

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR
(ADMIRAL NIMITZ MUSEUM)**

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

Hearol R. Veteto

January 11, 2005

2nd Air Division 8th Air Force

328th B.S. 93rd B.G.

B-24 Bombardier

Bailed out 2-26-45, 5 weeks walking out

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is January 11, 2005. I am interviewing Mr. Hearol R. Veteto by telephone. His address is 412 Chapparal, Pleasanton, Texas 78064. His phone number is 830-281-3531. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Hearol, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country back in World War II. Do you have a middle initial?

Mr. Veteto

R

Agreement Read

Mr. Veteto

Yes, I do have one question though. In the statement there you said...you're talking about the original tapes we're making right?

Mr. Misenhimer

Right.

Mr. Veteto

Ok, I'll agree to this.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Veteto

My birth date is 26th of August 1924.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Veteto

I was born in Waco.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Veteto

I had a brother who was quite a bit younger than I and he was killed in an airplane crash in Arkansas some years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was not in World War II then?

Mr. Veteto

No, he was 16 years younger than I.

Mr. Misenhimer

This airplane crash, was this a civilian air plane?

Mr. Veteto

Yes, it was a twin engine piper. He was piloting it but they hit what they call clear air turbulence and he made a tape. He dissected it all the way to the ground. I can't read it.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Veteto

My father's name was George Ethelbert and my mother's name was Lottie Leferve Whitenberg.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were they born?

Mr. Veteto

They were both born in Texas. I think dad was born in east Texas in the little town of Iola and mother was born somewhere above Waco in Bosque county I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Veteto

Well, first he was a teacher. That's what he always liked. He would've liked to be a scholar; he was a person who really did enjoyed learning and knowing things. He also worked for Texaco Oil Company and he worked long enough to receive retirement.

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the depression. How did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Veteto

You would have to ask my mother and dad and they are gone. I don't know how it affected me.

Mr. Misenhimer

So as far as you're concerned you didn't notice anything then?

Mr. Veteto

Well, you know, we weren't doing too well. Dad was teaching school at that time and it was 6 month school; \$100 a month and the bank took 50% of it when the checks were cashed.

Mr. Misenhimer

They took half for what purpose?

Mr. Veteto

The vouchers were not funded with any money.

Mr. Misenhimer

I see, they only paid you half what it was worth; what the value was.

Mr. Veteto

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would be pretty rough then.

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, I don't like bankers sometimes. Not all of course.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Veteto

I went mostly to high school in a boarding school in Laredo. Holding Institute, it was a Methodist boarding school.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you graduate from high school?

Mr. Veteto

I did, I graduated in 1941 because I then went immediately to Texas A&I College. Of course we weren't worried about any war at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, 1941, as you recall I'm sure, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Veteto

I remember it very well. In fact, I was out in the yard behind the little house, a little one room building I lived in while going to college trying to make enough difference there and save a little expense for college. Someone came up and talked to me, he said, "Hey, the Japs are bombing Pearl Harbor." Well, I didn't know much about the Japs and knew less about Pearl Harbor. We were glued to the radio for quite a while from then on.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you think this would affect you?

Mr. Veteto

Well, I was eager to get in the service and do my part. Now I wasn't...the idea of saving the country or anything like that, I don't think it occurred to me in that way. I was glad to do what I had to do. I couldn't get in at that time of course because I was only 17.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when did you go into the service?

Mr. Veteto

I went in in March of 1942, it was March of 1943. I had a junior standing in college when I went in the service because I had been in what they call a PIPERC, the enlisted reserve corps. Then, I knew I wanted to fly, so I went to Mission, Texas took a test and passed it and was ready to go. That was in the latter part of 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was the Army Air Corps?

Mr. Veteto

Yes sir. Then I went to...well, I stayed in college until March or April of the next year.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about this enlisted reserve you were in. What was that again?

Mr. Veteto

It was Enlisted Reserve Corps Unassigned. I didn't do anything, I was just being held for whatever needed to come. So I never did have a draft number or draft order. I was already volunteered.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you join that?

Mr. Veteto

I joined that as soon after my birthday in 1942 as I could get in which was probably about 3 or 4 days. I don't remember – it seems to me like it was September 2nd or something like that when I was sworn into the reserve corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you didn't have any meetings or drills or anything like that?

Mr. Veteto

No sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this for the air corps at that point?

Mr. Veteto

No, it wasn't for the air corps until I went to Mission and took the test and they transferred me from the ERC to the ERCAF, I think it was, I don't remember what the term was.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then you transferred to active duty with the air corps at that point?

Mr. Veteto

No, I didn't go into active duty with the air corps until the first part of 1943 as I stated.

Mr. Misenhimer

March of 1943, but was that when you went to Mission down there.

Mr. Veteto

No, I went to Mission sometime about the early part of December and was transferred to the air corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

At that point you still were not on active duty?

Mr. Veteto

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

So March of 1943 is when you went to active duty?

Mr. Veteto

That's correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go there to do that?

Mr. Veteto

For active duty the first thing we did was go to Fort Sam in San Antonio and they checked us over and gave us a few exercises and held us until they found a place for our first duty. My first duty was at Sheppard Field.

Mr. Misenhimer

Wichita Falls?

Mr. Veteto

For basic at Wichita Falls.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there?

Mr. Veteto

Mostly just physical training and I believe we did some firing too.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this an Air Corps type training or an infantry type?

Mr. Veteto

I think it was more or less a general type. I was still in the air corps and they sent me there for the basic training and I wasn't associated closely with the Air Force until about April or May; just shortly after the six week training.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Veteto

We lived in barracks; two story barracks. They were all open. I don't know how many were in those barracks, but every bed was two deckers and the only place we could keep

our clothes...some were hung on clothes racks by the wall and the rest were in our footlockers at the end of our beds.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there?

Mr. Veteto

Well, we griped about it, but we put on weight. We had a lot of general food and it was not spartan; we had all we wanted.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were the cadre, the people you had over you training you, were they pretty rough on you or how were they?

Mr. Veteto

They hollered a lot, but I don't really think they were rough on us. I found no effect to that and I don't know anybody that would say that now. At that time we might have thought that, later on though...

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished up there where did you go?

Mr. Veteto

From there I went to gunnery school in Kingman, Arizona.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you wind up in gunnery school?

Mr. Veteto

Well, that was part of our training, our air corps training really. Wait a minute, I left out one little thing. I went to Hastings College in Hastings, Nebraska for a pre-flight, pre-

induction training. What it was was actually, you might say first year college. You had mathematics, history and it was intense but it was good training. Now as far as food, that's where we had good food.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that?

Mr. Veteto

You know I think about a month.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went there from Sheppard Field, is that right?

Mr. Veteto

Yes. While I was there we did a little flying, very little, but we did a little flying in Pipers and Aeroncas. I think I was the only one there that ever ground looped a Cub. That might have influenced my later training, my later classification in Santa Ana, California.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now were you training to be a pilot at that point, or hoping to be a pilot?

Mr. Veteto

Yes, I think so. The main thing I was hoping for was to fly. I didn't really think about being an officer or anything like that, all I wanted to do was get in the air.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you done any flying in civilian life at all?

Mr. Veteto

No. Well, just a little bit in light planes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were there in Nebraska for about a month?

Mr. Veteto

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then from there to Kingman, Arizona?

Mr. Veteto

From there to Kingman, Arizona to gunnery school. We had a regular gunnery school just like any other air corps member who was going to be an enlisted man.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said when you got to Kingman, Arizona you were doing regular gunnery training.

What all did your gunnery training consist of?

Mr. Veteto

Well, first of all, we shot skeet with a shotgun of course. That was supposedly teaching us to track our targets you know. Then as time went on we fired the 30 and that was at moving targets out in front of us. Toward the end of our period there we were placed in airplanes, they were 17's, and we fired at tow targets. That is the target was towed by another plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

What position did you fire from?

Mr. Veteto

In those I fired from both the waist and the lower ball.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did they tell who hit the target?

Mr. Veteto

The bullets that we fired were colored, they were dipped in paint, I don't know whether they could even read them or not. I didn't shoot down any planes.

Mr. Misenhimer

By looking at the color on the marking of the sleeve...

Mr. Veteto

The markings, when it went through the tow target, it would leave supposedly a color that was on the tip of it. I don't know how that worked for sure because I can hardly imagine now the colors staying on the bullet, but anyway that's what we had.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many flights did you take and do that?

Mr. Veteto

I think about 4 flights is all. Very little flying. Most of our gunnery was based upon familiarizing us with guns on the ground and all.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard people say they would be in a pickup or truck of some sort driving along and shooting from there with their shotguns. Did you do that?

Mr. Veteto

That's true. We had a circular or oval field and we were in the back of trucks, I think two of us were in back at a time, and they'd drive along at a certain speed and along the way they'd kick out a target.

Mr. Misenhimer

A clay pigeon?

Mr. Veteto

A clay pigeon, yes and you'd shoot at that. Then we got to the point where they put us up higher in the air and shot with a device that resembled a turret.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of being in the belly turret of that plane? How did you like that?

Mr. Veteto

Well, contrary to most people, I thought it was great. It was very comfortable and you had a very good shooting advantage; you could shoot right... you were laying on your back kind of and you could see right between your legs where the target was. The ball turret had an especially good sighting device. If you knew the wing span of the plane that you were firing at you had a device that would move to radicals on the gun sight itself together or apart and you'd frame the wing span, you were suppose to be able to hit it.

Mr. Misenhimer

But the waist gun didn't have that, right?

Mr. Veteto

The waist gun, no, they were free firing; they were mounted on a pedestal.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of a sight did it have?

Mr. Veteto

It had what you might call a ring and post sight. The ring was next to the back of the receiver group and the post was further on out the end. You were instructed how to place

the post in view of the ring and thing you were shooting at. It wasn't very accurate I don't think.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever fly in the ball turret except in training?

Mr. Veteto

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened there in training in Kingman?

Mr. Veteto

Well, not much. We happened to be there at a time that they got scarlet fever in one of the barracks and that was a to do then. The mess hall was poor. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of us had diarrhea a lot of the time. Also, another event that took place, a truck or a bus rather carrying cadets across the railroad tracks, the gunnery location, I don't know why it happened but it stopped on the track and I think it killed a large number of those people in the vehicle.

Mr. Misenhimer

A train hit it?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah. We may talk about the number of people that die in Iraq; we had just about as many die in gunnery school as died in Iraq.

Mr. Misenhimer

What are some other things that happened to people there?

Mr. Veteto

Well, I don't recollect anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean fatalities. What else would cause fatalities?

Mr. Veteto

We had no other fatalities that I remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

None of your planes crashed or anything like that?

Mr. Veteto

No, none of our planes crashed. I think the one time, they tell the story I don't know whether it's true or not, but an instructor was observing one of the cadets while he was firing and he was firing from the waist and he said, "Well, you couldn't even hit that plane out there." Well, they said there were 7-8 holes in the plane when they got to the ground. I thought he must have hit it alright.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Veteto

We lived in barracks. They were not as sophisticated, you might say, as in Fort Sam or a place like that. Just thrown up barracks, but they were comfortable. I don't ever remember being uncomfortable in any housing that we were in.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall that happened along there?

Mr. Veteto

Well, that's just about it I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

So far are there any humorous incidents you recall? Anything funny happen along the way?

Mr. Veteto

I don't recall anything right now. Like I was saying, that fellow that shot the holes in the plane... This is jumping ahead, but in bombardier school in Carlsbad, New Mexico, one fellow dropped a bomb and he didn't notice until after he dropped that there was a bus coming down the road. The bombs hit right beside it, he said it must not have been over 50 yards from the bus.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it hurt the bus or anything?

Mr. Veteto

No. Apparently no damage.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these practice bombs?

Mr. Veteto

Yes, they were 100 pound practice bombs. They had 5 or 10 pounds of black powder in the tail of the bomb, the rear end of the bomb. When they dropped, the rest of it is filled with sand, well hopefully the nose was pointing down and it would explode the powder.

Mr. Misenhimer

So something like that probably wouldn't do much damage then?

Mr. Veteto

Oh no. It was primarily done for spotting purposes; the smoke that was caused by the powder was the way we could spot.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished gunnery school, where did you go?

Mr. Veteto

After that I went to pre-flight in Santa Ana, California, that's down just below Los Angeles. In pre-flight the first thing we did there, of course they gave us a physical every time we stepped out of the door; well we had another physical there at Santa Ana. Some people were washed out because of the physical. I lasted that. We started taking tests and after those tests they took us in and we were with a group of officers and enlisted men and they told you what you qualified for. You could qualify for pilot, bombardier and navigator. They brought me in and said, "You qualified for a bombardier. Do you want to accept that or wait and try for another time?" I said, "I'll take it." I didn't want to be left out at all. We had some training there, mostly basic training similar to what we had at Sheppard Field.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was after gunnery school, right?

Mr. Veteto

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm surprised they put you through gunnery school and then possibly let you consider being something else.

Mr. Veteto

I may have that in reverse order. We went to Carlsbad first and then to gunnery school. I mean we went to Santa Ana first, that is correct, we did. But all the things I mentioned are correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, you went to Santa Ana first and then back to Kingman, Arizona?

Mr. Veteto

Then to Kingman, Arizona.

Mr. Misenhimer

The fact that you were going to be a bombardier, they still put you through gunnery school?

Mr. Veteto

Oh yes. As a matter of fact, the armament officer on the plane is a bombardier. We were supposed to know the workings of all the turrets and types of armament we had and how it affected us and how it affected our plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when you got to Carlsbad, what did you do there?

Mr. Veteto

At Carlsbad, we concentrated on basically identification of airplanes in the air and bombardiering. We had quite a bit of math along our stay at that place. We had a device that had a bomb sight on it and it was a tripod about 10 feet from the ground. The device was driven across the floor by an electric motor in the tail of it. We were supposed to hit a little bug, we called it a bug it was another device that was turned loose in another place

and it went across the floor, and you were supposed to use the technique's that you learned about the bomb sight in tracking it down and firing.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Veteto

I think that's about it. We graduated there and we became an officer.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's back up, on this bombardier training did you actually fly in planes and drop bombs?

Mr. Veteto

We flew in planes and dropped bombs. In Carlsbad you mean?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, in Carlsbad.

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, I left that out. We flew in the AT11. We not only dropped bombs, but we learned navigation as well. We had a very good background in pilotage and navigation.

Mr. Misenhimer

The AT11 is a Beachcraft I believe.

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Twin tail.

Mr. Veteto

Twin tail, twin engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who was flying those? Was it the WASP?

Mr. Veteto

Pilots stationed at the base.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there any women flying them?

Mr. Veteto

No, I don't recall any women. The only women I recall seeing flying were women who were taking planes from one field to another; delivering planes. We had a lot of respect for them. We never thought about the notion that women would ever go to combat.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand there were some women who flew the training planes; the T11's.

Mr. Veteto

There probably were some women who flew them, but I don't recall seeing any. Of course, we never went up to the flight deck. We were located in the waist instead of up front.

Mr. Misenhimer

Even the bombardier, you were in the waist not in the nose. Anything else happen there at that school in Carlsbad?

Mr. Veteto

Gosh, I don't know, six weeks or more.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then you were commissioned?

Mr. Veteto

Yes, well, we were commissioned flight officers. That's a warrant rather than a commission I guess. I didn't get my Second Lieutenant until I was flying overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is the difference between a flight officer and a Second Lieutenant?

Mr. Veteto

Not anything. The flight officer wears a blue bar with a cross piece in the middle of gold, but so far as what we did and how we ranked with each I don't know that there was any difference at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the pay? Was the pay the same?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, I think so.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall what your pay was as a flight officer?

Mr. Veteto

I think it was around, before we went overseas, \$150 a month. Do you remember any pay scales?

Mr. Misenhimer

No, I don't. How about when you first went in, what did you get?

Mr. Veteto

I got I think about \$110.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean as a private when you first went in.

Mr. Veteto

Oh, gee I don't know, I guess it was about \$90.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know some people said they got \$21 a month.

Mr. Veteto

Oh, no that was before my time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Because they were getting more than that when you went in?

Mr. Veteto

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then you got to be a flight officer when you finished up with bombardier school?

Mr. Veteto

Yes, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where did you go?

Mr. Veteto

Then we went to Wichita, Kansas, I believe it was, and there we crewed up. In other words, we met the people who would be on the crew with us. They already had that all fixed up, but when we got there we met the crews; each other.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, your pilot, copilot...

Mr. Veteto

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it B-17's there?

Mr. Veteto

In Wichita?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes sir.

Mr. Veteto

There were no planes around us at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok, no planes at that time. You just got together as a crew?

Mr. Veteto

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there then?

Mr. Veteto

Oh, I don't know, maybe a week; maybe less than a week. We were just there long enough to meet our crew members and then we were placed on a transport and transported to Boise, Idaho.

Mr. Misenhimer

You flew up there then?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do in Boise?

Mr. Veteto

Boise was our final training and that was the first time we had really seen the B-24.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, a B-24 you were on?

Mr. Veteto

Um-hum. In Boise in B-24 flights we did more bombing, more indoctrination and also gunnery. It was about the same thing just refining it and learning each other. When we first went up there, there was a problem with our nose gunner. He was replaced, or we replaced him you might say, the pilot called us in and asked what we thought; the whole crew. We thought it was a good idea to replace him. We got a real fine man in his place. From there we went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fly your B-24 out there or how did you go?

Mr. Veteto

We went by; I believe we had a delay en route.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you got to go home then.

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, we got about 3-4 days home. When we got to Camp Kilmer we were ready to go overseas. By that time it was, I believe December of 1944. We weren't there very long; just 3-4 days is all we were up there at Camp Kilmer. Then they put us on the Queen Mary, it was a nice, luxurious ride with three decker beds and rooms that were supposed to hold 2 people held 12 I believe. I think they said there were some 12,000-15,000 troops aboard a transport like that. I don't know how many there were really, but that's what I remember hearing.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard as many as 20,000, but I don't know for sure.

Mr. Veteto

That must be right then.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did that trip over take?

Mr. Veteto

I think 5-6 days or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you escorted or by yourself?

Mr. Veteto

No, no escort could keep up with us on the Queen Mary. We were out hitting 30 knots or more. When we got over there the first place I saw a destroyer was between Ireland and the British Isle up near Scotland. We started watching those destroyers that were escorting us and they would go into those waves and just bust through them. We were high and dry.

Mr. Misenhimer

So where did you land over there?

Mr. Veteto

We landed at the Port of Glasgow I believe that was where we landed. So we landed at Glasgow and moved pretty quickly to transportation, trains and were shipped to a place called Stone, England; that was the replacement location. We were there only probably a couple of days at the most and then we were sent to our base. It was near Norwich at a base called Hardwick. I think Hardwick was the name of the nearest village to us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your base have a name?

Mr. Veteto

No, not anything except it was Hardwick base. If it did, I don't remember it. Most of them, if you talk to most of those bombers around, that's the way most of them were identified by the town they were near.

Mr. Misenhimer

So what all did you do there then?

Mr. Veteto

We went through some more training. That's where we got familiar with the British "G" box which was an electronic device that could be used, I believe there were 2 and hopefully 3 different stations, they sent out signals.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was a navigational device?

Mr. Veteto

Yes, it was a navigational device and it was good enough in some cases to bomb from.

We learned that and then as a bombardier they refreshed us on what we would see in terms of towns and villages in Germany. That's about all we did there until we started flying which was not very long after we got there.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got your plane there then?

Mr. Veteto

Yes, but it was never...you know a lot of people think of bombers with nose art. I was talking to a pilot here the other day and I said, "John, do you remember any nose art?" and he said, "No, I don't." That's something that came later. I'm sure there were a lot of planes like that, but we never saw them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fly the same plane all the time or different planes?

Mr. Veteto

We flew the same plane. It was a real battle weary plane. It was a wonder we got through without more trouble than we had. All we knew from the plane was it was M for Mike, that was our signal so that was all if you want to talk about the name of the plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they called you they called "M for Mike."

Mr. Veteto

Um-hum, the called "M Mike". Actually the event that I would like to tell you about is the mission to Berlin.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok, tell us about it.

Mr. Veteto

Well, they got us up about 1 o'clock in the morning and we had hydraulic eggs. You know what hydraulic eggs are?

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about it.

Mr. Veteto

They were eggs that had been powdered and when they cooked them, they must have steamed them because they turned green in places and it would take a lot of nerve to eat them. We had that and the British bread, which we liked, that's about it for breakfast. We had breakfast about one you know in the morning. Then we went to briefing and there is where they told us we were going to Berlin. To this day, I don't remember much about the briefing itself because the briefing was primarily aimed at the pilot. Anyway, we were briefed and we took off. Well, let me say this, before we took off they couldn't start that plane that morning; the starter wouldn't work. As you know, airplane engines are numbered from the left side of the plane to the right. Number 1 being on the left of the pilot or whoever is sitting in it. Anyway, the number 2 engine had no starter so they came up with a half track and they put a rope around the propeller hub, in front of the propeller, and pulled that. The first time they did it I thought we were turning over, I didn't know what was happening. They pulled that I think a couple of times and it started. You can imagine what it was like.

Mr. Misenhimer

Never heard of that.

Mr. Veteto

You never heard of that?

Mr. Misenhimer

No.

Mr. Veteto

I don't know if it's Yankee, but its ingenuity isn't it?

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right.

Mr. Veteto

They weren't going to let us sit around because the engine was hard to start that was for sure. You know, to say it parenthetically, I never wanted to be any place but where I was. I felt like I liked it, probably I felt like I was doing something good or I wouldn't have wanted to stay there. Anyway, we finally got everything going and we got up in the air and we had a heck of a time assembling our flights. Then we started off. We got close to Berlin to the IP, or initial point. The initial point is where you turn towards the target on a bomb mission. The initial point is 20-30 miles or so from the target. That is a place where we reassemble, you might say. In other words, we might have been strung out flying over, but that's where all the flights came together so they would be a tight formation. As I say, there was no evasive action that could be taken from then on. Then we were flying to the target on the lead plane of the flight. In other words, I didn't drop the bomb myself. We were flying on the lead plane and when he dropped his bomb, he dropped a smoke bomb as well. We toggled, toggle is when you reach up and flip a switch and all your bombs go out a once. We toggled on him. From the IP on it was

pretty raunchy. Shortly after we turned on the IP we got a burst of flak. I don't remember just why it was, but we were briefed that Berlin had 15 minutes of flak. That's 15 minutes of someone shooting right at you, you know. We got a burst of flak close to the number 3 engine and went on a little further; a very short time. They had to feather number 3. When we got up we were really not level with the lead plane, we were quite a bit below it because our number 3 engine wasn't doing its share. Then when we got there close enough, about the time we got over the target it conked out or it was going to and the pilot feathered the prop. The reason he feathered at that time is because the B-24 is essentially a hydraulic operating plane and if you lose too much hydraulic pressure you can't feather an engine. If you don't feather and turn them where they won't be turning, wind milling, there's no telling what will happen. You'll certainly lose a lot of air speed and they may go to pieces and come through the plane. So it was essential that he feather number 3. Number 3 I believe had most of the primary hydraulic system of the plane; it operated from the number 3 engine. By that time, we were past the target or right at the target and number 4 got a good burst of flak. That's when he feathered number 4 is right after that. So here we started back towards England with two engines on the same side. You know none of those planes were made to fly on two engines. We were concerned because we were losing altitude at that time. An unusual thing happened, this is a later time it was about 1985 or 1990 more like 1990 or 1995, anyway, we met a man in one of our reunions whose plane saw us when we turned back from going towards England and he made a note of it and the number of the plane. So it was no question where we were going or what we were doing there. Some of the papers criticized air crews saying that they went to Switzerland or Norway to avoid battle; well it wasn't in our case anyway.

When we turned around we were losing 500-600 feet a minute and by that time John, the pilot, had asked me to go back to the waist which I did and I helped supervise the movement of anything that was loose to lighten in our plane. We really didn't have anything loose to amount to anything so we were sitting there waiting for whatever John wanted us to do. We knew what was going on because the intercom was open. Then they kept saying, "We better bail, we better bail out, we better bail out." The navigator said that he saw the Oder River coming up, we were about, well he said just before we bailed out, we're about 30-35 miles north of Berlin. We had gone a good distance towards England and turned around and come back. Anyway, that's where he thought we were. All of a sudden I heard that bell ringing, it's a bell, you can't imagine how loud that thing is. I started supervising the bail out and all the men in the waist that was all except...that was all the enlisted men in the plane, me and the pilot, copilot and navigator were left. I called John and said, "Waist clear, John" Good luck, I remember just as plain as I'm sitting here today. I went back and bailed out. We all bailed out the camera hatch. The camera hatch, they use it for cameras alright sometimes, but it's a large opening in the back of the waist of the plane a little past the center. It's about 3 foot long and 2 foot wide, maybe a little more, something like that. It's hard to remember those things. It was an ideal place to bail from. You squatted down in the front of it and just grabbed your parachute rip cord with your right hand and put your left hand over it so you wouldn't pull it accidentally and just roll out. Of course some people have asked me, "Well, did you practice that?" I say well, they don't know much about bailing out. Some of us had these small emergency chutes, 22 foot, and they let you down on the ground at a rate of about what you would attain if you jumped off a 16 foot building. Which is a

pretty good jump. Anyway, I bailed out and felt pretty good when I saw the tail go over my head. I looked around and I could see nothing but clouds, everything was cloudy; above and below were clouds. Then I heard this airplane coming around, I'm sure it was ours, it was just screaming. I suppose that I was facing to the rear of how we bailed out, my back was to the place where we bailed out, but I don't know. Anyway, I heard this plane coming and I looked down and I could see it almost in front of me, some 2,000-3,000 feet below and it was turning to my right and it was really screaming. I could see it well enough because fire was coming out of the cowls of both 1 and 2. Then I looked away for a minute and it exploded. I heard this boom, little boom, not really loud and then everything was quiet; I mean really quiet. I thought it was anyway. Then when I started paying attention to what I was doing I started hearing this small arms fire. Well, that wasn't bothering me a whole lot because I couldn't even see the ground. I finally got down to where I could see it, and there wasn't much time. I don't know how much time maybe I was 100 feet or so above the ground before I could see it. I didn't realize it, but I was going like a pendulum, back and forth. Of course they always told us that's where you got killed and I was doing my best to stop the swinging back and forth. Then all of a sudden I hit the ground. I mean I hit it hard. It was in a plowed field, I guess it was plowed because it was soft mud. It was good and it was bad. I might have been unconscious for a short period of time, but I don't think so. Anyway, when I recall what I was doing I was on the ground following my chute just real fast across the ground. We had been warned that there was a wind velocity of 30-35 knots on the ground. You can image what 30 knots will do to you with that parachute pulling you along. I started trying to slip my chute, we'd been taught how to slip it; that is you're supposed to pull the lower

shroud lines and pull it until you could get a hold of the canopy, pull it firmly and it would not hold air. I never could do it at that time; I could not do it at all. I would get a certain amount started and I would lose hold of it and I couldn't do it so I thought I better do something else. I looked around, I was born in Texas you know, I got to thinking man there might be some barb wire fences down there and I sure don't want to be drug across one of those. You want me to talk about this?

Mr. Misenhimer

Go ahead, sure, please.

Mr. Veteto

Ok. Then I tried to aim my chute, it was still pulling me fast, but by pulling the shroud lines from one side to the other I was able to direct it left to right. What I was looking for was a tree. There were fences along the line, some of them were old broken down fences that were made of rock, anyway I missed the first tree I saw and the second wasn't very much of a tree; I'd say it must have been about 3 inches diameter at the bottom. I was able to catch it with my parachute and I went around it as fast as I could and then I tried to open my chute and I couldn't do it. The device to hook it together, one side had a slot and the other had a "T", and it fit very tightly together. All that mud had gotten in there and I could not turn it. I kept trying and I said well I'm going to get my knife out and cut the chute and cut the straps around my body there. Anyway, I was feeling for that and I looked up and here came somebody all humped over and I realized it was my copilot Sam. He came over and he said, "What are you doing Vet?" I thought that was a silly question. We started laughing about that. I said, "I'm trying to get out of this chute." He tried to undo it and he couldn't either. We finally got my knife out. The first cut he

made he broke the blade in it, but I had two blades so the second blade worked and we cut myself out and then we started running for some trees that were about a half mile or mile distance. At that time we could hear quite a bit of small arms fire, but we didn't look around to see where it was coming from. We headed for the bush. When we got there we stopped to kind of take note of what we had and what we were doing. We got into the trees and both of us, fortunately, had our GI shoes on. The get up that we had on, some of it was sheep leather turned inside out. They were good and warm and some of us had another device they were just beginning to use; it was an electrical device. They had the overalls that came up and they had electrical wires running all through it to keep you warm and all that. The only trouble with those things if you kind of sit down or squat down you get more electrical heat than you needed. They were not very useful, but anyway we got by pretty good. We started checking to see what we had. We knew we were supposed to have an escape Kit. Let's say that this was the first time that the air corps had been notified that we could go through Poland and Russia, so therefore it was unique in that way. We looked in our pockets on the legs of our pants, down in the bottom of the leg there was a big zipped up pocket, and that was very convenient because if you were squatting or kneeling you could reach that pocket very well. Anyway, we took out our escape Kit; you'd be surprised what there was in it. It was about 1 inch deep and about 3-4 inches across and 4-5 inches long I guess you'd say, not quite 5 inches. The reason it was that size is because that's what would fit in those pockets. We had two of those. We opened one, his and mine, we opened them up. I'm talking about Sam Kessler, he was our copilot and he was the best friend I ever had. We opened that up and we had a little can of cheese about an inch, inch and a half across and maybe three

quarters of an inch deep; just a little bitty can with a key on it to open it up. We had four hard biscuits, we had 2-3 hard cake like biscuits too and a bottle of Benzedrine.

Benzedrine is...you know they talk about people being on dope, I don't know maybe we were on dope. The air corps put that in there because they didn't want us to go to sleep some place and get caught. It was a small bottle of Benzedrine and we had four cigarettes and of all things about 4 pieces of toilet paper. I don't know whose idea it was to put that together that way but that's what we had.

Mr. Misenhimer

Each Kit was the same right?

Mr. Veteto

Both Kits were the same. No, I mean his and mine were the same. The other Kit had two silk maps and a little compass in it, the compass was about a half inch across. We looked at the map and unfortunately we did not find a single location that we recognized, but they had always told us that we should go east if you got shot down and we would meet the Russians. Well, that was somebody's happy thought, I don't know whose it was but anyway that's what we did. We started walking and all I think we walked, we figured, about 130 miles. We tried to make those Kits last a while, but they didn't last very long. We would go along and if one of us got real tired the other one would push him up a little bit. I remember one time we saw this stack in the field. We thought well, there's some food. We went there and it was a stack about 2-3 feet high of frozen straw and manure. There was a haystack pretty close. We had always heard how a haystack would keep you warm, well I didn't mention this before but the temperature was well below freezing all the time because it was in February when we got shot down. We got in that haystack and

thought we'd get us a little rest. It was colder there than it was walking because the air was coming up underneath us as well as on every side. We got out of that right quick and started walking again. I'm not always sure of the sequence of what we did during that time because you know how that works. I do remember that at one time we were stopped because we had gotten into the edge of some bushes and we were right close to the road where we could see the road. We heard some vehicles coming well it was too quick for us to try to hide so we just stayed still. It wasn't any question of who was there because we saw a swastika on the vehicles painted and the flag too. So we kept very quiet. We went on a piece and we came close to a river, we decided it might be the Oder. It was dark when we got there. Incidentally, as far as walking was concerned, we only walked when we could. I dare say we must have walked about 18 hours or better or maybe more than that for that matter because we had to to keep warm. Anyway, we were walking along and we looked down and we smelled smoke and we looked and there was a little fire, it wasn't a fire anymore it was just coals. There were people huddled up all around it lying down asleep. Well, you can imagine we got out of there in a hurry. We did have some armament, we had a 45 pistol, but that wouldn't do much good for very long anyway. We got out of there and then we got to this river. We were wondering how we were going to get across. There we could hear guns firing and we could actually see tracers going across the river. We, very luckily, came upon a skiff flat bottom about 8-10 feet, anyway it was small. We went down to get it and it wasn't locked up it was just there. We got in it and looked for a paddle, no paddle, all that was laying there was a shovel like device with a handle on it about 10 feet long. We figured what they did was pole the boat instead of paddle it. We shoved off and I started off with the pole. We got

about maybe the length of the boat or a little bit further in the water and I couldn't reach the bottom. So we set it up so we had a ruder back there, we didn't know much about that type of boating but we tried our best and Sam was scooping up water with his hands and his cap and I was doing my best to pole. We finally got across. It seemed like we were much closer to the place where the tracers were coming across the river. We jumped out of the boat, we thought we'd just jump right on land we weren't but a couple of feet off, but we jumped in the water waist deep, but that didn't stop us. We started up that steep slope and the time we got to the top of it the moon started rising and our pants were crackling with ice. It was pretty cold. We didn't have too many experiences there. One time we stopped at a farmhouse that was kind of on a little knoll, well it wasn't any farmhouse anymore, it wasn't more than a couple of buildings; shed buildings and an old cow. Well, we thought the thing to do was get us some milk. Well, she was dry. We thought we'd get some milk but she was dry, we got nothing. We debated on whether to shoot her or not, but you know a 2 inch blade knife is not going to do a whole lot of damage. We decided it was safer not to shot her because the noise might be heard by troops and we'd be caught. So we went to the chicken house and there were about 4 old scrawny chickens in there. We got one, I was holding him I was carrying him, and he started to squawk and I pulled his head off and that was the last we heard out of him. We went down to where we could hide a little bit and I skinned and dressed the chicken. It was 2-3 days or so before we found a place where we thought we might be able to cook him without being caught. What it was I guess was a sheep barn; it looked like the gable on a house, it was V shaped it came all the way to the ground and it was thatched with something, I don't know what it was, but it was nice. The door didn't open or close but

there was an opening it and we went in there. We could see a village quite a ways from us, but we decided we were going to try to eat that chicken. We finally got a fire lit, I had an old Dunhill lighter which by the way I still have, that we struck fire with because all the lighter fluid was out of it by that time. We struck fire and got a spark going and a little fire going. We were all primed for roasted chicken but it didn't smell good while it was roasting and when we got ready to eat it, we just couldn't do it, we just couldn't eat it. We just had to abandon it because we were going to throw up and to throw it up very much was going to be hard on us because we didn't have any other food. So we let it go. We went on, I don't know how far, we came to a location beside a railroad track; a switch house. It wasn't in...there wasn't any village around it at all, but they had several of those. I saw some later on over there; they were about 2 stories high. The first story didn't have anything in it, but the second was about 10X15 foot and it had steps on the outside. You walked up to it and up there in it were the levers to switch the tracks. We got up there and we looked down the road where we hadn't come of course, the direction we were going. We could see a train and the engine was coming towards us. By that time, that was probably we don't know for sure, but Sam said that it was like 4-5 weeks, I thought it was more like 3 weeks. Anyway, whatever it was, you must remember the only food we had was what was in that little escape kit.

Mr. Misenhimer

In this whole time that's all you had?

Mr. Veteto

Yes sir, that's all we had. We decided that if we didn't give ourselves up pretty soon we weren't going to make it. So we kept watching that group coming down the railroad and

they were laying a single track and we surmised that what they were doing and it turned out to be the truth, that the Russian track rails were wider than the European tracks and what they were doing was laying tracks for the Russian trains. So we took out our little... I forgot to tell you this, inside that box with the flags was a letter to the Russians and we were told to say, "Yame Amerikane." They were supposed to be able to read and see that we were really Americans. There was a nice United States flag about less than a foot across that we were to hold up and show that we were Americans. Well anyway, we did that. We held the flag up and walked down about 50 yards or more from the train and we thought we'd get down there so far and we would see a convenient place and we'd walk and turn ourselves in. Hopefully, we wouldn't get shot because that was our biggest concern about giving ourselves up is getting shot because that's what happened. We walked a while and then some woman soldier over at the train started hollering at some of the soldiers and pointing to us. When she did they started walking towards us, we kept our hands where they could see them and held that flag up. In one hand we held the flag and in the other hand we held the message to the Russians. I forgot to tell you that we were armed; well you knew we were armed with a 45 caliber. Anyway, when we were there at that switch house we decided we better abandon that gun because somebody would kill us for sure and we buried our weapons before we walked up to the train. We walked on up to the train and like I say, some of them believed us and some didn't. Well all it was was an engine with a bunch of box cars, they're quite a bit smaller than US cars, but in the car in the middle of it in a little sand tray was a coal stove. They got us to one of them and made us get into the box car and I don't remember that they ever searched us. What they did, though, was they asked us to open our jacket, but that was all they did

on that deal. We didn't have any language in common, but finally the Russians started saying, "Berlin kaput." We understood that. They started praising Churchill and Stalin and Roosevelt. Then they pulled out a glass, you know the little glasses that we have that look like a tumbler they will hold about 8 ounces, they put something in one of them about half way up and gave it to Sam. They'd thump the side of their throat and neck and say "Drink it", that's what they indicated we would do. Well, Sam tasted it and he said, "Oh, this is liquor of some kind and I can't afford to drink that" and he started to hand it to me. Well, they wouldn't have any of that, they made him drink it. As soon as he drank it, they filled it back half full and handed it to me. Of course by the time I got it Sam was already about roaring drunk you know. When we got that down they put us on one end of the box car on a feather bed and we slept for a short time, I don't know how long. When we woke the train was in motion. They fixed us something to eat, as a matter of fact that's the only time I ever saw any meat while we were in Russian. What they had was bacon and they cut it in little cubes and we had that and some sort of potato mash. I don't know what it was, but very little, but it was good too and black bread and that was it. Oh we had tea. They made their tea then as sweet as it would hold the sugar, just absolutely over sweet. I imagine that was on purpose because you know that as much calories as you would get from that kind of a drink would be useful in that kind of weather. We drank that and they started saying, kept on about people there and then they started saying "Studebaker". It wasn't hard to understand Studebaker, but they also had another word that took us awhile to get. It was Gemsee. Now what would you think Gemsee was?

Mr. Misenhimer

I wouldn't know.

Mr. Veteto

GMC. GMC trucks and Studebaker trucks, they really liked them. We had given them a lot in lend-lease. They even had that old P39 that we had so much trouble with and we gave it to them so we wouldn't have to fly them I think. We were good friends with most of them at that time. Then we went, I don't remember how long – it might have been the next day and it might have been a short time because I don't remember- but we came to a place and they took us off the train. There was a slap happy Pole and a Russian Lieutenant and they took us to a house and we went upstairs and there was an elderly man in bed. He apparently couldn't walk and he said, "Hi fellows." That was the first words in English we had heard since we left. We were glad to see him and he asked us to relate our experience to him for the Russians benefit. So we told him what it was. You remember that at that time the Russians were our allies. We went on talking and he asked us on the sly how we felt about the Russians. Well naturally we didn't want to say anything to get us or him into trouble. We didn't really make any comment on that. They gave us a very small lunch there and I've thought about it since then; I wish I knew where the man was because it was good. It was very, very small; it was light colored bread and that was just about the best thing we ever had. This Russian Lieutenant and the Pole took us down to another place on the track and it was a passenger train.

Mr. Misenhimer

This fellow that you talked to there, was he an American or a Russian that talked English?

Mr. Veteto

He was a Pole because see we were in Poland at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was crippled though?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, apparently yes. He was an elderly man. He had lived in Chicago for a period of time. That's the reason he knew the vernacular; "Hi fellows" and stuff like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

So they take you down to someplace else then...

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, they put us in this train, it was a passenger train. Before we got on both the Russian and the Polish guy they had to say, I don't know what they said. They talked to us for 3-4 minutes apiece and then kissed us both on the cheek. We weren't not quite used to men kissing other men, but that was their way of doing things. They put us on the train, the Polish man indicated that someone would get us, we didn't know who, but we were alone on that train there was nobody supervising us. We went on down to – it must have been just a few hours – went to Poznan, Poland. It turned out to be a center where they got POW's and carried POW's to that center for repatriation. We were there I think maybe one night and during the night we had an air raid, that's the first time we had been subjected to something like that. We had an air raid and we got a bowl or two of soup and some more tea. They put us on another train, there again there were several on that train that were American and British. In fact, all the ones in our box car were. They took us over to Odessa, Russia. On the way we went through Warsaw and all I could see of Warsaw was rubble, it was the worst bunch of rubble you've ever seen. Then we went

to Brest on the border of Russia and Poland, then on down to Odessa. They put us in another school, I guess it was. Earlier it was in a school. There were a lot of Americans there then and we still didn't get any meat or anything like that. We still got black bread, but we got more soup than we had before. We weren't there but about 3-4 days. The British Red Cross, I want to emphasize that because the American Red Cross; I never talked to a single person who was in the American Red Cross. The British Red Cross from St. John's or someplace over there in London, they gave us a new pair of gloves and a box of Hershey's chocolates. You can't believe how good that Hershey's almond was. We were careful about that to try to ration it as long as we could. Sam and I had been friends for a long time even when we were at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey just before we went out I think we had three days delay up there. Sam invited me to come, he lived in North Carolina, so we rode over there. I got to meet his family; actually all he had alive at that time was his mother. He was already going with a girl that he would in the future marry. He was really glad to get there and I was glad to have a chance to get away from the base. That's why we were like we were. Anyway, when we were on board that boat we were first give a physical and I don't know how much Sam weighed, but I know how much I weighed. When I left England I remember that one of the facts about my weight, the reason I remember it was because of the stones that they used in England. I weighed 196 pounds, but when they weighed us on board this British ship I weighed 124. It's hard to believe now. I might have been sick, but I didn't know it. We were given a pretty nice little cabin, just four of us in that one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you happen to know what date it was when you got on the ship roughly?

Mr. Veteto

No sir. I wish I did, but I sure don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Or even what month it was?

Mr. Veteto

No, I keep thinking it was probably in August.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean the Russian ship in Odessa.

Mr. Veteto

The British ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you'd been there about 6 months then?

Mr. Veteto

No, it wasn't. You mean from the time I got shot down?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah.

Mr. Veteto

Probably earlier than that. We could date it by the time that they dropped the bomb. I had been in the states – I had been loose – about 2-3 weeks at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok, we'll cover that later then. So go ahead, you're on the ship now and there's four of you in the cabin.

Mr. Veteto

We ate them out of house and home. We got a lot of good oranges and other kind of fruit and we liked the British Tea time, we made the most of it. One time we were walking on the deck there and we heard somebody say, "Hey, hey, hey" and we looked in the sick bay area and there was Kid. Now Kid was the lower ball gunner and when he hit the ground he broke his pelvis and that was pretty bad. They landed in a different place from where we were and I might as well say now that in the matter of when we met the Russians one of our crew member's Arthur DeCoster had done a little research on it. What he had found was that Guderian the General had talked Hitler into him making a push into Russia and hopefully stopping the Russians well short of Berlin and then getting a peace at that time because they didn't want the Russians there in Berlin if they could help it. We must have been following Guderian and the lines were extremely fluid probably 30-40 miles deep because it wasn't anybody's land at that time. Anyway, we looked in there and there was Kid. He had been picked up, taken by the Russians and then he was let go and some way or another, he was not clear on it either, he wound up in a town just north of Berlin and it was in Russian hands, but there was a German hospital there with German doctors and so forth. They took him in there and these doctors, they didn't have X-ray or anything, they put him in a moveable cast and he stayed in that until he was taken in to the US hospital in Naples, Italy. We were so glad to see him and he was gladder to see us I imagine. When we passed through the straits, the Dardenelles and all, we held him up so he could see Constantinople. After we passed that we were taken around the toe of Italy and repatriated in Naples or out of Naples in a little town of

Caserta. It's funny how I remember the names of those towns but I don't remember other things. That's basically the story of my experience with the Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you wound up in Italy then?

Mr. Veteto

Yes. Then they put us on a plane and sent us down to Casablanca. While we were in Casablanca one of the most unique experiences I ever had I think, somebody said, "Veteto, I know a Veteto" and he was up the way a piece. I said, "What's his first name?" and he said "Leslie" and I said, "He's my cousin." So I called Leslie up on the phone, the MP's let me use their phone, and I called him up and talked to him. We stayed there in Casablanca for 4-5 days, maybe that long maybe not. Then they flew us out to New York and that was the end of my trip to Europe. I didn't go back to my base in England. In the first place, when Sam and I were debriefed in Naples, the officer told us we would not be allowed to fly in that theatre again because of the Geneva Convention. Some way or another the effect was that we had been behind enemy lines and if we were caught later we could be shot as a spy. When I got over here they sent me to some place in Florida.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you know when you got back in the States, the dates or anything?

Mr. Veteto

I wish I did, but I really don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

They sent you to Florida, is that right?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, we spent 2-3 days there and they used to have these real nice bunch of people, the United States Armed Forces Institute, I talked to them and they gave me a test and I was able to take off about 12 semester hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was as soon as you got back from Italy or Casablanca?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, we had just gotten back from Casablanca. I was able to take off, they gave me credit for some 12 hours and that helped me along in my future. When we got back I was sent from Florida then to Midland again. There they were using the field at that time for bombardier training and they had started training people who were familiar with the Norden bomb sight; started training them in – they called it a glide bombing attachment. They did that I think because they figured we were going to go right soon to the Pacific and would need it to give us added protection in our flights. We were there maybe a couple of weeks when they dropped the bomb and that was all of it. They started releasing us from the service right off. We were released by numbers, I don't remember what my number was or anything like that, but anyway I was released right soon. I got back home in time to start school on about September 15th in college.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of 1945?

Mr. Veteto

1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was where, back at A&I?

Mr. Veteto

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You stayed in the reserves. You ever get recalled or anything?

Mr. Veteto

No, I wondered why they didn't call me for Korea, but they didn't. It didn't make me mad you know or anything like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you get your Second Lieutenant's commission?

Mr. Veteto

I think just as we went overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went from Flight Officer to Second Lieutenant?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, it wasn't any change you might say, no change in pay or anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back to your time in England. When you were shot down what mission was that, what number?

Mr. Veteto

Two.

Mr. Misenhimer

Number two?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, we'd just been on one to Magdeburg or some oil area before that.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was your entire crew that came over from the United States that was shot down?

Mr. Veteto

Yes. I didn't meet up with the entire crew until 1988.

Mr. Misenhimer

Everybody survived then, right?

Mr. Veteto

Yes, it was a miracle but that's true. Everybody survived. I know Sam asked me, "Hey, did you ever think about those anti-personnel mines." We had thought about the possibility of there being anti-personnel mine while we were walking there. Nothing happened to us there, we were just very fortunate.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long do you think you were walking across there?

Mr. Veteto

I'd say give or take some time between 3-5 weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had no other food except those packages you had with you?

Mr. Veteto

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many of those little cheese containers did you have?

Mr. Veteto

One each.

Mr. Misenhimer

One? And that's all you had the whole time?

Mr. Veteto

Yes sir. I would tell you to check with Sam but he's gone.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about water?

Mr. Veteto

We drank water as we needed it. I know that they tell you not to do that, but we did and we never suffered any problems from it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever meet any other people? Any Germans or civilians or anything like that?

Mr. Veteto

You mean on the trip?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, walking across there that 5 weeks or whatever.

Mr. Veteto

No, we evaded all the Germans. We knew it was very, very dangerous to talk to a civilian. A civilian, in spite of what the papers and the books show, the civilians were very much angry at us – the Air Corps I think they hated us worse than anybody else because we were the ones who tore the houses up and everything like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that the Air Corps told people if you were down over there, try to find the military instead of the civilians.

Mr. Veteto

Oh absolutely. That's what they told us. We thought we were very fortunate to get to the military in such a way that we didn't get shot.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you walk in daytime and night both or just at night or what?

Mr. Veteto

We walked mostly at night as much as we could. It was colder at night, naturally, so we stayed warmer that way. Of course we walked some in daytime, that was February you remember and the days weren't as long as they would be in the later spring time. I'm sure we walked 18 hours a day, well maybe not quite, maybe 15. That was all we could do.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't go through any cities or villages or anything like that? You were able to go around all of those?

Mr. Veteto

Oh no. An interesting thing happened later on just a few years ago. I was reading the magazine or paper that is put out by the 93rd bomb group, our association, and there was a letter to the editor in that asking if he had any way to put him in touch with and he gave a number of an aircraft that had been shot down on the 26th of February. As far as I knew that was the only B-24 that had been shot down on that day.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was yours you think, huh?

Mr. Veteto

I know it was. Later on I knew it was. Anyway, the man left his name there and I corresponded with him. Then we were over there, Maxine and I were over in Poland just a few years ago and we were in Holland when I said, "Maxine, I would like to see if we can get in touch with Mark." So I asked a tour man how we could get in touch with him. He said, "Write him a letter" I said, "Write him a letter? That's another country. It won't get to him." He said, "Oh yeah, send him a letter." Sure enough it did get to him and like I say we've been corresponding ever since.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he Polish or was he American?

Mr. Veteto

He was Polish. He's a member of an organization that was later on organized after the war. He's a young fellow, younger anyway. It was called MIA, well it is Missing in Action, but it refers to the air craft. What this organization did, maybe still does, they would locate where air craft had gone down and take whatever material they could find around it and artifacts and put a marker there. Ours had never been found.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did he know what plane it was then? How did he know the number?

Mr. Veteto

He knew the number because he had read the reports from the Second division.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back. You mentioned you were in the 93rd bomb group and what else?

Mr. Veteto

93rd bomb group.

Mr. Misenhimer

What squadron?

Mr. Veteto

328th

Mr. Misenhimer

Second air group?

Mr. Veteto

Second air division, 93rd group.

Mr. Misenhimer

Second air division in the 8th Air Force?

Mr. Veteto

Right. 8th Air Force, Second Air division.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were in the 328th bomb squad?

Mr. Veteto

Right. Anyway, we've been over there twice since that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, you were going to give me the names of your crew.

Mr. Veteto

John Cadle from Washington D.C. was the pilot, Sam Kessler was the copilot, then there was Eric Ericsson was the navigator, and the man that replaced one of the members that we asked them not to send he was Staff Sergeant Robert Faulkner, Bob Faulkner, and at that time he was from California.

Mr. Misenhimer

And his position was what?

Mr. Veteto

He was the nose gunner. Art DeCoster from the Chicago area he was the waist gunner and the other one, this man I'm going to have to tell you something about him, his name is William B. Ferrero from the Bronx, New York he was a very...if it hadn't been for him we would have never gotten together after the war. He was one of these family oriented type Italians and he kept writing us on Christmas and finally we got together. There is no way we could thank Bill any more than we have on doing that for us.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was his position?

Mr. Veteto

He was a radio operator. Fred Kid, he was the lower ball gunner, and he's the one I said that had his pelvis broken.

Mr. Misenhimer

He couldn't walk at all when that happened, right?

Mr. Veteto

Oh no. He can now though. He's got Parkinson's disease. We just feel so badly that we can't even talk to him you know. His son, we've been corresponding with him about Fred. The next one is...

Mr. Misenhimer

Wait a minute. On Fred, he bailed out and broke his pelvis and he couldn't move from where he was and so the Germans picked him up, is that what happened?

Mr. Veteto

I don't know whether it was the Germans or Russians, I think the Russians picked him up and took him to this hospital. The hospital was operated by Germans. I guess they wouldn't let them go home, I don't know what happened.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok, so the next person then?

Mr. Veteto

The next person is Prentis Lewis, he was the old man of the crew, he was 26 years old.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was his position?

Mr. Veteto

He was the flight engineer. The tail gunner was Charles Youree.

Mr. Misenhimer

So that's 9 and you were 10?

Mr. Veteto

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in England did you get a chance to go into any of the towns or cities or anything?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, I went into Norwich, not very much because we weren't there very much. I didn't have much free time at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were people friendly there?

Mr. Veteto

Absolutely.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were there did you see any Buzz bombs or V2 bombs?

Mr. Veteto

We heard some. None of them struck close to us, they came over but none of them struck close to us.

Mr. Misenhimer

The air raid you mentioned when you were in Poland, was that the German Air Force?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah. Some of them called it a bunch of Maytags, it sounded like it too. You should have seen the Russians when they came over, they fired everything they had; pistols and everything else. I don't think they hit anything, but they fired them anyway. When those bombs would hit, it was an unusual feeling for me, it felt like the ground left me; I was up in the air for awhile.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time overseas?

Mr. Veteto

At the moment I can't think of anything. If I think of something if you'd like me to write it down or call you I'd be glad to do it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were overseas could you ever hear Axis Sally?

Mr. Veteto

No, we never did. I didn't anyway, I never knew of anybody who did to tell you the truth.

Mr. Misenhimer

On April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died, did you hear about that?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you remember where you were or anything?

Mr. Veteto

I sure do. I remember that we had just got to England; I mean we'd just go to Italy.

Mr. Misenhimer

So that was April 12th you got to Italy then.

Mr. Veteto

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think about it when you heard that?

Mr. Veteto

I don't know. I don't think we were concerned, we were sorry he died, but we weren't concerned about the condition of the war because it was almost finished anyway. That was our opinion.

Mr. Misenhimer

On May 5th or 7th or somewhere along in there Germany surrendered. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Veteto

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's when Germany surrendered, V - E Day they called it.

Mr. Veteto

Well, no, but we went over to Norwich on the 50th anniversary and as a matter of fact this year we're going back to Norwich on the 3rd of May.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's see this will be the 60th year of the surrender. Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Veteto

No, I just barely got home. No I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the officers you had over you? Not your crew, but the other officers, what did you think of them?

Mr. Veteto

Well, the only one that I dislike, you might say, was the person who was in charge of our group after we were shot down. After we got to Poznan, Poland – you know it's a practice of the Army to take your highest ranking person in a group like that and he's in command – well the fellow that they put in charge of our group there was already so shell shocked and gone that he wasn't much good. I don't recall having any real animosity towards any person; I mean any of ours anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Veteto

I guess when we gave ourselves up. The flight...I don't think we had time to be frightened when all this was happening. I know that we were trying to do something all the time and if you have something to do you're not frightened. You may be frightened but you're doing something that takes place of the fear.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Veteto

Well, the only medal, you might say of any difference was the Air Medal.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got the other standard medals?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, I got the other standard medals.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned your crew had some reunions, right?

Mr. Veteto

The first reunion we had was in Colorado Springs that was in 1988.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did all the crew get there?

Mr. Veteto

All but Sam. We drove on, my wife and I, up above where Sam lived and then down and visited with them. At that time he lived near Atlanta, we went by and visited him there.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a long way from Colorado Springs.

Mr. Veteto

Yeah it is. We had gone on over and then cut down. We had a nice trip, but we didn't know he was not going to be there. After that Sam was able to come to two of our meetings. Most of our meetings took place in Florida, but one of them was here in San Antonio and that was about it on the meetings.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the 93rd bomb group or your bomb squadron, have you had any reunions with them?

Mr. Veteto

Oh yeah. We have yearly reunions with them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you go to most of those?

Mr. Veteto

Yeah, most all of them. The only times we missed were a couple of times they occurred when some of our children were married or graduating and that was more important you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Veteto

Yes, one. It was at Wichita Falls, Sheppard Field of all places. I never saw, you talk of people who try to help you, a single person in the Red Cross.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got home did you use your GI Bill to go to college?

Mr. Veteto

I sure did. That was a blessing to me because I was out in two years and I had my bachelors and went on to teaching. I didn't slow down after I got back.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Veteto

Well if I did I don't remember it?

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall?

Mr. Veteto

Not off hand I don't.

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