

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

WARREN TESSMER

Aerial Gunner, Air Force, World War II;
Aerial Gunner, Air Force, Korean War.

2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Tessmer, Warren D., (1924-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 55 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Warren D. Tessmer, a Wausau, Wisconsin native, describes his Air Force service with the 8th Air Force during World War II and the 343rd Bombardment Squadron during the Korean War. Tessmer speaks of getting his parents' permission to enlist during high school in 1942, basic training at Fort Sheridan, gunnery school, being wounded in the ball turret of a B-17 during a mission over Germany, being in the hospital when his crew was shot down, and training on B-29s until the war ended. After the Korean War started, he tells of being recalled to active duty and training with B-29s at Spokane (Washington). Tessmer mentions that he was the youngest guy on his airplane crew during World War II and one of the oldest during the Korean War. Assigned to the 98th Bomb Group, 343rd Bomb Squadron in Japan, he describes his flight overseas on a civilian plane. Tessmer contrasts the small flight formations in Korea with the large number of bombers and fighter cover during World War II. He comments on not being allowed to cross the Yalu River or bomb the Chinese base in Antung (Manchuria). Tessmer addresses the number of planes that got shot down, dropping air bursting bombs during night missions, duty as the Central Fire Control Operator, and the difficulty the computer system had with firing at jets. He details the condition of his airplane and purposely burning out the rusty barrels so they would be replaced. Tessmer compares and contrasts the B-17 and B-29 aircraft, stating that he'd chose the B-17 as a stronger airplane but that the B-29 was more comfortable. Based in Japan, he talks about bomb missions over North Korea, dropping propaganda leaflets over cities, and limited anti-aircraft fire. Tessmer details a mission when a wing was set on fire, being unwilling to bail out over North Korea, making an emergency landing at Pusan, and sharing his post-mission alcohol with some infantrymen who were going on R&R. He contrasts the mission objectives during World War II and the Korean War, stating North Korean targets were harder to find since they didn't have concentrated areas of industry. Tessmer describes his mental state during missions and how it changed over time. He talks about typical mission damage, use of safety belts, cooperation between the crew gunners, and debriefing. During World War II, he recalls his pilot used to shoot a .45 automatic pistol out the window at German planes. Tessmer talks about duty as a ball turret gunner, standard operating procedure, and working in a pressurized compartment. When on the ground, he mentions going to ground school, cleaning the plane, and R&R in Nikko and Karasawa (Japan). He talks about being on the wing lead crew. Tessmer mentions the presence of Japanese women, American wives of military personnel, and the Women's Army Corps. He touches on communicating with his brother, who was also in the service, and recent efforts to provide phone cards to troops. Tessmer talks about his homecoming from Korea after his one-year commitment expired. He analyzes the political nature of the Korean War and the lack of fanfare Korean veterans expected at their homecoming. He explains the lack of formality between the crew and mentions occasionally switching uniforms during nights out on the town. During World War II, Tessmer details getting

wounded over Pfaffenhofen (Germany) by shrapnel, and he tells the fate of his crew, who were shot down the day after Tessmer was wounded and either killed or taken as prisoners of war.

Biographical Sketch:

Tessmer (b.1924) flew in a B-17 until he was wounded during World War II, and he flew thirty-six missions in a B-29 during the Korean War. He worked in banking and settled in his hometown of Wausau (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

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Related Materials Note:

Photographs of this narrator's military service can be found in Wisconsin Public Television. Wisconsin Korean War Stories records (VWM Mss 1389).

Interviewed by Mik Derks, September 23, 2004

Transcribed by WPT staff, n.d.

Transcription edited and reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 2010

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

Mik D: Okay, so how- let's go [start of tape] all the way back, when was it '40 something?

Warren: Well, when I was still in high school, as a senior, and December that particular year, we started our senior year in September, and a good friend of mine who was sitting behind me said, "Let's join the service, otherwise we are going to get drafted." So we went to the recruiting office and we both got our enlistment paper and went home with mine, and my mother wouldn't sign it, but my dad would because he was an old World War I vet. And we got back to school and went to the recruiting office after that, and the recruiter told me--he said, "You're leaving on the train tonight." So I went back to school, immediately turned all my books, and I was on the train that night. Went to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and we had our physical there. And from there, we got transferred down to Fort Sheridan. Stayed there about two weeks, and this country boy got the good fortune of going to Miami, Florida for basic training in the Air Force. And of course, that was the first time I ever spent the winter away from Wisconsin. After that, we went to school in Buckley Field, Colorado, outside of Denver. And from there I went to a gunnery school, eventually into phase training on B-17s. Went overseas in the latter part of '43. Flew fourteen missions. On the fourteenth mission, I was wounded. Spent the next eight months in the hospital. But the day after I was wounded, my whole crew got shot down, and six of my good friends were killed and four were wounded and taken prisoners of the war. After I got back to the states and finally got out of--.

Mik D: How did you get wounded?

Warren: Ah, right through the left knee, I was in the ball turret--a shrapnel wound from anti-aircraft fire over a place called over Pfaffenhofen, Germany. It's near Munich. And after I got out of the hospital and I asked for reassignment for bombers, they put me on B-29's. We trained on B-29's for overseas duty, but never shipped out because in August of '44 or '45 Japanese surrendered, and that was the end of the war. And we all laid around, basically, and I went home on a ninety day leave, and when I came back, went in for my discharge, and after my discharge I went to school for a while. And I was out in Colorado and I heard of a position opening up in a local bank, so I went back home and got that job, and then bango, around that time the Korean War started. And having the job I did on B-29s, I was recalled to active duty, and from home I went down to Chanute Field, Illinois. Was reassigned to Spokane, Washington, and there we started training on B-29's.

Mik D: What kind of training was that?

Warren: Just getting familiar with the plane again. Some of the fellas that were on our crew never flew in a B-29. And they had B-17 experience, but they were totally new, and on our crew I'd say eleven guys, six of us that were recalled to active duty, the total crew. Ironically, in World War II I was the youngest guy in the crew, and in the Korean War, at age twenty-six, the pilot and I were the two oldest guys on the crew, so [laugh] it's quite a change to see these younger guys like I was in World War II on that crew, but it was a great crew.

Mik D: What did they call you?

Warren: The Old Man [laugh]. And, we'd done the training in various parts of the States, but we always returned to our home base at Spokane, Washington. Then in February of '51 we were sent over to Japan, assigned to the 98th Bomb Group, as a 343rd Bomb Squadron and—

Mik D: Did you fly over in your plane?

Warren: Yes, we did. We flew over in a civilian plane. We didn't fly our own plane, no. Our planes were already there from the 92nd Bomb Group. They went over there as soon as the war started; we relieved them. And it was great flying in that civilian airline plane, had all the luxuries of a civilian on a civilian flight. When we got to our base, we were assigned our squadrons, and our crew had to go through a lot of training before we flew any missions over there, and eventually did get to fly over Korea, and totally unlike World War II. World War II, you'd probably send up any where from to six hundred to a thousand bombers flying over Germany, with tremendous amount of fighter cover. Here you'd probably fly maybe four to eighteen planes in a formation, and that was it. And then of course you got up near the Yalu River, then the jets would come at you, and of course that was sort of unfair because we had regular reciprocal engines on our plane compared to the jets. But we also had fighter escort for us; the F-86's and the F-80's would come up and give us a little cover, but we always had to stay south of the Yalu River. We couldn't cross that baby. And right across from Sinuiju, was a place called Antung, Manchuria, and that was big fighter base for the Chinese, but we had to keep our hands off that place. Had we stayed on our bomb run for half a minute, we could have wiped that target off the face of the earth. But then we got the term 'politically incorrect,' so we couldn't touch 'em--yet they could touch us. It was a very, very odd war.

Mik D: So you couldn't touch that base and yet you would see them take off and come up after--.

Warren: You could see them take off from our altitude, sure. Then they'd make one pass and loop around, and go back to their base then. And nine chances out of ten they didn't hit anything, might have got a few bullet holes and that

would be about it. But you always had a mixed feeling about getting shot down in North Korea, cause from what you heard from our own intelligence report, they didn't treat flyboys too well in Korea, so you had to bail out; you take your life in your own hands, really.

Mik D: Did very many planes get shot down in Korea?

Warren: Not while I was there. I think after I left, the fighters came up in larger numbers; they're only flown by Russians, Chinese, where it came across the Yalu in greater numbers and when I was there. So it got a little rougher after I left. So I was fortunate to be there in the early part. But I had, I think it was thirty-six missions in there. And some of those missions we called night missions. You'd fly all by yourself, you'd go up the front lines where they were having trouble, and you'd fly, I think, around 12,000 feet, and the ground station air would control your aircraft where he wanted you to go and he'd say, "Drop your bombs now." We'd drop eight bombs in a cluster because we carried forty on a front line position, then you'd bring in on another front line position and drop eight more bombs and that. But they're all air bursting bombs, so if any of the enemy troops were in fox holes it didn't do any good, because it's like an umbrella. It just, like floated way above the ground and just dropped shrapnel like an umbrella over that area. And it helped the ground forces tremendously. But those were weird missions because you weren't used to flying at night.

[Transcriber deleted discussion between Mik and Warren about the noise caused by his watch]

Mik D: Well, first of all, what was your job on the mission?

Warren: My job they called Central Fire Control Operator. I sat with my head sticking out of the top of a plane. I had control the upper aft turret and the upper forward turret. And the upper aft turret is two caliber fifty machine guns, the upper forward there is four caliber fifty machine guns. And I had 360 degree view of the whole area around the plane. So, that was my control area, 364 degrees, or 360 degrees.

Mik D: Now how did that work as, were you in a--as you would pivot the guns would pivot, or--.?

Warren: Yeah, no you could pivot without the guns moving. The unfortunate part is ah, the computers were set up for standard aircraft, like the engine driven aircraft, and you could keep up with those, but when the jets came in you could have your sight on there, but then turret be sluing around trying to catch up to your sight. And by the time it came around, the jets were gone. That was the only bad part about it. Unless you're right on the jet

immediately, you couldn't catch up to those babies once they took off. You could keep up with them, but not the gun turret.

Mik D: So you could keep up?

Warren: Yeah, yeah. You could keep your sight up on 'em. You just hold the trigger down, and hopefully your guns would catch up, and then you'd start firing. It was a weird sensation, you'd be looking away, and then you'd see the turret going around for you.

Mik D: So you hit the trigger, but they don't fire until they get to you--

Warren: Until they get in line with the sight. Line of sight.

Mik D: And that was a computer operation?

Warren: Yes, mm-hmm. It was a good system, but you know, for standard aircraft, but not for jets. The sight would be there, like I said, the guns couldn't keep up with the sight.

Mik D: And had that evolved from the capability in '45 when you were first-

Warren: Oh yeah. That was great when they were flying against the Japanese, sure. They had standard aircraft, and sights and guns could keep up with the aircraft.

Mik D: So did they fix that at all, were they working on that? Were they bringing in new systems that would move—

Warren: Uh-uh

Mik D: --them faster?

Warren: Uh-uh.

Mik D: That is what you had to work with?

Warren: That what you had to work with, yeah. And you couldn't anticipate where they were going to go, you know, with your sight; you just had to stay on the plane itself. Like I say, it was agitating; you'd see a turret trying to keep up with the sight, and it couldn't do it.

Mik D: Was there any danger of shooting the tail?

Warren: No, they had, what you call 'em, "fire interrupter cams," so when you're good, you could hold the trigger down, but when the gun came to the tail

section the guns would stop firing, and same way on the arch of the props and the four engines we had. There was what we call a 'fire interrupter cam.' It wouldn't let the guns fire when they're going through the arch of the props or the tail section.

Mik D: So if that operated correctly you were okay.

Warren: Oh yeah. You'd check that out and made sure that it did operate that way, cause when we first got our plane, the guns were firing through the tail. You could check it on the ground without shooting anything, but you had gun charges. That's just like shooting a gun; you could hear charges working when it was going through the tail section. And when it went forward on the plane we got, it didn't fire, so it was 180 degrees out of alignment. So we got that fixed before we flew our first mission [laugh].

Mik D: It's kind of hard when you are shooting the tail off to keep—

Warren: Yeah, we had a good airplane, but the crew that had it before us didn't maintain it too well, and the barrels were sort of rusty, corroded. I don't know if they ever cleaned them or not. And ah, we couldn't get them replaced, the ground armaments said they were good enough to shoot, so one time we had a training mission over the Sea of Japan and we all held the triggers down until we basically called burned out the barrels, and then the ammunition traces weird, going in big circles leaving the plane. Then they replaced them all [laugh].

Mik D: That's what these guys do when they don't like a piece of equipment.

Warren: Yeah [laugh] but we got rid of the old barrels in a hurry.

Mik D: So how did your job change on a night mission?

Warren: Well first of all, you had briefing like 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon instead of 4:00 o'clock in the morning. You'd take off probably around 6:00 o'clock in the evening, hoping to get over North Korea or the front line area when it was dark out, because you are all by yourself, you had no escort or anything. And ah, I don't think the North Koreans or the Chinese had the capability at that time of picking up anything on the radar screen, if you are airborne. I mean, on their fighter ability to do that. And they had open sights like we did, and at night they couldn't see them, other than the flash or flame that came off your engine, the super chargers. That they could see, but other than that, no.

Mik D: And you couldn't see the fighters?

Warren: No, no, no. Once in a while a ground station would tell us that there was some unidentified aircraft in the area, but then you look and strain like crazy, but you couldn't see anything, no.

Mik D: And I assume you were flying without lights.

Warren: Yes, oh yeah. Everything was dark. Other than I suppose the navigator had his little light on in his compartment, so he could see his maps, but other than that everything was dark. It was a good, comfortable airplane though. If I can compare, in World War II, the B-17, you dressed up in heavy clothing, they had heated flying suits and they'd put sheepskin lined flying clothes on, because it got way below fifty sometimes where you are flying, and when your heated suit went out you really got cool, where in a B-29, you just wore a regular ground clothes. You didn't have to have a heavy uniform or anything else on. That was much more comfortable, and you could move around. Especially me, the ball turret, I couldn't move around; I'd be in there for six hours, where here in the '29 you could move around in your own compartment and I was with people, where in the ball turret, you're sort of isolated from the rest of the crew, you're all by yourself, but much more comfortable in the '29. But of the choice of the two planes, I'd probably say the B-17, for being a strong aircraft, and it would take a good pounding on it without letting the crew down and blowing apart on you. Took a lot of damage. Although we had a lot of damage on the 29, but you always have a soft spot for an old airplane like a B-17. And the design of the B-17, I think was ahead of its time, because it was a very streamlined aircraft, for its time. All those that flew 'em, love 'em.

Mik D: What was the difference in air speed?

Warren: Oh, good 100 miles, I'd say. The, ah, unfortunate part about a B-17 on cruising--I don't recall the cruise speed. But B-24's are faster. A lot of times they come out of a mission out of Germany, and see the B-24's going by you back to England.

Mik D: They were already done?

Warren: They were going back home, yeah. They were faster than the B-17. But, the B-24, of course, if it got shot up and had to glide, we always said it had a vertical glide path, where B-17--that big wing could hang on and glide for quite a distance.

Mik D: And the B-29 was--?

Warren: Oh, for comfort that was an ideal airplane. Ideal.

Mik D: And speed? And it flew a lot further didn't it?

- Warren: Oh yes, much further. That's why they had them in the South Pacific in World War II. And I don't know what the distance would have been if we could have carried bomb bay tanks in our gas tanks, never had to. And I don't even know if they done that in World War II. We always carried a full bomb load, and they had two bomb bays in the B-29, so you could carry a tremendous bomb load. I think, if I recall correctly, forty 500 pound bombs we could carry in a B-29.
- Mik D: So you would take off in Japan, you were--.
- Warren: We were stationed in Japan, yeah.
- Mik D: And how long would your mission take, up to the Yalu?
- Warren: Oh, probably anywhere from six to twelve hours. We had some night missions where we'd drop leaflets over North Korea. That one, we took off at 6:00 in the evening, landed at 6:00 the next morning. But that was flying all over North Korea. It was like a joy ride almost. No bombs or nothing, but you still had to watch for the enemy. But it was all done at night, and that was the longest one I can recall; it was twelve hours.
- Mik D: And you just dropped the leaflets out of the bomb bay?
- Warren: Yeah, I'd drop 'em over some of your larger cities. And I suppose we got some flak shot at us, anti-aircraft fire, but I can't recall. See what the North Koreans done, or Chinese done, on early anti-aircraft fire compared to the Germans, they would warm up their radar sets and all of that; they anticipate missions every day, or be an attack every day. So they'd anticipate when another mission was going to happen. They'd have their radar sets all warmed up. And when the new bombers were coming in, they'd turn them off, and then our one officer on a crew was supposed to pick up their frequency, and then jam their signal. But he couldn't do it without their sets on, and when he got in the target area then they'd turn their sets on, they were pretty accurate. Done a lot of damage, but I can't recall any planes getting shot down by their anti-aircraft fire. Unlike Germany, where they had maybe 500 anti-aircraft guns around Berlin or 1000 of them, they only maybe had a half a dozen or so around different cities. So it was a different type of situation there for anti-aircraft fire.
- Mik D: So you were more worried about the jets than--
- Warren: Yes
- Mik D: --you were about the anti-aircraft?

Warren: Yeah, we didn't worry about the anti-aircraft, not as much as we did over in Europe. But there we look for their jets and we get to find 'em, you know. But we weren't attacked that much by their jets.

Mik D: And you say you flew thirty-six missions?

Warren: I think it was around thirty-six over North Korea. Well, some were South Korea when the North Koreans were south of 38th Parallel. We flew some over Seoul when the North Koreans were in Seoul and Pyongyang, that's their regular capital, Pyongyang in North Korea.

Mik D: And did you always drop the same thing? Or did you have different bomb loads that you could carry?

Warren: No, occasionally if you wanted to wipe out a supply depot, we carried a lot of 100 pounders, and we dropped those, cause then you--oh god, I can't remember how many hundred pounders we could carry. It was just a mess. The bomb bays were loaded with them. And rather than 500 pounders, you get with the type of structure they had down below, probably grass shacks, basically or huts, a 100 pounder would do the trick on wiping 'em out.

Mik D: And then if you carried the 500 pounders, how many of those?

Warren: That's forty 500 pounders we'd carry.

Mik D: Forty?

Warren: Forty of them, yeah.

Mik D: Oh, that's right—

Warren: Twenty in each bomb bay.

Mik D: Eight at a time.

Warren: Mm-hmm. That was only on night missions that we drop just eight bombs at a time, or on a general target, we'd probably drop the whole load at one time.

Mik D: And in your thirty-six missions, did you have any close calls?

Warren: Yeah, we, ah--one I—tricks [?] for now, can't see it here, but one picture I have, showed us where we had a wing burning, and we were ready to bail out, but we didn't want to bail out over North Korea, and we eventually made it to Pyongyang and landed there, and then we kept our plane there and repaired it there. The good Navy flew us back to Japan then. But the odd part there--when we landed, when you'd go into briefing after mission, tell

your story, what you saw in the air and if there's any unusual things happening in the ground that you could spot, you reported that. Then they always gave you some whiskey or scotch to drink for medicinal purposes, settling your nerves down, so as soon as we landed in Pyongyang, our co-pilot went to the medics and told 'em we had a mission, we needed something to settle our nerves, so they gave him a quart of whiskey, and then we got to the regular briefing, they gave us another quart. So when the Navy flew us back, we had a bunch of infantry boys going on R&R to Japan, and we shared our whiskey with them [laugh]. They had two quarts [laugh]. So that was a good job by our co-pi, getting extra booze for the boys [laugh].

Mik D: So tell me more about that mission. Tell me how it progressed, and when you knew you were in trouble.

Warren: Oh. Okay, we went to, I think it was Sariwon[?], Korea, and there was just four of us bombers. We were flying in a V, and then a diamond man was in the tail end, we call him "Tail End Charlie," and all of a sudden we got jumped by about thirty-some-odd MiGs, and we didn't have fighter cover, but then all of a sudden the Marine Corps and the Air Corps flew up some troops, but one of our planes did get shot down, that was a diamond man, and we got battle damage on our plane, and with the wing burning and, our fuel tank burning I should say, our pilot, "Have Faith" Anderson, put the plane in a dive to blow the flames out, you know, suck the oxygen away from it, then she pull out of it and before it landed at Pyongyang--not Pyongyang, hmm, can't think of the name of the city right now, but the plane was out then already, so. The gas tank was burnt, fortunately it was rubberized tank so it didn't--and it was a full tank, had it been a partially empty it probably would have exploded. But being full, the gas just burned. There wasn't any collection of fumes in there that would explode. We were fortunate.

Mik D: So were there some pretty tense moments?

Warren: Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, because you had your chute on, but you really didn't want to bail out. And then once we got south of the 38th Parallel in friendly territory, the fire was out then, and we got to, not Pyongyang--Pusan and we landed there. Our plane stayed there, and we flew back with the Navy.

Mik D: And then did you fly back to get your plane?

Warren: No, they gave us another plane to fly while ours was being repaired. It took over a week for them to repair that plane. So we were--well, that was one of the fortunate missions we were on that we came home safely.

Mik D: And were there any other--I mean how often would you fly missions?

Warren: Well, I flew from February through the end of July. It depended a lot on the weather, and if they could find a suitable target to bomb. Unlike the European countries, there weren't too many industries in North Korea to bomb. You'd hear of a bridge, you'd bomb that, or a new airstrip or a rail yard. And heavy industry, they didn't have. I think they piecemealed it out to different areas, so there was no big concentration of industry in any one area. And your major targets were their big cities. They had rail yards and everything else, and we'd hit those a lot.

Mik D: So, you were there almost five months, and you flew thirty-six missions, so that was, about what, every five days or so?

Warren: Yeah, I don't think they really put a schedule on it.

Mik D: Just when there was a target, when the weather was right.

Warren: That's right, yeah, and headquarters down in Tokyo would say, "Hey, there is an active rail yard up here; we got to go get it." It was unlike Germany, where there were hundreds of thousands of different targets you could hit besides a rail yard. A lot of industry, especially in their Ruhr Valley, and every major city there of course had big industry. You would go after those. I was on the first daylight raid over Berlin, and that was March 6th, of '44. We bombed a ball bearing plant in a suburb called Erkner, and really hit that baby, because you could see smoke rising to our level after we left the target, and you could see it a hundred miles behind it, smoke from that target. It was one of the better jobs. But then we lost sixty-seven bombers that day. It was almost a ten percent loss.

Mik D: So there's just no comparison between the two wars?

Warren: Oh, no, no, no. No, you see, in Europe it would be anywhere from 600 to 1,000 bombers; later on in the war it would be 1,000. And where in Korea, it'd probably twelve or thirty-six. That mission we had, what was tough for us was just a poor plane formation. And I can't recall in Europe where they never sent more than 600, 700 bombers over. Unless it was the very early part of the air war, in '42, and they didn't have that many bases there.

Mik D: So, what do you do when you are under attack by thirty MiGs, and, and your guns can't catch up to your sight? Do you--?

Warren: You sweat. I had a different outlook on life during the Korean War. World War II, I was very fatalistic--or I wasn't fatalistic, I figured you were going to survive, but you were scared every time you flew because you didn't know if you were going to get shot down or shot up or killed. Where, when I got a little older, then I developed a fatalistic attitude where, if it's gonna happen it's gonna happen, nothing you can do about it. I'm sure the young guys in

our crew felt the same way I did in World War II. You are scared--scared or apprehensive. One of the two. You flew your mission, but you knew your chances of survival at that time were very limited.

Mik D: So, you must have discovered pretty early on that you were basically helpless against the--

Warren: Yeah, you were.

Mik D: Against the MiGs?

Warren: 'Cause you are. You know that's a big target, that B-29, and it's just like a big old crow, you know, flying along, and these little squirrels pick on him all the time. That's the way it was with a big old B-29, or B-17 and enemy fighters. Always remind 'em of bunch of bumble bees going after something. It was a weird feeling. And you are just a sitting duck up there. But with good planes and good crews, sometimes you got home.

Mik D: How close would the MiGs get to you? Would they get close enough for them to see you?

Warren: Oh yeah.

Mik D: And you to see the pilots?

Warren: We had one--on this mission where our diamond man got shot down, he was right off our right wing. You could see the cockpit and the pilot sitting in there with his oxygen mask on. By the time the turrets caught up to him, he was gone, 'cause he'd watch the turrets, he didn't care about the crew itself. They'd watch the turrets. Apparently when he saw the thing swing around to his position, he took off like a ruptured duck. He was probably out of ammunition anyway, so he was just playing around with us. But nobody could shoot at him, he just slipped in there, and there he was off our right wing [laugh].

Mik D: Now did you say the pilots were Russian, or were they Chinese?

Warren: Ahh, I'd say most of them were Chinese and Russians. I don't know how many North Koreans actually flew 'em, because it was a Russian plane and with the familiarity that the Russian Air Force has your own planes on. We just assuming they flew them most of the time. It was proven on later on in the war, after it was called a war instead of a police action, that there were a lot of Russian fighter pilots. And they're probably from their own eastern front, or western front, and probably excellent pilots. They had to be, because they shot down our planes [laugh].

Mik D: Did you have any other—[End of Tape WCKOR047] I was gonna ask you if you had any other missions with--you felt in danger--?

Warren: No, not like that one.

Mik D: Just that one?

Warren: Yeah. Ah, we had some up at the Yalu River, but we never seen that much damage to our plane as we did on this one at Sariwon[?]. And that's probably the worst mission we had.

Mik D: And what kind of damage did you come back with after your missions?

Warren: On this particular mission, the wing had a few holes in it and one wing tank we had was burning, or was put out of course, but there's gas burning in there, and there's damage to the tail section.

Mik D: But normally, would you come back clean, without any--?

Warren: Yeah, basic other, probably some anti-aircraft holes, but you--in the all of cabin were pressurized, so when we were flying, we always had our safety belts on because we lost pressure. If you didn't have it on, you'd get sucked right out of the airplane. So that was your biggest fear, of big chunk of shrapnel hitting a pressurized compartment. The bomb bays didn't make difference cause that wasn't pressurized, or the section after the section we were in, the central fire control area, that was not pressurized, but then you'd come to the tail section, that again was pressurized. And the tail gunner was much like a ball turret gunner on a B-17; he's all by himself way back in the tail. There's nobody around him at all. And where I was at, there was the radar jammer, the two scanners or waist gunners, and myself, so there was four of us. But under combat conditions, you always stayed in your seat, and strapped in with your safety belts.

Mik D: Now where were the waist gunners? Where were they looking? Did they have windows?

Warren: Well, yeah, they had a bubble, blitzer[?] we called it. It stuck out of the plane, and their sight sat in there, but they had a good view out of that. They could look down and look out of their sights, watch the bomb drop and all that. There's that much room in that Plexiglas dome. And their sight sat right there. And the right gunner, course he's responsible for the right side of the plane and the left on the left side of the plane. And the bombardier not on a bomb run, he had the forward part of the plane, but then I had the whole top of the plane. And course they help you out, they let you know if there's anything at 12:00 o'clock high or 6:00 o'clock low or whatever. And if it

was low then I didn't even bother, cause I couldn't shoot at him anyway, cause the turrets were meant for on top of the aircraft.

Mik D: And the waist gunners, did they have the same problem with their sights? The guns were on the bottom right?

Warren: Mm-hmm.

Mik D: They controlled—

Warren: Yeah.

Mik D: So was it the same problem with catching up to their sights?

Warren: Yeah, same thing. It's all the same system.

Mik D: How about the tail gunner?

Warren: He's the same way.

Mik D: Same way?

Warren: Yeah.

Mik D: Nobody had—

Warren: No, not where you'd move your sight and the gun, and they're right there right now. We always called it, they'd slew around. Your sight was here and then the turret would eventually catch up to the sight. But if you anticipated an aircraft in the area, say like at 3:00 o'clock high, and just that you could identify it as an airplane, you'd bring your sights and turret to bear spot then. But if you didn't see 'em, then they'd zip by your nose, it wasn't worth the effort to even try to keep up with them. Might to give you a little satisfaction, but that was all. I know--going back to World War II, talking about satisfaction, our co-pilot on our crew always carried a .45 automatic. And when a German plane'd fly over, he'd reach out of the side of the plane and start shooting at it [laughs]. Gain a little satisfaction, cause this poor guy's up there and just sat there, and he couldn't do nothing other than fly the plane. So we always remind him how he wasted a lot of ammunition [laughs]. With little satisfaction, and course all he got to do was get to clean his .45 after the mission was over.

Mik D: When you would land back in Japan, you were debriefed?

Warren: Yes, yeah they'd, just similar to World War II intelligence officers, sit down with the crew and each one would say, "Well, I saw this" and the other guys

said, "I'd saw that." And then the bombardier gave his report, and the navigator gave his report on what course you flew. Of course there's a pre-established course that you flew in and out to your target. And the pilot, same way, he'd give his report, and the engineer had trouble with the plane on some of the engines, he'd make that report. And then they sort of consolidate all these stories, and if something, several crews saw the same thing, then they'd say, "Hey there's something here that we missed," ya know. And they analyzed their own debriefing material. That's another place where you got a good shot of whisky to settle your nerves [laughs].

Mik D: Did your nerves need settling after a mission?

Warren: Ah-- I don't know if we really needed it, maybe a cup of coffee'd done just as well [laughs]. But it relaxed you. That was the point I guess, to relax you when you start talking.

Mik D: It sounds like it was totally different going out on a mission in Korea than--

Warren: Oh yeah.

Mik D: The B-17.

Warren: Oh yeah, in Korea, might get up at 7:00 o'clock, 8:00 o'clock in the morning, and go out 9:00 o'clock, 10:00 o'clock in the morning on a mission, where in Europe, they'd get you out of bed about 3:00 in the morning and you're taking off about 5:30 in the morning. And I don't know why, I think because of the weather in England, they wanted to stay away from the planes coming in at night, because they didn't wanna light up the airfield to start off with, cause that'd make a good target for the Germans. And occasionally German fighters would slip into the formation, and it couldn't be identified cause it looked like they were part of the bomber stream coming back. And that's why ball turret gunners, we stayed in our turret from at our base, right after take off, until just prior to landing. We'd stay in our ball turret, and then we'd come out just prior to landing and store our guns away. And sometimes I found it--six hours and eighteen years old, oh man, I felt like an old man getting out of there, couldn't straighten out. You have to grab hold of frame of the plane and straighten yourself out. But like I say, you had to be a small guy to fit in there at the time.

Mik D: Now that photo that I saw of you, it was after a mission, did you have armors and crew chiefs that would take care of the plane, or did you have to work on your own?

Warren: Oh no, it was up to us gunners to unload the guns immediately, so if somebody was playing around with your system, you wouldn't actually shoot off some rounds and, yah know, damage planes or kill somebody. So that

was the first thing we done when we landed, unloaded the guns. So even there, we got towed to our hanger there and then we unload the guns immediately.

Mik D: And then what, you load your guns or would the armors do that?

Warren: Oh, they put the ammunition in 'em, but it was up to us to get 'em into the gun cause you didn't wanna trust nobody but yourself to make sure that there's ammunition into the gun, so--. But no, we had nothing to do with loading, except one time all our ammunition canisters were empty, and we weren't going to ground school, so we went out to plane and loaded our own. And I can't recall how many rounds we put in each gun [unintelligible]. That was over fifty some years ago [laughs].

Mik D: What would you do when you weren't going out on a mission?

Warren: Oh, unlike that photo I showed you before, we'd get up into our turrets right away. And ah, constantly on alert, you never knew, yah know. It's experience from World War II, I guess, where the Germans would try to sneak in, and then we didn't know if the Koreans would do that or not. So you're basically in your position right after take-off there too. Well, you had to be in position because soon after take-off, they'd start putting pressure in the cabins, yah know, ground level pressure. So you had to be in your position, couldn't be wandering around the plane. Then we did have a tube that you could crawl through from the front of the plane, to the gunner's compartment in the back of the plane. I can't recall how long that tube was, but you could crawl through there during flight. But SOP, standard operating procedures, said when you're under pressure don't go in there, because if you develop a hole, you'll come out of the thing like a canon shell in that tube. So no body went in that tube until we were depressurized. And that was the only direct route to the front or the back of the plane, over the bomb bays.

Mik D: Did you ever lose pressure?

Warren: Ah-- when we got shot up that one time, yeah. We didn't have to wear an oxygen mask, but we always had it attached our helmet. So in this case here, yeah, then we wore our oxygen mask.

Mik D: What did you do on the days you didn't fly?

Warren: Ground school. Recreation. Mostly ground school. They tried to keep you busy. Or go out to the plane and just generally clean it up. We were wing lead crew so most of the time we went out to our plane, kept it very clean. Some place you could eat off the floor that thing [laughs]. It was that clean.

- Mik D: What's that mean, wing lead crew?
- Warren: We always led the flight. If our group went on a mission, we'd be the lead plane. And they picked--basically how good you pilot, co-pilot, n' bombardier, and navigator were. Call it the bombing team, and their radar operator. If they were hot-shots ah-- yeah, and they're good, you got to be a wing lead crew. Course the rest of the crew had to be good too, they couldn't be a goof-off, yah know.
- Mik D: So were your pilot and co-pilot and navigator, were they all World War II vets?
- Warren: Our co-pilot was not. We call him the aircraft commander, the pilot was a World War II vet. So was the bombardier. The other officers on the crew were not World War II vets, but our co-pilot was the youngest guy on the crew and he was just a kid [laughs], and unfortunately he died about five years ago, but he was the youngest guy on the crew; a big tall, lanky guy.
- Mik D: What was R&R like?
- Warren: Those were really nice. See, you go to certain hotels or motels in the countryside of Japan. The first one we had was Nikko, Japan. N-i-k-k-o. That's where, I believe, the Shintos had their shrines. Very scenic there. And Nikko itself, the part we were in, sat on sort of a hill. And hotel accommodations were excellent. There'd be like eight people sitting at a table. They'd order out the menu and the waitress didn't take note one. And she'd come back with your salad and the dressing you wanted, your soup, your main course. Got everything right. Nothing written down. That always amazed me. And little Japanese girls, they're really good. The second one is at Karasawa, Japan. That was in the mountains also, and that was very scenic and very nice. Waitresses there were the same thing. They didn't write anything down, but, if you had Caesar Salad or something, you got that. A guy had French dressing or something, he got that. Not make a mistake, you know. It was all right there. So they had to be all college girls or something, or highly intelligent girls. They were good.
- Mik D: And there was a shortage of women around? You said something about all the women were wives of the officers?
- Warren: Well, there was a lot of Japanese ladies around, of course, but mostly American girls were wives of people that were stationed there permanently. There was a lot of military ladies there, like in the WAC's or something like that. But those in civilian clothes, soon they were wives of some of the GI's that were stationed over there. In fact, my brother was stationed on the northern island of Japan, Kyushu or something, and he had his wife come over, he was a captain at the time. And he got his wife over there. And he

was an 82nd, but they were back-up troops for those in Korea. So he--I don't think he ever got into Korea itself. They stayed up as reinforcements in case something drastic happened.

Mik D: How much older or younger was your brother?

Warren: My brother was older than I was. I had one brother and one sister; they're both deceased of course. And ah, unfortunately, well, fortunately I outlived them all and on the twenty-eight of this month, I'll be eighty years old. So [laughs] man I don't know where forty years went since forty, yah know, but it went by.

Mik D: And but that's interesting that you saw your brother during World War II in England—

Warren: But I didn't see him in Japan.

Mik D: Oh, you didn't see him in Japan?

Warren: No, didn't see him in Japan.

Mik D: You were pretty close?

Warren: Well, he was, I was on Honshu and he was on the northern island, I think it was Kyushu, I'm not sure. And no, we never did get together. And I think we were over there at the same time. But in fact, all we done with communication was just by letter, I guess. We never-- course communication wasn't that great like it is now. But there are troops over in Iraq doing a little advertising.

Mik D: Calling on their cell phones?

Warren: Yeah. The--like VFW, we supply phone cards to kids over in Europe, or the States, or over in the combat zones, or anywhere in the world and Stateside. It's called operation uplink and it's sorta nice for a kid to get that card and call home, yah know. And we furnish that to 'em, at no charge, just have--if we know where a certain individual is, we'll send them cards, yah know.

Mik D: When you were rotated out, was that because you had served a certain number of missions, or--?

Warren: Yeah, no. Ah, no. In the World War II, when I was over in the 8th Air Force--twenty-five missions, but here in Korea, Harry Truman called me up for one year and that was it. And we were flying near the tail end of July of '51, and I was supposed to get out August 10th, and they said, "Oh, oh. Harry renegeed on his promise," but flew that one mission and I was grounded and

went back to the States. So they kept their promise, one year. And we all thought, "Oh boy, here we go again," [laughs] duration plus.

Mik D: I know it became really sort of a political war, later in the war, when they were along the 38th Parallel.

Warren: Oh yeah.

Mik D: But did you have any sense of the politics when you were in there, or did it make any difference to you?

Warren: Well, like I said, you're restricted in that you couldn't bomb China. Ya know, me and half the men are a minute away from staying on course and bombing near their airbase there at Antung. You could see the jets taking off, but there wasn't a cotton-picking thing you could do about it, even when they showed the pictures of the bridges on the Yalu River. Our bombardiers were instructed to bomb the North Korean half of the bridge cause the other half was Chinese territory. And that never did make sense to me. Never did. Politicians should've stayed outta there. And my personal opinion about MacArthur--I think he was right. We should've gone after the Chinese while we had a chance, and Harry Truman and the Chiefs of Staff said, "No." So, unfortunately he got fired for his opinion.

Mik D: Did that happen while you were over there?

Warren: Yeah, uh huh. [unintelligible]

Mik D: There's been a little talk about that.

Warren: Oh yeah, I remember when MacArthur was there. If you recall, he used to smoke a corncob pipe, bowl was about that tall, and then the stem coming out. So I didn't smoke that time, I said, "That's pretty neat." So I bought myself a corncob pipe and a pouch of tobacco and lit it up, and my tongue burnt like fire from that nicotine in there, and I go "Man!" Then I found that he had a custom made pipe that had filters in it [laughs]. But I kept the pipe, it's probably home somewhere now. Just a memento.

Mik D: I think I saw some photos of you with cigars.

Warren: Who's that?

Mik D: I saw some photos of you with a cigar.

Warren: Oh yeah, yeah, just to be a macho guy [laughs]. Nothing else, have a couple of beers and a cigar. Yeah, only macho stuff.

- Mik D: We've heard from a lot of Korean vets that they didn't exactly feel appreciated when they were serving, or when they came home. Did you have any--?
- Warren: No, yah know, I don't talk about the World War II vets getting all these huge parades. Of course, I came back on a hospital plane, but I didn't see any of that, but we were well treated by the civilians. But ah, the Korean vets like myself and maybe fifty percent of the fellas that were in the Korean War were recalled, and when they got out, they just forgot about the war and went back to their job like most of us did. And no fanfare or nothing, and at the time, I didn't put any stock in it. I was just glad to be home and alive and in one piece, and went back to work. Took off about two weeks before I went back to work and like I--a friend of mine was in the Korean service. He was from Spencer, Wisconsin, and they asked him where he was at for—"were you on vacation, or working somewhere out of town." "Yeah, I took a little, long vacation." They didn't know he was in the Korean War [laughs]. So, and that was the odd thing about the Korean vets, they just didn't care for any fanfare. They done their job, came home, and went back to work. Unusual bunch of guys.
- Mik D: You said you were a farm kid going into the military service.
- Warren: Yeah, well, country boy, yeah.
- Mik D: Country boy? Where were you--?
- Warren: Well, I mean from Wisconsin, everybody's the country boy at one time. So going down to basic training in Florida in World War II was a treat for me cause I basically hardly ever got out of the state.
- Mik D: But where were you from?
- Warren: Wausau, right here.
- Mik D: Oh, right in Wausau?
- Warren: Yeah, yeah. Born and raised here, homesteaded here. Well, I never left Wausau other than the service, and then I went to school out in Colorado for awhile, but that was about it. And the Korean War. So that was the extent of my deserting Wisconsin.
- Mik D: So you did it twice?
- Warren: Yeah.
- Mik D: You went over and--.

Warren: Very fortunate.

Mik D: Fought a war.

Warren: Very fortunate. Yeah. Yeah I had no regrets. If I'd be that age and capable of doing what I did, I'd probably do it over again.

Mik D: Being the old man in the crew in Korea--

Warren: Yeah—

Mik D: With the pilot--Did you sort of feel like a mother hen sometimes with your chicks in the plane or?

Warren: No, not really. No it's—

Mik D: They were old enough--

Warren: Yeah, we accepted each other, that we were crew members and each one of us depended on the other guy and the crew, just like on a football team, ya know. The quarterback is lousy, the whole team falls apart, and same way here. If the pilot lets you down, why, the whole crew feels it. But every--it was good crew. I think World War II, the crews were great, and I was in a good crew. But it seems like our B-29 crew, being guys that were in military and came back as a more integrated--like around our own plane, if there wasn't anybody around, everybody was on the first name basis regardless of rank. But when there's people around, yeah, then sergeant or captain or something like that. But other than that, it was always a first name basis. And a lot of times we'd go out together, a night on the town, we'd change uniforms. Somebody wanted to be a staff sergeant, I wanted to be a captain, I'd change his uniform [laughs]. Not too often [laughs]. But we done that a few times. Sure, it was good crew, we stuck together good. Even on social life, we stuck together, most crews didn't do that. Social life, but ah, we did, a very good crew.

Mik D: So you didn't need too much of being a captain, huh?

Warren: No, kept my rank at staff [laughs].

Mik D: Tell me just a little bit more, it's not for this program but, about when you were wounded. Tell me about that mission.

Warren: Oh, we were flying over Pfaffenhofen, Germany which was near Munich, and I forgot the altitude, had to be up 24,000 or something like that, and there's fighter planes around, enemy fighters, and when you get attacked by

enemy fighters and the bomb—the pilot tries a wobble wings and take evasive action and dive a little bit with the formation and go right and left. And ah, we were in evasive action mode, and my legs hit the guns cause the guns were right aside of my legs and come up by your head. And I thought I hit this leg on the gun turret cause I felt a pop like that in there, and we were flying, and all of sudden that leg got cold. I look down, and geez all the material was shredded on it. So then all of a sudden, the leg got cold, I couldn't feel--a nerve got hit and couldn't feel anything in the leg, and man-- and I called the pilot and he told the waist gunner to get me out of the turret, and just tried to step on this leg cause it still there, and it just collapsed. The nerve damage, yah know, affected the muscle in the leg. And ah, first I remember, I got thirsty, and all the water that we take was, of course, frozen. So that our radio operator in that crew--I flew with a different crew that day I was wounded. He lit up some newspaper and tried to melt the ice in a little canteen they had [laughs]. And I go, "Man, that's not right, lighting a fire in a bomber with all that fumes around." But they got me a couple of sips of water and gave me a shot of morphine, and about five hours later I was in the hospital. And like I say, at the time that I got hit, I didn't realize I was wounded, it was just something like my leg hit the side of the machine gun.

Mik D: And that crew you were with that day, that's the one that was shot down?

Warren: No, I flew with a strange crew that day. They were from our squadron, but their ball turret gunner was sick, so they got me as a fill in for him. The next day, March 19th of '44, was when my crew got shot down. Right ah, near the coast of France, where the rocket gun installations and they ah, they said six of 'em were killed, and four were wounded and taken prisoner of war. Ah, I talked to one of the members that survived, and he said all he remembers is floating in the air and his chute was open. The plane exploded. And got hit by an anti-aircraft fire, and they had a full load of bombs. Got hit and just blew her right apart. Unfortunately the ah, young guy who took my place, he was killed too in the ball turret. So I was very fortunate. Very fortunate to be able to talk to you today.

Mik D: And if you hadn't flown that mission the day before, you would've been--.

Warren: I would've been in there. I'd been there yeah.

Mik D: Did you volunteer for that mission or did they assign you?

Warren: No, no, they just--our crew wasn't flying that day, so they just picked me out and said, "You're flying with this crew today." Didn't happen too often, because when you flew with your own crew, why, that's who you flew with. And that was the only mission I ever flew with another crew.

Mik D: Well, I'm glad you're here to talk.

Warren: I am too [laughs].

Mik D: Thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

Warren: Thank you. Enjoyed it.

Mik D: And thank you for your service.

[End of Interview]