

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II P.O.W. Veterans Project

European Theatre

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MARK A. BOBICH

Interviewed

by

Jeffrey Scott Suchanek

on

April 23, 1981

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Mark A. Bobich participated in the liberation of France from German occupation during World War II as a soldier in the United States Army. Trained in the Tank Corps, Mark found himself in the 35th Infantry when casualties to that outfit made it imperative that all unassigned personnel be thrown into the breach. In September of 1944, as a member of a 75 man unit out of the point, Mark crossed the Moselle River in France only to be surrounded and cut off from retreat. Forced to surrender by an armoured German unit including a Tiger tank, Mark spent the next nine months in captivity as a prisoner of war and spent time in four different prison camps or stalags. He was sent to Limberg (Stalag XIIIA), Muhlberg (Stalag IVB), Mooseberg (Stalag VIIA), and Kommando 4071 Rosenheim. As such, Mark had many interesting experiences and insight regarding such prison activities as forced labor work details, escape attempts, treatment, food, medical care, and the attitude of both the German people and other prisoners of war as the war in Europe came to a close.

Born on January 4, 1924 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, the son of Marco and Dominika Bobich, Mark currently resides in Brecksville, Ohio and is employed by the Cleveland Plain Dealer. His awards include the Combat Infantry Badge, Purple Heart, Bronze Star, European Theatre of Operations Ribbon, and the Good Conduct Medal. He is Commander of the American Ex-Prisoners of War Barbed Wire Ve-

terans Buckeye (Ohio Chapter) and his interests include reading, music gardening and aiding former P.O.W.'s under Public Law 97-37 and the M.I.A. situation.

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INTERVIEWEE: MARK A. BOBICH

INTERVIEWER: Jeffrey Scott Suchanek

SUBJECT: Invasion of France; Life as a P.O.W. in Germany; Types of Stalags in Limberg, Muhlberg, Mooseberg and Rosenheim; Liberation

DATE: April 23, 1981

S: Mr. Bobich, let's begin with some information about your background, when and where you were born, something about your family.

B: I was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on January 4, 1924. I was born and raised in the city. I worked after I graduated from high school for a short time because of the war. I worked at General Aviation. I was assistant to a tool and die maker. And then I was just biding my time here and was drafted into the Army, which ruined my outlook on my future education going to college, to Kings College in Kingston, Pennsylvania. So, the war interrupted that.

So then I went into the induction center. We went through Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, a processing center and there they gave us tests. And being half asleep in the morning while pulling KP [Kitchen Patrol], and they give you these tests--and you are half awake and half asleep and whatnot--to evaluate you where you would go. So, I wound up going into the tank corps. I was sent to Camp Polk, Louisiana and I trained as a tank gunner. We learned the 75 millimeter, 50 caliber, 30 caliber, tommy gun, 45 automatic, and a 45 pistol.

After we got through with all our training with the maneuvers and bivouacs and whatnot, we were then disbanded. I thought we were going to go over to Europe

as a unit, as a tank outfit, the 8th Armored Division, but we didn't. They had taken us and separated us from our outfit and sent us to England, thinking that we were going to join an armored group. There we had a little more training as far as running goes and artillery practice raids, again with the tanks. We went to Bristol and we were shooting into the English Channel on targets. And then from there we were put on boats and sent to Omaha Beach, where that was one week after D-Day.

S: Where was your port of embarkation here in the United States?

B: New York. From New York we went to Glasgow, Scotland. And from Glasgow, Scotland we took a train and went to Wookie Wells, England. That I think is in Somerset. And then from Somerset we went to Southampton. And at Southampton, that's where all the invasion forces had gathered and we were assigned to go up to the Omaha Beach. Right outside of St. Lo we had been assigned to the 35th Infantry. At the time, I had my TO weapon, which was a tommy gun. I attended, with others of the 35th Infantry, a ceremony that they gave a silver star to a fellow called Miller who knocked out a tank. And the colonel had seen my tommy gun on my side being that I was in the infantry and took my tommy gun and give me his automatic pistol holster--instead of a rifle? And from there I went to our company area with the infantry. And the cook came over and he says, "You're supposed to have a rifle." So, he gave me his carbine and took the pistol. And after he took the pistol and I got to my platoon, the platoon leader took the carbine away from me and gave me an M-1.

And naturally, being in a tank outfit, we didn't know anything about rifles as far as breaking them down, cleaning, maintenance or loading or anything else that goes with them or sighting. We didn't have the training in infantry tactics. We were trained in armored outfit tactics. I was supposed to be an Army personnel replacement in a tank outfit because we didn't go over as a unit. So, that was a real fiasco on the part of the American Government. That's like training somebody with judo to go against a person who has taken training in ballet. After learning the rifle with a quick lesson there I was assigned to the platoon. And then from there on we had engaged the enemy. And from there we went all the way as far as the Moselle River.

S: Getting back to your time in England, how long did you spend in England before you actually went over to

France?

B: About three weeks to a month. So actually, what they were doing was just regrouping everything, gathering and amassing everything. Even though the war was still going on, it was just a preparation before the initial invasion of D-Day. There project overlord and it was just a matter of matching personnel, troops, equipment and everything else.

At the time when Hitler came up the coast of France, all he had to do was cross the coast of France and he would have had England in the grasp of hands. But, he hesitated and that was his downfall. Meanwhile, because the Air Force in England, they were attached to the limits because of the number of pilots that they didn't have and that they needed. And people that were pilots, a lot of them came from countries like Poland and other nations over there--France, that joined the RAF [Royal Air Force] because of the occupation of their native countries. Being that they did know how to fly, they did take over and fly some of their spitfires against the enemy.

S: Did you meet any of these people?

B: Yes, I had two neighbors. One was in an English submarine outfit and the other one was Stan Ostanowich; he was a pilot. He was a neighbor of mine when I lived in Lakewood, Ohio. And he was a Polish fighter pilot and after the occupation downfall of Poland, he had gone to England and fought there on the side of the English. And then later on after the war, he had come back here to America with his English wife. He is dead now.

S: Did you get to go into Blasko or any of these towns in England? What was the reaction of the people towards Americans?

B: The English people themselves are very, very, reserved people. I imagine that there were cases where they were friendly. The only time they were, you might say, friendly, would be if they are in a pub. If they talk to you, fine. If they don't, it seemed like they wanted their privacy respected. They weren't an open type of people who would want to go ahead and, what we might say, take you into their home openly. But they were very, very cold people from my estimation. I found that the French people were a little bit warmer. Especially like when our front was moving up, we'd stop at farm houses and they would give you some wine. They

would go out into the field and dig up boxes of wine that they had hidden from the Germans, otherwise it would have been confiscated. They would give you a bottle of wine or cognac or something of that nature.

S: Did you ever go into London?

B: No, I never had the opportunity to go to London. The only place that I spent most of my time was around the area of Wookie Wells, which is a sort of a scenic little town away from everything like the Army usually picks out. You're miles away from anywhere and it's a crossroad so to speak. But it was a quaint little town where there was a small castle with a moat and swans -- a pretty picturesque thing. But other than that, there was nothing there. There was a cinema and a few pubs. They did put on some dances there. They had a hall, institution, which happened to be a mental institution. But the hall itself, the dance floor was big enough where people could have a dance. And once in a while on the weekend they would put on a dance for the servicemen. And outside of that, why, we did get a chance to go to what they called Cheddar Caves. All that was was a hike or a forced march really when you come down to it. But as far as being able to go anywhere, we didn't have the opportunity to go to London or anywhere else, which I would have liked to have done just to see what had happened as far as the V-2 bombings that were happening and the other bombings and just the condition of England itself, which was really--you associate London with it. Other than that, that was the extent.

Most of the time was spent in training and trying to learn road signs and what they meant as far as the German language and French language so that you would know where you were going. They did have a lot of trickery where signs were being turned around on roads and putting you in an opposite direction and stuff like that. After that, there was not much more to do there in England as far as just getting prepared to move out across the channel into France.

S: Can you remember what you were doing when you got the word that it was time to go?

B: There was never such thing as time to go. Everything was secret or kept quiet. Just like you were restricted to the area and pack up your stuff. And there was always the word that there was a possibility that you might move out. So, you actually didn't know. There was times like that where you'd hurry up and wait. But

we did get word that we were restricted to the area. And then we got word to pack up our stuff. And we did, our duffel bags and gear and we got on the boat at Southampton.

S: Now were you on the initial invasion fleet itself?

B: No, we were just about a week after the invasion, but we did come up the Omaha Beach. And right on top, as you came up, the beach itself was rather short. It wasn't long beach like you would imagine a beach to be with a high rise. And the engineers had formed a type of a road going up to the town and at the top there was the cemetery of the American personnel that were killed at that time, right on top. Now I don't know if that's still there or not or whether they had moved those bodies to national memorial places. I don't know.

But then from there we went through Lt. Lo, which was level. And there was a little battle there. And just outside of Lt. Lo is when we had joined the 35th Infantry because the 35th Infantry had suffered numerous casualties because of that battle. And it had put a hole, you might say, into the line. So, that had to be filled up. So naturally, quickly took whoever you were there, whether you were a cook, candlestick maker, baker, flyer or what. And you were given assignment. And you were guided with what your training was to where you would be best qualified.

So, I felt very inadequate because of the training that I did get in the Army Corps, the tank outfit and then to be put in the infantry which made it a little awkward for me because you do learn sign language as far as your tactics would go. And a lot of this I had to, you want to say, pick up overnight. You learn it or you're in a lot of trouble. So I did buddy-up with a fellow who had some experience and he showed me the ropes, so to speak. And he watched out for me and I watched out for him. You always sort of team up with somebody--or foxhole buddy, whatever you want to call him.

From there we had gone all the way down to the Moselle River. And then we had engaged the enemy again just outside the Moselle River where they had just put up a stand and were firing artillery at us. And going through the artillery fire, we had come upon a machine gun nest that started shooting at us and pinned our troops down on the road. So, we went off to the side. Then we worked our way up after the machine gunners were



wiped out with rifle fire. We had proceeded through the woods and down to the river bank. And by the time we got down there, it was night fall. And we had crossed the bridge and we were, what you might call, quiet.

So, crossing the river and we went across the bridge, which was still up at the time. But going across, you could see the aerial bombs that were attached to the bridge for detonation. Just across the bridge, immediately we took cover because of resistance by the Germans and get into position for your next skirmish, not thinking anything but those bombs, whether they were defused, if the wires were cut or whatever. Well, if at that time we had known that, we probably could have got word back, but going that everything was so intense at the time with the firing. . . . The German machine gun was zeroed in on the bridge and anybody going across the bridge, naturally, was taking his chance again that he would make it okay!

S: The Germans had this bridge covered, then?

B: They had it covered, yes. They were up on the rows. The terrain had rows on the other side of the bridge. It had rows a little bit so they had an advantage of shooting down as opposed to even shooting flat. They did have a good field of fire even though it was night.

Evidently they must have already set up and zeroed in on the bridge probably with a few bursts to know where they were going. And at the end of the bridge, there was a fellow there. The firing was coming and we didn't know where it was coming from. And then he must have been hit and he kept saying, "Get out of here! Get off the bridge because it's zeroed in!" He was hit because he wasn't moving, but laying there.

So, we took cover along side the bank. And then actually the firing was going back and forth. And then, after a short time, there were more fire going on the bridge. There was nobody else that came across. They cut us off. So, we stayed there until wee hours of the morning fighting back and forth, the rifle fire and whatnot. And then the Germans brought down a tiger tank, an armored personnel carrier and one of those open--similar to our half track, the troops and heavy fire power. Now, we fought all night till morning and then the Germans came in and it was either a matter of time under the command of the lieutenant; it was either a matter of trying to take a chance of jumping into the river which was a pretty fast current.

or try to hold out and see what's going to happen. Well, we tried to hold out, but it was to no avail. They immediately and very efficiently moved right in. It seemed like it was a rehearsed program. They must have went through this once before. The tank moved in firing its 88 and that stopped everything. By the time our heavy equipment would come up, well, we did have a motor firer from across the river from our side and some BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] and the rifle fire. But that was like being caught between two firers.

So, by earlier morning, the lieutenant finally decide that it was a lost cause and that there was no chance of us getting back over the bridge to regroup. And the Germans came in and the officer who spoke English and he said, "Either give up or we'll wipe you all out." It was like a nightmare, the way it just happened. It happened so suddenly that you didn't know what was happening. And then from there they had taken us and disarmed us and searched us for any items that we might have taken from other Germans as souvenirs.

S: Was that a bad thing?

B: Yes, they frowned on that. If you were caught, you would have a fifty-fifty chance of finding out whether or not you were going to survive this or not.

S: How wide was this river?

B: It was quite wide. The Moselle River was wide at that point where we had crossed because when you crossed the river you turned left to go to Nancy, France. It was a wide river at that point.

S: Who was the lieutenant at this time?

B: I don't remember his name off-hand. I think he was from Pennsylvania. I'd have to look it up in the book. It has been quite a while.

S: How many of you were cut off?

B: I'd say about 75, somewhere around that neighborhood. There wasn't many, about 75, which was a drop in the bucket with the amount of power that the Germans had there at the time.

S: How many men would you say that you were facing?

B: Well, I would say that it was just the German front really. They had a tiger tank there, which has a fire power of 88 that it carries. They had the half track. They had some kind of armored personnel thing. It looked like a tank only it was open. And then they have a half track full of troops and plus all the troops that were all over the grounds there all the way around us. So, we were on the side of the bank between the river and the road. There was a road on top when you crossed the bridge. It went left and right. Mainly it went left, but we were right in that section there. And that's all the troops that were there that got across at night. So, we were going to try to get a tow hold, but it didn't work out that way for us.

S: You said that the Germans moved in like this had been rehearsed.

B: Yes.

S: How did they go about neutralizing your position where you just knew that it was hopeless to continue?

B: Well, first of all they must have been there before because the machine gun was nested up in the woods. They fired. They had a field of view of firing down the road when we were coming down the road. They were dug in. So, they must have been for some time in order to dig in to make a machine gun nest. The bridge that was zeroed in with the machine guns, they must have been there for some time in order to set up and also zero in the bridge. And evidently, they must have been controlling this and had the time to prepare the bombs for bridge destruction. So, we were coming down and we were engaging them. And evidently, I imagine they had called up for the tanks and other reinforcements to come in. Well, when the tanks came in, that was bad news.

S: All you had was small arms?

B: Yes, I had the M-1.

S: Which was useless against the tank?

B: Yes. I had no grenades on me at the time. If you had hand grenades, there was a possibility you could climb up on the tank and throw it down in the turret, but we didn't have it at the time. And from there, it was just a matter of time when the tanks came in. One came completely down to the river bank and did

fire it. As a matter of fact, I was in front down on the river bank when it did fire and the muzzle blast just about tore my head off because I had my chin strap on my helmet, which they don't recommend that anymore. That's like taking a noose and pulling it. And that was good opportunity for me to be able to get up there. But without grenades, if you are lucky, you could hit the tank commander and if not, why, then you're in a lot of trouble because there was too many troops to be able to get up there, and maybe get the tank commander and then later on, get somebody else in time.

S: I wanted to ask you about the first time you were going in a combat and you were being shot at, did it seem like it was real at first?

B: No, it doesn't. People think that. You're scared, I'll tell you that, after the first skirmish. You're scared because you know that they are out to get you. It's just like an animal that you're chasing. He knows that you are after him and you had the same feeling. But going in initially, you didn't have that feeling, but as you went along you did, and it grew more and more tense. And there are some of them that actually became shell shocked like when we were going down the road and they were firing the artillery. Well, as long as we're keeping moving because we were up in front as point--in infantry language--as long as we kept moving, the shells were falling behind us. But if we would have stopped and slowed down with them lowering and raising their site, they would just spread a field of fire and that way they would cover a large area. But raising and lowering the gun, they would in that manner, spread a field of fire.

S: Now, when you realized that you had been captured, you said that it was like a nightmare?

B: It was.

S: Can you describe your feelings?

B: It was unbelievable that we were taken. It was hard for me to know that we were taken. I just didn't believe that it was possible that they could have taken us so quickly. After you sat down and began to analyze it, you'd say to yourself, "Well, first of all, we didn't have the amount of people." It's like somebody trying to shoot down a whole squadron of planes as opposed to one plane. Somebody is going to get through and somebody isn't. And in our case,

being up in point, why, I don't know if you'd called them the sacrifice or what. . . Somebody has to feel them out. So, going up in point, that more or less is, if you want to call it, a sacrifice and I guess we were it. That's the only way I can look at it myself.

S: How were you treated initially, as soon as you were under guard and they had taken your weapons? Was that sort of a funny feeling to be under guard?

B: Yes, it wasn't very comfortable because you didn't know what was going to happen. You could have been shot. You didn't know what was going to happen, but the soldiers on the front seemed to have a little respect for one another. They're all in the same boat. There was a little bit of respect which didn't hold true for everybody. You always had somebody in the crowd who doesn't like to go along with the norm.

And one, I imagine he was a medic because the lieutenant . . . I didn't know German at all as far as language goes. I was able to speak a few words of French and quite a bit of Polish, but I didn't have the knowledge of German, which later on I had picked up. Being that you are immersed into it, why, you pick it up. And he did come over and my hand was bleeding and he looked at it. And I don't know what he did because I was so damned scared. You're like mesmerized, paralyzed. I don't know how to put it, but state of shock. And he wrapped some kind of--it wasn't a cloth bandage. To me it felt like crepe paper. It felt like paper. He looked at it. He put something on it, a powder. I assume it was sulfur powder. And that was when I was hit.

The other fellow, he had a bullet in his leg. They had taken him on--it looked like a jeep. I don't know where they took him. They must have taken him to a hospital, I assume. They might have taken him around the bend and shot him, I don't know. Who knows?

But the group of us, they did take us. I would say there was about 50 to 75 at the most. They did take us to Nancy, which must have been their CP point, their central point, command post or whatever. They interrogated us. They interrogated me. They pulled me out of the line and just like in the movies.

S: Just at random?

B: Yes. They'd pick out one here and take them in and question them.

S: What did they ask you?

B: They wanted to ask me what outfit I was with. I did have a patch on my shoulder of the 35th Infantry, and he knew that I was in the infantry, naturally. And I just gave my name, rank and serial number and that's it. But it was like in the movies where the light is dim and everybody is standing around. One guy is cleaning his bayonet to create an atmosphere of uncertainty. As the result of being interrogated, they did give out a little ration of a little bit of bread and I think it was some type of sausage or meat or something to the other prisoners. But being that I was interrogated, I missed my turn in line and I didn't get any.

From there they had put us on boxcars and we rode in those boxcars for, I'd say, maybe a week. It was hard for me to tell the time, but it was long. And we were transferred from there to Limberg, Germany, which is Stalag XIIIA. And being that I didn't talk to the officer in charge to let him know what outfit I was in and probably all other conditions that he wanted to know, one of the soldiers in the back gave me a good belt in the back with the butt of a rifle because I wasn't cooperative or to humiliate me, I don't know.

S: This was upon arriving?

B: No, this was when I was being interrogated at Nancy, France, when they pulled me out of line. They had us in this courtyard. And then we were put on the boxcars and then we were sent to Limberg, Stalag XIIIA. During that trip, all that while, I had no food. And they had roughly about fifty of us in the boxcar. And when we got to XIIIA, we did notice that there were other troops that were being brought in too. But what outfit they were from or where they came from, we don't know. The camp itself was compounded. They did have Russians in there and, I imagine, French. If you had cigarettes, then you were able to barter for bread. They would throw a loaf of bread over the compound fence wire and you would throw your cigarettes to them, or you'd throw your cigarettes first, trade.

S: With the guards or with these other prisoners?

B: No, with the other prisoners.

S: Okay, you were separated then in different sections?

B: Yes. We stayed in an area that had tents. Actually it wasn't a barrack type of a building. It was all muddy. They had straw on the ground, which after the rainfall, it was just a holy mess. It looked like a pigpen with all that mud--walking around in there. You had to sleep on the ground. You had no bed. They had a water pipe coming up out of the ground which the water was turned on and it flowed on the ground. So, to get some water you had to go back into that mud again. And then they turned it off whenever they felt like it.

And then from time to time the German guard would come in with German Shepherd dogs. It depended on who came in, sometime they had Pinschers and sometimes they had German Shepherds. Well, if you were thirsty and you wanted a drink of water, naturally you are going to go to the water. And not knowing their language and what he was saying, evidently they might have had a curfew or something. I don't know what it was, but they would sic the dogs on you to get you away from the water.

There we stayed for a short time and then we were sent back into the boxcars. And we were sent to Muhlberg, which is Stalag IVB. And we had to ride in the boxcars again. These boxcar rides were really something too, because we did have our Air Force coming all the time. Naturally, they're out to get the trains to stop troop movement and equipment and what-not. But how do they know what's in the boxcar? So, they had little windows with bars on them that we were holding our jackets out, our OD jackets or shirts, anything that had OD and hoping that maybe the pilot-- I don't know if they could have seen it or not that there was people in there. Now, whether they were rehearsed or given this information with their instructions from the Air Force, I don't know, in regards to the people that were being shipped to concentration camps by the Germans. Letting the pilots know that to watch what you are shooting. Go for the locomotive as opposed to the train itself, unless they knew that there was troops on there.

S: So were you strafed or anything?

B: We were strafed one time. At one point we were strafed only one time. Other times the plane itself had just buzzed us. In other words, he looked us over, which was a good thing. Except for another instance

when we were being transferred, I think it was from Muhlberg to Mooseberg when they had a bombing. Our Air Force bombed the tracks out at the locomotive yard. That stopped the train, so we weren't shot at at that time. It was just that we were stopped. Now, whether they derouted us or how they got us through, I don't know.

So then, from Limberg, next we went to Stalag IVB in Muhlberg and those were barracks. There they had photographed you and assigned you your number.

S: Why were you transferred? Do you know?

B: I don't know. I have no idea. I imagine as the front was shrinking, they were pulling people back. Why, I have no idea. I could never figure that out.

S: Describe the camp at Limberg.

B: Limberg was a large camp.

S: Was it ringed by barbed wire?

B: It had barbed wire. It had towers.

S: How many towers?

B: The only one that I could see was from my vantage point to where we were was just the one on the one corner. And the railroad was close by. And you always have the thought in your mind coming to you, maybe I could sneak out and get down along the tracks and get the hell out of here. But there was no such animal.

S: How many guards would they normally have?

B: Well, you had the gun towers with about--what I could see--fifty nearby. You had the double roll of barbed wire. And then they fine strand, one single barbed wire, where you weren't allowed to go over that, and guard dogs.

S: That was inside?

B: That was inside the compound. In other words, you had the fence and then you had this wire and you weren't allowed . . . Anybody over that was shot.

S: Do you know anybody that was shot at for doing that?



B: Not off hand, no. I wasn't there that long. I was there about a week, I think, when we were transferred. Other than having the dogs come in to move you around like sheep, it could make you . . . You're at a disadvantage when you don't know what the hell they are saying, just so you can play their game.

I was captured in September and then in December of that year, which I was already out of there, the American Air Force leveled that camp at Limberg, Stalag XIIIA.

S: At any of these camps that you were assigned, were there any distinctive markings that the Germans put on so that Allied pilots would know that this was a prisoner of war camp?

B: That I don't know. The only thing that we had when we went to Muhlberg, we were photographed and given our German dog tags. They also gave us, being that it was cold already--I don't know where they got them from--but the coat. It was like an overcoat. It had the markings of a Czechoslovakian army overcoat. And on the overcoat was printed KGF. It's an abbreviation for Kriegs Ge Fungenun, prisoner of war. The political prisoners, I think had, it looked like a bull's eye on their leg and on their back. I think they were the ones that had the bull's eye and striped outfits. But ours was just marked with KGF on it. So, if it was winter and you're trying to get away, you would have to dump the overcoat and pick up something else.

While we were there at Muhlberg, we stayed a short time. We didn't have to go to forced work there, but they transferred us to Mooseberg, which is Stalag VIIA. That's on the outskirts of Munich. There they got you up in the morning and put you on boxcars and took you to Munich to fill in the bomb craters and clean the debris off the streets. And you worked from early morning when you arrived and got back late at night, roughly, like you'd estimate time, ten o'clock. They took your watch away. They took away any jewelry, money and all personal items I had when I was in Muhlberg. I had a fountain pen that I got from my sister in New Jersey. It had a gold top on it. They'd take that. They'd take your watch away. If you had a camera, they took the camera away. If you had any money on you, they took your money. Oddly enough, and strangely enough, they gave you a receipt for some of the money, but they didn't give you a receipt for any of the other items they took.

- S: Maybe they figured that you weren't going to get the money anyway?
- B: Yes, like the camera and any of your personal effects that you had on you and they took away, they didn't give you a receipt. I have the original receipt that they gave me on some of the money.

They gave us a receipt for some of the money, but nothing else. If you had a gold chain on your neck or maybe your father gave you his watch or something like that, a keepsake or anything that you had that was on your person was taken away from you, anything of value. From there we were transferred to Mooseberg, where we were, naturally, put on what they call a working party. You had to work or else.

- S: How did that work? Were you just picked at random to go on these or were you forced?
- B: No, they took everybody. The only thing that I can figure out is that they took everybody from the barracks. Now, whether or not anybody else was left behind, I don't know because it was dark in the morning when you got up and it was dark at night when you came back. But everybody was put into the boxcars and off you went. There was no such thing as trying to get away from them over there in Munich figuring that maybe you can escape. But no, they had it too heavily guarded and watched. And most of these people were civilians, the guards. There was a few troops with them, who probably officiated in the guarding of the working party.
- S: These civilians, they didn't have uniforms on or anything?
- B: They had some type of a uniform. I heard the word "volks strum" used. I guess that means people's force, or whatever it is. I heard that used. It was a type of brown material as opposed to the sort of a blue-gray and black that the Germans had and they were wearing at the time.
- S: Okay, now the regular troops then, they were regular bare mark or were they SS?
- B: I think they were regular troops. I don't think they are regular SS. Just going by the markings, we did later on learn that the SS did have the two SS markings on their uniforms. These didn't look like SS; they just looked like regular soldiers.

Then we stayed there a short time working and living off of one kilo of bread a week, which is a pound of bread. And you sliced it up into equal parts for the whole week.

S: What else did you have to eat?

B: Then they had a type of tea. It was like a tea in the morning. I don't know what it was made out of, bark or what. And either like that or whether it was coffee and I thought it was tea. I don't know. But it was liquid and it was warm and that was good enough for me, especially with a piece of bread.

S: And that's all you got to eat?

B: And you got a potato. Your main diet there was potatoes. You're given a type of soup. If you could put a soup strainer through it, I don't think you'd pick up a vegetable or a piece of meat or whatever was in it.

And from there we were put back on the train and sent to Rosenheim, which is along the Inn River. And I stayed there for the balance until we were liberated in May by the 45th Infantry. There we did have a regular scheduled work day, where they had sent us out to work. We had gone to fill in the dikes along the Inn River that were bombed. We were sent to the railroad yards to fix up the craters, fill in the craters that the Air Force had bombed. And then at the same time, while you were working at these different forced projects, you were constantly bombed by your own Air Force. The one instance where we were working along the track and filling in some holes and the air raid siren sounded and the guard had taken us down to the air raid shelter to save himself too. And our planes come over and unloaded their loads right on top of us. I don't know if it was the Good Lord or somebody must have been watching us; we got out of it.

S: What was your attitude and what was the attitude of the men when they were getting bombed by their own Air Force?

B: They were glad. We were glad. We knew that they were coming and we knew that these people knew it.

S: Did you see an attitude change?

B: There's an attitude change in the German who sits next to you and pulls out his wallet and shows you a

photograph of his wife and kids. And show you that that was his Frau and this is my kinder. And their attitude changed completely, but we didn't care. For some reason or another, you felt good, even though you were being bombed and the plaster was falling off the ceiling and the lights were swaying and all this dust was filling-in the room, it didn't bother you. You were frightened to a point, yes. You'd have to be totally unfeeling not to be aware of it. But you had a good feeling knowing that they were up there. and maybe someday [you'd be] free again.

Now, we're in Rosenheim and we were assigned to the Kommando Camp, which is 4071. There we worked along the river and we filled in the holes in the dike. We were close to the Brenner Pass and off in a distance you could see the snowcapped mountains, the Alps. And then your mind is going again--possibly getting away.

We were taken to Kufstein to work on cement detail. And we had loaded cement on the boxcars of trucks. In our weakened physical state, this was a chore. And they were taking them to wherever they needed them. I guess the Germans, it must have been a rail yard, a little siding of some type where these cement cars were brought and we were unloading them. Some of the fellows thought that it would be a pretty good idea, while we were this far in to Kufstein, so close to the border, "What do you think we'll take off?" "It sounds like a good idea."

There was a Frenchman working with us and he could talk English. And he said, "I overheard you." And we didn't realize that he was able to understand what we were talking about. Because a lot of times we made comments about the Germans to see if they knew it. You'd call them a name or something like that to see if they knew what you were talking about.

The Frenchman told us, he says, "If you guys think you're going to go, just forget it." He says, "First of all, I've been here six years. One time I had a pass to be able to get through; they caught me. Another time I tried to go on foot and they caught me." He said, "It's so well guarded and policed with dogs and the border itself is so hard to get through, especially if you were going to go through the mountains." He says, "Forget it; you're not going to get through." He says, "At least with me, I was able to get on a train and ride like a regular civilian to get through, but you, you have nothing. So he went

ahead and he did that.

And from there we were sent back to our stalag area, our camp, stalag, whatever you want to call it. Two of the guys had taken off. One was Nathan Eskridge from Muskogee, Oklahoma, and another fellow, Glen Sandlin. They had taken off. They told the guard that they had to go to the bathroom. Well, the guard had to make up his mind whether he was going to let two of them go to the bathroom or let the other six, whether he was going to go with the two or stay with the six. Now, the two took off. Now, they were gone only about five hours. They were brought back in the morning. What they did, they had gone down along the road which was leading, again, to the Brenner Pass. And the Hitler Youth were out on the night maneuvers so they were captured again and brought back.

S: Now Hitler Youth . . .

B: Well, they had German troops with them training the young people so that the troops did bring them back. There was two of them that came back with them. They were reprimanded by the company officer there in our area. They had one corporal. He was in charge of this little billet. There were fifty GI's in this billet. And they had reprimanded them and they put them in the potato cellar. I think they were in there for three days to a week with no food or nothing, but luckily, potatoes. They just put them in there. And then they got them out. Well, when we had roll call, that's the time they would bring them out. And we always managed to slip them a piece of bread, put it in their hand and they were put down in there. Well, later on we found out that there was potatoes in there. So, they were eating raw potatoes, but we didn't know that. So, they had some food value by getting into them.

And they told them after that that the next time you go and do that you are going to be killed. You're going to be shot. You're not going to be brought back.

S: Well, is that the only, maybe escape attempt that you knew of?

B: No, we tried one. We were working at the railroad station. And it was the same deal. I was going to go and take a pee and then take off. I went in the bathroom and I opened up the window and looked out and there was nobody there so I started to climb out. And just then these German soldiers or troops, they

began to walk around the building so I had to go back in. I was just about half way out to the waist and then back in I had to go. So then I had to get back on the train again and off we went. That was the only time.

The other times we just harassed them as much as we could. We used to take their cigarette and put the cigarette in a match cover. We'd open up the match cover and put the cigarette in there and then closed it while the cigarette is burning. And when it hits the match heads, it creates so much BTU's and it takes off. Well, as we'd go through a railroad yard, if we'd see any boxcars or anything that are open, we would just throw this pack of matches with the cigarette into it. And once the cigarette burned down to the match heads, then it started a fire. So, we were trying that for a while.

And then they didn't have any toilet facilities on these boxcars, the boxcars which were transport. They had a box there full of straw and you were supposed to urinate in that. And you were supposed to go potty on it also. So, what we would do is we would go potty on whatever we could that we could pick it up with and as we went through the stations or through the towns, we threw it at whoever was there, at the people. It was nasty, but anything to let them know that I was feeling dissatisfaction.

- S: How much contact did you have with the German soldiers themselves and the German population?
- B: The German population we didn't have too much. The German soldiers we didn't have too much. You did what they told you to do and that was it. As far as communication goes--tried to talk too much about it, very little. The only ones that talked to you about anything would be a civilian who was a guard. And then he would say, "Yes, I was back in Chicago and I liked it." One mentioned that he was on the train and he liked the porters and how well they waited on them. So, he enjoyed that and the courtesy that he received when he was in Chicago. Or one would tell you, "I got an uncle in New York and someday I'm going to go back there." And here you're fighting the war and they're telling you someday that they are going to go back.
- S: What was their attitude towards you and the soldiers? Were you a despised enemy and since the war was coming to a close, did they try to buddy-up to you?

B: No, they tried to buddy-up to you because the war, they knew that it was coming to an end. As a matter of fact, we had no radios or anything like that. If anybody did have a radio, they kept it quiet because it would be taken away from him. When Roosevelt died, one of the guards came up and actually told us. And he felt bad about it. And what surprised me was the fact that here's a German who is fighting the Americans felt bad about it. From what I gather through all these cold things, it seems to me like the German populace itself had no animosity against the American public. Why, I don't know.

S: Their homes were being bombed and everything.

B: Yes. I guess maybe because the war was so close to an end and now they had to pay for everything that they did with the ravaging of the Balkan and the treatment that they gave to all the people in the concentration camps. I guess maybe their conscience was getting the best of them, really.

S: Do you think that they felt relieved that maybe it was finally going to be over?

B: Well, I think a lot of them are going to be relieved because the war was going to be over because I think they had their belly full of a losing war. They enjoyed the fruits at the beginning when they were the victors. The victors got the spoils. But then after the victors became losers, well then that was another story. And I think they had their stomach full of being woke up at night by Bed Check Charlie, who came over with his air raid and got him out of bed. They had to run to air raid shelters. And during the day, never being able to sit down and always wondering, "Well, I got my kids at home while I'm out here. What's happening?" And if there's an air raid, "Are they okay?" And when you go home you find out: "My house is down and my whole family is gone." One of those deals where it was happening the same thing in London when they sent the buzz bombs over. After the fuel was used up and it came down, where you didn't know where it was going to hit. Officers who had gone to work, when they came back, there probably was no building there. It probably wasn't one building, maybe the whole block wasn't there.

We had a fellow, Randy Brooks from Gary, Indiana, and he was a buddy of mine. We had met in one of the camps and we buddied up together. And he was also in this camp, for it was seven or more with me. And

one of our details was to go to the hospital which was across the street from this billet where we were kept, this little prison camp, and take the personnel and the patients down to the air raid shelter. The reason why they did that is because if there was any bombing, not saying that the Air Force was going to bomb the hospital because it was definitely marked, but they would take the people down to the air raid shelter because when the debris flew, it would smash the windows and then they could get cut with glass which added a little more complications to their problems. They were trying to get these people recuperated to get out of there.

S: Now, were these civilians or soldiers?

B: They were mixed. They were civilians and they were soldiers. And in the back, they had a garage. You've probably seen five car garages with all these doors on them. It was a makeshift morgue where a lot of these people and troops died in route. And you had people that would come there to identify their loved ones or maybe a son, brother or father, or whoever it might be. You'd see them going over these bodies, lifting up the sheets and look to see who was underneath there. Some cases they didn't even have sheet; they might have had a jacket or hat over their face. And they tried to identify somebody.

I was up on the fifth floor one time and they had an operation and we were waiting. And the air raid sounded and then it gave the all clear signal, but they kept us there anyway because evidently the Air Force must have made a turn. They were coming straight and possibly turned and went to another direction, so they called the raid off. They handed me a package and told me to throw it down the incinerator chute. Some of them could talk good English and some could talk just a little bit. Well, we had taken it and thrown this package down this chute and here it was a leg that was wrapped up in paper. Well, I didn't know. They had just performed an operation on one of the German soldiers and had cut his leg off.

What I'm getting at is the fact that we were working at that hospital constantly all the time. And Randy Brooks had come down with a cold and had developed some type of either pneumonia or some kind of respiratory problem. And then he got a fever and he got sick. Yet with that hospital that was across the street, they didn't give him any medical attention. And then he got so bad to where he was having a death rattle



already, this heavy breathing. And in comes a German officer--Frenchman in German uniform--with another soldier and he talks to the commander of the camp and wanted to know, I guess, the details of what was happening there. And he had a little black case with him, like a little pencil case. And he went upstairs and gave Randy a shot. And he came downstairs and told us to go upstairs and get the body and that they already had the box to bury him. Now whether he gave him an air bubble or shot some kind of a drug into him to kill him or what, but Randy died.

And I wrote his mother after war and she sent me back a nice letter. I told the details of his death and what the possible cause was. And yet, across the street was the hospital and we couldn't get any medical attention. He is returned and buried in Marion, Indiana.

S: Would you say that this was par about the medical attention the prisoners received?

B: There was no such thing as getting attention like if you went to your own doctor to get medical attention and you were given the true thing. You never knew what they were giving you, whether they were giving you pressed sugar or pressed baking soda. You didn't know what the hell they were giving you if they did give you anything. But what would they give you if they didn't have nothing for themselves to go around? They may have checked you and said, "Oh, you're fine." They may have gave you a little colored water to drink to think that the psychology will work on you and you will heal yourself. I don't know.

Then when Randy died, we went upstairs and got him out of the bunk. We had two tiered bunks. He slept on top. We took him and put him into this box. The box was that European style, like a cut off.

S: Hexagon kind of thing?

B: And they put the lid on. And when they put him in there, I looked inside. And they had, it looked like wrapping paper like you have in the meat markets and the bottom was wood shavings like you have in a carpenter's shop. And then this paper was there. They laid him on that and covered him with this paper and put this lid on and put two end-pins on.

And then we were given the privilege of, you might call, giving him a military escort, military funeral. We

put him on our shoulders and took him to the cemetery. And there we lowered him into the grave and one of the fellows had one of these invasion patches on his shoulder, the American flag. He had taken that off and we made a cross and we put that on the cross and we put his name on there as best as we could so that we'd know where he was at. Because when we went to dig graves in that cemetery, we had dug what you call mass graves because when they had an air raid, a number of people would be killed or would die from the injury. They would maybe have ten or twelve long and they would even bury them maybe two high. We had to dig them six meters or whatever it is. And they would even bury two high. And we buried Randy in a single grave.

He was close to an Englishman who had died, from what I understand later on. I didn't know that, because I didn't see any markings on the grave. Now, whether they had a plan of some type where they kept number records like they do in some cemeteries of the location of the grave, I don't know. But I did find out later on through correspondence with his sister that an Englishman did die there.

S: You mentioned these mass graves, were these civilians?

B: They were everyone. They were prisoners, Russians. The labor that was in town, you had Polish labor; you had Lithuanian labor; you had Italian labor; you had Russian labor. I hate to say this, but when a Russian died, we were sort of glad because when they buried the Russians, they would take coins and throw coins on the grave after burying them. And while we worked there, we would go over there and pick the coins out and see if we could get the civilian guards to get us some bread if he was able and friendly.

S: Did that kind of bartering happen often?

B: Not that often, but often enough. It all depended what guard it was. There was always one that would take sides, especially the one that was in Chicago, he had some feeling. But when a soldier did come around, a regular military soldier would come around and he was a civilian guard, then he would snap to it. Then he was all German. He was no longer a civilian. He was military.

S: These mass graves, did they bury them all in boxes?

B: They were in boxes. These were civilians. They were

put in a plain wooden box, just like Randy was put in. Later on I found out Randy was transferred here in Marion, Ohio. They had shipped his body back. And she sent me a photograph of the cross that was on Randy's grave. The cross that we made was just a plain cross with the American flag on it. And we tried to put some type of a marking on it. The photograph that she sent me, it was stat copy. It had the board that went across. Did you ever see those?

S: Yes.

B: Like a ruler type of a thing. I didn't recognize that. And I'm afraid to write back and say, "Well, I don't think that's Randy's grave." Now, since we had gone, there's a chance that maybe the Germans who take care of the cemetery changed that. And I don't want to create a problem or any doubt in their mind. I said, "Well, I'd better just leave it alone." If Randy is going to get any reward, the good Lord will take care of him no matter where he's at, whether he's here or there. I said, "I'm just going to leave it alone. I won't touch it." But to me that was not the cross on his grave that we made. Now like I say, there was a possibility they changed it.

S: You keep mentioning these air raids. Were these frequent?

B: Yes, they were often, especially towards the end. They were more frequent towards the end, than they were at any time. A lot of times the air raid would sound off and there wouldn't be a raid. They were just passing through. But being that they were up there, there was always a possibility and I guess that the Germans figured they better sound the raid and get the people in there. You never know.

S: Could you see the planes? Could prisoners see the plane? Could they hear them?

B: They were just what you want to call like flights, squadrons. The only time we saw many was towards the very end of the war. I think it was either just before we got liberated--it was April or early May. You'll never see anything like this in all your life. You'll never, I hope not. I don't think you'll ever even see anything like this. When I looked up at the sky when they had this air raid, it looked like they were heading for Stuttgart from the direction from where we were standing. The sky was black. I think anything that flew was put up into that air. I

never seen anything like this in all my life.

S: Did that create any excitement in the camp?

B: It sure did. We knew something was up. And then it wasn't too long later we heard artillery fire and then small arms fire. And then at night the guards from our camp had taken off. They locked us up. They used to take our pants at night and take our shoes away, no matter what time, either winter or summer. They'd take your pants off and take your shoes off and they would lock them up. So, if you were going to escape, you'd better have a pair of pants somewhere because they would pick you out. And when we heard this fire coming--this was a few days after the raid--we heard this artillery and we knew the front was coming. So, we heard the artillery firing that night. And then we had to go to the hospital again to take those patients down because of the air raids. Hell, we did one thing or another. Before you know it, the troops are coming up. The Germans had already taken off.

We really wanted to get this one guy, this corporal, because we had a guy called Fisher, he was Jewish. Now Fisher was complaining about bed bugs and what-not. And he was standing in a hallway there and the dim light they had on the stair case. The building was three floors. We slept on the second. The bottom floor was like dining room, toilet area, and a kitchen. And on the third floor was the corporal's quarters. And then there was the buildings that I think the other guards stayed in.

S: This is a German?

B: Yes. Well, Fisher, he was one of our POW's, American POW. And he was complaining about the bed bugs or body lice or whatever they are. And he was picking them off his body, especially around his waist line where his clothing was tight. It seemed like they congregated more around like your ankle area where you might have stocking or your waist line where your belt line would be or your neck line. And he was picking them off and he began to complain to the guard. The guard wanted to know how come he's not in his bed because they had a curfew. And then he'd come before bed check. Well, Fisher began to talk to him in Jewish. And Jewish and German is similar. And he was telling him, so the guard had taken his bayonet out and he put it up against Fisher and he actually drew blood. He told him, "Get in your bed

where you belong and quit complaining." And then he started complaining some more. And then he was asking to be transferred out of there. He wanted to get out of this camp. So, they did take him, but we don't know where they took him. We don't know if they took him to another camp or whether they took him down in the river and dumped him in the river. We don't know what happened to him. But they did transfer him. They took him somewhere, but I don't know where they took him. But the corporal did draw blood out of him.

S: How about other acts of brutality? Were they common? Did the guards pretty much respect prisoners?

B: There was a dog in Stalag XIIIA where the guards would try to herd you like sheep because of the language barrier. At least that's the way I looked at it. You'd tell them something and you don't know what the hell they are talking about. One time when I was in Munich at Mooseberg and I got out of the boxcar too slowly--naturally you're weak after all this time and you got the language barrier again and later on you found out that "Loos Loos" means "hurry up"--I did get one rifle butt to the back through my right hip and as a matter of fact, it still bothers me. And then they had no ladder or anything to get down from the boxcars. We had to jump down. That didn't help matters any. It just aggravated me all the more. So I did have a slight limp at the time, but I did have it checked out and the doctor did say that I had some deterioration, here at the VA Hospital at Brecks-ville. So, I don't know.

S: Were men taken out and beaten or anything like that?

B: If they were, I didn't see them. Being that we were moved constantly, we didn't have too much contact. Like VIIB was more or less an English camp. And we were just transit. We didn't see too much of that. I guess maybe because we weren't in the camp, itself, at all times like some people were in camps. Like the Japanese, a lot of them were in one camp maybe for years. If possibly they had transferred us from the beginning when they got us, directly to a camp somewhat permanent, it would have been different. We didn't even know where we were going to go, because they did come out in order. Later on I found that it was a group, I think it was an Air Force group, in fact, the order did come down for the German Army to eliminate this whole batch of air-men. Now, whether they were going to take them to a gas chamber somewhere or shoot them, I don't know.

But this did come down,

As you go along and talk to other people, you are going to pick up more and more people that have been in camps more permanent at one time. And you are going to find out from other people that they were treated real well. They might have been on the farm. And they'd say that that's the best thing that happened to them to be working on a farm. As you go along, you are going to pick up different things because circumstances are all different in all cases. Let's say I was a medic or some kind of a doctor, probably that hospital that was close by, maybe you might have wound up working in a hospital. And they would treat you with a little more courtesy than normally. But if every now and then you did get a good shove or in those two occasions, a good belt with a rifle butt in the back of the right side. I can't sleep on that side.

S: How were you kept informed about the progress of the war? Were you given any news at all on now things were going?

B: No, where we were we didn't get anything and what we got would be second hand, so to speak, because we went from Limberg to Muhlberg, from Muhlberg to Mooseberg, from Mooseberg to Rosenheim.

S: And the other prisoners would tell you what they knew?

B: Yes, what they knew. We would inquire, "Well, how's it going?" And you'd hear some things and some things you didn't hear. You did have a lot of Americans when you had conversation from one camp to another where you might have some GI who was really siding with the Germans. And became buddy-buddy with them and acted as their interpreter and everything else. And became the camp rat. So, you had things like that. But when it came to medical attention, if you had a cold, if you had a sprain or something, then you were in a lot of trouble. You either healed or . . . There was no such thing, really, as taking care of you.

S: How about Red Cross packages, were you given those regularly?

B: I received two Red Cross parcels in nine months. My mother had sent me through the Red Cross, asking them what would be best to send to the prisoner. The best

thing you can send a prisoner is cigarettes. The cigarettes were money. Your paper that they gave you, you might as well use for toilet paper because it meant nothing, but cigarettes you could buy stuff. And that was the thing. With cigarettes, you could buy bread. You could buy anything you want with cigarettes.

S: And the Germans were pretty good about giving you these cigarettes?

B: They didn't know they were in a package. The package was Red Cross parcel. I had two parcels. I got two from all that nine months, two parcels.

S: Who gave you these parcels? Was it a regular Red Cross person who would come and give it to you?

B: The one time it came out of when we were in the main camp, this English camp, it seemed like the English ran this camp and it came through them. And the Germans gave it to their commanding officer who's in charge of their troops inside the camp and they gave it to us. And we had one. And the second one I got was in Rosenheim. And that was given to us by the German officer who was in charge. He came and gave it to this corporal and the corporal then gave us our package. But we didn't get the whole package. They would let us go and take a little bit of something out of it. Now, you've got one tin of cookies and they look like those wafer cookies or tea cookies or whatever you want to call them. And you got that and you may have gotten a little tin of margarine, tin of jelly and maybe, I don't remember exactly whether there was two packs of cigarettes in there or not. Well, with the cigarettes, if you didn't smoke, you were in good shape so all you would have to do was just trade them off.

S: Trade them off among yourselves?

B: Among yourselves or among other slaves laborers at work sites, even to the German guards. You want a pack of American cigarettes, give me a loaf of bread.

S: What I'm driving at is what would prevent the Germans from rifling through your Red Cross packages themselves and just taking it?

B: Nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing. They could go in there and take anything and what are you going to do about it. There was nothing you could do.

S: Do you think that this was done at all?

B: Oh, I believe it was done. If they took away all my personal effects when I was in Muhlberg, they certainly would go through that too, and what are you going to do about it? You've got a bunch of troops standing around you and you got this guy here at the table and he says, "Unload your pockets." He had the interpreter tell you to unload your pockets, and don't hold anything back. So you're taking off your high school ring and putting that on the table; you're taking off your necklace, maybe with your cross on it and putting that on the table. "Oh, give me the watch," put that on the table. And then he gives you a receipt for some of the money you have. "And what about the rest of this stuff? How about my camera? How about everything else I have in my bag?"

S: What did he say?

B: "You don't get nothing else. That's all." He said, "You're not allowed to have this. This will be returned to you later." And you know that it's not going to be returned to you. And some of the fellows put maybe a little piece of jewelry or whatever they had, like a ring that they wanted or a wedding band or something, they put it in their mouth. And if you were lucky enough, you'd stuff it up your rear end and then try to hope that you were going to get it. But that's the way it went. They just took everything. Thievery, as far as I'm concerned, that's all it was. Well, what happened to all this gold and stuff that they had amassed? Is that the the ones down in Argentina living off the fat of the land?

S: Could be.

Can you tell me about the day that you were liberated?  
Can you remember that day?

B: Yes, that's the day when I told you that it was kind of strange that they had locked us up. And we didn't hear the corporal upstairs. He always had a lady friend up on the third floor and you'd hear all this giggling and stomping of his boots on the floor. And it was kind of strange that everything was quiet that night. And then we could hear the guns out in a distance. And the coming morning, usually they would take you out for a roll call, there was nobody there. So, we kicked open the door, smashed the window and



opened the door. And then we opened up the gate to the barbed wire fence. We broke that open and we went out. And then we saw that the jeeps and troops were coming up. And we looked at their patching and it was the 45th Infantry. And the first one we saw was a foot soldier, a regular GI, coming up the street with a rifle in front of him. And that was the best damned thing that I've seen in a long time. And we went up and hugged him and kissed him and thanked him. And then he told us that the kitchen was just on the way.

They were trying to set up a kitchen. We went down there and they give us some bread, white bread. The bread was like cake. We thought it was cake, and we're eating bread, whole loaf of bread.

We went back to our company area, to the prison camp and we picked up our personal effects that we had there. Four of us went to the hospital and we took a doctor's car, German car, and we went in and asked for the keys. They didn't want to give us the keys. Well, we got a hold of the keys anyway. We jumped in that and we drove to Munich. From Munich-- we left the car there--we went to the airport.

And at this airport there, they had a huge German prison compound. They're all German prisoners, American prisoners. And it was an entirely different type. So, we stayed there and we stayed overnight waiting and we'd hitchhike a ride from there to Paris. So a C-47 was going to take off and next morning so we stayed overnight and the guys made us something to eat. They knew that we were POW's and they were real courteous. They gave us some kind of a meat, I don't know what it was. It could have been steak for I know, I don't know, on white bread. I had my first experience with Nescafe. And I had Nescafe with milk, believe it or not. Milk at last, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was powder, but it was still milk.

And then from there it was me and another guy and we hitchhiked a ride to Paris. The only people that were on the plane was a pilot, a copilot, and it was either a radio man or a mechanic. And they landed at La-Braz Airport on the outskirts of Paris. We touched down, opened the door and we jumped out and they took off. Before we got out, the one guy gave us fifty bucks in French money. I wrote them later on, by the way. He lived in Michigan. I gave him his money back, too. So, I had a souvenir gun and I gave him a souvenir gun. I feel so good about this, I gave him

a souvenir gun.

S: What kind of gun was it? A Luger?

B: No, to me it looked like a horse pistol. I never seen a barrel so big. You could puttafinger up into it. I don't know what it was. I do have a gun souvenir, and a few other things, arm bands, medals, and stuff like that.

But the plane had taken off. So, then this kid from Michigan and I . . . the last three fellows I teamed up with were all from Michigan. Which is good; they were all close by. One fellow that I was in camp with, he happened to be from Akron, Charles Stoll. I tried to get in touch with him many times. He was working for B.F. Goodrich. But I think he must have married and moved on because I could never find him after that.

Since, I have met and we were honor guards at one of our Rosenheim Ex-POW [gatherings] buddy Darrell Little from Chardon who passed away.

And then we went to Paris and we stayed in Paris for about a week. And the military police picked us up. And being that we were GI's, they had picked us up and took our names down and gave us passes. So, we had an unlimited pass to stay in Paris, so we stayed there for about a week. And they gave us a food card to go to eat in the restaurant. This was their commissary at the time. And we went there to eat.

And then we were assigned to go on these trucks. They had these semi's, open back, with sides up on the side. And we got on that and we were sent to Le Havre, France, Camp Lucky Strike. From Le Havre they gave us a quick physical and a little bit of a fattening up period there where they gave us a lot of eggnog and stuff like that that you could eat to put on weight.

S: What kind of physical shape were you in at that time?

B: Well, I was down to about 120 pounds, somewhere around that neighborhood.

S: And normal weight was what?

B: At that time it was around 160 pounds.

S: So you lost about 35 pounds?

- B: Yes. And there were other people, I'd say, that were in real worse shape. Now, there was one guy, his name was Hayjack and just the opposite worked on him. It must be that the starch and the potato diet that we were on must have reacted on his body because he was blown up. He was like three times the size of what we were. And he was like swollen. Now, the only thing that I can figure is that the reaction of the starch diet on his system, it blew him up like a balloon. Now, the rest of us were on the thin side as opposed to what he looked like.
- S: Were you debriefed at all?
- B: No, after that we were sent to the States. We were put on the liberty ship and we came back to the States. It took us eleven days to get back. And I was sent back to Fort Benning, Georgia. When I was at Fort Benning, Georgia, now listen to this: They were going through my records and the corporal sitting across the desk from me says, "I see here that you were assigned a Thompson sub-machine gun. Where is it?" (Laughter) Can you believe?
- S: That sounds like the Army. He didn't know that you were a prisoner?
- B: I don't know.
- S: Did you get a kick out of that?
- B: I really did. I began to think back on how that one gun was transferred from my possession to the colonel and then the colonel give me the .45 and then going to the company area and the cook giving me his carbine, 30 caliber. And then coming back to my platoon and the platoon taking the carbine, "You're not supposed to have that; here's a rifle." And then come back and then they say, "Where's your .45 automatic or your Thompson?" That was like a comedy of errors. To be trained, too, in a tank and then be put in the infantry was a comedy of errors too. I realize that they had to plug up the holes in the front line but . . .
- S: Would you have rather remained in the tank?
- B: That's what I was trained for and that's what I knew. If I was trained for the infantry, then that's where I want to be because that's where I'm trained. I know I'm in the infantry. If I was a pilot, which I took a test for and I passed in De Ridder, Louisiana, fighter pilot. In February of that year, they

had turned down everybody who was a passed applicant because they had too many. But I wanted to go into fighter pilot and I did pass it. As a matter of fact, they took me off the company role and they put me on steady KP because I was to go to the Air Force Academy, but it didn't happen. So as a result, I was sitting back. And then we finally wound up disbanding and going overseas.

S: Okay, the last thing I would like to ask is: Were you ever questioned by anyone in the military about the treatment you received in these various camps?

B: No, there was no such thing as asking you, "How were you treated? Did you get medical attention if you needed it? And did anybody die?" They didn't even question to find out who died or anything. To my knowledge, I don't remember it. If they did ask somebody, it's beyond me to know, but there might have been cases where they did. I don't know. I couldn't answer that question.

S: Is there anything that you might like to add that maybe I haven't asked?

B: Yes. What I would like to add is: I wish the American Government--now that they got the fifty hostages back after all this publicity that they received--would bring back our 2,500 and some MIA's that are over in Vietnam yet. Since the length of time since the war has been over, let's bring these soldiers home where they belong. Give the wives and their families a break. The wives are sitting at home wondering is her husband alive or not. They may want to remarry. They don't know if he's living or if he's dead. I mean, this is a heck of a thing to live with. How is she going to conduct her life? There may be other things involved that we don't even know about and yet we still have these people over there.

Now there is something wrong there and I don't like it. Because of the publicity that we received, I am now jealous of the reception that the hostages received as opposed to the military personnel who's duty it was to defend our country. And they did the best that they could. At least they participated and that's more than I can say for some congressmen and other people who are enjoying the freedom and who don't know anything about it, who take it for granted and if they don't watch their step, it's going to slip out of their fingers.

Though we have military people over there right now in Vietnam who do care to come home. And they should get them and give them the opportunity to come home. If they want to stay there on their own free will, then that's another story. But let's round them up first and bring them home. And if they want to stay, then that's their prerogative. But at least it will be cleared up. This is not fifty I'm talking about, I'm talking about 2,500. I wish that would happen.

S: Okay, thank you very much.

B: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW