

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 734

HERBERT HRIBAR

Interviewed

by

Doug Silhanek

on

April 22, 1985

HERBERT H. HRIBAR

Herb Hribar was born on May 4, 1920 in Bessemer, Pennsylvania, the son of Alois and Mary Hribar. He graduated from Bessemer High School, briefly attended Youngstown College, and then enlisted in the Army Air Corps December of 1941. He served in England as a member of the ground crew and was chief clerk at a subdepot servicing B-17's for missions over Germany.

Shortly after returning from duty he was employed by the Bessemer Cement Company until his retirement in September of 1982. He and his wife Valeria have raised one child. Herb is a member of St. Anthony Church, Bessemer American Legion, and the Bessemer Croation Club. He spends much of his retirement gardening and reading.

Douglas M. Silhanek

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INTERVIEWEE: HERBERT HRIBAR
INTERVIEWER: Doug Silhanek
SUBJECT: Depression, school life, enlistment, ground
crew work
DATE: April 22, 1985

S: This is an interview with Herb Hribar for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Doug Silhanek, at Mr. Hribar's home, on Monday, April 22, 1985, at 7:30 p.m.

Tell me something about your childhood. What do you remember about your childhood growing up in Bessemer?

H: I think my earliest recollection would be probably in the first grade. I remember my teachers. We were in the old building, which would be just behind the fire hall in downtown Bessemer. I mostly remember the teachers and the people I went to school with, of course. I think in the third grade I could remember things more.

At school I can remember the front wasn't grass. We had limestone. That was our playground. We did a lot of roller skating on the sidewalk.

S: How about activities? What do you remember about neighborhood activities?

H: We had a game we would play in the summertime when we were free. We called it "town chase." You would choose up sides. One gang would take off. Usually they would probably go clear down to the other end of town. It took all night to play the game. After you captured a man, we would put them in what we called the jail on the school grounds. If one on the other team could run through that jail, then that person was released. It took until curfew, of course. At that time the chief of police was Archie Shoup. He was a pretty tough guy when it came to getting you off the streets at 9:00. The curfew was 9:00 up until you were sixteen years of age.

You had better be heading for home at 9:00. He walked the streets; he didn't patrol in a car. Each night he walked in a different direction. He knew everybody; he knew all of the kids. If you were headed toward home at 9:00, fine. If you weren't . . .

S: He would chase you down?

H: He would come and get you by the ear and take you home and kind of give you a lecture. He really didn't have to do too much to us. At that time as far as discipline was concerned, it was a little different than it is today. There is more freedom for youngsters. At that time, of course, our parents were immigrants. They wanted us to go to school to learn. We were always told that while we were in school it was as though the teachers were our parents. We had to listen. The chief of police, which was just a one-man force, was a symbol of authority. You paid attention to him. You didn't want to get into too much trouble. If word got home that there was a problem, if the teacher didn't solve the problem, usually our parents solved it one way or another. It seemed that they wanted us to excel in school. They wanted to learn from us. Their knowledge of English was limited, and they would question us when we got home.

I lost my dad when I was ten. He was a tailor in Bessemer. I can remember traveling with him picking up dry cleaning once a week. We would travel through Bessemer. He had a press shop also. He would clean and press the clothes. He made clothes. My mother helped him in the shop. He had a good reputation as a tailor.

S: What was it like for you to go through the Depression?

H: It was a little tough because of the loss of my dad and then my mother passed away when I was fifteen. I had a paper route. I was fortunate. I lived with my brother. There weren't the welfare payments that you have today. Money was scarce. Of course, they said you could do a lot more with what you had. I had a paper route, and I think I made about \$2 a week. While my mother was living, I would give that to her to help out. My brother worked at the cement plant a couple of days a week during the summer. Maybe he got a little work in the winter. He worked on the WPA (Works Progress Administration) projects when he didn't get to work at the plant.

When I was about fourteen, in the summertime several of us would go to the farms and put up hay, stack corn. I can recall we would go out to work for \$1 a day for hay. If it was thrashing time, then it was \$1.50.

S: Was it a little bit more tough on you since your father died?

H: I think it was. It felt a little more insecure since he passed away when I was so young. Until my mother passed away she gave us strength. I was very fortunate. My brother started working a little better about the middle of the 1930's. He was able to support us. He insisted that I finish high school. I think I was the only one in my family who graduated. He didn't pressure me into going to work. He wanted me to just play football, basketball, and study.

S: What about high school? Was that an enjoyable time?

H: Yes. I really enjoyed my days in high school.

S: Did all of that help take your mind off of the Depression?

H: Yes. The Depression happened in 1929 when I was nine years old. I didn't really know good times. My dad died in 1930.

I can remember that once a year in this old truck, the whole family would go to Cleveland to visit relatives. It was a big thing. Family was big then. It seems like there was more visiting. We would go to Cleveland in this old truck. It was a big thing, and we had relatives in Canton. We would go to Canton once a year. There were people up in Sharon and in Wheatland and Aliquippa. They in turn would make a trip to visit us. It was just a big get-together.

Things are just a little bit different today. I don't know what made it that way. I suppose everybody suffered and everybody had it tough. There were people working. They said that in twenty-five percent of the homes there was somebody working.

They had what they called the Booster club in town here. They would put on shows at the high school, minstrel shows, and raise money. Then they purchased flour, beans, beef, and stuff like that. They passed that out to the families. After my father died, my mother received some of their help. She would get a sack of flour every once in a while. These were the people maybe who were working in town. Mr. Young, Mr. Shoup, and other people working in town would put on this minstrel show. They raised money that way. There was help. It wasn't that you weren't getting any help. There just wasn't the welfare check like we know it today coming in.

S: The help was more private.

H: Yes, there was some help. I think the state gave some help. I wasn't aware of everything because of my age. We survived. Of course, in the summertime there was a big garden. We had big gardens. There was a lot of canning. If you were able to, you raised a hog or something. We raised one. Men would come and they would butcher it. It was smoked, and you had some

meat for the winter. There was a lot of baking. I don't think I ever tasted store-bought bread. It was home-baked bread, home-baked cakes and doughnuts.

S: What is one of the first things you remember about the war breaking out?

H: I was going to Youngstown State I think in the fall of 1939. It was Youngstown College then.

I remember the war starting in Europe when Germany went into Poland. Of course, prior to this I remember the meeting in Munich.

We had a teacher in high school. We called him P. J. Ross. Mr. Ross taught P.O.D. He was a stickler for reading Life, Time, newspapers. If you would bring enough clippings from the newspapers and the magazines, you could pass the course with an A without the bookwork. He got us interested, or at least myself, in world events, in the history of the country, and what was going on. As a result I read a lot of happenings in the news. Having a newspaper route . . . I had two newspapers, the Youngstown Vindicator and the New Castle News. So it was all through my childhood.

I can remember either in 1932 or 1933 that there was an incident in China where they sunk an American ship. I remember when the Japanese went into China. In 1935 was when the Italians invaded Ethiopia. In 1936 the Civil War in Spain broke out. So almost through my entire young life I was reading about these battles going on. Of course, there were others, but those were the main ones.

I can remember Italy sending in troops when they went into Ethiopia. I think Italy had control of one of the countries over there. Maybe they wanted some more land, but I think they did control a colony that was adjacent to Ethiopia by the Red Sea.

From 1932 from that incident of sinking that gun boat through 1935 and into the Spanish Civil War, that seemed to get my attention. Of course, being a young man I wondered how soon it was going to be for me. I thought maybe it all could wind up before I got old enough to go. It wasn't bothering me so much. You just continued to see how war was spreading.

Then, of course, in 1939, also, Hitler invaded Poland. The first step was that he declared war on Poland.

S: Did you feel like you were getting closer to being called or America was closer to being in the war?

H: Yes. The Americans were helping the English as much as they

could. Franklin Roosevelt was trying to give them help. I can remember that he gave them fifty, old destroyers. I thought that maybe it was only a matter of time before we would be drawn in. I didn't think the war would have lasted that long. Hitler was moving very fast.

S: What do you remember when you were called?

H: I had gotten out of school by then. I was working in a mill. I worked night turn. Prior to this they were drafting men for a year. We had men going out there from twenty-one to twenty-eight. I can remember maybe half a dozen from Bessemer had gone. There was a song out at that time, "Good-bye Dear, I'll be Back in a Year." They were drafting them for a year. I think that must have started in the early part of 1941 because nobody completed their one year before we got into the war in December of 1941.

I was working nights. I got up at about noon. I was told that we were at war. Pearl Harbor had been bombed. I was twenty-one years old. I had friends who had gone in. I knew it was only a matter of time before I was drafted. I thought that maybe I should go down and get in. You could choose then. I had a friend in Keesler Field, Mississippi, and I had one at an airfield in Missouri in the Air Force. They had been home on leave different times. They said, "Herb, if you are going to go into the service, get into the Air Force. You can go to school; you can learn a trade, and it will help you later on." They enlisted. They said, "Don't wait to get called. Then you will go where they want you."

I got washed up and had my lunch. I went up. I told a couple of buddies that since we were in the war that I was going to go. They said that they were going to wait. I said that it was just a matter of weeks or months before we got drafted. I went out that evening. I didn't go to work then; I reported off. I made up my mind, more or less, that I was going to go.

I went down the next morning to the post office in New Castle. The recruiting offices were there. They were on the second floor. It is abandoned now. It was downtown in the square of New Castle.

It was pretty early. The first recruiter who came in was a Marine. He came up to me and said that I could be the first. I said, "I was out late last night. I may look tough, but I don't think I'm quite that tough. I'm waiting for the fellow across the way." He said, "You don't want to go there." I said, "No, I will see what he has to say."

It was the Army Air Corps then. You didn't have the Air Force. You had the Navy, Army, and the Air Corps was part of the Army.

He came in and I went in and talked to him. They hadn't even declared war then. They declared it later on that day when the Congressmen convened. This was a Monday morning. He said, "We haven't got any regulations or anything. The rules right now, if you enlist in the Air Force, it is four years. If you go into the Army, it is only two years." I said, "Well, four years is a long time." Being under peacetime regulations I had to go back to Bessemer and get three references before I could sign up. I came back and I think I got the priest and the principal of the school and the chief of police.

I came home and got those references and I went back. It must have been about Wednesday or Thursday. The recruiter said, "Boy, I have good news for you. All you have to do is sign up for the duration and six months." I said, "That's good. Six months training, six months war, six more months and in a year and a half I will be home." I went in.

The following Sunday I went down to Pittsburgh. They gave me another physical there and swore me in on that Sunday in the afternoon. We stayed in Pittsburgh overnight, and then I went to Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. We got some clothing there. It was either too big or too small and we got some shots. I had signed up for the Air Force when I went back and signed for Keesler Field because this was December and Keesler Field was in Mississippi. My buddy said, "Come on down here; it's nice and warm." I said I was not going to Jefferson Air Field because that was in Missouri and that was cold.

We stayed there just a short time and they ran us. We got on a civilian train with our civilian clothes. The funny thing . . . The day we came in civilian clothes others yelled, "Hey, rookie." The next day we were issued our clothes. I saw what was going on. As soon as we got our uniforms on the next day the bus came in and we were calling them rookies. We were there only two days and we were veterans.

S: Been around, yes.

H: We were veterans for just two days. Anyway, I went to Keesler Field. Everything was hectic. Men were pouring in from all over. The barracks weren't done. The enlisted area wasn't completed. They had outhouses. There wasn't anybody to train us. We would get up in the morning. They would say, "Is there anybody here who had prior service?" Somebody would stick their hand up and say, "I have been in the Army for six years." They would say, "Okay, you take this guy out and march him. Get him out of sight. Get him trained." There were big fields out there to march on. I guess there is a big air base and training center there today. It was just going up then.

So we stayed there. We were getting interviews and they were sending men to school. We got our shots; we got orientation. They read us the articles of war. They would go through the whole set of articles. There was one--I forget which one it was, maybe 102 or something--but if they couldn't get you on any other article, that was catch 22. That would take care of any other problem that they couldn't solve. They kept hammering that to us. That was part of the orientation.

During that time they were taking groups in and interviewing them. They were sending them--many from the Air Force--to sheet metal school, machinists, aircraft mechanics, engine mechanics. They needed all of these trained people. I sat down with the second lieutenant. We were talking. He asked me what school I wanted to apply to. I said, "Well, I would like to go to machinist as first choice, engine mechanic, or sheet metal." As we were talking, I don't know how it came about, but there was something about typing. It was the strangest thing. I had a little free time in school and I took up typing. He said, "You can type? You can just get over here by this typewriter and we will see what you can do." I went over there. He said, "Go ahead." I said, "Well, give me something to copy." He said, "You mean you can copy from notes and stuff?" I said, "Yes." So I typed for a little bit. He said, "I'm sorry. You are trained. You can't go to school. They are crying for clerks. We are going to ship you out to California. They are forming a new squadron at March Air Base. They just need clerks."

S: Did you feel good about that?

H: Mixed emotions. I wanted to get into a trade that I could use after the war to make a living. I thought typing was girl's work. Girls did all of the work like that. He said, "No, I'm serious. I would be doing the wrong thing by assigning you to a school. You passed all of the tests; you could go to school, but they are really crying for people who can do something like that." That was strange that they needed typists. I guess maybe most of the boys didn't take typing in school. Mostly the girls did. I just took it by chance because I had free time and I didn't want to spend too much time in the study hall. That is how I got into that.

I went out to March Field. I didn't do any basic training or any marching or anything. I got out there and they put me into an office. Right away I was typing up orders and things like that. They were organizing units to work out in the bush. After I was at March Field for a couple of weeks and got organized, they sent us to a unit down in San Diego. Everything was mobile. We had plane parts; of course, that was in Air Corps supply. We were supposed to service planes.

Of course, everything was hectic then. I don't think they had anything really planned. This was in January of 1942 when I was at the west coast. You can imagine things were pretty mixed up. They were trying to get things organized after Pearl Harbor.

We had gasoline trucks to fuel the planes. Then there was a squadron of planes there that patrolled the coast from San Diego down to southern Mexico. We were training to go to the Pacific. We would be a self-contained unit, maybe with a portable airstrip. They would take these metal mats and lay them out as a landing strip. You could land planes in the jungle. We were supposed to be a self-contained unit supplying a squadron of planes with repair parts. We had the mechanics to do the larger repairs, other than the squadron mechanics. They did the first echelon repairs. We did the second echelon repairs. We were doing the work in between.

I was with supply. We were handling airplane parts. We were at a Navy base. We were on North Island. We had just a small part of the island. We had a hanger. Another group went to Santa Barbara and we had a place called Mine's Field. I don't recall where the fourth unit went, but that's how we were split up. We were a complete squadron, but we were in four different units. I suppose they were going to send us overseas. We were going to work in the islands.

S: So you figured you were going to the Pacific?

H: Yes. We were in that situation for about six months. Then they brought us back to March Field. They shut everything down. We were there for a short time, and they split us in two. By that time they built the units up. We were more or less like a trained unit. They split us and they were going to make two units. Each unit got another half that was new so that they made a full complement. Out of the one-half unit that was trained, we were training the new men coming in. They didn't send them all to school. Some of the mechanics went, but a lot of them had on the job training.

They really had a method to their madness. I can recall talking to a friend. He was a watchmaker in civilian life. He was an instrument repairman in the service. The welders had their shops. They fit right in. There was sheet metal, so they fit right in. Sheet metal men fit in and stuff like that.

S: They considered that. They read up on you?

H: Yes. Like I said, the lieutenant said that I was trained, so that is how I got that job.

I don't know what percentage it was, but the men who were trained in civilian life for different jobs, a large portion

of them were allowed to work on the planes and other jobs. They sent some off to school, but there were a lot of men who went right into work. The welders and others fit right in.

S: They needed them right away.

H: Yes. The men were pouring in, enlistees, draftees, and everything. You almost started from scratch with the Army. They had these draftees in 1941, but I think most of them were training with broomsticks. They were just marching out in the field. They were just getting men organized. I think they were getting the bugs out of the draft because these fellows were supposed to go in for a year.

S: You didn't have to go through that?

H: I didn't go through any marching. I didn't get any KP until I came back from San Diego. They sent me from March Field to San Diego. The Navy did everything. We were at the Navy base. They didn't bother us for any duty. Nobody knew we were down there except our field, and we had a courier plane twice a day to bring parts. I would make up the order and take it to the Navy at what they called the TEL-X, and they would send the order up to March Field. Then they would bring the order on a courier plane. They would bring our supplies down. They had a transfer plane that came to us and the other bases.

That was the job I had with them. I would go back once in a while on a courier, maybe on special orders, to get something and just to see that base. I didn't stay. I would catch the next flight and go back down to San Diego. It was about 120 or 130 miles. We would just go up over the mountains.

When we came back from San Diego, the first sergeant got us out. He said, "You boys have been on a picnic." The old first sergeants, the old-timers, the regular Army men were tough. He said, "You fellows were on a picnic, but we are going to straighten things out. The poor fellows who have been staying there at March Field have been doing all of the dirty work. For starters, you will spend a week on KP (Kitchen duty). You won't be on the serving line either. You will have some pots and pans to scrub. We are going to get some work out of you guys." That went on for a little while.

As I said we split up into two units. One was going to go out into the desert. They called it Muroc Dry Lake. Actually today it is Edward's Air Force Base where the spacecrafts land.

Anyway, I worked with this captain down at San Diego. I met him one day up at March Field. I said, "Captain, can you fix me up to go to Santa Maria? I don't want to go out to that desert. It is 120 degrees in the shade and this is August,

no way!" He said, "Herb, I'm going to the desert." We went there about two or three times, and I got to know him pretty good. Ours was a small unit down there. I would be sitting at the desk, and he would come in maybe 10:00 or 11:00 in the morning. I would have the orders made up. I said, "Well, maybe I should go to the desert with you." We had a good relationship. He said, "Okay, we will see what we can do."

When they split the units up, I went with the group to the desert. The boys who left for Santa Maria were happy, for a while. They weren't there for two months and then they were in the jungle. We went to the desert. We were supposed to go over sooner than we did. I think when we trained for the desert, our troops were in Africa then. About the time we were getting ready to move, that was winding up. We moved out of there in March, and we went east to Sioux City, Iowa. We stayed there about six weeks. Then we got orders to ship out. We were going to go to England. I thought we were going to go to the desert, but England was okay. I didn't think that was too bad.

It was hard to visualize being in the war. I never realized what actually went on in the service. There were so many men to keep a plane flying. I thought that if you went to the Air Force, you did a lot of flying or something like that. I didn't know they had all of these ground crews. It takes a lot of men to keep a small number of planes going.

S: What do you remember about your feelings about having to go over? When you were shuffled around the states, you were still at home really. Was there a change in your attitude or a change in your feelings when they decided that you were going over?

H: It was really strange. I got home once in that time. I got home in October of 1942. When we got back and we packed up to go to Sioux City, we figured we were going to go someplace. We had to go someplace because this was the early part of 1943. You weren't going to stay in the States forever. We were staying on the base. We were destined to go somewhere. When we started to move, I thought we should get it over with. That was the feeling it seemed everybody had. They said, "Let's go." The suspense kills you. You wonder if you are going here or if you are going there. We just wanted to do something. Of course, our troops went from north Africa to Sicily. There was a possibility of going there.

We had no set plans. We were just working in the Air Corps. We didn't know whether we would be with fighters (planes) or bombers (planes), or what. Then the orders came for England, and England was bomber country. Mostly they had fighters for escort duty, but that is where the Eight Air Force originated. Of course, we had fighters in England to protect the bombers

with. The primary purpose was bombing Germany. When they said England, it was almost like a sigh of relief because war is hell and you think of the areas that aren't too bad and like that. Still England was catching moderate air raids.

S: Was this in 1942 still?

H: No, this was the early part of 1943. 1942 we spent up until August in San Diego and then from there we moved to March Field for a few weeks and then we went to the desert, Muroc Dry Lake. We stayed there until March of 1943. Then we knew we were going someplace. I don't think when we got to Sioux City, Iowa that we knew we were going to England. I know when we left the desert, somebody was talking about taking stuff overseas, and I remember asking about coat hangers. He said, "You won't find a branch on a tree to hang your coat up where you are going." That is why I thought we were going to go to the desert in Africa.

Things were moving pretty fast there. They wound up in Africa, then went into Sicily. Then they were building up in England the Eight Air Force. It started late in 1942. I don't think in the early part of 1943 that there was too much in the way of bombers in England.

S: Where were you over in England?

H: We went to Camp Shanks, New York. Then we got on a ship at New York Harbor. It was the Aquatania. It was a four-stacker. It was among the two four-stackers, and it was, I think, the third largest ship on the ocean at that time. You had the Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth, and they were taking full divisions of men across the ocean in about five days. The Aquatania was the next largest. When we got on it, it wasn't too crowded. They were bringing wounded English troops from Africa. They brought them over to South America and up the coast and they were going back to England. We got on and we were just a small part of it, the American unit on it. It was mostly wounded English.

S: Were those troop ships escorted?

H: The Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth and this ship weren't. They were fast enough. They would outrun a submarine. We weren't escorted. The smaller troop ships went in convoys, and they had destroyer escorts and they had other escorts. The planes would escort so far. Our trip over was seven days, and we went alone. We had drills to get off of the ship in case we were attacked. You went three minutes in one direction. Then the ship changed course three minutes in the opposite. You went across the ocean zigzagging, three minutes one way and three minutes another way. They didn't care whether

thirty foot waves hit you. They washed over the ship and they continued that way. I got so sick on that ship. You would heave everything out. I got so seasick I am sure glad I didn't join the Navy from that experience.

Anyway, it took us seven days to get over. We landed in Glasgow, Scotland. We were met by a little bagpipe band on the shore. They took us down into what they called the Midlands. We were there just for a short while. Then they moved us over to Framlingham over on the east coast in what they called Suffolkshire. It was the farming section in east England. We were maybe ten miles from the English Channel. Across from there it was ninety miles to the French coast, about seventy miles northeast of London.

Anyway, we settled base there. We set up a subdepot. We didn't do what we planned, like in the units we trained for, to go to the Pacific and work out of the islands. We landed at an air base. We had thirty-five bombers. We were a subdepot. We were the Air Corps supply unit. They had four bomber squadrons with the 390th bomb group. There were thirty-five planes, thirty-five crews at the beginning.

We set up shop. We handled all of the gasoline. My job was chief clerk in the subdepot, maintain stock record cards on all of the parts and supplies and fuel into the three fuel dumps, and I kept the fuel dumps supplied with gasoline. I think they contained like seven 12,000 gallon tanks each.

We ordered gasoline from the English, and they delivered from a city below us about fifteen miles away called Ipswich. That was where the main terminal was. When we had a lot of raids, I had to keep the fuel coming. They couldn't stock enough. Then the planes were going often. That was part of the job with supply.

We had people shipping and receiving; we had what we called a tool crib. We had special tools that all of the people on the base used. The squadrons had their own mechanics. We had the hanger which, like I said, we did second echelon repair. If they had big jobs, they brought it into the hanger and our mechanics worked on it in the engineering section. We had like 250 men in this squadron. We had the engineer; we had a paint shop, a fabric shop because there were some parts on the plane that had some fabric in it. The sheet metal shop patched it, the aluminum part. The paint shop, the instrument shop, the welding shop, and a machine shop, that was about it.

S: What was a typical day like there?

H: I got up either at 6:30 or 7:00. I would come up to the main common mess where the ground crew people ate. The officers had their own mess and the flying personnel had

their own mess because they had different hours. They were up all hours; maybe like early in the morning they were getting briefed to go up. I would get up and have breakfast and make my bunk and get up to the office about 8:00.

We had a major who was a stickler for details in supply. He had run a large supply business on the west coast in the oil business supplying people who drilled for oil. When he came into the service, he just went in for training for thirty days to learn some regulations, and then he became a supply officer. He wasn't a military man. Our job was to keep planes flying and do as good of a job as we could for the men who flew the planes so that they had the parts and had the equipment when they needed it.

Anyway, I went to work at 8:00 a.m. It was strange when you worked there. I would get all of the orders from the previous day. I had another man working with me. He would post them. I was more or less like the secretary for the major. I did all the typing of letters and orders. There was always paper work from headquarters back and forth. I would take care of sending out our reports. We had an order section that would make up the order. Then I would get the orders up to the main depot for the parts.

I think there were forty men in our group that I took care of. I took care of their vacation. We had a setup where we could work six days and get a day off. This was when we didn't have problems. You could work twelve days and take two days, or you could work eighteen days straight and take three days off. Then I would work the schedule out for the guys and I would keep track of the work schedule.

If the supply officer went back to the bin and there was supposed to be three generators or even three small items in a bin after they were posted, you better believe there better be three parts in there. He did a heck of a job. Manpower wasn't in short supply. He had one man to help him with cost and inventory. We had big parts for the planes, parts for the wings and the airframes, the big things. We had a big warehouse for all the supplies.

With the gas . . . I never ran out of gas. I don't know what would have happened if I would have. When things got hot--when there were a lot of raids, say like around D day--then we were restricted. There was nobody allowed off of the base. You worked around the clock almost day and night for quite a while. I sat on the phone and would call engineering. We more or less had a little code. They told me how many planes or how much fuel they were taking. Of course, during D day the fuel amounts weren't that heavy because they went across the channel and back. Before D day when we had the big raids, they would

go to Augsburg or someplace. They would take a full load of fuel. I think it was 2400 gallons. When you would send out thirty or forty planes with that much gasoline, I had to have gasoline coming. Then sometimes I would get a little too much and they would cancel the mission. When the stuff was coming, boy, I was really hoping to find somebody so that I could divert the trucks to.

S: What was the primary mission before D day of the planes?

H: When the United States started, about the first thing was daylight bombing. They, the Germans, didn't really think the Americans could bomb in daylight because the German Air Force was tough. They had good planes, but our type of flying was standard. It took about three hours for the planes to circle over England to gain altitude. All of the different bases would send so many planes. Then you had one lead bombardier in the air, one lead navigator. They would lead; they would come up. Then they had the pathfinder; it was a radar unit. They would circle for about three hours over England getting themselves up to 22,000, 24,000, 25,000 feet in this formation. They were stacked. I don't know how high and how many planes wide, but there were eleven guns on each plane, eleven fifty-calibre guns. When they would fly in this formation, there wasn't a blind spot in it. The fighters coming at them . . . There were guns on them from every direction. Those were the American planes.

The English flew single file. You could hear them taking off at night before dark. Each plane had their own navigator and bombardier. They would take off single file. When they hit the target, the first planes were back landing before the last ones were taking off. Ours would form this formation early in the morning, and then they would go over as a whole group. They were stacked several planes high, and they flew as a group.

You had the one lead navigator and he took the whole group over. There were several air bases, and these planes would all take off from different bases. Then they would form one group.

The first thing that I can recall that they went after were airplane factories.

S: Over in Germany?

H: Yes, they went to Frankfurt and Schweinfurt. We got presidential citations for both. Another was Regensburg. They were knocking out their defense. If you knocked out the airplane factories and you knocked their planes out of the sky, they couldn't rebuild those planes fast enough. Then they went for ball bearings because you have to have ball bearings. They did a good job. Our planes went a few times. I think when they went to Regensburg, they flew there and then went on to Africa because

they didn't have enough fuel to return. They went down and across into Africa, but they got the heck knocked out of them. They were supposed to reload there and come back to make another raid going back. They couldn't do that; they were shot up so bad that they went down through Gibraltar and came up that way back to England.

S: Since they got hit pretty good, instead of going back and bombing again?

H: Yes, they came back and got repaired. They got patched up in Africa, and then they came back for major repairs.

After they hit the ball bearings and the airframes, they went after oil, synthetic oil in Merseburg. The flyers would wear leather jackets on the base. Every time they made a mission they would have a little bomb drawn on there. The big thing was to . . . I have been to Merseburg. It was the ultimate in raids; it was tough. It was hard to realize what was going on because we went to work in the morning; we went down for lunch; we would go back to work. If things were normal, we could go out in the evening and have a couple of beers and talk.

Being in Air Corps supply, I met a lot of the flyers. The pilots would come in for what they called hack watches. They were wristwatches which could be synchronized and the navigator came in for sextants. We had all of the supplies more or less locked up because they were scarce. The navigators would call me often, so I got to know a lot of them. I got to know the gunners too. I would have a beer with them in town. Then you knew the planes they were flying. Our outfit was right near the runway. We had a radio that we could pick up their conversation. We could hear them coming back. Then you would hear them ask for clearance for wounded. There were planes missing too.

I always felt kind of odd. I was sleeping in a warm bed and those poor guys were out flying. There were a lot of young kids. The pilots were young. They wouldn't even want to salute you. They were there; they had a job to do. Regulations required that we salute all officers. These young guys would be looking up the field at some of us there. You just had to take your hat off because these guys went up day after day. They didn't fly every day, but often. In the beginning they could fly twenty-five missions and go home. We had thirty-five crews to begin with. Fifteen of those crews finished up. Twenty crews were killed or missing in action. They didn't all get killed. When their planes would get hit, a lot of them would parachute out and land. Then they were taken prisoner.

You would have to talk to somebody who did it because these boys would go up in broad daylight and go over those targets. No matter how much fire came up or how many fighters were there, they would very seldom not go through with the primary target.

They would fly through that. You should have seen some of the planes that came back sometimes. One hundred and two hundred holes shot through them. One came back with the nose knocked off; they lost the bombardier. It wasn't our base. The B-17 could take a lot of punishment. You just couldn't say enough about the men. I couldn't say enough about the men who had this to do. That was something. They never seemed to complain. There were a few who just wouldn't go after a while, but not very many. Day after day they would go. We had men from our unit who belonged in supply, but joined the flyers.

Getting back to the oil, they went after the oil at Merseburg. We sent, I think, fifteen planes this one day, then came back. Those ten who came back had sixty-two German fighters to their credit that they knocked down that day. The Germans had to protect their oil. They would send everything and anything they had up. Then they came up later with rockets. Our boys couldn't get near their fighters. Their fighters set off these big rockets. Toward the end they came up with jets too. It was touch and go for a while.

That was the idea I think. They went for the airframes to knock them out. Then they knocked out ball bearings, and then they went and knocked the oil refineries. Germany used a lot of synthetic oil. They went after those. By the time D day came around Germany was pretty well crippled.

S: When did you first start hearing about a possible invasion? You must have had an important role in that with the planes.

H: You knew it was going to come. I don't think anybody was going to guess when it was going to happen or where. One funny thing that happened, as I look back now, I thought that something was going to happen at that time. This was maybe a couple of weeks before the invasion. I told you about the supply officer who was a stickler. A few miles from our base there was a huge chunk of concrete that was used for planes that had lost their brakes or couldn't get their wheels down. It was like a crash site. I don't know how many thousands of feet long it was. It was just a runway that these planes would use. We were so close to the channel, and they could just head for that and they had all of the room they needed to land. This supply officer had myself and two other kids organized. We would go over there and strip the plane of instruments. We would get over there before the MP's (Military Police) or anybody could stop us. We would go over there and take off parts and get in the jeep and run like heck and get the heck out of there.

We saw these planes going in, so we jumped in the jeep and went over there. A lot of the foreign troops had English uniforms, but if they were from Norway, it said Norway on

the shoulder patch. There were French; there were Norwegians; there were Czechs; there were Poles. They all had English uniforms, but they had an identifying patch on the shoulder. I looked through the trees and there were rows of gliders. That place was bare the week before. I knew something was cooking.

They had gliders that took maybe fifteen men. They were towed by transport planes, and the transport plane had paratroopers in it. In fact, our Congressman Clark was a glider pilot.

Anyway, I saw gliders. There were tents; there were troops there.

A couple of weeks later I got to the office and turned on the radio, and we heard. That was 8:00 in the morning; that was the first I knew about D day.

S: So they kept it quiet.

H: As far as we were concerned. I always did keep the gasoline up, but I don't think that would have been critical because these planes took off and they bombed and then they came back. For about a week they made three trips a day. A lot of the guys got a lot of missions in a hurry. I think some boys who came over flew one month, one month and a half, and they had enough time to go back home again. They sent them over for thirty-five missions then that was it.

They took medics from our base. They took one doctor and I think two medics. We didn't know. There were stories. They said they were all temporary reassignments somewhere. You didn't really think that much about it. You didn't hear anything in town. It had to be pretty well kept secret. When you look back now after it happened, you know why that doctor and the two medics went. They went on these ships that took troops across and brought the wounded back. They stayed, but they didn't land. Our medics and doctors worked on the ships bringing the wounded back from the beaches.

Prior to D day there were raids of several hundred planes. After, they called them thousand plane raids. This was like in a twenty-four hour period. We would send planes; English would send planes.

S: Were you getting a little busier then?

H: Yes.

S: Round the clock?

H: Yes. Then when they started going further into Germany,

then we were busier because they were taking more and more gasoline.

S: Did you think that the war was winding down then as we were getting closer?

H: Yes, because the troops were moving . . . What really set us back though . . . The Battle of the Bulge is where the Germans dressed up in American uniforms. That was their last gasp. Our planes flew one day. Then the fog set in. I don't recall how long it was, but we couldn't send a plane up. I know it was over a week. That was when the Germans really moved. They had these tanks with no planes able to work on them. They made a lot of headway; of course, then when the weather cleared up and the planes started . . . I don't recall exactly how far they went, but I know they . . . When this fog was going on and you heard on the news about them every day moving further and further across Belgium and such, we thought it was just about over. When that happened, we wondered what the heck was going on because we didn't even get bombed a little bit.

All during the time when we were there, their planes would come. We had a lot of alerts, but they were after the gas dumps which were down fifteen miles away from our base. Anytime there was a German plane within twenty-five miles of our base we would get a red alert. It got so that we would almost ignore it. Every once in a while they would come over. We would see an aircraft gun going off and big, huge searchlights shining up there. Once in a while you would see one spotted. They would come and go and then you would see a burst of flames. They shot it down.

They would come over and they were mostly nuisances. They dropped 100 pounders and half of them were duds. It would make you jump in a hole quick. Then they dropped anti-personnel bombs. They might have gotten wind somehow that there was a big raid coming.

They would come over and they would drop canisters with crow's feet. Whichever way it landed, they were sharp points up. They were maybe two inches or three inches long. Whichever way they landed, there was a sharp point up. They would explode the containers, and they would come down in parachutes onto the runways. These things would fly all over. Naturally some landed on the runway and the planes couldn't take off because it punctured the tires, and it was a nuisance.

Then they would drop down their antipersonnel bombs. We would get warned right away. It was about the size of your fist. When it was cocked, there was a little flap that came out. If you kicked it, it would knock a leg off or something. When this happened, right away we had a public broadcasting

system with loudspeakers in the areas. They were dispersed all over the air base.

You didn't all live in one area. There was one little group here and another squadron there. It was quite a ways around. In fact it was so big that they had buses that made runs around there that took you to your work and took you to the mess and took you every place. They would tell you right away that these antipersonnel bombs were out and to stay on the hard surface of the roadways. A lot of people would take shortcuts through the field going to work, but they would stay out of there when these bombs were dropped.

S: How did the war wind down for you?

H: After the Bulge was cleared out . . . They started to move and the first place they moved into Germany was Aachen and a couple of other places. The Russians were moving on the other side. When our planes started to bomb Berlin, we figured that it had to be over then because there was nowhere for the Germans to go. There were forces coming up from the south. Our troops had gone already into Czechoslovakia and Austria, and the Russians had come across Poland. Of course, that is a whole other story over there.

Talking about Russia, we had some planes that went from our base to bomb somewhere in Poland and went on into Russia. Prior to that they took a couple of boys from our base who spoke Russian and brought them over to Russia. They were going to service our planes over there. They were mechanics. These planes that flew across Germany and bombed Poland went over to Russia. Russia didn't give much protection because the Germans hit some after they landed. They just did that a few times. Those boys came back to our base. It didn't work out too good, I don't think. They tried.

S: When did you find out you were going home?

H: Right after the war ended they reorganized us. They were giving points like combat points. We didn't have combat points. They gave points to you for different medals. We just had the citation. We were closing up the base. We were sending most of our supplies to the Army of occupation in Germany. Our office supplies like our typewriters and things were boxed up and we were going to send them to Germany where the Army of occupation was going to go.

There was a debate whether we were going to go directly to the Pacific or go home. If you had enough points, you could go home for R&R, which we heard was Rest & Recuperation. The way it worked out I think it was sometime in June. They said we were going to go back to the States for R&R for thirty days and then we would regroup in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

and go to the Pacific. There was a big cheer because we were going to get home. I only got home for ten days. In all the four years I was in I had that one ten day furlough in 1942. I came right down through Mahoning County on the train when we were going to New York. You could look out, but you couldn't get off of the train to visit.

Anyway, about sometime in June they told us that we were going to go home. We were packing up all of this equipment that we had and getting ready to ship it to Germany. Then they reorganized some of the units. Some people went to Germany.

I got on a little Liberty ship in London in early August. I'm not going to be specific about dates. While we were on the ocean . . . It took us eleven days on this Liberty ship. There were 600 men on the ship. You either were on the deck or you were in the hold. It took us three days to lose sight of England. I remember that. When we went through Lands End, it was pretty rough. After we got out to the ocean it was just like sailing on a lake the rest of the way to Boston.

While we were on the ocean, the atomic bomb was dropped. Then another was dropped when we landed. We came back into Indiantown Gap and were sent back home for thirty days R&R. I was in Warren visiting my sister. We were having supper and Japan surrendered. When they surrendered, my sister and her husband and I jumped in the car. We went to downtown Warren. Everybody was celebrating. Of course, you heard about the celebration in San Francisco and Chicago; it was really wild. Everybody was there just driving around, blowing horns. What else could you do? They were just letting off steam.

S: How about when you came back home?

H: They didn't discharge me there. After the thirty days were through I went to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I think some of the guys on the west coast didn't come back to Sioux Falls, but most of us from the east and the midwest . . . We regrouped and we were supposed to go to the Pacific from there.

We were in Sioux Falls. We were sitting around. I got assigned to the discharge center. There were several, young civilian girls working there. I was supervising the discharge of a group. I worked the night shift. They were discharging men as fast as they could. I would check them for accuracy. They had their records. They would check to make sure they had it all there, the awards and the medals. This was going to be their discharge to show the history of their service.

Before my time came up for me to be discharged, I stayed there and worked there until, well . . . This was the latter

part of August maybe. I worked there until sometime in November before I got my discharge. Then I came home and I went back to the mill.

S: What was the mood of the town when you came back? Did you notice a difference from before the war?

H: Everybody was talking. They were meeting all old friends. It was kind of upbeat. The sad part was that I didn't realize how many boys were killed, people who I knew. In fact the one fellow who I had talked to about going in together and who said that I should wait to be drafted, Johnny Pelozza, was killed. I think there were thirteen, young men who were killed just in this area. That is quite a few for a small town.

You didn't know what to do. You wondered what was going to happen to you. You didn't have a job at first. I went to the mill for a little bit. They went on strike and I was back out of a job. It was a funny feeling.

Talking about that enlisting, when the sergeant said that I had to enlist in the Air Corps for four years, I only signed in for a year and a half. I went in on December 14, and I got out in the latter part of November of 1945. It was just a few weeks shy of four years.

I think there was a feeling of insecurity of wondering what to do. Even though you were in the war you were going to work every day. Then here you are back to part-time, especially when I went on strike. I wasn't going to work, so what was I going to do. You figured if there wasn't any work here, you could go someplace else because there would be work. I know the officer who I worked with said to go out to California. That was where he was located. He said that there was work out there and that I could work for him.

Coming back home there was a celebration. The Rotary had a big dinner for us, serving us as guests, and the Croation club had a dinner. We got a lot of free dinners. Of course, some of the older people had passed on. Some were gone when I came back. Being away that long, just getting home that one, short time, there were a lot of changes.

S: You had to get caught up.

H: Yes, the one thing I noticed was that the town looked so much smaller than when I left.

S: You got older and saw a lot.

H: I got older. I had been around a little bit more. It was a good feeling. I had driven over in England. When I drove over there, I had a jeep and you drove on the left side of

the road. The first day I was home I was at my brothers. I got in the car and I was going down the left side of the road. There was a guy coming at me; I had to move.

S: It was what you were used to.

H: Yes. I was in England for two and a half years almost. I had a rack of clothes over my bunk and I thought I was going to be there for the rest of my life. It didn't seem like it was ever going to end at first.

I was fortunate. I had good duty, but I saw people who really suffered. When you see these young boys . . . Toward the end I was maybe twenty-five or so. When I'm talking about young boys, I'm talking about eighteen years old or nineteen. To me they were kids who were flying. You would see them take off in the planes and then you would see them bringing the planes back. Out of 301 missions we probably lost all together maybe 200, but that would be that some crash-landed on the base. Maybe over 150 planes were shot down, so you lost a lot of people. There were a lot of people who came back wounded. A plane would come back shot full of holes. There were ten men on each plane. The planes would get shot up; there were a lot of wounded; there were some dead on the planes too. That was hard to take.

I would be going to work in the morning and these boys would be coming in who were dead or wounded. They were going through hell for maybe three or four hours, going over to Germany. They would go early in the morning. As soon as they crossed the French coast before the invasion, they were under attack. They had fighter plane escorts, of course, when they went over. When they first went over, they didn't have fighters until later toward the end--not the end, but later on in the war about 1943. They wouldn't take escorts over the target.

S: Is there anything that you think is important that we might have left out?

H: I don't think so.

END OF INTERVIEW