Benjamin Arnold "Ben" Nicks Jr.

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Interviewed by Leah Cohen
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Cohen: Okay, so today is June 13th, 2018. My name is Leah Cohen. On behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, I have the pleasure of conducting an interview with Mr. Ben Nicks. Mr. Nicks flew thirty-five combat missions as a B-29 Aircraft Commander, in the 9th Bomber group, in the United States Army Air Force, in the Pacific during World War II. So, Mr. Nicks, if it's okay with you, I thought we could ask you some questions about your background, and then, of course, the most part of the interview would be about your enlistment and service, and at the very end, if it's alright, we'll take a look at your post war life.

Nicks: Alright.

Cohen: Okay, so, where and when were you born?

Nicks: I was born March 31st, 1919, in Chicago. And I lived, our family lived there. Before I was a year old, my family moved to Kansas City when my father was transferred. His job transferred into Kansas City, and so, I moved from Chicago to Kansans, oh, in less than a year.

Cohen: Okay, and what was it like growing up in Kansas City?

Nicks: Well, I don't know what it's like. We lived in the middle of the city; Kansas City, Kansas. You do know there are two Kansas City's. I lived in downtown Kansas City, Kansas, and then in 1929, the family moved to Shawnee, Kansas, where I've been ever since. Shawnee is a suburb in the Kansas City area. And so I lived as a little kid, until 1929, in Kansas City, Kansas, then I grew up in Shawnee, Kansas. Basically, I spent the rest of my life in Shawnee, Kansas, and that's where I am today.

Cohen: That's wonderful. Um, did you grow up with brothers and sisters?

Nicks: My mother did have a previous baby girl that died; that barely got born and didn't live a day; you might say basically that I was the oldest one, and I had one brother. So there were two of us in the family, myself and my younger brother, who was three and a half years younger. His name was William; Bill of course. And my nickname when I was growing up was the June, J-U-N-E for Junior, because I was Ben Nicks Jr. I was named after my father. So my nickname was

June, my brothers nickname was Bill. So, growing up, we were known as Bill and June, June and Bill, and uh, well I've already said it.

Cohen: What kind of work did your father do?

Nicks: He worked in a foundry, an iron foundry that made railroad wheels for box cars. Uh, you know, box cars traveled on iron wheels, and as a matter of fact, he was killed in an industrial accident in that shop, in 1951. So, but his job was in a foundry that made railroad wheels for box cars.

Cohen: And was your mother working or was she taking care of you?

Nicks: Oh, ho, ho. Oh. Was my mother working? Well, Leah, I can tell right now you're not very old. [Laughter] Women didn't work before the war; didn't you know that?

Cohen: I did know that, but sometimes I've been totally surprised - that's why I …

Nicks: Women did not work, but a few of them did. When I say few, it meant a very few did, but uh, when the war came along, that provided… the war took so many men out of working in business - to be in the military, there were fifteen million soldiers wearing the uniform I would say, in World War II, and women started to work in World War II, and then continued ever on, and it's gone on and gotten on to the point where women work, expect to work, and do work. Just like the man, but it wasn't like that back before the war. My mother did not work. She never worked in her life, ever.

Cohen: Okay, and um, was your father, or any other relative in the military?

Nicks: No, my father was not, but I had an uncle, I had two. Two had, I had two uncles in the American Army, and several cousins of course, and of course my brother entered the army after I did. When he got to be about twenty years old, he joined the army and he wound up flying as a bombardier on B-17s in England, against the Luftwaffe, and so it just so happened that in January... in 1944, starting in January 1944, my family, my mother, and my father, had one son flying B-29s against Japan in the Pacific, and one son flying as a bombardier on B-17s out of England, against the German Luftwaffe, and it took me, I don't know how long before I finally realized what kind of a pressure that was on my family, but there were a lot of families that had the same pressure.

Cohen: Yeah, I would think that would be a lot of pressure with both sons in combat.

Nicks: And Bill, by the way, uh, was shot down twice. His air craft was shot down, down twice. Both times they crash landed behind their own line, and there on one of

those, he was wounded, in the leg, spent two weeks in the hospital. He got out of the hospital, and went back to flying missions again. I've got a letter from him here somewhere, where he wrote and told me that he didn't want to go back, but he was going back.

Cohen: Before we go on, did you want to get a drink of water, because I'll wait?

Nicks: Oh, all right.

[8:21- 9:03 Brief Break]

Cohen: When you were in high school, how aware were you of world events or the rise of Nazi Germany, you know?

Nicks: Well, you mean, what did I know or what did I think of the war going on?

Cohen: Yeah, like even before the draft started?

Nicks: Well yes, of course, even the United States didn't get in the Army until Pearl Harbor day, so I was completely in and out of high school. Let's see, I graduated from grade school in 1932. I graduated from high school in 1936, and I graduated from college in 1940. Well of course, up until 1936 there was no war going on. Actually, I, well, I'll have to speculate here, I don't remember thinking anything particular about the situation in Europe, course, Hitler was coming on, but, "What the hell, who's Hitler?" Now, from 1936 to 1940, then the War started, the war started in about '37 didn't in? Something like that? Or was it '39? '39! I was in college in '39. By then, the political situation in the world, and especially in Europe, had gotten so dangerous that they started the war, that Hitler told Neville Chamberlain that we're going to have peace. And Chamberlain went back to England. Germany moved into Austria and took over. We knew vaguely things like that. Well, when I got, in 19... the War was going on when I graduated in 1940, and uh, I uh, I got a little job, oh, an office boy job working for the United Press in Kansas City, Missouri, and uh, and uh, the draft, the American Army draft came in. I think it was in November of 1940... in the fall of 1940, and I had a very low draft number, and my boss called me and he talked to me and he says, "Why don't you get your year over with, and come back and we'll see how it goes." I think he fired me, but I won't... the bottom line was, yeah I enlisted in the draft to get my one year over with, and I was in the military service in January of 1941. That was my... my service started in January of 1941, and uh, I think, I think... didn't I already tell you I was in the 35th Division out of Little Rock?

Cohen: You did, and just to back up a little bit. What did you study in college?

Nicks: Uh, well, the reason, I went, I went from... The high school that I was in was a Catholic parish grade school, and a Catholic parish high school in Shawnee, Kansas, and the priest there, he got me enrolled up at St. Benedict's College, and that's just in Kansas. Now that is a Catholic monastery college, classical college, and total between the high school and…He got me enrolled up there, he says, "Why don't you think you becoming a priest?" I had never thought of that before, so I says, "Well okay." I was getting up and the tuition fee was extremely low, $200, a year. Think that over, and see what your authorities would say when you say that, but anyway. Anyway, I spent one year up there, and then I told the college... while I was up there, that priest that sent me up there, he died. Yeah, unfortunately, he died. And so I told them I didn't want to become a priest, so they took me out of that but they left me in college for a regular classical education. Now between the high school and college, I took five years of Latin, two years of French, two years of Greek, and uh I majored in English, and I minored in Medieval History. So that was my educational background.

Cohen: Interesting. So you finished college and on January, 1941, you decide to enlist, so was it possible to enlist for one year? Is that what you were told at the time?

Nicks: Oh yeah, the draft was for a one-year term in the army and that's what I enlisted in under those terms. However, when I signed in, I was signed into the army in January of 1941, in Leavenworth, Kansas. And uh, the army post is a big, you know, or maybe you don't know, there was, is, and still is a big army post at Leavenworth, Kansas, and they put some papers in front of me and said, "Here, you want to sign these?" "Well, okay," and I signed them. I didn't know that when I signed it that it was an application to transfer over to the Army Air Force. So I was up in the... I was up in the 35th Division. That's a National Guard Infantry division from... January of 1944, and we all had various jobs. Eh, oh, I belong... in this army division, I wound up in the artillery regiment, and so I got to go out and watch them shoot the gun, and hide behind the tree and watch them shoot. In June of 1941, that transfer came through transferring me to the Army Air Force. Well, I had forgotten I had signed it. That's alright with me. I wasn't particularly happy with running around on the ground, firing field artillery rounds, but okay. Uh, from there, uh, I was transferred to a place called Sikeston, Missouri, S-I-K-E-S-T-O-N, I'm sure you never heard of it. It's down in, Missouri has a little boot heel way down south way over to the east. You remember the outline of the state of Missouri? A little boot heel way over east, way down south, sticked down in Arkansas there. And Sikeston is there, and that's where I took my preliminary flight training. First time I had ever been in an airplane in my life, although my family and I, they used to take us out to Kansas City Airport, watch airplanes fly and take off. We didn't do that. So I knew what an airplane was, and that's about all, and from Sikeston, Missouri, for primary training.

Cohen: So were you happy to be out of the field artillery battery and start to train in air craft? Was it a change that you welcomed, after the fact?

Nicks: I don't understand your question, what was that?

Cohen: Were you happy to be training as a pilot in Sikeston, Missouri, rather than being in the field artillery?

Nicks: Oh yeah, I liked that. I liked that, and uh, besides, that was a lot higher classification. I was only a buck private while I was in the 35th Division back in Arkansas, and I knew that if I was successful in this flight training I would commission as an officer. I knew that. Yeah sure, I liked it. Well anyway, after I finished primary training at Sikeston, Missouri, I transferred to Randolph Field in San Antonio, Texas. Now I got a hunch you may have heard of Randolph Field in San Antonio. That was a big Army Air Force Base and still is, and so I went there. It was about November of 1941, that I went there. And while I was there, I was taking basic training, then. I took primary training at Sikeston, took basic training at Randolph Field San Antonio, and while I was there, I got in touch with my brother. Wrote him and called him, and made arrangements that I was going to take my Christmas leave back home. I hadn't had a leave since I'd been in the army. Well, it wasn't quite a year. Anyway, hadn't been home, hadn't seen, but I got together with Bill and we agreed that I would catch a train back to the Union Station in Kansas City, and he would pick me up and drive me out home to Shawnee, and surprise my folks for a Christmas holiday while on leave.

[21:27]

Cohen: Sounds good.

Nicks: Yeah, that was very good. Uh, oh by the way, let's see, when was it? December 6th, 1941. Is that right?

Cohen: I think you're saying a Christmas 1941?

Nicks: No, this was 1941. Well, I'm trying to kid you a little bit, what I said was, I was planning to take my leave, we all knew we were going to get a leave, and so I got together with Bill early in December and on December 6th [7th] 1941, the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor, God, I thought everybody knew that.

Cohen: I thought you were trying to recall when your brother met you to go back to surprise your parents. Okay, yes, I did know that, thank you.

Nicks: Well, maybe I did tell you, I don't know. So the point is I did not get my... Oh well, the first thing is, the whole military says, all discharges are cancelled,

nobody gets discharged from the military for no reason at all. That's the first thing they said. So, the year that I had enlisted to get over with stretched out to be five years before it was over. But well, that's life, you know. And anyway, I didn't get to go home, and I completed my basic training at uh, at uh, Randolph Field in Texas, and then moved over to Brooks Field, B-R-O-O-K-S it's also in San Antonio, for advanced training.

[23:17]

Cohen: Before we go on, can I ask you, what was the difference between the training that you did; like the basic training, and primary?

Nicks: Between primary, basic, and advanced, that's what they were. Primary, basic, advanced; Sikeston, Randolph Field, Brooks Field, and then, well, we took the primary training in PT-18's, and we took the basic training in BT-13's, and we took the Advanced training in AT-6's. I mean, if you have any acquaintance with aircraft, you probably know what they are and what they look like, but those were trainers. The advanced... The basic [i.e., primary] training was the PT-18. The basic training was the BT, that B like in baker T— basic training— 13, and the advance trainer was in the famous AT-6, which today is still flown around by a lot of people.; the AT-6, the Advanced Trainer 6, is still active around, aviation around the United States, maybe around the world. It was a very good plane, and that's what we learned how to fly advanced training. Well, it was just different classes of training. Basic training was learning how to fly, how to get the thing to [go] forward, how to take it off, and come around, and land gently. That's basic training, I mean that's primary training. Primary training was learning how to fly. Basic training was learning how to do certain maneuvers. Loops, for instance, we were taught how to do loops, and bank sharply, and recover from a spin. And advanced training, we learned how to fly in formation. It was just different grades of aviation flying, which I'm not sure you'd be interested in describing. That's not what you're going to want to do anyway, but that was the three differences in the three trainings. And then another thing just by the sides, my primary life. While I was in basic training at Randolph Field, I met a girl in San Antonio, met her... they used to have a ball for the cadets, we were aviation cadets, by the way. The Gunter Hotel in San Antonio, G-U-N-T-E-R. That's still there, but up on the top floor, they'd have a dance every Saturday night for the cadets, from both Randolph and Brooks Field, and one of those night meetings I met this girl. They told the girls, "Come in, and have a dance with the boys," and they sure did. There were a lot of them there, and I met this girl, and, eventually, I became acquainted with her, and after I graduated from Brooks Field in March of 1942, I graduated and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant Pilot in the Air Force. And in April, I married this girl, she spent the rest of the war with me, the rest of her life, and our lives together with me for sixty more years.

Cohen: Beautiful.

Nicks: But anyway, after I graduated and got my wings, uh I spent a few weeks, maybe a month, while they decided where I was going to go. My first military assignment, in a tactical outfit in the Army Air Force was a Reconnaissance Squadron in El Paso, Texas, at Biggs B-I-G-G-S Field. Biggs Field, El Paso, Texas, and our mission there, of for more than a year was flying border patrol from, oh what the hell is that city on the Gulf of Mexico, uh over to Douglas, Arizona... From Douglas, Arizona down to... Can you think of that city name down there? Hold on a minute I might get that, if you hold on a minute I'll get you that city.

[28:54-29:37 Brief break]

Cohen: I think it's Brownsville, right?

Nicks: Yes, it is. I just looked it up.

Cohen: Me too.

Nicks: Oh, you're quicker on a computer than I am. Anyway, from Brownsville, Texas to Douglas, Arizona, that was the mission of the 1st, of the 120th Reconnaissance. That was the outfit I was in; the 120th Reconnaissance outfit and we fly old observation planes for almost a year, watching the border to make sure that the Germans did not cross that and get into the United States, and uh...

Cohen: Pardon my ignorance, but was there a suspicion that, like, Mexico would allow for German troops to infiltrate the US border?

Nicks: We had absolutely... well, I'll speak for the whole outfit. We had absolutely no idea about that, and didn't particularly--[unintelligible] but I'm sure if the Germans had wanted to get into Mexico and cross into the border, they wouldn't have asked Mexico permission to do it. So the bottom line is, actually, the Germans, they weren't that strong. They could not come over on the, and have any military operation. We didn't know that and finally, after maybe a year, I guess the military... the American military decided the same thing, [and] said, "We don't need these guys, let's send them somewhere else." And so in the middle of 1942, no early '43, I was, I was transferred to Florida to learn, to get checked out on the big bombers, the B-17s, and that's what I did in 1943.

Cohen: When you were still doing reconnaissance along the Mexico border between Texas and Arizona, was your wife nearby?

Nicks: Oh, yes. Let me say that when I married her in August, er April 19th, '42, she accompanied me on all of my trips around the United States until I left the

United States and went to the Pacific. And that was from 1942 to 1944. Yeah, so I went, I was transferred to Florida where I checked out on uh, on the B-17, the heavy bomber plane, and while I was down there, on one of the flights, on one of the training flights, the number two engine caught fire and the instructor pilot, he ordered all of us to bail out, and which we did, and as we bailed out over Florida. I think there were five of us, all told. The engine fell off the plane, and he managed to land it with three engines on it, and we who bailed out, made our way back to the air base and checked in again. So that was one of my interesting experiences at that time, bailing out. And after that, uh, I was sent with several of us, well, we were sent to Boise, Idaho. I don't know why, they just sent us to Boise, Idaho, and uh... I recall the five of us, we made our way on the train, you know, there were no airlines operating to speak of those days, we went on the train to Boise, Idaho, and I recall the five of us went into the airport at Boise, where the army base was... where the Army Air Force based as stationed, and they sent three of four of us, three of us I think, down to a place called Mountain Home, Idaho. Well, you might have heard of Mountain Home, I don't know. That's about sixty miles from Boise; southeast of Boise. So I can still recall the three of us coming in and uh, checking in with the uh, operations office there, where the captain was sitting at the desk, there. He said, "Boy am I glad to see you three guys." He says, "We've been waiting. We aren't open very long" We may have been the first to be dispatched, "We sure have been waiting for our B-24 instructors to come along." And we looked at each other, "Well, sir, we're B-17s." None of us had ever... Well, we knew there was a B-24, but that was all, none of us had ever touched one. And he, the captain looked up, "Hey, you were sent here as B-24 instructors, and you're going to be B-24 instructors. I'll check you out myself." He says, "Grab a chute over there and go out and find... There's a few places taking off for night flights. Go out and get on and ride around for a little experience." [Laughter] Oh so I grabbed a chute and there were the coal burring fire there, this must have been, well, in the winter time of 1943, and a coal burning fire and a stack of parachutes. I grabbed one, went out and walked up to one of the B-24s that were there and asked for the captain. He'd come up, I'd say he was about an eighteen-year-old kid, and I says, "I'm your instructor tonight, let's get in and take a flight." He says, "Yes, sir." So, okay, they all piled in and I started to get into the B-24, and I didn't know how to get in. I could not get into the B-24. Well, the B-17 is a tricycle shaped airplane...fuselage, and you could get in the rear end just like you would an ordinary plane today, a tricycle shape, but the B-24, no the B-17 was two wheels, not three. The B-24 had three wheels, a nose wheel, and that put the rear end of the B-24 up in the air. [Nicks later clarified: The B-17 is a tail-wheel aircraft and the entrance is toward the back whereas the B-24 is a nose wheel aircraft and the entrance is at the bottom of the aircraft through the open bomb bay doors. This required climbing up a short ladder against the front wall of the interior bomb bay.] I didn't know how to get in the plane. Well, I watched carefully, and they all got underneath the bomb bay and they climbed up the latter inside and I

followed them. I followed them all up, got up, the guy had; Captain says "Want to take off sir?" "No," I say, "I'm here just to watch. Go ahead." So they did. I watched them how they took off, made three or four circles, came back, and landed, and uh, and that was it. That was my first flight in a B-24, which I was the instructor. Well, the captain didn't check me out. Later on, he died in a midair collision of two B-24s; poor guy. He was a nice guy. I can't think of his name, I could if you need it, but I don't think you need it. Well, uh, and... That started me on a tour of being a B-24 instructor in the United States. My wife being my wife, was with, with me all the time, all the time. She carried all of her goods in one suitcase and I carried mine in another one. We lived in Boise because there was no place to live Mountain Home, just no place at all, and uh, uh... The captain, that operations captain there fixed it so we would work maybe three days, and have the rest of the week off, we worked double shifts. Instead of working a night hour shift, where you worked a twelve or sixteen-hour shift, and take two or three instructor flights, and so that was how we started [as] B-24 instructors...

Cohen: So sorry. So just to, it's all very interesting, I'm just wondering, was the plane very different aside from the door, and the number of wheels? Was the B-24 very different than the B-17?

Nicks: Well, yes it was. The first thing is a B-24 had what they called a Davis Air Foil, Davis Air Foil, that's the wing, and it was longer and narrower than the B-24 [i.e., B-17] wing. I don't know if you want to get into things like that, but that was one of the things that was wrong with it, and it did have a little better engines, although they were touchier than the B-17. And the B-24 was a better aircraft than the B-17. The B-24 could carry a heavier bomb load. It could fly faster. It could fly higher. It could fly further. And the only thing that the B-17 had that the B-24 did not have, was a good publicity agent. Because everybody's heard of the B-17, I'll bet you've heard of a B-17.

Cohen: I have. In fact, I told somebody about the interview today and they said, "Did this gentleman fly B-17?"

Nicks: Well, then actually, there were a lot more of them made. I think there were about uh, 12,000 B-24s made, and a little over 2,000 B-17s made.[1] They made a lot more B-17s [B-24s] too. Anyway, uh, we went to different bases in the United States, mostly in the West. It was in the second... The 2nd Air Force... the 2nd Army Air Force I think it was, I forget the number on it, but it was a training outfit that moved me around to lots of bases. We go and maybe spend five or six weeks there, four or five weeks depending, and then go on to another base, and my wife went with me all along, and then... One time, I got orders to go to Clovis, New Mexico, and to, what for? To check out on a B-29. Well we heard the B-29

[1] According to Airplanesofthepast.com, there were 18, 493 B-24s and 12,731 B-17s built during World War II.

was coming. It wasn't there, but it was coming and we heard lot about it. And here I was, sent down to Clovis, New Mexico to get checked out and I did. I went down to Clovis, New Mexico. That would have been in, about, May... April or May, 1944, and uh, I check out of the B-17... B-29 there, and then was sent up to McCook, Nebraska, and that's where I was assigned to the, I think, the 1st Squadron?

Cohen: Is this the 1st Heavy Bomber Squadron of the 9th Bomber Group?

Nicks: That's it.

Cohen: The 313th Wing. The 20th Air Force?

Nicks: That's the outfit I was attached to right there. Well, up at McCook, I spent the rest of 1944 training. And the Training on B-29s was um, it was handicapped because they didn't have enough B-29s to do the training. And we were there flying and we did a lot of our B-29 training actually in B-17s. Uh, so, but anyway, we finally did get trained. And I went up to McCook in June, 1944... no, June... Yeah, June of 1944, and uh, spent all of the rest of the year there, and then in January of '45 we were sent overseas. Earlier, I think I made a mistake earlier, that I said that, me and my brother Bill were both flying against the enemy in 1944, January. That's not right. It's in January of 1945 that we were both flying against the enemy. I missed that, wrong. But anyway, in January of 1945, the 1st Bomb squadron, the 9th Bomb Group, actually we really were working as a group, down as three squadrons. We were one of the squadrons in the 9th Bomb Group. We were sent to the Pacific to the Tinian Island in the Marians. Tinian, in the Marians Islands, in the Pacific. That was about 110 miles northeast of Guam, and that's where we went there. And we went there in middle or late January of 1945, to start fighting the Japs.

Cohen: Before you being, and this is all very important, could you tell me a little about the training, like what were the other tasks that you had to learn once you were at the McCook Army Air Field, like to be a bomber and so on? I think you mentioned that you were trained as a bombing commander, do you have to take on more leadership there? What was it like?

Nicks: Well, wait a minute. I don't think I understand your question; can you say that again?

Cohen: Oh I'm sorry, yeah. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the training at the McCook Army Airfield in Nebraska.

Nick: Well, the first thing we did was learn how to fly the plane. It was a little bit more difficult to fly than the B-24 or the B-17. The B-17 was the easiest to fly, from a

control point, and the strength you needed to have to operate the controls. So that was the first thing, and the second thing on the... the additional training that we had to do on the B-29 was the crew. I was the pilot, all right, and I was training the pilot but, hell. We had navigators, and bombardiers, radar operators, radio operator, gunners. They needed to be trained to, so a lot of our training as pilots was to go up and take them around while they did their training. And then we did do a lot of formation flying practicing, too. So uh, I don't know if that answers your question or not.

Cohen: It does, and how did you work, you as the pilot work with the others? Like did you have radios, radio communication between you?

Nicks: Well, let me also bring up a very embarrassing subject. The Army Air Force says early on, they says, "You know, we called the flight crew in a bomber, a pilot and a co-pilot. A pilot and a co-pilot, but you know, the B-29, that's a better airplane, we can't just have a pilot and a co-pilot on board. I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to have an aircraft commander fly it, and the pilot." They say. Instead of having a pilot and a co-pilot like the rest of the world did, the B-29 ended up with and aircraft commander and a pilot. The same things. The aircraft commander really was the pilot and the pilot of the B-29 really was the co-pilot. And ever since that time, there has been confusion running rampant over who did what. He said he was a pilot on the B-29. Well does that mean blah, blah, blah was he a co-pilot? So that particular stupid decision by the United States Army Air force has confused who the hell was flying the B-29 ever since. And that's... I haven't gotten into the habit of using the air craft commander title because that's actually what it was at that time, and the people who I was with, my buddies and all that, of course they're all dead now, but anyway, we knew what we were saying. And we had to be careful, oh, he's an aircraft commander, he must be at least a full general. Well, no. I got promoted to captain over there but… [Laughter] Anyway, that's it. And I was in command of a crew. I was the crew commander although I didn't have to do much commanding. In fact, I can't think I'm doing any commanding. The difference between the commissioned officers and the enlisted men was significant in the Army. They weren't buddies. I was buddies with several of the other air craft commanders and pilots, my own for instance. We got along fine, uh from a command point of view goes; I never had any trouble, at all, with any command of the crew. They may not have... I know there were lots of things they thought I was doing wrong and the guys could tell it. One of them, for instance, was when we were doing night flying, when we were doing night flying, uh, and there'd would be... See other aircraft there, the bomb, the gunners in the rear of the plane, they were going to shot at him, and I kept telling them, "Don't shoot that maybe one of our planes, let him shoot first at you." Well, they didn't like that. I know they didn't like that. They didn't rebel or anything but I knew they didn't like it and they didn't obey it either. They would shoot at anything they saw in the air. By the time we got

there the Japs' air force was just about ruined. It had been shot out of the skies. So I was never afraid of being attacked or suffering any damage from Japanese Air Force. They didn't have the tools to do it anymore, really. They still had the good anti-craft on the ground, though. That's what I was more afraid of. And really, more than anything else, I was awful leery of our own motors and our own engines, and our own B-29s. They were very touchy. Wright-Patterson 3350 are what they were, and they were very touchy. In fact, when we went over there, we could only get two-hundred hours per engine out of it, then they had to change it. Well, it's... That's barely around the corner.

Cohen: What would you do... would you make stops? How would you manage with one engine if it only went two-hundred miles?

Nicks: Say that again, will you?

Cohen: Sorry. You mentioned that the B-29ss had a touchy engine, and that it only went about two-hundred miles?

Nicks: No, no, no, two-hundred hours. Well and then, they changed the engine on the ground because it was worn out.

Cohen: Okay, I see.

Nicks: That was up to maintenance and we had, and in our group in the 9th Bomb Group, we had about, let's see, uh, we had about five-hundred aircrew members, and about fifteen-hundred or maybe even two-thousand ground operators, maintenance men and suppliers and everything else. And so, that was their job, for instance, to change the engine. And as I say it was a Wright, W-R-I-G-H-T, 3350. That was the name of the engine and it was touchy. Yeah, in fact, we lost at least one plane because of engine failure on take-off. I think we lost at least another one and we had several flights after – they had to return. They had to scrub their mission and come back because the engine that failed in flight.

Cohen: So you're in the Pacific and you say your first stop was in Tinian in the Marianas?

Nicks: Well, that was where we landed. Another was... We went to California, and then California to Hawaii, and Hawaii to Kwajalein. And uh, I don't know if you heard of Kwajalein or not. That's K-W-A-J-A-L-E-I-N.

Cohen: I've seen the name but I don't know if I... yeah.

Nicks: Kwajalein. Yeah. And then to the Marianas. We stopped in those places, along the way, if that was what you were asking.

Cohen: Was Tinian the island that had an air field that you used for your missions?

Nicks: Ah, the air base, the 20th Air Force Air Base was in the Pacific. Well there was three islands. There was Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. And Saipan and Tinian were in what they call the Marianas group, and Guam was a little bit south. I'd show ya. Saipan was a bigger island, but Tinian provided more flat space, that you could put more airfields on. Um, Saipan had one field and it only had two runways on it. Tinian had two air fields and the one we were in was called, the North Field and that had four runways, and it also had a west field which had two runways. And down at Guam they had one airfield. It was two runways. And as I say, that really made Tinian, Tinian was uh, provided more space for more aircraft landings than the other two islands, and that's where we were at; Northfield at Tinian.

Cohen: Okay, so you mentioned in the emails the different types of missions of the thirty missions. Do you want to talk about that, please?

Nicks: Okay. Remember I said that back in training, part of our training was formation flying? Okay that's one of them, and we did have... that was for dropping heavy bombs; high-explosive, HE: high explosive bombs. They weighed around two-thousand pounds and we even had one mission where we had four-thousand pound, high explosive bombs. And those were dropped in formation and we started out by flying those at about twenty-five or twenty-six thousand feet. Then we dropped down later to about eighteen or nineteen thousand and sometimes, even as low as twelve thousand. Flying in formation. Um, and then we also had incendiaries. Those were fire bombs; incendiaries. Those were flown at night at about five thousand feet, and not in formation. Just single planes at night. And then there were the mining missions where we dropped mines in the water to sink their ships; their cargo ships, and their fighting ships. Those were also dropped at night, so... Most of them are, I counted, I flew about twelve formation missions, and then about fifteen or so, maybe more, nighttime missions. They changed over; our daylight flight missions and heavy bombs weren't doing any good. We uh, well they just were no good. You couldn't hit the target at all, and that's General Lemay... Curtis Lemay, I don't know if you've ever heard of him or not. Curtis, C-U-R-T-I-S, L-E-M-A-Y. Curtis Lemay, and his nickname was Iron Ass, and he was... the first thing he did when he came over there in April, in March, was to stop the missions, and then he reordered them but we went over to night flying, incendiary, and bombing, and mining missions, and from then on most of our missions were really night missions. Well, some bombing missions at night, but that means only one third of our missions were flown in formation at night, the rest of them are all in the... goddamn it, were formation missions in the daytime, formation high explosive missions in the daytime, and the other two thirds were all night time, on either incendiary or mining missions.

Cohen: So why...

Nicks: In fact our last mission that I told you about, oh on August the 6th, was to Korea, now North Korea, uh and that was a night time mining mission there.

Cohen: In fact your friend, this Mr. Ashland wrote in an email, I don't know if it was to you or to Tom, that he thought it was the longest of the mining missions. Like nineteen hours, is that correct?

Nicks: What mission was nineteen hours?

Cohen: That mission to Korea?

Nicks: Well, yes, we landed in Iwo Jima. That was on a non-stop mission. Uh, we flew to uh, we flew to Iwo Jima, and fueled up, then we flew to Korea, and came back and landed at Iwo Jima again. I think it went almost twenty-one hours, but maybe it was nineteen, but I forget now. But anyway, it was a not non-stop mission both ways. That was the only mission that we were scheduled to stop at Iwo Jima. We did stop on Iwo Jima a total of seven times, but that was the only one that was scheduled. The other two, the other two uh, yeah, those were the only two scheduled, the rest of them, just in order to refuel, to play it safe, make sure we can get back to our home base on Tinian.

Cohen: I think you also said that your August 6th mission was your last one, since this was when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, is that correct?

Nicks: Well, yes. We flew our thirty-fifth, and last mission on the same day that they dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Actually we went to Korea and came back, and coming back to Iwo Jima, and they dropped the bomb after we came back the second time, and when we landed at Iwo Jima, we fueled up and headed back towards home, in uh, Tinian, and we got a radio report from the radio back on Saipan that the Army has announced that they've dropped a big bomb on Hiroshima that was going to end the war, and we looked at each other, and we looked it up and then discovered, "Hey, we probably came within fifty miles of Hiroshima, there." It wasn't involved in it, it just happened to be at the same time that they dropped the bomb. Now that is true.

Cohen: So when you returned to you home base at Tinian...

Nicks: What's that again?

Cohen: So August 6th you hear the report on the radio from Saipan, and then you return, I suppose, to Tinian?

Nicks: Oh yeah we're, oh, Tinian and Saipan, they're only a mile apart. So, the radio actually was on Saipan; that was the radio for the Marianas Islands group, was on Saipan, but of course we listened to it on Tinian. It was our radio too. But that's, the radio actually was on Saipan. By the way, when I said we dropped those mines in North Korea... in Korea, damn it, it wasn't North Korea, then. We dropped our mines in Korea, the little place that we dropped them on was a little port called Rashin, R-A-S-H-I-N, and that was an important port for the Japanese, because that was where they loaded a lot of their cargo ships that brought food back to Japan. That's where they would load up and come back, and fly and fly back to Japan, and sail back to Japan. So we put the mines in there to stop them, and that's why we dropped a lot of mines in what they call the Inland Sea in Japan. If you remember your map of Japan, they've got four islands around and they form a little sea in-between them, called the Inland Sea, and we dropped... In fact, most, I'd say all of our mines were dropped there in the Inland Sea excepting that one trip to Rashin. We did a lot of flying over the Inland Sea during the ending days of the war.

Cohen: Did you drop the mines in the passages to the Inland Sea as well? Like the, I forget the name, the Shimonoseki Straits?

Nicks: Well, we uh, we tried to drop...We dropped them in the shipping lanes rather than in the ports. Inland Sea is only a couple hundred feet deep at the most, and uh, and so they would work anyplace if you dropped them in the Inland Sea. We tried to drop them near some of the cities that we knew there, I can't think of their names, but anyway, uh, it was just a matter of getting them into the water. The Shimonoseki Straits that you mentioned, yeah. We put a lot of mines in there because they were only a couple miles wide and the Japs didn't have any options, they had to go through, in fact did. Towards the end of, they just sailed their boats... they knew there were mines there but they sailed them anyway, and they lost a lot of them that way too.

Cohen: You know, earlier you mentioned something that I had a question about. You said, at the beginning there were a lot of day flights in formation with the very heavy bombs and then General Lemay said to stop doing them. So why, what was the problem, why did they keep missing the targets, and what were the targets?

Nicks: Well, the targets, that's a good question. The targets were generally, they tried to drop them on maintenance bases, manufacturing bases, that would manufacture military equipment, um, war ship ports, uh...anyone that made battleships or anything, make tanks or anything, so they had a fair idea where these manufacturing plants were so it didn't do any good to just go in and throw them out over Tokyo. Yeah, and on the other hand, when you went to drop

incendiary bombs on Tokyo you throw them out anywhere, within a general area and they worked, so that's one of the reasons. One of the reasons hitting a small target from twenty-thousand feet and flying in formation, that's a difficult thing to do, and we weren't doing it. Most of our, as a matter of fact, our very first flight up there, I can remember that. We were at twenty-nine thousand feet, we had just gone past Mt. Fuji, you know, that famous mountain up there with the snow on the top of the peak. Uh, headed towards Tokyo, and the bombardier turns around and looks at me and he said, "Ben, this plane don't go that fast." I said, "Huh?" He says, "We're going over 350 miles an hour." And he says, "We don't go that fast." Well what had happened is, we didn't know it, nobody knew it at the time, but we were caught in what they call today, they call it the jet stream, but nobody knew that there was a jet stream at that altitude, and that flying at that speed... So we got, we were caught in the jet stream, and Phil the Bombardier looks around and he told me, and I'll never forget the look on his face when he says, "Ben, this plane don't go that fast." Well, we dropped... The squadron... The formation dropped every bomb it owned in the off shore in the water. Didn't even hit the land. Yeah, so that's one of the reasons General Lemay says, "We're going to think this over for a week." Actually, he thought it over for, I think, two weeks before we had the first big incendiary, I mean it was not only a big one, it was the biggest one during the whole war, that first March 15. That's when it was. Incendiary mission on Tokyo, well, the officially, United States Army Air Force report says that 80, 000 casualties resulted, and those were men women and children, you know. The Japanese says, 120,000 casualties occurred. So that first incendiary mission really sent the signal out that we were going to fly more of these and we did all over. We did have one other incendiary missions that had big tolls, death tolls and that, but none like that first one on March 15th.

Cohen: Okay so this was supposed to be like, almost like a warning to the Japanese or to push them to surrender? So was the idea behind the first?

Nicks: Wait, I can't hear you.

Cohen: Sorry. Was the purpose of the first incendiary mission to scare the Japanese?

Nicks: Hey, Leah, you must be away from the telephone, your voice has gone down.

Cohen: Oh okay, one second, let me try again, hang on. Okay, one moment please. Okay, can you hear me better now?

Nicks: Not really, are you back away from the telephone?

Cohen: I don't think so, is this any better?

Nicks: There, that was better there. Talk louder.

Cohen: I will, I'm sorry. Was the purpose of the first incendiary mission to scare the Japanese and encourage them to surrender?

Nicks: Well, partly, yeah, but really, no. The Japanese have a lot of industry around there that had workers that lived around the place. They were all workers in their war machine really, and again, it was the civilian population that supported their— that eventually supports their military, so it's, that's, of course, that's a question that today is still being argued about, "Should you attack civilians in the war?" Well, uh, that's just a hypothetical, philosophical question. When war comes, civilians are going to get attacked; period. And so it's hard to say following their thinking on it, but was really an attempt to stop their manufacturing process by stopping their workers, and it seemed to work pretty good too.

Cohen: You know, in the emails that you sent to Tom a few years again, either you or one of the uh, or somebody you knew talked about the Norden bombsight [i.e. a device that measured the aircraft's ground speed and direction whereas older bombsights required lengthy procedures]. Could you explain what that was supposed to do and why...?

Nicks: That was just the technical name for a bombsight, and it happened to be the Norden, that was the name of it. There may have been others, but I think the United States Army Air Force relied almost entirely on the Norden bombsight, and I don't know the technical issues involved except that it was a bombsight. What more can I say? I don't know anything more specific than that. It just happened to be the name of it. Uh, well, it's attached to a project, the Lockheed Constellation, for instance.

Cohen: I think though, you're saying that it wasn't efficient, and I was wondering what that meant.

Nicks: It wasn't what?

Cohen: Efficient. It was not efficient or it did not work well.

Nicks: What is that? What didn't work well?

Cohen: The bombsight?

Nicks: Oh, no I never said that. No it's... Well, it worked as well as it could, I mean, I don't remember ever saying, I thought it was efficient. No I... it may have been

or may have not have been, today probably they wouldn't even think of using it. I don't know I can't answer that question.

Cohen: Oh that's okay, that's fine. [1:15:20] Is there another specific mission that stands out in your mind?

Nicks: Yeah, the one that I was... I think of it the most, that I appreciate the most, was the where we uh, one where we followed a bomber, a formation— we were on one of those formation flights that I'm telling you about— that uh, over Shikoku, an island that's one of the islands in Japan. S-H-I-K-O-K-U, Shikoku. And the ship next to us was one, the captain on that, the aircraft commander on it was a guy named Brown; Eugene Brown. And uh, they got hit pretty hard, and so we were accompanying them from Japan back to Iwo Jima, and we followed them for oh, it's about three hundred miles or so from Japan to Iwo Jima, and they kept wandering around, our navigator kept following them, and we kept, "You're losing course. Go over there." They couldn't fly. "Find me the captain." The pilot called me and says, "We're going to have to abandon this, we can't control this, anymore." So all of them bailed out. Eleven of them bailed out. Later on, the other crew told us, that one of their chutes didn't open. It flared but it didn't open, and he was killed, and lost. The other ten, I can still remember seeing those chutes come out, looking down, seeing those little yellow rafts with a man in them floating around there, and we circled and we sent messages back to the rescue squad. The rescue subs were out, submarines were out, and we did that for a couple hours. Then when it started to get towards the dark, our radio communications failed. In those days, it would fail in the evening, early evening. So I took, I left them there and went to Iwo Jima, and landed and reported again everything we had said with our navigator's remarks. The navigator had gotten good position. Our radio man had gotten the message back, and the subs were already on their way. And the next day, a sub picked up ten of those guys. The ten guys, and two... they didn't take them right back home or land them. They stayed around for two weeks while the sub remained on salvage duty there, you might say. And when they finally got back, we heard from them and they seemed pretty soothed. And I'm glad we had a hand in saving ten guys on Gene Brown's crew, and that is the one mission that really sticks out in my mind as being the one that we all were proud of and we were proud of it.

Cohen: Really saving ten lives. [1:19:00] In one of the emails to Tom, um, somebody wrote that May 28th marked the loss of the crew of Lieutenant Stanley Black and his men. Were you familiar with this?

Nicks: Oh. he was my buddy. Uh, as I said, the, enlisted men had their buddies and the officers all had the enlisted, the commissioned officers all had theirs'. I had a couple and Stan Black probably was the one that was my biggest buddy, and that was the day... He was actually flying our plane. We all called... We'd get a

planned assigned to us—the same plane— and we'd all call it our plane. Well, it wasn't our plane. We didn't own the title to it, but anyway, their plane had been destroyed by one of those... Remember I said we had engine problems?

Cohen: Yes, I do remember.

Nicks: Black's plane had been destroyed by an accident, a takeoff accident when the engines failed, that killed the crew, and two or three guys on the ground too. And so, Black was flying our plane, flying on a mining mission to Shimonoseki Straights. Remember we were talking about that? Yeah, and that's where, and he never came back again. Later on, we found out that they had been shot down by anti-aircraft. One of the guys who didn't bail out was captured by the Japanese, then two weeks later they cut his head off. So that's was ah, that's one of the storied that I can tell ya about.

Cohen: That's very hard. While you were in the Pacific, just to change to a little bit of a lighter subject, were you able to write letters, like was there any mail delivery?

Nicks: Yes, yes we could, and they all would be censored, and not only that, the officers had to censor the letters of enlisted men. And I can tell ya this, I never read a letter, I must have done that a dozen or so, I never even opened or read them, I just marked them "Censored" okay. And I find out that all of the letters that I sent back, none of them were censored either. They were supposed to be censored but they weren't.

Cohen: That, on the whole, people trusted each other's good judgement, it sounds like. It sounds like you trusted you're enlisted men's good judgement.

Nicks: Well I guess, that wasn't the right thing to do, but I can tell you, I did it and a lot of other guys did to, so what more can I say?

Cohen: Um, some of them, some of the members of the 9th Bombers [i.e., Bombardment] Group mentioned hearing Tokyo Rose. Would you like to explain who she was and what she...?

Nicks: Oh, Tokyo Rose [laughter]. That was a propaganda radio program from Japan by a female speaker called, Tokyo Rose. Don't know what her name was. Anyway, we used to listen to her and laugh at her. She'd tell jokes, and she'd mention, "We know you're there and we're going to get ya." And of course we laughed at that too. Yeah, there was Tokyo Rose. I think that after the war, they were going to, the American military was going to execute her, and they changed their mind and forgot her completely. I'm not too much up to speed on it but that's my impression.

Cohen: Did you have any down time when you were there?

Nicks: Whoa, can't hear you again, speak louder.

Cohen: Oh okay, I think when I move the receiver even a little bit it makes a difference. [1:23:50] So my question is; did you have any downtime when you were in the Pacific? Like any time to relax?

Nicks: Have any what kind of flights?

Cohen: Any time to relax when you were...

Nicks: Relax, oh yeah. Lots of time. First place, well we had to make sure the weather over Tokyo was good and Japan would have a lot of cloudy weather, so yeah. And uh, it really was the weather over Japan would interfere with us, but we yeah, sometimes, I'd sometime would go for two weeks without any action. Yes, we did have, and they had, there were entertainment groups that came around. I can't remember the names of any of them, but they would come around and sing the music and that and they... A couple of baseball teams came around and played baseball for us. Uh, and we could read, we were supplied with reading books and that, and played poker. Yeah, played poker, we did have some... Men could go swimming too although Tinian did not have any good beaches to go swimming on. They were all a lot of rocks and that, and I went one time, didn't like it and never went again.

Cohen: Were you concerned that there were Japanese hiding on the Island?

Nicks: Yes, there were. When uh, the Army over ran the Marianas Islands, some of the troops especially on Tinian, escaped to the south part of the island, and hid out there, but they were not... they were there to hide. They weren't there to fight. As a matter of fact, one time, one time, one of our guys was in the, sitting in the privy, we had privy's dug there, and he was sitting in the privy doing his business, and a Japanese appeared by the front of him holding his hand up, saying, "Don't shoot, don't shoot." And later on, of course, that scared the hell out of the guy, but anyway when they got the guy corralled and sent off to the prisoner's camp, he told them, "Well I wanted to surrender but I was afraid they'd shoot me first so I figured he couldn't shoot me there." Yes, there were some Japanese there, and we did have little scouting teams. Not us, not the Air Force, but Army Infantry had some ground forces there, a few squads, not much. There'd be squads and patrols and they'd go out and hunt the islands for prisoners, and every once in a while, they would catch one or shoot one or something.

Cohen: Did you live in tents, or were there huts or houses?

Nicks: Uh, we first, the first time we were over there, first couple of weeks we were over there, we did live in tents. And then they, the civil engine... What the hell, they built us some Quonset huts, if you know what a Quonset hut is. That's that round shaped building, tin round shaped building, and they'd call that a Quonset hut. I forget what they called a civ... I can't think of the guys that did the building.

Cohen: Like the engineers, like the combat engineers?

Nicks: Yeah, that was it. The combat engineers, yeah, they built, well, they built the roads, they built those runways, those airports and runways we landed on, and anything that had to be built; roads, and Quonset huts, and uh, operations offices and all that. Yeah. Yeah.

Cohen: When you were in Tinian, were you allowed to go let's say to another island? Aside from the missions. Like, were you allowed to travel?

Nicks: No, well yeah I guess... Um I don't know. Well, I never did that. Uh, um, no we, I'm trying to think, no, I never did and I don't know anybody else that did either. They may have, but we had enough trouble supplying our own guys rather than supplying them for somebody else. So I would say no, we never did that.

Cohen: Yeah. How did people react when they heard the war was over?

Nicks: Oh, oh, oh. We had a nice drinking spell, I remember that. Well no, uh, I remember after, I, remember that last thirty-five missions I told you about, me and my co-pilot, we managed to get ourselves drunk that night, but the war wasn't over then. Uh, we got drunk cause our thirty-five missions were over with. We knew of course that we would get thirty-five... that we would get a thirty-day leave and then be called back to fight again. So, that's the way it was, but then of course, when the effect of the two nuclear bombs sank in and Japan surrendered, and, of course, the war was over then, but that didn't really happen 'til two or three weeks later, or after they, in fact even maybe a month later, the official surrender, I forget the exact date, aboard the Battleship Missouri.

Cohen: Yeah, um so, you wrote in your email that you were still in the army until January 1946.

Nicks: Yes, well, uh, when I came back, uh, I came back in August and uh, and in September, maybe October, I was out of uniform, the Army discharged me then, but I had pay, I had leave pay that I had never taken. So they put the date of my actual discharge technically when that, by paying me for my leave day and that was up in March, so actually, my official technical separation from the Army was

in March. I'm sorry, in uh January of 1946, but I was really out of the Army in October, and started working for TWA, in November.

Cohen: Oh, okay, where did you go to back to the States? Were you allowed to go directly where you wanted or did you have to go to a base?

Nicks: Oh no, no, no, actually I was assigned to an airport near Los Angeles. What the hell is the name of that airport? I can't think the name of it, but uh, I was assigned there, and then given a two week, uh no, a one week leave to go back to, to San Antonio to see my wife again, and by that time, Margaret was born. She was born in November... August I guess of 1944, so got back to see her. March Field in California. Uh, os that's where I was sent, and that's where the leave, I actually got leave, and, well, be out of the enemy for a week, maybe two weeks, something like that, but by the time I got back, it was obvious that the war was over. So, pretty soon I was discharged completely, as I say, and in November joined TWA.

Cohen: How did you find work at TWA, was it because of your flying experience?

Nicks: No, I did not. I didn't, I was uh, I did not want to fly a plane, anymore. I didn't think… I know I wasn't really good enough to do it. Uh, Uh, but I did, I did When I went to apply at TWA there was a guy there, that uh, that I had known from living form my folks living back in Kansas City, Kansas, and he was there and he got me a job as a ticket agent. Got a job as a ticket agent in the Muehlebach Hotel in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, and that started in November.

Cohen: Okay. So you began to get back to work right away?

Nicks: Yeah. Oh yeah. Well yeah, there was a hiring surge going on then. I mean they were changing over from military equipment to back to civilian equipment and that took some time and men, and so there was a job boom going on, and, anyway, I guess I lucked out. I got a job as a ground job, as a ticket agent for TWA. I spent three years doing that. About a year and a half at the Muehlebach Hotel, and another year and a half at the airport as a ticket agent at old MCI [Mid-Continent International] Airport.

Cohen: Your nephew wrote that you also worked as an editor for the TWA corporate magazine?

Nicks: Well that was later. Can you hear me?

Cohen: Yes, can you hear me?

Nicks: Well no, you keep driving down. Yes, after three years as a ticket agent, I got a job as the editor of the TWA employees' newspaper. It was an internal paper. Uh, just, there was an opening on it, and I applied for it, and I had had some experience with the United Press and writing letters for the... Writing letters, writing some little articles for the *Kansas City Star*. So I got the job and I had that for six years. Up until 1954.

Cohen: Okay, do you think that your experiences in the air force helped to prepare you for civilian life?

Nicks: Well, yes, uh, I uh, I learned that you got to, you have to stay in line and take orders. You can't run your own shop and give orders. You got to take them and I think that helped a lot. There are times I do things I don't want to do, now, well maybe not, this was a long time ago. Hell, this was more than seventy years ago. Yes, I'd say, yes. Is the military service good? And uh, you know, I think that Switzerland is a country where every man has got to serve a term in the military just for that reason. I think that might not be a bad idea. [Laughs]

Cohen: Yeah, to at least have a short draft. You know, your nephew wrote something that uh, that I don't totally understand. He said that in the 1990's, you had a prominent role in the protests against the contents of the atomic bomb exhibition at the Smithsonian.

Nicks: Yeah, that is right. The Smithsonian, got the plane that dropped [the atomic bomb], the Enola Gay, and they were preparing to display it, and they were going to display it around a view of all of the suffering people down there being killed by the job. In other words, they were fighting the anti-nuclear war that was common then and is still common today. Uh and, of course, those little – [unintelligible word] didn't add anything to it. We consider the atomic weapon, just exactly that, a weapon. Uh, they used to fight weapons with crossbows that were considered immoral because they were crossbows and too dangerous. So we protested to the Smithsonian and then they [said], "Well, we're going to…you know" and finally, the United States Government, House of Representatives. I can't think of the name of the guy down in Texas [Nicks later added: Sam Johnson]. [The] Texas representative on the board [was] investigating that. He got involved. And the bottom line was that Smithsonian backed up, and they displayed the Enola Gay without anything around it to indicate anything, other than this is the aircraft that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. And out at Marsh Field, whatever, I forget the name of the field out there now, where the Enola Gay is displayed, it still says that and nothing else. Yes, I was involved in that, and I'm glad that I was, but that was a minor incident, nothing too important.

Cohen: Yeah, okay. What was your views on the enemy...?

Nicks: I can’t hear you.

Cohen: What is your view on the enemy, at the time?

Nicks: I don't understand your question.

Cohen: What is your opinion of the Japanese who were the enemy during World War II?

Nicks: You mean my opinion of them, today?

Cohen: Both today and yesterday.

Nicks: Well, uh, I don't…Well, they were a military opponent that we were fighting. I can't say that I had any enmity against them or anything. In fact, I don't know, I can't say... I felt nothing personal, or nothing like personal enmity to them, and I would wipe them all, out you know? No, I didn't feel that way about it. I don't know if I could answer that question. I was called to duty to protect our country and I did and I did what was necessary, and had to drop on, or a fire bomb on some of them, I did period.

Cohen: That was what was required, yeah. Have you, kept in touch with your military buddies?

Nicks: Well, I did with a lot of them, but there’s only one live now that I know of. He was our navigator. He's still alive in St. Louis. I talk to him about once a month just to keep up, but uh, I did for quite a while. We had an association. We met every year. All around the country. And uh, but now they're all gone and he's the only one I can really say I know is really alive that I knew back then,

Cohen: Oh my. What do you think younger generations can learn from your experiences?

Nicks: Uh, I don’t know. I think, uh, I don’t know if I can answer that. I hope they recognize that patriotism, honoring our country and showing respect for it, by saluting the flag and not showing enmity towards it by kneeling down when it's played at the ball games, I think those who stand up and are silent, or maybe put their hand over their chest, are real American patriots, and they learned a lot of that from our military men. Not only in World War II, but in the other wars that we have fought, necessary or not, but we have fought them. I think most of the country and most of the young people and most of the old people too, are real true patriots and they don't show their enmity and their lack of patriotism for our country. Period.

Cohen: Yeah. Thank you. What is your definition of a citizen soldier?

Nicks: A citizen soldier? [Laughs] I don't know if I ever heard, what is yours?

Cohen: Well, it's my understanding that it's a citizen who is normally a civilian but goes to war when the country needs it. That every person will participate in the forces, as needed. That everybody...

Nicks: Well I guess you could call that a fancy definition of an honest American citizen. [Cohen laughs]. That is. I don't know if, I wouldn't call him a citizen soldier, I'd call him a citizen.

Cohen: Okay, the museum here, we seem to use, to like this term a lot, I thought I would ask your take on it.

Nicks: You keep losing your voice for some reason.

Cohen: The museum here likes this term so that's why I...

Nicks: I can't hear you...

Cohen: Our museum, the Pritzker Museum, likes this term...

Nicks: I still cannot hear you.

Cohen: Okay, what about now? Can you hear me now?

Nicks: Not very well.

Cohen: Um. That's okay.

Nicks: Are you near your microphone there?

Cohen: I am; can you hear me now?

Nicks: No, not really.

Cohen: Okay one minute. Okay, what about now.

Nicks: Well, a little better.

Cohen: Is there anything you would like to add? Is there something...

Nicks: Wait a minute... I cannot hear, I absolutely cannot hear you. Are you talking on a telephone?

Cohen: Yeah, one moment please. Is this any better?

Nicks: Yes, that's better.

Cohen: I just shifted the receiver. So I wanted to ask you…

Nicks: Hey wait a minute you dropped off again.

Cohen: I'm, sorry. Is there anything you would like to talk about that we did not yet talk about?

Nicks: Well, I, no, I can't say there's anything more. We covered a lot of territory. [Laughs]. No, I can't say I have. So I know. You sure you don't have enough information, now?

Cohen: I think it's excellent. I think it's a great interview and I really thank you, and uh, really on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library... on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, I thank you for your interview and, of course, your service to the country.