

Foster Rodda

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Question: What's your name?

Answer: Okay, my name is Foster Rodda. Rodda is spelled R-O-D-D-A. But ever since I was a little tyke I have gotten "Foss" as a nickname and I came by it I guess quite naturally because I was born in a home, not in a hospital but on Foss Avenue, that was where we lived. So Foss has stuck with me over the years.

Question: And you were with now the 8th Army Air Force?

Answer: You've turned it around a little bit. They called it the 8th Air Force. The Army part was the Army Air Corp, which is of course not used after, well you know after the war they changed it to the U.S. Air Force.

Question: And what Bomb Group were you in?

Answer: I was with the 388th Bomb Group and I was primary SSN, as they call it, a navigator. Part of the time I was utilized as Squadron Navigator after I had done a fair number of missions which is a lead navigator for your particular squadron. Then if the lead squadron, if you aren't in the lead squadron, happens to have to abort or gets blown up or whatever, you can move in and take over the whole group of anywhere from 18 to 28.

Question: Can you stop here... I want to jump back cause normally... ask a little bit about the beginning. But, your nickname's Foss..

Answer: Right.

Question: But you're not from the Northwest.

Answer: No, I'm from suburban Philadelphia.

Question: You were born there?

Answer: Born in Drexel hill, which is a suburb of Philadelphia. Right. I won't give you my age but I guess it's quite apparent. I was born in 1919 so next month I'll be 84 years old so...

Question: You look pretty healthy for 84 I'll say that. I would never have guessed.

Answer: Thank you. And some of the things however we may talk about may be a little bit faded and foggy in my mind because we're talking sixty years ago.

Question: Well that's okay. Did, now were you a... were you in high school during Pearl, at Pearl Harbor or..?

Answer: No, as a matter of fact I was out here to be best man at my brother's wedding here in Seattle. And I gave them my car to go on a honeymoon cause he had a truck and I didn't think that was, you know, quite the thing and I had a pretty convertible kind of Pontiac with blue sailcloth covers. And so while he was down there, I went to the old Edison School up on Broadway where they were teaching buck riveting and some sheet metal and the bucking of the rivets and I went to work for Boeing. So by the time my brother got back from the honeymoon that he went

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on down in Oregon, I was working for Boeing. Now this was oh, August-September I guess of 1941. Then Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941 and it changed the whole complexion because I was planning to get married here in Seattle. My intended was back in Lancaster, Pennsylvania... and I had in fact the church, the wedding and the preacher set up to have her come out and we'd be married but then Pearl Harbor changed a lot of things. What was my thinking here... I just lost it. Oh, then I'm sure that I could've stayed working at Boeing on a deferment because I was doing what they called, oh I don't know, prime..

Question: War work.

Answer: War work, yeah. But my supervisor in the department where I was, a fellow by the name of Red Campbell... one day it was announced he'd be leaving. He'd gotten called up and I thought, boy if my supervisor doesn't have enough to keep deferring and I kind of wanted to get in the fight anyhow, you know, I'm gonna fold my tent here and see the draft board here and get transferred back to Pennsylvania. And that's exactly what I did. So I went back there I guess in February of '42, trying to get my house in order and then I went to apply for Naval Air Training down at the customs house in Philadelphia, 2nd and Chestnut. One of the questions that they asked was about your physical condition and they asked about asthma, hay fever, and that kind of thing and I allowed how I had some of that problem. Well that knocked me out right away because they said you know we get you out there on the high seas, we can't have you tolerating with any asthma attacks or that problem so thanks but no thanks. So I went downstairs to the Army Air Corp Office and I said well I'm gonna get smart enough not to tell them I have that anymore, and so I was doing just fine to be accepted as an Aviation Cadet. That's where you started into the training when you wanted to get into flying. Well the trouble is there according to the rules of the road so to speak I was about twelve pounds underweight. And they said no, we can't accept you because you're not, you're below the minimum weight requirement. And I said, oh, you know, why don't you give me a couple of weeks to see if I can't, you know, gain enough to get up to the hundred and whatever it was that they required. But it was twelve pounds over where I was and they said, well you know you'll never make it but okay we'll give you a couple weeks. So I fed up on bananas, of course, and milk shakes and all kinds of things to gain all the weight that I could. And in two weeks I came within ten pounds, I mean within two pounds. I had gained ten and they said, well, you're still a little under but if you want to take your chance on what'll happen when you get to your first station where they... you'll be probably going to Kelly Field, it's up to you. Otherwise if you flunk out down there you'll, you know, be in the regular Army. 'Said I'll take my chances and I went to San Antonio Kelly Field, where they had the start of various qualifying and tests to see what your best suited if you did fly, rather bombardier or pilot, navigator. And the flight surgeon that I got said; Well it doesn't bother me that you're a little underweight, I'd rather have you that way than overweight. But he said you do have a little systolic heart murmur and I want to have you come back tomorrow and let's listen to this some more. I said, Doc I've had this ever since I was a kid and my doctors have always been aware of it but they'd never been frightened or concerned about it so I think I just live with it but lets.. I'll come back tomorrow. So it was a similar thing tomorrow. He said, Well yes you still have it but okay, we'll pass you. So now I'm into the program.

Question: Was this real early, at the start of this... were you in an early class?

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Answer: Yeah, I was in, well it was called 43-3, meaning that we would be finishing our and becoming commissioned in February of '43.

Question: So was Kelly Field, was this a...?

Answer: Well, from Kelly Field then I went to Ellington Field and then on to Bombardier School at San Angelo, Texas.

Question: So were all these schools real new, had they just started them or..?

Answer: Oh, relatively new, probably less than a year old, most of them.

Question: So you'd, so they had just was really, sort of learning how to teach people..

Answer: Right, fortunately quite a few that I worked with, particularly in the Navigation School, which followed the Bombardier School, they were just excellent, they really had some super guys. Texas was sort of the hub of the training command for the Army Air Corp at that time. There were some in Santa Anna, California, but most of it in Texas.

Question: So was it a question between you being a bombardier or navigator, was that the two?

Answer: What determined it for me is the fact that I wanted to be sure I got commissioned, sure I flew and they had been washing out quite a few of the pilots and I said well, here again, I'd better elect my option to be on the sure side that I'm gonna get my wings so I'll go into bombardier. I don't know why I'm having such a frog here this morning. So, that's what, where I went and, went to San Angelo, Texas and was commissioned in February '43. Now a group of us were, I guess we did well enough in our basic stuff and in our bookwork that they said; We're going to send you to Navigation School as a student officer. So I ended up in San Marcus Texas, I think after a couple of weeks to slip home and started three months, three months... yeah I think it was, yeah, February through May I guess, going through Navigation Training. I think that the reason, (I should have rested before I started this taping I guess,) they wanted a fair number of us cadets and student officers to train to be bombardier and navigator. It was an SSN 1037 so that we could be dual rated to fly B-26's, B-29's in the Pacific. But the B-29's production had not moved as fast as they thought it might so we didn't go there. Instead we went the other way to England with the 8th Air Force. And my primary duty then was navigator, not bombardier. But I would certainly back up the bombardier if something happened to him.

Question: So did you, what type of navigation did you use back then?

Answer: Back in the States?

Question: When you were, what were you trained to do?

Answer: Oh, we did the whole thing, you know, cross-country, celestial navigation, a lot of DR navigation which is called dead reckoning, you know, taking certain happenings headings for a certain time, at certain indicated air speeds and

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true air speeds and taking into account drift and your wind on the craft... day missions, night missions, the whole, kind of, ball of wax.

Question: So when you were in a bombing flight, would, just would there, the lead plane would that be..?

Answer: There'd be a lead navigator, there'd be a lead bombardier, there'd be a lead pilot and co-pilot. And often the co-pilot of the lead craft was one of the top operational officers in our group.. would go, maybe a Lieutenant Colonel Cox or something like that. He wouldn't be the pilot but he would be co-pilot and he would be responsible for the entire group and what we did and where we went.

Question: I sort of jumped ahead but, when, after you got out of Bombardier School, you were formed up into the group that you were gonna fly with, didn't you before...

Answer: No, no, no, no, that didn't come until after we finished the navigation. Then we were assigned to tie in with a group and I went to... they called it Phase Training, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Phase Training or staging from the time you finished either bombardier or pilot or navigation, then you start to tie up with a crew. But we were sent to Moses Lake and just lived in tents for about a week and sand and wind blowing and it was miserable but that's what they wanted in case we were assigned to Africa or something, you know. Then I... we were, five or six of us, sent to Walla Walla and Walla Walla was 2nd and 3rd Phase Training and from Walla Walla you were getting ready to head for overseas through the various depots to get equipment and aircraft, that kind of thing. So at Walla Walla I was, went in the CNT Navigational Trainer. This is like a link trainer for navigators and I guess I did exceptionally well with the one mission that they had me fly and so a few days later one of the operations officers approached me and he said, Foss, you've done real well and we have a crew that's about ready to leave but their navigator has just gotten a fear of flying. They've had to knock him off; he's just flaked out here. So it's a great crew; they'd been flying together for, you know, over a month and you don't have to accept it but we'd like you to consider it. So I thought well, you know, I'm gonna get overseas within a couple of more weeks anyhow and here's a crew that's been flying together and I met some of them, particularly the pilot and the bombardier and they were just super guys so I said, I'll take it.

My wife never knew this because she was there with me.. she was in Walla Walla in the hotel there while I was finishing some of that phase training. She knew it, way after the war was over that I did volunteer because I could have stayed, probably two or three more weeks but so what. And of course she came from Pennsylvania out and it would have been three weeks she would have enjoyed. But she was at the Walt Whitman Hotel in Walla Walla and it's still there. So we..

Question: You'd gotten married in this time of..

Answer: I.. we did, backing up a little bit, after I got back from Seattle with Boeing and contacted my draft board, got into the Aviation Cadet Program. And they said, We have such a huge influx of people coming into the program we just aren't going to be able to put you on orders and assign you, maybe for a month or two, but he said, you know, you've sworn in, you are into the Army Air Corp now. And you have to keep in touch with us or give us phone and address which I did and then it was about two months later before they called me up and I went in. So in the meantime, my wife to be, we were getting married out here in Seattle and that didn't

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work and her folks, particularly her Mother said, Oh, you don't want to get married now. You know Foss is going into flying and it's going to be dangerous and wouldn't it be better to wait till after the war. And of course I'm sure many parents said that to many of their kids but we said well we probably will, but within two weeks we got married. So, yes, we were married.

Question: Did, who, did your wife decide you were going to get married or did you decide..?

Answer: I think we both said you know, kind of, what the heck. Because I figured well I'm either gonna live through it or else I'm gonna be killed because when you're flying, it seemed to me then you were either gonna live and be okay or else you won't.

Question: No wounded.

Answer: Right, but there were plenty of wounded of course... many of them wounded.

Question: Did you drive your car back to home?

Answer: No, we didn't have any car; we went on the train.

Question: Oh, I was wondering when you said your..

Answer: Oh, I'm sorry, from here when I left Boeing, Yes, yes.

Question: Though we were at war and you were driving across the United States?

Answer: Yes, on tires that I had my fingers crossed because my future father in law who was an automobile dealer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania sent me four tires. I was living at the Calhoun Hotel at 2nd and Virginia. Those tires came into the lobby and I thought I should, you know, I should take out a shotgun or something to keep people from not stealing them because they were, in fact retreads, but they were good retreads and had a lot of tread and the tires I had on the car, I know I wouldn't have wanted to cross country with them.

Question: You couldn't get new tires?

Answer: No, you couldn't get new tires.

Question: So they must have thought you were a celebrity with those tires showing up?

Answer: Well, they thought I was something yeah, I think. Where in the world did you get these?

Question: So did your, you took them down to the garage, have them mounted up and?

Answer: Yes, and probably I shouldn't take time to get into this but my wife whose name is Donna, her first name, her brother joined me out there before Pearl

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Harbor because I said, Paul, come on out... I can get you a job here at Boeing, no problem because they're hurting for people and he had done some sheet metal with aluminum and stuff and I thought, Boy, you know, they'll just love to have you which Paul did come out on the bus. And he went to work for Boeing so we both then drove back. We decided after Pearl Harbor, you know, our folks would never forgive us if we went from Seattle and got in and signed up so we went back to Pennsylvania.

Question: Was Boeing, when you started working for Boeing pre-Pearl Harbor do you think that Boeing was really gearing up for what they thought was going to happen?

Answer: Oh absolutely. Oh, we were on, everybody was working overtime, there were three shifts going day and night and those B-17's were coming out the front door like crazy.. pre-Pearl Harbor. And then afterwards when we had the blackouts and all that kind of stuff it was even more accelerated program. Of course, some of the B-17's were made by Lockheed and the Willow Run Plant, the old Ford plant was producing at that point a lot of B-17's.

Question: So it was war production already.

Answer: Oh yeah, yeah.

Question: Were they going to the Army Air Corp or were they going to Europe or... what was happening to them?

Answer: The B-17's?

Question: Yeah.

Answer: Most of them were going to Europe, yeah. A lot of them to the 8th Air Force, some directly into Africa and some to the 12th and 15th Air Force in Italy. But to my knowledge none of them were being sent over Pacific way. We had B-17's there, if you read the history and Ford Field there at Pearl Harbor when it was bombed we lost all kind of B-17's along with all the many other aircraft.

Question: What did you do in the assembly line? What was your job?

Answer: I was.. I started out as rivet buckler. A rivet buckler is the person on the other side of the rivet that's being pneumatically hammered and so the.. you know, shank of the rivet comes up and you hit a couple of things on the skin of the aircraft meaning height, that's enough, let's go to the next one, so the riveter is usually on the outside poking in these rivets and pre-drilled holes. I'm buckling on, from the inside with metal bars of different sizes and shapes.

Question: So you'd actually be in, would you be in a wing doing that or..?

Answer: We were in, not in the wing, people doing wing, they.. I'm not familiar with how they did it but we were in the fuselage department and normally I was working toward the... oh, from the bomb bay back toward the tail.

Question: So you always did that?

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Answer: So I always did that except that before long I was, said how about being a riveter? And so, no longer am I a bucker... I'm on the outside on various stands and so forth with the Chicago pneumatic rivet guns. And so I was a riveter. Then I don't know why but I was offered a position as final assembly inspector for sheet metal in the nose compartment before the aircraft was accepted by the Air Corp and went out the front door. So that's where I was when I left Boeing, working in the nose checking on sheet metal work that had to be re-done or rivets that weren't in right or something missing or whatever.

Question: Was there, do you remember when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Do you remember where you were?

Answer: I was in the Calhoun Hotel in the lobby at 2nd and Virginia that Sunday morning I believe.. and yes, that's where I was.

Question: Did you have a radio down there or..?

Answer: There was a radio in the lobby.. cause we didn't have one in our room. And people quickly started to gather around and listen to the, you know, the various commentators on the severity of it and couldn't believe it kind of thing. And, you know, within a few days afterwards we all said... shoot we're going to clean those Japs up within a couple of weeks, a month at the most and they're out of here. Well, we didn't do it and we couldn't do it and you know what the length of the war went on until the fall of 1945 at Hiroshima.

Question: Were you... did it.. it was just unbelievable when you heard it, I mean you heard..?

Answer: Oh yes, yes. You know, how old was I, 22 maybe and those things couldn't have happened because we had defenses all over the Pacific you know. I was aware that we had regular Air Force and Navy personnel out there. No way could they have a surprise raid of... particularly Pearl Harbor. And of course, we didn't know too much about installations other than maybe Pearl Harbor. I mean, who was in the Philippines and said we didn't know.

Question: Did you... I assume that one of the first things you did was to call your wife or your fiancée cause you were engaged, right?

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: Do you remember that call?

Answer: I don't and I don't think that was one of the first things I did. I think Paul, her brother and I probably went out and had a good dinner and a drink. And talked over, now what, what'll we do. And I said, Paul we just can't enlist from here because our folks and your folks would never forgive us for that. So that's when we started to make inroads and did then call and talk to Donna and talked to her Father who said, Well, if you're coming home.. well we want you home I'm gonna send you four tires so you can drive that Pontiac back here.

Question: Did your, you knew that your lives were changed. You knew that...

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Answer: Oh, absolutely, yes. And you know, it was an exhilarating thing. It was something you had no fear about. In fact you were going to... everybody was into the war effort whether they were just civilians and no matter what age and it was a patriotic spirit that will never happen again. Everybody pulled together. If somebody was 4-F which means they had physical disabilities or something or they were, thing slips me, but where they just refused to serve..

Question: Conscientious objector.

Answer: Conscientious objector. Most of us would look down our long nose at those kind of people and say, Huh you know, that's.. they're chicken, afraid to get in, so...

Question: Did, Boeing, things changed immediately at Boeing, I mean, like that?

Answer: No, because as I said they were in max effort pretty well before Pearl Harbor so they couldn't change too much except that they really did go full three shifts and a lot of overtime was being worked.

Question: Did they, did you have women working with you before?

Answer: Oh, yeah, not very many, not very many and they were doing, you know, light kind of work; they were working in the tool shop or something of this nature. They weren't up on the planes actually building them as they did you know "Rosie the Riveter" later.

Question: Did they, Seattle was, did that change? Did you walk outside that night and there was a blackout or how did those things change?

Answer: Immediately there was blackouts all over the Northwest and that was a new experience that you... Lines were drawn. There were no streetlights. There was no cars that were traveling with lights after a certain time. Public transportation, you know, they had headlights on a dimmer kind of thing, half of it, headlight taped off so that it doesn't shine too much because that's the way we came and went to Boeing. I didn't drive my own car.. Just foolish to, we took the bus.

Question: The, so your daily life just changed. I mean, just the way you did things changed.

Answer: Absolutely, it's, yes, in fact from day to day, you say, oh no, what's, what are we going to do tomorrow. And we had decisions to make and we have.. the way of, the way things were going and the war wasn't going well and so I don't know that my life changed that much but my thinking and reacting to things certainly changed.

Question: I know you said earlier that you all thought, oh we'll take care of the Japanese in two or three weeks but in reality today looking back we all say, oh yeah we won but it was questionable at times..

Answer: Oh absolutely. It was very questionable cause the Japanese were infiltrating into the Philippines and Marianas and all those Pacific Islands with forces that could, you know, come back upon us in the, in Hawaii and on the Aleutians off

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of Alaska, up and down the West Coast. There were some bombings and there were some Japanese that infiltrated that far.

Question: Did you go to newsreels and see the news that the Germans and Japanese..?

Answer: I don't think we had time to go to the movies, go to shows. We were either sleeping or eating or working. I don't recall that I did then... Fox Movietone and that kind of thing I guess I occasionally did but I..

Question: I was just wondering if there is times when you thought, Oh my God they're so powerful or..

Answer: Yeah, sure I did but it was more from the news that you heard on the radio and read in the paper more than going to movies and see Fox Movietone or Pathe News was one of the things was of those years.

Question: Did, now, I sort of took you back, when you accepted this... your wife had come out to what was it, Walla Walla?

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: And so she's in...

Answer: Oh she came out because I first went to Moses Lake so there's no place for family, wife or anything in Moses Lake so I said, you go to Spokane and get into a hotel.. either the Davenport or the, oh... I can't think of the one or two, the Ridpath I guess. But wait until you hear from me until I get moved out of Moses Lake and then you can join me. I think we'll be sent back to what was Geiger Field... it's now Fairchild Air Force Base, just west of Spokane. And that's where most of us thought we would be going so I said, you stay right where you are in Spokane and you know we'll be over there soon. Our next call I'm trying to find her, where she is and the hotel because I said, Donna we're in Walla Walla... Walla Walla, where is that? Well, I said, I told her how she could come.. and again I think it was, I think it was on the train.

Question: She had never been to the West I take it before..?

Answer: No, no, she'd never been away from home that long.

Question: So that was a big deal... getting ready to move.

Answer: Oh, everything was a big deal for you, for me too.

Question: So did... in the short time you had, did you find a place together and..?

Answer: Yes, well, we stayed at the Walt Whitman Hotel because we knew we wouldn't be there too long and I wanted a nice place for her and we didn't have any place on the base as I recall for married officers in the officer's quarters. So you lived off base and you got extra pay for it. But that's where I kept her. And I probably only got in.. to see her still on weekends unless we had a thing going on at the base where, like an officer's dance or something like that where she could come on out to the base on the bus.

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Question: So then when you got your flight crew and you said you had met them, that was the ten, those, it was nine people and you, correct, there was ten people all together.

Answer: Right.

Question: So the ten... you ten were destined to be together through your tour?

Answer: Right, right, yeah, we were a close team I'll tell you and that's how you became. You just became so closely knitted to everyone, the four officers and six enlisted men. You just, as you flew together a little more and more, you just knew what the other was almost thinking and what he was gonna do next.

Question: Did, now from Walla Walla did you have additional training before you shipped overseas?

Answer: Not additional training, no. From there we went to Topeka, Kansas mainly to get briefing on our flight, taking an aircraft and flying over to Gander and Newfoundland and Iceland and over into England. And getting charts and the whole checkout kind of thing, getting some B-4 jackets and boots and things that they could issue there at Topeka rather than..

Question: So did you say goodbye to your wife in Walla Walla or where did you say goodbye to her?

Answer: Yes, in Walla Walla, I got her on the train, that was quite an experience again for her to go all the way back.. and trains were just jammed with soldiers and wives and people sleeping in these dirty old hot coaches, you know.. and windows open and soot and everything else cause a lot of them were still, you know, steam trains then rather, they weren't electrified or diesel.

Question: So she came, came out and within a matter of weeks, is..

Answer: Yes, that was it.

Question: So that, do you remember the goodbye, was it?

Answer: Well, it was kind of, you know, I think maybe I'll try and get off and see you if there's any chance if not, yes it's goodbye, I'll write. I'll keep your picture right on my bosom here in my shirt pocket.

Question: So was she, did she?

Answer: Now we didn't fly over, we went instead to Newport News, Virginia because I think they'd been losing quite a few of the aircraft that were being flown over... equipment failures, crashing, loss, running out of fuel and that kind of thing so they decided to have most of the crews go over on vessels rather than fly over. So we were in Newport News maybe for a week before we got on a ship and then picked up a convoy partly out of Newport News Virginia, but then again up at Nova Scotia and St. Johns I guess it was. So we ended up with a convoy of about 26 ships, a lot of corvettes as escort ships. We were on large ships. I remember the ship that we were on as formerly a banana boat, the Santa Maria or something like

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that.. that you know, those ships were refurbished, then used as troop carriers. And it was quite a crossing, I think it was about ten days because you couldn't go any faster than the slowest ship in your group and they also took a lot of evasive action when there was submarines either perceived to be sighted.. or if we knew they were out there. So they would, the whole convoy would take a heading and then ten, twelve minutes later the whole convoy takes another heading. This went on day and night and I thought how do they do this you know.. everybody moving at the same moment. There was supposed to be radio silence but I'm sure ship to ship there was communications but I was pretty amazed at the time that with that many ships we didn't run into one another at the time, especially when there was heavy fog or night.

Question: Did you run into?

Answer: But we ended up and got into Liverpool I think about ten days later. And from Liverpool we went to a staging area, distribution center in Stoke on Stone. Stone was a river... the town was called Stoke. Then ultimately, at night as I recall, get into big four by four trucks and take us to the bomb group. Knettishall was the name of the little town where the 388 Bomb Group was. And we had three other groups within our traffic pattern so you can see how close these stations were to one another in East Anglia. That was where most of the bomber stations were. And I think there were about 26 bomb group stations, airfields in eastern England.

Question: So when you got there, how long had the Air Force been there doing that?

Answer: We were the first replacements. So they'd gotten in there... I think August of '42, just about a year before we did. They had done thirty missions.. because when I got on one of these missions to Bremen it was my eleventh mission and it was the 41st mission for the group.. so they had done about thirty missions by the time. And we were the first replacements for this group that had come over from Wendover Field outside of Salt Lake City in Utah so, and they were hurting for people. Their losses had been heavy and for personnel and aircraft so we were the first replacement and of course, oh, welcomed you know.

Question: Did you get there at night?

Answer: And immediately we thought, boy if you lived through five missions, that's probably more than you can hope for. Yeah, we came in at night, uh huh.

Question: And did you, did... now, the officers and men slept in separate quarters?

Answer: Right.

Question: But you stayed with your officers?

Answer: Right, in Quonset huts with a pot bellied stove in the center of the Quonset hut and if you were anywhere close to it you were burning up and if you weren't you were just cold and damp and.. you know it was miserable.

Question: So, did it occur to you that your bunks of a crew that had died?

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Answer: Oh, yeah, we soon got, you know the grape vine among the crewmembers and particularly officers. You were asking if we learned of what had happened just before. Yes, they'd had a couple of raids where they had oh, 28% of the craft that they sent out not return. Some crashed and some of course people got out, parachute over the target and that kind of thing. But just to put it in perspective, of the group that I went over as first replacement group, and I forget how many crews we were, 86% did not finish 25 missions, which was a tour. You finished 25... you were done. Later on it went to 30 and then finally 35, but to do 25 it was really a feat.

Question: Now when you got to England they got you to this bomb group pretty fast.

Answer: Oh yeah.

Question: You didn't sight see, you didn't..

Answer: Oh no, no, none of that.

Question: So when you got there, how long was it before they got you up for a briefing?

Answer: I would say two weeks, maybe less. We went on one or two familiarization flights right in England just, you know, practicing formation mainly and we were, I'm sure it was less than two weeks that we went on our first mission.

Question: Did you dread that?

Answer: Now on the first mission we had a co-pilot who was, who had flown other things. And often when you had losses of crew you will have some co-pilots and some navigators excess to the needs of any particular crew. And he flew one time on our first mission. It was an easy one to Rheims, France as I recall but from there on it was all us.

Question: Did you dread the two weeks? Did you think, oh my God we're gonna?

Answer: No, no, in fact I just kind of easy, you know, eager after all this training, bouncing around over in Texas and the state of Washington to get in and I felt so close to my crew that I thought there's no way... we're not gonna come through this. On the other hand I was sure we wouldn't. Many times you said to yourself and you prayed about it that you no way are you gonna get through 25 of these terrible missions. A few of them were what we call milk runs but there weren't many of them.

Question: You never voiced that, when you talk to friends you never voiced negative...

Answer: Oh no. Well the only talking, you mean, with folks back home?

Question: When you sat around the barracks you never voiced the negative thought?

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Answer: Oh, to some extent maybe particularly when you come back and four of your officers sleeping on the other end of the Quonset are gone... and somebody comes in, some sergeant comes in and starts to put their belongings into a bag to be sent back to the states, back home because... they either knew they had been killed in action or missing in action and so. That kind of got to you. Then a couple days later another four officers come in to take their place such as we did when we came in.

Question: Did the, when was it that you really got a clue of what was going on? Now I've talked to people that it was when they saw a plane come back or... When did you sort of figure out the ferocity of?

Answer: Well, the, I think about my second or third mission we had one to Münster and I, we saw and experienced everything on that mission. I mean, they threw the book at us. Flack, you heard... it used to be said anyhow you could get out and walk on it... all these blank bursts all around your plane and your group. Fighters hangin' off just waiting till one of you gets, you know, into trouble and they come right through, even when you're dropping bombs over the target they'll do that. Planes are going down. I counted 46 parachutes in the air at one time before we came and dropped our bombs. With the groups ahead of us 46 parachutes and here are fighters comin' in and shooting at these poor devils and some of the planes were exploding and the farther we'd go down and of course the parachutes under there were just gone... you know, the bodies dropping in flames, the chute was in flames..

Question: Plane blows up and the flames hit the chutes...

Answer: Yeah, and they're done. And that's when it really hit home as to the, what these missions were like and we knew they weren't gonna get easier because they wanted to penetrate into Germany as quickly as they could. And one of the, of course, sorry things at that time of the war was the lack of fire protection, our fighters defending us on our flights. They had P-47's, the old Thunderbolts; Republic P-47's was the only fighter that we had over there at the time. You know, they tried to protect us but they ran out of fuel. They had no extra tanks for fuel and they no more got over the coast of France or something... they had to turn around and come back to England. So from there on, we're plodding along, you know, at about 200, 210 indicated air speed and we're just dead meat for any of those. Because the German fighters with their Focke-Wulf 190 which was a super aircraft. Probably better than the Spitfire and what it could do, the maneuverability, the firepower and the ME-109's, 110 and 210, the Messerschmitts were the two main fighters that Germany had. Well they had fields spotted all the way from the coast inland so they would have an alert and you're coming across the Netherlands or something you get through that coastal anti-aircraft fire if you're lucky and then here come the fighters and after they leave you in about ten... fifteen minutes another group comes from another airfield further in the continent and it just went like that on and on. And you know we, we don't have, all we had is 50 caliber guns and their range is pretty miserable and when you're flying at 200 and something and you're in formation your ability to shoot and get one of their fighters as fast as they're in, especially if they're coming in head on, the closure is so fast. You're just kind of lucky, a lot of, we did get a lot of their fighters that way but most of their fighters were down because ultimately we had fighters that would bring tanks and belly tanks with extra 200, 250 gallons of fuel so they could go further in.

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Question: Do you remember that when you... that first raid into Rheims, France that, is that a real memorable thing that very first time you crossed the coast?

Answer: It's memorable in the fact that, what's so tough about these missions you know. Cause this was, we called them milk runs, when it was just an easy mission... no big losses and you know little damage to the plane from anti-aircraft and you were lucky if you came back with only ten or fifteen holes in the fuselage or the wings you know which they would patch up and you'd go off again the next day. So you know, I felt good about this. But it turned sour very quickly.

Question: So that sort of almost set you up for a big fall then?

Answer: Oh yeah. As I say this raid to Münster was the one that I think shook our entire crew up pretty badly and we say you know, this is serious. So each day when you were assigned and you got up 4:30 in the morning to go on another mission you thought, you know, this could be our last. But we tried to stay positive and as a crew we did, we did cause we knew our own skins determined much by how we and what we did as a crew.

Question: Did you... now being a navigator, where was your position?

Answer: I was in the nose along with the bombardier. The bombardier was all the way up at the Plexiglas part of the B-17 nose in a little seat that would swivel. And I was on the port side of the aircraft, which facing forward is on the left side in the nose with a table, navigator's table, and I had a kind of an office seat that would swivel. It didn't have arms but at least, you know, you sat there and you could move and this is where I did my plotting and my, with my charts and E6B computer to determine wind speeds and drift and we had a drift meter just to my back, a meter that went right through the fuselage and was picking up your drift with a grid so that you could tell if you had no drift whatsoever, stuff would be tracking under you perfectly. If you had drift, you had to change the grid to stay with the drift and then you'd read ten degrees or twelve degrees left drift or whatever.

Question: Could you look straightforward and see out of the aircraft?

Answer: Oh yeah. Oh I had a great view... not quite as good as the bombardier but the two of us did.

Question: And did you have a, did you man a machine gun or something?

Answer: Yes, I had two 50-caliber guns and the bombardier had a 50-caliber gun through the Plexiglas nose. Now this was a B-17F and the B-17Gs', which came along, and we ultimately were flying the G Model, had the chin turret. This is a turret with two 50 caliber's mounted and the bombardier controls that gun with handles, you know and sighting and these guns are pop, pop, pop.. out the nose from the chin turret. So there were four then, I had one on the left, one on the right that I could use and did and the bombardier had head on.

Question: So you had to go back and forth..

Answer: Depending on where the, yeah, planes were..

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Question: Did you do that and did you see things or did someone yell to you and say..?

Answer: Well, they would yell, you know, ten o'clock high. We got a plane coming in and then you knew where to look. And for those that might not have picked it up, sometimes they're coming in from different directions and you get so busy nobody's calling anything cause they're all over.

Question: Now you all hear each other, correct?

Answer: Yeah, we had an intercom that if it's working we're all in touch with one another. We hold down our conversation to the bare what's important.. none of this joking or anything until we get back over the English Channel and head for home. Then we even played some music over our system. But yeah, we had intercom.

Question: So there was a, when you, was that sort of a line that the coast of Europe, was that sort of a, when you crossed that.. did things change then?

Answer: Oh yeah. Now you're in enemy territory. You know anything can happen. The whole coastline was heavily with armor with anti-aircraft weaponry. So many times we would fly further north and come in from the north part, over the North Sea, past the Friesian Islands, the west and east Friesians and then down into Germany, like into Bremen which was another horrendous mission that we had that I had written up in to a magazine here. To avoid a lot of this coastal anti-aircraft because they were accurate and they were good and they had a lot of it and so many planes we were losing right there coming in on the coast so we would take other routes to get in hoping to avoid a lot of it.

Question: So you saw, you got to see everything as, like the pilots then, I mean, you saw what you were getting into then?

Answer: Yep, yep, you had a good view.

Question: Did you feel vulnerable?

Answer: I would say it's like sitting on a double-decker bus on the upper level, right in the front row. Yeah, you had a view of the whole thing. In fact, speaking of that on our first mission, I guess it was our second mission cause the first one we had this co-pilot who was flying with us to give us some help. But on the second mission we almost didn't clear the runway at the end. They had red lights at the end of the runway and we're still trying to get airspeed to take off and these red lights are coming up and up and up and the bombardier and I are in the nose and we thought oh, this is it you know. So the pilot had to bounce the plane off and we just cleared the shrubbery and hedgerow right at the end and just got airborne. We'll never do this again. What happened was he was used to setting at the end of the runway and slowly working the engines up to speed as the plane started to roll. Well our fields back in the states were pretty long and we had, you know, mile and a half runways on some of them. I think the Moses Lake one was about a two-mile runway but certainly over a mile on most of them. Here they were short runways so he quickly learned you gotta stand on the brakes, give it full power, release the brakes and the plane lunges but you're not off on a slow roll start. So it's full power right now. Cause you're got a bomb load that's 5,000 Lbs. you know, full gas, full

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armament, all these 50 caliber's, and all the gun positions which were eight of them I guess so they were every mission was a different challenge. This one to Bremen was my eleventh mission I think was my worst and it wasn't because we had a heavy fighter..

Question: Could I interrupt... I have one last, just one thing... do you remember each of the 25?

Answer: Do I remember?

Question: The 25 missions... are they all in your mind... are they all..?

Answer: Oh no, they're all meshed together. That was sixty years ago and I can't.. I've got a thing that..

Question: Until then though each mission has an identity though, is that..?

Answer: Yeah, except that the minute it's over, that's a forgotten mission and tomorrow's another one and you're on a red alert to go again... sometimes three days in a row you go on flying.

Question: And then it was after your second one that you... from then on, your whole ten, you always have the same crew?

Answer: Well, except this eleventh mission to Bremen we lost, I say we lost, our tail gunner he, our oxygen finally leaked away so we had no oxygen at all. He fell off to the side, pulled his oxygen mask off and he had severe frostbite, unconscious, same as one of our waist gunner... they just passed out and they were laying you know. So that was the last time our tail gunner flew with us because he went to a general hospital somewhere down near London and they were gonna amputate both his legs because of that frost bite. As I found out later he pleaded with them at the last minute, try and save them... I'll do anything to keep my legs and they apparently said okay, we'll see what it looks like in another few days and it did improve and so. But of course he wasn't flying anymore.

Question: Let me change the tape here.