

Albert Sanders Oral History Interview

CHARLIE SIMMONS: This is Charlie Simmons, today is the 22nd of June 2012, I'm interviewing Mr. Albert Sanders, the interview is taking place with me in Fredericksburg, Texas and Albert in Austin, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information related to the [this?] site. And, Albert has asked me to point out that he allows the museum to use his information for publication but he cannot relinquish all rights as it's stated in our request for release of rights, but he will allow us to use the information. Did I say that right, Albert, or are we [straight?]?

ALBERT SANDERS: Sounds right to me.

CS: Okay, well here we go, then; Albert, without further ado if you would, please give us your name, your date of birth, and your place of birth, and we'll take it from there.

AS: Okay, my name is Albert B. Sanders, unfortunately in the military -- a junior after it because the courthouse burned down and Dad went with me to the courthouse and he put junior down and I was too stupid to correct him. But, born

in Corpus Christi, Texas, outside Corpus on a farm; that was on May the 20th, 1924, what have I forgotten?

CS: Okay, you've got all that right and now we'd like to kind of move into your upbringing, what sort of family you had, do you have brothers and sisters, older, younger, or did you grow up on the farm there?

AS: Yeah, Mother died when I was six years old and my little sister died just a few months after that and my three brothers and my father and I lived on the farm until I was 12 years old, and we did cotton farming, all the work involved with that except the picking of cotton, we hired people to pick it but at 12 years old moved into Corpus Christi and stayed there until I was 18 and joined the military.

CS: Okay, in Corpus Christi did you lead an active social life or were you -- were you working part time on the farm or just --

AS: No, I was too poor to have any social life with girls, which I really wanted, but I played second string football, I played first string basketball, captain of the squad. Ran track and the half mile medley, so I was a [three-starter?] man in my senior year; I did not graduate, I was a drop out. I had one credit didn't have and I was too

angry to go back and get that one credit, so I never became a high school graduate, okay?

CS: Okay, and what year did you graduate from high school?

AS: So, I left high school in '42 --

CS: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean graduate, of course, I meant what year did you drop out of high school?

AS: Yeah, I understand, it was 1942, in October of '42 my friends and I joined the Army Air Force, and they sent us back to Corpus and said, okay, you're in the military but we'll call you when there's a space for you. Well, they called us in February, I believe, and we reported for duty at Wichita Falls, Kansas for basic training.

CS: Okay, in Wichita, Kansas.

AS: I'm sorry, Wichita Falls, Texas.

CS: Oh, Wichita Falls, okay, the other Wichita, okay. Okay, and had you gone through boot camp or was this your initial, your initiation?

AS: Yeah, that was it, that was boot camp, that was where you got into the Army with everybody else from the world, you weren't cadets there, you were [buck?] privates. And we were there until they assigned, actually both of us, to Austin College in Sherman, Texas as air students and I was there for enough months that I got some college credits,

and then finally they said, okay, you're off for Muskogee, Oklahoma, and you're a cadet.

CS: Okay, how did -- was it called a V-12 program, where they -
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AS: I don't think so.

CS: -- okay, where they assigned students to college in preparation for putting them in officers' candidate school?

AS: No, no, no, no, not (inaudible) definitely not. No, we were just there because they didn't have room for us in the cadet's program, they wanted us to come into the military and get a little more education than what we had and just wait until there was an opening in the cadet program, and the minute there was an opening in the cadet program, they sent us off to it.

CS: How did you get selected for the cadet program, then?

AS: Well, okay, until the war started, you had to have two years of college to become a cadet, and of course I never had any hope of getting two years of college, I was too poor to attend college, so I took all sorts of courses like typing and drafting and you name it, anything other than science. Well, then just before -- I guess the war had been on for about six months when I found out that they would accept you if you could pass a test, so my friend and I went up to San Antonio and we passed the test with hardly

any problem, it was mainly mathematics, and that time we got accepted, we passed the test.

CS: Okay, so you were designated for being a cadet when you went in to start with, I see.

AS: Oh yeah, oh yeah, I went into the service as a person who was going to become a cadet.

CS: I see, okay, well had you ever flown before?

AS: I had taken a dollar ride in a Ford Trimotor out over the Corpus Christi Bay that was (inaudible) watch the wheels come off the ground what a thrill.

CS: Okay, okay, well that sounds like preparation enough.
Okay, so --

AS: I think what got me interested in flying was watching the crop dusters on our farm, they poisoned the boll weevils, and they would do these chandelles at the end of each row, and my God it was dangerous work. And finally, one of the crashed and we went out and we got him to the hospital, he wasn't badly hurt, but my three brothers and my dad and I lifted the plane up and put it on our flat [buggy?] truck and took it to the airport, and I saved a shoe out of that.

CS: Well, they also had -- the Navy has a training base there in Corpus for their [fighters?].

AS: Oh, is it ever huge; I did not sign up for that.

CS: Well, you must have seen some of the old SNJs flying around in the skies.

AS: Oh, oh absolutely, and the yellow tails, they were -- the tails stuck up and all [that the farmer sees is them tails come down?].

CS: Okay, so then you're accepted in to the cadet program, where was it, Muskogee?

AS: Started out at Muskogee, flew I think they were called [TT-14s?], those little [ring?] biplanes, graduated from there and went to Coffeyville, Kansas and flew the [Vultee Vibrator?].

CS: Now, what time of year -- this was still in 1943, is that right?

AS: Oh yeah, yeah this almost all happened in '43.

CS: Okay, and how long was your initial training there?

AS: In each one?

CS: In -- well, yeah, you said your first in the --

AS: I think in each one it must have been possibly two months because I'm going to end up telling you when I graduated, and it will be in April of '44, a month before I became 20.

CS: Wow, 19, that's -- okay, so I'm sorry I interrupted, you and you went on to your second places.

AS: That's okay, I went on to, yeah, the second place is Coffeyville, Kansas, that's where we flew Vultee Vibrators,

a more powerful engine, went from there to [Panther?], Texas, and flew tiny little twin-engine planes but now we're in an enclosed cockpit and we got instrument training for the first time, and when I graduated from there I was a second lieutenant with wings. And, that was like I say, April of 1944.

CS: Okay, and you were --

AS: And --

CS: -- you were qualified for [multi?]-engine, then.

AS: Okay, then they sent me to Liberal, Kansas, and there was the Monster B-24 sitting there and we had to learn to fly that, and after I learned to fly that they sent me to Pueblo, Colorado to pick up a crew and learn to fly formations, and we went from there by train to New York City, to England by Liberty Ship --

CS: About how long -- let's back up a little bit, Albert, your time in Liberal, about how long were you there on this initial B-24 training would you say?

AS: I think probably we're in the range of two months, I would guess, I never really sat down and figured it out, I probably could do it because I can take each base and divide it by how many months there were, it's in the range of two months each time.

CS: So a couple months in that B-24 training, then to Pueblo with the crew and formation flying a couple of months, and then you took the train to --

AS: To New York City.

CS: -- New York City.

AS: And from there we had a -- put us on a Liberty -- I was sick the entire way across, and then we -- they took us by some sort of vehicle to our base, and there we were.

CS: Okay and you got to England, what time of year was that, about?

AS: So, gee, that had to be November.

CS: Okay, November '43 or '44?

AS: Forty-four, forty-four.

CS: Forty-four, okay --

AS: We've gotten up to '44 now.

CS: That -- yeah okay. November '44 and where was your base in England?

AS: A place outside of Norwich, England called Seething; we were virtually surrounded by the little town of Seething.

CS: And which region or which county in England would that be of, I'm not sure?

AS: Oh, I can't tell you I can just say it's probably 90 miles or so north of London.

CS: North of London, okay, and your planes were -- they were waiting for you with other -- do you have other crews --

AS: Oh, there was already -- we were latecomers to the group, the group had been flying for over a year, we were just replacements dead crews.

CS: Oh, okay. Were you assigned and old plane, new plane?

AS: They didn't assign you a plane; each time you flew you were assigned a plane, you never had your own plane.

CS: What was the attitude, I guess I should say, the morale, of the flyers there at your base and the squadron you were assigned to, when you got there, the old guys that had been there for several missions?

AS: Yeah, there had been some there that were there for several missions, and there were some that were pretty bitter at what they had done at one time; they had gone around a target twice and the second time around the target they lost three or four B-24s from flak, and every time they briefed us for a mission they would say, "And you will not go around twice." So, yeah, there were some that were very bitter about that, but by and large when I got there the threat of the Nazi airplanes was diminished, you know. At one time it was awful, but by the time I got there, you'd think it's [terrible?] [how far?] it was from flak, so we had to put up with the fear of every time we turned on the

bomb run there would be a huge dark cloud of flak out ahead of us and we knew we were flying right into what was there, and -- you want me to go ahead and expand on what happened to us a couple of times, would you like that?

CS: Sure, yeah, please.

AS: It's probably [in?] all my memoirs that we had to land in Belgium twice because we were shot up and we were not allowed to come back across the Channel, we had engines out. And one time we had hydraulic fluid all over the airplane, a B-24, the people who built it were smart, they left a little reservoir so that you had brakes, one time, when you landed if you could push on the brakes one time and don't let up, and I used that to full advantage on this little fighter strip that we landed on, so yeah, we got lots of flak damage but very fortunately no one on the crew ever got hit. There are three of us still alive today.

CS: Really, really pretty lucky then, it sounds like.

AS: Oh, you bet, oh yeah.

CS: Well, what were the -- what was the maximum number of missions, the required number of missions before you could rotate by November '44 do --

AS: Okay, it was 35, but they took us into lead crews after 10 missions, the lead crew commander asked me if I would like to become a lead crew pilot. And I said, "I guess so," and

I said, "What's the advantage?" And he says, "Well, you only have to fly 20 missions as lead crew." And I said, "Why's that?" and he says, "Because the fighter planes always try to shoot down the lead crew and disrupt the formation." "Well, okay, I see why." And he said, "After 20 missions you'll get a DSC and become a captain." And I said, "Oh, well, I'm willing to risk that," and so we did. So we went into crew training and this took about two months, and I can expand on what happened during that time if you wish.

CS: Were you -- okay, well, just to back up a little bit, first of all, you had flown 10 missions over what period of time did it take you to acquire 10 missions, for example? You were flying every other day, or every day, once a week?

AS: Oh, golly no, oh no never. I would say except for the Battle of the Bulge when we flew three missions in three days, I'd say we flew a mission every week or sometimes longer than that. You were stood down so many times because of weather and then of course we got leave to London, three-day leave about every three weeks, so you know, it was a life of rally.

CS: Now, were all of your targets at that time within Germany?

AS: No, no, we bombed a few in France but mainly in Germany.

We bombed Koblenz I believe three times in a row, we bombed

the marshalling yards more often than anything else. They were so interested in keeping the Germans from being able to move supplies and men and so forth to the front. So, we would bomb those yards and apparently the workers that they had from Russia and you name -- wherever they had captured people -- would get out there and repair them and we'd go back and bomb them again.

CS: They had the long-range P-51s by this time?

AS: Oh, golly yes; wonderful little planes.

CS: And they could go all the way in to any of the targets.

AS: All the way in, all the way back, yes.

CS: That must have been a nice feeling, then.

AS: Wonderful feeling.

CS: Probably had something to do with you being willing to take over the lead plane, though.

AS: You can bet your bottom dollar. We were deep in Germany one time and got an engine shot out, and so I turned the flight over to the deputy and we started for home; and here we are, a single airplane deep in Germany trying to get back. And so I radioed for help and by gosh we got some help, but they scared us, they came in on pursuit curves and my gunners didn't recognize them at first and fired a little at them.

CS: Uh-oh, well that's not a good way to make friends.

AS: Huh?

CS: That's not a good way to make friends.

AS: Yeah, they said "You want help or not?" And we said, "My God yes, we're so sorry, you look like (inaudible)," and he said, "Well, yeah, a little bit." So they stayed with us for about 15, 20 minutes and then the guy said, "Oh, no there's a big air battle going on 60 miles away, we've got to go." And so they left and we journeyed home alone and made it.

CS: Did you -- this was not one of the two times you went down in Belgium, I assume?

AS: No, as a matter of fact by that time they had changed the restrictions and you could fly across the Channel with three engines.

CS: Oh, okay, and okay, so well back to, oh gosh, I'm afraid I've kind of lost track, you had been turned over as -- or you had worked -- undergoing training for the lead bomber for a couple of months, what did that entail?

AS: Well, not a lot, it'd just be a matter of learning to fly extremely -- make very gradual turns, keep within two or three hundred feet of the lead formation. If you were a low left or high right, you had to stay fairly close to the other -- the group lead, which would be another 12 planes, you had 12 and the high right they had 12, if you were low

left, and the group had 12, so you wanted to stay a cohesive group, because this is what is effective against the German fighters. Having hundreds of machine guns firing at one plane as it comes in, so that's a little scary for them.

CS: Yeah, I can imagine.

AS: So, we had -- yeah, it would scare me. So, we had to learn to fly more gently, the navigator -- I the best navigator I think in England, and he had to learn specifically how to find the place where we formed. You know, each time you formed -- well, let's say this, you flew -- we had a thing called a little thing called a [striped-ass ape?] airplane that was a forming ship, and it had nothing on it, no guns, no bombs, no -- and you would just take off and you and the pilot and navigator and the engineer, and you would climb up to where the navigator had determined that that's where the group should form, and then you would start to fire flares for that day. You would have distinctive flares that would -- that the other planes could recognize you by; say, red, yellow, red, you would fire those until all the planes that were in that squadron would form behind you. And when they formed behind you, then you could tear off back to the base and head for London. So, that was a fun time.

CS: Okay, now, and then you'd have your 12 planes and then you would form up with the other two squadrons in the group, is that correct?

AS: Well, that's what we -- that's what they would do, if you were flying the striped-ass ape, you went home and went to London. Okay, but if you were the lead pilot, the lead person, then you formed behind that striped-ass ape and then you're right, you would then form up and the other two would be very near you, assigned very near spaces, and you would form up with them. Now you've got the whole group together, well that group was formed into the wing and then the wing would head into Germany on line with the entire Eighth Air Force, however many they had at the time, that day. Sometimes you would see planes as far ahead of you and as far behind you as you could see.

CS: How often --

AS: I think a thousand --

CS: Yep.

AS: I think a thousand-plane raid happened at least once.

CS: Whoa. How long would this whole process typically take?

AS: Well, B-24s are really underpowered, and it would take you an hour to climb to 20,000 feet to where you formed, so there's an hour spent just doing that, and probably another 20 minutes getting into position and lining up into the

full formation that you're headed for Germany with, and so then off you go. And the missions were ordinarily fairly short, six to eight, nine hours.

CS: Okay, so the B-24 had a nominal range with a bomb load of about what combat radius?

AS: It was a lot more than that, we never flew them [the full?] range. The B-24s had a fairly massive range that they used out in the Pacific and also in the Atlantic patrolling for submarines, but they carried a lot more gasoline in extra fuel tanks than we did.

CS: Right, yeah. Yeah, the R- -- what was it, the R-4Bs, the Navy equivalent, I think they only carried bombs in one bomb bay and had gas in the other bomb bay. Okay, so you've taken over as group leader and you've got 10 missions to go -- or I'm sorry, as flight leader -- and you've got 10 missions to go so -- on one of those you got an engine shot out, right, you just talked a little bit about that?

AS: Yeah, we -- I don't know how many engines we had shot out. It's probably half a dozen; it's just amazing how often. And when you got an engine shot out, it was always an outboard engine which made it much more difficult to fly, but the only two that really caused us to have to land in Belgium were early on in our experience, before I became a

flight leader, and those were when you could not fly back across the Channel, they had restrictions and at that point they had lost too many people that didn't make it back across the Channel, so yeah, that was our experience there. We got engines shot out and we would be -- one time I was one minute away from bombs away, when the co-pilot said, "We've lost oil pressure completely in engine number three." Well, the minute you lose oil pressure that is serious in an engine. If you don't shut it down and feather the prop instantly the thing may pop the crankshaft, in fact it did in one airplane, and the prop flies off and in this case it cut the airplane in half. So, well I instantly told him to feather the thing and gave the mission over, gave the lead over to the deputy lead. So, yeah, it was not unusual to lose an engine.

CS: Well, so not all of the engines were lost because of flak, then, or only --

AS: Oh, yeah, oh yeah, all were lost because of flak, and the reason you had to turn the airplane over, the flight over to the deputy is you could not maintain speed with three engines. You could not fly the -- we always indicated 165, which probably at true-air speed at 20,000 feet was about maybe 220, but we could not do that with three engines, so

you could not continue to lead. So, you had to drop out and give it to the deputy.

CS: Okay, that's -- now, talk a little bit about your crew for a minute, did you keep the entire -- the crew intact that you had the one that you went over with?

AS: Yeah, we had -- we lost our radio operator back in the States, he got sick and they assigned us a real old fellow, he was 35 years old, who was an instructor, and so we had one old man on the crew, but everybody else was their teens or early 20s; kept them all the time, the entire time over there.

CS: And no combat [injuries?]; that was -- I guess you must have felt pretty lucky for --

AS: Oh, yeah, my navigator, he was my best friend, he's still alive, there's a little bubble head of the cockpit between you and the nose gunner, and that's where he is up there with his chart and instruments. One time in flak he stuck his head up in that little bubble and stuck his tongue out at us, and then he put his head back down; a piece of flak went through that bubble and hit in the console between the co-pilot and me, he stuck his head back up in that bubble and his eyes were like [bugged?]. He had just missed getting his head blown off by a couple of seconds. So yeah, we got flak damage; we never had serious flak damage.

You see planes that the tail is shot off, one of the horizontal stabilizers or vertical, you know, lots of terrible damage. We never had that, we just had holes in our plane, engines shot out, but what luck. Okay, we never were attacked by fighters; those P-51s protected us. When we went into lead crew training, though, the Germans unleashed their jets and they were really a panic; during the time we were in lead crew training, those jets were really a problem until the P-51s learned how to handle them. We were scheduled for our first lead crew flight and they gave us a test and I don't know what happened, but something happened -- I always blame it on the navigator, he and I are such great friends we can always kid each other -- but anyhow, the major who gave us the test flight did not let us fly it the next day, he assigned it to a praying crew. I always (inaudible) in my memoirs, but they -- this group, this flight -- the B-24s (inaudible) and this pilot I think he was the one who lead it, they would pray on the tarmac before each mission and we called them the praying crew, because they took over and flew that mission that we were supposed to fly and he got separated, he got behind the lead, and the jets came in and shot down him and three of the other B-24s of that group. So, that was a mission we were awfully glad that we didn't make.

CS: Wow, well it could have been a different story if you had been the lead and kept in formation.

AS: I hope so, because we sure kept tight, I tell you what.

CS: Yeah, well that must have been a terrible sight for a German fighter pilot to see a group of B-17s all snugged up together and knowing he was just basically a wall of .50 caliber machine guns, because --

AS: They interviewed one on TV, and his face was a mask, it was a horrible looking thing, his eyes were about the main thing that was normal and the rest of it was terribly scarred. And he was a German fighter pilot, and he described the fear that they had coming into a tight group with as many as 6 machine guns off of each B-24, and 36 B-24s; and in spite of the fact that the number of planes to come in at the same time, he said it was just frightening. And he got shot down, his plane burned, and he was very lucky to be alive.

CS: Well, did you make friends with a lot of the other crewmen, or did you pretty much keep with your crew or stay together, or?

AS: Virtually stayed together with your own crew. The only time you really got with the rest of the people in the squadron was you'd play bridge occasionally and go out and play a little volleyball or something like that, by and

large it was a team of brothers. The crew was a very tight-knit crew; we officers always went to London together. My Navigator and I, he would -- he was a cute little guy who could dance and he always picked up a couple of girls and so we had a great time when we were in London. You know, the whole life over there was not bad at all, it's just you had these few hours of terror in between.

CS: What did it feel like, I guess this is sort of a trite question, but it's difficult to answer, but you know, you're anticipating getting up in the morning and do you know the day before you're going to fly a mission, or when are you informed?

AS: Oh yeah, you're informed that evening before the flight, and --

CS: So, you've got all evening to think about it and all the next morning.

AS: Actually, at my age now, I probably wouldn't get any sleep, but at that time I would go out, look up at the stars and say, gee I hope I'm looking at you tomorrow night, but go in and go to bed and go to sleep.

CS: Well, that's pretty amazing, I just have a hard time thinking, you know, knowing that if you get through this one you're going to have to go back and do it again next week, and the week after.

AS: You live one day or one mission at a time, however you want to think about it, and it wasn't something that you dreaded that much except when they told you, yes, you're flying tomorrow; yeah, then you'd have a little dread. Some people drank too much at that point, they would -- they'd go into the officer's pub and they would start to drink. Well, I couldn't do that, I decided that if I was going to give fortune any help at all, I was going to be sober doing it, so I never drank before a mission.

CS: Wow, okay, well it's better to be clear-eyed, be able you got to make decisions pretty fast up there I guess.

AS: Absolutely, absolutely. In fact, my navigator once told me, he was a much smarter person than me, he had graduated at 19 years old from Penn State, he was a real genius, but he told me once, he said, "You know, I didn't realize how much -- how important it was to make the right decision quickly," and that's what you were able to do. And that's true, I realized that then. I still do that pretty well driving, you know?

CS: Yeah, well, that's a good habit to get into.

AS: Oh yeah, absolutely.

CS: Yeah, well, is there any particular mission or missions that you -- that really stand out in your mind? I know --

AS: I think the ones that I've said where we had to land in -- the first two we landed at was Liège, the whole inside of the airplane was filled with hydraulic fluid, it was smelly, it was nauseating, and the poor navigator couldn't read his maps, they were covered with fluid. But he found a little field and we landed, and we didn't know until we landed that it was a fighter field, so I knew that I could only push on the brakes one time, so when I landed I got on the ground as quickly as possible and got on the brakes and I got to the end of the runway and was doing 60 miles an hour, and that was all the runway that there was. But, fortunately, there was another 100 yards or so of this steel mesh laid out that the fighter planes never did use, they didn't need all that landing space, so we didn't sink into the mud, we were able to stay up.

CS: Where they able to get the plane out later out from that field?

AS: Well, that was unfortunate; like I say, I think this was our probably our third mission in the Battle of the Bulge, and the Germans were really approaching Liège at this time, and they were handing rifles to cooks and accountants and bookkeepers and everybody and saying, "You know, you're going to be out there stopping the Germans," and they looked at us and they decided these guys are too valuable,

we're not going to get them killed, and they got a C-47 in and they flew us back to London, back to England. But, we were awfully close to being handed a rifle and going out there and being infantrymen, so yeah, we're very lucky.

CS: And, did the plane survive, or was it stuck in the field?

AS: No, damn it, the plane was all shot up by the damn Germans when they came through and we never got that plane back.

That was our favorite plane, too; it got the best gasoline mileage of any of the planes we ever flew, yeah.

CS: Yeah, gosh. Well, let's see, how about -- I'm running out of questions here, Albert, you need to help me.

AS: Well, let me add something that you haven't asked. I flew only 18 missions, did I tell you that?

CS: No, what happened?

AS: The war ended. Hitler found out I was there, he committed suicide.

CS: Oh, okay, well, that was a smart move on his part.

AS: So, the war ended with us being two missions short of completing our 20 missions, and I never was asked except by one guy about well, "Weren't you very unhappy not to have got those two missions in and got your Captain's [NDSC?]?" And I said, "Oh, you damn fool, no, those trinkets were worthless, I could have been killed on either one of those missions."

CS: Yeah, well, so what happened after the end of the war, then, what did they with the planes of your squadron?

AS: We flew ours back; we flew all the way back to Maine by way of the Azores. We stopped in at the Azores and bought a bottle of wine, pretty lousy wine, and then flew on in to Newfoundland and then flew into Maine. And, that was the last time that we landed an airplane. I got to tell you a little interesting story, but I keep on telling you that everything I'm saying is in my memoirs, I don't know if it's worth talking --

CS: Well, yeah, but this will be -- this is actually for a different audience, I think, probably will be looking at this, so...

AS: All right, we -- I had no problem landing in the Azores, and no problem landing in Newfoundland, but landing in Maine our last landing, and now we're in the United States, when we approached just as I'm pulling the nose wheel up to get the nose wheel up in the air and let the big old main wheels take all the brunt of landing that heavy airplane, I couldn't get the nose to come up. And all three wheels hit at the same time, I had used all my strength but I couldn't get the nose to come up. Well, so we hit the ground at about 110 miles an hour instead of 90, and now you don't have the wing up to slow you down, it scared the hell out

of me, I [almost?] run out of runway, so we didn't. Okay, so I was so shook up that I didn't ask the colonel, the squadron commander had flown with us because I think he -- not my piloting skill but my navigational skills, my navigator, and so he flew with us, and if I had just thought to tell him to go check out those people that went up into the nose and give them hell, I would have felt a lot better about it, but I didn't.

CS: Oh, you were nose heavy because people were in up in the nose kind of watching the runway come up.

AS: Wanted to be first into the United States. Yeah I neglected to mention to you that we had 20 ground pounders on our plane when we came back. We had my entire crew and 20 ground pounders and all of our luggage, everybody's luggage, so that was made up for all the bombs we didn't carry. So, we were loaded, but we were balanced until those idiots got in the nose and I couldn't get the thing up. If that (inaudible) had collapsed we probably would have all been killed because that thing is 110 miles an hour with a [bin?] throwing sparks and who knows whether it would have ignited -- I don't know, it could have, we're very glad to have lived through it.

CS: Well, that would have been a pretty ignominious way to die, is dying on the landing back in North America.

AS: Last time I've ever flown an airplane. Okay, let me tell you then about the accident that really we thought we were going to be killed, and that was in Pueblo flying a brand-new B-24 and landed it smoothly and the right tire blew out and jerked us off the runway, into the mud, and the plane is headed for the tarmac where another B-24 was being gassed up. And we were about, I'd say, we were doing maybe 60 miles an hour and not more than 20 yards from that airplane, and we thought we were dead, but we hit a ditch that broke the landing gear down and stopped the airplane. And so, we came out of that alive. That was the nearest I think we came to death, in training.

CS: Well, that's -- you've had some memorable experiences there, then.

AS: Yeah, well --

CS: What did you think about the B-24 in general as a machine?

AS: Well, let's say this, it was underpowered, they gave us 12 horsepower, 12,000 horsepower engines that they had 2,000 horsepower engines available that they put into Vultee Vibrators and even bigger engines than that into the B-29. So the underpowered, the B-17 and the B-24, and so it was difficult to get them up to 20,000 feet, but aside from that the plane was hardy, you know, it held together well, apparently broke in two if you had to land it in the water,

the B-17 was a little-winged airplane and would skim across it. But, the 24 was a [big?]-wing airplane and it would tend to break in two, and it was dangerous to land in water, and I'm glad I never had to.

CS: Yeah, well I had interviewed a fellow that was a B-17 crewman, and they had flown 60 missions in the B-17 and then for some reason they had gotten -- well he was in the Pacific, so they weren't quite what you went through I think, but he was -- he flew against (inaudible) actually that was pretty touchy, too, but anyhow, they flew -- for some reason they didn't have any 17s available and he flew one combat mission in a B-24, and he said they couldn't wait to get back into the 17 because it felt like such a sturdier ship than -- so he was the only fellow that I'd ever talked to that actually had experience with both planes.

AS: Well, let me tell you that I only -- we got a ride back in a B-17 on one of our Belgian trips, and the pilot took off, he was trying to impress us with the 17, and as far as I was concerned it was just a big Piper Cub, you know? It didn't have the feel of a big airplane, a big, powerful airplane that we flew, the 24. We could carry more bombs, we could fly farther, I guess the only thing we couldn't do was probably we weren't able to fly as high as the 17 was,

and land in water, but as far as I'm concerned the 24 was a superior airplane. They had learned from the 17s some of the things that shouldn't be done, just like the B-29 was so superior to either one of these airplanes. I mean, it was pressurized cabin, electronic gun controls, the 29 was far superior to either of the 24 or the 17.

CS: Wow. Well, I suppose everybody's got a little bit of prejudice about their own machine, too, so...

AS: Oh, of course, we made fun of the B-17s and I'm sure that there's no denying that it's a beautiful airplane, but I wouldn't consider it more trustworthy than a 24, no.

CS: Okay, well that's an interesting observation. Well, like said, Albert I'm going to let you wing it for some more of your stories; I know that those are in your memoirs but anything else that we could get included here for some people that probably won't have access to those in the future.

AS: Oh, I don't know that -- we only flew 18 missions so there's only so much that can be said. The most interesting ones were the ones we had to land in Belgium, but we -- one other time -- you know, we felt like we were such a lucky crew. When we got to England there were four Happy Warriors in the hut that you stayed that one night, they had come from Sweden where they had landed and they

were due to [send?] back to the States because they could never fly combat again, that was one of the rules Sweden had, they released you back, but you had to go home and train people. So, these guys, two of them had taken advantage of Sweden's liberal marriage laws and they had shacked up with two girls while they were there and thought that they would marry them as soon as they could get back to the States and send for them. I told my navigator instantly that he should always know the [heading?] to Sweden, he (inaudible) well we never were close enough to Sweden to go, so that's the way it goes.

CS: Well, that's sort of too bad, too bad you couldn't fake it on one of the easier rides.

AS: My children and grandchildren are probably glad that we never were that close to Sweden.

CS: Yeah, well that's -- the --

AS: We, one other time, we had trouble taking off, they had to come out and do a little tinkering with the engine so we were late taking off and by the time we got up to our place the squadron leader had left. And so we joined another group and flew with them, and completed the mission by doing that. But our hut mates, they were four of us officers in this hut and there were four other officers in another group and these guys became our best friends, other

than our own crew. And they took off on a mission once and never returned, they just, no one ever knows what happened to them, but they just never returned, we think they probably iced up and went down over the North Sea or something. But, that was probably the most dramatic experience for us and losing our good friends, knowing it could happen, but that was it, that happens.

CS: Yeah, well, did you still have reunions after the war with your crew and other crews from your group?

AS: The [458?] Bomb Group until three years ago met every year and that would ordinarily it would be anywhere from 40 to - - it kept getting down, dwindling, until three years ago they decided that there just weren't enough of us alive to do that anymore. So, my navigator and my tail gunner and I, the three remaining members of my crew, would meet every year, we did that for three years, but we have missed it this year so far, and may never happen again, to talk about it. With our wives, we have met in oh let's see, we met in North Carolina once, and we met in San Antonio once, the men played golf and the women shopped and we have great conversations, and [tell lots of lies?] and you know, [they're cool veterans?].

CS: Where do the other crewmen -- crew members live?

AS: They both lived in New York, well one of them in New Jersey, the other in New York, and the one that lived in upper New York has retired to Florida now, he and his wife are living there, yeah. So, we haven't visited them there and I don't know if we will ever get around doing that or not. My family, my daughter and her son and Virginia and I are going back to Rocky Mountain National Park in August, this is our favorite place in the world, and so you know, that may be the extent of our travels for a while.

CS: Yeah, well, you could pick a lot worse place to spend part of your summer than Rocky Mountain National Park.

AS: Oh yeah, when it's 105 in Austin, Texas we'll be up there, it's wonderful weather with all the Ponderosa pines.

CS: Well, if you get up on top of the Trail Ridge Drive there and you look south about 200 miles you can just wave at me because I'll be down in Creede, Colorado and to San Juan, so I'm doing the same thing.

AS: We always drive up Trail Ridge Road that is our favorite thing to do when we get there, we sometimes go up the old one-way road and then back down the paved one.

CS: Yeah, the old, what is it, Fall Pass, Fall River Pass?

AS: Yeah, Fall River Road, yeah. That's a beautiful drive but if you get into any car trouble there you're in trouble because you can't come back down. Well, I got a story on

that, it doesn't affect any of this but I just bought a brand new Buick Lacrosse and I looked in the trunk to see if I had a spare -- a full-sized spare or one of the old doughnuts and I didn't have anything, I just had a little compressor there, and I got to thinking, you know, if we drive up Fall River Road and have a blowout, what am I going to do? You can't fix a blowout with an air compressor, so I gave them hell and they finally gave me a spare tire in place of that, so we now have a spare tire.

CS: Well, I would certainly, definitely wouldn't go into that kind of country without one, so I think you made a good move.

AS: Oh, yeah.

CS: Well, listen Albert, I guess it looks like we finished up with your World War II life and so we probably want to bring this to a close here, but I want to appreciate -- to tell you I appreciate your spending some time with us today. I know your memoirs are going to be on record here at the museum but this is, you know, we have sort of an archive, a system that will allow a lot of people to be able to access this information perhaps a little easier because of the indexing systems that we use.

AS: Okay, some people will listen to this rather than read the memoirs.

CS: Yeah, actually this will be translated into a written format at some point, but I will send you a copy of this and we don't need to talk about this on the record itself because I'm going to turn the system off right now and I just wanted to say thank you very much.

AS: Okay, well let me say this, that we have, you know I know that someone said that we're the greatest generation, well I don't believe that, I think Washington and the men at Valley Forge were the greatest generation.

CS: Well, you just proved that --

AS: We could all be speaking with a lousy British accent right now if it weren't for him and those men. We have been so appreciated in places, we were in a restaurant in San Antonio and we were being very boisterous after having drinks and all, and probably annoying the hell out of all the people surrounding us, and I thought, oh gee, I ought to apologize, and I said, "You know," in a loud voice, "we're World War II airmen and we know that we've been loud and boisterous and we hope that we didn't annoy you too much." And they all applauded, they jumped up and applauded us. Isn't that funny?

CS: Well, we all still feel that way, and I can tell you that I feel the same way about it, it's a privilege to be able to talk to you, so thanks again, so on behalf of the museum.

END OF AUDIO FILE