

# The National Museum of the Pacific War

## Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with:

Herbert Cavness

8<sup>th</sup> Air Force-46<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group

B-17 Gunner

May 3, 2018

This is Ed Metzler. Today is May 31, 2018. I am in Brady, Texas at the home of Mr. Herb Cavness and we are reviewing his experiences during World War II. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives of The National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Herb, I want to thank you for spending the time with me today to share your World War II experiences. Let's get started by having you introduce yourself and telling us of when and where you were born.

Herbert: Cavness: I am Herb Cavness and I was born and raised in Mason County, Texas. I went to school in Streeter, Texas and Grit and Mason High School.

Ed: What is your birth date?

Herb: December 17, 1924.

Ed: That means you will be 94 this December.

Herb: That is correct.

Ed: Were you born in town or on the farm.

Herb: I was born on the farm.

Ed: Were you the oldest, or did you have brothers and sisters?

Herb: I had one brother who was nine years older than I.

Ed: What did your father do for a living?

Herb: He was a farmer.

Ed: Did you guys have your own farm, or were you tenant farmers?

Herb: To start with, we lived on my grand-pa's place and daddy raised cotton. Then we moved to Streeter and the peanut program started.

Ed: Where is Streeter?

Herb: It is 10 miles West of Mason on the Junction highway.

Ed: So, you were raising peanuts?

Herb: Yes. I went into the military from there.

Ed: Had you finished high school, before the war started?

Herb: I was a high school dropout.

Ed: What year of school was this?

Herb: I had just finished my mid-term in my Junior year of high school. I felt like the Army has to be better than this. I did not like high school. There were eight of us in Mason that day, that went to San Antonio to be inducted. When we got there and I was interviewed, I told the Officer that I wanted to go into the Army Air Corps.

Ed: How old were you, at that time?

Herb: I had just turned 18.

Ed: What year was this?

Herb: It was in the 1942. He said, "You will have to take a test." I said, "Ok. I will take it." There were four of us that took the test and I was the only one that passed it. Then I went to Shepherd Field at Wichita Falls, Texas for Basic Training.

Ed: What did your parents think about you volunteering like that?

Herb: They were not happy at all. I could have stayed at home and helped my daddy raise peanuts, but I thought no, people would call me yellow and I didn't want that to happen.

Ed: What was Basic like for you? Was it easy or was it hard?

Herb: It's not easy, but it wasn't too bad. From there, we went to Las Vegas, Army Air Base.

Ed: Had they assigned you any sort of a position or job, before you went to Las Vegas?

Herb: No. We went out there and sometime during that phase of training, I went up to Indian Springs, Nevada and that was the first time that I ever went up in an airplane.

Ed: What was that like?

Herb: Well, it was not bad. Not bad at all.

Ed: What kind of airplane was it?

Herb: It was a B-17 (Bomber). We went up into the nose and fired at a small tow target being towed behind a smaller plane. We fired at it and fired into a mountain.

Ed: So, you had already received training in 50 Caliber machine guns?

Herb: Well, at that time. No.

From Las Vegas, we went to Sioux City, Iowa and we were assigned to a Group. We flew lots of training missions out of Sioux City.

Ed: That is a long way from home, isn't it?

Herb: It is a long way from home and we lost three airplanes with three crews, within two days.

Ed: How did that happen?

Herb: The pilots were not accustomed to flying close formation, which we would be flying in combat. The day that I flew; we flew even and odd numbers and the day that I flew, two of our planes got together right above ours and they came down on either side. There were no survivors from either plane. The next day, my buddy was flying and an airplane sat right down on top of the one that he was in and the prop knocked a hole in the plexiglass nose and somehow, he got a parachute hooked on one hook. He told me that he guessed that he was sucked out of the hole made by the prop and he landed in a corn field. He only got a scratch through the whole ordeal. He was the only survivor out of that crew.

Ed: That is dangerous training!

Herb: That's right. From there, we went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and got on a boat.

Ed: Let me ask. Had you been assigned a position in a crew?

Herb: Yes.

Ed: Did you know, at the time, that you would be a waist-gunner?

Herb: No. At that time, there were ten of us. I had taken training in the top turret, which was right behind the pilot and co-pilot. When we went overseas, they had taken the bombardier off of our crew and made the nose-gunner a Toggler. When he would see the lead, plane drop a bomb he would start to toggle our bombs.

Ed: Where did you get on the boat?

Herb: In New York. We got on the HMS Aquitania and we seven days on the journey, because we tried to evade the German submarines.

Ed: Was this a smooth crossing or was its rough seas?

Herb: It was not bad. It was a pretty good-sized boat. It had two Funnels. The Queen Mary was loading, when we pulled out. When we got to Glasgow, the Queen May was unloading.

Ed: She was already there. She was fast.

Herb: Well she had three Funnels.

From there we went on down through Wales to England and we were stationed at Sudbury, England with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

Ed: What did you think about Scotland, when you first saw it?

Herb: It had rolling hills and the train was smaller than those in the US. We went on down to Sudbury and was assigned a worn-out B-17 (Bomber).

Ed: What do you mean, worn out?

Herb: It had been around awhile and had made lots of missions.

Ed: Was she shot-up at all?

Herb: Well, she wasn't badly shot-up, but she had one engine that forced us to come back solo a few times. That old engine, when we would get to high altitudes, it would cut out. One day we made it across the channel with a full load of bombs.

Ed: What was the name of your aircraft?

Herb: It was called "Short Arm".

Ed: Was that already the name, when you were assigned to it?

Herb: It was. We wanted to change the name and they said, "No, that is bad luck.", so we flew it as "Short Arm".

Ed: I wonder where that name\* came from.

Herb: Not good. We just didn't want that to be name of our plane. But it was.

One day we crossed the Channel going to the target. We had a full load of bombs and when we got to about 20,000 feet that old engine cut out on us. Well, we couldn't go in with a load of bombs by ourselves, so we turned around and started coming back. The Flight Engineer got the engine running pretty good again, so we turned around and started back in. We wanted to tag on to a group of B-24 (Bombers), well by this time we had colors of the day. I don't know if you know why we had colors of the day. No-one knew what the colors of the day were going to be until the Officers were in the early morning briefing. It was then that they were told what the colors of the day would be. There was a door in the top of the radio room and the radio operator would fire the colors of the day with a flare pistol. The B-24s answered back with the colors of the day and we tagged on to them and the further we went, the be-hinder we got. We just couldn't keep up with that group of B-f24s.

Ed: Are the B-24s a little faster?

Herb: It is little bigger, a little faster and carried a little heavier load, but was not as maneuverable. So, we came back and dropped our bombs in the Channel. We couldn't

land with a load of bombs so that was our only choice. That got their attention, so they gave us a spare plane to fly and kept our plane and put a brand-new engine in it. It was the left in-board engine.

Ed: So, you flew some missions in another aircraft?

Herb: We flew some in just spare aircraft.

Ed: I am looking at the list of the missions you sent to me and I am wondering if the mission that was supposed to go to Brenham was the one. It says that it was aborted. Is that the mission?

Herb: I guess that is it.

Ed: It says that was February 24, 1945.

Herb: Well, no. we had flown some missions before. We had to come back alone two or three times. I want to tell you the story the reason why we had colors of the day. The Germans, somehow got ahold of a B-17 that was air-worthy so they came up and would put it into a group of B-17s and would shoot them all to pieces. So, that is when they started the colors of the day. That way, if anybody tried to tag on and didn't know the colors of the day, they would get shot down.

Ed: It was kind of like knowing the secret password.

Herb: Right. We were so proud of that new engine and we were flying along on a mission one day and there was black smoke all by the left waist window. I called the flight engineer and told him our left in-board engine was on fire. He called back and said, "That's not smoke. It is oil." A piece of flak had hit an oil line and the black oil was coming back and I thought it was smoke. He feathered the prop and they were able to repair the engine.

Ed: Was this after you had gone on the bombing mission?

Herb: No, we were returning.

I guess we were on the bomb run over the flak zone and piece of flak hit the oil line.

Ed: Was that the biggest problem for you, the German flak or German fighters?

Herb: No. The flak. Our P-51 (Fighters) took care of the German fighter planes. Our P-51s were superior to the German fighters. When we would get on a bomb run, the P-51s would go around the flak zone and meet us on the other side. There was no need for the P-51s to go in where the flak was. There were no German fighters in there either. When we would get on the bomb run, one of my spare jobs was to get a walk-around oxygen bottle and go in the bomb bay and pull the safety-pins on the bombs. At 20,000 feet up with the bomb-bay doors open, it was very cold. Then I would go back through the radio room into the waist and get back onto the oxygen system.

Ed: So, there was a centralized oxygen system that you would plug into at your station.

Herb: Yes. You would plug in.

Ed: What kind of clothing did you wear?

Herb: We had a heated suit, but there was not a plug in in the bomb-bay. We also had a fleece lined suit over that. It was not really bad. My gun was sticking out of the waist window but it had a boot on it that kept the wind from coming in.

Ed: So, it was not just an open window with a gun sticking out.

Herb: Right. I had a hand held 50 Caliber and it had a ring and post sight on it. I could line that post up with the ring that had other rings within and I would line the post up with whatever ring would lay off the deflection

Ed: What was your worst run?

Herb: Over Hof, Germany. We went in at 12,000 feet and did not put an oxygen mask on. They had no defense, but when we got there the air exploded. They brought in anti-aircraft guns on the railroad. Our mission was to knock out the railroad. It was a switch station. The Germans were manufacturing aircraft parts at other places and bringing them in by rail and assembling them. Our mission was to knock out their transportation of parts.



Ed: Tell me what happened on that flight.

Herb: Oh! I think we lost four crews. We were told that our people called the Germans and told them to get everybody out of town because we were going to blow the place up. I watched one-man float down. A burst of flak would occur and there would be a big black spot and then I would see him come out the other side of the burst. I imagine that he was full of holes. My pilot was looking out the left side of the plane and saw a waist gunner looking our way. A shell exploded right where he was standing. One time, I was watching men bail out of a plane over to our left, through the right waist door and I guess one man got his parachute but he didn't hook it on to his harness. When he opened the chute, he just dropped like a stone and the chute floated away.

Ed: As a waist gunner, your primary job would be to attack fighter planes.

Herb: Right. We were not attacked that I saw. Our ball-turret gunner said he saw a German Messerschmidt 210 (Jet fighter). The Germans had just come out with the jets. They were fast but not maneuverable and our P-51s took care of them.

Ed: I believe they also had the Faulk wolf 190 (German jet fighter) and they were fast.

Herb: They were fast, but they were pretty heavy. They were an attack bomber and they had the Me-109 and it was replaced by the Me-210.

Ed: So, you believed that the Germans were told that we would bombing the site and to evacuate the town.

Herb: I believe it, because otherwise why would we have gone in at 12,000 feet, when normally we would go over a target at 20,000 feet. We would put our oxygen masks on at 10,000 going up and we took them off at 12,000 coming down.

Ed: Who was your pilot?

Herb: Our pilot was George Thomas and he died last year.

Ed: What was your rank, when this was happening?

Herb: I was a Sargent.

Ed: How close were you to the rest of the crew? Were you guys a tight knit group?

Herb: We were a family. I was the only one from Texas. At that time, our pilot and co-pilot were both from California. After the war, my pilot was on a motorcycle and had a bad accident. He was returning from the funeral of a good friend of his. The man's sister was there and they met and got married later on. George kept the crew together. When we were discharged at Drew Field in Tampa, Florida, everybody went home. The tail-gunner was from Michigan and nobody ever heard from him again. The rest of stayed in contact and we had our first crew reunion in Columbus, Ohio. From there, we went on down to Air Museum in Dayton, Ohio and we found odd was that we had been through the museum and met outside and getting ready to go our separate ways. Suddenly everybody looked up and there was a B-17 flying that was going to be in the museum. They had a P-51 escort flying beside it.

Ed: Tell me about Sudbury.

Herb: It was just a little town and we didn't live on the base. We had Quonset huts out and around. We would get up real early and walk to briefing way before daylight. They would issue us our guns. We would get on a little G.I. truck and would haul us out to our airplane and we would install our own guns. Then we would check to see that they would work. We didn't fire them but went over them to make sure they would work properly. The ground crews would take the guns out and would take them in and disassemble them and inspect them. The housing for the gun was already there and they had a barrel outside the gun barrel for air circulation, for cooling. The guns were automatic. You would only hold down so many bursts and then let off or the gun would get red hot.

Ed: How many rounds did you have?

Herb: I don't know, but it was a box full at my feet. As we fired, the empty cartridges would drop down and also the chain length that held them together. For part of our training,

we had to be able to take that gun apart and put it back together, in so many minutes, while being blindfolded. So, we knew the gun.

Ed: What was the food like?

Herb: They had two mess halls. One for the ground crews and one for the flyers. The flyers had fresh eggs, supposedly. But they were far from fresh. Occasionally I would get in line with the ground crews. They had powdered eggs.

Ed: Why do you think they kept the ground crews separate from you guys?

Herb: I do not know.

Ed: They were an important part of the team.

Herb: Yes, they were, but they catered to the flyers.

Ed: Did you have a bunk to sleep in or a bed?

Herb: We had Quonset huts and we had individual bunks.

Ed: Did you get Liberty and were you able to go into the town?

Herb: We went in a few times. We would fly three or four days and then we were off two days. One time we were in London and Bock, the radio operator, went down stairs to get some coffee and a paper and he came back and he said, "Well, FDR has kicked the bucket."

Ed: Did you get a chance to mix at all with the British that lived there?

Herb: Very little. We went down to Piccadilly Circle and it was a madhouse. We didn't stay long. It was not something where a Christian would want to be.

Ed: Did you write letters home and get letters from home?

Herb: Yes. One time, I had a friend from Streeter and he was stationed in Healy and I wanted to contact him. My mother got his address from his mother and I wrote him a letter. A few days later, it came back marled "Deceased".

Ed: What did you miss most from your life, when you were over there? Family, or what?

Herb: I guess that is true and we just knew we had a job to do and we did it and we didn't think a whole lot about it. In fact, when we were flying through flak, we didn't think much about that. We just concentrated on our job. Down at my feet was a cardboard box and in side of the airplane, there was a square tube going out and that box had tin-foil strips in it. They were just like the foil that you would hang on a Christmas tree. I would some of that foil down there and the air-stream would suck that foil out and go down. If it was cloudy, you could look down and see the flak bursts down there where it was falling. If it was clear, the Flak would come right up and get us.

Ed: So, that was to jam the radar and make it think the foil was the target?

Herb: That's right.

Ed: Did you have a lot of this foil?

Herb: It was in a square cardboard box.

Ed: Did the other waist=gunner have the same thing?

Herb: There was only one on any airplane.

Ed: I thought there was a waist-gunner on both sides.

Herb: There was, but only on the left was the tube to drop the foil.

Ed: Who was the other waist-gunner, in your crew?

Herb: It was just me. I watched both sides.

Ed: So, you crossed back and forth, depending where the targets were.

Herb: In case of attack by German fighters, the radio operator would come back and man one of the waist guns. But we did not have to do that.

Ed: Could you actually see the targets that the bombs were going down on during some of your runs?

Herb: Oh, yes! I could see the bombs dropping. In fact, I wasn't supposed to, but I took some pictures of it.

Ed: What do you think about the B-17?

Herb: It was the best bomber in the air, at that time. It could land with one inboard engine running.

Ed: It could land on one engine?

Herb: On one engine. It could and did.

Ed: Did your plane ever get down to one engine?

Herb: No. We always had as much as three. A friend of mine was in a crew that did land with one engine. When we would come back from a mission and were over England, you could see planes peeling off and going into that pea-soup fog and you knew that it would just be a matter of time and we would be in that soup along with them.

Ed: How did they land in heavy fog?

Herb: We were pretty well fixed with radar and of course they had landing lights along the way. We never did have an accident.

Ed: Who was the Commanding Officer at Sudbury? Did you ever see him?

Herb: No, I never did. At one time Ira Akers was the Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. He grew up at Eden, Texas and my mother grew up in the next County down, Menard, County and they were cousins. I never met the man.

Ed: When did you first know that you were going to be on a B-17 over Germany? Was that before you went overseas or did you find out after you landed in Scotland?

Herb: We didn't know if we were going to the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force or the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force. The 15<sup>th</sup> was in Italy. We got lucky and we went to the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

Ed: Did they have B-f24s (Bombers) as well as B-17s?

Herb: Not at Sudbury, but we had them in the 46<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group.

Ed: Where was that Bomb Group located?

Herb: Our part of it was at Sudbury. I don't know where the B-24s were.

Ed: Did you get a chance at all to mix with the P-51 pilots?

Herb: No. They were special.

Ed: What did they call them? They had some nick-name for them.

Herb: The P-51 Mustang was the most beautiful airplane ever built.

Ed: It was a life saver for you guys.

Herb; It was. That is for sure.

Ed: What do you think about the Germans. They were the enemy then.

Herb: That's right.

Ed: How do you feel about Germany, Japan and all those guys?

Herb: I have no hard feelings. They had a job to do and did it. Just like we did. We were not mad at them, but they were the enemy. We had to win.

Ed: When F.D.R. died, what did you think?

Herb: I thought that we've had it.

Ed: Why did you feel that way?

Herb: Because I felt he was our leader. Then Truman took over and Truman was really good.

Ed: He turned out pretty good, didn't he?

Herb: He was alright.

Ed: So, were you still in the UK when Germany surrendered?

Herb: Yes.

Ed: Did you guys have a party or what?

Herb: No, not really. But they had us fly our combat plane back to the states. We brought a ground crew back with us. We had to get rid of our personal stuff there and make room for the ground crew. We were supposed to bring that old plane back. We had to get it out of England. They didn't need it. We needed a ride back so we left Iceland one morning early and flew to Labrador. We got to Labrador that evening. The next day we flew to Bradley Field, Connecticut and we got out of our airplane and two pilots got into it. They took it to the junkyard and it was scrapped in December of that year. We flew back across the ocean the 4<sup>th</sup> day of July 1945. I really sweated that trip, because there was nothing but deep water below us.

Ed: Wouldn't that be a shame to survive 25 missions over Germany and then go into the water coming home?

Herb: When we got there, they gave us a month to spend at home and then we were going to take a short course on the B-29 (Bomber) and go to the Pacific. While I was at home, the Japanese surrendered and I didn't have to go. I went back to Drew Field and got my discharge.

Ed: Where is Drew Field?

Herb: Tampa, Florida. I lacked one month of being 21 years old, when I was discharged. I could even drink or vote.

Ed: How to you figure, being in the war, on a plane like that, how did that change you as a person?

Herb: It changed me a whole lot. I would have been a better person, had I stayed at home.

Ed: Why is that?

Herb: I guess it made me grow up too soon but I have been successful in business. I worked out at Curtis Field sixteen years and I was Chief Inspector of aircraft parts that we built. We built wings for the Glen L. Martin P-5M (Flying boat) for eight years. The outer wing.

They hauled them from here, standing two on edge on a low-boy trailer and haul them from here to Baltimore and put them on an airplane.

Ed: What was the P-5M?

Herb: It was a twin engine that landed on water and it had rocket pylons that could fire rockets. We built auxiliary bomb-bay tank supports for a Boeing bomber. I can't remember which one it was. These were built to be able to carry more fuel to provide for a longer range. We also overhauled lots of helicopters and lots of those putt-putt engines.

Ed: Did you leave the Army Air Corps. just as soon as you got back to the states?

Herb: The war was over and I went down to Drew Field and they discharged us according to how many points we had. Flying gave you extra points being overseas gave you extra points and I got out pretty early. I was ready to go home.

Ed: Did they try and talk you into staying in?

Herb: We were offered an opportunity to re-enlist. I didn't want to as I wanted to go home.

Ed: Do you ever think about those war years? Do you have dreams about it, or anything like that?

Herb: Well, I can only remember one time, dreaming about it and it was not pleasant. After 16 years out at Curtis Field, I bought a Conoco station in Brady and I ran it for 16 years. I had a good business. Then, I moved up here. My wife and I owned all this property, so I went into business on Bridge Street. I was in business there for a number of years. I loved being in a business and I made lots of friends.

Ed: You said that after they flew you back to the States, that you did some training on a B-29.

Herb: No. That is what we were going to do, if the war continued with Japan. We dropped those two bombs and Japan didn't know that we didn't have any more. My son now



works in the Los Alamos museum. That is the reason I am in Fredericksburg, he brought me here. He is a permanent employee with that museum.

Ed: Did you ever hear of the fate of any of the other crews, where the planes were lost on various missions? Did they get thrown into POW (Prisoner of War) camps or what?

Herb: I never knew. I never had any contact with any of them.

Ed: What was the toughest time for you, when you were over there flying those missions? When was the darkest time for you?

Herb: That would be when we were flying without clouds. We were just sitting birds for them. Because we were 20,000 feet up but they could easily reach us. That anti-aircraft flak: I'll tell you, when those things would explode, I was just a big black smoke and they were just throwing scrap metal everywhere.

Ed: That must be a helpless feeling as you are flying level and constant, because you are coming in on a bomb run, you can't maneuver, so you are just a sitting duck.

Herb: That's right. One time our lead plane was shot down and the deputy lead moved into place and it was shot down. We were next. The air just exploded. I guess that was over Hoff, Germany. Some way or another our pilot got us out of it. He was just a month or two older than me at 20 years of age. We had a good pilot. He brought us home lots of times.

Ed: What did you do between missions, when you had some time off?

Herb: Not much. One time, I came in and, on my bunk, lay a Colonel's blouse. I thought, what in the world is that doing on my bunk. Well, the nose gunner's daddy was a Colonel, who was stationed in Italy and he came to see his son. They had and gone somewhere and that is why his blouse was laying on my bunk.

Ed: That took you a while to figure that out, I'll bet.

Herb: Yes.

Ed: Did you come back with any memorabilia from the war? I guess that because you had to leave a lot of personal stuff when you came home, because of a number of the ground crew members that came back with you.

Herb: That's right. I think that there were seven or eight ground crew members and it was pretty crowded

Ed: Did you guys ever joke around and play tricks on each other?

Herb: No. We were pretty grown-up. It was just business. I bought a couple of bicycles and restored them. I sold one and I had another one that I rode. When we got ready to leave, there was a rock wall out near the field, and I got going as fast as I could on that bicycle and then I cleared it and it hit that rock wall and bent the fork all the way back. That's where I left it. Some Limey probably found it and made a bicycle out of it because they were pretty hard-up for things then. My friend and I went on leave, one time, to another air field, to visit a friend from home and he was gone, so we didn't get to see him. We went back into that little town and the people that lived there were renting rooms out to the American G.I.'s. We rented a room from this lady and she said, "I have been hoping some American soldiers would come because I have a pound of Folgers Coffee that I was saving and she made us some fresh coffee.

Ed: Have you been back to Europe, since the war was over?

Herb: I can't go back because I don't fly. I got it all done back then.

Ed: You got it out of your system?

Herb: Yes, I did. I did ride in a King-Air from here to Nashville, one time with my wife and a couple of friends. And then last year, I rode in a P-51 Mustang which I enjoyed a lot. I have a little farm, out in the country, and he flew me over it.

Ed: So, what stories do you have that you are not telling me?

Herb: Well, it took us one day longer to fly back than it did to go over by boat.

Ed: Why was that?

Herb: Well, we went to Badly, Whales and stopped and had our plane worked on and we went to Iceland and we were there a day or two while they worked on the plane. Then we made it to Labrador. It was late and we stayed until the next day. Then we went on down to Bradley Field. So, as I recall, we spent eight days coming back. It took us seven to go over by boat.

Ed: Have you ever watched the Television shows about the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, the B-17s or movies like 12 O'clock High?

Herb: There was another one that I watched, of course shows are made from real happenings but they add a lot of things to it that were not real.

Ed: It wasn't quite that colorful, huh?

Herb: No. One time, I was standing in line at the mess hall and one of those, rockets, we called them stovepipes, came over. They would drop anywhere.

Ed: What is a stovepipe?

Herb: As it went over, you could see fire coming out of the back of.

Ed: So, this was a German V-1 (Rocket)?

Herb: I did see a rocket launching pad, one time, and a rocket went up and circled and then went toward England.

Ed: Was this on one of your missions over Germany?

Herb: Yeah. It was just a while triangle launching pad.

Ed: Was this a target that you were going for?

Herb: No, we were headed in land. We were in London, one night, when rockets fell on the railroad tracks. We were in the hotel and it was quite a way from us. We heard about it the next day.

Ed: Did you see any damage, in London, from any of the bombing?

Herb: No. Most of your travel in London was in the underground system of trains.

As far as Radar: our bomb sights were Radar controlled.

Ed: You are talking about the Norden bombsight?

Herb: Yeah. The top turret, that I took training out, the guns were up above my head. The controls were down much lower. I had a little sight glass right in front of me and it had a line across the middle of it. At each end it had a line which I could control. I never did see a German fighter coming in. If I had, I could have set him right on top of that middle line and frame his wing=tips with the other two. Then we would have him.

Ed: So, you took training in the top turret but you never actually flew a mission in that position. Is that right?

Herb: That's right. When we went overseas, they took bombardier off of our crew and moved the flight engineer to the top turret and moved me to the waist position.

Ed: I have heard that a tail gunner in a B-17 was really tight to be able to get back there.

Herb: Yes. You had to crawl to get back there.

Ed: I have heard that is the hardest position to get out of if you had to abandon the aircraft.

Herb: Oh, yeah. You would have to crawl back to the waist where the waist door was. We had a pin in the front part of tht door and you could pull it out and it would fly away.

Ed: The lower ball turret was also dangerous too, wasn't it?

Herb: Yes. I was too tall for the ball turret and I was glad of it. He was at my mercy because if his power went out, I would have to hand crank the lower ball up by hand to get him out.

Ed: You said, crank him out. What do you mean?

Herb: Well you had to crank it so the guns were pointing straight down and there was a door that he could come out of.

Ed: Did you ever have to do that?

Herb: Never did. The guns had to be pointed down, to open that hatch. That old B-17 was a flying machine. We took off one morning with a full load of bombs and got caught in the prop-wash of the plane ahead of us. It kind of threw us off track and that tail wheel was just going up and down and bouncing along and the main gear was already up. The pilot got it up and we were on our way to Germany. Most of our missions were over Germany. We did bomb Bordeaux, France. The Germans were still holed up in there and we bombed them and the British shelled them by ships. As I recall we took fire bombs on that mission.

Ed: Ok. Well, I am going to shut the recorder off but I want to thank you for spending the time with me today. It is always an honor to meet you World War II veterans. Thank you for what you did for our country.

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