

Interviewee: Frank Linc

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 11 March 2005

Location: kitchen table, Linc residence, Hopkins, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, April 2005

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, May 2005

Frank Linc was born 20 January 1919 in North Saint Paul, Minnesota, one of three boys. He grew up there and graduated from North Saint Paul High School in 1937.

Frank enlisted in the US Army Air Corps in December 1942, and completed training as a pilot on four-engine heavy bomber aircraft. By 1944, Frank was co-pilot on B-17 Flying Fortress, flying with the 8th Air Force, 401st Bomb Group, from a location in England. On 29 April 1944, while returning from a bombing mission to Berlin, his plane was shot down over Germany. He bailed out of the crippled aircraft, and was taken prisoner after parachuting to the ground.

As a POW, Frank spent a short period at the Dulag Luft interrogation facility, then from May 1944 – January 1945 at Stalag Luft III at Sagan. In January 1945, with advancing Soviet forces nearby, the Germans evacuated this camp—some 11,000 men—and marched the prisoners towards central Germany. Frank was in a group that ended up at XIII-D Nuremberg, where he stayed until early April. Now, with American troops closing in, this camp was evacuated and the men marched south towards Munich, to VII-A Moosburg. This overcrowded camp, housing nearly eighty thousand men by April 1945, was liberated by US forces on 29 April 1945.

Frank was among those US POWs evacuated to France, then back to the United States. Following some time recuperating, Frank was discharged in late 1945. Again a civilian, he used GI Bill benefits to attend the University of Cincinnati, where he graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering. Frank spent his career in the field, working for General Mills, Honeywell, and other firms.

Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor

F = Frank Linc

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is 11 March 2005. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project; my name is Thomas Saylor. Today I am speaking with Mr. Frank Linc at his home here in Hopkins, Minnesota, on a rather snowy day. First, Frank, on the record, thanks very much for taking time to participate in this project.

For the record, you were born in North St. Paul on 20 January 1919. You are a graduate of North St. Paul High School, class of 1937. You enlisted in the service 1942, and December of '42 you went on active duty with the Army Air Corps. By 1944 you were a copilot on B-17 Flying Fortress aircraft, flying with the 8th Air Force, 401st Bomb Group, from a location in England.

As I mentioned before we started, let me go back to 29 April 1944. That was to be your twelfth mission as a crewmember. Was there anything about that particular mission, as you got up in the air and were headed toward the target, that seemed to be any different than the other eleven missions you had flown?

F: Yes. The main thing was that the weathermen made an error in the wind velocity, our headwinds, and as the result of that we reached Germany one half hour late, and all our fighters were running out of fuel already. They were flying around in circles for half hour. All they could do was salute us and go back home.

T: So that's a crucial half an hour then, isn't it?

F: Yes. The Germans were no dummies, and as soon as they sensed this, they sent up all their available aircraft. As a result of that we lost sixty-three bombers.

T: In that one day?

F: *(nods)*

T: How many bombers were headed on this mission?

F: It was meant for about eight hundred heavy bombers. Plus the fighters.

T: That's a lot of planes in the air.

F: Yes.

T: Now as a copilot on a B-17 aircraft, just as a slight off point, what are your responsibilities during a flight?

F: Mostly to relieve the first pilot. Because we had eight or ten hour missions, and that's a long time. So we'd trade off. And watch the instruments. Make sure we're not losing power on some of the engines. This sort of thing. That's about it.

T: So you were, both of you, pilot and copilot, were both completely trained pilots.

F: Oh, yes.

T: Did the pilot outrank you or was he the same rank as you?

F: No. Same rank.

T: Now you were hit. You made it to the target, which was Berlin that day, and were on the way back when things began to happen.

F: Yes.

T: From your perspective, how did things transpire?

F: We left Berlin after we dropped our bombs, and we lost two engines. This dropped us way behind our formation. The anti-aircraft was picking us out because we were at the lower altitude and well within their range. All of a sudden the aircraft fire ceased. So this meant the fighters would be coming. They did. They had about six fighters coming at us.

T: As a lone aircraft. You were by yourself by this time.

F: We were just by ourselves, and our formation was getting out of sight already. Our third engine was cutting down on power. We knew our fate, so we dove into the clouds to get out of sight. With one and a half engines we knew that we couldn't make it back to England, and we knew the fighters would be waiting for us above the clouds and below the clouds. So we made a decision to bail out of the aircraft.

(1, A, 48)

T: Could you really hide in the clouds, in a way, from the other aircraft?

F: Oh, yes.

T: But the cloud cover wasn't going to last forever, obviously.

F: Yes. But it was very heavy cover.

T: But with the couple engines out, it sounds like eventually you would have lost enough airspeed that you would have dropped out of the clouds.

F: Yes. Oh, yes. One and a half [engines] isn't much. I'm assuming, well, I know that the third engine would have been out in another five minutes.

T: With one engine you can't fly at all.

F: That's right. Because if you let them run half power too long you damage the engine. We did that on the second engine. They'll freeze up on you, and I waited too long to cut the power. The shaft was freezing up in the engine. The whole plane was shaking. Finally the shaft broke and then the propeller was just spinning freely.

T: Let me ask you, sitting there in the plane, who gives the order to bail out? The pilot has to give it?

F: Yes.

T: When that order came, what's going through your mind?

F: It's the next thing to do. Didn't scare you a bit.

T: Had you made a parachute jump before?

F: No.

T: So this was going to be your first jump.

F: First one, yes.

T: Is it also your last jump?

F: *(laughing)* My last jump.

T: So as you're sitting there from your seat, where do you bail out of the aircraft?

F: Bail out of the door in the nose of the plane. Just below us.

T: Underneath.

F: Yes.

T: That's where you get into the aircraft too, at that same place.

F: Yes.

T: When you get out of the aircraft there, at this point you've got a parachute on, walk us through the jump. I mean, here you are. You've got this first jump. How does that work?

F: The first thing I remember, as I tumbled out [I was] facing up and I could see the aircraft passing over me. And the thing we had to be concerned about is the enemy fighter coming in and shooting us out of the parachute. And they did start doing this. We were warned about this. So I kept falling and falling and falling and I started thinking of a lot of things. Silly things, like my laundry didn't get back *(laughing)*.

T: So all sorts of things going through your mind then.

(1, A, 77)

F: Yes. And the thing that aggravated me the most, I was having an English tailor make an Eisenhower jacket. And I said, "Oh, I paid him the sixty bucks to make this jacket and he's going to have it now." *(laughing)* Those are crazy thoughts.

T: So really your thoughts were about anything but your situation at that moment.

F: Yes. That's right.

T: Very interesting. One might be tempted to think that a person would be concerned with, what's going to happen to me when I hit the ground, and I hear you saying you're worried about all sorts of other things.

F: The only thing as far as my wellbeing is, don't open your chute until you get close to the ground because of the fighters, [they] might shoot you down out of the parachute.

T: What altitude were you flying when you got out of the plane? Do you remember?

F: Twenty thousand.

T: You were way up there. That's a long way to fall.

F: Oh, yes.

T: At what point did it cross your mind that what could likely happen to you is you're going to be a prisoner of war?

F: No, that didn't enter your mind at all. The only thing is, when you get down, head for France. So I fell for—it seemed like eternity. I thought it could be that it's a low cloud and fog below that and I won't know I'm out of the clouds until I hit the ground. So I was ready to open my chute and things started lighting up, and I looked

and hey, there's the ground. I had a little farther to go, so I kept falling and finally I thought it was about time I pulled the chute. So then I looked down and I said, "So this is Germany. Crazy." *(laughing)*

T: Could you, as the ground came closer, could you see any people down there?

F: No. But I saw big trees reaching for me.

T: So you were headed for a wooded area.

F: Yes. So I knew enough about parachuting from stories, you start pulling on the shroud line on one side and that will slip you in that direction. So I did this, but I was close enough to the ground that it scared me because it doubled your speed almost. You can see the ground coming up much quicker. So then I just let it go, and I missed the trees and took one roll and hit a stump.

T: You did miss the trees though.

F: Missed the trees, but I hit a stump and wrenched my back a little bit. That was it. Took my chute off and rolled it up and hid it under some branches and headed off.

T: How did you decide there on the ground what to do? I mean, here you are, you know about where you're at, but you're a long way from anything, right?

F: Yes. Head east, or rather west. We had our escape kits with a little thumb-size compass and a map of the area.

T: So your escape kit had a little compass, map. Any kind of food or anything like that inside?

F: There were a few other things and I don't quite remember anymore what they were. I think there was same kind of a candy bar or something like that. They were just little packs about three-quarter inch thick and six by six. Something like that.

T: How much had the Air Force or the Air Corps prepared you ahead of time for if you're ever captured this is what it's going to be like? Had they ever talked to you about that kind of stuff?

(1, A, 123)

F: Just to head west is about the only thing, after you're down. But then they told us pretty much what would happen if you were captured. What you should do, etc.

T: So you had a little bit that you remember, of kind of training of, if you're captured here's what to do.

F: Yes. And the first thing is don't give any information. Just give your name, rank, and serial number.

T: And you're an officer. Second lieutenant, first lieutenant by now?

F: Yes. Second lieutenant.

T: How long did you stay on the ground before the Germans actually captured you?

F: I would say probably a half hour. I ran for about five minutes and saw someone ahead of me, who was my radio operator.

T: A guy from your own crew. So you recognize him.

F: Here he was without shoes. Because when you snap, when your chute opens your feet snap, and they warned us about this. That your shoes could keep going. So if you want to, tie another pair of shoes onto your chute straps. That's what he did. But he got down and he was barefoot and he got out of the chute and ran and left his shoes (*laughing*).

T: He did all right except he didn't put them on.

F: He just wanted to leave that area. So I had my shoes on plus the flight boots, which were fur-lined and very clumsy. So I gave him those. So he had a hard time running because (*laughing*)...

T: He'd brought the shoes and forgot to put them on his feet.

F: Yes.

T: Were you found by civilians or people in uniform?

F: Civilians. We were cautioned not to approach any clear area. We were going along and here was a clear-cut area, and we sort of ducked down when we saw it and we thought, well, maybe that's the place to go because there was a big pile of brush. It would be a good place to hide until the next day. About that time someone on the other side yelled out, "There's someone over there." So we took off like mad. We started getting out of breath. We stopped and I heard something behind. I looked and here's a kid on a bike following us. Probably fifty feet behind us or something like that. My radio operator said, "Hey! Here's a rock. Let's konk him out." I said, "No way! If you hurt that kid you're going to be dead within an hour." So I said, "Let's just walk, catch our breath, and I'll give the signal and we'll take off." So that's what we did. So as soon as we started running he yelled.

Then we got to a stream. They cautioned us about streams too. Avoid that because someone on the other side will see you. But we had people coming behind us and on each side so the only way to escape was to cross the stream. We just got

into the water and someone yelled on the other side. Took a shot at us. So we got back and raised our hands and sat down. Then the farmers came up with a rusty shotgun. That was good enough for us (*laughing*). So he took us into a small town.

T: Did you fear for your life at all when the civilians finally came to you?

F: No. In fact we even had an amusing little incident, if I can tell this on tape (*chuckles*).

T: Go ahead.

F: When you're in high altitude and you get down, oh boy, you have to pee like mad. We didn't take time and so he was marching us through a field and I asked him to stop. (*making motion with hand to groin, have to urinate*) That I have to pee. He said, "Heraus mit you! Heraus mit you!" So we walked a little more and I got his attention again, and I held my finger like this (*hand to groin*). "I got to do this." And he laughed. So the three of us stood there and peed (*laughs*).

T: The farmer too? So you weren't threatened, certainly, or mistreated, it sounds like, by these guys.

(1, A, 176)

F: No. I found on our marches if you go through a large city we had people...and what I remember, a couple women there, they were spitting at us. But you get into the small towns and it's an altogether different story.

T: So the reaction from the civilians was different.

F: Yes.

T: And less threatening the way you're describing.

F: Yes. So he took us into town and put us up in the jail. Wait a minute. Before we got into town, we stopped at a little farm and they had a big barn. They wanted to search us. So they asked us to take off all our clothes.

T: How many Germans are we talking now?

F: By this time there were about four there. All civilians. There were probably ten ladies, mothers, daughters, kids at the door staring at us. I said, "No. Not until you get those people out of here." (*chuckles*) So they told them to get out. They shut the door. I had this little compass.

T: From the escape kit.

F: Yes. And it was called an asshole compass.

T: Why?

F: When you're searched, there's one place you can hide that that they won't...so that's what I did. That's the only thing I kept.

T: And everything else the Germans took from you.

F: They searched us. Our clothes. That's the only thing I kept from my escape kit, because when we were sitting down there at the side of the stream we hid our escape kits under the moss.

T: I see. So you got rid of all this stuff.

F: That's right.

T: Did you have a weapon at all?

F: No. We had side arms, and they cautioned us. They said, "You can carry them if you want, but if you are down on the ground and you shoot someone, they catch you and they know you did that, you're dead." So we didn't carry side arms.

T: It sounds like you were better off without them.

F: Yes.

T: And really, what are you going to do, shoot your way out of Germany with...

F: Yes *(laughing)*.

T: So here you are. You're in a barn with a bunch of German civilians searching you. How long was it before people in uniform showed up?

F: It took about maybe an hour. A truck came in with a policeman. They hauled us to the city jail. It was a small town. They held us there until the next day, and then they sent us on to the next place, Frankfurt, Germany.

T: There was a central interrogation facility there in the Dulag Luft that most airmen went through. Did you go through the interrogation facility?

(1, A, 220)

F: Yes. Let me tell you something interesting there. We were interrogated separately. They took me to this office and the captain, German captain, was there. Very polite. He asked me to sit down and we talked for a bit. He started asking

questions about the B-17, about the bomb site and this sort of thing, and I said my name, rank, and serial number. He asked a few more questions. I'm doing the same thing, and then he got mad and he was pounding the desk and everything. Of course, this was just for show.

T: He spoke English to you, right?

F: Oh, yes. Very fluent. Yes. It got to the point where he said, "I don't need information from you, because I know everything about you anyway." And I knew the procedure. Our intelligence people told us about everything that would happen.

T: Really? About, if you're captured here's what they'll do.

F: Just the pattern of our interview. They had that all down pat. That they were going to get mad, and then they'll start telling you that they know everything about you anyway. So I said well, if you do, prove it. So he said, "You were born in North St. Paul. You went to North St. Paul High School and you graduated on such and such a date." All of this information. "And you took training, flight training, and you started on such and such a day. Graduated on such and such a date. Went overseas." By golly, he knew everything.

T: So he really knew about it.

F: He knew more about me than I knew myself (*laughing*).

T: How did that you feel when he read that stuff off to you?

F: Kind of funny, because I already knew he would say this, because of our people telling us just exactly what would happen.

T: So there was a script and here the script was being followed, just like they said.

F: Of course, the next thing they said, they'll lock you up and threaten you. No food. So, sure enough. He said, "Well, if that's the way you feel, we're going to put you in a cell here and you're going to stay here with not much food," et cetera, et cetera. I said, "Well, if that's the way it has to be, that's it." So they called the guard. He took me to a room and in the evening the guard came in and gave me two slices of bread. Nothing on it. Just bread. I said, well, there may be a case where I may need this food later on, so I ate one slice and put the other slice under my mattress. I often wondered. I'll bet you they had a peek hole someplace watching my reactions and saw me do this, because the next morning they gave me some barley soup and said okay, that's it. It was in the afternoon already. They took me out into the yard and there was the rest of the crew. All ten of us.

T: So you saw everybody from your crew there. Still alive and still okay.

F: Right.

T: Did knowing the script, did that make that whole sequence easier?

F: Yes. Oh, yes. Sure. That's for sure. And the comical thing there, they had us lined up. Had to go through the routine. Calling our name, and then you had to take two steps forward. So he said the first one is George Gould. Two men stepped forward. Boy, did he get mad! He told him to get back. He said, "I want only George Gould to step forward. George Gould step forward two paces." Two guys did the same thing. Out flight engineer and the first pilot who was the operations officer were both named George Gould.

T: So there really were two named George Gould.

F: He was a colonel. So he decided we better not laugh too much. So he told the captain what the story was. And the captain laughed. He thought that was funny (*laughing*).

(1, A, 292)

T: Were you threatened at all by the Germans, or were you mishandled at all there at Dulag Luft? I mean, they talked and pounded on the desk a lot, but did they really do anything?

F: No. No. But I remember that they marched me to my cell. Then there was another guard coming down. They threatened me I would be there until [you have]...[they showed me] another person with a beard about like this (*laughing*). I knew at that time, I said that's a show and tell thing again to scare me. Here's a guy that's been here for two months already with that big beard.

T: But you knew to expect that in a way. That was part of the script as well.

F: Yes. So I give our forces credit for having all this information for us. It made it much easier.

T: It sounds like it did. I mean, you sort of knew the Germans would do this and this and this, and they did it. How many times did they question you there?

F: Just the one time. I was there in this captain's office I would say probably an hour. It's hard to remember exactly how long.

T: But only that one time that you remember.

F: Yes.

T: How were you transferred from that facility to the Luft III camp?

F: They put us on the train the next day. Another funny thing that happened. We were going through one town. I forget the name of the town. But one of the fellows looked out—and it was a passenger train, and the curtains were down. So you peeked out and oh, this is one of the towns we bombed out and everything is flattened. So we all wanted to take a peek. This German guard came with his gun and said, “Heraus mit you! Heraus mit you!” My navigator, he was in the army in Pearl Harbor and so forth, so he had enough time to bluff a little bit. He pulled his lapel here with his bar. He says, “Officer! Officer!” and the guy actually snapped to attention.

T: Did he really? A German guard?

F: This is how class conscious they were. Just like that. Of course, he snapped out of it right away too, but...

T: I see. Now was your crew still all together, enlisted and officers, or had you been separated by now?

F: At that point we were separated already. Yes. So it was just the four of us officers in that train.

T: That’s pilot, copilot, bombardier, navigator.

F: Yes.

T: When you got to Luft III, you must have got there sometime in May if you were shot down in April. When you got to the camp and got inside, how would you describe what the camp looked like to you?

(1, A, 350)

F: They had all the barracks of course, and they had two fences. High fences with barbed wire above it. They had dogs, in between the two fences. It’s just something that okay, we expected this, and this is it.

T: Did the prison camp sort of match your vision of what it was going to be like?

F: The one we were in was probably better than I expected, because they had so many prisoners coming in that they had to build a whole new section there. It was the south section, I believe. So they were really new barracks. The compound beyond the fence was much older and this sort of thing.

T: So it was better. You were in not a bad section at all.

F: Yes.

T: The barracks themselves: now you arrived with the other officers from your crew. Did you stay together in the same barracks or were you split up?

F: They split us up. In alphabetical order.

T: So you were assigned to a barracks, or to a room as well.

F: Yes.

T: When you got there, how big was the room and what was inside?

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 385.

F: Twelve by fourteen.

T: And how many men were housed in that room?

F: We started off with eight, and when they got more prisoners in we had twelve men in the room.

T: And were there bunks in the room?

F: Three high. Let's see. There were one, two, three, four. Yes.

T: Four bunks. Three high. Now as officers, of course, you weren't required to work at all.

F: That's right.

T: How did you pass your time during the day? You were there a lot of months.

F: Some of the fellows—there were four fellows in our room that played cards most of the time. The Red Cross brought in decks of cards. So we had one deck in our room. So they played cards a lot.

Everybody had their own thing to do. I made utensils. We would make pies out of whatever we could. Then you'd cut up the pie in eight pieces. This was before we got the additional people in there. Hey, your piece is bigger than mine! *(chuckles)* So I thought, well, hey, we have a lot of tin here from tin cans.

We had our Red Cross parcels, which is what kept us alive really. You'd have some canned food. There were English cans too. From England. So I would take the tin out of them and I made an eight section pie plate. So now you know exactly how to cut the pie.

T: So it marked an exact plate.

F: So each section was a section by itself. I won't explain how it was made but I was proud of it.

T: How did you make that? You had no tools.

F: Okay. We had a kitchen knife. Dinner size.

T: You were issued those, right?

F: How did I cut it? I didn't have anything sharp or anything to bend. But I looked, and we had a chair that was a pretty hard wood. There was a crack right down the center that my knife, table knife, would fit right in there. So this was my cutting tool. I laid the tin there and just cut that way. Cut it up. I would fold it over to make a seam. There would be eight seams around.

So on our last march I still had it. I wanted to take it home. But we needed a kettle in case we catch a chicken (*laughs*). We were in this one city and there were women along the sidewalk or whatever, and this gal saw it and she wanted it. She pointed. She'd like to have it. Meanwhile, she had a pot, kettle, about ten inches in diameter by yay (*holds hands eight inches apart*) deep. Good for boiling potatoes or whatever you might find for food. So I said, "Okay, I'll give you this if you give me that."

(1, B, 421)

T: So a barter, right there.

F: Yes. And right away.

T: She took your pie thing and gave you that kettle.

F: Yes. But I think we both felt we got a bargain. But I've been kicking myself ever since. I would have liked to have kept that and given it to the museum down in Andersonville.

I would also like to add that, midway through my internment as a POW, I received a letter from my mother in which she said that my brother Bob just returned from a hunting trip, and he got his limit. In a clever way she was telling me that Bob had finished his thirty-five missions and returned home safely. Luckily, this letter got through the German censorship. Not all letters passed through, and I was fortunate that this one did. Every time new POWs were added to our camp I was at the gate checking if Bob was shot down and among the new POWs.

T: Let me ask you about German civilians. On the march or before that, how many times did you come into contact with German civilians? In train stations for example, or...

F: No. The only time we really had contact with civilians was on our second forced march.

T: The one from Nürnberg to Moosburg.

F: Yes. One bitterly cold night in January 1945, we were aroused by the German guards and told to gather our belongings and prepare for a forced march to a new location. We could hear the rumbling of artillery from the advancing Russian front. After three days of marching with only eight hours of sleep we arrived at a rail station and had our second eight hour sleep, on the concrete floor of a warehouse. The next day we were packed into boxcars, shoulder to shoulder. I stood for two days and two nights without room to sit or sleep. This was the worst time of all. The bumpy ride caused pain in my joints.

We finally arrived in Nuremberg, where we lived in a flea-infested old barracks that was previously used by forced laborers. The advancing Allies greatly concerned the Germans, so they sent us on a second forced march, lasting two weeks, to Moosburg [in Bavaria, southern Germany]. There we arrived on the April 1 [1945].

It was April already and it was late spring, early summer almost. So it was nice weather. The German guards weren't the young Germans. They were old, sixty year olds and this sort of thing. Of course, they still carried rifles, so we honored that. But they would take us to a little town. They would post a sentry on each end. Because there would be only one road going through. And we would scrounge for food and so would the rest of the German guards.

T: You're both doing the same thing really.

F: Yes. Because the Germans, their transportation lines were all shot to pieces by that time. There was no way to feed us, so we had to rummage for our own food. So this is where you get to meet all the people in these little towns.

T: What kind of experiences were those? Were they tense or unpleasant or were they more of the kind of bartering that you talked about earlier?

F: Bartering. One of the most interesting was we were at this one little town. There were thousands of us in this little town.

T: So you were marching in a long column.

F: Yes. Oh, yes. But on our first march I remember in the snow—it was two feet of snow—and I would look in back of us. The end of the line was out of sight. Same thing in front. There were ten thousand of us in that one camp [Luft III].

T: That's a ton of guys to be moving.

F: And they were all either American officers or British officers. Mostly American. There were a lot of people marching. But anyway, I said to Art, I said, "Hey! See that steeple over there?" "Yes." I said, "If we hop over these fences we can go in that direction and we can have the town to ourselves." (*chuckles*) So off we went. I knew the guards would be at the end of the road so if we go this way we're safe enough. We got to this little town and just got in there and I heard someone say, "Ssst!" I looked and here was a French forced worker there.

T: Civilian guy.

(1, B, 456)

F: Yes. So we walked over and he wanted to know who we are. We couldn't understand him and he couldn't understand [English]. So I asked for egg. If I remember, egg was *Ei* in German.

T: In German. Yes, it's *Ei*.

F: So he went and got us a couple eggs. We thanked him and on we went to this big barn. It was huge. A little gal standing in front of it. Beautiful. So we stopped and thought maybe she can give us some more eggs. So we asked for eggs and she said no. We talked a while and we were able to find that she was a Russian nurse who was captured, and she was a forced laborer there. So then when we asked for...she said no eggs. So she started pointing here.

T: To your crotch?

F: (*laughing*) I'm just married. I don't want any sex.

T: That's right. You were married now.

F: So I said no. No. She pointed again. Then I noticed she was pointing to my hip. I had a tin cup there. Then she said *Milch* [German: milk]. She wanted my cup. Now I knew what she was trying to tell me. So we each gave her our tin cups and she took them in. When she said *Milch*, then I knew what it was all about. So she went in and I thought—it seemed like ten minutes passed by and she didn't get back. That gal took off with our cups! (*laughing*) But she did come back and gave us the cups of milk. I remember drinking that milk. It was warm. And it was leaking down my chin. I didn't know it and all of a sudden I realized...that was one of my most embarrassing times. Here this beautiful gal here, and sloppy old me (*laughing*).

T: You must have looked a sight by that time too, right?

F: Yes. I should add that too. At Sagan, Luft III, they let us have our own organization. So we had a commanding officer coming through every Saturday for checking for cleanliness and so forth and make sure we were clean and everything

was clean. So I give them credit for that. We weren't sloppy with big beards or anything like that.

T: At the camp at Luft III, and you were there for six months or more, did you have problems with things like lice or fleas or any kind of bugs at all?

F: Oh, yes. I'll tell you about that when I finish this other. I'll get into the big thing.

So we walked to the end of the town which wasn't too far to go and here, a nice house. Had this steel archway. I thought, hey, these people have a little more money. *Bürgermeister*. What is *Bürgermeister*. Hey, that's the mayor.

T: That's the mayor in German, right.

F: This is the place to get some good food. So we walked in there.

T: Nobody is trying to stop you now.

F: No. We were away from the other towns. And we were the only ones there. So I knocked on the door and this old fellow, he must have been about sixty-five, came out and I asked for eggs. He said no. He started turning around. I pulled out a cigarette. I made one smart move. I didn't smoke all my cigarettes that we got from our Red Cross parcels. I made a slit in the lining of my A-2 jacket, and this is where I had a couple of packs of cigarettes. I just pulled a pack out and held one cigarette in front of him and he looked at that. No! He started turning around so I said, "Two of them." He looked at that. So he did this, put up his one finger. So I knew he said, just a minute. That's what he was really saying. And so he walked in and he must have talked to his wife and he came out and he said, "Okay, come on in." So we walked in there, must have been ten senior citizens in there. Of course, they wanted to know who we are and what we are and so on and so forth.

(1, B, 512)

T: What language is being spoken here?

F: Body language. I can't explain it, but we knew what they were asking for. So we mentioned we were from the US. Americans. They understood that. So they wanted to learn more. So I said we're *Flieger* [German: flyers]. That they understood. We learned a few words by that time in German.

T: Sure you would.

F: As soon as I said *Flieger* the whole room cooled down and boy, they were...I thought, oh, oh, that's the wrong thing to say. So I thought I better pull us out of this real quick, so I said the three of us, pointed to us—

T: There were three of you here now. Three Americans.

F: Yes. First time...*(engine noise then shooting noise)* and showing planes coming down, and then I said, here we are. Right away everything softened up. Now they felt sorry for us. Because, first mission we got shot down.

T: It was a tense moment there, it sounds like.

F: That's right. After a little more conversation [we found out that] these were all people that lost their homes in other cities and they came to this town because they were related. So they sat us down. They said, take off your coats. They pointed to our coats. Take them off. I said no. Because I had a couple eggs here and a half a loaf of bread here that we already picked up. I didn't want them to see that because we wouldn't get much from them.

T: I see.

F: So we sat down.

T: You're still trying to play these people for something. Food or something.

F: Yes. Right. All we wanted [was to] have them give us some eggs, but they fried some eggs for us. When we ate the eggs I don't remember if they gave us something to drink or not. I can't recall. But then—you know what strudel is?

T: Yes.

F: We each got a piece of strudel about yea size and about this thick.

T: So a half inch to an inch thick and fairly big size.

F: The best strudel I ever ate *(laughing)*.

T: It's amazing you didn't gain weight on this march *(both chuckle)*.

F: That was a good day. That was a good day. To me it was very interesting to see the German people in the small towns. They didn't care for the strict ruling group. I guess you'd call it that.

T: You noticed a difference already between cities and small towns and how the Germans treated you.

F: Yes.

T: To the point where you felt comfortable, it sounds like, just going up and knocking on someone's door and see what you could get out of them.

F: I probably wouldn't at my age, but back then, twenty-two years old, you don't think too much. This is the thing to do, better do it.

T: You were on the road about two weeks marching from Nürnberg to Moosburg.

F: Yes.

(1, B, 554)

T: Are there experiences that were similar to that, or was that more unique?

F: There was another one that was real interesting. About the middle of this march we were stopped in this little town and they were waiting for the column to catch up to itself. So I looked on the little hill, probably a quarter mile away, this big building. I looked at it and I said, "Hey, Art. There's a brewery up there. How would you like to have a beer?" "Oh! That would be good." I said, "Well, we can get there and get a beer and come back here before the column starts marching again," and he said okay. I said, "I'll check the guards, and soon as they're all facing away from us I'll give the signal and we'll take off." This is what we did. We got to this brewery and this big archway. We walked into the interior courtyard I guess you'd call it. Nobody around. Then we heard this fellow say, pssst! He was in this little room. So we walked over. He wanted to know who we were. We told him. Body language again I guess you'd call it. I said we want some beer (*laughs*). He didn't understand what we were saying, so I did this like I was drinking a bottle of beer. Oh. Of course, I already offered him a couple of cigarettes by that time.

T: So you had his attention.

F: So he said just a minute, and he walked back into this room and we followed him there. There was a barrel about like this of sawdust. He reached in there and pulled out a bottle of beer. I gave him the two cigarettes and he didn't want us in there, so we went out in the courtyard and I took my swig, the fellows took their swigs, and I was on my second one when the guard came (*laughs*).

T: One of your guards or the guard from this place?

F: German guard. Evidently they sent someone up to—and there were a few other people doing this. So they took us up into a room. Concrete floor and bars on the windows. Locked us in there and we slept on cold concrete floor all night and the next morning they took us back to the column. The column wasn't there, but the next column coming in. They were going to hold us and put us into that column. Then I said to the fellows, hey, we don't want to be in that column. We know the direction our column went. Let's go that way. All of friends are there. They agreed, so we started going—pulled the same thing. The guards were not looking, so off we went then. We saw this chicken coop so we went in there. Thought we could pick up a chicken. But scared chickens are pretty hard to catch. They made pretty much

noise so I thought, you better get out of there. So we got back on the road and walked, followed that road and we were getting hungry. I saw a big pile of dirt in this field. I thought something was stored there. We dug in there and we pulled out a beet about that size.

T: Sugar beet.

F: I'm not sure what kind of beet it was.

T: They're big. Like a kohlrabi thing. They're big, aren't they, softball size anyway.

F: Yes. We had no knife or anything. We found a sharp stone to use to peel that stuff off so we could—we ate most of that. It must have been about two o'clock in the afternoon we rounded a little corner. There was a little farm. We walked in there and pounded on the door. I mean knocked on the door and the farmer came out. I told him we'd like to have some eggs. He said no. Sign language again. I did the same thing. One cigarette and then a second cigarette did do it. So he took us in. They sat us down and this little old lady was making us some eggs. They had these cast iron skillets. What she did was in each little dip she put some lard and then put the egg in there. It was like a poached egg then. And they had some bread with jelly on it. We were about halfway through and there was pounding on the door. Oh, oh. And boy everyone was scared. They opened the door and it was a guard again. Boy! That gal was just shaking.

T: The lady.

F: Yes. Of course, he saw us and he said, "Heraus mit you! Heraus mit you!" This is a month or two months before the war was over. You have to understand conditions were much different with these guards.

T: Actually this is April, so it's a month maybe.

F: Yes. So he wanted us to get out of there. I said we have this food here, the eggs. I was pointing to that. He understood what we were saying. So he said okay, and he was telling this lady what he wanted. Pounding his fist. So she gave him his food. So we deliberately just slowed our pace. We ate very slow, and finally he was done and he looked at us and he said, after the war—he pointed to us—he said, after the war you to me, that we would cut his throat was what his body language said. I said no. So I stood up and I went like this. We go back to the field.

(1, B, 637)

T: Making like a farmer.

F: Yes. So he understood what I was saying. That was it. Then he finished and he left.

T: He left you there?

F: Yes *(laughing)*.

T: It sounds like this two weeks where you're going from Nürnberg to Moosburg in April here, it almost sounds like a charade. You're with a column and there's guards, but you kind of come and go as you please almost?

F: Almost. In the little towns. But then this beer thing. I found out later that we weren't the only ones that were doing this. And when the last column would go by, then it was followed by SS troops and they were catching a lot of these fellows. They weren't very nice. They pretty much beat them up. So we were taking a chance.

T: Did youth have something to do with the chances that you take?

F: I was the instigator. Is that what you're saying?

T: Sometimes when we're younger we take more risks.

F: Yes we do. Things don't scare you as much as they probably should. After you were in the service a year or two, then you're braver, let's say. And things don't shake you. There's a lot to that too. I often thought if I ever go back to Germany, then I would like to look up that little farmer and thank him.

T: Have you ever been back to Germany?

F: No.

T: Ever want to go?

F: I did. But by now I couldn't go back to that place. The guy's been pushing daisies for twenty years already.

T: He was older anyway.

F: It would have been nice after about five years. After I got out of school. Probably take a trip there. But then, we all wanted to get on with our lives. Then when you've got the time and so forth, why, then it's too late.

T: It is really, isn't it?

F: Yes. I meant to do that twenty years ago or thirty or something like that.

(1, B, 677)

T: Let me go back to Stalag Luft III. You talked about the kind of daily routine. What about the food there? I mean, here you're in a camp. Is there regular food supplied?

F: Germans...we would get our rations. Barley soup.

T: Regularly?

F: Yes. Just a plate about yea much of it in there (*holds index finger and thumb, one inch apart*) and that's not enough. That's the only thing we got. Although I remember one time they hauled in a load of kohlrabi. Our kohlrabis, they were like this.

T: So twice the size of a softball.

F: Big.

T: But that was out of the ordinary.

F: Nobody wanted to eat it. That's not food. So I peeled one and started eating it. They wanted to taste it. We ate them.

T: When you're hungry, you eat different things, don't you?

F: Oh, yes. Let me tell you something else. Although life as a POW was harsh, we kept our spirits up by planning our future, making cooking utensils out of tin cans, walking, being buddies. I recall one time when we heard that more new POWs were to be added to our barracks. I caught a large fly, tied a fine thread from my coat to its leg, and let it circle above my head like on a leash. As the new POWs entered our room one of the men asked what I was doing. I replied that I was taking my fly for a walk. This guy looked around and asked, "How long has he been here?"

That evening, when we sat down for our barley soup, which had some worms that almost looked like barley, I placed about four worms from my soup beside my plate. One fellow asked me what I was doing, and I replied that I was saving the meat for later. "What kind of meat is it?" he asked. "Just worms," I replied. He wouldn't eat soup for two days, and as a result I had double rations. On the third day he was hungry, and ate the soup (*laughing*).

You get a bunch of Americans and it's a little different. They can get along better, I think, than other nationalities.

T: What do you mean by that?

F: They kid together and they do things together. I don't know how to explain it. But one thing I noticed in camp, Germans came in with a wagon-full of something and the wheel came off. So there was the wagon with the horses and there are three privates there looking at it. One went to report it and came back. Why don't they put it back on? They just sat there behind the wagon. Half hour later a German

officer came in. He looked at it and was giving them instructions what to do. Now if it was an American situation, they didn't need an officer to tell them what to do. GIs are pretty smart.

T: They'd just fix it themselves.

F: Little things like that, they would take it upon themselves to do it and we got it done. I thought that was quite interesting to see that.

T: What kind of people, by and large, were these Germans? German guards at the camps. Think about Stalag Luft III. Young guys, old guys? Nice guys, not nice guys?

F: They were...I'll say a combination. Of course, the younger fellows would be the ones that probably every week or two they would go through all the barracks and see if there's anything going on or tunnels or stuff like that. Because that's where the big tunnel was, you know. Even during the wintertime everyone had to go out in the big compound in the middle. We would be all lined up there in groups. We'd stand there for an hour.

T: For roll call.

F: Roll call sort of thing. Sure. You're right. They did have roll call. But then we would still stand there for all the time. Meanwhile—we called them ferrets—the German guards would go through all the cabins. Turn everything upside down and see if there was something. And they turned up a radio a couple of times.

T: So they could find stuff. They weren't just...

F: Yes. When we left that camp we still had one more radio.

T: Does that mean you were getting some kind of regular—

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

F:—the latest of where the lines are and so forth. So before the march our forces had contacted the radio operator we had and told us if you're on the forced march do not try to break away. Stay in the column. That's the safest thing to do. Because the war is just—

T: So you had some information before you even got out of the camp on how to handle yourselves.

F: Oh, yes. I think my first pilot who was an operations officer—I'm not sure if he was a major or lieutenant colonel, but he was the highest ranking—believe it or not they parachuted in a general about a month or two before we left. He took charge of the camp.

T: An American guy.

F: Yes. He had his regular (*pauses three seconds*) flight bag, or whatever it was they called them back then. The Germans brought him in, and I imagine somehow our forces notified them that they were going to drop this guy off or whatever.

T: He was a real general?

F: Yes.

T: And his job was to basically take charge of this camp?

F: Yes.

T: They knew what was going to happen.

F: Yes. So that's why there were no mass breaks or anything else. We were told stick together. That's the safest way to go.

T: What do you remember about the evacuation on the 27 January 1945 from Luft III?

F: We were awakened and told to gather our belongings. We were going to go on a march to a different location. There wasn't much to think about. This is happening and we have to do the best we can. I remember we packed—we kept a lot of food as surplus all the time. So we divided that. If I remember, I had a can, like a coffee can of milk, powdered milk. But after about ten hours of marching we were pretty well pooped. So the line was halted at this point. I still remember everyone was emptying their bags out [of what] they probably won't need or whatever. Or too hard to carry. You didn't have much strength back then.

T: Right. So the extra weight was being jettisoned.

F: Yes.

T: Now you marched for a couple of days and then ended up on a train that took you to Nürnberg. That train ride, boxcars this time, right?

F: Yes.

T: What do you remember about that?

F: Oh! That's the worst time I had as a POW. Yes. They put us in these cars, these boxcars. They loaded us—in our car at least we had only enough room to stand. We crowded to one end to allow six people to lay down. And those would have to be

those that are sick, crippled and so on. I forget how long that trip was. Was that three days? *(pauses three seconds)* I stood all that time. We were supposed to change places, but of course, if these guys are sick you couldn't expect them to, so I stood the full time.

You know how a railroad is. That bouncing continually. It seemed every joint in my body was aching. About mid-way we stopped in a marshalling yard and the guards, I think one guard for each boxcar, opened up the doors so we could get fresh air and you also had to go. So I told the guard. Body language again. I have to go. No. They pointed a rifle at me. "Heraus mit you!" I looked and people were looking out of boxcars all the way up and down, and I finally thought it's now or never, so I jumped out and the fellows behind me followed me and there was a ditch there. I happened to look and because I jumped out everyone else followed suit. From all the other cars. So in the ditch we were doing our duty and I can imagine what that place was like when we left.

(2, A, 54)

T: Was the train that you were on strafed or bombed by Allied aircraft?

F: No. No. No. We were fortunate.

T: It was traumatic enough, it sounds like.

F: Yes.

T: While you were marching from Nürnberg to Moosburg, was that column ever attacked by American aircraft?

F: No. But I remember one time we were concerned about it. We came to this bridge, and as we were crossing I noticed at each end a ditch was dug into the roadway. Probably three foot wide and eight feet long and about two feet deep. Cavity. They had a big bomb in there. So I knew it was set up for if the American lines came that far, they would blow up the bridge. But we crossed the bridge and we were spread out in this field waiting for the rest of the column to catch up, and all of a sudden three P-47 fighters came above us. Here again the commanding officer of our POW camp somehow got a hold of a bunch of cloth for such purposes, and a few designated people were carrying this cloth. They right away spread it out in the field, [and spelled out] P-O-W, so the fighters would know who we are.

About that time an anti-aircraft gun was there, close to us, they started shooting at the planes. The fighters peeled off and dove in and started firing at that gun emplacement. As one fighter stopped shooting and he would go up in a steep climb, and the second one was firing and as he would start climbing, the third one would be there. It was like a cartwheel. Each one took about three passes and then they silenced the gun.

T: Didn't hit any of you guys?

F: No. That was pretty clever. That was good to see.

T: Yes. And fortunate that you weren't hit by any of that.

F: The reason for that, I would say, is our senior officers were looking forward to what could happen. They had enough white cloth along there to place [spell out] "POW" on the ground.

T: That was good thinking on their part because had they not seen that, they could have mistaken you for Germans.

F: And this could have been this general that was placed in our camp.

T: There's obviously...somebody knew to do that.

F: Yes.

T: You ended up for a couple months at XIII-D in Nürnberg. That camp was also picking up a number of people from different places. How did that camp compare for you to Luft III?

F: The worst you'd expect.

T: So it's gone from okay to bad.

F: Yes.

T: What made it worse?

F: We walked in there, and it was about eleven o'clock at night. There was one bulb in the barracks. So we were trying to pick out these bunks. They were four high or three high, whichever it was. It could have been four. So we were ready to crawl in when someone said—near the light—this place is filled with fleas! So we looked and there were fleas in the corner of your bunk. They were just these straw mattresses about yea thick (*holds thumb and index finger an inch apart*). Peel that back and there was a quarter inch of fleas in that corner. So nobody slept that night.

The next morning we tried to...there was one little broom there, and we tried sweeping and washing it off. But you can't get rid of them all. I remember the middle of the night I would wake up and I would feel something in the back of my head. I knew that was a flea. Yes, it seems to be moving. So then you tried to catch it. Midnight. You know if you have it. Then you can sort of feel it there and try to get it between your nails and do this and try to toss it away. So you didn't sleep very well.

At Nürnberg we had no heat. Just that little bit of mattress to sleep on. Plus, I don't know if you knew this, because of the Great Escape that they tried about a

month or two before we got there [to Luft III], the beds were made out of two by fours and with slats for our bed. But every other slat was missing. They wouldn't let us have a complete coverage of slats on our bunk, because this is what the tunnel makers had used to shore up the tunnel. So the Germans said, "If this is what you want to sleep on, that's what we'll give you." I had one slat for my head, two for my shoulders, two for my hips and some for my...so there were some spaces a good ten inches between the slats.

T: It sounds like you didn't get much good sleep there at all.

F: *(laughs)* Yes.

T: I mean between the bugs and the cold there at Nürnberg...

F: No. This is at Nürnberg. Here they had all the slats, but they also had all the fleas too.

T: Where was this, at Luft III? Where were the fleas?

F: In Nürnberg. Yes.

Because we didn't have enough heat in Stalag Luft III, I got a hold of some thread out of my GI coat and made a sack out of my blanket. This way I trapped the heat. Otherwise one blanket, and you lay on half and fold the other half over. You roll over and you're almost bare there. I knew I had to get a hold of those fleas, so I would get up on one of the sheds, the pump shed, on the roof, and slowly peel that bag inside out. The fleas would always go to the bottom. As I opened it up they would keep on moving, so that when I got to the end of the bag that's where they were. I'd be catching them and killing them and then leave the bag inside out and hang it on the fence all day in the sun, and then use it the next night.

T: Do you learn to simply coexist with fleas and bugs?

F: Yes. Can't get rid of them. We had the Red Cross come in and check into conditions.

T: Which camp did they come to?

F: This was at Nürnberg.

T: The Red Cross came in to Nürnberg.

F: We told them about it and he said they would get some flea powder to help us out. But that never happened. Of course, we were there [at Nürnberg] only about a month.

T: You were in and out of that camp pretty quickly, weren't you?

F: Yes. So it was a relief to get out on the open road and get away from those fleas.

T: So marching from Nürnberg to Moosburg really was kind of a welcome change from that camp?

F: Yes.

T: Comparing the camps for you, Nürnberg was worse than Luft III.

(2, A, 147)

F: Oh, yes. Much, much worse.

T: How do both of those compare to Moosburg, which is where you ended the war?

F: Moosburg, it was a bombed out place. There were potholes all over. Which meant some of the barracks were blown apart. They set up tents. We got a tent. So we sat in the tents.

T: I've seen photographs of those. Rather large tents, weren't they?

F: Yes. They had some ditches there to hide in, in case there was an attack. But I remember when Patton came.

T: You were there just a very short time before the Americans arrived.

F: Yes.

T: What do you remember about the day the Americans arrived?

F: We could see them coming over the hill, the big tanks.

T: Describe that.

F: At the same time, rifle fire [came] from the guards. So we jumped into the tent. Very strange. Here there were the ditches that we could jump into, but we did not, and I remember sitting there and all of a sudden I heard bink, bink! I looked and here there was a bullet hole in the canvas right here (*laughs*).

T: Canvas doesn't provide much protection, does it?

F: No.

T: But somehow you felt safer in there.

F: Yes. I should have jumped in the ditch, but instead of that I just lay flat on the ground. I didn't want to get out there where the bullets were flying.

T: Now the Americans came right into camp.

F: Yes. We were finally liberated by General George Patton, who rode into camp standing in his jeep, hands on hips and wearing his two pearl-handled revolvers, while the American flag was being raised. There wasn't a dry eye among us. An emotional moment I will remember and treasure forever. Being a POW was very difficult and resulted in lasting friendships with those that shared the experience. We visit with John McDevitt, a fellow POW, every year for a few days.

I remember a Jeep came by us and stopped to ask how things are. I remember they gave me an orange and stuff like that to eat. Then they asked how the conditions were, and how did the guards treat us. One of the fellows said they were all pretty good except that one over there. And he was a bad one.

T: So the guards hadn't got away. They were still there.

F: So believe it or not, these GIs grabbed that guard. They took him into the woods, and shot him.

T: So there was some kind of retribution against the guards that they caught. That one anyway. How did that strike you? Was that the right thing to do?

F: No. I didn't like it. I noticed on the front of the Jeep there was a bar going up about four feet up, six feet up maybe. There was a hook on the end. So we asked them, what is that for? The Germans would run a wire across the road. And he said they ran into this one time and two of his buddies had their heads chopped off because of that wire stretched across. Here's where the GI had a lot of smarts. They made these things up themselves to protect themselves. Where I don't think the Germans GIs would do that. They had to wait for the officers to tell them what to do.

T: Interesting assessment, really, of how—

F: Now these fellows lost buddies. It didn't take much for them to react the way these guys did. I think probably we all would do the same thing if we were under those circumstances.

T: So being a ground combat troop puts you in a different situation.

(2, A, 197)

F: Oh, sure. I never saw people killed. I never saw blood. This sort of thing. So it's an altogether different world. I talked to people afterwards. I said, boy I think of you fellows down there in the trenches and I used to say, you poor buggers down there. He said, what do you mean? We'd be on the ground looking up at you and we

said, those poor buggers up there. So it's what you're used to doing. You're in your own environment. Let's put it that way.

T: You become accustomed to that.

F: Yes. That's right.

T: The air became a comfortable place for you, removed from the war.

F: Yes.

T: Did you, from Moosburg, were you evacuated back to the States by ship or by plane?

F: By ship. Hospital ship.

T: What kind of shape were you in when you left Moosburg? Physically.

F: A lot of people ask me what do I feel about that experience, and I say I got back out, back to the States. I've got my limbs, my mind. I lost forty-five pounds but, hey, I'm one of the lucky ones. And I have freedom.

T: How do you consider yourself one of the lucky ones?

F: Just because I came back home whole. In one piece. American C-47 cargo planes were dispatched to pick us up and fly us to France. The pilots had difficulty locating our camp, and when they did they were already low on fuel. We were loaded up and quickly transported to Camp Lucky Strike, in France. Unfortunately, we learned that two of the C-47s ran out of fuel and crashed, killing all POWs and crew members.

T: In addition to these POWS, there were a lot of aircrew guys that didn't come back.

F: I saw some. Like this one fellow. He flew the B-24s [Liberator four-engine heavy bomber] and they were a fireball. They had all their hydraulic and gas lines passing through the bomb bay, and when the bomb bays are open and the shrapnel comes in and breaks the lines...this one fellow, he was pretty well burned. He had just a stump for a nose and his ears were gone, his eyelashes were gone. He was in a B-24. B-17, again, was one of the most stable and safest planes you could expect.

T: From a pilot's perspective, easier to fly than a B-24?

F: Oh, much better, yes. B-24 is much more unstable and you look at the pedals, the rudder pedals. They're worn down to the steel. No more paint. You look at a B-17. The paint is still there. Because you didn't need it that much. Evasive action where you have to really make a rough turn, okay, you'd use it. But normally just level. We had the big tail there. That was a big stabilizer.

T: And the B-24 didn't have that. That's right.

F: Yes.

T: When you got back to the States, Frank, your mom was still alive and your first wife, Leona, was here. Were they in North St. Paul or the Twin Cities area?

(2, A, 238)

F: Yes. In North St. Paul. Yes. Of course, Leona was from Hopkins, but she took a job at the War Department in St. Paul so she lived with my mother during that time.

T: Your dad had passed away.

F: Yes.

T: When you got back to the States, how soon was it before you got a chance to see your mom or your wife?

F: Pretty quick. It took two weeks to get across the ocean. The first thing I did was wired my wife. I was on my way home; don't contact me. It took about two days, three days and I was home. From the East Coast.

T: And your mom and your wife knew you were coming.

F: Yes.

T: When you first saw them, how much did your mom or your wife, Leona, ask you about your POW experience? Not your combat experience, but your POW experience?

F: That's a hard question to answer. Did ask questions, and I would give some. But I didn't go into detail.

T: Is it safe to say you kind of told them a light version, almost, of what—

F: Yes. You know, back then you didn't want to...you wanted to get on with your life. This was all something you wanted to forget. There are important things to do and to talk about and this sort of thing. I do remember we—my two brothers were home at the same time. We'd go to a restaurant or a bar, and you didn't have to spend your money for booze. If you were in uniform (*laughing*), everyone wanted to buy you a drink.

T: When you went with your brothers and you saw them—they were both in uniform, both in service—how much did they ask you, Frank, what's it like to be a POW?

F: Oh, gee, I don't know. That's a long time ago. We talked in general terms, I guess, what we went through. I don't recall going into any great length.

T: So if it came up, you may have given an answer, but it wasn't something you dwelt on perhaps.

F: Yes. Just like this picture here shows (*points to newspaper photo of the three Linc brothers, in June 1945*).

T: Yes. There you are. All three of you.

F: They were interested. One was going on.

T: You were a young guy. You're twenty-five years old at this time so you really have a lot of living to do.

F: Oh, yes.

T: As the years went by, was your POW experience something you could talk about with people, your wife? Did you have kids with Leona?

F: We adopted two kids, yes.

T: Did your kids ask you about things? Coworkers?

(2, A, 284)

F: The coworkers would. Back then the kids were pretty young, of course. Because I went to school for five years. Then we adopted our kids. I guess we didn't talk about it much. Like I said, they were more interested in what we were doing than... It wasn't, I would say, until during the last twenty years, probably, that we talked more about our experiences. One of my buddies, he was in the artillery, I think. He was a POW about a year or more. He couldn't talk about it until about two years ago. I was finally able to sit with him and talk about it.

T: Even POW to POW, he had trouble.

F: Yes.

T: No kidding. Now, you're a member of American ex-POWs, right?

F: Yes.

T: What prompted you to join that organization?

F: That's a funny question. I guess I just wanted to be part of that group. Yes.

T: People that shared experiences with you?

F: Yes.

T: Do you go to meetings or conventions?

F: Conventions, we went to a couple of them. The Air Force conventions, we went to about three of them. And we have 8th Air Force, the Minnesota group has a Christmas party every year. We go to that. But lately I've been thinking of going to some of the POW meetings. But usually they're in August. That's our busiest time up at the lake. So here I have to make a decision, which will I enjoy the most. Now, if I could go...if it was a POW place where I'd find a lot of the people I knew, if I knew they would be there, yes, I would probably go. But for the 401st Bomb Group get together, I wound up knowing only two people there. One was a...I flew with him on one of the missions.

T: But most of the guys you didn't know.

F: The first pilot, he had to fly five missions before he could take the crew on a mission.

T: Right.

F: Berlin was our first mission together. We got to Berlin and he chickened out. He couldn't handle it. So he turned it over to me. That was good. I don't mind. So I didn't say anything. But of course, the flight engineer is right here. His feet are almost on our shoulders. He may have reported it, because we had one more mission with him and they jerked him off. Off the crew. So I flew with a number of pilots. I think that's where I got a reputation that I could handle the plane, and so I was being checked out for first pilot on my last mission. So that was the end of my flying career.

T: You mentioned your crew. How much have you kept in contact with your crew since the war ended?

F: The navigator, he visited us once in Cincinnati and we kept in contact by letter. Then we were in California and dropped in to see him. He passed away the next year. The rest of the crew I have no idea what their addresses are, and just a month ago I got myself a new computer and you're supposed to be able to find all this information, but I just went through the regular way and this George Gould, I wanted to get in touch with him. It would give a state where he is. I think there

were two states that they mentioned. So then to get more information you have to pay in sixty bucks.

T: I know that site, yes. They give you just enough to let you think...right (*laughing*).

(2, A, 377)

F: But there is a military—what would you call it.

T: Search service?

F: That you can go to, I believe, because I've heard you can get all the information on anyone this way. So I'll have to find out.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

T: So it sounds like you're closer with guys you were POWs with than guys from your crew?

F: That's about it. Yes. Johnny talked about the University of Cincinnati, what a good school it is. He thought that was the best thing in the world. When we got back I tried at the U [of Minnesota] and they had already started and they—my brother started there. He quit because if had got to the class late he would be standing in the doorway taking notes. That's not the way to get an education. So then we went to Cincinnati. Of course, that's where Johnny lived. So he set us up, helped us find a place to live and introduced us to his friends and so forth. So we see him every year. And one of the fellows, Art Peterson, all I could remember of his name was Pete. He was the one on the forced march. We did all our scavenging.

T: Yes. You mentioned Art a couple times.

F: How would I find a Peterson? That could be a million by itself. So I never tried to follow it. But then I wrote one of these articles, *The Lost Soul* thing. I got that into the Air Force magazine. And Art's wife read that and she said Art, this is Frank Linc, the fellow you have been talking about. So she wrote me a letter. So then about three years later we went to California, and we stopped and had a couple of days with them.

T: The first time you'd seen him since...

F: Yes.

T: What was that like to see him again?

F: Real nice. Yes. Of course, he wanted to invite a couple of his buddies there that were POWs. Both of them were from our same camp. So there were four of us there. This is in a little cattle town.

T: Yes. Right. It sounds like you hadn't seen this guy for fifty years, and yet you can pick right up with him again.

F: Yes.

T: That's a pretty deep friendship.

F: The only problem is, he was half-blind, and now he's almost completely blind. But if we head west again we'll drop by again. But he, this is something interesting, there was a third POW there that was a Japanese POW. They give talks to schools. A POW from Germany, and a POW in Japan, and Pete's wife was a POW...if you remember the stories about after Pearl Harbor they took all the Japanese and put them into an internment camp. She was just a little girl then, so she was there with her parents. So they got together and they got married. Very interesting.

T: Frank, when you got back, picked up your civilian life again, how often did you find that you dreamt about your time as a POW in any way?

F: Quite often. Sometimes even now I will get a slight dream and wake up. I'll be a little in sweats about it. But then the problem would be not the dream, it would be I'd get a mindset and that's all I can think of. So you try to think of something else. I found out the best thing to do is just get up and play solitaire for about an hour. Then my mind is open again.

(2, B, 429)

T: That works for you.

F: Yes.

T: Have the dreams decreased in frequency over the years?

F: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And that's normal, I guess.

T: Adjusting. Dreaming. Did you have any issue after the war with drinking and trying to put things in your life straight?

F: No. No.

T: You're fortunate in that respect.

F: Yes.

T: So gradually you just kind of moved into civilian life, it sounds like, and that kind of drifted into the past, your POW experience anyway.

F: Yes. Of course, the fact that I was home probably about four months, then headed for Cincinnati. Now five years of school. All you can think of is your studies. I would say that helped right there in itself. It would take your mind off of everything but what you're doing at that period of time.

T: Keeping yourself busy. Mentally. School, if you were going to school and working.

F: Yes.

T: That's the last question I had, so on the record then I'll thank you very much for this interview. I have enjoyed talking to you very, very much.

F: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Frank Linc's additions (JUL 05)

One bitterly cold night in January 1945, we were aroused by the German guards and told to gather our belongings and prepare for a forced march to a new location. We could hear the rumbling of artillery from the advancing Russian front. After three days of marching with only eight hours of sleep, we arrived at a rail station and had our second eight hour sleep, on the concrete floor of a warehouse. The next day we were packed into boxcars, shoulder to shoulder. I stood for two days and two nights without room to sit or sleep. This was the worst time of all. The bumpy ride caused pain in my joints.

We finally arrived in Nuremberg, where we lived in a flea-infested old barracks that was previously used by forced laborers. The advancing Allies greatly concerned the Germans so they sent us on a second forced march, lasting two weeks, to Moosburg [in Bavaria, southern Germany]. There we arrived on the April 1 [1945].

Although life as a POW was harsh, we kept our spirits up by planning our future; making cooking utensils out of tin cans, walking, being buddies. I recall one time when we heard that more new POWs were to be added to our barracks. I caught a large fly, tied a fine thread from my coat to its leg, and let it circle above my head like on a leash. As the new POWs entered our room one of the men asked what I was doing. I replied that I was taking my fly for a walk. This guy looked around and asked, "How long has he been here?"

That evening, when we sat down for our barley soup, which had some worms that almost looked like barley, I placed about four worms from my soup beside my plate. One fellow asked me what I was doing, and I replied that I was saving the meat for later. "What kind of meat is it?" he asked. "Just worms," I replied. He wouldn't eat soup for two days, and as a result I had double rations. On the third day he was hungry, and ate the soup.

We were finally liberated by General George Patton, who rode into camp standing in his jeep, hands on hips and wearing his two pearl-handled revolvers, while the American flag was being raised. There wasn't a dry eye among us. An emotional moment I will remember and treasure forever.

Being a POW was very difficult and resulted in lasting friendships with those that shared the experience. We visit with John McDevitt, a fellow POW, every year for a few days.

Midway through my internment as a POW, I received a letter from my mother in which she said that my brother Bob just returned from a hunting trip, and he got his limit. In a clever way she was telling me that Bob had finished his thirty-five missions and returned home safely. Luckily this letter got through the German censorship. Not all letters passed through, and I was fortunate that this one did. Every time new POWs were added to our camp I was at the gate checking if Bob was shot down and among the new POWs.

American C-47 cargo planes were dispatched to pick us up and fly us to France. The pilots had difficulty locating our camp, and when they did they were already low on fuel. We were loaded up and quickly transported to Camp Lucky Strike, in France. Unfortunately, we learned that two of the C-47s ran out of fuel and crashed, killing all POWs and crew members.