

Interviewee: Bertram “Bert” Schauer

Interviewer: Dan Borkenhagen

Date of interview: 24 August 2001

Location: the Schauer home in White Bear Lake, MN

Transcribed by: Dan Borkenhagen, March 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, July 2002/April 2003

Bert Schauer was born 14 February 1920 in St. Paul, Minnesota; he spent his childhood there and graduated from Washington High School in 1938. In 1939 Bert enlisted in the Air National Guard. He did his Basic Training at the University of Minnesota, as part of the school’s ROTC program.

When the US entered the war, Bert was called to active duty and sent to Texas and Louisiana for further training. He was then sent to England as a part of the USAAF’s 109th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, serving there as a chief mechanic. In 1944, Bert was returned to the US; he was discharged in September 1945 with the rank of tech sergeant.

After being discharged, Bert came back to St. Paul, worked for the Postal Service, and got married (wife Jane). He also served during the Vietnam War as a member of the 109th Transport of the Minnesota Air National Guard.

After a long career at the US Post Office, Bert retired in 1977. At the time of this interview (2001) Bert and his wife Jane lived in White Bear Lake, Minnesota.

Bert Schauer died on 29 July 2008.

Information on 109th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron during World War II is included at end of this interview.

Interview key:

BS: Bert Schauer

DB: Dan Borkenhagen

[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.

DB: For the record, this is an interview with Bert Schauer. My name is Dan Borkenhagen and we're interviewing on Friday, August 24, 2001. Just to get started, Bert, I need a little biographical information. Could you tell me your place and date of birth?

BS: St. Paul, Minnesota. February 14, 1920.

DB: Who were your parents?

BS: Herb and Anna Schauer.

(Bert's wife comes in and says hi, he tells her a couple of things)

DB: Could you just say a little bit about your childhood?

BS: Oh, we grew up in the north part of St. Paul, known as the Rice Street area. My wife was raised near Oakland Cemetery. We went to the same high school together. Washington High School. From 1933 until 1938.

DB: I guess that's all I need for biography stuff. The first question is 7 December 1941—where were you, and what were you doing?

BS: Well, that was a famous day. I was in Louisiana and we were on active duty already. Actually, my World War II started in 1939 when I joined the Minnesota Guard. And we were an air unit. One of the first certified Air National Guard units. They were formed back in 1921. It's all in here *(gestures to book about Air National Guard)*. We were called up to active duty. I had joined them in '39... we heard rumors that we were going to be called to active duty from '39-41 when we were actually called, so this is the time Roosevelt decided to call in the guard and the draft people for the air corps. Since I was already signed up, I didn't sign a draft card.

We were called to active duty in Feb. 1941. We were in Louisiana in Camp Beauregard and we were on maneuvers all during the summer of 1941, and we were a pretty well trained unit for that time. Then came Pearl Harbor, and I'd already had my... I was ending up my three year enlistment plus a year of active duty, so I was contemplating coming home and going back to school. But the events of the day changed my itinerary. So we were extended another three years for the convenience of the government. So we were on active duty, the call went to Savannah, Georgia, for submarine patrol and so forth.

DB: So on the actual day, December 7, you were in Louisiana?

BS: Yeah, I was in Louisiana and I was on KP, washing cups.

DB: That's exactly what you were doing?

BS: Yeah.

DB: How did you hear the news?

BS: Somebody came in and said, "Hey did you hear the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor?!" Well, everybody was saying, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" *(laughs)* So we had no idea where Pearl Harbor was.

DB: So your reaction right away was just kind of shock?

BS: Yeah, well, not really. We were just listening to the radio. That's how we operated.

DB: So what did you think about it when you heard it? Did you know what it meant for you?

BS: Not really. It was just that the events of the day, periodically we'd get news stories out of what was happening in Europe. And so we were more or less prepared for the worst, hoping for the best, that's about the attitude we had.

DB: So because you had been trained, you had prepared yourself for this to happen?

BS: Yeah. We had a feeling that we could fight another war. You have to remember, we were the first generation from World War I. And our parents had been in World War I. So actually I've kind of drawn some of my own conclusions on World War II, really that we were finishing the job that they didn't finish in 1918-19.

DB: Finishing up what in what way?

BS: It was just an update from World War I, and the way we operated was on World War I tactics. Somewhere to the way Korea was operating on World War II tactics.

DB: They always talk about fighting the last war, and that's the way you felt?

BS: Yeah, that was about it.

DB: I'm going to jump back in history a little bit for you. When you first joined up, do you remember the day when you joined up, with the National Guard?

BS: Yeah, I was going to the general college over at the University of Minnesota [in Minneapolis], and I was part of the ROTC over there, I was coastal artillery guard. I joined the Guard and in the meantime, they offered me a job as a part of what we call permit detail. And actually the reason was because I loved airplanes. I wanted to get next to airplanes. I could care less about the Army part of it. Since that was the place I had to be, I accepted it.

DB: Where did this love of airplanes come from?

BS: Well, Charles A. Lindbergh was my role model. Everybody in my era was dreaming of flying because of the exploits of Charles A. Lindbergh. Those early pioneers. So it wasn't that we didn't have dreams.

DB: You just wanted to get in an airplane and fly.

BS: Yeah.

DB: Do you remember Basic Training much?

BS: Yeah.

DB: Where was it?

BS: In Minnesota, in the coastal artillery.

DB: Just at the university that you did it?

BS: Yeah. In between classes, when we had ROTC class there, we drilled. We had the old World War I drill pattern. It was during that time that they installed the new, what we call the Close Order Drill now. So we had to learn both of them.

DB: So you were stuck in the middle, in a sense?

BS: Well, you could say that I was on the cutting edge.

DB: What did you think of Basic Training?

BS: Oh, I thought it was cool.

DB: What good memories of it do you have?

BS: It was all good memories. It wasn't drudgery.

DB: So you enjoyed every minute of it?

BS: Certainly.

DB: Do you have any stories, specifically, anything that you remember?

BS: No, because it wasn't that formal. We just did it because we liked it.

DB: After you did your training at the university, were you sent on for advance training?

BS: No, then I was in the Guard, but the Guard didn't have Close Order Drill. We were, technically, we weren't formal as what we call the army, gravel agitators, they agitate the gravel. *(laughs)*

DB: Do you remember anything about training for the Guard, becoming an engineer?

BS: Well, I didn't become an engineer, I became a Crew Chief. The Crew Chief was in charge of keeping that airplane flying. I learned mechanics, but I learned most of it on my own initiative.

DB: You had already studied some of that stuff beforehand?

BS: Yeah, and I just hung around with the old mechanics and learned on the job. "Go over and get that pail of oil—we've got to dump it in this airplane." So I was a gopher. Go fer that and go fer this. But that's the way we learned.

DB: Were there any minorities present when you were training at the university?

BS: No. It was all German, Norwegian, Swedish, Irish. Minnesota people. Because we weren't invaded with minorities. Minorities we discovered when we got to Louisiana. That's the way it was.

DB: So, you did your training in Louisiana and then you were stationed in Georgia. Didn't you say you did sub patrol or something like that?

BS: Well, that's after World War II started. They sent us to Savannah, Georgia, because our airplanes, there was a [German] submarine menace [off the East coast of the US]. So they sent the pilots and they flew out over the waters to spot subs, on patrol.

DB: Do you remember heading out to Georgia?

BS: Yeah, most of our traveling was done by train, but I, being a crew chief, went with the airplane.

DB: And when approximately was this?

BS: Well, maybe about a week or so after Pearl Harbor.

DB: So this was pretty quick after things started.

BS: Oh yes. From Louisiana.

DB: How long were you in Georgia?

BS: Well, I couldn't say, because when I was in Georgia, I had orders to report to... I didn't have formal tech school training, even though I was a crew chief. So I had to get that on my record, that I went through school. So they sent me to school. So we went to Shepherd Field, Texas, which is Wichita Falls, Texas. I was in the eighth class to go through there. Just a brand new school and brand new buildings. Lots of red mud and cold weather. This was in January of 1942.

DB: So that's not maybe quite as good of memories as other places?

BS: Oh yeah, it's always good memories.

DB: How long were you there training?

BS: Well, I was supposed to leave in April, but I'd been in a little accident, so I spent time in the hospital recuperating. The rest of my class went on and I was washed back a couple of classes. So I didn't get out of there until about the 4th of July, 1942. Then I went back to Louisiana, where our unit was back there. We were getting ready to go overseas.

DB: So when did you receive the news that you were going overseas?

BS: Oh, it was a foregone conclusion. When I rejoined the unit, I knew that we were going to go at some time or another, they were starting to prepare for it.

DB: Was there any nervousness or anything about it?

BS: No, it was just a job to do.

DB: Maybe a little excitement then?

BS: Well, yeah, you get a little apprehensive about things, but outside of that, no. The only thing is we were whining and complaining, which is a healthy thing.

DB: Why do you say that?

BS: Because, if you weren't whining and complaining, we figured maybe there's something wrong with them. *(laughs)*

DB: Did you cross the ocean by boat or by plane?

BS: Yeah, we left in August of 1942 to, we went to Fort Dix, New Jersey. We were about two weeks there, staging, our unit. Preparing, getting our shots, man they used to puncture your arm with shots.

DB: Just immunizations and stuff like that?

BS: Yeah. We did get, in that two weeks time, we did get to visit New York City.

DB: Did you, what did you think of that?

BS: Oh, Henry Krueger, who was from Luverne, Minnesota, and Whitney, who was from Minneapolis, were walking down Time Square and looking up at all those buildings. Henry says to Whitney, "Man, this ain't nothing, you just wait till I get you down to Luverne." (*laughs*) We weren't too impressed, we weren't. Just a big city with a lot of people.

We did get to see certain things. We went up on the Empire State Building and I got up as high as you could go, even up on that little pedestal up there, little platform up there. And they had all kinds of weather instruments up there. Though I guess it's closed off to the public now though, at that time it was open, so went up as high as you could go.

DB: A unique experience, was it?

BS: Oh yeah.

DB: So then, that first day when you shipped out.

BS: Shipped out of Fort Dix.

DB: How long did it take to get over there?

BS: Six days. We had the most recent ship built for passengers. It was the *Queen Elizabeth*. We had 20,000 troops on board that thing.

DB: How was that?

BS: I don't know. Some of them had to sleep on deck, topside. We were fortunate. We had a little place back on the (***) . We had mattresses. Some had hammocks. We were the first troops off of the ship, and we landed right off Scotland. See they didn't have any dock to dock that ship, so we stayed out off of Clyde, Scotland. Then they took us off on lighters and to docks on the lighters. We were the first troops off of that ship. The first day, they had trains waiting there and we climbed on board the trains and they took us all to England. Traveled down through the cotswolds.

DB: That's where your base was?

BS: Yeah, where I showed you on the map. *(points to place on map)*

DB: What was the city called again?

BS: Well, it was Hungerford, that was one of them. We were between Hungerford and Newbury. We were approximately 20 miles from Oxford, southwest direction from Oxford.

DB: So you stayed there?

BS: Yeah, but we didn't have any airplanes.

DB: What did you do?

BS: Well, we did a little more close order drill, just to keep busy. And they used us, farmed us out to other units, to the [US] 8th Air Force, to bomber units, while we over there to help them. We were on a hush hush deal and went to a field, an RAF field in Southern England. It was called Herr. It's still an airfield, an RAF field. One day we helped six B-17s that came in. We serviced them and helped their crews get stuff ready to go. Then a bunch of VIPs came and they boarded this bunch of airplanes and they took off and we didn't know where, but that night, when we were listening to the BBC, we heard that they'd landed in Africa. They had invaded Africa and they (***) in 1942, the 6th of November, 1942. We were part of that operation and didn't even know it.

DB: Do you have any idea who these guys were that were the VIPs?

BS: Well, guys like Jimmy Doolittle, Eisenhower.

DB: Big generals then?

BS: Yep.

DB: A little more abstract question, you didn't have much contact with the Germans while you were at the base obviously, but how did you look at the Germans during that time? Did you just perceive them as the enemy because that's who we're fighting now, or negative or positive, or how did you feel?

BS: Towards the Germans? Oh I sort of had mixed feelings, because being of German heritage, I might be fighting my own cousins. But it was a job that had to be done. We were task oriented.

DB: Just focused on what you had to do?

BS: That's right. We didn't get bothered by trivia. Get the job done. See, we were raised in Minnesota. Which is a character of Minnesota people, task oriented. We weren't the Ivy League type.

DB: Did you ever see combat experience while you were there?

BS: No, I didn't. No, because my job was to... Our unit was to, first of all I want to say something about our unit. When we came, we really didn't have any equipment, so the British loaned us airplanes and equipment, so we had more British equipment than our own. In other words, the first airplanes we got were Tiger Moths, which was a biplane training plane, and they used that to maintain our pilot's proficiency. Also, our division had maintenance. Our pilots got, then they gave us Spitfires, which was the premier British fighter, so our pilots flew those. But the Spitfire didn't have much range. If we had a pilot that stayed out much more than say an hour and 45 minutes, we could rest assured that he would make it back to the field, but we might have to go out and tow him back, because he'd be out of gas. He couldn't taxi back.

DB: Did you have to do that very much?

BS: No. But it was that close. I've taken the cap off gas tanks and looked in, all I could see was the bottom of the tank and it was dry.

DB: Pilots pushed it sometimes?

BS: Oh yeah, they came in on the fumes. Well, you didn't worry about being safe. You had to do what you had to do. Our feeling then was that we had so much British equipment, we didn't know if we were in the American Air Force or the RAF. And we had a lot of RAF people with us. Then we finally got our own [American] P-51s. Our unit was not a combat unit per se—it was a reconnaissance unit. We were a tactical reconnaissance unit, we had cameras. Our pilots were not to engage the enemy, we were Sneaky Petes. Also, those pictures you see of the invasion beaches, where they fly over and you can see all the obstacles the Germans set up along the shore, those pictures were taken by us.

DB: Really, so your unit was sending people over to take pictures of Normandy?

BS: Oh yes.

DB: Did your unit get sent out on any other important missions, or missions that you remember, that you got sent out for?

BS: No, no special ones. From, we who were sent down to (***) , there were only about 30 of us crew chiefs. The rest of the men were sent up to a place called Atchum, which was in the Midlands, near the Welsh border. And Atchum is up by Shrewsbury, which is by... It is a medieval town, the houses were of the Tudor type.

With the big timbers, and that's where the Saxons settled. And we were sent out there, there was a field up there, they trained pilots for combat flying, so we could get the formations and different tactics. We had pilots who came over from the Eagle Squadron. The Eagle Squadron was volunteer Americans who'd gone over to the RAF to train, before we were involved. So we had some of those Eagle Squadron boys, and they were great pilots.

DB: So what was an average day like for you over there?

BS: Oh, get up, go eat. Get up around six o'clock. Put (***) Get something to eat. Take off for the flight line. We lived with our airplanes.

DB: You spent all day out there?

BS: Oh yeah. A lot of maintenance.

DB: Did you ever see planes come in from combat and require more maintenance, or was it just mostly routine stuff?

BS: Mostly routine, because our pilots never really got damaged until we went on active operations.

DB: What do you mean by operations?

BS: Actually flying over enemy territory. Ops. Other than flying over enemies, we did mostly training.

DB: How did things differ when they went on ops than training?

BS: Not much. It was mostly routine.

DB: So you did mostly the same thing?

BS: Oh yeah. Because we trained just like we were on ops all the time.

DB: Did you ever have leave while you were over there then?

BS: Oh yeah. We'd get three days, maybe we could get a week off, they would give us leaves. One of my favorite towns to go to, everyone went to London, well I could care less about London. London was a hub. I mean, if we wanted to go anywhere, we'd probably have to go to London to change trains, everything traveled by train. So when we were in Shrewsbury, we got to go up the West Coast and we didn't have to go to London. And one of our favorite places for us to have leave was, some of us. We were the first GIs, so we had the pick of the crop. One of my favorite towns was Edinburgh, Scotland.

DB: What did you like about Edinburgh?

BS: It was just... the people. That, and it had, the town was clean. The people were very thrifty and they stepped on principles. I went to church one time out there, I think it was an Episcopal church, but I could have sworn that, that preacher could have preached in a Missouri Synod [Lutheran] church. *(laughs)*

DB: That good, huh?

BS: Yeah. In fact, there service was just like at home and I could get to play golf up there. On the Royal Rumsfeld Links. That's a real old course. We used to go there quite often. I did get to tour the University of Edinburgh. And I did get to see the place where the King James Version of the Bible was translated.

DB: That would be interesting to see.

BS: It is. Old Edinburgh, which was up on top of the hill, that's where it was located. And also, the fort there. It's a big... it's medieval. Trains all run down in the valley below it. One of the main streets in Edinburgh, Scotland is called Prince's Street and they have a (?) there in the park, dedicated to Robert Burns.

DB: Who was Robert Burns?

BS: He was an author.

DB: Any other favorite memories of leave, or mostly Edinburgh?

BS: Not really. That was a good spot.

DB: Kind of a nice, more peaceful area then London.

BS: Yeah, that's it. Too many GIs. We saw them every day.

DB: This was a chance to do something different?

BS: Oh yeah.

DB: I'm going to go back to a couple things we kind of mentioned earlier. I asked you quickly about Basic Training and whether or not you came into contact with people of other races, and you said not really there, but you said in Louisiana, you saw them to some degree.

BS: Well, we were, when it comes to blacks, we weren't segregated up there. Black people, we just accepted that, because there weren't that many. But down there, they were segregated. They had to go to the back of the bus and everything.

DB: Within the army was their actual segregation?

BS: No. We didn't see it

DB: Was there any, did you ever see a problem with some of the Southerners?

BS: Some of the Southern guys we didn't have any problem with, others we couldn't get them to work. Their work ethic wasn't the same. Or you could get a guy who was from the Midwest.

DB: How about women, did you ever come into much contact with women in uniform?

BS: Oh, yes in England. England had them, but we didn't have them, our WACS weren't in the service yet, when we were overseas.

DB: What kinds of positions did they have? Everything or...?

BS: No. Women were relegated to office work. Maybe driving trucks or something. Nurses.

DB: Were there any individuals that you met during your service. I would imagine that some made a big impact on you? Comrades or officers, or something like that.

BS: Well, I don't know. Our officers, we respected them. The officer that I had that flew my airplane. I really didn't realize what kind of guy he was until just before he died.

DB: What was his name, do you remember?

BS: He was Clarence Lowden, from Pennsylvania. He was a pretty wealthy family there, his dad had a big well drilling tools. Then after the war I guess the guy was in energy. Their dad owned the only privately owned energy company in Pennsylvania. He was a graduate of Lehigh and Penn State, and their circle of friends was the Carnegies. I didn't know it, but he and I were just talking like we are now.

DB: You had good relations with him?

BS: Oh yeah, everyone respected him, because of his principles.

DB: How did he show that?

BS: By the way he conducted himself.

DB: He was very ethical?

BS: Yes, no nonsense.

DB: Fit in with the Minnesota guys?

BS: Well, yeah he fit in with us, especially with poker, he was a good poker player. If I could talk, we still keep touch with his wife. In fact, I didn't even know it, but when he died, he was a Lutheran. (*shows some pictures and stories*)

DB: So what are these stories of?

BS: I cut these out of *Stars and Stripes*, the paper over there. That was our service [US Army] newspaper. These are my buddies, we were all crew chiefs, that was the way we dressed (*pointing at picture of himself and other men, with a cat*).

DB: What were the names of these guys?

BS: This one is Bud Wise, Bill Patterson, Holly Wessel, myself. This cat had a bunch of kittens, we were playing with them, and they were in our hair.

DB: And it got in *Stars and Stripes*?

BS: Yeah. This is one of our guys that went overseas with us, then he went over to Bomber Command. This is a story about him, in *Stars and Stripes*. Read it, it's quite good.

DB: (*reading*) "An East Anglian town February 21, four gunners bailed out of a crippled fortress near the rural village, and a few moments later knocked at the door of the nearest house. The occupant, a Mrs. Buckingham, answered the door almost immediately. 'We've been expecting you, won't you come in,' she said. The gunners, astonished, filed into the house to find a table laden with 17 hard boiled eggs, toast, marmalade, coffee, and a bottle of whiskey. I dreamed about a Flying Fortress crashing near here and four men came to the door. I didn't want to see it come true, but if it did, I wanted to be prepared. Some of the neighbors helped with the eggs, so here you are. The gunners, almost as shaken by the reception as the experience that had preceded it were Tech Sgt. Bradley H. Barker, Richmond, Virginia; Staff Sgt. Edward J. Rotte of Chicago; Howard E. Anderson of St Paul; and John S. Rosenbaum of MA." Howard E. Anderson was a guy formerly from your unit, huh. Wow, that was a heck of a story. Almost a miracle.

BS: As I said, you can keep a copy of it, you're welcome to it.

DB: Were there any other, you mentioned your buddies, here, were there any guys who had a lasting impact on you from the war?

BS: Well, yeah, but I don't know what you mean by that. We still get together. Here's a couple more of my buddies (*shows picture*). This is when we were going to tech school. He's still living. (*pointing at various men in photo*) Me of course. Bealie is from Montana, he attached himself to us, the two of us. See, they put us in with a bunch of recruits, they didn't know what to do with us, because we'd already been crew chiefs. So, you can tell, because see, he's got just that, but we had our jackets already. (*pointing out details of picture*). It was cold there in Texas. This was taken in Texas. So we wore those to stay warm. Here's down in Alexandria, Louisiana. They had a Lutheran Center for us, that's what it looks like in 1980. It's still there. This is the same place. My wife and I went down.

End of Side A. Side B begins.

DB: Okay, so this is a picture of you and your wife after you came back.

BS: Yeah, I came back in March, April, 1945 to go to cadet school. My fifth week, they canceled the program. So I was reassigned here in the States.

DB: I guess moving on to another type of question. Do you remember how it was to stay in touch with family back home? What did you do?

BS: E-mail. (*laughs*)

DB: Now you do, but you sure didn't in the 1940s!

BS: What do they call it...

DB: Air post, or by boat?

BS: You know, all these microfiche that we enjoyed, that was starting out then, during World War II. And we'd write a letter they'd put it on microfiche. They'd get more letters sent. Then when they got back here, they put them on the little letter and mail them. They had a machine that could polygraph them. Whatever they did with them, I don't know. [reference is to V-mail]

DB: That's how they sent the letters.

BS: Jane (*to wife outside the room*), what kind of mail did we have during the war, what did they call that? You know, the little writing on it.

Jane Schauer: Oh my gosh, I don't know.

DB: How important was mail time to you, getting mail and sending mail?

BS: Oh always, I mean that was home. Sometimes you'd get packages.

DB: What kind of packages?

BS: Care packages. We called them care packages. Cookies, some guys got whiskey.

DB: That actually made it, huh?

BS: Yeah. They'd pack it in popcorn. They'd pop a lot of popcorn and put it in the box and put the bottle in there. It'd come right through. Some of the first packages we got were hilarious. Some of the guys would get, they'd send us these packages, and someone would have made some cookies. Then they'd... like toothpaste, a lot of items were scarce, like toothpaste, tooth powder. Stuff like that, they'd pack it in with the cookies. By the time we'd got them, and they'd open the package up and there were the crumbs, they were all crumbs with the toothpaste and the tooth powder that had come. It was hilarious. We'd talk about how good they tasted. It was covered all in toothpaste. *(laughs)*

DB: They figured out how to send packages better after that?

BS: Oh yeah, after a while, they'd get lost and everything. 'Cause everything was shipped by boat, you didn't fly stuff then.

DB: What kind of papers did you have available? You showed me some editions of *Stars and Stripes*. Did you read anything else really?

BS: Oh we'd get London papers.

DB: Did you ever get anything from back home?

BS: Oh, once in a while, some people had them. Being the paper, they'd send us the clippings.

DB: Did you, I know you weren't married to Jane during the war, but had you already met?

BS: Oh yeah.

DB: So you kept in contact during the war?

BS: Oh yeah, we've known each other since we were in school, in 1933. In ninth grade.

DB: So you kept in contact with her. Did she send you any care packages?

BS: Once in a while. Later on, when we first got over, we were on British rations, and the food was British. That's all we got, "Nothing but muck," we used to say.

DB: Doesn't sound real good to me.

BS: It wasn't. *(laughs)* We finally started getting our food.

DB: Now you mentioned shortages, what kind of shortages did you face, you said toothpaste and things like that were kind of hard to get?

BS: Items that we take as everyday stuff like toilet paper. We were rationed to a roll of toilet paper a week or something.

DB: So you had to carry around your roll or something?

BS: Some guys did.

DB: Anything else that you remember being short of?

BS: *(pauses briefly)* You sort of forget that side. Gasoline was always short, but not in the Air Corps.

DB: I'm sure you guys were taken care of.

BS: Well, yeah, but we didn't have need for it anyway, because all our transportation was by tank truck.

DB: Tank truck, what was that?

BS: Trucks mated with tank. *(laughs)* We used to ride in the back of those trucks all the time. There wasn't any of the traffic that you have here. You did have to learn how to drive like the Brits.

DB: Oh yeah, how was that for you?

BS: We were young and we could adjust very quickly.

DB: No little accidents from going on the wrong side of the road?

BS: Not really, not once you get going. I mean, you gotta use your head, but we were first (**). Being from Minnesota, I can tell you when we first got over there and didn't have any equipment, it was September, harvest time and of course, being out in the country, there was a field out there and there were two gals out there. That was when they used to shock the grains, to protect them until they could take it out, harvest it. They were out, the gals were out, they were picking these sheaves and setting them up with shocks. Our guy says, "Oh, it won't take us long to do that," so they went out to help these gals and it was over ten acres of grain out there, and they did that within an hour. They were making points with those girls. The

farmers around there appreciated us. In fact, our unit in Shrewsbury got a letter of commendation from the Lord Mayor of Shrewsbury, for our conduct.

DB: Did you guys meet a lot of people from England, a lot of civilians?

BS: Oh yeah. Yeah, we were the first ones. They looked at everything real close.

DB: So that was a really positive thing?

BS: Yes, we were very cognizant of putting on a good face, just being the quality people we were.

DB: Did you meet any individuals that you remember specifically?

BS: From England? Not really. Just the native farmers and country people.

DB: After the war, you do stay in contact with a number of the guys you met from the war?

BS: Oh yeah, we still get together once a month, those of us who are still around. We have lunch. First Tuesday of the month.

DB: Why is it so important for you to get together with those guys?

BS: Oh, it's just like family, keeping track.

DB: You guys bonded during the war?

BS: Oh yeah, I guess you call it bonded now. We enjoy each other's company. Well, you sleep and work with them, it's just like you going to college [Dan is a college student at Concordia University, St Paul].

DB: You had become so close to these people...

BS: Yeah, you talk about old college buds and stuff like that, that's the way it was in the service. Fraternal. It's a fraternal thing.

DB: Coming to the end of the war, and the years right around there, do you remember the time when President Roosevelt died?

BS: Yeah, where was I?

DB: It was April 1945.

BS: I was in the (*pauses three seconds*). They came back from overseas and they sent me right back to Louisiana.

DB: Spent a lot of time there, didn't you?

BS: Yeah, I was in a rut.

DB: What do you remember about when FDR died? Do you remember the day really?

BS: Not really. Because FDR wasn't that great of a guy.

DB: You weren't that impressed with him.

BS: No.

DB: Did you notice any people around you reacting towards it?

BS: No. Because we knew what kind of a guy Truman was. We knew what we were going to get. To me, Truman was a better guy than Roosevelt was. That was my opinion.

DB: So you were high on Truman. You expected big things out of him?

BS: He had the track record that we liked.

DB: What do you mean, what kind of track record?

BS: Well, I mean of being honest. Trustworthy.

DB: A lot of people didn't hardly know who Truman was when he came to office.

BS: Oh, that's because they were sucked in by Franklin.

DB: You weren't obviously in awe of him.

BS: No.

DB: Well, how about V-E Day and V-J Day? V-E Day was 8 May, 1945. Do you remember that day?

BS: Yeah, we were pretty happy. The 8th of May my wife was expecting our first child.

DB: So where were you on the 8th of May?

BS: I was in the (***). She was home here. Had the baby, and I was in Louisiana. Nothing much. There was still a job to do, even though the European Theater shut

down. We still knew that we were going to go on. In fact, we used to have a saying, when we looked overseas in '42 we'd say, "Golden Gate in '48." We'd heard that we were going to just circle the globe and just keep right on going.

DB: Make a full circle, in a sense?

BS: Yeah, we figured we'd be home by '48.

DB: Got back a little bit faster, though, didn't you?

BS: Yeah.

DB: When did you actually come back from England?

BS: In 1944.

DB: Then let me ask about V-J Day, 15 August 1945.

BS: V-J Day I was in Texas. We were in Temple, Texas. My new unit that I was with, we were over there for an exercise, and when V-J Day came, we celebrated by drinking a bottle of beer and going to bed. Just glad it's over.

DB: You were kind of expecting the end?

BS: No, not really. We didn't. We thought we were going to have to leave. We were thinking, "Oh geez, another big job."

DB: Did you think you might actually be sent to the Pacific?

BS: Oh yeah.

DB: So, maybe some relief associated with V-J Day?

BS: Yeah. There was. Our thoughts were, we were still task oriented. The war wasn't over yet. Still something to do. That was our attitude.

DB: So, associated with that, was the dropping of the atomic bomb. How did you feel about the US government dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

BS: It was a job that had to be done.

DB: That was just what was necessary, in other words?

BS: That's right. Do what you had to do to get the job done.

DB: Did that attitude ever change at all these last few years?

BS: The attitude is in this latest generation, the sixties generation, that's where the attitude came from. That's the sixties attitude, that rebellious attitude.

DB: You've never doubted it since? You still continue to support it, that's what had to be done?

BS: Certainly. We're task oriented. *(laughs)* You can emphasize that in here, in your notes.

DB: You came back in '44 to the US, spent time in Louisiana and Texas. When did you actually get back home in Minnesota?

BS: September of 1945, I had enough points to get out. We had beau cou [many] points. So, they transferred me up to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, that was an airbase then. So I mustered out up there, got on a bus, and came back home.

DB: What was your reaction to getting back home? How did it feel?

BS: Well, it's a new ball game of learning. My dad said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Geez, I don't know." I mean, we didn't... I was trying to get myself re-oriented. Of course, I've already got a family started. He says, "Well, you get down to the post office. You gave the best years of your life to your country, and your country at least owes you a job." So I went down to the post office and then I was a mailman.

DB: So that was your first job after you got back?

BS: First and only.

DB: Did it take some time to readjust to civilian life?

BS: I think we just re-adjusted. Because I wasn't, see, this sixties Vietnam people, they had a different ballgame than we did. That war was, it had to be done, but the way it was done was, it was political.

DB: Were there any changes in your community from when you left and came back, or were things pretty much the same?

BS: They were pretty much the same, except that there were a lot of things missing.

DB: What kind of things?

BS: People missing.

DB: People who had gone off to the service?

BS: Yeah, and some were elsewhere.

DB: Did you have some close friends that moved, for war industries or anything?

BS: Oh yeah, we had to reorient ourselves to our environment.

DB: Meet new people and get new friends?

BS: Well, I was out, we used to kid each other when we were in the service. We would say, "Well, the next war I'm going to be standing on the curb waving the American flag when you say goodbye." That's something we'd say. The next war was the Korean War. I was dang happy to be waving the flag. Some of my buddies had gone back into the Guards. I'd been out for 15 years, and I was itching to be working on airplanes again, kid stuff. And they'd gotten these 97s. And so I says, "Well you take me back in?" I was disgusted with the Post Office because I wasn't making any money, and everyone else was making more money than me. So they took me back in and I signed on as a flight engineer. Well, as it turned out, instead of quitting the post office and going to work out there, I did the Guards part-time. See, I had that job lined up, I could have quit being in the Post Office earlier, when they reformed right after the war, but instead, I stayed in the Post Office. I went out there and worked as what you call a weekender. Weekenders go out and put in there two weeks. I put in being on a flight crew more training periods, and we did a lot of other stuff to keep our proficiency up. That's when, working in the Post Office, the air guard was my part time job, and the post office was my regular job. As it turned out, I put in 37 years at the Guard. I'm glad I did it. It wasn't easy. Family took it. You're not around. That's about my career. Other things. Oh, I made three trips to Vietnam. We landed in Danang. So I, there were a lot of World War II guys fighting in Vietnam. Like pilots and air crews. That's something else they don't tell you in history.

DB: No, I'd never heard that before.

BS: I can't believe that, that you didn't hear about that.

DB: We don't really hear about the World War II presence then, in Vietnam.

BS: You can tell that to your history professor. Tell him those World War II guys were in Vietnam too. I made a trip into Danang in 1962, before we were engulfed. We were just advisors. In 1964 I made another trip over to Danang. Man, the field we went into then, it looked like Minneapolis. I said, "Where did all these runways come from?" The first trip I made in, like going into Benson [a small local airport in Hugo, Minnesota]. The last trip I made was into (***) which is in Saigon. This was February when we made the trip. The guy cleared us to land and he says, "There's no smog on the runway." He was from Minneapolis. That was my experience in the service.

DB: So looking back on it all, specifically on World War II, can you say that it changed you in any way?

BS: Oh, it changed everybody. There's some more than others. We're individuals, we're all individuals.

DB: How do you think it changed you?

BS: Oh, I don't know. Because we were so young. We were bound to change. I don't know if it would have been any different if there was a war now. It all comes back to our basic beliefs, our core beliefs. As Christians, we have a core belief. Some of these people, this Hollywood, these liberals today, are living on fantasy, relying on themselves. They're not in the real world. They'd like to make you think they are. It's one of my pet peeves.

DB: I guess that covers basically all the questions I have for you. Are there any memories or just things you'd like to add, because my questions didn't quite cover, or did you kind of get through everything?

BS: I don't know what you're interested in.

DB: Well, is there anything about World War II that sticks out in your mind, that time in your life that you think I should know?

BS: A lot of the time, I don't even think.

DB: It's just a time in your life.

BS: Yeah. *(discussion of pictures; Bert starts flipping through book of planes from Air Guard)* I just wanted to show you some of our airplanes. Here's one of our airplanes. That's the kind we had when we started.

DB: What's it called?

BS: O-38 E.

DB: That was what you guys were working on first?

BS: That's what we took down to Louisiana, in '41. We weren't tankers, other guys were. Here's the kind of airplanes we had, the kind we did submarine patrol in.

DB: What kind was that?

BS: An O-47. Beautiful airplane. It was fast, flew like a DC 3.

DB: Did you ever get to go up in a plane like that?

BS: Oh yea. Show you a picture of the airplanes in Louisiana.

DB: What did you guys fly over in England?

BS: We had Spitfires.

DB: Spitfires and stuff like that, all English aircraft. Well, I guess this ends the question part so I'm just going to turn the tape off. Just for the record I want to thank you for your time. Thanks for the interview.

(tape turned off, but turned back on when Bert later remembers something he'd like to add)

BS: There's one thing I got to tell you about. 1941 when we got to go to Louisiana, they hadn't implemented the draft yet, they hadn't even started with registering yet. They finally got that going, and everyone registered and they made some drives. Well, the army had all the units even though we were on maneuvers in the South, our budget was so short they didn't have any facilities to take care of us. But they already drafted these boys and they didn't know where to send them for Basic Training or anything. So they just sent them off to the units, and all the units had to give them their basic and everything. And so the first draftees from Minnesota, instead of sending them to some other unit, they sent them to Minnesota units. We got a bunch from Southwest Minnesota, from down around Luverne, Worthington, Austin, all those. And those were farm boys. They were a good bunch of boys. And they'd come raw recruits, we had to give them uniforms. We had to give them Basic Training. We did it within the unit itself.

DB: They just said each unit's responsible for training these guys in.

BS: Yeah, so that's just the way things were. In 1941, after December 7, immediately after it, it was like everyone in the country was running around like a Chinese fire drill. I wanted to point that out to you, that's how events were at that time. When we were in maneuvers, we didn't have any equipment, this country was so unprepared for World War II. We were on maneuvers and we had trucks sitting out there in the woods. And they had a sign on them, "This is a tank." We had guns, 2 x 4s, pointing up into the sky. *(laughs)* You can laugh, but that's the truth.

DB: So you guys used them for training?

BS: Yeah. Right after the war started, after December 7, they issued us World War I equipment. The helmets we got were World War I helmets. And the guns we got were World War I guns; they gave us a 30-06 Springfield rifles and they were brand spanking new. They were so raw, the stocks were rough. We had to oil them all down. First of all, they were covered with about a quarter inch of coslene.

DB: What is that?

BS: Coslene is a rust preservative. They'd had them in storage. The rifle they issued me was a 30-0-6 rifle and it was just covered in coslene. We took them over on the flight line and used Stoddard solvent, gasoline, to clean all the coslene off. Then we went to the mess hall and got a bone, a hambone or something, and rubbed the stocks. That was the best shooting gun ever made. I mean at 200 yards you could lay that bullet right in the bullseye. It was a good weapon, but the only thing was its firepower, it only had five shells, and than after each shot, you'd have to hand crank the bolt. It was a darned good gun. That's what I had, I wanted to tell you. The other thing, the gas masks they issued us after December 7 were World War I gas masks.

DB: So everything was old.

BS: But that's how hard on the budget this country was operating. You have to remember we were just coming out of a Depression. Actually, I think this country could have recovered from the Depression without the war; that's just my opinion. Of course, I've got 20-20 vision.

DB: 20-20 hindsight. Thank you again, Bert.

END OF INTERVIEW

109th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron

Source: <http://usacac.army.mil/organizations/cace/cgsc>

Organized on 8/27/17 as 109th Aero Squadron, redesignated 803rd Aero Squadron on 2/1/18. Demobilized on 6/23/19, reconstituted, consolidated and assigned to the National Guard on 1/17/21. Redesignated on 1/25/23 as 109th Observation Squadron, federalized on 2/10/41, redesignated 109th Observation Squadron (Medium) on 1/13/42, 109th Observation Squadron on 7/4/42, 109th Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter) on 5/31/43, 109th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron on 11/13/43, inactivated 11/9/45.

1941 Continental US

9/7/42 Membury, England

11/21/42 Atcham, England

5/15/43 Membury, England

12/12/43 Middle Wallop, England

7/4/44 Le Molay, France

8/29/44 Toussus le Noble, France

8/31/44 Buc, France

9/20/44 Gosselies, Belgium (operated from Chievres, Belgium 7-18 Dec 44)

3/24/45 Vogelsang, Germany

4/2/45 Limburg, Germany