

Everett Tuttle

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Volunteer Editor: Martha Byrnes 11/14/18

Everett Tuttle

Today is July 27, 1994. My name is Charles Nelson and I am a volunteer at the Midway Village and Museum Center in Rockford, Illinois, which is cooperating with the statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois persons that participated in the momentous events of World War II. We are in the office of Midway Village interviewing Everett Tuttle. Mr. Tuttle served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in that War.

Everett, would you please start by introducing yourself to us? Please give us your full name, place and date of birth. We would also like to have the names of each one of your parents.

TUTTLE: Everett Tuttle. I was born in Grand Forks, North Dakota, 1923. My father and mother were Clarence and Anna Tuttle.

NELSON: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

TUTTLE: I had no brothers or sisters.

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

TUTTLE: No, they were just common rural people.

NELSON: Okay. What was life like for you before the War and especially during 1941?

TUTTLE: Well we just came out of the depression and the drought up there in North Dakota. Getting a job was a rarity. Life was really struggling before we went into the War.

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

TUTTLE: Well, I felt it was a matter of time even though I was only 18 years old because of Hitler's speeches and all the radio talks and the news on the movies when we went in. We always saw that and we felt that it was a matter of time.

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

TUTTLE: I was attending Teacher's College. I was ridiculing or aggravating a guy that had a gas station. As I walked across the street, he hollered at me I wouldn't be here very long. The Japs just bombed Pearl Harbor. So that's how I heard about it.

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

TUTTLE: Well, we wanted to sign up right away.

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

TUTTLE: Just that I thought that it would probably have to be stopped so they couldn't begin to come over to this country. Our first line of thought was that we had to defend our homeland and our fathers and mothers and our neighbors.

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

TUTTLE: Yes, I had.

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

TUTTLE: What I saw on the—heard on the radio. We would all listen to it even though we could hardly understand it. And then on the movie news they would show film and hear his speeches and see the marching of the people and organization of their military.

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

TUTTLE: We were going to volunteer and they didn't have enough guns or places for us. They asked us to stay until we could be drafted because it would just cause confusion. So I waited until I was drafted.

NELSON: Was your response to entering military service influenced by family and friends' attitudes toward the War and threats to national security or any other consideration?

TUTTLE: The threat to national security.

NELSON: Okay. Now let's go to the basic training. When and where were you inducted?

TUTTLE: I was inducted into Fort Snelling, Minnesota. And I took my basic training at Buckley Field, Colorado, outside of Denver.

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

TUTTLE: No, it's just a whole new life being in the military. (Laughter).

NELSON: (inaudible)

TUTTLE: Very afraid

NELSON: How old were you?

TUTTLE: I was 20 years old.

NELSON: What happened after you were inducted? Where were you sent?

TUTTLE: Well, with basic training I was in Buckley Field, Colorado. I did basic there and they lost my records. Then I went to [inaudible] Mississippi for engineering and I didn't like that. I couldn't qualify so then I went to Laredo, Texas, to gunnery school which I wanted -- machine gun training.

NELSON: What did you think of that training?

TUTTLE: I enjoyed the machine gun training—enjoyed that.

NELSON: Did anything special happen there that you can remember?

TUTTLE: Nothing special. Just a routine. The hardship of Laredo, Texas, in June, July and August. (Laughter).

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

TUTTLE: Well, we formed our crew in Lincoln, Nebraska. We went on to training in Casper, Wyoming, for overseas duty as a crew.

NELSON: Did you have any leaves or passes anytime?

TUTTLE: I had one emergency leave and I think I had a 30 day furlough after I came back from the European Theater when Japan had not surrendered yet.

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

TUTTLE: Most of the time the relationship was good. Mississippi was not too good because they had so many service men down there and they could not take too well to the Army or the Air Force. They did like the Navy down there.

NELSON: Kind of took over down there, didn't they?

TUTTLE: Yeah. It was understandable.

NELSON: Your military unit was the Air Force?

TUTTLE: Army Air Force.

NELSON: What were your assigned duties?

TUTTLE: My duties were—I was a nose clerk under the [inaudible] and I also was an assistant engineer. I helped on take-off, sometimes on landings. [Made] sure everything was precise.

NELSON: Where did you go after completing your basic military training in the United States? Where did they ship you?

TUTTLE: We picked up our new plane, a bomber B-24, in Topeka, Kansas. We went from there [to the airfield in] Newfoundland. We were in a blizzard there and laid over. Then we went to the Azore Islands and then from there we went into the Marrakesh, North Africa, then into Tunis, North Africa, and then we were bogged down with mud in Italy so we couldn't land for a few days. Then we went to [inaudible] Italy to the [inaudible].

NELSON: As you arrived, what were you assigned to do when you first got to your overseas base?

TUTTLE: The main thing we did was—we had to do work around the compound there with Italian civilians. There was snow over the mud—[we were] wading [in] the mud almost knee deep. Then when it dried up a little we just immediately started flying combat right off the bat.

NELSON: So you didn't have any training missions over there at all?

TUTTLE: No just—the only training mission we had was a little gunnery mission over the Adriatic to see if we could hit something.

NELSON: What did you think of our nation's War efforts up to this time?

TUTTLE: Our nation's what?

NELSON: What did you think of our nation's war efforts up to this time.

TUTTLE: I thought it was all out and very much backed by all the citizens of the United States. It was just wonderful the way they sacrificed and did everything into production and sacrificed to help this.

NELSON: Tell us about your experience of entering the first combat zone or your first mission.

TUTTLE: First mission was one that you didn't want. It was in Vienna, Austria. I had the misfortune of running or going over it twice. The casualties were very high and the Russians got over 500 [inaudible] out of there. The other missions were really terrible. We were in Linz, Austria. The Benzol [oil] plants there. Herman Goering's tank

factories -- and they had a lot of the yellow-nosed fighter planes there up in Germany.

NELSON: Okay. I think you covered the next question pretty well. Taking these one at a time, first tell us in full detail, if possible, about the approximate number and types of casualties, how they occurred and how they were treated and if you had any [inaudible].

TUTTLE: We were very fortunate. We returned back with over 200 holes in our ship but nobody was hit and we received a four-day pass in Rome for going through Vienna twice and Linz twice plus the other missions. The major casualties was on the combat missions that the guys getting hit, their airplanes blowing up and the parachutes coming out on fire and the planes going down. The flak was so heavy sometimes you couldn't see if the other five or seven planes got through it or not because it was so heavy from the smoke.

NELSON: What altitude did you fly?

TUTTLE: We flew at about 25 to 27,000 feet.

NELSON: Did your mental attitude change as combat continued?

TUTTLE: No, it was just another job. If you made it, you made it. If you didn't, you didn't. Your family got \$10,000 bucks.

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

TUTTLE: (Laughter) Wasn't enthusiastic about it.

NELSON: Wasn't like going to Sunday school?

TUTTLE: No. No. No Sunday school picnic—job that had to be done.

NELSON: Did you write many letters home and receive letters?

TUTTLE: I only wrote on occasions. I never received many letters. I didn't have any family. My mother wrote me and I think one aunt did. I had no relatives.

NELSON: So, you didn't get any packages?

TUTTLE: No, I didn't get any packages overseas. They would never get there.

NELSON: How about the other men? Did they receive letters and send letters?

TUTTLE: A lot of the guys [who] were engaged to their girlfriends and sweethearts got letters. Most of us gunners weren't engaged or anything so we got occasionally letters, usually a "Dear John."

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

TUTTLE: Every [year], since 1990, we've gone to the 461st Bomb Group reunion. The pilot, the co-pilot, the engineer gunner, the radial gunner the ball gunner, myself, and the top turret gunner have been to these conventions and we do see each other once a year.

NELSON: Were you ever involved in retrieving a wounded buddy or that sort of thing?

TUTTLE: No.

NELSON: You never got involved in liberating prison camps?

TUTTLE: No, we didn't.

NELSON: What was the highlight occurrence of your combat experience or any other experiences you can remember? What stands out in your mind?

TUTTLE: It just seems like we drew the tough missions and I'm sure every guy in combat felt the same way. But it was routine combat and just something we went to bed a little early and got a good night's rest because you may have the luck if you went down, to be able to walk back, but not too many did.

NELSON: What time did you have to get up in the morning when you flew?

TUTTLE: They got us up at 2 o'clock in the morning. Then they fed us, then they briefed us, then they took us down to draw our gear and ammo, and then we loaded the plane. Then they leveled—they used a slide rule where the weight all was and we took off probably—we probably didn't take off until about 7 o'clock, so that took about 4 to 5 hours.

NELSON: You mentioned briefing. What was briefing about?

TUTTLE: Briefing was about where you were going, where to expect the flak, what you were probably going to run into, and then alternate routes where you would bomb alternate targets. Then you would plan if you went down, where to head for -- primarily Yugoslavia, or head near Switzerland to try to avoid being captured. We had an incident that so many civilians were working around [inaudible].

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

TUTTLE: Usually you just lined up and went to chow and got a little something extra.

NELSON: When and how did you return to the U.S. at the end of the War?

TUTTLE: At the end of the War we, as usual, drew some detail, and we had to dismantle the area that our bomb group was in, and we flew a weather ship back. So we had it heavily loaded with instruments. Our pilot was a "number one" pilot and our copilot—Any time the company commander flew a weather mission or a mission, he'd take our pilot as a copilot. So we felt pretty good. He'd take half the crew--the engineer, the navigator and the radio man--but they really didn't need a gunner when they flew that weather because it was usually dark. It's a good feeling with a crew of that quality.

NELSON: Now when you arrived in the United States, what happened?

TUTTLE: When we finally flew through all the storms back and landed we got our traditional big steak and a quart of milk. Where we landed there was a lot of prisoners of the War -- Germans. They were glaring at us and we were glaring at them.

NELSON: What town was that?

TUTTLE: I think it was somewhere in Georgia. I think we landed in Georgia first and then went down to Florida, I think. Then we went on a 30-day furlough.

NELSON: Tell us about your military rank and your decorations, especially your campaign decorations.

TUTTLE: Well, I went in as a private, same as everybody else, but I came out as a Staff Sergeant. I can't recall—I know I had

the air medal and cluster and we had the European Ribbon. We had the North African ribbon. I got the good conduct medal. And through training, of course, I got Sharp Shooters. There's some other medal in there that I got but I didn't look at my discharge before I came out.

NELSON: You flew how many missions?

TUTTLE: We had 19 credited missions. We had some that were scratched. We went up to hit the jet fields. I saw the first German jet up over Czechoslovakia. It was something to see. We were trying to hit their....

NELSON [interrupting]: Do you remember about whether that was in April, 1945?

TUTTLE: I think so, because they didn't have fuel so we went up there and this fellow that every so often—One squad out of 766th Bomb Squadron, 766th--one of those guys would have to lead. So to make him mean we flew around and around up in Czechoslovakia and the fields were so camouflaged we couldn't bomb them but a German jet came up and we had those flak fighter pilots that were flying escorts. They jumped on him and he left them standing still. They just winged over and went back to Greece. Our seven planes just circled around until finally my pilot told them they had enough gas to get back, "We better get back."

NELSON: Did you see any other planes?

TUTTLE: Oh, yeah. I saw the British. They were terrible. They set a course and they'd just fly right through it—almost like flying through the formation. I had a chance to shoot down a JU88 but it looked like a bullfighter of the English. I hesitated shooting because I didn't want to shoot him down but I had him in my sights. I should have

shot him. I caught hell for not shooting him down, you know.

NELSON: The reason I mention that is because I lost my co-pilot. He was flying another crew over Czechoslovakia. They got hit by ME-210s. I was just wondering if maybe our group flew on the same mission that you were on?

TUTTLE: It is very possible, because they were trying to hit those jet fields up there where they had them stored. When they took off, they just left the B51s like they were just standing still. It was a whole new ball game.

NELSON: Oh yes, yes, it certainly was. Now this is in reference to your return to civilian life. How did you get along with the men with whom you had the greatest contact? That was the people you were serving [with]?

TUTTLE: We had wonderful officers and men. We were close, very close as a combat crew. I don't think our pilot and copilot would even open a candy bar without offering half of it. It was the kind of relationship we had.

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

TUTTLE: I don't think so, because it's a job that men of our time should do.

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

TUTTLE: KP [Laughter]. I hated K.P. [KP is short for kitchen police.]

NELSON: A lot of them say their first mission.

TUTTLE: Yeah, the first mission would be, and the training, or it was KP. The first mission was so—you didn't know what to expect. You had no idea, no idea what was happening.

NELSON: Is there anything that stands out in your mind as [your] most successful achievement in military service?

TUTTLE: [Hesitation].

NELSON: Getting your wings?

TUTTLE: Oh, I think getting my wings was my—a personal achievement that I felt good about because you had to take that machine gun apart and put it together blindfolded. You had to qualify to hit these moving targets and you had to hit these sleeves that were—that had the [inaudible] parts.

NELSON: Had to shoot the sleeve and not the...

TUTTLE: Not the [inaudible]. You see, your bullets were all color-coded so they counted your hits. If you had yellow bullets or if you had blue or whatever. So your hits were counted.

NELSON: How did you learn of VE Day and what was your reaction to it?

TUTTLE: We were in Tampa, Florida, and [I was with] a new-found buddy, because the crews were not being reformed for Europe. We were in a nightclub when we heard about it. So we were in Tampa, Florida, celebrating it.

NELSON: Celebrating a little bit, I imagine.

TUTTLE: Yes, [laughter] we did.

NELSON: How about VJ Day?

TUTTLE: Now wait a minute. I'm sorry, that was VJ Day.

NELSON: How about VE Day?

TUTTLE: VE Day. I'm sorry. VE Day we were in Europe and we kept running up to the command post there to find out if there was any information yet, because the Russians were really going and then Patton... We couldn't bomb because Patton, you never knew where he was! The Russians we knew where they were, because they were burning everything. We felt that VE Day we were over there in our squadron area.

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

TUTTLE: I felt great about it, to tell you the truth. They bombed Pearl Harbor without justification. They wouldn't even have the War if they had stayed in Japan. I feel if they had it, they would have used it. No doubt Hitler would have used it. It was a matter who did it [first]. I've got to commend Harry Truman for dropping that bomb. How many lives --and ending the War-- and how much we saved!

NELSON: Has your opinion changed over the last 50 years? If so, how?

TUTTLE: No, absolutely not.

NELSON: When and where were you officially discharged from service.

TUTTLE: I was officially discharged out here at Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois.

NELSON: Do you have any disability rating or pension?

TUTTLE: None.

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

TUTTLE: Yes, I do. I don't think women should be in combat jobs. I think they should be in jobs where they are pretty well protected. It would be terrible if they were captured.

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

TUTTLE: No, not really. I had some and I was very disappointed.

NELSON: Have you ever been in a Veterans' Administration Hospital?

TUTTLE: No, I haven't.

NELSON: Would you like to tell us about your family? How your family supported you during your military life? I think you mentioned this earlier.

TUTTLE: My family--They were 100% behind me, you know. They were concerned, the same as any parents, same as the average American family.

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

TUTTLE: Well, it just makes you more aware what keeps your own family strong. Then, I believe if the family is strong the nation is strong.

NELSON: Is there anything you would like to mention that we haven't touched on that you would like to mention on this interview.

TUTTLE: Off hand, I can't think of anything.

NELSON: Well, Everett, it has been very nice interviewing you. Thank you very much.

TUTTLE: Well, thank you.

Editor, November, 2018:

Everett Tuttle died June 29, 2018. Per his obituary in the Rockford Register Star [legacy.com, published July 3-5, 2018] he was a veteran of the US Army 765th Bomb Squadron in WWII. He retired from All Rental Garment.