

Interview of Warren McAllister.

Interviewer: Warren Benion McAllister, we appreciate you coming up here and doing an interview with us today. Tell us a little bit about growing up in Utah and up to where you first heard about Pearl Harbor and all of that.

Crew Member: Before you start, can I have you do one thing? Can you move your hat up just a hair? Yeah, on your head -- just like that. I want to see your eyes. That's better, thank you.

Interviewer: Give us a little brief history of growing up in Salt Lake and how you heard about the war and how you got into it.

Warren McAllister: Well, I was born here in Salt Lake. Grew up, went to (inaudible) elementary school, which was down on 15th East, and then I went to Roosevelt Junior High, I guess they call it second schools or something like that now.

Interviewer: I think junior high is --

Warren McAllister: Then I went to East High School and then the University of Utah, not the University of Utah till I had been to the war and come back. Just a typical Salt Lake resident, I guess.

Interviewer: What were you doing on December 7th when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and what were your thoughts?

Warren McAllister: Well, a friend of mine had his car out. It was a Sunday. He drove us around, we were just talking. Just killing time. And we heard it coming over the radio that the Japanese had hit Pearl Harbor. We couldn't believe it, but nevertheless, that's what

it was. So we knew right then, at the age we were, we were going to either be drafted, or we could join voluntarily, which we did. And I was with the field artillery at the university. I was going into my junior year, and I was all settled in the field artillery, but I knew that I wanted to fly. So I had to transfer, which was quite a job then to leave one branch and go into another, but I had to write letters to Washington to I don't know who all. The recommendations, and finally I got it, and went to flying school. Went to basic training in Lincoln, Nebraska. Then went to Santa Ana, California, and then started with my basic flying in different parts of the country. Finally, when I graduated in April 15th of 1944 -- and I had, it was a hard test. And I was lucky enough to get through it. And they were washing cadets out for every little thing. So, to get through, you had to be well and lucky. We started out in basic training in California, and then primary training, I went to -- what's the big town, where did we fly to, Julie? Going to California at this time?

Family Member: You flew into Burbank.

Warren McAllister: I know, but on the way to Arizona.

Family Member: Phoenix? You flew to Phoenix.

Warren McAllister: Yeah, Phoenix Arizona for primary. Secondary, I went back to Lancaster, California. Then I went to Marfa, Texas -- from there for advanced and that's where I got my wings and commission, and I never had such a time in my life with bugs. Where they kept us, you would open the drawer, and just like an army of whatever bugs they had down there. Have to go back to the barracks and you would tear your whole barracks apart to get rid of them so you could go to bed at night, and then it was hotter than blazes there. So, we were very happy to go back to California again, Santa Ana to decide where they were going to send us for flight school, and I did it right there -- my primary. Basic, I went to Lancaster, California. And

advanced, I went to Marfa, Texas. Which was in the desert. You'd wake up in the morning with six inches of desert on you, and that was advanced. That's where we received our commissions and our flying wings, which was very vigorous training. I mean, we went to school again and we went six days a week. Took all kinds of courses.

Interviewer: And tell us how you got overseas, did you fly a B-17 over the Atlantic?

Warren McAllister: No, I sure wished I could, but I didn't. No, I went over on the Queen Mary, which was quite a ship in those days. And I landed in Scotland, and then we went down to Lancaster, California. That's where our base was.

Interviewer: That would be England. Lancaster, England.

Warren McAllister: Yeah, and one of the biggest things that upset us was when Glenn Miller was missing. They never did find him. But, his band was fine. If you knew who Glenn Miller was, he was one of the big bands of the day. He was the one that would install music from his music to when you trained. So you'd go out and march, and the music was all of Glenn Miller, which was a real treat.

Interviewer: When were you assigned to B-17s and when did you get your plane?

Warren McAllister: Well, we picked up our crew in Arkoma, Oklahoma. And we had a tail gunner, a ball turret gunner, a waist gunner, a tail gunner -- I don't know how our ball turret gunner lived through it all in that little ball he climbed in. It had to be little, and they were in it for the whole mission. But then, we put in our 35 missions, but we only had to bail out once.

Interviewer: What was your base in England? Did you fly out of Lancaster; is that what you flew out of?

Warren McAllister: No, Lancaster was in Texas.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Warren McAllister: We flew out of -- that's why I brought my book.

Family Member: Is it Kimbolton, Dad?

Warren McAllister: Huh?

Family Member: Kimbolton?

Warren McAllister: Yeah. Kimbolton, England.

Interviewer: England, and that's where you flew all of your 35 missions there?

Warren McAllister: Right, and it -- always flew over the, what was the water between England and main land?

Interviewer: The English Channel.

Warren McAllister: What?

Interviewer: The English Channel.

Warren McAllister: Yeah, the Channel.

Interviewer: All right, well, tell us what a regular mission would be like. How long would it be, what you did the night before, and what you did when you got up, and take us through a typical mission.

Warren McAllister: Well, you'd be in bed by 9:00, because they -- if you were going to fly the next day, they'd wake you up at about 3:00 AM in the morning. You would get up, go to the mess tent, and have the so-called "food," which was terrible. Powdered eggs

and things like that. Then we would go to briefing, and the commanding officer would come in and tell us where we were going, and how long it would be and what we were supposedly going to run into, and then we'd get in our airplanes and take off, one after another. And we would re-group, generally over France. And then from France, we went to where ever the target was supposed to be for the day. So, it was -- took all your time.

Interviewer: And, how many, what was the average age of your crew?

Warren McAllister: 18 to 21.

Interviewer: And how old were you at the time?

Warren McAllister: I was 21.

Interviewer: You were kind of the old man, then?

Warren McAllister: Yeah.

Interviewer: 21 years old.

Warren McAllister: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you flew 35 combat missions?

Warren McAllister: Right.

Interviewer: And you had, I want you to zero in on the ones that have the most memories for you. I know you had a couple of hair-raising situations. Tell us as much detail as you can about those.

Warren McAllister: Well, I mean, it got to be routine, a lot of it. It wouldn't be routine to anybody else, but it would be routine to us. You would get in your airplane and sit there and wait until they gave you the green light, and then you'd take off and we would either join the units and fly over that way together -- nobody would be alone. Either that, or generally we grouped over France somewhere. And then from there, we would take off to the mission. Of

course, we already knew where we were going, and some of them -- a couple of them were milk runs, but basically, you never saw so much flack in all your life. I mean, it started about ten minutes before your target where you let your bombs go, and you would drop off your lead ship. I mean, when he dropped his bombs, our bombardier dropped ours.

Interviewer: How about German fighters? Did you have many German fighters come at you?

Warren McAllister: Well, it was flack more than fighters. We didn't have a lot of fighters hit us because we flew a tight formation, and the tighter formation, the more they left you alone because you had too much fire power if they're going to come in and have a group of 13, 14 airplanes shooting back at you, which we did. And the flack was -- I don't know. We had over 100 holes in our airplane quite a few times. We'd count them when we got back to the base, and it was amazing that we didn't have a crew man that got shot. That was the closest that I had, the shots came through either the wind shield or right by the side of me. On one mission, I could feel this wet. I didn't know what the matter was. Finally, I put my hand down, took my gloves off, and tried to see if I was hit or I had flack or what it was. And, because it was red, I thought it was blood. And it turned out that it was hydraulic fluid that had squirted all over me, and I thought I was hit. But I wasn't. When I found that out, I was sure relieved. But, we were very fortunate. We -- the fighters kept us at arm's length, I guess you would say, because we had a tight formation and that many guns coming back at them if they hit us, we would knock them down before they could do it to us. But we -- the flack was terrible. I mean, you didn't know which ones -- well, one day, a big enough flack came through my radio operator's area where he was sitting, and right down on the bottom of the chair, came through the chair, picked up the seat and he hit the top of the airplane with his head. And it was funny because he thought he was hit,

I thought he was hit. It put a bump on his head, but that was the closest we ever came to having anybody get shot.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Warren McAllister: On the day that we had to bail out, we were fairly low. And we did bail out over Belgium. It was far off the ground, so we couldn't see anything. We couldn't crash land. So we had to bail out -- the whole crew. And you'd have to find your way to whatever you could find. I happened to find a little lane, and I just sat there till something came by to give me a ride.

Interviewer: Did you have a couple of engines when you knocked out when you bailed out? Tell us what let up to that having to bail out.

Warren McAllister: We lost an engine. Losing an engine was an everyday thing, really. Flack, we'd get a lot of them. Over the larger targets, the flack would be so thick; it looked like you could stand on it because you could see it when it burst. And flack was our biggest enemy. It wasn't ground -- well, too from the ground, because they were the ones that shot it. And if they were any good, they could put it pretty close to you when it exploded and then that little stuff would penetrate everything. But, like I say, we were very fortunate. I had my nose canopy blown off. I lost my top turret because flack hit it. Like I said, we counted over 100 holes in our airplane after one mission, but it didn't hit anything vital. I did have to land with wheels up when we got back to the base because either the hydraulic system would not work, or you couldn't get it down and it was rough anyway because with that many airplanes in the air and all getting back about the same time, the skies were murder. And I saw it twice, two different times. Airplanes coming into an English field and coming from opposite directions and

hitting each other. Here, they'd run their mission, got back, and run into each other and get killed that way.

Interviewer: Hmm. Let's go back to this mission that you were bailing out over Belgium. What happened to your plane that caused you to have to bail out?

Warren McAllister: Well, we'd lost our hydraulic system again. We were on two engines. And we can't fly very far on two engines, not on one of those big ships. And it's just circumstances, really.

Interviewer: And so you gave the order for everybody to bail out.

Warren McAllister: Right and we had a sequence of who was bailing out when. And, of course I was the last one to bail out. So, I was down around 500, 600 feet by the time I was -- the crew was out of range of me, because I had it on auto pilot and I just turned around and dove out head first and pulled the rip cord and it wasn't very long before I hit the ground, and I hit the ground pretty hard that day. That's the only time I had to bail out. But flack was our big enemy, it wasn't enemy planes or anything else, but flack from grand control of the Germans.

Interviewer: After you bailed out, tell us about hitting the ground and, I guess the Belgians were friendly.

Warren McAllister: Yeah. It took quite to doing to convince them we were American, that's why we had stuff on us telling them that we were American pilots, because most of us couldn't -- didn't know how to speak in a foreign language. And, so the couple that lived where that picked me up, they took me to their house, they sent somebody to get the local police to find out where my squadron was, so we could re-join them. But we never joined any of our own because I was in the hospital over six or seven days, I guess, where we bailed out and

then we finally got taken to England again. Huh, and back to our unit where the next day, we were on another mission.

Interviewer: The very next day, you flew on another mission?

Warren McAllister: Right.

Interviewer: So none of your crew was injured during that time?

Warren McAllister: No.

Interviewer: Was this the time when the plane was circling and you had to go back?

Warren McAllister: Yes.

Interviewer: Put it on automatic pilot?

Warren McAllister: Yeah.

Interviewer: And if you hadn't done that, the plane would have --

Warren McAllister: It would lose altitude, eventually and be going in a circle. I mean, it could wipe any of us out.

Interviewer: Right.

Elizabeth: Can you have him describe that really specifically what that plane was doing?

Interviewer: If you can give us a real detailed explanation of that and what it's like to bail out at 500 feet and what was going through your mind -- give as much detail of that experience as you can, that's what we like to have.

Family Member: Dad, that's why you got the DFC.

Warren McAllister: Yeah, but the plane -- even with it on auto pilot, it would change its own course once in awhile, but I got the crew all bailed out and set the control on auto

pilot and turned around and, just about ready to jump, but my left wing drooped and I started around back. And so, I had to go back and straighten the airplane out again so I could get out, and so the airplane wouldn't wipe out any of the crew. And gee, it was only 600 or 700 feet off the ground then. And I hit the ground like I was lead, and I was knocked out. I sprained one leg from the tip of my toe to the top of my head. I was in a -- I was fortunate because I was in a B-25 outfit, twin engine place and they had a fairly good hospital unit and I was in the hospital there for five days before they would let me out, and they said, "We won't let you out till you can walk across the room without limping." So I got up and I walked across the room and it killed me, but I did it. And I got out and we had a plane take us from where we were in France back to England, and back to our base. And then, they -- we did go on a mission the next day, but after that mission, we did get a leave of about five to eight days, whatever. And then, we would go back to the base and next day, we would fly again. So, it was all -- it was no joy. It was all hard work and never knowing if the next mission was going to be the one you got it on.

Interviewer: You are one other mission.

Crew Member: I had, whoever has the airplanes, you need to be careful not to turn pages while he's speaking, because I can hear it.

Warren McAllister: We had, what were we talking about?

Interviewer: You were telling us about the mission where you bailed out in Belgium and going to the hospital for five days and getting back and going on another mission again. But you had another time when you had to land, one time with wheels up, you had no -- your landing gear wasn't down, is that correct? And this time, I believe when two engines were gone, or three of them, and the fourth one ended just as you were landing, do you remember that?

Warren McAllister: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us about those times, if you can. Those missions.

Warren McAllister: Well, either they had shot out from flack from the target; they could knock out engines or whatever. And many times, I came in with the wheels up because I couldn't get the wheels down. They were -- they were shot from enemy fire and so we crash-landed on our own base a number of times, but we were just lucky to get back anyway. But, we didn't have very many milk runs. They were all thick as -- the flack especially was thick. I mean, it was -- you couldn't see the ground for anything.

Interviewer: Now, there was a time when you had to land when, I believe, you had two engines out and a third one went out and just as you landed --

Warren McAllister: That went out.

Interviewer: The fourth one went out. Give us as much detail as you can about that.

Warren McAllister: Well, it was a long mission of ten hours. We got back to England and the flack had taken out two engines, or we came back on two engines, and we lost -- it was hard to believe, but we lost engines waiting to be able to land because there was somebody else trying to land, too. And we took our turn and by the time we got to the ground, we didn't have any gas or the hydraulic system would be out, different reasons why you had to come in with wheels up at your home base. That happened quite a few times. But we had a good crew that had to get to work on it and put them together so you could fight the next day. But, no. It was not fun.

Interviewer: Were there any other times that you'd like -- have a big memory for you? Any other missions or very dangerous experiences that you had that we haven't talked about?

Warren McAllister: Well, I had one that -- our fuel was so low that I knew that we wouldn't get back to England. And, so we -- well, but we did. We did make it. I didn't think that we would, but we did. And I told the navigator to find the nearest runway to the island and we went for straight that (inaudible). Had to cross the north sea and we had to land at the first place we could find because we were out of fuel, too. And we did lose our engines because of no gas, and this particular mission, we were on our final approach, and two engines were out, and a third engine was stopped and as we hit the ground, the fourth engine stopped. So, it was -- we had no power at all on that one. It got kind of hairy, but that's what you were doing.

Interviewer: I bet your crew was glad to be on the ground when that fourth engine went out.

Warren McAllister: Yeah, they were down.

Interviewer: What has being in that war meant to you for the rest of your life? Did it influence the rest of your life?

Warren McAllister: You remembered it for quite awhile. Regardless of what happened to you, you were in the air the next day and on another one and I really didn't know which time it was yours, because we only had a 50/50 chance of ever coming back, which is not very good odds. We lost a lot of planes.

Interviewer: If you had to say something to future generations about your experiences, what would you say to them?

Warren McAllister: Well, if you want freedom, freedom isn't free, and you have to fight for your country. Somebody has to do it, so that's what you did. It wasn't any bowl of Wheaties, it was rough.

Interviewer: Where were you when you heard that Germany had surrendered?

Warren McAllister: I had finished my tour of 35 missions, and I was out in the middle of the Atlantic on the way back to the states when it came over the radio of the ship we were on, and they announced that the Germans had surrendered and the war was over in Europe, but we still had South Pacific to go through. But, we didn't have to go to the South Pacific. I was just in the process of being re-assigned in the United States when VJ Day came, so I took a leave and I came back to Santa Ana. They asked me what I wanted to do, and first choice was to stay in flying. And then the next one was send me home, which they did, which was quite a thing to be able to come back and go home and get out of the service and go back to school and try to pick up your life again. Was kind of hard for awhile, but we did it.

Interviewer: Well, that's great. It's interesting. Any questions, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Well, I'm wondering when he came home, if he was able to talk about his experiences? Or did he talk about his experiences in the war.

Interviewer: When you came home, was it easy for you to talk about what you had been through, and was it hard for you to adjust to normal civilian life?

Warren McAllister: It was, it took a little while. Uh, I went back to school at the university. I was a junior at the time, and so that was enough to keep my mind off of it. But, no, it wasn't easy to talk about it, but it wasn't really hard, either, especially to my family. If they wanted to know, they had the right to know. It was just a wonderful sight to get off that train and

coming from back or coming into Salt Lake, Union Pacific station and have your folks there, waiting for you. It was just wonderful. I knew my one brother had been killed, but my other brother was -- he stayed in the service for over 30 years. And he flew a B-17, and the brother that -- just older than I was -- went to the South Pacific. He was killed. We don't know how, we never did find out what happened. They eventually brought his body back. I don't know -- it was around New Guinea somewhere, but we never did find out what caused it or -- we presumed that they were shot down. But, it was rough. It was rough on the family, so, they say, "We had a rough time over there." But our parents had an awful rough time, too. Probably worse than we had because we were there.

Interviewer: Sally, have you got a question?

Crew Member: Yeah, can you ask him, being a pilot and being responsible for his crew, what his feelings are?

Interviewer: Did you feel a personal responsibility for your crew?

Warren McAllister: Yes, very much so.

Crew Member: Have him talk about that.

Warren McAllister: Yeah, we were very knowledgeable about that. I mean, it was -- you became very close. They became like brothers to me. Yeah, I was the pilot, but I was just a guy, too.

Interviewer: Did you get together with them after the war?

Warren McAllister: Yes. In fact, my squadron, as we talk here, they're having a reunion in Colorado Springs. And I used to go to those, where we would meet our crews and the other guys all the time. Yeah, I think -- it wasn't until my wife died we had to stop going, or I stopped going to reunions because without her, it wasn't worth it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Crew Member: Rick, can you have him maybe describe the character of some of his crew and while they were on a mission and how important it was and a little more on crew?

Interviewer: Tell us about the crew. Did you have any unusual guys that were part of your crew, or were they all good guys and did you enjoy having them there?

Warren McAllister: We had a good rapport on our crew. There wasn't any fighting among them or anything else. I mean, they were like brothers. That's how close you got, and being the pilot, I was responsible. Of course, I was responsible for the incoming flack. But for anything else, as far as flying was concerned, it was up to me to get us there and get home.

Interviewer: And those missions where you lost engines and had to land belly-up, did you crew come and thank you for getting down safely?

Warren McAllister: Oh, yeah. They let me know if I had a good landing or a lousy landing. But I don't think I ever had a real lousy landing. Now, I had my ball turret gunner, something went hay wire with the motor that turned him around, and, of course we always had him out of the ball turret before we ever landed, except this one time. And, it was real hairy to have to land with your belly man still in his seat underneath. So, I was just fortunate enough to be able to make good landings.

Elizabeth: I want to ask about the gunners. The guy we had before said he'd come to the briefings and come out feeling sick and throwing up. What is the difference between that mentality of a gunner, and the pilot? Is it sort of a control thing?

Interviewer: Many airman that we've talked to said that on some missions, they were so scared that they'd throw up their food, their breakfast.

Warren McAllister: The gunners.

Interviewer: Especially, we just interviewed a tail gunner. Did you have any like that in your crew?

Warren McAllister: No. Never did.

Interviewer: And did you have the same crew most of the years that you were flying those missions?

Warren McAllister: Yes, I had the same crew.

Crew Member: Was there fear? Ask him if there was fear among his crew.

Warren McAllister: What?

Interviewer: She said, "Was there fear among the crew members?"

Warren McAllister: Well, I guess no more so than all of us had. If the mission was to a known place that had flack like Berlin, we went there three times, and the flack was thick as dust, and no -- but you just became acclimated to it. Of course, there wasn't anything else you could do. There were a lot, I guess, that had to be reassigned. In fact, I knew some that did. But, it is rough because you never know whether it's your turn to get it or not. And, especially if it was a big target because the flack would be so thick, you could almost get out and walk on it. We had over 100 holes in our airplane more than once with the flack, and they were two or three inches thick, pieces that came through your airplane. We were -- we were so fortunate, though, that we didn't have any of our crew hit.

Interviewer: That's amazing that you brought them all back safely after 36 missions. And, all survived.

Warren McAllister: Yeah.

Family Member: Dad? Tell them about the time where the planes on either side of you blew up and you flew right through.

Warren McAllister: Near the end of my tour --

Interviewer: And talk to me like I asked that.

Warren McAllister: What did you ask again?

Family Member: About the two planes that blew up on either side of you?

Warren McAllister: Oh, yeah. We had airplanes that were direct hits of anti-aircraft, and I had both wing men -- one on the left, one on the right both get it one day. Just direct hits and the planes just disintegrated. And, to sit there and see that and know that there goes over 20 men, just snuffed out just like that, it got awful rough that way because your own crew, you get very close to them.

Interviewer: It would be hard, and they just disintegrated in mid-air and nobody was able to bail out.

Warren McAllister: Yeah, nobody got out.

Interviewer: And ten crew members were lost. That had to be hard.

Crew Member: I have a question about crippled planes. When you are in formation squadron, and you said, "The tighter you are, the less likely you were to be attacked?" You know, your formation? The more planes there are -- when you come back and some of your planes are crippled, are you supposed to fly back in that same formation? How do planes do that?

Warren McAllister: Well, you had a better chance in formation than you had coming back by yourself because you still had more fire power if the enemy came in.

Interviewer: But if a plane had lost engines, and they couldn't keep up with the main formation, is that correct?

Warren McAllister: Yeah, you just come back by yourself. Like they say, "On a wing and a prayer."

Interviewer: And then they're subject to more danger when they're on their own.

Warren McAllister: Oh, yeah. They're very much so. No, I counted over 100 holes on my airplane on one mission from the flack.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Warren McAllister: And yet, none of the crew were touched.

Interviewer: Yeah. Warren, we appreciate you coming in. Is there anything else you'd like to mention or bring up we haven't covered?

Elizabeth: You're squeaking your shoes together.

Warren McAllister: Sorry.

Elizabeth: It's okay.

Warren McAllister: I don't know, anything you want to know.

Interviewer: Well, you've been very good. We appreciate your service and thanks for coming up here. I know it was a little hard for you. Thanks, Julie, for bringing him up and sharing that with us. It had to be quite an experience. So, we'll -- we will get you to sign a release here and you might want to keep some of your pictures and get your book back to you or something.

Crew Member: Well, I wanted to ask Julie -- are the pictures in here, it looks like your family made this?

Family Member: Mm-hmm.

Crew Member: Are these original pictures in your hands?

Family Member: I can get them, yeah.

Crew Member: Because I'd rather have them than --

Family Member: I'm sure it's easier.

Crew Member: I will call you and come and get them. And if your Dad wouldn't mind signing -- Warren, can you write your name and address and sign it? And this says we can use your interview for this --

End of recording.