B-29 Missions Over Japan in World War II

Narrated by Henry "Hap" Horner

Oral History Project
Under the Direction of
Doctor D. McGregor

by

John L. Garner
UIS

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# Contents

About the Participants................................................................. 3
Method....................................................................................... 4
Editing Process........................................................................... 5
Synopsis........................................................................................ 5
Photographs................................................................................ 6
Introduction.................................................................................. 13
Transcription Introduction............................................................ 18
Pearl Harbor................................................................................ 19
Basic Training.............................................................................. 22
Uniqueness of the B-29................................................................. 25
Man O’War.................................................................................. 34
Deployment................................................................................... 46
Emergency Landing................................................................. 50
B-29 Crew.................................................................................. 56
Guam......................................................................................... 62
Enola Gay................................................................................... 66
Kamikazes.................................................................................... 68
Distinguished Flying Cross......................................................... 71
Revisionist History................................................................. 72
About the Participants

*Henry “Hap” Horner* – Narrator

Henry “Hap” Horner is the Chairman of the 58\textsuperscript{th} Bomb Wing Association. He worked for the Monsanto Corporation from 1963 until he retired in 1985 as a Laboratory Manager in Sauget, IL. Mr. Horner served as a Central Fire Control Operator on one of the first operational B-29 crews and participated in approximately 18 missions and 9 hump missions in the Pacific Theater. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and numerous other awards while serving his country.

*John L. Garner* – Interviewer

John L. Garner is a graduate student at the University of Illinois – Springfield. He is majoring in history. John Garner received his undergraduate degree in education from Eastern Illinois University. He works full time as an Illinois State Police, Master Sergeant, supervising a Special Victim’s Unit.
Henry "Hap" Horner

Oral History Transcript

Method

The interview was conducted in the lower level at Mr. Henry "Hap" Horner’s condominium in Collinsville, Illinois on October 7, 2006. Mr. Horner’s humility made him a reluctant narrator but his family coaxed him into participating.

The purpose of the interview was to capture Mr. Horner’s unique experiences as a member of the crew of one of the first operational B-29 long-range bombers. Approximately 1,500 World War II veterans die each day according to the World War II Veteran’s Oral History Project (Delaware), Web Site. With each passing a unique history and part of our nation’s past is lost.

Technical Method

The audio taping was done using a standard cassette tape recorder with an internal microphone. Experiments were conducted prior to the actual interview utilizing an external microphone but the sound quality was substandard. Additionally, digital video of the interview was captured utilizing a 20 GB, JVC, Everio, HDD Digital Video Camera. Digital images of Mr. Horner’s personal photographs were also captured using the digital video camera. The audio transcription was conducted by John Garner. The video editing was done by Tracey Garner. The video and manuscript documentation transferred to High Quality, Pure Silver, CD-R 80, media.
Editing

Editing of the transcript was minimal. "Buzz words" like "ummmmm" and "ahhhhh" and false starts in Mr. Horner’s speech were eliminated. A draft copy of the manuscript was provided to Mr. Horner and he conducted an extensive edit of the grammar and spelling contained in the draft manuscript but altered the content little. Mr. Horner was concerned sentence fragments and incomplete sentences were inappropriate. His edits were incorporated into the final manuscript.

Synopsis of Henry “Hap” Horner’s Tape

In this tape, Henry “Hap” Horner discusses his life in the United States at the beginning of World War II. His reactions to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and his enlistment and basic training are chronicled during the early parts of the recording.

The center-piece of this project is the B-29 airplane and its crew. As a member of one of the first operational B-29 long-range bomber crews, Mr. Horner discusses the struggles and challenges the new technology brought with it. Also discussed are the dangerous B-29 missions over the Himalayan Mountain Range, Japanese air resistance, and the bombing of the Japanese mainland.

At the conclusion of the interview, President Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bomb (transported by a B-29) upon the Japanese mainland is discussed. Additionally, Mr. Horner discusses his state-side role as a military trainer during the final days of the war in the Pacific.
B-29 “Man O War” – Henry “Hap” Horner (4th from left, front row)

Henry “Hap” Horner – working on B-29 at base at Piardoba, India
B-29 crew at advance base at Kiunglai, China

Crew of B-29 briefing just prior to mission over Japan
Henry “Hap” Horner – receiving Distinguished Flying Cross

Henry “Hap” Horner – 1943
Henry “Hap” Horner - in B-29 at 2006 Bomber Reunion

Kunglai, China – (below “N” in CHINA on above map)
Piardoba, India in West Bengal
Introduction

The Boeing B-29 Superfortress was a four engine propeller driven heavy bomber flown by the US Army Airforces in World War II. It was one of the most advanced bombers of its time, featuring pressurized cabins, a central fire-control system ("Hap" Horner's assignment), and remote controlled machine-gun turrets. Originally designed as a high altitude daytime bomber, the B-29 found greater success as a low altitude nighttime bomber.¹

The Boeing B-29 was designed in 1940 as an eventual replacement for the B-17 and B-24. The first one built made its maiden flight on Sept. 21, 1942. Developing the Boeing B-29 was a program which rivaled the Manhattan Project in size and expense. In December 1943, it was decided not to use the B-29 in the European Theater, thereby permitting the airplane to be sent to the Pacific area where its great range made it particularly suited for the long over water flight required to attack the Japanese homeland from bases in China. During the last two months of 1944, B-29s began operating against Japan from the islands of Saipan, Guam and Tinian.²

The B-29 Superfortress was more than just the plane that dropped the atomic bombs on Japan. The first production B-29 came off the line in 9/43, and the last in 10/45. There were further design variants, including the B-29A and B-29B. A total of almost 4,000 planes, comprising all three types, were built. And these planes not only were successful in their intended use, but they also went on to a varied career. Some were loaned to the British, some were used as test-beds for new equipment, others were

converted for uses as varied as aerial refueling and weather reconnaissance. The last B-29 was retired from the Air Force inventory in 1960. Out of some 4,000 planes, only about two dozen remain, at museums and Air Force bases around the country.\(^3\)

Manufacturing the B-29 was an immense task. It involved four main factories: two Boeing plants at Renton, Washington and Wichita, Kansas, a Bell plant at Marietta, Georgia, and a Martin plant at Omaha, Nebraska. Thousands of subcontractors were involved in the project. Because of its highly advanced design, challenging requirements, and immense pressure for production, development was deeply troubled. The first prototype crashed during testing, killing the entire crew and several ground personnel. Changes to the production craft came so often and so fast that in early 1944, B-29's would leave the production lines and fly directly to modification depots for extensive rebuilds to incorporate the latest changes. This 'battle of Kansas' nearly sank the program, which was only saved by General Hap Arnold's direct intervention. It would still be nearly a year before the aircraft was operated with any sort of reliability.

The most common cause of maintenance headaches and catastrophic failures was the engine. Though the Wright R-3350 would later become a trustworthy workhorse in large piston-engined aircraft, early models were beset with dangerous reliability problems. It had an impressive power-to-weight ratio, but this came at a heavy cost to durability. Worse, the cowling Boeing designed for the engine was too close (out of a desire for improved aerodynamics), and the early cowl flaps caused problematic flutter and vibration when open in most of the flight envelope. The cylinders leeward of the distributor overheated, due to the reduced cooling air.

\(^3\) "B-29 Superfortress," [http://members.aol.com/elsquared/B29site.html](http://members.aol.com/elsquared/B29site.html), accessed 10/13/06.
These weaknesses combined to make an engine that would overheat regularly when carrying combat loads; it frequently destroyed cylinder valves. The resulting engine fires were exacerbated by a crankcase designed mostly of magnesium alloy. The heat was often so intense the main spar burned through in seconds, resulting in catastrophic failure of the wing. This problem would not be fully cured until the aircraft was re-engined with the more powerful Pratt & Whitney R-4360 'Wasp Major' in the B-29D/B-50 program, which arrived too late for World War II. Pilots, including the present-day pilots of the Commemorative Air Force’s Fifi, describe flight after takeoff as being an urgent struggle for airspeed; generally, flight after takeoff should consist of striving for altitude. Radial engines need that airflow to keep cool, and failure to get up to speed as soon as possible could result in an engine failure and risk of fire.

In wartime, the B-29 was capable of flight up to 40,000 feet, at speeds of up to 350 MPH (true airspeed). This was its best defense, for fighters of that day could barely get that high, and few could catch it, even if they were already up there and waiting. Only the heaviest of anti-aircraft weapons could reach it. The crew enjoyed, for the first time in a bomber, full pressurized comfort. The nose and the cockpit were pressurized, but they had to have a large bomb bay that was not pressurized, or they would have had to de-pressurize to drop their loads. So the B-29 had a long tunnel over the two bomb bays so that crews could crawl back and forth between the front end and the back, with both areas and the tunnel pressurized.

The initial plan was to use B-29's to attack Japan from airfields in southern China, with the main base in India, and to attack other targets in the region from China and India.
as needed. This was an extremely costly scheme, as there was no overland connection available between India and China, and all the supplies had to be flown over the Himalayas. The first B-29's started to arrive in India in early April, 1944. The first B-29 flight to airfields in China (over the Himalayas, or "The Hump") took place on 24 April 1944. The first B-29 combat mission was flown on 5 June 1944, with 77 out of 98 planes launched from India bombing the railroad shops in Bangkok (5 B-29s were lost to non-battle causes).

On June 15, 1944, 47 B-29's launched from Chengtu in China bombed the Imperial Iron and Steel Works at Yawata, Japan. This was the first attack on Japanese islands since the Doolittle raid in April, 1942 (Henry "Hap" Horner was part of this raid). The first B-29 combat loss occurred during this raid, with one B-29 destroyed on the ground by Japanese fighters after an emergency landing. Because of the extreme cost of operations, the raids against Japan from Chinese airfields continued at relatively low intensity. Japan was bombed on: 7 July 1944 (14 B-29s), 29 July (70+), 10 August (24), 20 August (61), 8 September (90), 26 September (83), 25 October (59), 12 November (29), 21 November (61), 19 December (36) and for the last time on 6 January 1945 (49). B-29s were withdrawn from airfields in China by the end of January, 1945. Throughout this period B-29 raids were also launched from China and India against many other targets throughout Southeast Asia. However, the entire B-29 effort was gradually shifted to the new bases in the Marianas, with the last B-29 combat mission from India flown on March 29, 1945.4

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The need to use inconvenient bases in China for attacks against Japan ceased after the capture of the Marianas islands in 1944. On the islands of Tinian, Saipan and Guam a series of airfields were built, which became the main bases for the large B-29 raids against Japan in the final year of the war. The islands could be easily supplied by ship. The first B-29 arrived on Saipan on 12 October 1944, and the first combat mission was launched from there on 28 October 1944, with 14 B-29s attacking the Truk atoll. The first mission against Japan from bases in the Marianas was flown on 24 November 1944, with 111 B-29s sent to attack Tokyo. From that point ever more intense raids were launched regularly until the end of the war. These attacks succeeded in devastating all large Japanese cities and gravely damaged Japan's war industries.

Perhaps the most recognized B-29 is the Enola Gay, which dropped the atomic bomb 'Little Boy' on Hiroshima on 1945 August 6. The Bockscar, also a B-29, dropped 'Fat Man' on Nagasaki three days later.

The B-29 was used in World War II only in the Pacific Theatre. It was later used in the Korean War, over the course of which they flew 20,000 sorties and dropped 200,000 tons (180,000 tones) of bombs. 3970 of the aircraft were built before they were retired in 1960.

The B-29 was soon made obsolete by the development of the jet engine. With the arrival of the mammoth B-36, the B-29 suffered its first ignominy by being classified a medium bomber with the new Air Force. However, the later B-29D/B-50 variant was good enough to handle auxiliary roles such as air-sea rescue, electronic intelligence gathering, and even air-to-air refueling. It was replaced in its primary role during the
early 1950s by the Boeing B-47 Stratojet, which in turn was replaced by the Boeing B-52 Stratofortress. The final active duty variants were phased out in the mid 1960s.

With the B-29, USAF/USAF introduced an entirely new crew concept. The aircraft was to be managed like a naval vessel with the pilot becoming the airplane commander. Prior to takeoff, the crew would line up on the port side of the airplane for a formal inspection by the captain. In flight, the pilot called for engine and flap settings, much like a ship captain would call for "left rudder" or "full speed ahead," instead of moving the throttles and the flap levers himself. Another innovation was the number of calculations the crew had to perform before and during the mission. Prior to the B-29, flight manuals provided only approximate performance figures and pilots relied largely on instincts and experience. The B-29 manual had charts to compute takeoff and landing speeds based on weight, elevation, and temperature. Finding the optimum power settings for cruise required consideration of cruise altitude, outside temperature, aircraft weight, and desired true airspeed. The power settings were recalculated every two hours or with every change in altitude. These types of computations are routine in modern civil and military aviation but were a groundbreaking innovation in 1944. The benefits of improved range and performance were irrefutable.

The B-29 was a relatively easy aircraft to fly and could be flown without two engines. However, the expansive glazed nose left pilots without a point of reference, forcing many to fly on instruments at all times. It also required great physical strength because the controls on this massive aircraft did not have power assistance.\(^5\)

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5 Ibid.
Henry “Hap” Horner, October 7, 2006, Collinsville, IL

John L. Garner: Interviewer

Introduction (Counter @ 005): Today is October the 7th of 2006 and we are in Collinsville, Illinois in the lower level of a nice condo with Mr. Henry “Hap” Horner who was a crew member on B-29s in World War II. Our goal today is to talk about his unique experiences in World War II and what that meant to him and what we can gain from that today.

Q: How old were you in about 1939-1940?

A: I was fifteen when the German’s first invaded Poland in 1939.

Q: So you didn’t even have your driver’s license at this time?

A: No.

Q: What do you remember from your parents and from your community and from your neighborhood? What were some of your thoughts about what was going on back then?

A: Well, probably we were all rather naïve. I lived in a rural community and most of the news we got was over the radio at the time from some of the commentators. I had been aware that there were problems in Europe and I guess I remember Chamberlain was the
Prime Minister of England at the time. He met with the Germans and practically gave away the store, I guess and came back and said we will have peace in our time. And within a short time, the Germans were bombing Poland.

Q: That would be kinda scary. What did you think of Pearl Harbor? What were your thoughts when you think back to that day and President Roosevelt was speaking?

A: Well I think (pause) there was a tremendous wave of patriotism at that time. Everyone I think wanted to do what they could to remedy the situation. Of course it was a surprise. I was listening to the radio when the report came through about the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor....and without any prior indication, matter of fact their ambassadors had been in Washington and we were trying to work out some type of agreement with them and apparently they were aware all the time what was going on but (not understandable) so ahhh, ahum, from then on the Japanese were not very welcome as far as I was concerned. (Laughter)

Q (counter @ 36): Now you were in Lancaster, Pennsylvania right?

A: Well, I was in Lancaster County. I lived in a small town by the name of Bainbridge. At the time, I was a senior in high school in Maytown, PA. At the time of Pearl Harbor. I know all the guys in the class, Monday morning, after the attack on Sunday, all the talk was about signing up and going to do their part.
Q: Just so I can kinda connect the dots here, would you say, you were talking about patriotism, I remember feeling that way after 9/11. Was it something similar to that?

A: Yeah. Very much so.

Q: So, you were a senior in high school. Were you shocked? Angry? Confused? What was going on in your mind as far as……

A: Well, it was a shock and I think anger would probably describe it, yes.

Q: So how did you enroll in the military?

A: Well, I when I was eighteen you had to register for the draft. So, as soon as I could I volunteered through the draft board but they didn’t call me, let’s see, I would have been eighteen in January of 1942, but I didn’t get called, they didn’t call me up right away so I took a Pennsylvania State College extension pre-engineering course at Franklin/Marshall College in Lancaster, and that lasted throughout the summer. Then I went to work for Armstrong Cork Company who was a big linoleum manufacturing (not understandable) in Lancaster. We were making wing tips for B-26 bombers. And I worked there from about September until February when I actually went into the service.

Q: Was that something you wanted to do? Were you kinda looking forward to it or did you just feel it was your duty to do it or were you anxious to get in?
A: Yes. Because they talked to me about possible deferment but I didn’t want to do that.

Q: One of the reasons we are talking to you today is because you are the Chairman of 58th Bomb Wing Association and you have been since 2001. So you have a historical museum? Can you talk about that a little bit?

A (counter @ 63): Yes, I don’t know how many years ago, the man who was chosen as the 58th Bomber Wing (Chairman) at that time was taking a trip to New England and saw this old beat up B-29 sitting there along with some other planes in sort of a grave yard and he found out they belonged to the New England Air Museum so he approached them about he possibility of rehabbing that plane. And that idea sort of took off. With contributions from 58th Bomb Wing members and the State of Connecticut and (not understandable) they’ve done a really nice job on it. We just had a reunion up there this past September and the plane is probably is one of the best rehab jobs of all the B-29s that are on exhibit throughout the country.

Q (counter @ 75): Do you know how many are restored and on exhibit?

A: I think, I’m not positive about the number, there might be twenty. There is only one that is capable of flying and that was Fiti. But she’s been grounded for some time with engine problems and so forth. Boeing started out to build another that could fly and that project has been going for a number of years now and they still have intention of doing
that. This is in Wichita, Kansas but the main drawback is they have to have all the engines rebuilt and there is apparently only one company that can do this job and it is very expensive.

Q: Tell me about your basic training what was that like? Did you know when you went in what your assignment was going to be? How did you get involved with the B-29?

A: Well, no I didn’t know what…. When you went in there was sort of a toss up as to just what, where you’d get assigned. When you went into what they called the Reception Center, you got your physical, some of your shots, and testing and all that sort of stuff. You could specify what branch you’d like to get assigned to but they always said that would be the one you wouldn’t get. But anyway I was interested in flying and I don’t, every since I can probably remember anything just about. I’ve always been interested in flying so I wanted to fly in the worst way. And ahh… At the time, I didn’t even think about applying for pilot training because I didn’t have any college at that time or anything like that. I did specify that I wanted to go in the Air Corps as it was known. And ahh, fortunately that is where I was assigned. I went from the Reception Center to St. Petersburg, Florida for basic training. I spent most of March down there I guess. I don’t remember the exact timing any more. We lived in the Ballroom of the Hotel Vinoy. They had bunks set up throughout the Ballroom of the hotel. Several hundred of us in there. (Laughter) And you’d go out in the morning, it was cold out there, they’d take you out on the beach and you’d dress warmly and by 10 O’clock, you taking off everything you could. Our basic training wasn’t as stringent as some, but ahh, we
managed to get through it. From basic training I was assigned to Armament School out at Buckley Field, Colorado. We went out there and late March, middle of March, somewhere around there and that was quite a contrast being in Florida and then going out to the Denver, Colorado area that time of year, plus the altitude. The first time they took us out to do PT we almost (laughter) didn’t survive. It took awhile to adjust to that. Armament School we learned all about the turrets and so forth, of just about all the aircraft, the 17, the 24, the 26, the 25, plus we learned all about the caliber 50 machine guns and that sort of thing. I think that course lasted about eight weeks and most of thought at the time maybe we’d be assigned to the 8th Air Force over in England or something like that flying in 17s or something like that. But the last week of Armament School there was notice on the bulletin board that said these guys serial number so-and-so, are assigned to Central Fire Control School at Laurie Field, we thought Central Fire Control School, we didn’t want to fight fires (laughter). We’d never heard anything about Central Fire Control or the B-29.

Q: It didn’t exist at that time, did it?

A (counter @ 124): It was a top secret project. So once we got into school and found out what it was all about we, well the school lasted from April until September. It was an extensive school. We spent, I think the school was more intense than pilot training or navigational training or some of the other programs that the Air Force had. I think I was in about the second, second class that went through Central Fire Control. I enjoyed Colorado, I always said if I could have found work there when I got out of the service
that's probably where I wanted to live. But anyway, after we finished school that September we were sent to (pause) Kansas.

Q: Alright, so you were sent to Kansas and then what happened?

A: We went, we were sent to Smokey Hill Airfield in Salina, Kansas for assignment to one of the B-29 groups. And when we got to Salina that was first time we ever saw a B-29. There was one fly’n.

Q: What did you think when you saw that?

A: Well we thought, we wondered how in the world that thing ever got into the air. Cause at the time that was the biggest airplane that the Air Force had. Much larger than a 17.

Q: It was about three stories high, wasn’t it?

A: The tail was, yeah. Ninety-nine feet long, and 141 foot wing-span 3250 horse power engines. They always said the wing-span was greater than the Wright Brother’s first flight. (Laughter) But we were only in Salina for a few days then we were reassigned to groups and I ended up with the 462nd group at Walker Field in Victoria, Kansas, which was a very, very remote area in Kansas. (Laughter) The closest town of any size was Hays. And Russell. We got there in October of 1943 and I was assigned to a crew, flight
crew and I was with that crew then through the entire rest of my time in the service. The crew members became very close. Just like brothers almost. I’ve kept in touch with most of them until they died. I think there are four of us left out of eleven.

Q (counter @ 161): One of the neat things about the B-29 was the remote control....

A: The B-29 had several unique things which no previous military planes had. One of them was the remote control turret system and the other was the pressurization. We could stay pressurized to eight-thousand feet so we didn’t really need to be on oxygen except when over the target. Then we would depressurize and go on oxygen in case we got hit. We didn’t want that sudden change in pressure for everything loose would blow out. But the remote control turret system was called the Central Fire Control system and it was computerized. It was a GE system. Of course it was all vacuum tubes at that time, no solid state stuff. We spent a lot of time trouble-shooting that thing. It really worked pretty well. You had essentially five sighting stations. The top station which the Central Fire Control Gunner manned. And there were two side blisters, the right and left side blisters. And then the bombardier manned the gun station in the nose and then there was a tail-gunner. And you could operate several turrets from one location. (Cough) I could use the two top turrets. The left and right side-gunners could operate either one or both of the bottom turrets, plus the tail turret. And the bombardier could operate either the top or bottom front turrets. You had a lot of flexibility. And one of the jobs of the Central Fire Control Operator was to keep switching positions to the guy that needed the guns at a particular time. So, it took a lot of juggling sometimes. But the tail-gunner, he was by
himself back there. His little compartment was pressurized all by itself and once we were pressurized he was stuck back there, no way to get out. The central part of the airplane was pressurized. There was unpressurized section between the tail and the central section. The central section contained the radar operator and the two side gunners and the central fire control. Our compartment was connected to the front of the airplane by a tunnel. We could crawl back and forth through that tunnel. We weren’t as isolated as the tail gunner was. I never wanted to be in that job.

Q: Let’s go back to the political environment. Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor by this time were also in China, is that right?

A: Well, they had been in China for quite awhile before that.

Q: You complete basic training and where do you go next? Where was your first dispatch to? Operation?

A: You mean after the Walker Field Training? We were there through the winter of 43-44. At first, we were very limited in the number of 29s. Each squadron had only one B-29. So, we had to take turns flying that thing. A lot of our training was done in B-17s.

Q: So you weren’t actually in the B-29s for training?
A: And that really didn’t help us, the Central Fire Control Operators. They didn’t have a Central Fire Control. We were flying for bombardier training, and navigational training, and pilot training, but so…our training was quite limited in the early….the 29s were really put into operation before they were debugged. There was a lot of problems with them, particularly engines. Clear up until almost the end of the war they were having trouble with the engines.

Q (counter @ 215): How many engines does the 29 have?

A: Four. Four bladed props on them. They had trouble with overheating. The popped valves and that sort of thing. It wasn’t too unusual to comeback with an engine feathered or even two. You could fly on two. The training period…that was a rough winter in Kansas. Probably one of the roughest winters, snow; ice, we had to sweep the snow off the wings of the airplane before we could take off. We always said you’d move one step forward and be blown back two. It was a bad winter.

Q: Let me back up a little. You are part of the 58th Bomber Wing. How big is that?

A: The 58th Bomb Wing consisted of four groups, the 40th, the 444th, the 462nd, and the 468th. Each group was at a different location. The 468th was at Salina. The 40th, I think was at Pratt? (not understandable), the 444th was at Great Bend, Kansas, and we, the 462nd, were at Walker, at Victoria Kansas.
Q: How many people were in yours?

A: I think in a group there were somewhere around 5000.

Q: Were they all operations or were there support people too?

A: A lot of support people. A lot more support people than there were flying.

Q: I’ve heard someplace that, I know in Okinawa, there were 20 support people for every....

A: Yeah, that is probably a good ratio.

Q: So, then for the 58th Bomb Wing, there could have been 20,000 people?

A: Yeah, 15 to 20 thousand probably at one time.

Q: And then how many planes would be in? You just have....?

A: At first, we were suppose to have twelve per squadron which would have been 48 in a group. And ahh, we didn’t reach that count until we were overseas, I think. ‘Cause we just didn’t have that many airplanes.
Q: They were still producing them. Right?

A: Oh, yes.

Q (counter @ 245): Were these “Rosie the Riveters” who were making these planes?

A: Oh, yea. Sure. A lot of them were made in Seattle. There was one in Marietta, Georgia and one in Wichita, Kansas.

Q: So, you were assigned to your crew and you trained through the winter, what happens to your crew next?

A: Well, then they were anxious to get the 29’s operational. And there were still a lot of problems with them. So in the spring, along about March, they made a real push to get the planes overseas. They had a lot of Boeing personnel come on to the base and that sort of thing to trouble-shoot and iron out bugs and that type of thing. So we started leaving in April to go overseas. One of the really humorous things when I look back on it, it wasn’t at the time. The first airplane our squadron had, I was in the 768th Squadron and the 462nd group, was designated by the last numbers on the tail. It was 210. Of course you can imagine by time it got through the training program it was get’n a little bit weathered and beat up but that was the one we were assigned to. It still had the camouflage paint on it. The newer ones coming out would just be aluminum finish. They found out the paint slow’em down some, added weight and that sort of thing. So
my pilot decided he didn’t like fly’n that camouflaged airplane particularly if we had to take it overseas. He got a project going, he got permission to take the paint off that sucker (laughter) but the Boeing engineer said you can only take the paint off the area that isn’t pressurized. This involved the area between the tail turret and the central radar compartment were we could take that paint off Well, the crew had to do that job, the ground personnel wouldn’t do it. And we spent several weeks tak’n that paint off, and it was an odd look’n spectacle. But the ironic thing is about two days before were to take that plane overseas a new one came in and we were assigned to that. But the thing was, it was also a camouflaged job so we still (not understandable) took a camouflaged one overseas. But I always thought it would be interesting to take that one, because the Japs would have laughed themselves to death when they saw it.

Q: What made the B-29 unique? Why was the B-29 so critical to our mission?

A: ‘Cause of the range, primarily.

Q: How would you compare and contrast it with what we were using prior to that?

A: Probably almost double the range.

Q: Had extra fuel capacity?
A (counter @ 290): Fuel capacity, yeah. Bomb load and so forth. When we take off loaded, around 70 tons, 140,000 pounds.

Q: Which meant we had to use fewer ground troops to secure forward positions, right? The B-29, in effect, might save lives because we wouldn’t have to have bases as close to Japan or our targets?

A: Initially, we didn’t have good places for staging. That’s why when we were sent overseas, we were sent to India. Most of us didn’t understand why in the world we went to India. Get out of the airplane there and the temperature was about 100 and some degrees. There weren’t many places, not on the mainland of Japan certainly, that we could reach from India so the plan was to have advanced bases in China. So we’d fly from the base in India to the base in China, to fly missions over Japan. But the main draw back was supplies. We had to, at first we had to fly our own supplies over there. We make what we called “hump trips” over the Himalayan mountains and we put tanks in the bomb bays to carry extra gasoline. And then when you’d get over to China, you’d download all the gas you could just keep enough to get back to India. That wasn’t a very good way to run a war, really.

Q: What was it like flying over the Himalayas? I understand that was pretty dangerous?

A: Yeah, it was. We lost a lot of planes. Because if you lost engines over there you were down in that mountainous region. We had a number of guys who flew into those
mountains. The fog. We didn’t have satellite navigation like you have today. You had
to depend on your navigator and some of the maps weren’t as good as they could have
been and things like that. Yeah, it was….as a matter of fact they actually gave us combat
time for the hump trips.

Q: So in theory then, you would fly from India (I don’t think of India when I think of the
War in the Pacific) then fly to another forward base and then resupply and do your
missions from there.

A: A couple of early missions were over Burma, cause the Japs had overrun Burma at
the time and Bangkok and Rangoon and places like that to get some experience. The first
time we went to China, it was the plane we flew over from the states, we were landing the
brakes went out, there was a rock pile at the end of the runway. I was sitting in the CFC
seat and I could tell something was wrong. All the sudden I saw us veer off the left and
we jumped a drainage ditch and the nose wheel collapsed and the tail went up in the air
and ahh, of course they cut the power and it didn’t catch on fire. There was some
Colonel outside yelling, “get out, get out, it’s gonna burn!” But it never did burn.

Q: Of course you were loaded with gas?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: So, you fixed this plane? Obviously, someone did?
A: The plane was never repaired. It was stripped for parts since they were badly needed.
We flew back to India with another group another crew, I mean. That’s when we got
assigned to Man O-War.

Q: Let’s talk about Man O-War. What was on the nose art on that plane?

A: Well, it was a horse.

Q: So it was a horse, not the sea creature, Man O-War?

A: No.

Q: Who actually did the art? Did the crews do their own art work?

A: There was some guy who had a little artistic talent, he practically did all the nose art
for the whole group.

Q: There was a variety of different pieces. Those are kinda famous now, aren’t they?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Were the B-29s the only ones that were painted up? Were the others?
A (counter @ 354): The 17’s and 24’s, there some nose art on them too.

Q: Did you guys pick the name? Did your Captain pick the name, Man O-War?

A: No. Actually because of the shortage of planes, two crews were assigned to each plane and this plane was military assigned to the Squadron Commander. He was from Kentucky and a great horse racing fan and that’s why it was named Man O-War.

Q: I gonna say a few more names of planes and you can tell me if any of them are familiar? Hellbirds, does that ring a bell?

A: Hellbirds was the insignia of the 462nd Bomb Group. And that was painted on the right-hand side of every plane in the group.

Q: And what was your (the Hellbirds motto)?

A: With malice towards some.

Q: That was kind of a play on Lincoln’s statement of “with malice toward none.” But obviously if you are at war you have malice toward some.

A: That’s right.
Q: Do you remember Night Mare?

A: Yeah, Night Mare. I remember that one.

Q: Ramp Tramp and Ramp Tramp II?

A: Yeah.

Q: Hump’n Honey?

A: Yeah.

Q: O Bitch You Airy Betsy?

A: Yeah. (Laughter)

Q: King Size, Hell’s Angels?

A: Yeah.

Q: You took these humps and everything and once you stationed at a forward base then how much time did you have before you actually went on a mission and describe the first mission for me?
A (counter @ 380): Let’s see. We got over to India in April, 1944. I don’t know how many trips over the hump, we probably flew two or three. On June 15th, we staged a raid over Yowate, Japan. That was the first raid over Japan since the Doolittle raid.

Q: Take me inside a little bit on this. I’m trying to picture this 18, 19, 20 year old kid from the states, who was just a little while back was working at a factory and just graduated from school and is now in a B-29 with 10 other guys flying over the Himalayas and now getting ready to fly his first mission. What was going on in your head? Were you pretty much condition and your training took over or did you feel a little nervous?

A: Probably we should have felt more nervous than we did. I think most were a little bit naive and didn’t realize what we were getting into. And we had so much confidence in the rest of the crew members. We felt nothing was going to happen to us.

Q: Did you guys have any other planes accompany you to intercept Japanese fighters or were you pretty much on your own?

A: Oh, we were on our own. We had no fighter escorts. They didn’t have fighter escorts until much later on in the war after Iwo Jima was taken. They had some P-51’s flying out of Iwo with the guys coming from the Marianas but the ones flying out of China had no escort at all.
Q: So where were you at in China before you flew out on this first mission do you remember the name of the place?

A: Yes, it was Kiunglai. It was in the Chengtu Valley. A-5 was the designation of the base.

Q: How far or how long was the flight from China over to Japan?

A: Maybe 16 hours roundtrip. A little over 3000 miles roundtrip.

Q: Did you have time to think on the way there or were you pretty busy going through checklists and operations?

A: I think on the way there you were pretty much alert not know what to expect or when you might encounter opposition and so-forth. On the way back, it was a little different. Everyone was sort of relaxed once we got away from the target area.

Q: Now how many B-29s when up on this mission?

A: On my first mission I think there were only about 30 that made it over the target. I don’t know many started. It was a multigroup effort, it wasn’t just our group.

Q: Did everyone take off from the same place? Or did you just meet in the air?
A: We went as a group.

Q: So you guys took off and kind of went over as a group. Not as an organizational group but a group in close proximity to each other.

A: Yeah, when you got close to the target they would hone in on the lead plane and get into formation.

Q: How accurate were the B-29s?

A (counter @ 434): It was lousy. Because there were some things we just weren’t aware of. Particularly the winds. At high altitude, like 20 or 30,000 feet and we didn’t take the weather into account. So we weren’t effective at all. Maybe some might get lucky once in awhile. I think the main impact the first B-29 raids had was to make the Japanese aware we could get there.

Q: Now was this one of the first raids over the Japanese mainland?

A: This was the second raid over the Japanese mainland. The first one was Doolittle when his 25’s flew off a the aircraft carrier and bombed Tokyo, Japan. I think that was in ’42.
Q: What was your target? What was your mission? What was your goal on this?

A: We were trying to hit the iron and steel works at Yawata.

Q: Did you encounter any resistance, Japanese resistance?

A: Actually, the flak was pretty intense and we did encounter some fighter opposition. Not a whole lot.

Q: But you were ground?

A: Mostly, yes. Ground fire.

Q: So, you were actually under fire. But you can't respond, except with your bombs.

A: Once you start your bomb run you have to stick with it.

Q (counter @ 460): Were any of your friends shot down out of this mission?

A: Yeah we lost some. I don't remember the number anymore. But there were several lost. Later on the Japs got much better and we took heavier losses.

Q: Was there a safety plan in case you did get hit? Did you have parachutes?
A: Oh yeah, we had parachutes. And they had some subs stationed at various places in the sea. We were over water, of course, until we reached the Japan.

Q: So were some of your peers shot and then parachuted down and rescued by a sub?

A: Yeah, there were some rescued. Some were taken prisoner of war.

Q: Did you have any idea about the conditions the POWs were in? Did you know at the time how brutal the Japanese were?

A: No. We really didn’t until word started drifting back later on and of course after the war we learned how bad it was. I don’t know how some of those guys actually survived. There were a lot of them never made it through. Either they were killed or just died. The Japanese had never signed the Geneva Convention and so they didn’t go by any rules, like that.

Q: When you were actually over the target was this a daylight or night mission?

A: This was a daylight mission.
Q: One of the early ones. So you go ahead and drop your payload. Correct me if I’m wrong but it seems to me to balance the plane you had to alternate bomb drops, there where two drops in the plane?

A: You had bomb racks on both sides on the bomb bays. There were two bomb bays on the 29 and you could release them several racks at a time or you could salvo the whole load. Generally they dropped on the lead plane. Supposedly the better bombardier was in the lead plane and when he would drop the rest of them in that formation would drop.

Q: whose mission was that? The guy was actually called the bombardier?

A: Yeah, Yeah. He used the Norton bomb sight and the Norton bomb sight was supposedly the ultimate in sighting capability. They always claimed they could drop a bomb into a pickle barrel but it wasn’t that good. (Laughter)

Q: The marketing didn’t match up. When you flew this first mission, you went from India and the hump over to China. You got a 16 hour round trip. You got 8 hours to get to the target and 8 hours back. How long of a window in that mission were you actually under fire by the Japanese or being pursued their fighters?

A: Probably no more than a ½ hour.

Q: And your only defense at that time, obviously, was the remote control systems?
A: Right, right.

Q: You had a co-pilot, navigator, is that right?

A: We had a co-pilot, a navigator, radio operator, an engineer, and then left and right gunners, top gunner, tail gunner, and radar operator.

Q: Who spotted the Japanese the first time you were out do you remember? Was it radioed into you? Did you know they were coming? Did you see them?

A: Yeah, they came up. I think the bombardier spotted them first because they coming up from below. But later on they come in from everywhere (laughter). They had a nasty habit of getting up in front of the formations and dropping phosphorus bombs on us. If that stuff happened to get on a wing or get in the gas tank, you had a problem.

Q: How would you describe the weapon system on there? Did you feel that it was adequate for the handling of the Japanese fighters? Did you have superior, equal or weaker lesser firer power?

A: We had good fire power. And if you had the right formations and enough planes you could really put out a lot. But…
Q: You had defense formations you guys trained for to combat and minimize crossfire and stick together as a group?

A: You had to be very careful you didn’t shoot down somebody else in your own formation. You did have mechanical stops which prevented you from shooting off your own propellers or tail and things like that.

Q: Okay, so you fly this first mission and you fly back into China. When you are there you have to resupply and....

A: Yeah, Gas up and fly back to India.

Q: This is real obvious to you but why didn’t you just stay in China? Why did you have to fly that hump again back to India? Was it a supply issue?

A (counter @ 569): Actually our primary base was in India. That’s where our headquarters were and all that. When we were in China we just lived in tents for a day or two while we were getting ready for the mission.

Q: What was atmosphere after your first mission? Was it like you just scored a touchdown?
A: Oh yeah. Everybody was happy. They take you into briefing to check you in, they ask you all sorts of questions about what went on, what were the fighter opposition and the flak and all that sort of thing. And they hand out drinks. Of course I didn’t drink at the time so, I was popular because...

Q: Someone else got your drink (laughter)? So you stayed in the tents for a few days and did the debrief and everything then you’d go back to India. At the same time were other planes heading over the hump or what?

A: They all had to get back.

Q: Did you all go back together? Did you go as a group?

A: Just single.

Q: In the mean time, it was just the humps. You didn’t have to worry about the Japanese this far out?

A: A couple people might have encountered a little Japanese opposition but not anything significant.

Q: Let’s go back to operations and some of the resistance you did run in to. These are just words to me but if I say Japanese “Hap” what does that mean to you?
A: Different type of planes that they had.

Q: They had different capabilities, were there any that you feared more than the other?

A: There were some of them, they had some pretty good planes and they had some good pilots. They had some guys that were shooting down 20 or 30 B-29's.

Q: Did you know any of their names or did you just know that some of pilots....?

A: I don’t remember any of their names. I have a book that talks about that but I don’t remember the names.

Q: These humps were pretty dangerous so there some airplane art on the side of the plane I saw?

A: Every time we went over the hump and come back we’d put a camel on our plane.

Q: Did the same guy that did the nose art do the camels?

A: No, they were stenciled on. It didn’t take an artist to do that. And for every mission, we get a bomb painted on the side.
Q: Were there a set number of missions you had to do before you were eligible to leave?

A: No, not at that time.

END OF SIDE ONE
(COUNTER @ 632)

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO
(COUNTER RESET TO 0)

Introduction – Part II: This is the session with Henry “Hap” Horner and we are talking about his time in World War II and the B-29. We just got through talking about his first mission and we want to go back a little bit and discuss his leaving the United States and heading over for his deployment in India so... what was that like when leaving, when you got our orders how much time did you have to prepare?

A: We probably had just a few days actually, to prepare after we got our orders. We knew it was coming soon as soon as the planes were ready because they were in a hurry to get them over there and get them operational. Arnold had a point to prove to – that he had backed the development of the B-29. When we left Walker (cough) we flew to Maine and stayed there over night then went on to Gander Lake, New Foundland.. From there we headed across the Atlantic went over to Marrakech, Africa. We flew over the desert to Cairo, Egypt and then went to Piardoba, India and then from there to our base in
Piadoba, India. So that was an interesting flight. A lot of the planes got bad gas at Marrakech and some of them went down in the desert. The B-29 required 100 octane gasoline. The other bombers could fly on 90 octane so we had some engine problems and we spent a couple weeks at Cairo ‘cause we had to change out all the carburetors. While we were doing that we got to do some sight seeing. We got to see the Sphinx and the pyramids and so forth so that was an interesting stay. But when we hit Piadoba all the glamour ended.

Q: Take make through a day in India? It wasn’t all stars and stripes and God Bless America in the background?

A: A lot of it was pretty boring, as a matter of fact. We spent a lot of time out on the flight line. ‘Cause when we first went over, we had no ground people qualified to work on the central fire control system. The flight guys had to do the work and keep them operating. I teamed up with a guy, the central fire control gunner on the Squadron Commander’s crew. He and I became good friends and we’d spend a lot of time out there testing out, making sure everything was working the way it should. The guns were responding and following the sights and all that sort of thing. I never had a gun that didn’t work.

Q: Well, when you’re the one that’s gotta operate them that’s probably a good investment of your time. Did you do things recreationally?
A: Yeah, we played ball. There was an orderly room where they had ping pong and pool and things like that. I spent a lot of time reading, really. We also had to stand guard on the planes for a long time, different members of the crew. A lot of times we spent most of the night out there by the planes. And we did a lot of our work out there in the evening because it was so hot out there doing the day. We had siesta from noon until three o’clock. It was just too hot, those airplanes would get so hot you could hardly touch them.

Q: Letters from home? Did you write a lot of letters? Did you get a lot of letters?

A: Wrote a lot a letters. It was a little bit different than today. We didn’t have email, phones that we could call every day and things like that. It was strictly a mail situation. We had what we called V-mail. You’d write a letter on a certain form they’d give you and then they’d microfilm back to the states and reproduce it and send the letter on to whoever you addressed it to. It would easily take a couple weeks to get a letter home and before you’d receive a letter from the states. When we first went overseas my mother use to send me care-packages, home-made cakes and things like that. She sent one that didn’t catch up with me before we left. And after we were over in India about two or three weeks this package arrived, well, things weren’t in very good shape. But we had an Indian, we called them Indian bearers, he took care of the barracks for us. We’d each chip in and pay him so many rubies a week and they’d keep things cleaned up for us and things like that. And I was gonna throw out that cake and he said, “Oh, no no Sahib.” (Laughter) He wanted it.
Q: Did you have a lot of interaction with the locals there or not?

A (counter @ 54): Not a whole lot. The guys that worked there could communicate some. Some of them knew a little English. We learned a few Indian words. We weren’t near any sizable town or anything, we were pretty remote. When we got a pass a few times we went into Calcutta, sightseeing and things like that.

Q: Not exactly the top of your tourism list?

A: No, no, no. Had to walk around the cows on the sidewalk and things like that.

Q: Were the locals pretty receptive to us being there?

A: Yeah. We had no problems.

Q: Now, how many humps did you fly total, with the crew, and how many missions did you fly?

A: We flew eighteen missions and I tried to count the humps onetime and it was thirteen or fourteen.
Q: Out of those eighteen missions, can you walk me through some incidents that still stick in your mind? That were kind of interesting or unusual events, or any unusual firefights?

A: There was one mission over Omura, Japan, Nov. 11, 1944. It turned out to be an interesting mission in that we lost the oil out of two engines. I don’t remember whether a fighter got ’em or what? But we had to feather two engines. But our pilot managed to make it back just over China and just over the Japanese lines and there was an emergency field and we managed to set’er down. We put oil back in those engines and he got us back out of there.

Q: So how long were you on the ground?

A: Oh, probably a couple of hours. It was a very small field and the interesting thing was when we landed the guy who was in charge of the field, some Captain came out in a Jeep and he says, “Major, this is an emergency field. You are supposed to only land here with your gear up.” And the pilot said, “Sorry as Hell Captain. I’ll do better the next time.” (Laughter)

Q: He didn’t want you down there with your landing gear? Didn’t think that was appropriate.
A: We were no more there than the old lanterns went up on the post. That was an air raid alert. The Japs saw us come down. But they didn’t find us. We managed to get out of there before they found us.

Q: Take me back just an hour or two to the firefight that happened before that. What were the circumstances where you lost the engines? Was it ground or was it air (fire)?

A: Well, it was both flak and fighters on that one. Matter of fact, we lost, our wing man went down on that mission. The right gunner in that crew was a friend of mine from the town close to where I lived in Pennsylvania. Our co-pilot was a great camera man. In fact, he was about the only one who had a camera over there, on our crew. And he was always taking pictures and the flak was coming up pretty heavy. Apparently Bailey was up there taking pictures and all the sudden over the intercom, “Damn it Bailey. Put that camera down and help fly this airplane!” (Laughter) We’ve always kidded him about that. He just died in February, Bailey. I saw him in January.

Q: Well it must be interesting now to look at some of those pictures? Kinda take you back. I assume you still have them?

A: He sent me some. I’ve got some of them around here in places, yeah.

Q: So, you guys did an emergency landing. Were there any other missions or any other incidents where, that come to mind when you think back to your time in the service?
A: Well we had several missions over Manchuria, Ansleriu, and Mukden. Those were tough missions. For one thing it was extremely cold. We had to take all the oil off the guns before we went on those and just put a coating of kerosene on or they wouldn’t have operated. It was about fifty-five below zero. They had some of the best fighters we encountered were up there, the Jack 10 and a few like that. Those things could fly almost straight up. When we got back from one of those missions we found out we had a control cable just holding by one wire, one strand, the whole thing.

Q: Was that through wear, through flak?

A: No, a bullet had hit it. Our radio operator sat looking toward the side of the plane. He was on the right. His radios were there and there was no window or anything. He was always complaining he couldn’t see out and one day some flak opened up a hole right above him. He never complained anymore. (Laughter)

Q: You said in an earlier mission the wing man went down was, did they die? Were they captured?

A: The whole crew was lost. Yeah, we contacted a sub that was down there and alerted them to the fact. But we don’t know. We saw several parachutes but never knew what happened to them (phone rings).
Q: What was the mood like when you came back as that happened? Did you maybe become kind of callous?

A: Yeah. It was not an easy situation. The worst part was when they came into the barracks and so forth and take the guys belongings out and footlocker and things like that.

Q: You mentioned Arnold earlier? And how did you get your nickname?

A: Somewhere along the line, my name is Henry and his name is Henry and somebody started calling me “Hap” and it stuck. I’ve had that nickname every since the war. The only people who call me Henry are back in Pennsylvania and there’s not many of them left.

Q: “Hap” Arnold, he was the....?

A: He was the General of the Air Force.

Q: And here you are around airplanes so they just kinda of...of course everyone knew who “Hap” Arnold was so they called you “Hap.”

A: Yeap. There was a “Hap” special. A B-29 built that had his name on it. As a matter of fact it was one that landed in Russia. It landed in Russia after a mission and the Russians copied it. Even down to a few patches on the fuselage.
Q: Was the Tupaluv TU-4?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you ever see one of those?

Q: Did you ever see one of those?

A (counter @ 129): Never saw one.

Q: But you knew the Russians had a copy?

A: Yeah. There’s been a lot of publicity out on that.

Q: Why was the B-29 called the Superfortress?

A: Well, the B-17 was called the Flyingfortress. It was a Boeing airplane also. And then the B-29 was so much large and had substantially more armament so I guess it was just natural they called it the Superfortress.

Q: Plus you kinda of had your own defense system and in reality it was like a fortress?
A: Yeah.

Q: Let’s talk about the red rudder. Was that just the way....?

A: That was just the way the 462nd group planes were designated.

Q: You could identify one very quickly?

A: Yeah. Every group had different designations so you knew, pretty much, who was out there.

Q: When I mention the name of General Curtis LeMay, what comes to mind?

A: Oh, LeMay. He was a...I guess the best way you could describe him, LeMay was he was a unique individual.

Q: (Laughter) What made him unique?

A: At least outwardly he was a very gruff person and you either hated him or loved him. Some of the things he did the guys weren’t too happy about but usually the decisions he made turned out to be good ones.

Q: Like what type of decisions did he make?
A: Well, we weren’t gettin’ anything going in at 30,000 feet so he decided to go in at 8 or 5. (Laughter)

Q: Did you ever do any missions that low?

A: I was not in on those missions. I was already back in the states at that time. But it turned out that they really lost less planes in the long run because they didn’t have to go back to the same targets so many times.

Q: That makes sense. They were more accurate. I’m gonna mention another name to you – Major Mackall?

A: He was a good fellow, a great pilot. I would have flown anywhere with him.

Q: What traits did you like in him? What made him a good leader?

A: Well, he was just a good steady guy. He never got rattled. And you always felt you were gonna get back with him up there.

Q: How much older was he than you?

A: He was, I think, 26 or 27. He was an old man compared to most of us.
Q: You trained with him initially?

A: Yeah. I got assigned to his crew and I was him in training and overseas and most of the missions up ‘til January of ’45. He got assigned to a position in Group. We got a Captain Steen as pilot. I flew just a couple of missions with him.

Q: That was at the end?

A: That was close to the time that I left over there.

Q: You mentioned Bailey earlier. That was the guy who took the pictures? What was he like? What was his assignment?

A: Well, he was co-pilot. And he was an easy going guy. I liked him a lot. He never, never got rattled (short pause) about anything.

Q: So what would be the co-pilot’s job on a mission? They had specific duties?

A: The pilot was really called the Aircraft Commander. And the co-pilot would assist on take-offs and deal with flaps and throttles and that sort of thing. And then he would fly the airplane too. I don’t remember Bailey making a whole lot of landings. He wasn’t…. (laughing). They were a little more bumpy but he gets it done. But ahh, he…
Q: I’m gonna butcher this name. Was it Kisilitchak?

A: Kisilitchak, he was flight engineer. And he was really good. He was from Pennsylvania but not close to where I had lived. People called him Polish but he always said he wasn’t Polish he was Slovakian of some sort or other. But anyway, we’d come back with more gasoline than probably anybody else on those missions. He knew how to nurse those engines. And.....

Q: How to get you back?

A: Yeah, we had one long mission where we flew we went to Ceylon which is now Shir Lanka and flew a mining mission over to Palembang, Sumataru. We mined a river leading up to a Jap refinery. That was the longest mission ever flown by a B-29. It was just our group that did that, the 462nd. And it was about a 21 hour mission.

Q: You were up in the air the whole time?

A: Yeah.

Q: Wow! And that was because of his ability to nurse those engines?
A: Yeah. A matter of fact, most of them made it back. They thought they were going to
loose quite a few planes because of the fuel supply but most of them were able to get
back. It turned out to be a very effective mission. They found out later those mines sank
a couple of Japanese tankers and blocked that entry way and so forth and essentially shut
down that refinery.

Q: Did you drop mines into the river?

A: Yeah.

Q: I just never thought of that.

A: Yeah. Later on the B-29’s did a lot of mining around the Sea of Japan and place like
that. They had them sewed up so the Japs couldn’t hardly get anything in or out.

Q: So you dropped like an anchor with a chain or something on it?

A: I think they were different kinds. Some were magnetic, some were noise sensitive.
We dropped them by parachute.

Q: Klatt?

A: He was navigator. He’s still alive.
Q: Was he pretty good at his job?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: I would think that would be an important job?

A: It was, yeah. Flying across the Atlantic at night. We went to Africa and right on course and you didn’t have all these assists you have today?

Q: McFarland?

A: He was radar operator.

Q: Mueller?

A: Mueller was right gunner. Hakes was left gunner. Gilman was tail gunner. His father got seriously ill, terminally ill. And he was sent back the States. Then we got a guy by the name of Phillips.

Q: Conway?

A: Conway was radio operator.
Q: Radio operations were from plane to plane? Were you communicating with bases or anything like that?

A: Yeah. They could really go quite a long distance. They could pick up the submarines.

Q: Where they encoded in any way?

A: They used Morse code.

Q: But they weren’t trying to hide the code from the Japanese?

A: I don’t know what system they used.

Q: February 1945, you’ve flown quite a few missions and quite a few humps. You and your crew were assigned with the 21st Bomber Command over in Guam?

A: I wanted to mention January 9th, 1945, was my 21st birthday. We flew a mission over Formosa. A long one. We took off early in the morning. Flew that mission to Formosa came back, gassed up and went back to India that same day. It turned out we were in the air for 21 hours.
Q: That was a long day?

A: Yeah. Then, as you were mentioning, we were assigned to war weary we were supposed to take back to the States and do some war bond tours and so forth. Well, the day before we left to come back, they changed our orders and said you aren’t going home you are going to Guam to set up a training program for the new guys coming in from the States. And boy, we were one sorry bunch. So they assigned another crew, put us on board, dropped us off on Guam and they took the plane back to the States.

Q: What did you train with? How would you train? Was it classroom instruction?

A: Yea, classroom instruction. We did some flying.

Q: You guys were really the only veterans of the B-29 at that point?

A: Yeah, that’s right. We were the first ones to fly in any combat or anything like that. And after we got to Guam. It was interesting; LeMay called us in to give us a pep talk. And said, “If you guys do a good job in this, I’ll see that you get back on combat.” (Laughter) We just looked at each other and thought, “Yeah, sure.” I guess we didn’t do a very good job because in April they sent us back to the States to Muroc which is now Edward’s Airforce Base to instruct back there.

Q (counter @ 248): So, when you taught in Guam did you teach the...?
A: I taught the Central Fire Control System. How to use it. You’d tell people what you’d encountered. Something about the fighters. How good they were. Or just what tactics they used.

Q: Let me guess, you didn’t have any trouble keeping their attention?

A: No.

Q: Eventually, you came back State side to Muroc with is now Edwards and did you do the same type of job there? Did your crew do this too? Did they keep you guys together?

A: Well, we were all there. Each of us was doing our own thing. It was different...actually, as a matter of fact, all of us said this was more frightening than flying in combat. ‘Cause you get with some of these guys and they forget to close the Bombay doors when you take off and things like that. And above the desert, it got to be a little rough with those air currents. We were supposed to be...having gone back over after a certain period of time. But fortunately the war ended while I was still in America and they dropped the “A” bomb. I always said that was one of the best decisions Truman ever made.

Q: Let’s talk about that for a bit. From your perspective, you were living this in real time, there seems to be a couple controversies involving the Enola Gay and the dropping of both the atomic bombs or Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One of them is whether we should
have done it or shouldn’t have done it. And I think...you were actually involved in that and may have actually been, if you went back you would have been deployed back over Japan for sure?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: So you felt that stopped things right there? You think without the “A” bombs we’d have ended up invading Japan?

A: Oh yes. I don’t think there is any question about it.

Q: Do you believe there was any sincere effort by the Japanese prior to that to negotiate a surrender?

A: No, I don’t think so.

Q: When you were hearing what was going on in Okinawa and some of those places, while you were State side about the number of causalities we were having there or Iwo Jima...

A: Iwo Jima was taken while I was still in Guam. And, I had the opportunity, I was assigned to a crew to fly over to Iwo and pick up some guys that crash landed there. There was still fighting at one end of the island when we went in there that time. That
was an interesting experience. We didn’t spend much time there. We said it was like flying off an aircraft carrier. You see Iwo was just taken in March. It was the end of Mach when we went in there.

Q: When you found out Roosevelt had passed away, were you a little apprehensive about that and timing of all that?

A: It wasn’t as significant to me as it was to some people. I personally didn’t feel a lot of remorse.

Q: Let move on to the allies. Did you do anything with the allies or did you pretty much work with the US?

A: Pretty much working with the US. We did once or twice land at some British airfield on an emergency basis. We ran out of fuel or something like that, in India. I always enjoyed landing there. They had better food than we did. (Laughter) We had the dried eggs.

Q: They were pretty receptive to us?

A: Yeah, yeah. And the Chinese we encountered too on the bases were pretty nice.

Q: We were seen as liberators at that point?
A: Yeah. They were not very well equipped. A few times after coming back from missions, the Japs would follow us in. We’d no more than land and there’d be a air raid alert. We’d try to get back to our tents and these guys would be out there with rifles and we didn’t know whether they would shoot us or not. We’d get to talking to some of them and we’d look down their rifle barrels and they were smooth. There wasn’t any rifling bore left in the barrels. Bad shape.

Q: You didn’t fly the June 5th, 1944 mission to Bangkok?

A: No.

Q: What was the significance of Tinian airbase?

A: Well, Tinian was in the Marianas and it became a principle airbase, that’s where the 58th wound up after they left India. They went over there in March and April in 1945. There was another Wing there also.

Q: Did you ever meet any of the guys from the Enola Gay or Boxcar?

A: No.
Q: How long after their mission did you know about the event? They were B-29s that dropped those? How long afterward did you know it was B-29s did that?

A: Almost immediately. There was a lot of chatter going on. They were located on the North end of Tinian. They were isolated, they were fenced in, they had extra guards and that sort of stuff.

Q: Did you know what was going on at the time?

A: I didn’t because I wasn’t on Tinian. But the guys that were on Tinian that I talked to knew something was going on.

Q: Was that a source a pride for the B-29 crews?

A: I guess it was a surprise, the impact it had. We knew they had tested some “A” bombs. We knew they were operational.

Q: What was your reaction on VE day? Did you think you were getting more reinforcements over and more soldiers to fight the war in the Pacific? Or did you feel it would just be a matter of time before the Japanese surrendered? What were your impressions, as you look back on it now, when the Germans surrendered?

A: I think the major thing would be all the effort would be directed toward taking out the Japanese.
Q: Did you have any indication that things were starting to wind down over there after the “A” bomb was it a wait and see type of thing?

A: I think after the fire raids actually. A lot of people thought the fire raids would force the Japanese to surrender but the military part of their government would have hung on...I don’t even know if they would have surrendered after the “A” bombs except I think the Emperor finally said it was time.

Q: As your tenure over in India continued did you notice less and less resistance from the Japanese, was it about the same all time or did it increase.

A: During the early part, we were flying missions out of China. The opposition was getting stronger. Their anti-aircraft was getting more accurate. They had their crew fighters. Of course then later on they were ramming 29s.

Q: They were ramming 29s? What were they using to ram?

A: Fighters.

Q: To ram 29s?

A: Yeah.
Q: I heard about the Kamikazes that rammed the boats but...?

A: They rammed 29s also.

Q: So, they were single fighter planes?

A: Yeah, they took out quite a few.

Q: And that was their intended mission to do that?

A: Yeah, they were assigned that type of mission.

Q: Did you have chance to experience that first hand?

A: No we never had any rammings. We had some come in pretty close. We had some that dropped the phosphorous bombs but there wasn’t any rammings that I encountered.

Q: That would have been something impossible to train for?

A: And no way to counter-act it, really. If they decided to do it.

Q: That makes you job as the defense for that B-29...?
A: That book I was just reading recently, they experienced that and they rammed one plane and some of the parts knocked down the plane behind it.

Q: Now were these called Kamikazes or was there a special name?

A: No. They were called Kamikazes.

Q: That let you know they were pretty desperate at that time?

A: Right.

Q (counter @ 383): Well, we’ve kinda covered a lot a years and a lot of time. We started back in the 1930s and when you were about 15 years old. When did you get out?

A: October 28, 1945, so I would have been 21.

Q: So the war had been over…?

A: A couple months. I had accumulated quite a few points. I got an air medal with cluster, the Distinguished Flying Cross, a number of battle stars, presidential citations. They always said if you were in the Air Force and you stood in the chow line long enough, you’d wind up getting a medal. (Laughter)
Q: Were any of those for a specific incident we haven’t covered?

A: Well, I got the DFC. I don’t remember which mission. But somebody got the bright idea we could carry more bombs if they could wire two 500s together and hand them from one shackle. Well the shackles were on the side of the bomb bay. When these bombs dropped they came together and hung up. They were off the shackles but were still on the plane. One of the guys went in from the front and I went in from the CFC compartment and chopped those wires that were holding together so they would drop out. (Laughter) The Group Commander happened to be flying with us in the co-pilot seat and he called us up there before we went in there. If you guys fall out you want to go this direction. What he did know was you couldn’t go in there with a parachute, the walkway was too narrow.

Q: You went in there without a parachute to cut those wires, didn’t you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Any other incidents like that? Any other tie ins to you decorations?

A: No not really. Pretty routine.

Q: I don’t think there is anything routine about flying over hostile territory.
A: I think I had credit for 1 ½ fighters.

Q: Anything else you want to pass on?

A: One of the things that bother me is there is a tendency to revise history. To make things out like we were the aggressor. I tell my grandkids don't believe that stuff cause it isn't true.

Q: Especially if you weren't there and were not involved and that stuff....

A: Right.

**Conclusion:** Well, we are going to wrap things up. I really enjoyed the opportunity to talk to you today and to get this information. It's been an education for me just for the record, to say thank-you for your service. I think on behalf of the other history students I can say thanks. It was a great interview and a great opportunity.

A: Thank-you.

Q: All right!

END OF SIDE TWO

(Counter @ 450)