Donald Nulk
1st Lt.
B-17 Navigator

Jon: Tell me what you did.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, they had the Battle of the Bulge, which was the last gasp of the Germans, during which time our Infantry went through hell, and the Air Force was playing football, in conditions where the backfield of the one team couldn't see far enough to see the opposing line.

We were the first group that was allowed to take off. Now at this time, there were 1500, 2000 plane raids. They would only risk 300 planes. The nearby field, the first and second plane crashed on takeoff. We took off with 250 planes. We laddered through, supposedly, uh, 15,000 feet of soup to form up above. We were the last plane to take off, and when we got to 15,000 feet, there was no… it was…we were still in the soup.

So we wandered around, and we finally broke radio silence and found out that the hole in the cloud had moved, and our group was some distance from us. So I gave the pilot the heading to go to the IP, the Initial Point, and we got there three minutes ahead of schedule. I told the pilot to do a three minute turn… a 360, and in the last quarter of a 360 we saw the planes come in view and dovetailed in and took off. Then things cleared, and it was no problem.

Down below they wouldn't fire their dual-purpose 88's at us, because they'd reveal their position. So we went over and dropped on a bridge. Milk run. Coming back the clouds formed underneath us. By the time we hit D'Apa on the coast, it was 15,000 feet of soup below us. We were at just above there, and there was a wall just like Walt Disney drew it 45,000 feet in the air.

They said, okay, peel off every man to the base by himself. We peeled off and on the way to base, it was so thick we couldn't see a No. 1 and No. 4 engine. We got over our base, which had a field elevation of 33 feet, and there were a few hills around, a few trees. We were down to 250 feet. I could see the ground; the pilot couldn't. They had every form of light out there to try to guide us in, and I said, "Okay, you're over the field now. Do your 360 and land." He did a 360, came around, lowered his landing gear, and at 50 feet above the ground, he finally saw the field, made an adjustment and landed. Not a shot fired at us, still the worst mission we had.

Jon: Back then there were not many navigational tools to help you get there, were there?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, once in a while you had G-boxes. It so happened that this was the first time I had, the first and only time I had a G-box over there.

Jon: Did the lead crews typically have one?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Uh, sometimes, it was not a very widely used item.

Jon: What was your memory as to the value in using a G-box?

1st. Lt. Nulk: The one time I had a chance to use it, it was very functional. It was coming into base. It was a little laborious to use; it took a little while to make a fix. Because you had to get your readings and then go to the map, but by the time you fiddled around, it was the better part of five minutes. Uh, far cry from what we have today. But it was functional.

Jon: What were your responsibilities as a navigator?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, as a navigator, not a lead navigator, you kept track where you were all times. And like you say, if you were a crippled plane and had to leave formation, why they relied on you to get back. Uh, in addition to that, you were the intelligence officer. You recorded the shots, the flack, any information you could see, bomb drops and things of that nature. And what usually happened is that you didn't really have too much to do other than take a (navigation) fix about every 15 minutes.

Now when you are flying in formation, you're constantly jockeying, and so your altimeter shows you going up and down like this, your air speed is varying. It's going back and forth. Your direction is varying irregularly. Now some how or another, the mind becomes a computer and after every 10-15 minutes you take a mental attitude, an average of what has happened that 10 or 15 minutes and put that down.

Now, about, oh, 60 percent of our missions were flown between cloud decks, so that when we left Europe, I mean, left England, we didn't have any aid to navigation except dead reckoning. And yet you could dead reckon using this technique for nine hours, and you come back to base and you say, well, we're over base. Actually, no, we're there at a 45-degree angle. And, and how we did it, I don't know. But some how or another the mind gives you the ability to do this averaging, and you come out all right.

Jon: Would you explain what dead reckoning is?

1st. Lt. Nulk: In dead reckoning you record where you start and then when the next, uh, fix, you take the heading that the ship has had plus the wind that has blown you off course, and from there you make a speed and distance calculation and make your plot accordingly.

Now up there the average temperature of our mission was about 50 degrees below zero, and yet you had to operate the pencils and computers. So in the left hand you had a silk, a leather, and a mitt on. In the right hand you had nothing but a silk glove. And periodically you'd shove it into, a heated mitt to warm it up. But strangely enough we had heated suits, which I only turned on one or two times, because we dressed in layers, and we could operate there at 60 degrees below zero without turning on the suits.

Jon: Is it true that even at 60 degrees below zero, once you turned on your suit you would be sweating?

1st. Lt. Nulk: (Laugh) Well, I was leaning over the bombardier watching some bombs drop over a target once, and there's a little, flexible 50 gun goes out here, and the little window about that big, a Plexiglas window. And it was just about like this from me. All of a sudden it disintegrated. I looked up. I looked down. Baby, are you hurt? (Laugh) We'd do some crazy things you know, like this.

Now that air coming in there felt refreshing, and we had our oxygen masks and everything on. But it felt refreshing, and had we not been trained, I might have stayed there, stood there enjoying it and get frostbite. But, you know, that 60 degrees below zero, you don't mess around with it, so we stuffed a blanket in it to take it off.

Jon: What factors were involved in the Army Air Corp's decision to make you a navigator?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, we went through a sad sack down at the relocation center, and there were 34 squadrons. Each squadron had 12 barracks, and each barrack had 200 people. Quite a few people being processed at once. At the end of that processing you went in for an interview, and when they went in, (UNINTELLIGIBLE) interview, they said, "Cadet Nulk, we'd like to make a pilot out of you. You had a good record on your tests." I said, "Thank you, sir, what was my record as navigation, navigator?" He said, "That was good too."

Being an audacious young man, "Well if it's all the same to you, I'd just soon be a navigator." (Laugh) Every one that was foolish enough to make that thing was granted except eight in that whole area. I was one of eight that went to navigation school. And I don't know why, but I thought that maybe that it took more intelligence to be a navigator than it did a pilot. (Laugh)

Jon: Did you have any background training as an engineer or in math?

1st. Lt. Nulk: I had three years in engineering at the time. I was studying to be a metallurgical engineer. And after we had about 25 missions, we were offered the lead crew. Now that meant that I would have made my Captaincy. They (the crew) went up to the pilot said, "Well, let's have a vote on it." And, since that would mean prolonging our stay over there, they voted against us, so I missed my Captaincy.

Jon: Tell me about your first mission in a B-17, and what it was like.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, my first mission was in a B-24. We had eight missions in 24's, and then we switched to 17's.

Jon: Tell me about what it was like to switch from B-17's to B-24's for your missions.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, the navigator was completely forgotten in the B-24. The bombardier was up in the forward turret, and there was about this much space behind that and the navigator's table. And the only way you could see out is look in the side windows, so you had a hard time looking straight forward. Visibility was horrible. Uh, you had to either stand up or sit on the table. You had almost no room to work, and the visibility didn't allow you to do a good pilotage when the opportunity existed.

When we went to 17's, we were in a glass dome out there; you could see all around you. And you had plenty of room to navigate. It was a much more comfortable plane for the navigator.

Jon: What was it like to advance to a plane that could fly higher and absorb more battle damage?

1st. Lt. Nulk: The 17 would fly typically at 30,000 feet; the 24's at 24-25,000 feet. Now, at 30,000 feet there were three different guns that the Germans had. There was the 88, where they could get four shots on each group as it went over. The 105, they could get three. The 155, they could get two.

Now, I'm not so sure but what they could get five shots on the B-24 going across. But, oh, this affected your vulnerability to flack. The 24 had better engines. It had a wing that flapped out here, but it was strong. But it was heavily wing-loaded, so it wouldn't glide as well as the 17's. And the 24 didn't have as rugged a fuselage. It wouldn't take the punishment that a 17 would. We had one 17 come home with 2,000 flack holes, still flying. We had one engine had a direct flack hit, and four cylinders were out, and it was still running. So it was a rugged plane.

Jon: Go over again about your flying over enemy guns, how many shots each type of gun could get.

1st. Lt. Nulk: 105's they could get three shots.

Jon: Explain again how you were safer in a B-17 than you were in a B-24.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, you're higher, so the accuracy is less. And possibly you could get fewer shots. I'm not sure of the number of shots that they could get at a B-24, but we relied heavily on what we called chaff, which was bundles of aluminum. And you'd throw these things out, and they would make blips on a radar beam, so when they tried to get a shot of a group going over, they'd just get snow all over the place from all of these strips of chaff.

To illustrate, we went over Mersburg, which is near Lipeschnick, the most heavily defended target in Europe. And, uh, when they opened the screen and everyone groaned, because it was Mersburg. I said, "Okay, fellows, you're a, a trained crew. You know it's rough; we know it's rough," but, uh, we're coming in from the south and splitting out west, and, uh, we'll be on the…over the target for 12 minutes. And there isn't any one time that they can train over a thousand guns at you. I figured that during this run each group had 10,000 shells fired at them. Uh, the very fact that, uh, most of them came back indicated how poor the accuracy was of the German flack.

Jon: What was your main fear during the missions?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, my first mission was over the Danish peninsula, to Russellsheim, a small refinery. We were the first group over. We dropped our bombs, and by the time the second group came over two minutes later, the smoke was up at 25,000 feet. So we practically creamed it on the first group. There wasn't a heck of a lot of flack, but that was the first time. I came back home, and I said, "Lord, they're trying to kill me." I said, "If it's all the same to You, I'd like a little protection, but then, You know, if You need me, go ahead and take me. But I'd like a little protection." (LAUGH)

You know, from then on I never had the real feeling of fear on a mission. However, to give you an idea how keyed up you were, we'd start about midnight with breakfast and getting everything ready and we'd usually take off around dawn. It would be 9, 10:00 at night by the time we got back. And during that period of time we had breakfast, a pack of gum, a candy bar, and maybe a doughnut when we came back. I would come into the officers' mess and sit down and read the "Stars and Stripes" from cover to cover so that I could calm down enough to enjoy our meal.

Jon: Tell me about a typical mission.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, we usually got up about 11:30 or 12:00 at night, and we had 15, 20 minutes before the truck would come and pick us up. You see the various shacks were scattered out around the field. They'd take us to the mess hall, and there we had a breakfast and typically it was fortunately eggs from the local farmer, and we usually had a fairly decent breakfast.

Then we would go from there to our briefing shack, and there they would brief us on the mission. Everyone would come in, and then they would pull the screen in front of the map and tell us about the mission. Then they would give us a time hack; everyone had a time hack (Editor's note: this is where they synchronized their watches so everyone had the exact same time).

And then navigators went to the navigator briefing, and there they would apprise us of various problems and opportunities along the way and from there we'd go to the ammo shack, and there we would pick up our 50 caliber guns. And they'd take us to the plane, and we'd load on the 50 calibers, and we'd load our equipment and get everything squared away.

And then we'd go out and wait for our time for take-off. Now, on a take-off, there is a perimeter track going around the field, and the planes were scattered around the field. So you were assigned a place on the take-off schedule, and you would come around that perimeter track ready to take off. And they would come in from either side taking off in two-minute intervals.

And so you'd take off and typically over England, you would have soup (overcast), and you would ladder up through the clouds using radio beacons and zigzag back and forth. And you would zigzag back and forth on a pattern here and maybe there's another zigzagging here and another one over there.

And all these planes would come up to the assigned level for assembly, and that was usually above the clouds. When you get above the clouds, you would have a schedule that the radio operator would give "very pistol" plays, like say two greens and a yellow might be our schedule for the day (a "very pistol" was a large caliber flare gun that could be fired through a port in the roof of the B-17. These flares were used for signaling purposes).

So the lead crew would shoot out two greens and a yellow, and the lead of the other squadron would have another one. And they would form by the squadron and then form by the group. And these were laddered, horizontally and vertically, so that when the group was in formation, all of them could drop at the same time and not drop on each other and form a pattern.

At the same time this pattern would be such to protect it from enemy aircraft. You could concentrate the most guns at any one given direction by a

given pattern. And, of course, you know these guns, were…uh, had electrical control, so that when they swept over a tail or a propeller it would automatically kick it out. So you wouldn't shoot down your own plane.

Well, after the group formed, then the division would form. And there were three divisions in the Air Force. And then the…that would form. It may take you two hours for the whole Air Force to form, and you had a schedule going out the IP, the Initial Point.

Now Europe was loaded with fixed anti-aircraft. This was mapped; we had a map of all the anti-aircraft. In addition to that they had a lot of anti-aircraft on railroad cars and so forth that would be shipped around. Well, you couldn't take care of those, but you would plan your mission to dodge as much of the fixed flack as possible. This was to our advantage, but it was also to the advantage of the Germans, because they could concentrate where we were coming and arrange their fighters accordingly.

Well at the time we got over there, I landed at (UNINTELLIGIBLE) at D-Day, by that time all…most of the old, bold (German) pilots were dead. And they had these kids that they gave 30 minutes of glider and 30 minutes of powered flight. Then they shoved them up in the air and two or three hundred planes (German fighters) would buzz over a hole in the ground, watching for the Eighth Air Force to go by.

And they'd look for a straggly formation where they wouldn't concentrate as much power – firepower, and they'd line up and zoom, zoom, zoom. Three or four hundred planes would go through there frequently decimating the whole group. And then they'd split out home before our fighters could catch up with them.

Well, if you had a few thousand planes raid, your 8th Air Force is scattered over a couple hundred miles. There's no way our fighters could really protect us in that respect. So when you went over, you dodged the major flack area and suppose you had a given target area. Well, you would go over and fake another town, alert them, everyone go into the air raid shelters, and then you'd come around and ruin another town.

You kept faking various towns until you finally hit the target. In the meantime you caused as much confusion as possible. One of the problems is always the straggler. If you started running into mechanical problems, you start dropping further and further back. Like one of the missions we were near the front of the air force; we started losing power, and we were climbing on course north of the Frisian Islands. And we kept falling back and falling back and finally the last group passed. We couldn't make it. We had to turn back right about Heligoland and head back by ourselves.

Fortunately, no fighters came by, and we got back okay. But the last few minutes over the target, you had to face the major flack. No way you could do it, because the bombardier had control of the plane, and it had to stay on a given course steadily in order to get your bombs dropped. So for five minutes you were on a course that was easy meat for the enemy to pick us off.

After you dropped your bombs, you wanted to get out of there as fast as possible. Coming home, there were always a few damaged planes, and they would get priority in landing. And you're landed and went from there to debriefing, then there they would have coffee and a shot of liquor. And you went through debriefing, and then a navigator – you went through navigator debriefing. And as from there, you went over to the ammo shop and put away your ammunition. And then you were allowed to go to the mess hall and have a meal that was considerably quite a few hours after breakfast. But like I said, you were sort of high-keyed and had to calm down before you could enjoy your meal.

Jon: Did you ever eat any meals on the plane?

1st. Lt. Nulk: I never, I never had any…the only food we had aboard was a pack of gum and either a candy bar or some of these British hard candies. That's the only thing we ever had aboard.

Jon: Tell me about teamwork on board the plane.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, of course, you had the pilot and the co-pilot who ran the plane. And the lead pilot in any group was flying a given mission, and everyone else was flying on him in a particular pattern. Now formation flying is rough, because you're constantly jockeying, increasing speed, decreasing speed, up, down, back and forth. And so it's a pretty exhausting job for the pilot himself and the co-pilot, of course, which shares the mission.

The navigator likewise, the lead navigator is running the show, and the others are following, being ready - the bombardier the same way. The radio operator has communication responsibilities. Of course, you have intercom that everyone can hear each other. And the navigator every ten minutes or so will call for an oxygen check. And everyone has a particular order and say, "Pilot okay, co-pilot okay, bombardier okay," all the way down through. And if someone fails to come in, they immediately check for anoxia.

We had such a case where the engineer failed to show, and the co-pilot looked around, and here he was hanging out over the bomb bay. His suit was the only thing that kept him from going out. And he jumped out, ripped off his controls, and went over and put oxygen and recovered him, and blankets and so forth. And we had three or four minutes there that occupied quite a bit of our time. Fact is, during this, this was going over the target that this

happened, and so after this happened, I went back to navigating – I assumed that we followed the prescribed course.

As it happened, we went about two minutes further south, which meant that I was off four minutes, two minutes south, four minutes. I had a heck of a time reorienting myself afterwards, because you look down at Europe, and it looks all the same. The engineer has the responsibility of following some of the instruments that the pilot has. Now, of course, all the members except the pilot and co-pilot have guns to attend, so they have dual problems. The other members of the crew are, are essentially gunners, two waist gunners, a ball turret gunner down below, and a tail gunner. The radio…or the engineer has the top turret gun, and obviously when the plane goes down, 10 people go down, so that 10 people are working very hard in consort to keep that from occurring.

Jon: What kind of difference does a good lead pilot make?

1st. Lt. Nulk: The steadier that the lead pilot is in both his direction, his altitude, and his speed, the less ripple effect there will occur all the way back. And if you take a look at the low low (Squadron), this man has one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eh, about 10 itinerations back him. So any change there, you can see is amplified by the time you get back to the, uh, tail end. It's very important to keep a good smooth area. To give you an idea, now, we had 36 missions, which is the max, by the way. Thirty-five was normal; they had us fly one extra. We had 36 missions, and we were never attacked by a fighter. And the reason, in my estimation, was that we had the closest pack formation, that there were always looser formations for them to attack. And this meant good flying on the part of the pilots, both the lead pilots and all the rest of them.

Jon: Do you think it would have made any difference if you were with the 100th?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Immeasurably. They were very sloppy flyers on the whole, and they were completely, almost completely wiped out three times.

Jon: Do you remember the alleged incident that caused the wrath of the Germans on them (100th Bomb Group)?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, I remember one that they claimed was the cause. They claimed that one of their planes (B-17s) were shot up and he pulled out of formation and lowered the landing gear, which was like throwing up the white flag. And as the (German) fighters came in to escort him, they opened on the fighters. Our fighters came in, rescued the guy, and he came back home, and they promptly court-martialed him when he landed.

Now, this story has received wide distribution, but there's some question, because some of the Germans questioned after the war, were asked, "Did you pick out the 100th because of this incident?" We didn't have time for that. We looked for the straggly formation. Just so happened the 100th didn't fly as well as some of the other groups.

Jon: How much battle damage could a B-17 take?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, like I said, there's one of our crew, one of our division, let's say, group, landed with 2,000 flack holes in. We had amazing luck. The most we ever had was eight flack holes. One of them was rather amusing; navigator all of a sudden, brurrr bang, bang, bang, bang. You know, something ricocheting around the boot, looked around, where is it? You don't see a thing. It happens too fast, but it had a very strong wing, a very strong body, and, uh, you probably heard about the tail sections that landed.

There was one B-17 that was…had a direct hit, and the tail gunner has a chest pack. And he has to take off that pack and put it beside the chute, and then he goes back to his guns. And if he has to bail out, he has to come through the tunnel and buckle on his chest pack and bail out. Well, he had a direct hit, and he knew he had to bail out. So he crawled through the tunnel, no plane, no chest pack, nothing. Here he is, on his hands and knees in the tail section of an airplane, but the funny part is, it was blown off in such a way that it was almost perfectly balanced, and he could shift his weight and literally glide the tail section into the ground. He did so, broke a couple of legs, but lived. That's in the annuals of the Eighth Air Force. **Editor's note: This was actually documented on three separate occasions. Wes Borgeson was one tail gunner who experienced this.**

Jon: Tell me about flack, what it was like.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Flack was scary; it was more scary than it was damaging. The shell would come up and explode and you'd see this ugly black cloud which was not the flack. I mean that…that had already blown away, and it's just a cloud left. But that cloud was sort of a reminder that there was a shell.

The flack was an exploding shell that would break up into numerous pieces, and these pieces could spread damage. Of course, a direct hit meant you've had it. By the way, one of the planes in our group got a direct hit on the…this was on a B-24…got a direct hit on the landing gear which was pulled it up into the wing and did not explode. When the plane landed, the, the shell was still stuck in there. They took it out and disassembled it and (a note inside) said compliments of the Romanian underground.

Jon: Did you ever have to record other aircraft going down?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Yes, one day we were flying, and off to the right, uh, four P-38's came up and started flying formation with us. We weren't briefed on 38's. I told the radio operator, I said challenge them with the lights, you know, and he challenged. I said, "Gunners, get ready. Challenge him once more. Get ready and when I say open fire." About that time they peeled off. We got back to base and sure enough they were Jerrys that were flying captured planes and were calling out our altitude and air speed and things of that nature. Another case, uh, we had an old war-weary plane, uh, that looked like it was one of these planes that were having trouble keeping up with the group. Come on boys, come on, boy we're rooting for you. As we approached the flack area, he pealed off. He was a Jerry, calling out our position to the ground crew. So, I had mixed feelings. (Laugh)

Jon: Tell me what it was like seeing a B-17 going down.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Scary. We went over Ludwigshaven, and at the time no group had gone over losing less than four planes. We lost three. As we went over up above us and to the right, a plane got a direct hit. It peeled over and ran into another plane, and pieces of those two planes came running down all around us.

And all of that happened in a matter of a couple seconds. I mean it's devastating, but it's all so fast, so fast you'll, you hardly have a chance to respond. You get these wild things where a plane comes back that's heavily damaged and it still limps home. Another case two planes, the lead and the deputy lead were being formed, and all of a sudden something happened, an air pocket. And one went over, and the prop of one chopped into the other, and two planes went down. And we saw one parachute out of 20 men. So, we went over, rode over, it was near base, and we rode over after our mission, and rubble all over the place. We couldn't see a thing. It tears you up.

Jon: Did you ever think about whether you could realistically get out of the plane if you had problems?

1st. Lt. Nulk: As little as possible. We had one plane in our group that was shot up by 40 mm cannon, and it got the pilot. The co-pilot took over and had everyone bail out, and then he threw it on automatic pilot, tried to bail out, and the minute he left the controls it started to go into a spin. And he couldn't get out.

He headed back for base on two and a half engines, and he was escorted. And he headed for Wharton, which is an emergency landing field. You know where that is. And they had a bunch of ships on the channel ready to pick him up. And he started out by dropping 500 feet a minute; then he trimmed it and got it back to 300 feet a minute, and he lost the third engine. So he was on two engines, and he came down over the channel and was just able to make it

to Wharton Field.

Well, he landed with a tail wheel and one main wheel, because the one had been damaged in battle. So he was down on two wheels, he was going down the runway, and just as he lost lift he chopped the engine and they only bent one pair of propellers. He got the DFC for it.

Jon: Were you apprehensive about your last mission?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, I wasn't pessimistic; I assumed that I would come back. And I was looking forward to ending it. And it was sort of an anti-climax, because we'd had two or three wild missions before that, and this was a little bit of a milk run. So it was, like I say, anti-climatic, but when we finally touched down, why, we're glad to see terra firma.

Jon: Tell me about the English people.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, it's not hard to see that when the populace were outnumbered by the military, that they had to become a little aloof. And, of course, the English tend to be aloof anyway. And they ran through a difficult time.

We had a little bit of a difficult time trying to communicate with them. I was invited once to a ladies' tea, they invited four or five of us over here. She invited us in, and we had tea and crumpets, a few things like that. And after an hour we were shown the door, and she had taken care of her duty.

And we sympathized with this situation, but it was not the time to really make friends over there, because we were a nuisance to them. And then, of course, you always have the ugly American. We had a fellow that was over there - a civilian with some company that went down in London. And, of course at that time the British were allowed an egg and a half a week. There was no limit on the Americans, because the American dollar was coming in.

This ugly American walked into a restaurant and in a loud voice ordered a dozen eggs for breakfast. That didn't help our situation.

I picked up some French lemoch (?) from a bombed-out home. I got four dishes and two pedestal dishes. That's the closest thing I could get to a memento of the area. But I think one of the most charming Britisher was the taxicab driver. In order to drive a taxicab in London, you had to be able to know every street, every institution, everything about the city.

If I was here on a given spot in London and had to go to another spot, he had to describe every move, every street, every turn in order to get there. And sometimes it took six or seven years for a person to get a taxi license. And

they were charming people.

Jon: Tell me how you and your wife corresponded?

1st. Lt. Nulk: I came back from getting my commission, and that next night, I guess it was, we decided to get married. And so my mother-in-law had, what, three or four days to get ready?

But who was I going to get as ushers. There were no men around. So I called... the only local base was an intelligence base, and I called and asked the major there if I could have four men for ushers. Oh, he said, I'm sorry, we can't; our, our men have a lot of things to do. I said, look fellow, I'm going overseas. A lot of the fellows there are going to cool their heels in the states. I said the least you can do is supply me with four ushers. I got them. So we had our wedding. We went right after the dinner, after the wedding, to the train station. And we had one Pullman ticket. We shared a booth, uh, the upper booth of a Pullman.

When we got to Chicago, another young couple shared the lower booth. We went all the way to California, and to Fresno, where at that point we picked the crew. We had a meeting, and everyone's around getting acquainted and a man said hey, how'd you like to be my navigator? And I got talking to him, and we formed the crew this way. And from there we went to Murock, which is the...in the Murock Desert. It was right across from the Edwards Base, and there we had what they call RTU. It was for training prior to going overseas.

We got our crew, and we trained in the plane. And from there we boarded a plane, went to the DOE, and went overseas.

Jon: Did the pilot get to handpick his crew and officers?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, the pilot nosed around until he found someone that he wanted as co-pilot. And then they nosed around and found someone they wanted for, by mutual consent, a navigator, and then a bombardier, and then we were assigned the gunners and radio operator and so forth.

Jon: Did you have to go through gunnery training and were you adequate gunners?

1st. Lt. Nulk: No, we we really weren't an adequate gunner. We didn't have, we didn't go through gunnery school. And it was sort of a last resort if we fired a gun up there.

Eventually they got a chin turret for the bombardier. But early in the development of the Eighth Air Force the Germans found that the most

successful way to attack them is head on. And this led to the demand for a chin turret. But I never fired a 50 caliber in battle.

I did, however, get an expert rating in the Thompson submachine gun. We had...we fired that for two practice rounds, and then one for qualifying, and they had these targets that came up and went down. And if you fire a Thompson, you fire it, and the thing walks up. And there's no way you're gonna hold it, so you go blip, blip, blip like this. I got 23 out of 25 shells in the target.

Jon: Was it a positive self-attitude that made you think you would get through the war safely?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, like I said, I said, "Lord, they're trying to kill me. Uh, if you want me, fine; otherwise, protect me". And from then on I just had faith in God.

What were your feelings about the war and your sense of duty?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, I don't think there was any doubt that Hitler and Tojo were people that had to be defeated, and it was a job that was messy, but it had to be done. And there was no question that we would go in; it was just when and how and with whom. So I don't think the idea of dodging the war ever came up. It just wasn't even discussed.

Jon: So you sensed a patriotic duty to defend your country?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, as an American and if American rights were threatened, it was up to us to step in there and change the situation.

Jon: What is your memory of the day we bombed Japan and of the bomb used?

1st. Lt. Nulk: The whole aspect of warfare has changed, and we were fighting an obsolete war. And no one would ever do what we did. We were sort of the dinosaurs as the result of this, and no doubt in my mind that there were hundreds of thousands of people's lives saved by Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and those condemning this country for dropping some are not thinking any further than the end of their nose, because not only did we save thousands of our lives, we saved thousands of the Japanese lives, because any attack on Japan would have been very, very bloody.

Jon: Where were you on VE Day?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Yes, when I came back from overseas, it was obvious that I

would either go to some training base cooling my heels or eventually go to the Pacific, and that was not very probable. They were recruiting people to go to Nassau at the time, where we were at in Miami.

And I had an interview, and we were hired to go to Nassau, and I got up there and in the particular group that I was with they were primarily draft dodgers, scared, frightened of war. So when it became obvious to me that VE-Day was around the corner, I sent a letter to the Adjunct General, which was my official communication.

I said I am quitting my job at Nassau with view going back to active duty with view to immediate discharge. And I showed this to some of these draft dodgers. You aren't gonna send this, are you? I said, you bet I am. And so, I figured that it would take me about four weeks for them to act, so I gave them two weeks notice...

Jon: You flew in unpressurized cabins and so forth, tell me about that.

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, if you were out to live to an old age, you didn't join the 8th Air Force. Between January and June of 1944, if you were a member of a flying crew in the 8th Air Force, you had one chance in nine of not having a purple heart. Out of the 1,000 flying crew there was about 750 killed or missing, about 175 injured and the rest didn't have a purple heart.

So this was certainly not an easy way of fighting the war, nor were you protected by a bunch of high-tech aspects. And the 8th Air Force actually went through a metamorphous trying to figure out what a reasonable target was. They would bomb a factory. They (the Germans) would get it back in order. They would bomb a ball bearing works, they'd get it back in order. They finally found the one target that really defeated them – oil.

Without oil they could do nothing. When Normandy had, on D-Day occurred, some troops left the Eastern Front, uh, Russia. They walked. They didn't have transportation. They got to the Western Front in time for the Battle of the Bulge. They had so little oil they couldn't properly train pilots. They couldn't use their new jet technology. They even used horses and wagons to carry people or walked them. Oil defeated Hitler.

Jon: Anything else?

1st. Lt. Nulk: Well, I don't know whether it's apropos, but we were standing on a hard stand waiting to take off one of the rare days it was clear weather in England. Ninety miles to the East we saw a V-2 take off, the contrail. We looked over 90 miles to southwest toward London. The contrail petered out in high altitude. We saw the tail end of that trip coming down to London. Another V-2 came right up through our formation.

Jon: Did you ever have any experience with the Comet (a German jet fighter)?

1st. Lt. Nulk: No, we didn't. Thank goodness. That was a wonderful technology they developed. But between Hitler's mishandling of it and the lack of oil, it never reached the capabilities it could have. A friend of mine was in the
Chemical Corp and in the Army and they went over on the autobahn toward the end of the war and wing tip to wing tip for miles were Hinkle 272s. Each of them had a thermite bomb dropped into their engine. And they had plenty of technology, but no oil.