

Interview of Willard White

Interviewer: Now when we talk, remember, I'm going to ask the questions, and you just look at me and answer and they might ask some questions and things like that. But we're glad to have Willard here, at last. Okay, what's your full name?

Willard White: Willard Henry White.

Interviewer: And you were born where?

Willard White: Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, September 16th, the great year of 1921.

Interviewer: Great, are we ready?

Crew: We're ready.

Interviewer: Okay, so. You were born in 1921?

Willard White: Yes, uh huh.

Interviewer: Okay, so, you grew up where?

Willard White: Well, I lived in Salt Lake City till we were nine years old, so I was nine. That was during the Depression. My dad was a produce man, and he went broke along with millions of other people, and so there was nothing left for him in Utah. We moved to Los Angeles and I grew up there, went all through school there, high school -- LA High -- and then I came back to Utah, I went to Utah State.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Willard White: That was about 1938, '39.

Interviewer: What did you study there?

Willard White: Pardon?

Interviewer: What did you study there?

Willard White: I studied girl-ology.

Interviewer: (Laughter).

Willard White: I took two years of flying, what they call civilian pilot training. That was part of the government plan called civilian aviation, and that's where I learned to fly. I took two years of flying in college. I flew a Piper Cub the first year and then an advanced CPT, that's civilian pilot training, a government program that was only facilitated at, I think, state universities. Then I flew a secondary I flew a Waco UPF-7, that's a biplane, and I had the scarf, the goggles, and the whole works. Man, you'd think that -- it was a lot of fun. Anyway, so I spent two years at Utah State and it was very, that was a lot of fun. We learned to fly. The reason why they had us civilians do aeronautical administration is because Roosevelt, those days, knew we were going to be in a Second World War. So he knew, or some of his people knew that we had to train some pilots. That's why I was in CPT -- it was a government program and it was a very good one.

Interviewer: So you learned to fly.

Willard White: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you student girl-ology.

Willard White: Right, and then when I got out of CPT the second year. I had what they called a limited commercial pilot's license. They don't even have that anymore. It was just a lot of fun.

You learned emergency landing. A couple of us, two of us were going to, we wanted to parachute, and it was against the rule. So we were going to go up and unfasten the seatbelt and the other guy and I were going to parachute. They found out about it and they said, if you do, you're going to get washed out. So we didn't. Anyway, it was not fun flying that open cockpit.

Interviewer: So, tell us about where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor.

Willard White: Okay, well, my parents, I have a farm up by Driggs, Idaho. They used to come up on the weekends, pick me up in Logan at the Sigma Chi house where I lived and take me down to the Weber Club in Ogden at the Hotel Eccles. My dad was a member of what they call "the Weber Club." It was a club for men. You go in there and have a drink and so forth and all his brothers belonged, too. We were there on that Sunday and we were interrupted for lunch because this guy says, "I have the radio on and the President of the United States is going to tell us what's going on." So he brought this old radio in there while we were eating and we could all hear it, and President Roosevelt got on there and told us of "the day of infamy" and that we were attacked at Pearl Harbor. So that's how I heard of the day, that it happened, the day that we knew about it. That's how come I knew about Pearl Harbor, and also why that Utah State, I was in ROTC, so I was already part of the military, you might say. I wanted to be a pilot. I was already a pilot, but I wanted to be a pilot in the Air Force. So what the Air Force had done, that's the Army Air Force, they started in Southern California at USC and went to UCLA and Stanford and then up in to Oregon and Washington, the universities, then they cut across and come into Logan, at Utah State. That's where they were recruiting for the Air Force pilots, and they went around to a lot of other places, or other universities, in order to drum up some business to have some pilots. This is, of course, right after Pearl Harbor, a month or two. So they came into Utah State and I signed up to take the test. Well, it just wasn't a little test. It was a two day test. So,

for two days, I took the test and I lucked out and passed. Then I joined up into the Army Air Force and it was really a great day then. You had to wait, I mean, I had to wait to be called to active duty. So I had to wait through -- my first day of active duty, I was 21 years old and that was September the 16th. So they called me active duty, and the rest is history (laughter).

Interviewer: By the way, do you need water?

Willard White: Pardon?

Interviewer: Would you like some water? Do you want some water?

Willard White: Oh no, I'm okay.

Interviewer: Okay, let me know if you do. Alright, the rest is history. Let's get back to it. So where'd you go then?

Willard White: Okay, where I went is, a friend of mine name Tom, he also went to Utah State, and we took a train from Idaho Falls down to Kelly Field, and that's in San Antonio. That's where we went to preflight school. Then from there, I went to Corsicana for primary, then I went to Greenville for basic, and then I went to Ellington Field in Houston for advanced. This is in the Air Force. In Ellington Field in Houston, it was probably the finest advanced Air Force place in the United States because we flew three airplanes. We flew an AT-6, that's a single engine. We had gunnery in the AT-6. We would go to Galveston and shoot up the place (laughter). Then we flew an AT-9, that's a twin-engine airplane, all metal, this it during the war. Then we flew an AT-10, and it was a fabricated airplane with mostly wood, and that was a twin engine. So I had training in three different airplanes, and that's advanced. No other school that I know about had that. Then I finally graduated as a second lieutenant.

Interviewer: Did you want to fly fighters? Did you want to fly bombers? What did you want to fly?

Willard White: Well, what happened, what they did after you graduated, they sent a memo around to all of us, and the memo asked that that same kind of a question. They said, "Do you want bombers, do you want fighters, do you want to be an instructor?" Well, I didn't want to be an instructor. I didn't have any patience, so I cut that out. I didn't want to be a bomber pilot. I wanted to be a fighter pilot. I think they have a P-38, and that's my favorite airplane. They had, in those days, a P-39, a P-40. I don't think they had the 47 then. Then they had, in the heavies, they had the B-17 and the B-24. In the medium bombers, they had the B-25 and the B-26 and the A-20. Well, I put down fighters, and my first choice in fighters was a P-38. So naturally, I got a B-26 (laughter). Then they gave me a couple of weeks off. So I went up to the farm in Idaho and fished, and after having a general -- going back to Ellington Field, a general came on the base one time and the way he said, "Kill! Kill! Kill!" Just yelled it out like that. Well, that's good. I went up to the farm and I killed some ground squirrels, you know (laughter), because I had two weeks off. I went fishing in the Teton River.

Interviewer: Tell us about.

Willard White: From then, do you want me to go--

Interviewer: Tell about the B-26 training, and all the accidents, and how you started to really shine at that point.

Willard White: Okay, after that nice little rest up in Idaho, then I got on a train and went down to Atlanta, Georgia, stayed overnight. Then I go down to MacDill Field in Tampa, Florida. That's where I was sent. I had to be there a certain day and I did. I took a cab, as I remember, from the

station to MacDill Field. When I went on to the base, there was a feeling -- I never felt it before or since -- but I could feel, if you want to say death in the air. I did, right when I went on the base, it was just that way for some reason. Anyway, I went into training, and three of the my buddies had also been sent there from my class at Ellington Field. Of course, you have to start flying as copilot to learn to fly the airplane, so we had to do that. In those days, the B-26 was considered the hardest airplane in the Air Force and the most dangerous, by far, because we lost more people in training than any other airplane, ever. Anyway, I was, you know, sent up with some of these guys to learn to fly the airplane. Of course, they just hold on to the pedestal with both hands and sweat, and that's what killed lot of them. They were killed, a lot of these pilots, when the airplane -- it had some flaws on the original B-26 that I flew. My three buddies one day were all flying copilot in formation in three different airplanes, and the three came together and killed my buddies. It was horrible. They had all been recently married. So I had to go to the club that night, we were going to meet their wives for dinner at MacDill Field, and I had to tell them. Here I was, a young punk myself, about 21 -- I had to go tell their wives, and that was hard to do. Anyway, I was really scared to death. I wasn't scared of the airplane, I was scared to death of the pilots that were training me to fly that airplane, because they'd kill me. I figured, "I'm going to be killed by some jerk pilot." So I decided, "Well, I am going to do something about this." At that time, the head of the 397th Bomb Group was Lieutenant Baker, a terrific guy. I went up into his office and salute. He says, "Lieutenant, what do you want? Are you going to quit like one of the other guys?" I said, "No, Colonel, but what I'm going to do, I want you to get out of that chair, and I want you to go down and check out a B-26, and then I want to go down and you and I check me out." I said, "I never want to fly copilot again. They're going to kill me." I said, "I'm scared to death, but I'm not afraid of the airplane." So, believe it or not,

he did that. Here he is, the base commander -- he gets up out of his chair, he and Willard go down and he checked me out. Consequently, I never flew a mission as copilot ever. Not that I'm so great, but a lot of those guys were very dangerous, and they said, "A plane a day in Tampa Bay." That was no lie. In fact, they categorized one time that there could have been 40 airplanes go down. That's a lot of men that were killed. The B-26, as I mentioned, had the worst training record of any airplane in the history of the Air Force, but we had the best combat record in Europe.

Interviewer: Tell us what the nickname was for the B 26.

Willard White: Well, the B-26 was called, "The Flying Prostitute," and that's because there was no visible means of support. The Truman Committee, when he was a Senator, he said, "That thing won't fly." (Laughter) So we did have a great record in Europe. One time in Europe, towards the end of the war, we had more medium bombers of B-26s than we had any other airplane. There were 1,000 B-26's.

Interviewer: Okay, tell us how you got to Europe.

Willard White: Easy. (Laughter). So, we were stationed in Savannah, Georgia. We were stationed in Hunter Field, that's after MacDill Field. They had to decide, because there were only so many airplanes they could fly overseas -- I forgot the number, maybe it was like 30 or something. We had a lot of pilots, lots more, but they all couldn't fly their own airplane overseas.

Interviewer: I'm sorry -- this is because of the distance?

Willard White: No, it's because they didn't have the airplanes.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Willard White: You can only fly so many airplanes overseas.

Interviewer: Were they going to take the rest by ship?

Willard White: Yeah, they took the rest by ship. Of course, I wanted to fly the airplane overseas, everybody did. So my two buddies -- they were in the same class I was in -- the squadron operations officer, named Captain Wilson, picked me to fly one of the airplanes, and the other two guys taking the ship. Well, of course, they were plenty ticket off. I don't blame them. So the CO got involved with the operations officer and they said, "Well, that wasn't fair just to pick Willard, poor ol' Willard, to fly over seas." Anyway, what they did then was they had us draw straws, and I lucked out. I got the lucky one to fly the airplane overseas, which was great, absolutely terrific.

Interviewer: Did you fly through the Azores?

Willard White: What we did is we flew out of Miami. We were going to Puerto Rico first, and then we were going to British Guiana and we were supposed to call in Puerto Rico, if we didn't land there for gas, then fly on down to British Guiana. I kept trying to call in, I had plenty of gas, so I just went on down. Of course, when I got there, the head of the little base down there in British Guiana, he put me in the brigs. "You didn't call in, tell us if you had gas or not." I was supposed to be in big trouble, but the CO came along, and he finally landed and he had me exonerated. Then we went to Natal, and that is where they have the famous Natal boots, at least, that was for the Air Force. They were just so soft and leather, the way they worked -- the leather and everything. It was just beautiful. So I had a better pair of boots, Natal boots. From there,

our next stop was Ascension Island, a that's right in the middle of the Pacific, it's a little dot there.

Interviewer: The Atlantic?

Willard White: Ascension Island is, it's right on the -- anyway.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Willard White: Before we took off, we were told three A-20s had been lost at sea, and to keep our eyes open. Going back a little, we never did fly formation flying overseas. It would have been too hard, weather and every other reason, so we all flew individually. We all had our own navigator on our airplane.

I want to back up a little bit. Back now past the British Guiana, then I flew down over the Amazon River. Prior to getting to the Amazon River, I was having a lot of fun. I was flying low and doing all these things because I was alone, nobody was reporting me. I was flying real low and I looked down up there and there's a village of thatched roof little huts and guys running around, you know, with not much of anything on. So I go right low over the village and I looked down and we couldn't believe it. They were shooting at us with bows and arrows. So I'm the first one that went to combat in our group, right there. I decided, I made a 180 and came back around, and they still shot arrows at our airplane. That was really something, because nobody had ever heard of that. This was a little village that probably didn't know what an airplane was. They thought, "My gosh, that's a big bird! That's not an eagle." Anyway, then, going from Natal to Ascension Island, it was a beautiful day. We did all sorts of maneuvers to look for those A-20s and never found them. They were gone. At Ascension Island, you kind of landed between two little peaks -- anyway, we had no trouble, we got there okay. But the next day was hell to

pay. We got up and there's a line of thunderstorms. There was awful bad weather taking off. There were a lot of cumulus clouds, banks of them. So we took off -- you, know, we had to go. This is war. You do things you don't want to do. Anyway, so we took off individually and I was maybe the 7th or 8th of 24 airplanes, and it was just terrible. I heard some of the guys that had taken off prior. One guy, Bob Evans, the strongest guy in the world. Incidentally, he was a double all-American, once at Missouri, once at West Point. His name was Bob Evans, and he was a terrific. He's not with us anymore. Anyway, he called up and said, "I'm at 8,000 feet and I am just getting the hell beat out of me. I just can't keep the airplane straight and level because you're riding these cumulus clouds. You couldn't get above them." We didn't have oxygen in our airplane, so we couldn't go that high. Then another guy called in. He was at 5,000 feet and he said he could hardly hold the airplane up. Then another guy called in at 3,000 or whatever. I heard all these things and I thought, "Well, that doesn't sound good to me." So I flew right over the waves over to Africa, to Liberia. That's where we went, to Liberia. I flew right over the waves, and it was not bad. I didn't have any problems at all. I was about the second one to land in Liberia, so I landed there and everybody comes staggering in. There's a friend of mine, his name is King and he's mean toward me -- he didn't like me very much, this Freddy King, this West Pointer, because going back to Savannah, Georgia. We were both single. There was a girl there and I take her out and he would take her out, but if he had a date with her, she'd break a date and go out with me. Now, that's not understandable, but that's what happened. He really resented me for that. So he had a date with this gal and it didn't work out, so he started a fight with me. This is after we landed, after that horrific ocean, you might say, going through all those clouds and everything, that horrible weather. He didn't hit me, thank goodness, because at Utah State, I was on the boxing team, and he was on the boxing team at West Point. Big deal, you

know, I lucked out. Anyway, then from Liberia, we went up to Marrakesh, Africa, and I flew over a sand storm that you wouldn't believe. If you had to make a landing, you'd be dead. You couldn't see, it was just -- you couldn't see the ground. We finally got out of that, and then we landed in Marrakesh. Then we went to another base.

Interviewer: So, when did you get into England?

Willard White: We went by Portugal and there was a whole bunch of ships underneath us there. We had a deal to turn on so they could hear our frequency or we'd been shot out of the sky. So I started for Portugal and then we went into England.

Interviewer: Tell me about your first day of combat, your first mission.

Willard White: The first mission, we flew to the coast and we were stationed at Braintree, a place called Rivenhall. That's where I flew a lot of missions, that's before D-Day. The first mission, we flew against some batteries. I mean, that's where, they were manufacturing and they're going to launch the V-1s from, the V-1s and the V-2s. So that was one of our first missions.

Interviewer: So, this was when? May, April?

Willard White: This was in probably April.

Interviewer: April of

Willard White: '44.

Interviewer: What was that first mission like?

Willard White: It was no big deal. What happens, you clear your guns right over the English Channel. Being the pilot, you're pretty busy all the time, and your heart will always skip a

couple beats, but as far as doing your job and being a pilot, I was busy all the time, so I wasn't scared. Now if had been a tail gunner or a waist gunner, I would have been scared to death -- I don't know. I do know that if you're scared and you're on a mission like that, you're probably going to get shot down. You have too much to do. There're all kinds of things to do as pilot to be sure that everything in the ship is going right, that everything worked -- the tail gunner, the race gunners, the top tier gunner, the forward gunner, he was a bombardier. He had a .50 caliber and I could shoot four .50 caliber machine guns by pushing a button where I was. So that was our first mission, and it was -- it depends, everybody was different.

Interviewer: So how many missions did you fly *before* D-Day?

Willard White: 30 missions before D-Day, and two on D-Day.

Interviewer: Tell us about the two missions on D-Day.

Willard White: Well, on D-Day, they got us up and told us what it was all about at 2:00 in the morning. We had a briefing, and I was scheduled to fly that first mission. We took off and it was still pretty dark, the time we took off, just turning lighter. We took off and I guess we hit Omaha Beach and we hit the beach on the first one. I remember when it was light, and looking down -- the greatest armada of ships in the history of the world was underneath me. I can't still get it out of my mind today -- the hundreds and hundreds of different kinds of ships for D-Day. That's the greatest armada ever put together anyway. I saw, in front of us, there was one B-26, I guess from another group, and he was a little ahead of us and he blew up right in front of me. Another plane must have hit his bomb bay, and the whole thing. Other than that, we took some flack, but it wasn't that bad.

Interviewer: So, what about your second mission on D-Day?

Willard White: Well, the second mission was a milk run. They had us go into the interior, low level -- which was didn't do, that's the only time -- and look for opportunities to, you know, anything that moved, we'd shoot at them.

Interviewer: So you'd strafe?

Willard White: So we could strafe and the whole thing. That's the only time--

Interviewer: Was that unusual in a B-26 to strafe?

Willard White: Oh yeah, because when the B-26s first went out of England, that's before my time quite a bit, they had like six airplanes and all six got shot down -- all six. One guy unloaded and came back, but that was low mission, that was low level. So they changed that finally and we were a medium level. We'd fly around 10,000 feet, anywhere from 9 o 12,000, and that seemed to be the best place for us. Go ahead.

Interviewer: I was going to say, we're going to come back, but I want to get to the -- this is December, is it the 26th?

Willard White: 23rd.

Interviewer: The December 23rd mission during the Battle of the Bulge. I want you to tell us all about that mission and what happened that day.

Willard White: Well, what happened is, prior to the 23rd -- that was during the Battle of the Bulge -- we were stationed at A-72. That's a pretty close, a little town called Saint Ferrata in France. We weren't very far from the Battle of the Bulge on the airbase, but we couldn't fly -- nobody couldn't fly. They couldn't fly, the Germans, and we couldn't fly for, I don't know how long, a couple of weeks in a row. Then finally, we had -- of course, we were side arms anyway,

we wore .45s all the time because the Germans infiltrated, were in our uniforms to bases like ours and caused a lot of problems, but we didn't see any. Anyway, December 23rd comes along, it was nice. We were to hit a bridge in this little (inaudible), or whatever, in France. We were at altitude and everything, and they had three chaffing ships. Now, the chaff -- they throw out little metal things and that's supposed to thwart the 88 millimeter, which was the best gun of the Second War, the German 88.

Interviewer: Because, uh--

Willard White: --because it had ruin their radar things, their aiming. We had to chaff people who were down by sprinkling this stuff so when they shot at us, they may not have as good a chance to hit us. So I looked down and all three were shot down that day, just like that, right after we've reached altitude. It just so happens, the B-26s, we always had fighter cover, like we had P-38s, we had P-47s, we had Spitfires, and a couple other airplanes. They always flew cover for us, otherwise, because we're not a fighter. We're a bomber, a medium bomber

Interviewer: So, the fear was, you needed fire cover to protect you from what?

Willard White: Protect us from fighters, any 109s and FW-190s, the German airplanes. They didn't show up that day. Of course, the Germans, in those days, they didn't have much gas, so they saved up for a day like that. They didn't fly every day all the time because they were short of fuel, the Germans. So that day, they had it. They had enough and they sent these FW-190s and F-109s after us. I think they shot down 10 of us right away. My top turret gunner was out, and I know I was number two in formation and I saw this FW-190 coming at me. Well an FW-190 had a canon in the nose where the filler is, and it was very lethal. It was a canon, the 109 didn't have that, but they were terrific too. Anyway, this guy comes right at me, and there's

nothing I can do, because he comes like this. I can't get out of formation and try to shoot him that, because that, you're impairing everybody else in the flight, other airplanes. Anyway, I knew that this guy had me. He must have -- something must have happened to his canon because he didn't shoot. He did a split "S" right in front of my airplane and went on about his business, or I wouldn't have been here if that canon would have worked. Anyway, we got shot up pretty good that day.

Interviewer: You lost how many planes?

Willard White: We lost, I think, 13 or 14 airplanes.

Interviewer: Out of how many?

Willard White: Out of maybe 35, 36, so they put us down pretty good. That's when, you know, when you get the Congressional Medal like that, it's usually because you lost a lot of people. That's what happened to us. It wasn't that we were so brave or anything, or any different than any other mission, it's the idea that we got decimated by the Germans and that's what happens.

Interviewer: So you won--

Willard White: When you get the Presidential Citation like that.

Interviewer: The Presidential Unit Citation.

Willard White: Yeah, that's what we got.

Interviewer: All right, tell us about some other missions that come to mind.

Willard White: Well, anyway, we were on this one mission. We were called the “Bridge Busters.” We knocked out a lot of bridges, and then the B-26s also hit a lot of marshalling yard. You know what a marshalling yard is -- a marshalling yard?

Interviewer: Tell me.

Willard White: That's a train depot. So we hit a lot of marshalling yard, too, in these different cities. We were on some kind of a mission, like, I think it was a marshalling yard we hit, and we had a lot of flack, boy. So we came in and this guy named John L. New was right in front of me, and he was really shot up. He had flares going up and everything. He comes and I am right behind him, and just before he lands. You can't believe it happened, but he did a barrel roll and landed right off the ground, he goes around and makes the land. His crew kind of shot up, too. We landed after that mission. I never did this, but my tail gunner and some of the crew members used to count the holes, and we had 146 holes. They were all four inches in diameter, and they didn't even count them. After that, we had to change our airplane, but nobody on my airplane ever got hurt. So my guardian angel was watching over a whole crew.

Interviewer: Did you have a name for your airplane?

Willard White: Yeah, the white cross, from Sigma Chi, but I never got it painted all the way on because I had to change planes.

Interviewer: So tell us, why would they shoot flares? Explain to people why you'd shoot flares.

Willard White: So that the ground people would know if you had injured on board, so they'd have ambulances ready for you, so you shot flares out.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Willard White: To let the people know on the ground that you were in trouble, that you may have people dead on your airplane or badly hurt or whatever.

Interviewer: Tell us about German flack, you mentioned it. Try to paint a picture.

Willard White: The flack comes from, I told you, the best gun in the Second World War, just not in my opinion, it's the way it is by a lot of experts. It was the finest gun in the Second War. It was the German 88 millimeter. They did all kinds of things with that gun. That's what shot the flack up there, and of course, they could time it, you know, whatever, for the altitude. Then when you flew in to flack and sometimes you heard some guy say, it was so thick you could walk on it? Well, I've seen it thick. You know, if a piece of that hits you, depends on where it goes, the fragments and a lot of little pieces, and then when it explodes up there, it's black. It's black. There's a black little cloud -- black, black, black. That's the way it looks and that's the way it is and that means if it is explodes up there. Some of the pieces hit you and make little holes and some of the people right there -- it depends on where it hit and where you are in relation to the flack. To see the flack up in front of you and you know that you had to fly through that to get to your target isn't fun. You know, but that's it. That flack really probably, well, except for the heavies, I guess, the 109 shot down, I mean, the heavy. More people were killed in the Air Force than all the other services put together in the Second War. People don't realize that, that so many thousands of airmen were killed. Of course, a good part of them were in B-17s and B-24s and the 8th Air Force. I was in the 9th Air Force.

Interviewer: So how many people did you lose in your squadron?

Willard White: I don't know, they never published that.

Interviewer: Did you have any idea?

Willard White: I have no idea because when somebody is shot down in a group -- we were a squadron, I was in the 596th Squadron -- if somebody in your barracks was not there because they take all the stuff out immediately when they knew he wasn't going to be there. As far as, there're four groups in the 397th Bomb Group, I mean, there're four squadrons, and we were one squadron, the 596th, so I really don't know. Now, they put out a letter of the deceased and those left alive and I have some of the old letters, but there's hardly any of us left comparatively speaking.

Interviewer: So, did you lose any crewman?

Willard White: No, I never lost a crewman. Never had a crewman hurt on my airplane. We lucked out.

Interviewer: And you flew how many missions.

Willard White: 66 is all.

Interviewer: You say that's all -- tell us why that's so funny.

Willard White: Well, when we first went overseas, they had the missions down. You flew 25 missions and you go home. Well that changed because they were short of pilots and all this. Slowly, they upped-the-ante all the time. Originally, it was like 25 missions, go home. No, didn't happen that way.

Interviewer: So, could you have gone home earlier? Did you volunteer for any of this?

Willard White: Well, what happens is they made it the maximum that you wanted to fly was 65 missions, and I flew 66.

Interviewer: What did the commander think of you?

Willard White: Well, his name was Robert McCloud, and is deceased. He was our squadron commander -- one of the finest guys I ever met. Fantastic. What he had told me, I was a flight commander at that time, and I was also a special service officer and also public relations officer of the squadron. So, what that meant is that I used to go to a station in France, Versailles, I would get weekends and be able to go to Paris and make radio talks and they'd sent them back to the United States. They asked me to do a lot of stuff, and I did it, and put on the parties for the squadron and they are stories all by themselves.

Interviewer: Oh, really.

Willard White: You know, I told you, I think you have some of those stories.

Interviewer: All right, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Um, I'd like to hear a little bit more about the armada and D-Day.

Interviewer: Tell us more about D-Day, tell us more about what you say. Try to paint a picture, what's your altitude and how far can you see and what's

Willard White: Well, as I say, we were stationed of course in England. They had a briefing about 2:00 in the morning. I told you, and it was dark and we waited awhile. They had a couple briefings, and then we took off just about dawn. It was, as far as we were concerned, we always figure we were fortunate if we got to be in something like that. It wasn't the idea that we were going on a mission -- that was our job. So, when I took off that morning, I was glad I was picked to fly that mission. Then we took off and, you know, when you're flying, I'm awful busy being the pilot. I just can't be checking everything out too much as far as the ground goes. I remember

that it was kind of intermittent clouds and so forth, but then, after awhile, you could see that ocean and see the hundreds and hundreds of ships. Then the coast line came in, our bombardier took over and took the target. We went through a little flack, but D-Day wasn't expected. They had some fighters out, but they didn't have a lot of fighters out to invade the Germans. They did have some flack and they did shoot down some of our airplanes.

Interviewer: What was, how many airplanes could you see? Was the sky filled with airplanes on D-Day?

Willard White: Well, there were quite a few, but I remember flying out of England that sometimes, and then out of France, there would be -- they had a few missions where there were a 1,000 airplanes, American mostly, heavy bombers, B-17s, B-24s, B-20s, B-25, B-26s. They had sometimes thousand-airplane missions, and that's how come we decimated Germany completely.

Interviewer: What's it like to fly in a thousand planes?

Willard White: Well, I'm not part of that because most of those were heavies they are at 28,000 feet or whatever, and I'm down at 10, 12,000 feet. We could see them up in there, up in the sky. It's a sight you'll never forget. Also stationed in England, the heavies, they would get up about three hours before us and take off on their missions. They'd have to circle, and you know the weather in England "ain't good," to use good English. It's pretty bad most of the time, especially in the winter. There are a lot of clouds. So, what was the scariest part would be a midair collision in the clouds, because you had to circle around. We didn't have the sophisticated radar and stuff they have today to get separation. We don't know who's up there coming around. I know one time, a guy came screaming down in front of me, I guess a crash, just missed us. I will tell you, what we did in our barracks in England. We could hear the heavies, and once in awhile, you'd

hear when two airplanes come together and crash. That was because of bad weather. We had that too many times -- they'd crash up there because they couldn't keep separation and keep where they are supposed to be at certain altitudes. It was tough in bad weather. That's, as far as I'm concerned, and a lot of other pilots, that was the scary part is going up through the clouds to get into above the clouds or whatever, to get into formation.

Interviewer: What was your last mission?

Willard White: Well, it was a milk run. It was nothing exciting, that I remember, because at that time, we pretty well shot the German Air Force. They were down to hardly anything anymore. Some of the -- it depends on where you're going and how the flack was.

Interviewer: Yeah, so, when did you go home? How and what were the circumstances.

Willard White: Well, I went home by way of Paris. That's quite a story

Interviewer: By way of where?

Willard White: With some of the buddies

Interviewer: How did you get home? I didn't hear.

Willard White: I took a liberty ship home from England and we went over to England and took a ship home. I've never been air sick, but I was nauseated for 16 days on this boat -- (Laughter) -- to go to New York.

Interviewer: Did you go home to Utah? Where did you go?

Willard White: Pardon?

Interviewer: Did you go back to Utah? Where did you go?

Willard White: Well, I went to Los Angeles. That's where my parents spent their winters, and I went up to Idaho to fish and fool around.

Interviewer: Were your parents glad to see you?

Willard White: Oh, yeah (laughter). Surprised, because my brother was a captain and he went to Anzio. He also was in Africa, and he was a forward observer in the infantry, I guess. So he went to, he went to Anzio, and that was one of the worst battles in the Second War, as you probably know.

Interviewer: Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Reflections on the whole ordeal, the whole--

Interviewer: Tell us about, as you look back now, on World War II and what you think about World War II and America's mission and your role in it.

Willard White: Well, I'd say, at that time, America had a big role to play because without America, the Germans -- if Hitler had been smart and he'd attacked Russia, he'd definitely had taken England. But with this there now, we are in to the fray and he is trying to fight on two big fronts like that and, thank goodness, but America, sure. At that time, if we hadn't have gone to war, and let's say Germany had won, you'd be speaking German now to me. We were very important for that day, and the Air Force at that time, it was an all volunteer Air Force. They were not conscripted like the rest of the people in the services. We were all volunteers, so we volunteered for all these things. That was the attitude of the young American in those days. We love America. The only thing we were afraid of in MacDill Field was dying before we got there.

We wanted to fight over there. It wasn't like, sorry to say, some other wars we've been in. The men, like I said, were the greatest generation. I'm not going to say that's true, but it could be close, because in those days, all the guys, my two best friends I went to LA High School with, we all wanted to be pilots. We were having lunch before the war and this airplane flew really low, it was the biggest thing we'd ever seen. It was a C-47. We said, "We're going to be pilots." So we were all pilots, and one was killed. He was stationed at Wright-Patterson Air Field. He was a test pilot, a great guy. This is quite a story, his father was sick in LA, so they let him take a P-51 from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base to Los Angeles. They ever found his airplane or him -- and the greatest guy. My other best buddy, he was stationed at Las Vegas as an instructor pilot. What's the name of that field in Vegas? Anyway, he was an instructor pilot, and in those days, he was flying a biplane and they have dual controls, front and back, they were sticks like this. So he was teaching this guy, you know, to fly, and this guy froze. He pulled back the stick like this and wouldn't let go and my buddy, the instructor, there's no way he could push that and get out of that spin. So it killed my buddy. So my two best friends were killed. They thought they were going overseas and they were my best friends for years in Los Angeles. That was really -- I still can't remember, I just hope I go to heaven because that's where they're going to be (laughter).

Interviewer: Okay.

Elizabeth: I'm good.

Interviewer: That was a wonderful interview.

End of recording.