

Interview of Tom Demery

Interviewer: Tell us about what happened when you volunteered and something about your basic training.

Tom Demery: Okay, I went in, they gave me a preliminary physical. Right away, they said, "Sorry, we can't take you. You only weigh 128 pounds." I was 5 foot 11. "You only weigh 128 pounds, you've got to weigh 136. You've got to gain eight pounds." So, at 5' 11", 128 pounds, I was second string tackle on the football team, high school football team -- weighed 128 pounds.

Interviewer: All right, then, how did you get overseas and end of--

Tom Demery: Well, this is also in basic training. While we were there, they gave us all IQ tests. They wanted to determine -- see, the pilot is like, in now a days, pilots have to be college graduates, I think, have a lot of math and a lot of science and physics and things like that in their background. Then, they were taking kids right out of high school and sending them to pilot training. So, in order to make sure that they were getting people who had some kind of an IQ, they give us IQ tests

Interviewer: And tell us about eventually going overseas and your experiences there.

Tom Demery: Okay, then they shipped us to Nashville, Tennessee, which was the center for they determined which kind of plane you would be flying in. I had to go through a really tough physical there and they said my eyes, one eye was not good enough to be a combat pilot. So, I didn't get to go to pilot training. I did get 10 hours of flying training at the college training detachment in Knoxville, Tennessee. I got 10 hours in a J-3 or a J-5 Cub. But, then they gave me some tests to determine whether I should be -- let me go back for just a second.

Interviewer: Okay.

Tom Demery: Put in a little bit of humor here. We had to go through just shooting on the ground at a target, and then we'd get on the back of a truck and we'd shoot it while we were moving, and then they'd put us in a B-17 and took us up. It was the first time we'd gone up in a B-17. It was kind of bumpy, they flew low to the ground. This was out in Arizona, low to the ground and, and it was kind of bumpy and there was one guy who said he was getting sick, air sick. He thought maybe he ought to go back to the base, and so, one of the other fellas who was kind of a practical joker, he reached down and pulled this funnel.

Interviewer: You were a radio man then?

Tom Demery: Yes.

Interviewer: And a gunner, I guess?

Tom Demery: Well, I didn't have a gun. When they first started flying missions, they had 10 men on the crew. They had two waist gunners, and the radio operator had a gun in the top of his radio room going out through a little plastic, what was now just a plastic hatch. This was early in the war, and our fighters could not go all the way. In fact, they could not go much past the channel; they just didn't have the range. So the bombers were not accompanied to the target and back, and that's when the German fighters would really hit because there was no protection from our fighters. Then they only flew 25 missions, and some of those were, I mean, really tough missions. I don't know whether you've heard about--

Interviewer: Take us through a typical day of a mission.

Tom Demery: Okay, it depended on where the target was, but if it was not very far in, then we would not have to get up too early because the mission would only be maybe six or seven hours long, so they wouldn't wake us up really early. If we had a long mission, they would get us up maybe at 3:00 in the morning, and come in and open a door into the Quonset hut and turn on all the lights, "All right you guys." They would use some language you wouldn't ordinarily use. "Get out of bed, breakfast is at 4:30, briefing is at 5:30, start engines at 6:00," something like that. So we would get up and go get our breakfast and come back and go get our gear. I had to go to the radio shack to get the code sheets. We changed the codes every day, and by changing the codes, I mean, a certain word or something would mean something else. They printed those things on rice paper, and the reason is, if we got shot down, I was to *eat* the codes so the Germans wouldn't have it so they could understand what was going on. I'm kind of getting myself lost here. Anyway, we go to briefing and that's where we knew where we were going. That was the first time. In fact, we had found out that when the man came into to wake us up, there was no need to ask him or any use to ask him where we were going because he didn't know in the first place. So we would ask, "What is the fuel load?" And he said "2,780." That meant it was a full load, and we were going to have a long mission -- 2,780 is the number of gallons of gas you are used to fill up a B-17. We knew it was going to be a long mission, probably 10 hours. So that was about the only way we knew it was going to be a tough day.

There were times when we had as many as 50 B-17s on our base going on a mission. And there were 40 something bases around England, if we had a maximum effort mission, for instance. That means every airplane you can get off the ground is going. When they start those engines up, they start one at a time, and pretty soon the four engines are going and you got 50 airplanes in a small area there with 200 engines going and the ground just kind of vibrates with all that

noise -- it's just incredible. Then the planning of who's going to fly, what position in the group, who's going to be the lead plane, who's going to be deputy lead, who's going to fly number three, and you've got four groups, four squadrons up there -- 12 airplanes each, generally -- so the other two probably were just standbys in case something happened on takeoff, or somebody had to abort, then they would be ready to go. The number one man would take off, and then 30 seconds later, the one who is going to fly his left wing would take off, and the first one would go out quite a ways straight ahead climbing very slowly, and then he'd start making a very slow turn. Then the second one would turn inside, and then join up and the third one would turn and they would join up and that's the way we got 36 to 48 airplanes in there, and we'd do a circle around the base, just in a continuous circle and climbing very slowly until we got all 48 or 36 or 48 airplanes in formation. Then they headed to a point on the English coast, from where they would head across to, in the general direction of the target.

I was going to say something about my girlfriend. We got engaged before, just before I went over there.

There were times when I was very, very up-tight. When we would come back and the bases would be covered with fog, which happened a lot in the winter over there as you probably realize, and here is 48 planes, or 36 planes coming back and still in kind of a formation, some of them dragging and we're trying to get down to our base. We had to go down through that fog and I remember standing back in the waist looking out that waist opening, and all you can see is just white and I wondered, "When are we going to hit another airplane, or when are we going to crash into the ground?" But my copilot was telling me that they had what was called a "G-box" that the navigator used to determine our position. I think it was tied into two or three radio transmitters on the British Isles -- one in Scotland, maybe one down in Southern England, and

one somewhere else. When you would turn your frequency in, you would get the direction from the airplane to that particular station and you would draw a line on the chart and you did that three times and it would give you a pretty good idea where you were. He said our navigator, Hank Noland, could get us almost to right over the base without any trouble at all. Then they would peel off into the fog and try to find the base. At the end of the runway, they had put 50 gallon drums of gasoline, one on each side of the run way, and set it on fire so it would clear off some of the fog, kind of open up so you could see. That way, you could see where the runway end was. Well, anyway, that was probably the scariest thing to me -- not having any idea what was going on out there.

Interviewer: You, as a radio man, what exactly was your duty on each mission?

Tom Demery: The main duty, well, I had to monitor by radio all the time. Every 15 minutes, if I remember correctly, every 15 minutes, either the group or division or the 8th Air Force headquarters, somebody would send out a radio signal with a code, and I had to put that in my log book with the time and write it out exactly. When we got back they would check, they would take my log back and they would check and say, "Okay, you missed this particular time. What was going on? What were you doing?" I remember a couple of situations that were kind of interesting. After the bomb run, after we dropped our bombs, the doors would not go up. So the engineer, who had the top turret in the cockpit with the pilot and copilot, he was responsible for going back in. First, he'd unhook his oxygen and he'd put on an oxygen walk-around bottle, they're called, put on his parachute, go out in that bomb bay, and kneel down on an eight inch wide thing through the bomb bay you would have to walk on to get through the pilots back to the back. I had to go up sometimes to walk on this little plank. He was kneeling down on that, trying to crank the bomb bay doors up. The door to the pilot's compartment swung over on his

back and he couldn't get up. He couldn't reach around me with all this gear, I couldn't reach around. We couldn't do anything.

Interviewer: For sending messages and receiving them, were they all in Morse code?

Tom Demery: All in Morse code, and the Morse code would type out or send out another code word, which would mean something else.

Interviewer: Okay, out of the 35 missions, I want you to think back, if you, and tell us about the most interesting missions that you had.

Tom Demery: There was one where there were 2,000 bombers and 1,000 fighters. This is what I got off the internet and from a book that I have about my bomb group -- 2,000 bombers in the air at one time. This is just a little aside. The heat from the engines, when you're at 25,000 feet, especially when there's moisture in the air up there, the heat from the engines form contrails -- condensation trails. When you got all those planes in a group and you just leave a huge, wide, cloud up there. We've heard that the German people could look up and see all these airplane and the condensation cloud behind it. They called us the "Aluminum Overcast" because there were so many planes and so much fog or clouds; we were known as, the "Aluminum Overcast." Take me back to the question.

Interviewer: Okay, well I was asking about the most interesting mission.

Tom Demery: Okay.

Crew: Hold on just a second.

Interviewer: Did they all fly at the same elevation when you had that many airplanes?

Tom Demery: Generally, one part of the group would fly at 25,000 feet and the high element would fly at 26,000 and then the low element at 24,000 -- a thousand foot separation, generally. We pretty much flew in that same group of altitudes. In fact, I don't think the Germans really needed to have radar to track us. By the way, their 88 millimeter canon, anti-aircraft canon, was absolutely incredible. We'd be flying along, all of a sudden right off our wing tip, "Pssh!" How they would get that altitude so precisely, it was just incredible. You could see they didn't know precisely what the altitude was, but they had radar and so they were able to determine what it was in. But those guns were so accurate, it was almost scary. When we were going over the target, going into the target, there would be a lot of flack, but the German fighters wouldn't attack because they didn't want to get in there with all that flack. So we didn't have to worry about fighters while we were on the target run. I think we talked about this before. As we had the fighters with us, the German fighters were not, well, they were kind of reluctant to come up because there just weren't any more left because we were bombing aircraft manufacturing plants and bombing airports, and refineries, synthetic oil refineries, ball bearing plants -- just a lot of stuff. The Germans didn't have, I don't think, on the ground the number of fighters. By the way, the FW-190s were really something, and the Me-109s, they were really great pilots, those guys were. Anyway, here I go again, losing my train of thought.

Interviewer: This was in 1944.

Tom Demery: '44, '45.

Interviewer: Late in the war.

Tom Demery: Yes.

Interviewer: So the German Air Force was decimated quite a bit.

Tom Demery: It was, quite a bit.

Interviewer: We were talking about your missions and some of the most interesting points of those 36.

Tom Demery: Okay, this one mission -- now I'm getting back with you.

Interviewer: Okay.

Tom Demery: This one mission we headed to Berlin. It was in March. I believe there were about 2,000 planes on that mission, plus the fighters. We were up -- if we weren't in the first group, we were very close to the front end of that bomb trail, bomber trail. We went straight in and then after we dropped our bombs we made left turn and went to come back out. I could look out my window and just, miles of B-17s and B-24s going in on that same. We just plum plastered Berlin that time. We had a headline, "30,000 killed in Berlin" on that mission. My copilot was saying, "I think each group had a different corner, a street corner to bomb on." They just plastered the thing. I guess they just had to do that in order to get the Germans to surrender. I'm not really sure, but anyway, that's what I remember about that mission and then seeing all those planes just going and going and going and going. It was just an incredible thing to see, plus the fighters. That was interesting about the fighters, too. When we had a bomb load, our speed was probably 160 miles an hour -- there again, I'm just presuming in that area. The fighters would fly 300 miles an hour. They had to maintain their speed to be ready in case the Germans did come in. If they tried to slow down and stay with us and the German fighters had to come up, these guys would have to get back up to fighting speed. So the way they would cover us, they were up a couple thousand feet over us, and we'd be flying on straight line into the target and they would be going S-curves back and forth across the top. I'll tell you, that was the

prettiest sight to see all those P-51s up there. They were little friends, we called them, and they'd call us big friends. But to see those fighters just made you feel safe, almost. That was one of the things I remember very much. Flack, of course -- planes bouncing around. I'm not sure if there's any particular mission other than that one. Well, maybe there was one during the Battle of the Bulge in December of '44. There was about a week or more that we weren't able to fly because of the terrible weather. Finally, when the weather cleared up, we went out, and that's when the Germans were back into Belgium again. I guess they were part way into Belgium. So we were supposed to go up and go kind of north and bomb on the German side of the lines and then head back home. I don't know whether it was the next day or the day after that, but the pilot said, "Tom, I don't know whether I should tell you this or not, but you got the only bomb strike photos that showed that we bombed on the wrong side of the lines." You know, of course it wasn't my fault, but it was just a terrible thing to realize we probably made a serious mistake. We didn't hear about whether or not people were killed, but anyway.

One more thing about a mission through Berlin, on one of the missions anyway, I'm not sure what it was. We got shot up pretty bad and one of our fuel tanks was hit and was just losing fuel like crazy. The pilot called and he said, "We're not going to be able to make it back to England. We don't have enough fuel. We've got two alternatives: we can either turn to the north and go to Sweden," which, quite a few crews did and they couldn't get back. They went up into Sweden because Sweden was neutral and if we did that, we would be interned there for six months, but we single guys on the plane wouldn't have minded that at all. We heard about the Swedish girls. So we wouldn't have minded, but the navigator and the flight engineer, who were married, we were getting close to the end of our mission. We probably only had three or four more to go. Hal and Nolan didn't want to spend six months in Sweden. They wanted to go back home. So,

the pilot said, "Okay, we'll try to find a place." We landed in Brussels. As we landed, there were fighters all over the field, American fighters burning. The Germans had just been there and strafed the field. When we landed, they came out and told us, "Don't get out of the airplane. We'll give you enough fuel to get you back to England, but you got to get off this field." So we had to take off and go back, but we wound up landing in another airfield because the weather was bad where we were supposed to go. Anyway, that one I remember. I guess it's best that we went ahead and finished our missions instead of spending 6 months in Sweden.

Interviewer: I imagine. Now, did you see any other planes of ours shot down next to you and damaged?

Tom Demery: I wasn't able to do that because I had my radio right there in front of me, and it had this window and so I couldn't see out. The other guys, the bombardier had a chin turret. He had to shoot two .50 caliber machine guns from the chin turret when he wasn't on the bomb run. Of course, he didn't need them on the bomb run anyway because the fighters wouldn't come in. So he had this huge view of everything out in front of us. I can imagine it would be terrifying. Let me go back. The first, the first bombardier we had, we went on this first mission. He flew on a different mission than I did or the pilot did. He wouldn't fly after that. He just chickened out and he was trying to get out of flying anymore. In fact, the copilot said he was trying to go around trying to get somebody to pick up his foot locker and drop it on his foot and break his foot so he didn't have to fly. I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's what the copilot said. We don't know what happened to him, we never saw or heard about him again. He was gone, so we had to get another ration, we had a toggler. He was an enlisted man who simply watched the lead plane and when the lead plane dropped its bombs, then he would toggle our bombs. So, we flew with the toggle ear. Once in a while, we'd have a bombardier, but we flew

with a toggler almost the rest of the missions. Then pilot and copilot could see up ahead of them, but they couldn't see anything down. The bombardier could see down and up and all around in front. The top turret gunner could see everything above the aircraft and then some down, too. Then the ball turret gunner could see only down. The waist gunner could see on one side, and if the planes were coming like, if somebody would holler, "Fighters at 3:00," and if he was over on the 9:00 side of the plane, the left side, he would drop that gun or just really sit and go over and get to the other gun. He had a view of the side, and the tail gunner had a pretty good view of what was coming up from behind. But I didn't have a view at all. Once in awhile, you know when a plane was going down because somebody would say on the intercom, "Plane is going down. He is turning and tumbling. C'mon guys, get out of there!" Yelling, almost like the people, the men on the plane could hear him. "Get out, get out!" Then they would count if they saw parachutes opening or things coming out. Sometimes the parachutes didn't open, and they would count the number and when we'd get back to the base and go through the debriefing, they would ask us -- the intelligence people would ask us a lot of questions about what did you see, what happened, all of this, the fighters, and all that kind of stuff. So, I guess that's enough on that unless you have a specific question.

Interviewer: The, well, you may have already covered this. Were there any other real dangerous situations that you experienced other than being out of gas at that one time that you mentioned?

Tom Demery: A couple of times had engines out, shot out. We didn't have fire on any of them, as I remember. I just don't recall ever hearing the word "fire," which was one of the F-words that we had: Focke-Wulf, fire, flack, fog. So those were our F-words. I don't remember that we were in any particular danger. We had to make an emergency landing or two because the engine was out and we couldn't get back to the base, but I don't think there were any dangerous situations.

Interviewer: Where would you make those emergency landings?

Tom Demery: They had emergency fields along the channel, the English side of the channel.

Interviewer: On the other side.

Tom Demery: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, that's interesting. Liz and Jeff, have you got any questions?

Jeff: I have several questions. But look at him when I ask.

Interviewer: Yeah, look at me. Pretend that I'm asking you.

Jeff: Tell us about the German jet -- the day the German jets showed up.

Tom Demery: Okay. I think it was, I don't remember whether we were going to the target or coming back from the target, but most of the time, there was not much in the way of conversation or on the intercom. It needed to be cleared in case somebody did see a fighter, they could yell out where it was coming from and whether it was German or what. But anyway, things were going along and all of a sudden, the tail gunner said, "What the hell was that!" (Laughter) Then he repeated it. We realized -- I didn't see it -- but we realized that it was a German jet fighter, the only jet fighter the Germans had. In fact, they only jet fighter that anybody had in World War II. It was the Me-262, which was a twin-engine plane. I don't know how fast they could go. It was quite a bit faster than the P-51s, but it just went "zoom" right down through evidently. It wasn't too far from our plane, I guess. I don't know that he was able to shoot down any of our planes, but he went through there and the poor tail gunner, "What the hell was that!" Because we didn't know about these planes and consequently, they weren't flashed up on the screen when we'd go through aircraft identification, which we did quite

frequently. They would flash a picture up on the screen and it could be a silhouette, it could be a side view or something like it and we had to know whether it was a German fighter or one of us. The P-51 and the Me-109 had some similarities. They were both had in-line engines. The P-47 and the FW-190 had radial engines. There was a reasonable amount of identical features, so it was hard to sometimes tell. That's why they wanted everybody to have perfect vision because they couldn't permit anybody to wear glasses except for the goggles that we would wear. So that plane was not on anyone's aircraft identification chart. It was kind of an interesting thing.

Jeff: I want -- is that okay?

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Jeff: You know, I will stand over here. A lot of people don't understand, you're in winter, right?

Tom Demery: Yes, yes.

Jeff: Tell us how you were dressed. Go into detail what you had to do, how you had to dress to beat the cold and what you had to plug in, and how you had to do your work in this kind of uniform.

Tom Demery: Well, the interesting thing about that is we didn't have to do much in the way of work because we were either sitting or kneeling or standing without moving around. We did have the fleece flying suits that were reasonably warm. In fact, they were pretty darn warm. And then you had heated suits, and they didn't work too well. Anyway, we were dressed pretty heavy. The temperature outside out 25,000 feet in the winter is around 50 degrees below zero. The temperature inside is around 50 degrees below zero because there is no insulation in one of those B-17s. In fact, the side windows were open. That cold air could come in through the

bomb bay doors when it would open. The cold air would come in like crazy. You never really got warm. The ball turret gunner and the tail gunner probably had more comfort than we did because they just had to sit there and they couldn't move around at all. But the waist gunner could move and I could get up and walk around and pilot and copilot, I think they had a heated compartment, and the bombardier and navigator. I think they had heat in there, but not in the rear of the plane where I was and the gunners were. It was cold, there's no question about that. If I take off my gloves to transmit something or write, my hand would get pretty cold.

Interviewer: In the summer, it would be equally cold?

Tom Demery: It would still be cold, but not quite that cold--

Interviewer: Yeah.

Tom Demery: --in the summer.

Interviewer: Well, tell us about your last mission and was it the whole crew on your last mission, or did it vary?

Tom Demery: I don't remember exactly anything about, I don't even remember exactly where we went on that mission, but there is something that the last mission is very significant for me. Did I say that right?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Tom Demery: Let's go way back to the first mission. When we would come back and when we went through the debriefing, they had a wall just full of bottles -- quart bottles or fifth of a gallon bottles of liquor. I think it was Irish whiskey. Anybody that wanted, after the briefing was over, we would get a shot of whiskey. I didn't drink for some reason or another. It wasn't a religious

thing at all. I don't know why, I just didn't drink. My parents did, my uncles did but I didn't. So I would always give them, somebody on the crew, my shot of whiskey. On the last mission -- this is the thing I really remember -- they all poured theirs in to a big glass and made me drink it. Eight ounces of liquor, a whole bunch. I mean, I was having fun that night. My pilot was a musician and he had a trumpet and he played piano. In fact, he wrote a song over there called "Mission to Mursburg," which is a really, really tough mission because of the synthetic oil refinery. So I got ahold of Bob's trumpet. When I was a kid in Florida, my dad, I think he bought a trumpet for me. It cost about 10 dollars. I learned to play a song called, "Oh Johnny." "Oh Johnny, Oh Johnny." That's the only thing I knew how to play. So I got that trumpet from Bob and I went around the camp blowing "Oh Johnny" till they almost threw me out on the ground and took it away from me. But, I remember that. I remember that.

Interviewer: Where were you when you heard that the war in Germany was over?

Tom Demery: When we were through with our missions -- well, when I came back, we came back on a boat. I got acquainted with another radio operator who was in the 407th. I was in the 326th squadron. There were a 325th, 327th, and the 407th squadrons in our group. This guy had been a radio operator and had been shot down and was able to get back. I think he was liberated when we got in to Germany. Anyway, he and I back on the same boat. He only lived 20 miles from me and I didn't know him at all. He lived in a little town and I lived in a little town. We decided -- that was actually the 1st of April when we got together. We volunteered to go into B-29s to fly in the Pacific. So they sent us back to radio school in Scott Field, Illinois and back to Reno, Nevada for flight training in C-46s, which had the same equipment that the B-29 had. It was while we were in Reno that the war in Japan ended. There was another story about that, about Ike, but, I won't go into that. It was kind of an interesting story. So we just had to wait

there until we had enough points, till they got to us to get discharged. Then I went back to Florida and got discharged.

Interviewer: Jeff, have you got?

Jeff: I have one more. Tell us, you were telling me earlier about Morse code that you had to learn.

Tom Demery: Uh huh.

Jeff: Go through that again. That was colorful. Tell us about learning Morse code and everything you had to do.

Tom Demery: Well, a lot of people think that Morse code is dot-dash. Like, A is “dot dash” and B “dash dot dot dot,” but we don't learn it that way. We learn “de-da.” A is “de-da”, and “da-dit-dit-dit da-de-de-da--da-da-da,” you know, so forth and so on. That stuck with me. We had to go through some pretty extensive training on being able to take code at so many words per minute. A word was just five different characters. It could be numbers or letters, you just mix it up, like knowing that “press” was. So they would send, let's see, five characters. I think it was about 15 or maybe 20 words a minute, which would be 100 characters. So there would be, between one and two characters per second. They would send it out and we'd have to write down -- there's another story that goes with it -- we'd have to write down everything we got, and then they would correct us, grade us. We got to where we could take it, and I could still, if my fingers were nimble enough, I could still send. I know the alphabet. I've always known that alphabet, all the way to "Z." But if I hear it, it doesn't register as fast. So, if I heard something simple like “S. O. S.” – dit-dit-dit da-da dit-dit-dit” -- that would be very easy. But I couldn't write it down by listening to it on a headset, except if it was very, very slow. Then I would

almost have to go through the whole alphabet to find which letter that was. Let's see, I was going to make a point. Oh, heck.

Interviewer: About the Morse code?

Tom Demery: Yeah.

Interviewer: Maybe it will come to you.

Jeff: Do you have an example? Give us an example of what you would listen to on that, on those ear phones during a mission.

Tom Demery: Yeah, I could tune in to -- it wasn't the BBC, it was an American station back in England where they played a lot of World War II music type stuff. You know, "Don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me." Glenn Miller kind of stuff. So I could tune that in, and I'd have to do a lot of cranking. Radios were great big things. That was just the receiver, and behind me, I had the transmitter, which stood about that high, about four, three or four feet high, not quite four feet. It had five different transmitter things in it. I would have to pull one out, and stick it in up on the desk and tune it up, and had a trailing wire and antenna that went out. Got a story about that, too, but I don't have time to tell that. Then I could tune in with the needle to the precise frequency, and when the needle would be at the maximum, that's when I knew it was good. I would plug it in and everybody on the plane could hear. We didn't do that when we were in enemy territory. Of course we could override. We could just pick up the microphone and just talk right into it and it would over ride anything, but I was able to do that. That was kind of nice. Then, once in awhile, after we were going back, there would be some jabbering back and forth between different planes and things like that. Most of the time, it was strictly radio

silence, except for the code that would be coming from back in England. There was another part of your question, I can't remember.

Jeff: Just give us an example. Do that “de-de-da-da” again. Give us some examples.

Tom Demery: Okay, the alphabet is (Morse code sounds). I can't even remember where I'm now. (Morse code sounds).

Interviewer: Pretty good after 60 years.

Tom Demery: The last one is “da-da-de-de.” Z is “da-da-de-de.”

Interviewer: Tom, tell us about your thoughts -- you didn't realize there was danger, but there were a lot of casualties of airman.

Tom Demery: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us about that and your thoughts on the war and maybe what you would like future generations to hear when they listen to your words.

Tom Demery: Hmm. Well, there were a lot of casualties in the 8th Air Force. This is stuff I got off the internet. About 25,000 were killed. I guess it was about May of '42 through May of '45, so that would be three years, about 25,000 killed. Twenty-some thousand were prisoners of war, and 13,000 were killed in training -- a lot of accidents in training. I don't know how many were injured, but bunches were injured. Like I said earlier, we were so fortunate that we did not have anyone on our crew that did not have any injures or not wounded. The war--

Interviewer: Let me stop you right there. Did you ever have to come back with more than one engine out? Or did you have two engines out at one time?

Tom Demery: We never had two engines out at one time, but several times, we would have one engine out. That brings up another thing. While we were on our mission, the ground crew, the ones that took care of the airplanes were probably sleeping, because we would come back, and they would have to replace an engine or patch holes. They worked all night to get those planes ready to go again the next day. Sometimes we would fly two or three missions in a row. Sometimes it would be several days, but it depended on the intelligence. When we would give, there were 40 or some 45 groups around that part of England that would all give intelligence. Somebody would have to take that intelligence and make stuff that we tell them and make sense out of it, and get that to the wing headquarters, and they would have to get it to division and they would have to get it to the Air Force headquarters, 8th Air Force, so that they could decide, do we go back to that place? Of course, they had to get the film from the cameras, and that was just film. It would have to be developed. Anyway, they would spend hours just deciding where to go next, how many bombers, who's going to lead, which group would be the first in. It was just a 24 hours a day situation. Some people worked all night. We spent a lot of time, when we weren't flying, we were training. I was in the radio shack a lot just getting my code speed where it should be and getting some new information. The pilots, quite frequently, we would have to fly training missions. You've heard of General LeMay -- Curtis LeMay?

Interviewer: You bet.

Tom Demery: He was the commanding officer. By the way, our commanding officer, James Wilson, was 26 years old and a full colonel, at 26. That's something. Anyway, General LeMay, his group was just a five miles from ours. There's another story there. Anyway, he's the one that came up with, I guess, "the law" that when we were flying own a mission, going into the target, where fighters could possibly attack, we had to get almost wing tip to wing tip, just jammed in

really tight so the concentration of fire power from the machine guns would be really intense.

Then as we got closer to the target, I think the thing was, we spread apart a little bit in case one plane got hit by flack and blew up, it wouldn't affect another one. Also, to spread out, when you got that many groups going on to a same target, you want to cover as much ground as possible.

So he's the one that came up with that. He also came up with the one that once you're on the bomb run, you do not wasn't to change course or speed or altitude or anything. You've just got to give these bombardiers time to get that Norden bombsight working just right so they can see the target. They used to just divert -- if the flack was too heavy, they would go around it, but he said, "No more, no more. Go straight in."

Interviewer: You were talking about -- the question, I guess, is to tell us about your thoughts on the war and the things you would like to say to a future generation.

Tom Demery: The war, that war was one that almost, entirely the whole country was in favor of because we had been attacked, severely attacked. Not only that, you are probably going to remember President Roosevelt establishing this lend-lease program with England where we weren't in the war, but we were shipping war materials to England all the time for quite a while before we got into the war. The Germans, the U-boats, a lot of them would come off the coast of Florida and when those ships would come out of the Gulf from the Mississippi River in the middle of the country, they would come up and go around the gulf stream, because that was the shortest way to get to England, and those German U-boats just sank a lot of ships in the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. So that was a cause of us declaring war, but I think that Germany declared war on us. We declared war on Japan and then Germany declared war on us. I think that was it. Somebody can check that and then strike this from the video.

Interviewer: I think that's it.

Tom Demery: Anyway, the whole country was heavily involved. You've heard of Rosy the Riveter. There were probably hundreds of thousands of women that were involved in the construction of the building of all kinds of war materials -- airplanes and trucks and bombs and machine guns and things like that and uniforms, things like that. The whole country was involved. In fact, the whole east coast had a blackout and a lot of civilians would join with. I'm trying to remember the name that they had for them, but they would go up and down the coast line, on land, of course. You could not have head lights, you had little slits so when you had to drive at night, you must be able to see something. If we had lights on, the Germans could sit out there with the glow from the lights of the cities, they could see the freighters pass by -- the silhouette of the freighters pass by -- as they were going over to Europe. Even at night they would sink them, and so they had the whole coast was black out. They had aircraft watchers. They would go up on the roofs of buildings with binoculars and supposedly check for enemy aircraft coming in, which would have been almost impossible, but the whole country was involved. "Victory Gardens" -- it was a war, well, I don't want to start getting into the politics. It was something that everybody got involved in. I've been thinking, the people who stayed in this country while we were fighting. My Dad was in Europe fighting in the Corps of Engineers, I was fighting with bombers out of England, my middle brother was in the Pacific, and my younger brother was in Military Academy, so my mother was home pretty much alone. In those days, if you saw a guy with a cap on riding up on a bicycle, you know he was from Western Union. That's how they notified the wives and mothers of the death, or something like that. Sometimes a military car would drive up and a chaplain would get out. Those women had to suffer as much as some of us did, I think, not knowing. They just didn't know and they would

take weeks sometimes to hear things. Nowadays, they have cell phones and they can just call home. Now, I guess the thing that would never be solved that I wish it could be solved, especially for my grandkids and things like that, how to *keep out* of war. It's just almost an impossibility. Somebody is going to be trying to take over somebody else. It's just going on all the time now and it's been going on for centuries, almost, but it would be nice if there were peace in the world. I'm a barbershop singer, we used to sing barber shop music a lot, and I've often thought, "If we could just get all these people together and sing. Just, no matter what the language was. Just sing together, harmonize together. That may have some effect." But that's an impossibility. The Tabernacle Choir, when they go to foreign countries, they just bring people to them because of the singing. It would be tough to get some of these people to sing, but I think that would be a wonderful thing.

Interviewer: Tom, thanks. You guys have any other--

Elizabeth: That was wonderful.

Jeff: When were you the most frightened? Tell us one mission where you were the most frightened.

Tom Demery: I think I mentioned something about that earlier. I think, really, the time I was the most frightened was coming back and trying to find our field in fog and 36 airplanes trying to get into the same airport, and then five miles away, 36 airplanes trying to get into, and five miles another one. So you nearly have 100 airplanes circling in the fog trying to find the end of the runways so they could land. I remember being terrified almost of something like that because you couldn't see the ground. I think I mentioned the fuel tanks -- 55 gallon drums burning to burn some of the fog away so if the pilot saw that, he would just turn right fast and just land.

That was probably the most terrifying. Like I say, I don't remember being able to see too much in the way of flack or fighters because I had that small window, but I'm sure that some of the guys were frightened, especially the ones that were married. We young guys didn't have enough sense to be afraid. But flying around in the fog was scary.

Elizabeth: I think we're good.

Interviewer: Tom, thank you very much for coming in and sharing your thoughts with us. We appreciate--

End of recording.