Interview with Edgar Gottschalk

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Interview # 01: March 30, 2011

Interviewer: Bob Young

Young: This is Bob Young. Today is the 30th of March, 2011. I'm interviewing Edgar Gottschalk. We're doing the interview at his home. This interview is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's, *Veterans Remember*, Oral History project. And we're going to start off here, Edgar, if you don't mind, asking about some of your background. Your birth date?

Gottschalk: My birth date is December 13, 1923.

Young: December 13, 1923, okay. And where were you born at Edgar?

Gottschalk: I was born in Springfield, Illinois.

Young: And your parents, what were their names?

Gottschalk: My mother's name was Lenora Gottschalk and my father's name was Fredrick J. Gottschalk.

Young: What was your mother's maiden name?

Gottschalk: Her name was Vieira.

Young: Vieira. Any brothers or sisters?

Gottschalk: No brothers or sisters.

Young: You were the only child. And they were born here, in Sangamon County also?

Gottschalk: No. My mother was born in Morgan County and my father was born in Sangamon County.

Young: You were in the Second World War, and what branch of the service were you in?

Gottschalk: I was in the 13th Air Force, Army Air Force.

Young: Army Air Force. And what was your rank when you left the service?

Gottschalk: Technical Sergeant.

Young: Where was most of your time served overseas?

Gottschalk: About half of my time was in the United States, which was about a year and a half, and then I was eleven months in the South Pacific.

Young: Over in the South Pacific.

Gottschalk: In the 13th Air Force.

Young: Tell us a little bit about when you went into the service.

Gottschalk: I was drafted January 20, 1943, into the United States Air Force. I graduated from high school on January 26th and went to Scott Air Force Base, to the Air Force, on January 27th.

Young: So, you basically then were drafted right out of high school.

Gottschalk: Yeah. I graduated January 26th and went to the Air Force January 27th, 1943.

Young: You didn't have much time then, to play around one way or the other did you?

Gottschalk: No I didn't, I certainly didn't.

Young: Well, tell me a little bit about where you did basic training and you know, the time before going overseas.

Gottschalk: When I joined the Air Force, I went to Scott Air Force Base near St. Louis, where I was issued my clothing and received my shots for different diseases. Then I went to Miami, Florida, and was housed in the Floridian Hotel on the beach, for basic training, and I was there probably six weeks. Then I went to airplane mechanic school in Sheppard Field, Texas, and I was there for approximately nine months. And when I graduated from mechanic school, I went to Ypsilanti, Michigan, to the B-24 Bomber plant, and I was there about three months. Then I went to the Air Force aerial gunnery school in Arlington, Texas, for approximately three months.

Young: Well let's talk a little bit about those first. Now you were saying that you did basic training down in Miami.

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: Was there a military base there? You said you were on the beach.

Gottschalk: No. They utilized public parks and marched in the street, did calisthenics in the public park. It wasn't a military base.

Young: It wasn't a military base. Was there very many recruits down there or was it just a handful?

Gottschalk: Well, there was an officer basic training school there and an enlisted men training school in other part of Miami.

Young: And then after that, when you went to Wichita Falls, was that mechanic school to become…

Gottschalk: ah, it was airplane mechanic school, and actually it was for B-25s and B-26s. Then I went to the B-24 Bomber plant in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Young: You were saying earlier, as we were talking, that when you were up there, that you were building B-24s. Is that correct?

Gottschalk: Yes. They had two assembly lines there and they put out one plane an hour.

Young: One plane every hour.

Gottschalk: Yeah.

Young: Wow, we were building a lot of B-24s over there then.

Gottschalk: They surely did.

Young: What were you doing there?

Gottschalk: Well, there was a familiarization course for aerial engineers really.

Young: So then you had a pretty good knowledge of that aircraft before you ever got on a B-24.

Gottschalk: Oh yes, yes, I sure did.

Young: And you went from there, you said you were down to gunnery school, is that right?

Gottschalk: I went to aerial gunnery school in Harlingen, Texas. They had professional marksmen they acquired from Winchester and several ammunition

manufacturers. They had like a track, shaped like a racetrack, and they had wires stretched across that, that went to skeet launchers. You'd ride around in the back of a truck with a shotgun, and when that truck went over the wire it tripped the skeet launcher and the skeet would go—you didn't know which way the skeet was going to go. It could go away from you, it could come at you, it could go along the same direction the truck was traveling. And then they had the skeet launchers in high towers. You would be sitting in a gun turret, like the ones in the aircraft, and it had a shotgun mounted in it, instead of a machine gun. They would launch the skeet from the towers and you would track it with the turret and fire the shotgun.

Young: So you got pretty proficient then, with the shotgun, over that period of time.

Gottschalk: Oh yeah. These instructors were really expert. They could shoot skeet with a shotgun over their shoulder, pointing backwards, between their legs and holding a mirror. They could do all kinds of things with a gun. We also went up in AT-6s and shot at tow targets.

Young: And that was the Army Air Force's way of training you how to shoot down a Jap Zero then. (laughter)

Gottschalk: That's right yeah, exactly.

Young: So after there, did you say you went out to California?

Gottschalk: I went to March Field, California, for overseas training, for about three months, and we did navigation flights up the coast to Seattle. We did bombing practice at bombing ranges up in northern Nevada on dry lakes, they were on dry lakes, and just a general familiarization with the different tactics.

Young: And that was the first time then you were on a B-24, was there, as far as up in the air.

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: That your crew was flying?

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: You were telling me earlier that you went over with the full crew. How many was on that crew?

Gottschalk: From March Field, we went up to Fresno, California, and that's where the basic crew was formed: the pilot, copilot, bombardier, navigator, engineer and radio operator were the basic crew. And then at a later date, we picked up the remaining gunners, the four remaining gunners.

Young: Four gunners?

Gottschalk: Pardon?

Young: There were four gunners then, besides the basic crew?

Gottschalk: There was a nose turret, two waist gunners and a tail gunner, and then I was in the top turret. The radio operator served as a waist gunner.

Young: The top turret? So there were five guns.

Gottschalk: Five. Actually five positions.

Young: Five positions, okay.

Gottschalk: Oh, the ball gunner, there were six of us.

Young: Oh yeah, a ball gunner. And do you still stay in touch with some of the fellows?

Gottschalk: After we had been out about ten years, my wife and I made an endeavor to locate all the crew members, and we located eight out of the ten. That was in 1955, and we had a crew reunion at the pilot's residence, and he also owned a motel in Granby, Colorado, up in the mountains. So we had our first reunion in 1955, and we had one every five years until about I don't know, 1980.

Young: And since?

Gottschalk: Now, out of the ten members on the crew, there's three still alive.

Young: And you were telling me that you were just talking to the pilot.

Gottschalk: As a matter of fact, the pilot's still living. I talk to him a couple times a month and he is 93.

Young: And what was his name again?

Gottschalk: Roy Meyers.

Young: Roy Meyers. You said he lived in Colorado?

Gottschalk: He lives in Colorado Springs.

Young: Colorado Springs, fantastic. Let's go on and tell me a little bit about when you went overseas.

Gottschalk: Well, we were up at Hammer Field, up by Fresno, California, and we'd already formed our crew. They assigned us a new plane to ferry over to Guadalcanal. So we left California in March of '44 and flew to Hawaii, then to Kanton Island the next day, and then from Kanton Island to Guadalcanal.

Young: And when you got to Guadalcanal, that was after the Marines had already cleaned up the island, correct?

Gottschalk: Well, actually it was the Army that cleaned it up.

Young: The Army, okay.

Gottschalk: When we got to Guadalcanal, they picked us up at the airfield and took the plane, to put it in a 5th Bomb Group inventory. They picked us up and trucked us up to the mountains. There was a campsite up in the mountains where we stayed seven or eight days. We had a hammock strung between coconut trees and a mosquito net. And then from there, they assigned us to the 5th Bomb Group, with the 13th Air Force, and then we moved up to the Solomon Islands.

Young: Which squadron were you in there?

Gottschalk: I was in the 5th Bomb Group, 72nd Squadron, of the 13th Air Force.

Young: And you say you went to the Solomons?

Gottschalk: Yeah, we went to the Solomons and we were there maybe four or five days, then we flew our first mission, and it was against a major Japanese Navy, Air Force and military base on Truk Island. Basically, our missions were to eliminate Japanese airfields, and I think we flew three missions on Truk Island.

Young: And most of that was just to bomb the airfield and soften it up.

Gottschalk: Bombing the runways and the planes on the ground and the ships.

Young: And you were telling me earlier that some of that was just to keep their aircraft away from the Marines and the Army personnel that was on Guam and action against U. S. Navy.

Gottschalk: North of it.

Young: North of you, fighting up in the islands and so forth.

Gottschalk: Yes, yes.

Young: You were saying something there to me about when you were flying, that you had to fly forty-five missions before you could leave?

Gottschalk: Yes. The standing rule was, after you flew forty-five missions, you would go back to the States.

Young: And over in Europe it was twenty-five missions, correct?

Gottschalk: Yes, that's correct.

Young: How long were most of your flights?

Gottschalk: They varied, from seven or eight hours, up to eighteen hours. One was eighteen hours, on the oil fields in Borneo.

Young: And what elevation did you usually fly at?

Gottschalk: Well, it would vary. After you were in the air, you would fly maybe around ten thousand feet, and then a couple hours before you'd get to the target, you'd go up to twenty, twenty five thousand feet.

Young: And your aircraft wasn't heated was it?

Gottschalk: The flight deck was heated.

Young: The flight deck was heated.

Gottschalk: Yeah, that was the only place. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. It was a gasoline heater mounted on the wall.

Young: Is that right? Things have changed in these aircraft today, I'm going to tell you.

Gottschalk: Right.

Young: So the gunners in the back then, they were cold. (laughter)

Gottschalk: Well, they just wore more clothes than the crew up on the flight deck. They were cold though, their hands would get cold.

Young: Oh, I can imagine.

Gottschalk: Especially if the waist gunner windows were open and they were manning the machine gun.

Young: So you did forty-five flights. Tell me about some of those that were memorable, the more memorable flights that you can remember. Some, I'm certain were—unless maybe all of them were memorable.

Gottschalk: When we attacked Truk Island, the military base there, the Marine base, it was really a major base. Then they had another base down at Rabaul, and that base was so big, they had submarine pens with submarines in them. The fighter pilots at Truk were very accomplished pilots, because they fought in wars before World War II started, over in China, in that area.

Young: So that's right, you had mentioned something to me, that when you went out on a flight, you had no air support. You had no fighters.

Gottschalk: We went too far for our fighters to go with us, so they flew for another Air Force. I recall that, yeah. We had one mission I flew that had fighter cover, was that raid on Borneo oil fields, and those people all volunteered to go, and they lost quite a few.

Young: Because of running out of fuel?

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: So when you were up there, your squadron and that, all you had was your own weapons, gunners, for protection.

Gottschalk: For protection, yes.

Young: And you met a lot of Japs come up, the Zeros and so forth.

Gottschalk: Well, when we went to Truk, on our first mission, they had some islands prior to our initial points of attack, and so they would alert the people at the target that we were coming. So you could always bet that they'd be there waiting for you, up in the air already. They had six or eight at least.

Young: Six or eight of them at least, up there?

Gottschalk: Yeah.

Young: And you engaged them or are they engaging you very often?

Gottschalk: Every time.

Young: Every time.

Gottschalk: Yeah, every time.

Young: Was there ack-ack too and ground fire?

Gottschalk: There was ack-ack.

Young: Really?

Gottschalk: Ack-ack fighters.

Young: So on an average mission, how many planes would you lose?

Gottschalk: Actually, we lost very few planes. Maybe… I don't know, a couple every five or six missions.

Young: So the twenty-four was built [so] it could stay in the air with a few holes in it and make its way back?

Gottschalk: It was very sturdy, but it wouldn't take the beating a B-17 would take, but the B-17s were there at the beginning, because they came down from the Pearl Harbor area. But because they couldn't fly the required miles that was necessary, they were replaced by the B-24s, which could carrier a heavier bomb load too.

Young: You carried a bigger bomb load and more miles. I've read somewhere in one book that you had given me earlier, that there was three things that were most worrisome for the aircrews, and that was the weather and the distance you had to fly, and the Japs were the third one in the list of items.

Gottschalk: That's true. Most of the flight was over water, so you didn't have any reference points, and you'd better have a good navigator. And then the weather, there was a lot of bad weather.

Young: With storms and so forth you're talking? They had what, a lot of typhoons?

Gottschalk: Yeah, there were tropical storms, typhoons. So if somebody got injured, there was always quite a few hours before you would get back to where there was medical assistance. We did have one nose gunner, a shell came up through the bottom of the turret and hit the gun site, and it was a phosphorus shell, which is prohibited by the Geneva Convention, but the Japanese use the phosphorus. The shell came up and hit the gun site mount and went off. He lost his eye and the end of his nose, and had a lot of phosphorus buried in the skin around his neck. It was probably six hours before he got back and we landed, before he could get medical attention, although we had some medication and some morphine and stuff. You could subdue some of the pain but it was a long time before you really got professional help.

Young: Yeah, I can imagine. That's a long time to be up there flying to get back, especially in pain like that. Did you have much room to lay him out?

Gottschalk: He was in the nose turret, so we got him back on the flight deck. I just got off the flight deck and went to the back of the plane, so they could put him on the deck.

Young: And your other flights, when you were up there flying, did you think you ever hit any—your aircraft itself, down any of the Jap Zeros?

Gottschalk: Among the crew, it's not like fighters, they've got cameras you know, and they can document what they hit. Ours was all verbal, so sometimes you might hit one and he'd go down and nobody else saw it. Our crew got credited for, and I got credited for a few planes.

Young: You were telling me that you had one while you were flying that formation, that come right up towards you.

Gottschalk: They normally don't attack from the front, because the rate of closure is so short. And the same thing from below. They liked to come from above and from behind, so they got a longer period of time to train their guns on you. They had kamikaze pilots that would try to fly into you. On one mission, I was in the top turret, looking up towards the back, and out of the corner of my eye, I saw this plane coming from in front of us. I rotated the turret around and started shooting, and it just went into a big ball of fire behind the cockpit. He went on by and as he went by, I could see his face just as plain as day, and he went on back behind us and went on down and crashed in the ocean. He was really close. He was trying to fly into us I, think.

Young: Yeah, if he was that close and you could see each others' face.

Gottschalk: Oh, I could see his helmet, his goggles, you know, his whole features.

Young: What about your long flights, the one to Borneo?

Gottschalk: Borneo had a couple of oil refineries; one at Tarakan and one at Balikpapan, and they were operated by the Dutch, and I think Shell Oil Company owned them. One time, we got paid in Dutch money, Guilders. So we went on this flight. Japan got most of their oil from Borneo, so the orders came down to attack the oil refineries in Balikpapan. So they cut our ammunition in half and they had some journalists from the United States at the briefing. We took off about 12:30 in the morning and they had searchlights at the end of the runway, so they could watch the planes go through, and the one ahead of us hit the water and bounced off.

So we flew all night and at 9:00 the next morning, we rendezvoused about an hour or hour and a half from the target, and I looked out and here's this Jap plane flying along parallel with us, getting our altitude and our air speed. I said to the pilot, "I'm going to pop him a couple times." So, I shot a few rounds at him, and he wiggled his wings and went back home. They said we'd only encountered ten heavy enemy aircraft and ten heavy guns. Well, they must have had a hundred guns and about fifty, sixty fighters. So we rendezvoused and then about an hour later we hit the target. Well it was socked in and so we had to abort the bomb run and go and do a 180 and come back and make a second bomb run, do it all again.

The planes got shot up so bad that they couldn't fly a mission the next day. The group couldn't fly a mission the next day. And when I looked back, after we came off of the target, it was just a big black cloud of smoke that we went through, and ack-ack.

Young: Yeah. So that was what, an eighteen hour flight then?

Gottschalk: Yes. It was the longest flight a B-24 made in World War II.

Young: Did all of them get back on fuel?

Gottschalk: Yeah. Well, we didn't have enough fuel to get back to our initial starting point. We landed on the west end of New Guinea and stayed all night, and then went back to our base the next day.

Young: And you had some fighters that went with you on that one, you said.

Gottschalk: Not that one.

Young: Oh, not that one, okay.

Gottschalk: The one after that.

Young: And that was the one where you did hit the oilfields, and that again is the same one?

Gottschalk: We hit the same one, yeah. But we had some bombs, some thousand pounders and the rest five hundreds, and some of them had delayed action fuses, that they didn't go off maybe until twenty-four hours later.

Young: The reason for that is so that it would do damage after they were all set up again.

Gottschalk: Oh yeah, when they were out there trying to fight the fires and deal with the damage, they didn't know when a bomb was going off.

Young: I understand.

Gottschalk: So they wouldn't be too eager to get in there and work.

Young: So you were island hopping then pretty much.

Gottschalk: Basically, we island hopped twenty-five hundred miles in ten months.

Young: As we kept advancing closer to Japan and the Japanese retreated.

Gottschalk: As the ground forces secured an airfield, we moved in. Our permanent equipment never caught up with us. We never had any refrigeration or any permanent stuff.

Young: I had read that somewhere, where you were the jungle Air Force.

Gottschalk: The jungle Air Force, that's right. We slept in hammocks sometimes, we slept on the ground sometimes, but we did have tents with wooden floors most of the time but not all the time. We were on dehydrated food most of the time.

Young: Other than probably for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Gottschalk: Spam.

Young: Spam?

Gottschalk: We had Spam. (laughs)

Young: A lot of C-Rations in that, yes.

Gottschalk: And once in a while, if you got fresh meat, it was mutton from Australia.

Young: I heard others tell me a lot of the land crabs, or the crabs were all over the islands, around the coral and that.

Gottschalk: Oh yeah, there was those, the iguanas, ,the lizards that lived in the trees, yeah, and all kinds of little things crawling around you.

Young: A lot of mosquitoes?

Gottschalk: Yeah, a lot of mosquitoes. There was always vitamin pills and mosquito nets that was available. A lot of mosquitoes.

Young: So you went from one island to the next and you just kept following them.

Gottschalk: We started at Guadalcanal, that's where we landed when we first went over from the States, and then we moved up to the Solomon Islands and operated out of there, bombing Truk Navy Base on Truk Island. Then we moved to the Admiralty Islands, then we moved to Wadke, which is off the coast of New Guinea. Then we moved to Noemfoor; it was in a bay on New Guinea, farther west. Then we went to Morotai Island in Halmahera, which is the southern Philippines.

Young: And you were in there during the invasion there, of Leyte and that?

Gottschalk: Yes. Probably the next to last mission, they were preparing to invade Leyte Island, so the mission was to attack the Japanese Navy at Leyte. Now, we're geared up for missions on land-based targets, so we're not really a Navy plane geared to naval attack. We were accustomed to operating at higher altitudes and we were assigned to go in at ten thousand feet, which is pretty low for a bomber.

Young: Yeah.

Gottschalk: Yeah. So anyway, we're on our way up there and I look out and here's this peninsula coming out, and on one side of the peninsula—that would be on our right—was this big fleet. On the other side was a smaller fleet. We didn't know which one was which at first, but the one on the right was a U.S. fleet and the one on the left was the Japanese fleet, and our assignment was to attack the largest ships.

So as we got closer, the fleet on the left was the Japanese fleet. A destroyer took out, started circling, running around in circles and shooting up the in the air, and pretty soon the whole fleet was in motions. So we progressed north and made a 180-degree turn and came back and started the bomb run. Well, these Japanese battleships were shooting at us too. I had one friend, I was telling him the story and he said, "Oh, they can't shoot up in the air like that." So anyway, they can shoot twenty-five miles away, and you could see these big, black gobs coming up towards you, and it would go off and shake the whole plane. Then it would break into about five pieces and then they go off. So I'll tell you, battleships can shoot at you in an airplane.

Young: Kind of like grapefruit then, or grapeshot. It just goes out and it just keeps breaking up.

Gottschalk: The plane would go like that you know? It was a lot different ack-ack, I'll tell you. (laughs)

Young: I can imagine that.

Gottschalk: So anyway, one guy behind us, one of his bombs went down the smokestack of a cruiser and sunk it right there. I looked down and on this battleship, there were guns on the left side of the ship shooting at us. I could see the flashes. I didn't have anything else to do so I just strafed it? It was far enough away, I could get my guns down you know? So the next time, when I saw it again, it was turning and it wasn't shooting anything up the air. So I don't know what happened there.

Anyway, it was quite a battle and it's been written up as a major battle in the Pacific, naval battle in the Pacific, but somehow or other in the history of the battle, we never got mentioned.

Young: Yeah, I think a lot of times that depends on who's reporting what.

Gottschalk: Exactly.

Young: Or who's command.

Gottschalk: Exactly. In our Air Force, nobody got a major medal, nobody.

Young: Is that right? You were under…?

Gottschalk: Then, we were under [General Douglas] MacArthur, but before we were under the command of the Navy. When I first went over, we were down in Solomon Islands, it was under the command of John McCain's father, Admiral McCain, and our Army Air Force was flying under the command of the Navy. It was called a combined composite group. It was the U.S. Army, the Navy, the Marines and the Australians.

Young: So you were all under McCain then?

Gottschalk: Yeah.

Young: Or under the Navy.

Gottschalk: For a while, yeah, until they gave it to MacArthur.

Young: You brought that up about awards. I noticed up here on the wall you have your Air Medal and some clusters. How many clusters did you have up there, four or five?

Gottschalk: I think there's four.

Young: And an Air Medal was for what, twenty-five missions?

Gottschalk: Ten missions.

Young: Ten missions. And every cluster was ten others. So that's your forty-five, that's how you ended up with your forty-five. And your other citations?

Gottschalk: A Philippine Liberation Ribbon, an Asiatic Pacific Ribbon, because we were—actually, some of that was almost to China.

Young: Yes. I see that, you did have four of them up there, four clusters. You have Tech Sergeant stripes. Did anyone get the DFC over there? You say no one got anything, none?

Gottschalk: Nothing.

Young: Unbelievable.

Gottschalk: It is, it's unbelievable.

Young: It's unbelievable.

Gottschalk: I mean it wasn't just an individual, it was a whole Air Force.

Young: Right. I understand. For your whole squadron, the whole Air Force down there, that's hard to understand.

Gottschalk: Although one of the pilots that flew the same mission we flew to the oil refinery in Borneo, I got a newsletter from my 5th Bomb Group. Somehow or other, just last year, he got a DFC.

Young: It finally was awarded to him?

Gottschalk: Yeah.

Young: They put the papers in.

Gottschalk: Some way, he got a DFC.

Young: So you completed your forty-five missions and you're island hopping the whole time. Any other memorable ones, anything real special about any of the missions? Probably the last mission was the best mission, wasn't it?

Gottschalk: On one mission, we were going up to Luzon, the last mission, and there was two prisoner of war camps; one south of Manila and one north of Manila, and one up there in Luzon. Somehow or other, intelligence got word that the Japs were moving out and they were afraid they were going to kill the prisoners, so they sent us up there to bomb the Jap installation. San Jose Town, that was the name of the place. They said don't fly right over it. There's a guy there with a mobile gun and he's good. And so we get up to San Jose Town and here comes one gun, shooting ack-ack, just every once in a while, a little ack-ack going off, and it hit our number one engine and pierced the oil line that went to the prop governor. And oil was shooting back, on the engine and every once in a while it would blaze up and it was smoking. We were leading the group, so we ran the engine all through the bomb run and didn't feather it until we left the target. Well, so then the weather was bad and we ran into almost like a typhoon, and it bounced the plane around, the sky was black, and the engine was smoking and flaming up every once in a while. So I said to the pilot, don't you think we ought to feather that engine? So pretty soon he feathered it, and so now we're flying on three engines.

The gas gauges were tubes, vertical tubes, that showed the gas level in each tube, vertically. So I'm watching them like a hawk all the time, and it got down to where I knew we weren't going to get back to base, so I said to the navigator, "How long is it back to base?" He said, "About six hours." So I went up and told the pilot, we've got to find a place to set this down because we're not going to make it back. Luckily, we were west of Leyte. They had already made the Leyte invasion and captured it, so we landed there and fueled up. We had about sixty gallons of gas left. So they repaired the engine, the oil line in the front of the engine, and took on 2300 gallons of gas, so we took off for home. It was like 1:00 in the afternoon or so.

Anyway, when we got back to where our base was it was dark. So on the plane is a device called an IFF, identification, friend or foe. So we got back to the base and we're approaching the island and suddenly the runway lit up with vehicles parked along the runway with the lights on, and we were coming in with the wheels down and slowed down to like a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour or something and this guy is shooting at us. So we continued, you know finished the landing, but boy it was scary.

Young: Worry about both your people plus the enemy. (laughs)

Gottschalk: Yeah. (laughter)

Young: So then, after you did your forty-five missions, everybody was pretty happy about that, then you got to come home?

Gottschalk: Well, yeah that's when our crew dispersed. Everybody was going their own direction. I went from Morotai, up in the Philippines, down to Biak, which was in a harbor or a port, bay, on the north coast of New Guinea, and I was there about—I guess fourteen, fifteen days. All the Air Force guys were supposed to fly back, but somehow or other, I got put on a ship about 12:00 at night. It was dark and I remember walking across the decks, because they were chained together, the Liberty Ship. I ended up on a Liberty Ship for twenty-six days, coming back to the United States, and I flew over in two days.

Young: So you have twenty-six days coming back. You said the Air Force was supposed to fly back.

Gottschalk: They had WACs[1] there that had been in service there and one day we decided to walk down to the beach, and we walked down to go swimming and coming back, we went by this stockade like facility that had barbed wire all around it, and these WACs were there hollering at us when we walked down the road.

Young: Is that right? Oh, okay.

Gottschalk: So they got the plane I was supposed to.

Young: They got the plane and you got to come back on the ship.

Gottschalk: I got twenty-six days on the ship.

Young: So when you got back, you weren't discharged.

Gottschalk: No. We came back to San Francisco and boy that bridge looked good, because it's the one we flew over going out. So anyway, I went to Santa Ana, there at the Army base, distribution base, and I got a thirty-day furlough and came back to Springfield. Then I went back to the same place by train, both ways. Then, I got on the train again and they sent me to Chanute Field over in Champaign.

Young: Over in Champaign.

Gottschalk: So I went through electronics school there and the day I graduated, I was supposed to go over to be an instructor in the school. My discharge came through the same day.

[1] WAC: Women's Army Corps

Young: So you graduated.

Gottschalk: They asked me if I wanted to stay and I declined.

Young: You declined. (laughter)

Gottschalk: Yeah. So then I went to Fort Sheridan, up by Chicago, and they had a bunch of German prisoners there that worked in the cafeteria and had done various jobs. So I was there about a week and then they sent me down to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, and that's where I got my discharge.

Young: Down in Missouri?

Gottschalk: Yeah.

Young: So you went from Chanute—it seems like the military back then, didn't know any more about what they were doing than they do today.

Gottschalk: I don't think so.

Young: With an awfully lot of moving back and forth.

Gottschalk: A lot of train riding.

Young: A lot of train riding. And how long were you at Chanute, just there two weeks, or a month or two?

Gottschalk: I was there about four months.

Young: So, your total service time, how much were you…?

Gottschalk: Two years and ten months, something like that.

Young: Like you said, one year of it was overseas pretty much.

Gottschalk: Well, I was ten months overseas. But you know, that sounds like a short period of time maybe, but when you're going out and getting shot at every day or every other day for ten months, it's a long period of time.

Young: Definitely. Oh yes, I didn't mean anything by that.

Gottschalk: So then the rule was there, after you flew forty-five missions you could come home.

Young: Definitely.

Gottschalk: So I had my points, so I came home.

Young: You're not the only one that came home, I'm certain. Everybody was waiting for their forty-fifth ride.

Gottschalk: Right.

Young: I understand. So when you got back here to Springfield, you come back in from Jefferson Barracks in Missouri, down back to Springfield.

Gottschalk: Mm-hmm.

Young: And your parents were here in town?

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: And you went out and got a job the next day, or what did you do for a few days?

Gottschalk: Well, my father was a member of the Plumbers and Steamfitters Union since about 1912. I'm trying to make the decision, what I want to do. The colleges were pretty well jammed full of people who had been in the war earlier, in '41, '42 and all that you know, the GI Bill, so it was almost impossible to get into college then. So I decided well, my best bet is to learn the trade you know, the plumbing trade; plumbing, heating, air conditioning. So I served a five-year apprenticeship and worked in the plumbing, heating and air conditioning trade most of my working life.

I worked in commercial construction for about twenty-three years and then I decided well, I'd better get inside, I'm getting older. I had an opportunity to go to work for St. John's Hospital, so I did that, and so I managed mechanical maintenance for twenty-three years.

Young: For St. John's Hospital? What company did you work for?

Gottschalk: Edwards Plumbing and Heating, I worked for when I was in construction.

Young: Edwards Plumbing and Heating. And tell me about your love life. Where did you meet that beautiful bride of yours?

Gottschalk: While I was starting in the apprenticeship program, I met my wife at a football game, a Springfield High School football game. We carried on a relationship for about a year and then we decided well, maybe we ought to get married. So we got married on September 22, 1946, and so we'll be married sixty-four years this September 22nd.

Young: Wonderful. And once again, your wife, what was her name and her maiden name?

Gottschalk: My wife's maiden name was Dolores Winegardner and she was from Winchester.

Young: Winchester, Illinois?

Gottschalk: Mm-hmm. She graduated from high school and she was working up here as a secretary.

Young: Sixty-four years. Any secrets to being married for sixty-four years?

Gottschalk: I don't know. We seem to be able to have the same philosophy, the same thoughts. We were always able to come to decisions made by both of us together, and we just got along very well.

Young: And where did your wife work at?

Gottschalk: She worked for the Board of Education, the Vocational Education Department.

Young: And you had no children, correct?

Gottschalk: No children.

Young: Anything else that you'd like to discuss before we close this? Anything to say to the future generations or to anyone about what we've done right and what we've done wrong with the wars?

Gottschalk: I don't know what type of advice I would give, except you just have to get in there and deal with the situations. Keep out of trouble.

Young: Edgar, I really thank you and I'm so glad we could do this a second time. Hopefully this one works.

Gottschalk: Oh, I think it will.

(end of interview other interview continues)

Interview with Edgar Gottschalk

VR2-A-L-2011-010.02

Interview # 02: February 24, 2011

Interviewer: Bob Young

Young: This is Bob Young. The date is the 24th of February, 2011. I'm here at Edgar Gottschalk's home. We're interviewing Edgar today, Air Force vet. Edgar, tell us about the missions that you were on and what you did from day-to-day while you were flying.

Gottschalk: Well, probably when we first started, they were trying to knock out the Japanese airfields, so the land-based planes wouldn't be able to get to the Navy ships up in northern Pacific. That's where the U.S. Navy was operating, up in the northern Pacific, so our job was to knock out airfields basically.

Young: So what island were you flying out of at this time?

Gottschalk: We're flying out of the Solomon Islands, in our first mission. We probably were at Los Negros, in the Solomon Islands, and we were bombing airfields in the Caroline Islands.

Young: And how far a distance was that, hour-wise?

Gottschalk: Probably four and a half hours to the island. They had lookouts on some of the smaller islands, so they would intercept us. They would know we were coming, you know? We operated, eliminating those airbases in the Caroline Islands, and then after we put those island bases out of operation, the really big next target was Truk Island, and that was a huge Japanese naval base. They had hangers underground and ack-ack. Everything you could imagine at

a naval base, it had. It was a major Japanese naval base. We bombed that out three different times, those air bases.

Young: You went in there, three different missions in?

Gottschalk: Correct.

Young: Dropped bombs and they send flak up at you.

Gottschalk: We dropped the bombs, we'd get the interception, you know because they had detected we was coming. They'd be maybe eight or ten interceptors waiting for you. You'd see them before you got there, circling you.

Young: Did you have fighter support?

Gottschalk: We never had fighter support. We always flew without escorts, except for that one bombing mission later on at an oil refinery in Borneo. On a second mission, we had fighter escorts. The fighter pilots volunteered to fly the mission, because they were going to have fuel problems going as far as we went.

Young: How were you flying most of your missions?

Gottschalk: Mostly around twenty thousand feet.

Young: Twenty thousand?

Gottschalk: Sometimes twelve.

Young: And you dropped the bombs then, at twenty, pretty much.

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: How many planes in the formation?

Gottschalk: There would be four squadrons of six planes—twenty-four.

Young: Twenty-four planes on each mission then. And Truk was a big island?

Gottschalk: It was really major, yeah.

Young: A lot of Japanese on there then, so that was a major island for them. And how long did that take, before Truk was taken?

Gottschalk: Probably six weeks. There was twenty-six ships sunk in the harbor.

Young: Is that right?

Gottschalk: Now it's a major location for scuba divers, but they can't take anything out.

Young: Twenty-six Japanese ships you sunk.

Gottschalk: No, I'm not saying we sunk them all.

Young: No, no, but I mean that were sunk during the six weeks of bombing. Unbelievable.

Gottschalk: They had tanks in them and all kinds of equipment.

Young: So, did the Marines then come in and clean up after that?

Gottschalk: No, no, they'd been gone.

Young: They just left.

Gottschalk: Yeah.

Young: Okay, so the Japanese left there and where did you go from there?

Gottschalk: We went to another Japanese island, Yap, that had a big airfield on it, and we flew five different missions on that island.

Young: And you were personally with the five?

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: And so you just island hopped basically.

Gottschalk: We island hopped. We moved twenty-five hundred miles in ten months. Our permanent equipment never caught up with us.

Young: I think I read somewhere, where you were with the Jungle Air Force.

Gottschalk: They called us the 13th Jungle Air Force.

Young: Was that because when you got to the islands, you lived out in the jungle basically, or had no provisions?

Gottschalk: When I first got there on Guadalcanal I was sleeping in a hammock strung between two coconut trees, for about two weeks.

Young: How about the food while you were over in there?

Gottschalk: The food wasn't a bell ringer. We were on dehydrated food all that time. The food was bad.

Young: The food was bad?

Gottschalk: We had fresh eggs, I think, two or three times in that ten months. Dehydrated milk, Spam.

Young: Items that you no longer care to eat.

Gottschalk: Right. When I first got home, my mother had some Spam , and I said, "I don't think I really want that."

Young: I can understand. I sure do.

Gottschalk: Dehydrated potatoes, everything you know, nothing fresh. Oh, they got some mutton from Australia once in a while.

Young: So the islands, what about the natives? I mean, the islands where you were at there in the Solomons.

Gottschalk: We were instructed not to associate with the natives and not go to the native villages. Sometimes one of the men would walk through our housing area to trade different items: shells and pipes or whatever, things like that. They allowed them to do that, the men.

Young: Over in that area, weren't there a number of headhunters?

Gottschalk: As a matter of fact, almost every place we was, there was headhunters in the vicinity. In the Solomons, there were headhunters, in Borneo there was headhunters. But mostly, I guess they never bothered us, but after the war on Biak Island, which is off the coast of New Guinea, it was a really small island. It was so small, sometimes when you took off—they had a roadway that went around the perimeter of the island, and when we'd take off, the wheels would go across the road.

Young: That is small.

Gottschalk: Yeah, that's small.

Young: Yes it is.

Gottschalk: But anyway, back to the natives. That island, after the war, Rockefeller's son went there and he just disappeared, and they think the cannibals got him. These cannibals were in Borneo, they were in a lot of places.

Young: Yeah, that's awfully interesting over there. You didn't want to get too far from base then.

Gottschalk: That's right.

Young: Or from your area.

Gottschalk: You wanted to stay close to your facility.

Young: What island were you at, where the pigs were so important?

Gottschalk: The pigs? In New Guinea. New Guinea is a long island and half of it's administered by the Australians, they police it, and the other half, the west half, is administered by the Asian Indonesian people. And so these natives, of course, live in villages. They have their own customs, and one of the things was they prized pigs. They make carrying bags out of some native materials, vegetation, and they prize those and they prize shells. So if a young native decides he'd like to get married, he can trade pigs for a bride, and so four or five pigs can buy you a bride.

Young: I suspect we have to spend something for our wives, don't we?

Gottschalk: Yeah. (both laugh)

Young: On the day we get engaged and everything, and have a big wedding.

Gottschalk: We never encountered the native population too much, because they instructed us not to associate or go to the villages, and they didn't allow them to come in either. I never saw any with bones through their nose, but they were there.

Young: And where were you at after Yap, where did you go?

Gottschalk: After Yap, we went to Woleai, which was another island with an airfield, to eliminate that airfield. Then we went back to Yap one more time, and then after that, we went to Palau, which is closer to the Philippines, Celebes, the Philippines yeah, and we bombed the airfield on that island.

Young: What time are we…?

Gottschalk: We did that three times.

Young: Three times? And what month did you do that?

Gottschalk: It was in the fall of '44. And after that, we went to the Halmaheras, which is in the southern Philippines, and we bombed the airfields there in Lolorata and Galela, and Hatetabako. Then we went to Ceram and bombed the airfield there, Liang town.

Young: And all those are down in the Philippines area?

Gottschalk: Those are in the Philippines. And then we moved our base to Noemfoor.

Young: Where is Noemfoor?

Gottschalk: Noemfoor is in the center, northern coast of New Guinea. It was really muddy the days that we moved there. We're moving around, tromping around in the

mud, and we finally procured some lumber to build a tent floor and got out of the mud.

Then we had a Japanese guy come around about 11:00 at night. They called him "Washing Machine Charlie." He'd fly around all night, maybe dropping a bomb an hour, just to keep you awake, you know? We had our movie theater and I was at the movie theater one night. The movie just started and we heard bombs whistling. He was dropping bombs. Everybody started running out of the theater, and I ran in back of the theater and I heard these guys talking in a hole, and so I jumped in the hole and come to find out it was a toilet.

Young: One of the latrine ditches?

Gottschalk: It was a regular outside toilet they were digging, and they hadn't put the top part on yet. I just jumped in, on top of those guys that was in there.

Young: So you weren't on the bottom.

Gottschalk: That was up to the fall of '44.

Young: So we were setting everything up for [General Douglas] MacArthur to come back.

Gottschalk: Yeah, he came back. We stopped flying for the Navy. Actually, when I went over, we were in a combined group. There was Army, Air Force, the Marines, the Australians, some English too, I think, all under the command of John McCain's father, Admiral McCain. We flew under Navy command. The Army flew under Navy command for about four or five months, until MacArthur decided to come out of Australia and return to the Philippines. So then we were Army again, flying under Army command.

Young: It's interesting, very. You were at a lot of islands.

Gottschalk: A lot of islands. Well, when you move twenty-five hundred miles in ten months.

Young: And I read somewhere there, that one of the biggest fears wasn't as much as the Zeros, it was more with the weather than anything.

Gottschalk: Oh, the weather, yeah. You had those tropical storms. One morning we were out, it was dark yet, to start the mission, and we was in the plane and all of a sudden, they shoot the ack-ack guns off, to warn you that there's problems. So these guns go off and we just evacuated the planes, turned off whatever lights were on and everything was dark, there was no lights anyplace. And so we all bailed out of the plane, you know jumped out of the plane, and you couldn't see anything, it was so dark. So I just jumped out and ran about a hundred feet from the plane, hit the ground and lay there. They had those combination four-

gun, antiaircraft machineguns, mounted in a mount you know, and they were shooting. This jet had come down between the mountains and they didn't detect him until the last minute and he's shooting the airfield up. He only made the one pass, but then we got our act together and cranked up and started taxiing, and got out, left on our mission.

At times, we would be parked there in line to take off and it rained so hard, you couldn't see the plane in front of you.

Young: Is that right?

Gottschalk: Those tropical storms, yeah.

Young: So that was awfully dangerous then, if you were flying any distance, you know, five hundred miles away, to another little tiny dot in the middle of the ocean.

Gottschalk: You'd better have a good navigator, I mean a really good navigator, because most of the time we were over water and there were no landmarks or anything to establish where you was at.

Young: Did you lose many aircraft just from weather you think?

Gottschalk: We had several planes disappear; they didn't know what happened to them. New Guinea has high mountains, so if the pilot wasn't aware of where they were, some of them crashed into the top of the mountains at eleven thousand feet or something like that, and some of them just disappeared. The plane we flew over, when we landed it they took it for a replacement right away, because of the shortage of planes; it was intended to be a replacement, but it was flying just a ferry mission to someplace and it just disappeared and they never did find it, never knew what happened to it. So we lost planes and planes disappeared. As a matter of fact, after the war they found a group commander on top of a mountain out there, our group commander.

Young: Is that right?

Gottschalk: Yeah.

Young: He hit a mountain?

Gottschalk: Crashed.

Young: Crashed into the mountain. Yeah, mountains are scary when you're up in that air.

Gottschalk: Oh yeah. You know, they could be socked in, you couldn't see them, clouds.

Young: Yes. You had a couple missions, I was reading, in the 72nd's book here, about the long distance, the flights. Some of the long flights, they were twenty hours or better?

Gottschalk: Eighteen. Actually, we flew a mission to attack the oil refineries in Borneo.

Young: Let's talk about that oil refinery.

Gottschalk: Those oil refineries were mainly operated by Dutch companies, Shell. As a matter of fact, we got paid in Dutch money, Dutch Guilders. The attack on the oil refineries in Borneo, when that oil refinery was eliminated, it more or less shut down the Japanese, because that's where they got all their oil and aviation gas, from those oil refineries.

They had a briefing before this mission to Borneo, to the oil refineries, and they brought in outside news people and they were at the meeting. They decided they were going to cut our ammunition in half in order to execute the long flight.

Young: So you took away ammunition and put cans of gas in, I suspect?

Gottschalk: Half our ammunition. We had a Bombay tank and some of the planes had two one-thousand pound bombs, and then the rest, five hundred pound bombs. Those bombs were set so they would go off instantaneously, or some given hours. Some were twenty-four hour delayed fuses.

Young: Oh really?

Gottschalk: So, if they were in there trying to clean up, they'd go off and get more people. I don't think that would be a very good situation to be in.

Young: No, no that doesn't sound like it at all.

Gottschalk: Those thousand pound bombs are something else, you know?

Young: So, when you did the long flights like that, the ones where you were going down to the oilfields, you did with less bombs and less ammunition, and you had fighter pilots.

Gottschalk: No escort.

Young: No escort?

Gottschalk: Never had an escort, but on one mission, and it was after that mission.

Young: After that.

Gottschalk: We had another mission on that refinery and we had escort, and the fighter pilots volunteered, because it was so dangerous for them because they didn't

have the capability or the distance we could go. They carried extra wing tanks and they lost a few in the mission, a few pilots, a few planes, because of the circumstances.

Young: And that was an eighteen hour flight? That's an awfully long time.

Gottschalk: That was the longest flight a B-24 made in World War II.

Young: Is that right? And most of that was all over water and that navigator had to get you there and home?

Gottschalk: When we took off, it was like 12:30 in the morning, right after midnight, and they had the runway all lit up with lights on the side. They had a light across the end of the runway. As a matter of fact, the plane ahead of us bounced off the water. They thought they lost it.

Young: Bounced off the water? Yeah?

Gottschalk: Yeah. Well anyway, so we took off after midnight and at 9:00 the next morning, we rendezvoused about an hour from the target, you know, get it together. I looked out and here's this Jap plane flying off of our right wing, determining how high we were and how fast our speed was. So I said to the pilot, I'm going to pop him a couple times. So I shot at him two or three times and he wiggled his wings and took off.

Young: He was up there so that he could radio back to where the ack-ack, all the gun locations to tell the height.

Gottschalk: Send back our altitude and our air speeds, yeah.

Young: And then they were setting up a barrage for you.

Gottschalk: At the briefing, they said you're going to encounter ten heavy ack-ack guns and probably ten interceptors. When we got to the target, it was closed in, so we went on and made a hundred eighty and came back. We went across the targets the second time. Well, there was an Air Force, 15th Air Force, up north of us; they were supposed to be with us. They was down there and they turned around and went back home. (laughter) There was at least a hundred heavy ack-ack guns and about forty to sixty interceptors.

Young: Oh my goodness. I was reading there, when they throw it up, it's like the kitchen sink. There's phosphorous, there's every color coming up at you.

Gottschalk: Oh yeah. When we came off the target, I looked back and it was just a big black cloud. When the planes behind us was coming off, they'd just come out of this big black cloud. The ack-ack was so heavy.

Young: That heavy. Did you have any problems with your aircraft? I mean, you got any flack or got hit? I guess you get hit a little every time.

Gottschalk: We didn't have enough fuel to get back to the base that we left from, which was around Noemfoor there, I think it was. But we landed at Sansapor, on the very west end of New Guinea. When we landed, the fuel truck came and I was up on the wing, going to refuel and right next to the fuel opening was this hole, about as big as your finger or so. So I fueled the plane and we went to eat and we came back and we were sitting in a jeep there and all of a sudden, all this gas came out of the Bombay, just like a waterfall. So we stayed there all night and the next day they flew the plane back on the left wing tanks. That hole was in the right wing. They disassembled the skin on the wing and took the four tanks out. That shell went through four tanks and ended up right in the middle of the plane, right behind the upper turret, the top turret. That went through four tanks and didn't go off or didn't do anything. You know, it finally cut loose, the self-sealer had cut loose that night after we came back.

Young: I was going to ask. They had a sealer then?

Gottschalk: Those tanks are built with self-sealing in the walls, and so those four tanks had held about five hours after they'd been pierced.

Young: That's wonderful.

Gottschalk: I'd have been swimming, yeah. (both laugh) No, I probably wouldn't even have been swimming, you know if it caught on fire.

Young: Absolutely. Yeah, that came right up your direction there, if it comes up behind your turret.

Gottschalk: Right behind the turret and the flight deck, yeah, yeah.

Young: When they sent up interceptors and that, and all of you were shooting, the gunners were all working, what kept you from hitting the other aircraft in your formation?

Gottschalk: Well, all the guns were in the turrets except the waist guns. There's stops on the gun side that will stop the guns from firing. They're programmed so they'll only cover a certain arc or a certain degree.

Young: Yes. And that's why you're in formation; you stay in a formation you didn't have that problem.

Gottschalk: Of shooting your own plane.

Young: Right.

Gottschalk: Yeah. But you have to really be careful you don't shoot your fellow members and Group planes.

Young: Absolutely. So they come in, straight in, and try to knock you out of the sky. How close did some of them come?

Gottschalk: You know, they had the suicide pilots and they were trained to fly into the [center]. We flew like six planes together in a squadron, like two Vs . Well, they were trained to hit the center plane and the front three, with the idea that it would rock and knock the two planes out on either side of it, plus they would go back into the second three planes.

At one time we had one—I was up in the turret and I had my guns pointed back and upward, halfway between where I was and the tail would be. I just happened to look out my peripheral vision and I saw this Jap Zero coming from the front. So I swung around and he was probably a hundred and fifty yards away, something like that, when I saw him. So I started shooting at him and then just a big orange ball exploded behind his head, behind the cockpit, and when he went by, I could see his face. I could see his goggles, I could see his helmet, and he looked like he was just leaning to the right side of the cockpit, looking at me, and then he went on towards our back tail and descended and went down in the ocean. I think his intentions were to fly into us.

Young: Fly into you. Do you know, did any of them actually get into any of your squadrons when they were up, or any of the formations, not that you were with but during your time over there.

Gottschalk: Not to my knowledge.

Young: They weren't successful then.

Gottschalk: I have no recollection of that.

Young: They weren't that good at it, or else they really didn't care.

Gottschalk: When we started out, the Japanese had a big naval base at Rabaul, which was off the northeast coast of Australia, an island, and it was a similar type naval base, a huge naval base. That's where their best pilots were. Actually, when we went over, the operation in the South Pacific was just starting. Americans didn't have much equipment really, at that point. And so these pilots were really good, because they'd been every place the Japanese had been previously and had a lot of experience. So those pilots were their major defense and when Rabaul was eliminated, more or less, from operational flights, those pilots moved up to Truk, and so we encountered those same fighter pilots across a good period of time. But they got eliminated too, so the farther we progressed, the less skilled pilots we encountered.

Young: Towards the end, they were just sitting ducks.

Gottschalk: Towards the end, they wouldn't even try, they weren't too aggressive; not as aggressive as the ones down at Rabaul, and less skillful.

Young: I know you got a couple of different awards. I see up on the wall, you've got the Air Medal with what's that, four clusters up there?

Gottschalk: They're awarded for a certain span of activity.

Young: Certain missions. You had to do so many missions.

Gottschalk: Ten missions, something like that.

Young: Ten missions to each cluster. Your unit was awarded a couple of other citations.

Gottschalk: We were awarded two Presidential Citations, the whole group. One was for the elimination of the refineries in Borneo and the other one was for the battle of Leyte Gulf, when they were ready to instigate the invasion of Leyte. Actually, our skills weren't directed at Navy exercises, you know? We were land-based people.

At Leyte, there was a peninsula that came out, and there was a fleet on one side and across the peninsula was a fleet on the other side. On our way up, just before we got there, the large fleet was on the right side and a smaller fleet was on the left side, and at first, I didn't know which one belonged to who, you know. So when we were maybe five miles or so from their location, the fleet on the left side started disbursing and this Jap destroyer went out and he'd run around in circles, shooting up in the air. Well, after a while, all of them got underway. So we were north of where they were, and we made a 180-degree turn and started a bomb run. Well, we were probably five to eight miles from them yet, when we started to bomb. Actually, the bombardier started taking over, flying the plane, with a bomb sight, and so our instructions were to go after the largest ships. There was a battleship in there and some aircraft carriers and destroyers and cruisers, and so they started shooting up at us, they shot those big guns on the battleship at us when we were five to eight miles from them.

Young: My goodness. That far away?

Gottschalk: Yeah. And you could see those big shells. They were around fourteen inches or something like that. You could see them coming up, and then they'd break into about five pieces and then those pieces would go off. Some of them were those phosphorous shells, that if they hit you they'd burn, you know? It rocked the plane, they'd rock the plane.

Young: They were that big?

Gottschalk: Yeah.

Young: My goodness.

Gottschalk: So this one ship, they had antiaircraft guns on the side, so I could see them going off, so I just strafed it. They were far enough away, I could get my guns down low enough that I could just spray them. I don't know if I did anything but I probably scared them. (laughs)

Anyway, one of our planes had a bomb go right down in the smokestack of a cruiser, sunk the cruiser. I don't know what else they did, but it shook them up a little bit, I think. The Navy's idea was for us to just disburse them and keep them from the troop ships [that] were over there where the U.S. Navy was and they were trying to protect the troop ships, besides executing the invasion. Probably, that kept a lot of people from getting killed.

Young: Everyone helped. Everybody helped, there's no doubt about it, helped the ground troops. It seems like going from island to island, you were just softening everything up and taking the fuel away.

Gottschalk: I tell you, there was two different oil refineries on Borneo, on opposite sides, on opposite coasts, and they knocked both of those out. Not in one day, but they put both of those refineries out of commission, and when they invaded the Philippines up around Manila, everything was parked. They didn't have any gas. The planes, they weren't flying or anything, because they'd go after the ships, the tankers too, so they couldn't get the oil away from the refineries.

Young: I guess everybody has to run on fuel don't they?

Gottschalk: Oh, you bet, fuel. That's what happened in North Africa; the key was the fuel, when [German Field Marshall] Rommel and all of them were over there, yeah.

Young: Earlier there, you said something about you thought you might have scared them when you strafed them down there.

Gottschalk: I think they put us out as sitting ducks, for the Navy.

Young: Were there times when you were scared? During that whole time you were over there, there's probably a lot of it.

Gottschalk: I said to my tail gunner, Chester, was you ever scared? No, I was never scared. I'll tell you, if you wasn't scared, there was something wrong with you.

Young: If you were not scared, you weren't there.

Gottschalk: Yeah.

Young: Your other awards up there, the citations there, what was that one?

Gottschalk: One is a Philippine Liberation Ribbon and the other is an Asiatic Pacific Ribbon.

Young: You were a Tech Sergeant.

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: I see you still have your dog tags.

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: Everybody knows their serial number.

Gottschalk: I still know that serial number.

Young: Oh, I think anyone that's been in the service, they die with knowing their number, don't they?

Gottschalk: That's right. They ingrained that into you, you know?

Young: The fellows on your crew, I've seen a picture of them and can you tell me their names? Start with the captain, I suspect.

Gottschalk: The Captain was Roy Myers. He was from Minnesota. The Copilot was Richard Stein, he was from Ogden, Utah. The Navigator was Albert Jaffe from New York and the Bombardier was from Kansas, Victor Willard. The Nose Gunner was Granvil Forest from California, the Los Angeles area. The Radio Operator was John Cleary, he was from Los Angeles. Rice, the Waist Gunner, was from Michigan. The Ball Gunner was from Pennsylvania. At the moment, I can't recall his name.

Young: You said you had one from Mississippi, wasn't there?

Gottschalk: Yeah, he was a Ball Gunner. Hoyle Phillips, from Guntown, Mississippi.

Young: Guntown, Mississippi.

Gottschalk: The Tail Gunner was Chester Hopson. He was from Oklahoma.

Young: Did you ever see them again or do you have any reunions or ever get together?

Gottschalk: As a matter of fact, about ten years after we were out of the service, my wife and I made an attempt to locate all the crew members, and we located eight out of the ten. The pilot owned a motel in Granby, Colorado, up in the mountains, so we had the first reunion there in 1955. Every five years after that, we had a reunion, up until the 1970s, we had one every five years.

Young: Up until then. You haven't had one since the 70s, so it's been quite a while. Do you know how many are still alive?

Gottschalk: Out of the ten, there's three: the pilot, the tail gunner and myself, the engineer.

Young: And how old was the pilot when he started, when you hooked up with this?

Gottschalk: I think he was twenty-six.

Young: Twenty-six and you were eighteen, nineteen?

Gottschalk: I was nineteen.

Young: Nineteen. That's a heck of an experience for a nineteen year-old isn't it?

Gottschalk: Yes it is. (laughs)

Young: Yes. Heck of an experience. Do you have anything memorable that you would like to talk about, about your service time, that we haven't spoken about?

Gottschalk: I think more of it as a good education. The service is a good education. I saw a lot of things, learned a lot of things. Even though there were some things that wasn't too great, you found a way to persevere and carry on, and do whatever your duty was. The Golden Gate Bridge looked better coming back on the ship than it did leaving by plane with our bomber. It was around noontime when the ship went under the Golden Gate Bridge, and the people were up there throwing coins down. Everybody was trying to catch a coin coming down.

Young: Catching the coins. Yes, it's great memories you know. A man told me one time—I'd asked him when I got drafted, what's the service like? He said, I wouldn't take a million dollars for my experience, but you couldn't give me a million dollars to do it again.

Gottschalk: True, true.

Young: Is that true?

Gottschalk: That's true, yeah.

Young: The morale in your unit, how was the morale? I mean during that time and not having proper food.

Gottschalk: It was good. I never really encountered anybody that exhibited any degree of dissatisfaction. You always have a couple apples in there that have their problems, but all in all, I think everything went along well under the conditions we were operating under.

Young: Did you get any R&R, and time away?

Gottschalk: As a matter of fact we did, after we flew that mission on the oil refineries. We went to Australia for about ten days, and so we took a C-47. I think there was about ten of us. We flew down to northern Australia. We landed at Cairns and then we landed at Townsville, and we landed at Melbourne. Our destination was Sydney. And actually, we had a great time and saw a lot of great sites. And one thing, we met some ladies, nice ladies, that were introduced by people to us, and they escorted us. We went to the theater at night, we went to the racetrack and we saw the bridge over Sydney Harbor.

And then they had taxis [but] they didn't have gasoline, so they used a charcoal burner on the back of the taxicab. It was like a vertical boiler like, and it burned charcoal and captured the gas from the charcoal and it went up to the roof by a tube and the gas coming from the charcoal inflated the bag on the roof, then the engine ran off that gas. So one night, we were going to the theater and we came to a big hill, and it just didn't have enough power to climb the hill, so everybody had to get out and push the cab up the hill. (Laughter) But it was a nice leave.

Young: So Australia was great, yeah. And what about when you were at your base there on the islands at night? Was there movies or was there USO shows?

Gottschalk: Well, we didn't have any refrigeration, so we had a PX and finally, about the middle of the tour, they had beer and cigarettes, and the same brand of cigarettes, Chelsea, something? They weren't a name brand cigarette, you know? One night, somebody came in one of those six-by-six Army trucks, and they raided our PX and stole all our beer. But we had movies and we had a couple of USO shows come through. Yeah, they stole all our beer.

Young: Stole all your beer.

Gottschalk: Of course, I wasn't too much of a beer drinker anyway.

Young: How did you stay in touch with your family during that time, your mother and your father?

Gottschalk: Letters.

Young: Letters? Did you get many sent?

Gottschalk: Not a lot of letters.

Young: How did they take it during that time? Like every other mother I suspect.

Gottschalk: I suppose they had their worries, of course, but never anything in postal communications. I think I sent, in proportion, the most letters back and forth, because we were moving all the time too.

Young: Yes. Hard to get mail.

Gottschalk: Hard to get.

Young: I notice you have a lot of photographs of that period; you were fortunate to get photographs.

Gottschalk: When we'd go on a mission, if it was a major one like the oil refineries or the Naval battle or whatever, really major, major, like Truk, we'd take an aerial photographer with us and he would take his pictures through the bottom of the plane, there was a door. And so when we'd get back, they'd process that film to assess the damage of the bomb strike, so I had access to those pictures. They were probably fourteen inches square, something like that. I cut out the main section of the picture and brought it back with me; several bomb strikes.

Young: You have quite a few pictures of fellows that you were stationed with or that you were there, different squadron pictures and so forth.

Gottschalk: I have pictures of artwork on the plane. I had some pictures of people that I was with. Not a lot of pictures of people. You didn't have a camera you know?

Young: You didn't have a camera.

Gottschalk: A personal camera. There wasn't any film.

Young: You had no beer and you had nothing else. I suspect they wouldn't have had any film for you. What about, when we talked a little bit about the friends you made in the service and your senior crew and so forth. When you got out, discharged?

Gottschalk: Well, I can tell a little bit about before I got out, how many train trips I made. When I got back from the Pacific, the ship docked at San Francisco, and then we went through a processing center. Then I got a 30-day furlough to come home, and so I got on a train and I came to Illinois. Well then I was assigned to go back from where I started, back to California, to that processing center. Then they assigned me to Chanute field in Illinois, over by Champaign, and so I got another train trip back to Illinois.

Young: And how long were you at Chanute before you left from there?

Gottschalk: Then I went to electronic school there and I was there, oh, probably three months or so, and then when I graduated from that, they were going to make me an instructor. So they came and said well, you can go over to the school and be an instructor or you can get discharged.

Young: And I know what your choice was.

Gottschalk: So I told them I wanted to go home. (laughs)

Young: Sort of like seeing that movie, Forest Gump, when they told him he could go home.

Gottschalk: Yeah. (laughs) So anyway, I had a lot of train travel there, in a short period of time. So from there, when I got discharged, I went to Fort Sheridan up by Chicago there. They had a lot of German prisoners there, serving the food in the cafeteria and all that. And then they sent me down to Jefferson Barracks for discharge.

Young: That was in Missouri, correct, Jefferson Barracks?

Gottschalk: Yeah. West of St. Louis. So I actually got discharged in Missouri, Jefferson Barracks.

Young: And I see that was what, date of separation was the 3rd of September.

Gottschalk: Right. It was right around Labor Day.

Young: Right around Labor Day, you'll never forget that day.

Gottschalk: No.

Young: So when you got discharged and you come home, what was the first two weeks of home life like?

Gottschalk: Sitting around, deciding what I was going to do, you know? I had worked in the heating and plumbing trade during my summer vacations. My father was a steamfitter and he belonged to the local Plumbers and Steamfitters Union, and I decided I'd like to go to college and study electrical engineering, but by the time I got home, all the people that went in right at the beginning of the war, '42, the universities were pretty well filled up.

Young: Oh, okay.

Gottschalk: Housing and all that. So I decided well, probably my best shot is to learn the trade. So I spent five years apprenticeship, learning the plumbing and heating trade.

Young: So you retired in the plumbing/heating trade?

Gottschalk: I worked about forty-six years in the plumbing, heating and air conditioning, yeah. I worked for one plumbing and heating contractor for twenty-three years, and we did a lot of work for the local St. John's Hospital organization, sisters. So at the end of twenty-three years, I decided well, I've had enough out in the weather and so forth; I think I would probably like to get inside, you know. So the hospital offered me a job as the supervisor of mechanical maintenance, their plumbing, heating, air conditioning, temperature control

and all that. So I worked for the hospital for twenty-three years, managing the mechanical maintenance. Not the electrical, not the carpenter, the mechanical.

Young: And when did you retire then?

Gottschalk: I retired February in 1989.

Young: February of '89. And since then you've traveled?

Gottschalk: We traveled. We bought a 35-foot Avion trailer and a suburban, and we spent the winters in Arizona. For eight years, we were in Arizona, in the winter.

Young: And now you're back here in the winter.

Gottschalk: Don't like it. (Laughter)

Young: And once again, your wife's name and how many years were you married.

Gottschalk: My wife's name is Delores and we got married in 1946. We've been married sixty-six years.

Young: Sixty-six years.

Gottschalk: Sixty-seven years it will be.

Young: Fantastic. What's the secret?

Gottschalk: Being a yes man helps a lot.

Young: Being a yes man?

Gottschalk: (laughs) No, you know, we managed to be really compatible and although we didn't produce any children, we've lived a good married life.

Young: Wonderful. Have you joined any veterans' organizations?

Gottschalk: As a matter of fact, I'm still a member of the 5th Bomb Group organization and a member of the 13th Air Force Group.

Young: And do they still have meetings or have reunions?

Gottschalk: They have reunions. Once a year they have reunions, and then they have quarterly newsletters, but the members are getting pretty thin now you know?

Young: Yes, yes, it's a shame but yes. In this closing now, I want to ask you a couple of things and this one here is a little touchy. Do you think the war was justified and if so, why?

Gottschalk: I think World War II was justified. I think if we hadn't interceded, it would be a different world now.

Young: How did the war change your outlook on life? It's hard to say. For a young man, everything changes.

Gottschalk: I think you are exposed to some different cultures, different countries, and it broadens your knowledge of things happening in the world.

Young: I noticed today, when I came, you were watching what was going on with Libya.

Gottschalk: Yes.

Young: You were concerned about that.

Gottschalk: The cultures, they change. It's not near like it was when we grew up, our values. There's really a different culture.

Young: Here in the States?

Gottschalk: Yes. All over.

Young: All over. What advice or wisdom would you pass on to future generations?

Gottschalk: Well, it doesn't appear that people are going to be able to live together without having their differences. There's always somebody that wants to be the leader, you know, and just like what's going on in Libya and some of these African countries right now, the dictatorships and all that. You always have those kinds of people to deal with and do the U.S. standard in the world and stature in the world, we seem to be the leaders. I don't think one country can govern the world, you know? It seems like in the last few years, we're always fighting a war for somebody else, financing different countries with a contribution, while our own people here and infrastructure suffers.

Young: You had said something the other evening when I was here, about how you felt fortunate that you and your wife lived in this time period, your era.

Gottschalk: I believe I was fortunate enough to be in what I think was the best generational area in existence. We've seen everything in our generation, from the airplane, cars, communications, trips to the moon, than anybody else has ever seen in a hundred years say. I think our generation was the best generation.

Young: And here though, I mean you lived through the Great Depression, through the Second World War that took years and many lives, and you still can say that. That's amazing and it's probably true, it's probably true.

Gottschalk: Well, you know like today, there's a depression but it's nowhere near what the depression was in the ‘30s. My generation went through that. I remember when people went out during that time, they threw coal off of the trains at night. People were raising pigs, people were raising chickens, had gardens, to survive. It was really bad. There wasn't any organizations operated by the government, administrated by the government, like Social Security and different programs for people then like there is now. You was on your own.

Young: So, are we better off now?

Gottschalk: Not really, not really. It's not any better. You were better off then. Well, the population was smaller. The financial situation is different now than it was then.

Young: Absolutely. Anything else you'd like to say?

Gottschalk: I don't think so.

Young: Well, I really appreciate it and I thank you for everything. I've had a great time and I've learned a lot.

Gottschalk: Well, thank you.

Young: I really respect everything that you've done for our country, you and all the other veterans, of not only the Second World War or the First, the Korean War veterans, the Vietnamese, Vietnam, and today.

Gottschalk: My generation, after World War II, there was a great many people in my high school class that went to service and became professional people, doctors, lawyers, scientists, architects, but that happened all over the country. That generation built the country.

Young: Yes. I have to agree with you. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Gottschalk: No.

Young: Okay.

(end of interview)