

# The National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Robert Warren

9th Airforce

439<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group – 94<sup>th</sup> Squadron

Operation-Market Garden

Battle of the Bulge

Crossing the Rhine

Today is March 28, 2022. My name is Floyd Cox and I am a volunteer oral historian for the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today, I am accompanied by Ed Metzler a fellow volunteer oral historian. We are at the home of his daughter, Ms. Tami Marlin to visit with Mr. Robert Warren, who is known as Bob concerning his experiences as a youth growing up during the depression as well as serving in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II.

This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Bob we want to thank you for taking the time to visit with us today and I would like to start by asking you a little bit about your background: Where you were born and when you were born.

Warren: I was born in Frisco, Texas February 1, 1921. I have no siblings. I was an only child. My dad was a barber in the Warren Brothers Barber shop in Frisco, Texas. The population of Frisco, according to the 1920 Censes, was 300 people and I was number 301. As far as the Depression years are concerned, my parents had a big garden and raised all kinds of vegetables. As it was said, "We ate all we can and what we can't we can. We had no problems concerning food, during the Depression. My dad had this barber shop and he was getting 25cents for a haircut and 20 cents for a shave. He had some days

that he would go into the shop and never had a customer. We really didn't know that things were all that bad because everyone else had the same problems that we were faced with as far as income was concerned and along came the crash came. I was saving up money to buy a bicycle and I had twenty-one dollars saved in the bank and the bank closed and got my twenty-one dollars. I never got it back and I had to start all over again. I picked cotton and worked on one of the farms that was near-by and got a dollar a day.

Cox: How many hours would you work?

Warren: From sunup to sundown.

Later on, I was soda jerk at the local drug store and I enjoyed that. I had a paper route and later on I delivered coal, in sacks, on the back of my bicycle.

Cox: Did you go to high school in Frisco?

Warren: Yes.

Cox: When did you graduate from high school?

Warren: In 1938. There were 20 people in my graduating class and today I am the only survivor. I sit down every day and have my daily bowl of oatmeal and I have my class reunion right there.

Cox: So, after you graduated from high school what happened?

Warren: I was valedictorian of my graduating class and I was offered a scholarship to any state school for two semesters which was a big

deal at twenty-five dollars per semester. So, I accepted that fifty dollars. I decided upon Texas AM University as I did not want to buy a bunch of clothes and during those years if you went to A&M for the first two years you were required to serve in the ROTC (Reserved Officers Training) military. I figured that was great as they furnished uniforms. Consequently; I would not have to spend much money on clothes.

Cox: Did you graduate and if so, what year?

Warren: I graduated from Texas A&M in 1942 and the war had just begun and I did not finish the last two years in the ROTC so I did not get commissioned. The reason I had to pass up the last two years in the ROTC was because I had to work during the summer. If I had stayed in the ROTC, I would have had to go to summer camp. I couldn't afford that. So, I did not have a commission and I knew one thing: I did not want to be a ground soldier so I went to the Navy. I asked them what kind of course would I have to go through to obtain a commission. They said that that they had a Deck Officer course that would give me a commission. So, they gave me an exam and I passed it. They sent the application in and it came back rejected. It was refused because they said I had over-bite. I thought my teeth fit perfectly but apparently, they didn't.

So, the next thing I did was to go to the Army Air Corps. I went to the Dallas recruiting station and took the test. I passed it and they said, "Ok. We are going to teach you how to fly." Then they sent me back

home and told me to wait until they had an opening in flight school. It was about three or four months before they ever called me. It was almost Christmas and they called me in and sent me to pre-flight school at Lackland and then they sent me to Chickasha, Oklahoma to learn how to fly a little airplane that doesn't have a canopy on it.

Cox: Was it a two winger?

Warren: No. It was a low wing airplane. I spent six weeks there and then they sent me to Garden City, Kansas for my basic flight training. That was the most misnamed place in the world. I never saw a garden while I was there. After six weeks there, they sent me to Altus, Oklahoma for twin engine flight training. The planes had positions for a pilot and co-pilot. After six weeks there, I graduated and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. I was then sent to Austin, Texas to Bergstrom Field. There, they were to teach me how to be a troop carrier pilot.

Cox: In C-47's?

Warren: Yes. I spent some time there and graduated there in 1943. They checked me out on a C-47 (transport plane) and taught me how to fly and how to do low altitude navigation and that sort of stuff.

Cox: How did you like that?

Warren: I liked it. We took off on a cross-country trip one time and went out into the Gulf of Mexico and turned left and made a run over Louisiana just like you were doing an invasion.

When I was in the class there, my wife was giving birth to our first born. They permitted me to go home. When I went on leave, I just lacked one week to graduate and when I returned, they set me back six weeks. That probably saved my life, as I did not participate in the Normandy invasion. After I graduated, I received orders to go to Indiana, and pick up an airplane as well as a Co-pilot and a Navigator. I was then to fly the North Atlantic route to England and join a Troop Carrier Group that was already there.

Cox: Tell me about taking the Northern Route. I understand, from what I have read, that you went to Greenland on this route. Tell me what it was like to fly over the Greenland Ice Cap.

Warren: Well, we spent the night in Goose Bay, Labrador and they showed us pictures of what we could expect, when we landed in Greenland. The air field was inland and you had to get under the clouds and fly up a Fjord (narrow inlet to the sea) and there was a place that you came to a fork. If you went to the left it was a dead-end and you would crash. So, you had to go to the right. Sure enough, we flew up the Fjord and took a right and we landed going up-hill. When you took off you were going down-hill. We spent the night there and the next morning we flew over the Greenland Ice Cap and flew to Iceland. You had to get up to 1200 feet to clear the Ice Cap. After you got off the ground, you looked around and there were ice-bergs floating around. I thought to myself, "Man, keep those engines running." From there we went to Iceland and from there we were

supposed to go to Scotland. We found out that Scotland was weathered in so we landed in Ireland. We spent the night in Ireland and they told us to leave our plane there and we had to take a boat to (garbled). Once there, we caught a train to Surry, England. This was where we were to be stationed. We found out that the unit that we to join had just taken part in the invasion of Normandy. About the time we got settled there they said, "Ok. You are going to Italy.

Cox: At this point, what unit were you assigned to?

Warren: The 439<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group, 94<sup>th</sup> Squadron. We were part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force. The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force was bombers and the 9<sup>th</sup> was fighters and troop carriers.

Cox: Once you got to Italy, what operations were you involved in?

Warren: We took part in the invasion of Southern France.

Cox: Tell us about that.

Warren: It was calm, compared to later operations. We flew to Southern France and did not encounter any opposition or anything. So, we went back to our base.

Cox: Did you carry paratroopers?

Warren: Actually, I was involved in the pulling of the GC-4A WACO gliders.

Cox: Tell us about that. Did you take off pulling the glider or did you snag them in some manner?

Warren: They were attached to our plane by a tow cable and we took off pulling them. There were times when they retrieved gliders after an invasion. To retrieve gliders, they would construct a device something like a goalpost and string a cable between the posts with another cable leading to the gliders. The transport plane would snag the cable and off they would go. They use to do a lot of that.

Cox: How would the plane's pilot communicated with the glider pilot?

Warren: There was a telephone line in the cable between the plane and the glider.

Cox: You really had to coordinate with the glider pilot when you were pulling the glider, did you not?

Warren: We seldom had a need to talk to the glider pilot as we had a signal for them, when they were to turn loose. If we had turned loose without the proper signal, the cable would have flown back and gone through the cockpit of the glider. We had very little communication with the glider and when we did it was our crew chief who talked to the glider. We had preset signal to turn loose when we got to the right place.

Cox: Was it very difficult to coordinate your speed when you took off pulling a glider

Warren: No. When you took off, after you got up a little speed, the glider got off the ground first. After that there was very little drag created by the glider.



Cox: In some instances, you would pull two gliders at the same time. It would seem to me that it would be very difficult to coordinate.

Warren: As far as I know, when we crossed the Rhine (River) it was the first time that they had a double glider tow, which was near the end of the war. Now the gliders were not side by side but staggered. When we took off, there was quite a bit of drag and we got them into the air. Our cruising speed was normally a little over one hundred miles per hour but in pulling two gliders, ninety miles per hour was as fast as we could go. Consequently; trying to stay in formation was not easy to do. We were stationed about sixty miles southwest of Paris and to Cross the Rhine we were up close to Belgium. That was a long flight pulling two gliders at ninety miles per hour.

Cox: Of the operations you were involved in, Market Garden, Crossing the Rhine, the Battle of the Bulge, which one would you consider the most difficult?

Warren: Crossing the Rhine was much more difficult. I had a littler adventure during the Battle of the Bulge. They sent us over to England to pick up the 91<sup>st</sup> Airborne and we loaded our plane down with airborne. They loaded our plane with a jeep (vehicle) and about twelve airborne troops. During the take-off, one of our engines started sputtering. I called the tower and they told me to come back around. The runway was full of our airplanes because we were one of the first planes to take off consequently; I had to fly over the planes and land in front of the next one scheduled to take off. I tried to land and I

looked down I was doing ninety miles per hour when I went off the end of the runway. It was downhill and I tried to turn and I tried to stop and I couldn't do either one. We started hitting trees. We hit one tree and it knocked the wing off. We hit another tree and it crumpled the nose of the plane. The plane was totaled. We only had one casualty. The jeep had broken loose and broke the leg of one of the troopers.

Cox: During any of your missions, did you see any C-46s or gliders shot down?

Warren: When we crossed the Rhine and had a double glider pull, we released the gliders and got out of there as fast as we could. On the way out, they shot the plane down in front of me and I watched the crew bail out. I saw the pilot hit the ground at the same time as his plane did. That was the only one I actually saw shot down. During Operation Market Garden they sent us back to England at a base close to London. I have forgotten the name of that base. That is where we took off to cross the English Channel. I was about two planes back from our lead aircraft which was being flown by our squadron commander and as we approached the coast of Holland the German anti-aircraft opened up and it hit the commander's plane. Everybody was turning to the left and we wondered what was going on. Then we saw pieces of his plane flying back and we thought "oh, oh". He was able to land on the beach and all of the crew was taken prisoner except the co-pilot. He decided that he would put up a fight and the Germans killed him.

Cox: Did you fly any missions after that?

Warren: About this time, General Patton (George S. 1885-1945) was going across France as fast as he could and his ground supply couldn't keep up with him. It was decided to use troop carrier planes to haul fuel to his forces. They loaded our planes down with five-gallon Jerry cans (liquid containers). We would fly up there and land at whatever was the latest cow pasture that they had cleared for landing. Sometimes, after we unloaded, we would go back and pick up another load.

Cox: How many cans would you carry?

Warren: They would load our plane down and in order to get to the cockpit you had to walk on top of the cans from the back to the front. Now we did a lot of things other than troop carrying activities such as carrying medical supplies to the hospitals, etc. At the end of the war, we carried release prisoners of war.

Cox: Were they in pretty good shape physically?

Warren: Most of them were in fair shape.

Cox: So, after you did this, did you return to the United States and if so what year.

Warren: It was 1945. It was at this time, they brought over C-46s (transport plane) to our base close to Germany. We were told to learn how to fly the C-46 and after we mastered the C-46 we were to fly to Ft. Smith, Arkansas. They said, "take a 30-day leave and then go to Ft.

Wayne, Indiana and pick up a new plane. Get you a new crew and get ready to go to the Pacific.

I was on my 30-day leave, that the Japanese surrendered.

After my 30- day leave was over, I went to Ft. Smith, Arkansas. When I got there, they said, “Now that the war is over, would you to stay in the Air Corps. as a regular or serve in the Reserves?” I told them that I would elect to take a Reserve Commission. They said, “Ok.” So, after that they sent me back home. I had to find a job. I went with Collage Station and checked with my professors to see what they thought I would best suited for. They told me that I needed to go to Houston and get a job with an oil company. I had already checked with Braniff Air Lines and they told me they would hire me on as a co-pilot for five years at two hundred and fifty dollars per month and after that I would become a pilot. I told them no thanks. So, I went to Humble Oil Company in Houston and they told me that they had pilots returning, and they had first choice but they would like to hire me anyway. I asked them what the job would be and they told me that the pay would be two hundred and fifty dollars a month and I would start out at an oil camp near Beaumont, Texas to learn the oil field business. I said, “Ok”. I got there and found there were old experienced oil field hands. I got to know them and they trained me in various phases of the oil business and from there I moved eight times in my career. I ended up in Houston, where I retired.

Cox: Getting back to your military career; you flew various aircraft. What was your favorite?

Warren: The C-47. That was a good old airplane. It was sturdy and easy to fly. It was easy to land. During that time, we flew fuel to Patton, we would land in a pasture and when we would take off, we had to make sure we cleared the trees at the end of the pasture.

I had a lot of different assignments while I was with the Troop Carrier Unit over there. One time they assigned me to a base in England and there they assigned me to a British General and he would tell me where he wanted to go. One day he might say "well we will go to and name a base in France" and the next day he would say I want to go to so and so in Belgium. One day he said, "I want you to go to this airfield, I can't recall the name, and we are going to land there and watch an operation they have going on." When we got there, here comes the British Horsa gliders. They were practicing turning the gliders loose and as they did the gliders would crash into the trees at the end of the field. Those Horsas were big gliders.

I had that assignment with that British General and I found out that what he was doing was getting ready for the mission The Crossing of the Rhine. He was inspecting the groups at the various airfields.

Cox: How did like doing this?

Warren: Oh, I liked it a lot. The British Officers had a "Batman" (Orderly assigned to an Officer) that would come around and tuck us in and

bring us whatever we wanted or needed. It was a pretty good assignment and a lot of fun.

Cox: Did you do any flying after you were discharged?

Warren: I stayed in the Reserves and did Reserve training every six weeks or so. After that I didn't fly very often.

Cox: Do you know how many hours of flight time you had?

Warren: No, not really. I lost my flight log and really lost track. I had quite a few hours though.

Cox: Well, that is all the questions I can think of at this time but I am sure that Ed has quite a few to ask you.

Metzler: Did your C047 have a name?

Warren: One of them was "Bouncing Babe". We flew different aircraft from time to time and I don't recall if any others had names.

Metzler: How many were in the crew of a C-47?

Warren: There was the pilot, a co-pilot and a crew chief and on some occasions, they would have a navigator.

Metzler: What was the crew-chief's job?

Warren: He sit behind the pilot and co-pilot and he would take radio messages.

Metzler: Did you always have the same crew?

Warren: No, we didn't always have the same crew. Normally it was the same pilot and co-pilot and we would have our own plane, but not always. When I had the detached service with the British General, I might not have had the same plane every time.

Metzler: How about the co-pilot?

Warren: Yes, I had the same co-pilot.

Metzler: What was his name?

Warren: Kenneth (?)

Metzler: Did you stay in contact with him?

Warren: Sorry to say he crashed and burned while landing at Chicago, shortly after the war was over.

Metzler: Did you go to any reunions after the war?

Warren: That is a good question. My 94<sup>th</sup> Squadron had reunions every year. A few years after the war there was one guy who got us all back together. We had reunions every year. We had them all over the United States and even some in Europe.

Metzler: In Europe?

Warren: Yes, we went back to Europe a couple of years. While there we toured all the bases where we use to be. It was great.

Metzler: When was the last reunion you attended?

Warren: The last one was in San Antonio. My daughter helped organize it. We really had a ball. We went to President Johnson's ranch and we got to visit with Lady Bird Johnson (Claudia Alta Johnson 1912-2007), the widow of President Johnson. The bus drive that took us out there said that of he had been taking the bus out there for years and that this was the first time the riders had ever got to go into the house. One of the ladies involved in the reunion had known Lady Bird for years and that enabled us to get into the house.

Metzler: You told us about your experience with the British General and how you were exposed to other British officers, what was your general opinion of them?

Warren: We weren't really close to them. You know, when we were over there, the British said "You are over here, you are overpaid and you are oversexed".

Metzler: Were they condescending to you or did they just treat you.....

Warren: They treated us pretty well, overall

Metzler: Now you were also stationed in France. Did you have any exposure to the French?

Warren: Oh, yes. It was very good actually. My unit was stationed at a place about 60 miles Southwest of Paris. We got along well with the people in town. Actually, my unit had scouted around and found a place to set up our tents. We were living in tents at the airbase. He found a big old building which had been a French barracks. One end



was bombed out but the other end was still livable so he found this building which was two story and it was just a good place to live. We would go into town and get supplies and we would cook some of our good meals on a coal stove.

Metzler: The British General came to the aid of you Yanks in some cases.

Warren: Absolutely.

Several years later, our wife and I gave our grandchildren a certain amount of money when they graduated from college. This one grandson was an avid historian. I said to him "Shane, would you rather have this amount of money or would you rather take a trip to Europe with us?" He said, "Let's go to Europe." His daddy said, "I am going too. I will pay my way." So, I was our tour director. I took them to London and after that I had a car rented at Normandy. So, we caught ship and I made it so the ship would make landfall on Normandy at sunup, just like it was on D-Day. We toured Normandy and then went to Paris and then went on over to the German border. We went to Bastogne. We toured the big museum that is there and then we went to a theater where they had a movie about the invasion. As we were touring, there was another tour group in front and I told our guide that there was a guy in the other group that looked about my age. I asked, "What about him?" He said, "He's German and was in the war too." I said, "Could you introduce us?" So, this German and I sat side by side watching the movie of the

Bastogne battle. At the end, when we won the battle, I said to him, "We kicked your butt." He didn't understand but just went "Ha Ha'.

Metzler: When you were overseas, did your family back home know where you were and know that you were ok? Did you write letters?

Warren: We had letters. My wife was seven months pregnant when I went overseas and a few months after I got over there, she was getting ready to deliver the baby. I got a telegram advising me that my daughter had been born.

I had five children. The daughter, with which I am living came along by accident. We had decided that four children were enough, so I went and had a vasectomy. The doctor checked me out and he said, "Man you are clear". In the meanwhile, my wife turned up pregnant. I had the doctor check me again. This time he said, "You are as strong as ever. I will do that surgery over again." So, he did the surgery again and he checked me and said, "I didn't get it that time either." After the second surgery, he said, "I'll adopt that child." I said, "No thank you." We kept her and it was a good decision. Here I am living in her house.

Metzler: What did you think about your Commanding Officers?

Warren: I had all kinds. When I was taking flight training, there were young guys who didn't have a lot of hours in. I never did have any that I didn't like. My Commanding Officer over in Europe was Colonel Young. He was Group Commander and he was a great guy. The Squadron Commander was nice. I didn't have a lot of contact with

him. He would give briefings and things like that. Colonel Young was a great guy. He graduated from a college in Kansas and he and a buddy of his bought this old plane that was like a World War I plane. They learned to fly and went around the country Barnstorming. When he entered the Air Corps, he set a record of having the least time in training before he soloed than any other cadet. After the war he was an airline pilot. He had been one before the war. He wrote a book about the history of the Troop Carriers and it is a great book. He tells about when they started the Troop Carrier training and goes all the way including the various battles.

Metzler: What was your closest call?

Warren: I guess the closet call was when I hit the tree at the end of the runway at ninety miles per hour.

Metzler: How was the food?

Warren: Generally speaking, we did pretty well. We were stationed in Southern England and there was a Navy group down on the coast and you talk about good living. The guys really lived good. There were a few times when had to eat K-rations (Daily combat food ration).

Metzler: What did you miss the most, when you were over there?

Warren: I missed my family. My daughter was seven months old, when I got back. It was the first time I had ever seen her.

Metzler: When you came home, how did it feel to be back in the USA?

Warren: It felt pretty good. We landed in Connecticut and caught a train down to Fort Smith, Arkansas. Yes, I was glad to get back to the good ole USA.

I flew back over the North Atlantic. I brought that C-46 back and turned it over to this group that took care of the airplanes. After I turned the plane over to them, we caught the train going to Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Metzler: Toward the end of your tour, you flew the C-46. I know it is a larger aircraft than the C-47. Compare the two aircraft for me.

Warren: The C-46 was not much fun to fly. It was so big and it put up a lot more wind resistance and the cross-winds presented a problem. It was a real job to keep it on line. What happened was; we were stationed at an advanced base at the German border. They called me and another crew to go back to our home base and told us they wanted us to go back and learn how to fly a C-46 and when we were checked out on that they would send other crews for us teach them how to fly a C-46 and then to check them out.

Boy, with that rascal, in taking off in a crosswind you had to have full power on one engine and practically none on the other. It was not fun to fly and I personally did not enjoy it.

Metzler: What do you think about the Germans?

Warren: I didn't have much contact with the Germans. At the end of the war after a bunch of the prisoners had been released, I went up to

Hamburg, Germany one time to pick up some both civilian and military. We had a certain weight limit and our crew chief was supposed to keep a check on the weight of our cargo. I got back in the plane and I said, "Man we are overloaded." The crew-chief told me that some of the women had babies with them and he made an exception for them. I said, "Ok. Weight wise, we will probably be safe." We started to take off and I did my engine check and one engine was not running as it should. I said, "I am not going to take off with one bad engine." So, although I hated to do it, they took some of the passengers off. They caught a later flight.

Metzler: You were overseas for three years.

Warren: I was really overseas for fifteen or sixteen months.

Metzler: I was an active fifteen or sixteen months. Do feel like that changed you as a person?

Warren: I grew up.

Metzler: How so?

Warren: I was twenty-three years old and here I was flying an airplane. I grew up while I was over there. Actually, I was the only one in my squadron barracks that had a child so they called me pappy. I did a lot of growing up being in charge of an airplane and a crew. With those responsibilities I had to grow up.

Metzler: Well, what else can we talk about?

Warren: One time a group of men came in and were put into our barracks and we found out they were sent to our base for. They were going to be co-pilots on gliders. When they had those missions, after the gliders hit the ground, they were just like infantry. By that I mean as soon as they hit the ground they were under fire. Some of these boys, when they came back, they had some tales to tell. I remember one group that came back and they said, "We hit the ground and got out of the landing patch as fast as we could. We under fire and I got behind the wheel of the glider as quick as I could." They came back with some pretty tall tales.

Metzler: I can imagine. Did you ever have an occasion to be in one of those gliders?

Warren: They had us check out in a glider before we could tow one. We had to have at least four hours in a glider.

Metzler: Is there anything else?

Warren: Occasionally we would get a weekend pass and I remember going to Bourdeau, a small town in France. The people in this town had never seen Americans because the invasion was further South. We got there and they put us up with the French people. They placed three of us with a family and they took us home with them. They said, "Ok, after lunch we are going to a football game." We thought, "Oh boy. I didn't even know you guys played football." We got there and it was soccer. They were all so very nice.

Metzler: Well, is there anything else before we close this interview?

Cox: I know one thing. Ed will want to join me in wishing this gentleman a happy belated birthday. He turned 101 years old recently.

Metzler: We also want to thank you for what did for our country.

Warren: I'll tell you what, San Antonio is military city USA and they have really welcomed the veterans here. We have a veterans breakfast every four weeks which we really enjoy.

Cox: During your next breakfast, if you have any World War II veterans that would be interested in telling their story, I would appreciate it if you would give me a call.

Warren: Ok. Most of the World War II veterans in our bunch served in the Pacific.

Cox: Bob, we will interview any veteran of World War II whether he was in Europe, the Far East or Indo-China. We have a really broad spectrum of you veterans. Ed and I are both proud to have been involved in saying your stories.

Warren: Thank you. You mentioned Indo-China. While I was in England, they gave us leave to go into London and I was in London one time and a whole bunch of Americans were in the lobby of a hotel. There was a black guy that was an American and he saw this other black guy that served with the British. They got to talking and the American said to the other, "Where you from?" The other guy said, "Indo-China." The American guy said, "Oh, man. I am from Oxbow, Alabama."

Metzler: Well that sounds like a happy ending so I am going to turn the power off and end this interview.

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