

Edward R. Renfro
Veteran

Wayne Clarke
Interviewer

Lexington Ave. Armory
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WC: We're interviewing Mr. Edward R. Renfro. It's May 23rd, 2001. We're at the Lexington Avenue Armory in New York City, and my name is Wayne Clarke. Mr. Renfro, tell me about where you were born and raised.

ERR: I was born December 2nd, 1924. I'm now seventy six. I was born in Huntington Beach, California, and I was raised there. It was a small town, then it was about four thousand people and about that many oil derricks. It was an oil boom town, which was kind of a pooped out oil field and wonderful, wonderful beach. An absolutely marvelous place to be a child in good schools. All the people who went to school there still get together. Most of them still live in California. Let's see. I had an older brother, and a younger sister. My father was an oil field roughneck and my mother was a housekeeper.

When the war started, I was an usher in the local theater, so I was already in uniform. [laughs] I was going to the theater for the matinee. Across the street was a service station. They had a radio blaring [that said] the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Of course, that changed the world overnight. We managed to find a dusty old record up in the projection room and put on the National Anthem. The manager of the theater went up on the stage and told a bunch of little kids in the afternoon matinee what had happened about Pearl Harbor. I was about sixteen then.

When I was seventeen, I graduated from high school. A friend of mine, Leroy Jauman [?], came over and said, A bunch of us are going over to Santa Ana Army Air Base. They built these things just overnight. It was absolutely amazing how the world changed. They had barrage balloons up around the harbor in San Pedro, which was all very exciting. So, we thought we should go over and see if we could become aviation cadets and be pilots. Dumb. What do you know at seventeen? [We thought] Yeah, why not? It would be more fun than being in the infantry. I knew I would join up or something. So we went over and

I passed. I was absolutely astounded. I took all these tests. In fact, I got very high grades. It was a general intelligence test. I'm not good at geometry and algebra, but at general things I'm pretty good. But I had to wait to be called because they wouldn't take me in until I was eighteen. My brother hadn't gone in yet either.

They never did figure out what it was, but something, a barrage balloon or something, flew over the Douglas Airplane Factory, which was about ten miles away. All these anti-aircraft guns started and searchlights and machine guns. They started shooting. It was amazing. We got up on the roof and watched this. It was spectacular to see. It made you really feel like you were in a war. I sometimes think maybe the Army did this on purpose to make the civilians take all this very seriously. [laughs] Anyway, Then I got called. I worked in the meantime pumping gasoline for Standard Service Stations. I went to Los Angeles. There were a whole lot of young men there. We all got on a train and were taken to Camp Kearns, Utah, outside of Salt Lake City. It was just a miserable, miserable place. We got all kinds of shots and marched like crazy. In the information they sent us, [it said] you're going into the service and we will furnish you with all everything you need. Shirts, pants, shorts, everything. Towels, razor blades. So don't bring anything. No golf clubs, no tennis rackets. I didn't have those anyway. Fishing poles or anything like this. No cameras. I wish I had a camera. Anyway, so I went there. I was in some corduroy pants, I think, and a t-shirt and just a light cardigan sweater. We got to Utah and it was March. It was colder than heck. There was still snow on the ground. It was like two weeks before they issued our uniforms. I was freezing to death. They stuck us full of all kinds of serums and stuff. All my glands swelled up. I could hardly move. I had to be helped. I was a puny guy. I was not athletic. I could hardly keep up with all this stuff. But it was a wonderful bunch of guys. I mean, we made instant friends. I'm still in contact with several of them. They helped me out of my bunk and out the door. My glands were all so swollen from these shots that I couldn't march fast enough. The drill sergeant always gave me hell. Anyway, I survived all that.

WC: How long was that school?

ERR: That was just plain old basic training, I guess, about six weeks or something like that. Then they sent us to Sioux City, Iowa. It was a program they initiated because they were getting so many people in the service they couldn't handle them all. Like pilots they couldn't put in training right away. So they sent you to the Army College Training Detachment. That was a wonderful experience. We were there for about two and a half months in Morningside College. It was a wonderful bunch of people. I found all the guys from California were a bunch of smart alecks because we thought we were the golden people. We just knew California was better than anywhere. It was an empire unto itself.

We had patriotic California songs and everything. We were a bunch of beach rats. When we met guys from the Midwest, they were the most honest and straightforward. I immediately liked all these guys. I was a little embarrassed by the California guys. They were all cocksure of themselves. I just met this absolutely wonderful bunch of young men. We did a lot of marching and studying and stuff. Then we were sent to what they called pre-flight Santa Ana Army Air Base where I joined up. That was only about five miles from my home. In fact, I saw the tree in front of my house from the drill field. Then they marched the hell out of us and gave us all kinds of tests. Depth coordination, more shots, of course, aircraft identification, weather, all kinds of basic things. Not much about flying because we didn't fly yet. I guess we were there for two and a half, three months. It's hard to remember now. Flying training took quite a while. Then they sent us to Hancock Flying College in Santa Maria, California. A man named Hancock, a wealthy man, had established this flying school. It was a wonderful place. They had nice dormitories. We were introduced to flying PT-17s, Stearman, which looked like a World War I fighter plane. We were issued all this equipment, leather-padded, wool-lined flying pants, jackets, helmets, goggles. It was wintertime, so we got heavy equipment. Although, the wintertime in California, of course, is lovely. I mean, just the most beautiful time of year. Santa Maria is near the ocean. It's up in the foothills of the Coastal Range. Lovely little quiet town, it was then. We were assigned...tell me if I go on too long.

WC: No, no.

ERR: We were assigned instructors. You got in and the student always flew in the back cockpit. There were two cockpits. The instructor was in the front one. You went up and learned to do spins, loops, chandelles and Immelmann turns, and Pylon eights. And God, that was real flying. That was just delightful. You were out in the open air and you thought you were...there used to be a radio program, Jimmie Allen, *The All-American Boy*. That's Jack Armstrong. He was a young pilot. But anyway, that was who you thought you were. They gave you a big white silk scarf to roll out the back. [gestures scarf blowing back in the wind] It was like being a movie star, like being in a movie. Goggles. God, it was like, you know, *The Dawn Patrol* [1938 movie]. You were supposed to solo after eight hours of training. I think it was eight hours, maybe it was six, but I think it was eight. I was actually the first one to solo. I was astounded. You always think everyone's doing better than you are, and I must have been doing pretty good because after about five and a half hours, the instructor said, Think you could take it up by yourself? [I said] Of course, you never said no. [laughs] I said, Sure. God, I got into this thing. It was very different being by yourself. It just seemed like the world was going all over everywhere. You went up, flew around the field a couple times, came in and

made a landing. I did it. God, you just felt wonderful. Being a pilot, being part of an elite. We didn't think of it that way at the time, but it was. It was terrific for your ego, believe me. Then we got more instruction and more solo time. Should I tell you what I just told you?

WC: Yes, go on.

ERR: The last day, we hadn't graduated, but on the last day of primary training, to give you a treat, they let the cadet fly in the front cockpit. This was a biplane with struts. It looked like a World War I fighter plane. You had to put a crank in the side of the engine which had a big flywheel. One cadet wound it up like this to start the engine. [gestures circular motion] When you were in the cockpit, you said, Stand clear! Contact! All this sort of wonderful stuff. [laughs] I was in the front seat. I was flying around doing aerobatics and whatever, flying from here to there. We were flying back. It was a beautiful, beautiful day. It was wintertime and everything was lush and green in California for about two or three months. It was just a gorgeous, gorgeous place, Santa Maria. We happened to be flying over an auxiliary field that was not in use. We were about four thousand feet and the instructor said, Do a slow roll. So I rolled the plane over on its back. He said, Your nose is dropping off the horizon. You were supposed to keep your nose on the horizon. It was like this. [He said] Push your stick forward. So I pushed it forward. When you were upside down, that pushed your nose up. That put enough strain on the seatbelt. The bolt that held it onto the seat was loose and no one had noticed. It had worn and it snapped. There was a loud clink and the next thing I knew I was falling through the air.

My first thought was, I'll be damned, I fell out of the airplane. I wasn't frightened. I know no one believes this, not because I'm brave, but because I didn't expect this to happen. It's like walking across the floor, all of a sudden the floor opens up and you fall four floors and land in a big soft pile of mattresses and don't hurt yourself. It would be all over before you had time to even get frightened. I was still falling headfirst looking up at the airplane. I turned myself over. They told us how to do that. They gave us very vague instructions on parachuting. You didn't expect it to happen anyhow. I turned to where I was face down, my feet up in the air, and I thought, well, I must be clear of the airplane by now. Reached over and I couldn't grab a hold of the ripcord because of all the padded clothing and I had big gauntlets on. I grabbed a hold of the harness and pulled it out like this and then grabbed the thing. [gestures pulling to the front of him] I looked at it like this, pulled it and it worked. I pulled it. It wasn't all the way out of the guides. I pulled it the rest of the way, which is a mistake because when it opened, it jerked it out of my hand and I lost it. It would have made a wonderful souvenir. Then I looked back over my

shoulder. First I thought, I'm sure I must be clear of the airplane by now. It all came out of the pack, but the cords were still coming out. You can cut this out if you want, but this is an honest thought. God, eighteen years old, falling through the air from four thousand feet. I think the instructor said I must have fallen about eight hundred feet before the chute came open. I looked back and it was all strung up, this white, silk in those days. I thought it looked like a used condom. I was not an innocent kid at that age. I looked back down to the ground and whoomp, it came open. I knew I was all right. The instructor came over and circled around me and waved and I waved. Other planes in the area came over, circled around and waved. I thought, oh my God, I'm a hero. What I really meant was I'm a celebrity. But then I landed and I was going slightly backwards. There was no wind to speak of, and I just rolled along. I was just amazed when I thought about it. I did everything right, and I'd never done this before. I was never very athletic at all, but I just rolled over. Just like an acrobat would, rolled right over the back of my neck. My goggles were up on top of my helmet. I rolled right over them, broke one of the lenses, and scratched my forehead very slightly, but not even enough to leave a scar. That was my only war wound. Landed on my feet. I rolled up the parachute, sat down on it, and lit a cigarette. Everybody smoked then. I don't smoke anymore. The instructor landed, Mr. Al [unclear] 19.10 was his name. He was a brand new instructor. [laughs] His first group of students and one of them falls out of an airplane. He was hysterical. I thought he was going to die.

We went and looked at it. We saw that I buckled my seatbelt. The bolt snapped. That saved my neck. He flew back and sent for an ambulance. They came over and they were hysterical too. Drove me back to the base. Everyone quit flying for the day and they were all gathered in this huge hangar. The ambulance pulled up and I got out carrying this [parachute]. I think the ambulance drivers kind of knew it would give me a little dramatic interest there. They pulled right up in front of my [unclear] 20.03. All these cadets looked up and they all went, Oh, oh! in one voice. I walked over carrying my parachute over to the window where they issued parachutes. The woman who packed parachutes, I thought she was going to faint. She just died. [means ecstatic] Somebody used one of her parachutes and it worked. I gave her a box of candy and a bouquet of flowers. I phoned my mother and I told her that I fell out of an airplane. She said, Oh my God, are you in the hospital? I told her what happened. I knew this story was going to last me for the rest of my life, which it does. Anything comes up about the war and someone says, Didn't I hear that you fell out of an airplane? I get to tell the story all over again. Everyone says, But did you have a parachute? I say, No, but I had terrific knees. [laughs] Anyway, The big, heavy flying boots, flying coveralls under that, and a helmet. I was eighteen years old. Oh, God, you just couldn't believe this was happening to you. A big white scarf, like

in the movies, you know. Oh, boy. Santa Maria was close enough that I got home on a pass once in a while. Anyway, then they shipped us to...should I speed all this up?

WC: Keep going. We're doing fine.

ERR: They shipped us all off to Chico, California. I was really lucky. All my training took place in California.

WC: How long was that basic flying school?

ERR: I think the whole flying training program took about eighteen months. It's been a long time ago and I wasn't paying a heck of a lot of attention at the time. But I think each stage of training was two and a half to three months.

WC: Then you went on to Chico.

ERR: That was in a BT-13, made by Vultee. They called it the Vultee Vibrator. They always gave these things nicknames. It was a good airplane. It was a little bit too easy to fly, actually. Very wide landing gear, monoplane, one lower wing all in metal. The primary trainer [plane] was a fabric plane. Everyone loved that primary, the PT-17 Stearman. It was practically indestructible. It was just a wonderful airplane. We practiced a little navigation flying. When I tell you what I was afraid of. I wasn't afraid of getting hurt. I was always afraid I was going to make a mistake and make an ass of myself. Like if I went out flying from point A to B to C and got lost, which did happen. Not to me, but it happened once in a while. Someone made a mistake and came in an hour late, almost out of gas or something. They got lost. You were washed out if you did that very much. Washed out meant you got eliminated. Since, the Air Corps was part of the Army, it was the Army Air Corps, you ended up in the infantry. In the Battle of the Bulge or something. That happened.

Anyway, one time we learned night flying and flew the planes over to this auxiliary field before it got dark. Well, the guy who was flying this plane, learning navigation and stuff, got lost. He was late getting back. It was already dark. The instructor said, Do you think you could fly this at night without any instruction? [I said] Sure. You didn't dream of saying no. I got in the thing and it was dark. I took off in the dark. I knew the heading and where to go. Everything was lit up, even though it was wartime. This field was two hundred fifty miles from the ocean. It was all lit up and you could see it. I flew over and made a perfect landing without any instruction. That was really exciting. I managed. I did it. Then one of the most exciting things was shooting landings at night. They stacked the planes up around the corners of the field. The top one was about eighteen, two thousand feet. When you were up there, they called in [someone], B-12, come in. You rolled the

airplane upside down like this and just split right straight to their heading, vertically, right straight to the ground. Pitch black, couldn't see a damn thing, and the engine made a hell of a lot of noise. At five hundred feet, you pulled out, came around and made a landing. You did that several times. That was really exciting and a lot of fun. It was flying. That area was full of rice paddies. At night, with the moon shining, it was just gorgeous. All those paddies reflected the moonlight. It was a very nice area up there. They tried to train you for the kind of plane that you really wanted to fly. If you wanted to fly a transport, which not many did, they tried to send you to the advanced training field. The sergeant asked me, What do you want to fly? They asked everyone. He wrote all this stuff down. I said, I want to fly a P-38. He said, That's a twin-engine, so we'll send you to Stockton. That's a multi-engine school. I didn't know and he didn't know. I ended up in Stockton, California. That was advanced training, but for bomber pilots. I didn't want to fly a bomber, but that was the way. What could I do about it?

WC: How old were you at that point?

ERR: Oh, by this time, I think I was still probably eighteen, but I may have been nineteen. No, I think I was still eighteen. You let me know if I'm going on too long.

WC: No, no, not at all.

ERR: I was flying an AT-17, which was a twin-engine called a Bobcat. We called it the Bamboo Bomber. It was too easy to fly. It was a little too safe. It wasn't an exciting airplane to fly. But anyway, you learned to shoot landings at night. With all the lights blacked out, when you finally lined up with the airstrip, then you saw a string of lights. They were all hooded, so you couldn't see them until you were lined up. And by God, I did it. You flew two cadets side by side, and we took turns. I loved night flying. I greased that thing to where you were amazed. You were on the ground and you hardly even heard the wheels screech or anything. It was such a smooth landing. Because during the day you saw the ground and tended to overcorrect. But anyway, that was wonderful. We graduated and they made a movie. I think it was *Winged Victory* [1944]. It was a real wartime kind of a slick tearjerker movie. They filmed our graduation. When we graduated, we all tore the grommets out of our officer hats we got. I still have my uniform. A bunch of tailors from Stockton came up, measured us all and made these uniforms that were superb. I still have mine. It has snaps on the little flaps on the pocket to keep it open, padded inside, beautiful. I feel like I'd like to contact those people, of course they're all dead now, and tell them I still have their wonderful uniform. We had pink [unclear] 29.49 pants. Forest green, called a blouse. It's a jacket. New wings. Officers had the big U.S. emblem on the front. Jesus, I couldn't believe it. This is little Eddie Renfro. How did you end up here?

WC: You were commissioned as a lieutenant?

ERR: Yeah. I was a second lieutenant. Bars on my shoulders. A set of wings. [gestures left lapel]

WC: And you were 18 years old?

ERR: Yeah, I think I was. I could have been just nineteen. I don't really remember now. I must have just turned nineteen. Yeah, I'm sure I had by then. We got ten days leave and my parents drove all the way up Huntington Beach near Los Angeles in a 1940 Ford. Gas was rationed, but they managed to save their coupons. My aunt came along. They went to the graduation and ball afterwards. Then I got ten days leave and went home. There was an atmosphere during the war that was just wonderful. I mean, everyone was together and we all had a cause and there was excitement in the air. Everyone was patriotic. It was just terrific. Of course, the United States never got bombed or that sort of stuff, not the mainland anyhow. Then I went to Lincoln, Nebraska for just sort of an assembly. I mean, we didn't do much there. I liked Lincoln. I loved the people in the Midwest. Went to Louisiana. You were on the train at night. It was full of soldiers, new officers. The train was stopped at a crossroads somewhere. There were a bunch of girls waiting at the crossroads in a car. The guys were all yelling. A couple of them jumped out and got in the car with the girls. The train went on. The girls rushed maybe ten miles to beat the train to the next stop so the guys could get back on. Anyway, I met a girl in Seward, Nebraska, Jenny Clayton. If you ever hear this, Jenny Clayton, all I ever did was kiss you, but you were a sweet, wonderful girl, and I've never forgotten your name. Anyway, I was shipped to Alexandria, Louisiana, which is the capital. It's right in the middle of the state. I haven't been to the south since the war, but I understand it's much more progressive now. No more segregation and so forth. I swear the Civil War hadn't ended [when I was there]. I felt more like I was in a foreign country there, than I did when I went to England. It was humid and oppressive, and the people did not seem happy. There weren't any old happy blacks around. They all looked and acted very depressed. There was a certain amount of resentment against the hundreds of thousands of soldiers around Alexandria. We met our crew. I met my first pilot. I was assigned as a copilot.

Oh, I forgot, when you graduated, you listed what plane you wanted to fly. They had a list, they were all bombers. I wanted to fly a Douglas B-26, I think it was. It was a real hot airplane, a light bomber. In fact, they used it as a night fighter sometimes. I would have been very happy with that. Well, they didn't have any assignments for that. The next one was... maybe it was a B-26. The first one I knew wasn't a B-26. Well, it's unimportant. The B-26 was a, what was the name of that? It was known as the flying

prostitute. No visible means of support. It had a very narrow wing. It was a very hot airplane, but very dangerous to fly. They trained them in Tampa, Florida. They called them "One a Day in Tampa Bay." Well, they didn't have any assignments for that either. Then they had C-47s, which is a twin-engine DC-3 transport plane. I didn't want to fly that. Then B-24, a high-wing four-engine bomber, pilot and copilot. Well, I didn't want that.

WC: Was that the Liberator?

ERR: Yeah. I didn't want to be responsible for nine other people. My God, that would just be a fate worse than death, I thought, still to this day. I'm a freelance illustrator. I do humorous illustrations. I can throw all this in. I'm pretty good too. I've avoided running a business or something all my life. In the end, I didn't want to be a B-17 first pilot, so I ended up willy-nilly and a whole lot of other guys. Well, all you guys who didn't get what you want, you're all going to be B-17 co-pilots. It turned out beautifully. Because I couldn't get what I wanted, but I got something. I lived through it. I met some wonderful people. They sent us to Louisiana to meet our crews. I was assigned to a fellow named Ronald Peter Strauss, who was from a very prominent New York family. He'd gone to Yale and everything. He was a first-rate pilot and a wonderful guy, always calm and in charge and courteous. First gentleman I'd ever known. He was wonderful. I still keep in contact with him now and then. Anyway, we trained down there in Louisiana flying B-17s. The weather was terrible down there. I mean, hot and sweltering, and then gigantic thunderstorms drifted across, lightning and rain for fifteen minutes, then it was clear again. Anyway, so we flew around there. Then we flew back to Lincoln, Nebraska for some reason, or went by train. We had met all of our crew by this time. The ball turret gunner and the radio operator was John [B] Lapicca from here in New York who was killed right after the war. He was going to stay in the service. He was on a B-29 in England in 1946 or 1947 and it cracked up and he was killed, poor guy. We were assigned a brand new airplane and issued big .45 caliber Colt pistols.

WC: A .45 automatic.

ERR: A shoulder holster, ammunition, a big knife about this long. [gestures about eight inches] Escape kits that you put on your knee pouch in case you were shot down. It had a little wonderful silk map in there, a little tiny compass that you hid in your ear or in your hair or your crotch or somewhere. Various things like that. Which was all very glamorous. Oh boy. And so we flew to...you tell me if I'm going on too long.

WC: Okay, let's just stop for a minute. I got to change tapes.

ERR: Okay.

WC: This is tape two with Mr. Eddie Renfro.

ERR: So we flew this brand new plane, landed at Grenier Field, New Hampshire to get gas. It was autumn in New England and it was just gorgeous. The airstrip was right by a lake. I'd never been there before. Then we flew to Goose Bay, Labrador [Canada]. That's pretty far north. I remember the trees. A tall tree, but about six feet tall. It was getting to where the trees were getting sparse and they were getting short. There was snow on the ground and we slept in a big hangar. Got gas and stuff. We had a big auxiliary gas tank in the bomb bay and a bunch of equipment. Sleeping bags and stuff they issued us. Here you were, nineteen at this time and, God, you were going off to war.

We were assigned to the 8th Air Force in England bombing Germany, which was wonderful. Some guys I know, a friend of mine, was a P-47 pilot. He was sent to Hawaii and he spent the whole rest of the war flying around patrolling Hawaii. There was no opposition there by that time after Pearl Harbor. He just had the time of his life. Another guy spent his time patrolling Panama. Another one flying a cargo ship all over South America, the Mediterranean, Caribbean. Anyway, I thought that was terrific. We were being assigned to the 8th Air Force. That was the big leagues. We flew over the tip of Greenland. There were icebergs and all this stuff. Can you imagine? [I had] never been much of anywhere before. Here you were flying over Greenland. We landed in Iceland, but we didn't get to go into town or anything, but just slept in a big hangar again. Then we flew on to Valley Wales. It was just gorgeous. Wales is mountainous. There was this airfield there. We landed the plane. Alongside the runway, came a man in a charcoal gray suit with a vest, a bowler hat, a perfectly furled umbrella over his arm riding his bicycle. He was a genuine Englishman. Maybe he was Welsh, but I mean, he was right out of an Alfred Hitchcock movie or something. Then we went to some little brick houses on the ridge of a low hill. The local people fed us some wonderful soup and stuff. There were big black crows sitting on top of these houses, crawling away. My God, it was like *Wuthering Heights*. Here I was in England. My God, I couldn't believe it. Then we went to Stone, England which was a medieval city surrounded by walls. Boy, I'm telling you, it's even far more glamorous now to me than it was then, in hindsight. I've got years of art training and stuff, so I appreciate things like architecture a lot more than I did then.

Then we were sent to our base, which was the 457th Bomb Group, a place called Glatton, England, near Stilton where they make cheese and near Peterborough. That's where all the bomber bases were in the Midlands. We were assigned to this hut. The 457th Bomb Group, I think the 356th Squadron or something like that. It was a Quonset hut that held four, but it could have been three crews of officers. Four officers [which consisted of] a

bombardier, navigator, pilot, copilot. Three or four groups of those. They had all been killed that day except I think two, maybe three. The place was empty. The chaplain came in. We were just sitting down on our bags and stuff, weeping. [He said] It's not always like this. This is the worst thing ever. My God, I'm telling you, when you're nineteen, you're just a callow youth. My thought was, oh my God, this really is the big leagues. I mean, this was like a movie or something. You walked and they had all been killed. One guy was a captain. This was on a raid up on the Baltic Ocean somewhere. From that day on, they were all flak happy. All they ever talked about, these two or three officers that [unclear]. 58.57 They got replacements and stuff. I think there were probably three crews in there, so that would have meant twelve and ten of them had been killed. They were flak happy. In World War I they called it shell shock. That was all they ever talked about. This captain got his Top Gunner engineer's leather flying jacket that had a hole in it and blood on the inside. [The engineer] had been killed and [the captain] wore that thing. He put a squadron patch over the hole and he wore that thing. He went on flying, but they probably haven't gotten over that to this day. Anyway, this was really it, this is war.

Our first mission was probably the most difficult mission we ever flew. It was a milk run. We flew to Holland to bomb a bridge or something. There was no opposition. It only took about five hours. We were a new group, a new plane. We didn't have any bombs. We carried surrender leaflets, which was outrageous. Who wants to do that? [If] you were going to go bomb the enemy, you wanted to drop bombs. But it was the roughest flying I ever saw. Whoever led our group was flying right in the prop wash of a couple hundred other planes in front of us. It was just like a roller coaster, just like this, trying to fly formation. [gestures moving back and forth all over] But we survived it. The officer who led this and his copilot recommended each other for a Distinguished Flying Cross for leading the group through hazardous prop wash. All he had to do was pull out a little bit to the side.

Then we started flying missions and went to thirty five of them. I had my twentieth birthday. I like to think it was over Berlin, but I have no way of knowing that. We bombed Cologne twice, Hamburg, Kassel, Dortmund and all kinds of places in the Ruhr. Not just in the Ruhr, but especially in the Ruhr. Leipzig and Berlin twice. Just all kinds of places. By that time, the German Air Force had been pretty well shot up, so there wasn't much fighter opposition. They were getting jet fighters, and there was practically no defense against them. They went one hundred fifty miles faster than a regular fighter plane. We had fighter escorts. There was a tremendous amount of flak. I was flying mostly in the wintertime, so the weather was just atrocious. You frequently flew...you got above the cloud layer, but you were in this silver haze where you couldn't see the sun,

you couldn't see the ground. It was just surrounded by this silver haze. You could see for several miles of it, but you got disoriented. What's the name? I'm seventy six. A lot of things I can't remember anymore, names of things. Anyway, you thought you were flying straight and level, but you weren't. You were going like this [gestures a steep angle] because you had nothing to orient yourself.

WC: Spatial disorientation?

ERR: Well, that's what it is, but it has a name. I'll think of it in a minute. It was very common and it was nightmarish. You were flying along, six planes or something, and you were on the wing, and they all started going off that way. What the hell's wrong? Why are they going here? We're not supposed to turn here. You could not convince yourself they were right and you were wrong. You were what was happening, you were going off like this. [gestures veering off course] So, we got in the habit, one of us flew and the other one watched the instruments and took turns. And I saw planes drift off, just drift off and disappear, and sometimes never made it back. This happened to a crew. They flew all the way back to the coast. There were several, three or four places on the coast of Brittany where the Germans still held out and they weren't worth conquering. They had maybe six or twelve flak guns and enough ammunition to where we let them sit there. They [the planes that veered off] flew over this and got shot down. Nothing wrong with them except they were...vertigo.

One time we were bombing a bridge, a bridge over the Rhine, and it was really ferociously defended. We turned onto the bomb run. This plane flew way out like this. They apparently thought they were going to get scraped, in other words, run into another plane, which wasn't true. They were clear out like this. [gestures far away from the other planes in formation] Our bomb doors were open and we were carrying one thousand pound bombs. We usually carried five hundred pound bombs, which was a general-purpose standard bomb. Big bombs to blow this bridge up, which we did. This plane came in. Pete was flying. He always flew on the bomber. I was watching this plane. That was part of my job, to watch what was going on out there. He came in, the bomb doors were open, he dropped two bombs and he had four left. A one thousand pound bomb is big. A B-17's carrying capacity wasn't as good as it could have been. He had four bombs in there. [gestures coming back in at an angle] He came in like this, getting closer and closer and all of a sudden he just exploded in one gigantic ball of fire. Like the explosions you see in movies nowadays, pyrotechnical. They look gorgeous. That was what it looked like, just a perfectly round ball of flame and smoke. It blew us clear up like this. [gestures his plane on its side, one wing up, the other down] We almost went over on our back. If we had, we would have never been able to pull it out. It was not very likely anyhow. The

B-17 was a hell of an airplane. It may well have withstood all that. It [the blast] didn't hurt the airplane fortunately. Pete said, help me. I had to put both feet, as he did too, on the right rudder, pulled on the wheel, not a stick, and pulled it like this. [gestures pulling hard to one side with both hands] Finally, we got it. We righted the airplane. Then we went back.

WC: What happened? Were they hit by flak?

ERR: My opinion was that they got a direct hit in the bomb bay with an 88mm flak shell. The most common flak gun was an 88mm, a marvelous, very versatile cannon the Germans had. Sometimes it was a 120mm gun and that made a bigger bang. Some thought that a bomb had dropped on it. I'm sure that was not what happened. I saw the whole thing. A crew in our hut one time returned from a mission. We landed and we were still in the plane watching. What was his name? He went to the University of Michigan. Lovely, lovely guy. [gets emotional] It's funny, I never felt this way about it before. You get older and you think about this nice guy and his crew. They were coming in like this and another plane came in. [gestures hands heading towards each other] Someone screwed up and they ran into each other, maybe one hundred feet off the ground. They hit and exploded. Both crews were killed.

Then another time, sitting again on the runway, a plane that had been shot up was coming in. They couldn't quite make it to the runway, and their wheels were up. The pilot shut off the engine, feathered the engines, and just glided in and hit the dirt. He made a perfect wheels-up landing. Of course, it ruined the airplane. It stopped and all these guys piled out. None of them were hurt. In the wintertime, they lost as many planes and stuff from accidents and things like that. Bad weather, people running into each other. My God, you came in...a B-17 has a one hundred four feet wingspan. There were buildings on the ground. Of course, they weren't too high, a couple of stories at the tallest, and trees. Then there were clouds at maybe three hundred feet. You had dense clouds, rain and you had to land in that. Peter was flying then. He was the better pilot and he had more training than I did. Anyway, we made it every time. No one got killed or wounded. The ball turret gunner almost died. Flak shot out all of his controls. His heated flying suit was not operating and he was freezing. I think he could get oxygen. You checked around every so many minutes with the crew to make sure. He didn't respond. I told someone to go. My job was to check on him. They had to crank his ball turret around by hand and open it up. He was unconscious and they pulled him out. They wrapped him in an electric blanket, which was standard equipment. He survived. He was perfectly all right. A few more minutes, he would have been dead.

WC: Now, how cold was it at that altitude?

ERR: Oh, God. Always twenty five below and sometimes as cold as fifty below. I'm glad you brought that up because there were so many things that had not a hell of a lot to do with getting shot at. You wore oxygen masks, of course, and goggles. You had this glacier of frozen breath just cascading down here like this, all frozen, nasty looking. [gestures from mouth to chin] You had to knock it off every once in a while. Germany was east and the sun came up in the east, isn't that right? You usually hit the target around noon. You flew all the way and stared into the sun unless it was completely cloudy. Then you flew home and stared into the sun again. Those planes were not heated. If they were, it didn't do any good. I don't think they were. I don't think they had a heater. You wore a heated uniform.

WC: How high were you normally flying?

ERR: Usually about twenty five, twenty six thousand feet. The highest was thirty one thousand, but the planes began to mush then. In other words, you turned and it sort of [gestures soft loose turns]. We couldn't have gone any higher than that. One thing, I was a terrific formation pilot. I could fly that goddamn big old B-17. They don't seem big now, but they did then. I could almost lock in like that, [gestures interlocking hands] and just no matter what they did, boy, I kept right up there. My fingers danced over the...I'd make very [small adjustments]. It was very tiring.

WC: You were twenty years old at that time?

ERR: Yeah, twenty years old. Of course, I didn't think I was just a kid. I was an officer, twenty years old and I had a gun. My fingers danced over those throttle controls. Every little thing, I just [adjust] But once, I fell asleep. We were flying, leading six planes. Let's see, I think it was twelve or was it sixteen? Twelve planes, I think, in the squadron. There were three planes up here and they were in a [group of] four. They flew in a diamond shape. Four diamond shapes, so that was sixteen planes. So there were four planes here. We were the lead for this flight and this one down here. I didn't like flying that. There was a window above you. You had to fly like this, looking up like this. [gestures leaning back looking up at the ceiling] Your neck got sore. Anyway, I had a hell of a time sleeping. I think now it was from drinking too much coffee, but then I just couldn't sleep. I was tired all the time. I was kind of a puny guy anyhow. I was flying like this and all of a sudden Pete slapped me upside my head, took over and said, You fell asleep. I looked up and I pulled up like this very close to the ship. The tail gunner in there was waving us away. Our bombardier navigator in the nose got the call asking what was going on. I fell asleep in a flying formation. Can you imagine that? Jesus Christ.

Some things, like, once we flew to the target and it was all socked in and we bombed it with radar, which was very inaccurate. It was tough when it was cloudy. But sometimes it wasn't worth it and we were told to pick an alternate target. But the alternate target was also socked in, so we were told to pick a target of opportunity. We all lowered down to ten thousand feet. There was no opposition. I mean, several hundred planes, and we spread out over the target in western Germany somewhere. We took off our oxygen masks and there was a little town [below]. A railroad went through it, a railroad sighting and some silos. Probably one thousand, fifteen hundred people or something like that. Probably no bomb shelters. They probably never expected to be bombed. We lined up on that and you saw the bombs go boom, boom, boom, boom. You can see it in the newsreels on TV and stuff. We just blew it all to hell. It was too bad. I didn't see any of the people on the ground who were killed. Germany were the bad guys. The Nazis were very evil. We genuinely were the good guys. We were there to rescue Europe, and we did. Americans were generous. But that was unnecessary. It wasn't a war crime or anything, but what can you do? We ostensibly bombed the railroad, which we hit.

Bombing was amazingly inaccurate. You'd be amazed how inaccurate it was. They bragged about the Norton bombsight, which was good, but nonetheless. At one time we were aiming for a railroad yard, a big industrial city. The bombardier leading the whole group had what was called extended vision, like a telescope. He picked up the target long before you got to it. Then just before you got to it, he shut that off and went on just normal bombsight. He forgot to turn this thing off. We dropped the bombs way too short. We saw the pictures the next day. They took pictures of all this and they stuck them up on the bulletin board. You saw all of our bombs going boom, boom, boom, boom, boom and they stopped. The target was up here. [gestures the bomb drop in a different place than the target] One guy was late in dropping his bombs. He saw his bombs. Boom, boom. These were big clusters. I'm not kidding. This is a true story. The last bomb went into the railroad yards and hit an ammunition train, blew the whole thing up and accomplished the mission. The whole railroad yard was destroyed. You could bomb things like the railroad yards at Cologne and overnight, the Germans got a one-track railroad through there and got traffic moving again.

Another thing was some of the hazards of flying. You were flying formation and the inside of the airplane, the windows and stuff, frequently iced up depending on the weather. It didn't happen every time. You were flying formation like this, a big plane over there. [points to something off camera] You reached up and there was frost on the window like this. [gestures one or two inches thick] You couldn't see through it. The front windows had little tiny wires in them. They were supposedly heated, but they didn't

work very well. They frosted up too. You scraped off a hole in the ice and looked through this hole this big, [gestures a six inch diameter hole] Not a very clean hole either and flew in formation like that. You did it. The flak, just lots and lots of flak. We got an engine shot out once from flak. Pete feathered the engine. He was a superb pilot. I admired him very much. He was a perfect guy. I think he wanted to fly bombers. It was very tiring, very hard work.

You got a pass and you got to go off to London and meet a girl maybe if you were lucky. The buzz bombs were ending when we got over there, and the Germans were shooting V-2s. You were there in bed and all of a sudden, boom, you heard this tremendous explosion maybe a few blocks away or something. Everything was blacked out. Again, little Eddie Renfro all blacked out in London. It was all charcoal gray in those days. Now it's all clean and sparkly because they quit burning that soft coal and got prosperous and cleaned all these buildings up. At that time, everything was charcoal gray from soot, and for centuries. Wandering around, everything was sandbagged up, blackout curtains.

At the time of the Battle of the Bulge, it was a ferocious winter. We couldn't fly. Finally, the weather broke. We went over and just bombed the hell out of the German supply lines and the frontline ammunition depots right behind the lines and helped break the German advance. We had big Christmas parties. They brought truckloads of local girls. We hung chaff, which is like Christmas tree tinsel. You threw it out of the airplane and it fluttered to the ground and confused the German radar. We used that to decorate Christmas trees and stuff with. A lot of drinking.

WC: Let me ask you this. Did you always fly with the same crew?

ERR: No, I flew two times [with another crew], I think. I was such a good formation pilot that they set me up twice to fly with another crew who weren't flying a good formation. Not to instruct them, but just to set an example. Every crew took a turn of being stood down in reserve. In case something happened, you were rushed out and flew. So we didn't fly every mission. I flew, as I said, two, maybe three missions with other crews. I didn't like doing it. Then we finally finished our missions. By this time it was spring. The war ended about six weeks later, with the Germans. We were at a rehab depot or whatever you called it, being assembled to be sent home. Roosevelt died. That was a real shock and heartbreaking thing. We knew we were winning. It was practically over with. We came back on the USS Sea Owl. It was a freighter that was converted to carry American troops Half of them were Canadians. The Canadians had all the gambling instruments, dice, little roulette wheels and stuff, and they won all the Americans' money.

[laughs] Although, the Canadians were very well paid. Americans were the best paid and the Canadians just a little bit behind them.

WC: Had the war ended at this point or you just completed your ____

ERR: No. When we were coming across the States on a troop train, we were in the Chicago freight yards. We didn't get off the train or anything. The war ended. The Germans surrendered. The Japanese hadn't. You saw flitter and stuff coming out of the skyscraper windows in the distance. That was all good news, of course. Then we got back. I got leave and felt like a million bucks. Everyone treated you like a million dollars.

WC: I imagine your family must have been really happy to see you.

ERR: Oh, yeah. My brother went in the Navy for six months or a year. He was three and a half years older. He went into the Navy and he was in combat just like that. I was in training for probably a year and a half. He was on the USS Aylwin, number 355. A-y-l-w-i-n, I think it was. It was in more combat than any ship in the Navy. It was in that terrible typhoon. It was the first ship to combat the Japanese. They were on their way back to Pearl Harbor from patrol or something on December 7th, and they got submarine contact. They depth charged a submarine. They didn't know if they got it or not. That was the first striking back of the American Navy. He was in every damn battle there was and never got a serious hit. They lost two or three men. One washed overboard during the typhoon and a couple more killed by machine gun fire or something. They were on the picket line at Okinawa with those kamikazes. I was very fond of my brother. We were very close. We got along beautifully. Sometimes we were home on leave at the same time.

WC: What rank was he? Was he enlisted?

ERR: He was a sailor, an enlisted man. I don't know, like the equivalent of a sergeant or something. He was a loader on a five-inch gun. Before that, he had been firing a 20mm or something like that. That was his combat station. The other time they made him a cook. He didn't know anything about being a cook. They made him a cook. He smoked. I smoked. I quit twenty five years or more ago. He quit smoking and six weeks later, they found he had lung cancer and he died at sixty three. He was a great guy. He died like a brave man. Then I got out of the service. Let's see. There was an opportunity...when I completed my missions, they interviewed you and they said, What do you want to do for the rest of your time in the service? I wanted to be a fighter pilot.

WC: Were we still at war with Japan?

ERR: This was in England. We were still at war with Germany. They had what was called Clobber College. Guys like me who wanted to be fighter pilots, after they completed their mission, went to this base and they stuck you in a fighter plane, a P-51 or a P-47 or something. They told you how to work it and you took off and learned to fly it on your own because they didn't have dual seats. They called it Clobber College because so many guys were clobbering themselves. They eventually quit that just before I wanted to go there. But the war would have been close to over anyhow. I was kind of gung-ho and patriotic. They wanted people to go to Texas and learn to fly helicopters, which were just coming in. They were hardly used in World War II, maybe a little bit at the very end of the war. In the Korean War, they used them a lot. Anyway, I thought, jeez, maybe I should go do that. I didn't want to go to Texas, it's hot and dusty. Those air bases were always terrible places.

I was stationed in Las Vegas for about two and a half months one summer, copilot training school. That was a lot of fun. Las Vegas was a marvelous place. It was probably one tenth as big as it is now. I won about one hundred eighty dollars, which was a lot of money then. I sent it home to my mother. I decided I didn't want to do that [training school], so they sent me to Minter Field near Bakersfield, California. I was flying AT-6s, which was kind of an advanced training plane, a wonderful airplane, kind of like a fighter plane. But then the war ended. The Japanese surrendered. It was great. There was Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, all these wonderful orchestras. The whole atmosphere during the war was just wonderful. And for six months or a year after the war, it was just hysterical. Everyone was partying and drinking and getting good jobs and slapping each other on the back.

WC: Let me stop the tape here. This is tape number three with Mr. Edward Renfro.

ERR: Let's see. They had a system. They had so many men by this time, before the Japanese surrendered. They had all those guys in Europe. They were going to ship them off to fight the Japanese. From the amount of time you were in and the amount of combat you saw, you got points for that. I had a whole lot of points. I was going to stay in. I wasn't going to make a career of it, but it was pretty obvious I was never going to be sent overseas. I'd never really be a fighter pilot because they just didn't need anything anymore. I got out about ten days before the Japanese surrendered. I became a civilian. I made up my mind when I was in the service, especially after I became an officer, that an awful lot of the guys I trained with went to college. And their lives were much more interesting than mine. All I was interested in was getting into girls' panties. I was just obsessed with girls, and I drew pictures all the time. But I knew that their lives were more interesting than mine, so I decided when I got out of the service that I was going to go to

college. I should get an education. This was before the GI Bill had been announced. I went to UCLA on the GI Bill as a fine arts major, with the intention of becoming a commercial artist, an illustrator, which I did. I did humorous stuff, cartoon work, but not for comic strips. It was for advertising, children's books. I got very good at it. I was quite popular and very successful. Won all kinds of awards. Moved to New York about 1959 or 1960. I was married in the meantime. I went to UCLA. I don't know if I said that. Class of 1950. I went to Europe in 1953. I was worried about how to get a job. I mean, God, how do you get a job? I never had to go out and find a job as an artist before. I was the art editor of the UCLA Yearbook. Someone who ran an art studio had seen it and said to his friend, when he graduates, send him around to see me. So I did, and they hired me. The first place I went, I was hired. It was sort of an overnight success. I took a trip to Europe, met an American girl, and we got married.

WC: What year was that?

ERR: 1953. It was a disastrous marriage. It did not work. It lasted twenty years, but it was not a success. I remarried successfully, since, to a very sweet girl, woman, she's hardly a girl anymore. I had two children. We lived in Los Angeles, then we moved to San Francisco, and built a house in Mill Valley. Then I decided I wanted to go to New York and wrestle with the big boys and see if I could make it, you know, against the real competition. So we did. That was where my former wife was from. She was from Brooklyn. So we moved to New York. Someone said, Go to J. Walter Thompson [company] and see so-and-so [because] I used to work there and he was a nice guy. So I went there and phoned up this guy Dick and I said, I knew [unclear] 21.41 who used to work here. She was another illustrator. She's still with us somewhere, I guess. I said, Can I come see you? He said, Sure, come on in. My God, I went in and I walked out with a Ford billboard. Great big, you know, big as that wall. You don't do them that big, we do them this big. [gestures two feet] A big charging bull or some damn thing. I did dozens of them. I mean, instantly. I walked into the [unclear] 21.14 of Manhattan not knowing if I was going to make it. First place I went, I walked out with the biggest job you could get, a Ford outdoor billboard, which was big in those days. I went to Holt Reinhardt and Winston, it was called then. The name's changed a bit. Anyway, I walked in there, saw someone, and walked out with a children's book to illustrate. I had nothing to worry about and went on. It was an absolutely marvelous career. Everyone was lovely. I was always treated with great respect, given wonderful jobs, well-paid and constantly busy. Never had a time when I didn't have some work to do. I worked at home, freelance. Advertising was absolutely marvelous. I don't know about it now, but back then people had a misunderstanding of it. It wasn't just a bunch of prostitutes selling their souls. It was the cutting edge of society, of culture. This was where all the best thinking designers and

illustrators went. They were doing absolutely terrific things, even though it was just selling soap. It wasn't all selling soap. Anyway, I did some animation, not much, children's books, magazine illustration for all kinds of things, *Sports Illustrated*, banks. Then I got a divorce after twenty years. I went back to San Francisco to get away from the bad scene. This gets kind of personal, so I won't go into that much. I came back to New York about three and a half years later, picked up my career without any problems. But the field was beginning to change, and computers were beginning to come in. I do not work with computers. I do not own a computer. I have nothing against them, but I'm just not interested. It's impersonal. I've never seen any artwork turned out on a computer that I really thought was very good. As I aged, I kind of lost interest in doing more and more advertising. Times changed. I was amazed that someone said it was traditional cartooning. I was always cutting edge, very advanced. But I'm seventy six now and sort of semi-retired. I still do some work, but not a hell of a lot.

My son was a plumbing contractor, sold that business for a nice fat profit and opened a very luxurious yoga studio in San Francisco. I went out there and painted murals on the front of it. First time I'd ever done that. That was a lot of fun, about a year ago. Laying on the sidewalk, painting stuff, standing up on a ladder and doing it. God, it was good for the ego. People came by [and said], God, did you do that? Where'd you learn to do that? That's terrific! [laughs] It was terrific for your ego, to have an audience.

Then during the Korean War, thank God...I had joined the inactive reserves. I didn't have to go and train every couple of weeks a year or anything. If another war started, they called me back and I got my rank back. I didn't get any kind of money or anything. I had the privilege of going to an airbase, and if a plane was available and I was qualified, I could take it up to fly. But I never did. I don't fly. I've flown a little bit, but very little. It was really a wartime experience. It's too complicated nowadays. I've lost my train of thought now. The Vietnam War was, I think, a terrible mistake. I did some protesting and all that stuff, and some artwork against the war. I got kind of radical for a number of years. I'm much more conservative now.

One incident I'd like to bring up was the bombing of Dresden. The movie, *12 O'clock High*, with Gregory Peck, was quite accurate as to what flying was like. However, that was before I got over there. It was much worse at that time. We were actually losing. I mean, we couldn't have lost because we were too big, we could keep replacing. Daylight bombing without fighter escort was not a success. I mean, they were getting shot down like crazy. But anyway, we went into the...I forget what it is, a big hall, a giant quonset hut. There was a huge map on the wall with a curtain over it. They came in and pulled the

curtain and put big red lines on where you were going. If it were someplace like Leipzig...well, we actually went just outside Leipzig, a big oil refinery. Everyone groaned because it was like twelve, thirteen hours of flying and lots of flak. A long, long way. We went in that time and it was Dresden, which was a long way off. This was what they told us. This is how I remember it. I think it's quite accurate. The Germans were retreating and the Russians were advancing. Dresden, they didn't say it, but it was one of the most magnificent cities in Europe. I didn't know it at the time, but it was. It was like sort of the Venice of the North or something. Anyway, there was no wartime industry there. They never expected to be bombed because it was so far away. There were practically no bomb shelters. Scores of thousands, maybe one or two hundred thousand refugees were sleeping in the parks and all kinds of things. It was the first time we had done this. We were carrying three hundred pound anti-personnel bombs. We all said, Oh, naughty, naughty. Everyone knew that this was a raid aimed at people, not industry. But no one stood up and said, I refuse to do this. No one. That was what you did. But everyone recognized that this was unusual. A three hundred pound bomb is a big powerful bomb. The bomb casing is cut on the inside so it breaks up like shrapnel. Where an ordinary bomb might break up in rather large pieces, this was like shrapnel to kill people. It destroyed a hell of a lot of things too. Plus, you always carried incendiary bombs too, which were clusters of bombs. A five hundred pound bomb broke into, I think they were two and a half to three pound thermite bombs, incendiaries. One of every five of those had a small explosive charge in it. So if someone was trying to put it out, it exploded and killed them or maimed them. A lot of nasty stuff during the war, Jesus Christ.

The story was, I don't know if we knew this at the time, that Churchill thought, and rightfully so, that Russia was going to be a big danger. They were very aggressive and had this dogmatic philosophy of we're right. And the government was very brutal. We should go in and bomb the hell out of Dresden to show them what we could do. It was primarily a British raid. I don't know how many, but one thousand British bombers. They may have gone in in the daytime because they usually bombed at night and they didn't fly formation. They flew in big gaggles. I think maybe two hundred American planes, not more than that. We were sort of a token force to make it a joint effort. They flew in the day before and bombed. We went in to finish off the job. Well, when we got near the target, a radio message, of course I didn't hear it, but that's what we found out, came in diverting us to Chemnitz, which was an industrial target maybe fifty miles away. So we changed course and bombed Chemnitz. We found later that the reason they diverted us was that Dresden had been so destroyed that it was unnecessary for us to go in to finish it off. Although we were on our way to Dresden.

Because I became an artist and I've seen a lot of art, I did a lot of art, and I love it. I study architecture and go to museums all the time. It just breaks my heart to think of this. I have no guilt about the killing of people because I didn't see that. All Germans weren't Nazis. What Germany stood for was evil. What we did was quite justified and necessary. When you were five miles up, you didn't know what's going on down there. Sometimes you were bombing through clouds. I feel very bad about some of the destruction that took place. I'm glad I didn't bomb Dresden. I've been to Prague. Prague's a beautiful city. Dresden was supposed to be even more beautiful.

One spectacular thing is we bombed Berlin the second time and it was like the Gotterdammerung [German for Twilight of the Gods] There were clouds and then we got near and the clouds broke. There were big canyons down through the clouds and you saw Berlin down down there and flak was going off all over. All these airplanes left condensation trails behind from the moisture coming out of the engine when it hit the cold air. So you had all the way from England, this fantastic train of planes. It must have scared the Hell out of them. I wonder what it was like to be a German, look up and see hundreds of planes coming. It got to Berlin and we were maybe in the middle of the train. The lead ship and each squadron dropped smoke markers as their bombs fell. A smoke marker went down like this. [gestures straight down] You had all of these smoke markers going down like this, flak going off all over, and you saw bombs hitting Berlin, the smoke billowing up and stuff. A plane going down occasionally. I wasn't familiar with opera then, but Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, that was what it was like. It was. Here were the Germans down there, going down to defeat, my God. I'd love to do it all over again, though.

I met a girl. My wife and I were at the Museum of Modern Art. My wife went into the ladies' room and a young, attractive young woman came up and wondered if I had the time. She spoke with an accent. She was German. We started chatting. She was born and raised in Berlin, after the war, of course. She wanted to know if I'd ever been to Berlin. I said, Well, you know. We started talking about the war. I broke down crying sitting there on the bench. I just started weeping. She wondered why I was so upset. [She said] because of the death? And I said, no. I didn't know those people. I said it was the destruction. I explained I'm an artist and even though I do cartoon stuff, I'm a serious artist. I love all this wonderful architecture. To think that so much of it was destroyed, and I helped do it. Also, it was nostalgia for being young, being a new officer, a pilot. I said it was like being in a movie. I mean, I didn't get hurt. It was just a deeply emotional thing that welled up out of me that wouldn't have happened thirty years ago. Maybe as I

get older. It was a lot of nostalgia for an exciting [time], you were part of a cause. You were part of an elite. It stood me in for all my life. I've known I was an aviation cadet, a pilot, and I have something to live up to. That's good. It was wonderful. It was wonderful. I've often thought, if I could write, I've never written anything, I'd write a book called Sherman Was Wrong. Sherman was the Civil War general. [He said] War is hell. I would write a book saying Sherman was wrong, war is swell, which is smart-ass, that's not true. I had an engaging and exciting time. I would willingly do it all over again. Boy.

WC: Okay, well, I think this is a good place to end. Any final thoughts or anything you'd like to add? Do you want to hold up your artwork?

ERR: This is that newspaper article.

WC: Yes, let me zoom in on that. Because that's pretty interesting.

ERR: It's an article about when I fell out of the airplane. I don't know if you can read it, but it says, the instructor said roll the plane over, so I rolls the plane over, which I knew was bad English, but it sounded sort of cocky, you know?

WC: Okay, I got it. All right. And yeah, I'd like to see your artwork. Let me just ask you, your B-17, did it have a name that you can recall?

ERR: [It was called] *Rabbit Habit*. Yes. We had leather jackets, flying jackets, you know, wonderful. Being the artist, I painted Rabbit Habit on the back of each jacket. Every raid, you had to paint a rabbit on there. I got about half of them on, I guess, and we ran out of paint. It was hard to get paint in those days. I don't think it ever got finished. I had a big patch here. [gestures right chest] *The Fireball Group* was the name of our group. Ram charging. Wings over here. [gestures left chest] We called each other Big Ed and Big Pete because neither one of us were very big. But Peter Straus can still wear his uniform. Athletic as hell, slender. Mine would be like this. Let's see. Oh, this is what I do. This is sort of typical of me. [shows some artwork] This I did for the revival of the play *Crazy for You*. Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney made a movie about it. I got paid for this, but they didn't use it. Not because they didn't like it, but they ended up with something much simpler. These things are over here. Some were done for advertisements. Some were done for the fun of it. I sent these out to advertise myself.

WC: Great.

ERR: I belonged to Caterpillar Parachute Club, which is a group of people who have used a parachute to save their life. I got a little pin I can wear. I've flown very little since. I have two children. My daughter's an artist.

WC: Any grandchildren?

ERR: No. My present wife is an artist. Although she doesn't earn her living at it. But I guess Pete Straus is still around. I run into him every once in a while. He travels in kind of loftier circles than I do. But anyway, it was grand and glorious. It was like being with the Greeks assaulting Troy. Honest to God. When I see *Henry V*, Laurence Olivier's movie of the Shakespearean play, and he says, "Once more into the breach, dear friends." God, I'm telling you. You know, it all comes swelling up again. [laughs] So that's about it.

WC: Okay, well, thank you very much.