

Transcription: Dennis Rudloff

Good morning. Today is Tuesday, June 10, 2014. My name is James Crabtree, and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Dennis Rudloff. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Rudloff is at his home in Fayetteville, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us. Sir, the first question I always start with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

Dennis Rudloff: Okay. Well, my childhood. I was born in Shelby, Texas, on March the 17th, 1924. My schooling, I went to school at the little schoolhouse, a one-room schoolhouse at Skull Creek, they called it. I went there three years, and then I transferred to the Shelby schoolhouse and completed seventh grade there.

Where is Shelby?

Dennis Rudloff: It's between Brenham and La Grange, you might say, on 389.

Yes sir. Yes sir, okay. And did your family live on a farm?

Dennis Rudloff: Yes sir. They lived on the farm about two and a half miles southeast of Shelby, the little town of Shelby. It's just a little village, you know.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Dennis Rudloff: Yes, I had two brothers. Ruben and Percy.

Were you the oldest? The youngest? The middle one?

Dennis Rudloff: I was the oldest.

The oldest. Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: Ruben was the second one and Percy was the younger one.

Yes sir. So you grew up on a farm. Tell us then where you were when the war started. When Pearl Harbor was bombed.

Dennis Rudloff: After I finished grade school over here, graduated from Federal High School in 1942, yes. Then I went to Texas A&M University or College at that time, and finished my first year up at A&M. Then I went over to the bookstore to get my sophomore books for the year. And when I got back, I went to the post office. And that's when I had my greeting.

So that's when you got drafted.

Dennis Rudloff: Yes. Then I took my books back to the bookstore and they were very generous about it. They gave me my money back for the books and that's when I was drafted.

Did you have a pretty good idea that was going to happen with the war going on?

Dennis Rudloff: Well, I was expecting it all right, but I didn't expect it so soon. I thought maybe I could finish another year before I would go. But it didn't happen that way.

You were drafted then in 1943?

Dennis Rudloff: February the second. See, in January of 1943, I was drafted out of A&M College, and on February second, 1943, I was inducted into the Armed Service of our country.

Was that into the Army Air Corps?

Dennis Rudloff: After my physical in Houston, I was sent to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, and from there to Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi, for basic training. After basic, I was assigned to the Army Air Force, and I stayed at Keesler Field for airplane engineering and mechanic school. After graduating from the school, I went to gunnery school at Harlingen, Texas. Air Force. After finishing gunnery school down there, I was sent to Wichita Falls for assignment.

Yes sir. When you got the draft notice, how did your parents and your family respond to that? Were they worried for you? Were they scared? What were their thoughts?

Dennis Rudloff: Well, they were very concerned about my assignment to the Air Force because they had heard that the losses in the Air Force in Europe was very heavy. They were very concerned about that. I guess all parents are concerned about their people when they are in the war zone.

Sure. Especially sending their son off to war. What did your brothers say to you? Were they old enough to understand where you were going and what you'd be doing?

Dennis Rudloff: Well, I guess they did, because Ruben was four years younger. He was about 14, 15 years old, and my younger brother was about 10 years old. So I guess they understood all right.

Did they talk to you about it at all?

Dennis Rudloff: You mean when I got back?

No, before you went. Did your brothers say anything to you or talk to you about your going off to war?

Dennis Rudloff: Not really. Well, they knew where I was going, and we talked about that, and I wrote letters back and forth to 'em. They knew where I was.

Yes sir. So tell us, sir, what the Army Air Corps was like. What were your first impressions when you entered the Army Air Corps?

Dennis Rudloff: The first . . . I was assigned to a B-24 heavy bomber crew as a flight engineer. Our pilot was Bob Harrington. He was a second lieutenant at that time. Our crew of 10 men was shipped to Muroc Air Force Base in California which is now Edwards Air Force Base. Here all the crews took part in intensive overseas training. We flew days and nights on some fake bombing targets that they had set up in the desert, you know, in the big circles in the desert. At

nighttime they had a little light on 'em, some way where we could see 'em from the air. Some of those missions were far away as Phoenix, Arizona, at night. After finishing this training, our crew took, together with many other crews, were transported to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, by railroad. The troop train stopped at almost every intersection.

To pick somebody up, I imagine.

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah. And from there, we were deployed to the European Theater of Operations. We left Camp Kilmer to go to New York and sail on an English ship in a convoy. Approximately 50 other ships to Europe. We had to sail all the way around the Azore Islands in order to avoid the German U-boats. Even so, our convoy was hit by a batch of German submarines, but little damage was done. The destroyer escort, we had a pretty heavy destroyer escort that kind of kept them at bay with the many depth charges they dropped.

Let me ask you, sir, to go back a little bit. You said you became a flight engineer which I know they didn't just pick anybody to be a flight engineer. Did they give you some test that showed that you had the skills and aptitude to be an engineer? Is that how that was determined?

Dennis Rudloff: Yes, we took a test at Fort Sam Houston before we were even assigned to the Air Force. They asked us what kind of courses I had completed. We had to have knowledge of mathematics, usually. They asked if I had any courses in geometry or trigonometry or algebra, and I said yes, I did. I had some at A&M. I was taking trig at A&M, and they were satisfied with that, I guess.

Because I would say that there probably weren't that many draftees that had college like you did.

Dennis Rudloff: There were some, but not too many. We had a few of them that were assigned to our base in Mississippi. I know we had one guy out of Rice University in Houston. He was also in the, what do they call it? ROTC, Reserve Officer Training Corps, and I was also in the ROTC at A&M at that time.

Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: So we were kind of . . . Had to lead the basic trainees and teach 'em how to, all the military maneuvers, you know.

Yes sir. Was there any talk about them potentially sending you to Officer Candidate School and giving you a commission as an officer?

Dennis Rudloff: No, not really. We didn't even try for that anymore because we were assigned to a combat crew.

Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: I probably could have got into that, but then I probably would have had to go to the infantry because that was the course that I took up at A&M. I was in the infantry.

I was just curious because I know with the fact you had college, a lot of times they would steer the college guys in towards the officer route. I wasn't sure how was determined. Sir, tell us then,

a little bit, if you would, the crew that you were with on the B-24. You mentioned the pilot, but tell us a little bit about what a B-24 was like and the men that you served with aboard it.

Dennis Rudloff: Well, the B-24 bomber was a four-engine bomber that had four 12-hundred horsepower engines on 'em. We had the copilot, the bombardier, and the navigator. They were second lieutenants. The radio operator and myself were tech sergeants. The gunners, the waist gunner and tail gunner, and the ball turret gunner, they were staff sergeants. They kind of said that the reason for the sergeant, what they gave us the sergeant stripes for was that the Germans, after they got in the prisoner of war camp, if they were captured, they were treated a little bit better.

Okay, that makes sense.

Dennis Rudloff: So they all gave the air crew a sergeant rating.

Sure. And I imagine in your crew you're pretty close-knit. You train together, live together, become a team together.

Dennis Rudloff: Yes, we were very close together. In the infantry or other outfits, the officers were . . . Never associated too much with the enlisted men. But in the Air Force it was a little bit different. When we went on a furlough or something, we usually went down from England to London, but we all went with the crew together. All the officers and enlisted men, we went together and stayed together down there in London.

Yes sir. And all of you were very young, right? I would imagine none of you were much older than maybe mid-twenties?

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah. Let's see, in '24, I guess I was 20 years old at that time. The pilot was the oldest one. I believe he was 25 years old.

Yes sir. So that's very young. A very young group of men as a crew.

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah, we were. The copilot, I think, was not much older than I was. Maybe a year or two older. Of course, the radio operator was my age too. Gunners were all our age, about 20 years old.

Tell us, sir, what your job was as a flight engineer. Tell us a little bit about what that meant, to be a flight engineer.

Dennis Rudloff: The flight engineer of the . . . In the morning, I was the flight engineer and the guy that came around in the morning to wake us up, I was given a slip of paper that we were assigned to a bombing mission that day and I was the one that had to wake up the crew. So I had to get out there and wake up all the rest of the crew. They got ready for breakfast and went to the briefing room where we briefed before the takeoff. And then I had to go out, since I was the engineer on the crew, I went out to the bomber that we were taking that day, and started up the engines and checked all the gasoline gauges and everything so everything was okay. If the engine missed out one time, if any one of the engines missed out, we didn't have to take that plane that day. Most of the time they were in pretty good shape.

I think that's something that a lot of people don't realize, is that you didn't fly the same bomber every time. You would have a different bomber for each mission potentially, is that right?

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah, that's correct, yeah. We flew one bomber for a while, that we were assigned to, for a few missions. Then we took different ones. They were grounded for a while, for patching up the holes in the planes where shrapnel went through and bullets went through. Then we took different planes. Most of the time they were in pretty good shape when we took 'em.

Yes sir. But obviously, you had to know, you really had to know how those planes worked if each time you were taking up a different one. You had to know what to look for.

Dennis Rudloff: Our pilot, he was kind of concerned about . . . He said, "It could happen that the pilot or the copilot would both get killed on the plane." So if we were in the air on practice missions, we flew a lot of practice missions over England, he had all the crew people fly the plane.

That's great.

Dennis Rudloff: They were not hard to fly, but the landing and takeoff, no, none of 'em did that. But he said if that ever happened, that we would have both the pilot and copilot killed for some reason, we should just take hold of the plane and fly it back to England and put it on automatic pilot, you know, and it would fly by itself, and as we reached the land in England, we would bail out.

Okay, that makes sense.

Dennis Rudloff: But we never had to do that.

Yes sir. Yes sir. Wow.

Dennis Rudloff: But flying the plane was not very difficult because you had to keep it level and all the instruments, I knew all of them. Of course, if the oxygen lines on a mission were shot out, lines, I, as the engineer, had to crimp 'em off and repair some of 'em, especially the hydraulic lines. I had all my tools along. So I crimped 'em off and rerouted some of 'em.

So definitely an important role and one that I'm sure kept you very busy all the time. Even when you're flying, I'm sure you're constantly monitoring gauges and that sort of thing, to make sure everything was functioning properly.

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah, yeah. On takeoff in the mornings, I sat between the pilot and the copilot in the cockpit of the plane, and I monitored all the instruments. They didn't really have time to look at all the instruments while they were taking off on the runway. So I always had to read the instruments while they were taking off. The speed of the plane at that time, and how fast we were going on the ground. When we reached about 135 miles per hour, it started taking off. All the instruments were working correctly. After takeoff, of course, I checked all the other parts of the plane and finally, after we went through the combat, I went up to my turret, the top turret on my machine guns.

Yes sir. Sir, tell us if you could, what are your memories of your first mission, your first combat mission? Do you remember that?

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yes, I do. Very. Our first combat mission was very lengthy. We went to . . . Our first mission was Hamburg, Germany. We were away from . . . I got a time here. At four a.m. in the morning, ate breakfast and went to a briefing room. In this room, they had no windows in there, and the commanding officer of the mission had a large map of Europe at the front of the room. He showed us the target and the route we were to take. The intelligence office has briefed us that the city of Hamburg was very heavily defended by 13-hundred 88mm anti-aircraft guns. After briefing we went to our assigned planes and we took off that morning at 7:45 a.m. with the bomb load of 6,000 pounds of demolition-type bombs. And after assembling in a formation over England, the 466th, there were 48 planes, the 466th Bomb Group. We took off for the continent. Many of our bomb groups were on the mission. We went in over the North Sea and Denmark to Hamburg from the northeast side to hit oil refineries and oil storage tanks. Over the target, of course, we were met with very intense anti-aircraft fire. That day we lost one plane from our group, from a direct hit. Our group hit the target with pretty good results, and the pictures that we took showed that all the oil installations were totally destroyed. And we saw the smoke that rose to about 10,000 feet. On our bombing run, one of our 500-pound bombs hung up on the rear shackle in the front bomb bay. The nose of the bomb was hanging down and the detonating propeller was spinning up to arm the bomb. The bombardier and I went down on the maintenance catwalk. They had a little catwalk, you know, from the bomb bay to the rear of the plane which was about six or eight inches wide. But we couldn't wear a parachute because of lack of space. We tried to unscrew the primer from the bomb nose, and after we finally got the primer out, well I held the propeller, had to reach way down to get to the propeller on the front of the bomb. Then I tried to pry the bomb loose from its damaged shackle with a screwdriver. But after a while, the screwdriver, my hands got so cold, it slipped out of my hands and fell out. I told the bombardier that we could maybe pry it loose with a machine gun barrel. So I went up to my turret and I unscrewed a 50-caliber machine gun barrel from my turret, and after numerous tries, we finally pried the shackle loose and the bomb fell into the English Channel, only a few miles of the coast of England. The radio operator said that ice was forming on my chin but I was still sweating.

Wow.

Dennis Rudloff: We bombed the target from 23,000 feet. The temperature was a minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit. And we had a fighter escort, a P-51 fighter plane, and P-47s, and P-38s. Our planes had many shrapnel holes but, luckily, we didn't have no injuries.

That's great. What were your thoughts before that first mission? Before you took off for that first time?

Dennis Rudloff: My thoughts?

Yes sir. Was there any fear or excitement? Anxiety?

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah, I had some. I had no idea really. The thing was when we arrived at Norwich, England, when we got there they were moving out crew that had been shot down. And we got their place. So that was my first thought about it, you know. That we got their place and

they were all prisoners of war or maybe got killed, we didn't know. But anyway, they were shot down that day. And we took their place. That kind of put a little bit of thought in my mind. That we're going to be . . . What we were up to.

Yes sir. And then tell us what it was like when you returned home from that first mission.

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah. When we returned on these bombing missions, the Red Cross, they usually served us donuts and coffee and things, and they also had this idea that if they kind of loosened our mind a little bit, they gave us a few shots of whiskey. Then they interviewed us what the mission was like and what we saw and what happened. After the interview, we just went back to our barracks until the next mission.

How often would you get a mission? Would it be about every other day, or every day?

Dennis Rudloff: In the beginning, it was pretty close together. Let me see. I got a record of our missions and when we flew 'em. I believe Hamburg, well, Normandy was still going on too, but Hamburg was our first mission which was on August the sixth in 1944.

August sixth.

Dennis Rudloff: The second mission, we flew August the seventh, the next day. Target was Belgium. Ghent, Belgium. That was the second mission. Then the number three, that one was on August the ninth in Stuttgart, Germany. Flight time was three hours on that one.

So it was pretty consistent then, like you said early on.

Dennis Rudloff: The number three, let me see, August the 12th again, we flew the next one. That was three days after. Then number four, we flew on August the 13th.

At this point, you weren't seeing any German aircraft really, right? I think at that point the Americans pretty much controlled the skies, is that right?

Dennis Rudloff: Well, to tell the truth, the German Air Force was very efficient. They had very good pilots and they finally learned that they come in . . . My gun turrets on top of the plane, I couldn't level them down low enough and I guess they finally figured that out so they came in head-on into the group. They used to come in from the side and from the tails of the plane, or from the bottom. But they finally found out if they came head-on, that the only one that could shoot at 'em was the bombardier's turret. That way they loosened up when they got within range of them 20mm. They had 20mm cannons in their fighter planes. They took down many a plane that way.

When you were flying your bombing missions, did you encounter a lot of German aircraft?

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah.

So they were still flying pretty regularly?

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah. They were up there.

Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: Sometimes they didn't hit our bombing crew, the 466th. Sometimes we didn't get hit by fighter planes. They went to another group or some other place. But when we got hit, you know, they came through the formation. They had many, many planes up there in the air. They had hundreds of 'em. Hundreds of fighter planes, and after our planes. They had the duels with our fighter planes too.

When you were over a bombing target, and you started encountering anti-aircraft fire, was there a certain elevation you could go to to avoid that? Or was it just something you had to fly right through?

Dennis Rudloff: Well, we were assigned our elevations, to bomb the target from that elevation. If they assigned us that we had to bomb the target from 23,000 feet, well that was the altitude we had to take and stay at that altitude. Kind of at the end of the war, we were a lead crew in our group. And we dropped what they called a PFF bomb that was a smoke bomb. It had a long trail of smoke down to the target. And when the rest of the planes of our group got to that point they all dropped their bombs at that point. At that time, you know, they came out with radar at that time, and we could see the target through the clouds. Before that, we couldn't see the target through the clouds. But after we had radar on the plane as a lead crew, well then we could see the targets through the clouds.

Was there ever any missions in which your plane was hit by fragmentation from any anti-aircraft fire?

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah, that happened all the time. We had holes in the plane almost all the time, except for some, like mission to Ghent, Belgium, which was out on a viaduct over there. They didn't have any anti-aircraft fire or no guns over there. But the other towns, all the cities in Germany, were heavily defended. The Germans, they had their bombers too, but we never saw any of those bombers. They bombed England at night.

Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: But the fighter planes, the ME-109 fighter plane, I would say was very equal to our P-51. And at the end of the war, they came out with a jet fighter.

That's right. At the very end. Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: We only had a few more missions left. But that fighter, the first time we saw that thing, the pilot looked at it, it went through the formation and took down a plane, and the pilot asked me over the intercom, "What in the heck was that? Was that a rocket?" And I said, "Well, I saw that thing too. It was at a terrific speed." Then later, we found out it was a jet fighter plane. It was not a rocket. But every time that thing came through a formation, it shot down a plane.

I'm sure. Wow. How many missions did you end up flying, all told?

Dennis Rudloff: How many missions?

Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: Thirty.

Thirty?

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah.

That's a lot. At that time, did they not have it to where if you flew a certain number of missions, you could go back home?

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah. We had a point system at that time.

Okay. Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: And the battles that we were in, they added up the points. I don't really remember how many points we had to have and how they figured that, but if they had that amount of points, we didn't have to fly anymore. My battles were for Normandy, and Rhineland, and Ardennes, Central Europe, and Northern France, and the Bulge. Those were the battle stars that I received. So our crew got through with our missions at number 30.

Yes sir. And you were with the same crew for all 30 missions?

Dennis Rudloff: Yes sir. Yeah, we had the same crew.

That's impressive. How long a period of time were those 30 missions? Did that take place over a few months, or over a year? Do you remember?

Dennis Rudloff: Let me see. We flew in August . . . The last mission we flew was number 29. In March of 1945, we flew our last mission.

Your last one in March of '45. And your first was in August of '44. That's a pretty good time period then.

Dennis Rudloff: It was quite a number of times. The last mission was in Kitzingen, Germany. The flight time, it was a long mission. It was eight hours and 40 minutes flight time.

Did you know that was your last mission?

Dennis Rudloff: Well, yeah.

You knew when you took off that that was going to be your last mission?

Dennis Rudloff: The last one we had to make, yeah. Oh yeah.

Was there any superstition or worry about it being the last one? Or, was it just another mission?

Dennis Rudloff: It was just another mission, you know. There was no special time. But we went along the Swiss border on this mission, and the Alps sure looked beautiful when we flew right around the Alps to Kitzingen, Germany. It was so clear that the sun was so bright you could see almost 50 miles.

Wow. Was there any sort of celebration amongst your crew when you landed after that final mission?

Dennis Rudloff: Well, the only thing we really celebrated was we kind of went to a pub that evening. Well, everybody had a bicycle over there. We left and went to this pub and had a few of the beers at the pub. Then we went back home. That was about the only celebration. We didn't really celebrate much.

Yes sir. Did you get letters from your family while you were over in England?

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah, we got letters all the time. We had kind of a code, you know, when I wrote home all the time on how many missions I had. But they cut out all that information.

That's right. They would censor it.

Dennis Rudloff: They censored it. And they cut out . . . They didn't know how many missions I flew. I didn't have any sheep at all at home on the farm, so I finally asked them how many sheep I had left over there at home. And they didn't cut that out.

So that's how you were able to get that through then.

Dennis Rudloff: We got that home, how many missions I flew, had gone on.

That's great. After you flew that final 30th mission, did you stay there in England or did they send you back home to the United States at that point?

Dennis Rudloff: They sent us home.

Sent you home.

Dennis Rudloff: I had a cousin over there by the name of Walter Luedeker. He was from the New Ulm area and he was my first cousin. He got wounded in the Battle of the Bulge. After he got out of the hospital, he came to England and wanted to visit with me. But I had already shipped out of my original base. So he traced me all the way up there, almost to Ireland where they had shipped us. So he finally found me there. We stayed together there a few days in the barracks. And they had some Chinese soldiers there too that were training for their country over in China. They said . . . Yeah, they could speak pretty good English. They said, "Yeah, you boys are going home now, but we are not going. We are going home but we have to fight our battle in China yet."

Against the Japanese. That's right. What was it like when you got back home to the United States? Do you remember your homecoming?

Dennis Rudloff: Yes, I do. We came home and we were on the train. We landed in New York on an American ship. We came home on an American ship. Then when we arrived in Saint Louis, that day the war ended. In May. And they had a great big celebration in Saint Louis that night. All the people were out on the streets. We were along with them over there. That was a big celebration there that they had.

So you got to celebrate in Saint Louis before coming back to Texas?

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah. Yeah. We stayed in Saint Louis. Then the next day, we were shipped back to California. From there we had to go through all sorts of physical exams and things when

we got back. After they got through with that they gave us a furlough. I went back here to a furlough. Finally, on July the third, I was discharged at Fort Sam Houston. I came home, you know, at that time, and at the Round Top up here, it's about eight miles west of Shelby, they always had a Fourth of July celebration. And I just got home for that celebration.

So that was quite a homecoming, I'm sure.

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah, that was a homecoming. There were very few military people that were discharged at that time. I was one of the first ones. Of course, I was in the Air Force, and all the rest of them were on the ground crew.

I'm sure your parents and your brothers were very excited to see you again.

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah, they were. They looked all different. They were still going to high school and when I got home . . . At that time, well, there was hardly any traffic going on from San Antonio. When I got discharged at Fort Sam Houston, I took a bus to go home. And when we got to Schulenburg . . . It went from Schulenburg to Houston, so I had to get off over there. At Schulenburg. Then I stood on the corner there for a while and tried to hitchhike to La Grange. A few cars came by, but it didn't go anywhere further. So finally the sheriff, _ was his name. He was in Schulenburg. He had to pick up some people over there at a joint. They had some kind of disorder or fight over there. So he stopped and he asked me, "Soldier, where are you headed for?" I said, "Well, I'm going to go to try to get to Federal." He said, "Well, I'm here, I have to go down here to a joint that they had a fight over there and I have to go." So I drove with him over there and we picked up two people and then we went to La Grange. They had a dance at the La Grange fairgrounds that night, so he took me to the fairgrounds. I thought for sure that some people over there would be from Federal, but we didn't have anybody from Federal there that night. We had one guy that was close to Federal. He had a restaurant in Federal while I went to high school. So he said I could ride home with him to Federal. So when we got to Federal, he asked me where I lived in Federal. I said, "Well, I don't live in Federal. I live in Shelby." So he said, "Well, I took you this far. I'll take you all the way home now."

That's great.

Dennis Rudloff: So it was late in the morning when I got home. It must have been around 3 o'clock in the morning. We had a long porch on our home, and of course, Mama and Daddy and the brothers were still asleep, so I just laid on the porch that morning. And when they awoke, they saw me there. So then I finally got home.

I'm sure that that had to have been a great thrill for them. To wake up and find that you were there. That's great.

Dennis Rudloff: Well, they got up pretty early in the morning too. Around six or six-thirty all the time.

That's great. And so then, at that point, when you got out, did you go back to Texas A&M?

Dennis Rudloff: No, I did not. First of all, we were in the agricultural business, and instead of taking the college way out, they had this program going on where you could go back to school or you could go to a school for agriculture or for mechanics or whatever you wanted to. So I finally

went to this school and finished at . . . They had a job open in Houston. They made something for the ships. And I had a welder over there. After a few months, I didn't like that. I went back over here. They had an opening at Industry State Bank at Industry. I started working over at the bank. That was my career over there after that. I worked at the bank for 39 years. I finally retired in 1992.

Sir, did you keep in touch with any of the men that you served with on that bomber crew?

Dennis Rudloff: The only ones that I ever got in contact with was our radio operator. He was living in California at that time. All the rest of 'em, no. We never got back. They were from all different parts. I wrote to some of 'em. One of 'em was from Arkansas. And I wrote to him once but I never got a reply back. I guess . . . I don't know what happened to him.

That's too bad. Yes sir. Do you still have photographs and things of that sort from your time in the military?

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah. Yeah.

That's great. And I understand your children then have probably talked to you a lot about it, because I know they're the ones that contacted us to interview you.

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah. One of my grandsons, his wife, he made a book out of it. All the missions I took. When I got back from my missions, I always wrote it down in a book, all the statistics and when we took off and everything. From that information, she made this book.

That's great.

Dennis Rudloff: And now, some kind of information, all the information I have in this book, a lot of people want to read it so, maybe decided that we maybe make some of these books. Maybe the people distribute them to some people.

Yeah. That's great.

Dennis Rudloff: It's a hard cover book. It's got all the information in it.

That's excellent. It's great that you kept all those records all those years.

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah, I kept records of all the missions from end to finish.

That's great. Have you ever had a chance to go inside a B-24 since the war? Have you ever gone to any of those commemorative Air Force shows or that sort of thing and seen a B-24 again?

Dennis Rudloff: A B-24? The only time I got to see one, they had one here in Brenham at one time. But they wanted to take people on a flight. But I didn't want to fly because they charged around \$400 to go on a flight.

That's a lot.

Dennis Rudloff: And I said, "I've been flying so often I don't want to go on the flight." That was on the ground.

They should have flown you for free.

Dennis Rudloff: They should have, yeah. But I didn't go.

Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: But the B-24, I read an article here. The B-24 bomber. Consolidated made some of 'em, and Ford Motor Company made some of 'em. But the Ford Motor Company plane was a better plane than the Consolidated one.

Which one was yours, that you flew in?

Dennis Rudloff: In the beginning, we flew the Consolidated version of the plane. But the Ford Motor Company, they came out with a whole lot better fuel transport system. The engineer did that too. I did that all the time. To transport the wing tanks into the main tanks. They had electrical pumps that transferred. All you had to do there was just turn the switch from one tank to another.

That makes it easier.

Dennis Rudloff: That was kind of simple. Instead of transferring the other way. Well, we carried . . . Besides the bombing missions, we flew some missions to Normandy. They weren't really combat missions. They didn't consider them combat missions. We transferred gasoline over there.

Okay.

Dennis Rudloff: They had these 500-gallon wood tanks in the bomb bays, and they filled them full of gasoline and then they filled the bomber with gasoline which carried about 35-hundred gallons in the wing tanks. With the four- or five-hundred-gallon tanks in the bomb bay, we landed in France and they took all that gasoline out of there and we left just enough gasoline for us to get back to England which wasn't very far. But they didn't consider those bombing missions. We flew quite a number of those things on our spare time.

Ferrying fuel over.

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah, bringing fuel over to the front lines. Otherwise, even going over Normandy with that gasoline and landing, and the German Air Force, of course, at night we were just sitting there on the runway with all those bombers. And sometimes the German Air Force came over but they never did bomb us while we were there. But they took pictures. They flew in real low and took some . . . We could see the light when they took pictures, you know, from that plane. Then we were supposed to sit over there and wait for the planes at our gun turrets, but that was a very dangerous place to be.

Yes sir. No doubt. No doubt. Well sir, I really appreciate you taking the time to share some of these memories with us.

Dennis Rudloff: Well, I appreciate it, and I am still kind of looking forward to the trip to Washington, D.C.

Oh, that's great.

Dennis Rudloff: From Austin. They have a plan over there to take some of the . . .

Yes sir. Honor Flight.

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah, the Honor Flight, they call it.

Are you planning on going on the next one in September?

Dennis Rudloff: Well, I was thinking about it.

Yes sir. You should because that won't cost a dime for you. It's all covered by the program. They'll fly you up there and you'll spend a day getting to see the World War II Memorial and a few of the other memorials, and then you spend a night there at the hotel then you fly back the next day. It's all completely covered too. Your meals, your transportation, everything.

Dennis Rudloff: Everything covered.

Yes sir. You should do that.

Dennis Rudloff: I was thinking about going maybe in September sometime.

Yes sir. I would definitely recommend it. It's a very good program. I know quite a few veterans that have gone to that and they all speak very highly of that program. So I think it would be a great thrill for you to be able to do that. And if any of your family wants to go with you as an escort, they can do that as well. You can bring . . .

Dennis Rudloff: I understand it costs them . . .

I think it costs them a little bit.

Dennis Rudloff: Some money. I don't know, 400 dollars, I believe.

Yes sir, which is still a lot less than it would normally cost for a plane ticket.

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah.

Meals and hotel and all that, so it's still a good deal for them as well. But for the veteran, it's no cost at all.

Dennis Rudloff: Right. Yeah. One of the missions that kind of stood out, one of my biggest missions was a . . . I got a clipping here from the 8th Air Force. It says at the top, it comes out in one of the papers in England: *Record Bomb Blow of the 8th Air Force Yule Gift to the Nazis: Over 2,000 heavies, Biggest Single Mission Ever, Unloads on Christmas Eve.*

Wow.

Dennis Rudloff: That was like a big, big Fourth of July celebration in the air, looked like it. So much firing going on it looked like a big celebration, you know, where they have kind of shooting up into the air, the rockets and stuff. That was one of our biggest air attacks, and we lost a lot of planes that time. The Luftwaffe was weakening at that time. They didn't come up with . .

. They said they had about 400 fighters in the air on that attack, but Luftwaffe failed to put up quite a show of resistance and came out of the fighting with 46 of their planes were shot down.

Yes sir. I think the P-51 Mustang helped to make a big difference in that as well. I know you mentioned you had the Mustangs as escorts on those missions.

Dennis Rudloff: They had more fuel on 'em at that time. They could escort the bombers all the way to Berlin.

I think that probably helped make a big difference in neutralizing the Luftwaffe.

Dennis Rudloff: The people on the ground in England that time, at Norwich, they kind of . . . We knew about this thing about a day or two ahead of time already, that they were going to have a mission to Berlin. They were kind of disputing that and they were kind of unhappy about it because it was on Christmas Eve. But they went through with it. They said they had 2,000 heavy bombers and 900 fighter planes.

Wow.

Dennis Rudloff: The targets were the heaviest ever flown. The biggest one single mission.

That's amazing. Well, sir, I wanted to tell you, I don't know if your family told you, but part of our reason for doing these interviews is first of all to thank you for your service to our nation, but also to save these interviews for posterity, for future generations. We have, here at the Land Office, archives that go back to the 1700s. We have the original registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the settlers that came to Texas, and we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. So your interview will be like all these other veterans' interviews we've done. We're going to add it to the archive.

Dennis Rudloff: I see.

So hopefully, people can listen to this hundreds of years from now.

Dennis Rudloff: Well, that's nice.

Yes sir. With that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview long after you and I are both gone?

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah. Well, that's very nice for the future people to come along and listen to it.

Is there anything you'd want to say to them about your service or anything in general?

Dennis Rudloff: Well, it was a great experience all right. And I wouldn't take anything for it now anymore. I really wouldn't want to go through it anymore, another time. Not knowing what's happening.

I understand that completely.

Dennis Rudloff: I know one of my buddies, well, we had quite a few from this area that were in the Air Force. We had one from New Ulm, by the name of Elton _. He was shot down and parachuted out and came back. And then we had one here by the name of LeRoy Grebe. He was

also shot down and was a prisoner of war. They were both prisoners of war. The thing was that both of those people could speak the German language too when they were captured. Then we had another one, in Bellville, that got shot down with the name of Jackson. Of course, he couldn't speak German at all, and when Elton _ and Grebe were captured, they assigned them to a desk in the prisoner of war camp in Germany. And they interviewed the prisoners that came in. Of course, Elton _ was sitting at the desk interviewing the prisoners and what and behold, here comes Jackson. And Elton said to Jackson, told him to shut up, not to mention that they knew each other. But they did know each other. They were big buddies here. Went to school together.

That's funny.

Dennis Rudloff: But they couldn't talk together, at least Elton _ didn't want 'em to talk. If the German staff found out that they were buddies.

And did you speak German?

Dennis Rudloff: Me?

Yes sir.

Dennis Rudloff: Oh yeah.

Yes sir. Did you parents come from Germany? Or your grandparents?

Dennis Rudloff: No. My great, great grandparents came from Germany. From Bremen.

Okay. Yes sir. Because you have a bit of an accent, so I didn't know if your family had come over when you were young, before you were born, or that sort of thing.

Dennis Rudloff: No. The reason is at home we talked a lot of German too. People that speak only English, they can distinguish that I have an accent. But I speak pretty good German, but now, I haven't spoken it for so long it's getting pretty difficult.

Sure. It gets rusty.

Dennis Rudloff: I don't know what it means anymore.

Might forget a little of it if you haven't used it, I guess.

Dennis Rudloff: My kids, they could all speak German here at home when they grew up. But right now, it is very hard for 'em to speak it. They don't speak it at all anymore.

Yes sir. Well, that makes sense, I guess.

Dennis Rudloff: Yeah, it does.

Well sir, again I want to thank you for taking the time to let us interview you today, and most of all, on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone here at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our nation.

Dennis Rudloff: Thank you very much.

And like I said before we started, in a few weeks, be looking for these CDs to show up of this interview. They're going to come in a commemorative binder that has a letter and a certificate in there from Commissioner Patterson as well. It may take a little longer than normal because I'm going to be gone for the next couple of weeks doing military training. But as soon as I get back, I'll have those in the mail to you.

Dennis Rudloff: Okay. I'll be looking forward to it.

Yes sir. And I think your family will like having those as well.

Dennis Rudloff: Okay.

Sir, it was great speaking with you.

Dennis Rudloff: Are you in the military?

Yes sir. I'm in the Marine Reserves.

Dennis Rudloff: In the Marines.

Yes sir. So I've got to go do my two weeks of training starting on Friday.

Dennis Rudloff: Do you go to California?

We go to Fort Sill.

Dennis Rudloff: Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Yes sir. For artillery training. So that's where I'll be for those two weeks. But when I get back, we'll have those CDs made and I'll get them in the mail to you at that time.

Dennis Rudloff: Okay.

Yes sir. Sir, it was good speaking to you, and again, thank you very much.

Dennis Rudloff: I appreciate it.

Yes sir. Take care.

Dennis Rudloff: Thank you.

Yes sir. Bye-bye.

Dennis Rudloff: Bye-bye.