

**Sam Kamerman
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke and Mike Russert
New York State Military Museum
Interviewers**

**Four Points Sheraton Hotel
Manhattan, NYC, New York
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Q: This is an interview at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel, Manhattan. It is the 11th of January, 2005 approximately 4:00PM. The interviewers are Wayne Clarke and Mike Russert. Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth please?

SK: My full name is Sam Kamerman full name. What's the next question?

Q: Date of birth and place of birth.

SK: March 16th. I was born in 1923, Lower East Side, New York City.

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

SK: I was two years of high school. That was it.

Q: Do you remember where you were and what you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

SK: Oh yes. I remember that. Quite amusing also. You want me to....

Q: Tell us.

SK: I was in the park playing basketball. I was eighteen years old, I guess, with a bunch of fellas. This is a Sunday around one o'clock or so. In comes Harry into the park. All of these young kids are playing basketball. He hollers, "The Japanese just bombed Pearl Harbor". You know what all of us did? We all asked each other where is Pearl Harbor? You asked me do you remember. Do I remember? Where is Pearl Harbor? OK.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

SK: I enlisted because all the fellas around me, my age, were being drafted. I didn't want to go into the Army or be in the dirt kind of thing, so I enlisted into the Army Air Corps.

Q: Did you ever fly before?

SK: No. Never. I was looking to stay away from the dirt. (unclear) flying. I'm a peace-loving guy.

Q: When did you enlist and where did you go for your basic training?

SK: I enlisted in New York City. I guess it was Washington Street. I forget the name of it, but I went to Fort Dix for indoctrination. From there I went to basic training. Do you want me to continue?

Q: Yes sir.

SK: I went to Miami Beach for basic training. Great huh? Two things I remember – I got KP twice down there and I did pots and pans. These pots were like three feet high. For seventeen hours I'm digging into the pots and pans, into the pots basically. I caught this twice. Somebody didn't like me. I caught this twice in the month's time that I was there. I said if I ever get a chance to get away from KP that's what I'm going to do. In the following story you'll find out where it came up. So, that's my basic training. Do you want to know about the schooling I went to?

Q: Yes. How long did you stay in Florida?

SK: I was there a month. From there, I went to Madison, Wisconsin. Truax Field, radio school for a couple of months. From there I went to, I didn't graduate. From there I went to Sioux Falls, South Dakota radio school for about five months. Upon graduation, an officer came into the classes and said we need flying operators. I was not interested. He said you get an extra stripe. I still was not interested. He said well you get fifty per cent flying pay. I still wasn't interested. He said well there's no KP and that (raises his hand). Don't laugh. This is the truth. You're laughing. KP – I got out of it. That was it.

The rest of the story goes I went down to Philadelphia, a special school, radio school. I went down there, came back to Madison, Wisconsin.

Q: With radio school, were you learning Morse Code?

SK: Radio school. Alright. You learn a little of EIR, voltage and capacitance, resistance, that kind of stuff. We also learned Morse Code. Flying radio operator, you had to know your Morse Code. From there I went back to Madison, Wisconsin. From there, I was sent, this is the beginning of the meat of the whole story, I was sent to Salina, Kansas. This was the 20th Air Force, the 58th Bomb Wing.

When I got there, I went on one or two practice flights in a B17. The first time I was uncomfortable because I was looking out the window all the time and just enjoying the sites. The second time I was busy somewhat. I was better. In Salina, Kansas I got my flight gear. The flight gear was very, very impressive stuff. You get a summer flying suit. You get a winter flying suit. You get a 45-caliber gun. You get a watch. You get goggles. You get...it just keeps coming and coming. A parachute.

So, now I'm part of the 58th Bomb Wing. I'm attached to them. They send me down to Great Bend, Kansas. I'm there for about two months. From there, they send me to a place called Marietta, Georgia. I'm there for like another couple of months. This is all part of the 58th Bomb Wing. From there, I went to Walker, Kansas. Walker Army Air Force Base in Kansas. There I was sent into an office there after I was there about six,

eight weeks. This officer says to me you don't have to volunteer but we need flying radio operators to go overseas. At this point, I've been in the service like seventeen months or so, a year and a half. I said to the officers, let me go home and get a furlough. I'll come back. He said we can't do that. One of the best moves I ever made, I said no. I don't want to go. A couple of weeks later, this 58th Bomb Wing – which was the first B29 outfit by the way, the very first combat outfit, they went to the China-Burma-India area. They flew out without me.

Two weeks later after they leave, approximately, I'm sent to Pratt, Kansas. This is a new bomb wing. This is the 73rd Bomb Wing and I am now part of a combat crew in Pratt, Kansas. Well, the B29's at this point for testing for flying were very unreliable. Most of our B17 combat training had to do with B17's. This is from about April to around August. This is about a five-month thing. I was in with a very nice crew. By the way, in this crew which is eleven crewmen. We had four New Yorkers in my particular crew which is this particular case. We flew in all kinds of weather. I can tell you what is it, lightning and thunder? I'm looking out this thing and I'm looking at the ground. One of the few times I said I wish I was on the ground now. It was lightning. It was thunder. What are you doing out in this weather?

Now some of the things that took place and this in only combat training. This has nothing to do with the war. We flew one mission, one training mission. It was approximately seventeen hours in the air. We left Kansas. We flew into the Caribbean. We flew what is that. I guess that's south. Yes, south, then flew east to Cuba, over Cuba. These are approximately. From there, we flew north over the Atlantic to Massachusetts then we flew approximately to Michigan and then flew back to our base. This was like a good sixteen, seventeen hours but it was a long, long time.

This was one of the few times I flew with an oxygen mask because the B29 was the first bomber in World War II that had a pressurized cabin. This was the first one. It was quite an experience being up at 25,000 feet with the oxygen mask and tapping away at a speed of like five, six words per minute. You can't go fast in an airplane. Not that I was any good or special at it. That shaking. You don't recognize it but when you want to do something, it lets you know its shaking. I was commended on this particular flight for being in touch with the Army Airways Communication System.

Now another thing happened. Also, our commanding general, by the way, was a New Yorker. Rosie O'Donnell, you every hear of him. He ended up a real big deal. Now, we finish our training and we're all going home on furloughs from Kansas to New York for me. What happened is there is a training mission. Somebody on a B17 on a training mission, they're going from Pratt Kansas to Mitchell Field, New York City. There's about, oh I don't know, approximately fifteen of us from the metropolitan area. We all get in the plane We're all on furlough at the same time.

I told you the general, our general, was from New York. So, he did, my feelings are, he set this thing up and there we are. We flew into Mitchell Field. It took us about five hours or whatever instead of the forty-eight hours. Coming back, me being a kid, and knowing I am going overseas, I wanted to stay home a little longer. What I did, and this is what my radar man told the story eight years later, ten years later, what I did was I took extra time. Not to be AWOL. On the last day I went back to Mitchell Field hoping to catch some kind of a ride.

Sure enough, I got lucky. There was a B17 and I don't remember where exactly where it went, going to Kansas. This plane is dropping me off in Kansas but not my case. I got off in Kansas and I'm always carrying a parachute. Very impressive. I got off in Kansas. I got up on a highway and thank the lord the people there were wonderful. You get out there and they'd pick you right up. Where you going soldier? I got back to my base about 11:00 o'clock at night an hour before I'm AWOL. This to me, I'm glad to tell it on film. Now, we finish. What happens now. Oh yes. Can you cut it down, I want a little water or something?

Q: OK

SK: Now we're getting ready. We finish our combat training. There's the 497th Bomb Group. In the 73rd Bomb Wing, there's the 497th, the 498th, the 499th and the 500th Bomb Group. There are ten crews in each group. No, ten crews in each squadron. Three squadrons to a group. We've got one hundred twenty combat crewmen crews in a big hanger place in Harrington, Kansas. All these crews are going there to pick up a new B29 Superfortress.

I consider myself for the Pacific a pioneer crew. I consider. It's a word I made up. We were the first ones. Each crew will eventually get a new B29 Superfortress. We get ours. We get in. We take off. In about an hour and a half, we blow an engine. I get in contact with the base, home base. I let them know we are making an emergency landing in a place called Kingman, Arizona. The funny part about this is that, at this time, this plane is top secret. When I went home, I never mentioned, as a kid, I never mentioned that I was flying in a B29. They didn't know about a B29 anyway. I never mentioned that I'm involved with that.

We make an emergency landing in Kingman, Arizona. When we get to the stand or wherever the plane ends up, we have about thirty, forty MPs around the plane. Nobody's allowed to get near the plane because it's top secret. The term I used when I walked down, I felt like – today - I felt like I was somebody who came in from outer space. This is the feeling. Of course, they're all looking. We had different types of jackets at the time. They made us look pretty exclusive. They made you get the feeling.

So now two days later we have a new engine. We go to California. From California, we go to Hawaii. In Hawaii, I did something that my whole crew looked at me like I was crazy. I forget I'd be there like six months, a year. I had my whole head cut. I was bald. When I

went into a briefing and I the hat off, they all looked at me because no hair you know. So, this is somewhat different.

From Hawaii we went to a place called Kwajalein which is a little atoll. All they got is an air field. Anything else you can forget about. From there we went to Saipan. This is the beginning of where we are going to be involved.

Q: When did you arrive on Saipan?

SK: On Saipan, I would say, I've got it in the book somewhere, late October 1944. We started out early October. It took us about fifteen days or so. I can give you...

Q: No. I just meant about the time.

SK: Late October 1944. When we got there, we had a number of training missions.

Q: Up until this point, most of your training had been on the B17s. Correct?

SK: That's correct.

Q: Can you compare the B17 to the 29?

SK: Yes. It was night and day.

Q: In what ways?

SK: The B29 was much larger. It went further. In reference to bombs, we had two bomb bays that were tremendous. The B17 had a small, little bomb bay. It was a tremendous difference. It flew higher. It flew faster. It did everything more so. I was the radio operator. I had to read up on a lot of this stuff, but I didn't know too much about what was happening. I had to read up to find out. They didn't give me enough medals. With all I went through and this is all they gave me (laughs), I said alright that's their game.

Let me see, where was I. We got some training missions. We bombed Truk Island. It was Japanese held at the time. Now November comes approximately November 23rd, 24th, 1944 we go on the first ground-based bombing mission of Tokyo. Two and a half years before Doolittle bombed Japan. Two and a half years before. Now we are going on the first one. We didn't do, as they tell you, we didn't do a good job at the beginning. We let them know they were in a war. We went over. There was flak. There's always flak. As a rule, there's always fighters. We were the first ones. Not only were we the first ones, our particular group was "A" group. We were like the first ones to go over targets. They went over in different groups. We got clobbered.

After I say, the first ones, the next day, the day after in this country it was plastered all over the papers. I have it here. B29 Superfortress bombs Tokyo. This was great for the public you know. You read this, and you say hey we're going after them, that kind of stuff.

Q: Did you always fly in the same plane?

SK: Yes.

Q: Did you get to name your plane?

SK: Our plane never got a noted plane. We had eleven in our crew and we did a democratic thing. We took a vote. All of us were from all up north. My pilot was from North Carolina. He named it the (possibly the name was Dixie Darlin') kind of thing. I can't think of the name off hand. It never got a splash like you'd see these books and they have beautiful paintings and all and loads of different good names.

OK. Where am I now. The first mission. I am going to give you what I consider outstanding. I'll jump ahead. Remind me to come back to January 27th. I'm going to jump to March. March, the middle of March, was what they call in that area, the incendiary blitz. March 9th, 11th, 13th, 16th, 19th. We hit Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Kobe and back to Nagoya. This first one over Tokyo, March 9th, is considered one of the worst horrific bombing missions of any war. We burnt out like sixteen square miles. It was sixteen square miles on that one. This is all in the book. Fifteen point eight, sixteen square miles what's the difference, two tenths of a square mile. Eighty thousand plus dies. A hundred thousand injured. A million homeless. Ridiculous kind of numbers but this is what actually took place.

As I said, we were an "A". Many times, we were the first or the early ones to go over. When you go over Tokyo early, you drop your bombs, your incendiary and you leave. You may not even see anything burning because you're the early one. We did this with Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka. Going to Kobe we were one of the latter planes. One of the later planes. About a hundred and fifty miles from Kobe – approximately a hundred – anywhere between a hundred and fifty, two hundred miles – one of the crewmen in the nose over the intercom says, "What's that spot out there?"

I have to manipulate to get up front, but I got up front and there is at approximately twelve thirty, one o'clock there is this little orange dot. You can't tell distance at night. There's this little orange dot. Nobody knew. I go what the heck is that. Its all black then there's this little orange dot. It could be a plane. It could be a light. It could be anything. As we keep going to the target, this little orange dot starts getting larger. I'm back in my seat and somebody hollers out, "Kobe is burning!" This is a hundred and fifty miles out. You can't believe it. Approximately a hundred and fifty miles away you can see a fire. You can't believe it.

Now we are in the latter part. There's been, I don't know, three hundred planes that dropped their fire bombs on this area. Everything's burning. When we get to the target, I'm not specific. The bomb bay doors open. We're over the target. At this point, there comes up a smell that was awful. It was debris and also bodies. It comes up. We're at six thousand feet approximately. We're very low. Now at just about – and this is all in books – I'm not quoting books. This is what happened to me. They wrote something similar and now, just about the same time we get the turbulence from this big fire. It comes up

into the plane and this plane gets shook up. This is a big plan and its, my top gunner he hurt his head because it shook where he was sitting. It shook so much. My question is, when it shook so much, where did we get hit? We're supposed to get hit because of this kind of shakeup but we didn't get hit.

Turbulence coming up. You've flown. You've heard about turbulence. You don't know what turbulence is. This thing is out of.... they give cockamamie stories about one of the planes was turned over. I don't believe that. One of the things in reference to telling the stories is there is a tendency to fabricate. I don't fabricate. I know what I've been through, what I saw I should say.

This is one of the stories. We were one of...and these missions one after another. You're not sleeping. They give you a number that you take before you get to the target. I remember one time my eyes (Benadrex) I think it was. My eyes were like this! Everything looked so beautiful. We're right near the target. And when you come back they're giving you a shot of whiskey so you can relax. So, for five missions, my tail gunner was a drinker, so he drank most of that. You've got coming up. You're got coming down. You're not getting the proper sleep whatever it took. Curtis E. LeMay, who was our boss then, he said at the end of the five missions, he said my boys were a little tired. What an understatement. For a young guy I said why am I feeling like this? Why am I so lousy? This is the...who knows that this kind of thing can take its toll.

Q: How many hours were you in the air from Saipan to the target and back?

SK: With our crew I'm going to say it was an average of thirteen hours.

Q: So, a round trip was...?

SK: A round trip was thirteen hours.

Q: From Saipan to Japan and back.

SK: Yes.

BREAK

Q: I was just asking about how long it would take on a round trip. You told me.

SK: About thirteen hours.

Q: I don't know if you're finished with that, but you wanted me to remind you about January 27th

SK: Oh yes. January 27th, we had a mission. Each group, we were the first group, the 497th, to go over. In this mission we had seventeen planes and most of our missions at the beginning were to try to knock out the airplane plant in Tokyo. Most of them. On this particular mission, January 27th, and this is the week after Curtis E. LeMay took over our outfit. You've heard of him Curtis LeMay?

Q: Yes.

SK: I'm dropping names. I can drop names. We're the first ones to go over. In our group there are seventeen planes in our group to go over the target. I'm not going to get too involved. Over the target, the Japanese fighters shot down two planes. That's an average of eleven men per plane. A third one sort of lingered on a side somewhere. They never saw this one again. That was the third plane. The fourth plane ditched a couple hundred miles off Japan. They never saw them again. That was four planes. The fifth plane made an emergency landing on Saipan. The crew was all shot up. So, out of seventeen planes, this is mission that my crew was on, we lost like thirty per cent. I figured it out two more missions like that and we're not around. That's all it took.

That was the fear. Fierce was the fighter opposition. We have it in a book. Five hundred and fifty fighter attacks just on our seventeen planes. I got away with that. I didn't know it at the time we got away with that. Where am I now.

Q: You finished with all of your mission against Japan, against Tokyo in March.

SK: We didn't finish.

Q: You talked about March being the one...

SK: These are the big ones. The first one made headlines. The March 9th you can get, in my opinion, there's over a thousand books that have written one thing or another on March 9th, 1945, the incendiary over Tokyo. We were the early ones. My crew did the, was involved, in what's the word, history. It did a lot of that, enough of that stuff.

Q: Did your airplane suffer and damage?

SK: Always!

Q: A lot of flak damage?

SK: We got flak, we got fighters, it was there. I can tell you one time we're over the target and I hear a "ping" and my navigator is right pretty close and I look at him and say, "What happened?". You can't talk. The noise is tremendous. You can't communicate. I said, "What happened?" He said, "I don't know." When we got back to the base I immediately jumped out there was right by the bomb bay very close to us a nice big hole there. The holes were there in many planes.

The flak was up there. Like they say in the movie, you look out the window and you can walk on the stuff. As long as you can see it, you're all right. Once you see that, what's the stuff that leaves the...once it leaves its all over. Once you see it. It's when you don't see it, it come up, bam, where it could hit you. It could hurt you. The flak wasn't so good. It wasn't like it was in Germany. In Germany, the 8th Air Force, I'm glad I was never involved with that. They got...

Q: Did you wear a flak vest?

SK: At the beginning yes but its so cumbersome. Alright, if they are going to kill me, let them kill me. You throw it right down there where you're at and leave it there. The first time or the second time you wear it.

Another thing is we got bombed on Saipan at the beginning. We're getting bombed. Where they were coming from they were hard to figure it out. Iwo Jima. Iwo Jima was closing up. I don't know how a fighter or plane could go from Iwo Jima to Saipan and then get back. That I didn't know. It seemed like it was too much distance.

We flew for five months without fighter protection because the fighters couldn't go from Saipan to Japan and back. We had to wait until they captured Iwo Jima. Once they captured Iwo Jima there were many B29s that made emergency landings. These people who were the Marines and the Army who sacrificed their lives on Iwo Jima, it was for a good B29 cause. The B29 people, it saved a lot.

I was on a crew that very little happened. I didn't even catch a cold. I was sitting at a desk. I could have sat a desk with the whole war with all that going on and not looking out. There wouldn't have been anything. I remember looking out. Somebody said there's a plane way out there at two o'clock. I got up into a plexiglass thing where the navigator shoots his stars. I looked at about two o'clock and there's this plane just staying ahead of us.

I heard somebody holler "He's turning." That's when I took a look and there's this plane, we're going and there's this plane coming right at us. I'm watching and, again, you don't hear anything. I see in the wings there's this orange stuff coming out. It's a matter of split seconds. Its all over. I realized this orange stuff he was shooting at us. I didn't realize at that particular moment we're at war. This is one of those little things.

There was another incident that's very hard for somebody to believe. I had to read about the same incident to know that's the reason, whatever it is. It's a nighttime mission and we're over Japan and we're heading towards a target and five, six thousand feet. I'm up in this plexiglass thing and I'm looking around. Its all dark out there.

Now I notice at about ten-thirty a plane – and this is dark – so it had to be fairly close to us and going in the same direction. The first thing you say to yourself, B29. But I took a better look. This was a two-engine plane. I said, well we don't have any. What is this all about. This plane was staying ahead of us for about five minutes that I observed. Then I went back to my desk. Then I read about what that was all about. I didn't know at the time. This plane was sending back to the base on Japan our altitude, our speed, all the information but I had to read about it. I didn't understand this particular thing. I could say oh we had a plane there. Somebody would say come on its your imagination. I know I saw this thing for about five minutes. When I read up there were planes that just gave the information. This plane looked like it could have done this (motions with hands). His job was not to do that.

We dealt, since I was with this kind of thing (motions with hands), we dealt with “kamikaze’s” as they say. The Japanese had a squadron of what they called “rammers” who were not kamikaze people. They came in and hit the tail or tried to hit the tail a certain way to hurt the plane. They, in turn, parachute out. I read a book on that. This is what they did. They rammed the plane whereas the “kamikaze” went in just to blow up.

Now another thing. When was it? In April. April '45, the kamikazes were clobbering the Navy in the area there. They only flew, they were in the southern tip island, the southernmost island of Kyushu. The flew out, the kamikaze flew out from Kyushu and they hit the Navy. They hurt the Navy a lot at this time. We went in. We bombed their air bases in Kyushu. Three days later they'd fill up the holes. You couldn't do too much about it but one of the funny stories I tell is that my crew bombed USA. Somebody would say to me USA what are you talking about? One of our missions over Kyushu, one of the air bases, the name of the air base was “USA” – U-S-A. We bombed the USA. I consider it amusing. Some people so what...ok, that's one of the stories. You want to turn that off please.

(reads and refers to notes)

Q: What were your feelings about LeMay as a general?

SK: Wonderful. Am I still on? I'm sorry. When LeMay came into our outfit he made changes. All of us cursed this guy all to hell. We cursed him all to hell. We were bombing at 25,000, I remember approximately. He brought us down to 16,000. These are daylight raids. Then, he brought us down in night raids to approximately 6,000 feet. Everybody was cursing this guy. The cursed him. I even said what's this guy up to? PS: This the best thing that ever happened to us.

He had the answers for us. He came up with the incendiary thing. This was a big thing. We were one of the small per cent. My crew was one of the small per cent, approximately ten per cent, of the crews that flew these five missions because they were tough missions on the plane. The plane it was tough for them to handle. The engines. The engine changes. Whatever it entailed. Just ten per cent of us.

I was on a crew. Our, the number for our outfit, to go home was thirty-five missions. We were one of the small, small per cent that flew only thirty missions. When they told me this is your last mission, I knew I hadn't flown thirty-five and, as a kid, I'm not opening my mouth. If they're telling me I'm going home, I'm going. I'm not going to question them. These are the funny things about that kind of thing. We flew thirty missions. There was about five per cent of the crews, the original crews that flew thirty missions and were sent back. After looking at it, we were involved with rough stuff.

I can tell you I met my radar man about ten, fifteen years later. He was at some army air base. I was talking to him. I sit here. He's sits there, and we were talking about the good

old days. After we finished, I left him, and I said to myself was he in the same war I was in? He had a different story all together. This is what you have to deal with. Maybe you were right. Maybe he was right.

Q: Everybody saw things differently too.

SK: That's right. You know where I learned that? I learned that from somebody who said to me the dog can only see from this angle (points low) and we see from this angle (points high). This is how it all works from where your perspective is. This is what happened.

One time, this is what I'll call, this is like January 3rd, 1945. My pilot's friend, he ditched between Iwo Jima and Saipan. He went on a mission, came back, couldn't make it and into the drink he went. They had an idea, the radio man or whatever, the position. The next morning, my pilot comes in and he says Sam get your chute. The chute means you are going on a flight. He says to me get the chute and get in the plane. This is a plane that two new engines have just put in. He's going to check out the engines. That's his job with this particular plane to check out the engines.

There's about six or seven of us in the plane. He needed a plane to try to find his friend, but he did something if the people upstairs knew about it, they'd hang him for it. These things aren't "Dumbo" kind of things. We got in the plane. I'm always in the front. This particular time...we have a tunnel in a B29 Superfortress. It's a crawl through tunnel. When you crawl through its just about like this (motions with hands). You can't see anything on your right. You can't go back. If you have a case of claustrophobia, it'll kill you. I'm half way through. I'm moving. I'm moving. Very funny. I went through this thing twice. I went to the side gunners spot. There was another side gunner there and all the officers were up front.

What was my pilot doing? He was up hundreds of square miles and he's just circling and circling, smaller circle for an hour, hour and a half. I'm in there. I'm looking. I can only tell you don't be in a life raft in the middle of the ocean. Its worse that a needle in a haystack and with an airplane, you're moving quick, two hundred miles and hour. Below, you just don't see. Very luckily, somebody said down below. Where I was, I looked down and in a split second I saw a life raft. I thought there were four or five people in it, crewmen. That was it. He circled around. I never saw them again. He called a destroyer or sub in the area. Because of my pilot, the saved about six or seven crewmen. There's more of a story to it but they were saved. I was very proud of my pilot. This is terrific.

OK. I'm trying to come up with something else for you people. One mission we went out very close to Japan. We flew about nine hours approximately and we aborted a mission which means that we flew, flew and when we got close to the island we had a malfunction of the engine. If you're having trouble with an engine you don't want to go over the target in a bombing formation because when you fall back, they're going at you.

You can forget about it. They just look for somebody to have a little problem then they leave everything else and they go for this one. So, we aborted. We dropped the bombs, the only one mission we dropped our bombs in the ocean and we came back. That was an aborted mission.

There was another one. My bombardier got...big thing...I'm glad I got notes on this. One mission we're coming back from a target. Now we have some bombs hung up. The bombardier couldn't release them. These are big bomb bays. Its twelve feet, I don't know, from here to the end of the...twelve, fifteen feet from the front of the bomb bay to the rear of the bomb bay. These bombs happened to be stuck way in the rear in an awkward spot. My bombardier, he comes and opens the bomb bay door. It also a crawl through kind of thing. It's tough to picture. This is the bomb bay door (gestures with hands) is open. We're flying over the ocean. All you've got down there is water, water and more water.

He's climbing out and if he slips he's gone. Any kind of fall, that's the end of him. He's going along the side of the fuselage. He's squirming. He knew something I didn't know. He's walking on thin air you might say. There's a little ledge of about nine inches and he's moving along this little edge. I get to the side of the fuselage and now he has to go back to the back of the bomb bay. All the time he's slowly but sure moving along. He's only standing on a small little ledge. He's moving toward the back of the bomb bay to get to the bombs. Its hard to believe.

At this point, my stomach couldn't take it. I had to stop looking at this kind of thing. He released the bomb, came back. I guess he got a DFC for this. This is something. I can't believe my stomach said you can't take it. I couldn't watch this thing So, he released the bombs because if you're going to land with these things subject to going off. There still armed and they have to be released. I don't know too much about armament. He did a great thing there.

Q: We're going to stop and go to another.... We're rolling again.

SK: Where am I now? Anything special?

Q: Why don't you were mentioning Robert Morgan from the Memphis Belle.

SK: I don't want to...this is me. He's had enough publicity.

Q: Were you aware of the Enola Gay and the atomic bomb?

SK: No. Nobody was. I was back in the states by that time. I finished the end of May. My last mission. Nobody knew about it. They did a good job of keeping in top secret.

Q: Did you know any of those guys who were the crew members?

SK: Of the Enola Gay?

Q: Or the other one Bock's Car?

SK: No. They were on Tinian. We were on Saipan. My crew, my outfit, made it easy for these guys. We took all of the clobbering. I'm not putting them down, but we took all of the clobbering and they came along. By the time they got there whose attacking them. They're not being attacked. Enola Gay and the Bock's Car, they were from Tinian. We were from Saipan. Two different places and you may not know but how far is Tinian from Saipan. There's a little inlet. It's about three to five miles. I saw Tinian when I went down to the beach to soak on the beach. I was able to see Tinian. But that's the Enola Gay. I'm talking about the 73rd Bomb Wing. This is the baby. This is the pioneer crews I should say. The sacrificial lambs. We lost...percentage wise we didn't lose a lot.

I've got a note. We didn't live in barracks, we lived in Quonset huts on Saipan. In my Quonset hut we lost, non-commissioned people, we lost one crew that went on a mission and never came back. Then we lost a second crew in my Quonset hut. We lost two crews from my Quonset huts. They come, and they go.

OK. I've got another one. I'm the radio man on my ship. We're getting close about a hundred and fifty miles from Tokyo. At this time, I'm not doing my job properly. I'm listening to music. Wah-wah-wah you know that music. I'm listening to music and I'm the only one listening because I'm the radio man on the radio frequency. I'm listening to it and all of the sudden it cuts out. I look at my equipment. I try to figure out what happened. There's nothing wrong with my equipment. I figured it out. I got on the intercom and said, "Radio to crew. Tokyo Radio just went off the air." They knew we were coming. We were a plane by itself at this time. They knew it. I think we were going to take photos of it. They just finished a mission there. They left. We're coming over to take photos. That was one of the missions, a photo mission. They just went off the air. That's all. There's a procedure. A plan comes close, the go off the air.

Alright. We flew a weather mission where you end up in practically the Japan Sea which is the other side of Japan. The weatherman and the plane is giving me the information and I'm decoding it – am I encoding it? I am encoding it, I guess No, I'm decoding it and sending it back to the base and they're encoding the information of the weather that this weatherman is giving me.

I was on a beach. Where I was is a little beach. There's Tinian. I'm sitting there just enjoying the area. I look at Tinian and I see a plane taking off. I'm watching. This is like three miles away. I see another plane taking off and I say oh they're going on a mission. Another plane and I'm watching for a while. This one plane takes off and instead of going up it goes down, down, down. There's a big splash. I don't hear it. I'm too far away. That's all there is to it. That was all there is to it. I don't know what happened. Some of them when the engines don't give you enough power. You're not going up so you're going to go down. This is one of the things that happened.

OK. There's another one. I love when I've got good listeners. We're coming back from a mission and we're losing altitude. Our pilot says ok, over the intercom, there's too much

weight in the plane. Throw out anything that isn't tied down, parachutes, flak suits. I'm right near the bomb bay and my navigator is close to me. They're handing him all kinds of stuff to the navigator. He's giving it to me and I'm just throwing it into the ocean out the bomb bay. The flak, the helmets, anything that isn't tied down. After about ten or fifteen minutes the pilot says ok we've leveled off. We're ok now. The thing is if the engine is (unclear) we would have ended up in the drink. We would have...I can remember. He's giving it to me and I'm throwing it out. I was having a ball I guess.

One time, people are surprised, fliers are surprised when I tell this story. We were heading towards Kobe, a daylight raid about 25,000 feet. There's this water we were flying over towards Kobe. This water we're flying over. We have to pass Nagoya which is the same area off this water thing. In the process of passing Nagoya which is a sea port. Nagoya's a sea port and Kobe. In the process of passing Nagoya, I look out and here is this flak. They're shooting up flak. Red. Green. Yellow. Blue. Flak of different colors. I had no idea what that was about. I found out later. What this was. It was a sea port. There were ships down below and they're shooting up their color flak. I tell this to airmen who are either years old and they never heard this kind of stuff. All they knew is black smoke flak.

Everything I'm throwing, my feelings are is first hand. It's not from somebody told the story to somebody else. This is something that I was at. Most of it to me wasn't much but I was a radio man. I don't know any better.

When we finished our combat missions from our Quonset hut we were put into – and I'm ready to go home – we were put into tents. They're keeping us away from the combat flyers. We finished our missions. Now at this point I'm figuring we go back in a couple of days. They kept us there for like a month. I myself said I don't understand why they kept us there. We're finished. Put us somewhere where we can start heading back. They didn't do anything about it.

Later on, I read a story of crew that finished just about the same time or maybe a little ahead of us. They got into a B29 and were flying back to the states. They flew from Saipan to Kwajalein. From Kwajalein they were supposed to go to Hawaii. This crew that just finished missions over Tokyo, over Japan, this crew crashed in the ocean. They lost, I don't know, they lost ninety percent of the people of maybe one hundred percent. From this I deduced that the wing doesn't want to lose any more men. So, this is one of the reasons I feel that they kept us there.

Now when they finally make a move and I don't know all of the other side stories going on, I'm the first one they pick in the crew and they put me in a B29 to go back to the states. The officers and all the enlisted men, they all stayed. I don't know how long they stayed. After reading this story I thought those no-good-nicks, I was a guinea pig. I was the only one. Till this day I said I don't know why I was the only one going back. That was a good enough reason.

I got back. I hit California the 5th of July, 1945. I got off this plane. Like they do in the movies, I kissed the ground. After that, I never flew in the service again. I guess that I covered an awful lot.

Q: When were you discharged?

SK: Immediately after that. September 13th, 1945 I would say. Yes. September 13th, 1945.

Q: After you left the service, did you ever use the GI Bill?

SK: No. I was one of those...I went into the telephone line at the time.

Q: Did you ever use the 52-20 club at all?

SK: Good question. Where did you get those questions from? I got out. I went on a 52-20. I was out so early. Nobody was out. I was so bored. I went to work in November of '45. I didn't use the GI Bill and let me say to all of you people, use the GI Bill. That's one of my negative moves.

Q: You didn't buy a house or anything?

SK: Nothing. My thing is I was a good athlete. The school work, I never was able to get to it. By the time I got to it, I was bored with it. Before I went into the service, I was a straight "65" student if I was lucky. It took me many years to understand why. Being with people, meeting people, I'm not a "65" student. I put all my time to sports.

When I got out of the service, I did a little night school work. I was getting 90's and I said oh my goodness gracious did I screw up there. Did I make a bad move? But that was it. I loved my sports. I was out there...sports...after the war, the big weekend coming up, I didn't look for socializing. I was out in the ball park playing football, basketball, softball. I loved it. This is one of the things where people expected more from me, they didn't get it. I didn't apply myself to the school work.

Q: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

SK: Not then. I never was a joiner in that case. When did I join the ones that are injured?

Q: The Disabled Veterans?

SK: The DAV because one of my friends belongs to that. By the way, I've got a couple of fellas who were so called heroes. Should I give them your number.

Q: We'll send you some forms.

SK: For them? For others? OK. Alright.

Q: Did you every stay in contact with anyone from the service?

SK: When I got out, no. When I got out, no. Somebody outside came into New York called me and I said I can't do anything for you. He came from some other part of the country. No, I would say the whole crew lost contact with each other until they started with the reunions. The first reunion was like ten years ago that I went to. My bombardier was there, one of the gunners, my radar man and myself. They were the only ones at that time. Ten years ago that was around that we knew about. Since then, my radar man passed away. My bombardier who became a Lieutenant Colonel eventually. When he goes out of the house, he gets in the car. He doesn't walk much. The other one seems to be in a senior type of home. Something like that. He says he's happy there. I spoke to them, both of them around the holiday time.

I'm the only one, as I say it's not easy, I move around but not easy. I'm hoping to go to, what is it, Florida maybe. Maybe one of these ships.

Q: (unclear)

SK: Yeah. But I'm single. They don't want singles. It's a negative thing to be single. To go with another fellow, oh my goodness, that's so tough. They got their own way of doing things. They're self-centered. My goodness. A couple of months ago, I went away with another fellow my age who I got along with quite well. By the time we got back, I do want to speak to him at all. I'm saying to myself, I know it's not me. I'm only glad to bend with somebody. It's not me (laughs).

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?

SK: Well, it got me away from my environment. But when I came back, I was playing ball again. With me, it didn't have that big of a change. I guess that I'm, what's the word, selfish. If you get married, if you don't want to get married, you're selfish. That kind of stuff.

I guess that's...is there anything else I can come up with. You want to go to the Memphis Belle maybe?

Q: No.

SK: OK. Another thing. My pilot who was very, how should you say... remind me I can come up with some cute stories...he was a nice person, but he didn't communicate. I understand when you're the top brass over a little organization you don't, you deal with somebody just below you. You don't deal with the others.

He never thought of socialized. He never spoke much to me and I'm sure including the officers. My pilot, I'll give you his name. His name is, do any of you know anything about the Fight Game? Sports at all? Do you listen to sports?

Q: I do somewhat.

SK: Do you know the name, he does fights mostly, Jim Lampley?

Q: No.

SK: Jim Lampley today, from the media, he announces fights. His father was Jim Lampley who was my pilot. This is what is known as dropping a name. But there are a lot of people in this country that know Jim Lampley. You guys are not in. What can I say? (laughs).

One time, we're on a training mission. All of the sudden, Kansas City. My pilot then was a single fellow. All of the sudden, Kansas City, blows an engine, blows a carburetor. I don't know what those things are. We land in Kansas City. The first thing, my pilot, he gets a jeep and he leaves us, the whole crew. I guess he tells the co-pilot something. We have to get an engine in and put it in. So, for twenty-four hours, we're hanging around for the engine to get put in to get set. He comes back about twenty-four hours. Everything's fine and we take off. The point is, if you were there, if you were sharp enough, you would figure out, he had a girlfriend in Kansas City. He had a girlfriend. He left us for twenty-four hours. I mentioned this to my bombardier. I said Ray do you remember the incident. He said sure. I surmised he had a girlfriend. He said yes, he had a girlfriend there.

Q: Last thing, can you hold that and tell us about that (holds a shadow box with medals).

SK: This is the Distinguished Flying Cross. I earned this one because of that mission where we lost like five planes. We were one of the planes. This is an Air Medal with four Oak Leaf clusters. In the good old days, I'd used to say why are they giving me all of this stuff? I don't understand it. This is the Asiatic Pacific Medal with four battle stars. This is the American, something or other, Campaign. This is the World War II Victory Medal. This happens to be a New York State...

Q: Conspicuous Service.

SK: You know that. This here. This is my name in case anybody's interested. This here is a Presidential Unit Citation with a cluster. My outfit got two of these. This is the wings, this is crewman wings that we wore again. Most of this. This is the 20th Air Force Patch. This is the 73rd Bomb Wing Patch. Most of this other stuff is repetitious or little stuff. That's about it. Maybe I should throw this in (pulls a sheet of paper from a folder). This is a World War II Memorial thing. You got that?

Oh yeah, I have photos here. I don't know what you want to see. Mostly of me. Let's see if I can find "Fifi" here. Here's the only B29 Superfortress that's flying today. It's called "Fifi". I guess that's about it.

Q: Thank you very much for your interview.