

Martin Francis Bezon

Narrator

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New York Military Museum

Interviewer

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Port Henry, New York

Q: Today is the 27th of March, 2012. My name is Wayne Clark. I'm with the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York. Today we are in Port Henry, New York. Sir, for the record would you please state your full name and place and date of birth please.

A: Martin Francis Bezon born on November 8th, 1921 here in Port Henry. As a matter of fact the house that used to be at the foot of this hill is where I was born.

Q: Alright. I assume that you attended school here.

A: I attended the Champlain Academy Parochial School kindergarten through 8th grade and I went to the Port Henry High School and I graduated from there in June of 1941.

Q: Once you graduated did you go onto college or did you go to work?

A: No. I went to work for Republic Steel. I had hopes of stepping out in the world and getting a better job but the job was available. So, we started working at \$.55/hour there but come December 7th of the same year – '41 – the black cloud the time the Japs attacked us at Pearl Harbor came about and it changed my whole life around.

Q: How did you hear about the attack?

A: I was walking up to the village and somebody stopped and said the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The full force of that didn't hit me yet but I got home and got the news and all that and I realized that it won't be long before we'd get in the service too. As a matter of fact, it was the next day that Roosevelt declared war.

So I waited a little bit then I went to Albany right away to enlist and I joined the Marine Corps. They said ok they'll accept us – there were three of us there – but we have to get home and have my folks sign some papers.

Q: So you were still 17.

A: I was too young, for some reason. I came home and found my father sick. My mother was alone and my brother was in high school here in the 3rd year of high school and the doctor here says no way are you going to the service yet because the responsibility of the entire family is on your shoulders. I tried to talk to my mother and the doctor but they said no. So that fell through.

I waited and worked for Republic. Eventually, I just couldn't take no more and told my mother that I got to go in. On December, I went back to Albany and signed up because they dropped the requirements for the Air Force – Army Air Force Cadet Program. There was no Air Force at the time. It was part of the US Army Signal Corps. So, it was the US Army Air Force.

Q: So you signed up...

A: I signed up with them when they dropped the requirements to high school graduate.

Q: And this is still '41?

A: This was '41. No, this would be in '42

Q: '42. OK

A: So, they gave me the physical and the complete tests like they did everybody - physical and what not. I was told. I went down to join the Air Force and they asked me "Are you anxious to get back in?" I said "Yeah, I'll come back tomorrow. I just need to go home for a day". They said "Alright, I'll give you some advice" – this is a Sergeant – he says "We'll accept you as an Air Force reservist and as soon as the Cadet class opens up, they'll put a call out and they'll go into the reservists first". He says "If you really want to get in quick, I'd advise you to get in on the next draft that you can and join the Army Service and get in the Army. When the call comes out for Cadets, they will first take the ones who are on active duty first." So I said, "Oh gee, I'll do that"

So as we left Plattsburgh - I mean Albany -we didn't even come home. We stopped in Ticonderoga because that's where the Draft Board main office was. We stopped up and went into Mr. McLaughlin's office and he looked up and said "What can I do for you boys?" I said "We'd like to get into the next draft sir." He said, "Great, I need three more men." He stamped three forms and said "Be back here tomorrow morning." So, the next day, I went back to Albany and he said to tell them that you were a reservist in the Air Force and that you wanted to join the Air Force. So, we got examined. They lined us up on the street and raised our right hand to take the oath of allegiance that we'd be in the

Army. Then I didn't even have a chance to ask to be assigned to the Air Force. They announced that anybody who wants to join the Air Force, to take one step forward.

So, I stepped forward with – who later became my brother in law – Zig but eventually he dropped. He got a little leery of being up in the air so far. So, I went in and went to Camp Upton at Long Island. I was there for about three days and shipped out of there to Camp Croft south of Spartanburg, South Carolina. I kind of joined an empty training. I went through six weeks of basic and seven weeks of advanced. They tried to keep me in as a Sharp Shooter but I said 'No, I'm waiting for the Air Force". I had to wait a couple of weeks and then the call came out. I was happy that we were picked out of I think eight of us. Before we left, three of us – three of the boys -didn't pass. So three of us did go down to Camp Croft – From Camp Croft to Nashville, Tennessee I mean. We had one week of written and one week of physicals. I was accepted into the Cadet program then. There were just two of us left out of the six.

Even though I qualified for pilot and navigator, I was asked to be a bombardier. They needed bombardiers badly. They were building a huge armada of bombers and they said they were getting ready to just bomb Germany off the face of the map. So, I said it makes no difference as long as I fly. They promised when I put in the tour and come back that they would put me into pilot's school and you go through as an officer (unclear).

So, we were accepted and wound up training and went to Santa Ann, California for preflight. They had our curtains closed because they said we were too valuable of a target. We were the cream of the crop that they could pick. We weren't allowed to raise the curtains on the train until we got way out around Arizona out in the desert. We headed north. Everybody was guessing where we were going. We were headed east rather west. We were going to Chicago or something. Nope. Then we headed south and then headed back east. We crisscrossed the country that way until we got out to Arizona. Then the officer in charge comes through and raised curtains now and said "You guys are going to Santa Anna, California for preflight." I remember that there was quite a "whoop". They all liked that idea. So we went to training up there.

Q: How long was your preflight training?

A: Let me see. I think it was about six weeks. I remember a sergeant coming in the barracks one time and he said "How many people have never flown in a plane?" I thought gee I was going to be embarrassed that I would be the only one standing but there was quite a few of them who stood up. So, we all got a ride in a plane to get the feel of it.

On weekends, we went to Hollywood, Los Angeles, and Long Beach. It used to be that every Friday night there used to be about fifty buses outside the gate to take the cadets wherever they wanted to go.

When we finished preflight, we were sent to Kingman, Arizona for air to air gunnery. That was a seven week course out in the desert. You had to shoot the 50 caliber machine guns way up in the air. You can imagine how far those projectiles would go.

We had different types of training. We had a huge screen coming over for a machine gun that fired only BBs. There was thousands of BBs fall back and they would just put them back in. Then you would have planes going across and you would try to hit them. Then we were on the shotgun range every day. We had to fire fifty rounds of 12 Gauge shotgun at clay pigeons going through the air -some going one way and some the other. That, I loved too.

The final week, we had to fire from the back side of a pickup truck. The guy shooting was tied down so he wouldn't fall and you had two men with you. So, as you went around the track at, I believe, 30 miles per hour, they had underground cement places that they made with the front secure so you couldn't get hurt or anything. It had a small slit in it and you looked through the slit. When you see a truck coming and hit a certain spot, you just lean back and pull the thing there which throws it out. You had to work that for the other crews that came on. It was hard to hit with you moving with the target coming at you and going away from you- going to the right and going to the left, going straight up. If you got six or seven hits you were lucky.

But the last day, I don't know what happened. I couldn't miss – just couldn't miss. I know a lot of the boys from the city they don't know how to fire a weapon so they used to keep it loose. When that backfired, it would hit them. The rest of us, it would just push us. So they were black and blue all over the arm and the chest. This one guy (unclear), he couldn't fire any more his shoulder hurt so bad. Another one (unclear) he was an ex-boxer in civilian life said "I'm going to shoot fifty for myself and you shoot your fifty then I'll shoot Creevy's (name spelled phonetically) fifty and then I'll shoot my fifty again" So, he was going to shoot a hundred rounds. You're not supposed to do that. So, I fired mine. I couldn't believe it. I think I got 21 out of 25. He shot twice for Creevy and somebody out with a megaphone in the middle of the field hollered, "Truck number (so and so) put the shotgun up to your shoulder" So, he asked me to fire the rest of Creevy's. I fired 21 shots for Creevy and I got I think it was 18. I said, " Don't tell them 18 because our truck can't be that hot. He hollered at the end of two runs you made two

runs (unclear) Creevy and Bezon and give the number of hits. Danny Dunder said "Will you fire my fifty". I ran and shot his fifty and then went back and shot my fifty and then shot the fifty (unclear). I got a lot of shooting that day. My scores were all high – very high. We got through with gunnery, passed and got the certificate as "Air to Air" gunners and then we were given a seven day furlough.

We just didn't have enough to go from Kingman to New York City and come up to here (Port Henry). You'd never make it. So we went to Los Angeles and Hollywood and spent a week there. Then we headed down to Albuquerque, New Mexico. We got our advanced bombardiering course. There we learned all about the Norden Bomb Sight. We learned everything about in and out and made our practice runs. We flew AT-8's on a bombing run. I had a close call there. After we got through and everything was good, we had time on our hands. The pilots liked to fly up through the canyons. One time we saw one plane coming out while we're going in. They had enough room but in the planes you don't know. So, as they were ready to pass they both flipped over and flew by. It turned out good – no problem.

We did have one man killed. One of our cadets was killed on training. A couple had to bail out. (unclear) everything went good. We enjoyed our weekends in Albuquerque. Sunday we had to come back because every Sunday they had a huge parade and everybody on that base had to be in that parade even the KP's and no matter who it is.

If you were on toward the tail end of the parade, you had to stand out there for a few hours just standing there for your turn to go. It took that long – at least two hours before the last few would get to march. Whoever was picked the best would get an afternoon off to go to town at twelve noon next Friday instead of five o'clock. Finally, we got one day (unclear). We felt we were going to make it. We came out there and everything was good. Then they gave "eyes right" and we did but there was a little Italian guy that had a little bit too much to drink the night before he snapped his hat flew off and he stooped to pick it up. They gave us a good mark but it kicked us out of first place. But, we graduated – graduated as a 2nd Lieutenant. This was January of '44.

We were sent to a place called Boca Raton – Drew Field in Florida. It was on the east coast of Florida near Tampa. As a matter of fact, we used to live on the spring training grounds for the Cincinnati Reds. It was on second base that we had our tent pitched.

We flew missions. A bunch of bombardiers came in, a bunch of navigators and a bunch of pilots and they formed crews and that was going to be our crew that we were going to go to combat with.

So, I ended up with Lt. Tuttle and Lt. Burkes as pilot and co-pilot. We had a good crew. Then there is Zelienski and Donavan. We were really like a family and blended together good.

One day I was on a mission – the first mission I had to go on. They gave you missions. You had to complete so many different types of mission. You had to drop, I think it was, 200 bombs. The first mission we didn't have a navigator and the first mission I looked up on the board and we had a navigational mission that night. We had to take off at midnight. I went back to the pilot and said, "Bob, I think we got a navigator" He said, "How come" and I said " Because we're going on a navigation mission". We went up to the instructor there and said "Who's our navigator?" and he said, "What crew?" I said, "92". "You don't have a navigator", he said. I said, "But we've got a navigation mission." He said, "Who's your bombardier?" I said "I am". He said, "You'd better know what navigation to learn because you're the navigator." I said "Oh boy"

So, we had to fly from Tampa over to just below Miami I'd say 20 miles. You could see it all lit up and then out in the ocean out there 50 miles or so the land disappeared. Then I had to head north in pitch darkness to a point where you turned a little bit north northeast and headed down toward the Alabama area – the swamplands down through there in Florida and then we had to go out into the Gulf of Mexico. From there we turned into our home base.

Where we were stationed there was St. Petersburg not too far away and they had a long bridge in St. Petersburg. I think it was the Gandy Bridge and way off in the distance as dawn was breaking, you could see that string of lights. So Tuttle says, "Marty, what's those lights ahead?" I said, "If that's not Gandy Bridge, we're lost." So we landed right on course and I felt pretty good since it was the first mission and we did that good on it.

But we they trouble – it was B-17's that we're flying . We were dropping bombs. No matter what I did, I followed all procedures and did everything we were supposed to do to make the bomb run but the bombs won't leave. I think it was about three missions we wasted where we never could get the bombs off.

I remember the co-pilot was getting a little grumpy about it. They were short of instructors and we were one of the few crews that never had an instructor. They take you out of an AT-6 and put them into a B-17 was quite a difference. They finally gave us this one plane and we went up night bombing. We had to fly to Orlando, Florida and the targets were all around Orlando. My job was that as soon as we reached the area to call the station. They taught me how to do that and say "Bezon, ask permission for bomb the target". You couldn't go on a target until they gave you permission and told you

which one. They would tell you what elevation so you wouldn't be on the same elevation as some other plane. The planes going around the target would be pretty close to each other at times.

I called and called and called and couldn't get anything. So I called up the pilot and said, "I don't know if they are reaching me and I don't realize . I don't know if they're reaching me and answering." We can't get them but said that I can't make contact. The pilot said "I'll try". He tried. He couldn't do it. The co-pilot did.

In the meantime, I'm over my bombsight and one side look up see the lights down below over here or over here. So you knew the plane was twisting around. You don't realize it because they are not sharp turns. There was one time the pilot happened to go down to see if there was a broken wire or something. I didn't realize that and looked ahead of me a few miles I see lights and when I looked up and I said to myself, " Holy Jesus, where the heck am I? What position?" I see the lights below me and that's a plane coming. He kept coming head on and as all pilots know standard operational procedure they follow – SOP – that no matter how distant even 10 miles away you need to make a left diving turn both of you so you go away from each other.

I'm waiting for him to make the turn and I look and he's getting a lot closer. I'm looking and thought I can't make it now so I grabbed my parachute and put it on which was foolish because if we were going to hit then we're not going to have time to parachute. In the meantime, somebody woke up and they did the dive but didn't flare off to the left. So him and I are coming right together and it was close. At the last minute the pilot was underneath and he's wondering why he was bumping his head as he stood up and he saw the plane he revved it right up. Whoever was in the other plane did the same thing. I could see that plane. It was closer than that wall (points to wall in room). We went belly to belly. So it shook us up because in just a matter of another 30 seconds we would have been killed.

So we landed and the instructor came out and asked "What's the trouble?" and we told him. He said, "Get in the jeep. Get another plane. You're getting back up." He said "Don't land for six hours".

We flew up with another load and this time the plane worked good. I dropped the bombs quick – twenty of them – twenty runs. So I asked the pilot where we could go to get loaded up for twenty more. Like I said, we were two missions behind already. We landed again and they loaded up quick and I dropped 20, 40 bomb loads that day and from then on had no problem.

We graduated from there and we're ready to go overseas. We went up to Langley Field and they took me off the crew. I didn't know why but they said "You'd be notified." But then I noticed all of my buddies that were bombardiers from several of the crews. So there was about ten of us that knew each other and we were all taken off and the rest of our crews left.

We were taken into a church and they used that for a hall. All of the officers had to be there. They said that you're here for a four week course in radar and you are going to have two weeks' vacation – furlough. So it was a four week course so I figured it was six weeks but it wasn't so. They said "I am going to name all of the names of the guys first who are going to start school and then I'll name the guys who are going to go on furlough for two weeks." I wasn't in either group. So after they got through, I walked up to front of the church and asked the sergeant "Serge, you didn't read my name". He said "What is your name." So, I told him "Lt. Bezon." He said "You're going overseas right away." I was happy as heck. He put me with my buddy Broadway. He and I went through all the way. I told Broadway, "They didn't call my name." He said, "They didn't call my name either". All of the crews (unclear). He said "They are out on Langley field waiting for you."

So, we left. We didn't get in the training program there. We got to Langley Field. We were going to fly the B-17 over in a few days. They gave us a brand new B-17. We went out that night and partied up pretty good. We had to take the plane for a thousand mile hike – a hop. They named three places – one west, one down towards the south, the other up here near Burlington, Vermont going right by here. So, I asked the pilot if nobody has any choice, I'd like to make one. He asked everybody (unclear). I said "How about going to Burlington?" (unclear) I called up my mother on the phone and told her that I would be flying over Port Henry and we had permission to drop a little bit low. We could get down to ten thousand feet. I said that I would be in a little window in the middle of the plane, the waist, and I'll be waving a white flag.

I made a parachute out of some silk or something I found there and put a little gift for my mother in there and figured the wind. I knew how to drop it. So I said, "I'll drop something from the airplane with a little white chute on it." We were coming up and we flew across the bridge and made a few circles. We dropped down to about two thousand feet with the B-17 over the village of Port Henry at two thousand feet. I see my mother. She is shading her eyes looking up waving and I'm waving back. Then I threw the thing out and I see that she got it. That was the last I would see of my mother for quite a while.

Then we flew around the bridge once more and I tried to get the pilot to go underneath the bridge. He said 'Geez Marty, we won't fit (unclear)." We thought second thoughts and (decided) we better not so we went to Burlington and went back. Everything was good. Everybody checked his position to make sure that nothing was wrong with it. That was the reason for the test op.

The next day we took off into Bangor, Maine. We still didn't have a navigator. I was doing the navigation with my radar set. We got to Bangor, Maine and stayed overnight and loaded up our plane with a bomb bay full of mail for the GI's overseas.

We took off the next day to Labrador – Goose Bay, Labrador. We had a near miss up there. They gave us a navigator. He'd never flown with us before. My orders were not to use the radar and to help the navigator. We started and got up to elevation and all of that and headed down across the ocean (unclear) go across the ocean quite a long time before landfall is seen. I went up and asked the navigator. I won't mention his name. I said, "What do you want me to help you do here?" (He said), "Never mind, you're a bombardier. I don't need no help." I said, "OK, I'll be down in the radio room." I waited there but I went back up and said, "Are you sure you don't need help?" (He said), "Nope, I don't need help." After I got thinking about it, I thought we'd been flying quite a while. We should have seen land.

So, I told the pilot, Bill Tuttle, "Bill", I said, "We should be seeing land somewhere. We've got quite a ways to go from land yet." He said, "Lower the radar set." I had to get the enlisted men to lower my scope. In the bottom of the ship, the scope hangs way down. Inside of it, it's a scope enclosed in this cylinder that they lower down. I warmed up my radar set. It takes five minutes for the first switch to go on. You wait five more minutes before you throw the primary in.

I get a picture of it after that. The pictures are like this here (points to documents that he has at his desk). If you see land you see all of that light and water you see black. When I send the pulse out, if its water at 90 degrees none of that comes back. That's why that's always black. Over cities and ground and terrain and all of that a lot of them come back to you. The rest go up. So, you could see well lit areas. When you hit a city, about 75% or better of them come back at you. So, the city's much brighter. It's a great navigation tool. We never got lost.

He said to lower that down. So, they lowered it down. By the time they got it down there about 15 minutes later I got it set it. You have graduations on your picture and you can make these (refers to documents) 10 miles, 50 miles, 100, 150,200.

I put it on 50 miles each and looked out 200 miles. There was nothing in sight but water. I finally went up to 500 –nothing –and then 600. All I see is a boat out there 550 feet away from us, miles I mean. We were over 600 miles away from shore and we'd been flying too long. I went back top to the pilot and said, "Something wrong. I can't get landfall." He said, "Go up there and I'll call him on the speaker to let you look at what he's doing."

So, I went up. In the meantime, the Air Force got a new type of compass. Flying over here, there is so much ore in these mines up here in the hills that the compass is off fifteen, sixteen degrees. If you don't realize it, you get lost flying around here. All over the world, there's these little deviations plus or minus. Up here it was high. I think it's about seventeen degrees off. The new compass that we got had a little furl nut on the side and a little window on the inside of the thing and you could preset the variation. Then you read true heading.

If you didn't use that, on your log the first thing is our heading – observed heading. The next column down is deviation and it was subtracted or added on to it. That's your true heading. If you don't use that, you could see how far off you're going.

I looked down and saw that he's got the Fluxgate Compass. Good. I said, "Let me see your log." I looked over there and said, "What are you doing?" He said, "What's the matter?" I said, "What's the first column". He said "Heading". I said, "What's the second column". He said, "My deviation". I said, "What did you put it in the compass for? You've got it both places. You're going off 16 degrees since we left Goose Bay."

We were way off course. I said, "I'm going to tell the pilot to take it 180, 245 something like that, 270. I am going to tell the pilot take it 270, give another heading." So, I went up and told the pilot to take it 270 and start praying.

We made it. The land came in and we came right on target. We landed and the engines all "conked" out after we stopped. We couldn't even taxi to our revetment. As a matter of fact, not even a minute before landing we would have all died. They got rid of him pretty quick when we got overseas.

Q: Whereabouts did you land?

A: We were heading from Goose Bay to Reykjavik, up in Iceland. We landed there and had something wrong with one of the engines so we stayed there two or three days.

From there we took off and headed down to England and landed there and they took me off the crew again. I was sent to a one month English Radar school to learn their

type of navigation and everything. Then we were assigned to the 466th Bomb Crew. My buddy Broadway and I are still together.

Q: And that was part of the 8th Air Force?

A: It was the 8th Air Force then. So I went up to headquarters the next day after I got settled down and ask if could get on a plane and start flying my missions as quick as possible. I said that I'm a qualified navigator and qualified bombardier. I'm a qualified air to air gunner and I said that I would sure like to start 'em up. They said that they can't do it and that there was too much money spent on you guys. There was a lot expense to train one of us. He said, "Are you anxious to start your missions"? I said, 'Yes, I am". He said, "The next group to us the 467th has a crew which is waiting for a radar man. Do you want to transfer?" I said, "Yes, I do".

That was the first time Broadway and I split. I went over to the 467th and got on with Bill Chapman and his crew and flew my missions with Chapman. We flew together until our 18th, 19th mission when we got shot down.

Q: Was your plane named at all?

A: No, we were in theWhat they do is get these planes away for radar men for planes that have proved themselves a little superior to the rest of them. They pick them out for lead planes first or second planes. They both are equipped identically alike so if this one gets knocked out, this can take its place.

So, they were all lead crews and all lead crews were in the 791st Squadron of the 467th Bomb Group. And that's how I went into the 467th Bomb Group as a lead -elite -plane.

So, I met the crew and all of that and started our missions. (unclear) not very happy with the navigation. With radar, you couldn't navigate. You would see little spaces sometimes on the map with a small channel to go between two cities. On the way to a target, you pass pretty close to the different cities or town. They've got flak guns around a lot of them. They know the distance that the flak could reach us at the elevation we're flying. You can only be so far. If you get closer to them, they are going to reach you. If you head right between those areas, marked with the red cities, you were ok.

There was one that was very narrow but they always like to go through there because I hit it dead center.

Q: Did you normally take flak on most of your missions?

A: Most of them you'd get flak – some more intense than others. A couple of times, we had fighters come in. The Colonel, the CO of our group, Colonel Shower, he was a sticker on tight formations. The tighter the formation is, the less the fighters bothered you because you've too much concentrated fire power. So, we weren't attacked as bad as the other groups flying with us. Once and awhile they'd come over but didn't bother us too much.

But outside that, like Dresden and Nuremberg and places like that they had a lot of flak.

Q: Now what were you bombing primarily? Were they factories?

A: We had different phases. First of all, it might be oil then we would only have oil as our targets. Next would be industrial and we would bomb only industrial. So, I think there were three different phases that we went through. Later on it was some pinpoint bombing like bombing a bridge going over some waterway. They kept sending squadrons until they finally blew it up.

The English wanted us to bomb to kill people because their agreement with German and an Allied agreement that we would not bomb the city to kill people. It could only be targets that meant something for the war. Then the Germans turned around got the "buzz" bomb and started sending them over. All it was a great big bomb with wings and it had a motor on it.

I remember the first day that I got to England, I was standing in line going in the movie house, I heard the "bzzzz". Everybody said "buzz" bomb was coming. I didn't realize that we were the closest air base to where they launched the "buzz" bomb. Every "buzz" bomb went over our base and if it kept going and don't worry about it. But if it sputters and stops sometimes they keep flowing through the air. Other times they would turn and come right down. When it stops, head for the bomb shelter.

This one is going and it started sputtering and stopped and everybody ran in. Somebody looked up and said we're was ok. Then, we watched it. It got down behind the hill and all the sudden you could see the concussion coming before you felt it.

One night, they were sending a lot of "buzz" bombs and it rained and it was muddy outside. They had the planks to walk on. Somebody said "buzz bombs" and we all ran out in out pajamas and jumped into the shelter and went back, We weren't then sleeping another fifty or sixty minutes and then another "buzz" bomb and another one. By the time of the fourth one, I said the heck with it and I slept the rest of the night. They kept coming up every night (unclear)

Q: What kind of quarters did you have? Were you in Quonset huts or tents?

A: Quonset huts. Very cold huts. Just a little metal inside and outside covering it.

Q: When did you arrive in England?

A: That must have been about July of '44. The hut had one stove in the middle. They would give you a quota of just so much coal. You would burn it up in a day or day and a half and then you were going to be cold unless you could find wood and where were you going to find wood in England? So, you had to kind of conserve it. Toward the evening just before you go to bed, you just to warm it up a bit. It was cold in the barracks.

Somebody came up with the idea of taking the oil that they change the oil on the engines. They had barrels and barrels of it available. It took a certain amount of oil and a certain mixture of high octane gasoline. He stirs it all up and put a can up near the top of the roof and piped it into the stove. Oh, that was good. We rigged one up and we had a red hot stove all day twenty four hours a day. Somebody put too much octane in one of them and it blew up then they made us take them down.

Q: How were you treated by the English people?

A: Oh not bad but you'd get in a bar, of course, and drinking and get into an argument. (unclear) There's only one trouble with you Yankees. I said, "What's that?" He said, "You're oversexed, overpaid and over here." No, I never got in trouble with the English.

After the war was over, everybody went celebrating but they restricted us to the base and wouldn't let us go out. But we all had 45 revolvers and we went around shooting the smoke stacks on the buildings. Then they thought they'd better let us go in or we'd kill ourselves.

(unclear) down in Norwich. We were all stationed just outside of Norwich—all of the bases of the 2nd Division. I used to meet my buddy there every time I went into town we went to the same pub (unclear). I don't think I ever got into trouble with anybody. I had an argument with one of the guys in the barracks but we settled it all up. That's the way we lived.

Q: What about unit losses? What about your unit losses?

A: I have a book here someplace and if I find it, I'll mail it to you. It tells all about the history of the 467th. Maybe you could (unclear). It's around here somewhere. I'll have

her send it to you. It tells you losses and all of that, people killed, how many wounded, how many missions they flew. It gives you all of the detail in there.

Q: What was the worst mission that you were on? Obviously, it was the mission that you were shot down.

A: Dresden was a bad one too.

Q: Do you want to tell us about Dresden?

A: Well, what happened there was we got hit bad. It was one of our early things. I loved the crew that I was on. They were great – Chapman, Wallace (unclear) and our other Navigator. We have two navigators on the lead ship – a DR Navigator (Dead Reckoning) and myself a Radar.

One time we lead three hundred planes and we're in the front and they've got to go where you go so you have two. We're on the flight deck. The flight deck was here. The pilot was here (points to table) and the DR was sitting right next to him back to back and I was here just cut in behind the co-pilot.

So, we had signals and said ok five minute take a fix. I would check my watch quickly and I would get a fix and he would get a fix with the radio and I'd get a fix with the radar and compare them and then give me the ok. He never gave me a sign that we were off.

Q: Now as the Radar Man were you known as the "Mickey Man"?

A: Mickey Operator, H2X operator. Pathfinder.

Q: Where did they get that name "Mickey" from? I've heard it before.

A: I don't know. They usually called us a "Mickey" or "Radar operator" or "H2X operator". (unclear) He'd call us "pathfinders". I remember when we were first taking radar, they told us that if we ever say the word "radar" in town, we would face a court martial. It was very secretive.

You had one classroom here where you had to go through a MP. If you want to go from this classroom to the other one, there would be an MP just across the hall. You would have another MP checking you very close.

Dresden had heavy heavy flak and we got hit but not bad and we made it through. Someplace here, she has a picture of it. It might be in one of these books (thumbs through books on the table). We got a hit the size a little bit bigger than a softball. I

would say about a six inch piece of shrapnel came up (through) the roof of our plane about the middle of the plane. The fuselage was open. Thank God nobody was hurt.

Coming back, we hit into a front. We were advised to look out for that front but where they told us it was going to be was way off. I checked with my radar continuously to take a fix on it. I realized something was wrong so I (unclear) and found that we were being blown way off course. So, I went up to the RP and got on to the rally point where we had to meet and head home. I called up the pilot and said something's wrong we were about 15 miles off course. I said we got a new heading we should take. We hit the front that we were briefed on but it was a lot earlier before. We were flying deputy lead and there was a wing lead. Everybody wants credit for the big lead because you get promotions that way- to wing, to division. He evidently called up and nothing was said. We had a pilot and co-pilot and a command pilot. The command pilot is there to make sure that everything is running. He is in charge of everything.

I never got a response but called up again "Mickey to Pilot". He said, "Got ahead Marty". I said, "We're twenty five miles off course. Something better be done." I marked the heading that we were going and we we're heading right for the Ruhr Valley and that's all industrial place. There must be a thousand anti-aircraft guns around there. It was heavily, heavily, heavily defended. They make their steel and everything else down there.

He didn't say anything and I called up again, "Mickey to pilot. Chappy, we've got to get something done. We are thirty five miles off course and we're heading to an area that we will be getting flak soon and we are going to lose several planes." There was going to be forty or fifty men killed guaranteed. He said, " I checked everybody and everybody said we were on course except one guy said we're fifteen" All the other planes said were on course and we weren't. We were thirty five miles and I was right.

We got down there and I said when we were going to be getting flak soon and the guys in the waist said that it's already popping out ahead of you waiting for us. They'd have shot many of our planes down. So, the front plane finally said that since you know where we are, take over.

So, we swung up to the lead and said. "Take it up north quick and get the heck out of there." I headed north and hot our old track that was on the map to follow home and went across the French Coast across the channel. You could see the white Cliffs of Dover coming up and you know you're home. I finally relaxed a little bit.

We had a meeting and they had all of the officers from the base. I said geez that they are probably going to pat me on the back for doing a good job. I got up there and they

said that they were going to crucify me take my wings off me and wouldn't let me fly. They said, "What's a matter, you sleeping like that to get so far off course?"

I had a good crew and I didn't want to lose them. I didn't want to tell them that I gave the course several times to the pilot. I didn't want to tell them that all of the other planes that were on course. I didn't want to tell them that when I gave the first course correction on the bomb run when we first made a big "boo boo". I gave an eight degree correction when we went from the rally point heading for the target. That eight degrees would have been ok. It's like you turn here and the targets up here (points to piece of paper). I come over here I came to eight degrees. I was supposed to be heading here and the bombardier calls up and says "I don't want that. I'm making a visual bomb run." But I'm going to kill the course for him. Two minutes later, I gave him a ten degree and he still wouldn't take it and the bombardier says, "No it's a visual bomb run." So, I wouldn't make the bomb run. He's going to make it visually. I said. "I can kill the course for you." He said, "Never mind."

So what happened was we kept going way off course instead of coming up. Instead of doing about I'll say about a 45 degree course to the target we got off so far that when the bombardier found out where he was he had to almost turn it north.

So what happened these other planes came up, they went underneath us. So I looked out the bomb bays to see the bombs drop. I looked down when they were ready to drop and saw a plane right below us. So, I hollered, "Don't drop the bombs." It was too late. They went. One bomb went between the wing and the fuselage and almost killed ten men. I was blamed for it (unclear)

Q: Did they have to bail out or did they make it?

A: Oh no. The plane didn't get hit but it was close. It was the pilot's fault. It was the command pilot's fault really. He should have told Chapman to put that. By the time the bombardier gets a target in sight, it's got to be about a seventy degree angle.

Hell, if we were forty miles away from there yet. I could kill that course dead. You don't have to correct it more than one or two degrees with the bomb sight after. They didn't do it. So, I didn't want to say what I did but I thought one of them would stand up and speak for me – the pilot, the command pilot or any member of the crew. They heard it all. The bombardier, I suppose they were scared that I might say something I didn't want to say something. So, they said one more move like that and you're off your crew.

So, I went back to barracks. I felt bad, real bad, because I could have blown the whistle but I didn't want to get off that crew. I took my shoes off and went to bed with my

clothes on. I covered my head and cried like a baby. Then I heard my pilot and Sidney, Captain Sidney came in. Sidney was in charge of all radar men. He said, "Chappy, I don't know what happened up there but I know this man wasn't to blame." He said, "He's the only one that comes to this shack after every mission to find out if he could have done better with the radar. If anything's wrong, he wants to find out. He's the only guy to ever come up there. He's very interested in his bombing. He's good. I know it's not his fault. I know it" Chappy said, "No, it wasn't. It was my fault as well as the bombardier"

I woke up in the morning and everything's ok. I went up to see the commanding officer and asked him if I could have a meeting with our crew. I would like to talk to the crew about my position and what I am there for. He gave me permission.

I went up there and we had the meeting there. I told the guys what I could do. I could navigate when all other systems are blacked out by the Germans. They can in no way block off my signals. I said I've got a perfect navigational equipment. I said that I'd never been lost and don't intend to be lost. I went up to (unclear) and said " If you ever countermand a correction that I give you, I am going to punch you in the head and there'd be another hole in this plane. Don't you ever do that. It's your fault." He said, "I know."

Everything was forgotten. We had a great crew. Great missions. After that, when I gave corrections then, they took them.

Q: Do you want to tell us about that last mission?

A: OK. December 18th, I think it was. Yes, December 18th on a Sunday. It seems like Sunday was our bad mission. And they gave fresh eggs, so I knew it was going to be a rough one. If it wasn't going to be a rough mission, you usually get powdered eggs for breakfast.

We got up the next day. We went outside. There was a Catholic priest there. He's there at every briefing – not at the briefing but outside waiting. We would come out and a lot of us Catholic boys would kneel down and some received Communion. He gave us the blessing then they jumped in the wagon and went out to their plane.

A couple of guys kind of almost knew it was going to be a bad one by the look on their faces. Going over was good. Navigation was super. We were leading the squadron at that time. We were coming up on the bomb run. We had a little plane attacked us for a while and flak started greeting us and up ahead we could see them. The sky was black with flak. You can't swerve. You've got to go right through it.

We got into it. I had my bomb bay doors open. I was ready to turn it over and watch the bombs go off. You get that explosion. I thought it was inside the plane it was so loud. Directly underneath the plane we got a direct hit. We had fires in the bomb bays. Up where the pilot was, there was some kind of white metal, hot, that landed. The co-pilot stamped on it. It burned right down through the ship and (unclear) a hole.

The pilot and co-pilot have bucket seats made out of heavy steel. The rest of us got safety vests that sometimes stop the bullets, flak I mean. There was fire where we are (unclear) around my legs. I turned around and grabbed the... he went into a dive, of course, it was hard to maneuver. It forced you down on the ground. I finally got the thing and stood up and started to put the fire out.

Q: The fire extinguisher?

A: Yeah. I got pretty well out and looked around and I don't see my navigator help me. I noticed he was laying down and his eyes very grey. His brains (were) hanging down the side of his head. All I could think of is that they looked like frog eggs. I went over and picked up the brains with my hands. They were warm yet. I didn't know what to do. Hell, he's dead. So, I spread some sulfa on it and went up to the pilot. (Unclear) was in the bomb bay just below me where I could tap him on the head. I looked down. He was gone. I could see a piece of his clothes and stuff on the side of the plane. He was shot off when it hit. He just dropped out of the plane without a parachute.

The nose was burning pretty good. They got that fire out with the wind was coming through nose put that fire out. They waist wasn't hurt too much. Nobody got hurt back there. (END of DISC #1).

Q: OK, you mentioned the navigator was dead and the fellow was blown out the side of the aircraft.

A: The rest of us. The pilot had - the backside - he was worked on by the Russians. The steel seat he was sitting in was hit so hard (unclear) into his backside but nothing serious at all.

We were blown into a dive and to this day, I don't know how we could have managed to pull out of a dive because #1 and #2 engines were shot out altogether. #3 was only pulling half power and was running at around twenty. #4 was the only good engine and he was pushing it to the limit about sixty two, sixty three. If he had to have flown another hour, it would have blown up - that engine.

We're carrying a full load of bombs in. Because it tangled up the releases and everything so bad, they asked me to go back in the waist in the bomb bays. I took my parachute off. It was only a six inch walk. There was nothing underneath me but a six inch catwalk. I had a big screwdriver and I put all the weight that I dared put on it to try to open the releases to drop the bombs.

I unhooked the arming wire. The arming wire goes from the nose of the plane up to the little place you hook on and down to the point where it's going to – what do you call it – the arming pin. When the bombs hit with the nose, the arming pin drives it in and makes the explosion. I unhooked that wire so they wouldn't go off when they dropped. I fixed the ignition and all of that so they wouldn't explode and shut a cotter key in it so there's no way they could slip forward. So when the plane did land, none of the bombs exploded.

They were able to find the navigator. He was burned up but they found he was all in one piece.

Q: So, the rest of you bailed out?

A: We went into a dive but somehow with an engine and a half, I don't know how they did it. There must have been terrific pressure. They pulled it out of the dive. We were over the middle of Berlin. I remember when we pulled out of the dive, I put my parachute on. Of course, the navigator, his parachute was ok. Mine had a hole in it. It was just burnt a little bit but I knew I couldn't use it. So, I took his and remember saying, "Thanks pal, Van" I said. There was a chest (unclear). You've got two big eyes on your chest and you hook into it and your chest is right in front of you. The pilot and co-pilot had back packs.

I'm up talking to the navigator and the bombardier. I was kneeling right between them. I tell the Pilot that Van is gone and George Fuller is gone. I contacted the waist. The waist was ok. I said, "The waists are all ok." So I said that we had two killed in action. He said, "OK". I told him where we were and I gave him a heading to pull and said take it 90 degrees for the time being.

I went and set up and used my drift meter and all of that and I gave him a corrected heading more south because that's the closest the Russians were to us to the German boundary line or rather the front. As we were heading there, the plane stayed level but she kept losing altitude. So, it was a matter of time that we had to bail out and there was no way we could land it because everything was shot up on the flight deck – the controls and everything. How he kept it level, I don't know.

We got over and we started getting strafed by a German plane. He had one landing gear down, I remember. The other one was up. He made a pass and turned around to get another pass at us. Three Russian Yaks came in. He flew away and they circled us a couple of times and they came in and started strafing us to knock us down.

Q: They couldn't tell that you were an American?

A: They couldn't tell the plane level. The emblem was American on it. But I think, after years went by, I think they must have seen the bomb bay doors open and saw the bombs in it so probably figured maybe we were on a bombing mission. That's one thing I could see.

However, that day we were bombing Berlin three American ships were knocked down by Russians. So, they did it every once and awhile. Of course, a couple of Americans knocked down a couple of theirs too.

They started strafing us and Chapman asked me to give the waist the signal to bail because the radio system between the waist and the flight deck was out. So, I had some object there that I heaved it at the doors so they opened up the door going into the bomb bays or rather the waist and I patted my parachute and said "Go". That was it. He nodded ok.

So, we got ready. I went over and touched my navigator again and went out and I sat down by the bomb bay. I climbed down the bomb bay and sat on the walk way there – that six inch beam. I sat with my feet dangling out. I never jumped out of a plane before. I waited for the co-pilot to come close to me that way we'd be close enough that when we landed, we'd find each other quick.

The waist gunner, Twiford, jumped (unclear). I bailed out and put my head between my legs and rolled out and fell far enough to make sure that I wouldn't be around the plane. I pulled the rip cord and nothing happened and I started clawing at the thing and then finally it popped open. There's an auxiliary parachute in there. It's under spring tension and that popped a little parachute out and that started pulling the main parachute out. That's the way they got the parachute to come out of the thing. So that auxiliary chute is fitted into your main chute and it pops out first and drives the main chute out. All I remember was an awful jar. The first time it stopped and then a couple smaller ones and you swear you're floating that way instead of floating down but you're going down alright.

As I was going down, I see three planes come down. One picked on the pilot. One hit me. He didn't hit me but he attacked me while I was falling and one on the waist gunner.

Q: Did you have a ball turret gunner?

A: No, that's where my Radar equipment was put in. That front ship if you ever see a picture of it, it's got a dome sticking down – the radar ships, the lead ships.

So, he started strafing me. I look at him and waved my hands at him and everything and he's coming right at me. I saw him and thought lord what am I going to do? What you should do if you are far enough from the ground you pull the cord on one side and the other and it collapses the chute right away and you freefall and just let it go and you get away before you hit the ground.

So, I chose to play dead. I waited until he went around and looked around and he's looking square at me. I see the guns going off. I slumped down put my hands along my side and my head down to my chest. He circled me two or three times then flew off.

Then I heard popping and looked on the ground and I could see it looked like a hundred people on the ground shooting at us. I heard the bullets but none of them hit. Maybe two or three went through the canopy. I cut that piece out to take it home but somebody on the ship coming home took it on me.

We were dropping down and I looked down there was a sharp peaked house coming right in front of me. I moved over a little bit with the shroud line. Down along side of the house there's a little cavity in the ground like some kind of excavation. It was just small. I would say maybe three feet deep. I landed right in there and, of course, cut the wind so my chute collapsed there and didn't have to be dragged or anything. We are all taught to how to say "ne strelyayte , ya amerikanets" (нестреляйте, я американец). It Russian it means "do not shoot, I am an American".

I see the emblem on their hats and everything that they're Russians so I started yelling, "ne strelyayte , ya amerikanets". My mother and father come from Krakow, Poland back in 1911 so as we were growing up we had to learn Polish because that's the only way we spoke. So, I knew enough of Polish to say " I beg you do not shoot, I am an American." I said, "I have some Papers, easy, easy!!"(speaks in Polish)

I reached in. We had these papers. They were small, you fold it, you take them out and open it, it's a big poster. It had a picture of Stalin and a picture of Roosevelt on it and underneath them is says "Comrades" then it had a lot of Russian writing underneath it saying that we're American and all of that.

So, I couple (of Russians) saying (In Russian) "Americans, Americans". Then a big black Cadillac look like limo came along had three officers in it. I could see that they were high

ranking officers and they were told we're Americans. He reached down, took my hand and pulled me up out of there. That was the first time I had a sigh of relief.

They found Wallace almost immediately – two of them. I told them that the guys falling out of the sky they're all Americans. So, they sent word around to make sure that they're alright.

The ones that were strafing Chapman - He collapsed his chute then free fell and then opened it up again. When he hit the ground, they put him in a truck and some Russian on a horse came up to him with a pistol and put it to his head and pulled the trigger three times but the gun wouldn't go off. Then the truck pulled away he could see the guy working on his pistol. He finally fixed it but the truck was too far away so he didn't chase it.

So, Wallace and I and Twiford, they brought us to this building. They had some interrogators there. They asked me. I told them – I said I'm Polish. They brought a woman over to act as an interpreter but I couldn't understand her and she couldn't understand me. They then brought in a fella by the name of Walter. He was a big gangly guy and the type of guy that you see that you like him. We spoke to each other just like talking to my mother or father. He told the Russians that he knows what he is seeing.

They asked through the interpreter what were we bombing. Of course, generally you don't give information to the enemies except the name and serial number. But in this case, the papers would be blasting that, I think it was, 2000 planes would hit Berlin that day in an all-out effort.

I told him we were bombing Berlin. He said, "Good, good. How many planes?" Again, I knew the newspapers would give the amount of planes. I said, "2000." They were pleased with that. He said, "How come didn't you shoot us down when the Russians were strafing you?" I didn't tell him all our guns were all knocked out and that we couldn't shoot any of the guns otherwise we would have knocked them out. I said, "We knew you were Russians so we didn't want to shoot back." I had to lie a little bit.

Then they brought out a bottle of some kind of white liquor. He said, "Have a drink." I said, "Yeah, I need one." So, they gave me a little shot. Then some woman there said to put some water in it. The Russian said, "No, he can drink it." I drank it and boy was it strong. It went down and I felt better after I warmed up. The waist gunner went down to his knees almost.

The put us up and the next day got the rest of the crew there together. There were two more missing but we were going to meet them at the end of the day. They said we were

going to bury the navigator. They found him and they found my log. I was hoping that they'd give it to me. It was partially burnt you could still read it.

He said that they were going to pick you up at so and so time. It was two trucks. It was one of these flat bottom trucks with green cloth or something over the bottom underneath the truck and had a casket on the front. There were two Russians in the front and two in the back with rifles riding with it. The other truck had three seat benches. We sat on that and rode backwards. They had one with the Russians on it.

We went up to a cemetery in Landsberg and they had a ceremony there. They said something in Russian. They asked me through my interpreter if one of us wanted to say something. I told Chapman they wanted to know if anyone wanted to say last few words. Chapman said, "Yeah, I would." He gave a nice talk about being a good navigator. He was just married for one month. He married an English girl. (unclear). He was a wonderful man not only a great navigator.

He ended up and had a great big tombstone there. They came to see me and asked me what I wanted on it. I put "Harold B. Van Tress, born (gave them the date) killed in action today March 18th, 1945, bombing mission Berlin" they had that all inscribed overnight they had it on there. That was a big stone that stood up there at least four or five feet. I asked the girl taking the photograph of everything if she would send me or give me a photograph. She said she'd try but I never got it.

We stayed there in Landsberg for a couple of days. They gave us a couple of planks to live on -2x8's (unclear) together pitched them a little bit to be straight. They gave us some hay to put on there and we wrapped our parachute around it (unclear). That's the way we slept.

Then we went to Poltava, rather, uh what was the place name after that. It was (unclear). I think it was (unclear). From there, we were taken to Lublin, Poland. That was a pretty good size city. The Russians came in and told us 9:00 there is a curfew – nobody on the streets.

So, he said, "If you listen tonight you will hear the Russians holler "(Russian for halt)" which means "halt" and you hear a shot. The next day looking out your window you can see a funeral going by. He says, "We're not fooling".

We said ok. Chappy and I walked around and (found) a nice English Pub. It was a nice clean place run by a husband and his wife and they had a young daughter about eighteen – a beautiful girl. She's kind of the receptionist. She met everybody at the door.

We went in and had a few vodkas. The next night we went down again but this time we overstayed. It was 10:00 before we came out. I said, " Oh boy, Chappy, this is going to be a lulu." We were walking up the street. He was a little bit pie-eyed. We kind of leaned on each other and heard a son of a gun Russian holler "(halt in Russian)" Chappy hollered, "Halt your butt" but he didn't use "butt", he used the other word. I was just waiting to feel the bullet go through my chest. I was just wondering how it was going to feel.

Two Russians come up and said, "Krazy Amerikanski" and they helped us up to the hotel. So, every night they'd meet us down there they knew we were coming out and escort us back.

Walking along the street one time going back to the hotel, some Polish guy had a GI watch. They gave everybody the same kind of watch – the pilot, co-pilot, bombardier and navigator. After each briefing, (unclear) the watches to the exact same time.

So, I had a watch. If you lose it, it cost you \$15 to get a new one. Some guys says I want to buy the watch in Polish. I said, "How much will you give me." He said "25,000 zloty" I said, "Chappy, some guy here wants to buy my watch." (He said), "How much is he giving you?" "25,000 something", I said. "Tell him you want 50". I said, "He's the pilot and says it's got to be 50,000." He said, "I'll give you 40". I said, "It's a deal."

So, I don't know what it was. I stuffed my pockets with drools of money. When I got back to our base, I asked a guy in personnel to find out how much it was worth. He said, if you had brought that money home, it would have been worth \$750. Back then, it would have bought a brand new Chevy.

Anyway, we decided to go down to the pub the next day to find out how much the money was worth. I figured it would cost few hundred dollars at least for a drink. So, we ordered two vodkas and two beer chasers. There was some Polish guy crying there so we got him a drink too. For three shots of Vodka and three nice thin glasses of beer, it cost three Zloty and here I got 40 thousand of them. Going home, I said, "Chappy, we're going to be the drunkest guys ever (unclear)."

I went to church Palm Sunday. Over in Poland they have what they call a continuous mass. It starts from twelve midnight Sunday morning to twelve midnight Sunday night. There were no Saturday masses then. Anytime you walk into the church whatever part of the mass going on when that part came up again you walk out.

There were people going in and out all the time. It was full. I went in. I don't remember if any of the others were Catholic or not. I took, I think, 20,000 of those bills and a

bearded priest came in. He had a nice big beard on him. He was slowly passing down and you could see people stuffing a bill or some coins in it. He comes to me and I chuck 20,000 of them in there. He put his hands and bowed three times to me and took off. I never saw him again.

I stepped out of the church that day and two guys came up to me. One talked English pretty well – very well. I said, “Where did you learn English?” He said that he was a professor at the Lublin University and he said that I’d like to talk to you sometime. He said, “Speak Polish so my friend can talk.” I said that I could talk a little Polish. So, we talked in Polish and the other guy was happier than heck. He invited me to come down to his house the next day for dinner. I said sure and he told me how to get there. It wasn’t too far from the hotel we were living in.

They sent a guy to take care of us and I asked him for some food because I was having dinner with this Polish family. I said I would sure like to get some food so I could give them because food is scarce to them and I didn’t want to go down there and eat their supplies.

So, he gave me a lot of k-rations. He gave me a chicken that was still frozen and cans of different vegetables. So, I went down and gave them all. You would think I gave him a million dollars.

We had a nice visit and he asked me if I would take a letter for him and smuggle it back to the country. He said smuggle because the Russians wouldn’t let me take it out. As a matter of fact, while I was walking the streets of Lublin, I must have got about eight about letters from people who begged me to send to their relatives in the states. So, I took them all.

A couple of incidents happened while we were there in that hotel. The hotel was just a bombed out half building and we had a nice women come in everyday to straighten our beds. Like I said, they were just two planks with hay on them. She would straighten up the hay and fold the parachute on them.

Eventually, I told her, I cut off a little piece of the shroud lines and I pulled all these threads out of it -very very fine thread just like you sew clothes with and I said, “You can’t break it. It would be good for sewing. You take this parachute too”. She brought me in some kind of thing to cover myself that night and she took and hid everything so the Russians didn’t see her taking it from there. I hope she finally got it out of there.

Another time we were in the room and in comes three Russians. You could see they were a little bit looped. I guess they wanted to fight. He came up to me and said, “Me

boxer". I said, "Me, football player." He went to the next guy. Then he went over to Chapman. I looked at Chapman. He was a little southern boy and I could see he's not going to take it. So, I told Yarcusko to get ready. He hits Chapman on the chest and Chapman hauled off and belted him one. I belted one and somebody else grabbed the other one. So, we were fighting there and somebody fired a pistol.

Some big shots come in –big officers, high ranking (unclear). We all stopped when the shot went off. My interpreter came in and asked me what happened. I told him that we were resting and relaxing here and they busted in and they wanted to fight.

They threw them out of the place. I don't mean pushed them. They threw them out. He gave me a Russian pistol and he said the next time somebody comes in to bother you, don't talk to them, don't answer them, don't ask them questions just shoot them. Don't drag them out in the hallway throw them out the window and we'll pick them up. So they left and I took the bullets and the gun around and said, "Don't fool around boys." The next day they came and took the pistol away from me.

It was a lot of fun, I wanted to go to Krakow but they had no way of transporting me there. I knew that I had relatives all over the area.

They finally flew us from there to Poltava up in the Ukraine over Russia. We were trying to take off. I was on a grass field – just a meadow. They had a jeep loaded on there already and all of us went on. I sat in the seat just behind the steering wheel. They started going on the grass and all of the sudden hit a hole. They pulled it out and tried again. It did the same thing. I said, "Holy cow." Finally, they took us off and put us in another plane and sent it down a few miles away they had a cement runway – a hard top runway. They had heavy screens over the thing. When we got there, they loaded us on the plane and flew us to Poltava then.

We weren't prisoners. We were kept in confinement with the Russians. We had quite a bit of liberty. Whenever we pick up a Russian girl to take her to her house to talk with them, they would pick up the girl the next day. The KGB – is it – they would question here and tell her we were spies. But, none of them believed it.

One time, they came in and said "We can't ask you officers to do (manual labor)" I guess the rules of the Geneva Convention the enlisted men got to work today. I said, "Doing what". He said, "Shovel some (unclear) on the truck." I said, "I'll go with them". He said, "No, you're an officer" (I said), "I want to go with my men." He said, "OK."

So I went with them and I took a shovel and helped them fill up a big truck. There was two trucks to load up. So, they're going down to the first load and I said, " Can I go with

you?”. He said, ‘Sure’. (unclear) it was into a prison. The dumped it in. I went in where all the prisoners were. I had never seen anything so sad in my life. I see one guy there with nothing but bones sticking out of his face. You could count his ribs so easy and his face was nothing but bones sticking out. His eyes looked at me and here I am fat as a hog and smoking a cigarette.

I see he is looking at me. I took a cigarette and walked over to him. They said, “No, no” but I said the hell with you, you’re not going to shoot me. (unclear) I see some of the others looking around. I had about twelve cigarettes left. I broke them in two into twenty four and gave everybody a half cigarette. There was no filter so you could smoke either end.

We finally found a plane there over in Poltava that was in good shape except the landing gear was pretty badly mangled. We found another landing gear on one of the other planes there that was in pretty good shape and, with Russian help, we jacked the plane up got the thing off and put the other one on. We worked on the engines – whatever we knew about it. We never had any experience.

They said ok it would be ready to go. We are going to let you test run it first. What happened a year or so before that on what they call a shuttle mission – they take off in England and bomb Germany, then Poland over Russia. The next day take off loaded with bombs again hit the southern part of Germany and land in Italy. The third day, fly from Italy, bomb Germany again and then land back at the base. They called it a shuttle run – three runs. Three missions in three days you’d get.

They had seventy five of these planes come in. The Germans, instead of attacking them, would follow them way back. We landed and left the planes. They lined them up in two rows. They came in. They demolished all of the planes. Never took off again. That’s where we got our landing gear and stuff.

Each plane has a small generator on it because you don’t have any electricity in the plane until at least one engine is going. So, we start them up to give us power while checking the position that we were flying. When we got that all done, he said they took all seventy five auxiliary engines – they called it – and put them all in the bomb bay – all seventy five of them. Then they said we’ve got sixteen more men we want you to haul out of here. There’s eight of us left, so there would be twenty four men.

So, we went up to test op it – Chapman, Wallace – the two pilots and myself acting as the engineer. I knelt between the pilot and co-pilot. It was one of these steel matt runways. You could hear that rippling noise as you land over them. Usually, you should get over 100 miles, 115 miles, 110 miles an hour before you like to take the plane off.

(unclear) I watched the speedometer. I leaned. Both of their heads are close by me. I hollered, "You're doing 60, 65 (I went by five)" but when I got around 80, it didn't climb very high. "Eighty four, eightyyyy five". Oh boy, I look up and we are at the point of no return and gone too far. When I got up around 88, 89, Chappy pulled back on the plane and said, "We're going to crash." The plane took off and he quickly folded his landing gear. That worked thank God. We went down and just before we hit the ground she picked up enough speed and kept going.

So we landed right away. They gave us heck. They thought we just taxied down the runway to turn off but here we are going full speed. So, we said we've got to do some more work on those engines. We get ready to take off and but got to take all those auxiliary engines out of the bomb bay and the other men – we can't take off with 16 of them - They've got to wait for somebody else to come in. So, they fixed the plane up and they said ok take off this time don't come back.

All the guys assembled there. Something told me this time when we got on that plane, we're going to be searched. As soon as I got to my navigation position up there on the flight deck, I opened a big huge fuse box about that wide and about that high (makes gesture with hands) and all the fuses in there. I opened it up. It had two screws on top and one on the bottom. I took the bottom one off and loosened up the others and removed it and put the letters in it and put the screw back in quickly.

I went to my position and then they came on (and said), "Everyone out." We had to go all out of the plane. They took about four men and they went in and searched that plane from one end to the other. So, I kind of held my breath. Then they said, "Alright, get on, close that door and don't come back." The said "You're going to Bari, Italy" I got orders to Bari there (points to papers). He gave us the elevation of the flight at ten thousand feet and gave us the wind. I forgot how many knots it was and the direction the wind was coming in. Like anybody flying an airplane, you've got a heading here and if the wind is coming here and you want to go there you better go this way so the wind would blow you on the right track.

So, I told them, "One minute, when I go up in the air at ten thousand feet, I am going to take three different headings. I'll only be a minute – a minute or so on each one". He said, "What are you want to do that for?" I said, "I want to get my own wind and the knots." He said, "We gave you winds." I said, "That's alright, I want to get my own." He said, "Alright." So, I took a heading so and so and I told Chapman to take another thirty forty feet the other way and then the third way. Each time, I marked our heading and how much drift we were making. I put all this on the E6B computer. We carried a small computer. I set them all on there. I could turn the dials and show you exactly what

degree the wind was coming from, the exact knots up to half a knot. I think it was five knots an hour. Anyway, I put the wind on the E6B after I erased it and put my heading on there and applied the wind. I put the course on there. The exact course I wanted to make. I put the heading on and it showed me how much correction to make into the wind. I put that all down and we took off. They told us if we get one mile off course, we've got to shoot you down.

We went down across Yugoslavia (unclear) over the mountains. We came over the top of a mountain and looked down and saw the bluest body of water that you've ever seen. You couldn't see the other side and I remember the co-pilot saying, "Marty, what's that blue water". So again I told him, "If that's not the Mediterranean Sea, I don't know what country we're in."

We flew across it and once we got across the Mediterranean, we still couldn't see land yet. He said, "What's our ETA and course?" I said, "The course looks pretty good but I have been taking a drift of the top of the white caps on the Mediterranean" and I could see we were drifting a little bit more than we did before. I gave a one degree correction and checked my ETA and gave the time we should be there. We came into Bari right over the runway and our time was off by half a minute. It was a perfect hit.

We landed and they gave us hell for coming in with that plane. We had no parachute. Nobody had a parachute. They told us to get out of the plane and gave somebody orders to tow that out to the junkyard and junk that plane. Everything was beat up on it but it made it.

Q: Did the war end?

A: No. Not yet. They took us up to Naples and they deloused us. They put us naked into a shower with a strong stream of water and they deloused all of us – head, ears, everything –any crevasse in the body to make sure. There was a lot of louse. We were loused up from Russia. They gave us a clean (unclear) put some kind of powder on us and put it under our arm pits and stuff like that. Our clothes, before we went into the shower, had to take all our clothes off and shoes and stockings and put them in this rubberized bag then they sealed it off so no air could come outside of it or anything. Inside of it you could feel a little tube hard metal cylinder. He said, "Put it on the ground and put your heel on it". That was before we went in the shower. We had our shoes on yet and stomp on it. It opens up and puts this stuff or whatever it is to delouse our clothes. Everything was clean. We then went in the shower and put our clothes back on. It did a good job.

In Naples they gave us a couple of days there and we went into town – Chappy and I. We got a little bit looped. We were so happy to be back in American hands. We were supposed to take off at 7:00 in the morning to head for the base in (unclear).

I caught a ride on a truck. It was already daylight. When I got back to the base it was after 8:00. I went in the tent. I said, “Holy cats, everybody’s gone. Look at that. I am going to get burnt here.” There was a guy cleaning up the tent and I said, “Geez, what time did they leave?” He said, “They haven’t left yet, you’re the first one back from the town.”

So, I felt better. The second night they kept us on the base and, the second night, we took off on the second morning.

They flew over with a stopover in Paris for one night. Then we went back to the base. It was at supper time. Of course, we weren’t dressed in Class A uniforms. We went up into the hallway and they lined up to go into the mess hall outside and the line goes into the door. You pick up your plate and they give you the thing on a metal plate.

We were walking up and everyone turned around looking at us. They were all young kids, Christ, they looked they must have got out of school or something. I didn’t see any of the old timers. They were all gone. It was about eight weeks had gone by.

As we turned to go in the mess hall, I could see inside the mess hall. There was a long table in the front. It has the CO, Colonel Shower and all the brass from the base all on that long table. They were waited on while the rest of us had to go through the line.

The minute I walked in, I noticed this Captain Novak looked up. He said something to Colonel Shower and Colonel Shower jumped up and came running over to us. They were notified we were dead. He took us back to the table and we were waited on that night. Captain Novak asked who (unclear) Polish. I said, “I did”. He said he was Polish too. I asked where are our clothes and everything.

He said, “I think they are up in the Post Office. I hope they haven’t sent them out yet.” So, I said, ok, we had supper. “Where are we sleeping tonight?” He said, “In the hospital.” I said, “Alight.”

I got out of there as quick as I could and Chappy said, “Where are you going Marty?”. I said, “I am going to see if I can get up to that Post Office.” So, I took a bicycle. I don’t know who it belonged to. There used to be a lot of bikes taken but they turn up at the end of the month. They had about three hundred bikes that people would have to claim.

I took somebody's bike and I rode off because the Post Office was on the outskirts of the base. I knocked on the door. It had a screen wire mesh on the front of the door and the glass and way in the back I could see one guy working.

He points to his watch and says no. I kept banging and banging and banging. He finally comes up to the door and says, "Sir, we're closed." I said, "No, no, I just want to ask you a question. Do you have any boxes of clothes that are going to be shipped out here yet?" I gave him the names. He said, "Yeah, we've got ten boxes out there." I said, "What's the names on them?" He went back and said, "There's a Chapman, there's a Twiford." And he named three or four. I said, "Geez, don't ship them. Please don't ship those clothes out. Ship Van Tress and Fuller. George Fuller and Harold Van Tress. Ship them home but the rest of them, we're all back on the base." He said, "Am I glad you came here because in the morning, they're going out."

I still have the board where the address was marked "Killed in Action" and they were going to be mailed to my mother. I hadn't been able to get in contact with her. I did send her some letters from Italy and England. She finally got two of them. The rest of the letters, I gave to the guy that used to audit all of the mail going out. They checked the Polish letters and said that they were alright. So, we mailed them out.

I went to town that night. I knew my buddy would be worrying the hell about me. He was over in the corner of the bar crying his head off. He said, "Why in God's name didn't you tell me you were going to do that, I would've gone with them." I hauled out and belted one. He jumped up and boy did he cry. We saw each other and it was the last time that I saw him. We were supposed to head out. They weren't going to form any more crews here. The front lines were moving so fast, they did very little bombing after that.

I asked to go back by boat. I flew over and I'll never be able cross the ocean on any kind of ship. I got on this ship. I think it was the USS Frederickson. We did see a whale. I was seasick for about three days. I lay on my cot and never moved. We slept eight above on little cots. I think it was eight above each other – one on top of the other. I was on the very bottom and only had about that much room (makes gesture with hands).

So I came back and put all of the clothes down in the hold. Somebody, during the trip, took whatever they wanted and that's how I lost a lot of the stuff.

I came home and landed in Boston. They had to give us furlough papers to go home for a month. I went home and then back to Langley Field. There was a Sergeant interviewing all of us getting information from us. He said, "Where do you want to go? You can go be based anyplace you want." I said, "No, I got a little more (unclear) left in

me, I would like to go to the South Pacific.” He said, “You don’t have to go down there.” I said, “I want to go down there.” He said, “Wait a minute, you were missing for over six weeks. I said, “Yeah. Missing in action. Eight weeks.” He said, “You can’t go. You have to go home for two months -one month at home and one month in the recuperation center. You can go to Long Beach, Atlantic City -of course, there were not casinos there then- or Lake Placid, New York for a week. Do anything you want. Say anything you want. Dress the way you want. You just have to have one month of recuperation. Then you come back and get reassigned.”

I said, “No, skip that. I want to go to the South Pacific.” He said, “You’re crazy. You’d better take your vacation.” He said ok. So, they assigned me to a group in Boca Raton – B-29’s. I trained there for combat in the South Pacific.

I was going down. I was a couple of days ahead of schedule. I stopped in Atlanta, Georgia. The guy that sat next to me in preflight -he was the kid that was killed in the (unclear). Devine, I think his name was. Him I used to talk many a time lying in the bunks. I thought I would find his folks and go over and visit with them and tell them about their son and maybe I’ll get a supper out of it.

I bought a quart of whiskey first - \$2.49. I put it up in my room and I went downstairs and was going down to have dinner, supper and thought I would make the phone calls first. I went into the phone book and I thought that there would be two or three but there were a couple of pages of Devine’s so I said forget it. My god, there must have been fifty of them.

I went down to order a steak dinner and I put the fork in and I noticed going in that there is a package store across the street – a liquor store. I was just ready to cut the steak when Harry Truman came on the air and announced that the war in Japan was officially over. We are now at war with no one.

So, I didn’t even cut the steak. I went across the road and bought eight more quarts of whiskey and took them up to my room.

Ten minutes after it became known – maybe fifteen minutes - liquor went up to \$20 per quart. I got it for \$2.49!

I went outside and saw a Marine and said to come on with me. We hugged each other and said that we did it. I said, “Listen, this hotel room’s going to be open and I got all the liquor in the world. You come here and take a drink any time you want.” He said, “OK, come with me though sir. I never thought that I would talk to an officer, but hey we’re humans just like you.”

So, he took me in the pool room and there were quite a few rows of tables. He said, "Third table. Third table up look on the upper left leg reach down there you'll see a bottle of booze at the leg. You come in here and take a drink any time you want."

Then I met some sailors and I took them up. I wasn't doing that much drinking but they were.

The next day, they were really celebrating there. I got tangled up with five other people celebrating and dancing and eating and all of that.

I was a day late coming down to my base in Boca Raton. The little Sergeant says, "Sir, you're a day late. I've got to mark you AWOL." I said, "Oh, Come on. The war's over. I did my duty." I pleaded with him then I made up a story, "With my wife and my car broke down up in Ft. Lauderdale and my wife's there with two kids and you're going to give me AWOL." He said, "I'm sorry sir, that's what the rules say." The Master Sergeant came walking in. I look across his chest he's got his name – (unclear) ski- or something like that. He said, "What's going on here?" I said, in Polish "I got drunk as hell and I'm a day late coming down for my arrival. He wants to mark me AWOL." He said, "Write in here that he came in two days ago." He said, 'OK Serge'. He signed me in two days early.

I hung around for a while and asked for a discharge and I came home.

Q: Were you married?

A: No. No. I had a girl there that I was going to marry. I asked her to marry several times but she kept putting me off. (Shows a picture of a woman).

Q: OK, Let me zoom in on that. I think we are so close; I am having a problem zooming in. Let me just switch positions here. Maybe I can get a better shot. I'll try something here. It isn't working for some reason. Here we go. I think that's...ok. Alright. Got it. Very attractive woman.

A: Yes, we were married October 17th, 1948 and I lost her in (1977) from cancer. Twiford

Q: I'm sorry to hear that.

A: This is a copy of the work I do -a picture of the radar set. (shows picture). The round lines, you set them at different distances. I think this one is set at about 20 miles apart. Here you see the town and here's a town here. This is a heavy wooded area. You could tell what that is. I've got some other pictures out here.

Q: Can you hold these up too?

A: OK. I'll give this one first. This is a picture of Berlin. I'll point. You can see a B-24 falling down. If I put a pencil there would that be better.

Q: For some reason, it's starting to get blurry as I come in close with it. Hold on. That's about as close as I can get without it getting really blurry. That's over Berlin?

A: Yes, This is a plane going down burning. It's just in front of my finger there in the lower corner. (unclear) went down tried to pull out of a dive.

Here's a picture of me when I was.

Q: When was that taken?

A: This was taken in 1944.

Q: '44. OK. Got it.

A: This was the group taken in Poltava. It shows starting on the upper left: Chapman, Yarcusko, Wallace, Twiford. I am on the bottom row – myself, Anderson and Austin.

Q: I am losing it here. Let me just turn this off and try again. That's about as clear as I am going to get it.

A: (Unclear). There is another picture of me.

Q: Yeah, that's a good shot. That was in cadet school?

A: Yeah, I was an Air cadet then.

Q: OK. Got it. That's your crew?

A: That's my crew. Most of them.

Q: Can you name them for me?

A: OK. Starting upper left, myself, Chapman..

Q: Can you tilt that toward me a little because I am getting some glare. Ok, that looks pretty good.

A: OK. Upper left is myself. Pilot Chapman. DR Navigator Van Tress. Co-Pilot Wallace. Lower left Anderson Radio Operator and George Fuller the Engineer. George Fuller and Van Tress are the two that were killed that time.

You can take these with you.

Q: OK. Now, how many of your crew are still living? Do you know?

A: I could never find Wallace. He sent me a letter in 1947. He was taking engineering up in college. He let me know that he and his wife Betty are good and he hoped that I go to college too. I wrote him a letter back and then we kind of let time slip by a little bit. I even put an inquiry in American Legion Magazine and the VFW Magazine to see if anybody knew his whereabouts.

I landed in St. Louis where I last knew he lived one time heading out to Las Vegas. We had about a three hour layover and I called up his home. The people who were living there then never remembered him. My son got how many Wallace's around the area. I think there was ten. I called three but none of them were there. The next night I called three more so I gave it up. I do not know where he was.

I even called the 2nd Air Division Association which I belonged to and they tried to find him and they couldn't.

All the rest of the men are gone. Chapman was the last one. His wife called me from Florida. He lived there. She wanted me to let me know Bob passed away. I used to call Chapman several times.

Q: Hold right there. I am going to put another tape in. (END OF DISC #2)

Q: OK, you were saying

A: Where was I?

Q: You were talking about Chapman.

A: Yeah. We talked to each other quite a bit. I know the first time I sent him a Christmas card, he sent one back. He said please if you ever come down and see me, don't ever talk to my wife about what we did in the service (laughs). He liked to drink.

He lived in Troy, Alabama. We were going to make plans to go down. He became quite wealthy. He had a crew of men out – carpentry work, anything. He worked the whole of Alabama and even part of Florida doing construction or anything he'd want or excavating or whatever.

He owned a local Johnson franchise and he owned a big share of the local bank. He had a loan company and a motel. Even Howard Johnson he had. He said if you ever come down, I don't want you paying any meals or pay where you are staying. He said, you

come here I've got a place and I am looking forward to seeing you. A couple of times something happened. He wasn't feeling good or I wasn't feeling good or something.

I called him up. Every Christmas Day I'd call him up. After twelve noon, I'd call him up and have a talk. The last one I called just a few years ago. It can't be over even five years ago. His wife answered. Of course, down there they don't use your first name. They just go by your last name. She said, "Who is this?" I said, "That Polish Yankee from Upstate New York." She said, "Oh, Bezon! Just a minute. I'll see if Bill can get on the phone". So, I said, "Oh, sounds like he is not good."

He got on and said. "Martin, you don't know what this means to me when you call." I think it bothered him what happened the time that I was (unclear) and chewed out and I think it might have bothered him quite a bit later in life. I said, "What's the matter with you Bill?" He said, "I just had open heart surgery and I'm recuperating." And then he had something wrong with his leg. I said, "Geez Bill, we've got to get together at least once." He said, "Boy, we've got to!"

I got worried about him. The 25th about the 29th I called up again. I said "I just want to know how's Bill doing." She said, "I am sorry to tell you, he died last night." So then Twiford died and that was the last of them.

Anderson was on the police force and died from a heart attack. Yarcusko was out in California laying rugs and he died. So, they're all gone and I stay here.

You can look through these books if you want to find something that might interest you.

Q: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

A: Yeah, I've been a member of the Knights of Columbus 57 years. I've been a member for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I've been a life member of both the KC and the Veterans of Foreign Wars from '46 on. From '46 (unclear) that would be 60 about 70 rather 67 years. I am a member of the American Legion – a lifelong member of the American Legion also.

There are other pictures here. I don't know what to show you.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life? Let me ask you this first. Once you were discharged, did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

A: No and I didn't take the \$20 for week for a year was it?

Q: The 52-20 Club.

A: The 52-20. I wanted to go to college but I wanted always to be a math teacher.

I think that was the guy who was killed (points to a picture in a book). No, not that one.
(unclear)

Q: Did you use the GI Bill for a mortgage or anything?

A: No.

Q: What type of work did you do?

A: In '46, I went up to Alaska to work on surveying for the US Geological Survey. Two of us. We had to go up in the hills. I averaged about 22-23 miles walking a day in the time we spent up in the mountains. I dropped from 215 to 175 pounds. They gave us all the K-rations and the other rations we need. It contained a pack of cigarettes or two in each one. It didn't cost us too much to live and the government gave us \$15 a day to live on anyway plus our wages.

I came back at the end of '46 and went back to Republic Steel. In between strikes and all of that, I worked construction here and everything and never drew unemployment. I had 31 years credit with Republic Steel. It wasn't the actual time I spent on there because our service time was counted as years worked and they called me back during the Korean War. I had to go back again to serve. So, I trained on the B-29's. Then I became an instructor.

Q: What rank were you when you were discharged?

A: When I was discharged the first time, I was supposed to hold a Captain. Because when Sidney was a staff officer for the Radar Operators, he got his missions and he left. I never thought I'd get it because there were several older men but I became the staff officer of the radar men. I know they grumbled at me but I put them through the paces every week. I said by God I want to get home and I want most of you to get home too.

That called for a Captain rating so I was put in (unclear). It had to get approval of headquarters. I don't know if Doolittle had anything to do with it or not. Then we got shot down and word came back that we were killed. So, they put all that off. When we got back to England, all promotions were frozen. I got like a belated Captain rating that considered that you would have made Captain to appease me a little bit. I never got it. I was a First Lieutenant then.

Q: Then when you were called up for Korea, were you promoted then?

A: I should have been. Anybody taken out of reserves automatically gets promoted. Then again, they froze it. They wouldn't do it.

So, then I took a job. The last job was they needed a man in Radar, rather the "Ration Breakdown Officer". So they sent me there. They had a Master Sergeant there who was there on permanent duty and a little uh, supposed to be a clerk. There was only three of us there and we'd get parties of groups coming in of four or five men three, four and we'd teach them what "Ration Breakdown" was about. Then would move on and they would send new ones in.

We had to feed nine thousand troops. We had eight main mess halls and one small one. Food is delivered three times a week. Every month we'd have a meeting with the Colonel in charge of supplies and all of that.

If this is March, we would have a meeting this month April and May we'd get the menu for June three months from there. We would have three months to get the right food in there. The menu is all printed out.

Q: Whereabouts was this?

A: This is on every base; every outfit in the United States would get that.

Q: OK. So, you stayed in the states?

A: I was in Mountain Home, Idaho then. This is a pretty good town – a little town out in the desert. We'd review the menu- breakfast, lunch and dinner. If there's any changes to me made, you could change the meals. They'd have three months' notice and they'd know what the heck to bring in.

They'd have a meeting once every three months – we meet every month -and discuss what' coming up three months from then. We had it's called an office when I first went in there. It was just a corner of the warehouse with a desk there. A pencil, pen and paper and forms. We used to do all the figuring how much food in long hand and pencil. I knew math good. The First Sergeant was good too. He said he used to get some 2nd Lieutenants come in who just wouldn't know what to do.

We had it running very smooth. The one thing I had to do was take inventory every month of all the mess halls. If they had too much of what they were supposed to have then – more than they were supposed to have of a certain item, we would take it away and give them credit. For instance, I went in one mess hall and he had four tons of coffee. All you're supposed to have on hand the maximum is 1000 pounds.

So, I took all that back and, oh my God, at the end of the year – end of the month –we were about \$62,000 ahead. I thought geez that's pretty good. I'd get a feather in my cap saving that much money.

We'd get the order each month from Washington for each month– a \$1.1236 or something like that. The dollar sign then they'd carry it four places for the amount of rations for the month in dollars.

We'd have to get receipts from the mess halls. They'd come in each month and tell us what they were going to feed. This is what we'd issue to them. Like I said, Monday, Wednesday and Friday we'd issue all of it.

We have to check the financial status and all of that - auditors came in the end of the month and they saw that sixty some odd thousand. They said, "What's this?" I said, "This is most of the inventory I took back". He said, "The government says that you have to give these men a (dollar so and so) ration. You shorted them. If we come back here and see anything like this again, you're out of a job."

I said, "I thought I was doing something good, I didn't realize it and that it would be fixed". So, we used to give a bunch of officers in the mess hall. Those guys were always short because they had to pay for their meals. They'd come over all the time and I said I would give them a whole hind quarter but if you get one of the mess halls to sign for it. It's got to be signed by somebody. So one of the (unclear) mess halls they were in pretty well off shape so I gave it to them. They were charged with the meat. The officers were happy and they were happy.

Everything went good but we were still seeing money and couldn't stop it no way. We did everything we could and gave out what's supposed to be given out. Sergeant Paine and myself sat down one day and we talked it over and we came up with an idea. The next meeting – Colonel Flavin in charge of it – opened it up the thing and said ok, I'll review the menu. So, he's reviewing the menu and one of the 2nd Lieutenant mess hall officers raises his hand. He said, "Sir, I can take oleo and I'll dress it up so you and no one else will ever know the difference with butter." I remember the colonel got up and pointed the finger at him, "If you ever stick oleo in front of me, you will be off this base so quick." I said, "Wow". So, he got through the menu and all of that. I raised my hand and he said "Go ahead Martin." I got to know Colonel Flavin real well.

I said, "I have a problem of having too much money left over. We tried a few things but it doesn't work. Harold Paine and myself came up with an idea." He said, "What is it?" I said, "Can you get KPs for Sunday night?" because Sunday night meals are baloney, salami, dry sandwiches and a big batch of beans. That's about all it is. A lot of guys

never come in the base for that. They stay in town and get drunk and get in trouble. So, I said, "One of the Sergeants says we've got a lot of guys waiting to be punished". I said, "How about dropping the cold meal on Sunday nights and have a hot steak dinner?" Everybody picked up and said, "Can you do it?" "Yeah, I think that would help me with my paperwork and the money will come out of where it should be if you get the KP's" He said, "Try it." We did.

The next Sunday it was all hot steaks and the Sunday after. 75% of the crime rate in Mountain Home was cut down. The guys all came back took a shower and everything, took a nap and Sunday night came in for a hot steak dinner. Everybody was happy.

Then we also used to get a car load of milk – Carnation Milk. It came in maybe two boxcar loads. We had one forklift. We'd send some help up. They'd load 40 cases onto a pallet lift it up and over and then they had to unload that and pile it up. There'd be big big stacks of it and they were all square. The regulations – there was supposed to be a fire lane all around and in between those things had to be a certain length open.

We thought that we could cut down on the help if we could take and have a bunch of pallets made instead of making them square put them at an angle. The fork lift would come in at an angle and load it. Then if you had the pallets by the time you'd get done loading that, the other one would be waiting to come over to set it right on top of that. You'd be done within a couple of hours. You could unload two of them in almost two hours.

We measured the lanes and all of that and kind of drew it off with a chalk mark. We could do it and we wouldn't hurt the fire lane at all. So, I said we'd send you, I think it was, five hundred pallets and we set up a big long row of them. They came over and inspected it and measured it, Ok'd it. I don't know if they ever did it but they said they're going to notify all the warehouses.

They approached me and said they got a job on the outskirts of where the main camp was. It was where all the equipment on the base – anything that they claim is shot that they can't use it anymore – planes or anything. There were a lot of planes they'd bring out there. They'd take them all apart and salvage the parts that were salvageable. They said the job's yours if you want it. You'll get your Captaincy right away.

I liked the crew I was working with. (unclear) and I became real tight friends. We fished and everything out there together. I said no I'll finish the few months I've got left here. So, I stayed there. I could have got my Captaincy then. I wasn't in for the rank anyway. I was in to do a job.

Q: So, when did they discharge you?

A: Well, it was in '53. November of '53.

I got thinking about it. Of course, I was married then. I told the wife, "I ought to get back in the service. Why did I ever get out?" Between the first day I went in the service in World War II and the last day I was discharged and in between I was in the reserves. But, if you are recalled like that, all your time counts as time served. All I needed was about another nine more years and I could have got my pension. I would have been a young man yet. I wouldn't have been even forty. If I would have stayed longer it would have been better.

Of course, at the time, pensions weren't that big but now they're beautiful. I was getting paid, as an infantry man, \$50/week. They'd take out \$8 for insurance and dry cleaning laundry. Everybody got a \$20 bill, two tens, two fives and two ones.

Q: Your wife didn't want you to stay in or?

A: She was willing to go back in. I wasn't married during World War II.

As a cadet, we got \$75 per month and our insurance was paid for. That was good. I came out of the service; I got a card from Pennsylvania saying that we could pick up our GI Insurance if I wanted. We weren't getting much money then. I was lucky to make \$4000, \$5000 per year or something. Of course, it was good money back then. You were able to save then. I told the wife, we ought to take \$1000 at least of it. She said alright and like I said, it cost peanuts.

I called up after about two or three years and said to reinvest the dividends. The dividends are always tax free and the insurance refund get eventually (unclear) insurance that I left in there will be tax free. I told them that I wanted in 20 year pay life.

So, back in 1962, they sent me a letter not to send any more money in. That \$1000 has gone up to \$8000 now just by being reinvested – buy more insurance, buy more insurance. I put it down as burial. The kids know it's my burial fund.

I have no qualms about everything I've done. I enjoyed my life. I enjoyed the comradeship that I formed among a bunch of guys all of them.

I used to go up in the tower to watch the planes come in when I wasn't flying. All of the sudden, I'd see one short. (unclear) You'd hate to even hear which crew it was.

Van Tress had a son born. He was married for a month. Chapman and I tried to talk him out of it to wait until the war was over. He married this girl he was wild about. So he died.

The last time I talked to Twiford, he said he heard from Mrs. Van Tress, David, their wife and his son are coming over. So, he would be her grandchild.

When he got shot down when we came home, there's a couple of guys who came over from some other base and wanted to talk to me about Van. The mother asked them to go see me because Van (unclear) slept right next to me. I gave them a whole bunch of pictures of Van and his wife and all of that. So, they took them with them.

That's all.

Q: OK. Thank you so much for your interview.

A: This shows (points to piece of paper) the number of planes lost that day – two – it shows the crews and down here our crew wasn't lost. We bailed out but these two were lost. There's one, two, three, four, five, six, seven eight, nine, ten more guys were killed that day.

It shows a P-51 escort with Berlin as the target. Type of target - factory site. She'll send you copies of all of these.

Q: Alright. Thank you again.