

Julius (Jay) Gross
Veteran

Michael Russert
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Interviewers

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The Hampton Inn
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Q: Could you tell me your full name, your date of birth, and place of birth, please?

JG: My name is Julius Gross, now known as Jay. I was born in the Bronx, New York, on October 3rd, 1916.

[Phone rings]

Q: What was your pre-military service education before you went in?

JG: I, uh, went to grammar school, high school, and graduated from New York University.

Q: Ok, now you graduated before you went into service?

JG: Well that's part of my story [Laughter].

Q: Oh, okay. One question then before you tell us that. Where were you and what kind of feelings did you have when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

JG: That's very interesting. I had a very good friend—lifetime friend, he just died recently—I was at his home. He came from a family of 8 children. We were all sitting around—it was a Sunday morning—all of a sudden there was an announcement on the radio: “Pearl Harbor's been bombed by the Japanese”. We each looked at each other, “Where the heck is Pearl Harbor?” That's how I learned about it. From then on, of course, everything came from there.

Q: Do you know what you felt when you heard about this?

JG: Well we felt—yeah—all of us were of age to be called. We thought, “Well here comes a war, we're gonna be in war.” We all thought of that. But we hoped not. That's all I can tell you about that, that's how I heard about it.

Q: Tell us were you drafted, or did you enlist?

JG: Okay [here] comes the next story.

Q: Okay.

JG: When they bombed Pearl Harbor I was in the last year of college. In fact, the last six months, and lucky me, I picked a low number in the draft. So naturally they called me up in the early part of...that was 1940...1942 [unclear]. In 1942 they called me up. So I asked them to please let me finish college first, and I'm not trying to avoid it, but I'm trying to finish college. I came from a rather small town. At that time I was living in New Jersey.

WC: Called?

JG: West New York, New Jersey. My father was pretty well known—I don't know if he had anything to do with it—but instead of giving me a delay, they put me in 4F. 4F means of course that I'm incapable of going. So I said fine, I finish college, and they never called me again. Time was going by, war was getting worse, all my friends had already been taken. Even my younger brother was in. I knew they were gonna look at it again, 'cause I knew there was nothing wrong with me. Instead, I decided I was going to enlist. And I also knew that if I was put where they want me to go, and I had faced an enemy with a gun in his hand, and I had a gun in my hand, I couldn't kill him [Laughs]. So, I said let me join something where I don't have to do that. I figured the Air Force was the best way. I could drop bombs on them. I was working in New York for an accountant. I went to study accounting in college—and I took the afternoon off and went down and enlisted in the Air Force. And this is a good one, you need to hear this whole story. I enlisted in the Air Force, and they said okay, come on...we'll call you back in a couple of weeks for examining. A couple of weeks [later] they call me back downtown New York, into a big room, and there's 60 fellas there. We're sitting far apart so you can't cover from each other, you know.

Q: Uh-huh.

JG: They gave us a written exam from 8 o'clock in the morning until 11 o'clock. 11 o'clock, they said okay the exam is over, go out to lunch, come back, we'll let you know what happened. So, we go out to lunch, come back, and this time there's a door between the room, half closed. And we come in, all 60 of us leaning and sitting in one room. Lieutenant...or a Captain or something...sits up on the desk and says "When I call your name go in the other room. [He] starts calling off names, calling off names, didn't call me. Finally, there's only 20 of us left and he hadn't called me yet. I say "Jeez, I didn't even pass the written test" finally he looks up and says "Well fellas, you fellas passed" [Laughter]. Now go home and we'll call you back for a physical exam. A couple of weeks later they call me back for a physical exam—I was out in the Hudson River someplace; I don't remember where—out of 20 of us—you won't believe this—20 of us went through a very rigorous exam. When we get done only 5 passed the first time.

Q: Wow.

JG: I was one of the 5, after 4 others. The rest of the other 20 were never called again because the Air Force won't pay for anything—this guy had bad teeth, this

guy had a bad nose or something—they probably all got in later on. Just our 5—we passed. That's how I got into the Air Force. From then on, they sent me for more examinations throughout the city. I finally wound up in welding...after a lot of examination they call you in to a room individually and they tell you what you're fitted for. Either a bombardier, navigator, or a pilot. When it came to me, they said you're eligible for all of them which one do you want. I chose navigator because I was studying accounting and I wanted to be a chauffeur [Laughs]. So I chose navigator. They sent us to Sulman Field where I learned my navigation. And I went through the whole learning of it...I think...and at the end of that they again call you into a room—oh and you either became a second lieutenant or a...flight officer, which is lower than that. And I became a second lieutenant. And from then on they sent me to a couple other places in the United States, I mean I don't remember where they were. I finally wound up in...uh...uh...What do you call it, jeez the word skipped me...uh...Tonopah, Nevada. That's out in the middle of the desert. And 8th Air Force was just starting, that's where the 458th was just starting. They got bombardiers and navigators in, and they started bringing up crews there. I was assigned to a crew with 10 guys, with a navigator, a bombardier, and two pilots. There we practiced...uh...we did practice on the — they gave us an airplane. A B-24 plane. We practiced there and then we went on to war. Can I go on from there?

Q: Yes!

JG: That's where my — that's where my diary starts.

Q: Did you—did you uh...fly the plane over? Did you fly in the plane over?

JG: That's what I was going to tell you.

Q: Okay.

JG: That's where the story continues.

Q: Alright.

JG: When they sent the crews when we finished studying, they said “Now you're ready.” So they...go ahead and they send us out to combat. Took us a month to get from Tonopah over to Europe. [Laughs]. Went to South America, and stopped all along the way. I got it all written in here where we stopped. And [we] finally flew across the ocean and went to a new field — Britain had just given to the United States they let go from called ...uh...Horse of Saint Faith...it was near Norrish in London right about...I don't know...90 miles north of England. And that's where we started. I was on one of the first ten crews to arrive there... The 458th didn't start flying until March the first. The first mission was on March the 2nd, I was on the 1st mission. And uh. Well could I go on and finish the whole story now?

Q: Sure.

JG: Alright. So we were one of the first ten crews to finish ten missions. And they decided to give us a weeks' vacation. So they sent us to a place – I even have the name of the place that they sent us – we stayed there for a week and we came back and found out that our plane had been flown by a different crew. They were shot down, they were all killed. So we had no more airplanes. So for while we went with different crews for the next couple of missions. Finally we were assigned another plane. The copilot of the other plane that we had first became pilot, and that's how I finished my 30 missions.

Q: Did you name your plane?

JG: Yes. We didn't name the plan. The enlisted men went out one night, we didn't know about it, they put the name Worthless on it. Then we came out, "What the heck is Worthless?" But we said well let's leave it then, what's the difference?

Q: Was your first plane...uh...did that have a name on it, too?

JG: That was – that's the first plane.

Q: The one that was shot down?

JG: The one that was shot down. The second plane we never – that one didn't have a name on it. In fact, we never got a second one for a little while, I used to fly with other crews. We finally got a new plane – a nice silver plane – but it never put a name on it. And – well you want all the incidents that happened?

Q: Sure.

JG: Okay. I remember one flight – it was a very cloudy day. Now, usually on a cloudy day they used to cancel the mission, but on this day the clouds were very low, low clouds, and above the clouds was clear. So they didn't call of the mission. So we were scheduled – we used to fly the lead plane, one on each wing. We were scheduled to fly the lead plane. Somehow after flying through all the clouds, the plane that was supposed to be on this wing, he got there first. The other fella was already on his other wing so our pilot came up there and said "I can call him up and tell him to get over here but he's a good guy let him go, let him be the lead." Okay – well he led – he led the three of us there all around the planes. We go to the target – just as they open the bomb bay doors to drop the bomb, [a] German bomber blew the plane apart, they were all killed again. And uh – that was another incident, see I always say that I had a guardian angel guiding me. [Laughs]. So that was that mission. Another mission – another pilot that time – we came to the target or just before the target. We got hit with flak and knocked out one of our engines so we lost speed, couldn't follow it, and the pilot decided we're going to turn around and go home. They turn around and starts home, losing altitude as we go along, suddenly we're attacked by German planes, and we said this is the end we can't fight with those guys they were coming down. All of sudden, American planes come down p...p28...p38 -

Q: - P38 -

JG: - P38. He came out of the sky and drove them away. So, we got home alright, losing altitude all the way. When we got to the channel, we were about 100 feet off the channel, we finally got in okay.

Q: Huh.

JG: That was another incident, and the final incident that almost killed me was a navigator and...uh...I used to sit in the nose of the plane – behind the pilot – and I had a little wooden table there, and a window that I had to look out and keep track. I always looked out that window over here, I looked away from the window for a while, a piece of flak came from the bottom of the [unclear] ran through, broke through the bottom of the plane, went through the table, banged up on the ceiling and came down on the desk. I picked it up and I burned my hand, it was so hot. If that had hit me, I wouldn't be here now [Laughs]. That's another...the rest of the mission were, you know...we always got hit with flak, but we managed to get through.

Q: Uh-huh. Were most of your missions into Germany, or did you fly into France?

JG: I'll show you. I have a map that I made. That's my missions.

Q: Ok I got it.

JG: That's all verified.

Q: Ok, um, you had your 30 missions, uh, what awards did you receive or awards?

JG: Distinguished Flying Cross, 4 Air medals. They gave a certificate of valor they issued and that's about all.

Q: What is the distinguished Flying Cross for, why did you receive that?

JG: Well, it sounds awful lot now, not many people got it, but if you did 30 missions and you did a good job, they gave you the distinguished flying Cross. Not many people got that.

Q: When were you discharged?

JG: Well, I was discharged, actually I wasn't, I went straight into the reserves, I wasn't discharged until 1955.

Q: What did you do in the reserves, were you ever called up?

JG: I was never called up. But before that, well I have to tell you I wasn't discharged. But I came back, after I finished my missions, I went home for weeks' vacation in the United States and then I was supposed to report to Atlantic City for rescheduling, that year there was a big hurricane. You probably remember, I

don't know if you are old enough to remember but that year it was a hurricane that blew Atlantic City practically off the map. So, in a minute while I was home, they transferred me to Florida and I was there for 9 weeks, and then they sent me to Harvard University for some reason or another. They sent me to Harvard University to study um, statistical control, and from there they sent me to IBM school to study their machines that they had, you know they have computers that they had machine that chamomile and I learned about that then they sent me to Dayton Ohio, where they had a station in the airport where they kept all these records and I was supposed to be in charge but there was a civilian from IBM there and I would just see that everything was done right. From there I was discharged.

Q: Uh-huh.

JG: God that was 19. The reason I was discharged was because I asked for a leave of absence to get married. So, they told me, we could discharge you, you have more than enough points to get discharged why do you want a leave of absence? So, I took the discharge, and I was on terminal leave when I got married.

Q: Did you use your GI Bill when you returned home?

JG: No, I already had college I didn't have to.

Q: How about the 52-120 club, did you make use of that?

JG: No, no. I never used anything. The only thing I took from them, I took a pair of glasses every year, and then I stopped that because I didn't care much for them.

Q: Did you join any Veteran's organizations?

JG: Well, I recently joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and I also joined as a new organization the Distinguished Flying Cross Association, I joined that. And I joined the 8th Air Force Museum in Atlanta, and that's about all.

Q: Did you ever stay in contact with any of the crew members?

JG: I didn't but a couple of years ago, about two years ago, I got in touch through one of the organizations that I belong to, I asked them to please find them if they could find them. They found two of my crew members, and through those two, they told me that all the others were dead. They all died. There were two left and I lost track of those two, what do you call it, gunners, but outside of that I didn't get in touch with anyone.

Q: Going back to your plane, did you ever decorate your jacket at all?

JG: No

Q: No, you never did? Ok. How did you feel when you heard about Roosevelt passing away?

JG: Oh, I guess I felt as bad as everybody else. It was quite a shock. And what else can I say? I got over it eventually, but I felt very badly.

Q: Where were you when they dropped the atomic bomb?

JG: I think I was home then, and I was very angry that they did that. I didn't think that they had to. I think it was done to show off so to speak. I said that war would have ended soon anyway the Japanese were pretty far down and they couldn't go very far so whatever we say that we killed a million people to say that I didn't think it was right. Especially the second one, that was totally unnecessary.

Q: Ok, do you have some things to show us then?

JG: Well the things I am showing, I had the map I wanted to show you, and this book has got this, and it's got all of these messages to us.

Q: Show us the plane?

JG: This book has two awesome pictures.

Q: Alright this is, this picture right here? Where are you? The one kneeling here?

JG: This one right here.

Q: There's another picture.

JG: Here.

Q: He's showing me the name of the plane. Ok.

JG: This book has my picture. Right there.

Q: Hold that up so I can zoom in.

JG: Yeah, that's me, before and after. I've got something else too.

Q: You got this picture? What else have you got here?

JG: Here's a picture of me. You want to see it? It's an early picture I was only a 2nd Lieutenant.

Q: When was that taken?

JG: It was taken right after I got my promotion I guess, 1st Lieutenant. No, that was taken after I finished at Selman field, so I became 2nd Lieutenant. Early. At the beginning. I have some papers here, but I don't think you want those. I don't think you could photograph these.

Q: Yeah unfortunately, they told us the copy machine was broken downstairs. We'd like to. Could you show us too that you kept a diary for the entire time you were in England?

JG: I'll show you but let me get my glasses on.

Q: Let me hold this up and show a sample of your writing. So, you kept this the entire time you were over in England, you were able to record all of your missions in this?

JG: Yeah, not in detail.

Q: But at least where you were going.

JG: The trip over and the trip back and the whole thing.

Q: Now you left this back at your base you never carried it with you did you in the plane?

JG: The diary?

Q: Yeah.

JG: [Laughs] No, there was no time to write in the plane.

Q: Yes, I know that, but I was just curious if you...

JG: No, but it was all here and good names of all of my crew members, came from the number of the plane, everything is here.

Q: Ok, could you hold that page up and I can zoom in on that?

JG: Plane name, plane serial number. It's all there.

Q: Ok, got it.

JG: What else can I show you?

Q: There's the other book down on the bottom there....

JG: This book is uh, this book has all the missions that I flew. See I went through I put dots on each one. We started flying on the 2nd of March, see the little dot up there? I put the dots, and all the missions but they are all on there so it's the same thing.

Q: Ok.

JG: So, several months, there's more. This book has the same pictures, so you don't need that.

Q: I'm going to hold the book up for them. Ok.

JG: What else can I tell you?

Q: Ok, well, thank you very much.

JG: You see on January 4th for example, we left Tonopah, January 4th, the flight goes every day and I give you every day, and January 5th we arrived at Hamilton Field, California. January 10th, Palm Springs California. That's how we went, all through the country. Texas, Tennessee, Florida, and then Puerto Rico. That's the whole trip, we across British Guiana, Brazil, Africa, the whole thing is right there.

Q: I bet your parents were relieved when you got home in one piece?

JG: My parents were very sensitive, and I never would write to them at all and then I would write only good things. But I had an uncle and I have a couple of letters here.

Q: Yeah, you mentioned you had an uncle.

JG: And I used to write to him as in the events and I told him to, here's an incident here in this book. I'm not in this thing because it's all the people that died.

Q: Wow.

JG: Here's an order, maybe you would be interested in this. It promoted me from 1st Lieutenant to Captain.

Q: Yeah, hold it just like that.

JG: I can't keep from shaking now.

Q: That's alright. Ok.

JG: Here's my discharge, 10th of August 1955.

Q: Now when you left Europe you came back in a ship right?

JG: Yeah, I came back in a ship, and I played poker all the way across. I came back a rich man.

Q: Now do you remember what camp you left England out of? Was it Lucky Strike or?

JG: No, what camp? What field?

Q: No, I guess most of the fellows they went to like one camp that they left from Lucky Strike or Chesterfield

JG: Officers did that? I don't remember that. We came separately. After I finished my missions, they had that on the plane that the British had entered navigational equipment called a G-Box.

Q: Uh-huh.

JG: And the Germans used to jam it, right? Somehow or other I figured out a way to fool them. Every time we came off a mission I said where did we go this time; how far did we go? And she was always very surprised. So, when I got done with my mission, they sent me to Ireland to teach this to the new coming in navigators. The new ones. I was there for several months, and it was the best part of my war. Those guys were so enthusiastic and glad to listen to me and I enjoyed that. So, that's my history.

Q: Thank you very much.