

Interview with Ignatius Nalewaja

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Interviewed by John Carter

Nalewaja (00:01):

--you get hired by Douglas Aircraft.

Carter (00:04):

Sunday, December 7th, 1941.

Nalewaja (00:05):

Yeah. I was, at that particular time, I was at the airport.

Carter (00:07):

You were at the airport, doing what?

Nalewaja (00:11):

Well, I was unemployed, so I wasn't assigned, but I was looking. A guy was there happened to be demonstrating a new kind of parachute, and just before they were going to take him up, they closed all flying on the West Coast. That was about 3:00 in the afternoon.

Carter (00:11):

Yeah.

Nalewaja ([00:42](#)):

That's when I found out that there was-- I didn't know there was a war until three in the afternoon.

Carter ([00:51](#)):

Now, how did you end up in the military? Did you volunteer, were you drafted or what?

Nalewaja ([00:59](#)):

Anybody that had some flying experience, they had a war training program, and I qualified for that. They said, "If you enlist in the reserve, we will train you and find a flying job for you." The government was doing that.

Carter ([01:18](#)):

Yeah.

Nalewaja ([01:25](#)):

And I spent, probably it was pretty near a year and a half training, civilian training, in the Reserve.

Carter ([01:30](#)):

In the Reserve? So you were in the reserves when World War II broke out?

Nalewaja ([01:32](#)):

Yeah. Well, after it broke out [crosstalk 00:01:36] the reserve.

Carter ([01:36](#)):

Oh, after you joined? Oh, okay. So when--

Nalewaja ([01:38](#)):

Anyway, after I finished my training, they decided they had too many pilots already, so they gave me a choice. I could get discharged from the Reserve and turned over to the draft board, or

I can join as an enlisted, and they'd put me to work wherever they'd find use for me, so that's the way I went in.

Carter (02:06):

You went in the Air Force as an enlisted man rather than a pilot? Oh.

Nalewaja (02:08):

Yeah. Because they didn't need any more civilian pilots there.

Carter (02:11):

Well, what job did they give you in the Air Force?

Nalewaja (02:15):

Well, they sent me to a mechanics' school, which was a very good school. And after that I wanted flight duty, so they sent me to a gunnery school, and I ended up as flight engineer, which was upper turret gunner.

Carter (02:37):

So it's a combination job? You were--

Nalewaja (02:39):

Yeah, but in combat your main job was watching that upper turret.

Carter (02:46):

All right. So you were flight engineer, upper turret gunner?

Nalewaja (02:48):

Yeah.

Carter (02:48):

Now, how old were you when you started this, when you were assigned to be a flight engineer, upper turret person?

Nalewaja (02:56):

Well, let's see. I think I must have been 27, 28, something like that.

Carter (02:58):

Oh.

Nalewaja (03:00):

See, I was too old for aviation cadet.

Carter (03:02):

Ah. That's interesting. Most of the gunners on the airplanes were quite young, weren't they?

Nalewaja (03:07):

Yeah.

Carter (03:08):

I mean, you were the exception to the rule.

Nalewaja (03:11):

I was the oldest guy on the crew. The sad part is, I'm afraid I'm the only that's left of that crew.

Carter (03:20):

Oh, what do you-- Where did you take this mechanics' training and then your gunnery training?

Where did you take that at?

Nalewaja (03:28):

I took the mechanic training in Amarillo, Texas, and the gunner training was in Kingman,

Arizona.

Carter (03:38):

After you finished gunner-- You went to mechanics' school first, then to the gunnery course?

Nalewaja (03:43):

Yeah.

Carter (03:43):

All right. Then what happened?

Nalewaja (03:45):

Then we were sent to replacement center and then we went to an overseas training unit, where we on simulated bombing missions and--

Carter (03:59):

But what date was it? Do you remember what date you went to the replacement center, then to the training thing? What year and month or anything like that?

Nalewaja (04:07):

Let's see. I know what month, but the year-- Let's see. I have to stop and think.

Carter (04:16):

Overseas training, it was when?

Nalewaja (04:17):

It was from about June till August of 1944.

Carter (04:23):

Okay.

Nalewaja (04:24):

At Sioux City, Iowa.

Carter (04:31):

All right.

Nalewaja (04:31):

And there they did a lot of formation flying, and we had two mid-air collisions in one week.

Carter (04:39):

In Sioux City?

Nalewaja (04:40):

Yeah.

Carter (04:40):

Okay. All killed?

Nalewaja (04:43):

Out of a class of 350, there was just a few over 300 left.

Carter (04:49):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. Now, when did you leave the United States? And you went to Europe, didn't you?

Nalewaja (04:55):

Yeah. I left the United States-- Let's see, from Sioux City we went to Lincoln, Nebraska, where we were outfitted for overseas. And I'd say that was first part of September.

Carter (05:13):

Of?

Nalewaja (05:13):

Of 1944.

Carter (05:16):

'44. Okay.

Nalewaja (05:18):

And from there, we went to Goose Bay, Labrador and to Greenland. And because of poor weather, we stayed there about a week.

Carter (05:32):

You were being flown over, then? Airlifted?

Nalewaja (05:33):

Yeah, in Lincoln, Nebraska, we were given a brand new airplane.

Carter (05:40):

Oh, you were flying your own airplane over?

Nalewaja (05:40):

Yeah.

Carter (05:42):

What kind of airplane was it?

Nalewaja (05:43):

B-17. Brand new one.

Carter (05:45):

Brand new. What model?

Nalewaja (05:46):

G.

Carter (05:47):

The G model? All right. Good. Was this a group, like a squadron flying themselves over there?

Or--

Nalewaja ([05:53](#)):

There were individual crews flying their own airplane.

Carter ([05:59](#)):

They didn't have anyone leading you across or anything?

Nalewaja ([06:01](#)):

No.

Carter ([06:01](#)):

You just got in, and your own navigator was doing the navigating for you and everything.

Nalewaja ([06:08](#)):

Yeah. But there was an everyday flow of airplanes they had going from Lincoln, Nebraska to England. They had a pretty near everyday steady flow.

Carter ([06:18](#)):

Like a train going across here, but they're airplanes. Ah. When did you finally get to England?

Nalewaja ([06:24](#)):

I'd say it was about two weeks after we left Lincoln, Nebraska.

Carter ([06:32](#)):

Whereabouts in England did you end up? Where were you based?

Nalewaja ([06:35](#)):

We ended up at Sudbury, England. They called it Station 174.

Carter ([06:41](#)):

Okay. What town is that near? A town called Sudbury? Or is it--

Nalewaja ([06:45](#)):

Yeah. The town is Sudbury.

Carter (06:47):

Okay. Whereabouts in England is that, do you know? Is it East Anglia, Midlands, or--

Nalewaja (06:51):

Wait a minute. It would be northeast of London maybe 50, 60 miles.

Carter (06:59):

Now, was this a large base? When you got to it, had it already been established? It was already a large base?

Nalewaja (07:04):

Yeah, it started out, it was a British fighter base. It was quite a few years old, but Americans took it over. Gee, I think they took it over in 1944, it was leased to them.

Carter (07:25):

Did it have paved runways and everything? Or was it a--

Nalewaja (07:28):

Yeah. It was paved runways.

Carter (07:32):

Okay. Now, you arrive in England, you and the B-17 and the rest of the crew. What group did you join when you got there?

Nalewaja (07:41):

We were assigned to 486 Bomber Group.

Carter (07:46):

486 Bomber Group? Okay. And you flew out of Sudbury?

Nalewaja (07:47):

Yeah.

Carter (07:48):

Do you remember your first mission, where it was?

Nalewaja (07:51):

Yeah. The first one was Cologne, Germany.

Carter (07:54):

Cologne. How long did it take, do you remember? Hour-wise?

Nalewaja (07:59):

Hour-wise, I would say it wasn't really a long mission. It took about six hours.

Carter (08:05):

About six.

Nalewaja (08:06):

It takes about an hour for the rendezvous, then coming back, they peeled off-- Let's see, I think it was one a minute, so 38 airplanes would be 38 minutes.

Carter (08:24):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Now, was there much enemy opposition when you went to Cologne that day, as far as fighter planes went?

Nalewaja (08:35):

Fighter planes that day, we didn't see any. When I got there, our fighters had pretty much control of the air.

Carter (08:47):

Oh, okay.

Nalewaja (08:48):

Yeah.

Carter ([08:50](#)):

You went to Cologne on the first one. Do you remember the date, by any chance?

Nalewaja ([08:55](#)):

I had the dates of the missions and everything and I lost that.

Carter ([09:03](#)):

Oh, darn. Oh, okay. So you went there on the first one?

Nalewaja ([09:03](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([09:06](#)):

Now, when you got to England, how many missions were required of a crew?

Nalewaja ([09:11](#)):

35.

Carter ([09:12](#)):

35?

Nalewaja ([09:13](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([09:13](#)):

Okay. So you went to Cologne. What was the deepest you went into Germany as a group, as a bomb group?

Nalewaja ([09:24](#)):

Let's see, I'd say Leipzig and Merseberg, I think.

Carter ([09:28](#)):

You never went to Berlin, then?

Nalewaja (09:30):

Oh, yes.

Carter (09:30):

You went to Berlin? But that wasn't as far? The other places were further?

Nalewaja (09:33):

I don't think Berlin was quite that far. One time we were briefed for a mission way over on the edge of Poland, and they scrubbed it. Finally, they figured out we didn't have enough fuel to get back.

Carter (09:50):

Now, can you recall-- And when looking at your missions going on-- The longest one was into Merseberg, you said?

Nalewaja (09:59):

I would say the one to Merseberg was the longest.

Carter (10:01):

But how many hours would that be?

Nalewaja (10:03):

That would be between eight and nine hours.

Carter (10:06):

Eight, nine hours, by the time you got home. Now, on those long flights like that over into Germany, did you ever run across enemy opposition in the way of fighter planes?

Nalewaja (10:16):

The one to Merseberg, there was plenty of them along the side, but fighters were taking care of them.

Carter (10:28):

Oh, okay.

Nalewaja (10:28):

Our fighters.

Carter (10:30):

For the most part, when you flew the missions and into Germany, you had friendly fighter escort, practically all the way to target and home again?

Nalewaja (10:37):

Yeah. As far as actual firing at fighters, I never done that.

Carter (10:45):

You never did that?

Nalewaja (10:46):

No.

Carter (10:46):

In 35 missions, you never had to shoot your guns in anger once?

Nalewaja (10:50):

No.

Carter (10:51):

Ah.

Nalewaja (10:52):

But the roughest mission I was on was December 24th.

Carter (11:02):

That was 1940--?

Nalewaja (11:03):

1944.

Carter (11:04):

Okay.

Nalewaja (11:06):

That was when The Battle of the Bulge was on.

Carter (11:09):

Okay.

Nalewaja (11:10):

There were two weeks. It was foggy. There was no flying. "The fog was so dense," they said, "Even the birds are walking." Then December 24th it cleared up, and the Air Force decided they were going to send everything they had out. Between the fighters and the bombers, they sent up about 2000 airplanes.

Carter (11:38):

2000?

Nalewaja (11:39):

Yeah.

Carter (11:39):

Judas priest. All right.

Nalewaja (11:43):

And the Germans, they also decided to send up everything they had, so when we were getting to the enemy lines, my job was to help the pilot and copilot put on their flak suits. When I was working on that, all at once in front of us comes down a burning ME 109.

Carter ([12:08](#)):

Right in front of your airplane?

Nalewaja ([12:09](#)):

Yeah. And that thing fell all the way through our group and it didn't collide with anybody, as tight a formation as that was. Anyway, when that happened, I got back into the turret. Then when our fighters, when they get ready for combat, they drop their external wing tanks. If there's any fuel in those wing tanks, then we see a stream, a contrail. Anyway, when I got in the turret, I saw nothing but the contrails, and every place I looked it seemed like you saw a burning airplane going down.

Carter ([12:47](#)):

Did your group lose many on that flight?

Nalewaja ([12:50](#)):

They didn't-- We were just ahead of that. Anyway, they said it was the biggest battle of the world. This describes it better than I could.

Carter ([13:11](#)):

All right, then on December 24th, you were involved in what on the ground was called the Battle of the Bulge?

Nalewaja ([13:17](#)):

Yeah. The people on the ground, they were crying because they weren't getting any air support. Of course, it cleared up that day, so they did get their support, too, but [inaudible 00:13:32] Air Force wasn't doing anything for them because we were strategic.

Carter ([13:38](#)):

What kind of friendly fighters were used as escort for you at that time in 1944?

Nalewaja (13:42):

Their T-51 was the most popular, but there were T-47s and T-38s too. Any of them we were glad to see.

Carter (13:54):

When you went on bombing raids and this sort of thing, as you approached the target and there were certain areas in Germany where there were flak. As a crew member sitting there, what was your thoughts about flak? Fighters you could shoot back at, but flak, what about that?

Nalewaja (14:08):

Yeah. That was one-- I said, it was the most helpless situation there was. All you could do was hope and pray.

Carter (14:18):

Yeah, that's right. Huh?

Nalewaja (14:19):

Anyway, I used to say to myself, "Well, fighters at least you can fight back." When one time we was coming back from the target there was this crippled B-17 struggling, maybe a couple miles from us. All at once I saw a little tiny dot take a dive at it. And boy, all that was was it just one big explosion. That was a fighter, that little dot, and the fighter got away. And after that, I wondered about fighters.

Carter (14:54):

Now, you flew 35 missions. You encountered, in some cases, fighter planes. Did you ever sustain battle damage to your airplane on these raids, through flak or fighter damage?

Nalewaja (15:06):

Flak, it was pretty near every time we come back, there were some.

Carter (15:12):

Some holes?

Nalewaja (15:15):

Yeah. But there was a couple times when we couldn't fly the airplane for a couple days.

Carter (15:21):

Can you recall which missions they were, by any chance?

Nalewaja (15:27):

There was one where all we did was make it back to an airport in France.

Carter (15:34):

Oh.

Nalewaja (15:34):

It was in that bad a shape.

Carter (15:39):

Were engines out?

Nalewaja (15:42):

We lost one engine, and another one we couldn't feather the prop, so actually we were like with one engine.

Carter (15:50):

Do you remember in France where you landed?

Nalewaja (15:53):

[Lyon-Couvat 00:15:53], I guess they call it.

Carter (15:58):

What number mission was this? 25? 37?

Nalewaja (16:00):

This was after Christmas. This was after this terrible mission we were [crosstalk 00:16:05]

Carter (16:06):

Oh, just after the Battle of the Bulge?

Nalewaja (16:06):

It was between Christmas and New Year.

Carter (16:11):

Where was that mission to? What city were you in?

Nalewaja (16:25):

It was somewhere in the Ruhr Valley. I don't know the name-- It wasn't Frankfurt. I think it was Engelstadt was the name of the town. I was trying to see what that means. I thought that must mean chicken town, because engel is chicken and-- Anyway, that was my interpretation of it.

Carter (16:34):

You went to Engelstadt then? I'll be darned. Oh, okay. Now, your responsibilities were then for the top turret and the engines?

Nalewaja (16:50):

Yeah.

Carter (16:50):

Okay. And you never shot your guns in anger?

Nalewaja (16:56):

No.

Carter (16:56):

35 times?

Nalewaja (16:58):

But there was several guns, they had them cocked, ready to go. In fact, when we were straggling one time, there was an airplane coming toward us and the P-51 was pretty much alive. Well, this guy was coming toward us to see if he could help us. I told everybody else on my crew, "Keep your guns cocked and ready," but as he got closer we saw this.

Carter (17:30):

I was told by someone that every once in a while, if a bomber was in trouble and the fighters came to help them, they would roll up kind of sideways so that you could see the star on the wing or the shape of the wing or something, so they wouldn't shoot at them.

Nalewaja (17:40):

Yeah, I know. This guy didn't do that.

Carter (17:42):

He just came along?

Nalewaja (17:43):

Yeah.

Carter (17:45):

How many times were you a straggler?

Nalewaja (17:48):

Let's see. I'd say about four times.

Carter (17:48):

About four times?

Nalewaja (17:51):

Yeah.

Carter (17:51):

What was your feeling when you knew were going out of formation and you knew the results of that?

Nalewaja (17:57):

Well, the first two times, I didn't realize how serious it was. We dropped our bombs and I figured as long as we got rid our bombs the mission was over.

Carter (17:57):

You were ready to go home then, huh?

Nalewaja (18:06):

Yeah. After that, I saw what fighters were. In fact, one time we had-- The flying they were doing was a lot of times in such bad weather, they should have stayed home. Between the contrails and clouds, a lot of times you went through patches where you didn't see the wingtips, and we were flying in formation. Anyway, when we were flying in this kind of stuff, all at once, here's an ME 109 right amongst us, because he was as dumbfounded as we were. Finally, he pulled out of there.

Carter (18:54):

He was flying right in formation with the B-17s? God. I'll be darned.

Nalewaja (19:01):

Pretty soon the group commander, he gets on the radio and he says, "Hey, you gunners, wake up. Nobody fired at that thing." Pretty soon there was a couple of T-51s chasing the fighter. Boy, everybody cut loose, and they hit the T-51.

Carter (19:24):

So instead of shooting down the German, they shot down one of their own, eh?

Nalewaja (19:24):

So then the commander of the fighters calls out. He says, "If you gunners want to shoot the fighters, we'll stay home."

Carter (19:37):

Four times you had to drop out and find your own way home. One time you land in France. Obviously, that was the one you sustained the most damage in.

Nalewaja (19:44):

Yeah.

Carter (19:45):

Was that the most frightening one for you?

Nalewaja (19:49):

It wasn't too much. The most frightening one was December 24th. The thing is, seeing all those fighters.

Carter (20:03):

They sent up everything they had basically, then, to get you?

Nalewaja (20:09):

Let's see. I think it was November 2nd when we were on the-- Yeah, that's in here.

Carter (20:20):

That's tough. What was the most dreaded target again?

Nalewaja (20:20):

Merseberg.

Carter (20:22):

Merseberg was the [crosstalk 00:20:23].

Nalewaja ([20:25](#)):

There was an oil refinery there that--

Carter ([20:27](#)):

Strongly defended?

Nalewaja ([20:29](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([20:29](#)):

What was the name of your airplane? We've got a couple minutes here. Do you know?

Nalewaja ([20:37](#)):

Well, by the time we got done, we were on the third one.

Carter ([20:41](#)):

You had three different airplanes? Well--

Nalewaja ([20:43](#)):

We were the only ones that flew them.

Carter ([20:43](#)):

Oh, okay. Do you remember the name of the first one?

Nalewaja ([20:49](#)):

The first one, the one we left in France, we called it Winged Virgin.

Carter ([20:55](#)):

And the second?

Nalewaja ([20:56](#)):

And the other two didn't have any names.

Carter ([20:58](#)):

Didn't have any names?

Nalewaja ([20:59](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([20:59](#)):

Why was that?

Nalewaja ([21:02](#)):

Well, we just didn't get around to it. They were replaced so fast they didn't have time to name them.

Carter ([21:08](#)):

When you got down after a flight and the airplane was damaged, did you have to work at all with the ground crews to refurbish it? Or did you just turn it over to them?

Nalewaja ([21:18](#)):

Theoretically I was supposed to be in charge of the maintenance manual, but no. They didn't have us do that. We were free, because then we had to go to interrogation, and they didn't want us working throughout the night so that we'd be asleep the next day.

Carter ([21:40](#)):

Before a mission, everyone was briefed as to where they were going. What was the briefing like for the enlisted men, the gunners and, in your case, the flight engineer?

Nalewaja ([21:55](#)):

Well, they had a big map on the wall and they had ribbon to stake out the course. Of course, then they had a curtain over that, so when we got to the briefing room, the briefing was at 3:00 in the morning. We were usually there maybe 2:30 or so. So when we'd be sitting there waiting, we'd

be making jokes. "Oh, we can't be going very far because there's a lot of ribbon left over." But when they'd draw that curtain, you'd hear the guys saying, "No, no. Suicide. We can't go there." And you could figure that's a easy mission. But when they raised that curtain, then you could hear a pin drop and you knew that was--

Carter ([22:50](#)):

That was a serious one? Oh.

Nalewaja ([22:51](#)):

Pretty soon you'd see some guys, they'd be leaving the room. They couldn't hold down their breakfast. You see movies where you see the guys, "Hooray!" Well, there wasn't much of that. It was pretty serious business. There was nobody going there because they wanted to.

Carter ([23:16](#)):

Some people develop little superstitions. Did you have any of little superstitious thing you might do before you'd go on a mission or anything?

Nalewaja ([23:23](#)):

Yeah. I had one cap I was always wearing. It happened to be December 24th, and I had everything ready and I happened to think, "Gee, I've got a different cap on." I figured I could make to the barracks and back in half an hour, so I took off.

Carter ([23:47](#)):

Running? Walking?

Nalewaja ([23:48](#)):

Running.

Carter ([23:49](#)):

Running?

Nalewaja (23:49):

Yeah, I ran. I didn't tell them guys what I ran for.

Carter (23:54):

You get the hat?

Nalewaja (23:56):

Yeah, but it didn't do any good.

Carter (23:58):

You've still got it, huh? I'll be darned. All right. Now, you were at Sudbury the whole time--

Nalewaja (24:07):

Yeah.

Carter (24:08):

--that you were stationed there? What was the relationship of the people there, first of all, around the Air Force base? What was the relationship between the Americans and British at that time, in 1944?

Nalewaja (24:22):

It was good.

Carter (24:23):

It was good?

Nalewaja (24:24):

Yeah. I know this much. There used to be quite a bunch of people who used to come out and watch when we'd be coming back. You'd see them on the road and there was bicycles and stuff.

Carter (24:41):

When you got days off, what did you do?

Nalewaja (24:41):

We did get quite a bit of time off.

Carter (24:47):

Weather influenced that, am I right?

Nalewaja (24:51):

Yeah. Weather influenced it, too, but our schedule was three days we would fly, and then would be stand down, then we'd go to ground school.

Carter (25:04):

All right. Let's talk about ground school. What was the ground school you went to?

Nalewaja (25:07):

Well, it was pretty much repetition of what we had in the States. Sometimes they'd get a guy from the fighter squadron to tell us what their end of it was. One time a guy says, if they wanted to communicate from a fighter to the bomber, he says if they hold up four fingers, that means channel D. That did come in handy, because when we were straggling, that's what the guy done. He held up four fingers, but the pilot didn't know about that, but we told them.

Carter (25:51):

Oh, the gunners knew about it? Some of the ground school was useful. Not all of it was useful, or was it all useful?

Nalewaja (26:02):

I'd say it was. Then you went where they had deals-- Kind of deals where you practice shooting, where there'd be a moving target.

Carter (26:15):

What kind of guns were you shooting at this moving target during ground school?

Nalewaja (26:19):

Well, it was electronic deal.

Carter (26:21):

Oh, electronics?

Nalewaja (26:22):

Yeah.

Carter (26:23):

Oh, see, I didn't know they had video games back then.

Nalewaja (26:28):

It was something like it, but they weren't as good as what they've got today.

Carter (26:32):

But it was electronic-

Nalewaja (26:33):

They had a half a sphere sky, and there was a light there. You'd chase that. If you scored a hit, it would go "bong."

Carter (26:48):

Did you ever get into London on any three-day passes or anything like that?

Nalewaja (26:53):

Oh, yeah. But during the war I didn't see much in London I cared for. In fact, there was more American GIs on the street than there were civilians.

Carter (27:06):

On your days off, if you had a three-day pass, what would you--

Nalewaja (27:10):

I usually went through Cambridge.

Carter (27:11):

Cambridge. Ah.

Nalewaja (27:14):

That was damn nice town. Right size.

Carter (27:23):

After you were assigned to your overseas group, to fly with your airplane, did you get to go home at all? Was there any leave at all for you?

Nalewaja (27:30):

Yeah, we did get about 10 days.

Carter (27:34):

About 10 days? Oh, okay. Did you ever wonder what you were doing there, in the service at that time? Did you ever say to yourself, "What am I doing here?"

Nalewaja (27:43):

Well, when I first got in the service, I figured I didn't even want to go to mechanics' school. I wanted to get overseas. But after going to mechanics' school and then seeing in the papers, air corps losses, 80 planes lost, so many-- In Sioux City we had a couple of those crashes. By then, I was beginning to wonder, what did I volunteer for?

Carter (28:15):

Then, being in a bomber crew, then, was all volunteers? You volunteered to do that, basically?

Nalewaja (28:22):

Yeah. Of course, once you took the training, I don't think-- You'd get in trouble if you refused to-- Because gunnery training, that was pretty expensive training. By today's standards-- Well, at that time shotgun shells were probably a nickel and later they were about 25 cents. But we figured out, between the shotgun shells and the 50 caliber stuff, we figured each guy used up about \$3000 of ammunition.

Carter (28:59):

Oh. Now, you mentioned earlier that you were the oldest fellow on the airplane at 26.

Nalewaja (28:59):

Yeah.

Carter (29:05):

How old was your pilot, do you remember?

Nalewaja (29:10):

I would say-- I don't know if he was 21 or not. That never bothered me. The fact that they had less than 200 hours, that never entered my--

Carter (29:20):

Never bothered you at all, huh?

Nalewaja (29:23):

No.

Carter (29:23):

What was the relationship between the enlisted men and the officers on the airplane? In the air and then on the ground?

Nalewaja (29:35):

I'd say it was good. In fact, there was a little bit of friction between the people in charge of the base, the permanent ones. The crews were pretty much transient. You went there to fly a mission, you'd get out. The officers on the crew, they were in about the same boat as we were. The permanent people were the establishment.

Carter (30:05):

That's where the conflict arose? Not between you and your officers--

Nalewaja (30:05):

No.

Carter (30:08):

--but some of the people who were on that base permanently?

Nalewaja (30:10):

Yeah. They were the ones who'd send us to these tough places, for one thing.

Carter (30:16):

Well, I can see why you wouldn't like them. But then there was, I guess, an informal relationship with the officers, between you and the officers, then?

Nalewaja (30:27):

They had their separate quarters, but we were pretty informal. In fact, when the crew started, I called the copilot, I said "Sir" to him once. And he said, "Don't use that word."

Carter (30:37):

Don't use it, eh?

Nalewaja (30:38):

He didn't want it. I can see why he was only copilot.

Carter ([30:57](#)):

Did you fly as a crew all the time? Was it the same 10 men? Or did you have to rotate at all?

Nalewaja ([31:02](#)):

No, we stayed together the whole time, except when a tail gunner got laid up once. Flak hit his fingers.

Carter ([31:02](#)):

Oh.

Nalewaja ([31:13](#)):

Then he missed about five missions, but then he didn't have to fly the whole 35 after that.

Carter ([31:24](#)):

Because of his wound?

Nalewaja ([31:25](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([31:26](#)):

Ah, okay. All right. Now, let's stop a minute. Of the 10 men on your crew, they all made 35 missions except the tail gunner, and because he was wounded he flew-

Nalewaja ([31:39](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([31:41](#)):

Then you all, as a crew, made your goal of 35 missions?

Nalewaja ([31:46](#)):

Yes.

Carter ([31:47](#)):

How long did it take? You started out in--

Nalewaja ([31:51](#)):

Well, see. There was a lot of bad weather. We started in, I'd say, middle of October. I think we finished toward the end of February.

Carter ([32:01](#)):

That must be October '44?

Nalewaja ([32:03](#)):

October '44 and February of '45.

Carter ([32:12](#)):

All right. All right. Did you at any time bomb any other country besides Germany?

Nalewaja ([32:18](#)):

There was one time we bombed something in Denmark.

Carter ([32:22](#)):

Do you remember the town?

Nalewaja ([32:26](#)):

No, I don't, but I know they were awfully careful about that then.

Carter ([32:36](#)):

Did you ever go on a raid to a place called Peenemünde that you remember?

Nalewaja ([32:40](#)):

Peenemünde, no.

Carter ([32:42](#)):

In Germany? Okay. I was just wondering, maybe you hadn't made that one. All right. Once you finished 35 missions, got that done. [inaudible 00:32:55] What was the feeling on your 35th mission? Where did it go to? How long did it take? When you got done with it, how did you feel?

Nalewaja ([33:01](#)):

Well, that was a pretty darn good feeling. Yeah.

Carter ([33:08](#)):

Where did it go to? What was your mission? Where was it? What city?

Nalewaja ([33:15](#)):

I can't even think of where that one was.

Carter ([33:17](#)):

The last one you can't--

Nalewaja ([33:18](#)):

No.

Carter ([33:19](#)):

I'll be darned. But you came back on the 35th mission. You knew it was over. Did the pilot do anything? Did he get a buzz job or anything special?

Nalewaja ([33:19](#)):

They didn't allow that any more.

Carter ([33:35](#)):

They didn't allow that any more?

Nalewaja (33:36):

When we first got there, they did, and they ended up having some unnecessary accidents, so the base commander said, "None of that."

Carter (33:46):

You just flew back, landed?

Nalewaja (33:47):

Well, the pilot and there was another crew, they were buddies, and they made a bet who was going to be the first to land. Our pilot, he was up to it, and he-- That was the only horseplay.

Carter (34:08):

Did he make it? Were you first to land?

Nalewaja (34:10):

Yeah. Yeah. We beat the other guy. When we finished that, then the base photographer come over and took a picture of us.

Carter (34:20):

Was there a big celebration that night?

Nalewaja (34:23):

Not too much. We were pretty happy to--

Carter (34:28):

Once you finished that 35th mission, then what happened? What became of you?

Nalewaja (34:33):

Well, the other guys went back to the States. I could go back to the States, or I could work on the line as a mechanic, so I chose working as a mechanic because the guys here in the States, then they trained them in B-29s, to go to Japan.

Carter (34:53):

Oh, so there was a reason you decided to stay and be a mechanic in England?

Nalewaja (34:58):

Yeah.

Carter (34:58):

You'd heard what might happen to them, huh? Oh, well how long did you work as a ground crew person there in England?

Nalewaja (35:07):

Till about July. I think we were the last outfit to leave England then. That was after Germany surrendered.

Carter (35:17):

July '45? Okay. And then what happened.

Nalewaja (35:24):

Of course, then Japan surrendered shortly after that.

Carter (35:26):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Where were you when Germany surrendered? What were you doing, do you remember?

Nalewaja (35:38):

Well, we knew pretty sure that it was going to happen the next day because we were listening to the German radio and what we were hearing there, we figured-- The guys started shooting flares when they heard about it, and [inaudible 00:35:56] put a stop to it, basically. They didn't want us to go off the base, either. They said, "Leave the British to their celebrating." They figured there would be too many fights for some.

Carter ([36:12](#)):

One question I almost forgot to ask you. Did you ever see the Messerschmitt 262, the jet-powered airplane? Do you ever recall seeing one of them?

Nalewaja ([36:20](#)):

Yeah. That's another one we saw flying by once, but it just flew by. It didn't--

Carter ([36:28](#)):

Didn't attack you?

Nalewaja ([36:29](#)):

No.

Carter ([36:29](#)):

Ah. When you ended up, that four times of straggling, coming out of formation and straggling, did you come under attack at all by enemy fighters? Or were they driven off or what?

Nalewaja ([36:40](#)):

We were just lucky there wasn't any around. When we were going to Magdeburg, I think they routed us purposely so it would look like we were heading for Berlin, and that time the fighters were all up. We were maybe a half an hour from the target yet and one of our engines quit. And there were fires all around, so the pilot told the bombardiers, "Scared. Drop the bombs." They dropped the bombs and they closed up the bomb bay doors, and then he had enough power to get back into formation.

Carter ([37:22](#)):

Oh, so you went all the way to the target then from home--

Nalewaja ([37:26](#)):

On three engines.

Carter ([37:27](#)):

--with no bombs?

Nalewaja ([37:28](#)):

Yeah. No. If we wouldn't have stayed in formation that time, I don't know. Because we could see our fighters were out there chasing the Messerschmitts.

Carter ([37:42](#)):

Now, once Germany surrendered in July, when did you leave England to come home?

Nalewaja ([37:49](#)):

Germany surrendered, I think, in May.

Carter ([37:52](#)):

May, okay.

Nalewaja ([37:54](#)):

And we didn't get to go home until after the Fourth of July. I know we put on a big celebration the Fourth of July. They had a bunch of ammunition to use up or something. They were shooting up mortars all night.

Carter ([38:06](#)):

On the Air Force base?

Nalewaja ([38:10](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([38:11](#)):

Did they do any damage with it? Or just--

Nalewaja ([38:13](#)):

No. I don't know. It was flares, the guys were shooting up.

Carter (38:20):

How did you come home from England? Did you fly? By boat?

Nalewaja (38:22):

No, we flew them back home.

Carter (38:24):

You brought your plane home?

Nalewaja (38:25):

Well, I wasn't assigned to a crew any more, so I got put on-- Gee, I think we must have had 18 people in our 17 we flew back.

Carter (38:40):

When you came back you had 18 people in a B-17, designed to carry 10? Where did you stop on the way home, then?

Nalewaja (38:47):

We stopped at Iceland. They skipped Greenland. Then we went to Goose Bay, Labrador.

Carter (38:56):

And then you came back? Whereabouts in the United States did you-- What part of the United States did you see first? What state?

Nalewaja (39:04):

I imagine it was Maine--

Carter (39:05):

Maine?

Nalewaja (39:06):

--from there.

Carter ([39:06](#)):

Okay. And where was your first landing?

Nalewaja ([39:15](#)):

I think it was Camp Miles Standish. I don't know if they had an air base there or not. But anyway, that's where we come in to get, I don't know, free something.

Carter ([39:28](#)):

And you were released from the service when then?

Nalewaja ([39:32](#)):

See, I got released, I think in November. See, that was after Japan surrendered.

Carter ([39:37](#)):

Yeah, Japan surrendered. Were you under any training at all to possibly go to the South Pacific as a mechanic, once you came back?

Nalewaja ([39:48](#)):

No. When I come back, they said if you had so many points-- This was in August-- You could get a discharge. I counted up, I had enough points, so I went through all the process. Then it was time to get out, they said, "Your reserve time don't count," so I was short a couple points.

Carter ([40:10](#)):

Oh.

Nalewaja ([40:13](#)):

Then they sent me to Santa Ana, California. I spent there till November doing nothing.

Carter ([40:24](#)):

Doing nothing? Well, sometimes that happens in the military.

Nalewaja ([40:27](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([40:29](#)):

What did you plan to do after the war was over? While you were in the service, did you make some plans? "I'm going to do this and this and this when I get out."

Nalewaja ([40:37](#)):

No, I figured barnstorming was done for, so I decided I was going into the machine shop business. That's what I went after.

Carter ([40:49](#)):

And you've been running your own machine shop business since World War II?

Nalewaja ([40:53](#)):

Pretty much so.

Carter ([40:54](#)):

Great. Super.

Nalewaja ([41:00](#)):

But here they were awfully particular about information. I cut out all the timings and altitudes. I figured if they catch me with that, they can't say I'm [crosstalk 00:41:16]. This was a mission to Leipzig.

Carter ([41:21](#)):

This is a little map, then, on a mission to Leipzig.

Nalewaja ([41:21](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([41:24](#)):

And you've cut out-- What are all these little squares cut out of here?

Nalewaja ([41:26](#)):

That's where it was time and altitude.

Carter ([41:29](#)):

Oh, so where this little square is, at a certain time, you're supposed to be at a certain altitude?

Nalewaja ([41:33](#)):

Yeah. Anyway, these areas are where you got flak, see?

Carter ([41:39](#)):

They look like, on today's weather maps, where there would be clouds. Those are all flak areas, huh?

Nalewaja ([41:45](#)):

See, we had to go through flak there and there. See, that shows you, the navigator had a pretty tough job. They had to guide you between the flak corridors. This was Leipzig here.

Carter ([42:01](#)):

Yes. That's where you were headed that day? Leipzig. Oh.

Nalewaja ([42:02](#)):

And these areas, they could do evasive action. From here to there, they had to fly a straight beeline and they'd shoot at you.

Carter ([42:16](#)):

Was it pretty accurate?

Nalewaja ([42:19](#)):

Well, most of my bombing was through the clouds.

Carter ([42:24](#)):

Did you get radar bombing then?

Nalewaja ([42:26](#)):

Yeah, most of it was.

Carter ([42:26](#)):

Ah.

Nalewaja ([42:30](#)):

They used to throw out chaff to confuse the radar down below, but as the war went on, there were so many shot-down B-17s in Germany that they reassembled them and then they'd send them up and they'd fly as stragglers, and they'd radio down to the anti-aircraft crews, whether they were shooting too high or too low.

Carter ([43:02](#)):

Say that again. The Germans did what now?

Nalewaja ([43:04](#)):

They took some of these crashed B-17s and restart them.

Carter ([43:09](#)):

And then they did--

Nalewaja ([43:11](#)):

Then they'd fly and they'd give information to the ground crew how the mission is progressing.

Carter ([43:19](#)):

They would act as stragglers and--

Nalewaja ([43:21](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([43:22](#)):

--radio down. Oh.

Nalewaja ([43:24](#)):

They'd tell the ground crews, if their flak was too low or so, they'd tell them to shoot higher.

Carter ([43:32](#)):

Oh, I'd never heard of this.

Nalewaja ([43:33](#)):

You saw a straggler, you didn't know for sure whether it was ours or one of theirs.

Carter ([43:41](#)):

Oh, my god. I never heard that before. This was given to you? How did you come about this thing? This piece of little map I have here?

Nalewaja ([43:51](#)):

They gave these to the navigator.

Carter ([43:53](#)):

The navigator? Oh.

Nalewaja ([43:58](#)):

I happened to keep this one. I was coming home. I thought, "I'll take a chance on taking it. If I cut all that out, then maybe they won't put me in jail for--

Carter ([44:07](#)):

For stealing military secrets, huh? Oh, that's fascinating. I'll be darned.

Nalewaja ([44:09](#)):

Another thing that was going on, a normal N-17 was hard to shoot down for a normally equipped Messerschmitt. Then the German Air Force come out with Storm Fighters, they called them.

Carter ([44:39](#)):

What were they?

Nalewaja ([44:40](#)):

They were FW 190s with enough armor plates that they figured they could fly right through the bullets and stuff that-- But they were so heavy and clumsy that they had to have an escort, to use an escort. This one particular case where they had 20 of these making attack, they had an escort of about 100 ME 109s.

Carter ([45:08](#)):

Fighters protecting fighters, then?

Nalewaja ([45:10](#)):

Yeah. Anyway, these guys, they were volunteers, and they were told what they'd have to do. They weren't allowed to turn back. They wouldn't shoot their guns until they got closer than 1000 feet, and if everything failed, the last thing they could do was ram a B-17. They were that desperate. Anyway, they tried that on a 440-- One of them bomb groups. Anyway, there was 25 bombers in that group and they got all but two in one pass.

Carter ([45:56](#)):

Jeez. They got 23 in one pass?

Nalewaja ([45:59](#)):

Yeah. But they shot 23 in one pass and 10 of them got shot down, though, in spite of that. Anyway, this was a German guy I was reading, wrote a story about that. In an area of a couple miles, there was over 40 airplanes fell down, and the German people, they said, all those fires there, they thought that must be Hitler's secret weapon that they used.

Carter (46:33):

One of his V-2 weapons or something, eh?

Nalewaja (46:35):

Yeah. But--

Carter (46:38):

When you went in the service, you were a little bit older than everybody else. You'd been in Reserves. Did you have any feelings at all, one way or another, about people who were of draft age but didn't go in the military?

Nalewaja (46:50):

No, if it was me, I figured it was a privilege.

Carter (46:54):

A privilege to go in the service?

Nalewaja (46:58):

Well, I was brought up during the Depression. When I got out of high school, I tried to get in the Navy, but their requirements were so high, they'd turn you down if you couldn't pee straight.

Carter (47:14):

That would eliminate a whole bunch of us.

Nalewaja (47:17):

They turned me down because my measurement across my chest was not high enough. I was too slender.

Carter (47:24):

Oh, I'll be darned.

Nalewaja (47:27):

No, they turned guys down for being flat--

Carter (47:34):

--affect you as a person?

Nalewaja (47:38):

I don't know. I think it helped a person a lot. It helped you face things more, but there were times a person would have liked to have got out of it if he could.

Carter (47:53):

Oh, that thought did cross your mind on occasion, maybe?

Nalewaja (47:55):

Yeah, but the way your Articles of War are, you had no choice.

Carter (48:01):

Yeah. What do you remember most about coming home?

Nalewaja (48:08):

You mean from overseas?

Carter (48:11):

Overseas, and then after you were done with the military.

Nalewaja (48:16):

Well, I had big dreams about starting a machine shop, but that didn't get as big as I thought. It wasn't as easy.

Carter (48:29):

Oh.

Nalewaja (48:29):

Yeah.

Carter (48:29):

Did you think the country had changed much since had gone off to England and came back, that the country had changed very much?

Nalewaja (48:36):

Well, my lifestyle changed a lot because I practically grew up in the barnstorming world. Then I had to get used to keeping my nose to the grindstone, which was quite a change.

Carter (48:53):

We're going to start today and do some background, before you went in the war, and then some other day we'll come back and we'll talk an hour or two just on what you did before the war. Are you originally from central Minnesota? Is this your hometown?

Nalewaja (48:53):

Yeah.

Carter (49:06):

Okay. What's your hometown here?

Nalewaja (49:08):

Browerville.

Carter (49:10):

Browerville? And what year did you graduate from high school in?

Nalewaja (49:13):

In '36.

Carter ([49:14](#)):

1936. And tell me what you did after high school. What did you get into?

Nalewaja ([49:17](#)):

Well, I went to work for my brother, who was in the air show business.

Carter ([49:24](#)):

Oh, your brother's in the air show business? Okay. That's how you got started?

Nalewaja ([49:26](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([49:28](#)):

Okay. What did your folks think about two boys going off to be in the air show business?

Nalewaja ([49:33](#)):

Well, I don't know. At that time, times were so tough, and 10 kids in the family--

Carter ([49:45](#)):

Maybe they weren't disappointed to see you go, huh? Is that what you're trying to tell me?

Nalewaja ([49:45](#)):

Yeah, maybe that had something to do with it.

Carter ([49:54](#)):

Where did you join up with your brother? He invited you to go-- Where did you first start this barnstorming business?

Nalewaja ([50:06](#)):

Well, I went way up to Minot, North Dakota. He was working out of Williston. I went to work for him, and it was the understanding, I said that if he got crippled then I'd have to do parachute jumping.

Carter ([50:38](#)):

If he got crippled?

Nalewaja ([50:46](#)):

Yeah.

Carter ([50:47](#)):

You got to do--

Nalewaja ([50:55](#)):

Well, if he sprained an ankle.

Carter ([50:55](#)):

Oh, I was thinking breaking a leg or something, permanently crippled, then you got to do the job.

Were you ever lucky enough to get that job, parachuting?

Nalewaja ([50:55](#)):

Yeah, I did.

Carter ([50:55](#)):

You did some parachuting?

Nalewaja ([50:55](#)):

I made about 15.

Carter ([50:55](#)):

How old were you when you started parachuting?

Nalewaja ([50:59](#)):

Oh, let's see. I was with him two years before then, so--

Carter ([50:59](#)):

About 20?

Nalewaja (50:59):

Yeah, I'd say I was about that.

Carter (50:59):

Do you remember that parachuting, first parachute jump [crosstalk 00:51:00]?

Nalewaja (50:59):

Oh, yeah. He sprained an ankle and I said, "I'll do it, even if it kills me."

Carter (51:05):

Oh, good. Do you remember what kind of airplane you jumped out of?

Nalewaja (51:08):

It was a '33 Stinson.

Carter (51:09):

'33 Stinson? Was this a free-fall parachute jump?

Nalewaja (51:13):

Yeah, free fall.

Carter (51:14):

You had to pull your own ripcord?

Nalewaja (51:16):

Yeah. Well, that's the only kind they had [crosstalk 00:51:19].

Carter (51:18):

Oh, okay. Now my age is showing. I didn't realize-- So you jumped out, what happened? Do you remember?

Nalewaja (51:28):

Well, the only thing I noticed, everything was so quiet. You jump out of a noisy airplane and--

Carter ([51:34](#)):

It was quiet. Did they tell you anything before you did it, how to go about it or anything like that?

Nalewaja ([51:40](#)):

Well, I was watching him jump for two years, and so there was nothing about that-- But I was brought up in Browerville. When I was going in grade school, you'd see an airplane maybe once a year or so. Airplanes were so scarce, I know one time there was an airplane circling town, and the teacher says, "All right, you kids can go outside and watch that."

Carter ([52:14](#)):

You were in grade school then?

Nalewaja ([52:15](#)):

Yeah. That shows you how things have changed.

Carter ([52:24](#)):

I'll be darned. Is it a traveling circus? Can we call it that? This flying circus? Did it have a base? And where did it operate to and from?

Nalewaja ([52:34](#)):

We started out out of Williston, North Dakota. We were on a five-day schedule. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Each day would be a town. Then Monday and Tuesday we'd go out and advertiser for another string of towns. We kept that up, usually started in May till it'd freeze up, it'd get too cold.

Carter ([53:07](#)):

What did you in the wintertime, when you weren't barnstorming?

Nalewaja (53:11):

Well, I was usually out of a job. My brothers, they were paid to hunt coyotes with an airplane.

Carter (53:17):

For bounties, huh?

Nalewaja (53:18):

Yeah. But then, in the winter of 1938, we joined up with that guy who had that Trimotor, and we'd barnstorm New Mexico, Arizona and a little bit into California and Texas.

Carter (53:37):

You got to see a lot of the country for a person during that period in history. There wasn't a lot of--

Nalewaja (53:37):

Yeah. That was--

Carter (53:46):

Yeah. You've had some great adventures.

Nalewaja (53:48):

Yeah. It was. It was interesting.

Carter (53:49):

Would you do anything over, related to flying and that?

Nalewaja (53:56):

Well, I'd do it 10 times better than I did.

Carter (54:00):

Oh, you'd just do it better? All right. Great. Super.