

**Bernard Graney**  
**Veteran**

**Philip Leonard**  
**Interviewer**  
**Hoosick Falls Historical Society**  
**Hoosick Falls NY**

**Q:** Where do you live Bern?

**BG:** At 36 wall street Hoosick Falls, been a resident of Hoosick falls my entire life.

**Q:** Tell us a bit about what you did in Hoosick Falls before you went into the service.

**BG:** Well I was a student in Hoosick Falls high school, graduated in 1942. All the graduates of any high school in the United States in 1942, 43, 44 or 45 didn't have to worry about college entrance exams because there was something waiting for them, they were going into the military and I just took a PG course after high school and rounded up on algebra and things like that because I wanted to get into the air corps, I wanted to fly and I knew I would need math for that so I went back, took a PG course just waiting for my number.

**Q:** Then what happened?

**BG:** Well in March my number came up so I was inducted into the service with a bunch of other fellows from Hoosick Falls and my first step was...

**Q:** You remember any of the guys that went down with you?

**BG:** Yeah, Leon Harrison was one of them, he is the only one that stands out. Mason was in the same graduating class with me.

**Q:** Then what happened?

**BG:** Well I went down to Fort Dix first and the first job I did in there was moving a coal pile that somebody probably had moved the day before from one place to another just to keep us busy and anytime I went before anybody in an interview or anything else, I kept stressing, I want to go in the air force I want to go into the air force. So finally that's where I ended up but first thing I knew I was on a train and it took us three days to get down to Miami beach Florida and I was stationed at Miami Beach, that's where I took my basic. I was down there for probably 4 or 5 months and I'd probably still be down there if I didn't tell them where I was. I played a musical instrument, the alto horn in the high school band, so one day they come around they said we need somebody to play the troops in and out when they come off the field. I could play a bugle, they said okay, you can play bugle so they transferred me to another hotel and I was in the band unit and

somehow, they lost my records. Well there's no problem going to chow line but when it comes time to get paid there was no record to pay me so I had to go and tell them where I was finally. So after about three months of basic training I shipped out there and went to Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina and stayed there for about four months I guess.

**Q:** Was that a cadet program?

**BG:** That was a cadet program, I was in that and then at this time this was all probably mid to late 1943. We did some flying in small single engine Luscombe planes training but then they determined they already had enough pilots in training. What they needed was gunners, radio operators and mechanics because they were gearing up for the four engine bomber, as any student of history knows, if Germany had a four engine bomber they probably would have knocked out Britain and the whole course of the war would have been changed but Britain didn't have a four engine bomber and England didn't have a four engine bomber and England finally realized they need a four engine bomber and so did we. This is why they started the four engine bomber program. They had the B-24, which was a heck of a good ship and could do a heck of a good job and could carry more bombs than the B-17 but it was limited in the range it could go and the height it could go and also the speed and armament it could deal with so they built the flying fortress. It's aptly named because it had guns all over the place. My position was in the radio room, right back in the bomb bay as you can see it had a chin turrets here and had a chick turrets here and it had a ball turret you can just barely see there and waste guns here and a top turret here and these were all twins and a tail turret so it was aptly named, it was a flying fortress and the Germans learned to respect it. With the adaptation of the formation flying they had the high, the low and the lead element, they had like a box formation and fighters could not penetrate it very well.

**Q:** How many in a group would fly out?

**BG:** Well there would be the high low and the lead element and each one of the groups would probably consist of maybe about 30 to 40 planes but then there would be a whole division, there was three divisions. The first, the second and the third division. Ours was the third division with her had a block "L" on the tail, the other divisions, one of them had a diamond and I can't recall what the other division had, anyway, they would make up the group. Until the advent, until they got the fighter planes, could only go so far and protect us, they call them our little friends. They could only go so far until they developed the wing tanks for their added fuel, so when they give up the wing tanks, then they could go deeper in with us and when we go to Berlin for example, the fighters could not go all the way but if we went just inside of Germany and things like that the fighters with their tanks could go with us most of the way, any event that German planes jumped them they would drop their tanks and their maneuverability.

**Q:** Let's go back, now you are in Miami, went to South Carolina to Presbyterian college and they were getting you ready for this flying fortress.

**BG:** Well no, at that time I was studying to be a cadet but they determined they had enough piolets so they sent me to Nashville and they did a study or something. I had to make a choice, go to engineer or radio or gunnery. Well gunnery you would go about six or eight weeks of gunnery, you go right from there to combat so I said well I learned something first so I guess I go to engineering or radio and I always liked radio, so that's where I went. I went to radio and I went to Scottsfield so I took that. Scottsfield, Illinois. While I was there I can recall very vividly I didn't know what the heck was going on. Scottsfield was one of those places whether we are doing an awful lot of glider work but this was in preparation for D day, of course I didn't know this at the time. They were hooking onto gliders and towed them and everything else in Scottsfield. I knew something big was coming but I did not know what it was. I finished my radio course, qualified as a radio operator and then I had to go to gunnery anyway so I went to Yuma Arizona. But we went Yuma, took our gunnery, air to air to ground. We would shoot at targets with a fifty caliber they would tow behind the plane and after that, after gunnery, I graduated from there sometime in mid to late 44. Then I went from there to Lincoln, Nebraska and that is where our crew was formed and coincidentally our crews, you could see they were formed alphabetically like there was myself, Graney, there was Ganger, Hyneman, Hunt. They were all done alphabetically. So we formed as a crew and we went from there to Alexander, Louisiana to a base and we trained on B-17s and I can always remember down there while we were training one of the B-17's crashed and all of the crew was killed so just like horseback riding the first thing you do, they took everybody out after the plane crashed, then get in the air again so you had to get in the air again because if they forget they give you time to think about it, you're going to be chicken, not going to do it. So we trained at Alexander, did smoke bombing and things like that and the first thing you know we were qualified I guess to go overseas and they formed our group, the group we were going to be part of was the 452<sup>nd</sup> bomb group. That was formed originally in Washington State but then they moved from there to Rapid City, South Dakota and they went from their overseas. They went by boat over there but then to get the planes over there we picked up a plane, I cannot recall exactly where we picked it up, whether we picked it up, must have picked it up at Alexander, Louisiana. Anyway, we flew over and I can remember going over upstate New York looking down seeing the mountains and Maine and we landed at Goosebay, Labrador and the next step was Iceland, we stopped at Reykjavik, Iceland. From there we landed in Whales, over in England. We left the plane wherever it was in a station there and took the train, went to the base where we were stationed which was in East Anglia which is the eastern part of England, it was the 452<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group that we were just outside Attleboro in Norwich in England. We flew all our missions on there.

**Q:** Then you started doing missions? Tell us a bit about your first mission? Where were you going?

**BG:** Well we went all the way from probably some of our deepest penetration, I

remember December 5<sup>th</sup> 1944, we went to Berlin, Germany and I can remember going in on the IP where we're going to get to the initial point, we were going about 300 and some miles per hour, we had a hell of a tailwind going in but we did an 180 degree turn and we come off the other way and we were making about 60 or 70 miles of ground speed and the flak-gunners had a field day because we were just about standing still but I can't remember the exact first mission.

**Q:** Your missions were usually in France and Germany

**BG:** Yeah, France and Germany

**Q:** How many missions did you do?

**BG:** Thirty-five, we were a lucky crew really, we had nobody and all the time around they were wounded, we did come home one time on two engines, two engines out on one side. I can remember we were throwing the machine guns we were throwing everything out into the channel to lighten the load so we could get home and we just barely made it home and when we got back they wanted a court martial the engineer because it was one of his jobs to check the tailwheel, there was a light that indicated that the tailwheel was down. Well that was his job to check that and he checked it, but somehow the tail wheel malfunctioned and the plane come down and we skidded off to the side of the runway but they come to find out and what did they find in the mechanism of the tailwheel but they found a fifty-caliber bullet so there was a good reason for the malfunction.

**Q:** Then what happened? You did your thirty-five missions?

**BG:** Well we did our thirty-five missions then of course it was getting towards the end of the war then. We finished April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945 and believe it or not the April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945 mission was the worst mission I think that we ever had and that was our 35<sup>th</sup> mission. We looked and the plane on our left side I can still see it very vividly, I was shooting at fighters out the waist window and this one fighter came in and he came right straight broadside to us and I could look down and I could see the pilot and he was like hunched over, now whether he was wounded or not I don't know but he missed us by inches he came right underneath like this and when he did he pulled up the other side and he hit well, right underneath here and that plane just broke right apart. Now I didn't actually witness this, the other waist gunner on the other side, all I can remember his saying oh my god and the whole thing just fell apart, the theoretical thing was that the plane that was on the left side of this was the one commonly referred to as snake eyes, it was an older plane. It was a B-17 E I think it was, the later ones were called a G model but that was our favorite plane and somehow, we wanted to fly that plane we have a petition group to fly the plane but they wound not let us because we were lead element and they said we should have a newer model plane. Well ironically as I say that plane went down and everybody

was lost on that plane to the best of my knowledge nobody ever saw any shoots come up or anything else.

**Q:** What do you mean by the lead group?

**BG:** Well you have to have somebody that's the leader of the group then the rest of them were stacked behind it and they all kind of follow the leader. Most of the time when they drop their bombs they drop their bombs all on the lead plane. The lead bombardier would cite in on the target and the rest of them we all poised in a minute they saw his bombs go, they would release their bombs but they did like a saturation bombing.

**Q:** Would you explain your uniform to us and what is on it and everything?

**BG:** Well of course this is the eighth air force patch and this was my rank which was technical sergeant that they've all changed now. This was the wings of a gunner and the blue, I'm not exactly sure what the blue is but I think it was just like the combat infantry in different countries badge. These were my campaign ribbons and the airman Air medal with five clusters and the good conduct and the ETO with three battle stars and this was a unit citation that the group received for participating in a particular mission, I believe it was the shuttle mission to Russia but I am not positive and this I think you are probably familiar with that is the old ruptured duck. This was the radio patch, that signified that I was a radio operator. Other than that the rest I guess are just standard US air force.

**Q:** How about that hat you got there?

**BG:** Well that's the typical elic man's hat you know, that was a good grade hat I purchased that in St. Louis I recall. Does not have the fifty mission crush because you can recall seeing the pilots with that from wearing the earphones but when you are flying at 30,000 feet you don't wear that kind of a hat, you have the snoopy helmet on and the goggles and the oxygen mask and everything else.

**Q:** Alright so you split your 35 missions and he had points and you came home. Then what happened?

**BG:** Yeah, basically I went to Southhampton, England and we waited around there and we had an interesting event on the way back, a submarine surrendered to our convoy. We were on the water I think May 8<sup>th</sup> or May 9<sup>th</sup> on the way back when the war was officially declared over and a submarine, I can remember him dropping depth charges to the submarine and I think it surrendered to our convoy but I'm not positive. I come back to the state and we have an automatic fertile for I can't recall a long time maybe a week or two weeks something like that and I went from there to Atlantic city and that was like a restaurant and I remember the jitneys and going up and down the boardwalk and

everything. I have not been back there since and I have no desire now with all the gambling. After that I went to Randolph Field in Texas and I really would have almost liked to sign up for B-29s and gone to the pacific but I just didn't see the sense in pushing my luck. I said I'm going to sit here comfortable and with the advent of the atomic bomb and everything else you could see the end was coming.

**Q:** Could you tell us about the machine gun you brought?

**BG:** Well this is an early model German machine gun I'd like to say I took it off a dead German but I did not. I picked it up in England, a party had brought it back and they did not want to bother with the paper work, it was required to take it back. So they offered it to me so I said oh sure I'll take it so I filled out the necessary paper work and it still works but the FBI came, after I filled the paper work and they welded inside the board so you can't use it as a machine gun so but it makes an interesting souvenir and there is a little story that goes with that too, one time St. Mary's had a play up here and somehow they needed a gun like this and I let the kids take the gun, my children were in school at the time and some of the kids were walking down the street with a machine gun and a police car seen them so I got a call a little annoyed and told them that the gun is not operational at all it won't work.

**Q:** Alright so what happened? You were waiting around then did you get your discharge out of Randolph?

**BG:** Yes I did, They came out with a point system and I had enough points to get out and I had two options, I could go to a point closer to home and be discharged or be discharged there and they would pay my rail fare home so I elected to be discharged there so I processed the forms and picked up my discharge and got my travel money and came home here to Hoosick Falls and my mother had died in 1942 so my father and brother and sister were keeping house so when I come back I kind of pitched in, my father had a general repair business as a welder and things like that so I was working with him up to the point that he got killed in an automobile accident in 1947 so I was all set to go to school to become a welder under the GI bill of rights, I had all the paper work done and everything else then a job came up in the post office so I took that and stayed there for well went in at 47 at the post office and got out in 85 so almost 40 years

**Q:** Then you married, were you married in the service or married when you came home?

**BG:** Married when I came home, I didn't meet my wife until I think it was 1947, Christmas party, she worked in the underground at the time and we were married on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1950, only went together both.

**Q:** How many children?

**BG:** Six children

**Q:** Any of them live in town?

**BG:** Yes, my son Bernard, he built a house right behind me he lives in town. The rest of them are scattered all over. Mike is just South of Rochester, Barbara is in Miami Florida, Rosemary is in Clifton Park, Joseph is in Falls Village Connecticut and Patrick just recently finished a stint in the air force. He put in 20 years in the air force as a maintenance ground person on the lines and now he's down in rural Pennsylvania and he is working on aircraft down there basically doing the same thing he did in the service at a better rate of pay.

**Q:** You did become mayor at one point?

**BG:** Right, mayor for two years here in Hoosick Falls, I enjoyed that very much. I do not like the political end of it. You know you could just do a good job and let it go with that but this, I looked up the definition of a politician in the dictionary one time and decided I did not want to be one.

**Q:** Anything else?

**BG:** The time was right, the opportunity was right, nobody looked at themselves as heroes but I do firmly believe that without the use of the four-engine bomber the war would have lasted much longer than it did and could have had a much different outcome. Few people realize how close Germany came to defeating us. Hitler was working on an atomic bomb just as rigorously as we were and I just believe someone is really watching over this country.