

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II, B-17

Personal Experience

O H. 1286

NICHOLAS D FURIE

Interviewed

by

Joseph A Nuzzi

on

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N If you could please give me a little bit of background about where you were born and raised at?

F: Youngstown, Ohio I was born and I was raised in Nutwood, Ohio

N. Where at?

F Nutwood

N Nutwood, Ohio What schools did you attend, what high school?

F Fowler

N. Fowler High school? When did you graduate Mr Furie?

F 1941

N: 1941

F No 1942.

N Did you attend any vocational colleges?

F No, no.

N Ok what as a boy growing up was there something with flying that you always wanted to do?

F I wanted to be in the air force, flying,

N What made you get interested in flying or in the air force?

F Well I just read about them and I saw the planes flying over and I figured I'd like to fly, and then I seen the stuff during the war, you know going to the movies and saw the war pictures and I said I like to get in the air force

N You worked on a B-17 right?

F Yes

N What was your job on the B-17?

F Ball Turret Gunner

N Ball Turret Gunner, now that is on the bottom of the aircraft?

F Yes

N Ok I've got a picture here of the B-17 that's this right here underneath the middle of the plane?

F That's it right there

N Ok we are going to talk about that in a little bit here, I'm gonna ask you some more questions Where did you receive your basic training at?

F: Amarillo, Texas

N Amarillo, Texas, what was the name of the outfit you were in then?

F Well just the army air force

N Just the army air force of Amarillo, Texas How long was basic training?

F Well I only had two days of basic training then I went straight into school

N Straight into flight school?

F No I went into Engineering school

N Engineering school?

F Yeah

N Ok after engineering school did they take you into at that point .

F Yeah

N To be a Ball Turret Gunner?

F Yeah, after that I went to gunnery school in Las Vegas Nevada

N Las Vegas, Nevada huh? What was the name of the post there?

F That's what it was

N That's what it was, Las Vegas, Nevada Army post?

F Yeah

N Oh ok how long was your ball turret school?

F Six weeks

N Six weeks of training?

F Uh huh

N And you got used to them flying not flying but firing the fifty millimeter?

F Um you start with Beebe guns

N Beebe guns let's talk about that, what type of training did you receive?

F Well I started with Beebe guns it was like a shooting gallery up at one of those amusement parks They were machine guns, machine guns with beebees Beebees, you would shoot those beebees toward your target and they would back out through the back and come down through a trough and when they came back you kept shooting them

N Oh Yeah? (Laughter)

F And then from there I went into shotgun shooting skeet, the shotgun range skeet

N Ok so you learned how to shoot

F Yeah and from there I went into the shotgun the ones on the turf just like the ones on the airplanes and the shotgun would shoot skeet, it would shoot the skeet targets just like you were doing skeet shooting

N So you learned how to lead another aircraft

F Yeah and then after you get done with that you then get with an AT-6 And they throw a target and you have a thirty millimeter machine gun and you have to mount on your back and your bullets are painted so that they can tell who came closest to the target They throw a target and you have to pass that before you graduate, that is a score

N Is that the phosphorus paint you are talking about?

F: Yes one of those two

N Treasers they call them

F Yes

N Ok, what else can you tell me about that type of school there?

F Well after you get qualified, then you graduate.

N How many guys were in your class?

F To tell you the truth I don't know, quite a few

N Quite a few huh? How long did your training last?

F Six weeks

N Six weeks of training, where did you go from there? They obviously said you were ready

F I went to Miami Beach, Florida to go to a different assignment, from Miami Beach, Florida I went to Ufieda, Washington to a different assignment, to get flying approved.

N Where in Washington?

F Ufieda,

N: Ufieda, Washington, so you went from Florida back clear across the country to Ufieda Washington What did you do there, did you get assigned to a crew?

F Well I just sat around and did nothing for about a month

N What year was it?

F '43

N 1943, what month?

F. I don't know It was probably October or something like that I got assigned to a crew, I was the last one to get assigned to a crew, I was assigned to one crew, but just when I was ready to get on it I got bumped off because the guy who was on it came back and got on that crew, so I had to sit in those barracks all by myself Maybe for about three or four days, I just went to town everyday Then finally I got assigned to a crew and I went overseas

N Where did you go overseas?

F We had to take all kinds of training in the states first

N Oh you did so you started in Ufieda, Washington You've got more training

F Oh yeah, to tell you the truth, I can't remember all of the places I was

N What kind of training did you receive?

F Well flying the plane, just learning how to operate everything, you know, then

N If I can interrupt you real quick, I understand that some of the guys learned to fly themselves. If you were a ball turret gunner then one of your duties were to learn a little bit about flying yourself

F A little bit, not that much

N But enough just in case, in case one of the pilots got shot and killed and you would have to fly

F You could fly, yeah, you could fly

N So that was standard then?

F. Yeah everybody got that, some guys got more than me, they learned how to land the plane, I didn't I just learned how to fly in the air and that was it

N I see, were you responsible then to learn to work the radio as well?

F. No

N Or did you just stick with the ball turret?

F. Just the ball turret I took care of making sure that all of the guns were working and the bomb load was right, then that was that. We went to Camp Shane, New York and got shipped overseas in a boat

N How long were you in the United States? You went to Ufford, Washington and got assigned to a crew, did the crew travel to different parts of the United States, they did battle training?

F Yeah different phases of training as we went along

N I hear a clock here in the background, a grand father's clock, what time is it?

F I forget how many bases, I was in, North Dakota, I was in South Dakota, I was in Utah, Nebraska, there was just so many and it has been so long, I just forgot

N How many months are we talking about, I mean combined?

F: Well it wasn't that much, when I graduated our training only lasted about four months. Then we went overseas in '44, January the first, after the new year

N Right after new year, now you left from the base in Washington or .

F. No

N Or not Washington, but New York

F. Camp Shank, New York

N How do you pronounce that?

F Camp Shank

N Camp Shank, New York ok Where did you go to overseas, London?

F I went to, we landed on a boat in Lasko, Scotland, then we went to Peterborough

N Wait you landed in Lasko Scotland?

F Yeah

N Oh ok

F I went over on a boat

N Ok from a boat I'm surprised you guys didn't fly over

F We couldn't, we lost our airplane

N How did you guys do that?

F At a training mission, we landed on the wrong field so . (Laughter) it was nighttime training

N (Laughter) Let me ask you this question, had you not lost your aircraft during a nighttime training mission at which you landed on the wrong field, had you not lost the aircraft .

F We would have flew

N You would have flew the aircraft, well why didn't they simply send you another aircraft then?

F Who knows how they work, somebody else flew our plane

N So they were teaching you guys a lesson by putting you on a boat.

F No there were a lot of us that went over on a boat, because we actually did not have enough aircrafts for all of the ground, or all of the crew we had So we went over and we had to

wait for new airplanes to come in because we opened up the new base in Peterborough, England

N Petersborough?

F Peterborough

N Ok, now ok you guys are in Lasko, Scotland now? That's where you landed

F That's where we landed

N That's where you landed

F We then took a train to the Peterboroug, England.

N Oh yeah, how long was the train ride, do you know?

F Oh not that long, I really don't know

N Was Peterborough strictly an army base or was it a mixture of army and air force?

F No it was a strictly air force base

N Strictly air force base, army air force, there weren't any English on it?

F Yeah there was when we first got there, see they had just opened up that base it was a brand new base and when we first got there the English were running our messhall. You know then after we got all of our people there they left and it was just all of ours

N What outfit were you with at that time?

F. Uhhh, 457th

N 457th bomb group?

F. 457th group and 751st squad.

N. Ok what were some of the things you did when you got there? Did you have additional training or what?

F No, no we were ready to go

N You were ready to go to war?

F No more training

N What type of barracks did they put you up in? Were they open kind of barracks?

F They were Quansen huts

N Quansen huts, how many guys were there?

F We had two crews, two crews to each hut

N Two crews, your talking how many?

F Twelve guys

N Twelve guys?

F Six on each Six enlisted men on each crew

N Officers didn't stay with you?

F No they had a different barrack

N So two groups to a Quansen hut, did you guys have to do your own cooking?

F No, no we had a messhall, we had a special messhall for the flyers

N Oh really?

F Yeah we were on a special diet

N What? Let's talk about it, that's interesting, what kind of a diet were you on?

F Well I don't know, we never ate no beans or nothing, we had fresh fried eggs for breakfast and bacon and milk. Then for supper we had steaks and stuff like that, we had good food

N No type of food that would cause any gas. Ok that's interesting, that makes sense Now that crew that you were with, did you stay with that crew or did you have to stay?

F No you had to stay with the same crew all of the time

N: Well that's interesting because I had talked to a pilot recently who said that he was constantly switching crews

F: No

N you stayed with the same crew

F We stayed all together

N: You guys got to be pretty chummy then huh? You knew each other then quite well I'd imagine

F No not necessarily

N: No (Laughter)

F We had our own little cliques, you know, as far as going to town we all went to town together officers and all of us, it was just all the same On a flying crew there was hardly any distinction

N: Oh really?

F Yeah they treated you all the same, but when we got to town we all, each guy went their own way

N That's interesting, there was stratification then among the officers?

F Oh yeah, it was just like being in high sediment

N Sediment, yeah ok that contradicts what somebody else has told me In his outfit they didn't have that

F Oh didn't they, oh shhh, see we never called them sirs or none of that

N Oh really?

F No

N: So everybody was just part of the group

F Yeah we had ten people on the crew at first but then they cut it down to nine

N Uh huh, why was that? Do you know?

F Yeah there used to be two waste gunners, then we were down one gunner so they took one waste gunner off

N I see

F: That was the new order that came through We were getting shorted a gunner I guess, I guess you could only use one waste gunner anyway, because you would be bumping one another when you are shooting from both sides of the airplane

N Oh really, oh I see ok

F See that is what they come up with, they come up with nine then And we flew, we got over there in January and the weather was bad, when the weather gets good, then you fly. We would go to briefing and we would pick out the targets we are going to

N Let's talk about the briefing ok, prior to the briefing, what did you do in the morning when you got up, did you have to wear underwear and things of that nature?

F Oh yeah, when you got ready to fly, when we first got over there we wore that heavy stuff That heavy clothing at first , then we got them electric heating suits, just like underwear there was a little suit and it just went over them, and that is what you flew in, because we had heating suits and you just plugged them in, just like our electric blankets are today

N Yes that is what one guy said that I talked to, since they were like that I would imagine they kept you guys pretty warm with the altitudes

F Oh yeah, they did

N Ok so you got up, you got dressed, and you went to your briefing, what was a typical briefing like?

F Firstly, the briefing, you get up early in the morning, real early, 3 30, 4 o'clock in the morning, and we go to breakfast and then we go to briefing and they have a big map on the wall and it is covered with drapes, and we all come in and they close the doors, and they have guards at the doors, to make sure that nobody sees it and then they open the drapes up and then they have red outlines of where we are going and they have pins there on where all of the flacks are going to be and we'll have to fly over, you know, we have to find out where we are going and hardly ever did we get a short mission, we always got one of those long suckers

N Oh yeah how many hours are we talking about?

F Ten, ten hours

N Ten hour flights, did you have to refuel?

F No

N No refueling

F No refueling I think the longest was oxford, to the aircraft factory

N Oxford?

F. Oxford, Waynesburg, Frankford, Frankford

N Once you boarded the aircraft, what was your average speed and altitude, do you remember?

F Well once we got to the English channel we started that, because we all stayed to the middle of the plane until we got up, and then when we got up to 10,000 feet then we had to get in our positions and put on our masks, our oxygen masks.

N Why did you all sit in the middle of the aircraft first?

F In a Ball Turk you can't take off in it or land in it.

N Ok that makes sense

F: Channel guns were all of the way through the tail when they took off, but I sat up with two waste gunners, and I always sat up in there

N Now with a ball turf, in order for you to get into the ball turf what did they have to do, rotate it?

F You cranked it up, you cranked it up by hand

N. You had to crank it by hand?

F Yeah to get into it. Until you got into it, then you start using the levers and it was all automatic then whichever way you moved the lever that's the way it went

N You were locked into that thing at that point?

F Yeah

N Did you ever have to get out of there in a hurry or what? How do you get out of that thing in a hurry?

F (Laughter) You would reach back, open it and step out of the plane. Actually, if something were to happen and it wouldn't work they would have to crank ya.

N They could crank you back up then?

F Yeah, by hand, in fact, you were never allowed to land in the hole, you had to be out

N What was a typical flying mission like? Did you run into a lot of flack or enemy ?

F Yeah, a lot of flack and when we first went over a lot of enemy fighters. Actually, I don't

know, you know when you see crows and you see the little blackbirds chasing them? Well the sky was full like that and the flack was so heavy when a plane would go down it would sound like a big dog bark, WOOF, the planes would go up and down and shake

N What kinds of fighters were you free to fly, mission ships?

F We had mission ships 109, 108, flock wolves, and junkers, we had all kinds.

N Well they had a whole thing that they threw at you

F Oh yeah, they had all of the planes everyone who got to fly had that

N Did you guys ever jam on there?

F Oh no,

N No, they worked all the time?

F Yep

N How about the other guys?

F Our gunner, never

N Were you guys responsible for cleaning your own weapons?

F No they took them out but they had an army that took care of cleaning the weapons.

N Oh yeah so you guys didn't have to clean them? Well that is nice How many rounds did you guys have? How many rounds of ammunition did you guys have at one time?

F I wouldn't know, we never shot them all

N You never shot them all (laughter)

F We shot a lot of them but we never ran out of ammunition We had extras on the plane too incase you did run out

N Is there any particular experience you could tell me about, what it was like shooting at another aircraft that was coming at you at 300-400 miles an hour?

F In fact it felt good, (laughter) That is how we got shot down, airplanes shot us down.

N Another aircraft shot you down

F I got him, he was coming in at us and I knew he was gonna get us, but before I shot him, he shot us and got a motor, and caught the plane on fire

N I want to talk about that for a second, but one question prior to that, how many aircrafts did you shoot down?

F I had five.

N Five aircrafts and how long?

F Well three of them were being investigated and I shot that one down the day I got knocked down and I was credited for two before I got shot down

N How many missions did you fly?

F Twenty

N Twenty missions, obviously your last missions were the ones in which you were shot down

F There were five more to go, we had to fly twenty-five when I first went over there

N You had to fly twenty-five and then you were done

F Then you were done

N What did they do with you after you flew twenty-five?

F You came back to the states and sold bonds and then you went to B-29s

N Oh really (laughter) You had five more to go then you would have been out?

F Yeah, I wouldn't have been out of the service

N No not out of the service but that would have put you back in the United States

F Yeah I would come back to the states and sell bonds or taught school or went to B-29 school and then I would have gone to be a B-29 You are never done

N You are on your twentieth mission at this point and what year are we talking about now?

F It was shot down in 1944, May

N May

F May 28th

N May 28, 1944 Do you remember the time by chance?

F: It was probably about one o'clock

N One o'clock in the afternoon?

F Yep

N So you have these guys in sight and you are firing at them, that's it though, he's got you

F You know when they've got you. I did

N: What side of the aircraft were you on, the right hand side or the left hand side?

F I was underneath

N You were underneath, oh that's right you were underneath the aircraft. Where was he coming from?

F He was coming from the front

N Coming from the front?

F Yeah coming straight at us And I could see him, he had us honed in, I shot him but I got him but he got a few off before he went down.

N Which engine did he hit 1,2,3 or 4?

F Two

N He hit number two, that would be right off to the pilot's left hand side, is that correct?

F Yep, right along side

N Right along side the pilot and that one caught on fire?

F. That caught on fire, yeah

N. What happened then?

F Then the pilot rang the bail, and that is when he presses the button and the bail rings and every station hears the bail ring and you are supposed to bail out

N Is that the first time you have ever bailed out? Out of a plane?

F I had bailed out before but not under those conditions

N· But you were used to parachuting?

F Oh yes, I just accidentally got used to it

N You never went through that kind of training before?

F No we never had that kind of training

N Wait a minute, I am shocked and amazed here, you are on an aircraft and you know your chances of getting shot down are ends of ends, as we would say at that time, you never went to a formal parachute training school?

F No

N Why not? Why did they do that?

F I don't know, everybody jumped out anyway (laughter)

N Well that's true

F We knew how to do it, just accidentally None of us had done it before, I had done it before but that is just because I had to, not because we were trained

N What happened the time you had to? Let's go back to that real quick

F Oh that was back when I first got in there, I had been training for something in the airplane and he told me to bail out and the airplane then got better

N· And here you are out of the aircraft.

F Yeah but it was nothing

N. They never sent you guys to jump school?

F No, not while I was there.

N God, I can't get over that, that's something else

F All we learned how to do was put on a parachute.

N· You learned to put on a parachute and they said the cord is on the left side, don't forget to

pull it

F Yep, count to ten and pull

N Well son of a gun, was the chute on the front or the back?

F Huh?

N Where was the chute coming from the front or the back?

F: Mine was on the back, I was supposed to have a front one but I couldn't wear it

N. Did you have a reserve suit?

F No, no when I first started flying, there was one that snapped on the front, the ball turrets don't have room for it so, you leave the chutes up in the plane and you go down there without a chute

N You go without a chute

F Yeah so I was down there on the first mission without a chute and we got all shot up and the waste gunners who were supposed to take me out of there forgot about me and so I finally got out of there and when we landed I told my pilot I ain't flying down there no more without a chute, I said these guys forget me when it gets bad. He said let's go to the fighter base and see if we can get one that fits on your back because you are small enough to fit in there, and a pilot put one on my back and I had plenty of room so while everybody else saw me using that then they got one

N (Laughter) They wanted one too

F That is what I bailed out of, I bailed out of the ball turret too, but I didn't even go up into the plane

N. Oh there was a hatch door on the ball turret too?

F So I just opened it up and flopped the door back and I rode like that for maybe a half an hour with the door open, ready to bail out in case the plane was ready to blow up because it was burning pretty good and half of the crew bailed out and half of us stayed in until we hit Switzerland but we couldn't make it. Actually we broke orders because that was a standard procedure whenever there's a fire and he says bail out you are supposed to

N. But you guys rode it for about a half an hour

F Yeah four of us did

N Wow, what did the pilot say?

F I don't know he never said anything to me

N. He never said anything to you about it?

F. We all ended up at the same prisoner of war camp in the end

N Let's talk about that, I definitely want to talk about that prisoner of war camp, but let's put you back in the airplane for a second, you are back up there and how many feet were you at when before, or just prior to jumping out? Do you know how high off the ground you were?

F I'd imagine about 20,000

N Did you free fall for a while or did you just pull the rip cord?

F. I free fell for a while

N Free fell for a while

F. Because I had plenty of time to think about it

N Yeah (laughter)

F I actually wasn't scared to tell you the truth, I wasn't scared

N Some of the guys told me that, they said I don't have time to be scared they were just thinking about what was going on at that time

F Yeah I wasn't scared, when I hit the ground I didn't what I was going to do then I didn't have time to make up my mind because they already had me

N Who picked you up? The Germans?

F Oh yeah

N And this is where at?

F I got shot down in Germany, I don't know what town it was, I got shot down in a little farming town.

N Little farming town, who picked you up, who was the first on the scene?

F First on to get me was the old farmer with the big gun

N The old farmer with the big shot gun?

F No he had a big rifle A World War I rifles

N: Oh really?

F By the time I could get my suit off, you know unhook it, there were about fifteen of those fourteen year old kids with those stabbers, they were just, what the heck were they trained for? They were just trained to be soldiers they were fourteen years old They took me down through town and people stood on the steps and throw bottles at you, spit at you

N You were by yourself?

F Yeah

N: You didn't see any of the other crew?

F No I couldn't see anybody else, there were only four of us left and everybody bailed out at different times I was the last to leave, everybody else left and then I bailed out Because we put the aircraft on automatic pilot.

N So they walked you through this town, did they have your arms strapped or anything?

F No

N. But they are walking you through town and everyone is taking their turns throwing bottles at you?

F Yep

N That had to make you feel real good huh?

F Yep, and then they take you to the town Marshall is what they call it, he looked like an SS sucker He had no hair and a round belly from drinking beer I guess They took me to what had to have been that little town's prison, or jail because they put me in there, then the army came and picked me up and took me.

N How long did you stay there before the regular army came?

F Just for one day

N Just one day What troop picked you up? Do you know?

F. I don't know.

N Where did they take you to?

F The took me to a big interrogation center

N Where was that at do you know?

F I don't know. The red cross was there

N The red cross was there? Did you speak to anybody from the red cross at that time?

F Yeah, I wrote a card out that let my parents know that I was a prisoner of war, and that was the last time I talked to them

N. What did the red cross say to you? Did they brief you?

F No

N. They just gave you a card to fill out and that was it?

F Then the Germans are at different desks and they have the guy sitting back there, he could speak better English than you or I He must have graduated from some college over here

N He went to school over here huh?

F They know their English

N There is a picture here on page 164, is this your aircraft?

F Yes, yeah that's it

N. You were under Lieutenant Clyde Griffer?

F Yeah that's right.

N Ok I'd like to read this later on if I may, Ok the Germans had you and have you in interrogation now or at least having you sign up from one area to another right?

F. Yeah,

N They took you to interrogation?

F Yes, you go through there

N Let's talk a little bit about the interrogation, what was that like?

F: Actually there was nothing to it

N Really, why?

F: He told me more than I knew about myself. They had a book you know, like that book with me, he opened up to this page and he said, he told me what squadron I was from, who all was on my crew, who our colonel was and what plane they shot down of ours, they had that all down, he said he thought they were going to get the colonel before the war was over (Laughter) Colonel Luper, that was

N. Colonel Luper, he actually told you how many guys were in your crew at that time?

F Yeah, actually he told me all of the places I was in the states,

N: He had that knowledge as well?

F Right, I said he knew more about me than I did, did you ever hear of the town of Nutwood? He knew

N: He knew where Nutwood was?

F Well he knew that's where I was from

N. Yeah but did you ever figure out how he got that information?

F Well you know how they put your name in the paper when you graduate from different schools, when you do good service and all Well they have good spies.

N Well they must have, that is interesting

F You'd be surprised, I was surprised I told them my name, rank and serial number. He says you don't have to tell me anything I have everything down, I said I wasn't going to tell you nothing

N. What happened then, after you got done talking to him, what happened then?

F He said for you the war is over (laughter)

N That was it, then where did they take you?

F Then we moved on, we got two blankets we got clothes because we didn't have no clothes, the red cross issued us a pair of pants, shirts and all that and two blankets and then we got on a train, on a forty and eight boxcar as they called them

N Forty and eight?

F Yeah, there were only supposed to be forty people or eight horses in one of these, so they called them forty and eight back in those days

N Ok I see

F So we had one hundred

N You had a hundred in one car? How many people were aboard the whole train and were they all prisoners?

F They were all prisoners, we were all prisoners

N How many guys are we talking about here?

F I couldn't tell ya A whole bunch of us I know

N Oh yeah, a couple hundred?

F Oh yeah atleast. I learned right away when we got off of the train when they started to line us up to go to the camp where we were going which was a new camp that had opened up too and I could see the guys in front, they would hit you in the back of your shoulder blades with the butt of the rifle And put the dog on you, the German dog you know

N German shepard?

F Yeah and they would sick them on you to get you going I said boy I am getting in the middle, because they don't get you in the middle, they don't they get you in the front or the back, if you are in the middle you don't get beat up too bad. Then they take you to the prisoner of war camp The first one I went to there were . eight to one room

N Eight to one room? It was like a barracks or what?

F Yeah just like a barracks, built off the ground and it had wooden, I mean it had cement lays that the building was built on and it was underneath.

N. So that you couldn't drill through

F So that you couldn't get out, and you didn't want to get out because they let the dogs run under there when they locked you in they put a big bar across the door

N How big was the barracks, were they comfortable? How did you sleep?

F The beds were one man to a bunk 1

N How big of an area are we talking about?

F. Oh we are talking about, well the barracks was about as big as this room here and the bunks were all lined up along the four sides

N So as big as your kitchen area, and your kitchen is what twelve by

F They were about twelve by twelve

N Yeah twelve by twelve,

F And there was a stove in the middle, they could have done away with the stove because they never burned it

N. It was just there for looks huh? (Laughter)

F. Just for the red cross to see when they come and inspect it

N: Oh did the red cross inspect it?

F. Once

N Once a month or what?

F Just once in the time I was there.

N How long were you there?

F I was in that camp for about eight months

N What was the name of the camp?

F I don't know

N They never told you?

F I don't remember what it was

N: Ok we were temporarily interrupted there but we are going to continue now with the interview it is now 1945 and we have got you in the prison camp but you don't know what the name of it was.

F: I really don't know, it may have been Stetten Bay.

N Stetten Bay

F I forget what number it was

N Ok But it was in Germany?

F Yeah it was in Germany

N Ok and you stayed there for eight months?

F Eight months

N What was a typical day like there?

F Well at first it was terrible

N Explain

F We had dehydrated cabbage soup three times a day and water, it was very dehydrated we ate it in one end and it went out the other And that went on for about a month and then we finally got a red cross food parcel, we were supposed to get one of those a month but we never did I think the Germans were taking it

N You are probably right

F Yeah, and we got one but we were supposed to split it, one parcel was supposed to be for one person a month but we had to split one parcel for two persons a month And we got, well all together I think we got about four of them And the Red Cross brought them in a big red truck with a big red cross on it

N You said earlier that the red cross was supposed to make inspections but they never did?

F No they came once

N They came once, do you know why, were they denied permission to come in?

F I don't know, the war was all screwed up by then, the Germans were losing all over

N Let's go back, what was a typical day like? You already described the cabbage soup

F Yes the cabbage soup

N: What else do you remember?

F The advisor would get up and hang up a loaf of bread it was cut up into eight pieces, it was brown bread and it was made out of saw dust I think, yeah

N Everybody says that, they say it was terrible

F Yeah but it tastes good after a while though (Laughter) You know when we first went there the guys that were there before us, who had been there for a while, we wouldn't eat our stuff but they would be waiting in line to get it, they would eat it and we were doing without, you know we were so used to eating good, then after you get so damn hungry you'd eat a piece of grass, so then we would start eating it and it would get a little better, as time went on and then the Red Cross came and they brought us, and we would play ball, you know softball and basketball or volleyball or horseshoes.

N Oh you could go out?

F Yeah finally

N. You could go out and play?

F Oh yeah we were allowed out, we had roll call every morning at six o'clock, everybody had to fall out of the barracks We would be counted and they would call your name, just like in the service After roll call we got to do whatever we wanted

N Oh is that right? How many guards did you have guarding you at one time?

F I can't really tell you how many there was but two of them we never liked, because they were mean son of a guns, one was a big guy We would call him "Big Stupid" and one was a little fart and we called him "Little Stupid", and they were mean

N. What did they used to do?

F. What?

N What would they do?

F Well they would crack you in the head if you did something they didn't like So the best thing to do was to just

N Just to let them

F Yeah, and then they had towers set up all around with machine guns set up and they had guards in them all the time Then inside they had the dogs They walked around with dogs all of the time.

N Basically you could do what you wanted to from after 10le call to when?

F: Nighttime role call and then they locked the barracks from the inside I'd say about six o'clock at night

N Oh at six o'clock at night they had 10le call again and everybody had to go back into the barracks

F: We'd go back in and they would close the doors and put a bar down

N Did you guys have any type of structuring yourselves, any form? Were you rank cautious or were you just prisoners?

F We were just prisoners. There were no officers They had a different camp for the officers. We were all enlisted men

N What did you guys do to pass the time away? You said you played baseball

F: At night we would play cards

N You played cards all night?

F. We would play cards all day long too in the winter We used to play, when you got the red food parcel you got cigarettes in them so we would use cigarettes for money Like one cigarette or two cigarettes. That's what we did there then after that we walked from one prison camp to another at the end of the war

N You went from one prison camp to another?

F Yeah, we walked

N They were taking you from one camp to another?

F Yeah at the end of the war

N Ok let's talk about that, you were in this camp for eight months

F Probably about eight months

N Where did they change you to?

F We marched to Nuremberg

N. You marched to Nuremberg, how far was the march?

F I wouldn't know, it took about eleven days I think.

N It took you eleven days to get there? How did you survive? Did they feed you?

F Stuff we carried, stuff from the red food cart, bread, you know that black bread Well when you got that food parcel you got a can of spam and a can of corned beef.

N What time of the year was this when you were on this march?

F About, probably started about February

N About in February? You are marching, you are marching through towns, through country roads?

F Country roads

N Country roads all of the way?

F They wouldn't take us through a town, we would go around them because the people were bitter at us

N I see, So for your own safety they would march you around towns

F Yeah we went around the towns. And we slept in barns and/or on the ground it didn't make no difference

N And they obviously, well I'd hope they gave you a blanket

F Oh yeah we each had our own blanket, we carried them

N The one you came here with is the one you kept right?

F If you didn't have it, tough shit

N Right, that's the law huh?

F Yep you had to carry your own stuff from one place to another And then we got to Nurembourg and we weren't in Nurembourg very long because we marched from Nurembourg to Mooseburg

N Mooseburg, how far from Nuremberg is that?

F I don't know, I suppose it took us about eight days

N Eight days to march to Mooseburg?

F Yes, Mooseburg,

N let's go back real quick, Nuremburg, you go there and that was another Prison camp you were in?

F It was an old Russian one

N An old Russian prison camp? What style?

F I mean they had the Russians there.

N They had the Russians there? Did you meet any Russians?

F No

N They were long since gone?

F There were a few of them around and they did the workman's stuff you know, cleaned toilets and stuff

N Where did they take the Russians to?

F I don't know

N You didn't care. You just were there

F. Yeah

N I don't blame ya What did you guys do at Nuremburg? How long were you there?

F We weren't there that long, probably about two weeks or three weeks at the most

N How did they treat you better there or what?

F They just left us alone because they knew the war was getting over so they made sure you didn't try to escape, that's all And we just fended for ourselves This Nuremburg Camp was all run down it was in terrible shape. Then we marched from there to Mooseburg and when we got to Mooseburg the barracks were all filled up there so they just put up big tents and we slept on the ground

N Who were they filled up with?

F All of us prisoners of war

N All Americans

F Yeah from all over I think we had some English too

N How many guys are we talking about? How big was the camp?

F Oh God, we're talking thousands.

N Two, three, four?

F Probably

N Four thousand guys whoa.

F I think, now I never got a chance to leave from our compound And see there were all kinds of different compounds

N And you were in a tent at this point, they put you up in a tent.

F Yeah they ran out of buildings so they had a big tent

N How long were you in the tent?

F: Until the war was over, until we got freed by Patton

N How long was that?

F Well I suppose I got there in March. About a month and a half

N So we are in May now right?

F Yeah, I got freed the last of April

N The last of April by Patton's squad?

F Yeah they came right through the gates with a big tank

N Oh yeah?

F They came and they got out with a big handle 45, you know? He said I'll have all of you guys home within ten days

N Did you get a chance to meet General Patton personally?

F: No, but my brother served with General Patton

N But you never got a chance, other than seeing him?

F I talked to him, you know when he was there we all waited and he told us he'd have us home There were eleven compounds and we cut cards to see how we would leave And we were the last ones to leave

N Oh Geez, last ones to leave

F Ofcourse it was good though the Americans fed us good food, I mean he had his kitchens and everything brought in We had white bread and mashed potatoes and everything We couldn't get out of the fence, America had guards around the fence so that we wouldn't run away

N Our own troops?

F Our own troops

N: They wouldn't let you out if you wanted out

F We cut a hole in the fence and the Germans left all of their motorcycles and things there and we had fun just riding them around

N: Did you guys have any advance warning that that was coming? Did the Germans tell you?

F No they didn't we knew it We got up that morning and there weren't no guards around

N. Oh really?

F Oh yeah everybody was gone We had a pretty good spy system I mean we knew how the war was going and everything.

N Tell me about that spy system

F Well I don't really know how it worked but every night we had papers that we put out.

N Who put the papers there? The guys in the camp?

F. Yeah that's what I say, yeah

N They had their own underground paper?

F. Yeah I don't know how they got the information but every night they would read the news to us, what was going on, even with The Battle of the Bulge when the Germans thought that they were going to win, at the Battle of the Bulge, we were really worried then because the Germans were really pumping out their chests then

N That's amazing so every night you guys had something read to you?

F Yeah we would pass it around from room to room

N. Did anybody ever get caught?

F No not that I know of. I don't think so

N. This is in Mooseburg now?

F No this is up in Stettin

N You went from Nuremburg to

F No, the first place I was at was Stettin

N Oh this was in Stettin? And then you went to Nuremburg?

F: And then I went to Nuremburg

N And then to where?

F Mooseburg

N Mooseburg, Ok. Did you have this underground paper in Nuremburg and Mooseburg too?

F. No we didn't, we knew the war was over then Have you interviewed anyone else?

N Yes, actually I have a list here of about forty prisoners and you are the second interview
Ok so you are at Moosburg now and you knew, we were talking about the German guards that were nice to you guys

F. The war was capoot.

N The war was capoot huh? How did they feel about that?

F. Well I'll tell ya, most of our German guards were older fellas and some of them were in the first World War and some of them had been over here and they went back to Germany and they got stuck over there

N Oh really?

F Yes they were in the German Army and they could speak better English than us

N. How old of men are we talking about at this time? Fifty or sixty?

F Yeah probably, most of them were old, the young ones were in charge they were the mean bastards

N Was this typical in all three camps you were in?

F. Yeah, our guards went right with us

N Your guards went with you?

F Oh yeah

N. So they had to march along with you?

F Oh yeah they had to, who's gonna watch us?

N Yeah but didn't they atleast drive the guards in a truck or anything?

F Oh no they walked

N They walked with you guys too? Son of a gun

F They had their dogs too I'll tell ya one incident we were marching between the woods ya know, there are a lot of woods in Germany We were going down this road and I could hear these airplanes coming I said to a nice guard, I said "Hey we had better get our sign out", we had a big prisoner of war sign we would put out so that our planes wouldn't shoot us ya know I said that is our plane he said "Nicks, Nicks" He wouldn't talk English then, "Thems was German" I said No they are not I can tell the difference in the engines Then they let out a blast and we all flew into the ditches! We got the sign up and they wiggled their wings and away they went (Laughter)

N What kind of a sign did you have?

F We had big white letters that said POW cut out of well sheets

N Was that standard that every camp had that?

F: I don't know that was just our group.

N Ok I see so you had a sign on sheets and it said POW on it

F And we had guys that would go ahead and lay out in the field so that they would know it was POW

N Ok and when our pilots flew over they would know and do the wave off

F Right but they opened up that first time because we didn't have the sign out quick enough Then they saw the sign and away they went

N What did that guard say to you after that?

F (Laughter) He said "I guess you right "

N Tell him to listen to you next time huh?

F I was kinda up front when we were marching that time because this one guard, him and I got along pretty good so wherever he was I tried to keep close to him because with these other guys you'd get a dog or a butt in the back

N For the most part did the guards treat you guys pretty decent, for the most part? Like you said most of them were here in the United States and they were a lot of older guys

F Yeah they were mostly they treated us good

N Did you ever talk to or run into any of the guards personally that were in the United States at one time?

F Oh yeah

N: What did they say about the United States?

F Oh we're going back.

N They said they were going back?

F Oh yeah they were going back

N That's amazing, here we have guys over in Germany and telling you, a prisoner, that I can't wait to get back. What did you do? Tell them I can't wait to get back neither?

F It just so happened that he was back home visiting his parents and the war broke out and he got pushed into the German Army. Some of them even went to the universities here. This one guy who interviewed me over there he was a graduate from some university over here. He was a regular German though he didn't care about staying over here he just came to go to school or something. I don't know but he could speak better English than you or I.

N So that's the truth?

F I think that if you would talk to other prisoners of war they would tell you the same thing if they went through the same thing. We didn't all stay at the same place but they treated everybody the same.

N: You are in Mooseburg now right? And you guys got freed by Patton. Now how long were you guys there before you got shipped back to the United States?

F We were there eleven days before we got out of there or out of that camp. We went to Camp Lucky Strike.

N Camp Lucky Strike? Now where is that at?

F In France.

N. In France, whereabouts in France?

F Right on the border, right by La Harsse.

N Right by La Harsse, where is that?

F I don't know.

N When you guys finally busted loose. This is why I didn't want your wife around earlier,,,,,what did you guys do to celebrate?

F We just ate!

N Just ate?

F Ate and smoked! (Laughter) There were no women there.

N No women (laughter) What about the drinks though didn't you drink at all? Were there any booze around at that time?

F I don't think so, not in Germany we didn't get any We made some one time but it didn't come out too good

N Where did you make it at, in camp?

F: Yeah, out of raisins

N There Germans let you make it?

F: Well we got a box of raisins in our food parcels and some of those guys from West Virginia they knew how make booze It tasted pretty good, we had it for Christmas but that's all

N How long were you in France before you got shipped out? Did you come straight home from France or what?

F I come home on the Liberty Ship

N On the Liberty Ship What year are we talking about then 44?

F '45

N What month, do you know?

F May

N May of '45. Were you immediately discharged from the army at that point or what?

F No I was home on leave

N You were home on leave at that point?

F Yeah, I was home on leave for ninety days.

N For ninety days, well that is good

F I was home when the war was over in Japan I was up at Geneva on the Lake.

N. Really? (Laughter)

F After my ninety days were up I went to Miami Beach Florida again, I was down there for

two days I think and then they flew me to Texas

N What did you do in Texas?

F I got discharged.

N Oh that's right you got discharged (Laughter) Is it true that air troops got treated quote on quote better than the regular crews?

F Yeah

N Do you want to talk about that? Why? Give me some of the reasons why.

F Because we were all staff sergeant or above and staff sergeants in the German Army were the big shit.

N Oh were they?

F Yeah See before I got over there you know the flying crew was only corporals or something and I guess we figured out that if we were better rank we would get treated better I don't know what it was All you had to do was go to some school and they made you buck sergeant

N Oh yeah so you had rank real fast huh?

F Yeah So we didn't have to go to those farms and work on nothing

N Oh the other prisoners had to work at farms?

F Yeah

N And you guys got to sit around and do nothing all day

F Yeah

N Well let me ask you this question Mr Furrie, Do you, in your mind, do you think that the Germans had more respect for those ranked as opposed to those ground troops?

F I think that they did, that was supposed to be an elite group

N: I remember when I was in Germany the Germans seemed to have respect for those men in rank

F: Yes, I think that is why we were treated better. Of course we were never treated to what the Geneva Convention called for. That's what burnt me up. Because when I came back and saw how our German prisoners were treated, tea under the collar.

N: When you discovered that did, well like the Vietnam prisoners today, they have groups and so forth to help them through it, did you guys have anything like that?

F: No, I never had any after effects. I see some guys do but I didn't.

N: You didn't know of any self-support groups though that you could talk to?

F: Not that I knew of. As a matter of fact I wasn't worried I was having a good time (laughter). When I got home I forgot all about it, I was just glad to get home. That's why I don't like to talk about it.

N: Sure.

F: I used to go, and guys would ask me.

N: After you got released, I have to ask you one question, you got General Patton coming in and then you went home after that, how were you treated by other army personnel or military personnel, once they knew you were appealed did they treat you with a friendship or a camarade?

F: I don't even know if they knew I was prisoner of war, see we come home on a crew ship, there were so many people coming home, you didn't have a bunk, you had to find a place to sleep.

N: Oh really?

F: We was over booked, we were supposed to take turns on the bunks, you know, we were assigned two to a bunk, you know one night you sleep in it and one night your buddy sleeps in it. Well the guy I was assigned with he found a nice place to sleep so he said "Nick, you can sleep in the bunk way in the back because I got a good place, so I never had to change."

N: How long were you on a troop ship coming back?

F: I don't know it took like eleven or twelve days, something like that.

N: Is there any one experience in particular in the camps that you would like to talk about while you were a war prisoner, any particular event?

F: One thing that I was really mad about happened in my first prisoner of war camp.

N. This was Stetton?

F Stetton, the night before, this young German guard, see the town got bombed and his parents got killed so this guy was outside pumping water, the water was outside and he went up to the window and this sucker shot him and killed him and I happened to be coming out of the barracks when I hear the gun go off and I see this guy go down and then everybody went running out all the barracks and we almost had a riot, but then the Germans up in the tower opened up with their guns over our heads and we all had to go back into our barracks they came out with the dogs and everything.

N When did you find out the circumstances of that, that his parents got shot

F: That guard that I told you I got along with told me

N. I see

F And right away they took that kid away, I don't know where he went

N: That's interesting.

F That was one of the worst things that happened as far as beating up on guys and putting the dogs on them maybe some stragglers but other than that

N. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we didn't go over?

F I think that is about it

N. It sounds like my, is going into cardiac arrest over here do you hear it squeaking?

F. I think that is about all of the highlights

N You think that is about all of the highlights?

F Yes

N Ok well listen I thank you for the interview, it was most enlightening, I mean I really appreciate it, thank you for having me over tonight

F Yep, I don't even think my brother-in-law knows this much about me '

N Really, are you going to share this with your children? How many kids do you have?

F I have two boys and a girl, but I 've got one boy who got shot.

N. Your boy got shot?

F Yes, my one boy got shot at a gas station about ten years ago I don't know if you remember, over in Mineral Ridge.

N: Mineral Ridge, I do remember that, that was your boy? He was with the sheiff's department at that time. I remember that incident

F: He went through two terms at Vietnam and never got a scratch

N Then he comes home, I remember that My brother was with the sheriff's department at that time Let me shut this thing off.

End of interview it is now eight o'clock