

## Interview of Alden Rigby

Interviewer: All right, tell me your full name.

Alden Rigby: Alden P. Rigby, "P" for Peter.

Interviewer: And you were born where?

Alden Rigby: Fairview, Utah, January 4, 1923.

Interviewer: That's in Sanpete County?

Alden Rigby: Sanpete.

Interviewer: All right, you grew up there. Your parents did what?

Alden Rigby: Yes, through high school, then college at BYU for a year.

Interviewer: Were your farmers?

Alden Rigby: Oh, yes. Farming was strictly up there. Came from a family of two girls and seven, eight boys -- dear? Farming was it.

Interviewer: You graduated from which high school?

Alden Rigby: North Sanpete High School, 1941.

Interviewer: And your wife is sitting with us and did you know her back then?

Alden Rigby: Oh, yes. We were rather sweethearts from freshman year on. We go back a long way together.

Interviewer: And you've been married how long?

Alden Rigby: 66 years in June.

Interviewer: Wonderful. All right, tell us -- okay, we usually start at this point if you want to start everything you think we should know for this. Tell us what you were doing December 7th, 1941.

Alden Rigby: I home from BYU to Fairview for the weekend and was just getting ready to come back to Provo when the news was broadcast of the attack on Pearl Harbor. I went back to Provo that evening and listened to the broadcast in geology class the next day -- quite an exciting time. Of course, when you're that young, you put it all in perspective and it was at that time of life, everybody had the same problems. I mean, we knew that we would be involved in the war and it just came kind of natural, probably wouldn't be any more schooling for awhile. After a little time, I knew that Uncle Sam wanted my body, all 135 pounds, so, I wound up at Fort Douglas and had a choice of either a paratrooper or aviation cadet. I had never been in an aircraft, but I just thought that that would be the lesser of two evils. The other option was paratrooper. I didn't fancy jumping out of an aircraft unless I had to, so that was the beginning of my aviation career.

Interviewer: Were you drafted, or did you enlist?

Alden Rigby: Well, I was drafted, but drafted into the Air Force, really. So with that option to take care of, yeah, it was a good move.

Interviewer: How old were you and when did you actually go in?

Alden Rigby: I went in January 9th of 1943, so I was just turned 20.

Interviewer: Were you still single?

Alden Rigby: No, we were married June 4th of 1942. We knew the war was coming and we had big plans. We had a seven year plan. First was schooling, then a mission, then more schooling, but all of that fell by the wayside on December 7th of '41. So, training, do you want any of that?

Interviewer: Yeah, we'll get to that. What were you majoring in in college?

Alden Rigby: Just generals.

Interviewer: Alright. Tell us about your training and tell us about what you did and what it was like for you.

Alden Rigby: Training came at Fort Douglas. I passed the exam and I wanted the west coast, naturally. So where did they send me? Nashville, Tennessee, "A" classification. You were either classified as a bombardier, navigator, or pilot, and the pilot was always the short list. Talk about rigorous examinations, everything from, oh, calisthenics -- we did a lot of that in the mud, this is February now of '43, and coordination, a physique that was really tough. So, I find myself on the short list, which was really some compensation for being there. The next was Maxwell Field, Alabama. We're getting father away from home, and that's preflight, the tough courses from mathematics, weather, all kinds of academics. Two months there, and we're talking the class system and if you know anything about hazing, the lower class was dirt. I mean, we had to walk in the gutters. You ate at attention, and just for a month. Then the lower class comes in, you're a big upper-classman now, and you're supposed to provide the same kind of tough schedule for the underclass, which I didn't do much of. I kind of pitied those poor underclassmen. Two months of that, comes the first flying primary. Now we're in Bennettsville, South Carolina with civilian instructors with the check rights to be military pilots. Two months there with about 65 hours of flying -- this is my first flight in any kind of an aircraft. About the

first thing the instructor does is turn that thing upside down and let you hang from a safety belt. Of course, you've got a parachute on, but the open cockpit, so that's a little test to begin with. You get about -- that's in a PT-17, a Stearman -- you get about 65 hours there, graduate, but there's a downside with about 50 percent of the class washes out. They either go back to bombardier or navigator or a choice of the infantry, so we lose a few there. Then you pick up another group at basic and that's flying the BT-13 called the Vultee "Vibrator," a fixed landing gear, a wide landing gear, but you have to crank the flaps up and down. Two months there and I had kind of a prize there. I had a returned combat pilot that I suspected was his punishment for some violation like flying under a bridge or such as this, which actually happened to him, and I don't know whether he wanted to make a point or a name, but he soloed me it three hours and 45 minutes, which was the first in the class. I was not ready for it, I'll be honest, but I made it. So that was basic, and we were taught navigation, some formation flying, night flying, and we lose not only to wash out rate, but fatalities. Here's where you fly, you begin flying with a buddy. After so long, you get another cadet in the back seat. It's kind of a proving time with the other cadets to see who, who's the most daring with maneuvers, knowing very little about flying or the aircraft, so the flag was flying at half mast quite often in basic. As a matter of fact, it was in advanced my roommate was killed doing just that. So two months at basic in Sumter South Carolina, then it's big time. We go to advanced and basic, we are divided into either stay as instructors, air transport command, bomber pilots, fighter pilots, and I had a disadvantage, in a way. I was a married man, and few of the cadets were married. The powers that be just had the idea that I ought to have something else rather than a fighter pilot, so I had to fight my way through to get what I wanted. I was very fortunate to get that. That was a little more compensation for being back east, we're in Veniceville -- no, we're in Sumter about to go to

Spence Field, Georgia for advanced. I happened to make the grade to be a fighter pilot, overcoming what I thought was some obstacles that shouldn't have been in there in the first place, but there were very few married cadets. Comes advanced, we're now big time -- retractable landing gear, hydraulic flaps, but a narrow landing gear as well and rather a little difficult to land that bird with what little experience we had. Two months there of rigorous training. By this time, I had my wife with me, and that was another incentive to make the grade. I credit her with having some large effect on getting me through that program. I was not about to let her down. She lived in town and could come on base once or twice a week. So, that was a little difficult for her to be away from home, but that was the beginning of an Air Force career for her as well. Comes graduation time, and I'm not on the list to graduate, but I'm not on the list to have a 10 day leave. They had decided that I should have some time in a P-40, so I was sent to Tifton, Georgia, to have 10 hours in the P-40. Some of it was after graduation, but there goes my leave. I would have almost given up everything to be home for 10 days. My wife had left sometime before graduation of necessity, and so, I get 10 hours, which was really a plum for that stage of training. I get a 10 day leave after that and I'm home for three days, and back to Tallahassee, Florida. On my leaving home on December 17th, just before Christmas, that was a bad day. So I go back to Tallahassee, and that's a pool for training replacement pilots for overseas. I just happened to be in a group that was sent to Bartow, Florida, the only P-51 base in the Southeast training command. Now, the 51 was new off the line. They had flown off the A model in England, and some in North Africa. That's the Allison engine, and at least I'm compensated again for being where I really didn't want to be. So in February of '44, I find myself in Bartow, Florida, and there are three squadrons. I'm assigned to those flying the A model, the others are flying the B and C model with a supercharger, but I loved that A model

except the Allison engine wasn't all that reliable. Sometimes a runaway prop, but it is always the Cadillac of the sky. It came off the assembly line from drawing board to the assembly line in 151 days, which is another miracle. I really enjoyed flying that bird. We did a lot of formation flying, we did dive-bombing, a little strafing, so it was a prelude to combat. Then comes graduation time. I'm on the graduation list, but not on the shipping out list. There are three of us out of 120 not on the list, and I knew those other two guys were fair pilots, so I wasn't too disappointed to be in that small group. So, we're accepted as instructors, and that's a nice assignment in that type aircraft. You just set out to decide and give the student instructions on the radio and grade his capabilities. So I go through two classes with that assignment, and then I could see the writing on the wall. There were about to be many more instructors. They had enough, so I applied for overseas knowing that that was coming and I should get it over with. So I find myself in England July 1st of 1944, just after D-Day. I have a selection of what group I want to go to, and so I picked the 352nd Fighter Group. I knew some of the people there and some of the students I taught, some that I graduated with cadets, so I picked that group and also knowing that they had three of the highest scoring aces in the 8th Air Force. So that's another plum, and it worked out very well. I didn't fly my first combat mission till August, then flying from England, and that's another story with weather.

Interviewer: Tell us about that, the first mission.

Alden Rigby: The first mission was--

Unknown Person: I need a change a battery here, I'm sorry. Okay.

Interviewer: Alright. We were talking about your first mission.

Alden Rigby: The first mission was really half credit, we have what we call relay flights. I was first assigned to one of those where you just cross the coast line and relay back to base what's going on with the people that are in combat. So, that was my first mission, but my first mission or my first action came, oh, perhaps two or three missions later, we find ourselves in a big dog fight.

Interviewer: First of all, what day was that -- your first real combat?

Alden Rigby: Oh, it was sometime in late August.

Interviewer: And the assignment was--

Alden Rigby: I don't remember, I'll have to look it up to see where it was. But at any rate, we find ourselves in a big dog fight and I'm flying wing to Colonel Myers, then the leading ace. I'm supposed to be protecting that guy and I did well to keep him in sight, but I thought at that time if I wandered too far from the farm and, uh, but the adrenaline gets flowing when you see that big cross on the enemy airplane for the first time. It was a good prelude to what was to follow. I should define just a little bit on the conditions that brought me into England. A big pasture, we took off four at a time, close formation, and landed four at a time, but in between we're generally faced with weather. Climbing up through, we had 12 to 16 ships all tacked on to one guy flying the instruments, and sometimes we had in clouds and rain, it was difficult to see the plane next to you, the clearance lights. We go through that and to get out on top, you can see forever. It's smooth, but by that time, you're over the enemy coast line and the flack starts coming. So that's, that's the answer to where you are. Then coming back, you have to drop down through the same thing and you're sweating gas and oxygen. We had always carried drop tanks out of England. We had two drops with 75 gallons in each, and this, with the internal fuel, give us about six and a

half to seven hours. That's a long time strapped in that bird. You just become a part of that aircraft. I flew out of England then from August till December. I can't say how many missions I had by that time, but probably 30 or so. We had word during the Battle of the Bulge -- which started December 16th -- about the 20th, they decided to send our group to Belgium to help stop the Battle of the Bulge. Now, that was probably some political maneuvering due to the aces we had in our group. As difficult as it was, physically and with weather, it proved to be a good move for us. We find ourselves at Y-29 in Eastern Belgium, a little village called Asch, A-S-C-H, and we're now operating one at a time off from a steel planking strip. I mean, the engineers had laid that strip down a couple of months earlier just after liberation and you've been through that area but it was a forest before that and it was a forest after. Landing on that strip after not finding it the first day and having to go back to Antwerp, and that's another story we don't need to get into at the moment, but the next morning, we find that strip. I'm on fighter four. We don't carry drops on that mission because it's supposed to be about an hour and a half. We did have a full load of ammunition. The next morning, December 24 of 1944, and upon landing, we find ourselves in the most difficult winter in decades. We've all heard about how difficult it was for the ground troops. At least we had a tent and warm aircraft to operate with, but we could hear the big guns off to the east. We were probably a little less than 10 miles from the front lines. There were reports of infiltration, so we didn't know if we were going to have to get out of there or not. Some historians record that three days of good flying weather stopped the Battle of the Bulge. Of course, we had a lot of help. The "heavies" were still flying out of England and we had a lot of help from the 9th Air Force that we were attached to for what was supposed to be 10 days and we were to be back in England -- never happened. On December 28th, the fog closed in, and we could not get off the ground to even test off our aircraft. Our poor crew chiefs,

working on aircraft in that weather outside, the 50 P-47s on the base that were there earlier had at least a hanger for maintenance work. Our troops didn't have anything. December 28th brought on such a bad situation. We knew that Bastogne was still surrounded, that's only less than five minutes flying time from where we're at, and they're dropping out of England supplies to those guys. We could not even see the trees at the end of the runway. Three days we sat cursing the weather, and we had some people that could do that. One plus was the 9th Air Force food was better than we were getting in England, but that's little compensation. On January 1st, you want to get into that one now? Or you have questions?

Interviewer: Just one question. The air field you were at, just explain what a Y-29 is.

Alden Rigby: Y-29 was the designation for that airfield, Asch Belgium. There were all kinds of those letter and numeral designations. Y-32, A-84, that's just the location.

Interviewer: All right, and had you shot down any aircraft before that day?

Alden Rigby: Yes, I'm glad you asked that. It's kind of interesting, I had shot -- we'll call this one shot up, an airplane on the ground. A Ju-52, I'd have to get my log book to see, but that was late September or August. We caught an airfield and I was in the top flight flying cover and spotting the anti-aircraft, we took out the anti-aircraft and then set up a traffic pattern, but by the time I got into the traffic pattern, there weren't many left to shoot up. Those Ju-52s are built out of plywood and they burn pretty good. That was the first ground victory, and I should add that the 8th Air Force counted ground victories the same as air because they were so difficult, even more difficult to get than air sometimes. The P-52s are not built for strafing. We had liquid-cooled engine, no protection over the radiator, and small arms fire could take you out of the air. We were not built for that, but we were forced into doing it and we lost something like 39

percent strafing. Meyer said, "If that target is worth four men out of 12, we'll go down on it."

That was a mild assessment. We lost a lot of good pilots doing that. After strafing the Ju-52 -- that counts as air now for a time -- and then on November 27th, I got that day down, that was my first air-to-air kill. Some, we'll put a little more mild victories, but we were strafing a train and I had a wingman with me and we strafed a train, just kind of 3 or 4,000 feet and 90 degrees trying to take out the boiler. We had only three guns in each wing calibrated across at 900 feet and that's where you try to get the target. The Jugs or P-47s are four guns in each wing and a radial engine that could take a lot more punishment than we could, so they generally took care of those things. But today, we're strafing. One thing that was a positive in the air war about mid '44, we were allowed to go down and strafe targets of opportunity after we get the heavies off of the target and safely on the way home. So, we, on our way back to England, we could go down and strafe. We did *not* indiscriminately take out civilian targets -- transportation, tanks, trucks, mostly rail. Making a second or third pass on this engine to get any steam coming out, I'm pulling up to about 4,000 feet for another run, and here comes an Me-109 right beneath me. I know he saw me, he couldn't help it, we're not more than 3 or 400 feet apart vertically. So all I have to do is make a hard left turn on him and he's headed for a cloud. That clout is not very big, so I fire a few before he gets in there, but he comes out, I fire a few more, off comes the canopy, and out comes the pilot. We had an unwritten law that we would not shoot a defenseless enemy pilot in his parachute. I never violated that, and I didn't see anybody that did, but I've heard about it. At any rate, he's in his parachute for maybe two or 3,000 feet, and he's either waving at me or shaking his fists, I don't know which, but I'm circling on the way down and when he lands, I know he thinks I'm going to take him out. Then I just waggle my wings as a salute to him and go back to England. That was my first kill. I thought, "If he's that easy today, he'll be that easy

tomorrow," but tomorrow never came for me, getting easy ones. So that was the first victory. That's quite a milestone, really, that's what you're trained for and I don't have any regrets, I did what I took an oath to do, to defend the constitution of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic. That meant more than just staying alive. So, that's number one, but we get to the real action a little bit later. We've got the preliminary of that now.

Interviewer: One thing before we get to January 1, what was the name of your plane?

Alden Rigby: Ellen and Jerry. That's after my wife and--

Interviewer: Alright, let's start again. Name of your plane was?

Alden Rigby: Name of my plane was Ellen and Jerry, painted on the nose of the aircraft in big letters.

Interviewer: Can you say that one more time, sorry.

Alden Rigby: Okay, that's all right.

Interviewer: Say, "The name of my plane was--"

Alden Rigby: The name of my plane was, I had Ellen and Jerry after my wife and newborn daughter. It was a beautiful plane, it was on a blue nose and of course the silver body of the aircraft with an "R" on the tail for Rigby. If you know, you see the aircraft, you always see the serial number in smaller letters, but you will see a large black letter on the vertical stabilizer. So I often told my wife that I had more to live and fight for than anyone I knew and that she was now going with me on every mission. It was quite a tender love story, but that happened.

Interviewer: So, set up January 1st, 1945 for us.

Alden Rigby: Okay, I think we're to where the fog closed in--

Interviewer: Mm hmm.

Alden Rigby: --and cursing the weather and you'd have to be with us to see and believe how difficult it was flying off of that little strip and actually finding that little strip after a mission. Generally, we did not carry any drop tanks, the missions being so short for the first couple of weeks there. After we could not hear the big guns to the east, we knew that the Germans were retreating. We could have had a field day, but we could not get off the ground. We left that to the people in England. On January 1st, we could finally see the trees at the end of that small strip. So we're haggling with the 9th Air Force, we're under their command now, and we're haggling with them to just let us have a look at what's going on at the "bulge". For the first half hour or so, the answer is "No. You've got to meet the heavies overhead at 10:00, or something, and escort them on to Berlin." But finally -- now, keep in mind that there are 50 P-51s on this base, and there are 50 P-47s on the other side of the strip. So, they finally give us 12 aircraft, "Start engines at 9:00, take off at 9:20, be back on the ground, I remember, at 10:30, so you can refuel, rearm, and meet the heavies overhead." So here's where it comes in that ol' Dean Houston and I are up in the mess tent -- that was the only warm place on base -- and we're supposed to find some more sober pilots to go aloft, but honestly, I didn't see any celebrating on January 31 that I knew of. It was just too miserable for anyone there. Some probably found a liquid refreshment, but I didn't see or hear of it.

Interviewer: So, this was New Year's Day?

Alden Rigby: This was New Year's morning, and little did we know that Goering, Hitler himself with Goering, the Reichsmarschall of the German Air Force, had programmed to coincide with

the Battle of the Bulge. Even weather was in their favor. They estimate 900 to 1,200 German aircraft from the eastern front -- all of the pilots and planes they had available -- to strike 16 Allied bases in the Netherlands, France, and Belgium. We're the closest base to the German border. They had designed this so their takeoff times were staggered so they would strike each of those 16 bases simultaneously and would you believe, 9:20 on New Year's Day, that's our take off time schedule. Quite a coincidence, but it's fact -- it's verified and documented. So, I'm the number 4 guy of the 12 that they authorized to fly, and we're sitting on the edge of the strip, ready to take off when we see flack and we had about four or five gun emplacements around the field. That's the announcement of something serious happening. The next thing that I see is a horde of Me-109s, they're flying top cover for the Focke-Wulf 190's, 50 to 60, to strike each base. We didn't have really a choice -- if we had, it would have been slim and none. Caught on the ground, this was the first time in European theatre and probably anywhere that American pilots had been caught in such an odds facing them. Here we are, on the ground, on the runway, we know they're going to take us out first. That's standard procedure. Here we are, loaded, internal fuel, and we have an auxiliary tank right back the armored plate. That holds only 85 gallons, but until you burn about an hour or down to 35 gallons, the weight and balance shifts to the rear, and that's a little difficult to maneuver, especially near the ground. So, we're faced with that situation on the ground, the Germans had the three key elements in air-to-air combat: speed, altitude, and surprise. We had none. We didn't wait for any direction from the tower, the makeshift tower. We generally had a control officer that would flag the next guy off after the tail comes in the air for the proceeding one. We didn't get any of that, and I'm fighting prop wash and that big Rolls Royce engine throws off a lot of prop wash, there's a lot of torque to the engine which requires a strong right leg, fighting this and prop wash and flack. I mean, those

ground troops are shooting at everybody. That's us, and there was some very strong language on the radio trying to get those shot down, but it never happened. I suppose those guys, they been trained for this also, and wanted to piece of the action, but the only good thing about it was they were not hitting anyone. So we had that to face and a guy ahead of me was named Litgey, he's German by descent and he spoke fluent German, and he was used after the war to interrogate, but he's on my left and about, maybe 150 yards ahead of me, and here comes an Focke-Wulf 109, the German raiding engine and the strafing comparable to our P-47. He's on Litgey's tail by now, he's between us. I tailed Litgey on the radio, I said, "Litgey, break left!" He's (inaudible) three and I don't want any misunderstanding on the radio. He brakes left and the Focke-Wulf 190 follows him right along, which puts him in my gun sight, and, by the way, this is the first time and to this day I don't remember turning on the guns or the gun sight. It's there. Thing were happening so fast, and instinct takes over. So that pipper, I just lined up one (inaudible) eye lead, squeeze off a few, and here's not more than 75 yards. My son counted on the film some 32 hits. You see, that close, it's kind of hard to miss. There's hits from the tail to the cockpit, back to the tail, that's number one. Now, there's another Focke-Wulf 190, and I'm still at climbing speed -- which is only 175 miles an hour or something like that -- but here's a Focke-Wulf 190 headed east just below me. So I dropped down on his tail, and keep in mind that everything is to the fire hole -- I mean, firing control, the prop angle, everything. He has the speed advantage on me until I can drop a little altitude and I fire. By the way, I had my tracers loaded only in the last 300 rounds of some 2,700. I did this because, to me, the tracers were a little deceiving. You could tell if you were shooting above or below, but not ahead or behind. They were loaded only in for every 10th round anyway, so I relied on the sight a lot. So Murphy's law comes in -- if

anything can go wrong, it will, and it did. My sight goes out, so I have to walk that thing till I finally see enough hits to crash in the trees.

Interviewer: Keeping your finger on the button, on the trigger?

Alden Rigby: Yes, all the time. But you have to be careful there, too. Perhaps 10 seconds or so of continual firing will burn the barrel out. So you have to be careful there, but I didn't worry too much about that on this day. So the trees take care of him, and now I'm in deep trouble. That fuselage tank is still mostly full, limiting my maneuverability, if I take that in the account. I'm low on ammunition, and no gun sight, but I don't have any trouble finding the field. The flack is still there and I have to chase this guy some 15, 20 miles east. So I came back to the field and I really needed what ammunition I had left for self preservation. I'm deep into that last 300 rounds, but there's a P-47 at about, oh, I think he was less than a thousand feet. He's in a left bury, a circle with a lighter Me-109, and I know that 47 cannot turn with a 109 at that altitude even on a good day, but he's still loaded. He has the initial advantage. I see a couple strikes on the tail of the 109, but then, the P-47 mashes to the outside and this guy has a clear shot. I mean, I know the name of the P-47 pilot now, and we can get to that, but I came up between them and without the gun sight, just nose ahead, maybe only 50 yards away -- we're hand-to-hand now -- and squeeze off a few. I hit the left wing, the engine, the cockpit. That's there. He crashes and I don't wait to see him crash because there're other things to be done. By eyewitness accounts, we were not that high. I know that I do not have any ammunition left, but there's the last fight of this engagement off to the south of the field, a mile or so, and I think, "Well, numbers should count for coming, even if I don't have a chance to fire away." So there're two P-51s that think they have this guy boxed in, but he's rolling that aircraft, that 109, over. Of course, by this time he's light on fuel -- for a thousand feet or so and pulling out on the tree tops. We couldn't do that

in a Mustang, we have to have a few more feet than that. Then he's back in the fight, but I don't see him firing anything. I think that probably his situation was as bad as mine, but I'm an incident bystander out there until one of those Mustangs fires a few shots at him and I thought I saw strikes, but I couldn't be sure, but enough to turn him broadside to me, something less than 50 yards away, and all I have to do is make a hard left and the last of my ammunition shatters the cockpit. So that's the end of the fight and that's the end of the entire engagement, which lasted about 25 minutes, at most. I'm not at all anxious to land. Safer in the air than it was on the ground that day with all the strafing going on, but we did not lose a man on the ground or in the air. We're talking another miracle. Three of us had shot down 12 of the 24 with the score being 24 to nothing. For this, the 47th Fighter Squadron was awarded the Presidential Citation, that's reported to be the first and only individual squadron to be award that Presidential Citation. You can read about this if you want to pull up the old newspapers, January 2, I had a copy of the *New York Times*, but I'm sure local papers had the same date. I've been going to put that up and see how it read.

Interviewer: You won an award that day, too?

Alden Rigby: The Silver Star, yes. That's the third highest award. It's quite a prize, but I just happened to be in the right place at almost the wrong time. I'm not saying that I had any advantage. Every fighter pilot combat qualified would have done the same thing given that opportunity.

Interviewer: Were there any P-47s shot down?

Alden Rigby: Pardon?

Interviewer: Were there any P-47s shot down?

Alden Rigby: One P-47 shot down, yeah. He bailed out, but I have to admit that at that time in the war, the cream of the crop was no longer with the German Air Force unless they were commanders or such as this. The commander on this day was Günther Specht. He had, I don't know how many victories, and we don't know who shot him down.

Interviewer: Do you suspect that last plane might have been his?

Alden Rigby: I don't know.

Interviewer: Is that in the account?

Alden Rigby: I have no way of knowing, but I have an eyewitness account of that last battle and he did not identify the body. He was off the base, and I'll have his personal eyewitness account in the mail tomorrow or the next day from California. I did not know he existed. He sought me out after reading some magazines and tied in that encounter. He was the operations officer of the P-47 fighter group there, so I now have an eyewitness account. I claimed only half of those two 109s because I saw them fire on the bird and at that stage in the war, the Air Force, 8th Air Force, counted ground victories the same as air. With those two that I shared, I was then an ace, so why not share those with those other two guys? Neither of those two 47th pilots, the other 11, even filed a claim for damage or anything. I was naïve and very generous, but the American Fighter Aces Association representing the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines, the AVG, all have approved those for full credit. So I have that from them as well as the 8th Air Force Historical Society, the 352nd Fighter Group, and now the (inaudible) for the Hall of Fame. So, it's pretty well settled.

Crew: Some questions for you.

Interviewer: Yeah, explain to people who don't know what flack is and why it's so dangerous. Tell them -- somebody who's never seen it or heard of it.

Alden Rigby: Well, you've seen the History Channel documentaries and those bombers walking through that flack -- it's those flack bursts. When you get close enough to where you can hear the burst, or see the flame within that burst, boy, it's time to get out of there. We had an advantage. Those poor bomber pilot crews had to fly through that stuff knowing that the Germans knew their heading, they knew their altitude, they knew their air speed. They knew they could not change any of this on their bomb run, so I have a lot of respect for those guys. We could sit out to the side or above and we take our share of flack, but not like they did. We could go up, down, out to the side, and get away from it. Those Germans were so far ahead of us in technology, they had radar control guns that would follow us right along, pick out our altitude. Keep in mind that they, after D-Day, and the Russians coming from the west, the Allies going west consolidating those guns, they took the guns with them. Some of those airfields we were strafing had three and four rings of guns around them, so it was murder.

Interviewer: Explain to us what the responsibility of a wingman is. A lot of people don't understand it.

Alden Rigby: A wingman is simply to protect the flight leader, the element leader. Generally, we go on flights of four and we always try to keep at least two together, one protecting the other. We have the flight leader, his wingman, the element leader in the same flight and his wingman. The sole purpose of those wingmen is to protect that leader. He's not on the shooting most of the time until he gets to be an element leader or a flight leader. I could interject this with George Preddy. We lost George on Christmas Day at Y-29. He was the best and he assigned me to fly

his wing, he and Preddy's wing, maybe my first 10 missions. I'm supposed to protect those guys and I'm the new kid on the block. I had the impression of Preddy, especially, he knew I was a father and I think he assigned me so he could protect me, in part. He was that good, really.

Interviewer: Yeah, he was the top ace?

Alden Rigby: Yes, he's still the top Mustang ace, yeah.

Interviewer: So you were his body guard for that.

Alden Rigby: Yes, essentially, supposed to be. Let's put it that way.

Interviewer: Explain to people, I have several questions. Explain to people what drop tanks are.

Alden Rigby: They're, you'll see them under each wing. There's 75 gallons, later they built cardboard with 108 gallons, and that's what they used on the shuttle to Russia and down back to Italy and back. I didn't get on that, that fell to another squadron. The drop tanks, I should explain the controls just a little bit. On the stick, that's the maneuverability, but on top of the stick, you have a button. That's drops, and we could carry either drop tanks or a 500 pound bomb under each wing. So you just punch that top button and they're gone.

Interviewer: These were full of gasoline.

Alden Rigby: Yes, 150-octane.

Interviewer: To extend your range.

Alden Rigby: Yes, uh huh. We had about three and a half internally, but that increased it to almost double, and we needed every drop sometimes.

Interviewer: Which brings us, tell me about Berlin -- flying over Berlin.

Alden Rigby: Well, there was a lot of flack. I only really saw good weather and any definitive positions on the ground two or three times. I remember one time they assigned the bombers to Berlin at 12,000 feet. We questioned the reality of having them do this.

Interviewer: Why is 12,000 feet so--

Alden Rigby: That's so low and vulnerable to ground fire, anti-aircraft. I don't know what the bomber pilots thought of this, but we thought it was almost suicide to send them in at that low altitude. Of course, that brings us down to fly top cover for them to an altitude comfortable. I remember seeing the large stadiums and things that they had there, but at this time of the war too, there was a lot of rubble. You don't have time, really, when you're in a fighter situation to take in the scenery. I mean, you're so busy doing other things, especially in the target area. So for a fighter pilot, it's a little bit different. You're also, if you're a wingman, you've got to keep the guy, the wing, the leader in toll, so you're always looking in the sky for other birds. There's not any time for scenery unless it's on the way home and nothing else going on.

Interviewer: Why were you so determined to get overseas into combat?

Alden Rigby: Well, I could see the writing on the wall. It was coming, no doubt about it. They had enough instructors, not that I wanted so much a piece of the action, but it turned out so well and I had had so many disappointments in location and things were falling in place and I just had the feeling that by the time I got overseas, I had almost double the time in that aircraft that other people had that went before me out of my classes, so one other plus. Actually, things fell into place so well that it opened doors following the war for aviation career and still in the Korean War, a little bit. I got recalled for that in Kansas City, but the big thing that led to was a position

with the Federal Aviation Administration, the best of both worlds for 25 years. I don't have any regrets, any of it.

Interviewer: Tell me about Antwerp and the buzz bombs.

Alden Rigby: Antwerp -- that was buzz bomb alley. If you know buzz bombs, that's the V-1. That was Hitler's first secret weapon. That's a pulse jet engine, not manned, loaded with only enough fuel to strike a target. When that, when you hear the rumble die down, that thing just goes down. Antwerp was buzz bomb alley, and the night that we stayed there, there were only three hotels still standing in that whole city. There wasn't much sleep that night because we could hear the continual roar of buzz bombs. We had the foolish idea, "If it's got your name on it, that's the time to worry." You're 21 years old, there's not much, I mean, you have your anxious moments, but it's not like it would be now.

Interviewer: These were crude cruise missiles?

Alden Rigby: Very crude, yeah. They'd cruise at probably 400 miles an hour and we could, I've shot at them before, but we left that to the typhoons and those with canons. To get close enough to those to blow them up, they would be in your face.

Interviewer: You said that in your writings that there was a tragedy in the theatre at a Christmas party with children.

Alden Rigby: Oh, that's a difficult one. When we landed at Antwerp, after not finding Y-29, the British had a Spitfire group there, and we had a nice, long runway to land on for a change. The British driver that picked us up and hauled us to town -- just before this, I was standing, I'm in a brand new airplane. I got the name painted on it, this was the first combat, first time across the

channel. As I was climbing out of the cockpit and taking off my suit, the life preserver, there's a huge explosion and a V-2, that's the latest. I mean, that's the rocket, fired on a trajectory and when it hits the altitude it comes down and the trajectory is just like this or this to hit the target. So, I'm dodging debris from across the field of those Spitfires. I even got under the wing too in case, but I thought, "Here's the first flight across the channel in my new aircraft and to have it damaged without any combat time on it, that was a downer." The British driver passed by what was earlier in the day a theatre. There was something over 100 children and parents in that theatre for a Christmas celebration, and it was reduced to rubble. I mean, the smoke and things are still there. I mean, talk about impressionable to four young fighter pilots. We had seen a lot of destruction from the air, but nothing at ground level like that. That takes its toll.

Interviewer: Tell us about, okay, one last thing on that January 1st mission. How many American aircraft were destroyed that day?

Alden Rigby: We had reports from anywhere, 300-400 on the ground. There weren't many Allied aircraft destroyed in the air. I don't have the account, it's in the (inaudible) book in detail of how many were lost, how many were missing in action, how many were POW's, but they lost their heart of their Air Force that day.

Interviewer: What's a "miner's shower?"

Alden Rigby: Well, it's a rough -- it was heaven, once a week, or fewer times than that.

Interviewer: Is that how you pronounce it?

Alden Rigby: Miner's, yeah.

Interviewer: Miner's shower?

Alden Rigby: Yes, see, this area is mining and they have slag piles, underground mining and the miners had showers in some building there. We tried once each week for the time we were there to hit those showers. That was heaven. I mean, we are in the same clothes that we came in and those old olive drabs and leather jackets and we did not come prepared to stay. We thought we'd be back in England shortly, knowing that we could take care of the bulge, you know, we were that confident. We had a shaving kit and that was about it. So, the showers, as bad as they were, I don't remember the temperature of the water, but I don't think we had the best of facilities there.

Interviewer: You lost a wingman one day.

Alden Rigby: Oh, yeah. The only wingman I lost. It was while we were at Y-29. I don't have the date without my log book, but we were over Cologne, and that's only perhaps 15 minutes east of Y-29 and the Roer River Valley, that industrial area, was a hot spot. I mean, they consolidated their guns there to protect their industry. We took more flack from there and we were at lower altitudes generally there, so we were susceptible and we were coming back from something on Cologne on target, some kind of surveillance, and my wingman takes a direct hit. Of course, that's the end, so I had to report that as KIA, but that's tough to lose a wingman. It just takes one, at that low altitude, it just takes one burst, and that's it.

Interviewer: Tell us about coming home. What was that like, to come home to Utah?

Alden Rigby: Incredible.

Interviewer: Tell us how it all happened.

Alden Rigby: Willy Miller and I were in about the same situation. I met him in Tallahassee on our way to England. He had trained with a different base prior to that. He had a daughter about

the same age as mine, and we had a lot in common and flew our missions, lots of them together. We finished our missions the same day. We came home, our orders were cut -- just he and I -- and we left Scotland, Edinburgh, on a C-54, flying home which was a real advantage too instead of coming boat-wise. So we get to Washington, D.C., at what's the name, National Airport. First we landed at Iceland to refuel, and boy, that's a whole, I mean, the air was cold, the wind was blowing, it was night, and hoping for no layover there. We got to Washington National and both of us kind of kissed the ground. We parted ways to, he's to Columbus, Ohio and me to Salt Lake. We've kept in close contact ever since.

Interviewer: And how did you get to Salt Lake?

Alden Rigby: Let's see, coming that way, it was by train, all the way. Going from Washington to Chicago, I had almost forgotten there was a war on, and the accommodations on that train were not the best. I complained a little bit, thinking that I deserved something better. From there on, I had a Pullman. There was a young woman, I'm sure her husband was overseas, but was so far along and I gave her my lower berth. I took the upper one.

Interviewer: She was pregnant?

Alden Rigby: Oh, yeah. She, on the way home, she doubted that I was -- I didn't wear my ribbons or anything. I just came as I was when I got off the bird and she questioned whether I'd been overseas or not. So, I had to pull the ribbons out and put them on before I got home to convince anybody I'd been anywhere.

Interviewer: So, did you pull into Salt Lake City on a train?

Alden Rigby: Well, into Salt Lake, and would you believe, I had to ride the Bamberger from Salt Lake to Logan? Meeting my wife -- it was noon time, and the first part of April -- and I met her at the Bamberger Train Station, and the kids were all out for lunch. We met in the middle of the street. She had lived with her folks in Logan for the time I was gone. So it was quite a reunion. She noticed that I had lost some weight and some hair, but other than that, it was great. You get to a point where you wonder if that day will ever come. I kept her fully aware of the missions and what kind of missions I had left and when it got to within the last 10 or so, I figured, it was time to just let her on even more of what I was doing. There is that point where, you've seen so much destruction, you've seen your friends go. As a matter of fact, I had to, with Cliff Wilcox, he was the only other Utah pilot in the group. On August 6th, he came up missing. So I had been there such a short time. I graduated with that guy. I had to write to his folks and send his belongings home, write to his fiancée. That is tough, and we lost about three in our hut, is so-called that I was living in.

Interviewer: So, looking back all those years now. You led a full life, obviously.

Alden Rigby: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell us about your thoughts about World War II and United States.

Alden Rigby: Well, World War II was something that had to be done. I mean, we were in a world conflict that, if lost, we would have been in sad shape. That was one, there was no question that there was divine inspiration, guidance, there was help from above and preserving this great nation. The only nation on earth where things could have happened following World War II and before. I mean, we're a blessed nation. There is no doubt about that. It comes with winning a war and I hate to think what would have happened had it not turned out that way.

There's divine intervention in all of our lives, no doubt about me. I mean, I'm not that good, but I can do things alone. I'm the first to admit were it not for divine intervention, I would not be with you today. No question. Someday, I hope to find out what I did or what I should be doing now to justify this.

Interviewer: Is Elizabeth here?

Alden Rigby: She's probably asleep.

Elizabeth: I'm right here.

Interviewer: Is she in the audience? I usually ask my producer if they have -- I ask the producer if I have any more questions. Do you have any more questions?

Unknown Person: Um, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Well, that's wonderful. It was a wonderful interview. Is there anything we haven't covered that you want to talk about?

Alden Rigby: I don't know that I do now. I'll think about it when I get home. I'll e mail you.

Interviewer: Well, we may have you come back.

Alden Rigby: I'd be glad to.

Interviewer: We're very honored to have you here.

Alden Rigby: Well, it was an honor to be with this station at KUED. I mean, we watch that often and you're doing a great educational service, I'll tell you that.

Interviewer: Thank you. It means a lot to us.

Alden Rigby: Oh, I'm sure, yeah.

Interviewer: This has been a very successful series. We've won all sorts of awards.

Alden Rigby: Well, I hope this interview turns out as I hope the History Channel on the week from Friday turns out.

Interviewer: March 7th.

Alden Rigby: March 7th, yeah.

Interviewer: A whole hour on dog fights, is that right?

Alden Rigby: It will probably be two hours, just on this one episode. It will be, I was under the lights in Seattle for about two hours. Of course, there's probably a half a dozen others in the same air battle

Interviewer: Really?

Alden Rigby: That will give their version. Well, there's only two of us there, but there is one P-47 pilot with their part of the story.

Interviewer: Good grief.

Alden Rigby: So there's two of the us, Sandy Mulch and myself were the only other two interviewed. Well, there's about, there's four of us alive out of the 12. Two of those are physically unable to participate anymore.

Unknown Person: You said, you had the first kill, where you said, when your son was watching the film?

Alden Rigby: Oh, yeah. The first kill on New Year's Day, yes.

Interviewer: Are we still rolling?

Unknown Person: Tell us about gun camera film.

Alden Rigby: Oh, yes, a 16 millimeter camera mounted in the left wing route. You'll see a little square, you'll probably see it on that painting that I gave you. That's a 16 millimeter camera and you'll have the switches and you can use camera only for training, but combat, you just switch that to both -- keep it there all the time.

Interviewer: So, when your guns fire, the camera records.

Alden Rigby: Absolutely. You've got to remember that the ideal conditions are not there. You're shooting in the sun and you don't take into account positions or anything. So some of that film is not that good. At my time of the war, it was not over when I finished my missions. So, the fighter group, I suppose this came from head quarters, the 8th Air Force, somewhere, but they censored any film that carried markings. All of mine were so close for markings and they said they'll give it to me after the war. It never happened. We've tried to trace that down, but--

Interviewer: So your son actually had some kind of film?

Alden Rigby: I've, we've got the first part. Did you see, it was on the, in my room?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Alden Rigby: That's right there.

Interviewer: Stills.

Alden Rigby: Stills.

Interviewer: You have a little bit of that on video?

Alden Rigby: We couldn't transfer it to DVD. It didn't come out--

Interviewer: Okay.

Alden Rigby: --and this is so old now

Interviewer: Is it on video?

Alden Rigby: Yeah.

Interviewer: Let us try.

Alden Rigby: We've got a, the (inaudible) is that one.

Interviewer: That's fine. Let us try. Yeah, I can let you. I see if we can get a copy.

Interviewer: That's a deal.

Alden Rigby: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you very much.

Alden Rigby: Oh, you're welcome, Jeffrey.

End of recording.