

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Ernest Dutcher
February 19, 2013
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PREFACE

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ERNEST DUTCHER

February 19, 2013

Question: Okay. Good morning. This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Ernest Dutcher, Jr.**, on February 19, 2013, in **Encino, California**. Good morning Mr. **Dutcher**, and thank you for agreeing to speak with us today.

Answer: Good morning, and you're very welcome. **[technical comments]**

Q: Mr. **Dutcher**, from what I understand, you were a liberator with **U.S.** forces of concentration camps in **Germany**, and were a member of the military. So I'm going to ask a lot of questions that leads up to those events in **Dachau** because we'd like to know a little bit about your life and your military service prior to the liberation of the concentration camps, and your role in helping survivors survive. So, I'll start at the beginning.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Please tell us when you were born, where you were born and a little bit about your family.

A: I was born in May 16th of 1920, and I was born in a s-small town in northern **Wisconsin** called **Antigo**, and I lived with my parents on the farm. Our background initially was all farming until about I reached the age of approximately 16. And I lived with my mother, my father and I have two sisters, both older, and I have – had

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a brother about one and a half years younger than I, who also was involved in the war, but never made it overseas, and I have a younger brother that was old enough to help out on the farm and so forth. And then I –

Q: Excuse me. Let me follow up on that a little bit. What kind of – what did you grow on the farm?

A: Oh, it was a very rocky farm. We grew basically potatoes and corn. Mainly things for a family to eat and survive, because survival was the key item back in those days, very, very poor conditions.

Q: So did you sell any – did your family sell any of these items?

A: We sold a ce – a certain number, but there's not too much of a market, cause we was quite a ways back in the so-called woods back there. And the farm was a very small one initially. We later moved to a much larger farm and we sold – we s – we sold maple – maple syrup, basically. We tapped the maple trees in the spring, and then we had big pans that – within which we boiled for a 50 to one ration, we boiled off 49 percent of the liquid, which was water, and the residual was maple syrup.

And –

Q: And is that why it's so expensive?

A: It – well, that's only part of it. We took that raw maple syrup and ran it through – we – we mixed it with milk and the milk absorbed all the solids in it, and it came

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out beautifully clear, and – and it sold at that time for about several dollars a pint.

And several dollars back then was a lot of money.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Your father and your mother, what were their names?

A: My father's was **Ernest E. Dutcher, Sr.**, my mother was – my mother's name was – oh gosh, excuse me.

Q: It's okay, it's okay, take your time.

A: **Amanda Dutcher**. And they were initially from **Iowa**, where they were brought up and educated. My mother was a s – was a schoolteacher down in **Iowa**, but she moved up to northern **Wisconsin** and eventually become a – a correspondent for the small town, with the **Rhineland Daily News**, which was our nearby large city, which 9,000 people.

Q: Oh my.

A: So I went to **Rhineland** High School for two years, after which I – I become a – I worked out in the woods, and when you say woods, it was a logging environment, and where I took care of a team of horses, I was 18, took care of a team of horses about five miles off the main road and got snowed in sometimes. Sometimes the weather become 40 to 45 below.

Q: My gosh.

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A: And I had a cast iron stove that I chopped my own wood and kept warm with. It probably was a luxury compared to what these camps went through. But anyway, I was offered a job at **Montgomery Ward and Company** during the 19 – seven – I think that 19 fo – 1939, 1940, '41, '42. 1942. And I –

Q: Mm-hm. So you would have been 22 years old?

A: Yes, uh-huh. Yes, and then in – then we – I was also working on the – in the furniture and radio department of **Montgomery Ward**. I loved radios and I didn't – my first radio that I ever heard was a little crystal set, and I had to share two – I had to share two earphones with anyone else lucky enough to listen to it, and we – we listened to the radio on **WLS Chicago**, music and everything else on it. Very scratchy and everything, but very amazing. And then I moved on, tha-that was quite a little earlier than my graduation. My graduation from **Rhineland** high school, with a – with a high school graduate degree, which was pretty good back in those days. And then in showing off radios one day, I heard a big bulletin come over the radio, that **Pearl Harbor** had been bombed. And – and **Roosevelt's** speech I'm – saying the – about the dastardly deed. And based on that, several of us in the – in the [indecipherable] in the store, **Montgomery Ward** store, decided we'd enlist. So on the 30th of December, we enlisted in – I – I wanted to be a pilot, and I just loved flying. So –

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Q: Can I interrupt just for a second?

A: Yes.

Q: I want to step back just a little bit to find out about your town. It was called **Rhineland**(ph)? With no –

A: **Rhineland**.

Q: **Rhineland**.

A: Yes.

Q: And you say was 9,000 people there?

A: 9,019 exactly.

Q: 9,019.

A: Right.

Q: And, well, if your mom was a correspondent from the newspaper, those are the sorts of facts that newspaper people know. Tell me, i-if you can, were they all pretty similar in background, all pretty similar in religion? Was there a predominant religion?

A: The predominant religion in the town was – most of them were like Lutheran and – and – a-and that. There were several Jewish families. One owned the department store downtown, and – and –

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Q: You knew what I was getting at. I wanted to find out whether or not there had been any Jews in the town, whether people knew them, whether you had gotten to know anybody. That was –

A: I-I never did, except when we'd go into the store for buying clothing and so forth. And that was the only ones we knew that – up there tha – at that time. So then from there, we went to **Wausau, Wisconsin**, which is a recruiting center and we all signed up at that place. I had taken several years with the National Guard before that, from the time I was 16, and on to time I enlisted.

Q: Okay, I have another question.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: You said that you always loved flying. You had been in an airplane before, or –

A: No, I just loved the thought of it, I –

Q: Okay.

A: – I – I was really enamored with **Lindberg** and his – his antics and history, so forth. But I definitely wanted to be a pilot, so –

Q: So you had two passions, which you've identified so far. One for radio, and one for flying.

A: That's correct.

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Q: Okay. So let's take us through then, the enlistment process, where you enlisted and what happened after that.

A: Well, we enlisted in **Wausau, Wisconsin**, which is a much, much larger city, it must have had at least 15,000 people in it. About 50 percent larger, I would say. But that was the center of a lot of activities up there. And so we were taken down to – to northern **Illinois**, where they had a – a center for processing the – the troops and so forth, where we got all of our shots, and all of our – all of our warnings, an-and – and early – early instruction. The fact I'd been in National Guard though, made me kind of special, because I then was put in charge of small delegations that started training. From there we were shipped, after the initial equipping and issuing of clothing and blankets, and so forth, I was shipped to **Jefferson barracks Missouri**, which is adjacent to **Saint Louis, Missouri**. And **Jefferson** barracks was – it was cold, and middle of the – middle of the winter, virtually. And down there we were placed in tents, and very, very cold. There we got all of our real tough shots. And the shots made us so sick that we were afraid we wouldn't die. There, while I was at **Jefferson** barracks, and that – we started our training there, I'd – I did the drill sergeant role of taking the raw recruits and showing them how to march and how to turn and how to stop and the proper commands and all that. But then the newspaper headlines come out; **Roosevelt**, we will be building 125,000 planes a year. It was

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beyond belief, but anyway, it didn't make that much sense because during the time that I had gone through medical – the medical exams, I got what is commonly known as white coat fever. And the – and – and I got excited. I was so worried that I wouldn't pass, that I, of course, didn't, and my blood pressure went sky high during the exams. Well, so, I wasn't apparently a good candidate, and probably wouldn't last too long.

Q: For what?

A: Well, poor health and all that part of it.

Q: No, no, but what were you – was this to be accepted as – in – into the pilot program?

A: That exactly right.

Q: Okay, mm-hm.

A: Yeah. They had lesser than – other programs had lesser requirements, physically, so I had no problem with any physical and I had no problem with high blood pressure at the time. I had no trouble with eyesight, but when it – when we finally got down to **Jefferson** barracks, I chose my second choice, which was radio.

Q: Okay.

A: Radio training took me to **Scott Field, Illinois**, just ship – just across the river from our training at **Jefferson** barracks. And at **Scott Field** I went through the

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course of radio, which I just loved the course, cause I l-loved the idea so much.

Where I learned to – how a radio works, and I went – I was selected then to become an instructor, cause I had such enthusiasm for it. I instructed radio there until I got a waiver on the two year requirement to join the – the radio – radio officers' program, and officers' cadet program. And I was sent to **Yale University** via – via **Valley Forge**. And we spent some time at **Valley Forge**, again taking courses and so forth, leading up to the time that they accept us in **Yale**. And we march in – in – in and out the countryside [**indecipherable**] area. And I was –

Q: What year – excuse me again, I'm interrupting, but what year was this when you were accepted to go into **Yale**? How far in the 40s were we?

A: We were, at that time, '42 probably.

Q: Okay.

A: '42. Things happened so fast. '42 and then '43. Yes, that – '42.

Q: Okay.

A: And then I was a little bit – I also was, before I joined the National Guard, I was a – played in a little band and I was a trumpeter in the band, played the coronet, and the French horn and trombone and a few other things. And I was selected as the bugler. Now of course, every – **Reveille** was the mor – get them out of bed in the morning.

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Q: You must have been a popular guy.

A: So, then we stayed at a beautiful mansion that we were allowed to use, we used that for – marble staircases all. And then they had a – way up in the top was kind of a little area where you could go up and look out over the terrain and there's where I took – took all – care of all the bugling.

Q: You had the space for it, huh?

A: Yeah, and th-then – from there, I eventually went directly to ma – ru – to – went directly to **New Haven, Connecticut** where we were put up in the ya – **Yale** dormitories there. And we were immediately put on a program of radio, army radio and – and all communication, different types of communication such as teletype – and at that time teletype was really coming into its own. And – and also, the sig – signal corps type of – of wire communications, telephones, laying wire –

Q: That must have been fascinating stuff.

A: It's very – I was very f – in that th – I was so thrilled with the course, that of course I paid more attention than the average person. And after a period there, I forget the exact number of months, but let's say during the time that I was there, we had occasional nights we could go out. And I loved ice skating. Coming from northern **Wisconsin**, I was pretty good at it. So I did figure skating, so I went to the ice rink in **New Haven**. And there I saw a young girl skating around in a short skirt

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and I couldn't take my eyes off her. But I only ha-had a problem, I only had 50 cents with me, because we hadn't been paid for weeks. So anyway, she eventually came up and she had had her clothes in the same balcony seat that I had. And we got acquainted and so I took her down and I blew the 50 cents on a **Coke** for her and her sister, who was along. And I was so fascinated with her that she came to my graduation – we knew each other at least two weeks by that time. Came to my graduation, and after graduating we went down and got all our new army uniforms, they were so beautiful, long overcoat, and we just couldn't get over how great we looked. Then we were, shortly thereafter, shipped to **Boca Raton, Florida**, because my graduation score was 98.2, and the top – the top five of the gr – of the grade was sent to **Boca Raton** for radar training.

Q: Wow.

A: And – and then the radar – we arrived in **Boca Raton, Florida**. When I say we, the gentleman that become the 89th radar officer was a buddy of mine that we stuck kind of together. And so we landed at the train station in our heavy bu – beaver overcoats, then we had the wool, green, then we had the pink **[indecipherable]** trousers. But we wouldn't take them off, cause we just –

Q: Cause you looked so good.

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A: – we looked so good and we just couldn't take them off. But that's some of the things I remember, and – and then we went through a very, very grueling course on radio – radar. And radar was so new that information was coming from a mass – the **MIT** labs, where they invented s-some of the aspects, including the – a very powerful tube that could generate enormously strong pulses. Well, we then took it ri – almost from the design desk and we went through school, and learn – learning how it worked and everything. And you may have seen the underbelly of some of the planes that had a bubble under it. This was an antenna housing that the pathfinder aircraft used eventually. So we didn't know a thing about what the – we were doing. We were learning it and it wasn't important that we knew the whole story. So anyway, after being down there about three weeks, I – I couldn't get over the idea of the little girl I met. So I – I wrote a letter up to her mother, and says, I'd love to have her come down, cause she is the one I want to spend my life with. So anyway, the father sent his approval down, along with his daughter. And we – we – we met and I had a little apartment all picked out and – and so we lived off base actually, but right away the big job was to get married, cause that was a time that you never lived together. I mean, there was no – no way that could happen. So –

Q: And she had some say in this?

A: Well yes, she had – she – she loved the idea, I guess.

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Q: Okay.

A: I don't know what she saw in me, but anyway, I think she liked the idea, I was a pretty good figure skater. I could – I could skate circles and so forth, you know, and backward flips and stuff. So anyway, she came on down and so we found that we had to have the mother's signature as well as the father's signature on approval.

Q: Okay.

A: So we immediately forged that, and – and we went down. She knew how, you know, pretty well how to write. So we went down to **Miami** and went to the Justice of the Peace down there, and – and – for the ceremony. And she so happened to be cross-eyed, so the thing I do remember, that we were married by a cross-eyed Justice of the Peace, and a – and April the fifth of 1943.

Q: Wow.

A: And we just celebrated our 70th wedding anniversary. So –

Q: Well, congratulations. Congratulations. What's your wife's name?

A: **Beatrice.**

Q: **Beatrice.**

A: **Beatrice. Beatrice Jane.**

Q: And while we're on this topic, how – do you have children?

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A: Yes, I have a son, who went with me to the museum yesterday, and then – and a grandson. And this – my son was my last, my youngest. He lives in **West Hills** with his – my grandson. And then I have a little older brother – his older brother was **Ernest E.** the third, who eventually didn't like that term the third, and changed his name to **Ernie van Dytchen**(ph). He was a relative of mine was –

Q: Are you from Dutch background?

A: Pardon?

Q: Are you Dutch background?

A: We're Dutch, Swiss, I think a little mixture of everything.

Q: **America.**

A: American, yeah. So anyway, then I have a daughter, and she was the a-apple of my eye, **Beverly**. And she just gorgeous. She grew up in th – she – when I say she, my wife and her family were Catholic. And I surrendered to the fact that even though I was Mormon – you asked that earlier, and I forgot to tell you.

Q: That's okay.

A: I was brought up in the Mormon faith, but not a good – not a good follower, I was a rebel. And so I kind of abandoned the church and – when I was 20. And I decided that yes, I'll allow her to bring up the children Catholic. So that's a story there.

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Q: Okay.

A: But **Beverly** went to Catholic school –

Q: Okay.

A: – eventually went to Catholic University in – in **Denver, Colorado**. And – and there she become a – a nurse. And during that time she joined a – a – a – the motion picture side of it. She acted in a play with some – some professionals in “**The Sound of Music**” and oh, that made it – that made the day for me.

Q: I can imagine. I ca –

A: So, let’s see, from then –

Q: Okay, so we went down –

A: Oh, she become a nurse, and eventually spent 30 years with the University of **Colorado** Medical Center.

Q: Okay.

A: Now, we’ll go on fr – wherever you want me to start.

Q: Okay, I’m sorry, I got you off on a tangent here.

A: Yeah.

Q: But you were in – you were in **Florida** and you had just married, with a forged signature.

A: Yes.

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Q: Yes.

A: Totally illegal.

Q: Yeah. And – and you were going to be learning a lot more about radar that was coming from the **MIT** lab. So let's go back to your military side – this military side of your life.

A: Okay.

Q: Yeah.

Q: Well there we, again, we were graded based on our grades and our accomplishments there. And I had a s – handicap, cause I – I didn't know too much about math and that was all math at the time, so – but I did have a fellow student that was a – a math major, so he – he brought me along in the evenings and so forth, and we spent a lot of time, you know, bringing me up on that. And then – then we went through learning all about these – this new device out of **MIT**, the – the new radars, t – absolutely, totally top secret. And then we were – actually went out on another piece of radar, flying off the coast and finding submarines out of the water with this particular anti-submarine device, which I never was involved with using later. So then from my graduation there with a satisfactory rating, I was then assigned to a – of all things, a shooting range, while we waiting for our assignment to various squadrons that were being formed. In the range, I-I directed people in the

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proper stance, the proper position, using the **Colt 45**, the **Thompson** submachine gun and the – and the little 30 caliber carbine used by the paratroopers, and the **M-1** rifle that was used by the tr – by the liberators, these people that came in to save the camps. So we – I – I became expert on – on the se – **Thompson** submachine gun and the **Colt 45** and sharpshooter on all the rest, just from my experience there. Then I was transferred up to – to **Fort Wayne, Indiana**, where our group was being really put together, assigned to certain squadrons up there. Eventually then, we went to **Sedalia, Missouri** for real s – flight training. We actually took our places as doing our thing, each of us doing our own thing, not knowing too much about what everyone else needed to do. We were being trained to be experts in what we were – our education took us, you know. So that's the secret.

Q: What does that – excuse me, I have to interrupt you. What does that mean? Did you know what your eventual job was going to be?

A: Yes.

Q: And what was that?

A: Radar. Radar officer.

Q: And so that means, for a layperson like myself, as a radar – what does a radar officer do? What does –

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A: A radar officer was in charge of m-maybe 25 to 50 men. They were also trained in the same thing, but they weren't officers.

Q: Okay.

A: And we were the teachers, we – we had to teach them all about the things that we had learned about radar and so forth and they also went to school, but not as detailed as we went. So then – and each squadron was the same, so then our other jobs were constantly trying to figure a way of improving this radar and re – and communications that we had.

Q: The technology that existed at the time.

A: Yes, and it was evolving, and so it wasn't perfect.

Q: Yeah.

A: So anyway – and it just goes a step further, one squadron – the thing was repeated in four different squadrons that made up a group.

Q: Okay.

A: The group I g – that I was with was the 438th, troop carrier group, become very famous, cause we spearheaded the invasion of **Europe**.

Q: You mean **Normandy**?

A: Yes, we were first into **Normandy**.

Q: Wow.

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A: The – but, getting back to the organization –

Q: Sure.

A: – a four – a four squadron group, the squadron had 13 airplanes that were flying, several more for reserves. So each squadron had 13 airplanes, the group had 13 times four.

Q: Okay.

A: All right? Now the group, four s – four groups formed a – a – they formed the next division – it escapes me for a second. Anyway, there was –

Q: The next part of the structure.

A: The next part of the structure up.

Q: Right.

A: And then there was 50 – wing, it was a wing.

Q: Okay.

A: We were the 53rd troop carrier wing, and that consisted of a lot of groups. I – I don't know yet, I di – I was trying to get the statistics before the meeting here, but I couldn't find them.

Q: Okay.

A: But anyway, then a number of these wings consisted of the ninth troop carrier command. And that's the big thing I want to come out of what we're saying here,

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because the ninth troop carrier command had more effect on the liberation, because of the fact they shortened the war by so much by what they did.

Q: In wha – okay.

A: And I'll describe that later.

Q: Okay, okay, fine. So I want to get back to though, something. You're a radar officer?

A: Yes.

Q: And you're in charge of others who are radar experts?

A: Yes, right.

Q: And what's their job? Was their job to use the radar to detect where there would be emen – enemy submarines? Was that it?

A: No, we had nothing to do with submarines.

Q: Okay.

A: Everything was flying now.

Q: Okay.

A: Everything was air. Their job was to – to keep the radar gear in the planes in top working order.

Q: Okay.

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A: You know, y – anything made by man is going to break down, it's like – we were like a **Ford** garage, or you know, and we took care of the defects that showed up. And then every day they had to go out under my supervision and – and – and flight test every plane before they took off.

Q: Got it.

A: As to – to maximize the – or minimize the chance of anything going wrong, and ruining and possibly losing a lot of lives because of that.

Q: So, i-if I can summarize, but I'd like to know whether or not my summary is accurate, is that in many ways your role in this structure was an educational role as well as a maintenance role, to make sure that you understood the equipment, and to make sure that the guys who were under your command understood how to maintain that equipment.

A: Exactly, you got it right.

Q: Okay.

A: An additional job of mine was to – because I was inventive and I wa – I've been inventive from the time I was a young boy, 12 years old, I – I really developed a system where a very close friend and pilot of mine, Lieutenant **Wilmer**(ph) **Kline**(ph) was in an airplane with a – in the left seat, flying with a blanked out windshield, he couldn't see out.

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Q: Okay.

A: And then we had a-another pilot that could see out. We started – we started trying to find a way of landing a plane blind, cause the weather was so terrible over there, th – I mean, it was an unusual day, maybe one day a week that the sun came out. And that's why the – the st – the invasion of **Europe** was delayed, the weather was so bad. So anyway, I invented a system where we could, actually made, actually 12 blind landings utilizing that system. And it's – I have a complete write-up on it, so –

Q: Okay.

A: – you'll be able to – you already have it, I think.

Q: Yeah.

A: But anyway, that system got kind of spread ar – I didn't know all this until just in the last couple years. The system was memorialized on a daily record or monthly record, summarized monthly. We had to write what we had done during the month in a sort of a re – a permanent record form –

Q: Sure.

A: – and they were classified as secret. Anyway, that information started to get out to the group. We were only a squadron, one-fourth of the group.

Q: Right.

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A: Then, through my friend and so forth, he witnessed – we shared the radar building, and he witnessed what was happening and he started to follow what I was doing in – in ni – in the 88th squadron. Eventually it went through, then it went to the wing, then the wing ordered all planes to be – all pilots to be trained in utilizing that particular system, because it used equipment already in the plane. It used nothing except equipment already in the plane.

Q: So it was based on what you had learned about the technology?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: And – you must have been quite proud.

A: Pardon?

Q: You must have been quite proud that they adopted the system.

A: I did – I didn't think of anything different. I-I – I didn't know anything – I was a 22 year old at that time, and I was concentrating on what we were doing, and I – I never thought that there was any major accomplishment to it. I didn't know that until just the last couple of years. But anyway, then **Wing** decided to call the general of the Ninth Air Force. The Ninth Air Force controlled 1,000 of these airplanes, these **C-47** airplanes, the most wonderful airplane ever built. And i-it – I-I – everyone should learn about the **C-47** aircraft, a dece – **Douglas DC-3** was the forerunner of it, and it could do anything. But anyway –

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Q: Okay.

A: – we didn't – I was concentrating on the job, and not much –

Q: Can I ask about – we're in **Missouri**. From what I understand in your story, as far as getting to **Europe**, you're still in **Missouri**, correct? Training some of these oth – now a radar officer –

A: At that time – no, no, all that was done overseas. A hundred percent of that was done overseas.

Q: Oh, I see. So tell me how – at what point did your training end, and you got shipped out to **Europe**?

A: It was – we did a lot of flying, flight training. And believe it or not, we were not allowed on a test, on a final test we had to take, the pilots were not allowed to fly these airplanes higher than five feet over the highest obstacle.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: Five feet, not 500, not 5,000. Five feet. And so, we were flying this high over the ground where it's level. And so we had to pull up to get over a fence. And the chickens were flying, and –

Q: Chickens weren't happy.

A: They weren't happy at all, neither were the cows. So, anyway, that – I gave you some background on that, cause that's important.

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Q: Okay.

A: So that took place on this side of the ocean, but most of the training of the pilots and navigators, radio operators, crew chiefs, took place in my kind of a conference room that I had in addition to the shops and so forth of my office building that was right off the runway of our main airfield in **Greenham Common, England**.

Q: I see. I see, when you were already over there. So I'd like to establish the date of when you left – I mean, because up til now, from when we talk about when you enlisted in **Wisconsin** to now, it sounds like such an intensive –

A: Oh, right. Yeah.

Q: – training from the very basics, to something extraordinarily sophisticated.

A: Oh it was, it was. It was very – when I think of it now, I was thinking of it this morning, that entire thing, including the camps, everything happened in a – within a three year period.

Q: Yeah.

A: Of course, the camps went on way before that, but our reaction to it – to get –

Q: Well that pr –

A: Wi – wi –

Q: Mm-hm, sorry – I'm sorry, ki – keep on going.

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A: It was only a three year window, and I – I – I marvel at how we got so much done in three years.

Q: Yeah.

A: So anyway, we went overseas then, it had to be probably, oh, let me see, ground – air echelon went overseas by way of **South America** and across to **Africa** and then eventually up to lame – **England**. They flew their planes over. The ground echelon which I was part of, went over by – by boat, under heavy armada of destroyers and so forth, because a troop ship – they were sinking ships like crazy at that time. Probably only half of the – of the material that was being shipped overseas got overseas because they –

Q: Really?

A: – were sunk by those U-boats. So that's – so we went over about – to answer your question about the first part of to – of 1943 – three. No –

Q: 1940 –

A: 1940 – had to be in 1943. We were married in '43, so training ended. Probably the latter part of 1943.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: Because the invasion happens half a year later.

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A: Yes, you're right on.

Q: In June '44.

A: Right.

Q: Okay.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: By that point – I know you, you know, from your story we get a sense of – of real intensive focus on the work that you're doing, on the technology, on learning everything that you know about it. What about the wider political events that were going on at the time? Do you remember, do you hear, did you read newspapers about how the war was progressing before the invasion? Did you hear anything about what was happening to the Jews of **Europe**?

A: We heard about it, but it wasn't concentrated like it should have been, and – and of course, like we discovered later. We – we knew we had to c – we had cut the head off that monster.

Q: Okay.

A: We knew that, because they were very close to running the world. Had it not been for the power of our – our country's factories, and the – and the home front – they did a marvelous job. I give them so much credit for actually winning the war. But the – the – unfortunately the word of the camps were treated more or less like

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propaganda. We – we couldn't believe anything like that could happen. It just was a case of we were too naïve to – it wasn't a case we were ins – insin – insincere, it was a case we just didn't know any better. And of course, being 20 years old, you don't get buried in politics anyway. So –

Q: No, no.

A: So that was the –

Q: I'm just trying – you see, the reason why I asked this question is I'm trying to get an – a sense of the context of the time, the mood of the time, the level of knowledge of the time. You know, what had priority and what had less priority, and how much did people know and – and what they were aware of. Which I think you've addressed, you know.

A: Yeah. It – they only knew what the army – what the top peop – top generals and so forth, wanted them to know. They wanted their morale to stay up and they didn't want to be discouraged in – in the **United States**, because they were doing such a marvelous job of reaching that goal of **Roosevelt's** of 120,000 planes a year.

Couldn't – couldn't be done, but it did, it happened. And so al – they only fed them information that was relatively good, and that's one reason – one of the primary reasons, I believe, they didn't want too much bad news to get out, where we had l – made – we lost a battle, or where we made a mistake, or something like the mistake

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that was made where all of those British paratroopers d-died because a bad mistake in judgment by the superiors, and –

Q: We can perhaps come to that – come to that point when – in your narrative I remember –

A: Yeah.

Q: – it's something that you wrote about.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you hear then, about the bow – Battle of **Stalingrad**, which was in 1943?

A: Yes, we heard about that and of course all we heard was the good part of it, you know. We didn't hear – although we knew – we knew that **Stalin** was brutal, we knew that. We knew the Russians were probably not – you know, following that course, was not the nicest people on earth. So, I – we – we followed that Battle of **Stalingrad** cause we were so delighted over the fact that the Germans were losing. And so that was good news to come across.

Q: That's right.

A: But the news of all the people that was lost at our air base during a short period of time, that didn't get back to the public. No one knew about that.

Q: Well, let's talk about that a little bit. Was this in **England**?

A: It was in **England**.

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Q: Okay, so tell us the story in a – in – yeah, tell us the story, tell us what happened with such losses?

A: Well, the worst things I'll – I'll tell you about. The – there was – there was a tremendous concentration of aircraft bombing the coast and bombing inland and so forth. Planes were flying overhead all the time, going back and forth, a constant drone, you couldn't sleep. I mean, around the clock. The two **C-47s**, cause of the weather, bad weather, two 40 se – **C-40** – not **C-47s**, but two **B-17s**, bombers, collided right – almost directly over our base.

Q: Oh my.

A: And the debris scattered over a very large area. And hearing the – I was one of the few people that heard the crash. It was a tremendous explosion, and – and so pieces of everything, engines and bodies and stuff were coming down all over the area. I was one of the very first on the scene, because I onl – my off – radar building was only a short distance away. I had a **Jeep** that I had assigned to me. I jumped in the **Jeep** and drove over to the – where I knew the sound had come from, and then I started to see that debris all over. And the first sight I saw of a body was a young navigator. The navigator – I knew he was a navigator because the body was quite intact, and it was lying on his back. And he was partially buried because the force of dropping to the ground. And he – his – he was a little – little gray looking and so

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forth. But he looked like he was sleeping, like peacefully sleeping. But his ta – his watch was still running, that's [indecipherable] a strange thing. And then, little beyond I saw a body that was decapitated from hitting – from going through a tree branch. And – and – and then – then a lot of the pe – lot of the people from the base started to come over and we all were scattered through to see if there was any survivors.

Q: Were there?

A: Yes, there was a pilot, I think, one pilot, or maybe th – I can't recall now for sure, but I think at least one pilot survived. And the pilot that didn't survive, I – I've, in the last couple years I got – I've got to know who – who – who their relatives were and they've written to me and so forth. They found out through another – I had another interview with the **BBC**, and somehow or other that got out and they – they got ahold of me, and it was kind of – kind of sad.

Q: Yeah.

A: But – but anyway, from that, that was number one. Number two is the –

Q: Excuse me.

A: Yeah?

Q: How mu – do you know how many people died in that – in that collision?

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A: Yes, 20 – as I recall, there was 22. Because I got a figure of 51 in my mind that combined the two crashes that happened the same week.

Q: And was this because of the intensity and the frequency and just the sheer number of bombing missions that were taking place, that they were – there were just too many in the sky?

A: Well, military aircraft usually flew in formation, and the formation consisted of, let's say – our formations consisted of 13 airplanes, but th-that means they weren't too far apart. And the weather was so bad that they cou – you couldn't see. In other words, you just lost the sight, and somehow or other, two planes brushed together and – and caused an explosion.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that scattered them all over, you know, so then I give you an – a article about **Bob Owens**, the – our engineering officer that was – was big in all of our – our missions and so forth, so he – well, I'll follow that later.

Q: Okay.

A: Or no, he – I-I'll pick that up now, because the **Horsa** glider was a British made, all wood, but a very large aircraft. Instead of carrying only 15 paratroopers, they could carry 30.

Q: Okay.

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A: Well, they had 29 in that, plus two pilots. And –

Q: So that made 31.

A: That makes a total of 31. The 31 plus the 22 made the 53 that sticks in my mind as far as the loss. Anyway, the – he had told them, he had – they – they sent the aircraft in and he wa – he noted in inspection of the aircraft that there was about a three inch space between the tail mounting and the fuselage, where it's supposed to be tight. The glue had – this was all glued together, it's a wood aircraft. Like this, glue had separated and he issued what they called a red tag. And every one of the **Horsa** gliders on the base was red tagged. But **Wing**, next step up, decided that they had to have a practice run of a troop car – of **647** aircraft pulling a s – the c – this digger glider. And so they assigned two 88th pilots, glider pilots to the task.

Q: Can I interrupt just for a second?

A: Yes.

Q: I just want to ma – establish that the manufacturer of the gliders was British.

A: That's right.

Q: But they had sold them to the Americans and this was now an American military operation.

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A: It was part of our – our assigned – we didn't pay any attention who – who furnished it, but we had a certain amount of planes, certain number of gliders, certain number of **CG-4** gliders, which is the smaller –

Q: Got it.

A: – certain – along with the others. They wanted a test to show the capability of the **C-47** aircraft towing that fully loaded glider. This fully loaded glider would go okay, even with that tail problem. So they were able to fly the gliders into the airport, but he said that the minute you take off, it probably will not be more than just a few seconds and that tail is gonna separate. Well, just exactly like he forecast, the – the tail broke off when the – when the tu – the **[indecipherable]** plane and the glider was probably about a hundred feet in the air. And course, then they drove straight into a little knoll. I recall the plane had dove straight into that kno-knoll, and every single one of those occupants was in the fr –

Q: In the middle.

A: – in a mass of flesh in the front –

Q: Oh my.

A: – of that glider. I wasn't there – I wasn't certainly the first there, but they had removed the bodies and then I – hearing about the crash, I drove over to that also, which is in the same area, in the same debris field as the crash of the two **B-17s**.

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And the guard – there was a guard assigned to it by then, and he says, well there was a – there's some – a human hip or something like a – a big roast –

Q: Oh gosh.

A: – still there. They'd removed all the human remains, but they'd missed that. So that's – that's number 30 some. Anyway, but the thing that was so – so – so remarkable is seeing 13 ambulances, wi – each with four bodies of people that were highly trained, moving off the field toward the cemetery.

Q: Oh my.

A: And that was imp – very impressive, I mean, in their own sort of way. Those are things that were not relayed to the American public.

Q: Were they co – were they considered secret, top secret? Could you speak about them to your relatives, to your wife?

A: Oh, we couldn't speak about anything, no, they – they took every one of our letters, and when they – when the relatives got them, there was a lot of black mark, cause they took out a lot of information, you could not mention anything.

Q: Okay.

A: Highly, highly – they – they – they edited everything that went out.

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Q: Must have been that those, you know, that – that you and others on the ground, when you saw the price of somebody's decision, the mistake, it – I mean, the anger at the – at the price that was paid.

A: Well, one step further, the man that tried to stop it, **Bob Owens** was on his way to a court martial, because he had ignored an order to allow the 88th pilots or planes to fly. The unfortunate thing is, they chose two fi – pilots from the 89th squadron, and a plane from the 89th squadron. There's now a memorial there to that particular thing that the prince – Princess **Margaret** was there at the dedication of it. But they got it a little wrong, I'm afraid they – they sh – I think they showed 88th pilots still on that marker, but it was only – it was actually 89th.

Q: Remind us again what part of **England** did this all occur?

A: It – it – it – it – it was in southern **England**, and **Greenham Common** was close to a town called **Salisbury**, and then that was a short distance towards **London** was – we were west of **London** about – probably about a hundred miles. There was **Salisbury**, **Reading**, and then **London**. The other way was a **Salisbury Plain**, where the big – that big prehistoric monument stood, you know?

Q: **Stonehenge**.

A: **Stonehenge**.

Q: **Stonehenge**.

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A: These are little details you forget. Anyway –

Q: Well, I'm amazed by how many details you remember, I really am. It's a lot.

A: Well, you know, the whole picture never came to me. Each one of these were separate little things, and I wrote about it a step at a time. I was going to use each one of these little things as a separate chapter in my book that I was writing – I was going to write. But lack of time and the fact that I'm still working, I'm still own my own business, I never got to write the book, but I didn't want these details to be lost, and so –

Q: Yeah.

A: – it was just – back in those days it was just me doing one job and nothing big about it, nothing. Nothing unusual about it, that's what I was supposed to do.

Q: Yeah.

A: But then when I look at the whole picture, the ninth troop carrier order [indecipherable] 1,000 planes, ordered, that the entire group of 1,000 planes be equipped, or be given the information, taught the information, I also came up with a – an idea to extend the range where they – you could see the signal from farther out when they're coming back, to try to find the airfield in bad weather. I was able to extend that by so-called piquing of the frequencies. I don't know now how I did it, but I did it back then. There – there were several things that the – right up to

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General **Williams**, who came to the base, and w – and – and interviewed everyone and so forth, and tried to figure out what all this fuss was about. They – he then ordered the entire – now comes the British – I don't recall I – but it's British Engineering Association that was very big, and they did design a lot of beautiful equipment, so forth. But they kind of took credit for the fact that this – these things happened, and they ordered the **RAF** and every – every part of their fleet to be using the same equipment. And so it's just recently that I could see the whole picture and had an interest in seeing the whole picture, that I finally decided that this was a lot more than I had ever given credit for, that every plane that flew in the **ETO**, European theater of operation at that time, u-utilized these advancements.

Q: Well, that's –

A: Well then, because of that, the **C-40s** – the 438s performed flawlessly in the invasion of **Normandy**. They lost no planes, they missed no targets, and the radio – the radar on all their planes worked perfectly, and they can – come back and eventually got the only st – unit citation ever received by a troop carrier group.

Q: Wow.

A: And groups were very – kind of tiny, there's dozens and dozens of groups, so we – we were kind of singled out for that. Based on that, I finally realized that what I had done probably helped a lot to our getting that citation.

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Q: Congratulations.

A: So I had to give myself some credit later.

Q: Well, congratulations.

A: Thank you.

Q: Congratulations.

A: Thank you.

Q: I'm also impressed that it sounds like innovation was something that was allowed.

A: Oh, defin –

Q: Innovation was something that was encouraged within the structure.

A: Encourage – oh, I got to give the upper level a lot of credit. Anything they saw that would improve the chances of a man getting back, and his aircraft and his crew getting back safely, was encouraged and certainly adopted, if it worked. And later they – I lost my train of thought for a moment.

Q: Something about – about the – the innovation being encouraged.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it – it – it – well, I wou – I would – I was trying to think of a certain instance where it was very, very easily – oh, th-th-the – this outcome was, of course, of course, the outcome was that probably untold number of lives were saved by pilots that could find their way back and didn't – di-didn't have to ditch, or

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didn't have to crash land or – or something like that. So then I told myself, you know, I never killed anyone. I never had to shoot someone, that's terrible, that's hard to live with. I never done anything, but I believe that I've saved lots of lives. And that – since that time I've had no ma – nightmares, I've slept very soundly. I have no regrets for anything – any judgment I made or anything. So that – that's –

Q: There's peace. There's peace in that.

A: Peace. That's exactly right.

Q: Let's go forward.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: We need to – we need to find out how it is that you come in contact with what we – what people realized later was the Holocaust, and the genocide against

Europe's Jews.

A: Right.

Q: Tell us – so, were you part of the invasion of **Normandy** or were you staying in **England** while the –

A: On – on that particular mission, I stayed in **England**, but on the Bridge Too Far mission, or Operation Market Basket –

Q: Okay.

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A: – which was a big mistake. Operation mark – Market Basket, I went along with my friend that was [indecipherable] landing pilot, I went along with him because the **CEO** thought it'd be nice to have more than one navigator in the squadron, in case the first plane got shot down. So he asked if I'd go along as a wing navigator.

Q: And Operation Market Basket was what?

A: It was where they tried to save all these bridges. A Bridge Too Far is probably more im – memorable.

Q: But the bridges in where, what part of **Europe**?

A: It's on the **Rhine** river, where they tried to – want to shorten the war by saving the bridges so they didn't have to rebuild bridges across the **Rhine**.

Q: Okay.

A: And that particular mission was to preserve those bridges, that – and so that the tanks, **Patton's** tanks, when they got there, couldn't blast across without having to build pontoon bridges.

Q: Okay.

A: He was moving very fast, and we were terribly important in the fact that he was able to move so fast because a **C-47** carried paratroopers into areas of drop. Then, on the way back, they – they came back and picked up the gliders and they threw it – flew them in. Then they came back and they flew into – like I took a mission into

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– on **D-Day** plus six, we flew into **Omaha Beach**, and we flew into a – a – a landing strip that had been cut hastily in the bluffs above **Omaha Beach**. And we landed there with flight nurses aboard, and picked up the terribly wounded – most terribly wounded of **Omaha Beach**, and we just had a constant stream of airplanes flying in and out, and bringing those people back to hospitals in **England**. And while I was there, I stepped out of the airplane, trying to help with the loading of the – of the litter patients and so forth. And a captain on the ground, in the infantry yelled at me, get back in that airplane, because you s – have greens on. The green – I didn't have the camouflage on, and he says, there's snipers in the area. So, of course, I was forced back into the airplane then. But that – I'm telling that because the – the – the **C-47** done so many other things. On [**indecipherable**] rush across, he outrun all of his tankers. He'd run out of gas and then couldn't go any further. Then we started loading up 6,000 pounds of gasoline on each airplane and flew a constant stream of these airplanes and flew a constant stream of these airplanes right behind **Patton's** army as he raced across **Europe**. We'd land in – in pastures, we'd land on roads. And this – these planes were so powerful, they could pull themselves out of mud.

Q: Wow.

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A: So they flew supplies, gasoline supplies and then loaded the medical patients, had litters that come down from the side on inside, they loaded the litter patients up and got out of there, and back to hospitals in **England**, you know. I'm trying to say that the airplane itself was such a big story, what it could do. And – and then, naturally, it was a natural carrier, so thousands and thousands and thousands of displaced people and survivors of the camps and survivors of the – of the slave labor camps, very close together, they – in one – the area we went in, the slave laborers and – and the ovens were right close by because they had to use the si – ovens to dispose of the slave laborers that was too – too weak to work any more. And then they had the **V-2** factory underground right there, you know.

Q: So –

A: And like the lady from the museum that said about a young girl, she was 16 and – and – and that's actually the people that we – that I was involved in helping get back into **France** and different areas.

Q: Okay, so let's – let's go to that point.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: You said you were in O-Operation Market Basket and that was – was that the right way of calling it?

A: That was before.

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Q: That was before.

A: Yeah.

Q: That was to try and save the bridges.

A: Yes, uh-huh.

Q: And did you – did the –

A: No, it was a total failure, and that total failure, **Montgomery** talked General **Eisenhower** into doing this, thinking it – it would s – cut time off the war, really it – it added a year to the war, because **Patton's** tanks didn't have the gas that we were flying in. We had to fly to save bridges instead of flying the gasoline into **Patton** where he could keep going.

Q: Got it.

A: The war would have ended one year earlier, had it not been for that mistake.

Q: So, when you're finally – the war does end, had you had any knowledge or contact of what – what it is that – that you eventually saw, or was the – were these flights that took place – I'm no – I'm not phrasing this correctly. Let's go this way: what's the first time that you flew on these planes, the **C-47s**, where it had contact with the survivors of the concentration camps, the survivors from slave labor camps, and displaced persons. Set that up for us.

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A: It was in – it was June the se – around the f-first of June and the second part of May of 1945.

Q: So the war had ended?

A: The war had ended by then, and we had lots of transport available and these – the need for getting those people out of there as fast as possible, was great. So –

Q: How did you kn – did you know who – what you were going to be meeting?

A: Yes.

Q: At that point did you know – what is it – what did you know about the camps before you even got there?

A: We knew we – by that time there was a lot of information out. And so – I mean, months and months earlier we knew about it. And – and that was, of course, one of the great reasons that – and I'm sure that it was on everyone's mind that if – if we don't k – if we don't knock the head off that monster, that these people, there will be nobody left. So we were aware of it, and we were very shocked by it. Of course, we were very shocked by it, way before June.

Q: Okay. And where did you take off from?

A: We took off from **Amiens, France**. We had moved just right – just before that, we'd moved into **Amiens, France** in an old World War II battlefield. We had the old World War I – I'm sorry, not two, one, World War I, correction. We had the

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trenches from World War I all – all around us, virtually, and there was this level patch of ground that they laid down the airstrip, made of steel – interlocking steel sections. And we had to be careful, cause if we went off our general area of operations, there was unexploded ordinance around, and people were getting – still getting killed from World War I armaments.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: And then the – the trenches were full of nice small birch trees, beautiful birch trees, and I got some pictures that eventually the museum will get. And there's a picture of a 88th and everything, made out of birch. Kind of a big entrance-like to our – our – our **Amiens** base. So that – that's where we took off from, and the idea was to be closer to carrying troops – gasoline with the various tanks and so forth.

Patton went so fast that the – his big express that they had designed to keep gasoline flowing to him, just couldn't – couldn't keep up, and he was being slowed down, and they got together and just a day or two later they come up with the idea of flying them in by troop carrier and flying out the wounded.

Q: Okay, so when you were taking off from **Amiens**, were you – did you take off with gas and came back with people?

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, it was primarily to go. We went there empty.

Q: Okay.

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A: No, we probably carried supplies in. [indecipherable] I don't recall, we – I -- we almost never flew empty.

Q: Okay.

A: And we knew that that area was being liberated and so forth, so we knew the need probably would be great. I'm sure we took medical supplies at least, and things of that sort in.

Q: So, do you recall how long the flight was, when you landed, where you landed?

A: We landed at **Halle, Germany**.

Q: **Halle**, mm-hm.

A: And I – I – I'm still not quite sure how far that was from the closest, I th –

Q: Well, **Halle** is in what was **East Germany**.

A: **East Germany**.

Q: **East Germ** – what became **East Germany**.

A: Yeah.

Q: **Buchenwald** was in **East Germany**, and – what became **East Germany**, and **Dachau** was near **Munich**, which was going to be in **West Germany**. So is –

A: This was quite a long flight.

Q: Yeah.

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A: It was – it was fairly long, because like, as I recall, and I was navigator on – on that flight. As I recall, the time of take-off, and then coming back over the German-French border was quite long. So it had to be back in **East Germany**.

Q: Okay.

A: I – I wa – I knew nothing about geography in those days.

Q: Okay. So when you landed, do you remember what you saw?

A: Well, when we landed, all we saw was the very carefully selected survivors that were strong enough for the flight. And they had been put – they had been organized by the 88th of all things, anti-aircraft – **AA**, anti-aircraft something. It was a ground based force that was real big in – in the liberation.

Q: Okay.

A: And – and their story was told in one of the articles I – I gave you. But we met up with them there, and – and took their assignment. They knew how many we could carry.

Q: How many could you carry?

A: Well, we could carry about 18 - 20 probably.

Q: Per plane?

A: Per plane.

Q: Okay.

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A: And then my job is to be sure that going back from navigating and so forth, being sure that they – they were doing okay. They sit in long rows on each side of the airplane.

Q: So they were sitting up.

A: They were sitting.

Q: The people were sitting up.

A: Huh?

Q: They people were sitting up.

A: They were sitting, yes, they were sitting.

Q: Okay.

A: They had – some of them had sticks over their shoulder with little bandanas or something with their little worldly goods in them. Very, very pathetic.

Q: And – yeah, tell me what it – what did they look like?

A: They looked like skeletons. Even though they could walk and everything, they looked like skeleton – miracle they would walk. Saying – some were worse, some were better, but they were – their skin was kind of tallow looking and their eyes were kind of hollow, their clothes were in tatters.

Q: Were they wearing the striped –

A: No.

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Q: No.

A: By then they'd changed into some other type of clothing, but it wasn't – it – it wasn't **Brooks Brothers**.

Q: Yeah.

A: And these, a lot of these were French that we have on this – had on this particular mission. And it was hard to tell, because they were mixed. Anyone capable, they weren't any discrimination, anyone capable of being flown out of that hellhole, were – were as-assigned a spot on one of the tho – hundreds and hundreds of flights that came and left. Their –

Q: Could you tell who was a man and who was a woman?

A: There – there were no women on our flight.

Q: Okay.

A: No women on our flight. They probably were seg-segregated, but our flights were all men.

Q: Were they – could you tell their ages, approximately?

A: It was impossible to tell, really impo – they all look old.

Q: Yeah.

A: But, imposs –

Q: How did – how did they walk?

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A: They walked with – some with – with canes and – and some – we had to help some of them in getting aboard the plane, cause there was a step down, kind of little ladder that come up into the plane and so they had to be helped – most of them had to be helped into the plane. And then – then again, water and so forth, important things that they needed, we supplied during the time. And candy bars, but we had to be very careful, because they gave us orders not to feed them, because in feeding them too rich a diet – they had to have a special diet – these are little details I can recall – special diet, and then they were fed, instead of gallons of water at a time, you know, just small amounts of water at a time and so forth. So – but it – it was very pathetic, and the – and the most – the most memorable part of the trip is when I made the announcement – had to go back among them, made the announcement that we were just crossing the French border of **Germany**. That's where I can't – to this day I – I can't talk about it. To this day I can't talk about it without breaking down. The joy, seeing smiles on these ke – skeletons. When [indecipherable] give me a lot of thanks that I had never b – had not been on the other side of that fence. But that's the – that's the main memory of that – that – we never flew any women to my knowledge that – you probably couldn't tell the difference between then anyway, but – but that was very difficult.

Q: Did they say anything? Did they say anything?

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A: No, they were – they could under – there – few of them could almost understand English, and I didn't have to sign language anything that we were going to be crossing over the German and French border. We were able to – course, we could have been able to do it by sign language just in case there wasn't English speaking survivors there. But – but that – that – that was so powerful that it kind of blanked out some of the other memories I had of it.

Q: Do you –

A: And – and we landed in **Amiens** in – in th – one of the flights that I recall, and – and it was kind of interesting, there was also – German prisoners were stationed the same place. And the German prisoners were doing pick up of cigarette butts and they were doing all the maintenance around our camp and our tents and so forth. And so that was such a thing, the superpowers and then we were flying these people in that now a part of us, you know, that –

Q: Did they see them?

A: Oh, I'm sure they saw them. But they were s – they were still in prisoner garb.

Q: Did you recall anything about how they left the plane?

A: Well, again, they had to be helped off, and – and I can just recall helping some of them off, and being sure they still had their belongings, and being sure they – being sure they were strong enough to join – someone was there at the time, with

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ambul – there were ambulances there. They were pulled up and the weaker ones were taken off by American ambulance. Where they went from there, I'm not sure.

Q: Okay.

A: Cause our – our job was to keep flying them back.

Q: Did you do more of these trips?

A: I did only two of them, and they were bo-both very similar, we come back to the same place. But there were – there were hundreds and hundreds of those trips. They were almost like invasion, they were just constantly – planes were flying in and coming back in different areas. Our planes – actually, I didn't go along on them, but our planes actually flew in and picked up Russians. And they hated it, to be taken back to Russian lines, they just hated that, because once they got to Russian lines, they communicated with the flight crews that they had to walk all the way back into their country, back to the ar – Red Army. They landed at Red Army lines –

Q: That's right.

A: We dropped them there. Then from there they had to walk all the way back into wherever they were going, and they said after that they probably would be shot for traitors, for not dying for their country.

Q: It happened, it happened.

A: Yeah.

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Q: It happened.

A: So –

Q: So you would pick up Russian prisoners from someplace in **Germany** and fly them to the Red Army lines, to another place in **Germany**?

A: No, the Russian prisoners were prisoners that were used as slave laborers.

Q: Okay.

A: You know.

Q: And – and so you would fly them east.

A: We would fly them east, yes.

Q: I see.

A: But not too far, because the Russian lines were not that far.

Q: Okay.

A: Then we flew Czechs to somewhere in **Czechoslovakia**, we flew people all over. And I have a detailed analysis of that in our written record there.

Q: So, it was not – so your f – i-if I understand correctly, your flight, where you helped bring survivors of the camps out to – to **France** was – there were two flights.

A: Yeah, that I – well, there were a lot more than two.

Q: I know, but the ones that you were invo –

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A: I had my job to do on the ground, I had to keep those radar sets working and stuff. So I just went along because a lack of a navigator or something of that sort, I filled in.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: As I can recall, that's all.

Q: Okay. Did they say anything to you? On either flight, did anyone speak with you?

A: I can't recall anything, except the unmistakable change in their mood when they crossed the border, I can't recall any conversations. Everything was so blo-blotted out by that j – that demonstration of joy that I – that took mo-most of my memory away from that.

Q: Did they stand up at that point?

A: Oh, those that could. They weren't supposed to, but they were – they were just – they were so joyous. Cert-Certain – certainly not everyone stood up, because they were – were not that strong yet. But it was like seeing a bunch of smiling dancers, you know, like they were putting on a big dance, so –

Q: I can only imagine that they – that they moved very slowly, if they were – if they were weak, you know.

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A: They – they – they we di – they were different, every – every person is different. So they moved – but they were strong enough to stand a flight. There's those that could not – they could still walk but were – weren't strong enough to survive a flight of any duration, they had to be under hospital care. As you know, the – as we discovered after we got to **Halle** that the camps were actually quarantined, and the doctors move in – moved in to the quarantined areas and took care of people, trying to save as many lives as possible, and – until they were brought along strong enough to move out of the area. But we learned a lot, a lot about the camps.

Q: You said mi – tell us a little more detail if you can, about the other flights that you took, in addition – oh, excuse me, before I get into that, both times you flew into **Halle**?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Okay, so –

A: Both times were almost identical.

Q: Okay.

A: I – I could have predicted on the second flight.

Q: The other flights you took in addition, with the Russian prisoners-of-war, or slave labors –

A: I didn't take that.

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Q: You didn't take that flight?

A: No, no, no, no.

Q: Oh, I see. That was somebody else who did?

A: Yeah, the – I mean, most of the flights were without my need, thank you.

Q: And what about the ones for the Czech – you said there were Czech people who were flown back from –

A: Yeah, there – our – our records show that in the May and June period, that we flew just about all over the continent, flying people back to their home, or their hometown. Lot of flights into **Paris**. Many flights, there were a lot of French soldiers taken prisoner, and they were treated as slave laborers.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so a lot of them come back and we – and the stories of that, they would – they would take them into **Paris** and the – the big airfield in fra – in **Paris**, and they had an honor guard and red carpet and so forth. And they were treated just like – like victors, you know, as they deplaned there. And there was a lot of those flights, lots of those flights. But in other flights was all over. **[knocking]** I got to answer that.

Q: Okay. Wait a second. Let me remove your trans mi –

A: No, no, someone can answer it.

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Q: I know, I know –

A: Yeah. [break]

Q: So where were we, we were in fra – are you ready, rolling?

Q2: Yeah.

Q: Okay. We were in **France**, you know, and you were taking about when French prisoners-of-war came home and how they were treated.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: I'd like to ask you now, how much longer did you stay in **Europe**. Tell me about what happened in your life after that.

A: Let's see. That was actually in June of 1945.

Q: Right.

A: Immediately after finishing the task of bringing all the survivors to their various destinations, we started packing up to come home. We had to go to **Europe** – had to go to – at that time we had to go to the **South Pacific**. And so, the month of June, latter part of June especially, we were packing all the supplies up and so forth, to be transported back to the **United States**. And then probably in July – July, August, July, August, September – probably about in early August, the – this is subject to correction, but it's in that time frame anyway. The air echelon, or the – all the airplanes loaded up all the gear that they could take aboard that was high – high –

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higher value, and they took off and flew via **Iceland** to **Nova Scotia**, back that route, to – I don't even know what field they landed on, but anyway, the ground echelon which I was on, were packed up and put aboard a liberty ship, or is – it was a victory ship, a victory ship. There was two types of ships; the liberty was the slowest and ugliest. The victory ship was a troop carrier and – and did about everything, but it was faster. It took less s – escort. They – they took around some – somewhere in August and we then board, this slower ship came in probably sometime in September. And we landed – we landed in **Boston**, and you know, some – some ways the – what we did over there was clearer than what happened afterwards. And anyway, we landed in **Boston**, and course **[indecipherable]** every time we came back there was a huge demonstration, the Red Cross people were there and we got the first milk we had taste – real milk, since we left.

Q: Wow.

A: Everything was powdered. Then my wife met me. I can recall she had a black – big black hat on, dressed in black, beautiful. And again, we then drove – we di – I think she came with her parents or some – somebody that was able to drive. We drove back to their home in **Russell Street** in **Connecticut**. And there we decided what we're – talked about what our future was going to be. And – and back there, we decided to – I had saved a lot of money, I didn't smoke or drink when I was

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overseas. So all the money that I was allotted for that went into a s – a belt around my waist, and I was able to – and then I turned them into money mor – money orders. By the time I got to the **States**, we were – I had quite a little, I had probably several thousand dollars, I don't know. Anyway, we bought a – the latest vehicle manufactured, **Pontiac**, the last wave of passenger vehicles that were manufactured before the war, turned into wartime status. And we decided we'd go to **California** because we'd never been there.

Q: So you were out of the war? You were out of the w – e-effort for the **Pacific**, the war had ended for you, and everyth –

A: I missed one point.

Q: Okay.

A: During the time that we're talking about and the time we're packing up to go, news came the atomic bomb had been dropped, and so immediately we knew that the war in **Japan** was over. We knew that our wartime experience was over. I mi – I missed that.

Q: Okay. What –

A: So anyway, we drove to **California** for the first – go ahead.

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Q: Hang on, I – before you – to get there. When you came back, how much of what you had – how long – first of all, how long had you been overseas? If you left in late '43, it was?

A: I left in late '43.

Q: And you came back in almost se –

A: Late '45.

Q: Late '45.

A: Only two years.

Q: Less than two years.

A: A-A-All that had been compressed into t-two years. An –

Q: Did you feel like you were a changed person?

A: I never give it a thought.

Q: Okay.

A: I never give – I didn't have nightmares like so many did. We were able to look to the future and say okay, where do we go from here? I decided to get into business rather than – rather than take the **G.I.** Bill of Right – bill that sent so many people to college. And so we finally went across the country with this little car and – and I s – was able – we were staying at – we ha-had a destination of my uncle's place. My uncle, his name is **Callie**(ph). And they lived on – in **Santa Monica**. So we came in

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with him, and he was a painter, and I spent several days painting. And so I started making money just about soon as I got back, because our – our pay was delayed again. By that time I was a captain and – and the pay wasn't too bad from the service. Anyway, leading beyond that as fast as we can, we received a lot of the four engine air – **U.S.** Air Force planes back to **Douglas** aircraft field. We re – we started to renovate them, I was involved in – I knew wiring and so forth, so I was involved in the electrical side, and we spent several – I spent almost a year with them, and about 1946 – '47. Meantime our dau – we had a daughter born in 1946, **Beverly – Beverly June**, and she is now retired. And also working, they've had to call her back. She was a nurse at University of **Colorado** medical center. Anyway, going on from that, in 1949, I opened my first business, which was a ra-radi – a radio-television operation. And I spent quite a number of years with – with the star community like **Clark Gable**, and all these big stars, including this **Disney** – I mean, including the gr – the – **Jack Carson, John Wayne**, and many, many, I mean, we had the world's [**indecipherable**] release for signed photographs.

Q: So that meant you owned a television company?

A: Yes. I owned a – I opened it up and it ran for about 10 years.

Q: What was it called?

A: **Valley Video Service.**

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Q: Okay.

A: And later we opened **B** and **D** Electronics. **B** and **D** being **Beatrice** and **Dutch**, **B** and **D** electronics. And we handled the entire 13 western states and distribution of electronic parts for television and radio and – and accessories. And then I eventually wanted to see more of what goes on in the real world, so I stepped out into various jobs that led up to me designing a anti-collision device in the 60s, and I think it was 1965 when the – the first jet aircraft flying passengers came out. Two – two **TWA** planes had crashed over the land – over the **Grand Canyon**. And I said, what a terrible, terrible problem, and what a terrible thing to happen, when there was a solution.

Q: Yeah.

A: And again, I used what was available in my radar training and so forth, same – same equipment, same stuff, and I designed an anti-collision device. And – and it – believe it or not, it was just the same basic idea; why not take what's already proven by war, by everything and turn it into something to save lives? Anyway, there again, after m – drawing the design kind of roughly, I decided before I waste any more time that I would go back to **Washington**, and meet with the – the **FAA**, and so they set up an appointment a half an hour. And we got – my – my brother then met me at that point, and – cause he was a pilot that had not finished his training

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before he was sent overseas. And he met me, and we met with the **FAA**, and I showed the the design, I showed them the – where – where I had had success of that in **Europe**, it had actually worked, and so forth. And the half hour meeting turned into four hours, the whole afternoon was taken, and at the end they says, look, we know – we're pretty sure that this will probably save 95 percent of our collisions, he says, but unless you get to a hundred percent, there's no way we can ever get it through Congress, or get it approved. So – and I – and I also met with people at **M-Magnavox** Corporation, a big electronics firm. They al-also designed a system. So I had communications with them, and they had the same – same luck. Eventually I – I made a ri – a di – a revelation – or I made a disclosure to **Bendix** Aircraft, and I says, here I'm disclosing this, what can you do with it? You have more power than any little one person. Well, they di – had the same results, they said yes, it would work, and so all I got was the satisfaction of knowing the thing would work.

Q: Oh.

A: Beyond that, I got into my own business. I – I joined as a chairman of a public electronics firm that made specialized cathode ray tubes, the display device that they use in air traffic control. We design little tiny tubes that they use on helicopter pilot sites – air – gun sites. And we designed – we also designed a – a ground radar

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type of system that would cut the earth down, I don't remember how many feet, but then show the side of it in layers, for finding oil.

Q: Wow.

A: And that was a sale – we made a sale of that device to **Brown Root**, a division of [indecipherable]. And that – let's see – lost my train of thought, what was the last –

Q: Oh, you were talking about some of the business ventures and – and – and the –

A: Oh yes, I was talking about that one.

Q: Yeah.

A: And this was – had to have a silver oxide type of – of paper that flowed past a heater. The heater design was – had to be very even heat over a s – a stretch of heater element, and the paper flowed over it, it was heat developed. And the fact that I had worked at two heat – specialized heat manufacturers as vice president of – of new – new product design and so forth – two separate ones, I had a lot of knowledge about that particular product, and we were able to solve that problem, and that was sold to **Brown and Root**, where it went from there, that's where my – my memory trailed off, I don't know.

Q: Yeah. Did you may – so it sounds like you were both in business ventures, and also inventing.

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A: Well, the inventing was kind of a – again, a side – a side product of – for the heat companies I invented a couple of devices for boats. One to guard against reversal of the polarity of the power coming out of the boat from the dock. Cause if it was the wrong reverse, i – the – it would eat up the prop and everything else, it had to be the right di – the right polarity. And I designed a de-device that would automatically reverse it in the device, rather than have – have the damage. The other one was – what the heck was it? The other one was pretty interesting, but I can't remember the details.

Q: It's okay. If you do, we'll talk about it.

A: Yeah.

Q: Those two compressed years that you were in **Europe**, if I recall you had two sons and a daughter?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Did you ever talk to them about what you had experienced, what had gone on there? Did you ever talk about these things?

A: Not during their – because again, we didn't want to talk much about it, you know, little pieces of – didn't mean anything to us. My little job, what – what's inter – what's interesting about having a little radar job? So, I couldn't say I was a – a big hero. By the way, one of my clients was **Audie Murphy** when I was in the

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radio-television business. And also the ace of **South Pacific**, **Pappy Boyington**, and also General [indecipherable]. These are all customers of mine, as well as virtually the entire film industry. But then again, I didn't think it was important enough to talk about it, I was no – I was no hero, you know.

Q: But the various events, I mean, kids are im – are always a – interested in what their dad did.

A: Yeah.

Q: And for their – them, their dad is the hero, no matter what.

A: Oh, of course, you could be any –

Q: Yeah. But then, you said until recently, many things had been classified.

A: That's exactly right, I couldn't talk about so much, so I just learned not to talk.

Q: Okay.

A: Especially the **South Pacific** – no, the south – southern **France** invasion, that was top, top secret, I was with – **Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.** was in charge of **PT** squadron in the **South Pacific**. And this was – as part of the invasion of our aircraft and riders and paratroopers, they had to have certain locations marked with no deviations so they could make their turns to the new direction. So they could make their turns, in my case, over the last marker to hit the area in southern **France** that the bombers had pulverized, so that they ran with the least chance of being shot

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down. Well, I was a-assigned to – to his squadron, to operate their radar to locate that spot in the middle of the **Mediterranean**.

Q: Can you repeat this – excuse me – I think you said that he was in charge of a squadron in the **South Pacific**. You mean –

A: No, I – I meant the so – southern **France**, southern **France**.

Q: Okay, so **Douglas Fairbanks** was in charge of such a squadron in southern **France**?

A: He – he was thought of at the time as a playboy with a degree – the june – lieutenant rank that was just playing around, but that guy was a hero.

Q: Was he?

A: He was marvelous. And there's so much to tell, but couldn't. Was – his whole operation was top secret until after the **Vietnam** war.

Q: No kidding.

A: So, during that time, I – you know, I could not talk.

Q: Well, what can you tell us now about it?

A: Tell you everything now, but I – I just started to memorialize it, so I can't –

Q: Right.

A: – I don't want to publicize anything yet, until I've got it in a better form, and you'll get it as soon as I do.

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Q: Okay.

A: That'll be – that was gonna be one of the chapters in my book.

Q: Okay. Well, is there anything else that you would want to share with us today about what it was that you experienced, what you'd want people to know?

A: The big – the biggest subject that I wanted people to know, was obvious at the meeting yesterday, was the fact that the 90th troop carrier squadron got a very, very bad rap from the author of “**Band of Brothers**,” name was **Stephen Ambrose**. He wrote that entire – supposed to be truthful series, all about the paratroopers, 101st and 82nd, which were marvelous and they – they thought the world of us. All about that, but he never interviewed one air – one [indecipherable] pilot to get the story of who carried them in and what happened on some of their problems. They interviewed people that had – had f – had been on aircraft that weren't as trained as the 438th, and they dropped their paratroopers in – in the wrong spots, in the marshes. And they're the people, the paratroopers were interviewed. But I have something I want to read into the – into the record, about what a paratrooper said about us. And my biggest goal of this entire operation is to focus on the fact that the 90th troop carrier squadron of four forces – I'm saying forces, or incidents or whatever, four of the most important, famous in World War II, one of them was the 90th troop carrier command, and they're – they've been downgraded an-and kicked

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and so forth. I wanted to restore the truth about that – that squadron of a thousand planes.

Q: Okay, hang on a second. What time are we at right now?

Q2: It's after 12, let me check for you.

Q: All right.

Q2: I – I – when we had our little chat with the lady, we were at 12 - oh something – 12:24 – 12:25.

Q: 12:24. I would suggest – do you – let's cut right now.

End of File One

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Beginning of File Two

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mr. **Ernest Dutcher**, on February 19th, 2013 in **Encino, California**. And Mr. **Dutcher**, we wanted to follow up on a few things that we talked about earlier. Just one of them that – one question about your transport of survivors. Did you ever meet any of these people who had been on the plane with you, or any of the other planes that took them out from **Germany** to **France** for medical attention?

A: Unfortunately, no.

Q: You never did?

A: No.

Q: No. And you never came across anybody's story who said that they had been on such a plane, whether they wrote about it, or it was filmed, or anything like that?

A: That's the thing about the 90th air force, it was just forgotten about, apparently –

Q: Okay.

A: – and none of the things are – were every publicized a lot.

Q: Okay. Now let's step back and talk in more detail about – you mentioned

Douglas Fairbanks Jr., and his role.

A: Mm-hm.

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Q: And we started to – to talk about that a little bit. But explain exactly where in the picture he fit. You know when you were talk – explaining to us about the squadrons and the wings and you know, the lo – what was – what was his, not just his rank, but what was his job?

A: His job was to mislead the Germans into where we were going to land at almost every landing. His job at the specific southern **France** invasion was to use about 10 of his 12 **PT** boats in a squadron, they were equipped with very powerful ma – amplifiers and loudspeakers. And he would race along the sh – it'd race along the shore to about 40 knots, or 50 miles an hour, so very fast in the water. And they would turn on these – these things as if there were 10,000 boats out there. Very, very loud and very deceiving. At the same time he'd have a fl – a plane flying and dropping what they call window.

Q: And what's that?

A: Window is strips of tin foil. And it – the strips of tinfoil would look, on the German radar, like a whole big fleet of airplanes coming. And they were all headed for this – this fake landing site he designed. He also designed rubber paratroopers of different sizes, make it look like there was a lot of them. They were inflatable, and then they dropped those from the planes at some point, that looked like there's the place it's gonna be, so the Germans would move all their reinforcements over there.

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Which then, of course, made the – the real invasion point much safer for the planes coming in. Specially planes like **C-47s**, that did not have an ounce of firepower on it. It was very vulnerable, so –

Q: So, did this happen simultaneously as the **Normandy** invasion or just prior, or –

A: No, no, me – this happened in August of the same year's invasion. We – we moved down to southern – we – we were stationed in a wheat field, in the mid -- middle of **Italy**, and – called **Canino** airfield – air base. And from there, we did our training and so forth. And then, I was picked out from the four radar officers of our 438th group, to be the one to go on detached service for the navy. That was a navy operation. So I was then broke away from the group, and moved down – or broke away from our squadron and moved down to **Corsica**. And at **Corsica** there's a base for these – a harbor for these boats and this – adjacent to the harbor were their living quarters, and – and mess halls and so forth. And – and I – I lived like a navy person at that time and like – very, very graciously entertained. I was kind of the – the top person there for awhile, because I was the one they picked to put the marker beacon in the middle of the **Mediterranean** so that the final turn of the aircraft with the li – with the pilot – with the paratroopers first and then followed by –

Q: The rubber paratroopers?

A: Huh?

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Q: The rubber paratroopers?

A: No, no, these – this is the real thing –

Q: Okay.

A: – the real thing. The reason for me being there is I had to man that light, and we did it on a **PT** boat. But the real tr – the fake paratroopers was his design.

Q: Okay.

A: And he – far from being a playboy, this guy was valuable. So valuable in fact that all of our participation had to be sworn secret, we couldn't discuss it with our own family. You couldn't discuss it with your s – your bunkmate, you know. And – and it – all that secrecy was not lifted til after the **Vietnam** war. That's why nothing has been printed about it, and as far as I know, I'm the only living person that has the knowledge of what went on.

Q: Did you meet **Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.**

A: Pardon?

Q: Did you meet him? **Douglas Fairbanks** ju –

A: Oh, absolutely, I had lunch – we ate at the same mess hall. He was very self-depreciating person, very nice person.

Q: And it was his thoughts, his ideas –

A: Mm-hm.

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Q: – for these types of diversionary and misleading tactics?

A: Yeah, he got his – his start with **Mountbatten**, out of **England**, and he got his commission out of **England**, and then eventually was transferred to a navy commission and – and there he started doing his dirty work.

Q: And would you say successfully?

A: Very successfully, yes, very.

Q: Okay. Is there anything else to that episode that you'd like to add about him?

A: All I – I only saw him at – at the mess hall, that's the only time that – and usually – usually in the evening, after we got through with our maneuvers, and we went through several weeks of training on – on the **Mediterranean** at different points on the **Mediterranean**, under – I was assigned two of the **PT** boats that were heavily armed with 40 millimeter anti-aircraft guns and 20 millimeter and twin 50 calibers, and – and about a half a dozen death – depth chargers – charges for submarines, there were still submarines in the area. And also a couple – about four torpedoes. This little 78 foot boat, wooden boat, carried all those. And to – we practiced targets, we practiced torpedoing the ship and we'd go straight at the ship at high speed, and then make a hard left, and let the torpedo go before we made our turn. That way we were out away from the blast zone. Then, at night, you know, were – we were kind of very flexible. At night we would pull into a little canal

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where there's trees and shrubbery over us, and we'd stay the night there, and about daybreak we'd go back out to our training. So that part has not been documented yet, and that – that's what I'm involved in trying to get pulled together before I wa – I – I don't want to release the whole thing yet.

Q: Okay.

A: Cause the whole thing is not here yet.

Q: Got it, yeah. You mentioned earlier also that there had been these tragic and senseless mistakes in **England**, when due to – you know, due to decisions made by – by leaders, you know, military leaders and also just the sheer number of flights, that there were these accidents that resulted in victims. Do you recall any other such instances where – where there were – there were these sad events that happened?

A: Well, the biggest one of all was Operation Market Basket.

Q: Okay.

A: Had that not been diverted by General **Montgomery** selling the idea to mi – **Eisenhower** – these are all our opinions, not only mine, but a lot of – lot of our people, that those tanks of **Patton** could have been continuing on their unobstructed drive to **Germany**, and would have saved one year war.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's the biggest of all.

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Q: Yeah.

A: And –

Q: And that's because the gasoline – you said that the gasoline was used –

A: Oh, yes, the –

Q: Yeah.

A: – old workhorse **47**, when it was carrying – we would fly gasoline in and land at little pastures, or muddy fields. Anywhere that there was a space big enough that a plane could roll out in. We'd even help – when I say we, it's the people aboard the plane, cause I had enough to do at the base in **England** to keep the planes' radar prop – properly working. But they would help unload the planes with the gasoline, and they carried about fi – 6,000 gal – 6,000 pounds of gasoline. At eight pounds per gallon, you can calculate how many **Jerry** cans there were. Anyway, they were the standard **Jerry** cans, laid inside the cabin on the floor. And they – they not only un – helped unload those cans and – so the tanks can be refueled, they were – they f-far outran their – their surface supply tr – tanker trucks. They were going that fast. So we would da – we would unload the gas cans and then load up the wounded, the most seriously wounded, and then bring them back with the litters that came down from the side, inside the plane, and flew them back to hospitals in **England** and

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then make another – sometimes they made two trips a day, each pilot, they were very tired.

Q: I can imagine.

A: But we – I have no doubt, myself, that the war would have ended one year earlier, at least a year earlier, maybe even sooner. Cause keep in mind, all this is compressed now. Everything we're talking about is compressed into a two year per – time frame.

Q: Yeah, yeah. What about civilian casualties in **England**?

A: Oh, they were high.

Q: Were they?

A: In – in my start of my book, I said, my book was going to be entitled, I was there. On the first chapter, I describe the fact that I loved ice skating. I met my wife that way, so forth, before I left. I loved ice skating. And they have a nice ice skating rink in one of the suburbs of **London**. So I used to go frequently into as soon – as often as we had any sort of a pass, I'd take the train into **London** and take the subway, the famed British subway system, which was also their air raid shelters, we'd take – I'd take it out to the rink, which was, as I say, a suburb. And after tha – after that, I-I would come back to the Red Cross building, where as soon as we heard the sirens, everyone was supposed to dive for the shelters. We got to the point

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where we were playing Russian roulette, that it would – it's not going to hit us, you know, type of thing, you know. And so, when the **V-2s** come over, they were st – sort of a staccato sound, very staccato. And when they stopped being staccato is when we had to worry, because then they were – the power'd been cut off and they just indiscriminately fell into the heart of **London**. And of course, there was thousands of British civilians killed during that time. I think they lost many more civilians than they did soldiers.

Q: Close –

A: Oh then –

Q: Yeah.

A: – another time, we had to go on a – a trip to pick up supplies, up to **Coventry, England**, and you remember the **Coventry** thing where a bomb hit a air raid shelter, and they were all sealed in there, forever.

Q: What about –

A: And –

Q: Mm-hm, yes?

A: – driving by **Coventry**, we ran across a British fish and chips place and we – and the fish and chips were put into newspaper, old newspaper, and we – then we drove out of town. We didn't get very far, but we had to turn around and come back and

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get a second order of it. They were so delicious, even though they had a little print sometimes on a – on a French fry. So I say –

Q: What about **Salisbury**?

A: Pardon?

Q: You said – you mentioned earlier to me that – that there used to be dances near **Salisbury**.

A: Oh, they'd a hold officer dance at the officers' club and – on our base. And they would go out and get these young – these girls, the ones – the – the single guys, the single pilots and all, they could go out and do that. Us old married people had to stick to our inventing. So anyway, they would bring them into the base and then had the responsibility to take them back to their home after.

Q: Were there any s – were there any incidents there of – of civilians, the – some of the girls who might have been hurt, that –

A: That's the only ones I know of – of –

Q: Well, tell us about that incident.

A: Pardon?

Q: Cause it – tell us about that incident that mentioned to me off camera.

A: Oh, I thought it was on camera.

Q: No, it wasn't on camera.

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A: Yeah, well that's – this is the – during that particular period of time, the headlights of the **Jeeps** and every ground vehicle, including civilian cars, if any, had to have a little slit in it. Light was projected out of that slit, enough, not to see too much of the road or anything, but for other drivers to be able to see it. So they – these two young – young pilots who were taking their – their girlfriends for the night, they had picked them up and brought them in for the dance, then they were – no, I'm sorry, it's the other way around. They, having picked them up at their homes, were coming into the base, before the dance. And the small headlight – small square of light wasn't enough for them to – to be stopped – or have the pilot see it in time for him to do something, but the pilot – a pilot was coming back from a mission, a night mission where he was training. And he was just crossing the highway where the **Jeep**-load of people were coming his way. And his right prop started chewing up the **Jeep**, and – and it did result in the – one pilot was killed immediately and another pilot lost an arm and a leg, and the two girls were fatally injured, but they didn't die instantly.

Q: Oh my.

A: They – **Bob Owens** tells the story, that he was right next to his office, right next to the accident, so he was first on the scene, and he was holding the girls in his arms.

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Q: And was all this classified information? Was all this –

A: Oh, of course.

Q: Okay.

A: This information never would get out to the public, cause the public was only fed information that was positive. Very few of the loss – very few of the setbacks were ever mentioned to the public. And I think even the “**Bridge Too far**” movie that was made, I don’t think the impression was given that it was a failure at all. It was just another very exciting mission. And these were items that were not fed to the public for one big reason. The public was doing a magnificent job of producing all of the war materials that were needed for that huge undertaking, for all of the different participants, including **Russia. Russia** and **England** mainly, and the French, when they were able to. And had they released any of this information, it might have destroyed some morale back home. And they had a good reason, I think for doing it. So the fact that they didn’t tell the home front everything, I can understand.

Q: Yeah, yeah. But do you feel better now that it’s possible to talk about these things? Do you think people need to know about them?

A: I think they really need to know, because th – you know, a varnished – a varnished truth is not the truth. And if they want to know the truth about what went

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on, and I think most people do – I’ve talked to my grandson and I’ve talked to my son and every one of them agree that this is the right way to go, is let it out.

Q: Let’s turn now to something that you have said earlier that was very important to you. Tell us about the book, **“Band of Brothers,”** and the author **Stephen Ambrose** and the story that he told. Tell us about the story that he told and where y – and after that, what you think is misleading about that story.

Q: Well, the **“Band of Brothers”** was worldwide, it was a very, very successful movie. And of course, the people that made the movie was following a script that was flawed. So I don’t fault any of the actors or any other participants in that movie, including the paratroopers involved. The only thing that was missing was the fact – and I think a very important fact was missing, was that no pilot, no member, no –

Q: Excuse me, I have to stop you. What was the story of the **“Band of Brothers?”**

A: Oh – oh –

Q: Can you gi – can you summarize to us what was the story of the **“Band of Brothers?”**

A: It was a series of very, very exciting and very apparently true – apparently true story of the 101st and 82nd airborne being dropped into **France**, on **Normandy**, on **D-Day** for example. Mainly on **D-Day**. That’s where the most damage was done to our reputation.

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Q: Okay.

A: These people that they interviewed, happened to be people that were on a plane that went into this terrible cloud bank that they encountered just before the drop zones.

Q: Excuse me again, I have to interrupt.

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: Are you talking now about the story of “**Band of Brothers**,” or about interviews done for the story?

A: Well –

Q: I’d like to know more, but what was the story of the “**Band of Brothers**?”

A: Oh, the “**Band of Brothers**” –

Q: And what were the points that were being made in that story?

A: Oh yeah, it was mainly a story about their – their training, their formation back here in the **States**. There was different **CDs**, I think there’s about seven **CDs**.

Q: Okay.

A: And the – i-it would go from home here at their training bases here. Then they’d go to **England** and their training in **England**, in the countryside and all their – how they got acquainted with the British people and so forth. Then they had the story of the actual – one of the – I think the third **CD**, somewhere in there, it told about their

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actual landing in **Normandy**, the first people ever to touch foot in **Normandy**, and – since the Nazis took over. Wonderful story, had it been – not – not been mis-mistold [**indecipherable**] it was then the race across – across **France** and the various strategies and the big battles they were involved in and – and – and – and then **Bastogne**, they were the heroes of **Bastogne**. They deserved every accolade they could get, cause they were a tough bunch.

Q: Okay. And at what part do you say what was shown in the movie, or in the – written in the book, where you say it damaged the reputation of the 101st, is that what your – is that what you –

A: No, the reputation of the ni-ninth troop carrier command.

Q: Okay. How – what – how was the ninth troop carrier command portrayed?

A: They were portrayed as a bunch of over-the-hill airline pilots that had been converted to drive these – these big bu – these big trash trucks, or – you know, big, big airplanes. It was unflattering, I can't remember the exact words, but any event, I got a story from Captain **Gates**, was then a Major **Gates** –

Q: Hang on a second, I'm still – before we go there –

A: Yeah.

Q: So, they were portrayed as over-the-hill airline pilots who didn't know what they were doing, is this what the issue was, or –

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A: Well, they knew what they were doing, but they were just drivers of transports, that's it.

Q: Oh, airplane transports, okay.

A: Air-Air-Airplane drivers.

Q: Okay.

A: They were the – the – the indicated – indications seemed to be that that group of pilots were the lower echelon of pilots, you know.

Q: Okay. So that's how it was in “**Band of Brothers**.” What was it like in your view, and according to your experience?

A: Just the real story, that I'd kind of like to get out, to help bring the fame of the – the real accomplishment of the 90th troop carrier command, bring it into the truth.

Q: Okay.

A: And they did marvelous things, they did really marvelous things. First of all, instead of being old, inexperienced airline pilots, who knew nothing about night at – night flying or anything, they were really highly trained. They were highly trained in the **States**. I ver – I mentioned at lunch, they were highly trained in the **States** by being forced to fly five feet over the highest obstacle for 500 miles.

Q: Right.

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A: And they were highly trained because I held for many weeks before **D-Day**, I held schooling in all the different aircraft – different radar in the aircraft. Every pilot knew how to operate the **Rebecca** gear, which was the main – one of the main airborne navigation pieces. He knew all about operating the new British **G** system that was brought aboard by another story. We did an awful lot of training, these were highly trained people. They were trained so well in fact, that on the first – they were chosen by **Eisenhower** to be the lead group to lead the whole – whole group of aircraft participating in the invasion, into the fields of fire, like we say here, into **Germany**, into **Normandy**.

Q: Okay, into **Normandy**, **France** first, yeah?

A: Yeah, we were first. We – we allowed the troop carrier, the 101st air – troop carrier, and the 180 – and the 82nd troop carrier to be the first put boots on the ground. But they wouldn't have been able to put those boots on the ground were it not for the fact that we were very proficient in finding the spot where they should be, as well as not – not losing anyone that we were aware of, in the flight part of the operation. So then they turned around, and they come back to the field and picked up the gliders. And they hooked one glider per aircraft, and took off. Flew those gliders on in and one of my very close friends, and the most senior of glider pilots

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was killed in that particular operation. Before that it was flawless, no one had died, no planes were lost. And the – they flew that group in.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was Lieutenant **Darling**, and he has a cross at one of the close cemeteries there that I've got pictures of, so forth. But the stories of those pi – those troop c – not troop – the pilots of those glider pilot – pilots of the gliders, I'll get it straight, became fighters when they got on the ground. They were just part of the fighting group, so they took their – their different weapons, and they tried hard – they're supposed to get back as fast as they could. And some of the – some of them had some harrowing stories to tell, of how Germans would massacre the soldiers that were in some of the downed gliders, and injured and so on. It was too much detail to even [indecipherable] now. With one exception, the – one of the pilots that came back was a very quiet redheaded glider pilot. He – they cut loose from the tow aircraft and while he was landing there was a German soldier in the middle of the little hedgerow field, and he had a – what they call a burp gun, you know, that's a automatic pistol. He was waiting for them to get close enough. In other words, they were dead ducks. So he kicked the windshield out of his – he was a co-pilot. He kicked the windshield out and took his gun, took careful aim – and the p – a glider, after it's cut th – cuts loose is very stable, very steady. He – he – he got the –

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killed this German soldier and saved, of course, that whole planeload. One other thing, the German were standing in the middle of the field with Germans in all the hedgerows around, waiting to shoot, and they were using wooden bullets. Now I don't think – I don't think that's well known. Wooden bullets were little coated, hardwood bullets and they would travel a certain – they would travel a certain distance before losing their velocity.

Q: Okay.

A: So before it hits the opposite hedgerow, that was twice as far away as the German in the middle, they would fade out.

Q: Okay.

A: If they hit a person, though, they were devastating.

Q: Were they like exploding bullets?

A: They almost had about the same effect to your internal organs. They would never pass through you, it'd just tear you up terribly. So they were vicious, and – but as I say, I haven't heard from anyone else anywhere about them. I even brought some back, and eventually my kids probably was playing with them and stuff, lost them.

Q: So you – so does – those bullets were being aimed at the gliders?

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A: Yeah, they were being wa – they were being aimed at the glider pi – glider load. The paratroopers, or glider troopers, they were called. The nose of the glider would tilt up on landing, and then they could race out from the front, in different directions. But they – he was waiting to shoot them as they were coming out, and the ones around the hedgerows were waiting to get them with the wooden bullets, without hurting their own people.

Q: And that's why they used them –

A: Yeah.

Q: – because they lost their velocity before they'd hit the other hedgerow.

A: Exactly, exactly.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: And were they able to use them, or did they – I mean, were they – what happened to the glider – were any of the gliders lost?

A: On this particular one, the Ge – the Germans were not in the hedgerows, this is just –

Q: Okay.

A: – a situation I brought up as a side issue.

Q: Okay.

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A: But on this one, where he killed the – his potential executioner –

Q: Yes.

A: – they didn't have any in the hedge – hedgerows there, he – he was able to get out everyone out and he got back.

Q: Okay, so why do you bel – do you think – have you given a full story, according – you know, according to what you believe we need to know about what was the true professionalism of the pilots and those who were piloting the glider planes, or is there more that you want to add to show that they really did know their stuff?

A: Well, the best evidence is the fact that they got the presidential citation – it's either the presidential or war department sar – citation, some call it presidential. A citation as being the only group of a – of the – the thousand airplanes that were flying, the only group to win that award. And then the 88th, other group that liberated your actual slave labor camp there, also the 88th, won the same distinguished citation, as a unit citation. Every member of the group could wear the ribbon.

Q: Okay. What did the ri-ribbon look like?

A: It was a gold framed blue, just plain blue. I was gonna bring them along, but I couldn't find them.

Q: Okay. So why did the “**Band of Brothers**” get it wrong?

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A: Because the author got it wrong. He was a famous author. And of cour –

Q: Mm-hm. What was his name?

A: His name is **Stephen Ambrose**.

Q: Okay.

A: And we ax – when I say we, some of the troop carrier people, such as Major **Gates**, who's now Colonel **Gates**, and he wrote an email to me that was very revealing, he said – he's the one that said that not one troop carrier pilot to his knowledge – and he was quite h-high up there, had ever been interviewed for this. So although we – it was a wonderful movie, and a very successful movie – we can't blame any of the actors, or we can't blame any of the participants in it, cause they had no knowledge that he had not interviewed any of these. However, the damage had been done. And a lawsuit was started – was started by the troop carrier group against **Ambrose**, not against "**Band of Brothers**." And it was proceeding at the time he died.

Q: I see.

A: **Ambrose** died, and then the – the troop carrier grou-group dropped the lawsuit.

Q: And what were they charging him again –

A: Against de – defamation, I mean – I mean, just ruining the reputation of an entire – an entire command.

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Q: How many people would that involve?

A: Well it involved 1,000 aircraft and 1,000 aircraft involved at least five people per aircraft and plus the ground personnel that equal that, so you can kind of use the math on it

Q: Sure.

A: – and figure out that an awful lot of people – some people didn't care, you know, they got out of the war, hey I'm still alive, what am I complaining about? But some did, and it's still hurting us through the fact that the Holocaust happened. Yesterday showed the – showed the people that liberated – the different groups that liberated it. And it showed the 101st, it showed the 82nd. But there was a vacant spot down below there that didn't show the 90th air f – air force. Because the thought was that nobody but ground people were involved in the liberation. So that's the thing that –

Q: How was – forgive me for this, but was there a direct way that the 90th aircraft was involved?

A: Well, when – our – our – our thought would be – maybe it's only mine, but our thought would be that the fact that this plane shortened the war so much that – that a lot of the Holocaust survivors benefited from the fact that – and were still alive today because of the – even **Eisenhower** said that.

Q: Okay.

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A: Said that we were such a big force in ending the war, so – and so was the ground troops that fought from battle – from foxholes and so forth, I'm taking nothing away from them. They did a great job and a great number of them died. And so did a great number of the people in for – in the ninth troop carrier command. They also died. So my feeling that liberators, we were the pre-liberators if you cou – you might put it that way. We shortened the time.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: Had it not been for us serving – supplying gasoline as fast as we did to **Patton**, those ground troops that liberated the camp would not have been there yet.

Q: Yeah.

A: Th-They didn't – they weren't free enough to be there yet. So that's – that's my position.

Q: Is there anything else you'd want to add to this episode, this part of the story? That you think is –

A: No, I think that's basically the thing that I – that's driven me for – in trying to piece the whole thing together, particularly in the last two years, because I didn't know the whole story, I cou – I did – I couldn't put it together.

Q: Okay.

Q2: Just two points of fact that were –

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Q: Sure.

Q2: You – you keep saying either the 90th or the ninth?

A: 90th. Nine zero.

Q2: So, see I heard ninth and I heard 90, so it's definitely 90th, okay. And the second one was **Mountbatten** was a field marshal for **England**. If **Fairbanks** had a relationship with him, and had another commission, was it a – a British commission or an American commission in the na – since you were with him on **Corsica**.

A: I-I can't – I can't – he was with the **United States** Navy at that time, had to be a navy commission.

Q2: So – so he – he left from the British [**indecipherable**] American, so that's – that's an interesting [**indecipherable**]

A: He had a – he had a title in **England**.

Q: So if we can – we can just explore this. I don't know whether your voice is caught on – on the mike when you're asking this question. If I can repeat it –

A: Okay.

Q: **Douglas Fairbanks Jr.** had both a British commission as well as a **U.S.** commission, is that correct?

A: That was the question, and he had definitely at the time I was involved, an American commission in an American navy br – group. His British – he had a c – a

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title there, and I think it was lieutenant, but I ca – I can't tell you. And I'm not even sure what lieutenant meant in rank there.

Q: Okay.

A: But I did want to mention one more humorous –

Q: Okay.

A: – side of the **Montgomery** story. During the build-up, probably about – it could have even been a day before **D-Day** – oh no, I'm sorry, this is – this is different, let me s – let me straighten that out.

Q: Sure.

A: Cause he was on the base at this time too. He was with **MacArthur** in that famous picture of **MacArthur**, and –

Q: Who – who – who is he?

A: Huh?

Q: Who – who are you referring to?

A: **Montgomery**.

Q: Or **Mountbatten**, which one?

A: **Montgomery**.

Q: **Montgomery**, mm-hm.

A: Yeah, General **Montgomery**, the famous general.

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Q: Right.

A: But in – on – around December 23rd, 20 – from the 20th to the 25th was the holdout at **Bastogne**. But there was a rumor around our air base that a German prisoner of war camp was gonna break out on that day and we armed everybody to the teeth. So I carried a submarine – a submarine – I carried a submachine gun, a **Thompson** 30 caliber submarine – sub – submachine gun. And then I was appointed officer of the day on that particular day. Well, in come this big, big British command car, and I had orders that nobody entered that base without showing identification. And so, not that I didn't recognize him, but my orders were that I had to ask for identification from everyone entering that base. And so he didn't want to give it. Well, my submachine gun was held over the shoulder. I unstrapped it and I said, sir, could I see your **I.D.**? I got it real quick.

Q: Did you really?

A: I got it real quick, cause it's no nonsense time, you know?

Q: Yeah.

A: And – and then I laughed afterwards, thinking that if I'd have used it, it might have shortened the war even more.

Q: Oh gosh.

A: You'd better strike that one.

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Q: Yeah.

A: No, this – this –

Q: Okay.

A: It was desperate times.

Q2: [inaudible] fish and chip story, they were going back for another –

Q: Okay, you were going back for another fish and chips, you know, the – what was the significance when you talked to us about the fish and chips that you picked up and how tasty they were and you went back for another one? Was there something that was part of that?

A: Part of that was that we were in **Coventry** –

Q: Yes.

A: – and we was reviewing the town and getting the history of it and so forth. I actually went there with a – a **Jeep** and a trailer to pick up parts for our radar operation. And we were coming back from picking up the parts and we saw this fish and chips place along the road. We stopped and we got an order of fish and chips, which they carefully wrapped in a piece of newspaper. And we con-continued on our way til we got a mile or so out of town and we finished our fish and chips. They were so darn good, we had to turn around, make a trip back for a second batch.

Q: And did you? You get a s –

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A: And we did.

Q: And you got a second batch.

A: We got a second batch.

Q: And that fish and chips was not one of the targets of the Germans.

A: That was not under any – not under any di – problem whatsoever.

Q: Okay.

A: It was just – just great, and since that time I can't – I can't pass a fish and chips dinner.

Q: Okay, okay. There was something else that you had asked, which was the ninth or the 90th?

Q2: He – he was – he would say either the – he would – he – he would say either the 90th or the ninth, and so therefore it shows a discrepancy –

Q: Right.

Q2: – so what is it? Without equivocation, he said the 90th.

Q: So it's the 90th, can you explain what? Because I'm not a military –

A: It's the 90th troop carrier group –

Q: The 90th troop car –

A: Nine zero, 90th, yeah.

Q: Nine zero, 90th troop carrier group.

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A: Which I guarantee you haven't heard too much of in the public since the "**Band of Brothers**" come out.

Q: Yeah, yeah. What else would you want a younger generation to know about what it is that you saw during the war, and what it is that you'd want them to understand about the Holocaust survivors and what they went through, that you witnessed as well.

A: The only thing that I'd like to have you – have them know, that our experiences over there and experiences since that time, have made – made a non-Jewish person, and non-j – most of our buddies that were over there with us, feel more sympathy for the Jewish race, and more – more admiration for the Jewish race. And part of the admiration was, we were trying to tell ourselves, why would they go through – why would they go through that torture and everything without committing suicide? We couldn't figure that out. Well, the answer came in the fact that their – their great faith and their great will, and – and that's – kind of answers the question, so – but the younger generation – I – I was – my grandson I mentioned took me to a -- what they call a – a bring and tell to a f – a first grade class. And he brought me in, the other kids brought toys and different things like that, he brought me in. And he says, this is my grandpa and he wants to tell you something about the war. Well, they didn't utter a word. I told them, and I had to be careful cause there was Japanese

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teachers there, so I had to be careful not to mention how bad they were. But I only mentioned this bad man out of **Germany**. And he took all those people and – and he put them in camps, and he – they killed them, and this was terrible. But he s – it – it was a bad – it was a bad war. And then at the end, a little Korean first grader came up to me and says, who won the war? I says, well, we did. He says, cool. So, anyway. But yeah, I think the thing I – should be done na – thing I should – thing should be done now, and I’ve offered to do it over the years, is to speak to high school groups and high school history groups, a-as part of their curriculum. And I’ve never had a invitation, so –

Q: It takes time, it takes time sa –

A: Yeah, it does.

Q: And understanding. And sometimes that understanding isn’t there.

A: Yeah.

Q: You know, of what the significance is, of a person’s experience.

A: That could be too, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Well, thank you very much for agreeing to share those experiences with us today. It’s much appreciated. You’ve filled in a piece of the puzzle that we weren’t aware of. And I know that my colleagues back in the museum are also grateful to

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you for your contribution, so in their name also thank you. And this concludes our interview with **Ernest Dutcher** on February 19th, 2013 in **Encino, California**.

A: You're very welcome.

End of File Two

Conclusion of Interview