

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II, B-24

Personal Experience

O.H. 1290

LAWRENCE J. PRINCE

Interviewed

by

Joseph A. Nuzzi

on

November 11, 1989

Lawrence Joseph Prince

Lawrence J. Prince was born on March 14, 1924 in Warren, Ohio. He attended the Warren City Schools where he graduated from Warren G. Harding in 1942. Upon graduation he worked at Copperweld Steel Company in Warren until his enlistment in the Army Air Corps as a radio operator in February of 1943.

Upon graduation from the Army Air Force Radio School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 1944 he was transferred to gunnery school in Yuma, Arizona. There he learned to operate the fifty caliber machine guns that were standard equipment aboard heavy bombers during World War II.

After successfully completing gunnery school he was attached to the 454th Bomb Group, 738th Bomb Squadron, in Cerignola, Italy in June of 1944. The 454th was attached to the 304th Air Force Wing, which was under the command of the 15th Air Force. During his tenure with the 454th he was assigned as a radio operator aboard a B-24, Liberator.

On his thirty-third mission October 7, 1944, he and fellow crew members had just completed a bombing raid over the Winterhoff Oil Refinery, in Vienna, Austria, when his aircraft was heavily damaged by ground fire. The aircraft was virtually cut in half, forcing the crew to bail out over Vienna.

As the plane tore in half, Mr. Prince was left behind in the tail section of the aircraft. Because of ruptured fuel lines, the tail section was soon engulfed in flames. As Mr. Prince bailed out he sustained multiple burns about his head and body. Upon

landing he was captured and eventually was taken to a Budapest hospital in October of 1944. Later, he was transferred to Stalags in Frankfurt, Keifheide, Nuremberg, Berlin, then finally to Mooseberg, Germany. In April of 1945 he was liberated by General Patton's Third Army.

After returning to Warren, Ohio he married his wife Phyllis on July 7, 1945. From 1946 to 1977 Mr. Prince was so-owner of the El Rio Restaurant in Warren. He also worked for the Trumbull Country Club from 1977 to 1980 and the Albert Guarnieri & Co., from 1980 to his retirement in 1988.

The Prince's have four children: Larry, age forty-two; Kristine, age thirty-eight; Karen: age thirty-three; and Jeffrey; age thirty-one.

Mr. Prince and his wife presently reside in Howland, Ohio. Mr. Prince is currently a member of Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Warren. Among his many medals Mr. Prince was awarded the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, Presidential Citation and the Purple Heart. He is a member of the Mahoning Valley Ex-POW's, and the National Ex-POW's.

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World War II, B-24

INTERVIEWEE: LAWRENCE J. PRINCE
INTERVIEWER: Joseph A. Nuzzi
SUBJECT: B-24s, POW Camps, 33rd mission.
DATE: November 11, 1989

N: This is an interview with Lawrence Prince for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on World War II, B-24, by Joseph Nuzzi, at 8489 Old Farm Trail, Howland, Ohio, on November 11, 1989, at 11:22 a.m.

Where were you born and raised at Mr. Prince?

P: Warren, Ohio.

N: You attended all of the city schools in Warren?

P: Yes.

N: Which schools were those? Do you remember? Elementary?

P: First Street School, West Junior High School, and Warren Harding High School.

N: Oh, Warren Harding. What year did you graduate from high school?

P: 1942.

N: 1942?

P: Yes.

N: You were eighteen at the time?

P: I was eighteen.

N: Okay, did you immediately go into the military upon

graduation from school?

P: No, I got a job at Copperweld from graduation until February of the following year, which was like seven or eight months.

N: So that was February of 1943?

P: Right.

N: What made you decide to go into the military? Was it the fact that the war was on or what?

P: Well, the war was on and my very best buddy went into the marine corp and he wanted me to go with him, but at the time when you were eighteen you had to have your parents signature and she (my mother) wouldn't sign for me to go into the marine corp. So, as a result when my best friend had left I decided that it was time for me to go so I went to do ...the draft board. At that time there was a draft board who called up the guys you know. And I went down there and told them that I wanted to go and they said, "Did you get a call or do you have a letter report?" And I said, "No, I just feel that my best friend has gone and I can't see any reason for me to stay here." So, I went down and I told them to push me up and sure enough about a week later I got the letter to report and then about two weeks after that I was gone.

N: Now you went into the Army then?

P: Well, the Air Corp was part of the Army.

N: Well, what made you go into the Air Corp?

P: Well, I don't know. First off they gave us a bunch of tests. They gave you physicals of course. This was up in Cleveland. And some written tests, and apparently I scored fairly well on the written tests. If I remember it was called the GCT-General Classification Test. And the guy up there said, "Would you like to be in the Air Force?" I said, "I would love it." So as a result they shipped me to Sheppard Field, Texas.

N: Sheppard Field, Texas?

P: Yes.

N: Is that where you went for basic training?

P: Yes, that is where we went for basic training.

N: How long did basic training last?

P: Those numbers kind of fade a little bit as time goes by. It seems to me that I was there from February until probably May.

N: February to May was a long time. What did you do during this time? Were you learning to become a radio-operator?

P: No, no this was basic training.

N: What did that include?

P: Number one, I wasn't there too long and I got sick and they put me in the infirmary then for about ten days. I had sore throats and one thing or another and then I got out and as a result I was a little bit behind the rest of the class. So, then I started my basic training and then when I finished my basic training I was eligible to be sent to what they called a Technical School, but they asked me, they told me-they didn't ask you anything.

N: Nobody asked you anything?

P: They told me that there was a group in what they called Gadgets. Gadgets at that time were what they referred to as pilots in training. These were people who were qualified to go in for pilot training but they hadn't done any of the basic physical training to get into basic flight training. And they wanted to know if I would take this group of gadgets since I had been through the mill so to speak and make sure that they got their training and went to their classes and whatever. So the time.

N: Okay, I see.

P: Until these fellows finished up and then from there I was sent on.

N: So you were like a basic training instructor then?

P: Yes, for just this one group. I don't think that it was what they would have referred to as a DI in the Marine Corp or something like that, but it was kind of like a Corporal in charge to make sure that these fellows got the training that they were assigned to get.

N: How many guys were in there?

P: It wasn't a large group. I think that it was somewhere around twenty.

N: So, then you stayed there in Sheppard Field from Febru-

ary to May. Where did you go to after that?

P: Well, from there they sent me to...

N: Did you go to a Technical School?

P: Yes, I went to a Technical School which was Sioux Falls, South Dakota Air Base.

N: Sioux Fall okay.

P: Yes. I went there for radio-training.

N: What type of training did you have for radio-training?

P: Well, actually all phases of it and in relation to the flying service, Code. You had to learn to take code.

N: Morse Code?

P: Yes, you had to learn to take and receive Morse Code. Which was the way that they communicated in the Dark Ages. Of course they had voice communication. Not that they didn't have it but that it wasn't widely used at that time. And you learned what they called Second Echelon Repair Work. You had to qualify to do Second Echelon Repair Work along with the type of radio work that you would have to do as part of the flight crew.

N: What do you mean by Second Echelon Repair Work?

P: Well, it was repair work that could be done in the field without the help of a lot of parts, a lot of equipment. It was field work.

N: Let me ask you this question, how long does training last first of all?

P: Well, this lasted up until... I think that it was November. Probably six or seven months.

N: November of 1943?

P: Yes.

N: You learned all the phases of radio-operation.

P: Yes.

N: Can you give me some basics about that? Like what that would include?

P: Well, to learn basically how the radio was made. We are talking about Air-Borne. Very basically and primarily Air-Borne equipment.

N: Triangulation and all of that...

P: Yes. You had radar. Even though it was in its infancy we had radar, and we had the means of identification with other Air Craft through the use of radar. That is about it really.

N: How do you feel about the training that you received from the military? Do you think that it was good?

P: I thought that it was good. We had mostly civilian instructors.

N: Civilian instructors?

P: Yes.

N: What was the radar like at that time? Did they tell you that guys were still learning or what?

P: Well, the most used radar at that time was what they called an IFF. IFF meaning Identification Friend or Foe. IFF is still used today incidentally.

N: Oh, really?

P: Yes, it is. It is a little bit more sophisticated but it is still that very basic principal that they used at that time. And the way that it worked was you had a chart and every hour every day (which depending on the hours that you were going to be in the air), you had a chart that you had to go by and set your transmitter, at that particular frequency and you turn it on and if there were any aircraft within the vicinity that you were unsure of, whether they were "friend or foe," this radar sent out a signal and if they were tuned to the same proper reciprocal frequency it bounced back to our set and told us whether they were "friend or foe."

N: That is interesting because I talked to a guy on a F-17 who told me that it was not uncommon for them to pick up stragglers.

P: Yes, very definitely.

N: He said, "We knew that some of the guys were German in the aircrafts..."

P: Yes, right.

N: So we really had no way of telling.

P: Yes, they captured intact, some of our airplanes. The point in question there was that we were coming back

from a mission up in France one time (we were out over the Mediterranean), and each particular group had a tail-marking on their plane that was distinctive and most everybody knew what the rest of them were as far as the guys that they flew with everyday. Now like us, they called us the "Cotton Tails," because our tail was painted all white. And they had other ones that were painted in a checker board pattern or diamond patterns, or circle patterns, or whatever. And this plane just kind of... Nobody knew where it came from and it just kind of moved up and moved into our formation (B-24), just like what we had, but no one could identify the tail markings so the IFF was on and the IFF was telling us that this was not a friendly aircraft so everybody was instructed to turn the guns all to face this particular airplane and as soon as we turned the guns on this airplane slowly but surely this guy dropped down, dropped back, and pretty soon he was gone.

N: Oh really? This one guy was telling me that "you never knew often who was flying next to you."

P: No, you didn't.

N: Well, you see a guy peel off and you figure, "maybe he was a bad guy." Did you guys lay a fire on this guy at all?

P: No, no we didn't because there was always the thought in the back of your mind, "Maybe this guys IFF isn't working."

N: I see, sure.

P: "Maybe he has a malfunction, maybe he has radio problems, maybe he has electrical problems." And as a result, usually putting the guns on them let you know what they were up to. So when they dropped back we assumed that they were not friendly. If they were friendly they would have found some other way to signal.

N: What other ways are there to signal?

P: Well, every airplane had a flash or a gun.

N: Oh.

P: And you flashed Morse Code. Like a light gun. And if all else failed you would expect something to come out of that cock pit to let them know, or to let them know who you are. Even with the gun you weren't real sure. So, you are better off if you let them go. Put the guns on them-if they are friendly they'll drop back far enough away that you can't get to them and hopefully

they will get back to their own base. If they are not friends they are going to be gone. Which in this particular case, they were gone.

N: They were gone?

P: Yes, they just drifted back till they were out of sight.

See, there were times when you were over land and you were being hit by fighters and your best defense was a tight formation, a tight group because you had the concentration of fire power. And this was not normally the place where these guys moved in. If they did they were usually someone, from our own outfit. If someone had been knocked out of the formation and in order to fill that hole and maintain concentrated fire power that they would move up into the vacated spot. Like if you were going on a bomb run or just coming off of a bomb run. Something like that.

N: I want to talk more about that later on.

P: Okay.

N: I would like to get back to Sioux Falls, you said that you spent November of 1943 at Sioux Falls, what did you do after that?

P: Well, then I got my own leave to come home for ten days, and from there we went to gunnery school.

N: Aerial Gunnery Schools too?

P: Aerial Gunnery right.

N: Okay.

P: Aerial Gunnery School in Yuma, Arizona.

N: Where at?

P: Yuma, Arizona.

N: That seemed to be pretty common practice.

P: Everybody had to be a gunner.

N: A gunner.

P: Everybody had to qualify with the .50 caliber machine guns.

N: I see. So you spent some time in Yuma, Arizona at gunnery school then?

P: Then you have to complete a designated course.

N: And that was what...Correct me if I am wrong, the rest of the guys were with BB guns and shot guns and then just things of that nature?

P: Well, no. There were no BB guns. We started out with .30 caliber machine guns.

N: Okay.

P: Because we had already qualified in basic training with rifles and side arms (which were .45s for us).

N: What side arm was that, do you remember?

P: .45.

N: Remington? Who made it?

P: That I don't remember Joe.

N: Okay. So, then you started off on a .30 calibers, then what was that like?

P: Well, we started out with .30's. Well, it was on a stationery range.

N: It was on a stationery?

P: Yes. You went out and there was a range and the guns were mounted and there were targets out there and you fired at the targets with colored projectiles. The tips of the projectiles were painted different colors and you were assigned that particular color and particular target, and they could tell from that color that went through the target if it was yours.

N: Oh, okay.

P: So, we started out there, then from there we went to the stationery skeet range and we fired skeet (and I call it stationery but I forgot what they called it at that time). Then from there they put you on trucks and they would take you around a track and as you went around the track these clay birds would come flying up and you had to fire at them. When you first started out you knew which way they were going to come. You were traveling at like maybe ten miles an hour, but what they were trying to get you accustomed to was your moving, the targets moving, and this is how we compensate. This is what we do in order to hit that moving target, and after a kind of progression through those courses you wind up on a banked course going about

fifty miles an hour around a track and you are kind of like in an open-stake-bodied truck with a couple of instructors. As you pass certain points on this track these birds will come flying out, and the thing is that you didn't know which way they were going to go.

N: Oh.

P: They could go in front of you, they could go this way, they could go away from you, or that way, or they could go behind you and you had to be ready with your shot gun to trail these things.

N: That had to be harder than hell to do?

P: It was difficult but it was the most enjoyable part.

N: Is it?

P: Yes, it really was. It was a challenge.

N: A challenge exactly.

P: A real challenge to knock these things down.

N: I take it that most of these guys probably got pretty proficient on it, you think?

P: Oh, yes. Well, you had to meet a certain minimum before they qualified and before they let you out of the school.

N: So, then you guys were then as radio-operators you were qualified to go into any one of the turrets or waist-gunners positions?

P: Yes. Well, they give you a smattering of each of the gun positions. We did very little flying in gunnery school. We did some air-to-air and air-to-ground, and most of those were done in B-17; but you weren't necessarily assigned to a particular position at that time.

N: That came a little bit later on then?

P: Yes, that came a little bit later on.

N: Okay, after this school here where did you go to from here? You said you went to gunnery school, to what? How long were you in gunnery school?

P: We were there until January.

N: Until January?

P: Yes.

N: January of what?

P: That would be 1944.

N: 1944. Well, let's see, you said that you were at Sioux Falls until January. So you started here in January 1944. About how many weeks or months?

P: I think that it was about a two month course. Some of these dates might be a little foggy.

N: Sure, that is no problem. Where did you go after gunnery school?

P: Well, after gunnery school we went to Topeka, Kansas.

N: Topeka, Kansas? What was in Topeka?

P: That was an assignment center. I'm sorry, not Topeka, Salt Lake City, Utah.

N: Salt Lake City okay. What was Salt Lake City like?

P: Salt Lake City was an assignment center where you were assigned to a crew.

N: Okay, that is where you picked up your crew?

P: Yes, that is where we picked up our crew.

N: Okay, that is interesting. You went to Salt Lake City and a lot of the guys on B-17 came back East and picked up their crews out of somewhere around Illinois. You were assigned a crew in Salt Lake City...

P: Right.

N: How long did that take?

P: We were there just very briefly.

N: Very briefly?

P: Three or four days.

N: You caught your crew and then got out?

P: Yes, well our crew was assigned and from there we went to Tucson, Arizona for what they called "Transition Training."

N: What was transition training like?

P: Well, transition was training as a crew where you

trained as a crew.

N: Okay, here you trained as a crew. How many guys were on board?

P: There were ten.

N: Looking at that picture here, similar to a B-17 it had two turret guns on the... you had waist gunners, turret guns on the bottom, and then you had a nose gunner?

P: And a tail gunner.

N: And a tail gunner.

P: The tail was a turret, the nose was a turret, which neither one of them were turret on the B-17.

N: Neither one of them were turret?

P: No. The B-17 had a top turret and a ball turret.

N: Yes, a ball turret, but those were actually turret though? The tail and the front?

P: Yes, that was an actual turret that...a power turret.

N: Okay.

P: That you got right into it and it moved.

N: And it was not like the B-17?

P: No, B-17 had what they call a "Chin-turret" if I remember right. There was no turret that was manned as a powered turret.

N: Now you got pretty familiar obviously with your crew?

P: Oh, yes.

N: Is there any distinction between officers and enlisted men? Did they get along fairly well?

P: There is always that...I guess what they called the "Caste System." Where the officers were...And when we were in transition training other than flying we really didn't spend much free time with the officers. Whether it was our own doing or the officers doing or a mutual thing, but we didn't spend much time socializing you might say.

N: What rank were you at at this time?

P: At that time I was a staff.

N: You were a staff sergeant?

P: Yes.

N: Okay. Did you notice that camaraderie developed a little bit different after ..

P: Well, the camaraderie developed when we got overseas.

N: When you got overseas?

P: Yes.

N: Let's put you back in Tucson again before we get overseas. Here you train with your crew as a transition period, where did you go to from Tucson?

P: Well, from Tucson we went to Topeka.

N: What was in Topeka?

P: Well, at Topeka we were supposed to be assigned an airplane to fly overseas. We got to Topeka and there were not enough aircraft for all of the crews that were there and as a result they drew straws. They split the crews. I think if I remember it was equally in half and they drew straws. The ones that won supposedly were the ones that got there own airplanes and flew them over. The ones that lost they sent us onto Camp Patrick Henry and we got on boats and went over. We went over on ships.

N: Camp Patrick Henry?

P: Yes.

N: So, you were the unfortunate ones that had to go on board?

P: Right. We were the ones that had to go on board ship.

N: Oh, gee. Where is Camp Patrick Henry?

P: In Virginia.

N: In Virginia?

P: Yes.

N: One thing I forgot to ask you, this transition period in Tucson, Arizona that is where you went up everyday?

P: Yes, you learned to operate as a crew. Everybody specializing in his own particular job.

N: Did you start off early in the morning and then go late at night? What was a typical day like?

P: Well, you didn't spend all of your time flying. I mean there were classes. You attended classes to keep you abreast of what was going on in that particular field of operations that you were heading to. Any changes that were being made in the communications system as far as the radio people were concerned.

N: Was there any piece in the radio equipment that they told, "Hey guys, if the aircraft ever goes down make sure that you destroy this?"

P: There was only one thing that we had to destroy that was the IFF.

N: Okay.

P: And that was...Apparently they felt that we had this advantage that the Germans didn't have at that time.

N: I see.

P: The IFF had a built in charge.

N: Had a built in charge?

P: That you were supposed to destroy and if you had to leave in a hurry (which we did), at that particular time, I am trying to remember if there was some self-detonating device set up but I don't remember. But they were very...With that and the bomb site were the two things on the plane that they didn't want to fall into the hands of the Germans.

N: The Norden Bomb Site?

P: The Norden Bomb Site yes.

N: I only had one guy tell me. I asked him that question, "Did you have anything on the bomb site?" He said, "No, why?" I said, "You didn't?" He said, "No, why?" I said, "Did you ever take one apart?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, I did. On the bottom of the box that is Naval German." I said, "You are kidding me?" He said, "No."

P: He said that?

N: Yes. On the bottom of that it is made in Germany and I told him I said, "You were never told the story of the bomb site?" He said, "No."

P: Was he a bombardier?

N: He was a bombardier, yes. And I specifically asked him that question. And he said, "No" from there none were destroyed.

P: Well, that's news to me. I know our bombardier and I went on couple of practice missions. They had things set up in a hanger in Tucson. They looked almost like scaffolding, quite high. And you climbed up this scaffolding and on top of this thing was a platform and there was a bomb site on this platform and on the floor as you looked through the bomb site was topographical pictures of areas. The bombardiers knew what they were. They were up there practicing, but when they went up there they always had to have somebody with them to "fly the airplane." Because the bombardier takes over actually as the pilot when they turn on to the bomb run, but they have to have somebody to get them to a certain point and in the meantime he is doing all of this figuring and setting of all of these dials and one thing or another.

So, I went up with him a couple of times up on this scaffolding type of arrangement and he was doing his practice. Practicing his bombing you might say, and it was set up in such a way that these things left when he would hit the bomb release somehow or another (I don't remember how), there were marks that came out on top of these to show the patterns of the bombs and whether he was on it, or off of it, how far off of it he was. And then they would critique this thing as to the mistakes that he had made, and why the bombs were going where they were going, and why they weren't going to where they should be going. I remember that because I did that a couple of times and I enjoyed that.

N: Well, you know everyone I have talked to so far has said, "Oh, yes we had to destroy the bomb site." But this one guy said, "No, why?"

P: Well, I know my bombardier always said that. He had to destroy. (And I think) Now we didn't get into the bombardiers part that much and into the bomb site because the bomb site went with the bombardier all of the time.

N: Oh, it did?

P: Oh, yes and he carried them out and he carried them back.

N: Oh, okay.

P: You know when he went on a mission. He never talked

about it. I had to assume that there was a charge in there that would blow up.

N: Let's put you back on to Camp Patrick Henry. What type of boat did you go overseas on? Do you remember?

P: Yes, and I can remember because there was an association there. My dad had a restaurant downtown at the time and he called it the "Santa Rosa."

N: What?

P: Santa Rosa.

N: Oh Santa Rosa.

P: The Santa Rosa Cafe. Of course being Italian you know... You had to have some Italian name on it.

N: Sure.

P: He called it the Santa Rosa Cafe and it was very successful. But this ship that they put us on was an old (I shouldn't say old), at the time it was a luxury liner. It was a luxury liner that they used for transporting passengers back and forth to Europe.

N: They probably got it after you guys did?

P: And this is the one that we got on.

N: Oh really?

P: Of course they're refitted. So, you know the state rooms at best and these so called "luxury liners" are not very big. But they refitted them so that there were nine guys...

N: In a room? And it was called the Santa Rosa?

P: It was called the Santa Rosa. And I remember at the time when we got on the ship and we went over...letters, everything was censored at the time you know. All G.I. mail was censored. And I wrote to my mom and dad to tell them...I had come over on the boat, which as long as it was in the past I was allowed to say that but I wasn't allowed to give any names; but I said that, "the name of the ship was the same as Pop's restaurant downtown." I always thought that that was pretty clever of me. Then I got the name across to them.

N: Yes, exactly. That is something else. Where did you guys land at? Where did the ship finally wind up at?

P: Well, we landed in Naples.

N: In Naples?

P: Yes.

N: Okay.

P: Which at that time was really, heavily bombed. As a matter of fact when we got there you couldn't even get into the harbor itself because the harbor was filled with a lot of sunken and half sunken ships.

N: Our or theirs?

P: Some of both.

N: Some of both, yes?

P: Yes, and when we got off of the ship we had to...They had a thing set up somehow where we walked across about four of these different ships. They had put planks and things across these ships.

N: And you walked from ship to ship on a plank?

P: Yes, on planks.

N: Now these ships were sunken?

P: Yes, sunken and half sunken.

N: And you just...Jesus.

P: And this is the only way that you could get to land.

N: They couldn't even get you a barge?

P: Well, I am sure that they could. I am sure that they had barges, but you know when you are pulling in (I don't know how many troops ships a day) and into a port like that they would be there forever unloading guys.

N: But that had to be a hell of a feeling though getting off of a boat and walk on a boat that is half way in the water you know?

P: Yes, apparently they assumed or felt that it was safe or they wouldn't have done it.

N: Yes.

P: I can see the wisdom of it.

N: Well, it made sense to stay there anyway, basically

just utilize it.

P: You know the docks themselves were inaccessible.

N: The other ships that you were talking about, were they German ships and Italian ships? Or basically German?

P: Well, I think that they were mostly German ships. I don't know if there were many or any American ships. I think that what at the time they felt that they could slow down our war effort even by scuttling some of their own ships that were there.

N: Yes, that would make sense too.

P: Yes, and it made sense to them to slow us down by denying us access to the harbor.

N: That's my point sure.

P: Yes.

N: When you got to Italy did you move out from there? Was that going to be your station?

P: Well, they put us on a train and the train moved out to I don't know how many miles, maybe twenty or twenty-five miles to a little town called Bagnoli.

N: Bagnoli? Yes, I know where Bagnoli is at.

P: Well, there is a couple of Bagnoli's.

N: There is? Really?

P: Yes. This Bagnoli...I am trying to remember...I met some people from Niles. There are a lot of Bagnoli people in Niles. Erpino...Erpino, Bagnoli. And this is a different Bagnoli. This is a small town where they have a college.

N: Would it be north, south, or east of Naples now?

P: This would be north.

N: North?

P: North of Naples. The other Bagnoli I forget where it is. It is Bagnoli Erpino. I think that is further inland and it is up in the province of Abruzzi, which you know is a bit of a hike from where this Bagnoli is. This Bagnoli was almost seaside, the Mediterranean. But we were there. They put us up there in that college. We slept on marble floors over there. We were there I don't know I think three or four days. Then they took

us down to a train station and the train took us across the mountains to a town called Bari. It is on the Adriatic.

N: B-a-r-i?

P: Yes. From there they put us on a plane (some DC-3's).

N: The "Old Gooney Bird?"

P: Yes, the "Old Gooney Bird." They put us on DC-3's and they flew us up to our base.

N: Okay, where was that located at?

P: Well, that was located in Cerignola.

N: Boy, how do you spell that one?

P: C-e-r-i-g-n-o-l-a.

N: You were still in Italy then?

P: Yes. And this is where our base was--the 454 bomb group.

N: 454 bomb group?

P: Yes.

N: What part of the Air Force was that attached to? The eighth?

P: The fifteenth.

N: The fifteenth Air Force. What squadron were you with?

P: The 738th squadron.

N: The 738th squadron. So you were with the 454 bomb group.

P: Now the designations were the fifteen Air Force, 304th wing, 454th bomb group.

N: 304th wing?

P: Wing, right.

N: Okay. And 454th bomb group.

P: Correct. Then the squadron.

N: The 738 squadron.

P: That is kind of breaking it down. The 304th wing encompassed four bomb groups.

N: Okay.

P: Each bomb group had four squadrons.

N: Had four squadrons.

P: Right.

N: What were the numerical figures of these squadrons?

P: The numbers?

N: Yes, the numbers.

P: Well, ours was 736, 737, 738, and 739.

N: Okay.

P: In the wing was the 454th, 455th, 456th, and 459th.

N: Okay. One guy was telling me, if I remember correctly he said, I asked him what were his squadrons and he said, "I forget the name but they were the 350 or something like that and he hit me with an odd number and I said, " Wait a minute, how come it goes clear from three hundred to five?" He said, "It is simple because when they had new aircraft come in, these squadrons would hit you with a numerical number (hundred) away from there always and that is how you know that is was a new squadrons from another outfit from somewhere else." They had replacements that is why.

P: I never heard of that. I never did. I am not saying that its not true, but I never heard of it.

N: Yes, he told me that it was considered a replacement squadron that came in from somewhere else and he said that they hit him with a new number altogether. There is normally one hundred...

P: Only in reading did I find that...like in our group, the 454th, it was formed in Charleston, South Carolina and went overseas as a group. And the way that I understood it was...you know I was not part of that original group. We went in as a replacement crew, but the way that I understood it was when they moved the whole group over like that there it was strictly on a replacement basis or a rotation basis you know.

N: So, the guys went in with their own groups then? With their own bombers?

P: Yes, they went with their own, they were part of that group when they were formed here, Stateside.

N: That is why I couldn't understand when this guy told me. He said, "No, as a replacement. He said they added groups and he became a replacement squadron." I said, "Well, whatever."

P: Well, I think...And it isn't that I say that I am one hundred percent right, because you know time tends to fad a lot of these things and change some of your thoughts and you don't realize that you have changed them. I located a couple of years ago a fellow who was in my crew and living in Milwaukee, and when I contacted him and was able to talk to him he doesn't remember so many of the things that I remember...to the point that he had me doubting my own memory you know?

N: Sure.

P: And I honestly can't feel that I lost that much of it. I may have lost a step or two along the way as a lot of people will, but there were just some things that he came up with that I couldn't make any sense out of.

N: Well, sure after awhile too you know you do start to take a little bit from here and a little bit from here and put them together.

P: Yes, and I think that as time goes on probably you tend to embellish a little more. It becomes a little bit more "I" rather than "we." Hopefully, I have not fallen into that.

N: Well, it sounds to me that you still have a very good memory. You know what you are talking about. You haven't lost that.

P: Well, it had a big impact on my life and that is not to put down someone else, but some people take these things and they are able to discard them as time goes by they are able to discard them. This fellow I was telling you about in Milwaukee, he couldn't remember our squadron number. He couldn't remember the plane number on the plane that we flew. We flew the same airplane for the largest part of our missions.

N: What was your tail number?

P: He couldn't remember and these are things that I find really hard to understand. These are the guys that are able to put these things aside and forget them. Whether they do it willingly or subconsciously I don't know.

N: Well, some people it doesn't phase them to the point where they want to forget.

P: Yes, I am sure that some of them are so traumatized over it that they want it out of their minds and they will get it out of their minds.

N: What was your tail number by the way? Before I forget to ask you?

P: Our tail number?

N: Yes.

P: Well, they went by the last...I know the whole number. But it was designated by the last three numbers...

N: The last three numbers?

P: Yes, and it was 542. But the whole number was 4251542.

N: Okay. So, you flew out of the air base...what was the name again? Cerignola?

P: Cerignola. Well, they called it Foggia because Foggia was the nearest big town. And there were a lot of air bases in that area.

N: Were you able to get into town a lot?

P: Yes.

N: How did the Italians treat you when you got into town?

P: Well, they had you set up on a twenty-four hour basis. Every day at 5:00 you went up to the headquarters building and on the bulletin board...

N: 5:00 a.m.?

P: No, 5:00 p.m.

N: Okay.

P: So, every day at 5:00 p.m. you went up and they had a roster up for the following days mission-if there is a mission scheduled the next day. If there was a mission scheduled it didn't always mean that your particular airplane was going. Sometimes they would have two missions going out of the same base because if it was a small target they are liable to send them in two different directions.

So, when you went up at 5:00 p.m. and if your crew was

up there to be on deck the next morning for briefing you had to sign the roster and you had to be there. The big problem was when the roster went up if you weren't scheduled to fly you couldn't go any place that it took you more than twenty-four hours to get back, because you had to be there at 5:00 p.m. the next day to check the roster. They didn't hold your hand and they didn't tell you that you are going to get a licking if you don't...

So, if you had plans and you wanted to do something, we were not too far away from where my mother and dad were born.

N: Oh, really? Son of a gun.

P: Yes. It was just a matter of from the air base to where they were born and to where they had family.

N: Yes? When you wrote home to your mom and dad did you tell them that...

P: I was able to tell them that I was close to their home town, which was all that I could tell them.

N: I see.

P: You could not mention names.

N: Names, okay.

P: But you had to be able to do it in twenty-four hours, and this was about...or probably one hundred and twenty-five kilometers, which is less than one hundred miles. But the transportation was so bad. I mean you didn't jump in the car and go you got out on the road and you hitchhiked.

N: Oh, gee.

P: The only thing that you could hope to catch was Army vehicles and you hoped that they were going in the right direction. So, I tried it one day and I didn't get far at all because first of all the town that they were from was over the mountains and there was no reason for Army vehicles to be going over there. It was a little town. There was no industry. All they did was fish. So, you know what interest does anybody have in going over there. So, as a result I had never gotten over there.

N: That is a shame.

P: I made it over there four years ago.

N: Oh, did you?

P: I finally went. So, any way that is where they set you up on the flight schedule.

N: Once you were picked for a flight what time was the briefing? Explain a typical day? What did you do when you got up?

P: Okay, on a typical day they would get you up around 4:00 and go to mess, got to briefing. Briefing told you where the target was for that day. If you've ever seen the movies it was just like you see in the movies, which is a rarity that the movies are...

N: That the movies are right.

P: But they would do it that way. They would have a map on the wall and a cover over it and after everybody was in and seated and everybody seated according to their jobs—you know pilots and navigators and so on, and they would raise the blind on this thing and they would show you where the targets were.

It showed you the primary, they showed you the secondary, and after the primary and secondary if you ran into problems you know as rain or cloud cover or fighter interception, or whatever reason there could be for not reaching a primary target... Weather usually was the biggest problem in reaching a primary target.

Then you went to the secondary and from the secondary they would tell you to pick a target of opportunity. In other words whatever you see down there don't come back with those bombs. Use them somewhere.

N: Twenty-four wasn't pressurized was it?

P: There were no pressurized airplanes... Well, the twenty-nine was pressurized I understand that certain areas of that twenty-nine were pressurized. They had a tunnel that went from the front to the back...I understand that was pressurized because they couldn't keep you on oxygen.

N: But you guys were on oxygen most of the time?

P: Yes, we were on oxygen all of the time.

N: Did you have the flight suit that you plug into the wall?

P: Yes.

N: Okay.

P: But seventeen's, twenty-four's, twenty-five's, and twenty-six's there was no pressurization at that time.

N: Once you got your assignment and so forth what were your duties as a radio man? Did you have to go to another...

P: Okay, this is when I wanted to talk you on the phone this is what I wanted to bring out. Unless you flew lead or deputy lead for the group...

N: What do you mean deputy lead?

P: That was the second in command.

N: Okay.

P: Usually, when they put up a squadron, a squadron consisted hopefully of twelve airplanes. There were four Echelons of three airplanes in each Echelon.

N: Four Echelon, okay.

P: Yes. The first Echelon was...And you know what an Echelon is?

N: Yes.

P: One of these. The first Echelon was the guy who was the lead plane and he normally was the squadron commander or sometimes the group commander. Sometimes squadron commanders took their turns moving into the lead plane. Normally, it was supposed to be held down by the group commander so when you flew that position, which they called lead, or if you flew deputy lead, which was the plane to its immediate right. In case the first plane got shot down the second plane was supposed to take over. Outside of those two airplanes there was radio silence maintained all of the time. The only time that you broke radio silence was the lead or deputy lead airplane and they would communicate back to the base what the results of the bomb strike was. And that was always done by one of those two airplanes. So, unless you flew lead or deputy lead really all of the radio training that you had was down the tubes. You never used it.

N: You never used it all?

P: You never used it. We flew deputy lead one time after we had had I've forgotten how many missions we had in, and they put us into their deputy spot. The only thing that I had to do was to have all of the frequencies that were assigned for that day for you know getting

back to the base, for air-to-air communication, air-to-ground communication, IFF, and anything that involved communication within the squadron or within the group. But I didn't get a chance to use it because the deputy lead is the one that takes that over. You didn't even communicate...You didn't communicate air-plane-to-airplane, air-to-air.

N: Why?

P: Because anything that went out over the air they felt could be intercepted. So, as a result...And eventually it evolved into the bombing that you did.

When you went out over a target every airplane had a bombardier. Every airplane had a bomb site, but these bombardiers eventually became to be know as "togglers." They were called "togglers," because the only guy that would really have the bomb site work was the guy in the lead plane.

N: That is interesting. The B-17 guys told me the same story.

P: The same story?

N: Except they told me that they eventually took out the bomb sites for the other planes and the only other guy that had the bomb site was the guy in the lead.

P: The guy in the lead.

N: And they called him a toggler.

P: Yes. Well, they didn't do that while I was there. They may have done it eventually, but the only guy that used that bomb site...

N: Gee, and all of that training that you had went right down the toilet.

P: Down the tubes.

N: Did you guys talk about that at all? Did you feel...

P: Oh, sure, sure. You know you felt like you wasted all of this time. Of course you got an education.

N: Yes.

P: As far as I was personally concerned I didn't feel that it was a waste of an education, but it was a waste of time as far as getting these guys over there to get into the war effort.

N: Gee, it would have seemed to me that they could have had some guy go to school naturally because if they got shot down or wounded or what have you they have someone to take their places, but you could have almost put anybody in those positions out there.

P: So, you've already heard that story you know. They call them togglers. There was actually a toggle switch that they could hit this toggle switch and the bombs would go just the same as if they were tracked with the bomb site, but they dropped the bombs on the lead planes. When they saw the lead planes... When this bomb... When the first one showed up falling away from that bomb bay that is when everybody dropped.

N: That amazed me when the guy first told me that they would do something like that.

P: Yes.

N: What time frame are we talking about now that you are in Italy? Pulgia?

P: Well, I got there in June.

N: June of 1944?

P: Yes. I forgot when, the early part of June because we left in May.

N: Okay, how many missions did you go on before you were shot down?

P: We were on number thirty-three.

N: You had two more to go?

P: No, we did fifty over there.

N: You did fifty missions?

P: Yes, see the twenty-fours had a longer range and that was the reason most of them were based in Italy. Because of the longer range we reached further than the seventeens, and as a result of some of these missions that we went on we would get a double credit on some particular missions that were sometimes as high as thirteen or fourteen hours duration. Now when you hit those...

N: You are talking thirteen, fourteen hours round trip?

P: Yes, and a cold, cold, drafty, noisy airplane that

isn't a whole lot of fun. But I guess when you are nineteen you take it in stride.

N: You know I was telling an instructor the other day that a story was told to me from a B-17 pilot, that they were only allowed to fly twenty-five missions that one time. I asked, "Well, why is that?" And he said, "Well, we eventually flew thirty-five and they stopped it, but at one time we flew twenty-five."

P: Yes, when they first started it was twenty-five.

N: Yes, because he said, "They thought that they were going to become sterile." And I said, "You are kidding me?" And he said, "You never heard that before?" I said, "No." He said, "The doctors actually thought that you would become sterile." Did you hear something like that?

P: Well, they didn't come up with specifics they called it being "flak-happy."

N: Flak-happy?

P: Flak-happy. When we were in Italy not even a set number of missions, but after missions, X-number whatever it was, they sent you on what they called "flak-leave." And with us they sent us down to the Isle of Capri. And this was really more of a...I think that it was more of a mental vacation than physical, because I think that the flying service was more of a mental thing than it was for the poor guys who were the ground-pounders you know and gravel-crunchers. The guys who were in the fox-holes and stuff. I think that it was a more physical thing with them and I think with the Air Force it was more mental; and it was kind of a mental vacation away from...Usually, it was for about a week. Everybody looked forward to it. We never got it. We went thirty-three times and we were scheduled one and they had an all out effort for an invasion for Southern France and they canceled us out and we were supposed to get re-scheduled and we never did.

N: What...You said that you went out for thirty-three missions basically, where did you fly to? Over France? Germany? What?

P: Well, we went up as close as Northern Italy. We went to France. We went to Germany. Most of our targets were at Germany. We went to Greece one time. We went to Yugoslavia. We went to Czechoslovakia. We went to Romania. Romania was one of the biggest targets during the war, because this is where they got all of the oil.

N: Did you ever bomb Ploesti?

P: Yes, we were at Ploesti. We weren't on...We didn't go on "The-low-level Ploesti rate." Which is famous because these guys went in at a tree top level and there were some snipers and they lost a lot of airplanes, and they lost a lot of men. But this was early in the war. This was early in 1943 when they did this low level raid on Ploesti. And eventually we did go back. We went back... Out particular group went back twice, but we hit them at higher levels. We had them at twenty, thirty thousand feet.

N: I was talking to one guy who got shot down over at Ploesti and he spent some time over in Romainia and in the POW camp. What were some of the most memorable type of raids that you remember? Do one or two stick out specifically? Before you got shot down, obviously that had to stick in your mind, but other than that?

P: Other than that? Well, there was one just a couple missions before we got shot down we went to Munich and they had covered the target with smoke, you know the smoke that they used-smoke pots.

N: Oh, yes? it looked like one big fog then?

P: Yes, we had...There was radar to a point, what they called "Mickey." They used to call them Mickey ships.

N: Mickey ships?

P: Mickey ships. Mickey ships had the ability to see through the clouds and the cloud cover and smoke cover.

N: Oh, really?

P: They had the ability of seeing through this, but this is one plane that went in then normally dropped markers where an obscure target would be. Obscured by man-made methods or nature. And these guys would go in and the Mickey ship would go in first and drop these markers and then we came along behind them and we dropped on those markers.

N: Markers?

P: Yes, and we were going into Munich and all hell was just breaking loose. There were fighters and there were 109's that caught us before we got on to the target. Once you start on your bomb run and they seem to know. They all kind of lay back.

N: They know that the flak is coming?

P: Yes, because they could be caught in their own flack

you know. So, they kind of laid back and we made our bomb run and we got several hits, several flack hits. And when we got off of the target these guys jumped us again. There were three of them and they just made one pass and then they left. And about that time we started assessing some of our damage. Well, we had lost some hydraulics. We had lost some radios which normally would not have been important, but we felt "You are allowed to communicate if you are in an emergency situation." But we had lost the radios and then all of sudden here comes an airplane. A single-engine airplane. It was our first sighting of a German jet fighter.

N: Oh, you did see one then?

P: Yes, as a matter of fact we saw two of them. We saw one on a mission following this one. This was a single-engine and they called it an "ME-163." And they made a pass at us. They made a roll, a head on roll right through our formation and left. They didn't hit anybody, but when we went back we had to go over the Alps. Well, we had lost hydraulics. We were losing fuel and we weren't sure that we could get up high enough to get over the Alps. And the pilot was asking for...He asked the navigator for the heading to Switzerland. You could land in Switzerland but you would be interned, but you would not be termed as a prisoner because Switzerland was a neutral country.

N: Yes, okay.

P: You could land there. They didn't want you to land there but you could, and they would take you. They would put you in jail.

N: The Swiss?

P: Yes, but they didn't treat you as a prisoner-as a war prisoner because they were not at war. And the way that I understand it was that there could have been Germans there too that did the same thing.

N: Son of a gun.

P: So, we were thinking about, "Well, maybe we are going to be going to Switzerland?" Which may not be a bad deal, but we were able to get over the mountains only because the pilot said, "Well, you know we are going to have to try and get back." We had to jettison everything out of the airplane. We jettisoned some guns, we jettisoned ammunition. We threw everything out. We threw our parachutes out.

N: Parachutes too?

P: Parachutes, everything went out.

N: Gee.

P: Oxygen bottles, tanks, everything that wasn't tied down. We were trying to figure out a way to drop the ball turret because it would have been easy. . . If we would have had the tools we could have dropped the ball turret, lightening the load considerably you know, but we didn't have the tools. So, we barely got back. We had a lot of holes in that airplane when we got home.

N: Give you something to talk about that night that's for sure huh?

P: Yes, yes, and prior to that I mentioned that we had gone to Greece. And we bombed a German air field over there, and I remember going over that target. The first time I had seen brown flack. Flack is black, just puffs of black smoke you know. And this stuff was brown.

N: Why is that?

P: I don't know. I don't know. They claimed that they were shooting bigger shells at us. They used eighty-eights. The eighty-eights were the popular anti-aircraft...Well, actually they used them as anti-aircraft shells, but these were brown and they claimed that they were bigger. They were throwing something bigger at us. And we used to have what we called a "Flack suit." It was like the catcher's vest. Like the catcher's chest protector.

N: Chest protector.

P: Front and back. And we used to put them on when we would go over a target because we knew that's when usually the flack was going to be the heaviest. And I had my flack suit on and we had an extra one on board and I had taken this flack suit and I had kind of pulled it up over my head this way and on this side of me was the ammunition box that was fed into the gun. So, I felt well, if any flack comes this way, I will be protected from this side and I will pull this thing from up over here. So, anyway to make a long story short when we got off of the target I took the flack suit off and dropped the one that I was holding and when I dropped the one that I was holding I looked down and here stuck in the flack suit was a piece of shrapnel. It was probably four inches long.

N: Oh, gee.

P: And you know all jagged and it was stuck. These flack

suits are metal and are layers of metal. They are kind of laid together like this with a fabric covering on them.

N: That is the one that you are holding up like this?

P: That is the one that I was holding up like this.

N: Oh, gee. Did you keep it for a souvenir?

P: Oh, yes. I picked it up and stuck it in my pocket. But unfortunately when I got shot down it didn't come home with my personal effects.

N: You didn't?

P: No.

N: I was talking to a guy that has got one piece in his turret, stuck right in his windshield and he took it home.

P: Yes, you could find it really, because these shells get up there and they burst. And sometimes they would be spent you know by force because these things blast off into a hundred pieces, and they fall into the airplane. They had instances where the whole shell, the whole eighty-eight shell would come up into a Bombay or up into a waist position and just kind of when it hit the super structure of the airplane it would just get in and then fall and lay there.

N: Without going off?

P: Yes, without going off. They were duds.

N: Oh, that had to scare the hell out of you?

P: Fortunately that never happened to me, but I heard tales like that.

N: Gee, yes, my God. Okay, where were you shot down over? What city? Germany or what?

P: No, this was in Austria.

N: In Austria?

P: In Vienna.

N: In Vienna?

P: Yes.

N: So, you got shot down in your thirty-third mission over

Vienna, Austria? What were you supposed to be bombing that day and did you get shot down before you dumped all your bombs or was it afterwards?

P: If we had not gotten rid of the bombs we would have never made it, because we got a direct hit in the bomb bay.

N: Oh, okay.

P: Because it was a matter of just seconds after we dropped our bombs.

N: What was your target for that day that you did?

P: The target was an oil refinery-the Winterhoff. I remember the name. The Winterhoff Oil Refinery.

N: Winterhoff Oil Refinery, okay.

P: That was in Vienna.

N: Did you take flack or get shot down?

P: Flack. Actually, we got three hits almost simultaneous. We got hit in the nose. We got hit in the number three engine, which would be, you know how they count them?

N: Yes, starting from the left.

P: Starting from the left.

N: Right, okay.

P: One, two, three. It would be the in board on the right side.

N: On the right side, yes.

P: We got hit on number three and immediately the whole wing just went. The nose blew up and then the hit in the bomb bay broke the airplane in half body-wise. This way. From here on out it went and when we got hit in the bomb bay. It broke in half. Just half of the wing broke off and that is where I was back there. I was flying waist-gunner.

N: Oh, you were a waist-gunner that day. So, they had taken you off of the radio and put you on a waist-gunner?

P: Yes, that is normally what they did. They would either put you on the top turret or in the waist. I was qualified, actually I was qualified for all of turrets except the nose. They had a martin turret at the top

and a Sperry turret on the ball and I was qualified for both of them.

N: So, you are the section then that is obviously dropping off from the rest of the plane. The tail section?

P: Yes.

N: How in the hell did you get out?

P: Through the grace of God.

N: That had to be a miracle to get out of there? What did you do?

P: Actually, you know we had chest packs for parachutes.

N: Yes.

P: I don't know if you are familiar with chest packs?

N: Yes, the guys have all been telling me about that.

P: Okay. Well, they snap on. You have your harness on all of the time, but you don't have your chute on because it is bulky and it is right in front; but it is always handy. So, when we got hit you don't realize what happened. All you know is bang you know something happened here and the next thing that you know I am pinned to the floor. This part of the airplane is going down and centrifugal force is holding me to the floor of the plane.

N: Oh, really?

P: And when I was able to gather my thoughts I looked up and where the bomb bay was, all I could see was sky. There was no bomb bay.

N: That had to be an eerie feeling?

P: Yes, and it was quiet. And at that point it had started to burn because there are fuel transfer lines that run through the bomb bay and when the...I don't know whether the engineer was in the process of transferring fuel or what because normally there wasn't supposed to be any gasoline in those lines. He might have been in the process of transferring fuel and didn't turn it off or whatever and when we got the hit it started to fire. And the back section was burning as well as the front section I guess. So, I found out later. But when the thing went into a kind of a flat spin was when you could try and figure out what was going on and I reached down and the parachute was sitting next to me here on the floor. I picked up the chute and I put it

on because I felt that I was going to have to get out of here you know. Herkimer, who was our pilot had brought us through some pretty tough scraps and this is where I thought this is one that the "Herk" isn't going to make. So, about the time that I put the chute on I kind of looked to my left and here is my ball - turret gunner he is sitting, if you are familiar with the ball - turret at all it's actually up inside the plane. If you get it into a certain guns down position there is a door that opens and you could come out.

N: Right.

P: And he was sitting kind of half in and half out of the turret.

N: Oh, he was still in there?

P: Yes, he was in when we went over the target, but they are always...When you went over the target in a turret you always put it in that position in case you got hit so that you could get out.

N: I see, okay.

P: And you could retract it. The guys inside can retract, manually they retract the ball and bring it up inside; but there was none of that but he was kind of half in and half out when we got hit. I looked down and there he was. He didn't even have his chute on yet. So, his chute...He always kept two of them. He kept one on either side of the ball - turret. So, he kind of reached over and put his on and got out of the turret. And about that time it went into another tight spin and we were both hanging on to...There was a column, a steel column that runs from the top of the plane to the ball - turret. It kind of holds it in and also serves as kind of a shaft for when they crank it up and when they can pull it up into the plane. so, we are hanging on to this thing with all of this open sky over here and like I said, you don't realize it till it is all over you know just what has happened. All that I had to do was relax my grip long enough and I would have been gone you know out of that gapping hole there that was formerly the bomb bay.

So, anyway then, it came down again to where it was kind of in a flat spin and he looked at me and I looked at him and I went like this to him and he went like that to me and I was actually standing a little closer to going out you see. So, finally then, it was expeditious for me to go first and I went out and pulled the rip cord and then of course the rest is history. And I was never sure whether he got out and he used to nag me. I found out many years later. As a matter of fact

about two years ago I found him. He was from St. Louis, the ball - turret gunner.

N: And all this time you never knew if he made it or not?

P: No, we were told when we came down in Germany and all of these other things happened and we wound up in the interrogation center in a little town called Wetzlar outside of Frankfurt. They had a big interrogation center there. This German interrogator had told me that everybody got out of the plane except the top-turret gunner, who was the flight engineer; and the co-pilot. The co-pilot was on his first mission. He was a first pilot who was flying with us as a co-pilot to see how an experienced crew worked - what you did, how you did it, where you did it. And he was supposed to be you know just there and kind of an indoctrination and he never made it out.

N: But you did know that the tail gunner made it out then?

P: Yes, then but you know of course you can't believe these people because they are Germans and you don't know what the hell they are telling you.

N: Yes, sure.

P: When I got to the interrogation center they said that...the guy spoke perfect English. He told me where he went to school. He went to Colgate.

N: He went to school in Colgate?

P: Yes, he was a graduate of Colgate University and spoke perfect English. He started asking me questions. He said, "That's alright, I'm not going to ask you any questions." he said, "You know the rules and I know the rules." He said, "I can only ask you your name, rank, and serial number." I said, "That's right." I said, "So, why belabor this thing ." So, I gave him my name, rank and serial number. And then he said, "I'm going to tell you about you." And he is sitting at this desk and he has all of these books like big loose-leaf binders. And he starts pulling books out and he pulled a book out and opened it up and he starts telling me about me - where I went to high school, where I took my training, when I got overseas, the bomb group that I was in, the squadron, the target that we hit that day, told me about my mother and my dad being foreign born. And you know, we were told in briefing that when you get into a situation like this what the Germans were looking for was confirmation. They think that they know a lot of things but they are not real sure until they get a confirmation from somebody. And at this point I don't think that he was looking for confirmation ever because

I had been in a hospital. I had been in Budapest, Hungary and by the time I had gotten to this interrogation center about two months had gone by so anything that I had told him would not have been much use to him anyway because it wasn't current and it wasn't fresh and he knew that. And he told me that these were the only two guys that were killed and that is what I said, I never really knew for sure whether this guy got out or not or whether any of them got out.

N: Let me ask you this question. I brought this up to my teacher the other day we were talking about...I said, "you know every guy that I have talked to has said the same thing and we could bring out a book and tell a guy when he went to high school, he talked a little about his parents, his upbringing, his schools or colleges, where he went to, all his training that he had in the military and so forth; and he seemed shocked and amazed because he had never heard that before. He said, "How do you suppose it got there?"

P: The instructor?

N: My instructor yes, and he is well familiar with the military. He said, "How do you suppose they knew all of this?" I said, "I can only guess back in the States that they may have had somebody back in the States going through old newspapers and things of that nature, assigned in different areas because you know how we are with the Freedom of the Press you know as soon as you graduate from school or..."

P: Everything is there.

N: Everything is right there and maybe cutting all of this stuff out." What do you think?

P: You know apparently, I didn't say anything to this guy. The first thing that he did was offer me an American cigarette. He had a pack of cigarettes on the desk. He had a pack of Lucky Strikes. He had offered me a cigarette. Well, at the time I was smoking a pack a week.

N: I was going to say that Lucky Strikes were something else at that time for him to have.

P: Well, sure we weren't getting them.

N: That's for sure.

P: We were getting them overseas but we weren't getting them State side. We were getting some off brand cigarettes. But this guy offered me a cigarette after he spiel off all of this stuff about me and he said, "You're amazed, aren't you at what we know about you?"

You know what can you say I shrugged my shoulders. There again I am thinking that well they told me in briefing that this is what they are looking for. They are looking for confirmation. So, I try not to express any views. But he said, "Let me tell you... He said, "Your intelligence agency knows as much about us as we do about you."

N: Oh, really?

P: Yes. He said, "So, don't be surprised." He said, "That is the way the game is played."

N: I'll be damned.

P: He said, "Your intelligence knows as much about us as we do about you."

N: That's amazing. Now I still wonder how he did it?

P: I don't know. You would think gee here I am I am a little spoke in this great big wheel you know. Why would they want to know about me?

N: Yes.

P: Why would they go to all of this bother and trouble to find out of about a little old menial gunner that is one of thousands of guys flying over everything? Why would they be interested in knowing about me?

N: I guess, the only thing that I can think of it must be the psychological effect that they figured it may have had you know?

P: Yes, well they play a psychological game.

N: That is the only thing that I can think of.

P: They did with my pilot. They did this with my pilot. They played psychological games with him. I found out later you know because I didn't think that he got out, but he did and they played games with him. They threw him in solitary and didn't feed him and all kinds of things.

N: What did they do with you after he told you about all of this stuff? Now you are in Vienna right?

P: No, no, this was in Frankfurt.

N: Oh, this is in Frankfurt. Well, let's go back to Vienna. You bailed out of your aircraft and where did you land, in an open field?

P: Well, I landed right next to the Danube River. You know the Danube runs right through Vienna. I landed right next to the Danube River. I was burnt. I was badly burnt.

N: Because of the gasoline?

P: Yes, the gasoline. All of my head and my face.

N: You obviously didn't leave any scars. I don't see any.

P: No, the only scars that I have and you can't see I have a few back here which is where I was really burnt the worst and I think that the skin might be a little more thin and tender in those areas back there. I had some other scars around my nose and around my mouth. They eventually went away. And after I landed on the other side of the river was where the fires were burning that we had started when we had dropped our bombs over this oil refinery and oil storage tanks. And I could see people over there. A lot of people running back and forth and I think that they were mostly civilians fighting fires.

We have what they call an "Escape Kit." I am sure that you have heard about those.

N: Yes.

P: So, I opened up my escape kit and I knew basically the Danube River runs the North and the South and if I stuck close to the Danube River I could eventually get down towards Yugoslavia where there were partisans down there. And if you got in with the partisan groups in Yugoslavia the Americans would pay the Yugoslavia partisan groups. You know they were all fighting one another down there. They would all fight the Germans, but they would also fight one another. They all wanted control. So, when you got in with the partisan groups they would get you back to your base and the Americans intern would pay them either in ammunition, guns, or money, or whatever. But there was an agreement with the partisan groups that if there were any downed air men that they found they would get them back and be rewarded for it.

N: Gee, what a way to earn a living.

P: So, anyway I started following the river and as I am following the river I am hearing noises like somebody is following alongside the river. A kind of sloshing. And I kind of ducked down and I looked around and here it is my tail-gunner. The tail-gunner is walking up. So, I saw him and I kind of whispered to him, "George." He sees me and he yells out, "Larry, how are you

doing?" So, anyway to make a long story short we got together and we decided...He was burnt too and we decided that we had to get back and we had to get back in a hurry because we needed some medical attention. So, we took a road. We got the map out and we took a road and it looked like a fairly, not a main road but still at the same time it looked like it went on down in to Yugoslavia. So, I said, "Well, if we can bear with our burns here you know maybe we can get back. So, we started going along the road, off this road along side, in and around and amongst the trees and bushes and things and every once in awhile people would walk by and of course then we would stop and they would go by in either direction. So, we did this for probably a couple of hours and pretty soon I am hurting and pretty soon he is hurting and we noticed that a lot of these people as I said they were fighting the fires. So, we kind of noticed that a lot of these people had kind of like burnt clothing. Which our clothing was burnt.

N: They weren't paying any attention to you guys?

P: Well, they couldn't see us at this point.

N: Oh, I see okay.

P: We are off of the side of the road and they can't see us.

N: Oh, okay.

P: We are hiding, but moving at the same time and this road is running kind of along side of the river. So I said, "George, why don't we take a chance. Let's get up on the road. So, our clothes were burnt and maybe they won't even notice us." We got up on the road and I'll bet you a dozen of people passed us going in both directions and nobody said a word to us. And finally, there was a group of about seven men, civilians. They were walking towards us and George was a little prone to taking the easy way out and he said, "I think that he spotted us?" I said, "Don't pay any attention." He said, "But I think that they spotted us." I said, "Don't pay any attention George just keep walking." So, we walked and this group as they came closer to us looked at us you know. They keep looking at us and then they walked on by and then George made the mistake of... He kept turning around.

N: Oh, gee.

P: I said, "George don't turn around just keep walking. Pretend like you are talking and keep walking." He said, "I think that they spotted me." I said, "No, they didn't keep walking." So, finally he turned around and

said, "I think that we better stop because they have a gun." One of the guys had a gun. As soon as he said gun I said, "Okay, George I'll stop." So, we stopped and these guys came back and they were civilians and they started talking you know. So, finally they wanted to know if we were English and I said, "No, Americans." And they started shaking our hands.

N: Oh, yeah?

P: Yes, they didn't like the English.

N: Why is that?

P: I don't know and they signified that by you know words that I am sure were not complimentary but...So, anyway finally I said to one of the guys, I said, "Tu parles l'italiano lei?" So, you know that I know a little Italian. So, it turns out that one of these guys speaks some Italian. We finally got a common ground you know. So, the next thing that you know they are whisking us away and I told George, "We got the right people. They are going to be on our side." They took us to a house that was kind of...We walked for a little bit and it seemed to be a house all by itself and they took us to this house and they gave us wine, they gave us food, they gave us sandwiches, and cookies and this one guy was talking Italian and I am trying to get through to him that we want to go down to Yugoslavia and they get us there and in this escape kit you have American money. There is \$50.00 in American money and at that time \$50.00 was...

N: A lot of money.

P: A lot of money. So, I asked George I said, "George do you have your escape kit?" He said, "No, I threw it away." I said, "What the hell did you do that for?" He said, "Well, it was attached to the parachute harness and...He said, I just got out of the parachute harness and I left everything there." What a dummy. You know they had morphine in there for if you were hurt you could give yourself a shot of morphine.

N: You had fishing gear and everything in there.

P: Yes, fishing. And it was all in a little package. There was even a little candy bar in there, the maps.

N: George wasn't too bright was he?

P: No, he wasn't. George was a drinker.

N: George is probably thinking, "The hell with the candy bar and the fish give me the booze."

P: Yes, there is no line in there if we get it. So, anyway he didn't have it and I am digging the \$50.00 out to give to this guy so he can get us back you know. And it was about that time that the door came open and in walked these three guys and they were either...I don't know whether they were Gestapo, the police...They weren't in uniform. They were not in uniform, but they were German officials of some kind. I don't think the Gestapo bothered themselves with situations like this. The Gestapo was the strong arm of the German...I can't say army because they covered the whole thing. Gestapo was army and military.

So, anyway they hauled us away and put us into a car. We were going down a road and by this time it was dark. It was real dark. I don't know what time it was but it was dark and we were going right by this Winterhoff Oil Refinery and it is just burning. I mean it's burning. Flames fifty feet and up.

N: Really?

P: Yes, in the sky.

N: What time during the day had you bombed that?

P: Well, our ETA if I remember was right around two o'clock.

N: Around two?

P: Yes.

N: Okay.

P: So, at this time it is dark. It is October.

N: October, okay.

P: It is going to be darker.

N: October what? What is the date on that?

P: October 7th.

N: October 7th?

P: Yes, and apparently this guy was driving, could not... Well, they were pointing to the fires and yelling at us like, "This is your doing and you are going to pay for it." And the next thing I know apparently there was a bomb crater in the road because this little car, I don't know if it was a Volkswagen or what, but we are in this bomb crater and it knocks me out and I am not

aware of anything for I don't know how long.

N: Who knocked you out? What knocked you out?

P: Well, going into this bomb crater and I hit my head on something in the car you know and they...I just vaguely remember a bunch of guys pulling this car out of this bomb crater and getting back into the car, but everything as I said that point was kind of fuzzy because I had been knocked on the head and they drove us to an airbase where they put us into a lock up and at this airbase I saw my bombardier. He was sitting on a table and they were giving him a shot. Some guy in a white coat was there and he was giving him a shot. At that time the Germans, or the Europeans instead of giving you a shot in the arm they used to give you a shot right here.

N: In the chest?

P: Yes, right through threw the fleshy part of the hands.

N: The upper torso, yes.

P: Yes.

N: Or the breast part.

P: I remember the bombardier sitting there and we spoke of course and he hadn't been hurt but he was getting a shot for something and I just saw him momentarily and then they whisked us into another room where they put salve on us. On our face and stuff. They put bandages on and put us in this lock up. And they left us in the lock up for three days.

N: They just left you there for three days?

P: Yes.

N: Any food or water?

P: They brought us water occasionally, but they never brought us any food. Then on the third day they came and got us out and what happened to my bombardier I don't know. I have never been able to find out since. They took us out and put us on a truck and took us to a train station put us on a train and took us to Budapest to a hospital. We were in the hospital with some Russians until...It was November, late November sometime. We were in this hospital.

N: What was the hospital like? Did they treat you fair really in the hospital? Did you get your fill of food?

P: Well, it was a Hungarian hospital but it was...The Germans were very much in evidence. They were...They controlled Hungary at that time. And we were there and the treatment wasn't too bad. The only bad treatment, actually it wasn't bad treatment. In the three days that this dressing or this salve or what it was that they had put on us had dried up and we had severe burns and when they got around to changing the dressings on our burns the salve had all dried up and it stuck to our face.

N: The gauze.

P: The only time that I can ever remember passing out from pain they started pulling that off and I am screaming and my tail gunner he is on the next roll away cart over there and they are doing the same thing to him and he is screaming. I don't know what happened to him. I don't know whether he passed out. I passed out. I passed out from the pain for which at that point I was grateful.

N: Yes.

P: It was the next best thing to an anesthetic.

N: Yes.

P: But from then on they took fairly good care of you they changed the bandages regularly. And we were there until like late November and I saw some cases there that would just absolutely turn your stomach and break you right up. There was a guy there who was a tail gunner on a B-17 and he couldn't get out of the plane and the plane took fire. And he was a Jewish fellow from New York and he was burnt so badly. His head...There was nothing on his head just some scars and some scabs and stuff and he had a little fringe hair in the back. He had no ears.

N: Oh, gee.

P: All of his ears you know that hangs out was gone. He had no eyelids. His eyelids were totally burned away. His nose was burned away.

N: Oh, my God.

P: And all you could see was two holes.

N: Two holes.

P: Two holes right here and his mouth was like this.

N: The size of a quarter?

P: Yes.

N: And that was it?

P: The size of the quarter. And he was in misery, naturally.

N: Yes, sure.

P: He had been there awhile and a lot of the stuff that started to heal to the point where they had a surgeon there who did an operation to...A plastic surgeon who did a, supposed to have put an eyelid on one eye because prior to that when they told you lights out in the ward a lot of the guys they would close the black out shutters but they would leave the lights on and this guy one night he got so upset he got up on the bed and started to scream. He said, "They told you a hour ago lights out, some of you guys can sleep when the lights are on, some of you guys don't want to go to sleep. I would like to go to sleep, but I can't because I don't have any eyelids. I have to have darkness. Now if you don't mind I would like to see you turn the lights out so I can get some sleep." He slept with his eyes open.

N: My God. Was he able to talk perfectly normal?

P: Yes, he talked. It was a bit muffled a lot of the words you know he couldn't get out because they were said within the mouth, but he was perfectly understandable.

N: Poor guy. What ever happened to him?

P: I don't know. I really don't know. I met a guy there from Toledo. He had a leg shot off, it was from about here down. He had the greatest attitude. He used to say...I went to see this guy later. He used to say to me, "Larry, when I get back home I am going to get one of those wooden legs and I'm going to have a place in there for my radio, a place in there for a bottle of beer, a place in there for a newspaper. And I am going to go to the park and I am going to go and sit down and I am going to turn on the radio and I am going to have my beer and read my paper."

N: I'll be dammed.

P: I went to see him a couple of years after I got home. I found him in Toledo and he had opened...He was a radio-operator like myself, and he went and took some further schooling and opened a radio shop and he is doing this radio work. And I went to see him and we had a good time for one night talking about the old times

and at that time it wasn't that old really. It had only been a couple of years.

N: That son of a gun.

P: Another guy there was burnt so badly that they couldn't lay him down in bed. His legs and his arms...He had the same situation. He was caught in the turret and the plane caught fire and they couldn't get him out.

N: Oh, no.

P: Just burnt to a crisp. Burnt to a crisp. And when we left there when the Russians started moving in from the Eastern front and when they started moving in they decided to move us out and this one guy, this second guy that I was telling you about that was burnt so badly, they left him there. They left him in the hospital.

N: Figuring that the Russians could have him?

P: Yes, the Russians would get him and take care of him. Which I think turned out to be wishful thinking because I don't think that the Russians were any better than the Germans. As a matter of fact they might have been a little worse.

N: That is what I have heard.

P: Yes, there was a lot of them that they...The healthy ones anyway, they took them and sent them back to Russia, a lot of them. So, anyway he was the only guy that was left there and I remember the day that we left. He was laying there on that bed in kind of a sling and he is burnt so bad that it was some kind of a it was like a net sling that they had him suspended from these bars around the bed to keep him off of the bed because of the aggravation from the burns that would just drive him you know just drive him insane with the pain. And he was still there. Really not a whole lot aware of what was happening. And we left him there.

N: How many guys did they take out of the hospital at that time when you were in?

P: Well, they evacuated...There were thirty-eight altogether. There were thirty-eight Americans there and there were about twenty Russians. At one time we were all in one big ward and then they eventually took these Russians and moved them into another ward and left us there.

N: So, you guys when they evacuated the hospital did you

see the Russians? Did you mix up with them again?

P: No, I never saw the Russians again.

N: You never saw the Russians again. What happened to you guys then? Did they put you in trucks?

P: No, they put us on a train.

N: They put you on a train?

P: Yes, and the ones who were ambulatory they sent to Frankfurt. This was when they sent me to the interrogation center.

N: So, you are in Frankfurt, okay.

P: Yes, but when we got...There was another town which was called Gyor, which is up in Northwest Hungary, when we got to Gyor and they split the train and the ambulatory guys they left on one train on one part of it and the others they left on the other part and we assumed that eventually there was going to be an engine that came along to hook up to the other train you know, but the train that we were on went right onto Wetslar, which is Frankfurt, where the interagation center was. And we went through interagation there then they put us on a train again and they sent us to a little town by the name of Kiefheide.

N: Kiefheide?

P: Kiefheide.

N: Can you spell that?

P: K-i-e-f-h-e-i-d-e.

N: Okay, Kiefheide, Germany?

P: Yes.

N: Okay.

P: It is a little town near Stettin, which is in the Polish corridor right up on the Baltic Sea.

N: Okay.

P: Are you familiar with it?

N: Yes.

P: I think that that is now called...They changed the name. The Russians changed the name of that town. I

forget what they call it now, but anyway we went up there and that was Stalag Luft Four.

N: Four?

P: Yes.

N: Okay. What was Luft Four like?

P: Luft Four was the permanent camp. Luft Four was the best run camp there that I have been in.

N: How many camps were you in? You went from Frankfurt to...

P: Well, Frankfurt is called the Dulag Luft.

N: Why was it called the Dulag Luft?

P: I think...I don't know exactly what it means, but there were two Duglag Lufts. The Luft meaning of course was...

N: "Air."

P: And that is why I say that they separated the Air Force people from the Infantry or Ground Forces is what we used to call them. They went to Luft Four then from Luft Four we went to Stalag Thirteen.

N: How long were you in Luft Four?

P: Well, we were in Luft Four...We left there in January.

N: January of 1945?

P: Yes, January of 1945.

N: Okay.

P: We left there in January.

N: To go?

P: We went to Stalag Thirteen which is Nurmberg.

N: Nurmberg, okay. All of the guys that I have talked to have so far have said that Nurmberg, Nurmberg, Nurmberg, but nobody has said Stalag Thirteen.

P: It's Stalag Thirteen.

N: Stalag Thirteen, okay.

P: As a matter of fact I think that it is specifically

Thirteen D if I remember right.

N: Okay.

P: But it was Thirteen, anyway they put us on a train and we were on a train eight days.

N: How long were you at Luft Four now? What was the time frame for Luft Four? A couple of months?

P: Luft Four, yes about two months. Over Christmas.

N: Okay.

P: We left there January...

N: How many guys were at Luft Four? Do you remember?

P: I don't know. There was a big camp.

N: And you were in...

P: These were all airmen.

N: All airmen?

P: Yes.

N: Were the huts off of the ground?

P: Yes.

N: Okay.

P: The new ones. They were building new ones and the new ones were off of the ground. They had some there. They had some in another compound that were built on the ground.

N: Did they let the dogs loose at night?

P: Yes.

N: One of the guys was saying that they got up about six or seven o'clock in the morning...Was there anything for you to do when they... He said basically there was nothing for them to do.

P: You asked for a work camp you know work. They called them work or arbeit camps. You'd get into an arbeit camp because that guys at worked got better rations.

N: But you weren't allowed to work because you were an NCO?

P: An NCO right.

N: Okay.

P: And that is one of the times that they stuck to the Geneva Convention Rules.

N: Yes, I bet that that was the only time.

P: Yes.

N: Sure, they figured it out that if you could get a better deal they stuck to the rule.

P: Yes.

N: How were you treated at Luft Four?

P: Luft Four wasn't bad. It truly wasn't. The Red Cross came through the Swiss channels. We regularly got parcels. Food parcels.

N: Oh, you did?

P: Well, what we called parcels.

N: Well, what do you mean regularly? Once a week, once a month?

P: Well, it seems to me that it was probably once a week.

N: Once a week? Was there anything taken...

P: But what they did see was the Red Cross parcel consisted of several things and came in a box so big. Powdered milk, some candy - "D bars" is what they called them, cans of chopped egg yolks, chopped ham, you know food things that they could put in a package that would be preserved, margarine. But what they did when those parcels came through they came into the compound and they went to...The Germans took them into a special room and they opened the packages. They opened the cans and then they distributed these things. And the reason for that was that you couldn't stock pile them for a break out attempt. They found out through experiences apparently at one time they used to give these cans and things out and the guys stock piled it for escapes. When they would escape then they would have some food. They could be independent in trying to get back you know. They would open all of the cans and at the same time you were marked down for "x" number of cans and then so many days later you turned in those cans so they couldn't be used for making weapons, or making anything. So, Red Cross parcels they were fairly, pretty regular.

N: How old were the guards at this place?

P: The guards?

N: Yes, were they old guards, young guards?

P: There was kind of a mixture at this camp.

N: Did they treat you fairly well?

P: Yes, there was really no brutality, no bad things out of the ordinary.

N: Did you guys have...Did you take showers? Most of the guys that I have talked to say that the biggest problem was taking showers and lice.

P: Well, that was a big problem. I am trying to remember...It seems to me that we took a shower maybe once every couple of weeks.

N: Did you have problems with lice because of that?

P: I never had the problem and I don't know of anybody else that had that problem.

N: Okay, some of these guys were telling me that one of there biggest problems was showers and lice.

P: Yes.

N: What appears to me is that depending upon the commander for the prison camp is how the guys were treated.

P: Exactly. See, we had what they call a "Man of Confidence."

N: A what?

P: A "Man of Confidence."

N: A "Man of Confidence." What is that?

P: Well, he was our confidence man and he was our liaison.

N: Oh, he was the liaison? Was he German then?

P: No, no he was American.

N: Oh, American.

P: He was American but he was the liaison with the Germans, and we used to call him a Confidence Man. He was the guy...You didn't go you know...If I had a complaint

I didn't go to the commandant or the oberfeltwebel or the sergeant or whoever, I would go to him.

N: Oh, he was definitely the intermediary?

P: Yes, he was the intermediary. He was the guy and he met with the German official of the camp, you know the commandant and whoever else was involved.

N: Okay, so you guys had established your own chain in the community?

P: Yes, right. That is why I think that it was run so well, because apparently commandant was a fair minded guy and we got everything that we had coming to us as far as things that were sent through the neutral powers - Sweden, Switzerland, there was another country there but I can't remember what it was. So, we didn't hurt for food at that camp.

N: So, you had food then?

P: Well, it was our own?

N: It was your own, yes but none the less you had food?

P: Yes, there was no such thing as a mess hall or anything like that because it wasn't necessary.

N: So, you ate three square meals a day then?

P: Well, whatever you got though Red Cross is what you had.

N: Okay, and you had to ration that?

P: But you can't call that three squares because you know today you might have a can of chop pork and egg yolks and you had some powdered milk that you could mix a glass of milk or if you had a d-bar you could scrape, grate the d-bar and make some hot chocolate because we had pot belly stoves in each of the barracks and you could heat the water.

N: You did have the...They did give you firewood for that then?

P: They gave you coal.

N: They gave you coal?

P: Yes, and they...Each room, there were ten rooms in the barracks and each room had a room chief, and the room chief was the guy everyday went to the coal pile where there was a couple of German guards and they counted

out so many lumps of coal for each room.

N: Did it keep the room fairly warm?

P: Yes, it was comfortable.

N: A couple of the guys that I talked to they said, "Well, we had pot belly stoves, and that is it." They said that that was just there for looks.

P: No, we had coal but I am sure that I mentioned that this was one of the better camps.

N: Yes, it sounded like your commandant, the German commandant cared you know?

P: Yes, and too I think that there were two major factors: number one, it was a luft camp, which they held the flying people, the people who were in the air service, they held them a cut above. Whether it was justified or not I don't know, but that is the way that was their thinking. And number two, it was at a time during the war that there was nothing pressing from either side as far as the Russians or the Americans. So, supply lines were good, Red Cross got through. We got...We were issued clothes. All G.I. clothes but they came through the neutral powers. They were sent through maybe the Red Cross, by the Salvation Army.

N: You were issued American clothing?

P: This is American G.I. clothing, uniforms.

N: Yeah?

P: Yes.

N: That is interesting. You would think that that is something that they would not issue you because for fear that the Germans would confiscate it and pretend that they were soldiers.

P: Well, they took care of that. The neutral powers...They had people there at these camps to make sure that what came through got to the people for who they were intended.

N: I'll be dog on, okay. Because you know I get these different stories. Some of the camps are like yours and others are not.

P: That is different. I was in camps that were totally different. Totally different - where you got nothing.

N: Yes, so you saw both ends then?

P: I saw both ends.

N: Yes.

P: I can't say that they were wrong because they are not, the other guys. This camp, as I said I think that...

N: See, this was like a model camp almost. That at least the guy gave it to him and...

P: This was the camp where we got the instruments on a Christmas show. Everything was...I can't say that it was beautiful but the war camp where you are a prisoner, you really couldn't have asked for really a whole lot more.

N: Other than to be out.

P: Yes, other than to have your freedom.

N: Yes.

P: But you had to be there.

N: That is the one that you would like to get into?

P: Yes, right.

N: What time was lights out for you guys in that camp?

P: 4:00.

N: 4:00 in the evening?

P: Right.

N: Okay, where did you go to from there? Nuremberg? Stalag thirteen?

P: Well, we went to Nuremberg and in route to Nuremberg on the train, they stopped us in Berlin and while we were in Berlin they put us on the siding. Berlin is a huge railroad marshaling yard.

N: Oh, I know I have been there and they are huge.

P: Huge. And while we are there they put us on the siding. They decided that they are going to leave us there until the next morning because of the movement of the trains I guess were more important.

N: How many were with you at that time? You stayed on the train right?

P: Yes, I honestly don't know. There were fifty guys in a car and these were the old forty and eight cars. I don't know if you remember them.

N: Yes.

P: They were the old forty and eight cars and we were...They evacuated the camp. There was nobody left at the camp because the Russians were coming. So, they put us on this train and got down to Berlin. Berlin that night.

N: Got bombed right?

P: Was the target of a major RAF attack.

N: And here you are in the middle of a train yard?

P: And here I am in the middle of the train yard. And what they do when they stop the train, they slide the door shut and you can hear the locks, the pad locks going.

N: Oh, gee.

P: So, they locked the doors and they leave.

N: You didn't have any light in there or nothing in there?

P: The crowds leave. No, you don't have anything. The crowds leave and we got bombed that night. Fortunately nobody got hurt, but you prayed a lot.

N: Yes.

P: Because I mean they are busting all around you and the British were never known for precision bombing.

N: Really?

P: No, that was the reason they went to bombing at night. They could do what they called "Saturation Bombing." Let's see because when the war started they used to bomb in the daytime and then when the Eighth Air Force went over there they found that we could pin point bomb better than they could. So, we took on the day shift and they took on the night shift, which they liked better.

N: Really?

P: Yes, because at that time a lot of the anti-aircraft guns were not fired electronically or with any type of...

N: Accuracy for aim.

P: Accuracy, right. And they depended a lot on visual.

N: So, they flew at a lower altitude than I would imagine because of the bombing?

P: They could fly at lower altitudes...

N: Yes, and they didn't have to worry too much about the flack.

P: Right. Ah, they worried about it but they weren't as accurate because they needed visual reference in order to be effective.

N: Sure, unless they had powerful flood lights.

P: They didn't have that advantage of visual reference at night. So, anyway knowing the situation and what they are best at, saturation bombing...

N: That had to have scared the hell out of you?

P: Yes, we prayed a lot that night. But anyway we wound up at Stalag thirteen. Which is Nuremberg and we were there. That is one of the camps where we got next to nothing. They had these are things that I remember. Which was against the Geneva convention rules. They had us very close to some military targets. They had us in a camp that was very close to some military targets and the first night that we were there the RAF came bombing. They bombed this target which fortunately they were able to hit most of it. The next day we all found ways to start digging trenches and fox holes whatever way because there was no place to hide other than in the barracks so everybody dug a fox hole. Later they had the pot belly stoves but no coal. And this is where we had some tick and lice problems because there was no heat and this was like February. They had wash houses that were separate. Separate from the barracks. It got to the point where it got so cold that we started ripping the wash houses down.

N: Wash or are you saying watch?

P: Wash house. Where you went to take a shower but there was no shower. Each wash house had one spigot.

N: And that was it?

P: And that was it.

N: Oh, that is terrible. Where did you go to the bathroom by the way? They weren't attached to the barracks were they at this time?

P: They had out houses.

N: Out houses?

P: Yes.

N: Okay. So, you started ripping down the wash houses...

P: We started ripping down the wash houses for kindling wood to throw into the pot belly stove.

N: What did the Germans do?

P: They didn't do anything.

N: They just let you do it?

P: They just let us do it. You know the first couple of days they did raise some hell, but the next day you start doing the same thing all over again. Till they saw that apparently it was useless to fight it. By the time that we left there all that was left standing was four by fours that were holding up the roof. Everything else was gone.

N: Yes, I don't blame you.

P: So, then we walked from there. When they decided that it was time to move again they would hit the road.

N: Now, was this when you went to Mooseburg?

P: Yes, this is when we went to Mooseburg.

N: Okay, this was the death march that you guys were on?

P: Well, I can't call it a death march. A lot of guys...I should say some of the guys were still walking wounded. They were not able really to negotiate a walk like this and a lot of them dropped out and whatever happened to them I don't know.

N: Okay, the guys that I talked to though were in Stalag Thirteen. They said they took on fourteen days or so...

P: Sixteen days.

N: Sixteen?

P: Yes.

N: Sixteen days to get to Mooseburg and they said... The guys told me they said...One guy told me he said, "I learned to shit side ways." I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "Well, I had dysentery so bad that they would not allow you to stop. You have to pull down your pants and walk side ways and go to the bathroom." Was that the way it was with you?

P: Well, yes I guess. I know a lot of guys that had that problem. I was fortunate not to have had it.

N: How many guys were in the... One guy told me he said that "Out of the camp there were about ten thousand guys."

P: Yes, I would say that there were that many.

N: He said, "They would divide us up into groups of two hundred."

P: Yes, and they moved you out that way. I don't know if any of them told you, but the first day we were out and having been in the Air Force and all we knew when I had mentioned to you about primary targets, secondary targets, and target of opportunity it was the same way with the guys that flew the fighters. They had primary, secondary, and target of opportunity. Now, what their orders were was shoot at anything that moves. And the first day that we were out...And this crossed everybody's mind when we left there, you know if we are going to be moving and we are going to be in columns what is going to keep those guys up there from knowing that these are Americans down here? So, the very first day, it had to be about one or two o'clock in the afternoon, there was...We were on a particular road except this was all open, like field and on this side on the right was woods, and about the time that we hit this area we hear a couple of airplanes and we look up and we figure that it is a couple of Krauts. I mean you are in Germany and we figured German airplanes.

N: Yes.

P: And we are watching them and pretty soon this first one starts kind of a slow descent and then all of a sudden you see him rack up like this and as soon as he racked up...You learn to identify airplanes you know in your gunnery training. As soon as he racked up the airplane a P-47 had what they called a semi-ecliptical wings, and as soon as you racked it up you could see that wing and it was just out lined perfectly and when he shoved that throttle in you could tell by the sound of the airplane that it was a P-47.

And they came down, two of them. And they...We knew what they had in mind. They didn't know who we were and I took off. Everybody took off in different directions. I took off for the woods and I felt...I don't know how

far I ran but I felt like I ran a mile before I stopped. But they were letting us have it. They were firing. They were firing up the column. They didn't hit anybody fortunately they might have been new pilots I don't know. But after that every time we stopped for a break what they did was they managed to get some white towels, or sheets or something and they would mark it down. They would take it out in the field and mark it down POW and they set it out there when we you know stopped. And the second day that we were out there were a couple of P-51, or P-47 and a P-38. They came by but then they knew who we were and they knew where we were because everyday at the same time they came over. Two or three airplanes came over and they would fly right...You know a hundred feet above us giving this. You felt like I am as safe as in my mother's arms. They were looking after you. We stayed in barns on the way, slept in fields where they happened to stop you.

N: What did you eat? Anything along the road that you could get your hands on?

P: Whatever you could bum from the farmers. One night they put us in a barn and it wasn't bad you know there was a lot of hay and stuff you get in there and you could stay warm. But the floor of the barn, below the floor of the barn was a storage area and they had potatoes in there. And one of the guys found out it was locked, but they made sure that it unlocked and a guy crawled in there and he started throwing potatoes out and everybody got some potatoes and stuck them in their pockets and the next day when we had a break they decided that we were going to eat. They got some wood together, started a little fire and cooked it up the best that they could.

N: How were the Germans treating you at this point?

P: Well, at this point all of the Germans were the older one and most of them were not Germans as such some of them were Polish, some of them were Slovaks, some of them were Hungarians, German uniforms but you know not necessarily Germans and they were at that point really kind of resigned that it was over.

N: It was over. Did you ever hear one story about a German guard.

P: Big Stoop?

N: Big Stoop, yes.

P: I knew that you were going to ask about him. Yes, I knew Big Stoop.

N: Did you know him?

P: Not personally but I knew him. He was very much in evidence.

N: I understand that it came to a rude awakening along the trail that somebody had cut off his head?

P: Well, actually it wasn't on the trail it was the day we were liberated.

N: Yes, right that is what one guy said. It was the day that we got liberated.

P: Yes, it was the day that we were liberated. And General Patton came in the Fourteenth Armored Division and the Ninety-ninth Infantry Division. They liberated our camp. And we found out through a couple of soldiers that came in about finding this guy. So, apparently somebody didn't forget you know when the time came.

N: Well, I could tell you the story of it because one guy told me. He was in on it.

P: Oh, is that right?

N: And he told me he said...

P: I can't say that I was in on it.

N: He said, "I can't tell you what happened but...he said, I could still consider it a war crime but" He said, "Let's put it this way," He said, "When we woke up one day and we discovered that all of the German guards were gone." He said, "For whatever reason this guy stayed around," He said, "That he (Big Stoop) had given us such a bad time."

P: He gave a lot of guys a bad time.

N: Yes, He said, "He had given us such a bad time" He said, "I can't tell you what we did to him except he lost his head over the whole thing."

P: Yes, that was the day that we were liberated.

N: Son of a gun. Yes, this is the third time that I have heard this story and this guy must have been an S.O.B. from the war.

P: Oh, he was. He was not human.

N: That is what everybody said. He was not human.

P: He was not human. They had a couple of stories about

Big Stoop in our POW magazines.

N: Oh, really?

P: Yes, everybody every once in awhile you know people...Guys write in and contribute some things that they remember from these camps and they publish them. And Big Stoop was mentioned a number of times. Infamous.

N: Yes, some of these guys must have been.

P: I have to tell you this.

N: What is that?

P: Because it was the most stirring thing that happened to me in the time that I was in there. The day that we were liberated. That is the day that all of the guards were gone from the towers, and we knew that it was coming because you could hear the tanks. You heard them the night before. The tanks were rumbling. You know they had a rumble all of their own you know and you could hear the tanks rumbling. And then during the nights I could hear small arms fire. And as the day wore on it seems to me that somewhere right around noon word came out that the liberating force was coming in and everybody was to stay down. Keep your head down and lay flat on your stomach and don't get hit by a stray bullet at this point of the war you know. So, when they came in and you know the tanks fired a few rounds. There wasn't really wasn't a whole lot of resistance. There was a German Garrison in this town but how many were left in there I don't know. Apparently there wasn't much because there wasn't a whole lot of shooting going on, but there was some and it seemed to be right around noon or 1:00 . We could see...This garrison was not too far away and German...this German Swastika was flying there and everybody was kind of watching it. And sure enough after the shooting kind of tapered off and quieted down and everybody is kind of half looking up and half staying down. Down came the Swastika and up goes the stars and stripes. And that is the moment that kind of gets you right there you know.

N: Yes.

P: Really moving. It was like somebody was playing the Star Spangled Banner you know at the same time.

N: I get that you guys stood up and just went nuts?

P: Oh, they did. They absolutely went out of their minds and they took off. They took off by the hundreds. I didn't I stayed where I was and I am glad because it

was a short time later...The camps are set up in what they call compounds. So, many guys in a compound and its that line with barbed wire. And there were several compounds. And the compound next to us somebody said, "Here comes a jeep." And here comes this jeep into this other compound next to us and we all went kind of running over, the rest of us that decided to stay there and who was in it but General Patton.

N: Oh, yes.

P: General Patton, "Old blood and guts himself." And I am telling you Joe, I never saw anything so impressive all the time that I was in the service. This guy...He just exuded professional militarism you know because he was a big guy. He was tall. He was I think six foot four.

N: Oh, really?

P: Yes, a big guy and he had his...I don't know the word that I am looking for. It was legendary with him.

N: His pearl handles?

P: His pearl handles.

N: A forty-five wasn't it?

P: Yes, pearl handle forty-fives. The putties, the shined boots you know.

N: Yes.

P: And like the riding pants.

N: Yes.

P: And the short jacket.

N: The Eisenhower jacket.

P: And this helmet that was shinning with the stars on it and he is driving this jeep himself. I mean he doesn't have a dog robber doing it for him he...

N: Is doing it himself?

P: Yes, he is driving his own jeep. He pulls into this compound and as soon as he gets out of there everybody screams you know just screams. Yelling his name. He gets out and he waves and when he got out of that jeep I didn't realize it until he got out of the jeep, how big a man he was and I was like from here to the wall

from him. And he was the kind of the guy that when you looked at him the thought had to run through your mind that, "I am glad he is on my side."

N: Yes.

P: Like you would a football player, a guy that is six foot five and two hundred and eighty pounds and he is out there blocking for you and you have to think, "Gee, I am glad that this guy is here. I am glad that he is on my side." And that is the way that I felt about Patton. They wrote a lot of stories about him and how many were true I don't know but he was a symbol of victory to me. He was just super.

N: Is there anything else that you want to tell me that you may have forgotten to cover here or remember?

P: This is the first time I have talked like this for years.

N: Really?

P: Yes, it has been years.

END OF INTERVIEW