

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Alan Hildebrandt
Logansport, IN
November 12, 2009
95th Bomb Squadron, 17th Bomb Group
12th Air Force
Pilot B-26, 64 Missions**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is November 12, 2009. I am interviewing Mr. Alan Hildebrandt by telephone. His phone number is 574-753-5810. His address is 2818 High St, Logansport, IN 46947. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alan, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for service to our country during World War II. Does he have a middle initial?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Actually, I would just use Alan Hildebrandt. Actually Robert Allen Hildebrandt but he goes by Alan.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alright, however you would like to do it. The next thing I like to do is read this agreement with the museum. "Agreement Read." Is that ok with you.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Its fine with me, I don't see a problem with it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the next thing I would like to do is to get an alternative contact. And this will probably be you Mark, but we find out that that sometimes several years down the road that we try to get back in touch with a veteran and he has moved or something. So, Mark what is your address and phone number?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Address is PO Box 563, Logansport, Indiana 46947 and my home phone number is 574-722-3429.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alan, what is your birthdate?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

February 28-1923

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

He was born in Logansport, IN

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

He had one older brother and one younger brother.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were either one of those involved in WWII?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

His older brother, John, was a B-24 pilot in the European Theater.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is he still living?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, he grew up during the depression; how did the depression affect he and his family?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

They had a pretty good deal. Their grandfather had started a business in the 1890's manufacturing fishing tackle and their grandfather served in WWI....

Mr. Hildebrandt

No, it was my father.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

I'm sorry, that's right, it would be their father Hiram served in WWI and came back and continued that manufacturing business so they were ok during the depression.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alan, where did you go to high school?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Logansport High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you graduate?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

1941

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7th, 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I was at Purdue University as a freshman.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you hear about that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

The radio in the common area.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I didn't. I wasn't aware what was going on.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How did you think it would affect you, I mean did you think that would cause you to go into the service or anything at the time?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, pretty soon after that we presumed that we would be going into the service.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you enter the service?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I enlisted in July of 1942 and was called into the cadet training in January of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

You enlisted in the Army Air Corps?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Air Corps?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, I'll tell you, a real good friend of mine in Logansport when I was home in July asked me, he said "I'm going to join the Air Force, how about joining?" and I said "Ok." So, we joined together.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Was that Herman?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Jack Steinweder; we went in at the same time and we graduated from cadets the same day on November of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go in at?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I went to San Antonio for classification and pre-flight. I went to El Reno, OK for primary flight.

Mr. Misenhimer

In your primary, what plane did you fly there?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

PT-19, Fairchild.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was it to fly that plane?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Oh, it was a great plane! You could do acrobatics, you could do spins. It was a wonderful plane.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Dad, now you correct me if I am wrong, but I'm thinking that the PT-19 was a low wing, radial engine, two place.....

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

It was not a radial engine; it was a hand crank start plane with a fabric covering.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

But it was open cockpit?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

With tandem

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Two seats.....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Front and back.....

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you solo there?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Oh Yeah, sixteen hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like to solo?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

It was a thrill. (Laughing) I didn't want to get washed out.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did many people get washed out in primary?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Quite a few, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go for basic then?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I went to Winfield, KS to the BT-13, which was a radial engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

What plane is that?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Was that a twin?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No-no, a single. BT-13 is a standard basic trainer, a six.....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Ok, BT for Basic Trainer

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that a Vultee?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Vultee, does that sound right?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I don't know who made it. I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

There was one that they called the Vultee vibrator, now I am not sure.....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

I've heard of that, but I do not know if that was it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do in that training there?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, we just flew about, I think we got in about 70 or 80 hours there and then when we graduated we determined whether were going to single engine or twin engine advanced.

I am not sure that we had much choice but I ended up with twin engine advanced in Pampa, TX flying a UC-78.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that the Cessna, right?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I am sure that a couple different people made it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in basic, what did you live in there in OK?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

What was that Mark?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

When you were in basic in OK, what were your accommodations?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Tar paper shack in Winfield, KS.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many people to a shack?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Ahh, quite a few; I would say 20 or so.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uhm, passable is about it. That is about the only place where the food wasn't great.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you went for advance in Pampa, TX?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Advance was in Pampa, TX

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What was your accommodations there?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I can't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

The plane was a UC what?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What was the aircraft in Tampa?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

UC-78 Twin Engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

How large of a plane was that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

It wasn't a large plane; it was a very easy plane to fly and....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Was that fixed or retractable gear?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I'm sure it was retractable gear.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it a fabric or metal plane?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I'm pretty sure it was fabric. The other twin engine trainer was, I think, something like 18-9 or something. It was a metal plane but we didn't have any of those.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the other plane had twin tails, right?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No. It was twin engine, but not a twin tail.

Mr. Misenhimer

A lot of the trainers were a Beachcraft which was the AT-11 which had a twin tail. Tell me about your training there in advance.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What about your training In Pampa, Dad, what was memorable?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Nothing really exciting, it was just learning to fly a twin engine airplane. Mostly landing and taking off with a little bit of cross country.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get instrument flying?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, we had instrument training in basic in the Link trainer and I don't remember instrument training in advance.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is some other things that happened in advance?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Nothing too exciting.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How long did that last? Were you there a month or three months?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

At each place, uh, we were basically there 8 weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was it to go from the single engine to the twin engine?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, I can't answer that; I don't thinkthe changes was when I started flying the B-26. That was a change that threw me.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you graduate?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

November 3rd of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got commissioned then?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Commissioned and pilot rating in Pampa, TX.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they have quite a ceremony for that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, Yes. We had a yearbook and it was a pretty big deal at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did any of your family get to come to that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, no. After that we got 7 day leave before we started training for a bomber.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

So you went back home for 7 days?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How did you get back?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, I kind of hitch hiked on the train. I had airplane reservations that got bumped so I

got on a train and headed from Pampa back to Logansport on a train and from Logansport back to Del Rio on a train.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What was the training in Del Rio?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Laughlin Field for B-26.

Mr. Misenhimer

What uniform did you have when you got commissioned?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, the same one I got now. (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it have the pink pants and the green blouse?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

It had the green blouse and pink pants and later on we got green pants.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Kind of a dark olive jacket?

Mr. Misenhimer

It was green, it was green. I saw the picture in the paper; you still had that jacket on.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

He wore it yesterday.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I wore it yesterday to go to my grandsons Veterans Day program.

Mr. Misenhimer

You're very fortunate to be able to put that jacket on. Tell me about your training there in Del Rio?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, well, the training there at Del Rio was; incidentally I will just mention, primary training was with civilian pilots. Basic, advance and Del Rio were all Army pilots. Each instructor had 2 students that worked together, the 3 of them worked together in learning to fly. The instructor would show you something and then one student would take over and do that and then the instructor would go again and then the other student would take over and that is kind of how it worked. After....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Did that mean, were you all three in the airplane at the same time?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And then you guys would switch seats?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We would take turns.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was in the B-26, right?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

That was made by Martin in Baltimore, MD.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, the Martin Marauder they called it. Now you say it was quite a change to transition to that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes it was. After awhile the instructor let the 2 of us go up without the instructor and that is when we really started to learn fly it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that the B-26 could present trouble from time to time?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I can tell you briefly that the original model, which was called the A model, was very difficult to land and take off because as the wing wasn't quite right and they modified that wing the camber on it and I think that they lengthened it a little bit so that after the C, D and other models after that, I don't even know if there is a B model, I didn't know of one. When they made the change the airplane performed much better and the problem in the early plane was over come so that the reputation that plane received was on the early models where they did lose quite a few in training.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Wasn't Pampa another training field?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And the Rhyme was “one a day in Tampa Bay?”

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

That was the story.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And that was a high wing loading, I believe.....

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

For the weight of the aircraft. It had a very small wing which meant that you really had to keep the air speed up there to keep the thing in the air. Evidently they changed wings giving it a little more area and configured it a bit differently and that addressed that.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

It didn't have a very good glide angle either, I understand?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What was the power out, glide characteristic Dad?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Pretty cool. My instructor was; on our checklist we had a check off for power off landing and the instructor made a power off landing but I never did. It's not to be recommended.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

I don't know if you know this but in the war in combat it had, if not the lowest, I believe

it was the lowest loss record of any medium bomber.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

That's because it was flying primarily in 1944 and 1945....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Towards the end of the war?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is some other things that happened in the B-26 in training there?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, uh, at Del Rio, TX is on the Rio Grande River; on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande it starts to get pretty mountainous and it is really dark and when you are night flying you had to be very careful to maintain your position and watch your instruments. Otherwise it is difficult to orient yourself at night. The only other thing, one of the other requirements was a cross country and three of us went to a cross country to CA but the weather got bad and we ended up in Phoenix and just stayed in the city and came back and that was the cross country.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of navigation aids did you have in those days?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Just a compass. (laughing) A magnetic compass and gyro compass.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And chart.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

And an altimeter.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any radio direction finding or anything like that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well we had, yes, yes, we did have. We had, ah, where we could fly in on the beam with radio contact and maintain at certain direction with that beam.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any practice in bombing?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

When you were in training in Del Rio, did you guys drop anything out in terms of practicing bombing?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, no, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about gunnery practice?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Any gunnery practice?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Nope. Not even at Barksdale.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you left Del Rio where did you go then?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, we were at Del Rio for about 8 weeks and then we went to Barksdale Field and my companion at Del Rio was named Richard Hisey, and he went to Barksdale Field also and at Barksdale Field we acquired our crew with a bombardier, navigator, co-pilot, engineer, radioman and tail gunner. That was our crew.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And so, Mr. Hisey got his own crew and you got your own crew?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes, that's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

↳ Who was the nose gunner for your plane?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Who was the nose gunner? Was that the bombardier?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, in combat we didn't have a nose gun. It was removed.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did he have in the way of guns on his planes?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What guns were in your airplane dad?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, the only guns that we; originally the pilot had a couple machine guns on each side of the fuselage.....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

That were fixed to the side of the fuselage up front.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We never had them in combat. The only guns we really had was the tail gunner to fight against fighter planes.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

No top turret?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No top turret.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about waist gunners?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

If one were needed in that case it would be the radioman who would be involved with that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about waist gunners?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, no waist gunner.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do in Barksdale?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What was the training in Barksdale, what were your activity there? Were you there about 8 weeks also?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yep, uh-huh. We did cross country, uh, simulated bomb run type thing and mostly orienting the crew to coordinate effort.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

So, teamwork?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Did you quarter with all your crew? I mean, did you guys all stay in the same barracks and.....

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, no. No we didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

On your plane, how many were officers and how many were enlisted men?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Pilot and co-pilot were officers, the bombardier and navigator which was one man was an officer, and then we had 3 enlisted men.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the officer stay together?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We lived in the same bachelor officer's quarters but we weren't together, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have any bomber training?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

But the bombardier would have been through specialty school of some sort, wouldn't he?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah. He trained with the Norden bomb sight and navigation.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall from your time at Barksdale?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, we did quite a bit of night flying at Barksdale to get proficient at flying at night and after that we took a train over to Savannah, GA to get ready to go overseas. The whole class went to Savannah at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there any funny incidents up to this point?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Anything humorous happen up to this point?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No. Only on the train ride over we got; we lost a few people. They would get off the train and then the train would leave. One guy had to charter a plane to catch up with the train. Everybody was going overseas so they were getting a little restless.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went to Georgia, did you say?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Savannah, yeah.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What airfield was that dad?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, there was 2 Army Air Force bases in Savannah and I can't tell you either one.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you at Savannah?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We were there about 10 days, 2 weeks at the most. We were assigned an airplane and we had to fly it over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What route did you take?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I had my crew and we....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Now wait, let's back up. That was a brand new airplane?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And you had sign for it?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I had to sign for that bird.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Do you remember the price tag?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

It was about \$250,000 dollars.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you had to sign for that, huh?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

What I remember. I don't have any papers to justify it. But I think that was correct.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And then your route, go ahead with your route.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I'm going to tell you that at each stop we only spent one night. If I had it to do it over I would take 6 months but we went from Savannah to Homestead Field, FL. From there to Puerto Rico, from there to Trinidad, from there to Belen, Brazil and Belen to Natal, from Natal to Ascension Island, from there to Roberts Field in Liberia, at Dakar and from Dakar through the Atlas Mountains, to Marrakech, Morocco. And I think that was about 9 days and 9 nights.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that trip over?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

It was great. Everything worked just fine and.....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Did you have, excuse me for barging in here but my curiosity. Did you have a crew chief

with you to maintain that aircraft?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Our engineer was the only guy. He was the crew chief.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any trouble with the plane over?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, no. When we left Natal, the bombardier got in the nose so he could take some readings off the ocean and then I had the beam on, the radio and we flew right into Ascension Island and there were no problems. But taking off from Ascension Islands there is an awful lot of birds that sometimes can cause some trouble but I didn't have any trouble.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand Ascension Island is a rather small spot out there in the Atlantic.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, there is nothing there. If you don't hit it you have a problem.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you did have a radio direction to find it with, right?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you arrived in Dakar what happened?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, it was my understanding that the plane was going to be turned over to the French Air

Force that had a B-26 group that I never, ever found out where they were and then my crew and I were assigned to the 17th bomb group on Sardinia. Sardinia actually had three bomb groups at that time, 17th, 319th and 320th and when we got to the 17th bomb group they assigned us where they needed people and my crew was broken up. We didn't all go to the same squadron but my co-pilot, my bombardier and I went to the same squadron.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And that was in May of 1944?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

That was in May of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

What squadron did you go to?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

The 95th squadron, which was a WWI squadron also.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Was that Kick'n Mule?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Kick'n Mule, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What Air Force was that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

12th Air Force.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Ok, bare with me here, was the Kick'n Mule Rickenlacker's unit?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, his was the Hat in the Circle, the 94th.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Oh yeah, that's right.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I'm sure it was the 94th.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, the three of you stayed together; were you assigned a plane then?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Oh No. We weren't assigned any planes. Each squadron, when we had a mission each squadron would put so many ships into it and each squadron would alternate being the lead aircraft and we would fly 18 or 24 ships in a mission. And sometimes we would fly 36; two 18's. And the lead aircraft had a Norben bomb sight and the other 17 or 23 ships would target their bombs off the lead aircraft and that is where we dropped. Initially in May of 1944 we were bombing; Anzio Beach had just been established and we were bombing Italy from Anzio Beach on north.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And you were there through August?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes, we were there from May, June, July and August and probably part of September. September we; because the war had progressed we dropped bombs on the 15th of August on the invasion of Southern France. So within a few weeks we were moving to Corsica where the war had moved up the northern part of Italy and Southern France.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were flying out of Sardinia, what were most of your targets?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We were bombing Marshaling yards, bridges and sometimes we would bomb troop replacements or what we thought were troop replacements.

Mr. Misenhimer

What altitude did you bomb from mostly?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

The altitude from bombing would be from 10,000-12,000 feet when we would be dropping. On the bomb run it would be somewhere 10-12,000.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have fighter escorts?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes we did. We often did, we didn't always have but it depended on the mission.

Sometimes we had a spitfire fighter escort, sometimes we had P-47.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where you attacked by enemy fighters very often?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Nope, we didn't run into any fighters until France and we moved up north.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How about flak when you were out of Sardinia?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

There is flak everywhere. You know that bombs bursting in air? That is what it is. I was

never anywhere that didn't have flak.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your squadron lose many planes?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No-no. We didn't lose many aircraft in Sardinia but between the three groups that were some crashes for one reason or another, sometime there would be a crash on landing or sometime on take-off. Most of the flight damage was not severe enough that you would ground aircraft when we were in Sardinia but later on it changed. At times we lost some.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many planes in a squadron?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Oh, we must have had, the first squadron must have had about 23. Well, we probably had more than that because sometimes we had 24 in the air. We must have had 34.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the top speed on that B-26?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

When you had a good tail wind, dad, what was your top speed in that air plane?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, coming back after mission was up without a bomb load and with less fuel we would go about 220 knots.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the cruise speed?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We didn't do too much cruising; when we go out bombing we were loaded and we would fly about 180-190 climbing out and then on a bomb run we would run about 200 mph.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

When you were going out full fuel and full crew and full bomb load, it was just all you could do to keep the engines revved up to keep it up in the air pretty much?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, I wouldn't say that but it's just couldn't make any speed. You fly around and around forming up.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Oh, so when the first airplane takes off he has to hang around and then until the whole squadron gets up and then you form and then you start off on your mission.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah, you got to get all 18 planes together.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How long would that take?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

It didn't take too long.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you take off one plane at a time?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, in Sardinia we were flying off of kind of a gravel air strip and we could take off two abreast, almost abreast, but in Corsica and France we had a single runway and we'd

take off one at a time. I don't know if that would be 30 or 40 seconds between take-off.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What was the composition of that runway?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well in Corsica we had half concrete and half steel mat to get the length you needed. In France we had a concrete runway.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the bomb load on the B-26?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

The maximum was 4,000 pounds.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of bombs did you drop mostly?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, we probably dropped more 100 pounds and 500 pounds. Sometimes we would vary; on a certain type of mission we'd drop fragmentary bombs and on the invasion of Southern France we had two 2,000 pounders in the bomb bay to bomb the batteries on the southern coast of France.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Were those heavy embedded gun in places?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah, those were cannon, shore cannon.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else happen in Sardinia?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, it was hot. We slept under mosquito netting because they had a lot of malaria but we had good tents; we lived in tents. We had good chow and we weren't in Corsica very long. Corsica was not as good as Sardinia but it wasn't a problem.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

You were in Corsica about 6 or 8 weeks, in September and October?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah, something like that and then we moved to Dijon in November from Corsica.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Dijon, France?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do in Dijon?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, we had a lot of bad weather in December and we couldn't fly many missions.

Occasionally we would go to briefing and take off and try to form a formation and have to come back and bring the bombs back. We had a lot of cloudy weather.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And that was November and December that you were in Dijon?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah. I'll tell you something; might be appropriate, I don't know. My friend Hisey was at the, I believe the 320th group and he was in Sardinia and moved Corsica and he moved

to France; I've got the exact paper but I can't recall right now but that one day in November he was flying with 8 other people to Dijon and they crashed about 20 miles south of Dijon and they were all killed and nobody knows for sure exactly what happened but the people; it was a town called Plottes, France and people in 2004 which was the 60th anniversary made a memorial and printed a booklet that honored those men that were killed in that crash. They crashed into the ground at full speed.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

The French people of Plottes did that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes. I got some information on that I can send him if he is interested?

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure. Was it just one plane that crashed?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

That was a B-26 with 8 people on board. It didn't have any bombs, it wasn't a mission. It was moving from Sardinia to Corsica when he was killed. I mean Corsica to Dijon.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

So, when you moved from base to base; of course you wouldn't take bombs but did you load tents and stuff up in the airplane?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah, we would put all our junk in the airplane and moved up in the airplane, bombs and gasoline and stuff. It probably moved some other way.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you came back from that aborted mission, did you land with the bombs

aboard?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

If we didn't drop, we brought the bombs back.

Mr. Misenhimer

What are some other things that happened?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, uh, I really; I'm not anxious to mention this but I will. On December the 19th our squadron commander Major Hugh Tietsworth, he was a career man and he had been home on leave in November and he came back in December and on the 19th we flew a mission which was the 100th mission for a plane, I think its number 49 that was donated by the employees of the New York Central Railroad. Well, the result of that was that folks in my hometown and Major Tietsworth hometown there was some publicity because they wanted to recognize the fact that those employees had donated that airplane and so it came out in the newspaper that we flown that mission. A hundredth mission for the airplane, not for me. But anyway, a week later we were on a mission. When we were flying that mission, I was the pilot and he was the man in the right seat, the mission commander, and we were the number one plane. That was when we were flying group leads.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And that is why you got the publicity, you were pilot and he was co-pilot and your commander?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah, and my bombardier was the guy dropping the bombs that everybody toggled were

on. We'd flown group lead starting in September, my bombardier and I, our squadron had two group lead teams; my bombardier and I and another two guys. About a week later the other team was flying the big mission and the plane took a direct hit and Major Tietsworth, the pilot and the bombardier were all killed. I think that the navigator and the radioman got out, parachuted. That was unusual but it happened. It was a sad tale because of the publicity that we had the week before.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who did you say that had donated that plane?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

That was the employees of the New York Central Railroad.

Mr. Misenhimer

The flak was a lot worse up there, is that right?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

You said that the flak in that part of combat was worse dad when you got to Dijon?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, we were supporting the 7th army at that time right across the border into Germany and depended on the target. Certain targets had quite a few anti aircraft guns and that particular time in December was close to the frontline and there were a lot of anti-aircraft.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there more enemy fighters up there?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We saw fighters but we didn't have fighters attack.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Did you have fighter escort at that time?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now I understand that the Tuskegee Airmen were in Italy; did you ever have any experience with the Tuskegee Airman?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

The Tuskegee Airman, the black squadron that flew the P-51, did you have anything to do with them?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We never had anything to do with P-51.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, they flew P-47's part of the time.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

But you never remember them escorting you on; did they all have red tails, is that it?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, uh-huh. I think they escorted the B-24's more. It would make longer missions into Germany. Ok, what is some other things that happened?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

The B-26's were also flying out of England out of the ninth Air Force after D-Day and they were bombing in France the same as we were. It was two different operations for B-26's.

Well, there is not much more to say. We got a new squadron commander and he took over and I flew missions when he was the mission commander and pretty soon the war ended and that was it.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And you were in Dijon for part of November, December and January and then when did you head back to the US?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

After the war ended, I think it was in April.

Mr. Misenhimer

May the 8th is when Germany surrendered.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

I'm sorry, what was that date?

Mr. Misenhimer

May the 8th of 1945.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We flew right up until the end. I think I even got a mission in May now that I think about it.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Richard, Dad has given me a declassified copy of his mission list and there is 64 missions during a 13 month period if I remember right. But, uh, and it gives the date the target, the duration of the flight and the identity of the target.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many pages is that?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

I think its probably two pages.

Mr. Misenhimer

Can you send me a copy of that?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

I will try to look for that and try to get you a copy of that and get your address.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure. We would like to have that. We would put it in with his oral history.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I think we are about there, Mark.

Mr. Misenhimer

About what was the longest time for your average mission?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How long did each mission last? I mean they were different.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, in Sardinia we would mostly fly from right over the Italy coast and not very far inland originally. We would make our bomb runs and come back over the water and get back. So those missions were probably, some of them might not be over 3 hours. And so, probably our longest mission would be about 5 hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever make more than one mission in one day?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, on the 15th of August when we went to Southern France, we had bad weather and

we took off at 4 o'clock in the morning, it was dark, but we had bad weather and we couldn't drop and we came back and had to go back in the afternoon to drop. That was unusual.

Mr. Misenhimer

If you aborted the mission and didn't drop, did that count as one of your missions?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Oh no.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

So you had to get to the target and drop your bomb for it to count?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

I had heard that before. I wanted to clarify that.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

My mother, Richard, just handed me his mission and his first mission was May 19th of 1944 and that was a long one; that was 5 hours and 50 minutes. That was the Lissano Railroad Bridge. The last mission was May 1st, 1945 and that was Bordeaux Gun Position, 4 hours and 20 minutes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the name of that first mission again?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

That first one was the Lissano Railroad Bridge.

Mr. Misenhimer

And the date was what?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

That was May 19th of 1944. It must have been in Italy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah. Almost one year. Did he get any leave while he was there?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

When you were there in Europe, did you get any leave at all?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes, I had three day pass to the Isle of Capri, stayed overnight in Naples and I went out with another group for a five day pass to Cairo and Tel Aviv.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were those places?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well Capri was great. We stayed in a hotel and they had army k-rations and they had a good chef to prepare them so the food was good. And we got to see the blue grotto and got to relax for a couple days.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you said Cairo, Egypt?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, we saw the sights in Cairo and then we took the flight over to Tel Aviv and spent one night and came back to Cairo and then came back to our base. In theory it was a whiskey run but we never did get any whiskey.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Did you get to see the pyramids while you were in Cairo?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I can't remember.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Card games or drinking while you were over there?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Any card games or drinking! (laughing) There was poker all the time and our poker was a dollar ante pot limit, the enlisted men were two dollar ante pot limit. We got a fifth of whiskey a month as a ration and in Sardinia we had some catana beer available which wasn't very good and drinking is up to the individual. Some people drank quite a bit and some didn't drink at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have an officers club?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes. Well, that's what our mess hall was; the officers club was the mess hall. And that is where you played your poker and did your drinking.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about a normal mission; what time did you get up? What kind of briefing did you have and all of that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Generally we would get up early....

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What was early?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I'm not sure, about 6 o'clock and then we would have chow and then go to the headquarters for briefing and get the outline of the mission and who was to do what. Then we'd go to the flight line and within a few minutes we would start take off. Our missions were generally over pretty early in the day.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of debriefing did you have when you got back?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, we had a few debriefings. After the missions anybody that wanted it would get a shot of real good whiskey and then depending on what the mission was and the success of it, we would be interviewed to give our comments on what anything that was significant. But, most every mission that we were on had photographers in it. The photographers would get the results of the mission after the drop.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Were they in the same flight as you and towards the rear of the formation?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes, they were in the same flight.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Ok, they were in your airplane in the trailing part of the formation.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

It doesn't take those bombs too long to get down.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fly the same plane very often?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How many different airplanes were you in for those missions, dad? Did you have one?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, no. I probably flew 10 or more different planes. You had your favorite but you didn't always get your choice.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your favorite?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Miss Peggy! Number 59, Miss Peggy, was my favorite. Because we had a wonderful crew chief and when you got in his airplane you knew it was going to go.

Mr. Misenhimer

How often did you fly that one?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How many times were you in that one dad?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Every chance I'd get! (Laughing) I don't know, several times.

Mr. Misenhimer

On May the 8th when Germany surrendered, did you have any kind of a celebration on that day?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I'll tell you what happened. About two days after the surrender we had to have to put our

dress uniforms on and have an inspection. That is the only celebration that we had.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's not too much fun.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

They didn't want everybody to get carried away so they made us put on our uniforms.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you come home?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Very soon after that with another couple guys I took the train to Calais, France.

Took a ferry across to London and from London we went to Lancashire which is a replacement pool for a lot of people coming back. I imagine we were there a couple of weeks and then I got a ride home as a passenger on a brand new B-24 that never had to fly a mission but it just come over when the war over and then it came back and landed at West Dover Field, MA.

Mr. Misenhimer

What route did you take coming back?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

The northern route, from England to MA.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Did you have any stops along the way?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, nonstop.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs from over there?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, I did not. I was only 21, I wasn't too smart.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How about any USO shows over there that you remember?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, we had an USO show in Sardinia but it wasn't at top level, it was a second tier musical show; a comedian and music, one time only. Well, I'll tell you, in December they knew Glen Miller was missing, I forgot about this, I had another officer and I took a group of enlisted men to Paris for a three day pass and I went to the Glen Miller show that Tex Beneke was running because at that time they thought Glen Miller would be coming in the next day. He flew over by himself and the band had gone over ahead of him and so I did get to see the Glen Miller band in Europe.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes, in Corsica we would go into town and get some coffee at the Red Cross.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they charge you for it?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I don't think so. I don't remember but I don't believe that they did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Axis Sallie on the radio?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Axis Sallie, I have no experience.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Oh, our squadron, we were all compatible and no serious problems at all. We had a pediatrician was our flight surgeon and he took care off everybody and in good shape.

We had good morale all the way.

Mr. Misenhimer

April 12th of 1945 President Roosevelt died, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

What was your most frightening time during that time? Where were you the most afraid?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, I'll tell you, I guess it would be that mission I had in December because what happened was my bombardier couldn't pick up the aiming point and we had to come around and make a second pass at the target and by that time the flak was thick and it was a little scary.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Do you know what date that was?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

That was around December the 19th of 1944.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

It was December the 19th, I've got a mission number 47, and it was some Marshalling Yards.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever lose an engine on your plane?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

No, I did not. Never lost one from an enemy fire or malfunction either.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you discharged?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I got out in July of 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you stay in the reserves?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Yes, he did. How long were you in the reserves dad?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

21 years.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

21 years counting your active and your reserves?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your highest rank?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Lt. Colonel. That is what your retired at isn't it?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank that you got to during WWII?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

When you were active what was your highest rank?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Captain. Army Captain.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in the reserves, did you have to do much flying?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How much flying did you do in the reserves dad?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did he do in the reserves?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

We were what you call standby, we'd have ground school, we would study emergency procedures that were needed.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

And Richard, I can remember as a youngster that I got to go to a few of those meetings.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that in Logansport there?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Not a bit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Yes I did, to go back to Purdue.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you graduate from Purdue?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

February of 1948.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your major?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Civil Engineering.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Our 17th bomb group started having reunions not too long after the end of the war and I went to one in Orlando, FL I think maybe 1987 but I am not sure of the date. I went to another one in San Diego later but I just went to those two reunions.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't like them or what?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

How come you didn't go to more?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Uh, primarily because the first reunion I went to I only knew two guys there and the second reunion I went to I only knew one guy. The 17th bomb group started out in Africa in 1942 and went clear up to France in 1945, so there were an awful lot of people coming and going throughout that period, so you didn't know very many people.

Mr. Misenhimer

What medals and ribbons did you get from WWII?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

One Distinguished Flying Cross, eleven air medals and Croix de Guerre group citations, and those I don't really know what they are.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many missions did a B-26 pilot have to fly to be able to come home?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Well, when I went over in the spring of 1944, up until that time if you got 40 missions you were able to come home but that changed and after that there wasn't a set number. If we got replacements, the older pilots would get replaced and then they could go home and then the relief guys would take over but there was no guarantee of any number that you would get to go home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now I know in the heavies it was 25 or 35 missions depending on what it was.

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

I think that was earlier in the war for the most part.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was 25 to start with and then it went to 35.

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

Flying 17^s and 24^s had a different system and I think the original B-17 pilots in England were able to come home with 25 missions but very few of them got to 25 because they had a lot of loss, high casualties.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alright Alan, anything else that you can think of?

Mr. Alan Hildebrandt

I think that I already said more than I need to.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, no you are doing well. Mark, anything you can think of that he hasn't told me that you have heard over the years?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

Yes, there is one thing. I asked him what his most harrowing moment was and he told me it's when the young reckless drivers were taken from briefing area down to the flight line in the fog, in the dark driving 60 MPH in an open jeep.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you can think of Mark?

Mr. Mark Hildebrandt (Son)

I think that's it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alright, I thank you again for your time.

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August 1, 2010

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