<u>Interviewee</u>: Jack Ringgenberg <u>Interviewer</u>: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 27 August 2004

Location: kitchen table of Ringgenberg residence in North Mankato, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, September 2004

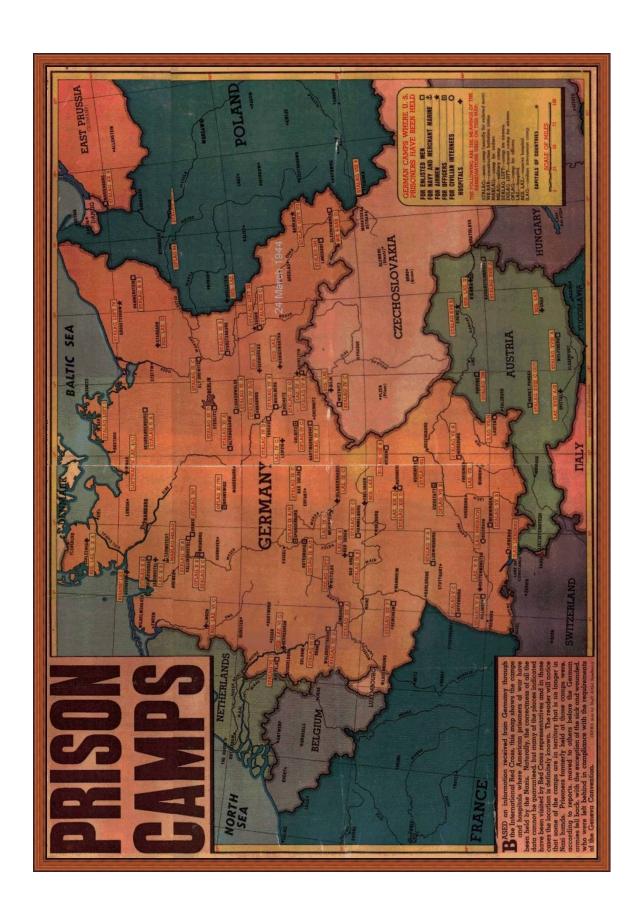
Edited by: Thomas Saylor, May 2005

Jack Ringgenberg was born 21 March 1924 in Rochester, Minnesota, one of three boys. He grew up there, and graduated from high school in 1942. He was inducted into the US Army in March 1943, completed Basic Training at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, and then volunteered for paratrooper school at Fort Benning, Georgia. Upon completion of paratrooper training, Jack was assigned to the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), 82nd Airborne.

Jack was in action with the 504th PIR at the battles for Sicily and Salerno, both in 1943. This unit also supported the Allied Anzio campaign in January 1944, part of the invasion on 22 January; Jack was there. Four days later, though, after a deadly firefight with German troops (twelve of eighteen Americans killed), Jack was taken prisoner.

As a POW, Jack spent time at several prison camps (German = Stalag) after an initial interrogation in Florence, Italy: II-B Hammerstein, IV-B Muhlberg, Luft VI Heydekrug, XIII-D Nuremberg, and finally VII-A Moosburg. This overcrowded camp, located in southern Germany, was liberated by advancing US forces on 29 April 1945. Jack was among the thousands of Americans evacuated from Moosburg; he went first to France, then to the United States. He was discharged from service in November 1945.

Again a civilian, Jack was married in 1947, and helped to raise four children. He used GI Bill benefits and graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College in 1951. Jack stayed for the most part in the Mankato area, working many years for Red Owl Foods, a grocery retailer, and also owning a store in Forest Lake, Minnesota. He has been active in the American Ex-POWs organization.



Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor
J = Jack Ringgenberg
[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 27 August 2004. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I'm interviewing Mr. Jack Ringgenberg at his home here in North Mankato, Minnesota. First, Jack, on the record, thanks very much for taking time today to speak with me.

J: You are very welcome to be here. Thanks for coming.

T: For the record we have this information. Please correct me if anything here is incorrect. You were born on 21 March 1924 in Rochester, Minnesota. You were one of three boys. No sisters. Graduated high school 1942. You enlisted in the Army December 1942, inducted March of 1943. Did your Basic Training at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, and from there volunteered to be a paratrooper and went to Fort Benning, Georgia, and earned your jump wings there. On the other side of that you were finally discharged from service 6 November 1945. As a paratrooper you were a member of 82nd Airborne, 504th [Parachute Infantry] Regiment, and from our conversation earlier, you had a jump into Sicily in 1943. Is that correct?

J: Yes. We went in, but there was just a small number of us. We went in about a week after the invasion. At Sicily. I don't know why but we did, and we were only there for about forty-eight hours and they yanked us out.

T: Did you jump at Salerno as well?

J: Yes. We were at Oujda and we were told that the Germans were pushing the invasion force out and they needed some help right away. So the 82nd Airborne dropped there and again, I lost a real good friend there. But we were only there for two days.

T: So both the...the first two times you jumped it was a rather quick in and out...

J: Quick in and out. Of course, we were always told that paratroopers would never be in battle for any length of time, because they were just to help the invasion. But we were only at Salerno for two days. The Germans pulled back. So the invasion was safe and that was that.

T: So at that point you, as the paratroopers, were no longer really needed for what you'd been dropped for.

J: Right. Then the 505 and 506 after Salerno, they were sent to England and the 504 was told that we had one more jump to make in Italy.

T: And from our conversation before we started taping, it turns out you didn't go out of an airplane but rather out of a boat.

J: Out of a boat.

T: What was that experience like? You'd been trained, and sort of your mindset must be for jumping out of planes, and suddenly you're in a landing craft heading for a beach.

J: *(chuckles)* Well, the water at Anzio on January 22 was very cold. We had a little short guy in our outfit. Our landing craft had hit some sort of a sandy pier or something. Anyway, when we stepped off, we really went down in the water.

T: So it wasn't the beach like the photographs.

J: No.

T: It was in the water?

J: It was in the water because...we were probably fifty yards from the beach and we had to wade ashore. It's a good thing we grabbed that little guy, because we pulled him out.

(1, A, 40)

T: So the water was over his head.

J: Yes. The water was over his head. But anyway, we got there and then the first thing they had us do, the demolition people, was blow up the five bridges across the Mussolini Canal.

T: You're a demolition expert.

I: Yes.

T: What did that mean? What kind of things were you trained to do?

J: We were just trained to blow up bridges or...because we carried TNT. TNT takes an explosion to make it explode. It isn't like dynamite. Of course, when you jump, you know, and a bullet...if you were jumping and you had dynamite and a bullet hit it, it would blow you up. But TNT can be struck by a bullet but it won't blow up. So

we just wrapped the TNT around a bridge shaft and take a hand grenade and put it next to it and run like hell.

T: So the hand grenade would make it explode.

J: Would make the TNT go off.

T: When you had to blow those bridges up, how did you actually...do you carry the stuff with you? I'm trying to imagine how that happened.

J: We carried everything with us. I mean, when we jumped we carried our bullets, our rifle, our TNT, and enough food for three days. I weighed 150 pounds, and I imagine all the stuff I was carrying was about 125 pounds.

T: You doubled your body weight just in the stuff you had to carry with you.

J: Yes. And we jumped from four hundred feet in combat, and believe me, you got down awful quick.

T: Do you remember the first time you jumped out of a plane?

J: Yes. I was in Fort Benning.

T: What was that like for you?

J: It was <u>exciting</u>! It really, really was. We had three hundred people in our class at Fort Benning. One day they took us to a tower about one hundred feet in the air. They would put us in a harness and it was attached to a rope. Then we had to jump out of this tower and there was a sergeant down below. Now he could stop you five feet from the ground or ten feet after you jumped out of the tower.

T: He controlled the rope.

J: He controlled the rope. We lost half of our class that day. They refused to jump out of the tower. Of course, if you refused to jump out of a tower you were done. They were sent back to some infantry school.

T: Was that intimidating as you recall it? Jumping off that tower?

J: Oh!! Very...I mean, it was <u>very</u> frightening. A lot of them quit. Said, how do I know if he's going to stop me? Because you go one hundred feet and you hit the ground, you're...but the five of us that were friendly, we knew that they would stop us. We wanted to become paratroopers. So we jumped. And that first jump that I made, the...at Fort Benning we jumped at twelve hundred feet. It was wonderful. I mean it was so enjoyable. But then you had to make five jumps to get your wings. We

jumped Monday, then another one on Tuesday, and Tuesday morning when I woke up I thought, my God, Ringgenberg, what are you doing here? *(chuckles)*

T: And why is that?

J: I don't know. I guess it was...but you know, when you're in that airplane and your stick starts to go out, you just follow. You're sort of hypnotized or something. All you want to do is get out.

(1, A, 81)

T: Is the fear gone by that time or...you see people ahead of you going out of the plane?

J: Yes. The fear was gone. Altogether, with combat and practice and jumps and everything, I made seventeen jumps and there was only once I had some fear, and that was the second jump.

T: Why was that do you think?

J: I guess I...I don't know why. Sort of realizing that what I was doing was...could be death-serving or something. I thought of my brother.

T: He was a Navy pilot.

I: Yes.

T: Was he serving in the Pacific?

J: No. He was flying out of Cuba. He flew A-20 attack planes. There was a pilot and a nose gunner and a tail gunner. They were trying to find the submarines.

T: Right. So he was flying from a base in Cuba?

J: Yes. Then he flew up to see me once at Fort Bragg.

T: Did he serve in that Cuban unit for most of the war?

J: No. His squadron came home, back to the States there, going to be transferred, I guess, to the Pacific. Anyway, my folks told me after I was discharged that the Navy lands one way where they circle the field one way, and the Army circles the field another way, and an Army plane got mixed in with this Navy squadron and my brother dove his plane and so did the Army. Dove his plane. They hit.

T: He did not survive the crash?

J: No.

T: And that was after you were already in the service?

J: That was when I was a prisoner.

T: So you heard about this only when you got back?

J: Yes. I never got any mail all the time I was a prisoner. My folks said they sent me letters...

T: They never got to you though.

J: Never got to me.

T: I wonder if part of that might be that you seemed to be constantly on the move. I wonder if your mail either was destroyed or just never caught up with you.

J: I know Dad said every month he'd send me a carton of cigarettes. He said, "I don't know if you were smoking or not." I never got them. I'm sure the Germans used them.

T: Good quality American tobacco was probably in demand.

J: Yes.

T: You had a third brother. Was he in service?

J: Just before the war ended he enlisted in the Navy but he never...he was stationed in New Orleans, but he never left New Orleans.

T: So you were the middle brother?

J: Yes.

T: Let me go back to Anzio, where you jumped out of a boat, because it was four days, it looks like, after you landed there that you were captured by the Germans.

(1, A, 122)

J: Yes. On 26 January [1944].

T: I want to pick the story up there and ask you to describe, from your perspective, the circumstances surrounding your capture by the Germans. What happened then?

J: Oh, I don't know. I think we were about twelve or fifteen miles past Mussolini Canal by the time we made contact with the Germans. Then all of a sudden all hell broke loose.

T: Was it a sudden...you didn't see or hear anything until...

J: No. We didn't see a thing, hear a thing. We were told to dress very lightly because we were going to be moving very swiftly and as soon as we made contact with the Germans we were to turn around and come back. Well, as soon as we made contact, the Germans just surrounded us. We were in a farmhouse, two farmhouses. One on one side of the road and there was another on the other, and we were split up and we were fighting the Germans. So we decided we'd better start moving back. But we didn't know we were so surrounded.

T: They had seen you before you saw them apparently.

J: They told us that they had been watching us for a couple of hours. I mean, that's what the Germans told us. Anyway, several of us got back to a creek and we were crossing the creek when all of a sudden we looked up and there was a tank in front of us and there was a tank behind us. They opened up on us. The guy on my right got killed (voice cracks and continues in a whisper) and the guy on my left got killed (very emotional) and I lived. Anyway, there was only six of us left. The other twelve were dead.

T: This guy on the left of you getting killed and the guy on the right of you getting killed. Did you...have you thought about that over the years?

J: That machine gun had to go right across me...

T: And it missed you.

J: Missed me. Missed me completely. Reality was moving it too fast.

T: At that moment did the Germans then come to you or call on you to put your hands up, the remainder of you?

J: We were still thinking of making a run for it, but then these two tanks...we could just see those machine guns, and all of a sudden there must have been about thirty or forty Germans standing on the shoreline of the creek. The little hills. The creek was down...

T: How close were they to you? Can you estimate?

I: Oh, I would say they were within about twelve, fifteen feet of us.

T: Oh, my goodness. So if you hadn't given up it would have been...

J: All of it was trained on the six of us. We were spread out hardly over ten yards. We weren't in a group or anything, but we just gave up.

T: What happened from that moment then? Were there wounded men among you?

J: No. They were all...if there were wounded they were gone. The Germans told us that they had killed all twelve. Now I don't know if they had or not. There were twelve GIs laying in a row and some of them could have been wounded. But the Germans said they had killed them all. And the Germans took our wristwatches. Right there.

T: When they captured you.

J: Yes. And they took the boots off all of the twelve GIs laying there. They took our boots. Our paratrooper boots. They gave us their boots. I happened to make a statement. I told the guy putting my boots on, I said, "You better make damn sure that a paratrooper doesn't catch you with those boots on." Boy, did he hit me with a gun. I learned to shut up in a hurry.

(1, A, 174)

T: This all happened very quickly it sounds like.

J: Very quickly.

T: What was going through your mind as a young man at that moment?

J: I didn't know what to expect. Really. I had no idea of what was going to happen. The Germans took us into a small town and...

T: Close by there?

J: Yes.

T: Had you given any...I mean at this moment, from one moment to the next you're a prisoner of war.

J: Yes.

T: How much thought had you given before that time to what it would be like to be a prisoner of war?

J: I had no thought whatsoever. I thought I might get killed. I mean, everyone realizes there's that possibility.

T: So you had thought more, I guess concretely, that that was a possibility as opposed to being a POW.

J: Right. I never <u>once</u> thought about being a [POW]. We captured some Germans in Salerno. We treated them very fairly. We had one paratrooper one day that started killing some of them.

T: One of your paratroopers.

J: One of ours. We made him stop. I mean the rest of us made him stop. I never felt any hatred to them [Germans] or anything. A lot of them could talk English, and we would talk, and a lot of those guys in Italy were about the same age that we were. There wasn't a bitter feeling between them nor us.

T: You didn't feel any sense of hostility just because they were German.

J: No. No. But boy, that Herman Goering Panzer outfit that captured us, they were sure bitter.

T: From the moment that they captured you there, you mentioned they took your wristwatch, were you searched or roughed up at all when you were first captured?

J: They searched us and no, I wasn't. Outside of taking our boots and then that kid hitting me after I made that statement about he better never run into another paratrooper while he was wearing those boots.

T: He understood English. That was clear.

J: Yes. He understood English. But so many of them did.

T: You mentioned they took the six of you, the remaining six of you, to a nearby town. Were you questioned, or what we might say interrogated, there or just held?

J: We were just held. Then the next day they loaded us into the back of a truck and they drove us through Rome. Stopped occasionally, and they got out and showed the Italians, here's some paratroopers for you to look at. When we got to Florence they talked to us some, but all we did was give them our name, rank, and serial number and that's all we said. They left us alone.

(1, A, 224)

T: This getting out of the truck in Rome there. Was that intimidating at all? When they sort of had you on display.

J: We knew we had to do what they told us to do. There was no ands, ifs, or buts about it. So we did it. We tried to be very frank. We tried to cooperate. All six of us

tried to cooperate. I guess we thought...we knew we wanted to live through this event and get home. Did want peace.

T: Among the six of you, did you do any talking at that early time about what do we think is going to happen to us or anything like that?

J: No. We didn't at all.

T: How were your thoughts developing? I mean, once the reality of this has sunk in, what are you thinking about?

J: Just staying alive and living through this process. And getting home.

T: So it was a matter of realizing the situation you were in and sort of adapting to it, it sounds like.

J: Yes.

T: And the first questioning you mentioned at all was there in Florence. That's several hours north of Rome. From your information, you were kept at Florence for a number of weeks.

J: I think it was about a week and a half or two weeks. Then we were put in this boxcar, and it took us about three days to get to [Stalag VII-A] Moosburg.

T: Yes. Across the Alps.

J: When we got to Moosburg we were interrogated again.

T: The questioning there at Florence, talk about the kind of things they wanted to know from you.

J: They wanted to know how many paratroopers there were, and that was about it. And what our mission was, and I just kept telling them my name, rank, and serial number.

T: When you didn't tell them what they wanted to hear was there any kind of threats made against you at all?

J: None whatsoever.

T: So if you didn't answer the questions it didn't have any negative repercussions.

J: When we got to Moosburg they told me when I had entered jump school and when I had graduated from jump school, and all six of us thought that, my God, they know

more about our military history than we do. And we could never understand how that could happen.

T: So they knew who you were already.

J: They knew who I was already.

T: And you were just a lowly enlisted man.

J: *(chuckles)* Yes. I mean nothing, no secrets or nothing. But they knew when all six of us had entered jump school...

T: No kidding. Now, how did the questioning there at Moosburg differ from the questions you had at Florence?

J: They just told us at Moosburg who we were and how much information they had about us. If we had any knowledge we might as well tell them, because they knew more about us than we knew about ourselves. Sort of the thing they were trying to impress on us.

T: So the way they tried to get information was not to physically threaten you, but rather to say we already know it anyway so you may as well tell us.

(1, A, 282)

J: You may as well tell us. Why be quiet when we already know?

T: Did they try to bribe you with anything?

J: No. No bribes. No threats. No nothing.

T: I did forget to ask: were you physically injured at all at the time you were captured?

J: No. Not a scratch. On the trip from Florence to Moosburg I froze my feet. My feet got frozen, because we had those German boots and we had no blankets or anything in the boxcar. It seemed like that boxcar would go a short distance and then we'd sit for hours. We used a corner as a latrine, and all we got was water.

T: How many guys were in that boxcar with you?

J: Oh, I think on that particular trip there was only about twenty of us. Us six and then there was...they brought some more prisoners, American prisoners, from other parts of the Anzio invasion.

T: Not necessarily paratroopers anymore.

J: No. Right after we were captured the Rangers made quite a stupid move. I guess a lot of Rangers were captured. These other guys in the boxcar were all Rangers. Guys I didn't know.

T: You were in a number of different train boxcars actually. Were any of those, as you think about those boxcar journeys, were any of those more difficult than any others? From your perspective.

J: Well, there was that one move. I can't remember which move it was. But we spent three nights in Berlin, and we just sat there and sat there and all of us...I mean, there must have been forty of us in this particular boxcar I was in, and that's packed.

T: Yes. The boxcars are smaller.

J: Small. We all felt that the Germans were hoping that some British or American airplane would drop a bomb on us. Bombs went off. We could hear them.

T: But not close to the train where you were being...

J: No. Then they finally moved us out.

T: In any of the boxcars you were in, were you ever bombed or strafed by Allied aircraft?

J: The closest we ever came was when we were in Berlin. The railroads in our area. That's the closest we ever came.

T: How difficult were those boxcar rides for you? Being enclosed like that.

J: They were very frightening. You got no food. You got a little water. You had to use the corner of it for a latrine-type of thing, restroom. Miserable. And that's the only thing you could think of was, can I live long enough to get out of this thing?

T: How did you organize your thoughts, in a way? I mean, there's the unknown of not knowing where you're going next or if you're going to get there. How did you keep your thoughts sort of organized?

(1, A, 341)

J: Well, when I was in a prison camp I did a lot of walking during the day. I thought about my family. I thought about living. And I was going to do everything I could to live through the process.

T: Were you by nature, would you consider yourself a fairly optimistic person at that time?

J: Oh, yes. Well, I mean, any man that is, I guess, stupid enough to jump of an airplane that was still flying had to be optimistic (chuckles).

T: So for you, did you find yourself getting down in the dumps from time to time about your situation?

J: No.

T: So you would say you kept a sense of optimism...

J: That I was going to live through this process. Yes.

T: What kept you going?

J: My determination to get home. Alive. Up in IV-B one day they brought in a bunch of Air Corps guys that had been shot down. These guys said, we're not going to—three of them anyway that were in our room—said we're not going to stay here. We're not going to eat this slop that you guys...we're going to escape.

T: They were new to the place.

J: They were new. So anyway, they snuck out at night and they were going to go and they got caught. The next morning at roll call the commander killed them.

T: The German.

J: Yes. Killed all three of them and he told us, he said, if you behave you'll live through this. If you –

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 382.

T: Asking about the Germans. You were in a number of camps, VII-A Moosburg, II-B, IV-B, Luft VI, XIII-D Nuremberg. Did you notice differences in the Germans at these different camps?

J: Oh, yes. When we got to VII-A Moosburg, the first thing they did was take all our clothes off and burn them.

T: This is right after Florence when you got to Moosburg.

J: Yes. Moosburg. They shaved all our hair. Every bit of hair that we had on us. They said we probably had lice and they wanted to get rid of them. I don't remember any lice. Then they made us shower and then they gave us clean clothes.

T: Did you get your shoes back? Or the shoes you had before.

J: No. I got GI shoes, but then, of course, the Army had been sending a lot of stuff through the International Red Cross to the prisoner camps. We got all GI stuff, but it was all new.

T: Oh, really? So you got new stuff that the Americans had got through channels over there.

J: Yes.

T: And it fit?

J: No. Because I was losing weight. But I was just happy to have some clothes. We left VII-A and we went to II-B. Now II-B was a brand new camp, and we got out of the boxcars for about two miles away from the camp.

(1, B, 398)

T: And II-B, I'm looking at a map here, is way up in northeast Germany there. So you went a long way.

I: When we got out the commandant made us run.

T: When you got off the train.

J: Train. We had one kid that had been stuck in the butt with a bayonet about four or five times...because the Germans were running alongside of us. They had bayonets on their rifles. They sicked their dogs on us.

T: How many of you were there doing this?

J: Oh, I would say there must have been five, six hundred of us.

T: A huge group of guys being...

I: Chased.

T: Chased, and terrorized it sounds like.

J: And we were all Americans. That was very trying. Believe me. Very, very trying. And then they had a guard there. I spent every day I could [walking around the camp.] But they had a guard there that was about six eight, six ten. A huge guy. And we all had to be careful, because if he was strolling around the compound the first thing he'd do is walk by you and then hit you.

T: Just without any kind of...

J: Once we knew who he was we would watch and when he went out of the compound we would walk. But when we knew he was in the compound we'd stay away.

T: Was he typical of the kind of treatment you got from German guards in the camps?

J: No. Because most of the guards were Germans that had been wounded in combat, and they knew what combat was like and they were decent. They never harassed us or anything.

T: Did that change over time as it got close to the end of the war? Did you get better or worse treatment from the German guards?

J: When we left Luft VI the Russians were close to us. In fact, at night we could see the explosions, hear the explosions, and the artillery and the flashes. They took us to a seaport on the Baltic Sea, and there was Americans and British, French in this particular camp. I think there must have been ten or fifteen thousand of us, and they put us on a boat. We were all scared to death that something was going to ...that the boat was going to hit a mine.

I had the unfortunate experience of being in a lower deck. Of course, all the guys on the upper deck yelled down and said well, the minesweeper that used to be in front of us is now behind us. Then another time they yelled down and said well, at least the German guards have all got life-saving vests on (*laughs ironically*).

T: How reassuring.

J: But the Germans, they'd send down water in a pail and we'd drink the water, and urinate in the pail and then they'd... (*trails off*) We were on that boat for about four days. No food. The lower deck, only half of us could sit down at a time. The other half had to stand. You couldn't lay down. Then when we docked we were sent to XIII-D at Nuremberg, which was a Jewish camp.

T: So it meant another train ride too, didn't it, down from the Baltic?

J: Well, just a short one. That was a Jewish camp and I don't know how those people ever lived there. I mean, our camps were like the Hilton Hotel compared with what the Jews had.

(1, B, 441)

T: So you noticed a difference from some of the camps you were in.

J: Oh, right away. And then when the Americans got close to us at Nuremberg and we marched...we had to march from Nuremberg to Moosburg. The SS were

watching us on this march and they told us if we made any attempt, or looked we were making an attempt, to escape they would kill us. So we all sort of more or less behaved. The only way we got food was the fact that the Russians were working on farms. Would bring potatoes if they saw us coming. They would bring potatoes down.

- T: So that march from Nuremberg south to Moosburg, for those days the food was difficult if not impossible to get.
- J: It was just what the Russians that were working on farms would bring down.
- T: You remember the Germans supplying any food for you during those times?
- J: No. No. Not a bit.
- T: Let me go back to the ship. How does that ship for you compare to some of those boxcar journeys you were on that were also a number of days?
- J: We were more crowded on that ship than we'd ever been in boxcar. And I mean, we were <u>crowded</u> in a boxcar. But they put the entire camp from Luft VI on the one little boat.
- T: So you must have been packed in there like sardines.
- J: Oh, we were packed in there like sardines. And you know, if something had happened, it had been bombed or hit a mine, we never would have gotten out. And believe me, we were all praying.
- T: Speaking of that, were you a particularly religious person at that time?
- J: No. I mean, I'd always gone to church and been to Sunday School and all the stuff that everyone goes through. But overly religious, no.
- T: Did you feel that your personal sense of faith changed at all while you were a POW?
- J: Yes. Because I feel that that boat trip, someone helped us. Had to be someone up there looking out after us. When we got out of that boat all of us looked up and thanked him.
- T: Is that something...have you since you were a POW, would you consider yourself a more religious person than you were before?
- I: Oh, yes. Much more religious than I was before.

T: This sounds like that's one way that the experience may have changed you as a person.

J: Well, even when I was in Basic Training at Fort Benning I went to church every Sunday. All five of us did, because Sergeant Peron made us *(chuckles)*.

T: He was looking out for you, wasn't he?

J: Yes. It was really funny. The closer you got to combat, the more religious people became.

T: Did you notice that for yourself too?

J: No. I didn't think I was more religious. I always felt I was religious. You know, you could go to church on Sunday back in the States and there would be hardly anyone there. But we had a pastor in the Headquarters Company, Third Battalion. He was terrific. He was in combat with us. He didn't have to jump with us.

T: He was a chaplain.

J: He was a chaplain, but he was with us all the time.

(1, B, 481)

T: What was his name? Do you remember?

J: I don't remember. I wish I did.

T: So you had a chaplain that was actually with you.

J: Yes.

T: And he didn't have to be.

J: No. He didn't have to be.

T: Did you find yourself going to services before...or noticing that more about vourself?

I: No. I just went. I guess it was training and what I got from my folks.

T: So growing up that way.

J: Yes.

T: You mentioned the six guys you were captured with. The six of you total. Were you able to stay together with each other throughout, or did that break up after a while?

J: No. Because there was only two of us that got transferred...two paratroopers that got transferred to Luft VI and the other four they said no way. They were not going to admit they were paratroopers. Although the Germans knew they were paratroopers. But they wanted to go to work on farms.

T: So they stayed at Moosburg?

J: No. They stayed at IV-B. When we left IV-B and went to Luft VI they stayed there.

T: I see. So at that point your paths ended. Your paths split. And you went with one other guy that you knew.

J: Yes.

T: With all the moving around that you did, did you have a person or persons that you were especially, that were closer friends for you?

J: No. I tried to stay friendly with everyone. Well, there was one guy, Kelly Martinson, he was an Air Corps guy. I still talk to Kelly. He lives up in the cities.

T: Up in the Twin Cities.

J: Yes.

T: So he's another Minnesotan.

J: Yes. We get together and discuss things that we did.

T: Where did you meet him?

J: I met him at IV-B.

T: So fairly early on for you. So after Moosburg, after II-B.

J: Yes.

T: Was IV-B the place that you stayed the longest?

J: No. I would say Luft VI is where I stayed the longest. IV-B is where the six paratroopers and three Air Corps guys could make that table come up and down. Because if I hadn't have been there I wouldn't believe it. I don't know why anyone should believe me, but there was a long table and we'd sit on three sides of it and

our hands would touch. The Germans...well, anyway, people asked us, the table, questions. If the table would go up and down and guys got down on the floor to see if we had our knees on it and we didn't. And the Germans, German guard came in and he asked some questions and the table answered very truthfully.

T: What do you make of that?

(1, B, 516)

J: I don't know. The nine of us thought that God was doing it.

T: And it was only this one place where you had this kind of experience.

J: Only that one place. And then the commandant came down. He asked us who was going to win the war and of course the table said US. Once for the US, twice for Germany, and it only went once. He asked us, he asked the table how old his daughter was. The table knocked three times and she was three years old.

T: So the commandant. So this was enough of a deal that the actual camp commandant came in to check it out in a way.

J: Yes. Check it out. The next day the whole barracks was on a train headed for various places.

T: He split the thing up.

J: He split the whole thing up.

T: No kidding. And that was at which camp, II-B?

J: IV-B.

T: At IV-B.

J: That's where the Air Corps naturally went to Luft VI and the two of us paratroopers went to Luft VI and the nine of us had been split up. It was funny. It was only us nine that could do that. Some other people tried it and nothing happened. I still think I'm nuts.

T: Because you know what happened.

J: I know what happened and I can't figure out how it happened.

T: Boy, that's interesting. But what it meant for you, after the commandant saw it, was that you were on your way out of there.

J: Oh, yes. I suppose he figured that if, my God, if those guys can make a table come up and down...because even the commandant got down and looked under the table.

T: The camp commandant is in checking this thing out.

J: Yes. And maybe he figured I better get rid of those guys. I don't know.

T: From your perspective, when you think of the conditions at the camps, were any of these camps better or worse than any others?

J: Luft VI was the best.

T: As far as the conditions you had.

J: The conditions were the best. The guards were the best. We did some foolish things there. We used to taunt the dogs that they turned loose in the compound at night. That was rather ridiculous, but we knew the dogs couldn't come through the iron bars on the window.

T: They sent dogs out at night?

J: Oh, yes. I mean, there were dogs all over. In IV-B one day...you know, they had Russians that did all the dirty work around camp. One day the Russians wouldn't come out for roll call, and so the Germans sent in a bunch of dogs.

T: Into their barracks.

J: Into their barracks. And it took the Russians about fifteen minutes to behead the dogs and skin them and threw the heads and the skin out and they had dog meat for (laughing) lunch. And believe me, the Germans left them alone that day. The only time we ever had meat was if a dog died or a horse died.

T: Did the food change from camp to camp for you?

J: Yes. Luft VI was the best.

T: And for you that was the place where you had better food, better conditions...

(1, B, 562)

J: Yes. All around.

T: By the time you got to Moosburg at the end of the war, where you were liberated from, how had the situation changed as far as camp conditions or food there?

J: The food was worse because there was more people there. I ran into a bunch of my buddies from 504 there.

T: Did you? Some people you knew.

J: Yes. They were the ones that told me about Sergeant Peron. They were very critical of Eisenhower.

T: How was that?

J: They jumped to help Montgomery make a stupid invasion, and they said everyone knew it was stupid because they jumped so far ahead. There was only one road. Because the Germans flooded the area on both sides of the road and there was only one road that Montgomery could come down and relieve the 504 and 505 and 506. So many of the paratroopers had to—because they couldn't get equipment, they ran out of ammunition—and they had to give up. And they all said that Eisenhower let Montgomery do that because he wanted to make Montgomery feel better. Well, my God, think of all those young guys that got killed. Because Eisenhower wanted to make Montgomery feel good.

T: So they had that story to recount to you.

J: That's what they told me.

T: What other...as you moved around these camps, was it possible for you to get news of how the war was going?

J: When we got to Luft VI there were a lot of British there and they had the knack of radio that they could hide from the Germans. I don't know how they did it. But anyway, they would come into every barracks and tell us the news.

T: So they would verbally pass it on to you.

J: Yes.

T: So you had sort of an idea, at least at that camp, of what was going on.

J: Yes. Sort of an idea. And then of course, when the Russians got so close to us we knew that the Germans were...in fact, we had a guard at Moosburg that told us once that Hitler had ordered instructions that all prisoners were to be killed. But the guard, he said the German High Command would not do it.

T: That's tough to hear. Were you ever on work details at any of the camps you were at?

- J: Never. They wouldn't let the paratroopers out because they said their paratroopers were trained to do sabotage and they said we won't trust you guys.
- T: So you were treated differently as a paratrooper.
- J: Yes. I felt we were. We were treated differently than the regular infantry were treated when we were at II-B and IV-B.
- T: Do you feel that got you better treatment, or worse treatment, or just different?
- J: Just different treatment. We weren't abused like some of the regular infantry was. And they shouldn't have been, but the guards that we talked to said you guys are paratroopers and we know what our paratroopers are like. We know what you're like.
- T: So they identified you really from how they saw...
- J: From their perspective of what their paratroopers were like.

(1, B, 615)

- T: So without work details, how did you spend most of the time you were around these camps? What did you do?
- J: I walked. As I said. Talked to people and listened to people, and listened to these guys brag about their life back in the States.
- T: Guys were bragging about stuff?
- J: Oh, they all drove Cadillacs.
- T: You had a lot of BSers around.
- J: A lot of them. I just listened to them. I mean, I was nineteen years old. Heck, I didn't <u>own</u> a car. These Air Corps guys, they were the most talkative you'd ever met in your life.
- T: Really. They were the ones carrying on the conversations.
- J: Oh! About how many women they had slept with and all this. A bunch of baloney.
- T: And it sounds like you knew it then that it was a bunch of baloney.
- J: Oh, yes. I tell you, you just listen to them. We played a lot of bridge. I never knew how to play bridge, but I learned how to play bridge.

- T: So you had cards, it sounds like, at least at some camps.
- J: And at Luft VI the Germans gave us softballs and bats. We would play ball.
- T: So there were things to do at some camps, but not at all camps.
- J: Not at all camps. But again, I think that was because of the different quality of the guards.
- T: You mentioned that the guards differed from camp to camp.
- J: Oh, yes. II-B, they were a bunch of bastards.
- T: And yet at other camps they were...
- J: Fairly decent. IV-B it wasn't too bad. But Luft VI was terrific. And of course, Nuremberg then we had the SS. Boy, you didn't dare look at them cross-eyed.
- T: How do you explain the difference in treatment, which sounds like it was really all over the place?
- J: It was just the type of troops. I mean, like most of the guards came off lines, battlefields. They'd been wounded. They knew what it was like.
- T: And so they could have respect for you as a combat soldier yourself.
- J: Right.
- T: I wanted to ask about communication, because you mentioned you never got any post at all, any word from home.
- J: No. Some guys got some mail. I don't know why. I never got any.
- T: Did you send any?
- J: Oh, yes.
- T: The little postcards or something you could send?
- J: Yes. I sent those, and the folks never got them. I mean the Germans, they could care less. See my folks were notified that I was MIA and then about a week later they got a phone call from the Army that I was a prisoner.
- T: So your folks knew relatively quickly that you were a POW.

J: Yes. They said it was about a week after they were first notified that I was MIA. Then they got notified about it. I think Dad said about a week or ten days.

(1, B, 668)

T: This is all news that you got once you actually saw them again.

J: Dad said the Army told them that the Germans had broadcast that I was a prisoner.

T: So they knew and then they could try to send things to you, but as you mentioned, none of that ever arrived to you.

J: The Army...you know we got Red Cross parcels. When we were in II-B and IV-B we got them. We got some at Luft VI, but not too many. The Army paid for all of that, but yet Dad said the Red Cross came around demanding money.

T: Really?

J: Yes. Because I was a prisoner and they were supplying me with food. So my folks, every time Dad would give them fifty or one hundred dollars until they finally got a letter from the Army telling them to stop paying the Red Cross because the Army, the United States Army, is paying for all of that.

T: So your Dad told you this once he saw you again.

J: Yes.

T: That the Red Cross had been, I hate to say strong-arming him, but...

I: Yes. You want your son to have this or don't you. Naturally they're going to pay.

T: Of course they are. That's a tough situation for your folks to be in.

J: Yes. And Dad said then they finally got this letter from the Army that the Red Cross wasn't paying a penny.

T: On another POW subject: relations between prisoners. I mean, you observed...it sounds like you were listening to a lot of guys talk about themselves. You saw a lot of guys in a lot of camps. From your perspective, how did POWs get along in difficult conditions like that?

J: Basically we all got along pretty good, but there would be a few people that all of us couldn't tolerate. They were bragging too much or they knew too much. We had this one guy from California. He was in the Air Corps, and he was so full of hot air and he would never shut up. You just get tired of listening to an individual like that.

T: What can you do in a small...

J: Nothing [you can do]. Some of the rooms we were in, there would be like this room and our dining room. There would be anywhere from twenty to thirty people.

T: Maybe twenty feet long and ten feet...

J: You know our bunks would be three high and that was straw mattresses that weren't worth a damn and you had one blanket. Miserable conditions. And the Germans turned out the lights very early every night. So we had no choice. In the wintertime you had no hot water.

T: What caused, from your perspective, what was most likely to cause disagreements between prisoners?

J: Bragging about something you knew was a bunch of bullshit.

T: So telling guys that you don't want to hear anymore could cause friction. Was there, from your perspective, a problem with theft? People stealing from each other?

J: There was one guy, he...one prisoner was saving up his bread, and another guy stole it. So a bunch of friends of the guy that had the bread stolen took this guy and stuck his head down into a latrine. Later on [after the war] I got a letter from the VA asking me about this situation, because I guess the guy that had his head stuck in the latrine was blind. Blinded by having his head exposed in...you know [the latrine]. Anyway...

T: They wanted you to verify that it had happened.

J: It <u>had</u> happened. And I did. Then they wrote back and said this guy was suing these other soldiers.

(1, B, 752)

T: You're kidding!

J: No. And they wanted me to testify, and I just said leave me out of it. I don't want any part of it.

T: How long after the war was that?

J: Oh, it must have been a good ten, twelve years.

T: So all those years later. He was going to sue them for damages I guess.

J: [He was going to sue them for] Damages I guess. I had never heard of anything like that. I don't know how in the world they ever got my address. Of course, like Kelly Martinson, he was always taking down addresses and...

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

- T: ...and some guys don't. Some guys collect things in their head. Experiences.
- J: Yes, but Kelly was writing down everything.
- T: Now where did you meet Kelly Martinson? Which camp was that?
- J: I think it was IV-B that I met him.
- T: Did he go to different camps with you then?
- J: He went to Luft VI. He was in Nuremberg with me. He was in Moosburg with me.
- T: So from the time you met him at IV-B you guys kept together.
- J: On April 29 we were liberated at Moosburg by Patton. Then I think it was May 5 or something like that they put us in airplanes, and most of them went to Camp Lucky Strike, but the plane that Kelly and I got on went to England.
- T: So you bypassed Camp Lucky Strike.
- J: Yes. We got into a hospital in England, outside of London.
- T: Was he an officer or enlisted?
- J: He was a tail gunner. He was enlisted like me.

When we got into the hospital they gave us a certain amount of our back pay. I think they gave us all twenty pounds or something. But then the hospital said they had to lock it up. They had to lock up all our souvenirs and everything. Because we couldn't have them in the hospital area. So after two weeks there we were told we were going to go to London, and so we asked them for our money and our souvenirs. It had all been stolen (*laughs*). From the hospital. They said, we don't know. People broke in and took the souvenirs and took the money. We thought it was a bunch of crap.

- T: So all the stuff that you...the personal effects you'd given them were...
- J: Taken. Because a few days after the Germans had given up at Moosburg, gee, I had a dagger. Had a swastika on it. It was about that long. I thought boy, this is going to be something to take home as a souvenir. Never saw it again (laughs).

T: Ended up as somebody else's souvenir, didn't it.

J: Yes. Someone else got it.

T: How come you and Martinson clicked? What was it between you guys?

(2, A, 26)

J: I don't know. We just liked each other.

T: Is he also a Minnesotan?

J: Yes.

T: Was that it, or was it just you're just a good personality mix?

J: Well, we always got along. We enjoyed each other. We enjoyed each other's company. After I got out of service, I went back to Rochester, because my folks were still there. But then my dad bought a hardware store in Lehigh, Iowa, and I went up to Macalester College [in St. Paul]. I was going to go back to college. Kelly tried to get in touch with me at Rochester, and of course I wasn't there. Then when I was at Macalester I met my wife. She was going to the University of Minnesota and there was a hockey game between Rochester High School and one of the northern high schools and a bunch of us went, and there a friend of mine from Rochester who had been dating Dorothy.

T: Did you...Kelly, did you lose touch with him then for a while?

J: A long while. Then in a year, Dorothy and I got married and I graduated from Gustavus Adolphus finally. We were living in Bloomington and we...at that time I joined the ex-POWs and I went to a State convention and my God, who should show up but Kelly (laughs).

T: So when was that when you saw him again? In the '80s sometime or before?

J: It had to be...I don't know. About fifteen years after we were liberated. We had lost touch with each other.

T: You've been in touch ever since then.

J: Oh, been in touch ever since. In fact, Kelly is having a rough time. He's got cancer.

T: Do you still talk to each other on the phone or see each other pretty regularly now?

J: Yes.

T: When you guys get together, is the POW time something that comes up in your conversations?

J: No.

T: It's just sort of the background to why you know each other.

J: Yes. Talk about our families. That's about it. His wife Joyce is very friendly with Dorothy. In fact they're both registered nurses.

T: So there's a whole number of things that connect you.

J: We just talk about our families and our children, grandchildren. Don't talk about prisoner of war life.

T: That's what brought you together but not something that you talk about when you get together.

I: No. Sure isn't.

T: Let me move to the time when you were liberated, because that was at VII-A Moosburg when the Germans finally implode. What do you recall about the liberation of the camp and the end of your POW experience?

J: We woke up that morning and everyone said, gee, there are no guards in the towers. None whatsoever.

T: So from one day to the next they were gone?

J: They were gone. They were completely gone.

T: Had there been rumors among the guys that you remember hearing that something was about to happen? Or did you feel like you were really surprised by the liberation at the end of the war?

(2, A, 64)

J: Really surprised. In fact, I had a—he wasn't a friend at the time but he's married a friend of my wife's. John Silver. He remembers. He was a tank commander or something. He remembers going by Moosburg. I always call him on April 29.

T: That's the day you were liberated?

J: Liberated. Because I always kid him. Why didn't you stop and say hello?

- T: Like he would have found you, right? In that sea of humanity.
- J: Didn't even know me then.
- T: What happened when the Americans arrived? Did they literally come through the front gate or was it...
- J: They surrounded the camp and they told us that the Germans would probably counterattack and that we should stay put. Of course, that was the worst thing in the world to tell us, because we immediately started packing a few belongings and we were going to head west.
- T: I see. So the worst thing they could do is tell you to stay put because...
- J: Stay put. But then a few hours later they came in with food. And boy, was that...that bread was so delicious. A lot of us got sick. From the food.
- T: Having regular food.
- J: It was so much richer than what we'd been used to. So much better.
- T: What kind of physical shape were you in when you were liberated?
- J: I always felt I stayed in pretty good [shape]...of course, I always told all the Air Corps guys, said you guys are in such poor condition. You never knew how to do anything. I said in the paratroopers we never walked anywhere—we ran.
- T: So you were in better physical shape when you were captured maybe.
- J: Yes. Much better than what they were. A lot of those Air Corps guys would go downhill so fast. You know they were used to richer food and...
- T: They slept in real beds at night, didn't they?
- J: Yes. They had beer and everything. Really, the only good time we had overseas is when the 504 was in Naples, and Sergeant Peron was an Italian and he could speak Italian, and every night he rented a horse drawn buggy and he'd get some wine and put all five of us in there with him because he didn't want us roaming the streets and finding some prostitute (laughs).
- T: Which you probably would have found. They were all over.
- J: Yes. They were all over Naples. Which we probably would have found.

T: Do you have good memories of that...like that time in Naples? Is that one of the positive things that you look back on?

J: I had good memories about when we were in Oujda, North Africa. One time our officers decided they were going to hold a dance and they made us put up a tent so they could bring in the nurses and the band. Here we were. We could hear the band playing and hear the girls giggling. The liquor was going. So a bunch of us went out and cut the guy ropes and let the tent collapse (laughs). We showed them. Oh, boy, did we catch hell.

T: I bet you did. Have you ever been back to Italy or North Africa since the war?

J: I went into Italy, but I wasn't close to Florence or Anzio or any of it. I've been to Germany three times. See, there was a town in Switzerland that's named Ringgenberg.

T: Is that right?

(2, A, 109)

J: And there's a castle. Ringgenberg Castle.

T: That's interesting.

J: We've been back to England a couple of times.

T: When you went to Germany, was it specifically to sort of look for places that you would recognize as a POW?

J: Tried to, but the only place we ever found a prison camp still active, I mean that was there, was Moosburg. Everything else had been destroyed.

T: Did you go back to Moosburg?

J: Yes.

T: What was that like? Here's a place that you were twice as a POW. What was that like?

J: It looked a lot better than the second time I (*chuckles*)...than when I was there before, when the war was on. When we were at Moosburg after Nuremberg there were so many of us there, we'd go to the latrine and instead of going back to the barracks we'd go to the back of the line.

T: It was so overcrowded.

J: So overcrowded. It was terrible. They always kept the officers and the enlisted personnel separated. But we even had colonels at the last few days at Moosburg. They had been captured somehow and brought in.

T: It was really chaotic it sounds like.

J: Terrible.

T: Was it tough going back there? Did it bring back memories when you saw the place again?

J: I wanted to show my wife where I was. She said, "This isn't too bad." (laughs)

T: With the tens of thousands of guys that were there the last time...

J: It's a show place now.

T: So was it tough at all to back and sort of see those places again?

J: Yes.

T: That's interesting. And in Italy you haven't been back to Florence or Anzio or any of the places...

J: No.

T: ...where you were captured at all.

J: No.

T: Do you think that would be harder to go back, for example, to the place where you were captured?

J: Yes. I think it would be very hard.

T: So that would be harder than going back to VII-A for example.

J: Yes. Much. I know when we were in Italy Dorothy said, "You want to go to Anzio?" And I said no.

T: So you had an opportunity and said no thank you.

J: Yes. And I'm glad I never did go back.

(2, A, 136)

T: From the way you talk, the toughest memories are those times when you were captured and a number of men around you were killed. The prison camps were a different kind of tough times, but not the same thing.

J: They were tough but...you had to cooperate. You knew if you didn't cooperate the Germans could kill you.

T: Were you, to put it this way, a good cooperator?

J: Had to be.

T: So you adapted to the situation it sounds like.

J: I know a lot of my high school buddies, they were sons of doctors, Mayo Clinic doctors. I'd been back to high school reunions years ago but not anymore. I had some of those guys that had never been in service come up to me once and say, how in the world could you give up? Because there had been articles in the Rochester *Post Bulletin* where people were talking to me after I came back. I told them, you son of a bitches! You never even went! And you're asking me. That was tough.

T: That must have been.

J: And it was always these clowns that managed, their parents managed to keep them in college and out of service. Same way with that damn Bush. Stayed out of service.

T: The current president.

J: Yes.

T: You were liberated...how soon were you back in the United States after April 29, 1945, Jack?

J: We went to England. We stayed in a hospital two weeks. We were separated from all of our funds. We were given two weeks in London with no money. But I did get a letter from my folks.

T: That caught up with you.

J: Yes. They didn't say that Dean was dead, but...

T: You didn't know yet, did you?

J: No. But Kelly, when he was flying, he became friendly with a family there, and so we went out to this family and we sent my folks a wire.

- T: This is from England now.
- J: Yes. And we gave them the address of this lady for them to send the answer.
- T: So you suspected something was up?
- J: Yes. That's when I (very emotional) found out.
- T: So you found out while you were still in England.
- J: Yes.
- T: How did that news hit you when you got it?
- J: Hard. In fact, I had to excuse myself from Kelly, and I was walking the streets of London that night. That first night. Thinking about Dean.
- T: Had you been close with your brother?
- J: Oh, yes. Yes. You checked one of my teeth...closeness. Dean and I were closer than Phil and I have been.
- T: How much older was Dean than you?
- J: Three years. He was twenty-three when he was killed.
- T: And he was killed in 1944 or 1945, right?
- I: Yes. Somewhere in there.

(2, A, 182)

- T: When you were a POW though.
- J: Yes.
- T: When you got back to the States, how soon were you able to see your folks?
- J: You see, after we were in London we were told we were going to go home on the *Queen Mary*. They told us, all you prisoners are going to be on the top deck. All you ex-prisoners. We thought, boy, that's going to be wonderful. The driveshaft was about that far above my bunk.
- T: Two, three feet maybe.
- J: Yes (laughs). That's as close as I got to the top deck. But it only took us three days.

T: That's the good side of this. Yes.

J: Then we went to a camp somewhere in New Jersey.

T: Kilmer maybe.

J: We were there for, I don't know, three or four days and put on a train to Fort Snelling. Got to Fort Snelling and I called my folks and they drove up.

T: They came up to see you.

J: Yes.

T: When you saw your folks, I mean, here on the one hand they're still dealing with the loss of their oldest son, and yet they've also got this returning POW son. Really, I don't know how your folks did it. Quite honestly. When you saw them again, how much did they want to know about your POW experience?

J: Didn't ask me anything.

T: They didn't ask you anything?

I: No.

T: Did that change over time?

J: No. They never asked me much about it. I guess it was just...I came home *(emotional again).*

T: Do you wish they would have?

J: No. No. I had a lot of... When I first came back, the VFW and American Legion wanted me to come down and talk. I just couldn't talk.

T: With you and your folks, was it really more that they didn't ask you or that you didn't want to tell them?

J: I didn't want to even think about it. To be very honest. It wasn't until, I don't know, ten, twelve years ago that the schools here asked me to talk to their students once. Every year. I think I'm going to have to quit that because it bothers me.

T: You mentioned earlier, when we started taping, that it's gotten more difficult for you to talk about it.

J: Yes.

T: So not easier with repeated times, but more difficult.

J: Oh, it's much more difficult. My wife wants me to put all of this stuff down. I can't do it. I start doing it and I rip it up.

T: Is there any...how might you explain how it gets more difficult as opposed to easier with...

I: I have dreams about it. I never used to dream.

T: And this is one of the things I ask people, did you have dreams when you first came back about your POW experience?

(2, A, 228)

J: No. About once a month...I'm under that damn bridge.

T: The one where you were captured there.

J: Yes.

T: And this is something you didn't have for decades.

J: No. But I do now.

T: And it comes regularly you say?

J: Yes. It really (in a whisper) bothers me. In fact, I almost called you and cancelled this thing.

T: Thanks for not. Very much. Do you have, among your dreams, do you dream of any of the camps you were in or the boxcars you were in or...

I: I just dream about that table lifting and boat trip.

T: The one where all thousands of you were packed on that ship.

J: Yes.

T: So there were a couple specific moments that come back in your dreams and other things don't really come...

J: Then I dream about those damn Arabs at Florence. The first couple of nights they came...when the Germans only fed us once a day. When they'd bring the food up they would just go and they'd take it all. Then we'd go up, the six of us, and there

wouldn't be any. After a few days we got a little hungry so we finally, the six of us, would go up and stand where the food was coming. When the food came we invited the Arabs to try and go through us.

T: So there was some hostile...some friction.

J: Oh, a couple of them came up, and by the time we got through beating them up the rest of them stayed away. But we would take some food but we left enough for them.

T: No kidding. So there was not necessarily all allies here. This is very much...there was them and there was you.

J: When we got to Oujda, I could never understand this, but we were told by Ridgeway that if we killed an Arab we'd be charged five dollars.

T: If you killed one you'd be charged five dollars?

J: Yes. Now why in the hell would I want to kill an Arab? I didn't know.

T: But being charged five dollars. How bizarre.

J: That was so stupid. Sometimes I couldn't understand the officers. What their thought was. I never heard of any paratrooper killing an Arab, but that's what Ridgeway told us.

T: I don't quite get the five dollar charge. It's like parking your car on the lawn costs you more than that.

J: We decided it must mean that's how much it would cost to bury them. But I'll never forget that. We were told if we killed one we'd be charged five dollars.

T: Back to the post-war. Your folks, are they both deceased?

J: Yes.

T: Did it ever change? Did this ever come up in conversation between you?

J: No.

T: So it really was never something that was...

J: Never brought up at all.

T: You and Dorothy were married in 1948.

J: Yes.

T: When you were married did she know you were a POW?

J: Oh, yes.

T: Was it easier to talk to your wife than to talk to your folks?

J: Yes. I think so. Because when I came home...see, my dad was a sales manager for Postier and Evers Buick Pontiac etc. in Rochester. Then of course, when the war was on, Dad had to find another job because there were no new cars.

T: Of course.

J: So he went to work for Bell, in Niagara Falls.

T: Up in New York.

J: Yes. Of course mother, she stayed home with Phil and sometimes she would go for a week or so to see Dad. He lived in a hotel there. Then finally the minister at home called Dad and told him he better, I mean I think, I don't know just when that was, but he better come home because my mother was really down in the dumps. So he quit and came home. Then he had to find another job.

T: Your mom had it tough too it sounds like.

J: Oh, yes.

T: Two boys in service and then ultimately she had to deal with one being killed and one being captured.

J: And then anyway, that's when my folks, Dad, after the war, he decided he better get into his own business and he went in down to Lehigh, Iowa, and started a Gamble store, hardware store.

T: Did your folks relocate to Iowa then?

J: Yes. Then I dropped out of college and went down to help him. I spent two years helping him. Then I went back. I got married and I went back to Gustavus and graduated.

T: So even when you were living with your folks after the war, the fact that you were a POW was just never part of the conversations.

J: Never part. Never asked me anything about it.

T: Did you talk to other people about after the war. I mean, if you met other servicemen or friends or people at work. Was this something that you could talk about?

J: No. It never came up at all.

T: Was that okay with you? I mean, the sense that...

J: It was fine with me.

T: How about your own kids? I mean, kids sometimes just ask stuff.

J: Two of my sons, Bruce and Todd, they feel I should write all of this down. I got a grandson that's twelve years old. He always tells me, "Grandpa, I'm going to be a paratrooper." (chuckles) But I want to forget.

T: Have your kids, as they were growing up, did they ask you questions about, gee, Dad, you were in the war, what did you do?

I: A little bit, but it was never any big conversation.

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T: Now, you have three sons and a daughter, is that right?

J: Yes.

T: How much do they know now about your POW experience?

J: Well, not a great deal. I don't know. I just haven't discussed it that much and I'm never going to write a book about it. I've had a lot of people write books and they say that really helped them. Fine. Help them. I don't; I want to stay away from it.

T: So for you it's...and you have talked at schools a number of times.

J: Yes. But I'm going to quit that.

T: But the thought of writing it down isn't something that would...you think that might just make it...bring things back more concretely?

J: I really don't know. Sometimes it sort of scares me.

T: How so?

J: I wonder if I'm going nuts.

T: In just how you think about all this stuff?

J: Yes. I mean, it bothers me so much. We're in Iraq. Like my wife, she says, "You've got to stop watching the news," and I do. I don't watch it anymore.

T: It affects you so much.

J: It affects me.

T: Does it bring back your own past or is it...is that why it bothers you?

J: I don't know. It must be because of what I went through or... I lived. I'm happy I lived. But I don't know. The last couple of years it's just started bothering me.

T: Does it...

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 382.

T: Well, you survived. You mentioned that earlier. Does that, in a way, eat at you or sit on your shoulders?

J: No. You know, my brother's child was born after he was dead.

T: So his wife was pregnant when he died.

J: Yes. And of course, when I came home his wife Ann had gone back to Oregon. That's where Ann was from. We went out to see them. My parents and Phil and I. (***) was a beautiful young lady. About six years ago she and her mother were out walking (long pause and heavy sigh) tragic end there. I mean, I guess some of that stuff has affected me more than it should.

T: On the record, let me thank you for taking time to do this interview for the POW Oral History Project, based at Concordia University, St. Paul.

END OF INTERVIEW