

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT:

VETERANS OF THE AIR WAR OVER EUROPE IN WORLD WAR II

**INTERVIEW OF A BOMBARDIER/NAVIGATOR WHO FLEW 75 COMBAT MISSIONS
IN THE B-26 "MARAUDER" MEDIUM BOMBER
- CONDUCTED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF SIUE COURSE HIST 447
"APPROACHES TO ORAL HISTORY"**

NARRATOR: EDWARD J. F. (JOHN FREDERICK) FETZER

INTERVIEWER: DONALD D. (DAVID) GASPER

**DATE & PLACE: INTERVIEWED 6 OCT 2001 AT MR. FETZER'S RESIDENCE IN
BLOOMINGTON, IL**

DONALD D. GASPER: [Begin transcript – Tape 1, Side A] OK, so let us begin. My name is Donald D. Gasper and I'll be the interviewer for the interviewee of Edward Fetzter – prefers to be referred to as Eddie Fetzter – and we are here on the sixth of October, 2001, a Saturday, at Mr. Fetzter's residence here in Bloomington, Illinois, and this is tape 1, side A; and this oral history project is concerning the veterans of the air war over Europe during World War II; and this oral history interview is being conducted under the auspices of a graduate level course at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Specifically, the course is "Approaches to Oral History", History 447. So at this point, I'd like to ask Mr. Fetzter to say his full name and spell it, if he would, just so we get that correctly for the records and then after he does that we'll stop the tape and play it back for a sound check. So, Mr. Fetzter, if you would say and spell your full name.

EDWARD J. F. (JOHN FREDERICK) FETZER: [continue] OK. Edward J. F. Fetzter. That's F-E-T-Z-E-R. And you want the serial number?

GASPER: Well, you mentioned J.F. the

FETZER: John Frederick, two middle names.

GASPER: I see. And you know your serial number still by heart, yes, and what might that be?

FETZER: Oh yes, it's AO732456.

GASPER: Very good. So at this point let's just make sure we do a sound check and see how we're doing so we'll stop the tape at this point. [Brief break for sound check] All right, we're back, we've done our sound check. Everything is sounding good and let's go ahead and proceed. Let's begin. First question, starting at the very beginning, if you would say please your date of birth and your place of birth and then please tell me about your childhood, where you grew up, what you did as a child, and leading up to your entry into military service.

FETZER: I was born April the 21st, 1921 at a little village of Richland, Illinois which probably has an address now of Pleasant Plains which is west of Springfield. We lived there until I was about five years old. Dad had sold the farm. We moved to Springfield and we lived in Springfield about five years and where I had then started to school and in Springfield at Trinity Lutheran School, and I was probably... well, I finished the fifth grade and then when we moved back to the farm I went to sixth and seventh grade to a little country school.

GASPER: You say you moved back to the farm, is this, you returned

FETZER: Dad bought another farm. No, another, he bought another farm there because

GASPER: Located where?

FETZER: It was real close by the other one. It was a Pleasant Plains address, just nine miles west of Springfield.

GASPER: So basically moved back to Pleasant Plains?

FETZER: Yes, would be the address. So then I went to this country school and then for the eighth grade then, sixth and seventh was there, then the eighth grade, my sister was teaching nearby so she went through Springfield and dropped me off on her way to school, picked me up on her way home, and I finished then the eighth grade at Trinity Lutheran School so I could be confirmed in the church at that time. Then after graduating from the eighth grade, I went to the Pleasant Plains Township High School and graduated from there in 1939. And from there, I was on the farm with my dad until things begin to look like we were going to well get into a war, we, there was a war in Germany going on and I had some friends that had they were couple years ahead of me in school, but they had gone out to San Diego and were working in a Consolidated aircraft factory. And I thought that would be a pretty good thing to do. So I went out then to see about that and after getting there I had to room with them in their boarding house and I went on a Monday morning to Consolidated. I was immediately hired because they were looking for all kinds of people. I was supposed to go to work on a Wednesday morning, but that Monday evening we were sitting around listening to the radio. You didn't sit around watching TV because there wasn't any in those days. But anyway, there was an announcement they were looking for flying noncoms. It was a new deal, they needed more pilots and a man could go through and take pilot's training and graduate as a staff sergeant and pilot. And oh boy, well that sounds like something interesting. So I went down the next day and enlisted in the Air Force.

GASPER: Now this was roughly what month?

FETZER: This would have been September of '41. 1941. And I enlisted in the Air Force and I think they, it was right away then that I filled out the papers for this flying noncom thing but in the meantime then in order to wait for this I was inducted at Fort Rosencranz [sp?] California, outside of San Diego and typical of the Army they sent me back to Jefferson Barracks [Missouri] [chuckle] for indoctrination because if I would have enlisted in Illinois they probably would have sent me to California. But anyway, I went to back to Jefferson Barracks for indoctrination and my choices were I could do armament school, or mechanics, or radio, and I know, well, mechanics was at Chanute Field [Illinois] and radio I think at that time might have been at Scott [Airfield, Illinois] – I'm not sure. And, but I didn't care for either one of those, so I chose armament which was at Denver, Colorado. And after a brief period of time of normal Army go-through checks and exams and stuff, I was sent to Lowry Field, Colorado. While at Lowry Field, I happened to be roller-skating in downtown Denver the morning of December 7th and four MP's came into the roller rink and said "All service personnel is now ordered back to base immediately." So we went back to base and sat around and turned on the radio and listened to Franklin D. [Roosevelt] tell us all about the war that was going on or was going on [chuckle] so I did finish armament school and

GASPER: Now how long did that take roughly?

FETZER: Well, I forget exactly, I was there just before Thanksgiving I got out to Lowry and then I went to, they sent me to Mitchell Field, Long Island for armament work. That would have been in the Spring. I was out in Denver all winter probably January or so before I went to, or February, when I went to Mitchell Field, but in the meantime then while I was at Denver. Then an announcement came through that they were needing more pilots and even though I was, had my papers in for flying noncom if a person would take the equivalent exam of a two years of college, you could get into the Cadet Corps and graduate a second lieutenant and pilot. So I checked on that and asked about the deal and they said well, I said "What if fail this exam?" They said "It doesn't matter, your name is in the file; when your number comes up, you'll be called for flying noncom." So sixty of us took that exam and fifteen of us passed and it was the equivalent, it wasn't an easy test but it was the equivalent of two years of college which qualified you for cadet school. Well so, I didn't hear much from that until I was at Mitchell Field and working in armament

which was I was working on fighters there with machine guns. We didn't have many bombers at that time but we knew all about bomb racks and stuff. One day the squadron commander called me in and he said "Mr. Fetzer, how's come you didn't let me know you were going to be a cadet." He said "I would have made a private first class out of you." I said "I don't care about being a private first class, I want to be a second lieutenant." He said "Well, here's your papers, you're supposed to go to Maxwell Field, Alabama." So I went to Maxwell Field and then we were around there for oh I don't know three or four days, again one of those things where we were first learned how to be a cadet. You ate your meals in a figure eight and square meal and you did not let your eyes up from the table or you'd be hollered at and look you down "Mister, do not look around. Do you want to buy the place?" We had all kinds of hazing. They'd come into our barracks at night and haze us and tell us jokes and if we'd laugh they'd say "Wipe that laugh off your face, go wash it down the stool." You'd have to take your hand and wipe your face off and throw it down the stool and flush the toilet. It was just [unintelligible] hazing.

GASPER: So now for someone who hasn't heard of a "square meal" that's where you have to take right angles to your mouth

FETZER: And do a figure eight [laughter] too you had to do a figure eight now and then.

GASPER: A very regimented way of eating

FETZER: Yes, right! It was just more or less it was a hazing process. The same when crossing a street. I mean you had to stop and look both ways or they'd get you. [laugh]

GASPER: One thing I'd just like to double check, as now we're getting into your military training phase and that sort of thing. I just to step back a second, I'd just like to make sure in your growing up and being on the farm and that sort of thing to what extent, of course you ended up being in the Air Corps, the Army Air Force, to what extent did you have exposure to flying that might have, you know, as you grew up, that might have influenced you joining?

FETZER: I don't know, nothing, it's just that I knew I didn't want to be a ground soldier [laugh] and crawl around in a trench and I thought it would be better if I was flying and the main reason no flying background at all, just that I always enjoyed watching the planes and so forth but I just didn't want to be a ground soldier, that's all. [chuckle]

GASPER: And as I recall, we talked about, you know, you growing up, and I just would like to make sure now you don't, in a farming community, you didn't have a family background of military

FETZER: None whatsoever. No. None. No. I had two sisters and my father was at the time of World War I he was I don't think he even registered. I think he was beyond the age at that time because he was forty when I was born and, but he never did register for the draft or anything so none of our family was any where near the military at all. It was just that we were getting into a war and I thought it would be better to volunteer than to sit back and be drafted mainly. (laughter)

GASPER: Yes, right. And in what I believe I've heard the phrase that people who join before Pearl Harbor got "eager beaver" designation.

FETZER: Yes, right here. That's called an "eager beaver" ribbon. That's pre-Pearl Harbor.

GASPER: Oh, as you're pointing to your little, oh I shouldn't say little, but your display case of various medals during your military service. I will go ahead and take a picture of that just so I can include that display with the other materials concerning this oral history session. I'll be sure to take a picture of that. Let me just mention one other administrative point I guess is that just to make note that we're doing or we began our interview at approximately 2:30 in the afternoon here on the sixth of October, 2001, just as a way of background of circumstances of this interview. So anyway, pardon that checking of family, your background and that aspect, but you were saying then you were in your cadet phase and the hazing and all that so please continue.

FETZER: Well before that though, going back just a little bit I would to say that one of the things too with this eager beaver ribbon like my volunteering was rather disgusting in a way because as a volunteer as a private first, basic buck private, I got twenty-one dollars a month. All the fellows that were in the service with me that were drafted were getting thirty dollars a month. I didn't think that was quite fair but that's the way it was anyway. [laughter]

GASPER: Like much in the military, fairness is not a

FETZER: Right, that didn't count. So OK, I was at a, as a cadet then at Maxwell Field. We were there for I don't know really maybe a month or so and then for some reason or other they sent us to Selma, Alabama. While I was there then it was decided and right about that time then they didn't need pilots too bad. In fact, in the cadet school this word was out that boy, one little goof up and you were washed out. So I didn't think that was too good a deal and then there were other things that you could volunteer for, so I picked out bombardier training, and so then because of the bombardier training I was sent to Santa Ana, California. Nobody knew exactly why we were there and didn't do much of anything but stand formations and so forth. Now Santa Ana is just outside of Los Angeles so we did have time to get into Los Angeles on weekends and stuff.

GASPER: OK, so now speaking of time, you said you had a month at Maxwell and then you went to Selma for some period of time there

FETZER: They're real close together really. Selma, Alabama is close by Montgomery.

GASPER: OK, so you were in Alabama for roughly

FETZER: I'd say a month or two.

GASPER: OK and then you went to Santa Ana, California and you were there for how long and

FETZER: In Santa Ana, I'm not sure how I was there either. It was just, for one thing I didn't realize until years later that when I arrived at Williams Field which is Chandler, Arizona outside of Phoenix, that we were about one of the first groups on the base and I think that's one reason I stayed in Santa Ana as long as I did. They were kind of waiting for that base to be opened. It was an advanced pilot school and bombardier training both.

GASPER: At Williams?

FETZER: At Williams, yes. In fact, one of my acquaintances while I was there I happened to run into a famous man at that time was Tommy Harmon from the University of Michigan, one of the great football players of all times and I kind of got acquainted with Tommy a little bit. But

GASPER: Well, just again to make sure I understand the timeline here. So you went to Santa Ana, roughly when that might be? Month? Year? Or let's put it this way, when did you go to Williams then? Roughly

FETZER: OK [looks at his service records which he kept near him for reference during interview]

GASPER: Just to get an idea of your training time, that sort of thing, or well we can, I guess we could always fill in the transcript on some elements of that. Well, I see you're looking through your, you have some documentation here as we're talking.

FETZER: A little bit, but not too good of dates on it.

GASPER: That's OK. We could always fill in the timelines at another time.

FETZER: Yes, Williams Field. Well, I know left I left Williams October 31st of '42 because I was in the class of 4215 which graduated October 31st, 1942.

GASPER: OK, and that's when you completed your bombardier training.

FETZER: Yes, that's when I was made an officer and, by an act of Congress, a gentleman. [laugh]

GASPER: [laugh]

FETZER: Took an act of Congress to do it, but I

GASPER: Qualified that

FETZER: I was made an officer and a gentleman on October 31st, 1942. Right.

GASPER: Yes, "second Louie".

FETZER: Right. Second lieutenant.

GASPER: All right. So then after completing your bombardier training on October 31st of '42, then you moved on to

FETZER: They sent me to Fort Myers, Florida which was an air base on the coast and there wasn't much going on. That's when I first was introduced to B-26's. So in those days, I don't know whether it still is or not but you needed four hours a month flying time to get your flight pay which was fifty percent more than the average base pay. I don't know whether that still holds true or not. But anyway, going to the flightline and trying to get in some flight time, one day they said well one of our planes just went down in the Atlantic on the other side of the bay, and then the next day I went down, well we just lost one in out of Fort Myers here. [laugh] So I think there was at least a month when I lost my flight pay. I couldn't get in a flight. So then they had opened up a new base at Avon Park, Florida and I was sent up there then. By the way at Fort Myers there wasn't much of a base there, in fact they put me up and all expenses paid. I lived in a pretty nice motel or hotel in downtown Fort Myers. But then at Avon Park is when they made us into crews and that's when I met who was to be my pilot/copilot and in fact our whole crew – engineer, radio operator, and gunner. So then for quite some time we flew, well, I would say that would have been probably October, November, well, I could almost show that here let me go back to Avon Park here once after graduation. So at October, here, [checks his service records] OK, December of '42 I started flying around I guess it was then it was in Fort Myers, yes, or at Avon Park. Yes, here was my report from the end of November – there was no time accomplished this month at Fort Myers. So then but in November then or December I started flying out of Avon Park and we just flew local missions not really missions we just flew I covered Florida every inch of it fourteen times probably. We'd just make circles all over Florida at different places and at that time then too as a bombardier though in the B-26's they decided to make navigators out of all of us. So mainly those flights were navigational flights and I had a real great co-pilot. In fact, like well I said, we lived together for eighteen months and there was never a cross word between us. I mean perfect gentleman from Georgia, but he used to sit and look down his window. When I'd give him an ETA for an airport he would wait 'til we got right at the middle of the airport and he'd watch his watch and he'd say, "Ed, you missed it two seconds." [laugh] He was very critical.

GASPER: So at Avon Park then that's really when you were trained to earn the designation of a bomb-nav – both a bombardier and a navigator.

FETZER: Yes, both a bombardier and a navigator. Yes.

GASPER: And at what point did that training get completed, that you then had that designation? Roughly, would you say.

FETZER: Well, we had that until about from what I could gather here from in my flight records May the 3rd of '43, May the 3rd of '43. And that's when, [checks records] I think that's, well, my orders show Selfridge Field, Michigan. So that's when they sent us to Augusta, Georgia to pick up a brand new airplane.

GASPER: A B-26?

FETZER: A B-26, yes. And we flew that around, I don't know two or three days, and then our orders were to go to England, and to go to England we went up the East coast to Goose Bay, Labrador. However, in so doing, when we got to close to New York we were getting some engine problems, nothing serious, but light and the pilot says "Where can we go?", and I says "Well, I was stationed right out here at Mitchell Field" so we turned off to go to Mitchell Field. We had been flying the airways but the minute we turned off the airways we were jumped by four fighter planes. [laughter] We told them it was a mayday, we were headed for Mitchell Field because of engine problems. Well, they couldn't do much with us there so they sent us to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania which is a air depot. So went to Harrisburg for, well our problem whatever it was didn't amount to much but while we were there they discovered that something about a wing bolt we either had a red bolt that was supposed to be blue or we had a blue that was supposed to be red, so we were there for about a week, with nothing to do but wander around town [laughter]. So then finally they got our plane going again and we took off for Goose Bay, only we decided well we wasted so much time now why let's just go back to LaGuardia and we'll spend the night in New York City. So we did that. We had a nice evening in New York. So then we took off for Goose Bay, Labrador. And then in Goose Bay we were there about two or three days just kind of waiting for weather. They finally gave us clearance and they said "Well, since you're not a qualified navigator" – see I didn't have any celestial navigation, I was only a dead-reckon, a DR navigator – so they said "You'll have to follow that B-17." Well, we just kind of snickered and says "OK we'll follow that B-17." Well, we had crossed the coast of Goose Bay Labrador before that B-17 ever got warmed up, so we took off for Greenland anyway. And I DR'd the North Atlantic which they said couldn't be done, but about halfway to Greenland out over the North Sea there was real easy to pick up a beam, so we picked up the beam from the Greenland Bluey West One and flew on in on that beam then. And by the way the DR navigation there too was a little tricky when I started because if you'll look at a map in that part of the country you'll notice that the longitudinal lines come through pretty quick and that's about how often you change course, you need to follow your right direction, you change course about every five minutes really.

GASPER: Just to double check one of the details, you said you picked up the beam from Greenland from what station, I think you mentioned it.

FETZER: Well, there it was the Station 162 they called it. No, no I mean no I'm sorry that's not it, Bluey West One, Bluey West One.

GASPER: Bluey West One.

FETZER: It's the far West coast, pretty well south. There was another base north a ways but this was pretty well to the southern part of Greenland. It was kind of tricky because the base was in a valley like and you flew in just a cavern up over a kind of river like and when you got in you sat it down on a runway because while I was there somebody had trouble with their landing and tried to go around only they didn't get around. They smacked into the mountain on the other side on the end of the runway. But while we were there then there was a way you could go around to the way south end of Greenland or you could cross over the icecap. Well, in the meantime though, we had met up with a group that had just left Florida ahead of us and they were going over as a group. And the old colonel, Carl R. Story, asked us what our destination was and we said "we don't know, we're just going to England as loss replacement aircraft" – that was what we were sent over as.

GASPER: And that's why you were solo?

FETZER: Just to fill that, yes, we were just going over by ourselves. So he says "Well heck, I can always use another plane why don't you fellas join my outfit." We says "Well, we don't know how to do that",

and he says, "I do." So he made some calls or something or other and then a couple days he said "Hey, you fellas are in my outfit, go along with us now." [chuckle] So

GASPER: And now that outfit was specifically the group and the squadron

FETZER: That's the group that I stayed with then during the war.

GASPER: And that designation?

FETZER: The 387th Bomb Group.

GASPER: The 387th Bomb Group and you

FETZER: 556th Squadron.

GASPER: 556th Squadron. And your nickname?

FETZER: I don't think it had one.

GASPER: Well, let's see, you had some sort of markings on your aircraft, the

FETZER: Not really. The only thing our squadron commander, Colonel Ives, Walter Ives. He was a character. He had been in service, he had been I think in a tank corps or something because he had his plane named the "Gravel Agitator" and we had our plane named "Cuthbert" which we lost when we got to England because it was a different number, different style plane that the colonel didn't like. So we got a new one when we got to England. But anyway, and there was no other, the squadron or anything didn't have any markings at that time.

GASPER: Well, at that time, OK. I guess another thing I guess I should point out here just to show some background on this interview is in my studies I conducted a summer internship at the Prairie Aviation Museum in the summer of 2001 and had the opportunity to hear the very interesting recollections of Mr. Fetzer previously, and so trying to touch on some of the points we talked about before this recording. I just thought I, OK, at that time unmarked or largely unmarked aircraft, but at some point you had some stripes that were applied, not the D-day stripes but the squadron

FETZER: That was for the invasion.

GASPER: Well, the black and white invasion stripes.

FETZER: Yes, those, yes we were the group.

GASPER: Did you have some sort of other

FETZER: No, it was just a group marking. Each group had their own designation.

GASPER: Yes, or well did they have a particular color on their tail?

FETZER: The 386th was plain yellow. Ours was yellow with black stripes, tiger stripes.

GASPER: With a stripe going straight up or straight across?

FETZER: Cross ways, slant ways, slant ways.

GASPER: Diagonal on your tail. That was what I was getting at that somehow your

FETZER: Model up there on the wall, up above [points to a 1/48th scale model hung from the basement ceiling at his residence which shows the diagonal "tiger stripe"]

GASPER: Your squadron, right, your squadron aircraft had, OK, I see your model over there with the diagonal yellow stripe on the vertical tailfin of the B-26 with the black thin lines on each top and bottom of that yellow stripe. OK, so yes, that's what I seem to recall now you talking about. And then of course right before the invasion, the D-Day invasion, of the 6th of June, I seem to remember you saying those stripes, the black and white stripes were applied on the wings the night before.

FETZER: Yes, the night before. That was just for the American planes so we could identify each other you know.

GASPER: Sure.

FETZER: And not get mixed in with a bunch of German fighters or something. But then from on our way over like I say, we crossed the icecap and unbeknownst at that time, in fact I didn't know about it until about like what, I don't know, six months or so ago, that this outfit had gone down in Greenland, the P-38's and B-17's not too far from where we went over because the weather was tricky. We were in Greenland thirteen days waiting for the weather to go. We flew the icecap at 11,500. It was 11,000 feet high. We cleared the icepack by 500 feet and then we found out that these P-38's after they went down in the fifty years that they were in Greenland the ice had built up 258 feet.

GASPER: Yes, as I seem to recall, there's been some media coverage about trying to recover those aircraft which I believe was something on the order of six P-38's, and a couple B-17's which of course the ice has tended to crush considerably over time, but that, right that that's now here in the last decade or so attracted much interest, and in fact recovered at least one of the P-38's to try to restore. So you cover, crossed the icecap on your way to your combat

FETZER: To Iceland. To Iceland. We went into Reykjavik, Iceland. And there we were just a couple days in Iceland, I think mainly for one weather pattern. From Iceland then we went to northern Scotland, yes Scotland, went into Scotland, and then down to Ireland in the next day or two and then in Ireland that's when they took our plane away from us, and we went over by transport to a Station 162 which is at Chipping Ongar, England about forty miles northeast of London.

GASPER: Now why didn't they just let you fly on with the aircraft?

FETZER: They left it there for some reason or another for training purposes or something in Ireland. And

GASPER: Oh, to give you a different aircraft

FETZER: Yes, when we got to England then we got a different aircraft, yes.

GASPER: And could you say the name of that Station 162 again, please.

FETZER: Well, it's just station 162, it was at Chipping Ongar, a little town of Chipping Ongar. In that area there was an Ongar, a High Ongar, and Chipping Ongar at least if not another one or so. [laugh] I don't know where they got the names from.

GASPER: And this is in the vicinity of what other major town?

FETZER: Well, the next biggest town was Chumsford like I say we were about roughly forty miles northeast of London because while there I made several trips into London. It was easy; we'd catch the train out of Chipping Ongar and buzz into London for weekends and so forth.

GASPER: And so you arrived at your base in England and this would be now

FETZER: We set up almost a record there, from my calculations we drew our airplane on May the 3rd and we got to our base June the 26th [laugh]. We figured it was twenty-nine days crossing the Atlantic, that's not a record. [laugh]

GASPER: So this, and this is of course 1943?

FETZER: Yes, 1943. So, I don't know, but anyway we got there. And then we flew around quite a little bit because well for one thing the group that we joined had just been made up. The co-pilots, most of the co-pilots had just graduated from school and they hadn't flown with the crew hardly at all, so mainly while they were training with their crew and getting acquainted with the first pilot, the co-pilots mainly were getting acquainted. We just kind of flew around kind of on our own. They just let us go and we just kind of toured England and in fact as a bombardier-navigator the pilots almost checked me out. In fact, I always figured if I was in an emergency I would have tried to land the plane myself [laugh] because I had that much time in flying. But because it was from June then until, our first mission was August the 9th of '43.

GASPER: And what was the target, or what

FETZER: We were going down the coast of France. It was a quite interesting mission. We had gone straight across from about the white cliffs of Dover in that area, gone over to France and I'm not real sure what the mission was that day because as we were going down the coast of France kind of to our target we were hit by flak and I think it was the radio operator because I was down in the nose already and the radio operator had called back and said we'd been hit pretty good. So I came back up out of the nose and checked and looked back into the bomb bay where we still had our bombs on board but they looked like bottles in a bottle washer. I mean a two inch hose under fifteen pounds of pressure was squirting gasoline all over our bomb bay. So we decided it was time to try to get back to England [laugh] so we headed immediately to England, aborted that mission, and we got back over the channel I salvaged [sic - salvoed] the bombs and just before we got to England the pilot says I don't think we're going to make it, we're going to have to land in the water. And we were all set to land and I was standing up between the pilot and co-pilot and I says "Right dead ahead is a little strip over there in England, let's put her down." And we landed on this strip and got to the end of this little runway which was barely long enough to accommodate our plane. The tower called back and says "Well, taxi on back up to the hangar" and as we turned the plane around it coughed twice and we said "We can't make it to the hangar, we are out of gas." [laugh] That mission was aborted but it did count as a mission anyway and so, I don't know, they came down and got us from the base and then it was a couple days before they got that plane patched up and then we went back and got it again. And we picked it up then a day or two later.

GASPER: Now clearly it was fortunate that with all that gas spewing about that nothing, no sparks set it off.

FETZER: It just, yes, just lucky that it didn't blow, that's all. [laugh]

GASPER: So would you say yet here's your first mission and oh boy what a

FETZER: That kind of made believers out of us [laugh] yes.

GASPER: And would you say that was your, the closest call? Well actually, I remember from one of our previous discussions during my internship you talked about by getting hit by a piece of flak that set you back.

FETZER: Well, yes, that was just, well we had a lot of, oh yes, almost always when we'd get back with a mission they'd have to, if we flew the next day, it would take all the mechanics all night long to patch holes in the planes. We'd bring them back in looking like top of salt shakers many times and we got hit so often with flak.

GASPER: Do you remember some of the, if they counted the holes how many you might have

FETZER: No, I don't know. I know it was numerous, some planes I mean were just really riddled but they'd still fly and that's when we started gaining confidence in the old B-26 because it would take a beating. A lot of the guys then, really, that probably I mean as close as we were hit we could see because basically going in then to a target area we would hit evasive action and at our altitude at eleven to eleven-five [11,000 to 11,500 feet] which we flew most of the time you could watch the guns on the ground, you could watch the flash and you knew you had about twelve seconds or so before that shell would get to your plane, so you'd wait 'til it flashed, then you'd alter course. So we'd be turning away and here boom, boom, boom up side of us would come all the shells. A couple of times they kind of surprised us, mostly eighty-eights but one time particularly we were going in and we didn't know what it was cuz they were really booming and bouncing us around and we found out after we got back they were throwing hundred and five millimeters at us [laugh] and they let us know they were up there. But we didn't have and again mostly flak because we did not have fighter problems. Almost every mission we were escorted with fighters. Early in the war we started out with mainly they were Canadians flying the English Spitfire. And then later on they changed to P-51's and then even later on then not too long before the invasion

GASPER: Now with the P-51's that was American units then flying?

FETZER: Oh yes, that's our plane, yes. And then just before the invasion they started giving us P-47 escorts, and because we went in and they were all around us I mean it was quite, you know, encouraging because the fighters we could see in the distance we might see a few fighters but they didn't come in because we were just, the fighters were just, they'd circle us, go and fly a circle around us and everything else. [cough] One day it was kind of amusing almost we were going down kind of almost the coast of France and I don't know, I didn't see it but my co-pilot happened to look out to the side and he said, "Hey, that looks like an ME-101 flying beside of us" and I could, by going way out into the nose and looking back, I could see and I said "It is a 101" and we called

GASPER: A 101 or

FETZER: A ME, Messerschmitt.

GASPER: Fighter? Single-engine fighter?

FETZER: Yes, Messerschmitt fighter, yes.

GASPER: OK, 109.

FETZER: So we called to the turret gunner. We said, "Do you see that Bob?" "Yes", I says, "I just now noticed that". He says "Well, turn your guns on him." So Bob started turning the turret towards him and about that time the old German gave us a salute and peeled off. [laughter] He didn't want any part of that turret coming at him, but I don't what he was sitting out there for. He just flying along side of us for quite a while.

GASPER: Your remarks are prompting some other questions I have here on what you've been saying. Just to back track for a moment here, I was just curious to what extent in your training, your bomb-nav training, did you witness a wash-out rate of some folks, just or some of the personnel washing out for one reason or another or going on to other things?

FETZER: Not too much when I was in school. I don't remember of a classmate washing out.

GASPER: I see.

FETZER: Now I can get into that when I came back and was an instructor and in fact I was a flight leader after I got home. I had at that time, when I went through school we were two to a plane. We each had the AT-11's had ten bombs, we each had five. But when I came home then and got to be, well, I wasn't an instructor long because they called date of ranks so I was made a flight leader. I had seven instructors and

seven pilots under me and twenty-one cadets, so we flew three cadets to a plane at that time. One of the times I know that I think the instructor came to me and he says 'bout have to, it was up to me to give the guys a "wash ride" as we called it. I mean he was ready to wash 'em out. And I went up with them and I said "What's the trouble guys?" They said "Well, we don't know." And I said "Well, let's see." One of the guys dropped a bomb and I mean he threw it clear out in the desert some place. I don't know where it was. And at that time they sent cameras along so they took pictures of all the shots. And I called back to the guy with the camera, I says "Give me that camera". So as he handed it to me, I dropped it in case ... and in dropping it I accidentally threw it a little harder too on the floor and broke it pretty good. So I said "OK guys, let's do some more bombing." So I pulled what they called the "old rake" on them and a couple more went out in the desert and I put them in about 200 hundred feet and the guys looked down and they began to grin you know and here before it was over with those guys were throwing bombs right into the target I mean. And I said "What's the matter with you guys?" "Well, the instructor, he's been giving us a bad time." And I said, "Yes, I can see that". So I went back and I said, the instructor met me and he says, "Are you going to wash them out?" I says "No, I'm going to give them a new instructor." [laugh] And as far as I know, they went on and graduated. They did fine.

GASPER: Well, another thing about the training phase and even into the combat phase, because you talk about how the B-26 took a beating repeatedly among your fellow aircraft and other aircraft you flew with. Of course, the B-26 was, tended to get a reputation of you know the phrase of "One a day in Tampa Bay" and, what was it, the "Baltimore hustler" because it looked like it had "no visible means of support"; "the flying prostitute", relatively short wings and

FETZER: It was mainly the idea that I think when, well, they kind of built up a name and then when the pilots got a hold of it they were afraid of it more or less, I think. But actually, when it all boiled down to it, it had one of the best records of any of the planes flying in the war. It was one of the safest planes to fly during the war. And it was just a matter I think of getting used to it. It was a short winged plane. It would stall out at a 150 and in landing you touched the runway at 110 or you'd crash it, I mean you flew it right into the runway. It was a hot airplane in those back by considering in those days. I think it was just a matter of people getting used to it, that's all. Personally, I liked it. (laughter) even though my first mission 'bout scared me out but it wasn't the plane's fault. [laugh]

GASPER: Now, so in your experience you didn't witness or hear of too many training crashes or you

FETZER: Training crashes, no. Very few. No. I was trying to think, no, at Williams there, see it was a pilot school. I know there were a couple pilots cracked up, but as bombardiers, no. My main, when I was in school the plane I flew with most of the time was, we mainly had about the same instructor and same pilot and my pilot

GASPER: I think we're going to [about to say "run out of tape"]

[END Tape 1, Side A]

[BEGIN Tape 1, Side B]

GASPER: All right, the other side of the tape I was just starting to say I think we're running out of tape and in fact we did at just at that point so let's pick up here on the other side, now please continue.

FETZER: Well, as I was saying, the pilot I had was an old Canadian crop-duster and we really enjoyed him and what he liked to do after we'd drop our bombs there in Arizona, off in the distance a lot of time were some big high cumulous clouds and he used to head for those clouds and fly around in the caverns in those clouds which was quite interesting. [laughter] He wasn't supposed to be doing it but we all liked it anyway.

GASPER: I see. Well, another thing I wanted to check with you is you mentioned on your first mission the harrowing or the unsettling experience of seeing your bomb bay awash in gas spewing all over and you managed to make it back without having a spark blow the whole thing up. And then, you mentioned one time during my summer internship, that you got hit by a piece of flak that set you back into the aircraft which fortunately you had a flak vest on and I just was wondering any more comments you might have about that particular incident.

FETZER: Well, the mission, I don't recall, but I don't even remember when we started we flew a few missions and then it wasn't long 'til we got these flak vests. And they were kind of a well they were cloth covered kind of armor plating like. They weren't all that heavy but it was a tough type metal like and luckily by having that on and I don't know what the mission was exactly but we had a real close burst of flak that didn't break out my window in front of me, it just knocked a hole in it because it was a plexi-glass material and it just didn't shatter or anything but it knocked a hole out and the thing came in and hit me right in the chest in this flak suit and knocked me back in my seat. It was hit that hard but it didn't hurt me a bit. It just bounced down on the floor after it hit my flak suit.

GASPER: How big of a piece hit you?

FETZER: Oh, it was probably a half inch by an inch something like that because those they use fragmentation type shells you know they just, when they went off then it would just shatter shells like kind of like an antipersonnel bomb.

GASPER: And I believe you said you carried that with you for some time.

FETZER: Yes, I carried that piece of flak with me for a long time and finally lost it. It was rough on the edges and I think I wore a hole in my pocket and lost it someplace. (laughter) And then no too many close calls. I saw some planes hit pretty good. Well, we hadn't been flying too long and in going into the target area, going to the coast of France, we started going just straight into a target. Well, with a lot of respect that they gained from us, German anti-aircraft gunners were no slouches. I mean, about twice they picked off the lead plane in our group. So after that then they decided they'd better use a little evasive action when they hit the coast of France. And because they were accurate and like I say because of using evasive action and being able to see the guns flash we were able to avoid an awful lot of it. However, the one time which was so close to was a reprisal raid that the U-boat pens at IJmuiden, Holland. Before we got there, there had been a few B-26's and ten planes had made a raid on the U-boat pens at IJmuiden, Holland. None got back to England. So this was a reprisal [sic - reprisal] and we were sending a pretty good squadron in and I'm not sure whether it was all thirty-six at least it was eighteen ship squadron. And our squadron commander was leading with our crew, he liked our crew, anyway he was with the enlisted crew. He liked our engineer, radio operator, and turret gunner. And he had the crew, was leading and I was following in the number two, as the back-up bombardier, with another crew. And just before we were getting into Holland, he took a burst of flak which was right behind the right engine nacelle. It just blew off the whole engine nacelle because I was right behind when I saw it. And because of the impact there, it blew into the side of the plane. It immediately killed my engineer who was on the waist guns. He's usually in the tail but the first pilot was in the tail so he could keep a tight formation and call the other ships. It killed him. My top turret gunner was in the turret and it tore an elbow off of him. The radio operator was OK because he was sitting at the radio and the radio compartment, it was mostly to the rear of the plane. And we saw the plane and we thought it was going down. Well, finally after we found out later on, that the pilot, the squadron commander, had pulled it back up and it had killed the one engine but the problem was that he could not feather the prop. It was just windmilling and dragging him but he did manage to bring it back. He said he would have ditched it and bailed out but because of Bob, our turret gunner, who was hurt. He said the other two men were dead anyway, it wouldn't have mattered. But he wanted to get Bob back to England. So he flew it back to England and landed it. And when they did land it, they junked it. I mean, it was too far gone to even try to fix. I think he did finally get a Silver Star for bringing that plane back (laugh) but it was pretty close but really we didn't get much of the flak for some reason or other it all hit into his plane, because I was right behind him.

GASPER: On that one particular raid, and so you were saying those were crew members that you had been

FETZER: Yes, they were basically our crew that he had used, yes.

GASPER: Your crew, and because you were playing a different role in that particular mission than usual. You weren't with that your usual crew.

FETZER: No, I wasn't with that crew right, or with my co-pilot either. I had a different pilot and co-pilot and crew. I was just by myself too with another crew that day. Yes, uh-huh.

GASPER: Were those guys, did they fly with you all that long before they were killed?

FETZER: Yes, because see that was the crew that we had trained with in Florida.

GASPER: Oh really.

FETZER: Yes, they were our original crew. But for some reason, they were all good. The radio operator could bang out the code, I mean he was good, and the engineer was an excellent engineer and the turret gunner was a good shot and the squadron commander just kind of liked the kids that's all. They were just nice boys and he flew, he took them quite often and would give us another crew.

GASPER: So you said the engineer got killed, that the top turret gunner was badly injured with his elbow, and did you say another person was

FETZER: There was a first pilot, another pilot that was riding in the tail.

GASPER: Riding in the tail and he got killed?

FETZER: Right. He was acting as tail gunner and he got killed because the squadron commander, I mean, in order to watch behind and keep a tight formation. He wanted planes to fly in tight, I mean we'd fly with our wing a foot apart from the other plane, I mean. He wanted a tight formation because when we'd drop our bombs which we found out later on didn't do any good anyway. We dropped thousand pound bombs, those U-boat pens at Ijmuiden were heavily reinforced concrete where they'd put the submarines into and we thought we could break them up but obviously after we got reports back we really didn't do much damage as it was. [laugh]

GASPER: Just such thick concrete that you're bouncing Ping-Pong balls.

FETZER: Yes, that's about right, thousand pound balls. It really didn't do much good.

GASPER: So you know, go ahead, I'm sorry.

FETZER: Well, I was going to say then, other than that most of our targets which you might be interested in we did a lot of railroad yards. We called them marshalling yards you know where they would make up trains and so forth. We hit a lot of those and we hit a lot of airports around and also at that time, earlier in the war, they had the old buzz bomb, the V-2's they called them, you know. It was like a, well, "Maytag Messerschmitts" we called them. It was just like a little Maytag wash machine engine on them. They put so much gas in them would get it over England and then when it would run out of gas, it would just come down. It didn't know where they hit or what they hit. They'd hit a lot of London.

GASPER: So were you hitting both V-1 sites as well as V-2 sites? Both sites?

FETZER: Yes.

GASPER: Both the buzz bomb, V-1's and the rocket, V-2's you were trying to

FETZER: Yes, the first rockets, I forget what we were doing, there was a bunch of us just kind of outside our barracks one day and we heard a ka-boom and our pantlegs rippled and said "Boy, that was a big one close by. Where was that?" It was a couple days later we found out it was the V-1 that had hit fifteen miles away from us and it rippled our pants legs. [laugh] They were powerful. Well, they'd take out a city block in London when they'd hit. Yes.

GASPER: Oh well, as I recall, of course the V-1's were the mini-planes types that they could have a chance of shooting down, but the V-2 of course would come screaming in and there was no way to defend against that.

FETZER: Well, they

GASPER: Bcause it was coming through the atmosphere.

FETZER: Well, the V-1 was a rocket type. Now the V-2 was the "Maytag Messerschmitt." They shot a lot of those down. Fighters could shoot those down. Because they wouldn't go very fast like I say with just a little put-put engine on them and you could hear them coming, and I know we'd sit in the barracks and hear those silly things and about the time we'd hear the put-put-put it'd quit and everybody would duck under the bed because it was coming down. [laugh] [Interviewer's note: Interviewee appears to be reversing/confusing the weapon systems associated with the V-1 and V-2 designations.]

GASPER: Well, I guess just to review you talked about the close calls with the bomb bay with the fuel and getting hit by the piece of flak. Was there any other missions where you thought, like uh-oh, this is another close call.

FETZER: Not too particularly, no.

GASPER: Of course, how many run-ins with potential demise do you want to have?

FETZER: Well, that's it too, yes, and no it wasn't, in fact I know my dad came back later on and in fact when I got home I think well my old high school principal or something because dad asked him he says "What did you teach my kid when he was in school? He wrote home and he says war is a monotonous thing over there." [laughter] Which in a way it was really it was in a way, because after a while, you got up in the morning and got dressed and went to a briefing and flew a mission, it did get boring.

GASPER: Well that actually was a question I hoped to raise and this sounds like a good time. Your typical mission day, you know in other words, when you got up, when you briefed, when you had engine starts, your typical duration of a mission which I know there's going to be variations naturally and then upon return your debriefing. Would you kind of run down the

FETZER: Well, so many, they would get us up fairly early in the morning always, it seemed like for a briefing and

GASPER: Now you're getting up at what time?

FETZER: Oh, sometimes three o'clock in the morning or so.

GASPER: Was that, would you say what was the usual time?

FETZER: Oh, a lot of times around six or so. Yes.

GASPER: Six or so and then you'd brief at roughly?

FETZER: And brief, oh, well you know, they'd give us time, because we could hear the jeeps running around. They'd take you to the mess hall and then take you to the briefing room and if you weren't on a

mission that day, you'd always know the day before if you were going to have to go on a mission that day or not.

GASPER: You would know you'd have to go, of course you wouldn't know any details yet.

FETZER: No, right, that's it. But you'd know if it was your time to go and well you'd have no idea where you're going or why but you could hear the jeeps running and picking up guys and taking them to the mess hall or the briefing room and sometimes early. And, I don't know, briefings would last, oh you know, they'd give us pictures and drawings of the target area and then the weatherman would always give us a forecast of the type of weather we could expect and they'd show us all our landfall you know where we were going, our IP, or initial point as we called it, that's when you turned on your target area and an hour or so for a briefing probably and by the time everybody got to their planes and got lined up we'd take off usually, well, three on a runway. There'd be one plane ready to lift off right at the end of the runway and one would be timed to be about the middle of the runway and the third plane would be gunning its engines ready to take off, ready to get on the runway. That's the way we would take off for our formations and make one circle and we always flew in boxes of six so that by about one circle of the field and you'd have your box made up and be ready to take off and go. And most in a B-26, about the most we could fly was four hours. That's all the fuel we had because that's one reason we bombed mostly France, Belgium, and Holland. One time, I don't know what it was, a railroad yard or something, just over the line into Germany. They just gave us one to say we bombed Germany mainly. (laughter) Most of them, about four hours and the one thing too that sometimes we would fly late and in fact I remember a couple times we landed at eleven-thirty at night in broad daylight in England. It's that far north. [laugh] I mean you ... that's one thing I was going to say too when we were in Greenland, it was funny. You know, you'd meet a guy in the morning maybe going to the latrine or something and you'd say "Are you getting up or going to bed?" because when we were in Greenland there in May of that year, the sun would go down about a half an hour. But when you wouldn't see it, otherwise you'd see the sun. It'd be like maybe three o'clock in the morning or so it'd dip for about a half an hour and that's it. Otherwise, it's broad daylight all the time.

GASPER: Now you said the most you could fly was four hours- your usual mission took about how long?

FETZER: That or less, about four hours or less, yes.

GASPER: OK. Well I was just wondering if the longest was four hours if you more often found yourself flying say two hours or three hours

FETZER: Well about three mainly. Yes.

GASPER: Three typically?

FETZER: Yes, to get into France or, well, Holland was the longest really to get up there and then we'd come back across the North Sea. You'd have more over water flights. Now some places in France well twenty miles there, I mean it wouldn't take long to, we were only like fifty miles from our target sometimes. Yes.

GASPER: Now you mentioned flying in boxes of six aircraft and I seem to recall again from of our previous discussions you mentioned how very often since not every aircraft would have a trained bombardier that you'd have a toggler and if you could explain how that works.

FETZER: Well, what they do, there would be a bombardier in the lead plane of the six. There'd be one forward, two on each wing, and then another one behind in the center and two on either and one on either side of him which make up the box of six. So the lead bombardier would have a sight and bomb and then as soon as the bomb dropped the other fellas sometimes just noncom's would be sitting there as toggliers and they'd hit the toggle switch to release the bombs. And after a few times at that then they realized that there was that little delay so they gave the lead plane a couple of the little old blue sand practice bombs that we always used and when he'd release these bombs, those practice bombs would come out and that gave

the fellas a chance to hit their toggle switch so that their bombs would be dropping at the same time the lead bombs were and that would be a much better pattern.

GASPER: So the lead plane would have the trained bombardier and the other five in the box, they might have a trained bombardier in the back but they of course are all working off the lead's signal and would you say most often those other five aircraft had a gunner or some other person to actually

FETZER: Yes, most of the time, yes.

GASPER: Because bombardiers weren't so plentiful that you would have one

FETZER: No.

GASPER: Now a squadron at that time, you typically had how many bombers assigned to a squadron?

FETZER: Well, each squadron would have eighteen, three boxes of six.

GASPER: And then the group then would be three squadrons?

FETZER: You could, we would very seldom, well, as a group I think a couple times we flew a thirty-six plane group.

GASPER: So in other words, the three squadrons would provide the thirty-six aircraft, but of course each of them have about eighteen aircraft in various states of mission readiness.

FETZER: Yes, uh-huh.

GASPER: But eighteen aircraft to a squadron assigned?

FETZER: Because it was a matter of a really all assigned one target so you wouldn't get the pattern with many more planes than that unless you know it was a big one, if it was a big marshalling yard or something, then maybe or a big airport maybe they'd send thirty-six in but not often. We'd more than likely bomb eighteen, mostly eighteens.

GASPER: You usually, OK, boxes of six totaling eighteen aircraft was the typical package you might say.

FETZER: Yes.

GASPER: I'm also very interested to hear more comments about the threats you faced. You mentioned how fighter opposition wasn't so much because you always had good escort presence with either the Spits or the P-51's or the P-47's so that the fighters didn't often bounce you all that often although the flak was very accurate if you naturally made your adjustments to do that. Did you find any other threats, was there much, to what extent was there concern that if you got shot down what your POW treatment might be?

FETZER: Not a lot. We were given some articles at one time, we had some pictures taken that we could put on forged passports and we carried those with us and then we were given instructions too like particularly as bombardiers if we were shot down the first thing you did you carried a 45 automatic with you all the time with the bombsight and your first shot would be to blow up the bombsight.

GASPER: The Norden bombsight which was considered to be a very

FETZER: Top secret, yes.

GASPER: So you would, the instructions were to put it, in how many shots?

FETZER: One would usually do it. They told us where to do it would be, there's a gyroscope in there and to hit that basically which would just about wreck the sight so it couldn't be copied. There were some captured as I understood later on they did but I don't know as they ever got anything out of them or not really. It was a thing, in fact all through cadet school, when we first started into school, you drew your bomb sight and then automatically drew a 45 [pistol] along with it and you had to have top secret clearance in order to be a bombardier also.

GASPER: Now, and you said the POW treatment you didn't have too many

FETZER: Weren't too many. We had a couple planes go down and in France particularly since France was very friendly to us, we had some fellas walk home, we called it walking home because the French people would shuttle them from one group to another and walk them across the Pyrenees mountains in the south into Spain.

GASPER: Did you say a couple guys or a couple crews?

FETZER: Well, crews. Yes. We had a few and one thing that if you were ever shot down and walked out you were sent home and you couldn't go back into combat again. (laugh) because they'd get you as a spy if you went back. You'd be shot on sight as a spy if they found out who you were. I only remember just a couple crews walking out.

GASPER: Now you said you lost, well, I'm not sure exactly how much losses your unit suffered, to what extent did that occur?

FETZER: Oh, not greatly. We had some individual crews and a few individual people were hit.

GASPER: Where the aircraft makes it back but sometimes brings home

FETZER: Brings part of the crew, yes. Well, I want to show you this after a while too.

GASPER: Oh, your, you have an article about the B-25 hitting the Empire State Building.

FETZER: Very good friend of mine, slipped right across the

GASPER: He was on that B-25, huh?

FETZER: B-26. Or the A-, well no, it was a A-46 transport plane or C-45 transport. Yes, it was an Army transport that he was on.

GASPER: Oh, in other words, the cargo version of a B-25, is that right?

FETZER: I don't think so. More like a DC-3.

GASPER: What, let me just take a look at the article you're referencing here. Oh, that's because I didn't realize it says here a C-45 transport *Detroit News* article dated 20 May 1946 saying here Army C-45 transport into the offices of Atlas Corporation and the Bank of Manhattan on the 58th floor which I just thought that way, you know the Empire State Building incident. So, in any event, we'll take a look at that and see about that incident.

FETZER: Somewhere in here is a list of a deceased.

GASPER: Well, in other words, you didn't come back, you didn't have the idea of seeing empty bunks and empty places where

FETZER: Well, not that many, no. Like I say, we when it was all over like we said we decided that the B-26 was a pretty safe airplane really.

GASPER: Now to what extent did you

FETZER: Here it is.

GASPER: Oh, you have a

FETZER: OK, this is '42-'45.

GASPER: The casualties of 556th Bomb Squadron, casualties.

FETZER: That's our squadron, yes.

GASPER: From '42-'45 and I'm looking at a page here starting from February '43 to April '45 and there looks to be at least, oh I'd wager four dozen names listed here. I mean I of course don't have an exact number and an exact number is not, there's no total listed here specifically counting them. And actually, well no I turn the page and see it goes to May of '45 and there appears to be another dozen names there. So, maybe I should make a copy of some of these things just so that anyone listening to this tape would have that documentation.

FETZER: This would be well like I say that's our squadron so there's four squadrons in a group too, our group could be four times that.

GASPER: Well, let me understand here, did most groups tend to have just three squadrons?

FETZER: Four squadrons.

GASPER: For a B-26, it was four squadrons?

FETZER: Yes, now right here on, here's March of '44, OK that's when we hit the U-boat pens because my engineer Pete Ogilvy, Staff Sergeant. Yes.

GASPER: So that was that mission you were referring to the reprisal raid where you were in a different aircraft than those other crewmen that you typically flew with. To what extent did you incur losses due to non-operational causes, in other words, or I'm sorry, non-combat causes, in other words, you know planes colliding due to weather or things of that nature.

FETZER: Oh, very very little, hardly any that I know of really that I can say off hand.

GASPER: Alright.

FETZER: We did have a couple of midairs on take-off basically. Well, for one thing, we had one squadron that the squadron commander had the fellas pull their planes off. A B-26, you know, they'd go down the runway and they'd get up speed and it flies off and he would just have them haul back on the stick and pull them off and they'd go along just mushing and that way maybe the guy behind him, and we'd take off like I say three at a time on a runway. Well that didn't give the fella behind him much chance if he was sitting there stuttering and he was running good come up underneath him. And that happened a couple of times.

GASPER: Where one is mushing along and the other one is going, coming right up and slamming and of course everyone's lost.

FETZER: Oh yes. Both planes would go down. In fact, the one crash just about took out our mess hall [laugh]. They all fell awful close to the mess hall.

GASPER: And a of course with you being based in England and all your missions were flown out of the same base, is that correct?

FETZER: Yes.

GASPER: That a, I'm a, Chip..., I'm sorry, I probably won't pronounce it right but

FETZER: Chipping Ongar.

GASPER: Chipping Ongar, yes. And you flew a total of 75 combat missions, correct?

FETZER: Well, six what they call sorties dropping bombs and nine diversion raids, which a diversion raid is the same really as a mission only we didn't carry any bombs. We would go in ahead of like a B-17 group and fly over a couple airfields to pull up the fighters so they'd chase us and then we'd give them a run for the money and head back to England and then the fighters would have to go back in and refuel and about that time the B-17's would go over. So it was timed so that the fighters would be refueling when the B-17's went through. And we did that nine times, on diversion raids.

GASPER: So if I understand correctly you had a tally then of 75 missions including nine diversions.

FETZER: Yes, uh-huh. Sixty-six sorties and nine diversions as we called it.

GASPER: Sixty-six sorties because you said the diversion did not carry a bomb load, but the others of course the sorties you were, you had ordnance onboard.

FETZER: Yes.

GASPER: And a, and that period of combat time you were flying combat from what month and year to what month and year?

FETZER: From August to July.

GASPER: August of '43?

FETZER: August of '43 to July of '44, first part of August to the 16th of July.

GASPER: And how did the requirement change for you in terms of how some crews initially had a certain number of missions that they had to fly and then it was subsequently changed and increased?

FETZER: The B-25's, I mean the B-17's basically went in with a limit of 25 missions and then they were sent home. Ours was supposed to have been 50 missions. One of the first men to get his 50 missions, we were flying a crew one day and had a different mechanic on board. It was his 50th mission and it was kind of a tough mission but we toughed it out and made it. We were about ready to abort it but since it was his 50th mission we ran it anyway so he'd get his 50th mission we thought he'd be on his way home. Well, they just ignored it. They called it his 50th mission and that was it (laugh). And so then I forget what mission it would have been. I probably had 50 or 55 and we were going on a leave in London one evening and we used to meet our doctor there, our squadron doctor, he was quite a character. Doc says, "Am I going to see you at the B's club in London?" And I says, "Well, I don't think so, doc". I said "Anymore, I can't drink". I said "I tried to drink the other day and I just couldn't hold it, I just threw it up, I mean I can't drink anything." And he says "You're sick". He says "You got to go to the hospital." So he sent me down to southern England to what they call the "Miami Beach of England"; it's not Miami Beach by a long long way. [laughter] But it is nice, it was a nice hotel and it was just kind of a rest and recuperation camp is what it was. Well, they called it a flak house is what it was because, and if anybody, I told some people, if they'd ever seen the old movie, "Twelve O'clock High", where I forget who the main actor was now

GASPER: Gregory Peck, I believe.

FETZER: Yes, Greg Peck. When he couldn't pull himself up into that B-17, that's how you feel, you don't have any strength, you can't hardly tie your shoestrings. And that's just how you go. So I went there then and then because of that when I got back to base doc says "Well, in order to make it worthwhile" he says "you should fly a few more missions." So I did then, probably I think I flew about six missions or so after that. So then, what happened then too, see this was July and after the invasion, so what was happening our group was getting ready, but first they were going to France, but first they were going to a base in southern England to kind of regroup and then go on to France, and what happened then because two or three of us had had a good many missions in, decided to send us home instead of making the move. So that's mainly how come I got to come home because the group then left the base from England there and was going to southern England to France.

GASPER: So you mention you had, let's see, you said six missions after that rest and recreation center and then you got to go home because you didn't have to make the move with the unit and the R & R period was roughly how long? I'm sorry, did you say?

FETZER: I was there probably a month, I don't know if it even that long really though, I don't know, maybe (looking through his records) I can maybe tell by dates, I don't know in my records.

GASPER: Well, just ball park, couple weeks or maybe? Just curious just how long of a time off that was.

FETZER: Well, here's June the 10th to July the 7th evidently, probably about then I didn't fly, maybe because 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10 in June

GASPER: Well, I'll have to see if I can't make some copies of that documentation that you're looking through, some of your service records, whatever you wouldn't mind furnishing so that someone wondering what you're referencing can take a look themselves.

FETZER: I don't know where those things might be on file someplace, probably I guess, I don't know you could find them or not. Someplace they'd be on file, I'm sure.

GASPER: The Air Force Historical Research Agency, you never know what they might have or of course The National Records Center, the individual person's

FETZER: See, I'm still listed as Captain Air Force Reserve Retired.

GASPER: Got out as a Captain, OK.

FETZER: Well, afterwards, after I was out. I was in the Reserves see for years.

GASPER: At what point did you exit the reserves?

FETZER: I'm still at, I'm still listed as a reserve.

GASPER: Well, retired but I meant as far as

FETZER: Oh, I don't know. See, when after I was married we lived at Virginia there for awhile and I went to Jacksonville to a reserve unit. I was planning to build time for retirement but then I took a job and I was on the road and I just couldn't make those meetings.

GASPER: Let me understand here. You completed your combat tour in July of '44 you came back. And you came back to the states and you were, I believe you said you had instructor duty for a time.

FETZER: Yes I was, dates I'm not sure about.

GASPER: Well, would you say you served active duty another couple of years or

FETZER: My last flight was the 24th of May of 1945.

GASPER: 24 May of '45, last flight. So you got off of active duty

FETZER: Well, right after that. I was sent to Chicago and was given my release then. I mean, I didn't get a discharge, I'm not discharged.

GASPER: Right and then you went into the reserves until what year? When did you retire?

FETZER: Oh probably oh, we were married in '46 let's see and I went to Ottawa and oh when did we go to Ottawa. I'm not sure, '55 or so.

GASPER: You retired from the reserves.

FETZER: Well, I quit going. I didn't really retire, I just quit going, that's all, I mean.

GASPER: OK, so '55 you kind of hung up the uniform so to speak, you were no longer drilling or anything.

FETZER: No. Well, I never did. We had, it was just a meeting we went to in Jacksonville because we were on non-active reserve unit.

GASPER: So you didn't drill in the reserves?

FETZER: No, uh-uh. No. And we didn't go to camps either like some of the units did. This was just an inactive reserve unit.

GASPER: Well you said you went to a meeting?

FETZER: Yes, once a month. Yes, one meeting a month.

GASPER: One meeting a month in the reserves.

FETZER: And then you could also, through correspondence, you could pick up some points too. See I forget now anymore what it was but if you could get so many points a year which would count like a year's time and what I was trying to do. I ended up with eleven years credit I think. See if I could have gone for twenty, why I'd have gotten, well I'd be drawing about twelve hundred a month now, if I had made twenty years if I'd have gotten my twenty years in.

GASPER: So you were between your active duty service of a let's see, you said you got out about '45 so you were active duty

FETZER: Just under four years, from September '41 to July of '45.

GASPER: And then you had with the reserves about another seven years of reserve time, for your eleven. Well, OK. Now just again to try and sketch out your postwar time; you then came back and, aside from your reserve activities, you then went into the business world or the working world, the civilian working world I should say.

FETZER: Actually, when we were first married we were on the farm with my dad and also rented an aunt and a cousin's farm across the road from us. Well then, it came up that Connie's uncle was retiring from a real nice farm

GASPER: Now you married Connie in '46, what was her maiden name?

FETZER: Roos. R-O-O-S. And her uncle was retiring and he got the word someway that I wasn't too happy with my dad. Well, we just didn't have enough land to for two people to live off of for one thing and he had a real nice farm at Chestnut over here just south of us, you know, northwest of Decatur [Illinois] and wanted to know if we wanted to rent that. So we did. But about two years of that, well let's see we went there in '48 I guess and then in '50 and in riding tractors well the I showed you the plane where we cracked up, this "Short Snorter" or the "Middleweight Champ". I was standing up then

GASPER: Oh, the nickname of the plane you

FETZER: I was standing up

GASPER: Just to let someone know whose listening that's where you had a mission where flak pierced the tires, but when you came into land the pilots didn't realize the air had gone out of one of the tires and upon landing, well of course, you were lucky that didn't get any worse than just damaging the aircraft.

FETZER: But because of that, as soon as I felt that the plane was pretty much out of control well I usually rode in the navigation compartment across the aisle from the radio operator. So I jumped up and was trying to open an escape hatch which was right between us there. For some reason or other I couldn't get the thing to open right and about that time was when the plane spun off the runway and I hit my back into the radio pretty hard and otherwise I didn't report it or anything at the time. It hurt for a few days. Now my turret gunner, he jumped out the back end and it was still up in the air pretty good and he sprained his ankle as he jumped out and he got a Purple Heart for it. [laughter] But I just never did say much about it but then because of this farming and riding a tractor that was just bothering so much I just had to give up farming. That's when I went into the insurance business.

GASPER: And this would have been what year then? You gave up farming

FETZER: '51

GASPER: Early 50's for sure, all right. Gave up farming around then and then you proceeded to have a career in the insurance field for the remainder of your

FETZER: 'til '85, I retired.

GASPER: And you were dealing with largely farming related insurance.

FETZER: Yes.

GASPER: And you did that in central Illinois and into Wisconsin, well, I'll let you say where exactly.

FETZER: I had worked all over the central part really, some in Indiana, basically a territory of Illinois and Wisconsin and part of the time Iowa.

GASPER: Midwest there

FETZER: And I have done quite a bit of work in Missouri and at Colorado a time or two and Nebraska, yes.

GASPER: Until your retirement in '85. And then since that time your how would you say your time has been spent?

FETZER: Well, just like this morning, I mowed the yard, and like I told Connie when I came in my old dad had an expression for that - he says I made it look not quite so much like a widow woman lives here [laughter]

GASPER: Well you certainly, like you say, at the age of 80, going out and mowing your yard you certainly have, you're a plenty spry, there's no dust gathering on you.

FETZER: Well, I try to keep a little bit active on that respect. I do yardwork and fiddle around like that.

GASPER: Well, now of course again citing my summer internship, I know that you have been affiliated with the Prairie Aviation Museum for some time and well, and your wife, Connie, is the marketing public relations person, a board of director. She is a very active in the museum as well. So tell me about your role in the Prairie Aviation Museum, here in Bloomington, Illinois. How long you've been involved with that and what all that has involved.

FETZER: It was quite odd because shortly after we moved back to Bloomington from Wisconsin where we lived for eleven years

GASPER: Well, OK you lived in Wisconsin eleven years and this was just roughly, again, if I can get an idea of the time periods?

FETZER: '96.

GASPER: So from '85 to '96. So you retired in '85 and you were living in

FETZER: We moved to Wisconsin then.

GASPER: But when you were retired you were living where?

FETZER: Ottawa, Illinois.

GASPER: Ottawa, Illinois and then you moved up to Wisconsin – where in Wisconsin?

FETZER: St. Germain.

GASPER: St. Germain.

FETZER: North part of Wisconsin.

GASPER: And living up in "God's country" up there in retirement

FETZER: Fishing, snowmobiling

GASPER: OK, very good. St. Germain, Wisconsin from '85-'96 and then you moved here to Bloomington and at what point did the Prairie Aviation Museum come in?

FETZER: OK, after we got here, I don't know we had heard something or kind of knew about it and Connie decided to give Ron a membership for his birthday.

GASPER: Your son. Now your children are, or I should say, Ron, just so someone has your children's names.

FETZER: Ron and Carol, our daughter Carol, lives at Marseilles, Illinois. One reason we moved back to Bloomington because kind of in between the kids and it was just kind of a ways from them in Wisconsin. They enjoyed coming up, but we decided it was just not that good to be that far away. But anyway then, we gave Ron this membership for his birthday and somewhere on the membership they asked something or other about whether anybody was interested in the museum and I think Connie put my name on that form.

GASPER: Well, let me pick up with more about the museum, we're running out of tape here.

FETZER: OK.

[END Tape 1, Side B]

[BEGIN Tape 2, Side A]

GASPER: So yes, we ran out of tape on that previous cassette, so here we are picking up Tape 2, Side A and you're talking about how the involvement with the Prairie Aviation Museum at Bloomington, Illinois came to pass after you bought a membership for your son, Ron. Please continue.

FETZER: Well, when Connie put my name in, it wasn't probably that same day or the next day that I got a telephone call and asked a few questions and wanted to know if I would care to be a volunteer of some kind and possibly a host at the museum and we both agreed it might be a nice thing to do. So then it wasn't long 'til I was hosting and immediately became a member myself. And then after a little while of doing that I don't know just how it came about but somebody or something was said that Connie used to be the reporter for a local paper in Wisconsin and they thought, well, she might be handy at the museum also. So they got her involved and then now we both belong and are quite involved. [laugh] More than enough I think, sometimes when Connie's busy doing this and doing that but it keeps her going anyway.

GASPER: So you moved here in '96, so you bought that membership, so your initial involvement was in roughly in 19—well, I'm not sure if it was '96 or '97 or

FETZER: I think it would have been probably maybe '97 because Ron's birthday is in July, oh, I don't know, it might have been, I don't remember.

GASPER: Well, yes, I, pardon my, you know, fixation on just the dates and trying to make a sense of a timeline here. But so you've been hosting at the museum, and what every other week or so you take a day?

FETZER: Oh, I go through a couple times a month, but I just remarked here, oh the last time I was there was, oh I don't remember the date now, the end of September and I was going to put my name in for October and everything's full. So I couldn't even find a slot open for September.

GASPER: So how does your involvement in the Prairie Aviation Museum, how do you view that in terms of what it means to you and the contribution to the museum's purpose?

FETZER: Well, I think it's just, it's interesting work. I kind of enjoy the hosting, meeting the various people that come through and maybe doing some good by, you know, by helping out a little bit that way mainly. And then also, well, I've been, except for a year ago when we didn't help out at the airshow because we were on a tour of Germany, but normally we help out there and other little things you know that we can do going along and different items of help with the museum. It's just a thing that we're kind of interested in. We'd like to see the new one get going. We just recently made a trip south to Indiana and Kentucky mostly checking on the sites for the Challenger Learning Centers which was quite a little interesting trip. We visited three or four of those sights plus a couple extra museums and,

GASPER: Now the Challenger Learning Centers are of course the a, since the Challenger, the shuttle Challenger crashed in '86, or blew up, that the families have created a foundation to help train the youth about aerospace missions, shuttle missions and showing them the technology and the cooperation necessary to do that and so what that with the Prairie Aviation Museum, I understand from our other discussions that that now brings an aerospace dimension to the museum and of course in here the 21st century, bringing it in not just as an aviation museum, but an aerospace museum and I guess one of the things I'm wondering about right now here we are again on the 6th of October of 2001, with the events of last month, the horrific terrorist attacks that occurred in New York and in Washington, D.C., the Pentagon in Virginia I should say on 11 September, 2001, of course you, with your experience dating back, your military experience, just curious, how do you compare and contrast, how do you view the impact of Pearl Harbor and how you view

the terrorist attacks of last month. How, what was the effect of Pearl Harbor on you, what's the effect of the 11 September attacks as well, and then how do you see in how they are similar and different?

FETZER: Well, it's hard to say. There's quite a difference in the thing though because of course we had warning before Pearl Harbor. The Germans were at war, England was at war with Germany, and Japan was threatening but still we knew, but that when Pearl Harbor occurred we knew who it was, it was the Japanese and so immediately they seemed to want to get things started so we kindly obliged them by going over and letting them know we were serious too. Whereas this thing here it appears they're kind of beginning to pinpoint where the problem is and my theory is there's going to be some people hurt but we're going to have to go after some of these places and go after them hard and good. That's my feeling of it.

GASPER: How did you hear about Pearl Harbor? Do you remember the, you know some people for certain events they can say oh I know exactly where I was and how I heard of it and

FETZER: Well, like I say I was roller skating in downtown Denver.

GASPER: Oh, that's true, I, pardon me I

FETZER: Yes, that's all right.

GASPER: Well or let's put it this way then, and how did you hear of the attacks on 11 September?

FETZER: We hadn't been up very long, in fact I think Connie beat me up, and for some reason or another she heard something on the radio because when I came downstairs she had the TV on and the first tower had been hit but from the pictures I saw it was just at the time the second plane came in and hit the second tower. Again, this is the type of thing that brings back the memories and one reason I keep saying that when we were in Wisconsin I had a big dish up there. We got 150 stations and one of my favorite stations which is on 24 hours a day everyday of the year is NASA. I didn't have to wait 'til the six o'clock news to watch the Challenger blow up, I watched it originally happen, when it happened, I watched it, it was on TV and I wish I could get that NASA station. I wish I could because I found it quite interesting myself because so often they showed things that were going on you know if a capsule was in the air, they showed pictures of the guys, you know, doing things up there and it was, it was always very interesting I thought. We watched the landings and take-offs.

GASPER: Now there's been much in the media and in fact best seller status for Tom Brokaw's books and well of course his original book, *The Greatest Generation*, and now he's added a couple other books in that series. Just wondering, I mean I don't know if you'd a chance to read any of the books, but of course with his message as I understand it of, here's a generation that endured the Depression, pulled together in World War II to crush tyranny across the globe where the Japan and Germany were threatening freedom and then took on that heroic cause and then came back to help build a very prosperous America and continue the freedoms that we enjoy and help others across the globe with such aspirations. So I guess what I'm getting at is, what do you see as the message future generations should take from the quote-unquote the Greatest Generation that you've been a part of.

FETZER: Well, I think the basic thing in fact in just reading some articles. I get a little human events paper and just reading some of that.

GASPER: What, I'm sorry, what paper?

FETZER: *Human Events*.

GASPER: That's the title of it?

FETZER: It was showing, well it was an interview by one of the, one of these diplomats from Washington that is in a communication thing with the Far East and as he was saying, well he blames

Madeline Albright for one thing to not notify us of things, things that were going on. He said he knew it but could not get the word out.

GASPER: Now, Madeline Albright was a former Secretary of State under, in the Clinton administration.

FETZER: No, the ambassador, she was, yes. And he was saying that he was stonewalled so many times that they didn't get the word out, and to me this was the big thing they didn't, they suspected something was going to happen but they just wouldn't quite say it. We got to have better intelligence and better network to relay intelligence that we know about. I think that's one of the downfalls.

GASPER: Well, and then, as far as other things with respect to how your generation, it's impact on America, not only at the time of World War II and immediately thereafter but carrying on to today, what, is there anything else with regard to what you want future generations to keep in mind of what your generation did.

FETZER: Well, there's, I think there's a big thing in that a, and actually you can't explain it to kids, I don't think in any way, but to live through a Depression is something else. That a, like I say, they don't understand that. Today's kids want something, they get it, I mean, but back then, I mean we lived on the farm, we went to town once a week to do some grocery shopping, and we went to church on Sunday's, otherwise the car stayed in the garage, it didn't go any place and we didn't spend any money either on anything else. And I wore homemade shirts to school that my mother made for me and but today's kids just don't, I don't, like I say, I don't think you can explain that to them to where they'd understand it at all. They're brought up and born and used to all the prosperity they just don't know what it is. They just a

GASPER: Well, I think I can, having parents in my case, that were born in 19 – my dad born in 1913 and my mom born in 1915, and I kind of came late in their lives, I think I understand what you're saying to some extent moreso than perhaps some of my peers. I just wanted to make sure you know, your assessment of how your generation, what it experienced and what it contributed to America in history. And I don't mean to belabor that, I guess I have some other questions here as far as, well, I shouldn't say questions plural, I guess it depends on what you want to say kind of in trying to wrap things up here in conclusion. Is there anything that we haven't talked about, brought up, whatever, that you would like to add and mention that whether it be historians conducting further research or just things that you hope somebody would continue to keep in mind in the future about just anything that we talked about whether it has to do with the military experience, your, I'll just try to let you talk now and stop with my

FETZER: I don't have, I don't think too much more to add, it's just that I would hope that today's younger people would understand some of the meanings of a, a little bit more, about war, it's not pleasant and hard times aren't pleasant. It's just a thing many of us have gone through and we survived and I would look back and say actually I think I had a pretty good life. (laugh) I'm retired, not going to bed too hungry and I think my kids are all doing pretty good. Don't have much more to say. [laugh]

GASPER: Well, we covered a fair amount of ground here today and well maybe just in on one particular facet again with my focus here on the air war in Europe, do you see anything not really well covered or maybe not covered at all in books, military books, or military film, documentaries, whatever that you would like somebody to know about that maybe hasn't really been brought out enough or at all.

FETZER: No, from what I've seen of it, it's been pretty well explained really. I think it has, I really think so. I sometimes wonder about some of the people in some of the foreign countries really, if they really grasp it, I mean.

GASPER: Well, of course with oral history one of the things we try to do is see to what extent we can supplement existing written works or other types of works to see what else may be added, well of course, particularly with your personal dimension of the things you've experienced that maybe don't get enough exposure in some of these works. But I think we did do a pretty good job here. I guess just looking back quickly on some of my notations here, you talked about a typical day, in terms of getting up, you had maybe an hour or so briefing going over the details for the day, flying your mission, you know, which

could be fairly short, a half hour to as long as four hours, and then what, you always upon return went through debriefing and how long would you say that typically took?

FETZER: Oh, that didn't take too long, normally they'd, maybe there'd be some phase of it that they'd try and pin down but normally it was a matter of the officer that you'd talk to, I don't know, five minutes visiting with him was about all it was.

GASPER: Really. Debriefed in five or so minutes?

FETZER: Yes, it didn't, yes, unless something specific went on, did you see anything particular or unless anything spectacular happens, you know, you hit the target and so forth. But then of course too like I say, see there's a, what we have, well I said fourteen months [pause] fourteen months at thirty [pause] well, there's 420 days and I was busy of it 70. See what I mean? [chuckle] 75, I guess, counting all missions, 75 yes. So there were a lot of days where I didn't do much. [laughter]

GASPER: I bet you, you made up for it on the other days I'm sure. And you mentioned that flak, that piece of flak that you carried around for sometime until you lost track of it, did you have or other people that or the other crews that you worked with, people have their good luck charms of some sort?

FETZER: Well, yes a lot of them did, I mean different things you know, yes, they did. Kind of suspicions you know, you'd wear a certain pair of socks or something on every mission. Yes, everybody had their own their own little thing going, yes.

GASPER: OK, well I just like I said there's a couple of points I was just curious to round out here as we went through the various points I had hoped to go over and I believe we did quite well today. I want to thank you for your time here. I just again if there might be anything else you might want to point out but if not I do thank you kindly for your time and sharing your recollections and for the benefit of future researchers and historical works and that sort of thing that are yet to be written and will have your tape to draw upon with your experiences. So

FETZER: You're free to edit that anyway you want to also.

GASPER: Oh no. [laughter] In your own words and, well, Sir Eddie Fetzer, Captain U.S. Air Force retired, I want to thank you and appreciate your time, and I'll be taking some pictures and hopefully some copies here of some of the documentation to add that; and I thank you and I think we'll come to a conclusion here and I salute you sir and thank you much for your time.

FETZER: Alright.