



Mont Mickelson

United States Army Air Corps

Machinist

Pacific Theater

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Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, UT

Interviewer:
Rick Randle

THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Rick: Mont we're glad to have you with us today. Would you say your name and spell your full name for us?

Mont: First name is Mont, M-O-N-T middle initial for Jens, J-E-N-S. Mickelson is the last name M-I-C-K-E-L-S-O-N.

Rick: What we'd like to have you do is tell us about your early life growing up in Utah and your high school situation leading up to December 7th and when you got in the service.

Mont: Well you youngsters wouldn't know where Bonita Utah is but that's where I was born with a midwife and my older brother said he wishes that Mrs. Redden hadn't brought me – she delivered me and I went to first grade in Duchesne and then we moved into Salt Lake City. I went to Roosevelt Junior High and East High. Those years were extremely tough and we four kids did what we could to help support the family if you will, as small as the means might be. My mother was working as an elevator operator, the old crank type you know at the Temple Square Hotel at the time and she became ill. I was still in high school and had about a year to go so I asked the manager if I could take her place which I did then I went in to be Bellman and at that time the tips were very good and in those days I was making fairly good money. Then it became evident to me that I've got to get into something of a vocational nature. I wanted to get involved with the service and at that time civil service had a program for training all kinds of mechanics. They called it the '*Mechanic Learner Program*'. After about two and a half days of aptitude tests I went into the Machinist Program and these were accelerated programs and after (I believe we were in training about 8 months at Jordan High School), at that time we were shipped with completion of that we were shipped into Hill Air Force Base as Machinists and I worked up to the Journeyman level. Along about that time I was asked if I wanted a deferment in fact they requested I take a year deferment from the draft which I did. Frankly I was extremely skilled as a machinist, this may be too much at this point but I could hold extremely close tolerances on a lathe which normally would require a cylindrical grinder to do and then I was a supervisor and trained women as lathe operators and milling machine operators on production operations.

Rick: Let me stop you there. What year was it that you were a Bellman down at the Temple Square Hotel?

Mont: This was in the '40's.

Rick: Before Pearl Harbor?

Mont: Oh yes. I also had a newspaper route at that time in addition to working at the Temple Square Hotel and it was Sunday December 7th when I had finished my newspaper route at about four a.m. when the 'extra's' came out on that infamous day when we were attacked at Pearl Harbor. Of course being a machinist was the reason for Hill asking me to take a deferment.

Rick: This was after high school then?

Mont: This was after high school.

Rick: Let's talk about your high school years first and a little about the depression and then what your thoughts were on December 7th and the newspaper headlines and that kind of stuff. So take us into your high school years.

Mont: My high school years were not the best because of working 8 hours a day and I graduated, yes but they were tough years.

Rick: What year did you graduate?

Mont: 1940.

Rick: So you graduated prior to Pearl Harbor?

Mont: Yes and subsequent to that was when I went into the machinist training and then went into Hill Air Force Base as I mentioned.

Rick: Let's go back to Pearl Harbor and you were delivering newspapers?

Mont: I was just completing my newspaper route delivering the Sunday morning papers and I was totally devastated. Even at that time I had a desire to get involved with the service. I wanted to wear the uniform.

Rick: Even before Pearl Harbor then?

Mont: Well basically after Pearl Harbor because at that time was one of the victories that the Japanese had over us along with other victories – Curragador and all of those. But with Pearl Harbor the devastation of our naval fleet, just decimating our fleet and with few planes at the time, a few B17's to carry the ball and so at that point on I was anxious to go into the service. Now keep in mind I was drawing good money as a Journeyman Machinist at Hill and at the completion of that one year deferment they asked if I wanted another deferment and I said, "*No, I'd like to be drafted*". One might question the wisdom in that because with making good money and then dropping down and being drafted as a private and so they...with an MOS of 114 machinist I was drafted and at that time Wendover was a sub-depot to the Ogden Air Material Area which Hill Field was known at that time. Of course Hill Field was named after Major Hill who lost his life, but I was drafted and they asked me...let me back up. Hill Field had about six sub-depots under their control. They asked me if I had a choice which sub-depot I would like to go to and I said "*no*". A week later I was on orders to go to Wendover and this was in December of 1943.

Rick: Did you complete basic training somewhere?

Mont: I did not have to take basic training because I went through the ROTC program in high school. So that was waived. So they put me right to work in the shops at Wendover on swing shift and...

Rick: Did you stay in barracks out there?

Mont: We did.

Rick: So you lived right out there in those barracks that are still standing there that we see?

Mont: My barracks is not still standing. The better ones I think they tore all out and those remaining there I think are in real bad shape. Ours were not in that bad of shape. Yes we were in barracks; it was heated with two potbellied stoves, one at each end. So then as the war progressed, Wendover at that time was the 317th sub-depot under OAMA which is the abbreviation for the Ogden Air Material Area and that's about the time Wendover became quite active in 1942. I didn't arrive there until 1943 but Wendover is a historic base and should be remembered as such because during that era there were 8 B17 heavy bombardment squadrons that were trained at Wendover and immediately following that it was the sister ship the B24 and 13 bombardment groups were trained at Wendover. I was there during part of that era in the machine shop. We also had P47's. Now the machine shop building was fairly close to the end of the runway and even though we were in an inland base we had our disasters and some of these fresh young pilots would come out of pilot training and placed in a P47 and perhaps you recall that the P47 is a hot plane, a single engine, a huge engine but you could not glide it in it had to be flown in. So these young pilots would be placed in these P47's and on several occasions they would take their turn and come in for a landing and their speed would be too slow and they'd just pancake and hit the runway and we, perhaps not the smartest thing to do would run out to see if we could assist any of those young pilots. They would always come in with the canopy open and on this one occasion this one lad was decapitated, his head was just hanging over the edge of the cockpit with some skin of the one side holding his head. Others would come in with oil leaks and if they missed the runway they too would crash. As far as our work in the machine shop it was close tolerance work. Most of it was what was called 4th echelon work – not the complete overhaul facility like OAMA or Hill Field but the machine shop was very well equipped with engine lathes, milling machines, shapers and of course all of the necessary tooling that was necessary for machine shop operations. The supply room was extremely well equipped with all sorts of steel, color coded to make sure you were using the proper steel when you were manufacturing a part and that it had the correct heat treatment. For our use also we had a

cadmium plating tank which was necessary to put about 3 to 5 tens of a thousandth cadmium coat on the steel so it would not corrode. The machinist at that time also would have to go out to aid mechanics, for instance if a cylinder head bolt was sheared off rather than pull the entire engine we as machinists had to go out and get the center point of the stud and with precision drills drill a hole directly in the center of that stud because if you were not directly on center you damaged the female threads and so this was our lot to do that and also on support equipment, landing gears and when we went over seas on Tinian our lot was much of this same procedure. As I stated previously I was sent to Wendover in December of '43 and all of these bomb groups were going through and then along about the 17th of December in 1944 an air of secrecy permeated the entire base and that is when secrecy was adamant. We maintained secrecy from that point on.

Rick: That was December 1944?

Mont: Yes, December 17th.

Rick: I want to go back a little bit and ask you a couple of things then we'll go back to that point. I want you to tell me if you can, if you remember the next day after Pearl Harbor you were still delivering papers, can you remember what the headline said and how big it was on that paper?

Mont: Japanese – it was about if I recall 3 inch headlines – “*Japanese Bomb Pearl Harbor*”!

Rick: Did you know where Pearl Harbor was?

Mont: Absolutely, sure.

Rick: And then I want you to describe what the town of Wendover was like when you first went there, what the base was like in as much detail as you can.

Mont: Wendover and this picture that I have here for you will explain in greater detail because that picture was taken in early 1945. The base was fully operable. There was still construction going on with hangars and later on the Enola Gay hangar was in the process of being built in the last part of '44 and '45. The machine shop was fully in operation when I got there. All of the...the parachute shop, the sheet metal shop, the link trainers, the radar people, all of that was fully functional.

Rick: So when you go out there today is it still the same runways that's sitting there that they had then?

Mont: A new runway was built but at the time we had two runways and...

Rick: But all of the hangars and the machine shops and stuff are pretty much in the same position as...do you remember it in 1944?

Mont: Oh yes but not now. The machine shop burned down. Prior to the burning of the building the industrial equipment was removed and I assumed at that time that that equipment...during the war the government had a department called the "*Industrial Reserve Program*" where all of these huge and small machine tools were stored and the machine shop at Wendover we had either new machinery or rehabilitated machinery. So prior to that burning I would assume that all of that industrial equipment was returned to the Government. It's just like the contractors of today where they can receive on a bailment contract a lot of this industrial equipment out of the industrial reserve program.

Rick: Was the swimming pool in existence?

Mont: It was and I didn't make too much use of the swimming pool for this reason – as the 509th group was formed they asked three of us in the machine shop to join the 509th composite group. We were told that it was high risk. We were told that there was a remote possibility we wouldn't be returning. I had a car out there at the time – a 1940 Desoto and so I would utilize all of the three day passes I could get a hold of and with other GI's get in my car and drive to Salt Lake.

Along about that timeframe I was dating a beautiful girl and I had dated other girls but I always went back to my existing wife and incidentally we just completed 60 years of marriage last February. So I had a three day pass and we were married on a three day pass and at that time I moved out of the barracks and during all of this timeframe I had established a rapier with the local people and the store people and the gas rationing people and...

Rick: Okay describe the town of Wendover in those years as best you can.

Mont: Well there was one gas station at the time and there was a place of entertainment called 'Spikes'. There was the Stateline Hotel and Casino and I can show you the infancy of that on this picture. Of course the building of the barracks and all of this was up. Now some of the officer's quarters, due to the lack of some places to stay, they were putting two and three families into one unit and I was lucky in that there was this old two-room home covered with roofing paper and a great family lived in there who was a farmer in that area for years. They were building a new house and they said, "*If you're going to be married, you're welcome to come and live in that house*". The house itself was two rooms but we did have a coal range or wood range and the bedroom was so ice-cold we moved the bed into the kitchen. We were fortunate enough to have a half bath – there was a toilet and we had running water and but it was comical in that the bed was...our only walk space between the bed and the stove was about one foot and our friends would come and sit on the bed and it would crash right to the floor and of course that was our honeymoon house and it was obvious that we learned quickly how that functioned.

Rick: That was just off the base?

Mont: It was just off the base near the roundhouse. I'm not sure if it's appropriate to mention names but the McKeller's had this home and they were building a new home there in Wendover which still stands.

Rick: Does your place still stand?

Mont: No, it's gone but I've got some pictures.

Rick: So you got married then in 1944?

Mont: We got married in '45. February 13th 1945.

Rick: You were about to tell us the air of secrecy and what I want you to do is give us the first experience you had of that – what were your orders, what did they tell you and all of a sudden everything is hush hush in as much detail as you can you know before they got the B29's there and before Tibbits came and...

*** Change Tapes ***

Mont: As I remember we didn't have too many B24 crashes, we had some and they were serious ones with fire and so forth but then in December of '44 the 509th was formed and Colonel Tibbits being the tremendous humanitarian that he was and yet so disciplined that when he gave an order you know you better keep it and under this context is what he used in the security program that if anybody was found saying anything that was going on on the base boy they could be shipped to Timbuktu and in fact that was one of his words or to Alaska, but it would be your last day. A few of our people did disappear. I don't know what happened to them. But he called the group together and explained that we would be going overseas. That Tinian would be our destination and he didn't say anything about what he had or what we were going to do. Some of us thought that it would be in the...well we all felt that it would turn the tide of the war and it was rumored that our mission could be short-term. I was a good friend of George Markwort who flew one of the escort planes; specifically at that time he had the photographic area. Had it of been necessary to drop the third bomb he would have been the pilot on that plane. But back to this security aspect – signs went up on the base and you've probably seen them – *“What you hear here, what you see here, leave it here”* and we had security briefings each and every day in the shop to be extremely careful. That nothing was said when we went on leave with three day passes. A lot of people went to Salt Lake City on their three day passes; some of them went to Elko and Ely Nevada. So under that environment we knew darn well that we better keep our mouth shut. Of interesting note, after the war the only time I saw my service record was that one year before the

509th Composite Group was formed the FBI had investigated me thoroughly and apparently that's what they did across the board. It even had the people's names that they contacted to determine what type of an individual I was.

Rick: Did you know that it was a super bomb that they had or did you have any inkling that that was what the mission was going to be?

Mont: We had no idea at that time. We felt it was something that would turn the tide of the war. Whether it was advanced buzz bombs or whatever...

Rick: Tell us about the first time you saw a B29.

Mont: The first time that we had a B29 was a General's B29 that flew in. It wasn't Colonel Tibbits, it was some other General and of course when they came on board we in the machine shop manufactured various adaptors – tooling, shackles and this type of thing. On separate occasions I was escorted from the machine shop with some parts that I had manufactured, some of them being long threaded rods that had to be cut on a lathe and I was escorted by two MP's with guns, full regalia through two security fences to a B29. It was dark at night and at that point in time I could see no numbers on the plane because of the darkness but I had to perform a functional fit of the manufactured part with the bomb bay to be sure that the parts were fitted properly even though they were manufactured to aircraft tolerances in the shop. And so with one of our planes that was my first experience. We had worked on other planes – B24's, B17's as the occasion arose. As we progressed....

Rick: Let me ask you about that one part you were installing, was that to increase the capability of the bomb bay doors to carry an atomic bomb and drop it though there? Is that what the...

Mont: I had no idea that that was an atomic bomb.

Rick: I understand but it was to alter the bomb bay doors of that one B29.

Mont: We didn't alter the doors. Our planes were brand new. We had 15 brand new B29's. Our code name was "*Silverplate*" and Colonel Tibbits went over the heads of a lot of people to get what he wanted and so 15 B29's, they were larger engines, they were fuel injected, the props were reversible. Most B29's had two bomb bays – our planes had one. We did not do any work on the bomb bay doors at all. This was specifically for adaptors to hold if you will something that we were going to carry. The enlisted men...when the decision was made to go over seas, we were only in our home in Wendover for two months so the last night I had to spend on base and I sent my wife home with one of our friends that were in the 216 base unit of which I was a part prior to the 509 and so he brought my wife Ruth home and then we were due to board the train. I was not a flight crew member, I was an enlisted man and there were a total cadres of some 1767 men in the 509th so I was merely a tooth in a gear in a chain of multiple gears that had to do a job and we did it.

Rick: You knew you were going over seas but you didn't know where at that time or did you?

Mont: George Markwort who was an officer told Ruth, he said, "*I think Mont will be back in six months*". Now maybe you better not put that on the tape but I think that some of the...even the crew members did not know what they were carrying until they were airborne. That's my opinion.

Rick: But did they know of the island that they were going?

Mont: Oh yes.

Rick: So they knew that you were headed for Tinian?

Mont: Yes. Most of the enlisted personnel got on the train at Wendover. It took us two and a half days to get from Wendover up to Fort Lotten Washington. We were there for a week and then we boarded the Cape Victory. The Cape Victory was the name of the ship but it was one of the victory ships that Kaiser built during the war and then we zig zagged for 24 days across the ocean. At one point we were stopped for submarine alert. Of course we were instructed no

lights, no smoking, we had to get to our holds and we were dead in the water for some 30 minutes. We did hear one of our escort ships dropping some cans but we don't know what happened to that, fortunately nothing happened to us and we continued on our journey.

Rick: Were you in a convoy of ships?

Mont: I was told...in the horizon we could see ships. Later it was rumored that we had 14 escort ships. We stopped in the Hawaiian Islands for refueling. We were not allowed to get off the ship...well we finally did the second day but we couldn't leave the dock and those lovely people came down and put on a show for us and we were able to buy some cans of pineapple which was a delicacy we didn't have on the ship. Needless to say three days out of Seattle a lot of us were deathly ill, ridding our stomach contents over the side and whether you want to call it psychological or not I was one of them and for the first three days going and the first three days coming back. So when we...as I say we were 24 days zig zagging across the ocean and we could see some escort ships that carried us right into the Tinian harbor and we were loaded on trucks and went to a tented area. The 603rd Engineering Group, my group and the 1027th Material Group went in tents fairly close to the line and to the machine shop and to the other shops on the line and so that was where we were stationed for the 6 month period.

Rick: Did they fly those 15 B29's over there?

Mont: I'm not sure they were the exact 15 but there were several.

Rick: And what was it like on that Victory ship? What kind of accommodations did you have and any experiences that you want to share with us while you were over there?

Mont: The accommodations were extremely poor. We went down into our hold and our bunks were canvas strung between pipes and they lifted up. Those bunks were 7 high and you could hardly turn over without hitting the guy above or the man below you. So it was extremely smelly and the environment was extremely poor. We spent as much time on the deck as we could and got by the situation. And it was similar coming back, after our six months we boarded

the SS Duel and it was a similar arrangement but it was a faster ship and it only took us 18 days to come back and of course we didn't zig zag during that time frame. Perhaps that was the mistake of the USS Indianapolis in not zig zagging because as you know that was the one that was carrying some (I want to say a fusing mechanism) delivered to Tinian and after that was delivered and they went back and they did not zig zag across the ocean and of course they were bombarded by the Japanese and it was sunk.

Rick: Tell us about Tinian, when you first got there what it was like.

Mont: Well, there were on the north field... Tinian was probably if not the largest air field in the Pacific. There were four runways and all of them were operable and as we arrived there on the island all of our planes had arrows painted on the tail. We quickly found that those arrows had to be removed and we picked up huge letters on the tail that the other squadrons had like maybe a "Z" or an "R" or a triangle or something of that nature because as our planes would go on practice runs with other bombardment groups if you will, the Japanese would see these planes with arrows on the tail and naturally they would wonder what was going on there and would seek them out. But none of our planes were shot down. The CB's were on Tinian and the island was secured for the most part. On one tip of the island there were some Japanese that were primarily holed up in caves. Sometimes they would come out and take a potshot at somebody but for all intents and purposes they were defeated and the CB's did a marvelous job on Tinian with building the runways and when the CB's moved out of their compound the 509th took that over and so in comparison to some of us why they were plush facilities.

Rick: After you got to Tinian did you know then it was a super bomb that was going to be dropped or when did you find out?

Mont: Well I had seen a couple of the bombs and of course at Wendover we had pits as you know and the pits, the bomb would be lowered into the pits with the hydraulic system and then the plane would be towed over the pit and then the bombs winched up into the bomb bay. We knew that it was not a conventional type of bomb just by the looks.

Rick: At Wendover you knew?

Mont: At Wendover, yeah and but the 509th could have been shipped to anyplace in the world, we were self sustaining. We had our own doctors, we had our own cooks, mechanics, machinists, dentists, they could have shipped us anyplace in the world and we would have been self sustained.

Rick: So at Wendover you kind of figured it was some kind of a different kind of bomb?

Mont: Oh yes.

Rick: And did you ever get anymore information other than that when you were over in Tinian?

Mont: No.

Rick: That's all you ever knew.

Mont: Yes. As far as I can determine Colonel Tibbits announced to his crew what they were carrying when they were airborne. I don't know if that's factual. But they knew it would be something that would turn the tide of the war. Our B29's had no gun turrets except the tail turrets. All of the other gun turrets were removed so the plane could fly higher and faster with greater payload. But it did have a tail gun and Bob Karen one of our tail gunners took some pictures and his pictures are some of those you see that he took – bootlegged them in some way I don't know.

Rick: After you got to Tinian how long were you there before that historic mission took off and what you did leading up to that mission and when they came back and what you heard. Give us as much of an insight into that as you can.

Mont: Well our planes didn't fly very often and when they did they flew in formation with other planes and so our troop took a tremendous grubbing by the other outfits. They knew that the

509th was some special outfit, specially treated if you will and we took a drubbing in that effect – “*well the 509th is not flying again*” you know and things like this and the same occurred within the machine shop because they melded us with other machinists from other bombardment groups in the machine shop which was very well equipped for the island of Tinian with the same milling machines, lathes, a good supply of stock and etc. There was one difference in that they had a trailer hooked to a jeep and on occasion (not on our planes) that jeep had a grinder on it and an air compressor for us to grind our own drill bits because that vanadium and other metals were so hard that you had to sharpen your drill bits extremely often to drill out some of these studs. And that I had to do on planes of other bombardment squadrons. Of course our planes were new and we had very little to do in that regard. But finally when the first bomb was dropped on August 6th and we had a big massive party and when Colonel Tibbits landed why he received the Metal of Honor of course and it was...so then the 509th saved faced because it was not nice with some of the comments that were received before that.

Rick: Tell me about when they took off. Were you aware that that was their mission and that they were...

Mont: I got up at...our plane the Enola Gay took off at about 2:30 am and I watched that.

Rick: So you knew it was significant or you wouldn't have got up to watch it?

Mont: Oh yes. Rumors were flying.

Rick: When it took off there were three planes that left with it, right? All three took off roughly at the same time?

Mont: Well there was...I would say at least three because there was the weather ship, the photographic ship, the backup...

Rick: The Boxcar, ?? Evil and then the Enola Gay – was there more than that?

Mont: One ship was on the island for back up and I forget that island, it's a well known island that took us a long time to take from the Japanese people but...

Rick: Okay then did you hear by radio that mission was complete or anything, did you have any knowledge there on Tinian after the bomb had been dropped and it was a success?

Mont: They radioed back.

Rick: How did the word get out to the machinists and...?

Mont: Oh the entire island knew about it at that point.

Rick: Before they came back?

Mont: Oh yeah, you bet.

Rick: And what happened when you heard?

Mont: Well just numerous parties all over the place you know in celebration.

Elizabeth: Where were you when you heard?

Mont: I was in our area, fairly close to the line.

Rick: Because you guys knew it before the rest of the world did by many hours I would think there on Tinian.

Mont: I wouldn't dare say. In fact I would guarantee you that probably the President would be one of the first to know.

Rick: So then tell us and describe when the planes came back. Were you there and watched them land when they came back?

Mont: Not specifically on the landing but of course the photographers were there and all of the Generals and so forth. And the Enola Gay just landed in its spot there on the island and as did the other planes. And of course the photographers were plentiful.

Rick: And so they took off the next day for the next...for Nagasaki wasn't it?

Mont: No, it was three days. Nagasaki was on August 9th. It was hopeful that the Japanese would surrender but they didn't and so the President authorized the dropping of the bomb on Nagasaki. Nagasaki was the secondary target and the clouds opened just briefly for the bombardier to get in and complete the run with the Nagasaki mission.

Rick: During these three days when the pilots and crews got off did you talk to any of them and did they tell you how devastating it was?

Mont: No. They were pretty much you know encased in high level meetings.

Rick: And so at that time did you know that the word "*atomic bomb*" was that in your vocabulary then?

Mont: Oh yes.

Rick: So you knew it was a big super bomb and it was a success? All right now can you tell us about the Nagasaki mission? Did you watch them take off for that?

Mont: No.

Rick: And then can you tell us about hearing of the success of that?

Mont: Well as I say it was broadcast on loudspeakers and the planes radioed back to Tinian of the success.

Rick: And they broadcast it on loudspeakers around the base?

Mont: That's correct.

Elizabeth: You said you're good friends with George Markwort. Can you tell his story? I'm sure he eventually told you what he saw from...could you just tell Rick his story that he may have shared with you eventually?

Mont: Well, the most colossal event was the huge mushroom cloud and of course in order to avoid that cloud after the bomb was dropped the planes were put in 360 degrees to get away from that cloud as quickly as possible and therefore it was this tail gunner that snapped a few shots of the cloud, the mushroom cloud. Because you know you didn't know what was going to happen and what the pressure would do to your plane. You didn't know whether you'd be a survivor or not so that's why it was adamant to have the faster planes with larger engines so they could escape that cloud.

Rick: Did George ever...

*** Change Tape ***

Discussions in progress...

Mont: That was after he had his stroke wasn't it? And that was when we had the Japanese speaker?

Rick: It's been it seems like 4 or 5 years.

Mont: You see George and his son handled the reunion in Wendover and was instrumental in getting that monument in memory of the 509th Composite Group. It's interesting to not to me that the Utah Governor didn't want to put any funds towards that monument so they contacted the Nevada Governor and he swooped it up and was tickled to death to do it.

Rick: It's strange, but it's on the Nevada side isn't it?

Mont: Yes.

Rick: We were talking about the experiences that George Markwort may have shared with you about his role in the mission.

Mont: The only thing that George shared with me and my wife on separate occasions he told Ruth he said "*don't worry, I think Mont will be back within six months*". And that came to pass pretty close. In fact I left...my wife wanted to get pregnant and I said "*no*". In fact she wanted to get married, I didn't want to get married but I took the bait and we got married then she wanted to get pregnant and I said, "*no it's too high risk and I might not come back*". I took the bait and I left her pregnant and I got home in time to see our first son born.

Rick: Tell us about when you heard that the Japanese had surrendered you know after the second bomb was dropped there were still two or three days before they surrendered. Give us your feelings and what went on there on the island of Tinian when they heard that the Japanese had surrendered.

Mont: I guess you might call it a suspenseful time. There was another bomb that could have been used. I don't know where that bomb was but it was available and as I say they could have...at one time it was rumored that we might have to go to Europe. But of course that didn't happen. So a lot of these stories are rumors but it is factual that there was a third bomb.

Rick: What happened, where were you on VJ Day?

Mont: As I recall I was working in the machine shop.

Rick: And what happened at Tinian and among yourselves, what were your thoughts when you finally knew the war was over?

Mont: Very humble, prayerful attitude if you will. A lot of silence. A lot of grateful hearts and souls. That's the best I can describe it.

Rick: Did you have any feeling of the sense of mission that you had helped be a part of to end the war Was there a feeling of that?

Mont: Well, at the time that the 509th was formed and all of the progression came about that we were going to be doing something to turn the tide of the war I felt that we were in a group that was the cream of the crop and there is no doubt that every man was hand picked. Colonel Tibbits made sure of that and he took the best that there were at the time, including his crew, including the enlisted personnel. And so as we came back and put down our thoughts which is in one of the books that you are aware of I made statement to that effect that I was happy and honored to be a member of the group because I felt that we were the cream of the crop. But then you have second thoughts and you think about all of the thousands of people that were killed in Europe, in the Pacific and all of the tremendous terrorist activities that were performed on our men – beheadings. We have one friend that spoke at one of our reunions, he was in the 504th bomb group – one of the earlier bomb groups from Saipan as I recall. On his first mission he was shot down over Japan, you might have been there during that reunion when he spoke to us and the atrocities that our people were subjected to at that time and at this time he reiterated the abuse and so forth that went on in the prison camps and the executions that took place. He was, as he explained it to us with tears running down his cheek, he was due to be executed the very day that we dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and of course how grateful that he was. Now he since has gone back to Japan several times and he has a lot of Japanese people as friends as do I. And hopefully we will never have to have such a horrendous experience that we had with the atomic bombs but I'm convinced that had we not used the atomic bomb and we had to invade Japan, there's no doubt about it that the Japanese people were being trained with sharpened

sticks and rods and whatever – they were prepared to go at hand to hand combat. And so there's no doubt in my mind that the dropping of the two bombs literally saved millions of lives on both sides. I hope we never have to do it again but I think we've got to maintain a strong force. I don't want to see our forces cut back to any large degree. There's no doubt that Wendover played a significant part in bringing the war to a close. With all the training of over 21 bombardment groups – 8 B17 groups and 13 B24's and as a support field I admire Jim Peterson in his effort to restore some of the buildings at Wendover. Our young people have no idea what happened. They have no idea about the atomic bomb. Some of our people in our public schools today when the flag is raised and the Pledge of Allegiance is said and how often have you gone to a ball game and looked around when you see the young people that don't hardly know what to do – whether to cover your heart, and they look in utter amazement and then gradually they will raise their hand as others did over there in commemoration of the flag.

Rick: Did you ever meet Colonel Tibbits personally and can you tell us about what he was like a little bit more and what your experiences with him were.

Mont: Oh yes. Well as I say he was not the typical GI Colonel or General. He was a man's leader. He would walk up to you and shake your hand and say "*hi, I'm Paul Tibbits*" and of course you would respond. When he would call a meeting together there was nothing typically GI about him, he would walk up in his coveralls as the rest of us had on with his hands in his pockets and explain to us as best he could with the knowledge that he was allowed to display and after we got...the same thing prevailed after the two bombs were dropped and we entered under the Golden Gate and you see that huge sign on the hill "*Welcome Home*". And so we got on a train in Oakland again and we were shipped down to Roswell Army Air Force Base and that is where other elements of the 509th Composite Group were stationed. So that's where we were discharged. But to show the tremendous courtesy and what I would describe as concern and love each man if you will he called the group together and basically said "*well we did it*" and thanked us all and he said "*if any of you could see to hurry up with me I would appreciate it*" and I think a goodly number did that. It seems that all of those in leadership positions were of the same caliber and at the reunion and some of these books that were published – The Enola Gay and so forth and Paul Tibbits was there and autographed the books and came and would shake your

hand and refresh his memory which group you from and what some of the things you did. He said, “*You guys did more than what you realize*” and so that perhaps typifies the type of individual that he was.

Rick: Do you want to comment on President Truman’s decision and maybe any accolades that the 509th have been given by the Government during that time and since?

Mont: Well I think the flight crews you know have received their dues and it was only in recent years that the entire group received a ribbon for valor. So that was basically it. Naturally we received all of the other medals – the Asiatic Pacific and the World War II Victory Medal and so forth and of course the medals and ribbons that went along with qualifying and the piece of armament that you qualified in and so forth. But that was basically it. I was extremely disturbed (maybe you ought to take this off your tape). I was extremely disturbed in that the Japanese people had their large convention in the Smithsonian Institute and the president or whatever his title was at the Smithsonian, the top man wanted our war planes covered up including the fuselage of the Enola Gay which was there at the time. He wanted all of our war planes covered up so as not to offend the Japanese people. So it took two or three years for the veterans to ban together and have him removed from his position. So now the people in charge of the Smithsonian have a much better attitude. The Enola Gay is completely refurbished and is on display at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum out by Dulles Airport and the Boxcar is on display at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base at the covered museum there. And the other planes for the most part have probably been scrapped. Some were used and sent over to Korea. There were probably close to 80 to 100 planes made at the same configuration as the 509th’s and some of them were transferred to cargo facilities, gasoline transport and this type of thing. Please don’t quote me on that number because I could be off on that number but there’s a considerable number, more than our 15 that were manufactured of our configuration with the single bomb bay, fuel injected engines and reversible prop’s etc.

Elizabeth: You said basically when you were at Wendover Airbase you were building something to haul something big. How do you build something to hold something big when you don’t know what it is?

Mont: We don't know it was big. We were building things to sketches, some blueprints and then we'd have to perform a functional fit on the aircraft. But to see exactly what that application was, we had no idea.

Elizabeth: But you had blueprints, so you knew what size and how to configure it?

Mont: Oh yeah. We manufactured the part to the tolerances that were allowed on the print. So you know, we had no idea. We knew there were two different sizes and that's about it. But we didn't know whether it was some type of adaptors or shackles to hold a cement bomb because our crews did train with cement bombs to be dropped. Probably the same weight ratio as the atomic bomb. Some were dropped on the Salton Sea in California, so cement bombs were used. So we don't know, we knew we made some parts, we performed functional fits on the parts in the bomb bay but whether they were going to hold a bomb or stabilize a bomb or stabilize a photographic camera or a bomb release mechanism or whatever, we had no idea. We did what we were told and completed the job and that was it. And then we kept our mouth shut.

Elizabeth: So when you got to Tinian what was your job then? You'd already built these things and made these things and then they send you off to Tinian, what then are you doing there?

Mont: Well, keep in mind that there on Tinian we were melded in with other personnel with all of these other bombardment groups on the islands and so we were doing things for their planes. Whether we were removing broken studs, whether we were manufacturing propeller balancing hubs or whatever the job came that was to be used on these other crews. We were put right to work, there's no doubt about it.

Elizabeth: Can you tell Rick in two or three sentences why the 509th was formed?

Mont: The 509th was formed specifically for atomic missions. It's the only organization that's ever been put together for atomic missions. And as I say we could have been sent anyplace in the world to be self sustaining. It was one of a kind and since that time hopefully there'll not be

another organization to be formed to do what we did. I hope we can live in peaceful negotiations.

Rick: Mont do you feel personally that Harry Truman's decision to drop those bombs was a good one?

Mont: Absolutely, no doubt about it.

Rick: I think most of America would agree with you.

Mont: Well if people knew the potential of not dropping the bombs and if they knew how the Japanese were preparing for an invasion, I think some of the attitudes would be positive towards it.

Interviewer: I'd like to ask a few questions. When did the word atomic start being used? Were you in Wendover or Tinian? Did you have Engineer's in the 509th that said "*this has got to be something new and big*" or can you recall the first time and what some of the rumors were?

Mont: In my sphere of operation there word '*Atomic*' was never mentioned. Never.

Interviewer: So you were rigging the bomb bay for something newer and bigger?

Mont: Well it's not unusual you know that if you're doing some experimentation on something for the machine shop to build certain adaptors to facilitate that use whatever that use may be and frequently it's not to hold anything heavy or in that regard. It may be to just modify some part of the bomb bay. It may be just a simple thing.

Rick: So even on Tinian you weren't even using the word '*atomic*' then in reference to the bomb?

Mont: No, absolutely not.

Interviewer: I'm going to ask you to recall again the vivid memories that you have of your homecoming and passing underneath the San Francisco Bridge and describe to us the rush of feelings.

Mont: After you're on that ocean and you know you're approaching the United States of America and you pass under that Golden Gate Bridge and you see that huge sign on the hillside "*Welcome Home*", it gives you (and it gave me) a greater appreciation of what we have in these United States of America. My thoughts go to a lady by the name of Katherine Lee Bates who came to this country and went to Colorado Springs and went up on Pike's Peak and she viewed the entire area from that high altitude and it was here where she penned the words to America the Beautiful. Yes, we do live in a country that is beautiful. Later those same words were put to music by a man by the name of Ward and that America the Beautiful was in stiff competition for our national anthem at one time – I think it was about 1930 or so. And so to go through an operation like that and you see the mass devastation and you compare it with what you might have seen or would have seen had we to do an invasion of Japan, it gave me a greater appreciation if you will of this great United States of America in which we live and I hope that our schools will pick up on history and I think even with Wendover – if there can be some rehabilitation done on Wendover to give our school kids some kind of idea what went on during the war. I think if we lose Hill Field as one of our Air Logistic Command Centers, we're going to be in bad shape as Utahns and the United States as a whole. I think we ought to keep, as I said before, keep our military strong and not let it get too weak and let our young people know what the actual history was with these wars and import that we enjoy as being citizens of these good United States.

Interviewer: You came back and went to Roswell and then when was the first time you saw your wife?

Mont: I was only in Roswell about one week and therefore everybody that did not re-up with Colonel Tibbits were being shipped hither and yon for discharge. I don't know why but I was shipped to Fort Logan Colorado and I lived in Salt Lake City. But I was discharged in Fort

Logan and hitchhiked to Salt Lake City and my brother and his wife picked me up at...I think somebody had dropped me off downtown someplace as I hitchhiked from Denver and of course everybody would pick up a GI during those times. So my wife was in the car at that time and she was still pregnant but due any day and so that's when our first son was born on December 12th 1945.

Rick: How many children did you eventually have?

Mont: Three boys and one girl.

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Rick: Mont tell us a little of your experiences with War Bonds and the home front – maybe some of the rationing...

Mont: With the announcement on the invasion of Pearl Harbor the centers for signing up were very busy and all over the city were these huge posters of Uncle Sam to buy war bonds and I bought some that I could afford at the time and I'm sure everyone else did. The entire area took on a different tone of a relaxed atmosphere you might say.

Elizabeth: What did the streets look like?

Mont: There were a lot of parades; there was a lot of confetti thrown. Everyone was exhilarated. Probably the marriage rate increased to some degree, but everyone was happy to return home to their loved ones.

Elizabeth: Do you remember Victory Gardens?

Mont: Everybody during the war was encouraged to have a Victory Garden, to raise some of your own food and to provide a means. Not only was a lot of the food being diverted to the

services but also it was much cheaper if you had your own Victory Garden to sustain yourself and that was a big thing. And needed – no doubt about it!

Elizabeth: How about rationing?

Mont: Rationing was the same thing. As I recall there were three types of rationing cards – A, B and C. Depending on the type of work that you did – A was the minimal amount of gas you could receive; B was a little bit higher and C-ration was if you were involved in Government effort to aid in sustaining the war or you were employed by a Government agency such as Hill Air Force Base. And then all of us would team up and get as many people in the car as we could and were able to draw C-ration stamps at that particular time. And basically the rationing of stamps also was carried over to Wendover.

Elizabeth: Do you remember famous people downtown in Salt Lake or famous people selling war bonds and things like that?

Mont: As a hotel employee you're sometimes ready to see just about anything you wish. My mother was (as I stated earlier) an Elevator Operator. The Temple Square Hotel was one of the better hotels at that time that prohibited ill doing if you will, it prohibited prostitutes coming in and some of the well known people knew that. There was a particular Senator – Albert D. Thomas who would always leave my mother a nice tip as he rode up and down the elevator in those days and there were other people in that same category. It's been a great life; if I had to do it again I'd do it. If war came about and it was needed and I could pass a physical to do something, I'd do it in a moment. No doubt about it.

Rick: Mont you did a good job!

End Interview