

Why and how I became a WWII Army Air Corps Pilot – Donald Moomaw

It really started rather early, probably around 12 years old. I took an old weathered board, approximately 3” wide, and with a hatchet chopped out an outline of an airplane of that day (1935). I didn’t have a saw. I used wood-plaster lath to make the wings and tail. (Plaster lath were wood ¼” thick and 1 1/2” wide.) I used two nails at an angle to make the landing gear. I whittled out a propeller, which spun in the wind. It looked fairly well like an airplane of its day. It was about 12” long. As I recall, I mounted it on the top of a stake as a weather vane and it worked quite well turning in the wind with the prop spinning. I can see it in my mind today as if I just finished it. Also, probably the same year, I built a glider plane out of a lead pencil and turkey feathers (around Thanksgiving time) and it worked, somewhat. Next, in the 6th grade, I sat at my desk, using a pencil, practicing making airplane landings. And as I learned to fly, I learned I was doing it exactly correct, just as I was doing in the 6th grade. As you can see, I chose the wrong profession; I should have been an aeronautical engineer.

September 1, 1939. I was camping out in Yoder’s Hollow with Bob Bartells and Dick Peterman. At that time I had heard that the war in Europe had started. England and France had declared war on Germany. I was overjoyed that I would see a war in my time. And had I known I would have been part of it, I still would have probably been overjoyed. I was 16 years old at the time and wasn’t very mature.

The next step was I saw a movie. I can’t recall the title, but it was about transferring planes from the United States to Europe for the war. And at that time I decided that I wanted to be a pilot. My biggest problem was getting Mother and Dad to sign for my enlistment. I wasn’t of age at that time and it required that they sign. It must have been a terrible thing for them to do.

I completed the necessary papers and received a message that I was to report to Cleveland, the Cleveland Post Office, to take a mental test. I don’t recall the exact dates and so forth, but it was in the wintertime. I went to Cleveland one early morning and when I got to Cleveland, being the hayseed that I am and was, I forgot the address that I was supposed to go to. So I stopped a patrolman or a policeman and asked him what the main street of Cleveland was. Well, of course there are lots of main streets in Cleveland. But he asked me my destination and I told him the Post Office and so he sent me to Euclid Avenue.

The test was in this manner: they wanted to know exactly what you knew and not how much you were guessing. So for each question you did not answer, they gave you so much of a point. I don't recall what that was. But when I handed that test in, I knew that I had passed it. For I knew how many I had correct and I knew how many points I got for not guessing.

Several weeks later I went to Cleveland for a physical and passed that okay. Then I received a letter stating I should be in Cleveland on December 3, 1942 to be sworn in, which I did. My official date entering the Army was December 3, 1942. We were put in the U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve and I was ordered to return to active duty on February 19 at Fort Thomas, Kentucky. I left Orville on the 18th at midnight, got into Cincinnati in the morning, and reported to Fort Thomas. We were there only part of the day and shipped out that evening on a troop train. We had no knowledge of where we were going or how long or so forth. But we ended up in Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi.

We arrived at Keesler Field around midnight. You never arrived at a new destination in the daytime. It is always in the middle of the night, for whatever reason. I don't know. But anyway, we were greeted by hoot calls from the other barracks, "You'll be sorry. You'll be sorry." Probably other cadets who were also there. We were put into tents. It was a rainy and cold area. Cold as blazes at night and by 10 o'clock in the morning it was hot. Our main duty was just drilling. They had nothing for us to do. We had no equipment and so forth. It was just a holding area. But I guess they wanted us in the service.

At this point, the Army and I made an agreement. They weren't aware of it. The Army in the early morning still, some messenger would come around and tap somebody and say, "KP" and "Go such-and such." My cot was the first cot inside the tent and so I was the one they normally touched. They had no idea who they touched, who they notified, from what tent and so forth. So there was no problem when I didn't show up. If there wasn't enough, they still didn't know who didn't show. And I don't believe anyone else in my tent was ever tapped. So I didn't feel guilty that I didn't show.

The cots, of course, were just canvas. The cold would seep right up through it, regardless of how many covers you had on. So we had newspapers and anything we gathered up to put between us and the cot. We had our overcoats, our uniforms and everything on trying to keep warm. In the morning when we would go out to drill, we would be wearing everything because it was cold. And by 10 o'clock we were carrying

everything. I don't know how long we were there. Again, we didn't have much duty. It was rather a holding area to get slots to send us to other points of our training.

We shipped out to Mississippi State College in Starkville, Mississippi. Our course there was to be three months. I don't know what the purpose of it was, whether it was to teach us things that we didn't know or should know, I never determined that. Anyway, at the end of six weeks, a group of us was shipped out to a classification center in San Antonio, Texas. At this point here, at classification, they give you all kinds of tests like putting square blocks in round holes and all that jazz. They put all kinds of wires to you, like they do when you have the heart test to see how your heart is beating and so forth. And they tested us that way. They put us in front of airplane controls to see how we would handle them and so forth. Supposedly they were able to determine who could become pilots and who could not.

I was also selected by the end of my serial number. My serial number was 15134215. All the 15's were given special tests. They just picked us at random as such. Sure, we were 15's, but how many had 15's I don't know. It was very long and so forth. I don't remember what I did anymore or why or how. But anyway, in order to evaluate their test, they kept track of us to see what happens during the military and after the military. Twenty-five years after I left the Army, or after I took the test, they were still sending me letters asking me questions. What I was doing, why I was doing it, and all this type of thing. Of course by this time the tests had no value because the aircraft had changed, everything had changed. So I don't know what value. But anyway, the test was supposed to say that yes, they recommended me to test for pilot, did I make it, how did I succeed in it.

At the Classification Center you were classified in four different methods of training: pilot, bombardier, navigator, and if you didn't make any one of those, you were a gunner. Once you volunteered to fly, you were going to fly. I had no doubts that I was going to be chosen for pilot training, and I was. At this time I had not had any close friends in the military. We were just there as people. So I don't know how many made pilot, I don't know how many made bombardier, I don't know how many made navigator, I don't know how many went to gunners. I suppose there were some that washed out for flying duty and were sent wherever in the military.

After that, then we had what we call pre-flight training. This taught us weather, how to forecast weather and so forth, and types of clouds, cumulus, cubitus, limulus, stratus, and all that jazz. I suppose ten years prior to that, that would have been a good course, because at that time, ten years previously, they didn't have the methods of forecasting weather. Even though it was not near what it is today, they did have some means of forecasting by whether the pilots should be flying or whatever.

They had engine mechanics. I really wasn't interested in that because I didn't think that I was ever going to crawl out on a wing and repair an engine, that or on the ground. And those two courses really at this time had no value. It was a carryover from a future time and our time should not have been wasted on it.

Also, we had a course in code. Tap-tapping the little brass ticker and then they had the visual code like they have in the Navy where they flash that and so forth. I learned the code, I learned the key, I could tap that out. And the visual code. That was difficult. We had to test five words a minute. Six words a minute, but there were five letters per word. And you had dots and dashes with those lights flashing. I passed it. There were people who didn't that were held back. I don't know what happened to them.

It was terribly hot down there. Our courses were held in a tent. The engine mechanics, they used to keep me in the front row to keep me awake. So that's how things went. I don't know what I did. I got through the courses. There was a lot of drilling there, a lot of formations. We changed our uniforms maybe five or six times a day from work uniforms to Class A and go to retreat every night to lowering the flag at 4 o'clock. We were dressed in white gloves and Class A uniforms and really doing the things up right.

At physical training, they really put us through that an hour a day, building us up. One thing I must say also, there will have to be some cutting and pasting in this. Back at Mississippi State we had a lot of physical training and we used to run the course, whatever you would call it, cross country races. On Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday we would have a long one. My goal was to pass anybody in front of me and never let anybody pass me in the rear in this running. And I was successful the whole way. We didn't have that when we got out of college and into the regular Army again. But we did at PT.

It was hot in San Antonio. My, oh my it was hot. On the blacktop, the heat would burn your feet right through your shoes. I still have the trousers I had in physical training and cadet training. Just long pants. Blue with gold stripe running down the side.

The food was good. We bitched about it, but it was good. One thing about it, this whole training period, we were training with young fellows who all had the same goal. All the same age and our goal was the same. And it was great.

We were shipped to Vernon, Texas, up near the Oklahoma border for our primary trainer. We trained in PT1 Fairchild. They were nice little airplanes. I had a good instructor, Mr. Selser, trained with Aviation Cadet Powers. I have to back up here again. When we were in the college, we were aviation students. Once we went through the Classification Center, we were Aviation Cadets and we wore the Aviation Cadet uniform, which was quite different from the regular enlisted. We had just nice uniforms. We were the cream of the crop, the Aviation Cadets. We were. I was very fortunate and blessed to be there. I read a number of years ago that out of 198,000 pilots they trained, they went through 2.5 million applicants. So out of 2.5 million applicants, 198,000 of us made it.

At primary, I soloed eight hours, I believe. Eight or eight and a half. I don't remember a thing about that solo flight. I don't know a thing. All I know is that I accomplished it, I believe, on October 17, 1943. We learned all kinds of maneuvers there. Mainly in primary we did loops and spins and chandelles and lazy eights and that type of thing. It was a lot of fun. We had one test at one time that in the landing area there were two lines, of course touch down and another line. We were supposed to land within those areas four times out of seven. Well, I don't think it was skill. Just a lot of luck, but I landed the first four right where I was supposed to. So I parked my plane and went back to my instructor. He said, "What did you quit for?" I said "I hit the four." He never answered me back and I don't know whether he was pleased that I used my head in doing it or not. I might have missed the next three. But anyway, perfect score.

Our cross country flight: Now we had no radios. The instructor sat in the back seat and we had a thing we put on our ears and he had a microphone, but it went through a rubber tube, so he spoke to us. So what I'm getting at, when we went on this cross country, if you got lost, you were in trouble because there was no one to contact, no way of contact, and you would have to find some place to land other than your home field.

Whether you could find an airfield or land in a vacant field, a wheat field, or whatever. That was quite a test. We had maps and here was a water tank, here was a railroad, and here was a river, and here was a town, and all this jazz. And we had figured out, we knew the air speed of our airplane and we figured we should be at these certain points at a certain time. Like did we cross this river, did we cross this railroad track, did we see this big manufacturing plant, and did we see this crossroad and went so many miles this way of a certain compass heading, made another compass heading and the same thing, I mean all these landmarks we had to watch to another point and then head back for the field. Well, I made it. No problems. I don't know if there was any who did not.

There were several hundred cadets there so you only knew the ones that were in your own little barracks area. I don't know how many washed out. The story was this: If there are three of you standing there, before you get the wings, there is only going to be one. And that's about right. I believe that I read statistics later on that 198 cadets became pilots, back in San Antonio and these other classifications, those who were selected for pilot training, 198,000 made it, 127,000 did not. I was fortunate.

We had about 60 hours there and went on to basic to Majors Field in Greenville, Texas. It was just outside of Dallas. And in Greenville, Texas, I remember going into it, the road signs. We rode, not in busses, but they had trailers like semi trailers with seats in, so we rode that way. And I remember going into that, and the sign Greenville, Texas. The blackest soil and the whitest people. Well, that sort of shocked me. But anyway, there were 400 of us training. No, we had 400 airplanes. I don't know how many were there. We had two runways. And as we would come in to land, we would be facing each other and turn onto our runways facing. Why we didn't have collisions, I don't know, but we didn't. There we learned snap rolls and slow rolls, and Immelmans, and still then the spinning. And the reason you learned to spin, stalls, I should have gone to in primary. When an airplane stalls, it's going to fall off into a spin. The reason they train that, so if that should happen and you get into a spin, how to recover from a spin. So that's one of the very first things I learned in flying is a stall and recovering from the spin that the stall resulted in.

We had a BT13. It was a metal plane with 400 horsepower engine and two speed prop, and a canopy. You could close the canopy. You could get out of the weather if necessary. The primary trainings were all open cockpits. And again, we still communicated the same way with the rubber tube.

Going backwards again. After you soloed, probably the most of your flying was solo flying. Your instructor would just go with you to teach you the new aerobatic things, procedures, loops, and so forth, or to see how you were doing. So most of the time you were on your own.

In basic it was the same thing. But there you learned the snap rolls, the slow rolls, flying upside down, the Immelmans, there again. That was at the top of the loop you would roll over so you were going in the opposite direction of what you started the loop. We learned all those maneuvers. I didn't like the snap roll. It was violent. I did it and continued to do it, but man, I didn't care for it.

We did night flying, which, why we weren't killed there I don't know. We went to an outlying field, out away from the regular field. I don't know exactly what we did. But the only way you could come in and land was enter the pattern and go, I'd have to explain it better. On the base leg, which was the leg you were flying before you turned into the runway, and the only way you could see the runway is when you were perfectly lined up with the lights. So you would start a very slow turn in the direction of the runway and when you saw the lights, then you would line up. You couldn't see the runway. All you could do was see the lights and you could see the end of the runway and you would head for that. Anyway, we all made it. I remember one time we were up there and two P38's, we had radios then, but anyway, mine wasn't working. I didn't know it. I had no reason to use it, no reason to call. But anyway, there were two P38's lost and they were trying to get them into the field and they were calling all of us planes in the area there that were up in the air to get out of the air and let these two P38's in. Well, I didn't know anything about it until I got on the ground, and they weren't very happy that I didn't respond. Well, you can't respond if the radio doesn't work.

I had 60-70 hours of flying in the PT13's. Again, most of it was solo. I don't know who we lost and who we didn't as washout. One thing, when a cadet washed out, he was immediately moved out of the barracks and you never saw him again. Not to embarrass the cadet who washed out and not cause any confusion, they just disappeared.

At this time we had the choice, and I think most of the choices were honored, we could either take advanced training, we could either choose single engine training for fighter training, or a twin engine. The twin engine plane was mostly bombers, but the P38 was a twin engine plane so I chose twin engine, thinking that was the proper one to fly a P38, a twin engine fighter. Well, as I learned years later, that was the exact wrong way to

do it. They somehow felt that the cadets who chose the twin engines were more conservative people and they wanted the people who were gung ho when it's single engine. The thought was they could teach a single engine fighter pilot to try to fly a twin engine easier than taking us conservative people and put us in the P38. Well anyway, I didn't get to fly a P38.

So we went into advanced at Fredrick, Oklahoma, which was only 20 miles from Vernon, Texas, where I really started training. And there we had the AT17, which I don't know who even made them, but it wasn't very powerful airplane. It had the twin engines. We learned to fly single engine and we learned to do this and we learned to do that. There were no aerobatics in the twin engine because the planes weren't designed for that. And since we weren't going to be fighters and so forth, at least I didn't know it, but all of us were going to go to bombers or to transport planes so there was no need of teaching us any aerobatics. Went through there okay, again 60 – 70 hours, I don't know. But this was quite exciting at this time.

Oh, I've got to go back. We lived in what they called tar paper. In Vernon, Texas we had brick barracks. That was the civilian field. Not bricks, tile. Whatever. Then at Majors Field we had what you called tarpaper shacks. They were just wooden single buildings, one story buildings, two doors, a couple of windows. Wood sheeting with tarpaper on it to keep the wind and rain out. We had what they called a community bathroom. It was just a big bathroom with the toilets, commodes, wash sinks and some mirrors. Sometimes hot water and some not. And showers, you know. But just very basic. It supplied the needs but to be nothing elaborate. But that was okay because those fields were only going to be used as long as the war. When the war was over, they were done. They had no further use or them. There wasn't such a thing as large hangars or anything of that nature. Everything was very temporary. Built for very temporary use. And the same way Fredrick, Oklahoma. tarpaper shacks.

But then towards the end of our training, I'd say about a month before we were to graduate, we were allowed to go pick out our uniforms or buy our uniforms and get everything we needed to be an officer. Again, I don't know how many, if any, washed out. I don't know. But anyway, the big day came and we got our wings and gold bars. That's the day they read off, now the B26 had a terrible reputation, you know, nobody would ask, there again, at the end we had a chance to select what type of planes we would like to go into after we graduated. Well, of course mine was P38 and I don't know what the next ones on down, but B26 wasn't one of them. It had a terrible reputation. The Widow-maker. Signed coffin. A tisket, a tasket, a double engine

casket. Well low and behold, guess what. I was assigned to - the B26. That was it. I don't know if they wanted to get rid of me or figured maybe I could do it. Anyway, B26.

So we went home on leave for two weeks. We went to Barksdale, Louisiana, Shreveport, and then on to Lake Charles, Louisiana for the training. We trained for overseas training. 36 crews started this training, only 30 finished. We lost 6 crews at that point of training.

After we finished there and we received overseas assignments, 15 crews were scheduled to fly new B26's over and 15 crews went by ship. I was in the group of 15 that went overseas by ship on the Queen Mary. Of the 15 who left Savannah, Georgia to fly to Europe to what they call the southern, only 12 made it. So we lost 3 at Lake Charles, and three that didn't make it, we lost 9 crews out of the 36. We lost 25% of the crews without ever flying a mission in combat.

From Savannah, Georgia, we went by rail to Camp Dix, New Jersey. There we stayed, I suppose, a week. While we were there, we could get passes to New York City. I really didn't want to go so I gave my pass to another pilot. As it ended up, he was killed on a takeoff accident in Europe, so I was always sort of glad that gave him the trip to go to New York other than myself.

Anyway, at Fort Dix on the barracks wall everybody, not everybody, but people would write their names and the dates they were there. So I did, I followed of course. I put my name on the wall and the date that I was there.

Anyway, we shipped out to Europe on the Queen Mary. There were somewhere between 15,000 and 18,000 on the ship. It was really jammed. We were in what had been a state room and on all four walls there were three canvas cots stacked up. So we were 12 to a state room and the floor was completely filled with luggage. So when we wanted to go in and out, we had to walk over luggage. I believe it took us six days. We didn't go by escort. The ship was fast enough that they zigzag and could outrun the submarines. They fed us two meals a day and the reason that was, they couldn't serve three. There were too many people. They didn't have the time. They were feeding continuously.

We landed up in Greenock, Scotland. They took us by train down through Scotland to a place called Stone, England. Scotland was a very clean country. There wasn't a piece of paper lying along the railroad track or anything. It was just clean. We saw a lot of sheep and so forth. Stone, England, I think we were there four days. It was cold and damp. I don't remember meals. We flew to Le Borget, an airfield, which was outside the international airport. It was pretty well shot up at the time.

We were assigned to replacement depot somewhere near Paris. We stayed there probably a day or two and we received the order. We didn't know where we were going. But they put us on two and a half ton trucks and started out across France. We were assigned, we eventually found out, we went to the 44th boundary. We were stationed near Pontuas, France. The name Pontuas meant the Ridge over the Oz River. That ridge was blown up prior to the invasion. Anyway, we got there at night again. Always at night. You never got an place during the day. So they assigned us a room and bunks. There were no mattresses so they sent them out to get mattresses at what had been, I guess you'd call a whore house that the Germans had used. So they brought us mattresses and I was assigned an empty bunk. By the way, we were in an old French schoolhouse that the German Air Force had converted to a barracks for their use. That's the only thing that was left of the air field. Everything else was destroyed except that and the runways. Now we were the only squadron in a building. The other three squadrons were in underground facilities that the Germans had used for housing.

The airfield had one runway. Of course, it was a German fighter airfield and so there was only one way to take off and one way to land. The airfields in Europe had at least two runways so as the wind changed and so forth, they could take off into the wind. We didn't have much choice. We had one way. Everything except our barracks was in tents. Mess hall, everything.

At that airfield I knew of three places: the mess hall, where I slept, where the briefing tent was, and where the airplanes were. I never knew more. I didn't need to know more. I didn't know where squadron headquarters were, or group headquarters. probably in a tent somewhere.

The schedule for flying was what they called a load list. About 4 o'clock in the afternoon they would post the crews that were going to fly the missions the next day. You were on that load list for three days. If they flew three missions in a row, or four missions in that day, you flew them. Then you came off of the load list for one day. That didn't mean you were free. It did, mainly, but if they needed extra crews or extra people you

were scheduled the 4th or 5th or 6th day, whatever. Of course we were there in the winter and what determine how many missions you flew was the weather. Not the weather in France, but what the weather was in Germany, could we see the target? If you couldn't see your target, there was no need of going. It didn't matter if there was three feet of snow on the ground. When you were scheduled for a mission, it went to briefing, you got into your airplanes, started your engines, and got ready to take off. If the mission was cancelled, which it was many, many times on account of the weather, they would shoot up a red flare from the control tower. But that didn't change things. If you were scheduled to the mission, you went to a briefing, you got in your airplane, you started it up, ready to taxi out.

If you were going to go on the mission, then a green flare would go up. All this was done on a scheduled time. You checked your airplane, got into the airplane. That flare, they would send it and everyone started their engines. About five minutes later another flare would go up and you started taxiing. Everyone knew where they were positioned in the group and so you would join the parade where you were supposed to be. You would taxi in a straight line out to the takeoff point. At that time you waited for another green flare. The first plane off, the lead plane, when the flare went up he was out on the runway and released his brakes and his engine and started rolling. Every 20 seconds another plane, as quick as that plane started rolling, the next plane rolled out to the take off point, revved his engine up full speed, and the brakes, and that old plane would just bounce there with those twin engines at full power. We would take off every 20 seconds. We would go out on the runway with our engines full blast, Our engines were set to 2800 rpm and 52 inches of mercury, if we could we could get 2850 rpm's and 53 inches of mercury we got it. And the copilot would time it. And when 20 seconds was up, he would motion the pilot and release the brakes and down the runway we'd go. So at that time, there was one plane just taking off, one plane just about half way down way, and another plane just starting to roll. So even at every 20 seconds, it took us, depending on how many planes, 12 to 15 minute to get in the air. Once we got in the air, we knew the heading we were supposed to take, and it was a clear day, of course you would just take off and go climb to your altitude and get into formation. But if it was cloudy and you had to climb through the clouds, and sometimes you would climb through 10,000– 12,000 feet through clouds that you couldn't see your wing tips and you had a plane ahead of you 20 seconds and a plane behind you 20 seconds, all climbing at the same compass heading and the same air speed. We climbed at 180 miles per hour, climbing 300 feet per minute. And we did break through those clouds, even though we were all heading on the same compass heading at the same air speed, planes were all over that sky and the

compasses weren't that close and the air speed indicators weren't that close. So what the lead plane would do is make a large circle and we would cut into it. We would spot the lead plane and then we would get into our spot. It seemed to work. I don't know why, but we would get in our spot and take off for Germany.

We flew 12,000 to 14,000 feet. All the other Air Force fighters and the heavy bombers had oxygen and oxygen masks and so forth. We didn't. So we were flying at 12,000 and 14,000 feet without oxygen. I often wonder, I would always come so terribly tired and I didn't realize it until after the war, we were just oxygen starved.

Well anyway, when we got over Germany, what we called the bomb line, the bomb line was where you were entering enemy territory. Whether it was France, Belgium, or Germany, when you crossed the bomb line the you got credit for a mission, whether you dropped your bombs or not. Very few times, I think only one time we did not drop bombs. We knew when we would hit flack. This is anti-aircraft fire. There were three flack belts that you had to go through. In other words, the Germans had the flack guns on the western front lined up that you couldn't get into Germany without going through those belts. Also, if you got anywhere near a large city you were going to get flack. If the flack was what we called light accurate, we didn't take evasive action. At our altitude, it took the Germans 17 seconds to load, aim, and get the flack to burst at our altitude. So every 12 seconds the group leader would either turn right, left, or go straight ahead. The purpose of that was that if they aimed at us and thought we were going straight, the flack would be there to meet us. If they guessed we were going to turn left and we turned right, the flack was out of range for us. But if they guessed which way we were going to turn, the flack was there to meet us. So it was just like a game of checkers. You tried to outsmart each other. They knew what we were going to do and we knew what they were doing. It was about like what you kids used to play with your fingers and so forth. It was a game like that. If we outguessed them, we were safe for that period of time. Also, they were smart, too. When they got near the target, they were pretty well assured of what our target was. So they would just shoot light accurate flack so we wouldn't do evasive action. And then when they got on the bomb run, they had us zeroed in. The bomb run started at what we called the initial point. Normally our initial point was two minutes away from the target. And if you had heavy flack, they put it into you while you were on the bomb run. Flack was an 88 mm shell. Now what 88 mm is, whether it's 2 inches or 3 inches or 4 inches, I don't know. But when that would explode, the pieces would be from the size of your thumbnail to the size of your hand, however the thing broke, and it was flying through like a hailstorm, really. Now, a piece the size of a thumbnail, if it hit

the right place, it would bring you down. Or if it hit you at the right place it would bring you down, kill you. But anyway, how can I say it, once it came up, you were so busy it didn't bother you. Your mind couldn't, my mind couldn't take it all in. So it was just there. You could see the red bursts. Not all the time, but when it was close, accurate, and heavy you could see the red bursts. You could hear the pinging. You could smell the acid smoke. You could feel it at times tearing through your airplane. You could hear it. You could feel it. You were just there. There was nothing you could do about it. You were trained to fly formation. Whatever your leader did, you did. There were no questions asked. You just did it. You dropped your bombs about 2 miles from the target and the forward motion carried the bomb into the target. We weren't as accurate as they would have liked, but we did hit our targets. Now when we carried 2000 pound bombs, when they hit and exploded they just tossed your airplane in the air. Not toss it, but lift it up. When we pulled off the target, as quick as our bombs would have dropped, we would always make a steep diving turn either to the right or left. If there were 50 guns to the left of us or 100 guns to the right of us, we would turn into the 50 guns because it was less flack there. They knew that. So they always would try to catch us pulling off the target. On one occasion, and I have a picture here that shows it, they caught the lead plane as he was making that steep diving turn. Now, even though there was lots of flack, you had to hit at the right spot. You had to hit something that would put your engines out. Or blow off a wing or something like that. But most of it just went through your aircraft. Then as we pulled off the target, we would I guess we stayed at 10,000 ft. of altitude to get out of Germany. But once we got out of Germany, then we would start a gradual descent to reach a good altitude when we got home. There were two things there. Of course I didn't realize it then, but one was to get us oxygen again and second, to save fuel. Because as you're losing altitude, you throttle back and you're consuming less fuel. That's another thing. Fuel was worth its weight in gold. You would lean those engines back, putting less fuel and more air into it so our engine would start running hot. And then you just pulled back just a little notch, just to keep your engine from getting too hot, to conserve the gas. There were lots of crews lost and lots of accidents due to running out of fuel. That's one thing I always did. I supposed I embarrassed the ground crews, but I check those fuel tanks every time before we took off, that those tanks were full.

There's another thing. They tell you how high the losses were. The losses they counted were what was lost over enemy action. Take off accidents, collisions in the air, landing accidents, running out of fuel in enemy territory, those were not combat losses. So there were a lot of crews lost that you don't see figures. But they wanted the figures to look good.

Another thing. You didn't go into Germany without fighter escort. So if for some reason your fighter escort didn't show, you turned around and went home.

The first really rough mission I was in was the 5th one. And we just couldn't get out of that flack. I mean we twisted and turned and they had us zeroed in in every direction. I was thinking to myself how stupid people can be. I said no wonder you guys are losing the war, you can't hit the broad side of a barn. I was part of the broad side of the barn. Thank God they couldn't hit the broad side of a barn.

Lucky 13th mission, we were #2 position in the lead flight lead by Major Clay he was the fairest man I ever met in the military. He went on to become a 4 star general. Anyway, we got on the bomb run and a pink or red burst came up, I thought that was unusual. And then a short time later, just enough time that they had all been zeroing in on us, and the flack, you've heard the expression "the flack was so thick you could walk on it." It was. Our flight never reached the target. As I said, you followed your leader. Somewhere along the line he made a steep diving turn to the left. I assumed they were turning off, that we had gotten rid of our bombs. I thought things were so...so... you couldn't think. Naturally, you followed. But he was shot out of control, he hadn't dropped his bomb. The way we dropped bombs, when the lead plane dropped the bombs, the lead plane had the bombardier in it, and our bombardier would just throw a switch and release our bombs. Well previous to that, too, I had just caught a glimpse of the #3 position in peripheral vision his right engine was on fire and making a gradual turn out of the formation. That's the last that plane was ever heard of, the crew. But anyway, we didn't get rid of our bombs. We had heavier damage than we knew, when we got out and got flying home, the steering mechanism, I mean the controls, were sort of not right, it just wasn't right. So we pulled way left of the formation so that if something did happen to us, we didn't take somebody else with us, mean like crashing into another one. When the planes were inspected afterwards, 3/4 of that control column was blown away. Cut off or whatever by flack. Also, we didn't know this damage. We had a destroyed fuel line. That flack had cut it had sealed it. Now, on a return oil line that wasn't bad except that you would lose oil. But by sealing it didn't happen. Had it been on a feed line, we would have lost our engine and so forth. Anyway, had we lost an engine with the control column the way it was, that would have been the end. But anyway, I've got the oil line here, that piece that the ground crew cut out, and it shows how it was sealed and we lost oil, but not that great amount. Each engine carried 50 gallons of oil so it's a pretty good supply. Also I have a small piece of flack that shows what flack is. We were so shot up on that mission that the group was

grounded the next day to get the airplanes back in shape, get extra crews, and get extra aircraft . That's the way it was.

So we kept on going and then we had another mission. I guess there were two of them like that. I'm sorry I missed the second one. You never knew what the missions were, what you didn't fly on them. You didn't talk about those things. You didn't even talk about a mission after it was over. It was done. What happened happened. Anyway, we were scheduled to go into Germany. This was in February. Only the big towns with the big targets were hit in Germany. This time they wanted to show the little towns and so forth that there was a war on and sort of get the German people to understand what was happening and maybe influence the government and their soldiers to call it quits. So we went into Germany on the regular formation. We went beyond our targets and we split into three plane elements, which rather than 36 or 42 hitting the target, only three hit it. I don't know what our target was, what town. So we went beyond our targets and came down to 6000 feet and whatever town it was, we bombed, circled around, and came in and strafed it. And as we were going in strafing, just before we started strafing, I saw a parachute coming down, of course with a pilot in it, and it had to be one of the P51 escort pilots. But my God, coming down into..... Of course, I don't know how far away he was from the target at the time, maybe he didn't land close to it, but I thought my God, what chance does he have with what we're doing. Anyway, as we were coming in strafing, I assume 40 mm guns at this altitude, and each 5th shell, whether it was a machine gun or 40mm was a tracer. And those tracers were coming up as thick as you could see. But they couldn't keep up with us. They were all flowing in under us. In other words, they couldn't lead us enough. Had we been maybe 1000 feet back, the plane and the ammo might have been at the same altitude. But they couldn't lead us enough that it was just flowing in under us. After we did our strafing and pulled off, of course I don't know what speed we were going, probably 350 to 400 mph and pulling that B26 up with a half load of gas and no bombs, we went up like a fighter. We really gained altitude. I read after the war, I suppose 50 years after the war, that there were two missions that way. I don't know whether we were the first of the second.

My first scheduled mission: I thought well, that was my last meal, my last night of sleep. And it could have happened. There were a number of crews lost on their first mission. Anyway, when I got back I thought I could handle this, and I did. People call me a liar, but from that point on, I had no problems crawling into that plane and taking off. No problem whatsoever. It wouldn't have mattered whether I had a problem or not. I was going to go. But I didn't have a problem. As I say, when the flak came up, you sort of, it just wasn't there.

was there but it wasn't. I don't say there weren't concerns. There probably was. Like I say, I checked the gas each time. But I had no problem crawling into that aircraft and taking off. Like the good Lord put his hand on my should and said, "Donald, I'll take care of you."

I didn't know it at the time, but I flew on the last mission that our group flew. Some time in April, I believe April 26. All the air forces were grounded at that time because there were no targets to hit. The ground forces were moving so fast we didn't want to bomb our own folks.

There was one other B26 mission after that in Europe, but I flew the last mission in our group. So I helped through the end of the war. We bombed an airfield at Erding, Germany and later I was stationed very close to Erding. The German jet fighters ME 262 were out to greet us, there enough of our P51 escorts to handle them. Both sides were fighting to the very end.

We moved to Germany some time in early September to an airfield in Slieshiem, Germany. A German air force base. I don't remember the trip down. I just remember arriving. I'm sure you people have heard this story previously, but the first thing I heard when I got there were two German war prisoners talking and one of them said, "Comens zee here." Well, of course I knew what "Comens zee here" meant, it meant come here. Well, I said, I have no problems. That was the last German I understood the whole time I was there.

On a trip going down, Y5W aircraft, Wild Willy, which I flew a number of times and I have pictures here scattered all over the place, got lost going on a trip down to Slieshiem and flew into the Alps Mountain, killing all eight people on board. One of the eight was the crew chief of Y5W, and when the war ended he had enough points to go home. But they got him to volunteer to stay to maintain the aircraft until they didn't need him anymore. Well, he stayed, and his master, but didn't go home. That's the way life goes.

In Germany we really had no duties. There was nothing to do. We did not have not many aircraft and no people to maintain them so we did just about what we wanted too. One day we went hunting and shot a deer. One of the Germans was going to cook it for us, which he did. But the portion he gave up tasted so rotten that none of us could eat it. And so he got the rest of it. And of course I think he was smart enough to prepare and cooked so we

wouldn't want it so he could take it home. And that's no problem. At least it gave his family some food.

Also, there were castles down there. We went through those. And over the fence, we'd climb over fences and go through the castles. They were all empty. They had large rooms, large ballrooms, lots of statues, but that's all.

Then there was an arms depot, a small arms depot. We'd crawl over the fence and go in there and we'd put rifles together and all that type of thing. I probably had three or four rifles that I had in my duffle bag, maybe more, guns in my room. Anyway, when the time came to go home, that duffle bag was sitting there and I thought no way am I taking it. And I didn't. I'm sorry now that I didn't. I don't know who got the guns and it doesn't matter.

There was a discussion some time ago about my roommate. He was the one who got the other half of my parachute that I cut up. I don't have the slightest idea who he was. Even if somebody mentioned his name and show me a picture, I'm sure that I would not recognize him.

We had some small army cub planes down at the airfield. In the army they were called L4's. So I decided one day that I would fly one of those. I don't know if I needed to get permission or not. Of course I was not checked out on one. And I thought that I would have no problems flying it. So I got in and started down the runway and of course the B26 controls on the heavy aircraft like that, you have to put pressure on, lots of pressure, to control it. And of course the L4 is such a small aircraft, it's just like a flying kite. Well I went down that runway with the tail one way and the other, just swig-swaging everywhere. I finally got in the air. I had a good time flying it and came in for the landing. The B26, when you're over the runway you flared up, pulling your nose up, cut the power and man, there's just no question, it stalls out immediately. Well that cub, as I say, is a flying kite. I thought that thing never would touch down. It's a good thing we had a long runway. Well anyway, I flew it a couple more times and the other trips went more uneventful. But that first one was something!

Also, my last flight of the last B26 of our squadron, and there was very few of us pilots left. Anyway, I was scheduled to pilot the plane to the salvage area we went and got the plane and I had a copilot and a flight engineer which had never been in a B26 before. So they were of little or no help, probably a nuisance more than a help. Anyway, it was Y5S. That was supposedly the lemon of our squadron, it aborted quite a few missions. It still had the original paint on. Most of the painted were wrecked or shot down, so they were all silver by that time. I don't know how I was told of where we were going, but I had instructions scribbled on a scrap piece of paper and I got into old Y5S. Got to the end of the runway and you checked your mag, magnetos. And if they dropped over, I believe it was 2000, as you switch a magnet, it was not supposed to take off. Well, I kept checking and checking and finally the flight tower said, "Are you going to go or not?" I didn't respond, I just shoved the engines full throttle and released the brakes and away we went. We did get off, almost immediately into the fog and clouds. I don't know how far we had to go. I don't know what my landmarks were. I don't recall any of that. But when I saw the field and there were other B26's parked down there, it was just a small, short grass field. So I went in, of course with a grass field it slows you down immediately, no problem. I parked it, and on the way home on the truck I thought well, I'm not flying any more. So I took my parachute to my room and cut it in two. That was my last flight in B 26. I survived the war, I survived the Widow Maker.

In 2012, I learned that old Y5S was the lead plane of the entire Air Force to bomb the beaches of France on D Day June 6, 1944, I have the documents and photo of the plane crew, I had the honor of piloting Y5S on its last flight,

These planes were destroyed by putting 20 pounds of dynamite in each one and blew them apart. I don't know why they didn't do that in Belgium and leave us in Belgium or take us to Germany in trucks or trains, but anyway, that's the way it was.

I went into Munich one day and it, of course, was in shambles. There was nothing left. You've seen pictures that the towns are obliterated. But there in town, I don't know if it was the square or whatever, but there was some scaffolding around a monument. I looked it over, and it was a war monument. And this was their first priority. Not cleaning the streets, not rebuilding the other buildings. They had to get that memorial straightened out. I've got pictures. Cheryl, you

probably have the pictures somewhere in your negatives. But anyway, I think that's the only time I went to Munich, off the base, other than what I said about the castles.

I don't remember a thing about the food, whether it was good or whether it was bad. I don't remember what kind of a mess hall we had. It's blank. Blank.

Time to head home. We were to be scheduled home by the number of points we had earned, which was very fair. A point for each month in the service, 5 points if married, and I believe some for children, an extra point per month for overseas duty, and five points for each award medal. I don't recall the points I had earned, but somehow, I got lost in the cracks. It didn't matter, no reason to hurry home. I was one of the few pilots left, lots of co-pilots, and they needed to keep some pilots to fly if needed. Perhaps that is reason I got lost, as people with less points than me left before me. Sometime around the middle of October I received orders to head home. We were stationed deep in Germany, no planes to take us out, so it is by rail. There were 20 of us, each was issued a sleeping bag [perhaps you kids remember of it.] Our accommodations was a boxcar, just enough room for luggage and to lie down, no walking space, no bathroom facilities. They gave us some dry rations, don't remember any water, but there had to be some. We stopped at a couple soup kitchens, and four days later arrived in France. I don't recall exactly where. In France there were temporary camps, tent cities, named after cigarettes, Camels, Lucky Strike, Chesterfield, etc. They moved us through them, each one closer to the port, and finally hit the last one at the end of November. It was beginning to get cold. We rode all night in a rail passenger car that had all the windows broken out. It was a long cold trip to the port. We were put on a very small ship [Liberty or Victory]. The US had produced hundreds of them to haul cargo. About 400 of us, that is all it could handle, this ship shuttled back forth between the US and Europe, so they did have interest in getting us home. We stood at the dining tables, all tables had a 4 inch fence around them to keep the food, plates, etc. from sliding off. We got caught in two terrible storms, the ship bobbed around like a fishing cork, the propeller would come out of the water and the whole ship would vibrate. Some days we lost miles rather than gaining. If we would have had any sense, we should have had some concerns. Anyway it took 17 days to reach New York. Again, we arrived at Fort Dix at night, you have to arrive at night. In the same barracks that I had prior to going overseas, I noted that I had arrived back to

my previous signature on the wall, I don't anybody cared. They treated us to a big supper, including steak. The next day we headed for Indiantown Gap, Pa. to be released December 19, 1945

This I learned at least 30 years after the fact, Thomas Jerell from Euclid, Ohio, entered the service with me on the same orders, trained with him. He flew fighters, I bomber, we were released on the same orders on December 19, 1945. There was some 400 released that day, somehow our paths never crossed.

Lt. Donald Moomaw 0-720319

the