

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II, B-17

Personal Experience

O. H. 1283

PETER DASCULIAS

Interviewed

by

Joseph Nuzzi

on

November 29, 1989

PETER DASCOLIAS

Mr. Peter Dascoulias was born in New Kensington, PA., in 1921. When his father lost his job in the steel mill, he and his family moved to Middleboro, MA., when he was about five years old. At the age of 14, his family moved to Warren, Ohio where his father went to work in a local steel mill.

After graduation from Warren G. Harding High School, he could not find a job, so he entered the three Cs and spent six months at the CCC camp in Utah. From there he went back to Warren and got a job at the Ravenna Arsenal where he stayed until he got drafted in September of 1942. During the war, he flew as a waist gunner on a B-17.

He received basic training at Camp Perry in Ohio. While at the camp, he took a test for the Army Air Corp. Upon passing the test, he went to Keisler Field in Biloxi, MI., where he went to gunnery school. He also was stationed at Salt Lake City Air Force Base where he went to radio school.

Having received additional training in gunnery school throughout the various Army Posts in the US, he eventually was shipped to Salina, KA., where he was assigned to a crew. From Salina, he and his fellow crew members flew a B-17 to Bedford, England.

He arrived in Bedford, England in April of 1943. There, Mr. Dascoulias was assigned to the 423rd Bomb Squadron, under the command of the 306th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force.

On his sixteenth mission on July 26, 1943, at about 12:00 noon, his aircraft sustained major damage to the number two engine. They had just released their bombs over Hanover, Germany

when they were hit by ground fire.

Shortly after bailing out of the aircraft, he landed in a cornfield and was met by an old man wearing a World War I, German (pointed type) helmet. The old man took him to the village's city building. From there he was trucked to an Army base somewhere in Germany. Eventually he was taken to Stalag 7-A in Mooseberg, Germany where he stayed until his transfer in September to Stalag 17-B in Krems, Austria.

Mr. Dascoulias remained at Stalag 17-B until he was liberated in May of 1945 by General Patton's Third Army.

After the war, Mr. Dascoulias returned to Warren where he went to work for the water department for the City of Warren. In 1952, he married his present wife V. Bessie. The Dascoulias's have three children: John, age 34; Frank, age 32; and Christina, age 31.

He retired from the City of Warren Water Department in August of 1984.

Besides his many medals and citations, he holds: an Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, a Purple Heart, and a Prisoner of War Medal.

Mr. Dascoulias is a member of St. Demetrious Church in Warren.

He is a member of the 306th Bomb Group Association, the Mahoning Chapter of Prisoners of War, and the Disabled American Veterans.

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INTERVIWEEEE: PETER DASCOULIAS

INTERVIEWER: Joseph Nuzzi

SUBJECT: Army Air Corps, World War II, B-17, military training

DATE: November 29, 1989

N: This is an interview with Mr. Peter Dascoulias for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on World War II, B-17 by Joseph A. Nuzzi, 210 Fairmont NE, Warren, Ohio, on November 29, 1989 at 7:30 p.m.

Okay, you were born in 1921. What schools did you attend, Mr. Dascoulias?

D: In Warren?

N: Well, prior to coming to Warren. You told me you came to Warren. . . .

D: Yeah, I came from Middleboro, Massachusetts. First, I was born in New Kensington, PA. Well, my dad was working the steel mills there and he lost his job, so we went to Massachusetts. I was there for about five years, I would say in Middleboro, Massachusetts, and then we moved back to Warren, Ohio. My father got a job at Republic Steel. We moved back here to Warren.

N: Your family was originally from Warren, then?

D: No. No. We were originally from New Kensington. That's where we were born. From there I went to Middleboro, and from Middleboro back to. . . . I mean, we came here to Warren, and my father got a job at Republic Steel, and we started school.

N: You were in what, about eighth grade then?

D: I was in eighth grade. About what, 14, 15 years old.

N: And you graduated from Warren G. Harding High School?

D: Yes.

N: In June or January or. . . .

D: In June of 1939.

N: Since it was 1939 at the time and the war had not started in the United States, did you go to work immediately after?

D: I tried to get a job and I couldn't get a job, so I went to the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps).

N: Interestingly enough, my dad went to the CCC, too.

D: Did he?

N: Yeah. What did you do in the CCC?

D: Well, I was working in the office, like a secretary to the commander.

N: How long were you with the CCC?

D: Just six months. They wanted me to go more, but I got homesick.

N: What did you do?

D: I came home and I got a job at the Ravenna Arsenal. I worked there till I was drafted.

N: You were drafted in when?

D: September of 1942.

N: So you worked at the Ravenna Arsenal?

D: Yeah. I worked there about nine months.

N: What did you do there?

D: I worked with the 75 millimeter shells. We put them together.

N: What was that like during World War II? You guys had to be busier than heck.

D: We were. We were. . . .

N: Extremely busy. They had round-the-clock work for you guys?

D: No. We had shifts. Three shifts.

N: Three shifts seven days a week, though, or what?

D: No, no, I would say six days a week. Five and six days a week.

N: You went into the military then, in September of 1942. How old were you at the time?

D: I was 21.

N: You went to the Army Air Corps?

D: No, not right away. I went to Camp Perry, Ohio first. You want all that?

N: Okay, yeah.

D: I went to Camp Perry, and they gave us tests. And after you take the different tests, they said, "Would you mind going into the Army Air Corps?" And I said, "No." I was glad I went. I didn't want to go in the infantry, so I was glad. From there, I went to Keisler Field, Mississippi.

N: Oh, you went to Keisler, too?

D: Yeah. We went to basic training.

N: What do you mean by basic training?

D: Everybody has to go to basic training. You know, you get your. . . .

N: This wasn't flight school or anything, it was just basic training.

D: No. While we were there, now, they asked for volunteers if anybody wanted to be a gunner. Me and this friend of mine from Warren here signed up, and they shipped us to Harlingen, Texas. There was a gunnery school in Harlingen, Texas.

N: That's where you went to gunnery school, then.

D: Yes.

N: What was that school like?

D: It was very hard.

N: How did they teach you? Let's go through some of the training.

D: They go with the guns. Taking the guns apart and. . . . By the time you graduate, you had to take the gun apart and put it together--this was the 30 caliber machine gun--blindfolded. Otherwise, you wouldn't pass. They'd take you up in a plane and you'd fire at targets, you know. That was part of the training you had there.

N: How long did this training last? They started you off on 30 calibers, period, or they started you off on BB guns or. . . .

D: No, just 30 caliber.

N: This is about October 1942? November?

D: About October. I was there, I think, till December.

N: That was Harlingen?

D: Harlingen. After graduating from there. . . .

N: How long was that?

D: Three months, I would say.

N: Did you shoot 50 calibers at this point or just. . . ?

D: Just 30 calibers.

N: Was it automatic 30 calibers, then?

D: Yeah.

N: What was a typical day of instruction like? Did they take you up in aircrafts?

D: Mostly, it was just school work.

N: What was that like? What did they teach you? Were you in class?

D: Well, different fighters. . . . We had to learn all the fighters from the Japanese and all the fighters from the Germans and all the, you know, different insignias and stuff like that. It was just all school work.

N: So basically when you saw the silhouette, they asked you. . . .

D: Yeah, silhouette is what it was. If you didn't pass the thing, they'd flunk you out, and you wouldn't be a gunner.

N: What did they do with guys who flunked out? Back in the infantry or what?

D: I don't know. I passed though. Now, these fliers that we had were kind of . . . well, I wouldn't say mean, but they didn't want to be there. They wanted to be in combat. They had to take us up there so we could shoot at targets. They didn't like that at all.

N: Oh, they'd take you up in the aircraft. This is when you were doing 30 calibers, though.

D: Yeah, they took us up in a single. . . . Just the two of us. It wasn't a bomber; it was just the two of us. They used to tell us, "Be careful with these pilots. You better listen to what they say, because if you don't, they'll put you through the ropes." They'll give it to you. Roll the aircraft and everything.

N: What kind of aircraft did he take you up in?

D: It was AT-6s. I remember that now, AT-6.

N: Did they ever take two of you guys up at a time?

D: One. Fire and a sleeve. They pulled a sleeve. I don't know if you've ever seen them.

N: I've seen those before.

D: Then, they'd bring you down and they'd check you and the bullets. They'd see if you put any at all. We never did find out what we did, though.

N: What was the AT-6 aircraft like? Was that a single engine?

D: Single engine. That was a trainer. The pilots trained on that themselves. How to become a pilot. . . . They have the AT-6s, as far as I know. I never went to pilot school, but that, I think, [is] what they were for.

N: So, school consisted basically of doing this, anti-aircraft and shooting at that and. . . .

D: Putting guns together, then we had to shoot skeet to get the. . . . [We had to] train so we could hit a



moving object.

N: Sure. How to aim ahead of it.

D: Aim ahead, you know, and all that stuff.

N: You say this lasted for three months, then.

D: About three months.

N: Where did they take you after that?

D: Well, they took me to Salt Lake City. They gave us these tests if you wanted to be a radio operator. I guess I didn't pass it, because I wasn't a radio operator. They put me as an armor gunner. I was supposed to take care of all the guns on the B-17. Later, when we'd get the bomber, I was supposed to fix it if something happened. In other words, I had about another month of that training.

N: What was it called?

D: Armor gunner.

N: So, the armor gunner was in charge of all the guns?

D: Yeah, make sure they're all in working order and stuff like that.

N: You had to stay there an extra month in order to do all that?

D: Yeah, that was in Salt Lake City.

N: What was that training like? Was that school work, too, or was that. . . .

D: Yeah, a lot of school. Mostly books. Well, the guns too, but mostly school work.

N: What type of school work? Can you remember?

D: Mostly, I think, silhouettes like you said, the planes.

N: Going back to the silhouettes again and things like that. . . .

D: I can't remember. It's been. . . .

N: I know, it's been 45 years.

D: After that, they put us on a train. We went to Ephrata, Washington.

N: Going back to Salt Lake really quickly, is that where you got introduced to 50 calibers, though?

D: No.

N: Still 30 calibers?

D: Still 30 calibers.

N: How long was this training?

D: About a month.

N: Where did you go from there, then?

D: Ephrata, Washington. That was a cold place.

N: I was going to say. . . . The month of December up in Ephrata, Washington had to be cold.

D: When we got there, everything was a mess. We didn't know where we were . . . I mean, what we were supposed to do. They didn't give us any kind of orders or nothing until one day, I went over there and I seen my name on the board. They were shipping us out. I was there three or four days and I didn't do nothing, and I didn't know what I was supposed to do until we saw our name on the list that we were shipping out. I wasn't there, I don't think, [for] a week. They put us on a train, and it took us a week to get to Blythe, California.

N: What did you do in Blythe, California?

D: I was there a week or two, I don't know, and they put us in these tents. You know, it was warm in the daytime, but it got cold at night. We were in tents there.

N: What did you guys do?

D: We were out there doing nothing.

N: You just sat there? Did they let you off post at all?

D: Yeah, well, we could go to the PX. We weren't allowed off post. Here's the funny thing. I finally did go. They put us in a tent and I didn't know who I was to report to or nobody. So, finally when I did go to the sergeant, the master sergeant-- he was a real old-timer. He must have been 60 years old, then. I told him my name, and he said, "Where you been?" I said, "I've been here for two weeks." He said, "We had you down for AWOL." [laughter] I was there.

N: Well, when you reported in, did anybody take your name down or something?

D: No. I just got off the train and like a bunch of cattle, we went to the base there and got into the tents to sleep. Nobody asked us nothing.

N: So, they had all you guys listed down as AWOL, probably.

D: Well, I guess. Me, I know they did. I said, "Gee." I was surprised. I would have been here. . . . We went to the PX to drink beer and come back, and we didn't do anything. Finally, they did assign us to a crew, like. That's where we got the B-17. There was 10 of us.

N: You had two waist gunners at this time?

D: Yeah. Two waist gunners, a tail gunner, a radio operator. . . .

N: The navigator.

D: The flight engineer, bombardier, navigator, pilot, and co-pilot.

N: Some of the guys were telling me that later on during the war, when they were flying, they did away with one waist gunner. They flew with nine guys. They said that they discovered that. . . .

D: When did this happen?

N: Toward the end of the war. Towards the end of the war, they were telling me that they did away with the one waist gunner because the guys were bumping into each other.

D: That was kind of close, yeah.

N: They decided the heck with it, and they had the one guy switch back and forth. They needed two extra guys that would take the bombardier and move the bombardier back. In fact, in some of the planes, they kept the two waist gunners and did away with the bombardier. They just had the . . . and that was it.

D: That must have been later on.

N: Okay, so now you're in Blythe, California. How long were you here and. . . .

D: We were there a month, I would say. Maybe not even a month. The planes, the B-17s weren't doing too good on the runways there. The runways were too soft.

N: They didn't have concrete?

D: No. They had blacktop and they were mushy. They'd stay in. So we went to Pyote, Texas. That's about 30 or 40 miles from Odessa, which is a fairly large city. Pyote was nothing. It was just a little, small town. Very small. It had four corners.

N: What was the name of the base in Pyote, Texas? Do you know that? The post?

D: The only thing I know is Pyote.

N: How long were you in Pyote and what did you do there?

D: Okay, we did a lot of training there.

N: What, for instance?

D: We'd go out in the desert and fire our guns down into the target.

N: Are we still talking 30 caliber?

D: No, 50 caliber.

N: This is the first time you were introduced to 50 caliber?

D: We would, more or less be in the air five or six hours at a time. They would ship us all over. Mostly training for the pilot and the bombardiers, because the gunners, the only time we'd get down close to the gun, they would let us shoot the targets. There was, more or less, training for the bombardier and the pilot.

N: So more or less, you guys flew. . . .

D: As a crew.

N: And you got used to each of those idiosyncrasies.

D: Yeah, used to running around together and with each other.

N: That's another thing. You were what rank at this time?

D: I was a sergeant.

N: Did you guys run around with the officers at this time?

D: No. They were in different barracks and everything. We were in our barracks, and they were there. We never

did associate with them or go out together.

N: It's interesting. Some crew members got extremely tight--officers in on noncoms and. . . .

D: At that time, even when we went overseas, we never did get that type of. . . .

N: When you were in Pyote, you didn't have a lot of 50 caliber training apparently, or did you?

D: No. We just had the shooting on the ground. There was nothing to shoot at targets in the air or nothing.

N: But you weren't shooting at targets in the air.

D: No, we weren't shooting nothing. There was no training whatsoever.

N: Why was that?

D: I don't know.

N: That seems insane that. . . .

D: I don't know what you could shoot at unless. . . .

N: Didn't they have something that they could pull?

D: Well, I was thinking of tow, but they were probably afraid. Some of these pilots were shooting up a plane because the gunners would be so far up that they would probably knock one of the planes down. They had trouble.

N: Where did you go after Pyote, Texas, then?

D: We were going to go overseas.

N: Pyote, Texas, that was going to be what, January of 1943?

D: Yeah, about January or February. So they gave us a what you call a delay in route. We could go home for a few days and come back. We were supposed to go back to Salina, Kansas, but we had to find our own way home.

N: Okay, did you come home then?

D: So, yeah, we did come home but we didn't have any money. We went to the Red Cross and they loaned us the money.

N: How long were you allowed to go home?

D: I think I was home four or five days.

N: They didn't give you guys a 30 days pass or nothing.

D: Oh, no. Just four or five days. That's all we had and we came home. I remember we got to Cleveland. We were on a train. This fellow that was with me was from McDonald. He was in our crew. We got to Cleveland and got off the bus. It was about midnight or so. We had no way to get to Warren. There was nothing running then, so we had to wait till morning to get home. So we waited [until] about 5 or 6 o'clock when we found a bus and came home. We were there from about 12 midnight, sitting in the bus station waiting for a bus. It was cold.

Well, as soon as my leave was over, I went to Salina, Kansas. That's where we were supposed to get our plane. That's where they had the new bombers there, B-17s. We were there, I would say, about a month. It had to be about a month, but we didn't do anything there. Hardly anything.

N: No training, no nothing. You just basically hung around the base?

D: Just wait for the plane. We were supposed to. . . .

N: [Did they] let you off post at night to go into town?

D: We could do anything we wanted. We just laid around and did nothing for about a month.

N: Did you finally pick up a plane, though?

D: Yeah, we got our plane. I would say, I don't know, [in] the latter part of March. Anyway, from there, we got our plane and we flew to--what's the name of that town? Bangor, Maine. We landed there and stayed there a couple days, I think. I don't know why. I think we got orders or something. The plane was ours. In fact, we had our crew--10 of us--and we had Colonel Carr. He was the head of our groups. In other words, we went as a group over there. We didn't go over in one plane. There was six planes. And so, I forget. . . . I don't know exactly, the goal of it. We flew from Bangor, Maine to Reykjavik, Iceland.

N: So, you guys actually ferried in your own aircraft over?

D: Yeah. We flew them over. I'll tell you what happened. We flew to Reykjavik, Iceland, and we stayed there. They said, "Don't go to town because the civilians there don't like the Americans."

N: Oh. Why was that?

D: I guess there was a lot of Germans in Reykjavik. They didn't care too much for us and that's why we didn't go to town. We didn't have any trouble, but we never did go to town. Then we left there and flew to Scotland. I don't know exactly the name of the town. Here's what happened. We flew to Scotland. When we got off the plane, they put us on a train and left our airplanes there. We thought it was going to be our plane, but it wasn't. They left, and then, we were shipping over. In other words, we were transporting.

N: You ferried them over, and that was it?

D: Yeah, we went to this--I don't know what it was. It's a camp. From that camp is where they assigned you to different. . . . We went to this camp, and we stayed there two or three days or a week. I don't remember now. They sent us to Bedford, England. That's where the 306 bomb group was stationed.

D: That's it.

N: Okay, what squadron were you attached to?

D: The 423rd.

N: How many other squadrons were there?

D: There were four squadrons: the 423rd, 369th. . . . I got it right here. (referring to paper)

N: What was that, the Eighth Air Force you were with?

D: Yeah. What did I say? The 367th. . . .

N: Wait. The 367th bomb group? The 306th bomb group?

D: The 306 bomb group. The squadron. . . .

N: Oh, the squadron? Your squadron was the. . . .

D: The 423rd. The 367th, 360, 369th, and the 423rd was the one I was in. That was in Bedford, England. Actually, Thurleigh, they call it. It's outside of Bedford. It's close.

N: What's the name of the base? Do you remember?

D: Let's see. Thurleigh. Bedford was the closest town. That's where we used to go after the evenings.

N: Okay. How big was the town?

D: It was, I would say, like Niles.

N: Well, Niles has about what, 20,000 people? 25,000?

D: Maybe it was a little smaller than that.

N: You got there on what date?

D: It was April. . . .

N: Of 1943?

D: Yeah.

N: What did you do when you reported in? Did they give you guys any kind of leave to get yourselves accustomed to the ride over and everything?

D: No, we had no leave.

N: Did you immediately go into combat then?

D: Well, we didn't go right away. What we did was. . . . Our crew was still there. All of our crew got to there, the ones who went over there. To give us experience--like, our pilot was a co-pilot on. . . .

N: On another aircraft?

D: No. On ones that already went on missions.

N: So they broke your squadron up?

D: Yeah. They broke it up for a few missions so we could get experience. In other words, they didn't want our crew to go. We didn't have any experience, so they just broke us up. Like, the pilot would go as the co-pilot on a mission, and we would go, maybe two or three of us--not all of us would go--on that plane. Some of us [would go on] another plane until we got, I would say, about four or five missions.

N: How soon did you start to go on missions?

D: We went right away.

N: About 3 or 4 days later?

D: Yeah, we went right away. Yeah.

N: Where was your first mission to? Do you remember?

D: It was in France someplace. I don't remember.



N: Explain to me. What was a typical day like when you got up in the morning till the time. . . .

D: Well, we used to get up at maybe 3:30 or 4 o'clock in the morning. They would take us in the briefing room and do what they call brief, when they tell you what you're going to run into and the weather and everything and all that stuff. How long it's going to take you, who you're going to fly with, the other wings, you know, where you're going to meet, how long the mission's going to be, what you're going to run into, what kind of flack, what kind of aircraft fighters that would hit you and stuff like that.

N: The whole crew was there?

D: Oh, everybody was there.

N: They would have everybody from all the squadrons there as well.

D: In other words, we had four squadrons. We were all in one room. And then maybe six o'clock or seven o'clock in the morning, we would go. We'd have breakfast, and we'd go to the planes and make sure all our guns and everything was in working order.

N: Was there anybody in charge of all the guns? Like you said, you were armor gunner?

D: Yes, but I had nothing to do with. . . . Usually, they had their own guys there. In case something happens while I'm in the sky, they are supposed to take care of it. As long as I'm on the ground, they loaded the guns and they loaded the bombs and they did everything.

N: Each guy took care of his own guns, in other words.

D: Yeah, each guy took it.

N: Were you ever trained for turret gunning at all or just strictly for waist gunner?

D: Well, the turret gunner that we had, after a couple missions, he decided he couldn't hack it and he didn't want to go any more. He quit. In other words, he said, "I can't do it." They wanted to put me in there and I says, "No way. You're not going to put me in that thing." I was skinny then. I was little. I said, "No way. I'm not going into that spot." My pilot said, "No. We'll put somebody else in," and they did get somebody. I wasn't going in that turret.

N: I can't say that I blame you.

D: No. It's on the bottom of the plane. Did you ever see it? Did you see the one that was out at the air base?

N: Yeah, sure did. Not only was it. . . . It amazed me how close it was to the ground when you landed, too. But to be there by yourself would seem like it was the last place on Earth you wanted to be.

D: No. No way. So, that took care of that. I didn't have to go.

N: After you got your briefing and you got aboard the aircraft, what type of suits did you guys wear?

D: We had the electrical. . . .

N: The ones that you plugged into the wall, then?

D: Yeah, gloves and suits and then you had the fur. You had the oxygen masks. The gloves were wired with electricity. The gloves were wired with electricity. And they had shoes with wires in them, too. The whole thing. It was like long johns. Then, you wore your other stuff, your clothes, on top of it.

N: Son of a gun. I didn't realize the gloves were wired, too.

D: Oh, yeah, the gloves, everything.

N: God forbid if you had a short circuit. [laughter]

D: Was it me that got. . . ? I think it was me that got a blister on my foot one time. There was something wrong with. . . . It either burnt me or something. I got a blister on my foot from that.

N: How many rounds did you guys carry with you aboard the aircraft? Each gun had how many rounds? Do you know?

D: I can't say for sure now. I don't remember.

N: Did you have spare ammo, if you needed any extra ammo?

D: No, just what was in your case. They had it filled up. There was nothing extra.

N: Let's say, for instance, you ran out of ammo. Could you go borrow ammo from somebody else? Was it easy to transfer it?

D: No, it wasn't. Once you're out, you're out.

N: Let me ask you this question. Did you feel at the time

that they gave you an adequate supply of ammo?

D: Yeah, I thought it was.

N: Or were you always worried, "What if I run out?"

D: See, the only time that we would have any trouble with the fighters was after we dropped them bombs. They'd get us on the way back home. They very seldom hit us coming in.

N: Did you meet a lot of the enemy fighters?

D: Yeah, we hit quite a few. We didn't get them on every mission, because sometimes they would hit us. Other times, they would hit the other group.

N: Did you get credit then for shooting some down, or what?

D: Yeah, if you shot one down.

N: How many do you remember that you shot down?

D: Me? One.

N: What was it? What kind of aircraft was it?

D: I think it was a Messerschmidt.

N: What type of fighters were you likely to encounter?

D: Well, Messerschmidt and the . . . were the only two.

N: What were your missions over? Strictly over Germany or France?

D: Well, they were all over.

N: Like what?

D: France and Germany. We hit Norway one time.

N: What was up in Norway that you guys. . . ?

D: I think it was oil. . . .

N: Oil refineries?

D: Yeah. Oil or something along the coast there. I think it was oil.

N: What was a typical mission like that you bombed? Was it oil refineries, ball bearing factories, or what?

D: Well, we went to Wilhelmshaven. We bombed submarine bases where they kept the subs. We were hitting them. We'd go into maybe, like France, and we'd hit munitions plants or stuff like that, you know.

N: What was the name of that German town again?

D: Wilhelmshaven. We hit that about two or three times, I think. I heard they weren't doing any damage on them because there was so much concrete, you know.

N: I saw those pen when I was. . . .

D: I saw them when I was stationed in Wiesbaden. They would take us up by Frankfurt and show us the. . . . They said that they couldn't do any damage to them.

N: Something like 20 feet in diameter, one pen. Just one wall, they should save the pen. How many raids did you go on before you finally got shot down?

D: I was shot down on my 16th.

N: How many missions did you go on at that time? Twenty-five?

D: Twenty-five, yeah. Twenty-five, and you got to go home.

N: Let me ask you a question. Did you know why you went on 25 missions and go home?

D: The stress was too much.

N: I had a guy tell me this story. One guy told me--he lives in Champion--"You know why we went on 25?" I said, "No." Twenty five was the magic number, then they upped it to 35, then they eventually upped it to 50. He said, "We were told that our government was worried about our guys becoming sterile because of the high altitudes that you flew at." He said that they discovered that they were sending these guys back to England and they were fathering children, they decided to up it to 35. [laughter] You never heard about that one, though?

D: No, I don't think that was the reason. Well see, the time we went. . . . We were exactly the first ones over there. I think around December or January of 1942 was the first group. At that time, they didn't know what to expect, you know.

N: I can understand the stress.

D: We were daylight bombing. See, the British were bomb-

ing day and night. They didn't know how bad it was going to be. That's why they decided if you made 25 missions, you done good. Your chances to make 25 weren't very good.

N: At that time, sure. They probably were very poor.

D: The Germans had everything powerful at that time. They had all the fighters, they had everything. They had ack-ack [guns]. They had everything.

N: Prior to your 16th mission, did you experience any flack into the aircraft, any engine problems, anything of that nature that may have. . . ?

D: Flack, but I don't think we got hit any time. The only thing that I remember that scared us one time was that they decided that they were going to fly in the evenings because they figured that. . . . Like in France, they said the French workers wouldn't be there. We didn't want to bomb and kill them, see? So, we went in the evening on this mission and on our way back, our plane went up like this and boy, I went right down to the floor. The gravity held me down, and I couldn't get up. I thought, what the heck happened? So finally, I seen the tailgunner come up and his eyes were big like that and he was going to go out. I said, "Get back. Go back." So, he went back. When we did get back to the base, the lead plane, wherever it was--we were on the wing of it or something--a fighter got through, some way, through the sun and this guy was on his 25th mission, Captain. . . . And he pulled back when he got hit, and his plane went up like that. We were next to him and we almost got hit--we fly in formation. It's a good thing the co-pilot. . . . He got burned pretty bad from that too, but he flew the plane back.

N: So, when he went back, you almost got wiped out, too.

D: Yeah, well, it was lucky that the co-pilot didn't. . . . He got hit too, but that 20 millimeter went right in the cockpit and blew up in there. He was alright, so he could. . . .

N: He actually flew the aircraft back to the base?

D: Yeah, he flew it back.

N: That 16th mission you were on, that was July 26, 1943, right?

D: Yeah, in Hanover.

N: In Hanover, Germany?

D: Yeah.

N: What were you guys in route to bomb?

D: I think it was some kind of rubber factory or something. I don't remember exactly what it was. It was some kind of factory, I know.

N: What time of day was this?

D: Well, it might have been around noon, I imagine. I don't know how many hours it took us to get there. Two or three hours, probably, to get there.

N: You got bombed after you dropped your bombs?

D: As soon as we got to drop our bombs. . . . Usually when you're over the target, they don't bother you. Soon as you get through the target, that's when they hit you.

N: So, as soon as you got through the target, you heard the flack?

D: Yeah, flack.

N: What happened to the aircraft?

D: They hit us. I could see the one, the left engine. I could see it coming apart, the pieces flying off, and oil.

N: Would that be number one or number two?

D: Number two. I just remember stuff was flying. Oil was flying out. We were at a standstill, like. I could see the other planes gone. We were just sitting there. I said, "This is it." So, I seen the. . . . The same tailgunner, he come back out of the tail. I couldn't hear nothing on the intercom, see, so I looked back again, and the door's gone and he's gone already.

N: He jumped out already?

D: He jumped. I didn't hear no bell or nothing. I saw the radio operator come up, and he went like this and said, "Go." He told me to go because the pilot said, I guess, he must have told him or something. The radio operator is close to the front of the plane. So, out the door, I went. Before he told me, I told him about the turret gunner, because he hadn't come out yet. He was knocking on the thing for him to get out. He got him out, but he got shot in the leg. He died in a German hospital.

N: The turret gunner?

D: Yeah, he got. . . . Gangrene set in. I guess, I don't know if they took care of him in the hospital or what, but. . . . He was from Leavittsburg, but I didn't know him. He was just like a sub for us. I think he only was on about two missions with us. I didn't know him that well, but the other guys I knew from over here, from the states, most of them.

N: They pulled you guys back together.

D: Yeah, all but the. . . . We had a new bombardier and a new navigator, because they took our navigator away from us. He was real good, and they put him usually with the colonel or lead the group, you know.

N: Did everybody make it out of the aircraft okay?

D: We all made it out, but then the bombardier was hit pretty bad, I guess. But he made it, I heard. The only guy we lost was the turret gunner.

N: You say you jumped out over Hanover, Germany. What type of area did you come down in or parachute over?

D: I didn't know this, but I thought we were down lower. I talked to the pilot later on, years later, you know. He said we were at 27,000 feet, and we bailed out maybe around 20,000. Once you bail out--I don't know if you've ever bailed out or anything. . . .

N: I've been in planes, but fortunately, I've never had to.

D: It's just like, you hear all this commotion and all of a sudden everything is quiet. You don't hear nothing. You're up there. You don't hear nothing. You're trying to figure out where the heck you're going to land, you know.

N: Now, did you have any training prior to parachuting?

D: No, no training.

N: It was just your first jump and that was it.

D: That's it. The first jump.

N: Why do they do that? They just figure you. . . .

D: I don't know. They never gave us any training in jumping.

N: Didn't anybody ever ask?

D: We didn't have time, I think, because they were in a awful hurry to get bombing. The B-17s, though--that's why they asked for volunteers for gunnery. They wanted to get the bombers over there to get going.

N: You never went to a tower and jumped from a tower or anything?

D: Nothing.

N: So, [they said,] "Here's your parachute. . . ."

D: "Here's the parachute." We didn't have to do nothing with the parachute. They done everything. They had parachute riggers and all that stuff. We didn't do nothing. We never jumped.

N: That would be a hell of an experience, then. The first time. . . .

D: When that thing jerked me, I didn't even know what happened. You go falling down and all of a sudden, it stops you. It hit me right up in here.

N: Your crotch area must have felt like it was going to explode on you.

D: Bang. I thought, is this the way they do it all of the time? I've talked to other guys and they did the same thing.

N: Did you have to pull the cord or was there an altimeter on it?

D: We pulled it. I went to the door and they says, "Dive out because if you don't dive out, your head might hit the stabilizer in the back.

N: So, you had to dive like you were diving into a pool.

D: Keeping your legs together ain't bad, but I had my hand on my cord when I went out. I don't remember pulling it. I just remember when it opened.

N: One guy told me when he pulled his cord, the straps were loose, and he didn't have any feeling in this area down there for three months.

D: I thought I was done when that thing hit me.

N: I could imagine.



D: I landed in, like, a cornfield. There was this German with one of these old World War I helmets with a spike on top.

N: Oh, really?

D: He must have been the home guard, you know. He came over and said, "Hands up," and all that stuff. There were some old women there. I think he was the only. . . . I think there was another guy there, but I think he was in the home guard or something. He said, "Go," and he hit me with a gun he had.

N: Did he have an old rifle?

D: Yeah. I was so mad, if I had a gun, I would have shot him.

N: He just hit you for the heck of it?

D: Yeah. We weren't allowed to carry guns if you bailed out, because they could think you were spying, and they could shoot you. So they told them, "Don't carry guns."

N: Were you the only one in the immediate area?

D: Yeah, right there where I was. Then, my radio operator. . . . I ran into him. They had us in, like, a courthouse, a jail, there. Then I seen another, the engineer there, and they put us on a truck. They took us to . . . I don't know if it was a base or a hospital. It was evening and I couldn't tell.

N: Let's back up real quick for a second. When they took you out of the cornfield, where did they take you to? A central area? A jail house in the town, or what?

D: It was just like . . . not a courthouse, like a city building, you know, where the mayor like. . . . It was a small town.

N: It wasn't Hanover was it?

D: No, I don't even know where it was.

N: It was a small village, in other words.

D: Yeah, a small village. I didn't have no idea where it was, but then. . . .

N: Somebody took you to a train?

D: To a truck. No, they put us on a truck and they took us in a truck. They took us to this base. It looked

like an army base. The funniest thing--it wasn't funny--but, this one kid, he was hurting bad. I didn't even know who he was. It must have been the . . . .  
gunner because his back was killing him. So me and my radio operator, we carried him--they wouldn't pick him up or nothing--to the hospital. In this hospital, they had like a ward. You could see all Americans they had on mattresses. I don't know if they were all hurt. This poor kid. He was in pain. We laid him down. I don't know whether they gave him any help or not.

N: How many were in this place that you. . . ?

D: I would say, maybe about 10 guys bandaged up and everything.

N: They were all hurt?

D: They were, probably.

N: Did you see any doctors or nurses or anything of that nature?

D: I didn't. I don't think so.

N: Was there anybody that spoke to you guys in English at that time?

D: No. After we left there, we went to this. . . . It was right on the base, but it must have been the jail. There were five of us there. They took us out to this courtyard and they had a big wall, cement wall around it, and they told us. . . . [They] lined us up. One guy here. One guy here. One guy here. I said, "Boy, what are they going to do? Are they going to shoot us now?" It looked like where they shoot people, just along these walls, you know. Finally, they said, "Sit down." They wanted to keep us separate so we wouldn't talk to each other. I guess they were going to interrogate us there. But, I remember. . . .

N: That would scare the hell out of you.

D: My pal, he said later. . . . He told me. . . . He looked out the window and he said, "I saw them line you guys up. I thought they were going to shoot you." I said, "We did, too." So, after that, they took us to the--I don't even know where it was.

(Question is inaudible.)

D: They take you to this place and they interrogate you. First, they put you in a cell by yourself. Each person, their own. Nothing, nobody together so they can talk to each other. They don't give you nothing to eat.

They give you water and some tea. I don't remember if they gave us any potato or something to eat. We were there a couple, two or three days, before they even took me in to interrogate me.

N: That seems to be standard procedure. All the guys I talked to, everybody says they were there about three days before anybody even came in.

D: They didn't come in to tell us what's going on, you know? They had us in. . . . This friend of me from McDonald, when he was in, he had some newspaper. Well, I smoked cigarettes, too, but he started smoking paper. He said, "I wrapped up some paper and started smoking." I couldn't believe it.

N: Where did he get the matches at?

D: I don't know. He must have had them on him and they probably didn't take them. I don't know. See, we still had our original clothes that we flew in. They didn't take them away till after we got interrogated. You go in the office there, and they have this. . . .

N: They search you for weapons, though?

D: Yeah. We didn't have no weapons. We had our escape kits with money in them and I don't even know what happened to them, because there was a lot of money in them things. If you need help. . . . If you try to escape, you can give it to . . . and somebody would help you out. I don't even know what happened to that.

But then, they interrogated and asked, you know, questions. It wasn't that much. [They asked] what outfit you're in and when you came over and what way did you come? South or north? They knew it all anyway. They knew about everything.

N: How do you know that?

D: Because, why would they tell us. . . ? "Did you come the southern route or the northern route? Did you come through this place or this place?" They knew. That was the way we were coming. So, somebody told them or they knew it from some other times, you know.

N: This is when they talked to you in English, now?

D: Yeah, he talked perfect English.

N: Was it an officer that was doing the interrogating?

D: Yeah, but he only interrogated me one time. That's all. Then, we went back and from there, they took all

our clothes. [They took] all our uniform, and they gave us some old raggedy clothes. We didn't have our clothes. Boots, everything you had on, they took it.

N: Why did they do that?

D: They used it for something. Our clothes were good, you know. Leather jackets and all that stuff.

N: Okay, so they just gave ripped up clothing, then?

D: They just gave us old, beat-up clothing. I don't know if you. . . . Did you ever see the Yugoslavians or the Frenchmen? They wear them kind of clothes.

N: Yeah.

D: That's what they gave us. So, we went to the barracks. There was some Englishmen there and some South Africans, I think. There were some Americans. They were all prisoners. This is like a place where they. . . . They shipped you from there to your prison camps. In other words, like . . . what do you call it? The shipping-off place?

N: What would you call it? The point of debarkation?

D: Yeah, something like that. We got to shave there. We hadn't shaved for two weeks. I don't know how long it had been. They gave us some food. We couldn't tell if they were Americans or Germans, now. They could be just trying to get information from you. You had to be careful of what you said and all that stuff, too. They already briefed us on that stuff back in England. They said, "If you ever get in this or that, be careful of who you talk to," and all that stuff.

From there, they sent us down to. . . . They put us on these boxcars. I don't know, you probably heard this. They packed you in these boxcars with no toilet facilities, no nothing. From there, down to 7-A. . . . Now, 7-A is Mooseberg. I don't know if you've ever heard of Mooseberg.

N: Yeah. Most of the guys are telling me that when they went to Mooseberg, that was their final destination.

D: That was the first camp we were in, 7-A.

N: They didn't keep you there. They transferred you there from. . . .

D: We were there. We thought we were going to be there for. . . . As soon as we got there, they were marching. . . . Friends of ours that were shot down before

us, we thought they were dead. They were hollering at us, "We were waiting for you guys. We were sweating you guys out. We were waiting for you." That was something else. They were in our outfit, you know.

N: Back in England.

D: Back in England and even from States, you know. Some of those guys, we knew from the States. We were there till after the Italians capitulated.

N: How long. . . ?

D: That was about three months because. . . .

N: July, August, September?

D: July, August, September. End of September or first of October, we went to 17-B.

N: [Stalag] 17-B? Where was that at?

D: In Krems, Austria.

N: Now, this is Stalag 17-B? It's not Stalag Luft?

D: No, it's Stalag 17-B. Stalag Luft is usually where the officers went. They were up north in camps, around Berlin and up in that area.

N: I talked to some guys that were in camps. They were NCOs (non-commissioned officers) and a couple of officers.

D: The only NCO that I think they sent up there was one kid friend of mine. He was always escaping. They sent him to this certain. . . .

N: They didn't shoot him? I'm surprised.

D: He's a good friend of mine. In fact, I went last year and saw him in SanDiego. He lives in SanDiego. I said, "Boy, you're the only guy I seen escape so many times." They always could catch him. I don't know why he kept doing it. He kept doing it and they put him in the . . . bread and water for a month. Bread and water by himself in a cell for a month. He'd go out and escape again. Finally, I didn't see him no more. They shipped him up to some camp north. It was supposed to be that you couldn't escape from that camp.

N: Where was 17-B at?

D: In Krems, Austria. That's about 40 kilometers from Vienna.

N: This was your final camp, then?

D: Yeah. I was there for the rest of the time. Eighteen months, I think.

N: And you were in Mooseberg for three months.

D: It was 21 months. Twenty-one or 22. . . . Twenty-one months, I think I was a prisoner of war.

N: What was the Krems camp like?

D: It was a lot better than 7-A. It was a lot better.

N: What was 7-A like?

D: Well, it was cruddy. I mean, it was real bad. We had more room in 17-B. The beds were. . . . They weren't beds, they were--two slept down and two up--wooden beds with mattresses.

N: Were they like bunk beds?

D: Yeah, like bunk beds, but we had more room. The ones at 7-A were crowded, too crowded. They had them too close together. This way, if you had an aisle in the middle, you could walk, you know. In between the bunks, there was more room.

N: Did you have a stove in each. . . . How many guys were in each room?

D: It wasn't rooms. It was a barracks.

N: It was like an open bay barracks?

D: Yeah. There was 35-A and 35-B. 35-A was the top part and 35-B was the bottom part. I would say there was four in each bunk.

N: Four guys to a bunk?

D: Two on top and two on the bottom.

N: Oh, okay. The bunks were divided.

D: No, they were just like a double bed. They weren't divided. It was like a double bed.

N: They weren't divided? I'll be a son-of-a-gun.

D: Like in 7-A, there was just single beds. Like, three straight up. It'd be one, two, three. But this was just two. One bottom with two and two on top.

N: Two guys on top. I haven't run into that yet. You're the first guy.

D: That was in 17-B. I don't know what the other camps. . . .

N: In 7-A, you had the triple deckers and here you had two guys to a bed.

D: They had a stove and then the back part was a washroom. It was for us and the front part. It was, say, 75 on our part and maybe 75 or 100. . . .

N: Did you have showers in there and everything?

D: No, no shower. Just a place to wash your face, get water to drink, and that's all.

N: Where did you take a shower, then?

D: They were supposed to take you up once a week to this place up at the top of the hill where they had showers. They'd take you in there and they'd give you maybe five minutes to get washed fast and get out because another bunch. . . . When you first go into the camp--I don't know if somebody told you or not--they take all your clothes and they put them in these ovens that they call de-lousers. They de-louse your clothes so you don't get lice and fleas and all that stuff. Then, you go in and they cut all your hair off and they make you bald so you don't get lice and fleas. Then after that, you go down to the camp. Every so often, they'd take your clothes and take you up there and do the same thing. [They would] de-louse you so you don't have lice and fleas. A lot of fleas [were] there.

N: You know, talking to other guys who were prisoners of war, it appears that depending upon the commandant of that particular camp, how well or poorly the guys were treated. Some guys were talking about. . . . It was all they could remember was having lice and fleas. Apparently whoever was the head of this camp didn't want that in his camp.

D: Well, we still had them. Even after you de-loused and all that.

N: But at least there was some form of control.

D: Yeah, they tried to control.

N: The other camps they talked about, they said they didn't control.

D: The guy that I slept with, he was from Trenton, PA. He had flea bites on his legs that are still bad. He had sores on both his legs from flea bites. He's the kind of guy that they just. . . .

N: [The fleas] found a home and that was it.

D: I don't know whether it was his blood or his skin or just. . . . Fleas bother me, but they didn't do that. I didn't get sores on my legs like he did.

N: You were in this camp for how long?

D: About 18 months.

N: What was your typical day like at this camp?

D: Well, we didn't have to work. Because you were a non-commissioned officer, you don't work. We have to get up every morning, I don't remember what time--7 o'clock, we had roll call. In the summer, you'd go out and you'd stand in line, and they'd count you. Then they'd go back in and they'd bring you these big tubs, and they'd bring you hot water for breakfast.

N: That was it?

D: Well, see, they brought you hot water because we were getting the Red Cross parcels. They had cans of Nescafe and stuff like that.

N: They'd give you. . . ?

D: The Red Cross, yeah. The Red Cross would ship it and they would give us one a week.

N: Did you get everything that was in that thing, or did they take out what they wanted to?

D: Yes.

N: They didn't take out anything?

D: Ours was sealed. When we got it, it was sealed. I heard that they used to take some. I don't know.

N: Some of the guys were telling me that the Germans would take what they wanted first and give you other things.

D: Yeah, they used to take them, but who knows? We didn't know. We had our commander. He took care of them. He was like the head man for the whole camp.

N: How many guys were in the camp, by the way?



D: When we got there, I couldn't tell, but about 4,000 [or] 5000.

N: Each camp was subdivided, though. Did all 4,000 guys ever get together at one time?

D: Yes. We were all in one camp. Next to us was the Frenchmen, the Russians and the. . . .

N: Oh, you had French and Russians?

D: Oh, they weren't in our camp. We were separated. I mean, it was all one big camp, but they were on the other side. They had to go to work, those guys. You could see them going to work every morning, but we didn't have to work, so we stayed. . . .

N: Because you were NCOs.

D: Yeah, we could talk to these guys over the barbed wire. If they were Frenchmen or if they were Polish or whatever, they were guys at work in factories. I don't know where they worked, in farms or. . . .

N: But, there's 4,000 of you guys. Were you free to walk from one barracks to another?

D: Yeah, you could go visit any of the barracks. In the night you couldn't.

N: Yeah, I understand the night. Were the barracks off the ground?

D: Yeah. They were off the ground and you could go underneath them.

N: And they had dogs that would go out at night, right?

D: Yeah, dogs.

N: That's interesting, though. How big of an area are we talking about if 4,000 guys lived in it? Two or three baseball fields or football fields?

D: Oh, let's see. Our compound. . . . Let's see. I can't remember. They used to play baseball in the back of our compound. They had softball games.

N: Now, they gave you guys balls and bats?

D: Well, the Red Cross did. They even gave us. . . . They had instruments. They had a band and everything.

N: Oh, they had a band there, too?

D: They had a band. They put on shows. Americans. Now, these prisoners put on shows. We had a couple boxing matches. They gave us books. We had a lot of books. We had like a library. The Red Cross brought the books. We could read books. Your parents were allowed to send stuff over. It took a long time to get there, maybe four or five months to get there. . . .

N: So you had your own band, softball, library. Were you allowed to put on plays and things of that nature?

D: Yeah, they had plays. You could put on plays.

N: What type of band did you have? A dance band, a big band? An 18-piece. . . ?

D: There weren't that many, I don't think. Maybe 9 or 10. It was an orchestra.

N: How often were you guys allowed to . . . did the band assemble and play and so forth?

D: Yeah. Well, they'd have a show maybe once a week or something like [that]. Different shows.

N: Since you guys were allowed to get together, did you form any type of social structures where you had. . . ?

D: We did a lot of card playing. Bridge. I never played bridge but I learned to play bridge. All we did, almost all day, we played bridge and they had tournaments, you know, and stuff like that.

N: [With] 4,000 guys there, altogether, did you have NCOs that you picked out to be in charge?

D: Yeah. Our barracks had a leader. The front barracks had a leader.

N: So, every barracks had a leader.

D: Yeah. Then you had one guy who was [the] head of the whole thing. You had to have it that way because you would be in arguments and fights. Then we went to the groups. In each group there were 10 guys. Say our barracks, each group of men, bring you a loaf of bread. Okay. You'd have to cut the bread for 10 guys.

N: Well, how many guys to a barracks?

D: I'd say about a hundred.

N: A hundred guys to a barracks.

D: I'm not positive. I would say. . . .

N: So every 10 guys got one loaf of bread and were responsible for cutting it up.

D: Sometimes, rather than splitting it up and cutting the loaf of bread for 10 guys, they'd say, "One day, you'll get it and the next day, the other group will get it." In other words, you'd get two loaves and the other group would get nothing. Because how much could you cut up bread? It was that black bread. That dark. . . . I don't even see it around.

N: Yeah, I've seen it.

D: You've seen that dark bread?

N: In fact, a guy still has a piece. He showed it to me. It's filled with sawdust.

D: Yeah, sawdust.

N: I couldn't believe it. After all this time, he still had the pieces. Chuck full of sawdust in it.

D: I'd like to have the whole loaf, you know.

N: Yeah, he had a nice size piece.

D: Let's see what else happened there. We had an escape. I don't know if anybody told you about that. Did somebody tell you about the escape. They tried to escape.

N: No.

D: Well, anyway, they were foolish trying it because there was snow on the ground and from the barracks to the fence, I'd say it was about a hundred yards, so he started to crawl. We didn't know it. Well, you didn't know what the other guys were doing there. A bunch of guys in our group, you know. . . . We were laying in bed, I think it was. This one guy had a guitar. He was playing the guitar, and he used to sing at night.

N: What time did you have to go to bed at night?

D: You could go any time you wanted.

N: But, wasn't there. . . .

D: The lights would go out, yeah.

N: You mean, you had to be inside at what time?

D: Dark. Yeah, you had to be inside at dark. Even if they turned the lights out, we made oil and candles, like. If you want to play cards or whatever later on, you could do it. But anyway, these guys are going towards the fence, and we were in the barracks and all of a sudden, we heard this shooting. We didn't know that nobody was trying to escape. We were on this side of the aisle and right across, this kid that was on the top bunk, he got hit in the behind.

N: It came through. . . .

D: They weren't supposed to do it. They were shooting all over the place. They were shooting in the barracks and everything.

N: Really? Why in the hell were they doing that?

D: They were mad, I guess. They didn't care. They were shooting at us. They were trying to get somebody.

N: So they were just indiscriminately shooting, and they didn't give a damn who in the hell they hit?

D: Yeah.

N: Oh, my God.

D: So, in the morning, they had us out to role call. They had the guys that were shot in front of us down there.

N: Were they dead?

D: Well, one was dead and the other ones were. . . . He had 10 or 12 bullets in him. I don't even know if they took him to the hospital. I don't know if he lived or not.

N: But they showed you what obviously could happen.

D: They had them laying down there in the morning so we wouldn't try to escape.

N: That would give you cause to think about it. What were the prison guards like? Old, young or what?

D: They were older.

N: What age are we talking about?

D: Well, I would say somewhere . . . 50, 60. But, we had this one guy that was a guard. He was really younger. He was like the head man. He wasn't the head major, but we never saw him. The colonel, we very seldom saw

him. Once in a great while. Like maybe in the evening, we had role call, he'd show up or something like that.

N: How often did you have role call?

D: Twice a day. In the morning and in the evenings. He was raised in Chicago or something. He spoke perfect English. He lived in Chicago. He was a German.

N: How did you find that out?

D: He told us! He told us he lived in Chicago and this and that. Perfect English. He was one of the guards.

N: How long was he in. . . ?

D: I don't know how long he was in Germany.

N: He didn't say? He was raised in Chicago?

D: Yeah. He lived in Chicago. I don't know how long. That's why you had to be careful. Even, they had guys planted in the barracks. They were Germans, but they posed as prisoners of war.

N: They acted and talked like Americans, sure.

D: We had hid two Russians in the camp. Even I don't know where they hid them.

N: You hid two Russians, yeah?

D: Yeah, because they treated Russians bad.

N: Really?

D: Oh yeah. They'd put the dogs on the Russians just for nothing. They used to carry the Russians out every day, dead. They had no food. They didn't feed them. You'd see them carrying them from outside the fence. The cemetery was right. . . . Almost every day during the winter time, two or three are carried out. They weren't under the Red Cross.

N: They were left on their own, then?

D: I don't think they belonged to the. . . . I still don't think they belonged to the Red Cross.

N: I think you're right. I don't think they did then.

D: So, we hid these two. I don't know where they hid them. They never did find them.

N: But you guys gave them some of you're. . . ?

D: The day they came, they gave them clothes just like the Americans. But then, when they had role call, they had to hide them. So, the Germans knew something was going on. They used to bring the dogs in after. . . . They'd get us out of the barracks and they'd bring the dogs in and let them loose in the barracks to see if they could find somebody.

N: Oh yeah? Did they ever find them?

D: I still don't know. They never found them. I still don't know how or where they hid them. The guys who were hiding them knew it, but they didn't tell anybody else.

N: Did you talk to these guys and anything?

D: Oh yeah.

N: Did they speak English?

D: Well, they started a little English with us, you know. A little bit.

N: How did they get into your camp? Did they sneak in?

D: Well, they could sneak in. Well, see, what happened. . . . You could give the guard a pack of cigarettes and he'll let you out. Go in the other compound with the Russians, whatever, and get whatever you want. You could get cigarettes and bring in eggs. I never done it, but other guys were friendly with the Russians. The Germans, they'd get a few cigarettes and let them out, especially down in 7-A. Down there in 7-A, they give the Russians cigarettes, and the guys go out and get a keg of beer and bring it into the compound. You had to give the Russians money to let them out. They'd get the beer and bring it back to the barracks. They didn't do that at 17-B, but they did that at 7-A.

N: 7-A, now again, is in Mooseberg.

D: Yeah. That was different there. I think you could get away with more at 7-A than you could at 17-B.

N: They were a little bit more relaxed, then.

D: 7-A, you could get out any time you want, but 17-B was hard to get out.

N: When you got out, where did you go?

D: I didn't go.

N: Well, when anybody got out?

D: I don't know where they went. They'd go talk to Russians or whatever or get food off of them, because they worked the farms and they could get eggs and stuff like that. With cigarettes and soap, you could get almost anything. We used to throw cigarette butts on the ground and you'd see the Germans going picking up the butts.

N: No kidding.

D: Yeah. They didn't have any cigarettes. They'd pick up the butts and, you know, strip them down and roll their own cigarettes. They got mad and they told everybody in the camp, "When you throw a butt down, make sure you strip it so the Germans won't get it."

N: How did the German guards treat you guys? Half-way decent? Did they talk to you at all?

D: They didn't bother me too much. I don't know about the other guys. Some few, they bothered. The only time we saw them was when they came through to get you out for role call and that's the only time. . . .

N: That's about it.

D: Yeah, during the day, they didn't bother us. We didn't see them.

N: So you guys, basically you were left on your own all day. When Sundays rolled around, did you guys have your own Mass?

D: I think they had a priest, a chaplain, there but I can't think of his name. I think they had a chaplain there, but I never went. I think some of the guys went. We had a doctor, a major. He was captured in Africa and he was. . . .

N: American?

D: Yeah.

N: And they kept him in your camp, then?

D: He wasn't with us. He was out where the dispensary was. He didn't stay with us.

N: He was a doctor, though?

D: Yeah. I never had anything real bad happen to me, but I needed a doctor.

N: Was he with the U.S. Army, then?

D: Yeah. Major Beaumont was his name. A lot of people thought he was a collaborator, but you know, you couldn't prove nothing. Whether he was or he wasn't. . . . How long have you been here now? Two hours?

N: Yeah, since 7:30 and it is almost 9:00.

D: Hour and a half. Let's see what else, now?

N: When you were in the camp, you said you could go anywhere you wanted to and do basically almost. . . .

D: In the camp, in the wires, we played softball.

N: Softball, baseball. . . .

D: Not baseball, softball. We couldn't hit the ball that far. You'd hit it over the fence.

N: Were there any times that the Germans were curious enough to want to try to play softball or any games with you guys?

D: No.

N: They just stayed the heck away from you. You said these were the older guys at the time.

D: Yeah, well, they didn't. I remember one time when the boxing matches were on, they'd come around and watch that, but softball, they didn't. They had a place where you could exercise. They had a bar and all that stuff, you know, outside for the guys to exercise. We did a lot of walking around the compound, more or less. Just walking around.

N: Did you guys have routine calisthenics that you did?

D: No. We didn't have any. We should have it, but we didn't have it.

N: Your food packages came once a week?

D: Once a week.

N: So, you guys obviously didn't have a big storage of food, but you weren't starving, in other words.

D: Yeah, we were. . . .



N: You were eating well.

D: We were eating, but you had to be careful. You had to watch how you ate your food and make sure you last a whole week. In other words, you got a can of Spam, a can of corned beef. . . .

N: So, it was a planned diet.

D: You had to plan it. What some guys done was, three would get together and put all of it together and try to cook something and make it last longer. You figure when some guys didn't smoke, they'd trade their cigarettes for food. If somebody smoked a lot, they'd trade the cigarettes for food.

N: When were you finally liberated? You say in May, 1945?

D: Yes.

N: What was the feeling like? Did you guys know something was up?

D: Okay. That's what I'm coming to now. We could hear guns, canons. You could hear them from far away distance. So, this order came out, "Pack up everything. We're leaving." So, you had to get all your stuff together and carry what you can. The didn't tell us why, but we had an idea. The Russians were coming and they didn't want the Russians to get us. They wanted us. As long as we were with them, they figured they were safe. With the Russians with them, they were dead ducks right away.

N: So if they wanted to get captured, they wanted to get captured by the Americans.

D: Yeah. So, they started marching us towards American lines. We marched about a month, I think.

N: For a month?

D: Yeah, till May. . . . We didn't have hardly any food.

N: So, you started marching in April, then.

D: Yeah, but we didn't have much food either. What you could carry wasn't very much, you know.

N: How did they treat you on the way, on the march?

D: They didn't bother us too much, but they wanted to keep going.

N: What happens if you said, "Time out. I have to go to the bathroom?"

D: No.

N: You went to the bathroom as you were walking?

D: Yeah, that's right. You wasn't supposed to stray away. They made us in groups. They didn't want too many at one time. In other words, 500 here, 500 there. In other words, all groups.

N: What would happen if you stopped to go to the bathroom? Somebody would bayonet you, or what?

D: Probably. When evening come, we'd march from morning till evening, and then they'd put us in these barns or we'd sleep outside or whatever.

N: Which way were you marching? North? South? East? West?

D: We were marching west.

N: Marching west, towards what? What would be the closest town?

D: Well, they said we were close to Hitler's home. That's where we were headed. In the meantime, when we were marching, we heard Hitler gave the order to shoot all the prisoners.

N: How did you guys hear about that one?

D: I don't know. The guards told us or somebody. At that time we were watching when we were marching. The guards said that Roosevelt "caput" and we didn't know what the hell he was talking about. Roosevelt died. I don't know if they figured they were going to win the war after that or what. That's the way we found out that Roosevelt died. But we marched till we got . . . I don't know where it was. Up and down the mountains. We stopped at this one forest-like, and they said, "Sit." We stayed there. I think we were there two or three days. I don't remember. Then we saw this American jeep pull up. The captain was in it and a couple other officers. I don't know what they were.

N: Where were the German guards at this time?

D: I don't know what happened to the guards after that.

N: You woke up one day and they're gone?

D: Whether they're gone. . . . I heard some of the guys . . . when the Americans. . . . The Americans killed one of them. I don't know. They had heard the rumor that somebody had killed him, but he was a bad one. He bayoneted somebody or something. But, I don't even know. I guess they took them prisoner. I don't even know what happened to the guards.

N: Did you ever hear of a guy by the name of Big Stoop?

D: Yeah.

N: That's the guy you're talking about?

D: Maybe. It might be him. Yeah, Big Stoop. I don't know. It's said that they killed him, but I don't know that. I can't say, but I've heard it.

N: You're the third guy to tell me that story. He got killed.

D: He got killed for sure?

N: The Americans killed him. Not the. . . .

D: The POWs?

N: The POWs killed him. They cut off his head.

D: They did?

N: One guy told me, he said, "I can't tell you what we did." He said it's still considered a war crime. But, he said, "Let's put it this way. He lost his head." Okay?

D: I heard somebody got killed but I didn't know. . . .

N: They said he was a big, big guy. About 6'7".

D: Yeah, he was a tall guy.

N: He loved to beat up guys.

D: He was the guy that bayoneted somebody or something.

N: He was the guy that. . . .

D: A friend of mine, McGee, I think his name was. He was right in our barracks, and it was him that they bayoneted.

N: From what I understand, talking to some of the guys, they were on the same march that you were on. Apparently, your 17-B hooked up with another camp.

D: I don't think so. Not that I know of.

N: I've got to go back in my records, because. . . .

D: You mean, another group who. . . .

N: From what you're telling me. . . . It wasn't 17-B. You're the first guy I met from camp 17-B. There was another group and I can't remember from what stalag they were with. They apparently, [didn't meet] up with you guys, but were on the same route with you guys.

D: Oh, it could have been.

N: Big Stoop was from this particular camp.

D: He was from our camp.

N: He was from your camp?

D: I remember Big Stoop. Did they mention that when we were marching these Jews were marching the other way? Towards the Russians.

N: No.

D: Okay. We seen these Jews laying on the side of the road shot through the head. When a Jew would fall down, they would shoot them right through the head. I seen all these Jews laying on the side of the road. They were passing us. They could hardly walk. They'd shoot them right through the head right here. (motions with hand) We'd see them laying down on the road. It was sickening.

N: How many Jews did you see like that?

D: How many dead? I would say about a half a dozen.

N: Oh my God. That's unbelievable.

D: What they told us on the march when we were there [was to] watch ourselves. They were going to get the storm-troopers to escort us, because a lot of the guys were getting away and were coming back later. The storm-troopers were when you guys were in trouble.

N: The SS?

D: The SS, yeah.

N: They'd keep you in line?

D: When you're hungry, you go out and try to get some

food.

- N: Let me ask you this question. I'm searching my memory and I may be wrong, and it may be somebody else that I talked to that wasn't in 17-B. It's escaping me now, but I do remember one story. Two guys told me that when they were on a march headed towards . . . they were going around in circles. They said they marched for something like 20, 25 days. They were going around in circles. They told me about Big Stoop and they also told me about American fighter planes coming over and made a first pass and inadvertently killed some guys. They came back the next day and realized that after they had developed their film that it was Americans that they killed. They escorted them from there on. The P-51s would fly over every day and flap their wings back and forth.
- D: It might have happened. I don't remember. The only time that I remember anything about the American planes was when we were still in camp. That they flew . . . buzzed us, you know.
- N: Oh, they would come over your camp?
- D: Yeah, they did. Now, that was towards the end of the war and you know, I think it was just before we were marching. That was when we could hear the guns. Bombing or guns or whatever it was, we could hear it in the distance, you know. Far away.
- N: So, you're on this march. You said you were on the march for about a month, and then. . . .
- D: I don't know exactly the time. I would say about a month.
- N: And you wake up one day and all the guards are gone.
- D: Yeah.
- N: What outfit relieved you guys or liberated you guys?
- D: Somebody said it was the Third Army. I don't know for sure, but I think they said the Third Army.
- N: What did they do with you once they liberated you?
- D: Okay. We marched to this factory. There was nobody there. It was some kind of a . . . . They didn't take us in trucks or nothing. I don't even know how far it is. In fact, the Red Cross was there. We went in there and I sent a telegram home telling them that I was all right and liberated and all that stuff.

N: How far did you have to march to get to this factory?

D: I don't remember now. I remember we went quite a ways. I think it was some kind of fiber plant or something. I don't know. But then, from there, they took us in trucks. They took us to the airport. They flew us to France.

N: What airport was that?

D: I don't even know.

N: You were still in Germany at this time?

D: Yeah.

N: Where did they fly you to in France?

D: Camp Lucky Strike.

N: That's the one, yeah.

D: They put me in the hospital when I got there. I think I was down to about 90 pounds, I think.

N: What was your original weight?

D: Oh, I wasn't very heavy. Probably 140 pounds.

N: So, you were down to about 90 pounds?

D: I wish I would have had a picture to see myself at that time.

N: What did they do to you guys then? Once you got to Camp Lucky Strike, they fed you obviously.

D: We had to be careful not to eat. . . .

N: Not to eat too much.

D: No, I'd get sick. They try to diet you a little bit so you won't eat a lot of food.

N: How soon after you got to Camp Lucky Strike did you come back to the United States?

D: Well, it wasn't long. A couple weeks, probably. It wasn't that long.

N: You got back to the United States maybe in June, or what?

D: I got home in the first part of June. June 7th? The first part of June, I got home, I think. So, it took

us 10 days to come back on the boat, I think. Maybe not that many. Maybe it was nine days, eight or nine days.

N: What did you do when you came home? Did they muster you out of the military, or what?

D: Oh, no. We didn't have any money, so they gave us some money. They gave us some clothes and we had to buy a suitcase, because we didn't have any suitcases. We went to the PX and bought a suitcase so we could go home. Put our clothes in it and went home. We came home and they gave us 30-day furlough.

N: Oh, that was nice of them. [laughter] It's about time. . . .

D: That was in June. When I got home, then I got a telegram and they said, "Stay home for 60 more days." So, I was home 90 days. That was June, July, August, when the war was over. Then we went to Miami, Florida for . . . it was supposed to be like a recuperation. We didn't do nothing, just laid around. Then they came out with the points system. I had enough points, so they shipped me up to a camp and they mustered me out.

N: And this was in June? July?

D: This was in August or the first part of September.

N: After you got home, did you work then or what?

D: Yeah, I went to work.

N: Where at?

D: First, I went to Republic Steel. I worked there a couple months. I didn't care for it.

N: Were you married at this time?

D: No. When I come home, we were like maniacs. Never home. We hit the bottle. We were drunk every day. [laughter] For 90 days, half the time, I remember I got home. . . . It was bad.

N: I can imagine it was nice to be home with nobody telling you what to do.

D: After you're cooped up for a long time, you know. . . . So, I left there and got a job at Packard.

N: That's where you finished out your. . . .

D: No. I worked there 15 1/2 years. Plant 6, they shut it down.

N: What street was that on?

D: On Thomas Road.

N: Oh, yeah. Okay, you were over there for 15 1/2 years?

D: Yeah, 15 1\2 years. I started over here on Dana, but they moved it over. They shut it down and they never called me back over there.

N: After 15 1/2 years?

D: Yeah. They didn't call me.

N: You didn't have bumping rights or anything like that?

D: No bumping rights. When they made the contract, we did not have bumping rights to bump from one plant to the other. That was the whole trouble. That's where all the trouble started. See, we were on peace work there. A lot of the guys at Packard weren't on peace work. They wanted to come over here. See, when there was as layoff, they wanted to come over here. Laid off there, they wanted to come over here and take jobs off these guys; the new guys. But, then you got laid off here, you couldn't go over there and bump the younger guys there, either.

N: So what did you do then, after 15 1/2 years? What did you do?

D: I was out of work for a year. It was in 1961. Pickings weren't very good then.

N: Where did you finally find a job at, then?

D: I got a job in the city at the water department.

N: With the water department here in Warren?

D: Yeah. I worked there for 22 years.

N: Is there is anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about. Anything in particular that sticks out in your mind and you say, "Gee, I got to tell you this."?

D: [No.]



N: Thank you very much.

D: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW