

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral Interview with  
VICTOR MARTIN  
Army Air Forces, World War II  
1997

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**Martin, Victor A.**, (1909-2001). Oral History Interview, 1997.

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

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

### **ABSTRACT**

Victor Martin, a Marshall, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service with the 14<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron of the Army Air Force, and his post-war experience with the American Legion. Martin relates flight training in North Carolina and Texas, and supply missions in North Africa and Italy. He talks about USO and Red Cross shows, life on a military base including drinking and gambling, and the relationship between enlisted men and officers. He comments on towing gliders, carrying German POWs, and being on base in England during German air raids. Martin describes his role dropping paratroopers on D-Day and his experiences with German anti-aircraft fire in Holland. Also touched upon is the point system, returning to work, and joining the American Legion.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Martin (1909-2001) served with the 14<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron in North Africa and Europe during World War II. He achieved the rank of staff sergeant, and was honorably discharged from service in 1944.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs volunteer John K. Driscoll, 2002.

Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2002.

## Interview Transcript

- Mark: Okay, today's date is May the 27th, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Victor Martin, originally of Marshall, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Army Air Forces in World War II. Good afternoon. Thanks for coming in.
- Martin: Thank you.
- Mark: I appreciate it. Why don't we start at the top and why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941?
- Martin: Let's see, I was born in Marshall, Wisconsin, and then after I, oh, I run a service station before I went in the service.
- Mark: Was it one that you owned yourself? Or was it a kind of business?
- Martin: Yea, I and a brother. And he kept running it while I was in service.
- Mark: So, you were born in 1909?
- Martin: Nine, yea.
- Mark: That would have made you, you graduated from high school?
- Martin: I only went three years.
- Mark: Okay, but at the time Pearl Harbor happened, you were like in your mid-twenties by that time. A little older than a lot of the young guys.
- Martin: Oh, yea. I was getting a little old to fly, already. I am eighty-eight, today.
- Mark: Why don't you tell me a little bit about running the service station. I mean, you started it during the Depression? I would imagine?
- Martin: The what?
- Mark: The service station.
- Martin: Yea.
- Mark: Why don't you tell me a little bit more about the service station?

- Martin: Oh. Well, we ran the Sinclair there at that time. And we did automobile business, and sold automobiles. Right there in Marshall. And we also would open nights, all night. And it was my brother and myself. And he would work tonight, and I'd be off tonight and work all day tomorrow and all the next night. That is the way we run. Because when I went into the service, then we hired another man.
- Mark: When did you start the service station business?
- Martin: I'd say, about 1936.
- Mark: Yea. It was in the middle of the Depression.
- Martin: Yea.
- Mark: Wasn't a good for business
- Martin: No.
- Mark: How was it in your case?
- Martin: You lost quite a bit of money in charge accounts.
- Mark: After World War II started to heat up in Europe and Americans started to re-arm, did your business change at all? I mean, did it get better?
- Martin: Oh, yea. See, I didn't come home until October of '45.
- Mark: Yea. So, when Pearl Harbor happened - -
- Martin: I was working that day.
- Mark: I want your anecdote, what you remember of that particular day.
- Martin: Oh, yea. I remember. We had a little restaurant right with the station, and I happened to be in there when it came over the radio. See, that was December 7, and I went in in March, already. Drafted.
- Mark: Now, you were over thirty by the time?
- Martin: Oh, yea.
- Mark: If my math is correct.
- Martin: Yea. That was '41, really. Well, I was '42 when I went in. I was born in '09. So I was in going on four years. I was plenty old enough to fly.

- Mark: Now, I talked to a lot of gentlemen who were younger at that time, in their twenties, and they sort of expected to be drafted, eventually. For someone who was over thirty, and a business man, was this something you expected, or did it come out of the blue?
- Martin: No, I didn't think I would pass, really.
- Mark: Physically? Physical?
- Martin: Oh, my physical was all right. But, I had a business and everything. I went in with a brother that same night, and then they got another guy from the other town, there, and they didn't pass. And I was the only one that passed.
- Mark: So, there was someone to help run your business. You mentioned you were in business with your brother. And then they hired someone else after you went into the service.
- Martin: Yea,
- Mark: Why don't you just describe basic training for me?
- Martin: Well, I got it down here. See, I went right from Madison, here, to Rockford, Illinois, and then from Rockford, Illinois, to Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis. And there I took basic training. So, then they sent me to - - well, we had a test, and I was working with automobiles and stuff, so I was sent to Biloxi, Mississippi, to work with airplanes, to study on airplanes. And then, after I passed that, we went to Polk Field, North Carolina, and then from Polk Field, we went to Del Arc (??), Texas, and we were training glider pilots, at that time, in Texas. And, then from Texas, we went back to Polk Field. Was training paratroopers. And then we went overseas, to Africa. And in the invasion of Sicily, we hauled in gliders and paratroopers. And that is where the American and British navy opened up on us. And I didn't go in that night. I went in the next morning with a load. And you could almost walk on the plywood in that bay from the stuff that was shot down. And then we stayed in Italy, but hauled into Italy, Sicily, rather. And we hauled into Italy up as far as Naples. And then we went to England, to get ready for D-Day. And, see, I flew in a night drop, about one-thirty, we went in with paratroopers, D-Day morning. After that, it was all daylight drops. And then, after the invasions, then we would start flying ammunition, food, gasoline up to the front lines. And then flying wounded back to the hospitals. And then, if they had to have serious operations, we'd fly them to Prestwick, Scotland, load them on four-engine jobs, and then they would come right to the States. And, then we hauled wounded back. We could haul twenty-eight litter patients in the airplane.
- Mark: You were flying C-47s?

Martin: 47s. yea. We could fly two jeeps in there pretty easy. And then after a while, we'd take the stuff to the front lines. We'd bring back prisoners of war. We were bringing back Canadians, English, Americans, French, Germans, a lot of SS troopers. And we could haul twenty-eight litter patients. Then we got to hauling boys from the front lines to rest camps in Cannes, and Nice, in southern France. That was about a thirteen and a half hour flight, that day, from our base. And many of our buddies that had to bail out were prisoners of war. Some of them even got back through the front lines. The Frenchmen would give them different uniforms and walk them right through the front lines. Is that your phone?

Mark: Yea. That's okay.

Martin: So then, we flew paratroopers across the Rhine River, they told us they expected fifty-five airplanes shot down out of a hundred. But it didn't go nowhere near that. So then, the day we got shot up so bad in Holland, we were towing gliders. And we had an hour and a half - - I really got shot up the most before we even got over land. They had barges out in the water. And we had an hour and a half going in, and about an hour coming out, and then go to England. And it got three hundred and twenty-five holes in it, five cables cut off, hydraulic shot out and electrical system was shot out. And one oil tank was hit. And that was the only day we flew that new airplane.

Mark: Now, that was the spring of '45? This?

Martin: Yea. Or, September. It was September, '44. I and the radio man were both wounded. And he was wounded more than I was. Our upholstery was burning and stuff, and I told him he should go and sit down in the back and when I got done in the cockpit up there I would come back and take care of him. So, he had bought a pair of officer's pants. And they kept a crease better than enlisted men's pants. And there was a hole here, and I'd just put a finger in and tear the leg down, and I did it with sleeves. We wore flak vests, see. And I got him pretty well taken care of. He had one that went in here, and I could feel it on the bottom of his foot, It didn't come through the skin, there. And then he wanted a drink of water. So I went back to the toilet where I had the drinking water and stuff. And I come back - - no, I was just coming down when one came up through the floor in front of me. That is when it got me in the forehead, and I got it in this leg, and the back of my neck. There was powder burns. I had two 20's blow up within two feet of my head, and that was all powder burns back there. So, the after the war was over in Europe, we went to Trinidad. We went to South Africa, and then across to Ascension Island, and then to Trinidad, and flew troops from Brazil to Miami, to get ready to go to the Pacific. So then we stayed there until the war was over in Japan, and then we started, we came back to the United States.

Mark: Well, I'd like to go back and sort of re-cap some of these incidents.

Martin: Okay.

Mark: For example, basic training. I mean right from your very introduction into the military, did you have some adjustment that you had to make to the military? Did you find it difficult, the regimentation, the discipline, and that sort of thing? And especially, again, having been over thirty years old, used to living your own life since you were nineteen, it was a little different as an older person, relatively speaking, bring over thirty at the time. Were there some adjustments that you had to make to military life that you found difficult?

Martin: Oh, yea. You were not used to orders, like you were getting. See. I remember one time, where it was, orders were that we were supposed to turn to the right. We was marching. And I made a motion to go to the left. Well, then, the guy that was training us, he give me a rock about that big, and I had to carry that thing.

Mark: In your right hand so you would remember?

Martin: Yea. But a captain seen that, and he made me drop it. And he give him hell. I don't know why.

Mark: Now, I don't mean to keep harping on your age at the time, but this was a little unusual compared to other guys I have spoken to. How did the younger guys look at you? I mean, as sort of a father figure, or an older brother, or did it matter much, your age, at the time?

Martin: It was, but it seemed like they didn't live up to orders too good.

Mark: The younger guys?

Martin: The young guys, yea.

Mark: They weren't as nearly well disciplined?

Martin: Yea. Of course, we were more settled down, too, at that age, you know. Some of those guys were twenty years old, and twenty-one. But we got along good with them. A lot of them didn't work with the airplanes. They had work to do, otherwise. Get that stuff ready to go on the plane. We could haul six bundles underneath the airplane that would go down with the parachutes, too. Some time we would have as high as ninety pounds of dynamite in those. And if one shell would have hit it - -

Mark; Kaboom!

Martin: Yea.

Mark: Now, military service has a way of bringing people together from many different parts of the country. Was this the first time been out of Wisconsin and the mid-West? In your lifetime?

Martin: Well, I had been to California, in the United States before that.

Mark: More than a lot of people. So, when all these people came together from all different, or, when you were at Camp Grant, did you have the experience of people coming together from all different parts of the country? Was it a little unusual, or were they mostly mid-Westerners like yourself?

Martin: Well, you seemed to meet guys about your age, you know. You didn't mix too much with the younger guys, either. Of course, there was a lot of older guys. We had a lot of guys that were in long before the war, you know. They helped you out quite a bit. Most of our guys were from Texas.

Mark: Really?

Martin: And you didn't dare to say nothing against Texas.

Mark: Still don't.

Martin: Yea.

Mark: And, so you went overseas when, precisely? It would be fairly early. That would be 1942 sometime, or maybe '43.

Martin: I think I went over, I think it was during the winter of '42.

Mark: So you would have had to go to Africa first?

Martin: We went to Casablanca, and then went north. And then, when we were stationed in North Africa, there, two weeks after we moved to Sicily, where our camp was, and the runways were, it was a lake when the rains started. Boy, they had that figured pretty close. Cause we went back to Africa to get all this stuff to bring into Sicily and Italy.

Mark: Now, when you were in Africa, what sort of missions were you flying? Were these the kind, bringing troops to combat, or were these more supply?

Martin: Well, it was invasions and different movements, and you had to take in paratroopers or gliders, too. Otherwise, it was always supplies. Gasoline and ammunition, and food. Blood. A lot of blood. But we'd land up behind the front lines. Some airplanes got shot down from the other side of the front lines, that is



how close we were. And those pasture strips, those fields over there, are real small.

Mark: Yea, I was going to ask, how far behind the lines were you actually flying in to - -

Martin: Well, sometimes you would be a mile or two miles, and sometimes it would be closer. It would depend upon on finding a field. You got as close as you could, you know? And then they had their wounded men there to load on and take back. But we took care of the wounded ourselves, until we got to England, to go off the continent. Then we had a nurse. And she had to help. But those nurses were always good to those kids. And they never, not one of them would get sick from flying. They were the only ones that ever smoked on our airplanes.

Mark: The nurses?

Martin: I smoked before, but on the airplane, nobody ever smoked but these kids on the litters.

Mark: Oh, the wounded?

Martin: Yea. The nurses would light them for them. But those nurses were always good to them. And she had a helper, too.

Mark: And, so, when you were in Africa and Italy, how often were you flying? Were you flying every day? Or every couple of days?

Martin: Sometimes every day, and it would depend upon what was going on. We'd practically, they tried to leave one airplane back at the base. Once in a while, you would get that, and you were going to work on that airplane. And about that time somebody else would say we need another airplane and you had to keep those records pretty close. But, hell, a lot of times, you'd fill out the records flying the English Channel.

Mark: So, again, when you were in Africa and Italy, and you weren't flying, what did you do for recreation? That is a very different culture from the U. S.

Martin: There was no recreation at all.

Mark: There was no Red Cross or USO?

Martin: Well, Red Cross was around once in a while. And then we had Bob Hope came to Africa, and he put on a program for us. And he was at the 82nd Airborne base, and we had to go to their base for the program. And he had a platform, where he was on, and the guys with him, and then there was a big shelter behind it. And the 82nd blew off a bomb back there.

Mark: And did Bob Hope know this at the time?

Martin: No, he didn't know it. No.

Mark: I can imagine he was surprised.

Martin: Yea, I guess so. Well, them V-2s, you've heard about them?

Mark: Yea.

Martin: They would put a hole in the ground if it was out in the open you could set a house in it.

Mark: Now, that was up in England.

Martin: Yea. Now, when we were in France already, we had to go to England, about eighteen miles out of London, to pick up some British paratroopers. And we couldn't pick them up for five days. We sat out there. We were eighteen miles out of London. We were just in the line of these V-2s. And those would blow off, well, everything would jump off the desk. They were big. And the only time you'd know they were coming - - they went around seventy miles high, and about two thousand feet above the ground, they would blow the war head off. That too you could hear. I and another guy was going down to the Underground at Paddington Station in London, and one blew up, and everybody dived down on their knees. See, the old City of London was really blown up more than the new city.

Mark: Yea. That was where most of the industrial district was, or close by.

Martin: Yea. And then they had this V-2. One day we had five hundred airplanes, the engines running, ready to take off. And I looked out of the windshield and I see this V-1 coming. The was always low, no pilot in it. And I said, they know we are going to take off on this runway. They are going to try to blow it up. And about that time, two P-51s come in, just about like this. Shot it down. When that hit the ground, it just knocked our doors open on the airplane, and everything.

Mark: Pretty big boom?

Martin: Yea. It was a real small airplane. It flew real slow. When they would run out of gas, then they would go down. But they had they gas figured out about right. Those Germans were smart people. And there would be, where these V-1s took off, it would be near a small village, and a woods, and there they would have their ramp, to take off unintelligible]. V-2's. you couldn't notice that too much. It was just stakes.

- Mark: I'd like to get back to some of the recreation, free time activity, when you had some. Now, the military has sort of a disreputable reputation for drinking and gambling, and that kind of thing. Did you see much of that while you were in the service?
- Martin: A lot of gambling. Yea. We didn't have much drinking to do in the camps. Of course, if it got where you had a good commanding officer, and he would send an airplane to Belgium and get a barrel of beer, or something like that once in a while.
- Mark: In terms of chronic alcoholism, and that sort of thing, you didn't see much of that?
- Martin: No, it wasn't. Once in a while, see, we'd get these new airplanes from the States, and they were on ATC's - - non-combatant. And they would go back to the States on a big job and bring some more over. Once in a while, they'd bring you a bottle of whiskey and say, here, take it. And on a new airplane, always, two bicycles came with it.
- Mark: Why was that?
- Martin: Well, you could, a lot of times your camp was a long way from where the airplanes were, and you could ride them back and forth.
- Mark: So, for D-Day, why don't you just walk me through, you know, your experience at D-Day? For example, now, the invasion happened, of course, on June 6. But did you have some idea that it was coming before June 6? Or were you surprised?
- Martin: A very short time. We were thinking that it was coming, but we didn't know until - - after we knew, you couldn't even get a pass to go to town.
- Mark: Yea.
- Martin: When I say, the last night we dropped paratroopers was D-Day morning about one-thirty. But we went, say this is the river, the Channel, and we came in like this, was back wall, everything else, and those paratroopers were supposed to stop everything coming up to help the guys. Boy, these ports along that Channel was that much cement. Boy, they had that really built up. But, see, this here even says, friendly fire. But, D-Day was pretty quiet.
- Mark: So, you dropped troops behind the lines just before the invasion?
- Martin: Yes,
- Mark: Now, the troops had to have been dropped very early in the morning so you must have taken off from England some time late that night of June 5th?

Martin: Yea, it was probably around midnight, or a little bit more. Because we dropped them about one-thirty. And we were about ninety miles north of London, where we were stationed. But it was kept pretty quiet.

Mark: But you must have had some idea you were taking part in momentous events.

Martin: Oh, yea.

Mark: I am interested in the spirit and the feeling on the planes.

Martin: Because they knew how they had their lines set up there, and their blocks, cement blocks.

Mark: So, are people excited? Or scared? Or both? Or what sort of was the feeling on the plane?

Martin: It was a funny thing. Just like you do on a job, your job right now. You just went ahead and did it. They even, the English Channel, they threw gasoline out there and they burnt up a bunch of ships for Germany. But, if they had ever got into England, they'd have raised hell pretty fast.

Mark: So, when did you first go an a glider?

Martin: Well, when we trained gliders at Del Arc, Texas, we'd take one up and drop it at two thousand feet, and then go down and load another one on. Sometimes, you would do that thirteen to fourteen hours a day.

Mark: That was your training?

Martin: Training, yea. First gliders we towed, I think, were into Sicily, yea. And then after we got to Sicily, they sent us to Castle Vetrano. The Germans had a good runway there. And we had to start towing two gliders. That was the first week, with two gliders.

Mark: Now, I would imagine that poses some difficulty in terms of flying a plane and that sort of thing. How precisely did that work? You take off and the glider just sort of - - is it like taking a trailer, a camper trailer on your car? How does that work?

Martin: Well, it took extra power to pull it off. Especially two of them. Even those Horsas, they pulled hard. That was a big glider, that Horsa.

Mark: I would think that was a little more dangerous than a typical take-off.

Martin: Oh, yea. But we, some invasions, we'd have as high as thirty-five, forty airplanes in the squadron. Otherwise, we'd have about twenty-five. And we could take off, what was it, thirty-six airplanes in six minutes, off from one runway. Boy, think of the prop wash right there. But they took a lot of chances, but they, we had a C. O. that was really good. His, he had a dog that flew with him every time he got in an airplane. I guess his time was sent to Washington the same as ours. But they were killed at the same time, too.

Mark: The prisoners of war, when did you start bringing them back. Was it very soon after D-Day? Or was it a while into the campaign?

Martin: Well, it didn't take too long. Of course, then, the Americans held them doing that in a prison like that. But we would always have to de-louse the airplane before we would land at our own base. But the worst prisoners of war that we'd see, they were all officers. Every one. And they had their regular uniforms. And they was black, like grease. Like they never washed, or nothing. So we had to stop at an English base, and refuel. And they called on the radio, that if we wanted to feed those prisoners of war, we should bring them to the mess hall. When they went to the mess hall, they had gallon cans of peaches, and stuff. And those boys got in there like this. That was the worst bunch of prisoners we ever hauled. Every one was an officer. Many of our boys bailed out. Plane was shot down. The Frenchman would dress them into their clothing and stuff, and walk them right through the front lines. But if one was ever taken a prisoner of war and got away, we would never send him again, because they would shoot him the minute they caught him. So, it is fifty years ago, but everything comes back pretty easy.

Mark: Now, I think you mentioned that you had some SS prisoners, too.

Martin: Oh, yea.

Mark: Now, they were known for being a little tougher and gung-ho, I guess used to be the term.

Martin: That's right.

Mark: Was that your experience?

Martin: But they seemed to be pretty good on the airplane. Suppose they were happy they were out of the war, in the first place. But we were ordered, if one was sitting here and his buddy was over here, and he wanted to sit with his buddy, we'd say, "No, you stay there." You made him understand you were the boss. And he had to do as you told. But, otherwise, they were pretty good. They would talk between themselves. You couldn't understand them. But I'd say they were kind of happy they were out of the war, in the first place. And then we would always haul them to different - - the Americans, they came to Bordeaux. That is where we unloaded

them. And then everyone had different, English, French.

Mark: Now, as time went on, did these prisoners change at all? In terms of their age and morale, and that type of thing? Did you notice?

Martin: Well, not too much. Not too much. Of course, most of them, you couldn't understand them, neither.

Mark: Well, you know, there is some famous photograph from the end of the war of teen-age boys in uniform, because they were running out of men. I am wondering if, I am kind of curious from your experiences if you noticed that sort of thing.

Martin: Not too much.

Mark: Whether the prisoners were hungrier, or younger, or - -

Martin: See, at last, toward the end, they would just leave a hundred thousand Germans in one group. They would have their guns and everything. And, see, Dunkirk was that way, too. Right on the Channel. And I know one day we had to go to Paris and put on gasoline to take out on to the front lines, and there was pins in each wheel, to pull when you, so you could raise them up afterward. And I was pulling one, and I see that the tread in the tire was crooked. So I got up and told the pilot that we couldn't take off with this load, and land again at Frankfurt, Germany. He said, "There is a rifle shot, or something, in that tire that loosened it up." So, the CO says, "Don't worry. I'll give you a navigator and you guys come in alone. We are going to go, and I will send a guy out, a truck out, and he'll change that tire for you." So we got to Frankfurt, and the buildings were burning, and there was dead ones laying there yet. And we landed there. And I knew when I left the base that the runway was like this, and over here about three miles was about a hundred thousand Germans. And this navigator he give us, he was going right over the damned thing. And I just tapped him on the shoulder, I said, "We better turn to the left pretty fast, because we are getting awful close to them." And we could see that bunch when he made his turn. Pilot made the turn. We could see the group over that way.

Mark: So you were pretty close to the front lines.

Martin: Oh, yea. We was always to the front lines. But these Germans were way back from the front lines. They would just have guards around them.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Martin: Yea. They had their guns and everything. See, they was glad there were there too, instead of at the front lines, I suppose.

- Mark: Or in Russia. Why don't you tell me a little bit about your plane? I've often found that a lot of Air Force guys had an affair, for lack of a better term, with the plane. Did you always fly a C-47?
- Martin: Yea. That is all we, that is the only thing we had in the outfit.
- Mark: Why don't you describe the plane for me, and what it was good at, and what it wasn't good at?
- Martin: Well, we thought it was the best airplane built at that time.
- Mark: Some people still do.
- Martin: The wings made that airplane. There was big wings on it. And then the engines were Pratt & Whitney. They were good engines. And it used about eighty gallons of gas an hour. And we could haul up to eight hundred and some gallons. And, of course, oil. The engines always used oil, it seemed. The guy would come out and fill the oil tank. They would come out with the same kind of a truck that they brought gasoline out. And when we was going to Trinidad, we went way down to South Africa, to cross to Ascension Island. And went way down to South Africa to go to Ascension Island. And the pilot got stuck with the airplane, and it was about two miles from the base. And the gas man came out there, and filled us up with gas. So I had to see that it get that damned thing out of there. And the gas man said, "Well, you see where those two paths cross there? One tribe ate a boy from the other tribe yesterday." Here, the radio operator and I were out there alone. We'd get stuck up in the front lines on these fields. One day, I had French prisoners of war. We didn't dare to unload them. And I'd dig a trench in front of the wheels to go that far, and the old hedge rows were getting pretty close. But we got her out of there.
- Mark: So, a C-47 had a crew of how many?
- Martin: Well, the pilot, co-pilot, aerial engineer - myself - and a radio man, and sometimes you'd have a navigator, and sometimes not.
- Mark: So, during the course of the way, how many planes did you fly in? Was it just one plane? Or did you have like a bunch of different planes?
- Martin: Oh, you could go from one to another, until you got a plane of your own, see. That is just like I had a plane before I got this new one. And I had that one day. Well, they put me onto another one. It was another old one.
- Mark: Was it the same crew you flew with all the time?
- Martin: No. No. Radio man was mostly, radio man was with you more than the pilot and

co-pilot. But sometimes your pilot, co-pilot was with you. See, this here crew, I had this crew quite a while. See, this is the co-pilot, the first one. That is the regular pilot. That is myself, and that is my radio man. This was taken in France.

Mark: Now, there is one commanding officer you speak very highly of, was that one?

Martin: What is that?

Mark: There is one commanding officer you seem to speak very highly of.

Martin: Oh, yea.

Mark: Is he in this picture?

Martin: Well, no, he isn't. I don't think I've got a picture of him. But he was just a good man for enlisted men.

Mark: In what way?

Martin: Well, I guess he understood them, a little better. And he had a spotted coach dog that always flew with him. And then, our head nurse was his girlfriend. When he got killed, she damned near went crazy. But he was an extraordinary man. That was the only funeral we ever went to when we were over there. Many guys got killed and stuff, but everybody took off that day and went to his funeral. When we went to that funeral, oh, there were trenches dug from here to the opposite corner of this, that long. And there was thirteen chaplains. And that was all airmen that were buried there. They probably were buried and sent back to the States again. I had a friend that got killed in southern France. He was probably buried by the airplane, and when we went to Cannes, we would have to go to Marseilles to refuel, then he was buried about seven miles out of Marseilles. And then he was buried again. So there was about three different times before they were laid where they were supposed to be. And he never did come home. He is buried over there. But, you thought a lot of your buddies. We'd get passes once in a while. Like to go into London, stuff like that.

Mark: Not very often, I take it?

Martin: No.

Mark: Not much time.

Martin: No. It was always something you had to do on the airplanes, regardless. See, the English paratroopers, we had to put a heavy carpet on the floor. The bottom of their shoes were hobnailed. And, boy, they couldn't walk on that aluminum without running out. Let's see, I was, one day I had a paratrooper, he got hit above



his eye, and the blood was dripping off his chin. And he come to me, he said, "Do you think I should jump, or not?" I said, "I can't tell you to jump or I can't tell you not to jump. But if you don't jump, I got to be guard over you until I turn you over to the MPs back at the base." And he didn't jump. And they court-martialed him. They said, "Maybe we needed what you had on your back." But they just took his striped, is all that they did. But his blood was dripping off from him, and I said, "You jump if you want, and if you don't, I just got to keep you under guard." So, it was a lot of rules and regulations. Some of them were even killed before they jumped.

Mark: Rifle fire, or what?

Martin: Gunfire. Yea. See, if we was flying at fifteen hundred feet with a load going in, we was flying seven hundred and fifty feet. Coming out, we'd go down to treetops. And they could have a shell that would burst at seven hundred and fifty feet, or three hundred and fifty, or regardless. Like at night, well, it was just like the Fourth of July. It was just thrown up all around you.

Mark: So, what were the most dangerous types of missions? Was it dropping people? Or was it dropping supplies? And what times were you in the most danger?

Martin: Well, that would be when you are dropping paratroopers or gliders. Cause you are over the front lines then. When you was dropping supplies, well, you was going close to the front lines. But they had, we had a few shot down over the front lines while they was landing. I know Patton, God, we'd have him here today and tomorrow, he 'd be thirty miles from there. And a lot of them didn't like him, but he got there.

Mark: So, I think you mentioned, when the war ended, you were in Trinidad.

Martin: Yea. When the Japanese, we were in Trinidad then. So then, we couldn't buy whiskey in Trinidad. American soldiers.

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

Mark: Was that the army's rule?

Martin: Army rule. So we knew all the officers, flying with them and everything. So we'd give them \$10 and they'd buy us each one, three quarts. We didn't go to bed that night. So then, we flew to Miami and took the train up to Camp McCoy.

Mark: And so you probably had a whole bunch of points by this time. There was a point system.

Martin: Yea. We had points enough to go home. When we were in France. The 82nd were

grumbling pretty hard. They had the same amount of points. Wherever we was stationed, the 82nd was with us. And they were grumbling. So Eisenhower called us together. There was an airport about fourteen miles out of Paris. Le Bourget is right in Paris, just the underground to it. And we, what was I going to explain?

Mark: You were talking about the end of the war and the 82nd Airborne grumbling about--

Martin: Yea. So, Ike drew us together out there on that airport fourteen out of Paris, and he says, "We know what you mean. You should be home. But you are going to stay until it's over." And he told the troops. And we met the woman who drove his jeep. And she was the head of the women's underground. Boy, that French underground did a lot of work. See, that is what our pilots, or anybody, or crew chief, they'd get you back through the front lines. And that underground really was quite operative. But there is a lot of things a fellow forgets. We was in, stationed in England, at Grantham. And when they sound the alert, the first alert, the bombers or staffers are twenty miles away. See, at first, they would come right in across the Channel, but they had that guarded pretty good. Then they would go way up at the Wash, at Bath, and come in, and go south. Well, that night it sounded, the alarm sounded, and our underground tunnels, where we would run to, it was across the roadway. And, boy, we came out of that bunk, out of the place we was staying in. And they were strafing the road already. So I said, "I ain't going to run across that road in front of them." I laid right down here and about thirty men run over me.

Mark: Now, that didn't happen very often. Did it? There Germans attacking you?

Martin: Oh, in England, quite a bit. But, I say, they couldn't come right across the Channel, but they would go up to Bath and come in on the north, and then they'd go south. In England. Yea, they were pretty smart people.

Mark: So, you were discharged in October of '45?

Martin: Yea.

Mark: So, when it came time to be getting your life back on track, what were your priorities? For example, you had a business you had to get back to.

Martin: Well, I took it pretty easy for a while.

Mark: So, you got home in October. When did you start working?

Martin: Well, I started working off and on shifts, all winter. But I kind of took it easy and everything.

Mark: Go fishing?

Martin: Oh, yea. Come to Madison a lot. You'd be surprised, where there is a blackout like over there, you didn't see no lights, at night. And, boy, when you'd get into a place where there were lights, you couldn't see.

Mark: Like Madison?

Martin: Yea. My brother, he was in World War I, so when I got home, he was going to take me to Madison. And he wanted me to drive. And I got half-way around the Square, and I stopped and I said, "I can't go no further." And he drove around. But, your eyes get used to that, like in England, if you would go to town, everything would be blacked out. You thought it was a pub to walk into. You walked into somebody's house. How you found around in those places on blackout I don't understand to this day.

Mark: But you did?

Martin: Yea.

Mark: So, when you got back, how was your business doing? During the war? I mean, was it in poor shape because of the war, or did your brother and the assistant keep it up pretty well?

Martin: Yea. They did pretty good. Of course, they allowed so much gasoline, and you had the coupon, you had to have a coupon to buy gas. We was, we were in that business about thirty-five years, thirty-three years. And I said, now I got to be eighty-eight years old, I got to pump my own.

Mark: Life works in strange ways sometimes. Doesn't it? Now, so, after the war, veterans were eligible for some for business and that type of thing. Did you use that, or not?

Martin: No, I did. I used it to build a house, in 1949. I built a house. We live in it yet, today. We paid \$39 every month, paid that off.

Mark: You'd pay a lot more than that now, let me tell you.

Martin: Yea. And then I was drawn back into Madison here twice, for the check. See, I was hit in the leg and the back of my neck, and my forehead. But this doctor I had checked me, he didn't even know what a powder burn was. See, those exploded within two feet of me. My flak vest was just shreds on the outside. And then they called me back in once more, I had to go in. But I never did get anything.

Mark: Now, that was right after World War II. And so you didn't get a disability or a

pension, or anything?

Martin: No. That is what they were checking. I didn't get no disability.

Mark: Now, there was the GI Bill that was famous for sending a lot of young men to school after World War II. And someone in their thirties, well.

Martin: I was getting too old to go to school. But I did get, of course, all it was, if I didn't pay the bank, they would pay the bank. They owned the house. But I got it paid up. Of course, you build a house then, the house cost me about \$8 thousand. Lot and all.

Mark: Imagine that.

Martin: Yea. Now you pay \$30 thousand, \$35 thousand for a lot.

Mark: Yea. You sure do. I just have one last area I want to cover, and that involves veterans organizations. Now, on this sheet I had you fill out, you mentioned that you joined the American Legion.

Martin: Yes.

Mark: At what point? Was it right after the war, or were you a little farther along?

Martin: My brother, that was in World War II, he got me the first day I was home, to join the Legion. And I have been into that for over fifty years now.

Mark: Those World War I guys were pretty gung-ho with that type of thing.

Martin: Yea. Yea.

Mark: Were you what you would call an active member? Did you--

Martin: Oh, yea, I was real active. I still am.

Mark: So. I am interested in the activities of veterans groups. After the war, what was the main concern of your post in the American Legion? In the meetings, did you discuss communism, or veterans benefits?

Martin: Yea, a little of everything, like that. We have a nice post. We built a new building in '57. And then we were running Bingo here. You got to make your money somehow, you know. Yea, yesterday we had a real, we always had a good program on Decoration Day.

Mark: So, after World War II, up until World War II, the American Legion was just for

World War I vets.

Martin: Yea.

Mark: You must have been one of the first World War II vets in the post, then.

Martin: Yea.

Mark: Were there a lot of World War II vets coming in, or were you sort of unusual?

Martin: Well, a lot of World War II signed up right away. But we have, Marshall isn't very big, but we have over a hundred members. But a lot of them never show up at a meeting, you know. But we run Bingo every week, for a long time. We have quit it now.

Mark: Well, that is pretty much all I have.

Martin: Okay.

Mark: The questions. Is there anything you would like to add? Anything you think we skipped over?

Martin: I don't know of anything. After I get home, I will probably think of something.

Mark: Oh, I always think of questions too, but you have to stop somewhere.

Martin: People can't really realize what they had to go through over there. Yea. Even, like in England, those V-2s, you would think that it would be bothering you, but they were getting pretty close. They didn't bother us when we were in France as much as England. But, I say it, what country would see, if we hauled men to rest camps, we went along the Alps. They claimed some people flying along the Alps, said, "This engine isn't running right. Get over the Alps and land in Switzerland." And the war was over.

Mark: Is that rumor, or is that true?

Martin: Oh, that is supposed to be true. We talked about it but never took the chance.

Mark: Well, rumors run rampant in the military.

Martin: Yea. But, I don't know yet today, to this day, who owns the Isle of Man. We were in England and the first sergeant came to the tent, and he said I should have my airplane ready at eight o'clock tomorrow morning. And dressed in Class A uniform. And the radio operator, too. And then there was another crew chief, he had to do the same with his airplane. We didn't know what we were going to do,

or where we were going. Got up in the air, and I said to the pilot, I said, "Where are we going?" He said, "We are going to the Isle of Man." And when we got to the Isle of Man, it was about an hour and a half from where we were stationed. It was a brand new runway. And the man came out from the tower, and they wanted to put the chocks under the wheels, the locks on the wings, everything. As if the king of England landed. And we were told that Douglas was about five miles from this air strip. And you could buy steaks that thick. And the women had no morals. So, we thought, oh, boy. And this was on the Fourth of July. And within an hour, the pilot came out and said, "Get the plane ready. We have got to leave within the hour." We shouldn't have been there in the first place. I think that had nothing to do with the war. Same as Switzerland. But I never did find out who owned that island. So we left then. And we went to Brooklyn. No, it was something like Brooklyn, in England. On the Fourth of July. And they had a big celebration there. So we landed there. I remember we ride around with the people. And we couldn't buy whiskey in England, either. Like, if you was an Englishman, you belonged to a club, that was a pub. And this old guy came up to my radioman and I, and he said, "Now, if you fellows want to drink some whiskey, come with me. I am going to my club." And then he would sign us up, and we could buy whiskey there. And my radioman said to him, he says, "Do you guys always celebrate Fourth of July here in England?" He got mad as hell. And then I was sent to a rest camp, I and another fellow, in England. And we were there ten days. And when I got wounded that time, I didn't fly for ten days, either. Well, we had a - - I forget the name of the town. Quite a ways out of town was a big hotel. And we could get up in the morning at eleven o'clock, and still have breakfast. Didn't have to be dressed in Class A. And you'd get on a bus and go downtown. Anything. This was really the life.

Mark: That didn't happen very often, did it?

Martin: No. I don't know why they sent us. They just pulled us out of the hat, or - - we were both getting up in age, too. If this was that, or what.

Mark: Well, it sounds like you were pretty busy, too. I mean, you just needed some morale boosting. Well, anyway.

Martin: But we did have a good squadron. We couldn't complain.

Mark: Well, good.

Martin: See, this is a 47, right here. Now, we couldn't haul twenty-eight paratroopers. Because they had more on their backs than their own weight. Or, did you want this?

Mark: Yea, I want to put that in the file. Okay. Thanks for coming in. Very, very interesting.

**[End of Interview]**