

THE C.A.P.S. INTERCOM

Volume 2, Issue 1

January 2006

As we begin another year, I'd like to reflect a bit on 2005. Mother Nature dominated the news, first with the Tsunami, then hurricanes Katrina and Rita, followed by tornadoes in the Midwest, and capped off with an earthquake at the India/Pakistan border.

Naturally, Americans stepped up to the task of sending humanitarian relief to all parts of the world afflicted by these disasters. Because of all of the fundraising for these worthy causes, I found it hard to try to promote and raise money for CAPS, as my family and I donated much of our spare time to several of these relief efforts. At the time it seemed that it was more important to help with feeding starving survivors and rebuilding homes lost in disasters than preserving our history...

While my family and I worked hard to do what we could for a number of these causes, I've now paused to think: who prevented our country, as well as numerous others, from being demolished, not by weather or acts of God, but by foreign tyranny? To whom do we owe our thanks for our freedom and way of life? It is our veterans, that's who!

Now it's time to get back to work with CAPS and preserve these historical perspectives of World War II air combat. Welcome to Volume II, issue One of the quarterly publication of the newsletter for the Combat Aircrew's Preservation Society, or CAPS. A lot has transpired since our first issue, and we welcome you on board and I hope you will find this issue informative and interesting.

If you are a current member of CAPS, we want to thank you again for supporting this organization. Your contributions will go far in preserving the first-person stories of our WWII combat aircrews.

If you are not a member of CAPS, a new member application is attached to this newsletter, and we encourage you to join our group and help us to preserve history. As director of CAPS and publisher of this newsletter, I encourage your feedback and input. I've enjoyed the letters and cards many of you have sent me over the past two years; please keep them coming! My email address is jcermin@centurytel.net, or feel free to write me c/o CAPS, P.O. Box 490, St. Croix Falls, WI 54024.

I also want to extend a special greeting to the members of the 490th Bomb Group and the 8th Air Force Historical Society, Bloomington Chapter, for taking a special interest in the work and support of CAPS. All of your efforts and financial support are greatly appreciated.

Best regards,

Jon Cermin
Editor and CAPS President

What is CAPS?

The definition of CAPS can best be summed up by its mission statement:

The Combat Aircrews' Preservation Society is dedicated to recording and preserving the first person stories of military aircrews for the purpose of distribution to the educational and broadcast media markets.

For the past ten years, CAPS founder and President Jon Cermin has been videotaping first person stories from WWII Army Air Corps personnel; primarily those associated with the B-17 Flying Fortress. It was the original intent of CAPS to produce a thirteen-part documentary on the B-17, from its inception prior to WWI, all the way through its many roles in aerial combat, to its many post war roles.

Due to budget problems, the B-17 series has temporarily been put on the back burner (see an explanation in the FAQ section of this newsletter). Once we get going again with the B-17 series and it is completed, CAPS will pursue documentaries on other WWII aircraft and their crews. We foresee interviewing aircrews as an ongoing and almost daily process. A number of B-24 crewmembers have already been interviewed in anticipation on producing a B-24 documentary. Soon we will also begin interviewing veterans from the Korean War and the Viet Nam War; however, the WWII vets are our current priority.

The purpose of this Society is to preserve history through education. Today's children are growing up in an age of microchips, memory sticks, and real time information access. While it was considered cutting edge at the time, aircrews from the early 20th century operated with primitive equipment by today's standards. There were no pressurized cabins, ground radar, electronic targeting systems, GPS navigation, and so forth. These combatants relied only on their skills, talent, instincts and fellow airmen to complete their military objectives.

These first person stories will inspire future generations with tales of dedication and service to the profession of air combat in an environment void of modern technology. This cause isn't meant to glorify war, but rather to honor those who worked, fought and died in the unforgiving environment of the stratosphere.

CAPS operates as a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation. You can find out more about our Society's plans and projects, as well as our IRS 501(c)3 paperwork by checking out our web site at www.combataircrew.org

Reunion News

Each year I like to try to get to at least one bomb group reunion, and my first choice has always been the reunion for the 490th Bomb Group, who met in Colorado Springs this past September. I had my plane ticket and was set to go, but unfortunately I got sick while traveling on business in Dallas. As my Dallas to Colorado Springs flight would take me first to Minneapolis/St. Paul for my connecting flight, I decided that it would be best to just get off the plane in Minneapolis (which was where I started for my trip to Dallas), and go home to recuperate. I'm sorry I missed you guys in Colorado Springs, and I hope to catch you next year in Washington, D.C.

We at CAPS are always interested in attending Army Air Corps/Air Force reunions so we can videotape more interviews. If you would like to invite us to an upcoming reunion, please write or email me at the address on the back page. Due to funding constraints, it's easiest for us to travel to conventions in the geographic areas within a 300-mile radius of either Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota, or Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas. These two metro areas are home to the two office locations of my video production company, Cine-Cermin Productions, Inc., or CCPI. CCPI donates all equipment used in the taping of these interviews and has been funding much of the hard costs of these video shoots to date.

At this point we are *most* interested in the stories from WWII air crews, as their mortality rate is higher due to their advanced ages; however, we would not rule out post-WWII group reunions if they were held in close proximity to Minneapolis/St. Paul or Dallas/Fort Worth, as our expenses are less when we do not have to pay travel and hotel expenses.

AIR COMBAT JOURNAL

In order to keep CAPS in the public eye, it was decided to take some of the interviews that have been recorded to date and first turn them into one hour radio programs, and then when finances allow, turn them into one hour TV shows. This seemed the best way to quickly produce programming that is financially self-sufficient and self-perpetuating.

I realize that within this newsletter there are repeated requests for financial assistance. Please keep in mind that I am the chief cook and bottle washer for CAPS. If I don't personally do it, it doesn't get done. I wish there were volunteers, who could pitch in to help with the day-to-day needs of CAPS as well as video production, but there are few, if any, who are technologically capable of helping me. This is why I need the financial freedom to hire outside freelancers.

CAPS is currently seeking financial support form foundations and benevolent entities for this purpose. What follows is an excerpt cut and pasted from our grant application. If you know of a benevolent foundation or entity, please contact us!

Description of Request

The purpose of this letter is to request funding for Phase One for the “CAPS Radio Hour” radio program, which will cover thirteen one-hour episodes. With his full time for profit job, family responsibilities and civic commitments, CAPS president Jon Cermin is not able to dedicate enough time to complete these radio shows in a timely manner, i.e. one per week. Outside freelance and/or volunteer labor will be required to meet this goal. We can meet this goal with financial assistance in the amount of \$3,564 per show. This will cover the cost of hiring outside contractors to edit radio shows, as well as cover expenses for material and distribution.

This is a very cost effective rate for this type of programming. In comparison, the professional audio engineer who had mixed the music for the first two shows (for B-17 pilot Dwight Olson and B-24 pilot Larry Bachman) bid \$2,550 to *just add and license the music* for the shows. His fee did **not** include editing the narrative prior to adding the music, recompiling the edited audio to the video, section titles and graphics, or editing in sound effects (CCPI bought a sound effects library for this project, and these effects have been donated to CAPS as needed). His bid also did not include any duplication or distribution.

One element that drives up the expense of any broadcast program is music “broadcast rights”. This is above the cost of procuring the music and the labor of mixing the music into the show. Broadcast rights can vary; the aforementioned audio engineer in Dallas in his bid quoted \$500 to cover “broadcast licensing”. First Com, a well-known music library in Dallas, Texas, quoted CAPS \$3,200 *per show just for broadcast rights* of their music. This figure did not include the additional \$1,500 to lease their music library for one year.

It appears that the best means of keeping production costs down is to contract a composer to score original music for CAPS. There are several advantages to this. One, our music themes will be unique to CAPS programming. Two, we will own the music in perpetuity, and thus not have to pay annual fees for leasing a library (First Com wanted \$1,500/year). And finally, we will have better control over broadcast rights. We’ll still have to pay some broadcast fees to our composer and union musicians, but we can control these better as we’re not paying the huge mark up and sales commissions of for-profit music libraries. CAPS is currently in negotiations with composer Bob Parr, who is a well known and established composer and sound mixer on the east coast.

Even in paying for an original music score, which is estimated to be approximately \$10,000, this can still be cost effective for two reasons: One, it can be amortized though hundreds of individual shows; and two, because so much of the other labor and equipment has been donated by CCPI. This includes the labor and equipment to do the video recording, the videotape stock, the editing equipment, and the sound effects library. If these expenses were billed rather than donated, it would easily triple the cost of this project.

Goals of the “THE AIR COMBAT JOURNAL RADIO HOUR” project:

Goal #1: To preserve on broadcast quality videotape the oral histories of WWII Aircrews.

Goal #2: To edit these interviews into informative, educational and entertaining 48 minute narrative programs (the length of one radio or TV broadcast hour, or a high school class period).

Goal #3: To disseminate the history and heritage of our WWII Army Air Corps veterans to a mass media audience as well as high school history and civics classes.

Goal #4: To give the interviewees a keepsake in the form of professionally produced DVDs of their oral history for the education and enlightenment of their descendants.

Objectives:

- 1) To distribute WWII oral histories to a mass media market on a weekly basis.
- 2) To give interviewees a personal keepsake to be passed on to children and grandchildren.
- 3) To generate income from:
 - a) memberships from radio show listeners
 - b) corporate sponsorships of the radio show.
- 4) To get regional and eventually nationwide media exposure to CAPS so that we can:
 - a) grow CAPS membership
 - b) identify more veterans to be interviewed
 - c) raise funds to perpetuate our mission

Summary:

This project cannot continue at a meaningful pace and grow without outside funding. Many of those veterans who have been interviewed will never see their completed stories. Because of work conflicts and family commitments, Jon cannot produce these programs on his own at a fast enough pace to meet our goals. The clock is running out for many of the veterans that have already been interviewed. We at CAPS would really like to honor these veterans with a gift of historical preservation; by giving them the recognition they deserve by telling the world their stories of heroism and devotion to our country, and by giving them a keepsake that their heirs will be proud to watch and pass from generation to generation. We'd like to send these keepsakes to the original interviewees, not their surviving families. Time is not on our side. We hope you will help us in attaining our goals and objectives. For more information on this project, including funding requirements and a line item budget, contact Jon at jcermin@centurytel.net.

FAQS

Q. How is the B-17 documentary coming along?

A: The B-17 documentary is still in the works, albeit at a slow pace. Jon continues to interview B-17 crewmembers for the 13 part documentary series, “In Their Own Words: The B-17 Flying Fortress”. He is searching for Luftwaffe pilots and flak gunners to complete the interview process. While there are enough interviews “in the can” to complete this project (with the exception of the Germans), we are in dire need of funding to complete this project. A one hour pilot episode on B-17 Aeromedical Factors (Episode VII) has been completed, but it will take approximately \$780,000 to complete this entire 13 part series.

Q: Why will it cost so much to produce this series?

A: Typical programs for the History Channel, Travel Channel, Lifetime, etc. start in price at about \$2,000 per finished minute. The “In Their Own Words” series will cost about half of that price, mainly because Jon has been working on this project since 1995 at his own expense and in his spare time. Much of the production work has already been done. The expensive part now is the post-production work (editing, graphics, music, etc.)

Q: Why will it cost so much for post production?

A: Post production is expensive because CAPS has to outsource nearly all of this work. While CCPI owns and has donated all of the production equipment to date (cameras, lighting equipment and microphones) and most labor needed to shoot the interviews, CAPS has to rely on outside vendors for a majority of the post production elements. These include editing, custom music, 3-D graphics, errors and omissions insurance, archives combat footage and duplication to name just a few of these expenses. And while we can amortize most of these expenses over the entire thirteen episode series, it still comes to about \$78,000 per episode. At this time, we have planed for each episode to be one hour in length, so this is still way under the \$ 2,000 per finished minute quoted earlier. In fact, we have so much material, we may even stretch each episode to two hours.

Q: What kind of programming does CAPS offer?

A: At the recent board meeting it was decided that CAPS should focus more on education at the intermediate and high school levels. It seems that today’s schools’ History classes are focusing more on pop-culture rather than real history.

While CAPS covers a small niche of our war history (that of aerial combat), it is felt that there are others who are adequately covering other niches from WWII, i.e. Tom Hanks and his documentation of foot soldiers, and Steven Spielberg and his documentation of Holocaust survivors. Our niche is a very important part of the overall story of combat and world history.

All CAPS programming will include a brief lesson plan for History teachers. Several board members are currently working on locating History class programming

opportunities. If you, our readers, have any ideas or contacts for this endeavor to provide History lesson modules on aerial combat from WWII, please contact Jon at the address on the back page.

Q: Are there any more projects in the works other than the 13 Episode Series?

A: Jon is currently editing some of the interview tapes into one-hour radio shows (note that a one hour show is actually only 44 to 54 minutes long when you take into account commercials, station breaks, and promos). The reason for this move is that 1) it can be done rather inexpensively (around \$ 3,564 per show), and 2) there is at least one local AM talk radio station that is interested in airing the shows, and 3) if the shows are popular, we can start selling commercial time and/or show sponsorships, which will provide much needed revenue to the CAPS entity. See accompanying article “Air Combat Journal” Radio Show.

If the shows really take off in popularity, they could then be edited into “biography” style videos that we could potentially air on cable or broadcast TV. This would only occur if we were able to operate this financially the black, as editing video is much more expensive than editing just audio, i.e. a radio show.

Q: Are my donations to CAPS tax deductible?

A: Yes, your donations to CAPS are fully deductible to the full extent of the IRS tax code. CAPS is a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation. IRS documentation may be viewed on line on the CAPS website at www.combataircrew.org

WANTED: LUFTWAFFE PILOTS AND FLAK GUNNERS

CAPS is currently seeking Luftwaffe pilots and German Flak gunners to be interviewed for use in the 13 episode series, “The B-17 Flying Fortress at War, In Their Own Words”. If you know of any German veterans who might be willing to be interviewed, please contact Jon at 651-208-4388 or jcermin@centurytel.net.

WEB SITE UPDATE

Our web site domain name is www.combataircrew.org It is currently under construction, and we hope to have a very educational and interactive site. In our last Intercom issue, I reported that I had acquired the services of a student who was interested in creating a website for CAPS. To make a long story short, I mentioned in a recent fundraising letter that there are three qualities of a creative media project: good, fast or cheap; you can pick any two qualities, i.e., if you want it to be good and cheap, it will be very slow in coming. Basically I was trying to get a good and cheap website for CAPS, and essentially, our student took a real job before getting very far on our web site’s

development. Because of her new employment, little progress had been made since she started the project.

Consequently, I have now hired a real web designer, Kirk Anderson of Interactive Business Solutions, who is interested in our project and will work for a reduced rate as we are a non-profit. Kirk has created several web sites for local entities, including the St. Croix Falls Chamber of Commerce, www.scfwi.com (I was on the committee that contracted him to do this site). We will launch the new CAPS web site on March 16th.

Our web site will be completed in phases, with Phase One having a number of transcripts of interviews that I have shot since 1995. Phase Two will be the addition of audio files of the interviews that site visitors can listen to, much like a radio show. Phase Three will be actual streaming video of the interviews.

Obviously, there is a considerable financial commitment to each phase, and Phase One will be fairly limited in scope. CAPS currently has over 170 interviews on broadcast quality video tape; however, only about a quarter of these interviews have been transcribed. I will endeavor to get as many interviews up on the web site for our March 16th launch date, but keep in mind that it takes approximately \$95 to transcribe and digitize (for the internet) each interview. Contributions are always welcome, and if you wish your donation to be dedicated to the web site, please indicate this on your check. All donations are 100% tax deductible.

IN HIS OWN WORDS...

In every issue we will print excerpt from an interview with one or more of our members. Please note that the grammar used in these first person stories is pretty much that used by the interviewee. In some cases the text has been edited for clarity.

In this issue we feature the story of Lead Pilot Major General Lewis E. Lyle, one of the most decorated bomber pilots from WWII. This interview took place in 1995, and is part one of two. The second part of his interview has not yet been transcribed. **Part 2 includes the story of how Major General Lyle earned the Silver Star.**

LEW LYLE, PILOT

Lewis E. (Lew) Lyle
Major General, Retired Air Force

Jon: What is your name and rank?

Major General Lyle: My name is Lewis E., and my name anybody called me is Lew, I'm a Major General, retired Air Force and I live in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Have been for the last 20 years, and that's where I make my home. The last 15 years I've been commuting

around the countryside getting support to build and develop the history of the mighty 8th Air Force of World War II.

Jon: Tell me what you remember the first time you got inside a B-17.

Major General Lyle: When I first uh, got assigned to the 303rd I graduated on Pearl Harbor day from flying school, although I had been flying for a couple of years before. I was sent to Boise, Idaho with the 303rd. It was this date that the 8th Air Force was activated here in Savannah Georgia, January the 28th of '42. And I was impressed with the airplane, but not all that excited about it because they were all beat up old airplanes that had been used for training. And I was just anxious to get a lot of time because I realized that your experience, time in the airplane, had a lot to do with what happens to you in the long run. But it was not terribly exciting. My objective, to tell you the truth, I never got to fly in one until I had flown about 50 or 60 hours and got to be an Instructor Pilot flying at night. So I had an unusual training period.

Jon: What would you say to the people that said a man couldn't fly anything as big as a B-17?

Major General Lyle: Well, it was an easy airplane to fly. And no real problems. It was very gentle, you know, anything that you did with it, why if, I don't care how much trouble you got in, you just pretty much just turn lose it'd fly itself out of it. I found it awfully easy to fly, although I flew as a leader most of the time. I loved to fly formation and I had no trouble with it, very easy airplane to fly. The main thing about it was that it had to be trimmed properly. Constantly. So I really flew the airplane with the trim pads. Those little knobs on a twist (sic). Or, later we got autopilot and I flew it with autopilot. So, I didn't have to struggle with the airplane. There were a few occasions when I got shot up, why I had a little trouble but normally you just fly. I flew with trimming it out and no problems to sweat. Great airplane to fly.

Jon: Did you ever fly B-24's?

Major General Lyle: Yes.

Jon: Tell me about the differences between those two aircraft.

Major General Lyle: Well, actually the B-24 was a nicer airplane and more fun to fly. It was faster. I liked the sound of the engine. The cockpit was more comfortable. A big problem with a B-24 was that at lower altitude it was a hell of an airplane, but once you got it above 20,000 or 23,000 feet, it just quit on you because it didn't have the power with the Davis wing, to maintain stability unless you're going about 200 or 250 miles an hour and we were cruising along at about 150. (**Editor's note:** they were probably flying at 150 mph to keep pace with the slower B-17s).

So it was a poor airplane for high altitude, and I mean above 20,000 feet, but a fantastic airplane at lower altitudes. Faster, it carried a bigger bomb load, and I loved both of 'em. I flew both of 'em. I didn't fly the B-24 in combat but I had one on my base and I flew it a lot.

Jon: Explain why a low altitude bomber might be a liability in combat.

Major General Lyle: Well, the problem was that originally they tried to get us to fly together, the B-24's and the B-17's, and it was a compromise. If you flew at an altitude that the B-24's could be managed properly, the B-17 was too low, and therefore it put everybody in jeopardy because of flack, and not only flack, but fighters, anything, you know, it was just a different war at 20,000 feet than it was at 25,000 feet. I've been to 30,000 feet in a B-17 over a target. And that's a big difference, in say enemy aircraft or particularly flack.

Jon: Did it seem that there was a higher mortality rate for the B-24s because of their operations at lower altitudes?

Major General Lyle: Yeah, well that was a typical reaction, and even the guys in the B-24 knew that too. Unfortunately, until General Pocks who started doing the targeting the last year and a half of the war, I don't think the B-24's were given a fair shot because they were being sent to targets at a lower altitude when there were plenty of targets that they could of gone to and done a lot of damage at lower altitude. And so I think it was right to sent the B-17's into the tougher targets, and although (we bombed) a lot of times at 20,000 feet over a target if it was important. Sometimes you had a hell of a lot of opposition and so they lost out a lot of airplanes also. It wasn't a very easy situation to send out a total force of airplanes, and I've seen as many as 2,000 bombers and they just couldn't go over the same targets and survive.

Jon: I understand that if the lead aircraft did not fly at a steady airspeed, the control inputs for the bombers behind him would get greater and greater the farther back one was in the bomber train, until the last group was making very large increases and decreases in power, thus consuming more fuel and requiring much more work just flying the plane. Tell me the importance of flying lead and keeping the lead ship in a stable flight.

Major General Lyle: Well, you described it properly, that the further out you're on the end of the whip the faster things move, and if you start dropping behind, it's harder to determine that you are dropping behind. So, the tendency was, as you said, to get way behind before they started trying to catch up. And if you're making a turn, if you don't make the turn properly, and I mean by that very, very gently, which in a lot of cases wasn't possible, but you could throw your formation all over hell and be very difficult for 'em. One of the things that I never was able to understand, but it was common, is that the units didn't fly close enough. They were, the formations were too loose and a tight formation is much easier to fly than a loose formation. So they were working themselves to death, but they didn't have to. But for some reason or other they preferred to give themselves a little more room.

Jon: Tell me about the advantage of a tight formation.

Major General Lyle: Well, during the training of the group that I went over with, the 303rd, I was able to borrow airplanes, fighter type airplanes, and make attacks at our formations as we were practicing. And a loose formation is easy to attack because it's, you know, you have to shoot at one airplane. If you just fly through and fire in the mists of a gaggle of airplanes, you're likely not to hit anything and they're likely to hit you maybe as

a fighter attacking. When you got a tight formation, the enemy has got to get close in to shoot somebody down and if they do that everybody's going to be shooting at 'em. But if it's loose, they can come in and attack a single airplane with little or no opposition except from one airplane. So it was my opinion, one of the major problems we had was that the formations were too loose.

Jon: Tell us the theory behind daylight precision bombing.

Major General Lyle: Well, this idea of battle started after World War I, really, about precision bombing and the ones that were pressing for it, precision bombing were old bomber pilots and their idea was that we're not going to have the kind of force to go in and destroy a city and we don't want to destroy it anyway. We just want to use precision bombing to go in after the important targets of the enemy that would hurt him most, and not necessarily kill many people but destroy his capability to build weapons of war, or destroy his communications system or transportation system, whatever it was that we would be able to do that. And that the B-17, which is the airplane they were counting on then, would be able to, on its own, without any fighter escort, to survive, not only the flack and the guns, which turned out to be more dangerous than we thought, but also the fighters would have a hell of a time trying to get in without being shot down because we have the firepower of a B-17. And so as a result, they developed everything, particularly after the Norden bombsight was developed, into precision bombing. And you could do it with less airplanes, and real precision and it turned out that although that was a great battle, which I can tell you about in a few minutes if you want to hear about it, but, the thing that they didn't take into account was that we were going to fight Germany, and Germany had the tremendous strength and experience and were fantastic fighters.

And the other thing was the weather. You couldn't see the target most of the time; weather was a major factor in the bombing. And so, if you can't see it, you can't hit it very well. It turns out that in a situation like that, you wind up doing area bombing anyway. Later on during the war, we developed some crude instruments to bomb (in overcast weather), but basically we were still up until the last minute doing precision bombing.

Now the battle over daylight operation and precision bombing was fought in the Air Force and the military for a number of years before the war, but in December of '42, when I'd just been over there a short time, I had a few missions, I was called to my crew. I went over as a pilot, but I had, I thought, the best crew around and I guess somebody else did, too. They picked my crew to take Brig. General Ira Eaker, who was the new Commander of the 8th Air Force and his whole staff, to meet with, (Gen. Jimmy) Doolittle and (Major General Carl) Spaats and all the top people who happened to be in North Africa trying to form the 15th and the 12th Air Force. I spent a month with 'em. I flew all of them in my airplane, my B-17.

The meetings that, this was December now, of '42, they were getting ready for the Casablanca conference, although we went through the same route and went to Casablanca too with the top leaders, you know, Churchill, and Roosevelt and all the Joint Staff was over. They had to present the case for daylight precision bombing because it was so much pressure, because of our losses and the problems with targeting and so forth.

After about a month down there, Eaker was selected to do the briefing of the top people. I had been able to sit in on a lot of their meetings and I got to know all, most of the top people and they were in Europe.

The case that he made was, you know, not doing too well in the briefing. Churchill was the main person who was objecting. But in (Eaker's) briefing with Churchill, he hit upon the idea of trying to gain him over by saying the RAF will bomb all night, and the Americans will bomb all day long, so there will be no relief (for the Germans). Bombing day and night. And Churchill said he thought that was wonderful that they didn't have any relief, day or night. And as a result he quit fighting and insisting that we go with the RAF (at night). We weren't able or prepared to go with them anyway. But that was the decision and the time it took place and from then on there was no other effort to get us to go at night or join the RAF, although we worked closely together on target selection and so forth and they'd go out one day, we might go out the next...we'd go at day and they'd go at night and sometimes we attacked the same targets but not necessarily. But that's the story of how the decision was made.

Jon: Why do you feel Churchill was opposing daylight bombing?

Major General Lyle: Well, he wanted the RAF to have more support. Their losses were pretty high and he wanted us to augment 'em. He was infuriated over the fact that the Germans had wreaked so much havoc on their cities. And he wanted to kill people. He didn't give a damn what, as long as you got the factories and kills. His idea was if you've got a beautiful factory, but everybody's dead, that's the same as wiping out the factory. So he was determined to make 'em suffer. And that was one of the reasons he wanted us to go with 'em (the RAF, who typically bombed at night).

Do you recall the story of the bombing of the Cologne Cathedral?

Major General Lyle: No, but I know quite a bit about Cologne and the targeting there. There were tremendous railroad yards there and marshalling yards. And so it was always a favorite target of the British. And as far as they're concerned, see, the cathedrals in London had been bombed. They just as soon see it fall down. And so they had been in there and they had hit the target. And I'm talking about the cathedral there, and I'm sure that maybe in some cases that a few of our bombs might have hit the cathedral because the marshalling yards were real close. But we found out after the war, that thing was made out of some fantastic stones and, and it was uh, stronger than a bridge. And the bombs were bouncing off of it. So it took quite a bit of damage but it wasn't destroyed, not because it wasn't bombed. It just could take the bombing. But all around it was nothing but devastation. But there it stood. Never looked like it from a distance, didn't look like it had ever been touched. But it was scarred up but not down.

Jon: Did you feel well suited to being a pilot?

Major General Lyle: Well, it was something that I could do, and I had built model airplanes all my life and I was good at that, and I, in building the airplanes, by the time I got in one I knew how to fly it. I didn't need an instructor to tell you the truth. But I was in the National Guard in the infantry when the war was declared and I had been in for a year before I was in it (combat with the infantry). I said well I figure I'll get killed in

infantry anyway, I don't want to be killed with a rifle in my hand. I'd like to be doing something a little more important and I wanted to fly.

I knew how to fly. Had bought my own airplane when I was a youngster and flew it all over and it was a wonderful experience because I learned the two cardinal things about flying and they still apply to this good day. That one thing is critical, is that you never lose your flying speed and that you never stall an airplane. It is, and my...during the experience I had flying in a Piper Cub, which is what I had, I learned from experience that if you're faced with a possibility of stalling by trying to get over something, or just keeping your speed up and flying into it, you're safer, as long as you have control of the airplane, even if you're going to hit a brick wall. You're better to fly into the brick wall than you are to stall and fall into the brick wall. And I've come back with treetops in my, my little Piper Cub. I learned that and I never forgot it and it's the greatest thing to learn, but it takes a lot of guts to fly something into the ground. If you're going to hit the ground it's better to fly into it than it is to try to hold the airplane up and make it fly, and when it quits flying, it's a disaster. Always.

Jon: As a pilot in command, what were your responsibilities to your crew?

Major General Lyle: Well, I was early in the game and my responsibility was to train my crew and that's what I did. See that they got to their classes when we had classes. Our training program left a lot to be desired. We were the first outfit they put together. And the training appeared. I wound up as an instructor pilot and I spent most of my time flying with other pilots, checking them out in a B-17. It wasn't until a few weeks before, so I was flying with different crews all the time, but I did go to all the training courses, gunnery and all the other specialties - radio, whatever position the airplane, navigation, bombing and so forth. So I wound up being sort of a jack-of-all-trades in the training program, and spent a lot of time flying, most of the time flying with other crews. So I didn't get a crew of my own until just a few weeks before we went over. But I was pretty strict and I was older than most guys. I was 25 when I started over, so...and had a lot of experience and I didn't hesitate to give orders and expect 'em to be followed. And they were.

Jon: Tell me about the B-17.

Major General Lyle: Well it's normally thought that the pilot was the most important crew member on the airplane. And he did have the responsibility to be sure his crew was trained and all that, but he had a lot of help, and trained the crew from the training program that we set up.

In the nose of the airplane where the bomb site was you had the bombardier and, in the early airplanes why, all we had was a little old .30 caliber (machine gun) or something, mounted up there that he could fire in a emergency. But he, in my opinion, as it turns out, was a key person on the airplane. He had a navigator behind him with a table and with oh, very small cramped quarters. But they worked together at navigating in getting to the target or getting back home or whatever the navigation problem was and that the navigator was certainly a very key person in the equation. Really what you had was a bombing team of three people – the pilot, the bombardier and the navigator and that was the difference between hitting the target and missing it. And they were the key people. But in the final

analysis the guy who dropped the bomb and said, "Bomb's away," was a guy who was the most critical on the airplane.

Behind these lead teams as I mentioned there, you had a co-pilot and I originally started out with a young fellow, but then I wound up flying with older experienced pilots and then we had an engineer who had a top turret right behind us. He had an important role because he was an enlisted man, and he looked after all the other airmen on the crew, was looked upon as... first place he was usually a senior, but he also looked after these guys day and night and see... to see that they did their job promptly.

Next in the tour, of course, the bomb bay and then in the middle of the airplane was a radio operator, set up where he had a pretty nice room in there and a table, but all the communication gear was in there. He was key person in a lot of ways, helping with navigation, but also staying in communication with all the sources that you needed whether you're over water and in particular if you're flying across the ocean or something you needed in those days. You had to have a first-class radio operator to assist you in that. But he also had a gun in the hatch above him that he could fire.

Behind that (the radio compartment) and in the middle of the airplane approximately was a ball turret in a B-17 and it's a ball about three feet in diameter and a young little fellow could get in it, but not with a parachute. But he had 360 degree maneuverability and he could move that turret and aim at everything around, including part of your airplane if he wasn't careful. So he was as big threat to airplanes that were below or for approaching from any direction. So he was important.

In the waist, you had two gunners. One on the left waist and right waist and originally they had the most miserable ride of anybody because the temperature normally at 25,000 feet was around 65 degrees below zero. And we had lousy equipment the greatest danger they had during the early part of the war was frostbite, and practically all of them had it. It was a horrible thing. The wind was blasting in at 150 miles an hour and the temperature was 65 below zero, so you can figure out what they're up against. The clothing they had wasn't adequate. But you had one (gunner) on the left and one on the right.

Down in the tail you had a tail gunner. Of course, he was a key person for two reasons. One is that without a gunner back there you were terribly vulnerable to any kind of fighter attack. And also, I always flew most of the time I was leading a formation. I had an officer, a pilot, back there so he could not only shoot the guns, but also he could keep me informed as to what was going on back there about the formation and so forth. But they had to work together as team if they were gonna be effective because the B-17 was an awesome target to attack.

And to be honest with you, the stories that I've heard, the Germans didn't particular like it. They didn't like to come in against a formation, particularly one who was in good shape and all (flying in tight formations). But if the team was not alert, and a lot of times you get complacent, you don't see a fighter and you don't see any war going on, and the first thing you know you're shot down. And you don't know what hit you. This was a common story. So the key was... and that was the responsibility normally of the pilot, keep 'em on the ball. Don't let 'em relax; don't let 'em start telling stories. Make 'em stay on the high state of alert and that was the key to staying alive.

Jon: We talked to another lead pilot who would not let his crew chatter for that reason.

Major General Lyle: It was strictly business on my airplane and the only time they could shoot the breeze was when we hit the ground, come back.

Jon: Tell me about the weather in England.

Major General Lyle: In the first place, we had toward the early part (of the war), we only had a few hundred airplanes over there, but when you had two or three thousand airplanes over there it (was a) different situation. So in the early part of the war, the danger of hitting somebody else was relatively unlikely, even if it was bad weather.

The weather, generally speaking, was lousy. We had a lot of fog and had a lot of low clouds and then, as you got more and more airplanes over there, it got more and more complicated, trying to fly through 10,000 feet of fog and clouds before you broke out on top where you could see. So it was a terrible disadvantage in trying to get a force of that size, say a thousand airplanes together, and to get 'em properly lined up, exactly as ordered, and pass over a point exactly in, in their proper order. But also, the interval would be exactly right.

So that was the, the trouble there. But that was nothing compared to the weather over Germany, over the target area. In the first place, you wound up with a tremendous amount of clouds that you'd fly through. Well, that was hard on formations. They tended to give these long formations a lot of trouble trying to stay on course and not fly into each other.

The other thing was navigation. You didn't have any radar. You were doing DR (dead reckoning) and even if you could see the ground, you had a problem because they (the Germans) got to putting out smoke so much around the targets that you couldn't find the aiming point. And frequently, you'd come into a target area, particularly if it was a larger city, and if you weren't the first airplane there, why, there'd be so much smoke and fire that the visibility around the aiming point was so bad that trying to get bombs within 500 feet of it were very difficult.

So that was a big problem. The other problem was that there would be breaks in the clouds and you could think you could see the target and you would be able to see it come in, but then when you got over the target along the point where you would drop the bombs, and we didn't.

We dropped it in formations, you know, six or 12 or 18 (bombers), depending on the type of formation you're flying. Everybody's dropping on the leader and the last few minutes, or last minute or so, he can't even see the target. So, that was a difficult problem for doing good bombing. So the overall effect on it during the whole war was that the weather over Germany was a heck of a lot more important to us than the weather in England. Although the weather in England, you come back with lousy weather there, a lot of people shot up. It was a disaster too. But, but as far as accomplishing the mission itself, the biggest problem we had was the weather. If we could have seen the targets uh, we'd have done a lot better.

Jon: Tell me about the Luftwaffe vs. the B-17.

Major General Lyle: Well, to start out with, I think their the state-of-the-art back in the late '30's with fighter aircraft was so poor and they'd spend so little time and money on fighters, that they were comparing the fighters that we had, that we knew about, uh, with the enemy we might have, and uh, you know, this country wasn't thinking about fighting Germany at the time. But Germany had been in Spain and they had been building up their air force for twent..., for 10 or 15 years. They had tremendous experience and they had a lot of equipment that was far superior to anything we had. Guns, still at 50 caliber, they had 20 and 30 and 40 millimeter guns. And when you (flew close), so that a good, tight B-17 formation is a real deterrent to a fighter pilot, although they had tremendous experience and they were fantastic. They could come fly, they could fly right through your formation b... and barrel rolls and all kinds of things and just wiping out an outfit.

That was early. Eventually those pilots got shot down and killed, and they wound up with people who didn't have the experience and so forth. But they did continue to improve their fighter aircraft and their gunnery and the ability to build a fighter that's hard to shoot down. And, as a result, really, back in the, in the 40 th...period of th...'43 and when we were losing all the time, some people thought, well, you know, it's just a battle and they're winning. But, the fact is we were losing our... everything.

They were losing the crews and the airplanes and everything was short. And from those of us who were in the know, figuring, you know, it may not, we may not win this thing. It's just, with the way the Germans are building things they had gotten so many targets underground and alls that, but the Germans had a lot of experience to start with. And they had aces that had shot down 200 airplanes. We didn't have an ace in the air force. So the fact is they had the superior equipment, the fighters.

They had old timers who wasn't afraid of the Devil himself. They'd come barreling in at you. But as time went on, and we learned a lot about (them), and our own gunnery got better, we got chin turrets on the airplanes and the gunners got better training and the whole crews got better trained, we did better. But the (American) fighter escort was a tremendous help. But it didn't keep the Germans from attacking the bombers

The bombers were always used as bait. If the fighters went over there the Germans wouldn't come up, 'cause there was no threat to 'em. But when the bombers came over, they knew they were gonna bomb their cities. And they had to come up and fight you. Well, that was a good deal for our fighter pilots.

But they had some good battles among themselves, you know. And it helped the bombers to a great extent. But there was always the Germans had radar and they were able to tell where every group was, where there was fighter escort and where there was not fighter escort. And what they would do is determine where the force was going and direct their fighters towards groups that didn't have any fighter escort or they, they were in disarray. In other words, a lousy formation. So they would select the outfits and sic their fighters on the ones that had the most potential for getting shot down. And as you, if you know the history of the 8th (Air Force), frequently one outfit would just be wiped out practically, and when the others would have nothing in the way of losses, I'm talking about. But they

had it all, all kinds of uh, technical stuff that I won't try to explain to you now. But they really were making a lot of progress right to the end of the war, with their fighters.

Jon: When you were flying, what experience did you have against German fighters?

Major General Lyle: Well I flew quite a few missions and I... What I'm saying is, as far as the fighters were concerned, if you had a good formation, you had a big advantage. The other thing is, and this is, was controversial at the time, but it worked for me anyway, that if you...if a formation, if you're not on the bomb run itself trying to aim at the target and have to be absolutely still. Any slight movement over formation really screws them up. So you could be going down in a stream of 10 or 15 bomber groups ahead of you and the slightest movement would, it really screw them up because they had to get in a certain position and with the streams of bombers with say, three minutes between them,...by maneuvering and by slight movements left or right or whatever would screw them up. And that was my experience with them, but I flew every position uh, uh, but wound up flying mostly in the lead airplane, but I also flew Tail end Charlie and had hundreds of attacks, but again, they even in those cases, and I'm sure that my experience in being in command and all, I took advantage of it and I knew how to take evasive action and I could tell when a fighter was getting close enough to shoot and I'd move if I was in the back, you know. Nobody's flying on my wing.

It was the greatest sport I ever had was flying tail-end Charlie, but I couldn't do it, you know, they wouldn't let me fly (in the back of the bomber stream as opposed to leading it). Really the thing about the whole war that impressed me so much was that in spite of the fact of the danger and the lack of training and the losses and all, all the agony of the situation, the guys went (into combat). I couldn't figure that out. And then looking at my own experience I marvel at the guys that were flying with me in formation would go. They'd follow me and the other groups would do the same thing.

But that was, that was agony. They didn't know where they were going, had no control over the situation, little training, just took guts. They did a hell of a job. It wasn't just the original crews when we...the original crew disappeared. Within six months about 75% of them were gone, or less than that sometimes most of them are gone. But what really gave us the strength was the tremendous flow of new airplanes and trained crews and the crews were much better trained than we were when we went over. So that they come in at night and we'd wake them up at 3:00 in the morning and put them into formation and they'd fly and they're the ones who really carried the mail for it, because if you look at the number of people involved, it was the replacement crews that really dropped the most bombs and did the damage over there.

Jon: Was it particularly dangerous for a lead crew?

Major General Lyle: Well they, they realized that if they could shoot the leader down it would be devastating to the formation because he had the equipment. He had the best trained crew normally, but although we did have a deputy who would be usually on either right or left wing to take over, but if he, if you shoot the leader down it always screwed the whole formation up.

Now all their flack, the guns, were shot at the leader. They were trying to get the leader with their guns. But in looking through their records and talking to the German people, particularly fighter pilots, the leader was tough to get at as far as a fighter is concerned, and they could make a swipe at him, but if they came straight in to him to shoot him down, every chance they were gonna get shot down.

If he came in close enough to shoot you down then he'd either was gonna crash into you or he's gonna run into a hail of bullets. So most of the passes at leaders were out of the, from my experience and watching others, were diving passes out of the sun trying to get in there and shoot the leader down, but get out of the way real soon. They wouldn't come through the formation. It was a lot easier to go through the side of that formation and pick somebody who's back a little bit. So they realized the importance of it, but it was a good way to get shot down too.

Tell me about the dangers of being a straggler.

Major General Lyle: Well, being a straggler meant that all you had was 12 guns and if you were near in the formation, you might have 150 guns that could shoot (to protect you). So, it's really one of the things that I never understood about the flying, you know, and I've got all the respect in the world for the guy, but I could never understand why a guy couldn't stay 10 feet from a wing span, but he could stay 300 feet from you all day long staying in the right perfect place. That's a lot harder out there at 300 feet. Even 30 feet he'd been a lot easier flying. But they would straggle for all kinds of reasons: pulling too much power on the engines or just easing out here. I don't know, I don't know why they did it. But, and some of them I guess just were not qualified to fly that, although as I said, close formation is the easiest kind to fly.

Jon: I mean the guys who get hit and drop out of formation.

Major General Lyle: Well, in the first place in a B-17, unless you had all a lot of other problems, having an engine shot out should not cause you to have to leave a formation. You can fly on three engines. In a B-17 you can fly on three engines. A B-24 uh, if it were very high it couldn't do it, but a B-17 would fly on three engines. And now when they lost a couple of engines, why you'd have a different thing, but if you start straggling it's a good chance you gonna get shot down, especially if there was any fighters around because they...it was easy for them to shoot you down.

One airplane and it was a death knell when he started dragging way back and smoking and everything like that. You were just inviting anybody, you know, the youngest pilot could shoot you down over there. So it was a real problem to straggle the crew and there's a lot of battles that were fought by one airplane with many attacks and ducking into clouds to get away from the German fighters and all. But a lot of heroic efforts there on their part. And not to say that that they should have stayed in formation, I don't know, I wasn't in the airplane with them, but I could fly just as good on three engines as I could on four in formation at 25,000 feet in a B-17.

Jon: Was there anything you had apprehension about?

Major General Lyle: Well, in the first place, I got in the Air Force, leaving a situation where I thought I was gonna get killed anyway. So, this was sort of a comic relief, getting to be in the powerful force like that and have that much power in your hand. So I felt like that whatever the risks it was better than anything else I had in the way of an offer.

The other thing is that, as I told you earlier, I was very confident; confident in myself and the crew people with me and I figured that if I did the best I possibly could, and that meant I had to really be hyped up, I couldn't just go in there cool as a cucumber and just take it easy. When I got in the airplane, time I got to the airplane, I wasn't scared of the devil himself. You know, I had so much adrenaline flowing and that's the way I went through the whole thing – that's, so that, I know it sounds stupid and a lot of people won't believe it, but I never was afraid.

When you're sitting on the ground waiting for your turn to get to go on a mission , it was tough; I liked to go on all of them, but it's the, it's the easy way to, to get a tour or whatever your objective is, but sitting around and waiting was agonizing to a certain extent and if I started to thinking about getting shot down or something, well I just said well, that's a waste of time. Why don't I think about how to keep from getting shot down? And that's what I did.

Flying Funny Pages

On some air bases the Air Force is on one side of the field and civilian aircraft use the other side of the field, with the control tower in the middle. One day the tower received a call from an aircraft asking, "What time is it?"

The tower responded, "Who is calling?"

The aircraft replied, "What difference does it make?"

The tower replied, "It makes a lot of difference..... If it is an American Airlines flight, it is 3 o'clock. If it is an Air Force plane, it is 1500 hours. If it is a Navy aircraft, it is 6 bells. If it is an Army aircraft, the big hand is on the 12 and the little hand is on the 3. If it is a Marine Corps aircraft, it's Thursday afternoon and 120 minutes to "Happy Hour."

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During training exercises, the lieutenant who was driving down a muddy back road encountered another car stuck in the mud with a red-faced colonel at the wheel.

"Your jeep stuck, sir?" asked the lieutenant as he pulled alongside.

"Nope," replied the colonel, coming over and handing him the keys, "yours is."

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Having just moved into his new office, a pompous, new colonel was sitting at his desk when an airman knocked on the door. Conscious of his new position, the colonel quickly picked up the phone, told the airman to enter, then said into the phone, "Yes, General, I'll be seeing him this afternoon and I'll pass along your message. In the meantime, thank you for your good wishes, sir." Feeling as though he had sufficiently impressed the young enlisted man, he asked, "What do you want?"

"Nothing important, sir," the airman replied, "I'm just here to hook up your telephone."

~~~~~

Officer: "Soldier, do you have change for a dollar?"

Soldier: "Sure, buddy."

Officer: "That's no way to address an officer! Now let's try it again!"

Officer: "Soldier. Do you have change for a dollar?"

Soldier: "No, SIR!"

~~~~~

Q: How do you know if there is a fighter pilot at your party?

A: He'll tell you.

Q: What's the difference between a fighter pilot and a jet engine?

A: A jet engine stops whining when the plane shuts down.

~~~~~

"Well," snarled the tough old Navy Chief to the bewildered Seaman, "I suppose after you get discharged from the Navy, you'll just be waiting for me to die so you can come and pee on my grave."

"Not me, Chief!" the Seaman replied. "Once I get out of the Navy, I'm never going to stand in line again!"

## **Military & Aviation Wisdom**

"A slipping gear could let your M203 grenade launcher fire when you least expect it. That would make you quite unpopular in what's left of your unit."  
- Army's magazine of preventive maintenance.

"Aim towards the Enemy."

- Instruction printed on US Rocket Launcher

"When the pin is pulled, Mr. Grenade is not our friend.

- U.S. Marine Corps

"Cluster bombing from B-52s are very, very accurate. The bombs are guaranteed to always hit the ground."

- USAF Ammo Troop

"If the enemy is in range, so are you."

- Infantry Journal

"It is generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed."

- U.S. Air Force Manual

"Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword obviously never encountered automatic weapons."

- General Macarthur

"Try to look unimportant; they may be low on ammo."

- Infantry Journal

"You, you, and you ... Panic. The rest of you, come with me."

- U.S. Marine Corp Gunnery Sgt.

"Tracers work both ways."

- U.S. Army Ordnance

"Five second fuses only last three seconds."

- Infantry Journal

"Don't ever be the first, don't ever be the last, and don't ever volunteer to do anything."

- U.S. Navy Swabbie

"Bravery is being the only one who knows you're afraid."

- David Hackworth

"If your attack is going too well, your walking into an ambush."

- Infantry Journal

"No combat-ready unit has ever passed inspection."

- Joe Gay

"Any ship can be a minesweeper ... once."

- Anonymous

"Never tell the Platoon Sergeant you have nothing to do."

- Unknown Marine Recruit

"Don't draw fire; it irritates the people around you."  
- Your Buddies

"If you see a bomb technician running, follow him."  
- USAF Ammo Troop

"You know that your landing gear is up and locked when it takes full power to taxi to the terminal."

As the test pilot climbs out of the experimental aircraft, having torn off the wings and tail in the crash landing, the crash truck arrives, the rescuer sees a bloodied pilot and asks "What happened?".

The pilot's reply: "I don't know, I just got here myself!"  
- Attributed to Ray Crandell (Lockheed test pilot)

**Membership levels:**

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- SQUADRON: \$50
- GROUP: \$100
- WING: \$500
- DIVISION \$1000 & above
- \$10,000 and above: small bronze bust

**Membership benefits/gifts**

- Newsletter, membership certificate, lapel pin
- “ “ “ “ “ , pen
- All of the above plus cap with logo
- All of the above plus flashlight
- All of the above

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