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Note: This interview starts off with the men talking ...

W.C: We try to get as many as we can.

L.C: Well I know but it seems like the information is available to you .

W.C: No Not the personal stories.

L.C: Well

W.C: That is what makes the personal histories the individuals experiences. That's what makes it real. You can read a book and talk about the text.

L.C: The Cadets over _____ those guys we kind of argued over that with each other. That didn't impress me very much and it's not their fault every person experiences their experiences their own small scale and every time you get a group together one of them say no it wasn't like that I was on the other side of the hill and this is what happened and their not wrong, their right.

W.C That's why you need all the different perspectives.

L.C: Yeah well I hope it gets you what you need. Mostly what I am talking about is the, you can't say it's the whole 366 fighter group it's my own experience and that's what I went through my whole life. It's not always interesting and people always think they want to get this big story and It's not always like that.

W.C: No we want a complete story as much as we can . Sometimes its impressive sometimes it's very mundane it's all a part of the story.

LC: Should they take the records there (Pointing) and just put some automation to it instead of them just sitting there.

W.C: I think we can get you to where we want you to be.

L.C: That's what I inquired to you about, where you want me to go.

Start of the interview.....

W.C: Mr. Charbonneau where were you born?

L.C: I was born in Cohoes NY.

W.C: You grew up in Cohoes?

L.C: Yeah I went to Cohoes High School, There is a Colonial Dick Clarkens that you know from the Tibbits Cadets .

L.C: He and I were classmates in Cohoes high school.

W.C: What was Cohoes like back in that period.

L.C: There's a new book written about what Cohoes was like back in those days, it's in the Cohoes Library.

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L.C: It was a town with the main occupation was Woolen Mills. If the Woolen Mills faded the town disappeared.

L.C: But the Woolen Mills stayed on all my grandfathers life time. He came from Canada.

Other than that there was no industries in the town.

W.C: When did you graduate high school?

L.C: Well we celebrated our 60th high school reunion in Atlantis Grove last year, you're talking 1940 time period.

L.C: Because in 41' in December I entered the service right after Pearl Harbor. As many did.

W.C: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor took place?

L.C: Yeah I was standing in front of a old Philco radio that was on top of a little library section in a china closet. The hammer just came right down on my life right there.

W.C: Did you know that at the time?

L.C: Well not really, when your 19 or 20 years old those things they are just piece meals they just add up to the story of your life .

W.C: What did you plan to do at that point?

L.C: I was working at the McQuarry Machine Works they had a patent on a machine that thinned down goat skin hides that made gloves for the Gloversville mill up there. So they had that machine I was an apprentice at the time of course they had the machines all over the world. It could thin down and make the same thickness to make it like a piece of material instead of having gobs of hair here and there. Ladies gloves were what they were fashioning with the machine out of the products.

W.C: Just after Pearl Harbor occurred what did you and your friends think about what was coming or did you not give it much thought at that point?

L.C: Well I never thought I'd be in Europe. I thought I'd be in Japan, because the Japanese were the ones that stepped in and kept the history of Pearl Harbor. Other than that all we knew it was a big mess we were in for the duration plus it wasn't a 60 day trip to some place.

W.C: Now you enlisted?

L.C: Yeah, Army Air Corp.

W.C: Why did you choose the Army Air Corp?

L.C: A friend of mine , had a question asked to him when he got to the desk where three people were signing people up. He said , I don't want to join the Navy , talking to the Navy man the recruiter , the guy says why not why don't you want to join the Navy. He said I don't have anything against them now and I don't want to have.

Both men laugh...

L.C: It was just a shake of the dice but at the time I was interested as a machinist. I was riding Harley motorcycles at the time and I knew air-cooled engines so I thought I'd go into the Army Air Corp and became a mechanic which I did. I was a mechanic before I was a pilot.

W.C: Where did you take your basics?

L.C: Basic was Fort Dix.

W.C: What was that like? Was this your first time away from home?

L.C: Oh Yes, everybody along that time period, it was all their first time away from home. That was Fort Dix New Jersey then we went to Jefferson Barracks in Missouri. From there they separated us out into airfields and I went out into Aviation Mechanics group I went to Victor ville California.

W.C: So was Basics okay for you?

L.C: Basics yeah, Actually it was just getting use to hitting appointments on time no excuses trying to learn how to wear the uniform and find out what the designated pennants were on the company flag pole which told you what uniform you had to wear before you went out of

the Barracks , that was your first learning experience. But not very much in spectaculars at basics but I was glad in the later years that I did go for the aviation mechanics group because I became 366 fighter group. I became the test pilot for all the airplanes that were fixed before they put them back on line but I knew what the engines could do and what to write up and have the crew chief have it evaluated and fixed it.

W.C: How was the training?

L.C: Which?

W.C: The Aviation Mechanics?

L.C: I became an apprentice to very experienced people and were at the time we were trying a 18-9 when is a twin engine trainer out of Victorville California. And I got to the point where I had 3 crews and we would change engines at night and I asked for night duty because it was cooler at night and every month my crew got extra 3 day pass to go into San Bernardino all because of the write ups we got . Corrections that were made if you want to think about it, it was the accidents that were prevented.

W.C: You had good crews?

L.C: Oh yeah.. They all started out as trainees just like I did but during the summer of 42' they were short pilots at the time . I had been a crew chief on the 18-9's twin engines every once and a while the instructors would let us take over the controls, landing and take-off was your problem Flying the airplane was the matter of just getting use to the pressures. But they were short on pilots at the time in the Air Corp. It was in the Air Force and the Air Corp. They had a cadet examination another lad by the name of Allen a red head and I were the only two that passed the test that they required before you could start the cadet program. From there we went to Nashville TN. At Nashville they separated by testing coordination visual equity difference of that nature they tested which ones would go on to pilot training, bombardiers or navigators. I wound up as a pilot.

W.C: pretty vigorous training?

L.C: At that time, it wasn't that much different from what you were experiencing at your basic training but the training started after that, it was at Maxwell Field in Alabama.

W.C: Okay, what was Alabama like?

L.C: At that time it was pretty segregated.

W.C: What did you think of that?

L.C: I didn't think much of it, in the later years I thought less of it because we had people in that service from those areas who were doing the same jobs as we were doing and not getting any credit. Do you know the story of the red tails?

W.C: Yeah we interviewed Colonial Dark from Saratoga who flew for them.

L.C: If you know the story, they did as good of a job as anyone of us did.

W.C: You took your flight training.....

L.C: I took my flight training, I went to Arcadia Florida. It was a training command for the southeast. From Arcadia I went to Macon Georgia for basic and Maryanna Florida for advanced training also when we were at Maryanna we took the actual gun range, Eglin Field Eglin 9 it was.

W.C: Did you know that you were going into fighters at this point?

L.C: That was advanced training there was no switching your career field at that time unless somebody decided they couldn't fly fighters. Then they would switch you into some other career field. There was about 1/3 in each primary basic and advanced of the people that started. Each one of those in the training of the aspects that made it 1/3 made it and 2/3rd were wiped out and they became navigators and bombardiers

W.C: Was training dangerous?

L.C: Flying is dangerous. The biggest problem was the experience at the time, the problems that evolved people..... I'll give you a for instance in a AT6 which is called a Texan, Navy called it a SNJ. They had a horn right behind your head when you pulled back on the throttle and you didn't have your wheels down it blew. You know like hey wake up! Some of the people that were flying were inexperienced, they didn't have the capability to go with the flow as you might say. And they would land with the horn blowing throttle back and belly in on the runway and people would ask them "Didn't you hear the horn" they would say "Yeah but I couldn't shut it off."

Both men laugh.

But those are the things that caused danger. Probably the most dangerous was Formation and night flying. One of those things probably you may not have if experienced but maybe you have. One of the things in advanced training the instructors pulled a switch on us of our grease pencils. You probably say what could that do? Well you made your flight plan for a little short cross country, you made it out with the grease pencil he gave ya well it was red and you held it under the florescent light in the cock pit and all those lines disappeared just to show you simple things can cause you the most disastrous results these were the things done for our benefit for later on. You wouldn't make that mistake again.

W.C: Most of the flight instructors came from where?

L.C: Right out of the Cadet program or back from training with fighter units Panama, Alaska most of them were 2nd and 1st Lieutenants they come through the programs themselves but most were top notch of the trainees.

W.C: But nobody at that point really had any combat experience?

L.C: No

W.C: So after your advanced training where'd ya go.

L.C: We started 366, I say we cause Colonial Dickmere started the 366 in Richmond Virginia. We originally started at the Bluthen Fall field (?) which is no longer. I think it is some commercial field now but the runways are still there, we gathered there and they issued us clothing tents parachute bags that type of things. We round up together in Richmondville Virginia that's where we took our first operational training.

W.C: What were you flying at that time?

L.C: P47's

W.C: What was that like?

L.C: It's all in that book right there...(pointing)

W.C: For your experience.

L.C: My experience?

W.C: You gone from a trainer into a P47...

L.C: Yeah 2000 horsepower engine.

W.C: Like a sports car almost?

L.C: Yeah a 7 tons sports car, it wasn't really a sports car, but your first flights in a P47 that's what you aspired to all your training to go into a fighter air craft and your time was the P40's was the aircraft of the day that hot airplane of the day and with your first experience on a 2000 horsepower engine vs. a 500 horsepower was tremendous it flew you. You took the instructions and told the reactions you were suppose to have. What it was going to feel like to have to push 2000 horsepower and get it down the runway a little road that goes nowhere they called it and it was a gradual learning experience and that's what the operational training was for Colonial Dickmere was an old air mail pilot for Texas.

W.C: How do they handle?

L.C: Very responsive if you control it. There was only one trouble you could really get into you had a selector valve for internal fuel tanks and one of those tanks were behind the pilot, and

one was in the wing section. And if you took off you had to go take off on the internal wing so your CT center of gravity wouldn't get out of whack some people would get all frustrated and take off with using that fuel out of the back tank and when out on combat type demands on the engines that would burn hundreds of gallons an hour. So if you were up and you forget 100 gallons of fuel time 8 pounds per gallon that's 7 pounds of water. It'll take your center of gravity was all out of whack and you went and tried to do shondells and things you were suppose to practice you could get a tumble and didn't have enough altitude YOU BOUGHT THE FARM. Other than that the airplane flew like a dream.

W.C: So you liked the P47.

L.C: Yes Sir, also had behind the pilot it had the first airplane with armor hidden behind the pilot and that protected you from aerial attack. But unusual as it sounds we had the armors behind us but we needed it under us because we were fighting the infantry and tank units that was our mission they switched us when we were in England they switched us from escort type missions to P17 we only flew 16 or 17 missions of escort. But at that time the 8th air force their mission was to fight the air war and we were just along for the experience and they had probably knocked down 80% of the capabilities of the German air force in the 8th air corp. Colonial (inaudible) died a short time back. And as the P51 came along at that time it had 10 hours of fuel range , we had 5 hours so we could go out to our fuel range escort but we had a secondary mission and had 1000 pound bombs for each wing shackle after we left them we had a quick mission at strafing and dive bombing and head back to England. We always had 2 missions. That was getting into the 8th air I was in the 9th.

W.C: Now you went over to England when?

L.C: December 1943 graduated from flying school in July of 43 so between July and September was our operational training.

W.C: That's where you got your training experience?

L.C: Aerial gunnery , Murph Beach today is a bunch of Ferris wheels a fun place with golf courses all around that was our ground target. We were firing out to sea but it was all live ammunition and we would fly from Luthen fall fields we would fly the P47's down to the Gulf and the Gulf at the time was a complete firing range. We would use live ammunition with tow targets the ammunition we had at the time the colored tips different paints and it would hit the screen targets that was being towed it was vertical at the time the hits were registered by the color of ammunition they put in your plane that day and that's how you were scored.

W.C: So December 43' you shipped out.

L.C: We shipped out from camp Myles Standish over by Boston.

W.C: Went over by boat?

L.C: I have been across 2 oceans by boat yeah. We went across and landed in Glasgow Scotland.

W.C: You go over on the Queen Mary?

L.C: No it was some little liberty ship.

W.C: Oh okay.

L.C: But we were in a convoy we had a full unit that went over together and we landed in Glasgow Scotland. Then instructed to England to Membury first but that was only for a few weeks Truxton is where we gathered our airplanes and being a test pilot for the 366 we had to take 6, 7, 8 pilots and go up to Glasgow. picking up P47's that came in there on deck storage didn't have any tails and props they'd put them together in Glasgow. So we tested them out before use and then we'd take them down to Truxton and put them on flight line and they were combat ready.

W.C: That had to be fairly dangerous.

L.C: Remember my statement FLYING IS DANGEROUS.

W.C: That's What did you think of England what was your first impressions?

L.C: Truxton is about 25 miles west of London. My first impression was JUA 8 bombing us at night. Going down into dugouts that they had there and we really had a problem there because all of England's airfields and so on were all camouflaged. And when you go up the Orient in the old Glunburghs 20 -25 pilots, the sickest bunch of people you ever saw in your life when they got out of that Glunnyburgh they brings us around and show us what the fields looked like it blended in there was a field that was green paint that went across the runway, camouflaged. The fighter pilots that were there they didn't want to get into another Glunnyburgh, as long as they lived but they did many times.

W.C: Now what was the Glunburgh?

L.C: DC 3 just like the Mohawk airlines I was instructor pilot when I came back in because I went though instrument instructor school, in Marced California, sorry that's jumping ahead.

W.C: So you didn't like the Glunnyburghs?

L.C: No but that was an orientation for those pilots to see what camouflage could really do to change the landscape and we experienced that in our first weeks in flying in England fog the London fog we didn't have any runway lighting at the time. So they took 55 gallon drums of sand half full and a couple gallons of gasoline and when we were coming in talking to the tower we could get a DF fix Direction finding at the time and we'd come back through dodging the barrage boom flying low enough and they'd light those drums that was on one side of the runway on the left side because the pilot looks out to the left side all the time. With those drums you'd line up and use your instruments, you altimeter and field and altitude was the runway and you'd come in and land. But you have to remember in those years you weren't landing one airplane at a time. You'd have 75 airplanes up in one fighter group. So you landed each on the mat and you took 5 minutes for each one. So the last guy out was out of fuel before you could get in because you were coming in from a mission from later on. By the end of the training we landed 3 at a time the flight leader and 2 others landed. And they were

landing at 1 minute intervals but it still took a lot of time.

W.C: So everybody had to be real careful?

L.C: You came in on a downwind leg at 1000 feet above the runway you made a shondell up to the left and put your wheels down when your in the shondell and then when you lined up you were at about 300 feet a great big shondell and that's the way you landed but the men that were on each side of you (the leader) they followed you. They didn't watch the ground at all until they got into the landing position they flew on him. That's where the formation flying paid off, the training we got.

W.C: Your first combat missions were escorts?

L.C: My first combat missions I got a list of them in my book there, (pointing behind the interviewer) they were fighter sweeps and escorts.

W.C: What are fighter sweep

L.C: Locating where the Germans were in Normandy Gunkur where the German activity was and military equipment , they couldn't hide it all, a lot of it was on the roads because they occupied those countries France was theirs, Poland , Czech was theirs, they were pretty cocky at the time so we'd go in 30,000 -35,000 feet we're talking in terms of people on the airlines flying at 1,500 – 2,000 feet at the most we are flying at altitudes without pressurized suits nothing else we just had oxygen masks. We'd go in and locate where the locomotives were at maybe the roundhouses and they would give the people in the intelligence possible targets.

W.C: So you were photographing?

L.C: No.

W.C: Just all visuals?

L.C: Yeah we had a debriefing after each mission.

W.C: Did you run into the (inaudible) very often?

L.C: The Air Force were taking care of them before with 20% capability they didn't bother us out over the channel or just over France they were defending at that Germany that was their fuel range then we're against them too they couldn't come over and start attacking anybody over the channel and let the bombers get through and bomb big cities in Germany. It's a cat and mouse game.

W.C: So a lot of what you were doing at this point is really in preparation for D-Day

L.C: Yes while we're doing these type missions our mission was designated as dive bombing that's what the P47's did thunderbolt. We got so that in the training that we had put a 500 pound bomb on the belly shackle using the radical and our gun sights using the coordination between the 2 we could just roll over and hit a single tank. But you were exposing yourself always to ground fire. And Ack- Ack At the time and you know it there was something German had that they didn't want hit they had plenty of Ack Ack. We were lucky in one way toward the end of the time at the battle of France we had gotten so much of their tank business they were using Forces for the 88 gun and the 88 gun was the best piece of equipment they had for anti-aircraft as well as anti-tank. I know what this anti-tank business is with the 88 because General Pasida came into the 366 strip A1 and saw the Route Commander Colonial John H. Pease from Colorado and he's still alive. He say's "Get one of your pilots I want to give him a air craft radio and I want to have him put it into one of Patton's tanks."You know simple little instructions . So I was designated they gave me a jeep and a aircraft radio and this was right after the bombing battle of the Saint Lo . Go find General Patton actually sounds strange but the jeep was probably one of the safest vehicles behind the V-engines because the Germans would not leave their positions to fire at a jeep. They didn't know what you had or what you were doing. But there were times when you had to go in and bomb creators with the jeep in 4 wheel drive to go down to the bottom and let the battle go on above. Take cross roads and check where the MP's where, General Patton oh they went on their way yesterday and then

hit another cross road they went that way. I finally caught up with them. I got a picture there in my book I keep referring to it because that is the story of my life. We finally caught up with General Patton and the 3rd armor division my tank was called Mickey Mouse it was written right on the side of it, The radio man that I had was also my jeep driver and I was the forward air controller at the time because by that time I had 50 missions in and I was conversing with all the new codes and parlents with the fighters and they are all the way through the south of saint Lo all the way to Paris. I was in the forward air -control business either in a tank or back at the fighter outfit 366. I went back and flew more missions we were at Drew , Laione, Ash Belgium all the way through.

W.C: So your job was too?

L.C: Forward air controller he picks out where the camouflage....

Tape change...

W.C: Okay so the Forward air observers job was too?

L.C: He had his head out of the tank with a microphone setting up . We could call the P47's flying over the beach head, 40 miles either way was all we had but it was all ours. We worked directly with our Squadrons. I know the capabilities of individual pilots say if I had a 88 mil gun shooting up the tank, Sherman tanks it up go in one side but not out the other. It would ricochet around on the inside of it .

W.C: Was this a fairly new Concept.

L.C: No... Well at the time it was.

W.C: Right.

L.C: Yeah it was brand new I know Pasida evolved that.

W.C: So you were one of the first forward air observers?

L.C: yeah and then it wasn't just an air observer they called It a forward air controller.

Because you had direct radio contact with the fighters the tanks had no capabilities to

communicate with them.

W.C different frequencies?

L.C: No Frequencies different type of radio ours was the VHF radio they had the AM we called it . The infantry had no way of talking to the men in the tanks till a little bit later on they put an outlet on the tank for platoon leaders. So they were able to talk to the men without them having to open up the tank.

W.C: What were some of the problems initially working out this coordination between the air and ground?

L.C: The coordination on our part with the tank units was General Patton. The pilots had to know where the front lines were each day. On the fighters control tank they had a series panel a brilliant like panel over the back and when we called in our P47's I'd tell them I got a red panel today. We'd change every now and then cause the Germans tried to do the same thing we were doing and by doing that when they went back to their debriefing gave the intelligence officer the coordinates of where the front line were. Because with General Patton they were different everyday and it was all (inaudible) to the fuel range that the tanks had the 25 miles or so was all the tanks could go . In a day even with super rubber the fuel power was 500 horsepower radio engine just like an aircraft engine that's when they started moving that fast (inaudible) top notch requirement. They put in a pipeline under the channel for Sherbert and they had the Redbull Highway they put in all in 5 gallon cans and they tried to catch up to us every day and they couldn't move. We'd go right through the zigs and right to the fuel and circle like an old Indian game circling the field and wait for the Redbull highway trucks to catch up with us.

W.C: Lets step back a little bit let's get into D-Day let's see Stripped A1 were you there on D-Day?

L.C: Oh yeah we took 3 missions that day.

W.C: What were those missions?

L.C: One of them is tied into Mayor Jones of Saratoga here.

W.C: How?

L.C: He was with the 101st airborne.

W.C: Okay.

L.C: And he got wounded that day. A couple years back here they had a award for survivors I went to the Saratoga meeting presentation. Because I was one of the survivors and I met Paul Revere Jones and his wife was there. And we were talking about D-Day and in fact our first mission on D-Day was to go to Saint Mary Gleees where the 101st jumped in circle about 2000 feet for an hour or so and drop fire so those guys could get together on the ground and she was listening to that and shook my hand (winked) and said thanks. He got hit that day and evacuated back to England.

W.C: When you were first coming over the channel on your mission on D-Day what was your first impression of what you were seeing below?

L.C: Actually at the time we were flying probably about 10,000 feet or less the whole fighter group. The first impression I got was Halifax bombers coming through from the other direction right through our formation. They flew night missions and we were going over there getting there for daylight time. You couldn't see anything, you couldn't see a boat anything it wasn't quite daylight time.

W.C: Okay.

L.C: We had no navigation lights on we were flying in formation by the exhaust ring we had to open our flaps part way on the engine cooling systems and that is was hot constantly and that's how we flew the formation in. We'd hit clouds the lead of the group had a different heading that he gave to the people that were on his wing and they each picked up about 5 degrees of that and went up though the clouds like that and they got back together at the top

and went over. You couldn't see all the activity it was too dark.

W.C: Okay.

L.C: After we circled around Saint Mary Gleys we had a secondary mission we had 500 pounds on each one of our air craft's in the city of Carrington that was the communication center for the Germans with all of their people in Southern France not just southern France in Normandy and (inaudible) that was there main headquarters and after daylight came and we circled there our secondary mission was to dive bomb that communication center and we took it right out.

W.C: A lot of ground fire?

L.C: Where the Germans were trying to protect it that's as much ground fire you had at each place we went to was how much they venued that target you had whatever they could spare was put into that. There were railroad and ground houses they had to change and get spies to their troops they were saddle with the tunnies that they were able to get to the troops to be able to let them move or not same as we were.

W.C: Now when did you land in Normandy for the first time?

L.C: D-Day plus 6.

W.C: Now that was on strip day 1.

L.C: That was point day hun.

W.C: What was that like at D-Day plus 6?

L.C: Well if you look at one of those maps you'll see there is a little pen line like long (showing with his finger) that's what we had plus what the tanks were around us and the infantry. But you did the same thing as the infantry we were quartered in pup tents in an apple orchard and dug fox holes every night they kept us from the landing strip that's where the airplanes were. They spread them out and camouflaged them the best they could cause of the Germans would come through with JU 88's at night and bomb but they were

indiscriminate bombing there were no lights allowed and just hope they get the target when they do strip bombing. It's just aggravating nothing else the biggest problem we had was we had to remember the Germans had everything they could muster to put around their defense of that area and the black was rendered when the JUAE came over at night and the Navy was shooting at them from the boat, the army was shooting at them and we were shooting at them. Anybody that could shoot a gun took a peck at them and the Flack deck came down and the Flack birds would open up, they were like grenades pieces would come down and some were in chunks we finally solved that problem by taking.... what we had was this hard material which was actually wrapped paper and a gas tank from our P47's the first tank that were issued of this hard pressed board and it was lacquered up to the point it was impervious to gasoline and we'd take some of the old tanks and we'd cut them in half and put them over our sleeping bags in the morning there would be holes in the tanks but no holes in you.

W.C: That's interesting.

L.C: Interesting it was.

W.C: Now your reason for being there you were flying tactical missions?

L.C: Directly and support the tanks all the time.

W.C: So you were basically on the decks?

L.C: On the deck actually there was times I had to fly through tree tops because of the intensity of the Ack-Ack fire and you had to steal props at the time and it wasn't just the old wooden props. I don't say you intentionally hit the trees but you come back with pieces in your wings. But if you think about it the lower you go with an air plane the shorter time period you are in view of somebody that is looking at you, trying to shoot you down and if there are two anti aircraft units shooting at you. They would have at 300 or 400 miles an hour they would have only 1 or 2 seconds. But they converge fire over different areas and you had to fly through these or change directions and anticipate where they are shooting.

W.C: Awful lot of concentration at this level?

L.C: Concentrating plus luck and a good guardian angel, I would say I had a guardian Angel that worked a hell of a lot of over time.

W.C: The guys you flew with was a good group?

L.C: I don't think anybody would answer that question any different than I am. If you look at the awards and decorations that go with that group that's in that book over there. I have been through reunions going back since 1980. Just went to St. Louis a short time ago, in September and sat in one of the little hospitality rooms. One day when we were getting ready to come back from St. Louis and I was talking to one guy, I said you count the next 10 guys that come through that door and these were all pilots that I was talking to airmen were there too. There's no distinguishing between one or another it's a group and that's the way we were. I said you count the next 10 pilots that come through there and you'll find that there's been a thousand missions flown against them just 10.

W.C: So your relationship to the ground crew was fairly close.

L.C: I have been in contact with Sergeant Garry with my crew chief, the last time we went over to England. He just passed away a couple of years ago some then I have been in contact with his wife in Fenton Michigan. Sergeant Harry Hayes up in Black River NY state, he has written a summary day by day diary that you should have.

W.C: Now do you think you were closer to the ground crew then others like escort pilots?

L.C: How could I say. I'd know cause I was only with the 366. It's just a comparison from what you heard rather than the experience.

W.C: What did you do, you were living in tents.

L.C: There was no distinguishing, just an organization a military organization and they all had the same jobs the same mission just from different approaches. Each one had to get it from the communications men, the army men the mechanics and the pilots. It was just one bunch

trying to survive.

W.C: Was there any particular mission or missions that stands out for whatever reason?

L.C: You want to turn that off for a minute and I'll get you a summary that was in the Troy Record of one mission that was.

W.C: No you could just tell us.

L.C: That backs it up. A lot of times people give stories and they are just that stories. I don't have to give you stories I lived them. Yeah I'll show you a copy of the Troy Record at the time we had a mission in Belgium I tracked it down to the 91st bombing group. The organization I'm going to be talking about. The mission was an escort and a target of opportunity we had 1000 pound bombs under each wing we ran our own fuel range out 51 came in from East Anglia and they went on into Germany it was a rural valley at the time to do the bombings. After our fuel range was down to a point that was predetermined by the mission we had to go into our secondary mission finding targets of opportunity when we were fighting in Belgium. This is the time when the Germans were being pushed right back into Germany. A.W Morgan III he was my wing man it was the planes fault he was dead we were just past the low countries in Belgium and the canals systems had canal locks with 40 foot head of water. If you are familiar with a 40 foot head of water what it will do downstream just by chance I he says Bill there's our target. I say let take it out that lock below the lock was a whole bunch of barges and this was German equipment. Going down to the Dunkirk area I say let's take out those locks. That was going to knock them all back and that's what happened. I took out the lower lock and he took out the upper lock they had 2 locks and 2 gates on those locks so that you could raise and lower the barges and we both pulled off . Our instructions were to across the French coast we were just opposite Dover. The channel was only 20 or 25 miles wide where we were. So we started back gathering altitude. We had seen when we were going up all this stuff going down through the channel it went all the way down into the lower countries it must have

gone down 50 miles it was like taking out a dam, essentially that was what it was those barges were like jack straws. We had instructions to go across the coast heading back to England at 10,000 feet because that was cutting out a lot of the Ack-Ack from low altitude. So low and behold the bombers were on their way back some of them from the 91st bomber group. I knew because of the A on their tails a red background and an A. And my flight leader at the time was Teddy Cur and he says why don't you guys stay with that one that only has one fan going and he did a B17 with one out board engine going that was all an out board engine is bad ob the B17 because all your torch is pulling the leverages there. If you goose it to keep altitude your twisting yourself sideways and you can't hold it with a rudder. I know I've flown the B17. So Bill Morgan and I stayed with this one B17 that had the one engine and Teddy Curr and J. Philips they stayed with the other one. We finally got one to land along the French coast he bellied in right along the French coast he couldn't even make it across to England. Smoke coming out and everything. The one Bill Morgan and I stayed with about 15 minutes later Bill says I can't stay here anymore my blinker light is going on for my fuel it was the end of our mission. So I says well go on into Manstan I'll stay with these guys. So I did I stayed with them. He went into Manstan which was a big mat they had all these runways big mat where you could land and take off. Shot out the B17. B24's coming back from Germany they had ambulances and air rescues and everything else. It was just on the coast from London right on the coast. So I stayed with the B17 and he kept losing altitude and I kept following down and he was getting into the hazy on the channel. There was always hazy on the channel because the Arctic Ocean come down through the channel and the differences in the air temperatures that's where you get the London fog. They were throwing everything out even the belly turrets. I think it was the biggest mistakes never the less. They hit the water about half across the channel. I was just watching then go in and the hydraulic effects where the ball turrent was out behind the wing of the B17. The hydraulic affect of the water when he

hit the water just broke the airplane right in half. They were low on fuel at the time and I was the end of their mission so there was a little flotation left in their wing tanks so they could stay about 5 minutes. Two dingies came out of that there were only 5 men that got out of it 3 men in one and 2 in the other. I was circling them and I had flipped up my IFF button which is a signal to the English radar of who I was and who they were talking to so they could identify the blip on the tube on the catho tube with a bigger blip to show that was the airplane that they were talking to. I explained to them what was happening while talking to them the dingies started to drift apart. So I took my grease pencil and I wrote on a piece of map Tie your dingies together. I went down to about 50 feet over them and I had a rickets gauntlets at the time leather (put to his elbow) and they floated for a little while in water. I put the not in the glove I went down and I threw it out over this one dinky and they paddled over to it of course it was a fighter unit and you drop it out and there's only a short distance between where the glove hit and where they were. Anyway they tied the dingies together during this time period Air rescue out of Manstan sent out a Pepebull and I was talking to them. And I told them I was low on fuel and I say when you can see me circling a P47 that's where the guys are in the dingies. I say fire a green fire and I can take off and get to Manstan. That's about how it evolved but the little part of the story that is cute that I went into Manstan and I landed. They met my airplane and say your all shot up they wanted to know if it was battle damage I said No I just need fuel. So I sat for maybe an hour I asked the tower to call my home base tell them where I was so they wouldn't list me as missing in action. And they finally gave me permission to take off and get back to home base when things settled down between flights and bombers . I started down the runway and a little jeep come and the guy was flagging me to wait. I couldn't hear him over the engine and I stopped cause the way the P47 prop you had a 15 foot prop and I didn't turn the engine off. One guy came around to the back of the wing jumped up on it and gave me back my glove and a bottle of scotch. They had time that

hour wait that I had to get back. I have been trying ever since to find out what the names of those guys were but I haven't been able to do it. Except I did know it was the 91st bomb group. I got there book and it had all the planes that were shot down but it didn't give names of the crews. I went through quite a bit of trouble through the years but I never did succeed. That's that part of the story the next part of the story is I got back to my base at Truxton debriefing happened right after landing. There was a comment after I got talking to the intelligence officer I was a 2nd Lieutenant at that time he says ya know you guys aw to get back here sooner so I can get my reports in quicker. He wasn't worried about hearing what I did he just wanted to get his lousy report in. That was the comment of the day. Does that make up a little story for you?

W.C: That's a good story. So you did how many missions?

L.C: 99

W.C: 99, was that the last mission?

L.C: Geeze....

W.C: Your into Germany at that point?

L.C: No , Reams was my last mission and with us it was working the same thing we were doing on the beach heads. Going into a group position where the tanks had reported they were and looking for German activity ahead of them. I had my orders actually the end of October the 28th of October I had to go from the Reams into Belgium, Luxembourg the northern tip of Luxembourg which is just south of Bastogne. They say well you know how to coordinate this air activity show the 9th Armor Division how to do it. And I had my orders to go. But I had 2 weeks to go up there and show them how to do it.

W.C: So did you know this was going to be your last mission?

L.C: No I didn't know.

W.C: Maybe that was a good thing.

L.C: That wasn't the mission itself that was part of the ground activity. I was tied into the mission that we had was looking for German activity and dive bombing. Targets they had for us at that time the weather was breaking down in October and November a lot of people in tanks and infantry they speak to them saying well those fly boys they just fly when is nice ya know. But they didn't know that maybe 100 miles to the side we took out ammunition dumps where we could see the ground and 100 miles to that side we shot up a bunch of tanks.

W.C: You weren't just sitting there for weather to clear. So you went home 1940 what?

L.C: 44'.

W.C: So you missed the bulge for the most part?

L.C: By a week and half. The 16th of December was the battle of the Bulge and I came back on the 28th of November. I was in Northern Luxemburg a little town called Augoflagen (?). The time period is in my mind cause I met a daughter of one of our pilots that got shot down in Belgium. Just with the time I was with the 9th Armor Division. The 9th Armor Division took the Bridge at the Remagen that was the only bridge open. And Joe Early was the man that checked me out in P47 in Richmond Virginia. That's the day he got shot down his daughter was 2 years old then. When I met her at one of our reunions and I gave her a copy of the check out sheet her father had signed. It's the only signature in writing that she had of her father. She lives in Kansas City now, she wanted me last summer to go over to Belgium with her because of the little town of Govy, (?) they are putting up a plaque for him. It's one of those things for recognition the foreign countries have for the pilots and they knew it was his airplane just like they identify any fighter airplane they got the numbers and they got different parts numerically registered for each aircraft. I flew the same airplane through all missions.

W.C: Really, Did you have X numbers of missions you had to fly and that's why you were able to get out?

L.C: Early in the war the bomber people they would come back with 25 missions and then

fighters got in 25 missions in 3m's faster than the heavy's. So they went to 50 missions then went in over on the beach and they said well we still need you guys so we went up to 75 missions. Then there was a point system that was developed. I can see you know more than you are saying. They added up how much time you had at the front lines added up points for the decorated missions and this and that. This was about 1945.. it was 1945 because I was teaching Chinese pilots how to fly instruments at Marana Arizona at the time. The first Sergeant came in I was instructor there and he says " Sir when do you want to go home?" I says "Yesterday." He said" Well you want to go, you have more points than anybody on the base. You can have orders cut by Tuesday." So that's the time period when it struck home with me that I made it, ya know. I had a dodge club coupe and I had been riding Harley's just before I went into the service and I was acquainted with the Harley dealer down town, he said "You want to sell that car?" Cars were hard to come by at that time and the tires on it were getting so thin I couldn't drive it from there back to the east coast. I said "Yeah you got any motorcycles?" He says, " I got a motorcycle that was refused by the police department a over head 61." I said " How do are we swiping?" He says " I'll swap you even." I says "Your on." Because it had brand new tires. That's how my wife and I came back from there to the east coast.

W.C: You were married in the mean time?

L.C: I married a month before I went overseas. Thanksgiving Day 1943 I went overseas the next month.

W.C: When you came back she went out with you?

L.C: Yes and your are only talking about the first 1/3 of my life. I came out went into civilian life. I worked for Met Life Insurance company, I had a district office account dis-servicing claims. And we had 2 children, I had an adopted boy from Canada and I had a little daughter 6 months old when they called me back in as a reserve officer that's when I started going the

other direction.

W.C: Second career, we'll probably have to get that at another date.

L.C: You want to read about it all? I got it all over there. (pointing at the shelf)

W.C: I think we've just came to the end of the time, we could have gone on for another hour or so.

L.C: Oh Yeah.

Picture display

W.C: If you can hold this up and just give us an idea of what the various metals are.

L.C: This is a composite of what a lot of the service men do when then come back from overseas with decorations. This is just miniatures you have to wear on your mess dress. I just put them in there but it's not that many more than these.

I retired as a Lieutenant Colonial

Started in the Army Air corp.

Fighter pilot in the 9th Air Corp

Distinguished flying cross

NY state conspicuous service cross

Reserve metal

Air metal with 17 clusters on it which means.....

This one is from the United Nations which is the Korean war time period.

This is Korean defense

Air force commendation metal

This is Captain bars this is Australian. Just wore it in our collars.

This is my Craig my youngest son and I he is in the Marines he's with helicopters out of Norfolk. Just came back last month from Cosavol and he wanted a father and son picture taken so ...

I can actually still get into my uniform.

W.C: Hey that's a pretty neat trick.

L.C: You have to , to get buried in it.

W.C: That's one way of looking at it.

L.C: Ironic but true.

1. W.C: Well thank you very much.