

I was brought up in the aftermath of World War I, and we were always taught that that was the war to end all wars. All of us kids were steeped in the heroics of Raoul Lufberry and Eddie Rickenbacker and Frank Luke, and we were a little bit sad there weren't going to be any more wars; we wouldn't be able to get to fight. Boy, we were really wrong about that! I think the draft came out in 1940, and I had a pretty high number, 319 or something like that. Back in the summer of 1941 I had a cousin who was in the 75th Toronto Scottish Regiment, which was sort of like a National Guard outfit. In 1939 he was called to active duty and went overseas. He was gone for six years. He was at Dieppe, he was down in Italy and he was all over with the Canadian army.

I had an uncle who was killed in the battle of the Somme in World War I when he was fighting with the British army. We kind of had a military background and we were eager to go, especially when everybody else was going. So one day another fellow and I drove over to Windsor, Ontario, and when we went across the bridge the customs man said, "What are you going to Canada for?"

We said, "We've got business."

He hollered down, "Two more!"

There were over 10,000 Americans who crossed the Ambassador Bridge to get into the Canadian army.

But when we got down to the headquarters, they said, "We want to see a birth certificate. Go home and get it and we'll take you."

When we got home, we heard that a local garage was recruiting for a special unit in Illinois that would train you and give you a staff sergeant rating and send you to Egypt to be attached to the British 8th Army to repair those old tanks that went over on lend-lease. So another fellow named Deed and I went down and signed up. We quit our jobs. They gave us a paper and said we had to take it over to the induction center on Monday morning. They didn't say what time. He took an early bus and I took a later bus, and I got there at 20 minutes after 12. When I went in, there was a great big master sergeant in this office.

"What can I do for you?"

I gave him the paper. He looked at it and said, "You're 20 minutes too late."

"What do you mean?"

"They filled that quota and cut off everything at noon."

I said, "What else have you got?"

He said, "We need a lot of people in the infantry."

I said, "Is there anything else?"

He said, "If you can pass the mental and the physical, you can get in the Air Cadets."

I said, "How do I do that?"

He said, "There's a traveling Cadet Board coming to your town next week. You go down, and they've got all their own physicians and test people."

It was like a big trailer, by the courthouse. You took this four-hour written exam, and if you passed that, they gave you a physical. And if you passed that, they swore you in on the spot.

Before I did that, I got on the phone and I called Canada. I said, "Can I still get in the Royal Canadian Air Force and be an American citizen?"

They said, "Since Pearl Harbor we can't take anybody."

So I went down to the Cadet Board and there were 60 of us. Out of the 60, about 25 passed the written test. It had a lot of mechanics. I did well on it. Then they gave us the physical. I passed that, and was sworn in as a private in the Reserves on the spot.

Then they told me to go home and wait to hear from them. They didn't have enough training facilities. I got notified to report to duty on the 5th of January, 1943. And this fellow Deed who went into that outfit that was supposed to go to Egypt, he ended up in the 9th Armored Division. The fellow I went to Canada with originally ended up in the Seabees in the South Pacific.

I reported to duty in Detroit. There were about 250 of us. They marched us in a body down to the station. They had a band there, but it was 25 below zero and the horns froze up and they couldn't play.

I went to Nashville, and they gave us all kinds of tests. I passed, and was told I could either go to

pilot training or to bombardier school. I didn't do so well on the navigation. I said, "I want to be a pilot." Everybody wanted to be a pilot.

They sent me to Maxwell Field, Alabama. I went through pre-flight there, and I ended up at Carlston Field in Florida for primary training. And I washed out on a check ride. They washed them out like mad, because they had more people who wanted to be pilots than they could use. But they didn't have enough going to bombardier school.

I was disgusted when I washed out. I knew I could fly the plane but I screwed up a couple of things. On an S-turn I lost 50 feet. I didn't do too good on a forced landing. I did pretty good on the spins and stalls, and I felt in my own mind I could have passed.

That's neither here nor there; I flunked out. And that was one of the lowest points in my life, because everybody at home thinks you're going to be a pilot and all of a sudden you're letting everybody down. Including yourself.

Everybody who washes out has to go before a board, and they ask you: "What would you like to do?"

I said, "I want to go to ordnance OCS."

"Well, you can have that for second choice; we're sending you to bombardier school."

That's how I became a bombardier.

I went out to Texas to Ellington Field and went through pre-flight again. Then I went to flexible gunnery school at Laredo, and eventually to advanced bombardier school at Big Spring, Texas.

One of my partners in Ellington Field was Art Devlin, the famous skier. He later became a bombardier and he didn't go to Laredo; he went to Harlingen and I lost track of him, but he was on the Olympic team after the war. I visit him up in Lake Placid; he runs a motel up there.

We graduated just before Christmas of '43 and came home on a 10-day delay en route. Then we went to Salt Lake City where they made up the crews, and I was assigned to Reg Miner's crew.

We went to Casper, Wyoming, for phase training; then the weather got so bad that they sent us down to Pueblo, Colorado, and we finished our phase training there.

They gave us a new plane when we were up at Casper. We flew it to Topeka, Kansas, for alterations. Then we went on another plane to Lincoln, Nebraska, and we waited around Lincoln about a week. Finally our plane showed up and we got our orders. The orders were sealed. We had to get all our stuff together and report to the flight line. We got on the plane, and Reg Miner couldn't open that sealed order until he got aloft.

When we were in the air, we found we were going to Bangor, Maine. So we knew we were going to Europe. You either went to the Pacific or the Atlantic. There were two ways to go to Europe, the southern route and the northern. Bangor was the northern route; the southern route went down through Puerto Rico and Brazil and across to Africa.

From Bangor we flew up to Goose Bay, and the weather was pretty bad; there were still a lot of icebergs out in the ocean. Eventually we flew to Iceland. We spent the night in Iceland, and the next day we took off and made landfall at Stornaway on the island of Lewis. Then we went down across the Scottish Highlands and across the North Sea and part of the Irish Sea and landed on the island of Anglesea in Wales, in a place called Valley.

They'd issued the navigator and myself and some of the waist gunners big powerful binoculars that were supposed to spot any kind of ship. We didn't even see the ocean most of the time because of the clouds.

That was the last time we ever saw that brand-new plane. A lot of guys had spent money having nice logos put on, and then they lost their planes. We hadn't put any nose art on ours. Miner didn't go for logos much. It didn't make much difference. We flew with a lot of planes that had logos when we got to England. About the nicest plane I ever flew in – one of the best-kept on the ground – was one called Win With Paige. The crew chief's name was Paige, and the original pilot's name was Wynn. That Paige was a wonderful mechanic, and he kept that plane in tip top shape. We flew quite a few missions on it. To give you an idea of what a good crew chief does, he not only keeps the engine in good shape and everything top-notch, but he looks after the little things. Like one of the problems a guy getting in a nose turret has is

those big clodhopper shoes we had; you couldn't get your heel between the gun saddle and the seat. So he cut the clearance of the seat. And another thing that was bad, when the Consolidated B-24 was first built, it didn't have a front turret. It had a big greenhouse and it had an old machine gun sticking out through the Plexiglas, and it wasn't too satisfactory. So they decided to put a turret in. What they did at Consolidated was take a hydraulic Consolidated tail turret and mount it up in the front. It was a cobbled-up job and it was a mess, because they had two sets of doors, and you had trouble getting in and you had trouble getting out. And you don't want to have trouble getting out, I can tell you that.

What they did in our group – I don't know whether they did it in all the groups, but we had good engineering in our group – the later planes were coming in with electrical nose turrets. They were beautiful turrets made by Emerson Electric. They only had a single door and it was easy to get in and out. One of the problems with a hydraulic turret is they get to leaking, and then they just don't operate right. With an electrical turret; you've got a lot better control.

We arrived in Valley, Wales, sometime in May and we stayed overnight at a little base there. The next day we went on trucks and got on a train and we went up through North Wales and over into Staffordshire. There was a staging area called Stone in Staffordshire. We were there for several days, and then we got orders to pack our stuff and get down to the train depot, and they took us up to a place called Warrington, I think it's in Cheshire. It's not too far from the old Ringway Airport; I think that's now Manchester International Airport but at that time it was a small military airport. And as we pulled into the station at Warrington, it was June the 6th, 1944, because the stationmaster came running out, and he said, "They've landed in Normandy!" Everybody cheered.

We got off the train and they put us on trucks and took us over to Ringway, and they loaded us on some old B-17s and took us to a place called Clontow in Northern Ireland; it's probably about 40 miles west of Belfast in County Tyrone. The purpose of the base at Clontow was to train the new pilots in formation procedure. Formation flying is one of the toughest things they had to do because here's all these thousands of airplanes at all these bases clustered into an area probably about the size of northwestern Ohio. When you're going on say a thousand plane raid, you've got to form. And forming is a tough job, because you've got to be at a certain altitude in a certain spot at a certain time. That's easy to say, but when there are all these bees flying around, that's not too easy. What they did was they had radio signals coming up from the ground called bunchers and splasers, and they homed in on those at a certain time and a certain altitude. And the first guy up there was called a zebra ship. Each group had a zebra ship; ours was an old B-24-B called Lucky Gordon, kind of an orange dappled looking thing. He'd be up there and he'd be firing certain color flares; each formation had to have a different colored flare, so you had two or three things going, you had the radio signal plus the zebra ship firing these flares, and you circled around and circled around until you finally got in formation.

At Clontow, there was a crew that had trained with us in Casper and I knew the bombardier. His name was Freddie Crockett. They had a co-pilot by the name of Olsen. He was from Long Island. A big, tall, blond-haired, Swedish looking guy. Had a good voice. Used to sing in the light opera. He was down at this lake – this lake, mind you, is 15 miles across. It's a huge lake. And Olsen was down there monkeying around and he fell in. An eel fisherman by the name of Peter Coyle fished him out. And he took him up to the house to dry him out and give him some hot tea and whatnot. So he got acquainted with the family. Peter Coyle was a bachelor but he lived with his sister and her husband and his mother in this old stone cottage. Their family lived in that cottage for over 250 years. And he's a guy about 40. So the next night, Olsen said, "I'm going over to Peter Coyle's. I'm taking my tobacco ration for the grown-ups and some candy for the kids. Do you want to go along?" I forked over my tobacco ration and some candy, and we went over to Peter Coyle's cottage, and he treated us like we were long-lost brothers. They didn't have much. They had a stone floor and the chickens came in and out the door. They didn't have a fireplace; they had a raised stone hearth. And the smoke was peat smoke; it went right up the side of the wall and out a hole in the roof. They had an iron hook, and they brewed their tea on that. They made us tea and eggs.

After we were done, Peter Coyle had four little nieces up to about 10 years old, and they started to sing. Boy, could they sing. They were just like larks. It seemed like everybody in Ireland could sing. First

they sang Irish songs, and then they sang “The Yellow Rose of Texas.” I’ll never forget, they sang, “The yellow rose of Texas beats the belles of Tennen-see.”

Then we all started to sing, and Olsen was really a good singer. When we got done, we felt like we were their own relations. Peter Coyle took us down to an old barn, and there were a lot of bicycles and horses and wagons outside. There was a traveling theatrical group that was putting on a show. Between acts, one guy got up who used to sing songs in rhyme about people in the audience.

Well, they must have given him our name, because this guy sang a big song about Olsen and me and about Olsen dropping in the lake. I’d give anything if I had a tape recorder. I can’t remember the words, but it was all in rhyme and it was all in tune, and it was really an honor.

When we got done, Peter Coyle gave his rosary to Olsen, and he gave me a little religious medal. I don’t think I’m superstitious but I really am. I didn’t have that the day I went down. And I didn’t have a roll of tape. I always carried a roll of tape because one of the first things that happened was an evadee came to give us a talk. He was someone who had been shot down and was helped by the Underground, and he eventually crossed the Pyrenees Mountains on foot. And he said, “One thing you’ve got to do is protect your feet. And the best thing you can have when you’re walking is a roll of tape, so you won’t get blisters.” I always carried a roll of tape, but the day I went down I didn’t have my roll of tape with me. I didn’t think I was going to fly that day. And I didn’t have my GI shoes, which I normally carried. The tape wouldn’t have done me any good anyway, because I got captured as soon as I landed.

After we were assigned to the 445th Bomb Group, we were assigned to a nissen hut. There were only two people in my hut when I arrived. One of them was a Lieutenant Reed, who was a bombardier from Alliance, Kansas. He’d been in a terrible crash in England coming back from a mission, and he was the only survivor. He was about half flak-happy. He’d been in the hospital and was recovering, and he was just about finished with his missions. He might have made a mission or two more, but boy, he was jumpy. He played the cornet. And his hero was Mugsy Spanier. He had a little windup phonograph with all of Mugsy Spanier’s 78 records; he’d play them and he’d tune in with his cornet. He’d played a lot of jazz gigs in Kansas City.

The other guy in our hut was a fellow named Captain Steinbacher. Captain Steinbacher was from Williamsport, Pennsylvania. He was one of the original pilots that flew overseas with the group. He had finished up. He had played football for Penn State. Good looking, big, burly, and a heck of a nice guy. He and another pilot named Neil Johnson had finished their missions, and they prevailed upon Colonel Terrill, who was the commanding officer at that time, to put in a word for them. They wanted to stay in England and get into fighter planes. In the meantime they volunteered – in those days they could get done with 25 missions, but they volunteered to do five more while they’re waiting. He’d just finished up his five more, and he didn’t have much to do, so he always used to come down to breakfast at 3 o’clock in the morning with the guys who were scheduled to fly because that was the only time you could get fresh eggs. I got acquainted with him because he had the bunk right across the aisle from me. He lent me books.

He came down to breakfast the day we were going on our first mission. We didn’t fly with our own crew. They always broke you up a little bit and flew you with another, experienced crew. In fact, they may have flown Miner one ahead of us. I know first the day I flew, I flew with a Lieutenant Schreck, and Miner was flying as co-pilot off our wing.

When we got down to breakfast, Steinbacher was eating fresh eggs. All us rookies were kind of antsy. We’re starting to ask him about this flak and everything. And Steinbacher says, “Oh, you don’t have to worry about that flak. You see those black powder puffs out there, they’re not going to hurt you. They’ve already gone off. Fact is, you’re never going to see the one that hits you, so there’s no use worrying about it.” Well, that made you feel a little better. Not much. Oh, he did say one thing. He said, “When they start getting yellow centers, they’re getting a little close.”

So we went down to briefing and Metro Moe – that’s what they called the weatherman – gave a rosy picture about the weather: “It’s a little cloudy on takeoff; it’s just ground fog. It’ll be burned off by the time you get back. Maybe.”

Then the intelligence officer came on. He had this map of Europe, and it showed where there were

flak places. He had us going over the Netherlands. He said, "We've got you going through a flak gap, so you shouldn't see any flak until you get on the bomb run." We were going to a place called Kothen, which is south of Berlin. It was quite a long mission. We were supposed to bomb a Junkers engine factory. And the instructions were, "If you can't see the target don't bomb. Go to a secondary target at a place called Stendal." And the same thing applied there.

So we're flying across the North Sea and we no more than made landfall when up came the flak. We're supposed to be going through a "flak gap." Up came the flak and it had big yellow centers.

Luckily, we got through that all right. But then we got on the bomb run, and we were on that damn bomb run for 12 minutes. That's a long time. And the flak was thick as hair on a dog; you're going right into it, bommm, bommm, bommm, bommm, bommm, bommm, all over. It looked just like a whole poppy field full of black flak. All of a sudden, BANG! It sounded just like a sledgehammer hit the plane, and a piece of flak came in the side of the nose and went right between the navigator and me and out the other side. Miner was flying off our left wing and I looked over and saw a burst underneath his plane and I saw them feather an engine and they started going down and oh God Almighty, I thought, I'll never get to fly with Miner. But they made it back on three engines.

We were on that bomb run for 12 minutes, and the worst part of it was they didn't drop the bombs. Then we go over to Stendal. Same thing over there only the flak wasn't quite as bad, but we still didn't drop the bombs. So on the way back we had to hit a target of opportunity because you can't drop the bombs in Belgium or France or the Netherlands unless you've got a specific target. We came across some marshaling yards about halfway between Hanover and Berlin on the main railway line, and we plastered them pretty good.

That first mission was a pretty good foretaste of what was to come. The next mission we had, we went to a buzz bomb site. It was a short mission, over in the Pas de Calais. These buzz bomb sites were in the forest, and were camouflaged so that you couldn't see them from the air. The only way you could bomb one was from Underground reports. And we were lucky that day. We hit what we were supposed to; at least that's what they said. But I went on another one in the same area, and we couldn't find it. We circled around and around until I thought we were going to run out of gas, and we finally had to come back without bombing. We had to drop our bombs in the North Sea at a jettison point because they were RDX bombs, and they weren't too stable on landing. General purpose bombs you could land with.

The RDX was a high explosive. The GP bombs you could roll off a truck and it wouldn't hurt them, but the RDX was unstable. One day we were at Tibenham and there was the damndest explosion I ever heard in my life. It must have been 30 miles away. The depot blew up; I don't know how many people were killed. Blew a whole bomb dump up. You could hear it all over East Anglia. There was very little news about it because they kept it quiet. But I heard later that some guys were unloading RDX bombs and they rolled them off a truck, and one of them went off and blew right in this bomb dump.

I was taken off of Miner's crew. Miner was scheduled to become a lead pilot. He was a good pilot. And [Frank] Bertram was a good navigator. They replaced me with a radar guy; that's all I know. They put two guys on his crew and they took me off. They called me in the office one day and the old man, Major Martin, said he's going to put me in the pool. And he said, "Don't worry. You're going to get plenty of action." When I went down I was on my 29th mission. Miner's crew was on about their 19th mission. I flew so many missions. Day after day after day I'd be on a mission. All you could think of was getting up and getting down and going to bed.

I always thought I flew with seven different crews. I came to find out I flew with 10 different pilots. In one period I flew with two different pilots, Jerome Bernstein and Lieutenant Klein. I flew with Schreck the first mission. I flew seven missions with Miner. Then I flew four with Jerome Bernstein. I flew one with Wren, who had been Bernstein's co-pilot. And I'll never forget that mission. That was my 13th mission. Whenever you fly a mission with a co-pilot you're always a little leery because he didn't have the training a pilot had. But we thought Wren was good. We had a guy with us that mission; I'm not going to mention his name. This guy had been flying AT-6s at gunnery school at Laredo, and he was a chickenshit guy from the word go. Normally pilots are pretty nice guys. But this guy thought he was the

king of the world. When he came overseas he was a first lieutenant, and Wren was only a second lieutenant. When this guy arrived, he had his own crew, and as soon as that plane landed, he went into the operations office and wanted to fire his whole crew. So Major Martin interviewed each guy one at a time. Instead of firing the crew, he put this guy in the pool and gave them another pilot.

Here we are flying with a pilot with whom we'd never been on a mission before except as a co-pilot. And the first lieutenant is flying as co-pilot. I was the bombardier. And from the minute we took off, this first lieutenant is crabbing about the way Wren's flying the plane. This gets irritating after a while, because you're worried about the guy anyway and then this guy is barking at him all the time. You don't like that over the intercom. You want peace and quiet.

Finally, when we got on the bomb run, I got control of the plane. And he's still barking all the time. You're supposed to maintain radio silence on the bomb run so that the bombardier can concentrate. Finally, I let him have it. I said, "Get the heck off this intercom! We're on a bomb run."

Now he's going to have me court-martialed.

When we got back down, they took him off the crew again. Last I knew he was still sitting in the pool. I don't know what ever happened to him. He may be alive yet. He may have a nice family, he may be a nice guy, I don't know, but he sure irritated me. Anyway, I didn't get court-martialed.

I flew with Jack Knox and J.R. Lemons and Howard Boldt. Poor old Bernstein was a good pilot. He was from New York City. He's got Alzheimer's now, lives out in Oregon. I flew with Donald. He got killed on the Kassel raid. Bob Russell, I still correspond with him, he's a good guy, lives out in San Diego. Brett, he got killed on the Kassel raid. [Jim] Schaen got killed on the Kassel raid.

On the 16th of August I went on the Dessau raid. I always thought I was flying with Bernstein but I was flying with Klein that day. That was a tough target. It was not far from Magdeburg; it had a lot of flak. And we had supercharger trouble; the pilot couldn't keep it in formation. He couldn't control the plane. So before we got to the target he had to get permission to leave the formation and head back for England. He called me up and said, "Get on the bomb sight and pick out a target of opportunity before we get to the Dutch border."

I said, "Okay."

In the meantime, we had a guy by the name of Frederick Jacoby who lives in New York City; he's retired from Columbia University. Lives on Central Park West. Frederick Jacoby was an intelligence officer. Donald S. Klopfer was our intelligence leader; he was a major. He was a partner with Bennett Cerf and Alfred Knopf and they started Random House. He died in his eighties a few years ago. He was a good friend of Jacoby, and after the war Jacoby worked for him for a while in the publishing company, then he eventually went into television. He was one of the original guys who ran the Howdy Doody show. He eventually became a publicity man for Columbia University.

Jacoby always was pushing to try to get on a mission, so they finally let him go, and he was riding up in the nose turret that day. When we started back for England we called for some fighter escort. It didn't show up right away, but here we are stooging across Germany all alone in real good weather, and I had to get on a target. I see the Dortmund-Ens Canal coming up, and I'm going to hit a bridge on it. I pick a bridge out, and I'm on the bomb run. I've got control of the plane. Everybody's supposed to keep their face out of the intercom. Old Jacoby's real excited because he thought fighters were coming after us. "Oh my God!" he says, "There's an airfield!"

He screwed me up and I knew I was never gonna hit that bridge. I thought, "I've got to do something quick because the Dutch border isn't very far away." So I hurried up, and you've got to remember, on this autopilot – it was a Sperry that you've got on a B-24; you can rack that baby clear over to 45 degrees back and you won't tumble the gyro. A B-17 had the Norden autopilot; it'd only go about 18 degrees back and it would tumble the gyro, then you're really screwed. I racked that baby – I tilted everybody about 45 degrees. I went down and I got on that bomb run on that airfield that he's pointing out down there. I've got the course killed with the one knob, and I'm trying to kill rate, and I knew I wasn't going to get it killed in time and sure enough the bombs went over the top of the target and hit in a woods. And I was mad at Jacoby. "You dirty bum. My chance for being a hero here, and you screwed it up." I thought if I could have only got that bridge. I kind of barked at old Jacoby a little bit. We got back to the base, and he

rushed right into the intelligence office. He came running out, all smiles, and he had a folder full of maps. He said, "You know what that was? That was a night fighter base, and they had their planes stashed in hardstands in the woods!"

We had a party at the officers club one night, and Jimmy Stewart came in with General Timberlake [Stewart had been a squadron leader in the 445th]. Of course, being a second lieutenant I'm not about to go up and start talking to Jimmy Stewart. He was a lieutenant colonel then. He and General Timberlake were standing at the bar, and all the girls – there were a lot of nurses and English girls there – they circled around him like flies around a horse biscuit. You couldn't get close to him. He was a good friend of Captain Steinbacher. Eventually Captain Steinbacher and Neil Johnson both went into P-51s. And the night that Jimmy Stewart was there, Steinbacher came back from a raid to Munich, and he had shot down his first FW-190. He was celebrating that. Later on – I found this out afterwards from Major Martin – after the Kassel raid, one night he came back from a raid, and he did a buzz job over Tibenham. He damn near took the rooftop off, and he pulled up and went into a high-speed stall and crashed. It killed him. I talked to a guy that was in the medics that went out and dug him out of the plane. Terrible. He was a big guy, old Steinbacher. When I got back home and I got my belongings back – they would go in the hut and take all the belongings that they thought were yours, and they would go through everything, and they censored everything, threw your address books away – among the things they sent to my home was a pair of Brazil boots that were too big for me, and I think they belonged to Captain Steinbacher. They used to buy them down in Natal, Brazil, on the way over on the southern route.

The day before the Kassel raid we bombed the railroad yards at Hamm. They had been hit quite a few times, but the Germans always were able to get them running again in a couple of days. They had big trainloads of Russian prisoners whose sole job was to fix those railroads. I flew with Bob Russell. It turned out to be his last mission. And Krobach was the co-pilot. He was the operations officer. There was flak but we didn't see any fighters. We got back over the North Sea – this was Russell's last mission – and he got permission to leave the formation and he just put that baby in a dive, and he flew so low we had to come up to clear the top of a church steeple.

The next day, I was scheduled to go on a three-day pass. I even had the pass. And normally, you'd go the night before. The pass didn't start till midnight. You'd go down to Tibenham station and catch the train the night before. But I didn't do that. I thought, I'll go down there and take my time. I had it coming, too. I hadn't had a three-day pass for about 17 missions.

About 3 o'clock in the morning, there was a jeep that the guy who woke the crews up used. He was a sergeant from the 702nd Squadron headquarters; he had a jeep and it had a squeaky brake. In the middle of the night you'd be sleeping and all of a sudden you'd hear a jeep coming, you'd kind of get about halfway up, and you'd listen. If you didn't hear any squeaky brake you knew you're okay, you could go back to sleep. But if you heard a squeaky brake out in front, oh my God, he's coming in our hut!

He'd come in and you'd just lay there hoping he wouldn't come over to your bunk. Or he'd grab you and shake you, "Come on, Lieutenant, you've got to get up! You're going on the mission." And hey, he woke me up.

I said, "I'm not going. I'm going on a three-day pass."

"No," he said, "I've got your name here on the list. You're going to take a guy's place."

I knew whose place it was. It was Lieutenant Aarvig on Schaen's crew. Schaen and Aarvig and his co-pilot, Bobby McGough, and his navigator, Corman Bean, were all in our hut. Aarvig hadn't come back from London on his three-day pass. So I'm taking his place.

I was mad. I didn't want to go. I had my heart set on going to London. Well, okay. So I went down. And I remember distinctly, I think that was the morning that Major General Kempner came to the briefing. I think it was that morning, but sometimes I get mornings mixed up. It seems like he was there and he came to the bombardiers' briefing.

As I recall that briefing, we were supposed to hit primarily the railyards. Now everybody says we were supposed to hit the Henschel engine works, but as I recall it, we were to hit the railyards and right

adjacent to the railyards was the Henschel engine factory and we were supposed to hit both of them. And I remember I was pretty honored that Kempner showed up at our bombardiers' briefing.

Then I went out and got in the plane and we took off.

As I remember, we came in – you always tried to go on a target downwind because it's faster; you don't want to go upwind, because you're sitting there like a bird waiting for somebody to shoot at you. They always tried to get you downwind and as I remember we had a westerly-northwesterly wind that day. We came in and hit the initial point, and we were supposed to take a little turn to the east. We took a big turn to the east. We wound up going north of Kassel, and straight west towards Goettingen. And as soon as we made that turn, our navigator was on the intercom. He said, "Somebody screwed up. We're not supposed to be turning this much." Somebody goofed. Probably the "Mickey" man. The radar man. I think that's exactly what happened. I think the radar guy screwed up, and that was it.

It turned out later, that radar guy happened to be at the same barracks [in Stalag Luft 1] as Miner and Bertram. I was in a different compound. They told me they questioned him about that. He swore up and down that he hit Kassel. Everybody knew that was wrong. Even the dumbest guy, if he looked out the window, he could see the Kassel flak over there, and you're coming down here.

The radar man wouldn't have been looking out the window; he was looking through some type of a scope. But if somebody else were looking out the window, they should have known. It was ridiculous. Maybe by the time they found out it was too late. In my humble opinion, once we made the mistake, you couldn't just come back because you'd be flying through the group. It would be a disaster. But why couldn't he have made a 360-degree turn and gotten behind the rest of the group? He [the command pilot, Major Donald McKoy] made a split-second decision. He looked at the map and saw Goettingen. So he decides in a split-second [to bomb Goettingen]. They screwed that up, too. The only thing it killed is a cow. We hit the fields. It was a fiasco all the way around.

You've got to chalk it up to an error. You can't chalk it up to somebody having an ulterior motive. The only thing that's really bad about it was that somebody failed to notify our fighter escort.

We dropped the bombs at Goettingen and then instead of turning around and getting the heck out of there they made the same pattern they originally had for Kassel, only about fifty miles too far west. We made a right turn, and in the vicinity of Eisenach we made another right turn, and at that point we got hit by about 150 FW-190s and ME-109s. They came in on a broad front, in three waves, and were totally unexpected.

The first inkling I had that anything was wrong was when I heard something hitting the plane. It turned out to be .20-millimeter shells. Before we got hit, I saw these small flak bursts in front of us, and I'd never seen flak like that; it seemed like brown basketballs right in front of us. And they were very close. I thought, "I never saw flak like that." It didn't dawn on me that it was fighter cannons coming from behind.

Then I started feeling jolts hitting the plane. There was one underneath the turret and there were some on the left wing, and the next thing I knew the left wing was on fire.

About that time this fighter plane came over the top of the plane. It couldn't have been more than ten or fifteen feet above us. I tried to get the turret trained on him but nothing worked. The turret was dead. The only thing I could think of was that the hydraulics were shot.

I wasn't wearing a flak suit at the time. We had them, but I never could wear one in the turret; an average-size guy couldn't get into the nose turret with a flak suit on. Maybe a little guy could. I never wore a flak suit. I didn't even wear a flak helmet. I was just in there with my uniform and my heated flying suit.

Shortly after that fighter plane went over, I looked out and saw the wing on fire and we started nosing down. At the same time I looked over toward the lead squadron and I could see at least two planes flying along on fire, and finally they dropped off.

The flying suit I was wearing was a brand new model that the British had come up with. It was tan, and instead of having a liner with little wires in it, the wires were in the jacket itself, which was sort of padded, and you had your little boots that you wore underneath your regular flying boots. It was a much more comfortable jacket, and also it served as a piece of outerwear. The only thing that was bad was that I

forgot my GI shoes. I should have had them with me because I lost my flying boots when I bailed out. They took off when my parachute opened, and there I was in my stocking feet.

You also couldn't wear your parachute in the front turret, so I had it sitting someplace near where you got out of the turret. When I got out it wasn't there. Corman Bean, the navigator, had it in his hand. He had his on already and he snapped mine on me. Then he bent down and opened the nose wheel door, and then he hesitated. I thought he didn't want to jump, so I kind of gave him a little boost, and he gave me heck about that later. He said, "I was looking up to see what the pilot was doing."

I just kind of nudged him a little bit and then he went out. I went out right after him, and I thought, "I'd better make sure this chute's gonna work," so I hadn't fallen very far when I pulled the ripcord and Boom! My boots took off.

I'd estimate we were at 18 or 20,000 feet when I bailed out. A lot of guys decided to delay their chute, but I didn't. I'd never been in a parachute before. We'd had instructions, but it wasn't much. All they told you was a chest pack is like jumping off a 12-foot wall, so you know you're going to hit pretty hard. Especially when I didn't have my boots on, it kind of scared me.

When I bailed out, it was just like the battle in "Wings." You'd hear those guns shooting and you could hear stuff blowing up and planes blowing up and you could see bomb bay doors come floating by, and the fighters sailing in on these guys. It was just like the movies. Better than the movies. More realistic.

Everything happened so quick. It seemed that there had to be about 40 chutes in the air, and there was bedlam. But gradually, as you went down, the battle faded away. Pretty soon you could hardly hear it, and when I got into the clouds it was deathly silent. I could see nothing and hear nothing. It was the eeriest feeling. It seemed ethereal.

When I broke through the clouds at about 3,000 feet, I could see everything on the ground. There was a panoramic view. A beautiful scene. Little village. Ruined castle on a hill and a little river. I couldn't make out anybody on the ground yet.

About that time I heard a plane coming. I looked up and here came a fighter plane about my level, right toward me. When he saw me, he banked around, about the length of a football field away. And I could see it was a P-51 with a yellow nose. He saw me with my Mae West, and he knew I was American. He waved at me and I waved at him. And then he went on and his prop wash hit me, and I swung as high as the Eiffel Tower both ways.

When that settled down, I began to see more clearly on the ground. I was coming down with the wind behind my back. They told you to land facing away from the wind. Then you can see what's coming up. And they also told us when we're going to hit the ground to relax like a tumbler.

Before that happened, though, I could see a guy coming up a lane on a bicycle. He was looking up at me. And I was stretching things but I thought, "He's probably a Polish slave laborer, and I can talk him into hiding me out."

When I landed I twisted my left ankle and I fell on my left shoulder. It knocked the wind out of me, and the chute was dragging me across this field. Luckily it was a plowed field. I reached out and pulled the shrouds and collapsed the chute.

I was laying there trying to get my breath when the guy on the bicycle came up and pointed a luger at my head. I thought, "That's the end of that Polish slave laborer theory."

He was jabbering away at me in German and two other farmers came across the fence with pitchforks, and they made me pick up that huge, bulky chute. I was in my stocking feet and they prodded me along, and we headed toward the village. As we came into the village, the people came out of the houses and they lined the streets like a gauntlet, and all I could think of was old Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton running the gauntlet in the old days. And they were hostile. They were hurling epithets at me in German which I couldn't understand, but I knew that it wasn't praise. All of a sudden a kid about 15 years old came out and he had a big rubber boot on and he kicked me right in the rear end.

Then they took me down to this barn in the back of the burgomeister's house. Outside there was a courtyard with a wall around it and a big gate.

They started to search me. They made me loosen my pants and they were hanging down around my ankles, and I was standing in my stocking feet. They were looking for a pistol. I think they were disappointed because I didn't have one.

About that time I heard a commotion and a guy came through the crowd and he was really angry. He let me have one right between the eyes with his big old horny fist. I almost went down but I didn't. He swung two or three times more, but I ducked. I was trying to get my pants back on with one hand and fend him off with the other. Finally I got my pants buckled up and then I had two hands to work with, and he cut off the fight and he went over and picked up a long-handled spade. Normally a spade has a short handle. This one had a long handle and had a square nose. And he came at me with that spade. I saw him swing and I ducked and I felt it whistle over the top of my head. I thought, "I've got to get in close on this guy." I closed in on him, and I got hold of the spade and he got hold of it and we were wrestling for the spade, and about that time there was an old man in the crowd with a big white walrus mustache and he had a green felt hat on, and he came out and started to help me. He realized that they shouldn't be killing this guy, even if he is the enemy. Then the burgomeister and the village cop came to my aid and they disarmed this guy.

They took my escape kit away from me and whatever else I had. They had a bunch of stuff they had collected from the planes, and there were two big old felt boots. I pointed at my feet and the burgomeister gave them to me. I put them on, but they were about two sizes too big and my feet sloshed around in them.

Then they marched me up the street to the church, and they put me in this little jailhouse underneath the church tower. I was the first one captured, so I was alone. They locked the door, and all there was was a little shaft of light coming through a small window, with straw on the floor.

I just sat there trying to figure out what's going to happen next. That's when they threw Sergeant Eppley in, who was our top gunner. He told me he saw the planes coming in and he started shooting at them, and he watched those tracers coming up the fuselage of the plane right towards his turret. He didn't get wounded, but he didn't hear the bailout bell, and he was still in the turret when he saw the co-pilot go by and then the pilot, so he dropped right down behind them. He got down into the bomb bay – all of the people from the flight deck are supposed to go out the bomb bay. But evidently the radio man had already gone up towards the nose. And when Eppley got to the bomb bay, the other two guys are going up to the nose. So he reached out automatically and he pulled the handle on the bomb bay doors and they opened. The only thing he could think of is that they had pushed instead of pulled or vice-versa, and they didn't open so they thought it was jammed and they were going up to the nose. I think that's what killed the pilot, because when Eppley bailed out he said the plane blew up shortly afterwards, and the pilot must not have gotten out. His body was found right near the wreck.

The tail gunner and the two waist gunners were killed, too. Whether they were killed in the battle or blew up in the plane we'll never know.

In the next few minutes, every time you turned around they're opening the door and throwing another guy in. We must have had 14 guys in that room before long. One of them was Red Dowling [Jim Dowling is one of the veterans profiled in Tom Brokaw's "The Greatest Generation"]. Red was hurt, and he was also sick, because he threw up in the corner. That's one reason I remembered him, that and his violent red hair.

When I first wrote to him years later, I said, "I think you're the redheaded guy that was in that little cell with me." He wrote back and said, "I'm the redheaded guy."

Pretty soon they opened the door and told us, "Raus!" We all stood up in a line outside the door, and they came down the line and picked three of us out. They picked me and Eppley and this guy whose name I thought was Summers. I know he was a lieutenant, and he said he was a navigator. They loaded the rest of the fellows on a Wehrmacht truck and away they went. And they took us three and marched us down the street, and up the street came two haywagons. Each wagon was drawn by a team of horses. And there were a whole bunch of men and boys – they were either older men or younger boys – and they all were armed to some extent. There was one guy – he was an older guy but he was short; his name was Hans. He had black hair. And he had an old Mauser pistol with a wooden holster. The wooden holster serves as a

shoulder piece. It was a World War I Mauser with a big broom handle. Then there was an aristocratic looking guy on a horse, and he had a fine shotgun. He was riding around through the hills and fields and he'd come back and report where there were bodies and where there were wrecks. None of these people were military. They were all civilians.

We marched up the street. I still had no idea what they were going to do with us. We're marching alongside the wagon and we got up to a little orchard with a fence around it. We went through the fence, and lying there on the ground, face down, was one of our fliers with no chute. And then I found out what they wanted us for.

We had to pick the bodies up.

When we picked this flier up, he was still warm, and every bone in his body was broken. He was limp. One of the Germans had an envelope, and we took one dogtag off and he put it in this envelope, which they sent to the Red Cross. And I remember reading that guy's dogtag. His name was Bateman, and he turned out to be a navigator on Johnson's crew which Dowling was the bombardier on. We picked him up and put him in the haywagon. Then we marched around up and down the hills and fields all day long, till almost dark, and we picked up a dozen or more bodies. Parts of bodies. We went in one little cow pasture and we found two legs, and this guy must have been big because his thigh was big and heavy, and he still had his flying boots on. And it was an officer because he had forest green pants on. We picked those legs up and put them in the haywagon. We went up on a hill and we found this plane crashed up there, and there was a turret, and there was a guy in there and the top of his head was sheared right off. You could see his brains.

We found another guy who came down in his chute and he must have been killed in the fall. He was lying with his feet in a little creek. We came across a meadow and there was a guy laying in a pool of blood, and it turned out to be Joe Gilfoil. He was tossed out over the static line by the guys on Miner's crew after he got hit in the leg by a 20-millimeter shell. And it happened that Gilfoil had been on Schaen's plane before, and Eppley was a good friend of his. When we rolled him over and he saw who it was, he almost passed out. Gilfoil's skin was a bluish-pale color because he had been drained of blood. There was blood all over the meadow.

That morning, in the mess hall, I'd seen a guy. I'd seen him before. I never knew who he was; he was in a different squadron. He was a big, rough-faced guy, and I thought, "Who is that guy?" I don't know why I noticed him.

We came across this plane that's crashed, and in the co-pilot's seat, here's a guy sheared in two. From his waist down is in the co-pilot's seat. The rest of him is missing. We look up ahead and about a hundred yards away, here's the upper part of his torso butted into a tree. When I rolled him over, it was the guy I'd seen in the mess hall that morning.

I paid particular attention to his name. His name was Geiszler. Martin Geiszler Jr. Everybody on that plane was killed with the exception of the pilot. The pilot's now dead, but I had a little article he wrote one time, and he said that after they got hit, he must have been blown out because he doesn't remember a thing until he came to in the hospital.

When I was in Stalag Luft 1, there was a fellow from Los Angeles by the name of Oscar McMahon in the same room I was in. This Geiszler was from Bell, California, which is in the Los Angeles area, and after the war I got a phone call one day. It must have been the summer of '45. I got a long-distance call from Bell, California, and it was Mr. Geiszler, this guy's dad. He said he wanted to know who I was, and if I was the same guy that was on the Kassel mission.

I said, "Yes."

He said, "We were at a Red Cross meeting and we met a fellow named Lieutenant McMahon and we asked if anybody knew of anybody that was on the Kassel mission and he said, 'I knew a fellow who was a prisoner with me.' " He said, "My son, Martin Geiszler Jr., is missing and we don't know what happened to him. All we know is he went down on the Kassel mission."

I said, "Look, I've got to tell you right now. Your son is dead."

You could have heard a pin drop.

I hated to tell him, but what are you going to do? You aren't going to tell him he's alive. I could have

said, "Oh, I don't know anything about it," but I didn't want to do that.

Then he said, "Can we come to Michigan and see you?"

I said, "Sure."

By God, if they didn't come to Michigan; the war was still on in the Pacific and it was hard to travel. They came clear to Michigan, he and the Mrs.

I didn't tell them all the details. They never did know that he was torn in two. But I said, "I can definitely tell you that your son is dead because I was one of the guys that picked his body up. I hate to tell you that." But they thanked me for telling them because they didn't know.

It was only a couple of weeks later that the Red Cross notified them that he was dead. But those people, they used to send our kids presents – books and clothes – he offered me a job; he owned a factory in Bell and wanted me to come to work for him. They had one more son that was still alive.

One other guy on this plane that I picked up was Berquist; he was their radio man. Nobody on that plane lived except the pilot. And Mrs. Geiszler, when she found out the pilot was alive, she was bitter. I don't think it was his fault. She thought, "He shouldn't be alive if my son's dead."

We came back after going all day long, up hill, down dale, picking up dead bodies. We had two haywagon loads of bodies and parts of bodies. We came into the cemetery at Lauschromen. We unhitched the horses and left the two wagons standing next to a stone building. Then they marched us into town and we went up to the village pump, and we drank water until we thought we were going to die because we hadn't had a drink of water all day. All we'd had to eat all day was a couple of apples that some kid gave us.

Then they marched us over to the little jailhouse again, and pretty soon – this must have been a little after dark – they brought us a big mug of ersatz coffee and some white bread. That's the last white bread I ever saw until I got back to the United States.

A little later, we'd just gone to sleep when they roused us out again. There was a Wehrmacht truck outside, and it was full of wounded men.

We got in this truck, and we drove all around the countryside until about 3 a.m. We'd stop in a village and they'd take us up into an old mill or an old barn and there'd be a wounded guy laying there. Sometimes they'd try to help him and sometimes they hadn't. We'd bring them out, lay them in the truck – one guy had a 20-millimeter hole right through his thigh. How he was alive I don't know. We brought him back, and all these guys are in there, and Jerry Cathol was laying near the tailgate. He thought his back was broken. It wasn't, but his hip was dislocated.

Jerry Cathol was a big guy. He played end for the University of Nebraska. And I carried that big guy up two flights of steps. Three o'clock in the morning in Eisenach at the hospital. And after we got all these wounded people unloaded and in the hospital, they took us three guys that weren't wounded over to the Wehrmacht base. They took us downstairs and there was a guardroom down there. It had rows of wooden shelves, about six feet deep, and they had a raised end like a pillow made out of wood. About 25 of our guys were laying on these shelves. One of them was Ira Weinstein. One was McGregor. And there were two guys that were wounded; they were laying on stretchers on the floor. They should have been in a hospital. One guy had a leg wound and it was bad. The other guy couldn't walk either. We had to carry them.

We stayed there for a couple of days. I don't know exactly how long we were there. You couldn't tell whether it was daylight or dark because you were down in the basement. In the morning they'd bring us a bowl of barley and at night they brought us some black bread and ersatz coffee. They took us one by one and the guy tried to quiz us, and he took our wristwatch. If it was a private watch he gave it back. If it was a government issue watch he kept it. But he gave you a receipt for it. They took mine, because mine was a government watch. I've still got the receipt.

Eventually, two guys showed up from the Luftwaffe. They were feldwebels; high-class sergeants. Spoke English, and they had Walther submachine guns. They told us, "We've been delegated to move you to an air base at Erfurt. We're going to go by civilian train. We'll protect you, but keep a low profile. Don't say anything or do anything that would stir things up." Also, when we picked these wounded guys

up, they put a bunch of loaves of bread underneath the blankets. That was supposed to be our food on the trip. They said, "Under no circumstances show that bread to the civilians."

We marched down the street and we got on a civilian train. We had a whole car to ourselves. We went through Gotha and we got up to Erfurt. And Erfurt at that time had never been bombed; it was quite a picturesque town. That's one of Martin Luther's old hangouts, quite a historic place. We got off the train and marched up the streets. We had these two guards. And it was hot. We weren't in too good shape, and you get tired carrying these stretchers, so we had to keep changing off all the time. It was uphill almost all the way. We got up to the top of that hill, and we just about died. We set the stretchers down in the street and we all sat down. One of the guards stayed there and guarded us; the other one went over to a beer joint and had a beer. And about that time a lady came out from a house and she had a big can full of cold water. Boy, did we drink that water!

Then the guards scrounged around, and pretty soon somebody showed up with a two-wheel pushcart. It had rubber tires. We put those stretchers on there and we pushed them and pulled; it was nice. We just about got out of town, and we blew a tire. Then we had to start carrying them again.

About suppertime we came dragging onto that Luftwaffe base; I mean we were dead. We came in carrying the stretchers and went right in this barracks. We all flopped right down on the wooden floor and went right sound asleep. That was an awful day.

We were there a couple of days, and then they ordered us all out into the street, and there was a big truck waiting for us. A staff car drove up and a German colonel got out. He called the roll, and when he called the roll he said, "Veinshtein."

There's little old Weinstein, about five feet tall.

"Veinshtein," the guy says. "Das ist Jude."

I thought, "Uh-oh, they're gonna kill Weinstein."

Weinstein thought that, too, I think. But the colonel didn't say any more. All he said was, "Das ist Jude." And the next thing you know we're on a truck heading for the Erfurt station. We get to the station, we unload, and we're standing in a column of twos on the sidewalk, and a couple of SS guys come out with black uniforms. Meaner than hell. And they start in on us when they find out we were "terrorflieger." They were ranting and raving and a crowd started gathering, and they were getting the crowd all worked up. About that time the staff car drove up with this colonel. He stood up in the back seat and he read the riot act to those two guys. You should have seen them scam. He was a Luftwaffe colonel.

We got on the train, and at about midnight we arrived at Frankfurt am Main. The railroad station looked like a skeleton. All the glass was laying in pieces all over the floor. But the trains were all running in and out. They pulled our car onto one of the tracks, and we're all sitting in there, and away goes the engine. It left us sitting there.

Pretty soon somebody in the crowd discovered there was a POW train over here with a bunch of Amerikanisch terrorflieger. So they came over and they started getting hostile. They started picking up paving bricks and they were threatening the guards. The guards told us to lay down on the floor, and they held their burp guns on these guys. All it would have taken is a rock hitting one of the guards' heads and we'd have been dead. You know what saved us? The air raid siren went off, and everybody skedaddled for the air raid shelter except us; we're sitting there. Soon we heard a plane coming; it was a Mosquito, and he dropped a great big bomb about two blocks up the street. Man, did that shake things up.

By the time the all clear sounded, an engine came in and hooked onto us and pulled us out of there. And they took us to the little town of Oberrussel, which is a suburb of Frankfurt. It was what they called an interrogation center. They marched us up the street. It was dark; it must have been one or two o'clock in the morning. We marched up these dark streets, and the guys that were leading us didn't know where they were going. They had to stop and ask people.

Finally we came to this camp. They took us in the courtyard, and the courtyard was full of Polish, Canadian and British paratroopers that had been captured at Arnhem. I was right next to a Polish colonel, and I was hungry. I saw they had a garden plot, and there was a cabbage. I reached down. I couldn't get the whole head but I got a few of the leaves. They weren't very good eating; they were the outer leaves.

Finally, they took several of us to a basement room and several to another room. And the next

morning they came along with a big canister of Purple Passion – that’s what we called it – it was cabbage soup. Boy, that tasted good. Then they said, “We’re going to take you one by one for interrogation.” I had a little compass. I hid it underneath the window in a crack. It’s still there because we never came back to that room.

They took me down to this room and there was a guy sitting there. He had an Afrika Korp uniform on. It was a light summer uniform. He looked like a captain. He spoke perfect English.

“Here, have a cigarette.”

“No thanks.”

“Have a seat.”

He starts talking real friendly. And then he starts quizzing you a little bit.

“What group are you in?”

“Can’t tell you.”

“What kind of plane were you flying?”

“Can’t tell you. Not supposed to do that.”

He kept doing that, asking this and asking that. Finally he says to me, “You don’t need to answer any more, right now anyway. But I can tell you a few things.”

He said, “You’re from the 445th Bomb Group.” He knew all about our group. For crying out loud, he knew more about it than I did. “Now,” he said, “if you want to go to a permanent camp and be with your friends, you’re going to have to answer a few questions. Otherwise you may be here for a long, long time.”

I said, “I’m just supposed to give name, rank and serial number.”

“You do as you please,” he said. Then he dismissed me and they took me out. They put me in solitary confinement in a room on the second floor. It had a single bunk there, with a mattress filled with excelsir. Excelsir is like fine wood shavings. That was a standard bed in Germany for prisoners. I stuffed some of the excelsir into my boots because they were too large, only I didn’t know it but the excelsir was full of fleas.

While I was in solitary there, if you had to go to the toilet, there was a rope; you pulled that rope and it dropped a signal down in the hall. And the guard, when he got around to it, he’d lead you down to the toilet. You weren’t supposed to talk to anybody in there. And then he’d bring you back. I’ve heard of guys that were in there for twenty or thirty days. I wouldn’t have lasted that long. It was so hot, it was like an oven, they must have had steam heat. There wasn’t any air. I went down to the toilet once and there was a Royal Air Force guy there, and he spoke out of the corner of his mouth. He’d been there about thirty days. I thought, Jeez, this is going to be awful.

The next morning, they roused me out and I got out in the hall; there must have been 200 guys in the hall. Most of the guys from the Kassel mission were there, and there were some from the 15th Air Force. They took us out into a courtyard and there was a barracks by itself out there. We went in there, and there were British paratroopers. Polish paratroopers. Paratroopers are taken care of by the Luftwaffe, because paratroopers are part of the Luftwaffe in the German army. We’re all in this room, and they took our shoes off. They tied the laces together, threw them in a pile on a blanket and away they went. That’s so we couldn’t escape. I was kind of hoping I’d get a better pair but I didn’t.

Boy, were these paratroopers rough guys. They held out two weeks up at Arnhem and they were only supposed to hold out for seven days, and they got captured. And this one British guy, tougher than hell, he says, “Wait till we start winning the war. We’re gonna bollix all the men and shag all the tarts.”

The next day, they came along with that big blanket full of shoes. We all fished out our own shoes and put them on. Then they marched us up to the railroad station, put us on a train, and we’re heading for Wetzlar, that’s what they called Dulag Luft. Wetzlar was the hometown of Zeiss Camera Company. Also they had a 20-millimeter antiaircraft gun factory there. On the way up, there were planes strafing so they backed us into a tunnel. We got up to Wetzlar late in the afternoon. We’d just gotten out of the train, and we’re all standing there, 250 of us, and the guards have burp guns on us. At about that time the air raid siren sounded and along came a flight of P-51s, and I thought, “If they see this” – we’re standing right next to this old steam engine – “that’s a good target.” We were sweating blood. The guards went over in

the entrance to the air raid shelter and held their guns on us and made us stand next to the engine. The planes circled around and they came back, and I thought, "This is gonna be it." They made one circle and they took off. The only thing I can think is they knew there was a prison camp there, or it's possible it could have said POW on top of the train.

Then they marched us up the hill into the camp.

That's where we first encountered Red Cross parcels. They got Red Cross parcels and made meals out of them. It was pretty good food for a day or so. Then eventually we were put into contingents and went up to Barth. We went through Berlin – what a shambles that was.

At Barth, we were in Stalag Luft 1. We didn't do too bad until the first of the year of 1945. Right after Christmas. We used to get a Red Cross parcel a week per man, and eking that out along with your German rations you just about had a square meal a day. It would keep you alive. But when they cut back on the Red Cross parcels, we lived on 800 calories a day till Easter. Longer than Easter. I went from 170 pounds down to 135. And you don't have much ambition and pep when you get hungry.

Sometime in 1945, they rounded up all the Jewish guys and took them over to the North 1 compound and put them in a single barracks. There was a funny thing about that. They never got Weinstein. But yet they took an Irish guy.

Around the end of April, things got really hairy. We could hear the Russians' guns. They were approaching Stetin; that was 60 miles away. The Germans gave us permission to dig slit trenches, which we did.

We knew where the lines were because there was a secret radio in camp and everybody got the news every night – the real news, not what the Germans were telling you. Colonel Hubert Zemke was our senior Allied officer. He was head of the 56th Fighter Group. Colonel Zemke was approached by the German colonel, and he said, "We may have to move this camp." In other words, we'd have to march to the west, towards Hanover. And Zemke said to Colonel Warnstedt [the German commandant], "We are not in any kind of shape to be marching. We've got people here that have practically been on a starvation diet for four months. We can't march very far. What are you going to do if I give the order, and everybody sits down in the middle of the compound? Are you going to kill us all? Besides that," he said, "you know and I know the war's pretty near over." Warnstedt did know that, too.

So Warnstedt said, "I don't want to see any bloodshed, so I'll tell you what I'll do. When we get ready to evacuate, I'll let you know and you can take command of the camp."

This is all going on unbeknownst to us guys because this is high-level stuff. So on the evening of the 30th of April, 1945 – we got locked in every night; the lights went out. The power was shut off about 10 o'clock. We could open up the blackout shutters and get some air. We're laying there; some of us are sleeping. About 2 o'clock in the morning, the word got around. "Take a look at the guard towers, they're all empty! And the dogs aren't in the compound." They had dog patrols every night.

Somebody broke the doors open and we got out and sure as hell, the Germans had left. So Colonel Zemke sent word, "Everybody stay put in his compound. Don't move." Because we didn't know where the Russians were.

At 6 o'clock that morning the first Russian guy showed up at the gate. He was some kind of an officer but he was drunk. He was on a white horse. And he was raising all kinds of hell. He said to Zemke something about, "What do you mean? Aren't you happy to see the glorious Red Army? I don't see anybody cheering. I don't see any towers being burned down."

Zemke thought, "I'd better give this guy a little show," so he passed the word, "Burn down a couple of guard towers." Then they lit some guard towers and everybody took off over the hill. They all went to town, and Zemke was fit to be tied.

They came back the next day, and you should have seen what they brought with them. They had a full tracked vehicle, brand new. It drove in. And there were horses, there were sheep. Rabbits. They took everything. It was awful. And this guy Crotty, a friend of mine who was in our room, he was quite a drinker – we always told him the only thing that kept him alive was getting shot down – he went in town, the Russians were all drunk because it was May Day, that's a big celebration – and they'd uncovered a bargeload of Holland brandy in the harbor and everybody had bottles sticking out of every pocket. They

were all drunk and they were making everybody else get drunk.

And old Crotty, they carried him home on a shutter.

The Russians had a policy of automatically killing the burgomeister and anybody that's connected with him. A bloodthirsty policy. So the burgomeister of Barth went out on the dike and took his family with him, and he shot them all and killed himself.

Warnstedt I think got away. There was another German major that wasn't a bad guy that was captured there, I imagine they killed him. But I'll tell you what they did. A couple of months before we were liberated a whole contingent of Ukrainian partisans came into town. They were fighting on the Germans' side, and they were like irregular troops. They had all horse-drawn vehicles. They were driven out of Poland, I guess, and they came into our town. The Germans let them come up on our peninsula inside the compound and they built a tent city there. And I heard that the Russians rounded those guys up and murdered every one of them. Stalin was the most ruthless, bloodthirsty sonofagun that ever lived. One of our guys would go to town, he'd liberate a bicycle from somebody and he'd be riding along; if a Russian saw him and he wanted the bicycle, you either gave it to him or he'd blow your head off. The Russians went in the jewelry store and they shot the jeweler. I saw Russians with wristwatches up and down both arms. We got sick of the Russians pretty quick. Some of them were all right. Some of them were just ordinary guys like anybody else, but some of them were real rabble-rousing communists if there ever was one.

Finally, they came in and got us on the 13th of May. We were liberated the First of May and on the 13th they flew in with B-17s to the Barth airfield and picked us up and took us to France.

A lot of guys ate too much right away and got sick. I heard one English guy died from eating a lead cake. That's a cake that's made without any risers, like it's made out of hardtack biscuits, heavy as lead. It lays heavy on your stomach.

First we went to Camp Lucky Strike in France. That had been a staging area for when the replacement troops came in, but they were making it a staging area for POWs. They only had rations for 9,000, and 20,000 showed up. You didn't have too much extra to eat. I saw a donut line the length of the runway once.

Eisenhower finally came and gave a big speech. He said, "I don't understand why it is that we've got to take care of 20,000 in this place that doesn't have the facilities, and we've got all kinds of bases over in England with plenty of facilities." So I was the first guy to sign up to go to England, and they flew us out of there in a Liberator. It flew right over Tibenham. The personnel at Tibenham had already left for the States; there wasn't a plane on the hardstands. And they took me up to Horsham St. Faith. Treated me like a king up there. I finally got home about the middle of June.