

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
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WWII P.O.W Camps
O.H. 1334

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE LIGHT
INTERVIEWER: Joseph A. Nuzzi
SUBJECT: WWII P.O.W Camps
DATE: February 10, 1990

N: This is an interview with Mr. George Light at 600 East Prospect St. in Girard, Ohio for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project by Joseph A. Nuzzi Jr. Today's date is February 10, 1990. You were born and raised in New Philadelphia?

L: That's right.

N: Did you attend all the school systems in New Philadelphia?

L: All of them from the first grade up until the twelfth grade.

N: What year did you graduate from high school?

L: 1938.

N: What was the name of the high school?

L: New Philadelphia High School.

N: What made you come to Girard?

L: It was probably the location of our families. My wife was from Butler and my family was from New Philadelphia so we picked a spot that was close to each one. Also there were openings in this area and I liked Girard the best.

N: Let me rephrase the question. What was the catalyst that made you go up north?
Did you have family in this area?

L: No. I went to college and that's where I met my wife. I went to Heidelberg and after the war I taught one year at Wellington. I wanted to work in a bigger school and at a better location, in relationship to our families.

N: What year did you attend college?

L: 1938-1942

N: Where's Heidelberg College?

L: Tiffin Ohio.

N: What did you receive your degree in?

L: Bachelor of Science. The teaching fields included biology, physical science and physical education.

N: Was it a Bachelor of Science in Education?

L: No, just a Bachelor of Science degree.

N: In 1942 the war was on, did you think about joining the military at that time?

L: I really didn't have much time my number was up. I was lucky to graduate. The only way I graduated was that I enlisted in the air force and they didn't call me up right away so I had a chance to graduate.

N: What made you go into the air force? Was it the fact that you figured you wanted the air force as opposed to the regular army or what?

L: I think the idea of flying attracted me.

N: What year did you go into the air force?

L: I went in in November of 1942. I enlisted in June.

N: So you signed a contract with them in June upon graduation. Do you remember the date in November?

L: November 19.

N: What basic training base did you go to at that time?

L: I was in the Aviation Cadets. I went in at Fort Hayes.

N: The Aviation Cadets were flyers right?

L: Pilots right. I went directly from Fort Hayes to St Anna California.

N: You were inducted at Fort Hayes. Is that where you took your physical and everything?

L: No. The only thing we did at Fort Hayes was the Oath of Allegiance or whatever you take when you go into the air force. We still had our civilian clothes.

N: Where is Fort Hayes located?

L: Columbus Ohio.

N: Then you went to?

L: St. Anna California.

N: What base was this?

L: St. Anna Air Base. This is where I got my preflight training.

N: How big was the base? How many personnel?

L: It had all the aviation cadets for the western command. I think there were approximately ten thousand there. That's just a guess.

N: This was strictly for training pilots at that time?

L: Right.

N: How long were you at St. Anna and what was a typical day like? What were you instructed in and what type of aircraft did you fly and so forth?

L: We didn't do any flying it was all ground school. It was basically marching, the fundamentals of flying and military training.

N: What was the rank structure at that time? Did you have buck privates and so forth or?

L: Aviation cadet was my title.

N: Upon graduation you would be commissioned as a second lieutenant is that right?

L: Right.

N: What were your uniforms like?

L: The clothing you were issued was a little better than that of a G.I.

N: In what respects?

L: The officer's pants had a better texture. The jacket was a better grade of cloth. It looked better.

N: How long were you at this school?

L: About eight weeks.

N: Were you allowed off the base at all?

L: We had a pass from noon on Saturday until noon on Sunday. We had to be back for a Dress Parade at three o'clock on Sunday

N: Dress Parade every Sunday?

L: Every Sunday.

N: What was typical day like at St. Anna?

L: They got you up early, did role call, and then you'd march to breakfast. The most important thing seemed to be the air force song. Plus the typical marching songs. I'm a terrible singer and I hated that. That's what I remember the most. Then we drilled in the morning, had PT and went to lunch. In the afternoons we went to class and the road scrapers would come along and scrape the dirt to the side of the road and after class we'd shovel the dirt to the other side.

N: Why?

L: Just for discipline I don't know. Then the next day the road scraper would move the dirt to the other side and we'd have to shovel it to the opposite side.

N: Sounds like they didn't have anything for you to do and figured they'd give you something to do. Where did you go after St. Anna?

L: I went up to King City. I was primary that's where we did our flight training.

N: What was that like?

L: You took ground instruction as to why the plane flew, the controls and the parts of the airplane and so forth. Also how you scheduled and you were assigned an instructor. Then you were assigned a flight time by flights. I think I was there eight weeks.

N: What aircraft were you assigned to?

L: A PT Ryan. It was single wing open cockpit.

N: It didn't have a numerical number on it?

L: It might have I don't remember. The primary planes included a Ryan, Steer man; a Steer man was a biplane.

N: Was it a tandem or were you sitting side by side?

L: Tandem. The pilot was in front and I was in the back.

N: You were there for eight weeks?

L: I didn't make it eight weeks I washed out. Normally you have eight to twelve hours of dual instruction and you should solo somewhere between ten to fifteen hours. I soloed in eight hours without any problems. You were supposed to get sixty hours and I had somewhere around thirty. We were supposed to get into some acrobatic flying and two buddies of mine and me got into trouble because we got into the far end of the flying zone. We'd go up the northern edge and play tag cause there wasn't anybody there. The one kid kept going under the bridge. We didn't get into trouble for that but he did it a couple of times. The day we got in trouble we were playing tag and we forgot the time. You only have so much gasoline in those things and we came back and I came in too quick and grounded the plane. It didn't hurt the plane but it got me up for the e-ride. My friend did the same thing and the third guy was written up for the bridge.

N: What do you mean by the e-ride?

L: Elimination ride. It wasn't more than a day or two days later. I could tell no matter what I did I was going to go. First you take your e-ride from a civilian instructor then a military captain came in. Sometimes you could lick him and I could tell he was real doubtful whether he should wash me or not but he did. All three of us got the gate. The elimination rate was about fifty percent. I wasn't too far from going on to the next step. You'd graduate to more sophisticated airplanes.

N: Did he give you any explanation as to why he washed you out?

L: Not really.

N: Boys will be boys. You'd think they'd be a little more flexible.

L: The only thing I remember them telling me is that I wouldn't make it. No reasons why or anything. The whole approach to the military was different then. There was certain quantity that they wanted to graduate from a certain spot I think.

N: Sometimes I think they look for people to wash out because no program could be that good.

L: The thing that bothered the three of us is that we thought we were fairly decent. After we got washed we were sent down to Fresno to a cadre, a replacement center. While we were there we learned that two guys back in St. Anna had crashed into a mountain and had been killed because they got into a big airplane and weren't quite ready for it.

N: What was it like in Fresno?

L: It was a mess. It was a tent city. You didn't have anything to do and there was no organization. You'd get up in the morning and get in line for breakfast, eat breakfast, get in line for lunch...

N: That was the biggest part of the day? How long did that go on?

L: I was there a month, or three weeks.

N: After Fresno where did you go?

L: You went to a counselor and they had all your information. There you made a decision whether you wanted to fly or not. I wanted to fly; I wanted to be a gunner. They gave me my choice flight engineering, radioman or gunner. Incidentally I decided I wanted to be a radioman. Going back a little bit the

ground school at both King City and St. Anna had a lot of good science courses.

The courses I had in college helped me but this added a lot to what I had had.

The way they presented flight and the physics of flight was done in a much better way than any textbook. The military did a good job as far as principles of flight and navigation. I felt it added to my knowledge, I enjoyed it.

From there I was shipped to Sioux Falls South Dakota to radio school. I like the Dakotas. The people were more friendly. You didn't even have to put your thumb up people would just pick you up.

N: How big of a base was this? Was this a small community?

L: The only thing I could really tell you is when you went into Sioux Falls on a pass all you saw were khaki uniforms.

N: Was it called Sioux Falls airbase at the time?

L: It was called an airbase at the time but it was strictly for radio. You had three shifts. I went to radio school from midnight to eight in the morning. Half of the instruction was on mechanics, how it worked. It was condensed but you knew the basics of radio. The last half was taking code and sending. Our instructors were mostly middle-aged women.

N: Civilian?

L: Yes. I can't remember the number of words you had to have. I did fine I could get the words in practice but when it came down to the test I had a rough time. I had to stay over an additional two weeks in order to pass the test. At eight o'clock you marched to breakfast, got a couple of hours off and then at eleven you had PT. For an hour or an hour and a half you had to do some running. They

kept you in pretty good shape. Then you were done at twelve, had your meal and got some sleep. I remember I was tired the whole time I was there.

N: What months are we talking about?

L: July, August and September.

N: You said the people were friendlier, did you experience this in Fresno California or Kings City...

L: In Kings City you never got off the base. In St. Anna you were just a guy in uniform, they stayed away from you. In Sioux Falls where there were a lot of uniforms people weren't too friendly but when you got to the edge of Sioux Falls people were friendly. We'd get a 24hr to 48hr pass and would hitch hike.

N: Where is Kings City?

L: Central California

N: What was the comradery among the guys like?

L: No problems. The aviation cadets were a step above. As far as getting along I had a lot of good friends but you didn't have any lasting friendships because you're on the move. There was no cohesiveness.

N: Where did you go after Sioux Falls?

L: One final thing about Sioux Falls your last two weeks they'd put you on a piper cub and you'd send and receive in the air. The thing I remember is the wind blowing in South Dakota. I'd swear those piper cubs that came in would land without moving.

N: So where did you go after Sioux Falls?

L: Uma Arizona to gunnery school.

N: You guys had to learn a little about everything!

L: You had a fifty caliber and you had to be able to take it apart and put it back together blind folded.

N: How long was the gunnery school in Uma?

L: Six weeks.

N: You got there in September or October?

L: No, I'd say it was November.

N: Of what year?

L: 1943. I was there part of November, December and January. Then I came home and got married.

N: You were married in 1944 then. What was the gunnery school like?

L: You spent the first two or three weeks with ground instruction. You'd start out with a shotgun, go to the range and shoot at a steel target. Then you'd progress to a moving object, a bird, airplane or man and you tracked it with you shot gun.

N: What caliber shot gun?

L: I'd say twelve gauge. Then you went from there to shooting trap. At first you knew which direction it was going then it was random. I got pretty good at it. Then from there you went to a range where you got on a truck and drove through a certain track and a bird or shooter would come out and you'd have to shoot at all different angles and you'd be moving.

N: How many guys where on this truck with you?

L: I was the only one excluding my instructor. After that you move up to the fifty caliber. You had to learn all its parts and how to take it apart. You started out

shooting from the ground, then they had a moving target, then from there you progressed into the air and you went out onto the gunnery range. They had airplanes on the ground at the gunnery range that you'd shoot at too.

N: Was it a regular airplane or made out of wood or

L: I'd say they were made out of wood. Then they'd tow a target and they had tracers. Somehow they could keep track of how well you were shooting. You had to get a certain number before you could progress and I was amazed because I wasn't very good.

N: So after this you came home and got married?

L: Yes. I was given a fourteen day furlough.

N: You got married on January what?

L: January 23.

N: Where did you get married?

L: Butler Pennsylvania

N: Where did you spend your honeymoon?

L: Butler PA. My brother in law was in the navy and he was seriously ill and my family had to leave so we stayed with the sister in law and young baby so somebody could take care of them.

N: Those are the things that keep families together. How did your brother in law make out?

L: Ok.

N: Weren't you a little apprehensive about getting married knowing that at that time?

L: No. I think our families were a little more concerned then we were.

N: How old were you at that time?

L: I was twenty-three going on twenty-four at that time.

N: How old was your bride?

L: Twenty-two.

N: Where did you go after you got married? What base?

L: I went to Salt Lake City. This is where they built their crews. I was there from January to March about eight weeks. Probably my worst stretch in the military. I spent a lot of time on KP at least three weeks in a row. They had so many radiomen they didn't know what to do with us. One day I was coming from KP back to my barracks and I met three officers and they saluted. One of them was a Lieutenant Colonel he had graduated from Heidelberg a year ahead of me. He said, "What are you doing here?" I said I'm on KP I'm going nuts! He said, "I'll fix you up" so he got me a job firing the furnace in the barracks. All I had to do was go in there and sit. I spent about four weeks there until I was assigned a crew. I found out later what they were doing. They would go down a list of radiomen take the first name and make that man the radioman on the crew, then they'd take the next two radiomen and send them out as waist gunners. That's what happened to me, I was sent out as a waist gunner not a radioman. From Salt Lake I went to Sioux City Iowa. My wife and I had an apartment there and we were able to spend some time together when I wasn't flying.

N: What was the name of the base?

L: Sioux City Airbase.

N: Did you have an apartment off base?

L: Yes. It was probably the most lenient base I was on.

N: How long were you there?

L: About eight weeks.

N: You got there in March of 1944?

L: April or May of 1944. We had night flights and would fly into Rapid City or as far as Denver. I think at one point we flew to the east coast and back.

N: What rank were you then?

L: I was a buck sergeant.

N: Since your wife was with you in Sioux City did they give you separate quartering allowances?

L: No.

N: You had to be a certain rank to get quarters. What rank were you when you came out?

L: Staff Sergeant.

N: What was a typical day like at Sioux City?

L: It would vary. Some days you'd be up there eight hours in the morning and take ground instruction as to where you were going, if you were flying with a group, and then you'd fly formation and learn about your gunnery and position and so forth. They were setting you up for overseas flying. We never had more than twelve airplanes but we always had at least three.

N: Twelve airplanes comprised a squadron when you got overseas right?

L: Yes.

N: What was the comradery among the aircrews like at that time? Was there any friction among officers and enlisted men? Did you salute each other? Did you pal around with each other?

L: There was a definite separation. As an illustration just before we were ready to go over seas the engineers mother was talking to us and the pilot, co-pilot and navigator came up and told us they wanted to take us (me, my wife and the engineers mother) out to dinner. So we all went into Sioux City to a restaurant and we were all sitting eating and the officers came in and made the officers we were with move to another table.

N: They actually forced these guys to go to another table?

L: Yes they apologized but I couldn't believe that. Overseas there is no problem. On our crew there were no strong ties.

N: This is where you guys fine-tuned your expertise before you went overseas? When did you guys go over seas?

L: Yes. We went over seas June 16th then we went from Sioux City to Kearney Nebraska. We picked a new airplane a B-17. That's what we flew overseas. We flew from Kearney to Goose Bay

N: Was this B-17 going to be your ship or where you ferrying it over for someone else?

L: Just ferrying it over. We landed in Goose bay and stayed overnight. Then we went to Nutts Corners Ireland. There is one thing I remember about going into the mess hall at Goose Bay. At the time I was a big milk drinker and we never got a lot of milk at the military mess halls but the one thing that surprised me

about Goose Bay was at the evening meal I saw a big container of milk and I went and got myself a nice big glass and went to drink it and it was powdered milk.

Then we flew to Nutts Corners Ireland without incident. I met guys in prison camp that never even got to their bomb group. The navigator made a mistake and they ended up over Germany and got forced down.

N: When you arrived at Nutts Corners what did you do? Did you stay there awhile or fly on?

L: We took a train and got ferried and took a train to our bomb group.

N: Where was your bomb group?

L: Near Peterborough. That was our three hundred and fifty first bomb group. I don't know what squadron I was in I think the 408.

N: What were the other squadrons in?

L: 407's, 408's and 409's.

N: What air force?

L: The eighth. There were two divisions. The first division and second division and the insignia on our airplane was a triangle J. The triangle was the first division and the box I think was the second division and had some 24's in it. I'm not sure on this.

N: What was Peterborough like? How big was it, how many squadrons were on it?

L: There were three squadrons.

N: Twelve planes each squadron?

L: We always put up thirty-six.

N: How many men? A thousand?

L: I don't know

N: Was it close to the city itself?

L: Yes, you could walk in. I was there once. I was only in the bomb squad twenty-eight days.

N: What was the town like?

L: When got there it was dark, there was a black out and we went into a pub and then walked back so I never really saw the town.

N: What month was this?

L: We went over June 16th, which incidentally is my birthday so I think we got to the bomb group about June 18th.

N: How soon after you arrived did you get into combat?

L: It took about a week. You took orientation flights in England.

N: What were orientation flights like?

L: You'd always go after they'd take off around ten o'clock and we'd fly to the west away from any big areas. We'd stay toward the east toward the channel. We'd fly low less than ten thousand feet. The pilot was getting accustomed to taking off and landing I don't think they were concerned about us. One thing I remember about that is when we were in the barracks and the guys came back from a six-day mission in Munich. I have to digress a little bit here. When we got to the air base we attended a crew that had one waist gunner. They were only sending one waist gunner because they were not meeting many fighters they were getting mostly flack so rather than sacrifice ten men then were only sacrificing nine. Since I was a waist gunner I was only flying alternate missions with the

aircrew. The seventh day our airplane was up and the pilot flipped a coin to see which waist gunner was going to fly. The other waist gunner won the flip so he had to fly and they went to Munich the seventh day and that's a ten, twelve-hour flight. I think I flew my first mission to St. Lo.

N: Where is that France?

L: We went there two days in a row. That's the mission where we bombed some of our own crews. A general got killed. I can't remember his name.

N: What happened?

L: The troops had been held up at St. Lo and there was road that went across and the American troops were on one side and the German troops were on the other side. Our planes set off red flares where our troops where and what happened was the early bombers stirred up the air and the smoke went over the road and so bombs were being dropped everywhere.

N: This was around the 26th of June?

L: Late part of June.

N: This was on your first and second flight?

L: Yes.

N: On what mission did you get shot down on?

L: On my sixth. What's interesting is whoever was in charge of scheduling called me in and told me that we needed radiomen. He said I'm going to put you on cause we need spare radio operators. What this meant was if a radioman got sick I had to take his place. So I had to be up ready to fly regardless every third mission or if somebody got sick they could call me. I flew the backup lead and I

monitored voice to see if anybody broke radio. In other words I took down everything that was recorded. On my third, fourth and fifth mission I went to Berlin we had fighters that time that was a miserable flight, then Saarprucken, then Con.

N: Con France?

L: Yes, that was my fifth mission.

N: Let's talk about Berlin you said there were a lot of fighters going into Berlin. Did you get to shoot at any of them yourself?

L: No they were too fast. I was monitoring voice so I didn't get the chance to shoot.

N: Did you ever get a chance to shoot at any fighters?

L: No. They got almost the whole lower box on that flight and I think they got almost ten airplanes.

N: At what altitude were you guys flying?

L: twenty-two thousand.

N: That wasn't very high you'd take a lot of flack at that altitude?

L: Well you never went much above twenty-two.

N: That was about a twelve-hour flight to Berlin?

L: Ten hours.

N: What did you guys do when you had to go to the bathroom?

L: We used a cigar or ammunition box.

N: What was the attraction over Con France?

L: We were bombing ahead of the British troops. When we flew at Con they were tracking us with the tiger tanks and the eighty-eights but the British troops didn't

waste any artillery, they didn't help you out a bit. They didn't answer you. The guy that was flying with us was around awhile, he was smart. On an evasive bomb run what he would do would swerve from side to side and wherever the flack would burst he'd go the opposite way. I don't know how he knew to move. At the time I knew his reasoning but I don't know now.

N: Did you guys have a bombardier or did you have a toggle mat?

L: Bombardier.

N: So were you lead aircraft?

L: Semi-lead there.

N: So you were flying right behind the lead aircraft. From what other guys were telling me the lead, primary and secondary are the only ones that have a bombardier on them in the event that the primary had to peel off the secondary would take his place but there was only one bombardier the others had toggalers and they would line up on the bombardier when he released his and the other guys would release there's.

L: I couldn't tell you. I thought ours had a bombsite on it.

N: It may have had since you were the secondary aircraft.

L: You might be right I wasn't real well informed on that. When we were coming back off of the channel I was monitoring this voice and I heard this voice come on the intercom asking permission to leave the flight over the channel.

N: What flight was this?

L: The Con mission. I recognized the voice. It was my original pilots voice and he was asking permission to leave the flight because he had a wounded man aboard.

He did end up getting permission and I walked up to him after the flight and he said his tail gunner had been hit. What had happened was he was nailing and a piece of flack came in the tail wheel and hit him right in the cheek of the rump right into the bone. I didn't think anything about it. He got debriefed and went back to the barracks and some time later my original pilot came in and said how about taking Oggy's place? I can get you a transfer back and you know the crew, I can almost finish you up. They had been flying pretty regular and I had only been flying every third mission so they had fourteen in and I had only five. He said I could almost finish you up and get you home to your wife so I said ok, I thought that was a pretty good deal. The next day we were up at Leipsig and we got shot down. That was a long flight.

N: What was the attraction at Leipsig?

L: Oil refinery.

N: When did you take off? What was that day like? What time did you get up and so forth?

L: I think it was a twelve o'clock wake up. I think we were off the ground by seven.

N: Did you have to take your own fifty calibers to the aircraft? Was it already there?

L: I think it was at the armory and you took it there.

N: How about your ammunition?

L: It was already there.

N: When you got aboard the aircraft did you have to check your own area or set up?

L: You checked your guns and made sure they were loaded and then there was a long waiting period before you took off. It was a boring time.

- N: What about the briefing. You went to breakfast then you went to the briefing. What was the briefing like? The crewmembers were together at that point?
- L: Everybody was together. They went over where you were going and the weather and problems that you could have...
- N: I went to the Ray Patterson Air force Base a couple of summers ago and they had an old typical briefing room with a big map, just like it would be if you were in England. A couple of guys mentioned they were always concerned how long the string was. There was string going across the map. They said the longer the string the longer they had to fly.
- L: We always knew whether it was a long distance but we never knew where. There was one guy that was wounded and healed and had to fly with another crew. He started out with twenty-five missions then thirty, then thirty-five and he was flying alternates the same as I was. He would go down and find out how much gas they were putting in. If there twenty-seven hundred gallons he was sick. I don't blame him he was flying his last mission. That's the way he'd check.
- N: So you were going to Leipzig to bomb the oil refinery. That was what a ten-hour mission at that time?
- L: Yes, that was a long one.
- N: Did you bomb your target?
- L: We were on the bomb run in a heavy flack area. It was a triangle, Leipzig, Mareburg and Halle and we were bombing in the middle of the triangle. On the bomb run we were hit, it must have been the flack because it got into the engine and wing. I'd say it took a chunk out of the wing about eight feet one-way and

about three feet into the wing. You could see gasoline coming out. There was no doubt we were in bad shape. We were carrying a ten hundred pounder, five hundred on each side.were open. What I couldn't understand was why the bombardier didn't let the bombs go! We had to leave we were hit and were on fire and the pilot said well were going to try to make to the switch room which I knew we couldn't do. We were trying to head toward Switzerland but the Germans got a direct hit on us from the ground and blew up our plane. They had a direct hit yet somehow the six of us got out. I was in the tail and took my flack suit off to put on my parachute. I was at the tail door ready to go and I thought somebody had pushed me out but the bomb blew me out. I thought the instruction was good they told us fall free to get away from the debris and flack. They told us when you come out of the airplane you're going to tumble then your eventually going to fall without turning. You can control your body. If you want to fall with feet first than you put your hands on your hips and it will flip you over on your feet. If you want to fall headfirst than you put your arms to your side and spread your legs and they'll flip you over. When I stopped twirling I was falling face down toward the ground I put my arms on my hips and it flipped me over and I fell feet first. The question we asked our parachute instructor was when you're falling free how do you know when to pull your ripcord? He said when you're looking down and you can distinguish the windows in a house or branches on a tree than pull the ripcord. I was looking down and couldn't see it and kept looking and I thought I saw a window in a house and pulled it, I figured about ten thousand feet. It took me an awful long time to get down but I wasn't scared I

was more concerned about my survival once I got down. Another thing that worried me was I lost my fleece lined boots and I was in my stocking feet and I was wondering what was going to happen to my feet when I hit the ground. Very luckily I came down in a plowed field and didn't hurt my feet. My left knee was a little bit wounded. A German soldier came on a motorcycle when I landed and picked me up.

N: How far from Leipzig were you?

L: I don't have any idea. He came up and said comrade, which in German I found out meant surrender. He took me to the battery that shot us down and they had my waist gunner and navigator. They also had the engineer and another gunner and the radioman was injured pretty seriously I never saw him. They gathered up all the parts that fell and piled it on a big trailer. They had part of the tail and our bags that we had our personal things in.

N: What date were you shot down?

L: August 16th.

N: You were all captured on the same date?

L: Right.

N: What date were you liberated?

L: May 2nd.

N: So he took you back to the battery. Do you know what outfit he was with?

L: No. He was wearing a mock. He had the mock uniform on. The people at the battery I thought they were civilians. There was a woman in charge and there were high school kids running that battery.

N: They must have really been hurting for people at that time. Were they in civilian clothes?

L: Yes.

N: They were actually firing guns?

L: Yes. They got credit for shooting us down. They were elated to see us. There was no mistreatment. I don't know if we were the first people they ever got or what. Getting back to the trailer the radio, the guns and all were there. It was strange because the front section, the wing, went down as if someone was trying to fly it but we lost the pilot, the copilot and the bombardier. Unfortunately they stowed their parachutes way under their chairs. We used to tell them to put them where they could get to them. I don't think they had a chance to get out.

N: Did they interrogate you or throw you in jail?

L: No. They put us on a trailer.

N: What kind of trailer was it a boxed in kind of trailer or a flat bed or what?

L: It had sides.

N: You could stand up in it then?

L: No. We were sitting on parts of the airplane. It didn't have a top on it but it had sides. It was pulled but a tractor fueled by a wooden boiler.

N: It had a steam engine?

L: Yes. They had to stop two or three times to fuel up. They spread out all over the place. One got wood and another got water from a ditch and put it in the boiler then they took us to Halle Air Base.

N: Was it a Luffewaffa Base?

L: Yes. They put us in jail there.

N: How far was the airbase from where they picked you up?

L: I'd say about fifteen miles. It didn't take us more than an hour and a half to get there.

N: What time were you shot down?

L: I'd say about noon.

N: Were you treated well at Halle?

L: Yes. They gave us black bread with jelly on it.

N: How was that bread?

L: Horrible.

N: Some guys told me all they had at prison camp was black bread. It was basically sawdust and wood fiber.

L: Yes and you'd see buckeyes in it and nuts, those kinds of things. This was probably the best that we could of gotten.

N: Yes because they were probably eating it themselves at this time I'd imagine. What did they do with you when they got you to the airbase?

L: They just kept us; there was no questioning or anything. I think we were only there overnight. The next day they took us accompanied by two guards on public transportation to the interrogation center.

N: How far away was this from the airbase?

L: It took us a day to get there. I know when I entered the cell at the interrogation center it was three o'clock in the afternoon.

N: What time did you leave the airbase center?

- L: I'd say about eight in the morning.
- N: So it took you about seven or eight hours to get there? What did they do with you after they put you in your cell?
- L: They had a system there. They put you in at three o'clock and left you in solitaire. The only time they'd let you out is when you'd pull a string to go to the bathroom. I was in solitaire until three o'clock the next day. They took me out to an interrogation room. I'd say my interrogator was equivalent to a lieutenant. He'd had one leg amputated and told me he'd been traded as a British prisoner of war, a prisoner of war of the British, when they had traded for prisoners and that's how he'd got back. The only thing that he was interested in was what bomb group I was in and what target we were hitting?
- N: Couldn't he figure that out by the tail section of the aircraft?
- L: Yes, I couldn't understand that. You're right. I was only in there twenty minutes. I can't remember the other questions he asked.
- N: Some of the guys were telling me that when they got there the guy asked them various questions about where they were from, their bomb group and so on and would want to know their name, rank and serial number and the German would go to a rack and pull out a volume and would verify who the prisoner was. Is that what happened to you?
- L: The first day that's all they asked and the second day he asked where I'd been trained and I gave him my name, rank and serial number. Then he pulled out a notebook and he had it marked and went down the sheet and said ok here is your

aircrew. He described my co-pilots background and he was right on that information.

N: Did you figure out how they got this information?

L: No. They he went to the airfield. He said you're with the 351st bomb group and here's where it's located and here's the map of your airbase and you're in one of these three barracks and your airplane is parked here and here's where you're briefed. I was amazed. The other thing he said was that they had obtained information from the big names, the famous P-47 pilot, was his name Cabreski?

N: Yes Cabreski!

L: He told me what he'd said but I think he was using that as bait because I don't think that guy had ever told him anything.

N: What happened after that?

L: If they don't get anything out of you or they don't think it's worth anything then you are transferred to Wetzler. It was either called Offlog or Dulogg.

N: What's the difference between an Offlog and a Dulogg?

L: I think an Offlog is where they interrogated you and Dulogg was where we where. I was still in stocking feet and they gave me GI shoes and a GI overcoat.

N: American or German made?

L: American made with no insignias on them. This all came through the Red Cross. We were fed decent meals. I remember we had mashed potatoes. We were there only one or two days.

N: Where did you go to from Wetzler?

L: To a new camp down near the French border of Saarprucken. We were only there about two weeks. They were afraid we'd be liberated so they moved us. They put us on a train and moved us about forty miles west of Danzig on the Balding. It's in the province of Pomerania in a place called Grostuicho. There were about ten thousand of us there plus British POW's. The trip was five days six nights on a forty by eight car. I don't know if anyone has ever told you about this but were it opened they had barbed wire going across and the German guards were there and they had sixty of us in there thirty on one side and thirty on the other.

N: This is a train?

L: Yes a forty by eight.

N: Forty by eight is the size of the car?

L: Forty men or eight horses. That's what they called it during World War I.

N: So in the center of the car is barbed wire and the German soldiers are one side and you guys are on the other?

L: No. (makes drawing)

N: Oh so the soldiers were in the middle of the car with prisoners in groups of thirty on each end of the car.

L: Right. We traveled at night and in the daytime we were in the marshaling yards. We were in the marshaling yards at Cologne, Berlin and maybe Essin. The part that worried you the most is that you wouldn't leave until midnight and you knew the British bombed at night. Then during the day the Americans bombed. We got hit by the British in Cologne. Nobody can imagine the hardship that you have. For example just the business of going to the

- bathroom. You had just one bucket. Can you imagine what that's like with thirty men. I think the whole thing about being a prisoner of war under those circumstances and the same thing later on when we were on the march is the complete loss of human dignity.
- N: You know what another guy told me he said the same bucket that they went to the bathroom in they would take it out when the train came to a stop wash it out real quick and put fresh water in it and give it to you for drinking water.
- L: That could be. I wasn't aware of it. To tell you the truth I don't remember how we got water or food or if we even got any.
- N: How long did that trip take you?
- L: I think it was six days and six nights.
- N: It took you six days to go forty miles?
- L: No you went from Saarprucken to east of Danzig. Went all the way across Germany. You're thinking forty by eight and the camp was 40 miles west of Danzig.
- N: What was that camp like?
- L: That camp was a newer camp. It had four compounds and ten barracks in each compound. I don't know which one I was in. Around each compound was a wire fence.
- N: How many guys were in the barracks?
- L: Twenty-three in a room and there were ten rooms.
- N: How big were the barracks?

L: There were two hundred and thirty guys in a barrack. Five beds in a room with twenty-three guys.

N: How big were the rooms twelve by twelve?

L: There were five guys to a bed. They were big beds, it really wasn't a problem.

N: Where the barracks off the ground?

L: Yes, they were on stilts.

N: They let the dogs loose at night?

L: Yes.

N: What was it like in the morning?

L: There was role call in the morning. Then there was nothing to do until role call at night?

N: What did you guys do for fun?

L: We set up programs. I had biology and talked about biology. There was a cousin of Al Cap and he talked about Al Cap.

N: Didn't he play for the Pirates?

L: He said some good things but a lot of bad things about him. I was surprised since he was his cousin. There was a guy from New York who was a newspaperman and he talked about newspapers and we played bridge. We played so much bridge that we wore the spots of f the cards. There was a stove in each room and we were given coal and sometimes we'd burn soap to keep us warm. I can't remember when we got the Red Cross parcels. It was very seldom when we got a full Red Cross parcel we normally got half. I was with my waist gunner and we'd

share. We'd cook together. We made a cake out of powdered milk and crackers.
You learn to survive.

N: What did the German soldiers give you?

L: We got some black bread and some soup. Anything that you got was opened. You could see where they'd put an ice pick through the soap and toilet paper. If you got jelly it was opened. If they gave you ten cans you'd have to return ten cans. They were afraid you'd use it for some kind of weapon. In spite of all this we got news. Somebody would come through each room and tell you the news for the day. What we'd heard was that the British or Americans built a radio from the cans that they'd got. We knew about all the progress of the troops generally speaking.

N: Some guys told me they were in on a trade with the guards. They gave them cigarettes and would get crystals and make crystal radios.

L: I don't know. In our camp there was no contact with the guards.

N: What ages were the guards in the camp?

L: I would say they were middle-aged guards.

N: Forty, fifty years old? How did they treat you?

L: There were no problems.

N: As long as you left them alone they left you alone?

L: There were only two guys that tried to escape while I was there. Both of them were in another compound.

N: Did those two guys get killed?

L: No they tried to go over and they got them.

N: You said there are four compounds in each camp. Were the compounds divided into American and English camps?

L: The English were in the first compound because they were the first in. I don't know what compound they were in but there were Americans in with them. They told me that some of the British were shot down even before the war started. They were out on patrol duty and got shot down. I don't know if it's true or not you hear a lot of stories.

N: So there were about twenty-two hundred guys per compound? You couldn't go from one compound to another?

L: No.

N: There were all Americans in your compound?

L: Yes.

N: Was rank structure enforced?

L: No. We had what we called a representative for each compound and a representative for the whole works.

N: The representative was mediator between you and the official German's mediator at that point? What happened if a guy got sick?

L: They had a sick call.

N: They gave you medicine?

L: I don't know. I never got sick there. I got sick on the road when we had to march.

N: How long were you in there?

L: Until February the sixth.

N: When did you go in?

L: I'd say September.

N: September of what year?

L: September of 1944.

N: Where did you go from Luufewar??

L: We could hear the guns as the Russians were progressing and we knew that they were passed us. At this time our contact people were negotiating with the commander or captain to let us stay and be liberated by the Russians. We thought that that was what was going to happen. First, they told us to get ready to march and we took old clothes and made backpacks and had saved food but then they told us we were going to stay. Then on February the sixth they woke us up at two o'clock in the morning and told us to get ready to march so we did. Those that were capable marched and those that couldn't got on a train. I think the ones that were able to march were better off then the ones who were on the train because I heard they got stalled and got frozen feet and all from being on the train. They told us we were going to march at the most for fourteen days. That was a lie we marched continuously. We marched from there west almost over to Hanover and then we turned back and marched east and then we circled.

N: They were just marching you guys to keep you away from the Russians?

L: What I read later they called this the black hunger march. What I had heard was that Hitler had told Garring to take our shoes away from us and march us till we died. I don't know if this was true or not. I thought they were going to hold us as hostages. On that march we stayed in barns in some cases slept outside. You

couldn't help but get sick with an upset stomach and diarrhea from drinking the water. The Red Cross parcels lasted awhile and after that we got potatoes and sometimes hot water and soup. The soup had worms in it but you ate it anyway because you were hungry.

N: How long did this march last?

L: Until May the second. Eighty-nine days. We had a flight surgeon along and he kept a log and according to him we marched eleven hundred miles.

N: How many hours a day did you march? Sun up till sun down?

L: Yes. They'd stop you so you could cook your own food if you had anything. Some guys built a wind machine to build a fire and cook their potatoes.

N: How was the comradery at this time? Were guys on edge?

L: No. Guys wouldn't fight each other but you couldn't trust anybody with any food around.

N: Was the comradery back at the camp pretty good? Any fighting?

L: No.

N: How were the German guards on this march? Were they pretty upset that had to march eighty-nine days?

L: No problem. The only problem was when were going into the barns at night. We didn't move fast enough. You'd get the bayonet pointed into your back if you didn't move fast enough. It depended where you were in the march. If you were in the end and you and dropped out then you got into trouble. I never got into any trouble. We stayed in big estates in Pomerania in that area. There was a lot of forced labor. We would trade with the guards for food. We traded chocolate, and

cigarettes plus what we could steal. Some guys could kill a chicken without it squawking, skin it and have it cooked before the guards even knew it and you could trade with them.

N: How could you trust the guards? How did you know that when you gave them a pack of cigarettes or the chocolate that they'd follow through?

L: You can't. You didn't give them a pack only one or two cigarettes. I could speak a little German I took German in college and my roommate was Pennsylvania Dutch so we talked in German. So I could trade. I could go to a German guard and get a loaf of German bread for two cigarettes. The other prisoners got wise to me so they'd bid three or four cigarettes.

N: What would have prevented a German soldier from saying look guys I have the gun and you don't so give me the damn chocolate and cigarettes.

L: They could have but they didn't. I didn't trade too much with the German guards I traded with the forced labor.

N: Who was the forced labor?

L: Poles (Polish) that they brought in or Frenchmen.

N: Where would the forced labor be?

L: On the farms. We even traded with the German people. They'd trade with you for the chocolate. It would depend on where you were and the guards. We had to watch. In time we ran out of food and got split up. We got down to the river rail and they were floating Red Cross parcels down the rail. Almost all the groups got Red Cross parcels but my group didn't get them, we were too far away. The guys we'd shared food with earlier managed to get the parcels but

they wouldn't share with us. Comradery went out the window when it came to food but we survived. We traveled the back roads. You couldn't be in the military's way. But also on these back roads were all the German refugees trying to escape the Russians. I can't describe the picture. These people were traveling in all forms of transportation with all their goods just trying to get away. On one stretch, the Peta Monday, they took us across a certain spot rather than to let us be liberated by the Russians. In fact we could see and hear the gunfire.

N: Where did you finally end up?

L: East of Hanover going in circles. Eventually we just went into a spot and stopped. We were in an out of the way place and a British jeep with four soldiers liberated us.

N: So one day you woke up and the German guards had left during the night?

L: I don't know. They disappeared. The captain was still there but they liberated us. One British jeep.

N: An officer and three guys?

L: Yes.

N: What outfit were the British with?

L: I don't know.

N: Montgomery's people?

L: I suppose.

N: What happened then?

L: We stayed there that night and they gave us directions and we had to march to a British outpost.

N: How did you feel when you saw these guys coming down the road?

L: I don't know. We'd lost a lot of weight. We went into a French camp on Easter and we got fed and a shower. I never got lousy.

N: Did you guys get a lot of showers back at the camps?

L: No, that was the only shower. I hadn't shaved either.

N: So you had a full beard?

L: Yes.

N: So they deloused you guys?

L: Yes, but I wasn't lousy. They took us into the camp and took our clothes and put them into an oven in order to kill the lice and then put you in a shower with soap and then you got your clothes back. I can remember putting my clothes back on and from that time on I was lousy because my clothes picked up eggs from the oven. Nobody realizes how awful it feels trying to sleep at night in a barn with those things crawling on you. In order to stay warm my waist gunner and I slept together but I was never sure if it was his foot hitting me or a rat and it was usually rats. The other thing was diarrhea. I had lymes for four nights and it was hard trying to get out of the barn at night with all those men. The Americans would swear at you and everything. The English on the other hand would line up their men in a row to sleep and when you had to go to the bathroom you didn't have to pass anybody. The Americans didn't do it they went any which way. All this time during the march anyone could have escaped.

N: Where could you have escaped to though?

L: If you escaped you would get shot. There were enough SS out there that they'd shoot you. I think the worst thing that happened to us is that we had to march fourteen kilometers to a British outpost. When we got there it was almost dark, it was a German village and they had a field kitchen set up there. I remember we went into eat and they fed us two slices of white bread with strawberry jam and Irish stew. That white bread tasted like sponge cake. My waist gunner and I decided we wanted some more of that white bread so we went around the back of that kitchen and we crawled into the back window. We found one pound cans of strawberry jam and we took two of them and six loaves of white bread. We went into a German women's home and she heated some hot water for us, she was scared to death of us. The two of us killed those six loaves of white bread and two cans of strawberry jam. We had to march the next day from there to Luneburg to the British base and I just barely made it I was sick both ways and my waist gunner was the same. When you got there they didn't mess with you. You took everything off and they took a pitchfork and flung your clothes out the window into a fire and burned it. Then they sprayed you with DDT I suspect and then you took a shower and they sprayed you again and then you took another shower but they got rid of the bugs. I went into the hospital. I was in the hospital for two weeks. I weighed a hundred and thirteen pounds.

N: What did you used to weigh?

L: I used weigh a hundred and seventy-five. The size of my thigh was the size of my waist. That pretty well covers it.

N: Can you think of anything you'd like to add? How soon after did you leave the military? How did you get back?

L: They flew me from Lunenburg to Brussels British Hospital where I stayed two weeks then they transferred me to Camp Lucky Strike in France.

N: From there?

L: I came home by boat I think June 23rd 1945. One thing I remember about Lucky Strike is that General Eisenhower came and said "I'm going to get you guys home as fast as I can if you'll take two to a bunk and share I'll get you home faster." The steward on the boat was a movie actor Victor Matoro.

N: Was he in the army at the time?

L: The navy. When I got home I had a sixty-day pass and at the end of that I had fourteen days rehabilitation at Miami Beach. Then they assign you to where ever you wanted to go and I picked Lock born Airbase in Columbus. Then I was discharged. When I got home I got a letter from my tail gunner that had gotten hit. He told me when he was released from the hospital he refused to fly. I think he was staff at the time and they broke him down to a buck private and sent him to the infantry. He ended up in the 103rd or 106th infantry the one that got hit at the bulge. He went through to the end of the war and he still couldn't get out. I don't know whether he didn't have enough points or what. Then he ended up in the grave registration outfit. He wrote me a letter saying that he'd disinterred the bodies of the pilot, co-pilot and bombardier of our crew and he took the bodies back to the military cemetery in Brussels and buried them and he wanted me to tell the families that he had done this. It was one of the most heart wrenching

experiences that I had. The co-pilots mother was from Alison Park down near Pittsburgh, my wife is from Butler, and they had been corresponding. The families knew this and when I got back she wanted to talk to me. The main thing she wanted to know is how he died, that was a very trying thing going to the family. We have corresponded with her ever since. We got a Christmas card last year that she was in pretty bad shape and that she died. I think she was ninety years old. That pretty well covers it.

N: Ok, I appreciate it. Thank you.