

Interview with
John Waldrip, World War II Veteran
18 October 2005

Tape Counter and Subject	Narrative
000 Introduction	This is JoAnn Myers. Today is the 18 th of October 2005. I'm interviewing for the first time, Mr. John Waldrip . This interview is taking place in the Herman Brown Free Library at 100 E. Washington Street, Burnet, Texas.
Myers	Well, first off, Mr. Waldrip, I'd like to thank you for coming in today and taking your time to help us with this World War II project. I think it's very important to get everybody's story and I'm really eager to hear your story. I'd like to start with where you were born and when you were born.
Waldrip 008 Birth Info	I was born the first day of October, 1923 in Weatherford, Texas in a house.
Myers 010	You were born at home.
Waldrip	Yes.
Myers	A lot of people were back then, weren't they?
Waldrip	Yes, I don't know if they even had a hospital back then or not.
Myers 011 Parents	And what were the names of your parents?
Waldrip	My mother's name was Willie Mae and her maiden name was Dozier and my father's name was Frank Rayford Waldrip. Link to Relative Chart.
Myers	Okay. What did your father do for a living?
Waldrip	My father was a caretaker in the National Guard unit in Weatherford. The number of caretakers they had depended on the number of horses they had. He was one of the caretakers of the horses.
Myers	That was his primary occupation?
Waldrip	Yes.

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Myers	And your mother stayed home?
Waldrip	Yes, and then later on when I was about 10 years old she started working for J. C. Penney's and she worked for them for about 35 years and retired.
Myers	Well, that's unusual. Did you have any siblings?
Waldrip	No
Myers	You were the only child.
Waldrip	I was the one and only, yes.
Myers	I'm an only child too. I know how that feels. Well, where were you on December 7, 1941?
Waldrip 025 Pearl Harbor	When I graduated from high school I had an opportunity to go to Schreiner Institute at Kerrville, Texas and on December 7, '41 I was in the first semester of the college there. We were supposed to be going to church every Sunday and I, along with a couple of other guys, skipped church that Sunday and went down on the river there in Kerrville. We were walking down the river and we met somebody that happened to tell us that there had been a bombing over in Hawaii. That's the first we heard of it and of course we went back out to the college and started listening to the radio.
Myers	Well, did you understand what that all meant? Did you know where it was and what it meant to you?
Waldrip	Yes, I think we did. We didn't really understand how serious it was; how it could have happened but I think we did understand it. And of course everybody was jumping up in the air and wanting to go fight the Japanese.
Myers	So, emotions were running pretty high?
Waldrip	Yes.
Myers	Well, did you enlist right away?
Waldrip	No. At mid term I had an opportunity to get a football scholarship at North Texas State Teacher's College in Denton at the time. So in January I transferred up to Denton to North Texas and in about April or May there was an Air Force recruiting team that came through there. They were wanting people to sign up to be an air crew member or pilot. You had to have

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	two years of college to do that or else you could take an exam and if you passed the exam they'd let you enlist so I took the exam and passed it. I enlisted as an aviation cadet and May 28, 1942 and that's how I first started.
Myers	But you mostly joined the Air Force because those recruiters came through and talked you into it.
Waldrip	<p>It seemed like it was pretty glorious to be a pilot and be out fighting and that's really how I got in because I thought I was going to be a pilot.</p> <p>But the way it turned out the quotas for the pilots were full and a person would have to wait anywhere from 6 to 8 months before getting into pilot training. However they had two or three other opportunities -- you could get training to be a Navigator or training to be a Bombardier. I took the latter and decided to go ahead and train to be a Bombardier because I could do that right then or I thought it was going to be right then.</p> <p>So I left school at the end of May thinking I was going to be called right away but it turned out it was in January of '43 before I was actually called.</p>
Myers	That is a long time.
Waldrip	About 6 months.
Myers	So, what did you do in between? Did you actually sign up with the recruiter in May and just wait for your turn to school?
Waldrip Sheppard AFB Texas A&M	Yes, I went ahead and signed up and just waited. Then in January they called and I had to go take a physical over in Dallas. I took the physical and from there I went to Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls and went basic training. This lasted about 6 weeks and then all the quotas were filled again so they formed what they called a college training detachment and I went from Sheppard Air Force Base to Texas A&M at Bryan.
Myers	Were the classes you were taking pertaining to what you were going to be doing in the Air Force?
Waldrip	<p>No, I took regular college courses, chemistry and English. Later I was transferred to SAACC, San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center, in preparation for entry into aviation cadet training.</p> <p>I was transferred to Ellington Field, Houston, for aviation cadet training.</p>
Myers	That's really interesting. So you got to continue your college education while you were waiting.

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Waldrip 082 Training Las Vegas	Yes. I got a little credit. It lasted for about 3 months and then from there I went to gunnery training, which was in Las Vegas, Nevada. I went through that training and got to be an aerial gunner as a result. From there I went to Carlsbad, New Mexico to Bombardier training.
Myers	About what year was this? All in that one year?
Waldrip Tennessee Ernie Ford	This started in 1943 and then I graduated from Bombardier school in February 1944. One of the things that was interesting, while I was at Bombardier school, they had an instructor by the name of Tennessee Ernie Ford.
Myers	Oh, really! Wow!
Waldrip	Of course he didn't do much singing then!
Myers	I didn't know he was an instructor like that. So you didn't even know he was a singer then?
Waldrip	No, all I knew he was from Tennessee and that he was a Lieutenant then. We called him Lieutenant Ford.
Myers	Yeah. So, okay, was that about the last part of your training?
Waldrip Dalhart OTU Training	From there I went to Dalhart, Texas and was assigned to a B-17 crew for what was called OTU, Overseas Training Unit, and I was there for a couple of months. For some reason they closed Dalhart down and they transferred us from Dalhart to Tampa, Florida. That's like going from hell to heaven.
Myers	I'll bet.
Waldrip Aquitania	After we finished the Overseas Training Unit which we had formed up as a crew, we were put on a ship to England. This boat was the Aquitania and up until just recently that ship was still in service as a tourist boat.
Myers	Is that right? Wow.
Waldrip 110 England 490 th Bomb Group	When we got to England we joined the 490 th Bomb Group.

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Myers	Do you know about where in England that was?
Waldrip	This was a little town called Diss and it was about halfway between Norwich and Ipswich in what they called East Angala.
8 th Air Force	The 8 th Air Force was organized into a First Division and a Second Division. The First Division had all the B-24 aircraft and the Second Division had the B-17 aircraft. The group that we were assigned to, the 490 th Bomb Group, was equipped with B-24 aircraft. But they were just in the process of changing from B-24's to B-17's so actually the first mission that we flew was in a B-17 aircraft and all subsequent missions were in a B-17.
Myers	Well, did you stay with the same crew on the aircraft?
Waldrip	Yes, the same crew. We had one crewmember that was killed and during the course of the tour there were two more crewmembers that opted out of their job and we had new ones to come in but basically it was the same crew.
Myers	The same crew...the same pilot.
Waldrip	I might mention that this same crew meets together once a year. There are five of us still living and we're scheduled to meet in Savannah in November of this year.
Myers	Well, can you tell us their names, of this crew that you've kept in contact with?
Waldrip	The pilot's name was Charles Smelser and after he returned home he served as a State Senator for the state of Maryland for about 38 years. The Navigator was Neil Johnson and he lives in Naples, Florida. The Tail Gunner was a kid by the name of Leonard Kail and he is of Estonian heritage. He went to Ohio State after the war and graduated with a Chemical Engineering degree. He worked for Union Carbide and he was one of the developers of the insecticide, Sevin. It was called Sevin because there were seven steps to the process of making this insecticide. The Ball Turret Gunner was named Jake Jackson and he lives at Mt. Vernon, Texas.
Crew names	
Crew Photo 1, 1944	
Crew Photo 2, 1944	
	Well, that's really neat that you are able to get together with those guys and talk about old times. Do you talk about what happened over there or do you just have a good time together.
Waldrip	Well, we tell a lot of lies. And it brings back a lot of memories. We were scheduled to meet in Savannah, Georgia the first of October this year but that was about the time the two hurricanes came in. Because of the question as to the availability of gasoline and several other things we postponed our reunion until the first of November.

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Myers	Well, that ought to be interesting.
Waldrip	So, in about another couple of weeks we'll be leaving for Savannah.
Myers Crew, 2005 Crew Closeup	Well, maybe you could take some pictures and we'll include them in your file here of your old crew and see if you could get some pictures of everybody together.
Waldrip	Yes, we've got pictures from past meetings.
Myers	From back then? That's good; I'd like to have those for the folder. Well, what were the living conditions like over there when you got to England at your primary duty station?
Waldrip Buzz Bomb Quonset Huts	When we first got to England we went to several different locations before we actually ended up in the group that we were going to be assigned to. There were two weeks training here and two weeks training there but the first thing we became aware of was this term "buzz bomb". We had only been there about three or four days when one of those buzz bombs flew over and of course everybody had to evacuate the building we were in. They had an area that you were supposed to go to that would protect you in case the things landed but the two that we saw actually flew over and kept going. We never did hear one explode. We were living in Quonset huts and this group had four squadrons. Each squadron was an entity in itself and there were probably about 12 beds in each one of the Quonset huts.
Myers	It was all open?
Waldrip Living Conditions	It was all open, yes. Of course quite often of that 12 people there would be about three crews and because the crew got shot down or was missing there was also a little turnover within the living quarters. We were always either meeting new people or packing up stuff to send back home for the people who were missing there. There was only one shower facility for the whole group and it was at a central location about a mile or mile and a half from where we actually slept. Whenever you got ready to take a shower you had to walk there and you were lucky to have hot water when you got there.
Myers	Well, it was pretty chilly in England most of the time -- so you had to go take a

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	cold shower and then get out in the cold weather.
Waldrip	The mess hall was about the same distance from there and when you'd be scheduled for a mission you'd normally have to get up about 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and then walk that mile and a half to eat breakfast. From there you'd go to a briefing room and they would provide transportation in the back end of a truck.
Myers	To the planes?
Waldrip	Yes
Myers	Well, for the whole time that you were based in England and you'd have your missions over to Germany or wherever and you'd come back. Were you ever based in Europe proper?
Waldrip 219 Battle of the Bulge	<p>On Christmas Day, 1944 the Battle of the Bulge was being fought and we'd been grounded for about a week because of fog and bad weather. This was the first day we'd been able to fly and that was when the Germans had broken through there at Bastogne and had it encircled.</p> <p>We were able to fly that day but on the way back the weather turned bad and we had to land at a different base so we had Christmas dinner eating 10 in 1 rations. This was individual rations that we carried with us.</p>
Myers	That was your Christmas dinner?
Waldrip	Yes.
Myers	Where did you land? Did you have any idea?
Waldrip Got lost	<p>It was in the southern part of England and I'm not real sure where. I know it was a 56th Fighter Squadron base but I don't remember exactly what station.</p> <p>Another time we were on a mission deep into Germany and got shot up pretty bad. On the way back we got separated from our group and we were just out there by ourselves.</p> <p>The weather was bad and we got lost actually. We couldn't see the ground for the clouds and all we knew was that we were heading west. We got low on fuel and we thought we were going to have to bail out and everybody was fixing to bail out.</p> <p>The airplane's got a bell on it and when the pilot pushes that button and that bell rings you're supposed to leave the airplane. We got about where we thought we were over France but we weren't sure because we couldn't see the ground. The</p>

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	Navigator had failed to bring the necessary maps.
Myers	Oh, that's not good!
Waldrip	We were way south of where we thought we were. Finally we were able to see a little opening in the clouds and we ducked down through the clouds and got under the clouds. We saw what looked like a landing area or an airport runway. We decided we had to get down so we lined up to land and about the time we were getting ready to touch down on the runway we looked over there and there was about eight or ten airplanes that had that Maltese Cross on them.
Myers	The Swastika?
Waldrip	Yes, Swastika. We thought, "Uh oh, we're in bad shape", but we went ahead and landed. What we thought was a cement runway was just white dirt and he had been raining. As soon as we stopped we sank down about halfway up the wheels and couldn't move. We had ten machine guns on the B-17 and we had everybody manning a machine gun. We didn't know for sure how we were going to defend ourselves if that was an active German airfield.
FFI	But about that time a civilian and a little kid that looked like he was about 10 or 12 years old came running out. He belonged to this FFI--Free French Insurrectionists--and it had turned out that General Patton had been through there about two days before and run all the Germans off. We and the FFI were the only ones there.
Myers	Oh, my gosh, talk about lucky!
Waldrip	We spent about three or four days in that little town.
Myers	You got your plane?
Waldrip	No, we had to leave it there because it was still sunk and there wasn't any way to get the wheels out of the mud. But we went into this little town and we got back to Paris and spent three or four days in Paris.
Photo of plane, Mission #13	Paris had just been liberated and everything was still in kind of a hubbub there. To make a long story short, about six months ago I got an e-mail message that had been forwarded from a guy in France that had lived in that little town where we landed. He was inquiring if we knew any of the history or any of the information behind why that airplane was there at the airport. I contacted him by e-mail and told him our side of the story and why we had been there and he sent me some pictures of that aircraft.

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Myers	Is it still there?
Waldrip	No, we eventually got it back.
Myers	Oh, okay but he'd heard the story.
Waldrip	He had some pictures of it while it was there so he sent me the picture.
Myers	Well, that would be a nice picture to include in your folder here too. That's a really good story and have a picture of that plane -- it would be ideal. Well, that's interesting that he tracked down the crew that belonged to that airplane.
Waldrip	The 490 th Group has an association and the Frenchman contacted them and the fellow that's the President of the association put out the word and he tracked our crew down.
Myers	Well, that's really something. I hope he was happy with the story you gave him.
Waldrip	Well, I think he was.
Myers	Well, let's see. We talked about meal time. What about your clothing and equipment and weapons that you had during that period time. Did you have flight suits or did you wear any special kind of clothing on your missions?
Waldrip	Initially we wore flight suits because most of the missions were anywhere from 24 to 29,000 feet and it gets pretty cold up there--about minus 20 degrees, minus 30 degrees.
Cold weather clothing	At the time we had these sheepskin pants and jackets and wore a leather helmet. But after we'd been over there a couple of months the Air Force started issuing electric suits. They were nylon suits with electric wires in them, I guess. We'd plug them in and they'd heat up and then you'd have just a kind of a lightweight jacket that you wore over them.
Myers	Did you like those?
Waldrip	Oh, yes. They kept you warm and you could move around a lot better because those sheepskin suits were so bulky that as long as you were sitting in one place you were okay but it was kind of hard to move around in cramped quarters.
Mrs.Waldrip	You might tell about that crewmember that got killed and how you discovered it.
Waldrip	Oh, yes. Our crew chief's position was in what was called the Upper Turret, which was a machine gun turret, and he sat directly behind the pilot and co-pilot. On our 6 th mission the pilot called down and said that the engineer, or crew chief, had collapsed and wanted to know if we could get back to get him down and see

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	<p>what was wrong with him.</p> <p>I crawled back up there--had to go through kind of a little tunnel to get back up there and finally got him down into this tunnel. He was unconscious and we never could figure out what was wrong with him.</p> <p>To make a long story short, when we landed we found that he'd been hit right behind his knee. There's a big artery there and he'd bled to death. All that blood had gone down into his flying boot where we couldn't see and it had frozen. When we got back down to about 10,000 feet that blood started thawing out and then we figured out what had happened but he'd already been dead for several hours then.</p>
Myers	That's a shame.
Waldrip	Yes, it was. He was a fine person and we felt real bad that we didn't do more for him but we didn't know what was wrong with him and we couldn't do anything.
Myers	That was really something that it was so disguised that he bled to death. Were you issued a weapon of any kind as an aircrew member?
Waldrip	Yes, each air crew member had a .45 caliber pistol and we carried it in a shoulder holster but each crew position also had machine guns. The bombardier had what was called a "chin turret" that was on the front of the aircraft and it had twin .50 caliber machine gun. A bombardier sat, in effect, right on top of it. It had handlebars, kind of like a bicycle, that controlled the turret.
Myers	Did you ever have to operate that?
Waldrip	Yes. For safety reasons you didn't charge the guns or load the guns until after you got airborne. After we got over the English Channel to make sure the guns hadn't frozen up we had to test fire them. We had everybody in the crew to do the test firing at the same time. I never did hit anything but we had opportunity to try to shoot something every once in awhile.
Myers	Well, you were the bombardier, you said. Do you remember any of the specific targets on any of your missions that you had to pinpoint and what the result was?
Waldrip	I had a little notebook and I kept a log while over there--not realizing then, at 19 or 20 years of age, that it would be valuable some day but yes, I could tell you each one.
Kept notebook Diary Page	I recorded the target results and the amount of bombs we carried for that particular target and where they hit. I'd say 80% of our missions we never could see the ground. We bombed with what we called a PFF which is the equivalent of radar bombing and the lead aircraft would drop its bomb. The first bomb out

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	would be a smoke bomb which would leave a trail of smoke and as you came up even with that trail of smoke you'd drop your bombs there.
Myers	I don't remember hearing that before, either. How many planes went out on a routine bombing run?
Waldrip 442 Squadrons	Within the group there were three squadrons and normally two squadrons would fly and one squadron would stand down. A squadron consisted of twelve aircraft so there would normally be twenty-four aircraft that would go out, which would be 2 squadrons.
Myers	And that's all bombers?
Waldrip	That's all bombers.
Myers	Did you have any fighter escorts?
Waldrip	Oh yes. The twenty-four aircraft was just the one group and there would probably be 30 or 40 groups go out at the same time. We'd line up and just as far as you could see would be just be planes flying. We were all protected by fighter squadrons which were P-51 type aircraft and they would fly over the top of us because they were a lot faster than we were. They'd just kind of zig-zag to keep up with us and they'd stay on top of us. We were flying maybe at 28,000 foot and they'd be up 32,000 to 34,000 feet.
Myers	But could they accompany you all the way to the site?
Waldrip	Initially they could not; they could just carry us in to probably the coastline and then they'd have to turn around and come back to refuel. But they developed these external fuel tanks for them and at the end of the war they were able to go all the way in with us.
Myers	I bet you felt better with those fighters up there, didn't you?
Waldrip Berlin	Oh, yes. Toward the end of my tour over there we made our second trip to Berlin and this particular trip the Germans decided they weren't going to let us in over there and I guess they sent their entire Air Force.
Myers	Everything they had.
Waldrip 200 German	Everything they had. All of our P-51's were flying above us and they started diving down and I'll bet there was 500 airplanes out there just going every which way. We were sitting there riding along just like it was looking at a movie,

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Planes Shot Down	watching them out there. But they shot down 200 or so German airplanes that day.
Myers	And that was toward the end of the war when Germany was really getting desperate.
Waldrip	Yes. I don't remember the exact month. It must have been January, February of '45 then.
Myers	Wow, that's really something! So you were in on part of that destruction of Berlin that I've seen on old movies where there's nothing but rubble left in Berlin.
Waldrip Targets Briefing Board	<p>Yes. At our briefing for each mission you'd have an aiming point where you were supposed to set your bombsite and aim at if you could see the ground. Most of the time it was a railroad yard or marshalling yard or we went after a bunch of bridges. They've got a canal over there that we were trying to disrupt their canal traffic.</p> <p>We tried to drop the bomb so they'd hit where we were aiming but quite frequently either we'd get off course or they'd get off course and the bombs didn't go where you thought they would.</p> <p>We had a big camera in the back that automatically took pictures as soon as the bombs dropped. That would show where the bombs hit...they would develop the film when we got back and that way they could tell about what coverage you got on the target there.</p>
Myers	To see if you needed to go back.
Waldrip	<p>Yes. One other thing that I'm sure anyone that has ever flown a mission still remembers the term flak. There were several targets over there that the Germans thought more of, I guess, and they were more heavily defended than others.</p> <p>There was an oil refinery in a little town called Merseburg and they were getting short of oil and they didn't want us disrupting their refinery process.</p>
Myers	Yeah, I can understand that.
Waldrip 499 Flak	So, it seemed like they had a million anti-aircraft guns there. I'm sure it was in the hundreds but when you were on the bomb run you could look ahead and usually there's a group ahead of you and you could see all that flak coming up. It looked like you could just stand out there and walk on top of it. As long as you could see it out in front of you it was okay but when you started seeing it to the side then you'd think the next one's going be right underneath you.

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Myers	Was your plane ever hit by any of that?
Waldrip Hit by Flak	<p>We were hit nearly every time. We'd come back and it was a big deal to get out and count the holes in the aircraft.</p> <p>I remember one mission that a piece of that flak came through the nose and hit me in the knee. The handlebar grips for the turret had a red safety switch so you could compress that safety switch and that would allow the guns to fire or if it wasn't compressed then you couldn't fire them. But, that switch was red and it was resting right against my knee and I looked down there when the flak hit and thought it was blood coming out and that I'd been hit. But it turned out that it didn't even break the skin.</p> <p>Actually two pieces of flak came through there and I found those two pieces and brought them back home with me -- I had them for a long time but don't really know what ever happened to them.</p>
Myers	Well, didn't that stuff cause turbulence, too, for your plane if you were in heavy flak?
Waldrip	It was either that or our hearts were beating so fast it was causing it to bounce.
Myers	I bet it was pretty tense, wasn't it?
Waldrip	Everybody was full of anxiety seeing that flak come up there and I guess that was just about every time we went over a city...they'd have guns firing at us.
Myers	All the time?
Waldrip	Yes. There were lots of times they'd move those guns around and even though we changed our route and plotted where we knew they were, in order to bypass them, they got smarter and started moving them around a little bit and every once in awhile you'd unexpectedly get shot at there.
Myers 538 Major battles	Well, you mentioned that you flew missions during the time of the Battle of the Bulge. Any of the other important battles that you remember like that you were a part of as an aircrew like Normandy or any of the other major battles over there?
Waldrip Regensburg	<p>Most of our missions were what I guess you'd call strategic and most of them were into deep Germany.</p> <p>We went to Regensburg which had a big ball bearing factory there and we went as far as Poland one mission. All our missions were to strategic targets like oil or manufacturing refineries and we would hit a lot of marshalling yards where they</p>

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<p>Brest, France, Submarine Pens</p>	<p>had all the freight cars lined up, loading them. We were trying to disrupt the rail line to the traffic.</p> <p>We only flew one mission that I can remember that was not what you'd call strategic and that was about the first or second mission that we went on. The Normandy invasion had just started and the Germans had submarine pens at Brest, France and we went over and bombed that.</p> <p>That was one of the few missions that we only flew about 8,000 feet so we could see pretty well the ground and see what was happening.</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>So you destroyed those submarines?</p>
<p>Waldrip</p>	<p>Well, we bombed at them and we hit them but there were big concrete slips they were in. You could actually see the submarines in them.</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>So I guess they were pretty well protected by those concrete slips.</p>
<p>Waldrip</p>	<p>Yes. But that was one of the few missions that you could actually see what was going on. All the rest of the missions were either in clouds or up at 28,000 feet where you couldn't tell much about what's on the ground.</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>Yeah, that's true -- just have to rely on your Navigator to make sure he got you in the right place.</p>
<p>Waldrip</p>	<p>Yes, that's right.</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>Well, did you have any special friends that you were close to at that time?</p>
<p>Waldrip</p>	<p>Well, each crew was kind of like a football team -- it was more of a team and you just buddied with them.</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>And that's that group that you're still friends with.</p>
<p>Waldrip</p>	<p>Same group, yes.</p>
<p>Myers 570 Downtime</p>	<p>That's really cool. Did y'all have any downtime between missions so you could go do things in town or did you pretty much have to stay on base?</p>
<p>Waldrip 580 3-Day Pass</p>	<p>Well, about every 10 missions they'd give you a three day pass and most everybody would go down to London on that 3 day pass. There were lots of things going on down there. You could well spend 3 or 4 days down there and we'd have to ride a train on the way down there.</p>
<p>Quarters</p>	<p>One of the things that just came to my mind was that you were asking about the</p>

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	<p>quarters that we lived in and how we lived. We were living in these Quonset huts and you know it gets kind of cold over there at night and during the daytime too. Each one of these Quonset huts had a coal-burning stove in it which was just like an old wood stove except we burned coal.</p> <p>The base would have this coal delivered and they had a big high fence around it because it was rationed. You'd get a bucket of coal every week and you'd carry that coal in and just pitch it in as needed. But a bucket of coal wouldn't last a whole week if it got very cold so several of us figured out how to get across that wire to get some more coal.</p> <p>Another guy and I crawled over that wire one night to get some more coal and coming back one of those buzz bombs came over. That thing sounded like a Mack truck without an exhaust and it came right over the top of us.</p> <p>We said, "My God, we're gonna get killed and we're gonna be court-martialed for stealing coal", but that thing went on over. We got our coal and we made somebody else go get the coal the next time.</p>
Myers	(Laughing) It was their turn, huh?
<p>Waldrip 808 Uniform Cleaning with gas</p>	<p>Yes. One other thing -- the uniform that we wore was what they called pinks and green -- wool pants and wool jackets. You can only wear those so many days until they needed to be dry cleaned but there wasn't any dry cleaning facilities around there.</p> <p>You couldn't wash them so somebody got the bright idea of getting the gasoline that the airplanes burned -- a hundred octane -- and washing those uniforms in gas. It worked real good as long as you kept them outside and aired them out but otherwise they'd kind of smell like gasoline.</p> <p>But, it did a good job of cleaning them.</p>
Myers	It looks like that gas smell would just stay in there but it didn't, huh?
Waldrip	Of course everybody smoked back then, too, and you had to be careful not to flip ashes.
Myers	<p>Laughing...you'd have to be careful not to catch somebody on fire. Wow!</p> <p>Well, do you recall any of your superiors? Your commanding officers or squad leaders or anybody who was above you and by the way what rank were you as a bombardier?</p>
Waldrip	I was a First Lieutenant then. I was a Second Lieutenant when I first when over there and then got promoted to a First Lieutenant.

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617 Rank	
Myers	So who was your commander as a First Lieutenant of your group?
Waldrip	<p>Well, the pilot of the craft is the plane commander so basically he's the man in charge of the whole crew. But the squadron was commanded by a Major and during our tour over there we had 3 or 4 different changes in command because the commanders also flew missions and we lost some of them and some of them got transferred to other units.</p> <p>I can't really remember -- I can vaguely remember the name of one of them but we never really were associated with the commanders because the commanders dealt with the pilot, crew commander. The group was commanded by a full Colonel and he was so far above us we just knew who he was. We could recognize him because we would see him down at the Officer's Club every once in a while but we never did deal with him.</p>
Myers	But you just never did have any interaction with him because above you...
Waldrip	We had a group Navigator who supposedly looked after all the Navigators in the group and there was a group Bombardier and he looked after all the Bombardiers in the group but his function was mostly training. When he wasn't doing something else he had us training or going to class.
Myers	So you kept getting training all the time you were over there.
Waldrip	Oh, yes.
Myers 848 Additional Training	Did your equipment change and stuff that you had to get extra training on like your bomb sites or the way you approached the target, did that change, is that what you got your training on?
Waldrip	<p>Well, yes, I never did get any.</p> <p>The crew did, the Navigator -- there were several improvements in the navigational systems that we used. It got to the point when there were clouds or it was clear we could pretty well tell where we were all the time; the Navigator could. There were quite a few improvements that were made that required some additional training but I never did.</p>
Myers	Your equipment stayed pretty much the same.

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Waldrip	Stayed pretty much the same.
Myers 884 Mail	Well, let's talk about mail...did you get mail from home?
Waldrip	<p>We had -- this was V-mail, I think was what they called it. I guess you'd write a letter and take a picture of it and it was in a little bitty envelope. We used to get that coming and going.</p> <p>When you'd send one out I think it would go out that way but I might mention that there was a high security as far as mail was concerned. Any piece of mail had to be censored and of course there were millions of pieces of mail.</p> <p>There wasn't any one area that could do all the censoring so they said that an officer could censor the mail and you could censor your own mail. If you wrote a letter on the envelope you'd put censored and then you'd sign it.</p>
Myers	You could censor your own mail? That seems like a compromise waiting to happen.
Waldrip	An enlisted man couldn't do that and of our crew six of them were enlisted people. Our pilot appointed me as a censoring officer; I guess he thought I could read better!
Myers	Laughing.
Waldrip	So these enlisted men -- whenever they'd write a letter home they'd bring it to me unsealed and I'd have to read the letter and then seal it and write "Censored" on the outside.
Myers	So you got to read everybody's mail?
Waldrip	I got to read everybody's mail. I got to know them pretty well.
Myers	And did you read the incoming mail too?
Waldrip	No.
Myers	They got that straight.
Waldrip	They got that straight.
Myers	Well, did you get a lot of mail from home? From your parents or....

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Waldrip	I remember getting some -- it wasn't like every day like you would now. Maybe once every two or three weeks.
Myers	Did you write very often?
Waldrip	Unfortunately, I didn't.
Myers	You didn't. I bet your mother was waitin' for those letters.
Waldrip	Well, yes. Of course they were getting a lot of news, I think, but it wouldn't be like getting a letter from home. We really enjoyed it.
Myers	Did you get any packages? Like at Christmas time or anything. Did they send you cakes or cookies?
Waldrip 704 Packages	Well, they were restricted in what they could send. I do remember writing home and some of the people from up north were used to eating anchovies and sardines. I asked for some of those one time and my mother didn't know what anchovies were but she did send some sardines in a can.
Myers	Wow. So they didn't have sardines in England?
Waldrip	Oh, yes, but you couldn't buy them.
Myers	You just couldn't buy them.
Waldrip	We would take those sardines and sit around that stove, that fire, with crackers; open a can and eat those sardines. That was just like eating ice cream.
Myers	That's really a treat, huh? Let's see, did you get homesick for the United States in England? You stayed pretty much there all the time, so was it terribly different from what you were used to in the US and did you get homesick?
Waldrip 725 No time to be Homesick	I don't ever remember. Everything was so new and there was so much going on that you really didn't have time. I remember we got to go to London to see Buckingham Palace and there was a bunch of museums and there was a wax museum that was there. It's still there, I think.
Myers 736	Did the weather cause any problems for you, I mean besides the missions, just as an individual being in England. The weather was so different than Texas.

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Weather	
Waldrip	We weren't used to all the fog that you'd run into and of course I never did drive a car or anything. There were some cases when you'd ride a bicycle over there but you'd have to be real careful if it was foggy going down the street because you couldn't see but 2 or 3 foot ahead of you.
Myers	Well, they had blackouts there too, didn't they?
Waldrip	Oh, yes, every night.
Myers	So a blackout plus the fog that was probably pretty bad. Did you see any USO shows?
Waldrip	Yes, I saw one and I remember a girl playing an accordion but I don't remember who she was or what it was. They were there but I just never did have an occasion to go to them.
Myers	Well, how did you hear that the war was over?
754 War Over	
Waldrip	I guess the war was over -- I guess that would be when Japan surrendered?
Myers	I was thinking about when you over there in Europe, VE Day.
Waldrip	Well, when I finished the tour of 35 missions was in the last part of February 1945 and so I came back.
Myers	So you came back to the states.
Waldrip	Came back to the states and I had applied for pilot training -- to go through pilot training which is what I had wanted to do when I'd first started.
765 Back to States	They sent me to Big Spring and as soon as there was an opening in pilot school I went to primary pilot training at Goodfellow Field at San Angelo. I was there in San Angelo when the war ended and of course we heard it the same way you did, I guess, on the radio that the Germans had surrendered and later on I guess that when they dropped the two atomic bombs and Japan surrendered.
Myers	Did you stay in pilot's training?
Waldrip	You accrued points by how much overseas time you'd had and so forth and I had more than enough points to get out. I thought I wanted to get out and go back to school. I got out but I didn't go back to school.

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Myers	But you didn't have to serve any more time even though Japan hadn't surrendered -- you had to wait.
Waldrip	Oh, no.
Myers	You didn't get out until after Japan surrendered?
Waldrip	Yes, we were scheduled to go over there and everybody breathed a sigh of relief because we'd heard about the living accommodations over there and they weren't quite up to what they were in England.
Myers	I wasn't aware that the air crews got to come back to the states after so many missions, I didn't know that, I thought they had to stay over there until it was over.
Waldrip	No.
Myers	So everybody rotated out, after how many, 35?
Waldrip	35. It first started out it was 25 and then it went to 30 and then time I got over there it was 35.
Myers	Oh, wow. So, at the time Japan surrendered did they talk about the atomic bomb very much?
Waldrip	Well, about all we knew about that was what you'd read in the papers and that's what they were using, the term atomic bomb rather than nuclear bomb.
806 Atomic Bomb	
Myers	Did you know what that meant?
Waldrip	No. Not really. I knew it made a big explosion and a big bang but I didn't know any more about it. Well, later on I got connected with the National Guard and was in school several places and had an opportunity to actually see -- that first atomic bomb that they developed; the "Big Boy" I think they called it, and they actually had it on display and we were able to see it and it wasn't very impressive, it was just a big piece of metal there.
Myers	Well, describe your return home after you got out and Japan surrendered and you got out and you went home.

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<p>Waldrip 825 Return Home</p>	<p>I went home and I had the idea of going back to college. They had this GI Bill of Rights coming up and I lived in Weatherford and that was about 30 miles from Fort Worth. In the back of my mind I thought I would like to go to TCU over there but I had had a football scholarship at North Texas and at Schriener Institute both. I didn't realize it, but at 21 years old, I wasn't as physically fit as I thought I was.</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>At 21, huh?</p>
<p>Waldrip National Guard</p>	<p>Yeah, so anyway I got back and went into the insurance business there in Weatherford for a period of time. My father had been the caretaker in the National Guard while I was a kid. They came over there and wanted to form a National Guard unit again there in Weatherford and got me interested and got me involved in it and I helped form a new unit there. Shortly after that they authorized some full time people in the Guard and I was able to get into that.</p> <p>From 1949 on I was full time with the National Guard, not in Weatherford but first Fort Worth, then Dallas and then Austin.</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>But this was a civilian position -- it wasn't a military position?</p>
<p>Waldrip</p>	<p>Well, it was a military position. We were paid by the Department of the Army.</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>But were you subject to recall to active duty?</p>
<p>Waldrip</p>	<p>No, it was what was called a Title 10 and we were in what they called a Title 32. It was the same deal these people in Louisiana just recently have been under where they pulled all these National Guardsmen from other states -- they're still under the command of the Governor.</p>
<p>Myers 000 Tape 2</p>	<p>[Beginning tape two] Okay, we were talking about the National Guard. Go ahead. Your position in the National Guard and what you did.</p>
<p>Waldrip</p>	<p>I served in several positions. I was in a Cavalry Squadron and was the S-3 and then I got transferred over to the Division Headquarters and was the G-1 of the Division. We were mobilized and went to Ft. Polk, Louisiana for a year from 1961 to 1962 and I was the G-1.</p> <p>Then we were released from active duty and came back to the Division Headquarters which was in Dallas at the time and I was the G-1 and was later promoted to Chief of Staff of the Division. Then I was transferred to Austin and was the Director of Operations at the Adjutant General's Department. I was there from about 1969 to 1973. The 49th Armored Division had been disorganized and they reorganized it in 1973.</p>

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	I became the Chief of Staff of the 49 th Armored Division again and served in that position until 1978 and that's when I retired. Right after I retired I was promoted to a brevet Brigadier General.
Myers 026 Retired	Oh, really! That's what I was going to ask, did you get retirement points for any of this service, like military retirement.
Waldrip	Oh yes.
Myers	You get military retirement and benefits and so forth. Well, that's good.
Waldrip	Yes. I get retired pay.
Myers	And regular benefits like a military retiree.
Waldrip	Yes, I get the same thing.
Myers	So you were full time doing this stuff?
Waldrip	Yes.
Myers	You were a civilian but military?
Waldrip	Yes. I was actually paid by the military but we were still under the State control. In other words the State can move us around -- the State was the one that promoted us but when they promoted you the Federal Government would honor that and you'd get paid for that.
Myers	Well, was your unit ever called in to active duty for anything, after WWII and you went back in to the National Guard, were they called up to active duty for state things?
Waldrip 038 Fort Polk	In 1961 we were, this is when the Cuban crisis was coming up, the Division was mobilized, placed on active duty and we served a year down at Fort Polk down there.
Myers	Wow, a year!
Waldrip	About 11 months, I think.
Mrs. Waldrip	I thought that was called the Berlin Crisis.
Waldrip	Well, it was. It wasn't Cuban -- Cuba happened right after we were released. It was the Berlin Crisis. Two National Guard divisions were mobilized -- one was

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Photo Guard	out of Wisconsin and one out of Texas.
Myers	And the Berlin Crisis was right immediately after the war when they had the Berlin airlift?
Waldrip	It was some 20 years after the war. It was 1961.
Myers	Oh, when they built the wall then? I was thinking of the airlift right after WW II.
Waldrip	Well, I think they were still airlifting them then in 1961. That's all kinda fuzzy to me. I get mixed up.
Myers	Yeah, it does begin to fade after awhile. Well, you had a really interesting time of it over there in WWII in England and flying over Germany. Any special memories that you want to share? What was your most difficult time that you would say?
Waldrip 076 Germany today	Well, I remember one mission we flew in Germany was to Frankfurt and we flew to bomb the marshalling yards there in Frankfurt, Germany. Included in the marshalling yards was the train depot over there that was completely demolished. In 1970 something I had an opportunity to go back to Germany with the military and we landed at Frankfurt. I had an opportunity to visit what I thought would be the demolished railroad station and they had rebuilt it and it looked like it had been there for a hundred years. It was all built out of rock and the smoke, I guess, from the train had covered the walls with smoke and you couldn't tell, there wasn't any damage at all around there.
Myers	You couldn't tell anything had ever happened.
Waldrip	That just proves that the German people are pretty industrious there and they don't waste much time in repairing things.
Myers	That's right. Well, that's really interesting. I bet it was interesting for you to go back to Germany after all those years and see those places.
Waldrip	Well, it was. I made three trips back over there and we were able to see several things that did not appear like we thought they might.
Mrs. Waldrip	Well, you made arrangements for the German soldiers to come over.
Waldrip German Units to Texas	Yes, that's right. In addition to the Texas Army Guard, there's a Texas Air National Guard and they were equipped with C-95 refueling planes which were big 4-engine planes. Quite a few of their missions were to Germany and they would do their summer camp or annual field training period in Germany. Instead of just all going as a group they were going over at different times, maybe one plane or two planes at a time.

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	<p>Our Adjutant General got an idea about trying to work out some kind of a reciprocal arrangement with the Germany army about us sending a National Guard unit over for 2 weeks and they would send a German unit over here for 2 weeks. We would host them and then show them our training facilities and so forth.</p> <p>So they appointed me to go over and make all the arrangements. I don't speak German so I carried a young Captain with me as a translator. He had been born in Germany and spoke fluent German. We went over and worked through our Ambassador to Germany and got connected with the German equivalent of our Pentagon which was German army.</p> <p>We worked out an arrangement where we'd send 15 people over there and they'd send 15 people back and we'd use our C-95 aircraft to transport them. And it worked out real well for our people. They got to visit Germany and see a foreign country that they never would have seen before, I guess.</p>
Myers	I bet that was a great opportunity for some people. Well, how'd the Germans like their trip over? Did they like it too?
Waldrip	Real good. Of course not many of them could speak English when they came over but there was always one of them that could translate. But, they're all big singers and we'd usually have a big dinner or banquet for them at the tail end and one of the things they liked to do is get up as a group and sing German marching songs.
Mrs. Waldrip	We were amazed at the different things that they enjoyed, like water sports, water skiing and things.
Waldrip	Laughing. Yeah, we had a boat and used to do a lot of skiing and we took several of them skiing one day. They never had done that before and we tried to explain how to do it -- grab hold of the rope and let the boat pull you up and so forth. The first one we took off with, he fell flat but we had failed to tell him to turn loose of the rope. We dragged him halfway across the lake. It's a wonder he didn't drown.
Myers	Laughing. That sounds like you had a good time with your military career. Anything else you want to add?
Waldrip	All this talking's made me hungry, I guess -- it's dinner time, isn't it?
Myers	Yep, well, I 'll just close it off there then. Again, thank you for coming in and we look forward to getting this transcribed for you. Thank you.
	End of transcript

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Links to Photos

- [John Waldrip, 1944](#)
- [Crew Photo 1](#)- after a mission
- [Crew Photo 1 closeup](#)
- [Crew Photo 2](#) – Hunter Field, Georgia
- [Mission Briefing Board](#)
- [Mission #13](#) – 1944
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- [Crew Photo 3](#) – 2005
- [Crew Photo 3 closeup](#)
- [Waldrip Ft Polk, 1961-62](#)
- [Waldrip 2005](#)