

**Interviewee: Harold Van Every**

**Interviewer: Thomas Saylor**

**Date of interview: 2 April 2004**

**Location: sitting room, Van Every residence, Minneapolis, MN**

**Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, May 2004**

**Edited by: Thomas Saylor, September 2004**

Harold Van Every was born on 10 February 1918 in Minnetonka Beach, Minnesota. He went to local schools, graduating from Wayzata High School in 1936. Harold then attended the University of Minnesota, where he was an all-Big Ten football player; he subsequently played professional football for the Green Bay Packers (1940-41).

With the US entry into World War II Harold gave up his football career and entered the Army, and after six months in the infantry was transferred to the Air Corps. He earned his wings in July 1942, and by 1943 was pilot of a B-17 Flying Fortress four-engine heavy bomber. Along with the rest of the B-17's ten-man crew, Harold arrived in England in April 1944 and was assigned to the 447<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, based at Rattlesden. Over the next weeks the crew completed eight missions, but on their ninth, on 12 May 1944, their plane was shot down over Zwickau, Germany and Harold became a POW.

After a brief stay at Dulag-Luft, the central interrogation facility in Wetzlar, near Frankfurt/Main, Harold was sent to Stalag Luft III, located in Sagan, 150 miles southeast of Berlin. When in early January 1945 the Germans evacuated this camp due to the advancing Red Army, Harold and hundreds of other POWs were marched several days to the city of Spremberg, then taken by train to Stalag XIII-D, at Nürnberg. Here he remained until early April, when the Germans evacuated this camp due to the proximity of American forces. After a forced march south of more than a week, the POWs ended up at the overcrowded Stalag VII-A Moosburg. This camp was liberated by American units in late April 1945. Harold spent several months recovering from his POW ordeal, and was finally discharged in 1945 with the rank of captain.

Again a civilian, Harold returned to the Twin Cities area and his wife Drexel (married 1942). He spent a career in the insurance industry, and also devoted much time to community affairs. At the time of this interview (March 2004) Harold and Drexel Van Every lived in Minneapolis.

Harold Van Every died in August 2007, at age eighty-nine.

**Interview Key:**

**T = Thomas Saylor**

**H = Harold Van Every**

**[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 2 April 2004, and this is our interview with Mr. Harold Van Every of Minneapolis. First, on the record, Mr. Van Every, I do appreciate you taking time to speak with me today.

H: And I'm very glad to sit down with you.

T: You were the pilot of a B-17 Flying Fortress during World War II, and flew eight missions, completed eight missions over Europe. But I want to ask you specifically about flying a plane like that. From your recollection, what kind of plane was the B-17 to fly?

H: It was just a great plane to fly. As a matter of fact, I flew a lot of planes down in Headquarters 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Force. Some two engine, some four engine, and I didn't have much confidence in any one. We had single engine too, of course. Because that's what we took all through Primary Flying. I find out that I didn't have the confidence in the other ones, and when I got into a B-17, the structure of the whole airplane is very good and all of a sudden I got confidence in the plane and in flying and the whole picture. That's where I got my first training. In a B-17.

T: The crew that you flew with in Germany, where did you pick that crew up here in the States?

H: I picked those up down here in Nebraska and then we take the crew from there to Iowa City to get our bomber training before we went overseas. So we were what is called a replacement crew, which simply means that some of these fellows over there have had all the missions they needed to come home. If they got twenty or twenty-five missions. Usually it was twenty missions. When you had twenty before, you were allowed to come home. And may never go back again unless you want to. Then they lengthened that to twenty-five missions and even thirty by the end of the war because they were getting easier and there wasn't the enemy number of airplanes and so forth. Twenty isn't too bad. But, as you can see, it worked pretty bad for me, because I didn't get the twenty.

T: You have a good sense of humor about it.

H: Yes. That's right.

T: Your diary that I read—in reference to a diary here that I copied last time I was here—you flew the plane over to Europe. It looks like it took you a number of days with a number of stops in places like Labrador and Iceland.

H: Yes. Well, that's quite a flight when you're flying over the Atlantic. I guess there's no point in trying to be a hero. There's no strategic thing to the mission I was flying, because I was simply joining a crew over there and then going to bomb from there. So we did stop at different places which was nice. I'd never been to Iceland. So we had a nice little stop there. A few eggs out there. A few eggs in the morning and a few other things along the way. So we had very nice flights going over on the way to England where we joined our crew. 447<sup>th</sup> Group. Just about 1 April. So that's the way we got started.

T: What can you say about the crew that you flew with? Now, was it always the same people on the missions you flew?

H: Yes. Unless we had somebody injured, of course. Then we'd have to substitute for him. There were ten on a plane. There's the pilot and the copilot, and there's the navigator, and there's a bombardier—and they are officers. The rest are...there's an upper turret, there's a lower turret. There's a ball turret down below. There's a tail gunner and there's two side gunners. So that's the makeup of the crew and they are enlisted men. Some of them get as high as a master sergeant and so on. But that's the crew we go with and we do all our training with.

T: How would you characterize the relationship between the members of your own crew?

H: We had good esprit d'corps, which means we seemed to get along with everyone. As a matter of fact, I had a ball turret gunner who had fifty missions in Africa before I got him. Now, normally he didn't have to do any more flying. Fifty. He could have come home and rested in the United States, and I think I would have wanted to do that after flying that many against the Nazis, but he wanted more flying time and that was great. We got him and his experience even though down in Africa there wasn't as strategic missions. There wasn't the numbers of enemy people there because there weren't that many around. Nevertheless, that's what happened at that time and this guy was a nice guy to have on the—I made him my gunnery officer, which means he was in charge of all the guns. Make sure they're cleaned and they're loaded and everything else on every mission and after every mission. That's what his job was.

**(1, A, 50)**

T: By 1943 when this crew is being put together, you were twenty-five years old.

H: Yes.

T: Were you older than some members of your crew, for example the enlisted men?

H: Well, I might have been a little bit older than a few of them there. I guess some of them maybe hadn't gone on to college, and so they didn't have the number of years in there that intervened like I did. Going to college and so forth. I did have a little time in the infantry. I had six months in the infantry before I went into the Air Corps, so all of that meant that I would get just a little older.

T: Now I learned from you last time I was here, that you played a couple of seasons of professional football with the Green Bay Packers. Did people around you, your crew, did they know you from that?

H: Not too many of these fellows, unless they lived up in that Green Bay area. But they acknowledged that and they thought it was a pretty good thing. And I did too. And of course, more people like that Green Bay. I can hardly go to a place, whether I'm eating someplace or wherever it is, that there isn't somebody who have picked the Green Bay Packers as their team. And they always come up and say oh, boy! You mean you played for the Packers!? You'd think I'd climbed the stairway to the stars. It wasn't that big a deal I didn't think. I played for the Packers because I was number one draft for that. And the story there you might be interested in. Number one draft and I got the total sum in 1940 of four thousand dollars. Twenty years later Donny Anderson was number one draft for Green Bay and he got four hundred thousand dollars. I got four thousand. And about thirty years later Darryl Thompson from Minnesota got one million dollars for being number one draft. And I played more football on offensive and defense than those guys did. Now that...something isn't right there. I don't mind the difference in salaries and income, but that's too big a difference. Four thousand, four hundred and one million.

T: Yes. And it's only gone up from there, hasn't it?

H: Yes. That's right. It is. It's amazing.

T: I guess it's the "if" question. But if you'd only played football a couple generations later...

H: *(laughing)* Yes. That's quite a difference. Four thousand dollars doesn't last very long today. In fact, I have four thousand dollars a month to go to school now. That's what it is.

T: To get back to '43. So some people knew you as a professional football player but others didn't.

H: That's right. That's right. I wasn't that well known because you played football...unless you would have been the star on the team or something, and I just didn't happen to be quite that good.

T: Let me ask about flying missions from England. Do you remember the first mission that you flew?

H: Yes, I did. On April 24, 1944, we flew to Friedrichshafen, which is on the northern border of Switzerland. And of course, we were shooting at some oil targets down there and we had to be pretty accurate in what we were doing, and it was a good introductory mission because you had to get everything A-1 and ready to go. It wasn't just a training mission on the coast sometimes, which there are to start with. We dropped all the bombs from about eighteen to twenty thousand feet and had a very good mission. Friedrichshafen and then got home okay. We didn't lose too many airplanes on that, our group. And so that was what took place there.

**(1, A, 90)**

T: After all the training and the practicing, what kind of thoughts were going through your mind when it was suddenly for real?

H: Well, you mean as you're going from one mission to the next...?

T: On that first mission, for example. I mean, you'd done a lot of training in the States. You've been in England. Suddenly, on this first mission there's the chance that there is going to be real flak or fighters, and it's for real suddenly.

H: That's right. And you're flying in formation and you're pretty busy up there. If you're flying ten feet off somebody's wing at eighteen thousand feet, you're pretty busy trying to keep that airplane in its proper perspective, because there's two guys on your wings and there's another one on your tail. They have like a thing on their tail and their wings. So you're so busy doing that—unless you're being attacked, which we were, fundamentally, part way on the mission, until we get over the target. Then we're being shot at from down below with all the guns. All the anti-aircraft guns that they have. It's all part of it and it doesn't take you long to get...you become a seasoned veteran in a hurry.

T: I guess you have to.

H: You have to. Yes.

T: What was more disconcerting for you or more nerve wracking, the fighters or the flak?

H: I think it depends upon what mission you're on and how many fighters there are. Usually there's not too many fighters going into a target. They're hitting you very close to the target because they know you're busy trying to zero in, keeping that airplane in a nice attitude so you could bomb and so forth. So I think it depends upon, again, what mission. A lot of times we are busy keeping off the airplanes, and

then as we get to the target we just have the flak and that doesn't occur. We go on these ten and twelve hour missions where you're flying for six hours to get there and so you wouldn't have any flak until you got there, and then coming home you don't have any on the way because we don't fly over the cities to be able to get flak. We stay away from that as much as we can. The routes in or away. Except right over the target, of course. There. That's where you get the heavy flak.

T: So it sounds like a lot of relatively calm time in the air punctuated by some anxious moments over a target when the flak actually comes up.

H: That's probably the way to put it. But you're a pretty busy guy and you're flying. You're doing a little climbing all the way as you take off from the target and you form your—it takes an hour or so to get your whole group, twenty-one airplanes, in your formation. Their squadron. There's seven in a squadron and three squadrons. That's twenty-one airplanes. So it takes you quite a while to get those all in, and then you have to join another group. Be very close to where they are and you're doing this up there. You go so many miles over this way and that way to get a point, a rendezvous point, where you first get seven airplanes together and then you get twenty-one. Then you go from twenty-one and now you've got three groups together. All following. So it's quite a thing. It takes a little...you've got to be a little calm about it. You can't be too jerky or you won't even make your first flight (*chuckles*).

T: It's almost like putting a puzzle together. These pieces get bigger until the whole is assembled.

H: Yes. That's right. Til the whole is assembled and we're on the way to the target. Of course they're not, as a rule, they're not attacking us. Because we do our formation over England and then we take off over the Channel to hit. And that doesn't take long to get over the Channel. Maybe forty-five minutes or an hour at the most to get over the Channel to hit the coast. There's where you get hit sometimes. There is some flak on the coast. If you get a little off course. What's surprising is sometimes you're just flying along where it's straight and level and no enemy aircraft and all of a sudden boy, here are these bursts of flak and you got a little off course, about a mile or two, and down below they're shooting at you with their radar. Boy, they're pretty good. They're very accurate because they had a lot of practice. I tell you, for five years I think England—and I thank the Lord for the English. They did most of the flying for quite a while there before we got active in there.

**(1, A, 144)**

T: They did.

H: You gotta give them credit, by golly. A little nation like that up there. Little England. To take on the whole German deal, and that's quite a bit.

T: It is. Do you remember one of your eight completed missions being more difficult than any other?

H: I don't think there was any one. But I would say that we had three missions to Berlin. And when you're going to attack Berlin, that's like attacking New York City. You can be sure that New York City has its flak guns and pretty well loaded and enumerated too. The same way over there. And believe it or not, I flew three straight days to Berlin on missions where we had the whole Air Force of one thousand airplanes. Now that's a lot of airplanes in the air. When you've got a thousand. And boy, that keeps them pretty busy. By the time they got to the third day, there wasn't an enemy aircraft that even took off. They were all either shot down or they were without...they couldn't go down and gas up quite that fast to get back up again in a hurry and be very effective. So they just didn't come up about the third day. That's why we flew it three days in a row. I guess that is just about the toughest one that we had, I think. To be on missions that you fly that. Because you never know. If they miss you the first two, they maybe hit you on the third one. Either the aircraft or the anti-aircraft.

T: Watching people, other planes get shot down, and your group missing planes. How did that work on your own psyche? Was there a sense of, I'm going to get through this? I'm not worried. Or eventually I'm going to get it? How did you sort that out for yourself?

H: I think if you're busy flying and if you're any type of flying, you realize you're going to have certain tasks in the air and in the flying. You try to keep things within your scope and what you can handle. I just feel you're not thinking about being shot down because you're so doggone busy, and most of the mission you're not being shot at. It's just certain times there's going to be a group of fighters that's going to attack a certain group of bombers coming in, and you may get hit during that time. But you're so busy, you're not thinking about that. So I think it works out for almost everyone that way there. They're doing their best to keep it straight and level and flying on the way to the target.

T: So having your mind busy with other things, in a sense, didn't give you time to think about the possibilities of what could happen?

H: Oh, sure. Yes. You're not thinking about that. You're getting things, watching the old fuel gauge to be sure we're not running out of fuel, and watching if we're being attacked by airplanes. Being sure that we have enough shells in all of the guns and everything is going. So it's quite an experience to go. You're getting up about four thirty in the morning and you start...gosh, we'd get up at four thirty and by the time we'd form our formation of twenty-one airplanes it takes two, at least two, three hours. So it's seven-thirty or eight before you're leaving England and when you're going over on the continent, you don't get over on the continent until nine o'clock.

Now you've been up and you've been flying probably four or five hours by that time, and now you've got to fly all the way to the target. If it's Berlin, it's a long way. That's another four hours there. Or wherever your target is, is quite a ways in there. Sometimes it might be a short target over into France, but most of the time it's a good ten hours before you're back home. Then you go in for your briefing. And of course, your briefing is a good forty-five minutes to an hour. After you're doing that, you're going to get a chance to maybe eat and try to rest a little bit to go back to bed about eight or nine o'clock to get up at four thirty the next day. It's a very grueling time.

T: So physically grueling as well.

H: Physically it is. It's a very grueling time. And just because you're flying doesn't mean that you're not in the thick of it, because you can be in the thick of it pretty quick.

**(1, A, 201)**

T: Was your own plane, on the eight completed missions you had, hit by flak or fighters?

H: Yes. We got hit and we had about two, three hundred holes in our airplane from some anti-aircraft and stuff like that. So we got hit. We were hit several times. More than one hole is very visible.

T: So it was a real danger, in other words. The flak that was coming up wasn't just far away. It was right nearby.

H: That's right. If you're hit by direct flak from down below you never can tell. You're sitting on all these bombs and you've got gasoline in each wing of the airplane that's filled. You've got your wing tanks. Once you get hit in there—as a matter of fact, on the ninth mission where we did get hit, we got hit and then the airplane was on fire and we were at twenty-two thousand feet. The airplane—the wing was on fire—and it wouldn't have taken long for that fire to get over to the gas tank and then blow up. And when that happens, all that is left up there is just a bunch of dust. Once we got that signal that the wings were on fire and it's time to get out—I gave the order. Of course, at twenty-two thousand feet...I said I'm going to get the airplane down a little lower because the oxygen is pretty thin up at twenty-two thousand feet. Gotta get down around fifteen before it starts getting at least bearable.

T: On that mission on 12 May 1944, what hit your plane? Flak or fighters?

H: It was fighters. Fighters hit us, and our airplane being on fire at that altitude it was necessary first to get down a little ways and then to get all the men out of the airplane. Which we did. At about fifteen thousand feet.



T: So everyone got out of the plane.

H: Yes. I ordered everyone out. Of course, my bombardier always said to me, "I'm not leaving until you leave." So even though he was ordered to get out... See, we dropped our bombs. That's what you do—you get rid of your bombs. They could have been dropped on a church or a school or a city. Not a big city, because we tried to stay away from that even if we're coming down. So it was a pretty dangerous time trying to get out of the airplane. So we dropped our bombs. The bomb bay doors open.

T: Did you release the bombs? Or who releases the bombs?

H: No. The bombardier usually releases. I could do it from there, but not necessarily if the bombardier is around. So he'd do that. Dropped our bombs. Now, we go out through the bomb bay doors. In fact, a couple of enlisted men go out through the nose. There's a nose place you can jump out there without going to the bomb bay to have to bail out. That was quite a deal coming down. As a matter of fact...

T: To back up. Was Zwickau, the city of Zwickau, was that the target that day or were you on the way somewhere else?

H: Zwickau, that was the target that day. That's kind of an oil target.

We'd gotten hit and the old airplane was on fire, and we knew that if we stayed in there too long it's going to blow up. So we got out of there. I pulled kind of a funny deal there. All the other guys have chutes that are pretty close to them. You have a chute that they have very near, that hangs very near to where their operation is, where they are sitting. Of course, ours, the pilot and copilot, we have our chutes on the back of our seats. We've got to get up out of the seat and put on a chute up there with an airplane that's either going into a spin or—very seldom is it straight and level.

T: Yes.

H: In fact, the right wing was on fire. I had put out the engines on both three and four. So your airplane was on a very steep bank to the right. When you lose this, that wing doesn't go up when you lose the thrust of the motors.

**(1, A, 267)**

T: So three and four. It was your right wing that was on fire.

H: The right wing is down and you're going around like this. So I got up out of the seat and I'm heading for the bomb bay, and all of a sudden I realize I don't have my chute. You know, in all this furor that can go on when you're trying to get total of

ten men including yourself out of the airplane, I tell you, it's a pretty busy time and you're in a very precarious position at all times.

T: It's not very long, this time, either, is it?

H: No. It isn't very long. You gotta get out of that thing pretty quick there. So the deal of it is, I got up and I don't have my chute. I go back to the bomb bay. I'm heading for the bomb bay and I suddenly realize I don't have it. So I said to myself, I've got to get back up in my seat and try to get the airplane in somewhat of a flying position where you could get out of it yourself, or anybody else who hasn't gotten out. So that's what I did. I got back up there and I tried to right the airplane, which you have to do. Which means the right wing normally is down like that (*motions with hands*) when those engines are not, three and four, have been already extinguished there. So you had quite a time to do that. Then the main thing that helped me out was the autopilot. I had had good training when I was in the States on that. So if I could get that autopilot, at least the airplane is going to be in somewhat a flying position. It isn't going to be straight and level, but it's going to be somewhat...so you can get out of it. So I did that. Then I got out of my seat and I went back of the seat and I got my chute on. You think about it. How would it have been if you'd had gone ahead and jumped out of the bomb bay with no chute on?

T: You would have had two or three minutes on the way down to think about it.

H: I imagine that it's happened, because it can happen in the rush of everything that's going on and bullets and fire and whatnot. Anyway, that's what kind of saved...and my bombardier hadn't left the airplane. Because you remember he said, "I don't leave until you do." So when I left, he left right after me. We were scattered over several miles, because the first guy out is probably...maybe he's five miles back. The next one maybe four and a half, and four, and so on, back. And by the time you go out you're not sure where they went down. It isn't that you can all get together and now huddle together, because we're not all on the ground at the same time. It doesn't occur that way. You're coming down and each one of us, by golly, we did meet, and we were caught. I hit the roof of a house. I tried to figure out where I was going to land, and then I couldn't do that.

T: Talk about what's going through your mind as you're coming down in this chute, because it's clear that you're coming down over Germany, and there's a number of things that could happen to you.

H: That's right. Well, the first thing is when your chute opens, and it opens with quite a jolt, because you're going out at over one hundred miles an hour. When the chute finally opens you're going to get quite a jerk. That doesn't do your back any good then either. A lot of times, backs are hurt doing that. And the problem with that also, when you start to come down you swing from side to side in a parachute, and you find out that the shroud lines, which go up to the canopy on one side, when you're swinging over to that side are now, they're not tight. They're loose and what

happens, the chute collapses. About a fourth of it up there will collapse, and you drop about fifteen, twenty feet until the thing fills up again. You go down and you swear you're going to go all the way. You swear you're just going to go all the way to the earth. That's the scariest thing of the whole thing is having that happen. Then as you swing from side to side, then you swing over here and these shroud lines are not tight and of course, what happens? You go down another ten, fifteen, twenty feet. Finally, after going back and forth it will settle down and as you get down closer to the earth it just seems that the help of oxygen and everything that you're having a better ride down than when you first get out of a plane. We have had no training ahead of time. We haven't had chances to go up and do that. That isn't part of our training.

T: So your first and last, I take it, parachute jump was this one?

H: That's right. That's right. That's what it is. I thought I could tell. And you're going sideways sometimes as you're swinging, and you're going this way and you're going sideways, and you don't know which way you're going to go, because you swing way over here and you look over there and you're looking twenty-five miles that way and then twenty over here. You can't tell where you're going to go, and all of a sudden, finally, as I'm getting down...I'm getting closer to the earth. Boy, it comes up fast. I can't tell. So I came over and hit the roof of a house, the second story of a house, and I hit on the close side and I ran up over the top and the chute is still kind of carrying me to some degree. Then I ran down the other side and I'm on the second story and I gotta jump off the second story of the house and I jumped into a fence where there was a fence around the forest. Around the forest over there is where I got hurt. My back was really was the worst when I hit the fence there.

It wasn't long before one of these Nazi kids who was about seventeen years of age, blue coveralls on, comes over and, boy! I'm trying to get my chute off so I could get it out of there and kind of cover it up in the woods there, on the edge of the woods, and run someplace.

**End of Tape 1, Side A. Tape 1, Side B begins at counter 380.**

T: So your chute—just to pick the story up—you're down on the ground and you're seen almost immediately by someone.

H: Yes. It wasn't long before I was getting ready to get that chute covered up and run farther into the woods where I thought I might be able to hide and work my way out of there. What happened, there was a kid. He came along and kind of wrestled with me for a while. He had a...

T: On the way down in your parachute, were you thinking about really what might happen to you when you hit the ground?

H: You're pretty busy and you're pretty concerned with the flight down and trying to keep right side up and make sure that you're straight and level this way and what

you are. And there were some airplanes seemed to be going over very closely. Because the whole Air Force that were on is still coming and flying over. If we were in the front of the Air Force, we would have probably still be coming down when the tail end of it maybe hadn't quite, hadn't passed that point yet.

T: So the whole aerial battle, in a sense, is going on without you. You've just sort of dropped out of it.

H: Oh, yes. That's right. You're just dropped out of it. That's what happened. Then you're hitting. Now you're in a different scene entirely in the woods. I tried to get away from him and he turned around and he said, "Shoot." I turned around and he's got a pistol in my back. Of course, I thought of trying to wrestle him, but it was pretty dumb. We don't have guns. We're not allowed to carry a gun. You can see why. The reason why is that the first guy who is out of an airplane on a mission, if he had a gun, the whole German defense are notified and they'd shoot you, because in Germany almost every area was in security by people. In the country. In the cities. Everybody was armed with guns. And they would sit there and it would be just like shooting ducks. Sitting there. They would be shooting as you were sitting coming down in the chute. And it would be pretty easy to get you and kill you.

T: Yes. So you were not armed and this kid was.

H: Nobody was armed. And people are surprised. But just think about it once. They are not allowed to carry a gun. If you do carry one, it's just too bad because the next guys are going to be shot at by...because there's a guy in charge of this mile here, and the next mile over there's a security guy there. There's a security guy there. Round the cities and so on. No. You're not going to be lucky enough to be able to have a gun.

T: What happened when this young man has a gun on you? Take the story from there. What's happening to you?

H: When he said he had a gun I just said to myself, well, okay, I'm a prisoner of war. I've got no choice. So he just took me from there and he took me just a little short ways into town. I was put into the local jail. There were two of the others, two of my other officers. The navigator and my copilot. One of them had landed in a tree and hurt himself and so on. My tail gunner was not too well off. He had landed, also, in a tree and not doing well. But we met in the jail here with two, three of them. Then down the way, there was another group that were caught. So almost all of them were caught. Prisoners. No one got away and escaped that we knew. So it wasn't too long before we were on the way. We had taken a train. They put us on a train to go to the—we went to Frankfurt for our interrogation.

**(1, B, 423)**

T: At the Dulag Luft facility.

H: Yes. That's right. Frankfurt. And there they interrogated us to find out—and they knew more about it, more about the mission than we did. I mean, after all, look at the hundreds of missions we flew over Germany. It isn't very long before they pretty well know just what you're trying to do and where you're going, what your targets are. But we outnumbered them. That's the thing. And we just were better all the way around in the things we were doing.

T: That little jail you were held at. How long did you stay there?

H: We were there just about a day or so, because as soon as they got the prisoners together on this mission, that something had happened, then they were putting you were on a train. We had some guards who were guarding us and we were on our way to Stalag Luft III, which is up in Poland. That's our camp where there were two thousand prisoners up there.

T: You went to Dulag Luft facility first from Zwickau, right?

H: That's right. Dulag Luft was temporary. Stalag was permanent. That's what the words mean, I guess.

T: What do you remember about your time at the Dulag Luft facility?

H: Not too much. I did run into a person who interrogated me who spoke very good English. Interrogated me, and he knew just about everything that we were doing and how we were flying and so nothing...almost every day there was, there wouldn't be a maximum effort of one thousand airplanes, but there might be two hundred of them, and they're going over here, and another two hundred here, and another two hundred here, on these missions. Germany was just getting it all day long, all month long. So it was pretty tough for them. And you figure that the people who were at home, they weren't getting any sleep, because at night we were—and the British, of course, were bombing at night more. They did more bombing at night. So even at night there wasn't much rest for the Germans. They were catching it all the way through.

T: What kind of questions did they ask you at Dulag Luft?

H: Just the normal. They know most everything you're going to tell them. What time do you get up, and where are you forming, and what level were you flying when you came in, and what other targets were you hitting. So nothing you were giving them was anything secret. So it was just kind of a—to me—a waste of time for them to do it, because they know everything you're doing anyway. But they want to check your answers. If you're trying to evade them and give them a couple lies, they don't like that. I'm pretty certain they will make it a little tough on you. And you never know what you're going to be put into. Solitary confinement or something. Because they

know what's going on and you better be truthful, because they know all about it before they even ask you.

T: Were you kind of aware of that? In other words, before you were shot down, how much talk or information did you have about what might happen if you got shot down or what might happen if you were a POW? Did you know that kind of stuff?

H: We didn't spend much time talking about that, because we didn't think we're going to get shot down. I mean that's the thing—you go on the idea that you're not going to get it.

T: Did you really believe that?

H: Oh, yes. Yes. You're up there and you're fighting for your life all the way and you're not sure when you're going to get it, but there's no point in spending a lot of time on something that's going to happen anyway. So you got enough to worry about if you're busy, if you're a pilot and you're going to be studying the routes in and how you're doing this. There are certain things that the navigator's got to know what he's doing and the bombardier's gotta know. There's something secret that you're doing. Sometimes we have secret things on airplanes. So we just don't...you don't spend a lot of time on the negative aspects of it.

**(1, B, 468)**

T: So you weren't, in a sense, you wouldn't say you were prepared for what might happen if you were a POW? It's just kind of learning by going there.

H: No. You're not interested in that, because that's so far away. If it happens, it's going to happen. There's nothing you can do about it. So that's the way it went.

T: How long were you kept at the Dulag Luft facility that you remember?

H: Dulag Luft. I would say I was there about, oh gosh. We were there maybe seven, eight days. Then we were gathered together and put on a train and went all the way over into Poland to Stalag III.

T: How many times were you questioned by the Germans at Dulag Luft?

H: That was about, I think maybe when we first got in they wanted to know. They kept maybe the pilots down here, and they kept the navigators and bombardiers sometimes in another place where they could interview them and so forth. There weren't too many differences there. Some of our enlisted men, they shipped them out right away because they're not flying the airplane and they're not bombing, so there's no point in providing facilities for them. They stayed there. They just got on a train and they took them to their—there were so many camps in Germany. An amazing number of camps. The Air Corps. We had two thousand prisoners in Stalag

Luft III, which meant there were about, oh gosh...I'm sorry. When I said two thousand, I meant two thousand in each little division. We had an east, west, north, south, and a central division where there were two thousand people in each one of those. That's a total of ten thousand officers. Can you imagine ten thousand officers have already been shot down and are prisoners of war? You say, well, we don't have any left, do we? You'd think that, wouldn't you?

T: Yes. That's an awful lot of people.

H: That's an awful lot of trained professional people that have. I go to pilot school for six months to learn how to fly the airplane, and each one has the same type of school they're going to someplace. Even the gunners go for, not for six months, but they go for two, three months anyway. So, anyway, that's the way the thing...

T: You were put on a train to go over to Luft III, at Sagan?

H: Yes.

T: Were you in this train by yourself or with other officers or enlisted men?

H: Yes. Other officers. A whole bunch that had been shot down in that whole complete area there. There was enough of them being shot down so[that there] are even special trains for this. Of course, that's one thing in Germany. They have a lot of trains. They're going all the time.

T: How long did that train trip take to get over to Sagan that you recall?

H: I don't know. It seemed to me it was two, three days. A couple of days from there anyway before we came into our camp and where we get interviewed again.

T: That's Sagan at Luft III.

H: Yes. You get interviewed again to get your place. Wherever you're going to be put. And you finally do get put to a certain camp there with some of the fellows you know. Some of them you don't. I was in Block 163 over in Sagan [Stalag Luft III]. We had twelve men in our room.

T: And which of the compounds?

**(1, B, 508)**

H: Well, we were in the West Compound. And there was a North, East, South, and West, and Central in the center of camp.

T: You mentioned the barracks you were in. Talk about that. How big was it? What kind of conditions were there?

H: It was like a normal barracks. Maybe we have similar barracks on air bases in the United States. They got a bunch of boards for all the sideboards and everything, and we'd have triple bunks or triple beds. One on the bottom and middle and top. Because they had to get twelve men in a room. And that's a lot of men to get in a room. So you weren't sleeping too well when you're in the middle or wherever you are. Somebody moves up there and the whole bed shakes, you know. So that's what you have to contend with. For everybody else it's the same thing. So it's nothing that's new.

Then our food. We'd have to go to a certain place where we'd all have our evening meal or our breakfast or our next meal.

T: How many meals a day were there?

H: Normally at night is your biggest meal. The other two were very light in food. They didn't have very much, which is understandable. Because where you going to get food to feed ten thousand more people than you were before? That takes a lot of work and a lot of effort and a lot of money to get things there. So it wasn't...well, and you have to give the Red Cross, by golly. If you were never a believer in the Red Cross, you ought to be when you see what they've done. Providing food. They provided parcels of food. Cans were about like that. They'd come. Each man got a parcel of food that big.

T: A standard Red Cross parcel box.

H: Once a week. Once a week. It had meat in some of them, and it had vegetables, and it had fruit inside. Without their help, holy cats, we would have been in bad shape. Now the Germans provided potatoes and that stuff and so on. But I'm thankful to the Red Cross. My wife had worked for—she got a fifty-year pin the other day for working fifty years in the Red Cross. That's pretty good. And by golly, they did their—they came out of Switzerland. That's where the headquarters of the Red Cross is, International Red Cross. And the parcels would come by train.

T: Do you remember getting the parcels regularly?

H: Well, they were fairly regular. They would be kept out in the *Vorlager*, we called it. Once a week we'd get one of those. Though finally it got so that when the Americans would come over, they'd be bombing a train. Sometimes they'd bomb the train. The Germans would say well, there you are. This is your food. Your own people are bombing your trains bringing the food in. So you don't get any food for this day or that four or five days or a week. You don't get canned stuff. You get what other stuff they had. Bread and stuff. They had a cook. They did that right there at the camp. Loaves of bread and so on.

T: Now you arrived at Luft III in June of 1944, wasn't it?



H: Yes, June.

T: And were there until the camp was evacuated in the beginning of 1945.

H: In January '45. We got out of there when the Russians were making their all-out drive for Berlin.

T: Now during that six or seven months you were there, did you notice a change in the amount of food that was available or the kind of food that you got as a prisoner?

H: Well, yes. I would say we noticed that the amount of food would be less because, first of all, they were shooting up the trains and they couldn't keep feeding all these prisoners in the fashion which the Red Cross or your big manual says that they're supposed to. A prisoner of war is supposed to be able to get this. Those were just words. When it comes time to get your food, if it isn't there, it isn't there. They'd say well, we're trying to get the food to you but your own airplanes and your own people are shooting it down. So what can we do?

**(1, B, 564)**

T: So you noticed a decrease in the amount of food.

H: Right.

T: Let me ask about the Germans. How much interaction did you have with the Germans either as the guards or the administration of the camp?

H: Not too much. It's run—like in each camp there's one person, there's a German that's the head of this one, say Block 163, where we had over one hundred. Maybe 120 people in this one barracks. In the end rooms there's maybe two or three. In the next room there's eight or nine. In the middle rooms there's twelve to fifteen people. We had twelve in ours. So somebody's in charge of this whole place here and in each room the ranking officer is the head one, and so if they want anything they go to the ranking officer in that room. It's run like a military camp. You have to have guys all ready to go, and they know that we have meetings ourselves. They know that. So we never knew when we were going to get busted in on by the Germans. Because there's a head guy in each room and they brought us information. We better not start horsing around.

T: Now you were a captain by this time. Were you the ranking officer in your room?

H: I was the ranking officer in my room. Yes.

T: What kind of responsibilities did that bring for you as far as...

H: Oh, it's just first we have to keep everything...we aren't supposed to be making a lot of noise or a lot of things that you normally wouldn't do anyway. You better not horse around or anything, or they're going to make it pretty tough on you. They would do that. And down at the end of the rooms a major would be down there. In the end room where there's only one or two people. They were in charge.

We lined up. We had to be counted every day. Twice a day. Be counted in the morning around seven, seven thirty, and if anybody... Sometimes we would miss one man or two men. Sometimes a man was sick and he'd go to sick call from there. So pretty soon we're short a man or two and until they could find him and identify him—they thought that maybe he escaped—they'd keep us out standing for three, four hours sometimes. Out on the parade grounds where they counted us. Simply because they had to find out. If you were missing and there's one guy missing, that's just like ten guys. They'd keep us there for so long. Finally get us back. But that's normal. To keep the camp going. Otherwise there would be bedlam in there and they wouldn't be sure how many guys are going to be in. They never knew when we might sneak a gun in there some way or other depending upon what our facilities were and so forth.

T: Now they had the roll call as you mentioned. Was there a daily routine that things happened on a regular basis? Meals, roll calls, etc.

H: Your meals were almost at a regular time every day. Breakfast is maybe eight o'clock in the morning. Whatever breakfast there was. Coffee and whatnot. And at noon, it's the same thing. Then we were allowed to walk around the inside perimeter, barbed wire facility. We did that all the time. We would walk and you get so you wanted to keep yourself in pretty good shape. In fact, we would do our own exercising, and they let us do that. They didn't bother us as we were doing our own exercising. There would be one guy in charge and you'd be doing the side straddle hop and all the stuff you do together. The guys that wanted to stay in pretty good shape, they did simply by doing the exercising. But you lost a lot of weight. For example, I lost fifty pounds, and that's a lot of weight. That's from being in the prison camp, from the time I went in to when I got out.

T: In May 1945, you mean.

H: That's right.

T: Thinking about your own weight, did you lose a lot of weight at Sagan or really after once the camp was evacuated?

**(1, B, 627)**

H: I don't know. I lost all the weight at Sagan. In the camp. Yes. When we got out of there, of course, we could get all we wanted to eat back on our own base before we came back and went to the United States.

T: Now you were there for a number of months. Did you notice the importance of having friends, people to depend on?

H: Oh, yes. You get to know the men that have the wherewithal, the ability to govern and be over men and are not tough on you. And you knew the ones...a lot of times there were guys that escaped. Some nights there would be one or two that would escape from this camp. You're doing that all the time. That's your job. Your job is to try to escape.

T: Did you believe that yourself?

H: Oh, yes [I believe that]. But I'm not one of them (*laughs*). I didn't care to do. I had enough of it when I first got out of the camp. I know what it is to be locked up and so on. So there's no point in trying to be a big hero when you know what's going to happen if they catch you.

T: Wait a minute. On the one hand, you say you saw it as a duty to escape, and yet you yourself weren't interested in doing that.

H: Yes. You're not going to go...well, you've got guys sitting up in a guard tower about every half a block all the way around the outside perimeter of this thing. You're not going to try to escape when they're sitting up there with machine guns and rifles and so forth. That's just dumb (*chuckles*).

T: And yet, from your recollection, did people talk about escaping?

H: Oh, they do [talk about escaping] to some degree. There's always a committee, and sometimes you're not on the in, so you don't know who they are. But there is a group in each camp, and in each building, and in each room there is maybe one that is a part of the elite corps that is trying to escape or has the information to escape. Most guys are not in that category. You don't have that many good men.

T: Did anyone ever contact you and say, "Listen, Van Every, we're planning this or would you like to part of that?" Or did you just know it existed and weren't part of it?

H: It existed, and a lot of times fellows are being injured from bailing out of an airplane. Look, I've got a bad back. I'd be foolish to try to do something with my back. I got all I can do to walk down the road, let alone to try to escape. So I'm not interested in that. I mean, a guy's smart enough to know that. There'd be a few fellows that would want to do that and could handle it. We had one out of Wayzata here that was pretty good too, that you probably have talked to in the camp.

T: Did you make what you consider to be close friends or good friends at Sagan?

H: Oh, yes. You will always find several buddies. By several, maybe in the block there might be three or four that are pretty close to you and you begin to know them and you know more about them and their families. When you come home, I've had certain literature that comes to me every now and then with somebody from over there. It's interesting to see how they're doing. Yes. It's quite a deal.

T: People you've kept in touch with, in other words, since you met them.

H: That's right. That's right.

T: At Sagan, what kind of—shifting a bit—what kind of news did you have or receive about how the war was going? You're on an island, in a sense, in the middle of nowhere.

H: See our elite corps, the one where we got probably in the barracks we got three, four men that are on the in, really in. They were listening to the radio. They had at their disposal a radio, and almost every night or every day there were reports of how the war was coming and how many airplanes were shot down on the next mission. We were getting that information right along. We knew exactly what was going on. How we were coming and so forth. But you had to be very careful who they gave that information to because sometimes it's to the wrong people, and it's to somebody that doesn't know how to handle the situation.

**(1, B, 705)**

T: How was it that you were one of the people who got that information?

H: It would filter down and finally in the room one of the guys, being I was the captain, I would be called up to one of the rooms along the way and they would give us the latest news. We did this. That was kind of the normal thing to find out how the whole war was coming and how close the...so we knew that there was, well, we knew when the invasion started [Normandy June 1944] and which way it was coming. And we knew how close the Russians were, coming from the East. They and the invasion people were going towards Berlin. Whoever got there first was going to dictate the peace, and Russia almost got there.

T: So you would say that you were kept fairly well abreast of events, war events, outside your camp.

H: Yes.

T: How about the importance for you, personally, of rumors? Were there rumors around too of what was happening and what wasn't?

H: Oh, yes. You always got a lot of rumors, because people are very...well, they're interested in listening to somebody else. Somebody is talking and he seems to have

more information. The trouble is, you're too eager to get the information where it isn't that important and it didn't quite occur that way. But you're so eager to find out how things are coming and when you could get out of there, that a lot of times you wouldn't get the truth.

T: So there was, in a sense, I hear you saying, the news you were getting through radio reports from people on the in, and then there were rumors that may or may not have anything to do with the truth.

H: That's right. Guys are making up...well, you could start a rumor down at this end of the camp and you should hear what it was by the time it got down to this end of the camp. My gosh! You wouldn't believe it. Because people just make a big story out of it.

T: Sure.

H: That's normal. We're all the same in that.

T: Yes. People want to know, don't they?

H: Oh, yes.

T: How would you describe the relations between prisoners in the block you were in, the one you could observe closely? How well did people get along?

H: I think we got along pretty good. We very seldom hear or see a fight between prisoners in a room because they couldn't get along or because there were things happening. Somebody trying to steal something from another guy or something. You see, you put about twenty guys into a place where there's less food than they were used to and, by golly, they towed the mark pretty good because all you gotta do is not feed people for a while and by golly, you can get them to do almost anything.

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

T: Talking about Luft III. You were married. You were married in July of 1942, so by the time you were shot down, you had been married almost two years.

H: Yes.

T: What kind of news were you able to get back to your wife back here in the States about your condition, your location?

H: Well, of course, after a month of being missing in action they notified a wife by telegram that so and so has been missing. Drex [Harold's wife Drexel] didn't hear for a month and half, I'll bet, that I was a prisoner. She didn't get that right away, but eventually it got so that we could write when we were in our permanent camp. We

got paper and pencil and they'd allow us to write, and we'd go ahead and write. I guess the Red Cross paid for the stamps. Of course, we never knew whether they'd take all the letters and put them in the stove (*laughs*). They could. But we were able to write, and I got so, like Drex said, she was hearing, oh, I'd be writing every now and then as I could.

T: So you found out later she did get some of the letters you sent from Sagan.

H: Oh, yes. I don't know how many. Wait, I'll ask her. (*calls to Drexel Van Every, in next room*) Drex.

Drexel Van Every (*coming into the room*): Yes.

H: How often did you get letters from me, from Sagan. Once a week?

Drex: Oh, no. Oh, I can't really judge that. I wrote every day myself, but you know... I can't really say. I didn't get those regularly. I was going to say... They're right here, let me look (*starts to look through box of letters; interview with Mr. Van Every continues*).

T: Harold, let me ask how often you remember writing.

H: I'd probably write at least once a week hoping that one letter or two would get through and knowing that some would be destroyed on the way and not get there. So, you keep right on writing. What else can we do? We got all day to do our...then we'd walk around the camp.

T: How did you pass your time? Because there's a lot of time every day.

H: Every day you could go out and walk around the perimeter of this barbed wire, and you don't try to escape because there's double barbed wire and guards sitting up in the towers. It's just not for trying to escape. You're dumb to do that because they'd shoot you just like that. That's the way we kept going.

T: You mentioned exercising. You could walk.

H: Yes.

T: Writing letters.

H: Yes. Except the trouble is, I was...let's see, that was done in May and it was still cold over there. Holy cats! That winter that we had there [1944-45] was as cold a winter as they'd had in, I don't know, thirty, forty years they said. When we went on our march, and I should mention that to you too, they marched us out of there on January 12. During my wife's birthday we left out of the camp. Because that was when the Russians were coming, and if we didn't get out of there, the Russians were

liable to shoot the whole doggone bunch of us. They were going right towards Berlin and we, our camp, was right in the way. They were going to get to Berlin quicker than the Allies were over here which were coming this way.

T: Yes.

H: They got in the edge of Germany you know, and they couldn't get in there any further and we're inside where all the trouble could be.

T: You were east of Berlin too.

**(2, A, 38)**

H: Yes. A long way in there. That's right.

T: As the months you spent there at Sagan or even, let's say, after when you were at Nürnberg or even at Moosburg at the end there, would you consider yourself an optimistic person? Kind of keeping an optimistic look on things or was that difficult?

H: It's hard to do, but you hear that things are coming, and we would get the news. Maybe we'd get yesterday's news today. Yesterday's news would be a day old, but we were getting it from the... We get through our training and we had some pretty sharp guys. They are able to get radios, little small radios. A guy could get a little parcel from home and it would have...maybe it's got a pair of shoes in there, or a pair of any type of a clothes item, and pretty soon somebody would...and maybe they'd hide a battery or two in there.

Pretty soon, after a period of time, it might take six months, but a guy has got the parts to a regular radio and then you could bargain one of these Germans every now and then. Just start bargaining one of the Germans, and pretty soon we'd get to him and get certain other parts, and pretty soon they got the parts for a radio and somebody puts a radio together. There were some pretty sharp guys. You take two thousand men, you're going to have some pretty sharp individuals I'll tell you.

T: You mean there was bargaining going on with the Germans for certain things?

H: Oh, yes. Some of the guards. You might be able to take a guard or two, which wasn't...he isn't going to let anybody know. He'd help out a little bit maybe. And they'd never tell on him. If they ever did, boy, his life is over. But we know some of that is going on. You're bound to find it. I never knew who they were. But you'd hear this, and our news stream would be pretty darned good. We knew what they were doing.

T: So this was going on with a certain in group. You were not in this group.

H: I was not in the in group. There was just a few that they thought they could really trust, and we are able to do this and get the information. But we'd get the information. At night they'd call us, the head guys, out of each room, they'd call us down to this one room. We had to station guys on security places so if a German guard was close to there we had to be sure that they weren't going to get in and get a chance to listen or anything.

T: So that's how you got the news passed to you, in a sense.

H: It's passed. Then you kind of believe most of it. First you want to believe it, because it looks like the war is getting over. Yes. You're bound to get some information that way.

T: Let me move on the evacuation of the camp. January of 1945, the Russians are moving in from the east.

H: That's right.

T: And the camp's location in what is today Poland, then was Silesia, had to be evacuated.

H: Yes.

T: How did you find out personally that the camp was going to be evacuated and how much advance warning did you have?

H: It was on my wife's birthday. By golly, if we didn't leave out of that camp January 12, 1945. Thirty below. Geez, we heard the Russians are coming and by golly, we better get out of there, and we were supposed to walk. They were all for us. The Germans walked right with us. The guards. We got rid of the camp but the guards, they kept order on this camp. We had to be in certain numbers and we had to march together like we were just in the infantry practically, because we had to get out of there and get out of there fast. Russia was here and they were coming over into Berlin, and we were here and we had to get down south and southeast. We had to get down there in a hurry. So by golly, we got out of there.

T: So you remember not much advance warning for the evacuation.

**(2, A, 81)**

H: No sir. Boy, you had to get going and get out of there, because the Russians were coming. You never knew what those Russians are going to do.

T: At the time, Mr. Van Every, did you fear the Russians or did you, as an ally, did you see them as a liberator?



H: We weren't too happy, all happy, but they were making us move. Of course, we didn't know where we were going to go, where we were going to stay, where we were going to have food. Nothing.

T: They didn't tell you this.

H: No way.

T: Just, "We're leaving."

H: Oh, yes. We're leaving. We're all ready to pull out at midnight, and the clothes that you have is all you have. We didn't have warm clothes.

T: What did you have with you?

H: We just had whatever clothes we got and came down in. That's about all we had. Shoes, and some of them didn't even have the shoes. They had tennis shoes. And that's about all they had, and they had to move. You get out there and it's twenty below zero, and geez, we stayed—I slept in barns, we didn't go into houses because there was no room. We were on the outside of cities.

T: The march from Sagan went to the city of Spremberg.

H: Yes.

T: Where you got onto a train and that was number of days, wasn't it? The march to Spremberg.

H: Yes. Spremberg is a railroad center. We knew there were trains. Once we got down there, first I think we marched about fifty to sixty miles. That's a long way.

T: From Sagan to Spremberg.

H: Yes. That's a long way.

T: Let me ask you about that march. What are your memories of the days marching?

H: It's cold. As long as you keep going and keep marching you stayed warm enough so that you didn't fall by the wayside. Some guys did. You'd always lose [guys] on a march. You're going to lose several guys. Either that tried to escape, or it was too cold, or because they were injured in their airplane when they came down and they're not in good health. You never knew when you were going to lose a man. But there were so many.

The next place where you stopped they had everybody counted. Everybody counted, and the Germans were there. See, the German guards are thirty-five, forty, forty-five. They're not real soldiers. They're guards. Some of them would be pretty

darned good soldiers but they had taken older men. They take older people who could be a guard. The way they talk them into it, I don't know how they do. They'd be a guard and that's what they do for the rest of the war. Maybe their home was five hundred miles away. We didn't know.

T: On this march to Spremberg from Sagan, did you stay by yourself or did you march with a couple of the same people?

H: Oh, yes. We'd be with our whole block 163, it stays together. Move as a block. Like this Bob McWhite. He was one of the two, three guys right up front. He was in good shape. His legs were strong. He was ready to lead our bunch and he did. Did a nice job. In fact, he's been...I was the head of the group here back about ten, fifteen years ago. Prisoner of War group [Ax-POWs].

T: Yes. Bob led that too, didn't he?

**(2, A, 117)**

H: Yes. Bob had this for three years. He's just now finishing. On the twenty-fourth of this month he's had it three years. Real good. He's from Wayzata, and of course that's the town I'm from. But I didn't know before then. Isn't that funny? Met him over there in camp.

T: What about the food on this march from Sagan to Spremberg? Think of those days that you were marching. How did they feed you?

H: We'd carry this package [Red Cross parcel]. They gave us one a week, and it's about that high and about that big around. There's no handle or anything.

T: The Red Cross package.

H: Yes. You had to make your own handle and to carry that, and even that was tough because you'd carry it this way for maybe a half a mile...

T: Like under your arm.

H: Boy, that's tough. Some guys were able to make out of an old shirt or something, make a bag that could hang around your neck that would hang here. Oh, it was terrible, what you had to do. You ought to see the way some of these guys dressed. They'd grab stuff, you know, and put on them. Just to stay warm. But it was funny, but it worked so, by golly, you do it. That was quite a march.

T: Where did you sleep at night?

H: Most of the time we'd try to sleep in the barn. We'd be going by and there's farms out there. We'd stop and they have a barn. They might take as many as one

hundred or two hundred in the barn. You'd try to grab a little straw and hay over here, and that's where we slept every night.

T: Do you recall when the camp was emptied all the prisoners staying together, or were you in a smaller group?

H: You mean in the barn?

T: No. I mean as you're marching. Is it the entire camp population or had the Germans broken the camp into smaller groups?

H: They did. And this is because they don't know how the infantry moves and they're not smart. They started out with the idea you start out marching and then the first group would stop and they'd get a ten minute rest out of every hour. Let's say they'd go up to ten minutes to the hour and then they'd get ten minutes to the hour and then they'd start marching again on the next. But what happened, after a while they weren't smart enough to stop and give them that ten minutes. Each group, see? Each one would do this. At the start they were doing this. The first groups get their rest out here. Ten minute rest. And the next group or the third group might get three minutes and finally the fifth or sixth group back here got no because they were still marching and these guys were getting up to go on the next hour.

T: I see.

H: It was just poor. They didn't know how you march in the infantry. What you do. Everybody goes down at a certain time and you got five or ten minutes to rest.

T: You had been in the infantry, hadn't you, so you knew some of this.

H: I knew all of the stuff to do. We would try to do that but sometimes you didn't, and by golly, you were on your feet an awful lot during the day. Then we'd finally get into a place at night.

But these guys, it's magic what they could do and what they could make with their hands and stuff that would...

T: Your fellow prisoners, you mean.

H: Yes. That would hold food and so forth that you would use. Each one at night would make a little fire, and we'd be around the fire. We had things going. It's amazing what they [other POWs] would do. And the German guards were right with us. Heck, we'd have to feed them half the time because, where are they going to go? A German guy. What is he going to do? He has to mind our whole bunch all the way himself. He just wanted to be at home with his family.

T: I don't hear you describing these German guards on this march as sadistic or anything.

H: No. No. They're not. As a rule they're not that way, because they're not that many anyway. If you're any good at all, you're up on the front fighting. The Americans are coming over here. They're not back marching with a bunch of prisoners. And some of them, you felt sorry for them. They had a hard time coming. They didn't have adequate clothes, and we'd give them a little food once in a while because they'd have a hard time getting it.

T: Holy cow! This is...

H: They'd have to stop at some place, but as a rule they tried to take care of themselves. We would make the old march.

T: What was the most difficult part of that for you personally, of that march from Sagan to Spremberg?

H: I think the cold weather [was the most difficult part]. When it's that cold, and there's nothing you can do about it. You can't get away from it. The Russians are coming over here and you better get going. And we're going down this way to get away from them. That's it. We couldn't stop. We had to keep going because everybody was saying hey, those Russians. God! We were afraid at night they'd come in. With their trucks and tanks would be ahead of them. We could be taken over just like that. Or they'd shoot you.

T: Your perception was that it was good to be moving away from the Russians.

H: Oh, yes. And then down. After a while we weren't blaming the Germans. They had to move us to get out of the way. God! When you've got that many—now this is just one Air Corps camp. They had other Air Corps camps.

T: Right.

H: And they had enlisted man camps. All over Germany. It was amazing.

T: Let me ask you. When you got to Spremberg, it was by train that you went with others to Nürnberg to Stalag XIII-D.

H: Yes.

T: What do you remember about that railroad journey?

H: I don't. I knew we were getting away from the Russians. We were going a little bit south towards maybe our own troops. See, we were coming in a long line from here where the invasion was all down that France coast. We knew that we had

troops all along the way and they're all coming this way. So it isn't going to be too long before we're going to see our own troops. Of course, they were still hundreds of miles away but we were...it wasn't hard to dream a little bit and think by gosh, they're going to be coming in here pretty quick. And by golly they were.

T: Talk about the train trip from Spremberg to Nürnberg.

H: Well, what can I remember about the train trip? We tried to get as much rest and sleep as we could on the train. It was pretty hard to do.

T: Boxcars or passenger cars?

H: Boxcars. Where there is straw and whatnot. That's all we can remember. We still were hanging together, two or three guys in each little group out of our twelve in our room. I imagine we had two or three little segments of people there where there were three or four in this group and three or four in this. Always watching out for the other guy.

(2, A, 203)

T: Who were you with?

H: Bob McWhite was one of them. He'd be one of those that would be taking care of somebody else. You're maybe practically carrying somebody else to be sure he could make it. It was no picnic. But that's what you do with your buddies that are coming along. Finally a guy, if he can take care of himself, fine. He comes along. He's marching. Not very fast, but he's walking.

T: On the train were you someone who offered help or needed help?

H: I could help out where I could. And sometimes I did help out. A lot of times I didn't. I didn't ask for much help because I felt even though I didn't have a good back that I could take of myself. But Bob would tell you he probably helped out with a lot of them, and he was up front in the marching and the crews. This was before getting on the train. He would be up front, and he would go walking right ahead, leading the whole bunch. He was a good one. He was a good leader.

T: How did the Germans feed you on the train?

H: Again, we had our Red Cross parcels.

T: Still carrying those things with you.

H: Yes. Yes. We were on the train. We knew that they had a number of parcels. Thank the Lord for those. If the Red Cross hadn't done that, there would have been a lot of guys not there. You've got to give them credit.

T: Was the train, from your memory, attacked by Allied planes at all on the road to Nürnberg?

H: We did have a couple scares because our own airplanes were shooting at the trains because they weren't sure right away which train was carrying the food, and which was carrying the German soldiers, and which they wanted to shoot at. So, yes, there were some very close calls that we had that way. We were in tunnels for a period of time where they wouldn't take the train out until they were sure it was clear. There were certain incidents. I can't remember any one in particular where something happened like that, but that's all part of it. There's no one thing that happened that was the same each time. Each period of time away from your main base you're having to do things on the spot that you've never done before. There was guys that did things that were amazing. You ought to see the way some of those guys could cook or make food or do things.

T: Are you talking about in the camps now?

H: No. Out on the road. When you're marching. The things, it's amazing what they could do. Yes. And you just wish that you were more self-sufficient and able to take care of yourself and do this and that, but my golly, there's certain guys that could do that and there are guys that aren't.

T: In a sense, it's the differences in human beings.

H: Yes. Sure. It's very evident when you get on those marches where you have to take care of yourself, and you've got just so much food and you don't know how to cook it and you don't know how to carry it. You don't know what you're doing, so there's a buddy over here that will help or someone here that will help.

T: So friends, so having buddies was important.

H: Oh, boy. I'll say. It was important.

T: As a person, how did you personally benefit? Now, you were marched twice. Once from Sagan to Spremberg. Once from Nürnberg to Moosburg in April.

H: Yes.

T: How did you specifically benefit from the help of other people? On either one of those marches.

**(2, A, 256)**

H: I'm just saying that I'm sure that, first of all, if I would have had insufficient food, somehow my parcel was either—something happened to it. Somebody stole

something out of it or something. I know that somebody would take care of me. I don't remember any incident. There would be somebody that would give me half of theirs. Whatever they had.

T: So you thought you could depend on somebody else.

H: Yes. I could depend upon somebody else. Yes.

T: A close friend or just anybody?

H: Well, no, not just anybody. Because there are some guys that are just selfish no matter what you do. You could give them the moon and they'd still want the sun.

T: I see. So there were differences in character that really became more pronounced under stressful situations.

H: Oh, boy, I'll say. You put certain guys under stress, you're going to find out who is a real individual and who isn't. You find it out. Yes. It will show very evident. It doesn't take too long to find that out.

T: Who you can depend on and who you can't.

H: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It doesn't take you long before—they're not all A-1 Boy Scout leaders and so on. They're not all that way. People are not. The differences will show up almost more on a place like that than they will when you're out here. Like you've got certain things at home you do that I don't do, and I've got certain things here. You won't notice it here, but you'll notice it there. It will only take you about ten hours and you're going to notice some difference and you're not going to like some of these guys right away. It doesn't take long to find out.

T: That's interesting. So certain people you realize are trustworthy and maybe others are not trustworthy.

H: Oh, yes. You bet. That's right. As a whole, your guys are...you try to help guys and help one another and try to do the things, but it won't always come out that way. You try to do it. That's part of it. That's life.

T: That is.

H: It's painful. That is life.

T: That is a very interesting point.

H: No matter where it is.

T: And maybe it's because it's a stressful situation it becomes more pronounced in a way.

H: Exactly. Your weaknesses show up quicker.

T: Yes.

H: If we all got food and we're not hungry we could last here in this room and never walk out of this room for six months easily. If we all had food. Maybe we have eight guys in here we'll say. Or ten guys. But we start not giving them food and there will be somebody start to bitch and moan. It wouldn't be long before you find out who the real guys are and who are the other ones. It didn't take you long that way. It was more pronounced. That's normal. There's nothing that's new about that.

T: Let's shift the conversation to XIII-D at Nürnberg, because you were there for a couple months too.

H: Yes.

T: After getting off the train from Spremberg.

H: God! At night.

T: Yes. What do you remember about that particular camp?

**(2, A, 311)**

H: At one camp [XIII-D] the Americans came over during the day. Oh, boy! They came over with one thousand airplanes, and boy, did we stay down under where we were staying so the German guards wouldn't shoot at us. They wouldn't as a rule. But if you started smarting around then... This is when the Americans came over Nürnberg. I remember that in the day. They bombed the crap out of that. One thousand strong. And they did that two days in a row!

T: This is new for you, being able to really be close to an air attack.

H: Oh, yes. Because we were very close to those. On the edge. We were probably the edge of the town. And of course, they would get advance information that there's a column or there's a group of one thousand prisoners that are over here. A lot of times they knew that we were because the word would get out to them through the system. I don't know just how. So that was all right. Yes.

T: For you personally, how did the living, eating, sleeping conditions at Nürnberg compare with Sagan?



H: It wasn't. We were stationary at Sagan. We had regular food coming in all the time. We had a nice place to sleep and we stayed warm even though we only take about two lumps of coal at night. They'd give us ten. See they'd give us around eight or ten lumps of coal. Well, it's a bar of...

T: It's a briquette, right?

H: Briquette. Like that. We'd have that. And you could last quite a ways. But when you're out on a march and you don't have anything for warmth and you don't have enough food, it isn't long before you wish you were back in a camp like that because you were given the necessities of life.

T: Talk about Nürnberg as far as the conditions were. The sleeping conditions or the quarters or the food. How did Nürnberg compare with Sagan?

H: Nürnberg wasn't as good, and finally at Nürnberg we also found out, every night, you know who was bombing the Germans at night? The English. They did most of their bombing at night. Gotta give them credit. They'd come in with their bombers at night. So every night at about, oh anywhere from maybe twelve o'clock to two, we'd have to go outside and hit the slit trenches for being bombed. There was a couple guys got a little over their target, and they started bombing and they bombed very close to our camp. The things were just raining on down.

T: Talk about that experience. What's it like to be in a bombing attack?

H: It's no fun [to be in a bombing attack]. We got out of there and out in the slit trenches right away. But this was almost every night. Those doggone British. They did their bombing at night. A lot of it. In the day, of course, they'd do some too. But you have to give them credit for bombing every night. That made the Germans, they gotta get their gunners out there and they gotta get –

**End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 372.**

T: The conditions at Nürnberg. Did you have barracks or tents?

H: We had tents there.

T: At Nürnberg?

H: Yes.

T: The same as at Moosburg. You had tents as well.

H: That's right. That's all we could do because there would be all these thousands of prisoners all coming together at one place, and you couldn't have the facilities for them there unless you had a bunch of gymnasiums and all threw them in the gym or

something. You couldn't prepare for them because you never knew how many. They were coming in from all over.

T: Let me ask you about the tent facilities at Nürnberg. This is a far cry from the barracks you had at Sagan then.

H: Yes. That's right. They had no places to go to the bathroom. Were a little tough. They'd be outside the tent and it would be in little places. We had to go. And of course, at night we had to get up and go outside. It's not very pleasant compared to what we had. At Sagan we had nice facilities. Bathrooms off to the side. Wood. They were wood made and just temporary. Anyway, that's what happened there.

T: It sounds like you noticed once you got to Nürnberg how much better the facilities at Sagan had been.

H: Oh, sure.

T: Did the food change too as far as how much or how regular?

H: Well, yes. Although when you were there about two months the trains could get there. They were closer. We were closer to Switzerland where the Red Cross headquarters were. So the trains could get to us quicker and better because it was closer.

T: Did you get Red Cross packages at Nürnberg?

H: Yes. We got enough to last. Yes. We'd get that and we'd saved some from before. Sometimes we'd carry one of these things all the way for a week. Under this arm and under this arm. What you had, you made it last. You'd look at what you had and you don't eat it all because you know you're going to want to eat tonight or tomorrow morning.

T: Were the Germans supplying food at Nürnberg as well in the tents?

H: What little they had. They usually supplied the potatoes that we had or bread. They usually provided those. That's their deal. And you might say coffee. That they can do for you.

T: Like ersatz coffee.

H: Yes. That's right. That they can do and they did that. You gotta give them credit. That's it.

T: Now at Nürnberg, you're there in February and March, for Germany the situation is rapidly deteriorating. How much did you know at Nürnberg of what was going on outside that camp?

H: Boy, we knew. We were following along waiting to hear. In the news.

T: Was there a radio there at Nürnberg, too?

H: Oh, yes. The guys who were doing that were carrying the radio or had the radio. I don't know what kind of radio they had, but some guys can make a little radio and you can get three or four batteries and you get the stuff and they'd get that from the States. One week an envelope would come from home and there would be one little battery or they would get some clothes from home. And the Germans couldn't find everything you know, that would come into a camp where you've got ten thousand men to start with. You're bound to get some leaks through and so they'd get that, and it is amazing what they would do and how they could prepare it. Some guys are engineers. You know, they're brilliant engineers and it doesn't take long. You give those guys a screwdriver, and you give them some wire, and you give them a couple batteries, and geez.

T: From what you're saying, this radio that you mentioned at Sagan also went to Nürnberg...

H: Oh, yes.

T: So you had...

H: It came right along with us because they were being carried by the guys. And the Germans aren't searching us to that degree. If they are, if they're searching you up ahead by the group, these guys are smart enough to pass this back, and pass it, and pretty soon it's back here where there are one hundred guys that handle it on the way back. You had some esprit d'corps in there. Pretty tough to beat. Pretty tough to beat. So on the things that really counted they had it. They had it.

**(2, B, 413)**

T: At Nürnberg it sounds like almost a temporary facility that was set up here to house all these people in the tents. How did you pass the days here? What did you do?

H: All you do is you would go out and we would walk around the inside perimeter. That's what we did at Sagan. Every night I would walk around the inside of the barbed wire all the way through, and that's the way we stayed in shape. As a matter of fact, they made us do this, which is a good thing.

T: At Sagan or Nürnberg?

H: Yes. At Sagan and at Nürnberg. And they said because you're liable to have to march and walk for ten, fifteen, twenty, fifty...you never know. The Russians are

coming and they scared the crap out of us, and our own men said, look it, they're coming and you're liable to have to walk to get away from them, so you better get those legs in shape so you'd have to walk. We had to walk ten times around that barbed wire every day and it's almost a mile inside.

T: At Sagan.

H: Almost that thing. And so when we got along we were used to doing it. We'd been marching. Then all the way. That's the way it was.

T: Who encouraged the marching, the Germans or your own officers?

H: The Germans too, would say this. You guys, if you're going to survive this thing. They were the same way. They kind of insisted we did our ten laps. We did this ourselves. Mostly we did it our own selves. The high ranking officer, the colonels, would say, look, you guys, you better start marching around here or you're not going to make the march. You're going to die on the way.

T: Was this the same at Nürnberg? Were you encouraged to keep marching?

H: Oh, yes. We were encouraged to keep marching because we had to do it. If you're going to survive. It's in the winter where survival is pretty tough over there when it's that cold.

T: Do you remember cold being at Nürnberg in those tents?

H: Oh, yes. It was pretty cold. Pretty cold in Nürnberg. With these tents that all the people are in. They'd have little fires and try not to—the tents were fairly large and fairly high, so a little fire didn't bother them too much inside. Yes. That's all part of it.

T: What [did you have] for beds? What were you sleeping on at Nürnberg in these tents?

H: We would try to get hay in there if we can. Hay.

T: Any beds or cots or sleeping bags?

H: I saw a few cots, but not very many. You've got no way of getting them in there. You couldn't bring them with you when you were marching. You couldn't. So we just had to lay down wherever we were. We made that our home. That's where we're staying for this period of time. They were a little more chance to be livable there, once you're there rather than on the march.

T: Sure.

H: We slept in barns. I slept in a lot of hay. I never did that before.

T: At Nürnberg you mentioned a couple, or actually repeated, bombing attacks day and night by the Americans and the British. How close did those bombs ever come to your camp? To you personally?

H: They weren't that close. They weren't where we had to worry about our lives as a rule. I didn't hear of any guy getting hit by any bombs or anything. But it wasn't too far. They were trying to hit, with the bombs, they were trying to hit the strategic targets that were more strategic than what we were.

**(2, B, 450)**

T: Never close enough to be life threatening.

H: No. No. Usually it wasn't, because we were always just on the outside of...we could come down roads together. There are a lot of airplanes. We're coming down and, holy cats! They were diving at our group and they weren't sure if we were a bunch of...

T: This is marching after Nürnberg?

H: Part of on the march to Nürnberg or on the march to Spremberg. They weren't sure if we were German soldiers right away. It took a while. Geez, they were diving down at us. We had to be doggone sure they weren't going to shoot at us. Holy cats! Because we're coming down the road. If you're flying an airplane at about ten thousand and you've got the stuff. You see this whole column of men, you might go down there and shoot them up. That's what they'd like to do. Shoot us up. Of course, we made sure that—if that was a German airplane, the word would get out in a hurry in the front of the line. Watch the airplanes up above. Boy, we'd get out of there in a hurry.

T: Let me ask about the march from Nürnberg to Moosburg. Now this is April at the very, what turned out to be the very end for Germany.

H: It was now getting warmer.

T: What do you remember about that march from Nürnberg to Moosburg?

H: Every now and then we'd get a little food from a farmer, and I remember when I'd go into... It would be my turn. Say that I'm eating with three or four guys. And at the next place, the next farm, it's my duties to go into the barn or to go into the house, the farmhouse where the farmer was, and get certain food enough for the three or four of us. Away I'd go into the next farm and get the stuff and still I'd have to catch up to the bunch as they're marching.

T: This suggests the Germans were not keeping very close eye on...

H: They were marching right with us. The guards were right with us. They could hardly make it themselves because they had to go into the farm here to get some—otherwise how would they get something to eat? Who's going to take care of them?

T: So in a sense, you're saying that they knew you were leaving the column to go off.

H: Sure. They're fifty miles from the camp or one hundred miles from where there's a real camp so the only thing they could do is get right in line with us. Because they were going for their lives too. I tell you. They could go home and tell their mama when they got through that they were marching halfway through this county—it was this way all over Germany. What an amazing thing it must have been when you got these, all over Germany, people moving.

T: You kept a diary with you in this little booklet. I'm looking at it right now. For example, on the march from Nürnberg to Moosburg you date it exactly from April 4 to April 13.

H: Yes. Nine days.

T: List all the stops along the way, and you go so far as to list meals that you had along the way, and some of these meals...

H: Aren't bad. The farmers were pretty good to us.

T: How do you explain that? You've talked about kind of declining food up and including Nürnberg, and suddenly on this march I see listings of eggs and...

H: Eggs. You see eggs.

T: Eggs and potatoes and meat.

H: Where we have gotten eggs? Where would we get eggs?

T: Has to be from a farm.

H: From a farm. Sure. The farmers would give us some eggs. It was amazing.

T: Were you, I mean in a sense, the German civilians, how do you explain them being so forthcoming...

H: They were sympathetic.

T: How do you explain that?

H: You see a guy out there hasn't been shot at or bombed like the people that lived in the big cities or the cities. A guy who has been on a farm is pretty well away from all that. They see us and we're having a hard time walking and eating and they're ready to help there. People are people. I don't think all people are like the Nazis. You know what I mean. So that's what happened. We got eggs. Another guy and I, I guess we had ten or twelve eggs apiece. We just ate the heck out of it.

T: By going up, and you mentioned earlier the German guards knew you were going up to these farms...

H: Sure.

T: ...away from the column. Was it a barter thing where you offered these farmers something or did they just ask for stuff?

H: Yes. We gave them some of what we had. If they needed it and wanted it. We'd give them something we had. Yes. There weren't enough guards. When we got two thousand prisoners coming down the road, how many guards does it take to keep those guys happy? You'd be amazed. It takes a lot of guards. I mean, they had to do quite a bit of work to keep us in line and up in the front lines and keep going. That's a job. God! I bet they never had to that in history.

T: And from the way you're talking about the German guards, they weren't mistreating the prisoners.

H: No. No. No. Very few. Unless some guy was smarting off and wants to, you know, trying to get away or doing something. Then you better look out. But as a rule they weren't...I don't remember anybody next to me being shot at or being hurt. We were walking along all right and they were walking right with us because their lives would be at stake if those Russians come over that hill back there. They better get their rear end moving or they're going to be bad.

T: How did you communicate with these farmers? Let's face it. I don't think they spoke English.

H: No. I couldn't speak very much German, but I think it wasn't bad to learn...I learned *Haben Sie Eier?* [Do you have eggs?]

T: Do you have eggs?

H: I need eggs. It doesn't take long to learn *Haben Sie Brot?* A few things that you need. We'd try to give them what we could of things that we might have had. They would be kind to us. So we did all right. A lot of them have gone back. A lot of these prisoners have gone back into Germany since War II and gone to some of these people who really took care of them and given them something after the war. Since World War II.

T: As a thank you, really.

H: Oh, yes. Sure. This was happening all over Germany. We're just one camp. God! What's in all the other camps? We had three hundred thousand prisoners down at...

T: Moosburg?

H: Moosburg. Can you imagine that?

**(2, B, 526)**

T: On the way from Nürnberg to Moosburg, marching south through Bavaria, how often was your column of prisoners attacked by Allied planes?

H: Not too much. We'd have to be sure. Boy, all of a sudden back over the hill here comes two planes that are down right at tree level and they're coming right at us. Boy, we'd hit the side of the ditch and then finally they'd know. They came close enough to say oh, geez, these are maybe some prisoners or something. So they broke off. But to start with, boy you better watch out. Be ready to hit the ditches because they're going to come in and they're going to shoot because they think you're enemies.

T: So it did happen from your recollection.

H: Oh, yes. Yes. We had to hit the old thing several times.

T: Let me ask you about some of these places. You mentioned you were in a place called Muhlhausen and Schweinbach...

H: Muhlhausen, Schweinbach, sure.

T: Gammelsdorf.

H: Gammelsdorf. We had eggs in the sun there, I think I wrote down.

T: Yes. You spent, it sounds like, three days at Gammelsdorf. Took a bath, it says.

H: Yes. Took a bath in the stream. It was getting a little bit warm and the sun was out, and so I guess we took off our clothes. We knew we were going to be there all day. Bathed in the stream, the little stream going by there. So that was something you don't usually do. But that's why I wrote it there.

T: It sounds from your description in the diary that things were picking up. It's warming up and...



H: Oh, yes. That's right. The weather. The war is getting closer to us. We know it isn't going to be long. We're going to get out of there and we're feeling better. We've been eating okay with the Red Cross and with what we get from the Germans. We're doing all right. Anyway, that's the name of that game.

T: Let me ask you. Sort of comparing. You had Sagan, the cold weather march to Spremberg, you had Nürnberg, the march from Nürnberg to Moosburg, and Moosburg. Now of those kind of five stops, in a way, three stops and two marches, which of those was most difficult for you?

H: Oh, gosh.

T: I mean for conditions...

H: Let's see. I think the farther we were north and we knew our friends that were coming were farther away and we couldn't tell what was going to happen to us. I don't know. It's pretty hard. It was getting to be as we got down to the end there, there were more prisoners. When you've got three hundred thousand, my gosh, how you going to feed those people? You start thinking the poor Germans had to get...or the Red Cross was going to bring a train in. Boxcars and stuff. They had to do an awful lot of work to get that many people fed.

T: Now you were at Moosburg for a couple of weeks.

H: Yes.

T: Before it was liberated.

H: Yes.

T: What sight encountered you when you arrived at Moosburg? Describe what it looked like.

H: I can't. I really can't. Their cities. We were on the edge of the city, of course. That many men. They wouldn't take you downtown.

**(2, B, 568)**

T: Tents or barracks?

H: We were in tents again. See, these were made up as the lines formed and more prisoners came down. They had to quickly put up more tents. They had to do that. They couldn't really make buildings that way. That would be too many.

T: So you were in tents again.

H: Oh, yes. Big tents. Big tents that would hold one hundred or two.

T: Big tents.

H: Big, big tents. Not little individual ones.

T: What do you remember about how those two weeks went there? Was there an expectation that the war was about over by that time?

H: Oh, yes. They knew they were coming and the guys were coming from the west too—from the invasion group—were coming right straight in a long line and boy, we were waiting for any time to have those guys show up over the last hill that we went over here. Boy, we knew they were coming. Our own friends. And by golly, finally one night, of course, they came over the hill. Here comes our troops and our tanks and they came right into the camp and opened it up on April—I can't remember the date.

T: Your diary says April 29.

H: Yes. April 29. My gosh, that was a big day.

T: Talk about what you remember about that day of liberation.

H: Well, golly. We were free. Those were the Americans and they came across and General—I'm trying to think of the tank general—was always riding around in a tank. What's his name now? My gosh, he came in and he was our hero. Boy, he came in our camp and boy, what a hero he was. They all stood there and he'd come by or he'd ride in his tank coming through. What a day that was when we were finally let free.

T: Where were the German guards by this time?

H: They were all gathered together in another spot. We weren't even guarded at that spot because we had no place to go. If we didn't stay with our group where we knew where to get our food and where to sleep until they told us it was, you know, that you were going to get the airplanes to get out of here to go back up to Camp Lucky Strike. That came later.

T: That's right. You were there at Moosburg a number of days before you actually left the place.

H: Yes. That's right. We were. So there's no point in getting too off the way, because we're going to be taken out of there either by a truck to go to Camp Lucky Strike. You know where that is.

T: That's in France.

H: Yes. That's in France. A camp there or whatever there was. We knew it wasn't as good where we are now until we got the way cleared. We got there and then we were assigned to airplanes and so on to get home. What a day that was to get on an airplane and then coming home. Wasn't that nice?

T: Your diary mentions you arrived at Camp Lucky Strike May 11, 1945, and left there on May 19.

H: Yes. I was there eight days.

T: And then on a ship?

H: Yes.

T: You arrived at Camp Kilmer June 5, 1945.

H: Yes. Camp Kilmer. I'm just trying to think.

**(2, B, 616)**

T: After the Americans arrived at Moosburg and you were evacuated out after some days, how soon was it that you were able to send some word back to your wife here in the States?

H: Oh, gosh. I think we sent letters. As soon as I could find some paper I sent some letters. I don't have to write much. Just the fact that I'm free and she heard that. Boy, that's good news.

T: So the first communication you had was a letter?

H: I would say yes. It would. No, she gets a letter from the War Department that told them that I was—first that I was a prisoner of war, because first I was shot down and nobody knew whether you were alive or not. So the first notice she got is that I was a prisoner of war and she was very thankful for that because she knows I'm okay. Then coming home here was the quickest to find and my wife met me in Chicago then.

T: So you got back to the States June 5 and you were headed for Minneapolis at that point?

H: Yes. Back to Minneapolis. Of course, we stopped in Chicago. I don't know how many—a day or so. Drex met me down there. She had been to school down in Chicago. I've forgotten the name of the school down there. So she was pretty well prepared to meet me there. So it worked very fine. It was quite a deal.

T: Talk about that a little bit.

H: Well, that was nice. We didn't want to spend too much time there. Wanted to get home as quick as possible and get our acts together back here. So we did. I'm just trying to think. Does it say how long it took from Chicago to get up here? It doesn't say that.

T: No. Your diary ends on June 6.

H: June 6. How about that? That was that.

T: When you first saw your wife again, how much did she want to know about your POW experience?

H: Oh, she knew a fair amount about it from me having read this and that, but she didn't want to know too much to start with. I don't think. I think she was more interested in just seeing me and having some nice companionship together. Food and whatnot. I just think that came first.

T: As time progressed and even into the years in the future, how much did she ask about your POW experience and how much did you tell?

H: Well, I told almost everything I can. She's got an amazing memory. She can remember more of this thing almost than I did. It's amazing really. Her mind is amazing.

T: So you have, over the years, from your recollection, you have told her pretty much about your POW experience.

H: Oh, yes. I told her everything I could. Everything I could remember.

T: Do you remember, was there any reluctance on your part, early on, let's say, to share certain details of it or not?

H: No. There's nothing I don't think that I've not told her. There's nothing that I will not tell her.

T: Has that always been the case?

H: Always been the case.

T: Since 1945, really.

H: Yes.

T: If she asks you a question you tell her...

H: Maybe if you were really tortured beyond and so on and doing this and that. Maybe you want to tell...[don't want to] go through all the gruesome details, but it wasn't quite that way over here. This was quite an experience that I could ever wind up. You asked me some good questions because if Dale ever writes me, I'll have him kind of check with you just to look at this thing, look at the whole thing just to see what it is. He could write a book on it. Pretty good.

**(2, B, 682)**

T: When you were no longer a POW, what kind of experience did you have with dreams or nightmares about your time as a POW?

H: I don't ever remember having dreams or anything. Isn't that funny? Just never did.

T: And today, for example, these days, are there things that recur in your dreams that you can remember about your POW experience?

H: No. I have very little of that. Very little do I have of a dream. I don't dream much anyway. I have nothing that reminds me of the camp and other stuff.

T: You talked about it. You've already mentioned that when you got back with your wife that you talked about it pretty openly.

H: Yes. Oh, yes. We talked quite openly. We could talk about it. Certain questions she'd ask and I could give it to her as much as I could. There wasn't anything I could not tell her because, I don't know, even though the experience, you don't want to go through again, but all those things that happened are talkable. They just are.

T: How about the military, or after you were out of the service the VA, were they curious? Did they offer help as far as psychological counseling or things like this?

H: No. In fact, it must be because there were so many of us that no one guy was going through and getting the dirty stick all the way and the rest of them were not. There were so many prisoners over there. I just think that they said, well, you may have been through it but you're not the only one. So did ten thousand others. So what. It was just part of what you're doing. So that's it. There's nothing to spend much time on.

T: Do you get any assistance from the VA now as far as disability or weekly or monthly groups that you go to?

H: Yes. I'm disabled as far as my back and whatnot. I'm disabled as far as the Veterans Administration is concerned. So that's part of it. In fact, I'm going up there

Monday. I go out there and I've got to go to the urology department and I have to go another department there.

T: In Minneapolis here.

H: Yes. Out to the VA. We go right here. They take pretty good care of us.

T: A number of people I've talked to, ex-POWs, go to once a week or once a month sessions, talk with other POWs and maybe with a counselor. Have you ever been part of something like that?

H: Not with a counselor. No. We were asked to come out there for a medical checkup every now and then and do this and that.

T: And you do that?

H: Yes. We give some blood every now and then. They check it and see how we're doing and so on. But that's...

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

T: To pick up about the VA, you've mentioned that you don't go to any kind of regular talk sessions or discussion groups with other POWs.

H: No. Well, we have an organization, Prisoner of War Organization, where we go quarterly to meetings and Bob McWhite has been the leader of the last. I was, back there ten years ago. I had the job. Yes. That's done quarterly.

T: That's the American ex-POWs.

H: Yes. There's no other groups other than out to the Veterans Administration that we have.

T: Is there a group at the VA that you go to? A group of POWs that talks with each other or with a counselor?

H: No. I don't think there's any there. There may be. I haven't run into. There may be a group that does meet out there every now and then, but I don't know of it.

T: Let me ask about the American ex-POWs Organization. Now, you've been part of that group for how long?

H: Oh, gosh. Probably twenty, twenty-five, thirty years.

T: You've been involved very closely with them.

H: Oh, yes. I've been head of the group here for two, three years. We weren't as well organized then as we are now. That's what we did.

T: Of course, a nationwide group that has state branches, what does that group, why is it important to you? Personally.

H: Well, I guess it's where you can go. If there's something new, some new bills coming through Congress, once in a while there is, where prisoners of war will get some more consideration on something whether it's health or just by the law or something. It's good to have that because then they'll pass the information on down to you and that happens every now and then. There's a couple guys out there that are very well acquainted with that law and with the other stuff. So rather than you have to dig it all out yourself, you see one of them and they'll help out and boy, that's a big help.

T: Do you attend any of the state meetings or national meetings?

H: Other than the state meetings, there are state meetings here in Minnesota that we have. Yes, they have these meetings. They're quarterly meetings right out here. We meet out on 91<sup>st</sup> and Lyndale. Yes, they do that.

T: Do you attend the annual meetings, like the one coming in May in St. Cloud?

H: Those I don't. But I know all the guys that do. If I were one of the officers, you know, president or other officers like Bob McWhite is the president this year, yes, I would have to go to those because that's part of your job to do that. But I don't have that, so I just haven't attended. I've been to a couple of those meetings, but that's a while back. Those are the annual meeting over in St. Cloud.

T: Right. That's in May. Let me ask about the other members of your crew. Everyone got out of the plane alive which is pretty uncommon for the B-17s.

H: Yes. It is.

T: How much contact have you maintained with your crew members since the war?

H: I've had some contact. There's about three of them I kept up pretty close contact with. The only thing is my tail gunner, never did show up. We heard he was in the hospital over there and we never could get in touch with him and he never showed up at anything. So he is the only one that we haven't seen.

T: So you've seen everyone else since the war at least once.

H: Oh, yes. And we've had a meeting a couple times. A couple are down Kansas and Nebraska, and Richardson, my copilot, of course, he was killed. Gosh, he was flying a

plane shortly after we got home from Germany. Richardson, my copilot, he died down here in Texas.

T: In a military plane?

H: Yes. He was flying. So I haven't seen him since War II. He's dead now. I was trying to think. Now Nicky Schultz died—my bombardier. About, oh, it seems to me about three, four years ago. His wife is still around. We've kept up with them. And my navigator is not available either. He's died. Then I'm trying to think of the enlisted men that were in the...let's see, top gunner and the ball turret, yes, and that's that one...boy, we've seen them. I just had another one die. Now there's only about three of them left.

**(3, A, 48)**

T: But what it means is that since that war you've kept track of each other. You didn't just split and go your own directions.

H: No. No. Well, you normally do. You want to see how they're doing. Some of them have not done well and others have passed on.

T: When you get together with other POWs, with the members of your crew, how often do you talk about POW experiences?

H: There will be a time somebody will have a question or two and bring it up and we can chew it up, but it's not a subject that we bring up very often. I don't think. Some of these questions you ask me, gee, I've never been asked those before. If we give a bad answer it's only because we should have maybe more information on it (*chuckles*).

T: Talking about the POW experience, I mean, today you've really been very candid and very open about things that we've talked about. Would this always have been possible for you, for example if I'd have asked you for an interview in 1960 or 1980?

H: Oh, sure. I'd have been glad to give the information. Yes. We never been anything secret or silent. Nothing that's been that way. No. It's always been right in the open. Everything. Hoping that we can be of information by answering the questions.

T: Good. The last question I have is to ask, and when you look in the mirror at Harold Van Every and think about your experience as a prisoner of war, what do you think is the most important way that that experience changed your life?

H: Well, yes, of course right away one of the first questions people ask, they think maybe you were—and I suppose in Japan they had more of those where they made it tough on the prisoners of war and so forth, and I guess they did. But that's all



right. Hitler could be pretty rough too if he wanted to. Some of the things. I usually don't get in the discussion on those things because we didn't have too much of that. As long as we kept our nose clean and did things they weren't, there wasn't much of that going on.

T: As far as the differences in treatment.

H: Yes. Some of them say, oh, you were lucky to be a prisoner in Germany. If you'd been over in Japan you wouldn't be around. You know. Well, maybe yes, but that isn't something you want to make a comparison. They want you to make a comparison where the Japanese sure had it a lot tougher than you did. No. I don't believe that. That all depends on where you were and where you got caught. It doesn't make any difference, because there were a lot of prisoners over there that had a pretty rough time that I've not even mentioned. I don't know what experience they had, but you talk to them and, by golly, they did have.

T: What do you think is the most important way that that experience changed your life? I mean, changed you as a person.

H: Well...I don't know if there has been a change in my life. I'm not so sure of that. I just know that I'm just good and thankful to the Lord for everything he's provided for me in the way of being in the service and still being able to come home and be around here. I don't think that they want me to cry about it...just to take it as one of the phases of your life and gain from the experience from there, I guess. That's about it.

T: That's the last question I had for you today. Let me ask if there's anything else you'd like to add to the interview before we conclude.

H: I don't think there is. I think you've done very well. You've asked some very intelligent questions, and a lot of them that I wouldn't have probably thought of until I remember you asking them.

T: I guess that's a good thing.

H: Yes.

T: I'll thank you very much again, Mr. Van Every.

### **END OF INTERVIEW**