

Fred C. Seals, Jr.
B-17 Pilot
1st Lieutenant

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Tell me the difference between manufacturers of the B-17 (i.e. Boeing, Douglas and Vega Corp).

Well there were three aircraft companies that manufactured the B-17. And one of them was Boeing, which was the original one and then there was Douglass and uh, then the Vega Corporation. And it was listed or as the aircraft number. It'd have a B-17G-100, then the serial number, but then it may have a VG or a BL or, or like that. That would let us know. And usually we could tell when we were in a Boeing aircraft. For some reason it was just finished a little better. Vega, or the V one seemed to be the rough one. It was more like a truck – to me. It probably was some, somebody else, loyal, it might have been different but I favored the Boeing.

Tell me what the pilot's responsibilities were.

Well jokingly I have referred to myself as the father, that I was a father of about eight boys and they were all 18, 19 years old and I was only 20 years old. But what the pilot said and what the pilot did, that's what the crew did. And I never had any problems with my crew at all. It was a very good crew because for some reason we seemed to work together and I don't know if...I don't think I was that good a leader. It was just that we had that good of team and we didn't know much about team playing anything. We just, for some reason it happened. And it was a very good crew.

And we started out in training down in Alexandria, Louisiana and from there on we just went along as a very good crew and the pilot made the decisions. The pilot decided what was to be done. And in emergencies I didn't take a vote, but I would ask, you know, the crew members, "Hey, what do you think about this? What, what do we need to do or what are you thinking?" And we would make a decision to do it. We didn't have that many emergencies, but we had several, but it was a team effort and, like I say, we didn't call it team playing them. Now it's the go word of being a team player, but that's the way we worked is as a team.

Tell me what it was like in the back if you didn't have a good lead pilot.

I didn't realize it then, but the first assignment you have as a new crew, first of all, back when you're first assigned to like the 490th, the pilot was sent up as co-pilot on a combat ready crew. We took several training missions, I say several, might have been one or two, and then we went out with our crew. I don't believe any of the crew ever had a preemptive in flight, 'cause their first combat mission was with the pilot crew. And as that, the first...the new pilot or new crew is assigned tail-end Charlie and that's the end of the whip (the last group of bombers in the bomber stream).

And if you didn't have a good lead pilot and he did a lot of very abrupt changes to your course, direction, altitude, anything like...as you can imagine, the tail end of the whip, you got it and you were fighting the power all the time. You were running up trying to catch the aircraft or stay in formation or back off of it. And I don't remember any really adverse effect that I had, except that we just played and, I say played, we worked and stayed in formation and fought it.

Yes, we would be low on fuel when we got back and that's what it was from, was fighting that engine back and forth. But I worked up the ladder and seemed like I was number three man. That's what the third in the squadron and then next your deputy lead and then lead. And it was pretty good when you were number three. You could stay right there on the leader and stay with them.

Tell me about some of the problems with the weather over England.

The weather; it seemed like the most time it was foggy, but it wasn't. I'm sure there was some pretty weather because I've seen photographs of the country after we left. And it was beautiful. And going over we had to climb out in lot of times adverse weather, 'cause when we got there in January, and January till about April or May weather in England wasn't all that good. And as you know, the weather comes off of the North Atlantic, rolls out over England then over the continent and we would take off and rally at, oh, I've forgotten the altitude we'd form at.

And they'd form up as a group, then the group would form into the bomber stream. Well at times it'd be a thousand of us in the air at one time. And as you go over, as you see now, flying airplanes cause contrails and we had caused contrails so bad that we would have to change our altitude coming back because we'd be flying in the weather and sometime it got pretty scary. In fact I...at times coming back I had moved over and moved out of formation because I would lose sight of my lead pilot, and in one event we had a mid-air collision. The lead pilot and number two collided and I was off to one side and the crew saw it. They saw the mid-air collision.

Did anybody get out of the collision?

We didn't see anybody. As best I remember, we didn't see any chutes open. My co-pilot brought my attention to it. I looked across the right and I looked over and I could look through the bomb bay into the cockpit. The half of the airplane I could see. The tail was already falling. And when I looked in through the airplane I could not see anybody getting out. I am not really sure if anybody did. That was a mid-air collision that has been written up and, well I've already forgotten the details what it is, but we have a record of that mid-air collision.

What was your confidence level in getting out yourself?

Well, once such time we had trouble. We got over the target, made the bomb run and at

the initial point, or IP, the bombardier's supposed to open his door, bomb...the bomb bay doors. Well when he did, or tried to, they opened about halfway and hung. On the B-17 that we had, or on the model, had an electric motor that opened the bomb bay doors and the heater cover had fallen off, blown off or left off or some reason and when they got over there it was frozen solid, so they went to a certain point and would not go far enough to release the bomb bay racks.

So we still have, what, four to six thousand pounds of bombs and the bomb stream or the, or the rest of the group has dropped theirs and they made a sharp left turn and they're headed out. So it just like a loaded truck. We were sitting there parked and we couldn't get out.

So, I pulled out of formation, and had to, they were leaving me, and then we descended and found a target of opportunity which was a rail yard that the navigator found and got down to about 11,000 feet and then dropped our bombs. And I'm not sure if that's the time we crash landed or later, but one particular time we saw a B-17 out level with us and we found out later that this B-17 had been captured by the Germans and they were flying along with us and telling the gunners on the ground and the fighters where we were and what altitude and what airspeed we were flying.

And then we had some fighters to come up on us. And I called the crew and asked them, "Don't shoot. Just let things go." And sure enough, the Focke-Wulfs and ME-109s did not attack us. And we went on down lower, but we'd already been hit, I think, by then and, and...but fighters didn't attack us on that. But that's one of the times I asked the crew did they want to bail out or did they want to stick with me and make a crash landing and they said, "No, we're going all the way." So, we stayed as a crew again and crash landed and then got out. And then we were ferried back to our base later in a C-47.

I consider the B-17 as being one of the most stable aircraft that I had ever flown in. Well at that stage of my life I hadn't flown in that many and looking back I still consider it that way. One particular time we had a lot of the skin, or a lot of the metal shot off of the tail of the vertical stabilizer and what I remember our tail gunner, fellow named Potts, I got out and looked at it and fainted, 'cause it, so much of it had been blown away, and what this says that this airplane was still just stripped of its skin and it flew back.

I've never flown a B-24, so I don't know how stable it is, but we used to call them a twin rudder casket, so, and, you know, like just competition I guess. But, I still say the B-17 was one of the most stable airplanes that ever flew and that I've ever flown in and that it was one of the most stable platforms as far as bombing. And I think it proved its record. I've forgotten – seem like there were what, 18,000 of them built or something like that and some of them were shot in two and one of them came back. I had a bomb sticking out of its wing. It had been dropped from a bomber from above. And it was still in its wing wedged in the main spar. The thing flew back, you know.

What was your biggest concern when you flew?

On the trip over to our target, my co-pilot and I and then after we made our bomb runs we'd level out coming back, our biggest concern was getting back in tee time and play golf. He was quite a golfer and I was just learning, but we would argue about who was the better golfer and this sort of thing. And I don't know if we did this to keep ourselves from being so scared to death or what, but once we got into enemy air...territory, we got pretty serious about it. I don't remember really being afraid. I know I was. I know I was scared to death like the rest of the crew, but it was all business. I felt this is a job that we had to do. We had to go over and unload the bombs on the enemy and we had been directed by our military bosses to do this. We did it, dropped it and came on home. To me it was a job that I wanted to get on back and get out of the way.

Was your response to this being your duty as an American citizen?

Well, let me back up a little. I was in a military school. I was in Texas A&M in ROTC. And I was getting my reserve commission. My goal in life, even before the war was to be an army officer, with an engineering degree and what that would lead to I don't know, but that was my desire. And so after December the 7th, and all of us at Texas A&M that we knew that we would be in the military. Is...patriotism was not a word that you played with, but I think all of us felt it in our hearts that whatever America needed done or done for America, we were gonna do it and there was no question in our heart and our mind that we had a job to do and that, that the only way we could do it would be in the military.

And our biggest concern, I remember that our biggest concern was to keep the enemy off our shores. If we could keep the fighting in Europe or if we could keep the fighting in the Pacific, that was a lot better than being...doing the fighting against South Carolina or in Connecticut or wherever it would be, you know.

What was your reaction to General Paul Tibbett's speech? (The General had just spoken at the 490th Bomb Group Reunion)

I felt the same way General Tibbett's did. I was directed and asked and directed to perform a duty to my country to prevent further bloodshed and I would have done the same thing. I wouldn't have done it with the idea that I'm killing people or anything like that, which it did, but looking back and that it...how many millions of people, how many millions of lives that it saved, I would have done the same thing. And I think my entire crew would. I don't think anybody on my crew would have felt bad about it and that they would have knowing what we were gonna accomplish.

Did you ever have any experience against any of the jets?

Yes, and I forgot...seems like it was in April first of all, I think they had a what they call a 163 or something like that. It was a pulse jet type or...and they weren't very effective. They buzzed us and shot at us and came down, but the 262 came out and that thing came up and it would come through our formations just like a bolt of lightning and on this particular day I think three of them were shot down and there's been a big argument did

the bomber stream shoot it down or did the fighter pilots shoot it. My crew claimed one of the jets. In fact, that's why we got the name of our B-17 we call it the "Jet Threat". And I think there probably were about three B-17s that shot this particular 262 down and we were one of them, I think.

Did you ever hear the story of the 262 that made a pass and shot down one of the tail end Charlie's?

I haven't heard that one. I had one experience. We were in I forgot which raid it was, but a Focke 190, F-190, came up and it made I don't know how many passes. He dropped down right on the left wing and I turned and looked him, and I'm looking at him right in the eye, and he salutes me and peels off and goes off. And I didn't know, I didn't know what he was gonna do, but I am astounded, but here's this German pilot, he comes up and salutes, and peels off. And I remembered the way he looked until this day.

What do you think happened?

I think he was saluting us in respect of the fire power that we had because you put that many B-17s together with that many 50 caliber machine guns pointing one way or the other, there were a lot of lead coming out of there and I'd hate to have been a fighter pilot into that.

What kept your guys from shooting him down?

You know, I'm not sure what kept them. I think they were in awe – here was a fighter pilot that was not shooting at us, but was speaking to us or saluting us, you know. And I'm not sure anybody but my top turret or my engineer saw him; ball turret might have seen him. I'm not sure, or waist gunner, but nobody else that I remember.

Have you ever had any interaction with any German pilots?

Once or twice I've been introduced to German pilots at different receptions, but I've never had a chance to sit down and ask them exactly where were they when, you know. But they were very nice, very intelligent men, about my age, you know, 'cause they were World War II veterans too. And we respected each other.

To what do you attribute your survival of the war?

Outside of God? I mean, not my good looks or my good (LAUGHING) capabilities, anything like that. I, I don't know, except just that I was deemed to, to survive, and the whole crew was and, 'cause we didn't have any, any casualties or anything like that.

I've heard different people saw how important it was to keep a positive attitude.

I never did that I remember feel, well, I was gonna be shot down, because when I wrote to my wife we were making plans on what we were gonna do when I got back and, to me,

we had a job to do. We had a certain time to do it and we were gonna go home. We weren't gonna stay there as dead bodies or something. Now, one time we had, I've forgotten which time we were shot down or had a wreck or whatever it was.

My co-pilot was not aboard and he had hurt his ankle playing volleyball and had sprained it and I had another co-pilot with me and when we didn't come back his biggest concern how was he gonna write and tell my wife that he wasn't with us when we were killed.

Well then, I think we were gone about three days and then we showed up and he was greatly relieved he didn't have to write the letter. In fact, they had already started packing our stuff up in our footlockers to ship home or to give away 'cause they usually go through and get any, I say person...not personal items, but any harmful items out of there that you didn't want your wife and family to know about and they were already sorting things out. 'Cause they thought we were shot down because when we left the formation, the other rest of the formations thought we had been shot down.

Anything else?

I don't remember the cold. I remember it was cold and I remember our heated suits that we had and, you know, the stories you've heard about all of those and yeah, we had bathroom problems too, just like any of the rest of them. I think I've forgotten which one it was and, and maybe Rich would know.

I think one of the fellows, the waist gunners had diarrhea. We had ammunition boxes, wooden boxes and they had bolts that held the lids on. And this particular guy had to use it and in such a hurry forgot about the bolts and it ripped up his rear-end pretty bad. So, that, I think that was the casualties of the day that day. But, it happened. I mean the human body in that environment, it was a very unfriendly environment and you had diarrhea, you had anoxia, you had all kinds of problems like this and, and if you had sinus problems going from zero to 25 to 30,000 feet, you had problems. I don't remember any I ever had. I was just pure lucky I guess.

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