

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Bill Dingfelder

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Interviewer: Dwight D. Daniel

Mr. Daniel: This is an oral history interview of Bill Dingfelder, a staff sergeant in World War II, or ultimately a staff sergeant, who served in World War II and into the early 1950s. He was born 18 April 1925. The interviewer is myself, Dwight D. Daniel, an oral history volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War located in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today is 11 November 2005, and this interview is taking place at March Reserve Air Force Base, California. This interview is in support of the Center for the Pacific War Studies, which is the archive for the preservation of historical information of the National Museum for the Pacific War, Texas Park and Wildlife. This is Tape 1, Side A. Now Bill, a couple of things. You were born 18 April 1925. Where were you born?

Mr. Dingfelder: Erie, Pennsylvania.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding? I know Erie.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, that's--I was there for probably six or seven months (Mr. Daniel laughs). And then moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Mr. Daniel: All right! What did your parents do?

Mr. Dingfelder: My father was a sales manager for a refrigeration company, and my mother was a housekeeper. A housewife, typical mom.

Mr. Daniel: Cool. Now, what was your father's name?

Mr. Dingfelder: William S., I was a junior.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay!

Mr. Dingfelder: But I dropped it when he died.

Mr. Daniel: Gotcha. And what was mom's name?

Mr. Dingfelder: Laura Blades Dingfelder.

Mr. Daniel: Blades? B-l--

Mr. Dingfelder: A-d-e-s.

Mr. Daniel: A-d, that's her maiden name?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay. Cool! Why did you move to Pittsburgh, because of your father's job? I mean, you didn't move, they took you since you were only six months old.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, because of my father's job, right.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. So, how long did you stay in Pittsburgh?

Mr. Dingfelder: I was in Pittsburgh just about eighteen years.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay. Graduated from high school?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: Cool! Because in that era, a lot of people didn't graduate.

Mr. Dingfelder: No--well, I--it was close! (Laughs).

Mr. Daniel: It was close. My mother didn't and my father didn't. That's why they said, "You're going to college, boy!"

Mr. Dingfelder: (Laughs). Well, I went to college when I got out of the service.

Mr. Daniel: Let's see now. Eighteen would put you, '25, ah, about 1943. So when did you join up?

Mr. Dingfelder: July of 1943.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Volunteered, I assume?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: Why did you pick the Air Force?

Mr. Dingfelder: I always wanted to fly.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay. That's a--you're as bad as I am! When you joined up, where did you join up?

Mr. Dingfelder: In Pittsburgh.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Then where did you go?

Mr. Dingfelder: Greenville, South Carolina.

Mr. Daniel: All right!

Mr. Dingfelder: For basic training.

Mr. Daniel: Well, that must have been so special. What was it like?

Mr. Dingfelder: Ah, you know, it was very interesting to me, because I enjoyed the physical activity and things of that sort, yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Wow, no kidding!

Dingfelder: I can remember one thing specifically. We went on a campout and--with pup tents--and it rained and we got washed out at three

in the morning, and they brought us out garbage cans full of coffee.

Mr. Daniel: Awwwww!

Mr. Dingfelder: (Laughs).

Mr. Daniel: What else did you learn there? How long was your basic; do you remember?

Mr. Dingfelder: About six weeks.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay. So you had the full basic then.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Where did you go from Reedsville?

Mr. Dingfelder: From Greenville, I went to--

Mr. Daniel: Greenville or Reedsville?

Mr. Dingfelder: Greenville, Greenville.

Mr. Daniel: Oh. That would help. Okay, where did you go from there?

Mr. Dingfelder: To Huntington, West Virginia.

Mr. Daniel: Hey! That's where my mother lived.

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, is that right?

Mr. Daniel: Yeah! What was at Huntington?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, I was there for six, I think six weeks.

Mr. Daniel: What was there?

Mr. Dingfelder: It was what they called C.T.D., College Training Detachment, prior to--I was an aviation cadet.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay! So D.E.T. was college?

Mr. Dingfelder: Ah, yeah.

Mr. Daniel: What did it stand for again?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, it was Marshall College--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, I know Marshall! And what did the abbreviation stand for?

Mr. Dingfelder: College Training Detachment.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay!

Mr. Dingfelder: We learned such things as weather and we also, for the first time, flew an airplane, but did not fly solo.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought. Okay. So that was like a prep to a pilot school?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, a prep to it.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. So how many weeks were you there?

Mr. Dingfelder: Six.

Mr. Daniel: How'd you like it?

Mr. Dingfelder: Loved it.

Mr. Daniel: Why, because it was a college campus?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, and you know, esprit de corps that the Marines use, very much that.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, no kidding! Cool! Now where'd you go?

Mr. Dingfelder: From there, I went to San Antonio Air Force Classification Center, S-A-A-C-C.

Mr. Daniel: Ahhhh, yes!

Mr. Dingfelder: San Antonio. San Antone.

Mr. Daniel: Was that at--that wasn't on any of the bases; that was out in the city somewhere, wasn't it?

Mr. Dingfelder: That was the classification center; that's where we took the psychomotive and psychomotor tests.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, if you're a nut and can you physically do things?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: That's it. Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: That's also the sad part of my career. I was washed out of the cadet because of my eyes, because of my vision.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: No.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man!

Mr. Dingfelder: Classified for everything but pilot. I was told if I'd been there six weeks earlier, I would have passed.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding. So, how bad was your eyesight?

Mr. Dingfelder: You know, they never really did tell me, and I didn't wear glasses all through service, but it was something to do with close-up vision.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: I am very far-sighted.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, that may be why.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. That's why I couldn't fly either. I wanted to fly helicopters so bad. I mean I tried to volunteer for helicopters in the Army in the middle of the Vietnam War, and they said, "Man, your eyes, no." So you got washed out; what happened to you then, because you--you didn't get washed out of the service; you're still in the Air Force.

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, yeah. You know when you get washed out, which is a great disappointment, the first thing you do is say, "I want to go to a school that will get me there the quickest."

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: So I went to armament school--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: --in Lowry Field in Colorado.

Mr. Daniel: Were you able to pick that?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay. That's unusual. You said that was at Lowry?

Mr. Dingfelder: Lowry. L-a-w--L-o-w-r-y. Lowry Field.

Mr. Daniel: Where is that in Colorado?

Mr. Dingfelder: Denver.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, that's right. That's outside Denver, yeah. Got it. What did you go to at armory school?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we learned all about all the guns we would be using, the caliber 50, the twenty millimeter, thirty-seven millimeter.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, cool!

Mr. Dingfelder: All of the arms, how to arm bombs, how to disarm bombs.

Mr. Daniel: Right. That's an important part.

Mr. Dingfelder: Everything about armament that would be on an airplane--on a bomber.

Mr. Daniel: Super! Okay, how long were you there?

Mr. Dingfelder: Six weeks.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, (chuckles). I see a pattern here, I think. (Laughs).

Mr. Dingfelder: It seems to be, yeah. Well, you know, I may be wrong on the thing with Huntington. I may have been there six months. I really can't remember.

Mr. Daniel: It was college at least, so it wasn't bad.

Mr. Dingfelder: No, it was good. We really learned discipline and again, learned all about esprit de corps.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, when did you get out--do you remember when you got out of armory school?

Mr. Dingfelder: Ahh--

Mr. Daniel: It had to be sometime in '44, I'm guessing.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, I think it was early '44.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, so you went in, in July of '43. Yeah, that'd put it probably early '44.

Mr. Dingfelder: I think it was eleven months, something like eleven months later, yeah. I remember being on a troop train on D-Day.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, so where did you go from Lowry Field?

Mr. Dingfelder: Lowry Field, I went to Lincoln, Nebraska.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Is that when you were on the troop train with D-Day?

Mr. Dingfelder: I believe it was.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Now, let's talk about that. What did you--when you were on the train, what did they tell you about D-Day, other than there was a whole bunch of guys hit? Nothing?

Mr. Dingfelder: Nothing.

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: No. Nothing, except that there was an invasion of Europe.

Mr. Daniel: I always ask these questions because it's amazing what they told or didn't tell people. Okay, so to use just another invasion, we're on Europe. What did you do in Lincoln, Nebraska?

Mr. Dingfelder: Lincoln, Nebraska, I was assigned to my crew.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Ten-man crew.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, so you actually flew, you were actually flight qualified by that time.

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, yes.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, see, I figured all the armory people were on the ground. I didn't know that.

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, no. I was called an armorer-gunner.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay. Now I know.

Mr. Dingfelder: Somewhere in there I've missed, because I went to gunnery school in Las Vegas, Nevada, at Nellis Field.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. That makes sense, then.

Mr. Dingfelder: So I missed gunnery school someplace along the line (chuckles).

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Because normally the heavy-duty armorers were always ground people.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. No, I was an Air Force armorer.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: And from gunnery school in Las Vegas, I went to Lincoln, Nebraska.

Mr. Daniel: Gotcha. Oh man, when you get old, the mind starts to go; I know. Everything else goes, too, I'll say. For the people that-- guy looks really good; that's all cosmetic, we think. From gunnery school, you went to--

Mr. Dingfelder: Lincoln, Nebraska.

Mr. Daniel: Lincoln. Okay. What kind of aircraft did you pick up in Lincoln?

Mr. Dingfelder: B-17s.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, B-17s. I was hoping you'd get a B-29 in Lincoln (unclear).

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, no. As I said, I saw my first B-17, no, first B-29, as I was leaving to go overseas in my B-17.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man! What'd you think about the B-17?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well I think, again, it was as far as we were concerned, the bomber.

Mr. Daniel: I understand, yeah.

Mr. Dingfelder: We heard about the B-24 but I think that was the crate the B-17 came in.

Mr. Daniel: Right. I understand. Did you have a choice about what kind of bomber you got?

Mr. Dingfelder: No.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought. What did you think about your crew when you first saw them?

Mr. Dingfelder: It was a really varied crew. It--I was the second youngest. The tail gunner was six months younger. I had probably the best pilot and co-pilot you could possibly get, and they are still both alive.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding! Do you remember their names?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, Roland W. Ward.

Mr. Daniel: Roland, ahhh, Roland, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: And Charles P. Moore. C.P. Moore, better known as Buck.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Cool. What made them so good?

Mr. Dingfelder: They were comfortable leaders. They were people that you felt comfortable with. They were both excellent fliers and--

Mr. Daniel: That's important. Now the question for you, each crew is different. Did you do like 'yes, sir; no, sir' to the officers or were they more relaxed?

Mr. Dingfelder: No, no, it was all on a first name.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, so they were relaxed, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: The oldest member of our crew was twenty-four.

Mr. Daniel: Whoa! Oh, yeah. Amazing, isn't it?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: He was the old daddy of the crew.

Mr. Dingfelder: The old daddy. Well, he was regular Army. He was a radioman that came in from Panama.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding! Whoa! And that was the radioman?

Mr. Dingfelder: Radioman.

Mr. Daniel: Interesting.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. The flight engineer or the aerial engineer, really, was from Neenah-Menasha, Wisconsin, and he was a mechanic in the Kleenex factory.

Mr. Daniel: In what factory?

Mr. Dingfelder: Kleenex.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. He took care of the machinery.

Mr. Daniel: Wow! Amazing. Amazing where all these people come from, isn't it?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, it really is.

Mr. Daniel: So they were all over the country that came there then.

Mr. Dingfelder: The bombardier was from San Francisco; the navigator was from Minnesota; the ball turret gunner was from Illinois; and the tail gunner was from California.

Mr. Daniel: What crew position did you have there?

Mr. Dingfelder: I was a waist gunner.

Mr. Daniel: You were the waist gunner. That's what I thought.

Mr. Dingfelder: Waist gunner and assistant engineer.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Now what was your rank then?

Mr. Dingfelder: Staff sergeant.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, I didn't know waist gunners were staff sergeants.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, your radio operator and engineer were techs.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought, okay. So that's not bad; at least the Air Force promoted you fast.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Plus combat pay and flight pay. So where did you go from Lincoln, Nebraska?

Mr. Dingfelder: From Lincoln Nebraska, we went to Sioux City, Iowa.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Lots of Germans in Sioux City, Iowa.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah (laughs). That was for, let's see, what were the initials? I think R.C.D, Replacement Training Detachment, R.T.D., Replacement Training Detachment.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay. What the Army called "Repple-Depple." Okay, you just go fill in; we're going to send this airplane somewhere. So, how long were you there?

Mr. Dingfelder: Six weeks (laughs).

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man. I assume you were doing lots of flying during this time.

Mr. Dingfelder: Lots of flying. We did a lot of practice bombing--

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought.

Mr. Dingfelder: --a lot of night navigation, and--

Mr. Daniel: Flying the railroad tracks in case you got lost.

Mr. Dingfelder: --how to get along with each other.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, yeah. That's what I figured.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Because normally, by the time you pick the crew up, it takes probably about, they say six weeks, but it takes probably about double that to get a good functioning crew and this was the way to do it.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, the interesting thing in that, if I may digress for a minute--

Mr. Daniel: Go ahead.

Mr. Dingfelder: At that time, we had a mid-air collision.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, right in our flight. We didn't happen to be involved in it.

Mr. Daniel: Whoa!

Mr. Dingfelder: Everybody was killed except the pilot, who was pulled out over his seat belt, when the top of the cockpit came over.

Mr. Daniel: Wow!

Mr. Dingfelder: And he ended up in the place where the engine had made a depression. The funniest thing about it is that, about, well I don't now, about two years ago, at the museum, I had a couple of people from Sioux City, Iowa come in, talking about the fact that they had seen a mid-air collision, in Sioux City, Iowa--

Mr. Daniel: Wow!

Mr. Dingfelder: --and they thought they were B-29s.

Mr. Daniel: And they saw that, then.

Mr. Dingfelder: And he saw it--they saw it from the air, and they had searched the area to find out if anybody else had seen it; they had not.

Mr. Daniel: Wow!

Mr. Dingfelder: And they went to the place where the airplane crashed, and found this depression where the pilot had been found.

Mr. Daniel: I hope somebody interviewed these people! Probably not. Any guess what caused the mid-air? I mean, I know formation flying is dangerous--

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, formation--well, this is not the only mid-air collision I have seen.

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: It, you know, it takes practice, and I was talking with my pilot not too long ago, and was trying to say your right arm must have gotten awful tired, pushing those throttles back and forth. And he said, "Bill, I never did that." He said, "What I would do is I'd pull the airplane back when I was going too far forward and I'd push it forward when I wanted (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Daniel: Yeah. The only problem with that, though, you start to oscillate in the air.

Mr. Dingfelder: Very slightly, though. Very slightly.

Mr. Daniel: You've got to be careful about that. There's a choice between the throttles and oscillating in the air, because--

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. Well, they later came out with a formation stick that was a stick that had everything on it.

Mr. Daniel: You guys didn't have that?

Mr. Dingfelder: Not until--they had an "H" model, and I never even saw one.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay. If you've never done formation flying, it's a ghastly experience. The worst one is formation flying in instrument weather, and there's cases where, over England, they had to fly through the clouds and form up, and they knew what happened. They just assumed mid-air because the whole sky would light up

where all these air--these two loaded airplanes would collide. And they just assumed there was a mid-air collision; there was nothing left with all that bomb load (unclear).

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, in this case, it was visual; it was clear bell. It's just that somebody lost control and smashed into somebody else.

Mr. Daniel: Did you actually see it?

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It's something you don't forget.

Mr. Daniel: That's too bad. As clear as a bell?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, clear as a bell.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man. What did you think about that time, when you saw that?

Mr. Dingfelder: I don't know. I don't think I thought too much about it, really.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Did you think maybe, thank God I've got the good crew?

Mr. Dingfelder: (Laughs). Yeah, yeah. Or thank God it wasn't me.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, yeah. So you're now in Sioux City, the garden spot of America, and where'd you go from there?

Mr. Dingfelder: Back to Lincoln!

Mr. Daniel: Okay. What did you go back to Lincoln for?

Mr. Dingfelder: To get our airplane.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, you weren't--okay, so you picked the crew up but not the airplane?

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, yeah, just the crew. We flew in airplanes that Sioux City had.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, the old beaters, probably.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, they were probably “E” models, maybe some “F” models.

Mr. Daniel: Probably pretty close to being worn out, right?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, pretty much so.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, okay. I didn’t know that. I thought a lot of times they tried to issue the crew and the plane at the same time.

Mr. Dingfelder: No, uh-uh.

Mr. Daniel: That’s too bad. Okay, so went back to get a real plane. A “G” model?

Mr. Dingfelder: “G” model.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, at that time, good. Brand new from the factory?

Mr. Dingfelder: Brand new!

Mr. Daniel: Ooohh. Now was yours the painted green, the camo, or was yours still shiny metal?

Mr. Dingfelder: It was shiny metal.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. We’re talking brand new from the factory.

Mr. Dingfelder: Brand spanking new!

Mr. Daniel: What did you think about the shiny metal?

Mr. Dingfelder: About the what?

Mr. Daniel: About the metal being shiny versus being painted green.

Mr. Dingfelder: It really didn’t bother us. We figured that we were going to be seen no matter. You know, we knew at altitude we were going to have contrails, so it didn’t make a darn bit of difference.

Mr. Daniel: People make a big thing about that. It was psychological. A lot of crews said, “Look, you know, if everybody’s shiny, I don’t care. If everybody’s green, I don’t care. I don’t want to be a shiny airplane with everybody else green.” (Mr. Dingfelder laughs). I mean that’ll attract too much attention.”

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we didn’t have that. As a matter of fact, most of us thought that it would make us faster. And as a matter of fact, we used to wax the wings, sometimes.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, you guys actually did that? Cool! Oh, you guys were hard core then.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, we wanted to go from 155 miles an hour to 157.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, but what people don’t realize is that the waxed wing is less (unclear) drag, so you have a lot more fuel reserve.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah (chuckles). It’s better to land with extra fuel than not to land with no fuel.

Mr. Dingfelder: You’ve got that!

Mr. Daniel: Okay. As an aside, what’d you wax the planes with, regular car wax?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, regular car wax.

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: I think some of us sent home to our parents to get car wax.

Mr. Daniel: That must have really impressed the family.

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, now you're in Lincoln, brand new, straight from the factory. Where did you go from there?

Mr. Dingfelder: We went to Grundy Airfield in New Hampshire. That was our first stop.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, you were going--

Mr. Dingfelder: Overseas.

Mr. Daniel: Overseas, okay. Then where did you go from there?

Mr. Dingfelder: From there, we went to Newfoundland.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. And then, probably Iceland, or Greenland?

Mr. Dingfelder: No, from Newfoundland we went to the Azores.

Mr. Daniel: You went to the Azores? I'm sure there's some logic to that.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, I think originally we were going to go to England, to the Eighth Air Force.

Mr. Daniel: Right, which makes more sense. You went Newfoundland to the Azores, which I understand don't make sense.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we didn't, we don't know the reason. We made assumptions. We assumed that we were going to go to the Eighth Air Force.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: We found out when we got over to Italy that we had been losing --the Fifteenth Air Force had been losing an awful lot of airplanes and crews.

Mr. Daniel: It probably was a spur of the moment--

Mr. Dingfelder: I think it was a last minute change, and we went to the Azores.
From the Azores, we went to Marrakesh.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding? Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: From Marrakesh to Tunis; from Tunis to Gioia, Italy.

Mr. Daniel: Gioia? I don't know where Gioia is.

Mr. Dingfelder: It was a--really a depot.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we lost our brand new airplane, never to see it again
(laughs).

Mr. Daniel: Ahh, let me guess. You're the new crew. The experienced crew
got one shot up, so the new crew is not allowed to have the
brand new airplane, right?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we don't even know.

Mr. Daniel: You don't even know; they just took your airplane (laughs)?

Mr. Dingfelder: I have no idea. I know the first thing they did was take off the
de-icers. They tried to make them as fast as they possibly could.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: And the weight, you know, the de-icers weigh an awful lot.

Mr. Daniel: Right. So what did you feel about your brand new airplane
going bye-bye?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we were kind of sad about it--

Mr. Daniel: I can understand that.

Mr. Dingfelder: --because the--one of the first airplanes, one of the first missions I flew, I flew in one of--it was a -17 that had been given to Charles deGaulle. And it was an "E" model, and it still had the open windows that you had to open to fire your guns.

Mr. Daniel: Right, the ones you could freeze your buns off with. Terrible! Oh, man! So where were you assigned, finally? You went to--

Mr. Dingfelder: Foggia.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, you went to Foggia.

Mr. Dingfelder: Went to Foggia--

Mr. Daniel: You're one of those people.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, not Foggia Main; we were at a--called Amendola. We didn't know that. I didn't find that out until after the war.

Mr. Daniel: Right, nobody; just Foggia One, Foggia Two.

Mr. Dingfelder: Amendola.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. So you were with the Fifteenth Air Force then.

Mr. Dingfelder: Fifteenth Air Force, 97th Bomb Group, 341st Squadron.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay! So Fifteenth Air Force, 97th--

Mr. Dingfelder: Bomb Group.

Mr. Daniel: Bomb Group.

Mr. Dingfelder: Three forty-first--

Mr. Daniel: Three forty-first--

Mr. Dingfelder: Squadron.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. I may have interviewed somebody else from the 341st; kind of think--I got what squadrons these guys--all of a sudden, for some reason, I've been interviewing in the past year a whole bunch of people of the Fifteenth Air Force.

Mr. Dingfelder: Is that right?

Mr. Daniel: I don't know why. I think you guys all get together and say, "Go interview with these guys."

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, you know, the Fifteenth Air Force felt left out, because we got no important visitors. There were no hotels, no nice places to stay, no restaurants. And many times when we would get Stars and Stripes, we'd see--

Mr. Daniel: The Eighth Air Force won the war.

Mr. Dingfelder: --we'd see a B-17 come in to land and it'd say, "Another airplane from the Eighth Air Force comes in safely." And all the markings were of the 97th Bomb Group.

Mr. Daniel: I understand. In case you're wondering, it hasn't changed any. If you look at the last hurricane, you know, Katrina; why'd everybody go to New Orleans? Because there's hotels. Not all of New Orleans was destroyed, so there's infrastructure, so the photographers could take their--the news media could take their RVs, have a good time. Bourbon Street's opened up. Now if you think about it, you're on the coast in Alabama or

Mississippi. There are no bars, there's no strip joints, and you know, there's no hotels. Which would you rather go to?

Mr. Dingfelder: No question!

Mr. Daniel: So, yeah. Don't feel bad. A close friend of mine was with the 36th Infantry Division in the--in Italy. If you want to get him wound up, talk about D-Day. (Mr. Dingfelder laughs). I mean, it's good for two hours, like, wait a minute! These people got in late; we fought for two years and we didn't get anything!

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, you know, you feel silly, something about that, because the people don't realize that the end of the war, the Axis countries were not producing one gallon of fuel.

Mr. Daniel: Right. And that was because of you guys.

Mr. Dingfelder: The Fifteenth Air Force had knocked everything out.

Mr. Daniel: People don't realize that.

Mr. Dingfelder: No. Again, we kid each other, you know. It's a fight between B-17s and B-24s. It's also a fight between the Fifteenth and the glamorous Eighth.

Mr. Daniel: And the Eighth; I know that. Okay, so you were at Foggia. Did you spend your whole time at Foggia?

Mr. Dingfelder: Whole time.

Mr. Daniel: Whole time, okay. You were a waist gunner the whole time, armorer/waist gunner?

Mr. Dingfelder: No, I checked out; later, very, probably the last eight missions, my pilot, my co-pilot became a first pilot, and I went as his engineer.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, cool! Okay, how many missions did you fly?

Mr. Dingfelder: Thirty-five

Mr. Daniel: Holy!

Mr. Dingfelder: Side bit: I flew my thirty-fifth mission on my twentieth birthday.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding.

Mr. Dingfelder: No.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man! At the time, how many missions did you need to come home?

Mr. Dingfelder: Thirty-five.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, so you actually got to come home then.

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, I got to come home--well, I came back, and I happened to be in my hometown on V-J Day.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding?

Mr. Dingfelder: We were the first group to come back from Europe at the end of V-E Day.

Mr. Daniel: Right. Okay, let's talk about your missions? What was the funniest mission you ever had?

Mr. Dingfelder: The funnest?

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, what about that. What was the funny--everybody asks about the worst; let's do the funny one first.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, I think probably the funniest, and this is not really anything to laugh about, but we flew one mission and we got hit by flak, but only one piece of flak entered our airplane, and it landed in the back of one of our waist gunners.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, no! Oh, no!

Mr. Dingfelder: We couldn't figure it out, because it came from the back forward, and most of them go from forward back.

Mr. Daniel: Right. Did it actually penetrate his skin?

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, yeah. It just missed his spine.

Mr. Daniel: Whoa!

Mr. Dingfelder: In fact I saw him, after I had finished my missions, when we talked, he said, "This is my last mission. I don't care." When he got on the airplane, he went up to the machine gun and wrapped a bootie around the machine gun. He had just had a--been told that he had a baby son, and he said, "I'm never going to fly again." And so, when I finished my mission, I ran into him and he was limping, and he was going on his last mission.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, no! Oh, God!

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, you know, it was one of those things. If you refused to fly, you were in deep trouble.

Mr. Daniel: Oh yeah, it's not a big option, particularly after they promoted you, they put all this time training you, and in your case, it looks like you got the full training, which is unusual.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, well, we did; we got the full--

Mr. Daniel: Because what a lot of people don't realize; I mean, you know because you stayed a little bit afterwards, the amount of training you got depended on how soon they needed crews. I mean I've had bombardiers, I think the bombardier course was--I forget how many months long, six or eight months. It was a long course. Well, if they needed bombardiers, your course was down to about like three or four weeks. You know, the idea was, if the guy in front of you drops a bomb, you drop the same time. You're now bombardiers.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, that's what we did anyway. Actually, our tail gunner had no training other than gunnery school.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, that's what I thought.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, it's amazing; it just depends on how bad they needed troops.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, you remember the story of the ASTPs.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Dingfelder: Those poor guys went over to Europe, went into the front lines, never even fired a rifle.

Mr. Daniel: Yep, yep.

Mr. Dingfelder: A lot of them died within an hour.

Mr. Daniel: I've actually interviewed people. The guy was trained as an anti-tank man, spent a year being trained. Then at the end of the war they decided, you know, we need infantrymen. Here's a rifle. Uh, okay, what do I do with it? (Mr. Dingfelder laughs). Well, you've already qualified, get in the ship. And he was put on the front lines, I think within about three or four weeks of being in Europe, and had no real infantry training.

Mr. Dingfelder: None at all. You know, there's a book called "Citizen Soldier." It was written by--I can't think of, I can never remember, the guy's so well known as a--

Mr. Daniel: Ambrose, ah no, not Ambrose. Stephen Ambrose.

Mr. Dingfelder: Stephen Ambrose. He tells all about that, how they used to go into a foxhole that the Germans had left, and so they'd go in there, and the Germans knew exactly where it was and they'd just lob a--

Mr. Daniel: Right. You learned that the hard way.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Or a guy in the Pacific was telling me that their policy, their S.O.P. was, at nighttime, you never got out of your foxhole, period. If somebody was out of the foxhole or somebody walking around, it had to be Japanese, so they shot. And some

young troop forgot that, and for some reason got out of the foxhole, and they lit him up. I mean, they killed him, and there was an investigation. It wasn't an investigation because of why they did it; everybody knew why they did it. The investigation was, why wasn't he trained? And that was it, yeah, it's amazing.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, the only reason that I would think about is that he had to go to the bathroom.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, but basically, you did it in your foxhole.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, I guess so (laughs).

Mr. Daniel: Because you know, it was either get out of the foxhole and go to the bathroom and get shot, or do it in your foxhole. There's no option here.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, that's not a difficult decision.

Mr. Daniel: Right. That's why, you know, they had those grenade sumps? They weren't all used for grenade sumps in the foxhole. Okay, so what was your typical mission like? How long were your missions?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, six to eight hours.

Mr. Daniel: This is Tape 1, Side B of the oral history interview of Bill Dingfelder, interviewer Dwight D. Daniel. Okay, you were saying, all your birds had the Tokyo tanks in them.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, everyone had Tokyo tanks. We had to have them.

Mr. Daniel: Because you had the longer missions then.

Mr. Dingfelder: No, it wasn't just the long mission. Remember, we had the Alps to worry about, so we had to circle to get high enough to clear our target areas.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, so you were in that group then.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, yeah. That's one of the reasons we had so many hours.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, because a lot of those people were only getting four or five hour missions. Okay, that's why, then.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, the longest mission that we had, and I didn't happen to go on it, was to Berlin.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, you had Berlin missions, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: We had one mission to Berlin, and nobody's ever been able to figure it out, but I don't think we lost any airplanes from flak, but we lost some from running out of gas.

Mr. Daniel: Oh yeah. And you wonder why you waxed the wings.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. (Laughs).

Mr. Daniel: A gallon of gas can be important. Okay, so where did you guys normally go, then?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, let's see. My first mission was Maribor, Yugoslavia.

Mr. Daniel: What was at Maribor?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we were on our way to Venice.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: We couldn't get there. That was one of the targets that I went to seven times, and made it twice.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding; what, weather or?

Mr. Dingfelder: Weather, yeah. But we went to Maribor and dropped down from 29,000 feet to 21,000 feet, and Maribor was a marshalling yard--

Mr. Daniel: That's it.

Mr. Dingfelder: And in that marshalling yard were about, as we understand it, if my memory is good, that we were told, there were eleven hundred eighty-eight millimeter cannon anti-aircraft guns on the railroad cars coming back from Ploesti.

Mr. Daniel: Ah-hah!

Mr. Dingfelder: We had a hundred and eighty-seven holes in our airplane--

Mr. Daniel: Whoa!

Mr. Dingfelder: And it never flew again.

Mr. Daniel: I can understand that.

Mr. Dingfelder: Not one man was hurt.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding me, whoa!

Mr. Dingfelder: Not one man was hurt, and the airplane never flew, but the engineer who was in the top turret, a piece of flak hit the hydraulic container and it put hot hydraulic fluid on his leg. He reached down; it was all red, he thought he was bleeding (laughs).

Mr. Daniel: Did he get burned real bad?

Mr. Dingfelder: Pardon?

Mr. Daniel: Did he get burned by the hydraulic?

Mr. Dingfelder: No.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding! That's unusual.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, when you think of what all we wore, because of the temperature, we were pretty well insulated.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, man, a hundred and eighty-seven holes. That's kind of scary.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, of course, you know, we're guessing again, because there were some in and out (laughs).

Mr. Daniel: Right (laughs). Amazing! And that was supposed to be to Venice, and you never made Venice, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, my first mission.

Mr. Daniel: That was your first mission?

Mr. Dingfelder: First mission.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: First mission for the whole crew.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man! That must have really impressed the crew.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, I'll tell you. We were not smart enough or seasoned enough to realize enough to be scared. We later got scared when we only got ten holes in the airplane (chuckles).

Mr. Daniel: Because, I mean, you basically flew swiss cheese back, yeah.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. What were some of your other missions like?

Mr. Dingfelder: Okay. We went to, of course, Prague, Czechoslovakia. We went to Linz, Austria.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay, you were in Linz. Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, we went to--well, we went to, where else, I'm trying to think--Regensburg, because we were doing synthetic oil refineries.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: Ahh, I'm trying to remember; now it's difficult.

Mr. Daniel: So you had all the big ones, though.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we hit--yeah, we hit mainly those. We hit some in northern Italy. In fact, our last mission was to break up--we dropped frag bombs on Bologna.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay. Now, as a young kid flying to God only knows where, did you happen to know where any of these places were?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, I knew, of course, where Berlin was. I knew where Munich was.

Mr. Daniel: But what about like Prague or Linz? I mean, nah, just get in the airplane and fly.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. That's what I kind of figured.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: As a waist gunner, other than freezing your buns off, which had to be really cold--?

Mr. Dingfelder: As much as--as low as seventy below.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: You had--how'd you stay warm? Did you guys have the electrical heat flight suits?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. So you had the electric suits.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, electric suits.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Did they work real well?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, they basically kept your heart warm.

Mr. Daniel: (Laughs). That's not good!

Mr. Dingfelder: Just to give you an idea of what we did, what we wore, you know we always slept in our clothes, and so we would start with regular underwear, then we wore long johns, then we'd wear intermediate flying suit, and then we'd wear a heating suit, then we'd wear a heavy flying suit and all of the gloves were attached, the boots were attached, and our goggles were electric.

Mr. Daniel: I didn't know you had electrical goggles. Oh, cool! That must've made it difficult to move around a lot though.

Mr. Dingfelder: We didn't move--well, I had to move, because I had to check on those tail gunners all the time. So I had to crawl all the way back, because he was one of these kids that either fell asleep or unhooked his headset so--

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: --we didn't get an answer back.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man!

Mr. Dingfelder: But that was Chronson (?) and of course, we took care of all injured.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: That was the waist gunner's job, really.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, I didn't know that. Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: So, it--

Mr. Daniel: Did you stay warm enough? With all this?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, well, warm enough to stay alive. A lot of us got frostbite.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I was going to wonder about.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, I got frostbite of one ear, but--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, that's not bad, then.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, that wasn't bad.

Mr. Daniel: I mean you still have your ears, so it's not all that bad.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, I still have ears. The other thing, really memorable, well there are two or three things that are memorable. I don't know if you're interested in that or not.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, let's hear them.

Mr. Dingfelder: The other mid-air collision we were talking about, I saw again on a mission. I'm not sure exactly where we were going, but it was again on my side of the airplane and I looked at it; I

watched it from the beginning, because an airplane, the B-17, came from behind all the formation, came underneath the whole formation and then climbed. He came up and the tail on his airplane hit the nose of the other one. He went straight up in the air, banged again, broke in two and we sat there and watched the two waist gunners reaching for their parachutes. See, we never wore our parachutes. (During this commentary, Mr. Daniel reacts with exclamations as Mr. Dingfelder describes the mid-air collision).

Mr. Daniel: Oh, I didn't know that.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we couldn't.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, because you couldn't move around?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, they were chest packs, and you couldn't move around.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, I thought you wore the, not the chest pack, but the rear one.

Mr. Dingfelder: No. The pilot and co-pilot did.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, but you didn't.

Mr. Dingfelder: No. Anybody who walked around, wore chest packs, the tail gunner did--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, I didn't know that. That's got to be a scary feeling, to watch the guys.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, that was the reason these guys came flying out of the airplane. They had no suspect that they were being hit. And to see them, you know, it was like slow motion. I can still see

them. Anyway, we don't know what happened to the airplane. We watched one of them spin down; the other one went straight down, so we never heard (unclear).

Mr. Daniel: What caused it? I'm assuming not.

Mr. Dingfelder: No, they went ahead (unclear) most of the time.

Mr. Daniel: Well, you know what's interesting, is the only thing I can figure out would cause that is if the pilot or co-pilot was dead and nobody was actually flying the airplane. That would make sense.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, that would be the other thing, is that they lost their oxygen, something like that--

Mr. Daniel: Yep. There you go.

Mr. Dingfelder: --came through, one of them was conscious and for some reason they just pulled straight up. As it happened, they got the lead airplane.

Mr. Daniel: Whoa! It was the lead airplane?

Mr. Dingfelder: We know that it killed the navigator and bombardier, because they were smashed, and so--

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, I'm just assuming the whole crew went down.

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, the whole crew--well, the whole two crews.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, whole two crews. Because once you start to spin those things, you can't get out.

Mr. Dingfelder: No.

Mr. Daniel: Whoa! That's scary!

Mr. Dingfelder: The other one that was bad, I got a DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross), and I got the DFC when I was flying with another crew, and I didn't know anybody on the crew. I didn't know a soul, the pilot, the co-pilot, anybody. And I was flying as waist, and the ball turret gunner got what we call anoxia, which now is a lack of oxygen--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and he came up out of his ball turret and said, "Oh, I can't breathe." So we said, "Okay, we'll get you a new mask." "No, no," he said, "I can breathe now." So he went back down in and we never saw him or heard him again. So we knew he was bad, so we cranked him up and started to pull him out. The waist gunner, the other waist gunner, and the radioman came to help me. We turned off the IP onto the run and flak started, and they both left me, and I was trying to get this kid out. I had a walk-around bottle, which only full lasts three minutes; I had about two. Somehow, I got the strength to pull this guy out; got him out and we gave him artificial respiration for four hours, no good. He was dead when we got him. But I never have forgiven those guys. It was his crew.

Mr. Daniel: Right. And they left him.

Mr. Dingfelder: They left him.

Mr. Daniel: That's weird.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. I never--it's--

Mr. Daniel: Were you guys under attack at the time?

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, yeah. We were on flak. There was flak going, always, as we went to the target. We never missed flak.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought. I can understand maybe one guy leaving, but I can't imagine both of just leaving.

Mr. Dingfelder: They both left. Well, everybody seemed to think that that piece of thick aluminum was armor plate.

Mr. Daniel: No.

Mr. Dingfelder: It isn't.

Mr. Daniel: No.

Mr. Dingfelder: But he went to hide behind it. That was the waist gunner.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, you're kidding! Oh...

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. The radio operator went back, because he said, "I've got to radio that we've dropped the bombs." So anyway, apparently whatever it was, somebody said I should have the DFC, so I didn't refuse it.

Mr. Daniel: I understand. That's interesting.

Mr. Dingfelder: One other thing exciting, we had two bombs freeze, stayed up, and all the other bombs had dropped out, and as they dropped out, they bounced off the bombs and wrecked the door into the bomb bay.

Mr. Daniel: Are you serious?

Mr. Dingfelder: No, I'm serious.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, no. So you couldn't close the door?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, couldn't close the door. So, I went in to drop the two bombs, because we sure as hell didn't want--so I reached between the two bombs to release the lower bomb from its shackle, and as I did that, the top bomb fell. It hit the bottom--missed my arm.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, you're a lucky man, whoa!

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. Anyway, they dropped out, but that left the problem of the bomb bay door flowing back and forth, and the one landing gear, main gear, would not come down.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding. Oh, no!

Mr. Dingfelder: So I had to crawl and put my legs on one side, and crank down two hundred and forty-three turns, but I couldn't do it with my chute on, so I took my chute off and put it--and I stand, again this is something else I can still see. I can see the beautiful Adriatic. It was just beautiful!

Mr. Daniel: And you're sitting there in the bomb bay with no parachute on!

Mr. Dingfelder: No parachute, and my legs--I'd be better off if I couldn't have seen it (laughs). But anyway--

Mr. Daniel: (Laughs). So did you finally get the bomb out?

Mr. Dingfelder: Finally got the gear up. I got the bombs out; they came out when they dropped on each other.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: But cranking down the gear was--

Mr. Daniel: Forever!

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, it takes forever. It must have taken me at least fifteen minutes, I think, to do that. So anyway--

Mr. Daniel: But you got--at least you got it down and locked.

Mr. Dingfelder: Got it down, yeah.

Mr. Daniel: But your airplane had to be slow at this point, with a bomb bay door stuck open and the gear out.

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Daniel: I mean, you guys were not making good time here.

Mr. Dingfelder: Not at all. No, we were dropping altitude, that's the only reason. We were losing altitude going back home, and that's why we were over the Adriatic.

Mr. Daniel: Right. Whew!

Mr. Dingfelder: Anyway, the thing that amazed me, I think, more than anything else about any of us, was how we could get up the next day and do the same thing, knowing what we had seen the day before and that we were all the same.

Mr. Daniel: I think it has something to do with youth.

Mr. Dingfelder: Ah, no question.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, because I mean, nowadays, you'd think I'd not do this, but--

Mr. Dingfelder: No way!

Mr. Daniel: --I've come to the conclusion; there's something in the male gene, and I know it's a sexist statement, that when you're a teenager to early, mid-twenties, there's something in you that ignores fear or common sense.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, I think you're right.

Mr. Daniel: And that's the only thing that makes sense. I mean, you look at any military, I mean, like look at World War I with trench warfare, where the British would get up and charge, and you can argue about, well, they did it because they were afraid to be court-martialed, and you can give all this logic. There has to be something to do that, because you know it's almost sheer death and a lot of these guys did that. Like you said, you're up there and you're ignoring the fact that yesterday you were cranking this bomb down, looking at the Adriatic with no parachute. And the next day you get up and go okay, let's go back on another mission.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. Well, you know, there's a thought process on what you do. You looked at the situation, like I did with this kid in the ball turret, and you make the thought. You think, Jeez, you

know, I'm risking my life, and you just sit there and say, so what, that's what I'm here for.

Mr. Daniel: Yep. It's my job.

Mr. Dingfelder: I think that's what happens to the guys that get all the medals. You know, they just say that's what's got to be done. That's not bravery; that's just something you do.

Mr. Daniel: You're not the only one that's had that attitude, like, how do I do it? Eh, it's my job, you know, they trained me to do it, and what I've heard is, the quicker I do this, the quicker I get home to mom and dad. And if I don't do it, somebody else will go do it, and I'll be delighted.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, you know, I was fortunate at that time. I didn't have a girlfriend, so I didn't have to worry about it and that made it a lot easier, too. Of course, it was bad, because I never got any mail (laughs).

Mr. Daniel: I understand. Did the parents ever write you?

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, yes. Yes. Other than the parents, my sister.

Mr. Daniel: I understand. How often did your parents write you?

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, I think I got a letter, oh at least once a week.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, that's not bad!

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, that was one of the things we used to worry about, because we had a wounded guy on the airplane and we had to--it was the same one I told you about, that got hit from behind--and

we had to get him to a hospital as quick as possible because we couldn't stop the bleeding. We landed at a field in Rimini, which is a little tiny field, which was an RAF field. And we landed on this RAF field, and--

Mr. Daniel: That's Italy, right?

Mr. Dingfelder: What?

Mr. Daniel: Rimini, Italy?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, Rimini, Italy. And when we landed on that field, we were there for a couple of hours, by the time the ambulance got there and everything else. It was just a runway; there was no taxiway, and we had to get it down and make a 180, and face the other way. We were going to be late getting home, we had the habit of, if you're too late, you're called M-I-A.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: So we were scared to death; and why were we scared?

Mr. Daniel: Because you're parents would get the wrong note.

Mr. Dingfelder: No.

Mr. Daniel: Why?

Mr. Dingfelder: We wouldn't get our mail! We'd have to wait until the next day!

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man! How often did you write your parents?

Mr. Dingfelder: Ah, well of course, we had V-Mail then, and so they could be short. I would say probably once every other week.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, that's not bad. You're at least a good son then.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah (laughs).

Mr. Daniel: Not the guy who only writes every couple of months. Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we figured if you didn't write back, you weren't going to get another one.

Mr. Daniel: I understand. So the letters were important to you because they, what'd they have in them, just hometown news and that type of stuff?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. Well, yeah, and of course, we were all censored, you know, so sometimes the letters would get home and they'd be three letters and then a whole bunch of (unclear).

Mr. Daniel: (Chuckles). Do you still have any of your old letters?

Mr. Dingfelder: No. Unfortunately, when I--this is one of the things that hurts me most, it's--when my mother and father retired, they went down to Florida. This was before I got married, or right after, and we had no place to store anything. So when my mother and dad broke up housekeeping, they gave all my stuff away; my bomb pictures, my bomb--you see, we were issued, when we left, a copy of every bomb strike that we were on.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought. Oh, man, that's too bad.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, they were all given.

Mr. Daniel: On your missions, did anybody take, like on the actual missions, who took the bomb strike pictures? Was it you or did they actually have the flight engineer or somebody else do it?

Mr. Dingfelder: I did.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought. You had the camera you stuck out.

Mr. Dingfelder: I went up in and watched; there's a little camera port right at the end of the radio room--

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and you open that and that's where you just use that. I also took some pictures from the waist wing.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. That's what I thought. What did you have, was it a K-15 or K-12 camera?

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, I don't know; something like that. It was a beautiful big camera.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah. They took good photographs, you know.

Mr., Dingfelder: Oh, yeah. You know, during that time, I didn't even have a box camera.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: No. I had nothing. My pilot had some pictures, and last year he sent me about eight of them, so they're the only ones that I have, and I have a picture of the crew, and I have a picture of one of our airplanes dropping the bombs.

Mr. Daniel: Were you right or left gunner? Do you remember?

Mr. Dingfelder: I was--you know, that never came up (laughs).

Mr. Daniel: (Laughs). I was just curious.

Mr. Dingfelder: I don't think it made any difference. I think I worked both sides.
Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: That's what everybody--okay. Now, in the one you had, did you ever get a new airplane, or were you always flying that--when you went over, you gave your "G" model away. Did you ever get a new airplane when you were over there?

Mr. Dingfelder: No.

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: No, you know, we were sort of a check-out crew. So we oftentimes we would fly with a new co-pilot, a new waist gunner, a new tail gunner, on their first, early missions.

Mr. Daniel: Got you; right. Okay. How'd that make you guys feel, flying with new guys quite often?

Mr. Dingfelder: I guess proud--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: --that they considered us experienced enough to help these green guys. We had--flew one mission on Christmas in 1944, and never got--when we got back and landed, they had closed the mess halls--

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: --so we didn't get our Christmas dinner.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: No--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man!

Mr. Dingfelder: --that changed. The pilot went and talked to the C.O., and they came down and gave us a Christmas dinner.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, I used to run a mess hall. My troops got fed; I don't care what. They got fed.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, oh, that's an absolute necessity.

Mr. Daniel: Right. There's a lot of things you can handle. A hot shower and food is not something that's negotiable.

Mr. Dingfelder: (Laughs).

Mr. Daniel: I mean they'll go through hell and back and long as there's hot food somewhere in the equation.

Mr. Dingfelder: That's right, particularly turkey.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Dingfelder: With all the trimmings.

Mr. Daniel: So, did you guys eat fairly good?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, on occasions like that we did--Thanksgiving, Christmas, things of that sort.

Mr. Daniel: Right. What about regular meals?

Mr. Dingfelder: No. Well, regular meals, we lived basically on bread, Italian bread and canned peanut butter and jelly.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, you know, you can eat so much Spam.

Mr. Daniel: I understand.

Mr. Dingfelder: And we used to get this corned beef--

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and I remember every time we'd have somebody dropping in from another squadron or something, we'd say throw another can of water in the soup, because we've got company. But that was basically it. We got no fresh eggs; our eggs were all dehydrated--green eggs.

Mr. Daniel: I'm surprised, because I mean being in Foggia, you could live off the economy. You could buy food off the economy.

Mr. Dingfelder: No. Every one of the restaurants was off limits.

Mr. Daniel: I knew that, but I figured the military would be buying from the farmers or something like that. I guess not.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, the only thing we did, and the way we did it is, on our days off when we weren't flying, we'd go into the country with our .45s, and with scatter shot and shoot birds, but mainly we'd go in to a farmer and we'd trade him K-rations for potatoes and eggs--

Mr. Daniel: No kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: --and then we'd cook them. The old tin cans, you know, that you'd put holes around it and fill it with 100 octane gasoline, then put your mess kit on top.

Mr. Daniel: I'm sorry to hear that! Dehydrated eggs are the most horrible experience the world's ever--I don't care what anybody says. I

can handle Spam; I can handle anything. Don't give me dehydrated eggs.

Mr. Dingfelder: You know, when we brought our new airplane over, we brought over cases of K-rations--

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and we tried to give them away.

Mr. Daniel: Nobody wants them.

Mr. Dingfelder: Nobody would take them. So we ended up with them in our tent--

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and as a result, when we went out, we'd go trade K-rations to the farmers and they loved the cheese and stuff.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, yeah. Now, when you flew these missions, how'd you carry food?

Mr. Dingfelder: K-rations.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, you had K-rations.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, we had K-rations and we used to keep them so they wouldn't freeze. You know, they'd freeze like a rock, and after we dropped the bombs, they'd put the bomb sight heater on them--

Mr. Daniel: Ahhhhhh!

Mr. Dingfelder: --and thaw them out and then we'd get (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Daniel: Oohh, cool!

Mr. Dingfelder: The other trick, of course, we used to do was from the standpoint of smoking--we all smoked--and as we'd come down from altitude, we'd strike our Zippo lighters, and if they'd light, then we knew we could light our cigarettes.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay (laughs). There's enough oxygen to smoke; okay, I like that. Hadn't heard that before. What'd you guys use for the bathroom on these long missions?

Mr. Dingfelder: We had a relief tube--

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought.

Mr. Dingfelder: --that froze up!

Mr. Daniel: I was going to ask you now, with a frozen relief tube, did--this was not too functional, was it (laughs)?

Mr. Dingfelder: Not functional at all, and it always happened in an emergency or something like that. It was in the bomb bay, and of course, if anybody had gone there before you--

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: --the next one just got it all over his hands and his outfit (laughs). (To someone else in the vicinity: That right, Vern? Unidentified person answers, but microphone does not pick up reply clearly. Both laugh.)

Mr. Daniel: I was going to ask. At altitude, that's got to be a horrible experience to unzip your pants and--

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, yeah, but you knew damn well if you went in your pants, you were going to freeze to death, so you went to the lesser of the two evils.

Mr. Daniel: Right. I understand. Okay, what else happened? I mean you had your thirty-five missions; now, did you finish the missions very close to the end of the war?

Mr. Dingfelder: (Unclear) was April the 18th.

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: And the last mission we flew, I think was--no, the end of April, right at the end of April. I left Italy on the tenth of May--

Mr. Daniel: No kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: --and came back on a boat.

Mr. Daniel: Everybody did that, a form of punishment. Do you remember the name of the ship?

Mr. Dingfelder: USS Mount Vernon.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay. That wasn't a bad ship.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, it was an Army ship.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, run by the Navy, of course.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, but it wasn't a bad ship.

Mr. Dingfelder: No, it wasn't bad at all, except the number of people on board (laughs).

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, you were the famous six-high bunks or eight-high bunks.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, well, you got home though (chuckles). When you came back, did you come back out of Italy or did you come back out of France?

Mr. Dingfelder: No, came back out of Naples.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought. Okay. You came back to New York City?

Mr. Dingfelder: Came back past the Statue of Liberty--

Mr. Daniel: That must have been a good feeling.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and we came into ah, can't think of the name of the place, but we went to Camp Kilmer--

Mr. Daniel: Yeah.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and then to Fort Dix.

Mr. Daniel: Good old Dix; spent many a night at Dix.

Mr. Dingfelder: Of course, the thing that happened to us at Kilmer--of course, this was when we got our first meal, had steaks and all the milk we could drink, and we were served by Italian war prisoners.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, cool. Who probably didn't care; they were happy they were out of the war.

Mr. Dingfelder: They were delighted.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: They wouldn't have escaped if they had a chance (laughs).

Mr. Daniel: Right. (Laughs). And they got fed good because they were in the mess hall working. Okay. I understand. Where'd you go after Fort Dix?

Mr. Dingfelder: Fort Dix, I got to leave, went to leave.

Mr. Daniel: Got you; that's what I thought.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, and spent thirty days at home.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Now what was your home at this time?

Mr. Dingfelder: Pittsburgh.

Mr. Daniel: Still Pittsburgh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Still Pittsburgh.

Mr. Daniel: Were you programmed to go to Japan, or because you had thirty-five missions, they said no.

Mr. Dingfelder: I was programmed to go to--we were on our way to B-29 school.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. You're going to Japan. Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: I understand. Okay, B-29 school. You had thirty days; that would put you about July or so time frame. Where was your B-29 school?

Mr. Dingfelder: We didn't know.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, they didn't tell you?

Mr. Dingfelder: Because when we were there--we were given leave again from R&R, and we were home. I was home in Pittsburgh on V-J Day.

Mr. Daniel: Cool!

Mr. Dingfelder: The only thing is, I couldn't get downtown.

Mr. Daniel: I understand that.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, but from there, we went back to R&R.

Mr. Daniel: Now, the atomic bombs, like, both my parents were in Europe and all they knew was the atomic bombs would hopefully prevent them from going to Japan. My mother wasn't, but my father, he was on a Patton; basically they were already told that he was going to go home like you, thirty day leave, and then he was going to go somewhere for the invasion of Japan. So, when he heard about the atomic bomb, he thought it was the best thing since sliced bread (laughs). So what did they tell you? Where did you hear in the news about the atomic bomb?

Mr. Dingfelder: I think when we were at R&R; I believe. That's why we were given the time, the leave. I don't think everybody did that. We were, if I'm not mistaken, again (unclear) to the memory, but I believe we left southern California. We were at the old Orange Coast College, San Diego Army Air Base--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and we went home and then we came back, and then we were assigned, because we had to have enough points to get out.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: So I went from there to Victoria, Texas.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, I know Victoria.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Know it well.

Mr. Dingfelder: Called Aloe Field.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah!

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: You know it still exists? It's not an Army field, but the Army gave it to the City of Victoria and they still run it.

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, is it really?

Mr. Daniel: Yeah. I'm a private pilot and you land your airplane there, and you land, and you land in like 300 foot, and you realize there's umpteen thousand foot of runway (Mr. Dingfelder laughs), and you think--then you get out and look at it. I've never seen anything so wide in my life. And they parked bazillions of airplanes there, so you can land any way you want to.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, we went to a little sub-field.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay. You went to the sub-field.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, and we used to--we were giving advanced training to pilots and to any visiting officer who wanted to get his hours in--

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and that's where I ran into my cadet class.

Mr. Daniel: No kidding! Wow!

Mr. Dingfelder: They had eighteen points, and I had eighty-two.

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: So I was discharged from there--

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: --discharged from Ellington.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay. Now, did you stay in the reserves or anything?

Mr. Dingfelder: No, I didn't.

Mr. Daniel: So how did you get into Korea then?

Mr. Dingfelder: I later (laughs)--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, no.

Mr. Dingfelder: I enjoyed flying so much but I couldn't afford it, so I joined the reserves at the suggestion of a friend of mine, and we got recalled. We were flying C-46s and we went to Donaldson Air Force Base in Greenville, North Carolina.

Mr. Daniel: Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: And given 82s.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, that's not bad then.

Mr. Dingfelder: C-82s?

Mr. Daniel: Oh, C-82s. Oh, damn! What'd you do to get that kind of punishment?

Mr. Dingfelder: We had a commanding officer that was so anxious to (tape ends).

Mr. Daniel: This is an oral history interview of Bill Dingfelder, a staff sergeant in World War II into the Korean War. He was born 18 April 1925. The interviewer is myself, Dwight D. Daniel, an oral

history volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War, located in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today is 11 November 2005, and this interview is taking place at March Reserve Air Force Base, California. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, which is the archive for the preservation of historical information of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife. This is Tape 2, Side A.

Okay, now Bill, you were telling me that you went from--you went to Greenville, South Carolina or North Carolina?

Mr. Dingfelder: South Carolina.

Mr. Daniel: South Carolina, and the commander there wanted to get into the war, so he put you into (unclear) C-82s. Now you and I both know what that is, but there's going to be people that have no idea to describe what a C-82 is. Would you, in your own words, describe a C-82, and try not to be obscene about it.

Mr. Dingfelder: (Laughs).

Mr. Daniel: I know that's difficult.

Mr. Dingfelder: It's a twin-engine, twin-boomed aircraft, basically designed as a troop carrier and a para-dropper. It had two R-2800 engines and I think the purpose was, it could drop all kinds of equipment from the air; it could drop about 41 paratroopers at the same time, going out both sides of the airplane. It would have been a fine airplane if it hadn't been built by Fairchild.

The airplanes that we got, and we didn't get them for about three or four weeks after we got in, because we had to open the base, were pickled, which is storage for six weeks.--

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and they'd been pickled for two years.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man!

Mr. Dingfelder: So we ran into corrosion; we ran into the fact that we didn't have tugs, so we couldn't tow them, so we had to use our own automobiles.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man!

Mr. Dingfelder: We didn't have uniforms that were warm enough. It was a mess, and this is one of the things that bothered everybody. When we went down, most of the enlisted men had pretty good jobs; most of the officers did not.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, no kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: When we called in, a lot of them drove down with us, because our automobiles were decent.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: The end of the year, they were able to get new automobiles.

Mr. Daniel: Wow!

Mr. Dingfelder: When we went in, our commanding officer, who was a man by the Colonel Lance Call, gave the officers everything they

needed, but we were not allowed to have quarters and rations for our families.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: And we were told not to bring our families down.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: Needless to say Lance Call was not one of our favorite people.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, I understand that.

Mr. Dingfelder: Giving you an idea on the airplane, in the year and a half that I was there, we were not able to get one C-82 to fly 100 hours--

Mr. Daniel: (Laughs).

Mr. Dingfelder: --without a major overhaul. We had to take all of these airplanes down to Warner Robins for an overhaul--

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: --and that brings up another experience.

Mr. Daniel: Where was Warner Roberts, in Florida?

Mr. Dingfelder: No, it's Macon, Georgia.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, Macon, Georgia. Okay. What was the experience, or should I ask?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, the airplanes were so bad, in such bad condition, before going in for this major overhaul at Warner Robins, that we did what we could to get them flyable so we could fly them from Donaldson down to Warner Robins.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: We were supposed to take an airplane up to make sure that it would make the flight, so we went up and we--it was just supposed to be a short flight--and as a result of this, because of what we were going, I took my tool kit up. At this time, I was a combination flight engineer and crew chief.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay. I was wondering. Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, I had both of those jobs, as did all of them. And anyway, I got on, and all I had in my flight jacket was a pair of needle-nosed pliers.

Mr. Daniel: Right.

Mr. Dingfelder: We got up and for some reason or another, the pilot decided to retract--

Mr. Daniel: (Laughs). Bad idea!

Mr. Dingfelder: He retracted the right gear; he half retracted the left gear, and the nose gear wouldn't come down at all.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man! Why'd he do that?

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, so with my needle-nosed pliers, I was able to use them like a can opener to open up the area where the free-fall mechanism was, and I finally was able to get the left gear down. I finally got hand room into the area where the free-fall mechanism in the nose was, and I put my foot on the gear, reached in and found whatever it was, and it dropped.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, my God! Okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Anyway, we found out afterwards that my next-door neighbor with the next C-82 had trouble with his free-fall system, so he took a copy of--took mine out and copied it without putting it in the chart--

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: --and put it in backwards.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding!

Mr. Dingfelder: They would not let me land it at Donaldson, so I had to fly down to Warner Robins with the airplane, and I got down there with no clothes, (laughs), no nothing, and spent two days waiting for stuff to get down there and the rest of the airplanes.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, man!

Mr. Dingfelder: So, anyway, that's the--I had a great pilot and co-pilot, flew all over the place, but so much problems. Every time we'd land someplace, there'd be a major problem and trying to get equipment so we could work on the airplane was almost impossible. We couldn't get parts for it, so every time we got to another field, they'd close the parts shop, because they knew we would come in there begging or stealing. Anyway--

Mr. Daniel: They were noisy aircraft to fly, weren't they?

Mr. Dingfelder: Very noisy!

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought. And the wind would whip through them?

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, the R-2800s, they did have a collector ring, but trying to work on them--and that's part of the reason for my deafness, along with a 10,000 foot drop in World War II--

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, I'll bet that didn't help matters.

Mr. Dingfelder --but we'd get someplace and--for example, we'd go out to Norton, out here, and we had a leak, and I knew where it was and knew how to fix it. But they wouldn't let me. It had to be civil service people.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay, yeah.

Mr. Dingfelder: So I had to wait three days to get somebody to fix it.

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: But I got out right before the group was assigned the C, was it C-17s? No--

Mr. Daniel: No, 117s, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: 117s, and I was discharged because my reserve time ran out and they went over.

Mr. Daniel: And you weren't going to go back in again.

Mr. Dingfelder: Not for that (laughs), no.

Mr. Daniel: Right. I understand.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, at this time I had a son and a fourteen-month old and--

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: --anyway, one of my best friends was the navigator. He was killed over there somehow, don't know how.

Mr. Daniel: So, when were you discharged?

Mr. Dingfelder: March 1952.

Mr. Daniel: Ah, okay. Yeah, you would've made the long flight over.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Daniel: The 10,000 foot drop, let's talk about that, then we'll talk about what you--a few things you did after that.

Mr. Dingfelder: Okay.

Mr. Daniel: So how did you get a 10,000 foot drop here?

Mr. Dingfelder: We went into a joint raid on Munich. Eighth Air Force, Ninth Air Force, Fifteenth Air Force, Twelfth Air Force, everybody, and we'd never seen so many airplanes in our life. They were supposed to be dropping bombs every twenty minutes for twenty-four hours.

Mr. Daniel: Wow!

Mr. Dingfelder: We got in there, and we got into a situation where we ran into prop wash--

Mr. Daniel: Ohhhh!

Mr. Dingfelder: --and we were floating down in between all these airplanes that were around, and we dropped a pure 10,000 feet. I found that out later from the pilot, and--

Mr. Daniel: Wow! Is that because of the prop wash, or were you just trying to get out of Dodge?

Mr. Dingfelder: (Unclear) the prop wash and get out of the way--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay (unclear).

Mr. Dingfelder: --and also, the recovery time--

Mr. Daniel: Yeah. Whoa!

Mr. Dingfelder: --and anyway, I can remember sitting there with the other waist gunner, face to face, and remember the oxygen masks were green? So were our faces!

Mr. Daniel: Yeah, I can understand that.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, but anyway, we came back up and when we got there, we joined another B-17 group and we noticed that every one of the guns on the airplanes from this group that we joined were trained on us. The B-17 had been captured--some of them had been captured by the Germans.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: (Unclear) did that. They stayed that way until they saw us open our bomb bay doors and dropped our bombs, and we got back safely.

Mr. Daniel: Whoa! Yeah, that was the ones they used to tease people with and you'd fly, and they'd fly them off in bad places. They would lead the other groups away. Yeah, wow!

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, what did you do--okay, you got out in March of '52. What did you do? Just give me a brief--what did you do for the civilian world?

Mr. Dingfelder: Okay. I went to work for a small, a minor appliance company, and started out in Pittsburgh, moved to St. Louis, and then moved to Chicago. Each time I went from different--from a district manager to a regional manager.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: Well, the company I was working for was a raider, was raided, and so I applied and became a special market sales manager for another company in Racine, Wisconsin.

Mr. Daniel: Ahh, okay.

Mr. Dingfelder: I was with them for seven years, and then decided to move out here because they were moving back to New England, and I didn't want to go back there with my family again and travel. So I moved out here and I became a rep and worked as a sales rep for a company, a couple of companies, and then was a manager for a sling--lifting slings--

Mr. Daniel: Oh, okay!

Mr. Dingfelder: --nylon and polyester slings. And then at the age of 63, I retired.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. Why'd you stay in California?

Mr. Dingfelder: I can't think of a better place to live (laughs). There are a lot of faults in California, but the weather is not one of them--

Mr. Daniel: I understand.

Mr. Dingfelder: --and the things that you can do, it's just a great place.

Mr. Daniel: In case you're wondering, that's why I live where I do in Texas (laughs).

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah, right.

Mr. Daniel: Okay, do you want to add anything to this?

Mr. Dingfelder: I can't think of anything. The only thing that bothered me is, I went to Penn State, got an education, I was a national sales manager, but the officers in this organization treat you like a dumb enlisted man.

Mr. Daniel: Oh, what organization is that? Here at the museum? Yeah, okay. Vern must be one of these officers, right?

Mr. Dingfelder: Oh, Vern is one of the guys. Well, it's not them; it's generally the higher--colonels and above.

Mr. Daniel: Right. That's what I figured.

Mr. Dingfelder: Yeah. No, most of the guys we work with are great. We work with both officers and enlisted.

Mr. Daniel: Well, with that, I'm going to it off.

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