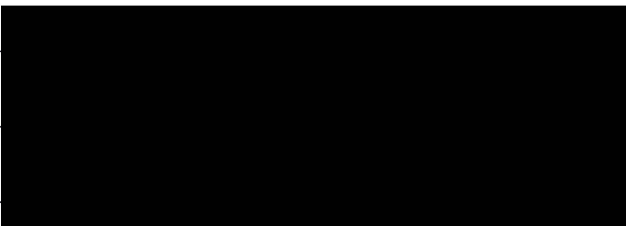


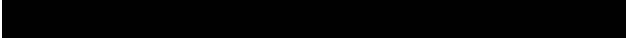
Interviewer: DONALD D. GASPER

## INTERVIEW AND TAPE SUMMARY

Name: EDWARD J.F. FETZER, JR.

Date and Place of Birth: 21 APR 1921, RICHLAND, ILLINOIS

Address: 

Telephone Number: 

Interview Date, Time, and Place:

6 OCT 2001, START TIME 2:30 P.M. (111:30 MIN.)  
AT INTERVIEWEE'S RESIDENCE - SEE ADDRESS ABOVE

Interview Summary (attach additional sheets, as needed):

THIS INTERVIEW FOCUSES ON EDWARD FETZER'S EXPERIENCES AS A B-26 "MARAUDER" BOMBARDIER/NAVIGATOR ("BOMB-NAV") IN THE AIR WAR OVER EUROPE DURING WWII. THE INTERVIEW ALSO INCLUDES MENTION OF OTHER PHASES OF HIS LIFE THROUGH THE YEARS: GROWING UP ON A FARM IN ILLINOIS; MOVING TO CALIFORNIA TO WORK IN COMMERCIAL AVIATION BUT THEN OPTING TO JOIN THE AIR SERVICE ~~IN~~ SEP 41; COMPLETING MILITARY TRAINING, AND FLYING 75 BOMBING MISSIONS AGAINST GERMAN-CONTROLLED TARGETS IN OCCUPIED WESTERN EUROPE (IN THE NINTH AIRFORCE, 387TH BG, 556TH SQ). HE DISCUSSES GERMAN DEFENSES (FLAK + FIGHTERS), DIVERSION MISSIONS, AND SOME "CLOSE CALLS". HE GOES ON TO MENTION HIS INSURANCE CAREER IN THE MIDWEST UNTIL RETIREMENT IN 1985, FOLLOWED BY "FOUR SEASON" RETIREMENT LIVING IN NORTHERN WISCONSIN UNTIL MOVING TO BLOOMINGTON IN 1997 TO BE NEAR HIS CHILDREN. DISCUSSES RECENT RETIREMENT ACTIVITIES MOSTLY VOLUNTEERING AS DOCENT/HOST AT THE PRAIRIE AVIATION MUSEUM IN BLOOMINGTON. ALSO COMMENTS ON 7 DEC 1941 VIS-A-VIS 11 SEP 2001 AND BEING A MEMBER OF THE GREATEST GENERATION.

Note any special circumstances involving the interview:

- INTERVIEW CONDUCTED IN HIS HOME WITH NO DISTRACTIONS OR BACKGROUND NOISE.
- SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED BY MR FETZER ATTACHED:
- PORTRAIT PHOTO OF FETZER IN DRESS UNIFORM (JULY 1944)
- AAF FORM 5 SHEETS NOTING HIS 75 MISSIONS (SORTIES AND DIVERSIONS) (23 PGS)
- 556TH BOMB SQ CASUALTIES 1942-45 (2 PGS)
- DETROIT NEWS ARTICLE + PHOTOS RE FRIEND (MATT CAMPBELL) WHO FLEW INTO NY SKYSCRAPER IN 1946 (3 PGS).
- AS MENTIONED ON TAPE, INTERVIEWEE HAD ALREADY MET AND TALKED WITH INTERVIEWER SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE LATTER'S SUMMER 2001 INTERNSHIP AT THE PRAIRIE AVIATION MUSEUM.
- ALSO ATTACHED IS INTERVIEWER'S PHOTO OF INTERVIEWEE TAKEN 6 OCT 2001 (WITH FETZER WEARING HIS WARTIME/ORIGINAL ISSUE A-2 FLIGHT JACKET) AND A PHOTO OF FETZER'S INSIGNIA AND MEDALS RECEIVED (PHOTOS TAKEN IMMEDIATELY AFTER INTERVIEW).

**BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY****OF****EDWARD J. F. (JOHN FREDERICK) FETZER****"AN OFFICER AND, BY AN ACT OF CONGRESS, A GENTLEMAN"****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 bombardier/navigator who flew 75 combat missions over the Third Reich during World War II, Edward J. F. Fetzer gained ample experience in surviving the rigors of air combat. In addition to his notable military service, this man of humble roots went on to achieve considerable success in the insurance business. Now at the age of 80, Mr. Fetzer enjoys a comfortable retirement which includes a role tied to his great interest in aviation, i.e., serving as a frequent volunteer for the Prairie Aviation Museum not far from his current residence in Bloomington, IL. Still spry and in largely good health, Mr. Fetzer (or "Eddie" as he prefers to be called) hopes to continue his support for the museum as long as he can for the benefit of current and future generations.

Born April the 21<sup>st</sup>, 1921 at the little village of Richland, Illinois (about nine miles west of the state capital at Springfield), little "Eddie" Fetzer lived on a farm until the age of five, when his family moved to Springfield to pursue employment in the city. Eddie went to school at Trinity Lutheran School at Springfield through fifth grade until the Fetzer family moved back to the farm. He attended sixth and seventh grade at a little country school. Thanks to a sister who commuted through Springfield to teach nearby, she gave Eddie rides to allow him to finish the eighth grade at Trinity Lutheran School and be confirmed in the church at that time. After graduating from eighth grade, young Edward went to the Pleasant Plains Township High School until graduation in 1939.

After graduating from high school, Eddie briefly continued to work with his father on the farm. However, as war erupted in Europe in September of 1939, Eddie knew of some friends who had found jobs in the rapidly expanding aviation industry in California. With a growing interest in aviation, he soon was hired to work at the Consolidated aircraft factory in San Diego. Just before his first day of work, he happened to hear on the radio that the U.S. Army Air Corps sought pilots, including allowing non-commissioned officers to fly. With American involvement in the war looming, Eddie preferred to be a flyer rather than wait to be drafted as a ground soldier. Eddie soon enlisted in the air service during the month of September, 1941.

Military training entailed traveling to various bases for a variety of training: Induction at Fort Rosencranz, California (outside of San Diego); Jefferson Barracks, Missouri for indoctrination; and armament training at Lowry Field (in Denver, Colorado). (While in Denver, Eddie heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941 as he went on to



finish armament school.) More training followed: Mitchell Field, Long Island for more armament training, and at Maxwell Field, Alabama for officer cadet training. Eddie learned he could volunteer for other flying roles besides pilot, and opted to become a bombardier, which entailed additional specialized training: bombardier training at Santa Ana, California (just outside of Los Angeles), and at Williams Field at Chandler, Arizona (outside of Phoenix) for advanced bombardier training. Eddie Fetzer became Second Lieutenant Fetzer when he graduated from bombardier training on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1942. As he jokingly stated (in a 2001 oral history interview): "That's when I was made an officer and, by an act of Congress, a gentleman."

Preparations for combat entailed yet more training for 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Fetzer (serial # AO732456): Fort Myers, Florida for introduction to the aircraft he would fly in during combat, i.e., the B-26 Martin "Marauder" medium bomber, where he also met the men who would fly in combat with him as crew members on the same aircraft (pilot, copilot, engineer/gunner, radio operator/gunner, and tail gunner). Their training flights went all over Florida. At this time, Lt Fetzer also learned navigation to earn designation as a bombardier & navigator – "bomb/nav".

By late June 1943, Lt Fetzer arrived in England, and after a brief orientation phase to the region, began combat flights on 9 August 1943. His 75 combat missions (in the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force with the 387<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 556<sup>th</sup> Squadron, based at Chipping Ongar) covered a range of targets largely in German-occupied Western Europe: Submarine (U-boat) pens, railroad marshalling yards, airfields, and launch sites for German rockets fired at England. Several of the missions involved diverting/"baiting" *Luftwaffe* fighters away from large formations of U.S. long-range heavy bombers. In his first mission, German anti-aircraft fire ("flak") cut a fuel line which streamed gas into the plane's bomb bay – luckily, no spark occurred which would have blown the plane up – Eddie's bomber made it back to base. During one mission, Eddie's armored vest fortunately stopped a piece of flak as it knocked him back in his seat. Surviving more than six dozen combat sorties at the height of the air war over Europe is no mean feat and cannot be understated. Eddie returned to the U.S. in July 1944 to serve as an instructor until he left active duty in July 1945.

After the war, Eddie returned briefly to farming. However, a back injury suffered during a minor aircraft landing accident during the war caused him too much back pain to sit on a tractor for hours on end. In 1951, Eddie became an independent farm insurance agent covering several Midwestern states from his home office in Ottawa Illinois until his retirement in 1985. He and his wife (Connie – they married in 1946) lived in northern Wisconsin (St. Germain) from 1985 until 1996 to enjoy "four-season" recreation. After those eleven years, they decided to move to Bloomington, Illinois to be closer to their two children. Since 1997, both Eddie and Connie have been very active volunteers in a range of activities, particularly at the Prairie Aviation Museum in Bloomington. Eddie frequently serves as a host/docent at the museum (while Connie assists with media and public relations efforts). At the age of 80, Eddie enjoys relatively good health and being active at home as well as in the local community. A former officer in the Air Corps, he remains a gentleman to this day who has proudly served his country in war and still supports his local community today in his "golden" years.