



1-19-2004

Interview with Paul Van Buren Hatten

Paul Van Buren Hatten

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview VHP #001
HATTEN, Paul Van Buren**

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Drafted: 1942 September 25 – 1945 September 15

Interviewed: January 19, 2004

Interviewer: Lee Q. Miller

Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Length: 01:31:05

Abstract: In his January 19, 2004 interview with Lee Q. Miller, Paul Van Buren Hatten explains how he entered the service during WWII and became a ball gunner for the Air Force. Hatten recalls basic training, his first mission, and the times he was “concerned” for his safety. Hatten provides detail about his crew members and how their confidence and expertise made him feel safe. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Air Force, Chaplain, Engineer, Ball Gunner, Berlin, England, bombing, Diary

Interview Session (January 19, 2004): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview/Interviewer’s Introduction*

00:00:45 **[no question]** Enlisted. Sworn in in Pittsburgh. Went to Miami for Basic Training. Enlisted, because PH wanted to be a pilot. Sent to Wittenburg College in Springfield, OH. Had a year of studies. Had pre-cadet air force training: arithmetic to trigonometry. PH says it was difficult for him. Before PH went into the service, he had intended to marry. PH talks about rumors people spread. PH decided to marry in Springfield, Ohio. Sent to San Antonio to the aviation center for classification. PH told he was an inch too short to be a pilot. PH called in and asked what he wanted to do in the military. PH classified as a radio gunner. Waited to go to radio school, but the radio school was filled. Sent to Laredo, Texas for gunnery school.

00:08:29 **[no question]** PH assigned to a crew – PFC. Sent to Boise, ID. PH’s crew consisted of a second lieutenant, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator, engineer, radio operator, tail gunner, nose gunner, and upper gunner. PH lists the names and hometowns of crew members. PH was the ball gunner.

00:12:26 *Question:* What’s a ball gunner? *Answer:* PH explains.

- 00:12:50 **[no question]** Kansas to New Hampshire to Labrador (last place in the United States). Flew to Nutts Corner, Northern Ireland. The plane was not ready for combat. Went to training school in Stone, England to learn about combat.
- 00:14:45 **[no question]** Another fellow joined the crew – waist gunner. After training was done, went to Rackheath, England. PH says a lot of planes were lost, because people didn't fly in groups. PH describes the characteristics of a navigator and the relationship PH had with his.
- 00:18:15 **[no question]** Engineer. PH characterizes his engineer. Shares story of the engineer at training school in England. The engineer “washed out” and was used as a receptionist. Court marshalled. PH main witness in the trial. Engineer became a Military Policeman.
- 00:23:02 **[no question]** Interviewer and interviewee reviewing materials and maps.
- 00:25:35 *Question:* How did you feel in your first mission? *Answer:* The ball turret was only used during combat. Couldn't land a B-21 with a ball turret extended. PH says he was never scared, but concerned with safety. PH says this mentality helped saved people's lives. There was no panic in the crew. PH says his crew had one of the best pilots. PH and interviewer talk about an article written called, “Sixty Minutes to Live.”
- 00:33:45 **[no question]** PH talks about the one time he was concerned. First practice mission. PH was not afraid, because he had the confidence.
- 00:35:21 *Question:* Your crew was with you in every mission? *Answer:* Lost a few crew members. Took navigator off PH's crew. Lost co-pilot – fell out of the plane.
- 00:37:30 *Question:* What was your mission? To drop bombs? *Answer:* PH says it was not intentional to kill people, but it most likely happened.
- 00:38:35 *Question:* What did you bomb? *Answer:* Oil refineries. During D-Day, dropped fragmentation bombs on German troops. Bombed Berlin – not particularly interested in where it was going, just so long as it hit Berlin. PH describes the destruction in Rackheath and London. PH says one target was a church. PH describes how soldiers handled these situations. PH regrets not writing about how war affects people.
- 00:43:51 **[no question]** Chaplains' role in war and how PH utilized his chaplain.
- 00:47:25 **[no question]** PH back up for radio operator. PH explains his diary – was told to be careful what he wrote. PH got his diary back after one year. PH explains why he wrote an autobiography.

- 00:53:35 **[no question]** When PH wasn't flying ball gunner he flew waist. PH recalls the co-pilot falling out of the plane. PH saved the co-pilot.
- 00:55:44 *Question:* How did you feel when you bombed Berlin? *Answer:* PH was very concerned. Went to Munich – one of the longest missions they flew. The sky was blackened. One time, PH's heated suit went out – was 30 below.
- 00:59:05 *Question:* How do you feel after moments of concern? *Answer:* Some people, like the engineer, don't handle those moments well.
- 01:00:30 *Question:* How did you stay in touch with family? *Answer:* Wrote letters every other day.
- 01:00:55 *Question:* Did your time in service affect your life out of service? *Answer:* PH didn't feel like he wanted to do any more. PH worked in the electrical industry. PH's one ambition was to go to college: never got to go. PH talks about his feelings of inadequacy because he didn't have a degree. PH became Vice President after fifteen years of work. PH talks about studying at Winthrop University and learning how to use a computer.
- 01:07:25 **[no question]** Gave up Vice President job.
- 01:08:20 *Question:* When were your flights? *Answer:* Early morning, sometimes when it was still dark. 12 hour missions.
- 01:09:00 *Question:* Ever hurt? *Answer:* No. PH mentions playing softball and spraining his ankle. That's why PH only had 33 missions instead of 35. Interviewer and narrator talk about printing PH's diary.
- 01:11:35 *Question:* Did you feel pride in your service? *Answer:* Yes. PH says he would have wanted to do more.
- 01:13:35 **[no question]** PH talks about the time he wished to go home. PH recalls seeing a lieutenant at a conference.
- 01:19:25 *Question:* Any good luck charms? *Answer:* Yes. PH diverts conversation. PH's wife bought him a cameo ring. PH lost the ring – shares that story.
- 01:26:45 *Question:* War today? *Answer:* PH shares his opinions on Iraq War and soldiers today.
- 01:31:05 *End of interview*