

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

QUESTION: So I get it on tape you are Robert Schimanski.

ANSWER: Schimanski.

QUESTION: Do you go by Robert or Bob?

ANSWER: Bob mostly.

QUESTION: Did you have a nickname in the service?

ANSWER: Nope, nope.

QUESTION: You ended up being a fighter pilot?

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: How did you end up being a fighter pilot?

ANSWER: I started flying at Felts field before the war, civilian pilot training program. I twenty years old didn't have anything to do that summer and they were teaching.. giving lessons and the old Air National guard pilots taught us. Started flying with Wallace Air Institute and got my private pilots license, passed and everything and then I applied for cadet training and I was accepted they told me to go to Randolph Field and then all of a sudden they wrote me a letter and said you've only got one year of college, sorry we can't take you. So They said go back to school and re-apply. So about that time my dad died and things didn't turn out too good so I stayed in Spokane a year or so. And pretty soon the war got going good so I enlisted in the air corp and I became a cadet in Geiger field, in July 1942. And then they sent me to pilot training school in San Antone, Texas, preflight and everything and then primary training at Garden City.. no uh.. Chikasaw, Oklahoma.. Garden City, Kansas, for basic training, and then Eagle Pass, Texas, for advanced training. The last two weeks in advanced training in Geiger.. in Garden City they determine then if you're going to be a fighter pilot or bomber pilot and I was chosen, wanted to be a fighter pilot, single engine I was chosen to do it and so then they sent me to Texas, Eagle Pass, for fighter training. Graduated from Eagle Pass and did a little transition flying in a P-40 and all of a sudden I'm over in England.

QUESTION: What did you fly in England?

ANSWER: P-51's.

QUESTION: Now the fighter pilots they are kind of the stud pilots aren't they?

ANSWER: Yes, I guess so, really.. normally you're the better pilots, the other guys get into bombers, transports, training and so forth and really the fighter pilots are the elite guys.. they're better pilots.

QUESTION: Now was that part of the motivation that made you want to be a fighter pilot?

ANSWER: Yea, uh huh. I took to it well, it was easy for me, with the advanced training that I had here at Felts field I was ahead of the other guys so flight school was easy for me. I tried hard and I was a success.

QUESTION: Again you flew a P-51?

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

ANSWER: It's a P-51D.

QUESTION: So it's you and the plane or do you have?

ANSWER: Oh no, it's just me.

QUESTION: Just you.

ANSWER: I'm in all by myself.

QUESTION: That's what I thought. So take me through a mission. In fact do you remember your first mission?

You flew out of England right? Do you remember your first mission?

ANSWER: I took off in (Leicstensacks Mundem?) a couple little towns right near the channel and. Yeah my first mission I had I think four hours transition flying in an old P-51 and they sent us out on our first combat mission. My first one you're apprehensive, obviously you've never been over Germany before and you've never been in a combat situation. Fortunately for me nothing particularly happened that day, it was a dry run. We took off, we flew in formation, we went over there, no enemy action and I came home, landed and it was all over.

But I think I had my first combat in about the tenth mission, just to go along like that 50% of the American losses of fighter pilots was in the first ten missions. You're unsure of yourself, you're not used to combat and so forth and literally half the guys that are lost are lost in the first ten missions so if you make it through ten, well you're kind of a veteran.

But in about the eleventh mission I had my first combat. I was flying wing man with my squadron commander and there were four of us and we were over Germany when we ran into four 109's, FW109's and we started engaging them. And a lot of time you get into a circle you're following each other around and so forth and of course the leader, my leader is shooting at the guy, German ahead of him and I got two German's following me. So while he is shooting at them they're shooting at me and this was my first real contact of actual enemy action. Fortunately we shot all four of them down, and we flew back home and I can still remember it, I thought my gosh this is just great, just like a Hollywood movie, four of us meet four of them, they're dead, we're flying home into the sunset and it was great. It gave me a huge amount of confidence then after ten missions and now here combat, I shared in one of the victories with my commander and I was real confident from that point on I'll tell you.

QUESTION: What is it like, visually what is it like, you're flying along

ANSWER: Yup.

QUESTION: Where do they come from or do they just appear all of a sudden, coming at you, they coming at you.. or all around?

ANSWER: Well, I'll take you off on a mission. We took off.. well in a squadron there are probably 20 aircraft, 5 flights of 4 each and you take off in pairs and then you join up together and the whole group joins up and flies over into Germany. Now that is 60 aircraft and you fly out at a certain heading. You are all in formation and uh.. pretty tight formation. You meet the bombers just about as they are going into enemy territory. They've taken off a couple three hours ahead of us, they're climbing out slowly and so forth and we meet them just

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

about as they get into Germany at 30,000 feet. They're probably at 26, 27, 28,000 feet. That's about as high as a B-17 could go fully loaded. So we sit up on top of them at 30,000 feet and escort them into Germany. And of course you're looking for enemy aircraft and the German's it was no secret they could see us coming. Maybe there's a thousand bombers in a mission and all pulling contrails, so it's a great big cloud across the sky as you come in there. So they could see us coming, they knew at what altitude we are, there was no hiding and then of course German aircraft would come up. They didn't want to fight us, they wanted to get to the bombers and they tried to get to the bombers on the bombing run because the bombers aren't taking any evasive action they are just on a dead heading going in and that's a key easy time for the German's to hit them or they would try to hit the bombers as they came off the target. Now you've been shot, at a lot are damaged, and so forth and its a lot of confusion so its an excellent time for the fighters to hit. So this is when we really looked for German fighters, and they would be coming at us at 30 thousand feet and sometimes even 31 thousand feet so, you were hitting them head on. And they came in large groups, a lot of times. Say we're sixty they might be a hundred, two hundred, and you hit them together at 30 thousand feet head on and that starts the fight. Of course they're trying to get through us they don't want to fight us they want to get to the bombers and we're trying to prevent them from doing so. And at that altitude the fight becomes scattered.. easily, the airplanes are all over the sky, up and down and back and forth. They don't stay congregated. The bombers are still moving along and so forth, but the fighting gets wild they're all over the sky and of course that's our job.. to meet them and shoot them down.

QUESTION: Do you in your mind can you can you slow, because you're talking massive amounts of planes flying this way and that way

ANSWER: Oh yes.

QUESTION: Does the world go in slow motion for you or

ANSWER: Oh no, it's fast you bet we're going 400, 450, 500 miles an hour, and so are the German fighters and you start diving, you're getting up to 550, 600 miles an hour sometimes and it gets real darned fast. Fights don't last 15,20, 30 minutes. 5 minutes is pretty long, pretty long. At the speeds you're going and everything oh they don't last very long.

QUESTION: How long does it seem to a pilot?

ANSWER: Not very long, it's fast.. you bet, things go real quick.

QUESTION: So when you spot a plane a German plane what's your job? Do you lock onto one plane?

ANSWER: Yep try to yes, try to get behind him and shoot at him. Aerial gunnery.. when you're in cadet training you learn a pursuit.. a pursuit curve they call it. It's a coordinated maneuver and you keep your airplane coordinated at all times and you try to maneuver behind the aircraft and if he's turning you turn inside of him and so forth. There's a pursuit curve that you've got to learn and it comes natural and a good pilot can do it and you hit 90 per cent of the aircraft from behind on a pursuit curve.

QUESTION: So how do you, what are you sighting with and how are you firing your weapons?

ANSWER: I got six 50 caliber machine guns three on each wing, and they are calibrated to join at a point.. I forgot now how many yards out in front of me.. 3 to 4 00 yards out in front

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

of me. And I'm firing API (armor piercing and incendiary) bullets a real high priced expensive. They were as big as my middle finger, good sized bullet. And all six caliber's were firing at once, you couldn't fire them independently, they all went at the same time off your trigger finger on the joy stick. You had to learn how to lead to hit them. And of course you're shooting, really I was shooting at the pilot, what you.. what you want to do, sure you want to destroy an airplane but you wanted to kill the pilot, then you done both jobs. So you're shooting, aiming right at the pilot. We had a new wing.. gun sight had pips on it and you would squeeze your controls and draw those pips right down to frame the airplane you were following and it was gyrated so that it would lead him for you.. boy so if you could fly an airplane properly you got those pips screwed down on him shoot and boy you got him, it was an excellent gun sight, but you had to know how to fly coordinated manner.

QUESTION: Did the guns move?

ANSWER: No no.

QUESTION: So here's the point and now

ANSWER: The fighter plane, alls it is, is a gun platform. I'm flying I'm on a gun platform and I aim the guns by aiming my airplane. I can't move the guns.

QUESTION: How do you know how much ammo you still have?

ANSWER: You don't know. You can guess. After you've shot a number of times you know when you're getting low. It's been so long I forget now how many rounds I had I don't know but it seems like it was 3-4 thousand rounds. I had a lot of ammunition. Some guys didn't carry a full load because it weighed your airplane down, I carried a full load of ammunition. You couldn't really tell, when they didn't fire you knew you were out.

QUESTION: Could you hear them?

ANSWER: No, no, you're sitting behind that engine A 2,400 horsepower engine, sitting right there in front of you, its practically in your lap and you don't hear anything but you hear that engine I'll tell you. You don't really hear anything else. I've seen a huge amount of flak shooting at bombers and so forth, but never heard a thing.

QUESTION: How many kills do you have?

ANSWER: I'm officially credited with six. When I finished my last mission I was told that was my tenth victory. And then I don't know, through regulations and this and that I was only credited with six. When my group finished flying in England, and the war was over they were sent into occupation in Germany and the group went in around Munich and I didn't go I'd already finished and while they were in England, excuse me in Germany nobody did anything, nobody kept any records, and my records got fouled up. So I've got six or ten or I don't know what.

QUESTION: Did every plane have a gun camera or not?

ANSWER: Yes, everyone had a gun camera on the wing.

QUESTION: And did you trigger the camera or

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

ANSWER: Everytime.. well I had a gun switch and a camera switch. So when I got into combat I flipped them both on and then when I pulled the trigger, every time I shot I took film for cameras.

QUESTION: Generally when you got back from a mission you had photos of everything.

ANSWER: Yes, everything, and then the next day we reviewed all of the combat film of everybody else's, we saw each other's films and you kinda learned from them.

QUESTION: Could you see the bullets going out?

ANSWER: Nope.. Well some guys used tracers. Every third bullet was a tracer and if you used tracers you could see them going. I never used them. I didn't like them. I was an excellent at aerial gunnery. I didn't need them, I didn't want them and no I never saw any of my bullets. The only time I'd see them, you can see them when you strike something like say you're strafing a train, or passenger cars and so forth. Boy when you start strafing one you can see them sparkle and hit. See I'm shooting armor piercing and incendiary bullets and when those incendiary bullets hit they just sparked and flew so I could see when I hit, but I couldn't see the bullets going, no.

QUESTION: Do you remember that first plane you shot down?

ANSWER: That one on my first mission, yeah, that eleventh mission when four of us shot down four German aircraft.

QUESTION: And what is that like. You're doing this and they're doing this, how close do you have to get and what happens?

ANSWER: A lot of times.. if you hit them real hard they just jerk.. and snap and roll.. you know you've hit them bad, they go completely out of control. One time, I was in a real tight turn and I hit a guy on the wing and I cut his wing off, and my camera, film camera shows the wing just disintegrating leaving and of course then he went out of control completely. He was at a real high speed with one wing.. and he's done.

QUESTION: How close are you... ball park?

ANSWER: Oh a.. 100 yards, 200 yards. You can't get too far away or your bullets don't hold their trajectory and everything, couple 300 yards. Sometimes you get closer. I've been darn close to some of them, but normally you're not real close. You say how do you know you hit them. Lot of times you damage them and the German pilot of course he's over Germany, all he has to do is jump out of that airplane or belly it in and he's home safe, in fact sometimes you're right over his field. I've fought right over their own field. Why they start going down and they're going to belly into their landing and so that's a good time to hit them when they're just going in, you don't want them... landing and then being back up there the next day in another airplane, so sometimes you get real close and its easy to hit them.

QUESTION: Are you close enough that, now once you hit them you are having to, to have to fly out of there?

ANSWER: Yeah. Fly out of there uh huh.

QUESTION: Now I heard one pilot say it was an unspoken rule that if somebody bails and they're flying down in their parachute you let them be, is that right?

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

ANSWER: That's a very controversial subject. Chivalry they call it and so forth. Are you going to be chivalry up there in the sky.. and I frankly didn't feel that way. There was nothing chivalrous about it. You are fighting for your life. You want to kill him, he wants to kill you now how can you do that in a chivalrous manner. So I didn't believe in it, I wanted to finish the guy. I didn't want him to fly another airplane. I wanted it all over, period.

QUESTION: What about if.. did you have people in your squadron shot down?

ANSWER: Oh boy, did we, a whole bunch. In my group.. er my squadron there's a record of 90 pilots that flew in a period of about a year and a half and out of those 90 pilots.. 45 were killed in action or missing in action, 17 were transferred out for various reasons, medical and so forth, and some guys just aren't suited for combat and you recognize it right off the bat that hey they'll never be any good they're be a liability they'll kill themselves, so the policy in our group was just transfer them out, get rid of them, so 17 of our guys were transferred out, so out of 90 pilots that left 31 of us who finished the job and survived. 24 were aces.

QUESTION: And to get an Ace status?

ANSWER: Five, so I seen an awful lot of airplanes go down. My own buddies and I've seen a whole bunch of bombers go down. I was over Berlin when 60 B-17's went down in... 15-20 minutes. It's quite a sight.

QUESTION: Do you see people or just machinery in the air?

ANSWER: You seldom see people. As far as seeing the German pilot, the fighter pilot, once in a great while you see them a little bit. I saw, I hit one guy once and he started jumping out of his cockpit so I saw him real good and I shot and I hit him and he never got out.. he slumped back into his cockpit. You see them a little bit, but not too much. You can see bomber pilots we're escorting them and sometimes we'd practically fly in formation with them and wave at them and so forth and talk to them, but you don't see much, no.

QUESTION: Did you.. would bomber pilots know fighter pilots or were there so many

ANSWER: Yeah pretty, we're scattered yeah

QUESTION: In the air it was another plane and another American soldier

ANSWER: We escorted the third division, the square D things, and we saw groups that we knew and were with frequently and so forth but as far as any personal relationships no.

QUESTION: What about fighter pilot to fighter pilot?

ANSWER: In our own squadrons and groups yes, you got to know them pretty darn well. You know you lived with them, you fought with them, you died with them, you had fun with them, so they were pretty close.. but in a very indifferent way because you realize people are going to get killed you don't want to make too darn good of friends or you are going to lose your friends and so forth. So in a way it was kind of an impersonal relationship.. although we were close and shared so many things together.

QUESTION: What are things you would talk about in between a mission?

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

ANSWER: Oh uhm.. of course you talked about your experiences considerably. As far as recreation very little.. we had a pool table, we played a little cards and that's about all the recreation we had at the base. We drank a lot, we smoked a lot, I smoked two packages a day, and a couple cigars and so forth. Oh.. there was.. We had a lot of fun. There was a lot of joking going on. It wasn't a depressing situation where we lived. In fact I fought a gentleman's war. We had an officers club, it wasn't very nice, not a heck of a lot nicer than this building here. But when I got down off the mission they used to have.. feed us a little fried egg sandwich and so forth and then we'd go off to the officer's club. I put on my blouse and everything and I went over to the Officer's Club and had dinner and had a drink and so forth.. so I led a gentleman's life.

QUESTION: I know I've heard infantrymen say that's one thing about pilots especially flying in England that basically you got to go home at night.

ANSWER: Oh yeah, every night, I flew seventy missions and I went home every time.

QUESTION: How many?

ANSWER: Seventy.

QUESTION: Isn't that way above average?

ANSWER: It's quite a few. I never landed on the continent. I always got successfully home every time.

QUESTION: Did your plane have a name?

ANSWER: No, a lot of them did I for some reason or other never had a name.

QUESTION: How long was a mission... ball park?

ANSWER: I flew seventy combat missions, three hundred combat hours, so that totals out 4 hours and 45 minutes per mission. The longest mission I was ever on was six hours and twenty minutes. That's a long time sitting there in a cockpit all by yourself.. and its cold. I'm up there at 30,000 feet and the temperature is going to run anywheres from twenty below to sixty below and the airplane wasn't heated real good, and it was a darn cold mission. But six hours and twenty minutes I tell you is a long time in a cockpit all by yourself.

QUESTION: Now I know in bombers they had a, when you talk about time they were up there a little bit longer but I know they had ways to take care of such necessities.

ANSWER: Right.

QUESTION: Fighter pilots did you?

ANSWER: Tough. Real tough, it was a serious problem.. urination, it was tough. Before a mission I would never drink more than a third of a cup of liquid of any kind. Coffee, juice, nothing.. I didn't want any liquid inside of me and then before you went you urinated 2,3,4,5 times just to drain yourself out completely. But then you get into the cockpit and there is no pressurization in it and so as you go up you start expanding and blowing up and you're expelling gas and holy cripes. The only thing we had is a pilot's relief tube. It was a tube that ran up between your legs and it had a little.. a little cup on it and then you tried to urinate in that thing. And the problem of course is that it is cold, I've got three pairs of

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

clothes on. I've got long wool underwear, I've got my slacks on, my flight suit over on top of that and then I've got three pairs of gloves on. I've got silk gloves, Chamois gloves, leather gloves. And then I've got one hand on the stick, one on the throttle and so forth and you are flying formation and now see how difficult it is to urinate. And so normally when some guy would have to he'd get off by himself and you could see him flopping around out there and so forth, but sometimes you couldn't, you were unsuccessful it was the way things were going. But it was a serious problem.

QUESTION: Oh I would imagine. Yeah. I know little babies sometimes go off by themselves so you got this fighter pilot.

ANSWER: Yeah, with his three gloves on and all these clothes on holy cripes.

QUESTION: And you did.. all your missions were daylight missions?

ANSWER: Yes, we took off.. well we would get up at 4:30, 5:00 in the morning and take off at 6 or something like that and meet the bombers over there about 8 and fly your five hours and you're back home at noon.

QUESTION: You would go through the bombing mission with them, get them started back and if everything was ok then leave them and come on home.

They did have one thing, what they called, this is a gruesome thing, they called a bloody Sunday. And what you'd do you'd take off with the bombers, you'd escort them over the target and so forth and then they'd turn around going back and if there was no activity, no enemy fighters, no flak, no nothing, then on the day of a bloody Sunday the fighters would all drop down on the deck and strafe. They would fan all out over Germany and that would be say 500-600 fighters coming back strafing indiscriminately and we did that a number of times.

QUESTION: Did you have specific targets?

ANSWER: No, you just shot at anything you saw coming back and it got pretty grim.

QUESTION: Did it make any difference military, civilian?

ANSWER: It didn't make any difference what, you just shot at anything.

QUESTION: And how low do you drop to do that?

ANSWER: About 50 feet.

QUESTION: So that is definitely visual.

ANSWER: Oh yeah, I'm right down there on the deck, yeah. Of course you're trying to shoot at trucks and vehicles, and trains and so forth. One of the things we shot at frequently, was water towers, you know you see these water towers in the valley sticking up about 200 feet with a big round bulb up there, actually it made a beautiful target for a fighter and of course you'd pump a thousand rounds of bullets into those water tanks and you'd just ruin them. It was actually fun doing that but we got did so much and caused so much trouble the German. Built flack towers and they built them to make them look like a water tower only it was a flack tower and boy when you would come in there instead of hitting water you got guys and machine guns shooting at you. They did build a lot of them because we caused so much trouble.

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

QUESTION: War is an interesting thing because the rules change, I mean I've never been to war but I've listened to people talk. Do you face a moral dilemma ever dealing with an enemy or is there something your mind does?

ANSWER: No.. no.. I was never read the rules of war, the Geneva Convention, or anything, I was never taught particularly with what to do and what not to do and uh. No I found no moral dilemma whatsoever, none.

QUESTION: It was a black or white issue for you then?

ANSWER: You bet.

QUESTION: Better thee than me?

ANSWER: Absolutely. Yep uh huh. I was trained to do a job. I'm out there doing what I was trained to do and do the best job I can. No it never bothered me. Never lost a nights sleep. I never worried about it. I had a free conscience all the time.

QUESTION: And that probably was a real advantage. Like you said right away, some people couldn't be fighter pilots.

ANSWER: That's right. You can recognize them. They're no good and but it never bothered me. Just none.

QUESTION: So what were some of your other, you escorted the bombers, but you also talked about strafing and was that only on a bloody Sunday you would do that or ?

ANSWER: Lot of times you are up there and there is nothing going on and at 30,000 feet you have a panoramic view of the whole countryside and you can see trains from a long distance away. And a lot of times maybe part of the group the squadron would drop down and strafe a train and so forth and we did a lot of strafing of trains. The ninth air force did most of it of course but we're deep into Germany and the ninth air force never went into Germany. And so we are deep in there, Berlin and so forth and even past Berlin and we're seeing trains the ninth airforce never saw, so we strafed quite a number of plains you bet. Military equipment if you could see it, but normally you are looking at trains, the lead guy would shoot at the engine. Of course what you want to do is blow that engine up, fill it up so it'll stop and then you have a train dead on the tracks and people start strafing it.

QUESTION: you said with armor piercing bullets you could come in and take out a big locomotive.

ANSWER: Yeah, you bet oh yeah. The most dangerous job we were told in Germany was to be an engineer on a train. He is sitting up there in the cab, metal cab and here comes the bullets ricocheting around in the cabin they were killing engineers on trains like mad.

QUESTION: Yeah, and its this big long, and they are easy to find.

ANSWER: Sure.

QUESTION: You know where they are going?

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

ANSWER: You know where they are going and they're stuck there and here comes 20 air planes with a whole bunch of armor piercing bullets and easy.

QUESTION: In your mind who did you see the enemy as, was it a person, people, a government, a country, a...?

ANSWER: Oh a government, a country, and of course Hitler, the damned guy. And it's pretty impersonal even when you're fighting another airplane one on one its pretty impersonal you don't know him its an impersonal thing. I had no particular animosity towards the guys I was shooting and fighting. I wanted to kill them. I didn't want to see them flying anymore, but no animosity.

Once I found out later on who I had killed. I found out 40 years later. The historian of our group went into occupation in Germany after the war, and he met some of the German historians. And he was always intrigued about a report I had made of an encounter and so he studied it and he went to this German historian who then studied the German troops and so forth that were involved that day and so forth and that particular encounter was a little bit unusual. There was a.. because it was a long nosed 190.. which was unusual you didn't hardly ever see them. And so this German historian was able to trace who was the pilot and who was flying that day and who was killed and so the two of them got together and they wrote a story and it appeared in a British magazine, I forget the name of it now.. 40 years afterwards, and it's a story of , "A Day In March". And it shows a picture of me and my airplane and so forth and my co pilot and so forth and a story of this encounter and they tell in there who the German was I had killed. It's only personal thing I have had from the war of finding out who I had killed.

QUESTION: Did putting a name to it change anything?

ANSWER: No.. at one time, of course this is 40 years later, but at one time I thought of maybe writing to the family. Trying to find out who their family was and telling them what an excellent pilot this guy was and what a hard time I had and so forth. And then I got to thinking why bring up something 40 years later and so forth, maybe they'd think I was bragging of what I'd done and so forth and so no I never contacted them, just let it go at that.

QUESTION: Again through your gun camera and all that you're going to see planes and numbers and this is a unique long nose there it is and you can't track these down. What did you do after the war?

ANSWER: Well I got out of the service early you know, I got out in July 1945, the war still going on, but they had so many pilots they didn't really need them and they said if you got so many credits you could get out early. You had to have 90. Well I had 220 credits so I thought heck why not so I was out before they dropped the atomic bomb. And I went back to work where I had worked before, the Crane company, a wholesale plumbing and sales company and somehow I decided this isn't good enough for me, I want something better, so I went back to school, and at age 27 I went back to the University of Washington and got into law school, met my wife Mary, and we were. I met her Memorial Day of 1948, and we were married in September of 1948. In fact we were married the day I was admitted to law school and so then Mary worked my way through law school. I worked harder than heck. I'd been out of school for a long time and it was kind of hard to start studying again.

QUESTION: GI Bill?

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

ANSWER: GI Bill. It took me the whole way through undergraduate and law school and I graduated in 1951 from the University of Washington so then came back to Spokane and started practicing law by myself and then I joined the Washington Air National Guard, they were at Geiger Field then . I became the legal officer out there and stayed long enough to get my retirement. Practiced law, retired from that, retired from the guard and retired from everything, but Mary. But Mary and golfing. Yeah.

QUESTION: Do you think , part how this project got started was some people think history books left something out and some thing they don't tell the message the generation need to know. Do you think there is a message from what you saw of war in World War II (inaudible)?

ANSWER: Yes. I've done some writing myself in a little bit different manner. Normally you hear about fighter pilots they telling about their combat missions, how they dove at the guy and they pulled this and that how they scrambled around and frankly I've gotten tired of reading combat experiences. So I've written what I call my reflections. And I am putting down what combat meant to me, my experiences in combat. For instance I talk about religion, religion, what part religion played in my experience over there, and I talked about some funny things and I've talked about serious. In fact the last thing I talked about was death, well death, and I've tried to explain what it all meant to me then and now. And so I have written ten reflections on various subjects that I'm pouring out my heart and soul and telling people just exactly how I feel.

QUESTION: What part did religion play?

ANSWER: None... for me. We had a chaplain over there, I knew his name, bout the only thing I did was say "hi". I never went to a church service, in fact we had no church services on our base. But we could attend. We were flying.. were in the air in the mornings and I never went to a chaplain. I don't know of any other pilots who did. We didn't pray together as a group, before missions, or after missions and so it was an extremely impersonal thing and as far as I'm concerned religion had no part of it. Others may have felt different. I didn't discuss it with others and so forth, but it didn't mean anything to me.

Once I had a girl friend over there in Great Yarmouth, and I used to go see her once in awhile, and a Sunday morning we were walking down a street in Great Yarmouth. This will show you how I felt about religion, and we went by a Church of England and she said Bob let's attend services here and I looked at her there and said I can't go into that church there is no way a guy like me doing what I could do have been doing can go into that church, I can't go in there and pray and say I'm sorry for what I did, cause I'm not going to say I'm not going to do it again... because I am, the next day I'm going to do the same damn thing. So religion became that impersonal, it meant nothing.

QUESTION: Another one you mentioned was death, how did death do in the war?

ANSWER: Oh I wrote quite a little on this. I saw an awful lot of death. The bomber pilots. I saw a whole bunch of them destroyed and people killed. And then as I told you in my group 45 of them 45 of my friends were killed right along beside me and... death became impersonal you live with it you know it is going to happen, you foresee it you know its there all the time, but you become indifferent to it, its part of life, you accept. It's not very nice but hey you're there and doing some dangerous things and you know you can get killed so.. I became indifferent to death, I became indifferent to religion.

QUESTION: What about after the war?

Robert Schimanski

Tape 1 of 1

ANSWER: Altogether different. Altogether different. Mary was a Methodist and we were, well I was a Lutheran to start out with. Mary was Methodist and we joined the Methodist church and later on I joined the Plymouth Congregational Church and so forth so it was completely different after the war. I mellowed.

QUESTION: War is a different end.

ANSWER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Is war a necessity?

ANSWER: Damned rights. You bet. You're not going to get rid of it. You bet.

QUESTION: I'm glad you were tentative on that answer.

ANSWER: (laughter)

QUESTION: It's going to be there forever.

ANSWER: You're darned rights.

QUESTION: My assumption is that you try to find the right within war.

ANSWER: That's right. We had a job to do, we all did, and I did my best.

QUESTION: Inaudible I normally would love to talk to you a lot longer but they're going to throw us out of the building here.

Interview ended due to facility