Jim Everhart
Radio Operator
Gunner

What is your name, crew position and rank?

Well, my name is James Edward Everhart and they call me Jim. All James's are called Jim. On uh, my crew position was a radio operator and gunner, waist gunner, on the B-24 and some on the B-17.
I was a Tech Sergeant.

What were your responsibilities?

As I've told lots of 'em, I don't know what I done. I think I was supposed to monitor the radio and copy down message I heard and send position reports at certain times when the navigator would tell us where we's at. When the bomb's was dropped, I think my job was to decode and send a strike report, whether it good, fair, excellent or whatever.

And, just monitor is all I knowed, and we had one job that I do remember was throwing out chaff. That was that strips of tin foil and you'd carry it in the radio room. We had a little trap door out the side of the airplane and at a certain point, usually close to the IP, (Initial Point, which was the point at which the bomb run started), all radio operators threw out chaff and while the flack was popping, you just have your head down and putting the chaff out the window and out the door and it was little packages of it that would come apart in little strips of tin foil fly through the air.

They told me to mess up the German radar and every airplane was doing it. And it had you busy while the flack was popping and uh, just kept your mind off of everything. I used to take my flack suit and I'd really slip around and take the flack suit off the side of the radio and set it, sit on it 'cause I, I figured that might help if something comes straight up. And throw that flack out and listen to it and listen to the flack…I've throwed that chaff out, listened to the flack a bustin' and that was about it, 'cause I hadn't had that experience of hearing that till this museum over here in Savannah, and it, the sound of the flack was so real (in the film at the museum).

Seeing that film over in the museum in Savannah over here, they, when they would listen to that flack and closing my eyes and all of sudden they simulated opening the bomb bay doors and that rush of cold air come in, it did bring back memories. That's about all I remember the radio operator done. Never had to fire my gun at anybody. We never were attacked in the whole 30 missions. Fighter planes never attacked us, so I never shot a gun at…never

fired a gun at anybody.

How would you describe flack?

Just the sound of it and seeing every once in a while the dust or hearing somethin' hit the airplane and seein' the flashes or either the, or the dust flyin' or something coming close to you – you didn't know it, it was so fast. But just the sound of it and it's hard to simulate the sound of flack. I hadn't heard any of it till I went to see the show, the Memphis Belle, and they had tremendous sound of flack, the sound of the B-17 engines and that was the first time I'd heard it or anybody imitate it since World War II and then I heard it again in the museum and I don't know how to, to describe the sound of it, just like I can't describe the sound of the buzz bomb. I want somebody to, to send me, and I think Eric Swain is gonna send me a cassette tape of the buzz bomb sound over…I know how it sounds, I can't hear anybody imitate it.

Talk about what a radio operator's responsibilities were.

I done Morse Code as far as communicatin' with anybody outside the plane, although inside the plane you had your throat mikes and you had intercom system. But all my communications from the radio operator's standpoint, was Morse Code and the pilot did all the voice talking, except one time when I was on this special job of a relay ship during the month of December 1944 when I had all channels and I would act as any station, any Air Force plane was calling and couldn't reach his people he was calling, then I would made like I was him, and 'course I'd say, "This is relay. I'll relay your message," and I did a little voice then, but my pilot did most of it. So others, I would just just Morse code was my way of communicatin' with someone outside the plane.

Talk about a typical mission day.

Well, I can reminisce about how you would, just a 19-year-old boy like me that was raised up on a textile mill village in South Carolina. Dirt streets and didn't know anything. Went to high school, but I never had anything much, so I might have been called a "hick" I guess what you'd call it, but never had anything.

So when I got in the Army and they told me I was in the Army Air Corp and went through all the trainings and ended up being a radio operator on a B-24. Prior to that they wanted me to stay at Minor Beach as a drill instructor, I guess because of my voice, I don't know what it was. But I wouldn't do it.

I wanted to fly, although I weighed 190 pound, but I didn't have any of this pot. I was real slim, but I weighed a lot. But, anyway, I got on the B-24 and

that's what I trained on in Mountain Home, Idaho and when I got overseas a typical mission I can remember is going out at night where you can find out where those English pubs were, drinking that Mild and Bitters, pouring it in you and then come by the orderly room and see the…it had a little white flag I believe that'd be pulled up if you didn't have any missions to do, and you'd say, "Well, I'll go home and sleep."

It'd be about 10:00, 11:00, and lay down in your bunk and sometime during that period of 11:00 till 2:00, some brass would decide we was going on a mission and they had pulled up the red flag, so to speak, and just as you'd get to sleep with your belly full of Mild and Bitters, somebody, especially the radio operator and engineer on the crew, had the responsible for getting' everybody on that crew up.

They would shake you and say, "You're going on a mission." That'd be at 2:00 or 2:30 or something that…in the morning. So you'd get up, don't make up any beds, 'cause you didn't know whether you were coming back or not. Go out in the old darkness, 'cause it was wartime, didn't have any lights on, but you could learn to see a little bit with your eyes and you knew where the mess hall was at.

Stagger across a field, a-cussing the Germans about getting' you up in the morning. You know how it is when somebody wakes you up and you don't wanna get up. You take it out on anybody. Get to the mess hall and I heard a documentary the other day, said they found they fed you powdered eggs, but they fed us fresh eggs. Just go through the line, get what you wanted, fry 'em the way you wanted 'em, and get stuff and you eat, eat in a hurry. Come out and I guess it was what your…condemned man's meal. You get your last meal 'cause you might not come back.

Well, I didn't even realize that being just 19 years old and nothing's gonna hurt you. When you're 19 you're immortal, you know. And get on an old truck. Ride around and you knew where the briefing room was at. Get off of the truck; go in the enlisted men's quarters. They'd come out, pull back the curtain. You had your red line showing where you're going and they'd explain to you about staying awake, wearing your…tying your shoes to your belt, which was just left them back in England, wasn't no use carrying them GI shoes tied to your belt.

You wasn't gonna jump out no way. And they used to say, "Well, if you ever jump out, when you open that chute and (come to a) quick stop and your sheepskin boots fly off and you get down in Germany on that snow and ice and you'll wish you had your brogans with you," but I don't guess I even realized that…wasn't gonna have to jump out.

So after you get through briefing you come out of the briefing room, go out

and there'd be an old truck with a step-up on it. You'd step on and it'd take you to the parachute room and you get your parachute and I'd get my code books and put on a heated suit, still maybe uh, cussin' every once in a while. You know, mad at everybody. Just thought you was a big shot when you'd use that profanity, which ain't good. And then come back out and get on another truck. They's always going around the perimeter track. You knew where your airplane was at, and pull up and get off.

Get in that airplane. You had a certain spot to go. Now on the B-24 I stayed on from up until the 490th went in B-17s at about late July, early August of 1944. I'd go in the back of the airplane, through the bomb bay and my radio spot…I'd lay my parachute down right at my waist gun when I get in. Just a little chute pack; lay it down on the floor. Go through the bomb bay and sit down at the radio room, get all my radio equipment, check it out, and just maybe set there.

And the pilot and them be coming in, everybody…I'd maybe fill out the form one for them. I got where I knew everybody's serial number, name, rank and serial number. And I'd fill it out, have it ready for them. Just sittin' at my table. And get ready to take off and that was my take-off position, just settin' behind the co-pilot. And I used to look right over the co-pilot's left shoulder. The engineer stood right beside me. The pilot was on the left-hand seat and you could see all the way out to the end of the runway, way off, just breakin' day. And I could see it from my seat and right in front of me I sat…back of him I sat sideways in the plane, takeoff sideways. And I could look out a little window about oh, 10 or 12 inches round, like a little porthole, and I could see the right landing gear of that B-24.

And we'd start down that runway and you could see the end of the runway way down there and I'd hear 'em, the pilot and the co-pilot, going through their procedures. I didn't know what it meant, but I knew that they did. And all of a sudden you'd get to go on and the end of the runway be coming and before you know it, the front end of the airplane would…you couldn't see out there. You couldn't see the end of the runway. It done got in behind that. 'Course you still had a lots of runway to go, but you couldn't see it from where I was sittin'. You was looking over the top of that top uh, nose turret and I'd get to wondering if that thing was gonna take off and the pilot talking and both of 'em would have their hands on the throttle and full throttle and just that…that plane just wobblin' going down.

And I'd look out at that right landing gear where it was stretching out trying to get off the ground. And I just look at that thing and I'd look over the left shoulder of that co-pilot and every mission though, and I'd look, "Doggone, is it gonna get off of that ground." Then all of a sudden it'd get airborne. The moment it lifted off the ground the pilot would say, "Wheels," and the engineer had a switch, I guess, he'd retract them wheels and the moment those

wheels started going up into the wing it felt like the airplane was sinking, an optical illusion, wheels going up.

And I'd pick my feet up off the floor and it, just as I'd get my feet picked up I'd set them back down, I'd see the pilot take one hand off of the wheel, he'd have both hands on that wheel, then he'd reach over and touch the co-pilot and he'd get them throttles and he'd, he'd got up high enough and he throttle it back and at that particular moment I could feel my rearend just relax. I guess I had it so tight…but that was a typical take-off and then uh, and by then it'd be daylight. You'd take off , get out, get up out of the bed at uh, about 2:30, 3:00 and take off just as the sun was, well, the sun wouldn't be shining most of the times. It'd just be a sunrise coming up somewhere.

What was a typical B-17 takeoff like? Did they take as long?

No, it didn't seem like it took that long. 'Course I wasn't up in the front. In the B-17 I had a little radio room. Go in the back door and I'd go through the waist, which wasn't too far, go by the bomb…go by the ball turret and sit down on the left-hand…right on the left wing and just look out a window right across the left wing and I had a Plexiglas dome up above it. Then just sit down in your radio room. You didn't have anywhere to go.

You went to the old place of battle or so (MUMBLE) you just sit there and I couldn't see out. I could see the pilot through the bomb bays and I could look up there and see them doing it, but I didn't have any reason up there. So I didn't see any take-offs in a B-17, except out the window and I didn't even really look for it.

I could, like in a commercial airline today you could go down to…you know when you get airborne, you feel it if you fly much. And you knew it was gonna take off and didn't think nothing about it. But it didn't seem like it took as long in a B-17. It might have, but when you're looking at the end of the runway and you had a B-24 and it just seemed like it took longer.

Whether it did or not I'm not familiar, but it…I believe the B-17 took off faster. I had a fairly comfortable seat, but I had a comfortable seat in the B-24, but I did have to come back and stand in the waist in the B-17. I sat in my radio seat all the time until maybe just step back three or four steps and man the waist gun if I had to manned it, but I can't remember doing anything. Just get up and walk a step or two and look out a window and watch, try to help the pilot.

Do you recall why they took out the radio compartment gun that was above you in the B-17?

No, I sure don't. I guess it was because of air superiority probably. I don't

know. I just went one day and it wasn't there. I remember being there and they had…I had to go to the armory shack. If you had a gun position you'd go to the armory shack and when you got to the airplane, got things there, go over there and get you a .50 caliber machine gun, lay it across your shoulder, bring it, insert it into that gun. I don't believe I ever had to insert one of them. I believe it was already inserted, but my waist gun on the 24 I used to go get it.

The 17, get the .50 caliber machine gun out of the rack, put it in that rack that they had in the airplane. And I don't know when they took it out and why, but it probably because not too much fighters attack you or something. I wasn't in that upper echelon to know them things.

Why were you in the hospital? Were you were wounded in battle?

Well, no, I don't believe so. After all this thing, I got a Purple Heart for it, but I just…I get to reminiscing about what happened to me as a kid. When I was 13 years old they said I had sinus trouble and they went up in my head and operated on my nose and I went into a coma and stayed in a coma for eight days and they said that my sinus had swelled up. I don't know what they done back then, it was in 1938 or '39.

And then after I was pronounced probably dead, they thought I was dead, I came out of that coma and a week or two after that while I was recuperating at home I was walking up the street and I had a, a seizure or something, fell over. And they said that's just after-effects of that thing there, so I didn't pay any attention to it. It just passed way.

Never had it again and then I actually believe on June the 14th, 1944, that I was in the waist in the waist gun and on a mission, I can't remember the name of the target… I probably could look it up, and all of a sudden I was laying in the waist of the airplane and the ball turret gunner was with me and the bombardier had come back there and I, see I must have been out a little while because they had time to get to me. They had my oxygen mask and was puttin' it on my face and they said, "Are you hit?" And my shoulder was hurting. I said, "I think so." And, but I found out I wasn't.

Then I found out it was just my shoulder. I had a trick shoulder that I'd hurt in football or baseball, something like that. It'd got out a time or two, but it'd always go back in. I couldn't get it back in I told 'em. So, when we come back and landed it was figured that I fell in the airplane, got…It might have been flack that knocked us and I might have grabbed and got my shoulder out of place.

But, after looking back at it, I believe I must have had a seizure and fell because I had to be out a long time, or I don't know, I don't know what I was

doing down there. But anyway, that shoulder was knocked out of place and they couldn't get it back in. They had to take me to the hospital and work on it and cast it up. Got it back in someway. And I stayed in the hospital about three or four weeks and it was wounded-in-action, is what they said. But I believe I had one of them spells that I'd had in 1938 or '39 and this was '44.

What do you recall about the stay in the hospital?

Well, they took care of me good. I went over there with a taped up arm to my side. I didn't know who the doctor was or anything, but they wanted to, immediately after x-raying, they wanted to cut in my shoulder and put pins in it and I said, "No, don't cut in there. It'd go back in. It's back in now."

I don't know, but it just seems like I made that doctor mad. I believe he wanted to do it. I don't know, but anyway, he said, "Put him down and cast him up. Put a cast on him." And they cast me from my waist up to my neck, prop my arm up in the air, put a brace under it, cast that all the way out to the end of my fingers and cut a hole around my where my naval was at and told me to go back to the ward.

Now, I had on a suit of armor and had to walk back up the hallway in this little 65th General Hospital. And you know, you wasn't too far up there, but I went back to the ward and I was hurtin' – a young boy with a shoulder been out of place and they had it all cast up and I was in bad shape and I wanted something to ease the pain, but the medic wouldn't give me anything. Said the doctor hadn't said anything. And I begged him and he wouldn't give me nothing to ease the pain.

So I got out walking around a little corner not too far from that little place I was supposed to be and I looked and nobody walking along and I'd stop and cry a little bit, like a little baby from home. I was away from home. I want my momma I guess. But then when I got back he said, "The doctor is mad at you." Said, "He come back by here, wanted to see you." I said, "What'd he say?" He said, "Didn't say nothing. He was just mad. He left."

And far as I know the next morning when he come in he just took my chart. I stood up out of the bed, but I could stand up when the doctor come in. Supposed to stand up when an officer comes in, I guess. And he just looked at that pad and he told that one boy, put this soldier out there in a tent. And as far as I know every morning when he come by, it could have been other doctors, I don't know, but they never did speak to me. Just looked at that chart. And I guess that's what they supposed to do, look at the charts, see how long you been in.

Then one day he said, "Send him down to orthopedics, get it cut off." That was about three or four weeks. Go down there and they sawed it off and I like

to never got that little arm down out of the air. When I did pull it down they had to put the smelling salts to wake me up. But, they started physical therapy and got it all fixed up and got it back and I went back and asked the pilot, Lieutenant Marvin Orleans, about getting' back on…was I still on the crew and he said, "You sure are. When does the doctor turns you loose."

So I went to the doctor and I said, "how I'm gonna get back to flying?" And then he said, "That's another crazy fellow, wanting to get back in that air." "I thought you was supposed to, 'cause I was a member of that crew." And he said, "Can you Indian wrestle?" and I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, put my arm down" I believe he let me put it down, you know, it was right quick. He put me on flying status and I took it back to the first sergeant Orcott or Azel Phelps or somebody.

Next day I was back on that crew of flying. So, they give me good treatment, especially the young lieutenant lady, a nurse, she really did know her physical therapy. I don't know here, and she was rather attractive girl and me a 19 year old boy, she was older than me, but she was attractive and she…I believe she was a first lieutenant. She was an officer. And she really knew her physical therapy and for the four or five times, go in the morning and afternoon, and those fingers rubbing over me and me a 19 year old boy and a good looking woman a rubbin' on you…(LAUGH)…but she was good till one morning I went up there and they had a soldier.

He started rubbing on me, he was training to be a physical therapist, and I think I must have asked about going back to the outfit 'cause he didn't rub like that young nurse did. She had a Midas touch, is that what you call it?

How important was teamwork?

All I can ever see, everybody did their job. You knew where the other man was at, they wasn't horsin' around on the airplane. It just everybody was at his position and they would talk to you over the intercom sometimes, they'd want to know something. But everybody did his, just did his specific job, such as a tail gunner stayed back there in his position.

And I sat in the radio room and if you just look, that's what you had to do is observe out those windows, look for anything to happen and to notify that pilot if anything… that was the first thing you was supposed to do, was push that button and tell that pilot if you seen anything out of the ordinary, and far as I know everybody did their job and you didn't have to do somebody else's job and we were lucky, no one ever got hurt as far as having to take over somebody else's job.

We never did get shot up so bad that you had to improvise and do things. So, we were really, I guess, a lucky crew. You take oh, flying the missions we

did and never get in anything bad. One time we had some engines mess up and we lost altitude and almost had to bail out, but we didn't. Came back…got down low and come back to England and the German fighters didn't touch us. We were a wounded victim, but they didn't bother us.

Tell what happened to a straggler.

Well, we had thoughts of it. They'd told us about it, that you were a sittin' duck and you get down there by yourself and that's what they wanted, just like a wounded rabbit, if you's out rabbit hutting and you'd wound him a little bit he was, he was yours.

And I was always told that when you get down like that, if you thought you couldn't make it and the German fighters started in on you, you could drop your wheels and that was a sign of surrender and they would lead you to the nearest air base and by you get there they used to tell us about destroying all secret things such as your radio codes and your bomb site, anything that you could destroy before you got there. That was legal within the rules of war I imagine.

And that's what they told us to do, but that one time that we were like that, that's all I remember. No one attacked us. We got back to England. I can't remember whether others got with us or what, but I do remember we were all ganged around around the back hatch (of the B-24). The bombardier was back there, everybody was back there except the pilot and the co-pilot, waitin' on him to tell us to get out.

We was going out of that thing, but something happened and it didn't…and so they never did touch us. But that was a sign if you dropped your wheels you were surrendered and they would lead you to an airport. Now I've been told that that's what to do.

I was told that there was one bomb group, I was, you know, how you hear a story about 100th Bomb Group, I believe they called it. That some pilot was in that particular predicament and told his gunner, said, "Get your guns aimed right at that fighter that was settin' on our wing". If you're ridin' along at 200 mile an hour and both of you, it's like you're sittin' side by side and all of a sudden he gives the word to fire.

But I believe that somebody, they shot him down, but I believe he notified somebody what happened or…because he used to call it, I believe they called it the Bloody 100th. It wasn't too far from us. And I've been over there with a boy who was in my outfit that had a cousin or something and we rode bicycle over their place, but I was told that they, every time they'd go on a mission those Germans knew where they was at and they were after them

boogers.

But my outfit was very fortunate when I was in there, it took us from May 31st (1944) to January the 10th (1945) or something to fly 30 missions, taking out the month of December. The month of December we were a radio relay ship for the 3rd Division. They took a B-17 and cleaned all the bomb bays out and put all kind of radio equipment, all kind of channels, bomber to bomber, bomber to fighter, fighter to ground – everything you had in that and we acted as a relay station and we flew every day that there was ever an 8th Air Force, 3rd Division airplane gonna be in the air, regardless of where we was at.

We'd leave our base and maybe get back two days later. Couldn't get in, bad weather. In December in England is rough. And somebody volunteered us for that mission. I remember…it was in November first…last part of it, a jeep…we got on a little training mission something, a jeep come out there, the pilot, co-pilot, radio operator, engineer. I know the pilot, the radio operator and the engineer. We were two enlisted men, the radio operator and engineer.

Video Tape Change

Conversation continues with Jim being called in to talk to some officers regarding this volunteer mission. Jim mistakenly thought it was about an incident that happened in London…

…to know what started Mitzen. I said right quick, like a kid, you know, you'll tell a little fib, that's the first line of defense. "I done nothing." He asked my engineer, Buck Mitzen, "What you done, Buck?" " I've done nothing."

I got to thinking about the time we was in London and how we'd cut up. And I remember one time Buck, he had really laid a good whack on a English man that worked in our hotel. He'd run some old English, spoutted at us and made, made Buck a little mad. And Buck didn't like the way he talked to us, and he slapped him, and we run down that hotel and got out on the streets, and after we was running up the street and going down them alleys, we heard them little whistles them Bobbies blowed. We thought they was hunting us. You know, that's the way they give signal back then.

But nobody ever said anything to us, so I thought about that. And I said, they found out about that. We…me and Buck just sat there behind the pilot. He was up in the front, we was in the back, but we never did admit to anything. We got over there, they'd tuck us in a room. And had some officer in there, and they closed the door. And we sat down, and they told my pilot, Lt. Marvin Orleans, says you're crew has been selected to fly a relay radio ship or radio relay ship, or whatever they called it, and through the month of December.

And we were just about…had about one more mission to go for 30, something like that. And was going, thought we was coming home, but they had upped it to 35 a week or two before, and everybody was mad about that. And we flew that thing for the month of December; then we come back in January and flew one or maybe two.

And the pilot, copilot, engineer, ball turret gunner, tail gunner, and the nose gunner had all finished. I was the only one that didn't have enough missions. I missed doing that little stay in the hospital. Now that was a problem. That was hurt when you watched them…I'd been with them since November of 1943. We were a crew that stayed together from November 1943 until January – mid January – 1945, and stayed together. No one had had to leave a little while with me with that injury.

Course, we had some navigators that left us, but the pilot, copilot, engineer, radio operator, ball turret gunner, nose gunner, waist gunner, and tail gunner stayed together the whole entire time. And our second bombardier joined us when we got overseas, and he was with us all the time of all that combat flying. No one got a scratch. Didn't have to shoot at a German plane nowhere. Nothing happened to us, so the old saying goes that somebody up there must have been looking after you.

And I made plenty of money. I'd never had the kind of money I had then. The tech sergeant rating, time and a half, and just money. Oh, I found out later that they paid you that good money because they knew you wasn't gonna collect it. Cause the life expectancy…now that I read the books, the life expectancy of an air crewmember was very little. I didn't know that back then; it didn't make no difference to me. Wasn't nobody gonna get rid of me. I wasn't ready to go then. But really and truthfully, I don't ever remember thinking about leaving this old world.

I guess that's the way a 19 year old boy's supposed to think, especially when he's just growed up and didn't ever have anything – no money. Had a little job of fooling around, going to high school, and playing athletics.

Did you have any responsibility to the ball turret gunner to help him get out?

I didn't ever have to help him get in and out. I probably was told how to do it. I remember we used to practice cranking that thing up or cranking it around, and, and I probably had responsibilities to look in for him, look out for him if something had happened. Cause things could happen.

I asked to let me get down in it one time. And I was a little bigger than him; he was a little bitty boy, but I could, I was slim but not too much taller. And I

got down in it. I wanted to get down and see how it felt to ride in that thing. And we was in I guess probably a practice mission, and I got down in that thing, and I did fill it up more than he did.

And laying there, and the gun sight was right between your feet and pull down the top hatches and use the gun sight. It was something like a bulldozer, I imagine, as far as I remember how you turned it and looked around. And I rolled around in it and looked at the ground and back up and on the…then I decided I wanted to get out.

And I turned it with the guns straight down. I believe that's the way you got out, or, I can't remember that. But I turned it the way you're supposed to get out, and I reached up to unlatch the hatch, and it wouldn't unlock. And I believe I got a little claustrophobia, is that the name of the word? I was ready to tear that place up. I didn't know what to do. Yeah, I wasn't thinking about intercom or talking to anybody. I did hit a few times on something, and they probably didn't hear me.

And I looked, and I got to reading, and it says in little red letters, said, "Line up arrows before opening. To open, line arrows up," and I put them arrows and got them lined up, and I opened that door. And I climbed out of that ball turret, and they…from then on I'd step by it, go around it. See, it was on my way to the radio room, right there in the ways. But I never got back in it. But I undoubtedly had procedures to get him out of there, because I do remember practicing cranking it. I don't know if we cranked the B-17's up, but they had a crank on where you could crank it certain ways manually as we did the wheels and the other things that had cranks. We all practiced on them.

Do you remember practicing anything else, like bailout or ditching procedures?

They used to practice ditching. We'd even practice that over land, but the pilot would just get us all back in the back of the plane, and him and the copilot, I believe, was all that'd stay up there. The engineer might have stayed, but I believe they was all up there, just about all up there. And what little bulkhead there was behind the bomb bay, everybody'd sit down in the floor on whatever on both sides and sat between each other's legs and hold each other around the waist. And there was procedures of knowing where the…just as quick as it hit, how long it would take you to get out.

And the B-24 would sink very quickly, and I think more so than the B-17. And go through practice those things, sometimes on practice flight, it was, I believe, it was the pilot's responsibility to practice them and log them down, so the headquarters would know that he had practiced them.

And everybody'd go through the same procedure, what he's supposed to do

and how you're supposed to get out and where your escape hatch is, how to get out, how to get that dinghy out of that wing or where ever it come from, and how to inflate your Mae West, and just go through them. But we never did have to ditch.

Did this give you confidence in case you ever had to?

Well, at that time, yes, you thought you could do it. Right…now then I don't…I look back at it, I don't know whether I could or not. But back then I was sure that what they was teaching us I would have responded to what they said.

Just like getting on a commercial airplane today, they read it off to you, but you don't pay any attention to them. But back then, you paid attention, or you thought you did, and you fully realized…I was confident that I knowed which way to go. Because when I got on an airplane, in the 24 especially, I threw my parachute down in the floor at the waist gun. And I went through the bomb bay and flew in the radio compartment.

Now I never did wear my parachute… my parachute was back there. I knew I could get to it, but now that I have to see them going down sometime, I don't know if I could have got to it or not. In a B-17 I carried it with me, my little chest pack, and laid it on top of my radio receiver. It was right up there, but if something had happened, it'd have fell off in the floor. And I might not have knowed where it…well, I guess you, you had confidence you knew where it was at, so you could snap it on when you had to.

Did you watch any B-17's go down?

I have never seen but one that looked like it was on fire that went off in the clouds, and they started bailing out of it. And that's…I've seen one that was…somebody said that was a plane going all the way down, and he was…we were going in to some of them little inlets up in Norway, or I don't know, Belgium or somewhere, them little straits. Where we went into Germany that way; they told us there wasn't much gun emplacements.

But there was a B-17, and something happened to it, and they was…we was at 20, 23, or 25,000 feet, and they must have been down around 6 or 7,000 feet. They was real low, and everybody was watching it, and somebody said it was up front. Then we caught up with it, and I looked out from my little window on the left wing, and I looked down, and I seen that B-17. It might have been, uh, 7 or 8,000 feet, but it was down, and you could see them water inlets down there.

And after a while three or four little parachutes come out of it. Then all of a sudden, I…you…just before we got out of sight, somebody said, "They've

jumped out of it. And I looked, and it looked like you could see splashes in the water about that time. They it looked like the plane started gaining altitude, but we went on off and left it. And I always imagined them boys that jumped out was looking, and there it went. Said, "Oh, we left too quick to go."

But I don't know what happened to it, but that's the only one that I seen. And when I was in the hospital, they told me that the Lt. Fellows, Richard Fellow's crew of the 851st Bomber Squadron got a direct hit. And some of the gunners said it all happened so fast, it blowed him up – the B-24 did. It exploded, and debris was falling, but it was over in split seconds. And you're looking for elsewhere this, this goes, but as far as seeing one exact… I never did see one go down and spinning around. I just never did.

Did you feel you could realistically get out of the radio compartment if the plane was spinning around?

I don't…back then I thought I could. Now then, reading these books – World War II books and things, I can't comprehend how anybody got to those places…you had places you'd go out, crawl and go out the bomb bay. It was right up at the front of you. Go back and go out one of the waist windows, or go out the side door. It wasn't too far away, maybe three or four feet, five.

But I just wonder if that plane was flipping and flopping, but it might not have done that. It might have come down pancaking. But at that particular time, I was confident I knowed how to get out of it. But I didn't think much about it, because, as far as I remember, cause I knowed nothing, wasn't nothing going to happen to me. I was immortal – bound to be when you're 19.

Was there anything you were really afraid of?

I don't remember being afraid. I guess you'd be…I've heard of a word called apprehensive, is that what you call it? At different times my body would react to certain things such as flack a popping, and you'd probably have a little queasiness in you, cause when it was over, you'd feel a little different.

But being afraid, as far as being in terror – holy terror, I can't comprehend or don't ever remember being completely scared. I remember the only thing that used to get me mostly were sometimes we'd come in, and the under cast would be below us. And maybe you'd have six or eight, twelve airplanes, and you had an under cast of maybe five or six thousand feet and a thousand foot ceiling below, and rather than come across the channel with a thousand feet ceiling, you'd come in above it.

And you'd have to peel off and go down in that stuff, and the pilot knew what he was supposed to do… come down so many feet per second, so fast, in a

certain degree of coming down. And the plane behind him was doing the same thing, and the plane in front of him.

And you had to look out the windows, and if you looked out the balcony window this morning toward that Savannah River, you couldn't see as far as you or I'm looking. That's the way it was in them clouds, and you wondered what was above you, and you're listening and looking for anything to tell that pilot.

And I can still remember that feeling of coming through there, and it'd seem like eternity. It would; it'd just seem like you'd never get out of it. Then all of a sudden you'd bust out into the clear air, and the ground would be…look like it was right on you, but it'd be a thousand feet below. And then you'd get down in the rat race trying to get on the runway, such as planes coming in, and you're having to make the approach, and something happened and blow you off course. The prop wash would knock you out, and you'd make another trip around. Pilot raising cane about being low on gas and getting bumped.

But that coming down through them clouds with other planes coming in, in front of you and behind you, peeling off, and you wonder what they was doing. That was the only…but being really afraid, I can't ever remember being afraid, just thinking about it.

Do you remember having a D-Box or a G-Box? (This was an electronic navigation device first employed by the British. Some American aircraft used this new technology to navigate their position.)

I used to have a box that I could, I'd send out a signal, seemed like on low frequency with a trailing-Y antenna. And I had a little thing I could pick up a radio station, two or three – three points, and flip a switch, and it'd give a reading on a dial. And I could draw that triangle, and I could pinpoint just about where I was at. But it was some kind of low frequency thing, I believe. But I knew how to work it back in radio school, and I've worked it on the airplane, you know, flying around in Idaho with those stations just to see if I knew where we was at.

Did you work with a navigator when you were doing that? (Sometimes it was the Navigator who operated the G-Box).

No, I don't remember doing anything with a navigator except listen to him and synchronize my watch with his when he called back, and then when he'd tell me to throw out that chaff, I'd…at the right point.

Tell me about your last mission, and did you know it was your last mission?

No, not mine. I knew it was, probably knew it was the last mission for the pilot I was flying with that particular day, because my crew, the Orleans crew, had already finished. As I say, I needed more missions, and I needed a crew, I guess, because somebody put me on a crew of Captain Ken Cavanaugh. And he was sort of a celebrity before he went in the war. He was a professional football player – Chicago Bears – and well known for it and a big boy. If you ever see him – he's here today – he's eight foot tall and looks like a…great big fellow.

But anyway, I was flying with him, and I probably knew it was his last mission because we flew on the mission – I don't even remember where we went – but when we come back, they was out there with photographers to take his picture. And I was in his crew picture. I flew my last, the last four missions I flew was with him.

And with Ken Cavanaugh crew, and they…I got on the old truck like always, went up, put up my parachute and harness. Then all of a sudden, I don't remember anything. The next thing I remember I was in the hospital. And I looked up, and the doctor said, "Well Everhart, your flying days are over." And I wondered what was wrong. See, I get back to that passing out, that seizure.

He said, "You had a seizure." Now this was February the 23rd, 1944. I believe on the June 14, 1944 I had one of them things, cause I know I had one on, in 1938 or '39. But, see, I had to been out…the boys told me later on that I just dropped over going in the interrogation room. And I don't…it took a long time for the ambulance to get me to take me to the hospital. When I opened my eyes, I was completely cured right then. Wasn't nothing wrong with me. And he told me I had symptoms of Epilepsy, that my right cheek quivered, and I'd urinated on myself. I didn't know what I'd done. I, wasn't nothing wrong with me then. I was cured.

But they grounded me and started through the hospital procedures and finally told me I'd had meningitis or encephalitis when I was young. I was supposed to have died, but I didn't. And I believe that was, that was the last…never had one since then. I'm 73 now.

Tell me about the intense cold on these missions.

In training there wasn't anything to do with it. We didn't have nothing but sheepskin clothing. But we didn't fly too high, very seldom we'd go on oxygen. I don't know many times, if any, while we was training in Mountain Home, Idaho that we went high enough that you had to use oxygen. We had oxygen masks and practiced on it, but it had to have been in January, February, something like that, or March of 1944 that…cause I understand each crew was supposed to check out at 30,000 feet. That was what was…I

remembered them telling us, and had the sheepskin clothing and had good heaters on the plane.

You had to heat the plane down on the ground real good. And we had all, everybody's on the airplane, we had to climb 30,000 feet and it had to be logged down by the pilot. And it took a long time to get to 30,000 feet. I don't know how long it took, but you don't do like the jets do today, go there in a few minutes or a minute. We had to gradually circle and climb, and before we got up to 20,000 feet, it had to have been, oh, I don't know how cold it was. They said sometime it'd get 50 to 60 below zero.

But I just had on sheepskin clothing, and I finally stood up out of the radio seat and stood beside the engineer, and the pilot and copilot were there, and they all…everybody had on big gloves. They had to get goggles pulled down, watching that altimeter. All the others – the bombardier and maybe the navigator – they was at their stations, just froze to death.

The heaters were going full blast, but they wasn't a cold…wasn't warming up nothing. And we kept waiting on that altimeter to get to 30,000, and when it got there, we were supposed to stay a certain amount of time. Whether we did, I don't know. I was so froze; I don't whether I've ever been so cold or not. And we started coming down.

But when we got overseas, they issued us heated suits. And the only thing I can remember about the cold weather, when it was cold, is when you're young and you're…you'll probably have to edit this…but you want to take a leak. And you're young, and you're warm inside your idiot suit. And a young man, he's raring to go along about then, and you think you can do everything.

So you pull off your big old glove, and you got your little silk glove on under there. And you unbutton your fly. Didn't have zippers like…we would have zippers, and then you reach in to get out that watering spout, and that's when you feel like it's 60 below zero! You had that little old relief tube, and you got lots of hot fluid in you. But that stuff would start coming out, and it'd start freezing when it'd get in that old relief tube. And it'd splatter all over your britches and you couldn't wait to get that thing back in there where it was warm and button up and get that glove back on. They you've have ice on you made out of salt water, you know.

But that's how cold it was. You wouldn't realize it. When you opened up that fly at 60 below zero, and you, you realized how cold it was. So you didn't do that much; you just sat on that little stopper and hold it. You got down low, maybe to use that relief tube. And I tried it one time up high, and I guess maybe one time, and I had sense enough not to do it any more, cause you'd sit there, and you'd…the breath would come out of the side of your oxygen mask and freeze on your shoulder. Just sat in one spot, breathing

good and warm in that heated suit.

But I do remember turning that heated suit down. They had a 24-volt system somewhere and had a little, oh, dial on it and turned it up to get warm. When the flack would start popping, I'm…I have remembered turning that thing down. I guess I was hot, getting…I probably was perspiring, because of that flack. But I do remember turning it down. I'd get so hot. So that was probably being scared, too, but I wasn't…

Tell me about the time you saw a B-24 come in downwind.

Oh, I don't know whose it was. I think it was the fellow that you interviewed before, but I don't know who he was. We was on a, I guess, going out on a practice mission or, I don't know what it was, but we had to all be there. We was going down the perimeter track, going around to the end of the runway, gonna take off. I remember we was gonna turn right and take off from downwind.

And we pulled up to the perimeter track, and I was listening to the pilot talk to guide the B-17 in. Over on the left wing, we was gonna turn and go that…go to the right instead of…I'll…and they…the tower called and said, "Hold up, hold up. We've got an emergency coming in and landing." Well, I sat there, and I kept looking out the left wing, and that's the way you're gonna land. You land way you take off. And I just kept a looking, and I wondered when the devil he's gonna get in sight. And I didn't see nothing.

All of a sudden I heard the tower talking to the pilot of that plane. "Pull that thing off, get it off in the grass. Get that thing stopped." And by then somebody said, "Looky yonder." And it was coming the other way. It'd landed downwind; it was coming toward us. We was parked on the end of the perimeter track, back away from the runway quite a bit. But here he come, and it was on fire. And the fire trucks was after…the pilot hollered, get out of this plane.

Everybody just unplugged, and they went out the back door. And everybody just got out of our airplane, cause it pulled right up in front of us, wasn't too far. I guess it was a good distance, but it looked close. When I left that plane, and I went and found me a gully somewhere off the end of the perimeter and got down in that gully and looked back, and when I looked back at it, there was firemen all around it spraying that white stuff.

And…but it landed the wrong way. He come in…he got on the ground the best he could. And I never did know who it was, until one of these reunions, that I can't pronounce that boy's name. I tell him I can't pronounce it. It's that fellow that we seen a while ago – Guagliano or something like that. I can't pronounce it. Well, he told me it was his plane, but that was just a thing

that happened. Them pilots would put…that old plane would just do anything. **(Editor's note: this was probably Ray Hann's B-17, and Jim is referring to the account of Radio Operator Mike Quagliano)**

It just…it…you couldn't hardly knock it out of the air. It'd fly on…I bet it would fly on one engine. I don't know. I'll bet they could keep it up in the air a while on it.

Which type of plane would you rather be in combat with, the B-24 or B-17?

I don't think it'd make any difference in combat. What I liked about the B-24 was it had plenty of room in it. I could walk around in it, get around in it good. I didn't have to get around in it, but I have been up in the nose on takeoffs. I wasn't supposed to, but I went up and tried it – a young boy. I sat in the nose, cause you could get up through the tunnel up in the nose real easy.

And the B-24 it seemed like you could move around, had a little more head space, but the B-17 just…I believe it was better taking off. I had a more comfortable headquarters, but it was all the same in combat, so I…they both were real good planes to me. I wouldn't…the only thing I'd say about the B-17 is my immediate position as radio operator had a little better…well, it wasn't any better seat, but I was in a little place of my own. And it seemed like it'd take off easier.

And by the reports from other folks, it wouldn't blow up as quick, but I seen evidence it would blow up, too. But they claimed the B-24 would explode in midair a lot more easier. But I couldn't prove that. But as far as comparing one to the other, they both were just equivalent to what they were supposed to do, to me. Like my copilot, he was favorable to the B-24, because he liked the way the engines handled, and the way he felt it in that cockpit. But he liked B-17's, too.

But I, just by hearing people talk, the B-17s were more durable. I guess I was thinking that, too, but it didn't make any difference. If that flack hit it in the right place, it'd go. But…so I'll just say they was both real good, heavy bombers of their day.

To what do you attribute your surviving the war?

I don't know, unless it's that Man upstairs. But I just, I can't pinpoint anything. I guess it was…might be the old saying the young…the good die young. The only boy that I know of that was real close as far as being close, was on another crew. He was always with us when we was training at Mountain Home and overseas. His name was John Rollin. He came from Pittsfield, Massachusetts. I believe he was a devout Catholic. I don't know. I

don't ever remember him drinking or getting rowdy like GI's will do. I believe he did start smoking a pipe.

He was the one that I never have forgot, when I was telling you prior to this. Cussing when they would get you out of bed every morning, staggering across an old sugar beet field or what you're doing, me a using profanity against the Germans or CQ's or anybody who'd wake you up. He was always saying, Everhart, why don't you shut up that nasty talk. And I'd lambaste him ever once in a while. But I didn't mean to, but I probably did, and he, on his…they were supposed to fly 30 missions and get through. And before he got to 30, they upped it to 35. I want to think it was the 33rd mission.

He was a tail gunner on Lt. George Reeves' crew, and there was a sort of an explosion right close to the tail. And it damaged the airplane real bad, and I've heard from the pilot personally, he said he thought he heard John say, "Oop," something like that. He don't know where he heard him over the intercom or what.

He had the radio operator go back there, the ball turret gunner, "Somebody go back and check on John." And he was setting in the tail gun station dead already. One piece of flack went between his, oh, he had a flack suit on the front like a catcher's breast protector and down the back, and there's a little gap underneath your arm where they…and that one piece of flack, just a little flack went right through, right through his heart and killed him instantly.

And so there was the good. I, I…we weren't flying that day, and I never have forgot it. I come back…and they come back in the barracks, and the enlisted men were crying. John had got killed, and we went to his funeral. And they buried him in England and went through all the procedures of…military procedures of saluting and things of that nature.

And I was supposed to go see his momma and daddy after the war, and I kept putting it off till later. And I finally did in later years got in touch with his daddy. His momma was already dead, but his daddy was glad I got in touch with him. And that's all I can attribute to it, is the good die young. And they say these old knuckleheads or whatever you say, that the Man up there might have a little something else he's planning.

What does it take for a guy to survive the conditions of cold, flack, etc.?

Well, first of all this war don't settle anything. They gonna have 'em and they always will and always will. They never settle anything. The winner always loses, or the loser never loses. They're not, mostly all political or religious. It's just a group of two people, might as well say, or groups of people, both of 'em wantin' the same thing and neither one will compromise.

And that's gonna always happen as long as they's human beings in the world. You would have to do battle in your method of the day regardless of what it was – back in the caveman days they battled with clubs and, and our day come along. But our day will never be again until the world changes and I don't believe the caveman days will be again.

And what they're doing right today with pushing buttons, we think right now that that's the only way to fight a battle with somebody settin' in a room 10,000 miles away push a button and destroy a target somewhere else. One button, one sends something on the way. And so…try to compare one with the other, I don't think there's anyway you do it. You just have to do battle with what you got in that particular day.

The leaders set up weapons and personnel and I think the people of today would react to a war if it really got publicized and thought that somebody was threatening our own little domain that we would respond to it, the young men would respond to it just like we did in World War II and my daddy did in World War I and my great-grandfather did in the Civil War. You just…whatever happens in your day, I think that the young will have to do it.

I do have an opinion that this old world will have to do something. It's getting to full and everybody getting too smart and I have opinions on that too. Lots of people don't agree with it, but I believe that the world will really and truthfully you…all inside this old earth is something and you see volcanoes and you see earthquakes and I actually believe that one of these days, might be a billion years from now, but everybody gets so smart and they know everything in the world, they claim, that it looks like there ain't nothing else to learn in the frontiers of it, foreign phases, out, out in outer space now.

But this old earth will get some bubblin' inside and crack and pop and change its shape. It's uh, it's a globe and it's gonna crack open and pop and move stuff around and mountains will fall down and the deserts will be up and all…you know where the water's going. The water's gonna go to the lowest places. And it'll change its form and now you got all that water went from one place to the other and there'll be a few little places, there'll be people living.

Grandpa and a bunch of people, everybody will drown, 'cause…and what used to be the high places the low places covered in water. Look in the ocean now. You got mountains. It might have done that once before. And the grandpa will say, "Hmm, boy, tell that old boy we used to do it this way," and he'll figure out a way to go out and catch some fish and eat and all of a sudden he'll venture off a little bit and he'll find a piece of land over yonder and then they'll get back to the other. Then there'll be people that talk

different languages and they'll be scattered all over the world, but they're gonna have to learn all over. And they won't have any electricity, won't have nothing. They'll just have to do what grandpa said, their momma said.

And somebody will say, "Well Grandpa said we had something back out…wonder what that was. And they'll think up some kind of invention. And just look at all the inventions come along because somebody had their head or that man up there puts it in somebody's head and it just kept a growing and growing. Who'd ever thought of an automobile and who'd ever thought of a parachute and these guns and everything?

What was your reaction to one bomber dropping one bomb?

It was just unbelievable to me really. I was, in a way, glad that it happened. Ready for it to end, I guess. I have feelings now, that it could have been the best thing. I couldn't have been the best thing. But it's one of those things that happened and you can't do anything about it, so you have to accept it for what it done.

You're sorry for the people that got hurt, but you're glad for the people that didn't get hurt. So one weighs as much as the other. At that particular time in 1945 I was likely with the most people. I was probably having a hollerin' good time 'cause it was over. I know that people on the receiving end was a having a wailing time 'cause it hurt somebody. But it had to come to an end and that was a method that's, that someone somewhere devised that had more authority or control than I do to try to put a stop to it and it did put a stop to it, but it didn't put a stop to wars.

It didn't take but four or five more years we was back at it again with Korea. And that was…didn't solve a thing. Then comes Vietnam and it don't solve a thing. The Gulf War ain't solved a thing. Nothing solves it. So, the only reactions I had when they dropped the atomic bomb was I said, "Well, that's good. The war's over now." That's about it.

But the war was good. It was the best thing that ever happened to this country hick or Mill Village hick. It was really the best, one of the best things that ever happened to me 'cause I didn't get hurt, met people, seen things. You wouldn't believe it, but I'd never used a commode. I hadn't. I had an outside toilet. Wouldn't hardly use it. I'd go to the woods. They had a commode in the high school downstairs where I used to slip to smoke a cigarette and throw the butt in it, but never use it.

And never used a telephone. Didn't know…didn't have one. Didn't have to use one till I got in the Army and used a telephone. A fellow showed me how to send a money order home. I never heard of a money order or telegram. I'd heard of maybe in the movies a telegram, but I'd never used it. All I done is

raised up, try to work a little bit around the home, play high school athletics. My daddy fed me good, made me wear clothes, tried to be good to my neighbor, got 18 years old, the war's going on.

I went to the draft warden, asked him take me in the Army right then. They took me. They'd wait six to eight months after you was 18 before they'd bother you. But they got me. I went down a week after I was 18 and they took me the next week. There was another good thing. I went in six months before I was supposed to. If I hadn't went in, no telling where I'd went. If I'd stayed at Miami Beach as a drill instructor I'd walked out on College Avenue and got run over with a truck. Didn't stay there. Just wherever I went everything worked out just fine.

But, just so war was just war and they'll have 'em tomorrow. They'll have 'em week after next and if anybody can ever show to me where one of the 'em helped solve any real, really solved any problem, I'd loved to see that answer 'cause I don't believe war ever solves, really solves, any problems.