

Interviewer: I want to thank you for helping me with this project and could I get you state your name and your date of birth for the camera.

Reeder: William D Reeder 18, December 1921 Nashville Tennessee

Interviewer: You were born the same year Mr. Mayfield was.

Reeder: Is that right?

Interviewer: Yeah born in Nashville okay. What was the size of your family?

Reeder: Have five children I was the youngest of five.

Interviewer: How many brothers?

Reeder: Had a brother and three sisters. Brother was the oldest then the three sisters and me.

Interviewer: You were outnumbered huh?

Reeder: Yeah

Interviewer: What was your family life like during the depression?

Reeder: Oh you would call it a normal family life in a small town in Dickson. I was born in Nashville but then we moved when I began school in the first grade in Dickson and stayed there through high school. And it was a typical small town life school and church and friends and sports and those sorts of things nothing unusual.

Interviewer: What did your father do for a living?

Reeder: He was I guess you would call him an entrepreneur he started out farming back in 1910 when he and my mother was married. And then he was auto mechanic and move to become supervisor of the service department of Pitman Motor Company in Nashville. And then he bought into his own automobile business and he and his brother were partners in Reeder Chevrolet Company there in Dickson. Then later in the mid 30's he started an additional business an electrical appliance business. TVA came to Tennessee and electricity could be reported for cooking and heating water and things like that so he began to sell appliances, radios , TV then he in the late 30's made it onto the house in which we lived in made it into a tourist court. So he had basically three businesses by that time.

Interviewer: Wow did your brother or sisters have any jobs?

Reeder: Yes my brother went into the oil business ne worked started out as a service station operator he started out as the service station operator and went to work for a Texas Company as a regional salesman.

Interviewer: This is your older brother?

Reeder: My older brother and my sister worked for the Agriculture Agency Farm Agency there. And then my second sister married right out of high school and my third sister died when she was 17 years old from pneumonia. And so that was the family. I worked in my dad's electrical store took a radio course in correspondence and fixed radio and installed radios in my dad's store and paid the grandsons \$5 a week.

Interviewer: That's a someone was telling me they were making \$3 a week so don't feel bad.

Reeder: Well bread cost ten cents nine ten cents a loaf eggs were twelve cents a dozen something like that so a dollar would go a fair way.

Interviewer: Did radios really interest you at that time?

Reeder: Oh yes I built my own crystal set while I was in junior high school and took it to the fair and won a prize most innovative project. And when I graduated from high school we had a giftorian in those days people were giving gifts to high light something and I was given a little radio tool and a little model airplane. They said I would be doing something with flight and radio.

Interviewer: Wow what a premonition.

Reeder: Yeah

Interviewer: How old were you in 1939?

Reeder: Born in 1021 that would make me 17.

Interviewer: Seventeen okay how aware were you of the political developments that were going on in the world?

Reeder: Very much my mother and dad were quite interested my mother unparticular was very interested in world affairs and we listened to the radio every night. HG Captain Borne or something like that was the Tom Brokaw of that day.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: And he came on sometime in the evening 6, 6 o'clock something like that. We all just listened to him and a little bit later on in 1939 early 40's when the bombing when the Germans were bombing London Edward R Mir we'd listen on CBS this is Edward E Mir from London terrible things are happening and such as that.

Interviewer: Is that how you found out about most of the events going on was through the radio?

Reeder: Yes well and newspaper we got the Nashville Tennessean and the Nashville Banner. The two papers in Nashville at that time we took those and kept up with the news.

Interviewer: Did you or your family ever consider American threatened being dragged into the war by Germany?

Reeder: Very much so very much so. We had a premonition that sooner or later we were gonna have to take a stand. Of course in those days in American there was a strong isolation center and passing the draft law Tennessee had the deciding vote and whether the isolation to get prepared for war. And Roosevelt was president and he said I hate war my wife Eleanor hates war and my sons hate war but then of course he was our wartime leader. When Pearl Harbor happened why the whole thing flipped.

Interviewer: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Reeder: Oh yeah in the draft law was passed in 1940 and September of 1940 an 18 year old such as I fresh out of high school and male had the choice of joining the National Guard and going for a year's active duty training or being drafted and taking years active duty training. Not much in the way of options.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: But I decided I would try and go in the National Guard because I saw there were vacancies at 105th observation squadron in Nashville for radio operators. And I knew the radio code I had HAM license and I when said I knew the code and could send and receive messages they said we need you so. I volunteered and went in September 16th of 40 is when the draft began. I went into 105th and then we were supposed to come back September of 41 after a year's active duty training and in July or there about in 1941 the congress passed sanctions economic sanctions against Japan that prevents the shipment of iron and steel and petroleum and so on to Japan. And we were extended for 90 day or I guess it was 120 days. But anyhow my day to get out of the service then was the 10th of December 1941. And we had been on maneuvers the 105th had been on maneuvers at Fort Bragg and Fort Jackson in North Carolina and South Carolina had large numbers of troops that were maneuvering out in the piney woods up on the border out there of North Carolina and South Carolina. And we I had a job with a ton and a half truck pulling a big airstream trailer full of radio gear it was a portable radio station. I'd go out with the air liaison officer who would call up air missions and I would send the messages to send so many airplanes to such and such place and so on. And I came back from those maneuvers about 1 o'clock in the morning on the 7th after we went to sleep well I went out and washed the dirt off and I was writing a letter on the typewriter in the radio trailer listen to the radio and music. And while I was writing I said I'll be home on Wednesday on the five o'clock bus please meet me because I will have two barracks bags need some transportation. And while I was writing a letter the radio came on and said flash the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor and I said that's all she wrote. And they had formation at five o'clock or so supper time and they said you can expect to be in for a duration of six months. And the president has asked congress to declare war at 11 o'clock tomorrow morning. And so my life changed.

Interviewer: Yeah

Reeder: Christmas Day I was on the road to Langley Air force Base and a couple a days after Christmas I was in the back end of an O47 flight up and down the outer banks of North Carolina looking for submarines. And it was not generally published because they did not want the Germans to know how well they were succeeding but at that time we didn't have an oil pipeline between Texas and the east as we do now. So the oil which came out of the wells in East Texas went to Houston on tankers and around the east coast to New Jersey to the refineries. And the Germans would lay off Cape Patterson early in the morning and wait for the light silhouette the ships coming by leashing one or two sometimes eight ships on fire out there hit by German submarines. There's a book called Torpedo Junction that a young fellow in recent years did some scuba diving off of Cape Patterson began to see all these wrecks and he

wondered about them and so he began to reconstruct the history of what happened and between Virginia Capes and Florida 256 ships were sunk between January and July of 1942. And I went to the beach in _____ on the outer banks while I was at Elizabeth Sea flying chasing submarines and the beach was black with oil in many spots.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: From sunken ships other places blacked out you couldn't you had to have covers like the covers on lights just to shine immediately in front of it them blue lights.

Interviewer: I remember reading about submarines that were off the coast of Florida. And people in Florida didn't want to shut their lights off at night because they were afraid it would scare you know tourist and that was a big thing because submarines were hitting ships in port.

Reeder: Had to change the way. But it was quite dark on the outer banks with the covers on shades on the windows. Black out lights on all the vehicles you had to get off the road if you didn't have the right equipment. But we were we had what was called a mobile squadron twelve airplanes that we ranged from Mitchell Field in Long Island down to Langley to Bloomington North Carolina to Elizabeth City North Carolina Cherry Point. And we the submarines would begin to show up in certain places and we would begin to go to the field closest to them so we could out quickly.

Interviewer: Did you ever spot any submarines out there?

Reeder: Oh yeah our unit had credits for three sinking's. The planes we were using for that purpose were Douglas O46 there were only 14 of them made. And they were not equipped for bombing they were observation planes. They had a 30 caliber machine gun that fires over the nose of the plane for attacking troops and whatnot. But they didn't have any bombs so we rigged up homemade racks and put two 100 pound blocks under the plane. I was the radio operator in the backseat and the pilot would say pull and pull too.

Interviewer: Wow

Reeder: But then

Interviewer: So did your planes fly singly when you were out there on patrol?

Reeder: Yes we were the smaller planes single engine planes would fly 75 miles out zig zag track out to 75 miles. Then the larger bombers would go out to 150 miles. The navy said the air core wasn't supposed to be flying over the ocean that was their territory. So finally they came to an agreement that they could go 150 miles and beyond 150 miles was navy territory.

Interviewer: The navy was not _____.

Reeder: No they weren't

Interviewer: Someone had to be.

Reeder: Yeah that's right.

Interviewer: Let's go back real quick before that. You had your training while you were in the National Guard then.

Reeder: My initial training yes.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Reeder: Well we were called active duty in Nashville and we were a week or ten days there getting trucks loaded and all our gear packed. We went to Columbia South Carolina and went to Owens Field which was the small municipal airport in Columbia still there. I was there a couple years ago to look at the old place and it's kind of in shambles now. The main airports developed while we were there they built a B25 center out north of Columbia which is now the municipal airport for Columbia. The Owens Field is still used for small airplanes. And we went there and they put up tents for us we lived for a year in tents. And then they put up some prefabricated buildings for mess halls and supplies and so on. Parked our airplanes in them we trained there we worked with Fort Jackson. Fort Jackson is still a large base like Fort Campbell here near Columbia South Carolina. We would fly over their training areas and do artillery spotting and high altitude photography things like that. Just in the course of doing the job we got our training.

Interviewer: So you pretty much immediately went right almost into working with the airborne?

Reeder: Yes not to bore you too much with detail but the pay for a buck private for the first three months was \$21 a month. And when you got to be a qualified buck private you got \$35 a month. So my first payroll came up and they had \$31.50 in my envelope pay envelope. In those days you marched up to the pay table and the captain gave you your pay in an envelope. And I got 31.50 and I said I'm not supposed to get but 21 buck. And he said well its 10.50 for flying pay.

Interviewer: That was pretty nice.

Reeder: In high school I had worked with a man that rebuilt his erect airplane down in Dickson. I would wipe oil off of it and pour gasoline and help him sell tickets he would go out barnstorming to church picnics and what not. And I'd sell tickets while he flew passenger's so I never wore a parachute here I was in flying suit and sat on a parachute and just relay had it good. I said they pay you for that.

Interviewer: So you really liked flying then.

Reeder: Oh yeah loved flying. I had the wild blue yonder in my eyes. From the submarine patrol work when I realized I was gonna be in for a duration of six months I said if I'm gonna be in this I'd like to sit in the front seat instead of the back. So I put in for flight training. In those days you couldn't get in flight training unless you had two years college and I was fresh out of high school.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: So they saw the need for large numbers of pilots about that time. So they opened it up to if you could pass a college equivalency test and pass the various tests that they give you well you could apply for pilot training. And went to Nashville they had an aviation cadet examining center they called where 100 Oaks is now. You walked around just in front of 100 Oaks there was the aviation cadet qualifying center they built with a bunch of temporary barracks and so on there. We got there before the barracks

were even completed. They had the roof on them but we swatted mosquitos at night. But they gave you tests there to see whether you were qualified to be a pilot, bombardier or navigator and I passed the pilot qualification because I knew a good bit about flying from my studies at home. And I went into aviation cadet training and went to Montgomery Alabama and Douglas Georgia for primary flight training and basic flight training and Gunner Field Alabama advanced training at Blackville Arkansas all in a period of nine months. They moved you to each phase that field was Douglas Georgia was set up with PT17s biplanes and you got 60 hours there 60 hours or so. And basic were BT13s and gunner then you went 20s advanced in my case.

Interviewer: What was your favorite plane do you remember?

Reeder: My favorite plane?

Interviewer: Uh huh

Reeder: I guess the 1890 was a real popular twin engine plane. And then the after I got my wings Winifred and I got married and went to ___ and went on to Columbus Ohio to learn to fly a B17 and they gave me first pilot on a B17. And then after you were checked out in a particular airplane like that fighter bomber whatever you were sent on to what they call phase training. In my case we went to Alexandria Louisiana and formed a crew of ten men pilot, copilot, navigator, bombardier, operator, engineer, two waist gunner, ___ gunner and tail gunner. And you did crew training you dropped practice bombs and formation flying out over the Gulf of Mexico gunnery all the things that you needed to go into combat. And then that was from July 42 until October mid-October we went as a crew to England with nine other crews ten of us. Went to Camp Hillman New Jersey and were put on board the Queen Mary in New York and were shipped over to England. And then was assigned to 306 bomb group up there and did my 28 missions 25 missions is the quota because in those days the average it was the statistics were that you could expect to do 15 missions before you got shot at. Some did some didn't but when you were assigned 25 mission tour and then toward the end of the tour I had 19 missions and General Doolittle took over the 8th air force in January of 44. And the missions were raised to a quota of 30 and having had 19 they prorated they gave you credit for a couple missions. And we finished up my copilot had two missions to do after we finished after the crew finished because the practice in the group was to take the new pilot new first pilot in and put him with a more experienced crew for a couple three missions to.

Interviewer: So you weren't rated as the bomber crew you were rated as an individual pilot, copilot?

Reeder: Yeah but you were called it was the leader crew.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: We flew together as a crew and we had an airplane assigned to us with I named the Lady Winifred.

Interviewer: Oh yeah

Reeder: Yeah and

Interviewer: That's great

Reeder: Yeah I've got a picture of it over there somewhere. And we flew as a crew but as I was saying the new pilot new first pilot was put with a more experienced crew to give him more experience on a couple missions then put back with his crew so that he didn't go out completely green. And kind of knew what to do and when to do it. My copilot was shot down in May of 44 and he was in prisoner of war camp until May of 45. But it was an exciting time. I finished in May of 44 my quota of missions and was asked to stay on for another tour because D-Day was coming up. So I was assigned with a plane that had special communications gear very high frequency communications gear where I could talk with the bombers out over in the territory. They go out over the channel just off the enemy coast and I stayed at 25,000 feet relaying bombing reports and positions reports and so on. I could talk to the planes over enemy territory and could talk to 8th air force headquarters and I would relay I was called cycle relay.

Interviewer: Where was the airborne station at?

Reeder: It was in the outskirts of London. Bush Park I think Bush and they had a set up there and then there were I don't know how many probably as many as 50 or 75 fields out in the midlands say out to 100 miles north of London area from just east of Birmingham England out to the coast was just full of all sorts of airfields.

Interviewer: Were you working with the British air force their bombing groups?

Reeder: In a sense that coordination was done mostly at 8th air force headquarters. We had spitfire fighter coverage sometime but later we got enough fighters of our own that we had plenty of fighters and they used theirs for air defense primarily. And our planes our fighters went with the bombers we had B47s, B51s, P38s that would cover our mission. We'd go in we'd form up over England there were three fields that flew together in my particular bomb wing 305th, 306th, 92nd bomb groups were at Celestine, Thermocline and Pottington were expected to they were about 5 miles apart if you think about a five miles triangle five mile along the side triangle with a field at each point of the triangle it was that sort of an arrangement. And we'd take off and fly southwest climb and turn back east climb and form formations 16, 17, 18,000 feet and then we would be time to join in with eight or ten others such wings fit four planes per box. We'd put up 14, 18 planes and the other two fields would do the same thing and we'd form three groups and one extra and the one extra group would go and form a composite with two other wings. And we'd fly a zig zag course out to what they called an assembly line and cut off corners to pick up stragglers and so on get in tight formation. And then we'd turn on a 50 mile assembly line out to the coast climbing across the channel and test fire guns and so on. And by the time we'd get into enemy territory we'd have a string of bombers perhaps 100 miles long. And then the P51s, P47s, P38s would come in formation and fly up the bombing line.

Interviewer: How long did it usually take you to get into formation after you took off and get heading the right direction?

Reeder: Oh climbed 500 feet a minute the max probably 30 to 45 minutes in the form up phase. And then probably another 30, 40 minutes getting into line going out across the channel. And an hour and a half something like that into enemy territory.

Interviewer: You were flying P17s?

Reeder: Yes

Interviewer: How did you feel about that was it a really good bomber?

Reeder: Oh yeah saved my life more than once. It was tough airplane and very reliable everything it wasn't fancy it was just

Interviewer: Did the job right

Reeder: Good ole solid airplane.

Interviewer: What did you think of the British their Lancaster's?

Reeder: They were fine airplanes they flew at night we would fly in the daytime they'd fly at night. There was a big argument in 1942 at Casa Blanca between Winston Churchill and Roosevelt they met to go over the war and the strategy and whatnot. And Churchill said from the RAF was offered the B17s earlier and they couldn't handle the high altitude they couldn't figure the high altitude it wasn't a reliable airplane.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: And it was an early model which was later much improved from that experience really. But there was the argument should it be day or night. And General Arnold was very much animate that it could be done in the daytime. We took several losses in the process but we finally broke the back of ___ and we could go anywhere we wanted to without undo losses.

Interviewer: What were your targets usually like before D-Day?

Reeder: Before D-Day early on when I first got there the stress had been on blowing up submarine capability Sanhusaire, William Charlotte, Hamburg and so on.

Interviewer: What ports?

Reeder: They were all submarine ports and submarine Hamburg was where they were built. And so there was such a great loss of ships coming across the Atlantic that was given a very high priority. And we and the RFs went after those submarine camps. And then as we began to see D-Day coming up in mid-44 and late 43 well back up just a little bit. In September of 43 we were going after ball bearing factories and critical production facilities of the Germans. And we just my particular group almost got knocked out of the sky on that particular mission and stood down for retraining. I was one of the replacement crews I was fresh blood. And I can remember going in and some barracks humor and a guy said gee that's a pretty new uniform you have on can I have it when you get shot down. But with the beginning of 44 we switched from submarine campaign antisubmarine campaign still did some but we switched General Doolittle took over and he said the first order of business is to break the back of the _____. So we began to go after all the refinery facilities, storage areas, aircraft fighting troops, airfields and the big week in February 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th of February we put out maximum efforts. And effectively knocked out a great many airplanes and factories and got the oil to such a low for them they couldn't do their training and spent most of their fuel on just fighting us. And they were in desperate circumstances for a while they rebuilt their oil mostly was based on coal they didn't have the Romanian oil fields and that's about all they had. And they made their petroleum products out of coal and Lubershatan was one of the places that my outfit took out a big part of it. Then when April by April we

could go pretty much wherever we wanted to without undo losses. And with D-Day coming up they switched the target complexes to railroad marshaling yards the idea was to cut off the battlefield at Normandy. And so supply build up ports, military facilities, places like Fort Campbell the railroads and highways connecting to the battlefield were our main targets.

Interviewer: What was resistance like in those early days when you first started bombing.

Reeder: German resistance?

Interviewer: Yeah like

Reeder: It was terrible. They had heavy flight they had three types of flight guns. Forty millimeter for low altitude the 88s and 155s and you'd go into a place like Berlin and they had something like 400 guns that could break the barrel. And the fighters we were losing as many as 25 to 30 planes a day out of of course that was 1,000 plane raid. We were losing a lot of airplanes fighters were the worst and then the fight was certainly affected.

Interviewer: you were formed up in boxes right?

Reeder: Uh huh we'd fly a three squadron seven planes each when we first started. Then Taylor and Charlie the 7th was getting knocked out so often that they quit flying that position. So we had three squadrons of six or 18 planes and then Chelston Plottington would fly the same formation with 18 and 18 so times 10 is 33, 54 plane bombings.

Interviewer: Wow

Reeder: The box would be 1,000 feet deep and 1,000 to 1,500 feet side to side about the same.

Interviewer: How close were you to other planes inside the boxes?

Reeder: You ideally you couldn't always do it due to turbulence and

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: Turning this way and that but the standard formation was to have your wing fly just behind so that you looked in the tail window of the plane next to you if you were on the wing. And far enough away so that if you overshot you wouldn't hit the wing.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: Of the plane which you were tucked in.

Interviewer: I can't imagine your gunners being that near against the fighters being that close that close area.

Reeder: Well we stacked so that the guy in the lead airplane was slightly ahead of you. And either above or below you the low squadron you flew down and to the right and the high squadron flew high and to the left. So you weren't on the level you flew so that he could shoot over the top of you.

Interviewer: Was there still a lot of damage from gunners firing?

Reeder: Oh yeah I had more than one 50 caliber hole. You could tell by the size of the hole what kind of bullet it was.

Interviewer: Do any of those missions stick out in your mind?

Reeder: Yeah the worst one I guess in February 22nd of 44. We were we hit an aircraft factory it had about 300 airplanes on the ground they reportedly couldn't get them out because they didn't have any fuel. And so we hit them and got most of the airplanes we had a solid hit right in the middle of the field. And on the way out we got hit by fighters and I took eight 20 millimeter hits down the side of the plane. The cables to the tail surfaces to the ruder and elevators were broken severed by it and the planes lurched on to we had an automatic pilot which we used for bombing the northern bombsight on that plane was hooked to an autopilot. So that when you went on a bomb run the bombardier when he made his corrections through the bombsight actually flew the airplane flew the autopilot. So we kept that warmed up for just a case it took hold fortunately parts and pieces. It had little motors back in the tail that it actuated so I flew by wire just the same they do now a day. You had little knobs like volume controls that you could wiggle up and down and side to side. I took the ailerons which still worked on the steering wheel and the elevators and the copilot took the ruder and between us we flew back to England.

Interviewer: What was the B17 like flying normally? Was it pretty hard to fly or was it

Reeder: It you had to be athletic to fly it. You horsed it around so in formation you were wet with ____ when you got home. But it was a good airplane a very stable airplane it had been built to be a bombing platform it was very stable.

Interviewer: Were you or your crew ever wounded while you were flying?

Reeder: My on this mission which I just recounted my one of the 20 millimeter bullets shells blew up in the radio compartment and peppered one side of the radio operator quite extensively. He went to the hospital for a week or ten days and came back out for the rest of our time. He would squeeze these little pimples and little bits of

Interviewer: Pop out huh.

Reeder: I guess our worst mission even worse than that we went over Berlin in May or March later part of March one of the first missions on Berlin. And there was a low ground fog about 1,000 feet thick over the target we bombed by radar. And from on up was completely clear and we thought well no fighters today because they can't get off the ground in that fog. When we got over Berlin the first ____ the flack in the sky. I was flying second element lead behind the commanding general that was leading the whole air show I was number two element. And the first full burst of flack in the sky they fired in boxes of four or they had four guns that tracked on one radar. They had they were radar directed and these four guns were locked in and synchronized with that radar and they went boom boom boom. And two of them hit just in front of the generals plane and he lost an engine immediately and I number four engine the control key was shot out. And it knocked the cable in what's called idle cut off position cut the gas off to it so I had a perfectly good engine but I couldn't use it. And number three engine one cylinder had been

hit and was squirting oil and what not but still running on eight cylinders. Number two engine the oil supply tank was hit and I had to feather it because you lose your oil on an engine you lose control of the propeller the variable pitch propeller is worked off the engine oil. And the prop will windmill and it will burn up the barrels and what not because of lack of oil and the propeller will fly off you don't know where it's going so it's very important to feather immediately. Number one engine was going wide open and we couldn't maintain formation so we dropped out of formation gradually went down and down until we went across the handle where the navigator got a little confused as to just exactly where we were went across the middle of Hanover and got in the middle of flight. We were down by that time there was a front with clouds up to 9 or 10,000 feet so we got in the cloud and kept fighting the seas.

Interviewer: Were there any fighters up at that time?

Reeder: Oh yeah they were all over the place by that time. Over Berlin area they were not but on the way out from this cold front.

Interviewer: Right I've read that once a bomber would break from the box the bombers would sit out.

Reeder: Yea

Interviewer: You were lucky to find that ____.

Reeder: Yea well we were taking out 40 millimeter flight which is you're not used to you would see a big burst coming up and I thought well odds are that they are not going to shoot in the same place twice. They're tracking me so that every time I saw a burst I would fly in to the smoke of course when the steel is gone it's just a burst of smoke. But we went on down finally a couple of fighters got after us and we ____ and were zig zagging over the top of us. And the top turret gunner hit one of them pieces flew off of his tail and he decided he better go one. In the other one made the same decision or was out of gas or something anyhow they left and we picked up a P47 escorting in front ____ would call it. We went on down by the time we got to Holland we were down about 50 feet or so go as low as I could go. I told the crew any of them I didn't know how far we were gonna go the shape the airplane was in that I would go as far as I could. But we were going to be down low enough they wouldn't be able to jump out and parachute after I let it on down. All of them said well if you're gonna go we'll go with you. So we got down we were low enough you could see people come out of their house and wave at you. And on one occasion the Germans had these flag towers they called them they were like a big water tank and had a flack gun on top of them. And we saw these fellows line up these spiral stairs on the side of there getting up there getting their gun. And the top turret gunner trained his guns on them and shot a few burst they decided they would go back down. And we got on out at that time it's been filled in in later years but that's what they called the ziti zee. It was a large inland lake in Holland we went over across that because no population and we figured that was safer. And came on out to what they called the hook of Holland what's called ____ now. The Germans laid their 88 guns down after us but they couldn't get their fuses to go off at the right they didn't know how far we were so we dodged that. And got on back to England and I decided well the first airfield I saw I better land and it was a fighter field a P51 field near south _____. And we landed and didn't realize our breaks had been shot out so we didn't have any breaks and while I still had ruder control I kicked ruder and figured well it's muddy it's March springtime maybe the mud will stop us. So it did it went out and the plane kind of went up on its nose and came back down and just before we started or stopped while we were still rolling there was an outhouse for the workers that worked on the runways and what not on one side of the field there. We were heading right for this

thing and the bombardier sits up on that big glass nose you know Charlie Fonteyn by name. Charlie said holy mack said all that way from Berlin and

Interviewer: What a way to go yea.

Reeder: What a way to go. But it went down to the left wing and the prop knocked it over so it didn't do any damage and the plane stopped in the mud and we all got out and kissed the ground.

Interviewer: I bet

Reeder: That was the most exciting one I guess.

Interviewer: Did you fly without escorts in the fighters?

Reeder: Let's see my first mission was in December of 44 and I guess no more than four or five missions we at that time they hadn't developed the wing tanks

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: The belly tanks for the fighter planes. So they would go as far as they had gas and if we were in a deeper mission like ___ or ___ the last hour then beginning did late January of 44 the P51s came in and they had belly tanks that 47th got belly tanks. The P38s ___ and they were ___

Interviewer: That seems like such a simple concept the belly tanks. The Japanese were using them before I'm surprised we didn't catch up on it earlier.

Reeder: Well they I guess they had a tradeoff between how much ammo to carry and how much they had certain amount of weight to play with. How do you spend your weight allowance. Another mission that stands out was D-Day I mentioned I went on this second tour of missions that where I would go up and be the radio relay plane. We'd go in and try and scare up some fighters and get them up and burning off their gas before the main force got in. Then we'd go over and stand off and do this relay job. I went up early in the morning on D-Day I had two missions on D-Day flew from about 4 o'clock in the morning until about 9 o'clock at night. We would refuel in the middle of the day and was over beaches the whole time. It was really a grand stand scene.

Interviewer: How high up were you?

Reeder: Twenty-five thousand.

Interviewer: But you could still see some of what was going on?

Reeder: Oh yea ships just hundreds of ships all over

Interviewer: I bet that was an impressive view.

Reeder: One of the things that I remember we saw these tugs what looked like tugs pulling a big white box about the size of this house in behind them. And they were tooling along across the channel and we

said what in the world is that. And I never did know until when I came back on the Queen Elizabeth Bobby Jones the golfer you know he was a famous golfer back

Interviewer: Yea

Reeder: He was an air force officer intelligence officer in the 8th air force headquarters. And I was talking with hi about seeing these things and I wondered what in the devil those were. He said well those were the mulberry ports they had these huge concrete boxes

Interviewer: Yea I know what you're talking about yea

Reeder: Full of air and so they would float and they were pulling them across the channel and then they lined them up in a line to make an artificial port.

Interviewer: Yea that was pretty ingenious made their own port.

Reeder: It didn't work too well because a big storm there was a lot of wind it stormed that day so they didn't exactly get lined up straight. But they finally built platforms over them so they were used ships could pull up beside or jetting so to speak.

Interviewer: How did you what did you do in your spare time between missions?

Reeder: Well a lot of it was training you'd have ground school classes escape and evasion classes. They had people who had been shot down and made their way back to explain and what not. They'd tell their stories you'd learn from them how to use their escape kits and what not. Then we'd do formation flying gunnery on days when we didn't have missions you know if the weather was good enough over England. Do formation flying to tighten up formation techniques. We'd do ground school on what kind of airplanes what kind of tactics the Germans were using. About once a month we had two or three days pass that we could leave and I'd got to Birmingham or London take we were all issued bikes you went to your planes were spread all around the airfield you had perimeter track they called it planes were dispersed against bombing attacks and you went to your planes on trucks but most of your transportation around base was on bike. On one occasion my bombardier co-pilot navigator and four officers on the crew went over to Cambridge England to look around Cambridge and see the country it was in April 44 beautiful.

Interviewer: What were the French people like?

Reeder: The English people?

Interviewer: English people yes

Reeder: They were very friendly very friendly. Some of the English guys they would throw cracks at you over sexed and over paid.

Interviewer: I've heard that from over here. You mentioned escape kits what did the escape kits impose?

Reeder: It was a little pack that you put in the pocket of the leg of your flight suit. And about 300 dollars in French francs and a little compass you could put in the corner of your mouth and pencils that had a clip on them that was magnetized so you could use it as a compass. You had silk maps that of Germany, France and so on so that you could find your way. And little language books to translate a little French and German. German wouldn't be much good but those were the main things maps and money oh and photographs we had a passport photograph in a civilian suit. If you went down in France they would and you got in touch with the underground they'd make up a fake passport for you a fake ID for you. But you could be shot in France for having a camera because you were thought to be a spy if you had a camera. And so they had no means of taking pictures so they asked us to take pictures of everybody to bring with them so that they could take those photos and put them on a fake passport same type of photo. And the Dutch and Belgiums as well we had several people that came back from over there. One fellow went down in Holland and in earlier years way back in the 1400s 1500s the priest were not welcome after the protestant religion set in after Martin Luther nailed his primus on the cathedral door and so on.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: Priest were persecuted and this particular home where this crew went from our outfit went to had a place to hide the family of the priest in behind the fireplace. The only problem was you couldn't sit down he had to stand up and he stood up for about a week in this area behind the fireplace. And the Germans came in and stuck bayonets in through the wall and all sorts of things but they never did find him. Then he was finally moved onto the Dutch underground to the French underground and the typical routine was to work your way down to the Pyrenees in the south plains and to walk over the line in Spain. Spain was neutral supposable but they had protocol so to speak if you were an invade they would charge you with abatement and put you in jail and the U.S. Embassy would give them 500 bucks and

Interviewer: Get you out

Reeder: Sent you to Portugal they had these black painted B24s came in every week went to Portugal and picked up the crews that had gotten out and quite a few came out through that route. We had one fellow that was Polish background spoke fluent polish and he was shot down back near Poland on the Polish border near Stanton and happened to come down in the parachute in the midst of some Polish workers who were working on the road. See Germans took pols and conquered countries and would bring the people back to work on the roads do menial labor. And so one evening this fellow fell in the midst of all these polish workers one took a shirt another a pair of pants and so on and they made him into a worker and he worked his way through back to the boarder of France. And he got there and said early one o'clock in the morning he didn't know how he was going to get through the check point there because there were German soldiers. He said well what would I do if I were in that situation one o'clock in the morning one cigarette and I couldn't talk to nobody at the next post. And sure enough that's what happened he got up and walked on through like he owned the place and he worked his way on. And he used then his \$300 in France he bought a plane ticket or a train ticket to go to Mersey he made his way to Mersey on a train and went across a ___ he said the nearest he came to being caught (tape skipped several seconds) in the train station waiting for the train had a bottle of beer and he was drinking the beer. And this German soldier came up and tapped him on the shoulder and he turned around and said almost gave himself away the German soldier flipped him no no he wasn't the one he was looking for.

Interviewer: Wow

Reeder: He got on the train went on his way and there was a check point between the occupied ___ at France and the trains only had a little running board on the outside to fit up against the train platform in the stations. They have individual compartments with doors that open into the individual compartments on the train about six or eight people sit there. The Germans were coming down checking passports and he didn't have one so he got out it was night time and he got out and hung by the handle on this little platform or little running board and stayed for about 30 minutes. Figured it was time for them to get online and he went back just pure brass ___ I guess you'd call it.

Interviewer: How close were you to your crew members? Did you spend a lot of time off duty with them?

Reeder: Oh yea we went to if the liberty bus was going into town out night we'd go into Bedford was the nearest town we went to the Red Cross and they'd have a bowl of soup for us something like that. You could get a bed and stay overnight for 50 cents. They had a dormitory like a gymnasium with GI cots we'd go pretty much the officers would go there way and the enlisted the six men were enlisted the engineer, radio operator, the ___ gunner, two waste gunners and tail gunner were enlisted. Because we made more money than they did it was embarrassing we could do things that they couldn't do. So we tended to split officers mostly when we got into town. We go we'd see a show walk around the part and people would invite you for dinner something like that. Anyway people were real good to us.

Interviewer: Did you ever would you write letters home?

Reeder: Oh yea every day.

Interviewer: Really

Reeder: Yea Winifred will tell you the story I got over there in late October and at Christmas time she hadn't heard from me yet. On Christmas Eve she got a whole bundle

Interviewer: A whole sack full

Reeder: Yea but you had the regular mail that you sent when you were on the ship of course it might be a month and a half two months getting home. But then you had what they called v-mail.

Interviewer: V-mails right

Reeder: Victory mail you wrote your letter and put it through the sensor and it went into a microfilm machine. Microfilm roll was airlifted back home so you could get those in a couple weeks' time it was pretty good.

Interviewer: Did you or your wife keep any of yours?

Reeder: Yea there's a box up in the attic.

Interviewer: Really my fiancés grandmother was married to a soldier over and he was captured in the Bulge. And she was always trying to figure out what to do with all of these letters and she said I'll probably just burn them. I said don't burn them I said there's a lot of ___ in their in archiving. She said I

don't know _____. Well if you change your mind let me know. She's like I'm just going to burn them all I'm like no don't do that.

Reeder: But we're in the same quandary now we're turning 80 and a lot of stuff upstairs from days past.

Interviewer: It's hard to hold on to a lot of stuff like that.

Reeder: Uniforms and what not.

Interviewer: Were you ever promoted during your service time?

Reeder: Oh yea I went from Buck Private to Colonel.

Interviewer: Oh wow over my career. I was promoted to Captain when I took the second tour of duty in England. I became Captain in July 44 just more or less a normal promotion you might say over the years.

Interviewer: After D-Day where were you heading after that?

Reeder: I stayed until D-Day was the 6th of June 44. And I left end of July came back on leave and I came back I had a month's leave something like that maybe three weeks to a month's leave. And then I went to Miami Army distribution center all the returning combat crews and what not were sent there for re-evaluation what we were doing next. And I was off at B29 training took a squadron to Quam and I had figured this is a numbers game.

Interviewer: Yea sooner or later

Reeder: I'd had my share I said let somebody else I said I've gotten 40 distinguished flying crosses over there. I figured that was a good quota. And so having been a radio operator knowing having been through radio school I went through air tactical school back in 1940, 41 and they said an alternative for returning crew said we're looking to fellows like you being in the regular force after the war if you so desire. And we won't have as many people on duty as we have in wartime so we want pilots to do something else besides just fly. And we want communication's officers' maintenance aircraft maintenance officers, photo officers and ___ officers to rate the pilots. And so I volunteered for communications officers course went through that course in Illinois and went from that into the telecommunications field. And after I flew the missing from ___ to ___ to Karachi Pakistan checking there maybe 12 or 14 airfields along the way. Had radio beacons and control towers and what not and communications connecting my job would be to go out and calibrate these facilities check them to be sure they were operating properly.

Interviewer: When was this what year was this?

Reeder: Pardon

Interviewer: What year was this?

Reeder: This was March of 45 till January of 46.

Interviewer: And by that time how many missions had you done over Europe?

Reeder: Twenty eight missions plus another 160 180 hours of cycle you got credit for two tours over there.

Interviewer: Wow pretty impressive. How did you find out about the process of the war that was going on in other theaters like over in the Pacific?

Reeder: Mainly Stars & Stripes newspaper it's still published overseas in Tokyo and somewhere in Germany. Stars & Stripes is operated by the feds department and it's a regular newspaper and it's distributed to bases all over. And so it was a way current means it was a daily newspaper. At breakfast time we would go do the club to get breakfast and always look for the Stars & Stripes see how they wrote up yesterday's mission.

Interviewer: How did you feel about the determination of the German people and the German military?

Reeder: Well you couldn't help but respect them their expertise they were good very good. Of course you had things like oh I forget Law Ha Ha was his name.

Interviewer: I've heard of that.

Reeder: Law Ha Ha was propaganda announcer on German radio. They had high powered radio that they beamed at us and he would make fun of our outfits and what not. And they had an amazing knowledge you fellows in the 306th bomb group you come over tomorrow and we'll give you a warm welcome. And so and so got shot down yesterday you can join him in cell lock seven you can get shot down tomorrow come on.

Interviewer: Wow those were disconcerting to hear that.

Reeder: Yea it made you scratch your head

Interviewer: And wonder

Reeder: Wonder how in the world of course what they were doing was getting down crews and finding out where they were from and so forth. And some of it was a lot of it was just made up propaganda of course. The Japanese had the same thing with Tokyo Rose.

Interviewer: Yea

Reeder: She would come on talk several times. But we had a few German and Italian prisoners of war who did work around the base. And they would do grass cutting, ditch digging menial work. And we were not allowed much contact with them. So our main contact was just fighter types and they were good.

Interviewer: (Could not understand the question)

Reeder: Oh yea it was as good as anything we had better in some respect. They were they had ME missions with 109s and _____ were their main planes ___ fighter planes.

Interviewer: Did you ever see the _____ that made the jets later during the war near the

Reeder: We saw what probably was we didn't recognize it as such but we saw these smoke trails going vertically up to their formation looked like an airplane.

Interviewer: Wasn't sure huh?

Reeder: Yea but we just lucky that Hitler decided there'd be bombers instead of planes. And because they were they were taking their toll. They didn't have much endurance they didn't fly but 20, 30 miles something like that because they burned fuel at such a rate.

Interviewer: So where were you stationed when Germany surrendered?

Reeder: I was at Lacra and on that day May the 8th 1945 I was flying B25 from Lacra to ____ to ____ I was going to a conference in ____ to decide what we would do from them on. There was a green project a red project I think something like that the decision was made to bring the planes B24s B17s B26s back through Africa they would come from England to Morocco to ____ to Liberia across the south Atlantic to Brazil and back up and to this country. They were brining planes back to refurbish them and send them on to Japan because we were gonna at that time the next project was back in Japan get Japan out of the war. And so on VE-Day the night of VE-Day I slept in a ____ hotel in Maracas the officers ____ in Maracas Morocco. They had a C46 training school there for the air transport command and had these twin engine C46 ____ airplanes. And they flew 24 hours a day on training missions and about 12 or 1 o'clock in the morning they started blazing them props you know they'd run them up to high speed and bring them back and the planes would moan. And we were just down the street from the wall city which is in those north African cities they'd have a wall city which is mostly Arabs and what not. And it would have outside walls and a European community where the hotel was. And we woke up everybody up and Arabs were screaming and hollering and shooting guns in the air.

Interviewer: Were you ever afraid you were going to get drafted into a Pacific Theater at that time?

Reeder: What's that?

Interviewer: Were you worried that you were going to get taken in a Pacific Theater?

Reeder: No I was overseas already in Africa see the Pacific situation broke in September I think it was it was sometime in September. So I was busy getting planes back from Europe and closing out we closed out the route across central Africa. The route across central Africa had been built back in 42 or so soon after the war began because Ronald was in North Africa and he got almost to Alexandria. And they were afraid that we and the British were afraid that they were going to take over the whole of North Africa. And we'd have no way to get to India so a route was put in across south of the Sahara Desert so they wouldn't come south of the Sahara Desert and the Central Africa route was open by the Pan Am contact the Pan American _____ built a series of bases on contract. That line was still open until July 1945 _____ was the head of that route. So the headquarters cleared out as far as _____. And I was there then we had close out that route and get all the people out from the 12, 14 bases so we had Roberts from Liberia, Crock, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____ and Arabia, _____, Liberia, Karachi those were the bases.

Interviewer: Wow that's a lot of bases.

Reeder: Had to get all of those people moved out back home redistributed elsewhere. Then we had we kept open Roberts in Liberia, _____ in _____, _____, _____ in the desert Sahara Desert, Maracas, Casa Blanca, _____, Oran, Algeria, _____, _____, Cairo _____, H4, H5, Jordan, _____, _____ over in Oran, _____ and Karachi that was the North African route.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: It was a busy time.

Interviewer: I bet it was. Where did you go from there?

Reeder: Went back to Robins Georgia charging squadron there and then they closed and went to Tampa Florida for about a year about a little less than a year. Went a couple months to Marshal Field Woodmont Field and to Rainey Air force base In Puerto Rico then to Albrook Air force base Panama Cannel zone. That was in years 1946, 47, 48 and still doing the same sort of thing we had. At that time we had bases all over the south east that were just being closed on a weekly basis. Had probable 15 to 20 bases that had no supervision to help them and we had to close those out. Restructure we were phasing out went from three and a half four million people in the service to a hundred men everybody wanted to go home.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: Got enough point to go home you got points I had points the reason I came back from Africa as early as I did I could have stayed over there another year. But I had a new daughter that I hadn't seen born while I was over there. And so from my combat tour I had more than enough points to come home so I elected to come home.

Interviewer: That's great how did you; I have two more questions for you. How did you feel the bombing campaigns over Europe did you feel they were effective because I know there's been a lot of debate over how effective the bombing raids were compared to the loss of man power.

Reeder: I don't know how we could have done all we did without them. We made mistakes one of the big mistakes after the war there was an extensive US strategic bombing survey

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: And call a spade a spade and the big mistake we made over there was that we didn't go after the electric system. We thought it was so complex and such an interconnected grid you

Interviewer: Couldn't break it

Reeder: Couldn't break it and the Germans were sitting their speared and charged the industry and what not and they were scared to death that we were going after it. And we should have done it then because that would have put a lot of things out of order. It's what we did in Yugoslavia you know in recent years now a days they have these little spools of wire that they put on back of one of those tomahawk missiles and it goes scooting across the country and wire falls across the wires and shorts them out and lights go out.

Interviewer: That's very impressive yea.

Reeder: No there was no question in my mind we reduced the submarine threat considerable we broke the back of the ___ from January – February of 44 to April was like day and night. You couldn't stick your head inside Germany without getting pushed in the face by fighters and flack fighter planes. By April we could go where we wanted to and didn't always need cover we always had cover until the time we had air superiority by April. And by D-Day there were I forget the numbers but there were thousands of sorties flown by the allied forces and there were less than a thousand encounters with Germans they just were not there. And had that not been the case there was enough difficulty getting up those cliffs in Normandy without airplanes.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: So of course I'm bias but like in the present situation there's not a lot of harm to be done to the air force but on the order of 80 percent of the tonnage of bombs that's been dropped on Afghanistan have been from air force airplanes.

Interviewer: I think they've proven ____. The other question the last question I have for you is what's the one thing or maybe not one thing a collection of things that sticks out in your mind the most of your times during WWII.

Reeder: Gee that's tough. I don't know I guess it was the willingness the dedication of everybody in the country to see the war through. Home front people did fantastic jobs that went from building 14 B17s to several thousand B17s and developed a B24 and massive industrial effort. Everybody was behind the war anybody that said anything to the contrary was booted out of town.

Interviewer: Right

Reeder: And people accepted what was and they accepted the job that had to be done. Guys hunkered down in boats in the middle of a storm and went ashore at Normandy and went up the cliffs. Guys in B17s, B24s I can remember in our barracks we had four crews and one night we came back and there were only two crews. There were eight guys gone but we got up and went out again the next morning. And just everybody it was just expected I guess it's the will of the country is the thing that comes across mostly to me from that phase. And subsequently Korea you call it the forgotten war but you go up here and talk to Bob Jones three houses up the road Bob Jones went in with 200 men under his command 18 of them came out. He was up in what they call the frozen chosen the chosen few chosen reservoir he got cut off by Chinese troops that were committed. And Vietnam same spirit and as long as people are willing to step forward and move out why our country will be what it is.

Interviewer: Our professor commented we were talking about WWII and he said that the veterans of WWII are probably the greatest generation that's left.

Reeder: Oh yea

Interviewer: They had a lot of determination and sacrifice.

Reeder: Kind of like these a little video on aging that we had in our Sunday school class. It showed 8, 9, 10 year old kids it's talking about their perception of old folks you know and then talking to the old folks

about their perception of old folks and what they're about. This one little fellow they kept asking him questions and the question was what do you think about old folks doing the way they do? He was very serious and he thought a long moment and he said well you know said folks just got to do what they got to do. And that's the way it was it wasn't the greatest generation that was just people doing what they was called on to see what needed to be done. You picked up your part of it and did what you could. Let the Lord lead you.

Interviewer: I think we're done here.

Reeder: Okay it's been a pleasure.

Interviewer: It has been a pleasure.