

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
World War II Project

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O.H. 1288

Micheal S. Medzie  
Interview  
By  
Joe Nuzzi  
On  
October 30, 1989

## Michael S. Medzie

Michael S. Medzie was born on September 22, 1922 in Morrisdale, PA. He attended and graduated from the local school system in Morrisdale. In 1939, at the age of 17, he left his home in Morrisdale and traveled to Warren, Ohio where he went to work for his uncle as a meat cutter. His uncle owned the Ideal Supermarket store in Niles, Ohio and four others in the Warren-Niles area. He worked there for six months then went to work with the W. B. Gibson Company as a carpenter's helper. Later he got a job at Cooperweld Steel in Warren where he worked from 1941 to his retirement in 1983.

Mr. Medzie was drafted in the Army Air Corps in August of 1943. He received basic training at Keisler AFB in Mississippi and was also sent to gunnery school there, where he learned to fire the standard 50 caliber machine guns that were fitted in the B-17s and the B-24s (Liberator) during World War II.

In June of 1944 he and his fellow crewmembers were sent to Ridgewell Air Base in Yeldham, England. There he was assigned, as a ball turret gunner, to the 532<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Squadron under the command of the 381<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group and the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

On June 7, 1944 he made his first bombing raid. Unfortunately on his twenty-fourth mission, with just one more mission to go, his aircraft was shot down after their bombing raid over Berlin, Germany. He was able to parachute safely, landing in an open field near the small German town of Eberswalde.

He was captured and taken to Templehoff Air Station in Berlin where he remained a short time before being transferred to Frankfurt, Germany where he was interrogated by a German Army officer. As with many of the captured American soldiers he eventually was taken to Mooseburg P.O.W. Camp, in Mooseburg, Germany. He remained there until he was liberated by General Patton's Third Army on April 29, 1945.

He and his wife Norma have three children: Donna, age 46; Michael, age 40; and Cheryl, age 34.

The Medzies presently reside in Champion, Ohio, where they are members of St. William's Catholic Church.

Mr. Medzie is a member of the Disabled American Veterans, the Mahoning Valley Ex-POWs and the American Legion. He holds the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Purple Heart.

His hobbies include gardening and mechanical work around his house.

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INTERVIEWEE: MICHAEL S. MEDZIE

INTERVIEWER: Joe Nuzzi

SUBJECT: World War II, B-17

DATE: October 30, 1989

This is an interview with Mike Medzie for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project by Joseph A. Nuzzi, Jr., at Mr. Medzie's home; which is 391 Earl Drive, Champion, Ohio. Today's date is October the 30<sup>th</sup>, 1989. It is now 18:13 hours.

N: Where were you born and raised, Mr. Medzie?

M: I was born in Morrisdale, Pennsylvania and I was raised there. My father was a coal miner. And I come to Warren in 1939.

N: How old were you when you came to Warren?

M: Oh, I was 17 when I came out here.

N: 17, you came out here with your family, anybody come with you?

M: Oh, no. I come out by myself. I worked at my uncle's store in Niles. It was called the Ideal Department Store. I cut meat in several stores around town but primarily I started for him down in Niles. And then I worked for W. B. Gibson for about six, seven months as a carpenter's helper. And finally I went out and got a job out at Copperweld. So I spent 38 and a-half years with Copperweld. I had quit one time for four years and I had worked for Warren Motors out on Youngstown Road, and I had a couple body shops of my own, in this period of time and I finally went back to work at the mill and still kept the body shops going.

N: You say you were 17 when you came to Warren and worked for your uncle. What was his last name, Medzie as well?

M: No, his name was Plebiack. Mickey Plebiack.

N: Did you stay with him at that time since your family did not come with you?

M: When I first came here I stayed with him for about three months.

N: What High School did you graduate from, then?

M: Morris Township.

N: This what year we were talking about then?

M: Well, I started in '28, so figure about 12 years from there, it must have been about 1940 - '39. In '39.

N: Well the war was not on for us, and so you were working with your uncle at the Ideal Supermarket. Where was that at the time?

M: That was in down in Niles. Of course you had Mickey's Market here in Warren, on West Market, and he had one on Atlantic Street at that time and he had one in Sharon. But through the years, he got rid of all the ones except the one in Niles.

N: What street was that one on?

M: That was right on Main Street.

N: What made you decide to go into the military?

M: I was drafted.

N: What year were you drafted into the military?

M: Oh, I went in... in '43.

N: 1943? What month, do you remember?

M: I believe it was in August. I was inducted I think it was in July and I went to Fort Hayes in Columbus and I went from there to Biloxi, Mississippi.

N: You were about 21 now at this time, right?

M: Yeah.

N: So you get inducted in 1943, August, and where did you do your basic training at?

M: Basic training was at Keisler Field, Mississippi.

N: Keisler Air Force Base, then. How long was the training there, was that just basic training then?

M: No, we had basics and flying. It was a flying school. They took pilots out of there. You had your basics; they had pre-flight, such things like that. At the time that we were there, they washed out 220 of us in one day. They needed gunners. So everybody that was in that class, for pilots' training, or navigator, or bombardier, they were sent to gunnery school.

N: May I ask you a question here?

M: Yes, sure.

N: When you went to Keisler AFB, that was your first contact with the military. You went right into basic training and take your basic training at Keisler and then they put you right into flight school?

M: Well, yeah, right after basic training you went to flight school – but while we started flight school -

N: Basic training and flight school were both at Keisler?

M: No, no, no. You went to basic training first and then to flight school.

N: Ok, where did you take your flight training at?

M: That was at Keisler Field but that's where we washed out – within 2 weeks after basic training they washed us out and put us in gunnery.

N: I see. So you had had your basic training at Keisler Field, and then you went into gunnery school. You were on a ball turret, right? On a B-17?

M: Right.

N: Some of the basics of gunnery school, how long did it last, what did you do, what was a typical day for you at gunnery school?

M: Well, gunnery started off with really, this might sound foolish but we started off with a BB gun. Target practice. Then you graduated from there. To a .22. Then you went to a shotgun. And this shotgun was a skeet range where you shot skeet. Then you went to a moving range, they had about a two and a half mile oval and you sat on the back of a truck, a pickup truck, and they had supports there and they had a big ring in the center and you stood inside of this ring to keep from falling out because they traveled about 40 miles an hour going around this oval. And the skeet traps were shot at different angles so that when you would come by there, maybe one would be this way, another would be straight and another this way. And I don't remember how many there were on

that oval – probably a dozen or better. And we went through that. And we went from that to the rifle. Firing the rifle, and from there we went to a 30 caliber machine gun. And from the 30 calibers we went to a 50-caliber machine gun. And this was all at Las Vegas.

N: You went to Las Vegas – you went from Keisler AFB to Las Vegas?

M: Yes, that's where I took gunnery school.

N: Las Vegas Air Force Base, is that what it was called?

M: Yes, it had another name but God; I can't remember what the hell it is, now. They still have one there. I can't remember what it was...

N: For the sake of argument we'll call it Las Vegas Air Force Base. (laughs) This was where you went all the way up to 50-caliber machine guns, at this base?

M: That was before we even started flying.

N: How long were you at the base there?

M: Well, I ended up in hospital right after I got there, for an operation.

N: What type of operation did you have?

M: I had a hemorrhoid operation. And the class that I had gone there with, they had already gone through and I caught the next class. That was probably about a month later. And I think that was about three months.

N: Where did you travel to in your travels from Las Vegas?

M: Well, from Las Vegas we went to Lincoln, Nebraska. Then our crews were formed at Lincoln, Nebraska. From there we went to Gene Autry Air Base Oklahoma.

N: Gene Autry Air Base? I didn't know Gene Autry had an Air Base named after him?

M: Well they named the base after him because of his hometown of uh... Oh, shucks.

N: Was it called Gene Autry Air Force Base?

M: Yes, that was the base.

N: In Oklahoma?

M: Yes.

N: Son of a gun.

M: I was trying to think of what the hell the name of the town was. (laughs)

N: How big of a base was that?

M: Oh, it wasn't a very large base, I don't know how many crews at one time that they taught there but I would say there must have been around 35, 40 crews there to take the training.

N: Did you get into the aircraft at that time?

M: Yes, we got into the aircraft at that time. There were a lot of classes on the ground that you went to – aircraft identification classes, and then you had ranges that we shot from the plane from our positions – targets on the ground.

N: So you did shoot targets on the ground?

M: Oh, yes.

N: And then did you shoot at tow targets, too?

M: Yes, we shot at tow targets, too.

N: Did any of your friends or you personally accidentally shoot the poor guy that was towing the target?

M: No, no. We heard stories about it – we heard about shooting the tail of the AT6 – that AT6 was towing the target. But I don't think that there was anybody in our group that ever hit it – that target was so far behind that the guy would probably be court-martialed if he hit that anyhow – that would have to be intentional.

N: How long were you at Gene Autry Air Force Base?

M: Three, four months. The town that that was near was Ardmore, Oklahoma.

N: How big was Ardmore, Oklahoma?

M: Ardmore, Oklahoma, I doubt much if they had more than about 6,000 population.

N: So you guys used to go and...

M: We used to have some good times in town.

N: What did you do? For fun and relaxation?

M: Well, we hit the bars and they had a riding stable in town and you could ride the horses. There were really a lot of things that a GI could do. A lot of them didn't do anything but hit the beer joints. But we were a little different – we went roller-skating, we went horseback riding, we went hiking all around. There was a lot of Indians around there and we did a lot of hiking, there are a bunch of Indian camps around there, they were little wee towns.

N: Did the people of Ardmore treat you decent or was it a typical military town where they took your money and said, "Now get the heck out."?

M: No, I didn't see that anywhere. I think I was treated with respect all the way around. I think they show you the respect that you show them.

N: Was this in 1943 still or was it 1944?

M: Well that would have been in 1944.

N: What month?

M: Well, it would have to be early in the year because... probably from February on. We left the States, must have been in June, I suppose when we left. It was before D-day when we left because we were in England at the wash when D-day went off.

N: You didn't happen to run into Mr. Colette, did you?

M: I didn't run into him over there, no. As a matter of fact, I didn't know him until last year. That he was in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Yes, I went out and gave a talk at one of those schools – oh, it was one of those men's clubs out here. And we got to talking one day and he told me that he was in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force and that he'd flown a B-17. We talked about that and he showed me some pictures and stuff. And last summer I got a call from Larry Diemler and he called me and he wanted a list of all the guys in our POW group who were flyers. They had the Sentimental Journey coming in and he wanted me to get the 17 flyers to come out there on a Friday for a beer bash and on the Saturday to go through the 17 and explain to the public the positions we flew and how we flew them and everything like that. So I took Colette out to the air base with me and when we went out to meet with Larry to talk about it. And then took him out to the field Saturday morning to look at the plane.

N: If I may interrupt, I want to get back to Ardmore, OK for a second. You say you left there in June?

M: It must have been in June.

N: What did you go see from there?

M: Well, we went to Kearney, NB.



N: What did you do in Kearney, NB?

M: We went there to pick up a plane and take it overseas.

N: Oh, you ferried an aircraft over there?

M: Yes.

N: Was this to be your aircraft that you would keep, or just ferried over.

M: No, just ferried over. We thought that the plane was supposed to be ours, but we found out different.

N: What route did you take to ferry it?

M: Well, we landed at Goose Bay; we landed at Connecticut first. We landed there and we gassed up and we stayed overnight. Took off in the morning and we flew to Goose Bay, refueled in Goose Bay, and we left Goose Bay and landed in Iceland. Well, we were supposed to stay there overnight; they come out and they fueled the planes up that night and we were supposed to leave the next morning for Ireland. In the morning, we get out there to do a pre-flight check on the plane, and here they had sprung a leak in one of the wing tanks. So we were stuck there for I think four days until they removed the wing and replaced the wing tank for us. Then we went over ourselves; the rest of the gang had gone on ahead, and we flew from there to Nuts Corners, Ireland. And that's where we left the plane.

N: That's where you just dropped the plane off in Ireland?

M: Yes.

N: What was your destination then from Ireland, and how did you get there?

M: Well we went from Ireland; we went straight to what they called the 'Wash.'

N: Where was the 'Wash?'

M: I don't remember. It was in England. I can't remember exactly where.

N: That was the base you were at?

M: No, that was the 'Wash.' We went there for two more weeks of gunnery training. And that was training where you shot at a drawn target again, and it was more a refresher on identification of foreign planes and American planes. And then we went from there and we went to our base. The name of the base was Ridgewell Air Base.

N: And whereabouts in England was that?

M: It was near a little town by the name of Yeldham.

N: You were assigned to the Eighth Airforce?

M: Yes.

N: And what was your bombardier group?

M: 381<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group and the 532<sup>nd</sup> Squadron.

N: How many other squadrons were with you at Yeldham?

M: There were three other squadrons. The 532<sup>nd</sup>, 533<sup>rd</sup>, 534<sup>th</sup> and 535<sup>th</sup>.

N: What was the town of Yeldham like? Was that a big town?

M: Very very small. I doubt if the population was 200.

N: 200? Boy, you boys got dropped off there in a farm community, almost?

M: It wasn't bad, because, from my barracks, maybe like a walk from here to Mahoning Avenue: you hit the English Women's Army Camp.

N: Oh, you died and went to heaven!

(laughter)

M: Oh, that was really something.

N: How many women were over there?

M: Oh, there must have been a couple of thousand.

N: And how many men were on your base?

M: Oh, there were about a thousand there, too. See, you figure there was at least – Well, there was 12 planes in a group that they flew in missions. So you had 48 planes in the air, 10 men to a shift. Then you gotta figure in service personnel and the extra crews that were over there because they had other crews but that was all they flew at one time.

N: So there were over a thousand men. Did you guys get to wine and dine the English ladies at the time?

M: We had a lot of parties on the base. They would have them come over. We had a Non-Commissioned Officer's Club, and they were allowed to come in there.

N: And what rank were you at this time?

M: I was a Staff Sergeant.

N: Oh, so being a Staff Sergeant, you wielded a little bit of authority at the time, then?

M: No, because in the Air Force, not even the pilot had authority – only in the air was he really the boss. You never called him Captain, or Major, you called him by name and that's all there was to it. Unless you were in a group of big officers on the base, and then you showed him military courtesy. But when it come to the crew and you were out together, it was Ed, and the co-pilot was John, and that is the way it went.

N: So typically the crews were pretty tight.

M: Very very close, you had to be.

N: What was the average age of the crew at this time, did you know?

M: Well, I think the oldest guy in our crew was our pilot, and he had been in the infantry for nine years before he went into the Air Force. He was an Army man. So I would say, if you get in when you are about eighteen, he must have been about thirty, anyhow.

N: He was the old man of the group. So what did you guys call him then, Grandpa?

M: No, we called him the Deacon! He must have been the tallest guy on the base; six foot four, and our co-pilot must have been six foot three, just one inch shorter -

N: How old were some of the guys in your outfit? I was talking to Mr. Collet and he was telling me that the Squadron Commanders were about twenty-four, twenty-five?

M: That's right. They were young guys. We were all young when we went over.

N: You were what, twenty-one, twenty-two at this time?

M: Yes. We had a kid that was a crewmember that was only nineteen years old at the time.

N: Yeldham, England. And you say you went to Ridgewell and you said you had some training there?

M: Well, the only training we had in Ridgewell was ground training where you would go to different classes on the base, and then you would go up on flights with your pilot several times during this training period before you started flying combat, to familiarize yourself with the area. And different bases, and emergency bases, and plans.

N: Once you got to Yeldham, that is when you actually saw combat, then, right?

M: Once I reached our base there, right.

N: Let me ask you this question. How soon after you got to Yeldham did you see combat?

M: Well, we flew D-Day, June 7<sup>th</sup>.

N: And you got there, when?

M: Oh, we must have got there in May sometime. Because we flew our first mission on D-Day.

N: Let me ask you this: Did you stay in the typical huts that most men stayed in?

M: No.

N: What kind of quarters did you have?

M: No, we had quarters that were strictly for our crew. We were designated as a lead crew.

N: What is the difference between a lead crew and a - ?

M: Well, a lead crew has a pilot who is A-1 and who can go ahead and lead the whole group to a target. He's got good nerves and can lead the formation to the target. And we flew on every fifth mission.

N: And on the lead crew, you got better quarters, or what?

M: We had better quarters for the lead crew, yes. We had a hut that just our crew was in alone. The rest of our group, they were in Mission Huts.

N: They called them Mission Huts? Why was that?

M: Well, they were a half-oval.

N: Oh, like Quonset Huts?

M: Yes. And ours, we had a roof on it. Only six of us stayed in there because the officers had their own quarters.

N: Oh, I see. Now did you guys have your own toilet facility, or did you have to go outside for that?

M: No, we had to go out to the whole bank of commodes that were outside. The showers were the same way, we had to go outside.

N: Oh, that must have been cold, then.

M: Oh, yeah. That was colder than hell.

N: English weather, it was not typical like ours all the time. So, what was a typical day that you were going to go out on a mission? I would like for you to describe for me a day that you knew you were going to go on a mission, June 7<sup>th</sup>? What time did you get up, how did you prepare for it, things that you did and so forth?

M: You didn't know the night before you were flying.

N: You did not know?

M: They would come in about four o'clock in the morning and wake you up. They would take you to breakfast, and from there you would get your equipment that was on a truck, and from there they would take you from the mess hall right to the airport.

N: You had no idea; until one guy would come in at four o'clock in the morning and say, "Get up".

M: That's right, and say, "You're flying today." And that's it. And they never told you where or anything else. But you go from there to the mess hall where you eat, get back on the truck, and they take you right back up to the airstrip.

N: Wait a minute, what about the briefing room? Didn't you go to a briefing room?

M: Well, once you go to the airstrip, then you go to the briefing room. They have a briefing room, and the navigators will go to a room of navigation, the radio man to the radio man's room, and briefing on everything like that. Then you would talk to yourselves, or you would go out and check the plane. And you would have to put your guns in. They would bring them out by truck for you out to the plane, and you had to install your own guns and get everything ready and check the plane out. That was a typical morning. And then you would maybe sit for an hour or two until the fog lifted. Many times you would take off in the fog. And the planes were spaced about sixty seconds apart in takeoff so that one would not run into another one. And you did not form your group until you got above the clouds. Maybe you would form at ten, twelve thousand feet. One squadron would have one area, the next would have a different area,

the third would have the other. They never flew four squadrons at a time, only three. One was kept in reserve on the base. So there was really only thirty-six planes in your group that day.

N: But you met up with other squadrons from other bases?

M: Yes.

N: You say your first mission was June the 7<sup>th</sup>, D-Day. Where did you fly to, do you remember?

M: It was right along the coast and dropped our bombs, we went in at ten thousand feet and dropped them along the coast.

N: Coast of what?

M: France.

N: Did you have a bombardier aboard your aircraft?

M: Yes. Because we were the lead aircraft. All lead aircraft had a bombardier.

N: Ok, the rest had targeters?

M: Yes.

N: Did you – was your aircraft responsible for dropping flares for the other targets to fall in on, or would he just fall in on your own bombs?

M: We would fall in on our own plane. We never fired a flare in the sky; I never even seen one in the sky. I heard other bases where there was quite heavy fog and there were so many planes in the air trying to form that they would have a different colored flare that they drop for their group to get together there but we never had one. I'd never seen that problem over there at all.

N: So your first mission was flying over Normandy; did you guys encounter any heavy flak at that time?

M: Yes, there was mostly 20 millimeter because we were down low enough for 20 millimeter. But –

N: How low are we talking about?

M: About 10, 12,000 feet.

N: Why so low?

M: Well, it was kind of foggy that day, for one thing. You had to get down low enough to see where you were going to drop your bombs – you had to make sure your visibility was clear. Because if you missed them, you hit the troops going in, coming off the boats and you had to get in there far enough to drop the bombs. So then, after that, all the other missions were at high altitude. From about 27, 000, up to about 28,000 feet.

N: How many missions did you fly before you got shot down?

M: I was on my 24<sup>th</sup> when I got shot down.

N: How many missions would you have had to flown prior to rotation?

M: Rotation was 35 missions per crew, except lead crew. Lead crews only had 30 missions to put in. So I had only six more missions to go. Worst of it was, I volunteered for that mission. I volunteered for about four more – guys would get sick and they would call me. Our squadron commander, he and I had become quite close by that time. And I didn't want to go to Japan. See what I mean? And it was getting close to the end of my mission. And I went and talked to him one day; Colonel Hall, and asked him if I could stay on the base on permanent party and rather than come back to the States I would have stayed there until the war was over and I wouldn't have to go to Japan then. And we talked it over and he said, "Well, the best I can do for you, Mike, is I'll make you a promise. If you fly 15 extra missions, I'll keep you as a gunnery instructor. Put you in the gunnery." Well I said, "That's fine." And I never even made my 30<sup>th</sup>!

N: Where did you get shot down?

M: I got shot down over Berlin.

N: Had you guys drop your bombs yet?

M: No, after the plane was hit, we must have flown for two or three minutes till we hit the IP, which was the bomb point.

N: Initial Point.

M: And we dropped our bombs then. And we got out of the group formation.

N: You guys were hit and you were still able to drop your bombs?

M: Well, the plane was burning like hell, and we stuck with it. I gave the bailout order because I saw how much of the wing was already burned off. Well I would have never had time to get from the ball turret into the plane to bail out...

When I came back off of my third mission, I refused to fly.

N: Why was that?

M: Well, we hit a target, I forget the name of it. Well, they were perfecting the atomic bomb; they called it "Heavy Water." And we hit that target. Well, that target was so heavily fortified with flak, you had any color that you could think of; it was up there in flak. And it was so heavy that you would think that you could put down your landing gear and land on it, it was so heavy. When we come back from that mission, we come back on two engines. And we had over two hundred twenty holes in the plane. Nobody was hit. But I was down in that ball turret all through that.

N: What was it like, being down there?

M: Well, you are all alone -- there is nobody with you. And there's no way of getting out, unless you have a chute, a backpack on to be allowed out of the ball turret. Because otherwise you have got to come up into the plane for your chute. It sits in the plane next to the ball turret where you could grab it and jump into it and snap it after you come out. But when I came back from that one, the plane was so badly damaged that we even lost another engine coming across the Channel and we had to land at an emergency airstrip. They had an emergency airstrip just across the Channel. And it took in about 40 acres of steel matting. And we landed there. We come down safe enough, but when we got down, we had no brakes. Brakes were gone, all the hydraulic lines and everything were shot out. And as a matter of fact, we wound the flaps down by hand because they wouldn't lower either. So when we landed that day, they came down and picked us up in another plane that night for debriefing.

And I went into the Commander's office then and I told him, "Well, I'm done flying. I am not going to fly any more." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Hey, that's a death trap down there. My chute's up in the waste and I'm down in the ball turret. I'd never have a chance to get out." I said, "No." He said, "You know what's going to happen. We'll put you on KP for the rest of your tour over here." I said, "I don't care where you put me, but it won't be up there." Well, he said, "Go on back to your squadron." So I went back to the squadron area, and we didn't have to fly for five missions, I think. And it was the fifth mission that we were due for. And it must have been the third day, I suppose, and they sent a jeep down to the barracks and they said, "Well, come on along, we are going to put you to work." And I thought, "Well, here I go to the mess hall."

Well they took me up to Parachute Division and they measured me for a backpack; they made a special pack for me to wear in the turret. So I was happy about that and this Colonel came out, Colonel Hall. And he said, "Well, will you fly now? Now that you have the backpack?" And I said, "Sure. As long as I know I have a way of getting out, have a parachute with me. I really wouldn't be able to do my job if I was down there knowing that I had to get up in the plane to get my parachute." So they made the chute up for me and I started flying again and I never had no down time at all and I made every mission with it on. And as a matter of fact, it saved my life. Because that ship was so far gone that day that I bailed out of the ball turret. I never would have had enough time to get up there.



N: How were you able to bail out?

M: Well, you had two latches behind you, and this thing is formed just like a ball, really. And I turned this into the prop wash, and I unfastened the hatches, and I whipped the turret around sideways, and the slipstream tore the door off.

N: Oh, I see.

M: And it tore it off, and I turned it around until I was completely behind the prop wash and I bailed out backwards; I dove out backwards. And that was about twenty-eight thousand feet, I guess, when I jumped and I didn't see any other chutes coming out of the plane, I think that everybody jumped before me... But as I was falling – and I was falling on my back – and I looked up and I seen a pair of legs come out of the escape hatch, up in the front nose of the plane. And here it was the pilot. And he had his legs out already and that's when the ship blew. He blew up with the ship.

N: How many of the guys were able to make it out?

M: They all got out but him. He was the only one, he went up with the ship. But on that mission, and after I came down, it must have been four or five days before I got to the Templehoff Air Base in Berlin, Germany –

N: Where did you come down at? I mean, you dropped your bombs on Berlin - ?

M: We dropped them over Berlin.

N: Did you turn around then?

M: No. We kept on going straight, we had to, to get away from the planes. But we had a strong tailwind that day. I bailed out right over Berlin, we had a strong tailwind – it was a forty-five knot tailwind.

N: Now this was in what month?

M: February the third of 1945. Right here – I landed in a little town called Eberswalde.

N: Who picked you up?

M: Well, I was running through a forest, and after I got on the ground I buried my .45 and buried my –

N: Oh, you had a .45 with you? What make?

M: Oh, I can't remember what our .45s were – automatic, anyway.

N: Some were Remingtons and others were Colts.

M: I don't remember what it was. My chute, I couldn't get it out of the tree, because they told you to always bury your chute. But Hell, it was up in the top of this tree.

N: So you landed in a tree and had to shimmy on down?

M: I slid down – I burned one of the shroud lines off and I slid down the shroud line. I got myself swinging to pull myself into the tree, I tied a glove to it, I wrapped it around the tree and I pulled myself into the tree. Because this was a hell of a big tree and this limb was a hell of a long ways from the ground. So I pulled myself into that but when I hit the ground I buried the gun and I run like hell.

N: Why did you bury your gun? Because if you got caught with it they would use it against you?

M: Well, if they caught you, usually they would shoot you with your own gun. So they told you to bury your own gun. So I buried my gun. I kept the escape money and everything that I carried with me, the escape kit, I carried that, but I buried the gun.

N: The escape kit had what, forty-eight bucks in it, if I remember correctly?

M: I don't remember what it amounted to anymore; it wasn't that much, but then you had your maps and compass and stuff, and I carried all that with me. But hell, I never even got a chance to look at the maps or the compass – I just wanted to get out of that area. Because I had come down into an area that was just east of the Ruhr River, and the Russians were on the other side of the Ruhr. If I had had another 1000 feet – if I'd have opened my chute a little sooner I would have probably landed in the Russian lines. So this was a tank-destroying outfit was in the area where I landed.

N: What division of the German army...

M: Oh, I don't know.

N: Were they SS at all, or what?

M: No, I don't believe that I saw any of the SS boys there at all. I run into them later along the way. But I was captured by this group – I was running through this pine forest and I was pooping out and I slowed down, and I swore I heard voices. And there was this great big tree in front of me and I got behind this tree, and I heard voices. They were right on the other side of this tree. They were two guards that had gotten together and was out in the woods and they was talking there. And I started backwards and I was on my hands and knees and I was backing up. And apparently there had been somebody seen me running in the woods and there was a guy behind me, well he poked me in the ribs with a rifle and geez, I must have jumped this high in the air. I didn't know this man was behind me. Never had the slightest idea.

Well, it scared the hell out of me then. And they took me down to their headquarters then, and it was in an old barn. And they sat me outside on this stump, probably from here to that fireplace away from the door of it, put two of their guards on me with machine guns. And I sat their all day, from the time that I landed – the time that they picked me up – until five o'clock that night.

N: How long was this, how many hours are we talking about?

M: Oh, it must have been about five hours.

N: No one came up to you at that time, and offered you anything to drink, or talked to you?

M: No.

N: Just stayed there?

M: Just sat there on a stump. Give you time to think. Well then that night at five o'clock, they had the changing of the guard. And while they were changing the guard, they took me into this little town. Well, everything was all right until we got into this little town. And the German population seen us coming through the streets, well they were out there with switches and clubs and stones and they probably would have killed me if it hadn't been for the soldiers that were with me. There were about 8 or 10 of them that were marching me in. And they beat 'em off with gun butts. And we come to a place, I seen up on the hill was a stone building. And there must have been, oh on the set of steps, probably a hundred, hundred and fifty steps up the hill. You'd walk so many steps and there would be a level, then you'd go up so many steps, and there'd be a level. And at the very top was a flagpole. Well, the mission before that we were told by our group commanders over there, that the Germans had started hanging the Air Force boys in their own parachutes from flagpoles. And I thought, "Oh, Jesus Christ." And they did get my 'chute down and I was carrying it, and I said, "Oh, this is it."

So anyhow, they sat me down, on that set of steps next to the flagpole and I said, "Uh, oh."

N: Must have drove you nuts.

M: If I had had a bad heart I'd have died then, I guess. So they gave me a break there of about ten or fifteen minutes, to get my wind back, because it was an awful set of steps. The parachute was heavy and clumsy, and the 'heata' suit I had on was bulky and the shoes were bulky, and finally they took me into this building and here it was a police station. And they had a detention cell down in the basement of it. And it was probably from here to the wall wide, and probably about five feet long. I know I couldn't stretch out. I stayed in there for three days with no food and no water.

N: This is in what town again?

M: Eberswalde.

N: And you stayed there for three days with no food and no water.

M: Right.

N: And they didn't give you anything?

M: Nothing at all.

N: Anybody come around and talk to you or anything?

M: No, the only thing that they did do is that they came around and lifted the flap on the door to see you and then they would drop it. Some of the townspeople would come in, they let them come in and view you, and then they would close up, they never come near me for three days.

Then they took me out on that fourth day, and put me on an ox-cart, and had an oxen pull it. And geez, I don't know how the hell far we traveled. Must have traveled about four hours before we come to a railway station, a small -

N: And they still hadn't given you any food or water at this point?

M: No, nothing. And then we got into the railway station, the one guard, he went over and got his canister out of his bag, and got me a cup of water, and I had a cup of water. Well, I'll tell you, that tasted like honey to me, it tasted so good. So then they put me on the train, and that is when I went back to Berlin, to the Templehoff Air Base. They transferred me by truck up to the Templehoff Air Base, and they threw me in the dungeon there and I got the shock of my life because I had never seen another American along the way, and I didn't see any other planes other than ours go down. But when I got down into that dungeon there was about 400 guys there that was on that mission that was shot down.

N: Four hundred?

M: Yes.

N: So this was right at the bottom of Templehoff, right? I have been to Templehoff. So when they got you into the main section of Templehoff, did they take you down the stairs or the elevator down into the dungeon?

M: We walked down all the stairs, because there was no elevator working, because everything was bombed and the power was off -

N: You are at Templehoff now and you said it was quite a bit of a ways down.

M: I don't know how many floors or how many flights of stairs now, but I know that it was quite a bit down.

N: Now how big was this area? You met 400 guys?

M: Yes, there was about 400 guys, and I would say that the area was maybe, oh, three times as wide as this area here – about 60 feet wide and about 200 feet long.

N: 60 feet wide and 200 feet long. Jesus, so when they threw you down there you had a lot of company. So what was that like, did they have groups that they divided you up in, people that you knew?

M: No groups, but you know that I did run into some of my crew there. As a matter of fact I run into all of them there but one. One guy got away.

N: One guy did manage to escape?

M: Well, he was on the loose over there for 30 days over there before they caught him. And when I saw him, well, he must have weighed 180 pounds when we got shot down and I would say the guy weighed 140 pounds when we saw him. And could very well have forged for himself in a foreign country, and the only thing he ate was stuff he found in the fields.

N: He probably would have been better off being captured.

M: Well, no, you didn't get anything if you were captured, either. He was better out!

N: When you got there, did the other prisoners brief you as to what was going on; did they say, "Ok, now that you are here, let's talk"? Did they brief you?

M: They wanted to know what outfit I was with, what group I was with.

N: Well, first of all they probably wanted to make sure that you were American?

M: Well, yeah, typical – they wanted to find out. And I told 'em, "381<sup>st</sup>." And they said, "we've got some guys that are 381<sup>st</sup>" and I said, "Well where are they?" So they hollered for a guy by the name of - oh, Finn, and he changed his name to Kent – and as soon as I heard his name, why, I said, "Yeah, it's here!" So then he come over. And he says, "Yeah, this is one of our crew. Ball turret gunner." I can't remember what the hell his name is. I have everything written down in a little book I had addresses in but I've never been able to find this guy, I don't know whatever happened to him. He lived up around Detroit and I checked their phone books and I have never been able to find him. So I don't know what happened to the guy, whether he is dead or moved away or what.

So I got together with the crew there and we kind of stuck together but when it come to food, you didn't get much. In the morning you got a cup of Ersatz coffee and a slice of bread.

N: How in the heck did they feed 400 guys? That's a lot of guys. Did they feed you in shifts, or what? Line you up?

M: Oh, you walked through a line. Picked up your coffee cup and a slice of bread. And then you didn't get anything until evening and then you got a small cup of soup. Like a little teacup. That's all you got. That's all they fed you. And that was true in all the camps that I was in.

N: How long did you stay in Templehoff?

M: Oh, we were there about two weeks.

N: Did you guys, did they talk about escape? Did they plan for escape at all?

M: No. How the hell would you escape from that place there?

N: Well you were down underground.

M: Your better chance of escape was either in travel, or in camp itself, and when you got to that camp and stopped there, why, when you seen the guards and everything there and wire fences and stuff, why...

N: You pretty much said the hell with it.

M: We could read the writing on the wall, we knew that Germany was losing and losing fast, so anybody that tried to escape at that time was goofy.

N: What - where did they take you to after Templehoff, where did they take you then?

M: They took us to a town by the Frankfurt, took us by train to Frankfurt.

N: Frankfurt. What was the camp name in Frankfurt?

M: Well, it wasn't a camp, it was just a railway station. And it was bombed. The railroad tracks there were wiped out, you couldn't go beyond that so then they took us from there to a town called Wetzler. And that was - wait, maybe I'm telling you wrong. Yes, I am telling you wrong. It was in Frankfurt, that was where they tried to break you down to find out what group you were from and everything else, you know. They sent you to interrogation there. Well, they put you in a cell, you were in a cell by yourself. I think about three days with no water or nothing. And then they took us in for interrogation.

Well, the interrogating officer would give you a drink of water there, and offer you a cigarette or this or that, and he'd ask you a lot of questions, and the only thing that you would give him would be your name, rank and serial number. The guy I was with

talked a little bit about himself and talked perfect English. Perfect. Better English than I talk. He told me that he had gone to college in Cleveland, named the college and everything else, lived here for several years and he went back there when the war started.

N: What college did he go to? What rank was he and what college did he go to?

M: Well I don't even remember what the hell his rank was. At that time, when you are first in there –

N: He was a German officer, though?

M: Yeah, he was a German officer. But during this interrogation, I kept telling him that I could only give him my name, rank and serial number, and he was getting a little bit hostile, and that's as far as I would go. And I finally says to him, "Well, put yourself in my position. If you were a prisoner of war, what would you do? Would you give anything other than your name, rank, and serial number?" Well, that was it. He never asked me another question. All he said to me was, "You think you're pretty smart. Well, I 'm going to tell you something. The Germans are the smartest race in the world. Now I'm going to tell you something about you." So he named my place of birth, the school I went to, the company I worked for, and every base that I was on in the States. And the group I was with in England. He says, "You fly with Captain Miller, and we have a special place for Captain Miller when he gets down here, but we will have him one day, too." So they must have had a real spy system or something.

N: They knew all the schools you went to and everything.

M: Yeah. They knew all about me. So then from there, they took us to a little town named Wetzler. And that was a 'transient' camp. I don't remember how far it was from Nuremberg, anymore. I don't know if this shows it. And that is where they sent you from –

(Looking on map)

Right here is Wetzler. North of Frankfurt. And from there they sent me down here to Nuremberg. And then when we left, we left Easter Day of '45, we marched out of camp. And we could already hear small arms fire.

N: Hold on just a sec, you went to Nuremberg, right? How long were you in Nuremberg, how did you get there?

M: They took us by train.

N: They took you by train to Nuremberg from Frankfurt. How long did you spend in Nuremberg?

M: I don't know.

N: What was the camp like in Nuremberg?

M: Well, I'll tell you – over there I got a little bit more to eat because I was with the headquarters group. I was fortunate enough to get in with the headquarters group as one of the cooks. I helped cook in the mess hall. The food, once everybody else ate, what was left, we had. So we'd get a little bit more than everybody else had. I was fortunate there. And when we left there I marched out with the –

N: Excuse me for interrupting, but how many guys were in Nuremberg at the time?

M: Oh, I'd say 20,000 guys anyhow. At least 20,000.

N: How long did you stay there and how was the treatment in Nuremberg? Did they treat you all right?

M: Yeah, the treatment was all right; you didn't step out of line and you didn't talk back to anybody.

N: Did they have regular huts that they put you in? What were the barracks like?

M: Yeah, you had a barracks that maybe would hold a hundred guys and you had three tiered bunks at the time. The rooms were maybe the size of this corner here – I would say about 20 feet by about 12 feet.

N: And how many guys per room?

M: I would say 35, 40 guys per room.

N: What was the typical day there? Get up at six, seven?

M: Well, they would call you out at 8 o'clock in the morning; you would have to get into formation. And they stood you five deep. In rows five deep, and they would come down and count the rows. Well, once in awhile the guys would shift, and there would be an extra row, and it would screw up their counting for them. So maybe we would be out there an hour and a half, and it would drive the Germans nuts, because they couldn't figure out if they were short, or if they had too many, and they would keep fooling around. So they guys would get together and – maybe six guys would get in one row, end up maybe they got ten rows and they count 'em, well, they got a guy missing. And we had 'em rattled. And this would go on almost every day of the week. And it would drive the Germans nuts.

And the only way to get anything decent to eat over there was to get on a crew that would be out on work detail. And you had to volunteer for that and there was usually an American soldier that was in charge of that detail. So it would probably cost you a pack or two of cigarettes to get on that work detail. I was – I wanted to get on the bread detail. I don't know, they must have taken 20 guys to work on that detail. And I don't remember how many cigarettes I gave to the Sergeant to get on it. But anyhow, when you got there, you unloaded for three or four hours, you unloaded a big tractor-



trailer of bread. And it was stacked like bricks. And you passed it out, you threw it from one guy to the other and you stacked it in their warehouse.

Well, the reason that you took this job was to see how much you could steal; if you could steal a loaf then you were all right. You could get something more to eat. I heard of a couple of guys who had come back with bread and that's where I got the idea that I wanted to go. So I bought my way into that. And I happened to be on the tail – the very tail end, I was the guy that got all of the bread and I was stacking it on the very end of the line. Then when the truck was loaded, I seen these guys before it was unloaded. They was sticking it in their pants, and pulling their coat around, or sticking it behind their back, and pulling their coat around. Well, when they go out the door, the God dern Jerries are shaking them down, taking their bread off of them and the guy gets a big bat in the mouth, yet, for stealing.

Well, I happened to think of something else. While they were getting the beating up there, I turned around and put a loaf in the sleeve of my overcoat. Down one sleeve, and put one down the other. These other guys, some of them wore their overcoats because some of them were trying to hide their bread. So when I walked out of there, I held my coat in my hand like that and they felt me all around, and I walked out of there with two loaves of bread.

So we get back to the barracks, and this one guy says to me, "You chicken-shit bastard." I said, "What's that for?" He says, "Our detail was supposed to go out and steal bread. You didn't even try." I says, "How many loaves did you bring back?" He says, "You saw they caught me and I got a bat in the mouth for it." I says, "Yeah, they caught you and you ain't very Goddamn smart, are you?" And he says, "Who are you to talk, you didn't bring anything out." I said, "That right?" I reached over on the bed and I pulled a loaf out of one sleeve, and I pulled another loaf out of the other sleeve. His eyes got about that big and he says, "Well, I'll be Goddamned."

So then we split it up between the guys that were working, you know. But that's how they started stealing bread after that. From that time on the guys would start taking two loaves, one in each sleeve, and when they walked out they would hold their coat here and the Germans would feel them all out. And the Germans would be smiling, because they whipped us, they thought. Those guys are not going to steal no more, but every time we went out on detail a guy would steal two loaves of bread.

N: And they never figured it out?

M: Never figured it out.

(laughter)

N: I was told that once you guys, because you were Air Force, you weren't put on work details unless you asked, specifically asked.

M: No, even if you asked, you wouldn't go because you were a non-commissioned officer. Anybody from Staff Sergeant up didn't work. Didn't go out, they wouldn't let you go out.

N: So you had to bribe a guy to get on that detail.

M: Oh, work detail like that, in the camp, you could do. But you couldn't go out and work on the farm, or work on the railroad, or anything like that. Because they figured that the guys with three stripes were a little smarter, maybe they would get a chance to get away.

N: Oh, I see. So what did you guys do all day?

M: Well, that's where I started working crossword puzzles. You would find old magazines, the Red Cross would bring magazines in, you know, newspapers. Another guy there was working crossword puzzles and I kind of fell in with him. And from then on – I got books and books up there. I never have a dry moment – if I'm not reading, I'm working a crossword puzzle.

N: Let me ask this question. What would you say if I told you that there was a Stalag that had their own dance band –?

M: Had their own dance band?

N: Had their own dance band, had their own plays, did their own shirts, went to radio class, built their own radios, what would you say?

M: I know it is the truth.

N: You know it's the truth? Do you know what Stalag I'm talking about?

M: I don't remember what the Stalag number was but I know that they did.

N: I was told by a guy, and I found it hard to believe, but he showed me proof and can't dispute that... Stalag Luft 3 had everything that I just mentioned. I mentioned this to other guys and they looked at me like I was crazy. "Are you sure that we're talking about the same war?"

M: Where the hell was Stalag 3 at?

N: How did you learn about that?

M: I heard about it after I got out of the prison camp.

N: After you got out of the prison camp. Where were you when you heard about it?

M: One of the air bases, I don't know whether I heard it on the air base or whether I heard it after we started our POW group.

N: I can't remember where Stalag 3 was at...

M: Jim Young got out of Girard; he had a radio over there.

N: Jim Young? Did he have a son by the same name?

M: No, they didn't have any children.

N: Let's get back to Nuremberg for a second. You're at Nuremberg now, and how long did you stay there?

M: Oh, I must have been there about two months.

N: You did crossword puzzles all day, and the rest of the guys did – what?

M: Well, you could play ball out there...

N: What type of ball? Baseball, basketball?

M: Oh, they had baseball, they had a softball area out there, and you could walk around that compound all day long.

N: You are talking about 20,000 guys now.

M: Well, no, there wasn't that many in each compound.

N: No, I mean the whole camp.

M: Oh, yeah, 20,000 guys.

N: So how many guys were there per compound.

M: I don't know.

N: So they basically left you alone?

M: Well, they didn't bother you unless you tried to get away. We had one guy that crossed the warning wire. They had two sets of barbed wire; now this barbed wire fence was maybe about from this wall to where you are sitting –

N: You are talking about 10 feet –

M: Yeah, 10 feet, and about 10 feet high. And there was loose coils of barbed wire down inside. And then, between there, about 20 feet away was a – what they called a warning wire. It was right along a pathway. And if you so much as put a finger on that wire, they shoot you. Or if you put a foot across the wire they shot you. You were

warned when you went in there, "Don't touch the warning wire. You'll get shot." And that's what the guards in the towers had orders to do.

We had one guy that went nuts in Wetzler. I heard the story that he blamed himself for the ball turret gunner's death. He didn't stay in the plane long enough to help the kid get out of the turret and the kid went down with the plane. So this preyed on his mind and preyed on his mind. He was in our barracks and we would hear him scream at night. Just scream at night, scream and holler, "Fire!" and it would really shake you up. And one night it was raining like a bastard. And apparently this guy, he really tried to commit suicide, I think is all it was. We watched through a window, we heard the sirens start and we didn't even know that this guy had disappeared out of the barracks. And we heard the sirens, and naturally everybody runs to a window and there's no lights on in the barracks because they turn them out at a certain time at night. And here this guy is, we seen him when he was crawling up the first inside wire. He'd already been crossed over the warning wire, and he was crawling up this first wire and he was going to jump to the other side to get the other wire, and he fell down in this coil of wire.

Well, he hung up there for a while, and they hit him in the leg, they shot him in the leg and he crawled up that wire and out. Now he run down through a plowed field. Well this was in the, oh, probably the latter part of - probably the first part of March, I suppose. And it was muddier than hell because it was raining. Well, the further he walked, he was slowing down of course being shot, and they were shooting at him, and all the guards were running along the fence, and then they turned their dog loose on him. Well, the guy disappeared from our sight; he went down over a little hill and we couldn't see him anymore. Well we heard these dogs really start tearing up on someone over there, he's screaming like hell, and all at once we heard about six shots, and that was it. They came up over the hill carrying him back, they killed him.

So a lot of the guys that knew him, guys that was on his crew, said that he blamed himself for the ball turret gunner's death, and they thought that he really wanted to commit suicide; that he couldn't take it. That was the only one that I saw that the Germans killed.

N: What was the average age of the Germans that were guarding you in that camp?

M: Well, that was something else. Because once in awhile you would find a young guy that was maybe in his late 20's, early thirties. But most of 'em were older guys, guys that could no longer be out at the front. Some of them were 60, 70 years old.

N: These are like the home guard boys, almost.

M: Yeah.

N: So they pretty much left you guys alone then.

M: Yeah, they didn't bother us too much. They were strict in everything. We got one bath a month. And your showers were out in the open air. They had water lines that went across, through the open air, and can you imagine taking a shower in February and March? They turned that water on; you had one minute in that water, it soaks you, you

soaped up, and then they turned that water back on you to rinse you off, get out of there and get into the barracks before you died of cold. Before you froze to death.

N: But even under all of that you probably looked forward to a shower.

M: Oh, we did – but everybody was riddled with lice. Gracious, you couldn't get rid of them. You couldn't wash there or anything. You know there was drinking water, and you could wash yourself every morning, and you never got a shower that often, and you couldn't take a bath outside in front of that hydrant. All it was, was a tap that was outside, no water in the barracks.

N: Didn't they give you any spray for the lice or anything?

M: Hell, no, nothing.

N: So everybody's walking around with head lice, body lice...

M: Everything. 'Cause there was no way to stay away from it. It was a mess.

N: Oh, jeez, that must have been miserable.

M: It was. That was the first thing that they done to us when they got us to France.

N: Sprayed you down for lice –

M: Took us to a delousing line. Went into that delousing line and they had sprays there – powder sprays – they sprayed powder all through your hair and all over your whole body. And then you went over and you sat on a bench for about 15 minutes. And then you went into the water and washed. And from there you went to a barber and they took all your hair off. I had a beard and they took all the beard off. And cut the hair to about that high, I guess. Then you go back through the delouser again. And then into the showers to shower up.

N: Oh, my gosh. And all the time you guys are going through camp, you were sitting there-

M: Always.

N: So what was lice like? Did you scratch a lot?

M: Oh, boy, you'd scratch. Yes, open sores, you'd scratch so bad. It wasn't a pleasure trip, I'll tell you. You will never know unless you were there.

N: Putting up with a lack of food, and the miserable conditions is one thing, and to top it all off you had wild lice to boot.

M: Yeah.

N: What time was lights out at night for you guys?

M: I think that it was nine o'clock, lights had to be out.

N: That's when they let the dogs out.

M: Yeah.

N: Now your barracks were three feet off the ground and the dogs would go beneath the barracks, right?

M: Yeah, the dogs would run all around the barracks. But a lot of guys were still digging tunnels and everything else in different camps.

N: They still dug tunnels?

M: Well, different camps; not in the camp that I was in, because they had the barracks raised.

N: What was the advantage of that?

M: Well, they tried to tunnel out from under the fence.

N: Did anyone ever do it?

M: Well, there was one group, there was a movie made of them, I believe that they all eventually got killed. But 6 guys got away. Out of the whole group, there was about 300 of them escaped that night.

N: 300 guys escaped that night and all but 6 made it – I mean, they all got killed except for 6.

M: Yeah.

N: Did you guys talk about escape at all, or what?

M: I didn't, the only place I heard any talk about escape is when we marched out of Nuremberg; they was marching us from there to Moosberg.

N: Was Mooseberg near Munich?

M: 12 miles away. I don't know if this map here would show Mooseberg or not.

N: What – So that was the first time you guys talked about escape?

M: Well, there was guys that talked then, but ...

N: What were you gonna do when you escaped? How were you gonna survive, what were you going to use for transportation? Money, and all that good stuff?

M: Well, guys were so fed up with – some of those guys were in there for two years.

N: Oh, really?

M: Oh, yeah. Lot of them guys.  
See, here's Munich, (on map)

N: Munich... now where's Nuremberg at now?

M: Right here's where Mooseberg – see here's Nuremberg, and we marched from here...

N: So you were traveling south, then.

M: Yeah, they were trying to get us across the line into Switzerland. So this is where, Mooseberg, we got to this camp here and they had just turned loose about 40,000 prisoners the day before, in order to make room for us and those that came behind us.

N: They turned loose here about 40,000 guys?

M: They didn't turn them loose, they moved them on, I don't know how far they got. But they were on their way toward the Swiss border, someplace, here. I don't know how far they got. But we come into Mooseberg at 5 o'clock at night.

N: How many guys were stationed at Mooseberg with you, then?

M: Oh, there was a lot of guys in that prison camp. I don't know how many was left there yet. And they told us that there was a group had just left that day, heading south, to make room for us. And this was probably just going to be a way station for everybody anyhow and then they would march more out. But the war didn't last that long, because we heard small arms fire that day. When we get in there, that night. All the way along we heard small arms fire. There was guys who run off, who did escape. We never seen them again. We didn't know if the SS guys killed them, or what. I never seen any of the guys.

N: Mooseberg. That's where Patton rolled into eventually, isn't it?

M: I couldn't tell you. He was going to the prison camps to look for his son-in-law. He had a son-in-law that was a POW. And he was hittin' the prison camps, trying to find

him. Now I didn't see Patton. The only guy, the first guy I seen – There was a tank come in about 5:30 in the morning, come into the compound.

N: Now how long were you at Mooseberg?

M: One night! I come in about 5 o'clock at night and about 5:30 the next morning I was liberated.

N: That was awfully fast!

M: Well, we were on that march for a long time, too.

N: How long were you on the march?

M: Oh, 18, 20 days. Something like that.

N: Why didn't they take you by train down to Mooseberg; they took you by train from...

M: They couldn't anymore. They was trying to ship all of their equipment back by train.

N: What did you guys do for 18, 20 days? How did you survive?

M: Walked.

N: Just kept on walking. Now did they shoot anybody who stopped?

M: Oh, yeah. Anybody that tried to get away from them, they shot him.

N: Well what about the guys who said, "I'm tired, I can't walk any further."

M: They made him walk, or their buddies carried them.

N: One guy told me, he said, because he was on that march down to Mooseberg, he said that they broke you up into groups of about 200 guys. He said, "I can remember I actually took a crap walking sideways."

M: I can believe it. They didn't allow you to get out of line to take a shit or to take a piss or nothing.

N: That's what he said. He said that he actually took a dump walking sideways. He said, "I got so good at it, I could hit the fence. Of course, a lot of us had dysentery." Because of the poor food conditions and whatnot. He told me, and you verify this, he told me that this was the only time that the German guards were really nasty to him. And they started to club him, and that they would take their bayonets and stick them in the



back, he said that they would actually go in about an inch deep... Is that what happened to you guys, too?

M: Some of our group got it, one guy especially. He was from Philadelphia, PA. He was a paratrooper. And I knew the guy real well, we talked in the camp and everything else, and on that march, he stopped for something. I don't know whether he stopped to tie his shoe or what and this guard came up behind him and he stuck his bayonet right in his ass. And he swore to me that night, he says, "I'll kill that son-of-a-bitch before this march is over. He's a dead bastard." He says, "I'll kill him."

Well we would stop nights and stay in farms and barns, or vacant factories, whatever. They would put us up for the night. If there was no building around then we were out in the open. Well somewhere along the way, I still think it was – I can't say for sure. Well somewhere along the way, somebody had picked up a hatchet. Well, I don't know how many days we were on the march when this guy that stabbed him in the back with the bayonet, in the ass; why that guard disappeared. They didn't know if he went AWOL, or what. So they sent guards back along the line looking for him, and here they found him. This must have happened on a little wee bridge, it was crossing the stream. They found this hatchet in the back of his skull, and they threw him over the bridge down into the crick, and he hung up on the rocks there and that's where they found him.

And I still swear to this day it was that guy from Philly that did it. He would never admit it and to tell you the truth, none of us really wanted to know if he was the guy. But in my own mind, I would swear to this day that he was the guy that did it. But that guy was one mean SOB and he wasn't only mean to that guy. He was mean to everybody. But I was fortunate. I wasn't in the compound that they were in. So I didn't have much to do with that guy. I didn't even know him for that matter. I had seen him, they called him – I forget what his nickname was. They had a nickname for him but I don't even remember what it was now.

And that was the only place, in the three months that I was there, that I ever saw a Red Cross parcel. Was on that march.

N: Now this march that you are telling me about, it was the same march that this other guy was on. This guy that got killed, was he a real tall gentleman about six feet seven, six feet eight?

M: No, this guy was, oh, I'd say he was six feet. He was a burly guy, big and heavy but I don't know if he was that tall.

N: A similar incident happened to another guy that was on that march, a George Momar.

M: I know George. George is a good friend of mine.

N: If this is the same guy that I am thinking, I think it was George that was telling me that he was on that same march...

M: He might be talking about the same guy, then, but I did not realize this guard was that tall.

N: He told me that the guard was six foot seven. He said, "I'm not going to tell you what we did to him." He said that it was a bunch of the guys.

M: I always thought that it was one guy.

N: Now I may be wrong, but I'm pretty sure that it was George that told me. But they caught the one guy. He said, "When we got done with him, well let's put it this way, he didn't have a head."

M: Well the story I got was that they found the guy and the hatchet was buried in the back of his head. He was in the crick.

N: We may be talking about two different instances, but then again, we may be talking about the same one.

M: I only heard about the one instance in that march, and George was in the same march that I was.

N: Yes, because George told me the same thing that you did, that they used to put them up in barns, and whatever, and he said that in fact that they were in a barn, and planes came over. And they saw that the Germans were putting tanks in the barns. And so the Germans pulled the tanks out, and put our guys in, and when the planes came back over, they –

M: Strafed them.

N: - strafed them all.

M: Well I was strafed, not intentionally. It was the first day of the march, when we left Nuremberg. God, I don't know if that little town would be on here or not (the map). Anyhow, come to that little town, and when you walked down to the road that we were walking on, heavy pine forest on each side, and when you looked down, it looked like a tunnel. The limbs would overlap the road, and it was dark in there. It looked like a tunnel. We were walking through this; it was nice and shady; and we come to an underpass, it was a railroad underpass. And we got through there with headquarters group. Oh, and maybe we might have been 300, 400 feet through this already, and overhead there was 3 P-47s hovering overhead. And all at once, well there was small marshalling yards to our right, and that was maybe 500, 600 feet away. 700 feet away from us. And these planes peeled off, they come down, and they aimed their bombs with their gun sights. On the P-47. And they triggered their shots. Well, they triggered their shots and they went right through our formation. They didn't go lengthwise, they went across. They hit about six guys. And they dropped their bombs, to hit the – this siding was loaded with V-2 Rockets and they were there trying to knock those rockets out. Well

they missed the rockets. But the shots that they fired, hit the guys in our group. There was about six or eight of them that got killed. I don't know, the Germans never would tell us how many got killed in that headquarters group.

'Cause we were the first group, and that was the group that got hit by the P-47s. And all three of them dropped bombs and all three of them missed their target.

So we had a Colonel who was in charge of the Nuremberg base, the American Colonel. He was an old guy, captured in Cassarene Pass. Well, when this happened, he brought us all to a halt. He got the group together and he says, "I want to tell you boys something and I'll tell you straight. If another plane comes over, I don't want to see a guy leave this road. Not one. I want you to stand out here. I have a flag around my waist that I've carried since I was captured. And I'll wave this flag, and let 'em know we're Americans on the march.

Well, the next morning, about 6, 7 o'clock in the morning and the P-51 come over. Well, shit. We saw that P-51 coming and there wasn't a guy on the road but that goofy Colonel. He's out there waving that flag. We found out afterwards that the planes that were bombing had picked us up in their cameras, and when they got back we were recognized as POWs. And that's why – they sent these planes there – we had a P-51 with us every day. As long as his gas lasted, and then another would come in, hover overhead, and would follow us all the way into Mooseberg. All the way.

N: What did they do, did they pick off any of the Germans, or what? Or did they just let you know that they were that they were around.

M: They just let us know, so the other planes wouldn't bomb us and strafe us. They were there for protection. We left Nuremberg, I believe that it was Newmarket where the railway station was that first time, so we weren't far from Nuremberg. Shortly after we started the march.

N: So it took you 18 to 20 day for you to march down to Mooseberg, and on the way you had P-51s to escort –

M: All the way. From that first day when they shot us up.

N: I'll be darned. What did the Germans think about that?

M: Nothing. They were glad that they were there. 'Cause it was protection for them guards, too.

N: Did they make any comment to you about that?

M: No, if they did, they said something in German and I couldn't understand any of that.

N: Did they speak any English at all to you guys?

M: We had one young guy who could speak fairly good English. And the thing I remember about him the most is that he was crazy about Deanna Durbin. That's all he ever talked about; was Deanna Durbin. What a beauty she was.

N: Deanna Durbin? You lost me on that one.

M: Never heard of her? She was a very beautiful movie star, a young gal. And he sure was hot after her. "Boy, she's a doll." Every time he'd come we'd bring up something about Deanna and he was happy. That's all he wanted to talk about. But he was a nice guy.

N: Where did he learn his English at? Do you know?

M: I don't know, I never questioned him on that. But I do know I asked him one time for some eating utensils. So he said, "I don't know, I don't know." So the next day he come in with a fork and a spoon. And they was enameled. Remember the old enameled kettles? Well that's the kind of fork and spoon he brought me. I don't even know what the hell ever happened to 'em. I know I brought them back with me but I don't know, the times that I moved around...

N: What did you guys have to eat on the way – on this death march?

M: Like I say, that all we got was what we could forage on the road from the farms. Be it potatoes or kohlrabi, or maybe you'd be lucky enough to find a place where they'd give you an egg or two...

N: Did you run into any civilian populace?

M: Oh, yeah. We stayed with a lot of civilians in their farms.

N: How did they treat you?

M: Well, I would say pretty good; because they could see the writing on the wall already, too. At that time they knew the war was just inches away from them, and that's when they changed their ways. I never talked to a German after I was liberated who didn't have something to say against Hitler. And I know damn well that all the years that Hitler was in there, he was their idol all the way down the line, but as soon as the war was over – Hey, nobody was a Nazi. Germany was a Nazi. Yeah, strange.

N: Did you ever go back to Germany?

M: No... I had a chance to go back. I belonged to – I still belong to the 381<sup>st</sup> Bombing Group. We have a reunion every year. As a matter of fact, I'll show you the monument we had put up on our airbase.

N: Ok, let's put you back at Mooseberg real quick. Once you got there you were in Mooseberg one day and, boom, you were liberated.

M: The next morning.

N: You woke up and the guards were probably, obviously, gone.

M: The guards was throwing their guns to the POWs.

N: They were?

M: Sure.

N: When they left... What did they do; just leave?

M: No, they stayed right there.

N: The guards stayed there?

M: They were giving themselves up to the prisoners.

N: Oh, they were?

M: Oh, yeah. The guards in the towers, the P-51s shot them out of the towers. They come in, they strafed the towers, shot them all. These guys were up there with machine guns and they weren't taking any chances on them turning the guns on the prisoners.

N: Oh, I see, ok.

M: So they shot the guys in the towers. Some of the guards that was in the towers jumped off of them towers to get away from the bullets, but when they hit the ground, they broke their legs or hurt their backs or something. Don't know what happened to them. But the first American I seen was a guy from Newton Falls. His name was... Lippa. Lippa, from Newton Falls.

N: What are you talking about, this guy you seen? What do you mean?

M: He was the first American that come in the camp on the tank.

N: On the tank, and he was from Newton Falls!

M: I had on the back of my overcoat, Warren, Ohio. And he signaled me, "Hey, you from Warren?" And I said, "Yeah." He says, "I'm from Newton Falls." "What's your name?" "Lippa, Lieutenant Lippa."

I told him, "I'll look you up when I get home" and he says, "Do that." But I never did find him around the Falls. And I checked the book many times, unless there's an

unlisted number for him someplace but I never run into anybody that had known him so maybe they moved away or something, since then.

But he got out on that tank there, and he says to the bunch of guys, he says, "Well are there any of these sons-of-bitches here that give you a bad time?" One guy says, "Yes, there is." And he says, "Here." And he throws him a machine gun and says, "Pick them son-of-a bitches out, and take them for a walk over the hill."

N: No kidding.

M: This guy picked out about eight guards, marched them down over the hill and all at once we heard the old machine gun going off. He cut 'em all down, and come back smiling, he threw the gun back to Lippa and that's all there was to it. He killed every one of them.

N: Honest to God, it was just that quick?

M: Just that quick. He had a hate for them, I'll tell ya.

N: The guy that obviously killed him had a hate for them – he picked out eight guards?

M: Eight guards that had given him a hard time, or done things to prisoners that he had seen, he picked them out – they were mean sons-of-bitches and he said, "They'll never be mean again." Straightened them right up.

N: Shot them all. My God.

M: I don't even know who that guy was. I had never seen him in camp, if I did I never recognized him.

N: When you heard all this shooting going on, what was your reaction? What was the reaction of the people around you?

M: Well, what we done, we run out – we heard all the small arms fire so close and we went out and got into trenches. Dug out there already for us; they dug them during the day. And we dove into these trenches while all the shooting was going on. So that's when the guards from the towers were being shot from the P-51s and that's when the tanks started coming into through the gates. They came in before the foot soldiers.

N: But what were you thinking, though, when that guy Lupka – what was his name – Lippa says to this guy, "Hey, anybody treating you guys bad?" And this guy says, "Yeah," and this guy throws him down a machine gun. What was going through your head and everybody around you?

M: Well, everybody was happy that there were a couple of Germans that got killed. Because when you starved that way we did for as long as we did, we didn't give a damn if you killed every German.

N: Really?

M: That's right! You know, I weighed a hundred fifty-six pounds when I was shot down. You know what I weighed when I got back to France? I weighed about 115 pounds. In three months. And you know what the bread was made out of that we ate? Sawdust.

N: That's what the other guys are saying, sawdust.

M: Ever seen a piece of it?

N: Yeah. I seen it before.

M: I've got a piece of it here; I brought a piece back.

N: Do you? I'd like to see it; it's been a long time.

M: I'll go get it.

(break)

N: All right, this bread actually has sawdust in it. And what were you saying about dates, now?

M: The bread was dated. On the bottom of the loaf they had the year that it was made in. They had 1918, 1920, 22, 28, that's how long they was able to store this bread. We don't know what other preservatives was in it. As a matter of fact, now a doctor from up in Cleveland has sent a piece of this to the laboratories to find out what was put in it to preserve it this long.

N: Yeah, here it is in 1989, and you're looking at this bread and if I had to say, I mean if you were to tell me, "Ok, guess how old this bread is," I would say, "Well, from the condition it is in, it's probably two or three weeks old." And that's all it looks like, is two or three weeks old.

M: When it come to us, on the bottom of the loaf it had the date of the year it was made.

N: Oh, my gosh.

M: You mean George didn't tell you that?

N: No.

M: He probably forgot. But they had the date stamped right on the bottom of the bread. And this is the end of the loaf so it wouldn't be on here.

N: Actually marked, then the German people themselves ate that as well, I would assume.

M: No, this was for prisoners and soldiers, maybe. I don't know if the soldiers ate this or not.

N: But wait, if this was stamped in 1923, though, what the hell was going on in 1923?

M: Preparing, probably. For another war.

N: This was strictly – not for the general population consumption though.

M: Nope. I don't think so. I never saw the Germans eat this kind of bread.

(this is tape two of Medzie)

N: You were talking and you said that you were at Mooseberg and you got liberated in one day...?

M: Got liberated April 29<sup>th</sup>. 1945.

N: What happened after that?

M: Well, about four or five days after that they took us into a small town by the name of Englestadt (Germany) and they flew us out of there in C-46s and C-47s and they flew us to Camp Lucky Strike. In France.

N: Ok. Lowell – was in Camp Lucky Strike as well.

M: Yeah. Well, they were supposed to give us physicals and everything there, but the only physical I saw is the doctor asked me if I could touch my toes. And that was it. And we must have been there about two weeks and everyday they would come in and say, "Well, the ships are held up. It'll be another day." Another day, another day, another day. Well this went on for two weeks. Well, one day, I was in the tent and I saw a B-17 come in. It landed on the strip at Camp Lucky Strike. So I run down across the strip, and as the pilot got out of the plane, I – it was one from our own division. It was a Triangle A. And ours was a Triangle L. It was the same division. So I asked him, "Hey, is there any chance of getting back to England with you? Maybe I could get back to the States with my group." Well, he says, "I'll tell you." He says, "We've got orders now to take nobody back but personnel from the base." And he says, "We're on standby now so



it might not do you any good." And I says, "Just get me the hell out of here, that's all I ask for." He says, "Well, I don't know you're on the plane."

N: What was this camp now?

M: This was Camp Lucky Strike.

N: Where was it at, now?

M: In France.

N: Whereabouts in France?

M: God, I forget the name of the port.

N: That's ok. But you did get on this B-17?

M: Yeah. So I went back to my tent to get my bag. And I took training with a crew that was shot down; I think it was on their 13<sup>th</sup> mission. And it was a crew that I went all through the States with, very very good friends of mine. And I run into them. And we were all in the same tent together since we got together.

So Midge Morning says to me, "Where the hell are you going?" And I says, "I am going back to the base." "How?" I says, "That plane that come in. I talked to the pilot and he said he don't know if I am getting on the plane." Those guys grabbed all their bags, too and they run down to the plane. We get into the plane, and so there was seven of us. Then, this pilot never went through the waist; he just climbed back up through the front hatch into the cockpit. And the plane took off and we got to England, we got there about 11 o'clock at night, I s'pose. Maybe 10:30 at night. And when we landed, and we come out of that waist, that pilot's eyes were as big as onions. He didn't realize that there was that many guys was in the plane. "Oh, my God," he says, "Am I in for this." Anyhow, they gave us a hell of a feast. They took us down to the mess hall that night and we could have had anything we wanted.

So it was around 11, 11:30 when this Master Sergeant says, "Well, we have to send our Liberty Run into..." Oh, I can't remember what the hell the name of that little town was in England, but our Liberty Runs went there too. He says, "We'll take you in and you can catch your Liberty Run back to your base." So we get back to our base at about one o'clock in the morning. And I'll tell you, once we hit that base, it was just one big party. They took us down to the Mon Club, you know, our NCO Club. And it got around the base we were there, and all the personnel were down around us. They gave us a Jeep and we run for four or five days all around the country over there. Finally come in one day and they took the Jeep from us and said, "We're moving out in the morning. You guys will have to leave today." So we took off from there. I was on the loose in England for a month.

N: What do you mean you were on the loose? The Army didn't know where the hell you were at all?

M: Naw, nobody knew where we were – you know, we weren't attached to anything. We were POWs.

(laughter)

N: So you guys are on the loose, right?

M: Yeah. We went to London; Chelmsford was the little town we come into. And so we went and visited – I had a gal in Chelmsford that I had been screwing around with before I got shot down.

N: Picked up with her again?

M: Yeah... and then from there we went to London, and we must have been loose over there for – Oh, two weeks, I guess. And we were all just about out of money, and we had got as much as we could out of the Red Cross already, and everybody was boozing and having a hell of a good time. We didn't give a shit. So we walked into the Red Cross Pub one day and on the blackboard they had a sign there: ALL AWOLs AND EX-POWs REPORT TO THE AMERICAN EMBASSY AT ONE O'CLOCK THIS AFTERNOON FOR TRANSPORTATION BACK TO THE UNITED STATES.

So, man, we made a dash for the station; for the Embassy. So we went down to the Embassy. And some young Brigadier General came out there and he says, "Fellas, of you get down to such and such a place by five o'clock tonight," he says, "Tomorrow morning you'll be on the Queen Elizabeth; you'll be heading back for the States, you'll be home in five days." Oh, everybody was happy. We run and go get our bags and everything and we head for the Liverpool Station. And we get into this town, and we get the surprise of our life. They were waiting for us. There were big six by six trucks, and there were MPs on each truck, and everybody had machine guns and they loaded us onto the trucks –

N: So that they didn't lose anybody!

M: So they took us to the naval base, took us to the mess hall and fed us. Gave us a hell of a meal there and from there to a barracks. They had a machine gun on each end of the barracks. We couldn't get out. No way, there was no getting out of there. Told us then, "Five o'clock in the morning, get up. Six o'clock, we go to the mess hall, seven o'clock you'll be down at the docks." Boy, everybody was happy as hell. So we went and ate, and came back, got our bags, got on the trucks, and down to the docks we went. We were standing there, waiting and waiting and waiting – all at once a staff car pulls up and out comes this young General – this Brigadier.

He crawls up on the back of one of the six by sixes, and then naturally everybody quietens down. He says, "well, fellows, let me tell you something. You've been out of military control. You're subject to court-martials." He says, "All of you. Well, I'm going to tell you something. You don't have to worry about a court-martial. I'm going to give you your punishment now." He said, "I lied to you a little bit yesterday," he says,

“No Queen Elizabeth you’re going on, no Queen Mary.” He says, “You’re going home on those LSTs.” They loaded us on those LSTs. Goddamn took us almost a month to get home. We hit a storm, it blew us out, I don’t know how many miles off our route; by the time we back into the States. We come into Norfolk, Virginia and we had the same treatment over there. The guards, the trucks, they didn’t want us going AWOL in the States.

N: Wait, a minute. You guys were AWOL, but, my God, you were ex-POWs. Didn’t they have any respect for POWs?

M: Nope. They didn’t at that time. They wanted you in military control and that was it, see? They were going by rules.

N: Military rules and regulations.

M: And so, we went into the – they took us down to the mess hall. I’ll never forget they had chicken for us. Goddamn, it was good. They told us we could have as much as we wanted. And this place was beautiful; it was spotless, you know. So we got this chicken, and I don’t know how many times the guys went through the line again. Well, one guy wanted milk. They gave you pints of milk. And he wanted another pint of milk and he walked up through the line again, and there was a guy handing out the milk. And oh, he said that he wanted another pint of milk. And the guy shook his head and said, “No, no, no.” And this guy says, “Yes! I want one of them!” He was bound to get one, you see. All at once this guy started talking in German. Here he was a German POW. The guys looked at him – he’s nice and fat, works in the mess hall with all the Goddamn food he wanted, and he’s giving us orders. They started a riot. Oh, they threw chicken and everything all over that place. They busted the milk up, beat the shit out of the Germans. There must have been two-dozen Germans working in the mess hall and they beat the shit out of them. By that time, the MPs come back in and got us. We were supposed to spend the night there –

N: Where was this?

M: Norfolk, Virginia. We were supposed to stay there overnight. They took us out, loaded us back onto trucks, took us back to the station, put us on a train and shipped us to Indian Town Gap. That night. They didn’t want any part of us.

N: Indian Town Gap? Where was this?

M: Pennsylvania. They sent us up there. And when we first got there, the commanding officer of the camp said, “I’ll have you guys home by the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.” We must have been there four or five days and they ain’t making no move to get us out of there. They gave us our clothes and that was it. No physicals or nothing. We was just sitting on our cans, and they turn around and they gave everybody passes for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Well, you was able to buy beer by the pitcher at the PX. And these POWs went down there and they got themselves all slopped up with beer, and they took off for the

Day Room, and they tore that Day Room right to the ground. They tore off windows, walls, everything. They tore it completely down. The MPs were there but they couldn't do nothing with the guys. They moved for another barracks; they were going to tear that down and they finally got the base commander there and he said, "Whoa, whoa - wait, don't tear anything else down - I'll get you guys out of here today. I'll get you out today! They started calling personnel back in from town to get out paperwork ready. I got out at midnight. I just got out in time to catch a bus for home.

Me and, I can't remember what the hell that guy's name was from Youngstown, we come in to Youngstown together and we get in about six o'clock in the morning, and come into the station. And he says, "Well, there's nothing going into Warren until nine o'clock - Come on," he said, "We'll go down to a club I know and we'll have a few drinks." So we went down to the club. We had a few drinks. Well, I made it back to the bus in time, and it took me into Niles. And the bus station was right directly behind my Uncle's store. So I come into there, and I said, "The hell with it. I'll go up and let Vic take me home or something." I went up to the store and it was a shock to see me. Because nobody thought that I was alive. They didn't know, you know, if I had survived or not.

N: How old were you at this time?

M: Oh, about 22, I suppose. 23. Well I went in to see him, and I says, I need a ride home. "Jesus Christ," he says, "Here, take the car." And he gave me his keys. "And keep it for as long as you need it." And he told me, "Any time you need gas, go to this station here and charge it to me." So I had his car for a couple of weeks while I was home on leave.

And I was home for 65 days, and so I kept his car for two months, I guess. And then they took us - after my 65 day delayed run out, they took us to Miami Beach for two weeks. We was able to take our wives with us down there.

N: Oh, were you married at the time?

M: Yeah.

N: When did you get married?

M: I was married before I went in. I had a kid before I went in. So we went to Miami Beach for two weeks. They put us on a train one day, and the next day they shipped us clear to Texas. What the hell was the name of... not Dallas, not Houston... I was just there a couple of years ago... Anyhow, it was the SAC Airbase. What the hell was the name of the town; it started with an 'S'.

Anyhow, we went there for discharge, and I got there September the 9<sup>th</sup>, I believe. September the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup>. And they told us they would have us out in a week and the discharge center wasn't even set up yet. So, October the 3<sup>rd</sup>, all these POWs - there was nothing there but POWs in this place for discharge - On a Saturday night a gang of them went to town. Sunday morning, they had to send trucks to pick them up from jail - There was a hundred and thirty guys in jail that night, and they came back to the base the next

day. Guys with hangovers, guys that carried booze with them or that had booze hidden someplace; and they started drinking again. And they tore a building down. On the base. They tore this building down, and man, it wasn't very long. The very next day, they let go 45 people. I was on the second shipment the following day and I got out of there. I think I got out on the 6<sup>th</sup>. 6<sup>th</sup> of October. I'll never forget that.

N: Listen, is there anything that we did not cover that at this time you would like to?

M: One thing that I would like to tell you about is the raid that I was on the day that I was shot down.

N: Oh, ok.

M: That raid was the heaviest or the biggest bombardment of any raid of the war. In Germany. There was 1600 heavy bombers, which would be B-24s and B-17s, that were carrying their loads to Berlin. That's how many planes bombed Berlin that day. 1600 planes.

So you can imagine the devastation of Berlin.

N: That was a hell of a defeat for Hitler, because he said that Berlin would never be touched.

M: Even before I was shot down, I could see planes as far as the eye could see, back behind us. We were leading the group, we were the first group into the target, and as far as you could see back, miles and miles, you'd see these planes shining in the sun. You were up above, you were up above 28, 29,000 feet so you seen that far.

N: Did you guys encounter any fighter aircraft at this time?

M: Never seen a fighter that day. Well, once they knocked out their ball-bearing factories and their gas and oil, why we didn't see too many fighters. When we first got there we had fighter problems but not too long after that. Once in a while you saw maybe five or six of them in the sky. Some would come down through your formation, trying to knock down a plane or two coming through, but usually they got hit when they went through. Because everybody was concentrating on two or three planes, anyhow. So a lot of those guys didn't live to tell about it. But there might have been a few, but we usually knocked them out of the sky. Because you figure you got at least eight guys up there with machine guns on each plane. That's a hell of a lot of firepower.

N: It sure is. But 1600 guys in the air that day?

M: 1600 aircraft.

N: That's a lot of aircraft.

M: That was heavy bombers. I got a record someplace, here, of all of the missions that were made in Germany for our group, and it tells you how many planes were on the bomb runs and everything. And that was 1600 and I went through it and that was the biggest. I had heard that when I was in the prison camp, that it was 1600. From somebody... I think it was some pilot that told us.

One crew there, the pilot had a broken leg, and his - I don't know why; I never found out - the crew turned against him. But he was in that Templehoff Air Base when we come down. And he had a broken leg, and they would not take him down to chow. They wouldn't take him - no, they'd walk around him. I don't know what it was that they fell out on, whether they blamed him for them being prisoners, I never did find out. But I know that there was 4 of us - we got a limb of a tree - Oh, one of the guards brought it to us - it must have been 4 foot long. And we'd get this guy - Because you couldn't carry any food back, anybody that was wounded. You had to take them up to get the food themselves or they wouldn't give it to you. We'd get him on this limb, and carry him up through the line, and get him his cup of soup, or his cup of coffee, or whatever it was. His crew wouldn't have nothing to do with him. Never found out, why...

N: That's unusual.

M: Well, this crew that I told you - that I met in France, they had a hard on for their pilot, too.

N: Oh, yeah?

M: Yeah, because on their 13<sup>th</sup> mission, they had just dropped their bombs, and one of their engines caught fire. So he turned on the fire extinguishers and they were froze. They wouldn't put the fire out, and he gave the bail out order. So these guys jumped. But the tail gunner, who was a pilot himself, in the civilian life, he was back in that tail, and somehow or other his intercom got unhooked. And he didn't hear the bail out order. He looked out, and looked out, and there was nothing wrong with the plane that he could see. Well, he walked up through the waist and called out the positions, you know, he saw that his wire was out so he plugged it back in, called all the positions and there was nobody on there. He went clear to the nose of the plane and there wasn't a Goddamn soul on there. So he says, "Piss on it. I ain't staying on this big bastard by myself." So he jumped. So they blamed their trip to being prisoners on him, and they whipped the shit out him. They caught him in the camp and they beat the living piss out of him.

N: There was no need to jump?

M: No, because the fire extinguisher apparently it must have thawed out with the fire and it did put the fire out. And he gave the bail out order.

N: And they beat the hell out of this poor guy.

M: Oh, they whipped the shit out of him. I didn't see this because this happened before we joined up with them. To begin with, they weren't even in the same prison camp that I was in. They were in Mooseberg when I got there, but I didn't know it. Then I met them in France when we got back to France.

N: Jesus. I would imagine, in his mind, he thought "This is it. We're going down. We'd better get the hell out of here." But, knowing the frustration that these guys went through, they probably had to blame somebody, so what the hell, he looked like the most obvious so that was it.

M: Well, they figured it was his fault for giving that order; that he didn't stay with it long enough.

N: Well, listen, I would like to thank you again for giving this interview. And for the record, it is now 20:22 hours. And that be all.

M: OK.

**Transcriber's Note:** Mr. Medzie was unable to proofread this interview due to poor health. Therefore this interview is filed without the final corrections.