

Bill Dewey

Interviewed Birmingham, Mich.

April 12, 1999

Bill Dewey: What's interesting about the Kassel mission is not that so many planes were shot down or that so many people ended up in prison camp, or that 117 Americans were killed – 118 really, with that fighter pilot – but the fact that it all happened in a very concentrated area, and 25 American planes and most of those 29 German planes all fell within that concentrated area, and that this German, Walter Hassenpflug, got so active in it and pursued it better than American historians and dug up all of this information. So when



Charley Craig and Bill Dewey (right)

John Woolnough, who was the editor of the newsletter of the 8th Air Force Historical Society, put a note in the summer 1988 newsletter that he'd like to have some information on this worst group loss in 8th Air Force history, the Kassel mission of the 445th, he was absolutely swamped. He said he never had so much information. He did an excellent job, and we reprinted part of it in our Kassel Mission reports. In fact, we reprinted all of it.

I asked John, "Why don't you continue to embellish on it?" He said, "We've got to think about the other groups." And he said, "Why don't you do it?" So we did. We composed and produced the book "The Kassel Mission Reports."

Bill Dewey: To my knowledge, the German fighters came up wingtip to wingtip, 30 abreast, from below, like a cavalry charge, and then split up concentrating on one or two planes. At one time we had five fighters on our plane, and then it cut down to three, and finally, they exhausted all their ammunition on our plane. It's amazing that our plane kept flying. You always hear about how the B-17s, the Flying Forts, taking so much punishment [and continuing to fly], but I'll tell you, my plane, like Mercer's, was just Swiss cheese. In fact, when we landed at Manston it was amazing with the terrible beating our plane had taken that we were able to land so perfectly. When we got on the ground I went back to the tail. I looked at it – the twin tails of the B-24 – and it looked like a giant can opener had been taken to the trailing edges; there just was nothing there at all. On both the rudders. And there was a huge hole in the right wing, in the right upper surface of the right wing right behind the No. 3 engine. It was wide open, spilling gas all the way back.

We didn't have to take the wounded out of the bottom of the waist. We could take them right through the waist window because there was no waist window there. There were two badly wounded men on board, and a third was slightly wounded.

Aaron Elson: Who were the badly wounded men?

Bill Dewey: Johnson was badly wounded and never flew again. He had a broken leg. And Walter Bartkow was the other one. Ruben Montanez was the tail gunner – Monty – and he’s the first one who reported fighters. He said, “I see flak! I see fighters!” What he saw was the tracers of the shells puffing gray puffs, not like the usual flak that we saw. Then all of a sudden the fighters appeared, and his tail turret caught fire, the hydraulic fluid caught fire, and he got out of that tail turret real fast.

It all happened in the space of about three to five minutes. All hell broke loose.

Aaron Elson: What was your position in the plane?

Bill Dewey: I was the pilot, of 855A-ABLE.

Aaron Elson: Did the plane have a name?

Bill Dewey: No. Just a number. We have a good picture of it that was taken by Squadron Publications. It’s in the Kassel Mission Reports. That was a good plane. It was a Ford-built, Willow Run-built, B-24 J, a darn good airplane. It responded beautifully. All of the tires were fully inflated, and not one of them was hit by any of the shrapnel. They came down. The gear came down and locked. Our flaps worked perfectly, and on that long runway [at Manston] who couldn’t make a good landing, but it was the best landing I ever made. They gave us another plane from another group, a green-tailed B-24, to fly back to our base later on.

Aaron Elson: Which number mission was the Kassel mission for you?

Bill Dewey: That was my eighth.

Aaron Elson: So you still had quite a bit of flying to do.

Bill Dewey: I had to fly 35 missions as a wing crew. Lead crews flew only 30 missions, but took longer to finish their tour. After Kassel, I think we flew one more mission and then they sent us on flak leave to Southport, on the southwest coast of England. And frankly I didn't enjoy it, because I wanted to get back and get my missions over with. We got back, and we were sent to Kassel again. That was one one of the first missions we had.

Aaron Elson: That must have been haunting.

Bill Dewey: Well, we were a little concerned, but nothing happened. It was a milk run. We saw hardly any flak and no fighters. But then they made us a lead crew. I always flew good formation. I was a good formation pilot, and Colonel Jones, the base commander, who flew in his P-47 on the practice missions always took notes on who was flying good position, and they promoted me very early to an element leader which meant that you led another group of one or two planes, and then from there on I was promoted to squadron lead pilot. That meant that we got a PFF pathfinder plane which had the radar in it, and three navigators instead of one. You had a pilotage navigator and a radar navigator – a mickey man, we called him – who looked at the radar scope. And the dead reckoning navigator who was the chief navigator. The pilotage navigator usually sat in the nose and looked at his maps and guided from the visual sightings on the ground.

Aaron Elson: Did the Kassel mission make you more nervous than you have been before?

Bill Dewey: Well, yes. But to my knowledge we only had one pilot that ever quit. A guy by the name of Al Frost. And he aborted. His plane aborted on the Kassel mission. About a week before he had brought a plane back with his bombardier beheaded, so he came to me after the Kassel mission – he came to our quonset hut – and he said, “Bill, I'm not going to

fly anymore. I'm turning in my wings." So he'd had it. But everyone else – I wanted to fly, I wanted to complete my missions. We were all crazy back then.

Aaron Elson: It's hard to fathom the stress and the tension that must have gone with that job.



Bill Dewey: Yes, it was tense. The interesting thing was – not just the Kassel mission, I suppose you've heard this from others – that flying formation was very difficult because you flew either the right wing or the left wing. Once you became a squadron leader and you flew with nine other planes behind you, the lead planes had a Honeywell C-3 automatic pilot and you could just twist a knob. But the other guys, if you weren't a good pilot on formation, you could use up all your gas by going back and forth and back and forth. Some guys did. If you flew good tight formation and made very few corrections, you could minimize your gas consumption. But the problem was that we had to fly through clouds, and when you went through clouds, you had to trust your instruments as well as watching the other planes. You had to look at the instruments, because if you didn't look at your instruments you'd get vertigo. One time, as the lead pilot we were coming back leading a formation, we'd dropped our bombs, we had rallied back into group formation, and I think we were flying the low left squadron of ten planes. I had it pretty well socked in underneath the lead squadron. The

group leader dropped down into the clouds, and of course we had to drop down too, and the slot leader – we flew a lead element of three planes, a high right element, a low left element, and a slot element of three planes – the slot leader got vertigo, and he pulled right up and my bombardier yelled, “Pull it up, Bill! Pull it up!” We were going to come together. So I had to pull it up, the formation fell apart, and one plane spun out and never made it back to the base. That was the hazard of flying formation.

The other thing was if you flew too close a formation – we were supposed to keep wingtip clearance in case one plane got flak and blew up, both of us wouldn’t blow up.

But it was, probably for all of us, the most exciting time of our lives. Even though we had the same food over and over again, it was certainly much better than being on the ground in Europe and eating K rations and C rations and sleeping in tents at best and sometimes in foxholes. We had it much better. But then we had to get up and go out on missions starting at 4 o’clock in the morning.

Aaron Elson: Mercer, in his account, described seeing two sets of propellers corkscrew off of the plane and keep flying in formation until they tilted downward. He attributed that to a mistake by the pilots with the thrust. Can you explain how that might have happened?

Bill Dewey: Well, that’s the only thing you could have done is shove the throttles forward to try to get out of formation. If you were flying in formation you couldn’t do that. I don’t quite understand why the pilot would do that unless it was panic and he shoved the throttles to the firewall just at the time they were hit. Then they exploded and the propellers took off on their own, from sheer momentum.

I didn’t see much. We were flying four squadrons. There was a lead squadron, a low left squadron, a high right squadron that [Reg] Miner was leading, and a high high right

squadron. We were in the high high right squadron, and what happened was, we made a 180-degree turn after we dropped our bombs and were heading back toward the bomber stream, or toward England. The higher you were, the more you tended to overrun because you're at a higher altitude and our airspeed, even though it was the same as [that of the planes] maybe 300 to 500 feet below, we would overrun because of that altitude difference. So our squadron leader had pulled us way over to the left, and consequently we were the last ones hit, which was fortunate for us – one of the reasons we got back, because some of the planes that reached us ran out of ammunition. So we were very fortunate to be in that position.

Aaron Elson: How many planes from your squadron made it back?

Bill Dewey: I think there were just two.

Aaron Elson: Now, what did you see?

Bill Dewey: I was over on the left seat, of course, as a pilot. My co-pilot, Bill Boykin, could see everything, because we were way up here and it was taking place on this side. So I saw very little. I experienced only the shaking of the plane and the reports that I got that our oxygen was shot out in the rear, and the plane was shuddering so that I knew we were in deep trouble, but as far as visually? No, I observed very little. But all these other guys saw a lot.

Aaron Elson: Did you lose any engines?

Bill Dewey: No. The engines performed beautifully. But our plane was shaking so badly that I couldn't keep up. After the battle took place there were seven planes left in our formation. Web Uebelhoer, the deputy lead, was leading the group. I called Web and asked him to slow down a bit. He said, "We'll try," but he didn't. He wanted to get back home. So

he was doing 160. I wanted him to slow down to 155. So finally we dropped out of formation and I contacted air-sea rescue, and gave them a long count. They asked me to give a long count, 1-2-3-4-5, then 10-9-8-7, and they took a reading on where I was. Then they gave me a heading to head toward Manston, and that was about an hour before we got there. Every 15 minutes they asked me to check in, and they would give me a slightly different heading.

Aaron Elson: When was the first indication you had that you were not on course to the target, or did you have any indication?

Bill Dewey: We were just flying in formation off our squadron lead, and our navigator, Herb Bailey, didn't pick that up at all. My original co-pilot, Bill Boykin, and Herb Bailey got their own plane in October and they were shot down November 26 on a mission to Misburg outside of Hamburg. Our group lost four or five planes that day; his was one of them. But Bill came back to me after he got his own plane and he said, "Bill, you don't know what a good crew you've got." Because he – I don't know if you ever saw the movie 12 O'Clock High – I've seen it 25 times. It's the best movie made about World War II. There are some flaws in it, but basically, if you remember the group executive officer was demoted to being a pilot of the Leper Colony, and he got the very worst of the whole group, they were given to him, and that's what Bill Boykin had. He got a plane where the pilot quit. They didn't do him any favors, I guess.

Aaron Elson: He became the pilot of the plane?

Bill Dewey: He became the first pilot and airplane commander.

Aaron Elson: But you got all 30 of your missions in?

Bill Dewey: Yes. I got all 30 and finished before the war was over. About the 4th of April I flew my last mission. My last mission was to just outside of Berlin, and after we made landfall we were flying about 19,000 feet and climbing to our designated altitude of 20, 21,000, and hadn't reached the target yet, and two planes came by us. They had the nacelles under their wings and we thought they were P-51s with wing tanks. Actually they were ME-262 jets, and they hit the group ahead of us, and then we saw two B-24s go down spinning. That was my last mission. But they didn't hit us. We dropped our bombs successfully I guess.

Then I was a briefing officer and assistant group operations officer. I think I only briefed two missions, but it was an interesting experience because there I was, 21 or 22 years old, and I was put in charge of running the whole mission, from the time you got the teletype through from Pinetree, which was 8th Air Force headquarters, and then down to the 2nd Air Division and the 2nd Combat Wing and down to our group, with the target and the designation of what kind of bombs you're going to carry, how much fuel, how much ammunition, it was our job, and usually there were two of us. I worked with a guy named Fritz Mueller, a lieutenant who had also finished his missions, from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Fritz was the son of Frederick Mueller, who was president of Mueller Furniture Company and Frederick Mueller became Secretary of Commerce under Eisenhower. Fritz and I were sitting in group headquarters to get the missions together. We'd have to get on the telephone and call the bomb dump, the ammunition dump, the fuel dump, all the squadrons, intelligence, weather, and then act as master of ceremonies, introduce the various people including the base commander and so forth, so it was a wonderful experience to be in that position.

Aaron Elson: What was the mood at the base after the Kassel mission?

Bill Dewey: We came back late. After we took our wounded off and we finally got back on this plane they gave us, we got in and it was dark. We came in and landed, and they'd already had the debriefing, and everything had taken place. Nobody was around. They sent a truck out to get our people. We were alone, and it was pretty blue. People were pretty down in the dumps. They couldn't believe it. It was shock. Because we thought the war was practically over, everybody was going to be home by Christmas. This was the end of September, and we hadn't seen German fighters since the Gotha mission in February. Here it was seven months later.

Aaron Elson: Had you heard stories about the Gotha mission?

Bill Dewey: Oh, yes. Everybody talked about how terrible the Gotha mission was, where they lost 13 planes. But the group hit the target that day. We didn't hit the target. They accomplished their mission, but ours was completely wasted. The only thing we hit, one dead ox. Well, actually it was wounded and had to be shot.

Aaron Elson: This is what, roughly 175,000 pounds of bombs? Assuming each plane had 5,000 pounds of bombs, 5 times 35. ...

Bill Dewey: That's right. All wasted. Many times we dropped them in the North Sea or the English Channel. Toward the end of the war we had to bomb visually because the troops were moving so fast. We were recalled twice. One time we led the 8th Air Force, and Colonel Jones, the base commander, was sitting in the right seat, the co-pilot's seat. I was the pilot but he was the command pilot. Our 2nd Air Division, all B-24s from all the 14 bases in Norwich, were under his command that day. Originally the 1st and 3rd Divisions, which were B-17s, were in front, but then they switched it to the secondary target and

because of the geographical position, that put our group and our division in the lead. We had made landfall, and it was solid undercast, and we got a recall. We had to turn back and jettison our bombs into the North Sea. So you can imagine how many bombs are down at the bottom of the North Sea, unexploded. Of course they're probably all safe, they've got the pin in them, but still. The North Sea and the English Channel are just full of bombs. And planes. Glenn Miller came to our base one time, and Glenn Miller's plane is down there in that North Sea someplace. You probably heard that it was reported that a RAF Lancaster coming back from Europe had jettisoned its bombs and hit a Norden Norseman, and they think that was Glenn Miller's plane that day. Freak accident. He came to our base one time, in early September, before the Kassel mission.

Aaron Elson: Did he perform, or did he just come to visit?

Bill Dewey: Oh yes, he set up the whole band ... I said the Kassel mission was my fifth mission. It was my eighth mission. On our fifth mission we had to land in Paris right after it was liberated. We lost an engine. We couldn't feather it, it just kept windmilling; it was our No. 2, our left inboard engine, and we thought it was going to come off possibly and go through the cockpit. So we headed for France. We dropped out of formation, found an empty field over Belgium, dropped our bombs, set them on safety, and our navigator, Herb Bailey, that time picked up Paris on his G-Box. We headed there, and it was Le Bourget Field, where Lindbergh had landed. But the main runways were just full of shell holes. Twin-engine C-47s were landing, picking up wounded, because it was only a week after it had been liberated and there was still fighting in the streets. So the main runways were full of shellholes and we landed on a 2,700-foot grass strip. You're supposed to land a B-24 on at least 3,500 feet. So we skidded to the end, and then a jeep came out with a big "Follow

Me” on it, and we followed him, parked our plane and went into Paris. We really weren’t dressed for the occasion, because we had our flying gear on. I spent the night there, and then my aerial engineer, Charlie Craig, and I flew back right away. The other guys came back a day later.



Bill Dewey and re-enactors at Tibenham airfield

Bill Dewey: We went to Magdeburg five times. The flak at Magdeburg was worse than Berlin. It was a terrible place to fly. It was heavily industrial, and they really protected it with flak guns. Those flak gunners were good. The only thing that saved our bacon was when there was undercast and we could drop that chaff – the strips of aluminum – that really helped. We could see that flak bursting against that aluminum that they thought was our planes. You know, every morning when we took off, we used the main runway which was 6,000 feet long. Often we would go south on Runway 2-1. There was a house at the end of the runway, and we always wondered with our bomb load and with 2,700 gallons of gas if we’d make it over the top of the house, and one fellow wrote me – we put a note in the newsletter – that his plane hit the chimney and knocked the chimney off the house. The

other way, on Runway 3, the reciprocal of that Runway 2-1, you'd head out over the North Sea. And we had to climb to 11,000 feet, and then we would turn toward Buncher 6, and at Buncher 6 circling around, we would have our formation ship, which they had painted wild psychedelic colors. They'd be firing certain flares, but the marking we could identify was our group, and we would form on that. So we would circle and form for about 45 minutes to an hour to get the whole formation together, and then finally our group would be in the proper formation with the other groups. The English said if you stood on the shore and looked at that formation going over, it was 45 minutes to an hour before the entire formation passed over. So every morning there you could see a crash of two planes coming together in the air. Through the black there'd always be a flash somewhere. We were so close together, and the fields were right on top of each other. It's a wonder we didn't all come together. Almost every morning there was a midair collision. And sometimes we would get into the prop wash of the group ahead of us and it took both us, the pilot and the copilot, on the rudders to keep that plane from flipping over. Sometimes planes came together as a result of prop wash. You had to be on your toes all the time. I think really the guys who were back in the waist and down below, the navigators, bombardiers and the gunners were much worse off than we were, the pilot and the co-pilot, because we could at least see what was going on. It's like driving a car with somebody that gets carsick in the back seat and has to sit in the front seat to see where they're going. I would have hated to have to ride all my missions in the back or in the waist. You'd have to have almighty faith in your pilot.

Aaron Elson: They must have had some damn good pilots, including yourself.

Bill Dewey: Well, we had wonderful training. Absolutely wonderful training. I cracked up in training. I had a forced landing. I lost an engine. In a single engine plane, if you lose an

engine that's it. So I totaled a PT-22 Ryan. I hit a dry irrigation ditch – it was the only field that was open – and I washed back two classes, so I had to start all over again. But you had nine weeks of pre-flight, nine weeks of primary, nine weeks of basic, nine weeks of advanced, nine weeks of transition when you got into the B-24s, nine weeks of crew training, then you were sent overseas. So we had almost a year of heavy training, and it was good training. It was just an amazing job that the Air Force did at that time to get us ready. It was outstanding. And that's why they gave us almost a year of credit when we went back to college on the GI Bill. I had 22 hours' credit. And I only had a high school education. It was worth it.

Aaron Elson: Was there any kind of stigma attached to the 445th after the Kassel raid?

Bill Dewey: Not really, but let me just digress for a minute. Colonel Jones got a call from wing headquarters and he thought he was going to be stripped of his command. Instead they asked him, "Do you want experienced pilots from other groups or green guys, fresh recruits from the States?" He said, "We'll take the fresh ones and we'll train them our way." But when he got that call he thought he was a goner. So all these guys that came in from the other groups, if you talk to them, they were scared stiff, because they came into these empty bunks. What happened to these guys? They were really scared. But no, we never had any jinx attached to our group. You'd think there would have been.

Aaron Elson: The pilots were all fresh?

Bill Dewey: They were all green crews. They had just come over from the States, and from North Ireland, after maybe a week over there.

Aaron Elson: And you got all new planes?

Bill Dewey: Yes, new planes came in. Usually every base had about 65 planes attached to it. There were four squadrons, and not all the planes could get in the air at once. A maximum effort was 40 planes, and we were supposed to have a maximum effort on the Kassel mission, 40 planes. That left 25 planes on the ground in various stages of repair.

Aaron Elson: Those ground crews must have. ...

Bill Dewey: They did a wonderful job. And their crew chiefs especially. Very few crew chiefs come to our reunions, and it's a shame. **Bill Dewey:** Walter Bartkow, our gunner who was wounded, had been in the paratroopers and made 16 jumps, broke his legs and didn't want to be in the paratroops anymore, so he switched to the Air Force to be a gunner where it would be safer. After our first mission – the Dessau mission – he told me, “I was counting beads so fast, when that flak was coming up, I never said so many Hail Marys in my life.” And then it wasn't too long after the Kassel mission – in fact about a week or two weeks later – we had a psychologist or psychiatrist, there was a major who came to the base, a big fat fellow. He was interrogating all of the survivors of the Kassel mission, and his eyes would get as big as saucers when you told him the stories. And he gave Walter Bartkow clearance to stop flying. He recommended that he not fly any more. That didn't take effect until right after the first of the year; Bart flew with us for a while, but he didn't finish his tour. But Bart showed up at a reunion we had at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. If it hadn't been for him [we probably wouldn't have made it] because after he was knocked down by that 20-millimeter, he got up and opened up a .50-caliber, this German plane was right out there and he could see the color of the pilot's eyes, and that plane just blew up.

One more 20-millimeter might have been our downfall. And Johnson the same way. He struggled to his feet even though he had a broken leg and shot down a plane. My crew is

credited with I believe two kills and three probables. But if you add up all those numbers there were a lot more German planes than hit us. Maybe 300 instead of 150.

There are only 29 that were shot down. What happened is the gunners were shooting the same plane from the other B-24s, and the same thing for the fighters. So there were duplications.

Aaron Elson: I didn't know that they had sent a psychologist.

Bill Dewey: He was a psychologist or a psychiatrist, I don't know which, but Walt Bartkow, when he came out of there, he said, "That's guy's crazier than a hoot owl." He told him all of his war stories, and he was intrigued.

Aaron Elson: He must have filed a report somewhere.

Bill Dewey: Yes, he must have. What I'd like to get – when we landed at Manston there was a 9th Air Force photographer who took pictures. We got out of our plane, and this photographer was a movie photographer and also took stills. He'd been all through the war with the 9th Air Force, and he'd seen all kinds of planes come in but he'd never seen a plane as bad as ours, and he asked Bill Boykin and me and Herb Bailey to go and act as if we were coming out of the plane for the first time. I didn't want to do it. I'd had it. But Bill Boykin said, "Come on, Dewey, let's do it." So we did that, and we acted as if we were just coming out of the plane and he made a movie of it, and he took stills of it, and he promised to send us pictures but he never did. So somewhere there are pictures of that plane. But probably there are thousands of others amongst his collection. And he was 9th Air Force and this was 8th Air Force, so probably it was just discarded as not important.

Aaron Elson: What kind of damage did the plane sustain?

Bill Dewey: It had to be practically rebuilt. It had to have a new right wing. A completely new tail section. A completely new waist. The No. 3 engine, which had our hydraulic, that's where they poured most of their ammunition and that had to be replaced completely. There was damage to the propellers. It was just full of holes everywhere. But they patched it together again, I guess it flew again. It was resurrected.

The best B-24s came out of Ford, Willow Run. They were turning out one B-24 every 53 minutes. And they said it never could be done with airplanes. They told Henry Ford they couldn't build them like automobiles, but he did. He proved them wrong. And they did a good job, too. They were excellent airplanes. I guess Lindbergh was attached to Willow Run at first. He flew some as a test pilot, some of the B-24s, and then also for Lockheed he flew the P-38s, and he flew in combat I guess for a couple of missions in the South Pacific.

Aaron Elson: The fighter planes that came in on the Kassel mission, were they P-38s or P-51s or both?

Bill Dewey: The P-51s came in responding to our original cries for help. But as we were heading out of the battle area with the seven planes, we saw these planes coming at us and they were P-38s. We thought we'd had it. We thought we got more fighters. So the 38's did appear. By that time the 38's and 47's were being replaced by 51's pretty much, so this might have been one group that had not had the replacement 51's yet. But they came really late. The battle was over by the time the 38's got there. And it was pretty well over when the 51's got there.

Aaron Elson: As a survivor of the Kassel mission at the base, were you regarded at the base in a special way?

Bill Dewey: Everybody had great respect. I think that's one of the reasons I was promoted to lead pilot. Also because I flew fairly good formation and there were very few crews left. There were only a handful of us left, so anybody who could fly good formation and understood was in line for promotion.

Aaron Elson: Did you have any contact with Jimmy Stewart?

Bill Dewey: Yep. My only contact was one mission I briefed that he flew as a command pilot, in April. Then, after the main briefing in the main briefing room, they broke up into the specialist areas. The pilots stayed together, the gunners stayed together, navigators and bombardiers all went to different places. I went to the navigators' briefing, which was in the war room, and Colonel Stewart – he was a lieutenant colonel by then – was there. After the navigator briefing I asked Colonel Stewart, “Do you have anything to add?” And he said, “No.” So that was my only conversation with him. But I guess he was a pretty good guy. He used to come back to the base and play the piano, and they said he was just a regular guy. He didn't put on any airs at all. You know, he enlisted as a private. Then right away, because of his experience, he was promoted.



Aaron Elson: Were you married at the time?

Bill Dewey: No. I was single. I was just one step ahead of the draft. I enlisted as a private also. And when I was at Camp Custer in Battle Creek, I got a card, "Greetings from the President of the United States. Report to my draft board." But I was already in. So I went through Santa Ana as a private, and then went through the Cadets. I had to resign as a private to become a Cadet.

Aaron Elson: Did you want to go into planes from the get-go?

Bill Dewey: Oh yeah. I was scared stiff they'd find out that I could type, and I'd end up a clerk. I hid that as much as I could. I wanted to fly. I wanted to be a pilot. But I didn't want to be a fighter pilot. I wanted to be a multi-engine pilot. I was looking forward to that. So I was sent to twin-engine school at Marco, Texas, and then on to B-24s at Albuquerque, New Mexico. My flying mate at Kirtland Field, Albuquerque, was killed. He stayed on as an instructor and he was killed, they flew into the side of a mountain. It was hazardous duty back in those days.

Aaron Elson: That's like what George Noorigian said. After he got back, they had to make up 12 hours to get their flight pay and he went on a flight to Tucson and on the way to Tucson they got lost and they barely found a little landing strip. The sheriff who came to get them said he couldn't count the number of times he had to go into the mountains and bring back bodies from planes that had gotten lost.

Bill Dewey: That happened a lot when we were at Kirkland Field. We spent a couple of days just flying, looking for a plane that had gone down. To my knowledge they hadn't found it by the time I left. The day we landed, we debarked from our 6-by-6 trucks at Tonopah, Nevada, when I went into crew training there. There on the side of the mountain was a B-24 burning. I don't know why they put a base there at Tonopah, Nevada, because

on three sides, a horseshoe, it's all mountainous. If you took off to the north and lost two engines you'd go right into the mountains. If you took off to the south there was a dry lake, you were okay. We spent nine weeks in Tonopah training as a crew. Terrible place.

Tarpaper shacks. Sand all the time. Sand in your food.

Aaron Elson: How old were you?

Bill Dewey: Twenty when I went in. Twenty-one on the Kassel mission.

Aaron Elson: When was your birthday?

Bill Dewey: October 5th. I wasn't quite 22.