



## Voices We've Heard



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WWII Pacific Theatre

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**TRANSCRIPT**

These materials reflect the thoughts and memories of those who were interviewed for or provided written information to "The War: Michigan Voices." The comments and language offered reflect the opinion of the speaker or writer. Names of people or places experienced in the distant past may not be accurate. Where possible, WKAR has attempted to verify locations of wartime battles, cities and ships, but in some cases, information was not available.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

I was drafted.

Just when I turned eighteen, there was a letter in the mail.

Q: And when was that?

January the 5th, 1943.

Q: So, how did you get in the Air Force?

That's a question that nobody's been able to answer. I went to Camp [inaudible] first, where they changed us from civilians into GIs, which is Government Issue, and put us on a troop train to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. Supposed to go in the Signal Corps.

And apparently they must have wanted more Air Corps men, so a bunch of us were shifted right there. And I went to Atlantic City, New Jersey for basic training and that's how I ended up in the Air Force.

Then I went from Atlantic City, New Jersey, another troop train, to Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado, to armament training, learning about machine guns and bombs and things like that.

And then from there it was to Laredo, Texas to gunnery school. And after gunnery school, then I was out to California for combat training and [to] be assigned to a crew. And that's where it started and that's where it ended in the United States.

Q: Tell me about when you went overseas. What happened? Where'd you go?

Well, we left Fresno, California with a new bomber, flew across the States to Florida, one of the air



bases down there and we were quarantined there for a week. And then we got orders to go and so we took off.

And our pilot told us when we got in the air about 3 o'clock in the morning, he said, "You guys wanna know where you're going?" And of course we said yes. "You're going to China-Burma-India." And that we couldn't figure out because they'd issued us all heavy-duty flying equipment, sheetline, clothing and all that stuff. And we landed in Trinidad for gas.

And then we flew on to Khartoum, Egypt, was there a couple of days. Then we flew across into South America, landed on Ascension Island for gas change and stuff like that. And then we ended up in Calcutta, India and then flew to Karachi. And then we flew to Pandaveswar and that's where we were based.

Q: Tell me about your first mission.

Well, it was down to Rangoon, Burma, and it was about a nine-hour flight down and back. And, no fighters, but we had a lot of flak and we got through that all right, too.

Q: You say, "There was flak and we got through that." Something tells me there's more to it than that, the first time there was shooting at you.

No, no, they just didn't have the right altitude for their shells to go off. And, a couple pieces went through us, but not any damage, so we made that trip just fine.

Q: So nothing upsets you at all with them--

No. I had an excellent pilot.

Q: Well then, tell me about the first time that things got a little scary.

That was on a low-level bombing mission. And our crew was picked out of four crews, or four sections we had there, four flights. And there was a plane from the 436th that was supposed to go in with us. But apparently something happened to their plane because they never made it.

And this was quite a mission because we had the squadron commander, Colonel Kyes(?), and we had the squadron navigator and the squadron bombardier. All of our guys in that capacity were left home and we come in about a little over a thousand feet with this two thousand pound bomb. And apparently, we must have caught them by surprise or else we hit the wrong bridge, I don't know, but that was the scariest one.

Q: What made it so scary?

Well, as you get that low with that big plane, and if they do shoot at you, they can't miss you. In fact, our tail gunner, Danny Driscoll(?), over the intercom, he said, "Let's get out of here because that thing is skipping right behind us," when he dropped the bomb.

Q: So what kind of things did you bomb mostly?

[Inaudible], that was their jetty where they brought in a lot of ships with fuel and supplies and stuff like that. Bangkok. And there was bridges that we bombed and there was another town, I can't think of the name of it now. But we hit quite a few places and we were in there quite a while.

Q: You ever come across fighters?



A few fighters to start with, but then by that time the Japanese were pulling all their men over into China towards their own home base to help protect their own cities and things like that. So we didn't have much fighter attacks.

Q: You shoot at any?

No. I was thankful for that.

Q: Do you have another scary moment that you can think of?

Flying the hump.

Q: Tell me about flying the hump. I've heard about it. Tell me what made it so interesting.

Well, just the fact that you don't know really hardly where these mountains are. And, they took us off the bombing runs, we had 28 bombing runs, and then they pulled us off that because, like I said, the Japanese were gone.

And, we flew 23 missions over the hump, for carrying gas for the 14th Air Force. We had two 600-gallon tanks in a bomb base(?) and we'd go over these humps and, like I said, you didn't know where they were. We'd be flying along and you'd look out and there was a mountain right there, flown right by it.

And I've been told that the bombing runs over the humps was just as dangerous as a bombing run because you didn't know where the mountains were.

Q: What kind of plane were you in?

B-24.

Q: What was it like?

It was roomy. It was a good ship. Four big engines and it had nose turret, belly turret, two waist gunners, top turret and so we had plenty of armament on board.

Q: Did it have any mechanical problems?

Not on any flight we went on did we ever have any mechanical problems. We had a good ground crew.

Those guys deserve a lot more credit than they got. And that one raid I told you about, that we went on, about that low-level bridge? We didn't get back to base till about, probably 11 o'clock at night and, coming in, there was a whole string full of jeeps and all the guys coming out to welcome us back 'cause we were the last ones in.

And there was just mile after mile of jeeps and GIs and our own crew that didn't go, were right there to meet us and that made us feel good. It all goes to the fact that--who your pilot is.

Q: Aside from scary moments, is there a memorable time, memorable event?

Personal or otherwise?



Q: Either way.

You know, we used to wear these electric, heated suits, and we had to have the windows open on the waist. And after we'd get into the safe zone again, you'd secure your weapon. And of course, I like to sleep, so I laid down and some of my buddies there turned my thermostat up and I kept twitching and kept twitching. Finally, I had to get up and there they sat laughing at me because they'd turned that thermostat up as high as it would go and they were watching me twitch and like that.

Other than that, we had a good crew, had a good time and had some spare moments where you wondered why it was them and not you. Like we were taking off one time on a mission and the leader goes down the runway first.

He gets halfway down and you're next, you're lined up ready to go. By the time he takes off, you're halfway down and the guy that was going to be on our left wing this day, I can't think of the pilot's name now, but I knew the kid--guys that was on the ship as gunners. And, of course, when you take off, well then, you're looking out the window watching the other guys come off too. And, all of a sudden, we were watching and he just barely got off the runway and blew up. Somebody lit a cigarette or something. Ten guys gone, just like that.

Q: Any other memorable event you can think of?

When they told us we were gonna come home.

Q: Tell me about it.

Well, they give us orders and, well, we packed our gear in a hurry and they had another crew fly with us. [Inaudible] give us a plane to fly to Calcutta and then we took off, we buzzed the air base, which you weren't supposed to do but they always let 'em do when you're going home.

We got to Calcutta and we got assigned and started coming home. But we got split up and I don't know what happened. Maybe my crew was trying to get rid of me, I don't know, but they went on ahead and I was tail-end Charlie coming off and that's the way it was all the way back home and I ended up in Casablanca for three weeks to come home before they had a ship there that was--they had a bunch of us to go home. And, so that's how I got home. I spent nine nights and ten days in that ship.

Q: When you went home, was it because you had enough points or was it because the war was over.

I had enough points.

And on this ship one day I was doing nothing and my name was called for shots, along with a bunch of other guys. We figured we had our shots, but they took us down to where the infirmary was and we didn't know this either; here was a bunch of GIs that had been wounded in battle. Some of 'em with no arms, heads all bandaged up.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard the war was over?

I was over in Stockdale(?), Illinois in [inaudible] party there and when the war was over, my wife and I, we all went in St. Louis, Missouri, and I never seen such a crowd in my life. [Inaudible] crowd, like it was here in Lansing and all over. But it was good to be home.



Q: Do you remember when you first landed in the States on the way back?

I walked off the gangplank.

Q: Tell me about it.

We walked off that right down to where there was a bunch of Army officers and other people. They loaded us on buses and took us to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. We had a great big dinner. Never seen a mess hall like it, tables all decorated up and real good food and things like that. And we were all thanked and somebody gave a speech and then they put us on a train and I went to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. And that's where I picked up my 30-day leave to come home and I was going to be reassigned to California.

Q: Do you remember when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Yes.

Q: Tell me what you remember about it.

Well, a bunch of us, I lived with my brother then in Mt. Morris, and a bunch of us guys were out playing football and, all of a sudden, here he come. And we all wanted to know what was going on? And he said, "Japan just bombed Pearl Harbor." I was only sixteen then.

Q: Did you know the significance of that at the time?

Not really, just--I was only sixteen and I thought, "Well, it's happened, there's nothing I can do about it." But I wasn't ready to go.

Q: Do you remember where you were when Roosevelt died?

Yes, I was walking across the field in the base in California, April 15th, 1945. Walked across there and they had a ceremony that night, had us all assembled, and that was it.

Q: Do you think that affected the morale of people in the services?

I think it did, some, and some it didn't. I know I felt pretty well upset over the fact that he was gone. I thought he done a whale of a job for us.

Q: As young as you were though, that was probably the president you remembered most, most of your life.

That's right.

Q: Was there a time when you were in the plane and you realized, uh-oh, this is a war?

I thought about that a lot because, John Tomaz(?) the other waist gunner and I, every time we climbed in that bomber, we'd kind of look at each other and I'd tell him, "Well, John," I said, "Look at it this way, we'll ask--tell the Lord that if we're gonna get it today, let's make it quick." We didn't want any--have to bail out or anything.

Q: Then you knew the seriousness of--

Oh yeah. We knew that every time we climbed in that bomber there was a chance we wouldn't



come back.

But we were one of the fortunate ones. We had plenty of help in case we had to bail out. We had flags on our back and a list of all the tribes in the Burma area that would say--there was something in there that the Americans would say, if you help me get back to my American people, my company will reimburse you and it's on this flag in back, of all the tribes that were in that area.

Q: So you were prepared.

We were ready.

Q: But you never even came close to having to do that.

No, we never to bail out or anything like that. The plane, like I said, ran like a charm and no fighter opposition to speak of, so we, really, we had it made.

Q: Who was your best friend at the time?

John Tomaz(?).

Q: Tell me about John.

He's from Boston, Massachusetts, and a real likeable guy, a lot of fun. In fact, the whole crew was that way, even the officers. But being the gunners on both sides of the plane, we were the closest of anybody.

Q: Was there anybody who was really strange, wacky, different?

Well, I'll go back to when we first formed as a crew. We had a guy assigned to our crew, I can't even think of his name now, Pop Warden(?). And, he was older. I was the youngest one, he was the oldest one. And, one day our pilot found out that Pop liked his liquor and he called a meeting one day of the crew and he told us what he called it for.

He said he didn't think he'd feel safe with Pop in the tail turret knowing that he liked his booze, whether he'd bring on his booze with him or not. So he wanted to know what we thought about it, either keep him or tell him good-bye. So, it was nine to one, tell him good-bye.

So then he was gone and we got Danny Driscoll(?) from St. Paul, Minnesota and he was a good one. He was a good man. In fact, he sent us a card one time; he got to be a milk deliveryman in St. Paul, Minnesota. And he said on this card, he said, "Now this is what you call a milk run."

[Laughter]

So we joked and laughed and had a lot of good times.

Q: What haven't I asked you yet? There must be some event or something that you thought of mentioning here that I haven't asked you about or we haven't gotten to.

Not really except carrying the gas to the hump. How [inaudible] back around here now, how we waste things. When those Chinese coolies had to come out to unload this gas, they had these drums. They'd get one shoved one underneath the opening, then they'd take that cap off. When that drum got almost full, they'd hurry up and cap it again, put another drum there.



And I don't think they ever lost a drop of gasoline. And they were real good. We had no trouble with them. Nobody ever threatened us or anything like that and those people really worked hard. Then on guard duty, they had what they called the Gurkha troops. I'm sure you've heard of the Gurkha troops. They're mean and vicious, but they're good.

And, I was on guard duty one night and the guy must have looked at me and knew I was getting tired, so he pointed up to the plane like this, and then put his head down like, and I said, "Uh-uh." I know what he wanted; he wanted me to go to sleep and he'd guard.

Well, I know what would happen if the officer of the day would come by and I was sleeping, I'd be in deep trouble. But, and never had any trouble with those guys either. They were good. The Indian guards were good; they helped us out a lot.

Q: How'd you deal with the language differences?

That was good, we didn't speak much Indian, I'll tell you. It was just hand gestures and things like that. Like we wanted our bachu(?) there, our boy, to do a little bit more cleaning on the floor. We'd just grab the mop or broom and do that and then he caught on to it. It cost us two dollars apiece, that'd be rupees for them, that's 99 cents apiece. And that's what he got, cleaning our barracks every week.

And boy, that was a lot of money to them. And then we had an R and R, that's what they call rest and relaxation, and they sent us up to Lahore, India; India then, it's Pakistan now. Fifteen days. And that was a beautiful city and a real nice place to take it easy and relax.

The only problem was getting the train to go up there; Indians were riding on top of the train. They didn't ride--they were full inside, they had to ride somewhere, so they'd get on top of the train and ride. Those were the good times, right there.

Q: If those were the good times, what was the worst time?

The worst time, to me, was knowing where I'm going, what are we getting into? 'Cause I realize it could have been worse, we could have went to the 8th Air Force, which took an awful pounding over there. We could have went up into Greenland, and like that, but we ended up where we were.

And even though there were dangers on the ground and from the Japanese too, we felt we were one of the lucky ones, to get assigned over there. I keep in touch with our pilot and we met last year. We're gonna meet again this year and we know where John Tomaz(?) is, but we don't know where the rest of them are, we can't find them. It would be nice to get together with them.

I just appreciate the fact that you're willing to listen to not only me, but the other veterans too and I'm sure there's other veterans had more to tell than I did.

#### End of Interview

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WKAR would like to acknowledge David M. Miller for his volunteer effort identifying and clarifying place names and other historical information. Mr. Miller is a student at Grand Valley State University, pursuing a B.A. in history.