

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
SIDNEY B. PODELL
Bombardier, Air Force, World War II
1995

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Podell, Sidney B., (1920-2009). Oral History Interview, 1995.
User Copy: 3 audio cassettes; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Master Copy: 2 audio cassettes; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Sidney Podell, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a bombardier in the Pacific Asian Theatre (20th Air Force) . He explains the physical actions of dropping a bomb, as well as the psychological considerations he faced. Podell also mentions what Hiroshima looked like from the air after the atomic bomb was dropped. He reflects on his time in the Air Force from a sociological standpoint, having been a sociology student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He also details the differences between the pre- and post-war University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Biographical Sketch:

Sidney Podell (1920-2009) served with the 20th Air Force as a bombardier in World War II. After being discharged in 1946, he returned home to become a lawyer.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.
Transcribed by Joanna D. Glen, 1997.
Transcription checked and corrected by Calvin John Pike, 2011.
Abstract written by Rebecca Cook, 2015.

Interview Transcript:

Van Ells: Today's date is January 31, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Sidney B. Podell of Madison, a veteran of World War II who flew with the U.S. Air Force on a B-29. Good morning. How are you doing?

Podell: Great.

Van Ells: Let's start at the beginning, as they say. Perhaps you could tell me a little bit about where you were born and a little bit about your upbringing and what you were doing before Pearl Harbor.

Podell: I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and from 1938 to 1942 I was a student. And I was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus when the war broke out and, although my draft board was in Milwaukee, which is my parent's place of residence, I did enlist; probably just a jump ahead of getting drafted although I wanted to be in the military service as did all of my contemporaries at that time. And I enlisted in the Air Force.

Van Ells: Let me interrupt here for a moment. Having grown up after the Vietnam War and the reluctance to go into the military, I'm interested in the attitude of the World War II generation, and this is something that I hear in all the interviews, that people were very enthusiastic about going into the military. Could you, perhaps, put that in perspective for me?

Podell: People who were rejected were depressed about it. I had another friend from this campus who had eye glasses so thick that you couldn't really tell the color of his eyes and just pestered the daylights out of the draft board and the military and finally was admitted. There were some pacifists around and there were some conscientious objectors and we'd all gone through a little gyration that is I felt that there was. Early on, ROTC was very active on the campus that this would have been an adjustment because I think that many of us felt that the war was not a way to settle disputes; speaking very, very generally. But when developments came to the level of Pearl Harbor etc., we all were very, very--I was very enthused about getting into the service. I felt that fascism, as a generic situation in the world, had to be physically defeated so I was a very willing enlistee.

Van Ells: Did you feel an obligation as a young man, that this is something you were supposed to do, you know, for your country?

Podell: No, it was consistent in the culture in which I had been raised, and the education I was receiving as a student of sociology at the University, that

fascism was a form of barbarism and was a throwback in mankind's progress; humankind as we would say today..

Van Ells: Allow me to back-track a little bit. You, apparently, came from some economic means to be able to go to college?

Podell: Oh, no. I would just tell you, no that wasn't true at all. My father planted trees in the parks in Milwaukee, family doubled up because of that depression, there was unemployment, there was all kinds of effects on myself as a high school person. However, everybody was sort of in that boat, but the first year I went to the Milwaukee State Teachers College, which is now UWM, and tuition there was very, very nominal. It was only \$32 on the Madison campus and that was a little much, plus room and board so I did a year at Milwaukee State Teacher's College and then I did another semester at the extension; to this division in Milwaukee. That was the University of Wisconsin extension division. There were a lot of people out of high school who did that then and the reason was they couldn't afford to come out here. However, when the time came to come out here, this aunt sent \$5 a week and this one sent so many and I wanted to go to school and my family was eager that I had that opportunity.

Van Ells: What were your career goals?

Podell: I didn't really know. My major was sociology. On the Madison campus, however, some very unusual things happened. Not only was the tuition at that time \$32 a semester; I think that may have included an athletic ticket as well as other perks, but let me just tell you something. Historically, you had lunch at the Union. You could do that, now hold on, for eighteen cents for a good meal. Now I'll even give you it was a nickel apiece for hamburgers. That consisted of two hamburgers, the nuts and bolts, on which you could put onions and relish yourself. It consisted of a scoop of potato salad, which I remember to this day; very delicious and the person behind the counter had an ice cream scoop and you'd say, "Come on, dig down," and he would. And the milk which came from Babcock Hall was three cents for a carton, so for eighteen cents you had lunch. No women in the Rathskeller, by the way, of course, as you know.

Van Ells: No, I didn't know that. Women weren't allowed to go in the Rathskeller?

Podell: Absolutely not; forbidden. So if your girlfriend wanted you, she asked some other guy to go in there and say, See that guy with the glasses over there or that guy with the red hair? Tell him I want to see him."

Van Ells: No, I didn't know. I had never heard that. So you were in college when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Podell: Yes.

Van Ells: For the sake of anecdote, do you recall when the attack occurred and do you remember your thoughts; your reactions?

Podell: Well, we knew it was very, very serious and all this shilly-shallying about whether we were get into war or not was over with and this was it. That's what I remember, but it's like hearing that there has been an earthquake in Kobe, or Osaka, or Los Angeles area. It's an explosion in another part of the world and the military world was not my world and Pearl Harbor, I think, that was probably the first time any of us heard that expression, "Pearl Harbor." The Hawaiian Islands are very remote,; they were very removed; they were some kind of a territory. They weren't a state, of course. It wasn't as if California was attacked. It was an explosive event that didn't trigger instantaneous enlistment on most university students.

Van Ells: I was going to ask you what was the reaction on campus and how did things change or not change?

Podell: The first thing that happened is there were some, as I remember--your question is just scratching memory at this point. There were some military units that were formed where University people were going to go into the service and stay together and some of those--as I remember, there were some athletes who got into those things, and Woody Swancutt the famous boxer--that name doesn't mean anything to you does it? [Woodrow Paul Swancutt]

Van Ells: No.

Podell: We had intercollegiate boxing in those days, and that was one of the most popular sports on the Madison campus, and I think Woody Swancutt eventually became a bomber pilot of some notoriety. They set up some kind of a Wisconsin squadron in the Air Force. It was the Army Air Corps in those days. So there was some enthusiasm. I think any of the people whose pacifist orientations were opposed to ROTC on campus, that was all dropped; suddenly that opposition was all dropped. Suddenly that [ROTC] became a very acceptable and good thing. You know, the military ball annually used to be picketed by people who were opposed to militarism and all that evaporated and people buckled down into the war effort.

Van Ells: Among you and some of your twenty-one year old friends on campus, this comes back to where we started out at. Was there talk of enlisting; was there talk about what you were going to do? I'm interested in the young man's reaction when a war breaks out. What goes through one's mind?

Podell: Well, we had to register for a draft, right? I think everybody was anxious to finish school, these were 1938 high school graduates that hoped to complete four years before going into Service so I would think that tempered one's excitement about enlisting; in my particular age bracket; in my class. However, once they graduated in '42, everybody went in, and I think, happily. There was nobody who felt, "Now wait a minute, if I get into graduate school, I'll be able to do better." Even medical students--people in Med School were getting deferments, but they had some kind of time in the military.

Van Ells: Okay, let's move on to the—

Podell: Am I too long-winded?

Van Ells: No. I'm interested in your actual induction process; the process of going from student to recruit. Could you tell me--for example, I'm sure you had to take some tests--getting into the Air Force--you had to go through some testing procedures and those kinds of things. Where did you go to get your haircut, and get sworn in, and where did you start basic training? So if we could start in Madison, tell me who you saw, where did you go sign up, and what happened after that.

Podell: I have no recollection of precisely where I signed up. I did have an interesting and unique experience, I don't know how relevant it is. The summer of '42, I worked at Oscar Mayer all summer long at the plant and I did have a very low draft number. I had saved up \$200, 300 dollars. You don't save a hell of a lot at forty-five cents an hour, but I decided I wanted to take a camping, hiking trip to Mexico and I got permission from my draft board in Milwaukee to leave the country in view of my low draft number. I grabbed a bus and went down to Mexico and got to Mexico and I was floating around down there and having a great time. I had to check in with the American Embassy in Mexico City. I get a letter from the Mexico City Embassy to come in and some Embassy guy, who looked like a real ivy league recent graduate, said "I've got your whole draft file here. They want to have you physically examined. We are not set up to do that." I said, "Whatever you say." He said, "When are you going back?" I said, "In a few weeks. My money is just about run out." He said, "Well, here's your file, would you take it with you and take it back to your draft board when you get back to Milwaukee?" I could have sat the whole damn war out on a beach in Mexico and there were some delightful beaches in Mexico at that time. At any rate, I came back and I was ready and willing and very desirous of getting into the Service. Rather than wait some more for the draft to catch up with me, I enlisted in the Air Force. What office I went to, where it was, who I talked to, what they asked, what they did; I don't know.

Shortly after that, I went to Great Lakes, which was sort of the receiving center, and I was ear-marked for the Air Force and sent my clothes home, got the haircut, was issued the uniform; they fit pretty well. And then they put me on a train for Sherman, Texas, which was an Air Force base, and then I went to basic training for, I don't know, maybe four or six weeks, learned how to march and about face and to the left flank march, and how to salute and all those good and necessary things; close order drill they call that, and hike a little bit and so forth.

Van Ells: I was going to ask, did you find adjusting to military life difficult; the drill sergeant yelling in your face and all these kinds of things?

Podell: No. That was not my personal experience. It was not obnoxious. After completing that so-called basic training, I think we went to a firing range. I fired a gun for the first time in my life. They had an opportunity to take many examinations for specialties in the Air Force--engine work, weather--as an enlisted person. I was a private. I looked the list over and I opted to take advantage of the offer to send me to photography school. There were some tests and I had the aptitude. I think I had the aptitude for almost anything; that's my egotistical expression. It was much easier than my requirements and discipline in academia at that point. It was physical and I did like the physical aspect of all this. Sure enough, they loaded me up on a train and I was sent to Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado. I was there for twelve weeks. I went through a photography course and if you think I suffered at that, quite the contrary. Denver was a delightful city. The people there were delightful and the photography course was fantastic.

Van Ells: Did you get off the base much?

Podell: Yes, into Denver, but my only friends were military people. I think I had no contact with civilians or people in Denver. So, it was a question of sight-seeing, going out to restaurants to eat, and, on the base, we were quite busy. It was a very comprehensive, interesting photography course. Myself and--

Van Ells: What kind of photography was it?

Podell: It was aerial photography. The Air Force was interested in reconnaissance and aircraft-carried special cameras that would fly over land masses and take pictures that could be read and had military significance. Not just bomb strike photos, but tactical military photos and so forth. And, of course, not only did we learn all the chemistry, and how to manufacture solutions, what goes into hypo and developer--We developed readable prints in hot water, water into which we'd urinated just to get a combat type field result, and it was a remarkable course. The instructors were civilian and

when we finished that course, two of us were selected for Officer Candidate School.

Van Ells: On what basis?

Podell: I assume our achievement in the course. One was a guy named Robert, no middle initial, Brown and the other was Sidney Podell. The OCS program was in New Haven, Connecticut at a place called Yale University. And I was on shipping orders, but we had to wait for several weeks before the new class opened up, so Brown and I were at Denver waiting to be shipped out. And I started to go down to a flight line where they had P-38 reconnaissance planes, into which cameras were located, and talking to some of those people. I said, "Oh, boy! That's for me!" I really got the flying bug. I watched those guys taking off and going straight up into the sky and then the Air Force song was probably a great influence on most people.

Van Ells: So this is where you caught the flying bug?

Podell: Oh, yeah. I caught it very badly.

Van Ells: Before that you hadn't given it much thought?

Podell: No, very little. So, I think I would have been happy if I had been a photo lab technician or something of that sort. I was repelled by the segregation of officers and enlisted men.

Van Ells: Having been both, I suppose.

Podell: Yes, eventually. I ended up a 1st lieutenant, but on flying status, which is very much of an earned commission and you often wondered whether people achieved-- I think if I had been a product of Yale, OCS at Yale, I might have been less entitled to the perks of being an officer, but we went into a theater and the officer's section was half empty and the enlisted men couldn't get in. They had to wait for the next show. Bull, that was a lot of boloney and so I think that class stratification was very aggravating and angered me. That's kind of a gut reaction.

Van Ells: I'm interested in that sort of officer-enlisted --World War II was one of the times in our history when we had a mass army; massive numbers of civilians. Democratic, small "d", civilians are coming into the military and they come across this rigid class structure. You, apparently, were quite disturbed by this sort of thing.

Podell: I was sensitive to it. I'll tell you more about that later as we get on into it.

Van Ells: Was this the reaction of others you were training with as well, or was this just your own personal feelings?

Podell: I honestly can't tell you. At any rate, sure enough, I went in and took an aviation cadet examination, hoping to be chosen for pilot training. I passed and the Air Force gave that priority over my orders to OCS. It was a tragic mistake in some respects, although nothing is tragic since I got out of the military alive and breathing in and out, what is it, thirty-two times a minute. No wounds and that's a good deal, but from there I was sent to Logan, Utah, which was then the Utah State Agricultural College, which is now Utah State with prominent athletic teams and mushroomed institution like all the rest of the-- I think when I came up here, the registration shot up to about 14,000 in the Madison campus in the late '30s and then it went to 25,000, unprecedented, and eventually 45,000.

Van Ells: It has more than doubled, if I'm not mistaken.

Podell: I eventually went to Santa Ana, California. I was in the Western Flying Training Command and I went to California, to Santa Ana, California in Orange County at the Preflight School and there--Speaking of discipline, there were the West Pointers, who were making us into West Point-type performers, and there is where we had the parade every Saturday with white gloves where you swing your arms, if I remember, correctly six inches to the front and three inches to the rear, or the other way around, and there was competition for the E flag. And after umpteen weeks confined to base, we finally were released to go on weekend passes, which was marvelous. The preflight training was pretty academic. There was no flying, but there were very good classroom experiences. By the way, the aptitude tests they gave, psychological testing, I thought, was really terrific. I won't belabor that point, but if you ever get anybody in your sights who was in the Air Force examination, testing for admission to flying specialty programs--Anyway, I'll tell you at this point, I qualified in all three categories; pilot, bombardier, navigator. I think they refer to that as a stanine score [STANDARD NINE]. I don't know what that is, but somehow I remember that term. Now as a military person in the Los Angeles area, what was my relationship with passes and leaves and the civilian community? We were all sort of heroes at that time. As an aviation cadet, we had special insignia and we were a different bird than the Marines are. Infantry guys and--I think that class distinction already started to set in a little bit. And we were officer candidates, albeit flying officers. I went in on weekend passes in the Los Angeles area and you took a train. By the way, just parenthetically, from Santa Ana, which is in Orange County, where the air base was to Los Angeles, and the train went through orange groves and the smell was overpowering through rural areas. Now that's solid housing, concrete, asphalt and, boy, if ever a society has lost a war--You should have seen

what it was; the beauty of that place. What it was and the blue skies and zero pollution. I mean, zero.

Van Ells: That's not the Los Angeles I know.

Podell: No, no, I know, but it was gorgeous. From there--do you want to ask questions or should I just go on?

Van Ells: Why don't you go on a little more. I got something I want to come back to but I'll remember it.

Podell: I was admitted to pilot school and I went to pilot school in the San Joaquin Valley, a place called Dos Palos. And it was a primary pilot school and I breezed through eighty hours of flying in what was called a PT-22, a Ryan low wing monoplane, and I soloed promptly. And it was a civilian-run school so the food was magnificent and the place was not far from Merced, which was in weekend-range to San Francisco. By the way, an aviation cadet standing out on the highway, cars would screech their tires to stop and ask where you were going and I never took public transportation to San Francisco. Graduated from that primary pilot school, which was just a whale of a lot of fun. I did every acrobatic in the book in those little planes. Then I was sent to basic pilot school in Merced, California. There I completed another approximately eighty hours of flying with my instructor; instrument flying, formation flying, cross country navigation. Loved it. Did very, very well, but, and I can't fix the date exactly--44E was my class--but before we shipped out, after I completed all the basic, a guy wanted to do a check-ride on me, an officer.

Van Ells: What's a check ride?

Podell: To see how I was doing. My instructor said, "Podell, you have no problem, I don't know how they picked you or why, but just go up and do what you have to do." I rode with this guy one day and I did everything right and he said he wanted to ride with me the next day and the next day he rode with me and he rattled me. He really rattled me and he washed me out. There are several theories as to why, as I look back on it, but I won't elaborate on that. From there I was sent--now you wanted to go back on something that you weren't going to remember.

Van Ells: I wanted to ask you about some of your fellow recruits and inductees. Was this the first time you had been out of the Midwest? I'm interested in did you get a sense of different regionalisms and different levels of education bringing all these different kinds of peoples together?

- Podell: I'd never been to California before. I'd never resided anywhere outside of the State of Wisconsin, actually. I thought there were a lot of local Californians there, but that's the way they oftentimes did things. They put people from Wisconsin in California and Californians in Wisconsin, but I thought there were some--the companionship was very acceptable. There were a lot of people who had been to college and I was with a--to use a terrible expression because I don't really think this way, or feel this way, they were a pretty high-type group of people that I was with as aviation cadets.
- Van Ells: Did you get a sense of regionalism? For example, were there many southerners and, if so, did you have contact with them? Or weren't there many because of educational deficiencies or anything like that?
- Podell: There were a few Texans and there were always the jokes about Texans and you know, I'm sure that every vet that's thrown in with Texans, you know if you say to a Texan, "But you got a lot of VD down in that state." You'd get this bravado back, "Damn right we do. We're bigger and better than anything else!" I remember those kinds of things.
- Van Ells: But there was never any kind of tension, really, based on--
- Podell: No, no conflict. Now mind you, there was one Hispanic guy that I remember and I'm not aware of any tension because of that. There was certainly never any Blacks nor Asians in any of the classes or training programs that I was in. They were monolithically white and perhaps even middle class.
- Van Ells: I was going to say, you seem sensitive to class issues and I'm interested to get your perspective on where these cadets came from.
- Podell: It's one of the machines that drives history, I think, whether you like it or not.
- Van Ells: Most vets I speak to don't have a class analysis so I thought I'd pick your brain a little bit. Were they middle class kids or were there some disadvantaged kids who worked their way up?
- Podell: No. I'm not aware that there were. I think most of them had some college experience. I'm not at the thrust of your inquiries. Was I aware of any conflict in the ranks; carry over conflicts from civilian life into military? The military also is a very big common denominator.
- Van Ells: It's a leveler.

Podell: There was--nobody had cars. It's a real leveler. Everybody related to you on the basis of whether you were going along with the group; you were conforming. You certainly were conforming. Your dress was conformance; your attitude, your gripes. If the food was bad, so everybody had [it]. We were all really leveled and, in that sense, I would say it was a pleasant experience.

Van Ells: I'll probably have some questions along those lines later on when you start getting overseas.

Podell: So now that we go to--I'm dispirited and down in the dumps. I'm despondent. I think I was as depressed as I've ever been in my life. By the way, I get letters from Robert, no middle initial, Brown, you remember, from the photo school. He's now 2nd Lieutenant Robert, no middle initial, Brown and he's assigned as a PX Officer in Paris, France. Would you believe? I had no idea what happened to him after that in life because my contact with him stopped. The mistake I made was I should have gone to that damn Yale twelve-week course and they'd have stamped me out as a 2nd lieutenant and then applied for flying training and I would have gone through in grade as a 2nd lieutenant and I'd have got, you know, kid glove treatment. Anyway, that's a little irony; a little aside. I was so damn eager to fly those P-38s. Another little parenthetical thing, I've read a lot about P-38s because my heart was set on that one plane. Had I graduated from pilot's school, I think I could have ended up--I probably would not be alive today because they had so much trouble with those P-38s that, by the time the war ended, they straightened out a lot of the trouble and of course, Richard Bong became an ace in the P-38s. Do you know who he is?

Van Ells: Yah.

Podell: Okay. But they flew in all parts of the world and, until they straightened out the bugs and major design changes were effected, they killed an awful lot of people. So, with all that despondency and unhappiness, I have to, now looking back--I'm fortunate enough to be able to look back--I have to say to myself, even if somebody had said, "This is a risky plane, you'd be better off being what we call a ground pounder, no wings". I would have said, "Off I go into the wild blue yonder." They sent me back to Santa Ana and reclassified me for bombardier training and, from there, I went to Carlsbad, New Mexico and the whole bombardier training was—Oh before I went to bombardier training, they sent me to a gunnery school at no less a place than Las Vegas, Nevada. So for I think--

Van Ells: Which I suppose back then it was not what it is today. It is my understanding that the Las Vegas that we know and love didn't emerge until after World War II.

Podell: Like Los Angeles; the comments I made about the LA area. I think there were two hotels on the strip loaded with slot machines and we gaped at the slot machines in church entries and so forth. The gambling and the marriage palaces, but the main street was sort of just a--you came in the desert at one end and you went out into the desert at the other end. It was like a western movie. That experience was very, very fun. It was all fun and games. I learned how to strip a 50 caliber machine gun blindfolded in umpteen seconds, and I flew in the belly turret of a B-17, a horrible experience.

Van Ells: How so?

Podell: You're hanging upside down under this plane and if it gets locked up or if the plane is going to crash land, you're going to be squashed like the sole of your shoe on an ant. It's cold and you're alone and the wind is whistling, that I remember. After that, I went to Carlsbad, New Mexico where I went through bombardier school with no problems or trouble, but, there's an appropriate military expression that applies, I was really pissed off not being a pilot. By the way, the pilots there used to let me, when we were coming back, would let me sit in and get some stick time. I never lost my interest in piloting. I think I would have been a good pilot. Graduated from that; there they transitioned me from an enlisted man, aviation cadet, to an officer and it was a lot of fun buying officer's clothes in the PX, getting fitted up. It was a lot of fun going home on leave with the wings on my chest. It was a lot of fun getting saluted.

Van Ells: You enjoyed that?

Podell: Sure.

Van Ells: If I may go with this just a little bit. What did you enjoy about it? Was it a power thing? Was it a respect thing?

Podell: Whereas I'm interested in these class considerations, I'm not anxious to be in the underclass. I'm a very ordinary, normal human being and I, parenthetically, to carry that point at this time and we won't have to come back to it, after I became an officer and we were crewed up, all of that officer-enlisted man distinction was eliminated, it became very apparent. There were eleven people on a combat B-29. Six of them were officers and five of them were enlisted men. Any individual on that aircraft, in combat, could cause the death of that aircraft and we knew it. So enlisted men would call me Syd and I called them by their name, "Martin" and it never bothered us. When the liquor ration came when we were overseas, we always split up our liquor

ration, which only went to officers on Saipan in combat, we split it up with the enlisted men.

Van Ells: Do you think this was typical in other B-29 crews?

Podell: Yes, all the B-29 crews, all the combat crews, none of that B.S. about your holier than somebody else or your excretion has no odor. It was not the point of view. In the theater, where we sat on oil drums watching motion pictures, there was no officer's or enlisted men's section. We were segregated by a mess hall, however, but that was it. Did I like being an officer? The pay was better, and we were no longer the untermenschen. [German word for underclass] Every society has it's untermenschen. The Germans didn't invent that.

Van Ells: This brings up a topic I wanted to cover. Maybe we should just go with this. That involves the crew. I wonder if you could just describe some of the personalities of the crew..

Podell: On the combat crew?

Van Ells: Yah. When did you first get together with--

Podell: Let me wind up the chronological sequence and then I'll tell you a little more about that. After graduating from Carlsbad, New Mexico, they made me a bombardier instructor at another wonderful place, Albuquerque, Kirtland Field, and I was teaching Chinese lend-lease bombardiers how to operate the Norden bomb sight. However, that was very short-lived because about that time, that was in the fall of 1944, the production of B-29 aircraft--this is what I have put together since then--they started rolling off production lines like mad. Not only was Boeing building them, but some other aircraft builders were building that too. They had taken Saipan; the Marianas, Saipan, Tinian and Guam; and the decision apparently had been made to use these B-29s to bomb Japan. If you do any reading of this, a good book I recommend--I'll have to get you the title of it. The B-29s originally were based in India and China and their bombing was a terrible failure with great losses of the airplane. The airplane hadn't been perfected; number one and number two weather conditions, flying conditions were such--

Van Ells: I'm much less familiar with the B-29s. Like I mentioned on the phone, you're the first B-29 person I've spoken to.

Podell: I'll illuminate you because--so they got a call for experienced bombardiers and I had fallen into that category as a result of teaching Chinese lend-lease officers how to operate the Norden bombsight and they zoomed me into Lincoln, Nebraska where I was crewed up and then we were sent to

Alamogordo, New Mexico for overseas combat training. It was a twelve-week program and the chips were really down. One of the inquiries, you have an interest in, is about training and I suppose I ought to, parenthetically, tell you that I thought that the B-29 training, particularly the overseas training, was just excellent. They had the benefit of all the European experience and some of that was painful experience. There were a lot of lessons learned and I do think that there was some high ranking and fast promoted combat people out of the European Theatre exercising a real constructive role. I'm not a cynic about that point, or critical. It was as good as it could be. Then we, after the overseas training, then we went to Sacramento, and we had a brand new airplane, and we flew it from Sacramento to Honolulu, and landed at [laughs] Hickam Field for a few days where there were about two hotels on that beach; at Waikiki. One of the hotels was an officer's billet. I had never been in a billet before, but it was a billet and it was just delightful where we stuffed full of great food, and comfort, and so forth. Then we took off from there and landed at Kwajalein, and then to Saipan where I joined the organization where I performed.

Van Ells: Which was the 20th Air Force.

Podell: The 20th Air Force ran all the B-29s, Mark, and that was the 73rd Wing of the 20th Air Force. That's the next step down, organizationally.

Van Ells: I'd forgotten all the Air Force organization.

Podell: Well, you would have had no reason to really be concerned about it.

Van Ells: Well, we learned it in basic training.

Podell: We had to write it out on the test.

Van Ells: In the medical field, we never did it anyway, but we had to know it.

Podell: Of course. The 73rd Wing; this was very pleasing because there were, I think, four wings under the 20th Air Force; two on Guam and two on Tinian and one on Saipan. And the one on Saipan was the original wing that had flown out of India and China and all the personnel that was involved in those campaigns were gone. They had been rotated home and so I was on a replacement crew on Devil's Darling Two.

Van Ells: That was the name of the plane.

Podell: That was the name of the plan. I'll show you some pictures; our crew, there were three sets of officers. Then I'll let you in on this question that you

wanted to ask, I'm leading into that. The Quonset hut--we were housed in Quonset huts. Let's see, we were the 20th Air Force that covered everybody in the Pacific in B-29s. They were controlled out of Washington, that's where Curtis LeMay, the commanding General operated from and then Guam was sort of a substation where there were also a bunch of generals there and then each wing was headed by a general and I was in the 73rd Wing on Saipan, which is the northernmost of the three Mariana Islands; Saipan north, Tinian in the middle, and Guam considerably to the south. Then I was in the 498th Bomb Group. There are a bunch of Groups, maybe that'll refresh your recollection under the Wing and then you go into the Group structure and then there's the Squadron and I was in a squadron, which had maybe four or five, six or eight planes. Our Quonset huts were away from the field, but there were three crews of officers in the Quonset hut and, I think, that we were all very compatible, that is, there were eighteen people. Some of them had many more missions than we did. We came in with no missions, of course, and entered this. That was a lot of fun because we set up housekeeping there. We did our own laundry. The shower was an outdoor shower. I can't remember what the toilets were like, if they were running water or pits. Isn't that odd?

Van Ells: Maybe something you have chosen to forget.

Podell: Anyway, the enlisted men were in another area and we ate separately. I don't feel that was any kind of a problem ever and there was an officer's club and an enlisted men's club. The enlisted men's club actually was built before the officer's club; maybe there were more of them considering the ground personnel. Now, you had some interest in what those relationships were like.

Van Ells: Yah. I wonder if you could describe your plane, which you have already named, and the crew; their personalities, how everyone got along, where they all came from, etc. Just to get a social portrait.

Podell: Well, I think, we became familiar with each other when we were in overseas training at Alamogordo, New Mexico. By the way, I came as close to dying in Alamogordo, New Mexico as I did in the air war against the--Two engines on a plane went out when we were over a mountain and we were all poised over the bomb bay to bale out and we should have baled out, [laughs] but the pilot elected to try to make the field and we just skimmed over a mountain top and it was a very scary incident. Anyhow, the officers became--we socialized, we went to town, we didn't go to town with the enlisted men. We went into El Paso, Texas, which was the closest excitement spot and so that's where we went. Also, once up in the mountains--I'd never been on a mountain before-- and there was snow and we ran around in it. Just did some nice things. Nobody ever got

spectacularly drunk. There was nobody interested in whoring around. Our pilot was married, actually, and he and his wife lived in a converted chicken coop in the town of Alamogordo; a very nice woman. And his wife had a car, which was also very nice. So Frank Shafer was the pilot, the co-pilot was a guy—Frank, I don't think, had any university training at all. He'd been in the Air Force for quite a time and he was a 1st lieutenant. I was a 2nd lieutenant at that time. The co-pilot was a very young guy named Ostroot who was from Pigeon River, Minnesota and we used to kid him about that because he wrote in his records that he was from Duluth, but Pigeon River was a little border town and Ozzie was--and both of them were very serious pilots by the way. And Frank let Ostroot do a lot of the flying, including instrument approaches and so forth, and they were very, very serious. The navigator was a guy named Moszynski [?] from New England somewhere. He was the most urbane of us all. I think he had a lot of experiences being an Easterner and maybe I blotted up a little of the Midwest antipathy to Easterners, which you are grinning about. You have some feeling--

Van Ells: No, my wife is from New England.

Podell: Well, that's all right. Some of your best friends--Well you know how New Yorkers and Bostonians don't--they have to settle in Madison for a while. At any rate, there was a radar operator, Putnam. Very clean cut guy. In fact, I have to use that term about so many of these people. He was in the back of the plane. The four of us were up front. He was back in the waist. There was a tunnel you used to be able to crawl through and the B-29 was pressurized, by the way, unlike any other American World War II military planes, so we were warm and cozy. We weren't freezing our "you-know-what" off, like they did in B-24s and B-17s. Those are the heavy bombardment planes. The B-29 was called the VHB; very heavy bombardment. We carried 20,000 pounds of bombs. The B-24, that Frank told you about, carried about 14,000, so we were very heavily loaded and comfortable. You want to know what our relationship was like when we were in combat? I've already touched on that we shared liquor and there was no saluting and we all knew that the enlisted men could be our downfall and it wasn't a situation of fragging.

Van Ells: And I suppose they knew that the officers could be their downfall.

Podell: I will say, I was in charge of the gunners. As a bombardier, I was a gunnery officer and I think these guys knew, and I once gave them a little lecture I remember about how, "If I tell you to do something, it isn't because I'm pulling rank or because I think I'm better than anybody else, I'm supposed to have had more training than you guys on some of these things and you can ask me why I say something if we've got time, but if we don't have

time, you just will have to do it. If I say 'jump' you have to jump." I think I said my relationship with those gunners was very, very good. The enlisted men, the radio operator was a young guy, enlisted man, whose name I do remember but I can't at this instant. The flight engineer was an older guy. A flight engineer is the guy who controls the - doing fuel computation problems, watching the engines. That B-29 required an engineer and he sat up in front with us, but he was a master or tech sergeant of some kind and he was a very quiet guy, a little older. And there were two blister gunners and the tail gunner. I can't tell you much about them. We didn't socialize a lot with them, they were very nice people and acceptable. We got along well.

Van Ells: That was a pretty big crew. Frank told me there were six or something.

Podell: I don't remember what a B-24 carried.

Van Ells: So you arrived in Saipan late in '44 or was it '45 by this time?

Podell: No, it was '45 by this time. It was the spring of '45. You don't know the history of B-29s, the time they'd been bombing Japan, trying to do precision bombing, which was the Norden sight was supposed to be able to do. And the B-29 was supposed to be able to accomplish precision bombing from elevation. The precision bombing was fraught with difficulties and failures from high altitudes. They would miss targets, badly miss targets. That's the ultimate failure of the-- there were no pickle barrel results. To get out of bombardiers school, the requirement level of expertise that you have to be able to drop from an airplane, I forgot how many bombs over a period of time within a 200 foot circular area of a bull's eye at a corrected altitude of 10,000 feet. That was the level of proficiency with which I was trained and bombardiers were trained and if you weren't able to do that, they washed you out. So the B-29 was, hopefully, going to do precision bombing against military targets. Because of the failure around the turn of the year, '45, this guy, Curtis LeMay was brought in and LeMay set up a new policy. "We're going to go down on the deck boys, and we're going to salvo incendiary bombs. We're going to burn them out. It's that simple." [salvo is the simultaneous discharge of a rack of bombs from a flying aircraft] One of the big reasons wasn't a failure of the aircraft or crews that they weren't hitting precision targets; the Japanese islands located in the marine environment, etc. Meteorologically, they weren't able to forecast bombing condition weather. That is, at 25,000 feet, you could have perfect settings on the instruments for the bomb release, all of which were recorded and later calculated on the ground, and should have been a dead hit, and the bomb impact is two miles away. The differential winds, as that bomb is descending would blow it, literally carry it off target, so there were particularly four aircraft engine plants in the Tokyo area that were never hit.

And, they were well defended, by the way, with some big losses. I never was on such a raid. I was in on most of the incendiary raids. So LeMay said, "Japanese cities are tinderboxes, number one, the surface winds will create fire storms, number two, and"--of course, we were told they were doing home work industry, all the little ladies with their wicker baskets go to the factory, get a bunch of parts, and sit up in their houses all night, screwing things together, taking them back.--"So we're really going to be bombing homes, residences, women and kids."

Van Ells: As we left off, we were talking about the fire bombing and the rationale behind it.

Podell: That was the rationale; we had to hit them in the home work industry. So he dropped us to 5-8,000 feet, we left Saipan individually, didn't bother with the formations, which is also a problem because you burn up a lot of fuel going into formations.

Van Ells: If I may interrupt you, here, for just one second. When was your first mission and how far into the number of missions that you eventually did was this?

Podell: They really loaded us with flying. I had sixteen missions. Two were practice missions in which, out there in the Pacific where we got shot at in both of them but they didn't count, but fourteen missions counted and they started in May or June to the end of the war. Most of them were night missions. I went on one daylight precision mission, which was in Osaka, and the others where we would take off, and they were night bombing missions. Right down on the deck and we would--I have what is called the bombardiers flimsy--the original documents. Your target is the center of the built up area of the City of Toyama or the City of Sasebo and lead planes would go in, pathfinder planes would go in and light up the target and we would go in and salvo those bombs. When we got to where I thought we were in the center of the city, I would hit a toggle switch and 20,000 pounds of incendiary bombs, which were supplied by Chemical Warfare, not Ordnance. Ordnance supplied general purpose bombs, but incendiary, napalm and magnesium bombs, which were most of my missions, were supplied by Chemical Warfare. So if our society is opposed to chemical warfare, we are well schooled on what it is because, boy, we did it. I did it. How did we feel about that? That was your question.

Van Ells: Yes. Some of the scholarship on World War II in the Pacific, much of it, the recent writing, deals with the issue of race and how race was perceived and how the Japanese were perceived as an enemy as opposed to the Germans and these kinds of things. So then we get to how you perceived of

the Japanese people and this rationale of the home work and these kinds of things.

Podell: Well, I can speak for myself, in no way could I tell you, could I recite what the general attitude was. I can just tell you about myself.

Van Ells: That's all I ask.

Podell: First of all, the 20th Air Force was a remarkably efficient organization. I have never seen anything as efficient and I won't bore you with the details, the operational details, but it was well done. The kind of efficiency I have never seen since in terms of its precision. We were in a very complicated airplane. One had to believe that the ground crew had prepared our aircraft and they had because I wouldn't be here now. The longest mission I had was sixteen hours and fifty minutes, mostly over water. A lot of planes, early on, were lost due to navigation errors, running out of fuel. People just disappeared. Planes just never came back; were seen leaving the target areas intact and then just never showed up at base. It was one of the scariest parts of the whole operation. In terms of my feelings, I just wanted to get the damn war over and get home. I had a lot of confidence, again, this is the way I've led my life and this is the way I feel about things in our society today that; [that] they know what they're doing. Maybe I've been indoctrinated in the command structure and so if the order filtered down that we were to salvo incendiary bombs on a built up area of a city, by God that's what I'd do. Now, that has bothered me since because I see all these people think I'm such a nice guy, and I'm educated, and I've never been arrested; I've never been caught doing anything wrong. I appear to be well bathed, etc. etc. I have accumulated some estate, done everything right. But when it comes to taking human lives, I have taken thousands of human lives and not fellow soldier's lives, if that is ethical, but I'm sure I've killed thousands of women and children. I don't like it today, but at the time, I just wanted to get the damn thing over with and get home and I had confidence in the leadership. There's your answer.

Van Ells: If I may play psychologist for a minute, when did the magnitude of the war experience start to weigh on you? How many years after the conflict? Was it the Korean War, the Vietnam War? As soon as you got home? When did you start to ask yourself these questions?

Podell: Well, I think it's been sort of cumulative, all of these events. None of which have been productive either for the welfare, this is me talking, my opinion. None of these wars have been productive in terms of welfare of the American people or the citizens of the planet. And, we keep doing the same things. Maybe even for less compelling reasons than existed in World

War II. I'm not discarding the motivations that I've expressed for justifying my participation in that war.

Van Ells: So you did about sixteen missions.

Podell: I did fourteen credit missions and two training missions, which I always like to interject that I got shot at, [laughs] but they were ranked only as training missions.

Van Ells: Well, for my purposes, there were sixteen missions. I'm not the Air Force. I have a few questions about some of the more combat military questions. Did these missions change over time in terms of their danger? We discussed the changeover to the fire bombing.

Podell: That's a very good question. The first few missions we flew--first of all back up. Some of these guys in the Quonset hut, other combat crew officers were very nervous, very frightened, very fearful of the next announcement. They didn't want to go back to target 357, which was the Nakajima Engine Plant in Tokyo. They were in fear, and we flew our first few missions, and we all talked about it. I don't know what the hell was bothering these guys. There was nothing to do. Just like in training, you take off, you follow the instructions, the navigation instructions, the bombing instructions, you unload, and you come home. What's so bad? But with every mission we flew, it got more and more fearful because I think, and I guess, this is every man's combat experience and certainly Air Force experience, the longer you're at it, the greater the risk of casualty and that awareness, I think, affected us. If the weather was bad or a mission was scratched, as it happened occasionally, oh God, we were delighted, we were absolutely delighted, with one exception.

Van Ells: Which was?

Podell: The day that first Hiroshima was bombed. We were flying toward a target and when they dropped the A-Bomb, we were called back and we were almost exhausted. [laughs] I can't remember whether it was twenty or thirty missions that got you rotated to go home. We were, also at the same time, anxious to get mission credit toward rotation. It became more frightening as time went on. Then, of course, I was telling you, people would just disappear. They'd be seen last heading for home, and then they'd never show up at home. That Pacific Ocean, looking down at that water at those white caps, they looked like they were reaching up for you and we spotted some--I spotted a ditched plane once and the rescue operation was very, very good with Navy submarines and flying boats, but at that point, I developed the point of view, which some people find humorous, I said, when my turn comes to die I don't mind dying, but I don't

want to just disappear. I want to die in my own bed with clean, white sheets on it and lots of crying and sorrow around me. I don't just want to disappear. You know he's gone; specific answer. And I've thought about that a lot. [It] is that it did become more and more frightening as we were aware of the risks. The training, again, I would rehash was so good that it gave us a lot of confidence, which wore thin as time went on and missions piled up.

Van Ells: I see. I have a note here about Japanese air defenses. I think you mentioned that, at one time, you thought they were effective in some cases. Did they remain effective? Did they get worse as Japan's fortunes--

Podell: Very much so. Japanese air defenses in this Tokyo area, where there were these industrial targets, were very effective and that's what made people in-- I'm now not quoting my experience, I'm citing the experience of other officers in the Quonset. They were very fearful of going back to those targets.

Van Ells: And what did they consist of?

Podell: Antiaircraft with flak and fighter planes. Another thing about the night fire bombing raids is the defenses were very ineffective. The first couple of missions-- night missions were very frightening because you could see the search lights all over the sky and tracer shells coming up. Of course, we were re-assured, more or less, that if you can see the tracers, they are very ineffective, and we did have a bombsight window broken once by a piece of spent flak, and we had to depressurize, but there was always this threat. You never knew what instant something was going to happen. Fighter opposition, I experienced no fighter opposition, none, but then I was only on a few daylight precision bombing raids. I don't think they had night fighters at that point. They were defenseless. Those islands were defenseless, within my experience.

Van Ells: More true towards the end?

Podell: Yah. I mean there were some Kamikaze things that were very frightening.

Van Ells: Are there a couple of missions that stand out in your mind that were most dangerous, or the best milk run you were ever on? Whatever? Or, do they all seem to blend together? Does each mission have its own character?

Podell: They were very similar, but I think I wouldn't--there was no high drama that I could recite in describing any one as opposed to the other.

Van Ells: Back in Saipan, you touched on some of your quarters and those sorts of things in Saipan. I'd like to come back to some of the conditions of the Air force on Saipan. For example, did you have any contact with the natives on the island, these kinds of things?

Podell: The Japanese had installed Korean slave laborers. Tinian and Saipan were intensive sugar cane production and we had no contact with them. When the war ended, and our whole operation was disbanded and before they set up a point rotation system, which I'm sure you're familiar with, I was sent over to Tinian and that's how I got into the 313th Wing on Tinian. We lived in a headquarters area, very beautiful. It had been a Japanese headquarters area. There we did have contact with Koreans and my laundry was done and I'm ashamed to say it, but it was a term of the times, the "Gook Laundry". These very sweet Japanese people worked very, very hard servicing American officers. They would carry my bundles through a path and over to the Gook Laundry, and they would do very nice laundry work. That was the only contact I had with native populations. We did have a jeep from the motor pool and toured Saipan while the war was on, looked around, saw some of the caves where Japanese were holed up, could see the burned out areas from flame throwers. We saw the famous suicide cliff where hundreds, if not thousands, of Japanese civilians leaped to their death, rather than be captured by Americans, and went through the battlefields where originally the troops landed on the invasion, a costly invasion. The Navy bombed the hell out of Saipan for days and days, and all the opposition was there when they landed.

Van Ells: Now this was, I'm sure, a major military base. Were there other branches of service there? Were there parts of the Army there?

Podell: That's a funny story. The Marines would come there for a rest and rehabilitation from combat, poor guys. They came around selling souvenirs and trinkets and I could have bought Samurai swords for a pittance. I didn't want a Samurai sword. [laughs] I just wanted to fly our missions and get home. I didn't want to carry one of those damned things. Interesting point that I know about first hand, all our supplies, our armament were brought in by ship and the harbor at Saipan was a very efficient harbor. These port battalions were solidly Black led by white officers, and I never had any contact with them, but when we drove through the port area, we could see these guys and they looked raunchy and sloppy and I suppose in our own way we were comparing them, from a point of view of our superiority, to these lesser troops; port battalions they were called. That's all I know about that.

Van Ells: What sort of amenities from home did you get? I had one veteran tell me the place was American territory when the coke machine first got there. I'm

wondering, did Bob Hope come there? What sort of amenities did you have?

Podell: We had an outdoor theater where we sat on old oil drums and watched movies and carried our ponchos with us in case it rained in the middle of the movie, and it did. I've had all of that Bill Maudlin kind of a look like some of those drawings covered my bars. By the way, I got a promotion, a combat promotion, 1st lieutenant. We had an officer's club. Frankly I wasn't much of a drinker, I hardly used any kind of intoxicant, even beer. Some of the guys were rumored to be making out with nurses and Red Cross queens.

Van Ells: I just made this note about women. It's a rear area, so to speak, I suppose. There were nurses or Red Cross women.

Podell: I can't substantiate any of the rumors about how any of those women got rich and so forth. We've heard all the stories, but there was one guy that seemed to have a date all the time with a very nice young nurse. He was a married man, a ground pounder, no less, not a flying officer. I think ground people had a lot more time, could root in. We were much more transient and we flew tough schedules. They crammed missions in, 'cause they wanted that war over. Why don't you just review where you are and let me get to this point about how effective I think our conventional bombing program was.

Van Ells: Why don't you just go ahead.

Podell: Fact. We had run out of targets. There were no more major cities to bomb in Japan. There was one city that was intact, and that was Kyoto, and we were told that was being spared as a religious shrine community, and that we would make it difficult in the post war occupation if we creamed Kyoto, because it was a religious thing. We would stir up fires that could burn us up. I know for a fact that we were receiving 250 pound GP bombs in the bomb dump, regular ordnance, that they were planning on aiming into rice fields to break dikes to affect their food production. After the war, we flew two more missions, by the way, if I say the danger of the missions was flying fourteen to seventeen hours over the ocean with relatively primitive-- We had radar, our Loran, but there was many a slip. The ocean was an enemy, danger, but after the war when the Japanese surrendered, Frank Stole told you about how he was on Yoshima when those two White Bettys [bombardier jargon, referring to the two atomic bombs] came down. Japanese surrender terms--and we knew about that and, I might inject, that when the issue became whether we'd accept their surrender or not, depending on--we were insisting that they depose the Emperor and, absolutely universal here, I can still hear the shouts "Let them keep the

damned emperor, let's get the troops home!" So, that's the one incident in which I will hazard accuracy by telling you what everybody thought. The Japanese brought the geographical coordinates of all the prisoner of war camps to that first meeting and we undertook to strip the bomb bays out of equipment for dropping bombs and build platforms and load them with food and medical supplies, and parachute devices to drop supplies to prisoner of war camps. I went on two such missions. On the barracks, they had PW in big letters, in addition to the coordinates, and we found those camps, which were tucked away in beautiful mountain areas; must be a gorgeous country. I'd been all over it, but never on the ground. We dropped those supplies there. After we dropped the supplies--those were cream puff missions. If you're looking for cream puff missions, as we were relaxed, nobody was out to get us. We just had to rely on our own skill and trust our airplane to get us back--we went sight seeing through the country, and we buzzed Hiroshima, which I looked at. Comments on the intercom were, "Holy Cripes!" Total disbelief at what we were seeing. The idea that one bomb had done all that.

Van Ells: And this was disbelief coming from bomber crews. What was so remarkable about that particular target? What did you see?

Podell: There was nothing standing there. I can show you a picture or two, some of which have been published, maybe some that haven't, of Hiroshima. Even on these ordinary incendiary raids, there is no place to run. That's what you got from the feedback on this last earthquake in Kobe. When the fire storm sweeps through, you can't run to the next block. Everything is on fire, and these houses are the densest kind of housing you can imagine; all wooden framed housing with, perhaps, narrow streets and if you leave your house, there is no place to run and hide. You just sit there and become incinerated. That was the situation. I think the magnitude of that--one lousy bomb did all that. That's what blew our minds. But, carrying to point number two, in buzzing the inland sea, we saw--I have to be cautious using a number, but it could have been--there were hundreds of major ocean going vessels where they would hit torpedoes and the 313th Wing on Tinian sowed torpedo mines in Japanese waters, and they laid, I remember being told, the total tonnage of mines that the B-29s laid in Japanese water and exceeded what the United States Navy laid all over the world in the entire World War II. So it was mind boggling figures like the tonnage of bombs dropped in Vietnam. What would happen was you'd see a major ocean going vessel--the vessel's in trouble, and they're in sight of land. They would just run it up on the beach, and we saw these all over the place. I, then, had the feeling that these people are in no shape to carry on a war. So, for all of those reasons, it has been my feeling and belief that they were not capable of mounting a defense, even of the home islands and that a negotiated surrender was very much in order, and very much a possibility, and I'm not

familiar--there has been some writing about some of the details that there were overtures, but I don't think that there was anything concrete. At the pain of sounding conspirational, I'm sure it's just not been let out. Some of the things I'm telling you haven't been let out, like your target is the center of the built up area of a city, dropping chemical warfare. And for some reason or another, I've got the original documents. They were all confidential. I'll roll back to another point. They were so badly beaten that when we arrived overseas and were given our overseas combat briefing, in the briefing room, I didn't ask the question, but another officer asked the question, "Are we supposed to shoot out the bomb sight? What if we are captured?" The briefing officer, and this is my own hearing, this is my sworn testimony, a briefing officer says, "Nah, if you're caught, tell them anything they want to know." This was in June. Tell them where you came from, where you've been, what your training has been. Draw them a diagram of the bomb sight if you can do it. Tell them how it works." It was so much over that all that secrecy and "die for your country, let them pull your fingernails out," was-- we were told to ignore that. It was very comforting. [laughs]

Van Ells: How did this impact morale? In Vietnam, you know, especially after Tet in '68, "we're here for nothing, why be the last person to die in the war?" Yet, it seems a sort of futility sense. It seems to have an opposite effect, even on your crew.

Podell: Number one; this is no place for antiwar activists. [laughs] Number two; this man, who you're talking to—Again this is the way I answer to myself and I haven't concocted this for this interview. I had such a respect for the authority, for the efficiency, and for the effectiveness of that military operation, and number one, and number two, and I was just yielding to--and I'm not apologizing for this, and I don't feel guilty for this--I wanted to get the war over with and return home. And I suppose, indirectly, there was still going on the "They started it!" I could say that, I would say I was concerned about the essence of fascism from an ideological point of view, than, maybe, most soldiers were. I think it was following orders, again, and the old Nuremberg ploy, but I think I'll give you another name if you want to put this in some reservoir. If your career is going to be in this area, there was a high school classmate of mine and a close friend by the name of Harvey Glick, who ended up 2nd Lieutenant Harvey Glick, and he was in the 313th Bomb Wing, and I was the last man of all his friends, his Wisconsin friends--that is, he was a childhood friend of mine, and then he went to college, and he graduated in '42 from this university [University of Wisconsin-Madison], and was a very brilliant student. I think his field was Econ, and I saw him last in that overseas training time at Alamogordo, New Mexico. And he was in the class ahead of mine. He had told me, at that time that he didn't think a lot of the crew he was with. I thought a lot of the

crew I was with. He went overseas and, after the war, I was on Tinian, and I tried to look for him, and I couldn't find him, and I was told, in his squadron headquarters, that his plane was shot down over a target, and they all bailed out, and that Harvey was beheaded by the Japanese who captured him as a war criminal. I would tell you that had we lost that war, you're talking to a man who could have easily been prosecuted and convicted under General Telford Taylor's Nuremberg's principles. That's my knowledge of Nuremberg, of General Telford Taylor. That's the way I feel about it today. Do I lay awake nights worrying about this, certainly not. I've been much too busy enjoying the goodies of American citizenship and, perhaps, the benefits of our success in that war against fascism. It might have been very much otherwise had we not succeeded, even though we did, early on. I may have been involved in some of that, destroying villages to save them, which is something that I just abominate the philosophy of human behavior, of military behavior. The way I feel about it if we would, I mean, just the enormity of that argument. We killed hundreds and hundreds of thousands of civilians, so that our troops wouldn't have to engage with Japanese troops. I mean that's the point, terribly uncivilized.

Van Ells: These sorts of attitudes you express, do you think they are standard of some of the other men with whom you served?

Podell: I cannot say. I will tell you that I heard Professor Howard Zinn speak on two occasions on this campus and I read one of his history books. Howard Zinn was a bombardier in Europe.

Van Ells: Is that right? I didn't know that.

Podell: He played the same role that I played. Howard Zinn says, now, there is no such a thing as a just war. There's no such thing as a just war. I haven't thought that through clearly. He has concluded, finally, and that's his philosophy. I want to be accurate in this interview and that's why I would, with not a little zeal, tell you that I cannot speak for others. Another little aside, if you want another aside where I can--I'm a very unreligious individual, and I'm sure there is no data or statistics about this, but I feel there was very little church attendance among the combat crews. My observation--I watched for people. I have no quarrel with people that feel comfortable going to church every Sunday. It was possible for all of us to have done that. I never was aware of that. Secondly, there was a very despicable event that took place--if this is the kind of human story, my first hand experience--when the B-29s were getting ready to go off on a mission. At the briefing, we all checked our watches and we were given, actually, a time when the pilot turned the switch on to start the engine. When the sweep second came around on this watch, on the pilot who had a watch just like this, the engine went on. So many minutes later, we would taxi out into

a line of planes that would be going to the take off point on the runway. Every two minutes by a sweep second, arriving at the top of that watch, the pilot would release the brakes. Ten seconds before the sweep second got on, he'd advance the throttle, stand on the brakes; the whole plane would shudder and shake and when the sweep second got to the top. There would be a guy with a flag, and the sweep second was there, and he'd release the brakes, and we'd surge off the runway; every two minutes. I always sat in the nose of the plane to give the crew confidence. We were heavily loaded. The take off, to this day in airplanes, that's the danger point whether you are on a commercial jet or a private plane. I always sat in the nose and had a few words for the crew to calm them down. Next to the nose, as we're taking off for Japan with 20,000 pounds of incendiary bombs to drop on the center of built-up areas of the cities, there was a rabbi, a priest, and a third clergymen blessing us as we're going off. I think about that. I would like to meet one of those clergy people—clergymen because there were no women—today and ask them how they think back on that.

Van Ells: And ask them what they were thinking.

Podell: If they knew what we were up to and what we accomplished, when we made line fall in Japan, and released those devices of chemical warfare. For your record, my impression is that very few people went to church. There were chaplains available, of course.

Van Ells: What do you think this symbolizes? A lot of young guys don't go to church anyway.

Podell: I don't know, but we have all that stuff about God is my co-pilot. My co-pilot's name was Ostroot, and I think other people went through the same thing. If that offends you, I'm sorry.

Van Ells: No it doesn't, not at all. It's something I've heard quite often. There are no atheists in fox holes. That's the saying, but it's not always true.

Podell: Alright, but that's my experiences. That's my candid—as one of you. By the way, when this terrible event just took place in Pennsylvania where this plane was twisting and they got the pilot's last words on the voice recorder, he wasn't pleading for leniency from the deity, he used a four letter word; twice. [laughs]

Van Ells: I'm sure I would too.

Podell: He wasn't thinking of the Great Hereafter, or the Great Creator.

Van Ells: I'd like to take a little break if we could.

Podell: yeah, hell, yes.

Van Ells: So we're back from our little break here. If you've got things you want to interject about the war, by all means do, but we can move on, now, to the post-war era. If you think of things, by all means, blurt them out. That's just fine with me.

Podell: Post war, good. After I got home I, well, you lead me on.

Van Ells: Okay. On the sheet I had you fill out, it says you didn't leave until April of '46, VE-Day, of course, was the middle of August of '45. Where were you and what did you do during that time?

Podell: After the war, they transferred me to Tinian. I didn't have enough points to go home and they generated a secondary MOS for me [Military Occupational Specialty] as General Administrative Officer and, on Tinian, I was in charge of calculating points for people to go home and making shipping arrangements and that didn't get me out of there until the spring. At one point, I was teaching a psychology course on some Armed Forces Institute thing, but it was a real vacation, [laughs] a very pleasant place, and very little to do, and I was very anxious to get home.

Van Ells: Was there any sort of unrest? There were incidents where some of the GIs protested with pickets and the whole business, in the Philippines, for example.

Podell: Not aware of any. Yes, I have something interesting to say about that. Demobilization. That was screwed up by this time. Everything I say about how magnificently I regarded that 20th Air Force in terms of efficiency, goes out the window because, when the war ended, that command did not want to relinquish its membership. They did not want a reduction in forces. My biased opinion is that when the war started, there were a lot of these general officers, people that were enlisted men, even, who came on and were given commissions and had a high rank when the war ended. When the war ended, they weren't anxious to revert to their prewar status. It had some tragic effects. Also, you understand, I described the 20th Air Force, and then there were these Wings and Groups. They all had authorized officer cadres and that depended on how many men were in the command. If the Group had four squadrons and they were going to reduce it to two, there would be two full colonels. There would be surplus. So, what they did--they couldn't avoid sending enlisted people, aircraft maintenance people, for example, home--but planes remained without proper personnel to maintain them. There were some major problems flying those planes.

Van Ells: What did they do?

Podell: Well, I think a lot of them were scrapped, a lot of them—they got back to Arizona where they scrapped them, with skeleton crews. They junked a lot of stuff. I have seen jeeps driven over the cliff into the ocean. I've seen stuff thrown away, good materials that could have been converted. Now they did, on Guam, they sent all kinds of equipment to Sing Tao, China, for the Chinese Nationalists, and I saw those materials departing from Guam on ships in holds. So, I went over to Tinian and was in charge of keeping track of points. By the way, when my own turn came to come home, I assigned myself to a civilian liberty ship, whereas we went over in twenty-one hours from Sacramento, California to Saipan, it took twenty-one days to get home on this liberty ship. It blew into San Francisco harbor. The guy next to me, I never did learn to whistle with my fingers in my mouth, but the guy next to me whistled, and a cab came up. I cut my orders to be discharged on the West Coast, with travel pay home, so I really was an insider helping myself.

Van Ells: As you are going into San Francisco harbor, do you recall your thoughts?

Podell: Yes. And I was prepared to tell you that based on one of your questions. You know what blew our minds? It was myself and a few other military people, but outside of that, the whole ship was civilian. The first thing we heard as we came past the Farallon Islands and got sight of that Golden Gate Bridge is radio advertising. That was a cultural shock. We couldn't believe it. On Saipan, there was an Armed Forces radio which played music, Glenn Miller, and all of the wartime music, and had programs that we listened to; never any advertising. But it suddenly--that was an absolute--like walking into a freezer, a shock. And it's not an exaggeration. Listening to that radio advertising about funerals and cars and sales, it was another world.

Van Ells: Now they had something before the war, obviously. It was just something that you had forgotten about until you were deprived of it.

Podell: Exactly. We were absent advertising and it just sounded so ridiculous to me and some of the people I was with.

Van Ells: What do you mean "ridiculous," like mundane or--

Podell: It just made no sense, the way they were touting certain products. I mean, if you're in the field, as some kind of an intellectual analyzing advertising, there's much of it today that can be described as ridiculous. We had no expertise in analyzing the content of sales persuasion, but, boy, that was really a shock. Everything else was--suddenly there was nobody else to report to--we had to report to a separation center in Camp Beale. I have no memory as to where that was or how I got there. I had some friends on the

West Coast that I went to see, still in uniform, I had a whole bunch of days. I was getting still paid for getting back to Wisconsin, and my mother and father were eagerly awaiting my return.

Van Ells: Did you phone?

Podell: Oh, sure. I'm an only child so they were very delighted to have me safe and sound and intact. And they were eager to see me and I was with them. I had enough of the West Coast. I wasn't at all tempted to stay there, though it was a possibility.

Van Ells: Which a lot of GIs did.

Podell: Oh, yah.

Van Ells: So you got back to Wisconsin when?

Podell: In the spring of '46. And after a week or so at home, I immediately decided to go back to Madison, and I did. I jumped into summer school, took two courses; one in music appreciation and the other in intensive Russian. My mind was like virgin soil. I got As in both, and it was a real pleasure, and I worked very hard.

Van Ells: Was it different than before the war? Did you approach things differently?

Podell: Oh, sure. The war settled me down. It was a very therapeutic interlude. I don't know how your experience was or others. Before the war, I really didn't know what I wanted to do and I really wasn't concerned about grades and, if something was more interesting, I cut class. But I knew, having gone through the flying training, which was rather technical, I knew then, that I had to specialize myself in one way or another, and it would be going to a technical school, and become a plumber or carpenter or whatever. And I opted, after that summer, which again I decided I was just running in place, I decided to go to Law School, and I did. I went into Law School as an alternative to being a carpenter and I've never had that exalted opinion that unfortunately so many professionals have. It was easy for me to quit practice after almost thirty-five years and not touch it again, although I had a good time of it and, I think, was relatively successful.

Van Ells: As for financing your education, the first thing that comes to mind, immediately, is the GI Bill. Did you use that even for that summer session?

Podell: Yes, every bit of it and, not only that, but I met a very lovely woman--a girl in those days if you could say, "girl--and we've been married from 1947 to this time. So we were married on what was then Sterling Court and is now

the Humanities Building and my GI Bill, the payment was even expanded because I was now. My wife dropped out of school, and also got a job, and we were very, very happy living in one--I moved into the same residence, the same room that I had before I left Madison. It was a very odd feeling and everybody else on Henry and Langdon was the place --murder mansion it was called--beautiful place never should have been torn down--and all kinds of other people that had left in '42 and were returning like those years just dropped away. And, of course, I went to school in my military uniforms, very nice _____ clothes.

Van Ells: Was that typical of a lot of vets?

Podell: Oh, sure. The classroom discipline, with one professor, particularly, a very preeminent law professor, Herb Paige, was very difficult for me because he treated everybody like they were children and that I resented and maybe I had a little officer crust, but his game playing was very, very obnoxious to me. And he taught some other courses that I wish I had taken.

Van Ells: Was there any sort of resistance to this kind of thing? Cause I've read, I have never spoken with anyone personally, but I've heard where the GIs have come back and tell the old professor, who is used to a lot of deference, "Hey look, teach me, and shut up, and don't be so--"

Podell: This guy Paige, if the bell was ringing, and somebody ran in the door, and the bell was sounding, and as the bell was still sounding, he was in his seat, he'd say "Out! If you can't be here on time you're not sitting in on my class." And, he'd throw him right out of the class. I thought, "Who needed that?" But I don't think there was any--I think the students were very relaxed. Another funny incident happened, before they tore down the old Law School. There was a main central room. It was an amphitheater, actually, with all the tables back, and the professor was down below, and when somebody said something that was a booboo, the students used to hiss. This one guy, McNamara from Portage, said something and the whole class hissed. And he looked around contemptuously and said, "I knew most of you guys when you didn't have a pit to hiss in!" I think there was a little independence on the part of the students.

Van Ells: Yah, I'm sure; former officers or sergeants. This is something that most vets I speak to have no recollection of, but for my own research purposes, I'm curious about it. Do you remember how you learned of the GI Bill and how you went about getting the monies? Was there someone in the Army that gave you a briefing on what to expect afterwards? Was there an office, on campus, you went to that helped you obtain these monies?

Podell: Yes. There was a veterans' affairs office. I think there was a formal Veterans' Affairs Office, called that. That's where we went to fill out applications. They supplied books. There was a monthly check. Tuition was paid. It was, again, rather painless. It's almost like the 18 cent lunches I told you about earlier on.

Van Ells: I'm sure campus had changed a lot between 1942 to 1947.

Podell: As a matter of fact, there was a Quonset hut put between the Union and the YMCA, which stood next to the Union. It's now a parking lot. And there was a veterans' affairs office there. Secondly, I would be sure, at the separation center, they would have said, "We have this GI Bill, and some of you may want to take advantage of it when you get home."

Van Ells: How had campus changed? For instance, had it grown, buildings and size-wise? Little do you think--

Podell: How had it changed? Very little. I don't think the building program had started, where they cluttered up that beautiful campus behind Bascom Hall, which was all forest literally; literally, forest. There were ski trails through there and, of course, there was nothing on the other side of University Avenue. All those dorms were still rooming houses. There was no change. It was like those four years just disappeared.

Van Ells: Out of curiosity, the place you rented on Mansion Hill before the war--

Podell: Murder Mansion.

Van Ells: And then you moved in, how had the rent changed?

Podell: I don't remember, but it couldn't have been very severe, because they had taken this old mansion--and there was a refrigerator in the hallway, and we had a half-shelf in that refrigerator, and we all cooked on hot plates, and the big technological thing was the pressure cooker. But it was a very happy time and Law School was relatively easy, although I was very anxious and, I think, everybody felt that way; to get out of school, enough of this being a school boy. We were really afraid the Depression would start up again, and if we didn't get our shingle hung up, and get started at this, and times were also tough--And I don't know what you know about salaries, but if you kiss rear-end very good in Milwaukee, and had connections, you might get a job in the DA's office for \$1,500 a year. This is in the late '40s.

Van Ells: I am interested in the employment situation.

Podell: That was it. There weren't jobs around.

Van Ells: As a student, there were things [unintelligible] as to how we were going to find work after college.

Podell: I like to think it's not unlike the kind of anxiety you have when they say, "You are now a Ph.D." What do I do with it? Where do I go with this? So, I'm a lawyer. Only medical doctors never have that problem. What will I do with it? How will I convert it? How will I buy a home in the suburbs? How will I buy a car or a new suit of clothes?"

Van Ells: As for social life on campus, did you associate with mostly veterans?

Podell: I think, mostly, older people and, mostly, veterans, and I think that I worked very hard in school. I did Law School in two years by going full time in the summer. I was in a hurry to get out. That's another thing, I was in a hurry to get out, by going full-time in the summer, instead of three years, two years.

Van Ells: Did you deal with non-veterans much? Did you have a particular attitude towards them?

Podell: No. I didn't feel any special sense of camaraderie or carryover. Just about everybody seemed to be veterans, it was no big deal.

Van Ells: There were some veterans groups that were active on campus at the time?

Podell: And I was in one.

Van Ells: Which one were you in?

Podell: The American Veterans Committee.

Van Ells: You're the first person I've spoken to-- I guess second, actually, who has been involved in the first one in Madison, here. Perhaps you could tell me about the group, what it did, what it's rationale was, how and why you decided to get involved in it.

Podell: Number one, I think it is an organization, as I think back, that would have attracted me, not just merely glorying over the fact that we had been in military service, which is my impression of what most of the driving forces in some of the other veterans groups; World War II veterans groups, World War I, but it was concerned more with, especially on campuses, with the problems of--Housing was a big issue, veterans housing. At that time, there were all kinds of people who were commuting up to Badger Ordnance, took over those barracks, and there was a terrible shortage of housing on campus.

I was telling you that the building boom had not arrived yet, and the student population was burgeoning so. And they were also interested with our world; the foreign policy, the Marshall Plan, conflict with the Soviet Union. Those were issues that weren't in ordinary veterans organizations. By the way, there were some very interesting people in that veterans organization. There was John Gronouski, who later became Ambassador to Poland under Lyndon Johnson. If he is currently there, I don't know. He headed that Johnson Center in Houston, I think it is. It was the Johnson School of Public Affairs at University of Texas. There was Gaylord Nelson, a town AVCer. There was Jim Doyle. Do you know those names?

Van Ells: I know Jim Doyle, the Attorney General. It must be his father.

Podell: Yes, who was a very distinguished federal judge.

Van Ells: There was a historian named John Higham, did you know him?

Podell: No.

Van Ells: I had read in a book that he had once been chapter president at one time. As someone who reads history, I recognized the name.

Podell: John Higham?

Van Ells: H-i-g-h-a-m. He teaches--he must be retired by now, Michigan or Michigan State.

Podell: Oh, but he wasn't on this campus.

Van Ells: Oh, but yes, he was on this campus.

Podell: Speaking of Michigan, there was Soapy Williams, the famous governor of Michigan. He was a national leader of AVC. I think one of the Roosevelt boys was active in AVC as well.

Van Ells: So when did you become involved?

Podell: When I got back, and people started going, and I met somebody who said, "This is a real nifty organization. It's not just 4th of July parades with uniforms, pretending that you were in combat when you were doing other important work." They had speakers, issues came up, and, at one point, it got very bitter, however.

Van Ells: There was the issue of Communism.

Podell: The Marshall Plan was the big issue and if you were against the Marshall Plan, that was the beginnings of that kind of red-baiting. That was the litmus test, that you were some kind of undesirable left-winger whose loyalty perhaps lay elsewhere than with our country, and so here were these veterans doing--my impressions and my recollections [is that] led to its demise. I got off campus in '49 and that was the end of my—I never had any more contact with that or any other veterans organizations.

Van Ells: Would you describe yourself as very active or just attend meetings.

Podell: No, I wouldn't just attend meetings, but I pretty faithfully attended meetings.

Van Ells: Do you recall any sort of debates on campus between your group and say local Legionnaires regarding the Marshall Plan?

Podell: No.

Van Ells: I suppose you were pretty busy with school.

Podell: Sure, and marriage. Had to have little releases here and there. And fun, learning how to sail a boat. [laughs]

Van Ells: You finished school, then, in '49 and what did you do after that?

Podell: In 1949, I went to Milwaukee and, after something I thought I was going to do fell through, I opened up an office as a self-employed lawyer in a neighborhood. In a very osmotic way, my practice grew. I also started flying, incidentally, as soon as I had enough money, together so that my wife wouldn't feel too deprived.

Van Ells: In getting yourself re-established, then, in a professional sense. Did you utilize other aspects of the GI Bill like a housing loan and those kinds of things?

Podell: No.

Van Ells: State programs?

Podell: No.

Van Ells: So you were able to put out your shingle, as they say, and find enough business to establish yourself?

- Podell: Yes. The maximum mortgage on our first house--I did not go into that GI mortgage loan opportunities. Having been overseas for that period of time, and being an officer on flying pay, I was able to accumulate a little nest egg and that was applied in that direction.
- Van Ells: I got some questions about readjustment problems back to civilian life. After the Vietnam War, very publicly, the problems of Vietnam veterans were exposed and this sort of problems that World War II veterans may or may not have had really wasn't discussed much in the public media. Did you have any problems readjusting yourself back to civilian life, major problems, minor problems? Some vets will talk about nightmares. I had one who told me he couldn't ride in a car. He had never been in a car, and it went too fast, and he had troubles with that.
- Podell: That's interesting. No, I don't think--generally I think I was focused on what was up ahead more than what was behind and--But there is one thing that I cannot do and that is the 4th of July fireworks. The first year we lived in Whitefish Bay, in Milwaukee, was very close to a place called Klode Park where they had a very large fireworks display. And the first year we had lived there, we walked over to the park and that stuff--I had to leave. It makes the same noise as flak exploding, and it resurrected what must have been a real latent fear, and to this day, I have no interest in viewing fireworks. That's the only scar.
- Van Ells: In relative terms, I suppose that's not too bad, I don't know.
- Podell: It certainly is not. Oh, I also, whereas I tried hunting and when a gun goes off, I wince. I have a little trouble squeezing smoothly because I'm expecting the bang and I think that's also my problem, Doctor.
- Van Ells: So we get back to your reevaluation of your participation in the war and what it meant; your views of Japan's state after the war and those kinds of things.
- Podell: Good point. For a long time, I could not believe, based on some of the things I've been expressing, what we did in Japan. That it would be possible for an American to walk down a street in a Japanese city. It still is rather mind boggling, but I guess one has to explore, in great depth, the culture of Japan, and their submission to authority. And maybe from that point of view, the occupation force leadership handled it beautifully. It occurred to me, I would say categorically again, and if they take nothing else, had we lost the war and I were placed on trial, I would have merited execution. Am I lying awake nights thinking about this? Am I driven to psychiatric consultation because of this point of view? Certainly not, but I feel very objective about this. There you go. But it bothered me. I've never

considered visiting Japan, but the fact that Americans can walk down those streets at night, and so forth, is a puzzlement. I don't know if Americans would behave that well, or if I would behave that well, if the situation had been reversed. [laughs]

Van Ells: I was stationed in Germany and the cities were bombed quite extensively as well. Did, perhaps, the Korean or Vietnam wars sort of focus these thoughts in your mind or was it more a gradual thing?

Podell: The Korean War, when I got out of the service, I stayed in the Reserve for a short time. And I never attended a meeting. I never did a darn thing, the points kept coming in from Selfridge Field, Michigan. They were playing this game like we were still one big happy Air Force family. And when the Korean War broke, a practice had just kicked off, and I said to myself, "Gee, if I'm pulled out of my law practice now, and the worst of the spade work was over with, I'll never put it back together again." So, I resigned from the Reserve. The issues in the Korean War didn't--I think I was just terribly busy with my building a practice and you start out with nothing, as I did, it was an all encompassing effort. I really worked very hard, several nights a week. Sundays, Saturdays I had office hours, so I don't think I had a lot of time for the Korean War. I don't think I got involved emotionally with the Korean War. The Vietnam War, I don't think the fact that I'd been in the military--see I don't feel that I deserve any special credit because I was in the military service. I could say I volunteered, but it was a step ahead of a draft board, number one, and everybody was doing it. That's way I was doing it. The same reason kids wear rings in their ears. What's the big credit? What's the unique individuality to that? I feel that a lot of my participation, although I think I did understand or had a feel for the ideological issues in that war, but I just went along so I'm not entitled to any special bonus. That was another thing. The AVC made a big fetish out of they weren't proposing any bonuses in Wisconsin.

Van Ells: Which many of the other groups did.

Podell: Oh, they all did. They all did. I didn't feel I had it coming. I did what I had to do. I did it because I really wanted to do it, and I'm okay.

Van Ells: We're just about to approach Vietnam.

Podell: A pension based on disability, maybe, that's another story. Even early on, reading of the issues in Vietnam, not only in retrospect, but even at the time, careful reading of those issues, that was a bummer. And so I believed from day one, it had nothing to do with my World War II experience, other than my Air Force was up there doing great things with the latest technology. By that time, I was completely obsolete in my skills and experiences. No value.

That's another thing that is wrong with the Reserve, by the way, that it's loaded with people that got ancient skills and technology. We move so fast that those Reservists would be an impediment. They're holding down all that rank, which they liberally distribute. I feel that World War II civilians came into the fold and did beautifully, despite the old military people.

Van Ells: As for Vietnam, Frank mentioned his involvement in protesting.

Podell: I wasn't in any demonstrations. Frank, I think, was in Madison, on campus, and he marched and felt that that was not in the best interest of our country early on, too. You know, Frank is a friend of mine. We obviously have some similar opinions.

Van Ells: If it's not too prying, I'm wondering why one veteran does and the other doesn't.

Podell: You have to figure that out.

Van Ells: It's the historian's job, isn't it?

Podell: Well, we're still individuals and we function differently. Frank was a salaried employee. That's where he ended up, and with great stability, and ultimately in his income, once he got settled in, and I was an entrepreneur, having to devote a lot of energy and time. I don't advise anybody to be self-employed. I am a product of successful self-employment.

Van Ells: One of the few.

Podell: Very few, very rare. People are always amazed when I say that's not the way our world can or should operate. It's a lot of hokum about all these people getting off welfare and starting their own businesses themselves, little grocery stores. I lived through that as a kid. It didn't work. Woodman's is much better than the corner grocery.

Van Ells: I've got one last area I want to cover and that involves activities in veterans' organizations. You've mentioned your activities in AVC. Afterwards, did you join any groups or attend any reunions or any of those sorts of things? Why or why not?

Podell: No. Number one, I did not attend any reunions. Number two, there has been some opportunities for doing that. Boeing Aircraft had a big reunion last year for B-29 people in Seattle and there is a 20th Air Force Association that I get mailings from, and they're selling war memorabilia like videos and stuff. Well, I've got a fine collection of things, if I don't want to just lay back and think, if I want to look at something tangible. But you have to

understand the 20th Air Force was put together rather late in the war, and crews came and went, so that I've never seen people. One person, this Ostroot in Minnesota, the co-pilot, I've seen on one occasion since the war, but none of the rest, nor have I ever heard from any of them. We just split up and many of these squadrons--they weren't like infantry units where they trained for a year, and then they were all together until the battle, and even then after they were all reassembled, so they have a personal acquaintanceship with each other. The Air Force is much less personal. You may have had a buddy or two, but as units. And then the 20th Air Force was so late in the game put together that there isn't that affinity that might exist elsewhere in the military units. I've not been interested. They ran a few tours to the Far East, including revisiting the base at Saipan, very expensive and I didn't think there was anything to be gained. I've been to Europe, four times, and done other traveling on my own, but I'm not interested in imputing to myself some degree of patriotism or excellence that I think was very ordinary.

Van Ells: You've exhausted my questions. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Podell: I think you've touched on a lot of things that I have spontaneously gone off in, probably a lot of areas that you probably would have queried on.

Van Ells: I think so too.

Podell: Just a funny little anecdote. Over this last Christmas holiday, the holiday of '94, my family who lives on the West Coast, my wife and I treated ourselves, and six in our family, to a trip to Hawaii. We were proceeding in a very neat airplane, a Lockheed 1011 jet, leaving San Francisco for Maui, and I'm standing up in a line, waiting to get into a lavatory, and the flight engineer and I have a little conversation in which I say something like, "Well, this is the way to travel if you're going westward over the Pacific, but it's not the way I traveled, it seems, just a few years back." And he said, "Oh, what do you mean?" I said, "Well, you know, I had been over thousands of miles of this ocean, been on it just once, and, in my time, it was propellers and enemy action, hostility and so forth." We exchanged a few other pleasantries, and I went back to the seat. About half an hour later, he walked back to where I am sitting with my family and he said, "Well, if you'd care to, the pilot would like to meet you." So, I went up into the cockpit. My son, particularly, was just astounded that his father would be invited up into the flying end of that aircraft. So I went up, and spent a little time up there with them, telling them a few more stories. And I'm particularly interested in navigation because of the kind of navigation they do, for several reasons. One of them being that one of the principle causes of fatalities in the B-29 Program was navigation and plane failure. Now, they've got that so completely whipped. Well, he did show me how the

inertial guidance system works and the kind of computer printouts so that the plane is flying by itself. By the way, both the pilot and co-pilot are turned around, paying no attention to the airplane, and they're all hanging on my fascinating stories. When it was all over with, I said to the guy, "You know, you guys are sitting up here looking at that beautiful sky and the ocean and the plane is flying absolutely by itself." If all of them had died, we'd have got to Hawaii. You think I'm kidding around?

Van Ells: No, not at all.

Podell: I said, "You know, to think that they are paying you \$300 a month for just doing this." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, that's what they used to pay me [laughs] and then we were getting shot at." That ended my session with the pilot.

Van Ells: That's a good story, I like that. Well, thanks for stopping in. I really appreciate it and I'm glad you called me.

[End of Interview]