

John and DeDe Knox, Pompano Beach, FL, February 2010

Aaron Elson: John and DeDe Knox. The DeDe, is that for Denise?

DeDe Knox: Cecilia

Aaron Elson: How did Cecilia become DeDe?

DeDe Knox: I had a brother and sister who were very young, and I was operated on, I had an ear operation, and the doctor said I'm going to bring an anesthesiologist and a nurse and I'm going to do the operation right here at your home. And my brother and sister, they were downstairs at the gate, and I called down to them, and they called back up, "DeDe." And that stuck.

John Knox: Cecilia is kind of a mouthful.

DeDe Knox: I went through grade school, high school and college as DeDe. Now there are only two people who used to call me Cecilia, and they're both dead. I'm known as DeDe.

John Knox: And they call me Jack because we live in John Knox Village.

Aaron Elson: Where did you say you were born?

DeDe Knox: Columbus, Ohio.

Aaron Elson: And you're from Ohio, too?

John Knox: We met in high school.

DeDe Knox: High school sweethearts.

John Knox: South High School in Columbus. Columbus is a big city. South High School. North High School. East High School.

DeDe Knox: And we've been married 63 years.

John Knox: Sixty five at the end of this year.

Aaron Elson: Was Columbus a good place to grow up?

John Knox: I think it was.

DeDe Knox: Average people.

John Knox: It was the capital of Ohio. Cincinnati and Cleveland are much larger, but it was a pretty good size city, probably 2 million counting the suburbs. It was a nice, laid back town.

Aaron Elson: And were your parents affected by the Depression?

DeDe Knox: Yes, slightly.

John Knox: Yours. Your dad had a job.

DeDe Knox: My dad had a job.

John Knox: My parents had nothing. We had nothing. We had to move in with my grandma and my two uncles. We lived with them about six years. My brother and I slept in an attic. We had nothing. As soon as I was old enough to get a paper route I got a paper route. But we were really strapped. I remember we didn't have meat on the table. And my grandma was awful good at putting things together with no meat.

Aaron Elson: What sort of things would she make?

John Knox: German dishes. She did a lot of chicken, that must have been the cheapest thing. But she made a lot of mush, and noodles and things like that. When she made noodles she'd take the whites of the eggs and make angel food cake and the yolk and make noodles, and we had just basic meals. We always had something on the table. She didn't have a refrigerator yet, they were just coming out, in the winter she had a box hanging out the window to keep everything cold. In the summer you had the ice man come, put the ice in the ice box.

My mother did have a car. My dad wouldn't drive. My grandfather was a tool and die maker, and he worked through the Depression. But we rented. We never bought a house until 1941, until I was out of high school, and that was because my grandfather died and left my mother and father enough money to buy a home. But your father had a house, way back. It was a modest house, a house with what, six people?

DeDe Knox: We lived close to school, walking distance to the Catholic school.

John Knox: I remember the Depression. Walking to school in the snow and ice, nobody cared.

DeDe Knox: We met in French class in high school.

Aaron Elson: What did you do for fun during the Depression?

John Knox: We didn't do much. We made our own kites out of newspaper and sticks. Somebody in the neighborhood had a Monopoly set, and we made a board out of cardboard and put in all the things, and made paper money, and made the cards out of cardboard, and copied this Monopoly set. We couldn't afford to buy one. That's how poor we were. When I was about ten years old I wanted a bicycle for Christmas. I got a used bicycle my uncles paid about five dollars for, and painted it up and fixed it up. I was disappointed. It wasn't a very good bicycle. And then we got a paper route. My brother was a little older and we bought a couple of wood saws, a lathe, and a circular saw. We made all kinds of things out of wood, got to be real good at

that. But we put a basket up on a telephone pole, shot baskets. A rim of a bushel basket, something like that. We improvised a lot of things. Oh, I remember once in a while saying “Mommy, I have nothing to do,” but I had a brother and sister older than me, and DeDe, you tell him what you did, you tap danced and things like that.

DeDe Knox: I took tap dancing lessons and I took mandolin lessons, and my sister played the banjo. They had a fair in the summer and we’d go and play, and dance. I went to a shelter house in the South End and taught the kids there to tap dance after school.

Aaron Elson: A shelter house?

DeDe Knox: It was for poor people, like a settlement. They asked me to go down and do that, and it was kind of fun. In high school my sister played bass fiddle and after she was ready to graduate, I was going to come in the very next year, so the orchestra leader came to our home and asked my parents, would they send me to take bass viol lessons at the university during the summer so I could play in the orchestra when I started the ninth grade. They said sure, so I learned to play the bass fiddle and I played in a concert orchestra and the symphony orchestra, and the jazz band. It was kind of fun. I played for four years then.

Aaron Elson: Were you in the same class, or how did you meet in school?

John Knox: In French class. I was a year older than her, so I learned English and math and all those subjects, but French was an elective. I think I finished two years of Latin, then I switched to French, and somehow that put me in her French class, that was my junior year. At that time I was setting pins in a bowling alley, and that’s how I made my money to take her out on a date. That was hard work. A lot of nights I’d set two hours together, and boy, as little as I was, I was real good at it. The boss liked me. I think I got three cents a line. At the end of the night I’d make a dollar, a dollar ten or something like that. But that would go a long ways. A downtown movie, a brand new movie like “Gone With the Wind” was a quarter I think. We had a good time. I’d even put a quarter’s worth of gas in the car.

Aaron Elson: What kind of car did your mother have?

John Knox: When I first met DeDe she had a ’35 Ford, and then about a year later, that would have been in 1940, she got a brand new ’41 Ford. And boy, then I’d take her out in that black Ford with the whitewall tires. We’d just come out of the Depression, and I was starting to live after being so damn poor. Boy I loved that.

Aaron Elson: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

John Knox: I was sitting at the kitchen table. I think we were having a late breakfast, I think it was about 11 o'clock Sunday morning, and we had a big kitchen. It was shortly after we moved away from my aunt and my grandma and my two uncles. It was the first place I ever lived since I was four or five years old where our family was alone now in our own house, and my brother and I had our own bedroom, and I still remember the scene sitting at the table and hearing, I don't know, I guess we were playing music or something, and they cut in, Roosevelt. I was a senior in high school then, because I graduated in June of '41. No, I was out of school then, because that was December the 7th, '41. We were dating then. It didn't affect us. We just kept on dating. I finished school and went to work for Curtiss Wright for a year until I was going to be drafted. I didn't want to enlist because I was in love with her, so I just figured, I knew I was A1. And I kind of thought I'd go in the Air Corps because I was so small, and I worked for Curtiss-Wright. I just assumed that. Then I made the mistake, they said Don't ever volunteer in the Army, you've heard that expression, and I volunteered to go to gunnery school. And that's where I made my mistake.

Ray Lemons and I both went to gunnery school, and then we went to Sheppard Field, Texas, to become flight engineers on B-25 or B-26 medium bombers. We were in the same class but we never knew each other. Then we got through with that and we thought we were gonna be on a B-25 or a B-26, be a flight engineer, and that puts you way up to tech sergeant, pretty good rating. And then they put us on a B-24 and we didn't know anything about the mechanics, and so Ray became a waist gunner and I became a tail gunner. And he helped me out when I was shot. I got a direct hit from a 20-millimeter cannon shell, knocked me for a loop and knocked my turret out of commission. The plane was on fire. He opened the door and got me out. That's all on the tape.

DeDe Knox: He was operated on his knee without anesthetic.

John Knox: That's all on the tape.

Aaron Elson: Let's go back to Pearl Harbor.

John Knox: We're going too fast.

Aaron Elson: DeDe, where were you when you heard about it?

John Knox: She probably doesn't remember.

DeDe Knox: I don't remember.

John Knox: Her memory's slipping a little.

Aaron Elson: Did you know immediately that John was going to be drafted?

John Knox: Oh, sure, as soon as I was called in for a physical and rated A-1, we talked about it. We were dating pretty hot and heavy. We were engaged when I went over.

DeDe Knox: Before he went overseas, he was out in Colorado, and the pilot said that's it, they were ready to go overseas but they had a delay, and he wanted me to come out, because some of them were getting married. My mother said you can't let them get married, because she wanted a church wedding, and she said, "You can go," but his mother chaperoned me. At that age, you never heard of that now. So I did go to Colorado and spend that week with him before he went overseas. And we were married after he got back. The Air Force flew him home every weekend so he could see me, and finally the doctor said "Jack, you go back home and get that girl and marry her and bring her back so you can stay put long enough for us to operate on your eye."

John Knox: I lost an eye. Shrapnel penetrated the optic nerve, and shrapnel put my knee out of commission. I've had a stiff knee all my life. This has been a terrible thing. You can't sit right. You can't do anything right. That's why I can't fly anymore, because I think when we went to Kansas City, the last 8th Air Force reunion we went to, my god, I got on the plane, I couldn't get my leg under the seat in front of me. And I'm standing there, everybody's getting on the plane. I told the stewardess, "I just simply can not sit down, what am I gonna do, get off?" I said "I can sit in a bulkhead seat," so she arranged a bulkhead seat. And then when I got to Atlanta I had to arrange a bulkhead seat, and then coming back. And I said never again.

DeDe Knox: They don't let you do it ahead of time.

John Knox: The time I flew before that the plane I was in must have been bigger, probably Delta, but I could squeeze my leg under the seat in front of me. But this, no matter how I tried, I couldn't get all the way down and get my leg. I almost hit the panic button, what am I gonna stand up the whole way or what?

DeDe Knox: Because he was supposed to light one candle, he was supposed to be on the stage and honored in Kansas City and I said "What are we gonna do?" And he said "I'll figure out something." He said that was four planes during that trip, and he said this is going to be our last trip by plane.

John Knox: That was five years ago.

DeDe Knox: It's a long time, but we manage.

Aaron Elson: Tell me about your crew.

John Knox: We met after, like Ray and I left Sheppard Field, Texas, we were flight engineers, we all met in Salt Lake City, that's where they assembled the crew. That's where we met Jim Baynham and the co-pilot Charlie, and the flight engineer was Howard Boldt who just died recently from Houston, and that's where we all met. We didn't have a navigator and a bombardier. We picked them up later. But that's when Ray and I found out we weren't going to be flight engineers on a medium bomber and we'd probably go to the South Pacific. And we weren't too happy about it. That was in Salt Lake City. After Salt Lake City we went to Colorado Springs to do our training on B-24s.

Aaron Elson: Who was in the crew? Who else joined later on.

John Knox: Jim Baynham. Charlie Bosquet was the co-pilot. When we finally got the navigator it was John, he's from Kentucky, it's on the tape. And Hector Scala was the bombardier, and Boldt was the flight engineer. He was shot up worse than I was. He was just getting in the bomb bay waiting to bail out, and he got shot in the legs. And of course Bosquet and John, the navigator, they were two that weren't shot, and the radio operator was Jim Fields from California, and he was wounded. And then the other waist gunner, opposite from Ray Lemons, was a Olen Byrd, he was kind of a Texas farmboy, not very well polished, and the last Ray and I saw of him he was sitting down on the floor of the airplane under the waist gun kind of looking at us. And the plane was on fire, we don't know whether he was afraid, and we had the door open to bail out, that was right there too. And I remember looking at him and I remember Ray saying "Come on, Bird, come on," and he said "no, no, no." And we don't know whether he had a bullet in him or something, or whether he froze, scared, all we know is we think he went down with the plane. And to this day, Ray and I were the only ones who saw him, and we don't know why. He had a funny look on his face. But he wasn't dead. But with all that stuff on him he could have been bleeding interior, and the plane was raked with cannon shells and shrapnel. The plane was in bad shape, and on fire. So we don't know about Bird. He was just a real quiet guy and all he did, he'd just gone to gunnery school, he hadn't gone to any mechanic school or anything like that, he was strictly a gunner. And then we used to have a ball turret when we went over, and we had a ball turret gunner, his name was Jed Lord. I don't think we flew maybe one mission and then they took out the ball turrets because we had better escorts and the missions were getting easier, and that thing created a drag, so we could go a little faster. So we rotated. And then Lord happened to be the one that day that didn't fly. When I didn't fly he flew the tail turret and when Ray didn't fly he flew the waist gun. So he was the one, and he went ahead and finished all his missions, stayed over there a couple of years I think, in ordnance.

Aaron Elson: Which mission was that for you?

John Knox: Eighth. It was different for some of us. It was my eighth, and I think it was Jim's tenth. We rotated, like I say, so I lost one there. And then one time the pilot and co-pilot, the flight engineer, and I think they took Ray along on that one, a bunch of them flew gasoline over to France. They got credit for a mission I think for that. So even on the same crew we had different, but I think eight was the minimum. People ask me how many missions I went on and I always said "Seven and a half."

Aaron Elson: Was that mission in September when they flew the gas over to France.

John Knox: Our first mission was in August, so it had to be in late August or September.

Aaron Elson: The reason I ask, Jim mentioned that, and my father's tank battalion had run out of gas because the gas was being diverted to the British on Operation Market Garden in Holland, and they had delivered gas in a B-26, or a B-24. He had mentioned that and that was when they needed gas at the front lines because they were with Patton's Third Army and had stalled.

John Knox: They made one mission on doing that and it's possibly over that period, they might have got two missions in, I'm not sure. But there was no reason for a tail gunner to go because they were not going over in enemy territory, they were just going across the Channel. And I remember Charlie, the co-pilot, got some cognac while he was over there. And I think he got drunk on it, too, because I think they stayed overnight or something, by the time they unloaded the plane and all that, and he had a ball. He was a character. Somehow he died, he wrote me a letter after the war, I don't know what he'd been, he wrote me a letter about 20 years after the war, and we didn't know each other too well because I was an enlisted man and he was the co-pilot. But it was a weird letter, like he was having mental trouble, all mixed up or something. And I wrote back and told him if there was anything I can do, let me know. But we weren't that close. He was closer to Jim. And about six months later he was dead. And I think he committed suicide. His family wrote us.

When I was a prisoner of war my mother got some information from the Air Force, the Army Air Force, of the addresses of all my crew members, and she wrote to all the wives, or mothers, or whatever, to find out how many of them are alive and how many are dead, because I was the only one that was missing in action. All the others were accounted for. Either they were dead or they were POWs, but I wasn't accounted for until one of my older letters from Germany which I still have, all those letters, arrived at her house, the following March, after the post office, after the mail carriers, kept telling her "You might as well quit writing, all of the letters are coming back."

DeDe Knox: He was probably dead.

John Knox: And then when they got that letter that morning he got in the car and took it right to the house. And she called up my mother, and that's the only way she knew that I wasn't dead. But I've got all the letters my mother wrote to Jim Baynham's wife and Hector Scala's mother. They wrote back. Who was missing, who was a prisoner of war, and who was KIA.

Aaron Elson: Tell me about the battle itself, what you remember, from the first inkling that something was wrong.

John Knox: Well, that was all weird. Our radios, we didn't back there know we pulled away from the group. We didn't know that. And then all of a sudden I saw a plane on my tail, and I assumed it was an American plane, and then I got looking close and I said "No, that's not a P-47, that's an FW-190." And boy, he was coming in on me. And I'm shooting at him. There's nothing over the intercom about planes or bandits or enemy planes or anything. Nothing. And he's shooting at me and I'm shooting at him, of course he's got 20-millimeter cannons and maybe even a 30, and I've got a couple of little .50-caliber machine guns. And he just, one of them hit my turret. I never saw all those 130 planes at all. And to this day I can't figure that out. It's weird. We were fairly in the back, and I think the attack started in the front. But I didn't see a lot of planes being shot down or a lot of German planes or engines. I didn't see anything. But the plane was already on fire when I got hit, so you know they made some passes at us. There was a fire in the bomb bay. So I don't know, it was just dead. I heard nothing. I heard nothing about a fire. I heard nothing about bailing out. I heard nothing about bandits in the area. Nothing. I'll never figure that one out.

Aaron Elson: Which position were you in?

John Knox: Tail gunner.

Aaron Elson: No, I mean the plane. Was it the tail end?

John Knox: I think we were pretty much. I've got a diagram of that.

Aaron Elson: I think Jim mentioned there was a diagram.

John Knox: We all got diagrams in our Kassel, the black book, this Kassel book.

Aaron Elson: So it all happened pretty quickly?

John Knox: It all happened very quickly.

Aaron Elson: Once you were hit, how did that, did the turret shatter?

John Knox: Apparently it shattered because I had shrapnel all over.

DeDe Knox: He's still got 13 pieces in him.

John Knox: But I knew my eye was hit, and I knew my leg was hit, and I could see the tear in my pants and the blood coming out. And I just got out of the turret and clipped on my parachute. I was kind of half in and half out and I bailed out and I counted to ten, I wanted to clear the rudders, then I pulled the cord right away. Because I was kind of woozy. And that's what I shouldn't have done probably because I passed out, see, we were at 23, 24,000 feet.

Aaron Elson: When this was happening, did your life flash before your eyes?

John Knox: No.

Aaron Elson: Did the concept of death occur to you?

John Knox: The concept, no, what occurred to me was, if I wanted to live, I had to get out of that burning plane. My desire to live overcame any fear of bailing out. So I took the only escape that I could see. I had enough sensibility to do that.

Aaron Elson: At what point did you see Bird?

John Knox: I saw him while I was putting my chute on, and Ray had the door open, just that second or two before I went through the hole there. He was sitting to my left, right under the waist gun.

Aaron Elson: And who was the other gunner who you said was hurt worse than you?

John Knox: Oh, that was the flight engineer. The flight engineer flew the top turret, and he got out of the turret, got his parachute on, tried to put out the fire I guess and couldn't. And the bomb bay doors were open. I don't know whether he opened them or whether they never closed or what, and he was on the catwalk, and that's where he and the radio operator were supposed to bail out, just right where the bombs went through, the doors. And he was standing on that. I've got a whole lot of stuff about him, a whole book about him, because he remembered every detail. And he was just ready to step off of the catwalk and fall through the bomb bay doors, and I guess he got raked by, both legs ...

Aaron Elson: Machine gun?

John Knox: I don't even know whether those FW-190s had machine guns by that time in the war. They had, according to my book *The Log of the Liberator*, they had 20-millimeter cannons, of course we knew that, and they might have even had a 30-millimeter cannon, which would be a pretty big one. But whether he got hit by machine guns or not, or whether those 20-millimeter things explode, kind of like a cannon shell, and spray shrapnel.

After Christmas, I came back from another place where they looked at my eye, as a prisoner of war, and that's a funny story. And I was put in the bed right to him. That's the first time I saw him. We were side by side. And we both had a cast over our legs and all the way up our body. And we'd sit there and play cribbage, they had a little cribbage board. He was in a lower bunk there and I was in a lower bunk here. We couldn't get in a higher bunk because we couldn't, we were just practically on our backs. We couldn't even sit up because of those casts. But he was in one of those electric scooters for the last 30 years, I think.

Aaron Elson: Was that Boldt?

John Knox: Howard Boldt. He had a terrible time. And he was a big man. And having a stiff leg, the worst thing you can do, being big, is fall on your own legs. I think he had a terrible life. But he was very, very cheerful. He was the most upbeat guy. He called me, the last 25 years he called me every five, six weeks. He called me, the last time he called me was just about a month or two before he died. And he would just talk about how they're taking care of him, and real upbeat, laughed, and he had nothing to be happy about because he had everything in the world wrong with him. His arms, finally, he couldn't use his arms because he'd used them so much to pull himself up, they went bad.

DeDe Knox: We tried to talk him into coming to a reunion one time.

John Knox: He would have loved to have gone to the reunions, but he said he just couldn't get around.

Aaron Elson: Did he have a family? Was he married?

John Knox: Of all things, his wife died young, probably when she was fifty. Where he needed her so badly. She died early. And his son and daughter were pretty much worthless. The daughter lived in Illinois, the son lived down there. But the only one that ever seemed to help

him much, later on, was a grandson, would come around and see him. But he had a terrible life. But he was so upbeat. He never complained. Always laughing and joking.

Aaron Elson: I could see that, because when you survive something like that, just the fact that you're still alive means a great deal, as opposed to the alternative.

DeDe Knox: He used to cook very well, too. And I admired him.

Aaron Elson: Now, when you pulled the ripcord, you passed out. When did you come to?

John Knox: Hanging in a tree. A tall tree. My parachute caught in a tree and I'm dangling. And about that time three or four soldiers, German soldiers, drove up in a vehicle similar to our jeep, and cut me down and took me somewhere. I was conscious then. And I came to just about the time they came, so I don't know how long I was hanging in the tree. Boldt was hanging a tree for several hours. He landed in a tree. And he couldn't cut himself down because his leg, well, he did finally cut himself down. He had a pocket knife. And there's a long story about that [in Boldt's account]

Aaron Elson: Did it ever occur to you the fact that you landed in a tree kept you from landing on the leg, which would have made it even worse?

John Knox: Yeah, because if I was still unconscious and landed in a parachute and you don't bend your knees, you'd probably break both legs.

Aaron Elson: So you both landed in trees.

John Knox: Both landed in trees. I had one bad leg and he had two bad legs.

Aaron Elson: German officers were they?

John Knox: No, enlisted men.

Aaron Elson: Came and cut you down, and where did they take you?

John Knox: I don't know whether they took me right to the hospital where I was at, or whether they took me to a field hospital. They took me somewhere, and the doctor said he was going to operate on this knee, but he didn't have any anesthetic. But he said there's a, it was either a Catholic nurse or some of those nurses over there in Europe wear kind of habits, they're like a nun, so I don't know really which it was. He said, "She'll hold your hand." He said, "I've got to operate on your knee." He spoke pretty fair English. And I passed out. And the next thing I knew I was in this boys' school which they'd turned into a POW hospital.

Aaron Elson: So you passed out and didn't feel the operation?

John Knox: See, I was pretty woozy from the time I was hit. I don't know how much blood I lost. I think they said they gave me some transfusions. So I might have a little more German blood in me now.

DeDe Knox: When they brought him home on the hospital ship he was about 65 pounds.

Aaron Elson: So, that was in September ...

John Knox: September 27th.

Aaron Elson: And then where did they take you?

John Knox: I was in that hospital all the time.

Aaron Elson: It was a boys' school that was converted to a hospital?

John Knox: I've got all kinds of information on that, pictures of it.

Aaron Elson: Now Baynham, did he land the plane or did he bail out?

John Knox: No, he took it down to about 12,000 feet as I remember, and then they bailed out and it blew up then. I don't know why he took it down so low. I guess he was trying to get back to Allied territory. But I don't know whether the fire, I guess the fire wasn't all the way out, why did it blow up? I never did get that story? Of course he's the only one that can tell that. One time we were at Lemons' house, after the first Kansas City reunion, that was about ten, twelve years ago. We went down and spent some time at Ray's house, and he surprised us and had Baynham there. That's the only time I've ever seen Baynham since the war.

DeDe Knox: And we went out of the way to see the fellow that didn't fly that day.

John Knox: Oh, yeah, Lord. We stopped in Tampa to see Lord.

DeDe Knox: You'd seen all the rest of the crew and Jack said, I'd like to go there. And his wife says he felt so guilty.

John Knox: Oh, we did that on the way home. We've been to Ray's house twice. The first time he had Jim over for dinner. He was married to his second wife. Then the next time we went there, we drove down to Houston and saw Howard Boldt. That's the only time I've seen him since the war. But Ray Lemons and I went to a lot of the reunions, and his wife and my wife get along real well. We had a good time at the reunions. The first reunion we went to was, one day Ray called me up, I lived in Deerfield Beach up here, DeDe and I did, we had a nice condo. And he said "Hey, Jack, there's going to be an Air Force reunion at Hollywood, Florida. Would you be interested in going?" And I said "Yeah. Where's it going to be?" And he said, "At the Diplomat." I said, "That's kind of expensive, why don't we just stay here? We had a three-bedroom condo close to the water right on the Intercoastal. And so he came down, and his wife Jean, and we went down there, and this was an 8th Air Force reunion. We'd never heard of the

2nd Air Division. And that was 1989. 1988, something like that. And so we went down there, and came back at night, for two or three days. And that's where we heard about the 2nd Air Division, and the following year they were gonna go to England. Jimmy Stewart was gonna be there and all that. So we signed up for that. And that's when we learned more about, well, then, that's the year we went over to the Kassel Mission Memorial.

Aaron Elson: That was in '90?

John Knox: We had a week in Norwich for the reunion, and then we went over for three or four days, for the opening ceremonies.

Aaron Elson: That must have been a very moving experience for you.

John Knox: Olen Bird's name was on there, and Hector Scala. And John, I can't think of John's last name, he was going to the University of Kentucky.

DeDe Knox: When we left to go on this trip, we had a neighbor at the condo in Deerfield Beach, she worked for the Sun Sentinel, and she heard about us going over to this reunion, and she came over and said, "I'd love to interview you." And I said, "Oh, I don't know..." And she said, "This is something good. People like to hear about this." So she came and talked to us and got all interested. So we went to Germany then, she called him over there, at the hotel, and did an interview. It was all over the newspaper. And then she called him two or three days later again.

John Knox: She brought a photographer and they came out to the condo before we left, and it was on the front page of the second section of the Sun Sentinel. And a whole article about us going to Germany and meeting the pilots.

DeDe Knox: And then she did a followup on it and phoned him again to see what his reaction was, and then they had another article two or three days later. She said people like to read about good things. And this was a gesture between the two countries, and it was very nice. And the bands were there. It was special.

Aaron Elson: When did you learn the fate of the three crew members who were executed?

John Knox: I don't think until about 1986. I got a letter from Walter. Walter wrote me a letter. I think he wrote everybody a letter. He wanted to know more about, and asked me a lot of questions. That guy got all the serial numbers of every plane that was shot down, every crew member, everything.

After the war I had a lot of trouble with, mentally and physically. I was in bad shape. And I went to psychiatrists, I went through shock treatment. And the psychiatrist wanted to find out what happened, so he asked me to write a letter to Jim Baynham, and I think that's when I first knew that we'd even gone off course. That this whole mission was a disaster. And that's all I knew about that, I didn't know anything about anybody being hit. I think it was 1986 when I found out about the three fellows being murdered. They started to put this stuff together, writing back and forth, and we got some information, all through Walter.

Aaron Elson: And you said the plane was on fire already when you saw the ...

John Knox: When I came out of my turret. See, I was facing the opposite, I don't see much of the airplane. The reason I had to get out of the turret, I was hurt. And the turret is dead, I couldn't shoot any more, it was badly damaged. So I turned around and started out and I saw, looked up there through the bomb bay and you could see right through.

Aaron Elson: And you didn't hear any other gunners firing?

John Knox: You see, you had your headsets on.

Aaron Elson: Now, tell me about your treatment in the hospital. You said it was good?

John Knox: It was better than you would think. It was good. No abuse of any kind. And the whole hospital was run by Dunkirk and Dieppe English prisoners of war. You know how they were trapped when France collapsed. They couldn't get back across the Channel. So there happened to be among them a medical group. Doctors and enlisted medics and all. And they were all taken prisoners, and Germany utilized them by putting them in this hospital. And the doctor I had was a captain, a young captain, I don't think he was 25 years old, would come around and review the cases with the English doctors. And the medics, they had to do everything, wipe our butt and everything else for a while when we were, Howard Boldt and I were in terrible shape.

Aaron Elson: Why is it that you lost so much weight?

John Knox: There wasn't much to eat and what there was was so bad I couldn't eat it. The bread had green mold around it and was real heavy and black and tasted like it was made out of sawdust.

Aaron Elson: It was made out of sawdust.

John Knox: I don't know what it was made of. And the coffee was the same, ersatz coffee, I don't know what it was made out of. It was horrible. And once in a while they'd get cheese, and I should have eaten more of that than I did, I just can't stand cheese. So part of it was my own fault. But most of it was just there just wasn't much to eat. Everybody lost a lot of weight. But see, I was small, I only weighed about 128.

Aaron Elson: Did you smoke at the time?

John Knox: I don't think we got, I don't know whether I ever got, I might have got a few cigarettes and given them to Boldt. Boldt smoked, in the next bed. If I got any cigarettes, I would have given them to him. I'm not sure. We got a couple Red Cross parcels. There weren't many.

Aaron Elson: Did they notify the government, or the Red Cross, that you were POWs?

John Knox: Somehow they did Boldt. His wife was notified that he was a POW. But my mother, see, she [DeDe] wouldn't have got the letter because I was not married, she never got a thing. All she got was letters missing in action. And we never, ever figured that out.

DeDe Knox: Well, the Red Cross said that the Germans didn't notify people until they got well and went to regular prison camp or till they died, then they notified, but in that interim period they didn't notify them while he was in the hospital.

John Knox: Three things could have happened to you in that hospital. You could have got better, and put into a stalag. Or you could have died. Or there was a repatriation list, and one boy went home a couple months after I got there. And I gave him my address, and he actually wrote a letter, a couple of letters. I've got the letters even. But I think I was on a repatriation list, but that didn't come up very often.

DeDe Knox: Would you like a cup of coffee?

Aaron Elson: No, thank you. DeDe, how about you during this time?

DeDe Knox: I was in school. I was in college, and then I worked part time. I sold World Book encyclopedias.

John Knox: She wrote a letter to my address in England every day. From September the 27th she kept them going until ...

DeDe Knox: May.

John Knox: Every day. And eventually they all came back. But she kept writing.

DeDe Knox: I kept writing. The mailman told my mother, why don't you tell that poor girl to quit writing, he's probably dead. And I said, well, I'm a very religious person, and I said well, I think he's alive somewhere, maybe with a nice family. He said, "You're a dreamer." I just knew he was alive.

Aaron Elson: You never doubted?

DeDe Knox: No.

John Knox: I've got whole albums of this, all the letters. And no one ever sees it anymore.

Aaron Elson: When you learned Jack was alive, what went through your mind?

DeDe Knox: Grateful. Happy and grateful. His mother and I were very close. She would pick me up and take me shopping and she took me to church and we were very close. We got to know each other.

John Knox: I didn't say much in the letters because we weren't allowed to complain or anything, so I just said that I'm doing okay, I've got some injuries, or something like that, and I'll never be quite the same as before, but I miss you and hope to get home soon. I just couldn't say much.

DeDe Knox: When he got back he was really cruel. He wanted to leave me off the hook. And I said to him, I said to him on the tape, I said, "Well, I have been writing to you every day all the time you've been gone, and you are not gonna dump me." The doctors, psychiatrists, I went to too with him. And he said that it's better that you weren't married because now this way Jack knows that you love him. But he was always of small stature and he was very self-conscious. But he realized that there's more important things in life.

John Knox: Jim was married, and the radio operator, Hank Fields, was married. And Ray was married. The rest all were single.

Aaron Elson: When you did get married, what did you feed him to get him back up above 100 pounds?

John Knox: Oh, that was quite a while. See, they kept me, as soon as I got to a field hospital in France they started me on a high vitamin, high protein diet. And I just loved milk and steak. I lived on milk and steak. I was in Paris probably a month waiting to get home. First they said they were gonna fly me home and I ended up on a hospital ship. Of course they fed me more there, and then they took me to Valley Forge General Hospital and they fed me there, so by the time we got married I was back.

Aaron Elson: If you don't mind, can you talk a little bit about the difficulties you had mentally adjusting after you got back?

John Knox: The biggest problem I had when I got back was a skin rash. It started on my face while I was a prisoner of war, and at one time they put some violet jelly on it, and my face just itched so bad I couldn't stand it. And they tried everything. But then it went away while I was in Valley Forge General Hospital, I think it was gone when we got married. And then it came back, on my arms and my face. And it got so bad that I wanted to kill myself. You never, terrible itch.

DeDe Knox: He was scratching so, that's when I had to wrap it up.

John Knox: This was when I'd started college on the GI Bill, and I just started itching so bad, and I had to go back up to Cleveland, back into the hospital. They put me in a psychiatric ward. And then I don't know, I got better and they let me out. I finally had to drop out of college

after about two and a half years. Then they gave me ultraviolet treatments for my face it had got so bad. Of course now I'm paying for it with skin cancer on my face, I've had about 35 skin, this is all skin cancer.

DeDe Knox: Just on his face.

John Knox: And then they tried electric shock treatments.

DeDe Knox: That was bad.

John Knox: But it seemed like after that, then I finally got okay and I got a job at a trucking company and I didn't like that very well and I ended up with the State of Ohio and I worked there for 25 years, and my skin, I started taking cortisone. Cortisone relieved my skin. So I lived a normal life then, from about the time I was twenty...let's see, this all happened when I was 21, from the time I was about 27. I was working regular and we were raising a family and doing everything, and living a normal life. And I still, I never got off of cortisone and it's got my skin messed up badly, the coloration. But it's kept me going. So I've lived a pretty normal life, raised three children, traveled all over the country, and had a good life. Did a lot of partying. I worked for the State of Ohio and had a fairly relaxing job.

Aaron Elson: What did you do for the State of Ohio?

John Knox: I started out as a tax examiner and worked up to a supervisor of the financial institution tax section. A nice job. I did that till I retired. I retired early, 58 years old, I didn't quite have 30 years in, but with my disability and my retirement from the state I thought I could live a pretty good life. And I figured with my eye problem and my leg problem I didn't know how long I was gonna live and be able to do things, so well, let's get started. We just fell in love with Florida. But I never dreamed that I would live to be 87 years old. And I still don't take any heart medicine or cholesterol medicine or anything like that. I've got all these problems but none of them are life threatening, so I can live a lot longer, but I don't really want to with these problems.

Aaron Elson: And **DeDe**, How about you? Where were you in college?

DeDe Knox: Ohio State University. My second year. I didn't get to finish. We got married and I said, well, it's better to be a kindergarten teacher, so we'll just get married and have our own kindergarten.

John Knox: See, where she lived and where Ohio State University is is just a streetcar ride or a bus ride.

Aaron Elson: So you have three children?

John Knox: Two of them went to Ohio State. Two of our children met in high school, like we did, and married, and the marriages are still there, and the third one, our daughter, the oldest

one, she met her husband in freshman class in college, and they're retired now. So all three successful marriages, and they all married young like we did.

Aaron Elson: Do you have grandchildren?

DeDe Knox: Five grandchildren?

Aaron Elson: Any great?

John Knox: Two or three. Three.

DeDe Knox: Three

John Knox: And another one on the way.

DeDe Knox: Yep, we've got another one on the way. Now we told them we can't fly anymore they just come and see us.

John Knox: See, this place we're at, we bought a life care insurance policy. And you pick out an apartment, pay like \$200,000 for it, but you don't own it. They own it. But they'll take care of us for the rest of our life, and if we have to go to the nursing home or the assisted living home, either one of us, the other will stay here, and you can just go back and forth in a golf cart, they'll take us anywhere we want. This is a 64-acre campus. The nursing home is far superior to the regular nursing homes run by large hotel companies and things like that. But this is not for profit.

Aaron Elson: Do you ever have flashbacks to the battle?

John Knox: Oh, I could still, if I was a painter I could draw a picture of me sitting in that tail turret and that FW-190 out there, I could paint a perfect picture of that. And of standing there with wounds, getting ready to bail out. And of some of the scenes in the hospital. But there's an awful lot I forget. Now Howard Boldt, he knew all the doctors' names. He told me all the things that went on in there, and I didn't remember any of it. A lot of the prisoner of war hospital has been blotted out. Probably by the electric shock, I don't know. But the hospital itself, I didn't have any real bad things happen in the, it's just the fact that I laid there and said well I was going to marry that pretty girl back there and look at me now. That's what I think caused all my trouble, the injuries. The fact that I was already little and then I had all this, I figured who in the world would ever want to marry me? And I think I dwelled on that. But I was a mess.

Aaron Elson: Before the Kassel Mission, in those eight missions did you have any close scrapes?

John Knox: Yes, on our second mission I've got an article that Jim Baynham wrote to his dad where we were ...

DeDe Knox: The Dessau one.

John Knox: Dessau, we were going to Dessau. And we were in formation. Of course I'm always looking the wrong way in the tail turret. But two planes above us, a plane above us in the next layer, I think it was to the left, got a direct hit of flak, and flew up, kind of, and peeled over and crashed into another plane right over us. And that came down and blew up in front of us, and flipped our plane over. The B-24 is not supposed to recover once it's out of control, but somehow Jim Baynham and Charlie, I remember, we were, centrifugal force, we couldn't move back there, because we were going straight down I guess. And we were pinned to the airplane. And finally they pulled the thing out. And we got back okay. And I remember I looked down in my turret and there was a piece of shrapnel laying right beside my leg, about that big (three inches) with jagged, sharp, it looked like maybe fifty or sixty razor blades glued together, just terrible. And it must have just run out of steam after it broke through the aluminum or whatever, and didn't touch me. I remember that. I can picture it. But I didn't, back where we were we didn't really get to see much of what happened, we just knew we were pinned to the floor, and Jim wrote a real nice letter to his dad about that and he published it in the Texarkana newspaper or something. But that was a bad one. That was the second mission.

DeDe Knox: He said that made him realize that war is scary.

John Knox: That was the second mission. I figured how the hell are we going to do this 25 times? And then shortly after that they bumped it up to 35. When we first went over you only had to do 25. But I feel that it was just a shame about that mistake that the navigator and the pilots made, because the missions were getting to be fairly easy when you had about 100 P-51s sitting out there cruising back and forth. The Germans wouldn't touch them, even come near us. Because we had air superiority and we were shot down by fighter planes. I thought military officers are supposed to follow orders, well orders are always to stay together. You don't separate from your formation. How they had the nerve to even do that if they wanted to, if they thought they were right. You shouldn't be able to do that. They can't make a decision. One group flying along with thirteen or twelve other groups is not permissible for them to break away. The leader of the entire bombing mission would have to make that decision. So that was a terrible tragedy that they did that. And I think there were two or three big shots on that plane.

Where the mission really went to hell was it wasn't fit weather to fly that day. They said there was a lot of overcast over Germany when we were briefed, and this is how it all started. They didn't have their ground margins, and that's why there's confusion, they just looked through a little hole here and there, and we never, ever should have flown that day.

DeDe Knox: They said after the mission the dining hall was so empty, and Jimmy Stewart had talked to the ones who returned.

Aaron Elson: Did you have any contact with Jimmy Stewart?

John Knox: Almost, when we went over to England in 1990 he was supposed to be there, he was getting pretty old, and his health prevented it. But we were hoping we'd meet him then. I've got his book. Beautiful book. Just his military life. He was always a favorite of mine. I guess he used to come to the enlisted men's barracks and talk to them. He flew, between the two

groups, he was with our group and then he went to the 389th, I think he flew about 20 missions altogether.

DeDe Knox: I'm glad it's all over with.

John Knox: We went to the reunions of the 445th Group, and we talked to a lot of guys who were there when he was there. They stole some beer and they stole some coal or something, he got them out of it somehow. I guess in the wintertime they stole coal to keep warm, you put it in potbelly stoves.

I've been having a lot of problems. I go to therapy for my leg and arm, eye doctors. I've got one eye and three cornea transplants on it, but I still see about 20-40.

DeDe Knox: He can read large print books.

John Knox: You know, you can't travel anymore. There's not much to live for.

DeDe Knox: He's been depressed.

Aaron Elson: There's television.

John Knox: We belong to Netflix, do you know what that is?

Aaron Elson: Yes.

John Knox: We get some decent movies once in a while.

Aaron Elson: What about writing a book?

John Knox: Our life's got a book in it. We just don't know how to get it out. ... I wrote my memoirs. It's not good. It isn't so much about the war. All of a sudden I thought, who in the hell would want to read this? And I quit. I talked to a couple of other people here at John Knox Village, who started writing their memoirs.

DeDe Knox: They even have a class, to help people do it.

Aaron Elson: Your children, your grandchildren, they would love something like that.

DeDe Knox: They all love his tape.

Aaron Elson: Your story, when I first started doing this, people would say "Oh, you've got to interview John Knox, and **DeDe**." Because of all the different elements that go into the Kassel Mission, your story is really one of the more, for all the tragedy, it's one of the more upbeat stories.

John Knox: Of all the reunions we went to, I think I was the only 445th member that was injured. A couple of times there was a fellow in a wheelchair.

Aaron Elson: Web Uebelhoeer, he was in a wheelchair. That was in 1999.

John Knox: We sat with him on a train over to, from the airport to Norwich in 1990, we met him. Is he still living?

Aaron Elson: No, he's passed away.

John Knox: He used to send us a Christmas card.

DeDe Knox: Well, you have to look back and count your blessings. Like I say, he's been through a lot, but he's survived. We are survivors.

We had a friend here from my old high school and he drove over to see us for a couple of days last year and so she told Jack that he wanted to see the tape. Well, he's a high school history teacher in Columbus, and he just begged him, oh, my kids would love this.

John Knox: We made him a copy of that Pride of the Nation and gave it to them.

DeDe Knox: She writes me almost every couple of weeks, she said My nephew Mike was so thrilled because they're studying World War II, and she said his students are so excited. She said they almost feel like they know Jack and **DeDe**.

John Knox: I'm in that very first scene.

The funny thing is, after the war and after I got straightened out, and got working, I never mentioned the war to anybody. Nobody ever mentioned it to me. We never talked about the war, until Ray called me up and wanted to go to that reunion in 1989. Never, ever thought about it. And working, all the people, no one ever asked me about the war. I never talked about the war. But then we got real wrapped up in it when we met the Second Air Division, the fact that they were all the same airplane and we had so much in common. I just couldn't believe the way we all bonded together at the reunions.

DeDe Knox: We took our children to several reunions, and they said We can't believe how close all you people are."

Aaron Elson: It's the same thing with my father's tank battalion. When I went to that first reunion in 1987 I was welcomed like family, just because my dad had been through what they'd gone through.

DeDe Knox: At the Air Force reunions everybody would take their albums in the hospitality room and just lay them out and share and people would grab them all the time, wouldn't they, Jack?

John Knox: When I took this tape to the hospitality room, it seemed to be the favorite tape. It came out good.

Aaron Elson: Have you sent one of those to Linda?

John Knox: I sent one to her about a year ago.

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