

Robert Lucas

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Robert Lucas

Today is February the 16th, 1994. My name is Charles Nelson. I am a volunteer at Midway Village and Museum Center 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 at Midway Village in Rockford, Illinois. I am interviewing Mr. Robert Lucas, 1624 Scottswood, Rockford, Illinois. Mr. Lucas served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in that war.

NELSON: Please give us your full name and place and date of birth.

LUCAS: Robert Lucas. August 21st, 1921.

NELSON: Where were you born?

LUCAS: Born in Dubuque, Iowa.

NELSON: We would like also to have the names of your parents.

LUCAS: Frank Thomas Lucas and Bertha Wanda Lucas. Both deceased.

NELSON: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

LUCAS: One sister.

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

LUCAS: Not especially. My mother was born in Latvia and came to this country at the age of eleven, so she had a pretty exciting background in her younger ages. My father was born and raised on a farm right outside of Dubuque. That's about all I can say that is really significant about my parents.

NELSON: O. K. What was your life like before the war and specifically in 1941?

LUCAS: We were a close knit family. I was educated in private schools and like I say, very close with my sister, mother and father.

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

LUCAS: At that age, I didn't give it that much thought.

NELSON: How did you hear of the December 7th, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese? Where were you and what were you doing at the time?

LUCAS: We were having a family reunion at my house with my parents, sister aunts and uncles when the news came about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

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

LUCAS: I wanted to sign up. I really did. In fact, I did about a week after Pearl Harbor. I tried to enlist in the Air Force as an aviation cadet. I did take the exam at that time.

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

LUCAS: No, I hadn't.

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

LUCAS: Very little.

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

LUCAS: None.

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

LUCAS: No. Like I say, I tried to volunteer into the air corps but I didn't pass, so I thought I'd just wait then until I was drafted which I did. About eight months later I was drafted.

NELSON: Was your response to entering the military service influenced by family or friends' attitude toward the war, the threat to national security or other considerations?

LUCAS: My father was a veteran of World War I, very active in the American Legion in his home town. I think he might have had a little influence on me.

NELSON: When and where were you inducted?

LUCAS: October of 1942 at Camp Dodge in Iowa.

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

LUCAS: Yes, I was drafted on December 23rd.

NELSON: How old were you?

LUCAS: Twenty.

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

LUCAS: Basic training on New Year's Eve we were shipped out and eventually ended up at Camp Blanding outside of Jacksonville, Florida.

NELSON: Where did you take your basic military training?

LUCAS: At Camp Blanding.

NELSON: What were you trained to do?

LUCAS: I was drafted as a military policeman.

NELSON: What did you think of the training?

LUCAS: I enjoyed it. I enjoyed army life.

NELSON: Did anything special happen there?

LUCAS: No, nothing special.

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

LUCAS: That was really the only—after basic training our company was shipped to Miami, Florida. I was stationed in Miami, Florida, for fifteen months as an M. P. and it was there that I took the test for the aviation cadet again. I passed it and I went from Miami into the Air Force over to Miami Beach. I took basic training all over again.

NELSON: Did you have any passes or leaves?

LUCAS: The first year I had one pass or one leave.

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

LUCAS: I still have a friendship of a man who was in the military police with me and his wife who I knew when I was in military police. Another friend of his who still lives in Miami, whom I still correspond with.

NELSON: Where did you go after completing basic training?

LUCAS: After basic training in the air force I went to radio operator's school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

NELSON: If you were not sent overseas immediately following basic training, when did you finally leave the United States?

LUCAS: After radio school I went to gunnery school. Then I crewed up in El Paso, Texas. We were in El Paso, Texas for three months and then we went overseas in December of '44.

NELSON: What were you assigned to do after arriving overseas?

LUCAS: No assignment. We went on a few training missions before we flew regular combat missions.

NELSON: What did you think of the national war effort up to this point?

LUCAS: Very good.

NELSON: If you did not immediately enter combat zone, where did you go before entering combat?

LUCAS: Before combat. I went right to—we picked up our plane after training in El Paso, Texas, and flew overseas. I was assigned to my bomb group and I went into combat five days after I got there.

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

LUCAS: Very scared! But it was interesting. On my very first mission one crewmember was wounded. Other than that it was a hairy and scary experience.

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

LUCAS: I flew 14 combat missions and after that the war had ended. I think that's about it that I can say to that question, I think.

NELSON: Taking these, one at a time in chronological order, what was the approximate number of casualties that occurred and how were they treated?

LUCAS: The only casualty, like I said, was to our navigator on the very first mission. His wound was a piece of shrapnel or flack went up along side of his leg and through his chair that he was sitting on and into his buttocks. It was a minor. He was back flying again in two weeks.

NELSON: Did your mental attitude change as combat continued?

LUCAS: No.

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

LUCAS: I thought we were there for a good purpose and hopefully we wanted the war to end. I had no objections to being in the service. I was glad to see the war come to an end. I was satisfied with the job and what my other crew members were doing.

NELSON: Did you write many letters home?

LUCAS: Yes, I wrote weekly to my parents, I wrote weekly to my sister and I wrote weekly to friends back home.

NELSON: Did you receive any letters or packages? If so how often?

LUCAS: I received letters from my parents, sister and friends weekly, also. Maybe every two weeks.

NELSON: What types of things did you get in packages?

LUCAS: Nothing overseas.

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

LUCAS: Some. Maybe in our crew, maybe four of my crew members did as I.

NELSON: Did you forge close bonds of friendship with any of your combat companions?

LUCAS: I had a close friendship with a crew member on a different crew. I had a very close relationship with him, but he was killed when we were flying overseas. His plane crashed in England.

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

LUCAS: No. Only the one who was in the Military Police with me.

NELSON: Did you ever have help retrieve a wounded buddy from a field of combat?

LUCAS: No.

NELSON: During your combat duties, did you ever capture any enemy prisoners? If so, describe the circumstances.

LUCAS: No.

NELSON: Prior to the end of the war, were you aware of any civilian concentration camps existed? If so, please explain how you learned about them and how much you knew at that time.

LUCAS: I had a friend, who I later found out, was in a prison camp. I knew that he was a Prisoner Of War but the strange part of the whole story is when his prison camp it was liberated by his brother's infantry outfit.

NELSON: What was your highlight occurrence of you combat experience?

LUCAS: I would say my very first mission.

NELSON: Why was that?

LUCAS: It was exciting. It was a tough one and the head—the one casualty on our crew.

NELSON: Where did you go?

LUCAS: I believe my first mission was at the Brenner Pass. Northern Italy, Germany. I've forgotten.

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

LUCAS: Nothing special. We usually had good meals on holidays. We enjoyed that.

NELSON: When and how did you return to the U. S. after the war?

LUCAS: We flew back in a B-17.

NELSON: What happened when you arrived in the U.S.?

LUCAS: I kissed the ground.

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

LUCAS: I was a staff sergeant, ___?___ medal and I received a citation for the—I've forgotten the campaign—with three battle stars.

NELSON: How did you get along with the men with whom you had the greatest contact?

LUCAS: Very good.

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

LUCAS: No.

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

LUCAS: I would say taking the aviation cadet exam again for the second time.

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

LUCAS: No, I wouldn't say so.

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

LUCAS: The announcement came over the loud speaking system at our base camp. There was really no big celebration.

NELSON: How did you learn about VJ Day and what was your reaction/

LUCAS: I was home on furlough at the time after coming back from overseas. I heard it then and that was a joyous occasion because finally the whole affair was over.

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

LUCAS: I was completely for it.

NELSON: Has your opinion changed over the last fifty years, if so how.

LUCAS: No.

NELSON: When were you officially discharged from the service?

LUCAS: I was discharged in October of 1945 from Scott Air Force Base in Belleville, Illinois.

NELSON: Do you have any disability rating or pension?

LUCAS: No.

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

LUCAS: Right now?

NELSON: Yes.

LUCAS: I don't like the cuts in the defense.

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

LUCAS: Right now, I don't, but I did have with the VA when my mother was in a nursing home. She was treated royally by these people and she received compensation each month because of my Dad's service in World War I. I thought the VA did a tremendous job.

NELSON: I think you have answered the next question. Have you ever gone to a VA hospital for medical services?

LUCAS: My father has. Not I.

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

LUCAS: My dad was active in the American Legion and he always said it was great to be in the service. My mother supported me and my sister supported through correspondence. The whole family supported me throughout my whole career.

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

LUCAS: My dad insisted I join the American Legion after I got out of the service. I still am a Legionnaire. My parents are deceased now but my sister is still in support—still close. That's about it.

NELSON: Thanks a lot, Bob. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview? Any stories you would like to tell or experience you would like to tell about?

LUCAS: The only thing I would like to say is in regard to the Veterans' Administration. Like I said, they were great to my mother through compensation, through health and to this day I am in full support of the Veterans' Administration. That's about it.

NELSON: Thank you, Bob.