



Fort Smith Historical Society Oral History Center World War II Project Interview with Albert Rogers

EO: This is an interview with Mr. Albert Rogers on November the 14th, 2005, at his home at (DELETED CONTENT).

AR: Right.

EO: Arkansas. And it's Elizabeth Orendorff and Carole Barger that's here with him. Mr. Rogers, your birthday is (DELETED CONTENT)?

AR: Right.

EO: And where were you born?

AR: Here, Van Buren.

EO: Okay. And that's in Crawford County?

AR: Crawford County.

EO: What was your mother's --

AR: Mary Ina Rogers, that was her name.

EO: Her maiden name was what?

AR: Pardon?

EO: What was her maiden name? Watson?

AR: Yeah, Mary Watson Rogers.

EO: Okay. And your father's name?

AR: Jessie Lee Rogers.

EO: Jessie Lee Rogers. Let's see, and you were stationed in Alaska first?

AR: That's the first, yes. Upon completion of eleven months of learning how to be a infantry soldier at Camp Robinson, we left there and went to Fort Ord. And we was out there about two weeks and we were assigned to go to Alaska to fight the Japanese because they --

EO: When they bombed --

AR: Yeah, when they bombed Pearl Harbor.

EO: December the 7th?

AR: Okay. They shipped us up to Alaska to fight eight thousand Japanese troops that had been scattered from Alaska, proper, down to the Aleutian Island chain, and that was our job, to get rid of 'em.

EO: Let me ask you, you were drafted in the first draft you said?

AR: Yes.

EO: What date was that?

AR: My draft? Oh, I was up in St. Louis, Missouri.

EO: Okay.

AR: That's where I was living. I was working up there in St. Louis for the St. Louis Postal Department.

EO: Okay.

AR: I worked downtown in the postal building, sorting mail, and my alternate job was delivering mail.

EO: Okay. And do you remember what year that was?

AR: It was -- MRS. ROGERS: It would have been 1940, Albert, January.

AR: Yeah. I was up there 1940, that's right. And then got Pearl Harbor on the deal and I had to leave from -- or I was drafted there in St. Louis, Missouri, and they shipped me out to Camp Robinson.

EO: And you were drafted in the Army?

AR: Yes.

EO: Were you married then?

AR: No, no.

EO: Okay. You were single? And how old were you?

AR: Twenty-two.

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EO: Twenty-two. How did it feel to -- Well, we weren't at war at that time. We were preparing for war, right?

AR: Yeah, in 1940, right.

EO: How did you feel knowing you would eventually go to war?

AR: Well, we talked about it. Well, it just -- just happened, see. We were just waiting. And one day, they bombed Pearl Harbor. Well, then they immediately notified us and gather your bags and everything and take off and go to California.

EO: Okay. So you were drafted and you went to Fort --

AR: Fort Ord.

EO: In California?

AR: For assignment.

EO: Okay. You trained at Camp Robinson?

AR: Right, I had completed eleven months of training at Camp Robinson.

EO: Okay.

AR: The war was declared, they shipped us out to Fort Ord to be assigned an outfit which we were in 134th.

EO: 134th Infantry?

AR: 138th, excuse me. And then they shipped us up to Alaska.

EO: Your training in the infantry, was it as a foot soldier?

AR: Yes, yes, that was it.

EO: Okay. So you would be in the trenches, so to speak?

AR: Right.

EO: And then from Fort Ord, you went to Alaska?

AR: Right.

EO: Okay. And that was because there were Japanese in Alaska?

AR: That's right. Eight thousand Japanese troops had landed on the island chain of Alaska, the Aleutian chain, same thing.

CB: Was this after Pearl Harbor, when the troops had landed?

AR: Right. That's what brought it all about, was the bombing of Pearl Harbor, that's what started the war, December.

EO: December 7th, 1941?

AR: 1941, yeah.

EO: What did you do while you were in Alaska?

AR: Fighting the Japanese. Well, that was the main concern right then was to get rid of the Japanese that had landed on the Aleutian Island chain. What they were going to do was to take over the Aleutian Island chain first, adjoining Alaska, take over Alaska and then go right down through Canada and enter the United States from Canada, fighting the war, but that didn't come about. But that was, that's what was supposed to have happened.

EO: I didn't know that. Did you, Carole?

CB: No.

AR: Lot of people didn't know that we had a war going on in Alaska. Lot of people didn't know that. I didn't know it, either, 'til I -- I couldn't believe my eyes. What made me become a infantry soldier at Fort Ord, they brought in three thousand Negro soldiers. Now, whether they just got 'em from all over the States and everything, like they did us, and they shipped 'em out to Fort Ord. Okay. And it was a toss-up when they started assigning these outfits where they were to go. Well, the colored people and it was a God-send actually, ³ I mean you get to thinking about it. They shipped two thousand of 'em to the Pacific, South Pacific, to get rid of the Japanese that had landed all over and was trying to get in and take over Hawaii, but they didn't get that far. Okay. Let me see now. Oh, they shipped out a thousand Negro troops, infantry troops, and the Engineers, to Alaska, to build highways, roads and gun emplacements, everything, and box up, or build up the airfields. And that was their job, and they did a real fine job of that.

EO: Were they SeaBees?

AR: In a way they were. They did everything. That was their job. The bad thing that happened to, like the infantry, whoever, anybody that was sent to Alaska, ended up with leather boots. Well, it was January, February, cold, bitter cold up there, twenty and thirty below zero, you couldn't build a fire on top of the snow and ice, there wasn't any wood available where we were. So we just grin and bear it, I suppose. But that happened anyway. They shipped us up there and I never did hear much about the colored people anymore. They either got froze out or their job was completed and they shipped 'em out because they were there when I left, I'll say that. When we left Alaska, we went on a troop ship.

EO: How long were you in Alaska?

AR: Well, I left there in '42, '42. Okay. For me, I was in the infantry.

CB: Were you involved in combat with Japanese in Alaska?

AR: Yes, we got rid of the Japanese. I had gone from a Private 1st Class to a Corporal to a Sergeant to a Staff Sergeant, to a Staff Sergeant. That was the rank I held when I left Alaska.

EO: And that was in a year's time?

AR: Yeah. Well, we were losing, we lost a few, snipers, snipers, Japanese snipers.

CB: I have never heard about fighting in Alaska with the infantry fighting Japanese.

EO: But it makes sense to land in Alaska and come down through Canada, doesn't it?

AR: That was a mistake the Japanese made. I got to thinking about it. Now, the Japanese officers or all the officers that was needed to help find out where we were gonna go. Now, I'm speaking where is the Japanese, where are we gonna go next. We're sending our troops from Japan to Alaska, and we're gonna enter the States coming down through Canada and enter and fight the war in the United States, like Montana and in Utah and up in that area and come right on down through. But they didn't do that. They made the mistake by landing all those troops in the Aleutian Island chain in January, twenty and thirty below zero. No fires. They were treated then just like we were treated, far as building a fire and thawing out your boots. I carried a pair of stockings rolled up, put 'em in my armpits, keep 'em dry. And whenever I got my boots kind of thawed out, then I'd take my stockings out of my armpits and I'd have dry stockings. That was just one of my tricks.

CB: Well, you have a picture of you on skis. What was that all about?

AR: That was to fight the Japanese.

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EO: You went on skis to fight?

AR: We didn't. We were available, we were there and they didn't -- I doubt if the Japanese even thought about bringing skis with 'em, I don't know. I never did ask that question or find out the answer, but we had 'em.

CB: Well, were you --

AR: I was Staff Sergeant down by Dutch Harbor.

CB: Dutch Harbor?

AR: But we started at Dutch Harbor. Okay. Let's see now, oh, getting back to the coloreds. When they were assigning the soldiers to the different outfits, if they had elected to, instead of taking our infantry boys from Camp Robinson and shipped us out in the Pacific, by doing so, by shipping the colored people out, they just saved our lives, in other words, really. Even though we lost less by going to Alaska as we would have going out to the Pacific 'cause it would've got in ones from the Pacific, they all got killed.

EO: So all of those blacks were killed?

AR: Yeah, but by us -- Even though we lost some ourselves, we didn't lose 'em like we did by sending the troops out in the Pacific.

CB: Where did you go after you left Dutch Harbor, Alaska?

AR: All right. Okay. I was in the infantry and we got rid of all the Japanese. As we were awaiting assignment --

EO: Now, you said you got rid of 'em. Did you kill 'em or did you capture?

AR: We didn't send 'em back home 'cause if we -- that's the only thing. I hate to say this, but I don't hate to say it. Okay. At the ending of our war with Japan in the Aleutian Island chain, we got rid of all the Japanese. We ended up with a hundred and thirty-eight prisoners. And we couldn't take 'em and put 'em on a boat and ship 'em back to Japan, war's going on. If we would have done that, after having unloaded 'em in Japan, then they would have kept us over there and we would have been prisoner of war, see. So what they did, I asked this Major, I said, "Major," I said, "What are we gonna do with these hundred and thirty-eight prisoners? War's over now and we can't take 'em back to Japan 'cause if we do, well, then whoever takes 'em over there will be captured." So he says, "Sergeant", says "don't worry about it, I'll take care of 'em." We did not have a concentration camp in Alaska, we didn't have the facilities to take care of 'em. So the question mark in my mind has been often, Major, what are we gonna do with these hundred and thirty-eight prisoners. "Sergeant, I'll take care of 'em." That was what he said, and that's it. Now, what he did with 'em, I don't know what. I assume that I know he didn't take 'em back to Japan. And when all the other guys left later on, left Alaska, there was no Japanese up there. So I have an idea he had 'em shot, which is war is war, that's all, kill or be killed. That's one of those things. So okay.

EO: And so when did you leave Alaska then after you got rid of all the Japs?

AR: Yeah, in '42, first part of '42.

EO: And you went where?

AR: I went down to Los Angeles, back to where I started from at Fort 5 Ord. And then I went from there out to, and a lot of people don't know about it, in Riverside, California, they had a concentration camp.

CB: I didn't know that.

EO: I didn't know that.

AR: Of screw-ups, it was composed of murderers, rapists, robbers, you name it, we had 'em, five hundred of 'em. These were Army, Navy, Marine, all the different outfits. They was shipped there, bad boys, out there to Riverside, California.

CB: This was American?

AR: Yes.

CB: Soldiers?

AR: Yeah, yeah. Infantry guys, Marines, Air Force, Infantry, you name it, that's it. Okay. Am I talking too loud?

CB: No, no, that's good.

AR: Okay.

CB: Did the Navy have 'em there, too?

AR: Yeah, there were Navy out there. We had five hundred personnel that we were guarding, this is part of it. So anyway, while we were guarding, our job was guarding, we lived in barracks there alongside. Well, we were guarding, like I said, we were guarding five hundred prisoners. It was across the road from March Air Force Base, and I was at this place where it was.

CB: What's the Air Force Base? What was the name of the Air Force--

AR: It was March Field, March, M-a-r-c-h, weather, weather march, March.

EO: Okay.

AR: March Field, that was the location. While we were there, there was -- course guys, they get all, to get a little time off, I mean you could go to town, you get three or four hours, go to town to break the monotony all the time. The Captain that was helping guard these prisoners had a girlfriend in Riverside, California, and on his time off, he would go in and see her. She also had a boyfriend, a civilian boyfriend, he went with her or she went with him. One night, it was on Friday night. Now, when a guy like me going out on a date with you, why would I want to carry my .45 pistol with me. That's the question. He run in on Friday night. This is hearsay from her, or from the guy, her boyfriend. Captain Smith, Captain Smith, he went in to see her. Well, he opened the door and this civilian boyfriend was there. And this is hearsay, this is said. Said, "What are you doing here?" the Captain said to the civilian. Said, "Well, I'm going out with her, she's my girlfriend." And the Captain, "No, she's not your girlfriend, she's my girlfriend." And he says, "You get out of here." Well, he started out, he reached in behind him, pulled out his .45 and boom, blew her head off.

EO: Hers?

AR: Yeah.

EO: While the civilian was going out the door?

AR: Yeah, yeah. He went out the door and he was standing outside. He's outside, okay. Meantime, the civilian police come out there and they brought him back out at the Base. At the same time that we was bringing him back, our own people went in to get him and bring him back because he was Government property, wasn't civilian property. The police at Riverside, California, was trying to take him away. That's what it was. They was trying to take him away from the Army and said we will prosecute him, and just turn him over to us. And they said no, says he's Army, says we'll prosecute him, he's the one that did the murdering or the shooting of this girlfriend

and that's what happened, so we took him. Well, they brought him out to the Base there and then took him over. We got him and took him over to the barracks and was guarding him. And anyway, to expedite everything, they had his trial in the next two days, they had his trial. This full Colonel and a Major and a Captain, they had a hearing, trial. And it was real fast, I tell you. I still think about it. They had his trial and they said -- I remember the Colonel says you have been charged with murdering this girl and the court-martial finds that being that you've been charged with murdering this girl, the sentence is you hang by the neck until dead. That was it. So that's the first time I ever attended a hanging.

EO: You went to the hanging?

AR: I was one of the guards that went and got him out of the barracks and brought him over to the scaffold and took him up the scaffold and they hung him. That was it. Like I said, I didn't want to mess you all up by telling you that, but that's the way it happened. One of the main things, it happened, true. Well, within a week, within a week, we got orders to close down the camp. And they got a -- Well, let's see. So they closed down the camp and they brought in about ten or twelve 6 x 6 big Army trucks and we loaded 'em all up in these trucks.

CB: The prisoners?

AR: In the truck, the prisoners. And we took 'em up to Oakland, by San Francisco, and put 'em on a troop ship up there. As they were putting them on the troop ship in Oakland, they were asked what do you guys want to do? You want to serve out your sentence that's been imposed on you, different times, ten years, five years, different amounts, and it was different crimes. You want to serve out your sentence, and if you live to tell about it when this war is over, you're home free. Or if you don't want to go fight the wars now, take your chance on living through it, then when the war is over, then you can go home free. So they had two lines there and the guys that wanted to go out in the South Pacific and fight, they got over here; and the other guys that was gonna take their chance, they got in this other line. So it was either do or don't, one of the two. You either want to serve out your sentence or you want to go over here and fight, and then hope you don't get killed while all the fighting's going on. Okay. Well, that's it. When we put them in it, we walked 'em aboard ship and that's the last I ever heard of it and that was all. Okay. Then I went back to Fort Ord and got reassigned again, and I got orders to go to Fort Lewis, Washington, Fort Lewis, Washington. It was a horse drawn artillery outfit up there. Imagine now, pulling big cannons around with mules, and we lived up there in tents, and we helped 'em a little bit, when we could, I mean helped.

7 But the mules pulled the horse drawn cavalry cannons around. Okay. And then that's where we got orders from to go to Alaska, is we were at Fort Ord, I mean we had been at Fort Ord and we ended up at Fort Lewis, Washington, and reassigned from Fort Lewis, Washington, to Alaska. Okay. That's how we got to Alaska where there was a war going on when we got there. Okay so far? Okay.

CB: Tell me something. I need to get this straight. After you left Camp Robinson, you went to Fort Ord?

AR: Yes, for assignment.

CB: And then you went to Riverside?

AR: Yes.

EO: And from Riverside, you went to Alaska?

AR: Yeah.

EO: And from Alaska --

AR: Wait a minute now. Riverside? Okay. Yeah, right, okay.

CB: Riverside, then you went to Washington?

AR: Yeah, yeah. I went back to Fort Ord and then picked up orders there to go to Seattle up there at Fort Ord, I mean Fort Lewis, Washington, that's where we left. Yeah.

CB: Okay. And from there, you went to Alaska?

AR: Right.

CB: Okay.

AR: Yeah. We left Riverside, they closed the camp down because there was a stink that was raised actually. Have a hanging here in the City, City Limits. Right on and we had five hundred murderers and everything, you name it, we had 'em, we guarded 'em. Yeah, I remember that. And then we went, like I said, when they closed Camp Hahn down, then we went to Fort Ord and we picked our orders up and went to the horse drawn cavalry outfit up there, and they didn't need us. They were a cavalry outfit and we were infantry. So they needed infantry guys. Said okay, guys, here you go. Put us on a troop ship and shipped us out to Alaska, away we went.

CB: And then after Alaska, where'd you go?

AR: After Alaska, I went to -- Oh, okay. After Alaska at Dutch Harbor -- I attended Van Buren High School, I quit in the 11th grade 'cause I got tired of going to school, and I wanted to get me a job and have my own spending money. Just a moment now. Okay. I wanted to get my own spending money. I did not get a diploma from Van Buren High School. Okay. I quit in the 11th grade. So upon our getting rid of all the Japs in Alaska, there was a Senior Master Sergeant come out and came over to where all our guys were. Says, okay, "All you 5th enlisted people, I've got some examinations that we're gonna give out to the ones that's physically qualified in the infantry. We don't want a bunch of cripples, we want good healthy, good gun material, bullet material." Okay. "You guys that want to take the test, this pilot's test 'cause we're running out of pilots over in England. They're shooting our B-17s down faster than we can build 'em." So everytime that we'd lose a B-17, we'd lose ten guys with it. Ten guys would lose their life, just shot down mainly, most of 'em were shot down. Okay. He says, "We have this test, a full college degree test for you infantry guys. If you pass it, then we're gonna send you to pilot school. We need pilots." Okay. And 8
then we drop on down to two years college equivalency test, you take that one. Or they had another one, oh, yeah, that was it, there was two of 'em. It was a full college degree test and a two year test. Well, I told the Sergeant, the Senior Master Sergeant who was giving the test at Anchorage, I told him, I said, "Sergeant," I said, "I went to Van Buren High School and I quit in the 11th grade. I can't show you a high school diploma so I won't be able to take the test you said, that, you know, two

years college equivalency test." He said, "Well," he said, you know, said, "I just happen to have an extra examination for not a full test, full degree test, a two year college equivalency test. Got one left and nobody's taking it, so tell you what, Sergeant, it won't cost you nothing." Said, "Here, you take this test and get over there in that other room there. And if you pass it, well then, you're okay, you're on your way. If you flunk, no harm, no skin off my nose." Okay. I says, "well, that's just fine, I'll try it," I said, "but I only got 11th grade education." So I went, it was around, I think it was around one o'clock, around one in the afternoon. So he said, "Go in that room there and take the test." So I went in there and I worked on it. And it was around four-thirty, five o'clock in the afternoon, he come and knocked on the door, said, "Come on out of there", said, "Time's up." And says, "Here, give me your papers." So I went over there and sat down, and he went back in the room and graded my paper, or papers. And so pretty soon, well, couple of hours or so, two, three hours, he come back in there and he says, "Sergeant, give me your paper, time's up." And so I gave him the paper and he went in there and took it in there to grade it. And pretty soon, he knocked on the door. Well, in fact, he opened the door, stuck his head around the corner there, says, "Sergeant." I said, "Yes, sir." He just grinned like a possum. You heard of possum grinning, he was just grinning like a possum. He says, "Sergeant," he says, "I want to congratulate you." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah," says, "I want to congratulate you. You passed, you got a hundred thirty-eight questions right out of a hundred fifty."

CB: Oh my goodness.

AR: With Van Buren's tutoring, I passed it. So I can't show you that degree, but I passed a two year college equivalency test. And he said, "I want to congratulate you, you're on your way." Says, "In two weeks, I'll have the orders cut, you go down to Anchorage, get on the troop ship and go back to the States and go to school, pilot school." And so I got to go to pilot school from Alaska. Just happened through the expertise of these wonderful teachers we had at Van Buren.

EO: Now, were you afraid because now he'd already told you they were killing these pilots faster than they could replace 'em.

AR: Well, it's better than wallering around out there and crawling around on your hands and knees in the snow and ice.

EO: I guess.

AR: Well, yeah. We came back to the States.

CB: Where did you take your pilot's training?

AR: Oh, in Mojave Desert, in Lancaster, in Mojave Desert and Phoenix, Arizona. I graduated from Phoenix, Arizona, Chandler. Chandler was the air base at Phoenix. I graduated there in February the 8th in '44. February 8 in 1944, I graduated as 2d Lieutenant.

EO: At Chambers?

AR: Wait a minute.

CB: Chandler.

EO: Chandler.

AR: Chandler, Chandler.

CB: And you were a 2d Lieutenant?

AR: Yeah, I graduated 2d Lieutenant. And then upon graduation, they said they needed instructors first, so they made an instructor out of me. They sent me to Taft, California, to become and teach instructors, and cadets.

EO: What's the name of the place in California?

CB: Are you saying tab?

AR: Taft, Taft, California, T-a-f-t. And so I instructed cadets there for three classes. For three classes, I instructed cadets. And then all of a sudden, I got my orders to -- they said we've got enough, we've got enough pilots going to school. We want you -- we're cutting orders now. We want you to pick up two other officers and pilots, and go to Willow Run or Detroit, Michigan, pick up a brand new -- that was assembly line that they had at Detroit, built B-24s. So they said we want you to go up there and pick up one off the assembly line and take it and fly it down to Nashville, Tennessee, and outfit it with bomb racks and put machine guns on it, which took a couple of days, two or three days for that. Okay. All right. So we picked up the B-24 bomber right off the assembly line, brand new, ferried it down to Nashville, Tennessee, or flew it down to Nashville, Tennessee, two or three days putting armament on it, machine guns and the bomb bay rack, fix those. And then we got orders to go to Dakar, over in the desert, it's Africa.

CB: Oh, what's the name of it?

AR: Dakar, D-a-k-a-r, Dakar.

CB: In North Africa?

AR: That's Dakar. Let's see now, I put the bomb racks on and the guns and we got orders to go from Nashville, Tennessee, South America at Belem, over to Dakar in Africa, which we did. We flew, went over to Africa and landed over there. And then we stayed all night there in the desert. And the next morning at two o'clock, in dark, 'cause it was a hundred and twenty in the shade and there was no shade around that day, they told us to leave. Says get out of here in the morning while it's dark or you won't be able to take off, 'cause it'll be so hot in the cockpit, it'll be like an oven in the hundred and twenty and the closed-in area right like this. Get out of here at two o'clock in the morning, take off. So we did, we took off in the dark at two o'clock the next morning after a short nap. All the buildings over there in the Sahara where we landed, are underground, and they put sand over 'em. They build the building and cover it with sand and then they got stairways going down under it, and that was it. So we flew over. We left there and we went by Egypt, went by the three pyramids, flew right alongside the Great Pyramids, across the Mediterranean Sea, over to India, at Jorhat, 10 J-o-r-h-a-t, Jorhat, India. And then the next day, we started flying our mission of which I

completed eighty-four, and I didn't get shot down. Lots of 'em did. We lost a lot of airplanes over there.

EO: You completed eighty-four missions?

AR: Yeah.

EO: And that was the required number before you could come back home?

AR: No. Well, it was twenty-five and then they upped it to fifty or whatever.

EO: And you never got shot down?

AR: No. I wouldn't be here if I had, I'll tell you. Okay. Like I say now, we had taken off on eighty-four. We had gone across the Himalaya Mountains, over to southwest China. We been going up and down the China coast. We were going into Kunming, to southwest China, Kunming, China. That's where we operated out of. Okay. When we landed on our forty-first mission, we had to decide windows open, let a little air get in there. We heard this boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And we hollered down there at the crew chief that directed us to park the airplane. And we said what's all that racket, what's all that boom, boom, boom racket. Said that's Japanese soldiers in China here, coming this way, and they were going to envelop, which they would have. When they come across the air base, they would've killed or would have captured or killed anybody and everybody they wanted to at Kunming. And we unloaded our airplane and gassed up right quick so we could get out of there and go back to India. Okay. While we were loading our airplane up with gas and oil and everything, checking it over, it was quiet, the boom boom stopped. And then all of a sudden, here come a Sergeant, was a Sergeant running the Army, this Sergeant just happened to be there. He come out of operations there that directs the traffic and gives you the orders to where you're gonna go and this, that and everything. He said, hey, guys, he says, hey, he says. We hollered what's wrong, what's all the boom boom boom, what happened to it. He says the war's over. He says hey, hey, the war's over, you can go home now. And then he come right back again, he said, "Grab the nearest guy to you, throw him on that airplane and get the hell out of here, go home, the war's over." That's exactly what he said. He said get the hell out of here, load 'em up, the guys, and that's it, the war's over. And the Japanese had marched up and fought up a war within eighteen to twenty miles of Kunming and they just stopped. And then it was there then, it was their job from where they were gonna be put on a boat was up at Shanghai down to Kunming, it's fifteen hundred miles. They walked, they walked out, they walked out. There was no train, there wasn't no trains. The Japanese coming down from Shanghai had obliterated all the good roads, or anyway, they messed it up.

EO: So this was after the atomic bomb had been dropped?

AR: Well, let's see now, yeah.

CB: August of '45?

AR: This was, yeah, August, August the 6th, yeah. Here it is right here (indicating).

CB: This was your forty-first mission?

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AR: Yeah, forty-first.

CB: When the war ended?

AR: Yeah. I had forty-four missions, I had forty-four missions in, forty-four missions. It was forty-four.

CB: I thought you had eighty-four?

AR: Yeah, that was total. It was forty-three. That would have been our forty-fourth mission. Yeah, it was the forty-fourth mission. I flew forty-four missions. Okay.

CB: Isn't that a miracle? Your forty-fourth mission and the war was over.

AR: Yeah, it was forty-four missions. Okay. Forty-four missions, okay. Now, I was flying a B-24. I got rid of the load and then gassed up and we got out of there when he said go home, boys, go home, get out of here. Okay. So we grabbed the nearest guy we could, threw him on the airplane, took off and went back to India over there where -- Well, they had just, somebody, the crew had brought a C-54, a four engine C-54 into the air base there and they were unloading it. And so when we landed there, well, we got rid of our guys. They wanted Operation to find out which is -- grab their next plane back going back to the States. So we didn't -- Well anyway, they took off. We said we'll give you this B-24 and you can take it and go on home with it and leave us that C-54, that four engine C-54. See now, the others got guns on, the B-24s are all loaded down, too much weight and too many people, no place to put 'em. But we wanted to get the 54, 'cause it was empty and the size of a cargo ship. So we got rid of the B-24 and got the 54. And while we were there, oh yeah, we were there. Then this Hiroshima, Nagasaki. Okay. This was going on, this was coming about (indicating). Okay. We were flying from India, we went over to Shanghai. But we heard that there was gonna be a big bomb go off somewhere, but we didn't know. And all we knowed, we just happened to hear about it, that it was going on. It was called, well, it was the atomic bomb was gonna be dropped, and so they dropped it. Well, they dropped it and we were in Shanghai when they dropped it. Now, the airplane, this Enola Gay, B-29, took off at night at Guam. And they flew and dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, and they took off and went back. Well, as you see right here, all the area was considered hot, you weren't supposed to get in it like it is right now, unless you were way out here somewhere, thirty or forty miles away flying around.

CB: What were you doing in Shanghai when the bomb was dropped?

AR: Okay. We were just waiting orders to get out of there and go home, but we had to go up there and pick up some more people that was up in Shanghai, see. We had an empty airplane. When we left Kunming, we went to Shanghai to pick up State Department people and different --

CB: In the C-54?

AR: Yeah. Our own personnel, the Army and Navy and whoever. While we were up there, we heard about this big bomb going off. And it was Hiroshima first and then Nagasaki second. Well, they dropped the bomb and the B-29 bunch, they went up there to take pictures right 12 here (indicating) of the bomb blast, plus the fact that they had reserved one -- the one that was

taking the pictures was up there to assess how much damage was done down below when this cleared out. So yeah, I was there, I was one of the pilots. And we had a C-54 and we were out on buses, the war was over. We had a beautiful airplane with nothing to do except go out here and see what was going on. So we weren't supposed to be out there, see. They didn't, they didn't even know we were around.

CB: And you flew over that?

AR: We flew over Hiroshima, around seven thousand feet up, we flew over and around and round and round and round and we got better, better look at the bombing, what had done -- they had done, you know, the bombing had blasted everything. And it was clear enough that you could see concrete stacks, ground, smoke stacks, concrete roads, brick streets, brick houses, concrete this, concrete there, everything was all -- we had a ringside seat. We had our own plane, and we just flew around and round and round. And we didn't have to report what we saw to anybody 'cause we saw it, we were our own on-lookers and that's it, just like this right here. I had a ringside seat. Lot of people don't know about that, lot of people don't know about that.

EO: Good thing they didn't find out.

AR: But we had a better sight than -- we saw the Hiroshima results. And then the next day, we went back and saw the rest of it. And then we decided, well, we've done all we can, the party's over, let's go home. So we took off and we went back to India. And then we went across the Mediterranean Sea, went over to that mess over there, Iraq, went over there to Iraq, flew over Iraq, Mediterranean Sea. Went on down to Tripoli and landed at Tripoli, and it was on out on the end of the Mediterranean Sea. We flew across the Mediterranean Sea to Spain. We landed in Spain, gassed up. And then we went from there -- Okay. And then we went on from there to out in the Azores, the Azores between New York and France, New York and France over there. There's a island out there belongs to England. We landed there and gassed our airplane up and then we went over to Westover Field, Massachusetts, up north of New York and went over and parked the airplane there.

CB: What was the name of it? Westover?

AR: Yeah, W-e-s-t-o-v-e-r, Westover, Massachusetts, at an air base.

EO: Did you go home then?

AR: No. We went out and partied for a week. Yeah. Well, one of the boys, Red Cohen, is one of our -- that's his name. Red was his nickname, but his name was Cohen. His momma lived in the Queens, New York City. We stayed there at her house and then we went out and went to see all the shows, the night shows, and then come back there and stay all night with her. And we spent a week there in New York going back and forth to partying and staying in at her house with her. And then the party's over then. Let's go, let's go report in and we can go home. And so we got on the -- Oh, yeah. We spent a week there in New York, and then we went down and got on the train. And we went from there to Chicago, and then from Chicago, went up to Montana, to Great Falls, Montana. End of show.

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EO: And that's where they released you from service?

AR: Yeah, but this is what I wanted to show you that. I had a ringside seat. Lot of people didn't know that.

EO: Where were you at when that happened about what Mrs. Rogers was telling us about you were gonna fly and they said, no, somebody else is flying and the guy got in and the plane blew up.

CB: You must have been in the Air Guard then?

AR: Oh, yeah.

CB: When did you go --

AR: Oh, yeah, yeah. We lost some guys out here at the Guard.

EO: When did you go in the Air Guard? MRS. ROGERS: It was in the Fifties. Albert, it was China where that plane was that blew up that you were supposed to took and didn't go, that you said. You all were hauling gasoline in China?

AR: Yeah. MRS. ROGERS: And the gasoline blew up and blew the plane up?

AR: Yeah, we did. MRS. ROGERS: And you didn't happen to be on it 'cause they'd stopped you just before you walked out.

AR: Yeah.

CB: When was that, during World War II?

AR: Yeah. MRS. ROGERS: That was during the war.

EO: Now, when did you get married? MRS. ROGERS: In '49, July '49. He'd been in the Berlin Airlift before we were married.

CB: Really? Well, that's interesting. Tell us about that. MRS. ROGERS: That was in '48.

AR: Yeah. We was flying out of Great Falls, Montana. MRS. ROGERS: Yeah, but you went to the Berlin Airlift.

AR: Yeah. We had gone back to Great Falls, Montana. And then this Berlin Airlift deal come about. And then we shipped out and flew over a 54 from Great Falls, Montana, over to Berlin Airlift that was started up.

CB: What plane did you fly?

AR: Frankfurt and the Wiesbaden. MRS. ROGERS: They were flying 54s during the Berlin Airlift.

AR: C-54, letter C, Charlie, C.

CB: And you flew out of Frankfurt?

AR: Frankfurt, Frankfurt and Wiesbaden, two bases. And they was going on 24 hours a day. The airplanes was a never-ending chain of taking off, landing, hurry up and unload the loads as fast you can, gas and a oil change, check the airplane over, load it up with whatever, noodles, groceries and coal, powdered milk, powdered -- just grocery items, whatever they could stuff the airplane with. Yeah, that was something else. What else? MRS. ROGERS: Russians had blocked traffic around Berlin. The only way they could get food and supplies in was flying.

CB: Well, was that dangerous? Were you concerned about the Russians?

AR: They come up and fly alongside of you, try, you know, egg you on, you know, just to try to cause confusion, yeah. 14 MRS. ROGERS: They didn't ever try to attack.

AR: They never did shoot us down or nothing like that. They just come up there and fly right alongside of you, then they'd peel off and go back down and leave us alone. We'd go over to Berlin and land, and they'd have crew of German helpers unloading the airplane just as fast as they could. But just like I say, twenty-four hour a day operation. We didn't --

EO: What did you do after you got out of service?

AR: I end up being -- I was a brick layer. And then I got in the Guard, Air Guard. MRS. ROGERS: And he worked out at the Guard for a long time.

EO: And that's the Air Guard. MRS. ROGERS: 188th.

EO: So you got to come home to Van Buren? You lived here? MRS. ROGERS: After he got out of the Air Force.

EO: And y'all have always lived here? MRS. ROGERS: He was born here. I was born at Mulberry. But I was just six years old when we moved up here and my grandparents have lived here and my mother was raised here.

CB: What rank did you have in the Air Guard?

AR: I retired Lieutenant Colonel.

EO: Well, that's quite a jump from a Staff Sergeant.

EO: For somebody that quit school in the 11th grade.

AR: Yeah, that's right. Quite a feat, I guess. I don't know. I attribute it to the wonderful teachers, Mrs. Graves, you know, Kenny, had some wonderful teachers.

EO: School was different then. MRS. ROGERS: A lot different.

CB: How long did it take you to achieve that rank of --

AR: Major to Lieutenant Colonel.

EO: What were you when you came out of the Army just right after the war? MRS. ROGERS: 1st Lieutenant.

EO: You were still a 1st Lieutenant after the war?

AR: Yeah, yeah.

EO: So while you were in the Reserves, you went from 1st Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel?

AR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Flying this airplane right here for nineteen years.

EO: And that's a --

AR: That's a RF-84-F. RFF, foxtrot, RF-84-F.

CB: For nineteen years?

AR: Yeah.

CB: When did you retire?

AR: '73. MRS. ROGERS: Well, you got out of the Guard in '73.

AR: Well, I got out at '73. MRS. ROGERS: But you got your retirement later when you were sixty. He was fifty-five when he had to get out of the Guard, and he had another five years before he got his retirement. You had to be sixty years old to draw retirement. Part of it was Guard time, unless you had a full twenty years active duty, and he had about sixteen. 15

EO: I said it once, I'll say it again. It looks to me like if you fought a war, that ought to be twenty years of active duty.

CB: Where was this picture made where you're holding your rifle? Is that in Alaska?

AR: That was down in Camp Robinson, yeah, just before we left to ship out.

AR: I was gonna give you one. That's why I had all these made.

CB: He's got one labeled for us right there, and a ski picture and a plane picture. MRS. ROGERS: Was this the one you were gonna give 'em?

AR: Yeah. See it's a 134th Infantry, St. Louis, Missouri, is the home of war with Japan, eight thousand troops landed on Alaska, Aleutian chain. MRS. ROGERS: Lot of those boys that were in that infantry --

AR: We got rid of all of 'em in 1942, returned to the States in '42. MRS. ROGERS: It's just lucky he got out of that infantry.

EO: Lucky he didn't go to the South Pacific.

AR: I was just telling 'em, I flew around this atomic bomb blast after. I had better coverage or better ringside seat than the guy that just about took it.

EO: The guy that took it probably skedaddled right after he dropped it.

AR: Yeah. They dropped it, that Gay got out of there right quick. Yeah, they really high-tailed it out.

EO: So what did you think about the atomic bomb being dropped?

AR: Well, that was one way to get rid, stop the war, that did it. Getting to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it got rid of two big cities. Boy, I tell you, that's something else. Well, it's just like I say, by using that, it saved a bunch of people. For us to invade the Japanese and all of 'em, they'd commit suicide, period. That was it. The whole country would have done it to get rid of the Americans, yeah.

EO: Do you think being in service during the war helped you? I mean like you went from non-commissioned officer to --

AR: Yeah. Well, definitely. Experience is the best policy. You got experience, you know.

CB: Well, you got some good training.

AR: That's right