

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEE ELI BAAR

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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SEPTEMBER 18, 2007

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Lee Eli Baar on September 18, 2007, in Elmwood Park, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth ...

Ben-Zion Jaffe: ... Ben Jaffe ...

Jessica Ondusko: ... Jessica Ondusko.

SI: Thank you very much for having us here today.

Lee Eli Baar: No problem.

SI: To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

LB: Bronx, New York, on Fox Street. I hear it's a hell of an area now. I have never been there. Unfortunately, my mother passed away when I was about five or six years old. I never really knew her. That top shelf there, the fellow on the end was my brother, my sister, my mother and my father [pointing to picture]. Of course, they're all gone. Picture below that, that's me and my wife, our wedding pictures. I was still in uniform, I was still in the service. My father remarried [a] widow, you know, he was a widower, she was a widow and he married a woman who made Cinderella's step-mother look like Mother Theresa. I shouldn't use the word like a bitch-on-wheels, should I?

SI: Well, no, but go ahead.

LB: She was a very, very lousy-type person. I left home as soon as I graduated from high school. War broke, I went.

SI: You mentioned that you went to New York University.

LB: Yes, I went to NYU at night. I had about seventy-something credits. What do you need, about a hundred and something, right?

SI: Depends on the college, but it's usually about a hundred.

LB: That was one of the most stupid mistakes I ever made. When I got out ... I could have had free training, [but] I never took it. I never got a degree.

SI: You never used the GI Bill.

LB: Getting back to ball-turreting, ask me any questions you want. I have some pictures here, too, if you want.

SI: You mentioned that you had followed your brother to NYU.

LB: Oh, yes. My brother wound up with the *Journal of Commerce*. He had a weekly column and then a little later they put him in charge of "Wine and Spirits." He had a page every week in

Journal of Commerce. I'm the only one that's left, none of them are still alive. At any rate, we trained as a crew, we got transferred, [and] we went over to England. We were assigned to the Eighth Air Force, the 306th Bomb Group. Four squadrons in the 306th Bomb Group, we were assigned to the 368th Squadron. Now, in those days, you had to fly twenty-five missions and if you're still alive they sent you home. General [Carl Andrew] "Tooney" Spaatz, was in command of the Eighth Air Force at that time. He got replaced by General Jimmy Doolittle. Name ring any bells?

SI: Yes.

LB: Now, he flew off a carrier, bombed Japan. He took over command of the Eighth Air Force. He decided that twenty-five missions wasn't enough. He raised it five, [to] thirty missions. Guys used to paint on their leather jackets, "Twenty-five for God and Country, five for Doolittle." Reason was that the survival rate in the Eighth Air Force was fourteen percent. It had the highest ... death rate, you know, people getting wounded, of any other branch. More than the Marines, or any other. Make a short story longer; here, I got a bunch of baloney here [takes out documents]. Now a couple of things. I had enlisted under my maiden name, the name I was born with, which was Eli Goldbarst. Look at that picture up there, that's me and my brother, I was about, well, I was being circumcised at that time, I never show my operation, so that was me and him. At any rate, I was enlisted under the name of Eli Goldbarst, there's my discharge, and when I was discharged, well, after I finished my missions, I finished my missions, incidentally on D-Day, June 6, '44. I have a list of my missions here if you are interested.

SI: Yes, we are.

LB: Oh, incidentally, I changed my name at the request of my brother because after he became, he had a firm, Barber, Baar Associates, public relations, whatever, and he asked me, after I had been discharged and married, he asked me if I would change my name to match his, which is what I did. So, I got this. I notified the Army and I got this from them to notify me that they have changed my name legally.

SI: So, had your brother written for the *Journal of Commerce* before the war or after the war?

LB: During, before and after, yes.

SI: How much older is he than you?

LB: About nine years older. My sister is about four-and-a-half older. I was the baby in the family. Incidentally, I'm here by myself because my wife passed away, November 23, two more days it would have been our sixty-second anniversary, November 20, September 20 rather, and when she passed away we were married sixty-one years. Now I am here by myself. I have two daughters, both of whom are working to get me out of here. They want me to move someplace close to them. The problem is one lives in Connecticut, near New Haven. The Rutgers graduate lady and her Rutgers husband live outside of Philadelphia and they found a place for me to move into for senior citizens, retired, whatever, which is about ten minutes from their home. So, my daughters took me there the other day, and down to Philly. Oh, here's the list of my missions.

First mission was Ludwigshafen, look at the last two. [Editor's Note: Ludwigshafen was a strategic city in southwest Germany which had large industrial and chemical plants that helped the German war effort.]

SI: Target A and Target C in France. [Editor's Note: Shaun Illingworth is reading of a list of Mr. Baar's missions. Target A and Target C was Air Corps code in order to maintain secrecy.]

LB: That was D-Day. At any rate, when I finished my missions, to give you a little short story. I had done my thirty. My next to last mission, coming back, I had problem with my ears coming down, coming out of the airplane. So, I was grounded and the rest of my crew finished their missions, and I'm left alone. I needed one more mission to finish up and the crew left me alone. I am left alone as a fill-in; someone who is short, ball-turret gunner, I'm it. ... I'm getting tired of waiting to get called as a fill-in, so I figured I wasn't going to celebrate until I got my last missions finished. I got tired of hanging around playing cards, went into town with one of the guys, couple of guys rather, and I fell under the influence of alcohol, you know what I mean. When I came back [to] the post, it was about six o'clock in the morning and they're looking for me. Somebody needs a ball-turret gunner; "Oh, that's me." I went over to the pilot, I knew the guy, and I'm standing in front him, weaving a bit, and I said, "Lieutenant, I'm not feeling too well. As you could see I went in [to town]." "Oh, don't worry about it," he tells me. "Get into the ship, as soon as the wheels are off the ground get in the turret and put on your oxygen mask and you'll be surprised," which is what I did. As soon as the wheels are off, I'm in the turret, I put on my oxygen mask and I'm breathing pure oxygen and I'm sobering up. All I can tell you, if I ever opened up a bar, I would have a tube of oxygen by the door just in case. As you noticed, Berlin, that was the first daylight raid to Berlin.

SI: The one in March.

LB: Yes, all the way up. I went to Berlin twice in three days. What a hell of a way to make a living.

SI: It says three missions to Berlin on March 8, 9 and 10. What do you remember about those Berlin raids?

LB: Oh, I'll never forget flying over, oh, on D-Day? Berlin? I had found out, you know, when I used to come to London on a pass, you know, you're on duty seven days, off-duty two. You got a two-day pass, you go to London. There is a hotel called the Jermyn Hotel. It was named Jermyn Hotel because it's located on Jermyn Street and that hotel used to get a whole bunch of RAF pilots. A whole bunch of people from overseas, who came over, you know, came from Spain, from France, and they are with fighting the British and the Americans. And there are a bunch of RAF pilots, Royal Air Force pilots. They used to fly bombing missions over Europe, Germany. They had a different type of bomber than we did, but they used to go at night. They have an entirely different way to do it. They have a pilot ship flying over, dropping flares onto Berlin and then the pilot ship would call "Cupid Queenie," "Come in and do your bombing, Cupid Queenie," and the ship would come in, drop their bombs on the flares, you know, where the flares were, and we were entirely different. We had never gone over during the day. We went into briefing. There's a huge screen on the wall and it has a cover over the screen. Lifted

the cover and there's a red thread, it's a big whatever, going from where we were to the target, and all the guys went, "Oh, my. Berlin?" All of a sudden, a lot of guys got stomach aches. They had to go see the doctor, but we went. But D-Day was an entirely different story. When I flew to the English Channel, there is a line of ships across the Channel that looked as if you could walk over the Channel on those ships. Standing right close to the shore were heavy stuff, battleships and cruisers bombing inland. You could see the muzzle flashes. Well, it was a milk run. We had very little to do. It was just to drop some bombs on some bridges, whatever, inside, which we did then we came back. The line of ships still there, and we landed and there was this colonel, comes over, he tells the pilot, he says, "I'm putting more gas into your ship, more bombs, you're going out again." That was my last mission, my 31st mission. I said, "Sir, that was my last mission. I should be finished by now." He says, "Get in the ship." Then I realized that a staff sergeant does not argue with a bird colonel and I went and I flew an extra mission. Nobody got hurt.

SI: Was the second mission to a bridge also?

LB: Yes, something. Oh, here, this is what a ball-turret looked like. Here is a picture of a guy getting in.

SI: Were you always going to be in the ball-turret, or did you just train as a gunner and, eventually they said you would be the ball-turret?

LB: I think I trained as a gunner, but then they put me into the ball. Now the gunners; you had a tail gunner, you had waist gunners on the side of the ship, [and] ball-turret. Now up front, you had a navigator, the bombardier, and they had guns in front of them, too. We had a crash landing, I have pictures of that, too, coming back from a mission. Here is the picture of the lower ball-turret with a guy in it.

SI: This is great.

LB: Yes, exactly.

SI: Not great for you, but it's a great picture.

LB: There are a bunch of things. First, you plug-in the oxygen mask, then you plug-in a heated suit, because the temperature, you know, you are at about twenty-five thousand feet. Here, when I finished my missions they sent me for operational fatigue, or as we used to call it "flak happy." That's what happened when I got into the hospital. Here this, is what they gave me when they sent me out of the hospital.

SI: You were describing getting into the ball-turret.

LB: Oh, yes. You plug in a heated suit, you're wearing boots, a suit and gloves, because the temperature at twenty thousand feet is way below zero, and you read that letter, that's what they suggested for me to do. All you had to do was stay alive to get medals. I got an Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters. You got an Air Medal every five [missions] and then, if you finish your

missions, you get a Distinguished Flying Cross, big deal. I have them here if you want to see them. I don't want to sell them yet. You want to see them?

SI: Sure, if you want to show it to us.

LB: Meanwhile, here are some pictures. The crash landing; we were coming back from a mission, the wheels came down but they didn't lock because the hydraulics have been shot away by flak, anti aircraft fire. Here they are. The problem is, I'm the only guy that's still alive from my crew. This is the picture of the crew. Here, there's another picture of the crew. Which one am I?

SI: Let's see. Is this you?

LB: No, I'm on the other end here. That's me. There's a listing of the names back there.

SI: Your pilot's name was Tripp.

LB: The co-pilot was Ray McDaniel and the radio operator. ... We had three guys named Ray, his name was Ray Manski? He was the first guy in the crew to get killed. I'll never forget that night. You know what they did, your first. Here's the same picture. Here are some pictures of the crash landing. There's pictures of me. ... Hell of a way to make a buck. The worst target we ever had that I can remember, target called Oberpfaffenhofen. It's in the middle of Germany. We sent eighteen ships and we lost ten. Eighteen planes, ten of them got knocked down.

When I had come out of the hospital, I was taken out of the Air Force because they didn't think I should be flying anymore and I got transferred from Air Force to Service Forces, which was in Baltimore, I forget the name of it. At any rate, I got a furlough and a friend of mine was going be on furlough at the same time. I didn't visit with my stepmother, you know, I saw my father, but not my stepmother. At any rate, first night he asked me if I wanted to stay my furlough at his home. He lived in Paterson. Sure, you know, he's on furlough too. First night, "What do you want to do?" "I don't know. What do you want to do? Who can we call?" We're trying to figure girls we could call. This one is married, this one is pregnant, this one is in service, this one is engaged, you know. "How about Isabel Monto?" "Who? Oh, yes, I know who she is." We lived in the same area. I had seen her walking around, I had never ever been in her company, I never ever spoken with her. My friend says, "Give her a call, she'll remember who you are." So, I called her. She said, "Oh, okay, sure." Went and picked her up and we took her to that clubhouse, had a drink, jukebox, we played the jukebox. When I finished my furlough, about two weeks later, I'm on my way back to Baltimore, where the post was, we were engaged. I don't futz around, you know.

SI: You knew who you wanted.

LB: But the only problem was I was already engaged to a young lady in London. I had to send her a "Dear John" letter. You know what they are. At any rate, we were married. I used to get passes, go from Baltimore to Paterson, you know, for a couple of days. I'll never forget, I was in Paterson in her home. She was in the kitchen with her mother, I'm stretched out on a couch in

the living room and I got the radio on, news. Comes a big, big news bulletin. The Air Force had dropped a new kind of bomb, a nuclear bomb on a Japanese city of Hiroshima and that one bomb was the equivalent, had the same destructive action of all the bombs that the Eighth Air Force had dropped. I said, "What?" I'm stretched out, I can't believe that, and he repeated it. I came running into the kitchen. Isabel was there with her mother, I said, "The war is over." "What do you mean, war is over," and I explained to them, you know. But after that, surely after that the government told the Japanese if they don't call it all off, they will attack another city. The Japanese didn't want to do it, so that's when we hit Nagasaki. So, at any rate we were married, and I'll never forget, I don't know if you're familiar with Paterson, but there used to be on Broadway, there used to be a big, big, old building, been there for years, and it was called the Women's Club, or something. That's where the wedding was and comes wedding night and I'm there, of course, and my bride is upstairs doing whatever brides do, putting their face on, I don't know, and this woman comes walking in. She looks very familiar, but I can't place her, but then, all of a sudden, in back of her, I see my pilot. Oh, incidentally, I forgot to tell you. When it came to picking a guy to be best man, all of my friends were in service, none of the guys were around. My wife knew this couple, Doris and (Obbie?). "Why don't we ask Obbie?" I don't know them from a hole in the wall. He'll be best man. He was in the service and now he got out because he got flat feet all the way. So, I asked him to be best man. So, comes the wedding night this woman walks in, in back of her I see my pilot. The last I saw of him was in England. I said, I gave Ray, I said, "Ray, you son-of-a..." and we embraced. I was shocked. I was so happy to see him. Of course, he immediately became best man and that woman was his wife whom I had met. Before we went overseas, my brother made a big dinner for the whole crew, ten guys, me and nine other guys, and their wives and or girlfriends at some hotel in New York and that woman that I saw coming in was Tripp's wife and I had met her before going over.

SI: How was the whole crew able to meet with your brother before going over?

LB: Well, we were all stationed someplace in New York, because we went over on a British ship, His Majesty, the *Andes*. I'll never forget that ship, and we were in New York waiting to board ship and that's how we all got together. But the unfortunate part about it is, I'm the only guy that's left of my crew. We used to exchange Christmas cards, little notes. [I'll] give you an idea as to what I mean. I got this note from Mac's wife, Ray McDaniel, my co-pilot. Here it is. You can read this, there's even a picture of him there. Read it out loud so they can all hear.

SI: "Dear Eli, want to let you know Ray lost the fight. He passed away March 10th. We miss him greatly but I know he's in a better place, no more suffering. Happy holidays, Zita."

LB: Zita, yes. That was her name, his wife's name. When I read that I fell apart. You know, we were so close, the crew was, you know, you had to trust each other. If I loused up they were in trouble. If they loused up I was in trouble. You know what I mean? And we all got very, very tight, very, very close. I'll never forget reading about Ray Tripp getting killed. We were living in Elmwood Park that time, me and Isabel, on Grove Street, and Sunday I get the *Times* every week, every day. No, we only get it three days a week, four days a week. I'm in the backyard reading the *Sunday Times* and there's a little slip about, "Pilot of private plane killed in crash, Ray Tripp." What? His name was listed as the pilot and I can't believe it. I can't call his wife, he came from Kentucky, I can't call his wife and say, "Is Ray still alive or what?" I couldn't say

that. So, I called Mac in Texas, this is before [he died]. I said, "Do you hear anything about Tripp?" He said, "Oh, oh, I'll check it," and he found out that was it. They had rented a plane, he was taking a bunch of guys to go hunting in the Midwest some place, Wyoming, I think, or I don't know, Wisconsin, I'm not sure, but he'd take them on a hunting trip. Somehow the plane crashed and he flew all those missions. After he had finished his missions, they didn't want to send him home. What they did, by the time the war was over, they sent him out on a, what he did he went to the targets that the Eighth Air Force had hit to see what the damage had been and they put that together, and the number of aircrafts that they had used, the crews, the type of bombs they dropped, the altitude from which the bombs came down and he had to do that. Meanwhile, I was in touch with him, we used to write letters back and forth. Great bunch of guys, I'm telling you, I miss them. When I got that letter and I read this thing in the paper. Small world. So, what else I can do you for?

SI: We have questions about your whole time in the service. You mentioned that you were at NYU and then Pearl Harbor happened. Do you remember where you were when you heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

LB: Yes, I was working. I was working for a firm called Cohen-Hall-Marks in downtown New York, a large textile firm. They're a part of the Wall Street firm called United Merchants and Manufacturers, big textile firm. When I came out of the service, I went back to them for a short time and then things were getting changed and I saw an ad in the *New York Times*, a trucking company had a separate division, textile division, sales division. ... These people in the textile division called on textile accounts to get the freight. We were in sales so I answered the ad and I got the job, and I was working there for quite a while, commuting, and I used [to be] a commuter, Jersey to New York, and then I got an offer from another trucking company. I was very fit. First trucking company I was with was Associated Transport. Then I got an offer from McLean Trucking Company and a much better firm and I go in and they had a textile department, also, and I get in and I'm hired. First thing that happens, they have a sales meeting down South. They have a train stopping in New York and me and my wife go, they had a couple of cars for [employees], you know, rented, it would come down to the South, I forget where it was, I think maybe around Nashville. The McLean Trucking Company is owned by Jim, Clara, and Malcolm McLean, two brothers and a sister. Malcolm McLean was the senior and he'd greeted all the guys and he was introduced to me by the guy who hired me. "Oh, incidentally Mac, this is a new guy with the company." "Oh, how are you? Blah, blah, blah." I introduced him to my wife and me and Isabel go upstairs to the hotel and then we come down. We're sitting in the lobby feeling very lonely. Malcolm McLean sees us sitting there, he comes over, he starts to talk to us, makes me feel right at home, and then he breaks it up and then a little later, the next, day there was a sales meeting. All the sales people and we go in an auditorium-type place and he's on the stage and he starts to talk. We're all sitting and he wants everybody to stand up and look, "Underneath your chair. Look underneath your chair, there are two silver dollars, two silver dollars you will find pasted at the bottom of the chair." He says, "Take them off and sit down again," which we did. Here are the two silver dollars that were under the chair. He said, after everybody had sat down and taken the silver dollars, "I just wanted you guys to know that if you want to make a buck, you got to get off your ass." I still have those silver dollars, my good luck pieces. Incidentally, he started what became Sea Land Service. You know, you're carrying trailers on ships. There's a sales meeting in the Carlton Hotel where he was introducing to all the

people, you know, the company, about what he had done. He had bought Navy surplus ships to convert them to where you could put trailers on them and then we would be able to offer our customers a choice of either going overland or by sea, you know, different rates, and this started what is now a huge, huge industry. You know, ships carrying trailers full of [merchandise]. ... At any rate, he passed away a while ago. Incidentally, he was one of the most brilliant men I have ever [known]. When he passed away he was one of the nicest guys you could ever meet. I'm headquartered in New York City, he's down in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. You had a major problem, you picked up the phone and you called Malcolm, you know, and he's a great guy. When he passed away there is a big, big article in the *New York Times* that he started this whole industry, you know, ships and freight. But it was a temporary job that I had with McLean Trucking, I was only there thirty-four years in New York, you know. I once got sent down South, to Ashville, not Asheville, at any rate, I traveled. But at any rate me and Isabel were married, she passed away. Although I must say, my two daughters ... have been so helpful and great for me. They don't want me to drive, incidentally, which one of the reasons I don't want to go down to Rutgers. The doctors said I shouldn't drive because of my age. You know, they are so concerned, but I have. The car that I have now has little under 14,000 miles on it, and I have never ever been in an accident with a car or a person, nothing. But the doctors that my daughters figured I should see because his card says Geriatric Services, geriatric people, that's me. How old do you think I am? Guess.

SI: Eighty maybe.

LB: Comes February would be my birthday, small Cadillac incidentally would be a nice gift. I'll be Eighty-seven.

SI: You look a lot younger.

LB: Well, if you drink a quart of booze every day it helps, you know.

BJ: If we can go back to Pearl Harbor, how did you react to the news when that happened?

LB: Oh, I was a little upset, but the only thing that really made me enlist was first of all, there is a guy with whom I graduated high school, I was graduated in Eastside High School in Paterson, the guy's name was James Platt. Jimmy Platt, he had enlisted in this aviation cadet thing and we used to correspond. He used to tell me about how great it was and so it was terrific, and he was in pilot training and he, incidentally, got killed very shortly because they had graduation service down in some field in Texas where pilot graduates flew their solo and he somehow crashed and got killed in that graduation service. His family was there. Golly, when I heard about that. But meanwhile, any chance of even, ... or going back to NYU, back to accounting, I just couldn't see. I felt patriotic, and [with] Jimmy and all the guys, I enlisted.

SI: Where were you sent first after you enlisted?

LB: Well, it took a while. I enlisted, I'd been sworn in but it took them a few months to call me in because they were kind of filled up, you know. They finally called for me in May, I forget the year, and I had to go to Newark, and Newark sent me to Nashville, Tennessee where I took all

kinds of exams, physical, mental, whatever, and my choice was navigation. When I checked out all of the tests they changed it to a pilot. So, I got sent from Nashville, Tennessee to Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama where I took a three-month course teaching me how to be an officer [OCS] because as a pilot you're a First Lieutenant to begin with. So, from Nashville, I got sent to Lafayette Field in Lafayette, Louisiana. That was where they had the pilot training and I loused up, you know. If you're flying a PT-19A Fairchild trainer, you're sitting in the front, right in back of you is the instructor, and there are two sets of sticks, and if he wants to take over he grabs his stick and lets, you know. I loused up a landing. You know, you're flying at about five thousand feet, he says, "Take me home," and then you see where the flag is for the wind and you're supposed to let down in a series of turns. Last turn was supposed to bring you right into the wind, the right way, and so I had loused that up and I had to fly with a test pilot. The guy who really was a Navy pilot, the instructor was a civilian, and I didn't fly. I got to go in the back. I didn't fly it, so I got wiped out of pilot training, and sent down to Biloxi, Mississippi and I had to go to the orderly room to get my insurance changed and I happened to see my test there laying around and I see I've been accepted for training as either pilot, bombardier or navigator and I went and asked the officer. I said, "Sir, I noticed I could qualify for training as a navigator also," which is what I had originally wanted. He said, "I'm sorry, we need gunners more than pilots. You're going to become a gunner." Who am I to argue with? That's how I became a gunner.

SI: Were you disappointed that you won't become a pilot?

LB: I was disappointed, yes, but then I got assigned as a gunner. Oh, I had taken a course in machine work as far as gunnery is concerned and the two guys that did that course became either a ball-turret or tail gunner, one of the other two. So, when we were all assigned as a crew out in Salt Lake City, the other guy, by the name of Charlie (Hung?), he had taken the same training as I had and I said, "Which one do you want? Do you care?" He said, "It really doesn't make any difference to me. I'll choose [for] you." He became tail gunner, I became ball-turret gunner and I had become friendly with the radio operator, Ray Manski ... from Pittsburgh. We were the same age and the same everything, you know, we became real buddy-buddy. Now when we got assigned to our outfit, 306th Bomb Group, new crew, they broke up the crew to fly one mission with a different crew, an experienced crew, to get your feet wet, you know, you got kind of broken in. So, Manski got assigned to fly. I wasn't assigned for anything so I went town with a couple of guys, had a few drinks, beer primarily. They didn't open a bottle of hard stuff until the late part of the evening and I asked the guy, when he was opening it up, I said, "Look, one of the guys in my crew, my best friend, he's on a mission today, could I bring back something for him?" And the guy happened to be real nice and he gave me a little container of scotch. I brought it back and they had huts, they're like twenty guys in there, double-decker beds, and I come in and a whole bunch of guys [were] there and then I see Manski's bed. The mattress is rolled over and his luggage, nothing near. I said, "Where is Manski?" "Oh, you didn't hear? Got killed on his first mission." I was like harpooned, and we lost a bunch of guys. Our navigator got knocked down on his mission. He wound up in a *Stalag Luft*. [Editor's Note: *Stalag Luft* were prisoner of war camps set up by the Germans for Allied air personnel that were captured.] We used to hear from him. Oh, and one of the waist gunners had a problem with his, you know, the inside of his nose, so they grounded him. They made him a, you know, working on the shifts. But the rest of the guys you know, we lived through it.

SI: Up until that point, when you lost your radio operator and your navigator, had you ...

LB: They got different guys. They got different guys, guys who had been left after their crews got, you know, like I got left when I was and we filled them in and the navigator, a short little guy, I'll never forget him. What the hell is his name? I forgot. Anyway good guys, you know, you couldn't louse up because what you were doing was keeping them alive. Same thing, if they were lousing up, I'm in trouble. You know, your crew filled in like that.

SI: Had you realized how dangerous flying could be before that point?

LB: Oh, yes. Although our first mission as a crew we went to, first on the list there, Ludwigshafen.

SI: That was your first time as a crew or were you flying ...

LB: First time as a crew, December 30, 1943. Now, of course, we had all heard about the flak and anti aircraft fire and the *Luftwaffe*, you know. Part of the training that we had, they showed film on a panel there showing the *Luftwaffe*, the Messerschmitts, and, you know, all these planes so you can identify the ship and not shoot your own aircraft down which was known to happen. That first mission, Ludwigshafen, the flak was none existent but you can see off in the distance other groups, the flak came up and you saw black puff. If a flak was close it sounded like a dog barking and then you got hit, you know, the shell has exploded. I don't ever remember coming back from a mission where we didn't have holes in the ship because of the flak. You know, it sounded like hail on the tin roof and they had all these holes on the ship and we weren't attacked by any German aircraft. I figure it's the first mission, I can do that standing on my head, no big deal. Second mission, we went to Kiel, that was a sub haven and we dropped bombs and that was the first time I saw a ship knocked down. Guy flying on our right wing. You know, you're taught to fly tight, the aircraft, because that made it tougher for the *Luftwaffe*. Your guns were pointed forward, you know, and there's a guy flying on our right wing and I'm on the ball-turret and I can see, looking peeking up, he's down a little bit and, all of a sudden I see there's a fire where his wing root joins the fuselage. A fire, a little fire. I'm about to call it into Tripp, you know, the pilot, "Guy on our right." All of a sudden there's a big orange flash, he explodes. Then it dawned on me. "There are ten guys in that ship. There were ten guys in that ship." That's goodbye Charlie, they're gone. ... When you land the first thing they do, they take you into the room with the intelligence guys. Part of my job as ball-turret gunner, when the bombers says bombs away I watch the bombs dropping and I've been [told] to, you know, knowing where the target, what the target was, whether it was a railroad marshalling yard or a factory, or whatever, and I see where the bombs are landing and, also, if a ship gets hurt and guys are bailing out, I'm supposed to count the parachutes coming out. I saw a couple of chutes as they come down. ... Then we get into intelligence ... after you come back. They ask you, "Did you see the bombs go?" Yes, they looked pretty good. "Did you see any so-and-so?" "Yes, I saw three parachutes. I saw four parachutes, you know," it's a hell of a way to make a living. Fourteen percent survival. I wasn't aware of that number until I was out for quite a while. ... The first time I went into an airplane, me and my wife went around on a vacation, went to England. The reason I went to England, I used to go to London on a pass but I never did any sightseeing or looking. The idea is to find a young lady and have a good time and it was very

easy to find a young lady. I wanted to get vulgar but Piccadilly was as dangerous a place as Times Square. It's the same kind of a place and you had a lot of young ladies become prostitutes, and you hear these sounds from, you know, everything is dark because of the, you know...

SI: The blackout?

LB: Yes. "Hey, Yank, you want to come home with me?" You didn't have to, but it was a standard procedure, if you said, "Yes," the next thing the guy would do is offer this young lady a cigarette. Cigarettes are very tight in those days and she would take a cigarette, then the guy would light a match and inspect the merchandise. But if you want to have a young lady for company, dancing was very, very popular thing in England, in London especially, and families used to go there. You'd see a husband and a wife and the kids and they'd be sitting there drinking tea and the band will start playing and the husband and wife would get up and dance and the kids would be drinking their tea, or the kids would dance too, whatever, and they have what was called "excuse me dances." You will see a young lady [that] seemed attractive. "Could I have this dance?" "Oh, sure." They have this dance and by the time you were halfway around the floor you were getting more and more friendly. ... The "excuse me dance," some other person could tap her on the shoulder and get you as a partner so if you found a young lady anxious to dance with you, you figure, "Boy, I'm not doing too badly." Oh, well. Then they started the buzz bombs. I'll never forget that. I was in Leicester Square, which is another square in London, and, all of a sudden, I see a flash across the sky and a sound that's like a lawn mower going and, all of a sudden, the flash flares out, then you hear an explosion, and that was the first time they had these air bombs going across and they came in two strengths. The smallest, you know, you could hear it was a smaller bomb. ... All I could see was the flame coming out of the tail end. I thought, "Well, those guys got hit," the *Luftwaffe* got hit, ... till I saw the paper in London that next day telling us about buzz bombs. That's what they called them buzz bombs. But, boy, you got very friendly with the British people. ... Oh, they kid around, "The problem with you Yanks; you're overpaid, over sexed and over here." They were very, very, nice people. I tried to do whatever I could. I had a niece, my brother's wife gave birth to a young lady, in Washington Heights in New York. I heard about her and a little while later I became friendly with some people, near the field, our field, our 306th Bomb Group, was next to a little town, I forgot the name of the town. At any rate, I used to babysit for some couple, they had a baby, and I think I'd be a good guy, so I wrote to my brother, "If you have any used baby clothes, send them over," and he sent me like a big shoebox full of clothes, baby stuff, and I gave them to that couple. They said, "Oh, my goodness." Of course, that small town had all kinds of problems. One night a guy comes back and said, "You know, there's a little restaurant in town, they're selling steak and chips." "Steak and chips? Wow." ... Of course, the mess hall was lousy, so I go to town with a couple of guys, have steak and chips. So, we go there a few times and then one night I go with a couple of other guys and there's a padlock on the door and there's a cop, a Bobby as they used to call them in England, in front of the door. So, we go, me and two other guys, three other guys, yes. We go to the cop, "Sir, why are they padlocked?" He said, "They were caught selling horsemeat without a license." Let me tell you something, horsemeat isn't bad if you haven't had a steak in a while. Hell, it's delicious, and that was it. But the people themselves were, you know, if you're in London and there's an air raid going on, you know, it goes off, you go down into the tubes as they called them there, the subways, and you see all kinds of people. They bring mattresses down, they bring stuff to make tea with, they're friendly, they're neighborly and

they talk to the Yanks, you know, because we're down there, too. We don't want to get hit on the head with a bomb. ... What made the King and Queen very, very popular [was] that after an air raid the King and Queen of England would take a walk along the area that had been bombed and they would see the people coming down to look at their homes, which were, you know, just bombed away sometimes. They would talk to them, "We'll do what we can" and, you know, they were loved. Oh, well. So, what else is new? You have any questions you want to ask?

SI: You did go on a mission to Schweinfurt at some point?

LB: Once. Yes, that I think was one of the worst, yes, Schweinfurt,

SI: I think it said in February.

LB: Oh, yes. They forgot the W, they have it down as Scheinfurt. [Editor's Note: Mr. Baar is looking at his flight log.] It should be Schweinfurt, February 28th. I see the day after my birthday February 11th, I went to Saarbrücken that wasn't an easy target either. But Berlin three times in four days.

SI: Early in 1944 you went on a lot of deep penetration missions into Germany.

LB: Yes. Well, we went to Berlin and I think I told you that was one of the biggest days for the doctors because, guys, oh boy, and you know there were so much flak in Berlin because that city was so well protected. But it was funny, Mac, my co-pilot, he had a thing to say after every mission. As soon as the bombardier said, "Bombs away," you hear Mac, over the intercom, "Let's get the hell out of here," every time.

BJ: What was your feeling when you're bombing Berlin, especially since you were in London when it is being bombed over there?

LB: Well, you get as I call it "flak happy," nervous. That was one of the problems I had when I went into [the hospital], when I finished my missions, I had been "flak happy." You know, the fact of landing every mission with holes on the ship and that crash-landing, you know. We didn't know that the gear wasn't [working]. The gear came down okay but the hydraulics had been shot away, and as soon as the weight of the ship came down on the wheels, it pancaked; it went right down, and they took the pictures. You see [in] the pictures, you'd see the props are still spinning and it was something. [Editor's Note: Mr. Baar is showing the interviewers pictures he has kept from the crash-landing.] All the guys started to run out of the ship because we were afraid that it might explode, but then it dawned on us, we had two guys on board that were wounded, not seriously. The top gunner, he got hit in the rear end, piece of flak, and Mac, I think, got scraped across his forehead. But, all of a sudden, we didn't know how badly hurt those guys were, you know, but we banged open the door and we started running down, then it dawned on us, "Two guys are hurt on board," we all went back to help the guys out. Fortunately, nobody was seriously hurt.

SI: Did you crash-land at your own field or another field?

LB: Our own field. You know, I developed a liking for, what was the name of the college where black pilots went?

SI: Tuskegee.

LB: Tuskegee. You want to hear something funny? Coming back from a mission we had been shot up pretty good. Incidentally, the difference between B-17 and a B-24; B-24 you lose an engine, "It's goodbye, Charlie," the ship's gone. But the '17, it will take problems like you can't believe. At any rate, we were coming back, we had been hurt pretty badly with an engine, I think one or two was gone. All of a sudden, this Tuskegee guy flying alongside us, ... we knew that they were flying P-51s but you could see in the cockpit there's black guy there. There were no black guys in the Eighth Air Force That was before Lyndon Johnson made, you know. But at any rate, this guy, the Tuskegee guy, flying that P-51 escorted us back to England, flying alongside of us and I developed such [a liking for them]. I figure I got to thank one of these guys, by God, because he saved us. Now to make a short story longer, my two daughters, they want, you know my wife is [no longer alive], I'm here by myself now, and they wanted me to move to someplace close to them, but one of them is in New Haven, outside of New Haven rather, in Connecticut. The other lives outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They wanted to find a place for me to live close to one of them. They finally found a place outside of Philadelphia and this is an old, old, old building but it's being used now. There are a tremendous number of guys same as me, no wife, that [fought in] different wars, I don't know which ones. But that building was built during the Civil War when Philadelphia had a high record of people getting killed; husbands, sons, uncles, aunts, you know, and they want to build places for these people to live and they built this huge [building], it's like two blocks long. It's ten minutes away from where my daughter lives and they want me to live there. So, they took me down to see it a week ago this past Friday, or a couple of weeks ago Friday. Karen picked me up, I'm not supposed to be driving, you know, ... Karen picked me up coming down from Connecticut and we went down to Philadelphia, but Madeline couldn't join us because she's a teacher, she doesn't come out till 4:30, and her husband picked me up and took me to his house and then Maddie came. But, at any rate, we got into [the building] and they are interviewing me and I asked, "Are there any guys in this complex who had been in the Air Force?" She said, "Oh, yes, as a matter-of-fact, there's a guy here, a black guy, he was with the fighter pilots and he came out of Tuskegee." "A pilot from Tuskegee? Could I meet him?" She said, "Yes," and they fed us lunch at this place. Lunch happened to be very good. I had one thing, Karen had something else, and this woman her name was, anyway she takes [me outside]. There's a very tall, black guy sitting on a bench outside and she introduced me to him. I said, "Excuse me." I said, "You're a graduate from Tuskegee?" He said, "Yes, why?" "You remember what ball-turrets were?" He said, "Yes." I said, "I was in one." I said, "I feel I have to shake your hand and thank you." He said, "Why?" and I told him about that P-51 that was escorting us, the guy had a P-51 from Tuskegee. He smiled, he thought it was pretty funny, we shook hands, and we sat down [and] chatted for a while. But I'll tell you, my wife had never ever flown. We decided our first trip was going to London. I forget what airline it was, but, anyway we sit down, she had never been on an airplane and, here I was, feeling a little nervous, you know, it's the first time I've been up since I ...

SI: Since the war?

LB: Yes. But we left, it was a terrible night, it was a thunder and lightning night, rainstorm going on, and the ship was getting up. I'm gripping the seat like you can't believe, white knuckles, and I'm trying to keep quiet. I don't want my wife to think I'm scared. "Oh, everything's okay, hon, everything is okay. Is everything's okay." [Heavy, nervous breathing] [laughter] But we landed okay. Then I had to explain to her, but knock-on-wood. Oh, incidentally, I've seen a couple of B-17s. The first time, there's an airport, not the one on Route 4, you know where, what's it called?

SI: Teterboro?

LB: No, not Teterboro. There's another one, up in Wayne someplace [Essex County]. Two years ago I have two nephews in the area, he wanted to see a '17. "Fine, let's go up." I want to see it, too, because to tell you the truth, I was curious, and we went up and I showed him the turret and I was able to take him in, walked around, showed him [how] you get [in]. You know, in order to get into the turret, there's a way of cranking it, because the only way in is a little door and the guns have to be pointed straight down for that door to be inside the ship. You opened up the door and you crawl in and you locked the door, then you can move the turret. The handles, they look like the end of two mop handles about so long, about so big around. And you go this way, the turret goes that way, you go this way, the turret ... goes around. Now on top of the handles are two little buttons. You press the buttons, that shoots the guns. Now you got two fifty-caliber guns on the turret. You saw that sticking out and you load it up the turret. You got about seventy-five rounds for each gun, and that's a lot of bullets, and it's set up so that if you're firing forward you're not going to hit the props. You know, the prop is spinning but it's adjusted so that you can't hit the propellers; shoot your own plane down, you know. But you get used to it, it becomes a habit.

BJ: Was it very loud when you were shooting the guns?

LB: You couldn't hear too much, but you could hear it, and, in fact, I used to come home with empty guns every time. ... You know the only way you got credit for getting [a hit], knocking down a German ship, you had to see that ship go down in either flames, or explode, or see the pilot bail out and somebody else had to see it. So, you know, if you want to, I never put in a claim for a ship, I know I hit plenty. "You know who am I? Did you see that Focke-Wulf burn?" "No," he didn't because you're so busy and then you're flying into anti aircraft fire. You know, you're busy looking at those black explosions. It's a hell of a way to make a living. I'll never enlist.

SI: It seems like when you were being attacked by fighters at least you can shoot back, but with flak you just had to sit there.

LB: The flak, yes, and, you know, if you got a big target, a major target like Berlin, you knew the flak is going be there. Sometimes you got a target, you had to hit a marshalling yard where trains were coming, you had to hit factories. You're trying to hit factories, ... like Schweinfurt was manufacturing ball bearings, they're manufacturing that. You also sometimes, you had a target where you're supposed to hit a field. You figure, a field? Grass? People who knew, knew

that underneath that grass was a factory and that was, you know, that's quite a surprise. But you went where intelligence told you to go. But after the mission you sat down with the intelligence guys and they tell you that, "Did you see the bombs go down?" "Yes." "Did you hit the target?" "Yes." "Did you see so-and-so? Did you see any parachutes come out?" You know, all kinds of things.

SI: Could you tell if the bombs were hitting the target or not?

LB: Yes, you could follow it down, sure. I can follow it down. If you hit a railroad marshalling yard, or if you hit a factory, you could tell.

SI: Did you usually hit your target?

LB: Usually, yes. I'll tell you, that bomb [hit on] Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When I think of what the Eighth Air Force used to hit, forgetting what the RAF used to hit, they used to hit a lot of planes, too, a lot of the factories. Oh, it's hell of a way to make a buck.

SI: How often would you be attacked by fighters?

LB: Oh, very, very often, depending on the targets. Sometimes, like Berlin was [protected], it was like what we would protect if they were going to bomb Washington or New York City, and there was always a huge [amount of flak], there's quite often *Luftwaffe* in the air, but the flak was [terrible]. A lot of ships got knocked down with the flak. You know, as I said, you could hear the explosion, sounded like a dog barking and you see black flash and if there's any plane close to it. It depends on what that stuff hits. Sometimes it could hit an engine, sometimes, you know. But, as I said, the '17 was a much, much better [aircraft]. You know, there were some very famous movie stars [like] Jimmy Stewart was with the Eighth Air Force.

SI: Clark Gable.

LB: Clark Gable, yes, and we lost a very famous band [leader], Glen Miller's Band. ... You know, I'll never forget the first time I went into town. You know, I'm a stranger there, pub is the only thing. You're drinking beer. That English beer is, "Yuck," but there's a guy sitting at the table and, all of a sudden, I looked on his chest where ribbons should be, there's a white ribbon with blue stars on it. I looked it, I looked at it, and I nudge the guy and said, "What the hell is he doing with a Congressional Medal of Honor?" You know, that's the sign of a Congressional Medal, white background, blue stars. Then he told me that's [Maynard] "Snuffy" Smith. [That] was his name and he had gotten the Congressional Medal because he was a ball-turret gunner, our outfit. They're on a mission, everybody is getting the hell knocked out of them and his ship was hurt very badly and he got out of the turret to take over waist guns, take care of guys that were hurt. He did a hell of an act and at that time the Eighth Air Force was thinking, "We got to get some good publicity in the United States, how are we going to do that?" "Oh, could we give some guy [the] Congressional Medal?" Then they decided on Snuffy. He really didn't earn it, he didn't, and [Henry] Stimson, I think, was the name of the secretary for the Department of War, he came over to give him the medal and they had the royalty there, there's all kinds, a whole big ceremony, you're giving him a Congressional Medal of Honor, and he died a while back. His

name was in the papers, Snuffy Smith they used to call him. [Editor's Note: Mr. Smith was in the 306th Bomb Group. He received the Medal of Honor in 1943 and was the only ball-turret gunner to win the award.] He was a ball-turret gunner.

SI: Would you remain in the turret for the entire mission or would you come out of it?

LB: Oh, no, I was in the turret for the entire mission. I got into it when we approached the English Channel, over the Channel [was] when everybody would test fire their guns and once we got into Europe, Germany, France, whatever, put on the oxygen mask because we were going to be over twenty thousand feet. Once we got above, I think, it's twenty-two, twenty-four, the oxygen mask had to go on. I once passed out because of that, because I'm in the turret and we had this heated suit; two boots, two gloves, and it's like a woolen suit and they're plugged into each other, you know. If one goes out the whole circuit stops. One of my boots went out and it started to get cold. I was never supposed to get out of the turret unless I had a good reason, so I called into Tripp and I told him, "My boot is out." I did have a spare set in the radio room, "Could I get out, you know, to switch the boot?" He says, "Sure, go ahead." I get out. Now I always had, stashed next to the turret, a walk-around tube of oxygen, you know, because oxygen, you had to have it. I get out of the turret, I pick up the tube and I plugged it in. It's about so big, about so big a round. I start walking into the radio room and I fall down. They see me fall and they quickly picked me up and plugged me into the ship's oxygen because some idiot had used [up] that tube.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You were telling us that you collapsed.

LB: Oh, yes. They saw me fall down, because somebody had used that walk-around and I had just passed out [from lack] of oxygen. So, they saw me fall and they plugged me in again and I came to and I got the boot. I think somebody had another walk-around further back in the ship, maybe near the tail gunner. But it's a hell of a way to make a living.

SI: Were you able to fix your suit?

LB: Oh, yes, I always had a spare. It was a circuit; you know; gloves, boots and a whole body shell.

SI: How well did it work? Did it work well?

LB: Oh, yes, it kept you warm. Sometimes a little too warm. But without that suit, you know, that temperature. You know, there is no heat in the turret. That turret is a kind of a complicated place, you know, firing the gun, moving the turret and making sure you didn't hit one of ours.

SI: Was that a big fear, friendly-fire, hitting one of your own?

LB: It has been known to happen, friendly-fire, yes. But you had to be very, very careful, everybody tried to be. What happens is sometimes, when you're being attacked by a *Luftwaffe*

group, you know, they had a bunch of them. They have Focke-Wulf, they had all kinds of ships. We had quite frequently, we'd have to look at the pictures of their ships on a screen to make sure, because if you look at one of ours and some of their, they look very, very much the same and unless you could see a star, or a cockeyed cross on the body, you know that it's one of ours and not one of ours.

SI: How did you feel about fighting the Germans? Were you particularly eager to fight the Germans?

LB: First of all, we have one of our guys at one of the *Luftwaffe's* [POWS, the] navigator. I told you he got knocked down, and then you hear stories about those places where they kill people by the [thousands]. You know, a good number of people who were able to leave Germany to come back, to come over to the States rather, and you heard all the stories from them. For instance, my son-in-law's mother, Steve, the one who's married to my Philadelphia daughter, his mother, [is] German, Jewish, but for some reason they didn't think she was Jewish so they put her to work in a factory and she was working in that factory all throughout the war until the Allies took over. Also there's supposed to be an unwritten law that if somebody is bailing out and he's on his parachute, you're not supposed to shoot him, you're supposed to let him get down, but you know what happens? German guy jumps out of his plane, he pulls his chute and somebody [makes shooting noise], they want to get the bastard. Now, of course, they'll put him in a new plane. That's quite often [that] you have one, you know, parachute getting hit. I always told the guys, I said, "Look, if and when the time ever comes that I have to bail out, make sure there's somebody big and strong standing in back of me by the door to push me because I'm not going by myself." I was scared.

BJ: You mentioned the death camps. Did you know in detail about what the Nazis were doing?

LB: You mean those places where they had? I think the news had come through. I think they had heard of what was going on. People getting marched into a death house, and then, awful. I tell you, I'm glad I wasn't able to see one. I don't think I would have been able to stand it. As it was, you know, when your friends get clobbered and wounded.

SI: How many casualties were there in your unit? You mentioned on a certain mission there were only eight planes that came back when eighteen were sent out. How high were the casualties?

LB: You know, there are a lot of ways to get hurt. You get hurt by flak, you could [get] hurt by gunfire. The flak expanded and you always were expecting some damage to the ship and depending on how many engines you lost. As I said, the B-24, you lose one engine you're in trouble, but a '17 was the strongest, most phenomenal ship you've ever seen. We came in once with a couple of engines on different sides and the others weren't turning properly, but we landed, we managed to get down. We had to do that in a British field because our ship, you know, our pilot, Tripp, found first flat level, you know, [he] saw a British airfield, we landed there. It was a question of being scared all the time, really that's what it was, because there were a lot of ways to go.

SI: How did you deal with your fear?

LB: With the guys on my ship? Everybody was friendly. Everybody was up to the same, you know, everybody knew what the problems were and how you're going to make out. If you heard that So-and-So got hit you try to go find out if he's in the hospital, you know, you visit, and then you keep swapping stories about, you know, a lot of, "Keep a shovel," you know, keep shoveling the way as you talk.

JO: Did anyone carry any sort of good luck charms on missions or have any type of ritual they would do to kind of ease the anxiety about missions? You mentioned you have those silver dollars. Did you take them with your missions?

LB: Oh, souvenirs from, not really. I had one caliber, one shot fifty-millimeter bullet. I hid it someplace, I didn't want to leave it around. No, nothing really to take.

SI: Would you carry, like a rabbit's foot?

LB: Oh, a good luck-type? Not really, no. I know a lot of guys did. A lot of guys would wear only a certain pair of pants, you know, luck type. Who knows? I may have forgotten, but I don't remember. All I know is I repeated prayers to myself. You know what a *bar mitzvah* is? The difference between my father and my stepmother; my stepmother was a communist. Come *Yom Kippur*, she and her group would have a dinner party, on *Yom Kippur*, she had to defy the world, you know. But my father was very anxious for me to be *bar mitzvahed* so I was going to grammar school, and I went to Hebrew school, too, after I came home. In my Hebrew school there are two guys there teaching, both of them, they actually became rabbis, but they taught and they taught and they taught and there was a time where I could speak Hebrew and read Hebrew as well as I could read and speak English because these guys were good. Finally came time for my *bar mitzvah*, now those *bar mitzvahs* in those days, remember this is during the Depression. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the president and let me tell you something, if they ever build another face on Mount Rushmore, if it isn't Delano Roosevelt I'll start a war. At any rate, so the *bar mitzvah* included, started with me doing the whole service and then some wine and little pieces of cake, period. The *bar mitzvahs* that they have today are entirely different. You have kids wearing tuxedos and all kinds of stuff. Came the day of my *bar mitzvah*, my father was sick, he was having some kind of ailment and he couldn't get out of bed. He wasn't allowed, the doctor told him, "You better stay in bed." So, I did the whole thing and I came home and I did the whole thing in my father's bedroom, repeated the whole thing. But you learn certain prayers and every once in a while that I was scared stiff in the turret thinking how I'm going to be dead within the next [hour], I would repeat a couple of prayers. I love the help, I'm still alive. As I said, I never learned about the casualty rate until many years after I was out. They came out with those numbers and they said that the Eighth Air Force had higher casualty rates than the Marines or any group.

SI: Were there any other times that you felt maybe you weren't going to make it back?

LB: Oh, yes, every once in a while, you know, because especially if Tripp would say that such-and-such is damaged, engine number so-and-so, you know. You stop to think, "Boy, if such-

and-such is damaged, if such-and-such an engine is *kaput*, how are we going get home?" But as I said, that '17 was [strong]. I was almost tempted to write a letter there, they had something on the news the other day about a bunch of women who were building aircrafts and they were building in New York or Jersey, I think B-17s. I was a little tempted to send them a letter or something. The only thing you had to be careful about was your oxygen mask because it didn't take very long to go down a chute if you're not breathing oxygen, but we had a good pilot, we had a good crew, and, you know, everybody knew that I depended on them and they depended on me, you didn't want to louse up anything.

SI: It sounds like you got very close to each other.

LB: Oh, yes.

SI: It doesn't seem like there was much of a line between officers and enlisted men?

LB: No, there may have been with some crews, but I know the officers on my crew, Tripp, Mac, those guys were like brothers, and I told you when I saw Ray Tripp at my wedding. I had always been thinking about him and, you know, "Gee, if he could be here, he could be my best man" and, you know, but then I see his wife and all of a sudden, "Ray!" Well, they were good guys. As a matter-of-fact, both him, he lived in Kentucky, Mac lived in Texas, both of them were working for firms. Tripp was working with a firm that made cable stuff for elevators and, you know, and every once in a while, he had to come up to New York. We're living in Paterson, he always stopped. A couple of times he stayed over and then went to New York in the morning, you know, [he] had a car, and Mac, he had the same thing. I don't know what he was selling, what he was involved with, but he had to go to visit New York every once in a while. They would always stop then and we'd fight the war all over again, you know. "Do you remember such-and-such and such-and-such that mission to Jabib?" you know. It leaves a mark, let me tell you.

BJ: Do you have a story that you used to talk about with your old buddies a lot?

LB: None of those guys are around.

BJ: When you guys were together, was there a particular story that stands out in your mind that you liked to talk about?

LB: No, not really. We never really [were] able to get together. As a matter-of-fact, my outfit publishes a newspaper every quarter and I got the paper. They still have reunions. Now, first [time] I'll never forget, I get the paper, they're going have a reunion of the 306th Bomb Group in New York City. Now, I'm commuting to New York, I go to New York everyday to work, you know, in those days, and Tripp was coming up on a business visit and he used to stop over and I told him about it. "Oh, yes, let's both go." So, we went, me and him went to this hotel where we're having a reunion. Didn't know a soul, not a soul. Everybody that we knew was either gone or they didn't go. So, we wandered around and we wandered around and, "Oh, hi, hi," people we didn't know. We always used to say, "I told Orville, I told Wilbur, you'll never get it off the ground." You know Orville and Wilbur are? The Wright brothers.

BJ: So, you said Tripp had come in and visited you after the war?

LB: Yes.

BJ: You guys would reminisce about wartime.

LB: Oh, yes, we talked about this and talked about that. "You remember such-and-such a mission? Remember such-and-such," you know.

BJ: Is there any particular mission that you guys would always talk about?

LB: Certain missions get pounded into your head like that one mission to, mission to Oberpfaffenhofen. We sent eighteen, lost ten. We talked about that, that's a lot of loss. I don't know what the hell that target was. ... There's one here that says abortion, yes. March 20 abortion, flying time was three hours and fifty-five minutes. What that means is that you got up in the air, but all of a sudden, something went wrong with the aircraft, the engines, something, whatever, and you had to come back home. So, that was called an abortion.

SI: You will get credit if it went to a certain point.

LB: Yes. Your target is Berlin and you get like short distance to Berlin and all of a sudden one of the engines or a couple of the engines is knocking away and you had to come home, otherwise something might blow up, whatever, and that would be called an abortion. We talked about that. We talked about different guys, how some guys were like this and other guys were like that. ... I hate to tell you what happened when I first got in there. You know, we shipped [over], we went over on His Majesty's Ship the *Andes* and we get off and then we get trained over to the outfit and we're put into a van [or] something, you're going to be in this and this hut, you know. It's twin beds. We go, me and Manski, we go in, open up and there's all kinds of twin bunks and the place is empty except there's a young lady sitting on the edge of one of the beds wearing a slip. We come running out and we tell the driver, we said, "Hey, there's somebody in there, somebody in there." "Who's in there?" I said, "A young lady, she's not fully dressed." "Oh," he said, "don't worry about it, she'll be out of there soon." That's what we found out, [and] that was [what] made our commanding officer one of the best loved people we had, because they would have a dance in the mess hall or someplace every couple of weeks and they invite a bunch of young ladies from the town and the young ladies would go, will come to the dance. We had danced and then some guys would be very brave, "Would you mind staying over?" "Staying over?" Of course, staying over, but they're going into the hut where there's a bunch of guys living and they're there. Of course, the guys aren't sleeping that well that night because the noise keeps them awake. Well, one night a couple of young ladies get taken away to go to a hut and stay over and she stays over and then as she's coming out, the MPs [asked], "Where are you girls coming from?" "Oh, such-and-such." At any rate, it seemed that somebody had made a mistake the night of the dance and these young ladies wound up in the barracks of a couple of officers and I think one of the officers, may have been the commanding officer, because the next day on the bulletin board, headquarters bulletin board, there's a note, "All visiting personnel must leave the post after forty-eight hours." ... They try their best. Oh, the food was absolutely the worst.

Ever have powdered eggs? Don't ever have them. Oh, they're awful. That was for breakfast every day, powdered [eggs]. You know, it looked like scrambled eggs, it tasted like I can't tell you. It had no taste at all and served with that was some kind of a sausage. I hate to tell you what it looked like and it tasted worse, and that was breakfast, and the rest of the time you worry about getting to town and getting steak and chips.

SI: How often would you be able to go into town?

LB: Depending on the missions and whether mission was called because of weather, or whatever. But you are on duty for seven days, you're off duty for two days. The two days you got a pass, you went to London. Now right where the post was, the town [was] called Bedford, is the train station, and you get over and you spend two days in London. Then you come back. God only knows, you might be scheduled for a mission. The way you got the mission; about six o'clock in the morning or six-thirty in the morning, the first sergeant will come in with a whistle and he would say something very vulgar about getting up, drop whatever, and getting dressed and go for your breakfast, and there's a briefing about the mission at eight o'clock or seven, you know, whatever, and you go. And the briefing, you know, all officers, enlisted men, you know, gunners, pilots, [are] all sitting and a big huge screen with something over it and, "Today the mission blah, blah, blah," lift the cover, then you see that red line and everybody goes, "Oh, my God." I'll never forget when I saw the target was Berlin, "How the hell can we go to Berlin?" But we did, we went three times in four days. I don't know what, if any, the casualty rate was but there was, I'm sure there was a casualty rate.

SI: Were there targets that you saw and you thought, "Oh, that's not so bad," or that should be pretty easy?

LB: Yes, sometimes you thought that the target was easy and, sometimes you didn't think it was, dependent on the target. When they said, "Berlin," everybody was scared stiff because we knew Berlin is a top city of Germany. It's got to be the most well-guarded city in Germany with antiaircraft flak and fighter pilots, you know, surrounding, [and] that's what it was.

SI: What about on D-Day? Was that the first time you had learned that there would be an invasion?

LB: Oh, yes.

SI: Or where the invasion would be?

LB: I was in town that night, I told you I was in town getting *embriago* [drunk] and when I came back I found out it was D-Day, I couldn't believe it. "D-Day? All of a sudden?" But I knew my crew was finished and somebody needed a ball-turret gunner, and that was it. But as soon as we got to the Channel and I could see that line of ships, it was unreal. I'll tell you, I couldn't believe it, and then you see the battleships and cruisers off shore, muzzle flashes; they're bombing like hell inland. I didn't see those guys climbing up that beach, thank God I didn't. You know, the casualty rate of those guys, boy, that was awful. But, by the same token, the Eighth Air Force, a lot of guys just got blown up. A lot of guys just drowned, you know, a lot of guys came out in

parachute and the chute didn't work, you know. As I said, it's a terrible way to make a buck. I'd rather go to the McLean way.

SI: Did you have any fears of like being captured by the Germans?

LB: Well, I knew that if you're going to be captured by the Germans you should only tell them your name, rank and serial number, that was it. You're not supposed to tell them where you're stationed, anything. So, you keep shutting up and if they start to beat you, take the beating and, you know, just shut up, don't tell them and that's what you're supposed to do. Name, rank, serial number.

SI: Were you worried that you'd be particularly mistreated because you were Jewish?

LB: Yes, I was afraid of that. As a matter-of-fact my dog tag had my religion on it, and all dog tags had them, and, I guess, I would have wound up, had I been captured, I would have wound up in some, not in a *Stalag Luft*, but in some ...

SI: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in the military?

LB: No, I didn't. As I told you, when I first got placed with my crew, that thought did cross my mind and when I spoke to Tripp and he said, "Forget it, don't worry about it," and, as I said those guys were [great], I never had any problems, and everybody knew that I was a [Jew]. As a matter-of-fact, my nickname used to be "Goldie," you know, before I changed my name, my name was Goldbarst. Everybody used to call me Goldie. They knew what I was, how I was with my religion. Knock on wood, there was never any problem.

JO: It sounded like you were very close with your crew. You guys are very close.

LB: Oh, yes.

JO: Was it hard for you to make the transition from military life, and being with your buddies all the time to civilian life?

LB: Not really, no. My brother, he used to have a public relations business in Madison Avenue, New York, and the name of the firm was Barber and Baar Associates and he was the guy that asked me to change my name because if it ever got, you know, cost him a hundred bucks. I still have the legal document. My son-in-law, the psychiatrist, you know, I had been hospitalized for a while with operational fatigue, flak happy, and all that stuff, [said], "You ought to apply for a pension." "Like hell," and I didn't apply for a pension a long, long time. Finally, all of a sudden, it dawned on me, "Why the hell don't I apply for a pension," and I started the proceedings. I had to go to Hackensack to have a military [assessment]. ... I brought all the documents with me and blah, blah and I got one. Not much, but it helps. As a matter-of-fact, I got a cost of living increase a couple of years ago, not very long ago, and this had happened when my wife had passed away but the increase I got in my pension, they knew I was supporting a wife so they increased it a certain amount. I didn't want to lie to them. I wrote them a letter with a little copy

of the paper, you know, the death certificate, to explain the fact that my wife was no longer with me and why, and they cut my pension a good hunk because I was no longer supporting any wife or children. My daughters have been supporting themselves a long time. ...

SI: After your last mission on D-Day, how did you get home and what was that process?

LB: They did, finally, tell me that I did have my thirty missions in and I was going to be separated from the Eighth Air Force, and, you know, where I got that Distinguished Flying Cross, they told me, "Go to the orderly room." "Oh, here," and that was it. Nobody pinned it on me, shake my hand, kiss me, nothing At any rate then, I got transferred to a place where they get ships out of and I got put into one of those big ones then, the *Queen Mary*, yes, and I got put into a room, it was gorgeous, and they had all of the fancy wood, teak, and everything else covered over and eating and the food was very good. Of course, there were huge poker games and crap shoots going on throughout the ship. Landed in New York and I came out and I called, "I'm home." I finally wound up getting separated in the States ...

SI: One of the letters you showed us said Miami Beach, was that where you recovered?

LB: Oh, yes. When I came back the Air Force had taken over the Don Cesar Hotel, are you familiar with that?

SI: We interviewed somebody who was also there.

LB: I was in that hospital, I think have the [form], I showed you the form that came out of that.

SI: Yes.

LB: And that was [what] brought my son-in-law [to say], I should place my request for a pension, which I finally did. But that was quite a place. All they did, they woke you up in the morning, they took your pulse and temperature and turned you lose the rest of the day. Now that hotel is practically on the beach. You've been there?

JO: I have never been there. I've seen pictures of it, though.

LB: It's practically on the beach and you're on your own, you know. If you were married, the top floors of the hotel, which they converted to a hospital, if you're married your wife, you and your wife could have a suite upstairs. ... I wasn't married, but that was long after. Then I finally got out of the Don Cesar Hotel and I was assigned and, eventually, wound up out of the Air Force, transferred into the Service Forces.

SI: That's when you were in Baltimore?

LB: Yes. In Baltimore I was in the Service Force. They looked at me like I was lost. I only have that jacket, they see the wings and the medals of Eighth Air Force, "What are you nuts? Are you lost?" And I had to tell them I got transferred out. All it was is red tape in Fort Meade. I'll never forget, they sent me home on a furlough and when I came back they told me, "You

want to get separated?" I said, "What do you mean?" I had picked up another star, you know each medal is five points, three oak leaf clusters and an air medal that's four points. At any rate, I was short five points when I got there to get out, but when I was being transferred, when I've been on that ship coming across the ocean and get back to the States, *Queen Mary*, that counted as a battle trip. We earned another Bronze Star, so since I was still technically connected with my outfit, that trip gave me another five points. When they found out that I got another five points, "Come into the orderly room, we want to talk to you. How would you like to get out?" "Get out? Twist my arm," and I called Isabel. I was supposed to be looking for an apartment in Baltimore for us to live, you know, we were married by this time, you know, for us to move. I said, "I'm not looking," I told her why, and I went out. You know, they sent me, there is a hospital that the Air Force had taken over, also, in Valley Forge. There's an Army hospital there, but a small part of it was [a] separation point, where they sent you to get discharged. Well, I used to wander through that hospital, I see those guys. Used to get me, because, you know, arms, legs, eyes, you know.

SI: Yes, amputee specialty, yes.

LB: Oh, golly, it hit me, like, "What the hell, am I getting out? How am I getting out? Why? Look at these guys here." But they turned me loose, so that was the last time I want to see the Armed Forces. This mission that they are now, in with Iraq. I told my grandson and granddaughters, "If they start with the draft and you're drafted, I'll drive to Canada. You go to Canada, I'll take you," because they're putting women in the service, too. You know how to fire a gun?

JO: No.

LB: You'll learn.

SI: Well, is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

LB: No.

SI: You told us a lot, we appreciate that.

LB: You have any questions, or anything else?

SI: You guys have any other questions?

BJ: One thing that I was thinking about is that you mentioned that you did, at least in the history books, two major missions; you flew on D-Day twice, and you also did a daylight raid on Berlin. So, when you were doing those missions did you ever feel a sense of historical importance?

LB: Oh, yes. D-Day, I felt it was something extremely important, this is going to be the war of the war. D-Day I knew right away, that it was going to be a hell of a, I was afraid also of what the mortality rate was going to be. You know, I knew how could our guys get [through], you know, that's why the two bombings we had were for bridges and stuff like that, to prevent the German

Army to get closer to the, you know, I thought of those things, and what [is] more, going to Berlin, those three missions, that really broke me up because Berlin was a hot target. The *Luftwaffe* was trying to protect it and the anti aircraft, oh, golly, that was tough. You saw you're flying into a black cloud, it was more or less, and, you think, "I could get killed in that cloud." The thought of getting killed [is] never really lost [on] those guys. You knew that soon there, because, you know, you come back from a mission [and] you know that So-and-So, got knocked down, So-and-So, got wounded, so-and-so, you know, the news goes all over the post.

SI: It seems like from your ball-turret you could see a lot of these planes going down.

LB: Oh, sure. I'll tell you, that first ship that I saw blow up, before that, I thought on our first mission, I think, "This is easy, no big deal," but then, when I saw that ship blow up, I knew it was a big deal. All of a sudden it dawned on me, ten guys in that thing and they're all gone, just a big flash, an orange flash; the ship blew up. Hell of a way to make a living, as I have always said. Incidentally, there is another [show] at Teterboro years ago, there's another B-17, there the public was invited. Another nephew wanted to see it, we went up to see it. They wouldn't let you near it. They would take you for a ride, they put you into the ship and take you for a ride around. It cost, I think, something like forty bucks, or something, to be a passenger, but they wouldn't let me near the ship. The first time I was able to get aboard, the first time I was able to get on board and walked through it and point out, "This is where the ball is," you know, and show him. Now they just had another one a couple of days ago, I saw it in the *East Bergen Record*, out of Teterboro, same thing, one B-17 on the ground. I don't know if they're going to take people for a ride but if they were that's a sure thing that they're going to be charging. I'll tell you the truth, I wouldn't go for a ride. I figure all the time I've been on a '17, this next time, "Goodbye, Charlie." I think I got a list of how many hours I was in the air.

SI: Yes, it seems about 250 hours on combat missions. You must have flown more in training.

LB: More in training, more as a mission, they counted that. That was the important thing.

SI: Were there people who after so many missions they just refused to go up?

LB: Oh, there was one guy. I'll never forget this. There was one guy who finished his tour, he got his thirty-one, whatever it was, he got them all in and he was finished. All of a sudden, he's signing up for another tour. Everybody thought he's a little bit nuts. He signed up for another tour. After, I think, his second tour, he goes to his hut; he wakes up in the middle of the night screaming and crying for his mother. He wants his mother, he wants out, and he quit. He flew two more missions. He thought he's going to go through the whole forty-whatever, never made it. I think you had to be crazy to volunteer. Well, like I said, they needed gunners, so I didn't become a navigator or a bombardier.

SI: Well, thank you very much for all your time and your service.

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Reviewed by Ben Jaffe 12/1/08

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 3/3/08
Reviewed by Hanne Ala-Rami 4/9/08
Reviewed by Karen Baar 8/12/08