

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Question: Let's go ahead and pick up on the Bremen raid... that was No. 11?

Answer: That was our eleventh mission and it. As I alluded to before, we got up around 4:00 or 4:30 in the morning. One of the sergeants comes in and shakes every one of us to get us out. We know we were flying but we want sleep as much as we could. We walk over to the mess hall and get a reasonably good breakfast because this is the last time we're going to eat till dinner. They don't put any box lunches up for us. So we eat a good breakfast. Then we walk to the start of the various briefings that we have. We initially have a general briefing so that we know where we're going, we know where we're flying and the squadron and the elements and in the group, and in the wing, and then the whole division. We have our times of leaving the coast and times of IP which is the initial point on the bomb run, it's the IP and then bombs away and then we go to briefings for our positions. We have a navigator's briefing, just navigators. A bombardier has just bombardiers. The pilots have just pilot briefings. Then we head to the parachute shop and check out a harness and parachute because we do not leave these in the aircraft cause they repack them often and make sure they're gonna work. Then, we, if we're lucky climb on a jeep or a four by four or something to go out to the hard stand where our plane is parked, and where the ground crew is living in tents and working their butts off through the night to get that plane serviced and back as an operational aircraft again. And then we still have a lot of work doing in pre-flight in the aircraft. As a navigator I probably don't have as much as some of the others but I've got to get all my stuff out of my case and set up and make sure my astrocompass is going to work and that kind of thing. A bombardier has to, you know, uncap his Norden bombsight and make sure it's working and the switches and fuses and everything are going to be okay. And of course the armorer and the gunners are the ones that have the most work because they have to load all the belts of 50-caliber. They've got to, well their guns are already clean but they've got to reassemble them, put them on the station and you know, set them up. The bombs are probably about finished being loaded, whatever they're gonna be by the ground armament, armor people. Anywhere from 500 Lb. bombs up to 2,000 Lb. Bombs and incendiary.. clusters of incendiary bombs are normally what we're dropping. And so they finish loading those and close the Bombay doors. The bombardier will make sure that the safety wires are into the tail spinner on the bomb so that we don't have an armed bomb at takeoff. And until he.. over the channel somewhere, goes back and pulls those wires so that they're armed when they drop and the tail fuses start to spin that's part of his job. So probably takeoff isn't until around quarter of nine, nine o'clock and in the winter that's kind of just daybreak almost because they have long cold damp winters there in England through the months that I'm talking about. And this raid was in November. And as a matter of fact we experienced the coldest flight conditions that they had in the continent the whole winter. Our temperatures in the aircraft were down.. outside aircraft were down to 60 below Fahrenheit, 60 below. We had icicles on our oxygen mask and of course you know B-17's were not pressurized so we were all, had to be on oxygen after we got up 12, 11, 10 thousand feet... from thereon you're on oxygen. And the whole trouble started because we left the coast right on time. We were in good formation with no aircraft problems, no equipment problems and you know, you just feel good. You feel like.. well 50% of this mission is gonna go well because we've started well. If things happen right initially before you ever get over the coast you got problems and you may even have to abort the mission. So we're going over it and in this case I used the example before, we went North Sea and then by the Friesian Islands and then down across Jade Bay, I think it's called. This is in the very northwest corner of Germany. It's a big port of Wilhelmshaven but a little further down, maybe another 15, 25 miles is Bremen.

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Bremen.. the target there was the FW-190, the Focke-Wulf 190 which was their hottest fighter plane and they were batting them out by the hundreds. So initially, our targets were mainly aircraft plants, ball bearing plants and oil production places like in Schweinfurt and some of those down there in Regensburg.

Well, before we really started on the bomb run we noticed that the oxygen system, the pressure was down almost to 100 Lbs. Normally at that point in your flight it would be around 250 Lbs. on the whole system.. because ten people are sucking the oxygen from this. Well, it was down to a little over 125 Lbs.; and I said to Hal, the pilot, what'll we do? Should be abort this mission and fly back to England because I don't think we're gonna be able to make it on the oxygen.. with the leak that's going on. He said, Oh, we've come this far... let's hang in there. We're on the bomb run.. coming up on the bomb run and so he just said we'll go. Bombay doors open, bombs away, flak like crazy all over the place, very accurate. You know much of this is timed to go off at certain altitudes, and some of these crews down on the ground, the Germans, get quite good at having. There'll be a plane spotting our altitude, one of their fighters you know, and radio on down that flight's basically at 25,000 feet and so there you got all this flak.

But all the Plexiglas, it looks like white Christmas inside the plane with this temperature 60 below Fahrenheit. And we start to lose instruments; we start to be unable to even see out. I know that the pilot had to look through a little peephole to stay in formation on the bomb run itself. And I start to lose instruments; we start to lose our intercom on a couple of positions, the tail gunner we lost and a couple of the waist gunners. We still had some intercom that was working, but things went really down hill from there. The, we had a flak burst in the No. 3 engine and we lost oil pressure. We had very quickly after that a loud crack and we'd blown cylinders on the No. 4 engine so here's one engine with reduced power, and the one that we blew the cylinders we were lucky to feather the prop so it wouldn't windmill and cause a drag. So here we are with two engines out on one side and we're all frosted up. We're losing contact with one another and then the next thing; most of our instruments were frozen. I have no compass. I have no astrocompass, no periodic compass. They just froze. We couldn't get the bomb doors closed. They were frozen open. We heard from the ball turret gunner. He mumbled something about on the few remaining intercom things where you had something about doors, doors. And you know, Billy Fore, my bombardier and I both figure well the doors aren't closing cause they didn't have any lights to let you know when they were open or closed like they certainly would today. So, we had people passing out. We were told the tail gunner has passed out. The right waist gunner is laying on the floor because of lack of oxygen. So we had the pilot and co-pilot go on portable walk around oxygen bottles. These bottles are if you have to get up and go, do something in the bomb bay or go back in the radio room or something you carry a walk around. They're bottles, you know, about this big around, like this. And you hook them to your oxygen mask. So to conserve all that we could so that we would have less.. no more people passing out, that's what we did. Several of us went on walk around bottles. But pretty soon we're getting, the whole crew is getting groggy and the air is just musty and we're breathing just at the very tail end of whatever oxygen is in the system. So the pilot knows we've got to come down out of altitude. We had broken formation earlier because of the loss of power. We couldn't stay in our formation and that's usually when the fighters will come in and just nail you because here you are a lone ship going out and you're in trouble anyhow. I don't know how we got so lucky but there was no fighter that picked us up at that point. But when we got down between the overcast and undercast at around 10,000 Ft. where we could get out of our oxygen masks and start to breathe, two ME-109's spotted us, and they head for us and our pilot was quick enough to spot a big cumulus cloud

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

ahead, dove into the cloud, did 180 degrees turn.. heading back the way we came and we lost both of them. They lost us. So then we dropped down and again, we're into the undercast, I guess somewhere below 7,000 feet. Instruments are starting to come back but not enough for me to have compass readings yet and it's still pretty frosty in the whole plane itself, the nose, the instruments, the pilot, the co-pilot, most of the instrumentation are out or they're so frosted they can't read them. So the pilot, you know, wants... where's home? because in our heading we said.. we get across the Dutch coast, we might have it made because we're having so much trouble. And I said I think we're over the Zuider Zee Peninsula.. which was along the Dutch coast, but I don't know which way we're heading. I don't know where east or west is. Of course, there's no sun to get a relative bearing on where you are but I said that hold what you've got in the way of heading because it would appear we're heading back west toward England. And all of a sudden I thought of a little compass that we had in our escape kit. We were always issued an escape kit as part of our briefing on every mission and it had the currency of the countries over which you'd be flying. It had morphine; it had other first aid items and it had maps of the area where you would be, kind of on rubber stuff that you could dissolve, I think if you left them in the rain. But this little compass no bigger than a dime.. and I pulled the escape kit out; I got this little compass. I put it in my hand and it works... we were headed due south over the worst of the coastal anti-aircraft down toward Calais and I gave the pilot a new heading and it saved the day so to speak because I'm sure we'd been in real trouble. So we take the, you know, not an exact heading but a heading west toward England and now we get word that the. And things are starting to come back in the way of instruments cause we're down... now we're down almost on the water level and so people that were groggy and everything are back with reasonable abilities to think and act. And we're find out there's three bombs hung up in the bomb bay that may have been one of the reasons we couldn't close the doors cause there may have been a switch kind of thing. I'm not aware of that, but I think it was the cold that made the doors stuck open but here's three bombs hung up and two of them have the tail spinner spinning so that they would be armed when that came off. And you know, you land with an armed 500 Lb. Bomb you don't want to do that because the concussion would just blow us to eternity. But the bombardier went back and with the help from the radio operator they were able to stop the fuse with a wire to stop it from turning. And they were able to kick it away from the bomb shackle which was, had malfunction so the front of the bomb released but the bomb's hanging like this rather than dropping free. So we go up about a thousand feet even though we lost power, we are able to climb a little bit and drop the eggs, as we called them, into the sea. They did... one of them exploded; I think the other one didn't cause we were able to put the safety wire in it. Cause we felt this big concussion you know but so then we dropped back down to skimming the water. When these fighters came on us when we were between overcast and undercast you never can turn an aircraft into dead engines, into engines that either are feathered or you lost power cause you'll spin in if you do. So we turned of course to the left to make this 180 Degree turn to try and get into the cloud to lose the fighters and which we did. Well, we came back shooting red flares, that gives you priority to land at your base or any other base you get into because it indicates you have injuries aboard and they have an ambulance waiting for you. So, our, this is where our tail gunner, he was really zonked out of the thing, he never did quite come back till they got him in to treat him there at the base hospital. And the rest of us started to come around and breathe again. That was a 6-1/2 hour mission that had action most of the time.

Question: Did the, did you have the electric suits that helped you?

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Answer: We had electric suits if they were working we were lucky. We had electric suits because through the winter in those kind of temperatures, 25 or 40 or 60 below outside temperature you were, frost your butt you know. So if you didn't have it you miserably lived through it... kept moving, kept your, you know, arms going and tried to be. Of course, you did have heavy, fleece lined, like chaps on, pants, you had a heavy B-4 fleece lined jacket, you had boots that came up to maybe here and they were fleece lined. So you did get some help from that kind of thing and usually we layered our underwear. We'd wear long johns and sweaters and shirts and under all these jackets. But when they were working they worked just beautifully, the heated suit. But between the heated suits and the flak suits which we later were able to obtain there were flak vests so that if you know flak fragments were to hit you in the chest you've got a vest, much like bullet proof vests the police wear. They were heavy as all get out but we would wear them when we knew we were gonna get into a lot of anti-aircraft fire.

Question: When you got up in the morning and you got up to go to your briefing you had no idea until that moment where you were going, right?

Answer: Right.

Question: Did you, you must have learned pretty fast about what was good and what was bad. When they pulled a... exposed the location you were going to, was it a sinking feeling when you saw certain names?

Answer: It often was a real sinking feeling. We thought, sooner or later, they're gonna try and get us to Berlin, which would have been a long haul then and a long haul back home but for PR back home to have the Fortresses go to Berlin and bomb, you know, it would raise the spirits of everybody back here in the states, particularly everybody was pulling and working in some kind of war effort. We ultimately did one of those raids to Berlin but that was almost to the end of my tour. But yes, they would pull the curtain open and here they would have a yarn string going from your station and showing the various changes up across the North Sea and over here and down into Bremen say or down into Frankfurt.. and then showing things to get you back home... and then you went, Ohhhhhh. You could hear everybody just moan Oh, or No not again. Cause I think we went to Bremen five times out of my 25 missions. You know, some of the bombing was kind of miserable for the first couple of times. So we kept going back there because we wanted to cut out that fighter protection or uh production.

Question: So it was the same thing every time?

Answer: Yes, oh yeah. Well, once in a while say you would get a milk run. You say, oh that should be... we'd go on the (Inaudible). Well it turned out it wasn't a milk run at all. The only milk run I ever experienced was the very first one, and I was too dumb to know it was such an easy mission.

Question: What did you, when you, what did you feel and hear when you were in combat, could you hear the guns going off and..?

Answer: Oh sure, sure, Pop, Pop, Pop, Pop (sound of guns going off) you know. And there's some vibration from the guns, specially if the chin turret guns with dual

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

fifties are going, same with the tail, he had twin 50 caliber guns and even up in the nose you could tell that he was firing.

Question: So you could feel all that going on?

Answer: Yeah, it just came right through, you know, there's no sound proofing to those planes at all.

Question: And then the only, on your intercom you only heard business, that was it?

Answer: Oh, right, right. And when it goes out, you've lost touch with everybody..

Question: It's a big deal.

Answer: And that's a terrible feeling. Something just popped in my mind. To do 25 missions I think we took off about forty times. We had so many missions that were scrubbed when 3rd Bomb Headquarters decided.. oh no we just, the weather has turned sour. We're going to lose all kinds of aircraft. We're going to have trouble with fuels running out on the long Schweinfurt mission or something... so they'd scrub it. They'd radio and the radio operator'd tell the pilot that our mission's scrubbed and the lead ship would get the word first and then he would start to take a turn and we all followed to go back home. So these were aborted or scrubbed missions and we hated them. You got up early, you went through all that, you went through the briefings, you went through working together, you went out to the hard stand, you loaded in the dark and you taxied up and every forty seconds a plane was taking off and you get up over the North Sea or you get across the channel and the whole thing is scrubbed. Hundreds of airplanes are returning back. It used to be only about 225 when our first missions and of course after I finished they had over 1,000 in the 8th Bomber Command. But oh, we hated those aborted missions because you don't get counted unless you're over enemy territory, you don't get it counted as a mission.

Question: So you wanted?

Answer: Oh yeah, we're up here, let's do it, yeah. But as I say to do 25, I'm sure we had take-offs and briefings and everything of probably close to 40 missions.

Question: So by the third mission you, when you went to a briefing, you got off the ground, you were experiencing anticipation or fear I take it?

Answer: I think we were still a little bit feeling that we were invincible. I mean the other aircraft would be hit and blow up and get on fire and spin in and parachutes and all that kind of stuff but, you know, it won't happen to us as long as we hang together and equipment. If your equipment goes bad, engines go out, or you have a fire aboard... that's the worst thing because you're carrying all this high-octane fuel in the wing tanks.. or you lose elevators or a rudder is shot off because of twenty mi.. or rockets they would go out and lob in rockets. They were out of your range for your guns, but they would sit there with these Messerschmitts 210's and they would have rockets under their wings and they're... boom. And you know, if you ever were hit with one, that you've had it. But even if you were close to it and it hit anything you were apt to be part of it.

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Question: There was a..

Answer: So I just think there wasn't the fear as you say as much as a constant being on guard and say, well now this is one more mission and we're gonna put our most and max effort to this mission if we stick together and get lucky we'll get back home tonight. And usually you came back in 3, 3:30 in the afternoon. Then there was the debriefing and the intelligence people want to know where you got the flak, where was this, the times, the headings, how many aircraft, how many did you get and all this. And you'd have a good hour, hour and a half of this debriefing and here you're hungry. They did give you a little bit of... the Red Cross was there and give us a donut and coffee but.. Some of the groups they'd give them a shot of whiskey when they got back in. I don't know happened to our station. We never had any.. ohhh. Our bar at the Officer's Club was well stocked but they never brought it out on the flight line.

Question: When you were back from a mission, when you were in the Officer's Club did, on your time off did you try to live as much as possible? Was it?

Answer: Yeah, when we knew we were not alerted for a flight the next day, No. 1, we probably slept in to try and catch up. We catch up on our letter writing back home because I'd try to write as often as I could. All of our letters of course were censored and some of mine were pretty well chopped up by the time, in fact tend, will find most of those letters in that book that I wrote to my wife.. I've lost where I was..

Question: What you did between missions that..

Answer: Oh yeah, right. I think we had one R&R to London, a four-day pass to London as a crew and I remember we booked into the Subway Hotel in London, the officers. And airmen went somewhere.. they had their own place. They had a housing for enlisted men in London where they could, like a BOQ kind of thing. And we did kind of live it up I'll tell you. But, total blackout you just never could get quite used to it you know. Everything running around at night and you, a good thing those cab drivers knew what they were doing, and could see enough with these little slit cat eyes for headlights and that was it.

Question: Did, now London was probably being bombed quite a bit then at that time..

Answer: It was being bombed fairly often at night, yes. Only once I guess when I was in London did I have to decide do I want to go the bomb shelter or sweat this one out and just feel it's an overflight or they're headed for somewhere else. I went to the shelter.

Question: What was that like?

Answer: Like a subway station.

Question: And did being on the receiving end of bombs... that must have... seeing that was your business..

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Answer: The bombs ended up not bombing in close proximity to where we were. I think they went over to Cambridge or something as I recall reading about it the next day. Cambridge got hit heavy along with the big cathedral there.

Question: Did you have a different outlook on it being that that was what your business was, was delivering bombs? The English lady or gentleman next to you that was Army or civilian or whatever, do you think that you... when you heard bombers and bombs dropping that your outlook was different because you were a bomber crew?

Answer: Oh, yes I'm sure it was. Although the British they might kid us about it, that we were overpaid and oversexed and over there, but that was just a joke they liked to say. They did think we were overpaid compared to their flyers. But no, they were so grateful that we were, had come and joined into the fray because they knew they couldn't stand too much more of that battle of Britain kind of thing and the blitzes in and around London. So no, they were just.. again it was just, all of us were so glad for the other person whether it was a Brit. or Cockney from East London or what. We just, they were thrilled to have us and of course it wasn't too hard to get girls, so to speak when you were an officer and you come to town. Speaking of that, our base had a dance almost every Saturday night for officers, and the airmen had their own dance and the word got out among the whole region that Hey, station 136 is having another officer's dance and they'd come to the railway station at Thetford which was close to Knettishall. And then we'd send big trucks to pick up all these ladies to bring them to the dance and they would come in mass almost because they were so happy to, you know, here's these guys, they have cigarettes and they have candy and they have booze and they have the whole thing. I'm sure some of them didn't get on the truck to get the train back home... they stayed somewhere.. I don't know for sure. But that was all part of that.

Question: Did... now your wife and you... your letters were pretty constant going back and forth?

Answer: Yes. Her's would come in bunches because that's just the way the delivery of mail was in England at the APO, whatever our number was. And I guess mine was the same way because they'd hold them up to sensor the letters and again, then they'd release three or four of them at one time.

Question: Did she through what the sensors allowed, through the news, did she know the danger bomber crews were in?

Answer: Yeah, pretty much by listening to Gabriel Heater at night, every night at 5 o'clock on the radio. Well they lost so many forts?? today and you know..

Question: Who's Gabriel Heater?

Answer: Well, he was like the Edward R. Murrow. He was like the Dan Rather of today for radio.

Question: So he..

Answer: He had the, you know, NBC news of the world at night at 5 o'clock and they'd hear Gabriel Heater and his voice sounded at times so pitiful that it doesn't look good today you know and we'd lost so many bombers. And I've heard

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

transcripts of some of those things so back here at home in those early days of our flying there it was, they sensed it was rough, really rough.

Question: So did the worry come through the letters from your wife?

Answer: No, I think she was good enough to try to be pretty upbeat about it. She just give me little notes, news like you know, I've decided to go take a teller's job at the Lancaster County Bank. She was living, her folks were in Lancaster at the time and Dottie, we'd gotten a new dog, and that kind of stuff, you know, light stuff and..

Question: Was your Mom...

Answer: Of course, a lot of emotional, how I miss you kind of thing.

Question: Was your Mom and Dad both still..?

Answer: Yeah, they were living but down in suburban Philadelphia where I was born and raised in Drexelhill.

Question: So, did you, you communicated with your Mother too I take it?

Answer: Yeah. Probably more I asked Donna if she would talk to Mother or call her or send her a note..

Question: Were you worried about it?

Answer: Because I just couldn't spend too much time writing. You had, you were so busy and you were so.. Your time off was so little that you made the most of it and between sleeping, letter writing and eating up and drinking I think..

Question: Drinking, was that a big thing to relieve the tension?

Answer: Well, you know, the drinking I wasn't much, I liked beer and I'm sure some of the guys got zonked you know. They, that was their release and they'd fall apart coming back from their bicycles from the Officer's Club to the Quonset hut where they slept you know and they ended up in the field somewhere. It, just a little of all that...

Question: Did you talk about missions when your were back, did you and other crews talk about what had happened?

Answer: Oh yeah, yeah. Especially at dinner and we had dinner usually for the ones who were flying was at a pretty established time. We all ate together, officers ate together. Yeah, we'd share about things that happened on that mission and things went wrong, things that went well. But there wasn't a lot of that because you were so often alerted for another mission the next day that you just... once you landed and got out of your flying equipment, turned in your parachute and got out of briefing and everything, you were so happy to have that one out of the way that you didn't massage it too much.

Question: Did you, you said you'd always felt invincible. Was there a point that you sort of saw your mortality, I mean, that you didn't feel as invincible?

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Answer: Let me put it this way. Today you would say I was man of faith and I was and I put a lot of faith that the Lord was gonna somehow get me through. And there wasn't much I was gonna be able to do to save my skin when people were shooting at me from you know planes and from the ground and the plane if it had problems, but and I don't want to say the Lord, you're the last resort kind of thing but I did. I somehow felt that if.. it's.. the Lord wants me to live through this, he'll bring me through it and I'll finish my missions. And the closer I got toward 25 missions the more tedious about it you felt. Oh, I've come this far... do you think I'm gonna get four more done to get my 25 in? So some of those late missions were pretty apprehensive as far as what your thinking was.

Question: Did you, now were you a spiritual person before you went into the military?

Answer: Yes, but I think I'd grown pretty much of what I like most young teenagers do from the church. I grew up in a church that was a very strong Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, 10th Presbyterian Church. Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse was the pastor. He was well known across the country. He had a NBC radio show weekly and he was just a very forceful pastor and so you know much of that was inbred into me. And yet young people often leave the church and leave an emersion into religious things, but will come back later because of the founding and the grounding that they have.

Question: Did, and I think you mentioned this but you did find yourself lapsing into the prayer occasionally huh, did you..?

Answer: Well these were silent prayers..

Question: That you thought... (Inaudible) listening God.

Answer: Yes, well I knew God was listening. Cause I felt his presence with me. But I didn't have time to pray to God when I was on a mission I'll tell you... too many other things going on.

Question: Does the, the bond that you have with the crew, it's, have you ever experienced friendship like that again?

Answer: No, nope, no. Even within our, my relations today with the church situation that I'm in, you know, I've been chairman of the finance committee and Christian Ed and the whole bit and teaching and, but nothing like that was and never will again. It's hard to imagine unless you were part of a crew, how knit you were and how much you depended on one another and how it was a day-to-day living, you know. I've lived through it one more day and we're goin' for it. I don't know where you'd in like, now, don't want to call peacetime because we're on the threshold of another kind of war and it's horrible cause I don't think anybody wins in a war. I really don't. But I'm not here to preach but I just don't think there's that cohesiveness and that personal bonding ever could happen apart from what I, for me, what I experienced. You know I was 23, 24, I guess 25, when I finished and got out of the service. I got out as a matter of fact when points, cause I had so many points toward the end of the war they would kind of usher you out and terminate your active duty time. Just about one week before Hiroshima and so within another

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

two weeks when I was processing out at Fort Dix, New Jersey, the war was officially declared over.

Question: Did the..

Answer: So I was in for three years.

Question: Your crew, they, whether you were on the ground in England or up in the air you still were a unit so you would go to the Officer's Club with your crew and..

Answer: Not necessarily, I mean we weren't married to that extent you know. If I wanted to see the movie tonight or something, and the other three guys said, hey, we're going over the lounge and have a drink. I'd say you know go ahead, I'll meet you later.

Question: Did you share, if I remember..

Answer: We weren't married to one another.

Question: But you would know if someone had, like if someone had gotten a Dear John letter, they would have turned to you and said that...

Answer: Oh yeah.

Question: Did that happen?

Answer: Yes, it happened with a couple of our enlisted men and so we'd go down at night and kind of counsel with them. And they didn't elect maybe to go to the Chaplain because they were too proud to let him know that this had been a pretty low blow for them. But if one of us, myself or the co-pilot in particular, would go to their hut and sit down on their bed and sort of hold hands and say, you know, you're young, there's a lot of women out there and probably it's just as well if you've gotten a Dear John that it wouldn't have worked anyhow so, you know, try and look it at it that way.

Question: Pretty devastating for a young man.

Answer: Oh yes, of course it was. I think those women back here that wrote those kind of letters had no idea what the impact would be or you know, if they'd any common sense they would never had written them. Even though you know they had moved away. Of course if they had been writing and now what does she say to somebody who she knows she's going to break with..

Question: Did the, we talked about, you talked about the coming war, does, and you say you don't want to preach, but you know, this has been, the project is to hear what veterans have to say and their feelings and thoughts about things and less dates and facts and figures and it's just and we've had many veterans have talked of their views on war and most of them reflect your view..

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: And just said it's a terrible thing.

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Answer: It is.

Question: And so if you wanted to talk to the President right now and the children to explain, having been there, your viewpoint, what would you tell them about it?

Answer: I'd say, George W., you haven't been there, you haven't seen the blood, you haven't seen what happens to the civilians, families blown apart, hundreds, thousands killed for what? What are you after? I mean, you know, we've got defenses that won't quit here in the states. Leave them alone. Let them work out their own thing. Worry maybe more about North Korea's missile possibilities, but I'm with Senator Byrd.. I heard him the other night and I thought he was excellent. That was his, he said, you know we have never perpetrated or started a war. Why are we doing it now? What are we going to win by it anyhow and we're going to spend billions of dollars.

Question: Yeah, World War II was different, wasn't it? It was..

Answer: Yes, oh, that was a different war. We did have something to win. You know, Adolf Hitler was making encroachments and gobbling up countries all over Europe. And I'm sure ultimately, if we had not joined with England they would have gone into England and that's a real empire and power and you know it's kind of down the tube from there.

Question: So we couldn't stand on the sidelines then?

Answer: Oh no, we had ever reason to be in it. We didn't start this war and, but we're gonna help end this war and our British, of course, are very close allies, always have been and so I think it was the sinking of the Lusitania or something that finally triggered us into knowing that we were going to join them.

Question: Did, do you think about that when, in your time in England, in your bomb group, do you think about where your bombs are going or are you so high up in the air that it's..?

Answer: You're so far, you know, you're five, six miles up and you just can't let that pray on you because you know your bombs aren't always hit where they're supposed to hit. You're gonna hit into thousands of homes and churches and schools and just be a bloody mess after you leave but you cannot let that pray on you.

Question: Did you, did you go, now Dresden, the famous raid at Dresden, the fire bombing, were you on that or..?

Answer: I was not on that Dresden raid.

Question: Where you couldn't, it's pretty, in a raid like that it's pretty hard to not know that you're...

Answer: Oh, oh, right.

Question: Does... is that something that, cause we've talked to lots of people about this but it's, now I'm losing my train of thought.

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Answer: Okay, something came to my mind now I'll poke in here while you're thinking. I was recalled to active duty in the Korean War, '51 and '52. And I was Air National Guard Unit in Philadelphia, having a ball on monthly flights out to the West Coast and all this kind of stuff, but then, wham, they activated all 22 Air National Guard Units across the country when this Korean thing came to a head and oddly enough I was sent out to Fairchild, you know, it used to be Geiger Field in Spokane. And by the time, we were a photoreconnaissance outfit in Philadelphia when, flying B-26's and some B-29's but when we came out to Fairchild they wanted us to get into, what did they want... anyhow it was into medium bomber kind of situation and by the time I was tapped to fly over to Korea, I didn't have enough time left to make worth their while to send me. Cause we had a strict 24-month commitment to activate us and at the end of two years we were out unless we elected to up you know. So I never did go to Korea but the last four months they assigned me to Group Headquarters and I had administrative work and got out. And Donna, of course, was with me for the two years we lived in Spokane.

Question: Is there anything that on these bomb runs, this sounds so horrific, we talked to pilots and they say that they're so busy keeping in your box that they don't think about all that. But from the coast to the bomb target and back to the coast is it unimaginable what it's like. Can we ever imagine it, could you ever explain it really that we really know what?

Answer: On the part of the pilot, he is working those whole hours, you know, flying formation. True it's a rather loose formation until we get on a bomb run when we need a close pattern of the bombing or when we get fighter attacks we tuck it in pretty close so the gunners have a better chance of getting some of them. But otherwise we're flying kind of loose and so you can do a little of... not relaxing, but the pilot doesn't have to be so tense about, you know, not running into the other aircraft cause it happened often one of the planes would run right into another one and they both go down. And you'd see that. So, and the co-pilot in our case occasionally would fly when there was no, no fighter advances coming on, there was no anti-aircraft fire and we, like coming home..

Question: Did you ever fly to Schweinfurt?

Answer: No... oh yes. I thought you meant did I fly it as a pilot.

Question: No, but I mean did your..?

Answer: Oh yes, oh yes... horrible losses to that Schweinfurt... I think it was the 28th of October 14th of October I think. They flew to Schweinfurt twice. One time they went to Schweinfurt and Regensburg and then went on to North Africa. A lot of them ran out of fuel... went in the drink in the Mediterranean. The second Schweinfurt raid is the one I was on. They didn't do that kind of... not dogleg, but that kind of mission, we returned to England and heavy losses. That was a ball bearing plant in Schweinfurt. Ball bearings very critical to aircraft and armament and tanks and the whole thing.

Question: Did uhm... the Schweinfurt raids is infamous, I mean I've.. most pilots that I've talked too, anybody from a bomb crew that I talked to that's been in Schweinfurt, that's something they never forget.

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Answer: Yeah, yeah... the 100th Bomb Group for instance which was right in our flight pattern, close enough that they were in our flight pattern ended up with one crew still flying, one crew, one plane out of I think out of eighteen, seventeen missing, blown up, down.

Question: How many men is that?

Answer: Imagine coming back to your unit, to your bomb group and you're the only one that comes back. And one of those had a... he was a lead colonel. I think he was leading the group on that mission. I think so, of course, he went down. I think they lost two high-ranking officers as well as all those crews. It was seventeen aircraft... you've lost 170 people right there. Just out of one group. Now Hap Arnold and General Eaker and later Curtis LeMay, General Curtis E. LeMay who pinned my Distinguished Flying Cross on me at Third Bomb Headquarters when I finished, they felt that they could tolerate a 10% loss of planes and crews. So if they got, sent up 250 aircraft on a mission if they lost 25, that was within a range, limits of what they would lose say on most any effort, any bombing mission anywhere but when you got up over 20%, 28% on that Schweinfurt there was a question, should we not be doing daylight bombing. Because the British said, you Yanks are out of you mind. How do you go in broad daylight and you know we go at night and true we get caught in the searchlights and stuff once in awhile and we do have fighters that attack us but our chances are extremely better than yours. You're out there and in daylight. The fighters can do what they want with you. Which was true. So I know that that Schweinfurt raid was a very pivotal thing for the 8th Air Force. Do we go or do we retrench and decide what we're doing wrong, what we have to do differently.

Question: What did the Germans do that made it so much more deadly?

Answer: They would find ways to attack us with fighter aircraft that they would nail more of us. They would come in to a funnel attack, four abreast. And here, you're in a plane here and they're coming in four abreast and they open fire and some of them had the 20-millimeter cannons on them... and then they would take off and peel off or break away both ways but they would close in it seemed like to about 100 yards before they would do that so you were pretty much dead meat. Occasionally, your 50-caliber would get one of them but then they were coming in from the sun. If the sun was up here at 2 o'clock, you've heard the film 12 o'clock High, the fighters would come in in the sun and we really couldn't see them. The sun made it impossible to zero in. I mean you were blinded by the sun but they could come in and close very close and they're gonna get two or three of you on every swipe, on every sweep.

Question: Did you feel..?

Answer: They were finding ways to get at us even in spite of the increased and the better escort that we had to defend us because when we got in to P-38's and then finally the fighter that all of us thought was the ultimate and was sweet plane, the P-51, the Mustang. And they came about when I was finishing my missions. That was a beautiful airplane, fast, maneuverable. It was as good as anything the Germans could throw up.

Question: Did the, your plane must have been struck by shellfire?

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Answer: Oh yeah, I think about eight or nine times we flew somebody else's plane because ours was so damaged that it wasn't operational for several days so we'd go in on another aircraft, somebody on R&R to London. We'd fly their aircraft.

Question: So could you feel it when it got hit?

Answer: Oh yeah. When they burst actually, actually the bomb bursts that are below you aren't usually the one that's going to get you. So you're seeing those and you look out and oh my goodness they're black... bangs all over the sky. It's the one above you because they'll break down and fragmentations come all down, like out of a hose you know and so that they're breaking right above you and your plane is going to shake from the concussion of their bursting and fortunately, we never had a direct hit but we came back with a lot of battle damage from fragments. One time, I didn't mention this, but when we were in, when you get into the really worst, you'll put a metal helmet on, like they were in the trenches you know. And one time I had one... a fragment came right through the skin of the aircraft. I was standing up at the time and oh, you know, went through the top of my helmet. If I hadn't I'd have gone I'm sure I wouldn't have made it, but you know it just cut right through the top, about three inches long. But it's the ones that are breaking above you that are the most viscous, that you need to really worry about.

Question: It's fine for being in your position, you must have seen... how far up in the group were you, were you forward or..?

Answer: You know, I don't even specifically remember. It was pretty early in my 25 missions when we did that Schweinfurt so I don't know where we were flying..

Question: When you got out there..

Answer: Where we were in the box, I know we weren't leading the group.

Question: When you got into a bomb run and the bombardier was doing his thing..

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: And you must have had a few minutes to sit there and just wait, I suppose cause didn't fighter protection, fighters sort of fell away when you got into the..?

Answer: Yeah, they'd fall off and go out of range of the anti-aircraft and that's when you'd get plenty of anti-aircraft if you were going like large cities, like Wilhelmshaven or Emden or Geden.. or Bremen or whatever. So it was the anti-aircraft that you had for that whole bomb run that was, you know, had you pretty shook up.

Question: Till you could get...

Answer: There wasn't much the navigator at that point, of course the IP into the target, maybe it was only ten or fifteen minutes at most, ten minutes, because once you were on that run from the initial point to the bomb, you had no evasive action whatsoever. You were locked in, in fact your Norden bombsight took over and flew that aircraft you know for range, I mean for range.. not range, but for left or

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

right kind of thing. It flew a straight line so the bombardier could be as accurate as possible. They just couldn't have any maneuvering going on whatsoever on that bomb run. So as a navigator, you know, I sat there and hoped Billy...Actually most of the bombing was done... most of the Bombardiers ended up being called Toggeleers cause we would wait until the lead craft dropped bombs and then we would just flip a switch and release our bombs. So we were bombing on that aircraft. Now if that aircraft was shot up or anything then we knew who was deputy lead and it could come down to our group and if I was flying squadron lead at the time it could be that Billy Fore, my bombardier would be the one that then would all the other craft would Toggeleer on him.

Question: Did you..

Answer: And finally, further in the war they did away with the bombardier position totally. They just had a Toggeleer.

Question: Did, what did you think about the atomic bomb when you heard about it?

Answer: I guess in one sense I think, Thank God. I think this is going to be over, but the more I realized what a holocaust it caused in the lives and the burning, the burning of people and children and women but I guess I thought if that's what it takes, it certainly shortened the war. Cause if we hadn't on Hiroshima and Nagasaki we probably would have gone on another six, seven months before we could get enough of our own bombing and then troops into Japan to have them call quits.

Question: Might of needed that to get them to stop I suppose.

Answer: Uh huh. See at the point I was on, as I told you on my way out, processing through Fort Dix and when they, when the Hiroshima bomb was dropped, as I say, I think my reaction at the time was, Oh thank the Lord. This is the beginning of the end even though I'm getting out. Somewhere this carnage has to end.

Question: Did you ever, when you were flying over Europe, who was your enemy, was it, in your mind, was it the people of Germany or was it the country or was it a party or..?

Answer: It was the German war people that saw?(Inaudible) what did we call them, oh, anyhow, it wasn't the people certainly, it was the political and the Army and the Air Force and all those that were causing all this terrible war. We had a name for German, huh, I can't think what it is, I mean, we were typically called Yanks you know but

Question: Krauts

Answer: Krauts is one name but that isn't the one I was looking for.

Question: Bosch

Answer: No, well..

Foster Rodda

Tape 2 of 3

Question: Did.. have you been back to Europe since then... have you ever been there?

Answer: Yes, in fact I'm going for a first visit to my old bomb station in May of this year. We have a group around fifty of us from, still left, that have decided to put together a tour package and we're going over and spend some time in Knettishall and Thetford and Cambridge. We'll work out of Cambridge, which isn't too far from where we were stationed. I'm sure the airfield itself has long since been plowed up back into farm kind of thing but..

Question: Are you, are going to go into Europe itself, you're not going Schweinfurt or any place like that?

Answer: No, no, oh no. I'll fly British Airways to London from here.

Question: Do you, when you got back did you dream about your..?

Answer: Oddly enough I didn't. A lot of, I, you know, I would hear a lot of fellows even years later they would have these horrible dreams.