Donald H. Black
Veteran

Wayne Clarke
Interviewer

New York State Military Museum
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Q: Today is March 25, 2009. We are at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York. My name is Wayne Clarke. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name, your date and place of birth.
DB: Donald H. Black. Known to my friends as Don. I was born September 27, 1922, in Brooklyn, New York.

Q: Did you attend school in Brooklyn?
DB: No, I was raised in Rockville Center on Long island and graduated from high school there.

Q: What year did you graduate?
DB: 1941.

Q: Do you recall where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor and what your reactions were?
DB: Yes, I do. I was listening to my radio in my room on a program that ran between three and four o'clock in the afternoon. And somewhere during that period of time, the announcement was made.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?
DB: I was drafted. Willingly, however.

Q: Whereabouts were you processed?
DB: I was inducted at the Grand Central Palace. It no longer exists in Manhattan. That was January 12, 1943. We were given a week's leave to settle up our civilian affairs. The reception center was in Camp Upton on Long island. We were there for about four days. We were issued our uniforms and given our branch

assignments. They went to various branches of the army, and I was selected for the Air Force.

Q: Did you request the Air Force or was it just the luck of the draw?
DB: No. Just selected. I don't know whether...at the induction center in Grand Central Palace, we were given the Army general classification test, and I think to some extent, the scores on those tests contributed to their decision as to which branch you went into.

Q: And where were you sent next?
DB: After about four days at Camp Upton, we were loaded on board a train. Of course, all the trains in those days were steam trains. We didn't have diesels yet. It was about a four-day trip, a long trip. They didn't tell us where we were going, but we watched the signs on the railroad stations. We knew we were going south, of course. Eventually wound up at Miami Beach for basic training.

Q: Was that your first time away from home?
DB: Yes, except for one month when I was twelve years old, I went to camp, but, yes, for any extended period of time, that was the first time.

Q: And you attended basic training in Miami Beach?
DB: Miami Beach, yes.

Q: Were you at a military installation?
DB: Yes. The Army Air force had taken over a number of hotels to put the recruits in. The program there was essentially learning something about Army life with a major in close order drill. We did a lot of drilling, a lot of marching.

Q: Did you do a lot of that on the beach?
DB: We did it on roads, right next to the beach. I mean, where we marched, you could see the beach and the ocean. But it was on the roads.

Q: What were your accommodations like? Did you have regular hotel rooms?
DB: They were very nice hotels. Of course, a hotel room that might have been built to accommodate a couple wound up with, I don't know, maybe a half a dozen or more soldiers and all their equipment. So we didn't have the luxury that the guests would have had before the war. But it was very nice, probably the best of any I had while I was in the service.

Q: How long was that basic training for?
DB: That ran, I think, about eighteen weeks. It may not have been quite that long. Hard for me to remember. It may not have been. Maybe it was twelve weeks. I can't remember.

Q: Once you completed your basic training, where did they send you next?
DB: At basic training, we took various tests to determine what schools we were going to be sent to. They ran all the way from cooks and bakery school to radio school and so forth, which is where I went. I did well with the Morse code test, and so I was assigned to radio school, which was fine by me, because radio had been a hobby of mine.

Q: Did you know Morse code prior to that?
DB: No, I didn’t. When I was younger, in my teens, a friend of mine and I had hooked a wire between our homes and we were trying to teach ourselves code. But it was a telegraph that operated with clicks, and the code we used in the military used an oscillator. So you had a tone which is actually much easier to read than clicks. But I had been interested in radio. And I did a great deal of what is now called DX-ing, which is long distance listening. My son does it, and he could tell you more about that. In those days, I don't think they even talked about DX-ing, but that's what I was doing. Staying up late at night so I could pick up distant stations and that kind of thing. And, you know, growing up in the twenties and thirties, I had a great interest in flying. Going to radio school with the hope of becoming part of an air crew.

Q: Had you ever been up in an airplane before?
DB: No, I hadn't. When I was a kid, twelve or thirteen years old, I rode my bicycle from my home in Rockville Center over to Roosevelt Field, a distance of maybe ten or twelve miles. Isn’t that far. I walked up and down the flight line, hoping maybe somebody would ask me if I'd like to go for a ride. There were biplanes in those days. What stands out in my mind are these big, red biplanes, but nobody ever did invite me. So the first time I flew was in the Army Air Force.

Q: How long was your radio school for?
DB: That would have run about eighteen weeks.

Q: During that time, basically, you knew that you were being trained or groomed to be an aircraft crew member.

DB: Not necessarily because some of the radio operatives got assignments other than to air crews, but that was what I wanted.

Q: Once you completed that training, what happened next?
DB: I was fortunate to finish toward the top of my class so that those in my group were selected to go to a communications cadet school. Which led to a commission. But before getting there, we had to put in a period of instructing at the same school that we just graduated from. So I became an instructor. That was kind of interesting, because the students that were assigned to me were about as good as I was. And I had to give them their radio code checks. To pass a radio code check, the student had to be able to copy three minutes of code with no more than three errors. But to give them the check, I had to copy it with what we called solid, that is, with no errors. Otherwise, how could I check them? So, as I say, we were working on twenty words a minute at that time. It took eighteen to graduate, and I was working on twenty-five when I graduated, which is really a little faster than you can copy with a pencil, which is the way we were doing it. You really needed a typewriter to do twenty-five words a minute. So I spent a great deal of my free time at school practicing code.

Q: How long were you an instructor?
DB: From August until we shipped out on Thanksgiving Day, November, whatever that was. 1943.

Q: You shipped out to where?
DB: We went to communications cadet school. That program had two features or two sections, two parts to it. The first part, at Seymour Johnson Army Airfield in Goldsboro, North Carolina, was what they called pre-technical school. It essentially was what was often referred to as ninety-day wonder school. Where you learned Army life from an officer's perspective. It had a great deal of West Point characteristics to it in that we had upperclassmen, lower classmen. We had hazing, we had square meals, if you know what they are. We had white-glove inspections. That was very West Point like. Some of the guys found that hard to take. I got through it okay. In fact, I became a cadet in ten [unclear 10.43]. We finished there and were sent to the second phase of the training, which was at Yale University, which was about the same length of time, about three months. At that point, at the end of that you would get a commission.

Q: Now, what did you learn at Yale in the second part?

DB: Yale was a technical school and we had been told it would be pretty much of a repetition of what we had been through at Sioux Falls, which sounded great. I did fine at Sioux Falls, so I was pretty optimistic about Yale. That turned out not to be the case though. Militarily I did fine. I became a cadet squadron commander. But in the enlisted radio school we learned to build radio receivers and transmitters by reading schematics.
The difference was, at Yale we had to design the schematic. They don't use these anymore, but determine the size of resistors and capacitors, or condensers, as we called them then, in the circuitry. Essentially we had to design the circuitry that was used to create the schematic. That required a level of mathematics that I didn't have. In school
I had taken a commercial course which lacked higher mathematics and I couldn't handle that. They were reluctant to wash me out because of my cadet rank. It’s kind of demoralizing to have the commander washed out. [gets emotional] It still hurts to think about. But on the third washback I told them they better wash me out. So I went back to what was called the GI Army and was given my former rank of corporal, which was quite a letdown when I expected to go for bars. So from there, there were a bunch of us eliminates that were shipped to gunnery school at Yuma, Arizona, where we got our aerial gunnery training.

Q: What was that like?
DB: It was very hot because it was now July, August, and September when I was out there. And one-hundred-ten degrees was an ordinary day in Yuma, Arizona. That made flying very rough because of the thermals that rose off of the desert. The high altitude gunnery was okay at twenty-thousand feet or more. You were above that. We did quite a bit of flying up there, shooting at towed targets. Some of it was low level gunnery. Shooting at targets on the desert floor. And we bounced around pretty badly when we were flying at low levels. But eventually we got through that and graduated. I was assigned from that point to go to Plant Park in Tampa, Florida for crew assignment and given a ten-day delay en-route to go from Yuma to Tampa, Florida. I got to go home. That's the first time I had been home since I was inducted.

Q: How long had that been?
DB: That was from January 1943 until September 1944.

Q: You were away for quite a long period of time.

DB: So anyway, we proceeded down to Tampa. Plant Park had been a fairground of some type, and the Army had taken it over. All the crews were formed there, and that's where I met my crew.

Q: Where were they from? From all over the country?
DB: Yeah, they really were. The aircraft commander, the pilot, chief pilot, head pilot was from Pittsburgh. The co-pilot was from California, the navigator from Florida. We had an armored gunner, which is like an enlisted bombardier. They called them Toggliers. He was from Oklahoma. The ball turret gunner was from California. The engineer top turret gunner was from Virginia. The tail gunner was Maryland, and I was from New York. That was pretty eclectic. We got along fine.

Q: Did you train quite a bit with them before being shipped overseas?
DB: Yeah, we were shipped from Plant Park, down the Hillsborough River to MacDill Field. It's now MacDill Air Force base. It's still a permanent Air Force installation, and we took our overseas training there. We flew practice missions as a crew until December.
That was from September to December. That period of time, we flew together as a crew.

Q: That was on a B-17?
DB: B-17s. Our gunnery training was in B-17s too.

Q: What was your impression of the B-17?
DB: I was glad I was on it. It wasn't fast. It could fly high. It couldn't carry a particularly big bomb load, but it could take a lot of abuse. So anyway, we flew up to. I can't remember whether we flew or were taken by train, but we got up to Hunter Field, which is in Savannah, Georgia. Picked up a new B-17. It had seventeen hours on it, and we were going to ferry that across. We got another furlough at that point. It was early December, mid-December, and we were given a five-day furlough. Which wasn't a whole lot of time, but I hopped a ride on a C-47 headed north. It was going to Dover, Delaware, and then on to Buffalo. I got off at Dover and took the train home to Long island, had an early Christmas and immediately made a reservation on Eastern Airlines for the trip back on a DC-3, which is a civilian C-47. It was the first time I was on a commercial airline, and I think I bumped a civilian. So we got back, reassembled it at Hunter, picked up the plane, and headed out, headed north. I was overnight in Dix Field, which today I think is McGuire Air Force Base, and just overnighted there. And then left there and went to Manchester, New Hampshire, which was our port of embarkation.

Because of the weather, and some of the crew got sick with colds and that sort of thing, we were delayed in getting out of Manchester. So we were there for quite a while. In fact, we were there over Christmas. I guess right after that, we took off and flew to Goose Bay, Labrador [NewFoundland]. We were there for a day or two, it was winter. I remember the snow was piled so high in Labrador, they would clear paths with big [unclear. 19.22] The snow was tremendously deep. In fact, I think we landed on snow. The runway, I don't think, was clear down to the asphalt. We went from there to Meeks Field, which is in Keflavik, Iceland. In those days, we didn't have the range to make it all the way across, all the way. I think those planes who went to Gander, Newfoundland, did go from Gander directly across. They made it a one stop trip. But the way we went by way of Labrador was kind of a rock hopping thing. In fact, we flew over the tip of Greenland in case we had to land there, but we didn't, and landed at Meeks Field. We were there for maybe four days. Weathered in at Meeks Field in Iceland. Left there and landed at Valley, Wales.

Q: What was the flight like over the ocean? How long did that take? Approximately?
DB: Because of weather delays and some illness, it took a long time, I would say. We left our port of embarkation, Grenier Field in Manchester, sometime between Christmas and New Year's, late December, and we got to Valley, Wales in February.

Q: Wow.
DB: Yeah. We had a lot of delays. I think you have to understand that most of the crews on these planes, I'll talk about the pilots, particularly because they're the ones that are most responsible for safe flight. The rest of us are pretty much passengers, except the navigator. He's a hard working guy. But most of those pilots had only a few hundred hours of flight time. You know, they had their training and their transition to multi-engine and finally to the B-17. But if you put all those flight hours together, you're talking about a pilot with relatively low time, not experience. So they didn't want them flying in extremely difficult weather conditions. The weather had to be satisfactory where you took off and also where you were destined to go. That's one of the reasons it took longer. Because when we were in Iceland, kept there by bad weather, I could hear the C-54s, the air transport command coming and going. But those pilots were used to flying in that kind of weather. At Valley, Wales, we turned our plane over to the replacement depot, because we only ferried it. It wasn't going with us to the bomb

group. And we were assigned to the 305th Bomb Group in Chelveston, which is in Northamptonshire, about fifty miles north of London.

Q: Now, is that part of the 8th Air Force?
DB: Yes, it was. 40th Bomb Wing, 1st Division, 8th Air Force. The 305th and its neighbor at Thurlay in England were the two oldest bomb groups in Europe. They had gone over in 1942 or 1943. The 306th was commanded by General Curtis LeMay, who was then a colonel. He was long gone by the time I joined the group late in the war. But it was a famous bone group.

Q: How were you guys accepted as the new kids on the block?
DB: Well, because tours of duty were determined by the number of missions, the air crews were constantly turning over, so there really wasn't such a thing as a new kid on the block, because there was a constant turnover of air crews. The ground crews were permanent, but they were used to this constant turnover of air crews. As a crew finished its required number of missions, they were sent back to the States. So being new was not a problem. Everybody was new.

Q: What were your accommodations like?
DB: We lived in Nissen huts, typical British RAF type arrangements. This had been an RAF field, but the US Army Air force had taken over many of the British bases. In fact, England was almost one massive air base, so they were typical and adequate. Surprisingly, though, the UK is far north of New York, but its climate is more mild. Not necessarily up in Scotland or the Hebrides, but down in Northamptonshire, where we were based, it was quite mild. In fact, when we landed in February in Valley, Wales, it was like spring. The grass was green and the birds were chirping. It was not an uncomfortable environment. The Nissen huts were fine. Very adequate.

Q: Before you went on your first mission, your first bombing mission, did you go on any training flights or missions?
DB: Yeah, for a week or two. We did practice missions up over what they called The Wash, which is a very large bay, if that's the right name for it. Up in the northern part of England, on the North Sea. We did practice missions up there. I can't remember exactly what we did. I'm sure they must have had targets of some kind. Of course, the navigator got to do navigation, and the pilot got to do the flying, and the radio operatives would work ground stations and so forth. The gunners, I don't know whether they shot anything or not, but we did a couple weeks of that before we did our first real mission.

Q: Being assigned to that crew, you were a gunner and not a radio operator?
DB: Okay, now, the gunnery part, I was a pretty good radio operator, if I do say so.
I was an adequate radio mechanic. That was the other part of radio school. I was a passable gunner, but not great. But fortunately for me, when we got overseas, we found that they had removed the radio hatch gun. So the radio operator didn't have a gun. I never fired in combat.

Q: So you were the B-17 radio operator?
DB: Radio operator. The reason I removed that gun, it wasn't terribly effective. A lot of these flexible or handheld machine guns weren't. Even the waste window machine guns weren't all that effective. The turrets with their electric gun sights were much more effective. And the top turret, which was operated by the engineer, covered the same field of fire as the radio hatch gun did with more accuracy than the radio hatch gun. So they just sealed up the hatch and took the gun out. So I never had to fire the gun, which is fine. I preferred the radio to the gunnery.

Q: Tell us about your first mission. What was that like and where did it go?
DB: Well, you know, you hear so much about it in training and so forth that obviously when you go on your first mission, there's a lot of apprehension. By this time of the war, the Luftwaffe was not much of a factor. There was still very accurate flak, anti-aircraft from the ground that was heavy and accurate. That continued right through the end of the war. But the Luftwaffe itself was not much of a factor any longer. And on that first mission, we didn't see any enemy fighter planes.

Q: Were you hit with flak?
DB: Oh, yeah, we got hit with flak. The plane I was in was never knocked down. I saw planes that were. First mission was interesting in that we went to a place called Swinemundi on the Baltic coast. The purpose of the mission was to hinder the evacuation of German troops who were being pushed back by the Russians advancing from the east. And by bombing the harbor installations, we hope to interfere with their ability to evacuate their troops. My recollection is that the 305th and maybe other groups that participated, I don't know about, got some kind of a citation from the soviet government. [laughs]

Q: Do you recall how long that mission was?

DB: My missions were all pretty long. Do we have a minute?

Q: Oh, sure, sure.
DB: I happen to have my Air Force form 5A, which is a record of flying time here. They gave me this when I was discharged, so I can look back and I can see. It's a separate sheet for each month. So I would be talking about the month of March, because that was March 12 on that first mission. If I can. It's a little easier for me to see the dates on this thing, the way it's in here.

Q: Was that a high altitude mission?
DB: Oh, yeah. They all were. Our typical missions were thirty-thousand feet.

Q: How did you keep warm?
DB: There were heat vents that took heat from the engines. Totally ineffective. I don't know if any heat came out of those things, but we wore electric heated suits under the rest of our jackets and that sort of thing.

Q: Was that adequate?
DB: The thing about the electric heated suit was that the bottom of your legs are against the seat of the chair and your back, if you were leaning back in the chair. I had a chair because I was a radio operator. The gunners, of course, had no chair, so they wouldn't have this problem, but the pilots and navigators and the radio operator would have this problem. It became very hot where the electric heated suit was pressed against your skin. The outside air temperature was thirty degrees below zero. The electric suit didn't do a lot for the rest of your body. So it was a peculiar feeling of being too hot in parts of your body and freezing in other parts. That was unusual. I should have, oh, this is June, and I have to get back in May and see.

Q: Did you normally fly the same airplane?
DB: I flew quite a few in an airplane and the last three numbers of the serial number were zero, two, five.

Q: Were any of the planes named at all that you flew?
DB: Ours had a name that was given to it by a previous crew that flew it before. Somewhere in my records, I had that name, but I don't remember it. But I nicknamed it “Wee Willie”, because, sarcastically, it's a big airplane. There was a big W painted on the fuselage side of the airplane around the radio room window to identify it as that particular plane within the 364th Bomb Group, which was

identified with a smaller WF. And part of the 305th Bomb Group, which was identified by a black triangle on the vertical stabilizer of the airplane with a big white letter G in it and a green stripe. So you could tell the group, the squadron, and the particular plane. The phonetic for W is William, or was, it's not now. It's whiskey now. In those days, it was William, and a lot of the radio operators would say, willie.

Q: Did you decorate your flying jacket at all?
DB: Yeah, I had a nice A2 jacket that the Army issued. Very similar to the one I have here, [gestures to a jacket] except this is goat skin. And my recollection is that the issue jacket was cowhide, sturdy jacket. It was adorned with the group insignia and the squadron insignia. The sad part of that story is that, and jumping ahead here now. But when I was discharged, we went through Camp Kilmer in New Jersey, where the quartermaster guys took certain items of equipment and uniform from us. And I lost my A2 jacket. I had a nice Eisenhower jacket that I had tailored to fit. It was a particularly nice one. It was handed down from crew to crew based on seniority, and they took that away, too, and reissued stuff that we actually had never worn in service. And that was just to get home in. So that's the story of Wee Willie.

Q: After that first mission, once you got back to base, what happened next? Was there any kind of debriefing?
DB: Yeah, we had a debriefing. The Red Cross women were there. Can't say girls. They were too mature to be girls. Nice, nice ladies. And they provided us with coffee and donuts before we went into debriefing.

Q: We always hear stories where they gave you guys a shot of whiskey when you came here.
DB: I was just about to say. My recollection was, after the debriefing, we could have a shot of whiskey. I don't remember ever taking it. I was a non-smoker, non-drinker. [laughs]

Q: What was the debriefing like? Was it all the crews together?
DB: I don't remember. I really don't remember in detail too much about it. But I'll tell you about one debriefing. We did a mission to Hamburg, Germany. Where the heck was that? [looks for the date in his papers] March 20, 1945. Of course, as gunnery students, we had had a lot of aircraft recognition, and we thought we knew every enemy aircraft there was. And on that mission, we were attacked by a

plane we didn't recognize. [gets emotional] It was very fast, and it flew through the formation. There were two of them that came through our particular formation. They had twenty millimeter cannons. I don't know if we knew that at the time, but they hit some of our planes, but not critically. Didn't knock anybody down. A friend of mine was injured by flying Plexiglas, but that's the only injury I know of. We had a P-51 escort, and the P-51 at the time was considered a pretty fast airplane, but he couldn't keep up. [gets emotional]

Q: Were those the German jets?
DB: They were, yeah. It was the Me 262, which was the first operational German jet, and we didn't know that. We found it out at debriefing. That's the one debriefing I remember.

Q: You didn't lose any aircraft on that mission?
DB: No. I know there were aircraft lost on missions at that time because I have records here that my late tail gunner's grandson developed, cut from governmental sources that gave casualty rates and that kind of thing. But I never saw a plane. I saw one that was shot down, not all the way down, as it turned out, but went down in smoke. They had a fire on the flight deck. I found it later. I think they had one of the engines burning, and I think the pilot was trying to put the fire out by diving. We saw them go down, but they turned up at base later. So they were hit, but they weren't fatally hit.

Q: Do you want to tell us about that incident where you had a piece of flak come through your radio?
DB: Well, you know, that wasn't really an incident. We got a lot of that. Just a small piece of flak. I'll show it here. I put it on a chain. At the time, I thought I would give it to one of my sisters as a necklace to wear. You can't. It's just a little tiny piece of scrap metal. [shows flak on a chain] The pieces weren't all that size. Some of them were larger. This particular one, though, embedded itself on my radio set.

Q: Did your radio still function?
DB: It did. The tag here quotes me as saying that this yellow paint on this piece of black that came off the radio, but here, sixty-four years later, that yellow paint has disappeared, so it's not there. I doubt very much that my sister ever worried. This thing. It's not exactly beautiful, but a souvenir.

Q: Did any of the crew on your aircraft ever receive any wounds? Did any of the crew members on any of your own personal missions, was anyone ever wounded at all?
DB: No. No. As I say in that one mission at Hamburg, a friend of mine who was a togglier, enlisted bombardier was injured by the Plexiglas when those Me 262s came through and fired a twenty millimeter cannon. One of them went through the Plexiglas nose of his plane, and some of that Plexiglas embedded itself in his hand. That was not really a serious injury. All those pieces had to be pulled out when he got back. Interestingly, because they wanted to award him the Purple Heart, he felt it wasn't serious enough, and so he declined it. Later, when the war was over, they set up a point system for being returned to the States. It was based on a number of factors. One, the number of months you've been in service, the number of months you've been overseas. Points for awards that you received, points for battle stars, that kind of thing. And that Purple Heart would have given him five points. So he was sorry at that point that he declined it.

Q: Now, how many missions did you fly all total?
DB: Only seventeen. The war ended. My last mission, which was really one of my two worst, was to Pilsen Czechoslovakia. The target was the Skoda Armament Works. But Czechoslovakia was considered enemy occupied. Not an enemy country, but an occupied country. So we were told to bomb the target only visually, no radar. To try to limit the collateral damage, as they now say. I don't think we had that expression then. To try to make the bombing as accurate as possible, we were to bomb only visually. When we got to the target, there was a cloud cover. So we proceeded to go around and come back again. We did that three times. Of course, the flak was getting pretty heavy and pretty accurate by that time. But we did manage to get rid of the bombs. Hopefully they landed on the factory. In fact, I have a picture here of the factory showing the damage. [shows photo of damaged factory]

Q: How many aircraft were on that mission, roughly?
DB: You know, I have records here that my late tailgunner's grandson developed. It says exactly on these missions, it tells how many planes. Interestingly, at the time I was flying, we knew these were thousand plane missions. That’s what we called them. But what I didn't realize until I saw these official records later was that all those thousand planes didn't go to the same target. There were often several targets. So there weren't a thousand planes over one target. There could have been hundreds of planes, maybe three or four-hundred planes. So I don't

know exactly how many were on that particular mission. But that surprised me. Because at the time, I thought the whole thousand were going to one target.

DB: Where were you when you heard that..oh, first, let me ask you, what was your reaction, if you recall, when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?
DB: Yes. The war was over at that time, and we were still based in Chelveston, England.
It was a shock.

Q: When the war ended, what was it like? Was there a lot of celebrating?
DB: Yeah, it was. I can't remember now whether we were warned. We had all been issued Colt 45 automatic pistols, and we could carry them on missions if we wanted to. My own feeling was that I didn't think I could shoot my way out of Germany with a 45. And it was heavy. It's a heavy weapon for a handheld weapon and accurate only at very close range. So I didn't carry it. I kept it locked in my foot locker. But there were nine or ten men in the crew, all having Colt 45 pistols. And the powers that be figured that there was going to be a lot of celebrating, you know, some of it not entirely sober. So I can't remember whether we had to turn our pistols in at that point or whether we were just warned not to use them. But I'm not sure that there weren't some [that were] fired in the air. I didn't join those celebrations. There was another one, of course, at VJ Day, which was pretty wild, too.

Q: Now, were you still overseas when Japan surrendered?
DB: Oh, yeah. After VE Day, most of the heavy bomb groups and maybe other groups in Europe were redeployed to the States to be transitioned into B-29s and shipped to the Pacific. Two bomb groups were left in Europe, the 305th and the 306th, because they were the two oldest bomb groups there and they were assigned to the Casey Jones Project. Here's another book, [shows *Casey Jones* book] I think another radio operator that I knew [who is] now deceased sent me this. This tells about the Casey Jones Project. Casey Jones was to photo map from twenty-thousand feet, Europe and North Africa. Of course, now they can do that much better with satellites. The maps they had, they wanted better maps than were available at that time. So they used these two bomb groups to photo map a great part of Europe and North Africa. The 364th Bomb Squadron, which was mine, one of four squadrons in the 305th group, was sent to Iceland at one point to photo map Iceland. We were told our twelve planes could photo map Iceland in three days in clear weather. Three months later, I was sent back. [laughs] You

don't say Iceland and clear weather in the same sentence. [laughs] They don't get much clear weather in Iceland. So that was a project. Incidentally, on that photo mapping project, my job was to turn the camera on and off. A Fairchild aerial camera mounted on the floor of the radio room. Which is how it became my job to turn it on, to turn it off. The navigator would tell me when to do that. It took sequence pictures automatically. They overlapped a lot and made a mosaic. The Corps of Engineers took those photographs to convert them into maps. We did that until I came back to the States in January 1946.

Q: And you were based right out of Iceland?
DB: We were based in Iceland. I was up there for about three months. What had happened was, after VE day, the group was moved to Europe. The 305th and 306th were moved to the continent when everybody else went back to the States. And the 305th was at a place called St Trond in Belgium. The Army called it A25. It was a former Luftwaffe base. And so we did photo mapping of the continent from there, and then were sent temporarily up to Meek's field in Keflavik, Iceland, to photo map Iceland. When I was detached from the group and brought back to St Trond, that Iceland project was still going on. So they hadn't finished it. I don't know if they ever did finish it. I was given a one week furlough in Riviera. So I was in Iceland one day, and a couple of days later I was down in the Riviera. In those days, that was quite a dramatic change.

Q: What was it like traveling around Europe after the war had ended?
DB: Very, very interesting. I mean, I became a tourist. My dad's family roots were in Scotland. So I got up to Glasgow and Edinburgh, and I saw a lot of Scotland and a lot of England, too. Shakespeare country and Cambridge University. I traveled all over England, London, of course, and I got to Paris. This was after VE Day. When we knew we were going to be moved to the continent, we needed office equipment. We took a C-47 over to an airport called Villacoublay, outside Paris, to locate furniture that was being left behind by redeployed ground headquarters to use ourselves. So I had an overnight stay in Paris. The first time I've been there. Took myself in a self guided tour. I didn't speak French, but I stopped at a newsstand and got a map of the city and just took myself by the hand, walked around and, of course, the Riviera. Actually I got to Schweinfurt too. That was after the war. We went to a number of places that had been bombed. Schweinfurt was a famous target, and had resulted in many losses of American aircraft. The factory there produced ball bearings, which were essential to the German manufacturing capability. I can tell you that. There wasn't a brick left, except in [unclear. 50.28] The target was totally destroyed. I didn't go to

Schweinfurt. I mean, that was earlier, 1943, I think when that happened. So we got to places like that. We did a low level tour of the Ruhr Valley. Destruction was unbelievable. It was not all Air Force destruction. A lot of it was artillery, ground warfare. And the road took a terrible beating. We flew low level over that to see it. Our missions were thirty-thousand feet. You really couldn't see much. So that was enjoyable.

Q: Did you get to see any USO shows at all while you were stationed overseas?
DB: I don't think we saw any USO shows, but the service clubs were operated by the USO.

Q: How did you get along with the civilian population?
DB: Fine.

Q: Did you find any kind of food shortages, like in town, or if you wanted to go out and have a meal?
DB: When we were there, the civilians had severe restrictions. Everything was rationed. We and the armed forces were pretty fortunate. We weren't really denied much. Well, we didn't get real eggs much. We had powdered eggs. We didn't get much real milk. It was powdered milk, but we ate well. And of course, the civilians were getting by too. Eating was not a problem for us. In fact, the mess hall personnel treated us like royalty.

Q: When did you eventually go home?
DB: Early January 1946. And we didn't fly back, unfortunately. We were loaded onto forty-and-eights boxcars and it was about a three-day rail trip to Antwerp, Belgium. The Army camp there was called Top Hat. We spent several days there and loaded on a cargo vessel called Fayetteville Victory, which was a victory ship designed for cargo. It didn't have any cargo. It had troops, and it didn't ride very well in heavy seas. Crossing the North Atlantic in January is an experience in a cargo ship that isn't adequately ballasted. So it was a very rough trip. I was fortunate in that, being among the top-three grade enlisted men, I was assigned a cabin. A midship. Not luxury because there were twelve men in that cabin in three-tier bunks. But those of lesser rank were all pushed up in the bow of the ship to hold it down. We were nine days on that ship and just bouncing all over the place. It must have been terrible up there. [gets emotional]

Q: What was it like when you pulled into New York?

DB: We arrived in New York very early in the morning. It was, I'll take that back. I think we arrived during the night, anchored offshore, and we didn't proceed into the port until daybreak. It was a gray, gloomy day. We could make out the Statue of Liberty. We docked in New Jersey and we're transported to Camp Kilmer, which is somewhere in that vicinity. I don't think it exists anymore. And that's where we went through the initial part of being discharged, where they took away parts of our uniform and reissued uniforms to us. In that process, I lost my A2 jacket, which was my leather flying jacket and my Eisenhower jacket. We didn't make a big fuss about that because we didn't want anything to hold up our discharge.

Q: Okay, I'm going to stop for a minute and change films. Okay, we're back. We were talking about missions. You mentioned one of the missions was how long?
DB: Well, that first mission you had asked me before, how long. That mission to Swinemundi was where we bombed the harbor installations. It was ten hours and five minutes long. Those missions at that stage of the war were long because they were deep into Germany. So while we didn't have anything like the casualties that the missions suffered early in the war, our missions were much longer. So, time wise, my seventeen missions probably could have been more hours than somebody who completed twenty-five missions in 1943 or so, just time wise.

Q: Did you ever have any missions that were scrubbed? I mean, you'd start off on a mission, and due to weather or for one reason or another—
DB: I don't think we ever got a mission scrubbed once we became airborne. But what happened was that we were called, typically, out of bed at, say, two-thirty in the morning, driven by a GI truck to the mess hall and given breakfast. Then driven to the briefing room for briefing. Then driven to the equipment room to pick up our equipment. Get out to the dispersal area, load the barrels of the machine guns into the machine guns. The enlisted men had to do that. The officers didn't. [smirks] And then we waited. The control tower wasn't using radio, for obvious reasons, because the enemy could pick up that and they'd know something was starting. They used a Very pistol from the control tower and shot flares into the air. It would be a green flare for go. We were all out there, and it was all assigned who was going to taxi out first and so forth. If we got two red balls, as we called it. The Very pistol would fire up two red flares and we called them red balls. Then the mission was scrubbed. And that happened from time to time. I was always very disappointed when that happened, because the worst part of the mission was all of that preparatory. It was almost a relief to get going. But I had a friend, another radio operator, in fact, the guy who sent me this Casey

Jones thing, who was always happy to see those two red flares. He figured the mission he didn't go on was one he didn't have to worry about getting back from. [gets emotional] His name was Albert, first name Albert. He was generally known as Al. I called him Red-Red, because he was looking for those two red flares. [laughs] But to me, I hated to see it because now, having gone through all of that, it was probably maybe six o'clock in the morning by now. And we've been through all of that, and the whole thing is scrubbed and we have to go through it again the next day.

Q: The day before your mission, did you know that you'd be picked that night or you'd be sound asleep and somebody would tap you and say you're going?
DB: They didn't tap you. The CQ, Charge Quarters, would come into the barracks and started shouting the names of people who were to fly that day. Then you knew you were going. They didn't tell us the day before. It was pretty secret.

Q: You completed your missions, you were sent back to the States. You were mentioning before that you were turning your clothing in, your equipment.
DB: Some parts of it, yeah. Not everything, but, yeah, they did. Why they did that, I don't know.

Q: Were you discharged at that point?
DB: No. That was Camp Kilmer. And then we were sent down to Camp Fort Dix. And that's where I was discharged, from Fort Dix. I didn't want to delay the discharge to sign up for the reserve. We had the opportunity to sign up and stay in the reserve. Gotta tell you, in those days, there was a strong feeling, especially, I think, in the military, that we'd be back in war with the Russians. I had friends who were shot down on a raid to Berlin. We all wore American flag armbands. They were captured by the Russians and, in effect, interned. [gets emotional]

Q: And this was when the war ended?
DB: It was close to the end of the war. After VE Day, they were repatriated, but they were treated like POSs.

Q: By the Russians?
DB: We always felt that the Soviet Union was an ally of necessity. What is that expression? The enemy of my enemy is my friend. But we didn't see them as friends. If war started again, I didn't want to start at the bottom. I was a top-three grade enlisted man, a technical sergeant. And so I thought I'd stay in reserve. Well, I didn't want to do it at Fort Dix because I wanted to get out. But I did the

next month. I went down to Whitehall Street, Manhattan, and I signed up, and I got my tech sergeant rating back. I was assigned to the reserve, but I was working full time and going to college at night. There really was no time for any reserve activity, so I never got active. In 1947, the following year, the Air Force was separated from the Army, became a separate branch. Separate Army. And I was transferred from the Army Reserve to the Air Force Reserve and commissioned.

Q: Let me go back just a little bit. When you came back to the States, were you with your crew? Did the whole crew come back together, or were you separated?
DB: Separated. I had more points than some of my fellow crew members because I had flown more missions. There were times when I was flying almost every day. Just, for example, [looks at his papers] March 12th, March 14th, 15th, 19th, 20th, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 28th, and 30th. In a period of just a little over a month, maybe six weeks, five or six weeks, I flew seventeen missions. The reason I flew more than my crew was because I was sometimes assigned to other crews when my crew didn't fly. They needed radio operators on other crews, sometimes in other squadrons of the group. So I was flying missions that they didn't.

Q: Once you were discharged, did you make use of the GI Bill?
DB: Yes, I did. I had started night college before the war, so I had eighteen credits toward my degree with one-hundred-twenty-eight credits needed. My employer paid part of that tuition at that time, and I paid the rest.

Q: Who did you go to work for?
DB: I was working for a bank in New York City, one of the major banks at that time. [It] n longer exists, called Irving Trust Company at One Wall street. I went to NYU, which had a downtown campus, a business school on Trinity Place within two blocks of the bank. I got out of work at five o'clock and I think classes started at five-thirty or five-forty-five. I had a chance to stop at the automat and get something to eat, and then I went to classes. I had eighteen credits before I went into service. After I was discharged, I went back to work immediately for the bank and signed up for the school. The fall session. I got out in January. I went right back to work for the bank and joined the reserve. I didn't start back at college until September.

Q: What did you get your degree in?
DB: It's a bachelor of science degree in business, in banking.

Q: You mentioned joining the Army Reserve. Then they became the Air Force and you were given a commission?
DB: Yes, I was discharged from the Army Reserve and commissioned in the Air Force Reserve. They had a program where a top-three grade enlisted men could apply for a commission and you were given a test. Essentially, as I remember, it was pretty much like that Army general classification test I took when I was inducted into the Army. A very similar kind of test. And they assigned me as a communications officer, which is what I would have been if I had graduated at Yale. But they didn't have any communications reserve units operative, so they assigned me to a reserve unit of pilots. I did attend some of those meetings, but what they were studying and working on had nothing to do with my MOS, my military occupational specialty. I was extremely busy working full-time at the bank and going to college at night and studying in my spare time. I couldn't fit active reserve into that. So at the end of my five-year term as a commissioned officer, I resigned.

Q: Were you a second or first lieutenant when you resigned?
DB: A second. I had started taking a program that was called…I think at that point it was called the Series Twenty. There were probably other series for higher grades, but to be promoted from second lieutenant to first lieutenant, you could take this course called the Series Twenty course. It was a correspondence course, and I was doing that in addition to my homework at college. I did that. Of course, that all went down the drain when I resigned. It was just too much to do all that at one time. I finally got my degree in 1951.

Q: And you didn't get called up for Korea?
DB: I had two invitations, [laughs] and I was pretty sure the third one was going to be an order. It never came through.

Q: You say invitations. What were they?
DB: I think I have that communication somewhere in my records. But essentially it said, we are in dire need of communications officers. Would you consider becoming activated or words to that effect? Military lingo. I don't remember exactly how, but it was obvious that they were asking me to become active.

Q: They were looking for volunteers?
DB: Well, I was already in the reserve. Not to volunteer, but to…yeah, to become activated. It was a tough time for me. I got married, signed a contract to buy a house. I had my civilian career going. It would not have been a good time for me,

which didn't always make any difference. I had a friend who was a PFC in the Army. He had been in the infantry during World War II. He stayed in the reserve, and he went into the armored division because he had always been interested in tanks. And he was a PFC in the Armored Reserve. When the Korean war broke out, he was ordered up. This poor guy had about five children, and how he was going to make it on the PFC pay. [shakes his head] Impossible. He tried everything he knew to get out of going, but he was essential. He must have been the most essential PFC in the world, [laughs] and he was sent to the Pacific. He didn't go to Korea. He was put in charge of a gun room on one of the islands that had been taken by the Americans during the war with Japan. His job there was to issue rifles to civilian guards in the morning and to take them back in at night. That was the essential job. The necessity of your civilian life didn't always count. I was just lucky, I guess, that I didn't get called up.

Q: Did you join any veterans groups?
DB: Never.

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone you were in service with?
DB: Yes, they're all gone now.

Q: You're the last one from your crew?
DB: That's not quite right. No, because there are two of us left on my crew, as far as I know. The navigator, who's not in good shape, he's in a nursing home. I do communicate with his wife once or twice a year at Christmas time, and sometimes in between. He's a couple of years older than I am. He's pushing ninety. He and I are the only ones left. And as I say, I'm not even sure about him. I think if he had died, his wife would have written to me, so I'm assuming he's still extant. But the rest of the crew is gone. Many of my friends were from other crews. Some of them from my cadet days, and we stayed in touch, but they are all gone.

Q: How do you think your time in service changed or affected your life?
DB: Totally for the positive. [gets emotional] I had a friend say that he wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience, but he wouldn't take a million dollars to do it again. [laughs]

Q: We hear a lot of veterans say that.
DB: I was very fortunate. You hear so many guys saying that they were misassigned. The civilian career and experience was one thing and the Army put

them in something else. That wasn't true with me. My military experience was good.

Q: You brought along some memorabilia. Do you want to show us those?
DB: I don't know if it's possible, really, to show you. I think I showed you this thing on Casey Jones. It talks about the photo mapping project. This book here is something. These are official Army Air Force records that my tailgunner's grandson got from governmental units. I'll just show you a page. Here are photocopies, not photocopies, photo stats. Very hard to read. But this book has the official records of all the missions I was on. This one here, [shows bound photo book] I put together formally. [The] tail gunner's grandson and it tells the story of our particular crew. The book is called *Kert's Crew* because Michael Curtis, who we all called Kert, was the pilot. And crews were usually identified by their pilot's name. This book is full of pictures and so forth of our group, of our crew at that time.

Q: Do you have a picture of yourself?
DB: Oh, yeah, a lot of pictures of me. There's probably more of me than anybody else because it's my book.

Q: All right, do you want to show us one of them so we can see what you looked like?
DB: Here is one In my A2 jacket that I lost.

Q: Can you hold that up in front of you? Can you bring it back farther? So I can zoom right in on it.
DB: This picture here was taken in Iceland. The largest waterfall in Iceland, which they call Gullfoss, which in Icelandic means golden falls. It's near [the size?] [unclear 1.14.05] like Niagara Falls. And it's a beautiful place. You can't see very well, but this page here shows the wreck of our B-17. [shows image of plane] We were heading to Iceland for photo mapping, and our engineer was taxiing the plane from one point to another. This was in Prestwick, Scotland. The brakes gave out while he was taxiing it, he lost control of the plane, and it rammed into a, I don't know, brick stucco building that was used as a firehouse and ripped off the wing on the plane. So we had to get another plane to continue on to Iceland. But let's see if there are any other pictures. [thumbs through a photobook] Got two pictures of my crew here. I don't know if we can. One of them is the official picture. This was taken in Manchester, New Hampshire. [shows photo of his crew]

Q: And where are you in the picture?
DB: Well, I have to get over here to see. There I am right there. [points to himself in the photo] This was a hitchhiker. [points to a man in the photo] He was a radar bombardier that hitched a ride with us to get to Europe. He was not part of our crew. [unclear 1.15.48] Bonowski.[?] This is Michael N. Kertis, our pilot. Bob Notestein [?], our co-pilot. Robbie Robertson [?], who's the only other crew member still alive who was our navigator. This is Bob Savile [?], our engineer. Jack Morgan [?], our tail gunner. Chuck Dillow [?], our waist gunner. I'm here, the radio operator. This is Leo Romero [?], the ball turret gunner. And Tommy Landreth [?], the togglier. A togglier, I don't know whether you've heard that expression before.

Q: Yes.
DB: You have. A togglier is an armorer-gunner. At that stage of the war, they would put a commissioned bombardier only in the lead plane of each element, and armorer gunner would be in the bombardier's position on the following planes, but without the bomb site, which was still classified. The [unclear 1.16.49] togglier would watch the lead plane. When the bomb bay doors opened, he toggled the switch to open the bombay doors. When he saw the bomb salvo, he hit the toggle switch to salvo his bomb. So they got a good pattern that way. But that's why they called them toggliers, because they toggled the bombs.

Q: And you also have some medals that look pretty interesting. Do you want to tell us the story about who you got them from?
DB: Yes. [shows a medal] After VE day and after we had been in Belgium for a while and we had finished the, or at least I had finished the Iceland part, the group was moved down to Lechfeld in Bavaria, Germany. We were quartered in a former Luftwaffe base that had been used for testing the Me 262, Messerschmitt jet fighter plane. The first operational jet fighter that Germany had. That anybody had. We had former POWs who were doing housework for us. Janitorial work in the barracks. The barracks had been used, of course, by the German Air force, and now we were using them. And one of these men told me that he had been a fighter pilot in the German Air Force and he had some medals. It's not the one I wanted to show you right off the bat, [grabs a different medal] but it's this one here. And he agreed to sell them to me in exchange for cigarettes. Cigarettes were being used like currency in those days. I bought them using cigarettes. What he said was his Iron Cross. It's marked, it has a swastika in the middle of the Maltese Cross, and it's marked 1939. [shows a medal] He claimed to have been awarded

this Iron Cross for having shot down aircraft, which he hastened to tell me were British, not American. But of course, in 1939 they would have had to have been because we weren't flying over there in those days. So that was kind of interesting. He sold me some other medals. Here's a rather attractive one which shows the Maltese Cross, again with the swastika in the middle. And the back of it says, in German, for faithful service.
I was told that this meant twenty-five years of service in the Nazi party because [shows box it came in] the box it came in has a twenty-five on it. But there's a question about that, because we don't know if the National Socialist Party, the Nazis existed 25 years before this medal was awarded, so there may be some doubt about what it was issued for. But anyway, it's a pretty medal. I have a combat infantry badge here, which is not very pretty. It looks like it's made out of lead. [shows medal]

Q: You mentioned that your father typed the information.
DB: Yeah, he did. He describes it. He said it's worn on the left breast pocket of a blouse immediately beneath the Iron Cross or any other decoration. It goes on to say it may have been given to soldiers who have taken part in at least three attacks on the enemy position on three different days and have overcome the enemy in hand to hand combat. I think the Germans didn't have good metal to make their medals out of. That's not particularly attractive.

Q: Do you want to show us your gunner wings that you have?
DB: Oh, yeah, I have two wings here. When I graduated from gunnery school, these are the wings that we were given. [shows wing medal] It looks a lot like a bombardier's wing. It's supposed to be a bullet with wings dropping straight down. The bombardier wing was very much like that, except the bomb had fins on it, and it was longer and narrower than that bullet. I didn't like to wear this because I didn't really regard myself as a gunner. I didn't even have a gun when I got overseas, so what I wore was something called crewmember wings. [shows wing medal] These wings could have been worn by anybody who was part of a crew. I mean, the pilots obviously would want to wear their wings and the other crew, you know. But I felt, as a radio operator, my MOS was a radio operator gunner. How could I be a gunner, II had no gun. So I preferred this one because it didn't indicate that I was a gunner.

Q: You also received some air medals?
DB: Well, yeah. The only medals outside of theater ribbons, Victory ribbon, good conduct ribbon, and things like that I got was the Air Medal. This was awarded

for each of six missions. That's the Air Medal. [shows medal] I was awarded this twice. They don't give you the medal two times. The second time you get a Bronze Star, and the Bronze Star is put on the ribbon. You don't wear the medal either on your uniform. You wear the ribbon, and the Bronze...not Bronze Star, the Oak Leaf Cluster. Sorry. Oak Leaf Clusters go on the ribbon. So I have the Air Medal with an Oak Leaf Cluster. That would have been for the first twelve missions. I didn't get the third one because I missed it by one mission. I flew seventeen missions, but I didn't care that much about the medal. But I was really trying to set a record for the shortest overseas time anybody ever set. I was flying so much, I would have been home within three months. I would have completed my tour and been home probably in less than three months. I didn't know anybody who had done that.

Q: All right, well, thank you so much for your interview.
DB: Well, thank you. I'm just happy to be here.