L. M. Sullivan Staff Sgt. B-17 Tail Gunner

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Tell me what you remember from your very first mission.

Well, it was June 6 - D-Day, and the sky was filled with airplanes. The channel was filled with boats, ships and landing craft. I knew at that time Hitler was done for, because it was just so incredibly overwhelming. And, of course, Eisenhower promised the guys that all the planes in the air would be American, and they were.

We didn't see any German planes at all. (We did see) flack, but our target was calm that day. The rail yards were calm. And that's what I remember most about D-Day and the first mission – was that incredible display of planes, equipment. 'Course, the only people we saw were in our plane, and, of course, I saw nobody because I was looking backwards. I had a great view.

Tell me what your specific responsibilities were as tail gunner.

Well, basically when the Germans early in the war attacked the bombers, they came in and flew what's called a pursuit curve. And they always had to tilt to keep the guns firing, and they always wound up at the tail. And winding up at the tail, they shot down an incredible number of B-17's before the tail guns were placed in them.

And our first plane was a B-24. We, we trained in 24's, went over in 24's, and I had tail gun turret in the 24's, but when we switched to 17's, then I was tail gunner on a 17, basically just to protect the rear end of the plane. The top turret gunner could not fire to the rear, because he'd blast off the vertical stabilizer. And the ball turret gunner could only get his up to 90 degrees, and they'd usually come in from high so they could be gaining speeds. I had to protect the rear end of it.

Were there any other things you had to do as tail gunner?

Well, I was also an armor gunner and helped (in arming the aircraft). The ball turret gunner and I were armor gunners, and if anything went wrong in the bomb load, we'd go out on the cat walk and straighten things out there.

We only had to do that one time, but the bombardier or the people who loaded the bombs fouled up, and the top bombs released first -100 pounders. And Blair and I had to throw those out, and, of course, some of them had

already, you just jumbled them. The catwalk was a nine-inch wide, uh, piece of metal that you walked from the front of the plane to the back of the plane. And we went out to throw these out. But basically that's what armor gunners did, to see if something screwed up in the bomb load, we had to go out and help it.

Tell me about arming bombs.

They've got an arming vane on the front, and the wire, the arming wire or the safety wire, stays in the plane. And it's just a piece of wire six or eight feet long, however long...the bottom one's, of course, had a longer one. But they were an arming or safety device, like a cotter pin, a long cotter pin, and as the bomb drops from the plane, there was an arming vane on the front of it. And it had to make X number of revolutions before the bomb was armed.

And then, of course, the arming wire kept that from happening (while the bombs were still in the aircraft). And some of them had dripped out into the slip stream and had already armed. But we, we got rid of them in good shape.

I expect we destroyed some German farmhouses, but... And we kind of even made sport of it. It was only about 13,000 feet, so we were out there without oxygen. It's not that bad at 13,000, but we'd hold them and sight down toward the ground and let them go.

Of course, we had no idea where they were falling, but... And really didn't give a damn. It wasn't our problem then.

Tell me what it was like flying at the higher elevations.

Well, incredible cold at 27 - 28,000 feet, just really cold. We had electric heated underwear, or electric heated suits, but during periods of flack or fighter attack, it was smart to unplug that. Because if you got a short in there, you could burn yourself, you know, a piece of flack came in and, and severed a wire in your suit. At least that's what they told us, so we would always un...unplug them during heavy attack.

But the incredible cold... I got a little frostbite on my forehead where my goggles had not covered my head. And, of course, you don't think you could sweat when it's so cold, but I guess it's nerves that causes sweating. And then I'm a heavy sweater, too, but that's, that's the thing that I remember – just incredible cold. Even on, on days when it would be pretty and the sun shined and we would have taken off in maybe 70 degrees weather, still cold.

Tell me about your pilot.

Our pilot was Robert Baum from Iowa, and one of the really nice fellows. I've met a few fellows that were what I'd call gentlemen in my lifetime, and Bob was one of those gentle people – soft spoken, never tried to exert authority.

But he flew the plane and was master of the plane, of course. Took command. But his commands were things we wanted to do. He was very capable. We had a good crew.

Did you feel like you were well suited to the position of tail gunner?

Well at that time I was 145 pounds. You know that was 45 pounds ago. But I was about the right size for tail gunner; I was about five-eight and 145 pounds. Anybody could fly tail on the B-24, because it had a spacious turret, but the B-17 was cramped quarters. Bicycle seat just to rest your rump on while you were not under attack.

And then, of course, you were on your knees, and that's a good position when you're up there – be on your knees. But blood circulation would cut off in your legs on long missions, and I had difficulty with my legs for some time after that. No problem now.

Did you had a hatch back there that you could use to get in and out of the aircraft?

There was a hatch, but we had to come around the tail wheel. There was a little crawl space around the tail wheel. I had to crawl...there's a hatch on the right side of the plane about 20 feet toward the nose from me. And I'd have to leave that position, crawl around the tail wheel, and then go out the door up there.

Were you concerned about whether you could get out if you ever got hit?

Oh, yes, yes, many times. But the tail was, was, uh, we, we actually have a verified record of a tail gunner who was the only one on his crew that lived, because the whole tail was shot off. (Editor's note: Wes Borgeson was one of three B-17 tail gunners who survived floating to earth in his severed tail section. His interview has not yet been transcribed, but will be in the near future).

There was room back there to take your chest pack, and you could keep that with you. The poor ball gunner had to leave his chest pack up in the plane. He had his harness on, but he had to leave his chest pack up there. And if he got in trouble, he was done for. Tail...there were probably more fatalities among gunners at the tail position, because that's where the fighters ended up.

Any stories about fooling fighters by throwing their empty ammo cans?

Sounds kinda like a sea story to me, but when we were shot down on our 33^{rd} mission, and the only ammunition that we kept – we were lightening the plane, because we had two engines out, and one of them was, one of the other was running so rough we didn't think we'd make it – so we threw everything out including the ball turret.

We dropped the ball turret from the B-17, and all the guns, all the ammunition except my two guns and 100 rounds each for them. And we were at, on the Misburg mission on the 28th of September, and that's a long way in, and we went across two big flack fields and were in real bad shape.

We actually had been given the signal to bail out, but then we decided to try again and try again. And the engine that was running rough didn't worsen, so we made it back to a little air field the Germans had flown out of about three or four days prior to that.

The British had relieved that area, so we made it back there and landed the plane amongst all the potholes on the runway and left the plane there. A British truck, lorry they called them, took us in to Leage and from there we made it to Brussels, which had been librated shortly before that.

The British put us up at a motel, a hotel, a real nice hotel. I've forgotten what it was called now, but each of us in our escape packs had \$50 worth of French francs, and maps, some compasses, and things of that nature.

We took our French francs to the Belgian bank and exchanged them for Belgian francs, and we were living pretty well, you know. We...the British were feeding us and housing us, and we wanted to stay because this was our 33rd. mission. And we thought they might forgive us the other two after we got back.

But our pilot all this time was trying to get us a ride back to England. Finally he got us on a C-47 the British were flying back to England. We got back to our base about six days after that. The "missing in action" report had gone out on us to Wing headquarters, but we were able to stop it there, so our parents and people back home didn't get bad news.

But the colonel told us that we ought to fly the other two, because we didn't want to set a precedent, have other people goofing off, you know. So we flew two more, and on my 34th mission I nearly bought the farm again. Missed about, uh, oh, six inches. Had I'd been back where I normally would be just lollygagging; I would have lost a head. But something told me to sit up, so I sat up.

Was it a piece of flack?

Yes, flack, went through from the left to the right. Would have gone about here. (He indicates an area on the side of his head).

What did flack look and sound like?

Sounded like thunder within 200 yards of you, severe thunderstorm. And, of course, we have those in Oklahoma. It looked, course, like a... when the artillery shell would burst it's just beautiful red that would turn to black.

So you had... and it looked like a tree, a black tree, growing from up, a red ball when it finally hit. They seemed to always, the black seemed to always go up from the blast. I don't know what causes it, but it looked like just a red ball burst out there.

And then, of course, you begin...after you see the thing you begin to feel the flack. Of course, it's coming down from above and beneath and the side, and it sounds like hail on a tin roof. If you've even been in a tin shed and listened to a hailstorm, it sounds like that, only they came through instead of bouncing off. I guess some of them probably bounced off, but it was, it was frightening.

Flack was probably more frightening than fighters, because you could do something about the fighters, you could react, but flack was... it was there, and you couldn't do anything about it, just take it.

Did you wear protection?

We had flack helmets and flack suits, and most of us tried to find extra flack jacket to sit on or, for some reason we, we felt that if we could protect our rear end, we could make it. But of course, the flack helmet, you try to crawl up into it. When it got really tough, you could feel your shoulders trying to get up into the helmet. But it covered, and had pertinences to them so they'd cover your earphones and you could still be in contact with... They were just GI helmets, I suppose, but they'd modified them.

What was it like on the interphone on the plane?

We didn't talk a great deal. Sometimes the pilot would tell Nobel, the radio operator, to see if he could pick up some music, you know, because... And then, of course, he was in contact with the group all time. But mainly we kept quiet unless we had something important to say to the safety of the mission.

Was it important to keep quiet?

Well, everything happened instantaneously and you had to be prepared for that. And if you were telling a story or laughing and joking and everything else; of course, there was not much room for jocularity in the air. It was a serious business. But basically we maintained pretty well silence unless we had reporting fighters or flack or some extra ordinary event. We didn't talk much.

What were your fears, if any, when you were flying?

We'd finish before the jets, but the rockets came in toward the end of our mission. We trained the en...flew our plane over and flew it for 22 missions, the B-24. We flew our first mission the 6^{th} of June, and our last mission October 9. So in, in that period of time, we flew 35 missions, and took a week or so to train on the 17's.

But if a rocket hit you, you were done for. It was a direct, and you could see the trail from them coming up. These came along, seems to me, about the time we went into 17's in the middle of August, and they were frightening to me – most frightening thing because you could see the trail of them coming up, but you couldn't see the missile itself. But if they hit a plane, the plane would just explode into bits. There was no possible way to escape that. You could escape from a plane if it was going down with...from flack or from attack by fighters, but wouldn't be any escape from a direct hit of a rocket. And we were through before the jets came into being.

Were there ever any injuries on your aircraft?

Our second bombardier lost the muscle of his right arm, just shot away. And I had to go; for some reason I was called on to do some things. I had to go up and, and help Sclincar; he was the bombardier, and, 'course you had to nearly undress a fellow.

But if a wound occurred on a person, you could take them morphine to keep them from hurting so much. We had morphine ampoules, piece of glass drawn out, and, of course, the glass itself was the needle. You'd just break off a tip. But I had to give morphine to Sclincar under his arm.

He was really the only one injured. I had a tiny piece of Plexiglas from...went into my hand, but no problem – didn't lose any time on it. But Sclincar was injured rather severely. He lost this part of the muscle; he didn't finish any more missions with us. Our navigator, Bubadorf, went to Berlin with another crew. He had missed a mission and was trying to make up, and he was killed on that mission. But those were the two losses we had.

When you lost someone was there a lot of mourning within the crew?

Oh, yeah. It...you get incredibly close to people in a short period of time. Our group formed in November of '43, and so we were together nearly a year. But of course, we were closer to the...I was closer to the other enlisted men. But you feel like family.

Maybe even closer than family, because you, you feel free to discuss anything you want to talk about with people with whom you're about to die. And so we never...closeness, we still maintained contact. I stopped in Marietta, Georgia to see the engineer; he's so incapacitated he can't travel any more. So we came by to see him.

But these are people we've known for 50 plus years. They're much closer to me, though I spent a short period of time with them than high school or college friends, because we went through so much together in a short time.

How did all the crew members deal with the loss of one of the men?

Well, we just went on and didn't think...at... you tried to wipe it away from your mind. You thought of moving north as we lost our navigator. I noticed in the pilot's notes when he would write about somebody, he wouldn't reac...and we were told not to keep notes, but the pilots and copilots evidently were told the same thing but did.

But notes on the mission that my pilot sent me like 10 years ago, rather than refer to somebody by name, I think he found it easier and we all found it easier to refer to position. And in his notes he'd say, "Tail gunner - near miss, third time." This would make it easier to deal with these situations. If you could make it in your mind impersonal, in your heart you can't make it that way, but in your mind if you can make it impersonal, you can come nearer dealing with it, I think. And we felt that way about Bubadorf, and it just...we knew those things happened.

Did you ever see any B-17's going down with someone you knew?

Well, we saw two B-24's run together right over England. And they had bunkmates. And then another group came in, and we were taking off in the fog one morning and while we were flying 24's. This was early in the mission, early in the tour. And an engineer who was in our hut...the two crews, two enlisted crews in one Quonset hut, the engineer jumped out of the plane. He thought their engine was on fire; it was another plane burning. But he thought their outboard engine was on fire, and he jumped out and went out to check and ran into propeller.

And, of course, it tore him up. But his crew was torn up, so that our crew stood down that day. And we went out and took their guns out, checked them

back into armory. And you know, those things affect you, knowing it could happen to you. But he just made a mistake in judgment – wasn't thinking, frightened.

What was it like as tail gunner during combat?

Well, I got to see what the results of the bombing was. On our mission to Misburg in June 20, we really plastered it. And before we got to the rally point, the smoke and flames, smoke, of course, 10 - 12,000 feet in the air, and it's incredibly beautiful sight, because you realize your mission has been accomplished. We received the unit citation, Presidential Unit Citation for that. In our plane somebody up front took a picture of our plane coming off the Misburg thing, so we cherish that.

How did you find yourself in the Army Air Corps?

I enlisted. Went into cadet training – pilot training, did well through primary flight training, did well through 19 ½ hours of basic flight training, and then they didn't like the way I flew the plane. And so they needed gunners, and I think pilots they had plenty of. And then I probably didn't fly, fly the plane as well as they did, but that was 82 hours of pilot training that I'd had. And that's what I intended to be; I wanted to fly a P-47 worse than anything in the world. But they wouldn't let me, so once you get flying in your blood, it never gets out.

I'd still fly if my wife wasn't afraid of it. But I got to be the third pilot on our plane. They'd let me fly co-pilot once in a while, and it was...and I think if it really got down to the nitty-gritty, we might have been able to get it back.

You know, the engineer and I, if the pilot and co-pilot both had been killed, I think the engineer and I might have been able to get the thing...at least we'd have tried. And we had some experience in doing so. But that's it. I enlisted right out of high school, class of '42 and we had...we didn't know we had much choice.

You know, there's a lot of people said they were conscientious objectors, and some went to Canada, and some went here and there. And we thought we had a choice of Army, Navy, or Marines. That was our choices. But yeah, I was, I was gung-ho.

Tell me how teamwork affected your longevity.

Well, our engineer was a very capable fellow. He was the guy who loaded the plane, distributed the load, from bombs to gasoline fuel loads. He told us where we had to be.

See, I could never be in the tail on takeoff, because of the weight. Just 145 pounds made that much difference. So I'd have to be up toward the bulkhead just behind the bomb bay. So he was a very skilled fellow.

And our radio operator was good. He could get a position report on radio, and the navigator was an extremely skillful fellow. We missed landfall from Natal, Brazil to Decar, French West Africa, seven seconds, and it made him angry because we had been kind of playing around a little. And, and he missed his landfall seven seconds. And that's...we're talking about a 12-hour flight. So he was a very capable fellow.

Our pilot was capable. Co-pilot was good. Our bombardier, first bombardier we had, they took him and made him a lead bombardier with another crew, because he was a extremely skillful too.

Who was your lead bombardier?

Uh, Spurlock, his name was Spurlock – Emmett Spurlock, Louisiana. And he was an older fellow. He was the most human of our officers from the standpoint of the enlisted men, because he had worked with all kinds of people in the oil business, a pipeline business. So he was an extremely human fellow, and he went with Stewart's crew; they made Stewart a lead pilot, and we took Sclincar from Stewart's crew.

Spurlock got sick and had to miss a few missions, and so Baum was volunteering for everything that came along, our pilot was. He wanted to get over there and get it over with and get home. So we were flying day and night. I can't remember from June the 5th when our first briefing occurred until after my birthday on June the 11th ever going to bed. I just don't remember going to bed. We flew two missions on the seventh of June, but... we, we flew our...they flew our tails off.

But Baum was volunteering us; he wanted...we found that our later. But had he not been doing that, we'd have been seeing some of those jets that gave fits to the guys later on.

Did you feel like 35 missions was a survivable number?

Must have been.

Well you know...

I think they were fair in raising it from the 25, cause the people who went over there in '43, it would have been impossible to fly 35 missions in a year prior to the time we got there. They just couldn't have done it. (End off tape)

Again, how did you feel about 35 missions?

Well, of course, it was 30...we knew it was gonna be 35 when we went over. So we had no problem handling that, because we didn't resent the fact that they'd raised it. They'd raised it about three or four months prior to the time we got there. But it was easier to fly 35 missions when we were there than it would have been to fly 20 missions prior to that time. Those guys had it awful tough. It was a milk run to us compared to the...what they did.

Tell us what it was like in '43 and why it was that way.

Well, 'course that was the first attempt at what the "wheels" called strategic bombing, and they thought daylight bombing was the only way you could do strategic bombing. And I guess it is, but the German Air Force was so much more potent at the time early.

The fact is they were overwhelming during the early part of strategic bombing, and the tail gun...they had no tail guns on the B-17's at that time. And they found out they had to put them on. But that was the thing that the German Air Force was weakened considerably by the time we got there. Had it not been, it would have been a different war. And so that's the reason I think that it was completely fair for us to fly 35. Fact is, it might have been even more, but I'm glad it wasn't.

Didn't they eventually increase it to 50 missions?

I don't know. Uh, see I left...I finished my last mission the ninth of October, and the 11th of October I was headed home. And for some reason I got to fly home and got home earlier than...I was the first one home out of our crew. We were the first crew to fly 35 missions in our group.

Tell me about the "Little Friends" (fighter escorts) and the difference they made.

The P-51, of course, has been called the best fighter of all time, and I think that's right - I saw a special on it just recently. Compared to all, even the jet fighters today, the P-51 has been rated number one. And they were the first ones who could escort us in and out.

And, of course, they didn't fly through the flack field with us, but neither did the German fighters. When the Germans would pick you up on the other side, they'd get you before you got there and then after you had been there. But the fighter, the P-51 pilots especially, were super.

Had I been able to finish pilot training, I probably would have preferred the P-51, but I wanted the 47's so bad I could taste it, but couldn't get it. But they were, they were super people.

Tell me about the maneuverability of the planes in tight formations.

The B-24 was a plane that was difficult to fly in a tight formation. It was kind of like driving a truck, the pilot said. And it flew faster, and mistakes could happen quicker. We had more air-to-air collisions with B-24's than anything.

But the 17 flew slower and was a much more controllable plane. It would fly formation speed slower than, 15 or 20 miles an hour slower. And then, of course it was easier to fly, and so they could fly tighter formations with the B-17.

And the B-24, when we'd make a turn, say a left turn, and you were flying outside high formation, you'd have to give it all you had to try to just stay in formation. But the B-17 would turn a tighter turn than the 24, and so you could fly tighter formation with the 17. Had we been in a 24 on our 33rd mission, we wouldn't be here.

Tell us why the tight formation was advantageous in German attacks.

Well, of course, there were drawbacks to the tight formation also, because their flack field would be thrown up in front of you and they could get more planes in a smaller flack field or flack area. And the Germans were extremely skilled in flack gunnery.

They understood ground to air artillery, but with the tighter formation you could get a heavy concentration of bombs in a smaller space on the ground. And this also made returning to the target for a second go at it less likely. So, over-all the B-17 probably was a better strategic bomber. The B-24 was a better long-range bomber. We could fly greater distances with it. But that tight formation helped the bomb pattern, and it also helped protect against the enemy, but it also helped the Germans in the concentration of flack over a smaller area of the sky.

Tell me about the survivability of the B-17.

Well, the B-17 had that large wing on it, and there were areas of that wing that you could have a hole big enough to put a compact car through and still not hit anything vital. But cables...flight cables would be one of the problems of control cables. But I've seen, I've seen B-17's with no rudder at all, and the pilot could fly the thing, because the whole rudder would be shot away or the vertical stabilizer and rudder would be shot away.

Fact is, the whole tail other than elevators, could be shot away and, and it would still fly. But, uh, it was...it would fly at a slower speed. The B-24 would mush along. If you got too slow with it, it'd just, it would just kind of belly into the wind and, and pretty soon it would just stop doing that. But, the B-17 was more flyable and it was tough.

If you had to do it all over again, what would be your aircraft of choice?

I'd still try to do the same thing I did. If I could...if I couldn't make it through the pilot training, I'd still go to gunnery school, and I'd still...I could've became a gunnery instructor after I came back to this country.

Which aircraft would you choose?

If I had to fly 35 missions again, I'd, I'd take the B-17, because it was, it was our savior on the 33rd mission.

Tell me again what happened on the 33rd mission.

Well, that's where we were shot down on the Misburg mission and we landed in Belgium. And the B-24, we'd never made it. We'd have been down somewhere in eastern Germany.

Tell me what it was like when you first started taking hits?

I can't...everybody was scared, but I can't remember anybody ever panicking. Our top turret gunner once in a while would seemingly lose it. He was a minister's son, and he'd sometimes hold his mike button down and swear, just lustily, and bang his head against the top turret. But other than that as far as I know, everybody was as scared as I was, but didn't want to let the world know you were.

What were your thoughts about not being able to get out of the plane if it went down?

Well, of course, for some reason I always felt I was going to survive. Had I not felt that way, I probably would have tried some way to obey that. The business of being so frightened that your life flashes before your eyes and you think about other things.

All we thought about was flying that plane as far as it would go, and everybody doing everything they could to make it stay in the air one more hour or one more minute or one more second. And we were busy. Blair and I were so busy getting the ball turret out of the plane that we didn't have time to think about being frightened or think about people back home or think about dying. We wanted to get 1,300 pounds of weight out of that plane, and I'm sure the pilot and the copilot were that busy also. But I don't know how you could describe how you feel, because at the time it's happening you don't even realize that you're feeling. You're just reacting.

Did you ever have any problem with your guns jamming?

No, never had...as far as I know, we never had a gun inoperative. Some of the people would fire so long that, that their guns would...they'd have to cool them, and some of them would ruin the gun barrels in firing too much. But we were just short-burst people, and everybody seemed to be about the same. But the only problem that sometimes you'd have is a ball turret would... if it happened to rain it would sometimes get frozen. The rain would freeze around there, and he'd have to break it loose by moving as much as he could.

Did you have the original guns back there?

I just had the two guns with the little three-ring iron sight. And I didn't have, had no support from the standpoint of hydraulics. That B-24 had a hydraulic or electric-driven turret, and the guns were elevated and lowered electronically.

But B-24's just, it was just a single mount with two guns, and you actually fired it by button, maybe fired electrically but that was about it. And you could fire it manually also. We always checked our guns, and, and everybody set his own headspace. And you didn't let the armorers who cleaned the guns and got them ready, you didn't trust them enough to forget to set headspace.

Headspace is a clearance between the firing pin and the bullet or the ammunition. And it had to be adjusted using a dime, is what we used. Of course, that 40 thousands of an inch was what they used, but we used a dime, and that's 40 thousands of an inch. We always checked our own headspace, so we knew our guns were gonna fire.

Were there instances when the armors would over-lubricate the guns, causing them to freeze at altitude?

No, we didn't have any difficulty. We had a outstanding ground crew, and the people knew what they were doing. One of the best people in the world was our ground crew chief. He was something else. And they hurt when that plane came back injured, and they worked on it day and night. They lived in a tent right beside the hard stand, and Kent had two people help him, and we never aborted a mission from mechanical failure.

When your plane didn't come back from the 33rd mission, how did your ground crew deal with that?

Well, he was not our ground crew chief. When we went in to 17's they changed us to a different squadron; we moved from 848 to 850. And then we lost Kent as a ground crew chief, but we had no, uh...and we just flew whatever plane was available in 17's.

Our plane, the B-24, was called Miss Lee, but, we didn't have the emotional attachment to the 17's, because we flew 17's probably six...in the thirteen missions we flew in 17's, we probably flew in six different planes. What do you remember most about your last mission?

It was a milk run to France, and it was a what's called a no-ball target, launching site for V-2's. And we had to look for flack in order to qualify as a mission, and that was fine with us, because it was the 35^{th} for all of us except the engineer. And it was his 33^{rd} . But it was, after that mission was over and we were back out over the channel, it was incredible relief because we knew we didn't have to do it any more. And that's the thing I remember most about the 35^{th} mission, is you finally get to sit down all the way and breathe.

What do you attribute to your survival of the war?

Well, excellent equipment and training. The fact that the intelligence knew what to expect or...and was able to help alert us to the fact that where the flack guns would be. They could do this with everything except over the Rhine River and the rivers because the Germans moved their flack overnight on barges. And sometimes they'd miss on that. But other than that, we had good intelligence, and they were able to help us a lot.

Then coming back after a mission on debriefing and before you go into the debriefing room, the medics stood there with three fingers of rye...Scotch whiskey or Irish whiskey. And you'd drink that, and that would help you to relax considerably.

Explain what debriefing was.

Well, debriefing was what we reported after we got back. And intelligence officers there would question you about everything you'd seen from the standpoint of enemy fighters or flack or any unusual things that occurred.

And then, of course, they'd take those 39 different crews that flew on that group mission and put it together and make some sense of it. And some people would report things that never happened, and some people would report things that might have happened, and some people reported actual happenings.

So they had to get the wheat from the chaff to get the truth. But basically, that's what debriefing was, was just questioning about the mission, and how close you think you came to the target, and all this jazz.

Did any of your gunners ever have any kills?

No. None confirmed.

What do you remember about VE-Day?

Well, of course, I was in Las Vegas, Nevada on VE-Day, August. And the 8th Air Force was coming through Vegas on its way to the west coast, or beginning to start that way, and I had gone down to the train station in case some of the guys came through that I knew. I was an instructor out at Nellis at that time.

And the train hadn't come through, and so I had gone to a casino and was shooting craps when VE-Day was announced the 15th of August. I was about \$400 ahead on the craps table, and then lost it all, because everybody was just having such a big, big time.

How did you relate to the bomb dropped on Hiroshima?

What I remember most about the atom bomb raid was when I took high school chemistry, the uranium was uranium. Its weight was 235. Well, of course, at that time we didn't know what isotopes were in high school chemistry, but when they kept talking about uranium 238 – you know this was the isotope that was the one used in making the bomb – and I remember at the time wondering, they kept talking about the atomic bomb, atomic bomb.

Everything's made of atoms, of course, basic high school chemistry. But the fact that they dropped that bomb, and Harry Truman was president of the United States at that time, and he was firmly convinced that it was worth doing.

It hurt me when the Gulf War came along and one fighter, the Stealth fighter, carried one smart bomb. And the commentator said, whether he can be verified or not, they could do more damage on a target than a group of B-24's or B-17's could do with all, you know, 39 planes, 390 men, and roughly 40,000 pounds, 50,000 pounds of explosives. They could do more damage to one small target than we could have done.

But it's true, I guess. And watching it happen, they hit the target. We hit sometimes in the area, in the target where it was, and then we just did area bombing once in a while. But to think that one man could do as much with one bomb as 390 people could do with lots of bombs, it's a humbling

experience and makes you wonder whether the world is ever gonna come to, you know. That's, to me, it's an awesome experience.

Technology has changed today, but you guys used what you had at the time.

Oh, yes. And then radar was just in its infancy at that time. But we had what's called a G-box that was kind of a locator thing on the plane, and we thought that was something else.

And then, of course, the, uh, Norton bombsight was just out of this world. I remember when I was in instructor school at Laredo, Texas, a B-29 flew in, and we wanted to go see the B-29, to see the plane that carried the bomb that could do the damage that it had.

But they wouldn't let us; it was so secret at that time that they wouldn't let us go out and see it. But the Mexican nationals who were working on the base were crawling over it like ants. It infuriated us somewhat, but they fired their guns see, remote control.

They set up in an environment where they had fresh oxygen and heated air and everything. And they were in an enclosed cabin and fired their guns by remote control and radar. We wanted to see it, but they wouldn't let us. But things changed drastically during that time. Course they change in everything. I drive down here in a Buick. It gets twice the mileage that my Model A did that I drove when I was in high school. And the Model A was a great car, you know.

Was it uncomfortable in the tail gunner position?

I smoke. Anybody up front had, uh, an accident of some kind, bowel or otherwise, flatulation, all the odors went out the tail. And so I had a very sensitive nose to all this, and course, the cordite, the smell from the...all the guns except, except the waist guns would come back through there.

And I had just the sleeve over my...sleeves over the, over the guns, and the rest of it was just air out through there. And, course, the air would always hit the back of my neck, and moving air is much colder than just cold air.

But just incredible smells that you'd get from the things that would happen. Sclincar, had, uh, diarrhea, and he'd just bought a new pair of pinks. And Baum made him throw them out, take them off and throw them out to get the smell out of the plane. Of course, everybody was, uh...but that...those were the things that happened, and in the tail you get all of that.

I've heard that most of the Gastro-Intestinal problems happened when you got to higher elevations.

Well, of course, you'd expand greatly, and they tried to keep from feeding us... they'd control our diet. We didn't eat broccoli or boiled cabbage or beans before we'd go on a flight, but still, a thimble of air in your gut at ground level would be a baseball-sized piece at upper levels. And there was a lot of flatulation occuring.

What was it like being on oxygen for so long?

For me it was a dehumidifier. It would just dry a person out. Nasal passage would just get terribly dry. And we had people who tried to smoke cigarettes while they were on oxygen. And one guy got his oxygen mask afire trying to light a cigarette at 17 - 18,000 feet. Course, he's not one of our crew, but we heard about it. You hear a lot of stories, whether they're true or not.

But oxygen...it was...it made me incredibly hungry. I was always hungry. Of course, at 18 or 19 you are hungry most of the time. And we'd get back to the base then and be in the debriefing, they'd give us our whiskey and the nose gunner and the top turret gunner and the pilot didn't take theirs. So the engineer and the radio operator and I would take theirs. We'd have two shots. Then we'd go, as soon as that finished, we'd go to the mess hall and eat. And you'd just eat an incredible amount of food whether it was good or not and then go fall in the sack and sleep. And that's what they wanted us to do. But even when we took our flack leave, they...the medics issued us some Scotch. Everybody got two fifths of Scotch.

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