

The National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with
Edward Campbell
13th Air Force, 394th Bomb Squadron
May 4, 2016

John Fargo: Today is May 4, 2016. My name is John Fargo and I am a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today I am interviewing Mr. Edward Campbell concerning his experiences during World War II. This interview is taking place in Mr. Campbell's home in Kyle, Texas. This interview is in the support of the Educational and Research Center for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

You were born South of Miami, Florida on August 29, 1925. Your father was in the Merchant Marines and the Master of his own ship.

Edward Campbell Yes.

John: You had two brothers?

Edward: Yes.

John: Where did you go to high school and when did you graduate.

Edward: I attended Redland High School but I didn't graduate. I went into the service when I was seventeen. It was in late 1943.

John: Did you enlist?

Edward: Yes.

John: How did you get into the Air Corps.?

Edward: My mother had passed away. My father was gone, so my two brothers and myself were living on the farm and it was tough. One of my brothers was older and one younger. We had been a little brainwashed as my teacher had a son, who was a pilot, and he came and visited our class. They had a Army jeep come by and take the guys for a ride

and talk to them, so there was sort of a movement toward the service and I guess that is what they were looking for at that time. I interested in aviation as I remembered one time a Navy plane got into trouble it landed in a strip at Homestead and we all went down and talked to the pilot. So, I wanted to get into the Army Air Corps. if I could. The problem was, I had not finished high school and so it was a little tougher to get in. I went to recruiting and they told me they were looking for gunners so we will get you in. I tested and qualified for air crew. My brother was already in the Marines. He was trained as an explosive handler and they sent him to China. There he was assigned to a War Lord to help blow Japanese bridges. I joined the Army Air Corps.

John: Where did they send you for basic training?

Edward: My basic training was on Miami's South Beach. I was quartered, at the St. Moritz Hotel, on the thirteen floor. It was luxury compared to the little house we had lived in. It had gadgets to take a shower that I could hardly figure it out. We were housed in luxury suites. What happened that the Army Air Corps. had taken over the entire South Beach. That was the basic training location for the Southeast for the Army Air Corps.. Which was interesting. They went from a regular military base type complex to a luxury hotel on the beach. We went swimming in the ocean and took our Physical training in the city parks. They strung barbed wire and we went through the firing range in the city parks. It worked out. I remember the Mess Hall where we marched a couple of miles because they had no place to feed these guys in the hotels and so they built a big Mess Hall on the end of Miami Beach. It was a big training center. They had OCS training there also. We had a swimming pool at the hotel and all the other modern things and I thought that being in the service was not a bad thing after all.

John: How long was the training?

Edward: I can't recall for sure. It was probably less than two months. All the training was strictly for air crews.

John: Did you have to go to gunnery school?

Edward: Yes. That was lousy experience from that point on because we boarded a train at Miami Beach, a troop train, to go to Laredo, Texas. I took three or four days to get there. At one point during the trip, they ran out of food. We were somewhere in Texas and all of the Officers got off and went into a pretty big town, I can't recall the name, anyway they went into all the grocery stores and bought all the food that they could carry. They brought it back and the train took off again to get us to Laredo.

John: How many people were on the train?

Edward: There must have been three or four hundred people. All of them were headed for the gunnery school. The old wooden benches in the cars were pretty uncomfortable. I went to civilian coaches and I saw this young lady sitting there with a baby with a nice comfortable seat next to her. I asked her if I could sit next to her and help her with the baby. I sit with them until we reached Corpus Christi. When I got to gunnery school, they told us that we were lucky as we were training for B-24 rather than B-17s.

John: What kind of guys were they?

Edward: They were 50 Caliber machine guns.

John: Tell me about a typical day. What did you do?

Edward: We would go to the gun range where they had the 50 Caliber mounted in little turret like boxes and you would fire at targets straight in. You weren't flying then. You were just learning to use the turret and the mechanisms used to turn and move the guns. We were also getting some training in communications using call signals for when fighters were coming in. We also had some skeet shooting from a jeep. The instructor would take a couple of guys out in a jeep and you would shoot the clay pigeons. They were trying to get you to think in terms of moving objects, the target moving and you moving. My hit ratio was not all that great, but we were learning to develop the feeling for moving with the target and determining which way it was going to go.

John: Did the jeep have the gun mounted on it.

Edward: No. It was a hand held shot gun. We had classes in which we would learn things like the Pursuit Curve which was used by the enemy fighters to get their guns honed on to your plane. They would come at you, but they wouldn't come directly at you, they were in a sliding position so their guns would bear on you. They would drop down and sort of slide by you and rake your plane. You had to learn that you wouldn't fire in front of the plane you had to figure out which way he was going to slide toward you. All of these things were factored in. Before we left, we got the planes and we got some firing at targets being towed by target planes. I had a bad experience with that. I was shooting a 50 Caliber out of the side of the plane and I was working the target and I swung it toward the tail. The B-24 has a twin tail and the guns have cut-offs so you don't swing and hit that part of the tail. Mine wasn't working and I shot off part of the tail. The pilot swore he was going back to combat where he was safer than messing with these kid gunners. I got clean up duty, for the rest of the time we were flying in the plane. It was a malfunction, but I got blamed for it. All of the gunners that were firing would deny it, but we were shooting colored bullets and they knew when the target was hit. They could tell it was me because I had hit the target that was being towed but I also hit my own plane. It really caused the pilot to use all kinds of bad language. I did cause some damage to my own plane which wasn't a very good start. We also had a blindfold strip. You would strip your 50 Caliber and put it back together. I was doing this and somehow a spring got loose on me. It went up and hit the floor and as I was blindfolded, I was fumbling around trying to find the part. The Sargent said, "Campbell, you not going to put this together and pass.", so he handed me the spring. So, at least I got a little help. I found out then, and throughout my military career, that people are helpful. They would see that you were failing at something and they would give you a hand. This happened all through my life. So, I was lucky that way.

We completed our training and got our wings and we were so proud. Then we got crewed up. That was a scary moment. Some of the pilots were just college kids and this was a big job they were doing and some of them were not quite up to it. But I was fortunate, as I got a Captain, named Rice, and he had been an instructor pilot and he

was an experience pilot. He had not been in combat but he had trained other pilots how to maneuver the plane how to avoid fighters and so forth.

John: What aircraft were you flying in?

Edward: The B-24 Liberator. I was lucky to get such an experienced pilot. That was the first great luck I had.

John: How many people are there in the crew of a B-24?

Edward: Ten.

John: Your position on tht aircraft was what? A turret gunner?

Edward: Yes. Everyone was scared of who was going to get what, because some of those positions were more dangerous than others. The best position to get was the top turret because you had armor around you that protected the pilot who sit right down below you. Also, most of the attacks came from the front or the rear. The normal attack was becoming pretty dangerous for these enemy pilots, so if they could come straight in at you from the front as fast as they could and fire away. If they could take out the front or back guns out they could take you out without being worried about running into the other guns. You had six fifty Calibers from the turrets and two from the side, which were fired by the radio operator and the engineer. You had four Officers. They were the Pilot, the Co-pilot, Navigator and Bombardier and you had six enlisted men. You had four professional gunners, in the turrets and the radio operator and engineer on the side guns.

John: Where did you join the crew? At Laredo?

Edward: The next assigned area was Tonopah, Nevada, in the middle of the desert. That's where we met the rest of the crew. In other words, the gunners left and the officers left

and they all met in Tonopah which was called the Crew Training Center. That is where we started flying practice missions as a crew.

John: How long did you do that?

Edward: That is where we got assigned our gun positions. Captain Rice had the honor of assigning the gun crews. The worst position was the Sperry, which was lowered down and the guy curled up in the turret. It took a little guy. It was hung below the aircraft and you had to hydraulically pump it down and there was no way to get out of it. You couldn't have a parachute with you so if the plane went down, you went down with it. It was more of a suicide position and nobody wanted it. A guy name Delecio, who was a small Italian guy from Brookland, got stuck with it. Since I was only eighteen, Captain Rice, asked me how old I was. I told him I was eighteen. Now at the time the law was that you could train at seventeen but you couldn't be sent overseas. The Army Air Corps. was pretty strict on that.

John: What was your rank?

Edward: PFC. When you got out of gunnery school, you got to be a Corporal. One of the attractions that the recruiter said was that when you are crewed up and in a gunnery position you are going to be a Staff Sergeant at least. If you are in the Infantry, you are never going to see Staff Sergeant. So, if you join the Army Air Corps. you are going to get better pay and get flight pay, which is like time and one-half and you get more respect, you get better food and better quarters and they take care of the air-crews especially. Of course, they did because that is where the highest casualties of the war occurred. As an enlisted man, I was flying with the officers and they were going to take care of us. Captain Rice told me to go into the top turret. That was pure luck because that was the safest by far. The nose and the tail were particularly vulnerable, especially in the Pacific because that is where the Japanese usually attacked.

John: How long did the air-crew training last?

Edward: It lasted about a month. I think that was mostly to train the Officers to work together. We went along, but we never fired a shot during that time. We just rode and got use to flying with the crew. It did involve some Navigation and there were some bomb runs and at times there were some strafing runs. As I was in the upper turret, I didn't get to take part in that.

John: Did you have any guns in the middle of the airplane?

Edward: Yes, one on each side. You could open an area that had plexi-glass and there was a 50 Calber in each side. That's where the radio operator was assigned when you were under attack as was the Engineer. In the older models the Engineer operated the upper turret, but in the Pacific with all the changes in the fuel tanks and the long distances required, they dropped that and added the engineer full-time.

John: After Crew Training what was the next step?

Edward: The officers had to pick up our plane, so they sent us to San Francisco and we had to wait for a few days. The Officers went to the Willow Run monster Ford facilities, that was cranking out a plane out every 68 minutes, to pick up a plane. The Officers told us that it looked like there were acers of B-24 and they were told to pick one out. They picked one out and flew it to San Francisco. We all got into the plane and we flew to Hawaii. It was a long trip. It must have taken ten or twelve hours. We all used our parachutes for pillows and we slept most of the war. It was a long trip but we had some longer ones later on. We didn't stay in Hawaii very long and then we headed for Ascension Island. That is where the Navigator sweated it out. We were headed for New Guinea . I remember the Pilot asked the Navigator how long it would be. He told him that he would see the island in about ten minutes and sure enough we arrived at the exact time he told him we would. I thought we were really lucky; we had a smart kid as a Navigator and a Pilot with a lot of experience. Our Co-pilot was a big tall fellow who had been a basketball player from the University of Oklahoma. Our Bombardier was a Jewish guy named Weber who was smart as a whip and it turned out he was one of the top Bombardiers in our outfit. I understand that Captain Rice got top people as he was

going to be sent over as at least a Squadron Commander. We had a good crew. The Engineer was a sharp as can be. He was from Houston and he was a gambler. He had worked in Casinos as a professional table man. He was a Tech-Sargant All of the gunners were Corporals' but as soon as you got into combat you got jumped two positions, to Staff Sargant. So you went out basic training as a Private to Staff Sargant within a year's time.

As a kid, I was always interested in the military. I read stuff about it and as a youngster, I had a soldier suit and the whole works, so military was of interest to me.

John: Tell me a little bit about your first combat mission.

Edward: My first combat mission was when we landed in Tarawa. That was the place the Marines had that terrible experience. We then we flew to New Guinea and landed at a strip which had just been secured from the Japanese and they were still working on it. The CBs had just built platforms and put up some tents so we could stay off the ground because it was in a real jungle area. Our first bombing mission was to Rabaul, which was a big Japanese base in the Southwest Pacific. The island had been cut off by General McArthur and our assignment there was to look for ships and don't let any type of ship near the island. The Japanese had 100,000 soldiers on Rabaul and they were going to starve them. McArthur decided to by-pass the island because it was so well defended. So we just bombed them, day and night. On one mission, I remember, we spotted a big Junk. It was close to Rabaul and the Pilot said, "We got to get him, boys." It was our understanding that the Japs had conscripted this type of ship from all over and forced the crews to run Japanese supplies in. So, we flew directly over the Junk and the pilot wiggled the wings of our plane. We gunners were excited as we were looking forward to doing some strafing, but the pilot thought otherwise. We circled around and we flew back over the top of the Junk and the crew were abandoning ship. They were jumping off and had they didn't get off any too soon as our bomb went right down the middle and that was the end of that supply ship. That was an interesting start. I have to give our Captain some credit for it was his feeling that there were innocent people on the ship but we were going to get the ship but he wanted to give them time to get off and

he did. Two other interesting things also happened. One of them was; the base was near the Owens-Stanley Mountains; I can't remember the name of the base because the Japanese had bases all over the Pacific that we would bomb occasionally. There was a stream that run right by the base and we were told that right down the stream was a beautiful water fall in a jungle like area. I got together with some of the other young men from crews and we decided that we were going to go on a jaunt. Boy, that was certainly unauthorized, but we did it. We took off down the stream heading for the water fall and we found it. Then we were just wandering around and run across this native village and we saw some banana trees, so we went over there and these native came out. One of them was a Japanese who evidently was a deserter. He was bowing and scraping and he gave us some bananas. Boy, when we got back to the base, they were waiting on us. We really got chewed out, because there were still remnants of Japanese, that had been defeated, that presented a possible danger. But that wasn't the main thing. Their concern was Liver Flukes. I had never heard of Liver Flukes. All the stuff that was in the water in this New Guinea river. The water was clear but apparently it had these microscopic organisms in it that was very dangerous. We had to go to the infirmary and get checked out. We didn't get sick but they wouldn't let us fly for awhile and that was bad news. I really got chewed out by Captain Rice. Anyway, that was a little teen-age jaunt that was not too popular with the Officers because they had to sit around and wait until we were released for active duty. We started moving up the New Guinea peninsula to other air fields and we were eventually assigned to Morotai which is in the Spice Islands of Indonesia. This was North of New Guinea and off the coast of Borneo. We didn't know it at the time, but we were going to be assigned to bombing the oil fields on Balikpapan, Borneo. It was a big refueling point for the Japanese fleet in the Southwest Pacific and it was superbly defended and that was bad news. That is where we got out baptism of fire because they were waiting for us.

John: What was the name of those oil fields?

Edward: Balikpapan, it was on the west coast of Borneo. It was a combination of oil fields, refinery and ports all in one area. The Japanese could refuel all their fleet and their

armed forces from that point. That is as far as their fueling went toward Australia which was their goal, I guess. It was well defended. It was a very tough target.

John: Why is that?

Edward: Because it was defended by the best pilots and best defensive planes they had. We were told they were brought in from China to defend the oil fields. They brought in some of their best defenders, just like the Germans did for the oil fields at Ploesti, Romania. Our air force took a terrible beating there. We got a lot of fighter opposition there. I will never forget one particular mission; a fighter came over the top of my turret and he came out of some clouds and banked firing as he went. I looked up and I could see that sucker looking down at me from his plane. I heard all this racket and I thought that he had got me. What it was empty shell casing from his guns as he was passing over. That is how close he was. Then he left and he didn't come back. We were waiting for him if he did because all of our guns would have been right on him. He was a single fighter that came out of nowhere. Our plane was the lead plane on this mission and of course they always tried to get the lead plane first. We had a lot of anti-air-craft fire and we lost one plane. It was the plane right next to us and it blew up, apparently by a direct hit, and it shoved our plane over.

That brings me to one of the most important missions I was on during the war. Probably one of the most important missions in the Pacific. Our bombing was not very accurate because we were harassed so much by Japanese fighters. They decided that we needed fighter escort. We had never had fighter escort because we flew long range missions. A B-24s range was well over 2000 miles and fighters couldn't come anywhere close to that. There was a P-38 outfit assigned to the 13th Air force somewhere and they asked for volunteers for a one-way mission to jump the Japanese fighters that were harassing our planes.

John: Where would they fly from?

Edward: They would come to the base where our bombers were. We would take off and they would take off later and catch up with us near the target. Our officers were excited about it. You know, a fighter pilot would like to be able to return to their base when they were finished, but these couldn't because they had to bail out.

John: Are you serious?

Edward: Yes. But, they had coordinates and they had submarines pick them up. I don't know what awards they got, but they must have received some for volunteering. There was a bunch of them that did that. We knew that when we were on a bomb run and had leveled out, that is when we would get attacked by fighters because that is when you can't maneuver and you had to stay steady. So, it had to be timed so that the B-38s, which flew higher than any other of our fighters and the Japs couldn't see them. Right before we got to the target area, I saw our guys way up there. We went on our bomb run, and the orders were don't shoot if fighters came in because you are going to get our fighters in to help you out, so we couldn't fire. The Japanese were flying by us showing off to show us how great of pilots they were and just waiting for us to start our bomb run. Then, here comes our P-38s and it was all over. Our guys shot every damn one of them down. The Officers told us later that the submarines picked up everyone of our pilots. The planes were lost but not the pilots. The pilots got a submarine ride back. I never heard anything else about it. Now it might not have been publicized because it was the sort of thing that was beyond what the Air Force expects people to do. It was basically a suicide mission.

John: At this point you were still with the 394 Squadron?

Edward: Yes. We had some other interesting mission because of Captain Rice. He was an experience pilot and they relied on him. One mission that was nerve racking, we had an air strip on one of the Philippine islands before the invasion and we were supposed to fly some Army Officers in there to contact some of the resistant forces. We flew into this beat up air field and one of the officers stayed with us. We sit up a defensive perimeter around the plane. Some one came in this old beat up vehicle and picked up

the Army officers and we flew out. The nervous part was the possibility that a Japanese patrol might find us. But everything turned out fine.

Now on those islands in the area, the natives were pretty wild. The base there gave the Chief a jeep and taught him how to drive it. He would tear long the roads that the CVBs had built and they would send out an alarm whenever the Chief was coming in. There would be all these wild looking people hanging all over the jeep and he would roar around. Our Officers told us that on Morotai there was a bay where PT boats operated out of and they were bringing in some guys that had bailed out and the native had rescued them. We were told that the natives brought in three guys and they were taken out of the canoes and the natives were given whatever they wanted. They loaded on axes, pots and pan, machetes and all kinds of things which made these natives more or less rich. They were rewarded and told that if they brought in any downed airmen, they would become rich. The Japanese did not do that. They enslaved the people and mistreated them and they paid the price. We were told that the Japanese had constructed small airstrips here and there so they could send up fighters quickly as soon as they knew we were headed their way. We never had that problem, because the native hated the Japanese so much that at night, the natives would cut down the trees and lay them across the runway. The next morning the planes couldn't take off because the runway would be blocked.

John: How many missions did you actually fly?

Edward: We were required to fly fifty. During the invasion of the Philippines, we were to take some high ranking Army officers for observation above the invasion area. So, we took them and flew over the area and the sky was full of fighters and they were all ours. We didn't even have to man our guns. We flew over and watched the invasion take place. At one point we saw all of these Japanese vehicles trying to head for the mountains and they were attacked by the Navy fighter planes and there were explosions all over the place. This took place at Tacloban. We could see the Japs moving toward the mountain and we flew down through the valley and you could see all the vehicles and artillery and the Army officers were spotting them. I got a little scared this one time as we saw this

big gun emplacement and they wheeled the gun around toward our plane. I thought we were goners but they didn't get a shot off. I don't remember anybody shooting at us. All they wanted to do was get out of there because these Navy Corsairs were buzzing everywhere. We flew five extra missions because they wanted experienced crews to bomb ahead of the invasion forces because you need a good bombardier as you don't want to drop bombs on your own people. We also dropped a lot of propaganda materials. We just shoved it out of the plane. The material told them that it was all over and if they were to bring it in they would be treated properly as a Prisoner of War.

John: So, what happened after you finished fifty-five missions? They send you home?

Edward: Yes, they sent me home. I had some problems getting home because they didn't ship us home as a group. We went as individuals as they could make room on the aircraft flying into Manila. That is where we had to go. They could only make room for one or two guys. I got lost in Manila and I didn't know where I was fortunately, I was picked up by the Military Police and was driven to the dock where the ship was.

Now, we had night raids by the Japanese bombers as they tried to get our planes. Sometime our missions would get delayed and we had a lot of time off. It was kind of bad as the bombs would be going off and you couldn't get any sleep. The Officers told us that the Aussies were going to send up a couple of their night fighters. We didn't have any night fighters but the British did. They sent two Hurricanes and the officers told us that they would take care of the problem. Boy, did they? They shot all of the Betty's (Japanese bomber) down. All, in one night. After that we were not bothered. While I was there, I had time off so I volunteered to work in Operations to file stuff, take messages or whatever and they appreciated it. The Colonel told me that my efforts were going into my records. I didn't do it for that reason, but later on it helped me a lot after I was in the Reserves. The five extra missions also went on my records. As I had a lot of time off, so I contacted the Red Cross and asked them if they could get me some paint. I liked to paint. I talked to a guy and he told me that the Officers had leather jackets and they liked to get the Squadron or Group insignia painted on the back. So, I got some paints and worked up a design which was a pretty fancy Bomber Barons which

pictured a Baron with a cigarette and that sort of thing. I painted the jackets and I was getting thirty bucks a piece for them. That was a lot of money at that time. I had them waiting in line as it took a while to paint one. The Red Cross got me the oil paints and I made some pretty good money. It wasn't hard as I just traced it on the jacket and then painted it in.

When I was ready to leave, they asked if I would stick around a few months as they were going to close the base up. This was in the Philippines. I told them that I would rather go home. After the war, here I was a farm boy without a high school education, it was recommended to me that I use the G.I. Bill and get an education. What a beautiful deal that was. First, they sent me to the University of Florida to register and get started and it was very crowded so they decided to send me to The Florida State College for Women. They sent about three hundred of us guys there as The University of Florida just had too many people so they had to scatter us out. So, we went to Tallahassee which had 3600 women and 300 of us guys. Before we got out, they changed it to Florida State University. I got extra tutoring to bring me up to snuff and I paid attention and worked hard. I graduated Gold T which is top honor. I received a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration. That's where I met my wife there. She was a lovely Coed and she was very popular. Now there wasn't much male competition there, so I concentrated on Corrie. It worked out real well and we had a beautiful marriage all the way through.

John: What kind of job did you get in Civilian life?

Edward: I went back into Agriculture and moved up through the ranks and ended with a top Agricultural administrative job with the Demary Company. I held a COE position but it was an Italian firm so the family ran it, so the title was Assistant to the President. Paul Demary was my boss. I did a lot of work in various phases of Agriculture, soil amendments, working with disposal of unmarketable fruits and vegetables. I set up a crop share thing which ended up being a state wide program for Food Banks after harvest and things like that. I also worked with migrate labor and housing. Then I got selected by the Agricultural people in South Florida to direct their organization which

was the Vegetable Growers Association. I went to Washington and was on various groups.

John: What year did you get discharged?

Edward: 1945. I had two years and a few months of actual service. I joined the Reserves and had eighteen years. Under the Reserve Program after the war, if you were a top three grader, you could apply for a Commission in the Reserve on your record. I applied for a Commission and got it. A direct Commission in the Reserves and stayed with it until Retirement. I retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. I had a little over twenty years when I retired.

John: We will wrap this up now. I want to thank you for your service.

Transcribed by:
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