

Interviewee: Robert Michelsen

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 3 November 2001

Location: kitchen of the Michelsen home, Apple Valley, MN

Transcribed by: Kimberly Johnson, July 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, August 2002

Robert Michelsen was born 15 November 1925 in Minneapolis; he attended South High School, graduating in 1943. Soon thereafter he volunteered for the US Army Air Forces, and after Basic Training was sent to gunnery school. By mid-1944 he was training to be a crew member on a B-29 Superfortress bomber. In April 1945 his 11-man crew, with Captain Dick Mansfield, was stationed on the island of Guam, from where missions were launched against mainland Japan. The crew flew ten missions over the next six weeks, striking urban areas as well as military targets.

On 25 May 1945 Bob's crew took off in the B-29 *Arkansas Traveler*, part of a five hundred-plane mission to Tokyo. Loaded with incendiary bombs, the *Arkansas Traveler* was beginning her final bomb run when she was hit by Japanese ground fire; with the plane going down, the crew was forced to bail out over Tokyo. Bob was captured as soon as he hit the ground, blindfolded and beaten, then taken to a nearby detention facility of the Japanese police, the Kempeitai.

Over the next three months, until the end of the war in August 1945, Bob and scores of other captured B-29 crew members were imprisoned at this facility in small cells, where they endured interrogations, physical and mental torture, sickness, and starvation diets. They were kept separate from other POW's, for the Japanese did not consider them normal military prisoners but rather, because of the nature of their missions against civilian targets, war criminals and thus not deserving of human treatment. Only in mid-August 1945 were Bob and the other surviving internees from his prison taken to a regular POW camp, which soon thereafter was liberated by American forces. Bob spent many months in hospitals recovering from his ordeal, finally being discharged in May 1946 from Hines VA Hospital in Illinois.

After the military Bob attended Augsburg College in Minneapolis, graduating in 1950; he then spent several years in Montana before returning to the Twin Cities in the mid-1950s to get married and raise a family. He worked many years for the publisher W B Saunders, retiring in 1985. At the time of this interview (November 2001) Bob and Gladys Michelsen lived in Apple Valley, Minnesota.

Documentation available, Missing Aircraft Report (MACR), at National Archives:
Aircraft number 44-69728, 29th BG, MACR #14510, Mansfield Crew

interview key:

R = Robert Michelsen

T = Thomas Saylor

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: This is an interview for the POW Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today is 3 November 2001, and this is an interview with Mr. Bob Michelsen of Apple Valley, Minnesota. First, Mr. Michelsen, I want to thank you very much for taking time on this beautiful Saturday morning to sit and have a conversation with me.

R: You're welcome.

T: I want to start by asking you some basic questions, for example when and where you were born.

R: Well, I was born in Minneapolis, in south Minneapolis, on November 15, 1925. I grew up there, went to school there, including South High School, from where I graduated in, *(pauses three seconds)* I guess my class graduated in 1945, and I left in '44.

T: This was a time when people were, young men in particular, were leaving school a bit early to join the military. Now were you drafted, or did you enlist?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* I enlisted in the Air Force, and by passing the Air Force test they guaranteed that, if I were drafted, I would be in the Air Force. And that's about what it amounted to, because when I finished high school, I finished a little bit early, and went to the Air Force right away. The Army Air Force, it was not the Air Force.

T: Was it important to you, as a young person, to be part of the war effort?

R: That's a good question, because, yes it was. My cousins, my friends, many of my friends were already in the Army, and I wanted to do my part, and I couldn't wait to get in.

T: Now when the US entered the war, end of December 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you remember hearing that news for the first time?

R: Oh yes, oh yes. I was in church that evening, it was a Sunday, I was in church, and I remember the news coming to the church that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. And my first thought was, "We are at war." And I had no more thoughts except to get in the Army.

T: How did your folks react to hearing that news, do you remember?

R: My dad was a veteran of World War I, and his thoughts were about the same, I believe. He said, "We are at war, and the country must be saved."

T: Were your folks perhaps already concerned about, about you being part of this, or didn't they express any concerns like that?

R: I believe they were concerned. They did not express a lot of concern, but my mother especially did not like the idea that I would end up in the war, in the Army. But she knew that it was my duty to do so.

T: Did you have older brothers?

R: I had an older sister, and two younger sisters. I was the only boy.

T: So you'd be the first sibling to join, as well.

R: Yes.

T: You entered service, according to what we wrote down here earlier [before we began taping], in late 1943?

R: Yes.

T: And when you, where did you go for Basic Training?

R: Jefferson Barracks, in St. Louis.

T: Was that a new part of the country for you?

R: I'd never been; Wisconsin was about as far as I'd ever been from Minneapolis, and, yes it was, it was a new part of the country.

T: Decent part of the country, from your opinion?

R: At that time we were housed in some huts that had very little heat, so it was cold and very humid. *(pauses three seconds)* And ask me more about that, because it's interesting *(laughs)*.

T: Let me ask you about memories you have from Basic Training.

R: I'd like to tell you! *(laughs)*

T: Yes, sure! *(laughs)*

R: In Basic Training, you have to learn a lot of discipline. And we had a drill sergeant, his name was Sergeant Ray. And Sergeant Ray would make us walk ten miles a day or dig holes in the ground, and do crazy things which, just because we were ordered to do so we had to do it. And we were very mad at Sergeant Ray; he was the devil for us. And we didn't know what to do about him, so those in my hut got together one day and said, "Here's what we can do. If Sergeant Ray says, march ten miles, we're going to say, why not twenty? If Sergeant Ray says dig a hole six feet deep and six feet wide, we're going to say, how about ten feet deep and ten feet wide?" And so we started doing this, and Sergeant Ray said one day, "What in the world are you guys doing?" Our answer was, "You cannot order us to do anything that we cannot do, or die trying." And Sergeant Ray said, "Maybe you'll be a soldier after all." The next morning he woke us up in the morning, very early in the morning, five o'clock or earlier, and his method of waking us up prior to do that was to turn on all the lights and cuss us out and tell us to get out of bed. That next morning, Sergeant Ray turned on the lights and said, "Attack the day with Sergeant Ray." And that's been my motto ever since.

T: That's a pretty good story. What was it like being away from home for the first time?

R: Well, we were so busy... Everybody gets homesick, but you're so busy you, you're going from morning to night, and you're very tired at the end of the day, so you appreciate just getting something to eat and going to bed.

T: Did some guys have more trouble than others adjusting to this Basic Training environment?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* Not that I recall, I think there were some that were more gregarious and thought they were a little bit stronger and faster than the rest of us, and that caused a few fights, but for the most part everybody was with it.

In the Air Force the discipline is a little lax, and for me it was not. I was a person who liked discipline, and I liked to, at least keep myself *(pauses three seconds)* somewhat as a disciplinarian because it's military protocol.

T: Okay. Did you have a chance, this was near St. Louis, you said, right?

R: St. Louis is in Jefferson County, so it was called Jefferson Barracks. It's still there and it's still used.

(1, A, 113)

T: Did you have chance to leave Jefferson Barracks and go into town at all?

R: No, not at all.

T: And after Jefferson Barracks you moved out to somewhere else?

R: Yes.

T: Okay. From Jefferson Barracks did you move to a place to train for airplane duty?

R: We moved, I think it was to *(pauses three seconds)* Shreveport, Louisiana, Barksdale Air Force Base in Shreveport. What I remember mostly about that was, we were supposed to go to school there, and we began some school in the afternoon, we started to study weather patterns and map and aeronautics, a few things like that. But we always did KP [military shorthand for kitchen patrol] in the morning, so it was more doing dishes than studying. And it was at Barksdale that they told us that the schools were closing, and there's only one school open for you, and that's gunnery school, take it or leave it. So I said, yes, I would take it.

T: If you had said leave it, what would they have done with you?

R: I'd probably have gone to the infantry. I wasn't keen to avoid that, but I kind of liked the idea of flying.

T: So given the option, gunnery school was still the best decision for you, from your perspective.

R: Only time would tell.

T: Now, for gunnery school, did you leave Shreveport and go somewhere else?

R: Augusta, Georgia. And that was, I don't recall much about it, it was, there was a school of some kind there, where we studied, again, mathematics and I think they even threw in a little bit of chemistry at that point. But even there they ended that in mid-school and said, you're going to Florida to go to gunnery school.

T: So you moved around quite a bit there—Florida will be the fourth place for you now.

R: Fourth place, yes.

T: Was that where you completed gunnery school, in Florida?

R: No, that was at Ft. Myers, Florida. That was a lot of fun, because I did like to hunt at my uncle's farm, so we got to use some rifles, some shotguns, and then the .50 caliber machine gun.

T: When did you learn that you'd be part of a B-29 Superfortress [four-engined heavy bomber] crew?

R: *(pauses five seconds)* Sometime late in 1944, after flying on the B-17 [Flying Fortress, four-engine heavy bomber] and the B-24 [four-engine heavy bomber] out of Ft. Myers, our orders were to go to Wichita, Kansas. And it's at Wichita that they assigned us to a crew. And in Wichita all of the men, all the crewmembers were getting together, and you were assigned to a crew. You had no choice in who you were going to be assigned with, you were just assigned. From that point [I] took a train to Alamogordo, New Mexico, where all the crews were training.

T: In New Mexico?

R: In New Mexico.

T: Was that a large training facility there?

R: Yes, it was. It was called, I think, White Sands at that time. Now it's called Anderson Air Force Base. We began learning about the B-29, the mechanical parts of it and everything, and then we started flying. We flew mostly from Alamogordo, out over the Pacific Ocean, made a U-turn, came back, drop bombs over Arizona, and then back to Alamogordo.

T: So these were longer training missions.

R: *(pauses three seconds)* Many of them were eight hours, nine hours, and at high altitude. Sometimes at twenty-eight [thousand], thirty thousand feet.

T: That's higher than the B-17 flew?

R: Oh yes.

T: By this time were you already working with the crew you would be working with when you got to Guam?

R: Yes.

T: How were, did you bond quickly with this group of people, these other men?

R: Yes, we all bonded pretty well together. The captain was, I thought, an exceptional pilot, and he watched out for his crew.

T: Was he a career officer?

R: Yes, he was. He was, I forget what college he went to, oh yes, he was a graduate of Ohio State University. He went to the Air Force quite early, probably early 1942. He was a flight instructor, married, had two children at the time. His wife was kind of like the mother of the crew, when we did see her, when we could get off base. At the

time, in 1945, he was twenty-six years old, and I thought, gee, that's pretty old. But now in retrospect, of course, it made no difference. But I did admire him, yes.

T: He must have seemed old to you then, or more mature?

R: Yes, he did.

T: How about the age of the rest of your crew? Crew of eleven, right?

R: Crew of eleven. Our bombardier was from Minneapolis, Mel Underman, he was a captain. He was a former bombing instructor, and he was actually the oldest, I believe he was a few months older than the pilot. Our co-pilot, Bob Ring, was just out of school, and I don't know his age, probably twenty-two. Flight engineer, Ed Carna, was several years older than the rest of us.

T: Twenty-six was the oldest then?

R: Yes, I believe twenty-six was the oldest.

T: And you said the guys in the crew seemed to get along fairly well?

R: Oh, we all got along well. The captain had, he treated everybody as if they were a partner, not as a, an underling at all.

T: What kind of an impression did that make on a nineteen year old Robert Michelsen?

R: Well, I thought I was a part of, a part of the Air Force, and I thought I was going to help in the war effort, and that was the goal for all of us.

T: Do you think, at that time, and this is sort of a lead-in to the next question, did you think, in a larger sense, who the enemy was? Or was there simply a job to be done?

R: *(pauses five seconds)* Hmmm. I don't recall thinking about too much about the enemy until we were, until we were overseas. It was mostly, I wanted to do the best job I could do.

(1, A, 212)

T: Did your experience change during the war, and I am thinking about the notion of "who the enemy is" and, as opposed to doing a particular job? Was there more personalizing of the enemy?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* When we were overseas we often thought about it, and talked about, what would we do in certain situations? As a matter of fact, in our crew we rehearsed what our reaction would be if certain events should happen.

And to that extent, yes, we thought about the enemy. But as far as hating the enemy, hatred did not come into it; it was still doing the best job we could do.

T: After the training at New Mexico, were you posted immediately to Guam?

R: I think we had a week furlough, and then went back to Wichita, Kansas, to get our airplane. It was manufactured there, and we spent about a week becoming acquainted with a new airplane, calibrating all the controls and all the gauges. Then we flew to California for one night, Hawaii, on Good Friday 1945, and left Hawaii on Easter Sunday. We spent the next night on Kwajalein [Atoll in the Marshall Islands; captured by US forces in 1944], and the next night to Guam [island in the Mariana Islands; captured by US forces in 1944].

T: So it took a number of days to get to Guam. You actually picked up the plane, and then flew it in a number of stages to Guam?

R: Yes.

T: Was there a large base on Guam at this time?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* The base was there when we landed, although it was still being enlarged and worked on. But it was still operating as far as flights back and forth to Japan.

T: What kind of a place was Guam?

R: Well, tropical, a lot of trees. We were housed in a Quonset hut [prefabricated building with a semi-cylindrical corrugated roof], and it was very humid. It rained every day at four o'clock. The food was satisfactory.

A little story for you. There were still Japanese out in the woods, they were called stragglers, and they would try to steal clothes off a clothes line or food, if they could get a hold of the food. I remember one day somebody said that there were stragglers out in the woods; get your gun and we'll go after them. And I did—I got a .45 [caliber] pistol and started for the woods after them, and then I stopped and decided I had better not, because I did not want to be shot for a Japanese out in the woods. Later on I told the captain what had happened and he looked at me and he said, "You're a flyer. You don't go marching in the woods." So I think I did the right thing.

T: So there were Japanese still on the island?

R: Just a few.

T: Did that worry people, or...?

R: Yes. They would occasionally shoot at you.

T: Was there leisure time on the island, when you weren't on a mission? What did you do to pass the time?

R: Sleep.

T: What about other guys? Activities, drinking?

R: The flight crew was, was housed in Quonset huts, and these flights from Guam to Japan and return were rather long, fifteen hours minimum. If you could rest in between flights, that's what you did. You ate, you washed your clothes, and you rested. As far as drinking, the captain would send a bottle, if he could get a bottle for us, he'd send us a bottle of bourbon after every flight, and we would drink it till it was gone.

T: Was drinking a pretty popular pastime on the island?

R: You know, I never did wander around the island too much, because we were pretty much confined to where we were, and our plane. As a matter of fact, we had guard duty, someone had guard duty every night to guard the airplane against these stragglers. So we didn't go wandering around too much, especially at night. But we had our own parties right there.

T: Officers and enlisted men were housed separately?

R: Yes, separately.

T: Did you see the officers off duty, socially?

R: Before Guam, yes, because the captain and his wife lived in Las Cruces, New Mexico, they had an apartment there, and he had a car. So we would occasionally take the car across the mountains and have dinner with him in Las Cruces. But on Guam, no, we didn't; it was all business.

(1, A, 270)

T: What was your attitude, or your feeling once you got to Guam? Was there a sense of trepidation or excitement?

R: I think excitement would be the word, because you knew pretty much that you were going to go every other day, and always preparing for that.

T: So there was an expectation that there would be regular missions every day, or every other day, as you mentioned.

R: Well, that's what we expected.

T: Did that turn out to be the case?

R: Yes.

T: Do you remember the first mission that you flew off of Guam?

R: Off of Guam, the first one was just a short training mission to the island of Rota. There were four island in the Marianas—Guam, Saipan, Tinian—and those were occupied by US troops [after being captured from the Japanese during early- to mid-1944]. Rota was a small island that was still occupied by the Japanese. It was a training mission over Rota, dropped some bombs, or if you had trouble with your airplane and you wanted to figure out is it still flyable and has everything been repaired you'd fly over Rota and drop a bomb or two. Then we had one mission to Truk [a major atoll in the Caroline Islands, important for its anchorage]. That was a Japanese held island, very well fortified, too fortified, I think, to invade, and it was now supplied by Japanese submarines. We had one flight over Truk, where we dropped bombs right down the middle of the runway on Truk and into the ocean. Because at the end of the runway was where the submarines would dock. The Japanese had very intense and very accurate anti-aircraft at Truk, and that was first experience at getting shot at.

T: This was April 1945, and this island was still pretty well fortified?

R: Oh yes. [Truk was still in Japanese hands when the Pacific war ended in August 1945.]

T: This mission over Truk—were you shot at from the ground?

R: Yes, anti-aircraft.

T: Can you say something about that? Because now it's gone from training missions to live fire?

R: (*laughs*) In our briefings, when we understood we were going to Truk, we were told not to worry, there's nothing to worry about, just fly over there and drop your bombs. There's no anti-aircraft, no defense at Truk at all, they said. And then when they started shooting at us, we thought something must be wrong.

T: Were you part of a group of planes flying here?

R: I don't remember how many, but there was a group, yes. But it was not counted as a mission, it was counted as a training mission. A non-mission again (*laughs*). The [Air Force's] reason I don't know; we got shot at. I believe it wasn't to advance the war against the enemy, it was more for, they said, more for training. The captain wasn't told, he was as mad as anybody. He was really upset, to be honest.

T: Was it soon after this that you made the first mission over Japan?

R: Yes. It was within several days.

T: What was the target the first mission?

R: Uh, the first target was Kurayama, which I think is northwest of Tokyo. A chemical factory, as far as I recall.

T: How many planes were on this mission?

R: I have no idea. Wait, I can tell you; I have the list here [of all missions flown by our crew]. But when you flight at night you don't know how many airplanes are there.

T: Did you take off at night?

R: No, you take off during the day, because you've got a seven-hour flight in front of you. *(pauses three seconds)* Let's see, Kurayama... *(looking at list of missions)* it's on my list here... 20th Air Force, eighty-five airplanes total... twenty-one airplanes from our [20th] Bomb Group.

T: Is that a relatively large group of bombers to send over a target?

R: Less than average. *(pauses three seconds)* Average would be probably 150, those that took off for the target. How many made it, you don't know. I think our losses from mechanical problems were greater than from the enemy.

T: Of the missions you flew, did you ever have to abort a mission because of a mechanical problem?

R: No. Now there is an interesting story about that, if you want to hear it.

T: Please.

R: Shall I name names?

T: If you are comfortable doing that.

R: *(pauses three seconds)* No, I'd better not. In our hut on Guam, there was a crew that claimed they would, they would survive the war no matter what happened. They bragged quite a bit about this, and they told us the reasons why. They had the highest abort rate of anyone in our Bomb Group. They would take off on a mission, find some mechanical problem, drop their bombs, turn around, come back, and land, and then say that, mechanically, they can't make it to the target. They bragged about

this. And over the target, they claimed, that if they were to go at eleven thousand feet, they would go in at thirteen thousand feet and make sure somebody underneath them was at eleven thousand [feet], and so they had some protection from the ack-ack [slang for anti-aircraft ground fire] coming from below. They did, they bragged they would survive, they would never get shot down, nothing would ever happen to them. The co-pilot of that crew talked to the captain [of our crew] about what was happening, and the captain told him that if he did not report this to the commander, that he would be as guilty as the whole crew. And that co-pilot did go to Colonel Starley and tell him what was going on. The colonel then disbanded this entire crew. The airplane commander, whose name I will not name, was sent back to the US and given an honorable discharge. The rest of the crew were placed on other crews where they had lost a member of the crew for one reason or another. I learned after the war that that co-pilot that was being honest about everything was killed in action two weeks after he reported his crew. So, ironically, he killed himself. And the captain of the ship was given an honorable discharge.

T: How does that sit with you?

(1, A, 345)

R: Mad as hell. I think they should all have gone to jail.

T: Was it a collusion, the entire crew was guilty here?

R: I think the entire crew was guilty, yes, because the enlisted men in our barracks were all bragging about it. So they were all in it.

T: It seems one thing to do it, and another to brag about it.

R: The other ironic part of it is that, I'll get to that point later, their airplane was called the *Arkansas Traveler*, (*pauses three seconds*) and that's the one we were shot down in.

T: *Arkansas Traveler*?

R: Yes.

T: You didn't always fly the same plane then?

R: No. I'll tell you why. The mission before the last one, that was over Tokyo, and we knew that Tokyo was burning, there was a wall of heat coming up from the city. We tried to avoid it, but we took it straight on, and so we went up, with a thermal, we went up four thousand feet and immediately down four thousand feet. We tried to take them straight on, because then your airplane is flipped upside down, and you've got a real problem. You don't know, in this heat and smoke, which is up and which is down, and you could lose. But we took it straight on, and when we came

out of it our bomb bay doors were open and would not close electrically. So what happened was, there was a winch in each bomb bay, it's to load bombs if you can't do it hydraulically on the ground. It also has a cable attached to it, and you can reach down over the air there and make a hook on to the corner of the bomb bay, and then winch the bomb bays closed. You have to do that without a parachute, by the way, because there's no room to get between the pillars and where you have to place this hook. So the left gunner held my legs while I bent out over that to make the hook, and then he pulled me in and then we reeled them up. But we lost, because of the airspeed loss our gasoline consumption was way down [increased use of fuel], and so we decided to land at Iwo Jima [island lying between Guam and Japan; captured by US forces March 1945] to get more gas so we make it on to Guam. We got back to Guam about noon the next day. Another mission was scheduled for, this would have been 25 May, another mission was scheduled for that night, and because we could no longer fly our airplane, we were assigned the other one, called the *Arkansas Traveler*.

T: What was the name of your plane?

R: No name. It had no name. We wanted to call it after the pilot's wife, Billie, but we kept switching airplanes because of... We were shot at a couple of times, you know, and so we, one plane after another.

T: How many different planes did you fly?

R: Probably three or four. The crew was the same, but the planes would change.

T: Was there any kind of superstition on the part of guys about changing planes like that?

R: No, the older airplanes were the ones you did not want to fly. You wanted to fly the newer ones, and the *Arkansas Traveler* was a fairly new airplane. That crew that was broken up had been on Guam for a while, and the longer that you were on Guam, the newer your aircraft, because you would take the airplane from someone else.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.

T: So you took this plane from Wichita, and you got to Guam, and you lost the plane?

R: Yes, it was assigned to a different crew. We were low man on the totem pole, so we had to take the worst airplane.

T: I see. And of course the more missions a plane flies, the more likely it is to have certain kinds of problems?

R: Yes.

T: So, the longer you stayed, the better your airplane?

R: The better your airplane. *(pauses three seconds)* Not the better, but the newer.

T: Flying over Japan for the first time, what feelings were going through you this time? I mean, Truk was one thing—going to the Japanese mainland I imagine might have been another?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* At Truk we went over in daylight, and you could see what was happening down below, and you could see the black explosions of smoke around you. **[1, B, 21]** Over Japan it was at night, and all you could see was the blackness in front of you, and if you were going to a larger city, the red burning buildings in front of you and below you. It was an eerie feeling, because you just hoped that you could get over the target and come out. **[1, B, 29]**

T: Did your thoughts go through your mind about what was happening on the ground? Or were your thoughts focused on yourself and your plane?

R: **[1, B, 33]** I think every time we went over a burning city we did think, at least I did, of what was going on, on the ground. You didn't dwell on it, though, but you did feel some compassion for that. **[1, B, 37]** And yet your job was to drop those bombs where you were told to drop them, and you did it as good as you could.

T: What kind of ordnance was your plane dropping on Japan?

R: Over the cities, most of the time it was incendiaries, and mixed with an occasional five hundred pounder. Over southern Kyushu [Island], on the airfields, we were dropping the five hundred pound bombs, and on the oil storage tanks five hundred pounders.

T: Were all your missions dropping bombs at night?

R: No. Over the southern islands, during the [US] invasion of Okinawa [which began 1 April 1945 and concluded in June 1945], the Japanese were sending the *kamikazes* from the southern airfields of Japan, so we were over there trying to block that effort from the Japanese. So we were bombing the airfields and the oil supplies.

T: Was it any easier for your crew, in a sense, to carry out those kind of missions than the incendiary raids on the cities?

R: Oh yes. *(emphatically)* Because when we went over the southern islands we were in a formation, and the Japanese would not attack a formation, for reasons I told you about before [the superior range of the B-29, and the accuracy and firepower of B-29 armament]. And the anti-aircraft fire was not as intense; the cities had radar-

controlled searchlights, radar-controlled anti-aircraft, and over the southern islands there was little anti-aircraft.

T: So those were safer missions to fly?

R: Yes.

T: These incendiary bombs—how do they actually work?

R: I have no idea.

T: They aren't very big, are they?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* Thirty inches [long]? I'm guessing, it's been fifty-some years, and I can't remember the dimensions for sure. But we carried thousands of pounds of them, ten thousand pounds of them would be about routine. They're filled with an explosive, and magnesium. Magnesium burns very hot. Some of them were designed not to explode on impact, but to remain on the ground for a matter of hours or days, and then explode.

T: Now the ordnance was loaded by someone else?

R: An armorer, yes.

T: Going over cities and dropping these bombs—were some guys appear to be bothered by that kind of a mission?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* Not that I am aware of. It's possible, but I wasn't aware of any.

T: One book, Robert Morgan's book about flying B-29s over the cities [*The Man Who Flew the Memphis Belle: Memoirs of a WWII Bomber Pilot* (Dutton, 2001)] mentions that, with these incendiary raids, it was possible to feel the heat swells, the thermal, which you also described. And also at times that the fires caused a certain odor, or smell, that could be detected. Can you comment on that?

R: **[1, B, 84]** Oh yes, you'd smell the smoke. I think it was smoke, it was like a burning building. A burning building has a peculiar odor, the charred wood, and many of those buildings, at least their smaller homes, were made of wood. And we wondered, are we just burning up homes, or burning up people? **[1, B, 101]** On the other hand, that last little trip in Tokyo, about 22 August, through a blindfold, I could see the city had been pretty well burned out. And yet these small homes did have machinery in them and a metal lathe or drill press or something. So they were manufacturing things in their homes.

T: Now you flew ten or eleven missions...

R: Ten or eleven, depending on how you look at it. I say eleven.

T: You did take the final mission on 25 May 1945. Was this mission, from the outset, going to be in any way different than the others?

(1, B, 115)

R: The airplane was different; we had an airplane [the *Arkansas Traveler*] we hadn't flown before. And there was one other difference which is not peculiar, it's kind of interesting. Someone on the runway, on the ramp I should say, took a picture of our crew, a candid picture, during the last inspection. By last inspection I mean, we all had our duties before flight time, and the last thing that happened before we got on the airplane [was that] the ground crew who maintain the airplane and the flight crew would get together, and the captain would go over everything and ask about the condition of the airplane, and the condition of the flight crew. And we'd laugh and joke a little bit. Someone took a picture.

Now the captain had a son who later became an Air Force pilot and flew tankers in the Pacific. In about 1975 he landed on Guam. In one of the buildings he would report to after landing there was a row of pictures of airplanes and crews that were lost during the Second World War. As he looked at these pictures he saw a picture of the airplane of his father's last mission, and our crew. It was taken on that last day. How ironic that there on the wall is that picture, with the caption, "the last flight of the *Arkansas Traveler*." So he had a copy made, and it was sent to us.

T: So you have a copy of this picture?

R: You know, in the move from the country to this town home I don't know where it is. I'll find it someday.

T: And it's that plane that you only flew...

R: ...that one time.

T: This mission, it sounds like, was routine in a sense, then, as far as the target and ordnance?

R: Yes, it was routine, because it was identical to the night, to two nights before.

T: What was the target this time?

R: Tokyo. Incendiaries.

T: Maybe you can describe the events... Was your plane hit by anti-aircraft fire?

R: Yes.

T: Can you walk us through that sequence of events?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* Well, as you approach the island of Japan, everything is dark. That night it was cloudless, the moon was shining, and we lined up on Mount Fuji. We lined up on that, which is south of Tokyo. We lined up on that to go northwest across Tokyo toward Choshi Point [east of Tokyo] and then out to the Pacific again. After we left Fuji we were picked up by the searchlights almost immediately, and I believe we were the only airplane over the target at that time, which was a big error. In retrospect, I believe this airplane, the *Arkansas Traveler*, was not calibrated properly for airspeed.

T: So you had lost contact with the group you had been flying with?

R: At night you were all alone, there is no formation flying at night. You leave Guam at a certain time, and the sun goes down, you're still alone, and you fly over there, over the target, drop your bombs and return. You are alone; there's no formation.

T: All the planes do this in sort of, in succession.

R: Yes, one after the other. So that all of the searchlights between Fuji and Tokyo, and all the aircraft, had only one aircraft to shoot at, and that was us. We disliked this; we did not being over the target alone, but this is what happened.

T: How long before they were able to lock in on your plane and hit it?

R: Almost immediately. How far, how many minutes between Fuji and Tokyo, in my mind it's about twenty minutes, but I think it's more like twelve. Eleven to twelve would be about right. We were hit in the number two engine, and the flames were reaching all the way back to the tail. I know that they tried to extinguish it, and feather it, and they did everything they could to stop the fire. It would not go out.

And then we were hit in the tail. The plane started shaking a little bit; it was not uncontrollable, but it was vibrating. *(pauses three seconds)* We had rehearsed what to do in this situation. We had some options; one option was to abort, that is drop the bombs wherever we were and try to get out of that ack-ack pattern, because we were still in the searchlight pattern and they were still shooting at us. Another option was to abort and head for the water, try to ditch in Tokyo Bay. The problem is, at night you don't know where the waves are or how high they are, and that's just as dangerous. The third option was, was to do what we did. On the intercom we had, the first thing that happened, of course, was that we would have to check in, and this just takes a matter of seconds, because we had a routine that we had worked out. Everybody checked in but the tail gunner, and we were worried about him. The radio operator had come to the rear part of the airplane and opened the hatch, and was dropping out tin foil as a, to distract the ground radar. And he had been wounded, now mortally, I'm not sure. He was wounded, and there was

blood around him. The bombardier said, "Let's ride it down." I could hear that on the intercom. I went right back at him and said, "Hell no, let's get out of here."

T: Ride it down means to...?

R: Ride the airplane down, and you're dead. Ride it down. Stay in it until it crashes. And the captain came back almost instantly and said, and I'm going to quote him word for word, "Target straight ahead." And that was it. So for that twelve minutes we had, the airplane was vibrating, the radio operator close to me was bleeding, I don't know what happened to the rear tail gunner, and we put our bombs right on target.

T: By saying "target straight ahead" the captain was saying...

R: He said we're not aborting, and we're not riding it down, we're going to the target.

T: What did that mean for the survival of the aircraft then?

R: Taking our chances, because we could blow up in mid-air. We had about five thousand gallons of gas in our center tank, and we had an engine burning. If that flame gets to the fumes of that tank, you have a mid-air explosion, and you're gone right there.

T: Plus you had the incendiary bombs on the plane, too.

R: *(laughs)* It wouldn't have made any difference if you blow up in mid-air!

T: The tail gunner, he never...

R: He never responded. The radar operator went back and pounded on his, now he told me this after all was over. He said he went back and pounded on the door and tried to open it, but there was no response to his pounding, there was no response on the intercom, and he could not open the door. So either he had bailed out, which he would not do unless he was commanded to do, or he's dead. So I believe he was dead in mid-air.

(1, B, 228)

T: So that the ground fire that hit the tail probably hit him as well.

R: Yes.

T: There was no window in that door back there?

R: No, there's no window, so...

T: Now when the captain said “target straight ahead,” what thoughts went through your mind at that time?

R: Everything became quiet, and the bombardier did his job, and the engineer, I’m sure, kept trying to put out the fire, which he couldn’t do. And everything was quiet and we, the searchlights and the ack-ack left us. The reason they left us, we were burning up in mid-air; there’s no reason to waste a shell.

T: You weren’t hit any more than that?

R: No, just twice.

T: Did you feel a sense of increased panic or fear at this time?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* I think I was kind of neutral! *(laughs)* There was certainly a lot of fear, because that fire was tremendous, but *(pauses three seconds)* I just think that the Army discipline teaches you that you put that out of your mind and you do your job. At least the captain said it, “Target straight ahead.”

(1, B, 245)

T: Was there any kind of response to that?

R: No, that was it. That was it.

T: As a gunner on a plane like this B-29, that’s flying at night, did you encounter many planes?

R: The *baka*. B-A-K-A. It’s a Japanese rocket airplane, *kamikaze*, and they’re loaded onto a Japanese bomber. They fly it into the sky, and then they release this rocket airplane. It cannot land; it blows up if it lands. But what they did, of course, was to fly around in the area and try to crash into an American airplane, a B-29.

T: Were these *baka* a serious concern for you as a gunner?

R: Oh, very much so, yes. We called it sometimes a ball of fire, because if you saw the ball of fire, you knew that rocket engine was going away from you. But if you didn’t see that ball of fire, and you they were out there, then the chances were, there was a possibility that they would locate you and crash into you. They are killed, and so is everyone on the airplane.

T: Did you ever see one of these *baka*?

R: Oh yes, many times.

T: Were the guns on your plane a decent defense against something like the *baka*?

R: No, no. Because we did not want to shoot at them. If you're in the searchlights, they know where you are. If you're not in the searchlights, then you don't shoot at that ball of fire, because the gunfire would give you away.

T: So as a gunner, what did you do?

R: *(laughs)* You're absolutely right! You want to shoot in the worst way, but you don't do it!

T: How many times did you actually use your guns, then, on these missions?

R: Only a few times. Because in the daylight formations they wouldn't approach you, and at night you didn't dare shoot.

T: It seems, in a sense, that the gunners were almost superfluous to the mission.

R: Under those circumstances, that is correct. We did use them once. We landed on Iwo Jima short of gas, we had a feathered engine, too, by the way. We backed into a ramp and the fighting [on Iwo Jima] was going on not far from where we had ramped the airplane, and the tail gunner let off a few rounds at the Japanese from the back of the airplane. But he did that more for fun.

T: Back to this mission: the bombs were dropped, and what happened to the plane then?

R: As soon as the bombs were dropped a bell rang, and that was the signal to jump.

T: The captain had made up his mind that the bombs would be dropped, and then you'd get out of the plane.

R: That's right.

T: Could the plane have stayed airborne longer?

R: In retrospect, yes. But you don't know that. He had put [the plane] on automatic pilot, and it hit the ground within, I would guess, three or four minutes after that.

T: So you didn't have a lot of time?

R: No.

T: Dropping the bombs made the plane lighter, right? Did that weight difference make it any easier?

R: No, it didn't make any difference.

T: Now you had practiced parachute jumps, I guess, right?

(1, B, 286)

R: *(laughs)* No! I think, as I recall, we may have jumped off about an eight foot ledge at sometime or other, that's about it!

T: But you knew how to use this parachute, I guess, how to open it?

R: Oh yes. How to strap it on, how to get it off. We had quick release harness; the four straps over the two shoulders and around the two legs, and they all came together in the center. There was a little knob on it that you could decide which way you wanted to release. If you had the knob so it wouldn't release, then everything was fine. Then you turned that knob and hit it with your fist, and all four straps released at once. So we had what we called a quick release harness.

T: Did all members of the crew make it out of the plane?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* No. The tail gunner and the radio operator did not make it out. I am ninety-nine percent sure the tail gunner was dead in the air, in the airplane.

T: What happened to the navigator?

R: *(pauses ten seconds)* I am positive he was decapitated on the ground [by the Japanese].

T: When the plane landed, or...?

R: No, no, he parachuted out. We know he got out [of the plane]. Only the tail gunner and the radio operator did not make it out.

T: So the radio operator chose not to jump?

R: He was wounded, and I don't know if it was a mortal wound or not, but he was bleeding and lying on his back. He put his hands behind his head, around the stanchion of a table that was holding the radar, and refused to jump. We could not get him loose.

T: Where did you jump from, I mean physically, on the plane? Was there a hatch?

R: I went out the rear bomb bay. The bomb bay doors were open, and there's a hatch going into that area.

T: And you just crawl back and just drop out the door then? Is it that easy?

R: I was the last one to jump from our compartment, and I think I just stepped off like you'd step off a diving board.

T: Do you remember that sensation of dropping off into that pitch black?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* You hit the wind, you can feel the wind right away. You don't know how high you are. My guess was six thousand feet, so I decided to open the chute as soon as I felt I was not making forward progress, but going straight down.

T: When you dropped to the ground, could you see where you were landing?

R: It wasn't that dark. I looked at the ground, *(pauses three seconds)* let's see... *(thinking)*. It was a windy night, and the parachute was moving with the wind, it was back and forth; I tried to control that. And after, one searchlight had picked me up after I jumped, but that went out almost instantly. I tried to control the parachute a little so I'd go straight down, *(pauses three seconds)* and I remember glancing at the ground as the ground actually came up closer to me, and there were people there.

T: They could see you coming?

R: Oh, I'm sure they could—I had a white parachute.

T: Were other members of the crew in the same general area?

R: I assume they were, but I couldn't see any of them.

T: Can you take us through what happened when you hit the ground?

R: I'd like to back up just a little bit please. Remember we talked before the recorder was on about the stragglers on Guam, and how I went and got a gun and went after them. Anyway, there was a .45 [caliber] pistol, and I had it strapped to my waist in the airplane. And before I jumped I took it out of its holster and said, should I take it with me or should I leave it? And no matter what you say about protecting yourself, that gun was not there for protection, because you're jumping on an island and you can't, there is no escape from the island. And it's in a foreign country, with foreign people, and you can't escape them. The gun was there for only one reason. I thought to myself, if I use it for suicide, it's the wrong thing to do, so I took the gun out and I left it *(bangs hand on table)* on the floor of the airplane. I did not want to have that with me.

So going down in the parachute I could see that there were people underneath me. Also there was a railroad track, and I landed just to the side of the rails. How big the crowd was around me I do not know, but there was quite a number of people. And there were other, what looked to me at that time like

soldiers, home guard or whatever you want to call them, with rifles and bayonets. When I hit the ground, I hit the quick release before I hit the ground, because I didn't want that parachute to come down on top of me. On the ground I glanced around, and I could see that these, what I thought at the time were soldiers, with their rifles and bayonets, they were pointed at the crowd and not at me.

T: Could you figure out what was going on?

(1, B, 347)

R: Oh yes, absolutely. It didn't come into my mind that quick, but I thought at the time that the Japanese wanted prisoners to interrogate, and that these men with rifles and bayonets were protecting me from the crowd. *(pauses three seconds)* But for them, I was dead.

T: The crowd, you think, would have killed you?

R: Absolutely *(emphatically)*.

T: Those Japanese soldiers actually saved your life—how ironic.

R: Yes it is.

T: So a number of people on the ground knew of your presence immediately.

R: Oh yes.

T: How soon before someone was over to you?

R: Well, you know, right away. Your hands were tied beyond your back immediately, blindfold, and a rope around your neck.

T: What was going through your head at this time?

R: Nothing, nothing. I was just hoping I'd stay alive.

T: Was it, in a sense, beyond fear?

R: Oh, I think so.

T: Where were you taken?

R: I don't know how far it was, it seemed to me like it was probably two hundred yards or so. But a gauntlet formed on each side. The Japanese love to hit people with whatever—that's why they carry these sticks that I'll tell you about later. They

carry shovels and hoes, and everything else, and one of their ways of punishing people is to hit them. So as we marched, as we were dragged to...

T: Was it just you?

R: Just me. As I was dragged to wherever we were going, it was like an Indian gauntlet, people on each side, just hitting you, swinging whatever they had at you. There was no order to stop it, because it kept on for as long as we were moving.

T: Could you hear voices or yelling as well?

R: Oh yes. I couldn't understand them, but I could hear them.

T: Were you conscious the whole time?

R: No, a couple of times I, I remember going to my knees a number of times, and how long I was on my knees I do not know.

T: Were you conscious when this gauntlet process ended, or did you wake up somewhere else?

R: No, I was conscious then, and I was tied to a post of some kind, and I surmised that it was close to a building because I could hear doors opening and closing. There was no light, but I could hear the door opening and closing.

T: You were blindfolded still?

R: Yes.

T: Were you taken to an interrogation center, or a prison, or what?

R: Well, there is an interesting story about the rest of the night, if you want to hear it.

T: Yes.

R: Tied to this post, you could hear the doors opening and closing. Whenever the door opened or closed, you would get beaten, because it was their privilege. The Japanese have a way of, I think --

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: This is tape two with Mr. Michelsen, 3 Nov 2001.

R: Anyway, we're tied up to a post, at night, near a building, because you could hear the door open and close. The Japanese have a, their way of life is that, anybody that

is lower in caste than they are, they can punish them any way they want. And of course somebody that they are really mad at, for bombing their city, and they're a prisoner, would be the lowest of the low. So that every time the door opened and closed you'd get beaten a little bit. (*pauses three seconds*) I say a little bit—it was more than that. Thing I remember about daylight, looking down at the ground and I said, my god, I pissed in my pants. But as it grew lighter I said, geez, that's not urine, that's blood. And most of it came from my head. I did get a little shrapnel in my leg—I didn't even know it until later—but most of it came from my head.

But back to the night: it's dark, and you could hear airplanes flying over. Once in a while you could hear everybody cheer, because you knew an airplane got hit then.

T: Because the planes were coming one by one, weren't they?

R: Yes, one by one. And in the middle of the night, a voice said to me, "Would you like a cigarette?" And I nodded my head yes, and so a cigarette was lit and put in my mouth, and I could puff on it a little bit. And then that voice said, "Would you like tea?" Nothing to lose at this point, so I said yes. And a cup of tea was put up to my mouth, and I had a few sips. And then the voice said, "I have a cousin living north of San Francisco. Do you think he's alive?" I said, "Is the cousin a citizen?" The voice said, "Yes." And I said, "Then he has nothing to worry about." That was my opinion at that time, and I guess that was true. They did go through this other awkward stage [of the US government internment camps]. Then the voice was gone. But it was a friendly voice.

In the morning I heard a vehicle drive up, it sounded to me like a motorcycle, and I was placed in a trailer attached to the motorcycle, face up, on my back. Your hands are still tied behind your back, and your legs are tied now, and you're placed on your back in this vehicle. And a canvas put over the top of you. We begin to go somewhere, and about what I assumed was every block, I don't know how many feet, they would stop and give people the pleasure of beating on you. And then they'd start again, and go a little while longer, and stop, and you'd get beat again.

At one of the stops, while I was getting beat on, I could feel that another person was put into this same trailer, and the canvas put back on top of us. Then the same—you go a ways, you stop, you get beat, and stop, get beat. During this process I heard the grunts and the groans and everything, and they sounded familiar, and I knew it was the left gunner from our crew. So underneath this canvas he maneuvered and I maneuvered so that, although our hands were tied, we could still touch each other and hold hands. And I've thought about that a great deal. Holding hands—you know, the connotations of it are, are such, but I think that a person in fear of his life needs a friend, and I think that was it. He lived in Spring Valley, Minnesota, and he lived there the rest of his life, and I would go and visit him down there. We'd go out to the golf course for dinner or something, and he'd introduce me to friends of his there, and he'd say, "This is the person I held hands with during the war." Then he would walk away and let me stand there and explain what had happened. He got a kick out of it, just teasing me that way (*laughs*).

T: The energy from that small gesture was...

R: That has given me pause for many a time, thinking about it.

T: Were you able to communicate at all verbally?

R: No, not at that time.

T: This process of driving and stopping continued until, until when?

R: We were taken to a building somewhere in Tokyo, and now I know where and what the building was—I learned all this later on. But the building was Kempetai headquarters, close to [Emperor] Hirohito's palace, by the way. Some people argue that this is the same building that two of the Doolittle flyers [US General James Doolittle in 1942 led the first American air attack on mainland Japan] were executed in. There is some controversy whether they were captured in Japan or not (*pauses three seconds*).

We were brought into a room in that building, and there was quite a few people there; we weren't the only crew there. American air crews. We were forced to kneel on the floor, what I call oriental fashion, which is your knees bent underneath you and your back perfectly straight and your head bowed. If you moved your head, or slumped, or swayed from side to side, or did anything, you were beaten immediately. Still blindfolded, but you could, the blindfolds were black, but you could see down underneath them, and you could sometimes see through the blindfold. Not see clearly, but you could see shadows.

So it must have been sometime early morning, in May it probably gets light around 5:00 a.m., so who knows what time it was. But it was morning. We were in that room for the rest of the day, I believe, because the sun had set. And one by one people were being taken to be interrogated, and then after that they would—at the time I didn't know what happened to them. It was around sunset, or later, when I was taken in for the first interrogation.

(2, A, 129)

T: You had been hands behind your back and blindfolded since your plane went down?

R: No, since I got to that room.

T: Weren't you also blindfolded when you first...

R: Oh yes, I had been blindfolded since the plane went down.

T: As you waited, you had time to think, and mull things over.

R: I didn't think at all. No, the pain in my back was so bad—sitting in that oriental fashion for me was very difficult, and it was for other people, too, because in the middle of the afternoon, I don't know how early or late, you accepted the beatings in order to bend your back, and to get some relief from that pressure.

T: So the focus was on the physical discomfort as opposed to what might happen?

R: Yes. I had no control over it; I just refused to think about it. If I started guessing what was going to happen, I would be worse off. You accept what was happening then. I think I did occasionally think about my home and family and mother once or twice, I'm sure I did, but, as you say, the physical discomfort was such that it was the only thing that mattered.

T: When you were removed from this room, can you walk us through that?

R: Well, we were—I say “we,” you know it's all “we,” everything happened to the group. It happened individually, but to the group. So if I say “I,” it's we, and if I say “we,” it's I (*pauses three seconds*).

You were taken by two guards, as I recall two, into a room that was dimly lit, and again on your knees, blindfolded, and hands behind you. My impression was that somebody was sitting at a table, such as you are, opposite me [Mr. Michelsen and I were sitting at a kitchen table, directly across from each other], and was going to ask questions. But before the questions you had to accept the next beating (*pauses three seconds*).

T: These beatings were ongoing, it sounds like.

R: Oh yes. The questions started, and the first was, of course, “What is your name, rank, and serial number?” I told them right away, and then the next question started. I don't recall what it was about, you know, where are you from, Guam, Saipan, wherever? And I gave them my name, rank, and serial number once more. At that beating [sic] then the beatings started, and I don't know when they ended. But it was still dark when I woke up.

T: So the questions didn't get any further than that?

R: I wouldn't answer them. But then I remember what the Air Force told us. They said, the Japanese know everything there is to know about the war, about the B-29. Answer any questions they ask you, because if you don't know, you can't answer the question. Just say you don't know. So I answered all their questions, but not that night. I was interrogated five more times, with a couple of days between maybe. I can't remember for sure.

(2, A, 178)

T: Was there a central holding facility to which you were taken or returned?

R: Yes. After that first interrogation we were taken to a *(pauses three seconds)* at that time I didn't know, now I know what it was; it was a horse stall. It was one of the stalls where the emperor [Hirohito] had been keeping his horses. But it had been converted to a, somewhat like a jail, with a floor raised up from the concrete and wooden bars and everything else. It measured about five feet wide by ten feet long, and there were eighteen of us in there.

T: All Americans?

R: All Americans.

T: All aircrews?

R: All aircrews, yes.

T: At this point were you still blindfolded?

R: No, not in the cell. But there we were, again, made to sit oriental style. This went on for a couple of weeks until they gave up.

T: Everyone was forced to sit a certain way?

R: If you could, yes. There were some that were pretty badly wounded, and they couldn't sit. They tried, but they couldn't do it.

T: What about the daily routine in a place like this, these kind of conditions? What was the daily pattern?

R: Well, let me get back to the interrogations a little bit, because for me the daily routine, which I'll describe... For the captain, it was a little different; he was, the captain was in what turned out to be the number one cell, which I was in. And there were six cells all told, I found out later. He was interrogated eighteen times, and he pretty much sat next to the bar, to the bars, because that was the most dangerous position. The rest of us...

(telephone rings; tape stopped)

R: The daily life in the cell—now it varies with the longevity, with how long you've been in the cell. The first couple of weeks you're back and forth to interrogation, and those are rather drastic, so you're trying to recover from that a lot. Also you have dysentery so bad that you don't think that you can survive. There's some other stories about that, which I'll tell later, but what you would call a toilet here, or over there, in that cell, was a block of cement about three inches high, maybe thirty-six inches long and eighteen inches wide, with one hole. And that was your toilet. Underneath that hole was a box. The toilet is called a *benjo*; the box is the *benjo-soje*.

Of course with dysentery, you get rather weak, and you're, it's bloody, and this goes on for a long, long time. You're convinced that it's going to kill you.

Once a day the person from your cell has to go out and take the box, under guard of course, and empty it. It was in a moat or a river, a small river or a moat, and I did this a number of times until I was too weak to pick up this box. And then two of us would do it, and for that you get a little extra food, which was okay. But eventually two of us could not do it.

There was one person in one of the cells, I'm not sure which cell he was in, his name was Sansucci. He was an aircrew member, and for some reason he could. So he was emptying these boxes for everybody, and he got quite a bit of extra food. But he would also knock a little bit on the, underneath the cement block, and he'd whisper to you and tell you what was going on in other cells. Not only was he brave enough to do this, he was quite humorous. He used to pass on a joke or two, and we really appreciated that!

The other life in the cell revolved around two things; one was food, and the other was the chief interrogator, whose name was Shorty. Well, we called him Shorty. Shorty, I believe, (*pauses three seconds*), was a sadist, because everything he did was to injure, and to hurt. If you were wounded, and you were in his interrogating room, that is where they'd put the pressure, on your wounds. And sometimes they were very painful. We had one prisoner, his name was Bob Ring, who was injured from his hip to his knee, a really deep, deep wound. And Bob told us, instead of beating on him, they would just put their sticks inside the wound and twist and twist and twist.

Interesting about Bob Ring, too, is that I recall that we received one rice ball a day, but other people tell me it was two. But anyway, we were starving, and they would roll the rice balls in on the floor, through a little opening under the bars, and that would leave a few grains on the floor. The captain decided that those grains on the floor should go to whoever needs it the most, which was Bob Ring, who had had the biggest wounds. So the captain would pick up each little grain, and try to pass it down to Bob Ring, who most of the time was at the other end of the cell. But as the starvation took hold, and the dysentery took hold, some of that food never got to him. So the captain ended that, after some effort to make it happen, ordering it should happen, it didn't happen, so that ended. But anyway, it was a good try.

The captain usually sat close to the bars. If you could picture the cell, and you were in the cell, looking out, he would sit on the left hand side of the cell, next to the bars. The reason for that was that Shorty would—I suppose the word is occasionally, but I like to say every day, but I don't think he did it every day—he would walk down the hall in front of us, and tell us that the courts had decided that you are a murderer and that within the next few days, the next week, you're dead. You will be killed.

T: Shorty spoke English?

R: Yes. He was the interrogator. He [Shorty] always carried his sword, and he'd stick his sword in the cell. And if you sat, the closer to the bars you sat, the more you

got stuck. So the captain always sat there. He was the senior in the group, and he thought it was his duty. The rest of us rotated around.

T: You could pick where you sat?

R: Well, *(laughs)* it was, once you went *benjo-soje*, things changed! Somebody was getting up all the time, and coming back all the time, or moving all the time. It was move, move, move all the time. You had to. *(pauses three seconds)* Either that or you'd defecate right on the floor, which did happen. It did happen.

T: Diarrhea must just have been a part of everyday life.

R: It was, until you get used to it. When we got out, we were so used to those microbes in our stomachs that when we got regular food, we got very sick. Just as sick! *(laughs)*

T: You were interrogated, you said, about five times.

R: About five times.

T: Was there a pattern to these interrogations?

(2, A, 275)

R: Oh yes. You were taken out of the cell, your hands were tied in front of you, and a rope around your hands so they could pull you by your hands, and a blindfold on. We went from the cell, we were in the number one cell, so we were next to the door, so you could tell when you go from the building into the sunlight, because the light would change. Then into another building, up about half a flight of stairs, as I recall, and then of course into this same room where you were before. There were two interrogators—one was Shorty, and the other we called Junior. Junior was, we figured, we figured he was learning his trade, and he was not as tough as Shorty. Shorty was a lot different. When it was Junior, things were okay; with Shorty, not.

But with either one, the first thing that happened was that they beat on you some more. Not even a question; they just started the beating.

T: You got to the room and the beating started?

R: The beating started. After they let up, then the questions. The questions started from the beginning again, from the very beginning. Name, rank, serial number, what island were you on, what's your position, etcetera, etcetera. Every question they had already asked.

T: Were you answering them?

R: [I told them] anything they wanted to know. Their main questions—I did not compare notes with anybody else, because we were not allowed to talk—to me, and what they were driving at every time, was the airplane.

T: The B-29?

R: The B-29. One of the questions was, “If you were to attack your aircraft, where would you attack it?” I told them, “From below, right between the wings, because that’s where the five thousand gallons of fuel are.” Then of course the questions became, “Well, what’s on either side of those wings?” Well, that’s the bomb bays. Their main questions were, “Have you ever seen a B-29 with only one bomb bay?” The answer was of course no—they had two. So one would be unusual. “Have I ever seen a bomb bay door that has been modified?” No. “Have I ever seen a bomb bay that’s been modified?” No. “What’s the biggest bomb you could carry?” And I said, “Ten or twelve thousand pounds of bombs, depending on the gas load or the target.” “What’s the biggest bomb I have ever seen?” And I said, “I haven’t seen anything bigger than what we carry, but I have heard of one called the blockbuster, used in England, and it decimates a large area when it hits the ground.” (*pauses three seconds*) Not until after the war did I realize that they were saying that, if you carry an atomic bomb in a B-29, you have to modify the bomb bay and the bomb bay door. Of course I didn’t know that, but it was after the war I realized the import of their question.

T: Had they then seen this plane? What were they trying to piece together?

R: Atomic bomb.

T: Had the atomic bomb been dropped by the time they asked this?

R: No, no. They were, their information... They knew so much about our country, and about everything we were doing. But that atomic bomb was a secret, and they were trying to solve that secret—did we have one, or what? What was it? As it turns out, Japan expected it, but fifty years ago I didn’t know that.

T: The questions just seemed to be...

R: Why those questions? I didn’t understand until after the atomic bomb had been dropped.

T: Could you tell how long these interrogation sessions were lasting?

R: No. How long they lasted? Less than half an hour, I’m sure. Except for the first one; the first one, I have no idea. But after that, less than half an hour.

T: Did people die in your cell?

R: Yes.

T: Were the bodies simply removed by the Japanese?

R: Interesting. We had two that were very severely wounded, and we did ask for medical attention, and of course as a war criminal there is no medicine available, there is none. And when you talk to them, the guards that are walking back and forth, if you say anything, you're beaten. The captain tried to talk to them for medical attention, and he had his punishment. But then for one of the men that was wounded, he was taken out of the cell, laid on his back in the hallway, and somebody came by and injected something with a syringe, and he died.

T: You could see this?

R: Oh yes. Now there's a person whose name is Harry Magnuson, also from Minneapolis, that was in our cell. Harry was designated to drag his body outside, and he was placed on a pile of dung, of horse shit. It stayed there for about three days, and then it disappeared. The reason we know this is that we were in the number one cell and could just glance outside that door. So that's what the Japanese think of Americans—they're horse shit.

T: What kind of impact did that kind of an incident have on you, knowing that you yourself might require medical attention or...?

R: *(pauses five seconds)* I suppose it had an impact, I'm sure it did, but I can't recall. Your thoughts every day were of your family, and your friends, and my girlfriend at the time. And the Lord's Prayer, and the twenty-third Psalm. But to be honest with you, you're starving, and you're hurting. And when I say starving, I don't just mean your hungry. Your gums begin to bleed, and your legs are swelling up, and your beard is growing—it's full of shit anyway, because your beard is floating in that box of *benjo-soje*—and you're weak. You couldn't stand if you wanted to. Your condition is such that you, you withdraw. Your mind will not even think about what is happening, and so you just withdraw from everything, and you try to become a blank. You're nothing. In your own mind, you do not dare think about anything. I think your mind is trying to save you, because you'd go nuts. So you just withdraw, and you exist, but beyond existence, there's nothing.

T: A daily, "I'm alive," and this hunger, and physical pain, but that's the extent of the circle.

R: Yes. But this is after three or four weeks. I remember thinking about food a lot, and I began thinking about ice cream. And then I wanted a big chocolate bar, and I said, "What the hell, why not put the chocolate bar on the ice cream?" But I ended up saying, the most important food to me would be green, anything green. I don't care what it is, grass, whatever, something green is what I wanted. But even that left me after a little bit, and all of us were just there. And I think in the same condition,

because I have talked to one or two other prisoners about this, and they said the same thing—their mind just refused to think about it, and they just existed. There was nothing else.

T: Did the food ever vary?

R: No.

T: Just rice balls?

R: Always, to me, one rice ball, and one cup of water each day. And I don't know if it was rice or not, to be honest with you, because it was purple. There was one time, this was after 15 August [the day Japan accepted surrender terms] I think, because it was toward the end of things, that we had a cup of what they called dog soup. But it was mostly salt in it, kind of like chunks of salt. At one point they started trying to fatten us up, but it was too late. But that was the only other thing, other than rice.

(2, A, 378)

T: The routine, from the way you describe it, didn't change much. The existence in the small cell, interrogations from time to time...

R: Interrogations for me ended after a couple of weeks. But they went on for the captain.

T: ...and then this daily pattern.

R: *(pauses five seconds)* There is a picture here of the three of us *(displays photograph)* that—

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.

R: ...and in this picture that we're looking at, we have a pair of wings over our pocket on our jackets. I had a pair of wings on me when we were hit by the anti-aircraft [ground fire], and before I jumped I took that set of wings off and put it in my watch pocket of my pants. The Japanese did search us, but they never thought of a watch pocket, and so I had this set of wings in that watch pocket all of that time. With the pin on the back of those wings we began scratching on the floor how many days we had been there, and we got up to about three and a half weeks, and then we quit that; it was too much effort. And that was the only other activity other than sitting.

T: Now you were shot down on 25 May [1945]. Within three months, the war was over.

R: Three months and some odd days.

T: When did you begin to sense that things might be changing?

R: *(pauses five seconds)* Sometime after 15 August [1945]. But there's a cute story about that time, too. This *benjo-soje* thing that we were, that became our toilet, also was a place for us to sit, because it was so crowded [in the cell]. One of the guards that walked by us routinely was a little more friendly than the others. Three of us were sitting on this block of cement, and the fellow beside me was sitting with his hands on his cheeks *(demonstrates)*, and so I put my hands over my eyes *(demonstrates)*, and nudged the person next to me, and he put his hands over his ears *(demonstrates)*. We sat there for a while, and the guard walked by, then backed up again to look at us, and started to laugh. And we laughed with him. So there was kind of a neutral period of time when we both understood each other, and it was quite exciting.

Sometime in August they became a little different, and we did notice that. We did notice that. Shorty did not.

T: Did he disappear?

R: No, he was there the whole time. As a matter of fact, he probably became a little more vicious after the fifteenth [of August 1945], but we didn't know why. No idea.

T: Can you describe the transition out of this situation?

R: Our guess is that it's 22 August, and for some reason we are taken out of our cells and blindfolded, led outside into the sunlight, and told to get into the back of a truck. I believe there were three trucks.

T: So the whole compound was going to be emptied?

R: All who were in there, a hundred and some odd. Into trucks, and there were guards in the back of the truck, of course, and how long we were in the truck going somewhere I don't know. But we ended up on the shores of what I believe was Tokyo Bay. We were led out of the trucks, down to the shore, still blindfolded and with our hands tied behind our backs, kneeling on the shores of Tokyo Bay. And I thought, *(speaking slowly now for emphasis)* this is the end. I thought, we are going to be decapitated here, and how am I going to survive? I thought, maybe if they are chopping the heads off, I could try to get underneath somebody that's already had their head cut off, and maybe they'll not notice me.

Instead, our blindfolds came off and we were untied and told to go into the ocean and clean up, wash. Some of them walked into the ocean, I think I walked into the ocean, and some of them crawled, but we were all happy to get as clean as we could, even if it was salt water, because we had beards and hair and all that stuff *(pauses five seconds)*.

I don't know how long I was in the water, but I turned around and looked from where we had come on the shore, because we could hear noises back there. Three machine guns had been set up on the shore, and Shorty was directing the

machine guns. So I thought, well, we are going to be machine gunned in the water, or as we come out of the water. And I thought, geez, I can swim, if I can swim under water, I might survive. But there was a terrific argument at the machine guns between Shorty and Junior, the two interrogators. Shorty left, *(slowly)* now I think *(pauses three seconds)* yes, he issued orders, and he left. And the machine guns were packed up and put in the fourth truck, and that truck drove away, leaving us there with Junior. And Junior said, “You’re going to walk out on a causeway”—which we could now see, I think to the left—“and on the end of that causeway is a prisoner of war camp [Camp Omori]. That’s where you’re going.” And he marched us out to that prisoner of war camp. The gates would not open, and there was another argument there, and finally the gates opened and we went into this camp.

T: With other POW’s, not necessarily aircrews?

R: No, no, these were Bataan and Corregidor people [captured during the fall of the Philippines in 1942] that had been POW’s for three and a half years.

T: That situation on the shore with the machine guns, it sounds like that argument could have gone either way.

(2, B, 107)

R: That could have gone either way. But in retrospect, I realize now, the war was over, and I think it was Junior that saved our lives.

(greets wife Gladys, who enters house—brief pause in recording)

R: Where were we?

T: The argument on the beach, apparently between Junior and Shorty, hung in the balance?

R: Yes, yes. That could have gone either way.

T: You mentioned here now twice that you had thoughts of mortality, of perhaps being beheaded or shot in the water. Now that’s something that’s new—for a while you mentioned that your thoughts had been rather existential in the cell, but now you did perceive this larger mortality issue.

R: Oh, certainly. I mean, we aren’t zombies, by any means, but you cannot just day after day after day after day sit there and think of nothing but your demise. So you think of nothing; what else can you think of? *(excited suddenly)*

Oh yes, there is that, this did happen. One of those days, July or early August, things were getting kind of bad in the cell, and there was some, some whimpering going on, I’d say that was the word. And this could be punished. At that time the captain was sitting in his usual place, and I was sitting directly opposite him. In that

cell I tried to maintain some military discipline, as far as I could, and the captain occasionally, not occasionally but only once, said something to me about, "Why are you that way?" And I said, "Because that's the only thing I have left. That's the only thing I have left—discipline." But anyway, there was this whimpering going on, and the captain spoke out loud. He said, "Do not think of your death; think what you will be doing when you get out of here." No, he said, "When you get home. Think of what you'll do when you get home." Punishable for speaking out loud, and he knew it, and he spoke out loud. But I was sitting opposite him, and he looked at me and just briefly shook his head. And I knew what he meant. What he meant was, we are not getting out of here. You and I know it, but I said that to the rest of them.

T: When thoughts came, was there a sense of fatalism? That is suggested by, by what the captain said.

R: Yes, there was, because Shorty told us many, many times, "You're dead; it's only a question of when." And you have to believe it.

T: Why did the Japanese treat the bomber aircrews like this, and not these other POW's, like those captured at Bataan? They were in a different camp.

R: We had killed civilians. We had dropped bombs on civilians, we had killed in Tokyo maybe one hundred thousand people, burned to death. And they are not treating us like they treated others. Well, the [Japanese] code of *bushido* was that you either win or you die, one of the two. That's the way they lived, and they expected us to be the same way. [For the Japanese, according to this model,] there is no reason to have a POW or an accused war criminal; you are a disgrace to be alive. You have disgraced your country by living.

T: Did you take it upon yourself to learn about these kind of things after the war, this code of *bushido* or...?

R: No, I didn't take it upon myself, it just happened. It just happened.

T: In this new POW camp that you've now arrived in, what was the situation in that camp?

R: I don't know. By the way, as an aside, it's the camp that [Marine Corps fighter pilot] Pappy Boyington was in, too. He broke all the rules, because he had a moustache. He liked to break the rules, I heard (*laughs*). The reason I don't know what the situation was, because when we entered the camp, we were at the parade ground, in the center of the camp, at attention. There was a lot of arguments going on whether we should be there or not, but at some time we were told to take all our clothes off and drop them on the ground, and then proceed to a barracks, a building, and we were told stay in that building (*speaking slowly and deliberately*) and do not for any reason come out unless you are ordered to come out. So I don't know what the situation was.

Our clothes were washed and, unfortunately, during the wash they all went to rags, so you ended up with no clothes practically. We were in that barracks, and a Colonel Carmichael came in, and said he was the senior aircrew member in this camp. He instructed us on how to act, and what to do, and how to bow and keep your mouth shut. But basically, he said, don't go outside, because you are in mortal danger if you go out. So we stayed there.

T: He knew you were in danger, too?

R: Yes.

T: What kind of danger exactly?

R: Because we were still war criminals, as opposed to a POW.

T: Was there still any sense of fatalism for you or the others?

R: Oh, no, we were in a clubhouse now, in a mansion. We were so happy and overjoyed. The paper, my mother saved the paper, the *Minneapolis Journal*, or *Star* I think it was at the time, that announced the release of prisoners from the hellhole of Camp Omori. For us it was not; we had been in a hellhole, and for us this was... We could lie down, and we could talk, and everything else. This was much different, and we were very happy to be there at that moment.

T: You weren't there very long, were you?

R: No. But just to continue the story. Some days later we were allowed to cut our beards with a scissors, and try to shave. But with only one razor for only one hundred people, and with salt water, I gave up on it.

A day or so later everybody was told to stand at attention in this parade ground, or area. And the commandant of the camp gave a speech. He talked Japanese, and an interpreter interpreted his words. He talked for a long time, but basically what he said was, "Japan did not, and will never, surrender. But Japan has decided to become an ally of the United States, and both the United States and Japan will now encounter the threat from the East."

(2, B, 210)

T: He told you this in his speech? How interesting.

R: Yes. Of course we didn't know it at the time, but Russia [then known as the Soviet Union] had invaded Korea, and it was only after the war that the "threat from the East" became clear to me. It was Russia that was starting the war against Japan.

T: Had your own personal mood improved in this camp?

R: Oh yes, yes. I was starting to become alive again.

T: Had the amount of food increased?

R: Yes. The Japanese were giving us more food, mainly rice, but also a lot of vitamin pills. Oh, we were sucking them down. Someone said they were fattening us up for the kill (*laughs*), but that wasn't true, of course. But boxes and boxes of vitamin pills.

T: To fatten you up for the release, so to speak?

R: If they are going to give you vitamin pills, you know something good has happened for us.

T: Were you now perhaps thinking that you were going to make it out?

R: We were not conscious of it; we surmised it. But the interesting thing is, the commandant of this camp gave this long speech. Everyone was sent back to the barracks, at least we were, and could not go out. And that was in the afternoon. Then some food was delivered at nightfall, and then it became night and we slept. The next morning we woke up, and it was very silent; there were no Japanese, except for one Japanese person, the interpreter. All the guards, the commandant, they had all left. Gone. Overnight, they were gone.

T: What was the reaction inside the camp?

R: Dumbfounded. Amazed. Particularly those that had been there a long time, the Corregidor and Bataan POW's, they, for them it was unbelievable. Shortly after that some B-29s began flying over us, dropping big, big crates of clothing and food and everything else, by parachute. So we knew then the war was over, when they started dropping supplies.

T: The Americans knew where this camp was?

R: Yes. Well, it was the first camp in all of Japan to be freed.

T: Was there an actual liberation, by American troops?

R: Yes, oh yes. This is the interesting part. There was a governor in the state of Minnesota by the name of Harold Stassen, and Harold Stassen in his third term resigned and went into the Navy. He was, I think, a lieutenant commander for Admiral [William] Halsey [US fleet admiral and commander, Third Fleet], who was under [Admiral Chester] Nimitz [commander of the US Pacific Fleet]. Nimitz and [General Douglas] MacArthur [commander of all forces, Southwest Pacific] were running the war in the Pacific. MacArthur had ordered that there would be no Americans, no American should step foot on the Japanese islands until after the official surrender [which took place on 1 September 1945]. Stassen said to Halsey

on board some ship, he said, "I'm worried about the prisoners. Will the Japanese begin murdering the prisoners before the official surrender?" According to Stassen, Halsey said to him, "I cannot order you to do anything, but let's save the boys."

So one of those afternoons, shortly after that commandant gave his speech, and we could see all the boats in Tokyo Bay, a large motorboat came toward the island. We watched it coming. There was a dock going out into the ocean, and [the boat] came right up to the shore and close to the dock. The Marines jumped out, with rifles and machine guns, and formed kind of a circle around it, and this person got out of the boat. It was Harold Stassen. The interpreter who was left in the camp approached Stassen—and I can quote because these are the words Harold Stassen has given me—and he said, "I have no authority to release these prisoners." And Stassen held out his hand, with a gun pointed at him, and said, "You have no authority, period." And the guard walked away, and that was when we were released.

T: You could observe all this?

R: Yes.

T: Were the gates then literally opened?

R: No, the gates were not opened, because the dock was on the other side of the camp, on the ocean side; the gates were on the land side. So those gates were not opened. We could have, and as a matter of fact some of the prisoners there said that they wanted to borrow machine guns from some of the Marines that were guarding Stassen and the rest of the camp, and they wanted to get into town and go looking for their, their tormenters. Stassen would not let them do it.

T: Were the prisoners, yourself included, kept in this camp then as a, a transition phase to another destination?

R: No, shortly after that... The boats, the small motor craft, were relaying prisoners out to the larger ships, and at some point or another, toward evening, I was relayed to a small ship, probably a battleship, and allowed to try to phone home to tell my mother and my family that I was okay. I couldn't get through, but somebody on that ship said they would call the newspaper in my hometown and let them know. Cedric Adams was a newscaster on the radio, WCCO radio [Minneapolis], at that time, and that's how my mother first learned that I was alive.

T: From the radio?

R: From Cedric Adams, the newscaster on WCCO.

T: He announced names of people?

R: Names of people, yes.

T: Did you hear from your folks, later, how that news that you were alive impacted them?

R: Not only that, I read it in the paper. *(laughs)* My mother saved the paper.

T: Can you recall what that article said?

R: She just said, "Thank god he's alive." That's what she said. And the paper, also, said the hellhole of Campo Omori. And, again, for us it was a country club compared to what we had been in.

T: What was going through your mind now, finally being on an American ship?

R: There were two things. The first thing that I wanted to do, I wanted to go back into Tokyo and see what it was like. I wanted to find out where we had been, and what the conditions were from the outside were we had been interred. And to see what the town was like. But there was no availability; could not do it. Not only that, I wanted to bring home a souvenir, and I couldn't bring that home. The other thing [going through my mind], I think it was just a matter of being alive. It was just the joy of being alive, and being secure. That was my main feeling.

(2, B, 300)

T: Was that a conscious thought that you could now allow yourself to have?

R: Yes.

T: After not being able to do that in the cell every day, now you could?

R: That's right, now we could.

T: Were you there with other aircrew members as well?

R: Oh yes. Now the crew [of our airplane] did not stay together; they went every which way. I don't know how they chose who was going where, alphabetically or what, but we were all on our own at that point. I don't think any other crew member was with me then. Other aircrews were there, but not my particular crew.

T: In what ways did guys react to this release and new freedom? Differently?

R: Oh yes. Some were more cheery and hollering; they were so happy, you know. A lot of them wanted to, wanted to get drunk *(laughs)*. They had, the Navy said, "Yeah, we got some drinks on that ship out there, go get it!" And the ones that got drunk, they got really sick. Now the food, my first meal was bacon and eggs, and I got really sick. My stomach wasn't ready for that.

T: What kinds of effects did you feel in those first days or weeks? Physical effects, for example.

R: *(pauses five seconds)* I just don't recall. It was all in my mind, and I didn't care about anything else. I did not care. The fact that, I was proud of the fact that I was still alive. I think pride was, yes, it was, it was pride in everything. Not only in being alive, but pride in the country that had defeated Japan. I think that was my main reaction—pride.

T: Did you stay in Tokyo Bay on that ship, or were you moved?

R: Quickly moved. One night and half a day on that ship, and then back into Tokyo, by truck I believe, some kind of conveyance, and to the airport. Then put onto a C-54 [cargo airplane] and flown to [the island of] Okinawa. Then from Okinawa to the Philippines, and there we were assigned to a hospital ship and we came back to the States.

T: How about the psychological adjustment? It sounds like it was taking precedent over the physical adjustment. How were you processing these events and changes, as you moved from plane to ship and further on?

R: You mean mentally?

T: Yes, mentally.

R: *(pauses three seconds)* I think I was still in the Army, I didn't question anything. "This is what I'm told to do, I do it." I was still in the Army, and mentally there was no question on my part, I wasn't questioning anything.

T: There was an initial euphoria when you got to that ship in Tokyo Bay. Did you begin to think on different levels about what you had been through, as weeks went by?

R: Not, not immediately, but some months later, yes. I remember being at home one night, and there's a bed that I could have slept in, but it was too soft; I slept on the floor. I was used to sleeping on a wooden floor. And I was on this floor, thinking about everything that had happened, and wondering, and the thought came to me, why am I alive, when friends of mine are obviously dead? I thought, how can I *(pauses three seconds)*, how can I join my friends? And there was only one way, and I remembered that gun I had left behind. So I briefly entertained suicide, to join my friends, and it actually was, to join my friends. But of course [the thought] was rejected almost immediately, but the thought did enter my head.

The other thought, why am I alive? That is a very difficult question, because some people say, "Well, God has saved you." Why didn't he save the others? So you get these questions, and, "No, you're alive because you are going to do something

great." Well, you are dead because you do nothing great? So all of these questions... I haven't counted the times during that episode when I was next to death; some people have, and I've heard one person say that he counted fourteen times. But I never did count them. So I, I think that it's just a matter of good fortune, and that's all I can attribute it to. I cannot say religion, or my own will, or my own pride, or anything else. Good fortune. I don't want to say chance, because that's... Good fortune. *(pauses three seconds)* So for months and months, maybe years, that was my reaction at home, to all that episode; that was my main reaction.

(2, B, 361)

T: Do you still find yourself asking that question?

R: Every day.

T: Has the answer changed?

R: No.

T: You don't let the question go?

R: No, but you don't let it bother you anymore, either, like it used to. It used to really bother me, but not anymore. But every day, in one way or another, the entire episode springs to mind, and I think of the people there, and those that died and those that lived. It was some months ago, and people asked me to sign an autograph, and I wrote three names. I wrote Eddie McKenzie and Jim Coughlin, and then I wrote my name. And they said, "Three? You're only one person." And I said, "This is for the two that didn't come back, because they're friends of mine."

T: That's these two guys in the photograph? *(same photo mentioned earlier in the interview)*

R: That's these two *(points at photo)*. And then there are others, too. But, you know, I was thinking about it this morning, what would I say if that question came up. And I can say, well, I still remember some of those people I went to college with, or high school with. I remember my high school sweetheart. So that's not unusual, that you think of those that you were in the war with, not unusual at all. It's a part of life.

T: You weren't discharged from the military until May of 1946, is that right?

R: Yes.

T: How did you pass those months between September [1945] and May [1946]?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* Well, I was assigned to Hines Hospital in Hines, Illinois, a VA [Veterans Administration] hospital. You go there, and they work on you, and

then they say, "You can go home for a while." So I'd go home. In March, I took my folks to Florida—I had a lot of money from back pay! *(laughs)* That was fun. And I bought my dad, my dad and I bought a car together. I paid for most of it. And then back to the hospital, and they work on you some more, and finally they say that you're done, and go home. So I went home.

T: When you say "working on you," what is that exactly?

End of Tape 2. Tape 3, Side A begins at counter 000.

R: Okay, so you're in the hospital in Hines, and you're assigned to a bed and you just lay there, and you say, "This is boring as hell." So you try to do other things. What was going on was a little reconstruction of my mouth and nose, and a little bit in the ears.

T: What kind of reconstruction?

R: Well, they shove these things up your nose to, to make it look better.

T: What had happened to your nose?

R: *(laughs)* You're pretty well banged up! It's like you've been a prize fighter for twenty years.

T: Your nose had been broken?

R: Oh yes. You're pretty well banged in.

T: This kind of physical reconstruction at Hines, then?

R: And then time to recover. Then you go home.

T: So you were discharged from Hines Hospital in May 1946?

R: Yes.

T: So you didn't have any other duty stations.

R: No, that was it. The Army was very nice to us in that respect.

T: When you took off your uniform and were a civilian, what was your initial reaction to being out of the military?

R: Hmmm. *(pauses five seconds)* I think most of it was a, a melancholy reaction. I wanted to fight, and I couldn't fight any more. I picked a few fights down on Lake Street [in downtown Minneapolis], but that was with another soldier, and he and I

were both in the same situation. Tommy Tommasco was his name. I said, "Tom, let's go out and beat the shit out of each other." And we did. Several times. My attitude was, I can't die, and nobody can hurt me. And I don't care how much you beat on me, you cannot hurt me.

T: Your experiences had brought you to that point?

R: Yes. And that attitude was there for more than a year.

T: Stages of adjustment?

R: Yes, it was.

T: Did you transition out of that phase, in a sense?

R: Well, I don't know, at some point I decided I had better get an education, and whether I transitioned out of it or forgot it, I don't know, but then education became important to me and I went to college.

T: Which college did you attend?

R: Augsburg College, here in Minneapolis.

T: From the way you talked earlier [before we began taping], you attacked college with a real purpose.

R: After about three months. I had to learn how to learn, and I was not doing things right at first. But after I got into the studying part of it, yes, then I did.

T: How did your family adjust to having you back again? Were there questions about what you had gone through, or a desire to leave that alone?

R: My father asked a few questions, but I never answered them. And my mother never said a word; she said, "We are just so happy you're home." Never said a word. *(pauses five seconds)* Nor would I allow them to ask a question. I would not allow it.

T: So you preferred not to speak about it?

R: Yes.

T: What kind of things did your dad want to know?

R: Well, he was in World War I, and he just wanted to know if I, if I was okay, did I have any deficiencies, and so forth. I think he approached it from that angle, and I said, "No, and don't worry about it." And that ended that conversation.

T: What about your [three] sisters? Same?

R: Yes.

T: Friends, co-workers, fellow students?

R: Nothing. They didn't know. Nobody knew. They knew I was a veteran, that's all. Except for one person. I went to school under the GI Bill, there were two forms of the bill; one was for those that were regular school and getting, I think, \$50 a month, something like that. I was in a different group that were being compensated a little bit more. And for that, they had a person that would come around and check on you every quarter or so, and see if you were actually in school and not absconding with the money. So he knew.

T: Knew why you were in that special category?

R: Yes.

T: What was the hardest thing for you with readjusting to being a civilian?

R: *(pauses five seconds)* I think that the days and the nights were different. During the day I wanted to learn and accomplish something, and decide what the future of my life would be. But at night, I would be lured back to that old Army thing of, of discipline and attack, and want to do destructive things. So there was a control thing that, that... I had to control myself, especially when I was alone.

T: Did you think more about things when you were alone?

R: Yes.

T: Did you have difficulty sleeping, or was that a time when you were able to put things out of your mind?

(3, A, 108)

R: *(pauses three seconds)* There was difficulty sleeping if you tried to think of things. But during that period I was also able to disengage the mind, so to speak, and not think of anything. I still can.

T: And while you were sleeping, were dreams a problem?

R: Not immediately, not immediately. **[3, A, 115]** The dream parts of it came somewhat later, maybe a couple of years really. At first I just refused to think, not refused, I was able not to think of it. And many a night, when some of these things would start, I would just say, no, no, stop it. And it would end.

T: What happened, that later you did start to dream about some of these things?

R: Well, I think I became concerned more about my own future, my wife and family. And these things don't end, you know. I mean, they don't end; you don't dream about them every night, they're more sporadic, but they don't end. So once you have these other concerns, these other things are backpedaled a little bit.

T: The contrasting point: what was the easiest thing for you, adjusting to civilian life?

R: The easiest? Hmm. *(pauses five seconds)* In what respect?

T: Well, you mentioned the difficulties with decisions about school, for example.

(brief pause in interview)

R: You asked about the easiest things to adjust to, and I really am trying to think about that question, and I can't really say that anything was difficult. You figured I was going to say easy, but it wasn't difficult. Church was a very easy thing to adapt to, because I went back to church where everybody was so happy to see you. And I did spend quite a bit of time around the church during those years. I believe I was searching for something, and yet I still, I still am somewhat religious, Lutheran, by the way.

It was also very easy to associate with other veterans, and that I enjoyed a great deal. A great deal. We didn't talk about what we did or who we were or anything, we just enjoyed each other's company.

T: So not digging beneath the surface, but just...

R: ...we were all part of it.

T: You mentioned religion, and spending time at church. Could I ask how your faith changed as a result of these experiences?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* I'm trying to think back into that time, and those days after the war. What was my faith like? I believe it was from, it became more of an inquiring type of faith, because I was obviously going to Augsburg College. And it presented a lot of things as "this is it, this is the fact, this is the way it is, you're a Lutheran and thank god for that." But is that true? So I began to question a lot, and question where I fit into the scheme of the Lutheran faith. That was a major thing that I was considering, to become more Lutheran or less Lutheran *(laughs)*.

T: Did you find yourself questioning God, or God's purpose?

R: Well, I think every religious person does that. Every religious person. If you are a historian, and you study history, you know that there are literally millions and

millions of people that never heard of Christ, and that's a consideration. And that man comes from Africa. What is that author [unclear reference] says, "Not in Asia nor innocence was mankind born." All of these things make you consider what your real faith is. Everybody is somewhat of a doubter; if they say they're not, they're lying. We all are, but that's because we have, we are inquiring into our status in life as well as death. And that's an ongoing thing. Part of my belief, and I don't want to make a confession of faith here, but part of my belief is that when we grow up in church we learn a lot of right from wrong, what is good for humanity, and we learn to reject what is bad. That's one of the valuable things of church, and that's why I'm very happy that my children are all church goers. Is that enough? *(laughs)* I don't know how to phrase it, because nobody's really tempted me with that question before! *(laughs)*

T: Is there anything else you'd like to add to the interview at this point?

R: I think I've said it—the heroes are those that didn't make it back. And there were a lot of them. In the 20th Air Force [the unit I served in], by my estimate, six thousand aircrew members perished. Some people have estimated higher than that, but my estimate is six thousand; there is no official estimate. Of those six thousand, about two hundred made it back. A lot of them died with mechanical troubles; you're down in the Pacific, and you're done there. A lot of them probably from mechanical problems and... I remember one airplane that went off the runway [at Guam] into the ocean, and down thirty-five thousand-some feet into the Marianas Trench. I mean, they're gone, they got no Purple Heart, but they're gone. Those are the people that I think of mostly.

T: Well, for you and your colleagues that didn't make it back, I want to thank you very much.

R: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW