

Interview of Leo W. Hardy

Interviewer: Did you have a conversation with him.

Leo W. Hardy: Yes I definitely did.

Interviewer: What was that about?

Leo W. Hardy: Well, I was hitching a ride from Fort Mead, Maryland to Washington, D.C., to see my sister who was a secretary to General Bevens, the Director of Army Air Forces. As I was hitching a ride, here comes this limousine, two motor cycles with the big limousine, and flags flying all over. This gentleman leaned out and said, would you like a ride, "lieutenant?" Of course, you know, a commissioned officer is not supposed to hitch a ride because he's supposed to make enough money that pays fair. But it was too late for me to say anything else, so I said "Yes." So I rode all the way in to Washington and when we got there, Marshal told the chauffeur, "I won't be needing you anymore. Take Lieutenant Hardy any place he wants to go. And I said, "No, no, no. I won't need no limousine." He says, "I don't need my limousine, he'll take you anywhere." So he gets out, covers the stars on the license plate, takes down the flag and the two motorcycle MP's left, and the chauffer says, "Where do you want to go?" I sais, "I want to go to General Bevan's office." He said, "Well, that's just around the

corner." And I said, "Well, that's where I want to go." So he took me there, and then he says, "I'll wait right here till you get through." I said, "No, no, no. I don't need no limousine anymore." So that's the story about General Marshal.

Interviewer: I like that. Alright, are we ready to go here?

Leo W. Hardy: Yeah, we're ready to go.

Interviewer: Okay, uh, what's your full name?

Leo W. Hardy: Leo Wendel Hardy, H-A-R-D-Y.

Interviewer: And where were your born?

Leo W. Hardy: I was born on a farm three and 3/4 miles south east of Paris, Illinois, 21 miles straight west of Terre Haute, Indiana across the Wabash.

Interviewer: And you grew up there?

Leo W. Hardy: I grew up and when I was 19 years old -- well, I'll tell you more. I was born August 22, 1920, on a farm. I went to grade school in one-room school with one teacher, eight grades. I graduated from there and went to Paris High School, graduated from there in 1938, attended East Illinois State University for a year. Then I volunteered for the Army on August the 7th, 1940, and I was sent to the Presidio of Monterey, California. I was put in the quarter master corps, and I

issued a uniform to Jackie Coogan, who said that he wanted a size 32 shirt, 38 blouse, and so on. I gave him a World War I uniform, but I didn't think that that was what I was in the service for, a quarter-master. So I volunteered to go to Fort Ord, California. I was put in the 7th Infantry Division, the 32nd Infantry Regiment, the anti-tank company. I stayed there for a period of time, and I was home sick because I was a farm boy and I never traveled away from home. I was home sick and I wanted to go back east. So, I saw a sign on the bulletin board that says, "Anyone that wants to go to Guam, sign up here." Well, I knew the Army does everything backwards -- they make a cook a mechanic and so forth. I thought, "Uh huh, if I just sign up here, they'll send me to Paris, Illinois." Well, guess what -- they did. They sent me to Fort Douglas, Utah, and believe it or not, the same group that was with me in the Presidio of Monterey had already transferred and opened the reception center at Fort Douglas and they even had my bed made for me when I got there. Well, it was Colonel Kaiser was the commanding officer of Fort Douglas and that's where I met Hobie Carmichael and Gene Tierney and George Montgomery and all of these movie stars and actors, but I had made up my mind. I wanted to be a commissioned officer. See, I was making 21 dollars a month, which was not very much. My goal was to be a commissioned officer. Every day, I'd talk to Colonel Kaiser, and he'd say, "Well, you're not even a non-commissioned officer." And I said, "Well, you could make

me one." He said, "Not going to do it." Finally, at the end of a period of time, he sent me to infantry school and I graduated and became a commissioned officer September 19th of '42. Was sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in the 9th Infantry Division, and from there I marched all the way to Fort Mead, Maryland. I don't know if I know how far that is, but I had blisters on my feet along with everyone else. Major General Smith was reprimanded because of that. Of course, the story of George C. Marshal goes from Fort Mead to Washington. What I wanted to do was get into the Air Force like my brother who was in bombardier school in Midspring, Texas. Believe it or not, that little sister of mine prevailed on General Bevans and I was sent to pre-flight school at Ellington Field, Texas, and from there to bombardier school the 43-9 class in Midland, Texas. I graduated from the bombardier school there and I was sent immediately to Tucson, Arizona, at Davis-Monthan. From there I was sent to Lowery Field to be a gun commander on a B-29. Well, a week before the graduation, they cancelled it and said, "You weren't going to be on a B-29." So they sent me to Mountain Home, Idaho, as a bombardier instructor. I was an instructor there for a period of time, not only in bombing, but also was certified as a teacher in the automatic pilot, the C-1 autopilot. From there, I was transferred to Tonopah, Nevada, another desolate spot, and I made up my mind at that time along with -- all of my crew were all instructors -- we volunteered for overseas duty. We went from there to Hamilton

Field, California, and from there, to Townsville, Australia where I started my combat missions. It's the 13th Air Force, the 307th Bomb Group -- long-rangers -- the 370th Bomb Squadron. My first mission was on Yap Island. I remember seeing flack, as the sky was completely black, and I asked this training bombardier who went with me on my first mission, I said, "What's that?" And he says, "That's flack. You'll find out what it is when we get there." I did. I'll never forget that. Anyway, I flew two missions on Yap Island, and I can't remember now, I have a record that tells me the exact weight of the bombs, most of them were 500 pound bombs. If you know anything about bombs, they have two rings on them, and the bomb shackle hooks into those rings. Then the shackle is fastened to the stantion in the bomb bays and, there's an arming wire with a ring on it that hooks to the center of the shackle, and the arming wire goes down into the fuse. On one of my missions, I noticed that one of the bombs didn't go out of the bomb bay. So I told the pilot that I'd have to crawl back to the crawl space to the catwalk and find out why the bomb hadn't released. Well, when where got there, the nose of the bomb was hanging down, and the arming wire was pulled out of the nose fuse and I knew immediately that bomb would explode in a short period of time. Here I am standing on this catwalk which is only a foot wide with air rushing in all directions and I thought, "What am I going to do to get this bomb out?" I turned around this way, and I saw a fire axe hanging on the pilot's compartment wall. I grabbed that

fire axe, and I thought, “If I can just hit that ring on the shackle that fashions through the stanchion, maybe the bomb will go out of the airplane.” That's exactly what happened, and the next thing I knew, I was lying in the pilot's compartment. It blew me through the door onto the floor in the pilot's compartment. When it dropped out, it exploded and it kicked me out and threw me through that little door, that's only this wide and that high. That was on one mission.

Interviewer: So that exploded just as it cleared the airplane?

Leo W. Hardy: That's right, and when it did, it through me through there. I flew.

Elizabeth: Can you have him say that?

Interviewer: Can you say that, what I asked you? Be more -- just say, rather than me asking you that and a yes or no answer, illustrate it. Tell us, you know what I'm saying? Tell us it exploded just as it cleared the airplane.

Leo W. Hardy: Yeah. When the bomb released, when I hit the ring on the shackle, the bomb fell, and when it fell, it exploded. Of course, the airplane traveled forward, but the concussion threw the tail of the airplane up in the air and threw me through the door into the pilot's compartment. That's the story of the fire axe. I can also tell you that when I was at Tonapah, Nevada -- as you know, the bombardier is the gun commander on a bomber. Anyway, I was to teach the gunners how to

fire the Sperry Ball Turret. Well, at Tonapah they had installed this Sperry Ball Turret, but he forgot to put the throat mic and the ear phones in the ball turret. And Kelly, my nose gunner, I asked him to get into the ball and I'd crank him down and he said, "No, lieutenant. Would you get in it first?" And I said, "Sure." He cranked me down, but I had no communications with the rest of the crew because of the no throat mic or ear phones. But apparently they had trouble with the airplane. Now, I can truthfully tell you that I am the only man that has ever flown below sea level, under the ground, and lived to tell the story. And how that happened -- I was flying over Death Valley, and when the belly-landed the airplane, I was buried in the sand under the airplane. They had to break the plexiglass to get me out. So I was flying below sea level, under the ground, and I'm here to tell you.

Interviewer: Okay, so you were still in the ball turret when the plane belly landed? Why don't you say that.

Leo W. Hardy: I was *in* the ball turret when the plane belly-landed on Death Valley, and they had to break the plexiglass and dig the sand out to get me out of the ball turret.

Interviewer: Tell us what, what happened. Tell us what you were seeing at that moment. Were you facing forward?

Leo W. Hardy: I was facing forward toward the nose of the airplane when the plane belly-landed and it bent the structure of the Sperry Ball Turret back and drug me into the sand. Now, if it would have been dirt, I wouldn't be here, but it was sand and I was saved. Like I say, I flew a number of missions. As I went overseas, I went over entirely with an instructional crew -- the pilot, the copilot, the navigator, the bombardier, the gunners, and a crew chief were all instructors -- but when we got overseas, because of the last mission that they flew and lost so many planes and crews, they split us all up. I flew my 52 combat missions with 15 different crews. That means that my chance of survival was cut pretty slim, but I'm here to tell the story. I flew missions over Corregidor three times, three missions on Corregidor. As you know, Corregidor was the place where General Wainwright surrendered. They had gun emplacements there in concrete revampment or, I don't know what you call it, placements. Anyway, I was to drop bombs directly on the gun because the Japanese were using those guns to fire at our Navy.

Interviewer: So these were American guns?

Leo W. Hardy: These were American guns that we had to bomb to neutralize because the Japanese had taken them over and the Navy had requested the heavy bomb squadron and group for precision bombing on the northern bomb site, and I did that. Like I say, I bombed Corregidor three times. I bombed Clark Field,

which is on Luzon, a number of times. I had night missions on Mindanao with fire bombs, and I blew up an ammunition dump. I'll tell you another story, if it's all right with you.

Interviewer: Please.

Leo W. Hardy: Just before I finished with my mission and was heading to come home, 26 other fliers had completed their missions and were on their way home.

As they took off -- now this is a week before I was to go -- they hit a palm tree and it killed them. Of course, then I was a little apprehensive about flying after I flew all of those missions, but I flew to Taclogan, and there they put me on a C-53 airplane to take me back to the states. Well, they didn't take me back to the states. They took me to (inaudible) and they kicked me off the airplane and said, "We're going to use this airplane for the wounded. You're going to have to find your way back the best way you could." Well, my orders read that I could go any way that I could find transportation. I hitched a ride on a C-46 which had a sawmill inside -- two timbers and a saw across this way. There was a little infantry man that hitched a ride along with me. Now, we blue from (inaudible) to Peleliu, on Palau Island. Of course, I'd bombed that island before. That's one, another island that I bombed. Anyhow, when we got there, I should have known that I made a mistake from the start, because when we took off, I was looking out of the window of the airplane

and I could see liquid coming off of the wings. So I went up and I asked the crew chief if he'd sealed the wing tanks, and he said, "Oh, I forgot." Well, we had to go back and land, and they refilled the airplane. That should have told me, "I shouldn't do this." Anyway, I did it, and we took off again and flew to Peleliu. Then from pillalua, I asked the control officer how the weather was to Taclogan where I'd taken off a few days before. He said, "The weather's beautiful. Don't need to worry anything about it." Well, no more than took off, and we run in to the darnedest storm you ever saw. Every time that we'd go along, all at once the engine would conk off and we'd go down, and we'd restart. It kept on, this, all the way until finally I told this young infantryman, I said, "I'm going to bail out of this airplane." I had my "Mae West" and my parachute with me. So I went up to tell the pilot I was going to bail out and he said, "Well, I don't think you will because we're on the white caps now." I looked out of the airplane, of course the inside was all moisture, you couldn't see anything. Anyhow, we landed in the water between two ships in the Taclogan harbor. As I opened the door of the airplane, there were six sailors in a boat that wanted to grab me and pull me into the boat and I said, "No, there's another man in here." And they said, "Well get him." So I got the infantry youngster. Prior to this, I had experience in my education about what happens when you ditch an airplane in water. So I told this youngster, I says, "You grab ahold of the side of the airplane and put your foot on this timber, and I'll

do the same on the other side." Well, I ended up on my back in the middle of the airplane, and he was still hanging onto the back of the airplane. Well, I got him into the boat and I said, "There's three more in there," and the plane started to tip up and go down. I was screaming at them to get those other three, and to this day, I don't know what happened to those three -- the pilot, copilot, and the crew chief. They took me back to the airbase on Taclogan, and believe it or not, the same man who put me on the C-53 to go back to the states says, "What are you doing here?" I says, "Well, it's a long story." And he says, "I will put you on the very first plane going to the states." And I says, "You'll do no such thing. I'll never fly again." He says, "Well, you go over there and sit on that cot and think about it." Well, I did, and I flew back to the states later in that day.

The two missions that I was really scared about: the first mission was on Balikpapan, the oil refinery on Borneo. I was to take off from Noemfoor Island and fly to Balikpapan, which is a round trip of 2,500 miles. We had fuel enough to get to the target and back *if* we didn't have a headwind one way. Well, when you fly that many miles, who knows whether you're going to run into a headwind. Anyhow, we hit the target, I dropped my bombs, and immediately, the zeros started to attack our airplane. One of my gunners later said that we had 17 fighters shooting at us alone. We got down on the water and passed what little ammunition we had to the top turret gunner so he could scare off the zeros till we could out-

distance them. We knew that they couldn't fly as long as we could because of the fuel. Anyway, we landed at Noemfoor on the runway and ran out of fuel. We were so shook up that we didn't even realize that our tail gunner was dead until the next day. We went down to headquarters and we turned in our wings and the nine of us left. Immediately, General MacArthur sent General Whitehead up to court martial us. He says, "You guys can be shot for turning in your wings." We laughed at him. And he says, "I'm serious." And we laughed. And then we said, "Why don't you go out and take a look at an airplane and then come back and talk to us." He went out and when he came back in, he was the most humble man you've ever saw. He says, "Guys, you must have gone through hell." He says, "If you'll fly one more mission on Balikpapan," he says, "I promise you you'll have more fuel, less bomb load, more ammunition, fighter escort." We laughed at him and we said, "We have citations for shooting down more fighters than any other bomber group in the South Pacific." He says, "You'll have fighter escort." And he says, "One other thing. I am going to give you all a medal." Here he was going to shoot us, now he was going to give us a medal. Well, believe it or not, uh, my first mission was October the 10th, 1944, in Balikpapan, that's where I lost my tail gunner. The next mission was October the 14th, 1944, and they did have fighter escort. And he was right about everything, they even had molded tanks in the front bomb bays for extra fuel. I saw, I'm not sure whether it was Major Bong, who was

a war ace in the South Pacific, or some other fighter, shoot down two Jap zeros that day. The way they did it is they, the zero would be flying this way and there would be two wing guys come in this direction and, then the one that would kill the Jap zero came from above down. I saw them shoot down two that day.

Interviewer: Those were P-38 fighters you were watching?

Leo W. Hardy: P-38s, that's true. Would you believe now, we had P-38s over there in different places, but I never saw any when I was on my other missions.

Anyhow, when they first brought over the P-51s, they didn't even have guns or ammunition in those and the P-38s shot those first group of 51s down. Our *own* people shot.

Interviewer: This was by mistake?

Leo W. Hardy: Of course, and in war, there's always mistakes. As a matter of fact, I can tell you one sad mistake. I can't say it was my fault, but it was on Mindanao and it was a combined light and heavy fighter plane strafing mission. The fighter planes would come in first, and then the light bombers, and then we were to come in after. I was leading the group that day, and I had just synchronized on the target and I saw a plane fly underneath and I immediately jammed the bomb bay doors and called the friendly planes below us that we'd make another pass. Well,

apparent an LT, one of my bombardiers in another squadron, didn't have his ear phones on. He dropped a 500 pound bomb right on one of the C-25s, a medium bomb and blew it all to pieces. Of course, there was a big hearing after that and they wanted to know why I was bombing my own planes. I said that I closed the bomb bays and called the friendly planes below us, "We'd make another pass," but I don't know what happened to the other bombardier in this case.

One time, when I was on a single sortie from Noemfoor Island to Tarakan -- which is the hog's head on the end of Borneo -- I sank seven barges in the harbor and blew up two oil tankers that day, and that was a single plane. Then there was another mission I flew on a single sortie with one plane where I saw an oil tanker -- Japanese oil tanker -- and I sunk it, and the sailors on that ship were swimming in the water with all the fire and turmoil. My gunners asked if I wanted them to fire on those and I said, "No." When we got back for interrogation, the interrogating officer asked that very question whether we'd fired on this innocent people and we said, "No." And they said, "Well, if you had, you'd be court martialed for doing this because of the acts of war." A lot of people talk about the atrocities and this sort of thing, and they ask if I saw any Americans doing anything like that. I can truthfully say I never heard of any of our people doing anything that I didn't feel were outside the rules of war. However, I can't say that about the Japanese. I saw many, many times when the planes would be disabled and the crews would have to

bail out. I saw the Japanese zeros not only tip the wing, or tip the parachutes with the wing, but also shoot the helpless people as they was coming down in the airplane.

I have to tell you one story about saving my nose gunner. As you know, on a B-24 Liberator, the bombardier's compartment is kind of under the nose turret and there's a little partition about eight to ten inches high that separates the bombardier's compartment from the nose wheel doors. I was lying in the catwalk with a blanket over my head with my ear phones on this one mission. I heard the pilot keep calling for the nose gunner. Finally, the pilot said, "Leo, will you check and see what's happened to Kelly?" I said, "Sure." So when I went up -- prior to this, we had been in a storm and the pilot had lowered the landing gear to stabilize the airplane. Well, when I got up to the bombardier's compartment, here's my nose gunner hanging on that partition flopping up against the nose wheel door. If he hadn't have had his parachute harness on, I could have never got him in the airplane. But I pulled him while holding on to the parachute harness, I pulled him into the airplane and saved his life.

Interviewer: So, the wheel well for the nose wheel is open.

Leo W. Hardy: Yes.

Interviewer: You can fall through if you're not careful because it's spring-loaded.

Leo W. Hardy: That's right. See, what happens, the cover that covers the nose wheel opens this way, and the wheel drops down and there's the open space where he's hanging, flopping up against the nose wheel and I pulled him into the airplane. I probably have a lot of other stories to tell you but, uh, probably you're getting tired of hearing me talk.

Interviewer: No, no, no. This is a great interview.

Crew: It is.

Interviewer: I have a couple questions for you. Let's see here. Tell us about -- you flew 52 missions. How many missions were you just supposed to fly in the South Pacific before you were sent home?

Leo W. Hardy: 25.

Interviewer: How did you end up flying 50?

Leo W. Hardy: I volunteered because I wanted to. Like I say, a farm boy who was home sick, who wanted to come back to the United States, and I volunteered for every mission. There was only one mission I didn't fly on that I was scheduled to fly and I woke up, I was to take off at 2:00 in the morning on a mission, and I

woke up in the middle of the night and my left arm was aching and when I turned on the light, my arm was black. So I went to the dispensary, and they said I had either been stung by a scorpion or some other insect and that I would be grounded for a week. So I was grounded for a week, but other than that, I flew every mission I could fly.

Interviewer: Europe gets all this press attention about the air war in Europe.

Leo W. Hardy: I know about the air war in Europe.

Interviewer: Tell us what makes the South Pacific so different.

Leo W. Hardy: Well, the problem that was different in the South Pacific, every mission that I flew -- with the exception of the Halmaheras and some of those missions there -- was over water. We took off in a jungle and flew over water to the target. It seemed like every mission I flew and every time I flew, it was storming. It was rain, rain, rain, and storm. Seemed like every mission. I don't know, I'll tell you of one more story. I'm not sure whether it's Henderson Field or just where it was, but our commander said, "We're going on a mission in the morning. I want all of the planes taken out of the revetment areas, and you know what a revetment area is, taken out of it and parked on the taxi strip. Well, my tent and everything was about seven miles from the air strip. Believe it or not, a loan

Jap Betty airplane dropped one bomb on one of our airplanes, and it was just like dominos -- bing, bing, bing. I was seven miles, and I saw the sky light up. Then all at once I felt like my pants would fly back against my legs and then I heard the explosion of each one of our airplane as it blew up. We could not take off because we did not have any airplanes. We had to go to Townsville, Australia to get our airplanes so we could fly again. But that's another story.

Interviewer: What were the casualty rates like in your bomb group, in your bomb squadron?

Leo W. Hardy: On one mission, on that mission on Balikpapan, we lost almost half of our group, which is a lot of airplanes and a lot of people. When you stop and think that there's 10 men on each airplane, and we had approximately 10 planes to each squadron, and we had four squadrons -- we had 370, 371, 372, and 424 -- we lost an awful lot of airplanes. On the mission, oh, I forgot now, where we dropped 2,000 tons of bombs on this target. I have a tape, but I can't remember, I think it was Truk that we bombed all of these tons of bombs on it. No, it was Rabaul, and we got a citation for that.

Interviewer: Rabaul was known as the "Fortress of the Pacific."

Leo W. Hardy: That's right.

Interviewer: When you say that, tell us what the defenses were like for Rabaul.

Leo W. Hardy: Right, uh.

Interviewer: What made it so different from other targets?

Leo W. Hardy: The thing about the South Pacific -- after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese took over most of the islands and things in the South Pacific. The two Air Forces, the 5th Air Force and the 13th, started out and they had to go through the Gilbert Islands and all the way through the Dutch East Indies and the Bismarck Archipelago, all the way to the Philippines, and from the Philippines also Borneo. Of course, you also had to go through Kwajalein and Iwo Jima, so that you could use the B-29s and they'd have fighter escort to Japan, and that would be the end of the war when that took place. The B-24 Liberators, with the "Jolly Rogers" outfit - - I call them the Jolly Rogers, the 5th Air Force -- and they got all of the credit. I have to say this: we were always assigned a target, and we'd bomb it at night. When we get to where we'd bomb it in the day time, low and behold the 5th Air Force would come in and they'd take our target. There would be a big write up, "The 5th Air Force hits Peleliu or Palau Island or Yap Island," or one of those other islands and other targets. They got the credit, but the Royal 13th Air Force, which was just a small air force, didn't get the credit for doing those things.

Interviewer: Tell us the nickname of your bomb group and what made it so special.

Leo W. Hardy: The group, the “Long Rangers,” which had an LR-stylized circle with a big “LR” on it. The reason why they called it the “Long Rangers” was the fact that we flew such long missions. It’s just like the two missions I flew on Balikpapan, Borneo. There're books written that tell the story about the (inaudible) raid in the South Pacific, and that is Balikpapan. That's the missions I flew on.

Interviewer: All right, you were telling me that earlier in the war, you had to trade off between ammo and bombs and because you couldn't carry the weight in fuel.

Tell us about that.

Leo W. Hardy: Well, our airplane, to give you an idea, the B-24. Well, first, the B-17 was first in the 13th Air Force, but then they did away with the 17s because they couldn't fly as far and couldn't carry as big a bomb load as the B-24s. Well, the B-24s, the maximum payload is 58,000 pounds. A lot of times we flew over 60,000 pounds, which was well-over loaded for the distance we had to travel. On that one mission on Balikpapan, on October the 10th, 1944, we lost two airplanes on takeoff. We took off on corral with medal mats over it, and they were like this. I can remember that we had to bounce our airplane to get it up to where we could raise the wheels. Some of those airplanes didn't do that, two of them went right off the end of the runway right into the water and blew up. So we lost two on that

mission just on takeoff alone. That's basically why they called us the "Long Rangers." and why we had two Presidential Citations and a Citation for the Liberation of the Philippines, and another citation, I don't remember what it was for. I think it was for bombing Rabaul.

Interviewer: All right, tell us about your crew, your fellow crewman -- this guy, Kelly, that you rescued.

Leo W. Hardy: Yeah, well--

Interviewer: You must have been pretty close after that.

Leo W. Hardy: Well, very close.

Interviewer: Tell us.

Leo W. Hardy: The thing about our crews is we -- I think the bombardier was closer to the gunners than any of the other officers in the group because I was always telling them about, calling out fighters to them, and we were talking about our weapons. Oh, by the way, there's another story.

Since I was commissioned in the infantry, on one of the islands, Tokyo Rose called and said, "You guys in the 307th Bomb Group had better move because 40,000 of our Imperial troops are just across the bay and they're going to be taken over."

Well, immediately, the group commander came to me and says, "You got to figure out what our defense is on this island." Well, here we are on corral, and corral is just like rock, almost. We didn't have any picks or anything to dig holes in the corral, and all we were issued was 45s, and how was we going to protect ourselves on that island with that? I told the group commander that what we should do is jump in our airplanes and take off. He said, "No, you've got to figure out some way of doing this." Well, believe it or not, I found some oil drums and filled it with sand and found some timbers, trees that had been blew up from explosions and this, piled it on top of the oil drums, and I drug a .30 caliber out of the airplane in my little thing there. And would you believe that I saw a number of the other men trying to dig fox holes in coral with a shovel? Impossible. You can't do that, but they were trying to do it. They did not come over. If they had, I wouldn't be here. I know.

It's a funny thing, to give you an idea about Tokyo Rose, I'll tell you one story. The pilot of my instructor crew that went overseas, his name was Captain Scar. And Captain Scar was over there for a period of time, and Tokyo Rose one day says, "Congratulations Major Scar." A month later, he found out he was a major. Now, tell me how Tokyo Rose knew he was a major. She knew a lot about our group and about the personnel in our group. But you ask questions about my association with my gunners and pilot and copilot and that. I did go on rest leave

in Sydney, Australia with these officers, and believe it or not, I wanted a milk shake. That's what I really wanted. I went to this milk bar thinking I'd get a milk shake and it was hot milk. I had a hard time finding ice cream. I had a hard time finding a place to eat in Sydney because all they were interested in was tea and crumpets. But I found a restaurant called the Californian and there I could have, "stike and ikes," steak and eggs, and white sauterne wine sitting on the table. But really and truthfully, on those jungle islands that I was stationed on, the only thing that we actually did was maybe swim in the ocean and there were on some of those islands, there were Pygmies and Aborigines, I guess you'd call them. They'd come in dug-out canoes and came and tried to trade. What they really wanted was our t-shirts. For some reason, they took a liking to our t-shirts, and they'd trade almost anything for a t-shirt. But I have to say this, I wouldn't take a million dollars for my experiences, but I wouldn't give you one cent to do it over because I know I wouldn't make it -- be here.

Interviewer: So, yes?

Crew: That is Dad's epitaph, what he just said. That is Dad's epitaph.

Interviewer: So, that's your epitaph, what you're going to say

Leo W. Hardy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that your--

Leo W. Hardy: Yeah, that's what I would like people to remember. Like I say, I wouldn't take a million dollars for the things that I have experienced, but I wouldn't pay one cent to do it over because I know that I'd never make it. I've had too many close calls. Now is there anything that you would like to ask me?

Interviewer: Hours more. We ask everyone this. We have to ask when you heard about Hiroshima.

Leo W. Hardy: When I what?

Interviewer: When you heard about Hiroshima.

Leo W. Hardy: Yeah?

Interviewer: What did you think? You think it was necessary? Were you happy?
I am not saying in a--

Leo W. Hardy: I have to say this, that reminds me of another story. I know that our bombing with the atomic bomb was necessary to save lives. Many, many people think that it was a terrible thing and we should never have done this. But, I have a different opinion. I know that that war would have continued on for a long period of time, and many, many Americans would have died and many, many

Japanese would have died. But because of this, I think we saved many people's lives. When I was in the Smithsonian Institute in the war room where they had the Jap zero hanging from the ceiling, and also the Norden bombsight. I was explaining it to my son how the bomb site operates and all of this and about the Jap zeros and Kamikaze raids and so forth. I didn't notice, but there were about 30 Japanese students there with an interpreter, and they were listening, at least the interpreter was listening to what I was saying. After I quit talking to my son, she came over and asked me if I would continue to tell stories because she wanted to relate to the students. Of course, it put me in a kind of a funny feeling because I didn't want to say anything that would hurt their feelings. So I told a story on one of my single sorties where I flew low altitude and as I came over a knoll, and I was in the knoll, I could see an enemy soldier in a fox hole. He was throwing something at me, and my nose gunner asked if I wanted him to fire at this soldier, and I said "No." But to this day, I don't know if he was throwing a rock at me, or whether he was trying to throw a grenade at me. But this is one of the stories I told the Japanese, this lady, who was interpreting to these youngsters. They asked the interpreter how old I was when this happened. And I said "24," and they said, "How older you now?" And they said, "86." They all came over and shook hands with me, but I thought that was an experience that I really felt good about.

Interviewer: Tell us how you feel about your nation, how you feel about the United States?

Leo W. Hardy: The thing -- one of the main reasons why I volunteered in the service in the beginning is because I love this country, and I know that the price of freedom is very high. I can't imagine a young man living in this country of ours today who would refuse to do military service for this country because it's the greatest country in the world. And I think the world of it. And I always will. I think that one of the reasons why I love to talk about the war and the sacrifices that people here in the United States went through in World War II, and of course they are doing it in other wars also, but definitely in World War II -- people sacrificed. Every man, woman, and child. Not only the military people, but the people here were doing those things that were absolutely necessary at that time to accomplish our goal of winning the war. I have to say that all of the symbols that we have in America -- our national anthem, our flag, and everything -- relates to how you feel about this great country of ours. I can never understand anyone who would talk or do something when the national anthem is being played or when our flag is being displayed. That's how I feel, and I always felt that way. I think that the flag that hung in my mother and father's home with the two stars on it tells how I feel about America and our great nation.

Interviewer: What do the two stars mean? What did the two stars mean?

Leo W. Hardy: Those two stars meant that me and my brother was in the service, fighting for our country. Now, my brother stayed in the Air Force. I told you that he was training as a bombardier. He stayed in it, he was in SAC. He retired in Columbus, Ohio, which is the place where SAC was head quartered. He was a colonel. Of course, I ended up a captain in the reserves, but I asked for release from the Air Force the minute I got back to the states. But, because of the repercussions of me going from the infantry to the Air Force, Major General Smith, who was a commander of Fort Mead, Maryland, tried to have my orders rescinded and got reprimanded by the war department left in my records that if I was ever released by the Air Force, I was returned to his outfit and the Air Force would not let me out of the service. I had 145 points where they were letting people with 40 points out. I was at Wichita Falls, Texas and I said, "I don't understand why you're not letting me out, when you're letting all these other people out." They said, "Well, if you really like to know, we'll tell you. The main reason why we won't let you out is because in your records, Major General Smith stated that if I was ever released from the Air Force, I was to revert back to the infantry with him and be back over seas and we didn't figure that anybody who flew 52 combat missions would have to go back over seas and fight in the infantry." I said, "Is there any way I can get out of the service?" And they said, "Yes, one way." I

said, "What is it." "Sign up for the air reserves for 10 years." I immediately signed for the Air Reserves for 10 years. That's how I got out of the service.

Interviewer: Tell us just a couple of things. I am going to turn it over to Elizabeth, I know you have questions. But tell us more about zeros and flack and what that's like to face that?

Leo W. Hardy: Well, I'll tell you how scared I was when we flew over the Battleship Yamato. I have never seen the sky light up with so many different colors in my whole life as I saw coming from that ship. Every mission that I flew on that I can think of with the exception of those milk runs on Halmaheras and those, I always saw flack. With flack, you don't know when it's going to hit you. You have to fly through it if you're going to accomplish your mission. As far as zeros are concerned, I can tell you one story. After dropping bombs, immediately, the bombardier would stand up on the two ammunition boxes on each side with his head in the astrodome, a little plastic dome, and call out fighters to the gunners. Well, I can remember one Jap zero that I know was a Kamikaze fighter, and he was coming right at us. I told the pilot that I thought it was a Kamikaze pilot. He immediately put a dive to the right as this fighter came toward us and believe it or not -- now this may be exaggeration or something, I think I saw him grin and saw his gold teeth. That's how close he came to our airplane. Most of the fighters, on

the first mission on Yap Island, I looked off to the side and I could see an airplane flying at our altitude, but it was out of our gunner range and I didn't realize at that time that that pilot was calling to that ground crew -- the gunners, the "ack-ack" crews -- giving our elevation and our air speed to them. I found out that they were pretty accurate and I every time I see a zero, they scare me. I can remember one zero. I was calling out fighters to my nose gunner, and he says, "I got him, I got him!" I said, "Like heck you got him. He's shooting at you." Kelly finally shot him down, but our waist gunners -- on some of my missions, we had waist gunners, two on the waist of the airplane -- and they would stand by the windows and their guns were on a swivel to where they could go up and down or at an angle. One of them faced -- they would be back to back. Then on other missions I knew, we had a Sperry Ball Turret. He could shoot in all directions. Then they took out the Sperry Ball Turret and put in what I call a "Scare Gun." What it was, was a circle in the floor of the waist with glass over it and the gun was on a track and you could walk around and fire at the zeros down below. We only had that Sperry Ball Turret for one or two missions, and the Japanese never came up from underneath after that. They knew that was the end of them when they came that direction.

Interviewer: What's it like to watch another plane go down?

Leo W. Hardy: Well, the only time I got close to being airsick was after I dropped my bombs and I was standing there calling out fighters. The plane on the right of us blew up, and it threw our airplane over and it put us into a dive and put me over the bomb site with my nose on the Plexiglass. I could see the white caps coming up toward me. Like I say, that's the only time in my life I figured that I was not going to survive because I knew what it would be to try to pull a B-24 out of a steep dive with that little altitude. But believe it or not, how they did it, I don't know, but they pulled that plane out to where we didn't hit the water. I saw a number of planes where we went, one plane was hit and was on fire and I could see the pilot and the copilot trying to get out of the airplane with flames all around them and to this day, I don't know whether they got out of the airplane or not. To see something like that or see these people bail out of an airplane and coming down and then these zeros shooting at them and tipping their shoots, it almost makes you sick to see it.

Going back, let me tell one more story about atrocities. I stated that I never saw any Americans do anything out of line, but on one of the islands, I don't recall where it was, some of the guys got together and they wanted to get some Jap zeros as souvenirs. Well, I just went and picked them up and found them and I knew nothing about that. Well, we took an LSD to one of the islands and the infantry guys there, they had just moved in, I guess. These fellows that were with me, all at

once, they disappeared and I asked this commander, I said, "Where's all the guys going?" "They've gone out to get some souvenirs." Well, I wanted to get some souvenirs. "Where do you go to look for them?" And he says, "Oh, we know where each one of the Japanese is, all we do is just show you guys where he is and all you have to do is shoot him." I said, "Not this guy." I wouldn't do a thing like that. He said, "Well, I think I can change your mind. " We just moved in here yesterday, and he says, "Come back to our tent." There's something I want you to see. At the back of that tent, there was ditch and there were bodies with their hands wired together -- blackened bodies that I guess, gasoline poured over them and set fire to them. I just couldn't picture things like that happening.

Interviewer: Did you ever go to Palawan Island? Palawan? Did you ever bomb Palawan or were your stationed there?

Leo W. Hardy: Seemed to me I was stationed there.

Interviewer: Okay, sorry to interrupt.

Leo W. Hardy: I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Because we know of something like that that happened there that we've interviewed someone about. So anyway, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Well, I just wanted to go back whether you were in that -- on the desert and you were underground.

Interviewer: Oh.

Elizabeth: I want you to describe to Jeff what it looked like from your perspective.

And the ground was--

Interviewer: The ground must be coming up pretty fast, from your point of view?

Leo W. Hardy: Well, in this little plastic ball that I was sitting in, of course, it has the handles with the two .50 calibers. I was facing the direction that we were flying. As we were coming down, I'm sure I was hollering at -- trying to tell the people up above that I was down in the ball turret. Of course, with no ear phones or anything of that nature, I couldn't tell anyone anything, but I know that -- well, I was just scared to death because here the ground was just rushing right at me and I knew that I, seeing as when I was, in a nose dive and I could see the white caps coming up at me. I was shocked, in a state of shock, I'm sure because I was, I never even thought of such a thing happening to me. That did happen, and, of course, I never want anything like that to ever happen to me again. But, if there is such a thing as real fear, definitely, I was afraid. I was scared to death. Definitely. And I have to say that.

Elizabeth: I don't have much more than that.

Interviewer: This is a wonderful interview, I have to tell you, absolutely wonderful interview. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you want to talk about?

(Break in recording).

Leo W. Hardy: I met my wife at the Coconut Grove, my future wife at the Coconut Grove. Believe it or not, we were in the Capital Theatre in Salt Lake City when they turned off the movie, turned on the lights, and said, "All you servicemen from Fort Douglas, report back to your base because the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor." And immediately, I went back to Fort Douglas, and I was told, "Send your civilian clothes home because you won't be needing them anymore." I knew I was in a war at that time, but I met my wife while I was at Fort Douglas.

Elizabeth: How much did he love the Coconut Grove?

Interviewer: I would have loved to have seen the Coconut Grove. Did you meet these celebrities when they came through the USO or what? Gene Tierney?

Leo W. Hardy: Well, these celebrities -- Colonel Kaiser, who was a commander at Fort Douglas, must have had some tie with Hollywood because I sat this close to Hoagy Carmichael on a piano bench while he played "Star Dust." Lou Ayers, who was the first doctor killed there, was a conscientious objector who I met in the

South Pacific as a medic. Jack Dempsey -- at Peleliu, while I was there getting ready to load an airplane to go to Taclogan, I saw this Quanza Hut and I saw this fancy leather suit case that said "Jack Dempsey" on it. So I had to go see Jack Dempsey, and shook his hand.

But, there was so many of these stars, movie stars. Just for instance George Montgomery, who married Diana Shore, came to Fort Douglas, came to me, and he says, "Hey, Bob. How about a cigarette?" So I gave him a cigarette. And he says, "Aren't you going to light it?" Well, George Montgomery was a pretty good sized guy and I wasn't going to argue with him. and I didn't. But I met a lot, of like Jackie Coogan. I met him, and while I was at Ford Ord, I was called one time, and they said, "At headquarters," they said, "You're supposed to go to division headquarters because you're going to be in a movie." I said, "A movie? Holy cow!" Anyhow, I went out there, and they didn't know a darn thing about a movie. They were always playing tricks on me, I guess, but I did get to see an awful lot of celebrities. I danced with Darcie LaMoure at a brown palace in Denver. So, I've met a few celebrities in my life.

Interviewer: Good.

Unknown Person: Before the interview, you were telling me about how the bombardier, you were on your knees the whole time? Can you tell me about that?

Interviewer: That's a good question. Describe you at your station and what you're doing as a bombardier. Take us through it.

Leo W. Hardy: Okay.

Interviewer: Good question.

Leo W. Hardy: As you know, on a bombing run, the bombardier has to set certain information into the bomb site. He knows what altitude he's going to fly, and he knows the air speed he's going, the *true* air speed he's going to fly. So he has a book that gives you numbers that you set into the bomb site. Well, after you're interrogated, you know at what altitude and what air speed you're going to strike the target. A bombardier has big binoculars that you can pick out the targets. Now, on one mission, I was told that I had to bomb a smoke signal from the ground crews because we were to bomb that smoke signal because that's where the enemy was. So anyhow, I saw that target, but I also saw that the wind was blowing toward me. And I saw that the smoke was moving. I remembered the spot where I first saw the smoke and I synchronized the bomb site by turning the course knob, which -- there's a cross hair that goes this way, and that's the course. That's the direction. When the pilot turns the plane over to the bombardier -- and they always do this -- the bombardier engages a connection on the bomb site to the automatic pilot. When he does that, then he reaches over and turns the course

knock and lines the cross hair right straight across the target. Well, once you have that, then you know the direction you're going. Now, the next step is to establish the rate or the speed. It seems you've already set a pre-set setting there. You go to the rate knob and you turn it until the cross hair of this, that's going this direction, coming either to you or away from you. When you adjust this till it sits over the target across the course hair, you put the trigger up on the bomb site and when you do that, there's two little white indices on the top of the bomb site. The one indice starts moving toward the other, and when that indice meets this one, that's bombs away -- automatic. But, you have to open the bomb bays, you have to see that all of your lights are on, and all of this prior to the approach. When you get to the approach point of the thing, that's when the pilot turns over the airplane to the bombardier, and then he guides it from there to the target, and immediately after the bombs away, you release this connection from the bomb site back to the pilot.

Interviewer: So, how are you physically? Describe yourself physically.

Leo W. Hardy: You're on your knees looking through the bomb site. Below the bomb site is a Plexiglass, nothing but Plexiglass. That's how you locate the target in the beginning. And you do that with these binoculars, you see the target. You know where it's at. Now, in theory, in gravy, when the bomb is released here, by the time the airplane is here, that bomb is right below the airplane. But, in reality,

because of the air resistance and the size of the bomb and so forth, there's always a lag. So I had to look back through this Plexiglass to see my bombs hitting the target. In other words, my plane was past the target by the time you look back. I got one more story to tell you, and that's it.

Interviewer: Please, tell us.

Leo W. Hardy: Okay, I was flying over the fieldings, I had one bomb left, and I told the crew, I says, "I want you to take a picture of that hay stack, because I'm going to bomb that hay stack." Well, I hit that hay stack, but guess what was under it? A Japanese zero, I blew it all to pieces. And that's another story.

Interviewer: (Laughter).

Elizabeth: I think that might be the name of the show, "And That's Another Story." Because that is another story.

Leo W. Hardy: Like I say, I can tell you stories

Interviewer: We may have you back, you're so good. I mean that, we might have you come back.

Leo W. Hardy: I could tell you stories for hours and hours.

Interviewer: We just might have you come back. So

Elizabeth: (Inaudible).

Interviewer: A lot of times, we're assembling a story, and we come to a--

End of recording.