

**Edwin Breed  
Veteran**

**Mike Lonergan  
Interviewer**

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**Q** It's running now. Whatever you feel comfortable talking about, some of your experiences, and they'll prompt you.

**EB:** Well Mike, you have asked me, being a veteran of World War II, some of my experiences, in that war. I want to tell you that I came from the Ticonderoga High School and when I was a junior, in 1940, the war came on. The local National Guard unit was mobilized, and so the New York State decided they would put in place a New York State Guard Unit to take its place. I joined that when I was a junior in high school, and I spent two years in the training that we had down in our armory down here in Ticonderoga. It was interesting. For two years we went to field training, taking care of knowing how to shoot a rifle and all of the rest of that that goes with basic training in the military forces. Upon graduation in 1942, I thought that I had enough training, and my parents gave me permission to enlist in the United States Army Air Corps. It was not the Air Force but the Army Air Corps. I went to Albany, took the allegiance to the flag and to the Constitution of the United States, and was shipped, of all places, to Atlantic City, where they, the Army Air Corps, had confiscated all these hotels down there. There I took training, which I really didn't need, but I took the basic training that they had, and because I enlisted, I asked to become a machinist in the ground forces of our Air Corps. It was approved. I went to Chanute Air Force Base, which is in Illinois. I spent approximately four months there training in the use of machines and lathes, milling machines and shapers and so forth. Upon graduation then, units were being formed by the Air Corps. One of the units that I went into.

**EB:** We got on the trains and rode around the country, until finally we came to Fort Kilmer in New Jersey. We stayed there for about two weeks and then we boarded a beautiful liner for overseas. It turned out to be the Queen Mary and you have seen the model that I have here in my home. [Gestures] There were 15,000 of us young people, and I might say that most of us were about 18, 19, or 20 years old. We thusly took off from the New York Harbor and for six days and seven nights we traversed the Atlantic Ocean, through the infested German U-boats that were out there sinking anything that came by. The Queen Mary was one of those that went about 32 knots, and that was really speedy because it could

outdo the submarines. The Queen Mary came into Eyre, Scotland. There the troops, myself, we went into lighters, got onto the land surface, and boarded trains, and for about a day and a half we ran up and down England. From where I don't know, but we landed in southern England at a replacement depot that was starting to set up by U.S. military units. The replacement was there. I lasted about a week there before I was assigned to a British airdrome up by Bury St. Edmunds. I went up there with a contingent of U.S. troops, soldiers, and we finally got our base to where we were, and ultimately a lot of military construction was going on because we were transferring it into a U.S. Air Force base. It was then designated as the first Strategic Air Depot, United States Army Air Corps. And we called it the first SAD – Strategic Air Corps Depot. This was my home for the remainder of the time that I was in England. We worked ten and twelve hours a day. We watched ... The first times that we first got on there we were invaded by the Nazi Air Force, and it came over at nighttime, giving us flares and so on and so forth. But they didn't drop any bombs near us, but it was further away. So those were some of the scares that we incurred during this period of time. The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Corps was composed completely of B-17s known as the "Flying Fortress". The Flying Fortress was one of those ... it got its name because it was a flying fortress. It had the pilot, the copilot, the navigator, the bombardier. It had gunners in the tail, tail on the two sides, down in the belly and so forth. It was a fortress. It took many casualties, but it gave many casualties to the Nazi Air Forces that came against it. They were heavy bombers. Their mission was to bomb the targets in Germany, and some in France, some that were set up in Holland and Belgium. Those were selective targets there along the coastline. But in the interior, they bombed Berlin ultimately, Hanover, and the industrial Ruhr, which was where the Nazi's had their tanks, they had their aircrafts units, I mean aircraft manufacturing, and so forth.

**EB:** I can only say that we saw a lot of bombers comeback tails that were halved off, holes in the wings and so on, but these flying fortresses almost, and as some of the pilots we talked too, they said "these bombers will fly by themselves". And so some of them ... In the depot that we were at, we repaired, we manufactured parts that were not in the system, the logistics system. That was one of the missions of the machinists, of the heat-treating guys that were right next to us, the props guys that did the work on props and repaired them, got them balanced and so forth. So, we were a group of specialists that took care of when a bomber came down it was analyzed that these were the things that were necessary. The mechanics went to it, they brought back stuff that said, "hey we need this helical gear", or we need this, or we need that. That was our job, and I reiterate again, we spent ten and twelve hours a day, two shifts, and I always took the back one, which was the nightshift all the way through. For what reason? -And you can smile on this- [Laughs] because every six months we were authorized a five day leave that was called a furlough. And so, when we got off duty in the morning some of us guys that got those five and six day passes or furloughs, we would shower [Laughs] and run like heck to get on those leaves and go to wherever we

were. Some of us went to London, some of us went to Edinburgh, Scotland, others went to Inverness. I was one of those that didn't particularly stay in the big cities. Because of my training here and my mom and dad, I was always a very silent type of an individual, and I went to the local, the little, small towns where, in some places I went, they'd never seen an American soldier. It was interesting because they opened their doors to you: "Come on in Yank, have some tea with us!" And I got to like tea pretty well. So anyway, that was the period of time in World War II that I spent with the Army Air Corps. Now, in some of your questions you ask, "how did you come back?" and so forth. I want to say very ... When we were waiting ... the troops in England were waiting to get on boats that were made available so that we could get on and come back to the United States. The military forces set up what was known as Sheringham American University. It was one of those universities where professors came from the United States, and they were mighty fine guys, and they set up a university. While I was waiting, I didn't know when I was going to get on a ship. I signed up for .... And I spent approximately four months, and I took three courses which ultimately, I passed: mathematics and English and history. Which ultimately, when I took the GI Bill of Rights when I **got** home, which was available to me to go to college, those credits that I got from that Sheringham American University were given into the University of Illinois, where I went to the College of Engineering and ultimately graduated. That was a period of time that was available to all soldiers, so I took the opportunity to do that.

**EB:** To start education because I knew, ultimately, that I wanted to go to college. When I received orders to go to Southhampton to come home we were supposedly-the group that I was with-we were supposed to come home on the USS Wasp, which was an aircraft carrier. But there was a problem with the Wasp and so we waited another two weeks until, where we were in Southhampton, I looked out and I saw this aircraft carrier out there. And I said, "Oh boy". This was the aircraft carrier that we were supposed to come home too. It had been retrofitted to take care of not the aircraft or anything else, but when you got on you were in the lower decks, and they had a-frames like this [Mimes an a-frame shape] with bunks that were for the troops like myself. They allowed us to walk around, and one of the great surprises of this aircraft that I was on, was I happened to walk by, in the main section on this lower deck, a commemorative in metal. It said, "The USS Lake Champlain" and I said, "Oh my god". I'm from Ticonderoga where Champlain is here [Mimes with hands] and Lake George is here [Mimes again with hands] and that's the thing of what Ticonderoga means. It means the city between two lakes. I started reading and there was a Grant Johnsons' name on there who was one of the representatives to the state government from our Ticonderoga here. He was, when the USS Lake Champlain was christened, he was one of the representatives from Ticonderoga and I knew him. So, there was a great compassion in my breast to feel that I was going home on a vessel that was so close to my home. It took six days. We came into New York harbor. We saw the lady standing there, and it brings a real chest analogy to

be home safe and sound. We offloaded, and we went to Fort Dix, which was the replacement depot for our getting back into civilian life. I processed through. I came over to New York because that's the transportation that would lead me up to Albany and then into Ticonderoga. I got to Grand Central Station and got on the Delaware & Hudson, the Laurentian. After a couple of hours on that we finally got to Albany, and then we waited for a few more hours and then I took the train, the Delaware & Hudson, to Ticonderoga and it was on its way up to Canada. It was a surprise to me that when we stopped in Ticonderoga-and of course the station is not there anymore, but it was right across from where there is the Fort View Inn or the restaurant there. The train station was on that butt of land that is right there.- I got off the train and I had my barracks bag, and I guess I had another barracks bag too because that was the military uniforms and everything else, I had accumulated, and they gave me. So, as the train took off and was going north, I happened to look over the tracks and there was a taxi there-and this is important, to me it is anyway,- and I said, "Can I get a ride to Ty," and the guy said, "Yes you can."

**EB:** The taxi driver happened to be Mr. Tony Fortino, an elderly gentleman-he was a taxi driver in Ticonderoga for many many years-and he said, "I'm waiting at the train at 4 o'clock in the morning, every morning, to see you chaps coming home." He said, "Hiya Breed." He recognized who I was, and he took me home. I got home at 4:30 in the morning, I rapped on the front door, I awakened my mom and dad, and it was a joyous occasion to come home, to see your mom and dad. I had both arms and both legs, my physical aspect was in tip-top shape, and I was not like one of those that comes home on stretchers and comes home from the wars that are dastardly. My friend Charlie Roos came back over. He was one of those that spent his time in Europe during the war, Battle of the Bulge, got his Purple Heart. He's well now, but he spent many months in hospitals in England and in Walter Reed Army Hospital before he was discharged. He came here. I see him all the time when he comes back from Florida on his vacations. It's always nice to come home. Particularly to Ticonderoga, which is a small community, where you grew up, you went to school, you have friends here and so forth. You realize that the United States is a very powerful nation. I can tell you from years later: I spent the thirty years of my military life in many areas of the country and of the world, and there ain't nothing like coming home. That's one of the reasons I retired here. My wife and I retired at this place here [Gestures towards the floor] because it belonged to my aunt and uncle, and it belongs to me now. I cannot tell you anymore unless I think...

[Tape jump or skip]

**EB:** And a half over there, in their country. We went to places where no Yanks had ever been, but they certainly opened their hearts to us. What a staunch

people those English were. They took it from the Nazis, and they gave it back to them in full measure with our help, with the 8<sup>th</sup> United States Army Air Corps.

[Tape jump or skip]

**EB:** You have asked me Mike to try to illustrate what the English people went through in the very beginning. Now remember World War II started in 1938. They really weren't prepared for what was coming on. The Nazis, the Germans, they had an Air Force of over 5,000 airplanes.

**EB:** Now a little incident that I read about when I was roughly your age was Charles Lindbergh was invited to the German armed forces, and he recognized the air force that Germany had: its modern Messerschmitts, its Dornier bombers, and so forth. -This one here.- [Points to something off screen] He came back to Roosevelt, the President of the United States, and he said: "The German Air Force is a unique air force of 5,000 aircraft and they're producing more." Roosevelt didn't really believe him, but it turned out that way. When 1938 came one of the strategic goals of Germany was to try and subjugate England! And so, they started what was a Blitz. It was their Air Force, with all its might of bombers, of fighters, reconnaissance aircraft. They targeted London and the outskirts of England, Manchester - one of the industrial areas, and so forth! When I got over there and got a three-day pass, I thought I would go to London. To Picadilly Circus, to see Nelson on his statue, and all of the things that I had read about in London. The American Red Cross had set up in one of the blocks, a canteen in an area where guys like myself, visiting London, could walk in there, sign in, get a bed, and stay the night or the three days that you were in London. You always had a place to go, you always had a place to sleep. One of the times [Choked up] that I visited London on a three-day pass, the Germans came over in force with their air forces. It isn't ... You can hear those bombers; they have a particular whine. The British, in their anti-aircraft batteries that were around London started firing. When you go outside like I did, it was nothing more than a Fourth of July like we have had in our own hometown here, where the skyrockets go up, and the boom, boom, boom. [Mimes fireworks exploding] [Pause] The Germans came over; they dropped their Incendiaries. Now if you know what an Incendiary is, it is a stick of bomb that when it hits, it ignites. And it is phosphorous, which is a very hot piece of fire. It goes down through concrete, it goes down through wood like [Imitates pow sound]. This time I envisioned and felt the bombers going over and not only dropping Incendiaries to know where they were, but they dropped bombs. When the Germans had gotten across London at that time, as they generally did, they went up over by Bury St. Edmunds, and Ipswich, and back over Holland and back into their airdromes. I went back to sleep thinking I was going to sleep, but we found that there was a fire going on in the Red Cross building. So, we all went, and it was an Incendiary, and so in that building and there were pots of sand and so forth. If you can find an Incendiary you put sand on it, so you cut off then

oxygen, then you got it [Smacks hands]. It'll stop. We were fighting these things throughout that building. But the next day I started walking around where fire engines were, [Choked up] where the English people were fighting fires of untold numbers. I observed one of the blocks in London was completely decimated. The people that were there hopefully they got out, but I don't know. But there were all sorts of fire engines, there were all sorts of ambulances, there were all sorts of this type trying to dig out, to do what they could to find out what happened to that particular building that was decimated. This is the way England fought, not only in London. But throughout London you'd walk along some of the streets and all of a sudden there'd be nothing there, it was [Mimes cutting motion and makes slicing sound].

**EB:** The Nazis, or the Germans, did a tremendous job on London and some of the other manufacturing cities in the northland of England. But they fought back! That is one of the reasons I just almost married a girl over there. [Laughs] But seriously, those people were such strong people. They had very little in rationing and all of this stuff to live on and so on. They were fighting these Germans in the very first part, and also throughout '43, '44, '45 with us. If you look at the landing in France you had the Canadian First Army, you had the Brits, you had us, and us, and us [Mimes with hands]. I won't say that the British ever would have capitulated. They would have fought to the last shell that they had. [Pause] Winston Churchill said, "we will fight on our beaches, we will fight in our cities and so on, but we will not give up." And so they were. That's the way they did. I have great admiration for the Brits, as I had, and I did have admiration, and I will have admiration for the Australians. They are a fighting bunch. I got to know some of those guys, particularly in the Australian air forces that were adjoined to us. Every once in a while, they would miss theirs and come into our airport, our strategic air depot. And they used to say, [Doing an accent] "Oh my god, I'm sorry. I've got the wrong airport." [Laughs] So my time in World War II was not blood and guts. That came later in my career with the Army and in the armed forces of our United States.

[Tape jump or skip]

**EB:** This must be the invasion! [Laughs] And then down in... Our first sergeant, he comes bounding out of there and with a word you know, and he went from Hutman, to Hutman, to Hutman. Our first sergeant, he says, "It's on! It's on! It's on! Everybody get up and go!" We reported back to our sections and of course we had weapons you know. [Laughs] I had a Thompson submachine gun, a .45 caliber machine gun with the bullets and the .50 caliber bullets and so on and so forth. And we all got out with our guns and everything else you know, just in case something happened. [Laughs] But this is what happened, the first sergeant says "Come on! Get your weapons up and let's go! We're going to go out and mobilize and so on and so forth." And then we went back to our normal operations. I

wouldn't say normal operations because we knew that there was going to be tragedy all the way along. But that was another one of those things that just popped through my mind for blitzkrieg-ing. [Laughs] We reversed the blitzkrieg-ing. We started bombing Berlin, and the Ruhr valley, and after it was all over-as I might have said-after it was all over some of us ground forces, we were asked, "hey would you like to take a ride in a B17 and take a ride over Europe where we were to see and so on and so forth." I signed up! Yeah! I said I wanted to go, you know? Being about nineteen years old and full of vigor and vitality. So, we got in there and six hours later we came back to our air depot. But we went over Hanover and some of those, Frankfurt was another place. There was nothing standing!

**EB:** Then we flew over Paris and there was the Eifel Tower there [Laughs] and I had to go and urinate [Laughs]-and you're not supposed to tell anybody this but I'll tell you, you're old enough to know [Laughs]- in the bombers they had urinating tubes and so I peed on the Eifel Tower! [All laugh] No one's supposed to know that, but I did! And I said there you Frenchmen. I never liked a Frenchman either [All laugh] even though when I was in Indochina ... anyway...

**Q** Did your work...

[Tape jump or skip]

**EB:** Were in close formation, because in close formation if you recognize where you were [Miming with hands] then when you were attacked by fighters, they couldn't get into the interior of your formation. Just on the outsides, you know? When you look at a B17 if you look at my model out there [Points], you'll see it is a fortress. The .50 calibers, the way they are in the tail, the two sides, the bond, up in the front. Sheesh. That was a fire power and a half. If one of them went across a formation like this [Mimes V formation], those guys would put up .50 caliber like this [Holds hands straight up]. If an attack aircraft went across, I mean they were shooting those down. But when bombers went down ... Those that came into our depot, I mean they were really shot up. All sorts of stuff there. Of course, many of the gunners were wounded, killed. An answer to your question, the formations that were made by the hierarchy, they tried to keep in groupings so that they couldn't be attacked singly.

**Q** Do you have ... You indicated you have copies of some of those mission reports?

[Tape jump or skip]

**EB:** Some films and movies and so forth that show... I can remember seeing one movie where a bomber was going along and all of a sudden, it's wing just collapsed and it went up like this [Moves hand in upward motion] and went right down. Now on that maneuver there, there ain't no one going to get out of that airplane. You've lost eight men right there. The casualties were great. There was no minimum, there were maximum casualties on almost every mission that the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force flew.

**Q** Did you handle bombs?

**EB:** No, I did not. No. That was the armorers. That was a different segment there and at the depot we did not have the munitions to take to an aircraft and arm it up. No. We were in the depot operations.