

**John W. "Bill" (JF)
and
Betty P. (BF) Francett
Narrators**

**Mary Ellen Stockwell (I)
Interviewer**

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I: I'm Mary Ellen Stockwell and we're here at Mr. and Mr. Francett's home. It's December 20, 2003. We're in Queensbury, New York. I'm just going to ask you a few beginning questions that are really easy to answer, and then we'll start off. So, can you just tell me your full name?

JF: John William Francett.

I: And your date of birth?

JF: 9/16/25.

I: Can you tell me what branch of service you were in?

JF: U.S. Air Force.

I: Were you enlisted or drafted?

JF: I enlisted.

I: You enlisted. Before you went into the Air Force, what was your education?

JF: High school.

I: You graduated from high school?

JF: I did.

I: Where did you live?

JF: Easton, Pennsylvania. That's very close to the Jersey border. It's right on the Jersey border, where the Delaware River separates Pennsylvania and New Jersey is where Easton was, on the Pennsylvania side.

I: Did a lot of your friends go into the Air Force? Is that why you chose the Air Force?

JF: No, I was always crazy about airplanes and I knew a lot about them and all that. It was sort of easy for me.

I: So, are your dates of service - is this correct - 9/20/1943 to 3/30/1946? Does that sound right?

JF: Yes.

I: So, can you tell me where you were when Pearl Harbor occurred and what do you remember about that?

JF: Yes, I remember it very well. I had an aunt that lived nearby and we were visiting her place in the country near Easton. I was with my mother and we heard the news about Pearl Harbor getting bombed while we were there at the house. And they had a son who was based there. He was older than me and he was a professional soldier. He had been in for quite a while and they were all pretty well uptight when they heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. They knew he was in Honolulu, somewhere around Honolulu, and he was a professional soldier. He had been in quite a while. And he was okay. But, a lot of people got killed there. But that's where I was when the Japs started the war.

I: Right.

JF: And then when I [unclear].

I: When you were eighteen?

JF: [Unclear]Air Force. I became a radio operator gunner. I had some flying experience before I went in. I became a radio operator gunner and our group was the oldest group in what they call the Eighth Air Force. The outfit that was based in England. We were in the oldest group. We weren't over there. We got over there near the end of the war. But it was the oldest group.

I: The Eighth Air Force was the oldest group?

JF: No, our bomb group, the 384th bomb group. The Eighth Air Force was the main, everything was the Eighth Air Force over there.

I: But the 384th was the oldest.

JF: The oldest group, yes. We were honored, being the oldest group, for staying over there for a year and doing all kinds of things right after the war. After that, we toured a lot of parts of Europe and saw all the horrible damage the cities had suffered at ground level. I'll never forget that.

I: You'll never forget that.

JF: During the war, most of our Air Force bombing was higher up. You never saw the stuff going on at a low level. That was truly amazing. We did different jobs. We picked up refugees at Casablanca, North Africa. Then we went...

BF: That's these people, in the picture. [Holds up photo.]

I: Those are the refugees?

BF: That's the woman, now that's the daughter. The mother and father have died since. Her and her mother were the refugees. [Points to photo.]

JF: They were refugees and we were a special group that stayed over for a year doing all kinds of stuff. [Unclear] benches in the airplane where people could sit. We picked up refugees in North Africa. In my part of the airplane, in the radio operator's cabin, I had a mother and a daughter sitting alongside of me. It was pretty interesting and we're still friends with them. They visited here after the war – the whole family. We were in France a number of times, Betty and I, and we visited them. The daughter turned out to

be – she was seventeen when I met her, she turned out to be a musician and a famous children's book writer, I guess you'd call it. And she was also well known, very well known, every year at Christmas time she would go to Paris, and I don't know if you ever have seen pictures of it, but it's a beautiful white dome in the middle of the city?

I: Sacré-Cœur?

JF: Sacré-Cœur, yes. Sacred heart. And she was always there Christmas day playing the organ. She became quite known for that. We visited several times. And her parents came over and visited us also.

I: So, you still talk to them right now?

JF: Yes, the daughter and her husband. The parents are gone.

I: [Unclear].

BF: [Unclear]Twenty years ago [unclear].

JF: So, we had a long friendship with them, real nice people.

I: Where did you receive basic training?

JF: Greensboro, North Carolina. It's near Raleigh somewhere. We have a son that lives near there now.

I: What was basic training like?

JF: It was [unclear]. We did all kinds of jobs [unclear]. It wasn't much.

I: You knew you wanted to be in the Air Force?

JF: We were in the Air Force and then for basic training we went to training on airplanes. Flying fortress group, B-17s, and we got over right at the end of the war. We joined this group that was the oldest group, actually the oldest group over there and, like I say, we got to do stuff, flying all over the place, that we wouldn't have had just flying missions. We saw [unclear]and we took tours to this low level to see what the damage was done in all these cities and that's something I'll never forget. Two cities just flattened from our bombings. The Royal Air Force bombing; the Royal Air Force bombed at night, and our Air Force bombed during the day – what a mess. Pretty hard. Just imagine all the people getting killed. War's a stupid thing.

I: You think it's stupid?

JF: Sure. Well, what we did actually wasn't stupid. The Germans started the war. We shouldn't be blamed for that. We sure suffered for it. Poor innocent people and the Royal Air Force bombed at night and our Air Force bombed in the daytime. Well, when you see the cities are flattened, it really leaves an impression. Pretty horrible. We could fly over one big city in Germany and we flew right past the tower, the only thing standing. There wasn't anybody walking around the streets or anything. Just bombed out – and wondered where all those people were. A lot them got killed [unclear]. We saw a lot of cities like that. [Unclear.] You know about the stupidity of war. Killing innocent people, really, a lot of innocent people.

I: How many men were in your unit?

JF: I really can't say. We were in a bomb group, four squadrons, four different squadrons in that group and I can't tell you...

I: How many men did you work with in your plane?

JF: We had a pilot, a co-pilot, navigator, radio operator gunner which was me, we had a ball turret gunner – that was sort of... We had a ball turret gunner that never flew.

I: Never flew in the plane?

JF: He never flew on an airplane. He was on sick call every day. [Laughs.] He was. I don't know how he got away with it. He wasn't sick. He never flew one minute. What a character. He was supposed to be the ball turret gunner. Now the ball turret, there was a thing like this [points with finger and makes an upside down arc] under the airplane, hanging down on the airplane, with a 50 caliber machine gun, and that's sort of in the middle of the airplane, the back of airplane, and he was supposed to be filling that. He never even...

I: He never showed up?

JF: I had the radio operator. I volunteered. The airplane commander... We had to do so many things to qualify before we went overseas, different things and one of them was the ball turret gunner was supposed to do a lot of camera gunnery, so many hours of camera gunnery, and go through the motions of what you would handle in actual combat, and I was sort of the chief by the ball turret. They had a ball turret on the ground in the hangar and I practiced on that just out of curiosity. Our ball turret gunner never flew. I took, we had to have... When we were flying, we couldn't practice, you had to have so much camera gunnery done. And a pleasure plane could be attacking us, our fighter planes were making mock attacks on us, and we had to shoot so much camera gunnery and I had to do it and run the radio, and the other guy never flew... Never. After the war... Never mind.

I: No, tell us.

JF: I asked this guy, "What did you think of combat? Have you ever done anything?" What a joke. It's a funny, funny thing. But I had to end up doing his camera gunnery. I had to qualify; every crew had to qualify in certain things. We had to shoot up so much film when fighter planes would be making mock attacks on us, our own fighters. I had to that and I didn't get to do too much of the radio operating because of that guy. Weird.

I: Did everyone in your group make it home?

JF: Yes, our group, being the oldest group in the Eighth Air Force, the 384th, we got to stay over for a year doing various things like I said, picking up refugees, flying low level and looking at bombed out cities.

I: Where did you pick up refugees?

JF: Casablanca. Let's see that's on the east coast of Africa, a couple of hundred miles down from the north. It was very close to the Mediterranean. First you had to go across the Mediterranean Sea to get there.

I: What was that like?

JF: Really interesting.

I: Picking up refugees...

JF: [Unclear] Like I said, we put benches in the airplane and we picked up these people and a mother and daughter were in my radio operator's compartment and we had [unclear] and they invited me to visit them in Paris, which I did over there and built a friendship with these people.

I: How many refugees did you pick up, like hundreds?

JF: I would say yes, hundreds, I can't really say. But there were quite a few during the course of a week. We did that for a few months after the war, not the whole year we were there. We did all kinds of stuff.

I: What did they look like when you picked them up?

JF: They were civilians.

BF: Were they happy to be rescued?

JF: Oh, yes.

I: Their reaction to American soldiers – what was that like?

JF: They had a good reaction to me. They invited me to their home. Fortunately, the daughter could speak some English. The mother didn't speak English, but the daughter could. That's the one that became quite well known.

I: And if it wasn't for you, she wouldn't be well known, maybe?

JF: Oh, no, I wouldn't say that; somebody else would have...

I: How did you keep in touch with your family when you were overseas?

JF: Writing letters.

I: How long were you over there?

JF: Several months before the war ended and then a year after the war, over a year. Now we were in a special group staying over doing stuff. There were two groups, the 92nd and the 384th. We were two groups that did the stuff, various, like picking up refugees. But we did get to see what the war really did. I'll never forget that. Seeing all these cities that were bombed out. Took a couple of tours at low level. That's something you can't forget. [Unclear] Innocent people got killed. War's pretty hard.

I: Were any of your friends passed away from war?

JF: No. I had some friends, a really good friend of mine who went in the service after I did and all he wanted to be was a tail gunner. Which didn't take that much training, you know, a radio operator, you had to go to radio operator school and all that stuff and gunner school. But he just wanted to be a gunner, a tail gunner. You would have liked this guy. He was the most handsome fella I'd ever seen. He was tall, about 6', and all he wanted to do was be a tail gunner. And he got to be a tail gunner and his airplane got shot down near the end of the war and that was it.

I: Did you go to high school with him?

JF: No, he went to the same high school I did but he was a little younger than me. I didn't actually go to school with him.

I: What was the food like on a daily basis?

JF: It was pretty good actually. After the war, it wasn't that great what we had, but it [unclear].

I: What type of things did you have?

JF: There was Spam, which I didn't eat.

I: You didn't eat the Spam?

JF: I tried it, but I didn't [unclear], but we were adequately fed, let's put it that way. The bomb groups ate well.

I: Would you say you were fully supplied with all the stuff you needed?

JF: Oh, yes, we ate well. Compared to guys in the infantry, you know, it was a different story. And the poor civilians...

I: Where were you based?

JF: A place called Grafton Underwood, let's see, Betty's from Nottingham and it's a bit south of Nottingham, an air base just south of Nottingham. How I met Betty, it was right after the war. A bunch of us decided we were going to... We were released from duty and we could go anywhere we wanted, so a guy says, somebody wanted to go to, I forget what town it was, and somebody, a guy says, "No, no, you've got to go to Nottingham, that's where the girls are." [Laughs.]

I: So that's where you went.

JF: That's how I met Betty at a dance.

I: What would you say your most memorable experience of the war was?

JF: Well, I didn't see that much action since we got over there late, but we were there for a year and we saw a lot more than the poor guys that did the bombing, probably, because we did all this low level stuff, saw the cities and that was the biggest impression of my life. The horror of war when you see one huge city after another just flattened [unclear]. It leaves a big impression.

I: Did you ever see any enemy fire at all?

JF: To be honest, I got there right at the end of the war. A lot of fellas in our group did. Our crew got there near the end, so we experienced the horrible stuff looking at flattened cities and everything right after the war, immediately after the war. In other words, our crew didn't see combat. We got there at the end.

I: But you did see a lot of things...

JF: But other groups didn't see. Since we were the oldest group, we were actually the oldest group, our group saw a lot of combat before we got there, but we got there at the end. We were replacements. The whole thing was quite a [unclear]. In a way we saw what the combat crews didn't see. We saw all the damages and everything. We

[unclear] bombings. We experienced seeing all that stuff. It leaves a lasting impression, seeing what wars could do, pretty horrible; [unclear] people got killed; flattened out cities in Europe. Pretty horrible.

I: You still remember everything?

JF: Oh sure.

I: After the war was over when you came home, what was your reaction towards everything at home?

JF: Really happy to be home. Things were different. I had a different outlook on everything like anybody would.

I: What about towards the President?

JF: The President? No thoughts at all. I wasn't part of a [unclear]. It wasn't like today. Now, she's the one that had experiences. [Points to BF.]

BF: She'll get to me.

I: Are you in any Veterans' organizations or anything?

JF: I was in the reserves, Air Force Reserves, for quite a while. That was a long time ago.

I: How long did you stay in after war was over when you came home?

JF: It wasn't that long. They released us pretty quick. But the thing was, we were two groups that stayed over for a year, so the guys that went home right away got released a lot earlier than we did. We had to stay over an extra year. We were honored to do that. We wanted to go home. [Laughs.] But, if it weren't for that, we wouldn't have met. [Points to BF.]

I: If it wasn't for that, you wouldn't be together.

JF: Right. For better or for worse. [Laughs.]

I: What do you feel about war today, everything that's going on in Iraq?

JF: I don't think it really [unclear] our President should have got [unclear]. Some people say, "Well, he got rid of Saddam Hussein and all that kind of stuff [unclear] starting a war in Iraq. There were evidently some good things coming out of it; helping out the people there, but as far as starting a war there..."

I: You saw a lot of things in places that were bombed from enemy and our warfare. What do you think about the atomic bomb? Dropping the atomic bomb?

JF: Well, it was a pretty horrible thing, but it stopped the war in the long run, and you sacrificed one city, Hiroshima. Our son's father-in-law was on the airplane that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. He was a flight engineer on a B-29. I was in a flying fortress [unclear]. B-29's were huge and had a longer range. [Unclear.]

I: He was on that plane?

JF: Yes.

I: Wow. Before you went overseas, you were stationed at North Carolina?

JF: Yes, Greensboro.

I: What type of schooling did you have to go through?

JF: That was basic training; we were taking soldier [unclear] through the ground stuff. That was basic training. From there you went to your Air Force training; the outfit where you get the various flying exercises and stuff, depending [unclear]. Camera gunnery and all that kind of stuff [unclear] shooting up [unclear].

I: You were a radio operator. What exactly did you do on a daily basis for that job?

JF: I think the most important thing was getting weather observations. Another part of it was we also were gunners. We had to do training for that. [Unclear.]

I: On top of the radio operator school?

JF: Yes. We went to gunnery school.

I: How long was that?

JF: I think it was only two months or something like that. Yuma, Arizona.

I: You've been all over the place.

JF: Yuma's right on the Mexican border, southwestern Arizona. Pretty hot, pretty hot there. When we were there it wasn't that bad.

I: Besides the people in France, the refugees, do you keep in contact with any other people from the war?

JF: No. A lot of them are gone. We know people had been, locally,

I: All right, [unclear] we'll switch. Take your full name.

BF: Just Betty.

I: Can you describe Nottingham to me?

BF: It's a nice city. We have [unclear] a big tennis court where they play the preliminary Masters for Wimbledon, and that's where Robin Hood lived – around that area.

JF: I was crazy about Robin Hood. I have books here about Robin Hood, a famous writer and artist did terrific stuff, before you leave, I'll show you.

BF: They have a castle there, a very, very old castle and the oldest pub in England there.

JF: The oldest pub in England, we were there. [Unclear.]

I: What was it like growing up in England before the war?

BF: Well, I was very young, nine years old when the war started, but we were just coming out of the depression, so we never had many things, but being young I just enjoyed myself, went to school, played with my friends. [Unclear.] Wasn't much money.

JF: A lot different than what we had in the States.

BF: You had no TV, no cell phone, no car. My Dad build a crystal set radio so we had radio from that, news from that. Not too cold over there, it's nice, we had a big wooded area near our home [unclear].

JF: [Unclear.]

I: You only went to school until you were sixteen?

BF: Yes.

I: Can you describe the education that you received?

BF: I had a basic education. I was able to go out and get a job They taught me everything I knew. I had an economic class, [unclear] we brought some clothes in, we washed them and we ironed, we learned how to cook and we did the English and the arithmetic and geometry and history and that was it [unclear]. But it was very basic and I was able to go out in the world. I was able to get a job right away, right after I got out of school. If we had had more money, I could have gone on to a secondary school. which is like your high school and on to college. But there wasn't any money.

I: So, [unclear] to continue?

BF: Yes, yes, right. [Unclear] more money. A lot of my friends went on.

I: What kind of job did you get?

BF: My first job was a clerk in a factory. All the men working there had to punch a time card and it was my job to go through these time cards and write it in a big book, so they could get paid that way.

I: How old were you?

BF: Fifteen. I could walk to my job; it was about three or four miles away and I walked back and forth. Did a lot of walking.

I: [Unclear.] What was the first [unclear] moment of war that you remember [unclear]?

BF: I remember... The scary thing to me was my Dad always stood outside when the planes were coming over, and the next-door neighbor and [unclear] the bombs and they always said the air was hot [unclear] when we got bombed.

I: In your interview sheet, you described you went into an air raid shelter.

BF: Yes, we had an air raid shelter in our garden. It was underground and the rest of it was covered with soil and grass, and with the air raids, that was horrible too when the air raid siren went off, you would have to get out of your bed and go in there and it was cold, to live like that.

I: Your father had a garden?

BF: Yes, a big garden – fruit and vegetables that kept us going through the war.

I: Did you ever use any of the rations besides your father's food [unclear]?

BF: Oh, well we were rationed; we had so much sugar, we had so much butter and we were able to survive on that, and a few extras. My mother used to queue up when something would go off rations. [Unclear] and she would queue up to get it. One thing

we learned in England was to stand in line. And you know that the only food we got was what came over on the – what do you call those boats, they used to bring food over – Merchant Marine. Because England is so small, they don't have much [unclear] vegetables and cheese and things and milk, some milk, but a lot of things had to come over on the boat. They'd get bombed too, the boats. There wasn't much food. In fact, they used to weigh it and make sure we had enough to eat.

JF: I just wanted to show you a picture of the outskirts of Nottingham, the English pubs are very nice. [Displays photo.] [Unclear.] It was like a restaurant also, right.

BF: Every pub has food.

JF: Yes. Every pub has food. And this is on the outskirts of Nottingham,

BF: And my mother was very good, you know, shopping, and we got a lot of American stuff.

Spam. A lot of Spam. Dried eggs. [Unclear.] I learned to like them. My mother made a lot of pies.

I: What was the morale of the people during the war?

BF: It was good. They were happy we were fighting Germans – they were so bad. It was good. But like I said before, there wasn't much communication, so it was just what local people thought, you know, but they seemed happy about it. And fortunately, we didn't lose anybody.

I: You didn't lose anyone that you knew?

BF: No. None of my friends, well my friends were young, but none of my friends' fathers, or brothers or any of my own relatives were lost. That was good.

I: In your interview sheet you said that your school was bombed?

BF: Yes, my school was bombed.

I: Were you in school?

BF: No, we were at home. Did you want to know how we got to school?

I: Yes.

BF: People volunteered to open up their houses for a few hours a day and we [unclear] in the house for school [unclear]. And my church, of course, was bombed. My school was by a railroad, so they probably thought it was a railroad station [unclear] may be why they bombed it.

I: Do you remember what you felt when you heard that [unclear]?

BF: Being young, I didn't have much feeling about it.

I: How old were you?

BF: I was only about ten. Too young to really think too much about it.

I: How old were you when you met Mr. Francett?

BF: Fifteen. [Laughs.]

I: Really, and he was eighteen?

BF: He's five years older than I am. Twenty. I went to dances a lot. We all did, the girls, go to dances, where you met the boys.

I: A dance where you wear a dress and everything?

BF: Oh, yes, just an ordinary dress, you know. We didn't wear pants in those days, it was dresses. They always had nice music you could dance to; the jitterbug was started. I used to love to dance. We went two or three times a week. That's where I met him.

I: Were the English girls crazy over American soldiers?

BF: Oh, yes!

I: They loved American soldiers?

BF: Loved Americans. They're the best. We had a lot of other soldiers there, too. We had Poles, we had Norwegians and Australians, but mostly Americans.

I: They're the best.

BF: They were young.

I: How old were you when you got married?

BF: Eighteen.

I: Were you married here or in England?

BF: In England.

I: So, he stayed over there with you?

BF: No, he had to come over just for the wedding and then he had to come back here and he left me there and I stayed over in England.

I: What was that like?

BF: Very interesting.

I: Did you write lots of letters?

BF: Yes, a few. We couldn't talk on the phone; we didn't have a telephone. It wasn't too long. We were married in November and I came over here, it was around Christmas time. I remember having Christmas at your Mom and Dad's house [looking at JF].

JF: She's younger than me and she has a better memory.

BF: But I loved the food when I first came over. Ice cream, we didn't get any ice cream through the war. And the doughnuts.

JF: It's hard for Americans to imagine what went on. But we didn't have anything like that. Even in wartime. Haven't a clue, the civilians here haven't a clue as to what went on in Europe.

BF: We had an orange at Christmas because that was special, brought in by the boats. I loved all the lights. We didn't have our lights back, the store lights, the neon, all the lights. It was very cold.

I: What would you say was your hardest sacrifice during the war, even though you were very young?

BF: Well, getting up in the middle of the night and going into an air raid shelter,

I: How often would you do that? Every night or...

BF: No, a couple of times a week, probably, we'd do that. We had an air raid shelter at school too, but we never had to go in that. We had to run in to a shelter one-time coming home from school because they were shooting us from... There was shrapnel coming down. We ran into a shelter. We also had to wear a gas mask, we had to carry a gas mask all the time and have it with you all the time. I didn't like that, you know, because, well once a day during school hours we had to wear our gas masks for a little while to get used to it. I didn't like that.

I: Did they have procedures at your school that you would follow in case of bombing?

BF: Yes, we had some, I don't really remember too much about that, just the gas masks.

I: [Unclear] alive. [Laughs.]

BF: Things I liked and I didn't like I remember very clearly.

JF: The American civilians didn't have a clue what went on over there.

BF: I try to tell people about it and, "Well it was much worse over here, we couldn't get butter." [Laughs.]

JF: Inconvenient, yes.

I: That's what they say?

BF: Yes. I have a French friend and she didn't perish during the war and all she got to eat was parsnips. She didn't have any food at all because the Germans were coming and taking it. It was pretty bad. [Unclear.]

I: Have you returned to England since you left?

BF: Yes, we've been over quite a bit and we used to go about every two years. We don't go back anymore because my Mum is not there anymore and my Dad, and my sisters – they moved out of England.

I: They live all over the world?

BF: I have some nephews there and I send Christmas cards, but I don't go back anymore. But we have to go to Finland now to see our son. We go there instead.

I: Were your sisters married to soldiers?

BF: My oldest sister, she was married to a sailor and his boat was hit – what do you call those things?

JF: Torpedo.

BF: It was hit by a torpedo. It was pretty bad, but he survived that. My other sister, she was married to an Airman, who came back.

I: Were they American soldiers?

BF: No, English, they married English. [Unclear.] My Dad had a job. He was [unclear] in a factory. His job was to light – he threw a smokescreen up over the city. They couldn't see anything. His job was to light a smokescreen in our area.

I: My grandfather was actually stationed over in England during the war.

BF: Was he?

I: I just found that out today.

BF: Whereabouts?

I: I don't remember where but I mentioned Nottingham and he said that he remembered a lot of bombing [unclear].

BF: Yes, it was a lot. Not as much as Coventry, like Coventry. That's where they had the steel, made the steel, it got bombed a lot. Birmingham.

I: All the factories?

BF: Yes factories, they went after the factories.

I: What about the factory you worked in?

BF: No, they didn't bomb that. They made lights for movies and things there [unclear].

JF: Coventry was quite famous for getting bombed. They were a city with power [unclear] night bombing; the Germans bombed at night. And, night bombing...

I: What did the [unclear] like?

BF: Dark. Mostly cloudy days.

I: [Unclear] remember it was just dark...

BF: No.

I: Was it accepted for you to go home to America? By your family?

BF: Yes, it was okay. They had met Bill, my husband, and they liked him and they didn't put up any fight. They said it was okay. I was a brave little girl and I came over.

I: And you've been here ever since?

BF: Yes. So, it was a good move.

I: Do you remember going to the movies and seeing any propaganda?

BF: Oh, yes, they had the – before the movie they would have news, and we saw all that. We got news. But then, we had, on our radio that used to come over, we used to have this guy that would come on, Lord Haw-Haw, his name was. He was an Englishman, I think, who had defected to Germany.

JF: He broadcasted from Germany.

BF: He broadcasted from Germany and he felt [unclear].

I: Like what?

BF: "Don't you think we've forgotten you in Nottingham. We're saving you for our troops."

JF: The girls.

BF: Yes, saving the girls. Actually, that's what he said, "We're saving you girls for our troops."

I: How do you feel towards the Germans now?

BF: Oh, I don't have any hard feelings. It wasn't those people, you know.

I: Do you still watch war documentaries today, like "Saving Private Ryan"? What do you think of things like that?

JF: Very interesting. Yes, sure.

BF: Yes, I watch a lot of movies about the Holocaust.

I: And you weren't aware of things like that back then, right?

BF: No, no, we didn't know anything about that while it was going on. Like I said before, we didn't have any communication, but [unclear]. Some people think it didn't go on, but it did.

JF: No TV. [Laughs.]

I: We figured that. Things were different.

BF: Things were different. But it was a good life. It was day by day, read a lot. So, it was good.

I: What was your favorite book?

BF: I think, Hans Christian Anderson. Yes, I liked that. No, "Grimm's Fairy Tales".

I: How do you feel about the atomic bomb [unclear]?

BF: It probably had to be done to stop the war. It would have gone on a lot longer and taken a lot of lives. It had to be done.

I: Mr. Francett, did you receive any medals?

JF: Just things like medals for serving in... I can hardly explain it. When we got over there, like I said, we were the oldest... I wasn't there.

I: You weren't there? You had come afterwards.

JF: We got there right at the end of the war. Now our pilot for instance, it was his second tour. He had flown fifty missions in Africa.

I: What was his name?

JF: Gorman, a German name [unclear].

I: Did you ever fly the plane yourself?

JF: No, I had my job, but after the war I got a commercial pilot's license.

I: So, did you fly a lot after the war?

BF: Yes, like I said, you had to have so many hours in the air for a commercial license. I wanted to do that and it got me my job at FAA.

I: That's where you worked after the war?

JF: Yes, Air Traffic Control.

I: Your whole life?

JF: Well, that was my professional life – air traffic controller.

I: Did you work around here?

JF: Yes, I worked in several places, the main thing was the air traffic controller at the local airport eventually.

I: When you guys came back to America, where did you move to?

BF: Easton, Pennsylvania. And then we bought a house on the river in New Jersey.

I: And you were still in the Air Force Reserves at that point?

BF: No. And that one [unclear]. He used to fly for the airlines [unclear].

I: Okay

BF: [Unclear.]

I: You used your experience from the war?

JF: Well it was part of the qualifications and I got, like I said, a commercial pilot's license. That got me a job at the airport as an air traffic controller. That was my profession – air traffic controller. That's quite a long time.

I: What did you do when you came over here?

BF: I didn't do anything really, I got a couple of jobs, you know. I didn't have any children then. He was gone [unclear] the airlines. I got a couple of jobs, nothing very much. I worked in a [unclear] in a factory, then I worked in a flower shop and then I did some waitress work, and then when we moved up here, I went to work for the Queensbury school cafeteria. I worked my way up and I got to be Manager for the middle school. I liked that. Whenever our grandkids talk against school food, [unclear] those ladies work very, very hard. They do [unclear].

I: I'm going to miss...

BF: I have a couple of kids that loved [unclear]. They loved it.

I: How do you feel about young people today?

BF: Oh, yes, they're good kids

I: What about you. How do you feel about young people today?

JF: They're a bunch of jerks. [Laughs.] Only kidding.

BF: There are some bad ones, but I think the good ones outweigh...

JF: We have a lot of relatives, in my family, you know.

BF: All our grandkids are really good. [Unclear.] We have one of them here for the summer.

JF: [Unclear.] Big handsome kid.

BF: [Unclear.] They have a hard time now. We had it much easier.

I: Even going through the war?

BF: Oh yes, there was no drugs or anything.

JF: We smoked.

BF: I think I started smoking when I was about twelve years old.

JF: Really.

BF: Oh, yes.

JF: I didn't know that.

BF: Well, not a lot. I'd just steal one of my Dad's cigarettes.

I: Did you smoke during the war?

JF: No.

BF: Nobody told us how bad smoking was. Now everyone says it is foolish. I smoked a lot and I quit.

JF: Later I smoked a pipe. Didn't last too long.

BF: Became a bad habit. Very hard to quit. But I did [unclear].

I: Do you find it hard to, when you remember things of what you saw, do you find it hard to talk about it?

JF: No.

I: A lot of people that went to war don't talk at all.

JF: I didn't have any bad experiences.

BF: We have a friend who [unclear].

JF: Yes. This guy was in the 82nd Airborne Division. Those guys did every beach, every invasion from North Africa to all the way up to Italy into Germany. The 82nd. In the invasion of Europe, you know when we invaded, the 82nd was the first bunch that hit the beach. And they had a lot of casualties. They don't talk too much about it.

I: Yes, not at all.

BF: One good thing I remember was Victory in Europe Day, VE Day.

I: What do you remember about that?

BF: We were allowed to stay out all night. My Dad had a strict curfew for all us girls – we had to be in at 8:00 during the week and 11:00 weekends. We were allowed to stay up and we went to the town square which was very big and we were dancing and...

JF: Nottingham's a nice town.

BF: Yes.

I: A lot of [unclear].

BF: Oh, yes. Not a lot of drinking. Having fun, happy. We didn't do much drinking. We didn't have money. [Laughs.]

I: So, when you met her at the dance you were done with all your jobs that you had to do overseas, and you were just kind of free to do whatever?

JF: We did a lot of flying after the war, doing various things like picking up refugees and [unclear] and stuff like that, but that was sort of... Settle down and we had a lot of time to visit after that. We were still with our two groups. Our groups were still there, but we were relieved of all duties. I remember we had gotten leave and somebody said, "Let's go to..." What was that town?

Break in tape 1:02:57. Resumes at 1:03:13

JF: You got all this stuff down?

BF: I think the war taught us how to cope and do without things and not be really unhappy about it. Do with what you have.

I: I think I [unclear].

BF: No, kids do get too much. We also have too much. We could make do with a lot less than what we have. But times change. There's a lot more money and everybody wants to give their kids more than what they had.

I: I know, I was taking this class – we've learned a lot about the war and we've read lots of books by [unclear] and commentary from people just talking about their experiences and we're reading the book, The Story of World War II by Donald Miller, and I know that we've learned a lot that a lot of kids don't get in school. [Unclear.]

JF: Yes, sure, yes you would.

BF: Oh, yes, do they teach you much about WWII in school?

I: In a regular class, you learn about it in 10th grade, you do maybe a week about it, but taking this class where it's just focused on WWII. Twenty in the class and it's all about WWII and we definitely learned a lot. I know so much more than I thought I would ever learn.

BF: [Unclear] you don't really like wars.

I: What did you think of the Vietnam vets that came back?

JF: I don't have anything pertinent to say about that. It was a different type of thing – Vietnam. It was a terrible, bad war. Very bad war. I think maybe [unclear].

BF: All wars are bad. [Unclear.]

JF: [Unclear] I'm sorry about the people that had to be in it. We know a fella who plays [unclear]. He was in Korea. He was an infantryman and he was in Korea and there was like an occupation force, and he got caught when the Chinese entered the war and they didn't say they were coming. He got caught when the Chinese crossed, they called it the demilitarized zone, dividing the Chinese from us, our occupation forces. The Chinese came pouring across without any warning and he was one of the guys that were just patrolling the DMZ, what they called the dividing line between the Chinese and us, our occupation forces. He got caught, he was just patrolling, he was just a patroller and these guys, hundreds of them, came down in his area and he said, "I just laid on the ground and pretended I was dead and they ran right over me. Went right around me." Scariest thing in his life. He could have easily gotten killed.

I: On the pre-interview form, there's a question about, "Did you see any of our commanders in the field?" and you answered, "After the war you flew [unclear] Africa for General Patton." Could you talk a little bit about that? Explain.

JF: Not much to tell.

I: [Unclear.] Was it a mission?

JF: That was when we were picking up refugees, actually, in that period. As I mentioned before, we met these people that were onboard the airplane and formed a lifelong friendship. That was...

I: [Unclear.] You didn't want to talk about [unclear].

JF: We knew what we had on board. That was it. We didn't distribute them or anything like that. We just unloaded the airplane, somebody came and unloaded the airplane for us, so that was a real [unclear].

BF: You know what came out of WWII?

I: What?

BF: Nylon stockings. We didn't have nylon stockings before the war. I think [unclear], I'm not sure about this, but they probably came out of making the parachutes. They might have been the nylon from the parachutes. We just had silk stockings. And sometimes we didn't even have any stockings, so we used to rub stuff on our legs to make them brown and then draw, you know, our stockings all had lines down the back. We had pencil lines down the back, that's how bad things were. [Laughs.]

JF: Different world.

BF: I remember when candy and old-fashioned sweets [unclear]. I quick ran down to the store and got them. I actually went on my bike. We had a sisterly bike, you know, we shared it and took the bike down to the store to get my sweets. I was so excited I left the bike there.

JF: Did you get it back?

BF: Oh yes. I went back to get it. I had to go back and get it.

I: English girls liked to get gum from American soldiers?

BF: Oh yes.

JF: Gum chum.

BF: Anything, we didn't have anything. We only had so much handy. Imagine now, just go down and buy a candy bar.

I: I'd die.

BF: You wouldn't. We survived.

I: We're learning about WWII in school. Every student does. Why do you think it's necessary for students our age to learn about war even though it happened so long ago? What do you think is the value of learning about it in school?

JF: Well it's all part of history and it changed lives.

BF: So, it shouldn't happen again. Things like the Holocaust. Should never happen again.

I: You still read books about it and watch movies?

BF: Oh, yes, definitely.

I: There were things that you didn't know?

BF: That's right.

I: Or that you weren't told?

BF: Or that we weren't told. We weren't told very much. I think it's probably the same in this country. I don't think we're told everything. They tell us what they want us to know and that's it.

I: When did you learn about the Holocaust?

BF: Truthfully, I don't remember.

JF: It wasn't really called that at the time.

BF: Right. It wasn't called anything. I don't remember.

JF: We didn't really know anything about it.

BF: I think we knew more about it when we came over here and I saw the movies on television.

JF: During wartime, people were doing things like their wartime duties.

I: A good movie, a serious movie about the war, is "War and Remembrance". Have you seen that?

I: Yes, we have seen some, there's a bunch of them.

BF: "War and Remembrance" and, I forget what the other ones were. "The Guns of War" and [unclear]. A good one to see about the people who lived in England was "Hope and Glory".

JF: I remember something. After the war, we were in groups...

I: Your bomber group?

JF: Yes, our bomber group. We ran out of things to do, picking up refugees and stuff like that. That lasted a while, then there wasn't anything. We went all over the place. And...

BF: You had a chance to go see the war camps.

JF: Yes, we had various things, you wouldn't call it entertainment, but we had the Army there, the Air Force especially had visits to places and one of the trips was about what they called the Holocaust - we didn't call it that at the time. I didn't go, I didn't really have any interest in seeing it. We knew about it, what the Germans did to the Jews.

I: When you were there?

JF: We knew it, we just heard about. This is after the war. We didn't know anything about it during the war.

BF: We knew nothing about it.

JF: I remember one of the trips we could go on was to Germany and visiting actual places where the Germans gassed all of the Jews. Some of the guys in our group went and saw it. Pretty horrifying stuff.

I: They came back and told stories?

JF: Yes. Most of it was pretty grim. I didn't have any desire to see that. I took other trips, but I didn't... After a while, we were sort of let loose. The military arranged these little trips for us, you know.

I: What little trips did you take?

JF: Oh, I went to a beautiful place called Davos in Switzerland, [Spells] D-A-V-O-S, they call it Davos. A wonderful place. Switzerland was, you know, they weren't affected by the war, really, and it was beautiful. The towns were beautiful, wonderful little towns.

BF: We went there.

JF: We went there afterwards. That was a good experience.

I: Any other trips?

BF: Went to England.

JF: We went to England of course.

BF: We went to [unclear] Paris [unclear] to see our friends.

JF: To see our friends that we picked up in the airport. That's how we formed a longtime friendship and we still hear from them; their daughter who became quite well known.

I: What's her name again?

JF: Jacqueline, Jackie, we call her Jackie, Jacqueline Pierre-Fumey. Pierre was a maiden name the way they do, they say Pierre-Fumey; married name.

I: Do you remember Christmas overseas, getting Christmas cards?

BF: I do. I remember we woke up in the morning and stretched out on the bed and our toys would all be in a pillow slip at the bottom of our bed. Mostly it was coloring books and crayons and paint and books, a few little toys, not much, an orange, some nuts, a bit of candy. It wasn't as big as it is here. We didn't have a real big dinner or anything. We didn't have any other close family.

I: Do you remember Christmas during the war?

JF: No, not really.

BF: You went away for Christmas?

JF: Christmas at home was Christmas.

BF: Did you have Christmas in [unclear] or anyplace?

JF: No. we didn't celebrate it. [Unclear] spent, nothing special. Oh, they made a special dinner at the mess hall, provided a special dinner for Christmas.

BF: We didn't have any churches [unclear]. It was hard to get together with people because we didn't have a telephone. People didn't communicate back and forth. Like every Sunday morning I'd go see my, I'd walk to see my grandmother and grandfather. Nobody came to visit us.

I: The Camp – Grafton Underwood – that you were at, what was that like? Is it still existing today?

JF: It was the oldest air base that the U.S. had – Grafton Underwood – and the 384th, our bomb group, was the oldest, the first bomb group in England, not when I was there, way before my time, it was the oldest group. I found this stuff out later. I didn't realize it at the time. It was a historic wartime thing, it was the first, our bomb group was the oldest bomb group, the first bomb group [unclear]. I didn't know that either until later.

I: Did you have any [unclear] traditions in growing up in England?

BF: Just the usual Christmas stuff. Not too much.

I: Anything that you remember [unclear]?

BF: Can't remember too much.

JF: One of the trips, trip to England, we visited the oldest pub.

I: [Unclear.] Talking about this oldest...

BF: I just remember being happy being with my family. My Dad used to take his walks every Sunday afternoon, take these long walks when we were little, and we only had little legs, and on the way back, he'd say, "Well, we'll catch a bus." We'd say, "Dad, we're tired," and he'd say, "The next bus stop. If there's a bus coming." And we never did catch a bus. He must have walked about six or seven miles every Sunday afternoon. Hey, kept us busy, nothing else to do. It was one of the highlights of my week.

JF: Lot different than what we were doing in America.

BF: Yes, then of course when I was older then I [unclear]. Oh, we had special place to meet with my friends, it's called Lion's Coffee House. It was in town; we'd all meet there and have coffee. And I liked the movies. I loved the American movies, they were wonderful.

I: [Unclear.]

BF: I don't know how any family can afford to go to the movies anymore. It's much cheaper to get video.

I: Mr. Francett, did you have any brothers and sisters?

JF: Yes. Two brothers. One was quite young. Younger than me and the next one, the second son... I was the oldest and the one after me was just young enough to get in the Navy; he was in the Navy at the end of the war. Yes, it was still wartime, but he was in the Pacific. And his naval group was one of the first to land in Japan after the war.

I: You have lots of history.

JF: Yes. He was about twenty-two months younger than me. And he went in after I did.

BF: When you were little like I was, you hated the Germans, you know. [Unclear.] I don't know why they never invaded and took over [unclear]. Except for the Americans, if the Americans hadn't come over, I think we would have lost the war.

I: Did anything of yours personally get ruined from the bombing, like buildings that you were associated with?

BF: My school, my church. My Dad worked at this place; it was a big bakery. He didn't work in a factory; he was out on the road. They gave him a car and if people called to complain about the bread or anything, he would go out and listen to their complaints. The bakers were baking that night when it was bombed. They just baked every night. They were caught, they were trapped and they lost a lot of lives.

I: A lot of lives were lost and more in total.

JF: Germany. Pretty horrible.

I: You saw the rubble.

BF: I couldn't believe one time what he saw in Dresden, just a pile of rocks.

I: Yes, we just read about that.

JF: Just rubble.

I: Nothing left.

JF: Like I say, we flew over the cities.

I: How low were you flying?

JF: Very low.

I: Taking pictures?

JF: No, we didn't have any cameras. We called them trolley missions. I don't know exactly why. It was something. I'm glad we were one of the groups that stayed over. [Unclear.] We were the oldest group. Of course, I wasn't...

BF: I had a funny experience in Finland. I went to visit my son-in-law and I met a couple of friends of theirs; I think he was a Finn and she was a German. And she was talking about her experiences, the young lady, in Germany. [Unclear.] It was so strange. [Unclear.]

JF: According to the German people [unclear].

BF: You can't carry on the war.

I: Forgive and forget. You'll never forget, though.

JF: One of the deals that they had for us after the war was visiting – I remember a couple of guys went to visit the places where they rounded up the Jews and gassed them. I can't remember...

BF: Auschwitz, Krakow.

JF: We had a couple of trips there. I didn't have any feeling about going there. I didn't want to see that stuff. I knew... There was enough to know what's going on. A couple of guys from our group did go and they were pretty depressed.

BF: One time we went to Florida to visit my husband's brother. And he had a new wife, she was from Oklahoma. And she said she was taught in school that none of that was true. She had a teacher...

JF: The Jews, the Holocaust was fake.

BF: Was fake.

JF: It wasn't.

I: There's lots of evidence that...

BF: Oh yes.

JF: Our guys went and saw where they were gassed.

BF: There are survivors over here. They're getting pretty old, too and they tell their story.

They still have their numbers on their arms.

I: We just watched a documentary called "Berga: Soldiers of Another War" about the war and it was a camp that nobody really knows about and it just came out recently

because there were so few casualties. So few people were taken to this camp to work, but the things they did to them were horrible. Have you ever heard of that – "Berga"?

BF: No, I never heard of that one, no.

I: Our class took part in making that known to teachers at the school.

BF: That's a good thing. [Unclear.]

I: Oh, definitely. Do you have any grandsons or nephews or anything in the armed forces?

BF: No. Course the grandsons in Finland all had to do a year's service. They had to do that there.

I: Oh, they do, everybody?

BF: Everybody. They both did a year.

I: Is there anything else that you remember, any questions for us? Now I have to write a long paper. A long one.

BF: Do your best to make sure there are no more wars. Do you have any relatives over in Iraq?

I: No, but one of my best friend's older brother was over there and he saw a lot of combat, a lot. And he just got home in August and he has lots of stories to tell. He went in Saddam's palace and everything. He saw a lot of stuff. A young boy, 22. So he saw a lot of stuff.

BF: You never forget that either. It's good that you're writing this down. [Unclear.]

I: We have a class of about 25 kids and everyone is doing this. We can send you a copy. We can make a copy of the tape for you. We have a school website, WWII Living History Project and it's with the NYS Oral Veteran's History Association. People will read it. It's basically like sharing your stories with other students. What we type out we will put it right on the website with other people.

BF: It's used for education.

I: And our teachers really [unclear] He's interviewed...

BF: Is he the one that started this?

I: Yes.

BF: That's wonderful.

I: Thank you very much for your time.

BF: Thank you for taking the time.

