

Sidney Feldman

JG: This is Judy Garry. It is April 18, 2003. We are here in Asheville, NC interviewing Sidney Feldman. Mr. Feldman's birthday is August 22, 1918. In the interview with us is Teresa Joyce Feldman, Mr. Feldman's wife. Interviewer is Judy Garry. I am working for the Center for Diversity as a volunteer in Asheville, NC.

OK, Mr. Feldman. Put this right here. Actually, maybe you should hold it and just talk into it as you can. Were you drafted or were you enlisted?

SF: I enlisted in the Air Force on January 12, 1942.

JG: And where were you living at the time?

SF: In Asheville, NC.

JG: And why did you join?

SF: Well, war was declared December 8, 1941 and I figured it was time to defend my nation and I enlisted rather than waiting to be drafted.

JG: OK. Why did you pick the service branch that you joined?

SF: I picked the Air Force because I wanted to go to flying school eventually. But that didn't work out as I was washed out in basic training and flight school because of a busted ear drum.

JG: And do you recall your first days in the service?

SF: No. It's been quite a while since my first days in the service. We had our basic training in Orlando Air Base in Orlando, Florida. I was there for three months training and then I took the cadet examination and went to Nashville, TN to the classification center and they found out I had a ruptured ear drum so I couldn't resume my flying at that time.

JG: And how did that make you feel?

SF: It made me feel terrible. I went before an equality board before I washed out and, uh, and they wanted to send me to the OCS infantry, and I enlisted in the Air Force and didn't want to go into the infantry so (unclear)

JG: Tell me about your boot camp experience.

(Static makes conversation intelligible from 027-040)

SF: But after VJ day, I had enough points to be discharged so I took the discharge at the time.

JG: Which wars did you serve in?

SF: I served in World War II in England.

JG: Tell me again exactly where did you go.

SF: I, I went to...well, we left New York on December 8, 1943 and, uh, we landed in Liverpool England. From there we..I went to basic camp there and then I was transferred to the (?) Headquarters which was General Eisenhower's headquarters in Bushy Park just outside of London. And from there, I went to 8th Air Force Headquarters in (?) And Highwickham which was a RAF base. I was on detached service there from the 8th Air Force, and that's where I met my wife. She was in the RAF, Royal Air Force.

JG: Do you remember arriving in England and what it was like?

SF: Well, we arrived in , uh, we left on the Britannica. It was a - um - luxury liner before the war and they made a troop transport out of it and we left New York harbor on December 8th and arrived in Liverpool two weeks later. I don't know the exact date. But, uh, we weren't in convoy because the ship Britannica had very good speed and could avoid submarines so we didn't have any convoy to guide us over there.

JG: Did you see combat?

SF: No, I didn't see combat. I saw plenty of bombing raids and B-2 raids, but I didn't have any combat duty at all.

JG: Were there many casualties in your unit?

SF: Oh, there were quite a few casualties. (Unintelligible)...S2 intelligence.. Brief and debrief... We had to critique bombing missions. (Unintelligible) We would send out 25 bombers on a mission, we were lucky to get back fifteen, eighteen bombers at the end of the mission

JG: Can you tell me a couple of your most memorable experiences? Besides meeting your wife (laughter).

SF: Well, I was stationed in Bushy Park for a while, and, uh, and it was UCF headquarters for General Eisenhower and, uh, and, uh one time Lord (?) who spoke over the British airways would make announcements over the radio. One night he said we couldn't bomb the Yanks in New York, but we could bomb them out of Bushy Park where I was stationed. And, uh, that night we were bombed out and quite a few nissen huts were destroyed and, uh, I was in a bomb shelter at the time and the next morning we woke up and we found two five hundred pound bombs that didn't explode and they evacuated us from the air base to families in the area, and we stayed with the families until they diffused the bombs that didn't go off. And, uh, I had a wonderful family over there - a Jewish family. And they took very good care of me. I spent two weeks with them while they were diffusing the bomb. And one of the bombs they diffused had a note inside of it saying "This bomb was fused by friends of the allies." In other words, the Jewish people in Germany were evidently doing the detonating the bombs. They put this note in the bottom of the bomb and they found that note in there.

JG: Were you awarded any medals or citations?

SF: Yes, I was awarded quite a few medals and citations from my unit which I was stationed with. And, uh I have a list of them. Would you like to have a list of them?

JG: I think what we'll do is make a - we'll take a photo and scan the list if its printed and then we'll put that in the files.

SF: OK

JG: I think that'll be OK. How did you get all these medals and citations?

SF: Well, I just happened to be a member of the (?) Bomb group, 561st Squadron and we won these medals by doing a very good job in destroying quite a few German installations.

JG: OK. Now, these are some questions about life in the service. How did you stay in touch with your family?

SF: Well, I stayed in touch with them by letters. In fact, I got...I wrote at least every other day and received quite a bit of mail from my parents while I was over there. And that's the only way we could keep in touch with each other,

JG: What was the food like?

SF: Well, when I was stationed at the British Air Force Base, the food wasn't very good. (Laughter) In fact, it was awful. But when I was on the American bases the food was very good. You couldn't complain about the food, but the British rations were very bad. But we finally got used to them after awhile.

JG: Did you have plenty of supplies?

SF: Oh, yes. We had plenty of supplies.

JG: Did you feel pressure or stress?

SF: Well, I felt pressure or stress quite a few times - especially when the Germans were sending buzz bombed and B-2's over England. I could understand what the English people went through. That devastation. The first night they sent the buzz bombs over, we had an air raid warning so we got in our shelters. And we could hear the B-2's going overhead and they sounded like motor cycles. And when the motor cut off, you knew it was getting ready to fall. Quite a few of them dropped in our area, but it didn't do any damage to our base.

JG: Was there something special you did for good luck?

SF: No (laughter). The only thing special was marrying my wife. That was good luck!

JG: How did people entertain themselves?

SF: The service men? Oh, we had quite a bit of entertaining on our base. In fact, I played with the base orchestra. I played sax and clarinet. We called ourselves "The Gremlins" and we played for all the officer's club dances and we traveled to quite a few bases playing at the officers clubs and the enlisted mens clubs.

JG: And your companions who didn't play in the band. What kind of things did they do?

SF: Well, we had quite a bit of entertainment on our base. We had enlisted mens' clubs and officer's clubs. I was fortunate enough to be a relative of one of the officers - ranking officers on the base. And I went to quite a few functions with him.

JG: You were a relative, did you say?

SF: Yes, his name was Captain Robbins.

JG: So, there were entertainers?

SF: Oh, yes, we had..well, Glenn Miller's band played at our base and at one of the aircraft hangers. We had about 5,000 soldiers there for that band.

JG: What did you do when you were on leave?

SF: Well, I would usually go to London and just see the sights in the area there.

JG: So did you travel other places while you were in service/

SF: Well, yes. When my wife and I were married, we went to Torquay on our honeymoon which was considered the Miami of England. And we travelled quite a bit. And when I first met her, we went to quite a few different places.

JG: Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual events?

SF: No, I don't recall. It's been so long ago. Oh yes, we had quite a few functions on the base there. In fact, when I flew 200 missions we had a 200 mission party on our base which lasted three days. And it was only supposed to last one day, but the base was completely shut down for three days while we had this three day party, 200 mission party.

JG: What were some of the pranks that you or others would pull? Did people pull pranks or do jokes on each other?

SF: Well, we didn't do that really in my outfit. We didn't play pranks on each other.

JG: So you do have some photographs. (No more recording on side 1 at 037)

Side 2 of tape:

JG: Did you join a Veteran's organization?

SF: Yes, I was a member of the VFW for quite awhile - the one in Hendersonville....But thendriving back and forth to Hendersonville so I dropped out of the VFW in Hendersonville and I haven't been a member of any other veteran's organization since.

JG: This is the last segment., and this talks about your life after the war ...up until now, I guess. What did you go on to do as a career after the war?

SF: Well, my father retired from the business and I took over the business in - what year was it, Terry?

Terry Feldman (TF): We had it for forty some-odd years.

SF: Between Dad and I both we had it for forty years

JG: What was your business?

SF: Family grocery business. Food store. And, uh, Terry and I had it for 35 years.

JG: Where was your store located?

SF: Where South Charlotte Street is now. That's where our store was.

JG: Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or about the military in general?

SF: No, I don't think it influenced any of my thinking, really. But, World War II was sort of ancient compared to the wars we're fighting now.

TF: But at the same time, you've got to realize that was then. You've got to think about what you were doing then. See, I feel that it had a great effect on me, because I went without so much that I realized that all the things you get in life are not given to you free. And you appreciate what you do have. And you know the food that is wasted ...when I think of all the things we used to do to accumulate - stand in line, wait in queue and get up at 5 in the morning to go get loaves of bread. I used to do that while in uniform because I knew, of course, that if I had a uniform on, I could get through the line faster. And then I'd go back to camp. But I gave the bread to my mother, and it was very, very important that I tried to do that. And you appreciate what you have - just a potato. We didn't have much meat. If it hadn't been for the spam, G-d only knows what we would have done. And we had plenty of spam. (Laughter) And dehydrated eggs. But you appreciate it now. I can't throw anything away. I have to look at it and suddenly remember what I did and I've got to pass that on. It's something that's ...and that's what it does to you. I mean I lost my home twice during the war. My mother had to live in an air raid shelter.

JG: Was your home bombed?

TF: Yes it was. We had a flying buzz bomb in front of the house and then we had a high explosive 18 ft. crater when we lived on Newman Street which was right smack in the middle of London. See, I didn't join up until '41 and that was September 2nd - no, June 2nd. But the point was, that before that when the war broke out - well, the war broke out in England in 1939, and we went through all that terrible bombing for such a long time that we were living in air raid shelters for so many times. Every night we'd put on our battle dress and go down to the air raid shelters and then come out at 6 o'clock in the morning, get dressed and go to work whichever the case might be.

Most girls at the age of 18 in England were conscripted because they had to release the men from the job. We didn't have that many people. I mean it sounds like a terrific nation. It is a terrific nation, but most people had to volunteer or they had to join up. And so whether you were

in college or wherever you were, you had to go. When your number came, you had to go. You had to release the man from his position. You had to take his place. And that's the reason why I also went to Blackpool and went to photographic school and was told from then on not to mention what I was doing because it was very very hush, hush. But photographic intelligence was very, very important. And I was glad to be a part of that. To know I was.

SF: Terry made a photograph of the first atomic bomb that was sent over.

TF: It was not the atomic bomb. It was a flying buzz bomb. We had the flying buzz bomb. We did not have a plane fast enough - even the spitfires or hurricaines weren't fast enough to get a picture of it. So they used a P-38 which was an American plane, and we fixed the cameras underneath the machine guns of the plane and for every release of every bullet there was one photograph. That's what they meant when they said photographic machinery - that's what it did. So, well, when they flew over it and saw what it was, they turned around and fired the machine guns and they had a picture of it actually being fired on and then dropping down. Of course it was in pieces - blew up.

JG: How did you get into photographic intelligence?

SF: I was in S-2. I was placed in that when washed out of the cadets...I made a very high grade on my cadet examination, and they figured that was probably where I should be. (Laughter)

JG: Okay. This goes back again to veteran's organizations. I guess Terry really did answer how the service and experience affected your life. Other than meeting your wife, which was a pretty big effect on your life, tell me about meeting Terry and how you all met.

SF: Well, we met when I was stationed at Bedford and, uh, we, uh, I was only there about six months before I was transferred back up to the 3(?) Bomb group and when I left - I left in a reconnaissance truck picked me up to take me up to the 3D bomb group area and she came to the truck just before we left and she started crying and, uh, I more or less proposed to her then. Terry would come up to the base and I'd go meet her in London where her mother had an apartment.

JG: What base did she come up - the base where?

SF: The 3-D bomb base where I was stationed at Bedford just outside Cambridge. It's been so long my mind...my memory is failing me a little bit.

JG: You're doing great.

TF: Now this is ironic, because I never would have thought that I would have met Sidney. My mother said to me, "Whatever you do, don't go with the Americans." I said no, I wasn't going to do that. So then my whole family is from Cambridge, and my grandmother had a pub there for 50 years and that was in Doddington Cambridge. And I was born in Brisbridge, Cambridge and, uh, well the thing is that eventually you have sort of around the track and you come back to where you started. So Sidney was in Bedford and that was not very far from Peterborough in Cambridge - the capitol of the town, and, uh, so I thought it was very ironic that of all the things I grew up as a child in London and Cambridge and my family - the background of my family came from Cambridge, and it was just unreal that Sidney would be in that vicinity and I should

meet him and, and marry from that area. Because we wereat...St. Edwards. That's where he bought my wedding ring. And there's a lot of stories. There's a lot of things going on with that area. And we went back there many times just to see it. We have not gone back to Cambridge to see the veteran's cemetery. On our next trip, we're going to do that.

JG: Anything that you would like to add that we've not covered in this interview? Take your time. Think about this.

SF: I would like to mention when I was stationed in Bedlington there was a very famous person in my office while I was stationed there was Sarah Churchill. She was a very good friend of mine. She was Terry's hut officer in Bedlington. What a wonderful person she was! She was very interesting and

JG: This was Churchill's daughter?

SF: ...Churchills daughter and she was married to Dick Oliver the actor. And, uh, Terry will tell you the divorce

TF: The day she got divorced from him, she came into our hut, and I had the girls to do a complete inspection and she was supposed to come in, and you'd walk with her and show her the girls done their inspection and then she stood at the door and she said: "Relax, girls. I've got something to tell you." And she sat down on one of the bomb boxes and she says "I'm divorced, I'm divorced" (laughter). And we all started laughing and said "Is this what you want to do?" and she said "Yeah, I've been trying to get divorced" -Divorce in England used to, back in 1940's used to take seven (7) years to get a divorce. So I don't know how long she had been trying, but I do know she used a parcel of lawyers to do it and she finally did get divorced. But when she did, it was our good fortune to have her in our hut, and she was going wild (laughter). So anyway, we thoroughly enjoyed her as a hut officer. She was in charge of our particular huts.