Interview Between Robert Shumard and Gene Pyle

GP: What is your name?

RS: My handle is Robert R. Shumard.

GP: What is your present address?

RS: 18286 Oakfield Drive, Detroit, Michigan.

GP: And the date of your birth?

RS: September 7, 1920.

GP: And your occupation?

RS: I'm Sales Manger for Sampson Company of Detroit, wholesalers in plumbing and heating supplies.

GP: How long have you been working there?

RS: Approximately five years, Gene.

GP: Can you describe exactly what type of work you do? You've already mentioned you're sales manager, but anything more -- does your work take you away from the office or do you stay more or less strictly inside?

RS: Primarily this is in a supervisory capacity. There are times when I make a few trips up in northern Michigan. Primarily all my duties pertain to sales and the office. I very seldom get out.

GP: What is your wife's name?

RS: Eleanor.

GP: Were you married at the time of this A-bomb mission?

RS: Very much so, very much so.

GP: When ~~/~~ were you married?

RS: 1943, in August. Come to think of it, my God, this is almost 17 years. It was 42 of August.

GP: Do you have some children?

RS: We have three cats. Fluffy, Flirty and Taffy.

GP: .... Can you describe the kind of home you live in?

RS: Well, I would say that, the home is average for the wife and I. It's a small brick bungalow. Four and a half rooms, living room, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms, gas heat, firplace. It's very adequate for our present needs.

GP: How long have you lived here?

RS: Well, let's see Eleanor and I bought this place in 1947.

GP: Thirteen years ago.

RS: Good lord willing, we'll have it paid for in the next few years.

GP: In approximate figures, what is your yearly income?

RS: What do you want to do, get me in trouble with Uncle Sam? Let's say it's in four figures. We'll be very discreet about that particular item.

GP: What do you recall most about the A-bomb mission? I'd like you to describe your most vivid thoughts and in any way expanding this answer, in any way that you can.

RS: Well, the most important and most vivid thing I would say is probably the time the bomb itself went off. That was my most -- vivid thing that I can remember.

GP: In other words you were impressed by what happened below?

RS: What happened below. Instantaneously what happened.

I think it was the accumulation of everything happening at once more than anything else.

GP: By that, do you mean color-wise, or physical properties of what was happening below. In other words, what you were seeing on the ground below, is that what was the most impressive about it?

RS: I would say so, yes.

GP: What did you see? Was it colors that were fantastic or was it just the awesomenessof the whole drama below? Was it on so gigantic a scale even at the altitude you were travelling? Incidentally, how far up were you?

RS: Well, as far as I know, it's still classified information. You could probably ask the Russians; they know more about it than I do. Something of this magnitude I would say is a very, very hard thing to talk about. After all, you don't brag about wiping 60, 70 thousand people at one time. Basically -- what the wife just said, I don't know whether you can pick this up or not -- she says, children, too. And she's right. I don't think that at any time anybody's ever tried to accept a lot of glory for what they done. It was a job thathad to be done, it was a job that saved countless number of lives.

GP: By that what do you mean?

RS: OUr own.

GP: In other words, by this happening in one particular phase of the war, then others were spared?

RS: I would say very definitely so. Possibly if we hadn't done what we done there would have been a definite invasion of Japan. It was inevitable. We were going to invade Japan one way or the other. And through talking to some of my friends who were in the ground forces, in the Navy; I had some friends in the Seabees; this was a long time ago, now; they -- all of them -- they always expressed thanks for the fact that we did do what we done, and those boys managed to get into occupied Japan after the war was over, and they said it've been next to suicide if they had attempted to land.

GP: Going into something humorous..., were there any odd little anecdotes that you might tell about this particular mission. Did you have a rabbit's foot on, or did you...was there anything in particular about the thing you'd like to expalin? When was this? In the morning?

RS: We left Tinian about -- Air Force said 0300 in the morning; that's 3:00 in the norming. That was time of takeoff. Something humorous? About the only thing I --.

GP: Any little anecdotes that might be connected with this fantastic mission that accomplished so much, something so historic recorded on our minds and in history from now on out.

RS: Well, some of the boys was carrying souvenirs.

GP: What particular things, for instance.

RS: You're pinning me down, Gene. In fact, I think there was two pairs of silk panties in the bombardier's compartment.

GP: Did you have any particular religious medals....?

RS: Before I left for overseas, the wife had given me a St. Christopher's medal, which, although I am not of that faith, I carried. I also carried my wife's picture, it's been halfway around the world, I guess. I had that with me. I do recall the fact that our RCM MAN, WHich is a Radar Counter Measure operator, slept over me for about half the mission. I recall somebody throwing apples down the tunnel, from the forward section back to the aft section where we were. Btu actually war is not a thing of levity. War is a very serious thing.

GP: No doubt about that. I just thought perhaps some little things were connected with religion --.

RS: No, Gene. Our crew was pretty -- well, as far as tha t goes, I suppose all Air Force crews were unique in the fact that we had, well, the so-called devil-may-care attitude.

GP: Did you have to be that way to be chosen for this particular mission?

RS: It's quite possible. I think that every man in our organization was screened for temperament, capabilities. I say, a devil-may-care attitude -- here today, gone tomorrow. It was -- we had a very unique organization in the fact that each man to my knowledge was picked and chosen for his particular type of job, whether he had to be on the ground crew or be in the air crews.

GP: Did you realize before the mission what you would be doing?

RS: Not to the magnitude it developed into, but we trained for over 15 months stateside, before our organization was moved overseas, so ordinarily a normal bombardment crew wouldn't train that long, before they went into actual combat.

GP: How did you happen to be on this flight? Was it voluntary? Were you chosen? Did you feel it your duty? How did that come about?

RS: Well, I don't think I was chosen any more than any the other 14 crews that we had that were -- each and every one of them was probably capable of doing the same thing that we done. And as I say, the crews for all the airplanes that we had were undoubtedly chosen by somebody with a lot more mentality and forethought than I have, as far as psychiatry, as I said before, capabilities, as far as crewmanship is concerned, capabilities as far as mechanical experience is concerned. It was a very well knit organization. I think we only numbered about -- oh, around 1500 personnel all together.

GP: Did you know what the flight would be, and atill decide to remain on it?

RS: I think it was the day before the mission. We were called into briefing. Nothing was really said about what we were going to do or what we were going into. They wanted to show us a picture. So they dimmed the lights in the briefing room, and they started the projector. And all that came on the screen was this large flash. And they said, "That's all, gentlemen." And we got up and walked out. As far as actually knowing at that time that we were going to drop an atomic bomb, we didn't know it.

GP: Do you consider being on this particular mission something of a personal honor? ....

RS: Well, I don't actually think that anybody considers it an honor when you go on something of this nature. It was an honor in the fact that our crew was chosen. But I don't think it was an honor in the fact that we had to go on a the type of mission that we did.

GP: O.K. We're on belt 2 now of the atomic bomb mission. You are, of course, aware of the fact that we're recording once again an interview on this particular Hiroshima bombing.... If everything was as it was in 1945, and you had the chance to volunteer again for this mission, would you volunteer again? .... Would you do it again? ....

RS: Well, Gene, this question has probably been asked of me, well, in the last fifteen years, three or four hundred times, and my belief hasn't changed at all. I'd say yes. Yes, I'd do it again. I don't have any qualms about the thing. I don't lose any sleep over it. Yes, I'd do it again.

GP: What were your thoughts when the bomb was dropped?

RS: Well, there's the vicious rumor going around that someone said, "Oh, my God." I don't know who said it. That was a very much publicized explanation, shortly after the war was over.

GP: Of course, I imagine in jest you were saying it; in sincerity you meant it....

RS: Well, if you get deep down into the thing, I believe you're right. N^{o}body actually wants to cause the destruction we caused. But it was through a necessity rather than a wanton type of destruction. It was something thathad to be done. As much as a man has gangrene in his leg, and they have to cut it off. It's something that has to be done. It was a cancer in the world situation that had to be removed, that's all.

GP: Can you describe seeing the very first A bomb dropped? .... Can you describe how you felt about it?

RS: Oh yes. That's very true. We --. In the Air Force after you once commit yourself to a bomb run, you're on the bomb run come hell or high water, so the expression goes. You don't deviate from that particular course. Up until the time the bomb's away signal was given, we had special type glasses which are called Poloroid -- Poloroid glasses -- which was, they was just to black out everything; you couldn't see anything. But the explosion of the bomb --

at the time the bomb was detonated -- was so great that it even pierced this particular type glass that we had, glasses that we had.

GP: In other words, the light was so --.

RS: Intense. Very intense.

GP: So that unless you had special glasses, such as Poloroid, to cut out all the glare --.

RS: It was a safety factor. They were used primarily to protect your eyes from the anticipated flash, which actually was there.

GP: We seem to be pinpointing a lot of thing....can you recall you most vivid memory of the A-bomb incident? Before, during or after the bomb dropping. This could be something that happened even before you took off on the mission, such as having forgotten something...or a sleepless night before. What to you is the most vivid memory of this whole incident. This could be a visual thing.

RS: Well, it probably definitely was. I think that the instant that bomb was detonated and that flash occurred, I turned my Poloroid glasses to where I could see clearly, and it just seemed that everything was coming rightback at us. Of course, we were at a very high altitude, but it seemed like everything was erupting right back up to where we were. I was scared. I don't think there was any --, I was scared, that was it. It's just like in a real close flack burst, it scares you to death, you know.

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Because you think possibly the next one has got your number on it.

GP: .... You were a gunner, weren't you? Would you have been in a more vulnerable position in the body of the palne?

RS: No, not necessarily. I probably had -- I would consider -- the best visible seat in the aircraft. It was in the aft section. I was flying right skinner's position in the aft section of the B-29. And as we made this bank to pull away from the target area after bomb's away, I was looking right down at the particular town of Hiroshima, and I would say possibly I had the best view of the whole thing from where I was sitting.

GP: Were you told what the mission was to be and how much depended upon it?

RS: No, as far as we was concerned, it's what the Air Force calls a g.p. mission or a general purpose mission. Before takeoff, we were briefed on just a regular general purpose mission. We weren't briefed on anything special. However, I mean the higher-ups in the crew -- the pilot, the co-pilot, the navigator, the bombardier, they quite possibly knew what was going to happen before the enlisted men in the crew did.

GP: Did you know or hope that you were flying high enough to be out of the way of the bomb damage?

RS: After that son of a gun went off, I hope to tell you. We were really moving to get out of the way. We did feel a certain amount of concussion from the bomb blast, even at the high altitude that we were away from the area. I would say we were probably at -- oh, between five and seven mile slant range, after the bomb went off, and we still felt the concussion from the bomb.

GP: In other words, it actually rocked your ship?

RS: It threw us around a little bit, yeah.

GP: Could it have been comparable to a situation such as in a boat....

RS: The Air Force boys would know what I'm talking about, when they start talking about a flack burst under the wing. To the average layman I would say like you're sitting at a stop light and somebody comes up and rams you in the rear. Not too much damage. I mean it was -- give us a good shaking up.

GP: Plus the feeling of fear. You've already admitted that. .... What were your impressions of the bomb exploding? .... The color of the bomb exploding....Great intense light.

RS: It was probalby the most vivid thing thatstands out in your mind, is the intense light that radiates from the actual detonation of the bomb. As I said before, the minute that happened, I switched my Poloroid glasses back to clear view where I could see what was going on down there.

GP: Without these Poloroid glasses, do you think you could have seen anything?

RS: Without the Poloroid glasses, it would probably have -- I don't think it would have blinded us, but it would have temporarily have blinded us to be able to see anything. And from my vantage point, as I recall now, there was probably two -- what looked like shock waves, or waves rolling into the seashore, you know -- radiating out from the center where the bomb was detonated. And as we found out later, everything that was in front of those shock waves was automatically levelled to the ground. Pictures that we have are proof of that. As far as colors were concerned, I would say there was all kinds of colors. There's no definite way of describing just what it was. Boiling action, more than anything else, you w could ~~just~~ tell there was just nothing but death in that cloud. One fellow told me -- he says, "All the Japanese souls is rising to heaven." And it's probably quite true. That's waht was happening. And then thereis the old familiar picture of the long spire and the mushroom on top, which is -- everybody knows that I think in this country. They've all seen thatpicture.

GP: Did you believe that this mission would hlep end the war or all wars?

RS: Well, I couldn't truthfully answer that question, because we didn't actually know what was happening until after the bomb was actually detonated. I don't think that our atomic bomb or the hydrogen bomb which we have today is any true end to a war to end all wars. As long as there's people in the world that are greedy, people in the world that are seeking powers beyond what any normal person should have, I don't think the hydrogen bomb, or the H-bomb, is actually an answer to any war. Nothing is gained by fighting a war. The winner never wins, and the loser never loses, actually.

GP: Do you think being on this mission haschanged your life at all? Thoughts? Job possiblities? So forth?

RS: Well, I would say in thought, yes. Because in this respect, like the fellow says, I was there. But the lack of realization, the willing to accept the fact that it can never happen to us, the people in the United States -- I think it's very true -- they don't actually realize what they're into. It's a very, very, very serious situation. I say, let's pay our taxes, or pay more taxes if we have to, but let's be ready for it.

GP: We're starting belt 3 .... Did you know that you were opening the atomic era when you dropped the bomb? .... Was it just a bomb?

RS: I would say that at the particular time that the so-called atomic era was never even thought of, because the average layman had never heard of atomic bombs or atomic fusion or nuclear energy, but I would say that that possibly come, oh, a year or two later, when the scientists started to bring their efforts towards peace and not towards war.

GP: Do you think thatatomic energy could have peacetime uses?

RS: Very definitely. Because I think we have some very glaring ~~at~~ instances of that today in your atomic reactors, atomic material used for detection of cancer, malignant growths in people's body in the medical field, atomic energy in the use and manufacturing of materials, shading towards the wartime deal a little bit, you have your nuclear submarines, which are very, very important in the defense of the country. I would say very definitely that atomic energy has its place in peacetime uses, if it's diverted to that purpose rather than the fact that -- diverted to wartime uses.

GP: Before dropping the bomb, did you give thought to the people on the target? Were they just enemy?

RS: I don't actually think that that question can be answered yes or no. After all, the Japanese Army, the Japanese Air Force, the Japanese Navy, were considered as enemy. I don't think the Japanese people themselves -- in my own personal opinion -- the~~y~~ way I put it out -- I don't think they were actually considered as enemies any more than the fact that the people in the United States wanted to fight a war. When I say that, I mean, I'm talking about the people in the United States. I'm not talking about people who had political aspirations, or people who were made millionaires by the fact that the war was going on. I'm talking about the average, the man in the street, so to speak. I don't think that even the Japanese wanted a war of the type that they got.

GP: .... Were you frightened at all during the mission?

RS: Well, as I said before, on the previous question that you asked me, Gene, I think that anybody who tells you he wasn't frightened, is a darn liar.. After all, nobody wants to pass into that, the so-called Great Beyond. Sure, I was scared.

GP: .... Were you told at all by the scientists that there might be danger involved?

RS: Actually, as far as the scientists were concerned, I don't think that we -- not that I recall -- that we had any particular dealings with them whatsoever. We were not dealing with them. We didn't have any particular idea of the amount of danger that was involved until after the whole thing ended.

GP: Can you recall your most vivid thoughts about this mission?

RS: Well, this particular mission, no. I would say that every crewman sat over there to get his 35 missions in and go home. Not knowing what the mission was about, I don't think we had any special thoughts, more than the everyday --.

GP: In other words, this particular mission was not stamped as being particularly important....?

RS: Let's put it this way, it wasn't any different than any other mission we flew.

GP: Can you recall what you were thinking about on this particular mission during the long ride to Japan and the long ride home?

RS: This is a long time ago, Gene. Fifteen years is quite long -- it don't seem that long. Well, what do the fellows usually think about? You're going to get there. You're going to get back. You're going to run into fighter opposition. You're going to run into flack. Are you going to make the bomb run o.k. and get out? Naturally, on the way back home most of the chatter was about what we done.

GP: .... Actually the bomb has exploded. Can you recall any impressions or thoughts you may have had after the bomb has exploded? .... How do you feel about it?

RS: By that you mean, after we'd already got back to the island?

GP: .... I'm just trying to note down all these impressions you might have had since you had firsthand information.

RS: Well, actually, as far as the amount or extent of damage that the bomb had caused, we didn't know that until hours later. In fact, the Air Force had a photographic aircraft up there approximately four hours after we left. It was still impossible to take any true pictures of the extent of the damage. However, some time later they did. They figured we had destroyed about four and six-tenths square miles, total destruction.

GP: .... Did you have any thoughts that this mission would be historic, or was it just another run in your scheme of things....

RS: I would say -- I actually believe that after it was all over we realized it was an historic mission in this -- well, in a couple of senses. One, the fact that we were the first ones, the first crews that due dropped an atomic bomb, successfully. And secondly, who'd ever heard of atomic explosions. No one had ever heard of it. It was probably the best kept secret in the war. Of course, naturally when it come out, I think it -- because of its magnitude, it when into the history books. And I think it will long be remembered.

GP: What thought did you give to the casualties?

RS: Well, actually, we didn't know what the casualties were. We knew what the total destruction was, but we didn't know what the casualties were, until -- I'd say, a week or two later we had an estimated casualty of around 60 to 70 thousand. But even yourself, Gene, if you will recall, at that time the casualty reports were continually changing, not downward in numbers, but upward in numbers. Due to radiation fallout, radiation burns -- though not fatal at that particular time proved fatal later.

So I don't actually know what the exact figure was, somewhere upwards of 100 thousand.

GP: So did you wonder what might have happened if the bomb didn't explode.

RS: Well, thats kind of a rough question. What would have happened if the bomb didn't explode. Actually, nothing would have happened. There wouldn't have been Hiroshima. There wouldn't have been an historic mission. Very possibly that -- the boys in the second one, if that hadn't exploded either -- this one might still be going on -- God forbid -- but it might still be going on. We were very fortunate in the fact that it did happen the way it did.

GP: .... Did you fly any other mission over Japan after the all-out mission we're speaking of?

RS: Yes, I did. One mission after that.

GP: Which one was that, Bob?

RS: Oh boy, I'm trying to recall where it was now.

GP: Was it important or a milk run?

RS: Oh no. I don't think any mission is a milk run, specially when you're flying 12, 15 hours over water. I wouldn't want to be held to this, but it seems to me that the last one I flew was to a place called Kuryama (?). It was a Japanese fertilizer plant. Now who wanted to bomb that for, I don't know. I don't know if they were making fertilizer there or not. But a rather amusing incident on that particular mission is the fact that we made eight bomb runs before we finally dropped our bomb.

GP: We're now starting belt four.... Today in perspective how do you feel about the Hiroshima A-bomb?

RS: Well, in a sense of the word, Gene, you've asked this question before. All I can say is I would do it again.

GP: Phrasing it another way, today in perspective how do you feel about any A-bomb or their use?

RS: Well, I think you're going to find in a short period of time that all of the nations and the country will get together, and they'll outlaw the atomic bomb, the hydrogen bomb, very much in the same way that they outlawed the use of gas after World War I. Everybody's sitting back and flexing their muscles and saying I'm daring you to start something, and you don't dare to start something, because I've got as much as you've got. I think that you'll find that the powers of all the countries will get together, and they're going to outlaw them just as they did gas after World War I.

GP: Do you ever have any feelings that this particular bomb on Hiroshima shouldn't have been dropped?

RS: No, I don't. I feel that ~~after~~ that particular bomb and the one that followed on the ninth of August should have been dropped. And I say this in this respect that if we did not have the bomb -- which fortunately we did -- and the enemy had the bomb, I don't think in my own mind that they would have had any hesitation whatsoever about dropping it. I think they'd have done the same thing to us we done to them.

GP: .... Do you have any feelings of guiltiness? Or was this just simply a military order....? Can you recall any anecdotal material about this? Such as not being able to sleep. Of a nickname that was given to you because of that particular trip? Recalling the first question, do you ever have any feelings of guiltiness?

RS: No, I don't think I do. Naturally, it's something that always sticks with you. I don't think you actually ever forget it, what you've done. Maybe that's why myself and 1499 fellows were selected to be part of this organization. As I said back there on belt two or three, whichever one it was, I think each and every man within the organization was selected for his psychological outlook on life, his mental attitude, his abilities. Why should anybody have guiltiness over something that had to be done?

GP: Have you ever visited Hiroshima, that is, after the bombing?

RS: No, I've never had the opportunity to go there. Maybe some day if I get out of the four figure bracket in my earnings, I can afford to go. I'd like to go there. I don't that that the Japanese people hold any animosity. I don't think that any member of the crew of the Anola Gay -- that his life would be in jeopardy. I'd like to go there and see the town. I understand now it's all built back up and you'd never know that actually anything happened.

GP: .... Have you ever gotten into any fights or arguments about this particular mission, physically or verbally?

RS: No, I don't think I have. Couple of chances of one or ten dollar betters the fact that I was on the crew or I wasn't. Of course, those usually were started down at Fran and Gerry's bar, which is our neighborhood bar which we go to quite frequently.

GP: What was that bar again?

RS: Oh, Fran and Gerry's. It's a little neighborhood bar. But, I don't know. I just as leave, let bygones be bygones. If they believe one thing, or they want to believe another thing, it doesn't bother me.

GP: ... I know you keep in touch with other members of the crew. One reason why I know this is because you're very much enthused about the business of Christmas cards. This seems to be not only a hobby with you, but you love to keep in contact with previous people socially, and in this case since you were a member of this particular historical crew who did the bombing of Hiroshims -- I shouldn't ask this -- but you have kept in touch with other members of the crew, haven't you, Bob?

RS: Well, actually I think Eleanor should take the credit for that rather than myself. She's the Christmas card sender.

It's more or less a hobby with her rather than myself. Actually, I haven't seen, personally seen, any of the boys since we were discharged way back in -- gosh, darn it -- 1945, although Eaanor is the one who keeps track of the boys as far as Charistmas cards are concerned. We still receive cards from most of the enlisted men that were on the mission.

GP: In other words, what was the last time you were in direct contact with the other members of the crew?

RS: Direct contact? I'd say August -- November of 1945 is the last I've seen anyone.

GP: ... When was the last time you saw the Anola Gay? .... It was a B-29? But also it q was a stripped down version...?

RS: That's right. We didn't -- the only armament we had was two 50's in the tail, two 50 calibre machine guns. Otherwise all the rest of the turrets were taken out. It was done for a couple of reasons. For weight situation. and also increased our speed very considerably, too, due to the fact that we reduced that weight. Streamlined the aircraft more.

GP: .... Was this type of aircraft used differently?

RS: This aircraft -- not only the Anola Gay -- but the other 14 ari aircraft we had assigned to our particular organization went through a modification center in Omaha, Nebraska. When they went in the front door, they were a conventional 29. When they come out the back door, they were stripped down version of the 29's. The engines on the aircraft were considerably different in the fact that we had fuel injection type engines instead of these normal carburetor type engines. We had Curtiss electric props in the aircraft, where the conventional type 29 had the old-fashioned Hamilton standard prop. We didn't carry the am armament which the normal aircraft carries. And also by the way the last time I seen the Anola Gay -- and in fact I didn't even know I'd seen her till after I'd left there was about 1948 or '49 -- I belong to the Air Force Reserve here in Detroit and we had occasion to fly down to Chicago -- I believe the airport was Cherry Hill. They have an Air Force Museum there. And we got there at night. Naturally we headed for town like all good Air Force men do, you know. I seen this old 29 sitting there, and as I walked by, I patted her on the nose and kept on going. And after I got thinking about the thing, I remembered that number 82 which we had on the nose of our aircraft, right. And I'll be doggone if it wasn't the same one. They had established a museum there. In Chicago. I understand that since that time it's been moved to someplace else. I understand they're supposed to amke a place for it in the Smithsonian Institute in Washingtm, D.C.

GP: I'd like now to call Mrs. Shumard to ask her how a wife might feel about this mission. .... You had been married two or three years when Bob was on this mission?

ES: I would say we had been married about three years when before this happened.

GP: .... How did you feel?

ES: Well, at the time I didn't know anything about it. When we were over in Utah, just like any Army wife, she had to go through herroutines, living the life of Army husband, and, living, like I said, living as an Army wife. And, at the time I didn't realize exactly what happened, until I was sent home. And all of a sudden a few months later I heard what had happened.