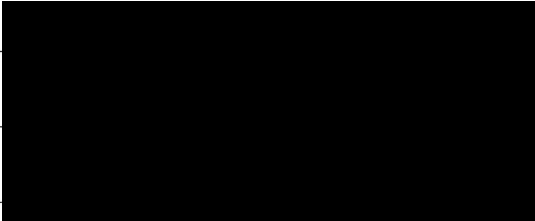


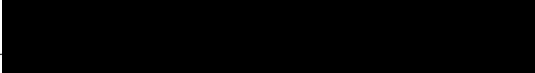
Interviewer: DONALD D. GASPER

INTERVIEW AND TAPE SUMMARY

Name: CHARLES A. WOODFORD

Date and Place of Birth: 14 JULY 1922, WASHINGTON, IOWA

Address: 

Telephone Number: 

Interview Date, Time, and Place: 8 NOV 01, START TIME: 2:10 P.M. (90 MIN.)
AT MCKINLEY CHRISTIAN CENTER OF UNION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
721 E. MAIN ST. BELLEVILLE, IL 62221 (MR. WOODFORD'S CHURCH)

Interview Summary (attach additional sheets, as needed):

THIS INTERVIEW FOCUSES ON MR. WOODFORD'S EXPERIENCES AS A ^{B-17} TAIL GUNNER
IN THE AIR WAR OVER EUROPE DURING WORLD WAR II, AND ALSO INCLUDES
MENTION OF OTHER MAJOR PHASES OF HIS LIFE THROUGH THE YEARS. THE TAPE BEGINS
WITH MR. WOODFORD ^{RECOUNTING} BEING BORN AND RAISED ON A FARM IN IOWA. HE THEN TELLS
OF BRIEFLY WORKING FOR AVIATION FIRMS IN CALIFORNIA (INCLUDING TALKING WITH ON
OCCASION HOWARD HUGHES). HE RECOUNTS IN DETAIL HIS MILITARY TRAINING AND
HIS EXPERIENCES ON ELEVEN COMBAT MISSIONS IN THE EIGHTH AIRFORCE, 388TH BG,
561 ST SQ (NOTABLE TARGETS MENTIONED INCLUDE SCHWEINFURT AND GYDIA). HE DISCUSSES
GERMAN DEFENSES (FLAK & FIGHTERS), OPERATIONAL DANGERS (BUILDING FORMATIONS IN BAD
WEATHER), AND "FRIENDLY FIRE" RISKS. HE ALSO TALKS ABOUT BEING SERIOUSLY WOUNDED
BY FLAK OVER BREMEN ON HIS LAST MISSION WHICH LED TO LENGTHY HOSPITALIZATION AND
NON-COMBAT DUTIES. THE DISCUSSION GOES ON TO MENTION HIS POSTWAR CAREER AS AN
AIRFORCE EMPLOYEE, RETIREMENT ACTIVITIES, 7 DEC 1941 VS A-VIS 11 SEP 2001, AND HIS VIEWS

Note any special circumstances involving the interview: ON BEING A MEMBER OF THE "GREATEST GENERATION"

- INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AT A MEETING ROOM AT HIS CHURCH (UNITED UNION METHODIST CHURCH IN BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS) WHICH WAS UNDER RENOVATION AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEW. ALTHOUGH CONSTRUCTION NOISE IS OCCASIONALLY HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND, NO SIGNIFICANT DISTRACTIONS OR INTERRUPTIONS OCCURRED.
- AS MENTIONED ON TAPE, INTERVIEWER AND INTERVIEWEE KNEW EACH OTHER AND MET AT LOCAL VENUES ON OCCASION WHICH INVOLVED THEIR MUTUAL INTEREST IN AVIATION / AVIATION HISTORY (AIRSHOWS, ETC.).
- SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED BY MR. WOODFORD ATTACHED!
- THREE BRIEF WARTIME NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS (ABOUT HIS WOUNDING AND LEAVING SERVICE) DATED 3 JAN 44, 15 APR 44, AND 15 NOV 45.
- THREE WARTIME PHOTOS (IN FLIGHT GEAR 1943; ON LEAVE 1944; AND AWARD OF PURPLE HEART 25 SEP 44).
- WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM TO HIS FATHER DATED 29 DEC ABOUT WOUNDS RECEIVED 29 NOV (1943).
- ALSO ATTACHED IS INTERVIEWER'S PHOTO OF INTERVIEWEE TAKEN 8 NOV 2001 (PHOTO TAKEN IMMEDIATELY AFTER INTERVIEW).

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY
OF
CHARLES A. (ALBERT) WOODFORD
“HIS UNLUCKY ELEVENTH MISSION
LUCKILY DID NOT END HIS LIFE”

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: *VETERANS OF THE AIR WAR OVER EUROPE IN*
WORLD WAR II

CONDUCTED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF SIUE COURSE HIST 447 “APPROACHES
TO ORAL HISTORY”, FALL SEMESTER 2001, INSTRUCTOR: DR. ANNE VALK

As a tail gunner who flew eleven combat missions over the Third *Reich* during World War II, Charles A. Woodford gained considerable experience in facing the dangers of air combat. Indeed, his eleventh and final mission nearly cost him his hands, feet, and even almost his life. After surviving serious wounds in completing his military service, this man of humble beginnings went on to work for the Air Force in a number of capacities as a career civilian employee. Now at the age of 79, Mr. Woodford enjoys a comfortable, relatively healthy, and active retirement which includes a variety of activities involving his church, national parks, part-time work, and aviation-related activities.

Born July 14th, 1922, in Washington, Iowa, into a farming family, at about age eight, Charles' family moved to Oskaloosa, Iowa where he attended grade school and graduated from high school in 1940. Drawn to aviation at an early age (seeing biplanes fly by now and then), he gained his parent's approval to pursue his keen interest in aviation by moving to the West Coast to attend the Aeroindustries Technical Institute in Glendale, California. After completing technical coursework, he worked briefly for North American Aviation in Englewood, California. He soon opted to work for Hughes Aircraft in Glendale, California, and was thrilled to talk with Howard Hughes on several occasions as Mr. Hughes conversed with staff about production efforts.

With the war well underway, on 31 October 1942, Charles joined the U.S. Army Air Forces at Fort MacArthur, California (near Los Angeles) and went through basic training (serial # 39539871). Additional training ensued at other bases: Armorers training at Lowry Field, Colorado; Flexible Gunnery School at Fort Myers, Florida (completed in April 1943); at Moses Lake, Washington, he was introduced to the aircraft he would fly in battle, the legendary Boeing B-17 “Flying Fortress”. At this point, he also met the nine other members of his B-17 crew (pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator, top turret gunner, “belly” turret gunner, two “waist” gunners, and radioman/gunner). The crew went to Wall Walla, Washington for additional training, where Charles concentrated on further training as an armorer and tail gunner.

Tail gunner Woodford & crew arrived in England in late July 1943 (via a trans-Atlantic convoy crossing) and were assigned to the Eighth Air Force, 388th Bomb Group, 561st Bomb Squadron at an airbase at Knettishall, England. Soon Charles saw much action, as his eleven missions occurred at a particularly dangerous phase of the air war for heavy/four-engine bomber crews. The American heavy bombers often flew “unescorted” deep into Germany to attack industrial targets, i.e., U.S. fighter escorts did not yet have the range capability to accompany the bombers along most of their routes. Agile, well-armed German fighters, along with often accurate and dense German “flak” (anti-aircraft artillery) ravaged American bomber formations. In his tail gunner position, Charles often saw U.S. bombers and Luftwaffe fighters blow up or fall from the skies. He also flew on a famed bombing mission against the ballbearing factories at Schweinfurt – 60 U.S. bombers were shot down with many others badly damaged, leaving relatively few bombers unscathed.

On Charles’ fateful eleventh bombing mission, as his bomber was about to drop bombs on the German industrial port of Bremen, a nearby German flak burst shredded the tail section of his B-17. Nine pieces of shrapnel hit Charles in several places, including a piece just under his eye. The burst also disconnected his heated flying suit. With the air temperature at that altitude at 50 to 60 degrees below zero (F), his extremities soon suffered severe frostbite. First aid by crew members helped the unconscious tail gunner survive. The war ended for Charles as he underwent lengthy hospitalization in England and back in the U.S. Fortunately, his injuries did not cause any permanent damage/impairment.

Staff Sergeant Woodford left the service in October 1945, went back to Iowa, and attended college under the GI Bill. Thereafter he entered Federal Civil Service, working in various capacities (specifically, flight line, quality control, budget & finance, and engineering) at Scott AFB from 1950 until he retired in 1979.

Mr. Woodford has remained quite active in retirement as he pursues a variety of activities and interests: continues his five decades of involvement with his church (United Union Methodist Church in Belleville, Illinois); performs volunteer work for the Forest Service in recent years at various National Parks across the country; handcrafts wing rib shelves and other aeronautical items for sale at craftshows and airshows; attends local airshows whenever possible; works part-time at a local Borders bookstore not far from his home; and is often asked to appear at various conferences to display his collection of what is believed to be the world’s largest collection of stamps which depict helicopters.

Still in largely good health, Mr. Woodford pursues his life with zeal – a life fortunately not cut short that fateful day in 1943 during air combat. Charles Woodford continues to serve God, country, and community, evincing many of the hallmarks of his peers – a group who has been collectively referred to in recent years as “The Greatest Generation” (the title of Tom Brokaw’s 1998 book about the generation shaped by the Depression, World War II, and who fostered a prosperous postwar America). In many respects, he has long earned and continues to earn a hearty salute by fellow Americans.