

Ernest Stolp, Jr.

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Ernest Stolp, Jr.

Today is the 30th, __?__, 1994. My name is Charles Nelson and I am a volunteer with the Midway Village in Rockford, Illinois, which is cooperating with the statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in the momentous events surrounding World War II. We are in the office of Midway Village interviewing Mr. Ernest E. Stolp, Jr. who lives at 1212 Comanche Drive, Rockford, Illinois, 61107. Mr. Stolp served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in that war. Ernie, please give us your full name, the place and date of birth. We would also like to have the names of each of your parents.

STOLP: My name is Ernest E. Stolp, Jr. I live at 1212 Comanche Drive in Rockford, Illinois, 61107. I was born in Chicago, Illinois, April 18, 1921. My father's name is Ernest E. Stolp; Sr. My mother's name is Dorothy K. Stolp.

NELSON: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

STOLP: I have one brother and one sister.

NELSON: Are there any details about your parents and or your family that you would like to give?

STOLP: I don't think so.

NELSON: Okay. What was life like before the war and specifically during 1941?

STOLP: In 1941, I worked for __?__ Electric in Genoa, Illinois as a multi spindle drill operator and set up man.

NELSON: What thoughts did you have about the war before the United States became directly involved in the conflict?

STOLP: Not much. We knew that the war in Europe was going on but I didn't pay much to it, being kids.

NELSON: How did you hear about the December 7th, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese?

STOLP: I was in a parade in the City of DeKalb, Illinois National Guard. It was announced over a loud speaker that we had gone to war with the Japanese.

NELSON: What was your reaction and response by those around you?

STOLP: Like a lot of other fellows, we said, "We better enlist now and get it over with".

NELSON: Had you formed any prior opinion or developed any feeling about what had been taking place in Europe or Asia?

STOLP: No.

NELSON: Did you recall reading newspaper accounts of German aggression in Europe?

STOLP: Yes.

NELSON: Did you have any knowledge of Hitler's speeches, ideas or actions?

STOLP: Not really; not any definite ideas.

NELSON: What events led to your entering military service? Were you already in service, drafted or did you volunteer?

STOLP: Well, I volunteered for the United States Army Air Corp and the reason for it being I didn't like the idea of the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor.

NELSON: Okay. This goes into basic training. When and where were you inducted?

STOLP: I was inducted in Wausau, Wisconsin. My basic training was done at Camp Grant, Illinois. Whereas I already had National Guard training, I was moved on to Enid, Oklahoma, right about 30 days after being stationed out here at Camp Grant, Illinois.

NELSON: Do you have any special memories of this event?

STOLP: Just that it was colder than heck.

NELSON: How old were you?

STOLP: I've got a tape of that event. I was 21 years old at the time.

NELSON: What happened after you were inducted?

STOLP: We were put on a troop train and shipped to Camp Grant, Illinois where we were in "tent city" for our basic training.

NELSON: What were you trained to do?

STOLP: At that time we were trained to march with a gun that was a broomstick.

NELSON: What did you think of the training?

STOLP: I didn't think much of it at that time.

NELSON: Did anything special happen there?

STOLP: No.

NELSON: Tell us about any other training camps you attended.

STOLP: Okay. I moved from there to Enid, Oklahoma with the Air Corp and we went into our training mode of mechanical engineering, such as repairing and servicing airplanes of the B20.. Wait a minute (on the PT13 which is a primary basic trainer for the Air Corp.

NELSON: Did you have any leaves or passes?

STOLP: Oh, yes.

NELSON: If so, how did you use them?

STOLP: Well, I used some of them to go see the girl-friend I had in Oklahoma City. Others I used to come home to see my parents.

NELSON: Okay. What do you recall about this period about the places you were stationed, the friends you made, your association with civilians?

STOLP: Well, I think the association with civilians was pretty good. The places we stayed were barracks with the old potbelly stove in the middle of them which was not too bad. Most all the weather we had in Enid. If you woke up in the morning and your feet—if your shoes were frozen to the floor, you knew it was cold.

NELSON: At this time, what were your duties?

STOLP: At that time I was a Crew Chief on the line on the B13(?) airplanes.

NELSON: Okay. Where did you go after completing your basic military training?

STOLP: From there to more training on airplane engines at Randolph Field, Texas. From there to Winfield, Kansas, [Storther?] Air Base where I stayed for some time. Then went from there to, let me see, Eagle Pass, Texas, and from there to Del Rio, Texas where I joined the B26 organization.

NELSON: When and where were you sent overseas and how did you get there?

STOLP: I was sent overseas in 1944 out of Stoughton, California, on a Liberty Ship, arriving in Mindanao Island which is in New Guinea, I should say, about 30 days later.

NELSON: Okay. What were you assigned to do after arriving?

STOLP: After arriving we were first assigned as part of an aircrew member replacing some of the fellows that were lost or gone home.

NELSON: What did you think of the Nation's war effort up to this point?

STOLP: Up to the point of my starting out, you mean?

NELSON: Where you were at the time.

STOLP: I thought it was real good. For instance, our squadron got a citation out there for a raid we put on over enemy shipping where if we hadn't we would have lost a whole bunch of people. I don't know whether they want me to read that or not.

NELSON: Well, we'll get into that. Tell us about your experiences of entering your first combat zone.

STOLP: Scare the "living daylights" out of me. (Laughter). We no more than got off the ship, we got on land when the air raid sirens went off. We didn't have foxholes or anything dug yet. We were just setting up our tent and they said an air raid was coming so I wound up hiding in a big old carryall, a steel-sided carryall they used to haul dirt in. I stayed there and I had ___?___ cup of water until the warning came that it was over with.

NELSON: Can you list for us in order of occurrence all subsequent combat actions in which you were involved?

STOLP: Well, this is 50 some years ago, Charlie. (Laughter). The biggest one that stands out, of course, is a raid on the shipping out there. The other ones were just bombing and photographing the enemies.

NELSON: Did you tell us what island you were on?

STOLP: Yes. On Mindanao in New Guinea from there to Luzon in the Philippines. From there to ___?___ which is off the tip of Japan. Actually the ___?___ of Japan. Then from there to Nagasaki, then Japan itself.

NELSON: Do you remember how many missions you were on?

STOLP: No.

NELSON: What airplane did you —

STOLP: B-25. Mitchell, B25, Model D.

NELSON: What was your job on the B25?

STOLP: I was Top Turret Gunner and Crew Chief.

NELSON: Can you tell us in full detail, if possible, the approximate number and types of casualties, how they occurred and how they were treated?

STOLP: Oh, boy, that's hard.

NELSON: Did you have any casualties on your airplane?

STOLP: Yes, we did. Had a couple fellows that were shot—I can't say casualties because they were wounded and survived, patched up and back to work again.

NELSON: Did your mental attitude change as combat continued?

STOLP: No.

NELSON: What did you think of the war so far?

STOLP: I didn't like it but I knew it had to be done. It was something we had to do to get things back the way they should be.

NELSON: Did you write many letters home?

STOLP: Yes I wrote at least once a week or maybe once a month.

NELSON: Did you receive many letters and/or packets, if so, how often?

STOLP: No, I didn't. I received quite a few letters but not many packets.

NELSON: If you did receive packets, what were they like?

STOLP: Well, they were usually stuffs. Of course, being out in the South Pacific food stuffs—the cookies were fine. They were kind of crumbly by the time they got to us.

NELSON: What did most of the other men write or receive letters?

STOLP: Yes, we had a regular call where some of the guys would get a stack of letters from back home that were 10 to 13 letters in a stack.

NELSON: Did you forge close bonds of friendship with many or some of your combat companions?

STOLP: No.

NELSON: Have you remained in contact with any of your World War II companions?

STOLP: No. I've lost track of them.

NELSON: Did you ever have to help retrieve a wounded buddy from the battlefield in combat?

STOLP: No. No.

NELSON: Except the flying crew.

STOLP: Except the flying crew. As long as we got back on land where the Medics took care of them right quick like.

NELSON: What was the highlight occurrence of your combat experience and any other experiences you can remember?

STOLP: The highlight one is this one right here. I know this is quite worn to put on tape.

NELSON: Can you briefly tell us what it is?

STOLP: Yes. It was the 17th Reconnaissance Squadron B of the 77th Reconnaissance Group, on December 26, 1944, it became imperative to launch all available aircraft on Mindanao. The task force from the Japanese consisting of a heavy cruiser, 1 light cruiser and 6 destroyers approaching an American Air Base on Mindanao. If we hadn't bombed them out, they would have taken us out for sure and captured the whole island.

NELSON: Were there any casualties lost?

STOLP: One was wrecked on take-off. One was shot down. Two had to be ditched and one was reported missing. That was out of 13 airplanes.

NELSON: Are there any other things you recall about that mission?

STOLP: No. Except it was a heck of a go around. We came back in, reloaded, refueled and took off again as fast as we could.

NELSON: Okay. Tell us what you and the other men did to celebrate America's traditional holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas?

STOLP: You mean during wartime?

NELSON: Yes, during your time in the service.

STOLP: Well we didn't.

NELSON: When and how did you return to the United States at the end of the war?

STOLP: I came back to Fort Lewis in Washington state by boat, on the US Aircraft __?__.

NELSON: What happened you arrived in the United States?

STOLP: We were quite well welcomed home. We went to Fort Lewis and there we staid for about a week, saw a little bit there then transported back to Camp Grant, Illinois and I got out at Camp Grant, Illinois.

NELSON: Please tell us about your military rank and your decorations especially your campaign decorations.

STOLP: Okay, I was—my rank was a Staff Sergeant and campaign decoration, 3 bronze stars, Philippine Liberation. I have the Asiatic Pacific Liberation medal and, of course, the ruptured duck (discharge decoration) good conduct medal and flight engineers wings.

NELSON: How many missions were you on?

STOLP: About 35 as I remember.

NELSON: Now this goes into the return to civilian life. How did you get along with men with whom you had the greatest contact?

STOLP: You mean civilians?

NELSON: I imagine the people you were with in the service.

STOLP: In service. Oh I got along fine.

NELSON: Are there things you would do differently if you could do them again?

STOLP: Yeah, I'd keep track of them. Most all of our crew—we were a replacement crew. We were replacing guys that put there time in and they were ready to go home. So most all of our crew was assembled from whom we didn't go overseas with.

NELSON: What was your most difficult you had to do during your period of military service?

STOLP: Most difficult? KP (Kitchen police).

NELSON: Is there any one thing that stands out as your most successful achievement in the military service?

STOLP: No. Just getting us there and back again.

NELSON: Coming home alive. How did you learn about VE Day and what was your reaction to that?

STOLP: We celebrated that on Iwo Jima by using our __?__ flare pistols and firing our __?__ flares into the air (inaudible, laughter).

NELSON: How did you learn about VJ Day and what was your reaction to it?

STOLP: VJ Day was a bigger thing for us because the surrendered airplanes brought the Japanese people to Iwo Jima in white airplanes. We were all up on the ramp to see that thing come in.

NELSON: What was your opinion of the use of the atomic bomb when it was used against Japanese civilians in August of 1945?

STOLP: We didn't know about it until we got to Japan and then we were told about how we flew over it because we were mapping Japan. We didn't know a heck of a whole lot about it. We knew it stopped the war.

NELSON: Did you have an opinion of it at that time?

STOLP: No.

NELSON: So your opinion is about the same now as it was then?

STOLP: Oh, yeah.

NELSON: It hasn't changed? When and where were you officially from service?

STOLP: Discharged from service, December 13, 1945, at Camp Grant, Illinois.

NELSON: Do you have any disability rating or pension?

STOLP: No.

NELSON: Do you have any opinions or theories about the nation's military status or its policies?

STOLP: No, I'm too old to worry about it.

NELSON: Do you have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

STOLP: Yeah, I did through the Veterans' Administration I did get my medical—Army Medical Records we couldn't get before. They were through a fire some place as you can see by this. The Illinois Veterans' Assistance here in Rockford helped me get those.

NELSON: What is your opinion of the Veterans' Administration at this time?

STOLP: I think it's good.

NELSON: Have you ever gone to a VA Hospital for medical services?

STOLP: I have but only for a visit.

NELSON: So you haven't received medical care.

STOLP: No.

NELSON: Would you like to tell us about how your family supported during your military life?

STOLP: Very well. My mother and my dad were both very supportive, of course. They followed us around made sure while we were in the states that we—my brother and I both were in. He was in the paratroops. They made sure we knew what we were up against as much as they could.

NELSON: Over the subsequent years what has this support meant to you?

STOLP: Well, I think it was good training so we could do the same for our own family after we got married.

NELSON: Is there anything you would like to add to this interview?

STOLP: Well, I found those—you asked me about service stripes and stuff. I had one Service Stripe, one Overseas Service Bar, American Campaign medal, the Asiatic Pacific Theater ribbon with four bronze battle stars, Philippine Liberation ribbon with one bronze battle star, Good Conduct medal and the World War I medal. Why that World War I—I don't know.

NELSON: Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

STOLP: No, I don't think so Charlie.

NELSON: Thank you very much Ernie. That was a good one.

STOLP: You're welcome.