

National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Daniel Samuelson

95th Bomber Group 8th Air Force

Date of Interview: May 3, 2009

Mr. Franklin: This is Mike Franklin. Today is May the 3rd, 2009, and I am interviewing Daniel Samuelson in his home in Austin, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So to start, give us your name, and where and when were you born?

Mr. Samuelson: I'm Daniel Samuelson, born in New Orleans, Louisiana on January 26th, 1926.

Mr. Franklin: And did you have any siblings?

Mr. Samuelson: Yes, I have an older brother and a younger sister.

Mr. Franklin: And what were their names?

Mr. Samuelson: My oldest brother is named Maury, and my sister's name is Joyce.

Mr. Franklin: And your parents names?

Mr. Samuelson: Mitchell Samuelson and Ruth Samuelson.

Mr. Franklin: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Samuelson: All of my schooling was in New Orleans, Louisiana; grade school, high school, and I had one semester of college at LSU in Baton Rouge.

Mr. Franklin: What year was that?

Mr. Samuelson: That was in '43. I was at LSU in 1943.

Mr. Franklin: So you were still in high school when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Mr. Samuelson: Right, I distinctly remember Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Franklin: You remember where you were?

Mr. Samuelson: Yes. I was in my daddy's tailor shop working on a Sunday when we got the news. And it just so happened that my brother Maury was stationed in Pearl Harbor at the time in Scoffield Barracks.

Mr. Franklin: Really!?

Mr. Samuelson: Yes. He lied about his age. He wanted to get into the service and he was a trouble-maker. And he just couldn't wait to get into a fight with somebody and what-not. So he got our parents to sign on his application to get in. He lied about his age. He told them he was 18 and he was just 16. And he was stationed at Pearl Harbor in Scoffield Barracks when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, which was right there.

Mr. Franklin: So you knew that he was stationed at Pearl Harbor then?

Mr. Samuelson: Oh yeah.

Mr. Franklin: How long did it take before you heard news from him?

Mr. Samuelson: From him? It took about a week and we got a cable that said "honestly, never felt better in my life." (Laughs) Quote, un-quote and that was it! He was a character.

Mr. Franklin: So, when you were out of high school then, what year did you graduate?

Mr. Samuelson: I was 17 when I joined. And I got my parents to sign for me to join, the Army Air Corps it was called in those years. And that was in '43, and I went to a summer school so that I could get out of high school earlier than I would ordinarily, and it gave me an opportunity to test college. So I had a semester at LSU. Upon going to college there, I thought it'd be kind of an easy thing, but it was very hard, very difficult, and I barely got by, which was great. It was an eye-opener for me. I figured, well, I'm just not college material. I'm not going to even worry about college. In those years, you didn't

even think about college so much. But, I was in the military, in military school. I did join the Corps and I liked it very much. We learned how to drill and stand at attention; right face, left face, forward march, and all that business. It hit my comfort zone very much so, more than the scholastics. So I was called to active duty in February. I became 18 on January 26th, 1944 and was called to active duty on February the 9th. So it was almost two weeks into being 18 and I was shipped off for basic training.

Mr. Franklin: Where was basic training at?

Mr. Samuelson: Shepherd Field, Texas.

Mr. Franklin: And what kind of stuff did you do in basic training?

Mr. Samuelson: Just marching, bivouacking, shaping up . . . basic training . . . learning how to shoot the carbine, the .45, the Thompson sub-machine gun. It was just like Infantry basic training. After I finished my basic training we shipped off to aerial gunnery school.

Mr. Franklin: Where was that?

Mr. Samuelson: That was in Kingman, Arizona. That was really concentrated training. Some of the things that you had to do; they had a screen with 35 millimeter slides, I guess they were 35 millimeter slides, showing pictures of aircraft in a hundredth of a second and you had to know what they were. Well that was a piece of cake for me because I used to build model airplanes. I was really good at it. I had no problems. No problems in gunnery school. I could work with my hands. I got to where I could break down a machine gun blind folded and put it back together blind folded. That was part of the training. And we trained all about the carbine and the .45 too. Up in gunnery school it was pretty extensive and concentrated. They'd have you go in a big, elliptical closed-

circuit, and they had trucks on it, it was pretty big, and they'd shoot out clay pigeons like skeet shooting. And these clay pigeons would fly in a certain way and you'd have a 50 caliber machine gun mounted there on the turret. And they had shotguns. And you'd give the right lead and you pull the trigger and hit the clay pigeon. That's a lot of fun. And then we'd go up in the B-17s and fly up there and practice shooting at fighter planes with 50 caliber machine guns without any bullets in them. But they had cameras in it, and the cameras would light up in a way where it showed how well you did. And we did pull targets too. They had a big trailer with a long canvas and you would shoot at that canvas. And your bullets would have red paint, or some would be blue, so when it came down you could see how well you did. So that was pretty extensive.

Mr. Franklin: So at this point you knew that you were assigned to the B-17s.

Mr. Samuelson: A B-17, with the gunnery, probably a B-17, because that's what they had the biggest push for. And then graduating from that school we were sent to Drew Field in Tampa, Florida where we did on the job training as a crew, and they formed the crews there. It would be a crew of ten men. And something very unusual happened there. They selected ten planes out of the whole bunch of training that was going on there in this particular group and, as a good will, flew to Cuba, and so we won one of them. We had a great time there. We flew to Cuba and at that time they were our allies and so forth. It was run by Batista. And it was a playground. The bands played when we came and we flew formation. It was just beautiful. We landed and all the big shots were there saluting, and all of the officers of the crew were sent to the Hotel National and enlisted men stayed on a base barracks there, a Cuban barracks. And of course we go out if we wanted to. We went downtown and hung with officers, you know, and just had a good time there.

Mr. Franklin: Was that in Havana?

Mr. Samuelson: It was in Havana. And it was a nice experience, but it was also such a traumatic experience for me to see that type of poverty. I had never seen anything as bad, ever, before in my life. And I was young and had no experience, you know. I had seen poor. I was there when what happened back in 1929, but that was in the thirties, you know. I was born in 1926, so I was a little kid. And you hang in there for a long time. But I had never seen anything like that. So anyway, we packed up and went back to Tampa, and from there we went overseas.

Mr. Franklin: Was it the same aircrew that you were with then that went to England?

Mr. Samuelson: Oh yeah. We stayed together. And the colored people there were sent over by boat. There weren't many. Most of us flew over by plane. So we took a train from Florida and picked up a plane in Bangor, Maine and flew that to England. And I was all excited about getting into that plane and flying. I didn't want to go by boat, I wanted to get into this fight! I mean, I really did. I mean it! I hated Hitler and all he stood for. And the pilot says "What in the hell? Why do you wanna fly over there!?! Well, because you go and fly into Iceland and there's just one runway that you have to get up and the U-Boats are coming up, and they are going to shoot us down." I really wasn't aware of that, but that did happen several times.

Mr. Franklin: You actually had contact with U-Boats?

Mr. Samuelson: No, I didn't, but it had happened. I wasn't publicized, you know, but they did shoot some down. I guess if it's foggy enough or what. That's when we flew overseas.

Mr. Franklin: So, on that flight over, did you have to fly over in the tail-gunners position?

Mr. Samuelson: Well no, I didn't have to do that. In fact you flew better if you didn't sit in the tail. Taking off and landing we would all sit in the radio room, or the waist gun area in the radio room to keep the weight in the middle of the plane. Especially when you were loaded up with gasoline, bombs, and whatever else you had to carry. You'd strain the ol' bird, you know. But it was interesting flight. It was during November of '44. They started serving turkey to the G.I.s at Thanksgiving and every place we stopped from Bangor, Maine to Newfoundland, Iceland, Greenland, and then Scotland. And the weather wasn't permissible in Newfoundland to take off. We stayed there for about three days. Eating that turkey for three days, and it was dark meat, they served the enlisted men dark meat. It was very little white meat. I just got tired of it so I asked one of the Sergeants, "Hey Serge, how about giving me some of that white meat over there?" and he said "Oh, that's for the officer's mess." I said, "Don't break the rules, but how about just a little nibble?" and he said "No! Go on!"

Mr. Franklin: So at this point what was our rank?

Mr. Samuelson: Staff Sergeant. I started at private first class and at each little thing went up. So at 18 I was a Staff Sergeant.

Mr. Franklin: When you finally got to England where were you stationed?

Mr. Samuelson: Horham. It's a little township about 99 miles from London near Ipswich and Norwich.

Mr. Franklin: And you were assigned to the 8th Air Force?

Mr. Samuelson: 95th Bomber Group in 8th Air Force.

Mr. Franklin: Okay, so you were in the 95th Bomber Group. This was in late November. Do you remember when you flew on your first bombing mission?

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah, it was in late November.

Mr. Franklin: And in the 8th Air Force, if I'm correct, you were more involved in strategic bombing?

Mr. Samuelson: Yes, factories and marshalling yards, so that they couldn't move anything very far at any time. And one of the biggest targets that we hit would be Frankfurt. We hit the marshalling yards where all of the railroads met. Everything is railed, as far as transportation. They didn't have a lot of Autobahns so the rail was the big thing. And we hit those things. We hit factories. I think we went to Frankfurt three times in the time period that I was flying. My quota was 35 missions and I would be rotated back home. Originally, when they formed these groups and B-17s first started the daylight bombing, it was a very radical thing. They had the Norden Bomb Sight. And sometimes we got very good results, sometimes we didn't. And we would fly in really, really tight formations so that the bombs would drop close together. We'd bomb anywhere from 20,000 feet to 29,000 feet depending on the weather and positions of where the flak guns are. In places like Frankfurt we used to fly real high because of those guns. They used to have the number, I don't remember what it was, something like 1,500 guns or 3,000 guns, and they had radar just like we did. And they knew where you were and they would spot you with this radar. At the initial point where you start getting the bombardiers to actually start to turn the plane with the Norden bomb sight, and little clouds would come up during that time, and the fighter escort would disappear and you had to fly through all that flak. Sometimes it sounds like you were in garage with

someone throwing rocks at you, or falling through the roof, that flak would when it hits. And if it hits something vital, why, you had a problem. The worst thing that happened to us was when one of our crew members was hit by a hunk of flak in the hand, and was replaced with a new person. Of course the plane got shot up. We lost engines, we had fires that we would have to put out, and it was just a long haul to get where you were going and then to get back. There was never a dull moment.

Mr. Franklin: For a typical mission, what was the process? How long would it take?

Mr. Samuelson: That's an interesting question, because it is a process. It starts with you having a briefing on where you are going. You have a map on a wall with a curtain over it, they have everyone settled down and they open it up and show the mission for where you are, where you are going, and other missions going on. The whole thing is planned. They had a lot of information, I guess with the Brits and the U.S., on what's going on with things to bomb and what to eliminate. It's pretty scientific, very detailed. And after you got that you got into a truck and they would take you out to where your plane is. You pick up your guns; put them into the planes and set them up to work, and then you take off. And it's early in the morning; 4:30, 5, 5:30. And you taxi out onto the runway, set up the engines, you can't see it's all foggy. It's real scary, because you can see just a little bit. You just go down that runway. It's all the B-17s. You go and get that bird and you get the engines start one at a time. And they cough. And they wheeze. (imitates an engine sputtering to life) And they feather out and get formed. You get your gear together, put on your heavies, that electrically heated suit, and the shoes, gloves, and everything else, and just barrel ass down that runway. That full throttle, and toss of pitch to the highest, and you barely get off the ground. You can hear the rumble and you go into the clouds,

and you circle and you don't see anything, try as you can. And I being the tail-gunner, I had a heavy flashlight. It was orange. You could read it, and I had the Morse code for V, and I would click on it. Just if you might be able to see it, you know. And we would fly maybe around 20,000, or 21,000 feet you break out of the clouds, and the sun is bright. It's gorgeous. It's just like a snow field all over. And you got these B-17s topping out in the contrails. You keep circling until you get everyone. Sometimes you lose them in the clouds. Maybe let them join up with someone else. Sometimes they had crashes in those clouds. You'd lose a couple. Not often. It's amazing how few. You were flying so many and they were so concentrated in the area. But that's the way we make the timing. This crew would go at a certain time, this one at another so you get just like that, you know. There are a lot of things going on.

Mr. Franklin: You're just having to circle, and . . .

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah, circle, you know, raising you up a thousand feet, thousand feet, thousand feet in a certain rhythm so you don't get two of them together. It's very well thought out, all that stuff.

Mr. Franklin: Once you break cloud cover, and you make formation, is it a V formation that you would fly in?

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah a V. It was twelve ships to a squadron; three, three, three and three. The threes would be at different heights, and you'd head out for your target.

Mr. Franklin: And it would take about how many hours, typically, to reach a target?

Mr. Samuelson: I'd say three hours. Turn around for three, so six hours, something like that.

Mr. Franklin: And that's about how long the missions were?

Mr. Samuelson: Some were longer; Berlin or other places real far away. Hamburg was a long way away.

Mr. Franklin: So for your first mission, what were you thinking before you took it, and how did that change from mission to mission?

Mr. Samuelson: Well, let me go right before the first mission. When we first got in we landed in Scotland, like I said, and then took a train into London, then we took a bus to Horham, and we got in at like two o'clock in the morning to the aircrew's hut. They had us bunked in about three or four crews which were assigned to a particular hut. Guys were sleeping in their bunks, you know, the guys who were serving. They woke up, and "which bunks are available" you know. I wanted an upper one. And the guy says, "well, that was such and such crew, and they got shot down yesterday." And my bunk was where this guy was killed. It was a weird feeling. It wasn't bad, but it was weird, it was strange. I had a hard time going to sleep that night. But then we did a little bit of training there, for about a week; getting used to this flying, and this stuff. And the first mission I wasn't particularly scared. I mean, I had to make 35 so I had a lot in front of me. So, not just the first one, but I was also thinking about the 31st. But that's what it is. It was acceptable. It was for a good cause. It was in my comfort zone.

Mr. Franklin: So from late November through the end of April, you flew 25 missions?

Mr. Samuelson: No, I had a total of 35. It started with 25, when we started the daylight bombing. We had lots of fighters, and we had no fighter escorts then. They didn't have much flak at the time, but there were a lot of fighters. And a lot of those fighters, when we were there, became almost non-existent. We very seldomly feared having a fighter plane coming after you. But the fighter escorts would escort the bombers in. And they

would go down during the bomb runs and shoot up anything that was around there, mostly aircraft that was on the ground. So they got a lot of them on the ground, lots and lots of them. And in time, when I was over there, they started, the Germans, with the jets. They had jet fighters, the Messerschmidts and the Junkers. And I saw one of those once. And in a way I didn't ever use my gun, luckily, but I'm glad that it was there. It was just in that period of time that they went from 25 to 30, then 35 missions. I mean, mathematically, to have 25 to 35, they're pretty big increases, 40 percent increases. But you don't have the fighters there. But, then again, the satisfaction of shooting down someone who says "I'm shooting you" is good. You hope that that would be the way that it would be. But the flak wasn't very damaging and the loses were decent, but there were some loses of the planes.

Mr. Franklin: And you were saying that you were hit a couple of times.

Mr. Samuelson: Oh, many times. We rarely went over a target and didn't get hit.

Mr. Franklin: Because they were 88s and 105s they would typically be time-fused?

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah, time fused. And the flak, the shrapnel, you could feel the plane getting ripped up.

Mr. Franklin: So you were supposed to fly 35, but because of the end of war in Germany, did you end up flying less?

Mr. Samuelson: No, I flew 35. I completed my missions before V-E Day.

Mr. Franklin: Oh you did? How long did that take?

Mr. Samuelson: It was, let's see, finished in April. Maybe March.

Mr. Franklin: So your missions were pretty frequent?

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah. Well, we had bad weather and so forth.

Mr. Franklin: After your 35 missions were completed, where were you assigned?

Mr. Samuelson: I was stationed at Keesler Field. But one thing, like you recall we were in Florida, I had a note to go to the headquarters. And this guy sat down with me and said “you’ve got to change your dog-tag.” See, your dog-tag has your religion on it, and I’m Jewish. In those years they put “H” for Hebrew. So he said “What would happen is that if you got shot down, and you have that on you, you’d be killed. You wouldn’t have a chance. And so we got the dog-tags that had a C on it.” And I think that stood for Catholic or Christian. And they briefed me, and I had heard this before, that if anything if you get shot down is that you try to escape. If you can’t escape, don’t ever give yourself up, because they are so mad at us flyers that they’d kill us. Don’t give yourself up to anyone in the military except for the Luftwaffe. Give yourself up to them and you’ll be treated significantly well at the air force Stalag, Stalag 17. And that was the thing. And this is why we were Staff Sergeants as air crew. At that rank as a western man you will not have to do KP, and manual labor, and so forth because of the regulations from Geneva. So that was interesting. And I didn’t mind that, until I got to thinking about it and I wasn’t really happy about it either. If I was killed, I’d have a cross on top of me. You know, I don’t think I could forget it. It wasn’t a big deal, but something inside wasn’t right.

(wife speaks garbled off mic)

Oh yeah, and I got this St. Christopher medal in Bangor Maine. They had some girls come over. They had, like, this dance there. This girl came over and she gave me this St. Christopher medal. She knows I’m going over, you know, and she gave it to me, and she was crying. (Laughs) I don’t know what the hell she was crying for! But I took the St.

Christopher medal. So anyways, there was this kid, Eddie, who was a big Catholic. We were both from New Orleans, so I says “Eddie, what’s this St. Christopher?” He says, “Hey, Goddamn, don’t you know what a St. Christopher medal is!? If you take a trip you’re not gonna get hurt!” It’s a good luck thing. “Wear that thing!” So I put my St. Christopher medal, my C on my dog-tag, and it worked! I’m here! (Laughing)

Mr. Franklin: So mentioned your friend Eddie and your other friend who was from New Orleans. Tell us a little bit about them.

Mr. Samuelson: Well, they were just nice kids, you know. They were nice. They were very Catholic. With a real inner. . . very strong with their religion. They did the rosary and all this stuff, heavy praying. Just to themselves, but you can’t help but hear it. They were nice. They were not drunks, nothing like that. They didn’t drink. They had a beer every once in a while. Some of the other guys there would drink.

Mr. Franklin: While you were stationed in England I suppose you had easier access?

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah, at times.

Mr. Franklin: Your living quarters, what were they like?

Mr. Samuelson: A Danson hut. It was very small with iron beds. And it had, like, a mesh metal, and they had three square pads on it, one at top, up and down. And it was real hard. And it was cold in England. Our barracks were cold. We were cold. And it was during this period that I was in England, during the Battle of the Bulge, and they made these blankets and everything, and there was a notice to anyone willing to give the blankets up. I gave my blanket up, most of us did, and I used an overcoat. It was hard. It was really tough, the winter. It was the hardest winter ever. At the Bulge, you know, they had nothing like that. We had creature comforts. The food was mediocre to decent.

Mr. Franklin: When your 35 missions were completed, were you mustered out or were you reassigned?

Mr. Samuelson: Well, after our 35 missions were completed, we were put on a liberty ship from Southhampton, I guess, and then we joined a convoy over the Atlantic Ocean. We went pretty far north to stay away from the submarines. And the convoy had all of these Naval vessels and the cruisers were bouncing up and down as these destroyers were like corks in the water. It was a big deal! And at this time they had a lot of POWs being rescued, because this was after the Bulge, and they were really in bad shape, those troops were. And I was on a liberty ship. Of course, they flew us over, and then they took us on boats going back. It was uncomfortable. Four bunks high, on that frame again. And they asked if any able-bodied person could possibly come up top to help. And, you know, I felt good. I'm in good shape. Bobbing around didn't hurt me, but these guys who were the infantry fellows, they were vomiting all over the place, they were sick, they were shrunken down to skin and bones, some of them. And so I was working 12 hours a day, doing everything. Mostly inside the mess hall or taking care of guys, you know, getting them cleaned up from vomiting all over themselves. Whatever they asked us to do, we did. They probably got their dollars worth. They were good servicemen. I remember when I got in I was paid thirty dollars a month.

Mr. Franklin: As a sergeant?

Mr. Samuelson: No that was as a private. I had 96 dollars a month as a Staff Sergeant. So, you know, guys that were in those units had probably gone through a . . . I was in a unique area, being there on the same boat.

(Wife speaks garbled in background recorder requested to be turned off).

Mr. Franklin: So, you went back on a liberty ship to New York. Were you discharged after that?

Mr. Samuelson: No the war was still on in Europe. In my head, I'm thinking they're really going to go after Japan now. I didn't dream of being out of the service. I didn't know how long these Nazis were gonna still hold on. There was a serious war still left in Germany, at least it was for a few months. And then the big push was for Japan. So they stationed me in Keesler Field in Biloxi Mississippi. And then from there I was discharged in Houston. I forget the name of the base I was discharged at.

Mr. Franklin: When was that?

Mr. Samuelson: (Thinking) Let me look on my discharge papers.

Mr. Franklin: Was it after the bomb was dropped?

Mr. Samuelson: Well, after V-E Day I figured that they would put me on B-29s, that I would do some more training. You know, I was in the service, and I had no idea that it was going to be over with. There was so much hate there, so much momentum that everyone was prepared to lose millions more, and all of a sudden they dropped the nuclear bomb. All of that was really something, when Truman dropped that bomb. Boy, that was unbelievable, that one bomb and what it did, and the Japanese wouldn't surrender. And they dropped pamphlets down there to get them to surrender. After both Nagasaki and Hiroshima, then they decided to surrender. And that was it. The war was over. There were a lot of happy Americans! 99 percent of them loved it. Now, they begin to write the history books, and they give Uncle Sam a real bad trip for dropping those bombs. You know, they'll call it the worst thing that ever happened. But, at that point in

time, I never found anyone who was critical of those two bombs being dropped on Japan. Not one! Nowadays there's a whole bunch.

Mr. Franklin: Anybody who was on Okinawa wouldn't contest how necessary it was.

Mr. Samuelson: Oh, it was!

Mr. Franklin: So after the bomb was dropped, you were discharged?

Mr. Samuelson: That's right.

Mr. Franklin: And you said that you were married shortly after that.

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah, when I was stationed at Keesler Field, my wife was friendly with one of my cousins, they were real close friends, and they had a place in Bay St. Louis which is real close to Keesler Field. And I used to hitch-hike to get dropped off there in Bay St. Louis. I would see her all the time when I was in the service.

Mr. Franklin: And your wife's name?

Mr. Samuelson: Rosalie.

Mr. Franklin: When were you and Rosalie married?

Mr. Samuelson: In 1946. On November 7th, 1946. And I was 20 years when I got married and I had to get my mom and dad to sign for me, because I was underage.

(Laughs)

(Wife speaks off mic about getting marriage license and signatures – mostly garbled)

Mr. Franklin: You had to get all of the parents' signatures?

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah, you know, once you're in the service, you're an adult! You grow up. I didn't shave when I first got in, but I had to shave for wearing that oxygen mask.

(Wife speaks off mic – mostly garbled & out of range about his driving back & forth long hours to see her on weekends in Bay St. Louis after he closed up his shop in Austin at six

o'clock at night, then would have to drive back to open up at 8. Her mother finally tells her father "Herman, if you don't let those children get married, he's going to kill himself on the highway!")

Mr. Samuelson: (Laughs) I'm used to that stuff. A 1941 Plymouth convertible, I had.

Mr. Franklin: Now you've been married for 63 years.

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah, 63 this year.

Mr. Franklin: So, is there anything else that you would like to add?

Mr. Samuelson: Not particularly. My experience in the service . . .

Rosalie Samuelson: Other than war is hell! (The rest is garbled and out of range)

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't want one of my kids to go through it. And I warned it, you know, that was different. Wars are different.

Mr. Franklin: The perception of it is different.

Mr. Samuelson: Yeah. The meaning is different One was survival.

Mr. Franklin: Well on behalf of the museum and on behalf of myself, I thank you for your service and thank you for taking the time to share this information with us.

Mr. Samuelson: Well thank you. I've enjoyed talking about it.

Transcribed by Michael Franklin

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