

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

EDWARD C. LOOKER

First Lieutenant, United States Army Air Corps, World War II

2005

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Looker, Edward C., (1920-2012). Oral History Interview, 2005.

User Copy: 1 audio cassettes (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 audio cassettes (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Edward Looker, a Wisconsin native, discusses his early years growing up in Manitowoc and Shawano (Wisconsin) and New London (Connecticut) and his service as a member of the 397th Bombardment Group of the 9th Air Force of the Army Air Corps during World War II. He mentions his basic training in Oklahoma and flight school in San Antonio (Texas) as well as the special training he received as a B-26 Marauder pilot in Lake Charles (Louisiana). After describing crossing the Atlantic Ocean aboard the *Queen Mary*, he goes into detail about the technical specifics of the B-26 and the twenty-four bombing missions he flew in Germany while stationed in France in late 1944. He describes one mission in particular for which he received a Distinguished Unit Citation for destroying a bridge crucial to German supply lines. He also briefly outlines daily life and mission preparation procedures for his unit before reflecting on his return to the United States and discharge at Camp McCoy in Sparta (WI), mentioning the worry he and his wife had that he might be deployed to Japan after Allied victory in Europe. Instead, he enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in Whitewater (Wisconsin) with aid from the G.I. Bill. In school, he studied engraving and teaching and earned his degree in 1949. He discusses the life he and his wife led during his schooling and his subsequent work as a schoolteacher in Lake Geneva, on a car assembly line in Kenosha, at an aluminum manufacturing company in Manitowoc, and at his father-in-law's bank in Maribel (all Wisconsin). He also details the hardships of private plane ownership before reflecting on his children's military service and the warm welcome he received when visiting his old posts in France and England in 1992.

Biographical Sketch

Edward Looker (1920-2012) was born in Manitowoc (Wisconsin) and served in the 397th Bombardment Group of the 9th Air Force of the Army Air Corps during the last years of World War II. He flew 24 combat missions in France and Germany, earning a Distinguished Unit Citation, before being discharged at the war's end. After returning stateside, he earned a college degree and worked as a bank cashier in Maribel (Wisconsin) until his retirement in 1985.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2005.

Transcribed by Telise Johnsen, 2012.

Abstract by Jacob Seidman, 2014.

Interview Transcript:

MacDonald: This is an interview with Ed Looker who served with the United States Army Air Corps, 397th Bombardment Group, the 9th Air Force during World War II, conducted at approximately 2:00 p.m. at the address of 4409 Walker Road, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of July 13, 2005. And the interviewer is Terry MacDonald.

Ed, would you like to tell us a little bit about your life circumstances prior to going into the military—the year you were born, where you were born, and things like that?

Looker: Well, I was born in 1920. And then, of course, after there was trouble with my mother being sick I had to be living with my grandmother. And so I built probably about 200 and probably about thirty or forty [230/240] model airplanes out of wood. And I don't know whatever happened to them because I moved to Connecticut after that was over. So, and then the other bad part was, everybody played ball in Manitowoc, [Wisconsin]. I was right next to the Westfield [Park] in Manitowoc, but when I moved out there, nobody played ball. I was a lost individual. So I was much happier when I finally wound up someplace where they played ball. But anyhow, we finally did get—we were—my dad, even before he had ever signed up to be in the military, I had been sent away when I was a junior in high school. And I graduated from that, and that was a basic sort of training for us to be in—Citizen Military Training Camp, it was called.

MacDonald: And where was that at?

Looker: That was Rhode Island, wasn't it?

Woman: Probably. You didn't explain that your mother died, and you went to live with your grandmother for ten years.

Looker: Yeah.

MacDonald: So, where did you graduate from high school, then?

Looker: In Shawano [Wisconsin]—up there, they might say “Sha-WAH-no,” but it's “SHAW-no”—Indians and everything else.

When I went to school there we had to be very careful, because sometimes you'd go out in a bar—I never did much of that—but some guys would go out. And one guy had an Indian friend, and if things ever got too rough they would move out of that bar and go elsewhere because things could develop and get into a bad situation. So we learned something from that.

MacDonald: So then how did you end up going to Manitowoc and signing up? Did you get drafted into the military, or did you sign up?

Looker: No. Like I said, we had to take tests and everything else, and five of us out of the thirty-one made it. We were sworn in, and that's how I got my start.

MacDonald: And directly into the Army Air Corps then, huh?

Looker: Yes. And then we were put aside until--the infantry was squawking about all these guys being signed up and not being in the service. So then they had to pull us all again, give us a month of recruit training, and send us away to college for anywhere from five to seven months. And then we were pulled back again and had to go through basic training--again, I suppose it was. And then when we finally got through all that then we received our wings. Well, at that time when I finally got my wings there were already so many second lieutenants that a lot of us came out as flight officers, which saved them some money, I suppose.

MacDonald: Was there a differential in pay? A slight--

Looker: There was some slight difference in pay and whatnot, yeah.

And so, anything to add to that?

Ellen Looker: Well, you worked in a Burger Boat when you enlisted--at Manitowoc--

MacDonald: Prior to enlisting, you were working in--

Ellen Looker: That's how he got to Manitowoc, was that he worked there.

MacDonald: And we're talking with his wife Ellen, is also here in the room today. So, how close did you come to being drafted?

Looker: By about ten days, I would say.

MacDonald: You got your notice.

Looker: Yeah.

MacDonald: Just after you enlisted, you got your notice that you were called in to be drafted.

Looker: Yeah.

MacDonald: How old were you at that time, Ed?

Looker: Wasn't I about—twenty?

Ellen Looker: November of '42--so the fall, in December, you would have been twenty-two. So you were twenty-one plus.

Looker: Uh-huh.

MacDonald: So after you got your wings, what happened? Where did they send you? You said you went for five to seven months of training. Where was that at? Was that in Oklahoma that you got sent to do that training, the college training?

Looker: Yes, almost all the college training, yes, and marching, too, you know.

Ellen Looker: Yeah, but the flying part was more in Texas, wasn't it?

Looker: Yeah, then when we came back to Texas we had to go through passing tests and whatnot.

Ellen Looker: San Antonio?

Looker: And so many of us passed, and so many didn't.

MacDonald: Was the dropout rate quite high at the time?

Looker: Pretty high, yeah. You were lucky if you had enough brains to go through all of that training and could figure it all out. And then you had friends that, if they had a problem that you were studying and you could help, and get some information from him. That all helped.

So then I was in basic training. Then I had to go to another training thing, and then I had to go to the third training thing, and then finally we graduated. And then, where was I sent? Was I loose for a while? Or did I stay down there?

Ellen Looker: Well, you came from Texas. We were married in July. We were supposed to be married July 1, but the government never—

Looker: Didn't release us soon enough.

Ellen Looker: Had to be delayed a day. So we called everybody up and said the wedding was one day later. So he came home, and I met him at the train.

And the girl from the courthouse—it was, like, a Friday or something, and the courthouse was closed, and she took the papers home to get our

license. And we signed the proper papers so it would be all okay so that we could be married on—that Sunday, I think it was, that was our wedding. But Saturday the courthouse was closed.

Looker: When I got to someplace down South where she could come and live with me and stay with me--

Ellen Looker: That was later.

Looker: Yeah. It was later, much later. She got off the train. I was waiting for her. And here's a girl way down the other end, and I didn't--I wasn't quite sure it was her or not, because when you ride on a train that's got all—coal-fired train—when she came out she looked more like a black girl than a white girl.

MacDonald: [Laughs] With the smoke and soot.

Ellen Looker: Well, it was soot. And the passenger trains were put on the side rail while the troop trains had priority. So sometimes your train trip took longer than you thought it would.

MacDonald: So, to have her down there with you, were there special arrangements with the--just officers or enlisted people?

Ellen Looker: No, you were on your own. Enlisted men could have their wives, too. But you were on your own to find a place. But I think they must have had a listing or something because in Shreveport [Louisiana], we--people in a town were asked to give up bedrooms for servicemen. And so we stayed with some nice people in Shreveport for like two weeks. Then he and I could stay together. Then after that he was sent to Lake Charles [Louisiana] and I took a bus or something--it was hot, too—to Lake Charles. And I don't know how we found this place to live but we did have a place to live. But it was [laughs] very, very crude. We had, upstairs, two rooms, and there were other military people might have had one room. It seems like there were three of us upstairs. And we shared a bathroom that was upstairs. But we had some kind of a little cooking stove, like a kitchen, and a bedroom is what we had. It was fairly large. But one thing that happened: here I am, this little nineteen-year-old white girl that never was exposed to bugs and all that. In the middle of the night, about the second night, I could hear this terrible noise, "Clack, clack, clack, clack," something jumping around. Ed turned on the light—cockroaches, big as, I don't know how big they were. [Laughs] But they—

Looker: I thought you were getting' to the part where we talked about the—

Ellen Looker: The rat?

Looker: The rats. I finally took tin cans that we had cut open—cut them all open-- and drove the nails into the wood to close all the holes up [Ellen and Terry laugh].

Ellen Looker: So we had to fix up, you know, the holes and stuff. And I washed clothes in a tub with a scrub board out in the backyard of this place. Except I think his uniforms we sent out. But the rest of our laundry, did by hand.

MacDonald: Mm-hmm.

Ellen Looker: And I remember there was a great big pecan tree, and it was fall by this time. I'd always take handfuls of pecans and put them in my wash basket to take back into the house. [Laughs]

MacDonald: So what kind of training were you doing down there, Ed? Were they training you to become a pilot?

Looker: It was a training to be a pilot, yes.

Ellen Looker: Well, you were a pilot, but you were training for the B-26.

Looker: I was already a pilot; I had the wings. But in that kind of airplane, which is a little harder type of airplane--.

MacDonald: And what type was that?

Looker: The B-26 Marauder. And there must have been about 4,449 of those made. And they were dispersed throughout the States. Some went overseas; some went to foreign countries and flew from there. Some flew all the way from the United States all the way up to where they had to go. I went over on the *Queen Mary*. So I had to be on board the *Queen Mary* early because I was going to be a loading officer. And so when all my men got aboard I had to get them all put away and then nobody showed up. I put the Canadian guys away; I got those all put away in the *Queen Mary*. And that was in the swimming pool area, and they had bunks five bunks high in that swimming pool for them to sleep, and I got them all put away. And then when the ship was moving every day I had to be in a certain place, and I had to be on the deck where the women were, get them all lined up and whatnot. And so that's how that all worked out.

MacDonald: What kind of a trip was it across the ocean, then?

Looker: We were on the *Queen Mary*, which held twenty-five of us, and it was about--was it nineteen or twelve hundred?—about twelve hundred crew

that made that ship. So that's one of the reasons why you only ate twice a day.

Ellen Looker: You got your numbers wrong.

MacDonald: It was pretty crowded, then, huh, because it was a troopship going across? The *Queen Mary* was pretty fast?

Looker: It was pretty fast. See, that ship would make its course, and every forty-five seconds it would change course. And that's how long it would take a U-boat to get a torpedo lined up to go and hit you. And if you changed course every forty-five seconds you were on a different course, and then it wouldn't work. And that's how we made it all the way across. And then we came in down in the Firth of Clyde which was on the other side of England, and we came in on the mainland of it, and we had to get on board a smaller ship. When we got on the land and coming aboard on the deck where you would walk to get—here they were playing all the—what do you call?—the bagpipes and everything else, all that kind of music. So it was just like moving into a different world when you're coming from a country that you hadn't ever heard much of that before. And so then we were sent away. I think for awhile we stayed in tents, wasn't it?

Ellen Looker: I wasn't there, Ed [Laughs].

Looker: Tents, something like that.

MacDonald: So, can you describe a little bit about the B-26, how big the crew was? Exactly what was the B-26?

Looker: Well, it held six men, each in various positions: the pilot, the copilot, bombardier, engine guy, and then in the middle of the airplane—he might have been with a radio or something, and then the tailgunner. And then, if you got to be a flight leader after flying in different positions then you had to have a navigator on board. And that's how things eventually evolved.

MacDonald: How many planes flew in a group?

Looker: So there were usually six airplanes in a group, and maybe there might be three groups flying together to the place where you had to do the bomb-dropping, and so forth.

MacDonald: And how big a bomb did the—what kind of a payload did the B-26 carry?

Looker: Well, you could put two hundred-pound bombs in it. You could put two/four one-thousand-pound bombs. And you flew at 225 miles an hour. And, what else was there?

MacDonald: And they were a medium bomber?

Looker: It was a medium bomber. It had two engines. Each engine was a—

Ellen Looker: [Laughs] Better not get into the details. You'll get 'em wrong.

MacDonald: What was the name of your plane?

Ellen Looker: Well, you didn't always have the same plane.

MacDonald: Oh, you weren't assigned to the same plane?

Looker: Well, when you were on your bomb runs then you had your own plane. Or if something was wrong with that one you got a different one. I think it was a 2,000 horsepower engine--fourteen cylinders each one--a very good, very good, engine, and four-bladed props. We were on one bomb mission one time when we were hit very badly. There was a big hole in the fuselage behind my pilot's head. He had an armor-plated seat, but he was sitting behind. I think we were still on the bomb run when we got hit. So we had to do as well as we could. When we finally dropped the bombs, we couldn't bring the engines and their power back and whatnot because that part was broken in the ship. And we throttled back the engines, changed the manifold pressure, and so forth, but we still couldn't get control of the airplane. So the part that was hit negated our doing that. So what I had to do, I had to put both feet on the floor and put my arms through the other wheel of the airplane and hook it in my arm, here. And then I had all that power. For two and a half hours I held that plane so that the plane could maintain its proper speed and so forth. And then, of course, when we came in to land it was a different situation again. And we got down on the ground safely. And then they had to probably pull that engine off and put a different engine on. Probably we flew on a different engine from then on, too, a different airplane.

MacDonald: Were you flying out of England?

Looker: No. By the time I got there, which was in December of '45, by that time most of the planes that had been in England--in all, it must have been about eighty bases there in England—those planes all finally had to fly from wherever they were, lower France, upper France, all the areas in that area. That's how we did our bombing.

MacDonald: What kind of targets were you aiming at on your bomb runs?

Looker: Well, we were trying to hit--when we were flying a little more westerly we were flying mostly in Germany where we had had all kinds of prisoners of

war. They were people that had to work in the factories putting these airplanes together. They were making certain parts and everything, and then we were the ones trying to bomb them out of business so that they couldn't do that.

And we were, of course, in turn, probably hit by their fighter—whatever it was--all kinds of different things that they used: .50 caliber cannon bullets and whatnot all.

MacDonald: At what height were your typical flights, your bomb runs? Because I know some planes, they flew--

Looker: We flew—usually at the highest height was probably somewhere around 14,500 feet. At that height, we were okay. But once you started getting higher than that the engine is running hotter, and you didn't get enough air, and so forth. And, of course, you always had lavatory problems. If you had to go to the bathroom, you had to figure out a way to get rid of it, [laughs] and so forth.

MacDonald: So, can you briefly describe a little bit about flying into a flak field—I mean, 'cause that's what the Germans mostly did—

Looker: Oh, yeah.

MacDonald: When you were flying at that height.

Looker: She wants me to point out, here, I received—what is the DUC again?

MacDonald: Distinguished Unit Citation.

Looker: Ok, a “Unit Citation for a mission on 23rd December”—which was at that bad one [?]-“1944 when a group withstood heavy flak and fighter attacks to sever a railway bridge at Eller [Germany], a vital link in the enemy supply line across the Mosel [River], continued to support the Allied drive into Germany until April of '45.”

Ellen Looker: But, Ed, you were a replacement for the planes some of the guys that were lost on December 23. So his group was replacements for the ones they lost.

Looker: Oh, sure.

MacDonald: Can you tell us what it was like, especially being a copilot, flying into the flak?

Looker: Oh, yeah. You heard the flak, and they had it at different heights and stuff. Sometimes we changed height to fly. But also, we always had three airplanes that would go out, and we had tinsel in those airplanes. And they would fly higher and lower and faster, and whatnot, all to keep dropping that out. And that would throw the German artillery off because they couldn't get the range corrected.

Ellen Looker: What did you call that stuff, that tinfoil stuff?

Looker: I just told you, "tinfoil."

Ellen Looker: Yeah, but there was a name for that [Laughs].

Looker: It's the stuff that you use on Christmas trees.

MacDonald: Tinsel, yeah.

Looker: Tinfoil.

MacDonald: So, beside the one incident where the shell went through, or shrapnel went through near the pilot, did you have any other? How many missions did you fly?

Looker: Twenty-four.

MacDonald: Did you have any other incidents where the plane was hit or damaged?

Looker: It wasn't as bad as that. And when you started flying you had to fly all the different positions till you finally--the second-last position where you were on the left side of the main airplane--the first airplane was number one, and then it was number one underneath there, at the back end of the tailgunner of that plane. And then an engine on the right and an engine on the left, and that's how you got six airplanes together.

MacDonald: Now, flying that formation, you flew fairly close together—

Looker: Why, yes.

MacDonald: The planes.

Looker: When we flew in the second-last position then I was sitting on the right side of the airplane which was closest to the lead airplane. So I would sit on that side, and I liked to fly with my wing sticking between the wing and the tail of the other airplane. Some of the guys didn't fly that close together, but I liked to do it that way. Of course, my pilot couldn't see that because he was too far away, and the visibility wasn't there. And so that's

how we did our flying. Then later on, because my pilot was really good, we got shot[??]. We had to take off one time, and a plane on my right—we always took off twenty seconds apart, six airplanes—and we had to get into the air. The plane on our right couldn't do that because--we found out later when I was at another reunion later on--their gas was coming out of their wing when they were flying. So they had to abort. Well, we had to get up in the air because we couldn't keep flying where that guy was. So my pilot, full manifold pressure—he did this all by himself. Full manifold pressure, full air gas pressure, and trimmed the airplane, maybe put some flaps out, so that he could haul that airplane up in the air at seventy-five miles an hour with a full load of 4,000 pounds of bombs. And the airplane weighed a good amount by itself. And we finally got into position. I had my hand on the escape hatch. I was going to have that open before we ever hit the ground so we wouldn't be frozen inside [laughs] or if we couldn't get out. We had a second situation like that, but I can't remember exactly what that was or what it was about. But that's how that worked out. That airplane, when you came in to land, you made your downwind approach, your basic leg, and you landed. You're coming in at a hundred and fifty miles an hour. And you had to slow down when you got near the ground to about ninety/ninety-five miles and hour. And that's when you first touched the ground. So, that's what we had to do and, of course, when we were in bombed up and everything else, we had to do it a little differently. But we still made it. And then we had to wait. I think we got a plane flew in that flew us out of there, and they had to put a different engine in that airplane. Then somebody had to fly over there and get it and bring it back.

MacDonald: Did you ever witness any planes that didn't make it into the landing or takeoff?

Looker: Well, I must have. I must have seen some.

MacDonald: Because there were quite a few accidents.

Looker: Oh, yeah. It wouldn't take much for them to be shot out of position.

MacDonald: How long was a typical flight for you, a bombing run?

Looker: It could amount to about four and a half hours. Some of the longest ones probably might have been six hours. And then you're starting to sweat having enough gas to get back and so forth. And then it depended on whether you're in flying low over the ground and no clouds, or if you had to get above the clouds so you could see better, and all that all worked in together. And then, of course, when you're flying probably above the clouds there might have been some fighter planes that might try to

interfere. And then we had our own fighter planes. You could see them up there working against the German airplanes.

MacDonald: Were you ever—was your plane ever attacked by a German fighter?

Looker: Well, I could see them off in the distance, but I don't think every too often they got close enough where that our gunners couldn't hit them first.

MacDonald: Could you describe a typical day at your air base? Because you didn't fly every day—

Looker: No, no.

MacDonald: So could you describe a typical day?

Looker: Well, we knew the night before, probably, that we'd be flying. We had to be--breakfast had to be very early in the morning. And then we had to go to a briefing. And then the different guys would talk, what things and circumstances might be. And that's how we flew our mission that way. And you knew where you were going, where you had to go, how you—probably had to change courses so that you follow [foul up ??] the Germans. I can try to name as many as I can think of, but there was certainly a lot of them.

MacDonald: Mm-hm. So, they always fed you good before you took off, right early in the morning a good breakfast?

Looker: They'd give you some food, yeah.

Ellen Looker: What was that about, if you got a candy bar or you got gum?

Looker: Yeah, if you got a candy bar, you would think that would be a long mission. No, that was a short mission. If you got gum, or hard something like that and you had to chew, then you knew it might be a six-hour mission [all laugh].

MacDonald: [Laughs] So, what did you do when you weren't flying? What was it like at the base where you were at? They kept the officers together?

Looker: Yeah, the officers ate together.

Ellen Looker: Where did you live in a tent? Sometimes you lived in barracks, sometimes--

Looker: Well, when we finally broke up and left where we were in France we were living in a house. I took a window out of the house which was about this

big. And I took that along in the plane that I was on. And when we got overseas and we were in the Dutch area, then when we set up our tent I arranged it so that I put that window up in the top part of the tent so that we always had light shining down in the tent. And then we used the door down below it. And that's how that tent gave us a little visibility out there.

And then we had a place that we either ate at outside--I was monkeying around or sewing, or I was writing to Ellen Jean, or something of that sort-

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Ellen Looker: But didn't you have a bike or something once?

Looker: I even had a bike over there. I even had a bike and a radio. When all my flying was done I sold the bike for a certain amount of money, and I sold the radio for over a hundred dollars.

MacDonald: Wow!

Looker: That was a pretty good radio. And then I got to come home.

MacDonald: So, when you were over there, did you have any entertainment—USO shows or anything like that?

Looker: We had some of those. They were times when certain guys were sent from where we were down into Paris. And they'd be over there at night, and they'd go to the—what did they call that group that was always putting on the entertainment? I can't think of the name of it.

MacDonald: Any big names that you can recall?

Looker: I'd have to call you a couple of days later and tell you what the names were. I can't remember it right now.

Ellen Looker: You never had Bob Hope, though, did you?

Looker: No, no. But we had entertainers. And then you had to watch it because when it got to be around 11:00 or so you had to start figuring, "Well, we got to get home. We can't wait till the buses are all gone." Then we got to walk ten/fifteen/twenty miles to get back to our room. So that we had always to figure that out ahead of time. When you're flying missions and, of course, when you're firing machine guns those shells would be flying all over the place. And sometimes maybe one of the machines wouldn't work right, and then the guy had to work on that one, and that always involved--and then you had a radioman that would always be in contact with the other airplanes, if there's any change about our target, or if we

were going to fly to a different place, or if we had to fly higher or lower. That's how you worked together.

MacDonald: How was the weather over there for flying? Was there a lot of crummy days, a lot of fog, or anything like that?

Looker: There was a certain amount of cloud cover, I would say, probably some of the time. Most of the time it was pretty good. When you could see good, well, then you knew what the circumstances were, how you were flying your airplane and flying in the right position. Yeah. And, of course, if you were hit, then you had to figure out how you could save yourself and get yourself back on the ground. You had to be out of enemy territory. You didn't want to land there.

MacDonald: Mm-hm. So, you flew twenty-four missions. Did the war end before—

Looker: Oh, yeah. See, I only had twenty-four missions. And then when everything was all being sewed up in that sense--see that letter I showed you before--that's when most of the guys were all sent home. I was the one that was short, and so I was there for awhile. Then I was another place for awhile; then I was another place for awhile, and I always had to walk wherever I wanted to go.

MacDonald: They didn't have anything for you to do, huh?

Looker: No. I was even transferred way up north one time. I was with the 8th Air Force, assigned to them. And that was different circumstances, 'cause those guys were all taller and bigger, too. When you're marching, that's the funny thing of it when you're in something like this. You got real tall guys that are six foot, and then you got guys that are maybe five-foot-four, or something like that. And if they're marching with you, those poor guys in the back they always had to run, because the front guys [laughs] were walking too fast, big steps and so forth.

MacDonald: Uh-huh. So, when did you finally find out that you were going to come back to the States, then?

Looker: Well, then they finally rounded up—I think there were five of us. And so then we had to figure out what we had to leave behind and what we could take along. We had a bag like that, and then we had another bag that held more clothing, and so that all had to be taken along with us so that we could get it on the plane.

Ellen Looker: Well, you mailed a big duffle bag back.

Looker: We did? Is that how we did it? Okay.

Ellen Looker: I remember that.

Looker: Yeah.

MacDonald: What was the feeling of the guys when they announced that the war in Germany was over with, the war in Europe was ended? What was the feeling--because the war in the Pacific was still going on?

Ellen Looker: Well, they thought that they'd be sent to Japan.

Looker: Yeah. We thought we still might have to go there. But that was another big move in itself. Those planes couldn't fly very far.

MacDonald: The B-26 didn't have the range.

Looker: No, it didn't have the range to get that far. You'd have to get to places where there was gas available.

MacDonald: That was why they developed the B-29 for the long-range bombing—

Looker: Yeah.

MacDonald: Eventually. So, you come back to the States. How did they ship you back? Did you come back on the *Queen Mary* [laughs]?

Ellen Looker: No, a Victory ship.

Looker: Yeah, I came back on a Victory-ship. That was nice, too. You had to change course and whatnot. And it was interesting, because of the ocean. The ocean--the prow of the ship would go up, and then when it was no longer in the water then that weight would bring it back down. And it would plop down in--
[End of Tape 1, Side A]

MacDonald: Ed's talking about coming back across the ocean on a liberty ship as he returned to the United States.

Looker: Well, when we were parked at Le Havre—and we were living in tents at that time--we had to keep our own fires going. But some of the guys that are more nervous than others, they perhaps were sick most of the time because they thought that they had the feeling like they were on board ship. And so that's why they'd vomit and stuff and everything else. But like for us that could take all that, that didn't bother us that much. So it was a different kind of situation depending on your physique and how you could take things.

MacDonald: Did they pack the guys on board the ship, you know, really pack them in on the return trip? Or did you have a little bit more room?

Ellen Looker: Oh, you had more room.

Looker: More room.

Ellen Looker: It wasn't as big a ship.

Looker: We had more room. They were small ships.

MacDonald: How long did it take to come across the Atlantic on your return trip?

Looker: Oh, I would say six/seven/eight days, something like that.

MacDonald: Where did you land when you come back to the United States?

Ellen Looker: In New York, I think?

Looker: I think it was probably in New York, not New York City itself, but there was another city that took all that kind of ships. They had the right kind of "havre"--Le Havre, as you might say--or where the shipping is and so forth. That's the same thing like today when you're going to China. There's one guy, he owns one whole place with nothing else but all loading boxes that go on board ship. Then you go to another place, he's got another place, and he's got all the ships that do all that. He must have a lot of moola-moola to do all that.

MacDonald: Yeah. So when you got back to the States then, what did the Army do with you? Did they send you to another camp or discharge you, or--

Ellen Looker: Yeah, he went to Camp McCoy [between Sparta and Tomah, Wisconsin]. That's where you were discharged.

Looker: Yeah, I was at Camp McCoy. I wasn't there very long. And they had these other five guys. Some were Indian. So we were all in different categories. So that's how we slept, and so forth.

Ellen Looker: I think you were sent to the one that was closest to your home.

Looker: Yeah.

MacDonald: For discharge purposes.

Ellen Looker: Discharge—although he is—

Looker: Yeah, we had to go to the one in Wisconsin here.

Ellen Looker: You came home in January, the end of January, I believe. But actually on your papers you had some leave time and stuff coming. So April was his discharge.

Looker: Yeah.

MacDonald: Uh-huh. So what did you do when you got out then, Ed, after your time was up?

Looker: Well, when you're discharged, then I went around looking for jobs, and there weren't many jobs. And I finally got a job washing walls, and me a first lieutenant. I was washing walls. And I even was so good that I even got promoted to be boss of the guys washing walls [all laugh]. Oh, what a funny thing that was.

Ellen Looker: Well, tell him—we did get unemployment or something. It was twenty dollars a week, I think, for a year you could get it.

MacDonald: For the G.I. benefit.

Ellen Looker: Yeah, when they were benefits. And so we did get that. And I, in the meantime, had rented an upper flat. I think it was forty dollars a month for a place for us to live so we wouldn't have to be with my folks or something. And so we were there for awhile. But we started to, you know, "What do you do now? Here we are; the war is over." So we decided that he should go to college.

MacDonald: You used some of your G.I. Bill for that?

Looker: Oh, yeah.

Ellen Looker: Yeah, yeah.

Looker: I had some of that.

Ellen Looker: So we didn't know, you know, you don't know. He went to some testing. First he was going to learn to be a—engraving, or something. But, I don't know, that fell through. It didn't—decided—

Looker: I had a professor that taught us how to do all that fancy scrollwork and everything else. And I could do that pretty well. And so one guy couldn't do that, so—

Ellen Looker: Well, that was later, Ed.

Looker: Later, when I had gotten good enough, he would drop his paper off on my desk. He'd go up and talk to the instructor, and when he came by, I had it all done. He'd just pick it up and take it back to the room and turned it in, he got a good score on it [all laugh].

Ellen Looker: No, but he's asking how we came to the decision to go to college.

Looker: Well, we chose [Whitewater's Teachers College, now University of Wisconsin]-Whitewater, because that was more--[Univ. of Wis]-Milwaukee was more--Lyle went to Milwaukee.

Ellen Looker: No, that was later. He's eight years—

Looker: I know he--but [UW]-Milwaukee was more restricted, the type of courses you could take, and so that's why he went that way. But I--

Ellen Looker: Well, we didn't want to go to such a big city. We didn't know where we'd find a place to live. And so we went to Whitewater [Wisconsin], and he started in summer school so he could get a start on school. And this was a small school at that time. It's much bigger now, but at that time it was a teachers college. And we went, and they said they were building apartments out of old Army barracks for these returning veterans that were going to college. So we signed up to get one of those, but they didn't get them done real fast. So the first summer we rented a room, you know, like in a house that was about a hundred years old at that time, and we had a bedroom on the third floor. And she let me use her kitchen so we could do a little cooking. And so that's where we were that summer.

Looker: I even got a job at his store where you sold shoes [laughs].

Ellen Looker: And then in the fall we rented two rooms from a couple that had rented a bigger house, and we rented two rooms upstairs. And we had, like, a kitchen. We had an electric roaster and a hot pad. And then I had a table. We had to share the bathroom with some other people that rented rooms. And so that's what we had for a couple months. By that time we were having a baby, and so the baby came to this two rooms. But two weeks later we got into this four-room apartment which we really appreciated because we had more room. And those were kind of crude, but they weren't bad. They had oil stoves to cook on, but I didn't trust myself with an oil stove so we used electric hot plate and an electric roaster for cooking. But we had a sink and shelves and things, and a living room and two bedrooms and a storeroom. So that's where our first little boy—well, I mean, two weeks after we had the baby and then we went—so that was our first home, really, from where our children came. So we had another

boy by the time he graduated. Two years later we had our second son. So by the time he graduated we had two little boys.

Looker: Uh-huh.

Ellen Looker: And everybody else had children, too, that was living there.

Looker: Luckily, we had enough money to have a car. So we had a car, but our neighbor across from us in the barracks where we were, they had a buggy. And so when they needed food they had to take the baby along, and the walk downtown was about ten blocks--and get their food. And they come back with their groceries and stuff, but they always had a case of beer in there, too. [all laugh]

MacDonald: So what did you do, then, after you got out of college, Ed?

Ellen Looker: Well, he taught school—

MacDonald: Oh!

Ellen Looker: For one year in Lake Geneva [Wisconsin], and then he decided that he wasn't cut out to be a teacher. And he was looking for something else, and he worked at—what was the name of that, in Kenosha [Wisconsin]? What cars did they make there?

Looker: Oh, we built cars at Kenosha. And then there were about seven or eight guys. And then you had to follow the—what do you call it?

Ellen Looker: Assembly line.

Looker: Assembly line, but what do you call the guy that puts these guys in their different positions and stuff?

Ellen Looker: Well, the boss.

Looker: It's something to do—

Ellen Looker: Foreman.

Looker: He's the foreman, but, it's a name that has something to do with having men being followed through you. So I always walked real close to them, but some guys strayed behind. So when we got our assigned jobs, that all had a bearing on what kind of job you were going to get. I got a good job, where I had to be at a certain place on the assembly line, where we put in the transmission and stuff. And you had to put the rug down and whatnot, put floors in and so forth. And then I got myself so good at it, I could get

myself done, have all the stuff in the cars, five cars ahead of time. And then they come back, and each car I could keep up like that. But these other guys had to take worse jobs than what I did.

Ellen Looker: I don't remember how long we had that job.

Looker: Wasn't too long, maybe about five months.

Ellen Looker: Yeah, well then we got a job in Manitowoc [Wisconsin] at the--it was the Aluminum Goods Manufacturing Company. By that time, we had another little boy.

Looker: Mm-hm. We didn't know any better.

MacDonald: [Laughs]

Ellen Looker: Ed was in the National Guard for an extra paycheck, you know. So while he was going to college he was in the National Guard already. And so when we were having this third boy, we did not know if he'd be going over to Korea or not, because his outfit might be called, and it might not be called. So I had the baby, and he went to summer camp. And I stayed with my folks, with my three kids by now, while he was at summer camp.

Looker: At Camp McCoy.

Ellen Looker: And, luckily, they did not get called.

MacDonald: And what outfit were you with in the National Guard? Do you recall?

Looker: It was the Headquarters Company from Whitewater.

MacDonald: Hmm.

Ellen Looker: And so then, after that, he resigned from the National Guard because when we moved to Manitowoc it wasn't the same outfit. So he wasn't in that. But he worked a couple years in Manitowoc. And then we went to work in Maribel [WI]. My dad was president of a small bank there, and my mother had worked in the bank and she didn't want to work. She was tired of it. And so Ed came to the bank, and he was like assistant—

Looker: I worked there a year.

Ellen Looker: --cashier or something.

Looker: That was about a year.

Ellen Looker: And so that's what he ended up doing. Most of our working years, thirty-one years he was in the—was that what you said, thirty-one?

Looker: Something like that, yeah. We had two banks. We had one at Whitelaw [WI] and one in Maribel. And I would go over there—didn't mostly every weekend I went over there and worked? Somethin' like that?

Ellen Looker: Just on vacations when Paul was gone.

Looker: And then vacation when the other guy was there.

MacDonald: Did you join any veterans groups after you got out, Ed, right away?

Ellen Looker: Yeah, he belonged to the VFW in Whitewater already. Then most of it he joined--when we lived in Maribel he belonged to the Cato Post. It was at west of Kellnersville, Wisconsin. Belonged to that one for—Eddie, I think you were commander for one year.

Looker: Two years--I was commander for [inaudible].

MacDonald: And how long have you been with the VFW here?

Ellen Looker: Well, since we moved up here. We moved up here in '95. It's ten years that we've been here.

Looker: So I'll be going to my first meeting tomorrow night after having my knee replaced and everything. So I was gone about two months.

MacDonald: Mm-hm.

Looker: So—oh, I forgot to tell you that when—she closed me off kind of fast in one place. Forget about it. I'll have to tell you about it when I think of it.

MacDonald: But looking back on your military experience in World War II, Ed, what kind of impact did it have, overall, on you? Did it have much at all, or what were your thoughts about serving at that time?

Looker: Well, I took the best course I could. I took it to be in when I was at the rank I had, and everything else was much better than coming in at a much lower rank.

Ellen Looker: Well, Eddie, you should tell him about—you always were interested in airplanes. You'd walk way over to the airport when you were a kid.

Looker: Oh, yeah. I lived at Westfield [Park] in Manitowoc. And then another guy—we built model airplanes together—and he went in the service. And

he was an instructor on a certain kind of plane all the while he was into that. When they no longer needed him then they just started putting him into being a flight engineer on a B-29. But he never got overseas. And so then he finally wound up flying for American Airlines, and he thought I should do that, too. But I thought that was kind of a constrictive way to live. You weren't home all the time. And I thought that wasn't exactly the thing for me. I probably should have done it, but I didn't.

Ellen Looker: But, Ed, you always were grateful for the opportunity to get to fly.

Looker: Oh, yeah. Finally, after about twenty years, I had enough money to buy an airplane. But that was a big mistake because I had to pay the hangar rent, and I had to pay the gas I used at eleven or twelve gallons an hour. Just think of that today, that price of gas. And then, finally, I was either studying and not flying, or I was flying and not studying. And I had to get someone to okay my records, and that didn't work out worth a darn. So I finally, gave it all up and sold the airplane. And that plane today—when I sold it for about seventeen thousand dollars [\$17,000]. That plane today is worth about sixty to seventy thousand dollars [\$60,000-\$70,000]. And that was--what was the number of that airplane?

Ellen Looker: It was a 180.

Looker: Cessna180, and the other one was a Cessna--

Ellen Looker: Well, the one you owned was—was it a 182 or—

Looker: It was a 182. But there was a lot smaller airplane, smaller engine and so forth. Those airplanes are selling today for forty-five to fifty thousand dollars [\$45,000-\$50,000].

MacDonald: Uh-huh.

Looker: So you can see a lot of big difference. But then if you would have kept it you would have had to pay the hangar rent and all that.

MacDonald: Oh, yeah.

Ellen Looker: But, anyway, it was kind of interesting. Our kids were of college age by the time he had this plane. Wasn't that when we were trying to sell the airplane?

Looker: Yeah.

Ellen Looker: No, no. I got my stories mixed up. But, anyway, at the time, we advertised in *Trade-A-Plane*. Well, I didn't know there were that many people. We

were getting calls from all over the country for this plane that he had [laughs]. Finally, somebody said he'd send us a down payment—never saw the plane. It had been damaged with some hail and that, so it wasn't perfect. And the guy sent us the thousand dollars for a down payment. And he came, and he wasn't even a pilot. He came with a guy that was the pilot.

Looker: Yeah, he didn't come--he came separately from where he was and came up through Manitowoc. And the other guy was a mechanic, and so we had to go through various different ways to get—all the ways, to get on and off and on and off—

Ellen Looker: We picked up these guys, we picked them up in Milwaukee, and they stayed overnight at our house. And they looked at the plane, and I guess they were a little disappointed, but, anyway, he still went through with it. He gave us—we didn't know what to do. Here we were; he was going to give us a certified check—wasn't that it?

Looker: Yeah, but you had to go to--

Ellen Looker: I had to go to Appleton or somewhere to--

Looker: To get the check.

Ellen Looker: Or it was being mailed. Anyway, it all worked out. He took the plane, and we had the money. And Ed was relieved that he didn't have all this trauma of—

Looker: Yeah.

Ellen Looker: --owning an airplane, and then--

Looker: They flew to Florida. And they took the airplane and started working on it. They took all the three seats out and left the pilot seat in. They put in four places for guys to be sitting on the floor and be clamped in place with their parachutes and so forth.

Ellen Looker: That's what they were going to use it for, skydiving.

Looker: And then they took the side door off, and they hinged it at the top, so that the door could go up like this. And they took pads[the pans ??] which I had just gotten finished redoing, and had them out. That came off. And they had it all fixed up for flying. They took some parts probably off the engine to reduce the weight and so forth. And then they had to fly to one island, and then they had to fly to another island.

Ellen Looker: To Puerto Rico is where they went [ended ??].

Looker: And then they finally got it to where they wanted it, and what was the rest of the story?

Ellen Looker: Well, the rest of the story was, I said, “Well, I’m a mom, and I’m worried about you guys flying across from Florida to Puerto Rico. At least give me a phone call.” So they did call me and let me know they got there, finally. So that was the end. We never heard from the guy or anything. It was so expensive for them, for their sky-diving club, to rent time, that they thought if they had a plane of their own--

Looker: They [We had] went to a place in Florida so we were right next door to where those guys were doing the same thing. The funny thing was—how do I explain that?

Ellen Looker: Well, that’s beside the point, Ed. But, anyway, I thought it would be interesting to say that you had been to many reunions over the years.

MacDonald: I was just going to ask you. Did you keep in touch with anybody you served with?

Ellen Looker: Oh, yeah.

Looker: Very much. We had to go once to California/

Ellen Looker: Well, we’ve been all over the United States.

Looker: We’d go down to New Mexico.

Ellen Looker: And we went to Europe in ’92. They had a group that went back to England, in fact, where the group had originally been stationed. People were very, very nice to us. And there were different ceremonies and things that happened. And then we flew to France. And then we toured the national cemeteries over there, and then, you know, had some tours. And that was quite interesting, except it was really a rush. It was like they didn’t want to allow too much time, so it was, like, seven days to do all this. It was a little bit—

MacDonald: Did you keep in touch with anybody, your flying crew—

Ellen Looker: Well, sure.

MacDonald: -- for any period of time?

Ellen Looker: Some of them.

Looker: Some.

Ellen Looker: He lost track of two.

Looker: Yeah.

Ellen Looker: The pilot died in the '60s.

Looker: Yeah, he was—he died too soon.

Ellen Looker: He had a heart problem, and he died.

Looker: Is that what it was?

Ellen Looker: Yeah. So he died. And the tail gunner, we used to hear from at Christmas.

Looker: But that all died off, too.

Ellen Looker: I don't know if they're still living now. But we do go to the reunions, and, you know, you see the same people. It's just that now they're trying to get a next generation to keep up the group, our group.

Looker: New material, people.

Ellen Looker: So I don't know. We're going to Washington, DC, for one in September if Ed's okay, if his knee is better.

Looker: Why, it'll be okay for the [inaudible].

Ellen Looker: But it'll be interesting because we'll get to see the World War II Memorial which we have contributed to for quite a few years. And we'll see some of the people that are still able to do it.

But the only problem is, one of our sons—we have four sons—we put their names on the list to get mail. Well, John said, "Well, it's going to be too expensive. People like us can't afford to do it. You and Dad can do it, you know, 'cause you're retired and you can do it. But, you know, for us, as middle-aged people with kids in college, we really can't do it very easily."

Looker: He's got four cars to take care of [Ellen and Terry laugh]—one for the wife, one for himself, and one for each of the kids. One's in nursing now.

MacDonald: Uh-huh.

Looker: She got to be a nurse.

Ellen Looker: So, anyway, you know, it's been an interesting time listening to "the guys." You know, the gals go shopping, and the guys hash over World War II [laughs].

MacDonald: Anything else you'd like to say? I see you've got quite a bit of material that you've collected over the years. Looks like you must've saved a lot of letters he sent home?

Ellen Looker: Yeah, from Vietnam, when our son was in Vietnam.

Looker: He was there twice. He took some guy's place.

Ellen Looker: Other son was in the Navy. And I thought I had more of those V-mails. I only came across that one V-mail.

MacDonald: And you've got some nice pictures of some of your crew members, here, your B-26.

Ellen Looker: Yeah, that we had. I couldn't find Ed's picture as a soldier. I compiled—we had our sixtieth wedding anniversary last year. And I put this booklet together of our life. It's not really World War II, but of our life together. I made ten books like this for each of the family. So it was kind of interesting that we could do that.

Looker: I want to get to go through—I was there, but the airplane didn't get there that summer. The next summer it came, and I wasn't there. And so this guy's got to fly that airplane from there—he had to fly it all the way out west where that airplane originally was during the war.

Ellen Looker: This is when we were in Louisiana, when I was with Ed down there. And then, well, this was our wedding picture in July of '44.

MacDonald: You've got a pretty good collection of stuff that you accumulated from the years with your papers there, Ed. So—

Looker: This one here—find interesting because of the Indian part of that side of the story.

MacDonald: Anything else you'd like to mention about your service time, Ed? Right now?

Looker: Well, it was a little different. My dad was in World War I and in World War II. And so his—

Ellen Looker: Didn't you say your father was in the Coast Guard?

Looker: He was in the Coast Guard. And so they lived in different places, too, when that was all going on. And he came to see me, which was very nice. Here's some of these guys [papers rustling].

MacDonald: And your son, you had a son in the Navy?

Ellen Looker: Our oldest son was in Vietnam, and the third son was in the Navy for a while. And the other two didn't serve. But it's kind of—my father was in World War I, and three of his brothers were in World War I.

MacDonald: You have quite a history of the military in your family.

Ellen Looker: That's just the way it was. The wars came along. My great grandfather was in the Civil War.

MacDonald: Okay.

[End of Interview]