Robert M. Black

Amthor: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940s* program. The Nodaway County Historical Society Museum is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support of the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today's date is November 5, 2008, and this interview is being conducted at the Nodaway County Historical Society Museum located in Maryville, Missouri. The interviewer is Joni Amthor, and assisting is Margaret Kelley. The interviewee is **Robert M. Black**, and he was born on October 21, 1919. He lived during the 1940s, and this interview is his story of life during the time period including World War II.

The first thing we're going to talk about is your background. Where were you born, and we've already discussed your birth day was, but later discuss who your parents were like, and what they did for an occupation, and if you had any brothers or sisters.

Black: Well, I was born in Burlington Junction, across the road from the cemetery. I am going to make a long distance journey across the road. My parents were Coral and Orpha Black, and they were farmers as far back as I can remember, and to start with they were renters and we moved around over the country and I, of course, walked to country schools, to start with. My folks finally bought a farm that had been owned by my great-grandparents originally, and we moved into Elmo district, and I went to high school in Elmo and graduated there.

Amthor: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Black: No brothers and sisters, I was an only child.

Amthor: Tell us what life was like in the 1940s before you entered the military. What were your concerns, your joys?

Black: Janie and I were married in 1936, 1939; I'm making us older! For a couple of years, I worked around here and there, and then I went to work for a pipe line company, and we moved around all over the United States. We started out in Missouri, went to Oklahoma, Texas, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and in January the first, 1942, we went to Homestead, Florida, and we were there for a year, and built a pipe line for the Navy, a hundred and forty-four miles from Homestead to Key West, twenty inch line for water for the Navy. We were there a year, and the later part of that year, I was drafted. Actually, I didn't know it. The notice came into the office, and my boss got it and sent it back, and I was deferred for six months. At the end of that six months, we had finished in Florida, and gone to Texas to work, and when I got my second draft notice, I quit my job and went home, and we went into service.

Amthor: What year was that?

Black: 1943.

Amthor: Do you have any other members of the family that went to the war?

Black: No, only my wife's – my brother-in-law – she had, what, three boys in service;

Mrs. Black: Four.

Black: Four.

Amthor: Now we're going to talk a little bit about propaganda. What did you know about the war in Europe, or in China? What did you hear about it before you went in service?

Black: At that time, I don't know that I heard a lot about it. Hitler was really in power over there and what we heard was a lot of his doings that I remember, in particular, the Jewish people, how he was prosecuting those.

Amthor: How do you think the United States portrayed the war in Japan at that time? What were they saying about them?

Black: don't know that we were – I didn't know that we were too concerned about Japan until Pearl Harbor. It seemed to me that is mostly we were concerned with Europe.

Amthor: How did you learn about the attack of Pearl Harbor?

Black: I don't remember where we were, but I am sure we heard it over the radio, I'm sure.

Mrs. Black: We were in Atlanta, I think.

Black: We were where?

Mrs. Black: In Atlanta, I think.

Black: Could be.

Amthor: How did you learn about the progress of the war?

Black: Radio, mostly. At that time, when I worked on the pipe line, we were working twelve hours a day, every day. There was no days off; the only thing was the weather that would stop us. Really, I didn't know what color the house was where we were living in' I wasn't there in the day time. Janie went with me all the time, but . . . .

Amthor: Now we're going to go back to when you got – did you get drafted, or did you enlist?

Black: I was drafted.

Amthor: You were drafted, that is right, you did say that. What age were you?

Black: I was 24.

Amthor: In what branch of service did you enter?

Black: I went into Fort Leavenworth for induction, and I had been operating heavy duty equipment, and they insisted that I go into the Seabees, but I had always been, even when I was a kid, I was fascinated with airplanes. Part of it was my Dad; my Dad was in World War I, he was in the Signal Corps, and at that time, all the airplanes that the U.S. had were in the Signal Corps, and he went overseas with the Signal Corps. I can remember him telling stories about when the planes landed if it was windy, two of the soldiers would run out and get a hold of the wings to keep the wind from blowing the planes over. Planes have changed some!

Amthor: What was the highest rank that you achieved?

Black: Staff Sergeant.

Amthor: Tell us a little bit about your basic training camp, where you were stationed.

Black: When I finally talked them in to letting me into the Air Force, they shipped me to Shepherd Field, Texas, where I took my basic training. I took a lot of tests, and I was accepted into Aviation cadets. Everyone who hadn't had college education they said they were training officers, and they sent us off to Lubbock, Texas, to Texas Tech, to college, where they gave us two years of college in sixteen weeks. It was rough. I wondered at the time if they didn't want to wash us out, but it was rough. We had an hour of calisthenics every day, every Tuesday we ran two miles and every Saturday we ran five. They had us timed, so you had to run. They were strict.

Amthor: Did you have any specialized training?

Black: Specialized training?

Amthor: Yes.

Black: From there, when we graduated out of college, I wanted to be a pilot, of course, and when we finished, they gave us each our orders of where we were going from there. I was disappointed, because I was to be shipped, the next day I was to be sent to Santa Ana, California, for navigator training. I was disappointed. The next morning, I was disappointed worse. They washed everybody out, and sent the whole class to Yuma, Arizona, for gunnery class. A class of three hundred and fifty, and we went to Yuma, Arizona, in July, out on the desert, which was miserable.

Amthor: How did you adapt to military life? What were your duties, your physical regimen, your barracks? Talk about - what did you eat? What was it like?

Black: Just fair, this food, I wasn't impressed. To skip ahead, when we were overseas, I thought the food was great. Really.

Amthor: Let's talk about some of your war time service. Where did you serve, and talk about your duties at these places.

Black: When we graduated from gunnery school, we sent to Ardmore, Oklahoma, where they put the crews together. I remember I walked into – they told me where my crew was, in a barracks, and I walked in the barracks. I didn't think there was anyone in there to start with, and at the back they had moved the bunk beds to one side, and here these guys sat crossed legged on the floor, in a wooden barracks, and they had a piece of tin with some heat tabs on it, and they were cooking some new soup that the army had issued. That was my crew. I went from there to – at Ardmore, we finished our training there, and of course, I got a furlough and at home, and we went back to Lincoln, Nebraska, where we took a train to New York City, and we went on the Queen Elizabeth, which was a luxury liner originally, but was converted to a troop carrier. I don't remember, I believe there were six thousand of us on this ship, and I am sure that the little rooms that we were in were made for one or two people, and they had put bunk beds in them, and they were three high. There were six beds in this little room, and we were served two meals a day, and of course, a lot of the guys couldn't eat because they got seasick quick. We were out the two meals a day, and we were on deck for about two hours each day, and we took seven days – we were in a convoy, and we took seven days to get to where we landed in Liverpool. At Liverpool, we were met by trucks, and they took us to the 305th Bomb Group, which was called Chelveston, and I was in the middle part of England, close to Northampton.

Amthor: Can you talk about some of your missions, after you got over in Europe.

Black: My first mission was on the 15th of December, we arrived over there; we were on the boat Thanksgiving Day, I remember that, because we had some greasy beef and some boiled potatoes. My first mission – we had flown around some before that in England, but the first mission to Kassel, Germany. We divided up and each one of us went with a crew that was their crew that was experienced. We bombed Kassel, Germany, came back. It was an easy mission; we had some flack, some, but nothing bad, nothing real close to us. When we got back, it was foggy, and the ship that my co-pilot was in hit a tower at Devontry, crashed and burned. This was about three o'clock in the afternoon. The burial service was the next morning at eleven. Of course, we all went to the service that day, there were 32 men and one woman buried at Cambridge. I was disgusted. The service was short, there was a Protestant chaplain talked a little bit, a priest, and a rabbi; each one of them talked a little bit and they had dug a long trench and these caskets were laid in the trench and when it was over, there were guys singing with shovels came out. What it was, was Italian POWs that were to cover the caskets. I didn't like it.

The next five missions after that I probably fired the gun two or three times, but nothing real close. We had flack of course, we had one crew that had just come in, and they were flying right aside of us, and I saw them take a flack –direct hit, and all there was, was a ball of fire and smoke. I wasn't particularly concerned, but the seventh mission we went on, the Germans had developed radar to the point where they were tracking us with radar and were aiming their anti-aircraft guns, and it was uncomfortable. They were putting them in there close. To start with, the 88 mm would fire, and when they burst, under the plane, they were black as coal. The 105s, when they shot those, they would come up, and they were white, and occasionally they would send up an incendiary, and it was red. It was like the Fourth of July! Anyway, the seventh mission, they decided I guess, that they had to do something about the radar, and they had found

out that a little tin foil strip the same thing you put on your Christmas tree, 18 inches long, they found out that if it was flying in the air, it had the same image as an airplane, on a radar set. So that day, there were 12 planes; there were eight from our group, and there were four from another group that were flying about half, quarter of a mile apart over the target, and we were twelve minutes ahead of the main group, with the bombs. We had the bomb bay loaded with what they called chaff, what they called that, and we were to go up to as high – something over twenty thousand feet, and scatter our chaff, before the main bunch. Usually when we flew, we were in formation. An enemy hesitated to come in, because there were a lot of guns that could focus on a plane, but what they liked were stragglers', and we were far enough apart that we were vulnerable. We were over the target, we were ready to drop our – start throwing out the chaff, and there was about, I don't know, about twenty or so enemy 109s came in, and we had P51s, fighters to protect us, and they went off north of us, we could see that they were in a dog fight over there, and another group came in, they claim between twenty and twenty-five Focke-Wulf 190s. They started in at one end of our group and they would make a pass at that plane and another one would come behind him until it went down. They finally got down to us and we – the ball turret gunner, I was in the waist, and the ball turret gunner got out; I looked around, and he was right in the bottom of the plane, right by me, and he rolled up, and called the pilot, and he said I'm out of ammunition. I am going to get out of the ball. The pilot said, this is an order, you get back in there and you move a bit, and make them think we're alive. So he got back in there, and it wasn't I don't think it was a minute until another plane came in, and the ball turret rolled up, and the door was gone. I guess some of those rounds had hit it, some of those rounds had hit the hinges, and the door flew off and he turned up, he came out of there, he was as white as a sheet of paper. He said later, when the air hit him, he thought he was dead. But anyway, I was firing at the two planes that went down. It seemed like we had had it, and all at once, the fighters quit, and just as soon as they did, we started getting flack. They started firing their flack, so we took a hit, we lost the number four engine over our target, and dropped our chaff, and started back, and we were lucky because two P51s, I guess saw us off by ourselves, and they came with us. We had lost one engine, and we were starting back, and somebody noticed we were leaving a vapor trail. They decided that it was gasoline, out of one of the tanks, and they had to shut down another engine, and they pumped the gas out of that tank into one of the others. We kept on for home, we were gradually losing altitude, and we had to come back to start with, to about ten about ten thousand feet, so that we would have oxygen, and we had lost our electrical system, and we had lost the hydraulics system. We came on and -----

Kelley: Do you want me to stop a minute?

Black: No.

Kelley: It's okay.

Black: We came on in, we were losing altitude all the time, and we got over the – the two planes stayed with us until we got to the [English] Channel, and when we got there we dumped everything out of the plane. We threw our flack suits, guns, everything that was heavy, we threw in the Channel, and the pilot thought we could get on to our base, so we were ready to land at our base, and we had lost another engine, and we had one, and of course we fired red flares, and went on in and landed, but we had cranked the wheels down; the landing gear, we had cranked it

down by hand. We discovered the tire on the left side was blown out, it was flat. The one engine that we had, was the number one engine on the left side. When we landed, the pilot – we didn't have any brakes, no flaps, and he had to keep power on that engine to keep that side up, with the other one, and we ended up we used the whole runway and when we got to the perimeter track, he got it turned and we got it on the perimeter track. The next day, the crew chief said that night, he said, why did you bring it back? The next day he told us there were a hundred and fifty-two holes in the airplane. I brought a piece of flack back home with me – I don't know where it is, I don't know where my medals are, my dog tags, but with them there is a piece of flack that, about four inches, came through the floor and hit the ceiling and fell back. I guess just for a keepsake, I brought it home. None of us were wounded, I don't know how we could be, but a hundred and fifty-two holes in the airplane. They worked on it for about two weeks before it ever flew again.

That was our last mission that I ever had a gun. They called me in and I was sent down by London somewhere to a radar school. There were six of us that went down there and we were there probably two weeks, and when we came back I flew the rest of missions in the radio room with the radio man. I had a radar set and I had a receiver and about six sets it would send, and I would pick up the frequency that the Germans were sending radar on. I would turn on one of my sets and jam it. That's the way they controlled the radar for the rest of the war. It must have worked. From then on, I flew in the lead plane, and they changed things to where you had to do thirty-five missions, but because I was flying lead, I only had to do thirty. They thought it was the most dangerous place.

I didn't tell you anything about the B-17 ; at the start of the war, the B-17 was the Cadillac of all the bombers. A four-engine plane and each engine developed about twelve hundred horsepower. They used, on takeoff and climbing, they used about 40 gallons an hour for each engine, which was 160 of high octane fuel an hour, and if we weren't on a long mission, as a rule when we got – took off and got to altitude, and crossed the Channel, we probably had used half of our gasoline. It was the safest plane I think they had made, because it would sure take a beating.

When we were ready to take off, well, our clothing, to start with. At altitude, at 40,000 feet, it's about 40 degrees below [zero]. Of course it was dangerous. To start with we wore our little GI short and shirt; they issued long handles, and I wore them once, but they were wool, and I think they were reclaimed. I was in misery all day, and I didn't wear them after that. To start with we put on a little suit that was an electric suit that was heated. It had the pants and the suspenders, then the jacket, and they plugged together, and we had feet in them that plugged into the bottoms. Then what we wore, we wore gloves that were silk, little silk gloves below our others, because if you got excited and touched a gun you froze to it. So we wore those, then our regular flying gear, with the sheepskin with the leather outside and the wool inside, and of course, the helmet, and next we come to the Mae West, which was a flotation device, that fit over our chests, and it had a little can in the bottom, where you could push the bottom and it would inflate if you were shot down in water.

Over that went the parachute harness, and of course at ten thousand feet we're wearing an oxygen mask. Usually when we came down, you could look at someone who had been flying and you could see a little white line around the oxygen mask, were it was trying to freeze a little. Buy ordinarily we were comfortable. We were pretty much the same every day: we slept in the barracks, and we had a bulletin board, and if our name was on there to fly, we were on alert. We tried to go to bed early and we'd put a white towel tied to the bottom of the end of our bed and

usually three or three-thirty in the morning someone came in and woke us. We had breakfast at four o'clock, as a rule. The idea behind it they said was said that we would cause more damage in Germany if we bombed them around the noon hour. They thought it would disrupt them more. Of course we wanted to get back before dark.

We had our own driver and truck for each crew, and he would pick us up at the barracks and take us to chow. The combat men ate good. I can not object to that at all, because they said that the ground crew didn't eat that good, but we could have most anything we wanted. We were privileged, I think. We went from breakfast we would go to the interrogation room, and it was a big hall, everyone would come in, and after they all got in, then they would lock the door. One end of it was a whole map of Europe. It would always have a cover over it, and after we were all in there, and the door locked, the cover would come down, and there would be three strings on the map. A blue one for our primary target, red for the alternate, and finally a white string for another target if we couldn't hit the first two. When we were through with the briefing, always there was an opportunity to little room, where there was a Catholic priest, a rabbi, and a chaplain available if you wanted to go. From there we went to the room where we got our equipment, and loaded everything we needed on the truck, and he would take us out to the airplane where we got ready.

When we had twenty missions, they sent us to what they called a flack home. After the men had been in combat for a while they got to where they wanted to be off by themselves, they wouldn't communicating with anybody, and they were touchy and hard to get along with, so they finally decided they needed - about half way through your missions they sent you to this flack home. We were there for – I don't know if it was a week or two weeks. Where we went must have been a castle at one time, it was converted into a hotel. It was off limits for MPs, we could do anything we wanted, check out a bicycle, and no bed check, you could go in – it was at Black Pool, England, which was a resort town in peace time, and I imagine was a real classy place to go. We were there for a couple of weeks and then came back, and back to the grind again. By the end of the war I had twenty-seven missions. The seventh one was by far the worst for me. On the seventh one, we lost six of those planes that morning, in about five minutes.

The worst mission my group had was before I got there. It was in 1943, in April. They put up eighteen planes, and I think two of them came back; aborted the mission with engine problems or something, the rest of them went to Schweinfurt, and I think there was – I believe there were seventeen planes went, and two came back. They lost the rest of them over Schweinfurt. When the war was over, the troops that took Schweinfurt, captured their flag that was flying, and they sent it to our group. They said the 305th had earned it, and it today is in our memorial deal, the flag that flew at Schweinfurt.

Amthor: How did you handle emotion in combat when witnessing casualties and destruction?

Black: Most of the time, good I guess. That seventh mission, when we came back, we went into barracks, and there was two crew gone out of our barracks. Now that was ten men, that was enlisted men. The engineer and I came back to the barracks and they were cleaning out, taking their clothes out, and of course, when we came back you have interrogation, and you haven't eaten anything since four o'clock in the morning, and always after interrogation you got a double scotch – a double shot of scotch. The engineer and I didn't go to supper, we went back to the barracks and went to the officer's club and bought a fifth of scotch. This was probably four o'clock in the afternoon, and we decided we would go to town, and the liberty run went at seven,

and I don't remember getting there. I guess they laid me underneath the bench in the truck. When I got back home, (I don't know if Janie knew that or not). But when we got back to the barracks, when I came to, I was in bed with my clothes on. And we didn't fly for probably a week after that, but of course, I was gone then, to this radar school. Outside of that one time I handled it alright.

Amthor: Did you form any friendships and camaraderie while in service?

Black: My crew; they were great. They were like brothers when you fly, and you're with a bunch of guys day and night for a year, and your life depends on them, you get close. You tend to leave everybody else out, too. Maybe you don't want to make friends – they are temporary, but your crew is special, and they still are. I have contact with two of them, sometimes, and our radio man ended up as a Methodist minister, and I think for eight years – he lives in El Paso, and for eight years he was in charge of the Methodists in Latin America. The boy in the ball turret, his name is Ferguson, he lives in St. Paul, he was Catholic, and he is now a deacon in the Catholic Church. We have contact with him every once in a while. He the one time he was telling me they asked him – said the circus was in town, and they asked him to come bless the animals. He said he went down there and the elephant tried to step on me! Of course he was a little guy, you had to be to get in that ball turret. We still hear from them pretty often.

Amthor: How did you stay in touch with your family and friends when you were over there?

Black: How did I stay in contact? Letters was all; it was by letters, that was the only way, and she said she would get four or five at a time. Her letters would come that way too. At the end of the war, she knew how many missions I had. I would write in each one and tell her I was exceptionally tired or something like that, and she knew I had been flying. By the end of the war, she knew I had twenty-seven missions in.

Amthor: What entertainment did you have in the service- like USO, Red Cross; what did you have?

Black: We had the USO, and the Red Cross that came in every once in a while. Clark Gable landed one time at our base. We had some of the women – I don't remember who they were – put on a show, you know, the USO, I don't remember just exactly who they were.

Amthor: Did you ever listen to Axis Sally or Tokyo Rose?

Black: Oh, yes, we listened to Axis Sally. She would even tell us when we flew, and she would tell us how many we lost, how many planes went down. That we were on the edge of disaster, [laugh] she was real informative.

Amthor: What did you do for recreation or leisure?

Black: We'd go to town occasionally, we would fly – I think it was three times, and you had to be off for – if you flew three days in a row you had to be off for I think forty-eight hours, and you could have a pass and go anywhere you wanted. A couple of times we – my crew went

together, of course, and a couple of times we went to London. I was in London, staying at the Rainbow Club, which is right close to Piccadilly Circus and I was in a room that had that double deck bed, and I was sleeping in the top bed, and a V-2 bomb came over and hit a fish market not two blocks from the Rainbow Club, and when that went off, I was on the floor. It was that ---- we went the next morning and looked at where it hit, and it ruined the fish market all right.

Amthor: Now we're going to talk about the end of the war, when you were coming home. How did you feel about D-Day?

Black: It was great. [laugh] Now the end of the war was May 8th. That's when they signed it and I don't know, within a couple of weeks, I was called into the colonel, and he told me that I just lacked three missions, and they were consider that I had had a tour of combat, and I would come home immediately. He also said that he noticed I had been aviation cadets, and said that he was going to make some recommendations for West Point, and wondered if I was interested in staying in the service, and I said no. I wanted out. He said that I would come home immediately. Well, within another week I was sent to Port of Embarkation, and this was the last of May, or first of June. They lost me, and I stayed there until September. I was lost, I guess. I finally volunteered for KP, and I was on KP every third night, and that night I got acquainted with the mess sergeant. Actually, what he did was put me in charge to see that the guys worked, and every night at midnight we had steak. That's the reason I volunteered. But from along in June to September, I was on KP every third night and I finally came back and they sent me to Liverpool, and came out from there and we were on a Victory ship, they called it, and I think we were 17 days coming across. We got into storms, and we sat for – except for three days, headed into the wind. Every little bit the propeller would come out of the water, and the ship would vibrate, and….most of the guys played poker for all day and all night. I didn't. I wasn't interested in that.

Amthor: How did you feel about the dropping of the atomic bomb?

Black: I thought it was necessary. I might go back; there are two missions that I wish I hadn't have been on. One of them was to Berlin. It was towards the last of the war, and we wanted to be humane. We told the Germans where we were going. We were going to bomb the rail yards at Berlin and we did. That day, of course the Germans knew that they were defeated. They had a bunch of slave labor around Berlin. They sent them to the rail yard and put them on box cars to be shipped out; they told them they were shipping them out someplace, that they were freed, they sent them to the rail yards, and we bombed them, and they claimed we killed twenty thousand that day. The other one was worse. We bombed Dresden. And I don't know if there was anything about it in the United States, but Dresden was a town that was practically no military part to it. It was a town where a lot of the people off of the front from Russia had moved into, they thought it was safe, and it was a wealthy town, I think, anyway, supposedly the idea was from the RAF, the head of the RAF was a man named Harris, and we called him Bomber Harris, I guess the Germans called him Butcher Harris, but his thinking was that the Germans had bombed England, to kill people, and the still continued to send the V-2 over, and it was aimed at London, just in the civilian part, and he thought that it was time for pay day. So, I think it was the 14th of August, the RAF went in and bombed Dresden with fire bombs. They pattern bombed the town with fire bombs. We went in the next day and bombed it with bombs, to keep them

from fighting the fire. Dresden burned, and it burned for ten days. If we were at altitude, and it was clear, we could see it for a hundred and fifty miles. The smoke from Dresden. They claimed the fire was so strong that it killed people in the air raid shelters, it took the oxygen and even killed them in air raid shelters. The littlest estimate that I heard was a hundred and twenty thousand people. It killed men, women, dogs, cats, everything. I am sure that the idea was the same as it was at the atom bomb. We were going to make Germany give up. We could bomb any place and they had to give up, and I think the idea was the same with the atom bomb.

Amthor: Do think President Truman should have ordered the bomb to be dropped?

Black: Yes.

Amthor: Where and what were you doing when you got news that the war was over, and how did you get home? I guess we've already discussed that one. Were you given a reception from your family, friends and the community when you came home? Did you get a reception?

Black: I think we were very fortunate in World War II. They guys that came back home after Korea and Vietnam, I've talked to some of them that – well, one in Burlington said that he was in Vietnam, and he said that when he got off the ship, he was spit on. In World War II, everybody was behind it, the whole country, I was treated great when I came home.

Amthor: How did you adjust back to civilian life?

Black: Very well, I think. I came home, and I started – we started farming. I intended to go back on the pipe line, and one of the neighbors came and offered to rent me his farm that year. He was going to move in with his dad, and so we started farming, and I farmed for a couple of years, and of course I went to GI school at that time, and then I got the mail route out of Burlington, and all told, now; Of course I carried mail now for thirty years and then retired in 1980, and there's been two months since 1943 that I didn't get a check from the government. They took me to raise.

Amthor: We discussed earlier that you'd stayed in contact with your company, your group of men. Did you join the American Legion or VFW?

Black: I joined the American Legion in Elmo in 1948, and I would have been an original member, but I was sick, I didn't go for two weeks. I've belonged ever since.

Amthor: Are you proud to be a veteran of World War II?

Black: Oh, yes.

Amthor: After the war, were you concerned about the Soviet's spread of communism?

Black: More or less, but not terribly concerned.

Amthor: Did you take advantage of the GI bill or any other of the programs?

Black: I went to the program where they taught you to farm for a while.

Amthor: You mentioned a little bit about this, but what do you think is the difference between the wars of today and World War II.

Black: Like I said earlier, everybody was behind us, and the wars since that, everybody hasn't been behind them. It's bad for the guys, and it's not right, but. . . .I'll go ahead and tell you, in 1988, our reunion of the 305th, that we belong to, was back in England, and Janie and I had the opportunity to go back to England to the base where we flew, and it was great. The kids at the school, they had a dinner for us, at the school, and they gave us ; they had drawn pictures of B-17s and they even gave us each a little box that had a piece of the runways at Chelveston, and we still have that someplace. I had two men on the street, two older Englishmen, to come up to me and wanted to shake hands, and ask if I had flew there, and thanked me for what I had done for England. It was great. We – the bus took us from there, and took us to the cemetery at Cambridge, and when we got there, I wasn't going to get off the bus. Janie talked me into it, she thought that I should. I got off. We had a – there were a hundred and fifty of us that were on that trip, and we gathered around the flag pole, and they had one of the guys named Fusch, and he lives in Illinois, and he's a minister, and he lives right east of St. Louis, yet. He was kind of in charge of it, and he gave us a talk at the flag pole, and had a prayer, and they gave each one of us a rose, to put on one of the veteran's graves. And I found John's grave and put the rose on his grave. We went back that night to the hotel, and the next morning, I told my wife I wanted to write down what I was thinking. And I wrote a poem. I don't usually read it, but. . . . I called it "A Visit to the American Cemetery at Cambridge."

We came again to Cambridge,
A hundred of fifty of the best.
We came to honor those who died
And were laid here to rest.
The war was over long ago,
The battles all lost or won.
First we ask God to forgive us
For all the wrong we had done.
We remember when we laid them here,
Some almost warm to the hand.
The bugle blows taps,
We stand bare headed and still,
Here in a foreign land.
All around us are stars and crosses,
Each one marks a grave
And for each grave a young man died,
The result of being brave.
We turn away, our heads bowed low,
For in every eye there are tears,
And memories come flooding back again
That have haunted us for years.
Oh, may this be a lasting peace,
May we never again have war,
I pray again that this is all;
Please, God, never more.

Kelley: That was perfect timing, that was a wonderful interview, I will go get another tape if you want to continue any. . . .