

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
HARVIN ABRAHAMSON  
Radio Operator, Army Air Corps, England, World War II  
2002

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**Abrahamson, Harvin**, (1924- ). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 42 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 42 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Harvin Abrahamson, a Shawano, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service based in England as a radio operator aboard a B-17 bomber with the 487<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 8th Army Air Corps. Abrahamson talks about being drafted while in college, being held back from cadets because of a misspelled birth certificate, radio and gunnery training, and learning Morse Code. He speaks of training as a crew and the boat trip overseas aboard the *Ile de France*. Stationed at Lavenham (England), Abrahamson gives his impressions of the village and the English people. He comments on his role during missions including operating the radio, throwing "chaff" from the plane, checking the bomb bays, and acting as the unit's medic. He describes some close calls involving flak and states that no one with his crew was badly injured during their seventeen missions. He recalls a plane nicknamed the "Fearless Fosdick" that was so beaten up nobody wanted to fly in it. Abrahamson details one incident when a bomb failed to drop from his plane and he had to manually push it out the bomb bay while in flight. Abrahamson mentions he wrote poetry when he couldn't sleep.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Harvin Abrahamson (b.1924) flew with the 487<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force during World War II. He was honorably discharged in 1945 as a Tech Sergeant. He is a past Post Commander for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 10171, and a past chaplain for American Legion Post 23. He is currently the chaplain for the Wisconsin Chapter of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Historical Society and resides in Grafton, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Laurie Arendt, 2002.

Transcribed by James Erwin, 2008.

Format corrected by Katy Marty, 2008.

Transcript checked by Channing Welch, 2009.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

**Interview Transcript:**

Arendt: Eighteenth, 2002. I am in Fox Point, Wisconsin. The veteran being interviewed is Harvin Abrahamson. Is that how you say it?

Abrahamson: Right.

Arendt: The only other person attending the interview is myself, Laurie Arendt. There is no affiliation between the interviewer and the interviewee, but this is for the Ozaukee County Veteran's Book Project. This veteran served in the Navy –

Abrahamson: No.

Arendt: No? Oh, he served in the Navy. I'm sorry.

Abrahamson: Okay. It's all right.

Arendt: You were in the Army Air Corps?

Abrahamson: Yes.

Arendt: Correct? From 1943 to 1945.

Abrahamson: Those were my years in service, yes, mm hmm.

Arendt: Okay and you left the Army Air Corps as a Tech Sergeant –

Abrahamson: Yes.

Arendt: And you served in World War II. Okay.

Abrahamson: Right.

Arendt: Were you drafted, did you enlist? Tell me about the very beginning.

Abrahamson: The very beginning. I was sixteen when I graduated from high school in 1941.

Arendt: How did you do that?

Abrahamson: I started very young.

Arendt: Okay, 'cause I graduated at seventeen.

Abrahamson: I cried a lot when my brother was going to school and I couldn't go so they me walk two miles and the teacher said "He'll get tired of it." You know there was no kindergarten. It was a one room –

Arendt: Yeah.

Abrahamson: Country School.

Arendt: Where was it?

Abrahamson: It was up in Shawno County.

Arendt: Oh really! Okay.

Abrahamson: Near Tigerton, north of Tigerton.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: So that explains it. I just stayed in school, though. I didn't quit as the teacher any my mother, you know, thought, "He won't make it." (laughs) And I skied to school –

Arendt: Really?

Abrahamson: Two miles in the winter time.

Arendt: Wow.

Abrahamson: Pine skis, and four feet long.

Arendt: (both laughs) All right.

Abrahamson: Through eight grades of elementary school. Then in high school I had about three and a half miles to go. I skied sometimes, but not often. I was normally able to get a ride into town with the cousin who had a service station.

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: So that was pretty good transportation.

Arendt: Okay. So at sixteen, did you enlist?

Abrahamson: Graduated from – no, I graduated from high school and the war broke out of course that year December 7<sup>th</sup>, and so I wanted to become an aviation cadet, and my brother was.

Arendt: Okay

Abrahamson: He did become a cadet, and he became a flight instructor, taught instrument flight instruction, blind landing procedures all during the war.

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: I wanted to become a pilot also. At that time the only way you could do it was you to get two years of college under your belt.

Arendt: Oh, so you went in as a lieutenant.

Abrahamson: So I went to school, but I didn't finish my sophomore year I was drafted. I didn't make it.

Arendt: So they didn't have deferment than? At all?

Abrahamson: No, not unless you wanted to stay on the farm or something.

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: I was going to school so I was not going to be deferred. You know wouldn't defer me if I was in school. So I went into service.

Arendt: Did your college experience help at all when you were actually placed once you were drafted?

Abrahamson: I don't really know that I did. No, I was drafted in Signal Corps and then I wrote the cadet exam. They had opened it up, you see. So I passed the physical, passed the mental exam, you know, and all the other exams and so forth. Well, this is a crazy story. I don't know whether it's worth telling, but –

Arendt: Oh, come on!

Abrahamson: My name, in order to transfer from the Signal Corps to the Air Corps, I had to show a birth certificate. So my mother sent me my birth certificate. I was born in Chicago. My mother and father both came from Norway. They were immigrants, you know.

Arendt: Oh, really?

Abrahamson: They were very – my dad was seventeen, and mother came over when she was thirteen. And that's a wonderful story, but anyhow I was born in Chicago, and the doctor misspelled my middle name and my last name,

left a letter out of my last name. He added a letter in my middle name, a “H-L-F.” It was supposed to be “A-L-F”, you see.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: They would not let me transfer, as I wasn't the same person –

Arendt: Ah!

Abrahamson: On the birth certificate. And so I wrote to Cook County, Illinois, to the Register of Deeds, whatever, and I said “I want my name changed because I need this transfer.” So I sat and waiting and waited for a letter, and finally I got a letter, “It is illegal to change your name in the State of Illinois. However, there is a bill in the legislature,” I recall.

Arendt: Oh, Pete's sake!

Abrahamson: So I sat and waited. Well, immediately I should have done this right away, you know, but a dumb farm kid, what do you know. I wrote to my parents, and I explained the problem. Well, they immediately went to a notary public, and they had this document and that I was the same person (laughs).

Arendt: Yeah, on the birth certificate.

Abrahamson: As the guy on the birth certificate. Then it cleared, you see, but this took months. Well, I was washed out of cadets, so I was given a choice. I took radio school.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: That sounds interesting.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: I went to radio school and then gunnery school and then operational training, and then I went overseas with the crew (??).

Arendt: Okay, good. You said radio school sounded interesting to you. Did it prove to be interesting? Why did it appeal to you?

Abrahamson: Well, it did. I guess just the fact that I had to do with science a little bit, you know, that sort of thing.

Arendt: Is that what you were studying in college?

Abrahamson: Well, I did receive a Bachelor of Science degree, but I did like physics, but –

Arendt: Good.

Abrahamson: No other particular reason. I didn't even have a major in science, but I've always been interested.

Arendt: That's the way I am (??).

Abrahamson: I did teach science –

Arendt: You did?

Abrahamson: In, you know junior high.

Arendt: Uh huh. (unintelligible) a teacher. So you went to radio school and gunnery school.

Abrahamson: Radio school was in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: In the cold of winter, and Yuma, Arizona gunnery school in the heat of summer.

Arendt: Oh, geez!

Abrahamson: So, (laughs) and then operational training.

Arendt: What were you trained for radio, you trained as a gunner. What were you going to do? Did you know?

Abrahamson: Well, yes I knew that I would be going into an aircraft of some sort.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: But I didn't know – as I was training I didn't know where I was headed. I was just being trained as a radio operator mechanic. Gunner was a possibility (??)

Arendt: Is it typed with dashes? Radio – operator - mechanic?

Abrahamson: That was just – no, it was all run (??) together.

Arendt: All one – okay. All one.

Abrahamson: Radio – yeah, just single –

Arendt: Okay. Ah –

Abrahamson: And so, you know, it for some reason or – it was fun taking the course. You know you had to build a transmitter, you had to build a receiver, you know, from scratch –

Arendt: Oh, wow!

Abrahamson: And so forth, that sort of thing, and of course you had to take International Morse Code which I had never had before.

Arendt: Okay. Did you learn any of that in the Signal Corps before you came?

Abrahamson: No.

Arendt: No.

Abrahamson: Ah –

Arendt: I was watching a show on I think it was the History Channel, and they were interviewing that pilot was captured during Desert Storm and how he was doing Morse Code with his eyes.

Abrahamson: Mm hmm.

Arendt: And I remember watching him on the news and thinking, “Man that guy blinks a lot.” You know, twelve years ago, whatever it was, and he was blinking Morse Code. Me as a civilian I would have never picked up on that. But that was very interesting. He’s just like my cats (laughs).

Abrahamson: Sit down (??) We had to be able to send and receive sixteen words a minute.

Arendt: Oh, wow!

Abrahamson: And that was something that just – once I got the alphabet, I was working at twenty-five words a minute in six weeks –

Arendt: Really?

Abrahamson: I couldn’t seem to – and I couldn’t print any faster. So – (both laugh) that limited my ability there. You don’t have typewriters on airplanes.



Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: I don't think – why would (unintelligible) typist – but I wouldn't be able to type that fast I think –

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: Much faster than that (both laugh)

Arendt: Good. You said that you knew you were going into an aircraft of some sort.

Abrahamson: Uh huh.

Arendt: Was there one type of aircraft you really wanted to be on?

Abrahamson: Well, I wanted to be a fighter pilot.

Arendt: Yeah.

Abrahamson: I mean there wasn't much choice.

Arendt: Yeah.

Abrahamson: And I wanted to be – well, I really felt I would have liked to have piloted a heavy bomber.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: But – but it didn't work out. So when we finished operational – I mean gunnery school, why then we got assigned to a crew (unintelligible) and I met these folks – I don't know, where did we meet for the first time? I think out in Omaha or Lincoln, Nebraska, and then we did your operational training in Dyersburg, Tennessee.

Arendt: Okay. So did you train as a crew at that point?

Abrahamson: We trained as a crew. *Then* you did everything together. You – we trained together, we got the same day off every nine days, and –

Arendt: Did you – did you get along with your crew? Did you guys gel together?

Abrahamson: Yes. Yeah, it's – we lost, we lost one of our co-pilot because – I shouldn't – doesn't make any difference.

Arendt: Yeah. We won't know his name.

Abrahamson: But I mean, you know, but I wouldn't – but he's dead anyhow. He got killed (unintelligible) lines, but anyhow, he was drunk all the time. Gosh (??), he almost killed us in training one day.

Arendt: Oh, my. I won't put that in –

Abrahamson: No, no, but that's what happened, and so he was transferred out of here. There were two other guys that – they were gunners that slept – I trained with them, you know, and then they were shipped out, but all three, I guess –

Arendt: So, the point at which you finished training, what happened?

Abrahamson: Oh, we – when we finished training we immediately shipped out.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: We – and we went by ship, the Ile de France. It was a big ocean liner. It was a French luxury liner before the Normandie, I don't know if you've ever heard of the Normandie –

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: But that was a beautiful ship that we got a hold of it, you see, and it capsized in the harbor out East. But the Ile de France was a French luxury – the British had control of that ship. It was a British crew, and we went over on that. There were ten, fifteen thousand men on board that ship.

Arendt: Oh, wow. How was your trip over? Was it calm?

Abrahamson: Rough.

Arendt: Rough?

Abrahamson: Yeah, it was (unintelligible). We had a bad one bad storm. A lot of people sick, you know.

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: Fortunately, I didn't get seasick. Never got airsick.

Arendt: Really?

Abrahamson: No.

Arendt: You must have a strong constitution or something. Wow.

Abrahamson: Grandfather was a sailor I guess.

Arendt: Well, there you go. It's genetic, okay, good. So when you were going over, did you know where you were going, where you were going to be, what your home base would be?

Abrahamson: No.

Arendt: You just went over.

Abrahamson: No, we went into the port of Glasgow and then we went to a, I don't know, we traveled, we were traveling all night. I know we got off the boat and we went to a Camp Stone, wherever that was, and then we went to our base by truck. Mostly, practically all of the Eighth Air Force, the whole (unintelligible) east side of the island towards (??) level land – keeps analyzing. So our base was a little, next to a little, tiny medieval weaver (??) village.

Arendt: Oh, wow.

Abrahamson: It was on the National Registry. You know you can't change the buildings. It's that half-timbered stuff in that little town.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: And some buildings lean in, and some lean out, you know, and so forth, and picturesque, very famous.

Arendt: Oh, really? What's the name – do you –?

Abrahamson: Lavenham; L-A-V-E-N, Laven -; H-A-M, Lavenham.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: But its pronounced "Lavenum" (??) (unintelligible). But it's, oh well, two other towns – it was near Bury St. Edmunds and Sudbury. Those were fairly, you know, towns that you'd, fairly large towns that you'd see on a map. They aren't really large, but –

Arendt: (unintelligible)

Abrahamson: But probably about seventy, seventy-five miles northeast of London.

Arendt: Okay. What did you think of England?

Abrahamson: I, well, we would get, you know, to go on pass and so forth, and not often, but we'd go into London by train. The English people were – I have just a great deal of respect for them. They were friendly, and they weren't complaining. They had come through (??) since 1939 – here it was, you know, 1945, and it's just – they showed such courage, and I have a great deal of respect for them. They were very friendly, too.

Arendt: Okay (??).

Abrahamson: They were very nice (??).

Arendt: So, I'm here on the sheet that – Peggy actually talked to you. This is her handwriting –

Abrahamson: A little bit, yeah.

Arendt: You had an event that happened during World War II that was humorous but true and dangerous. Any idea what this was?

Abrahamson: Well, I guess I have told this at schools because it's not too, you know, it's not gory or anything.

Arendt: Yeah.

Abrahamson: Our crew was blessed. I think the bombardier got scratched a little, just a little scratch from flak, you know. It was nothing to (unintelligible) (laughs).

Arendt: Oh, I had a man who had – you know over in – no –

Abrahamson: (laughs) He wasn't going (unintelligible) Purple Heart –

Arendt: Oh, this is funny. This man –

Abrahamson: Right.

Arendt: He went over a hill in Germany, and there was a German tanker waiting for him. He had a jeep driver. Hit his jeep, and he ended up with shrapnel in his hind end (??). And he got up, and everybody came by, "Are you okay? Are you okay?" My rear end (??) hurts." Well, his raincoat was just shredded, and he said "There's now way in H-E-L-L to get a Purple Heart from that A-S-S." (both laugh) So it must have been the same kind of thing.

Abrahamson: Yeah. (unintelligible) experience.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: I have (unintelligible) disaster once when one fellow got hit in the rear.

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: And I was, being the radioman I was also the – they gave every job to you that they could on board on that ship because – I had a really nice “office”, you might say (laughs) –

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: But I was the so called medic on board. I didn't know anything about medicine or anything, but I did have, I carried morphine, you know –

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: (unintelligible) emergency.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: But there was one fellow, not on our crew (??), who got hit in the rear, and they couldn't stop the bleeding. So they stuck his rear end out the (unintelligible) and froze it –

Arendt: Oh –

Abrahamson: And stopped the bleeding, but he didn't make it. But the idea was good, but it didn't work.

Arendt: Okay. Wow.

Abrahamson: I mean you don't have to quote me or anything (??) like that, but that's just one thing that –

Arendt: Yeah. Well, everybody, you know—

Abrahamson: It (unintelligible) that's a, that's a funny story, but this one –

Arendt: Especially when this guy was telling it.

Abrahamson: Yes.

Arendt: He was kinda' embarrassed about (laughs) –

Abrahamson: (laughs) I can imagine. So, anyhow, the – oh, I guess about the – our waist gunner’s arm was gone (??). Well, he got hit in the foot with some aluminum from the plane when some flak went through.

Arendt: Okay. Well, it sounds like you guys were really fortunate.

Abrahamson: Well, we *were*. I mean, I – I wasn’t – I forgot – you know, you forget about some of these things. After awhile you just don’t think of ‘em, but I was so lucky when I think about it. And the tail gunner had, he had flak go right through, right through both windows of his Plexiglas.

Arendt: Really?

Abrahamson: Position. I mean, if we had been leaning forward probably about three, four inches it’d have been his head off, you know. But I mean here was hole here and a hole here –

Arendt: Wow.

Abrahamson: Right straight – And I, the closest I came was practically had my leg blown off, I guess that I was the “chaff thrower.”

Arendt: Okay, and what is that?

Abrahamson: Or “window” the British called it. That’s why you could not get tin foil for your Christmas trees during World War II.

Arendt: Why not?

Abrahamson: We – this tinfoil was cut, you know, it was like tinsel.

Arendt: Mm hmm.

Abrahamson: You know, in probably about strips like about so long. Now this was wrapped in a much smaller package, but you get the idea.

Arendt: Mm hmm.

Abrahamson: I mean it was probably about a pack – triangular in shape with paper wrapped around it.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: Then this tinfoil was just stuck in there.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: Okay and this is what we called "chaff", and it was cut to the frequency of the radar of the German anti-aircraft batteries.

Arendt: Okay – frequency – okay.

Abrahamson: And when you, when you hit the initial point on the bomb run, that's when the bombardier took over the plane, heading for the target. They – we used to call it the "IP", initial point. When he took over you know, with his gun sight the plane was out of the pilot's hands. It was on automatic pilot. Control –

Arendt: Okay. What did the pilot do at that point?

Abrahamson: Sit.

Arendt: Just sat there.

Abrahamson: And the copilot and pilot just sit.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: But they're ready to take over manually if they have to. I mean the bombsight was controlling the plane, but anyhow off subject there. Anyhow –

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: Even before the IP sometimes they had a little chute right alongside the radio room which you can't see here because it's leaning –

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: I must have – I'll show you, later –

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: But anyhow, there's a little chute right here with a little bit of a door on it –

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: And I had boxes of this chaff there alongside, and the idea was *everybody*, all the radio operators, would toss – just put it in that chute, and of course being over the wing area where there's reduced air – just suck that thing right out.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: And exploded like a bush basket.

Arendt: Oh, really?

Abrahamson: Yeah, I mean it looked like a bushel basket of stuff but it all from this one little –

Arendt: So it was really compressed.

Abrahamson: One little package, you know, with the paper wrapped around so it would unwrap quickly and –

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: That was the idea, to spread it. It took hours for it to hit the ground.

Arendt: Oh, I suppose with all that interference (??) it was –

Abrahamson: But, yeah, and just drifting, you know, down from twenty, twenty-five thousand feet to whatever, you know. Why it'd take many hours to get down, probably four or five hours –

Arendt: Mm hmm.

Abrahamson: But that, if you were flying with under cast –

Woman: This might be (??) silly. I have to answer –

Abrahamson: Okay.

Arendt: That's okay.

Woman: -- on hold on the phone. Instead of the –

Abrahamson: That, that was very effective I say if there was under cast. If it was visual sighting for these people, they, you know, they'd use both radar and visual sighting. It was really quite effective, and we also toward the end of the war had jammers, radar jammers on board. These were fellows who listened for anti-aircraft signals and then they would plug in their jamming frequency and jam up their radar.

Arendt: What were those bundles of tinsel? Did they have a name?

Abrahamson: Yep. Chaff. We called –



Arendt: Oh, that's right. C-H-A-F-F?

Abrahamson: Yeah, and the British called it "window".

Arendt: Window?

Abrahamson: Mm hmm. (unintelligible)

Arendt: Okay. Good.

Abrahamson: But anyhow, what happened this one day (laughs), one day this flak came through right there, and it went between the post of my swivel seat and my leg, see –

Arendt: Oh!

Abrahamson: And there was a hole alongside of that, you know, fairly close to that chaff chute, about like so and about so big. You never find – well, ninety-nine percent of the time you won't find any flak on your ship. It always goes through.

Arendt: Because it's going so –

Abrahamson: Just a little, thin little skin, and so I've seen some. That one fellow did find at Eight Air Force Historical Society, but normally you just didn't find it.

Arendt: You just couldn't –

Abrahamson: It just went right straight through. So that one went, either it just missed my legs, and if it had hit the post, it was (laughs) – I spose I've have been sitting on the floor (both laugh), but it just went right through there, and of course I said, I mentioned to the pilot when we were getting off, and I remember, you know the little humor, there, he said, "Shaky –" and that was a name I got back in the States when I was, you know, had too much to drink one night and the next day I was (Arendt laughs) shivering and (laughs) one night there was a fella that hung that name on me. It stayed with me the rest of –

Arendt: Sure, they don't let you forget that stuff.

Abrahamson: So, "Shaky," he said, "Somebody's telling you something. You needed another chaff chute." So –

Arendt: (laughs) Good. Good.

Abrahamson: “That teach you not to – that’ll teach you to throw stuff faster than you do,” (Arendt laughs) you know, some remark like that. So, what, you know, else can you do?

Arendt: Good. So how many missions did you fly?

Abrahamson: I had seventeen.

Arendt: Seventeen. And what kind of plane?

Abrahamson: A B-17. That’s a Boeing Flying Fortress, and I have a picture of one that we flew.

Arendt: Oh, really?

Abrahamson: And this, nobody, nobody, even the fella that wrote this article later I read – you know, when I was a kid we were on the farm in Depression days you’d patch up your clothes, you know –

Arendt: Sure.

Abrahamson: Mother would sew a patch on your knees here and there. Well, then there patches on patches sometimes, sometimes different colors.

Arendt: Sure.

Abrahamson: I’d say Depression days were pretty tough, and I was the middle child. I was the younger brother, you know, for quite awhile until my sister was born. Anyhow, this plane, “Fearless Fosdick”, this is a picture of it. It flew back (laughs) to the states, too, but it was so full of holes –

Arendt: And it was your plane?

Abrahamson: Yeah, we flew it sometimes.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: And nobody wanted to get assigned to that plane because you didn’t think you’d ever get home with it, you know.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: Because it was so old and so beat up, you know. Just the interior, I mean the radio – and you know all the equipment and everything just seemed to be in pretty bad shape. But this taken in Kingman, Arizona. That’s where a

lot of these went to their, the graveyard, but this is “Fearless Fosdick” here.

Arendt: So why was it called “Fearless Fosdick”?

Abrahamson: Well, that’s nose art.

Arendt: Yeah, but what was the –

Abrahamson: I don’t know. It was named before we –

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: Yeah, in fact the crew that flew it before we did, they – this fella complains down here somewhere. He complains – he mentions the same thing that I felt about patches on patches, and he talks about –

Arendt: “Most patched up assembly of aluminum I’ve ever seen.” (laughs)

Abrahamson: And they – that was another crew that had it before –

Arendt: Wow!

Abrahamson: They flew that thing, and it was in bad shape then.

Arendt: Wow.

Abrahamson: But there it is in Kingman, Arizona. Somebody got to have to fly that thing back. We flew our plane back, too, but –

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: (unintelligible)

Arendt: So you didn’t always –

Abrahamson: (unintelligible)

Arendt: You didn’t always fly in the same plane then?

Abrahamson: No, but, you know, earlier, why, you did. You would keep a plane until, you know, something happened. You know, I mean, we had – a pilot tipped one over, nosed over once on a landing, and of course we didn’t, we didn’t even that plane anymore because it was, you know, damaged. It was in for repair, and he got another plane.

Arendt: Mm hmm. Good.

Abrahamson: So we – so we had several planes that we were flying.

Arendt: Oh, good.

Abrahamson: But that was “Fearless Fosdick “there, a well known plane on the base there, and of course (laughs) nobody wanted (Arendt laughs) to get on that thing because you never thought you’d get off.

Arendt: That’s funny.

Abrahamson: So --

Arendt: Good. So you, you flew seventeen missions. Did the war end at that point ‘cause I know you had to fly so many missions or get so many points or whatever –

Abrahamson: Yep, yeah, the war ended, and then of course we came back to the States in July of 1945.

[End of Tape 1, Side A. ca. 30 min.]

Abrahamson: (unintelligible) went (??) me tell you a funny story.

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: The kids liked this. It wasn’t funny at the time. I was – I went (unintelligible) I was about as scared as I’ve ever (unintelligible) And then I had – flak went through, there (??) and cut off the antennas off the, what do you call it, the command set. It was the radio that pilots used for air, you know, air to tower.

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: You knows to talk, and I found a patch cord. Normally you don’t have any repair equipment on a bomber, you know. It just doesn’t pay to have tools, you know.

Arendt: Right.

Abrahamson: Why have tools? You can’t do much anyhow. [Approx. 15 sec. gap in tape} antenna which was (unintelligible) this happened (unintelligible) and got the plane workin’ I mean the pilot thought I was a wonderful operator and a wonderful mechanic (laughs) because I patched up his antenna

(Arendt laughs) back there in the radio room. Yeah, but I was gonna tell you a funny story which the kids like.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: And I was, I was just, I'm so scared, I was so scared I couldn't, you know, I couldn't – even thinkin' about it, you know, I just can't imagine. Anyhow, what happened was this – we – we got off the bomb run and my radio room was right up, my desk was right up against a bulkhead with a door, you see, a little door into the bomb bay –

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: Area, and to get through that bomb bay there is a six inch walkway.

Arendt: Okay. Wow.

Abrahamson: And it's like an I-beam, you know –

Arendt: Mm hmm.

Abrahamson: Half an I-beam you might say.

Arendt: Yeah.

Abrahamson: Six inches wide (??). And I always got called from up front (unintelligible) “Check the bomb bay”, you know, see where all the bombs are at.

Arendt: Was that something you were supposed to do?

Abrahamson: Yeah, they always “Check the bomb boys”, and I'd always do it. I'd open up the door –

Arendt: Mm hmm.

Abrahamson: Of course I was plugged into my oxygen station there, but I could reach up and open the door, didn't have that much tube there – I could do that. SO I looked – immediately after the bomb run was over the pilot would normally get control of the plane and you'd have to be flying a perfectly level flight that bomb run because the bombsight is important, that's what you're there for.

Arendt: Right.

Abrahamson: And you've gotta have, that bombardier's gotta have that perfect control so that he can do his calculating and get that bombsight so they the bombs drop at the proper time. Okay, so then the pilot takes over and he does what we call evasive action. He'd dive this way and you'd slide, you know, because of these aircraft –

Arendt: Yeah.

Abrahamson: Fighters don't attack you normally on the bomb (unintelligible) because they don't want get hit by their own –

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: Friendly fire.

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: Okay. So anyhow, you do evasive action afterwards, and he said "Check the bomb bays." You know I always, always did, but he just always yelled that out to see if they were clear. Well, I looked up, and I said, yelled, I got back and I yelled, "Don't close the doors. There's one hung up by a shackle."

Arendt: Oh!

Abrahamson: And it was hung up in this manner. If you can imagine this being the front of the bomb, okay –

Arendt: Mm hmm.

Abrahamson: See they're hung by two loops in the (unintelligible) bomb bay (??).

Arendt: Mm hmm.

Abrahamson: One had let loose –

Arendt: Oh!

Abrahamson: So now this part of the bomb, the front part, was hanging below the bomb bay. So if he had closed the doors right (laughs) –

Arendt: Aah!

Abrahamson: That would have been the end of us, you see, because bombs, some bombs, it depended on what kind they were – if they were magnesium

bombs there was a barometric device that went off, exploded on the way down., and then they spread so they could set fire over a large area.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: But some of these bombs had little propellers. Maybe you've seen that on

Arendt: Yeah.

Abrahamson: When they're in the bomb bays, when they're loaded, they are wired so that this propeller cannot come lose.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: But a bombardier after take off arms all the bombs by pulling those wires so when that bomb hits the air stream –

Arendt: I just have to –

Abrahamson: Turns off (??) and that sets up your firing pin so that –

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: Hits, anything hits that, why it hits, why its impact, you see –

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: Explodes the bomb. So this is what could have happened –

Arendt: Oh!

Abrahamson: There if the bomb bay doors got shut. You know they really come and zip 'em shut. They don't – (both laugh) They close, close fast. So, well, of course, the pilot yelled "Well, get it out! Kick it out!", you know so –

Arendt: Oh!

Abrahamson: We gotta get, we gotta get oxygen, you know, and there's a v-shaped part of the rack there in the middle.

Arendt: Mm hmm.

Abrahamson: So I went out there and, you know, the doors are open at 20,000 feet to the ground or whatever, you know –

Arendt: Oh!

Abrahamson: You – I was hangin' on, I can remember hangin' on (Arendt laughs) to that v-shaped brace, you know, and kicking, kicking –

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: If I'd a had a screwdriver – you know I said we didn't carry many tools. The bombardier, you know, had, he had a screwdriver on him because he knew how to get these bombs loose. We all did, for that matter. We were taught how to do it with a screwdriver, but back in training, you see –

Arendt: Sure.

Abrahamson: We carried more tools. I had nothing to get that thing loose with, so I hailed the (??) oxygen bottle back to the radio room. The engineer is watching me (both laugh) from his position there, and of course he's I 'spose given' 'em a blow by blow, you know –

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: Description. Well, he told 'em “Well, he can't get it out,” you know, so the bombardier came, and he was a little fella. And I said “That guy should have been decorated.” I mean, honest to God, --

Arendt: Oh, yeah?

Abrahamson: He had, he really had guts. He came – and of course he had his bottle – well, I want out, you know, to get, to get him and, you know, get his, hold his bottle.

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: I'd go out to him about (??) “walk around” oxygen –

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: Bottle. Holding the bottle, hanging on to the (laughs) shaft there of that, I mean, that brace, and he is down there, lying down on that six inch catwalk with his screwdriver and he got that sucker out.

Arendt: Wow!

Abrahamson: And of course “Close the bomb bay!” (unintelligible) and whippin' it shut, you know, and of course, that was – the kids love that story.

Arendt: Oh, yeah!



Abrahamson: (unintelligible) story.

Arendt: That's like Pearl Harbor. Woo!

Abrahamson: So if somebody would have filmed that I betcha we looked like a bunch of Keystone Cops. (Both laugh) Of course you can't talk to each other.

Arendt: Uh huh.

Abrahamson: There you are with oxygen masks and hangin' down with your bottles and, you know, your parachutes you couldn't negotiate. With the chest pack you couldn't get through, you know.

Arendt: Yeah.

Abrahamson: Properly with all this other stuff. So, I say the kids get a kick out of (??) the story.

Arendt: Wow. Yeah. Well, show me your pictures.

Abrahamson: Oh, I've a picture here. Yeah, I've got a couple here.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: To choose –

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: In fact I had them, had one made up. This is a black and white that somebody, some –

Arendt: You used that for –

Abrahamson: Theater. Yeah. Where did I use that? Oh, up north, that's right, in a book up north.

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: I gave a talk up there. They dedicated a memorial up at Tigerton to World War – well, all the war veterans (??).

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: All paraded (??).

Arendt: Oh, how nice.

Abrahamson: They had flags, you know –

Arendt: I should tell my dad about that ‘cause he liked to go to those, you know (unintelligible).

Abrahamson: Mm hmm. I was invited to speak up there at the dedication Memorial Day last year (??). So then needed a picture for the book so this studio just put this together. It’s this one here.

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: But this is one – no, this is before color photography, you know, so –

Arendt: Hand colored.

Abrahamson: Painted.

Arendt: Yeah.

Abrahamson: Domro (??) Sisters (both laugh). Dumro (??) Sisters Studio in Shawano. My parents were living there when I came home.

Arendt: I can just use the black and white one.

Abrahamson: You can do that –

Arendt: That’s fine.

Abrahamson: Sure. You can have that one. That’s good. Sure.

Arendt: That’ll work ‘cause it’s in black and white anyway, and I’ll drop it off the next time I through ‘cause I don’t mail the photos. I don’t want to risk them being lost.

Abrahamson: So, this is –

Arendt: All my stuff.

Abrahamson: Now, I mentioned – did I give you this book?

Arendt: Unh unh.

Abrahamson: Okay. I meant to give it to you, and I will. So – because we gave this to the library and to the – I gave ‘em to all the schools that participated in the (unintelligible).

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: This was put together by the editor of the state newspaper, Bill Bottoms.

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: Now, he’s retired, and another fella’s taking – Helgeson is his name. He writes the state, he’s the editor of the state VFW – Bottoms collected all these poems and –

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: And this is the same poem here, and this is our crew before we were in operation training. This was actually a song, you see. It’s in, it’s the first prayer in the book that –

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: I wrote that while I was overseas.

Arendt: Wow!

Abrahamson: I’d wake up at night. I couldn’t sleep, and I’d – I had a little orange crate there alongside of my bed, and I’d use the flashlight and I’d write poetry.

Arendt: Oh! Wow. So what year did you write this?

Abrahamson: It was in 1945.

Arendt: Can I write on it? Is this (??) a problem?

Abrahamson: Yeah, you can do – that’s yours. You can do whatever you like. It’s yours.

Arendt: ‘Cause depending on how the pages are laying out I may have like black pages every once in a while –

Abrahamson: Mm hmm.

Arendt: And I want to put – I don’t want to just waste the pages. I want to put something on them.

Abrahamson: Now, I wrote some toasts, and they all have the same melody. This is one that we sang at the 440<sup>th</sup> – the commanding officer got a hold of this and he wrote me a letter (unintelligible) Alonzo Cudworth Post –

Arendt: Yeah, you told me about that.

Abrahamson: He mentioned he'd like to have 'em sing at that (??). This is a toast to the 440<sup>th</sup>. We sang it at the military (unintelligible). Oh, wait (??). (unintelligible) we had to sing for the 440<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Wing –

Arendt: Okay.

Abrahamson: Their national reunion –

Arendt: Oh, wow!

Abrahamson: Because they got of it through one of the people who happened to be 00 then I got a call from a Captain Ann Canobie (??) here just – my wife took the call, but it (unintelligible) we'll (??) probably sing for the Reserve Officers Association. She was at that ball also.

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Abrahamson: So this coming (unintelligible)

Arendt: Wow!

Abrahamson: My wife and I are going to be over in France, but there's that song, you see. But they loved it. They loved that.

**[End of Interview]**