

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Terence R. St.Louis

Albuquerque, N.M.

February 18, 2010

398th Bomb Group – 601st Bomb Squadron

Ball Turret Gunner B-17

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is February 18, 2010. I am interviewing Mr. Terence R. St.Louis by telephone. His address is 6019 Wild Flower Trail NE, Albuquerque, NM 87111. His phone number is 505-858-1453. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Terry, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum. When I do these in person, I let the man read it and sign it.

Since this is by phone, let me read this to you and make sure it's OK with you. (agreement read)

Is that OK with you?

Mr. St.Louis:

That's fine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. Now, the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes a few years down the road we try to get back in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something.

Do you have a son or daughter or some one who'd know where you are in case you are not at this number?

Mr. St.Louis:

I have a son, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is his name?

Mr. St.Louis:

Same as mine, Terence R. St.Louis.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He's a junior?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, we never tacked the Junior on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have an address for him?

Mr. St.Louis:

I can't give it to you right off the top of my head because he does not live here with us. He lives here in the city and I can get the information to you later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about a telephone number? Do you know his telephone number offhand?

Mr. St.Louis:

I don't have it offhand but I can get it. His telephone number is 505-271-9028. That's his home phone.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about an address?

Mr. St.Louis:

Let's see here. 1231 Mount Verde, Albuquerque, NM 87112.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you. Appreciate that. Now, What is your birth date?

Mr. St.Louis:

October 8, 1921.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. St.Louis:

I was born in the town of Ilion, New York.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes, we were a family of five growing up. I had two brothers and two sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were either of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes, well both of them were. My older brother entered the service after I did and he had a much better education. He was one of the early male nurses. The Navy found a place for him as the only medic aboard submarines in combat.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. St.Louis:

No, unfortunately he is not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did your other brother do?

Mr. St.Louis:

My other brother worked for Grumann Aircraft at a factory on Long Island. At the beginning of the war he voluntarily left that and left his family behind and joined the infantry near the end of the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. St.Louis:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were either of your sisters involved in war work?

Mr. St.Louis:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes, I had been in the service for almost three years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go into the service then?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, I went into the service on the 28th of June, 1940. That was two days after I graduated from high school. I was eighteen.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. St.Louis:

I went to high school in Mohawk, New York. That had a population of about 3,000 then. A few years ago when I was back there for my 60th high school class reunion, it was still 3,000.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when you went into the service did you volunteer or were you drafted?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, they didn't draft me because the draft was not implemented until October. By then I was already in Panama.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What made you decide to volunteer for the service?

Mr. St.Louis:

I wanted to become an Air Corps pilot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you volunteered for the Air Corps?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes. Because I had a high school education I was accepted. I was also chosen to go overseas immediately because there was a training school in Panama run by the 33rd Infantry that prepared candidates for the possibility of going to West Point.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you first went in, where did you take your basic training?

Mr. St.Louis:

My basic training? There were not even any basic training centers then. So I started basic training at my first base which was Ft. _____, New York. That's outside of New Rochelle on an island. That lasted for just two weeks, long enough for all of the volunteers there to furnish

coal for the coming winter season for all of the military homesteads on the island. We learned how to eat in the mess hall and drill on the parade ground and salute the flag when necessary, that sort of thing. Because I was already destined to go to Panama, you didn't get into weapons training yet because during summer time you wished you would get that training on maneuvers someplace.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So what did you do during that time? How long were you in basic training, you said four or five weeks?

Mr. St.Louis:

More than that but it was in increments. We took basic training wherever we were stationed after we had been at Ft. Slocum for I guess ten days or two weeks then we were transferred to Staten Island and in the 18th Infantry. The 18th Infantry most of it was up in Plattsburg, New York and those who remained were more mature, people who had been in the service for a year or three or four and they trained us. That's what basic training consisted of until the big training centers were established.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then when did you leave to go to Panama?

Mr. St.Louis:

I left to go to Panama on the 12th of August. Just a little over a month.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you travel down there?

Mr. St.Louis:

By troop transport, a boat. The name of it was the U.S.S. Republic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you leave from on that?

Mr. St.Louis:

Left from Booklyn, NY.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did it take to get down there?

Mr. St.Louis:

Five days. We weren't in a hurry.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that boat trip?

Mr. St.Louis:

Fine, fine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was the boat very crowded?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes, it was. There were a lot on it and there was a full transport or boat of that type had a deck that sloped toward the outside of the boat and the mess hall that they had spanned that and we ran into a storm at one time, happened to be during lunch time and one of the problems was that the trays that we were eating out of must be hung onto and they tended to slide from one end of the table to the other.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was there much seasickness on that trip?

Mr. St.Louis:

Little bit, not much.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else happen on that trip?

Mr. St.Louis:

Not anything spectacular.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, tell me again why you went to Panama.

Mr. St.Louis:

They offered me the opportunity as I was selected for the academy that they had down there, to go to school for only one year and then go from there to West Point for further education.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was this academy that they had in Panama?

Mr. St.Louis:

What was it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir.

Mr. St.Louis:

It was a military training academy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you go to that academy?

Mr. St.Louis:

No, I got bumped out of it because there was a quota. I was stationed at Kelly Field that was an airbase there. There were two of us that were applicants to make that class. It was coming up in

September. This was in August. There was only room for one of us to go. They drew the other guy's name out of the hat. The tough part of that was he lasted only ten days and by then it was too late for me to get in the class.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do in Panama?

Mr. St.Louis:

I was assigned to the support element of the Air Force unit there. The 3800 Sully Squadron which supplied the flight squadron and was assigned to the flight squadron and all of our work was directed toward maintaining aircraft. Not buying food for the mess hall or anything like that. So I learned how to run a warehouse and apparently I had a talent for it because they promoted me to PFC and put me in charge of one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your pay when you first went in?

Mr. St.Louis:

Twenty-one dollars a month.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Twenty-one you say?

Mr. St.Louis:

Twenty-one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And as a PFC what was it?

Mr. St.Louis:

I think it was thirty-two. I can't say for sure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So how long were you in Panama?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, I was there for about ten months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all happened while you were there?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, we were probably getting ready to have a war. There was a lot of training and there was a lot of well, learning how to do new things: what to do, where to do and so forth. However, there was very little consideration to that war being started in the Pacific. Everything was already started in Europe. So after about ten months I was selected to go over with a group of ninety-nine other people to Trinidad in the West Indies to set up the first of one of the lend-lease bases that had been arranged between the British and the United States. Our President swapped some World War I destroyers for the privilege of using the British colonies to set up a chain of support bases. What they were building was the route from the United States to China by air.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So what all did you do there?

Mr. St.Louis:

The same sort of things: running a warehouse for the maintenance of aircraft, you know, and I got everything from screws to aircraft engines, machine guns to cameras, whatever.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was life like there on Trinidad?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, wonderful. People were very, very receptive and they also had... They were a British colony. The people there for the most part were born there, they were not English-type British. But they were very hospitable and very friendly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did they speak English?

Mr. St.Louis:

Of course. That was their only language. Trinidad was probably one of the better colonies in the Caribbean for the British at that time. They had a good college there and had schools and well educated. It was a nice place to be.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you live in?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, it was kind of...guess it's a funny story. We slept in the army pyramidal tent, I'm sure you've seen those. They were set on a wooden platform or floor, it was unfinished, etc. One was housing for four people and their bunks and their footlockers, etc. Along about that time a friend that I had made at Port of Spain, Trinidad a family with five girls gave me a puppy to play with. I got back to where our small base was, only one hundred people, and the puppy would automatically pick the floor for her toilet. Because of that and the fact that our floors were unfinished, our tent acquired a very undesirable odor. About that time, the 33rd Infantry moved in, this was a National Guard unit, with a very inexperienced Brigadier General. National Guard versus regular Army. He came out with his entourage to do an inspection of our operation and we were all in our tents in full dress uniforms, etc., and he got to our tent. Of course he entered first and then everybody entered after him. And I'm sure the odor hit him right between the nose

and when it did, he said, "This tent is abominable." One of the other GIs who was standing at attention right there snapped right back, "Thank you sir. We try to keep it that way." The General was wanting to explode but at the same time he wanted to laugh and so he just sputtered for a couple of minutes and wheeled around and went back out of the tent. We could hear him down the way, giggling. The odd part of all this I told you was that the guy who responded had a master's degree in English from the University of Pennsylvania and he knew exactly whereof he spoke. Was that worthwhile?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir, that's a good story. I like that. You have any more stories like that, go ahead and tell them. We like to hear those stories.

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, yes, I'm sure you do. I've got a lot of them. Before I got through with it, of course, I had over five years of service under my belt.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any time you have a story like that, go ahead and tell it because we like to hear those.

Mr. St.Louis:

All right, if it fits into our conversation, I will.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened there?

Mr. St.Louis:

We were in the supply train and when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, of course that was done and over with before we heard about it. It so happened that the Navy and everybody else that could respond, responded very, very quickly. The Navy immediately started bringing depth

charges, anti-submarine equipment to Trinidad for by then becoming larger units that did have flying capacity. We had B-18 aircraft stationed there. We had P-40 aircraft stationed there and the people to fly them. It was obvious that the detachment was going to be used to support the British in the anti-submarine effort. During the next year, year and a half, that area between Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba and the Gulf of Mexico, that area became known as Torpedo Junction. Basically run north. At one time, late in my stay there and I was only there I guess going on two years, there was a hill in that part of the quarters, the residential area, and I was up there one day with a girlfriend, one evening with a girlfriend and I counted fifty-one damaged Liberty ships in the harbor and many of them were only a half of a ship. Some time later in to response to that they brought in what they called the floating dry dock. You know about those, don't you? The idea was that if you had the front of a Liberty ship and the back of a Liberty ship, you get them together on this floating dry dock and make them back into one ship. So that was one of the things that the military only worked on the outskirts they brought in civilian experts etc. to do that work. But in the meantime, the route had really been established, Florida down through the Caribbean to Surinam and South America, from there to Ascension Island in the middle of the Atlantic, from there to Dakar, Africa, from there to Egypt and from there to China for aircraft that the United States was building like LB30s to go over to fight the war in the Orient. So that was something that kept us busy and made us feel very good about doing something for the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you first went in, what uniform did you have?

Mr. St.Louis:

What uniform?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir.

Mr. St.Louis:

Just khaki uniform. We had the full uniform but we never wore them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have the World War I uniform with the wrap leggings, or what?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, no. We had a shirt and trousers of cotton khaki and black shoes to go with those, etc.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What helmet did you have?

Mr. St.Louis:

The helmet was the same thing we wound up with at the end of the war. We were there in Trinidad so we weren't immediately in combat. In general that combat gear wasn't for us. So like I said my job was in supply and getting stuff brought in to safe storage or into a warehouse and that sort of thing. We used to drive trucks back and forth from the dock. That of course depending on the urgency of the load and what time it was. We could be working all night or in the night or very early in the morning or whatever. Very early in that process when the Navy started bringing in the depth charges from Cuba, Guantanamo incidentally, we were moving that stuff into that secure area there that had been created very quickly, mostly of Quonset huts, and for those that come in at all hours. I remember one morning at some time between twelve o'clock at night and two o'clock in the morning, there was a full moon and we were unloading this stuff and everybody was there and the commander of our unit was a Major by the name of Major

Vump and he was among those who were doing it. He was even out of uniform. As a matter of fact he was just in his skivvies, t-shirt and underwear shorts, but since it was in the tropics, it was hot and sweaty. So that's why he responded that way. The urgency of the situation required the response of everybody that was able to do something. That's the way it worked. One of the other things that was notable for that early period was that the mess hall was open twenty-four hours a day. So you could get something to eat whenever you needed. Might be two o'clock in the morning, might be ten o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the German submarines were pretty active at that time down there, right?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes, they were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any ships actually torpedoed?

Mr. St.Louis:

No. That took place at sea but one of the other things at Trinidad and also at one of the other British Isles. There were oil refineries. I think the one at Trinidad was Texaco. I don't know what the other one was but they were potential targets so the U.S. Air Force took a very positive role both in trying to find the submarines, submarine patrol, and trying to defend the coast, preventing any possible attacks. The B-18s were in the air a lot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The B-18, is that a two-engine or a four-engine plane?

Mr. St.Louis:

Two engine. If you remember the DC3 airplane? Well it was that with a bomb-bay tacked on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened down there?

Mr. St.Louis:

That's kind of the pattern of what happened. I didn't get back to the United States for vacation until 1942, I think. Late 1941. I had to fly into Florida and then get a train up to my old hometown, etc. Ran into several of my buddies at school that had not gotten in yet. One of them by the name of Pete Lincoln who was not a classmate of mine, he was a year ahead of me. And another one by the name of Jimmy Smith and he was very important, who was a classmate of mine. Later in the war, just by coincidence, and things that happened in between that I haven't told you about. When we got back there I thought that I was, when I got back there to stay, which was in 1943, I thought that this was my chance to get the pilot training. So I applied and I was accepted to be in that and by then I was Kelly Field in Texas, transferred up to Sheppard Air Force Base, north of Wichita Falls, I guess you know about that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

At Wichita Falls, right.

Mr. St.Louis:

We were supposed to be starting our training for aviation cadets at that time. Well, in April of that year they washed out thirty-five thousand cadets who had been accepted for pilot training because they didn't need them. They didn't need them because gunners were dying three times as fast as pilots and co-pilots and so they washed out thirty-four thousand possible pilot trainers and I was on the road to Kingman, Arizona, and gunnery school. Because of my size, five foot six and 130-135 pounds, I was automatically selected to be trained as a ball turret gunner.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you start your gunnery school?

Mr. St.Louis:

August of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that training.

Mr. St.Louis:

It was very good. It was in Arizona and it was very hot and because of the number of classes that they were doing at one time, when you got there and formed a class group, you had to wait until one of the other classes graduated so you could get their training space. So a good bit of the time at Kingman, Arizona, at first we were not being actively trained as gunners. We were getting a little bit of it, but not much. Then when we were being trained in guns of course it was very intense and very concentrated because they wanted to get it done with and get us to the aerial portion of that darn training and on our way.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of training did you have there at Kingman? What all did you do?

Mr. St.Louis:

How to take machine guns apart, how to shoot them, how to work the turrets. They had all of the turrets in model form on the range. So you got training in whatever turret position you were going to be flying.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So all your training was in the ball turret then?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes. No, not all of it. They trained you for all the positions. They were going to train you for radio operator and engineers and specific positions, kinda doubleheader.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've heard people say they were trained with a shotgun. Is that right?

Mr. St.Louis:

No. You got to shoot all kinds of weapons. There was specifically some for aerial gunners. The technology of the turrets, particularly for the ball turrets, were very good, very effective. You had a gun sight which was an optical gun sight. The heart of that thing was a triangular piece of hard glass that had a horizontal line in it. It had projected on that line, two vertical lines, short vertical lines. The trick was to frame those two vertical lines on the wingtips of your targets. The horizontal lines through the nose of your target. If you did that at a thousand yards, you'd have your, put the control ring, the two vertical lines, if you extend it all the way out, that was the thousand yards. The theory was, and I never had the chance to prove it, that if you got your target aimed at just that situation, then before it moved out of it, you started shooting, you'd hit it. So that's the way it's done. We did get to shoot some machine guns but not with any bullets. The mechanisms for the training took pictures of what you were doing and that would show whether you knew what you were doing or didn't know what you were doing. It would also show, it was a two-sided training, because the fighter planes that we were shooting at of course were our own. When we looked at the film, the squadron pilots that were attacking us sat in the same theatre and said, "Oh, no, you didn't hit me." An unofficial advocate would say, "Yes, you did. You got shot down." A little competition there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The reason I asked about the shotgun. I had people tell me that they would shoot at clay targets to learn how to lead. They would actually ride around in the back of a pickup shooting at clay targets with a shotgun.

Mr. St.Louis:

That might have been done at some of the training schools but was not done where I was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you actually go up in the air and shoot your gun at any time?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, yes. What I just told you about. We were in B-17s. We were being attacked by P51s usually or P40s and normally we would be a flight of maybe four or five and there would be maybe six or eight making attacks on us. The agency training system flying exact and were also very precise and complicated maneuver. What they had to do was to fly along side of you; approach you out of range and along side parallel to you and then when they wanted to attack, turn in and if they continued to turn in, they would go right on by you at over four hundred miles an hour, your two hundred and fifty and their two hundred and fifty. So what you do, they turn in and then they turn back so that they're hanging in front of where you're flying and they slow down so that the two planes fly toward your tail. That's called a pursuit curve.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever actually fire live ammunition?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In training?

Mr. St.Louis:

That was also a very interesting thing because the targets that we were to shoot at were towed by women who had gotten into that female counterpart of the Air Force.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right, the WASPs.

Mr. St.Louis:

The WASPs. They were flying B25s and they towed targets and they would fly a kind of pattern that a pursuit plane would fly and of course when they got close to us, they'd turn in toward us and then they would have to turn back so they wouldn't collide with us and go by. So they would do that and of course then you would give a very good idea of well a very good demonstration of what we had to do to shoot down a target.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you would fire at the tow targets then?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did more than one plane fire at it?

Mr. St.Louis:

Took turns. Not at the same time. That was strictly because of safety rules.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you know who hit the target?

Mr. St.Louis:

Because of the film. The film was numbered.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when you were shooting live ammunition, it was still being filmed?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes, it was still being filmed.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, I've also heard that they painted bullets different colors so you could tell who had gone through it.

Mr. St.Louis:

Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did they do that with yours?

Mr. St.Louis:

I wouldn't know. We didn't have the same aircraft more than once.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened in your training?

Mr. St.Louis:

Our final training was done at Rapid City, South Dakota. This was the training that I was just describing. That was after we had left gunnery school. We did fly some aerial missions at gunnery school. But we didn't shoot at tow targets there. When we got to Rapid City then we were being trained as a unit. We even knew where we were destined to go before we left there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you had your crew together at that point, is that right?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes. The crew was put together at Lincoln, Nebraska. I got my tail gunner there and he was a great guy. His name was Johnny Klingelhofer and Johnny was a son of a German couple who had come to the United States since World War I and Johnny was born in O'Fallon, Illinois I think.

We were up there and went to school there and he was an excellent violinist and he was an excellent baseball player. I'm sure he was at the time as he had a contract pending with the St. Louis Browns for baseball when he decided to enlist in the service, etc. He was a good tail gunner and he took his violin with him wherever he went. He had his violin with him when we were in England. We were at one time slated to bomb Berlin and at that time at that particular target point we didn't know why he did it until later, Johnny took an extra pair of throat mikes and he wrapped that around his violin. When we were on our bomb run toward Berlin, eleven or twelve minutes, something like that, Johnny back there in the tail gun position was playing Bruno's "Ave Maria". He was doing that in the hope that some one on the ground would intercept the signal. The reason was that he still had relatives in Germany. So I think that's one of my better stories.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the name of the air base there in Rapid City?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, gosh, I wish you hadn't asked me. The only thing I can think of is Rapid City Air Base.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, it was.

Mr. St.Louis:

I was assigned to the Air Force Communication Service and also to the Air Defense Command.

Had a lot to do with historically recording the evolution of both the radar and computer technology, etc. Because when I came back in the service after World War II was over and after I had done some other things I came back in and as civilian employee, an information specialist.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let's go back. When you finished your training in South Dakota, then what happened?

Mr. St.Louis:

Then what happened, we all went back down to Lincoln, Nebraska for about three days and then we headed out with a brand-new B17 for England. Flew the northern route through Bangor, Maine, up into Canada, from Canada to Greenbay to southern Greenland, only then it was called Blooie West One. From there to Iceland, from Iceland to Wales, then we got our own airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were flying over there were you with other planes or by yourself?

Mr. St.Louis:

You mean were we flying over there in formation?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah.

Mr. St.Louis:

We were flying over there in traffic but not together.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, proceeding independently. Anything happen on that flight over?

Mr. St.Louis:

On the way over we were at B. W. One Air Base in Greenland and getting ready for a pre-dawn takeoff and one of the first B-17s to roll down the runway towards the fjord, blew a tire, went sideways, crashed into a snowbank and burst into flames. So nobody else was going to take off that day. The crew did escape without injury. I don't know how. But the rest of us were running down the runway as fast as we could with snow to throw up on the plane to try to put it out. We got down there close to the airplane and a safe distance away from it, sitting in the snow bank was the whole crew. We were there for quite a few days. Then flew on to Iceland for a couple of days, then finally to England. Then by bus to our ultimate base at Northamstead, England. The 398th Bomb Group. And of course by then the war was changing. But we did have some exciting moments.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were in the 398th Bomb Group. What Bomb Squadron?

Mr. St.Louis:

The 601st. We brought an airplane back in May of 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You got there in January 1945. At Northamstead?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes. My wife and I were back there about two or three years ago. The British have a group over there called the Friends of the 398th and we were near Northamstead and they put on a beautiful show for us including two 15-minute air shows.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand they put a stained glass window in some church over there, too.

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes, it was beautiful. All of that very, very nice. Incidentally, I'm glad that you were talking right now because my wife and I have an appointment to fly back there in June with my Bomb Group Association. We are going first to Prague and then Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. That was the last mission we flew. It was also the last combat mission the Air Force Flew.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many total missions did you fly?

Mr. St.Louis:

I think 26.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Twenty-six missions. Let's go back. You got over there in January of 1945 and what happened then?

Mr. St.Louis:

What happened then was we had a very short period of time when we flew around that part of England and learned the ropes of forming into formations and getting the crew into the scope of the battle, one group after another and just about every mission that we flew while I was there was a pre-dawn assembly and you find your own group by looking for them specifically colored flares. The engineer of the aircraft would be firing out of the cockpit and so forming a flight train of 1,000 airplanes was a very precise operation and very successfully done and almost always before dawn. Once we got in formation and steered right, you would all come out of that formation process in line with where you were supposed to be in the order of groups that were flying up there. I spent about 70 percent of my time in the ball turret. This was a very interesting process for me because I could spin around and watch what was going on and see the flares

going off and all of that stuff. Very early, probably our second or third mission, we had an adventure. And that was we got into a position where we were about to join our squadron and get into the group formation and our aircraft lost number three and number four. And number three was windmilling. We had six tons of bombs. We were going down at about six hundred feet a minute. We couldn't just drop them anywhere. So the navigator was working his computer as fast as he could, to try to get us from where we were to a place called "The Wash", that was a designated area on the sound, where we could drop our bombs and we did make that but we were down pretty low by then and we had to try to get to Woodbridge which is a huge British air base and it was designated for a place to go when you had an emergency. So by then, of course, it was dawn and daylight and the navigator went through conversation with the base traffic control people and we were doing fine and all of us were up and ready to jump if we had to and by the time we got close to Woodbridge, we were too damn low to try on our parachutes and so when we found out where he was taking us unfortunately it was at right angles to our left wing so we would have to make a 270-degree turn into our dead engines to land there and we didn't have that much altitude. We were flying right toward the field. Straight ahead of us was an L-shaped field and we were aimed right at the short end of the L. And the long end of the L was to our right. In other words we could turn into the dead engines and get on that. So the pilot, Jim Koenig, he put it beautifully down there. He got the turn started and about that time, oh, when we dropped our bombs at the Wash, because of an electrical malfunction, the bomb bay doors did not open and bombs dropped through them so we couldn't get the bomb bay doors closed again. We were landing in a muddy field. The muddy field almost totally came through the bomb bay doors and into the radio room where our radio operator was trying to stay alive and he was absolutely deluged in mud. So we slid to a stop and got out and walked away. The radio operator

turned around and looked back at the airplane and said, “Well, looks just like it’s supposed to.”
So we got over to the base, the only one that got hurt at all was the pilot and what happened to him was that, of course he was trying to pull the nose of the aircraft up so he was pulling on the wheel with all the force he could have, and when the airplane hit the ground, the right wing dug into the mud and the wheel hit him right under the nose and split his lip all the way through.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had dropped your bombs, though, right?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yeah, we had got rid of the bombs in the Wash. That’s where the bomb bay doors failed.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you landed, what country were you in? You still in England?

Mr. St.Louis:

Still in England.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I didn’t catch it. Did you say your other three engines quit?

Mr. St.Louis:

No, no. They didn’t. We would never have made it if they had. If we’d lost one more engine, the whole crew would have bailed out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what caused the two engines to die?

Mr. St.Louis:

Never found out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Wasn't lack of fuel or anything like that?

Mr. St.Louis:

No, no. Wasn't lack of fuel at all. Everything worked except the number three engine which is closest to the cockpit. The inability to feather that engine made all the difference in the world.

We had no power and an awful lot of drag.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now number four engine, was it working or not?

Mr. St.Louis:

Number four engine was dead and feathered.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But then the number three is the one that wouldn't feather.

Mr. St.Louis:

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did they salvage the plane or was that the end of it?

Mr. St.Louis:

I never knew.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was quite an experience.

Mr. St.Louis:

I think my military experience was exceptional anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about your very first mission. What was that like?

Mr. St.Louis:

The first mission? It was a piece of cake. There were other adventures. We landed on a British base that had been established outside of Brussels, Belgium, during or immediately after the Battle of the Bulge. We landed there and we had an airplane that was pretty badly damaged. We had taken some flak through the right wing close to the fuselage. Scared the hell out of me. It blew a hole through the wing that you could have dropped a body through. That included where the hole came through the flap. So when we went to land there we didn't know whether we were going to have two flaps or not but we did. No problem at all landing there. No problem at all taking off the next day. But we were picked up by a WAC who spoke English but she was Polish from Poland. I don't know how she got there but anyway she was our chauffeur in Brussels and took us to the place where we would sleep, etc. and then that night went out and went to a place that had been a very high class restaurant and during the Battle of the Bulge apparently had sustained enough damage so that they moved the whole thing down in the basement. We had our dinner there on our hosts and when we got seated there, they asked if we wanted wine and Lloyd Abbot, our navigator, said, "Not wine. What's wine? Champagne!" So they brought us some champagne. There was an opener and he said "No, let me open it." He opened it and what he did, he hit it on the bottom and the cork flew out into the chandelier that they had hung down there.

But that was fun.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Why did you land? Because you thought you couldn't get it back to England?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, it was late and we took the flak and this caused us to make a fast, forced landing. We chose to land because of the damage to the aircraft.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did they do any repairs to it before you left?

Mr. St.Louis:

No. They didn't but later that night after we had had our dinner and got back there, the Brits had made this airfield and it was all pure steel planks and they had their fighter aircraft there and they were scrambled about two o'clock in the morning and that was something to see because these Spitfires would, their protection was nothing but a revetment that had been put up in earth and each airplane was parked in one of these little revetments. They came roaring up out of there, one after another, very quickly and there would be two aircraft coming down these steel plank runways at the same time, one behind the other, taking off. That was a very interesting observation of air power.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your longest mission?

Mr. St.Louis:

I don't know. There was one. We had a couple over ten hours. We had the one that took us to Czechoslovakia was a long one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you bomb Berlin?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes, we did bomb Berlin on the mission that I told you Johnny Klingelhofer. The story I told you about Johnny Klingelhofer playing his violin. That was to Berlin.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's another other thing that happened on your missions?

Mr. St.Louis:

There you go. The mission to Pilsen was a very powerful mission, a big mission, and it was also the last mission that 8th Air Force flew on the 25th of April, 1945. In connection with that my wife and I are going to Prague in June and during the five days that we are there, there will be a special group to entertain us and they will take us back to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia and part of that is a tour through the Skoda Museum that was originally a weapons factory that used slave labor for manufacturing the German 88s. So that's the last thing in the war. We did a couple of sorties to Germany to pick up prisoners of war. That was about the end of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, were you ever attacked by enemy fighters?

Mr. St.Louis:

A couple of times but they never really got close because by the time we were flying the war, it was almost over and with the Brits and our own escort fighter aircraft, the Germans just didn't have a chance. Some years later, after I went back in the Air Force, and I was stationed over there in the 50s, and married and we had one child and another one on the way, my wife and I had found a place to live in Germany, an apartment on a farm, in Viederhausen, I think it was. The farmer's name was Bernard Ring and he had been a German fighter pilot during World War II and he and I had been in the air on the same day at the same time but we became very good friends. He was a wonderful guy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your plane damaged on most missions?

Mr. St.Louis:

I wouldn't say on most of them but probably close to half of them. Maybe more than half.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And that was by flak, right?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yeah. There were aspects of the missions to Pilsen that were given to me that this was a maximum effort and there were an awful lot of airplanes in the air. The story was after we got back that Jimmy Doolittle, who was then commanding over there, had word that we were coming. What we were told is that the workers at Skoda arms manufacturing plant were slave labor. So they were waiting for us. One of the things that I noticed at that particular time was that, I could easily see the group that was immediately in front of us. That were that close that I could see them closely enough that I could count them and see where each element of the group was in position. Each element of the squadron. The bomb runs, for some reason or other apparently... What they tried to do when they were planning it was over the shortest route exposed to enemy anti-aircraft fire and this was a long one. It was a real long one. That was because that was the best they could do. Anyway, I was watching as I always did when we approached the target and when they turned on the IP (Initial Point) I brought, and I always did this, I always brought my guns up to horizontal, and pointed them straight ahead, the airplane was fine. The group ahead of us, sixty airplanes, disappeared in the flak. There was that much smoke. Then we were in it. There was flak all over the place and I'm sure we took lots of hits but they were small. Small pieces of flak hit the plane but they disappeared in the smoke. A lot of the stuff was close enough that I could see the flames when it went off. So that's about the size of it.

Then we came home of course and we came back in May. The war, of course, in the Pacific was not over yet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now let me ask did your 601st lose many planes over there?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, yes, they lost some. On a couple of missions that we were on we lost some. In most cases that I can recall the crews were able to survive but there something like 28,000 who were wounded in the Air Force and something like 25,000 who were taken prisoners of war. You knew that, huh?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, that's fine. Did you see any planes go down?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes. The white blossoms came out. There's another thing I want to tell you about. We started out talking about my high school. Well, at the time I was flying my missions over Germany, my high school class had 36 students. Nineteen girls and seventeen boys. Of that seventeen boys, four of us were flying combat missions at the same time. One of them, Jimmy Smith, who was an outstanding musician, who didn't have to go to war at all because he was working for Pratt-Whitney in Hartford, Connecticut and a designer of parts for aircraft and he volunteered. Another one was a good friend of mine who, after my father and mother had died, was one of the families that had taken me in. In fact three different families helped me through high school. Each one took me for a year and their only consideration to me was OK, somehow or other you have to come up with ten bucks a week and I did. But four of us were dropping bombs or flying missions at the same time and Jimmy was the only one that was lost. He was a very, very good friend of

mine. He was such a good musician that while he was working up in Hudson, Connecticut he tried out for the New York Philharmonic and his instrument was the euphonium. I don't know if you know what that is or not. It's a baritone horn, not a sousaphone, it's smaller. He tried out, did what he did, and played a solo. The conductor said "You know, if that was a trombone, I'd hire you today." He was a great guy; he looked almost exactly like Jimmy Stewart. The girls all thought he was forever.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Take me through a typical day when you were going on a mission? What time did you get up? What did you do? Take me through a typical day when you were going on a mission.

Mr. St.Louis:

Any day that we went on a mission we got up before dawn, sometime between four and five o'clock in the morning. There was enough time to go and take a bath. The first thing was breakfast if you could get it and the second thing was briefing. The third thing was going to a locker room to get in your uniform, etc. You're outside as a unit, people. Then you get transportation to your particular airplane. Now you didn't have the same airplane every day, you got a different one. That's the way it went. Another thing, a lot of coincidence in my experience and one I'll tell you that happened there in Great Britain that has a lot of coincidence in it over a period of about two days or three days. Between missions we had three days off, went to London for rest and wanted to go to the nearest USO which had been converted from the Royal Ballet theater and went down and had to go by subway. You had to get a ticket on it. The engineer looked at my ticket, etc. and there was a lieutenant standing beside me. I did a double-take and looked at him again and did another take and looked at him and I said, "Herbert Barnum, what the heck are you doing here?" It was a friend of mine from our high school days. He and I had

shared bowling alleys at a nickel a line to earn a living. He was a co-pilot on a C-47 for a commander in Europe. He was there in Great Britain because his commander had come over for a meeting with the wheels. Anyway so we got together for lunch. We went to the USO and danced our heads off. So the next morning we were going to have a lunch at the Chez Club in the central hotel right in the middle of London and he got there first and had a table and I walked in and before I sat down I looked at the next table and then I sat down and I said, "Herbie, I'll bet you twenty pounds I know the girl sitting at the next table." He said, "What the hell are thinking, are you nuts? You just walked in here and you seem to think you know her?" About that time she stood up and said, "Terry!" and it was a girl that I had known in Trinidad. She was married to a British naval officer and somehow or other had gotten in the Navy, British Navy, and had gotten back there. She and her family had welcomed us with open arms when we came to Trinidad. They were a wonderful family. So that was my coincidence.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now let's go back. When you went to a briefing before you left, what all happened at that briefing?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, you were told the targets you were going to have and told when you were going to take off, told which planes you would have in the group division and the time of take off and the supposed time of arrival over the targets. Some estimate of what you might expect in the way of opposition, either of flak as well as airborne resistance. At that time in the whole war experience the German Luftwaffe was just out of business. It really was. They were using what was left of their autobahn for airfields.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were the pilots and officers in the same briefing with you?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have to get your own guns and take to the plane?

Mr. St.Louis:

You mean side weapons?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, the machine guns.

Mr. St.Louis:

No. That's all taken care of by the grounds crew. The armorers, when you came back from a mission, they inspect the plane and replace whatever needs to be replaced, clean it, make sure you have all the ammunition you can handle.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, you could get into your ball turret from the plane once it's airborne, right?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, yeah. Couldn't get in it on the ground and I wouldn't anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you could get out up there, too?

Mr. St.Louis:

The problem with the ball turret gunner as far as survival is concerned and I'll tell a story about a really weird one. The problem of survival depends on how quickly you could get out of the ball

turret because you could not take the parachute down there with you. If you wore a backpack you could not see through your gunsight. So you had to wear a chest pack. If you wore a chest pack, you still couldn't see out. You couldn't even close the turret because the chest pack would be between you and your gunsight. So you had to be able to get out of the ball turret and put your chest pack on and that's snapped on so you could do it very quickly and matter of fact, it took me about twelve to fifteen seconds to get out and get ready to jump.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But the ball turret had to be in a certain position before you could get in and out, right?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, yeah, it had to be pointed straight down. Before you got in it, too, you see. From the outside or inside of the airplane you would turn the turret on and wheel the gun so it pointed straight down and open the door because the door to get in was inside the airplane. Then you got in and slammed the door behind you and locked it up. Then you could use your guns.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you like being a ball turret gunner?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yep, very much.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened while you were overseas?

Mr. St.Louis:

I don't know. A lot. The experiences in Trinidad in the islands was very pleasant, a wonderful place. Wonderful people, very helpful. That was also true wherever we went.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in London, was there much damage?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, yes. The people lived there right under the missile attacks for quite a long time. They could actually sense them coming, even before they could be heard. We were going from the USO, walking a couple of girls back where they had to get a bus or something, and this one girl all of a sudden put both hands out and stopped us from moving. She said, "Don't move. Don't move. There's a bomb coming." I grumbled, etc. and about three minutes later, "boom!" four or five blocks away.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were these the V1s or V2s or both?

Mr. St.Louis:

I have no idea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the V1s, you could hear it; it made a sputt-putt-putt type noise. Was your airfield ever attacked by missiles?

Mr. St.Louis:

No, not while I was there. It may have been before I got there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But not while you were there.

Mr. St.Louis:

One of the things that happened that was kind of funny and I remembered when I went back there a couple of years ago. One of the first aircraft to take off from it blew a tire and spun

around and so they diverted everybody else to another runway and that was a short one. We were taking off with a full gas load and full bomb load and about the first or second aircraft that took off went airborne and hit the edge of the field. There was a row of poplar trees and that B17 went right through the top of the trees and cut a nice hole there. It didn't bother the airplane but I imagine there was damage to the airplane but it didn't interrupt the mission. They continued the mission and came back and there was this nice B17 size cut in this farmer's trees. I remember when we went back there a couple of years ago, my wife and I, I mentioned that story to one of the guys and he said, "Oh, you want to see that? It's over there." And there it is.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Still there.. When did you come back from over there? What date?

Mr. St.Louis:

I think it was May 23, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, on May 8th, when Germany surrendered, did you all have any kind of celebration or anything?

Mr. St.Louis:

Not that I recall, no. It certainly changed everything that we were doing. Like I said, we did fly back there and pick up prisoners of war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In your B17?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of condition were these prisoners in?

Mr. St.Louis:

Not too bad. They looked thin and not well as far as energy and all that stuff. Very glad to see us and gave you the impression that by contrast they were happy as hell for the first time. They smiled and were grinning from ear to ear all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many could you put in your plane?

Mr. St.Louis:

I don't recall, about eight or ten.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Would these have been Air Force or Army or Infantry or what?

Mr. St.Louis:

Some of both.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you come back to the States?

Mr. St.Louis:

We flew back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The same route?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, except for the last part of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was it the same crew, full crew, together?

Mr. St.Louis:

Full crew. Yes, we flew back and landed in Lanier Field, New Hampshire. Went from there down to Florida where we were supposedly to go into training to convert to 29s but that didn't become necessary.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. St.Louis:

I had my highest rank before I ever went to gunnery school. I was a Staff Sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now was everybody on your plane a sergeant? I mean the enlisted men.

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, yes. I guess the radio operator and the engineer were both Tech Sergeants. That was a position. The tail gunners and ball gunners and the nose gunner, I think. We didn't have a bombardier, we had what they called a togalier.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your togalier an officer or an enlisted man?

Mr. St.Louis:

He was an enlisted man, Staff Sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, I have heard that they made all the Air Force people Sergeants because the Germans treated any prisoner with a Sergeant different than the people who were Privates.

Mr. St.Louis:

That may have been true, I don't know because they never got me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got back to the States when were you discharged?

Mr. St.Louis:

Let's see. Get my records. I think it was something like late in July 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When Japan surrendered on August 15, you were already out of the service?

Mr. St.Louis:

August 15th, no I wasn't. I didn't get out until after December.

Mr. Misenhimer:

December of 1945. Then when Japan did surrender, did you all have any celebration then?

Mr. St.Louis:

I think there was a lot of celebrating going on all over the place. I was receiving female affection and all that stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, what medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, I got recognition for a several of the campaigns in Europe. Other than that I got four Air Medals. That was probably one for every six missions. Whole bunch of others. I got a whole bunch of them. A reasonably good sized bunch of ribbons. We got a bunch of ribbons for various missions that I flew.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home with any souvenirs from World War II?

Mr. St.Louis:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get to keep your 45 pistol?

Mr. St.Louis:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, gosh, yes, bunch of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any big names?

Mr. St.Louis:

In fact very early in the period... I can never remember... but there was a group of.. the Andrews Sisters. Do you remember them?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I remember them, right.

Mr. St.Louis:

They made records, etc. Well, they came to Trinidad and did a show. Chico Marx was part of a group and played harp. No, he didn't play harp, Harpo played that. But that was pretty good. I'm trying to think of the other ones and I can't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see Bob Hope?

Mr. St.Louis:

No. Never saw Hope but they came and they put on a great show. One of the Andrews Sisters came up and was going to sing. I guess it was Chico and Chico was accompanying her on piano, not organ,

Mr. Misenhimer:

What happened then?

Mr. St.Louis:

She was getting ready to sing and one of the G.I.s got up, turned his back to the audience and walked down the aisle, you know. She was about to blow her top. The emcee, he yelled at this guy to try to get his attention, "We know where you're going. We know where you're going. We know where you're going." The guy got to the end of the aisle and he turned around and said, "The hell you do!" He kept on going and went to the Coke machine, got two Cokes, brought them back and gave one to her.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. St.Louis:

Only favorable.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Favorable, good. What was that?

Mr. St.Louis:

Only one of the things I can think of about the Red Cross that was related to our missions. They were always handy to give us our last cup of coffee before we went out to the airplanes. They were always handy when we came back and were tired. Well, we were going out on a mission and it turned out to be a really rough one one morning and there was a brand-new girl there and she was just pouring out the personality and trying to cheer the guys up and everything. Well, she was getting a lot of attention and then we went and flew our mission and I think it was a little over ten hours long, a long one anyway. We came back and of course we came in and there was the girl. About the first three guys that came in, she looked at them and gasped and her face turned real white and she fainted. She was absolutely horrified when these guys came in shaken. It only lasted for a few minutes. The one thing you wanted to do was you're your back on it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You said that was a very rough mission. How was it? What happened?

Mr. St.Louis:

Lot of flak. Problems with weather.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. St.Louis:

Very high. I would say it was probably higher among the flying section than it was among the others.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Axis Sally on the radio?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of her?

Mr. St.Louis:

The tone of her voice annoyed all right. Couldn't understand her. It didn't disturb us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about Lord Haw Haw? Did you hear him?

Mr. St.Louis:

I don't recall that I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. St.Louis:

We sure did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the reaction people had?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, because we were all Depression people, we were very, very upset over it because what he did took us out of the Depression, the whole thing and better under more trying circumstances than what we're going through right now. Among other things for instance, and I think it was September 1932 he persuaded Congress to establish the triple-C, Civilian Conservation Corp. You had to be a man and be 18 to 25 and unemployed. What he did was take 300,000 people out of the job market. In three years they upped it to 500,000 and that made a possibility for other people to get jobs much easier. I admired Roosevelt very much, strong person and a very persuasive one and he had a beautiful home on the Hudson River. Those same criteria were

established for the first Selective Service, 18 to 25, unmarried and a man. OK, that took those guys off the job market. What did that do as far as our economy was concerned, it turned it around and partly because of the war. I had, well, as you probably know, the banks in those days used to be privately owned by any person or persons in the community where they were established. They did not have the help we have now and a lot of people tried to own homes but they were facing foreclosure all the time. One of the things in our neighborhood in that part of New York state, private banks were to offer a family that needed to keep that home, the opportunity to keep it by just paying the interest on the mortgage. I knew one family in the little town of Mohawk, 3,000, because I dated their daughter and they were desperate. They were facing losing their home and there were no jobs that this guy could go to anywhere. Along came the CCC, took the competition away, along came the war and with it came time and a half for overtime, sixty hour weeks etc., seven days at work and this one family I knew not only did he get out of trouble but he paid off his loan. That's the way it went.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mr. St.Louis:

Oh, they were terrific. At least one of them either stayed on or went back in the same as I did.

That was the navigator, Lloyd Abbot. One of the things he made out beautifully with was when he got to England he discovered that he was related to the people who owned Abbot Dale. So, he when he had two or three days off, he always had some place to go. He was a great guy, they all were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about the higher ups, not in your plane, but the other higher ups in the outfit? What did you

think of them?

Mr. St.Louis:

They were fine. The only thing that ... I had one trouble with a finance officer, I think he was a Captain and I tried to establish a savings plan where I would take only a small portion... They had this sort of thing. Well, I wanted to save twice as much as some kind of limit he had put on it. I had a heck of a time trying to get him to let me save the amount of money I wanted to save. He didn't want to be stuck with that job, accounting for it, I guess. But otherwise the Captains were excellent. The time we were down in Brussels I told you about. Picked up a bunch of bottles of wine, brought it back with us. The chaplain, Captain Gallagher, was really great with the enlisted. He hung out with the enlisted men at the NCO Club or whatever. One of the things he did was he offered to get for the Catholics he could get communion if you wanted to have it before you flew on a mission and the only thing that was required was to be there before you had breakfast and so anyway, after that the next time I was to go on a mission I was down there to take communion and you had to go to confession first so I go there to go to confession and he was kneeling down and I was kneeling down and I said, "Father Gallagher, when we were over in Brussels the other day and I brought back some wine. Would you like to have me bring you a bottle of wine? Would you like a drink?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "OK, the next time I come down, I'll bring you a bottle." "So where were you, fair-weather friend? I thought you had a drink for me now." When Germany surrendered about this period of time, Father Gallagher disappeared and so there was a lot of curiosity about where did he go? Well, the story we got and I'm sure it was probably quite true, is that he had pulled some strings and got a transfer to China. There was a civil war going on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. St.Louis:

Frightening... I think the deal with the two engines out. Because we lost so much altitude so fast. It was really a tight situation when we were going to get to the Wash and get rid of that six tons of bombs. That was kind of scary and we were over open water the whole time. If we had had to bail out it would have been in the English Channel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. St.Louis:

No, I didn't. In fact I went right back to my old home town, 3,000, and had no problem there.

One of the things I did, I met a fellow by the name of Johnny Urbaner who was a correspondent for the Utica Observer Dispatch. I went to work for him, writing news stories and that brought me into a whole new career.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was that career?

Mr. St.Louis:

I became an historian for the Air Force. I got dragged kicking and screaming into... I wanted to be in Public Information and I was but then I was transferred into History. That turned into a marvelous experience that I retired from in 1986.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go back in?

Mr. St.Louis:

Well, let' see. I went back in in 1948. I had to wait sixteen months. As soon as I was mustered out, I went down the hall and re-enlisted in the Connecticut Air Force Reserve.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Reserves?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yeah. And so when that three years was up in 1948, I was close to being out. They made you wait three months because the Air Force had not quite become separated yet and so I came back in then and stayed in. Retired from the uniform service on the 28th of June, 1961 which is the anniversary date of my first enlistment and stayed in for that. In 1961 I got out and came back in as a civilian as the first historian for the Air Force Operational Test Evaluation Center. I was promoted to an EM13.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What rank did you have then?

Mr. St.Louis:

Rank? Well, an EM13 is about equal to a very old Major or a very young Lieutenant Colonel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I see. So you were in civil service then?

Mr. St.Louis:

Civil service, yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. St.Louis:

You mean the bomb group? Well, I belong the association here, 8th Air Force Association here

and have had several reunions with the 398th Association which I've been a member of forever. That's when my wife and I went back there and in turn we're going to Prague. I guess I told you that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, did you use the G.I. Bill for anything?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yes, for my education and I went back to Syracuse University but only I got through one semester there and then I went back into the service. I went back into college training after I was married and had children and living over in Europe. My field was political science while holding down a sixty-hour a week job, and going to school... they called it the Brown Bag Campus because you could always get one of your courses during normal lunch hour and then take another one in the evening and my first enrollment in that was overseas, back in Germany, with the University of Maryland. Before I graduated from that political science class I was going to school also at the University of Arkansas. With the University of Maryland I got baccalaureate degree. University of Arkansas, I got a Master's Degree. Political Science for the first degree and International Relations for the second.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been back to Trinidad any time?

Mr. St.Louis:

No, I haven't and well, I did go back twice and she married somebody else. It was all right. I helped lick the envelopes for the invitations.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you went back not long after you got out of the service then?

Mr. St.Louis:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All right. Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. St.Louis:

No, I think that's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, thanks again for your time today and thanks for your service to our country.

Mr. St.Louis:

You're entirely welcome. I wouldn't have missed it.

End of Interview

Transcribed by:

Janice Conner

Winamac, IN 46996

January 19, 2011

Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer

P.O. Box 3453

Alice, Texas 78333

Home: (361) 664-4071

Cell: (361) 701-5848