

Alvis Kitchens
Savannah, Oct. 1, 1999

Aaron Elson: How were you injured when your plane was hit?

Alvis Kitchens: Well, it was a 20-millimeter shell coming up from the bottom.

Aaron Elson: A 20-millimeter coming up from the bottom ...

Alvis Kitchens: It exploded in between me and the radio operator.

Aaron Elson: Oh, so you were right next to Gilfoil?

Alvis Kitchens: Yes. I got part of it, and he got the most of it.

Aaron Elson: And you were injured in the backside, was it?

Alvis Kitchens: Yeah, in the, waist gun.

Aaron Elson: You were the waist gunner. And how was, Gilfoil, how was he hurt?

Alvis Kitchens: Well, like I said, that 20-millimeter coming up from the bottom, it exploded just about the time we ...

Aaron Elson: And did you help get him out of the plane?

Alvis Kitchens: Yeah, we got him out of the plane, me and Larry ...

Aaron Elson: Larry Bowers, yes, I talked to him yesterday.

Alvis Kitchens: We done what we could, and just pushed him out.

Aaron Elson: Was he conscious or was he in shock?

Alvis Kitchens: Yeah, he was in shock.

Aaron Elson: He didn't say anything?

Alvis Kitchens: He was bleeding real bad.

Alvis= daughter (Kathy Keys): I think his leg had been blown ... and they put a tourniquet, Daddy said, around the leg as best they could, to try to shut off the blood flow. Then got his chute on and pushed him out and pulled the chute.

Alvis Kitchens: He was dead by the time he got to the ground. At least that=s what they tell me.

Aaron Elson: Now, where did you land?

Alvis Kitchens: I landed in a plowed field with German soldiers all around. They were watching as I come down. Of course I was lucky.

Aaron Elson: What did you see when the fighters were attacking?

Alvis Kitchens: Just a lot of them. They were flying all around us, like a bunch of bees.

Aaron Elson: You had never actually shot at fighters before, had you?

Alvis Kitchens: Yeah, we had seen them before. Not that many. You know, they=d make a pass. It was aplenty of them to shoot that day. If you could stay up long enough.

Aaron Elson: When did you first see them coming in?

Alvis Kitchens: I don=t remember the exact time.

Aaron Elson: Not the time, but what was going on?

Alvis Kitchens: Well, I=ll tell you, we just looked and saw all those fighters coming in. We knew we was in for trouble. (Unintelligible) plane you=d see it drop, another one going down on fire.

Aaron Elson: Which part of the plane did you go out?

Alvis Kitchens: We went out the tail. We were trapped in the back end.

Aaron Elson: And which POW camp did you wind up in?

Alvis Kitchens: I went to (unintelligible) Stalag 13 I think. I wasn=t in there that long. I was in the hospital.

Aaron Elson: How badly were you hurt?

Alvis Kitchens: I stayed in there three and a half months.

Aaron Elson: How was the treatment?

Alvis Kitchens: It was pretty good? You know, considering they don=t have all the facilities and stuff that American hospitals possess.

Kathy Keys: Were you with anyone that you knew?

Alvis Kitchens: The only one I remember coming in was Thornton, and he didn=t stay there an hour or so. He had glass in his eye. I never did see him anymore, until we got back. I had a lot

of different injuries. They just pinned me up, pinned the muscles, and clamped it together, and my leg comes up, and I couldn't rest that way. And another doctor came in the next morning, and I don't know what he said, he said it in German, but I was back in the operating room in 15 minutes. He took all of that out, and let the muscle grow on its own.

Kathy Keys: So you still have some ...

Alvis Kitchens: Yes, I still have a big scar ... that leg still gives me a lot of trouble.

Kathy Keys: No, cause really, when he was younger, he didn't walk with a limp or anything, I'm sure it's the result of that doctor going back in and redoing ...

Jima Sparks: When you were growing up, did you hear these things?

Kathy Keys: No. Not until I was older. Then I'd ask, it would only be in response to specific questions that I'd ask, or Reggie would ask. He never talked about it.

Jima Sparks: Well it seems like it's either one extreme or the other, because George Collar seems to talk about it a lot.

Mrs. Kitchens: I don't know who else, maybe Frank, Frank Bertram did or not.

Alvis Kitchens: I don't think he did.

Jima Sparks: But maybe Bowers did. He was talking last night about the room in his house. So maybe his kids ...

Kathy Keys: It would be interesting to find out, you know, if he did that at a later time.

Jima Sparks: I know my father doesn't, my stepfather was in the Army, he rarely mentions, I remember he has a couple of pistols that he had brought back, German memorabilia, and he would be going through a drawer or something and pull something out, and he would tell us where he got it.

Aaron Elson: Did you have to march across Germany towards the end of the war?

Alvis Kitchens: No.

Aaron Elson: How were you liberated?

Alvis Kitchens: Russians come in our camp. They got in touch with the American army, and in just a few days we had a plane, picked us up.

Aaron Elson: Were you scared of the Russians?

Alvis Kitchens: No. I was glad to see >em (laughter). They bring us something to eat.

Kathy Keys: Yeah, they didn't have much food.

Alvis Kitchens: We didn't have a whole lot of food, other than the Red Cross parcels. That's the only thing that kept us going.

Kathy Keys: He was telling us yesterday, and that's the first time I heard about, like a piece of bread about, you know, two inches long, and that was supposed to last him the whole week. That would be their rations for the week.

Aaron Elson: Did they make bread, I've heard that they made bread that was almost like sawdust.

Alvis Kitchens: It wasn't real good. It tasted pretty good to us. Potato flour.

Mrs. Kitchens: What about when you were in the hospital?

Alvis Kitchens: The food was what they had.

Aaron Elson: Where was the hospital?

Alvis Kitchens: Frankfort.

Aaron Elson: Did the city get bombed much while you were there?

Alvis Kitchens: If it did I didn't know about it. It wasn't dropping close to us anyhow.

Jima Sparks: So when they picked you up in the field, when you landed ...

Alvis Kitchens: They took me into this little interrogation, German soldiers, they carried me in, and all I would give was name, rank and serial number. That would get them mad. Name, rank and serial number. They finally would just leave you alone.

Aaron Elson: Did they threaten you?

Alvis Kitchens: No. They didn't me.

Jima Sparks: And then they took you to Frankfort?

Alvis Kitchens: Yes.

Jima Sparks: On a train?

Alvis Kitchens: Yes, on a train.

Aaron Elson: How did you get the nickname Cotton? (Kathy Keys laughs)

Alvis Kitchens: Well, (unintelligible) (laughter, not sure what he was saying)

Jima Sparks: So were you all married before...

Mrs. Kitchens: I met him (unintelligible) in 45.

Aaron Elson: So you must have known each other before...

Mrs. Kitchens: No. Three months I think.

Kathy Keys: It was a blind date. (Laughter) His cousin (unintelligible) introduced you to him. Fifty-three years.

Mrs. Kitchens: It wasn't very long. We met in November and married in March.

Aaron Elson: And what did you do during the war?

Mrs. Kitchens: I worked at Selmon Field, the navigator school there. That's where I was working when I met him. But they were closing down the operations there, so I wasn't working at the time I met him. I was from out in the country (Kathy laughs), about 25 miles.

Alvis Kitchens: A country girl (laughter).

(Some of tape skipped. Selmon Field was in Monroe, La.)

Aaron Elson: Selmon Field ...

Kathy Keys: That was in Monroe.

Alvis Kitchens: That was a navigating school.

Aaron Elson: Now Monroe, what state is this? Pardon my ignorance.

Kathy Keys: (laughs) No, I can't believe you don't know where Monroe is. It's in Louisiana.

Mrs. Keys: Between Baton Rouge and (?)

Aaron Elson: That's a city.

Kathy Keys: Yeah, Monroe's a city.

Aaron Elson: Had you grown up on a farm?

Kathy Keys: Uh-huh.

Jima Sparks: I bet when you were over there in the hospital and in the POW camp, you thought you=d never eat another crawfish.

Mrs. Kitchens: You know, we didn=t eat crawfish up in the northern part of ...

Kathy Keys: Oh, really?

Mrs. Keys: We were in the northeastern part of ...

Kathy Keys: I think it=s interesting, Daddy, what happened at the end of the war.

Alvis Kitchens: At the end?

Kathy Keys: Yeah, that you came home, he thought the Red Cross was notifying them that he was going to be coming home.

Aaron Elson: And they hadn=t?

Kathy Keys: No. And they hadn=t. And he, you know, gets off of the bus, or the train, the train, you got off of the train and they weren=t there to meet him. So he just catches the bus that runs by his, you know, that he knew would run by his house. And he=s at the bus stop, and his father passes by, in his car, and sees Daddy standing at the bus stop. (Laughter)

Alvis Kitchens: They didn=t even know I was back in the country.

Kathy Keys: They didn=t know if he was, you know, still alive.

Alvis Kitchens: The Red Cross didn=t ...

Aaron Elson: They hadn=t even notified them that you were missing in action?

Kathy Keys: They notified them that he was missing in action.

Jima Sparks: So how long had you been away from home?

Alvis Kitchens: Uhh, two years.

Kathy Keys: So you can imagine his father=s shock when he was driving by and seeing his son standing there, that he hadn=t seen for two years.

Jima Sparks: Were you in your uniform?

Alvis Kitchens: I was in my uniform. When I got home, I weighed 135 pounds. I went in at 175.

Aaron Elson: And you had played football, your wife said?

Alvis Kitchens: Yes. In high school.

Mrs. Kitchens: He was 18 when he went in.

Alvis Kitchens: A young boy.

Aaron Elson: So you were 20 when you came back or 21?

Alvis Kitchens: Twenty. ... You wonder how you managed to make it.

Kathy Keys: In addition to the injury caused by the shell, he contracted some sort of blood disease while he was in the hospital, and they gave you shots, what, every day?

Alvis Kitchens: Practically every day.

Kathy Keys: He had some type of infection in his blood. He almost died.

Some of tape not transcribed.

Mrs. Kitchens: It may have been Frank, he talked about, that his arms were burned, his arms and hands were badly burned. But when I wrote to him, he had no scars, and I asked him why, I believe he said his face, his neck and chest were badly burned, and he had no scars, and I asked him why, and he said that the Germans were trying out some new treatments for blonding(?) During the war, and that they were using some new medications and new treatments and they used it on him. And he was convinced that that=s why he had no scarring. I don=t know if you have ever heard that?

Aaron Elson: No, I=ve interviewed a lot of people who were burned who were in American medical hospitals, and one fellow said that the guy in the next bed to him, both of them, they were using new skin grafting techniques over several months, and the guy next to him it didn=t work, and it just, I forget exactly what he said, but it was, but for him it did. He was very lucky.

Kathy Keys: And he was in an American hospital?

Aaron Elson: Actually I think he was back in the States already. But he was in a tank and it caught on fire and he was badly burned getting out of it.

(Some of tape not transcribed)

Aaron Elson: What did you see on the way down when you bailed out?

Alvis Kitchens: A lot of parachutes.

Aaron Elson: You saw a lot of parachutes?

Alvis Kitchens: Yeah. Most of them was falling pretty close to where I ... Me and Larry went out about the same time, he landed in (unintelligible)

Jima Sparks: So you never did see him any more?

Aaron Elson: Oh, Larry, I talked to him yesterday, I think he said he saw civilians and he tried to get, to manipulate or to maneuver into some woods, and he managed to do it, even though he had never had any experience with a parachute.

Alvis Kitchens: You just looked at that fire coming out of it, you said, well, here we go. You see, we had crash landed one plane. That was (unintelligible).

Jima Sparks: When was this?

Alvis Kitchens: That was on my fifth mission.

Jima Sparks: Where did you crash?

Alvis Kitchens: We managed to cross the English Channel.

Aaron Elson: Could you see the trees as you were going over the top?

Alvis Kitchens: Yeah, we felt them! The tail section was left up in the top of them.

Aaron Elson: Was it? I=ll be darned.

Alvis Kitchens: Where the tail gunner was. Where he had been. Not a soul got hurt.

Aaron Elson: Not in the crash, but Weddle...

Alvis Kitchens: Weddle got his toe shot off...

Aaron Elson: When they were hit. There=s a description of that in the book. Oh no, maybe there=s not. Frank Bertram talks about it a little.

Alvis Kitchens: I=ve got a picture of the plane.

Aaron Elson: I would love to get a copy of that.

Alvis Kitchens: It=s in Monroe.