

Henry Dobek 1999 interview

Henry Dobek: Now who did you interview in West Palm Beach?

Aaron Elson: Kay Brainard Hutchins. Her brother ...

Henry Dobek: Oh, you didn't talk to the person himself, you talked to his sister.

Aaron Elson: Her brother was killed. Not on the mission, he parachuted safely and he was one of five people who were captured and were executed on the ground.

Henry Dobek: Yes, I went to that town. When we put that memorial up, Hassenpflug took us all around, where the airplanes landed, where this execution took place. I think she was on that trip, too.

Aaron Elson: Yes she was. I wasn't, but she was. Now you were ...

Henry Dobek: I was a navigator.

Aaron Elson: In one of the planes that made it back to Tibenham?

Henry Dobek: That's right.

Aaron Elson: So let's go back a little bit, and get this from the very beginning.

Henry Dobek: From the very beginning.

Aaron Elson: I'd like a little background on yourself.

Henry Dobek: I was brought up and raised in Dunkirk, New York. It's about 35 miles south of Buffalo. And I went to school there, I graduated high school, and I think I was out one year when I enlisted in the Air Force, the Air Corps, as an aviation cadet. And I was classified as a pilot, so I went to preflight training and I went to flight school in Blythe, California, and washed out as a pilot. But they offered me the chance to go to navigation school, which I did. And I graduated from San Marcos navigation school in April of '44. From there we went to Casper, Wyoming, where I picked up the crew, and we trained in B'24s. Then we, after I don't know, about maybe four weeks of training, we flew to Lincoln, Nebraska, picked up a brand-new B-24 and started to fly overseas, and the first stop was Bangor, Maine. We were stuck there ten days because we had leaky fuel tanks. So we had to sit there while they replaced all the fuel tanks.

Aaron Elson: A brand new plane?

Henry Dobek: A brand new plane. So after a week, after two weeks or so, ten days, two weeks, I don't recall exactly, we took off, we went to Gander, Newfoundland. From Newfoundland we went to Iceland, and from Iceland to Ireland. Actually we landed there because as a navigator I had to take G-box training. As for the crew, it was about a week or so, they just sat around doing anything, I was the one that had to go to school.

Aaron Elson: Can you explain that G-box to me?

Henry Dobek: Well, basically it's, you have two radio stations sending out signals, and what the G-box would do was time the time it took for the signal to come from this station, then from the other

station, and consequently you would be able to find a line, and when these two lines crossed was your position, which was an excellent gadget. Unfortunately, its range was very short. After the invasion they started to put stations in Europe. They were able then to use it into Germany pretty well. That's what a G-box was, it was an excellent piece of equipment. If it worked (laughs). That was a main point. When the G-box worked you could find your position within yards. So it was an excellent navigational tool.

Aaron Elson: But that wasn't for bombing.

Henry Dobek: No. They thought that it could be used for bombing but it was never developed to that point yet. Actually you have to have stations, you know, that they were over enemy territory so it would be very difficult to do it.

Aaron Elson: What was the thing that was used for bombing?

Henry Dobek: They used a Norden bomb sight. And what they would do if the bombardier couldn't see the ground, he would take instructions from the radar operator, and they would drop on the, uh, radar operator radar operator would tell him, okay, we're here, and then he'd drop. But for the most part it was the Norden bomb sight that was used. And the only ones that had the bombardiers were the lead plane and the deputy lead planes, and the rest of us, we would just follow right along. So although we did have a bombardier on our airplane, but he was never used to drop bombs. He actually was a nose gunner more than a bombardier. And so what we would do we would fly along with the leader and watch him, as soon as his bombs go we let ours go. So that was basically how a typical run went.

Aaron Elson: So from northern Ireland, or from Ireland, you went to Tibenham?

Henry Dobek: Yes, we went to Tibenham and we trained, I don't know, for a couple or three weeks or so, and then they send you out on your first mission.

Aaron Elson: Now when you arrived at Tibenham, they had already been through quite a bit.

Henry Dobek: Oh yeah, because we didn't get to Tibenham until probably July, probably the end of July, it was at least a month after D-Day, so they had, Tibenham was in operation I think since ...

Aaron Elson: Late December or early January of '44.

Henry Dobek: I thought it was even operating before that. You see Jimmy Stewart was in our group. When we arrived there, he was already gone, but he would come back occasionally and we would see him in the officers club.

Aaron Elson: Did people talk about him?

Henry Dobek: Well, actually, he was very, he kept to himself a lot. The few times I've seen him in the officers club he would be off to the side, he would have his drink and then the people would congregate around him and it seems that he would then take off after a while. You know, he appeared to be quite bashful and I think he was. He didn't feel comfortable with a lot of people around him. But he would show up maybe once, maybe twice a month. Because he moved up from Tibenham to headquarters. He went over I think as a first lieutenant and I think that a year and a half later he was a lieutenant colonel, so he did pretty well.

Aaron Elson: What was your first mission like?

Henry Dobek: My first mission was to Karlsruhe, and it was a disaster. I mean, we were so nervous that we didn't know what the hell we were doing. As a matter of fact, as we made the bomb run on our first mission, what we would do is the bombardier, who was right in front of me, I'm behind him as the navigator, as soon as he'd see the lead ship's bombs go, he would let the bombs go, but as a backup I would hit the salvo lever to make sure that everything went. So, as I recall, we were going over the first target and they didn't drop the bombs, and I'm standing on this thing ready to go, and he turned around and he went like this and I thought he meant go, so I let 'em go, and we were the only ones who dropped our bombs (laughs). So on the way back home I said, "Man, we're gonna be court-martialed, they're gonna throw the key away," but the only thing they said was "Well, do you think you hit anything?" I didn't have any idea where they went. So that was quite a mixed-up, that was a disaster, but after that, you know, things went a little better.

Aaron Elson: Who were the people in your crew?

Henry Dobek: Well, our pilot lives in Florida. I should give you his name and address...

Aaron Elson: Please do, this is Swofford?

Henry Dobek: Yes, Paul Swofford.

Aaron Elson: Now George Collar said he's tried to contact Paul and he can't get him to talk.

Henry Dobek: I don't know, I see him, oh, maybe once every two years. We drive by to Tampa and we stop and see him. But he's not very anxious to talk about the mission. A couple of years ago we had a 2nd Air Division reunion in Chicago, and a young fellow showed up, he was an artist, and he had a picture of the Sweetest Rose of Texas, B-24, that's the one we flew on the Kassel Mission. And when he heard that I was a navigator on that plane on that mission, boy, he grabbed ahold of me and he says, "You've got to sign this thing." And he said, "Where's the rest of your crew members?" So I gave him the name and addresses of the few that I knew, and I told him about Paul Swofford, I said, "Well, give him a call, and see whether he'll see you," and he drove down to Florida and Paul didn't sign it.

Aaron Elson: Oh, good. I'm going over that way Sunday, so maybe, because I'm gonna meet Charles Graham and one other fellow in Cape Haze. Charles Graham I think is in Fort Myers.

Henry Dobek: Oh, so you're going across and then down again.

Aaron Elson: I'm going down to Miami tomorrow morning, back up to West Palm, to Palm Beach to meet Ira Weinstein.

Henry Dobek: How long have you been on the road?

Aaron Elson: Oh, since last Saturday.

Henry Dobek: Oh, so you're only gone a week. Well you're fortunate, because we're leaving for going up north this week.

Aaron Elson: I took two weeks, I went to Michigan and to Ohio and met George Collar and Bill Dewey.

Henry Dobek: So you talked to Bill Dewey?

Aaron Elson: Yes.

Henry Dobek: See, I flew the last 20 missions with him, as a lead crew.

Aaron Elson: Did you!

Henry Dobek: Yes. The Kassel Mission was my seventh mission, and I think I flew three more missions with Swofford, then they made me the lead navigator and I started flying with Dewey. And I finished up with Dewey. He actually is the one that was behind all this business of the Kassel Mission for the memorial, the whole works.

Aaron Elson: Yes.

Henry Dobek: We do have, called the Kassel Mission Memorial Association, and he's headed that from Day One. So he did quite a bit of work in that respect.

Aaron Elson: Yes. Did Swofford continue flying after the ...

Henry Dobek: He stayed in the Air Force, in the Air Corps. He retired, I don't know when, and then he taught school for a while. And now he's retired.

Aaron Elson: How did that day begin?

Henry Dobek: Well I guess it began like any other day. We would get up at something like two in the morning or three in the morning, a guy would come and wake you up, and we'd go out and have our breakfast, then go to briefing, and then dress up and then take off about, oh, I don't know, five, six in the morning, then go up and just circle and circle and circle until everybody else got up. And then you'd finally head to the target maybe 11 o'clock.

Aaron Elson: Do you remember what you had for breakfast?

Henry Dobek: Well, for breakfast, if you were flying that day on a mission, you got real eggs, so that was a treat, because if you didn't fly, you had to eat the powdered eggs. They weren't too good. But it was a very good breakfast, it always was when you're flying, you had eggs and the rest of the stuff that goes with it, so it was an excellent breakfast. If you were flying a mission that was great. So we got a real good meal. And then we took off, we circled until we formed, and then we headed off towards Kassel, I think it was the marshaling yards we were going after, I'm not sure.

Aaron Elson: Some people have said the Henschel tank engine works.

Henry Dobek: Maybe that was it, I don't know.

Aaron Elson: George Collar thinks it was the marshaling yards which were right next to the engine works. It could have been both.

Henry Dobek: Well it could have been both. I don't recall exactly what the target was. But again, my job is, we were flying high high right. You have a lead, you have a low left, you have a high right, and you have a high high right.

Aaron Elson: Now which squadron were you?

Henry Dobek: We were in the 70...1, I think. I think there were either 36 airplanes that were over the target, if I'm not mistaken, and 28 were shot down, and four of us got back and the rest crash-landed, a couple in France and a couple in England. One crash landed near our base, as a matter of fact.

Aaron Elson: That was Krivik, the pilot.

Henry Dobek: Krivik, that's right. But we were both in the same area, and we shot our flares because our radio man was hit in the arm, so we shot a red flare indicating we had injured aboard. I guess he did the same thing, and I don't know if they gave us priority over him or he tried to land before us but anyway, he crashed before we got to the base.

Aaron Elson: Now I talked to John Cadden over the phone and he was in that crew...

Henry Dobek: The Krivik crew?

Aaron Elson: Yes, and he said that there was construction equipment on the runway.

Henry Dobek: That I didn't know.

Aaron Elson: For some reason the runway was not available and then they had to crash land.

Henry Dobek: I don't know about that because we landed. And three others did. Unless we landed on a different runway, I don't know. I think there were just two runways (unintelligible) to begin with, because we went back for a visit a few years ago and we went to Tibenham, and they still had the runways there, because they have a glider school, and I couldn't believe how short those runways are when you consider the B-24s were loaded with bombs, it was something like 52, 5800 feet, which isn't very long at all. No, I didn't know that, that they couldn't land because of something. Now when we landed, we had no brakes. We went off the end of the runway and went into a ditch. We lost electrical equipment, our hydraulics were gone, so Swofford did an excellent job, he put the airplane down, and I think they had one application of brake, after that there's nothing. And we went off the end of the runway.

Aaron Elson: When you approached the initial point that day, what happened?

Henry Dobek: Well, again, when we got to the initial point there was nothing unusual. We were flying along following all these guys, and we got to the initial point, they started on the bomb run, and, usually a bomb run is around ten minutes. And we're waiting, waiting, waiting for bombs to drop, nothing happened. We just kept right on going. So according to my charts, we had already passed Kassel. And finally the bombs went, and I kind of figured out hell, we're 40, 50 miles past Kassel, I figured we were at a town called Goettingen. And then, we dropped our bombs, turned around, started heading back, and that's when we got hit by the fighters. I didn't know what the hell was happening. All of a sudden, fighters came, and I don't have a gun as a navigator. All I did was look out the window. Airplanes going down. Parachutes all over the place. Fighter planes flying back and forth. I just sat there. Then we got hit in the Number 3 engine, and so we had to shut that one off. And a, I think it was a 20-millimeter shell hit the plexiglas of the pilot's windshield, and I didn't know that until I went up, crawled up and looked up front, they had little tiny pieces of plexiglas in their face, and just little droplets of blood. It scared the hell out of me. I didn't know if they were hurt or not. But all it was was superficial wounds. It only happened I guess in a couple or three minutes and it was all gone. Some fighters came back, American fighters came back, and I guess they engaged the German fighters, and we just took off, and I think there was maybe three of us flying in very loose formation going back home. And we had one engine out, we were kind of concerned because with one engine [out] we weren't gonna be able to keep up with the other people. Until

we got to the English Channel and then everybody went off on their own and we went home. So, that was about it.

Aaron Elson: What was it like inside the plane? Were the gunners firing at the...

Henry Dobek: Oh yeah, yeah. That's when I knew that something was happening all of a sudden because you could hear the guns going off, the interphone, people were talking, fighter this o'clock, 12 o'clock, 6 o'clock and all this. So you knew there was something going on.

Aaron Elson: Was there a sense of panic?

Henry Dobek: Well, I don't know if it was panic or not but there was a lot of chatter. And then all of a sudden after it was, we were hit with that engine, I think the Number 3 engine had something to do with the electrical system because we lost our interphone. I lost my compass, so we had to fly back on a little bitty thing, a little magnetic compass that you might see in a car. Just a little tiny one.

Aaron Elson: How did you lose your compass?

Henry Dobek: Well, it's an electrical compass, so when we lost our electrical system the compass went out. So we had to go back with this little compass that we had that was sitting right in front of the pilot. But, you know, all you had to do was just head west, you were eventually gonna hit something. Oh, I don't know if you'd call it panic or not, but there was a lot of excitement going on, because that was the only time that we engaged fighters in any strength at all. Once in a while on other missions we had one or two fighters come and try to do something, but we didn't get much opposition. Flak was our biggest problem. So, they estimated what, there was 150 German fighters or so.

Aaron Elson: What was the flak like?

Henry Dobek: Well, it was I guess what you would call moderate. Black smoke popping up all over the place. It certainly wasn't as bad as it was over Berlin, or some of the others, but there was a significant amount of flak. Kassel was a pretty good size town. So there was quite a bit of flak.

Aaron Elson: Now, when you got back to the base, that must have been a pretty harrowing landing.

Henry Dobek: Yes it was as a matter of fact. But like I say, Swofford did an outstanding job. He put the airplane down and we were able to stop, but we were at the end of the runway in a ditch, then they came over and took the radio man out, he was wounded. And they asked, was everybody else all right? Yeah, we're okay. And they come up to me and says, "Do you have all your maps and log?" So they took that right away. And then we went to debrief, you know, try to explain what happened as best we could. One of our gunners was credited with a probable kill. I don't know if they ever, if they gave him a kill, but I think he got a probable kill.

Aaron Elson: Who was that?

Henry Dobek: I think his name was ... oh, it starts with a W. Here we go. This was our, right here. This is me. This is Swofford. He [another crew member] passed away. He was a famous author.

Aaron Elson: Who?

Henry Dobek: Augustine Mandino. And ... here was the guy, I think his name was Waller.

Aaron Elson (reading): Waller. Joseph Waller, gunner.

Henry Dobek: Yeah. I think that's, he's the one that was given a probable.

Henry Dobek: (reading) "I.G. Farben Steel Works." At least that's what (unintelligible). So it's not marshaling yards.

Aaron Elson: Now, how many days in succession had you flown? You flew the 25th ...

Henry Dobek: Okay, the 9th of September, the 10th of September, 11th of September, 12th of September, and then we got 25th, 26th, 27th, and after the Kassel Mission we got a little break until the 5th of October.

Aaron Elson: Now wait a second, you got a two-week break in between?

Henry Dobek: It was eight days. 27th of September until the 5th of October.

Aaron Elson: Now what did you do in those eight days?

Henry Dobek: I don't know. Apparently sat in the officers club and drank. (laughs). I'm not sure. ... This one here, it was our tenth mission, it was three days after the Kassel Mission, we're ready to take off, and the guys who were loading the bombs came to our bombardier and said "Look, you may have trouble with this one rack here, you may have to kick that out, because we had trouble installing it." So they're talking, all of a sudden the darn thing dropped, they were incendiaries. The incendiaries were oh, maybe about a foot long and maybe two or three inches in diameter, and they'd bundle maybe 200 in a bundle. The whole bundle fell down on the concrete. And they say that if it drops six feet or more, the things automatically go off. So when we saw that thing drop, we took off and ran like a sonofagun for a ditch, but none of them exploded. So we were lucky for that respect.

Henry Dobek: When we came back from the Kassel Mission there were empty beds all over the place. The next three or four days people were coming in; as a matter of fact, my neighbor, living next door, he came in after the Kassel Mission. But it was a mess for about a week or so afterward.

Aaron Elson: It must have been a tremendously down ...

Henry Dobek: Yeah, you know, because there were a lot of people you knew that weren't coming back. You didn't know if they were killed, if they were POWs or what.

Aaron Elson: Did you lose any close friends on the mission?

Henry Dobek: No. Gee. Your friends were not as close as they are now, because, you know, I've played golf with these guys here for 14 years. These guys I met maybe a month or two ago, and then that's it. So in that respect, you didn't really have real close friends. The only close people you knew were the ones on your crew. And the others were the people that were in the same quonset hut that you were in. But really you weren't real close.

Aaron Elson: What was the debriefing like?

Henry Dobek: Oh, I don't recall exactly, but I guess they were like any other debriefing. You know, they asked you what happened here, what did you do here? What did you do here when you turned the IP? When did the fighters hit you? Well they were asking me a lot of questions because I didn't have a

gun, I was watching the whole thing. I was a spectator. How many airplanes do you think went down? How many parachutes do you think you seen? When you watched this airplane go down were there any parachutes out of it? So there were questions like that. But it was a typical debriefing and, of course everything was somber because, you know, they knew they lost a lot of people.

Aaron Elson: Did Jimmy Stewart show up?

Henry Dobek: I don't recall seeing him. He probably did show up at some time or another. I'm sure he showed up but I don't recall seeing him.

Aaron Elson: And who was it in your crew that was wounded, the radio ...

Henry Dobek: The radio operator, Eugene Thum. He got shrapnel in his arm. It wasn't serious. I think he was in the hospital maybe a week or two, maybe two, three weeks, then he was flying again after that. But I lost track of those guys because I moved on to the lead crew I think about two months after the Kassel Mission, and I think I flew 11 or 12 missions with Swofford and then the rest, the 18, I flew with Dewey as lead navigator. You know, what has it been, 44, that's 55 years ago.

Aaron Elson: I know. Did Thum return to flying?

Henry Dobek: I think he did. He lives in Ohio as a matter of fact. Somewhere. I've never seen him since England. Very few of my crew showed up at the 2nd Air Division reunion. I've been to about six or seven of them, and there's, I don't think there was a single crew member from Swofford's crew that was ever to a Second Air Division reunion. Dewey's, when we were on Dewey's crew, a couple of guys would show up. I remember one guy, Springer, he would show up. He's since passed away. Dewey's been to a couple of them. And another, the pilotage navigator, he was at one or two, he's since passed away. So there were very few of my crew members that ever showed up at those reunions. But I've met a lot of people like Collar and Uebelhoer, and then we went to England together and we went to Tibenham and looked at the airfield, so, Reg Miner is another guy, he lives in New York. So I got to know them, I didn't know them overseas. Didn't know them at all.

Henry Dobek: I met this one person at a reunion. He says, "You're the guy that was always fixing your bike." I was always getting flats, and you couldn't get a tire. I don't think I went back to Kassel at all. I went to Berlin twice. We got a lead crew commendation for, I don't know what the target was -- Magdeburg. Oh, hell, I went there five times. A lady across the street is German, she came over after the war. Her sister lives in Magdeburg. I never told her I went there five times. Marshaling yards was the biggest thing because that was right after D-Day, we were trying to prevent the Germans from bringing troops up to the front. Berlin. We went after Hitler one time.

Aaron Elson: Really?

Henry Dobek: Yeah. There was a ... when was that? I think the place was called (Zaszen?), which is about 30 miles south of Berlin. And he was supposed to have a lot of, there was a big meeting with all his generals there and everything, and we went there and bombed. I don't think we killed anybody. I was watching something on the History Channel and they talked about that mission, of course they were all underground so the only thing that suffered were the things above ground. When the heck was that? Oh yeah, "German army headquarters, 15 March." Zaszen(?) Hitler was there, and I guess they were trying to get him.

Aaron Elson: When was your last mission?

Henry Dobek: 21 March. And then I stayed behind as an instructor/navigator until the end of the war. Yeah, people said, "Hey, don't go back to the States, they're just gonna train you to get on a B-29 and head in the other direction." Sure enough, because when I came back, they shipped me to Houston, Texas, and I was training for B-29s. Fortunately the war ended in August, so. I would have been in the Far East I guess if I would have come home after the, uh ... Now, Swofford came back quite early because when you flew lead, you didn't fly as much as you did when you were flying wing. Like you can see, we were flying, there were periods we were flying almost every day, but then when I got on lead, 21 November, 12 December 1 January, 16 January, 31 January, so you would have two, three weeks sometimes between missions. So Swofford's crew finished well before I did. I finished in March and I think they finished in January.

Aaron Elson: And you had 30 missions?

Henry Dobek: Yes, as a lead crew it was 30, and the others had to fly 35.

Aaron Elson: Did you see planes crash in midair and things like that?

Henry Dobek: Well, I've seen airplanes spinning going down, I don't recall if some of them were colliding with each other, but there was smoke all over the place with burning airplanes and parachutes and the whole works. So there was a bunch of, it all happened so damn fast.

Aaron Elson: What exactly -- I feel like the debriefing officer -- what exactly can you recall when you looked out the window.

Henry Dobek: It was just the most awesome sight. Well, it was the, I had another awesome sight, I don't know which was more awesome. The other awesome sight was when we flew over France a month after D-Day we looked down, and I thought I seen a million ships. I couldn't believe that there could be so many ships in one spot, because they were just unloading supplies. And that stood out in my mind, of course then the Kassel Mission was another awesome thing. But it was so fast, it happened like that, and all I did was look out the window, planes going like this, parachutes, and then when we got hit, I put my chest pack on, because I thought we were goners. And, especially, I couldn't hear anything over the interphone, I didn't know if we were, anything happened. So I was just watching the altimeter, I said if that sonofagun starts going down I'm getting out of here. My bailout position was the nose wheel door. And it was right underneath my desk. All I had to do was pull the handle and the nose wheel door fell out and all I do is roll out. So I was ready. I always told myself, would I have the nerve to jump? Well, I had no qualms that day. I was gonna go. But it was a hell of a sight, there's no question about it, seeing all those airplanes going down.

Aaron Elson: What did you do when you came back from the war?

Henry Dobek: I went to college, I studied chemical engineering. I went to Canisius College in Buffalo and then transferred to the University of Detroit, and then I got recalled during the Korean War. And I flew a combat tour in Korea. And then when I came back, I was married by then, I had another year and a half to go back to school and finish out, I says, you've got to make a decision, do I go back to school or make the Air Force a career? So I decided to stay in the Air Force. And then I retired from the Air Force after 27 years in 1969, and then I taught chemistry and physics, high school, in Freeport, Maine, until 1984, and then we moved down here.

Aaron Elson: What was your combat tour in Korea like?

Henry Dobek: Totally different. Totally different. I often said that I'd rather have flown in World War II than I did in Korea, mainly because in Korea we were a reconnaissance ship, and we always flew alone. And we flew at night, we took pictures, and it was the most harrowing thing I've ever been in. I was more scared over Korea than I was in World War II. At least in World War II you had airplanes, you kind of felt a little camaraderie, but when you're flying alone it is horrible. I never liked it. It was a much worse experience than I did in World War II. There were times when we had to fly along the Russian coast and take pictures of the ships that were going to North Korea and stuff like that, and we were advised sometime by radar in Japan that there's fighters following you. And we lost several airplanes. Most of the time they wouldn't bother us, but they shot down quite a few, because they claimed that we were too close to the Russian coast. So I didn't like that. That was horrible. You never knew where you stood because it was dark at night, and all of a sudden they could just pop you out of the sky just like that. So I didn't like that. I thought World War II was a lot easier. (laughs). But after I came back to the States I got into air refueling, tankers, KC-97s, and then I went to California and took specialized training and I became a bombardier and a navigator. And then I flew in B-66s, and then I developed high blood pressure and I got grounded, so the Air Force sent me to Florida State University where I finished my degree, I got a degree in meteorology and I became a weatherman the last six years of my service. And then I retired. I went to France for three years as a weather forecaster, and then I went to Taiwan for two years. I hated that job. I never liked it. I would have liked to have kept on flying, but I got grounded because of high blood pressure. In France for three years I was briefing a one-star general, and I was briefing a general in Taiwan, I just never liked that job because to me it was, I'd get up, do this, I had no idea.

Aaron Elson: So you got out before the Vietnam War?

Henry Dobek: No, I was there during the Vietnam War, but I never went to Vietnam. The closest I got was on Taiwan. We opened up a base on Taiwan and C-130s would land there and they would go from Japan, land here, pick up supplies and go to Vietnam. There were a couple of times I could have taken a trip to Vietnam I said nah, I don't want to go. I went through two, I don't need another ... I don't want to push my luck.

Aaron Elson: And when did you marry?

Henry Dobek: I got married in 1952. When I got recalled I went to San Antonio, Texas, that's when I met my wife. She worked at Randolph Air Force Base, and we got married, and then I went to Korea. And when I came back, that's when I decided to go back to school or stay in the service. I enjoyed flying, I really did. I really liked it. So I stayed in.

Henry Dobek: There was one time where an airplane exploded over the field. We weren't flying that day, I was laying in my bunk and a piece of the airplane hit the nissen hut, made a hell of a noise, we were deathly scared. We thought that somebody was bombing us. And I recall there were times when the buzz bombs were flying over, and we'd watch them just fly across the field. Some guys would shoot at them and "Don't shoot it, you might hit it!" and it'd come down. And then visiting London of course I witnessed a lot of the damage that the buzz bombs and the V-2s, they were horrendous. As a matter of fact, my mother sent me a bracelet, and she had my name engraved on it and everything like that, and there was something wrong with it, maybe my serial number, so I took it to a jeweler in London, and we would get a three-day pass maybe once a month. So I told him to change that, and stuff like that, so he says "Okay, next time you come in it'll be ready." I went back, the place was leveled. So I never got my bracelet back. It got hit by the V-2. Just leveled. Nothing there. Nothing. One of the treats about going to London is we were able to, as an officer you were able to eat at the Supreme Commander's mess hall. They served good food, I think that's where Eisenhower used to eat. And so we always went there to eat

because boy, you got a hell of a meal. I don't know if anyone told you, but the mess sergeant at Tibenham went up to Leavenworth, because they were smuggling stuff off the base. As I understand the story, these trucks come in to pick up garbage, well these guys had their garbage cans and they had all kinds of food in there, and then they'd put a piece of paper and put the garbage on top. Well, these guys would check it out and one guy lifted it up and there's all this food. So they were selling it to the black market. So I understand that the mess officer and the sergeant went up to Leavenworth for a few years.

Aaron Elson: Was that after the Kassel raid?

Henry Dobek: Oh yeah, that was, oh, I don't know, I'm guessing February or March of '45. The food there was terrible, at Tibenham, and I think I know why, it's because he was shipping it out.

Aaron Elson: I've heard that the British food was almost uneatable.

Henry Dobek: Well, they didn't have anything themselves. Fish and chips was always good, but you'd go to a restaurant, they'd maybe have one item on the menu, take it or leave it. And a lot of times it was this, what did they call it, cow's stomach. Tripe! Oh yeah, we wouldn't touch that. So, the thing is when we went to London we always ate at the Supreme Allied Headquarters mess hall. They had excellent food there.

Aaron Elson: Did you have brothers or sisters?

Henry Dobek: Oh yeah! I had five in the service at that time. We had seven boys and one girl in my family, five of the seven were in the service.

Aaron Elson: So your mother must have been a nervous wreck.

Henry Dobek: Oh, god almighty! She was so proud of those five stars. In all, my brother lost an eye, but that's the only thing that happened to the five of us. One was in the Army, he lost an eye at Anzio. I was in the Air Corps. I had another brother that was an airplane mechanic in the China Burma India Theater. I had another brother that was in the Navy, he was in, patrolled the North Atlantic. And then my youngest was in the Navy in the Pacific. So we all came out without a scratch, so we were pretty fortunate in many respects. A lot of times I figured I shouldn't have been here. And that's the way it goes. So any years I get are a plus, because I could have been down 55 years ago. I'm 76 now.

Aaron Elson: Do you think about that?

Henry Dobek: No, not really. Not that much. We've been to Germany so many different times, you know, and, you've heard of Joe Dzenowagis?

Aaron Elson: Yes.

Henry Dobek: Well, he was gonna make up a video thing, and he interviewed me, and he asked everybody the same question, How do you feel about the Germans now, and stuff like that. So, you know, most of the responses were Oh, that happened a long time ago, and, you know, Time heals all wounds, and things like that. So, I've been to Germany many times. We just took an 18-day trip of Europe here not too long ago. We went to Kassel. We went to Goettingen. (laughs), went to Berlin, went to Warsaw, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Frankfort. So there you are. I don't know if I was any help to you.

Aaron Elson: Very much.

Henry Dobek: You know, if you knew you were gonna live through it you would have taken a hell of a lot of pictures but you just didn't care.

Aaron Elson: Did you ever think that you weren't gonna live through it?

Henry Dobek: I don't know, I was a young kid. You may have thought about it, but what the heck.

Aaron Elson: What is this picture?

Henry Dobek: This is a formation of airplanes going up for a mission.

Aaron Elson: Did you take that?

Henry Dobek: No, I don't know who took it, but I got a copy. This was on a boat going back from Ireland to England after I got through with my training. This is a picture of Swofford and the crew. That's me, the co-pilot, bombardier. They canceled the mission, we were so happy.

Aaron Elson: Did you ever see anybody go, what did they call it, flak happy?

Henry Dobek: Not that I recall. We went to what they call a flak house, or a flak home, after the Kassel Mission and a mission another time where the damn bomb dropped before we took off. A short time later they gave us a week off and they sent us up to northern England into a kind of, what they called a rest home. And we sat on the beach and stuff like that. That was probably, they used to call it the flak home. Well, I don't know if I've been any help.

Aaron Elson: Oh yes, very much so.

Henry Dobek: Those were my recollections.