

## 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Richard S. Sheehy

Born Dec 14, 1922  
Cedar Rapids

Died:

Period of Service: WW II

Source: B10, svc  
questionnaire, J Gay  
interview

Enlisted Feb 10, 1943 at Jefferson Barracks, MO.

Trained at Jefferson Barracks, Minneapolis, San Antonio, and Big Springs, TX as Bombadier, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt.

Stationed in Italy, Salt Lake City, Tonopah, NE, and Midland, TX.

Theater: South America, Africa, Europe.

Medals include Air Medal, European Theater, Victory.

Released in August, 1945.

Joined American Legion Post 402 in 1993.

He was shot down over Jugoslavia in 1945 and rescued in a dramatic undertaking memorialized in a book called 'The Forgotten 500.'



# **VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

**Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations**

**Interview with**

**Richard Sheehy**

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

September 13, 2011

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library  
in partnership with the Library of Congress

**I'm talking with Dick Sheehy at his home on Green Bay Road on Washington Island, Wisconsin on September 13, 2011. We're going to ask Dick about his service – when he went in and what happened thereafter.**

[Transcriber's note: There is an additional person present for the interview. His comments are included in brackets.]

**Dick, can you tell us about entering military service.**

I went in – I don't know if I can give you the exact date – it was in the summer of 1942 that I enlisted in the Air Force in Chicago. I went back to college after that and was called up half-way through my junior year in college, and went first to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. From there we were sent to the University of Minnesota.

**This is all in 1942?**

This is in 1942.

From there we went to San Antonio, Texas, for classification. We took a lot of tests to determine what we were best suited for.

**Did you spend any time up in Minnesota?**

Yes. It seems to me it was about two months. One of the reasons we went there was because things were backed up so much, it was meant, as far as I can judge, as a delaying tactic.

**Kind of a holding.**

Yes.

In the classification I qualified for any of the commissioned positions in the Air Force; that is, pilot, navigator or bombardier. I wanted to be a navigator because I had had a lot of navigation in the Naval ROTC in college.

**What college was that?**

University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

I wanted to be a navigator because I already knew the navigation. So they said the navigation schools were all backed up, and would I choose one of the others. I said I'd like to be on light or medium bombardment, where you had a combined navigator/bombardier. They said okay, that was fine. So I asked if I went to bombardier school, could I then get back to the navigation. They said yes, that was the very thing to do.

**Now you went from Minnesota to ...**

San Antonio, Texas.

From San Antonio we went into a basic training. That was at Ellington Field in Houston, Texas. After that we were given the choice of what we wanted to be.

**How long were you at Ellington?**

That was about two or three months. It was basic training school.

I chose to go to bombardier school because I figured I could get from there back to navigation. I finished bombardier school in October, 1943. I was commissioned a second lieutenant and given a choice of whether I wanted medium or heavy bombardment. I said I wanted medium. And the next day I shipped out for heavy bombardment! Which was rather typical of the way things were.

**It was just a rhetorical question!**

I finished the bombardier school, was then ...

**Were they using Norton at that time?**

The Norton bombsight? Yes. The bombardier school was all on the Norton bombsight. That was before the Sperry bombsight came into being.

From there I was married and then went to ...

**You got married at that time?**

Right after I was commissioned.

From there I went to what they called “phase” school. This was for several months at Mountain Home, Idaho. At that point our crew for a B24 bomber was formed.

**How many was that?**

Ten: pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator were the four officers; and there were 6 gunners on a B24.

From there we went to Tonopah, Nevada, which was in the middle nowhere. Well, of obvious reasons – that was where we were beginning to drop bombs in practice, so we had to be where nobody else was. That took about three months with our crew formed and practicing dropping bombs.

From there we went to Hamilton Field in San Francisco.

**What part of the year are we? This was late in 1943?**

This would have been very late in 1943, or early 1944. I don’t remember exactly.

From there we picked up a new airplane: flew across the country, down through South America; from South America straight across to Africa.

**What was the range? Is that why they did it – because it had a certain range?**

Prior to the time we made our flight across to Africa, the range of the B24 was a little shorter. So they made a dog-leg stop at the Ascension Islands to refuel, and then went on to Dakar on the west coast of Africa.

When we picked up our new plane, it had a little bit longer range. So we were one of the few to fly directly across, without making the dog-leg stop at the Ascension Islands.

We then flew up and over, across North Africa, and from there directly to Italy.

### **What part of Italy?**

For the B24's, they were all around Foggia in Italy. We happened to be in a little town called Cerignola. The crews were split up, and we flew missions with part of the officers – part experienced crews and the new guys like ourselves.

The first mission was an air field in northern Italy. On one of those short practice missions we lost our navigator. He was with another group – they had taken a direct hit and the plane blew up. So we got a replacement navigator. The second or third mission we made was to Ploesti in Romania, which was a big oil field center. The importance of Ploesti was that it furnished about 45% of the German fuel supply. So it was a big one, and a very important one. It was heavily guarded both by fighter planes and by flak. On that mission we lost one engine over the target.

### **From ak-ak?**

From flak.

The fighter planes did not bother us too much. We think they were out of ammunition, which was very easy to happen over Ploesti. We could not feather the propeller of the engine we lost – by feathering I mean you turn the blades into the wind so they don't wind up like a windmill.

### **You were able to do that? That was a function you could do?**

Normally you could do it. Sometimes it's done electrically or hydraulically, or sometimes a combination of both. Our hydraulic and electrical systems had been badly damaged when we were hit, and we could not feather the prop. That means it's out of synchronization with the others, and you begin to shake yourself apart. Because of that we could not stay with the formation to fly back to Italy. So we made a direct turn and were going to make a straight line back to Italy. Normally you don't do that. You kind of curve around to confuse the enemy.

We made it back across the Danube River, at a place called Iron Gorge, which is right where Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia meet all in that corner. And there is a kind of gorge there in the Danube River.

We were about 40 miles inside Yugoslavia, and we were using as a point to check navigating a little town called Bor. There was a molybdenum mine and a copper mine at Bor, and the Germans had formed around it a POW camp. We were never briefed on Bor as a place not to go near. And we were using it to fly straight over as a checkpoint! There were six anti-aircraft guns there. It wasn't a very big place. And of course they

saw us coming for miles back. And we were losing altitude slowly – nothing alarming at the moment. But every one of those six guns was right on us. We lost a second engine. Now we have engines out on both sides of the four-engine plane, and the vibration is beginning to make the wings flap like a seagull. We knew then we were in trouble. We were still under control, but we were losing altitude more then.

Along the coast of Yugoslavia there's sort of a mountain range. Our problem to solve was whether we were going to lose enough altitude that we wouldn't clear that. Because if we didn't clear that we'd be right in the heart of the German army along the coast of Yugoslavia. So we elected veering to bail out further back in the wild parts of Yugoslavia, thinking we would have a better chance of making it out of that.

Of our crew, the gunners went back to the waist of the airplane which was behind the bomb bays. There's a big camera hatch there. And the idea was that the guys could bail out altogether almost, and be close together on the ground.

Our co-pilot went back to kind of coordinate this. Prior to the start of that mission, because of that first mission when we had so much trouble and had to get out on the catwalk of the bomb bays without parachutes because you couldn't get through, we had chest packs. And the chest pack is like a duffle bag – like the paratroopers. We had to take those off and work over the open bomb bays to throw bombs out by hand because some of them had hung up and malfunctioned. So prior to the start of that mission I had the parachute department bring me a backpack, which was a narrow thing spread out over your whole back. When I got out of the plane they had not brought that out, so I sent them back. They had brought out my old chest pack, and I had thrown that up in the nose and forgotten about it. Then they did bring out the backpack.

When it came time to bail out later, one of our gunners accidentally spilled his chute in the plane, and it tangled up hopelessly. So he came back up to me in the nose and I started to hook him onto my harness, which is not a very good idea for two guys to bail out on one chute. But at the last minute I remembered by luck that extra chute I had thrown in there and took it and gave it to him. He went back to the camera hatch. So he bailed out with the rest of them.

The first four guys who bailed out, of that four two were captured as POW's. The other two fell in with another guerilla group up in the hills. The remaining six of us, which included the four officers and two of the remaining gunners, were able to get together that same evening. By the grace of God, when I was coming down I could see in the valley white sheep and I figured if there were sheep there, there had to be people around. I didn't think it was a very good idea to run into people at that moment, so I slipped my chute and skidded off and landed in trees on the side of a mountain. We called them mountains; they were like the Ozarks. They were not like the Alps, the big mountains. I landed in the trees, got stuck there and cut myself out – cut the harness – and dropped down. Then I could pull the chute down, once my weight was off it. I buried it under a log.

### **How did you land? Did you hurt yourself coming down?**

I hurt one knee. I twisted a knee, but not badly. I could walk.

### **What height were you when you bailed out?**

About 20,000 feet.

**That's pretty far up!**

I started to walk from the woods down toward that valley because I wanted to see where I was. And there were three people coming up: two very young people, maybe 20 or 30 – I couldn't tell the age – and one very elderly woman. And they had seen me come down. They came up to meet me, I guess. Only I didn't know whether they were friendly or not. But I walked down and they were walking up. And I made a big to-do about loosening the flap on my holster, and they kept coming. Finally it dawned on me, I thought they were probably a young married couple and the woman was one of their mothers. It dawned on me that nobody in their right mind would bring their wife and their mother into a situation like that. So my guess was that they were friendly. And they were.

We came up to within about 100 feet of each other. And the old woman was the first one to say anything. She said, "Amerikanske?" And I nodded my head. And they broke out in smiles. So I figured I got lucky!

**Indeed you did!**

And they took me down to where there were two other older guerilla guys. And they made haste back into a little hut. And now it's maybe 2:00 in the afternoon, and we had started out at 6:00 in the morning. I was pretty hungry because breakfast, when you know you're going to Ploiesti you kind of lose your appetite. And I didn't have any breakfast. These two old fellows had a bowl of goat's milk and a mangy old cat. And they had some corn bread. And they offered us the corn bread. The crust was all right, but the inside was mush. Anyway, we dipped the corn bread in the hair covered milk from the cat and that was our first meal.

**Were you alone at this time, still?**

No. My co-pilot – we all came down into that valley, and every few miles there would be a shout from up in the woods and one of the other guys would come down. But at that time it was just my co-pilot and I had met up.

**Was this after you met the Yugoslavians or before?**

The three who picked us up? It was after. They took us down to where these two fellows were. And they were part of the guerilla group.

That evening they took us down to a house, and there were three people there. It wasn't much of a house, but we slept overnight there – my co-pilot and I.

I said we all met up the same day. But it was the following day we met up as we walked down in the valley with the other four guys of the six that got together within a day or two. They, then, guided us down to a big area. It was a sort of a recruiting center for the Chetnik area up in the hills. And they built a little cabin for us. Then we picked

up seven guys from another group – seven of the ten from another crew; the other three of that crew had been killed. So they built this little cabin for us, the guerilla forces did, and the thirteen of us then were together – six from our crew and seven from another crew. And we stayed there for about two months, just letting things cool off. Because obviously the Germans had seen our planes crash and had gone all over that.

At the end of a couple of months we heard of an effort to build an air field, and they wanted to get us down there. We walked a little over 300 miles in 11 days to get to this place.

### **Were you still in Yugoslavia?**

Yes. All this time we were in Yugoslavia.

We were now moving west. Our thought at first was we'd try to get to the Adriatic Sea and get across to Italy there. We didn't know how we were going to do that.

### **Figure it out later!**

Yes. Well, we saved all of our Dexedrine tablets, which are to keep you awake. And we figured if we had to we could steal a row boat and row across the 80 miles, and keep eating the Dexedrine to keep going. But we never had to do that, because we finally did get to this place where there was a hilltop pasture, 10 kilometers from a German air field. We could sit on top of that hill and look down into the German air field!

Then Mihalovic, who was the head of the Chetnik guerillas – a very fine man, he was a professor, and he had been a colonel in the Yugoslavian army – got us an old radio. It looked like a fish aquarium – it was a glass square with acid in it, and lead batteries stuck in it; sort of a homemade radio. We made contact back in Italy with that. And, of course, we had to send in the open. So the Germans were always picking us up. We'd send out a little bit, pack it up and run like hell 20 miles away and hide some more. We'd do it in little pieces that way. We had no codes or anything. We just had to send in the open. So we invented a code.

The British picked us up first, and they thought it was a kind of German stunt. We finally talked them into getting us into contact with our old squadron. They knew us personally. So we would say, "Take Jack's serial number and subtract this number from it and that's our latitude." Well, there must have been 500,000 "Jack's" in the army, so unless you knew who they were and what their serial numbers were, in a sense it was an unbreakable code! Or we'd say, "Take Dick's serial number, subtract this and that's our longitude." "Take Newt's serial number and subtract this number and that's the day we'd like a plane over."

Our main problem was food. We were all starving. I weighed 180 pounds when we were shot down. Three months later I weighed 113 pounds. I lost 70 pounds in the three months.

### **It's a diet that really works.**

Diets are fine. If you want to lose weight, all you have to do is stop eating!

In the meantime, we sent word out through the underground to all allied flyers who were down to try to gather at that point, not having any idea what we were getting into. We wound up with 214 guys! Well, then it got to be a major thing to try to get everyone out.

Well, they did send a plane over. They dropped a little bit of food, tommy guns – old-fashioned Chicago type of guns.

**How did they keep the Germans from seeing this?**

Well, this was at night. And they dropped an OSS team in: an Army captain, oddly enough a Navy radio man, and an Air Force radio man. They, of course, knew a lot better than we did what they were doing. They, then, made the final arrangements to try to get these people out.

**What year are we at this point?**

We are 1944.

**In the spring?**

By the grace of God it was in the summer. We would not have survived a winter in those hills.

**(Voice of another person in the room: This was August, probably. You were shot down May 18.)**

That's right. We were shot down in May and we did this air field thing in August. But at least we did not have the freezing weather. We had to keep sending this message.

I keep saying "we." I'm not talking personally. There was a bunch of us. And, as would be the case in the Army, the guy who took over in a sense the leader of this thing was a colonel or a major – I don't remember which. And he was coordinating with the OSS team on how to get us out of there. We'd send messages out. And even though now the OSS had a decent code and radio equipment, the Germans would pick it up. They would put range finders on you ...

**Triangulate ...**

Yes. And spot you. So, as you sent the message out, each time you'd do it, whatever it was, you had to scramble.

I missed one thing. In trying to identify ourselves, before we got this whole group we had them put in touch with our old outfit. And we had our own officers' club in Italy, in the basement of the building we had there. At first our own people would not recognize us. So they'd ask us the typical questions: Who won the ...

**So they were skeptical of what you were trying to do.**

Yes.

Finally, John, on the basis of one question they asked in our little officers' club, around the walls we had painted each plane with the insignia on there – you've seen them. And so they had pictures around the wall of the officers' club of those things that they painted on the plane. They finally said, "Now in the northeast corner of the officers' club, what's that picture." We said it was a picture of armored fists in mail that somebody had put on their plane. On the basis of that they recognized that it was us. Mainly because, even though they had German agents all over the place – and Italian agents; the Italians had surrendered then, they did laundry and stuff on our base for us. Well, the security was pretty loose. Even considering that, the idea was that nobody in their right mind would memorize what all these pictures were around the room. So they recognized it was us.

They arranged this thing so that I think half the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, on the day we were to be picked up, flew directly over this German air field – little German air field – sucked out the German fighters, they all took off after the bombers. There were also a couple of squadrons of old planes down there. But they were junk. We never saw them fly. And by that time gasoline was getting to be a little bit of a problem for the Germans.

### **We had been bombing the Ploesti oil fields.**

Yes.

The night before we went out it was all arranged, the Germans sent three little air planes up. They came straight up. Two of them fanned out on either side of this field we'd made. One of them flew right down the middle, and we figured they finally decided this had to be where all this information on the radios – it was the only place that made any sense. So we knew our number was up. But at dawn, as it would happen, the next morning – that had been in the evening, maybe about 5:00 in the evening they'd sent the planes over – and our assumption, of course, was that they were photographing the whole thing. The next morning at dawn is when the planes came in to get us. They were all DC3's or C47's – the old transport planes.

We had it all arranged with all of the 214 guys that the sick and wounded would go out on the first planes, and there were three of those. They came in – actually it was still dark when they came in, and that was as nifty a piece of flying as you've ever seen. Because this field wasn't very big. Then our crew went out. By that time it was dawn. And our crew went out in the first plane, because the 13 of us had been down the longest. And we flew back to Italy.

### **So they took off and got you out of there.**

Yes. And it was the air transport command. They were good. They were plenty good. They could have taken those things off an aircraft carrier, I think!

### **How many missions did you fly?**

Actually, only two. I was credited with three because Ploesti counted as a double. But it actually was the second time out. And I might add, in a way that was very

fortunate. I used to be we had to fly 50 missions before we would rotate home. Well, the odds, if you looked at all the numbers, were two-to-one against you. Only one out of three would ever make the 50 missions.

**Wow. The others got shot down.**

Yes.

Now they either were killed or became POW's. I don't know what the count was there. But, yes. The reason I say that in a way it was fortunate, is because you could almost tell, John, how many missions a guy had out of his 50. When you first started out you said, "Well, the odds are two-to-three against me." Or "I'm not going to make this." So you were sort of, in a sense, happy-go-lucky – you didn't care. But as you approached more and more and more of these missions, to make a long story short, when you went on the 50<sup>th</sup> one you were really in a cold sweat. It kept getting to you more and more and more as you went along. So to go down immediately, in a sense you got it over with.

**Right. That's sort of a counterintuitive happy thing: Get me now so I don't have to suffer. Wow. Now, I understand that your oldest daughter – Talli – is named after the lady ...**

No. That's a mistake. We all picked up that name in Serbia. I think, though, it may be more Greek than Serbian. But, of course, you begin to mix up things in that Balkan peninsula. You had Serbia, Macedonia and Greece. I do not know, for sure. We heard the name in Serbia. I can't tell you specifically whether it was a Serbian name, Macedonian or Greek. But we did pick up the name in Yugoslavia. We thought it was very pretty.

When I got back I told Patty about this, and somehow or another that got to be our first daughter's name.

**Did Patty know anything of this? You were missing in action.**

Patty had a telegram from Curtis LeMay. And he signed the telegram.

**He gave my commencement speech when I graduated from college at John Carroll.**

Is that right.

But she had the telegram signed by Curtis LeMay. I think it's still up in the attic here. I'm not sure. The telegram said – and it was worded; these won't be the exact words – that their plane was last seen over such-and-such a point, losing altitude but under control. So it left some kind of hope in there that we weren't just blown to smithereens.

That was a funny one. Patty stayed in California with her sister when we got our new plane and flew out of there. She worked at a newspaper. She ran the PBX board – remember the old plug-in telephone thing – for the newspaper. So she was out there when I was shot down. And the telegram was delivered to her house in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They wouldn't give it to her father. Well, her father was a very feisty newspaper

editor who had won a couple of Pulitzer prizes, by the way. Well, he wasn't about to take anything from this guy delivering the telegram. I don't know whether he was going to knock him silly or what, but he made him give him the telegram. So her father got the telegram. Then her father had the awful job of contacting her in California to tell her that this had happened. Her father, by the way, was the head of the "no foreign war committee." You can guess he was not a great friend of FDR.

**{No! They harassed FDR the whole time. I remember. The story goes around ... Well, let me first interject here that there is a book called *The Forgotten 500*.}**

That is correct.

**[By Gregory Freeman. And it contains much of what you've just told us.]**

Yes. However, that book concentrated largely on the political outfall after this was over. I wrote out for the kids the entire write-up of when we were in the mountains and up to the point of when we made the airfield. That book, *The Forgotten 500*, deals largely with the political fallout of this mess. At the Tehran Conference, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin got together. Up until that time, for the first two years in Yugoslavia there were no partisans – communists. Tito was in Moscow and came down there to form the communist partisans, who were guerillas the same as the Chetniks. The end result of that was that the Chetniks and the partisans – that is, the loyalists and the communists – are fighting a civil war, both at the same time fighting the Germans. It was a mess.

I'll tell you a funny story. I had to do a big interview down at the archivist for the State of Iowa. And the woman who is the archivist for Iowa – and all the records are kept at the University in Iowa City – her father also was shot down and landed in Yugoslavia.

**What a coincidence.**

Only, he fell in with the partisans – the communists – while I fell in with the Chetniks, the loyalists. And in a sense, here are two airmen fighting a civil war against each other and both fighting the Germans. And she was very interested in that.

There's a woman who's been commissioned to write a play of some sort for, of all things, Pearl Harbor Day. Which will be on PBS. My daughter, by the way, does films for PBS. And she was doing one on Hoover. And that's how she got involved – because of Hoover Library in Iowa – that's how she got involved with this archivist.

Anyway, the archivist gave all these tapes to the playwright who's to do a thing for Pearl Harbor Day this year. And she got so interested in this story, she said that was going to be a part of her play. I had no idea how she was going to do that.

**She's going to have to use her imagination to get them tied together. Now, there's a story hanging around you about when you were parachuting down you were trying to light a cigarette so you didn't look intimidated. Is that a true story?**

That is quite true! I'm coming down and I'm thinking – and it takes a while from 20,000 feet – so I'm thinking, “Oh, my God. I'm going to land right in the middle of the German army. What am I going to do?” So you laugh. And don't make a story out of this. I sat in that chute coming down and thinking: Who is the most sophisticated actor in Hollywood. I thought and I thought and I thought. Finally I decided it had to be Cary Grant. So I had a package of Lucky Strike Cigarettes in my shirt pocket and I thought: Okay, I'm going to be Cary Grant. I'm going to land down here and there's going to be a circle of Germans around me all pointing their rifles at me. And I'm going to pull out that pack and say, “Have a cigarette, fellows.”

Now, I think, John, I think that's an example of how distorted your thinking gets when you're really in a squeeze.

### **Anything that might work!**

Now whatever gave me that idea, I certainly don't know. I have no idea.

### **Well it worked, evidently. Is this book in print – *The Forgotten 500*?**

Yes. But. I started to tell you that at the Tehran Conference, that's when they decided they would dump Mihalovic and throw everything to Tito. Uncle Joe won the argument.

### **The Chicago Tribune had a time when they thought that was a betrayal.**

Well, when we got back to Italy they put us in the hospital for a couple of days to check us all over. And the first thing that happened – I'm in a hospital room – three guys walk in in three piece suits. I think they had just graduated from law school at Harvard. And they were not nice. They walked in and immediately announced to me – and I'm in bed – that if I said I was with Mihalovic or said anything about the loyalists I would be subject to ten years in jail and a \$10,000 fine. That was my 'welcome home.' Under the terms of the Logan Act, which if you can find it goes all the way back to the Revolutionary days. It simply says if you do or say anything that impairs the war effort, you're subject to these fines.

Well, I went through the ceiling. Obviously we weren't in much of a mood to get pushed around. And I said to these three guys: “You see that door you just came through?” They said yes. I said, “In thirty seconds, if you're not out that door I may not be in very good shape but I'm coming after you.” And they left. Never after that would you ever find the name Mihalovic in the newspaper. The 'great white father,' ...

### **Joseph Stalin.**

No. I mean FDR – could never make a mistake. And he had the press gagged. Now you think you can't do that, but it was done.

### **That was because Stalin wanted it done that way. And FDR gave in to him.**

And never did Franklin Roosevelt say he made a mistake.

**No. He was above them.**

Winston Churchill stood up in Parliament and said the worst mistake he'd made was in that switch. He had the guts to stand up in Parliament and say that. Our guy never said one word.

After his death and Truman took over, Truman reviewed the whole thing and engineered that a Legion of Merit medal would be awarded to Mihalovic's wife. Well, she died in a few more years. Twenty years went by. They State Department hid that medal – our State Department. Twenty years went by and finally they dug up this story. Truman, by that time, was no longer President – I don't know if 20 years is quite right. But finally, after all this time, did send a delegation over and gave the medal to Mihalovic's daughter. It was that raw. It was as raw as you can get.

**That is a shame. Well, I don't want to drag you into any further ...**

I'll tell you another funny story – only you can't put this in either.

Two-hundred-fourteen of us arrived back on an airfield in Bari, Italy. And by the way we brought back two of the Chetnik leaders with us to try and untangle this awful mess. The British arrested them we stepped off the plane, sent them back to the Island of Vis, which is off the coast of Yugoslavia in the Adriatic. That's where Tito had his headquarters.

**I'll bet they never saw the light of day.**

They were shot the next day. They were executed by Tito. The two guys. We said, "Come back with us." That will make you feel something: You talk two guys into coming back with you and two days later they're dead.

But, the funny story is 214 of us get off these planes, and we had every bug – lice, sheep ticks, fleas, bed bugs – we had every kind of vermin on us you could think of. So the first thing we had to do was take off all our clothes – stark naked; shoes, socks, everything. They were put in a bonfire to burn – everything. There were 50 nurses there who had come out from the hospital. They're all standing over at the side, and we're 214 guys stark naked.

The idea, of course, was that nobody was going to be allowed into that hospital. And they dusted us from head to foot with DDT. And we all go into the hospital.

Periodically the nurses would come into the room. They had gotten together this little fun thing they were going to do – the nurses. They all had gotten together. They would come into the room and would say, "Oh, were you one of those fellows who just came in today?" And I'd say, "Yes, I was." And they'd say, "Oh. We didn't recognize you." And they'd all go out in the hall and you could hear them giggling.

**How long were you in after you came back to Italy?**

Not too long. Well, I did a funny thing. They came back and said I was going to be a bombardier instructor. I said, no, I didn't want to be an instructor. They said okay I could be a navigator instructor. I said, no, I'd just told them I didn't want to be an instructor. They asked me what I wanted to do, and I asked what could I do. They told me I was qualified for pilot training. So I went to pilot school on the tail end of this whole thing!

Half-way through pilot school the Air Force came through with what they called "Project R." Project R were escapees, evades, re-patriot prisoners like me. Project R men are immediately eligible for discharge. This is the same time they created this point system. I don't know if you got involved in it – you had to get so many points in order to get out.

**Yes. It was 120 or something like that.**

With this Project R I was eligible right then. So I went down to the CO at the base in Sherman, Texas. At the time it was basic training – flight training. And I said I wanted to be with Project R.

Well, like all service people, you cover your ass. So the CO has now got this point system, and he's got another one that's Project R. So what he did was, he made the point system fit Project R. And it went like this: You had so many points for time, so many points for where you were and what you did and so on. All right, I'd only been in the Air Force a couple of years at that point, so I didn't have many time points. He asked where I had been. I told him I was in Italy at our base there. He asked how I got there. I said we went over through South America and up through North Africa and so on. He said, "Oh, you were in North Africa." I said yes, and he gave me so many points for North Africa, so many points for time. He asked me if I was in Europe and I said I was in Italy. He gave me so many points for being in theater. And he said, "Now, wait a minute. That's on the Mediterranean. You get so many points for the Mediterranean campaign." He asked where else I had been. I told him I got shot down in Ploesti. He said that was Europe, but you got double points for Ploesti. The absurdity of all this was that it was all Europe. But he just piled up all these points so I had enough points to get out in case somebody questioned that. Or I'm out in Project R in case somebody questioned that. So I just walked out.

**Very good. So by this time Patty knew about it.**

That's another goofy story. And you can't put this down!

Finally, when I got back to Italy I cabled Patty. But you could only use certain phrases in the cablegram. You had to pick these out, and it was a strange sounding thing. But in essence it said, "I'm safe. I'm okay and I'll be home soon." That's what the cable said. Well, she's in California and gets on a train immediately. She stood up all the way to Cedar Rapids, Iowa to get back. She thought I was going to be back in Cedar Rapids in a couple of days. In the meantime, we always had the arrangement in our tents with the guys – there were 6 or 8 guys in each tent, the officers. And we had an arrangement that if a guy got shot down and didn't come back, anybody in the tent could take anything

they wanted of his as a souvenir. Anything else would be shipped home to the next of kin.

Well, when they were sorting out the stuff, indistinct was our co-pilot. And by the way, the only person I've ever been able to contact from our crew was his daughter. She spent a week up here.

But they're putting this stuff together to go to the next of kin. Well indistinct was a gay bachelor. And he had a girl in every town, wherever we went. And he had their pictures. Well, a bunch of his pictures of the girls somehow or another got mixed in with my personal effects and were sent home. Now, this is a kind of a sad day when you get your husband's personal effects. So Patty and her father were opening these things and they keep running into the pictures of indistinct's girls. And after a while Patty's father got a little upset because they looked like they were my pictures. Well, fortunately Patty knew a few of the girls because we'd all been together through this training thing. And she was able to convince her father that she thought that was where those girls' pictures came from. But I don't think he ever believed it!

**He always looked at you with a bad eye! That's funny. Well, you got out then in 1945?**

Yes, 1945.

**And you went to work for ...**

I didn't want to go to work for anybody. I was just not in the mood, I'd guess you'd say. There was a thing starting out called "Frigid Dough." This was in the beginning of all the frozen products. Bird's Eye was one of them. But this was specifically for bakery products.

Well, I went around in circles. I got a woman who was a marvelous baker and went into Chicago to see the people who were forming this company. They said, "Okay, you can have the franchise for the State of Iowa." I said okay. So I went back home and this woman baked up all this stuff and we tried all kinds of things. That was in – I think I got home sometime in September. And for several months I played with this. Well, then I think your mom was on the way. [Which would have been like December of 1945. She was born in August of 1946. After the holidays – the New Year – you knew my mom was on the way.] And I haven't got any money!

Well, I thought going it alone wasn't going to work. So I went to the Quaker Oats Company and was hired right away.

There is another little story besides that one about how I got hired right away. Well, my father worked for the Quaker Oats Company but that isn't it. A fellow by the name of indistinct had been vice president of export. And he lived in London all through the blitz. And the British were the first people to try for Ploesti. They'd sent about a dozen planes down there and they never got to the target. indistinct knew how bad that was. He knew that's where I'd got my comeuppance. So I had an inside thing and was hired on the spot.

I worked for the Quaker Oats Company for 28 years, John. By that time I was in charge of all the manufacturing. And it just got boring. Patty and I said it just wasn't

worth it – I was gone every week of the year; I was living on the airplanes. We had 26 plants, and I was supposed to visit each one twice a year. Well, that comes out to 52. I just met myself coming and going in the airports. In essence I just got burned out, I guess. So we sat down and said it wasn't worth it and we should change our whole lives. Just change everything. And we did. We came to Washington Island.

### **How did you find the Island?**

We started out, we were going to look for a summer place. And we thought the Upper Peninsula would be a wonderful thing. So we got some camping gear, we got in the car and went up there – out into the middle of nowhere. We ruined the car. We pitched the tent, camped out. There were bears all over, mosquitoes and flies. We thought this was just way too remote. We had too many children. This would be no place to have a summer place.

So we came back down the other side of Green Bay. We came down into Green Bay. And we'd heard about a place called Washington Island. Well, we were ahead of ourselves in our little trip we'd taken and we had a couple of days to spare. She said, "Let's go look." So we came around up here and went to Washington Island. The bank was where the newspaper is now. Muriel was the telephone operator. I didn't know where to go, so I went into the bank and asked if there was somebody I could talk to about land.

### **What year was that, Dick? 1980 or so?**

No. I'm 89. Take 40 off of where we are right now. No, take more than that. ["64?"] Anyway, the woman at the bank said – and she was Ray Hansen's sister, by the way. She said, "Why don't you talk to my brother who's just walking across the street now." He was coming across to the bank. And they had just opened up South Point. Karli, Ray, Julie Anderson ...

### **Ellefson – was he there?**

No. That was North Point. And a lawyer – I can't remember his name; I never met him. In any event, Ray was coming across the street. So we went out into the street and stood there on the street. I said, "Ray, we're sort of interested in a place like this." And the Island made more sense when you've got eight kids – you're not off in the wilderness somewhere. Ray, on the spot, took us down to South Point, because they had just opened it up, this little syndicate. The first place we looked at is where Tim and Julie live now, in the cove. And we thought that was beautiful. So, we said, "Well, what's this worth." I think it was like \$1,000. We said, "We'll buy this!" And he said we couldn't. Jim Kolar, who was the black sheep of the Kolar family, had just bought it. We moved over one more step and that's where Carolyn Caldwell had built the A-frame. Mel and Jeanne have that now. So we moved over one more and bought that for absolutely nothing.

### **Is that on the water?**

Oh, yes. Two-hundred feet.

**Jack Hagan's zoning.**

And that night Patty and I – here's another goofy story for you that you can't print.

Patty and I said, "Let's have a picnic and celebrate this." Thursday afternoon we started – we met Ray Hansen. By Thursday evening we bought the first property over there. So I got a bottle of wine and a couple of steaks. We built a fire and had a little picnic. And after the picnic I said, "Patty, I want to go over and look at that cove again." It was a beautiful spot. So I went back over the rocks. I got about half-way there, and up over the rocks comes this gorgeous Japanese girl. Stark naked! Not a stitch of clothing. Well, Jim Kolar, the black sheep who had just bought the cove, had sailed his beautiful old yawl that he had and sailed in the cove. They were subsequently married, but at the time they weren't. Anyway, this apparition comes up over the rocks. I stood there and my mouth fell open. I didn't know what to say. Finally I stuck out my hand and said, "I'm Dick Sheehy." She said, "Oh. I'm Kashiko." I said, "Oh, boy." She was stark naked!

I walked over to where we were at for our little picnic. I said, "Patty, you're never going to guess what I've seen. Never!"

**Especially after all those photos!**

Jim, well he had a bit of an alcohol problem for one thing. He was a nice enough guy, but he wasn't very bright. He subsequently sold that to Tim Lyons and Julie. Kolar built the house.

That's how we came to the Island. Just by total chance.

**Well, Dick, I'm going to close this. Thanks for talking to us about your experiences.**

# **VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

**Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations**

**Interview with**

**Richard Sheehy**

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

September 13, 2011

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library  
in partnership with the Library of Congress

**I'm talking with Dick Sheehy at his home on Green Bay Road on Washington Island, Wisconsin on September 13, 2011. We're going to ask Dick about his service – when he went in and what happened thereafter.**

[Transcriber's note: There is an additional person present for the interview. His comments are included in brackets.]

**Dick, can you tell us about entering military service.**

I went in – I don't know if I can give you the exact date – it was in the summer of 1942 that I enlisted in the Air Force in Chicago. I went back to college after that and was called up half-way through my junior year in college, and went first to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. From there we were sent to the University of Minnesota.

**This is all in 1942?**

This is in 1942.

From there we went to San Antonio, Texas, for classification. We took a lot of tests to determine what we were best suited for.

**Did you spend any time up in Minnesota?**

Yes. It seems to me it was about two months. One of the reasons we went there was because things were backed up so much, it was meant, as far as I can judge, as a delaying tactic.

**Kind of a holding.**

Yes.

In the classification I qualified for any of the commissioned positions in the Air Force; that is, pilot, navigator or bombardier. I wanted to be a navigator because I had had a lot of navigation in the Naval ROTC in college.

**What college was that?**

University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

I wanted to be a navigator because I already knew the navigation. So they said the navigation schools were all backed up, and would I choose one of the others. I said I'd like to be on light or medium bombardment, where you had a combined navigator/bombardier. They said okay, that was fine. So I asked if I went to bombardier school, could I then get back to the navigation. They said yes, that was the very thing to do.

**Now you went from Minnesota to ...**

San Antonio, Texas.

From San Antonio we went into a basic training. That was at Ellington Field in Houston, Texas. After that we were given the choice of what we wanted to be.

**How long were you at Ellington?**

That was about two or three months. It was basic training school.

I chose to go to bombardier school because I figured I could get from there back to navigation. I finished bombardier school in October, 1943. I was commissioned a second lieutenant and given a choice of whether I wanted medium or heavy bombardment. I said I wanted medium. And the next day I shipped out for heavy bombardment! Which was rather typical of the way things were.

**It was just a rhetorical question!**

I finished the bombardier school, was then ...

**Were they using Norton at that time?**

The Norton bombsight? Yes. The bombardier school was all on the Norton bombsight. That was before the Sperry bombsight came into being.

From there I was married and then went to ...

**You got married at that time?**

Right after I was commissioned.

From there I went to what they called “phase” school. This was for several months at Mountain Home, Idaho. At that point our crew for a B24 bomber was formed.

**How many was that?**

Ten: pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator were the four officers; and there were 6 gunners on a B24.

From there we went to Tonopah, Nevada, which was in the middle nowhere. Well, of obvious reasons – that was where we were beginning to drop bombs in practice, so we had to be where nobody else was. That took about three months with our crew formed and practicing dropping bombs.

From there we went to Hamilton Field in San Francisco.

**What part of the year are we? This was late in 1943?**

This would have been very late in 1943, or early 1944. I don’t remember exactly.

From there we picked up a new airplane: flew across the country, down through South America; from South America straight across to Africa.

**What was the range? Is that why they did it – because it had a certain range?**

Prior to the time we made our flight across to Africa, the range of the B24 was a little shorter. So they made a dog-leg stop at the Ascension Islands to refuel, and then went on to Dakar on the west coast of Africa.

When we picked up our new plane, it had a little bit longer range. So we were one of the few to fly directly across, without making the dog-leg stop at the Ascension Islands.

We then flew up and over, across North Africa, and from there directly to Italy.

### **What part of Italy?**

For the B24's, they were all around Foggia in Italy. We happened to be in a little town called Cerignola. The crews were split up, and we flew missions with part of the officers – part experienced crews and the new guys like ourselves.

The first mission was an air field in northern Italy. On one of those short practice missions we lost our navigator. He was with another group – they had taken a direct hit and the plane blew up. So we got a replacement navigator. The second or third mission we made was to Ploesti in Romania, which was a big oil field center. The importance of Ploesti was that it furnished about 45% of the German fuel supply. So it was a big one, and a very important one. It was heavily guarded both by fighter planes and by flak. On that mission we lost one engine over the target.

### **From ak-ak?**

From flak.

The fighter planes did not bother us too much. We think they were out of ammunition, which was very easy to happen over Ploesti. We could not feather the propeller of the engine we lost – by feathering I mean you turn the blades into the wind so they don't wind up like a windmill.

### **You were able to do that? That was a function you could do?**

Normally you could do it. Sometimes it's done electrically or hydraulically, or sometimes a combination of both. Our hydraulic and electrical systems had been badly damaged when we were hit, and we could not feather the prop. That means it's out of synchronization with the others, and you begin to shake yourself apart. Because of that we could not stay with the formation to fly back to Italy. So we made a direct turn and were going to make a straight line back to Italy. Normally you don't do that. You kind of curve around to confuse the enemy.

We made it back across the Danube River, at a place called Iron Gorge, which is right where Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia meet all in that corner. And there is a kind of gorge there in the Danube River.

We were about 40 miles inside Yugoslavia, and we were using as a point to check navigating a little town called Bor. There was a molybdenum mine and a copper mine at Bor, and the Germans had formed around it a POW camp. We were never briefed on Bor as a place not to go near. And we were using it to fly straight over as a checkpoint! There were six anti-aircraft guns there. It wasn't a very big place. And of course they

saw us coming for miles back. And we were losing altitude slowly – nothing alarming at the moment. But every one of those six guns was right on us. We lost a second engine. Now we have engines out on both sides of the four-engine plane, and the vibration is beginning to make the wings flap like a seagull. We knew then we were in trouble. We were still under control, but we were losing altitude more then.

Along the coast of Yugoslavia there's sort of a mountain range. Our problem to solve was whether we were going to lose enough altitude that we wouldn't clear that. Because if we didn't clear that we'd be right in the heart of the German army along the coast of Yugoslavia. So we elected veering to bail out further back in the wild parts of Yugoslavia, thinking we would have a better chance of making it out of that.

Of our crew, the gunners went back to the waist of the airplane which was behind the bomb bays. There's a big camera hatch there. And the idea was that the guys could bail out altogether almost, and be close together on the ground.

Our co-pilot went back to kind of coordinate this. Prior to the start of that mission, because of that first mission when we had so much trouble and had to get out on the catwalk of the bomb bays without parachutes because you couldn't get through, we had chest packs. And the chest pack is like a duffle bag – like the paratroopers. We had to take those off and work over the open bomb bays to throw bombs out by hand because some of them had hung up and malfunctioned. So prior to the start of that mission I had the parachute department bring me a backpack, which was a narrow thing spread out over your whole back. When I got out of the plane they had not brought that out, so I sent them back. They had brought out my old chest pack, and I had thrown that up in the nose and forgotten about it. Then they did bring out the backpack.

When it came time to bail out later, one of our gunners accidentally spilled his chute in the plane, and it tangled up hopelessly. So he came back up to me in the nose and I started to hook him onto my harness, which is not a very good idea for two guys to bail out on one chute. But at the last minute I remembered by luck that extra chute I had thrown in there and took it and gave it to him. He went back to the camera hatch. So he bailed out with the rest of them.

The first four guys who bailed out, of that four two were captured as POW's. The other two fell in with another guerilla group up in the hills. The remaining six of us, which included the four officers and two of the remaining gunners, were able to get together that same evening. By the grace of God, when I was coming down I could see in the valley white sheep and I figured if there were sheep there, there had to be people around. I didn't think it was a very good idea to run into people at that moment, so I slipped my chute and skidded off and landed in trees on the side of a mountain. We called them mountains; they were like the Ozarks. They were not like the Alps, the big mountains. I landed in the trees, got stuck there and cut myself out – cut the harness – and dropped down. Then I could pull the chute down, once my weight was off it. I buried it under a log.

### **How did you land? Did you hurt yourself coming down?**

I hurt one knee. I twisted a knee, but not badly. I could walk.

### **What height were you when you bailed out?**

About 20,000 feet.

**That's pretty far up!**

I started to walk from the woods down toward that valley because I wanted to see where I was. And there were three people coming up: two very young people, maybe 20 or 30 – I couldn't tell the age – and one very elderly woman. And they had seen me come down. They came up to meet me, I guess. Only I didn't know whether they were friendly or not. But I walked down and they were walking up. And I made a big to-do about loosening the flap on my holster, and they kept coming. Finally it dawned on me, I thought they were probably a young married couple and the woman was one of their mothers. It dawned on me that nobody in their right mind would bring their wife and their mother into a situation like that. So my guess was that they were friendly. And they were.

We came up to within about 100 feet of each other. And the old woman was the first one to say anything. She said, "Amerikanske?" And I nodded my head. And they broke out in smiles. So I figured I got lucky!

**Indeed you did!**

And they took me down to where there were two other older guerilla guys. And they made haste back into a little hut. And now it's maybe 2:00 in the afternoon, and we had started out at 6:00 in the morning. I was pretty hungry because breakfast, when you know you're going to Ploiesti you kind of lose your appetite. And I didn't have any breakfast. These two old fellows had a bowl of goat's milk and a mangy old cat. And they had some corn bread. And they offered us the corn bread. The crust was all right, but the inside was mush. Anyway, we dipped the corn bread in the hair covered milk from the cat and that was our first meal.

**Were you alone at this time, still?**

No. My co-pilot – we all came down into that valley, and every few miles there would be a shout from up in the woods and one of the other guys would come down. But at that time it was just my co-pilot and I had met up.

**Was this after you met the Yugoslavians or before?**

The three who picked us up? It was after. They took us down to where these two fellows were. And they were part of the guerilla group.

That evening they took us down to a house, and there were three people there. It wasn't much of a house, but we slept overnight there – my co-pilot and I.

I said we all met up the same day. But it was the following day we met up as we walked down in the valley with the other four guys of the six that got together within a day or two. They, then, guided us down to a big area. It was a sort of a recruiting center for the Chetnik area up in the hills. And they built a little cabin for us. Then we picked

up seven guys from another group – seven of the ten from another crew; the other three of that crew had been killed. So they built this little cabin for us, the guerilla forces did, and the thirteen of us then were together – six from our crew and seven from another crew. And we stayed there for about two months, just letting things cool off. Because obviously the Germans had seen our planes crash and had gone all over that.

At the end of a couple of months we heard of an effort to build an air field, and they wanted to get us down there. We walked a little over 300 miles in 11 days to get to this place.

### **Were you still in Yugoslavia?**

Yes. All this time we were in Yugoslavia.

We were now moving west. Our thought at first was we'd try to get to the Adriatic Sea and get across to Italy there. We didn't know how we were going to do that.

### **Figure it out later!**

Yes. Well, we saved all of our Dexedrine tablets, which are to keep you awake. And we figured if we had to we could steal a row boat and row across the 80 miles, and keep eating the Dexedrine to keep going. But we never had to do that, because we finally did get to this place where there was a hilltop pasture, 10 kilometers from a German air field. We could sit on top of that hill and look down into the German air field!

Then Mihalovic, who was the head of the Chetnik guerillas – a very fine man, he was a professor, and he had been a colonel in the Yugoslavian army – got us an old radio. It looked like a fish aquarium – it was a glass square with acid in it, and lead batteries stuck in it; sort of a homemade radio. We made contact back in Italy with that. And, of course, we had to send in the open. So the Germans were always picking us up. We'd send out a little bit, pack it up and run like hell 20 miles away and hide some more. We'd do it in little pieces that way. We had no codes or anything. We just had to send in the open. So we invented a code.

The British picked us up first, and they thought it was a kind of German stunt. We finally talked them into getting us into contact with our old squadron. They knew us personally. So we would say, "Take Jack's serial number and subtract this number from it and that's our latitude." Well, there must have been 500,000 "Jack's" in the army, so unless you knew who they were and what their serial numbers were, in a sense it was an unbreakable code! Or we'd say, "Take Dick's serial number, subtract this and that's our longitude." "Take Newt's serial number and subtract this number and that's the day we'd like a plane over."

Our main problem was food. We were all starving. I weighed 180 pounds when we were shot down. Three months later I weighed 113 pounds. I lost 70 pounds in the three months.

### **It's a diet that really works.**

Diets are fine. If you want to lose weight, all you have to do is stop eating!

In the meantime, we sent word out through the underground to all allied flyers who were down to try to gather at that point, not having any idea what we were getting into. We wound up with 214 guys! Well, then it got to be a major thing to try to get everyone out.

Well, they did send a plane over. They dropped a little bit of food, tommy guns – old-fashioned Chicago type of guns.

**How did they keep the Germans from seeing this?**

Well, this was at night. And they dropped an OSS team in: an Army captain, oddly enough a Navy radio man, and an Air Force radio man. They, of course, knew a lot better than we did what they were doing. They, then, made the final arrangements to try to get these people out.

**What year are we at this point?**

We are 1944.

**In the spring?**

By the grace of God it was in the summer. We would not have survived a winter in those hills.

**(Voice of another person in the room: This was August, probably. You were shot down May 18.)**

That's right. We were shot down in May and we did this air field thing in August. But at least we did not have the freezing weather. We had to keep sending this message.

I keep saying "we." I'm not talking personally. There was a bunch of us. And, as would be the case in the Army, the guy who took over in a sense the leader of this thing was a colonel or a major – I don't remember which. And he was coordinating with the OSS team on how to get us out of there. We'd send messages out. And even though now the OSS had a decent code and radio equipment, the Germans would pick it up. They would put range finders on you ...

**Triangulate ...**

Yes. And spot you. So, as you sent the message out, each time you'd do it, whatever it was, you had to scramble.

I missed one thing. In trying to identify ourselves, before we got this whole group we had them put in touch with our old outfit. And we had our own officers' club in Italy, in the basement of the building we had there. At first our own people would not recognize us. So they'd ask us the typical questions: Who won the ...

**So they were skeptical of what you were trying to do.**

Yes.

Finally, John, on the basis of one question they asked in our little officers' club, around the walls we had painted each plane with the insignia on there – you've seen them. And so they had pictures around the wall of the officers' club of those things that they painted on the plane. They finally said, "Now in the northeast corner of the officers' club, what's that picture." We said it was a picture of armored fists in mail that somebody had put on their plane. On the basis of that they recognized that it was us. Mainly because, even though they had German agents all over the place – and Italian agents; the Italians had surrendered then, they did laundry and stuff on our base for us. Well, the security was pretty loose. Even considering that, the idea was that nobody in their right mind would memorize what all these pictures were around the room. So they recognized it was us.

They arranged this thing so that I think half the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, on the day we were to be picked up, flew directly over this German air field – little German air field – sucked out the German fighters, they all took off after the bombers. There were also a couple of squadrons of old planes down there. But they were junk. We never saw them fly. And by that time gasoline was getting to be a little bit of a problem for the Germans.

### **We had been bombing the Ploesti oil fields.**

Yes.

The night before we went out it was all arranged, the Germans sent three little air planes up. They came straight up. Two of them fanned out on either side of this field we'd made. One of them flew right down the middle, and we figured they finally decided this had to be where all this information on the radios – it was the only place that made any sense. So we knew our number was up. But at dawn, as it would happen, the next morning – that had been in the evening, maybe about 5:00 in the evening they'd sent the planes over – and our assumption, of course, was that they were photographing the whole thing. The next morning at dawn is when the planes came in to get us. They were all DC3's or C47's – the old transport planes.

We had it all arranged with all of the 214 guys that the sick and wounded would go out on the first planes, and there were three of those. They came in – actually it was still dark when they came in, and that was as nifty a piece of flying as you've ever seen. Because this field wasn't very big. Then our crew went out. By that time it was dawn. And our crew went out in the first plane, because the 13 of us had been down the longest. And we flew back to Italy.

### **So they took off and got you out of there.**

Yes. And it was the air transport command. They were good. They were plenty good. They could have taken those things off an aircraft carrier, I think!

### **How many missions did you fly?**

Actually, only two. I was credited with three because Ploesti counted as a double. But it actually was the second time out. And I might add, in a way that was very

fortunate. I used to be we had to fly 50 missions before we would rotate home. Well, the odds, if you looked at all the numbers, were two-to-one against you. Only one out of three would ever make the 50 missions.

**Wow. The others got shot down.**

Yes.

Now they either were killed or became POW's. I don't know what the count was there. But, yes. The reason I say that in a way it was fortunate, is because you could almost tell, John, how many missions a guy had out of his 50. When you first started out you said, "Well, the odds are two-to-three against me." Or "I'm not going to make this." So you were sort of, in a sense, happy-go-lucky – you didn't care. But as you approached more and more and more of these missions, to make a long story short, when you went on the 50<sup>th</sup> one you were really in a cold sweat. It kept getting to you more and more and more as you went along. So to go down immediately, in a sense you got it over with.

**Right. That's sort of a counterintuitive happy thing: Get me now so I don't have to suffer. Wow. Now, I understand that your oldest daughter – Talli – is named after the lady ...**

No. That's a mistake. We all picked up that name in Serbia. I think, though, it may be more Greek than Serbian. But, of course, you begin to mix up things in that Balkan peninsula. You had Serbia, Macedonia and Greece. I do not know, for sure. We heard the name in Serbia. I can't tell you specifically whether it was a Serbian name, Macedonian or Greek. But we did pick up the name in Yugoslavia. We thought it was very pretty.

When I got back I told Patty about this, and somehow or another that got to be our first daughter's name.

**Did Patty know anything of this? You were missing in action.**

Patty had a telegram from Curtis LeMay. And he signed the telegram.

**He gave my commencement speech when I graduated from college at John Carroll.**

Is that right.

But she had the telegram signed by Curtis LeMay. I think it's still up in the attic here. I'm not sure. The telegram said – and it was worded; these won't be the exact words – that their plane was last seen over such-and-such a point, losing altitude but under control. So it left some kind of hope in there that we weren't just blown to smithereens.

That was a funny one. Patty stayed in California with her sister when we got our new plane and flew out of there. She worked at a newspaper. She ran the PBX board – remember the old plug-in telephone thing – for the newspaper. So she was out there when I was shot down. And the telegram was delivered to her house in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They wouldn't give it to her father. Well, her father was a very feisty newspaper

editor who had won a couple of Pulitzer prizes, by the way. Well, he wasn't about to take anything from this guy delivering the telegram. I don't know whether he was going to knock him silly or what, but he made him give him the telegram. So her father got the telegram. Then her father had the awful job of contacting her in California to tell her that this had happened. Her father, by the way, was the head of the "no foreign war committee." You can guess he was not a great friend of FDR.

**{No! They harassed FDR the whole time. I remember. The story goes around ... Well, let me first interject here that there is a book called *The Forgotten 500*.}**

That is correct.

**[By Gregory Freeman. And it contains much of what you've just told us.]**

Yes. However, that book concentrated largely on the political outfall after this was over. I wrote out for the kids the entire write-up of when we were in the mountains and up to the point of when we made the airfield. That book, *The Forgotten 500*, deals largely with the political fallout of this mess. At the Tehran Conference, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin got together. Up until that time, for the first two years in Yugoslavia there were no partisans – communists. Tito was in Moscow and came down there to form the communist partisans, who were guerillas the same as the Chetniks. The end result of that was that the Chetniks and the partisans – that is, the loyalists and the communists – are fighting a civil war, both at the same time fighting the Germans. It was a mess.

I'll tell you a funny story. I had to do a big interview down at the archivist for the State of Iowa. And the woman who is the archivist for Iowa – and all the records are kept at the University in Iowa City – her father also was shot down and landed in Yugoslavia.

**What a coincidence.**

Only, he fell in with the partisans – the communists – while I fell in with the Chetniks, the loyalists. And in a sense, here are two airmen fighting a civil war against each other and both fighting the Germans. And she was very interested in that.

There's a woman who's been commissioned to write a play of some sort for, of all things, Pearl Harbor Day. Which will be on PBS. My daughter, by the way, does films for PBS. And she was doing one on Hoover. And that's how she got involved – because of Hoover Library in Iowa – that's how she got involved with this archivist.

Anyway, the archivist gave all these tapes to the playwright who's to do a thing for Pearl Harbor Day this year. And she got so interested in this story, she said that was going to be a part of her play. I had no idea how she was going to do that.

**She's going to have to use her imagination to get them tied together. Now, there's a story hanging around you about when you were parachuting down you were trying to light a cigarette so you didn't look intimidated. Is that a true story?**

That is quite true! I'm coming down and I'm thinking – and it takes a while from 20,000 feet – so I'm thinking, “Oh, my God. I'm going to land right in the middle of the German army. What am I going to do?” So you laugh. And don't make a story out of this. I sat in that chute coming down and thinking: Who is the most sophisticated actor in Hollywood. I thought and I thought and I thought. Finally I decided it had to be Cary Grant. So I had a package of Lucky Strike Cigarettes in my shirt pocket and I thought: Okay, I'm going to be Cary Grant. I'm going to land down here and there's going to be a circle of Germans around me all pointing their rifles at me. And I'm going to pull out that pack and say, “Have a cigarette, fellows.”

Now, I think, John, I think that's an example of how distorted your thinking gets when you're really in a squeeze.

### **Anything that might work!**

Now whatever gave me that idea, I certainly don't know. I have no idea.

### **Well it worked, evidently. Is this book in print – *The Forgotten 500?***

Yes. But. I started to tell you that at the Tehran Conference, that's when they decided they would dump Mihalovic and throw everything to Tito. Uncle Joe won the argument.

### **The Chicago Tribune had a time when they thought that was a betrayal.**

Well, when we got back to Italy they put us in the hospital for a couple of days to check us all over. And the first thing that happened – I'm in a hospital room – three guys walk in in three piece suits. I think they had just graduated from law school at Harvard. And they were not nice. They walked in and immediately announced to me – and I'm in bed – that if I said I was with Mihalovic or said anything about the loyalists I would be subject to ten years in jail and a \$10,000 fine. That was my 'welcome home.' Under the terms of the Logan Act, which if you can find it goes all the way back to the Revolutionary days. It simply says if you do or say anything that impairs the war effort, you're subject to these fines.

Well, I went through the ceiling. Obviously we weren't in much of a mood to get pushed around. And I said to these three guys: “You see that door you just came through?” They said yes. I said, “In thirty seconds, if you're not out that door I may not be in very good shape but I'm coming after you.” And they left. Never after that would you ever find the name Mihalovic in the newspaper. The 'great white father,' ...

### **Joseph Stalin.**

No. I mean FDR – could never make a mistake. And he had the press gagged. Now you think you can't do that, but it was done.

### **That was because Stalin wanted it done that way. And FDR gave in to him.**

And never did Franklin Roosevelt say he made a mistake.

**No. He was above them.**

Winston Churchill stood up in Parliament and said the worst mistake he'd made was in that switch. He had the guts to stand up in Parliament and say that. Our guy never said one word.

After his death and Truman took over, Truman reviewed the whole thing and engineered that a Legion of Merit medal would be awarded to Mihalovic's wife. Well, she died in a few more years. Twenty years went by. They State Department hid that medal – our State Department. Twenty years went by and finally they dug up this story. Truman, by that time, was no longer President – I don't know if 20 years is quite right. But finally, after all this time, did send a delegation over and gave the medal to Mihalovic's daughter. It was that raw. It was as raw as you can get.

**That is a shame. Well, I don't want to drag you into any further ...**

I'll tell you another funny story – only you can't put this in either.

Two-hundred-fourteen of us arrived back on an airfield in Bari, Italy. And by the way we brought back two of the Chetnik leaders with us to try and untangle this awful mess. The British arrested them we stepped off the plane, sent them back to the Island of Vis, which is off the coast of Yugoslavia in the Adriatic. That's where Tito had his headquarters.

**I'll bet they never saw the light of day.**

They were shot the next day. They were executed by Tito. The two guys. We said, "Come back with us." That will make you feel something: You talk two guys into coming back with you and two days later they're dead.

But, the funny story is 214 of us get off these planes, and we had every bug – lice, sheep ticks, fleas, bed bugs – we had every kind of vermin on us you could think of. So the first thing we had to do was take off all our clothes – stark naked; shoes, socks, everything. They were put in a bonfire to burn – everything. There were 50 nurses there who had come out from the hospital. They're all standing over at the side, and we're 214 guys stark naked.

The idea, of course, was that nobody was going to be allowed into that hospital. And they dusted us from head to foot with DDT. And we all go into the hospital.

Periodically the nurses would come into the room. They had gotten together this little fun thing they were going to do – the nurses. They all had gotten together. They would come into the room and would say, "Oh, were you one of those fellows who just came in today?" And I'd say, "Yes, I was." And they'd say, "Oh. We didn't recognize you." And they'd all go out in the hall and you could hear them giggling.

**How long were you in after you came back to Italy?**

Not too long. Well, I did a funny thing. They came back and said I was going to be a bombardier instructor. I said, no, I didn't want to be an instructor. They said okay I could be a navigator instructor. I said, no, I'd just told them I didn't want to be an instructor. They asked me what I wanted to do, and I asked what could I do. They told me I was qualified for pilot training. So I went to pilot school on the tail end of this whole thing!

Half-way through pilot school the Air Force came through with what they called "Project R." Project R were escapees, evades, re-patriot prisoners like me. Project R men are immediately eligible for discharge. This is the same time they created this point system. I don't know if you got involved in it – you had to get so many points in order to get out.

**Yes. It was 120 or something like that.**

With this Project R I was eligible right then. So I went down to the CO at the base in Sherman, Texas. At the time it was basic training – flight training. And I said I wanted to be with Project R.

Well, like all service people, you cover your ass. So the CO has now got this point system, and he's got another one that's Project R. So what he did was, he made the point system fit Project R. And it went like this: You had so many points for time, so many points for where you were and what you did and so on. All right, I'd only been in the Air Force a couple of years at that point, so I didn't have many time points. He asked where I had been. I told him I was in Italy at our base there. He asked how I got there. I said we went over through South America and up through North Africa and so on. He said, "Oh, you were in North Africa." I said yes, and he gave me so many points for North Africa, so many points for time. He asked me if I was in Europe and I said I was in Italy. He gave me so many points for being in theater. And he said, "Now, wait a minute. That's on the Mediterranean. You get so many points for the Mediterranean campaign." He asked where else I had been. I told him I got shot down in Ploesti. He said that was Europe, but you got double points for Ploesti. The absurdity of all this was that it was all Europe. But he just piled up all these points so I had enough points to get out in case somebody questioned that. Or I'm out in Project R in case somebody questioned that. So I just walked out.

**Very good. So by this time Patty knew about it.**

That's another goofy story. And you can't put this down!

Finally, when I got back to Italy I cabled Patty. But you could only use certain phrases in the cablegram. You had to pick these out, and it was a strange sounding thing. But in essence it said, "I'm safe. I'm okay and I'll be home soon." That's what the cable said. Well, she's in California and gets on a train immediately. She stood up all the way to Cedar Rapids, Iowa to get back. She thought I was going to be back in Cedar Rapids in a couple of days. In the meantime, we always had the arrangement in our tents with the guys – there were 6 or 8 guys in each tent, the officers. And we had an arrangement that if a guy got shot down and didn't come back, anybody in the tent could take anything

they wanted of his as a souvenir. Anything else would be shipped home to the next of kin.

Well, when they were sorting out the stuff, indistinct was our co-pilot. And by the way, the only person I've ever been able to contact from our crew was his daughter. She spent a week up here.

But they're putting this stuff together to go to the next of kin. Well indistinct was a gay bachelor. And he had a girl in every town, wherever we went. And he had their pictures. Well, a bunch of his pictures of the girls somehow or another got mixed in with my personal effects and were sent home. Now, this is a kind of a sad day when you get your husband's personal effects. So Patty and her father were opening these things and they keep running into the pictures of indistinct's girls. And after a while Patty's father got a little upset because they looked like they were my pictures. Well, fortunately Patty knew a few of the girls because we'd all been together through this training thing. And she was able to convince her father that she thought that was where those girls' pictures came from. But I don't think he ever believed it!

**He always looked at you with a bad eye! That's funny. Well, you got out then in 1945?**

Yes, 1945.

**And you went to work for ...**

I didn't want to go to work for anybody. I was just not in the mood, I'd guess you'd say. There was a thing starting out called "Frigid Dough." This was in the beginning of all the frozen products. Bird's Eye was one of them. But this was specifically for bakery products.

Well, I went around in circles. I got a woman who was a marvelous baker and went into Chicago to see the people who were forming this company. They said, "Okay, you can have the franchise for the State of Iowa." I said okay. So I went back home and this woman baked up all this stuff and we tried all kinds of things. That was in – I think I got home sometime in September. And for several months I played with this. Well, then I think your mom was on the way. [Which would have been like December of 1945. She was born in August of 1946. After the holidays – the New Year – you knew my mom was on the way.] And I haven't got any money!

Well, I thought going it alone wasn't going to work. So I went to the Quaker Oats Company and was hired right away.

There is another little story besides that one about how I got hired right away. Well, my father worked for the Quaker Oats Company but that isn't it. A fellow by the name of indistinct had been vice president of export. And he lived in London all through the blitz. And the British were the first people to try for Ploesti. They'd sent about a dozen planes down there and they never got to the target. indistinct knew how bad that was. He knew that's where I'd got my comeuppance. So I had an inside thing and was hired on the spot.

I worked for the Quaker Oats Company for 28 years, John. By that time I was in charge of all the manufacturing. And it just got boring. Patty and I said it just wasn't

worth it – I was gone every week of the year; I was living on the airplanes. We had 26 plants, and I was supposed to visit each one twice a year. Well, that comes out to 52. I just met myself coming and going in the airports. In essence I just got burned out, I guess. So we sat down and said it wasn't worth it and we should change our whole lives. Just change everything. And we did. We came to Washington Island.

### **How did you find the Island?**

We started out, we were going to look for a summer place. And we thought the Upper Peninsula would be a wonderful thing. So we got some camping gear, we got in the car and went up there – out into the middle of nowhere. We ruined the car. We pitched the tent, camped out. There were bears all over, mosquitoes and flies. We thought this was just way too remote. We had too many children. This would be no place to have a summer place.

So we came back down the other side of Green Bay. We came down into Green Bay. And we'd heard about a place called Washington Island. Well, we were ahead of ourselves in our little trip we'd taken and we had a couple of days to spare. She said, "Let's go look." So we came around up here and went to Washington Island. The bank was where the newspaper is now. Muriel was the telephone operator. I didn't know where to go, so I went into the bank and asked if there was somebody I could talk to about land.

### **What year was that, Dick? 1980 or so?**

No. I'm 89. Take 40 off of where we are right now. No, take more than that. ["64?"] Anyway, the woman at the bank said – and she was Ray Hansen's sister, by the way. She said, "Why don't you talk to my brother who's just walking across the street now." He was coming across to the bank. And they had just opened up South Point. Karli, Ray, Julie Anderson ...

### **Ellefson – was he there?**

No. That was North Point. And a lawyer – I can't remember his name; I never met him. In any event, Ray was coming across the street. So we went out into the street and stood there on the street. I said, "Ray, we're sort of interested in a place like this." And the Island made more sense when you've got eight kids – you're not off in the wilderness somewhere. Ray, on the spot, took us down to South Point, because they had just opened it up, this little syndicate. The first place we looked at is where Tim and Julie live now, in the cove. And we thought that was beautiful. So, we said, "Well, what's this worth." I think it was like \$1,000. We said, "We'll buy this!" And he said we couldn't. Jim Kolar, who was the black sheep of the Kolar family, had just bought it. We moved over one more step and that's where Carolyn Caldwell had built the A-frame. Mel and Jeanne have that now. So we moved over one more and bought that for absolutely nothing.

### **Is that on the water?**

Oh, yes. Two-hundred feet.

### **Jack Hagan's zoning.**

And that night Patty and I – here's another goofy story for you that you can't print.

Patty and I said, "Let's have a picnic and celebrate this." Thursday afternoon we started – we met Ray Hansen. By Thursday evening we bought the first property over there. So I got a bottle of wine and a couple of steaks. We built a fire and had a little picnic. And after the picnic I said, "Patty, I want to go over and look at that cove again." It was a beautiful spot. So I went back over the rocks. I got about half-way there, and up over the rocks comes this gorgeous Japanese girl. Stark naked! Not a stitch of clothing. Well, Jim Kolar, the black sheep who had just bought the cove, had sailed his beautiful old yawl that he had and sailed in the cove. They were subsequently married, but at the time they weren't. Anyway, this apparition comes up over the rocks. I stood there and my mouth fell open. I didn't know what to say. Finally I stuck out my hand and said, "I'm Dick Sheehy." She said, "Oh. I'm Kashiko." I said, "Oh, boy." She was stark naked!

I walked over to where we were at for our little picnic. I said, "Patty, you're never going to guess what I've seen. Never!"

### **Especially after all those photos!**

Jim, well he had a bit of an alcohol problem for one thing. He was a nice enough guy, but he wasn't very bright. He subsequently sold that to Tim Lyons and Julie. Kolar built the house.

That's how we came to the Island. Just by total chance.

**Well, Dick, I'm going to close this. Thanks for talking to us about your experiences.**