

## William Turley Oral History Interview

BILL STONE: This is Bill Stone. Today is January 15, 2009. I'm interviewing retired Colonel William Turley. This interview is taking place at his residence in Houston, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, Texas, and the Texas Historical Commission for preservation of historical information related to this site. Colonel Turley, would you tell me where you were born and the names of your parents?

WILLIAM TURLEY: I was born in Houston, Texas, September the 12th, 1925. My parents were Sam and Bessie Turley. They were both native Houstonians.

BS: Where were you on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7th?

WT: We lived at 12443 Greensboro Drive, which was about 15 miles east of downtown Houston. It was, of course, a Sunday afternoon. I quite remember the day. It was the middle of winter and my mother and dad, we had a pretty nice home. We had a lot of trees and we were out raking leaves up. We came in, turned on the radio, and found out about Pearl Harbor.

BS: You were 16 years old at that time?

WT: I was 16, yes.

BS: When did you enlist and what service did you enlist in?

WT: Well, I enlisted at the old City Hall in Downtown Houston on May the 12th, 1943. The terms of my enlistment were, I was 17 at the time, that I would not be called until I was 18. I reported for active duty and left with about 100 other men from Houston -- boys. I guess we were all about the same age. We left from the old Cady Depot, which was in the basement of the M&M building in Houston on October the 26th. We had to report down there, the way I remember, about seven o'clock in the evening. We left on a train, which took us to Sheppard Field. I was enlisted in the Army Air Corps. We went to Sheppard Field, Texas near Wichita Falls.

BS: Is that where you had your basic training?

WT: I had basic training there. I guess it was about eight weeks of basic training, during the winter. I remember most of it pretty well. What I remember mostly was being on the rifle range on a cold, wet, rainy, almost icy day, probably sometime in late November, early December 1943.

BS: Was most of your training, even though you were in the Army Air Corps, mostly infantry-type training?

WT: Well, it was more of an Air Force Air Corps Infantry. It was mostly firing range, learning how to march, discipline,

living together. We didn't have any real basic infantry training, I don't think. We learned more about our weapons, how to fire them, clean them. It wasn't too difficult; I'll put it that way. The weather was probably more of a consideration than anything else.

BS: When you finished basic training, where did you go from there?

WT: I left about the first week in January, almost to this day. About the 10th of January the way I remember it, 1944. I went on a train by myself. I was the only one in the [package?], and I went to the gunnery School at Las Vegas, Nevada. I went across the Santa Fe Railroad System, the New Orleans route, got off at Barstow, took another train up to Las Vegas and went to Army Air Corps gunnery School at that location.

BS: Was this anti-aircraft guns, or was this the guns that were in the planes?

WT: Training to be a gunner aboard a plane, primarily. I would say a couple of turrets, the top turret which was on a B-17, or possibly the tail gunner position on a B-17. Eventually, even though I became a ball turret gunner, I was not trained at all in that. There was no training in that. I learned about the machine guns, how to fire them; we did get quite a bit of firing. We flew in the planes,

and there was a number of people in the planes at one time. We went from position to position and sat down for more of an orientation sort of a thing. About six weeks I think, the way I remember.

BS: Where did you go from there?

WT: Well, I had a leave after that, and of course, I came to Houston. Actually, I went to Lincoln, Nebraska, for a classification center; and from there I was sent to Rapid City, South Dakota, to join a crew there. That's when the remainder of our crew met in a theater, sat on a row, and they'd call out the pilot's name. The rest of the crew members would sit in order. We knew who was going to be the radio operator and the senior aircraft mechanic, which was the crew chief... They had trained for that. There were four of us who were going to be gunners on the plane. They had the positions of two waist gunners, a ball turret gunner, and a tail gunner. The pilot -- I remember that was one of the first things he had to do, was decide who was going to do what on the crew and what position we were going to fly as.

BS: This was in a B-17?

WT: That's right. We were going to be in a B-17; they were training for B-17. Both B-17s and B-24s were trained at that time, but ours was strictly a B-17 crew mission for

training. I remember the pilot, Lieutenant [Studder?] -- great guy; I won't talk about him too much now. He got the four of us together, myself and the three other guys that were going to be the gunners aboard the plane. We had the four positions, two waist gunners, the tail and a ball turret gunner. And I say this in all honesty, I looked up and I saw the other guys and I was the smallest of the four. I wasn't much smaller, but I was smaller than the other four guys. They were not large people. I remember telling the pilot, I said, "Well, it looks to me that maybe I should be the ball turret gunner, since I'm the smallest of the group." So, I was assigned as the ball turret gunner, and the other positions were filled up. The ironic thing about it is that, later on, our tail gunner was killed. And to be really honest with you, during all my training I really wanted to be a tail gunner. It turned out that I was selected to be the ball turret and the tail gunner was killed. Since I was the first one who spoke up, if I would have said I'd like to be the tail gunner... I may or may not have got that position, I'm not sure. Nevertheless, I was assigned as a ball turret gunner.

BS: At what point in time did you know some of the dangers of the turret gunner? If the wheels couldn't come back up from lost hydraulics and they couldn't get you out of

there, what would happen? Or some of the other things that happened to the ball turret gunners?

WT: I think we briefly discussed those, but it hadn't struck me at that time, to be honest with you. I wasn't too concerned about that. I don't know whether we had known about it. We heard stories later on that it did become a very dangerous position. The weirdest and most dangerous thing that happened to me was, the pilots were getting just the basic training. The gunners were aboard, and of course we couldn't fire; we were over civilian communities and things of that nature. We didn't do any firing while we were there at Rapid City. We flew just about every day, it seemed like. Some days we didn't fly, and we flew some nights. On one of the missions, I guess I got too carried away with myself and I started to get down in the turret. The way you did it, there was a little hatch. The guns had to be in the directly vertical position to get in the turret. The door opened up and there was a little lever on one side or the other of the guns; but you had to essentially put the turret in gear. Once it was in gear then you could control it by the control handles, which were generally up above your head, and you moved them this way and that, turned them back. The turret would turn down and you would be looking out. For some reason or another,

I thought I had the turret in gear. You had to step down in it and then somebody, usually one of the waist gunners, would close the door over the top of you, the little hatch. It was more of a hatch than a door, and it would flip the little lock slide; then you had the thing and you controlled it. But I got down in it and I started to sit down; I was in the process of leaning down to go, and all of a sudden, the turret started -- it went backwards. I knew the door was not locked and, for about one-tenth of a second, I was in a panic mode. I thought, "I'm dead." I thought, "I'm going to fall out the back end," is what it amounted to. As it turned out, I don't know what caused it; but maybe it was the way it was built. These little handles, as the turret turned down, there was a ring around the turret to hold them in. I guess when passing back through there these handles were closed down. Not funny, but it was true. The next thing I remember I was down; I knew I was safe. There was a little inspection plate, a clear panel; I don't know if it was glass or plastic or something. And I will never forget our, waist gunner, named Charlie [Riesta?], was looking down there to see whether I was still in the turret. I remember the look on his face. "Are you still there, Bill?" (laughs) I still had not got the turret in gear yet because it was back

here, so I cranked the turret back up to let me get back out. I got myself back out and I said, "Hey, I was scared, but I've got to prove to myself that I'm not scared." I then went through the procedure again; getting the turret in gear, getting back down there and circling around; moving the turret around like I would normally do on any mission, looking forwards, backwards, anywhere around. That is the one thing that I remember most. I guess you might say it was the most outstanding event that occurred to me during our crew training in Rapid City. Like I said, the training was really more geared for the pilots and the navigators. They got a lot, because we would fly away as far as Fargo, North Dakota, maybe. I think it was Fargo, North Dakota. We didn't fly too far west. We flew mostly over that area for hours, several flights at night. The navigators and pilots got used to landing at night. We finished up our training on about July the 1st of 1944. I don't remember how many crews were in our group; I want to say 35 or so. We were Crew 30. C-30... I remember that. We went to Kearney, Nebraska, where we were assigned to a brand new airplane, which had been built probably at California, Boeing, somewhere. I'm not sure whether it was Seattle or where it might have been, but it was a brand new B-17 G Model. They were not painted and they were not



camouflaged; they were silver. I don't remember staying there overnight too much. I mean, I guess I was there one night. We got orders to fly the plane. We were going to England; we received our mission. Planes flew individually, with the navigator plotting the course and the pilots flying. We gunners, we were just flying along for the ride. Of course, we had all of our gear, all of our personal effects, anything we needed. I guess we had been issued some cold weather gear, but I can't remember much about it. We weren't expecting too much cold weather, because it was July. I think we took off on July the fifth. By the time we finished up our training around the 1st of July, until we got down to Kearney and took off, it was about five days in there. We flew to Grenier Field, New Hampshire, near one of the largest cities in New Hampshire. I remember landing there; I think we flew all day, and probably stayed overnight. I remember the next day we were wandering around the post -- and one of the things that you probably shouldn't talk about, but I'll mention it anyway, because it was kind of funny -- We went in the PX. Grenier Field was really a smaller field, but it had a lot of trees around it. I remember we came out in the parking lot and there was an Army Jeep there. Somebody said something like, "Wish we could ride around in it." We

said, "Let's go see." It wasn't locked, so we got in. I don't know whether I was driving or not; I think I was. I was probably the instigator of this. We drove around the post for maybe five to ten minutes. Then we realized we could get in some deep trouble here with this jeep so we parked it somewhere and left it there and walked off. Nothing ever happened about it but we did it as a lark. We obviously weren't going very far with it, but nevertheless I remember that. The next day, we went from Grenier Field to Goose Bay, Labrador, stayed there overnight, and then the next day, we flew to Bluie West, Greenland. We probably could have flown further, but the weather, or some reason or another. Bluie West was a small airfield on the west coast of Greenland. I remember the mountains were pretty close. They weren't really mountains, they were hills. The airstrip was right along the sides of the water there. We landed there and we stayed overnight. The next day, we flew across the top of Greenland. I remember it just seemed like a snow-capped area; very flat looking, the way I remember it. We got to the airfield right outside of Reykjavik, Iceland; I think it was Meeks Field. I'm not really sure of the name of that field there. Each night, one of the crew members had to stay with the plane to guard our equipment. I remember it was my turn to stay when we

got to Iceland. It was cold at Iceland; it was a windy, desolate area. I didn't see anything about it, the guys came the next morning, and we took off. We were originally supposed to go to Prestwick, Scotland, and I think weather caused us to veer a little bit to the south. We landed in a field in Valley, Wales, which was the southern part of England. We left the plane there; we didn't take it to our ultimate assignment. From there, I went to a reception station for the gunners. The pilots went one place, the radio operators went another, and the navigators and bombardiers went other places. Eventually, after being there for about a day or so, we went to a gunnery school on the wash, which is in the north. It's on the east coast. As you know, East Anglia has that big hump; it's on the northern side of that. We were there for about two weeks. We lived in a tent right out on the range in really, pretty bad living conditions. I remember that cold. This was, of course, in August.

BS: I lived in England. I know what you're saying.

WT: You're probably familiar with it. We eventually got there and we went back; and eventually we did a lot of firing, just from ground positions, just shooting the machine gun. They had some targets out on the water as we went over, and we just fired over the water. We came back and joined the

rest of our crew members and we all got together after that. We were stationed at Kimbolton, which is about 60 miles north of, maybe a little further than that, north of London, in the East Anglia area. More or less in the western side, where most of the bases were. I got there around the 28th day of July. The pilots came in; they had been training somewhere and they did some practice flights then. The pilots, I believe both pilots, flew an actual mission, and I think the navigator flew an actual mission before we ever flew a mission. I flew my first mission on August 11th to Brest, France.

BS: Let me just interrupt and ask a question.

WT: Sure, go right ahead.

BS: This is about a month after the Normandy invasion?

WT: Yeah.

BS: Do you remember what the attitude was at that time?

Because this was about the time that Patton broke out, but it was sort of stalemated there, especially around Caen during that time.

WT: Right.

BS: Do you remember what your attitude was about the war at that point in time?

WT: The best I remember it, it was that we knew it was a lot of heavy fighting in the infantry. We were geared on our own

selves at that time, preparing ourselves for these missions. We knew at that time we would have to fly 35 missions. That was the requirement: to fly 35 missions. Like I said on August 11th, I can't remember too much about what the feelings were there. Something happened there that, later on -- and I'll mention it now -- that I should have done something about. It was about the first day I was there, our Crew Chief, a fellow named Wilbur McNeese who was from New Jersey, came up to me and said "Billy--" or he may have called me Bill; I'm not sure which he did. "Did you know a guy from Houston named Steve LaBeau?" And just to show how funny things were, I said, "I knew him quite well. We were in the same homeroom together." And he said, "Well, he was here, he was assigned to this squadron and he flew two missions." Really, I had known this. And I mentioned to Wilbur McNeese, and it was very true, he was the best football player at our school. Really, a nice guy. He had been killed on D-Day. And I told him, "Yes, I did know the guy." And he said, "Well, he was assigned to this squadron here when he was killed." Of course, I felt real bad about that. As it turned out, later on, we flew in the same plane that he, Steve Labeau, had been in when he was killed. Nevertheless, on our second mission, getting back to the point that you made

about the 3rd Army breaking out of that same little pocket, our mission was to bomb a crossroads where the Germans were trying to get through, about 25 miles south of Caen.

BS: In Falaise.

WT: The Falaise Pocket. I'll get to that. It goes down as the most critical mission that I had, or certainly one of them. As we were flying along, I remember flying across the coast. It was a beautiful day, just like it is today; not a cloud in the sky. I remember the ships. You could see them just coming in, bringing in supplies, troops or whatever they were. I think we were probably closer to the British Zone, you might say, on the northeast corner of the landing there. It looked like it should have been what we called a milk run. I saw some flak over at Brest, but it was way out, so we didn't really get shot at there. There was a contusion my first mission; this one I was a little more secure. I was looking out in the ball turret. We were flying in groups of 12 ship formations; we flew in V's. We were, like I said, no more than 15 to 20 minutes past the coastline when, all of a sudden, this tremendous explosion occurred, it seemed to me, right underneath me. I turned my turret around so I was looking out to the right side as we were going forward, and I saw the plane that had been flying over here next to us, not too far away, was

going straight down with flames coming out the trailing edge of the wings. Then I looked around and I saw another plane, which was in a flat spin; another B-17 in a flat spin. The pilot said, "Bill, look down there to see if you see any parachutes." I think I saw five parachutes. No, I only saw three parachutes. The plane with the flames coming out, there was nobody coming out of the that. The one in the flat spin, the parachutes came out of it. They seemed to be pretty close to the ground to me but, all of a sudden, I see this pop of the parachute opening up. I was scared to death at that point. If I was ever scared on any mission, it was at that point; because I was younger, I didn't know what to expect. It wasn't like our other missions that we did later, where we saw the flak coming up there in front of us and we knew we had to fly through them. This was unexpected. And it's my guess, to this day, and I've read in some of the intelligence reports I saw, that there was probably a German 88 Battery or maybe two that were providing ground support. But here we come over, flying at 155 miles an hour, maybe a little more than that if the wind was pushing us. They had their optimal instruments and we were only flying 19,000 feet then, which was much lower than we normally flew. In fact, that's the lowest we ever flew, on any mission. We had about 35 of

these 175-to-200-pound bombs; they were fragmentation-type bombs. They look like real large hand grenades; bomb sized, but configured like a bomb configuration. You could see where they broke apart, and they would really be very dangerous to the troops. As I said, I was quite scared at that time. I thought, "Maybe my time is up." That was all there was. We flew about another five to 10 minutes and dropped our bombs. The report was that we probably didn't hit anything. I think there was a lot of confusion there. We flew in these groups of 12, and when the lead bombardier dropped his bombs then our bombardier would drop his. When he saw the first bomb drop, he hit his toggle switch too. I'm not sure if we hit anything then or not, but we did drop our bombs and came back to the base. I was really pretty scared then. I admit it, I was very scared. The other missions I was more prepared for it. From a thinking man's point of view, I knew it was coming about; but that was just so quick seeing the planes go down. I really was pretty scared. Now, just to follow up on that a little bit, I mentioned about parachutes coming up. Well, a couple days later, maybe three or four, one of the members came back to the squadron who had parachuted out. I'm not sure whether he was a bombardier or a navigator on that crew that was going down. The other crew, I'm pretty sure



they were all killed. Well, let me go back. I need to go back a little further. Right after when I was scared, right after it happened, they start calling the crew and they started at the back. The bombardier, he was the foremost to the front of the plane, so he would contact the crew members to see whether we were having any problems. He did this regularly on the flights, too, for the facts of whether we were using oxygen properly, or getting it -- But the tail gunner didn't answer the call. His name was Tony Papus; he was our tail gunner. They sent one of the waist gunners. The pilot said, "Meyers, go back and see what happened and why Tony's not answering his phone on the intercom." He comes back and reports, "Tony's dead." What had happened was that blast that went off right underneath me, one piece of flak diagonally going back, it must have gone a little bit on this side. One piece of flak went through the side of the plane, which was just a piece of tin you might say, aluminum. He had a flak jacket on front and back, but he was exposed on the side of his flak jacket. This one piece of flak came through. I was right there when we landed, and I saw the flak land right on the inside of his flak jacket. It had gone through the kidney up through the heart, and I'm sure Tony was killed immediately. He had a wife in Utah, was the son of a Greek

family, a coal mining family out there. Coincidentally, about 12, 15 years ago I got a note from his sister. I had written her over that period of time, maybe once every six months. I always try to write around August the 13th, when he was killed, and discuss a few things. We've never seen each other, never talked to each other on the phone; I just kept up with her. Anyways, Tony was killed. And getting back to the Steve LaBeau thing, the football player, I knew he had been killed. They had the funerals in a little American cemetery near Cambridge. Madingley is the name of this little community, five or six miles outside of Cambridge; maybe not that far. All the crew goes to the funeral about three days later and Tony's body was there. Before the funeral service actually took place, I wandered around. All the bodies were buried chronologically. I found June the 6th, D-Day, which this friend of mine was killed in. I located Steve LaBeau's grave, and that was the connection between myself and a guy I'd known in my homeroom that was killed on D-Day. It was actually his second mission, and he'd volunteered for that particular mission. I'd say that second mission was probably the mission that was the most critical for me. I felt, really, that I dodged a bullet. This Steve LaBeau thing was part

of it too, a little bit; knowing he'd been killed on his second mission. All of it just made you wonder sometimes.

(break in audio)

WT: I was there then, and like I said, I flew my first mission in August; and then I finished my missions up in January. I flew 32 missions. As I mentioned before, maybe, that the requirement was for 35. And just briefly, to explain the 32; our pilot, or my pilot -- the crew pilot -- was a fellow named Bob Studder, who happens to still be alive. He was about four years older than I was. I think he's now, maybe, 87. He lives near Flower Mound, Texas, in a retirement home and he was originally from Wesley, Iowa. And I mention this because he just a young guy, but he really was a great pilot. Everybody thinks their pilot is the best. He got out of the Army about 1950, and I had seen him a couple times since then. He went to work, or got a job with Delta Airlines at about that time. He flew, went up the ranks and became a Senior pilot; and eventually became a pilot that checked out the pilots. He said, "You know, I just love to fly an airplane." He said, "When I'd go up, I could usually tell whether a guy knew what he was doing. I eventually just learned to fly, myself." He probably wouldn't tell the people in Delta he did this; but anyway, that's what he said. "I just love to fly." I

asked him, specifically, would he ever desire to fly a smaller plane? A single-seater plane or that sort. He said, "No. I've never had any desire to fly that. I like the big planes." He was very meticulous, and obviously knew how to set up everything. You, being a pilot, would understand the various things you set into your instruments that would make it just exactly right; trim the plane up and so forth, if that was necessary; even with the larger planes. I remember we had to do that to the 17s quite a bit, or they talked about it anyway. Bob was a wonderful pilot and I feel that, to some degree, the way things worked out, even though we never were shot down we received a lot of flak and a lot holes in a couple missions. We lost one engine one time, but he was able to get it going again. The bad thing about losing an engine was that you would lose altitude and you couldn't keep up with the squadron. You were subject to the German fighter planes picking on you, and that's what they really did. They took advantage of any stragglers, you might say, and would come in on them, swoop in on them, two or three of them at time is what we were told. I was in the 526 bomb squadron and the 379th bomb group. It was a good group. And everybody brags about their group, but this particular group dropped more bombs than any other group did in England, over

Germany, and occupied France. It had some good points about it. Colonel Lye, who recently died within the last year; he and his predecessor, Colonel Preston, both had the same object in mind; that if we can get the squadrons flying as close to the other plane as they possibly could, almost sticking the wings right in close to the tail of the other guy in little groups of threes; you concentrated your gunner's ability to put a lot of firepower on one or two planes coming in. In other words, you could concentrate your fire. I do think we saw German fighters attack squadrons to our rear that were following us in a column of planes, but we always attributed the fact that we were flying a pretty tight formation, and that our fire power was concentrated in such a way that they would pick on the squadrons which were spread out quite a bit; where the planes were flying a couple hundred yards from each other as they flew along. I don't know that that has any validity, but we never did get hit by fighters the whole time I was there. We got a lot of flak, particularly at one particular target, one particular town. It was the town of Merseburg. Nobody's ever heard of it. You can even ask the Germans; they've never heard of it. It was near Leipzig, and it was where the Germans had built a synthetic oil plant. They were converting coal to oil and

gasoline at that particular plant. Of course, they were being strangled by the lack of oil during the latter days of the war and, of course, it became a high priority while we were flying; particularly in the months of October and November of 1944. I think we flew three missions there. I kept my little diary here, and I can show you the missions we flew to. Merseburg was a pretty deep target for us. By the time we were flying we had a lot of support from the little fighters.

BS: From P-51s (inaudible).

WT: P-51s were the primary ones. I would say P-51s were the ones that went in the deepest. The 47s were there with us sometimes, but not as many. We saw some P-38s too, but the P-51s were the primary fighters that were there going along with us. I don't know how they did it, but they knew the pattern, where the flight-line was going to be. We were flying in a stream, you might say, and they kept going up and down the side of us. Of course, when the Germans did come up they were available and, like I said, we didn't get hit. The 35 missions, getting back to that real briefly. The requirement was you had to fly at least 30 missions. I'm going back. Our pilot was a real good pilot, so he was selected to be deputy lead pilot. Now, he was just a first lieutenant, and the lead pilots were generally the squadron

commander, the squadron S3, or a senior person on the staff; a Captain or somebody like that. So, Bob Studder, he got to be flying the number two position in the V. Our mission was, in case the lead plane goes down, Bob usually had a lead navigator or lead bombardier along with us in the event that we had to take over. Another thing I failed to mention is that you flew only every other day, so there was two deputy lead crews. Lieutenant Lombardy's crew was the other deputy lead crew, and Lieutenant Studder. We flew one mission, and the Lombardy's crew another. Of course, when we went on three-day leave they flew any missions there; and likewise, when they were on leave we flew consecutive missions there if necessary, as well. So, you had to had fly at least 18 missions in the deputy lead position, and at least a minimum of 30. But by the time we got assigned to that we had already flown 14, so 14 plus 18 meant that the 18th would have been my 32nd mission. That was where I finished up, was 32. I think our pilot probably flew 33 or 34. I'm pretty sure our navigator probably flew 35. I think all the gunners flew, like myself, about 31 or 32; I'm not sure exactly. I did fly one mission unexpectedly. The CQ would come by and wake you up around 2:30 or 3:00 in the morning, depending on when your take off was. I remember I wasn't expecting to

fly that morning, and all of a sudden, they said, "Where's Turley, the ball turret gunner?" They said, "You get to be a replacement in Lieutenant Lighty's crew today." Well, I didn't know Lieutenant Lighty's crew from anybody else. I remember, I forget which mission it was, say about 15 or 16, or something like that. I flew that one mission with another crew.

BS: Now is this because somebody was sick?

WT: I don't know exactly why. I guess the ball turret gunner was sick, so I flew with that particular crew. I can't remember what the reason was now. It's a little bit of a funny feeling when you're flying with another crew. You think what might have happened. I guess my 32nd mission was going to be on January the 16th, 1945. I remember we went into the briefing room and I said, "Boy, this is the last mission; I sure hope it's good. I hope there's nothing bad." It was the same old thing. They got a way of covering up where the maps were. They'd pull a string and it opens up, and they got the red line. Lo and behold, my last mission was going to be Berlin. Berlin was the toughest target over there; they had more guns around Berlin than any place else. I remember that day, going out to the airplane. And I remember Lieutenant Logan who was our co-pilot, it was going to be his last mission also. We



set out on the tarmac. There's usually three planes around a little cul-de-sac, you might say. It was cloudy and foggy, and lo-and-behold, after about a two-hour wait, all of a sudden, we looked over at the control tower. I don't know if we could see it or not, but the red flares came out; they had scrubbed the mission. We felt pretty good about that one. Then the next day, the 17th of January, was my last mission. It was an easy mission, to a city called Paderborn. I remember some flak about a quarter of a mile off to the right, and all of a sudden four guns went off at one time. But it was quite a ways away, and that was all she was. Really, a very easy mission. I can't say too much about any things that were funny. You mentioned humorous things, and I'll try to make this one as clean as I possibly can, but it was kind of funny. One of the crews in our barracks, and they had been there longer than we had, I remember when we got there they were flying some missions into Munich; some of the real rough missions into Munich. I would say they had been there for maybe 15 missions when we got there. Maybe 12 to 15, but at least up there. You stood back and listened to their stories, and they wanted to scare you sometimes. Sometimes they didn't, I guess. I'll go back and say this: when we trained, we trained with two waist gunners. We only flew

with one when got to England. They decided they didn't need but one waist gunner. So, their waist gunner was a Polish fellow, a man or young boy like the rest of us. His name started with a Z, and it was something like [Zigowski?]; but we called him Ziggy. Ziggy was from Toledo, Ohio, and this is a story they tell. They said when they went out to the plane before the mission, we always had sufficient time to put our guns in the plane and get everything checked out before we took off. It wasn't a rushed sort of a deal; there was always a little time. Well, Ziggy would get with the Ground Crew Chief and get him an ammunition box, and then he'd go behind the tent with his ammunition box, and he'd go to the bathroom in the ammunition box. Then he took the ammunition box and put it on the plane somewhere near him. In the waist gunner's position, you had to pull a window open. Well, the story goes that, and I don't know if this is true or not, I wonder about it; I guess by then the excrement and everything had frozen in the ammunition box. As they flew over the target, Ziggy would get his ammunition box and say "Okay, you guys, this one's from Ziggy."

WT: He'd throw the ammunition box with the excrement out over Germany. (laughs) Whatever happened about that, I don't know. The funny things we'd do got in this magazine called

*The Contrails*, from our squadron the 379th. I did see Ziggy passed away here, about a year ago. It had the people that died and his name came up on it. I didn't remember his name, but the fact that I remember the Polish name, plus the fact he was from Toledo, Ohio; I put it all together, and I know that was him. That was one of the funny things that happened.

BS: Have you ever seen the movie *Twelve O'Clock High*?

WT: Yeah, I did see that.

BS: I went to a management school and watched that movie over and over again for about five days, so it's really ingrained in me. What did you think about the betrayal in that movie?

WT: I thought it was pretty good, but I didn't like the fact that, if you remember the ball turret gunner, he was the lover of the crew and the big shot. He had that terrifying experience down there in the bottom. I thought it was overplayed on his part. No, that's *Memphis Belle* I'm thinking about. *Twelve O'Clock High* I thought was really very, very straightforward. I remember Gregory Peck having the problems with that mission. I would think that was probably a pretty good [portrayal?]. I like that guy that moderated. He was going along and had the head of one of the guys, kind of like that, up on the mantle; and they

turned it around when the mission was coming up. But I thought that was really, pretty good. *Memphis Belle* was the one that I was thinking about. *Memphis Belle* portrayed the ball turret gunner as the lover. I took it with a little bit of a grain of salt. That one, I thought he was a little bit too melodramatic. But I did like both of them, really.

BS: What did you do when you landed on your 32nd mission, and you knew that was your last mission?

WT: I remember jumping out of the plane and kissing the ground, I remember that. Just reaching down and pecking the ground, you might say. We went into town that night and we went into Bedford on our liberty runs. It was about 17 miles away, but we rode in the two and half ton truck there. I had gone in quite a few times, because I had a little bit of a break by knowing that I wasn't going to be flying the next day, at least on those last 18 missions; so, I could drink a few beers and talk to people, meet people. I was one of the younger looking people probably at that time. I was one of the younger people flying in, and there were a couple of pubs that we hung out at there. I left about five days later. Kind of a coincidence that day was on the 23rd day of January. I guess it would have been six days. This is kind of a funny thing, an important

thing: I remember going down to the mess hall, and I believe it was a consolidated mess. I never did know this for sure, but I think all the squadrons ate there, because there weren't that many people in a group. We had maybe 50 ground crew in that group, it would have been, plus that. But I remember going to mess hall, and we were going to leave at 11:30. They were going to take us by deuce and a half, a two-and-a-half-ton truck, to the train station in Bedford to go to a place up near Liverpool, where they got all the people who were going back to the States together. I remember sitting in this truck and we were just waiting around. The truck driver was supposed to have a certain time he was supposed to leave, like going at twelve o'clock. We made sure everybody was there. I think we counted, or he knew how many people were supposed to be there. All of a sudden, the planes were taking off on a mission. They didn't go exactly over the mess hall, but the flight pattern wasn't too far away. You could hear them take off. And, all of a sudden, this tremendous explosion took place, we knew it had to be a plane crash. What had happened was that one of the planes, and I think it was the 525th squadron -- I'm not sure which one -- took off. They lost control as they were taking off, and the bomb came down and hit right in the middle of one of the

other squadron's living areas. Killed a bunch of people on the ground. I remember as soon as the explosion took place we were all like, "Hey, what's happening here? Let's get the hell out of here." The driver said "Okay, let's go." I remember us driving out the gate before the ambulances or anything came in. I later out found out what had happened. We didn't know exactly what happened as we left that morning. I have a book here written by a fella, I saw it advertised once. It's a small book, and he came in as one of the replacements for those crews which were killed as a result of the plane going into the barracks. He came in there and he finished his missions later in March or something like that, or April. He got through with them pretty quick. That held us up a little bit in the winter time; the weather did hold you back on certain missions.

BS: When you went back to the United States what (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

WT: Well, I actually went and got on a troop ship down in South Hampton. It was called the George Washington, it had been captured, I think, actually during World War I and held somewhere. It was a pretty big ship. And we went from there to New York Harbor, Camp Kilmer, and then I went from there, home. They took us all the way on the train. We traveled by troop train. I don't know if it was completely

a troop train, or just a regular train with a couple places for soldiers on it with Pullman cars. I remember going through St. Louis, and going from St. Louis down to San Antonio. I came home on leave and then I reported back out to Santa Ana Air Base. It was a reclassification center and I was there for about 10 days. A lot of nice food. They treated us real good. I remember eating all this frozen shrimp, and all the fruit juices and everything. The weather was great, of course. This would have been in about in March of '45 by the time I got home. January the 17th, it was, and with my leave it was probably March when I got out there. I was sent back from Santa Ana, and I went back through San Antonio on another train going back the other way. I remember being on a train going from San Antonio to Waco Army Airfield, where I was to be stationed. I remember at the time that President Roosevelt had died, because I remember being on that train in April. April the 15th?

BS: It was the 12th, not the 15th.

WT: Something like that. I can't remember the exact date. I remember being on a train, and went to Waco. I was there for a couple weeks. Here I was, a sergeant, I wasn't qualified to do any of the mechanics work, but they just put us out on the line. Or I did anyway; that's where I

was just gassing up airplanes when they were training pilots. I was there for what couldn't have been three weeks, and I needed to take all the gunners like myself and send them out to Garden City, Kansas; where they were taking the B-17s and actually mothballing at that time. They felt the war was -- well, of course it was just about over by then.

BS: The first part of May it would have been over, in Europe.

WT: Right. The war in Europe was over. I was there for a little bit, and I remember being on KP. I was a Staff sergeant by then, and I remember everybody. All of a sudden -- and I didn't know it, because I was at the mess hall -- an order came in: "We want 60 people to go down to do some work down at Tinker Field in Oklahoma City." I said, "Well, I think I'd rather be at Tinker Field, Oklahoma, than I would be at Garden City, Kansas." I was on KP and I asked the Mess sergeant, I said, "Can I go down? I'd like to try to get on." He said, "Yeah, go on down there if you'd like to." I went down there and the guy in charge of the thing, the CQ or whoever was running it there in the Army room, said, "You can sign up as a supernumerary if you want to and maybe you'll get it, and maybe you won't." It turned out a guy named Curly, of all things -- I remember the guy's face kind of, big guy -- he



got sick or something, and they said, "Well, you can take his place." So, they flew the 60 of us in one or two C47s, picked us up, and flew us back down from Garden City back down to Tinker Field. We were working on the old -- What plane was that? You, being a pilot, would know. C54s, I believe. It was something about the inside lining of the gasoline tanks. They'd used something to seal them up and this was flaking off, so we were going in and with high powered hoses and just knocking all the stuff off completely. I remember it was yellow looking stuff, the way I remember it. I was actually there at Tinker Field right outside of Oklahoma City when the war was over on September the 3rd, or whatever day it was in 1945. And shortly thereafter they said, "You finished up your missions here." So, they sent some planes and flew us back up to Garden City, where we were really assigned to originally, because there was still work to be done up there. In the meantime, my brother was in the Navy and he came home on boot training. I remember I really never did stay at Garden City. I went from there, back home on leave. While I was home, they called me and told me to report back to Garden City to get discharged from the Army; so, I got out on October the 9th. I had to go back up, all the way up, and then back down to San Antonio and got

discharged on October the 19th. Like you said, there was a lot of traveling. All of my traveling was done, mostly, by train. When I was in Tinker Field, I was there for several months. I did hitchhike home a couple of times, all the way to Houston from Oklahoma City -- all the way through Dallas and everything -- and got to Houston. One time, I actually came through College Station where my brother was going to, and he was younger than me; but he had started school in 1944, and that's when I was in service and seeing him there.

BS: When the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where were you and what were your thoughts at that time?

WT: Well, I was real happy about it, of course. (laughs) That was a few days before I got out. I could have possibly been home when that happened, on leave. Very likely I was at that time. What day did that take place on, do you remember?

BS: It was in the middle of August.

WT: Yeah, I was probably still at Tinker Field. I was very happy about it. I read that and I just wonder -- I know it killed a lot of people, and I'm sorry for those people, but it was war to me. I knew it would save a lot of people's

lives if we did it. Those were my thoughts. Let's get it over with, if we possibly can.

BS: When you were flying, all the people that flew were sergeants, weren't they? Non-Commissioned Officers, all of the gunners, et cetera?

WT: Yeah.

BS: Because the Germans treated non-commissioned officers different than the enlisted man.

WT: Yeah, right. We all got promoted. The four gunners were what you might call "career gunners." We all got to be staff sergeants. The radio operator and the crew chief got to be tech sergeants. They had one more stripe than we did, but we started flying our first missions as Corporals, and then worked on up pretty quick-like.

BS: So even there in 1944, when you started flying it was as corporal? And the Germans considered that non-commissioned officer?

WT: Well, I don't know whether it was or not. You know, that thought never did come to my mind that that could have been possible. I didn't think about it. I think we became buck sergeants pretty close after the first couple of missions.

BS: You were a corporal.

WT: We were probably corporals. It just took time.

BS: What was the relationship between your officers, your pilot and your co-pilot? Was there ever any rivalry between them? Did they fly the whole time together as the pilot and co-pilot?

WT: I think Bob Studder was my pilot on just about every mission I flew, except that one when I flew with the other crew. Logan was our co-pilot. Smokey Logan was a real nice guy, I really liked him a lot. He was from Lexington, Kentucky, but he apparently was not as well-trained, or he didn't have that ability that some pilots have; and as a result, they took the co-pilots, or the people that didn't fly as well, and made them fly in the tail gunner's position in the lead ship almost every mission. Primarily, because he knew the formations that people were supposed to be in and he could tell the commander, whoever is commanding the squadron, "Well, so-and-so in that position is supposed to --". Then the senior man who was in charge would radio and say, "Okay, so-and-so, get your ship up, get your plane up, you're too far out," or whatever he was doing. I know Smokey did get sent into that position; he was flying out there as a tail gunner on some of these. It counted as another mission for him, but it just wasn't as a co-pilot.

BS: Mm-hmm.

WT: The officers, they had a lot of poker games, and Smokey Logan was a great. He won a lot of money, they said, over there. He just happened to be a good poker player, I guess.

BS: Did the officers and the enlisted men get along? How was it?

WT: Yeah, very close. We'd see them down in London. We'd go to London with them, and then we'd see them somewhere. It wasn't just a buddy-buddy thing, but they were very friendly towards us, and could help us out and everything when they possibly could. They censored our mail without really reading it. You know they had to sign off on it, and we used the V-mail quite a bit, which was really a big help when we were there. I think it helped out. They took the little photograph, you'd write it on a certain little form and they'd photograph it, and then they'd send it back and re-develop it and expand it. Your family would get something about this size. I actually had a whole sack full of those V-mail letters that I had sent back to my mother, some to my aunts. I was pretty good at keeping people on track of where I was or what I was doing, without spilling the beans too much. I'd try to say something like, "Well, I'm 15 days, there was 15 cows out in the pasture behind us, now we've got 17 behind us," or

something like that. I don't remember how I did it, but I put something in the thing that they'd know where I was, maybe. My father I know sweated out, and I'm sure my mother did too; but my father probably showed it more than my mother. I remember my mother telling me about my father getting down on his hands and knees and praying for me. That's always been a tough thing for me to think about, that it did happen that way. I was certainly proud of my father, but you hate to think that you caused that much trouble for your parents. I probably could have taken another route. Other people did something that wasn't quite as dangerous as what I got into, but that's the way I wanted to do it.

BS: You told me that after you got out you went to A&M.

WT: Mm-hmm.

BS: You participated in the ROTC.

WT: Right.

BS: Became commissioned and then went to a career as a second lieutenant.

WT: Mm-hmm.

BS: And retired from the Army in 1973 as a full colonel.

WT: Right.

BS: Is there any other stories that you can think of, now that we've done this chronologically, that you want to relate or add anything to?

WT: Well, I could probably come up with something. I had a very successful career in the military, I think. I mean, for me it was pretty successful. I had quite a bit of command time. I commanded a battery in Germany, and then I commanded an air defense battery in the Washington-Baltimore Defense, which was interesting. I had a little piece of ground that, belonged to me, was under my control; my control area and launching area. Then I had one assignment that was kind of a unique assignment. In 1962, the latter part of 1962, I was ordered to go to Vietnam and a couple days before Christmas. In 1962 Charlene got the call. It said, "Tell your husband he's not going to Vietnam, he's going to India instead." You may not remember this, but in late 1962 the Chinese Communists came across the Northern India border up in the Ladakh area, and then some over around Sikkim and Bhutan. In an effort to kind of slow them down or see what we could do, Prime Minister Macmillan and President Kennedy got together out at Nassau and came up with some money to give to the Indians to buy equipment. I think it was something in the vicinity of maybe \$50 million to \$100 million dollars. In

those days, it was quite a bit of money. We were sent over there as part of the United States Supply Mission to India and it was a joint thing. Some Army and some Air Force people were trying to work with the Indian Army and Air Force to determine what they could use. I worked in the joint plans. There was a small, three-man crew in there. My boss was trying to coordinate what the Army and Air Force did. There was a black book thing prepared by both sections, with my boss, Colonel Cuprino. I was a Major at the time; he was lieutenant colonel. They sent this back to Washington, and it got tied in politically. General Kelly was our commander at the time. I was there for just about a year and there was, what we called "a hardship tour." I was there, and came back and went down to Tulane where I got my master's in political science. I was there for about a year and a half. That was a pretty nice assignment for me, a lot of studying. It tied in a little bit with what I said about the history thing. The hardest part was the last semester. I spent the whole semester doing it, because I had taken all the academic courses it had required. I think I had to have 18 hours, it seems like, and I had taken those in two semesters. Then the third semester I was there, I had to write a thesis. I didn't know really what to write about, but the professor



worked with me and he said, "What do you think about writing a story or a thesis on a subject something like this: 'The United States Landings in Lebanon'?" That would have been 1956 or 1957; I forget exactly the year it was. And he said (inaudible) some international legal aspects, tying in the political science aspects to it. I said "Oh, that's sounds like something I don't know anything about, but I can do it. I'll work at it." Then I spent essentially one semester in the library, in the carrels, in the back where all the stacks were. We could pull books out and put a little note where we picked the book up or where it was, put it in our little thing and draw your information out of there. That was a pretty nice assignment. You had to pass a language test, and I had taken Spanish. It scared me, because I really wasn't that efficient in Spanish. But they just gave you a book and said, "Okay, you can have this book and we'll call you back in about two months. We want you to translate as far as you can from a certain page." I remember doing that, and I don't know how good I did. I'm not sure that the professors down there didn't give us a break, to be honest with you. I don't know for sure. Nevertheless, I did get my master's degree.

BS: Well, Colonel Turley, thank you very much for spending this time and for this oral interview. I thank you very much, on behalf of myself and the Museum of the Pacific.

WT: Thank you for letting me do it, sir. I appreciate it and enjoyed it.

END OF AUDIO FILE