

Interview with William Leslie
engineer, top turret gunner
445th Bomb Group
radio relay plane, Sept. 27, 1944

Linda Dewey: I am with Mr. ...

William Leslie: William ...

Linda Dewey: Middle name?

William Leslie: Francis.

Linda Dewey: William Francis Leslie. And it is September 27th, 2008. And you were with the 445th Bomb Group.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Correct.

LINDA DEWEY: All right, let's back up a little bit. Where were you born?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Detroit, Michigan.

LINDA DEWEY: You were born in Detroit! Where did you go to school?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I went to a number of schools.

LINDA DEWEY: Where did you go to high school?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Southeastern.

LINDA DEWEY: I went to Redford High School. My dad went to Redford High School. So you went to Southeastern High School and graduated what year?

WILLIAM LESLIE: It must have been ... I think it was 1940.

LINDA DEWEY: And you would have been 18 at the time?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I think I was just going on 19. I'd been to so many schools before that, I ended up close to 19 I think.

LINDA DEWEY: And your parents had always lived in Detroit?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, the family was split when I was about seven, so we moved from Detroit to Cleveland, I think prior to that my dad was transferred for, they came from Pittsburgh

and they went to Hamilton, Ontario, and then they went to Detroit, and then they went to Cleveland. Then we came back. By that time the family was split up. It's been a few years back.

LINDA DEWEY: Sure has. So, what kind of work did your dad do?

WILLIAM LESLIE: He was in steel. He was a supervisor at 19 and then he progressed and he got to be second in command at Midland Steel way back when. And then he had some problems and they transferred him out of town to get him away from the atmosphere that he lived in.

LINDA DEWEY: Were they union problems?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I don't think so. I think he was imbibing and running around.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, so he needed to just get away for a while and then come back. Okay, so here you are, age almost 19, it's 1940 you graduated? So we haven't gotten to Pearl Harbor yet.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well yeah, right.

LINDA DEWEY: So what did you do when you graduated?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well I was looking for a job, and I passed a fellow classmate downtown and he had just come from the gas company, and I said, well I'll go to the gas company, I had been to the telephone company, and the interviewer at the telephone company said "Well, what can you do?" And I said, "I took a commercial course in high school."

He said, "Oh, we don't need anybody in commercial." He said, "I can't use you."

I said, "Well wait a minute. I thought you trained your people, and here I am, I'm willing to be trained." And then I went to the gas company, and my friend had went to the telephone company. I got hired the next day and he got a job at the telephone company two months later. So I guess my challenge to the interviewer helped. So I got the job, and I was there until I went in the service in, what was it, December the 7th ...

LINDA DEWEY: December 7th, '41 was Pearl Harbor. Did you enlist right after that?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well I went shortly after that. I was over, I used to play golf twice a week over at Chandler Park in Detroit, and then we'd go to one fellow's house and we'd play records and his mother always brought out a big angel food, no not angel food, devil's food cake, and we'd devour that, and one day they played the Warsaw Concerto and I said "Well that's it. I'm going in the service."

And they said, "You're nuts."

LINDA DEWEY: Why did the Warsaw Concerto figure ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: It just bothered me, because I was thinking of the fellows overseas already. So I joined the service in September of '42.

LINDA DEWEY: My dad joined in ... and you enlisted, you weren't drafted?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, I enlisted.

LINDA DEWEY: Because drafting came at the age of 19. When did you turn 19?

WILLIAM LESLIE: In July of '43 I guess.

LINDA DEWEY: So September of '42 you enlisted. What was that like, immediately you reported for duty, when?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well I went in in '42, I forget the dates, I've got it someplace.

LINDA DEWEY: And what did they have you do right away?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well I went to Fort Custer I think. I wanted to fly, but I went to the ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: First I went to the Navy. I didn't wear glasses then but my eyes weren't quite, so they turned me down. Then I went to the Marines, it was the same thing. They turned me down. So I went to the Army, and they had a good recruiter that said in effect, Well, if you come with us with the proper exercise and feeding and all kinds of good stuff, your eyes will get stronger and then maybe you could get into pilot training. Well, he had a good sale, you know. So I did, I joined the Army, okay.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, so initially you wanted to fly but your eyes were the problem.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yes.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, so you joined the Army. Where did you do your basic training?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I think it was Shepard Field **Linda Dewey**, Texas.

LINDA DEWEY: Was that in the summer?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, it must have been in the fall.

LINDA DEWEY: And you were just in basic Army training. At what point did they call you up for the Air Corps?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, I was really in the Air Force then. They changed it to the Air Force. But then I was in the reserve, I was supposed to go into pilot training. They had it in an area there. And later on they called me out of the class that was recruited for pilot training and I

was all set to go into pilot training and they cancelled the program, they had enough pilots. So that's when they assigned me to the group.

LINDA DEWEY: When do you think this was, that they cancelled the program and pulled you out of pilot training.

WILLIAM LESLIE: (reading?) Oh, in the spring of 1943 the Air Force decided it had met the quota for pilots and my wartime specialty was changed to engineer and gunner, and I was sent to gunnery school at Wendover Field, Utah. Then I was assigned to the 445th Bomb Group, 700th Bomb Squadron, and sent to (?) Field, Idaho for further training before being deployed to the European Theater.

LINDA DEWEY: So in Idaho is where you met your crew?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yeah, right.

LINDA DEWEY: And then you trained with your crew on B-24s.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Right.

LINDA DEWEY: So, in your training there, before you went overseas, were you involved in or did you see any of the accidents, the training accidents that were so notorious, where B'24s went down?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, the only thing I remember, we flew over to Iceland and Greenland, then to Scotland I think. And we were landing in England, I think it was, we had about 40 people on the bomber and they were just over there for training.

LINDA DEWEY: They were passengers?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, we were all going up there for training, and we pretty near went off the wrong end of the field, and if we had been landing the other way we wouldn't be here today.

LINDA DEWEY: Explain that, go into a little more detail about that. What do you mean, you almost went off the wrong end of the field.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, the field was on a cliff as I remember. You had to land into the wind, and when we landed the wind wasn't as fast as it was supposed to be. And we got to the end of the cliff and were able to stop the airplane, but we all walked away. But I never saw any accidents except one time we went, when we were over in England, who was it, Glenn Miller, he brought his group over.

LINDA DEWEY: We have pictures of that.

WILLIAM LESLIE: And he played at our base. When he flew in, one of the pilots tried to be clever and got too close to the control tower and clipped the end of the wing off, everybody laughed.

LINDA DEWEY: That wasn't Glenn Miller's plane, that was another pilot coming in?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well he flew separately but that's an interesting question, because he played that day, and then he left the next day in his private plane, and they were flying over to France ahead of the band, and he was never found.

LINDA DEWEY: Right. And that happened in December. And Glenn Miller's orchestra was around Sept. 14 or so was when they were at Tibenham. So who's plane was it that came in and, was it Glenn Miller's plane that came in and clipped the control tower?

WILLIAM LESLIE: One of the bombers that was bringing his band over, he clipped the end of the wing off, it was nothing serious, they made a big joke out of it.

LINDA DEWEY: So, you landed probably at Prestwick, Scotland, and then they probably took you over to Ireland for a couple of weeks of getting to know how things are done in England, right?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Right.

LINDA DEWEY: And when you come to the base, what was the date that you got to your base? Do you know?

WILLIAM LESLIE: In England?

LINDA DEWEY: This is 1944 now, right?

WILLIAM LESLIE: It must have been. It says I joined the B-24 crew in August of '44. Then I flew 35 missions over France and Germany.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay. Well I want to go into a whole lot of detail there. In August of '44, do you think it's August of '44 that you arrived at Tibenham?

WILLIAM LESLIE: It must have been close to that, yes.

LINDA DEWEY: So you were a radio operator/engineer, or you were an engineer/gunner?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Engineer/top turret gunner.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, you were the engineer. So you were the guy who stood behind the pilot and watched all of his controls as he would come in for a landing and called out the, 120, 110 ... you were the pilot's best friend, really. You monitored all of the ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Between he and the co-pilot.

LINDA DEWEY: You monitored everything, you changed the tanks and did all that.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, I watched the gauges on the tanks, you know, but the ground crew took care of the maintenance of the bomber.

LINDA DEWEY: Wasn't there some switching over from one tank to another when one tank got low you had to switch over to the other, and you had to watch that? So, when did it happen that, were all of your flights, you flew 30 missions, or 35?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Thirty-five.

LINDA DEWEY: Thirty-five missions over enemy territory.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Right.

LINDA DEWEY: Were you always on the top turret/engineer? Okay, so what is this with the Kassel Mission where you were flying ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Now that's an interesting question because I didn't fly that mission. What happened was, every flight you went on, you know you didn't fly every day because a lot of times you couldn't because of the weather, but on that particular day our job was to fly over the English Channel and relay the messages back to our base as to how the mission was going. So we just flew over the Channel, we never got to Kassel.

LINDA DEWEY: Right, right.

WILLIAM LESLIE: I don't know if I got credit for that or not.

LINDA DEWEY: Probably not because they didn't get to enemy territory.

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, I didn't.

LINDA DEWEY: Were you in a lead plane, lead crew?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, we always flew left wing, we flew with ... Jimmy Stewart one time, he led the group, he was over there just for publicity I guess, but he did fly with us.

LINDA DEWEY: Well he actually was assistant operations manager at the group next door by the time that you got there and my dad got there, you both got there about the same time. But he was still flying with the 453rd. Now, was it standard operating procedure for a plane to be

flying along the coast to be relaying messages back, did that happen for every mission, was there a relay plane?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I can't answer that. Because I wouldn't know who was flying what.

LINDA DEWEY: Had you ever done that before?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No.

LINDA DEWEY: That's the only time you ever did it?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Right.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, so it was unusual for you.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: So that was the only time. Now I understand, I've done some research asking questions with the Second Air Division people and they said that sometimes bombers did it, and sometimes fighter planes would do that.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Could be.

LINDA DEWEY: But not a lot. Not a lot of the time, so I wonder why this mission.

WILLIAM LESLIE: I have no idea.

LINDA DEWEY: So, do you remember anything that occurred while you were on that mission where you were on the enemy coast relaying messages back, do you remember anything that happened while you were doing that?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No ...

LINDA DEWEY: Any of the messages, or did you get a drift of what was happening?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, not until we went to land. I think there was only, I think we had, I think we had about 35 planes out of the group that went on the mission, and only three bombers came back and we were one of them. But I know when we landed, even the chefs came out of the mess hall and promised us anything we wanted, because they had heard how bad things were, and they just, everybody felt terrible of course, but that's the only thing I can really tell you about that.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, do you recall as the messages were being sent back, did you stay up the whole time that the group was gone?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, yes.

LINDA DEWEY: You were there for the whole time. So did you see those other planes coming back?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No

LINDA DEWEY: Okay. So what we know so far is that there were four planes that made it back safely to the base not including you. Four planes that actually went over the target, 35 planes, and we know that 28 planes crashed. One of them in France, one of them in Belgium, but there were, right there there were 28 planes and then two more made forced landings at Manston, at the emergency landing base. A fifth plane that was coming back to the base had to circle around, he was on two engines, and they had to wave him around and he lost another engine and crashed and the navigator was killed, and do you know why the navigator was killed? Because you know when you get ready to crash they have these nets that they put up that they brace themselves against? He would **Linda Dewey**'n't do it.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Is that right? I didn't know that.

LINDA DEWEY: He would **Linda Dewey**'n't do it. You only find that out when you talk to people that were on the plane, and he refused to do it, and he was killed. And he's the one that we've got from that day that's buried at Cambridge. We took a group to Tibenham, to the air base at Tibenham and then over to Germany to the Kassel Mission memorial there that's for both sides, and ...

LINDA DEWEY: So you were not aware of any of the messages, none of the battle, of what happened in the battle, none of that was relayed through your plane that you know of?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Of course the radio operator would **Linda Dewey** know, right?

LINDA DEWEY: Right.

WILLIAM LESLIE: That wasn't me. The pilot and co-pilot were on the same, you know ...

LINDA DEWEY: Frequency ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Frequency as the radio operator, so they would **Linda Dewey** probably ...

LINDA DEWEY: Spar(?) was your pilot, a Captain Spar or Lieutenant Spar, and then you said the co-pilot was who?

WILLIAM LESLIE: His last name was Goodwin. The radio operator was Joyner(?), I remember that. I can't remember the first name.

LINDA DEWEY: Last names are good. They're better than first names. Okay. So, you came back, probably before the other planes, they were on their way back, but you had no idea, you were in the plane, and your plane had relayed messages, and you guys just land, and you thought it was just normal, and what happened, at what point, were you getting out of the plane, what happened when you landed?

WILLIAM LESLIE: The only thing I can remember is that when we landed, like I say, everybody on the base knew, and the chefs came running out, you know, everybody felt, just down, there's a better word but I can't think of it, and the chefs, they knew too, and they came out and offered us anything we wanted from the kitchen.

LINDA DEWEY: Did you know a lot of the guys that went down?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yes.

LINDA DEWEY: You were 700th Squadron?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yes.

LINDA DEWEY: The 700th, they really took a beating. The 701st, the high high right, is the only one that had anybody that came back, one from the 702nd. Nobody from the 700th. A third of the men were killed, a third of them were POWs and a third of them found their way back. Do you remember what it was like when you went back to your hut?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, there were a lot of guys that weren't there.

LINDA DEWEY: In your hut? There were like 16 of you in a hut ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: I think ...

LINDA DEWEY: About four crews of four gunners, and a lot of them were gone, and so they come around and ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: And pick up their stuff.

LINDA DEWEY: I heard that before they would **Linda Dewey** come around and officially pick up stuff you guys would **Linda Dewey** go in and make sure that anything that would **Linda Dewey** be rather sensitive to the families back home, would **Linda Dewey** go in and rescue those things so that the families would **Linda Dewey** not be hurt, you know, by the girlfriends or mistresses, or you know, things like that. Do you remember anything like that happening?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Not really, no. In fact, the only thing I remember about that, I had been down to London with the navigator, and a couple of major went walking by and there was an MP behind them, and I failed to salute the majors, and the MPs wrote me up, and I got back to the base, and the adjutant came to see me, he said "You didn't salute the majors," and I said "Sorry about that." So he gave me some extra duty, I was supposed to clean a drainage ditch or something when I wasn't flying. So I was all prepared to do that, you know, cussing a blue streak, and then we had that mission and he didn't have the guts to come in the barracks anymore, so I never did clean the drainage ditch.

LINDA DEWEY: Oh wow, that's a great story.

WILLIAM LESLIE: But that was about it.

LINDA DEWEY: Plus, they were so busy with all the new replacements coming in.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, well, you're right, absolutely right.

LINDA DEWEY: But that very day replacements started coming in I guess, and the next day the 445th put up ten planes, did you go up the next day?

WILLIAM LESLIE: You know, I'd have to look it up.

LINDA DEWEY: It was to Kassel again, and it was very frightening for these guys. Nothing happened, but to get up there and go, after the worst loss for any group ever in history, was a little like getting on a horse again. But you don't remember that in particular? So what, were there some missions that stood out for you other than that one?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, just when we crashed, I think it was ...

LINDA DEWEY: Tell me about that.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, we were ready to take off, and we were taking off ...

LINDA DEWEY: When was this?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I really don't remember.

LINDA DEWEY: I don't need an exact date.

WILLIAM LESLIE: It was at Tibenham, and we were taking off.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, and it was after the Kassel Mission?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, it was before that. We had a plane that was called the Rambling Wreck.

LINDA DEWEY: Oh, I know that plane.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Do you?

LINDA DEWEY: Yeah. Sam ... Sure do, I've got pictures of it. And you guys were the ones that made it the Wreck?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: You're the ones that made it the Rambling Wreck, okay. Sam Miller.

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, the name was on there before we flew it.

LINDA DEWEY: I know. I'm teasing you. But Sam Miller was the original pilot of the Rambling Wreck, and I've got pictures of everybody swarming that plane. So tell me what happened on that. You were taking off ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, as I recall, I think we used to take off like 110 miles an hour. Maybe my mind isn't right, but I remember, but I think we were going 105. We were just about ready to take off, and I used to stand between the pilot and the co-pilot and call the speed, and I was doing that, and all of a sudden we ground looped to the right, I've got a picture up there in the den, and we had blown a tire, and ground looped, and I got the pilot and the co-pilot out of the top hatch, between them, and then I went down the walkway to the tail gunner, they were standing in the, the tail gunner and the two waist gunners were in the back near the waist windows, and I was going to see if they were all right, because the bomb bays had come together like this but I got through there, and I looked, I didn't see them there, I looked out the window and they were a hundred yards away and still running (laughs).

LINDA DEWEY: Really!

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh yeah, they were long gone from that wreck. And then the radio operator got out the hatch with the pilot and co-pilot. Then I got back and climbed out the hatch as I recall. And nobody got injured.

LINDA DEWEY: Do you think it's the blown tire that caused it to do the ground loop?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: So if it had been faster, 110, it would have been even ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well we'd have been off the ground by then.

LINDA DEWEY: Yeah, but then when you landed ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: It would have been tough.

LINDA DEWEY: It would have been worse. What about that house at the end of the runway, you know, they say that there was a house at the end of the runway ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: I don't remember that.

WILLIAM LESLIE: I know we all walked away, and then the pilot wanted to get another plane and we all thought he was nuts. We didn't want to go on another plane.

LINDA DEWEY: That day, you mean?

WD: That day, yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: And so you guys voted him down?

WD: Yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: So, any other close calls? What about flak?

WD: Oh, we had a lot of flak. But we were fortunate, but you could always, the flak would usually come up, well we were flying between 16 and 19,000 feet, the flak usually came up like in relays of three, and if you'd see a burst of flak like in front of the left wing, right, then the next one you knew was going to be behind that wing. Then the third one was always beyond the tail. So if you counted three you were safe momentarily. Oh, I've got all kind of pictures of flak.

LINDA DEWEY: Did you ever have any combat at all with any airplanes, fighters?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No. We used to be escorted by P-47s, and they didn't have the range that a P-51 had. Then later on we had P-51s, and when you look out the top turret or anywhere and you saw a P-51 you knew you were in pretty good hands, because they had the range and they had the speed, they were great, they were great.

LINDA DEWEY: Were there any conversations after the Kassel Mission as to why the fighters did not cover the 445th when it took that turn away from the rest of the bombers?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, I didn't hear.

LINDA DEWEY: Did anybody ever talk about it at all?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I don't know. For a while I was grounded, I had sinus trouble, they had to ground me for about five or six missions I think it was, then I had to fly with green crews after I got my sinuses cleared up. So I flew about five or six missions at the end of my tour with green pilots and green crews.

LINDA DEWEY: When was the end of your tour?

WILLIAM LESLIE: When was the end of it?

LINDA DEWEY: Yeah, when did you finish up?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, I think I've got it on my desk in there, with my enlistment papers, but I don't seem to have it here. I can look it up for you.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, here we go. So January of '45, that was your last one? Oh, you've got your whole mission history here. Is this your diary?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yeah, well that's the actual missions I flew. It tells you the bomb load and the time in flight. We used to, they'd give you a ration, and the only good ration was like cheddar cheese, if you cou**Linda Dewey** get one of those packages you were all set. Because we hadn't eaten for about, oh, here's one: Flight time, eight hours. So you hadn't eaten in eight hours, or maybe you'd eat a cheese if you cou**Linda Dewey** get that instead of sausage, then it gives you the altitude, and then, oh, after about fifteen missions when you'd land, well you used to get, the Red Cross wou**Linda Dewey** give you coffee and a donut, well then then somebody came up with the great idea they'd give you a shot of booze when you landed. So what you'd do is you'd get a couple of buddies that didn't drink ...

LINDA DEWEY: And get thier ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: And you weren't worried about flying any more.

LINDA DEWEY: You weren't hurtin'

WILLIAM LESLIE: You weren't hurting then.

LINDA DEWEY: I knew that was expensive whiskey, and then the guys came back here and cou**Linda Dewey**n't get into the bars back home. Here they flew and were shot at and went through hell and got expensive whiskey and came back here and cou**Linda Dewey**n't get a drink.

WILLIAM LESLIE: That's about it.

LINDA DEWEY: So, okay, so you're, now my dad's first mission was August 8th, yours was the ninth. I see that you flew on the 26th to Hamm, he also flew to Hamm...

WILLIAM LESLIE: I was at Hamm a couple times.

LINDA DEWEY: Now this is all from a hand-written diary that you kept at the time, a record?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yes.

LINDA DEWEY: And you have that, you have the hand-written diary still?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, I doubt if I ... do you think we have it? I don't think we have it. The hand-written thing. It was on a stenographer's pad.

WILLIAM LESLIE's son(?): That's what I transcribed it from.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh you did?

LINDA DEWEY: Do you still have it?

WILLIAM LESLIE's son: Somewhere.

WILLIAM LESLIE's wife(?): Tell her about the Dirty Rat, honey.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, yeah, one time we were flying over the Rhine River, yeah, that's right, and the flak guns were really working against us, and we had a mission that day that our troops were down there, but we were supposed to fly over the troop line and bomb from like 15,000 feet, and then our gunners would know where we were and for them where to shoot. And we were flying over, and all of a sudden flak went through my turret, blew a hole in the left side, right here. And I thought I was hit. So I pressed the intercom button and I said, "Top turret to pilot. Top turret to pilot. I've been hit. Those dirty rats hit me." (laughs). The plexiglas, well when you get up there it gets real warm, even you've got a heated suit on, so the plexiglas went down my open shirt. And they said, "Are you hurt?"

And I said, "Let me see. No, I didn't get anything, just glass there and glass here." I said, "I guess not, I'm okay." But had it been, had I been looking out that way instead of this way I wouldn't be here today.

LINDA DEWEY: Did you have any blood or anything from the plexiglas?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No. Like I say, the only thing that went down was just glass. So when I got down on the ground, they said "Those dirty rats, eh, Les?" So I said "Dirty rats." Because they knew when I got off the ground I never swore. I was pretty close to God.

LINDA DEWEY: So they called you Les?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, they called me many things.

LINDA DEWEY: What was your nickname?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Bill.

LINDA DEWEY: It was Bill, okay. Were there any missions that stand out in your mind, like that, things that happened ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: I don't know, we came back many a time on three engines, but I don't think we ever had to come in on two, I can't recall.

LINDA DEWEY: Were there any times that you were sweating it out ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Whether or not we were gonna get back?

LINDA DEWEY: Yeah.

WILLIAM LESLIE: I don't think so. We used to fly in some lousy weather, but I can't remember, I think the longest one was we went to Ulm, Germany, that's way down in southeastern Germany as I recall.

LINDA DEWEY: So then you were really loaded up, heavy with gasoline then.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, yeah. A lot of these things were seven and a half, eight hours, but I think Germany was ...

LINDA DEWEY: Dad said they were eight hours, by the time you formed up ... Didn't you guys get hungry?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, sure.

LINDA DEWEY: What did you do? Did you have stuff to eat?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Like I said, cheddar cheese was the best ration you had up there. The sausage wasn't worth a damn, so everybody would try to get a package of cheese.

LINDA DEWEY: So that's what you were talking about, so you picked that up when you were picking up all your other stuff, your parachutes, they would give you rations to take with you?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: So, what did you do about other problems that you might have while you were up in the air. Like, did you use ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, you had a relief tube.

LINDA DEWEY: Yeah, but I heard they froze up.

WILLIAM LESLIE: They did. So you went in the bomb bay, underneath the bombs. And hope it didn't freeze so you could open the bomb bay doors.

LINDA DEWEY: Well, yahhh, hope that it wou**Linda Dewey**n't free, oh my gosh.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Right. But that's what we did, yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: So, as a radio operator (engineer), it was your job to monitor all the readings for the oil level, the pressure and all that kind of stuff ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: And you wou**Linda Dewey** report to your, wou**Linda Dewey** your captain ask you to report, you know, what the oil pressure, or wou**Linda Dewey** you just watch it ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, I'd just watch it.

LINDA DEWEY: So you're watching oil pressure, the gas gauges, you're changing the tanks, you're monitoring all four engines ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yes.

LINDA DEWEY: What about, was there ever a situation where you were up there in the clouds and, where you saw the altimeter going up or you were going up and there was a vertigo (unintelligible) in other words, did you have to tell your pilot, You're going up ... you know, because they can't see, they have nothing to gauge it by except for the instruments, do you know what I'm saying?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: Did you ever have a problem with that? Anybody have a problem with that?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Not that I can recall.

LINDA DEWEY: Not on one of your ships. My dad had one where ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: He did?

LINDA DEWEY: Where the guy was coming up underneath him, and somebody said "Pull up! Pull up!" And of course, you know, you're in tight formation. So he did, he pulled up, but the planes above him had to pull up and two crashed, and one of the crews was killed, and there were people that were very angry at him for doing that, but he said "If I hadn't done that, it wou**Linda Dewey** have been worse." Because that was the top of the formation.

WILLIAM LESLIE: I think the highest we cou**Linda Dewey** fly was like, our bomb throw was 19,000 feet. Most of the time was probably between 16 and 19, but I think that's the highest we went. I think we went to 20,000, we really had trouble. I know one time I was flying, and I

got out of the top turret for some reason, I can't remember what, and I must have disconnected my oxygen by accident, and I didn't have any strength to get back, and the radio operator saw my plight, and he grabbed me and got my oxygen hooked up and then I was all right. And I got back up in the turret.

LINDA DEWEY: They say how many seconds, really ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: I was not very long, I can't remember, but I know, you're right, I don't remember, it's not long, eight or nine seconds.

LINDA DEWEY: Did you ever make a parachute jump?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No.

LINDA DEWEY: You never had to.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Sometime, I was flying like a practice mission and it looked so beautiful if you'd open the bomb bay doors and look down and see the patterns on the ground, like farms and stuff, you'd feel like jumping out just to experience, but it wasn't that great a feeling that I did it ...

LINDA DEWEY: I guess not. I hear stories about the bombers flying real low, especially like in Iceland, they'd fly real low and the guys would jump out and go skidding.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, is that right?

LINDA DEWEY: Yeah, craziness. They're kids.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well we flew, I think the pilot was, I think I turned 23 over there, and I think the pilot ..

LINDA DEWEY: You were an o**Linda Dewey** man over there.

WILLIAM LESLIE: I was the o**Linda Dewey**est one on the crew. I think the pilot was 22, and I think the co-pilot was 21. Big guy.

LINDA DEWEY: My dad was 21.

WILLIAM LESLIE: And then we flew a mission over to salute a nearby group, it was a day that we couldn't fly combat, so we flew over them they were having a 200th mission party or some dumb thing, for the group, not the crews, and we flew over there and we were flying at 300 feet, well the pilot and the co-pilot had to fly of course, and the radio operator and I had to fly, but the waist gunners didn't have to fly, but two of them went along just for the ride. Well, the co-pilot, like I said, he wanted to be a fighter pilot, and he was flying right wing, and he'd move that damn airplane so close to the other ship you know, like this, and the gunners over there were kidding them, they're going like this, you know, bring it closer, bring it closer.

LINDA DEWEY: On the other plane?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yeah, on the other plane. And pretty soon they grabbed their parachutes, you hook them on your harness, you don't carry them all the time, and they hooked it on their harness. Three hundred feet. So we got on the ground and I went up to the co-pilot and I said, "Goodwin, you're a damn good pilot but you don't have a goddamn bit of sense in your big head." Oh, he got all red, he was about 6 foot 2 and about 200 pounds. But I mean, he was taking everybody's life in his hands, to be clever. But, you know, we didn't have any accident, but I'll never forget that day because he really didn't think what he was doing. Three hundred feet, you wouldn't have a chance.

LINDA DEWEY: And yet the 445th way up in the air was known for its precision flying and tucking their wings right under each other. But when you get into turbulence and you're being jostled around, it's not like this ... And especially with the flak, I mean that jostles you all over the place.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yes, it did. That's true.

LINDA DEWEY: What was it like when you were not flying? What kind of things did you do to pass the time?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well you had to guard the ship at night in the hardstand.

LINDA DEWEY: I heard about that. Two of you at a time, or ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: One.

LINDA DEWEY: But didn't you change ships?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, as I remember it was at night, well maybe not the day after you flew a mission, but you had to go out there and sit with a .45 in your holster. In fact they took the guns away from us because too many guys used to get back after a mission and shoot holes in the quonset hut. Then when it rained you'd get all wet. They took all the guns away. Everybody was shooting holes in the huts.

LINDA DEWEY: But they wouldn't issue you the guns to ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: For protection if you had to bail out.

LINDA DEWEY: No, I mean when you were sitting guard for the plane at night on the hardstand, they wouldn't issue you a gun for that after they took them away?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I don't think so. I think they just, I guess you're supposed to notify somebody but I never had ...

LINDA DEWEY: So, you were an enlisted man. Was there a club that you guys would go to?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I would go and have a beer, I would go and drink beer once in a while.

LINDA DEWEY: And what about going into town? You went down to London ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, I only went to London, I think I went to London twice, like on a two-day trip and then came right back. But then I know when I finished up some of the guys wanted me to go London again, that had, newer crews, they were going to London. They wanted me to go along and I said Hell no, I'm going home. I'm not going down there again because you'd go down to London, then you'd be in a hotel room and all of a sudden a rocket would come over, it would shake the building two blocks away, and you didn't want to go to London anymore.

LINDA DEWEY: Well, it's kind of crazy, you're up in the air being shot at and then you're gonna go to London and be shot at some more on vacation.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Absolutely right. Then some of the crew would go down there, and they loved to drink Scotch. In those days I was strictly a beer drinker but these guys would buy a fifth of scotch and by the time they got to London they were bombed already. I don't know what the hell they did.

LINDA DEWEY: So back at the base, in your hut, you obviously probably wrote letters, and your diary.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: Did you play any games? Card games, or anything that you remember, listen to music ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, listened to music. I used to shoot crap until I lost all the money I had, which wasn't much. I didn't gamble any more for the rest of the tour, until I was coming home. And then I got in a crap game with Shorty the gunner, and I remember he had so many pounds in his wallet when they broke up the game, I forget how much I made but he made quite a bit of money, and I said "Now what are you gonna do with that money?"

He said, "Ohh, I don't know."

And I said, "I know what you're gonna do. You and I are going to the post office."

"For what?"

I said, "Because you're gonna send half of that money home."

"Okay." So I took him to the post office, and he sent half of it home.

LINDA DEWEY: Good for you. Did you ever hear from him again?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No.

LINDA DEWEY: Did you ever hear from any of the guys?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Nope.

(Mrs. Leslie?): What about Mr. Glass?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, yes. One time, in fact I've got his letter in my file, I was just looking through what I've got. About three years ago, just before Christmas, maybe two weeks before Christmas I got a phone call, Marion answered the phone and she asked who it was and he said "Is Bill Leslie there?" And she said Yeah. "Well, I'd like to talk to him, please." So I got on the phone and here it's Seymour Glass, that was his name. He says "This is Seymour."

I said, "Who?"

"Seymour Glass." He said "I flew ... I was a radio operator, I flew with you one time. You're the nicest guy I ever flew with."

And I says, "Jesus, that's awfully nice but I don't even remember you. How cou**Linda Dewey** you be my radio operator, when we had a regular radio operator, Joyner."

"Oh," he says, "I don't know. He was off one day and I flew with you." He says, "You were a great guy."

So we got talking, you know, and he still had the, oh then he sent us a Christmas card. I've still got it in there, from 19, what was it, 96?

Marion Leslie: We sent him a card and he kept it."

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh yeah, he kept it.

Marion Leslie: And he sent it back to us. On our first year we were married.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Yeah. So anyway, he sent the card back. But he said that he flew with our crew and I said, well, what did you do when you got back?

"Well," he said, "I went back to Columbia. I got my degree. Then I went in business with a friend," and he said, "We just so**Linda Dewey** out. Oh, I guess we got about three million apiece." He was in the garment business in New York, and he said, "Now I live on Long Island. I've got a three bedroom apartment in this high rise right along the river..."

LINDA DEWEY: How nice.

WILLIAM LESLIE: How really nice. I still talk to him, about two weeks ago, we still correspond, and we talk to each other. I guess he had a son that's a writer, that lives in Idaho, in the hills, all he does is write freelance, he's got a daughter that lives thirty miles away. He said "I've got this three bedroom," I guess the wife died I don't know when, "I've got this three bedroom apartment, I'm just gonna downgrade it to a one bedroom."

I said, "You can't do that because when we come to visit we want our own room."

LINDA DEWEY: You got it!

WILLIAM LESLIE: "Okay, I'll keep it." So he's still got a three bedroom place. All he does is play bridge now, and he plays golf. And he's had about seven operations on his, he's got cancer on one side of his face, but he still plays bridge and golf twice a week. He's got to be at least my age."

LINDA DEWEY: Were there any bridge games going on in the hut, or any, poker wasn't it, more like it.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, man. He played bridge. He still does. I guess he and his friend play in all kinds of bridge tournaments. According to him.

LINDA DEWEY: Did you ever see Jimmy Stewart on the base?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, I heard him one night. He was gonna speak before this one mission, and I went down to the quonset hut where he was speaking, and it was so filled I couldn't get in, I stood at the back and listened to him. I didn't see him but I heard his voice, you couldn't mistake it, it was Jimmy Stewart.

LINDA DEWEY: What was he doing, was he briefing?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Before the flight, yeah.

LINDA DEWEY: What about your family back home while you were in the service.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Well, before I went in the service, I was the only one home, I was supporting my mother, and we had an (unintelligible) in Detroit, and then she lived with my sister I think most of the time while I was gone.

LINDA DEWEY: That was the time.

Marion Leslie: That was the time.

LINDA DEWEY: What a great story. So are there any little anecdotes that you can remember from being in the service, little funny things?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Funny?

LINDA DEWEY: Or not. Or maybe terrible things, horrible things. Is there anything, were there accidents on the base, or ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, I don't think I can recall at the moment. I had a burlesque queen in England that wanted to come to the United States, that wanted to get married. But I said no.

LINDA DEWEY: Wait a second, the very first part of this story, you said "I had a burlesque queen."

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, I met this ...

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, you met this ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: You see the difference?

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, so how does one go about meeting a burlesque queen?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, hell, I don't remember.

LINDA DEWEY: Oh, come on, you do too.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh, no no no.

LINDA DEWEY: Okay, so you did have fun, didn't you?

WILLIAM LESLIE: A little bit.

LINDA DEWEY: So what about Tibenham itself, did you go into Tibenham itself, there was a Greyhound pub there and there were ...

WILLIAM LESLIE: No, I can't even remember Tibenham, really. Because I wasn't off that base that often.

LINDA DEWEY: We've got a lot of really good pictures of Tibenham. We've put it all in that Now and Then. It's pretty much a slideshow. ... We're gonna go to the Memorial next year, August 1st, for the 20th anniversary of, it's a German-American Memorial, with everybody on both sides who died on the Kassel Mission. ... Is there anything else in particular that comes to mind that you'd like to share, your commanding officers, what they were like, do you remember them? Do you remember Colonel Jones?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No.

LINDA DEWEY: Colonel Terrill was before that but you were there when Colonel Jones was. Dad said that Conel Jones was so, kind of lax, they had a rule that all the females had to be off the base by every Monday.

WILLIAM LESLIE: I don't remember that.

Marian Leslie: My goodness.

LINDA DEWEY: And the 445th was the best in bombing accuracy for the second quarter of 1944, they were also the highest in venereal disease. I don't know what the correlation is there.

WILLIAM LESLIE: My brother in law came over, he was a medic, wasn't he a medic? But anyway, they shipped Jim over there to England, and I think he changed ...

LINDA DEWEY: You don't remember any of the girls in the barracks, do you?

WILLIAM LESLIE: I know there were a few in there one time, they just covered their heads with blankets when whatsisname came through, I mean the quartermaster came through making an inspection. But I never disturbed my blankets.

LINDA DEWEY: You never disturbed your blankets? Do you recall the places or the fences where they used to sneak them in and out, that kind of stuff.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Not really.

LINDA DEWEY: Changing entirely to an entirely different side, the 445th was such a well respected group, it was, for what they did in the air, and the fact that they went back up, do you remember any times when other ships or your ship or anyone, I mean, exceeding kinds of valor, I mean where people really went over and above the call of duty.

WILLIAM LESLIE: I can't recall.

LINDA DEWEY: But you know, you get in there, and you start thinking about these things, these little anecdotes. An anecdote is a story, it's a couple of paragraphs long. ... It adds color and an understanding of what you guys went through. What was basic like for you?

WILLIAM LESLIE: Basic training?

LINDA DEWEY: Yes.

WILLIAM LESLIE: I don't even recall, I really don't.

LINDA DEWEY: So many guys had so many horror stories. Missouri was Pneumonia gulch, and my father washed out with pneumonia. You never had anything like that happen?

WILLIAM LESLIE: No.

(some of tape skipped)

WILLIAM LESLIE: We were supposed to take off on a bond tour when we got 100 missions on the ship ...

LINDA DEWEY: On the Rambling Wreck?

WILLIAM LESLIE: And we were taking off on the 97th when we blew the tire and we had to call it a complete wreck.

LINDA DEWEY: So if I wanted to find out about those messages I would have to, it was your regular crew, Spar(?) and Goodwin and Joyner, was your regular crew on that particular mission.

WILLIAM LESLIE: Oh yes. I had a list of them but I can't find it. ... It was Rasmussen, he was a combination navigator/bombardier.