd Field, Texas. And that was where we had basic training. Six weeks of regular basic training. It was, I think, the same basic training that everybody coming into the Army went through. Although that was an air base at the time. There may have been non-Air Force people getting basic training there. It was six weeks of basic training. We went in there as buck privates. Not air cadets or anything at that time. As I recall, we got buck privates pay which was probably \$19 a month, or something like that.

John: Good money.

Aix: It wasn't enough to do much on. It didn't make much difference because we didn't have any thing, I don't think we ever got off the base. We were confined to the base for the six weeks while we were there. We did close order drill every day and physical training for an hour or two every day. And that was about it. Physical training and close order drill marching. I don't remember that we did much else for six weeks. The end of six weeks, we were put on trains and went up to, a small group of us, probably twenty or thirty of us, went up to Nashville, Tennessee. They had a program there called College Training Detachments, CTD. It was called College Training Detachments. That was strictly an Air Force program, as I recall. But they had that going at colleges around the country. And just for the purpose of sort of integrating the youngsters who were coming in as buck privates, basically in the Army or the Air Force, into the Air Force routine. We became known as cadets. Air Force Cadets. They outfitted us with uniforms which were not buck private uniforms but sort of in-between. We had blue trousers with yellow stripes and we had cadet t-shirts to wear to class and so on. It was sort of a college experience. We would spend half a day going to class. We took classes in English, and in history, and in mathematics, and we got some algebra and calculus. And a little bit about the Army and the Air Force, and what was expected of us. So I spent six weeks there, and I played in the, played the drums in the band there. Army band. I had played the drums in high school. And in junior college, actually. And in several different places. So when they asked for musicians at that College Training Detachment, I volunteered. I said, "I played drums." "Fine, you are a band member." And you don't have to do any guard duty or KP.

John: Oh, that was a good deal.



Aix: That was a good deal. Sort of a pleasant interlude there for six weeks. Not too tough. The only thing -- I had the opportunity to learn quite a bit there about the various classes they were teaching. They had good teachers. And we did get off the post occasionally after the first two or three weeks we were there. Friday or Saturday, I don't know. I don't remember that I ever went downtown in Nashville to do anything, but I remember I went to church on Sunday morning, off campus, to a Methodist church. Not too far away, to go to church. At the end of six weeks, they simply loaded us onto trucks and transferred us from the college area, which was Peabody College, a pretty well-known college that's just across the street from Vanderbilt. Nice part of Nashville. And part of our training there had, in addition to class work, and physical training and marching, we did get an opportunity to get in ten hours flying time.

John: Okay.

Aix: They trucked us out in the country to some small airport out there and they had couple dozen old single engine planes, those old tail-dragging planes out there. And we'd get in them and had a two-seater instructor with us. Take off and fly around and do all kinds of things. Even before we were through, we were doing stalls and spins.

John: Oh, okay.

Aix: We never did solo. There was always an instructor with us. We had that opportunity and I appreciated that. The first time I ever had the opportunity to fly a plane.

John: Yeah. Sure.

Aix: And, I don't know, I didn't know whether I was going to make it to pilot or not. I had a tendency to get lost. We'd take off from that little airport and the pilot would know where we were going, so we'd go several miles out over the woods and the rivers out there around Nashville. And do, if we were on the ground, where would you go? If the motor dropped out? And fly circles around that intersection. And fly corners, and all that. And after about an hour, he'd say, "Well, take her back to the airport." Well, I couldn't recognize anything out there. "One of the things you got to learn, you know. You got to be aware of which direction we've come from the airport and how far out we were, and all this kind of stuff." I don't think I ever really completely got to the point where I could identify exactly how to get back to the airport. Well, then they trucked us from Peabody College, with our barracks bags and all that too, to an air base or some kind of a base. I think it was an air base. Just outside of Nashville. Which was called a classification center. They took cadets from all around, actually, and

brought them in there. And they gave us about a week or two of testing. Psychological testing, and motor testing, and all that kind of stuff. They wanted to know if we had the mechanical aptitude to fly airplanes or do other things. And the classifications you went out of there with were, they were classifying cadets either as pilots, navigators, or bombardiers. At the end of the two or three week session there, in addition to going through a complete physical work-up, and dental work, and, as I recall, they called me into the dentist one day, and got me in the chair, and the dentist drilled about eight or nine fillings in my teeth. And, boy, that was strange. My dad was a dentist, and he has been taking care of my teeth for eighteen or nineteen years, and here, they bring me in, and within a couple weeks, they fill nine teeth. But they were wanting to insure that you could go through the next three or four years, I guess, whatever you got into, without having to have a dentist, because you probably wouldn't see a dentist where we were going.

John: Yeah. Yeah. Right.

Aix: So, after all the testing, they called me in and they said, "Okay, here's what we are going to do with you." And, of course, I was expecting to be classified as a pilot and go to pilot school. And they said, "Well, for the three things that we classify people, you could probably do any one of them. You probably would make a pilot, but we have a big need right now for bombardiers. And, therefore, we're shipping you to bombardier school. Eventually." I was a little disappointed.

John: Sure.

Aix: For two weeks. But then, I got over it. And they shipped us out immediately to what they called pre-flight school. And that was a pre-flight school that was in Santa Anna, California. We spent about six or seven weeks out there at Santa Anna. We did get, after a couple weeks out there, we did get to go off base, which was nice. Go into Santa Anna, and we did. I think I went into Los Angeles one weekend for a day or a night. But it was basically physical training and about half a day of class work. So we got some more math, algebra and calculus type of math, and we learned Morse code, and had to pass a test in Morse code. And I can't recall anything else. And after that pre-flight was over, they shipped us to Kingman, Arizona, to aerial gunnery school. So here we were, a group of Air Force cadets, gone through CTD, gone through pre-flight school, and now we were in gunnery school. Gunnery school, we were there for six weeks. Spent six weeks there. Kingman was, and still is I think, a horrible place to spend time in. I think I got off base at Kingman once or twice. I didn't really want to. Once I was off, I really didn't want to go there again. It was one of those places. You know, there was more things to do, like movies, meetings, on the base than there was to do in town. Small town. At Kingman, we got experience in automated things like,

well, first of all, we had a lot of training in the .50 caliber machine gun. How to shoot it, how to tear it apart and put it back together again. Actually, I think one of the criteria for passing through was to be able to do it blindfolded. Feel around and get the pieces.

John: And not have any parts left over. Right.

Aix: And they had mock-ups of the turrets that you might get into on planes, basically bomber planes. They would simulate an upper turret or a nose turret or a belly turret or whatever, but there were the two machine guns and you would control the turret by turning the guns and the turret would go with you. And there was the bombsights. One particular sight had a machine gun loaded, had a little circle in there and you put that on and fired the gun and the other turrets were, you had to locate your target by sensing how far would you lead that target if it was here, or here, or here.

John: Okay.

Aix: Generally, we learned that if you were in a bomber and the fighters were attacking you, they would come from above and off to one side behind you, and they would follow a certain path where they could fire at you, because fighter planes had pretty much to fire straight ahead, so they would come in and get on your tail this way. And we had to learn how to judge how far to lead a plane, if it was out here, or out here, or if it got on your tail to shoot straight at it. So that was part of the training there. We got to shoot a lot of skeet, shotguns.

John: Yeah. Learning how to lead.

Aix: How to lead. Clay pigeons, at first shoot straight out. We'd shoot straight out. And we'd know where they were going. And they had a skeet range, I remember it was across the railroad tracks. And we'd get on the back of a truck, flat-bed truck. There would be about six of us, and a couple stations there. With shotguns, twelve gauge shotguns. And we'd get at that station and they'd run us around about a quarter mile track, and about every hundred yards there would be a little shack there, and they'd shoot the pigeons out from there. And you didn't know where they were gonna go. But you had to be ready to get that shotgun and shoot the pigeons. Kind of fun, actually.

John: Yeah.

Aix: That was part of the training. Along the end, they did take us up in B-17's, the Flying Fortress, and shoot .50 caliber machine guns out of the waist guns. To a sock pulled by a fighter plane out there, about a couple hundred yards out. They

just flew in a straight line, and we flew in a straight line. But we were firing real .50 caliber bullets, and the bullets had a little paint on the nose of the bullets. Red or green or yellow or purple. You were assigned a particular color to shoot, I don't know, fifty or a hundred rounds. And you would shoot at that target, and they'd get back down, and how many of your color hit that target? They had some sort of a record of whether you were doing anything or not.

John: Okay.

Aix: So we did that two or three times, not with any great regularity. But near the end of our training that is something we did. So we graduated from there in six weeks with completion of aerial gunnery school. And that's the same school that a lot of Air Force people coming through had aerial gunnery school, and then they would go directly to a crew, a B-17 crew or a B-24 crew. Maybe a B-25 crew, as an aerial gunner. And they shipped overseas. But we got there and went to bombardier school. Sent to Demming, New Mexico, for bombardier school. And Demming was, probably not a whole lot better a place to be than Kingman, Arizona. Other than the air base there, and the fact that it was about a fifty mile drive from El Paso, and across the border to a little Mexican town across from El Paso.

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

John: Go ahead.

Aix: I think we were close to four months in Demming for bombardier school. And the one thing, negative thing, I guess, that I could say that I remember about that was that, after I had completed the number of bombs dropped near the end of the program—I think we had to drop like a hundred bombs for a record, and they had them all recorded to make sure you could hit a target, and all that—after I completed all the bombs that I was supposed to drop, they sent me up with a group of cadets who were still dropping bombs. Had some to drop. And I was along as the camera man. And there was a camera man in the back of that, on every flight, and they would open a little trap door down there and have a sixteen millimeter camera. And he'd get in there, and every time a bomb would go out, you would film that. Well, for that particular mission, I was the camera man for all the others. And when we got back to the base, they came out and said, "Well, you just dropped some bombs on a target down there where there were people working."

John: Oh, Jesus. Wow.

Aix: Well, it really sounds bad and it could have been very bad, but fortunately, you

had just about had to hit an individual with a bomb in order to do any damage. Apparently there was no damage. I don't know whether the bombs dropped on target or near target or what. No damage, but it did cause a lot of commotion among the officials there.

John: Sure.

Aix: And they called me in since I didn't drop the bombs but I was taking the pictures. And they said, "Didn't you see that there were some human beings down there that you were dropping bombs on?" I said, "No, that didn't enter my mind. I was just back there, sort of along for the ride, and every time a bomb would go out, I'd get in there and take a picture of the target." So, that happened, and I think they gave me a little penalty there, which they called walking tours. Every weekend, instead of going to El Paso, I'd report to the headquarters and shoulder a rifle and march up and down.

John: Walking tours.

Aix: Walking tours. So for the last couple weekends in Demming, I was walking tours.

John: Okay.

Aix: Anyway, after the training was over, they commissioned me as a second lieutenant bombardier, and I think I had ten days at home. Leave. And then report to Muroc, California. Muroc, California, north in the desert outside of Los Angeles. Mojave Desert.

John: How do you spell Muroc?

Aix: Muroc, m-u-r-o-c. And the air base out there was sort of located down in the dry lake beds. I think they are still flying out of there, some of the space ships probably land there. There is nothing there but hard sand. So that's where we first organized as a crew, ten man crew. Four officers, pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, and navigator, and ten, or six enlisted men who were gunners, flight chief, radio man, and so on.

John: What kind of an aircraft?

Aix: B-24s. We were assigned there to a B-24 training program, and I think we spent, I don't know, at least four months there, maybe more. We were there quite a while, I know that. And the training there consisted mainly of going in B-24s, going up, they had bombing ranges around in there, and dropping various types of bombs on the bombing range from different altitudes, all the way from five hundred feet up

to ten thousand feet. Again, the only negative thing that happened there was, it happened on our first mission. Flying the B-24 after we had been there about the first three or four days, they said, "Okay, this is your mission. Your crew is going together for the first time. Go out there to the air strip. Here is your B-24. You climb in it and take off and go out to X bombing range, and drop fifteen or twenty hundred pound bombs out there." And it so happened, that that was a night mission. Not daylight, but night. So we got our first introduction as a crew flying in a B-24 at night.

John: Oh, wow.

Aix: And the pilot and the co-pilot handled it pretty well. And we all got in and got to our stations, and I got up there in the nose, and could see out. Here was the bomb sight, everything was fine. So we took off. Flew out to the bombing range. I could see it out there through the nose. It was all plexiglass. Here is the target we got to go for. So, I said to the pilot, "Okay, there is the target right out ahead. You are going to switch controls to the bomb sight, to control the plane. You are going to be over that target in a minute or two. You need to drop the first bomb." I said, "Fine." And in the nose up there, the bomb sight is right here in front of you, and over here are two levers. One of them is to open the bomb bay doors, and the other is the salvo lever. If you are ever in trouble and you want to get all the bombs out of there, you pull that salvo lever. That was a little different from the configuration in the training things we'd had. They didn't never talk about salvoing bombs in training school. You can open the bomb bay doors but, generally, I didn't even do that, you know. Somebody else would be before you, and maybe the pilots opened them. I don't know. But anyway, on this particular mission, we were approaching that target, the pilot says, "Okay, bombardier, take over. We're about to the target." I says, "Fine." I reach over here, grab the lever, and pull that lever. And the bombs all went right out through the bottom of the plane. I had pulled the salvo lever rather than the open bomb bay lever.

John: Oh, boy.

Aix: Now, that should not have happened. It was dark. The light was not very good in there, and here are two levers over here. And I had to make a choice of them. One of them was green and one of them was red. And I'm not sure I was aware of that at the time. I was aware there were two of them, and I was reaching over there to open the doors, and I reached over there and grabbed one and pulled it, and nothing happened. And, as I recall, I grabbed it with both hands and gave it a jerk, and that is when the bombs went out. I had reached for the salvo. Now, come to find out later on, you are not supposed to be able to salvo bombs without the bomb bay doors open, mechanically it was not possible.

John: Yeah. I was going to ask.

Aix: But I did it.

John: Did they break through, or what?

Aix: They all went right out the bomb bay doors. You know, they went out, kind of like that. That plane still flew. We went back and landed and looked and all that stuff. And the officers all came out. And the generals and everybody, "Tch tch tch." How bad was it? We were, well, the next three or four days, there was a lot of paper work going on. And recriminations, and all that. Why it happened. How it happened. And all that. Called us back in and said, "Okay, you are cleared to go. We'll send you out in the morning, and we'll have an instructor go up there with you. An instructor pilot is going to see you through all this. So we did. Got through the rest of the, that was the only mishap we had all the time there. The good thing was, about the end of the training, four months, we were still going up there and dropping bombs from ten, fifteen, twenty thousand feet. A little wooden shack down there on the ground, about the size of a small hot house. And they sent an officer, who was a major, I believe, who wanted to get in his flying hours. He went up with us. He was kind of checking us out, I believe. And he never did say anything officially about that. Anyway, the major went up with us. And here we went up to the target. I think we were going up there for a special mission, they put a five hundred pound fire bomb in there. That was the only time, the first time I'd ever actually dropped an explosive bomb. And it was a fire bomb. And we were going to drop that bomb from ten thousand feet. So things went along. We got a certain target out there, and we got up to the target. And as I started working over the bomb sight, the major comes up there and started looking over my shoulder. I think he was trying to check everything out. Like I was having problems. So, I zeroed in on that target, had about thirty seconds or so to make the run. And out went that five hundred pound bomb. Very big. I was watching it go down, and the major back there was watching it go down, and it hit that little target right on, right in the middle of the target. Boom! Blew out fire down there and, boy, that major was more excited than I was. He jumped up and down and whacked me on the back. First time I ever seen that happen. Considering that you are up at ten thousand feet and you are aiming at a little five feet square building down there. I don't think he had ever seen it, and I didn't ever expect it to happen. My circular error in bombardier school down at Demming, that is the feet away from the center of the target, average, was somewhere around a hundred feet.

John: Oh, that's good. Wow. That height, that speed.

Aix: The minimum for passing the bombardier school was a hundred and ten feet. Had to drop like a hundred bombs on different occasions with an error average of no

more than a hundred and ten feet. Mine was not really good, but it was not all that bad. So the good thing about Muroc, when we weren't flying, we were pretty much on our own. They had movies and shows, live entertainment on base, they also had limousines parked at the gate. You could jump in the limousine and be in Los Angeles, where most of us would go to Hollywood. Be there in an hour or an hour and a half. And generally we'd fly three or four days and then have a day or a day and a half off, so we could go into Los Angeles, or into Hollywood. That is usually where we'd go. Spend the night and be back out there the next day. Lots of good entertainment out there. Options for entertainment. And so we had quite a lengthy training experience there. It was generally good training. Finished up. They were ready to ship us out and they called us together, and they put us on a train. We went on the train up to San Francisco. Hamilton Field, air base up there. And we were just there for a couple weeks. I spent New Year's Eve, I recall that, downtown San Francisco. Streets were loaded, and here we were, servicemen about to go overseas. So you know, we could kiss any girl on the street with no problems. About a week after that, then we went on a train again and went up north to Seattle, Washington. Put us on a troop transport up in Seattle, and we took off into the Pacific Ocean, and we were headed for Hawaii. That was a rough trip. And we took, ordinarily you could go by ship even and get to Hawaii in five or six days. But I think we were two or three weeks on that troop ship.

John: Oh, wow.

Aix: We took the great circle route. We didn't go directly, but we went this way. And they told us that we were doing that to avoid the potential of having submarines, bringing in submarines out there on the direct route. And they also wanted to get some training for the ship member crews on firing guns.

John: Okay.

Aix: So we took – it was rough. The ship would go up and Bang! We had many days of that. It was not comfortable. And we were in bunks stacked up about six high. And we all ate in the same mess hall. And the majority of us for the first three or four days after eating a meal would go for the railings and lose the meal. We got to Hawaii and immediately transferred us to a plane and they flew us over to the island of Kauai. And we went to, directly to the air field over there called Barking Sands, on the island of Kauai. And that was not a great place to be but we'd been in worse places. We were able to get a Jeep and we could travel part way around the island, anyway, to see the water falls and the rain forests. And various other things. And we did have a little bit of training in ditching a plane in the water and getting into your life boats, and that kind of stuff while we were there. That was kind of interesting because they took us out a few hundred yards, and they did have men stationed on the ship with rifles. And we said, "What are those for?"



And they said, "Well, that is to shoot the sharks if the sharks come 'round."

John: Yeah. Sure.

Aix: And then after we had been there about two or three weeks, and we knew they were going to put us on some sort of transport and fly us out to where we would fly our bombing missions, they chose our crew and a couple of others to go on search missions. It seemed an Air Force general, his name was Harman, General Harman, at the time, had disappeared somewhere out over the Pacific on his way out. I don't know whether it was on his way out, but I think he was on his way out from Hawaii. And he just disappeared, and they didn't know really where, but they chose our plane and a couple of others to go out there. We went first to Johnson Island, and then I think we spent one night down on Kwajalein Island. And we would just spend about eight hours a day going out over the ocean and flying patterns there. There were about three or four planes, about a hundred yards apart. Flying at five hundred feet. Four or five o'clock in the afternoon we'd come back in, either to Kwajalein or into Johnson Island, and we were doing that for five or six days. One day a plane that was flying out on our right dipped a wing and went into the ocean. I never did find out exactly why that happened. The crew, apparently, most of the crew, if not all of the crew did get out, because we could see them down there in life boats and we circled them, and dropped them some equipment and called Coast Guard or radar. Somebody came and got them. We circled them for about an hour or so but we had to head back to Johnson Island, I guess it was, because our gas was running out, but we knew that help was on the way. And they did get back. We jumped on air transports and they flew us, first to Guam, and we were in Guam for just two or three days. We got on another plane and they flew us to Saipan. We were in there for two or three days and another plane picked us up and flew us to an island down in the Caroline Island group called Anguar. It was just across the bay from Peleliu. A ten mile bay there, and we could see Peleliu, and the marines were over there. And they had a coral air strip there on Anguar, and they had B-24s. It was our bomb group, and they had been bombing the Philippine Islands from there and some of the islands like Truk and Markus where the Japanese were. And so it wasn't but a few days after we landed there then we were off. I think we had two or three training missions before we went in. The pilots got accustomed to the air strip. And they assigned us a plane to fly in the bomb group, missions dropping bombs on one of the islands up to the north. One of them, I know, we bombed an island called Koror and it was one we bombed more than any, and another up there where the Japanese had a naval base called Babelthuap. Both of those were up north of Peleliu. And just a few hundred miles, maybe not over forty-five to an hour to make the flight up there and back. So we flew, I don't know, four or five missions like that. Some people referred to them as milk runs and they may have been, but we did get anti-aircraft fire on those missions up there, and while it was not heavy, it was pretty

accurate.

John: Oh, yeah?

Aix: We'd get over on the bomb runs over the target, we could usually see off to one side or the other, I could see it pretty plainly, because I was up there looking out. Boom. Boom. Boom. Fortunately, none of them hit us. They did hit one of our planes while I was there. It went down, landed in the ocean just off of the island there. And so far as we knew, they were all probably all died in the crash there. The bombardier on that plane was a friend of ours. He went through training with us. His name was Geeshe, Robert Geeshe. He was from Chicago. He was captured by the Japanese. Not real sure. But the word was that he probably was executed by the Japanese there. And that was about the extent of the loss. We were generally flying in a group, twenty-four planes. 494th Bomb Group was our assignment. There were four squadrons. 494th was known as "Kelly's Cobras." I don't know if we had a patch for that, or not. But that was a patch with a cobra on there and a bomb in his mouth, or something like that. So we were "Kelly's Cobras." We were the 866th Bomb Group. There was 865, 66, 67. No, 64, 65, 66, 67. We were the 866. And generally, I'd say, we'd fly missions, there would be six planes from each squadron. There would be six from here, six from here, twenty-four planes all together would go to a mission. So, we would go up to these islands and bomb. The missions would hit those islands at ten o'clock in the morning. The raids. We'd get up early to get braced on the weather and on the conditions, and what heading and what speed, and all that. Coincidental or something, but we would hit the target at ten o'clock in the morning, and we would hit the target basically on the same heading every morning. Coming in from east to west, or west to east. I'm not sure what the heading was, but it was the same heading. And we all thought that was kind of strange that we would fly up there where they would be shooting anti-aircraft guns at us. They knew exactly when we were coming and which heading we were coming on.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Aix: We never, never really got an answer for that, but it didn't, that is where it happened. One bomb trip that we started we aborted shortly after takeoff because there was something wrong with one of the engines. Engine went out, or something, so we circled and came back in. On another trip, we were having some trouble, I'm not sure in remembering whether it was with the plane or whether it was with the bombs in the bomb bay were not properly armed, or something. Anyway, called the head of the bomb group up in the lead plane and told him what it was. And he said, "Well, you are already behind us. You are not going to make it. Come in alone." So we did make that bomb run alone with nobody else. And that time, that is the only time, actually, that I flew a bomb mission and did

the entire bombing myself, individually through the bomb sight. Lined it up and worked it so that the bombs went out at the particular time we were down there. Otherwise, on all the other bomb trips, we would be in a group and the lead bomber would fly over the target and the pilots would take us over the target. They know the target. And we would look through the bomb sight and beside, by the cross-hair in there, just exactly when the bombs would go out. On some missions, there were a couple of missions—I'll mention one in a little bit—that we toggled our bombs after the lead bombardier had dropped his bombs. We would drop our bombs. We would not work the bomb sight. We left the island of Anguar after a couple of months down there and we went on a troop ship. We had not been assigned permanently to a plane yet. The planes were going to be flown up to Okinawa. We were going to Okinawa. We had invaded Okinawa but it was not secure yet. And we were going to go in when it was secured. So we went from Anguar up to a little place called Ulithi Atoll.

John: Yep. Yep.

Aix: Real nice looking little place. Rock islands sticking up around a pretty big harbor in there, and there must have been a hundred ships in there waiting to go to Okinawa. And ours was just one ship. I think, I know I went ashore one time. We had hot dogs and beer on shore, or something like that. I think the officers were the only ones that went on the shore. The enlisted men probably didn't go. But we were in there for about a week or ten days. Just doing nothing. And then they said "Got an air base up there that is secure enough. You are going to go up." So we went up, the troop ship. Parked in there, just off the air base. We were going in there. The planes had been flown up there to Yontan Air Base in Okinawa. That was about in the middle, north and south. And it was kind of up, it was already a strong air base. Coral runway a couple miles long. Sharp cliff drop-offs on both ends. And we started flying off of there just two or three days after we went in. B-24s were already there. And I think we may have been on the first mission that our group flew out of there, and it happened to be to Shanghai, China.

John: Okay. That's a reach.

Aix: We thought we were going up there to bomb Japan but we were going in there to bomb Shanghai. Couldn't figure that out, exactly, although Shanghai was occupied by the Japanese and they had troops and manufacturing going on there.

John: A big port.

Aix: So we were quite excited about going to Shanghai. We got our briefing. The whole bomb group was going over there. I think maybe some other bomb groups would be meeting us and going in. We got briefed, we were going in, it was about

a six or eight hour flight over there to Shanghai, and six hours back. They briefed us and said the weather was going to be uncertain, but go on over there. We got over the target, or a hundred or so miles out, and the target was socked in completely by clouds. So the order came back, we were going to go in there at ten thousand feet. We'd be flying into the clouds. There would be clouds below us, and there would be clouds above us, but you can see one another, and we have in the lead ship of the group we have a radar operator with a radar bomb sight, and he is going to toggle his bombs out of there at the proper time. And you see his bombs go out, your bombs go out. So that is how we dropped our bombs over Shanghai. We did not, we were not able to see the bombs landing. We had no idea. They may have landed in the river, or anywhere. We did, while we were on that bomb run, there was a big orange flashing in the sky somewhere around us. Nobody knew exactly what had happened. We found out after we got back that a ship, one of the air ships in our group, had been hit by anti-aircraft fire and just simply exploded.

John: Oh, wow. Oh, man.

Aix: The crew members, apparently, most all of them got out and parachuted down. And most of them eventually got back to Okinawa. The bombardier on that plane was a good friend of mine. His name was Hawes. Everything in the Army and Air Force was done by alphabetical order. My name was Harrison, so your name was Hawes, you were probably pretty close to the Harrisons. Same thing with that kid that got shot down over Koror. His name was Geeshee, and the Gs were pretty close to the Hs, so I had gone through all the way with him. Knew him pretty well. But Hawes got out. He landed in the water, down there. Yangtze River I guess it was. Landed in the water. He said he could see the little boats, the Japanese coming out to pick up the two or three in the water. He made, he got out of his suit, harness, everything, and made for the shore. And got on the shore. And got down in some mud, rice paddies or something, and he said he could hear them searching for him all night. But they didn't get him, and he got up the next day and started out. Came across some Japanese farmers, apparently. And we had little flags that we carried with us that said "I am an American Air Force so-and-so, and you will get a reward if you get me back to the American base." So he showed them the flag, and they took him in tow. And got him down to the coast line and put him on a boat back to Okinawa.

John: Oh, he was lucky. He was fortunate. Let me flip this—

**[End of Side B of Tape 1.]**

John: Okay.

- Aix: The other unusual thing about Hawes when he came back to the group, his hair had turned white.
- John: Wow.
- Aix: White. He had white hair. Otherwise pretty much the same, but he recounted his experiences to us and you could understand it was a real experience for him. Well, that was our first mission. After that, about every third or fourth day we would fly another mission, generally into the southern portion of Japan, somewhere. We had a little tent that had been erected there. It was all they built for us to get into. The four officers lived together, in a group. We had a mess hall here and we all ate together. Another bombardier from nearby and myself had got busy and we dug a little hole just outside of our tents, and we covered it with dirt and rocks and everything. That was going to be our air shelter. In case they dropped bombs on us. I don't know how well it would have worked. It was probably pretty small. And we were backed up to the air base, so we were backed up to a cliff. Several hundred feet actually. And there were a bunch of caves out there behind it. And they had told us that if we were in real danger of being bombed, we could make for those caves. Probably be a smart thing to do. We had, we were in fear, being there, of the Japanese coming down and bombing us. And there were rumors that they were ready to use poison gas on the troops, because they were afraid of Japan being entered into. Things like that. So we were a little fearful at the time. Not so much of the missions, bomb group, or being shot down as to what Japan might do to us down there because they were sort of facing the last resort. And they were being closed in on. Well, we had one mission. We only flew about five missions up over Japan before the war ended. One in particular, our group was assembling just south of the main island of Japan with two or three other groups. We were circling there. And as we were, probably a hundred bombers circling around trying to get into some kind of a formation to go up to the target, about six or eight Japanese fighter planes came out of the sky and started making runs on us. So all of our gunners in the crew got some real experience shooting at Japanese planes coming in. Far as we knew, at the time, we did not get hit. When we got back to our base, Yontan Air Base, and looked over the plane, there were three or four bullet holes in the fuselage of the plane. We didn't know that. But it happened. A little close call.
- John: Yeah.
- Aix: About the next thing of importance to recall, I think, is the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima. Well, maybe I ought to backtrack just a little bit on that. Just before that, a week or two, our bomb group was assigned to go up and drop bombs on some ships that were left from the Japanese Navy. Apparently there was a battleship and some cruisers and destroyers locked into the Japan Sea, the Sea of

Japan. Just south of Kyushu, there. And there were three or four ships, and they were locked in there, and our people evidently didn't know exactly what to do with them. They didn't know whether to send in our Navy or what. So they said, well, let's send up our Air Force and drop some bombs on them. So our bomb group was assigned along with several other groups to go up there and see if we couldn't bomb those. And it turned out that they had a lot of fire power. And the number of planes, returns, on one of those, maybe the first day up there, only about fifty percent of the planes came back.

John: Oh, wow. Oh.

Aix: That went up over there.

John: All from anti-aircraft fire from ships?

Aix: And they sent us, sent a group up there the second day. They had a little better return. But I think out of our group of twenty-four planes, probably five or six did not come back. Now we were willing to go up there. Fortunately, we didn't. They decided after a couple of days of that that we were really not doing any good in bombing ships. We were bombing I think from ten thousand feet, I think. Those ships could pretty well hit from there. They did hit one crew, one plane went down, and it went over land. And landed there and they were taken into custody there by Japanese soldiers and transported into the nearest town, which happened to be Hiroshima.

John: Oh, oh.

Aix: So the next thing that we were aware of, the atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. We didn't know at the time that our people were in there. We learned that later. But, of course, we were elated that such a thing had happened 'cause that meant, for all purposes, the war was over. We didn't have to worry about the Japanese coming down here and gassing us, or bombing us, or whatever. We did something we couldn't quite figure out a day or two later, after the bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, we were assigned another bombing mission. So we went up there with our B-24 group and bombed a town in southern Japan. The name of the town was Kurumi (?). And there was a manufacturing plant in that town that they felt we better bomb. So we went up there and bombed the place with hundred pound fire bombs. Pretty well, I think, burned them out. That was our last mission. A day or two later they dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. The only thing I can remember about that last mission, in addition to going up there and dropping fire bombs, and wondering why we did it, is the sky was completely red with dust from the Hiroshima bombing. We got in over southern Japan, and it was everywhere from horizon to horizon. Red dust. So, the war ended a few days after

that, officially. And we stayed there at Yontan Air Base for several weeks. They started shipping people home. They said, "You people haven't been overseas long enough or flown enough missions to go home. You are going to have to stay in a while. Probably you are going to have to go up and be part of the people who are taking care of the Japanese." So another two or three weeks, they called me in and said, "Well, what would you like to do? When you get up to Japan? We're occupying those people and we'll have need for all kinds of jobs up there." I thought it over. I really didn't have any great preference. I didn't know. I looked down the list. Here is Special Service. I looked at that and I said, "Well, they do recreation and PXs." That looked pretty good. I said, "I'd like to be a Special Service officer." So they put me in a little two-seater air plane and flew me up. Landed in Tachikowa, which is just outside of Yokohama. And from there, next morning, they put me on another little two-seater airplane and took off. And about thirty minutes later, I landed down here. And that was Atsugi, just outside of Yokohama down there. About a forty-five minute trip, between Yokohama and Mount Fuji back there in the distance. So, I became a Special Service officer, one of about six there at Atsugi Air Base. Walked in there the next morning to the office, Special Service officer, I think the guy may have been a major. The guy came out and shook my hand and said, "You're my replacement. Welcome. I'm leaving this dump in two or three days." So that is what happened. The whole group that had been running Special Service there for a month or so, since the end of the war, had put in their time and they were shipping back. And there were only one or two there, I guess I had outranked them or outdated them. They made me the chief the first day. So I spent a few weeks. First off, I was Special Service, or the PX officer. In charge of the base PX. Sounded great, but I really didn't know what I was doing. And I think after a week, somebody else, maybe the base commander, may have recognized that I didn't know what I was doing with the PX. And he says, "We've got another man coming in. We're going to make him PX officer." Matter of fact, after two or three weeks, they did get in a major or a colonel or somebody to be the main Special Service officer. I was put in mainly in duty of going into Yokohama and picking up supplies, including Japanese beer. All kinds of athletic supplies, and so on. I was made the manager of a baseball team, which was organized to represent the Air Force in the Special Pacific Olympics. They were going down in southern Japan, and I did spend about a week taking the team down and participating, coaching that baseball team. Pretty good duty.

John: Yeah.

Aix: So up there at Atsugi Air Base, I was scheduling movies for different units. Going in and picking up the films, going to other bases and picking up equipment. And so I spent about two or three months there, at Atsugi Air Base, before they decided I had enough time overseas to get sent back home. Said, "You're coming

up. Get your bags packed. Report down to Yokohama.” I guess we took off from there. Put me on a ship. Back home was a pretty nice trip. It was a troop transport but they did have special quarters for officers. Had a special dining room for the officers mess. We sat down and pulled up to the table with white table cloths. And we were on that ship about two weeks. Made the full trip all the way back to Portland, Oregon. Came in the mouth of the Columbia River, there.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Aix: Went up. Spend almost a day going up the Columbia River to Portland. Disembarked there and spent maybe three or four days there in Portland and then shipping to various places. And they said, “You’re going back to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to be mustered out. And we’re gonna a troop train ready to go in a few days. Would you like to be commander of that troop train?” No way would I like to be commander of a troop train. I said, “I’m here to get out of the service.” So they managed to find somebody else. But it was about a three day trip, I think, back to Fort Leavenworth, and two or three days there of paperwork. Turning in all your stuff and getting whatever you were allowed to take home with you. And that was about it. I was out of the service. Had about, I don’t know, thirty or forty days leave time that had been built up before I was officially out. So I was back home with all my uniforms and everything. And I was determined that I really was not going to do anything until I was officially mustered out of the service. I goofed off for a while.

John: Well, you had that coming.

Aix: And decided I didn’t want to go to college. The GI Bill looked pretty good at that time and visiting with some of the people I had meet in bombardier school, some other people I had met in Special Service out there in Japan, they convinced me I ought to go to physical education school, recreation. I went to the University of Illinois, Champaign. Bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree there.

John: Okay.

Aix: Taught school one year in Galva, Illinois. Went down to Oklahoma A & M College the following year. That was 1950. As an assistant professor of health and physical education. Taught school down there for thirty-six years.

John: That’s great.

Aix: After about six years, I took sabbatical leave. Went to Michigan State University and after two or three years, I had a Ph. D. So I went back with a Ph. D and I was, by that time, I had been promoted to full professor. So I spent most of my life



there, most of my work time, as a full professor.

John: Great.

Aix: And it was pretty good. Enjoyed it down there. Had a good life. Raised a family. Nice place to raise a family.

John: A question I ask most guys. You were a young man, your whole life was ahead of you. And then this thing happened, and you got pulled out and you were put in harm's way. What was your reaction to all that? Thinking back about it.

Aix: Well, it wasn't surprising at all. Because of the situation in Europe, you know. Everybody was— They were bombing the heck out of England. Submarines were downing ships and it was just a very fragile situation. So I was aware that we were probably going to be in a war situation.

John: Okay.

Aix: And there I was, in school. For me it was a good situation. I still had until I was eighteen. Even after I was eighteen, I had the opportunity to finish some school. And by that time I had the opportunity to enlist and get into the Air Force, which was kind of what I wanted. I was not shocked or disappointed at all. I had no real, nothing waiting for me in Marshalltown, Iowa, where I had been brought up and gone to school, to build a career there. And I really didn't know what I wanted to do for a career at the time. I didn't -- I was pretty close to Ames, Iowa, where the University of Iowa was, and I might have gone to school over there, but I had no idea what I would be. So it was not a shock, I wasn't disappointed in anything.

John: What about veterans organizations? VFW? Legion? Did you join those?

Aix: I'm a life member of the American Legion. As soon as I got to Oklahoma is where I joined the Legion.

John: Okay. Okay.

Aix: And after ten years or so, I became a life member. I have been.

John: What about reunions and that? Did you ever get together with anybody?

Aix: Yes. We have bomb group reunions, and I have been pretty regular since about six or eight years after the war. Started the bomb group reunion, I think it was the year, well, it was the second reunion that we went to, officially, as a group. And corresponded with the crew members, and said, "Let's all go to St. Louis." And

we did, and I think we had at least nine out of our ten crew members were present at that first reunion. And we have elected officers, and they carried on having group reunions every, once a year ever since then. And I have gone to, probably, five of them. We had our next biggest one in Colorado Springs back ten or fifteen years ago. Our pilot lived in Colorado Springs and he encouraged everybody who was left to come, and we had six or seven at that time. A couple of them had died. We had six or seven. I think it was all of the remaining living crew members got together at that time. I have been going to some in more recent years. The last one about five years ago. And we have a newsletter. Get three or four newsletters a year and they give some history in there, and who has died, and all that. But don't go to group reunions any more because I don't know anybody.

John: Okay. This is a remarkable story. You have a tremendous memory, too. Yeah, I spent 1958 on Okinawa. Long after you. Yontan was your base? That was just an air field. I think they had a few helicopters there. Kadena was the big air force base. B-52s were there. Well, look, I am going to wrap this up. This is a wonderful story. Anything else you might want to get onto before we—

Aix: No. Just to say that I have never been through the whole process of my own early days and growing up, and then going right into the war. I've been through, we have our family history where I've put on tape, video tape, actually, a family history of growing up, and going to college.

John: Oh, that's great.

Aix: Both my wife and I did that here in Madison a few years ago. We have a daughter in Madison. So—

John: Well, I'm going to shut this off.

**[End of Interview.]**