

**Thomas W. Horan
Veteran**

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New York State Military Museum
Interviewers**

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at the New York State Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, NY**

Q: Could you give me your full name and your date and place of birth please?

TH: Thomas W. Horan, New York City, 12-1-1921.

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

TH: I had two years of college at St. Johns.

Q: Can you tell me where you were and what your reaction was when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

TH: We were playing cards and somebody said that Pearl Harbor was bombed. So, everybody had to find out where Pearl Harbor was.

Q: Do you remember what your reaction was?

TH: There were eight of us there, and everybody went into the service within two or three months.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

TH: I enlisted, into the cadets.

Q: Why did you pick the Army Air Corps?

TH: Actually, I had never flown. I didn't even have a car then. I just figured that would be a better way to go than being in a trench or in the Navy.

Q: Where were you inducted?

TH: At Mitchell field, right over here.

Q: Can you tell us where you went to boot camp?

TH: They split us into two groups. There were thirteen of us in the second group. They said they could not take me, even though I had passed everything, because I was underweight by 4 pounds. I weighed 136. That was February. They said they would give me two months to gain the 4 pounds. I gained 3 and ate a bunch of bananas and water. I was at 139 and the sergeant wasn't going to pass me. I talked him into giving me a pound. From there we went to the aviation cadet classification center at Nashville, TN. I wanted to be a navigator. I had taken 22 credits of math, I had taken astronomy and courses at Hayden Planetarium. But, they needed pilots, so I ended up a pilot. The primary was at Kelly field near San Antonio, TX. From there I went to Pine Bluff, AR where it rained every day. We had two sections of flying. A section would fly one day in

the morning and the next day in the afternoon. We were there for two months and barely had any flying time. They said sorry but we were going to have to wipe out that class. I had soloed, so they asked me what I wanted to be. I said I wanted to be a bombardier. They asked why I wanted that because they wanted to make me a meteorologist. I didn't want that. They said how about an engineering officer? I didn't want that either. They asked about being a navigator. I said bombardier because it was shorter by 3 months. I had already been in for 9 months and not getting anywhere. So, I went to bombardier school. They sent me to San Antonio, then to Houston, then to Midland. There I got my wings and went up to Washington (state). That was where the various disciplines came together (navigator, pilot, etc.) to form crews. Then we went through three phases. First was at Moses Lake, then to Rapid City, SD, and ended up here at Camp Shanks in Rockland County, NY.

On November 30th we left for overseas on the British ship Andies. Its maiden voyage had been to Singapore, carrying reinforcements, who were all eventually killed or captured. We got to England and they split us up. We ended up a Polbrook(sp?) and the 351st Bomb Group, 508 Squadron. We got there at the end of November, 1943. We got briefed about twelve times. I only got credit for four missions. They had recalls, and one time we were set to go bomb Germany and they told us to sit down and they put a new crew on. It was a super secret mission. Then we were hit. I had gone to Leipzig the day before. Eleven hours we were up there. They shot up our wingman. Lt. Crump...(sp?) and Sgt. Mathis brought the plane back and they tried to land it with a wounded pilot (the co-pilot was dead). It crashed and they were killed. They both got the Medal of Honor.

The next day we took "Murder Incorporated", an old beat up plane, and we were up about ten minutes and we lost the no.2 engine. We couldn't feather it so it went wild. We circled and came in to the field from the wrong direction (perpendicular to the runway). We lifted over the hanger and plowed into a Brussel sprout field. The crash (exit) is in the radio room, behind the bomb bay. I got as far as the bomb bay when we hit. I flew backwards. I didn't even know my arm was broken. I got into the radio room. The enlisted men and the navigator were there. I got them out. I stepped on the table to get out and my arm was gone. The plane was in flames from one end of the wing to the other. I yelled and the sergeant, who must have been 30 yards away, came back. He jumped in and boosted me out. They dragged me and we got about 70 yards away when she blew. Everything blew at one time. Most of it went over us. Some came down but nobody was hurt with that.

I was in the hospital locally, and then they took me up to Manchester for an operation on my back. I was in a full-body cast. In a GI ambulance there were three stretchers. They were held by leather straps. I was in the single side and the other two were down. The ambulance went off the road and slid into a tree, and I flipped onto the floor. My arm and body were protected ok, so they picked me up and put me back and strapped me in and they got the ambulance back on the road and off we went to the hospital. The ambulance was bent out of shape, so we crabbed along about 15 mile an hour. When we get to the hospital it is a week or ten days after I was hurt. The only thing I could see was

the ceiling because of the cast I had on. I suddenly felt sensation in my feet. I looked over and there was a gray-haired guy next to me, so I asked him if he would feel my feet. He looked at me and I told him I had not had any sensation but now I think I feel something. Then I asked him to touch my knee. It was as if the crash had knocked my back into position again. So, they took the cast off and operated on me. So, I'm there in the hospital, the arm wasn't healing, but my bullet wound in my leg was ok, and my back was ok, and my head was ok. Anyone who was not ready for full duty by May 1st had to meet with a board to decide whether they were going to keep you there or send you home because they needed the bed. So, I came home.

I was permanently grounded, so they sent me down to Midland, TX, then to Amarillo, and got discharged. I went back to St. Johns and graduated, got married, and then we were recalled. There were 17 of us down at Camp Dix. Every one of us was in the reserves and completely inactive. I had a 40% disability pension and all of us were college-educated. So, were wondering, if we are so highly educated, why did they pick us? After the war, the Marine officers were the highest educated, then the Navy, and then the Army. The Air Force was way below all of them regarding the education level of their officers. A lot of the Army Air Corps in the war were only high school educated, where the others required at least two years of college to be an officer. So, what they were trying to do was raise the education level of the air Force's officers. I got sent to Mather Field in California and we were taking reservists back and, instead of being just a bombardier, we were training them to also be a navigator. We trained the pilots to be a navigator and bombardier. The planes then only had one or two men, so the pilot was the pilot and the navigator was also the bombardier. And then we were training cadets. I ended up as the wing personnel officer. In the base in England we had a group of four squadrons. Three groups made up a wing. Mather Field was a wing in itself. There were four groups and sixteen squadrons. It was a big place. Every month the General's adjutant would come over and try to get me to stay in. They were trying to get others to stay in too. Instead of being 24 months, it was 17 months and they let us out. That was it. I had to waive the 40% disability or take 40% off my salary. I waived the disability. I had to sign a card to that effect and I kept that card so they couldn't say that I voluntarily gave up my pension. So, I got my pension back, and that's it.

Q: You had told us off camera about the plane "Murder, Inc.". Could you tell us that story again?

TH: Our plane was to be named (we had it on our jackets) "Ten Graves to Berlin". That was an off-shoot of a picture named "Five Graves to Cairo". Supposedly a German anthropologist had planted oil and ammunition in three places in Egypt. As they went along they dug them up and used them. So, Duffy, who was quite a personality, named us Ten Graves to Berlin. We didn't have our own plane. I can't recall the name of the plane we flew the day before, but the day we were hurt it was "Murder, Inc.". The name was in reference to the infamous gangsters. I got back on May 24th and my crew went down on May 26th. The six sergeants and the navigator were killed. The pilot and co-pilot ended up in a prison camp and they have since died, so I am the only one still living. The Halleran(sp?) hospital had just opened. It became the infamous

Willowbrook hospital for mentally and physically disabled children. It had just been built when we came back and they put us there. The toilets were only about two feet off the floor, the sinks were about three feet and the showers about four feet. It was made for children. Later it was infamous due to the terrible conditions there. I was there for seven months and released in September. That was when I went back to Midland to be a ground officer.

Q: You mentioned that you received a bullet wound. How did you receive that?

TH: We did not arm the guns until we were in formation. When we got over the water we would fire them to make sure they were working. So, fortunately there were no bullets in the guns. The 50 caliber bullets, I think, were three to a pound. They were in aluminum holders next to the guns. The heat was making the bullets explode. The casing would go one way and the slug would go the other way. As we were running we saw them hitting around us. They were just kind of looping, as opposed to being fired from a gun, which would have torn my hip off. Nobody else got hit, but I got hit. I had 10% disability and after two years they increased it to 40%. About a week later I get a call from a doctor who said he could get me another 10% for disfiguring scars. I started to decline based on my arm and back being ok. He said he was referring to my buttocks. Additionally, if I took this increase, my wife would get \$58/month and we would get \$7.50 for each child, up to four children. In those days 40% was probably around \$80, so you would almost double it. But I was content to get the 40%.

They brought the ammunition rack to me in the hospital and it looked like a huge cheese grate. Another thing happened that was funny. I was in the hospital and I heard somebody calling my name "Lt. Horan, Lt. Horan!". I looked over and it's an Englishman, and he's got a dozen eggs. He says "I'm the farmer where you crashed, and I'm here to give you this dozen eggs". I said we blew up your farm! He says no, I had just planted my crop. Your government came to me, wanted my receipts for the last three years, paid me, and I planted a second crop. So, some good comes out of every situation.

Q: You mentioned that you decorated your jackets. What did you have on it?

TH: It had "351st Bomb Group", and then it had "Ten Graves to Berlin". My nickname was "Irish" so it had that on it. My daughter still has it. I had a new one painted. It is an exact replica of the original.

Q: Did you have nose art on your plane?

TH: Well, "Murder Inc." was on it. The planes in '42, '43 and '44 were painted a dark green. Then they decided that was extra weight so we just flew in silver planes. We got a new plane but didn't have a chance to put the name on it. I flew in "Round Trip" and I flew in "Sharon Ann". I was down in Amarillo and this Sergeant came up to me asking if I was Lt. Horan. I said yes. He asked if I remembered him. He was crew chief on one of my planes. He said "come down to the line tomorrow". So, I came down to the line and there's the "Sharon Ann"! We came out of Lugwigshafen with two engines out. Before we had crossed the Rhine we lost #2 engine. We dropped out of formation and the plane we

were in, the Sharon Ann, was flying so low. We had an auxiliary tank on one side of the bomb bay and a crate full of propaganda on the other side. We had lost that engine and then we lost #3 and #4 He re-started #3, though it was smoking like hell. So, we dumped the crate and the extra tank. We threw everything out of the plane that we could find. We kept some ammunition for the top gunner and tail gunner. We were at 23,000, then 18,000, and went down to 6,000 feet and stayed there. We had clouds right below us so we could jump into them in case of trouble. We were calling the fighters, but could not tell them exactly where we were. Suddenly a twin engine P-38 fighter, all battered up, comes in and lies along beneath us. Then a P-47 calls and says he sees us and he is full of ammunition. He joins us and says he will escort us. He goes ahead of us and drops through the clouds and says "whoa!... Antwerp". That meant heavy anti-aircraft action if they saw located us, so we got the hell away from there. We got to the English Channel and they were lost so we gave them headings to their bases. They departed and we made it back.

Our pilot had been an Englishman, born near our base. When war broke out he came home and got his commission. When he came back, he renewed his romance with his girlfriend and they got married. So, instead of landing on the coast where they had strips for crippled planes, he flew all the way back, and they shewed him out to no end.

The next day we are called down to the line and there was this P-38 called "Shorty" and this little 2nd Lieutenant was standing there. He was the one who had escorted us back. So Duffy picks him up and kisses him. Everybody is looking and he is all red.

Another time we were going to Frankfort and I was a spare bombardier. Engine #2 went out of control. When an engine goes down you feather the prop (the blades are turned so they are slicing straight into the wind to prevent rotation). In this case the blades were not quite straight and the prop spins backwards at the same speed as the other props and tears the hell out of the engine. So, we got rid of the bombs and he said we were going to try to make it back. The plane had rivets popping off and the tail was moving back and forth. We were flying so low that water was being churned up and with that the prop comes off. It shoots up in the air and away, and that allows the plane to pick up. We were going to ditch but that got us back in the air again and we got back.

You had to get fired upon or drop your bombs to get credit for a mission. At Ludwigshafen we got some flak so we got that one. But this one to Frankfurt that almost got us killed, we didn't get credit.

Q: When you got home, did you make use of the GI Bill?

TH: Yes, I had two years and I used it to finish the other two.

Q: Did you ever use the 52/20 Club?

TH: No. When I got out of school I went to work for Western Electric. They sent me out to Chicago. They were the manufacturing arm of the telephone companies. I was supposed to stay in Chicago, and then they sent me down to Texas. I was in Waco and

then they said I was going to the west coast and was going to work up and down the west coast. So I left them and went to work for Equitable Life.

Q: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

TH: I joined the American Legion.

Q: How about the 8th Air Force group?

TH: Yes, I belonged to that too. For \$75 you were a life member. They have a meeting every year and they have a quarterly paper that comes out.

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone that you were in the service with?

TH: When I came back I visited a co-pilot in Worcester, MA. I visited the deceased navigator's people in Chicago. A Lt. Henry was with us all the way through from the beginning and he had won the silver star medal and he ended up marrying my sister.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

TH: Not at all I think. I was lucky to survive. For us it was not personal because we could not see the damage we were doing with our bombs.

(showed photos)