

Clyde Butterfield
Veteran

Ashley Riverview
Interviewer

Interviewed on January 19, 2004
Hudson Falls New York

Q: You enlisted in the Air Force in 1942, correct?

CB: Right.

Q: And what made you choose the Air Force?

CB: Because I can't swim very well (laughs).

Q: Really.

Q: You were stationed over in England?

CB: For training, yeah.

Q: What was your training like?

CB: Pardon?

Q: Training, what kind of training did you have to go through?

CB: Well when I was training I had it in this country. The training was gunnery school, engineering school, pilot training. I ended up in Seattle Washington where _____ aircraft. When I got my engineer license they assigned me to a crew. We trained in different fields in this country. Did about a year and a half, and then then they picked me as the engineer for a certain crew. I had to go join them and train for another month or two. Then we got our equipment together, flew us to Greenland. Then the weather closed in. We had to come back and went the southern route, down through Puerto Rico, Brazil, Valenzuela. Suppose to get to Sanction Islands, but that was closed in with birds that got there. So we only had fuel enough to go to Gulf Coast and Africa, so we got that far and landed there in Bolivia. Got our plane towed out of the ocean (laughs) and got back in service again. Flew to Marrakesh, that is the northern part of Africa across from Gibraltar there, Monaco and all those places. Then the next jump we made was to England. That was from the time I left the United States, it was three months we were in z_____.

Q: Really?

CB: We had turned in Valenzuela for a month and a half because we had an engine blow out and we had to wait for a replacement. Well we returned there so we couldn't go out so the crew, well most of them flew out on other transports to Brazil, to _____

Brazil and one of the copilots and I stayed there and put the engine on. They gave us permission to test fly it. One of the planes that we flew in Brazil, we weren't supposed to leave the carrier, but we went and took the plane, went back and picked up the crew, and then we went the rest of the way.

Q: Did you get in any trouble for that, flying in Brazil?

CB: I little (laughs a little).

Q: So how did you end up in England?

CB: Well we got stationed in a place they called _____ England; it's on the east coast of England, on the North Sea. We were there for about two weeks when we got our first flight. We went to bomb a ball bearing factory in Germany. It took us about 18 hours flying to get out there and back. Then we made four or five other shorter runs to the coast in Northern Germany there where they had their submarine bases. We bombed those several times. Then we had another flight through Germany. There was a bomb factory where they built bombs. We bombed that. We only had a half a load of bombs. The other ____ Bombay was a big tank with extra gasoline. We had to shuttle through Switzerland and Italy and ended up in North Africa again, over on the east side. We made that flight through there. We went through the pass and Italy. They were firing at us from both sides, firing down at us, we were down in the pass, but we made it through. We only got hit once; just a small caliber gun. We got in there and then we moved back up into Marrakesh, on the west coast of Africa. Then we stayed there until the plane was patched up. We went back to England again. We had about 13 trips in at that time. The next trip I made was when I got shot in _____, 120 miles northeast of Paris in the forest area there. Our crew, the rest of our crew went out. I was obligated to stay with the plane until the bomb site was destroyed. So I did that, but I got caught there and they had already been caught. We ended up on a train headed for Germany.

Q: What was that like?

CB: Pardon?

Q: What was that like being caught and captured?

CB: I was just captured, that is all. You don't put up any fuss. They just take you and march you in.

Q: They weren't mean?

CB: They put you on a train and they left a guard on us. I don't think he was all but 15, I don't know. We lost lots of sleep lots of nights wondering whether he would have any rounds in his rifle. We got rid of him; it wasn't easy, but there was a Kernel who was captured on there and he told us not to try to escape or anything to go to prison. Well he was a Kernel, but there was six of us there besides him, all officers of _____, navigator, copilot, and pilot. They were officers and they were treated pretty well in

prison camp. Enlisted men like myself, radio operator, _____, gunner, armed gunner, and tail gunner they didn't treat us very well so I decided to escape. We were trained to do that if we were engaged in _____. So I got the crew and eight members of another crew that were shot down in the outfit. We got out and went through Paris and then south of _____, over the mountains into Spain. There were twenty six of us. All of my officers came with me.

Q: Really?

CB: We got back into Spain. We carried one fella whose feet were frozen from the top of the mountains. We carried him with us the whole way. We got into Spain and they would not let us out of Spain, so we got a boat near Gibraltar. Through Spain coast we got all away across the bay and got into France/Northern Africa area. We got a plane there that flew us back to England, another outfit made a shuttle flight to north Africa, brought us back to England.

They locked us up in England, the British because they were not sure whether we were German or not. We still had on our uniforms, but you could get them anywhere. They treated us worse than the Germans did actually. When we finally got back to base, some of the people that we knew were contacted. The crews changed so fast over there, by that time we did not really know anyone back at the base, only the big shots like Eisenhower.

Q: You knew Eisenhower?

CB: Yes, I met him personally.

Q: Really?

CB: And the general that was the head of our crew. He was a friend of mine in the states, Kessler. He used to fly a special plane when we were in training. I knew him well. He had family back in _____. After that we got shot up pretty bad. The rest of the crew bailed out over England. We made sure they all got out. We got back up and the pilot was hurt, he was hit and got out. They let him go and the copilot and I flew the plane out a ways and ditched it.

Q: Where did you ditch the plane?

CB: In the North Sea, I was in there for about four hours. The German submarines were about a mile and a half from us.

Q: Oh my gosh.

CB: With the plane, they said we couldn't float, so we had the Bombay doors open and the wheels down when we landed on the water, but it did float there for about two hours. That gave us plenty of time to get away from it. We could not get the escape rafts out of the hull, they were jammed and we could not get one out. We did not waste any time trying to get the other one out so we got four or five life vests. We all wore one under

our jackets. We got the extra ones and tied them onto us to keep us floating. We had on heavy wool coveralls, suits over us to keep us warm up in the air as there was no heat in the airplane. When you are up 30,000 feet in the air it was cold.

Q: It was a little cold.

CB: We got frostbite on our feet and things. Gloves held up all right because we could wave our arms around and slap the water and things for circulation. We were then about a quarter of a mile of the imaginary line that they have in the North Sea. The Germans were on one side and we were on the other. The British had their PT boats out there waiting to dart out and pick us up when it got dark. We never knew which side was going to get us first (chuckles).

Q: Right.

CB: But, the British got us and brought us back. That took about two or three weeks to get back into shape after that episode. I was kind of frozen, my legs.

Q: I can imagine.

CB: We had about eight more trips to make. I was with another crew when we got shot down. To make up flights I would fly extra to get caught up with the regular crew. I went over there and got shot down again, right near the channel in France. I got back in the boat and all the Frenchman carried me back to England that time. I did not get captured that time.

Q: That's good that is very good.

CB: Because I didn't have anything to do with the airplane like I did (chuckles) before. I got back to base and they had bombed fall and the airplane on the air fields. They blew up four airplanes. One of their bombs fell out of the Bombay of a _____. We lost several road crew there, maintenance men and _____. We were short of airplanes so I had to fly with other crews. I lost a lot of friends that time. There were four planes in the whole group to finish twenty five missions.

Q: Really.

CB: I was on one of them. _____ took (AR laughs) three airplanes. We got back and the navigator, he was wounded the same time I was.

Q: You were wounded?

CB: He lost a leg. A bombardier got it too. They sent him home. One of the other fellas got hit back in the waist. I was in the top _____ at the time. It came through the wind screen in front of the pilot and hit the _____, smashed the globe on the _____ there. It hit me in the head and the back of the neck. Bomb shell bursts right behind me entering that compartment were the _____ was.

Q: What happened next?

CB: They got us back and I was in the hospital for a few days getting patched up. My scalp, I got shaved there a little bit (AR chuckles). I haven't had any hair since then (both laugh).

Q: What mission was that that you got wounded?

CB: That was when we went over to bomb an aircraft factory. They had more planes out that day then we figured on.

Q: So how many missions did you complete total?

CB: Twenty five missions.

Q: Did you get to go home after that?

CB: No. It was quite a while after that. They sent me to gunnery school to teach gunnery. I ended up there at what they called the wash. It was kind of a swampy area up there. That was the last winter I was over there. I remember it was Thanksgiving and they shipped in a couple of truckloads of turkeys. We had Thanksgiving dinner. The turkey was enough for about a thousand people and there were only eighty of us there. So there was place nearby where they had children stationed. Mostly kids from around London. There were about a hundred and twenty of them so we had them all over in the mess hall and fed them turkey.

Q: That was nice.

CB: That was the last holiday I spent over there and then I came back on a boat, _____ they called it. It had swimming pools on it, dance halls, and everything else.

Q: (Laughs). That was better than staying in an airplane?

CB: Well, they did not have airplanes that could fly us all back.

Q: Right.

CB: All the ones that came from the United States over, women flew them over. They went back on the boat (laughs).

Q: So when did you get back over in the states?

CB: It was in about March of '44.

Wife: We weren't married then.

Q: So you were over there for about two years, over in Europe?

CB: Over in England eighteen months, from the first day I got there until I left.

Q: You must have gotten a lot of medals, for being shot down and being injured?

CB: Well, I did not get (laughs).

Q: You did not get those until a while after?

CB: I didn't get all of them. I got the good kind; I got out alive (laughter).

Q: You got the Purple Heart?

CB: Yes I did.

Q: And the Oak Leaf Cluster?

CB: Five or six clusters on the Oak Leaf Cluster. They would give you a medal every time you flew five missions. They would give you that one medal there for the first five missions. Then each five after that, they gave you a cluster.

Q: They did not give them to you all at once. What did you do when you came back home?

CB: I got about a month at home and I went to Atlantic City. I signed up for some R and R and went to North Carolina for a month. I left there and went to Florida.

Q: What did you do in Florida?

CB: I was down there and they did not have any place for me down there. There were a bunch of us there and I got sick of that. It was a hot summer down there (laughing). So, we complained and they shipped me to Biloxi Mississippi to run a gunnery school for those training in this country. I then got shipped to a place in Arizona. I ended up in Sioux City, Iowa. _____ and trained engineers and things. I worked in an office area for a while. After that I got discharged from the service, in about '45.

Q: Then you came back home?

CB: Yes.

Q: Got married?

CB: Yes.

Q: When you came home, what were things like?

CB: Just about the same as they were when I left (laughs)!

Q: Not much changed?

CB: No.

Q: When you came home, did you take advantage of the GI Bill at all?

CB: I got some of it when I bought a little farm I had up on the road there. Got help from the GI Bill on that. Not too much. Never got advantages though.

Q: Really (laughs).

CB: I could walk when I got back to the states. They were not too keen on giving anyone a pension that could walk (laughs).

Q: I really do not have any more questions. Do you have anything else you would like to tell us?

CB: No, I think that covers it all.

Q: That covers it all. Thank you very much.