

Adkins, Eugene Interview pt 2 11-2-87 (1)

[Speaker 1]

Okay, so you went to Oxford to the hospital. How long were you in the hospital? Six weeks.

Okay, of course, after that you were back on the trail. I guess the next one was over Lorraine. It did take a long time for those, all that skin, you know, those things, they're just as tender as they can get, real tender.

I have trouble with them now. Real cold, frosty morning. The snowy days, they don't seem to bother too much.

But now, frosty, cold mornings, they're really, real tender. I've already asked you to describe German fighter tactics. Anything you want to add to that?

No, but they were just real good and very aggressive. Where did you describe? No, I got that later.

What about rockets? Did you ever experience any rocket tactics? That came later, I guess.

I never did see any rockets. But you did experience the aerial bombs, the ATU-8s, and the fighters coming in on you. They'd always attack at 12 o'clock, 12, 1 o'clock.

Now, that means straight overhead. And then right in toward the nose. Right in toward the nose, a little bit high.

They'd come up out of the sun. If there's sunshine, they'd get in that sun. And you couldn't see them.

They'd come right out of that sun, right down. Could you see the, for example, I've heard that they would pass you. Could you see them pass you to get ahead of you?

Yeah. Well, they were at you. Really?

Yes, sir. They were reaching away at you. How did you feel toward those pilots, those fighter pilots?

I liked them. That's what I wanted to talk to them. It wasn't a personal thing at all, was it?

No. Of course, it couldn't be. You didn't know them.

I didn't know them. I just know that they sure knew what they were doing up there. They can sure find out everything.

But the main reason they'd fly, head on attack, you see, this top turret here, if it was down straight and level along here, you couldn't fire because we had a little thing in this mechanism up there. It would cut out the turret. The guns wouldn't fire because it would cut out to get these props here.

But you could do it the same way that the ball turret, if you were firing straight forward, and you cut out on this antenna here, about six or eight inches you'd need to prop there. But if you could fire down like this and straight back, you'd have no trouble at all. Forever.

Yeah. Which positions did you prefer, top turret or ball turret? I guess I liked the ball because you could sit out in there and you could rest yourself.

But this thing here, you'd have to stand up on them old steel steps, those turrets, you know. Boy, your feet and balls of your feet would get so tired. Even if you had big, thick socks on, GI shoes, big heavy boots, still you'd stand on that piece of metal there for six or seven hours.

Your bottom of your feet would just get real tired and your legs would get tired. What sort of clothing did you wear? Most of us wore long-johns, you know, underwear.

You mean the electric furling? Yeah, and then we had our heated suit on, blue heated suit on over that, then our GI pants and shirt. And the top turret and the ball turret, we couldn't wear a big, heavy flak jacket.

It just didn't have enough room to move up and down and get around. So we just used our little A2 jacket, flak jacket. Then our gloves.

I'll tell you what, I'll tell you what stopped that belt fight. After that, we got silk gloves from RAL. Little, little silk gloves.

You put those silk gloves on and then you'd be perfect. Then our flying helmet. It was leather, wasn't it?

Yes, sir. Now the pilots and the navigator and bombardier and all the other boys, radio operators, they had a tail gunner, waist gunner, they'd wear those big fur jackets because they had plenty of room there. The tail boy had plenty of room back there.

On his knees, wasn't it? Yeah, sit down on his knees.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, that was pretty rough.

[Speaker 1]

Legs get real tired sitting down on your knees like that. On that old coal metal back there. The coal.

It was the coal. That was, that was what was rough back there. This position here was awful mad.

These two waist positions. And that went blowing through there in that pitch below zero until they put plexiglass up here and plexiglass here. When they did that, boy, it made a big difference.

Big difference. What was your most exciting time in a turret? Can you recall?

I use the word exciting. I'm a pro at sensationalizing. Well, I guess one time, the German fighter came right up under us like that.

And one of those 303 bullets went right through that round piece of plexiglass there in the front. It came right up there and hit the side of the site there. It just went right by my ear there.

Hit the back of the turret there. And that bullet fell off of my lap, and I still got it. Kind of excited about that.

I can imagine. Is that the closest you ever came to being wounded? Yes.

Now, you have one conformed keel. If you don't mind. I don't have a keel.

Oh, that's excellent. I've got a picture back here. Did I show you that picture of the keel there?

Don't think so. This is 535th Bomb Squadron. I got my permission.

I went to the 381st Bomb Room. Now, there's your airplane. It's a good fighter.

Yeah, I bought it. I drove it here. I have a picture.

Just a little small picture like this. I never blew that thing up that good. But I'll be darned.

Where's that short story?

[Speaker 2]

You can send it to me. Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Boy, I wonder whatever happened to that short story. You ever see one of these? You want to have fun, buddy of mine.

What was the worst damage you ever received? Right here. There's a hole right here.

Flak? Flak. That's an illustration of the actual damage you had.

Yeah. There's a hole there. You could walk through it.

How often would that occur? We got that one time, and we got our horizontal stabilizer shot up. And we left that inside there quite a bit.

We got quite a bit of flak down there. Did you ever lose an engine? No.

No, I didn't. No, you lost an engine. But we have a load that was with you the whole way, once you were here.

Okay. About the Keel mission, I'm going to disregard that. Memphis bail.

What was your relationship to the bail? How long were you on it and so forth? I first got on it when we went to Walla Walla, Washington, December of 1942.

And you flew over the... Went over to England with them. And started flying all these missions with them.

I'd say you were with them up through England, weren't you? Yeah. After that, you were, I guess, weren't with them.

And then after I got my... After I came out of the hospital, I got back down to school the rest of the year. And then most of these missions, I got my nose and my fingers cut.

And in which plane? Memphis bail. Memphis bail.

Just a few that you weren't in the bail then? Fifteen. I was with them fifteen trips.

Okay. Over Keel, apparently, you weren't, though. Because here you were...

The bail wasn't on that one. She's strong. There's quite a few missions there.

She's 485. They're not listed here. There is another one.

24485? Yeah. And she's...

So you can see the ones... She was bailed. Where is it?

485. Uh-huh. Here's another 485.

And Morgan. He's squadron commander, I guess. Morgan was going along as co-pilot that day.

And 485 again. And when it comes to Keel, I would imagine you were with Eller because of the plane. And when the film was made, were you on that mission that the film was made?

I was with them quite a few missions when they made a lot of those pictures. And some they'd go over, and some they wouldn't. I think it was 15 missions.

I thought he was gone. Yeah. Don't blame him.

So you saw the filming of the Memphis bail? Quite a bit, yeah. And you knew all these men personally?

Yeah. Yeah, I knew them all real well. Over here.

They went to Detroit one day. They landed up there. This was Ellen's home up in Detroit.

And they were at my uncle's house. This is on your way over. Mm-hmm.

He's from the office in New York. Mm-hmm. And Scott.

That's Quinlan. All right. Went to, he was in Illinois.

He went to work for a motor company. After the war was over. Mm-hmm.

He was an inspector up there. And he gave him 30 seconds to inspect a Ford truck. That's what came up.

I said, well, I'm getting ready to head down there. All right. I said, all right.

Tucson. He was the waste gunner. He was the washing machine repairman, wasn't he?

Yeah. According to the film. I've watched the film before.

I can't remember. Morgan. That's what I asked.

Connecticut.

[Speaker 2]

Mm-hmm.

[Speaker 1]

Right. So Morgan's still, does he still live in Asheville? Yeah, he lives in Asheville.

He used to own Morgan Manufacturing Company over there. Can you remember what plane Lieutenant Eldridge was? A nickname or anything?

Mm-hmm. You know, one thing I found common, the first plane you're on, you remember. But then when you transfer out, you know, at the placement cruise and so forth, you just don't have the same attachment, do you?

You just don't think much about it anymore. Just fly on this, fly on that one. You never really keep up with them, I think.

That's your mission to Keele. It's unusually long, about nine hours. I guess the thing I remember more about that mission than anything else is there was a bay out here.

Here was the town of Keele right here. Mm-hmm. And FW190 factory there.

And they let off smoke streams out through here, all down through the coast of that bay there. And that smoke was going this way. Mm-hmm.

You could look down and see that smoke moving out, smoke stream. And see the boats going out there, a lot of boats. Man, they were just high tails getting out of the way there.

This turbine engine plant that you had at Keele, what was that for? Did you know at the time? It was for aircrafts and Navy boats.

Navy boat. Navy boat. For U-boats, I imagine, I'm just guessing.

Since U-boats, that was your priority target at that time. Yeah, I do imagine. About the Keele, you're one confirmed.

Tell me about that. What position were you in? I was involved, sir.

Okay. He was coming in. He told me he was coming in at 6 o'clock time.

He went right down under us like this. I had to turn my turret to the rear. Man, he was right up under us.

FW190, right? FW190. He went down on his pin.

Black smoke coming out of it. Did you see his parachute? Never did see his chute.

He went straight off. You could see from the ball turret what happened to him? See what happened to him.

But he went all the way in the ground. You'd see him. And when you got back, I imagine you went through the debriefing.

Debriefing. They had the formation. They showed us where we were in the formation, where the fighter was.

The other crews would tell who was shooting and what they were doing. But we had a lot of fighter attacks out there. Over the whole tail end of the fighter.

We lost 24. 24. From the hole.

We had four wings out there. That's full First Air Force, I guess. I mean, First Air Division, yeah.

What about the target? Do you remember? Yeah, we hit the target real good.

Yeah, we really hit that target. How long did the fighters stay with you? Because they stayed with us.

That one bunch, they hit us, I bet you, 30 minutes. After we bombed the target, just as we hit the coast, west coast of Germany, they had another bunch over here. They really climbed the thing.

And they were all the way, almost back there. Quite close to Dover. Boy, that was something to see there.

We came right back to, right over, quite close to Dover. You sailed with the water most of the time, though, I imagine, didn't you? Yeah, we went off up north sea on the water.

Came in up north like this and came back down here. Went back out over the North Sea again? North Sea again.

We made it up that North Sea. What kind of flak did you have? Good, heavy flak.

Real good, very accurate. You could walk on it. Stick out there.

Did you see any aircraft particularly go down that day? Yeah, I saw, I saw two down below us. They were given evasive action.

Went on top of it. Came back down on top of it. Both of them went down in collision.

In your group? Yeah. Pulled first quarter.

What about chutes that day? Did you see any come out of the aircraft? Yeah, quite a few chutes that day.

But that's a story real good, that. Do you read all that? No, I haven't yet.

I'm saving it like that for the stuff from the Air Force. So that's the May 19th raid there. This was put out during the war, so I guess they had to keep the dates and so forth.

Too high? Yeah. So that's about the time I'd be telling about it.

Now after that, soon after that you were, you went over with Brayman twice. Yeah. And of course, you had 13 other missions after you were commissioned.

Did you fly regularly after you were commissioned, or just when you wanted to? Just when I wanted to. And you were at Schleinfeld?

That was the last one. That was your last mission? About 450 bombers and about 300 fighters.

What do you remember most about Schleinfeld? It really hit the target. We'd climb in that ball backpack.

And what were you, in the ball turret during that? Of course, you know you were in the lead squadron, weren't you? Mm-hmm.

Target. And what were your duties after you were commissioned? Teaching the aerial veterans to new bomber crews coming over.

We lost 60 airplanes over the target day over at Schleinfeld, doesn't it? Sixty. And you left in August of 44, didn't you?

Mm-hmm. Of all the missions you flew, which one do you remember the most? It was Keel Raider, when they attacked through their own flak to hit us.

We never did think they'd come through their own flak coming up to make fighter attacks down there. I guess it's memorable also because you got the confirmed kill. I imagine there are many others.

I read accounts from other crews that they didn't want to go through the hassle of the confirmation debriefing. Is that true? Yeah, it was a long, drawn-out thing, and you were tired and scared.

They wanted to know so much about where this fighter came from and who was shooting at him. The mother crew, everybody had to tell who was shooting at that fighter so they could run away. If they really, then they'd send all that information to Hurricane to be made for.

They would go over all that information. It may be a month or so. The information would come back where you even got the fighter.

They just didn't want to sit around there for an hour or two telling all the details about this. They'd say they shot him down, and the next mission you go on, he's right back up there again. You say we shot down 30 German fighters today, or 20, and you go on a mission, back in the same area, there's them same damn 20 fighters back up there again.

They get tired. They get tired. That's rather debriefing.

Yeah. I guess they went into detail more about the flight and everything else. When you filled your 25th mission, how did you feel?

I know I was tickled to death to get back on that ground. Because that was from Schweinfeld. We lost half of the 91st group down there.

Tickled to death. Couldn't sleep that night. Medics there.

Same old kind of whiskey. Told me to hold on to my food. Strong whiskey.

And they'd give it to you when they came back to calm you down. Calm me down. Give you all you want.

But I'd take this, most of it, take a little sip. Couldn't do it. It wasn't strong.

We'd go home and clean up. Five or six o'clock at night, we'd walk down to the local club down there. About a mile out of the base there.

He'd always tell me 10 o'clock. He'd tell me 11 or 12. We'd all go back down there.

We'd go down there and drink a mile of dinner and get in the stout. Had a lot of scotch. Gin.

We wouldn't drink that old good. It was too strong. Pour it on the table.

Take the varnish off the table. Sharpen the table. And soon after, see that was, now which, that was the October mission you went to Schweinfeld.

One in August, one in October. And I guess October's the last one. They also hit Regensburg, you know, too.

Yeah. You know, LeMay and 3rd Air Division. Now, after you got out, what did you do the rest of your career?

You were in 20 years, right? I got out. I was on B-29s in Pueblo, Colorado.

Well, what was your job after the war? I was teaching military on B-29s out in Colorado. Then the war was over.

They just disbanded everything. I had 60 days leave. And I got discharged and came home to stay 60 days.

And went back in. Master Sergeant. I didn't get off to Langley Field.

I didn't stay a long time. I ran into Colonel Ray. He was in the personnel.

He walked me and things out. I ran into him up there in Operation. And while we were around, around 12 o'clock, I told him I wasn't going to be a B-29.

Back to MacDill. He just wrote my ceremonial again. And I said, thanks for all the help too.

Go back to MacDill. Back to B-29. He said, go back to MacDill.

I got on a B-29 and flew down there. That was when I went off to airplane engineering and mechanics school in Keesler Field. Fall of 46.

Finished in May of 47. And just got back to the base. First flight to Geneva, Minnesota.

Merced, California. I was going to activate the old 91st bomber. And I said, Lord have mercy.

I'll go back to 91st. He said, go on. I'll tell you what.

It's tough. Ready to go. Get on.

Went to Merced. I was a crew chief out there on B-29. Flying.

And I got recalled to active duty. B-29 crew. Went to Okinawa.

Doing another aircraft maintenance officer. On 29th. Did you get your commission back somewhere?

Yeah. That was a let down, wasn't it? Yeah.

To go from commission back to enlisted for a while, wasn't it? Yeah. There was a lot of military stuff.

Oh, yeah? Oh, yeah. There was a lot of...

Just to stay in? Yeah, just to stay in. They'd give us all masks on.

Everybody. Then I got on a B-50s. And went to England.

U.I. 50s. Came back and put away a 51. What were you carrying?

Was this conventional weapons? Or did you... No.

Oh, those bombs.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Those bombs were what I was... Maryland. Bang, bang.

There's a little town over there. There's airplanes a lot. I've been on this crew.

They took me out the last minute. They got a minister. And they made a condition for me.

For what? An old injury class.

[Speaker 2]

You know what I'm saying? You don't know what happened to that crew. We made a new condition for him.

I haven't seen it since. Right. I've been on this crew now.

Two weeks. I don't know where.

[Speaker 1]

I'm just thinking about what we did up there. We took off from Cape Cod. I think it was in England.

I don't know. It was close by.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

To go down that quickly with no... No... No reason.

Mm-hmm. They found out that we were in jail. I always stayed over there.

Back then I went to Okinawa. Were you flying? Yeah.

Did you fly any missions over for a reason? Not much. I came home.

I got on a B-36. Ah. Cardinals.

11th Bomber. 42nd Bomber. I got on a B-36.

Then we got through the 36. We got B-52s and... Maintenance.

Again, maintenance officers. I had 10. 10.

That's a squadron. B-52s in there. I stayed on those.

I got out... You got out for a good long time in there. How'd you retire?

Major. That's something else. Well, I think that...

Anything else you want to add? No, now that is a date. Now, we were in there...

Time to get wound up there. Why did you join? I just wanted to fly an aircraft.

I wanted to be an Air Force... Airman. I knew the war was coming.

When did you join? December 21st, 1945. A year early.

I knew the war was coming.