

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview With
Thomas W. Loftin
334th B.S. 95th B.G., 8th A.F.
One mission near Berlin
Retired as Lt. Colonel
December 14, 2004**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is December 14, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Thomas W. Loftin by telephone. His address is 444 Channing Street San Antonio, Texas 78210. His telephone number is (210) 532-9400. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific Wars, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today.

Mr. Loftin

Well this is naptime, but that's all right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sorry about that (laughing). I also want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Loftin

Well, I didn't go to Korea but I was recalled to Korea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, right. Agreement read. Is that okay with you?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, that's fine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me start first off, what is your birth date?

Mr. Loftin

November 9, 1919.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Loftin

San Antonio, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's and mother's names?

Mr. Loftin

My dad was William D. Loftin and my mother was Alma Lucy Williams.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Loftin

He was a lineman.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were born in 1919 so you grew up during the depression. How did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Loftin

We were poor but we didn't know it. There were 10 kids in the family, but we all survived it and my dad had a job, which most of the kids in the neighborhood, their daddies didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

So he was able to keep his job during the whole time then.

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yes, uh huh.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was a lineman. Which company did he work for?

Mr. Loftin

Well he worked for the different railroads in the Western Union is where he got his training, and eventually he wound up with a public service company here in San Antonio.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Loftin

I went to Brackenridge High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Loftin

1938.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Loftin

Well I tried to go off to college. I was a football player, and I went out to Sulross and I was doing pretty well my Freshman year but my Sophomore year I broke my left shoulder. And at that time if you got hurt, why, you lost your scholarship. So I stayed in school by working at a café at downtown Alpine, and I got in 2 years before I decided to join the Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you join?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, it was in early 1941. I went out and took the exam at Randolph Field, passed it. The quarterback, he's the one that talked me into coming down here. We could see we were gonna get drafted, so we came down here and I took the physical and passed it and he flunked it. And while I was waiting, the Air Corps Department, they put you on a list at that time before calling you for cadets. I went to work for the S.P. Railroad.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when did they actually call you up?

Mr. Loftin

December 19th of 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just after Pearl Harbor day.

Mr. Loftin

Right after Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

Speaking of Pearl Harbor day, do you recall where you were when you heard about it and what your reaction was?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, I was sitting on my front porch with my dad and a couple brothers and a fellow down the street (his name was Wayne Null), he came by and said, "Hey, did y'all hear they bombed Pearl Harbor this morning?" Our first reaction was, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" So anyway that's where we heard about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course, you were waiting to get called into the Air Corps. Did you have any idea...

Mr. Loftin

I was already on the list.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, so you knew you were going in anyway.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then how about your brothers, how many of those were in World War II?

Mr. Loftin

There were 4 boys.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they all come home from the Service?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, I had 2 brothers in the Merchant Service – Merchant Marines. One's a mate; the other was a Chief Engineer. And I had one brother in the coastguard and then I was in the Air Corps and I had one brother that had children at that time. He stayed home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the ones in the Merchant Marine, did they go across the Atlantic or where did they go?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yeah, Lord, yes! Back and forth. One brother that was an engineer, he had some pretty rough times on that Murmansk Run.

Mr. Misenhimer

Are they still living?

Mr. Loftin

No, there's just two of us boys left; one that was in the coastguard and myself. We're the only two boys left out of the five.

Mr. Misenhimer

So on December 19th they called you up and where did you report?

Mr. Loftin

In San Anton. I went to Dodd Field.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then how long were you there and what did you do there?

Mr. Loftin

Just long enough to be sworn in and transported out to, it was Kelly number 2, now Lackland Air Force Base.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that where you took your basic training?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, I guess you'd call it basic training, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did it consist of?

Mr. Loftin

Just marching and inspections and physicals and exams, you know, for...

Mr. Misenhimer

To see what job you'd fit into.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any kind of weapons training there?

Mr. Loftin

No, no weapons.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long was that?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, lets see, 19th of December, I guess about 8 weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

So sometime in February you finished.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then where did you go?

Mr. Loftin

I went to Jones Field, Bonham, Texas for primary training.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were in the pilot training, is that right?

Mr. Loftin

I was in the pilot training class.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there in Bonham?

Mr. Loftin

I just got my primary flying training and I soloed there and finished it up and went on to basic.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of plane were you flying there?

Mr. Loftin

PT19.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that is what?

Mr. Loftin

Fairchild.

Mr. Misenhimer

Fairchild, okay. Is that a biplane or a single wing?

Mr. Loftin

It was a single wing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it have 2 cockpits?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that training there?

Mr. Loftin

It was exceptionally good.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you soloed there right?

Mr. Loftin

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did it feel like to solo?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, gosh, it scared the hell out of me. I soloed in 8 hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Loftin

In a barracks, very clean, neat, trim barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that a new field?

Mr. Loftin

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there?

Mr. Loftin

Very good.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything in particular you recall from your time there?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we lost one airplane. There were 2 people killed in it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened?

Mr. Loftin

Well, they were shooting landings and he evidently slowed the airplane up before he got to the field and crashed.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else happen there?

Mr. Loftin

No, not that I know of, just routine flying training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you make any cross countries there?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, my first cross-country was from Bonham to Sulphur, Texas and return.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this was solo, right?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, it was solo.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else in particular there?

Mr. Loftin

No, not that I know of.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you left there, where did you go?

Mr. Loftin

I went to Goodfellow Field in San Angelo, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is for...

Mr. Loftin

Basic training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Basic training, okay.

Mr. Loftin

Basic flight training, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of plane did you fly there?

Mr. Loftin

I flew the BT13.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that's the what?

Mr. Loftin

Basic Training 13, Vultee.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's the one they call a Vultee Vibrator?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, um hm.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a low wing also I believe.

Mr. Loftin

Yes, uh huh.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there that you did not do at the first training?

Mr. Loftin

Well we got some instrument training and formation flying and quite a bit of time with our instructors. But other than that, nothing out of the ordinary.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now that's a fixed gear plane, isn't it?

Mr. Loftin

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Lose any planes there or anything?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, we lost one instructor and a student on night flying. They spun in shooting landings out at one of the fields.

Mr. Misenhimer

Got disoriented, huh?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else did you do there?

Mr. Loftin

Nothing much of anything. There wasn't a whole lot to do around San Angelo.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you live in barracks there also?

Mr. Loftin

Yes, we were in the old... well, actually at that time it was a new type of GI barracks and we had an inspection every Saturday morning. And there was a captain by the name of Nut, Texas A&M graduate (an Aggie), he was really hard a--. He'd inspect the whole barracks and he wore white gloves and if one hand got a little dirt on it, the whole barracks got gigged. One gig was an hour on the ramp on a Saturday afternoon.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was marching?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, on the ramp at 120 paces a minute.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was a typical day like there? What time would you get up, and what all would happen on a typical day?

Mr. Loftin

We usually got up, I'd say, around 6 and we fell out in front, went to the mess hall, ate, came back and took a shower, shaved, and shampoo and so forth. And then our day started around 8 o'clock.

Mr. Misenhimer

And did you have classroom work also?

Mr. Loftin

Yes, we had navigation and we had navigation and meteorology and some Army drill details thrown in.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have any type of infantry training anywhere?

Mr. Loftin

Yes, I sure did but that was later on, real late.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, not at this point. We'll get that later then.

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yeah, that come with when I got in the Guard.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were there in San Angelo, what rank did you have?

Mr. Loftin

Just Aviation Cadet.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your pay at that point?

Mr. Loftin

\$75 a month.

Mr. Misenhimer

As an Aviation Cadet, what did that equal to in the other ranks? Sergeant or Corporal or what?

Mr. Loftin

Completely separate.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, completely separate. And then anything else happen there?

Mr. Loftin

Not that I can think of.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go from there then?

Mr. Loftin

Well, I went to Brooks Field here in San Antonio, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

And about when would you have arrived there?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, lets see, about in April I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

April of '42.

Mr. Loftin

Um, hm.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what all did you do there?

Mr. Loftin

Got married for one thing. Actually, my class was the first class that the Army that let cadets be married. Prior to that they couldn't be married while they were in flight training. So my class was the first ones and my wife, we had been going together for about 2 years. She was a student nurse at the M and S Hospital here in San Anton, and I was a cadet out at Brooks. And on the spur of the moment, we decided to get married. We went down to Floresville. We picked my brother up and another couple, we went to Floresville and we got married and we came back to San Anton. We didn't even spend the first night together. I had to be back at barracks and she had to be back at the hospital. Anyway, we got married.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's an exciting thing to happen there.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, well we stayed, we're still married.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good, good. When you got there, about how many hours did you have?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, lets see. I'd say around 40 hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's in primary and basic, the 2.

Mr. Loftin

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then what did you do there at Brooks?

Mr. Loftin

Well we got quite a bit of cross country and a whole lot of formation flying, and quite a bit of dog fighting with our instructors and we had gunnery practice down close to Floresville.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of plane were you flying there?

Mr. Loftin

Well we started out with a BC1. That was the forerunner of the T6, and then we got new AT6s while we were there. And in fact, the old instructors preferred the old BC1s cause they had a radio compass in them and they could listen to music.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did the AT6 compare to the other planes you had been flying.

Mr. Loftin

Oh, it was a wonderful airplane, a lazy man's airplane. All you did was hit a button and gear came up, flaps went down, and so forth.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was a retractable gear plane.

Mr. Loftin

Right, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about some of your gunnery practice there.

Mr. Loftin

Well it was down close to Floresville. They had a range and we didn't do any real actual firing, but we got to, our instructors went with us, and we had to go through the motions of firing on any kind of an object. But most of that was formation flying.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were in the airplane on your training there.

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you actually fire your guns?

Mr. Loftin

No, the only time we fired them was in the pit here at Brooks Field.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you did practice dog fighting there.

Mr. Loftin

Right, I'll tell you they had some PT19s set aside for the instructors. And we went up in separate airplanes and we had dogfights with our instructors in PT19s.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was in the PT19 and you were in the AT6?

Mr. Loftin

No, we were all in PT19s.

Mr. Misenhimer

Everybody in PT19s, okay. Could you beat your instructor?

Mr. Loftin

Well, he said I did pretty good. He recommended me for an instructor's job.

Mr. Misenhimer

So what happened next?

Mr. Loftin

Well, it was six of us that got a hold back for instructors at Brooks Field. Last minute, they decided they didn't need that many, so they kept down through Lipmann. And took Loftin off, so there I was. So my classmates had all gone to their assigned units and I was just hanging around Brooks Field and they weren't gonna use me as an instructor. That's when I was assigned to the anit sub command.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go for that?

Mr. Loftin

I went to New Orleans.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel out to New Orleans?

Mr. Loftin

We had an old '38 Ford here that I was gonna drive down there. Initially, I was supposed to go to Galveston. The unit was at Galveston. Got over to Galveston, there wasn't a soul there, no airplanes or anything. And Major Bradshaw our CO came flying in there in an O47 and told us to get to New Orleans on the Air Base. So I had to leave my car there. I left it with my aunt, who lived in Houston, and I got on a train and rode to New Orleans and reported out to New Orleans on the air base.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up a second here now. When you were there in San Antonio after you got married, did you have to stay on the post or could you live with your wife?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, no. I had to stay on the post until I graduated.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now did she travel with you to Galveston?

Mr. Loftin

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about when you got to New Orleans, did she travel with you?

Mr. Loftin

No, I went to New Orleans by myself and later on, she and a girlfriend of hers came up, came over to New Orleans.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you get your wings?

Mr. Loftin

On August 5th of 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was at where, at Brooks?

Mr. Loftin

Brooks, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you, what, became a 2nd Lieutenant?

Mr. Loftin

Yes, I was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in the Organized Reserve Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they have any kind of ceremony for that?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yeah, we had a ceremony out at Brooks Field and old Colonel Sam T. Smith presented us with our wings and I, in turn, presented them to my mother. And later on, my wife fell heir to them after moma passed away.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your mother pin them on you or what?

Mr. Loftin

No, she didn't. My wife actually pinned them on me.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did your pay go to as a 2nd Lieutenant?

Mr. Loftin

It was \$326 a month. I remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Part of that went home. Is that right?

Mr. Loftin

No, no, that all came to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, that all came to you. Your wife got an allowance also?

Mr. Loftin

No, no, it was all up to me to take care of her.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, I see. So it all came to you. When you got to New Orleans, what happened there?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we went to New Orleans Army Air Base, which was a very small field. The longest runway was 4,000 feet, and we were flying O47s.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is an O47?

Mr. Loftin

It was, oh gosh, I think it was a North American. I can't remember. Anyway, it had a 620 horsepower engine, 3 place job. We carried a pilot, and they were what we called observers back in those days, and a rear gunner. We had 2 30-caliber machine guns in the wings, carried 2 depth charges, and you had a rear gunner with 1 30-caliber machine gun.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did the observer do?

Mr. Loftin

He was more or less a navigator and if you spotted any ships, he had the code for that particular day, you know. If we spotted a ship out there that we didn't know that he wasn't supposed to be in that area, we would buzz them and they would run up their colors for the day. They had certain flags that they put up; the observer would read those flags. They also, any strange ships or anything, he was on telegraph key. Everything was CW, and he reported into 36th Street, Miami.

Mr. Misenhimer

This O47 is a single engine, right.

Mr. Loftin

Yes, uh huh.

Mr. Misenhimer

How often would you go out on a patrol, every day?

Mr. Loftin

Well, yeah, we usually flew patrol every day. The airplane was very limited in its distance... we usually flew 3 hour patrols.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how far could you go?

Mr. Loftin

We'd go up to about, oh, 200, 250 miles out into the gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any submarines?

Mr. Loftin

(laughing) I never saw anything. That was the most monotonous work in the world. Some of the other fellows did. They got sightings and actually, we had no confirmed sinkings.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that the submarines were quite active in the gulf at that point.

Mr. Loftin

Oh, gosh yeah. They sunk 58 ships in the gulf at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, I understand along the Atlantic coast, a lot more than that.

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yeah, um hm.

Mr. Misenhimer

What's some other things that happened while you were over there?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, lets see, I made 1st Lieutenant and my wife came down and we lived on Spain Street in New Orleans, and we stayed there until we moved to Gulfport.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was New Orleans to be in a town at that point?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, Lord. It was a lot of fun. Of course, everything was blacked out towards the gulf. There were very few aids to navigation, you know, to get out there at night.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the French Quarter, was it there then?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yes, it was wide open.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they black it out at night?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we lived on an old street, Spain Street. Wait a minute, take it back, right off Canal Street. I can't remember the name of that street. Anyway, we lived in an old second-rate

hotel. That's all we could find, and later on, we moved out on Spain Street to a real nice duplex.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there in New Orleans?

Mr. Loftin

About 8 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then you flew these patrols almost every day.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see ships when you were out there?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, Lord, yeah. We flew convoy duty and they ran convoys out at that particular time, and we would fly convoy duty. And over at Pascagoula, Mississippi, they were building these aircraft carriers from the merchant ships and making aircraft carriers out of them. It looked like a flat top down there in the water. The Navy was using them, you know, as aircraft carriers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, that was the CVEs and CVLs, the smaller carriers.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, that's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What's some other things that happened there?

Mr. Loftin

We're still talking about New Orleans.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, New Orleans.

Mr. Loftin

Well, I took an airplane one morning, full load of bombs and so forth, started out and all of a sudden the engine started...I was still in a traffic pattern. The engine started running rough, oil pressure started falling, the manifold pressure started up so I just did a 180, get back into traffic, and come on in and landed. Now these old airplanes we were flying, they had been scavenged trying to keep them all flying. They'd take one and scavenge it and keep the others flying. But this one I was flying, I got it back on the ground and just let it roll. I reached up to get some brakes and I didn't have any, so when I got down near the sea wall, the sea wall is surrounded by air field, I pushed full left rudder and I sort of ground looped. I didn't drag a wing tip or anything, and my old CO, Major Morgan was standing there watching me and he didn't know what happened. But anyway, when I walked into the operations guy, he said, "Loftin, you're grounded until you can get those ants out of your pants." He was mad. Anyway, after he left, I talked to the operations officer, a fellow by the name of Don Lange, and told Don what had happened and old Don, he went in and told the old Major. Well, I guess it was a little while, Major Morgan come out and apologized. It was just one of those things that happened.

Mr. Misenhimer

You landed with your bomb load, right?

Mr. Loftin

I landed with it, yeah, both depth charges, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you went on a patrol and came back, did you land with your depth charges then?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, they were no problem.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't jettison them in the gulf or anything like that.

Mr. Loftin

No, we didn't jettison, no. We brought them back.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever get any aerial gunnery practice anywhere?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, we did. In fact, that's the way my brother got into the crash outfit. The pulled tow target behind a sea rescue vessels down in New Orleans, they had a school, and they'd go out in Lake Pontchartrain and drag a, well what it was a bunch of barrels. We in turn, would either strafe them or else come in and see if we couldn't skip bomb them. It was a lot of fun. And one day while I was out on this crash boat, there was a warrant officer there that was a CO and I ask him, my oldest brother was...my 2 brothers had gone to sea, my oldest brother, I was thinking of him, and I said, "How does a guy get into this crash boat business?" And that fellow told me, he said, "If you know anyone that knows anything about seamanship, just call this Colonel in New Orleans there." So when we

got in, I called that Colonel and it wasn't but a few days later, here come my brother, and they put him in a crash boat outfit, and that's where he spent the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

He's been in the Merchant Marines, is that right?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, he had been a Merchant Marine prior to that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now in this, you were still flying the O47 during this strafing and bombing?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

You say skip bombing. With a depth charge?

Mr. Loftin

Well, yeah, that's right. It was the duds, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

But it wasn't a regular bomb. It was a depth charge.

Mr. Loftin

It was just the dud.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, and what did the depth charge look like, like a 55-gallon barrel or something?

Mr. Loftin

It looked like a regular bomb, just a little fatter I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, okay. It had the same shape as a regular bomb.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, that was different from the depth charge on a destroyer then.

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yeah, much different.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how much did it weigh? How large were they?

Mr. Loftin

What was it? I don't remember. I want to say 350 pounds. That doesn't sound right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anyway, it was somewhere in that range.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you would skip bomb those onto this target they were towing.

Mr. Loftin

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What's some other things that happened there in New Orleans?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, lets see. We lost Van Sickel, one of our pilots. He hit the... we don't know what happened. He was by himself in an O47 and he hit a dike up above New Orleans there. I can't think of the name of the place right now, but that was the only pilot we lost while we were there at New Orleans.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was flying or was he on the ground when he hit it?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, he was taking off from an auxillary field out there. He didn't quite clear the dike there at the Mississippi River and hit it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from there in New Orleans?

Mr. Loftin

Not that I can think of.

Mr. Misenhimer

All right. If you think of something later, tell me.

Mr. Loftin

I've got one other incident. I was the duty officer one night at the airfield and we were real close to Lake Pontchartrain there. In fact, operations was right there on Lake Pontchartrain and I was duty officer and a PBV came in to land. And he got too close to that sea wall and there was a big cable around the sea wall underwater to keep ships from hitting the sea wall. Well, that PBV hit that cable out there and just broke all to pieces, and all I could do, I grabbed a bunch of life vests, ran out on the sea wall there and I

threw them in the water to those fellows that were in the water. A crash boat came along right after that. I don't know whether they used any of those life vests or not.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was anybody killed on the PBY?

Mr. Loftin

Well I really don't know. I never heard the results of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

All right. Anything else?

Mr. Loftin

Nope, can't think of anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went from there to where then?

Mr. Loftin

From there, we moved to Gulfport, Mississippi. We opened up Gulfport Mississippi Airbase. The reason we moved is we got B25s. And the B25s were the solid nose and a 75mm gun in the nose.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you still the pilot?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, I was checked out and I was a pilot on it, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you get training for twin engine?

Mr. Loftin

They sent us out to Lubbock, Texas and I went to...well, we thought we were getting into A20 and we get out there and they had old BT10s. We got twin engine training out there later on. They just put us in those B25s and checked us out.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when was this? After you left New Orleans?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went from there out to Lubbock for that.

Mr. Loftin

No, I went to Lubbock while I was at New Orleans.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, I see.

Mr. Loftin

Then I came back to New Orleans and moved to Gulfport.

Mr. Misenhimer

So the BT10, that was the...

Mr. Loftin

Bamboo Bomber.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bamboo Bomber, okay the Cessna, single tail.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mostly plywood as I recall.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when you went to Gulfport then you started flying B25s.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that?

Mr. Loftin

That was a beautiful airplane, easy airplane to fly, operated real good on one engine, no problems.

Mr. Misenhimer

It had a much longer range, too, than the O47, didn't it?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yeah, it was 6 hours on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that would be about how far, how far could you go?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, about the same distance out into the gulf, about 200 miles.

Mr. Misenhimer

But she could loiter out there longer. You could stay out there on station longer or make a longer trip, right, cover a bigger area.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about your time there then.

Mr. Loftin

It was a real nice base but it had the history of aviation there. They had every airplane that was ever built for the Air Force. It was an AM school, aircraft mechanics. And if you wanted to see anything the Air Force ever had, why, you could find it there at Gulfport. And it wasn't too bad. Housing was hard to find. We lived in an old, it was an old lady that had an old house, and we rented an apartment from her. The only refrigeration we had was an old icebox, and we were driving a '41 Chevy then but other than the Chevy, why, we didn't have much of anything else.

Mr. Misenhimer

On your B25, what armament did you carry on it?

Mr. Loftin

We carried 6 depth charges.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you had the 75mm in the nose.

Mr. Loftin

Right, and we had the gunners firing 50-caliber armor piercing shells.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many gunners did you have? This was a 75 you mean, the armor piercing were from 75mm?

Mr. Loftin

No, no that was a regular 50-caliber machine gun.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, the 50 calibers, okay.

Mr. Loftin

We carried 2 in the nose and we had a tail gunner and one waist gunner.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about a turret on top?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, that's right. It had a turret, yeah, for the engineer.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your machine guns in the nose, they were fixed or were they moveable?

Mr. Loftin

They were fixed.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've seen pictures of some B25s with like 8 guns, 4 guns on each side in a pod of some sort.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have those?

Mr. Loftin

We didn't have pods, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well tell me some more about your time there at Gulfport.

Mr. Loftin

Well we were there about 5 months and eventually, if we had a sighting out in the Gulf of Mexico, radar was a new thing at that time, and if there was a sighting out in the Gulf that they didn't get him, why, they called in the B24s. The reason they called in the B24s was because they had radar and they could fly at night and that's when the submarines came up to recharge their batteries. So that's when they whipped the submarine. When they got one into the gulf, why, he was trapped. He couldn't get out. Shortly thereafter, we were deactivated as an anti sub outfit.

Mr. Misenhimer

That brings up a point. Did you do any of your missions at night, or were they all daytime?

Mr. Loftin

All of ours were all daytime.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the B24s sink many subs out there do you know?

Mr. Loftin

I really don't know. They didn't give us that information.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then you were deactivated there?

Mr. Loftin

The squadron was. Most of us were all B25 pilots. We had no 4-engine time. There were 60 of us they sent out to Ephrata, Washington, 43rd Bomb Group. And the 43rd was a B17 getting ready to go overseas, and while we were there, about all we did was get our time, you know, for flight pay. Other than that, we just poked around until they decided what they wanted to do with us. And finally they sent us to Lockbourne Army Airfield at Columbus, Ohio and we went through what they called a CIS at that time, Central Instructors School, on B17s.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up. When you were there in New Orleans and Mississippi, what outfit were you with there?

Mr. Loftin

At first, when I first went over to New Orleans, I was with 124th Observation Squadron and then I transferred, I didn't transfer. They transferred me over to the 128th Division Squadron and the 124th became a fighter outfit. It broke my heart, but anyway, I went over to the 128th and then when we moved to Gulfport, we became the 21st Anti Submarine Squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out to Washington on the B17s, what outfit did you say that was?

Mr. Loftin

That was the 43rd Bomb Group getting ready to go to Italy.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when would that have been?

Mr. Loftin

That was 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you out there?

Mr. Loftin

I was out there about 6 weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the 43rd Bomb Group go on overseas?

Mr. Loftin

Well, I don't know. They left after we did, but we went from there, we came to Columbus, Ohio.

Mr. Misenhimer

As an instructor did you say?

Mr. Loftin

We went to CIS, Central Instructors School, at Lockbourne on the airfield in Columbus.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you become an instructor then?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we went through the B17 School, which was pretty rugged. In fact, Jack Catton gave me my final exam, my final test up there. You know who he was.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm sorry. Who was that again?

Mr. Loftin

Jack Catton.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, tell me who he was.

Mr. Loftin

He was a captain at that time. Later became Chief of Staff of the Air Force. He put me through the paces. While we were there, there was a mistake made, a crew getting ready to go out and do some flying, some 8 ball in a hangar there. They put hydrogen instead of oxygen. No, they put nitrogen instead of oxygen into the oxygen tanks, and that crew taxied out. I was in bed that morning when they taxied out, and when they got ready to go through their preflight, it was an oxygen flight, that aircraft blew up and knocked me out of bed. And I went down there later on and all that was out there was the tail of the B17 and the two wing tips and the engines on the ground. It was terrible. There wasn't but a few hours later that here come the FBI in. And they traced it down. They stopped all flying and all the pilots went to the base theater and they briefed us on what happened. As to the guys that put the wrong stuff in the oxygen tanks, I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

It must've been hydrogen, not nitrogen I think, was it? Or was it nitrogen?

Mr. Loftin

I don't remember whether it was nitrogen or hydrogen.

Mr. Misenhimer

Nitrogen I don't think is explosive.

Mr. Loftin

Well, this blew up.

Mr. Misenhimer

Whatever it was, it was...

Mr. Loftin

It killed everybody on board. There was 1 instructor and 2 pilots.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a shame. Anything else like that happen there?

Mr. Loftin

No, not that I know of.

Mr. Misenhimer

So how long were you there in that school?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, I guess about 8 weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then what happened?

Mr. Loftin

Well, that's when I moved to MacDill Field.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that's where? MacDill Field is where?

Mr. Loftin

It's in Tampa, Florida.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your wife with you all these times?

Mr. Loftin

No, no, she was up in Mason. I was being moved around quite a bit. She came on home. She was pregnant at the time and went up and stayed with her folks up in Mason County.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then when you got down to Tampa, what did you do there?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we were all instructor pilots and we flew 6-hour flights at that time, and I guess I was just a plain old instructor there for a few weeks and then they put me on the standardization board. And we had to fly with our instructor pilots mostly and check on if everybody was teaching things the same way.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now as an instructor pilot, the pilots you were training, had they had instruction in a B17 before or was this their first instruction?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, all of them were qualified B17 pilots, but we were standardization board.

Mr. Misenhimer

But I mean the instructor pilots, who were they training, new pilots?

Mr. Loftin

The crews. We were an RTU, National Training Unit. Our crews, after they finished all of their phases there in MacDill Field, that's when they were ready to go overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, they were getting put together as a crew, pilot, co-pilot and all the other members.

Mr. Loftin

The pilots had all been through transition training.

Mr. Misenhimer

And the standardization board, did you find many people not teaching properly?

Mr. Loftin

No, it was pretty routine.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, lets see, I went overseas in January of '45. So I guess, oh, about a year.

Mr. Misenhimer

And did your wife join you there?

Mr. Loftin

Yes, she did. I came home and got her, got the old '41 Chevy and we put everything we owned in the back of that car (laughing) including a child. Well, we actually lived at St. Petersburg.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time there?

Mr. Loftin

Well, one day I was up with a crew, pilots, a couple pilots, waiting for traffic to clear and all of a sudden, I saw parachutes. I couldn't figure out what was happening, and they were going down in Tampa Bay in the water. And I had to call the tower and ask permission for me to drop my life raft and they told me to go ahead. But what happened, a crew went up, they took all the guys out of the oxygen chamber, taking them on an orientation flight to show them what it was like to fly at altitude. Well, I don't know

what happened to the airplane. They lost a couple engines up there or something and the pilot bailed all those guys out. I dropped my life raft to them. I guess it helped them a little bit but they got all the guys out of the water. But there were crash boats right there at the Bay.

Mr. Misenhimer

How far offshore were they?

Mr. Loftin

Well, right over the field. MacDill was right at the bay.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they came down, they were close to the shore then.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, and my oldest son was born there. I'm sorry. My wife was pregnant when I came home from Lockbourne and she went over to MacDill and my oldest son was born.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good, so that's your second child now, huh?

Mr. Loftin

That was my first child.

Mr. Misenhimer

All right. Anything else happen there?

Mr. Loftin

No, I stayed there I guess about 8 months and then I could see that guys were all coming back from overseas. We were getting plenty of pilots, and I could see the war was pretty well winding down and I got me a crew together. I wanted to go over. So I got, there

was a captain navigator, I had a first lieutenant co-pilot, a first lieutenant bombardier, all of my crew members were either staff or above. So it was a pretty exclusive club I took over.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then how did you go to Europe?

Mr. Loftin

See, I asked to go through the phases there. They made everybody go through the phases, but I had to teach it and we went through the phases.

Mr. Misenhimer

What do you mean by through the phases?

Mr. Loftin

Well, you had to have your bombing, you had to have your formation flying, you had to have your navigation. That was called phases, phases of it. Anyway, when I finished my phases, when I was shipped to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. And from there, lets see, I had a 10-day leave...

Mr. Misenhimer

So you went up to Camp Kilmer. Did your entire crew go with you or how did they get there?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yes. We were all together.

Mr. Misenhimer

Y'all went up together on a train you say.

Mr. Loftin

I take it back. From MacDill, we went to Savannah, Georgia. And after being in Savannah for a while, we moved to Camp Kilmer.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you take a plane with you at all?

Mr. Loftin

No, no. We were...

Mr. Misenhimer

Ground transportation.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, train.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you got to Camp Kilmer. How long were you there?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, just a week or so and they gave us backpacks and everything. They didn't have any rifles, but anyway, we got on the train there and we were shipped up to New York.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to in New York?

Mr. Loftin

Well we went to the pier, I guess you call it, and we were waiting there. That's when we figured out where we were going. We looked up and there was the Queen Mary.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were there in Camp Kilmer, did you get a chance to get into New York City at all?

Mr. Loftin

No, we didn't have a chance to go anywhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, so you boarded the Queen Mary.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what was that like?

Mr. Loftin

Well, there were 20,000 men on it, and we were out there 6 days. When we left New York, man we had blimps and we had destroyers. We had everything imaginable with us until that old Queen Mary got out on the ocean and she really kicked it up. We woke up one morning and no escorts of any kind. We were all by ourselves, and when we got over close to...well, they said we went down close to Africa then came up the coast. Anyway, we got close to England, I woke up one morning and here were the blimps and the destroyers and everything out there with us. And we landed at Gurock, Scotland. And from Gurock we took a train and we went to Stone, England. And at Stone, there I was a captain. My navigator was a captain, and we had all the rank in the world, I guess you'd say, for a crew going over. Nobody really wanted us I don't think because they wanted to promote their own people. Anyway, after, well all the crews we went over with, they were gone and we were still there. Finally, they sent us to the 95th Bomb Group in England.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you assigned a plane there?

Mr. Loftin

Well, not really. You weren't assigned a plane. You just took what they gave you. Most of the time we were there we spent on practice missions. Colonel Shuck, he wanted his crews to be real sharp, and those of us that had just come in, we had to fly these practice missions while the regular bunch all went on bombing missions over to Germany. Well, finally on the 21st of April 1945 we were scheduled for bombing mission, and we went to Oranienburg, which is just outside of Berlin, and we had orders that if we didn't drop on the first run, we'd go to the tail end of the bomber string and come back and drop. And they wanted every bomb on that target and we couldn't figure out why. We found out later on. That's where Hitler had his atomic bomb people working. He already had the deliveries Air Force. He had the V2, which he could have put it right in the heart of New York City if he wanted to. He didn't have a weapon. That's the story behind going to Oranienburg. And after that, I was put in squadron operations.

Mr. Misenhimer

What squadron were you in?

Mr. Loftin

The 334th.

Mr. Misenhimer

You flew just the one mission, right?

Mr. Loftin

Just the one bombing mission, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

On that mission, did you encounter much flak?

Mr. Loftin

No, it was mild. The flak was real mild. In fact, the Germans had lowered their guns for the Russians by the time we got there.

Mr. Misenhimer

They used them for ground targets.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about enemy fighters?

Mr. Loftin

Well, I was monitoring the fighter red channel. I mean, that's what I had to do, and I could hear these guys on the fighter channel talking and no fighters came up to meet us. We didn't see any at all. And I heard this one guy say, "Hey, there's a couple of airplanes up here without propellers on them, a couple of bandits up here without propellers on them." And that's the first I knew of the jets that the Germans had.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see them at all?

Mr. Loftin

No, I didn't see any fighters, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your bombs get on the target?

Mr. Loftin

I imagine so. I had a da-- good bombardier. Of course, we dropped on the lead ship. The lead bombardier would drop and when he did, why, they called our bombardiers togglers.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you came back into operations then.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, we were debriefed. They gave us a shot of whiskey when we got in, and everybody talked and it was quite a bedlam there, you know, lots of excitement.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long was that mission?

Mr. Loftin

It lasted about right at 10 hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, that's a long mission then.

Mr. Loftin

Well, yeah, we went all the way to Berlin.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened there in England?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, nothing much that I can think of. After, you know, well lets go back a little bit.

Queen Wilhelmina went to Eisenhower. The Germans opened the dikes and flooded the lowlands in Holland, and Queen Wilhelmina talked to Ike. She told them, she said her people were starving. We had to do something. So the allies got together with the

German government and they gave us corridors we could fly through at low altitude and we would not be fired upon. Okay, we briefed that day and an old boy by the name of Scurman, I was supposed to go with him, but anyway at the last minute Colonel Gooding came in. He said, "Loftin, you go with this new crew. They need their flight time for pay." So I was put with another crew, and we flew just as instructed, right through these corridors at low altitudes and our target was Utrecht in, Holland. And we dropped food, flew in at about, oh, right at 200 feet and those people out there waited. They had soccer fields with very big white crosses, you know, across them and we dropped our food on those targets. And we dropped at Utrecht and then we came on home at any altitude we wanted to. We buzzed the dickens out of them coming home, and that's when Scurman was lost. The last airplane that the 8th Air Force lost came from the 334th Bomb Group. A fellow by the name of Scurman was the pilot. We called him 'Spider'. In fact, I was in the same barracks with him for a while.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did their plane get lost?

Mr. Loftin

Well, they think it was fired upon by some German ground troops. It went down in the North Atlantic out there, and I think they got the co-pilot and the navigator out of it. The rest of them all perished.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you dropped this food, was it on parachutes?

Mr. Loftin

No, no, just free load down.

Mr. Misenhimer

You'd slow your plane down as much as you could I suppose and then drop them, huh?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we slowed them down, yeah. We put flaps down, gear down, and horse her back as slow as we could without stalling out and just kicked the food out.

Mr. Misenhimer

You just made the one trip?

Mr. Loftin

No, I made 5.

Mr. Misenhimer

5 of those, okay. You weren't fired on any time, then, huh?

Mr. Loftin

I was flying as I guess you would say as instructor pilot or co-pilot.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you weren't fired on by the Germans any time?

Mr. Loftin

No, no, never saw any flak at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

What's some other things happened there?

Mr. Loftin

I can't think of anything exciting that happened there. VE night happened while we were there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What now?

Mr. Loftin

VE night, and it was pretty wild. And Colonel Shuck wouldn't let anybody leave the base. We had to stay on the base. So anyway, we celebrated a little bit. I had some Sunny Brook Whiskey and I got over in the flight surgeon office, had 2 fifths of it, and about oh, 8 or 10 of us sit there with old Doc Rice and finished the Sunny Brook Whiskey off.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could you get a whiskey allowance each month or something like that?

Mr. Loftin

No, no, we didn't. We could buy Irish whiskey there at the bar at the officer's club.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where'd you get the Sunny Brook from then?

Mr. Loftin

I brought it with me. I should've taken candy and women's underclothes or something.

Whiskey didn't do me a bit of good! (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were there, did you get a chance to go into London or any of the cities?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yes. We were given liberty.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was London like?

Mr. Loftin

It was pretty hectic at that particular time. There was a place, the Rainbow Pub down on Picadilly, that's where we usually stayed.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were the V2s hitting London at that time?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, the V2s, one of them hit on the back of the hospital there at Horom while I was there.

Mr. Misenhimer

The V1s, were they still using the V1s at that point?

Mr. Loftin

This was the V1.

Mr. Misenhimer

The V1, okay. Now when you were in London, were the V1s or V2s hitting there?

Mr. Loftin

Not while I was down there, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were the English people friendly?

Mr. Loftin

Lord, yes, they were more than friendly to us, especially around Horom.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened over there?

Mr. Loftin

Gosh, I really can't think of anything exciting.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, how about anything comical along the way.

Mr. Loftin

Let me think. Well, when I was put in operations, I was moved over to what they called a WAF side barracks, that was the one with the WAFs at one time, and it was better than the old Quonset huts. I had to give up my crew. In fact, my co-pilot ^{got} dumped my crew and they gave him another co-pilot. My co-pilot was a pilot with a crew at one time getting ready to go overseas and he's on night cross-country and he lost his hydraulic pressure and had to land the airplane and skidded off the runway onto a railroad track. But anyway, they made him a co-pilot. That's who I got for co-pilot. He was a better pilot than I was. Anyway, he got my crew and I moved over to the old WAF side. That's where all of the operations officers, the squadron CO and everybody else is over there. And on VE night, I started home. I was duty officer that night. I started home and I walked by the club, and Colonel Shuck came in and he says, "Loftin, they don't need you staying up here tonight. There's not gonna be any strike order, no bombing mission, so go home and go to bed." So I had to walk by the club to get back to my barracks, and I stopped at the club. I was gonna have one drink and go home and go to bed and I got my drink and I got over by a fireplace and 'wham!' And boy, something hit up beside that fireplace and I said, "What in the hell is going on?" Anyway, they were using that fireplace, the war was over with, they were using that fireplace to get rid of their glasses. So I sat my drink down and I went right on back to the barracks and went to bed. The next morning, I woke up and I thought, gosh darn I can smell something burning. And I walked through the CO, he had a separate room (Colonel Gooding), gosh darn, I opened

that door and it was full of smoke. He'd been drunk the night before, and he had gone to bed with his clothes on and he dropped a cigarette down between his pants and the bed and that thing was smoldering like the dickens. I guess he would have burned up if I hadn't had been in that barracks. Anyway, I got him out of there. He had a burned place on his leg, but anyway that's the only other exciting thing I can think of that happened over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Lets go back to your time over on the Queen Mary. What accommodations did you have on the Queen Mary?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we all ate at a certain time in a stateroom that was normally for 2 people. We had 8 people in there, and the officers reported in the stateroom and all the enlisted men were below deck.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any idea how many total people were on the ship?

Mr. Loftin

20,000.

Mr. Misenhimer

20,000, huh. Pretty crowded down below, wasn't it?

Mr. Loftin

I imagine so.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did anybody have trouble with seasickness?

Mr. Loftin

I don't know. I never noticed. I was made, what do they call them? In other words, I had about 10 crews I had to look after. I was a captain and I had to make sure that they all had their, the date of departure from the Z of I, from the Zone of Interior. And that they all had quarters and everything. It was a sorry job. Anyway, I had about 10 crews I had to look after.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else?

Mr. Loftin

No, nothing I can think of.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, then when did you come home from over there?

Mr. Loftin

Lets see. I'm thinking. I can't remember the date.

Mr. Misenhimer

Roughly, what month or whatever?

Mr. Loftin

In April, I came home in April.

Mr. Misenhimer

April of '45?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, VE day wasn't until May. May 7th or some such was VE day.

Mr. Loftin

Wait a minute. I'm a little screwed up here. Lets see, VE day, May, June, July, and August. I must've come back in August or July.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of '45, okay.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

And how did you come back?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we brought the airplanes back. I flew back with my crew that I went over with. Of course, they had a pilot and a co-pilot, but I just got down in the nose and I was a passenger. We flew back. We landed up at Goose Bay and then we came on into, oh up in...

Mr. Misenhimer

Up at Maine?

Mr. Loftin

No, not Maine. I'm trying to think of the name of the place.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you left England, was Goose Bay your first stop?

Mr. Loftin

No, we went to Valley Wales and from there, we went up to Iceland, and Island to Goose Bay, then Goose Bay into... what in the heck was the name of that place in... New Hampshire I think it was. I can't remember the name of that place. Everybody came back to the same place.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did it take to come back?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, gosh, I think about 6 days all together.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you'd stay at these places you landed, you would stay there for a day or two then.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, um hm, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you by yourself or with a group of planes coming back together?

Mr. Loftin

It was individual flights.

Mr. Misenhimer

There was probably a long stream of them.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, um, hm.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got back to the States, what did you do then?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we were all given a 30-day furlough. We came on home and when the furlough was up, I reported into Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened there?

Mr. Loftin

The bomb group was there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your bomb group?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, the 95th. The whole 8th Air Force was there, and we were waiting. You know, VJ day hadn't come along yet, but there really wasn't a whole lot to do. In fact, I was put in operations up there and I was flying... While the war was going on, we didn't do much, just wait for airplanes. And I did get 12 hours in a B29.

Mr. Misenhimer

As pilot or what?

Mr. Loftin

Just orientation flight.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that plane to fly?

Mr. Loftin

Well, I didn't get much time in it, just an orientation flight, that's about all.

Mr. Misenhimer

I see.

Mr. Loftin

And lets see, we were there when VJ night came along, VJ day. And when VJ happened, my assistant operations officer over in England (a fellow by the name of Judy), he had his car up there, he and his wife. So my navigator and my bombardier, Judy and his wife, and myself, we were on our way to town down in Sioux Falls to eat and on the way we heard VJ night had been declared. So we just kept right on going, and we wound up in Okoboji, Iowa. It was a tourist town. They had a carnival and everything going on there, so we spent about a week there doing nothing, just lounging around. And finally, we decided well, we'd better go back to Sioux Falls. In the meantime, General Travis had been made the CO of the base there. But anyway, we got back and gosh darn; there wasn't a soul on the base. Everybody had gone AWOL. So anyway, after about a week, General Travis put out an order to all those guys that were gone, they'd better get their tails back up there or get court martialed, so they came in from all over the country. And that was after VJ night, that's when I was still in base operations but we started flying, I guess you'd say courier runs up to Chicago 36th Street Airport. And oh, we went on up to Battle Creek and picked up people, the industrialist. And the war was over with, we flew them back to Sioux Falls, and they had, I guess you'd call them orientation lectures from the people out of the free world telling what they were gonna do after the war. And I flew those missions back and forth, you know, picking people up flying a B25. Just hauling passengers all across the country.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many people could you put in a B25 then?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, we didn't put over 3 or 4. I had a pilot, co-pilot, and engineer.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean as far as passengers, how many passengers?

Mr. Loftin

Well, we'd have 2 or 3 passengers. I mean, it was just businessmen mostly. And while I was there, I was made a troop train commander. They saw where I had worked for the railroad and some shyster; he decided I'd make a good troop train commander, which was the sorriest job in the world. And they gave me one train to bring down to Brownsville, Texas from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and we went down and loaded the train up. And we left; I guess we had around 200 guys on that train, everything from a Bird Colonel down to a flight officer. And it had the old gas lights in the coaches, just old worn out equipment. We left Sioux Falls with about 200 people, and when we got to Brownsville, I think I had about 40 or 50 left. The rest of them had all gone AWOL. But we had food galore. I mean, there were hams and sacks of sugar and everything else up in that mess car.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Loftin

I was still a captain. While we were in England, I would have made Major if the war had lasted another week because that's what my job called for as operations officer, but they froze all promotions at that particular time.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had to ride the troop train down and back, is that right?

Mr. Loftin

I rode it down but I flew back.

Mr. Misenhimer

You flew back in a military plane or what?

Mr. Loftin

No, in a commercial airline.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did they do with the people that went AWOL off of that train?

Mr. Loftin

When I got to Brownsville, the base commander down there, he came aboard and we couldn't get rid of that darn kitchen car because it had so much stuff in it. We finally got some quartermaster officer from Fort Brown came over and signed for it, wanting to turn me loose, but the Colonel down at Brownsville said don't worry about them. They'll all show up. But I didn't worry about them and I never heard any more about it. I guess it was all right.

Mr. Misenhimer

You weren't responsible for them then, huh?

Mr. Loftin

No, I wasn't responsible after we got to Brownsville.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean you weren't even responsible to get them there.

Mr. Loftin

No, uh, uh, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, gosh. I took one flight, I went up to Battle Creek and got some people, and I had a layover that night. Well I wasn't doing anything, well I went downtown and I was going to a movie. And I went to this movie and before I went in, I was standing out in front of this movie getting ready to get in and a guy walked up to me and he said, "Are you Tommy Loftin?" And I said, "Yeah." This is in Detroit, Michigan. And I said, "Yeah, I'm Tommy Loftin." He said, "Well, I'm Melvin Ott." And I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Well, I'm singing with Jimmy Dorsey's orchestra at this theater." And I said, "Well I'll be darned." He said, "Well, come on. Go with me." So I didn't have to pay to get in the movie. We went in and I got to shake hands with old Jimmy Dorsey and a lot of other people back there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this someone you had known before?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, we went to school together down in San Anton. He married a girl up there and he'd never been in the Army. He was cross-eyed so bad he couldn't hardly see. Anyway, I got to meet all those people. Wait a minute. I'm getting ahead of myself. The Ott boy, he'd been in the Air Force and he had been in the crash of a B29 and messed up his legs and he was a singer in high school here in San Anton. And that's what he was doing, but then when I got ready to go out, and the show was over with and everything, another fellow walks into me and I knew who he was. He said, "Tommy?"

And I said, "Yeah." He says, "What are you doing up here?" And I told him, and his name was Albert...I can't think of his last name right now – Haines. Anyway, he lived right up there on Porter Street not too far from me. That's terrible to loose your mind. But anyway, he had married a girl up there, but I ran into two people from San Anton I knew up in Detroit on a cross-country flight.

Mr. Misenhimer

Small world.

Mr. Loftin

Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when did you finally get out?

Mr. Loftin

Lets see, I got out in...I was never officially out. I stayed in the Reserves.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, but you were not on active duty, right?

Mr. Loftin

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when did you leave active duty?

Mr. Loftin

February of '46, I was officially separated out here at Randolph Field.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you stayed in the Reserves.

Mr. Loftin

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any choice about staying in the Reserves or not?

Mr. Loftin

Well, yeah, we signed a 5-year commitment. I had signed a 5-year commitment just before I got out, and I didn't do any actual participation. Oh, I made a few meetings out at Brooks Field here and I didn't really do much of anything. And then I got into an air, well it was an Air EVAC Reserve Outfit out at Kelly Field and I kept my flight status up. That was the main thing to keep my wings.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you, did you get home with any souvenirs from overseas?

Mr. Loftin

Well, I had my parachute and my 45, and my wife made a dress out of that parachute. My mother made me a shirt. My 45, it's in the bottom of a lake out at Martindale Field here in San Anton.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened?

Mr. Loftin

Well, my brother killed himself with it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

Mr. Loftin

CO out at Martindale when I was flying out there, he took that gun and bent the barrel and threw it in that old lake out there.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's too bad. Did you ever see any USO Shows?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yeah! Gosh, I saw quite a few, but the best one I ever saw was on that Queen Mary going over. I don't know, this guy was a violin player and when he came out, it was all pomp and ceremony and he started playing this fiddle and finally he got onto the hot canary and that fiddle started flying to pieces, and he wound up with nothing but the strings and that bow. One of the best USO Shows I ever saw.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you saw some others, too, huh?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yeah, right along. They were very typical most of them. Had a singer and a few dancers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see Bob Hope or anybody like that?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, I saw Bob Hope down at Gulfport, Mississippi. He and Frances Langford were together, and they cleaned out a hangar there at Gulfport and old Bob Hope and Frances Langford put on a show there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have an experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, we had a Red Cross Canteen on our base in England but I could never see that they did a whole lot.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were overseas, could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, we got mail pretty regular.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were in England, did you get paid over there?

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you get paid in, American money or English pounds?

Mr. Loftin

No, no it was in English pounds.

Mr. Misenhimer

English pounds, huh. Could you ever hear Armed Forces Radio?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, we listened to it quite often.

Mr. Misenhimer

And how about Axis Sally?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, we heard her.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of her?

Mr. Loftin

(laughing) She was a traitor. I mean that's about all you can say, water under the bridge now.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that she knew a lot about us over there. She even called the names of some of the crews and stuff.

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, she'd call people by name and the crew and when they got there and so forth.

Mr. Misenhimer

I wonder where they got that information.

Mr. Loftin

I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now in April of '45, President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Loftin

I was in my bunk that morning and it came over the loud speaker that he died that morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

What reaction did people have to it?

Mr. Loftin

Well, it was a real sad day, I'll tell you. Personally, I thought he was the greatest man that ever lived, and I think most of the fellows over there felt the same way.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they dropped the atomic bombs on Japan, did you hear about that?

Mr. Loftin

I don't know when we heard about it, but yeah, we were at Sioux Falls when that happened.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think about that? Had you ever heard of an atomic bomb or anything?

Mr. Loftin

I never heard of it. We couldn't even pronounce it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You stayed in the Reserve. Did you say you got called back for Korea?

Mr. Loftin

Yes, I was called back the same day, I was sworn in twice on the same day, December the 19th of 1941 and December the 19th of 1950. So I stay in bed the 19th of December every year.

Mr. Misenhimer

(laughing) Did you get over to Korea?

Mr. Loftin

No, I never got into Korea. I was recalled. I was with an air evac reserve outfit here in San Anton at Kelly Field, and it was about 6 of us that were sent to 1732nd Air Evac Squadron at Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do there then?

Mr. Loftin

Well we were flying gooneybirds, and they made us fly co-pilot quite a bit until they felt that we were ready to check out. And this was some pretty hairy flying up there. I mean, that weather is terrible up there in the wintertime, and I went up there in February. And I never had any close calls or anything, but I sure flew in some terrible weather. And the base ops would close the field down anywhere we were going into and if air evac showed up, they'd raise the minimums to where you could get in. And boy, we'd fly for, oh 8 or 10 hours and you wouldn't see the ground over a few hours of the whole time. The rest of the time, you were on instruments. But it was some of the best flying that I accomplished while I was in the Service. I felt I was really doing something flying patients all over the country.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you leave active duty then?

Mr. Loftin

Well, later on, while I was up at Westover, they put out a notice that they needed pilots here in San Anton for a ferry outfit, so I volunteered for it to get back down here in San Anton. And the wife and I, we had a car up there and we had our kids, 2 kids, and we drove back down here and I reported into Kelly for the 1737th ferry squadron. And I was with them until I was finally separated, you know, when my time was up.

Mr. Misenhimer

Earlier you mentioned you got some Infantry training. When did you get your Infantry training?

Mr. Loftin

Well, that's later on. When I got out in February of 1953, I really wasn't too much interested in staying in the Reserves. My dad was a retired lineman and he had a friend that was a retired lineman, and his friend's son-in-law was the base CO out at Martindale Field here in San Anton, Colonel Donald Beseth. So my dad, just laying around the house, didn't have anything to do and one day this old lineman came by to talk to him and he asked my dad if he wanted a job. And my dad says, "I don't care where it's at or what it is, yes." So he went to work out at Martindale Field as I forget what. He was just a guard. They called him an armed guard, but he was just a night watchman. Anyway, I took him to work one day and Colonel Beseth was there and he found out about my flying experience and we got to talking. He said, "Tommy, you ever ridden in a helicopter?" I said, "No." He said, "Come on over." So we fired up a helicopter and we went riding. We chased rabbits. We chased deer. We did a little bit of everything in that helicopter. So old Don, he says, "Tommy, why don't you come on and join a guard with me." So I did, I went into the Guard. I joined the Guard.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was what year, when?

Mr. Loftin

About 1957. I take it back. It was about 1956. In '57, that's when I went off to Infantry School. You see, I went back in. I was a captain and I had to take a bump back to first lieutenant to get back on flying status. So Don checked me out in an L19 and an L20

because I wasn't helicopter qualified. But anyway, lets see, I went off to helicopter school – that was first. That must've been along about 1957. In fact, I cracked up an L19 on July the 17th of 1957, I cracked up an L19 up at Fort Hood. I took an engineering officer out to review a convoy and on the way back, why, we were coming in and we flew a traffic pattern at 500 feet at North Fort Hood – that was Longhorn – and when I throttled back, why we got down to traffic altitude and we come back in and I didn't have any engine. I was too low to try to restart, so I thought well I'll just set her down in a cornfield somewhere. You know what an L19 is?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah.

Mr. Loftin

We come around a couple of little old hills there and I flared up, great big cables from the lake up there. Oh, what is that lake? Anyway, 3 big cables were right in front of me and I tried to hoist it over that and I stalled it out and it hit on the left wing. And I demolished the airplane but nobody was hurt. I cut my head getting out. I hit it on the compass. But anyway, that all happened up in North Fort Hood in 1957.

Mr. Misenhimer

The L19 is a Cessna, is that right? Single engine Cessna.

Mr. Loftin

Yes. I'm trying to think of any strange things that happened after that that I can remember. We flew helicopters more than anything else.

Mr. Misenhimer

You did make Major though you say.

Mr. Loftin

Oh, yes, I made Major out there. Let me think a little while. In 1972, I had to be either promoted or get out of the Guard and there were no slots available for a lieutenant colonel. I had 7 years in grade as a major, and if you didn't find a slot then you had to take a promotion and retire. Well, I had 27 good years. So that's what I did. I took my promotion and they in turn put me into the retired Reserve.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Loftin

I got the Air Medal and I wasn't over there long enough to get a DFC. And you know, the American Theater, the ETO, the...

Mr. Misenhimer

The EAME?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, theater ribbons. That's mostly what I got.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there any time you felt frightened at all?

Mr. Loftin

Well, not while I was flying, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the commanding officers you had, people over you?

Mr. Loftin

I had some good ones. Colonel Shuck, well Major Bradshaw one back over here then old Major Morgan, Colonel Shuck, and Colonel Gooding, all of them were good men. I can't say a bad word about any of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were in the 8th Air Force when you were in England, right?

Mr. Loftin

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was LeMay over you at all there?

Mr. Loftin

Was who?

Mr. Misenhimer

Curtis LeMay?

Mr. Loftin

No, he came to the base one time, and I didn't get to meet him. They had a big review for him, and he was quite a character. I mean, he was well thought of over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

He went to Japan then in January, or so...

Mr. Loftin

He sure did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall?

Mr. Loftin

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Loftin

Yeah, I made all the reunions with the 95th up until here about, oh, 3 years ago. My wife developed a real bad back problem and I don't want to go without her. We made them, that's field...oh, what's his name? Ian Hawkins, we brought him back from one of our reunions we had up at Phoenix, and he came down here with us, he and Alan Johnson, taking care of Ian. And they came down here and stayed with us a little while. Then we went up to the ranch and they had never seen anything like that country up around Fredericksburg, you know. Anyway, they wanted to take a little time to come back to the Nimitz Museum. We got up there at the ranch and the sun was shining so bright, and they just enjoyed themselves immensely up there and when it came time to come back to Nimitz, they didn't want to come back. They wanted to ride around in that country up there. You know, with the deer, the turkey, the rabbits and everything else up there. So we spent out entire time up there and then they left here and went on to El Paso. No, I take it back. They stayed at El Paso first and then they came down here and stayed with us, then they went up to Snyder to stay with a fellow by the name of Flag.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were telling me about a train wreck. What happened there?

Mr. Loftin

(laughing) Well, I was a conductor on a job, and I was riding the head end with another brakeman. And it was raining one night and we left here on what we called a bullet

going down to Corpus Christi, and everything going along real smooth. And it was after dark and we left Karnes City. Karnes City is on a hill and you go right down into Kennedy and then you start up Green Hill on the other side. Well, the engineers usually let it roll pretty good going down through there, and they have to keep their train under control, and you come off of Karnes City Hill going into Kennedy and the local had been working there. That local usually tied up about 2 o'clock in the afternoon at Skidmore, but they had been doing road work, they'd been unloading gravel up and down the railroad. And we topped that hill and I was sitting on one side of the seat, one seat, and my brakeman sitting on the other and I couldn't see out. And all of a sudden, the air goes to emergency. They had put it in emergency. I told this other brakeman, I said, "Bode, what's going on out there?" It was raining and he stuck his head out and he said, "Gosh dern, Tommy, brace. We're gonna hit a caboose down there." I thought he was kidding. He said, "No, no, no." He said, "Brace, brace!" Well, we hit this, old Foy Black's Caboose and went through the caboose and a couple of other cars, and the engine - that went off into Escondido Creek. We had 2 units, a lead unit and we were riding in the 2nd unit, and I started calling the engineer. Old Max. I said, "Max!" No answer. "Max!" No answer. Finally, a flashlight comes on. I said, "Max!" He said, "Yeah." I said, are y'all all right?" He said, "Well, I think the fireman hurt his leg, but other than that, we're all right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Plane crash and a train crash you survived, so that's doing pretty good.

Mr. Loftin

All in the same year!

Mr. Misenhimer

Same year, okay.

Mr. Loftin

1957, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

A lot of information here and I appreciate it, and thanks again.

Mr. Loftin

I'm not a hero. I was just an old throttle jockey, that's all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, a lot of us are that way.

Historian's note:

I met Ian Hawkins at the Bletchley Park Museum in England in October 2004 and he gave me Thomas Loftin's name and address and phone number.

Transcribed by
Christa Granger
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Alice, Texas

Oral History by:
Richard Misenhimer
P.O. Box 3453
Alice, Texas 78333
(316) 664-4071