

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II

Personal Experience

O. H. 1335

ROBERT J. MARSTELLAR

Interviewed

by

Joseph A. Nuzzi, Jr.

on

February 11, 1990

ROBERT MARSTELLAR

Born on January 16, 1923 in Youngstown, Ohio he attended Youngstown City Schools until dropping out of school in the 10th grade, in 1939. After dropping out of school he worked for Western Union and the Truscon Company in Youngstown.

Because he wanted to fly he joined the Army Air Corps on November 12, 1942. After his indoctrination at Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio he received basic training at a hotel in Miami Beach, Miami, Florida. Training lasted for six weeks in Miami, when he was transferred in January 1943 to an eighteen week radio school at Scott Air Field near Belleville, Illinois.

A six week gunnery school soon followed. In May of 1943 he was reassigned to an airfield at Harlington, Texas. (He could not remember the name of the base. I think it could be Reese Air Force Base.)

After gunnery school he was eventually sent to phase training at Dellhart, Texas where he was assigned as a radio/gunner aboard a B-17. His stay at Dellhart lasted for about three months when he received orders to transfer with his crew to Kearney, Nebraska. At Kearney, he and his crew were to pick up a new B-17 and ferry it overseas, but because of problems with the B-17's landing gear they had to take a train to an air base in Kilmer, NJ. From Kilmer they sailed aboard the British oceanliner, the Mauritania, in March of 1944.

In about ten days the Mauritania sailed into an English

port. After disembarking he and his crew were transported to Glatton Air Base near Peterborough, England. At Glatton they were attached to the 749th Bomb Squadron under the command of the 457th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force. Other squadrons included the 750th, and the 748th.

Prior to any bombing missions he spent six hours each day, for the next two weeks, in navigation school. Training consisted of learning about new techniques of navigation and about the terrain that he would soon fly over.

Upon completion of navigation school he and his crew flew their first mission. On April 30, 1944 they bombed an airfield near Lyon, France.

Shortly after Lyon, on May 2, 1944, he flew his second bombing raid -- this time over Berlin. Although flak was heavy and concentrated, his aircraft managed to return to Peterborough intact. Ten days later, on May 12, 1944, over Lutzendorf, Germany his luck ran out. With one engine out, due to flak, the crew still managed to drop their bombs on Lutzendorf. However, when the pilot turned the aircraft back toward Peterborough. The number two engine also cut out. Unable to feather the engine the propeller started to windmill. Subsequently this caused the aircraft to lose speed and altitude. At 2,200 feet the pilot ordered the crew to bail out over Koblenz, Germany.

Upon landing in an open field he was immediately approached by an elderly German who marched him to the town's train station, turning him over to German soldiers. From Koblenz he was then taken by train to Frankfurt, Germany, placed aboard a train, and

taken to Stalag Luft IV near Grosstychow, Germany.

He remained at Stalag Luft IV until February 6, 1945. Because the Russians were advancing toward Grosstychow, the Germans ordered all the prisoners out of the camp and forced them to march for eighty-nine days throughout the German countryside. Known by the prisoners as the Black Hunger March, the end came for Marstellar on April 26, 1945 as he, and those in his group, were liberated by the members of the U.S. 104th Air Borne.

After being liberated he was sent to Camp Lucky Strike in Le Havre, France. From the port in Le Havre he got aboard a liberty ship and returned to the United States in June of 1945.

On July 23, 1945 he married his wife Ellen. The Marstellar's have two children: Howard, age 43, and Sandra, age 42. Mr. Marstellar belongs to the Mahoning Chapter of the Ex-P.O.W.'s and VFW.

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT J. MARSTELLAR

INTERVIEWER: Joseph A. Nuzzi, Jr.

SUBJECT: Fort Hayes; radio school; B-17; gunnery
school; Luft IV

DATE: February 11, 1990

N: This is an interview with Robert J. Marsteller for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on World War II, by Joseph A. Nuzzi, Jr., on February 11, 1990, at 56 Wilmette, in Youngstown, Ohio, at 2:15 p.m.

N: Mr. Marsteller, do you mind if I call you Bob?

M: No, that is fine.

N: Bob, where were you born and raised at?

M: Youngstown, Ohio

N: Youngstown, Ohio. Did you attend the city schools?

M: Yes. I attended Warren Richey Grade School, Lincoln Junior High, and East High School to the tenth grade and then I quit.

N: What year was that, that you quit?

M: 1939, I think.

N: Did you come from a large family?

M: Yes.

N: How many boys and girls?

M: Eight boys.

N: Eight boys. All boys!

M: Yes. I was the oldest.

N: You're the oldest?

M: Yes. My mother had twelve children. Well, two of them died and the other two were stillborn.

N: Eight boys, Jeez! Where did you live at, at that time?

M: East side of Youngstown, Early Road.

N: What made you quit school in tenth grade?

M: I got mad. I wanted commercial art. They told me I couldn't have it. I said, "Stick this school," and walked out, which was a stupid thing to do.

N: What did you do after that?

M: Went to work.

N: Where at?

M: Well, when I was in high school I was working at the Western Union delivering messages from 6:00 in the evening till 2:30 in the morning. And I worked for them for awhile and then went to work at Truscon, welding tank treads.

N: Truscon? Where was Truscon at the time?

M: That was down on Albert Street. Republic Steel bought them out later.

N: I see. How do you spell Truscon?

M: Yes, T-R-U-S-C-O-N, I think was the way they spelled it.

N: And that was a welding company?

M: No, they made doors, steel doors, and windows. But at that time they made tanks treads for the Government. I took a welding course down there.

N: Oh, I see. How long did you stay with Truscon?

M: Until 1942, when I went in the service.

N: When you went in the military? Okay. What made you choose the Air Force?

M: Because I wanted to fly.

N: Was that something that you always wanted to do?

M: Yes, I wanted to fly.

N: Where did you receive basic training at?

M: Miami Beach (Laughing).

N: Miami Beach (Laughing) Boy that's a hard tour of duty!

M: Well we went in down here and we went to Ft. Hayes in Columbus, stayed there a couple days. Then they sent us down to Miami Beach, but after they put me in the Air Force. I went to Miami Beach down there approximately, well for basic training, was six to eight weeks.

N: What was the name of the base, do you remember?

M: There was no base. I lived in a hotel.

N: You went to Miami Beach and lived in a hotel?

M: I lived in a hotel in Miami Beach.

N: There was no base?

M: There was no base.

N: Where did you receive your basic training at then?

M: On the streets. We did very little training. I had very little basic training. Mostly it was tests for different schools they were going to send us to. We did close order drill and PT.

N: Where did you do the close order drill?

M: On the streets of Miami Beach.

N: On the streets of Miami Beach? They didn't put you in a classroom or anything, or in a building?

M: No, just to take tests, that's all.

N: Just to take tests they had you in the building. Do you remember the type of building? Was it a government building?

M: No, they were hotels.

N: It was in a hotel?

M: Yes, the regular hotels that people stayed in at that time. I'm serious.

N: I can't get over that. Like to a convention room in a hotel.

M: Right. It is a college bowl bar. All the hotels it was on at that time, 1942, it was nothing like today but there were nice two, or three story hotels.

N: What was the name of the hotel, do you remember?

M: I can't remember that, I really can't.

N: Do you remember the street that you were on?

M: No. You know how you are when you are eighteen years old.

N: How many guys were with you at the time?

M: Oh, the whole mess of them. There was a mess of guys there.

N: How many would you say?

M: Thousands, I mean that.

N: And everybody stayed in a motel?

M: Yes, in a hotel.

N: I can't get over that. What did you do when you were there? What type of training?

M: Close order drill and went and got shots.

N: Where did you go for shots and uniforms?

M: They just came to a regular hotel.

N: They took you to a hotel and said guys, "We are going to give you your shots."

M: Yes, right. They had doctors set up in the rooms and as far as I know. . . Well, there might have been a big building like a warehouse. I remember them giving us clothes but I can't remember that is a long time ago.

N: I can't get over the fact that they put you guys in a hotel.

M: I never had a gun when I got there. I never did, in basic training.

N: That was for eight weeks you did that?

M: Six to eight weeks.

N: Boy that was rough training, huh?

M: Yes, it was terrible (laughter). You're not supposed to laugh at me. My wife knows I'm crazy about ice cream and candy. I used to buy. . . They used to kid me. I would buy chocolate covered cherries and a pint of ice cream. That was my living it up. I went from there to Scott Field, Illinois.

N: Scott Field, Illinois?

M: Yes, for radio training.

N: That was near the base, Scott Field, Illinois?

M: Yes, Scott Field. It is close to St. Louis; Belleville, Illinois, East St. Louis, in that area.

N: And you went to what?

M: Radio school.

N: What was radio school like?

M: Code, CW as they call it, and Morse Code and radio theory, eighteen weeks of that.

N: Eighteen weeks. We are talking about what, December, January, something like that?

M: It was in January.

N: So about January to April?

M: Yes, 1943.

N: To 1943, January 1943 to April 1943.

M: It was probably March. I can't remember the exact date.

N: That is okay, no problem. What was a typical day like at Scott's Field?

M: Go get up and go to school. We went to school six, eight hours a day.

N: What time were you told to get up?

M: They woke us up about 5:00, 5:30.

N: Go to breakfast?

M: Yes.

N: Did you stand inspection and all that?

M: Oh yes. We did that and we also had to do PT.

N: You did PT before you went to the school, or what?

M: Yes.

N: And then you stood inspection right after that?

M: I stood inspection in the morning and then went to PT and went to school last.

N: Okay, what was a typical classroom like? How many guys were in a classroom? What did you do?

M: Probably thirty.

N: Thirty guys in a classroom?

M: Yes. Did all types of radio theory. And had probably an hour, two hours of code every day.

N: Got to be pretty good on the code, I would imagine.

M: Not too bad. Although, when you go in they give you a test and they pick out people that seem to have the rhythm.

N: What did you guys do at night for fun and excitement?

M: Well, we didn't do a whole lot. Played basketball or football or something. We had a pass, we could go into St. Louis once a week.

N: How far was St. Louis from the Scott Field?

M: I can't remember that. I think probably thirty miles, something like that.

N: How were you treated by the civilians when you went in?

M: Very good. They are nice people down there, I enjoyed it. In fact there was a restaraunt we used to go to that had a Philippine waiter. We would walk in, we would get our meal for free.

N: Oh yeah?

M: Oh yes, he was a great guy.

N: And you say you went into town once a week. What was the camaraderie like, of the guys, at the time?

M: Oh real good.

N: What rank were you at that time?

M: I was private.

N: You were a private. I assumed it was pretty close to that.

M: Well, PFC they would come out. They would give you a PFC rating when you come out of there.

N: After Scott's Field where did you go?

M: Gunnery school.

N: Oh, you went to gunnery school.

M: Harlingen, Texas. Down close to Brownsville on the Gulf.

N: Harlingen, H-A-R-L?

M: I don't remember the spelling.

N: I'll look it up. Harlingen, Texas near Brownsville?

M: Right, it is right on the Gulf.

N: Okay, I know where Brownsville is, I've been there.

M: It's in between Brownsville and Laredo, I think. In that area. It is warm, it is like Florida. In fact it is hotter than heck.

N: I've stayed at Laredo Air Base down there a couple of times. It is a nice place to be from.

M: Yes, I agree a hundred percent.

N: How long was your gunnery school down there?

M: Six weeks.

N: What was that like?

M: Real tough.

N: What did you guys do?

M: I shot everything from BB guns to a .50 caliber machine gun.

N: And you are shooting BB guns at first?

M: BB guns at targets on rail like at an amusement park.

N: Oh really?

M: Yes. There is a BB machine gun.

N: Oh, it is air powered then?

M: I think so.

N: Son of a gun. How long did that last before you got into the real stuff?

M: Very, very shortly. I shot everything from skeet and trap to flexible machine guns. They would take you out and, of course, you would shoot everything. You would get so tired that your arms would get black and blue marks from the shot gun hitting your shoulder.

N: How often did you have to go out? Every day?

M: Everyday.

N: For how many hours?

M: Three or four hours and then we had classroom too. We had classroom before we went out.

N: What was the classroom like?

M: On machine guns and turrets. See I was trained as a B-24 gunner, the turrets on a B-24. But actually I was flying on a B-17. You know how that is, that is typical of Army.

N: I'm sure they trained you for one thing. . .

M: But anyway they would teach you how to field strip a machine gun and you had to do it in twelve minutes blind folded. We shot everything. We shot at night. I shot from turrets on trucks at night, with tracers.

N: That is where they took you around in the truck and made you shoot things?

M: Well, you go down to the range and you'd be up in a turret in the truck and shooting. Then we flew in an aircraft.

N: What type of aircraft, do you know?

M: AT-6's. And AT-11, I believe it was. I only flew in that one time, a twin. Firing .30 caliber machine guns at sleeves.

N: When you were up in the air craft did you have the turret?

M: No turret. It was a flexible gun.

N: It was just a flexible gun?

M: Yes, open air. No canopy over you.

N: So, you were in the open air.

M: Yes, two place low-wing aircraft. You know what they look like. T6 they call them.

N: You were in tandem then. The pilot was in front and you were in the back?

M: Pilot in front, flying sergeant.

N: He was a sergeant?

M: All the pilots down there were sergeants. They came in as civilians and were given the rank of sergeant. I never saw an officer, they could have been. But I never saw one. They were all sergeants that I flew with: crazy, goofy.

N: Why is that? What were they doing?

M: They would do everything. They would roll you, snap roll you, everything, dive. They were goofy.

N: And you say you use a .30 caliber. When did you graduate to the .50 caliber?

M: They didn't. You shot the .50 on the ground but you used the .30 in the air.

N: What type of training did you receive with the .50 on the ground there?

M: The turrets and the flexible.

N: In-flexible?

M: Yes, both.

N: And you say this school lasted for how many weeks?

M: Approximately six weeks.

N: That puts us about into May 1943. Where did you go to after that?

M: I went to Pyote, Texas.

N: Pyote, Texas?

M: Yes. I don't remember how they spell that one either. But I tell you it was a whistle stop.

N: A lot of places in Texas are whistle stops.

M: Yes, I went down there as assistant radio operator gunner. I was there not very long. I can't remember exact dates. When we were down there I got a crew. They decided after. . . I didn't even follow this crew. I was down there about three, four weeks, maybe a little more. That they were going to do away with Second Radio Operators and make you First Radio Operators.

N: What was the difference between a First Radio Operator and a Second Radio Operator?

M: Well, the only thing is if one got hurt the other one would take over. I think that is what. . . But then they sent me to Alexandria, Louisiana.

N: Well, first of all, what did you do in Pyote, Texas?

M: Very little.

N: Describe very little, what would you do?

M: Hang around, waiting for a crew.

N: That was it?

M: Yes. I played some baseball and messed around and ate. That is about the size of it. It got awful warm. It was hot down there.

N: I know that area is terrible. Where did you go to from Pyote?

M: I went to Alexandria, Louisiana as a first radio operator.

N: What did you do in Alexandria? Well, what was the name of the base at that time?

M: I can't remember the name. I was supposed to go down there as a first radio operator. The first two airplanes that took off, caught on fire. I never was on a crew. I don't know what they really had me there for.

I only stayed there a couple of weeks.

N: What did you do while you were there?

M: Nothing. I went into town. We had class A passes. We could go into town whenever we weren't flying or doing anything. Went into town and waited.

N: It seems, talking to the different guys that I have been, you were switched around a lot just going from one place to another place. Stayed there two, three weeks playing cards or whatever, go into town.

M: Waiting to do something. I think they were very confused on what they wanted to do with us.

N: You think so?

M: Oh yes.

N: I think the other guys got the impression too.

M: I went to Dyersburg, Tennessee but I can't even tell you what that was for. It was only a week or so. We didn't do nothing there. I was a replacement I guess. Nothing happened. Cut orders and sent me to Dalhart, Texas.

N: How long were you in Dyersburg?

M: Just a couple weeks, it wasn't a whole lot of time.

N: They were switching you all over. You went to where from Dyersburg?

M: To Dalehart, Texas.

N: So, you are back in Texas one more time. I bet you loved that.

M: I loved that Texas. I hate to say this but I hated every part of that.

N: So did I, I can't stand that.

M: Anyhow, I got on a crew in Dalehart.

N: Oh, this is where you met your crew.

M: Yes. I got a crew. Oh, I can tell you what happened at Alexandria, Louisiana. I was on a crew and the pilot, a guy by the name of Lieutenant Saben, had a hernia and when they operated on him they split up the crew. He was going to be off. . . At that time a hernia operation was six to eight weeks. That is how they got

split up. I went to Dyersburg and got on another crew. I was flying with a Lieutenant Larr and this is the crew I went down with. Larr had a problem that every time he went above 10,000 feet his nose bled. He couldn't fly high altitude so they took him off of us and give us a Lieutenant Acres. That is a crew that I went from phase training with at Dalehart.

N: You call it phase training?

M: Yes, phase training. That consists of all kinds of bombing missions all over, simulated and otherwise. You did drop bombs on ranges. Sometimes you would go like up to Denver. Fly to Denver and fly over the city, do a simulated bomb drop. They would fly air to ground gunnery missions. That was approximately three months or so.

N: What did you guys do for fun and excitement at Dalehart? Obviously you were flying every day, is that correct?

M: Mostly every day, yes.

N: Did you fly mostly during daylight hours or at night?

M: Both.

N: Both of them? Anytime?

M: Anytime.

N: How many hours a day are we talking about?

M: We are talking about five, six hours.

N: Five, six hours every day? How many days a week, five days a week?

M: Five, six days a week. A lot of towers. You know one mission you would go up and you would fly eight, ten hours at a crack.

N: Oh jeez!

M: Then you would come back and this mission might only fly four, three hours. I'll tell you, they flew around the clock down there. They had mess halls open twenty-four hours a day.

N: How many guys were on that base?

M: Oh god, I don't know. There was a mess of people on that base. I couldn't tell you how many.

N: So, they would say that, "Tomorrow we are going to wake

up time at such and such a time and then take off."

M: You do it just like you do it if you were in a combat zone. Go down and you would be briefed of where you were going and then after you were done with the flight you would come back and they would interrogate you.

N: I see. So you got used to debriefing, interrogations, things of that nature?

M: Right, yes. They would wake you up anytime in the morning.

N: Oh jeez! They wouldn't tell you when they were going to wake you up?

M: No.

N: That must have been fun.

M: Oh, it is! And in between time the engineer and I were training for a green pilot.

N: You were training green pilot?

M: As a crew because we had been there so long. At that time. . . See, when you come out of gunnery school they give you a buck sergeant's rating and I was there and I went and I said, "This is not fair." The engineer, him and I went in and told, the old man, "This is not fair. We are flying these green pilots and they are going to kill us. We got to have rating." So he said to--the engineer was a fellow by the name of White, Ed White--he said, "If you pass a test on engineering and Marstellar if you take a code test and you can copy twenty-three words a minute I will give you staff sergeant rating." So that is how we got our staff sergeant rating, before we went overseas.

N: That is good.

M: Well, more money.

N: That's right.

M: I was sending money back home.

N: Is that were you left for overseas, from Dalehart?

M: We took a train to Kearny, Nebraska.

N: To Kearny, Nebraska.

M: We were supposed to get a brand new airplane at Kearney and fly it across. When we got to Kearny they grounded

every airplane because. . . I had more fun that way. They had landing gear problems, pins in the landing gear breaking in the gears. So, they put us on troop train, brought us through within ten miles of this city.

N: Of where?

M: This city, come through from Kearny, Nebraska through here . . .

N: You came from Kearny, Nebraska through Youngstown?

M: Yes, right close to Youngstown. Right to East Coast, New Jersey.

N: How long were you in Kearny, Nebraska before they did that?

M: Only about a week.

N: And the pins were breaking on. . .

M: They had problems with the gears on the aircraft. So anyhow we went to Carney, New Jersey and from there we took the Mauritania.

N: Carney, is that New Jersey?

M: Yes, that's New Jersey. No, Kearny, Nebraska. Kilmer, New Jersey, Camp Kilmer.

N: And you went through Youngstown?

M: Yes. I had only been home, I think, five days in a year or two years. Anyhow, when we got there we went on the Mauritania, which was a British boat.

N: This is from Camp Kilmer, in New Jersey?

M: Yes.

N: What was it? The Mauritania?

M: Yes, the Mauritania, which was probably at that time one of the biggest of the passenger liners that the English had. I think it took us ten days to get across. I slept under a table.

N: What day are we talking about, date?

M: This is in March 1944.

N: March of 1944, you are on the Mauritania?

M: Yes.

N: Something tells me I interviewed somebody else that was on the Mauritania.

M: It is possible. They had 10,000 troops on there. I slept in the dining halls, underneath the tables, on the floor.

N: On the floor?

M: On the floor. There was no bunks for a whole bunch of people.

N: Did they give you a mattress?

M: No.

N: You slept on a . . .

M: With a G.I. blanket.

N: That had to be harder than hell.

M: It was terrible. All I ate on the way over was chocolate bars.

N: They didn't have any food for you?

M: Well, they had food but I didn't like it. It was English food, couldn't get near the place there were so many people on the boat.

N: One guy told me, I can't remember the boat he was on, but he said he actually waited in line. He had breakfast, got done, and got into another line. By the time 12:00 rolled around for lunch you were still in line and you got your lunch. You did the same thing for dinner.

M: You could go up there, they had like a little PX's. It was nothing but a room like this. They had a bunch of candy bars and cigarettes. You could buy stuff. So, I bought candy bars and ate candy bars.

N: Where did the ship finally land at?

M: In Liverpool.

N: In Liverpool?

M: Yes.

N: How long were you Liverpool?

M: No, we got right on a train.

N: Right on a choo train.

M: Right on a train, yes. Went up to a place called Stone and stayed there a week, I think approximately, I can't think of how many days. Then we went to a base where we were assigned, which was close to Peterborough.

N: To Peterborough?

M: Yes.

N: What outfit were you with?

M: 457th.

N: What was the name of the base?

M: Glatton I think they called it.

N: Glatton Air Force Base?

M: I think it was a base near the town of Glatton. I don't know what they called the base itself.

N: But it was near Peterborough?

M: Peterborough.

N: You say you were with the 8th Air Force. What was the bomb group?

M: 457th.

N: 457th Bomb group?

M: Yes, 749 Bomb Squadron.

N: What were the other bomb squadron?

M: That was is the only one I was in.

N: Yes, but what were the other ones that were on the base though?

M: 750th and 748.

N: How many aircrafts did you have per squadron?

M: That I don't know. I can't tell you exactly. I can't remember. I know when we got there I had to go to school for two weeks.

N: You went to school for two weeks? For what reason?

M: Navigation in England, radio operator, and navigation equipment and stuff. You had to pass it with a ninety or you couldn't fly. They were all upset because the crew was hanging around. It was about two weeks.

N: What did the other guys do for . . .

M: I have no idea what they were doing when I was going to school.

N: How many hours a day did you go to school?

M: About six.

N: About six hours a day? So your nights were free then?

M: Yes.

N: What were you allowed to do at night.

M: Anything. In fact we bought bicycles and we went around country side. There were so many guys got knocked down that they had a supply of bikes there. You would just go in, I forget how many pounds I paid for that stupid bike. There was no cars, you had to ride.

N: Somebody else said the same thing, that the big thing of the time was to buy a bike and . . .

M: Oh yes, you could buy a bike and go down to the local pub. Go into restaraunts but they didn't have much to eat.

N: How big was Peterborough at the time?

M: Peterborough was a pretty good sized town.

N: How big are we talking about?

M: I don't know. Probably as big as Youngstown.

N: Oh really!

M: Yes.

N: How did the English people treat you?

M: Very well. I never had any trouble.

N: Was there any animosity though between our troops and the English troops because we had more money?

M: Yes. Especially when you would walk in a pub and the girls would leave the English and come over to the Americans. Because they money. I can understand, I

would be unhappy too. You always get a loud mouth.

N: How many days a week did you guys go into the town?

M: About once. It depends on how much flying we were doing. Lots of times we never went anywhere.

N: Okay, now you spent two weeks in the radio school. What did you do after that, go up in the air?

M: Yes, then we started flying missions.

N: That is when you started flying missions at the time?

M: Yes.

N: I would imagine that the pilot, while you were in radio school, was probably getting used to the rain.

M: Yes, they were doing other things. They had them all going to school for things, different. You are all aware. We were a replacements company.

N: So, you were there for two weeks and that is when you had your first mission?

M: Yes.

N: Where was that over?

M: Lyon, France.

N: Alright on April 30, 1944, you flew to Lyon France. That was your first mission. That was to bomb an airfield there. Your second mission was in Berlin, that was to bomb an industrial area. That was about May 4. And the last mission, I didn't get the date. When was that on?

M: May 12.

N: That was to Lutzkendorf, Germany. That was your third mission and that was the one you shot down on. What happened?

M: We caught flack in the number two and number four engine, and had to feather them.

N: Let me ask you this question first, you actually bombed your target though?

M: Yes.

N: You guys were in the process of turning around.

M: Well, we lost engine but we went over the target anyhow.

N: Oh, you lost one engine.

M: Yes, lost flak.

N: Because of flak?

M: Yes.

N: But you stayed on course anyway.

M: Yes, he feathered it. I think number four was the first one to go out. He feathered it.

N: Number four? That would be on the right engine.

M: Right, right outboard.

N: Okay, the right outboard. For the record, that is the furthest engine on the right wing.

M: And then after we dropped the bombs we turned and started. I think we got another engine went out, number two engine. When he feathered the number it didn't feather all the way and the prop wind milled. So, consequently we lost air speed and we started to decent. They got away from us. We were no longer flying in formation. We flew to around the Koblenz area at twenty-two hundred feet and he told us all to bail out that that was the end of her. She was running.

N: So you were over Koblenz?

M: In that area. Now I'm not real sure about that. That is just what he told me. The whole crew bailed out.

N: Everybody make it out then okay?

M: Everybody made out, a couple got injured. A ball gunner got hit high tension lines, got legs burnt from probably the hips down. The pilot broke both legs. I don't know what happened to him. We never saw the pilot. See, when we were captured I hid in a farm yard where there was a haystack, a little barn, and a house. I hid right in the middle of that. As soon as I stood up there was a gun at my head.

N: Who was pointing the gun?

M: German, civilian.

N: Civilian?

M: Yes.

N: You don't remember the town though that you were above?

M: No, I can't remember.

N: You guys never received any formal training on jumping out of an airplane did you?

M: Never, none.

N: How did that make you feel?

M: Terrible.

N: Did you ask anybody why not?

M: I never did. I tell you though, I was real fortunate. We were flying on one of those training missions before we started flying, training mission around England of course, before we went out. We had to land in an English base and they had a parachute thing set up there. We were standing around talking to the English airman and we were talking about jumping. I said, "Well, they never give us any training." He said, "Well I got a tip for you. Pull your harness up tight. It is a little bit uncomfortable but if you ever have to go out, you will not get hurt." So when I went out of the aircraft I did a somersault. I was on my . . . Laid on my back and watched the tail get away from me before I pulled the cord. That way then it went out.

N: The chutes didn't have altimeters on them at the time?

M: No, pull rip cord. It was a free fall.

N: How did you know when to pull the rip cord?

M: I just looked and when I saw the aircraft get away I pulled.

N: Just pulled it?

M: Yes.

N: Some guys were given instructions as to a particular time when to pull, and others weren't.

M: Now we got a lot of instruction on ditching aircraft. What do you do when you ditch aircraft, because of the channel I imagine. Nothing on jumping out. I guess they figure you do it the right way the first time or you don't do it no more. The assistant engineer, he was a waist gunner, when he went out, when he pulled his cord, he went out after I did, his chute didn't come out. So, he had to open and pull it out.

N: That must have been an experience. What did it feel like the first time you jumped?

M: It wasn't bad at all. Until I saw the gun.

N: What did the guy say to you?

M: Oh, he asked me if I had a pistol and I told him, "No, I didn't carry a gun."

N: Yes, most guys told me that they didn't because . . .

M: No, they would shoot you.

N: They would shoot you with it.

M: Shoot you, absolutely. You have got to understand that their people were getting hurt, like everybody else. Then the army come and took us over. I never did see the officers after that. We went out. . . In fact I never saw the officers.

N: Let me ask you this, how long was it after you were captured by this civilian that the army came and got you?

M: An hour.

N: Where did he march you to.

M: Took us down to the train station.

N: Were there other G.I.'s there at the time.

M: Just the crew, just my crew, enlisted personnel.

N: The rest of your crew then was all picked up immediately?

M: Yes, they were all picked up immediately.

N: Were you allowed to talk to each other at the time?

M: They didn't say anything about talking. We were talking but we didn't say much, you know. People standing around with guns on you, you don't say too much.

N: That is for sure. Who were the people that were standing around, were they older gentlemen or younger people?

M: Mostly older.

N: About what age?

M: In their middle ages.

N: Fifties, sixties?

M: Yes, but there were a couple younger ones that looked like they had been in the service and got injured and maimed, you know repatriated or something.

N: I see, how did they treat you.

M: Not too bad there. We went from there to Frankfurt.

N: What base?

M: It wasn't a base. We went in there to change trains.

N: So, you took a train from wherever you were at into Frankfurt.

M: Right, we were in a rail station and we had a German sergeant. He said, "If they bomb now, you are dead. The civilians will kill you." The station itself was all glass. The glass was all taken out from the bombs.

N: Oh shoot, I remember that house.

M: Big, big barn outfit; huge.

N: That is a beautiful train station.

M: It wasn't real nice then.

N: Not when you guys were there, no!

M: So anyhow, they put us on the train and there was a civilian there. Everytime I turned around he kicked me. He called me gangster.

N: Everybody tells me the same thing. They all thought of you guys at Chicago gangsters.

M: Oh yeah!

N: Did you say anything to him in return?

M: I didn't say a word. There were too many of them. That is the first time and the only time my mouth, I ever kept my mouth shut.

N: I don't blame you. How long were you in Frankfurt?

M: Not very long, until we got on that train.

N: A matter of hours or what.

M: And then I can't remember where the devil we went. We went to an interrogation place and we hung around there a few days.

N: Let me ask you this, how long was the train?

M: A couple of hours.

N: Did you travel North, South, East, or West?

M: I don't know, I really don't know. But they interrogated us for a day.

N: Was the interrogation immediately after you find your arrival?

M: Yes.

N: Who interrogated you at the time?

M: An officer.

N: Do you know what rank he was?

M: I really don't.

N: Did he speak English very well?

M: Very well.

N: What type of questions did he ask you?

M: About where we were flying out of, and what we were doing. What group, and what was the strength of the group. I really didn't know so I didn't even lie to him. I didn't know how big that was. I really didn't care.

N: Did he, by chance, happen to pull out a notebook of anything and show you what bomb group that you belonged to?

M: Oh yes, they had it down in the book.

N: So eventually he pulled it out and showed you everything about you?

M: He knew everything about me.

N: What was he able to tell you about you in specific?

M: That I was born in Ohio and he didn't mentioned the town. He told me when I came over and what boat I came over on.

N: He did?

M: Yes, I don't know how he knew that.

N: He knew that you were born in Ohio?

M: Yes.

N: Did he know what your training was, what bases you got to?

M: No, he didn't say very much about that.

N: Because I had a couple of guys tell me that when they pulled the book out on them, the guy told him not only where he was born at and so forth, what high school he attended, and what training camps they went to.

M: Is that right?

N: Yes.

M: No, he didn't. But then they put us back on a train and took us up to Luft IV.

N: Oh, you were in Luft IV?

M: Yes.

N: I had a guy yesterday that was in Luft IV. Do you know George Light, by chance, from Girard.

M: I think so.

N: George was in Luft IV.

M: Is that right?

N: Yes.

M: There is a lot of them there.

N: What type of treatment did you receive from Luft IV?

M: When we went to Luft IV we were one of the first to hit there. It wasn't too bad at first. We didn't have anything.

N: Did they give you clothing or anything?

M: No, the only clothing I had was what I had on my back.

N: We are talking about the latter part of May now, first part of June?

M: Middle of May we were getting there. They did finally give out some overcoats and that that they give us. G.I. overcoats, I don't know where they got them. Probably Red Cross.

N: Red Cross I would imagine.

M: We were getting some Red Cross parcels. Well, like it's supposed to be one per man but something like one for twelve men. Get hot water in the morning to make tea, if you had it, or coffee and a couple pieces of bread at 12:00.

N: What kind of bread did they give you? Black bread?

M: Yes, that sawdust bread.

N: You know I talked to one guy, he actually showed me a piece that he still has.

M: So, they gave us that and they had a little bit of soup at night.

N: What did you guys do during the day?

M: Walk.

N: Walked a lot?

M: Oh, walked around.

N: You weren't allowed to work because you were NCO's.

M: Yes, we were NCO's, we couldn't work. They had to do nothing. . . Of course they called you out, the German army was crazy, they would call you out any time at night or day to make sure you weren't escaping, and they would count you and do all kinds of crazy things.

N: Were your barracks off the ground?

M: Yes, all barracks were off the ground because they put the dogs under there at night. So they could see if somebody was trying to escape.

N: What type of guards did you have? Were they old?

M: Old.

N: Were they soldiers themselves?

M: Yes, they were regular army. From what I understand they were regular army.

N: When we talk about old, how old are we talking about?

M: We're talking about in their fifties.

N: You are a young guy at the time.

M: No, no, in their fifties. You would say that was older. Now they call them middle aged but I would say older.

N: Yes, at that time, sure.

M: They were younger than I am now.

N: But they were in their fifties?

M: Yes.

N: How was the treatment by these guys?

M: The treatment by the individual guards was not bad but by the whole bunch of them was bad. Not enough food. They thought of nothing of training their guns of the towers, test firing them into the compound instead of away from it.

N: They would test fire into the compound?

M: Oh yes, if you were in the way it is tough. There was a time there. . . This is in 1944, they used to have the aircraft, the German Focke-Wulf 190's, they got into a dog fight with somebody up there. I never did see the American aircraft. But he got hit and when he come out he come across the compound and he hit and blew up. The guys hollered, "Raid," and they turned the guns on the guys. I mean they didn't shoot to kill but they were firing.

N: Oh, the Focke-Wulf got shot down?

M: Yes. Another time they Russians as forced labor there and they treated them really bad. There was a German electrician went up on this line to repair. They put a Russian down there to guard the switch. Well, he waited until he got up there and got his hand on it, he popped the switch. Immediately they killed him but he killed the German. The guys hollered, "Yeah!", and they turned the guns again. Well, they had to. We had like windows, open windows, and they said if you talked through the windows they'll shoot you. And they shot people. They were terrible.

N: If you talked through the windows to who though? Who would you talk to?

M: Anybody inside the barracks.

N: Really.

M: Yes, they shot you. There will be no talking from outside to inside. They had a group of people they brought from Heidlecru, which was I think Luft VI. This is in the latter part of 1944. When they brought them in from that railroad station up to the camp they run them with guns and bayonets.

N: Who were the people, were they civilians?

M: No, our guys.

N: G.I.'s, and they ran them with . . .

M: They used dogs and the bayonets. Made them run all the way from the station to the Luft IV.

N: My God, how far was it?

M: Three, four, five miles probably.

N: If you didn't make it, it was tough?

M: That's tough, they shot you. They had a lot of good stuff going on.

N: Like what else?

M: Well, things started to get bad, the Russians started to come our way in the latter part of 1944. I'm trying to think what date it was. February 6, 1945, they evacuated the camp. They had evacuated some, more wounded, before that. I think in January. I went out in February 6, 1945, walking, heading south I would imagine. I could probably show you.

N: You mean you were walking where?

M: In a group of G.I.'s. I think there was three groups of G.I.'s with guards, walking out of this camp.

N: Okay. This is February 6, 1945 and you are on a forced march now.

M: Right.

N: Because why? The Russians were coming in.

M: The Russians were coming, yes. These guys come across by boat, in a hold of a boat.

N: And you guys moved out of Luft 4. Your march, if I remember correctly, was eighty-nine days.

M: Somewhere around that. Depending on the person it was from eighty to eighty-five or eighty-nine days.

N: How did the guards treat you while you were on the march?

M: Some of them weren't bad. We had some. . . They were state children you know, they were in their teens, they were tough. They were Gestapo.

N: What did they call them, the brown shirts or something like that?

M: Yes, they were bad. As long as you stayed together they weren't too bad. Some of the guys tried to escape and they nailed them. That was bad news too because, like myself, I couldn't speak German or anything. The whole country was armed. It was crazy at that particular time to try and escape.

N: What were some of the things that you could remember at that time of an inhumane nature that they would do to the prisoners?

M: Well, they would give us nothing to drink, or no food, very little food.

N: This is while you were on the march?

M: Yes, I ate everything from raddish, raw, to sugar beet and whatever I could grab. They fed us off and on. We stole off the farmers; you know eggs and stuff, what you could get. There wasn't much there. They did, they beat on you a little bit, off and on, if you didn't. . . You know everyone ended up with lice and dysentery. So, you get weaker and weaker and weaker. You are walking all the time, sleeping in the cold. The warmest I ever slept was in a barn with some hay, in all of those eighty days. If you lagged behind they beat on you. So, each guy tried to help the other guy.

N: What were the most horrendous things that you could remember about the march? Just the fact that the cold, no food, in general.

M: Oh, we were bombed and strafed by U.S. and Allied aircraft.

N: You were bombed and strafed?

M: Oh yes, sure. They didn't know who we were.

N: Didn't they eventually figure it out though?

M: I don't know.

N: How many times were you bombed and strafed?

M: Oh, five or six. I was locked in a boxcar while the English bombed.

N: This is while you are on the march?

M: Yes. They locked us in a box. . . Took us on a small train for a very short while and I don't know where we went, I really don't. I know we were on there and it was night and they were bombing. They locked it. You couldn't even sit down there were so many men in that box car. You could see because of holes in the . . . The flashes of gun powder.

N: How long were you in the box car?

M: All night.

N: What did you guys do for toilet facilities and stuff like that?

M: Very little. We went in a hole.

N: In a hole? You found a hole. . .

M: Yes, dysentery you went in your drawer.

N: Oh, jeez! What did you do while you were on a march?

M: Same thing.

N: They allow you to stop?

M: Most of them would. They would let you stop for a minute on the side of the road, no paper, no nothing. We were filthy.

N: You had to be.

M: With lice everywhere, that is terrible.

N: And that went on for eighty-nine days, you guys are just marching on?

M: Yes, different places.

N: How many guys were you in a group with?

M: Oh, a couple thousand probably.

N: A couple thousand in your group alone?

M: Yes.

N: How many guards did you have for this couple thousand?

M: Not very many. Probably ten.

N: Ten guys to cover two thousand.

M: Yes, we could have taken them but there was nothing. Were could you go, what could you do? You are in the middle of Germany. Like I said, the civilians are armed because they know that the Russians are coming. We had some leaders that said, "Cool it, because this war is almost over. If you try and escape they are going to kill you." I know of three, or four guys left. I know they were killed because I saw the body. That was it.

N: When you guys were marching down the street did you happen to notice any German refugees coming up the street?

M: No, but they were throwing rocks at us, the German civilians. The Polish, you know they had a bunch of Polish forced labor, they would throw us bread.

N: They were throwing bread?

M: Yes, wonderful people. They were tough, they took a hell of a beating over there. The Russians did too. I can understand why the Russians were tough when they went into Germany because their people got treated bad. They thought nothing of shooting them immediately. I think the only reason they didn't kill us, they were afraid of what would happen. I really do. I think the order was out, "Get rid of them," and they figured there were so many of them that they couldn't kill them all.

N: When you guys were on this march did you have a sense of feeling that indeed it was going to be over pretty soon?

M: No, we really didn't know until we started hearing the artillery, and the guns. Then I knew. I was in Annaburg, at a place, a dysentery, there was a Dutchman in there and he gave me a bowl of soup. Best food I ever had in my life.

N: Where was this at?

M: In Annaburg.

N: This is while you are on the march?

M: Yes, towards the end of the march. He told me that the

Russians were thirty, forty kilometers away. The German guard told me, "You can stay here with the people and wait for the Russians, or you can go with your gang." I went with the gang because I didn't trust the Russians. We marched for another couple days then.

N: The German guard was still with you at the time?

M: Yes.

N: That was the one that told you you could stay behind if you wanted to?

M: Yes. In fact, I carried a bayonets the last three months.

N: You had a bayonet with you?

M: Yes.

N: And they didn't take it off you?

M: No, no, I used it for cutting, to build fires and that stuff.

N: We were just looking at some mail there. In England when they would write back home they would take a letter and do some photography work on it. They would actually shrink the letter down to look like about a 5 X 7 card. So, if the letter was written on a 8 X 10 stationary they would photograph it and then reduce it down to 5 X 7, and then send it through the mail that way. That is interesting, I never knew that.

M: Yes.

N: So, you were in Annaburg and the German says, "You can stay here if you want," but you went back with your troops. You marched for two more days. Where did you guys wind up at?

M: I can't think of the name of the town. It was near Halle, Germany. When I crossed the. . . Remember where the Americans were waiting at the Elbe for the Russians?

N: Yes.

M: I went across right there. I went across the Elbe, we walked across. The night before we went across the lines. All the guards got new uniforms and the guys said, "There is something happening right?" All these Germans getting new uniforms. Well, they were getting new uniforms and surrendering. We are walking down

this road, a whole bunch of us, and we see this jeep come at us. It is four G.I.'s. They said, "Keep walking, keep walking, you will go across the lines at the Elbe." So, when they guys saw that they grabbed the guns and everything off the. . . There was a German Lieutenant on a bicycle. One of those guys grabbed that bike. "You are walking from now, you are the prisoner." So, we walked across the line.

N: What time of day was this?

M: In the afternoon. April 26. So immediately we went down and scrounged a bunch of rations.

N: What Army picked you up?

M: I think it was the 104th Airborne.

N: What did the German guards do at that time?

M: I never saw them again.

N: You never saw them anymore after that?

M: No, didn't even . . .

N: Didn't want to?

M: No, I was looking for food.

N: I don't blame you. When you got to the chow hall, and so forth, with the 104th. . .

M: The chow hall wasn't open so. . . Ahead of us were a bunch of barracks around there, German barracks, that were empty. So, we went in there and we started a fire and we got of the dog-gone C rations and made coffee, and made us a meal.

N: Now this is in Halle, Germany?

M: Yes.

N: How many guys were you with at that time?

M: Probably two or three crews of them.

N: You are crew member, you were still with them?

M: Oh yes, we are all together.

N: You guy stayed in contact with each other?

M: The six enlisted men, I am talking about, not the officer.

N: Yes, the officer would go to a different Stalag. But the enlisted guys that you were with on the aircraft, you guys all stayed together?

M: We stayed together the whole . . . They all made it.

N: You guys still keep in contact with each other?

M: A couple of them. One is dead. We send Christmas cards, about all.

N: What did you guys do after you got liberated there? Did you eat and go back to the United States?

M: We fooled around there a few days. It is hard to remember. Then they took us to an airfield and we took C-47's out of there, Halle, Germany, where the armistice was signed.

N: To Reims, France?

M: France. We landed there and we stayed there a few days. Ended up down there in Le Havre, at Lucky Strike.

N: Oh, you went to Camp Lucky Strike.

M: Then took a ship home, or a ship back to the U.S.A.

N: Camp Lucky Strike was in Le Havre, France?

M: Yes, I believe.

N: What was Camp Lucky Strike like when you guys got there?

M: Thousands of G.I.'s. All of them waiting to go home.

N: What did you guys do?

M: Nothing, you didn't do nothing.

N: They clean you up there or anything?

M: Oh yes.

N: You got deloused, I would imagine.

M: Yes, very brief physical. Nothing like I thought they we . . . They were all deloused, new uniforms, and food. Mostly chicken.

N: Probably thought you had died and went to heaven.

M: It was really nice. It was one of the best times.

N: I could imagine. How long were you in Camp Lucky Strike?

M: Oh, a couple weeks, three or four weeks probably.

N: What did you guys do while you were there?

M: Nothing.

N: Just sit around, or what?

M: Yes.

N: Did they have pool tables set up for you guys, or basketball, or anything?

M: No. In fact it didn't feel like it was in that good of condition. When we were first in the . . . In the early Fall, when we were at Luft IV, we had a softball league, no gloves except the catcher, and we had a six man football teams.

N: This is at Luft IV?

M: Yes. Then we didn't get any food and nobody felt like playing ball with that.

N: After that, yes, you are too weak to play ball.

M: We didn't, no, when we got to Le Harve. They sent us and we come up to New York.

N: How soon after you got liberated were you back in the States, about two, three weeks?

M: No. It had to be the middle of June.

N: What did the Army do with you then, after you got back home.

M: Sent me here for temporary duty.

N: You came back to Youngstown?

M: For ninety days, temporary duty.

N: Where did you stay at?

M: Home.

N: Oh, that was it. That was your temporary duty, to stay at home.

M: Yes. No furlough, and ninety days temporary duty at home. Did you have to report in to anybody around here?

N: No.

M: They just told you to stay home for ninety days?

N: What happened then?

M: I went to Miami Beach.

N: Back to Miami Beach, that was where you were. . .

M: For R & R (Rest and Relaxation). I went down there and they gave us a physical. I stayed down there a couple weeks. They give us a physical. Not a very good physical, what I remember, you know, blood pressure and normal stuff. Then they sent me up to Wright Field.

N: Where is Wright Field?

M: Wright Patterson.

N: Oh, Wright Patterson, Air Force Base.

M: I stayed there a couple of weeks and then I went over to Wilmington, Ohio; was stationed there until I got out of the service, which was November.

N: Is there anything that you would like to tell me at this time that maybe you have forgotten? Anything that you think is important at all, you think I should know this.

M: No, I can't think of it.

N: What rank were you when you got out?

M: Technical Sergeant.

N: And you came home and went to work?

M: Yes.

N: Who did you work for at that time?

M: Where did I work? Sheet and Tube. I went to Truscon, they said they didn't have a job. . . I worked a couple weeks, got laid off. Went to Sheet and Tube, worked a couple weeks there, they went on strike. I worked for Youngstown Steel Tank for a couple years, and then they laid me. . . Got me working, what, two or three days a week. Then I got a truck driving job and I drove truck for about thirty-eight years.

N: Who did you drive truck for?

M: CCC Highway, Modern Transfer, Bender-Louden. From 1978 they deregulated the industry and that is when I started loosing jobs. It is like the same thing happened to guys at Sheet and Tube, when they closed it out, they just went broke that is all.

END OF INTERVIEW