

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Bernard M. Kuse**

**LaGrange, Texas**

**June 10, 2008**

**601<sup>st</sup> Bomb Squadron, 398<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force**

**Radio Operator on a B-17**

**First Mission August 24, 1944, Last Mission December 24, 1944**

**36 Missions**

**Air Medal with Five Oak Leaf Clusters, Three Battle Stars**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is June 10, 2008. I am interviewing Mr. Bernard M. Kuse by telephone. His telephone number is area code 979-242-3675. His address is 418 Clear Lake Drive, LaGrange, Texas 78945. 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

Bernie, 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 during World War II. The first thing I would like to do is get an alternative contact. We have found out that sometimes in two or three years we try to contact a Veteran and he has moved or something has happened. Do you have a son or daughter or someone that you might give us a name and phone number in case we can't reach you?

Mr. Kuse

Wayne C. Kuse in Sherman, Texas. He is a Retired Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force. His address is 1301 State Highway 289, Sherman, Texas 75092. His phone number is 903-892-7286, that is his business number. His home number is 903-813-0453.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the next thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Nimitz Museum. When I do these in person I give them to the man to read and sign but since this is by phone, let me read it to you to make sure it is okay. "Agreement Read." Is that okay?

Mr. Kuse

That is okay with me. That will not prevent me from giving a copy to my son or my bomb group?

Mr. Misenhimer

No, it doesn't prevent you from doing anything. In fact, we encourage you to make copies to give out to family, friends or whoever you would like to.

Mr. Kuse

My son would like to have one and my daughter would like to have one. That's where the two will go when I get them.

Mr. Misenhimer

If you want to make copies for anyone else, the Historical Society or whoever, you are welcome to.

Mr. Kuse

Thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Kuse

September 15, 1922.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Kuse

Austin, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Kuse

I have two brothers that survived birth and two that died right after birth.

Mr. Misenhimer

The two that survived, were they involved in World War II?

Mr. Kuse

Yes sir, both of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they come home?

Mr. Kuse

Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

Are they still living?

Mr. Kuse

One is, one is not.

Mr. Misenhimer

The one that is still living, if I could get his name and phone number, maybe I could interview him?

Mr. Kuse

He lives in Schulenburg. He's my older brother. His name is Frank F. Kuse. He was a Staff Sergeant in the Air Force also. I think he went to the Philippines after World War II was over. I don't think he was over there during the war. His number is 979-743-4565. I might mention that he is hard of hearing and can barely talk on the phone.

Mr. Misenhimer

We may or may not be able to work that out then.

Mr. Kuse

I would say that it would be very doubtful that you can talk to him very long. And while I'm thinking about it, do you want the name and number of that fellow that I was telling you about up at Fredericksburg, the USS *Colorado*. His name is Charles Ritter. He lives here in LaGrange. His number is 979-968-5603. He is a retired barber. He just lost his wife a month or so ago. He goes up to Fredericksburg every year on Memorial Day and he was on the USS *Colorado*. I believe he was present at the signing of the armistice.

Mr. Misenhimer

In Tokyo Bay?

Mr. Kuse

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, I'll get hold of him and see if we can talk together.

Mr. Kuse

He's out of town right now. He's over in Europe but he will be back in a couple weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Next question. You grew up during the Depression, how did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Kuse

My dad lost his job in 1929 and never found one afterwards. When he went to interviews they always told him he was too old.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of work was he doing?

Mr. Kuse

He could do just about anything. He was a tailor. He did showcase paintings for store windows where they would put their stuff up on sale. He made all the display cards for sales. He was very flexible with his ability to do things with his hands.

Mr. Misenhimer

But he wasn't able to get another job?

Mr. Kuse

No kind of job.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you all survive?

Mr. Kuse

I worked as a pin boy at a bowling alley from the time I was 5 ½ until I graduated from high school in 1940. In the meantime, I was able, when I was about 8 years old to get a job as a Page in the House of Representatives in Austin, Texas. I worked there every semester until I got out of high school in 1940. I had the pleasure of meeting, personally, a lot of the Texas politicians from Governor Allred all the way up to Pappy O'Daniel and beyond him. Actually I started working up there when Ma and Pa Ferguson were in the Governor's Office. Coke Stevenson was the Speaker of the House for a time and Homer Leonard from McAllen was Speaker of the House. I had the privilege of knowing Mrs. Hobby who was Parliamentarian at the Legislature and subsequently became the commanding officer of the Women's Army Corps. Lyndon Johnson, of course.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oveta Culp Hobby was her name.

Mr. Kuse

Yes. Very, very brilliant lady.

Mr. Misenhimer

She was. Didn't they own the Houston Post or something? Her family?

Mr. Kuse

Yes they did. The Hobby family was well known and quite wealthy and they did own the Houston Post.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good old South Texas Politics.

Mr. Kuse

Yes, that's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your brothers also work and help support the family?

Mr. Kuse

Yes. The oldest one is deceased and he was in the Air Corps also in North Africa in Air Corps Supply. He was a Buck Sergeant. If you are interested in a little anecdote about my enlistment, I will tell you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure.

Mr. Kuse

When I got out of high school, I moved to Houston to live with him and went to work for a place called Red Arrow Freight Lines. I was working in the accounting department. My brother was older and he was going to be drafted, he knew sooner or later and he wanted

to get into the Aviation Cadet Program. But he had been out of school for about six years so he wasn't sure that he was going to be able to handle the math aspect of it. So he talked me into going down and volunteering to take the test to go into the Cadets. Which I did. He said, "You don't have to worry. You're underweight so they wouldn't take you anyway." I said, "I'm not worried about it, but if you want me to do so, I'll be glad to see what the test looks like." I went down and passed it and was sworn in. (Laugh) He took it and didn't pass it and wasn't sworn in. Then he enlisted in what they called the Ellington Volunteers out of Houston. There were about 10,000 of them that enlisted at the same time. They were promised that they would stay at Ellington for three months after they enlisted before they would be moved out. That was their incentive for all of them going in. Then he did and went to a school for Air Corps Supply and was then shipped over to North Africa.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this before or after December 7<sup>th</sup>?

Mr. Kuse

That was after December 7<sup>th</sup>. We enlisted in 1942, both of us.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your enlistment date?

Mr. Kuse

August 19, 1942 in the ERC and was called to Active Duty on February 19, 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that happened before you went into the service?



Mr. Kuse

When I quit working in the Legislature and supporting the family I went down to Houston and went to work for Red Arrow Freight Lines and was inducted in Houston and shipped over to Aviation Cadet Center at San Antonio on February 19, 1943. That began my military career.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you recall where you were when you heard about it?

Mr. Kuse

Yes sir. I was on the second tee at the golf course in Houston at the City Park area. My older brother and I were going to play golf. It was the first and only time that I was ever on a golf course in my life. We were just getting ready to tee off at the second hole when a guy came running out of the clubhouse and said, "My God, Japan has attacked Pearl Harbor." So we just put up our clubs and went by a convenience store, like the 7-11's, and got a couple cases of beer and went home and turned on every radio in the house.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Kuse

I knew that I would be going in because the draft was already in existence at that time. So it was just a question of when I became of age enough to do so. I didn't want to wait to be drafted so I went ahead and enlisted. I wanted to get into the Air Corps anyway. So it didn't make any difference whether I did it then, or waited until five months later.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you went in, where did you take your basic training?

Mr. Kuse

I'll tell you, I didn't take any basic training. I went over to Aviation Cadet Center and we checked in there. They issued uniforms and we were taught to say, "Yes, sir. No, sir. No excuse sir." About the fourth day there we went and took another flight physical and I flunked it. I was color blind they said. They flunked me out and I was sent up to Wichita Falls, Texas. When I got up there, I had to have a tooth pulled and was kept in the barracks by the dentist. A Lieutenant came through the barracks for inspection and he was also the Supply Officer and he asked me what I was doing in the barracks. I told him and showed him my excuse for being there. He asked what type of work I did in civilian life. I told him that I worked in the accounting department of a Class One motor carrier. He said, "Do you type?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Report to me tomorrow morning in Supply at 8:00." So I did. This Lieutenant was from A & M. I remember all the people that were permanent party there at that time called him Lieutenant Club Foot because he had a difficult time walking up and down the steps. He was a little bit pigeon toed. I reported in and they put me to work in there doing typing work and filling requests for uniforms and supplies and so forth. After about two weeks there the Supply Sergeant was shipped overseas. He had orders to go overseas. He hadn't been overseas so they shipped him overseas and made me acting Supply Sergeant. In the meantime, I had not taking any basic training whatsoever. No drill. No KP. No guard duty. No nothing. What I picked up, I picked up from watching others and keeping my ears open and my mouth shut, I guess is the way you could put it. We were there about five or six weeks. Then the Air

Force came out with a new instruction that if you were color blind, if you could pass what they called a red and green yarn test, that you could qualify for flight duty as a crew member. So I volunteered for that immediately. I went up and took the red and green yarn test and passed it and qualified for radio school or mechanics or any of the tech schools that they had. So they sent me to radio school at Scott Field.

Mr. Misenhimer

Scott Field is in Illinois, right?

Mr. Kuse

Right, at Belleville, Illinois. About 14 miles from St. Louis. A funny thing, I met my wife at the USO there. Later my brother was stationed there right after VE Day and he met his wife there and then in the latter years my son was stationed there twice, once in base operations and he met his wife there. So I stayed at Scott Field going to radio school and got out of there, I think in about November of 1943. Then I was assigned to gunnery school at Yuma, Arizona. We got out there and we went to take our gunnery training and I remember how cold it was at night and how hot it was during the day. We would leave for the firing range in the morning with overcoats on and by 8:00 in the morning we were peeling off our outside shirt if we could get it off. We started out in basic gunnery school firing shotguns at skeet. Then they moved us over to what they called the moving base range. We got into the back of a truck and they drove around this track. There were 24 houses around the track and we had 12 gauge shotguns and we were shooting skeet from the moving base. That taught you how to track an airplane that was moving while you were moving. We completed that and passed it. We were trained, naturally, all this time on 50 caliber machine guns. How to field strip it. How to repair it. How to load it, how to

respect it and so forth. Then we started air to air firing to see if we were proficient enough to be aerial gunners, so to speak. In the meantime, I had made PFC when I went to radio school. When we got out of gunnery school I was promoted to Corporal. I passed my air to air firing and was sent to Avon Park, Florida for an OTU assignment.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you finish this gunnery school?

Mr. Kuse

In February of 1944. I went down to Avon Park the latter part of February I believe it was. I don't know if you are familiar with Florida, but Avon Park is the fairgrounds for the county that Tampa, Florida is in. This is a big building something like an exposition hall and we had all of our Air Corps personnel in there, of all types. We were gunners, we were radio operators, we were armorers and we were engineers. From that pool they selected the crews. They had another pool for pilots and copilots. We were assigned to a crew and the pilot and copilot came over and introduced themselves to us and then we went to Avon Park, Florida to start our training together.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up. At the gunnery school, you mentioned about firing airborne. What kind of plane were you in to do that?

Mr. Kuse

We were flying B-17's. They were pulling targets with C-47's. Of course, the pilots of the C-47's were those that had screwed up in training some place along the line so they got all the nice duty, let a bunch of ignorant gunners shoot at them (Laugh) even though they weren't supposed to, but when you're pulling a target and it's only 100 yards behind you.

I was firing a pair of twin-50's. You hope they can aim.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes because you have to aim ahead to lead it.

Mr. Kuse

That's right and you don't want to shoot the tail off of the other one. (Laugh) That would get you a bad job. That was the aircraft that we trained on there. We didn't get many hours in them, maybe three or four hours in all the time that we were there.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said a twin-50 caliber, what position were you shooting from?

Mr. Kuse

Waist gun.

Mr. Misenhimer

They twins on the waist?

Mr. Kuse

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was more than one plane shooting at that tow target?

Mr. Kuse

Just one plane. They had several tow targets and several bombers and you went up for just your firing schedule and then came back down and somebody else went up.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know in some of the fighter training they would have several of them firing at the same one, so they would paint the bullets so they could tell who hit it.

Mr. Kuse

We had painted bullets too so that we could tell whether or not we had hit it. The paint on my shells was red and I got it all over my field jacket. I remember that. I never got it off. Then they would count the red holes in the tow target to see how many times you hit it. They knew how many rounds you fired. I don't remember how many rounds we fired but I know that is how they figured it. That and you had to blindfold field strip a 50 caliber machine gun in a very limited amount of time. I forget how much but I think it was about a minute or a minute and a half or something like that. If you've ever done a 50 caliber machine gun you know there are a lot of little pieces that go in that thing. We started firing out on the range on this little fixed base with twin-30's. They had them mounted out there. There was a big track that ran around there with little railroad cars and they had the target on it and you fired at that. I remember one late afternoon we were through firing and had just about policed the area up, and one of the gunnery instructors was there and he loaded up a pair of those 30's and there was a jackrabbit out on the range there. The jackrabbit started running down through there so he grabbed that mount and started firing away at it. I think that jackrabbit probably thought he had died and gone to hell. He never thought anybody would be shooting that kind of stuff at him. But he didn't hit him either. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

The crew that you basically joined, they had trained at Ellsworth Air Force Base you said?

Mr. Kuse

The group that I joined. That was the 398<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group Heavy. They were assigned as

a group to Station 131 of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force over in England.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think that we talked and that is in Nuthampstead.

Mr. Kuse

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then go ahead with what you were telling me.

Mr. Kuse

When we were down at Avon Park we fooled around as a crew just doing some navigational flights. Not navigation but just getting oriented to the aircraft and to each other. After about 3 or 4 weeks we got a bombardier that flew with us and he did the navigating. Later on we got a navigator assigned to us. They were the last ones that were assigned to the crew. Then we started practicing our formation flying and practiced some bomb runs over Lake Okeechobee. We were down there from March until about the latter part of May or early June when we left Avon Park. We were assigned to go overseas to the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. When you got over there then they assigned you to a group or a squadron. We were supposed to fly over. The day that we were going to leave Hunter Field at Savannah, Georgia we lost our bombardier because they couldn't fit him with an oxygen mask. He had a long jaw and they couldn't get it to where it wouldn't leak. They took him off the crew and assigned him to a B-24 outfit. We had no bombardier so a couple of days later they assigned a bombardier to the crew and we all went by train to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and went overseas from there. While we were at Camp Kilmer we were billeted at the same barracks as a bunch of fellows that had been over and

completed tours of duty and were going back. So they didn't care if school kept or not. I'll tell you when they went to bed, instead of going over and turning off the light, they would just take a big GI shoe and throw it up there and knocked the light bulb out. They knew what was going on. They had been there. Done that. They wanted to forget the rest of it. They were a pretty salty bunch.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were going back, you say?

Mr. Kuse

They were going back for another tour, yes. That was in May of 1944. Then we went aboard ship and we were aboard ship for ten days I think it was going over. It was an English ship. I remember going up the gangplank there, we carried all of our flight equipment. I only weighed 123 pounds. I had my flight bag with all my flying stuff in it and my clothes and everything. They told us that we had to take blankets aboard with us. We had those rolled up tight and bent in a u-shape and put them around the zip bag that we carried. I started up the gangplank with that thing. We had tied them with shoestrings and the shoestring broke and that thing straightened out like a pole. I was hitting the poles on the gangplank and couldn't move. I remember the guy that was taking us on was hollering, "Get up here as fast as you can. You are holding up everything." Then the guys behind me started pushing me and I got up there before long anyhow. That was on July 18, 1944. We got on early in the morning because we sailed at 05:00. The ship was the HMS *Tamaroa*.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that trip over there?



Mr. Kuse

Miserable. We were down in the hold. You could come up on deck only during certain hours of the day. When they would have gunnery training they would bring you up and sit you down there. Some guy in one of the outfits decided that he would be real smart. This was an English crew on this ship. One of the English officers walked in front of him and he had on his starched white shorts. They were immaculate. Somebody whistled at him. So we all got confined to quarters. That's where I learned too, that you don't wash you hair unless you've got saltwater soap.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were the accommodations like? How many bunks high?

Mr. Kuse

We were about 5 or 6 bunks high.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there much seasickness?

Mr. Kuse

No, not going over. Coming back there was, but not going over.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in a convoy?

Mr. Kuse

Yes. We were in a convoy and we were escorted by Canadian Corvettes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else from your trip over?

Mr. Kuse

Nothing except that it was miserable. The food was terrible. We ate hard boiled eggs for breakfast that had been hard boiled for about four weeks ago when the left Southampton to come over. You almost had to shave them before you ate them.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many meals a day did you get?

Mr. Kuse

We got breakfast and the evening meal. Since we were all non-commissioned officers they let us have access to the British non-com PX. So we could buy tomato juice and those little peanut butter crackers. We could buy those and that's what most of us survived on.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did your second meal consist of?

Mr. Kuse

The second meal, I don't even remember to be honest with you. It couldn't have been very good.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard people talk about mutton a lot of times. Did you get mutton?

Mr. Kuse

We got mutton overseas only after we killed the goat that lived on our base. We had a lot of pork. Overseas we got a lot of pork.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you land in England?

Mr. Kuse

We landed in England on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July at 21:00. We landed at Liverpool. That's when we realized that this was war because when we pulled into the harbor at Liverpool you saw bomb damaged facilities. When we got off the boat there, we got on an English train. They had these little English trains that had separate compartments that you got into. You don't get into the end and walk through. They were very, very rank conscious. We were sitting together as a crew, pilot, copilot and other officers and the rest of the crew were all together and the MP came by and made us separate. They put them in the officer's quarters and left us where we were. That's when we learned about the English attitude towards rank.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these MP's U.S. or British?

Mr. Kuse

They were British MP's. We went from there to a place that I can't remember the name of but it was for the radio operators. The crew was separated. Radio operators went to one school to learn United Kingdom procedures and the gunners went to a place called The Wash for gunnery practice. The pilots and copilots went to another place for flight training and to get checked out. The navigators went to another place to learn UK procedure and be checked out as navigators and the bombardiers went to another place.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you went to radio school?

Mr. Kuse

I went just to a refresher course. I didn't have to go to radio school there. I just had to go

to learn their procedures. Like we had never run into this business of “What is a QDM?”  
*(Editors note: A QDM is a fix sent out by three radio stations in England that would give you the exact number of degrees the plane was from where they were in England.)* “How are you going to be receiving your messages? dit dit dit dot?” “When do you break in and can you break in?” Radio silence was paramount. But we didn’t do much, in fact, I never did transmit from the air the whole time I was there. After we completed about three or four weeks of this we were then assigned to the 398<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, 601<sup>st</sup> Squadron at Nuthampstead. We got there in July. I flew my first mission on August 24, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Kuse

We had flown a little bit over there in practice formation flying and to get used to the way the British did things. We were sleeping in tents at an old barracks. All of a sudden at 1:00 one morning there was a guy who came running in with a flashlight and turned on the light and said, <sup>Marson's</sup> “~~Marson~~’s crew.” <sup>Marson</sup> “Marson was my pilot. “Marson’s crew, you are flying today.” So that was the first time we knew about it. We got up and had breakfast and got our heavy duty flying clothes. Picked up a parachute and went to briefing. In briefing they told us where we were going, what the bomb load was going to be, what we could expect from antiaircraft and fighter tactics. They gave us the take off time and probably the length of the flight as close as they could. Then we went out and got into a big truck and they took us out to the aircraft. We preflighted there, everyone to their own specialty and then we got in and waited for the Very pistol to go off that we were going

to take off.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now on the briefing, the officers and the crew were not together were you?

Mr. Kuse

Yes we were together. All the crew except for the navigators. They were in another group because they were working on charts in and out. All the rest of us were together.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that the common procedure?

Mr. Kuse

Yes sir. That was the common procedure. If it was something unusual, I would imagine they would have had some briefing of the officers that was different. But we never ran into anything, that I know of, that we weren't all together. That mission took us to a town called Kolleda, Germany. That was on August 24<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that mission?

Mr. Kuse

That mission was about 6 to 6 ½ hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was round trip?

Mr. Kuse

Yes. It took quite a while to get assembled. After you took off you went to what they called the beacon. And you circled that beacon until you could get into your position that you were going to fly. If you were going to fly lead, deputy lead or tail end charlie or

whatever it was. You had to pick your spot and get into it. After the group, which would be three squadrons, that would be 36 aircraft, got together, after they got all formed and in position, then you had to join the wing and then you joined the Air Force Division, which would be 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup>. We were in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. We were B-17's. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was B-24's and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was B-17's. We would find our spot there. You had the lead ship that was leading you and you just followed him mostly, like a little puppy dog follows his master. When everybody got assembled then the lead group would take out for Germany and away we went. It took about 1 ½ to 2 hours to get assembled that way.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that part of the 6 ½ hours, or was the 6 ½ hours after that?

Mr. Kuse

It was 6 ½ hours from the ground up. Our longest one was about 14 hours. That time there were 11 hours on oxygen. That was down to Czechoslovakia on September 12. We went down all the way to a little town called Brux, Czechoslovakia.

Mr. Misenhimer

Go ahead and tell me all about that first mission.

Mr. Kuse

We went to this little place in Germany. The radio operator on a deal like that, we bombed off the lead ship. They would drop a smoke bomb and when they did that, everybody else dropped their bombs at the same time. When you got to where you were to start your bomb run, you had what was called your IP, initial point. From the IP on to your target, you flew straight and level, never deviated from your course or did any kind

of evasive action whatsoever. So you were on a line and you stayed there The whole squadron and the whole group stayed there. That's when we caught heck from the anti-aircraft fire. On our first mission we didn't get hit by fighters but we did run into a lot of flak. You run into flak every time. If you crossed the Channel and got over the Continent, you were going to get flak. Then when we got to the IP the radio operator had two primary jobs. All the time you are listening to your home base and monitoring what they are saying and what they are sending. They weren't saying anything, they would have to send it by Morse Code. We copied everything that they sent. Then when we hit the IP, I would open the door to the bomb bay and the bombardier, in his time interval would open the bomb bay doors. I sat on the floor between the door of the bomb bay and the radio desk, watching the bombs go out to be sure that they were all out and during that 10 or 15 minute flight from the IP, I was throwing what they called chaff out the door. We had a chaff chute right next to the radio operator. We would drop the chaff out of there. We were supposed to drop three packets every 10 seconds. So most of us that were radio operators figured that if three of them in 10 seconds would do some good, six every 10 seconds would do better. So we managed to scavenge and steal and appropriate, whatever would you want to use, any chaff that we could find. Sometimes we would even pick up a bunch of old nuts and bolts and stuff like that throw it out. Anything to disrupt that radar.

Mr. Misenhimer

That chaff was aluminum strips, right?

Mr. Kuse

Right, just like Christmas tree tinsel or icicles. We would have maybe six cartons of that

in the plane. They allocated it out depending on how long the bomb run was going to be. They gave you what they thought you needed. If you wanted more, you went and got it someplace. Then on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August we flew our third mission and that was to Schoenfeld and on the 30<sup>th</sup> we went to Kiel, Germany. Then we went on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, we went to Brux, Czechoslovakia and our seventh mission was on September 10<sup>th</sup> and it was to Stuttgart. Number eight was on the 12<sup>th</sup> to Brux, Czechoslovakia. Then nine was to Lutzkendorf, Germany. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of September we went to Hamm, Germany. On the 25<sup>th</sup> we went Frankfurt, Germany. On the 27<sup>th</sup> we went to Cologne, Germany. On the 28<sup>th</sup> we went to Magdeburg, Germany. We came back from that one with 202 holes in the ship. So you can see we got into some artillery flak.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was all from artillery, right?

Mr. Kuse

Yes, all flak. Then that ship was salvaged. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, we went to Munster, Germany. October 3<sup>rd</sup> to Nürnberg, Germany. October 5<sup>th</sup> to Cologne, Germany. October 6<sup>th</sup> to Atenbrandenberg, Germany. On the October 9<sup>th</sup> to Schweinfurt, Germany. On October 14<sup>th</sup> to Cologne, Germany.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that Schweinfurt was a pretty tough mission, right?

Mr. Kuse

Schweinfurt was, yes. We went to Schweinfurt a couple of times and it was bad but Merseberg was worse. We went to Cologne on October 15<sup>th</sup>. The ship that we had been assigned to that day, we didn't fly because we had a stand down. You flew three missions



and then you stood down one mission for rest. On the 15<sup>th</sup> our crew was stand down and another crew that we trained with took our aircraft and they flew it to Cologne. In the meantime, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force said they wanted an all out mission so they activated everybody that could fly, to fly that mission. So we were assigned another aircraft and we flew with them. But on that day, the crew flying our plane got a direct hit by an 88 right on the chin-turret and blew the whole thing off from the pilot's windshield forward. It killed the young man that was flying as Togglier. I had trained with him. A very close friend of mine. They brought that aircraft back to Nuthampstead with no hydraulic system, no brakes and just guts. The pilot of the aircraft was a fellow by the name of Lieutenant DeLancey. He was awarded the DFC for flying it back. There is a picture of that aircraft at the Wright Patterson Museum in Dayton, Ohio.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the name of that plane?

Mr. Kuse

I don't know what the name of it was. We hadn't named it. We didn't go much by names of airplanes anymore because they were all silver at that time. They had gone back to taking off the camouflage paint. All it did was slow you down with extra weight.

Then on October 22<sup>nd</sup> we went to Brunswick, Germany. On the 26<sup>th</sup> we went to Munster, Germany. *(Tape side ended.)*

Mr. Misenhimer

Go back to about the last two and pick up from there.

Mr. Kuse

On October 26<sup>th</sup> we went Munster, Germany and on October 28<sup>th</sup> we went back to

Munster and on November 2<sup>nd</sup> we went to Merseberg, Germany. That was probably the mission that I remember the most because we nearly got killed on that one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Kuse

We got hit just as we dropped our bombs, with flak. The air, you could get out and walk on it. I've never seen it that thick before in my life. As we started off and dropped the bombs and turned away from the target, the lead crew called for 1,000 foot drop in altitude. So the whole group dropped 1,000 feet and turned to the right, I believe it was. The fellows in the planes didn't know what was going on except for the pilot and copilot. They didn't have time to relay back to us what we were going to do. We thought we were going down. We had holes all over the place and we thought for sure we were headed for the happy hunting ground. I started back to the waist so that I could bail out. I got out there and I didn't have my parachute so I had to go back and get it. By the time I got back we found out that we were all alright. We were still airborne and under control. So that stopped the abandon ship deal. Then on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November we went to Hamburg. The 5<sup>th</sup> we went to Hanau, Germany. The 27<sup>th</sup> we went to Metz, France. On that day another member that we had trained with in the States, an officer but I don't remember his name, he was killed on that mission. It was supposed to have been what they called a milk run, which was just like flying in a traffic pattern almost. But anytime you got up there and somebody shot at you, you took a chance. On November 21<sup>st</sup> we went back to Merseberg and on November 29<sup>th</sup> we sent back. The reason we kept going to Merseberg was because of ball bearing plants. That's what they were making there. That was part of what was

called the strategic bombing area. We wanted to get German industry to where they were paralyzed and couldn't produce. Everything moved on ball bearings so we figured if we could knock that thing out.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes and Schweinfurt was ball bearings too, wasn't it?

Mr. Kuse

Yes, Schweinfurt was also ball bearings. Merseberg had ball bearings and they had coal too, synthetic oil plants. That was on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of December we went to Stuttgart and on December 12<sup>th</sup> we went back to Merseberg again. On the 19<sup>th</sup> we went to Kassel, Germany. We briefed everyday until the 18<sup>th</sup> and we went to Cologne again. The we briefed from then until the 24<sup>th</sup> everyday and we didn't get off the ground until Christmas Eve and we went to a little place called Kirchgon Airfield Germany.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it weather why you didn't get off the ground?

Mr. Kuse

Yes. We were weathered in. That is when the Battle of the Bulge started. We went to this airfield right outside of Bastogne to knock out the runways so the Germans couldn't bring in any fighters. We didn't know that they didn't have any that they could bring up anyway. Back in November, on one of those missions, I don't remember which one it was, is when we saw the first ME-262's, which was the German jet.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Kuse

The came at us out of the sun and before you could say, "There's a plane" they were gone. We were doing our maximum speed which usually was 130 with a bomb load and gas load and they were running around at 275 to 300 at least. They came in, head on to us, fired at us, and that was it. They didn't hit us, thank God. That was the first time we had seen them. We knew that they were working on them but we didn't know that they were operational yet. Intelligence found out that they were operational and they started doing some work on it and found out that they required an extra long runway to take off and to land, so they could spot where they came from. So when they found out they could do this, the P-51's and P-47's would fly out there with us and look around and when they found the airfield that they came from, they would just fly a traffic pattern basically until they came back. They would be coming in for a landing, they would be low on fuel. They only had about a 20 minute fuel supply. They would come in for landing and the P-51's and P-47's would shoot them down like ducks.

When we took off on the 24<sup>th</sup>, they said that we had about 10 hours of flight time into the Bastogne area and back and we should be back in England in plenty of time before the weather socked in on us again. They missed the weather. We got over there and dropped our bombs and started back. We got back to England and we had 10-tenths cloud coverage. We couldn't get into our base. In fact, we couldn't get into any bases south of London. So we ended up landing at a British Air Force base. Probably the most frightening thing of my entire combat was that last mission because we came from 19,000 feet down to 400 feet in 10-tenths cloud coverage in formation with about 1,000 airplanes in the air all around you. You had to maintain a real disciplined approach.

Every 30 seconds somebody would drop into the landing pattern. We came out at about 400 feet and you never saw so many airplanes on an airfield on your life. We landed and got to the end of the runway and the control tower told us to just park it anyplace. The pilot took it over to the first place he could find where he could set it down. We stopped there. There was somebody chewing on our tail all the way in. We were only 30 seconds apart. We went to eat and we couldn't eat because we didn't have any money. The pilot had to sign a chit with the English before they would feed us. Then we got fed and the trucks came up from the base. We were only about 45 miles from where our base was. They came up and got us and took us back to the base. The next day, which was Christmas, the pilot, copilot, engineer and myself went back by truck up there to get the airplane. We got up there and cranked up the old girl and brought her home. I will never forget my copilot on that last mission. We were coming in to Nuthampstead and our control tower's name was Moran Control. We were flying a ship with P on our tail which meant P for Peter. We would say, "Moran Control this is New Way, (that was squadron call sign), P for Peter on Down wind leg for the last time." We knew we were going home. We made that landing and that was the last time I flew in a combat aircraft.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date was that?

Mr. Kuse

Christmas Eve, 1944 and the day we went and took the plane back to the base was Christmas Day, 1944. That was our 36<sup>th</sup> mission. We didn't get credit for them but we flew three others. We didn't get credit for them because they were scrubbed before we dropped the bombs. The weather or somebody had to abort or something.

Mr. Misenhimer

So actually you went on 39 but only 36 counted?

Mr. Kuse

Yes. 36 counted. That's what we got credit for. I'm looking at the DD-214. That's what they gave us credit for.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's see your first mission was on?

Mr. Kuse

August 24, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

So exactly four months, from August 24<sup>th</sup> to December 24<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Kuse

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see many planes get shot down?

Mr. Kuse

Not too many shot down. I saw several of them go down by flak hits, not by fighters but by flak hits. Fighters we didn't see too much of. I didn't because I was back in the fuselage and didn't have an open window except a little thing about the size of a newspaper. I wasn't looking out. I was listening to the radio and trying to my duties that were assigned to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were close to the waist gunners right?

Mr. Kuse

Yes. The radio operator is right behind the bomb bay on the B-17. Our space in there was an area about 6' long and that was the compartment there with the door and that went into the waist and then all the way back to the tail from there. Right outside the door to the radio compartment was the ball turret.

You might find something interesting in this little story. We flew an aircraft one time that had been flown for 2 or 3 days before and we didn't know anything about it. It wasn't our plane, it was assigned to us so we flew it. Apparently in one of the missions before, the turret gunner had become airsick and thrown up. Some of the vomit had gotten into the air hose and it froze. When we got into the airplane, nobody knew it, we had our regular oxygen checks which we ran periodically while we were in the air. He didn't answer the oxygen check so the pilot told the waist gunner to go back and take a look at him. He did and he was passed out over the controls. You are supposed to be able to crank that thing up manually to where you can open the door to get out of it. We tried to crank it up manually and we couldn't get it into position where we could open. We could only open the door maybe 1 ½ inches. So we couldn't get him out. He was going to die if we didn't get him out of there. We went and got the hand crank for the wheels and used it like a crowbar and got it underneath that door and three of us pulled on it as hard as we could and yanked and kicked at it. It was an aluminum door on it and we broke it off and we were able to get him out of there. We brought him up to the radio room and put him on pure oxygen and he came to and was alright. When we got back after that mission we got a little flak from the armament officer. He wanted us to sign a statement that would charge us for that door on that thing. He said it couldn't have happened that

way. We said, "You may not think so sir, but it did and it will." We went down to the gunnery training place and put the turret in the same position that it was in and he couldn't open it either. So that stopped that business. When you are flying an airplane, anything that happens should be expendable. Just like if you were overseas and something happened to your gun turret because of some action by the enemy, it shouldn't be your responsibility to pay for it.

We left on January 18<sup>th</sup> to come back to the ZOI. While we were there we went up to a little Repple-Depo in northern England and stayed up there for about a week while they cleared all our stuff to get us to go home. We built sidewalks in the daytime and at night another crew went out and tore them up so we could rebuild them the next day. That kept us out of trouble, they said. Then we went down to Southampton by train and left out of there and came back to the States. We docked on February 2, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that trip back? You said it was worse than the one going over.

Mr. Kuse

It was cold. We came back through the North Atlantic. The ocean was rough. We had 400 walking wounded and about 150 Air Force personnel on there. We did all the KP and Guard Duty and everything. Which we didn't mind but we were tired too. We were just tickled to death that we were going back home. That was the main thing. The little Corvettes were escorting us. The waves were so high, you couldn't even see them when they went down in the swell. Then when they came back up on top of the wave, then you could see them. I remember the second night out of Southampton, we were off the Isle of Wight on the tip of England and they decided they would have a gunnery drill at about



dark. We were down in our quarters in the hold of the ship. All of a sudden you heard the 50's and the 20mm's going off and you thought, "Oh my God, here I am, I'm in all this water. I just got through thinking I was going home and now the damn fools are going to sink us." (Laugh) It wasn't, it was just a drill, but it scared the hell out of us.

Mr. Misenhimer

I can imagine.

Mr. Kuse

We got back to Boston and Miles Standish. We sat outside the Boston Harbor from about 8:30 at night until 11:30, waiting for a pilot to come aboard and take the ship into the harbor. They told us if he didn't get there by 12:00 we were going to have to go back out to sea because there was a storm coming. All of us got out there and prayed for that pilot to get aboard. We got him aboard and when he came aboard he never got such a cheer in his life as he got that day. He thought he had made the winning touchdown. (Laugh) As we sailed into harbor I remember all the guys took their mess kits and threw them out in the middle of Boston Harbor. About 500 mess kits floating around out in the harbor. We were so glad to get home and so thankful that we wouldn't have to eat out of those things for another few days anyhow. The USO and Red Cross met the ship as we got off and got on the train. They had coffee and donuts for us. Which was a welcome, welcome thing. We went to Miles Standish and turned in what few little things we had, uniforms and stuff like that. They fed us a steak dinner and some ice cream and we got ready to get on the train to come down to Fort Sam Houston. When we came back, we came back with a bunch of fellows that were from the 36<sup>th</sup> Division, which was the Texas National Guard. Those guys were pretty salty. They had been through Anzio and landings in Italy and

South France. They didn't give two hoots whether the school kept or not. They were fighting among themselves. There was a little Colonel that built kind of like a spark plug. He got tired of their running around and fighting and everything. He came walking through those cars in just his GI underwear. He said, "If any of you guys think you are tough, come on down, I would like to talk to you. I'll see how tough you really are." They shut up. They were running up and down the train with hand grenades in their hands, carrying German daggers and rifles and guns and stuff. I know that we were just glad that we were in our bunks and out of the way. There was still a little animosity between the Air Force and the Infantry anyway. If you recall, right after D-Day we bombed in France. I wasn't on it, but we bombed ahead of the troops and the wind blew the smoke bomb back and we bombed some of our own troops. In fact we killed General McNair.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was quite a sad thing there.

Mr. Kuse

Yes it was. It was a freak accident but it could happen at any time. You can't control what mother nature is going to do to you. You can try to interpret it, but you may not be reading the right signs.

Mr. Misenhimer

I don't know if it's true or not, but I have read that 20% of the casualties in World War II were caused by friendly fire.

Mr. Kuse

I wouldn't doubt it a bit. I can understand it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Artillery fire, even rifle fire and bombing and all of those things.

Mr. Kuse

You can imagine what it was like over in Korea and Vietnam where they wore no uniforms. You didn't know who you were fighting.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right, no front line.

Mr. Kuse

No front line and no distinguishing marks on the enemy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back in England, did you get a chance to visit with the English people very much?

Mr. Kuse

Yes I did because we used to go down to the pub outside the base. It was about 8 miles from our base. We would ride our bikes over at night and have a few pints with the local residents and play darts with him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they friendly?

Mr. Kuse

Very, very friendly and very conscientious people. The lady that ran this pub, I think it was called the Four Horses, her name was Mrs. Hershey. She was an evacuee from London, she and her son. She ran this pub and I guess it was a hotel too but they only had a couple of rooms. We got to know her and the bartender there. She used to do all of the laundry for myself and my tail gunner and a couple of other fellows on the crew. She

would do all of our laundry, washing and ironing for us. Naturally we paid her but can you imagine getting a set of OD's washed and ironed for 50 cents. (Laugh) Whatever she charged us, we always doubled it. But you can imagine that. Occasionally she would come up to me and say, "Bernie, I've got eggs. Would you like an egg tonight?" Certainly we would and we would go back in the kitchen and she would fry us a fresh egg and maybe half of a tomato out of her garden and a piece of homemade bread. Man, that was like something from heaven.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand a few years ago, they had a reunion there and they put a stained glass window up or something. Were you on that trip?

Mr. Kuse

No I wasn't. I didn't go on that one, that one was at Anstey. One of our planes crashed and hit the cathedral there. We had a stained glass window installed in the church with the names of all in the 398<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group who had been killed.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand this was at that pub you were talking about.

Mr. Kuse

No, I wasn't there. I think it was a different pub. I think the one you are talking about was called the Woodman.

Mr. Misenhimer

You're right.

Mr. Kuse

They still go back over there now. They've got a monument and a memorial at the base.

Even at the Woodman, the farmers around there have taken care of it for us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Whatever this pub is, I've been there and it had about two rooms. It was a little Inn and it had about two rooms and the pub. I think I've told you this. A friend of mine, John Alebis, was in the 398<sup>th</sup>. He was in the 601<sup>st</sup> but he didn't get there until March of April of 1945.

Mr. Kuse

He got there right after Colonel Hunter went down. Colonel Hunter was the commanding officer. He went down, I think, the last day of January, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

John only flew two missions because by then the war got over. He went back over to that pub I'm talking about.

Mr. Kuse

They have had reunions and have gone back over there four or five times in the last ten years. In fact, I think they are going again next year but I'm not sure.

I'll tell you a funny story. After we completed 100 combat missions. We had what was called a 100 combat mission anniversary party. They invited girls from London and all around there to come in for dinner and dancing. Some of those girls and kids over there had never had an orange in their life. They didn't even know what they tasted like. Some of them didn't even know what to do with it, whether you ate the peeling and threw away the inside or if you ate the inside and threw away the peeling. So we used to pull out these big 25 gallon mess tubs with fruit cocktail in it. Those people just went wild over that fruit cocktail. They wanted to have ice cream for them too. The British don't go

much for cold stuff. So they had no means of making the ice cream. So the cooks cooked it all up and put it in those big vats and we put in the waist of a B-17 and took that thing up to about 30,000 feet for about an hour and you had the most frozen ice cream you've ever seen in your life. Think about cost. That cost about \$250 in gas per engine to fly a B-17. By the time you take off and land and everything, you figure about an hour and a half, it was  $\$375 \times 4 = \$1,500$  for that ice cream. (Laugh) But it was worth it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said 100 missions. That was the unit that had flown that many missions?

Mr. Kuse

The group, yes. The 398<sup>th</sup> Group. The 398<sup>th</sup> has four squadrons, 600, 601, 602 and 603. I think the group as a whole flew 180 some-odd missions. I don't remember the total.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fly the same plane all the time?

Mr. Kuse

No sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

Different planes, just whatever was ready?

Mr. Kuse

Whatever was ready because they would come in and they would have to be repaired from battle damage or engine problems or something. We got one ship assigned to us and we flew it three times. Then it got the nose shot off it and they scrubbed it and used it for spare parts.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever lose an engine on any of your flights?

Mr. Kuse

Yes, we lost engines. They didn't bother us. I remember in Florida when we got our navigator. He hadn't flown in a B-17 before. We were flying out over the Gulf of Mexico and nothing to do so most of us were dozing. He dozed off and then woke up and in the meantime we had an engine that seemed to be overheating, so the pilot had feathered it. He looked out the window, up there at the nose and saw that engine prop just still and he called the pilot and asked, "Will thing fly on three engines?" The pilot told him, "We've been doing it for an hour and a half." (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever lose more than one?

Mr. Kuse

Not on ours but I've seen them come back on two engines. You may not believe it, but the old C-47, those things could lose their engines over France and glide back to England. They could glide on that big wing over the 18 mile Channel there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a chance to go into London?

Mr. Kuse

Yes, one time.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that?

Mr. Kuse

It was during the blitz and we didn't stay long. We stayed one night and got out of there, on a three day pass. We enjoyed more just being out in the country there and going to the pub and visiting with those folks and buying a few beers for them and our own.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever bombed at your base there?

Mr. Kuse

No, we had some V-1's and V-2's go over but nothing ever hit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Those V-1's, they were kind of scary, weren't they?

Mr. Kuse

Yes, they were nasty. As long as you could hear the engine you were alright. When the engine shut off, then you had better start looking for some place to go. We had one group there close to us, I don't remember which one it was, they had a V-1 come down right outside their armament shack where they were arming bombs for the next day's mission. One of the armament guys was putting a fuse into the bomb. When that thing went off, it scared him so bad he went nuts. He had no control over his nerves after that. That would really shake you up, I'm sure.

Mr. Misenhimer

On how many missions was your plane damaged?

Mr. Kuse

I only remember one mission where we didn't get at least one hole.



Mr. Misenhimer

So on almost all of them, you were damaged, right?

Mr. Kuse

Yes, you got some battle damage on just about every one from that flak. We used to call flak "widow makers".

Mr. Misenhimer

And you say that there were not many German fighters when you were over there?

Mr. Kuse

They were there but they never seemed to hit us. If they were going to go out and try and stop the bombers they would go after the B-24's first. They figured if they knocked an engine out on a B-24 or damaged it pretty bad, they wouldn't take the punishment that our B-17's would. They could fly further and they had a bigger bomb load than we did but they weren't the war horse like we were.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever fly in a B-24?

Mr. Kuse

No. I flew in a B-25 after I got back from overseas just putting in some flight time.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you know there is always a big argument between the B-24 and the B-17 people.

Mr. Kuse

Yes, but you couldn't get either one of them to trade planes with you.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right.

Mr. Kuse

Just like we had Infantrymen come and fly on some missions with us because the Infantry thought we had it so damn nice. We could come home at night and sleep in a warm bed and have a war meal. But they didn't realize when you got in trouble, you were 600 miles ahead of the Infantry. You had a long walk back. Nobody wanted to change jobs after that either. Some of our gunners went with them on an exchange deal and nobody was willing to make a swap on either side.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else happen while you were over in England?

Mr. Kuse

I got stung on the tongue by a bee. I was writing my wife (she was my girlfriend then) a letter and had a snicker bar there. This was when I first got over there. I had taken a bite out of it and sat it down and was writing, then I picked it back up and took a bite and a darn bee was sitting on it and stung me on the tongue. I was very fortunate that it didn't swell. I was scared to death I was going to choke to death if my tongue swelled up.

Probably one of the most touching things I've ever seen in my life was when this one friend of mine, that got killed, was buried at Cambridge. We went up for the funeral. We had trained with this same crew here in the States at Avon Park. We went up to the funeral and was standing out there. It was a misty, rainy day, cold as heck. When you see them put 86 coffins in the ground at one time, if you don't have tears, you are pretty hard. That will linger in my mind forever.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a beautiful cemetery isn't it?

Mr. Kuse

It sure is. One of the funniest things. The day that we went up there for that, I walked into the office there by the Chaplain's office and the Sergeant there was an assistant, he had been assigned to the Chaplain, was a fellow that I had worked with the in the Capitol in Austin. His uncle was a member of the Legislature. His name was Robert Wood and his uncle's name was Lon E. Alsup. Lon E. Alsup was the first chairman of the Blind Commission here in the state of Texas. He was a blind Representative and he was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee for a long time. The man was a genius. He could add figures up faster than you could put them in on a calculator.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was anybody on your plane ever wounded?

Mr. Kuse

No, we had no wounds at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about in the 601<sup>st</sup>? Quite a few?

Mr. Kuse

No, I don't think we had that many. We might have had some nicks and scratches but Abbot was the only casualty that I knew of in our squadron while I was there.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were fortunate.

Mr. Kuse

Yes, we were. When we started flying they told us that if one out of five made it through, we were lucky. That's when you needed 25 missions. Then they changed it to 30 and

then they changed it to 35. Our copilot stayed over there and flew another tour. He finished up with, I think, 52. He stayed because he hadn't made First Lieutenant and he wanted to make First Lieutenant before he came home.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank that you got to?

Mr. Kuse

Tech Sergeant. In September of 1944 I made Tech.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many stripes is that?

Mr. Kuse

That is three up and two down.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it have a T in the middle?

Mr. Kuse

No. We were authorized to wear combat crew wings which we wore and then on our tunic sleeve we were authorized the patch of the trade school that you were representing. In other words, a radio man had a control tower on his patch and an engineer had some wrenches and the armament had a bomb. Those three were authorized for the people that had the MOS numbers for that.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned about a frightening mission. What was your most frightening time over there?

Mr. Kuse

Probably the most frightening one was the one to Merseberg.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Kuse

I've got the Air Medal and five Oak Leaf Clusters. I've got the American Victory Medal. Good Conduct Medal (believe it or not - laugh). The American Campaign Medal with three Battle Stars.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Kuse

No. Nothing that I didn't create. I made my wife a little pin out of a plexiglass out of a B-17 that we flew there. I do have a piece of aluminum that was shot out of a plane. A little piece about the size of a half dollar.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Kuse

No, we sure didn't, not overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Or even in the States? Did you see any in the States?

Mr. Kuse

Yes, the guy that used to say, "I've got a man in the balcony here." What was his name?

Mr. Misenhimer

I've forgotten.

Mr. Kuse

Mars Candy bars?

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Kuse

I never saw one until I got back from overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Axis Sally on the radio?

Mr. Kuse

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of her?

Mr. Kuse

Noisy. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

How about Lord Haw Haw?

Mr. Kuse

I heard him one time. The best music that we had over there was Glenn Miller before he went down. This is Ray McKinney and the boys in the band singing, "How Do You Do Do?"

Mr. Misenhimer

On April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt died. You were back home by then?

Mr. Kuse

Yes I was back home by then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any reaction when you heard about his death?

Mr. Kuse

No. I just felt that we had won already in the European Theater and I felt sure that things were looking up in the South Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

He actually died about three weeks before VE Day. April 12<sup>th</sup> was when he died and May 8<sup>th</sup> was VE Day.

Mr. Kuse

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

On VE Day did you have any kind of a celebration?

Mr. Kuse

I was at Ellington Field and I marched in the Victory Parade in Houston. It was hotter than hell.

Mr. Misenhimer

In August, when Japan surrendered, did you have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Kuse

That's when we had the Victory Parade in Houston. It was after they surrendered.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you discharged?

Mr. Kuse

September 14, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you stay in the Reserves?

Mr. Kuse

No I didn't. I thought about maybe staying in but they wouldn't do anything for me. They took me off of flight pay and that was 50% of my base pay. I wanted to get married and I couldn't afford to do it on \$96 a month.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Kuse

No. I didn't have any decent offers from the company I worked for before. So I came out and started a new career, so to speak, completely.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was that?

Mr. Kuse

I went down to Corpus Christi and went to work for an industrial supply house selling automotive parts and industrial wire rope, chain and traveled down in the Valley a little.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?



Mr. Kuse

Yes, I used it on the first and second homes that we bought.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Kuse

Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many have you been to?

Mr. Kuse

About 12 of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

When was the last one?

Mr. Kuse

The last one was about four years ago. It was in 2004.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was that?

Mr. Kuse

It was in Washington, D.C. We went there for the dedication of the World War II Monument.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was on Memorial Day of 2004 that they dedicated it.

Mr. Kuse

We were there right after that. In fact, I was there on September 12, 2004. You talk about

security. We had our final dinner that Saturday night. We got through about 10:00. We were staying in Virginia at a hotel in Falls Church. We were staying there and had our final dinner that night and went back up to the room to start packing to get ready to leave on an early morning flight. The people next door, in the room next to us at the banquet hall, had a Bar Mitzvah there and the kids got a little wild and they pulled the emergency fire alarm. The sirens went off in the hotel. This was on September 12<sup>th</sup>. That's all it took to get everybody pretty well shook up. The guy that was on the switchboard, on the PA system at the hotel sounded like he had just crossed the border at El Dorado that morning and couldn't speak good English. He was trying to say, "No Emergency. No Emergency." But all you could hear was "Emergency. Emergency. Emergency." We all got up and got dressed and found out what the heck was going on.

Mr. Misenhimer

That wasn't 2003?

Mr. Kuse

No, it was 2004.

Mr. Misenhimer

The year after September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Kuse

You couldn't get near the Congressional Building or the White House. Everything was blocked off. But we did get to Arlington and the World War II Monument. It took long enough to get it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bernie, is there anything else that you've thought of about World War II?

Mr. Kuse

All I can say is, I'm proud and thrilled that we won. I'm very proud of the fact that I had the opportunity to serve. I have no regrets. I was very fortunate. I met a beautiful girl, married her, and we've had 63 years of wonderful married life together. I can't complain about anything. I just wish more people would realize that freedom doesn't come free. The one thing that really bugs me is our handling of the social security. My wife and I are both in that notch area, which I know I'm not being picked out. But it irritates me the way they can take that money and play around with it. If I started a company and took my stockholder's money and did what they've done with the social security money, I would be in the pen the rest of my life.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bernie, I want to thank you again for your time today.

Mr. Kuse

Thank you for thinking of me and I'm glad to do it.

*(End of Interview)*

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