

Sturdy

Hello and welcome to Talks on Docs, a documentary review podcast 00:00:20

where the co-hosts and guests discuss review and give

recommendations on any and all types of documentaries. Episode 30 — 00:00:30

for this episode Sean, HB, and I interviewed Director Michael Sellers

about his most recent documentary Return to Hardwick, which

documents sons, daughters, and grandchildren of the greatest generation

as they travel to England to uncover the history of a disappearing World

War II air base. Return To Hardwick will be screened at the up and coming 00:00:49

DOCUTAH Festival from September 2nd through the 7th.

Hello and welcome to Talks on Docs, we're your co-hosts, I'm Sturdy, 00:01:19

HB

I HB, 00:01:22

Sean

And I'm Sean. 00:01:23

Sturdy

Guys we're not alone again. We have on this episode we are joined by 00:01:24

director Michael Sellers whose recent documentary titled Return To

Hardwick is currently making its way around the film festivals and will be

showing next at the film festival. DOCUTAH during September 3rd and 00:01:37

7th. Return To Hardwick documents the 93rd Bombardment Group. The 00:01:40

93rd was a United States strategic bomb unit during World War II

stationed in the east Anglia section of England. Thank you again Michael 00:01:51

for joining us. We greatly appreciate it. 00:01:52

Michael

No problem. Guys thanks for having me. 00:01:53

Sturdy

Our first question we'd like to know is how did you come across this documentary and was it something that was something personal to you or was it something that just kind of came across. Or how did you come about coming into this. 00:01:55

Michael

Yeah well you know it started back with a little Michael Sellers and he basically found out that his grandfather was in World War II and I was asked one day by my grandfather you know do I want to take a trip to England. And I was amazed. First of all that they were gonna pay for a trip to England. Family was gonna go and I you know already was kind of coming out of film school and had my camera ready and they said — yeah I'll go let's see what happens. And I blew through, at that time we recorded you know DV tapes and flew through four of them the first day and we were staying for a week so I found out yeah. I found out that my grandfather was a bombardier/ navigator in the 93rd Bomb Group. He was flying in a B 24, B for bomber and he was in charge to dropped bombs basically over Europe. He did 35 missions and it was — I was amazed and then I started to think about my own self actually standing there and that because he survived these missions — I'm able to be here. It was like blowing my mind that... because people did not survive those missions. So anyway that's what, that's what got me started and I was just like wow I'm a part of this — my grandfather was a part of this and started to go to reunions with him. So that's sort of the connection. 00:02:07
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HB

Well that's impressive. It's definitely history right there. I was wondering how did you get Michael Cudlitz involved to narrate. 00:03:37

Michael

That's a good question. Michael got involved because the way the industry works it's who you know. One of those things where you know somebody in the group and I'm sure we're going to get to this and you know how the project got started within the group and all that but somebody in the 93rd Bomb Group which we have annual reunions, came up with the idea to try to maybe approach him. There was a friend of a friend that he knew that was working with Michael and it was feasible to possibly get a hold of him. I had said once the project started that it would be nice to get some sort of name talent attached to it, it might give the project a little more ummf out there. You know you can think of your Tom Hanks your Gary Sinise and you can go on and on and I said well maybe this could be ours, maybe we could have Michael and do this. So yeah I gave him a call. I had his number through the friend of a friend. He picked up, I gave a little bit about the project and he said no problem right away. Yeah. There were no issues really at all he just said let me know what you want to do. He's like I'm in New York soon maybe we can do — and I had this idea of doing an introduction like he would introduce the film... I believe the Peter Jackson "They Shall Not Grow Old" if you've seen that recently. Peter does an introduction in there. And I thought that was great because I always thought like — man do I want him up front or do I just want him narrating. And you know I just kept Michael upfront. It was something people within the group like, my mom like seeing him up front. So I finally just kept him in. When I went to see Peter's film I was like yes he's up top so — he does a nice little introduction on that too.

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Sean

Yeah. That was great. I've always been a fan of... Band Of Brothers is one of my favorites. I actually watched a lot of that when I was in Kuwait. So it was just great to see them on there. That was actually the first thing my wife to ask is how did they get Michael Cudlitz that's awesome.

Sturdy

That's my first question too. It was all of ours.

Michael

Yeah, I tell you what. To be honest with you he is the nicest guy. He really — he is doing a lot of stuff for free. I did have to go through SAG. I did have to talk to SAG and I had to go under my own company and go through all the paperwork but you know he's kind of just throwing it right back at us and saying listen you know I'm doing this for the good. I've done some other projects like this, it's just something that I like to do. I can, I can give you a little quick funny story. Very recently happened. And I'll just tell you real quick. But we're at the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force which is in Savannah, Georgia. And I've got a couple of clips online on our YouTube that you can watch. And he was there. He wanted to be there and I was there so both of us kind of got up on stage and and sort of started talking about the film. Sort of introducing the film before we hit play. And he admitted that he thought that this was... he didn't know exactly what he was getting into but he knew that he was just being nice and wanted to be a part of something that was good. He said on stage he thought it was a home movie. He thought it was something that this kid was kind of putting together and he had recently watched it before we showed up that day — the full length feature and just like days before because he'd seen little snippets here and there but he never saw

Michael (continued)

the whole thing. And he was blown away. He didn't even know what he was a part of. 00:07:17

Sean

That's great. Yeah. It's certainly not a kid's movie. The quality...yeah. 00:07:20

Michael

I like the idea that he kind of came clean a little bit and that really made it 00:07:26

special for the audience like, woah — OK. We're, I guess we're going to — 00:07:31

"Michael (Cudlitz) says it's good. We're gonna see something. 00:07:33

Sean

So I actually I had an opportunity when I was stationed in Fort Drum to do 00:07:36

an actual annual reunion for the the 22nd Infantry Brigade. I got to be the 00:07:46

honor guard for so I thought was really cool to see that the 93rd Bomb

Group does this too. It was really great to be able to talk to these World 00:07:52

War II vets, there's not that many of them left. And so... 00:07:57

Michael

Oh yeah.... 00:07:58

Sean

Is the 93rd group doing pretty well with still having members around or I 00:07:59

noticed there's a lot a lot of families have joined the group which is kind

of cool.

Michael

Yeah. So really if you really go back even just after the war you've got all 00:08:09

your sections and groups in the military and the 93rd Bomb Group is part

of the 2nd Air Division which in Europe — sort of air force that was in

charge of taking care of Europe was the 8th Air Force and the 8th Air

Force was three different divisions and the 93rd Bomb Group fell in the

Michael (continued)

second and they flew B 24 planes. The first division flew to B 17s and the 00:08:38
third was a mix between B 24 and B 17. You probably know the B 17 from 00:08:45
Memphis Belle. That's a B 17 bomber. B 24 a little bigger, could go a little 00:08:48
faster and go, go a little longer. So, so really it whittled down to, they had 00:08:56
reunions for the second air division. Some divisions were a little more 00:09:02
active and some weren't. But within the second air division there's 15 00:09:07
bomb groups and the 93 is one of those. And at some point the 93rd 00:09:13
decided to break away. They just thought that the second air division... 00:09:17
and I'm talking through the years through the decades since the 40s they
would have a big reunions and the 93rd wanted to get a more family
oriented and they thought that they wanted to pass on what they've been
doing over the years to the younger generation and that's the second
third and even today the fourth generation. So that's what's been 00:09:37
happening since 2001. The 93rd kind of broke away and said — all right 00:09:42
we're not going to do these big reunions anymore we're going to gather
our people up and have these smaller reunions. I mean smaller by you 00:09:50
know in the beginning there was probably one hundred and twenty people
maybe one hundred and fifty at best and now we're coming down to
maybe 60 people that attend. And yes they are mainly family members of 00:10:00
veterans. We do have maybe about three, four or five veterans sometimes 00:10:03
that do show up. It is a little sad that I do look at the film and... you know 00:10:09
when I started all those veterans obviously were alive because I put them
on camera and interviewed them. But as the years go on and I started to 00:10:19
complete the film and put it out there I'm looking at some of these
veterans and I would say about three fourths of them are gone. They're 00:10:31
just not with us anymore. And that includes my grandfather who was in 00:10:32

Michael (continued)

the film. He is not with us anymore either but it's really a lot of the 00:10:35
families that do attend now and keep it going and that was the whole plan
for the 93rd. I will tell you, the sad story, second air division that used to 00:10:44
hold all the reunions they disband. They didn't pass it on to the younger 00:10:50
generation. So there is no more second air division reunions. So the 93rd 00:10:54
is kind of on to something there and that's what we still do today.

Sturdy

This is actually our second interview with a director going over a certain 00:11:01
section of World War 2 and the mention — the conversation came up
about how it became therapeutic for the families to be a part of the
documentary and to get their side of the stories out. Did you have that 00:11:18
same experience with talking with these fourth generation, third
generations and it being a therapeutic thing for them with being over
there and being a part of these reunions?

Michael

Yeah I mean I'll give an example. And again no spoilers here but I will give 00:11:30
an example of one person in then there... George Jung who he, he had
known his father was in the war but his father passed when George was
15 years old. So he never got to like mature enough into his twenties or 00:11:49
whatever and talk to his father about this because that's usually when
you do it and you know you can get like one on one with your father, he
never had that opportunity. So he had always known this he had his 00:12:00
father's records and was kind of you know keeping this stuff close to him,
he's, George is in his 60's now and I would say probably about five years
ago George went to his first 93rd Bomb Group reunion and he was a little
hesitant but the 93rd jumps around the United States a lot. So, 00:12:20

Michael (continued)

sometimes we might actually be close to you and people may get wind of it online and say you know I think I might go there close enough. I'd be stupid not to go. But George did that and he thought, and I talk to him later about this — but he thought he was only going to stay one day. Usually reunions are about four days long but that first day he felt an immediate connection to everybody there and he felt like it was family. So he kind of hung on and he found out that this trip that is featured in the film to Hardwick, to the 93rd's air base, was coming up and he signed up immediately and I do have him in the film talking and basically saying he felt like he was connecting with his father. He was actually on the place that his father fought and flew out of. And you know survived he basically made it back home. So that connection was very therapeutic for him in a way that he's gonna go back again and it's an energy from that place and I know George felt that.

Sturdy

Yeah I think that's the part of the documentary where my wife started bawling. She was watching it with me and she just really... because her or her father or I'm sorry Grandfather was in World War 2. He was a...

Michael

Oh yeah.

Sturdy

He was a marine on the Pacific side. So she had that connection and stories and we have a lot of old World War II photos that he took and actually should probably be in, should be in a museum.

Michael

Oh yeah.

Sturdy

To kind of go off with that. You guys have that one photo of the crash site was that in a museum or was that something that somebody had. 00:13:56

Michael

OK. So yeah. One of the stories where his uncle crashed on Hardwick, is that what you are talking about? 00:14:04

Sturdy

Yeah. There's like the once or one photo that survived are the only known photo of the crash site. 00:14:09

Michael

Right. 00:14:16

Sturdy

Do you remember if that was a museum piece or if that was something that somebody had. 00:14:16

Michael

So it's a funny story in the beginning. It was kind of like our historian we have sort of in resident historian, in fact you see him in the film, Don 00:14:20

Morrison. Not a professional historian you know — doesn't have degrees here and there but he is an enthusiast and he has started collecting over 00:14:29

the years photos and films of 93rd. He had that photo in his archive but a lot of what the film is about when you really put something like this 00:14:40

together and you're going to go commercial you kind of actually find and see if there's a real owner to these photos... because if you don't then you 00:14:57

could get in trouble down the line obviously. That photo I did investigate and found out that I believe is the Imperial War Museum in England, had it 00:14:57

and it was under an album there sort of a collection I guess you could say and I had to kind of go back and find them, that they owned it and some

Michael (continued)

of these photos too are free and some of them are not. I have been to the National Archives here in the US and if there was a Life magazine photographer out on the airfield during the war taking pictures and you look that up online, you will probably have to get charged for it. However, there are some photos which I've been lucky enough to find. We do have a photo by... "Polecat" (a B 24) is one of the planes in fact, I don't know if you remember but these guys are sort of standing and praying before they were taking off. That film, that photo is free. I called the National Archives and they said you can have this one. So the crash one was one where I don't believe I had to pay for it but I did find the source and we will give them credit so that's all they asked. But yeah that was literally the only photo of that... there was, there was a lot of crashes on Hardwick, and some people said oh yeah that's the "Marx's" crash and you can go online and find, and people are labeling the photos wrong. They're just... our historian basically says no that's the crash of this one and that one isn't the only photo for the "Marx" photo.

HB

That was, that was definitely one of the things that taught me was the old, The old footage in there. I mean there's, there's the standard FDR stuff we've seen him given his big speech and but some of the bombing runs, that... that footage from Poland. I'd never seen that was that was — the couple I would say the guy and the girl walking on the street.

Michael

Oh yes.

Sean

That was scary just powerful. So I was kind curious you know. Same 00:16:51
thing. I mean where you got that but you kind of answer that, so. But yeah 00:16:56
that was something I liked.

Michael

I could add that because photos tend to be a little different with the film 00:17:02
part. There is a great website and I'm not plugging them but they they did 00:17:07
help out a lot as far as finishing some of my history bits in there, but
criticalpast.com you can search the year that you're interested in and all
the videos and photos will come up. They have transferred a lot of film to 00:17:23
video or they've taken films or videos and cleaned them up. That's one 00:17:31
way why these guys can actually charge for this stuff is that they say that
they up res it, they offer HD or standard def. So I went to there for a lot of 00:17:39
stuff. If our historian Don didn't have it I'd have to go to other sources and 00:17:42
that, that... lot of that footage was paid for to be able to grab that stuff
but some of the Hardwick stuff, believe it or not there were
photographers on the base that Don knew later in life as Don got
interested and these veterans were going around these reunions and they
just handed him tapes and they were filmed copied over. So some of the 00:18:10
earlier stuff in the film when you see the base or you see the guys on the
base. I have a little section where people are jumping in a fire pond, 00:18:16
throwing somebody in a fire pond, they're standing next to the plane.
That's all like original footage that people shot on actual Hardwick airfield 00:18:23
and we just happened to have that.

HB

So is a fire pond literally for putting out fires. It's not for swimming? 00:18:31

Michael

Yeah totally because they didn't have pressurized water close so they would grab the buckets and dig into the fire pond and go throw it on what they needed to. It wasn't like for the planes or anything but it was they were definitely stationed around the airfield a lot, the base just in case you know they needed water right away.

Sean

I was really amazed by how much local support there still is there in Hardwick... is that, I mean... you got tons of great photos and everybody walking... and I was amazed. Have you found that that's kind of singular to Hardwick or is that common around these airbases? Because there is a ton of airfields in England. Is that common or was that just kind of just Hardwick?

Michael

So yeah I definitely tell the story of Hardwick in there and how it is today but you got to think about back during the war there about 60 air base during the war and they're built pretty quick. In fact I think the landowner of Hardwick, at least part of Hardwick mentions that in the sort of talk that he's doing with somebody and one of the huts. They had to build them quick. So you're talking about fighter bases, support bases, and bomber bases. So with that, yes today if you do some hunting, you can do it online, you can even just plop yourself right in the East Anglia section or even down south a little bit by London, you will come upon these air bases and some people... locals have restored them, or kept them there and maybe at the hut maybe it's a few buildings, original buildings and either landowners today have let them basically keep museums sort of maybe artifact building or something like that. Hardwick is one of them.

Michael (continued)

You know they have a few huts there that the landowner who bought that land after the war like everybody was doing, they basically had a war, built the bases. The war was over and the farmers came back and they kind of bought up the land and started farming. That's what they started doing. So yes you can go around. My, my grandmother who her husband was my grandfather who was in the war, she has a cousin that was in the 100th Bomb Group and that was a B 17 bomb group. It was known as a bloody one 100th because they had a lot of casualties. They were at an airbase Thorpe Abbots and that base is still active as a museum. They restored the tower. The tower at Hardwick was torn down but the tower at Thorpe Abbots it was still there. They kind of have part of the museum in the tower you can actually walk in it. I mean this is the tower. This is the one that was back during the war. So it's pretty cool they have some big huts there and I believe one of the bomb groups, I think it's gonna be the 100 Bomb Group, I believe Spellberg and Hanks are doing another HBO mini series and I believe it's based on a book called Masters Of The Air and I believe the 100th will be featured in that. But yeah these places are there you get a car and rent, rent a car and drive around you can hit probably at least five or six air bases within you know a full day of just touring and their museums will be open. You know you can look at the times and then you can... It's kind of cool because every bomb group has its own history and every little area that you'll go to they offer something different each time. So yeah the one at Hardwick is great. That's why I always go back.

HB

Well one thing I was wondering about related to those planes you were saying and some of the old buildings, you used some CGI, CGI in there. 00:22:12

Michael

Yeah. 00:22:20

HB

And I kind of wondering how you decided to do that. How did you, how did you do that? Did you do that yourself or you had somebody you were able to hire? 00:22:20
00:22:24

Michael

That's a real... I'm glad you asked that question. Really good question. I like when we get a little techie. 00:22:26

HB

(laughs) 00:22:33

Michael

So the idea for the beginning... just the idea for this film in general was the before and after and the historian of the group — when I talk to the historian about making the film I was kind of like you know you have so many photos and I've been to Hardwick once, why don't we do this. Why don't we have this in the film, this before and after thing. I can't... let's actually go to the spot where that photo was taken and do that before and after. So then it sort of popped in my head you know with drones today and obviously the best way to get this overview is... are these drones I guess to fly around Hardwick. And then I said wait we are right at the end of one of the existing runways. What would this look like back during 1944? There would probably be hangars over here. There would be hardstands over here that the planes were parked at. Planes would be 00:22:33
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00:23:32

Michael (continued)

going down this runway. So I got the shot first. I didn't know if I could pull it off but I got the shot. We were there in 2015 and got that shot and then I brought it back to a friend of mine who works on a lot of Marvel stuff for Netflix he it was really, really deep into the, the correct, you know software that you need to use and I said can you pull this off. I said you might have fun with this shot. So he went back and recreated the base basically with his software and he plopped the tower where the tower needed to be. He put planes in there. He put all the buildings. He basically... I gave him a map of what Hardwick looked like, an overview like a bird's eye and he went and popped everything in. So in theory on his software you can actually zoom over to the tower and see the tower. You could zoom over to one of the hangars and see it. But my part was he had to put the camera back where my drone was and he mimicked and tracked the exact drone shot basically. And any weaves left and right the tracking matched that. So at some point we dissolve to what 1944 would look like. And that was that shot. He did it somewhere halfway in the drone drone shot. So yeah I think it's a great shot.

HB

Yeah, Those are awesome. Those are some of the things that really just bring it home like OK there it is now and then... holy cow that's the way it was then. It's right there it really is you know just as you're describing it and the pictures are showing you.

Michael

Yeah. And it's and again it's accurate to where you know that angle at least, it's accurate to where those buildings were and the actual other two runways come back in if you do watch it again. We've only got one runway

Michael (continued)

left and Hardwick but the two other runways come back in and the perimeter track actually comes back in as well. So it's kind of cool to see that perspective. 00:25:31

Sean

That's a great shot it's real powerful for sure. 00:25:34

Sturdy

I'm glad you brought that up HB. That's a great question. It's one that, one of those things I really enjoyed as well too. 00:25:37

There's some footage of being actually in the bomber. Did you get the chance to be in the bombers and fly or were the cameras just set up and you had to retrieve them afterwards? 00:25:44

Michael

No I actually shot all those shot up in the front of the film sort of the I guess sort of the opening of the film with the narration and then what was inspiring for that was we actually had a veteran and I think I said in the titles up front there where he went back 30 years after the war sort of 00:25:53

walked around Hardwick. I kinda of took his... that article was in the, the newsletter for the 93rd back then. So I sort of took it cut it down a little bit and plopped it over these shots. Yeah. Wear you're inside a B 24. 00:26:14

00:26:21

00:26:26

Sturdy

Yeah. 00:26:29

Michael

And all those shots, even though the sound was there the plane was basically parked on the ground. But I was able to be in there and actually you know shoot where he worked. He worked at the radio station there. 00:26:29

00:26:37

00:26:42

Michael (continued)

Right. Right there in that seat where the radio is. That was his spot. So I 00:26:44
knew that I needed to get in there. There's a great company called the 00:26:50
Collings Foundation which tours with a B 24, a B 17, B 25 and a P 51
fighter. They actually... once spring starts they will tour from state to state 00:27:02
city to city with these planes from the war. And I've seen them once up 00:27:10
younger when they did it and then I was like You know what as I'm reading
this article I have got to get into their B 24 and do this because most of it
is sort of inside that plane. So I found out where they were going to be 00:27:28
and I went and met them and they said no problem, come on out. Shot 00:27:34
the inside. they were actually go into another city so I booked a hotel and 00:27:35
they were going to go to Savannah, Georgia from South Carolina,
Columbia to Savannah, Georgia. I jumped in and took a ride and basically I 00:27:43
did get some of the shots out the window but everything you sort of see
before and after that it was parked on the ground and just got the shots
that way.

Sean

That's cool. There's there's.. I know a B 17 flies in for... we've got air races 00:27:57
in the fall here and there's some P 51s and a B 17 flies in. It's breathtaking 00:28:07
seeing those things fly still.

Michael

Oh yeah great and there's only two B 24s that are flying today. One down 00:28:10
in Dallas at the Commemorative Air Force museum down there the other
B 24 is with the Collings Foundation which they're mainly, there station up
in Massachusetts during the winter but then they do their traveling.

Sean

So I thought it was great. You had Helen's story in here to get a female perspective. You know you don't hear a lot of female perspective on world war II. Was it hard getting that story in here or was it just kind of luck that you happened upon it.

Michael

I got to tell you when I first started the documentary I knew that we had veterans going to the reunion and I'm sure there's other bomb group reunions where there's another kid that grabs his camera and says hey can I interview you. So that's the way this documentary started. And then two years went by and I had one idea for a project and then another and then I was like I think, yeah I think we need to make a bigger documentary here. The historian got involved so I've got to tell you from the beginning I really had no idea what the film was going to be. I just knew I had these great interviews of these veterans but then this trip to Hardwick came up and I had been obviously to Hardwick before with my grandfather but this time I was gonna go by myself and I was gonna go with another group of people and I said we've got to document this we've got to document these, these... this next generation going. So with that I started meeting the people actually on the tour at Hardwick. I never knew them beforehand. I did know George who I knew him from that one reunion that I mentioned before. I didn't know Gail who is the daughter of Helen that you're talking about. And I did know John Marx because he is the vice president of the group. But I never got into his story really big so. On the trip I started, I started figuring out on scene who is going to be in this documentary. I mean you have to have a focus otherwise this is going to be some sort of travel log and that can be boring. So I got to know Gail.

Michael (continued)

Gail started telling me her story while were on the trip and she said oh 00:30:24
yeah I've got letters my, my mom would write these letters back home to
her mom all the time. I was like wait you got letters. Oh yeah. My 00:30:35
parents... and I don't want to give this part away and I won't spoil it but
she obviously has a great story about her parents too. So that's what 00:30:45
really started going. So once I was done with the trip I sort of was like... I 00:30:48
gotta go, I got to go to Gail's house and I've got to have her sit down and
interview her. I did get a quick interview during the trip but it wasn't 00:30:59
enough. I need to go down and say alright let's start from the beginning. 00:31:02
Tell me what you know. So her main interview is in her living room 00:31:05
basically in Missouri. And that was done because I just needed that detail. 00:31:11
And then I started going back to every other person and said, alright John 00:31:16
Marx has a great story about his uncle, George can be this small little
thread that goes through the film. And let me go back and get George. I 00:31:27
have these veteran interviews so eventually I started pulling it all
together. But Gail and Helen, Helen being the mother that was in the Red 00:31:33
Cross during the war... powerful stuff. I mean you just you know you've, 00:31:41
you've maybe heard these stories before and you've seen them in other
ways. But I was happy to have one for my film that... wow this is a story 00:31:46
that the 93rd owns. I can use this, we can use this for this documentary. 00:31:52
So I was very excited about that. And the letters on top of that were just a 00:31:55
complete bonus. And then getting the actor to be able to read the letters 00:32:00
like it is her mother back during the 40s, can't get better in that.

Sturdy

To kind of go behind the curtains... how long did this production go for 00:32:08
you from starting all the way to putting it in the can? How long of a 00:32:17

Sturdy (continued)

process was that for you?

Michael

Yeah. So they came up with the idea if you really want to be honest with it 00:32:19
it came up, the first idea came up in 2013 that, that was when they're like
we're thinking of doing something and when they have their reunions
people get up and sort of do reports and there's a business meeting and
then the historian and myself got up there basically and said yeah we're
interested in doing it. So they approved a few thousand dollars for 00:32:42
research and then 2014, they were like I think we're gonna do this. Can 00:32:48
we get the more money approved. And they approved \$10,000 because in 00:32:49
2015 is when we were going to take the trip to Hardwick and that was the
money that we needed to basically document that. So 2016... 15 into 16 I 00:33:00
put up the opening that you saw in that B 24 and it was about seven
minutes originally, the original cut and people saw it at the next reunion
and they just started handing money over. Every... all the members were 00:33:15
like Let's do this let's make this thing. So I would say for the next three 00:33:18
years after that I was editing. And fast forward to the top of this year is 00:33:23
when I started really locking the cut in. The original cut used to be 93 00:33:30
minutes long. Believe it or not ninety third, ninety three. But I knew that I 00:33:34
had to cut it down and it's currently 73 minutes. It happens. That's natural 00:33:42
and you get a lot of stuff and you just sort of figuring out your story. But I 00:33:47
am finding that the shorter length for the feature... people like to hear
that. They like to... they can program it. They can have you talk at a 00:33:53
presentation. They can play the film and you can do a Q and A afterwards. 00:34:00
I'm finding out that the 73 minute mark and around there is very good for 00:34:03
people to be able to show this thing. So yeah that's a little bit of about the 00:34:11

Michael (continued)

timeline.

HB

So yeah I mean the time frame doesn't seem too, too off from a lot that we've seen before but I was kind of wondering... and if it's too inside baseball for the doc let me know. But did you find anything else more about Colonel Ted Timberlake and his story and I thought I caught a snippet of them talking about him during one of the big low bomb runs. He was kind of interesting to me.

Michael

Yeah. Ted Timberlake... and when you talk about the group and sort of the chronology of the 93rd Bomb Group and again every bomb group is going to add the chronology the 93rd is the oldest B 24 group that was in there during the war. So they were over there in '42 and Ted Timberlake was a big was a part of that from the beginning and he knew that he was going to go over and run this bomb group. So a lot of the early people that went over they were connected to Ted Timberlake big time, like he was their man. And even back then early on in the war, all the crews basically had their plane and that's where kind of the naming of the planes came up like this is our plane we fly this plane. This is what we named our plane. Some of the planes were named after the pilot. There was maybe some funny story within the crew that you know the plane got named so. But during that time Ted ran, ran the whole show. And he did for awhile and it was one of those things where, I think he went on for like a year, year and a half, two years almost but he would then get promoted and he got promoted to 20th Bomb Wing Commander which was I think, I think it was four groups three or four groups that he was in charge of at one point. So

Michael (continued)

he kind of left the 93rd and became in charge of you know three or four bomb groups. But his story is interesting. You know we do have a book called Ted's Travelling Circus and that, that really does go into a lot of detail of sort of his timeline throughout the group and past that and the war. Yeah I mean you're talking about big stuff. I mean they had the Ploesti raid that they did over Romania that he was a part of.

HB

Did he fly? Did he actually fly.

Michael

He did fly. He was a pilot. Yeah he would he would go up and be a lead plane and the lead plane usually would go to Target and find the target and then if they dropped bombs the other planes in the element would drop their bombs. So lead plane was pretty big. But yes he would fly and he would be out there with them. He did three tours to Africa with them. I think definitely he did the first two and had to check on the third one but you know that's one of the reasons why they, why they called the group Ted's Travelling Circus because at the time that he was in charge of the group they traveled all over the place. And I do mention that in the film and that's, that was pretty rare. I mean they had the 15th Air Force. They had the 9th Air Force down there already but the 93rd was asked to leave Europe and go down south basically. And they already had B 24 untis down there but the 93rd with their first and they kind of had their act together so they would always call the 93rd and say come on down we need your help.

HB

One thing I was also wondering so in the 93rd association... what does that... What does it take to be a member. Can you just be a fan of it. And then also I kind of was wondering is there any way it's even paid in the whole thing or is it all just people doing it for the love of the 93rd.

Michael

First part. Yeah you can get online and go to 93bg.com and you can become a member. And that's mainly if you want to become a member that... you're giving support to the group and you get a newsletter, comes out quarterly and you kind of get the update on the group and what the group's doing where the next reunion is going to be. You also with the reunion information you do have to pay a separate fee to attend the reunion because the reunions do need to pay... be paid for, that's meals and transportation and all that. But that's... really you're basically just supporting an old World War 2 group. That's really what it comes down to. And then you kind of have to take it at that point of how much you want to get involved past that point. The other good thing is you know we do have a Facebook group. Lots of people have... especially since the film's been out, have been jumping on the Facebook page, or group and actually becoming members on there. And it's a great place to be able to — hey I've got these old photos, you know anything about them and you can put that stuff out there and people will answer back. We do have people that go to the reunions. This is one of the benefits of going to the reunions is that you can... if you have some... even if it's another bomb group you could still go to these reunions and find people that are really knowledgeable about the war about a bomb group. And it's, it's, it's one of these. I mean where else are you going to do that. I guess you can get

Michael (continued)

online and really search but to see people up front, they're gonna show you photos they're going to show you videos. It just sort of comes alive at that point. And that's really... you know the registration or the membership, it's sort of the beginning part and but will always take you know new members. It always helps to do that.

HB

That's great. I mean overall I just really thought this was powerful scene all those old members and just knowing where we're losing that as you touch on and they're, they're, they're gradually fading away. So it's important to keep this alive.

Michael

They are definitely, yeah they... and that's the sad thing and I, I do when I — when you know I could talk about this a little bit but we're basically in previews this summer and fall and the festivals are great and I'm super happy and excited that we are getting attention from some festivals and even the DOCUTAH festival which is, I mean I'm just thrilled about that to be able to, to have this and get a little bit a festival cred. That's, that's one of the reasons why I'm kind of bringing it out there because we do have 93rd people that go to our screenings. I just took my family up here to upstate New York near Albany and actually in Scotia, New York they had a theater there. A museum sponsored a screening for a two day screening up there and believe it or not people that were you know family of veterans that were in the 93rd showed up and the one thing that I love to do is go throughout the audience and I do a introduction to the film and sometimes I'll stand there for 20, 25 minutes before stuff kind of really gets going and I hit play and really ask the crowd first of all — are

Michael (continued)

there World War 2 veterans in the crowds. And I can tell you that I think in 00:41:33
the last six screenings that I had two people raised their hand, and that
was it. And I've screened in front of probably close to 700 people right 00:41:42
now. So then you just got to pare down you got to understand that yes 00:41:46
they are leaving us and you know the stories that we grabbed for the film
I think are super important and that's one reason why the film was made
to at least give them their voice. Let us hear that history firsthand 00:42:01
because my next question when I do these screenings is OK well is there
any family members of the veterans. And then the hands start going up 00:42:11
and that's when you really see like it is about the next generation.

Sean

A lot of the shots in this film are great really, really good. Did you do a lot 00:42:17
of filmography yourself or was there a photographer with you.

Michael

No I shot everything myself. It was just you know I'd say that but it was 00:42:28
over a length of time. But yeah. Everything from the beginning to the trip 00:42:38
to Hardwick, Cudlitz and his introduction we shot that at a museum out
here called the American Air Power Museum in Long Island. Yeah. You 00:42:52
know it's just one of those things where I've had a camera in my hand
since I was 12. I just... you know once... my dad bought the video camera I 00:43:00
kind of took it out of his hands and it became mine as I was growing up.
So it's natural to be able to have a camera and start shooting but you 00:43:09
know when you know it's going to be for a film and you're sort of really
start thinking about the shots and trying to get the best stuff you can. But 00:43:21
yeah there was, there was nobody really else. We did have a small crew, 00:43:24
there are some UK friends of mine that, that have a production company

Michael (continued)

there and there was I think a second camera that day just to grab Gail's story at the end but that was about it. Yeah. I enjoy shooting. I think it's great. 00:43:41

Sturdy

The other side of that would be the soundtrack. did you have a part in that because it was beautifully done as well too. It really gave a nice touch to it. 00:43:44
00:43:50

Michael

Thank you. I'm glad you're asking that question it's really... one of those things that just sort of happens in the background but my work in New York is, I started as an editor. And again I was editing when I was a kid too between two VCR in my room. But I've graduated up to the Avid and I've been working on Avid for 20 years here in New York. And a lot of my work is in television and cable television a lot of MTV work in the beginning, VH1. I worked on a lot of food shows and travel shows. It's just how you make your money you know you can just go in and do these jobs and... but I've always got these side projects. But one of the things that my normal regular job during the day has taught me is that we have to go into a lot of libraries to pull music. That's really one of the main things you have to do. I mean we don't... some of the shows I work on we don't have the luxury of having a composer. So what I did feel in the beginning with the film I was like — man do I want to get a composer or can I pull this off with you know basically needle drop music and some needle drop music is bad and some are good — that's just the way it works. But I had found a library and I had talked to the people that run the library, if I could use their music and I didn't talk price right, right away but I knew that they 00:43:53
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00:45:05

Michael (continued)

weren't going to be that expensive. And they said yeah go ahead will sign you up for an account. So all that music in there is from a library and with some of the background of my editing I've manipulated the heck out of that music. I basically became my own little conductor because they had really great tunes in there, some really great powerful stuff — I said I can make a film out of this. I said I can do this with what they've got. You know you sit in front of the library searching for hours for the right thing. But when you come across the right thing and then craft it and cut it up in the timeline that's pretty much what you're seeing in the film is me taking a pretty decent piece of music and just manipulating the heck out of it.

So....

Sturdy

Out of all the pieces that go into production was there any piece that was extensively long or took longer than you expected?

Michael

That's a good question. So you talking about production side or post side or both?

Sturdy

All of it. Yeah I mean sometimes we'll have directors say that animation took much longer than expected or the audio took much more long or much longer. Or finding the old footage. Was there anything that you came across that became kind of a stumbling block?

Michael

Yeah that's a good question too. I think... you know what's really, and it's still holding me up right now and I'm able to do screenings because I don't... I just don't think... we're not going to have any problems with it.

Michael (continued)

But what takes the longest on a project like this is getting the rights and clearances. Going through... doing your due diligence and basically saying yes we got permission to use this. What I've found is that if you think about everything that — I need to get permission for all of this before I start working — you'll never work. You'll never start cutting stuff in. So what I did... one of the things is maybe a lesson for some people, is that you know you can go to these sites called Shutterstock and all this other... these libraries that basically have all these films out there, but, photo that you can use. But you have to be really careful of what the license says, of what it says that you can use on it. I found some really good footage and really good photos that I really wanted to put in my piece and I did, and I put them in there. But when it says it's only for editorial use that means news, web and that doesn't mean commercial though. So then you have to go back and you have to go find well somebody put this photo up there, somebody owns it. You could ask them and try to get commercial rights for it. We're in the process. We've got about 30 entries out of 450 entries that are archival film or photos. Thirty entries that were/are in question. And our lawyer is saying let's clear 'em up and we can get the chain of title, we can get you the license for your film. Let's clear those 30 up. So we're in the process of going one by one right now. I say we, it's me. The 93rd has never made a film before. So I'm sort of helping them and I'm actually learning a lot too. This is technically my first feature documentary that I've worked on. So I'm going through this process as well and learning how to get the clearances for this stuff. And there is a path. The lawyer says, listen we can get through a lot of this. We just need to do our due diligence and get

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Michael (continued)

through it and have a record. So I'm still working on that. We do plan to go commercial at some point with the film so we have to have everything in line at that point. But with festivals and museum screenings I'm not charging a thing for the film at all for people to watch it during the summer and fall. So you're... I figure we're okay right now.

HB

Yeah. One thing I noticed I was sifting through the IMDB screen and you have a bunch of photos from like you know behind the scenes stuff. I really thought those, thought those are cool. Maybe something to like inlay at the credits or something. Kind of a lighthearted fun stuff because it's kind of cool to see you know, Cudlitz and you and some of the families, the families and the old guys.

Michael

Oh yeah. That stuff is great. I mean right now the... the credits, the credits sort of fill out with some of the veterans. I actually have some of the veterans that, that weren't in the film but I really liked their interview. And if they are in the film they don't talk so much. So I kind of gave them sort of a chance at the end in the credits, and it kind of is a light hearted moment with some of their talk about the war too anyway because it gets a little heavy toward the end. But when they come up in the credits I sort of, sort of liked them there yeah. Thanks for that. Yeah there's some good, there's a good shot there that we're able to get.

HB

Yeah I like, I do recall the credits scenes in those interviews. One thing I do like and we've mentioned it before and some docs that do it, I think we all like seeing how you bring up their names even when it's you know,

HB (continued)

Colin and Don how they're in there so often but I forget their names and whatnot and where they are from. So it's fun to see. Nice to see their names. OK. That's who that was I remember now. 00:50:30
00:50:32

Michael

Exactly. One of the things I did try to do too, you just kind of made me remember that but if a veteran comes up I always... I'm pretty sure I have this format for every veteran in there is that you'll see their wartime photo and on the left their lower third, their title will come up and it will just straight cut to them today basically and what they look like today. So yeah I really made an effort to try to do that because I thought it was important to be able to take the photo in, get the name and then see them today basically. 00:50:35
00:51:01

HB

Definitely it goes along with the CGI on the base I mean just showing then and now is definitely important and it sucks people and even more. 00:51:11

Sean

When can we expect to tell everybody to watch us on Netflix. 00:51:20

Michael

I'll tell you want to be honest with you. I'm getting a lot of you know... I'm on Facebook a lot and we have a page Return To Hardwick, a World War II story. A World War II documentary — and I get asked that a lot, every day almost — because I'm putting a little promo pieces out and say hey we made a film check it out. I believe yesterday was August 1st. If I'm correct and that was, that was the anniversary of the Ploesti raid, August 1st, 1943 is when that raid happened. So I put some stuff out about that. 00:51:23
00:51:35
00:51:47
00:51:59

Sturdy

Nice. 00:52:01

Michael

I got so many hits off of that and put a little snippet from that scene in the film. So... but then I'd get the question back — you know most people were like I'm trying to find this film on Amazon — I don't see it. I'm like it's not there yet. We're trying to work on it and get it out there. But I think that's all part of it that you know you do this big tease, you sort of get it out there... and I'm doing what I can with these screenings. I think... I'm really enjoying going to a lot of the screenings I've been everywhere from England at the start. I went back to Norwich the town there and showed it there back in June. I went to Savannah, Georgia at the Mighty Eight Air Force Museum, went to a film festival in Georgia. I just got back from upstate New York. I was in Minneapolis showing it at a museum there. So I'm getting it around and I'm able to kind of report back on Facebook like it's out there, it's out there.

Sturdy

That's really good. 00:52:54

Michael

Yeah, people are... I find that people are driving hours sometimes from another state to come in and watch it. So I don't know that that creates good buzz I think and maybe that will be better down the line once it is out on Netflix or on a bluray that you can watch.

Sturdy

Before we get into any spoiler areas, I think we'll go ahead and conclude the interview now Michael. But thank you so much. But before we let you go where can our listeners find you in the way of social media and

Sturdy (continued)

websites?

Michael

Social media... I really am trying to stick to Return To Hardwick, A World War II documentary — that's really where you can find it. And I believe it's "hardwickdoc" basically on Facebook also if you search that. The other main place that you can go to is hardwickfilm.com which that's the website. If you go right to the homepage you can see where we're screening. We have festivals listed in there. Some are not even listed yet. But I, once I get an okay from the festival I start putting stuff up and museum screenings. We're adding those all the time. And like I said I'm getting people from the west coast saying — hey we feel left out so we're trying to work some screenings over there — but those are the, those are the two best places.

Sturdy

Thanks Mike, we greatly appreciate that. 00:54:11

Michael

Sure. No problem. 00:54:13

Sturdy

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