

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
John "Jack" R. Miller
B-17 Pilot, Air Force, World War II.

1994

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Miller, John “Jack” R., (1920-). Oral History Interview, 1994.

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.

Transcript : 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers : 0.1 ft. (1 folder).

Abstract

John “Jack” R. Miller, a native of Madison (Wisconsin) discusses his decorated service during World War II as a pilot in both the Canadian Air Force and the U.S. Army Air Corps who flew twenty-five B-17 combat missions out of England with the 95th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force. Miller provides a sketch of his early life in Madison and reminiscences about watching parades on the Square during the 1920s. He also says that his great-grandfather, Charles B. Miller, served in the Civil War from Wisconsin and fought against Nathan Bedford Forrest, whose great-grandson Miller served with during World War II. Miller identifies his motivation for joining the Canadian Air Force prior to American involvement in World War II by stating that it was his childhood dream to be a pilot, flight lessons were expensive, and he could jump-start the process of being accepted into the Aviation Cadets in the States as one needed a college education and he was only a freshmen at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Interviewed by the Clayton Knight Committee in Canada to determine his acceptability, Miller began his training in Ottawa (Ontario), then to No. 1 Manning Depot in Toronto, then to flight school in Picton (Ontario), and finally to No. 7 Bombing Gunnery School in Paulson (Manitoba). He characterizes his training in Canada as strict and tells of an American friend who washed out because he was caught hedge hopping (flying low over the ground) and went back to the States, eventually becoming a full colonel during the Vietnam War. He says that at least one third in his group were Americans, and although there were cadets from the British Isles and Canada, most were from Australia and New Zealand. After Pearl Harbor, Miller was easily able to get into the U.S. Army Air Corps as Americans weren’t really supposed to be up in Canada anyway. He instructed aviation cadets in a BT-13A at Goodfellow Field (Texas) until he was sent to learn how to fly a B-17 at Hendrick Field (Florida). He states that the original cadre for their bomb squad was formed at Geiger Field (Washington) and mentions a variety of other stateside locations before his departure for England in May 1943. His combat missions started immediately and he addresses the psychology of his first flight and seeing planes go down. He speaks of tremendous losses during his third mission over Onteal, Germany where they had no cover and were badly outnumbered. He speaks of tremendous sadness after the mission and that they had no flyable planes the next day. He explains that he began to use alcohol to unwind, stating he needed “about three fingers of Scotch before I could breath.” Miller reveals that airmen were not allowed to go to the funerals of their comrades as this would have been too difficult to recover from. He became the sixth American pilot to successfully complete twenty-five missions and he speaks of the large number of casualties in his bomb group and among his own crew. He comments on being quite lucky to get through, characterizing this as “the falling of the cards” and explains that a lot of airmen “flipped out;” coming down from a flight unable to speak and “white as a shirt.” Miller points out that the

only protection in an airplane is their guns. A prayer service was held before each mission, which Miller portrays as sad because no one knew who was coming back and who wasn't. He speaks at length about the Schweinfurt raid into Germany, commenting on the length of the mission and the danger involved in returning to England after the bombing raid. Miller discusses rest and relaxation (R&R) where airmen would be sent to a rest home, called "the Flack House;" these were old English homes with time for card playing, writing letters, billiards, beautiful scenery, and no concerns about each day. He speaks of dangers caused by the many new replacements that sometimes had mid-air collisions due to poor visibility. He also speaks of the letdown felt when missions were cancelled due to the weather. He was present at the Alconbury Disaster where a airplane accidentally dropped bombs on the field killing twenty-three men, one of whom died in his arms. Miller provides a vivid depiction of flying a bombing mission describing the cramped space in the cock pit, the cold, confining equipment, complexity of instruments, having the plane jump up after bombing, hearing guns shooting, and having no idea of the mission's effectiveness. However, he does speak highly about their success in taking out German war factories, oil refineries, and infrastructure. He explains that P-51s were not able to escort B-17s very far until they got drop tanks and then were able provide escort into Berlin. He describes having his airplanes all shot up, especially focusing on one instance when he had wounded crew who would be unable to bail out so he decided, a twenty-two year old Captain, to try to get the plane back to England. He briefly describes his off-duty time, several times in London, but mostly in Alconbury, where he and his friends would shoot darts, drink foreign beer ("arf and arf"), play poker, and listen to the radio. He talks about the prevalence of spies and the important of keeping your mouth shut. Training was a constant and Miller was kept busy instructing new people and keeping his crew combat ready. Miller comments on the black market and tells of a T-bone steak he was served in January 1944 after his last combat mission. He characterizes buzz bombs as "spooky" and relates almost being shot down by British fire on his last mission because his IFF (Identification-Friend-or-Foe) indicator was hit, making him a target. He talks about being sent from the Army Air Force Redistribution Center (New Jersey) to a rehabilitation center in South Carolina; where he was able to recuperate, gain weight, and be with his wife. Miller spent his remaining service time as an instrument pilot training instructor, getting out in October 1945 to fly for TWA, an essential industry. He stayed in the Reserves until 1957 and flew for TWA until his combat disabilities caught up with him and he returned to Madison in 1946, lived out at Truax in a converted barracks, and went into sales. He reflects briefly about his gratitude for the creation of the Veterans Administration and GI Bill benefits and concludes with his involvement in veterans groups, including Disabled American Veterans, and various Air Force reunion groups.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, 2002.

Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2002.

Transcribed Interview:

Mark: The date is July 28, 1994

Mark: Good morning Jack.

Jack: Good morning Mark.

Mark: How are you?

Jack: Fine.

Mark: John R. Miller. And this is his full name. Jack is his nickname.

Jack: Right.

Mark: Okay, let's just start with some of these questions I have here.

Jack: Sure.

Mark: You were born in what year?

Jack: I was born August 21, 1920.

Mark: 1920. So you finished high school like in the late 1930's.

Jack: '38.

Mark: During the depression.

Jack: Out of West High School in Madison.

Mark: And do you remember Hitler's invading of Poland?

Jack: Yes I do.

Mark: Do you remember your reaction?

Jack: Uh, at the time I didn't think too much of it. It didn't, it was so far away it didn't. I think it was brought up in the Civics class, my civics teacher, Mr. Leahy, and we were talking something about that and I really don't remember much about it.

Mark: I'm interested in what prompted you to join the Canadian Air Force before, because you joined the World Canadian Air Force before the US even got into the war. I'm interested in what prompted you to make that decision.

Jack: Well, for one thing, I always wanted to be a pilot. An airline pilot, ever since I was a little kid. I never thought I'd have a chance. And I had a chance to go to Canada, prior to our getting into WWII. I took it so I could learn how to fly, and that's what I wanted to do and that's exactly what I did.

Mark: I see. It's kind of the opposite of the Vietnam War experience. Going to Canada meant staying out of a war and for you going into Canada meant going into one essentially.

Jack: Now at the time I went up there, to get into the Cadets down here, the Aviation Cadets, I believe at that time you had to have a college education. And I just started at the University here as a freshman so I had a chance to jump start a little bit as I say. Get a little advance. And I did know that I might eventually end up in combat doing this thing but that was not a big thing at the time.

Mark: So it wasn't the war that brought you to Canada, it was that you wanted to fly.

Jack: That's right. Flying was very costly to fly back in those days.

Mark: Oh, I'm sure.

Jack: This is a good way of getting it. Getting the time and to learn how to fly.

Mark: Was it difficult for an American to get into the Canadian Air Force?

Jack: Yeah, they had some people come by and interview us. It was called the Clayton Knight Committee. And they interviewed you and asked a lot of questions and wanted to know about your health and so on. And then if you were accepted you got a physical and a psychological profile and a written examination to make sure you might be a candidate. And I passed all those so I was accepted.

Mark: Where did you begin your training?

Jack: The training started first of all we went to Ottawa, Ontario and from there we went to #1 Manning Depot in Toronto, Ontario and then to flight school in Picton, Ontario and then from there I was sent to #7 Bombing Gunnery school in Paulson, Manitoba. And we were teaching Australian, New Zealander's bombing and gunnery. That was about it.

Mark: So at this time being part of the British Empire, Canada was already involved in the War?

Jack: They certainly were.

Mark: So you were pretty much on a war footing at that time?

Jack: That's right, I was. As a matter of fact just prior to Pearl Harbor the commanding officer of the day said that -----, Manitoba, his name was Group Captain Dipple, he was an Englishman. And my buddy up there, my friend and I were selected to go to an operational training unit to learn how to fly Spitfires and we were just getting ready to go when WWII or Pearl Harbor came along and so we wanted to get back into our Air Force. Incidentally my roommate up there was a washed out pilot. The cadet, the aviation cadet program down here, he got washed out because he was hedgehopping.

Mark: What's hedgehopping?

Jack: Well, that's going down, flying low over the ground and doing that sort of thing. He got caught by somebody. They expelled him. They were very strict. But this man came back and went to our Air Force, he came back and eventually wound up being a full Colonel, he stayed in as a thirty-year man and he took his own group over to Vietnam. He was a fighter pilot; he was an Ace during WWII. My best friend up there. So, he was washed up but he got back in it.

Mark: Yeah. Um, perhaps you could describe some of the personnel in the Canadian Air Force, for instance were there a lot of American, some Britishers perhaps, perhaps you could describe some of the people?

Jack: Well, there were, I would say, on the base I was at, there was, I would say a good 1/3 to 50% of us were Americans and the rest were a mixture of Canadians and English, Scotch, Irish, Great Britain types and then the people we were training with were mostly from Australia and New Zealand although there were a few Canadians, but most of them were that. They were learning how to be gunners and bombardiers.

Mark: Now these people you were training with, were they in the Australian Air Force or did they come to Canada?

Jack: They were the Royal New Zealand Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force, they were cadets.

Mark: It sounds like a kind of almost adjunct American Air Force. Is this typical throughout the Canadian Air Force in general?

Jack: There were a lot of Americans up there. I was surprised at the number of us that were up there.

Mark: And what brought all these Americans up there? Was it the war or was it the Duchess herself?

Jack: I don't know. I talked to, well most of us, my friends up there just for the love of flying. And at that time it was glamorous to be a pilot. It was good.

Mark: It was, really?

Jack: Yeah, and I think that had a lot to do with it. A lot of them did want to make a career out of being in the service. There were other people who were like me that wanted to fly commercially too. This was a good way of getting time without costing a lot.

Mark: I'm going to back track, I'm kind of off here. I want to go back a little bit about your upbringing. You're a native of Madison?

Jack: Yes.

Mark: Grew up here?

Jack: Yep, born and raised here, right.

Mark: West High you said you graduated from.

Jack: Right. I, my great-great grandfather Manoaah D. Miller came to Madison in 1853 and founded the first Baptist Church.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Jack: So, we've been here a long time. Our roots have been here a long time. I was born here in Madison, not too far from here actually. I lived down on West Washington Ave. at one time and then we moved out to the north side and I went to Randall School Kindergarten. Dutchen School through sixth grade then to West High School, West Junior High and then they had West High and I graduated from West High in 1938.

Mark: Hmm, hmm. So, this is the Depression during this time?

Jack: Right. Right. This was during the Depression. Right.

Mark: Were you and your family adversely affected very much by it?

Jack: We always seemed to have plenty of food to eat and clothes on our back. Dad, my dad, actually retired from the Wisconsin Life Insurance Company as a Controller, Vice President Controller of the Company. Right where you and I are sitting right now doing this interview, was the old Wisconsin Life Insurance building and I can remember when I was a kid I used to come up when they would have parades

around the square sitting up there in the office. This very spot that you and I are in right now was the old Wisconsin Life Insurance Company building. It was torn down and this building was put up.

Mark: Yeah. Cause I've been here seven years and that's not much. Well, compared to a lot of people I know.

Jack: I used to come back here in the early twenties to watch parades with my dad, he would take us upstairs and look out and watch the parades around the square. So, this is really interesting. And another thing that I might, well I'll get to that later.

Mark: Go ahead.

Jack: I was going to tell you about, I got my great-grandfather, Charles B. Miller's, Civil War record here through the computer and it was, he was, he fought against Nathan Bedford Forrest down in Tennessee, Memphis. That was several skirmishes. I flew a mission on June 13, 1943 over Kegel Germany, and I was flying on the right wing of his great-grandson General Nathan Bedford Forrest III. And I thought that was really interesting. I didn't know that my great-grandfather fought his great-grandfather during the civil war.

Mark: That's interesting.

Jack: It was very interesting I thought.

Mark: Okay. Let's go back now up to Pearl Harbor.

Jack: Okay.

Mark: When Pearl Harbor was attacked you were in Canada. You were in Canadian Air Force?

Jack: Right.

Mark: And you decided to come back to the U.S. and join the American Air Force?

Jack: Right.

Mark: Was it trouble for you getting out of the Canadian Air Force and getting into the American Air Force?

Jack: No. Not a bit. In fact, they ran a railroad train right from the west coast of Canada right to the east coast. You go in one side, end of the train as an officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force and come out the other side as a United States Army Air Corps. So it was very easy. You see, actually, we weren't supposed to be up there during

the war cause we weren't legally at war with Germany at that time, so actually, this was supposed to be a secret sort of a thing.

Mark: Or something they kind of wing-dinged into?

Jack: Right. They didn't do much about it.

Mark: So, having been an Air Force Officer already, what kind of training in the American Air Force did you have to undertake?

Jack: Well, the first thing they had me do was to go down to Randolph Field in San Antonio Texas and then from there they took me to San Angelo, Texas and got me checked out in an aircraft that I taught cadets in. It was a BT-13A. It was a basic flying school. So, I instructed aviation cadets in a BT-13A down there in San Angelo, Texas.

Mark: Which air force base is that? I was in the Air Force myself.

Jack: Oh, Randolph Field, no it was Randolph in San Antonio and San Angelo was Goodfellow Field and that was a basic flying school, basic training flying school. So, I did instruct there until I was sent to Hendrick Field in Florida to learn how to fly a B-17. And that was in September of 42.

Mark: And what did this sort of training involve? Just getting in the B-17 and flying around?

Jack: Yeah, right. I was trained as a command pilot, the first pilot and we got checked out and we had an instructor with us. I was assigned a co-pilot when I got confident enough to fly a B-17 and a bombardier and a navigator. And then we just trained down there for about a month on these air crafts. We would go out on submarine patrol once in a while. We didn't get too much in the way of high altitude flying which we did later on. We learned the basics of flying the aircraft which wasn't, well it was a little bit different than, it was such a big thing when you were used to flying something by our standards wasn't big at all. But to us it was quite large.

Mark: Well, they were pretty new at this time too, weren't they?

Jack: Right.

Mark: You must of been one of the first...?

Jack: Right. As a matter of fact, some of the air craft they had down there for us to train on were leftovers from Pearl Harbor. They were the old C's and D's and they didn't have the full tail like you see on the old movies. They had G's, F's and E's. But it was very, very interesting and it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it very much.

Mark: And, when did you get your orders to go to England?

Jack: Uh, I got out order to go to, we didn't know where we were going but I did want to back up just a tad. From Sebring, Hendricks Field Sebring, I went to Geiger Field in Spokane Washington, incidentally, we're going there at the end of this coming month of August for our annual reunion of our bomb group. And we, that's where the original cadre was formed there at Geiger Field, Spokane Washington in October of 1942. And I joined the group then. And then we trained there for a while then we went to Yufreta, Washington and back to Geiger and then to Rapid City, South Dakota to train more and then we went down to Kearney, Nebraska and picked up our B-17's that we were going to take somewhere and fly, they were combat ready. We didn't know where we were going, but we did know we were going to fly from West Palm Beach to Waller Field and Trinidad and Trinidad to Baalim and then Baalim to Brazil and then straight across the Atlantic to Dakar, Africa and then up to Marrakech. And we got to Marrakech, we had got secret orders were opened and we knew we were going to England. Some of the groups would go on to the Middle East in that area there, or even the Orient in that way, but we found out we were going to England.

Mark: This flight through South America, how long did that take?

Jack: Well, let's see it took us a little bit; we had a stopover in Trinidad because we had leaky bomb bay tanks. They put Bombay tanks in for the long trip we had to have extra fuel, we didn't have enough fuel. So, we were there about, the whole thing, all-in-all took us about 3-4 weeks. I think that was probably about that. I don't recollect I don't have my flight; the State Historical Society has got all that, so I'm not that good at pulling that stuff out of the air.

Mark: No, I understand. Neither am I.

Jack: If I got something in front of me I can tell when it is.

Mark: And then you got to England in the early 1940's?

Jack: Yeah. May of '43 we got there.

Mark: Oh, you got there in May of '43. And then you were flying combat weren't you?

Jack: Yep, I started right out. We started our first mission, my first mission was on the 17th of May, but the group's first mission was earlier than that. I'm not quite sure when it was though. But it was in the first week or so in May I think. But I flew the, my first mission was the groups first mission. On the 17th of May in '43 and we went to the submarine pins in France, on the west coast of France.

Mark: This is your very first combat?

Jack: Yeah, my very first combat mission.

Mark: Describe it. Was it what they called a milk run or was this tough?

Jack: No, it wasn't a milk run, you're always apprehensive about it but our group; I don't think had any losses. We had some battle damage. I'm not quite sure. If I had my book here I could tell you but I don't have that. That's when I saw my first enemy fighters and they were on the group up ahead as you could see them pouring in and you knew you were going to be coming up on that. I saw a couple of B-17's go down. That isn't very nice to see, your own people go down like that, but they weren't the leather bomb group, they were our people but I mean they weren't as close as our own group.

Mark: Yeah. I'm interested in what is going through your mind as you're on the runway about to take off on your first combat mission?

Jack: Well, you're kind of excited, your adrenaline gets to going and you get all pumped up and you're anxious to go and you can't hardly wait for them to shoot off the green flare from the control car saying that everything is go, and apprehensive and wondering what it is going to be like. You stop and think a little bit and say "I hope nothing happens" to yourself of course. You don't want your crew members, well they're all that way too, but I mean....

Mark: But it's something you don't....

Jack: You don't want to show your feelings too much. You're flying the airplane, everybody is depending on you and you're leading a group or a squadron, you want to make sure you look good.

Mark: Oh, I'm sure. That's pretty early in the war then.

Jack: Yep, they didn't start the missions over there until August '42, I think the first missions were over there, and throughout that winter we didn't fly hardly at all over there and then it picked up in the spring. We really got in ----- our ploy. When we first flew over there we never had nose guns or head on attacks and they knew this, they would come right at us, they would come right head on. Of course the cockpit was a prime target because that was the nerve setting of the whole airplane so, it was kind of rough at first there and it seems to get rougher as you went along.

Mark: I was going to ask how combat changed cause you flew 25 missions and this was over a span of...?

Jack: That was over up until the 21st, I flew my last one on the 21st of January 44.

Mark: So it was almost a year. And there were some important changes during this time?

Jack: Oh yes.

Mark: When did the P-51's first start to become?

Jack: Actually, I didn't see them start seeing P-51's until lets see, I think we had P-47's at first, and then they got 38's and 51's. They had 47's on Schweinfurt in October, that's the first time I really remember. They used to say we were going to have spitfire cover but I never saw it. I used to go down and sweep the air fields in France, tried to destroy everything. My first real taste of combat was the 13th of June, '43, the group's ninth mission, my third mission. On teal, Germany where the bomb naval installations there and that's the mission that Nathon Bedford Forrest III, General Forrest, was leading and I was flying on his right wing. And the only reason I was flying that day was the pilot of a crew came back on leave from London and the flight surgeon brought him because he was still kind of intoxicated.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Jack: Yeah, so they wanted, Colonel Gibson asked me to fly, Colonel Gibson was our air ----, so he asked me to take this crew, their crew on this mission. So I did. So, anyhow, sixty of us were sent there by General Anderson who was our Wing Commander, the Division Commander at the time. He put General Forrest in charge, or the Command Pilot, and out of the, we just got new what they called Tokyo Tanks, and it gave us an added range, that's why we went so far. And our combat wing there and that comprised of the 94th, 95th, 96th spot group which is 60 bombers, and out of the sixty, 22 were shot down over the target and we lost ten the 95th which was 103 men, and out of that, out of our original air -----, the 400 that went over there, we lost 103 on the groups ninth mission and my third mission. So you can see how the losses were...

Mark: Yeah, devastating.

Jack: Actually, that was horrendous and it was a very sad thing. It really was.

Mark: So, for a target that far and that early in the war, you didn't have fighter coverage out in the open?

Jack: None at all, we didn't have any at all.

Mark: So you really were sitting ducks then?

Jack: We really were. And they knew it and they came after us. We were badly outnumbered too. They, there were sixty of us and they I would say, I think they

must have had pretty close to 200 at the --. They just had a hayday. That whole sector up there, the -----, they knew about where we were going to make, concreted everybody up there, they just threw everything up at us. In addition to that, the flack ---- was fierce. The 88's were just blowing away at us, they knock you out of formation, the fighters will finish you off. In fact, those fellows were flying right through there own ----- into us, that's how radical they were. My airplane got all shot to heck. If I hadn't ----- back to the base I wouldn't have been able to fly.

Mark: Without a scratch?

Jack: Oh no. I had lots of scratches. In fact I had a hole in the right side of my airplane at the waist-gunnery window; you could almost drive a jeep through it. Oh, we were really badly shot up. Everybody was. I mean, we didn't have a flyable airplane the next day. They asked us how many we could get together; we called in and said we don't have any that are flyable right now. And they said they had to get some, we were getting replacements after about a week and they came in and they said, well, where is everybody? You see all the empty beds. They were here but they aren't anymore.

Mark: What was the mood around the base?

Jack: Oh, that was our most, very very sad, very sad. I got back from mission and the debriefing was very sad. Colonel Kestler, our group commander, I remember seeing him and he had tears in his eyes, 'What happened to my boys, what happened to my boys.' He was an old West Pointer and he was a father of the 95th. He just felt really bad. Of course we all did. A lot of tears in the eyes. Shock, disbelief. And one of the things I did, I started doing about that time is get about three fingers of scotch before I could breath. I tried to unwind you a little bit.

Mark: Did it help?

Jack: It did a little bit, yeah. But I think a lot of the fellows, well I know a lot of them did, myself included, went over to the Officers Club afterwards and had quite a few, kind of relaxed, but it didn't do us much good. But that was the worst loss of the 95th bomb group ever had.

Mark: I was going to ask, was that the worst?

Jack: That was the worst.

Mark: Because I see on here that you of course were in a Schweinfurt raid.

Jack: Yeah. Well, we lost 60 out of 244 airplanes that time. 60 plus five more I think. Out of the 244 that were sent off there, sixty were shot down and out of sixty 22, so the losses here are about 1/3 a little more than a third probably about 1/4 there.

Mark: Yeah.

Jack: But actually it was just a mad ---- too. I was going to show you, our bomb group here, we lost 156 bombers in the whole operations, 36 in operations, battle damage we had on 1362 we had 425 enemy aircraft destroyed, that's during, most in the Eighth Air Force. My gunners living, we had 23. My crew members living and dead we had altogether, the airplanes that I flew, and I flew different ones because some were, we had 23 enemy aircraft destroyed. They had our bomb group as a whole 117 enemy aircraft probable. We had 1,754 casualties in our bomb group, 39 out of the original 400; we were the only Eighth Air Force group to receive 3 Presidential distinguishing citations. Oh, and by the time I was flying my missions we lost 66 out of our bomb group. The Eight Air Force had 47,000 casualties so we had over 104,000 causalities in the European War there.

Mark: Yeah.

Jack: So it was kind of a really, you were quite lucky if you got through there. It was like I say, the falling of the cards, you never, you just never know what. Some did and some didn't. You just tried to accept that as best you could. You often wondered why you weren't with your friends and buddies and crew members. The man should come back somehow.

Mark: For someone who finished 25 missions such as yourself, that was, I get the impression that was quite unusual?

Jack: Yeah, I was the sixth to do that. It was very unusual. Yeah, it was very, very unusual. Just wasn't hardly done in those days. You know, of course, those German pilots, they flied until they died, essentially.

Mark: I was going to ask, your comments on the effectiveness of the German air defenses, both the ground, Black, fighter pilots as well?

Jack: I admired the German fighter pilots. They were fearless. How they could face all those different machine guns coming at you. It's hard to understand. They were good and their Black was very, very good. Their 88's were very active. A lot of times they would have the aircraft flying way out of our range along side of our bomb group, sticking to our altitude direction and airspeed. So they could sum up their flack at us, very, very accurate. So, their flack was accurate and back in those days there was really nothing to destroy the ---- ----- . Also, they had rails so they ack-ack in different areas where they would think they would be needed. And their target were very well protected. At that time the P-51's and the P-38's or P-47's

couldn't go down a straight because they weren't there. So, I mean, they had everything and we had nothing. They were defending their homeland against the intruder which was the American Air Force and RAF Air Force and they were very serious fighters. Tremendous. And it scared the hell out of me.

Mark: I'm sure it did. I've got one more questions on casualties. Um, there is an infantry saying of course that there is no such thing as atheists in fox holes. You know, you've heard that phrase before?

Jack: Yeah right.

Mark: Some of the World War II memoirs I read of infantry soldiers, that you know, sometimes they indicate that people are, infantry soldiers are often much more fatalistic. And I'm wondering if you could perhaps comment on that sort of thing in a bomber wing such as yours. Were there a lot of, was religion a solace for you or did people have lucky charms and all those sorts of things. How would you describe that people coped with such horrendous casualties?

Jack: Well, a lot of people flipped. There were a good number of people that they had to take off flying status because they couldn't cope.

Mark: Psychologically?

Jack: Psychologically, they were grounded down.

Mark: What happened?

Jack: You saw somebody that came down, they couldn't even talk or anything and they were about as white as your shirt, they would just take them away and never see them again. And a guy can take just so much.

Mark: This is fairly common then?

Jack: Yeah. Well, see, we never had a foxhole to go in. Our foxhole was our airplane you might say, which was our target. There was nothing to protect us except our guns. But no, before each mission, the chaplains always held a little service, they'd have communion for the Catholic and a little prayer service and it was kind of sad because you didn't know who was coming back and who wasn't. They wanted to have their last communion and everyone figured it might be their last. But the foot soldier out there, the infantry men, I don't know if there were any chaplains around. There wasn't certainly any around when we were actually doing the fighting or on our mission. You know they say here, I just pointing out what was, well, we had a twelve hour one down to the Lafalise and um, that's long. And of course your not under fighter, fighters coming in at you all the time during the twelve hours, but that's the name they gave the mission, but that's just the target. Like Schweinfurt,

you had a heck of a quite a ways to get there. They called that the Schweinfurt mission because that was the target. But there was a lot of fighting going on before you even got to the target and while you're over the target and after you're leaving the target.

Mark: Um hmm. I was going to ask, again, if you have a twelve hour mission and you spent maybe 45 minutes over the target or so?

Jack: Yeah, in that area.

Mark: And what went on for the rest of the flight?

Jack: What went on? You kept sharp lookout for other enemy fighters.

Mark: And did that frequently happen?

Jack: Oh yeah. They could always tell you where, they could go down and refuel and come back up and alert other bases along the way where you were heading. Well they know you're going back to England after the mission except on that one where we flew them from Reagansburg right down to Africa. They were waiting for us to come back and we never came back. ---LAUGH--- So, no, they knew you always had to go back to England so they would do everything along the coast there between the channel and England that they could muster. And a lot of Black Hawk in Schweinfurt, some would throw as many as three sorties against us. Because it was so far in and no fighter protection, it was murder.

Mark: And as your flying over Germany they can come at any time?

Jack: Any time. No, they can throw up, I think we figured there was about 1,100 Sorties flowing against us that day, so we were badly outrun with 224 planes. Of course they got sixty of us too, you know.

Mark: Yeah.

Jack: And there weren't hardly any fit for flying the next day, I think we had about five.

Mark: You mean airplanes?

Jack: Five that were fit for flying. Yeah, that couldn't actually fly the next day. The mission was called off. The losses were ----- . That week, prior to Schweinfurt, leading up to Schweinfurt, the Air Force lost something like that, 140 bombers, they were getting pretty low depleted. They lost, I mean they had to replace. And not to speak of a crews that went down with them. That would be 1400 men they had to replace. So they didn't fly an awful lot after Schweinfurt.

Mark: Yeah, there are often times some rather large gaps?

Jack: Yeah, there are large gaps. Then too, usually if a fellow survived to around between 12 and 15 missions, you used to send us to a place called a rest home, a rest camp. Used to call it the Flack house. And a couple weeks for R&R. And, just to get away from there.

Mark: This was in England somewhere?

Jack: Yeah, this is, they had some beautiful old English homes that the English people let us use and they were very nice. It was a relaxed atmosphere and we just took it easy and we didn't have to be concerned about what was going to happen the very next day and so on and so forth.

Mark: So did you play cards, write letters?

Jack: Yeah, play cards, write letters, they had a Louisiana Billiard table there, there was usually in a scenic area, there was a lot of nice scenery there. It was away from everything, you know. It was very relaxing. And then, we would have to go back. One of the things they never allowed us to do though is if you brought back any casualties; they were killed; we couldn't even go to their funerals.

Mark: Really?

Jack: Once in a while ... that was the last you saw of them. That bothered some of the fellows. I know my radio operator talked to ... when he finished his 25 he accompanied pilots to the cemetery. He ... on the wall ... Somebody had to do it. He didn't last too long. He got out of it. If you were fine ... and uh, it just wasn't the thing, protocol. I mean, you just do it, doing it. I think that it would affect people too much. It was affecting them enough as it was not to go out and have ... and caps and all that stuff. So that's why every time I see a flyer, caps, firing squad I can't handle it. It's tough to handle. I lost a lot of my friends, my actual crew members. Three different tail gunners, ... gunners, three different waist gunners, a couple of bombardiers (?). You know when you start losing members on your own crew; it gets to be quite bothersome.

Mark: I was going to ask you about replacements. They probably came in pretty frequently?

Jack: Yeah, they did. Yep, they uh, they were kind of gung-ho at first until they saw what was going on. ... trying to break them in.

Mark: Were they trained well from your perspective of..?

Jack: Not really. In fact when you see gaps in there that was a job that I did. I was an operations officer in my squadron and I would take the new crews that would come in and instruct

them, take them up over the wash for target practice. Take them up to ... getting, learning how to fly in good tight formation with experienced crews and then we had to further train them from their basic training from the states and there were some fellows that just couldn't handle it, some pilots. So, we had to get replacements for them and they would go to another kind of a job not actually flying in combat. But, then also during that kind of weather, it was so bad over there.

Mark: I bet it was.

Jack: And especially in East Angria. A lot of times you would go out on a mission and be waiting there for the weather to clear. And you would get very apprehensive. And then it would be canceled. And that's an awful let down when you're all set to go. I mean, you just couldn't go out and do it. And then other times you take off and you couldn't even see the end of the runway because of all the clouds. And there were a lot of mid air collisions. And that's another thing with these new guys. If you're not used to this kind of thing and you haven't had the proper training you could raise hell with the whole formation. You're killing your own people by crashing into them. That happened occasionally ... And there was always something to be ... about. I had an experience early on there where 92nd .. was supposed to be teach us like we were teaching our people, replacements. We got there and there was hardly anybody left. I was assigned to a place called the Alconbury House, this was in Alconbury. I went up into my quarters and there was a fella sitting there and there was a little stove there with coal by it to heat up the place and he was about as, this color and he wouldn't even talk to me. He was a I couldn't understand what was the matter with him. I found out later that he had lost ... So, that was my first experience talking, seeing someone in actual combat. And then while we were there, we were loading planes one day for a mission and, I can't remember which one it was, early, very early because we were all ... weeks. Colonel Kessler asked me to check the ... loading ... bombing and ... my own squadron ... and I was about 50 to 75 yards away and this thing explodes. I stopped my recount and we jumped underneath there, underneath this thing and all this stuff was going by us and coming down. This one airplane had dropped ten 500 pounders somehow, they still don't know, and we called it the Alconbury disaster. It took out, 23 men were killed, I can't remember how many people were injured. I wiped out our, I've got pictures of it, I can bring them sometime. My wife has a scrap book. And I got my recount and I went over there and I saw my armament officer there and I saw him and I tried to get a hold of these guys and I noticed that he was all perforated and I didn't know what had happened. And he died right there in my arms. I don't remember what had happened to my sergeant. I think he ran from it. Anyhow, I loaded about 5 of them that I thought could make it down to the base hospital ... And as I was going down the hill, here comes all the ambulances up to the field. That was real sad. That took some of our crew, and that wasn't even a mission. Those were the kinds of things that happened.

Mark: That's a dangerous...

Jack: Dangerous business. Very dangerous. You bet. And that happened early on, even before Keil. **[End of Side One]**

Jack: I got a couple of notes here, some military type things, before we get onto some more social type things. I'm wondering if you could comment on the effectiveness of bombing. Military ... regarding to how effective the strategic bombing was. Was it precision bombing at some point?

Mark: It was mostly precision bombing? From your perspective in the cock pit, which may or may not be...

Jack: From my perspective in the cock pit, I really couldn't see what was going on down on the ground. I was more focused on what was going on in the air, flying a tight formation, not losing sight of that, looking out for enemy fighters, watching the engines, instruments, the flight instruments. See, you're cramped in a space about, a little space, it was a cube and it used to be the office, that's what we called it. You had about 134 instruments to concentrate on as well as, well you had a helmet on, a black suit, a May West ... then on your flying equipment, sometimes your electrical suit, your parachute, you're trying to fly the airplane. You're doing all of this and you are worrying about your objects because we had no pressurized cabins, everything was oxygen masks and the colder than hell I tell you. Outside temperatures sometimes 50 to 60 below and we didn't have real good heaters in those days. And uh... then you hear all of that engine noise, the guns shooting, your flack coming up and bursting around you, fighters coming up and all of their shells blowing around you, you didn't have a hell of a lot of time to look down on the ground and see what was going on. Bombs away. When you heard bombs away, the airplane would jump up about 50 feet or so and you had to watch out for the other guys around you and make sure that everybody dropped at the same time as the lead pilot of the plane and ... that was your job, ... and we really wouldn't know how effective that was. Everybody would say "Oh, we nailed her good." Until they did a recon afterwards.

Mark: I was going to ask...

Jack: Yeah, they sent out recon claims afterwards and tried to get pictures of it. Actually, we had pictures too, in the cameras they would show where the target area was and where the bombs were, so we had a pretty good idea, after we got to the base and the pictures got developed, how good we did it, how good we did. I think most of them were quite effective. Most historians say they weren't worth a damn and the price we paid for it wasn't worth nothing. But we thought we were doing a good job and that's what we were there to do, to drive out Hitler's war machine and I think we did a hell of a job with what we had, but by the same token, let me tell you this too, when they invaded over there, the invasion they called D-Day, they didn't encounter any enemy fighters, soldiers. They did have a hell of a time I know ... on the ground. They could have been blown out in the water by the Luftwaffe if they would have had that many, the kind of opposition we had. Somebody said that there was only one German ... one sent over the beach at Normandy and it was a German ace and his wing man. And he ... over one night and went over. If they wouldn't have saw it, and I think we did save a lot of lives over there and by crippling important industries like ball bearing factories, which the war machines run out of, oil refineries, ... arts, transportation, things like that. I think it did have a profound effect on what had

happened, and I think that if we didn't have that, I think that we wouldn't have had a hell of a lot of chance. The RAF was down to their last, until we got over there. So they can say whatever they want to about the accuracy of flying. If they said that we didn't do a good job, I'm sorry, but I think we did.

Mark: I was wondering if you could comment on the impact of fighter planes once they were able to penetrate deep in the army?

Jack: Well I wasn't flying when they went... oh yeah...when they got to. Our group was the first one over at the Berlin incident.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Jack: Oh, yeah. We got there as soon as the citations from President Roosevelt as well as the other one. ... See the P-51's weren't able to go that far until they got the drop tanks and they did escort us to Berlin. And that's what they call the uh...The ace in the hole. Whatever you want to call it. And that's what changed the whole thing of the war, when they came down and were able to escort bombers all the way. Boy, that made a difference. We were always so happy to see anyone that was friendly. Now if you're down ... formation a few times, and you weren't expected to make it back, and nobody would come and fly with it because that ... the whole group. You were just gone and you see somebody you would do that and you would feel sorry for them. And I know how they would feel because I was in the flying twice and I managed to evade them and make it back in one piece.

Mark: Because your plane was hit?

Jack: Oh yeah. I had an engine shot out one time and part of another one. The tail was all shot away practically and I couldn't just keep up with, I was leading the squadron, and I just couldn't keep up so I had to veer off and get below the clouds ... but I lost people and all my crew and managed to shoot down a few of those guys, but we did manage to get back into the clouds, but I couldn't go over 125 indicated air speed because I thought the tail was going to fall off and I had the guys shove off everything that was loose on the airplane after we got away from the ... And I told them to get ready to bail if I called the alarm because I didn't know if the tail was going to stay but I wanted to try to get the guys that were wounded back to the base ... killed and I tried to get back to the base, which I did. So, that happened a couple of times, so that's a lonely feeling to be by yourself while all these other fighters are trying to do you in. I don't know if those guys..., it was kind of easy to bail out. It was kind of easy to say that too. I don't know if I was stupid for not bailing out and trying to get back or should I do the right thing by getting back the guys that were still alive or wounded. I didn't want to lose the guys that had a chance of making it. There's an awful decision to make. I wouldn't want to bail out of an airplane with those guys still up there wounded who couldn't do anything for themselves. It was a hell of a decision to make for a 22 year old kid to make. That's all I was. I was a captain, but I was still a kid.

Mark: What was the name of your airplane?

Jack: I had several different airplanes. One I named after my wife, I probably flew more airplanes than anybody in our ... It seems that every time I tried to name one, I would get all shot to hell so I just decided not to name them after that and for those of us who were left, so I never did. And then when I started leading, I ... somebody else might have. I had an airplane named "I'll be around", which I didn't name. I broke it in as an EB17GRO some of my final missions. That's the one that led the Berlin raid. That was my airplane that led... But I was long gone from the group then. I left the group. I was one of the lucky guys that got the hell out of there.

Mark: So you didn't really have any colorful artwork on your nose?

Jack: Well I had one called "Lonesome Polecat II", oh what were the names of the other ones..."Tanabird", "Old Bullet Bill", ... Oh I didn't really pay much attention. Some of the other guys liked that kind of stuff, but I wanted a good airplane with 4 good engines that would fly, and I good ground crew that knew how to take care of a fighter. And let me tell you one thing that not too many guys could say, never once did I abort from a mission due to engine trouble or any other thing. That's a real reflection of the kind of ground crew that kept our airplanes flying. A lot of people would try to be fast ... abort, leave the mission. No, I shouldn't say that, but you were trying to look for ways not to have to go, especially with the tough missions. But, that was a direct reflection on our ground crew I think. The airplane was patched up, the engine was ...

Mark: Very effective maintenance.

Jack: They did a wonderful job and those guys deserved every distinguished unit citation that they received. Well, the whole group did. The guy that's flying the airplane is just part of a big group, taking care of the airplane and everyone in it, getting the bombs to the target, dropping them on time, that's it. It takes a lot more than 10 people on an airplane to it. There are a lot of other resources that you have to do that for you. I'm glad our group did get 3 and we were the only group in the air force that got 3 distinguished citations from President Roosevelt, which was quite an honor.

Mark: I'd say. Let's move on to some more...

Jack: Geeze, I've taken up a lot of time, haven't I?

Mark: That's just fine, absolutely fine. Let's discuss some of the social aspects of being in England, and I'm wondering if you had contact with the British people much, I see that there are a lot of gaps in between missions, so undoubtedly, you got off base a couple of times and perhaps you could describe some of the relationship between the American men and the British women. You know that old phrase...

Jack: Well, I was married at the time. Me and Ann got married at the time I got transferred from the RCF and we've been married for 52 years now. But I used to go to ...

Mark: Congratulations.

Jack: Well, I'll tell you, all of our original group has left. I can't think of anyone that was still married to their wife, before they went over, which is really unusual in this day in age.
... I can count them on about 5 fingers. Anyhow, my buddy and I, the first real buddy that I had, used to go up to Cambridge University and take pictures and look around at some of the interesting things at the University there ... (flipped the tape over)... London. Of course we had a good time down there and the food was much better than around the local area, local areas and there was much more to see down there, although a lot of the places were closed like, ... and all that sort of things. But, it was funny going to some of these clubs. They used to have a club called the Nightbridge Studio Club that we used to go to. And they kind of catered to American officers and they had a piano singer and we would gather around the piano and play our songs and there was an Englishman.

[pause/gap in tape]

Mark: And that was in London?

Jack: Yeah, in London. Nightsbridge Studio Club on Nightsbridge Road. It's not too far from the camp. And you know, we would go down there and sing and have a good time and unwind. And several months later we went back there and asked "What happened to Reggie?" "Well didn't you hear? He was a German spy." Trying to get the guys a ... Yeah, he was a German spy, and I was amazed, and he was an Englishman. That was interesting. Wasn't that interesting? He was a German spy. They got him. They nailed him.

Mark: Did you get to London much?

Jack: I think I got to London about 3 or 4 times. That's all. It didn't happen a lot. I went to a little local...

Mark: I realize that, but to ask what base you were in?

Jack: The last base we were at was at ... We were at Alconbury for a few weeks, then we went to ... where we had that ... mission. And shortly after that we moved up to ... which is in East ... All these bases were in East ... in the ... a little village, kind of a triangle. The ... was just a little village that I don't think there was more than 10 houses, a church and a couple of Pubs. And, that was our base. I finished my missions there and that's where the group stayed until the end. Until the war was over. But, it was a nice little village and I used to visit the pubs with some of my friends and we'd get acquainted with the English guys over there and they'd show you how to shoot darts.

Mark: And drink foreign beer?

Jack: Oh yeah, drink foreign beer and arf and arf.

Mark: What?

Jack: A Half and Half they used to call an arf and arf. Half ... and half something, I don't know...half lager and half ale, or something like that. But, we had a nice club there, too, an officer's club. But before they tore that down there was a really nice one. I saw a picture of it. But the O (Officer's) club we had, we used to have a lot of fun there. There was always a poker game going on and we had the radio to listen to and a very nice bar.

Mark: Did you...Just out of curiosity, did you get any propaganda, broadcasts in Germany at all? Did you listen to them?

Jack: Oh yeah, we heard it.

Mark: What was your reaction?

Jack: They used to, they welcomed our group to England. That was kind of (Jack: Interesting) Yeah, how did you know. Yeah, and when they say well you guys are ... who's this ... and all that stuff. But, it was kind of, when you first heard it, it was some kind of an icy chill up your back. I hope they don't know where we're at. They had a very good spy network going there. I remember one night I was on the pipe there waiting for order, ah, the teletype coming from the wing to see if we were ordered for a mission and somebody rang the field phone and they wanted to know if the mission was on. I said "Well, who is this?" "I just want to know if the mission is on." I said "Well, I don't know." and I hung up. I called Colonel Kessler and he said "You did the right thing". That's how they would get their information; they would try to pump people. How the hell they ever got our numbers and stuff like that, I will never know. So, it was very, very, it had to be played very close.

Mark: Did this effect daily operations?

Jack: No.

Mark: ...like going to the pubs. I assume you were told to watch your tongue and that sort of thing?

Jack: Well, it was your own butt if you didn't. You soon found that out.

Mark: Were there like Americans in the pubs who would be listening for these sorts of things, trying to catch people talking?

Jack: I didn't notice anybody, but I myself was a, I was an SD officer, which is an operations officer ... which is intelligence.... And we knew enough. And I was telling those guys to just keep your mouth shut and don't say anything about anything that pertains to missions, or airplanes, equipment, or what we're doing, or anything.

Mark: Um hmm

Jack: Because there were English people on the bases sometimes who'd come in and ... you never who you were talking to. They could be dressed as a ... German spies could be dressed like any English person, or any American ... so you never talked; that was very important.

Mark: So, um, how did you spend the free time that you had? Were you busy going to some of the pubs, and

Jack: Yeah, or playing cards. And then other times—we were usually busy every day. Ah, like, ah, when you weren't ... like training, retraining new crews coming in ... practice, showing them how to use ah ... if they got shot down; procedures about ditching; ah, procedures about delayed parachute jumping, continually training all of the time. And we learned by experience over there. We learned by doing. I mean, that's a hard way to do, when you're in combat.

Mark: Yeah.

Jack: But a guy that had a few missions under his belt was looked upon as somebody who'd be a good instructor, ya know, who could relate what to do in predicaments.

Mark: So you stayed pretty busy?

Jack: So I stayed very busy instructing new people and keeping my own crews that I was in charge of, ah, ah, combat ready.

Mark: Um hmm.

Jack: There was always something to do. And I could read a little bit; and I could write letters and there was always something to do there. And have a couple of brewski's once in a while, a shot of scotch, ya know.

Mark: Um, one last thing in this area. Um, did you notice much of a black market type thing?

Jack: Oh yeah.

Mark: Wartime, what was that like? I mean, if you wanted a good steak, for example?

Jack: Oh, yeah, you could. In fact, as I finished my last mission, I was a good friend of the, ah, ah, mess officer; he went into the colonel's own private stock. I got me a big old T-bone steak. I hadn't seen one of those in a heck of a long time. So they had it. But I was going to tell you about the black market. I was approached by one of the owners of this nice ... studio club, asking me if I'd like to make some money, by selling scotch up on the base or, ah, or, ah, what was that? Bourbon whiskey up on the base; but I said no, no, I don't think so. I was a

little friendly with him; he thought—and he'd get it up there for me to sell. But I said, jeez, ah, no I don't think so, cause there was a scarcity up there.

Mark: Oh, sure.

Jack: So, I know, there was a black market for 'em ... I probably have made some money if would have had an interest in it ... there was the cigarettes, nylon stockings, those were worth pounds, British pounds if you wanted them, 'cause the English, and chocolate ... So, um, no, that was, ah, things to barter with, a lot of guys used them for bartering.

Mark: Okay. So, your last mission then was, um, January '44, and that was 25.

Jack: That was No Ball (??)

Mark: What is No Ball (??)

Jack: No Ball (??) is a code name for, ah, rocket launching sites.

Mark: Um hmm.

Jack: They were starting, they were starting to get very active about that time with those things, ah, those.

Mark: Buzz bombs?

Jack: I was in one of those; in fact, I was in a couple of those ... and that's kind of spooky!

Mark: Because you could hear it coming over?

Jack: You could hear it coming in, and then it goes off. And I was also on a bombing raid. The Germans were bombing, and this was early on, ya know. This was '43. That was a little bit later. No, so, I've been on the receiving end of that, too. So. Those No Ball (??) targets were very important. What we'd do is break off in squadrons and go in at a low altitude, five-, ten-, fifteen-thousand-feet, normally, we'd be flying up from twenty-to-thirty-thousand feet and up on a high altitude mission. And you're always afraid of flack, of course, at that low altitude. And they'd like to protect those areas.

Mark: Um hmm.

Jack: And fighters, too, at that low altitude; it felt safer if you had a little room to operate in. That's why I always like to operate high, either that or right down on the deck. But, ah, they weren't that dangerous; but, I mean, when you're finishing up and you can see the light at the end of the tunnel, maybe ya got a half-assed chance of getting through this dang thing, oh, boy. I was—And then, on my very last mission, I got hit; they hit my IFF.

Mark: What's an IFF?

Jack: That's a little Identification-Friend-or-Foe; it sends out a signal to the ground over there in England, of anyplace, that you're a friend, IFF, Identification-Friend-or-Foe. And the British ack-ack opened up on me on my way back home to my base. Oh, the air got blue; and I got scared.

Mark: This is number 25?

Jack: That was it, 25, and, I thought, some of my own people are going to shoot me down on my last mission.

Mark: But you got back to the runway?

Jack: I got back.

Mark: I'm interested ...

Jack: I got out of the—I was so glad to see God's green earth again. And back then—I was kind of in a daze I think for a while. But boy, jeez, that was frightening, to have your own people on your very last mission cut loose on ya. But I hadn't shot out.

Mark: Yeah.

Jack: 'cause Germans had captured B17s.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Jack: Sure. Sure. They'd fly them. They'd fly them. There wasn't many of them; but if you didn't have that IFF working.

Mark: I suppose it was good to see them do their job?

Jack: Yes, it was; but it was very good. But, I mean, it wasn't so good for me. So anyhow.

Mark: So, that's it, mission 25?

Jack: Glad! Oh boy, what a happy day.

Mark: And so, explain the steps from stepping off the plane after mission 25 to getting back to the states. What sort of traveling did you do? What sort of military processing did you do?

Jack: Okay. First of all, when I did that, General LeMay wanted me to over, Colonel LeMay he was at that time, to division headquarters ... I got over there and, ah, got into his office, and, ah, I went in to see him. And he tried to convince me that I wouldn't like to go back home

to the United States; he said: Oh, Captain, you're not gonna like it back there. I just got back from there recently and why don't you just stay over here and do another 25? My heart went down. And I thought oh my God! I said, "Sir, I respectfully decline." So, I been looking at your record, Miller, and, ah, I could do some things for you. He just wanted me to do 25 more. I think he was planning on getting me, ah, higher staff job out there. But I'll stay around and do anything else you want; but I've had enough flight for now. So, I said, okay ... 'cause I had another DMC, which was kind of neat, or, the orders for it. And, ah, so, then I was gonna go. Then he wanted me to fly a war-weary B17; one that ... a pick up crew of guys that had completed their 25 and go on a Bond tour back in the states.

Mark: Um hmm.

Jack: So, we got up there; we were gonna take off from around Liverpool someplace, and fly the north route back, and we're practicing a little bit, ya know, checking the plane out to see if it was okay. General Doolittle had just assumed command from, um. General ... and he just got kind of wind of this and put the kibosh on it right there. "No war-weary combat crew members will be flying any of these airplanes back to the States." So that ended that. So, I did stay over there just a few months longer and went right up to Prestwick, Scotland, to pick up B17s, B24s, B26s, and flying them to the modification depots, getting them ready for the business coming up, ya know, ah, ... in the spring. So I did that for a while; and then eventually I got orders to go home, which I did. I got on a big boat in a convoy and got back to the states.

Mark: It says here, you came back in May of '44?

Jack: Yeah.

Mark: That's still before D-Day.

Jack: Yeah. Yeah, before D-Day. I was back home in the States and it was a beautiful sight seeing the Statue of Liberty and everything. And then I got sent on a train ... go home ... and my wife ... here, in Madison, the Milwaukee Road depot down here on West Washington; and I came in on the Chicago Northwestern down there where the Madison Gas and Electric is now, so, we missed, some homecoming, my wife wasn't here to meet me. And so, I was at her folks door, waiting for her to come, said, meet you at home. So, anyhow, that's how that ended for me.

Mark: This was a 30-day leave; then you had to go?

Jack: I had to go back to the Army Airforce Redistribution Center in Atlantic City (New Jersey) and, ah, I was processed through there by the doctors; they had a psychiatrist, a medical—and all the other doctors. And they took three of us out; there was a P38 pilot, B24 pilot, myself, and with our wives and they sent us down to Lake Clearwater, North Carolina. I lost about 40-pounds, I think, and they wanted to fatten us up and get us back where we'd be operational again, real good, ya know. So, they sent us down to this rest camp down in

North Carolina. And we had a great time down there. We were up—they had revelly and everything. They fed us real good. We had a wonderful time there; it was on a lake.

Mark: With, with, with your wife you said?

Jack: Yeah, with our wives. We were allowed to have our wives with us. And we got checked over once a week, weighed-in, got back in shape, put on about 20-pounds, 25-pounds back on ... went back up to the distribution center, sent out from there.

Mark: To where?

Jack: Then I went to, from there I went to Brian, Texas, to the Army Airforces pilot training school.

Mark: Were you an instructor?

Jack: Yeah. Um hmm. And then I got sent back to, um, I got assigned to Langley Field as base operations officer. Then I had to keep all the pilots that were flying there; it was a radar school. B17s, '24s, I had a B25, an A26, a B24, and an AT11 at my disposal for these operations. But I had to keep all these pilots current on their instrument pilot training. 'Cause I was a Bryant graduate, that's what I went there for. You had to be a Bryant graduate.

Mark: Were you?

Jack: Bryant, B-R-Y-A-N-T, Bryant, Texas.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Jack: It was the Bryant Instrument—the man in charge of it was, ah, head of American Airlines, I think, at one time, Colonel Daniels. He was, ah, very—this was *the* instrument pilot training school at that time. When people went there, they were supposed to keep other people current on their instrument flying, which was my job at Langley, as well as, air (??), maintenance, clearance—flight clearance, operations—all the things that go with operations. So, I did that until, ah, ah, ah, my name finally came out on a list from the Pentagon. I was eligible to go with, ah, TWA, which I did. I flew a B17 out there (unintelligible).

Mark: So, then, when did you get discharged from the service?

Jack: Not until '57, September. But, I mean, I was actually out of the service, ah.

Mark: That's gonna be on this thing anyway.

Jack: Yeah. Where is that? You've got it there. Yeah, on the back page.

Mark: I've got a copy of it right here.

Jack: I've got a copy of it someplace, now, where did I put it? Oh, here it is. I actually got out of the service, ah, ah, where is that? Officers own request to return to essential industry; that was from the War Department. That was for TWA. So, ah, let's see, I got out of ... 19th of October '45.

Mark: Oh, yeah, 'cause you were in the reserve for quite a while.

Jack: Oh, I was in the reserve, until, ah, they wouldn't let me out all the way. They kept me in the Air Force Reserve until 28th of September '57. See, they wanted to keep me available if they would need me.

Mark: But you were flying TWA at the end of World War II?

Jack: TWA. Yeah.

Mark: So, um, where were you based?

Jack: I was based in Chicago, flying out of Midway. Then I went to; they asked me to go through their training program and that was in Kansas (Missouri). And then I came back to Chicago, because I wanted to be as near as Madison as I could. And this was called Transcontinental and Western Airlines and it was Howard Hughes was the major stockholder. And then, when they went international, it was still TWA; but it was Trans World Airlines, which is what it still known as today.

Mark: Yeah.

Jack: But my, ah, ah, I wasn't able to stay with them, because my combat disabilities caught up with me eventually and I couldn't pass the physical.

Mark: Like what? Because of your weight and things like that?

Jack: No, I had a lot of; there was a time it; time wasn't to; everything; it took several years before things started hitting home, to actually what had happened. And I felt real bad. And I developed a real bad ulcer. Also, my whole GI track, of course, was gone; it was shot. And you can't fly; you couldn't in those days.

Mark: Um, hum.

Jack: But I had several surgeries. And that was the end of my flying career, commercial flying career, as an airline pilot. Then I came back to Madison and I flew a little bit for Louie Willameyer, Four Lakes Aviation, ah, as an instructor. And, eventually, I got out of the

flying business entirely much to my dismay, I didn't want to. But I wanted to spend more time with my family. And I had a son and a daughter, that, ah; so I went into sales.

Mark: Okay. I'm interested in when you got back to Madison, '45, '46?

Jack: Yeah, '46. We lived out at Truax, a converted barracks out there they let people live in. And, ah, I wanted to go back to school here, finish out. And I wasn't able to. What happened? I can't remember.

Mark: I was going to ask you if you had any GI Bill benefits?

Jack: Yeah, I did. But then, I was going to go back to school here and I had to take some tests down at the Veterans, ah, down in Milwaukee. And I took a series of tests and they wanted me to, ah, ah, I got very good grades. And I was supposed to be able to; they wanted me to take a degree to teaching history at the secondary level. And I came back here and talked to, ah, the Dean, or assistant, or somebody; and she said, I wouldn't be able to handle it. (laughs) And I said, What? I'm doing all these things like that. And she says, um, you couldn't handle it. She talked me out of it; she really did. Then I went back to Milwaukee and talked to the doctors down there, the psychologist, they gave me all these exams ... Well, ah, he said, why don't you go down to Whitewater then? And I said I don't want to do something like that. So, I just took sales; that's what happened. I took sales work. I worked for Sears, Roebuck, as a salesman; automobile sales, and that sort of thing. Then I finally had to give up everything, I couldn't work. At the end of '72, I became totally disabled, March of '72.

Mark: So you had, obviously, a lot of contact with the VA Medical system. I'm wondering if you could just discuss the effectiveness, or your experiences, of the VA from right after the war right up until, whenever?

Jack: Well, ah, they've been taking very good care of me, especially in Madison; they've got one of the finest hospitals. My first contact with the VA was at Hines, down in Chicago (Illinois).

Mark: And that was right after the war?

Jack: Yeah. And then I came up here to Madison. I've had a lot of major surgeries. And they've kept me going all these years. I'm 74 next month and I think I owe it all to the VA. So, Mark, whether you know or not, I'm a residual that you're paying for from World War II, paying taxes for, an old geezer like me to live this long is all.

Mark: Well, I'm interested in the cost of warfare; it's more than; you can see my poster up here. I'm interested in what happens to the soldiers when they come back.

Jack: Yeah, yeah. Those poor guys. They were the start of

Mark: The World War I guys?

Jack: Yeah, they were the start of this thing called the Veterans Administration. They said we were entitled to it; I didn't know it at the time, when I was having some of this trouble, I just went to talk to the family doctor here in Madison. And he said, a guy just told me about this; and they should take care of you. And I'd been paying for everything out of my pocket. We'd lost a lot; I'd spent a lot of money that I'd saved up.

Mark: This is right after World War II?

Jack: Well, a few years, or so, after; we'd spent a lot of money taking care of my health. And I had been; and I don't even remember having health insurance in those days. There was no such thing as health insurance. I paid for my own until I got a job with somebody. But those guys, when they started the VA system back in the; right after World War I did a great thing. So, here we are now. I'm on the way out now; there's those Vietnam guys, the Korean guys, and the ones that are in there now. I hope they know what's happened.

Mark: Yeah.

Jack: What a great thing this country has done for them. Of course, we've laid our lives on the line for them, too, ya know. You feel a little bit strange about it sometimes; people make you feel like you're a twit.

Mark: They sent you over there; they ought to take care of you.

Jack: They didn't have any qualms about; of course, in those days things were different. Everybody was gung-ho; everybody was more together, seemed like. Now, everybody's going out this way; World War II everybody was together.

Mark: Yeah, um, I just have a couple more questions?

Jack: Yeah.

Mark: Um, as far as this GI Bill things, again. There was more than just the educational component; did you, um, use any sort of benefits to like buy a house, or, um, did you get unemployment insurance? There was the 52/20 Club?

Jack: I never had to use that, thank goodness; no, I mean, not thank goodness I never had to use that but I'm kinda funny. But I did use a second mortgage loan on my home from the State of Wisconsin, when I bought my home that we still live in. And I got \$3400.00 at 2 percent interest. It really helped me a heck of a whole lot. Because I had my first mortgage loan with Anchor and I had to have a pretty substantial amount down. But then I got the \$3400.00 at 2 percent and then the balance from Anchor Savings and Loan at 5 percent ... yes, they did help me a lot. We got our own home.

Mark: Good.

Jack: Raised our family in it. Then my wife says, the only way you're gonna get me out of this home is feet first. It's the first home she ever had in her life; her folks always rented.

Mark: See, I've got just one more thing?

Jack: Oh, sure.

Mark: I'm interested to know if you joined any veterans' organizations or attended reunions? You mentioned.

Jack: I always; I started attending; I started going to; I've got all kinds of things here Mark that I've. I'm a life member of that; I'm a founder and life member of that.

Mark: Disabled American Veterans.

Jack: These are the Air force ones I belong to.

Mark: You joined in 1963? That's twenty years or more.

Jack: And then, I'm a founder and life member of the 8th Air force Historical Society; life member of the VFW; a second Shrineford(??) Memorial Society, that was in Shrineford(??) (Michigan); I'm a charter and life member of that.

Mark: I never saw this one before.

Jack: There's not many; I'm the only one in the State of Wisconsin left.

Mark: Is that right?

Jack: Yeah, I'm the only one. I'm a charter and life member of that. Those are my only credentials for veterans' groups.

Mark: Oh, I believe you. That's quite a few. I'm interested in why you've joined these sort of groups? What do you get out of it?

Jack: Well, I got; all these Air force groups. Oh, I haven't got my 95th Bomb Group card out. I'm a founder and life member of the 95th Bomb Group, charter member. My own Bomb Group; I got that going; some of my guys. Well, we wanted to get together. We got a lot of things memorializing our own people that were killed over there, so they're not forgotten. Putting up the museum in (Arizona) called the 95th Bomb Group. We've got a restored B17 and everything down there in with the 390th Group; at the Air Force Academy; yeah, we got one at the Air Force Academy; and we've got one down at Dayton Wright Patterson, the Air

Force Museum there and, ah; we're trying to keep people aware of what went on during World War II is what it is. And also, to leave our footprints in the sands of time. So people will know. And pass on some kind of a thing to our, our, our own kids, ya know?

Mark: Did you join these groups right after the war? Because I noticed.

Jack: '76 was really about the time that I really; except this, DAV, I was. One of the reasons I joined the DAV was they helped me *so* much; they, ah, they had my power of attorney in case of anything happening to me. They took care of all my veterans' things, ya know, like, ah—I can't even remember where I had this—I kinda wanted to show you these things. I'm really kind of proud of these things. Um, they took care of all my veterans stuff. They got all my records and everything pertaining to the Veterans Administration, ya, know, to file claims or anything that's service connected.

Mark: Yeah.

Jack: So, they take care of that aspect for me; 'cause there was a lot of times, not a lot of times, but just a few times I'm not able to.

Mark: Um hum.

Jack: So, that's what it's all about.

Mark: Good. Um, that's all I have. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Jack: No. But the only thing I'd like to ask you is if you'd like some of those manuals I've got on the B17; there's a lot of information.

Mark: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure.

Jack: I've got all those things at home. My wife found and I was telling you about before. I've got a history book of our, a bomb group called *B17s Over Berlin* along with an operational manual; all people were killed, what happened to them, and everything else.

Mark: Oh, absolutely.

Jack: I could write the publisher and get those books for you if you want?

Mark: Sure, I'd appreciate that.

Jack: Well, Jack, thanks for stopping in.

Mark: You bet Mark.

[End of Interview]