

Audrey Jachimowicz
Honors: US History 2
October 8, 2017

Lyon, Robert. Personal Interview with the author. Lancaster, PA. October 8, 2017

Links for Soundcloud

Part 1: <https://soundcloud.com/audrey-jachimowicz/robert-lyon-interview-part-1>

Part 2: <https://soundcloud.com/audrey-jachimowicz/robert-lyon-interview-part-2>

Overview:

Mr. Robert Lyon was born on February 9th, 1922 to Robert and Cathryn Lyon. At the age of eighteen he enlisted in the army. A year later World War Two started and he served as a flight engineer gunner on a bomber. He was stationed in the South Pacific for seventeen months where he flew twenty-two missions. Robert came home and then departed again this time to Europe. He was stationed in Europe for seven months and flew fourteen missions there. When the war ended he returned to the states and had six months of rehabilitation before being discharged. Robert quickly got a job and enrolled in West Virginia University. He later became an art professor and an artist. He still shows and sells his work today.

Question (Audrey): When were you born?

Answer (Robert): On February 9th, 1922. AD

Question (Audrey): Where were you born?

Answer (Robert): Washington, Pennsylvania

Question (Audrey): What were your parents' names?

Answer (Robert): My father was Robert and my mother was Cathryn, with a C.

Question (Audrey): Did your parents work? What were their jobs?

Answer (Robert): My father was a advertising and display manager at department stores. He painted all the signs, trimmed the windows, uh brought up the newspaper advertising, and so forth. Advertising and display was his field.

Question (Audrey): Did your mother do anything?

Answer (Robert): My mother never worked. She worked up until she married, but after she married she didn't work.

Question (Audrey): Did you have any siblings?

Answer (Robert): Yes, I had two brothers and one sister.

Question (Audrey): What do you remember most about World War Two?

Answer (Robert): Coming home from overseas, twice.

Question (Audrey): Did you enlist or were you drafted into the military?

Answer (Robert): I enlisted.

Question (Audrey): How old were you?

Answer (Robert): Eighteen.

Question (Audrey): Did you have any idea exactly what was happening with the war at the time or what you were joining into?

Answer (Robert): I enlisted before the war started. I enlisted in June of 1940 and Pearl Harbor of course was December of 1941, so I had (*sic*) in when Pearl Harbor occurred.

Question (Audrey): What branch of the military?

Answer (Robert): I was in the Army Air Corp.

Question (Audrey): What was your role?

Answer (Robert): I was a flight engineer gunner on a bomber.

Question (Audrey): What was your rank?

Answer (Robert): My highest rank was staff sergeant. I was discharged for private, though I got busted.

Question (Audrey): What were living conditions like?

Answer (Robert): Living conditions varied a great deal. In the South Pacific, I was seventeen months there, lived in a tent the whole time. In Europe, I was in Europe seven months, and I lived in an abandoned German Air Corp barracks. It had some rooms with stoves and bunk beds, much better. I never minded living a distance in the South Pacific so much. I slept on a grass filled mattress cover. They had mattress covers and they filled them with straw, or with anything they could find and make a mattress of it.

Question (Audrey): What was boot camp or training like?

Answer (Robert): Well, I got my basic training I guess in Bolling Field, Washington D.C., that lasted six weeks. 1940. Lived in a tent, drilled everyday and marched all the time, everyday for six weeks. And it was kind of interesting. This was an entirely new experience to me.

Question (Audrey): Where did you serve while you were in the military?

Answer (Robert): I served seventeen months in the South Pacific in Australia, New Guinea. Then I came home. Then I served seven months in Europe. I was in France and Holland.

Question (Audrey): Do you remember arriving and what it was like?

Answer (Robert): No, not too much. Just getting adjusted and setting up camp and getting food.

Question (Audrey): What were your jobs and assignments?

Answer (Robert): My job was always the same. I was a gunner on a Martin Marauder Bomber.

Question (Audrey): Did you see combat?

Answer (Robert): Plenty.

Question (Becky, my mother): What does it mean to be a gunner?

Answer (Robert): Well, that's protecting the plane in aerial combat when you're usually attacked by fighter planes. If the enemy had fighter planes where you were going. And so there were seven men on the crew who would, all except the pilot and copilot, had guns that they used to protect the bomber, the plane they were flying in.

Question (Audrey): Were there many casualties in your unit?

Answer (Robert): Well, there were lots of casualties. On my experience, on my plane there was one very seriously wounded navigator. He was so badly wounded that he was sent back to the States for recovery.

Question (Audrey): How did you stay in touch with your family?

Answer (Robert): They had what they called v-mail. Which was a abbreviated piece of metal of paper that you could write on. In abbreviated sentences and so forth, that was sent quickly, postage-free.

Question (Audrey): What was the food like?

Answer (Robert): It varied according to where you were stationed and the availability of food. All in all it was edible. I remember my first Christmas dinner in New Guinea I had a piece of spam and three shrimp and I don't eat shrimp, so I gave my shrimp to some guy and he thought I was Santa Claus.

Question (Audrey): Do you have plenty of supplies?

Answer (Robert): Well I think so, I think we were well supplied. I would say so.

Question (Audrey): What did you do to relieve the pressure and stresses of the war?

Answer (Robert): Read. I'm an omnivorous reader.

Question (Audrey): How many missions did you take part in?

Answer (Robert): I flew twenty-two missions in the South Pacific and fourteen in Europe.

Question (Audrey): How long could your plane usually stay up before it had to land again?

Answer (Robert): We usually had a mission every three or four days. It varied though. If there was a big operation going on, well we had more missions.

Question (Audrey): Was there anything special you did for good luck before a mission?

Answer (Robert): Said my prayers. That's about all.

Question (Audrey): How did people entertain themselves?

Answer (Robert): We did a lot of group singing. We played a lot of records, they were 78 rpm records, old-fashioned plastic discs, but we loved to sit around and listen to especially Glenn Miller and his orchestra.

Question (Audrey): What were some major turning points that you remember from the war?

Answer (Robert): I guess when World War Two ended. The biggest event then of course was the death of Roosevelt, who was president at the time and the word that shortly afterwards he.

Question (Audrey): Do you recall the the day that your service ended?

Answer (Robert): Oh, yes, very well. It was in Indiantown Gap. I was mustered out as they called it and I was near Harrisburg, I hitchhiked back to Uniontown, my home town.

Question (Audrey): What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?

Answer (Robert): Readjusted and I got a job right away. My father got me a job and so I started working right away and I was discharged in September and in January I enrolled in West Virginia University.

Interview Part 2:

Answer (Robert): And the reason I went back overseas was I had a good friend who was a pilot and he had not been overseas and he was destined to be sent overseas, so I said I'd go with him when he went, so I did. It's kinda of a foolhardy thing isn't it... twenty-one.

Question (Becky): Did you have a lot of friends that enlisted?

Answer (Robert): Yeah, it was part of the game we were all playing.

Comment (Becky): Yeah, it was what everybody did, huh.

Answer (Robert): Everybody did something or other and we tried to enjoy doing what we did, although there wasn't much enjoyment in it. I was thinking the other day about the missions I flew in the South Pacific were all against Japanese military installations and the missions I flew in Europe, mostly, were against German towns and I didn't like that at all. Ostensibly we were supposed to be bombing railroads and freight yards and things like that, bridges, but we hit a lot of towns. We especially the town I'm trying to think of, Mymar (*sic*), which was the hometown of Gurtej (Goethe, *sic*) and that made me feel kinda funny. In the German estimation it's very similar to what Williamsburg would be to us. They're very proud of the history around Mymar.

Question (Becky): Now when you went up how many planes usually went up?

Answer (Robert): Now most of the missions were usually, well in the South Pacific the largest mission I was on was six and in Europe the largest was probably thirty-six. A big difference, we had a lot more planes then. In fact when the war ended the most memorable flight I ever had was that we flew a thousand planes over Frankfort, that's where the World War Two Treaty was signed and they had all available planes just flew in formation and to see the sky full of airplanes was quite a sight.

Question (Becky): Did you make a lot of good friends with the guys in your unit?

Answer (Robert): Oh, yes I had several friends that would be considered my closest friends. My one in the South Pacific was from Scranton. I still hear from his daughters once in awhile, I get a card from them and I send them cards. And the girls are very nice. I never met them, I don't think I ever saw them, but they were his pride and joy. They still keep in touch. I love hearing from them, it just touches my heart. I still think of them as little girls, which is what they were when the war was on, course they are both married now and with children.

Question (Becky): Did you ever regret enlisting?

Answer (Robert): No, I didn't. Well I figured I'd have been in it anyhow, I would have probably been drafted. The draft started shortly after I enlisted, but I wouldn't have been eligible for the draft, I was only eighteen, so I don't think they were calling up people till they were twenty-one. I would of had to register probably. And the things you remember, I remember coming back from Europe on what was called a "victory ship", they were ships that were mass produced, they were made of concrete or something and they were like freighters, but they brought troops home. The ship I went over on was an ocean liner and there were eleven thousand troops on it, that's a hell of a lot of people.

Question (Becky): Now were you the only one of your brothers and sisters to go?

Answer (Robert): No, my next brother, four years younger, I think he enlisted, but he enlisted in the 82nd Airborne. He was a paratrooper and he never made a combat jump, but he was in Europe and I found out when the war ended he was about one-hundred miles from me. So I hitchhiked down to where he was stationed and asked his commanding officer if he could come and have a three day pass with us and he got a three day pass and he came up, we hitchhiked, of course there was nothing but army trucks. And we came up and the next day we took him on a flight over the Rhine and we had to be careful of the Rhine because they had put cables across the Rhine, the Germans did. They're trying to sang you, ya (*sic*) know. But I remember when we crossed into Germany and we came across what looked... we saw nothing but grey. This field was all grey and I thought, what the heck is planted there. And when we got over, we were only fifteen or twenty feet above the ground, and here they were German soldiers, and they had all surrendered and they would wave to us. It was quite a sight and the grey was the gray of their uniforms. They had no arms or they weren't using any, they must have thrown them down. But their must have been a million... Things were terrible in Germany I mean it was famine and terrible casualties and they had been bombed out of all their cities, they'd been terribly bombed. I remember this incident very well. When I went up to Wilkesbarre with Jack and saw Wilkesbarre it reminded me of Europe at the end of the war and I threw up. It made me sick.

Question (Becky): Now what was it?

Answer (Robert): The destruction. It was the flood then, the big flood. It just struck me as... war ravaged Europe. But I went back to Europe twenty years ago or so on a trip and we saw all the places that we'd seen before. The rebuilding was remarkable. The Germans are so industrious and those cities which had been absolutely rubble, we had bombed into absolute nothing. I remember they sent in the Russians entered Berlin before us, so we sort of backed off and let the Russians enter Berlin. They said they raped ten-thousand German girls. And they had no defense. And these guys were, I saw pictures of them and they were peasants you know they were the lowest class of Russians and they just looked like animals. So to be a woman and survive the bombings and then have to deal with the plundering and rape. Terrible. Now Germany after the war men had service, men and women, of course by then the women were in the service too. They liked German service because they were very friendly and they had their Oktoberfests and all that sort of thing. I never had contact with a German family in any way, I never met a German girl or anything like that... too far removed. The reality I was facing and they were facing and I didn't like the fact that we were bombing German towns. And I remember we were supposed to strafe if we saw any movement of any kind just to fire on and I wouldn't fire into a German town. I just refused to do it.

Question (Becky): Now when you went back and saw the rebuilding did that make you feel better?

Answer (Robert): Yes, a whole lot better. I was stunned with how beautifully the towns had been rebuilt. Such beautiful cities, such as Cologne. Cologne was one of the loveliest of German's (*sic*) cities. I think they had 20 cathedrals or something in Cologne. Course Germany is primarily a Protestant country, there's one, Bulvaria I think is Catholic.

Primarily Catholic and the upper Germany is primarily Lutheran. I never had any direct contact with any Germans.

Question (Becky): Did you ever see any celebrities at bases or elsewhere?

Answer (Robert): Yes, I saw Joey Brown who was a comedian. I saw him in the south Pacific. He lost a son in the South Pacific. So I saw him and there was a movie actress Helen somebody that visited our camp one time and she sang, sang very well. The most interesting thing about this was when I was in Germany I went to hear Glenn Miller Orchestra and he was a captain or something and all of his musicians were soldiers and there was a young girl who sang and she was married to the guitar player in the orchestra and then I saw them in Germany when I was there. Just when the war ended and she was very good. She played the piano and sang and I came back and one time I was in New York, I was walking down Madison Avenue, and I saw this name on the billboard out in front of this bar of the pianist and songstress or whatever they call her. So I went in and talked to her and the funny thing was later she came to Mount Gretna. And then even after that I remember she had a weekly Sunday program from South Carolina someplace where she played the piano and sang, so it is a small world. But she was real cute, she was young when she was married to the guitarist with the Glenn Miller Orchestra, but she sang and played piano very well, but she was a little young for performing for troops and stuff, but then she married an American soldier. She lived a long time. I don't know whether she is still alive, I don't think so. I can remember I had a couple teenagers that I liked very well, they were in France while I was in Cambrai and we were in an abandoned German airfield, so we had a nice barracks with a little stove and stuff. And the French civilians lived all around us, nearby and there was a family that I could walk to their house, LeLong was their last name, and she did my laundry and they had two kids, Yvonne and Yvette, Yvonne was the boy and Yvette was the girl. And they would come up to my room all the time because I always had goodies for them. They had never seen an orange. So my mother would send me food of all kinds and I would give them to these two kids and of course they loved it.

Question (Becky): Now how did you meet them?

Answer (Robert): They would bring my laundry back that their mother did. I just found them myself, but evidently they knew the Germans too. They spoke very, very little English and I spoke very little French, but we conversed. Of course what they liked was the fact that I shared what my mother would send me in terms of goodies, but they were the cutest kids, dressed nicely, their mother did the laundry. I forget what their father did, he had a job of some kind. But there was never any risque stuff or anything, any bad language or anything, I was very respectful of them. Of course they liked the soldier, you know. I don't know that I ever gave them any money or not. I don't think I did, but if they wanted anything I would have bought it for them. Cause I sort of adopted them, that was nice. That's when I found out the war ended and then my brother was a hundred miles away. I remember he had a tooth out. I said, "What happened?"

He said, "I was in a fight."

"What were you fighting over?"

"Some guy was trying to get my raincoat."

Those paratroopers were fighting among themselves for activity. They were tough. He never had to make a combat jump and I'm glad of that. In fact, he was in the 82nd Airborne, the most famous of the airborne divisions and they were sent back to the states shortly after the war ended because they were destined to go to Japan for the invasion on Japan, so they expected if that had taken place if Japan had held out longer we would've had a million casualties probably taking Japan. We had just finished taking the Iliouze and the Saipan and so forth in the Pacific.

Question (Becky): How long did you stay in Europe after the war was officially declared over?

Answer (Robert): Immediately they established a point system and you were given so many points if you were over thirty-five, if you were married you were given extra points, if you had children you had extra points, and overseas service you had extra points. Well I had a hell of a lot of points, so I was one of the first to be sent home and it was interesting. I was stationed in Fenlow, in Holland and then they sent me to Luxemburg and then they sent me to Paris and I was outside the French capital, it was where the French had negotiated World War One treaties and so forth. Versailles. So they sent me when they saw I had enough points they sent me to Holland, Antwerp and I went on one of these boxcars that they had used in World War One and they were called quatorze chevaux and wei um, that meant forty horses and eight men. So I got to ride in one of those the whole way from Paris to Antwerp, that's where I caught the ship to come home and of course every town we'd go through we'd wave at the girls. We had a great time. But when we got to the states it was nice, a barge came out, a big barge came out from New York Harbor just filled with young girls and there was a big sign on it that says, Welcome Home, Well Done. So then they sent us to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. And from there they sent me to Indiantown Gap, sent down to Fort Sam Houston for rehabilitation, so I went down there and drank the whole time. That's the Army's way of doing things. Then they sent me back to Indiantown Gap to be discharged. Five years and one month and fifteen days.

Question (Becky): Did you ever consider making a career of the army?

Answer (Robert): No, some of my friends did. No I never did, I never liked it. I wasn't a good soldier by any means. I didn't like the caste system. I didn't like the discipline. I was terrible about discipline.

Question (Becky): Did you get in trouble a lot?

Answer (Robert): Yes, I broke every rule I could. Now the Army wasn't for me, nor was I for the Army. It wasn't a happy marriage. Terrible. Hated every minute of it. I hated the fact that some people were better than others. I mean when you have to salute somebody. That just goes against my grain completely. I was born to be an artist, see nonconformity was... And my youngest brother he went in the service. He's ten years younger than me. He's dead now, I'm the last of the family. But he went to Okinawa. It was after we had taken Okinawa. He was in the nearest Air Sea Rescue outfit. They rescued B-29s that had crashed coming back from bombing Tokyo. We did a lot of bombing on Tokyo toward the

end of the war. With the big B-29s, they were the super bombers. It was quite a crazy world. Everybody was touched by it. Kids in school. They had brothers, fathers, some had mothers probably in it, I don't know there were too many single or married woman that were in the Armed Services, the WACs, Women's Army Corp. There were nurses of course, there were always nurses. I remember I had the flu when I was in Newark, New Jersey. I went to school in New Jersey, the Army sent me to Casey Jones School of Aeronautics. I got a diploma from there for the mechanics I took. That's how I became a flight engineer on a plane. My job was the mechanical aspects of the plane, but I remember I had the flu so they sent me from Newark, where I was in school, over to Bludso's Islands (*sic*), which is where the Statue of Liberty is. I remember in the army hospital, went in the door, nurses took me back and said, "What's the matter with you, you having a baby?"

I said, "I hope not."

But that was nice to be out there on that island. I could see the Statue of Liberty. So I got some nice experiences. I was in the hospital for about a week I think with the flu. I remember I had a temperature of 104°F.