

Reginald Tunstall

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Question: Thank you for comin' in today to do this.

Answer: No problem

Question: Here we are. The first thing I'd like to do, just so I can have it on tape is to get your name, first and last and the correct spelling of it.

Answer: ok, first name is Reginald. That's R-e-g-l-n-a-l-d. And the last name is Tunstall, T-u-n-s-t-a-l-l.

Question: A-l-l. ok. And you were born where.

Answer: England.

Question: Which part?

Answer: Cheshire, Northwest England.

Question: And if I can be so rude as to ask what year were you born?

Answer: 1924.

Question: So you were, um, pretty young...

Answer: Yeah, I was a boy entrant. Back in those days, you could go to high school or you could join the service as a boy entrant. So I elected to join the service, and I went in the Royal Air Force as a boy entrant at 14 ½. And within a year and a half, here comes the war, September 3, 1939, so they decided that they had all these people in the service and they needed pilots, and they needed navigators, and they needed gunners, and you name it. So the whole bunch of us were moved into programs and shortly thereafter we were flying.

Question: so you were how old when you actually started flying?

Answer: 16.

Question: Sixteen years old.

Answer: Right.

Question: so, as a boy entrant, did you have to get parental approval, or....

Answer: Yes.

Question: So your Mom or Dad had to...

Answer: 'Cause you signed on for 25 years.

Question: 25 years.

Answer: mmm,hmmmm. Now, as it happened, during the war, they passed a law that said if you'd been in combat for better than 12 months or more, you could rescind your 25-year contract and tell them to shove it!

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Question: So did you tell them to shove it?

Answer: I told them in no uncertain terms to shove it! I'd spent 8 ½ years and it was time to get the hell out.

Question: So when you went in that young, was it like, um, was it kind of like going to a private school. I mean, was there still education?

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah. First of all, you went through a Royal Air Force station called Halton in Lincolnshire, and they trained you to be, well, mechanical work, and then you went to the Royal Air Force College at Cramwell, where they taught you to fly. And from there you went to operational elementary flying school and then advanced flying school, and then to the squadron.

Question: Now were you, going in there that young, was it just kids that were young, or were you with...

Answer: No, they were all young. They were all my age group.

Question: Ok, so you weren't with a bunch of adults then?

Answer: No, no, no.

Question: Sneaking out to the pubs

Answer: No, no.

Question: Getting a few pints.

Answer: No, no, no, that came later.

Question: So, once the war started is when they decided to hurry up the process.

Answer: Yes. Yes. 'Cause they were deathly short of personnel. They had lots of airplanes, but they didn't have a lot of pilots. And they'd call up the volunteer reserve, which was like our reserves. And they'd all been called up and still they were short of pilots, 'cause they knew that the Luftwaffe was several thousand airplanes and all they had was about 600, but they didn't have 600 pilots that could fly them. So they were short of pilots, and they knew it and they had to really get the lead out and get with it.

Question: What did you train on? What type of plane did you first fly?

Answer: Started out on the tiger moth, the DeHavilland Tiger moth, a bi-plane. 140 horse, two-seat open cockpit, and then you went progressively to bigger airplanes and then to frontline fighters.

Question: Do you remember when the first time was that you, maybe even before you were a full pilot, saw plane-to-plane warfare going on?

Answer: It was going on during the time I was being trained, but the Battle of Britain hadn't started yet. Göring decided 1940 that he was going to wipe the Royal

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Air Force out, and that's when they sent squadrons and squadrons of Stukas and Heinkels and Messerschmitts across the Channel from France. It's just like going from Catalina to the mainland in California, just 20 odd miles. You could almost see them take off, you know. And that started the Battle of Britain. Mostly Hawker Hurricanes were the frontline fighters, and they dated '37, '38, being built. They were slower than the Spitfire. The Hurricane was a good gun platform, a very stable airplane. Had 8 guns, 4 on each wing, and the Spitfire, of course, had the same, but it was a faster, more maneuverable aircraft, and all accounts say, Oh, the Spitfire saved the day. Well, Hell, the Spitfire didn't save the day, the Hurricane saved the day. A lot of them got shot down because they were slower. They were slower than the ME 109, but once they got a line on a ME 109 you could kiss it good-bye, because it was a good stable platform. When you fired those guns in a Hurricane it stayed there. With a Spitfire, it squiggled around, but the Spit was a much more maneuverable airplane.

Question: So how old were you when you were sent up for your first combat mission?

Answer: Late 16s.

Question: 16 years old. Now were you, do you think, I mean did you grow up fast?

Answer: Yeah. Overnight! Overnight! When they put you in the cockpit of this frontline fighter with a 1,000 horsepower engine sittin' up in the nose, and you couldn't see over the nose. You had to fishtail the airplane to see where the heck you were going, and it was a single seater so there was no way to get instruction other than the instructor standing on the wing, saying that's that, that's that, that's that, pull that, lift that, turn that. Tap you on the head, Good-bye. Have fun.

Question: How powerful did you say the engine was in that?

Answer: 1,000 horsepower. All of a sudden you jumped from a couple hundred horsepower to 1,000 horsepower, you got this great big Rolls Royce Merlin engine sittin' in front of you, snarling away like a bunch of angry cats, and when you opened the throttle, you did it very gingerly till you got the tail up and you could see where you were going 'cause the no came down. Now you could fly. And mostly off of grass runways. They hadn't gotten to asphalt, or concrete runways yet. On most of the fields. And most of the squadrons were just fields.

Question: So do you think you were more excited or more scared the first time?

Answer: Oh, I was excited. It was fun! Yeah. At that age, you know, you're lookin' for fun. And, I wasn't at all scared, except when we got up to altitude and somebody started shootin' at you, then it's time to realize that, Hey, these little buggers want to kill me!

Question: Had they trained you well for that?

Answer: Yes. Yeah. You had a lot of training with air to air combat simulated. And once you saw the cross-marks on the airplane, you just got it in your sights and you squeezed the trigger.. and hoped to hit it.

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Question: So what did you have for weaponry on this model of plane?

Answer: 8 machine guns. 303s, Four on each wing. And about 300 rounds of ammo per machine gun. Just enough for a blip, a blip, a blip, a blip, a blip a blip a blip and now you're out of ammo.

Question: And did you, the only way you knew you were out. I mean,

Answer: When you push the trigger and nothing happens! Then you did a slit "S" and got the heck out of there.

Question: How big's the cockpit in, is it small, compact?

Answer: It's pretty tight. It's about that wide, and there's legroom, and then you got a panel here and then in front of the panel is a hundred gallon gas tank.

Question: So you, and your sight is mounted in front of you?

Answer: yeah, the sight's up on the panel, up on the top above the panel, and it's in the windshield, and there's a crosshair on it and you line up that crosshair with whatever it is you're lookin' at, and if you can see in the crosshair, you got 'em.

Question: And how close did you have to be for accuracy?

Answer: Within 3, 400 feet.

Question: Wow.

Answer: So, you know, you can't shoot from, say, 1,000 feet away because if you shoot from 1,000 feet away, the bullet drops, so you gotta allow for droppage, and a lotta guys made that mistake. Not getting close enough so that the bullets went where they were lookin'. If you got in close enough, bingo! That was it!

Question: So what, what were some of your duties, I mean your missions that you flew on and how long were they?

Answer: Every mission was usually a scramble, because there were aircraft coming over from France. Thank God we had the elementary radar, which Britain had invented, and the radar operators could figure out what course these aircraft were on, and what altitude they were at. So we had those two factors, two dimensions. Which way and how high. So when you scrambled, you went up higher than that to look down and see them and then dive on them. And you usually had one wingman. Originally, early in the beginning of the war, squadrons would go in 9 airplanes at a time. Well, they changed that real fast to 2. You had a point and a wingman.

Question: So what's the point's job?

Answer: Point's job is it shoot down whatever's there and the wingman's to guard his rear end.

Question: And what, usually what was your target. What type of plane did you fight against?

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Answer: Mostly ME 109s, a lot of them were Stukas and they were just sittin' ducks. Even though they had a gunner in the back seat with an open canopy and one machine gun. You got on his tail and the machine gunner would fire at you, but if you came in sideways, you usually caught them unaware. And they were much slower airplane. You could just blow them out of the sky.

Question: How long would a mission be, on a scramble like that?

Answer: 15 minutes.

Question: Up and down.

Answer: Yeah. 'cause the climbing rate was 5,000 feet a minute, and you went up to 20,000 in 4 minutes. You were there.

Question: Oxygen, no oxygen?

Answer: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You wore oxygen, yeah. You had to. Anywhere beyond 10,000 feet you were on oxygen.

Question: And what did you wear for, when you were dressed, what all did you have to put on?

Answer: Well, usually, when you were on standby for a scramble, you had your flying boots on, and you had a pair of pants on, you had a flight jacket and a roll-neck sweater, and your helmet and your gloves were standing by, and your parachute was already in the airplane. And when you scrambled, you ran to the airplane, the mechanic got it started before you got there, you climbed up, got in, strapped on your parachute, put your gloves and your helmet on, and go. That fast.

Question: So how long, once you got a call, how long do you think it took you to get from your barracks or whatever up in the air.

Answer: Well, we were on standby at the base at a on-duty standby location where all the pilots assembled and they just either played cards, or read books, or just snooze. And when the claxon horn when off, everybody ran. The airplanes were right outside, so you had like 30 seconds to get to your airplane. That's all it took. You were airborne within a minute and ½.

Question: Did you, I know some of the bigger planes have nicknames. Did the smaller planes, did you name them?

Answer: No.

Question: How about superstitions with pilots? Did you have superstitions?

Answer: Yes, some did. Some didn't. Depended on your background, I guess.

Question: So when you were in combat, and again, I'm learning tactics. I know every plane looks different. Was your usually a dogfight? I mean, did you have some pursue and chase and...

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Answer: It depended on what was coming over. If they were in tight formation, the fighters that came over usually were protective of bombers, so if it was a bombing raid with fighter coverage, and you dived in on them, they didn't want to mix it up because that meant they'd not be guarding their bombers anymore. And they were afraid that another group would come in and blow the bombers out of the sky. So they didn't tend to want to mix up into a dogfight too quickly. On the other hand, if it was just a fighter group coming in, and they were going to strafe an airfield or whatever, yeah. Then they'd mix it up and it would end up being a dogfight, one on one.

Question: What do you think your scariest mission was, for you personally?

Answer: Well, for me, I had a wingman that in 1941 was essentially the kamikaze, before the Japanese even invented the word. He ran out of ammo trying to get somebody off my tail and he decided to crash dive into the airplane, and I saw it go boom-boom, both airplanes. Killed him instantly. And he was my buddy and he'd gone through school with me, and he was 18 years of age. Gone.

Question: That dedicated to you.

Answer: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Question: Was that, do you think that was the hardest part of war for you?

Answer: Yeah. Yeah, up to then it was, yeah.

Question: It got worse after that.

Answer: Yeah. Well, in 1942, I transferred to bomber command. Then I started flying heavy bombers over their homeland and dropping bombs on them. And I did 125 missions. Yeah.

Question: 125. Because I know, and I don't know about RAF , but I know you U.S. 20...

Answer: 25 and I came home.

Question: Right.

Answer: The Royal Air Force, 35 and that was one tour, but I did 4 tours. I didn't want to do anything else. If you finished a tour of bombing, they'd ship you off to a conversion squadron where you would train other crews to fly heavy bombers. I thought that was more dangerous than flying the damn bombing runs, because you had what we call sprog pilots, uh, learning pilots, if you will. Converting to heavy bombers, and they'd never flown a heavy bomber before and they were liable to do just something to cause you to crash and kill, and I thought, no way do I want to go to a conversion unit. I'll stay with the squadron. So I'd take a week's leave and then I'd come back to the squadron and say Sign me up again.

Question: And at this point, you were probably all of what, 19 years old?

Answer: 20.

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Question: 20 years old. So, in the bombing squadron, what planes were you flying then?

Answer: I started flying Halifax's. Handley Page Halifax's. 4-engine bombers. And I did two tours in Halifax's, then the Canadians formed a new group in bomber command called Six Group, which was based in Northern England, and they were flying Canadian built Lancaster's that were built in Toronto and flown over to England. They were short of personnel, so the Royal Air Force seconded, or loaned out a bunch of Royal Air Force personnel and I was one of them, and I got on a Canadian squadron and I spent the rest of the war with the Canadian squadron. And at the end of the war they all climbed in Lancaster's and flew back to Canada. And I went back to the Royal Air Force.

Question: And how big's the Lancaster. Is that a 4-engine bomber?

Answer: 4-engine bomber, yeah.

Question: How big a crew?

Answer: 7.

Question: And did you fly, once you got with a crew, did you stay with this same crew, or did those...

Answer: No, you stayed with the crew right through the tour as long as you survived. And then when you finished the tour, the crew disbanded and you got a new crew if you went back again, so I went through 4 crews.

Question: Do you remember any of the people you crewed with?

Answer: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. Yeah. Yeah. I kept in touch with one of them until he died. He lived in Canada, in Banff, Alberta.

Question: Is that a special bond?

Answer: Yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah. He was an older guy than me. He was in his early 30s, and absolutely fearless. Good man. Navigator.

Question: And what was your, were you a pilot?

Answer: Yeah, I was a pilot.

Question: You were still pilot.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So which do you like flying better?

Answer: The Lancaster.

Question: Really?

Answer: Oh, yeah.

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Question: Would they take the abuse. I know that they talked about the B-planes and the abuse that they would take, and still come back.

Answer: Oh, sure, yeah. 'Course most of our missions until late in the war in 1945, prior to that were all nighttime missions.

Question: That's right. That was the big difference between English and American, right?

Answer: Right. B-17s flew in formation. Tight formation, to protect the whole group in daylight. We flew in streams at night. You never saw another airplane unless you were right over the target, and then you didn't see anybody until you got home. You're just all on your own.

Question: Wow. And those missions were a lot longer. The bombing missions.

Answer: Yeah. Yeah. Definitely. And, you know, there was a lot of airplanes, usually, up to 1,000 airplanes in a raid. Mostly 800, 900 airplanes involved, so there was a constant stream of airplanes, and they all try to get over the target within like 2, 3 minutes. So there were wave, after wave, after wave, then you dispersed and singularly flew home.

Question: That's the hard, I mean, that's almost inconceivable to me because when you start thinking about a: that many airplanes, but b: getting them in the air, getting them close enough, like you said 2 minutes.

Answer: Right.

Question: And with technology being a little different then for you guys...

Answer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. 'course we all had radar. Uh, that did help. The navigators could monitor the radar and see what was around and above and below. So there weren't too many cases of airplanes crashing into each other, very rarely.

Question: Who escorted you then?

Answer: Nobody.

Question: Really.

Answer: Not at night, no. You just streamed over. Constant stream

Question: 'Cause I've heard the B pilots talk about being in that formation and you just

Answer: Hold your position.

Question: stayed on whatever, so the same with you but no escort.

Answer: No escorts, no. Didn't need them at night. The only time we needed them was when the Messerschmitt 110 was built and the luftwaffe had it and they'd formate underneath an aircraft and then they'd just pull up and rake ya. So we put

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a turret underneath, a blister turret, and the wireless operator sat in the belly of the airplane on the way to the target, and if he saw anything underneath, he started firing at it, so they stopped that real fast when they lost a bunch of Messerschmitt 110s.

Question: Were you taking flak or at night were you...

Answer: Over the targets you would, yeah. Oh, yeah. Definitely. They'd put up a barrage that was a solid curtain of flak, and you hoped you were a little bit above it. Most of the time, you were right in it.

Question: We talked to one guy, a guy named Gill Langdon from Eastern Washington. He was a ball turret gunner, and he said, you know, it's interesting because we went through all the training, and I know they told me they were going to fire at us, but he said, in my mind, I never thought they were going to be firing at us. He said, the first time I saw flak, he said, Boy, my ball turret was alive and goin'.

Answer: mmm,hmmmm. Funny thing was, as you approach the target, because of the curvature of the earth, you'd see all this flak, and you'd say, oh, shoot, it's way below us, and as you flew into the target, it started coming up, coming up, coming up, and you were right in it. And it was an optical illusion.

Question: Now could you hear it when it...

Answer: No, the sound of your aircraft, unless it was real close. And if it was that close you had problems

Question: But I assume what you heard then is 4 engines running. I mean, it had to be, was it loud?

Answer: Constant noise, yeah.

Question: Cold?

Answer: cold and high decibel level. 130 dbs. A lot of the guys went deaf.

Question: Oh, they did?

Answer: Yeah, yeah. I used to stuff cotton in my ears.

Question: When you went. You know, it's interesting because different perceptions of different countries, um, you know, in America World War II started with Pearl Harbor.

Answer: Right.

Question: You know, it was going on long before that.

Answer: Yeah. We started September 3, '39, when Hitler walked into Poland.

Question: And it was in your backyard.

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Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: Much different. I mean, yes we had Pearl Harbor, but, I mean, really World War II never touched the Americans.

Answer: No. Not until 9/11. That's the first time we've been bombed on the homeland.

Question: Who did you as a young lad think your enemy was? A person? A country?

Answer: Hitler.

Question: Just Hitler.

Answer: Her Schicklegruber Jawhol.. yep. He was, he stood for Germany.

Question: So when you were on a bombing run, that's what you were thinking, was I'm getting' rid of Hitler.

Answer: Not really, because early on in the war, the luftwaffe Bombed Coventry, London, Birmingham, Liverpool, all the major cities of England, and my Daddy had buckets of sand ready because the, the um, air raid precautions people had said, Have buckets of sand handy, because if they drop incendiary bombs you can snuff them out by blanket them with sand. And in 1941, an incendiary bomb from a bunch of German bombers, landed on the roof of my home, and my Dad climbed up the ladder with a bucket and tossed it on the incendiary bomb and put it out. I've still got that bomb at home.

Question: That's enough to make you wet your pants.

Answer: It was built in 1936 and it was dropped in 1941, and when I got into bomber command in '42, I said, I've seen what the luftwaffe's dropped on England. It's time to give it back 10-fold. And we did. And that was primarily why I went into bomber command. There wasn't much going on with fighter command. By then all we were doing was strafing France, and giving the Germans fits. But I thought it would be much more concentrated to be flying a bomber with 12,000 pounds of bombs on board. Now the B-17 was lucky to carry 4,000 pounds of bombs. My Lancaster ended up carrying 20,000 pounds of bombs towards the end of the war.

Question: And is that, when you get to the target, you open up and you dump that full amount.

Answer: Right. I once landed, we, coming back to England. Of course, English weather being what it is, it's like Washington. We were diverted to a field in Lincolnshire, which was the United States Air Force B-17 squadron, and these guys, of course, were very hospitable. They, each crew of B-17s adopted one of the crews of the Lancaster's and made sure we had places to go eat and places to sleep, and the next morning, the captain who had this B-17 said, I want to take you out and show you a B-17. I said, fine, so we got in the Jeep and we went around the perimeter track and here's this B-17, and he climbs in and he says, I'm going to open the bomb doors. Now stand there and watch, and he opens the bomb doors and I looked and say, Yeah, that's nice. He said, well, we can carry a lot of bombs.

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I says, Sure, you can, now, you ever seen a Lancaster? No. I said, Oh, let's get in the Jeep and we'll go back to my bird. I climb on board and I go up in the cockpit and I says, Now watch this, and I opened the bomb bay doors. Jesus Christ!!! 'Cause 2/3 of the fuselage was bomb bay. Funny.

Question: so that, you took care of bragging rights at that point.

Answer: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. He was amazed. He said, My God. That's a huge bomb bay. I says, well, we carry a bomb so big we just close the doors against the bomb. It's called a blockbuster. 20,000 pounds. 20,000 pounds? I said, Yep. Because it was way over gross. The airplane weighed 40 some thousand, and with a 20,000 pounder, it weighed 60 some thousand, and we had 5,000-foot runways, and we used every inch to get airborne. Those poor old 4 Merlins were screamin'!

Question: That's amazing. So when you say 20,000 pounds. That's a number of bombs.

Answer: No. 10,000. 10-ton bomb. One 10-ton bomb. It's called a blockbuster. It weighed 10 tons. 20,000 pounds.

Question: Give me an idea of the, so I can visualize that. As big as a car?

Answer: As wide as this room, and jeez, I don't know how big around. As big around as the top of that table at least. Bigger.

Question: And how was your accuracy?

Answer: Pretty Good. Pretty good. Of course, it was a surface explosion, so it just, whew, whew. It blew everything in all, omni-directional.

Question: And you flew at what altitude?

Answer: 20,000

Question: And you dropped it from 20,000.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: And what were some of your missions? What were targets that you were supposed to ...

Answer: Oh, you name it. Berlin, Kastel, Hanover, Baken, Magdeberg, Munich, Hanover, Mannheim, Oh, let's think.

Question: And was it usually, I mean, were you just broad sweeping whatever was there, or were you aiming for factories?

Answer: No. It was pinpoint. Pinpoint-type targeting. Early on. Pinpoint. Uh.. Krups had a factory making whatever, so you go after Krups' factory. If it was somewhere they were making tanks, you'd blow them to hell. Later in the war, like the firebomb of Hamburg, we went back three nights in a row with 12,000 pounds of incendiary bombs. Now an incendiary bomb is about as big as that little tube there, and 12,000 pounds of those is a whole mess of them. And we bombed the city of

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Hamburg.. 800 and some odd airplanes dropped 12,000 pounds apiece and caused a firebomb, fire thing in the city (firestorm), and people of course, would go down into cellars and so on, but because all these magnesium bombs were burning and burning all the oxygen, the people were asphyxiated. They died from a lack of oxygen rather than being hit on the head. And after the war, I got a chance to go on the Berlin airlift, and I was based in Hamburg, and Fuhlsbüttel Airport, which is Hamburg's major airport is 12 miles out of the downtown section, and there's a street called a Steiner-Damm and the Steiner-Damm was the main drag going into Hamburg. When I landed at Fuhlsbüttel and got in a car and they drove me into town, I'm looking at the buildings on both sides of the street. There wasn't one building intact. All the way for 12 miles. They really bombed the hell out of Hamburg, with firebombs, not explosives. So it was, it was the worst firebombed city in Germany. Hamburg.

Question: Does that create, 'cause war's a beast unto itself? I've never been there, so I...do you disassociate your mind when you're on a mission like that?

Answer: Oh, yeah. You have to. Yeah. You have to. Because otherwise you'd just say, Oh, what the hell are we doing this for? This is stupid. After the war, we all said that, this has been stupid.

Question: But it's, it's political leader against political leader.

Answer: Exactly. The politicians we should stick them against the wall, put a blindfold over their eyes, call in the guards, and shoot them. All of them. All of them. Because the politicians are ruthless. All they want to do is feather their nest, and they don't give a damn about the population. Only when it comes time to vote, they want your vote. And they'll give you a line of BS about yeah long and hope you vote for them. Politicians cause strife, struggle, servitude. They also cause wars. Well, it's like our president now. He wants to go into Iraq in the worst way. Not that I blame him in that case, but it's an example.

Question: We interviewed a veteran yesterday who had been in WW II, Korea and Vietnam, and he said, you know, the way to solve war is if the politicians have to go first.

Answer: Exactly.

Question: That it would be a different.

Answer: Give them an M-16 and say, Pop, go on.

Question: War can, I think, can become very impersonal when they get so far removed. I mean, even historically, for me it's become more personal, because I've talked to so many veterans, but reading it in a book, it was names, dates, places, and figures.

Answer: yeah. No. War is stupidity. And terrorism is stupidity. And, sure we gotta get Saddam Hussein out of there, so that the Iraqis have a chance to live a decent life. And we gotta go after the fellow from Afghanistan. Whether he's alive or dead I don't know. Who knows?

Question: Now you were. Were you shot down, is that right?

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Answer: mmmm, hmmm.

Question: Was that when you were flying bombers or when you were flying...

Answer: Both.

Question: Both?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So you were shot down twice?

Answer: Yeah. Yeah.

Question: So where in your first shoot-down....

Answer: First shoot-down was I took bullets in the header tank. There's a thing called a header tank. It's like a radiator on a car. And the guy got coupla bullets in the header tank, and the header tank spewed all the liquid coolant out and the engine was about to seize up, so I got the hell out, pulled the ripcord and floated down into the English Channel, and got in my dingy, and splatted around in their until the sea rescue vehicle came and got me. The second time I was over Germany, and got coned in searchlights, and once you get coned in searchlights, they were radar controlled, it was almost impossible to get out of them. You try to dive out of them. With a 4-engine bomber you can't do much in the way of aerobatics and I took some shots in the wing, lost a couple of engines, and the airplane started to go into a spiral, and I said, Everybody get the hell outta here! Including me. And I was taken POW. And...

Question: So were those the first and only two times you've been in a parachute?

Answer: Yeah. Thank God.

Question: So you never really had. I mean, your training was

Answer: Get out and pull the ripcord.

Question: So did your full crew get out then?

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Question: And where was that you were shot down over?

Answer: Northern Germany.

Question: And where did you land? In farmlands? Or town?

Answer: In a field, and there were people on the road and a member of the police and the policeman came over and told me put my hands in the air, which I did, and he took me to the nearby Wehrmacht army barracks, and they handed me over to the luftwaffe, and the luftwaffe put me in a Luft Camp, and the luft camps

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were set up as a temporary camp. They kept you there for maybe two or three months and then they shipped you off to a prison of war camp. Proper prison of war camp, or a labor camp. And while I was in the temporary camp, I decided this wasn't for me and I escaped. And I walked 300 miles across Europe, and on the walk I made contact with the French Maquis, the ground, and they got me to the coast, got me on a fishing boat, over the England.

Question: so how did you, so it was a temporary camp.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: um, I mean, did you escape through the fence, or...

Answer: No, through the gates. The gates were open. On a Saturday night, the commandant would go out in his Mercedes to pick up his girlfriend and then the car would come back with the girlfriend and then pick up the commander, he was getting dressed while the car went to get her, so they opened both sets of gates, inner and outer, and they got in their pillboxes, and it was usually raining or snowing, like it does here, and these guys didn't want to get wet, and they'd sit in there puffing on their cigarettes, and not looking what's going on, and I observed this from our hut. I saw what happened 3 times in a row, and I said that's the way to do it. So I talked to the escape committee and they says, Yeah, sounds like a plan. It's your tail end that's on the hook, so if you want to do it, do it. So I did. I ran like hell.

Question: Just you, or did...

Answer: No, just me.

Question: Just you.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: And did you speak German?

Answer: No.

Question: So now you're out.

Answer: Yeah. Sleep during the day and walk by night, and stay off roads. Stay in the fields.

Question: Did you have your clothing that you had coming out of the plane?

Answer: Yeah, sure.

Question: So it wasn't a prison outfit, then.

Answer: No, no.

Question: So how did you find the French underground?

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Answer: I just stumbled on them. I had been sleeping in ditches and haystacks, and whatever, and I had a hell of a cold, and I knew I was in France because the signs on the corners of the roads were in French not German, so I decided to go to a farmhouse and see whether I could get some food and maybe get a wash or a bath or something, and it turned out that the farmer was a member of the French underground, and he put me in touch with a Maquis, and they arranged for me to get a bath, they changed my clothes, they gave me French clothes, and a beret to wear and all that garbage, and the only thing I kept was my flyin' boots, and they escorted me into Paris, and on horse and car with vegetables in the back and this was a farmer taking his vegetables to market, and he stopped and he took me to this house and the lady took me upstairs and put me in the loft. Turned out to be a house of ill repute. Good place to hide. And then they arranged for me to go to the coast with another horse and cart, and this man was supposed to be a fish, uh, seller, and he was going to the coast to get fish. Well, he talked to the man that owned the fishing boat. Now the fishing boats were allowed to go out 5 miles, but this guy went all the way to within 1 mile and he says, I can't go any closer because I've gotta get back. You're going to have to swim, so I swam the last mile on my back, just you know.

Question: And this would be in the English Channel.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Not a real warm.

Answer: No.. it was cold.

Question: huh. Now did you speak any French?

Answer: A little.

Question: So you could kind of communicate.

Answer: Yeah. Yeah.

Question: By that point, you know when you were hungry and, did you care if you got caught again by that point or...

Answer: Oh, yeah. And what I did. At night, if I was going through a field, and I knew that it was, you know, it was obviously been a crop, I'd scratch around to see if there was any potatoes or whatever. And eat them raw. That's the only food I got.

Question: So at this point you are all of 21?

Answer: 20.

Question: 20 years old.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Wow.

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Answer: Things you do when you're a kid.

Question: so once you swam in and got back to England, did you join back up?

Answer: Oh, of course, yeah. They interrogated me and sent me back to my squadron, and the squadron said, ok, you can have a week's leave. You've been a good boy, and now I'm home and, of course, in the meantime, my mother had received a telegram missing in action, and when I banged on the door and she opened the door (whistle, mimics fainting)

Question: I guess that would be a little shocker.

Answer: It was! It was.

Question: Did you enjoy, I mean, I've heard. In fact the gentleman I talked to yesterday said that war is tragedy, but there also was some goodness come out of it. Friends.

Answer: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. There were good times. There were good times. Yeah. Particularly when you got on leave. Went home on leave. And being in an operational squadron, every 6 weeks you got a week's leave because of the pressure of flying for 6 solid weeks on missions, and they'd say, ok, you got a week to do whatever you want to do, and of course the Canadians would go down to London, because that was the Mecca, and sometimes I went to London with my buddies, but most of the time I went home. It was a good time, good life.

Question: I know over here the flyboys have always been uh, kind of the elite.

Answer: Yeah. They were in England, too.

Question: More women and...

Answer: Yeah, they were in England, too. They were treated with respect, because they were doing a tough job. Not many people want to do that. Although, occasionally, in a pub, you'd meet Navy guys, and you'd talk to them, and they'd say, what are you doing. Oh, I'm a submariner. You're a submariner. wow! You know. To me, that was the most dangerous job in the world, 'cause you're sittin' there under the water in a tube, whereas I'm flying up there in a tube. Different though.

Question: And the Brits and the Americans got along?

Answer: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Question: Fellow comradeship?

Answer: Yes. Yes.

Question: Practical jokes played back and forth or anything?

Answer: Oh, sure., Yeah, but we got along fine with the Air Force people, U.S. Army Air Corps. They were pretty good guys. Army was something else. I felt sorry for anybody that was just a foot soldier, you know, 'cause they were hand-to-hand,

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close in. To me, the war was remote, 20,000 feet remote, and a totally different aspect.

Question: I know, I've talked to some of the Army and they said they were jealous of you guys because,

Answer: Oh, sure.

Question: basically got to go home at night.

Answer: Yeah, right.

Question: I mean, it was a base, but you were there, they were out...

Answer: They're wherever they are. At least you had your quarters, and you slept in your own bed. Tough part was when somebody didn't come back and you had to clear his room out. Oh, boy. That was rough. Yeah.

Question: Was that a daily event.

Answer: Most of the time, yeah, because it didn't matter when you did a mission, somebody's going to get clobbered. You didn't know whether they were bailed out or whether they crashed or whether they're dead or alive, they're missing in action. Sometimes they came back, sometimes they didn't.

Question: We talked to one gentleman, again it was Gil Langdon I think that, he said, You know, the first day coming back from a mission, when I got down I stopped to see who else came in. He says, I cried that day. He said, but after that I stopped looking. I just didn't want to know.

Answer: Yeah. Right. Right.

Question: But we talked to other guys who said, blankets I guess were real valuable. And that if you were gone, everybody'd go get your blankets and he came back, everybody thought he was down, and everybody had stolen his blankets.

Answer: Stolen his stuff, right.

Question: Survival I guess.

Answer: Yeah. Yeah.

Question: Do you remember what you guys talked about around the barracks?

Answer: Yeah, mostly the job. Uh, how to improve your survivability. What to do if you had to bail out over Europe. How to get away from POW camps if you can and how to contact the marquee if you know how to do it and I earn a little bit of French, 'cause most of the time you're flying over France to get to Germany, so your chances of being in France are pretty high. And what to do on leave, and of course the families.

Question: That was a big one, wasn't it.

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Answer: Yeah.

Question: I remember talking to Lauren Schwisow, and in the movies they always make it look like prisoners of war would talk about their girlfriends back home, and I said, Is that what you talked about, and he says, No. We talked about food. Writing recipes, and ..

Answer: Right.

Question: And I think he's the one that every day still, flapjacks and butter, pancakes and butter. He still has it everyday because he missed that so much.

Answer: mmm,hmmmm.

Question: 60 years later.

Answer: Yes. Food was a real problem. Real problem. They'd have guys that were into cooking become part of the cooking staff. Hey, guys, we're having potato soup today. Oh, great. You line up for the potato soup and here's liquid and you say, Well, where' the potatoes? Maybe one or two potatoes for two gallons of soup.

Question: Now did you have different rations than, say, the Americans? I know they always talk about c-rations and K-rations for the U.S. Forces. Did you have a different dietary?

Answer: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Flight crews were treated very well. When you got back from a mission, you had steak and eggs, bacon and eggs or whatever you wanted you got. Now this is in England where food was strictly rationed, but they made sure that the crews that were flying missions, when they got home, they got a darned good meal before they went to bed. That's the only time you got a good meal. The rest of the time it was garbage.

Question: That's interesting, the different perspectives in that way.

Answer: Yeah, when you came back from a mission the first thing you did, you went to interrogation. What did you see, what did you do, what, you know, they want to know all the information, and then you went to the mess hall and had a returning air crew meal, and that's when you got a good meal. And if it was early enough you'd go to the old club and have a couple of drinks and then you'd go to bed. And you could get a couple of shots of Scotch, which you couldn't find anywhere, but they always had it for the crews. So you ended up having perks. And thank God we did. Without the perks, I don't think anybody would have done it.

Question: Was your Mom proud of you?

Answer: Yeah, oh yeah.

Question: Was it hard on her, do you think, that when you...

Answer: I don't think so. No, she was, uh, she was glad that I did what I wanted to do, and so was my father also.

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Question: Now I heard that your plane that you flew in, was it the Lancaster that ended up in a, you were up in Canada or something?

Answer: Yeah. See, it was Canadian built Lanc, and they flew it over to Europe, and they used it in Europe. Ok, and I flew it. Now, in 1950, from '48 – '50, I was in the West Indies flying airlines, British West Indian Airways, and, on a contract for 2 years, and at the end of the contract they could either send me back to England at their expense or give me the difference in dollars and I could go wherever the heck I wanted, and I said, Well, hell, I don't want to go back to England. What's in England?, nothing. I'm going to Canada, Toronto. So I get up to Toronto, and get a job with AV Roe, Limited, which was the manufacturer of the Lancaster in England and Canada. This was the Canadian version of the company, and I'm test flying a jet fighter that they'd designed and built, but one day I'm walking through the shop. Great big long factory, and they had flown in Lancaster's from Saskatchewan. They had been in storage like Davis-Monthan in Arizona, and they were refurbishing these Lancs. So I'm walking along looking at Lancaster, Lancaster, Lancaster, and all of a sudden I come to a dead stop. There's my Lancaster. So I'm looking it over, and the crew foreman comes over, Can I help you? And I says, Well, not really, but I'm just looking at my Lancaster, I flew this bloody thing in England. You did! I says, Yeah. He vanishes. He says, Please, help yourself. Meanwhile, he gets on the phone to public relations, and the next thing I know here's a bunch of people with cameras and all that stuff and they wanted a story, so I give them the story, and it's in the paper. Now, there's a sequel to this. That was in 1951. Ok. In 1995 or 6, I'm not quite sure, two friends of mine down in California, Canadians, were going to go up to Canada for a vacation, so they climb in their airplane and off they go in their light air plane to Canada. And a month later they come back and they say, Hey, I've got a T-shirt for you. Picked it up in Hamilton, Ontario, and on the front was stenciled in a Lancaster with the same number on it! And they had a poster rolled up, gave me the poster and here's a picture of this thing flying over Canada with all my numbers on it. My airplane. It still exists. It's in a museum in Hamilton, Ontario. Still flyable, all these years.

Question: Did they know it was your number or did they just...

Answer: They didn't know. Yeah, they didn't know it was mine till I told them. And they didn't believe me, so I dug out my logbook and says, there it is, See, there's the numbers. Well, I'll be damned.

Question: Have you ever gone up to see it?

Answer: No. No.

Question: When you see a plane like that, or hear. I hear some of the pilots talk about that sound.

Answer: Oh, yeah. You can't mistake a Merlin. A Rolls Royce Merlin sounds like nothing else. If it's a P-51 buzzing over, you know you're listening to a Merlin. It maybe a Packard Merlin, but it's built to the specs. Has the same sound, and it's unique. Unique.

Question: You said it runs like a top.

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Answer: Oh, yeah. Smooth-running engine. I flew behind Merlins right through the war. The Hurricane had a Merlin, the Spitfire had a Merlin, the Halifax bomber had 4 Merlins, the Lancaster had 4 Merlins. So I had Rolls Royce engines all the way.

Question: I just can't imagine being 16, 17 years old and be given that piece of equipment

Answer: And the responsibility for it. Yeah, but you know, England was desperate. I mean, if they'd come over and taken over England, that would have been the end of the war. And the next thing, the V-2 bomber, I mean missile, was launched from the Fresian Islands, came over the London, boom, but the V-4 was a 3-stage missile that they would launch from the Fresian Islands to New York, and that was the next move. But the weichon zwei (Vergeltungswaffe) was the last one they built. They didn't get to build the 4.

Question: Did you ever go to London shortly after the bombing of London to see the devastation?

Answer: Oh, sure. I was in and out of London. I was based right out of London. When I was in fighter command.

Question: How would you describe that? I was in London in 1998, you know, so it's a full city now.

Answer: oh, yeah. God. There's no. There are no remains of the damage in any of the cities. Even the German cities. They've been completely.... Cologne was completely rebuilt after being completely bombed. You go to Cologne today, you wouldn't see any damage anywhere. Hamburg the same way. It's just wiped clean. Gone. 'Cause it's over half a century ago. It's a long time. Long time.

Question: Do you think that there's anything that the history books are leaving out that we need to let future generations know about?

Answer: Kids today have no concept of what World War II was all about. None whatsoever. Where was it? What was it? How long was it? How many people got killed? You know, statistics like Bomber Command of the Royal Air Force lost 67,000 guys. That's a statistic that's never even mentioned, and you know, 8th Army Air Corps lost thousands of guys, too. Stupid. Stupid. And the only time it comes home is when you go to a cemetery, or you see on TV line after line after line of crosses. Stupid.

I had an experience in Italy in 1961. At that time I was designing and building rocket engines for missiles, and we had built an engine for Douglas Aircraft Company that made the Thor Missile, and the Jupiter Missile was built by Chrysler in Detroit. Well, the Chrysler missile, the Jupiter, was based in Italy and Turkey, and the Thor missile was based in England, so the air force decided they were going to make a trip over to Europe to check on these squadrons to see how they were maintaining these things. And they wanted somebody from Rocketdyne the company I worked for, to be with them so that they could check on the engines, so I got the job of flying with them. So we get over the Europe, and we check the Royal Air Force bases where they had the Thor missile and they were fine, and then we jump over to Paris, spend a couple of days in Paris, then go to Italy. So then Italy at Gioia Del Colle We checked the Italian Air Force out, and the first thing we see underneath the one of

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the missiles was a group of Italian Air Force guys cooking up spaghetti. Typical Italiano. Oh, my God. Anyway, now I've lost the thought I had in my mind.

Question: That's fine.

Answer: I had a reason for telling you all this, and I've lost the reason.

Question: We started talking about a message for future generations.

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah. You know, all these missiles were all over the place. They were in Turkey, they were in Italy, they were in England, all aimed at Russia, of course, and of course, the Russians had missiles aimed at these spots as well as the states. And that was the Cold War period. And the kids today, what was the Cold War? Never heard of it? I know what Nintendo is. Yeah, right. Give me a break. Unfortunately, the intelligence of the younger generation can be split in two. There are the intelligent kids that are referred to as nerds. These are the ones with brains and use them. And then there's the massive idiots. Don't know what their brain's for. World War II, what's that? Never heard of it. And they don't teach anything in school, either. It's never mentioned.

Question: I would assume that the two intelligences that you talked about, the nerds and the ones that don't know what it's for, would be a prime target for a person like Hitler.

Answer: oh, yeah. I'll give you an example.

Question: Let me do one thing.... I gotta