

**Interview with Frederick Stein**  
**August 17, 1990**  
**Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection**  
**St. Cloud State University Archives**  
**Interviewed by Lois Gaetz**

**Gaetz:** August 17, 1990. I'm interviewing Frederick Stein. This is Gaetz. Okay, why don't we start with, basically, who you are and your birth date.

**Stein:** February 5, 1917.

**Gaetz:** Okay. When you went into the service, was it voluntarily, or were you drafted?

**Stein:** I was drafted.

**Gaetz:** Okay. And when was that?

**Stein:** I went into service March 1 of 1943, that would be.

**Gaetz:** Okay.

**Stein:** Or no, wait. Let's see, Pearl Harbor was in--

**Gaetz:** '41.

**Stein:** '41, yes, and I went in in a few months, '42.

**Gaetz:** Okay.

**Stein:** Yes, that's right because I was drafted.

**Gaetz:** You went in right after. Okay.

**Stein:** Yes.

**Gaetz:** Okay. So, you went in before your brothers.

**Stein:** Yes. Well, Rog [Roger] was already in the service, but he had volunteered, you know. Before the war started, he was in.

**Gaetz:** Okay, so you were drafted.

**Stein:** Otherwise, I was the first one of the three.

**Gaetz:** And where did you go?

**Stein:** To start out with, Fort Snelling. All of them did from around here, I guess.

**Gaetz:** Okay. And where did you do your basic?

**Stein:** Camp Crowder, Missouri, C-R-O-W-D-E-R.

**Gaetz:** Okay. Now, that's a different camp. Is there any reason why—I mean, everybody I've talked to that I've worked with here has gone to different camps—is there any reason why you went to that camp?

**Stein:** Well, it all depends upon where they needed somebody in particular areas, I guess. That was the Signal Corps down there, and apparently they needed Signal Corps. They did give you some basic tests at Fort Snelling. You were sort of divided whether you would go Infantry or maybe Signal Corps or maybe office, depending on what they felt you were best qualified for. So, they did kind of break it down a little bit at Fort Snelling.

**Gaetz:** Before you were, okay.

**Stein:** Yeah. And then, I was sent to the Signal Corps.

**Gaetz:** Okay. What was it like at Camp Crowder?

**Stein:** Oh, they kept you busy. It was not that bad, you know. We got into basic training and then some Signal Corps work. They had further tests down there. Then, I was put in as a radio operator. That was supposed to be my qualifications. Then, we spent about three months at Camp Crowder, then we went to a radio school at Kansas City. We spent that summer of '42 in Kansas City at radio school.

**Gaetz:** So, that's where you got, basically, your advanced training? And then, from there, where did you go from Kansas City?

**Stein:** Well, then they said they needed radio operators to go to North Africa, and they were getting some together in Massachusetts. So, we flew by plane. In fact, they graduated us a week early and flew us by plane out there to some training in Massachusetts on Cape Cod. We trained there with the amphibians, you know, landing craft. Of course, I didn't see much future in that, carrying a radio up on the beach somewhere. At that time you could, I enlisted in the Air Corps at Cape Cod out there. In the meantime, I took a test out there, but I never heard anything further. Then, we went down to Florida and did amphibious training for about three months. Then I went all across the country to Fort Ord, California. That was the staging area that we were supposed to go to the Pacific from there. While I was out there in California waiting with our amphibious unit, I was called into the office and the commander said that he had a letter. He didn't know what it was about, but he had a notice that I was supposed to be transferred to Santa Anna,

California. That's the Air Corps basic training. So, they had apparently accepted everything, so I got out of the amphibians and went down and started Air Corps training.

**Gaetz:** So you went to Santa Anna. How did you end up from over there going to Europe?

**Stein:** Well, that's a long story too. [laughs]

**Gaetz:** Well, let's hear it.

**Stein:** At Santa Anna, I joined the Air Corps. Then, you take a bunch of tests again to see what you might qualify for: a pilot, bombardier, navigator, whatever. I wound up going to navigation school. They said that's what I should be doing, according to my qualifications. So, then, we spent some time down there, a little bit of basic Air Corps training, but then we went to March Field, California navigation school. That's near Sacramento. We spent pretty near six months of training in that navigation school just with flying and a lot of class work, whatever it took. Then, we graduated as navigators, second lieutenants in June or July of '43, I guess it was. After we graduated, we had two weeks off. I came home. And then, the orders were to go to Clovis, New Mexico. That's where they were getting crews together for the various operations. I was assigned to B-24s, and that's where we got together with some of the other fellows of our crew. They were putting the crews together. And we flew some B-24s there. Then, we went to Biggs Field, Texas, at El Paso, and we did some more B-24 training. Then, we were supposed to be ready to go overseas. So, we were transferred to Wichita, Kansas, and that's where we picked up our plane. That was in December of '43. So, we picked up a B-24, and we had our whole crew together. And from there, we flew to Miami, Florida with the plane and spent a couple days there. Then, we took off for England by way of South America. We flew to Belem, Brazil, overnight there, and then we crossed the ocean to Dakar in West Africa. Then, we went to

Marrakesh, North Africa, and from there we went out over the ocean and flew up to England. Then, we did some staging there again. In fact, we went to North Ireland and did some for a couple of weeks for training. Finally, we were assigned to the 453<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group at Norwich, England near the little town of Attleborough. We started training there. We flew some training missions. Then, we started flying bombing missions. It was about the first part of March when we started flying bombing missions over Germany and France. We flew 32 missions altogether. I kept a little diary of all the missions that we flew, what bomb load we had, how many hours we flew and what all happened. I've got some copies of those, and I'll give you those if you'd like.

**Gaetz:** I'd appreciate that.

**Stein:** It's not a very long explanation, but each flight has something on it.

**Gaetz:** I would appreciate that.

**Stein:** So, we flew until June of '44. We flew on D-Day, when the big invasion was. We flew that day, we were still flying then, and then we flew about three or four missions after that to make up our 32. Then, we were sent home by ship. The *America*, I think it was they called it at that time. Originally, it was actually the *Queen Elizabeth*, but they renamed it, I think. It was a big ship. We went to Boston. From Boston, we went to Miami again. And then from Miami I was assigned to Charleston, South Carolina. At Charleston, I did some navigation training for pilots that were training for the Pacific. We were instructors. I was there until I was discharged until in about October of '45.

**Gaetz:** Okay. On a typical day, after you were in England, what was that like, say when you had a mission? What was a mission like?

**Stein:** Well, it started real early in the morning. That was the hardest part of the whole missions, sometimes they'd wake you at 3:00 in the morning, maybe 4:00, depending on what the mission was and how far. Over in England, in March and April it was chilly. There wasn't much snow or anything, but damp, chilly, and we had these little huts we lived in and we never had any heat in them. You had about six blankets to keep warm. And then, they'd come about 3:00 in the morning, "Time to get up. Get up." And everybody would grunt and groan, and you hadn't much to look forward to, nothing exciting that you wanted to look forward to. That was the hardest part was getting out of those cold beds, going over to the cold mess hall and having breakfast of probably powdered eggs and whatever they happened to have. Then, go over to the briefing room and find out what your mission is and where you're going and get all the instructions. Then, you would go back to where you had all your clothes and everything, got dressed, got ready. And then, a jeep probably took us out to the plane about a half hour before take-off time, so you'd check in there and see that everything was okay. Then, you would take off with whatever bomb loads you had for that day. Sometimes if you were going a long ways, you were loaded pretty heavy. Probably a lot more than the plane ordinarily would carry, but they suped them up so they could carry a pretty good sized load. And then you would take off, and you would have assembly. You never flew by yourself. You always flew—the whole squadron was a part of the group, and the group was again a part of the Second Air Division. And you would circle, circle, circle your field with a lead plane that was colored like the Fourth of July, different colors so everybody could see it. And then, they would gather in behind that and fly until they were all together. Then, you had a set time—everything was timed, maybe say 10:00 in the morning—you were supposed to be over Bethel or London, some part of London. That's when you were supposed to come over there, and that's timed with the others that are supposed to

come there and you'd all get together so that you'd sometimes fly 7-800, up to a thousand planes would all fly together at a time for protection. That took an hour, hour and a half to get that organized, so all the groups would get their group together and then get them together so that they were all flying at the same time in the same direction. Then, you would take off for the target area.

**Gaetz:** So, how big was your group? How many planes?

**Stein:** Our group was, I don't think we ever had more than 30 flying, between 24 and 30, in our bomb group.

**Gaetz:** Did you all know each other? I'm just curious.

**Stein:** Well, you got to know your own crew real well. Of course, that was just like your family over there. You flew together, and you depended on each other when you were in the air. And you stayed together as one crew. You didn't fly with different people. You always stayed together, the same bunch. So, you really got to know your crew real well. And we had these Nissen huts. There were always two crews to a hut. In the officers' quarters, the four on one side of the hut were in one crew and the four on the other side were another crew. So, when we came over there, first our hut was empty. There had been crews in there, but they were shot down. So, we replaced them, and another replacement came. And about a week later, that replacement was shot down, and so we got another crew. We went through three crews while we over there as hut-mates.

**Gaetz:** That's interesting because I haven't—I mean, I knew that crews stayed together. Did your whole crew come back at the same time that you did then?

**Stein:** Yes.

**Gaetz:** Were you all at the same time?

**Stein:** Yes. When we got back we scattered. After we got back we broke up. In fact, I didn't see any of our crew until about five years ago. There was a reunion at Dayton, Ohio. Margaret and I went down for that, and that's the first time I had seen the pilot and the bombardier since we split up. And now, just this summer, Herb Bradley, the bombardier, said, "We got to get together sometime." So, he got a hold of Jones, who was in Michigan at the time, and they came up here to Cold Spring, so we had a couple days together, the three of us.

**Gaetz:** Oh, that was nice.

**Stein:** After 42, 43 years, you know.

**Gaetz:** That's a long time.

**Stein:** Yes.

**Gaetz:** Okay. Can you talk about some of the missions you went on? You went on 32 of them. Were there any that stand out?

**Stein:** Well, some of them were easy runs others, but others, again, were—our first mission was to Friedrichshafen in south Germany, right close to the Swiss border. In fact, we flew over Switzerland coming from the south to hit Friedrichshafen. I don't know, it was cloudy, and we didn't hit what we wanted to hit. There were some airplane factories and stuff down there we were supposed to hit, and most of the bombs missed. I guess, we didn't hit it too well. So, I guess the Germans knew that we were going to be back. They knew that if you didn't do the job right, they knew you'd be back. So, about five days later, our second mission was the same place, and

then they had quite a bit of antiaircraft and fighter planes there waiting for us. And we did lose a couple planes, but it wasn't too bad. I think we lost two that got shot down that time. Then, of course, our worst mission was going to Brunswick on May 8, 1944. Brunswick had a ball bearing factory that they wanted to knock out. Apparently, the Germans were expecting it. They had the fighter planes. They had a lot of anti-aircraft. Our group flew with 24 planes that we got in the air that day, and seven of them were shot down over there. And two of us got back, but we had to bail out we were so shot up. Our plane had the hydraulics shot out. The front nose wheel was flat, that was shot out. And one engine wasn't going. So, when we got back, the pilot talked to the base commander. He said what should he do, should he try to land it on. And the worst part of it was one of the wheels, the hydraulics were out so you had to crank down your wheels for landing. So, we cranked down the right wheel. That came down nice and locked. Then we were going to crank down the left wheel, and the end of the cable came off. That had been shot off. So, we couldn't lower the one. The left one was up, and the right one was down, and the front one was flat, so you only had one wheel to land on. [both laugh] So, the commander said, "Well." Jones, said he'd give it a try to land it. He wasn't afraid to try to and land it. But then, they said we should all bail out and just the pilot and co-pilot should bring it in. So, that's what we did. We all bailed out, and the pilot and co-pilot brought it in on that one wheel. Of course, when it hit, the wingtip hit. Then, it was so smashed up, they never flew it again. It was used just for parts after that.

**Gaetz:** Okay. Did you have many missions that went all the way into Germany? Is that where most of them were?

**Stein:** Well, the percentage, it was about half and half, I guess. Half Germany and half occupied France, or something like that. We went to Berlin twice, I think.

**Gaetz:** Most of your missions were all day missions?

**Stein:** All day missions, yes. The British flew at night.

**Gaetz:** At night, yes.

**Stein:** And we flew all day missions.

**Gaetz:** Okay. Well, what did you think of your officers and officers in general, but your particular officers that you had?

**Stein:** Oh, I don't know. They seemed to know what they were doing. I never had any problem with any of them.

**Gaetz:** Did you think they were all pretty well qualified?

**Stein:** Yes. I think so. They were all young, I was 26 years old when I was out flying over there, and everybody called me the old man because I was by far the oldest one there, you know. In fact most of them were from 20 to 22. That's about the average age of the guys flying over there. And I was 26, so I was the old man. And of course, your commander and everybody else wasn't much older usually either. They maybe had one year more experience than you did. [laughs]

**Gaetz:** Did you think that your training was adequate, that you got good training to handle what you were going to do?

**Stein:** Under the circumstances, I think so. Your training had to come kind of fast. You know, they pushed you through a lot. They always tell the story about the one guy who dropped his pencil during class and he missed all of his second year algebra. [laughs] It wasn't quite that fast, but that's what the story goes.

**Gaetz:** Okay. You were stationed in England, but did you spend much time with the English people? Did you have a chance to do that?

**Stein:** Not just a whole lot, it seems like. Locally, you were on the base. We went to Norwich, England maybe half a dozen times or more, and you'd meet some people there. Then, you went to London three, four times. Of course, you don't really meet, most of the places you go all you see is more American servicemen is what it amounted to. You did get in contact with different ones here and there.

**Gaetz:** Did you think that you were adequately supplied? I remember working with one tape, and he was a pilot. He said his biggest complaint was that they didn't have enough ammunition, so they couldn't fly missions because they didn't have ammunition.

**Stein:** I wonder, was that Pacific?

**Gaetz:** It was in Italy.

**Stein:** In Italy?

**Gaetz:** Yes. And he said that was probably his biggest complaint, that they had a shortage of ammunition. Did you have any problems?

**Stein:** No, I can't say that we did. I'm sure we never held up a mission for any shortage that I know of. They kept us pretty well supplied.

**Gaetz:** Did they repair your planes when they could be repaired?

**Stein:** Yes. They seemed to be well trained, the crews.

**Gaetz:** What did you think of your plane, the equipment you had?

**Stein:** Well, when I think of it now, it looks pretty antiquated, when you think of it, the way that they were put together and you had them loaded with bombs and loaded plump full of gas, then you'd go over there and get shot at. It didn't sound very safe. But I don't know, they were pretty dependable. They had those old Pratt and Whitney radial engines on them, and unless they really were shot up, as long as the engines kept going and you had a wing there you could keep flying, I guess. [laughs]

**Gaetz:** Did you think that you had adequate fighter protection and that all the time when you flew?

**Stein:** Oh, well, you'd always like more, I guess. [laughs] But no, I think they did a pretty good job. We had fighter protection most all the time, some places we went, we really didn't need fighter protection. Like we went a ways to southern France, right close to the Spanish border, which is a long flight down there, and the fighters couldn't have gone with us all the way but there was no opposition either. The Germans didn't have any fighters down there either. It was actually a quite uneventful mission, just a long time.

**Gaetz:** Oh, the "milk runs"?

**Stein:** It was a milk run, yes.

**Gaetz:** Okay. Did you have any fun? I mean, in the midst of war, what did you do for enjoyment? You must have had some free time.

**Stein:** Well, you'd go to the officers club and drink, I guess, play cards and maybe shoot darts. Then, they had dances at the base once in a while. Some of the English girls would come out, you know, and they would have dances. There wasn't really a whole lot to do over there.

**Gaetz:** Is there anything about your time in the service that you regret or that made you angry at the time or as you think back on it?

**Stein:** Oh, I guess at the time, sometimes you get disgusted with certain things.

**Gaetz:** Like what?

**Stein:** Oh, I can't even offhand think of much. Like I say, I couldn't see being with the amphibians. We trained, and you'd get up in the middle of the night and you'd go on these boats and you'd sit out there all night bouncing around in the water. And toward morning, you go up on the beach, and then you were supposed to run up and set up your radio station. And I just—first of all with bouncing on the boat, you'd get seasick out there all night, and then you were supposed to come on shore and set up a radio station and start communicating with whatever your setup was at the time. That was hard sometimes. You weren't feeling good in the first place and wet and cold. That's why I got out of that. I figured in the Air Corps, at least you'd have clean clothes and dry clothes most of the time. [laughs]

**Gaetz:** And then, you got so cold that you had to have six blankets. [laughs]

**Stein:** Yes.

**Gaetz:** Okay. Would you do it all over again, knowing what you know now?

**Stein:** Under the same circumstances, I guess I would do it about the same way, if the circumstances were the same.

**Gaetz:** How did you feel about the war? I mean, did you think about the war itself? During the war, I mean, did you have feelings about what was happening?

**Stein:** Oh, not just really that much, I guess. Everybody was concerned with himself and his group and what they were doing, more so than the war in general. You just left that up to somebody else, I guess.

**Gaetz:** So that wasn't a conversation?

**Stein:** Not too much, no.

**Gaetz:** Okay. I have to ask you about your group commander. Who was that?

**Stein:** Well, for a while it was Jimmy Stewart.

**Gaetz:** That's what I heard, that you ate cake with him. [laughs]

**Stein:** Yes, and cookies, and homemade candy.

**Gaetz:** Was he much of a star at that point already? He was a general.

**Stein:** He was pretty well known, but he made most of his pictures actually after that. The big end of his pictures were made after that. But he had made quite a few pictures already at that time.

**Gaetz:** So, everybody knew who he was.

**Stein:** Oh, yes, sure.

**Gaetz:** What was he like?

**Stein:** I don't think he ever really acted. He was just himself. He was just the kind of a guy that he always was in the movies. I couldn't see really any difference. He was just being himself in most of the movies. That's pretty much the kind of guy he was.

**Gaetz:** Okay. I want to go back to missions. When you were out on a mission, what were your duties?

**Stein:** Well, I was a navigator, and I was supposed to keep track. I had to keep a log of where we were and where we were going. I was supposed to know at all times where we were in Europe in case it gets cloudy or you get shot at and an engine goes out and you have to go down, and a lot of time you had to get back to England by yourself. Ordinarily, you would just follow the leader, but a lot of times something happened and you would get broke up and then you would have to get back to England on your own. So, I had to know about where we were and what compass heading to take to get back and how to get back to our base.

**Gaetz:** So, you were plotting that all the time?

**Stein:** You kept keeping track all the time.

**Gaetz:** What were the other people doing on the plane? I mean, I've listened to other tapes, and they talk about what people on their planes were doing and how concentrated—I mean, there was no time for, even when you're flying a long time, everyone is so busy with their jobs.

**Stein:** Well, sure, the pilot and the co-pilot, they were pretty busy all the time because if you're flying in formation, it's pretty strenuous to just stay fifty feet in back and below this next plane where you're supposed to be. You have to always be watching that, and then there's other planes over here and here. If you don't watch, you could ram right into another plane. So, that was a pretty strenuous job for the pilot and the co-pilot. They would change off. They had a big job that went hour after hour, flying, not just take a heading on the compass and then fly because you had to stay in your section of the formation.

**Gaetz:** Yes, I've heard people say they flew almost wingtips touching, you know. They were so tight at times.

**Gaetz:** Well, you didn't quite touch wings, but if you weren't watching that could happen real easy. Suppose the front plane moves a little bit and then the other plane moves, and then they go back and forth. And if you're not watching, then this plane might move over toward where you are, and if you just happen at that time to be straying over to the other side it wouldn't take much. And it did happen quite often that two would bump and probably both of them go down. They'd crash because they hit in formation. Not a whole lot, but it did happen.

**Gaetz:** Okay. Did anything every happen? I mean, you mentioned the time when you were hit and had to bail out of the plane. Were there any other incidents of that kind? Did your plane get hit more than that?

**Stein:** Oh, we had holes in the plane I suppose about half the times we flew, a little hole here or there. The flak was these big shells they would shoot up, and when they would get to your altitude they would explode. And all this shrapnel, these pieces of iron, would fly, and there was a lot of that. And you would hear it—clink, clink, clink—every once in a while on the plane, even if they shot above you and it would explode. A lot of time it would hit the plane, but it wouldn't really do any damage. You'd hear that, and then you knew they were shooting pretty close to you. [laughs] That time we were at Brunswick, there was one blast on the side of the ship that must have put a hole about that big, six to eight inches, and that hit right where the hydraulic lines were. So then, the hydraulic lines went out, so then you couldn't use the hydraulic brakes or the wheels or the flaps, lower the wheels and all that. That all had to be done manually then because of the hydraulics. Just last week when the bombardier was saying, that

time when they hit that hydraulic system, and it was spraying all that hydraulic fluid around, he thought there was a fire. He had the fire extinguisher. He thought there was a fire. It looked just like smoke, until he realized that it was hydraulic fluid. He had grabbed the fire extinguisher and was trying to put it out. After we got back from England, then we had it actually pretty soft. In Charleston, we were instructors, but you only had maybe an hour or two of classes in the day. The rest of the time, you could sit around the officers club or do pretty near anything you wanted to, go to town.

**Gaetz:** That's sort of your reward after.

**Stein:** Sort of, yes, I guess.

**Gaetz:** I've heard of a lot of people came back, especially flight crews, came back, and they were instructors after they came back.

**Stein:** Yes. That was a pretty soft job.

**Gaetz:** Okay. Okay, we're getting down to the end. You guys talk too fast, I think. [both laugh] Well, you cover everything really fast. Some fellows tell a lot of stories. I noticed that dad and Vic told stories as soon as a turned the machine on. [both laugh] Okay. We do ask one question about what you thought about the Vietnam conflict, having served in a war in everything, how you kind of felt. Some people say, "Well, it's not a fair comparison." But we figured that everybody has some feelings about that, and we'd just kind of like to know what a veteran from World War II thought about that and what they felt about soldiers who refused to go, or the evaders, the ones who went to Canada and that kind of thing.

**Stein:** Well, they say the Vietnam War was—and it was altogether different than World War II. Pearl Harbor was attacked, and everybody could see that we had to defend ourselves. There was a definite goal there, more or less. Whereas the Vietnam War, they just kind of went over there and they fought, and they didn't really know what they were fighting for, you might say. Even they said they wouldn't let them go ahead, and the policy was not to try to win the war just a delaying action or whatever they called it. And I can see where that would be pretty disgusting to go over there and fight in that kind of a war, in the jungle with not knowing who your enemy is or where he is a lot of times. We fought a much cleaner war, I guess. [laughs]

**Gaetz:** Yes. I think that's a common thread.

**Stein:** And I can see where some of the Vietnam veterans were down, pretty discouraged, much more so than we would have been in World War II because everybody pretty much understood what we were trying to do in World War II. There was no question about that. So many of them couldn't understand what we were trying to do in Vietnam, and sometimes I don't probably understand it either, just why we had to be over there. If we were over there, we should have gone over there and used whatever air power and whatever we had to win the war and get it over with instead of just piddling away with this delaying, holding action like we did.

**Gaetz:** What did you think about the guys who went to Canada, who chose not to go?

**Stein:** Well, I don't know. If that's the way they felt, I don't hold anything against them. I don't think there was that much of that in World War II. You never hear much of that. But Vietnam, I can see where a lot of them would do that. I don't know if I would have gone to Canada or not. I doubt it, but I don't really hold it against them.

**Gaetz:** I wanted to ask—I've asked for other people's responses to this. What did you think about after the war, when the United States—you know, the Marshall Plan and basically rebuilding Japan—did you have any feelings about that?

**Unidentified woman:** Hi.

**Gaetz:** Hi.

**Unidentified woman:** How are you doing?

**Gaetz:** Oh, we're getting there, I guess.

**Unidentified woman:** Okay.

**Stein:** Well, I suppose, in some ways, we were probably too good. Like in Japan, we sent everything over there. We sent troops over there to defend them. They don't even have to have an army. They took all our aid, and they built up their factories and everything. And we kept supporting a large army over there and here for defense, and they didn't have to worry about any of that. So naturally, they could build up their industries much faster than what we did, and of course now they're our big competitors. I suppose, it was the humanitarian thing to do but still, economically probably, sometimes we wish we probably wouldn't have given them quite as much. [laughs] I don't think they expected that much when they surrendered. They didn't expect that kind of treatment because they had never heard of anything like that before, you know.

**Gaetz:** Yes. I think that was probably the first time.

**Stein:** Well, when they went into China or somewhere, they just took what they could, and there was never any question of any kind of reparation.

**Gaetz:** Yes, I'd say that's the first time that the victors turned around and picked up the vanquished in the extent that that happened in any war.

**Stein:** Yes.

**Gaetz:** Well, I think we've got most of the information that we want.

**Stein:** Yes.