

**A Veterans Oral History**  
Heritage Education Commission  
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Moorhead, MN

**Edward Stern**  
**Narrator**

2007

UNK: Can you tell me your name and where you grew up.

**ES: I'm Edward R. Stern, S-T-E-R-N, and I grew up in Valley City, North Dakota.**

UNK: Can I ask your age?

**ES: Sure, 92.**

UNK: What did you do prior to your military service and how did that evolve into going into the military?

**ES: Well, we had selective service in those days; and I was going to be drafted about the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, so I enlisted two days before New Years of 1941. And I was in the service for four years. Let's see . . .**

UNK: When you enlisted, that gave you the right to kind of choose a little what area of the service you wanted to go into?

**ES: Yes, they had a different number for enlisted people than for draftees, so I was kind of glad that I had an enlisted number, 17366551. Never forget that one and when I became an officer, it was 0649423.**

UNK: What branch of the service did you go into?

**ES: I thought I should be in the quartermaster because of my clothing experience, but the quartermaster was filled, so I was sent to the Air Force. And I went to Florida.**

UNK: Was that for training?

**ES: For training, yes and incidentally I was – you wouldn't remember a baseball player by the name of Hank Greenburg, but he was in my outfit. And he was always goofing off. He was fairly well to do. And he would go to town every afternoon after we were through with our duties, Hank would go to town and come back late. He would have to walk what were called "tours of duty," which meant that you marched back and forth and back and forth with your**

**rifle on your shoulder as punishment, because he was, well, goofing off. But he was a great guy.**

UNK: What were you specifically trained for when you did go in?

**ES: Let me see. I was sent out to Ephrata, Washington, out in the middle of the Grand Coulee country; and I was a second lieutenant. And I made a \$165 a month and my first wife made \$175 a month. And, of course, that was a little bit hard on my ego that she made more than I did, but I finally got promoted to captain and then I got a little more money than she did.**

UNK: Were you married before you went in?

**ES: Uff dah. I guess so. Yes, she bought an outfit for Florida, and I got transferred from Florida up to Boston, so she had to take back all of her Florida clothes and get Boston clothes. And she was, well, let's see, . . .**

UNK: What part of the service was she in ..was she Army or . . . ?

**ES: She wasn't in the service. No, she was, she was just a . . .**

UNK: Oh, a civilian?

**ES: Yes.**

UNK: All right.

**ES: A real wonderful wife.**

UNK: Can you think of any memorable boot camp experiences?

**ES: No, I really.**

UNK: While you served in the war, where were you stationed then during the service and how did you get there?

**ES: I was sent to Spokane and then up to Great Falls, Montana, and then from Great Falls overseas to England.**

UNK: And was England your main base then for the four years you were there?

**ES: Yes, I was in England two years, two months, and four days. And I told, I remember telling my wife, "Don't worry, honey." It was the Fourth of July, and I said, "Don't worry, honey. We'll be back by Christmas." And two years later we made it. Those Germans were real tough.**

UNK: Do you have a particular memory you'd like to share about being in the service, whether it's a battle or a lesson you learned, or just military life overseas?

**ES: Hum. Gosh, I should remember all that stuff. It was so, you know, it was so traumatic.**

UNK: Well, what did you do when you were in England? Were you on air flights?

**ES:** No, I was a ground officer in the Air Force. When I got into the service, my CO, a wonderful guy by the name of Van de Vender (sp?), called me in and said, “Stern, I want you to know we’re headed for overseas. If you don’t want to go, now is the time to say so.” And, of course, I assured him that I was all set to go. And what the heck. I was in the Air Force. And we got Battle Stars for our service in the Air Force and we always laughed about it because I was a ground officer. And it was always kind of funny until we found out that we got Battle Stars for each battle that we were in. And there were five or six battles and we got six or seven Battle Stars that got us home about three months sooner than we would have gotten home if we didn’t have Battle Stars, so we fellows who hadn’t done anything particular in the line fighting, we got the Battle Stars and came home early.

**UNK:** So were you guys kind of the support staff on the ground for the aircrews, or? You were talking about how many men you had under you as a squadron executive officer. What did that do? What did that? What were your duties, as such?

**ES:** We had a bunch of flyers in our outfit who were getting shot at and getting shot down and killed and everything, and we . . .

**UNK:** You were saying that like 500 men that you were . . .

**ES:** Yes, in our particular bomb group. The 550<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron had, well, about 500 men in it, and there were a whole bunch of enlisted men and a bunch of officers, and the officers were the flyers. There were ten – we were in a B17 outfit; and there were ten men in every B17, four officers and six enlisted men. And it was a real, real rough, rough deal for those guys. So . . .

**UNK:** You already alluded to one interesting man that you met. Did you meet any other interesting men that were in your unit or in the military service that you were with; and do you keep in touch with any of the military men you met?

**ES:** Not anymore, General LeMay (sp?), yes, General LeMay was the head man of our particular outfit. A real tough cookie that saw to it that all of our flyers did their jobs ... Curtis LeMay.

**UNK:** Can you think of your worst military meal?

**ES:** No, I can’t. I don’t remember any terrible meals. I was easy to please. Let’s see now, we had – as you can see, my mind is hazy as the dickens. I was one of the three or four Jewish fellows in the outfit. And one of our Jewish fellows wanted to have a couple of days off for Yom Kippur, which is one of the Jewish holidays. And I gave him Yom Kippur off; but when it came time for Christmas, I made him work on Christmas Eve, and he was just furious. He didn’t see any fairness to that at all. But I stuck to it; and he, Rapaport (sp?), yep, he was, yes.

**UNK:** You have an incredible memory for detail.

**ES: Ha.**

UNK: You do. Did the military service define any of your outlook on life or shape it or influence it?

**ES: No, I would say not. I was in the service for four years; and when I got out, I went back to work in the store; and well, that was it. Didn't worry about any of the other stuff, but in the meantime, when I went into the service, my daughter, Sena, she was . . . Boy, I'm telling you, I've just forgotten.**

**I had a daughter by the name of Decky, and we named her Decky because it took me ten years to sell my wife on the idea of getting married and that's true. And then she was born about, oh, three or four months after I went overseas; and when I came back, here's this little girl that I wasn't used to little kids and Louise, my first wife, said to her, "This is your daddy." And she said, "No, this is Daddy." And she went over and picked up my picture. And well I remember her falling down once when she was running down the hall and just as clearly as could be, this little 13-month-old girl or something, said, "God damn it." And I decided I better reform my language then. And we had five kids, four on purpose and then one by accident, right at the end. A real nice bunch of kids ... everything worked out real well.**

UNK: When you did get out of the military service, what was your final rank?

**ES: Major.**

UNK: Okay.

**ES: Yes, I went in as a private. As they said, they called us "buck-ass" privates. And I got promoted a couple of times and well at any rate, I ended up a major. And there was lots of things that I should remember. We . . .**

UNK: Did any of your kids go into the military?

**ES: Yes, my son Rick did.**

UNK: And did you use any of the military benefits when you got out, such as the GI loan, or any [unclear]?

**ES: No, none at all. Just went right back to work. We had . . .**

UNK: And you had an existing job waiting for you?

**ES: Yes, I got out the day we dropped the bomb, August 6, 1945. The day we dropped the bomb that ended the war. And I, well, I enjoyed life for about a month, and then my father said to me, "Say, young man, when are you going back to work?" And I went back to work the next day. Yes.**

UNK: Well, how would you like to be remembered?

**ES: Well, as a good father, I guess. Yes.**