

Interviewee: Richard Ritchie

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date: 23 May 2003

Location: living room of Ritchie home, Plymouth, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, June and December 2003

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, June 2004

Richard Ritchie was born on 23 August 1924 in Waterloo, Iowa, the youngest boy in a family of six children. He attended local schools, graduating from East Waterloo High School in January 1943. After poor eyesight kept him out of the Navy, in March Richard volunteered for the Army.

Richard completed Basic Training at Fort Jackson, in Columbia, South Carolina, and received additional training as a medic. In late 1943 he was assigned to the 423rd Regiment, 106th Infantry Division, then stationed at Camp Atterbury, Indiana. This unit was shipped to Europe in October 1944, and in December assumed positions on the front line, in the Ardennes forest straddling the Belgian-German border. Units of the 106th Infantry Division were among the first overrun by the German offensive that began on 16 December 1944; along with thousands of other American troops, on December 20 Richard was captured by the Germans.

Richard endured the next four months as a POW in Germany. He first spent several weeks at Stalag IV-B (Mühlberg), then one month at Stalag VIII-A (Görlitz). When advancing Russian troops got close to the camp, prisoners were evacuated; Richard and others from Görlitz walked for the next fifty-four days, ending up near the central German city of Braunschweig. Conditions steadily worsened, and hunger and disease claimed the lives of many over these months. His group was near Braunschweig when American troops liberated them on 13 April 1945. Richard was evacuated to hospital in France, then by ship to the United States; he spent the time until his discharge in November 1945 in various medical facilities.

Back in civilian life, Richard got married (1947, wife Carol), and earned a degree from Iowa State Teachers College (now University of Northern Iowa) in 1949. He taught school for two years (1949-51), worked for the US Air Force in Biloxi, Mississippi, as a civilian instructor (1951-56), then relocated to the Twin Cities area and worked in the engineering and computer business, retiring in 1987 with twenty-four years of service from the firm Control Data. At the time of this interview Richard lived in Plymouth, Minnesota.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

R = Richard Ritchie

[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: This is an interview for the POW Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today is 23 May 2003, and this is our interview with Mr. Richard Ritchie of Plymouth, Minnesota. First, Mr. Ritchie, on the record, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today. We're at your house here in Plymouth, on what looks to be a very nice day actually. We've talked for a little while before taping started, and I know that you were born on 23 August 1924 in Waterloo, Iowa. You were one of six children, four boys and two girls, and you were the youngest boy. Your parents were not immigrants to this country but your grandparents were, one from Scotland and one from Germany. You went to East Waterloo High School, class of '43, but I think you mentioned you graduated early. How did that work?

R: I graduated in mid-year, what they called a mid-year student. They used to have for grades, seventh grade A and seventh grade B. So I missed one year, or one-half year, and so I should have graduated in '42, but I graduated in January of '43.

T: So these mid-year graduations were sort of part of the way the school system operated.

R: That's right. Yes. They had half grades. Six A and six B, and five A and five B.

T: So originally you should have [graduated in 1942,] because you were eighteen in 1942.

R: Yes. '42. Yes.

T: Well, from information that you shared before we started talking, it wasn't many weeks before you got your greeting from the government.

R: Right. I voluntarily went into a month early draft.

T: So you could have waited a month but that was it.

R: I didn't say I was absolutely physically acceptable by them by going to a later draft, but it worked out that way.

(1, A, 38)

T: Now you had three older brothers. Were any of them in service?

R: Two of them. They were in the Navy.

T: Had they gone in before Pearl Harbor or after?

R: Before.

T: So they were regular Navy then.

R: Yes. Well, no, I don't know whether they were regular Navy or not, to tell you the truth. All I know is that I had more time at sea than either one of them (*chuckles*).

T: So your folks were used to seeing men... Your brothers gone off to service. How do you remember your folks reacting when you got your letter and you went off to military service?

R: My dad helped me to make sure I got in the Navy, or tried to get into the Navy, and that sort of thing. I just know that I ate a lot of carrots at that time, which was supposed to be high in vitamin A.

T: Good for your eyes?

R: Good for your eyes.

T: So you wanted to go in the Navy.

R: Oh, yes. I sure did. I wanted to go in the Navy in the worst way, but, like I say, when I went through the physical, all the physical aspects of the physical examination were marked with a big blue N until I got to the eyes, and they marked it with a big red A, which was dominant as far as where I'm going to go.

T: So that meant that the Navy was no longer an option for you. You ended up...

R: No, that's right. I didn't have good enough eyes.

T: How much of a disappointment was that for you?

R: It was a big disappointment because I had no desire to go to the Army. My dad had been in the Army. He never said anything real good about it.

T: You mentioned earlier, before we starting talking, that Waterloo was kind of a Navy town.

R: Yes.

T: What do you mean by that?

R: Everybody that I knew seemed to want to go in the Navy, along with the fact that the Sullivans, five Sullivan boys, which was the biggest family tragedy in World War II I believe, single family affair...

T: They were from Waterloo? The five.

R: They were from Waterloo. They just lived down the railroad track a little ways from us. I used to work in a hamburger joint. In the summertime. I was going to school. Matt Sullivan always came in there. His brother came to a little hat shop next door which I used to work in.

T: So these were not just names. These were people that you actually had faces you could attach to.

R: Yes. I knew two of them real well and the other three I didn't know too well. I knew the youngest one and Matt.

T: So Navy was your first choice. You ended up in the Army. You also ended up for Basic Training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

R: Right.

T: Was that your first experience with the South?

(1, A, 89)

R: Yes. Yes, it was.

T: What can you say about that?

R: My first pass into town I was walking down the main drag in Columbia, South Carolina.

T: In uniform, right?

R: Yes. I got called down more than once for not highballing an officer, but I noticed further down the street there were two black people walking arm in arm down the street and pretty soon they broke apart and a knife fight started. And the next thing I knew, one was laying on the ground quivering and blood was running down the sidewalk, which was on kind of a slope. A black ambulance finally pulled up and they picked up the guy and put him in a box.

T: So one black person stabbed the other one, is that what...

R: Yes. They were cutting each other up with their knives. That was my first experience in Columbia, South Carolina.

T: What an introduction.

R: Yes.

T: Does Waterloo, Iowa, have a black population?

R: Oh, yes. The north end of Waterloo is mostly black.

T: So seeing blacks, necessarily, wasn't anything different for you?

R: No, no. I went to school with blacks in part because East Side was closest to the north end of Waterloo where most of the blacks lived.

T: [What] did you notice when you were in Columbia, as far as segregation or the way blacks were treated by whites?

R: Yes. The blacks would always seem to move off the sidewalk if you were walking down the sidewalk.

T: Almost automatically.

R: And they had restrooms that were separate. Whites only. In restaurants the same as that. I don't remember ever seeing any of them in a theater. I went to a picture show one time where the main star was a black person. I forget the name of the movie. But quite a famous black singer and I'm trying to think of what the name of the movie was.

T: Al Jolson? That one?

R: No. No. It wasn't Al Jolson. It was interesting. But I don't remember seeing any blacks in there at all, and if they did, they probably were in the balcony.

T: I see.

R: But they had carried on discrimination quite a bit there.

T: For someone like yourself from the North, what did you make of that as a nineteen year old?

R: It bothered me because we had in our—this would be a different time when I was at Kiesler Air Force Base as a radar instructor.

T: This was in the early 1950s.

R: Yes. There was a black guy in our class while we were going to get trained on teaching of radar, and one time at the end of class we all decided we would go out and have a Coke or something like that. This black guy was with the group. He wouldn't go or they didn't want him to go. So they let him know. I stayed with him. I didn't go either just because of that. Because I wasn't used to that. His name was Amos Haines and he eventually came up to the Twin Cities along with us. I mean applied for a job at Univac. And he got a job too.

T: He moved from the South up to here.

R: Yes. He was originally from the North anyway. But anyway he moved up here too. That's all the incidents I can remember. That was after the service. And the other happened before I was in the service. Discrimination was quite widely... *(trails off)*

T: Even into the 1950s.

R: And I remember when we lived down in Mississippi as a radar instructor, a neighbor woman and my wife went somewhere. My wife and a neighbor woman went somewhere and some gal walked by, and she was from the South too. This woman that my wife was with introduced my wife, and then after my wife said a little something... "You're a damn Yankee!"

T: Really?

R: Yes. That's what they referred to her as.

(1, A, 160)

T: So it was a different world. Let me ask you about Basic Training. Infantry Basic Training in South Carolina. What was that all about in your opinion?

R: The medics got trained a little bit differently than the regular infantry. The regular infantry had an obstacle course that they had to run, go through, and they were out on the rifle range a lot. They really had different barracks than we did.

T: So you were already a medic or identified to be a medic.

R: Yes. Right. Because I got assigned to that particular group. As medics we had two barracks all of our own. The 1st and 2nd Battalion were in Barracks Number One and the 3rd Battalion was in Barracks Number Two at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. The medics got most all of their lectures from doctors. I was a surgical tech and medical tech, and for the kind of training we got there they sent us to the station hospital surgical ward for one week and the medical ward for another week.

T: Hands on experience.

R: No. Well, making the beds and things like that, and preparing people for surgery in the initial steps.

T: I see.

R: On the surgical ward they sent me to a maternity ward.

T: You weren't going to be doing that in the Army were you?

R: No. And the medical ward was a communicable disease ward. I don't think I really got very much surgical training and medical training there, but we were lectured daily by our doctors assigned to our particular group. Like field problems, they would have simulated wounds which were made out of rubber mucilage or whatever, and you would come upon these and you would apply the first aid to them. That amounted to compact bandages, and you carried two medical bags, one with plasma in it, blood plasma, which you used for somebody that had a lot of bleeding and you have to build back up their blood volumes so you would give them blood plasma.

And we had morphine and the sulfa drugs where you sprinkled it on the wound to stave off infections and that sort of thing. Then of course, the leaders of our particular group generally were from another cadre. They were a cadre from another division and they gave lectures to us at times too.

T: So a lot of classroom training too.

R: Classroom were out in the woods somewhere leaning up against a tree.

T: But school learning as opposed to actually working with real wounds or anything like this.

R: That's right. Yes. Only one real wound. We were in Tennessee and they had this Jeep parked up on a little rise, and for some reason the guy didn't set the brakes and it rolled down. And it was nighttime and it rolled over this one guy that was sleeping on the ground. So I went up there immediately as a medic and I exposed some abrasions and so on, so my initial reaction was to put the iodine on there right away. You don't do that. You could drive the guy into a coma or something, because it was too sharp. The pain was too much to sit there and try to sterilize the wound right away. You'd have to use something more mild than that. Than iodine or whatever we had to spread on it. High jump or whatever it was. I got chewed out for that.

T: Thank goodness it was only abrasions.

R: Yes. It was for the most part just abrasions. So I learned my lesson about that. You don't hurt a guy that's already hurt.

(1, A, 221)

T: After Fort Jackson, did you go right to Camp Atterbury?

R: No. No. We were at Fort Jackson ten months in Basic Training. Then we...

T: Ten months? Really?

R: Yes.

T: Wow! That's almost a year then.

R: Yes. Then we went to two months of maneuvers in Tennessee, which were the last infantry maneuvers ever performed near and around Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

T: Were you furthering your training all this time and sort of learning more about how to be a medic?

R: Oh, yes. They did a lot of wound simulation and that sort of thing, and maneuvering around and sending out scouts and that sort of thing. On the whole trip from Columbia, South Carolina, to eventually Camp Atterbury, I was on what they called the quartering party. I rode with our company commander and the head of all the troops to find a place where they anticipated stopping for the night and find an area for your particular group to billet up for the night. Did that from Columbia to Murfreesboro or somewhere near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and then from Murfreesboro after maneuvers up to Camp Atterbury.

T: You were posted overseas finally September, October of 1944?

R: We went overseas in, I think, around the middle of October or the first third of October. I think that's on my discharge somewhere.

T: Yes. It probably would be. That's okay. So you spent a number of months there at Camp Atterbury as well.

R: Yes. I think it was five. Somewhere around five. Five months. Then after Atterbury, where we got further training because we had new recruits again out of ASTP and that sort of thing.

T: Right.

R: After a while they got indoctrinated and then we went to Camp Miles Standish.

T: Massachusetts, right?

R: Yes. I think so. Or else out around Maine.

T: It's Massachusetts, I think.

R: Then from there we started taking shots from the medics. I was a medic at that time and gave overseas shots.

T: Was that your first experience giving hypodermics?

R: No. No. No. No. All the way through Basic Training we got different shots. But when we were going to go overseas you got a different shot for that.

T: Is this the first time you were giving the shots?

R: No. We used to train on apples.

T: But this was the first time on people?

R: Yes. Not at Camp Miles Standish but down at Fort Jackson. A medic had duty in the dispensary on occasion. People that would come in from leaves, night leaves or whatever, all those had to be examined. If they'd ever had any sex they had to have Protogeral shots whether they liked it or not.

T: So the Army was pretty intent on keeping venereal disease under control.

R: Yes. Right. We used to see movie shorts and they had signs up around with a beautiful looking girl, innocent looking, and they'd say, she may look clean, but... So they kept pretty good eye on that. You had to work in the dispensary and take care of everybody that came in sick.

T: With all kinds of problems then.

R: With all kinds of problems. Yes.

(1, A, 270)

T: By the time you went overseas, how comfortable or competent were you in your abilities to work in combat situations as a medic?

R: I didn't really have a developed feeling. I don't think. You always think you're going to survive, so you just didn't worry about it.

T: So you figured that if the situation...

R: I'm a noncombatant. They ain't gonna shoot me.

T: Did you feel confident that you'd be able to handle the job as a medic?

R: Yes. I did. I had a feeling but I found out after a while that I didn't really know a heck of a lot. I mean the extent of gunshot wounds can be quite horrible. They get all torn up. Bodies get all torn up. But you did learn how to fill out a tag, a KIA, which meant killed in action. One little thing you had to learn was maintain the fighting force. So if you run across a bunch of wounded you want to get the guy that can get back in combat fixed up first, and then you take care of the other ones.

T: Now that seems counterintuitive to what we learn on the civilian front where if someone is hurt really badly you take care of them first.

R: Yes.

T: But it was the opposite here.

R: It seemed that way to me. Maintain the fighting strength. You see some guy that can give the rest of the group a hand with his gun yet, you fix him up first and get him to do that.

T: In a sense you had to leave more seriously wounded people laying there for the time being.

R: Yes. Right. Yes. You had learned how to keep them out of shock. If you had the capability of putting blankets or something on them to keep them warm. Keep them out of shock. That was one of the main things you learned. The degree of wounds, the number of variations you get is tremendous.

T: Was that something that really you could only learn in real combat situations? You had read books and listened to lectures...

R: Yes. That was. You learned all the bones in the body, two hundred six of them. You had capabilities of splinting broken bones and stopping bleeding, hemorrhaging. You learned oozing which is capillary and steady flow is venal, vein bleeding, and spurting is arterial bleeding.

T: So those are some basic things you had to know.

R: Oh, yes. You had to know those. The idea is to maintain their blood volume and you had your plasma for that. To reduce the pain you had your morphine for that. You had your sulfanilamide and you had a lot of bandages that they could put in a pack about that wide or long and about that high. Two of those carried one on each side.

T: That's what you carried. Now you didn't carry a weapon, is that right?

R: No. You weren't allowed to have a weapon. That made you a noncombatant. It said that on this card you carried in there. It gave your age, and a picture of you, and that you were protected by the Geneva Convention, but when we got captured a German medic and one of our doctors was brought up to look over the field and see who was wounded, and the German medic was carrying a sidearm.

T: That's something you would notice, right?

R: Yes. I would know that. In fact, I took off my arm brassard and stuck it in my pocket and threw my helmet away and put on a regular helmet. The doctor that I was with, got captured with, he left his on because when we had our little skirmish there, when all these people got wounded, two of them were medics. This told me they're a target. In effect, I listened to a lot of war stories since, and they agreed with me.

T: That medics were not necessarily protected.

R: No.

T: I know from some experience with the 106th Infantry Division that in the early days of December 1944 your unit was moved up into front line positions that were not supposed to attract German attention.

(1, A, 320)

R: It was a twenty-five mile front right up in the Ardennes Forest. We kind of took over the foxholes that the 2nd Division—which were there prior to us.

T: And they left and you moved in.

R: They left. Yes. I think they took our guns and we used their guns that were dug in emplacements. So we had pretty nice foxholes. I had a foxhole that was pretty long. Long enough so that you could lay down in it in a prone position. It had pine boughs laying over the top of it. The entrance into it was off to one side, but the guy had a wire with cans hanging on it, because we were told many stories by the 2nd Division people that the Germans would sneak through at night and roll grenades into holes. And sneak into holes and shoot people. That was my first foxhole.

T: How did this feel now? You've been far away from the war in Tennessee and Indiana. Now it's right over there.

R: Yes.

T: How did you respond to this? What kind of feelings did you have at this point?

R: I thought we were going to a quiet sector, because the 2nd Division had been there all the time and there were just a few exchanges of patrols. So I thought perhaps they just stuck us there to get some baptism to fire. After we were there, probably this happened somewhere around the 16 December, I was an aid station medic, but before all the action started, the guy from Philadelphia was sent back from the front. He was a medic. I was sent up to take his place. I went up there without any hullabaloo or anything, because he had it a little bit up here I guess (*taps head*).

T: So mentally he was...

R: He was disturbed. I got assigned to go with a certain company, and this one is the one I'm not sure [if] I was with L Company or K Company.

T: On the record, that's the 423rd Regiment...

R: 3rd Battalion.

T: 3rd Battalion and K or L Company.

R: Yes.

T: Now the German attack on 16 December. What do you remember about that?

R: A lot of artillery. I think I counted sixteen artillery shells landing in our company area.

T: That's not very big, is it?

R: No. That's wasn't too big. There was a slit trench built or dug into the ground, and then on each end of it was a foxhole. Went down deeper in the ground. They'd bring food up to us in big containers with two handles on it and they'd line that up along this slit trench. Then the servers would come up and one at a time you ran from your foxhole down the line of people that worked with the food and got your food and then went back to your hole. Then somebody would be called up. So they did it in that fashion.

I guess during dinnertime or suppertime at one time the sergeant and the PFC that was in the other hole on either end of the thing was... We started getting artillery, and so the sergeant stood up and was telling everybody to get down. And he got his head blown off.

T: Literally.

R: Literally. Yes. This guy in the other hole just lost it. That was my first patient.

T: This guy who had lost it?

R: Yes. So I gave him fifteen grains of Phenobarbital, which was supposed to ease him up a bit and get some sleep. He was with me overnight, and what a night that was. He had a lot of dreams.

T: So the Phenobarbital didn't sedate him to the point...

R: It did probably to a degree that made it possible for us to occupy the same hole at the same time. Because my foxhole was big enough and had enough protection in it to give us some room. Then a lot of artillery. Buzz bombs...

T: The artillery, did it continue through the night? The artillery too?

R: No. It was usually early in the morning that that occurred.

T: This fellow who you had to sedate, what happened to him during the night? Did he wake up?

R: Oh, yes. He eventually woke up and then in the morning he was sent back to an aid station. There was occasional traffic of litter bearers.

T: Could he walk or not?

R: I don't recall any more. I just know that they loaded him into a Jeep. Then take him back to an aid station. I don't know how far back the aid station was.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.

T: So he was taken to an aid station and at that point that would be the last you would see of him.

R: Oh, yes. From the aid station an ambulance would take him to a more sophisticated medical facility.

T: Another step back.

R: So the aid station would constantly be moved around. They had a tent and they had a couple three doctors that could take care of stuff that needed taking care of.

T: Right away.

R: Yes.

T: Now this German attack on the sixteenth, you were captured four days later on the twentieth.

R: Right.

T: What happened in that intervening four days from your perspective?

R: From my perspective, they eventually moved us out of where our area was and I remember loading us on a truck. I don't know how far we had to go back, but not too far, where we got on trucks, and I remember that they took us down, and on the way, I saw where all of our duffel bags were stacked. They were spreading gasoline and burning them.

T: Burning your duffel bags.

R: Yes. And I remember I had a Christmas cake in there and a few other things.

T: Now what did you make of the fact... that suggests something.

R: That suggests to me that we're in hot water (*chuckles*).

T: They're burning personal stuff.

R: Yes. They're burning personal stuff so it wouldn't be captured. Then they got down in flat country more or less, and they formed groups and I guess they were told that we were going to attack Schaumburg. So we followed a little stream for a long ways in single file and we were getting potshots taken at us from snipers or something.

T: They could see you.

R: Yes. We were out in the open and they were back maybe in haystacks or whatever and popping off people with guns. That would happen and then they'd send a patrol up there and weed them out and then come back. I remember I patched up one guy, I guess he was a lieutenant. He got a head injury. I wrapped his head up and he was really okay, because it was kind of a surface wound. Didn't need much care. Put a little sulfanilamide on it and wrapped a bandage around his head and he was okay. Then we finally came to where we moved back into the woods. This was the approach, Schaumburg I guess. Schaumburg is in Belgium. While we were on the line we were in Germany.

(1, B, 444)

T: Schaumburg is still on the German side of the border.

R: I thought it was on the Belgium side. I didn't know. They didn't tell me anything anyway.

T: It didn't matter really, did it?

R: You just do what you're supposed to do. Not a compass or anything, you know. It would have been nice to have a compass.

T: You could get lost really.

R: You did. You didn't know which direction to go. The only thing that was a blessing, if the sun shone and then you'd know just about where you were, but it was cloudy most of the time and cold. So we kept on marching and we got in this wooded area and we dug foxholes, and digging a foxhole in a wooded area is terrible. Because you've got roots to cut through and it depends upon what kind of entrenching tool you have. If you've got a shovel you can get the dirt, but you can't get the roots. If you've got a pickmatic you could pick at rocks or you could chop at a root. I don't know what the other entrenching tool was, but I had the wrong one. I was able to nibble enough out of the ground [that] if I entered my foxhole butt first my hands would be at the top and the top of my helmet would be level with the top. Then the artillery started coming in. And tree bursts [of artillery]. Don't take much care of you, if you're in a foxhole.

T: Everything comes down, doesn't it?

R: Comes down, yes. So we got a lot of tree bursts because they unloaded it. I think this was early in the morning. Maybe just before sunrise or shortly after. It wasn't real bright yet.

T: So as a medic now, were there increasing numbers of casualties that you had to deal with?

R: Yes. I hadn't got to that part yet until we were given assignments to go after this tank. With a guy that had a bazooka. Then there was a sergeant and a couple other guys with just rifles and me.

T: Why did they send you along with the group?

R: I don't know. They had to something with the medics. It wasn't very important to them. As a medic, it was the first time I was called, "Hey Doc," or "Medic." Other times it was a "Pill roller," a shanker mechanic [reference unclear], or something like that. "Bedpan commando."

T: Suddenly your status increased.

R: Yes. Your status increased.

T: So now they had some use for you.

R: Yes. And they began to learn what killing meant. And what getting wounded meant. When a guy is hurt real bad, one of the first people he starts calling for is mother. There was enough of that.

T: When did those kind of casualties start coming?

R: When we had this skirmish there where we thought we were, on the absolute front line. We heard something coming and here it was another medic with another company and he was waving a white flag and he's saying don't shoot. Don't shoot. He didn't know who we were. Pretty soon a machine gun opened up. A machine pistol. The Germans carried these machine pistols with a high cyclic repetition of the bullets. Down he went. This medic. He was wearing his red crosses on his arms and on his helmet and everything, and down he went. Then there was a lot of other fire. Pretty soon I heard medic being called and pointed to a guy over here. I went over there where he was on my belly.

T: You're dragging your medical equipment with you?

R: Oh, yes. It's strapped to my sides more or less. I get over there and what he was, he was behind a bush and he had separated the bushes to, I guess he had a mortar. A 30mm mortar. In doing so, he got shot right between the eyes. I didn't know where he was hit or anything like that. But he ended up out in front of the bush. I thought, well, gosh, if a sniper got him, then I better be careful. I carefully crawled out there and was able to reach his hand and I pulled him back behind the bushes and I turned him over and I saw right away he got shot right between the eyes. There was no life in him whatsoever.

T: So bullets like that come out the back or not?

R: Yes. They can. Because they are steel jacketed bullets. They have a lot of penetrating power. As a prisoner and in a boxcar, we got strafed by our own planes, and I patched up a guy that got hit in the groin and tore a big, you know, it's a smaller hole in front and a big chunk out the back. But he got hit by a .50 caliber airplane.

T: Those are big bullets.

R: Yes. The others are 30mm or something like that. The regular rifle.

(1, B, 532)

T: This engagement, this little skirmish, this one fellow, was that the first time you had had to encounter as a medic someone who was already dead?

R: Yes. Yes. Right. There were just maybe little scrapes or something like that. Surface kinds of wounds. Where they just grazed them or something.

T: How was that for you?

R: This is a friend of mine that's laying out there that got shot by this German. Then somebody, and I thought it was Captain Bricker but it wasn't—he told me later it wasn't him, shot the German.

T: This German was visible?

R: Oh, yes. He had been laying in the tall grass and there was a little opening in the woods there and he had been laying in the grass. This Herb Rubenstein came walking down here saying don't shoot and waving a white flag. He thought he was perhaps approaching the American troops. But he would have uncovered this German. But the German got up and shot him. Stitched him with a machine gun. Because I went to fix him [Rubenstein] up, and he had five bullet holes in him. His liver was hanging out. I didn't know right away what it was or not. Anyway, I crawled out there and was patching him up. He had one hand shot off...

T: He was still alive?

R: I don't know. He had one hand shot off. I remember taking that out and put a quick tourniquet on his wrist, stuffed his hand in his pocket, and then I reached to turn him over and I heard a guttural sound. I thought he was still alive. But when I turned him over his liver was hanging out. He had three bullets or four or five bullets that just went right across his body. And when they came out of course they took his liver out too.

T: Because it was so close they came out the back.

R: Yes. So I sprinkled sulfanilamide on those and put compress bandages on him. I filled out a tag, and I guess I knew he was dead then because of all the damage to his visceral organs.

T: This is no longer sort of fixing up surface abrasions anymore, is it?

R: Oh, yes. Yes. This was terrible stuff. Guys guts hanging out. What can you do as a first aid man? Put them back in position and spread sulfanilamide on them to keep down the possibility of infection. Then I went back. I had to be real careful getting back. I left him there and I wrote a tag up KIA and I came back and our administrative officer, which was Captain Blackburn, had been shot by the same guy.

T: This guy got more than one American soldier.

R: Yes. Because Captain Blackburn was, I don't know what got into his head, as soon as he saw Herb shot, he got up there and was pointing at the German. "You can't

shoot a medic like that!" The guy turned around and shot him. He was also a medic with our red arm brassards on and on his helmet. So I patched him up.

T: Was he injured badly as well?

R: Yes. He had been stitched by a machine gun too. With that machine pistol. I can remember what he said last. He said, "I'll never get home to see my little girl." I think he died on us through the night. Even with the battalion surgeon there. Because who's going to help a medic and wounded behind the German lines? There aren't any helicopters.

T: You're kind of on your own.

R: Yes. You're on your own. And you're going on the mercy of the Germans not shooting you. Then there were a few other wounds that were taken care of by people, and we dragged all our wounded over in the bushes. That was the evening of the nineteenth. Dragged them over to the bushes, and then our troops started retreating over us and we had to stay with the wounded. So we laid down in the bushes. The battalion surgeon and I and cuddled very closely. Fight off the cold.

T: How many wounded did you have?

R: I don't even remember. But it probably wasn't more than ten at the most. We slept. A fairly good snoozing time. When we were laying down in there we could hear the Germans going by us, yelling back and forth. They hadn't seen us yet. Going by us.

T: This would be on the twentieth now.

R: We could hear them. No, it's still the nineteenth. Our troops had moved beyond, and the Germans were coming in to see if there was any more cleanup to do. And they completely missed us. Because we could hear and see them. Recognize the German language. They were yelling back and forth and that sort of thing. We just laid still there and dozed during the night, and then in the morning when we got up we started moving around and pretty soon, "*Kommen Sie hier!*" [German: Come here!] It's the Germans. We were both medics, and there was nothing we could do.

(1, B, 612)

T: When the American troops retreated, how much was fear a part of this for you? Were you scared at this point?

R: It seemed like I wasn't really scared, because I thought the Germans were a humane people. They would protect you if you were a medic or something like that, with a bunch of wounded particularly. So I wasn't real scared, but I didn't know

what to do. When we woke up the next morning the Germans were still prowling around and caught us. They led us down towards the town of Schaumburg.

T: With your wounded as well?

R: No. No. The doctor that was coming up with the Germans was going to go up there and look over the wounded.

T: So you left them in the German care.

R: We had to right then, because we were prisoners. We went where they told us to go. I remember very distinctly the German leading us around a booby trap. Here was nothing more than a grenade on a window frame where the grenade was pushing the handle grip down with the pin pulled on the thing. The grenade doesn't go off until the handle flies off. The pin had been pulled and stuck underneath the corner of that window frame. He led us around that and pointed it out to us. Then they took us back to this farm block where our regimental commander was, plus a bunch of officers and a bunch of enlisted men. They had a wall between the two in this barn. It wasn't a very big barn.

T: So it wasn't long after you were captured that you met or were in with other Americans again.

R: Yes. Right. I just know that I saw shoulder patches laying on the ground all over the place. And I knew it was our division shoulder patch.

T: How come the patches were on the ground?

R: They didn't want them to be identified. Themselves being identified with that division. We were a green division. They took us to the farm block to the house first and interrogated us.

T: Talk about that interrogation. What kind of things did they ask you?

R: Every time they asked me something I'd give them my name, rank and serial number. That's all I was told that I had to give. And that, I guess, is a Geneva Convention rule or law or whatever. But the captain, he was in there longer than I was. He went in first.

T: Did they ask you specific questions in English?

R: They told me, we got eight "tousand Americanos" captured. I guess I read in *Life* magazine [popular weekly newsmagazine]. I didn't learn all about it until I read *Life* magazine back at the hospital in Le Havre, France. There was something like eight thousand casualties all together. Two thousand some were killed and all the rest were captured. That was two regiments of our division. We had two regiments on

the line and one in reserve which carried on and functioned of the 106th Division afterwards.

T: So the 423rd. The 422nd was also pretty much captured?

R: Yes. There were two regiments. I would say that a division fully loaded is about fifteen thousand men. It's a triangular division. I don't know whether that includes the artillery, support or what all it includes. Me being a lowly medic... *(chuckles)*.

T: So they ask you questions. What kind of questions did those Germans ask you?

R: I don't remember specifically. All I know is when he spoke I gave my name, rank and serial number.

T: Were you mistreated at all?

R: I didn't get much to eat.

T: How about physical...

R: Physical... On a march one time I got a pop in the face with a rifle butt because we were walking through a town and there was a good looking gal walked close by on the sidewalk. We were made to march in the street.

(1, B, 665)

T: This is at the beginning here or this long march at the end?

R: It was close to the long march at the end. Before that we were marching and I spotted at the side of the road a mound with, I knew, some kind of vegetation stored in that mound. Along the German fields they always buried their carrots and potatoes in dirt mounds. You learned to recognize those. I fell out of the marching column when I saw that because I thought there was a chance I could get in there. But I had learned also that you didn't break away from a marching column in groups and go after those buried vegetables, because that happened a couple times before and the Germans, the guards, opened fire on you.

T: This was when you were first captured or that long march at the end?

R: More or less near the end.

T: So not in December here. It was more in March or April, when you were marching that long march.

R: January perhaps. I don't know for sure what the date was. Maybe it was in February or sometime.

T: When you were first captured and interrogated, it took a number of days before you were moved, but you were also one of the people moved on railroad cars. Is that correct?

R: Yes. Yes.

T: Can you talk about that a bit?

R: Like I say, when we got billeted in the farm, little farmhouse and barn, in the house we got interrogated. Then we were put over into a barn with a big partition in it where the officers were on one side, enlisted men on the other. We didn't get anything to eat until December 25, which was Christmas Day.

T: That's almost five days.

R: Yes. So that's when I broke into this big container of molasses. They called it cow molasses or something. I guess they feed their cattle molasses. From that point on we got on trucks and we, in effect, went through the battle areas. I remember seeing a tank with guys hanging out of it roasted like a pig and stuff of that nature. Then we went to a town and got on boxcars.

T: Do you know what town that was?

R: No. I just know that evidently it wasn't very far off from Gerolstein. No, wait a minute here, yes, it wasn't very far from Gerolstein where the bombers came over and hit a building with a bunch of officers in it.

T: So that's where you got on these boxcars.

R: Yes. Yes.

T: From what I recall of this, you were in those boxcars for a while.

R: There was five boxcars lined up on the siding, and there was anywhere from fifty to seventy people in each boxcar. I don't know how long we were in them, but I don't think it was more than two or three days. One morning an airplane, a P-47 or whatever it was, came over and strafed. They went down the line of boxcars, swooped around and came back down the other direction of the line of boxcars.

T: So these bullets would go through the top of the cars when they hit.

R: Or the ends. It didn't make a heck of a lot of difference. In the long run it killed nine and wounded eighty people.

T: In all these cars.

R: Yes. There the five boxcars were lined up. They had let out a major or something to get water. I guess he would go down and fill his helmet with water and bring it back. That left the first boxcar unlatched and that in turn, the guys piled out of that and ran to the other boxcars and unlatched them. In the crowd of people trying to get out the door with this airplane buzzing around, that's when I... The boxcar was on a siding, but just off the siding where the tracks were, the ground sloped down with crushed rock of some kind into a pond. I got in the crowd and shoved off, and I don't know how I got out of that car. I got pushed out in an awkward position and I injured my hip. Being young and being able to recover, I was able to limp around. I went out on the other side of the boxcar where they were unloading and they had the wounded laying there. I remember patching up a guy that had been shot in the groin.

T: Did you have your medical equipment still?

R: Yes. They took our bandage scissors away from us, but I had the rest of the stuff. But you used your extra bandages that you had. So I didn't really have much to carry with me. I took his bandage and patched up his thigh. Then there was another guy that got hit with a bullet that entered one side of his helmet and whirled all the way around. Tore his helmet liner all up and evidently left on the same hole the bullet entered. They lined up all of the wounded. I took care of what I could, and they lined up the dead and the wounded on the brick... on the outside...

T: The platform.

R: The platform. Yes. Then eventually two trucks came around. They looked like ton and a half, one and a half ton trucks. They were all painted white and they had a red cross on either side and on the roof. They loaded all the wounded up in that. Then they proceeded to go out and wind around the hills. I think the airplane came back and strafed them. That was after Roosevelt wanted anything that moved west of the Rhine, or east of the Rhine, or whatever. He wanted them to shoot at it.

T: That's what happened to you in these boxcars. Can you describe kind of the feeling you have when you're trapped in this boxcar and you realize that you're being bombed or shot at by a plane?

R: You figure you're a goner, because people around you have been shot. There isn't much you can do except you start yelling, and somebody's unlocking the boxcar to let you out. So the next thing is survival, so you gotta get out of the boxcar or you're liable to get shot.

What we did after we got out of the boxcar and recovered and got the wounded people taken care of, there was kind of a hillside there. All of the prisoners migrated out there and they formed a big POW USA in the snow. On the side of the hill. And the airplane came over, dipped its wings and fired nothing and took off.

Then of course I never saw so many bombers in my life flying over our head. A few were shot down and they took me and another guy over to a crashed bomber.

T: American or British?

R: By this time since the airplane went over and recognized we were USA prisoners, there was no more firing at us. So the Germans now collected their organization and they took a couple of us over to a crashed bomber...

T: What kind of bomber was it? American or British?

R: Yes. Oh, it was an American bomber. Yes. Just what kind of a plane, I don't know if it was a B-17 [American 4-engine bomber] or what. Anyway, two German guards helped us locate the wounded and they pulled their boots off, took their watches and since they were dead they just left them there.

T: Were any of the crew still alive?

R: Not that I know of. Not that I know of. They were satisfied so we didn't take anybody back with us. So they led us back to the station and that's when the three, two white trucks came by with red crosses on them.

T: To pick up the wounded. Were you identifiable as a medic at this point still or not?

R: I suppose because of my actions I was. But I didn't lay any big claims to it. They just let you do what you had to do, and that's what I did.

T: You were in those boxcars for a number of days.

R: I don't know how long it was.

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

R: We couldn't get an engine to pull our boxcars, so we started marching again. Started marching and we went from there—I don't think Gerolstein was too far. It probably got caught in that bombing that we'd just visualized on the outside of town by quite a ways. But I think that's when they did all the bombing to that building, or to those buildings where all those officers got killed.

T: That was in Gerolstein. Right.

R: Yes.

T: So you were close to that as well?

R: I guess so. I don't know.

T: Yes.

R: Because they didn't give you map or say...

T: You had to sort of try to figure out...

R: Yes. Because I heard about this afterwards. So we started marching, and I think we marched all the way to Stalag IV-B.

(2, A, 19)

T: That's the one at Mühlberg.

R: Yes. And I understand that, that's what, about eighty kilometers south of Berlin, somewhere up in that area.

T: You marched the whole way to Mühlberg?

R: As far as I know. Yes.

T: How long did that take?

R: I don't know. I don't know exactly how long it took.

T: I know at Mühlberg you got a prisoner identification tag...

R: Yes.

T: But you weren't there very long.

R: No. Just two weeks. One day the Germans, or on a couple of occasions, asked for volunteers to go work on farms. And I refused to work on farms. Because I thought that perhaps was...

T: From Mühlberg they asked for volunteers?

R: Yes.

T: Let's talk about your time at Mühlberg. Couple of weeks there. Mühlberg, Stalag IV-B. South of Berlin there. What did you observe? What kind of conditions did you observe when you got there?

R: I think the conditions there were not bad in comparison to other Stalags I was in. They had a dispensary. They fed you once a day, I think it was. They generally

always fed you a soup of some kind. I remember that the best soup I ate was a split pea soup. That was pretty good.

T: You had to be pretty hungry by the time...

R: Oh, yes. I mean, we ate one time a day. How many times a day do you eat?

T: More than that.

R: Yes. You always got something below the starvation level as far as calories are concerned. Because you get fed once a day. On rare occasions you got to participate, maybe one in eight or one in twelve people, a Red Cross parcel which had a pound of butter in it, a bunch of crackers, a D bar, some gum, some cigarettes which acted as monetary system, and you could do business with the Germans with cigarettes.

T: With American cigarettes.

R: Yes.

T: In the two weeks you were at Mühlberg...

R: They took my high school graduation ring away from me. My bandage scissors away from me. When we first came into camp we had to go through a gas chamber where they deloused you.

T: So Mühlberg was a camp that had been there for a while.

R: Yes. Right. And from that, why they sent out people to different camps and to do farm work or something of that nature, but which I didn't ever volunteer to do that. I learned my lesson about volunteering for something so I didn't do that. Then after the first week or second week they piled us on trains again...

T: Now before you left Mühlberg, can you talk about the barracks there? How big they were? How many people were in a barracks?

R: I don't know how many. They seemed like they were thirty, forty yards long or something like that.

(2, A, 82)

T: So big buildings.

R: Yes. They were relatively big barracks. They had three tiered bunks, which were nothing more than slats across and you had to lay on them. There was always a gap about that far between the boards. The buildings were generally blacked out until

the people started using the blackout wood for burning fires. The British would collect from all of the Red Cross parcels the milk and the tea. And they would rig up serving tea once a day.

T: So you had British in this camp too.

R: Yes. There were some British in it. Yes. They would rig up tea for you. And so you would look forward to that. Then you got one bowl of soup you got a day. Then if you were sick enough and complained, you could go to the dispensary. Well, I had trench mouth at that time. So I went to the dispensary one day—that was sore gums and things—they painted my gums with Jensen Violet. I don't know if you know or ever heard of that. Evidently it's an antiseptic of some kind. Then it healed up.

T: Did Germans staff the dispensary?

R: No, I don't think so. I think the guy that was staffing it was a Polish doctor of some kind. Or a dentist.

T: So you had different nationalities in this camp.

R: Yes. Yes. The tendency was to keep the Russians separate from the Americans and the British and the Americans were generally pretty close together. I mean your compound was that and a fence built around it, so you couldn't really go anywhere. So that's about what you saw was the barracks you were in and the neighboring barracks. But with a fence around it. They used what? Farm fences or whatever and it was pretty tightly knit there. It seemed like they had a better guarding system there than they did some other places.

T: Let me ask you about the Germans there. What kind of Germans staffed this camp and how did they treat you?

R: Well, generally it was the, I think they called them the Old Guard or something. They were elderly soldiers. But on the road it varied.

T: So when you were finally marching, that long march...

R: Yes. You had varied groups. The Old Guard, and one time we had SS.

T: Those are younger fellows.

R: Yes. Those were younger and gung-ho guys, you know. So it varied. I remember—well, we're talking about Stalag IV-B. When we first came in, we went through the delousing chamber, and there you had to take off all your clothes, put them on a hanger and go in and take a shower, which was in the middle of the building. Then come out on the other side, and your clothes had gone through some

kind of drying process. You didn't know whether it was a gas chamber or what it was.

T: Were you scared at first?

R: Well, sure. Because it was unknown. You know, you're always kind of scared at that. And when we got out they sprayed you all over with powder.

T: Some kind of pump spray?

R: Yes. Pump powder or something. But I remember looking at my GI sweater I had been wearing and there were lice eggs all up and down. It was kind of coarsely woven and you could see those white eggs about an eighth of an inch long string up along your collar.

On the road you would sleep in barns and different places of that nature and scrounge for food. One time I scrounged a whole galosh of potatoes. I guess they were going to use for feeding their pigs or something. But anyway, you were lousy. The powder and the spraying didn't kill the eggs. It killed the live...

(2, A, 153)

T: So the eggs were still there and so in a few days you had the same problem again.

R: Yes. Around the waist (*chuckles*).

T: Golly! When you think about Mühlberg and the time you spent at Stalag 8A which was near Görlitz, how do those two camps compare to each other?

R: The one at Mühlberg was I think better organized, but kept tighter than the one at Görlitz because I could wander over, and I made a friend of a guy from Belgium. I was there a month. So I got to talk to him a lot and I could go over there once in a while and get something to eat. Because they had been in the camp for a long time and they knew the organization better and you could make it a little easier on yourself. But again, they still only fed you once a day.

T: Was it more crowded there at Görlitz? In the barracks were the conditions...?

R: Yes.

T: Conditions better or worse?

R: No. No. At Mühlberg it seemed like it was more crowded, because they had all kinds of people there. I don't remember them having any Russians at Görlitz. I mean, yes, Görlitz VIII-A, like they had over in Mühlberg.

T: So the food you said was the same. You got this soup once a day. Was there any kind of bread any other time or...?

R: Only if you had crackers or something from a Red Cross parcel, and you very seldom got to partake in one of those, because there wasn't enough Red Cross stuff coming in as yet.

T: Right. So you got soup.

R: Yes. Once a day. Right.

T: What about the daily routine in these camps? You spent a couple weeks in one place, at Mühlberg, and maybe about close to a month at Görlitz. What did you do all day?

R: We'd talk about food. Come up with Milky Way pies, and who in the hell eats Milky Way pies? (*laughing*) All kinds of concoctions. You had nothing to do. At tea time you'd drink your tea, but the rest of the time you just sat around. Slept most of the time. Get under your blanket and sleep the day through. There was not much card playing or anything like that. We didn't have any cards.

T: People weren't doing much really.

R: No. What could you do? There's no television to watch. Some people had set up and rigged up crystal radios. You used for a crystal like a radiator, your heat radiator has got silver paint on it and it acts like a crystal. It rectifies micro, I mean radio waves. Some type of amplifier. Maybe it was just the earphones you had. But you could detect sound and intelligence over those. I remember one guy saying that the Allies were only one hundred miles from where we got... St. Vith. The Germans hadn't gone many miles beyond St. Vith. So on occasion we got somebody's report, or by word of mouth what they had heard on the radio. That was with their crystal sets.

T: I guess you were in a weakened state, but you're not describing any kind of activities that people actually did things during the day. Walked outside or played cards or did any kind of activities.

R: No. It was wintertime. And you got cold easy.

(2, A, 205)

T: It was cold. Was your barracks heated?

R: Yes. It was heated with what wood they had and also by tearing the blackout condition wood off windows. They would stoke the fire with it. But that's how they

would heat up the water for tea is from that. But there were so many personnel in there, just plain body heat alone kept it a lot more comfortable than it was outside.

T: Yes. And it was still winter. That's right.

R: Yes.

T: It was January. What was the most difficult thing for you at this time? I mean you've been through being captured, the boxcar excursion and now two different camps. What was it of those things? What was the most difficult for you personally?

R: I suppose keeping alive by getting enough nourishment of some kind. You know, they'd pick up potato peels and eat that if it was laying around. You just got enough subsistence I guess. They consider below eight hundred calories a day as below starvation. What is it? Twelve hundred a day is a minimum. I think we hung right around eight hundred calories or so a day. And so you didn't have much energy, much pep. This is one way of knocking the fight out of you, just by not feeding you adequately. And that's what it amounts to. So what do you do? You just lay around. That's what we did.

T: Sometimes you watch these movies and there's people talking about escaping and...

R: That's because they've been eating good.

T: I don't hear any of this kind of stuff.

R: No.

T: That's not happening.

R: No. No. There was very little of that. That I knew of. Because they were too hungry and not enough strength to do any fighting. Like [the film] *Stalag 17*. That's a big joke. It was interesting watching it, but we didn't have the opportunity... we weren't nourished like they were.

T: They all looked very healthy in that film.

R: Yes. They looked too healthy (*chuckles*).

T: The longest period of your imprisonment, as it were, was a fifty-four day march.

R: Yes.

T: From the camp at Görlitz...

R: Yes.

T: And you wandered around a large part of central Germany, finally ending up near the city of Braunschweig.

R: Yes.

T: This march from 14 February to 13 April 1945. I want to talk about that a little bit because again, that was almost two months for you.

R: Yes.

T: What happened at Görlitz? Was it a planned kind of evacuation, or did it come rather suddenly?

R: It was planned. Well, we didn't get any appreciable time before that it was going to transpire, but they were organizing you probably a day or so before. I think it was a planned situation, because the Russians were coming over the Oder River. They figured they'd rather be liberated by the Americans than by the Russians. I don't know whether that was true or not. But anyway, on February [14] we started moving out in the morning. I think they started out with approximately 1400 troops—prisoners.

(2, A, 248)

T: How many of these were Americans, from your judgment?

R: I don't have any idea.

T: Did you know any of the people who you were around at this point?

R: Yes. There was one guy I knew pretty well because he was in our outfit. He lives somewhere in Illinois but I haven't seen him since. We started out with about 1400 troops and then we got so far and they split it into two groups of about approximately seven hundred.

T: How long was it before they did that?

R: I don't know how long it was. I have a sneaking feeling that this guy, John Kline [Army POW captured in Dec 1944, in Belgium], I think he must have been in the other group than what I was in.

T: He didn't end up near Braunschweig.

R: No.

T: He ended up somewhere else.

R: Yes. That's why I say it was split up, and he was probably in the other group. We went through the town of Gotha two or three times. A lot of times we'd be approaching a town and they'd be air strafing it and sometimes just leaving it, and then at times there would be strafing while we were in town.

T: Talk about that. Was your column of men ever strafed or attacked by aircraft?

R: Yes. Well, generally they knew where we were all the time. After that deal where we formed a POW...

T: In the snow there.

R: Yes.

T: At the train station.

R: Yes. They got a pretty good trail on us, but they didn't always know exactly where we were.

T: So a plane would come across a column of people marching [and] they might think you're Germans.

R: That's right. And if we waved white flags or handkerchiefs or something like that, generally they knew we were Americans.

T: When a plane came over, did you scramble to the side of the road or was it better to stay on the road?

R: It was better to stay on the road at that time because the Germans occupied the slit trenches they had made every so often along the roads. So you didn't go jump in a hole with a German. But you would either hit the ground or wave flags or handkerchiefs or something like that, and generally they knew where you were.

T: So you weren't ever actually strafed?

R: Just while we were in the boxcars.

T: In the boxcars... once was enough. How about the daily routine on this walk? Did it seem like you were just ambling along or did there seem to be...

R: [We were] Just more or less ambling along, but not in a parade formation or anything like that. But so many abreast... There were sick people. There were hungry people. There were cold people. But they had guards up in front and then every so often a guard along the side of the troops. Then they had a mop-up crew

with a couple dogs. You know, police dogs or German shepherds. Then following that was a sick wagon where there was some German captain in charge of this column of prisoners. And on occasion somebody would try to escape into the woods.

(2, A, 290)

T: So people did try to escape from this column?

R: Yes. They would send up the mop-up crew and you would pretty soon hear a couple, three, four shots and then the mop-up crew would come back. What they did, [I think] is they shot the guy. Then on occasion groups of guys would break away from the thing and go into where they had their vegetables along the fields buried in dirt mounds.

T: Like turnips and potatoes.

R: Like cow beets—we called them cow beets—and carrots and things of that nature. Then they'd let the dogs loose. Well, it got so plentiful doing that that pretty soon they started shooting into the crowd. Then they would move away and there would be a couple guys laying there. But they would all get back in line. We were approaching Gerolstein, or not Gerolstein but Braunschweig.

T: This is at the very end here. At the end of this forced march.

R: Getting close to the end of it [the march]. Yes. I saw these mounds along the roads. I didn't run right to the mounds. I just played like I passed out. The marching column kept on going and the mop-up crew came along and the next thing I knew, they whacked me in the back of the head with a rifle butt and it evidently knocked me cold. But they left me laying there. They expected the sick wagon to pick me up. I guess the whole crowd went by and the sick wagon went by and there I was all alone. I went over to the dirt pile and I dug out carrots and I ate carrots until they were running out of my ears (*laughs*).

T: Manna from heaven, as it were.

R: Yes. There were Germans marching out of town, not many civilians. Going the opposite way [we] were going as we were coming in. And so I finally lumbered up into Braunschweig, and I walked right down the middle of the street and I kept asking what we called commandos—these were slave labor people that they had working there—where the Americanos went. They would point in the direction. So I just kept following their directions and pretty soon I wandered out of Braunschweig and kept on going right down the middle of road and hearing small arms fire around.

This, by the way, when I went through Braunschweig, is when they whacked me again for looking at that woman coming out of a big swastika-covered building (*chuckles*). But I meant nothing. I couldn't do anything anyway (*chuckles*).

T: You were probably too weak to do anything.

R: Yes. So I staggered on down all the way through town, right down the middle of the street. Kept asking these commandos, or work people, where the American troops went. They kept pointing and I just kept going and pretty soon I ran across a farm block and there they were. All of them in this farm block. Probably five, six hundred. I don't know how many it was.

T: It was the column you had been with.

R: Yes, it was the column I'd been with. So I went in and joined them.

Some of them had some bread that they'd been issued. You toast it over an open fire and you eat it toasted, and you tear up the whole inside of your mouth because you haven't chewed anything or ate anything for a long time, and that hard crust on that military type bread just cuts the whole heck out of your mouth inside.

T: I never thought of that.

R: Yes.

T: You'd been drinking soup all along.

R: (*laughing*) Yes. You on occasion got issued their military bread I guess along with the soup. But you only got a fraction of a loaf. Sometimes eight people cut up a loaf of bread and you would get your portion. But anyway, there we sat, and they took one Polish guard out who was a fanatic. They took him around the back of the farm block and there was a little shooting out there. They came back without him.

(2, A, 340)

T: He was one of theirs?

R: Yes. Right. He was a radical Pollock of some kind. I called him a Pollock because that's what they called him. Anyway, there was a lot of Polish people...

T: The Germans shot him?

R: No. The Americans did.

T: After you were freed you mean? After you were liberated?

R: Yes. Right.

T: Context there.

R: Well, really not after. It was the guards all took off...

T: At the very end there.

R: Yes. Except a few, and this guy was one of the few. And the captains occupied the main little house in the farm block. You know, they have all the buildings around a block and a brick center and a well out there. So the majority of the guards took off. But the next day or so, one of our division tanks and a Jeep pulled up. They liberated us officially. The sergeant got out of the tank, or out of the Jeep, and walked to the main place, and the Germans had a table set up there, a big, long table with a white linen cloth on the top of it, and went through short little surrender ceremony.

T: How many Germans were left at this time?

R: Oh, golly, I don't think there was more than eight, nine or ten.

T: And they officially surrendered?

R: Yes. With the captains.

T: And that's when this incident happened, that this Polish guard, who had been with the Germans, was shot by the Americans?

R: Yes. I guess so. Like I say, I didn't physically see it. I just know that they were leading him out. A bunch of prisoners were leading him out and they took him around the end of the building and I heard some shooting and he didn't come back with him. So I had to assume that.

T: Was that the only act of retribution against the Germans that you witnessed or were close to?

R: Yes. Yes. Well, no... By the Germans?

T: Let's say on the Germans. Because you mentioned this one, this German being killed.

R: That was the only thing because you didn't have any kind of weapon or anything like that.

T: But after you were liberated here, when other Americans came...

R: Yes. Then you got rifles that were left around and that sort of stuff.

T: Was that the only German that you noticed that the Americans took revenge on?

R: Yes. Yes. That was the only one.

T: Now during this walk, for example, where did you spend the nights?

R: Oh, in the barn or right out in the open. When we were with the SS we slept on brick platforms, these red brick platforms—that was near a station of some kind. And we slept right out with our meager blankets right out on the ground. Right on the bricks.

T: How about other times?

(2, A, 368)

R: Sometimes in barns and sometimes outside. But not real bad conditions because... Of course, every morning you'd wake up [and] your feet were frostbitten or whatever, and you'd walk until you walked the frost out of them and that sort of thing. But for the most part, you still had on your [uniform.] I had a British uniform on, is what I had on. Because my GI uniform I had was my olive drab uniform, and being a medic it was torn and bloody all over. So they issued me a British uniform, which was made out of wool and had a red triangle on it.

T: The Germans did that?

R: Yes. They got it from the Red Cross, I guess.

T: So you had different clothes.

R: Yes. All the time I was a prisoner, except where I got that issued at IV-B.

T: That was right at the beginning there.

R: Yes. Right.

T: How did the prisoners, how did you organize yourselves when it came to this walk? This whole group of men. How were things organized?

R: We didn't get organized very well until you were in a prison camp.

T: How about during this fifty-four day march?

R: Not much of an organization at all.

T: Among yourselves, did anybody take charge of things or...?

R: No. No. No. The Germans were in charge.

T: So there's no self-organization there?

R: No. Oh, no. We didn't have any. But when you were in a prison camp they tried to organize you. That was the only real organization. I mean, you know, like I say, down the sides of the column there would be German guards. In the front there would be German...

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 385.

T: For yourself, did you have a group of people that you hung out with during this fifty-four day march or were you essentially by yourself?

R: Essentially by myself. I just knew one guy. And I don't know whether he was with us all the way or not. But, yes... I mean, they had prisoners from all parts of the frontline that were captured. So you didn't have any... And you had to be on guard with what little food you had with you. If you had a loaf of bread or anything, you would have to use it as a pillow at night, or you stick it under your vest or your coat or something, because they would steal it from you with you asleep.

T: So prisoners would steal from each other?

R: Yes. Oh, yes.

T: How much of a problem was that?

R: I think it was a big problem, because I got over a half a loaf of military bread stolen from me one night and I was using it as a pillow.

T: So someone came by and took it right out from underneath your head?

R: Right. And I didn't know it.
And I would go around and check for dead guys and...

T: Among the prisoners you mean?

R: Yes. Among the prisoners and sometimes it was Arabs or whatever, and I'd find dead rats and animals of all kinds, you know, small rodents of some kind in their knapsacks, which they planned on using as food. It was pretty hard to get adequate food, I'll tell you. But people would be downing potato peels, sometimes you'd be laying around and—apple core—that was a prize. Somebody ate an apple. A potato was a prize too. But a cow beet, I didn't have much, they were too sweet. They were too watery. They didn't have very good taste to them, but I ate them. Yes. Anything.

I remember going through some towns, and little kids going to school would run out and give their lunch to you. In a paper bag or something like that. Until the

Germans stopped them from doing that. We went through some towns and like little two-story buildings, and people would be hanging out the window. Some of them would be ticked off at you and others would be crying and knowing what conditions you were in and what you were being made to do and that sort of thing. They tended to be the older people who had gone through World War I probably. But the young kids would try to run out and give their lunch to you. They knew you were hungry.

(2, B, 440)

T: That's interesting. You mentioned that some Germans seemed to be angry at the Americans.

R: Yes.

T: And others sympathetic in a way.

R: Well, I think the ones that were really angry... If you wore a flight suit indicating you were in the Air Force. They just got the bombs all the time and they hated airmen. More so than they did the infantrymen. But they didn't know who was in the infantry. But if you were wearing flight clothes they treated you accordingly. They didn't like the Air Corps.

T: Did you have, as you went through some of these towns, was your column ever attacked by Germans, German civilians, with stones or with fists or whatever?

R: No.

T: So the guards kept the civilians away in a sense too?

R: Yes. Yes. Yes.

T: How about the food? Other people have described kind of scrounging for food when you go through towns. Trying in any way, shape or form to acquire food from...

R: Yes.

T: What can you say about that?

R: I picked up apple cores that had been eaten before and cleaned them off, and I picked up potato peels when I had the chance. I tried to bum some food off a German guard or something like that when we'd stop. Sit down alongside the road... But I never had much luck with that, because they didn't have enough food either.

T: Yes.

R: I just remember stopping at one town and sitting down there with a guard. He was from Philadelphia.

T: The guard was?

R: Yes. He'd gone over there on vacation or visited, and he got kept and forced to serve. I remember there was a train siding just across the road, and railroad tracks running there and I asked him, "Why don't they put us on the train and take us somewhere?" And he looked over and he said, "The train is kaputt. American Soldaten kaputt. Alles kaputt." So the train wasn't working. He had been in Philadelphia. He had gone from Germany to Philadelphia and lived there for a while and then came back and then had to go back in the service when he was in Germany.

T: It sounds like you were able to converse with him a little. That he was not unfriendly.

R: No. He wasn't. I think at the back of his mind he knew they didn't have much longer. Germany.

(2, B, 485)

T: Would you say that the treatment from that guard, or in a sense the friendly demeanor, was that an exception or more the rule?

R: Maybe kind of an exception more than anything else, because generally they had a job to do and if they did something wrong they'd get punished for it I suppose. But it depended upon what type of guards you had. Sometimes you had some Hitler Youth marching along with them. They were mean little guys. Then that one time the SS had guard over us for a stop overnight in some town where we slept out in the open. But generally these guys were what they called Home Guards, and they were probably in their forties, even fifties.

T: Guys too old for front line duty.

R: Yes. Right.

T: But they could do this.

R: Yes. They could do that.

T: Now you mentioned that there were some guys shot by the guards for trying to escape.

R: Yes.

T: But you don't describe a lot of that. It seems like by and large the guys walked, the Germans walked, and...

R: That's right. By and large that was true. I only know of one other guy that got shot in the camp. And I think it was at IV-B. He was a lieutenant. He had been in our division. He'd gotten out of the barracks. Wanted to go to the restroom or something. And he was walking with his hands in his pockets. He walked by a gate where there was German guards there, and they yelled out for him to stop and he didn't and they shot him. That was in the prison camp. But I think it was in IV-B. And their latrine situations were bad. Real bad.

T: This shooting, that was an exception. That was not something that happened regularly.

R: No. No. No. It wasn't.

T: Now you mentioned...

R: Tried for two weeks to try to escape.

T: What would you do? Unless you spoke German, what would you do anyway?

R: Yes. That's right. And I didn't speak much. I learned how to count and I knew *rauchen verboten* was no smoking. *Autobahn* and *Strasse* and isolated words.

T: Yes. Yes. Yes.

R: Just isolated words. But I knew the German commands like *langsam*, *weisebakken* [German unclear], and...

T: So you learned all that stuff.

R: Yes. Because you took those commands so often.

T: Sure. Now you mentioned latrine facilities, which kind of reminds me of health and dysentery and things like this. How much was dysentery and diarrhea a problem?

R: Oh, big problem. That's one of the things I had. I had, what do they call it... It's the same thing as food poisoning... Oh...

T: Salmonella or one of those...

R: No. They didn't say salmonella, but they treated me for it.

T: The Germans did.

(2, B, 532)

R: No. No. I didn't get any treatment other than with my mouth that time for trench mouth. They painted my gums with Jensen Violet, which was a superficial antiseptic of some kind. But it cleared it up.

T: When did you get treated for dysentery, or for food poisoning, or whatever?

R: Oh! I got treated for that in hospital in Lucky Strike, France.

T: So after you were...?

R: Yes. Yes. Right.

T: On this fifty-four day march, how much of a problem, from what you observed, was dysentery or diarrhea for guys?

R: Practically all of it. A lot of guys had dysentery and diarrhea and that sort of thing.

T: How does that impact you?

R: It weakens you. You're losing fluids and you're not getting enough... I carried a bottle of halogen tablets with me.

T: What do they do?

R: You could get a canteen full of water and put a halogen tablet in it and it's supposed to kill all of the germs in it. It was something issued to me. So that was how I drank. But I got dysentery anyway, or diarrhea. But I'm trying to think of a medical name for it. Food poisoning. But I can't think of it right off.

T: So this is a problem for guys. I imagine if you're walking you have to spend more than once a day... sort of hit the side of the road and just...

R: Yes. Right. They stopped every once in a while and let you rest up. But I saw civilians and women, you know, with their pants up and their dress up and they're sitting along the edge of the road doing their duty.

T: So it was not just the...

R: No. It was civilians too. But in the camps the latrines were terrible. I mean they were filthy. One time—I guess it was a road march. We stopped at Duderstadt,

which is a brick factory, and I remember the sign said *Nach Duderstadt*. That means approaching Duderstadt.

T: Yes. Towards.

R: Yes. And golly, they had slit trenches dug for the latrines there on the outside of that brick factory that were just terrible. Everybody seemed to use them, but they didn't seem to have any disinfectants of any kind to dump in there. They put you on different floors, and the floors all had board separation about that far and you'd get brick dust coming down from people that are above you in the thing, and you slept in there for a couple days I guess it was. In this brick factory. I don't know where Duderstadt was on the map.

(brief pause in interview)

T: You were finally freed by American troops on 13 April 1945.

R: Yes. A tank and a Jeep.

T: That was enough.

R: Yes. Yes. With all those POWs there. But they only left a skeleton crew there of guards, so there was no firing or anything like that that happened at that time.

(2, B, 576)

T: At that point I think I would have maybe just waited for the Americans anyway as opposed to run.

R: Oh, yes. Sure. I mean there was small arms fire. By who? The prisoners ain't got no small arms, can't defend himself. And we were about seventy kilometers from Hannover or something like that. And trucks finally came and picked us up. These looked like big grain trucks, like pulling out of south Minneapolis or something like that.

T: Really? Big things.

R: Yes. They loaded us all on that and took us to the Hannover airport.

T: And you got flown to France then? Is that right?

R: Yes. Yes.

T: Now what about that moment, that first encounter with Americans when you realized that this whole ordeal was over?

R: Yes.

T: What went through your mind at that point?

R: Not much, because you couldn't contact them. There were too many prisoners and too few liberation people to even get close to them. They walked right on through the group and went up to the surrender table at the farmhouse there, the little farmhouse, and went through their stuff. Then they took off and said that they'll be trucks to pick you up in a day or so.

T: How did you feel at that point knowing this whole ordeal was over?

R: Oh! What a relief! A lot of relief. I wanted some way to find some food. We did get maybe to share a K-ration or something.

By the way I still have those. I have three K-rations that I was issued in Hannover, Germany.

T: You saved them??

R: Yes. I'll go get them and I'll show them to you.

(brief pause in interview, to examine 1945 K-rations)

T: We just looked at K-rations that you have kept since 1945.

R: Yes.

T: A nice visual reminder of when food wasn't so plentiful.

R: Right.

T: The treatment you had... You were flown from Hannover to Camp Lucky Strike in France and you spent some weeks there.

R: Three weeks.

T: How much recuperation and medical treatment was there at Camp Lucky Strike?

R: I went right to the hospital because I had a fever, and I suppose that was due to the diarrhea and everything else I had. They put me on a cot and I had to go to the bathroom I bet you six, seven times a night. At least once an hour. They thought I had spinal meningitis. I went through a lot of tests for that and they figured I didn't have it. I was suffering malnutrition so they gave me a lot of vitamin pills a day. Fed us six times a day. Very light meals. Like sandwiches or something like that. We stayed in the hospital long enough so that they figured that you were capable of taking a hospital ship home.

T: You had to be in good enough shape to get on the ship, didn't you?

R: Yes. Right.

(2, B, 616)

T: They're taking care of the physical things. They're treating the diarrhea and other tests.

R: Yes.

T: What kind of treatment was there for psychological recuperation?

R: Oh, wait a minute. I have one more treatment I didn't mention. I got a penicillin shot in each cheek of my buttocks every three hours until I had fifty shots.

T: Oh, my gosh.

R: That's before penicillin was used in other forms, and they gave it to you every three hours because of absorption rate or whatever. So fifty penicillin shots I got.

T: You were a pin cushion.

R: Yes. They were trying to slow down my bladder problem I had at that time. But anyway, I had to walk stooped over like this because something up and down here hurt so much. I'd walk around like this. I didn't have any wounds. But it felt like my stomach was hanging on a thread.

T: What you'd been through, it's amazing that you weren't in worse physical shape.

R: Yes. But anyway I was lucky, I think I was lucky that we got liberated when we did because we couldn't have stood it much longer. I remember one colored guy. He was a truck driver on the Red Ball Highway. The Red Ball Highway was what they used for transporting goods up and down in France and so on.

T: He was captured too?

R: Yes. He was somehow captured. But he kept trading what little food he got for cigarettes and he finally died of malnutrition. All puffed up and he died of malnutrition.

T: And others died too on that walk. I mean you mentioned...

R: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I don't know how many but... Probably, you know, out of the seven hundred—they split once, I said, from 1400 to seven hundred—and probably

450 or something like that were actually liberated. There were a few escapees somehow, but other than that... There are some that died along the way.

T: On this recuperation, what was the Army doing to deal with the psychological impact of being a POW? Were they talking about that?

R: I don't remember anything like that. Not a bit.

T: So no psychologist...

R: I went to a major one time and he quizzed me a lot. But I don't remember what he quizzed me about. I guess he wanted verification that I was a POW or something. But I don't remember anything more definite than that.

T: So there was no, what we might consider today, kind of support group to talk about your experiences or whatever?

R: No. No. None of that.

T: Let me take the last chapter of this, and that is when you got back to the United States. How long was it before you saw your family again?

R: I got to see them at the beginning of a sixty-eight day furlough. We got a sixty-eight day furlough and following that an Army vacation in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in the Arlington Hotel there. Then got reassigned in Rockford, Illinois, the Camp Grant, Illinois, where I became a ward master in a clean surgery ward.

T: Is that where you finished your stint in the Army?

(2, B, 659)

R: Yes. Right. Then I had enough points, I think I had fifty-one points, and I got out—when you moved down to that many points then you got discharged.

T: When you saw your family again, that would be your mom and dad, I guess, and your brothers and sisters, how much conversation was there about your experience as a prisoner of war?

R: Very little if any. I had called my mother and I told her what I wanted to eat and (*chuckles*) I ordered chili. I wanted a nice big bowl of homemade chili. It was soup to our family. It wasn't this thick, you stick a spoon in it and the spoon will stick up. It wasn't thick chili like that, but that's what I wanted. I was really disappointed when I got home and she had a nice meal but not a bit of chili (*chuckles*).

T: She was obviously trying to do something nice for you.

R: Yes. Oh, yes. And I had to straighten out my language a little bit too.

T: Sure.

R: Cuss words that I didn't think bothered anybody. Like pass the f... butter and stuff like that.

T: The service...

R: Yes. Right.

T: That's the vocabulary.

R: Yes. And so I had to get off. But I only had one brother home. The other brother was still in the Navy. He was over at Pearl Harbor.

T: They must have been curious to know what you had been through.

R: They didn't ask me about it. I didn't volunteer much. Because I thought I was a down and out because of the way they treated POWs. I didn't think we got any heroism or anything like that. They didn't ask for it. So I didn't tell them.

T: They knew you had been a prisoner of war.

R: Oh, yes. Not long before I got home because the cards that I sent, like that one card I showed you earlier, I don't know that they ever got it before I got home.

T: So they didn't know...

R: I came back in May sometime I think it was. I had been issued all new uniforms and stuff like that. Everybody threw their form 32s which was their personal inventory of stuff the government had issued, threw them overboard. There was a trail of form 32s. But anyway, when I got to New Jersey, I think Camp Kilmer, they issued us all new clothes and then after we got straightened around a little bit, then they sent us home. We got this sixty-eight day furlough and then on the way back, or after the furlough, why, they took us and we were on our way to Hot Springs, Arkansas, where we got a two week paid vacation. But the war with Japan ended right then. Because we thought that we were going to get reassigned and then go to the Pacific.

T: You did.

R: Yes. We couldn't go back to Germany because the way prisoners would treat German prisoners. They didn't want to send us over there. So we thought they were going to send us to Japan.

T: The war was still on and it was expected to last.

R: Yes. August 14 I think rings a bell.

T: That's right. That's the day. You say you seemed reluctant, I hear you saying, reluctant to talk about your POW experience with your family. Are you describing a sense of guilt in a way...

R: Yes!

T: Or shame that you had surrendered.

(2, B, 701)

R: Yes. Yes. Right. And me being a noncombatant, it hurt me twice as much because, you know... It was twenty-five, thirty years afterwards that we started getting treatment. Now I got started getting disability in 1996.

T: That's fifty-one years after the war ended.

R: Yes. Right.

T: Not until then?

R: They aren't moving very fast.

T: The military.

R: Yes. And then what I got is what they call "presumptive" problems resulting from being in the military service.

T: After fifty years it would be hard to prove.

R: Yes. Yes.

T: Let me follow up on the point with your family. Around Waterloo you must have had friends as well.

R: Yes. Yes. I could get together with friends that had been in the military.

T: Could you talk to them about what you had been through?

R: No. Not really. I just told them where I'd been. I had one friend, a real close friend that was in the Aleutians up there off Alaska...

T: Yes.

R: And another one, he was a little bit younger. I started playing ball and doing things like that, and there wasn't much talk about the war at all.

T: So you were in a sense, I hear you saying, you were happy to not be asked questions.

R: Yes.

T: Did that... because in a sense, we're sitting here having this conversation...

R: They wouldn't believe you anyway, I figured.

T: You think?

R: Yes. I don't think they would have believed. All this crap about concentration camps and all that hadn't been let out yet to the public, I don't think.

T: So you feel if you had described your treatment they may have thought you were exaggerating?

R: Yes. Right. Exactly.

T: What's happened over the years? Because, in a sense, you and I are sitting here right now and I've learned an awful lot from you with questions? What happened in your life that you were able to talk about it? To answer peoples' questions.

R: With people that are familiar somewhat, you know, with it. You know, now that time has gone by and they have got educated, they're more receptive to hearing some of that. But you get a bunch of former GIs together and they all try to... one-upmanship.

T: My next question is really about family. You've been married for fifty-five years.

R: Yes.

(2, B, 728)

T: When you got married—had you known your wife before the service by the way?

R: No.

T: Okay, this is someone you met afterwards.

R: I was a believer in the fact that if anybody was going to collect insurance, my folks would. I didn't want to be tied up with...

T: So you had no girlfriend ties when you went overseas.

R: No.

T: When you got married to your wife, Carol, how much did you tell her about your POW experience?

R: Not much. Not much of any. She just knew I was. I had been. So that's about it.

T: Is it more that she didn't ask or you didn't tell?

R: She didn't ask, I don't think. Her folks were German. He was from Germany.

T: Her dad?

R: Yes. And maybe he was ashamed to ask me or something. I don't know.

T: Because you knew him. Sure.

R: Yes. I don't know if my wife ever told him. Just kept it kind of quiet until about twenty years ago.

T: You also mentioned you have five boys.

R: Yes.

T: What did they learn growing up about their dad's military service?

R: Just that I had been a POW. I had one of them that joined the, what was it? The National Guard, or was in the Reserves, or something. None of the other ones... I had one that had a very low number during the Vietnam War, but he didn't get called in. So I only had one son that had any kind of service. I guess he was tied up with radar somehow and computers. He went to camps in the summertime. He was going to the University of Minnesota, in Duluth.

T: Probably Reserves.

R: Yes.

T: Now when they were growing up, kids ask questions of their parents.

R: Yes.

T: Did they ask you questions?

R: Oh, if they did I gave them short answers that I don't think they could gain much from.

T: So it's changed though in the last twenty years. You say that as society seems to be more receptive to that, that you feel more comfortable giving details.

R: Yes. Right. Yes. That's because you think they really want to know. But at one time they didn't.

T: Yes. There was a celebration of those who had been part of the victorious troops and what you're saying is that you didn't feel yourself part of that group.

R: No. No. No. They had no fanfare whatever when we got off the boats. I think mainly it was in New York or in New Jersey or whatever. But I think we ended up at Camp Kilmer and that's in New Jersey.

T: Yes. It's in Jersey. And you've described your wife and your family and I suspect coworkers, people you worked with over the years?

(2, B, 759)

R: Oh, they knew but I didn't tell them much. They didn't seem receptive to it so...

T: You let it go.

R: Yes.

T: Let me ask you about the VA. One thing we're interested in is how helpful people found the Veterans Administration after the war to your position as a POW.

R: Didn't have much action because after I got out of the service, which was in November of '45, I went right to school in '46 and...

T: Iowa State Teachers College, right?

R: Yes. And I, once in a while a professor would hint that... They knew a lot of guys were going to school on the GI Bill...

T: A lot of guys were...

R: I went on the GI Bill, and I never had to pay for a pencil or a piece of paper or all my supplies were free to me, which I thought was nice. Then they paid me when I was not married about ninety dollars a month, and then when I got married I think it went up to one hundred five or one hundred twenty dollars a month. And I worked at...

End of Tape 2. Tape 3, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: So people at school, even when you were at college from '46 to '49, people knew...

R: I was at the GI Bill and that's all, really, they wanted to know. I mean, I didn't tell them anything else except, you know, another GI or something like that. And maybe that's why word got around. But anyway, I lived in what they called the Quonset hut area, which was on the south end of the campus. Thirty dollars a month or something I paid for rent.

T: Boy that sounds good.

R: Yes. Well, tuition was only thirty-three dollars a quarter then.

T: I know.

R: (*chuckles*) And you got all your free books and that, and then I had a job on the Rapp Packing Company on the side.

T: You were doing okay.

R: Yes, right. I was making as much money when I was going to school as I was when I went out for my first teaching job. I got three thousand dollars a year as a full time, and one of the top paid, science teachers in the State of Iowa at the time. Three thousand dollars.

T: Money bought a lot more in those days, didn't it?

R: Yes. Right.

T: After you came back, were liberated from the camps, in hospitals and at home, did you have recurrent dreams or memories of certain things?

R: Oh, pretty often. Yes. I know I was at my mother's house one time and I don't know whether there was an explosion or whatever, but I dove underneath the kitchen table. Unconsciously I did it. They thought it was funny. That was my habit at the time. Yes. I've had dreams, but they've tapered off quite a bit and I don't have them anymore.

T: When you had dreams, was it one image that repeated itself or was it a number of different ones?

R: Golly, I don't... It seemed like one repeated itself more than any. I don't know really anymore. I don't even know now what I was dreaming about. I was afraid of airplanes (*laughs*).

T: Really?

R: Yes. Right. Because, you know, one strafing will do it.

T: Yes.

R: And you know, we had those in Basic Training too, but they would fly these light aircraft over you and they would drop five pound bags of flour and they would hit the ground and break up and spread around. But you got used to that. And we had air shows where we would be sitting down in a hollow, a little auditorium, sit listening to a lecture or something, and they would call in airplanes to come in. But they would come in low to the ground below the level of the nearest field and then they would come up and swoop down on top of the crowd that was listening to this lecture. They'd scare the hell out of you.

T: That was the point maybe, wasn't it?

R: Yes. Right. That was the point. And they were generally P-51s or something like that. And then of course, those strafings that we got while we were prisoners were frightening as all get out.

T: Yes. That's the one image that you've mentioned several times as causing terror among the guys.

R: Yes. Yes.

T: You mentioned the Veterans Administration, the VA, as not being very helpful as far as helping POWs after the war.

R: Not right away. Now they've put on these "presumptive" claims that you could make for former POWs, this was in the '90s.

T: This was fifty years after the fact.

R: Yes. Then I filled out a form. You know, if you had anything that you thought might be... I put down that I'd had two heart bypasses. I mean twice. I had one in '76 and I was fifty-two, then and one in '93. Then frozen extremities or frostbitten extremities. I put that down. I put my hip problem down and sent in a claim.

T: This stuff never came up after the war. They didn't want to know this in the late '40s or early '50s.

R: No. No. They didn't. If you didn't have battlefield—a bullet in you or something, you got issued a Purple Heart—but if you didn't have a Purple Heart, you didn't have anything wrong with you.

T: I see. So if you couldn't display something...

R: No. Forget it. I had nothing to display.

T: You were fit. They looked at you in 1950, you probably looked...

R: Normal. Yes. I weighed about the same. I weighed about the same right now as I did when I was... When I got out of high school, I was on the wrestling team and weighed 143. I wrestled heavyweight because during the week they'd have elimination for the two guys closest at your weight. I'd lose once in a while and the other guy would lose once in a while but if you lost, you wrestled heavyweight because we didn't have any heavyweights.

T: At 143?

R: Yes *(laughs)*. We didn't have any heavyweights.

T: That'd be incentive to...

R: I mean, I could beat what heavyweights we had because I'd been in wrestling since I was in eighth grade. But my last match was January 22, 1943, and we were going to wrestle West Waterloo, and what I didn't know is the guy that I wrestled was their heavyweight, but I weighed that 143 pounds, and he ended up being the State heavyweight champion that year.

T: Didn't go too well for you that day.

(3, A, 108)

R: No. It didn't take him long *(laughs)*.

T: At least he didn't make you suffer too much.

R: No. No.

T: That's the last question I had about your experiences. Let me, on the record, thank you very much for taking a number of hours today to speak with me. I've learned an awful lot from you today. Again, thanks very much.

R: That's all right.

END OF INTERVIEW