

CONFEDERATE AIR FORCE ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

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Interviewer W. J. (Bill) Shinneman _____ Closed

Interviewee Thomas L. Guice, Jr.

Interviewee date/place of birth 5-8-21 Homer, LA

Educational level when entering the Service High School

SERVICE INFORMATION: Branch U. S. Army Air Corps

Date entered 4-21-42 Date discharged 2-16-46

Highest/rank held World War II Captain

Primary occupation Pilot - 4 engine

Flight duty Yes Theater European

8th Air Force 398th Bomb Group (H) 603rd Bomb Squadron

INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS:

S/N O 802559 Awards: AM w/3OLC (Recommended for DFC), ETO Campaign,

European African Middle Eastern Campaign POW? No

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ORAL HISTORY MEMOIR
AMERICAN AIRPOWER HERITAGE FOUNDATION
of the
Confederate Air Force Flying Museum

Interviewee: Thomas L. Guice, Jr.
Date: 18 February 1991
Place: Homer, Louisiana
Interviewer: W. J. (Bill) Shinneman

The record that I have of the Air Force was about as enlightening experience as I'll ever expect to have at any time. I volunteered for the aviation cadet training program in 1942 and reported to Barksdale Air Force Base where I spent two or three days and then transferred to Nashville, Tennessee for classification as pilot, bombardier, or what have you.

During my stay there, which was about 10 days - for classification - when I took my physical I found out I couldn't pass the pilot's exam without gaining three pounds. The Doctor that gave me the exam said, "If you'll come back I'll give you a recheck in three days and if you can gain three pounds you'll meet the qualifications for pilot or air force crew training. By the way, if you want to gain that weight, eat all the bananas you can eat and drink all the milk you can drink, and don't go to the bathroom too much. When you come back I'm sure you'll have at least three more pounds than you have now."

I weighed 118 at the time and when I went back for the recheck, I had exactly 121 [pounds] which was what I needed. So I met the physical requirements for the classification. Then after that we went through the different tests that they classify you by, and I wound up being classified for pilot training.

I went from there to pre-flight training at Maxwell Field, Alabama at Montgomery. I went through pre-flight and was assigned to primary training at a civilian training school at Ocala, Florida, training in PT-13s. After completing primary training, I was sent to basic training at Shaw Field at Sumter, South Carolina.

I completed the training there without anything out of the ordinary, except near the end of the training (we were supposed to complete the training in the BT-13) we were on a cross-country navigation flight and the weather was bad (these were all single pilot flights) and I got lost.

It was getting late in the evening and I didn't know exactly where I was and I started looking for a place to land before it got dark. I kept looking around for the wind direction and an open place to land, and I found a pasture close to the edge of a small town. There was a smokestack that was putting out smoke and I could figure which way the wind was coming from, so I made arrangements and landed in that field. When I landed, I just taxied up to the side of

the road I had landed by and had all sorts of company the rest of the night. I got fed real good by the people in the town, they wrote a few names on the plane. I had to call back to the base (Shaw Field), and they said for me to just stay by the plane and they would send someone up to pick it up the next day. The most embarrassing thing about the whole deal was that I was within a mile of a small airport that I didn't see when I was looking for a place to land. [A man] flew up and picked up the plane out of the pasture and I had to fly the one he brought up back. I was sweating out being washed out right then but I wasn't. Things worked out pretty good, I had a pretty good record in instrument training there and they sent me on into advanced training.

They sent me to Moody Field in Georgia and I went through advanced training there [flying] a twin-engined Cessna AT-7. The main thing I remember about my advanced flight training at Moody was this was where I really became acquainted with the only close Air Force friend that I wound up with: J. L. Evans, who made a career of the Air Force and stayed in until he retired as a full colonel. What makes me remember, and I kid him about this all the time, is how we used to have to walk to the flight line in formation when we would go for flight duty. He had almost tried to land with the wheels up so he had to wear a dumbbell around his neck. So I always kid him about having to lead that formation with the dumbbell around his neck.

The most significant thing I can remember, after graduation from Moody Field and being commissioned a second lieutenant, was being assigned to heavy bombardment. I never did figure that anyone as small as I was would be assigned to four-engined aircraft. I was expecting to be assigned to single-engine, or a fighter, and I ended up being assigned to four-engined aircraft.

It took me about a year to get my wings and commission. I went in April of 1942 and got my wings in April of 1943, Class of 43-D.

When I left there I was assigned to Boise, Idaho, and I stayed there until I was assigned to a crew. Our crew left Boise and was transferred to Wendover Field, Utah where we were assigned a plane to fly. We flew training missions, mostly navigation and bombing missions, and went through the high altitude training conditions at Salt Lake City. We weren't at Wendover Field too long until they transferred the whole group to Sioux City, Iowa.

When we got there for combat crew training, we went through training for the required period of time then instead of sending all of the crews overseas, they took the group that we were in and made a training group out of us, and broke the squadrons down into combat crew training squadrons. We stayed at Sioux City, Iowa from 1943 until 1945 as a combat crew trainers, four-engined.

While I was in combat crew training at Sioux City as a combat crew instructor-pilot we had to check out crews that were sent in for formation flight training and bombing

training. The nearest I ever had to having a good accident was [one time when] we were being led by Captain Spivak, who was one of our instructor pilots. He was leading the formation of six planes, and we had a low overcast that morning and he started to lead this group up through this overcast. I was flying in the second echelon below him in the six-plane formation. When we got into the overcast the plane on my right wing lost his sense of where he was. He started slipping [toward me] and finally wound up slipping into the plane I was riding in as instructor that day. He clipped off our right aileron and our right wing tip, but we got back without any problem. That's the only accident I was involved in, all the time I was in the Air Force.

The time that I spent at Sioux City was probably the happiest time I had in the Air Force. The people there were real nice to you and I got to stay there long enough to know where things were and when you had bad weather you got time off because you couldn't fly. In the dead of winter you had quite a few days that you couldn't fly.

My job as an instructor-pilot was to check the pilots to get them proficient on instrument flying, formation flying, landings and takeoffs. These were people that would come in and build up time. We had navigation missions that they had to fly, training their navigators, etc. You had a pilot, navigator, and a bombardier who were instructors flying with a crew that was in combat crew training. So you were instructing the pilot, navigator, and bombardier. A double crew, except for the gunners and the radio operator who were the primary crew in there for training. I rode in the right seat. They had to go through air-to-ground gunnery missions which was something that B-17s were never made for in the first place and you had the high altitude bombing training.

I remember when we first started using the Norden bomb sight for bombardier training, we had to go and check it out of the bomb vault and take it back. All that security that was carried on at that time.

After I had spent awhile at Sioux City as an instructor-pilot, I went to Lockborne Air Force Base in Columbus, Ohio for six weeks period of additional pilot training.

I went back from Columbus to Sioux City and stayed there probably another six or eight months until December 1944. It was beginning to look like I wasn't going to get to go overseas unless I got a combat crew. So I got a crew assigned to me in December, 1944, and we were given orders to be sent to the European Theater.

We left Sioux City and went to Karney, Nebraska where we were assigned a new plane to fly over [to Europe]. We were given orders to go to England by way of Bangor, Maine, Gander, Newfoundland, and from there to Valley Wales in the British Isles. We went as a single plane, but there were more planes than just us, we were combat crew replacements for those that had put in their time, or had been lost.

We went from there to a place what was known as Stone, England, and left our planes there. We ran them out through

roadways and left them out in fields.

From there we were assigned out of Stone and we were assigned to the 603rd Bomb Squadron, 398th Bomb Group (H). We were stationed at Nuthampstead in England, roughly 90 miles north-northwest of London.

Base housing was in Quonset-type huts scattered all over the landscape. The only way you could get around was in shuttle busses that ran around and picked you up and carried you from one place to another. The hut we slept in was about three-quarters of a mile from the Officers' Club and the Officers' Mess. One place we had to go get the mail, that must have been a half-mile. It was all farm land, with English-type houses with thatched roofs all over.

When we got there (at this base) I noticed off two miles or so away from the base, one of the B-17s was sitting out in the field. As far as I can remember the plane was still sitting there when we finished our tour of duty. It had landed in the field because it couldn't find the runway and ran out of fuel and they just didn't recover it. I'm sure they got it out. We flew off of concrete runways.

We put in two days of training as a crew before we were assigned to a mission and we went on missions the first four days on consecutive days. I stayed there until the war was over in May, 1945 when we were reassigned back to the States. We brought all the planes from the 398th back to the States and left them in Maine.

My first mission was February 16, 1945 to Munster, Germany. The target was the rail yards in Munster. Most of the targets we had were rail yards, synthetic oil refineries or facilities, and ball bearing assembly plants. In Berlin (I only made one mission there near the end of the war) it was a railroad.

We had one milk run out of the 20 missions that I flew. We went to Rouen, France, where they had some German holdouts there in a fort, after they had pushed the Germans all the way out of France. We made a bombing mission that day and that was the only one that we didn't have any anti-aircraft fire or any opposition at all.

We had some fighter opposition but I was there so late-right at the end of the war - four months from the end of the war - the heaviest opposition we had was from ack-ack fire. The one thing that stands out in my mind, and it bothers me because I can't remember what city the mission was against: I had a high school classmate of mine, Lamar Coleman, Jr., that was over there (I didn't know he was in our group, I didn't know anything about it until I got back to the states) and I saw his plane hit and saw it go down. He was killed. I didn't know about that until I got back and it has kinda bothered me ever since I got back and found that out. He was in the same group but I didn't know it at the time.

After I was there we didn't have too many losses. We didn't have an awful lot of damage on the missions I flew. One mission when I was recommended for the DFC (it was right close to the end of our time and it never did come through

before we were assigned back to the States) we were making a mission on Oranienburg in Germany and our control cables were shot away and we lost an engine.

We flew back to our home base using the auto-pilot. The only way we could fly the plane was by using the auto-pilot. We had tried to splice and tie the control cables together, particularly the rudder, and we thought we had it fixed so we could land. Just before we hit the runway, I had to kick some rudder to it to straighten up and when we did that the cable broke. We had not kicked off the auto-pilot because we were using it to maintain height so we left it on and gave it full throttle and then the tower sent us to an RAF base in England to land where they had a real wide and long runway. So we finally worked around and landed without too much trouble after that. That working the landing with auto-pilot and landing with auto-pilot is something you don't try.

Most of the time we bombed from 21, 22, or 23,000 feet, above 20 with the exception of the mission to France - that was fairly low, 12,000 feet.

The other major incident that I can remember happened, was when we came in over the North Sea and we were making a raid on the northern part of Germany - maybe Coesfeld. We had made our initial point of our bombing run and were supposed to bomb on the lead bombardier that day. We were flying in the second echelon, behind the lead echelon. When the lead echelon bombardier dropped his bombs they came out of the bomb bay [and] one of the bombs exploded. It messed up three planes in that squadron that day. We found out that most of [the squadron] got back all right, but it did knock down three out of that squadron.

Out of my whole time over there we didn't have one of my crew injured. We were real lucky in my crew. The whole crew flew back to the States. After we put in our time they were reassigning us back to the States, we brought a plane back from the bomb group back by way of Iceland and Labrador and we left the plane in Maine. After that we went for our overseas leave.

I only had liberty in England three times. I had a cousin stationed in the Army at Leeds and I visited him one weekend and went to London twice. They were only weekend passes. I didn't have much liberty.

We used the fur-lined boots and fur-lined jackets and helmets during our tour. We used the flak jacket but it was something you didn't have to wear. You were always given one every mission and the first few missions we went on we didn't have too much anti-aircraft fire - and that thing was pretty heavy for my size - so about the fourth mission I didn't think I needed to wear that jacket. So I had it laying down at the side of my seat. When we got on the bomb run and the flak started coming all around us it was too late to worry about trying to get that jacket on because you were pretty busy. But after that I always had that jacket on. I don't know, you just seem to try to take the easy way out and sometimes that easy way was not the best way to do it.

We had two boys over there in our hut, who got over there so late they didn't get to fly any missions so after the war was over we were waiting for them to reassign us, and we pulled a fake presentation ceremony one day. We called everybody out for the awards presentation to these two guys that had been assigned and never made a mission. We gave them a medal.

We had a lot of close fellowship over there. We made real good acquaintances. My co-pilot was Raymond A. Cronquist, from California; my navigator was Frank Luisi, from Indiana; my bombardier was Paul Caselton and he was from St. Louis, Missouri. (He had already been over and put in his 25 or 30 missions and came back as an instructor at Sioux City. Well when we got ready to go he said he wanted to go back as bombardier of our crew.) We had Leslie F. Trinder, the crew chief or engineer, the radio operator was Leonard A. Wsiukiewicz, the waist gunner was Donald L. Bendixen, and William H. Luce was one of the gunners and John J. Singer was the ball turret gunner. We had a crew of nine and we stayed together the whole time we were over there.

Later on it looked like we were never going to get to France. One day we were on a mission and got some anti-aircraft damage and it had knocked out the hydraulic system on the brakes so we decided that we were never going to get a chance to go to France unless we landed at one of the emergency fields. So we pulled an emergency and landed at an air base at Nancy, France. We had to crank the gear down to get it down because we didn't have any hydraulic pressure. We landed and got the brake system fixed and then went on back to [our] base the next day. That was our opportunity to say we had been to France. We had a night in the village but there wasn't much of a village there.

Part of my time after I got overseas and was assigned to the Bomb Group over there I had the job of Lead Crew Pilot and had the job of checking pilots out on the LORAN landing system. I guess due to the fact that I had had pretty good instrument training back in the States and had a pretty good [amount of] instrument flight time on my schedule.

I didn't do anything that was all that death-defying or dare-devil. As to the flak bursts, unless you could feel the explosion on your plane, the likelihood of it doing any severe damage was not all that great unless you were close enough for you to feel the explosion. Well, we put in 20 missions, and other than the one time when we had the cables shot out and lost one engine, that was the most severe damage that I received.

Unless you were flying lead plane, the pilot and co-pilot were intent on trying to hold close formation. The pilot would look at nothing but the plane he was holding formation on. You had to stay in close for maximum protection from the guns on all the planes in the group. That way you were better able to protect yourself from fighters. We had some fighter opposition. I never saw any jets. The only ones I saw were Focke-Wulf and Messerschmitt,

mostly Messerschmitts. We didn't see too many of those, most of the time they would come from the back top of the plane and you had quite a bit of firepower there. In those missions [when] we had fighter opposition we never got any hits.

In early '45 you had real good P-51 coverage the biggest part of the time. All the way along the run in and most of the way out. On the mission I talked about where I lost my high school classmate, we were caught by an ack-ack train. It was able to follow us a good way and it was due to the fact that we had to make two runs at the target. It was clouded over and we couldn't get a good drop and we had to make another run to drop the bombs. Most of the time we were under ack-ack fire on that mission. That time we were going after underground oil storage. [That was] Coesfeld, but I'm not sure.

Our takeoff would be way before dawn and you would try and assemble your group over a homing beacon over England. You'd get over there flying around trying to assemble your formation and every once in awhile (it never happened in our group) you'd see one run together so you'd lose a plane in the process of forming your groups [even] before you took off on your departure time for your target. It was all because you were forming up in the dark and you had so many planes flying around there trying to find out where they were supposed to go.

We didn't fly the same plane all the time. When we were assigned a mission we weren't assigned the same plane every mission (like they did earlier in the War). Of my 20 missions we probably flew the same plane six times, the rest of the time it was different ones. The longest mission we had from the time we started engines (I think it was to Munich, Germany) to the time we cut, it was about 10 hours. Most of the times we carried 500 pound bombs and incendiaries (I can recall carrying 1,000 pound bombs about five times). We did use some 1,000 pound bombs close to the end of the War.

The B-17 was as tough an airplane as you can come across. We had some that were shot up bad and they got back. It was hard to see how they got back in the shape that they were in.

We did not reform the group to go to the Pacific. While we were at Tampa, Florida for the purpose of reforming the group they dropped the atom bomb and the war was over in August, 1945. We came back from Europe in June, the war there was over on my birthday, May 8th, and we came back from there in June.

After I got back to the States and we weren't assigned to go to the South Pacific, I was reassigned to Military Air Transport (MATC) and sent to Romulus Field at Detroit, Michigan. That was the time they were ferrying all these planes from different places to Davis-Monthan, Arizona just to park them. This was in the latter part of 1945 and first part of 1946.

That was when I got checked out on the B-24 at the Willow Run Airport. That was at the plant at Detroit where they made the B-24. I got checked out but I never did fly them.

We ferried B-17s to Davis-Monthan at Tucson, Arizona, I didn't make but about two missions, then I was assigned to Love Field at Dallas, still in MATC, and made a regular run with C-47s from there to Tucson, Arizona. I stayed at Love Field and there I finally decided to get out because it was getting hard to get in the required number of hours of flying time.

I didn't think that I wanted to make a career out of the Air Force so I decided I would just go ahead and apply for discharge. So that pretty well ended my [active] career at Camp Shelby, Mississippi February 16, 1946. I stayed in the Reserves and at one time thought I would be called during the Korean deal but they never did call me and I just retired from the Reserves in 1955.

On one of our trips hauling military personnel from Tucson to Dallas, we had one Army WAAC aboard, the only female passenger we had with a load of regular GIs. She decided she didn't want to ride in the back and she wound up standing between the pilot's seat and co-pilot's seat. That was probably against all regulations but we let her do it. She said, "I'm just not going to sit back there!" I guess she wanted to see where she was going.

I wouldn't take anything in the world for the experiences I had and the time that I spent there. The fact is, I don't know but what it wouldn't be a good idea if everybody had to spend a year or so in the service, before they get started at anything else. I don't think it would hurt them.

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