Warren Anderson was born 22 July 1924 in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. He entered the US Army in 1943 and trained to be a paratrooper. By 1944 he was overseas, part of Company C, 504th Battalion, 82nd Airborne. In December 1944, shortly after arriving in Belgium, he was taken prisoner by the Germans.

As a POW, Warren spent time in a number of small German towns near Aachen digging gun emplacements; in January 1945 he arrived at Stalag XII-A in Limburg where he was held for about a month before being transferred to Stalag IX-B, Bad Orb where he spent March-April 1945 until being liberated by American forces. Warren spent a brief period at an American field hospital and then a hospital in Paris, France, before being transported back to the United States.
Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is Friday, 15 April, 2005. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project; my name is Thomas Saylor. This evening I am speaking with Mr. Warren Anderson at his home here in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. First, Mr. Anderson, on the record this time, thanks very much for taking time this evening to be part of this project.

W: You're welcome.

T: For the record now we have this information. You were born on 22 July 1924, here in Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

W: Correct.

T: And with the exception of your service time and time in college in the Twin Cities, you're a life long resident of Grand Rapids.

W: Right.

T: You were one of five children. You had one brother and three sisters. You entered service in 1943, US Army, and by 1944 were overseas. You served with Company C, 504th Battalion, 82nd Airborne.

W: Yes.

T: I want to go back to December of 1944. Again, for this project, that's where our story begins, in a way. It was around Christmastime in Belgium that your life change as well. You become a prisoner of war. I'm wondering if you could take us back, take listeners back, to the day you became a prisoner of war and sort of describe the circumstances by which that happened.

W: To begin with, I was a rookie as far as being a member of the 82nd Airborne, and because of this rapid turn of events I never got to know my fellow soldiers. When I was captured I think I'd been assigned to the Company C in the 504th, and was with them only, oh, maybe a week or two...

T: So you had really just arrived.
W: Right. Just arrived. So there was a bunch of us who were all assigned to the same outfit and we zeroed in our rifles. The first time I shot a rifle overseas, and the last time.

T: Really? The first and last time.

W: Yes. So the first night on the front, I guess you might call it, because actually you could see in the distance a little activity which was—that was a funny feeling to think there's that human being out there. He can shoot me or I can shoot him, and it will be legal. But that first night I got to know a fellow real well, Jacques Bonomo.

T: It's B-O-N-O-M-O, right?

W: B-O-N-O-M-O. Yes. We dug a foxhole and as was customary to do it, the efficient way to do it, is two guys would share the same foxhole and stay warmer. So this was my first, the beginning of my first full day almost you might say, of a member of the 82nd Airborne, and I was pulled out of the foxhole by whoever was on duty about midnight and told to go out on line there.

T: On the point? Like a listening post or—

W: Yes. In fact, we didn't have too many short-wave radios. That came shortly thereafter, but this was the twisted pair, the telephone line. There was snow on the ground. There was a faint moon there, because I can remember we could see pretty fair in the distance. For being midnight that was something. So me and two other guys, (**), my two fellow soldiers—they were old timers, and they knew how to set up the telephone. I was just kind of taking it all in. I didn't know what was going to go on. As I recall there was no sleep, because it was early in the morning when I just heard all this noise and racket, and this German patrol kind of had us spotted. I remember my M-1 rifle was real stiff. You checked the round in the chamber. I had to hit it against the tree. Some of the little things just are so clear in my mind. I can just see myself doing that, and the frustration because I couldn't do it the normal way with your hand to load the bullet.

(1, A, 55)

T: So it was cold out.

W: Yes. Yes. It was December, and in Germany it's cold. But anyway, one of my compatriots raised his hands and said, “Comrade, comrade.” In other words, I didn't know how you would surrender (chuckles). They didn't tell us that.

T: So the whole surrendering thing happened very suddenly.

W: Oh, yes. Bang, bang, bang!
T: So you’ve been a member of C Company about a week?

W: Not any more than a week, because the boat landed—well, when it came over we landed in Liverpool, I think. We took a train to Southampton and got on the boat and went over to Le Havre, France. It was just continual going east. To the prison camp (chuckles).

T: So in a sense, it sounds like we could write the story or your combat experience in a very short paper.

W: That’s correct.

T: Let me ask you this: you’ve been in the service for a while. The Germans have been the enemy in an abstract sense for a long time. The Germans are now standing right in front of you.

W: Yes.

T: Describe that situation and how you felt.

W: Of course, as I recall the question of fear wasn’t there, because everything was happening and from then on, my buddy, probably about twenty feet from me, surrendered. Then I surrendered. Followed how he did it. I just followed him.

T: And it was just the three of you out there, right?

W: Three of us. Then we were marched back to kind of a farmhouse.

T: How far was that, Mr. Anderson?

W: Probably about half a mile. The farmhouse. There was a German vehicle there too. They had it camouflaged somewhat.

T: Now did you say you had a sense of fear really, or you didn’t?

W: As I recall I was nervous, as I stated in that letter I showed you. This Malmedy Massacre had happened and the Stars and Stripes, that was the [Army] paper issued—I don’t know how often it came out. Every week I guess.

T: So this Malmedy thing was known to you.

W: Yes! And that’s really what made me nervous.

T: So that image was specifically in your mind. You remember that.

W: Definitely (with emphasis). Yes.
T: Were the Germans threatening to you in any way as they marched you back towards this building?

W: No, they weren’t. They were very business-like, and marched us to the farmhouse. I expected to be taken back further and eventually to the prisoner of war camp. This house where we were, I guess they must have radioed or had some way of getting another vehicle to take us back. How that happened, I don’t know. I remember there was a young German soldier. Of course this was nighttime. I guess it was getting closer to the day probably.

(1, A, 97)

T: So when you were captured it was dark.

W: Oh, yes. I would say that was probably one or two o’clock in the morning.

T: So only the moonlight you described earlier was out.

W: Yes. Then this farmhouse. It was still four, five o’clock in the morning. I can remember this young German soldier. He could talk a little English. Pretty fair. He struggled at it, but he was interested in interrogating me. Just for his own personal use, I think. He couldn’t understand what the Americans were doing over there fighting the Germans.

T: Is that what he said?

W: Yes. He couldn’t understand that. I got the feeling, what little I talked to the German guards and so forth, that many of them had a real fond feeling towards Americans. This one guard, he had a close relative in Chicago. That was interesting.

T: Were you questioned at the farmhouse at all?

W: Not in a formal way that they would do. No.

T: Any kind of general questioning of...

W: We were, at the next stage we were.

T: So this first place, it sounds like almost a transport stop on the way.

W: Kind of an outpost of the German Army, you might say. I would guess they had to start to pull back in a few days after this, because the weather cleared up and the Allied planes were able to come in.
T: That’s right. Yes. From that particular place there, were you moved again further behind the lines?

W: Yes. Yes. I don’t know what they call the vehicle, but it was something like a Jeep. It was open air. A little bigger than a Jeep, because there were three of us plus two Germans, the driver and a guard. So the next place we got unloaded there were quite a few more prisoners.

T: So the three of you up until now, but now you’re in a larger group.

W: Right. There I was interrogated. Of course you hear the old cautionary thing they tell you in boot camp: only give your name, rank and serial number. I was in a quandary. I had been with the outfit only a day or two and I had a faint recollection... I thought there was the name Tucker. I can still remember the name Tucker for some reason. I guess I remembered my platoon sergeant, but as far as the others... He probably figured I was just clamming up and using that for an excuse, but it was the honest to God truth. I couldn’t remember. I was too much of a rookie to get names and faces established.

T: You mentioned the name, rank and serial number line that you were supposed to give them. How much had the Army done before this to sort of prepare you for, if you’re a POW here’s what you should do or here’s what you can expect?

W: No. I don’t remember getting any instruction on that.

T: So you’re kind of really winging it.

W: Yes. Yes.

T: How much time had Warren Anderson given before that particular day, that in the course of this war I could end up a prisoner of war? Had you ever thought of that?

(1, A, 141)

W: I guess I didn’t. I figured that’s something that happened to somebody else. As I recall I never thought much about becoming a prisoner.

T: So in a sense, you really come to this unprepared either from information from the military or from your own thoughts about what it might be like.

W: Yes.

T: The questioning—you didn’t have much to tell them it sounds like. Truthfully. Now, were you kept with other prisoners there? Sort of milling about or how did they—
W: Yes. The next stage. Of course we went back further in to Germany. There were half a dozen Air Force men who had bailed out. They were there. Then these two little [German] towns, Flammersheim and Kuckenheim [spelling?]. I remember looking it up. I went to the library and looked up the names in the world atlas there. They’re there.

T: And they’re near Aachen I think, aren’t they? In the far west of Germany.

W: Yes.

T: And what’s their connection for you? Were you through those towns?

W: They had us digging gun emplacements.

T: So pretty soon after you were made a POW you were working.

W: I was working. I guess they were trying to get a sizeable amount and then march us still further back. I remember marching through Bonn. I remember that Beethoven was born there.

T: He was, that’s right, yes. So you’re marching away from the front. Did you go through Aachen as well?

W: No. As I recall I didn’t. But I remember the road sign saying Aachen.

T: You were close. Because Bonn is close to Aachen too. Now the digging the gun emplacements, did that last very long or was that a—

W: No. That was about a week.

T: So you stayed about a week there.

W: Yes.

T: Where did they house you? Did they have tents or a building?

W: No. They were buildings. Probably a vacated warehouse or something.

T: How many of you were doing that?

W: At this stage there were probably about fifty of us, and we had chores to do. The German guard would rattle off our names and off we’d go.

T: Now was this only the enlisted men here, or were there some non-commissioned officers working as well?
W: As I recall it was just privates. Something that kind of irked me later on, after I got back, is officers had it nicer in the POW camps than we did.

T: They definitely did, yes. There is a pecking order before you were a prisoner, and there’s a pecking order when you become a prisoner too.

W: The Germans followed that pecking order very religiously.

T: Part of it is the society, and part of it is the Geneva Convention which says that only enlisted men can be put on work details. So PFCs and corporals, yes, sergeants and above, no. And at least with the Americans, the Germans followed the rules.

W: Yes. That book by Steven Ambrose, maybe you’ve read it, *Citizen* Soldier. I just felt like I was part of that. The cover you know. The guy with his rifle in the snow.

*(1, A, 186)*

T: That’s right. There’s GIs marching on the cover there. Kind of marching away from the camera, right?

W: Right. He mentioned this pecking order, so called. That’s the first time I’d thought about it.

T: You definitely experienced it too, didn’t you?

W: Yes.

T: Your final transport, or one of your transports away from the front, was the boxcars that took you to Limburg.

W: Yes.

T: What do you recall about that?

W: Let’s see, I think that was Bonn where we got on the boxcars. They were crowded and, boy, I remember, thank God I was a little bit constipated. But the poor guys who weren’t constipated had to use their helmets. We had enough room, just enough, to sit down. No fancy chairs or anything like that. Seeing the TV pictures of the Jews being rounded up and going to concentration camps—it was the same boxcar.

T: So you were crowded in there but there was, from your recollection, enough room to sit down if you pushed a little bit.
W: Yes. As I recall I wasn’t real uncomfortable there. It was something I could put up with.

T: How was the mood among the men in that boxcar that you were in?

W: I guess nothing out of the ordinary that I can think of.

T: Was your boxcar, your train, bombed or strafed while you were in it?

W: No. I remember reading of some occasions where that happened, but ours wasn’t.

T: Was that something that you or the men around you talked about or worried about?

W: I don’t recall being concerned about being bombed or strafed. If I knew then what I know now I would have been concerned.

T: Maybe it’s best you didn’t know.

W: Yes.

T: You were at this point just twenty years old, is that right?

W: Yes.

T: When you got to Limburg, Stalag XII-A it’s, following our conversation from before we began, probably January of 1945.

W: Yes.

T: From your recollection and our conversation, you were there about a month or so you figure.

W: Yes. Maybe not that long. But three weeks anyway. Maybe a month.

T: What can you say about the camp? Really, when you walked in there, describe how that camp looked to you.

W: It looked like an industrial part of town. It didn’t look like a camp. There wasn’t an open field and barracks. It was a large building. It was crowded, and of course the food wasn’t the best. You got about a sixth of a loaf of bread and a bowl of soup that was pretty watery. It was quite a struggle every night to find a place to sleep.

T: Was it a large building that you were sleeping in?
W: Yes. It was a large building.

T: Were there bunks or beds?

W: No beds.

T: So on the floor somewhere?

W: Correct.

T: Was there straw or something on the ground?

W: No. But we had blankets. I can’t recall when those were issued out.

T: By the Germans they were issued though.

W: They must have been.

T: You didn’t have it with you when you were captured.

W: Correct.

T: In that building, were there other men you were captured with? Those two other guys, were they still around with you?

W: Yes. In fact they were with me all the way to Bad Orb.

T: And the rest of it is just kind of a cornucopia of people from different places and units.

W: Correct.

T: All Americans that you remember?

W: All Americans. Yes.

T: You mentioned the food being minimal, the soup a little watery.

W: Yes.

T: How was your health doing at this time?
W: Health was good then. I got strep throat. It was before we hit Bad Orb. I got strep throat, and had it for about five or six days and I could hardly swallow. I remember that. But nature healed it.

T: Maybe being young was not a bad thing here. Twenty years old.

W: Yes.

T: Were there any work details there at Limburg?

W: No.

T: So you had time to kill every day.

W: Correct.

T: How did you—

W: They had a little library there at Limburg. Instead of regular paperback—it was a paperback, but it was a different size. I guess it's something the Red Cross gave out to all prisoners, prison camps.

T: So there was something to do there during the day.

W: Yes. In fact there was a little orchestra they had. They got musical instruments to the prisoners, and I don't recall how the music was, but that amused me.

T: Did you play?

W: I didn't. No.

(1, A, 264)

T: But other people were playing.

W: Yes. There was quite a bit of talent in those prisoners there.

T: You put enough people together I think that's going to happen, isn't it?

W: Yes.

T: What was the daily routine there at Limburg for the month that you were there? Was there roll call in the morning?

W: Yes. Always a roll call. You would get out and they'd rattle off the names. So they knew if somebody took off.
T: And did you have roll call morning and evening, or do you remember?

W: Just morning as I recall.

T: So you had to find something to occupy yourself the rest of the day I guess.

W: Yes.

T: Was that a problem for you? Finding something to do?

W: I don’t recall. I read a lot of those books they had. So that helped.

T: Having nothing to do sounds terrible.

W: Yes.

T: So you remember reading and you remember there being musical instruments although you didn’t play them yourself.

W: Correct.

T: In a situation like that, from your observation, how well did prisoners get along with each other? This isn’t the best of situations.

W: Yes. Got along pretty good, but if you’re a bad one you’re really bad.

T: Meaning what?

W: This one fellow, you had to keep your eye on him because he would swipe things that you had that were swipable.

T: So he’d swipe from other prisoners.

W: Yes. If he had to go to the bathroom he’d find a corner of the place where we’d all sleep at night and do it. So he was a bad one.

T: Was he more, from your observation, the exception or the rule?

W: I don’t think there were any more bad ones in our group than elsewhere.

T: So you recall him, in a sense, as standing out from a norm of people who got along fairly well.

W: Yes.
T: Do you feel at Limburg, or at Bad Orb, both, could you trust other prisoners? Do you feel you could, people in your barracks or in your area?

W: Most of them you could [trust]. They were fine fellows and I just wish I'd written down some names and addresses. You think about boy, some day I'm going to get out of here and to heck with writing names and addresses.

T: Let's talk about your move to Bad Orb. Limburg was not a place you stayed very long.

W: Right.

(1, A, 314)

T: Bad Orb, Stalag IX-B, has a bad reputation as well as a camp. Now how were you transferred from Limburg to Bad Orb?

W: Walked.

T: Walked?

W: Yes.

T: That's not a short distance.

W: No. Have you got that map there? (both look at map of Germany)

T: So looking at the map it looks like fifty, sixty miles as the crow flies from Limburg to Bad Orb. How many men were in the group that were moved with you, can you estimate?

W: Oh, I'd say about fifty.

T: Not a large group then, really.

W: No. Not a real large group.

T: And was this a volunteer thing or were you selected?

W: We were selected.

T: This group is going—did you have any advance warning about this or was it just kind of, get your stuff?

W: Yes. I don't recall the incidents leading up to going.
T: What about the going itself? Was this done over a number of days, this march?

W: Yes. We’d go to places where, usually a farmhouse, and they’d have a manger where they stored hay and so forth. I remember sleeping on hay for a few nights. Yes. Talking about vivid recollections, I was on this, it’s quite a large bunch of hay in this barn, and it was the middle of the night and I started to walk or something and I slid down the haystack. This German guard, I guess I scared the heck out of him. He got up and he rammed the bolt in [on his rifle]—I just thought I was gone (chuckles). He brought it up. Just pointed [the rifle] at me after he’s loaded the bullet in, and I thought that was it. But he didn’t. Because I’m here. That was, I think, my lifetime scariest experience. Yes.

T: Really. Right in front of your eyes goes your life.

W: Yes.

T: So you had guards that accompanied you all the way from one camp to the other?

W: Oh, yes. Yes. They were elderly men. Too old to be fighting on the line I guess.

T: So much older than yourself at this time. You were twenty and they were older than you.

W: Yes. Yes. I would put them in their sixties, seventies.

T: Old guys.

W: Yes. Old guys.

T: Oh, my gosh. I didn’t think that old. During this march, now, did you go through any of the cities or small towns?

W: No, I don’t recall any small towns.

T: So largely rural roads.

W: Yes.

T: It’s further than fifty or sixty miles then if you weren’t even going in a straight line.

(1, A, 369)

W: I’ve often thought I’d like to go there. Even bicycle maybe some of that trail.

T: Have you ever been back to Germany?
W: No. It’s something I keep putting off.

T: So you’ve thought about it in the past though.

W: Oh, yes. Yes. But now it’s getting so it’s too late. When you’re eighty years old you’ve got these problems (chuckles).

T: When you thought about going back to Germany, what is it you’d want to go back for?

W: Oh, just to—

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

W: I guess it’s the human urge to see places that you’re acquainted with and see how they look under happier conditions. I suppose the camp itself has long disappeared and something new is there now, I’m guessing.

T: On a connected point, kind of jumping ahead, but since we’re at it I’ll ask you now. How do you feel today about the Germans?

W: I don’t have any animosity there at all. It’s the hierarchy, the Nazis I think. And of course the German mentality being what it is, they’re followers. So I don’t have any bad feelings and such against the German race.

T: Did you feel the same way when you got back in 1945 or was it different for you then? About the Germans.

W: You’re talking about when I was discharged.

T: Yes. When you got back to the States in 1945, how did you feel about the Germans then? Differently?

W: I don’t think I gave them much thought. I was thinking about me. Just to get an education so you can earn a few bucks. Start living.

T: Your thoughts were forward and not backward when you got back.

W: Yes.

T: And you were just twenty-one.

W: Yes.
T: A whole lifetime of experience by the time you’re twenty-one. Let me go back: on that walk there from Limburg to Bad Orb, what for you was the most difficult aspect of those days on the road?

W: It’s so long ago that it’s hard to remember what your feelings were and so forth. Of course I did get sick. We’ll maybe hit that later at Bad Orb.

T: You got sick at Bad Orb.

W: Yes. I got pneumonia and pleurisy bad.

T: Yes. And I’ll ask you about it, because Bad Orb is its own story really.

W: Yes.

(1, B, 405)

T: What was the most difficult thing about marching there? I mean walking from one camp to the other.

W: Any kind of marching if you don’t have the right nutrition, you’re hurting. But it wasn’t terribly bad. I think we knew that Bad Orb was our destination, and life would be a little bit easier. We knew the war was winding down and we’d be liberated eventually.

T: Let me ask about that. How much did you know about how the war was going outside of your little prisoner world?

W: Practically nothing. Of course towards the end of the war you could hear the gunfire in the distance.

T: In the camp there?

W: Yes. But the camp had its hospital, and I was in the hospital.

T: So you don’t remember getting news, as it were, or any kind of updates of what was going on outside of your little world?

W: No. No. I read, I think the same thing you did, about the Bad Orb—the guards there. This is of course just within a week of being liberated, I think. Some of them pulled out, I guess. But of course that was kind of beyond me. I was in the hospital. I was sick and having delusions.

T: Let’s move to Bad Orb, because you got there and spent a couple of months there. It looks like March-April [1945], a couple, two months.
W: Yes.

T: Was your health bad when you arrived there or did it get bad once you got there?

W: I think it [my health] got bad after I got there. [I got pneumonia and pleurisy bad.]

T: And what happened to you specifically?

W: I just got pneumonia. Fever and you’re weak, and you’ve got a fever. The bathroom facilities were practically nonexistent. So it was a welcome sight to see the GI ambulances roll in [when the camp was liberated in April].

T: How long were you in a barracks at Bad Orb before you ended up in the hospital?

W: I would say about three-fourths of the time there. I wish I could give you some dates and stuff.

T: That’s okay. So three-fourths of the time you were in a barracks, not the hospital.

W: Correct.

T: What were the conditions for you in the barracks? How big were these rooms, how many men were in them?

W: It was probably a room about this size [approximately 20 feet x 20 feet]. The barracks were three tiers, and two guys in each bunk.

T: Three high. Two to a bunk in a room maybe—

W: Not as wide as this room.

T: Twenty feet square maybe?

W: Yes. That’s about it.

T: So a lot of guys packed in a small room.

W: Yes. And of course there’s no taking a shower or anything like that. So lice were always a problem.

T: Did you have problems with lice before you got to Bad Orb or only once you got there?

W: No. I think after we got there. I know my fellow prisoners got lice sooner than I did. Why, I don’t know.
T: Let me ask you about the lice. For many readers or listeners who will not have had lice, how do they affect you? What do they do?

(1, B, 445)

W: You can feel them. You're laying on your back and they scoot across and you pop them with your thumbnails.

T: So you could feel them crawling across your skin.

W: Yes. Yes. You could feel them crawling.

T: Is it all the time or mostly at night, mostly during the day? Are they nocturnal things?

W: (laughing) I don't recall if they were more active some of the day or not.

T: You remember popping them with your fingernails.

W: Yes. I thought that was a great invention (laughing).

T: These were a problem the whole time you were there. For you anyway.

W: Yes.

T: What about the Germans here? Did you have much contact with the guards that were there?

W: Very little if any. Very little.

T: You could see them, but in a sense there wasn't anything where they came into your barracks room every day or anything.

W: They left us alone. Yes.

T: And the food, better or worse than Limburg?

W: I'd say probably about the same. Roughly. Just a little bread and a little soup.

T: Yes, that's what you said earlier. And the emphasis on little. Not very much.

W: Yes.

T: Was this augmented by any Red Cross parcels that you remember getting?
W: No. I remember—it’s a great rumor mill, a POW camp. The Red Cross was going to come and *(pauses three seconds)* they came once. All I got out of it was half a can of cheese. Two guys had to split a can of cheese. I remember that. I think earlier in the war there was more Red Cross activity. I’m kind of guessing that the officers probably did all right.

T: Generally they got more than the enlisted guys.

W: Yes.

T: With little food and your health declining, how was your mood here? I mean were you maintaining a sense of optimism or—

W: Well, yes. You knew the war wasn’t going to last forever. It was just around the corner. So really, the lousier the conditions, the better my outlook was I think. Because I knew we’d be liberated.

T: So in a sense twisting that around, the worse things were going for the Germans, the better.

W: Yes. Yes.

T: Were there any work details here at Bad Orb or was it again pretty much just, fill your time?

W: No. No. That little sheet, put out [by] I forget what organization, about Bad Orb. Talks about a work detail just to bury the dead. Because in our little hospital there were one or two deaths a night, as I recall.

(1, B, 476)

T: And you end up in the hospital.

W: Yes.

T: Could you feel yourself getting sicker, or was it a case that it came rather suddenly?

W: No. I was gradually getting sicker, weaker. Yes.

T: What kind of symptoms did you notice for yourself?

W: Just weakness. Spit a lot. You had this coffee can. You’d spit. In fact, I think of it quite often. I get a cold or something and you go through Kleenex like mad. They didn’t know what Kleenex was.
T: So you made do.

W: Yes. Yes. But I could tell I was getting weaker. [from p. 15: I was sick and having delusions.] I guess as a practical matter, in two more weeks I would have been a goner, I think.

T: You mentioned that [when we talked] on the phone too, that you were really in bad shape when it ended.

W: Yes.

T: Did you have, at Bad Orb there, people, friends you were especially close to, people that you helped or that helped you?

W: No. I didn’t really buddy up with anybody in my prisoner of war experience. In the hospital I think they had a chaplain and they had a doctor. I think the name Sutherlund came up and I recalled that. But he had his hands full. He had no medicine.

T: So not much of a hospital really.

W: Of course penicillin just came into being about World War II, didn’t it?

T: Yes. Right. At the very end.

W: That would have saved me a lot of misery.

T: It sounds like it. What were the conditions like in the hospital that you were in at Bad Orb?

W: I just don’t recollect. But I had a lower bunk. I don’t think there was a higher bunk in the hospital. So I had my own private bunk. They had a guy who would try to make you as comfortable as possible, but no medicine so you just kind of sweat it out.

T: Little they could do for you it sounds like.

W: Right.

T: You were in the hospital, but it sounds like you just moved from one bunk to another bunk.

W: Yes. Yes. “Hospital.”

T: Did you begin to worry that—you knew people were dying—that you might not make it?
W: You know, I don’t think that I had any fear of that because you could hear the guns away in the distance. And of course that was the talk, the gossip—that we were going to be liberated.

T: You mentioned that POW camps are rumor mills.

W: Yes. Yes.

T: What kind of rumors?

W: Of course being liberated was the number one. We always expected and hoped for the Red Cross to come through a little better. They never did. My crew. We only got the one Red Cross series of packages.

*(1, B, 513)*

T: You were there a number of months, and only remember one instance where you got something.

W: Yes.

T: So you didn’t get much news of the outside world. And I imagine when you’re in the hospital there that you know if you’re not feeling well anyway you’re probably not paying attention.

W: Yes. I don’t think I was interested in too much.

T: What do you remember about the end of your time at Bad Orb? The Americans did arrive—how did you experience that?

W: [From p. 16: So it was a welcome sight to see the GI ambulances roll in when the camp was liberated in April]. Of course an ambulance came. I think they loaded us four—I don’t know how many stretcher cases there were. I don’t know. There were three on one side and three on the other side, so that would be six. It was such a relief to get—the only miserable thing was that ambulance, the guy was a speed demon and it was not very comfortable. *(chuckles)* I had to take a leak awful bad.

T: It’s amazing what the mind remembers, isn’t it? *(both laugh)*

W: Yes. One of those things... I can remember that. It must have been a good day’s drive that we went to. Then we unloaded at a field hospital of some kind. I think they fattened us up a little bit for about a week. Then we went to a hospital in Paris. That was like heaven.

T: So you were at an American run field hospital first after you left Bad Orb.
W: Yes. Yes. And then wound up in Paris. Then they piled us on an airplane. Didn’t have to take the ship back. They flew us back to New York, someplace in New York. Then they asked us all where did we prefer, what hospital did we prefer. Well, the closest one for me to Minnesota was Chicago.

T: So you were one of the few guys who didn't take a ship back to the USA.

W: Yes. That was a luxury.

T: Yes, it was. Now you were liberated in April. How soon was it before you got back to the States? You’ve talked about a couple of hospital stops here.

W: Yes. Yes. Well, after we were liberated I would probably [say a] couple, three weeks before we got on that hospital plane. And from then on it was just a matter of—we knew we were going to recuperate. But then would we have to go and fight the Japs? We actually thought we were going to have to.

T: Good you bring that up. Was that something that people were talking about, that you were concerned about?

W: I don’t recall how concerned we were. We knew we had to do what we had to do. I didn’t expect anything special because I’d been in Germany. If I got all my strength back, then I’d hate to have been in the forefront of that invasion of Japan. But thank God for Harry Truman.

T: Because the invasion of Japan was set to happen, and you could very well have been part of it.

(1, B, 550)

W: Yes. Yes. They don’t take prisoners. They fight to the last man. So we were lucky then I think that—that would be an interesting study too, to figure out how many casualties if we didn’t have the A bomb.

T: When you got back to the US, did they take you to Chicago like you requested?

W: Yes.

T: And did you get home to Grand Rapids first or did your folks come in to see you?

W: My folks did make a trip to the hospital in Chicago, yes.

T: To see you.

W: Yes.
T: How long were you in the hospital there?

W: Off and on. I never did get back to active service of any kind before I was discharged.

T: So hospitals were your last stop then.

W: My last stop. And then they gave me an open-ended pass, you might say. Go home; we’ll tell you when we want you. And I guess the next time I knew, I was to report to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. Separation center.

T: When your folks came to see you, that was in Chicago there...

W: Gardiner General Hospital.

T: How much did your folks ask you about your POW experience?

W: *(laughing)* I don’t remember. I don’t remember. Little things, you know, you remember. We were about the second or third floor. It was a big open area. There was just a lot of bunks. Wounded and sick. My folks—how they made it I didn’t think to ask, but they got right up onto my floor. There was kind of a tearful reunion you might say. I guess you’d have to interview my sisters as to...

T: Did they come along too?

W: Yes. Three sisters and my folks.

T: So they all made the trip all the way from Grand Rapids to Chicago to see you.

W: Yes. Yes.

T: That must have been pretty special.

W: Yes. That was real special. It was. *(pauses three seconds)* Anyway, the nurse, she was kind of a tough old nut. She came in the room there, saw my folks right at my bed—although I was sitting up. I was getting along pretty good. She asked my dad, “How did you get here?” He said, “We took the elevator.” I’ll never forget that. He didn’t see anything wrong with it. The procedure, I should have gone down and met with them in the lobby or some room downstairs.

T: As opposed to by your bedside.

W: Yes. A reception area. I was pretty well on the way to mending when that happened.
T: Do you remember where you were when the war with Japan ended?

W: Yes. I was in that Chicago hospital. Still there.

T: Let’s move on: you were discharged from Camp McCoy, but you were home to Grand Rapids before that, right?

W: Yes. In fact I went to work in Coleraine, which is six miles from here. They had a lab there for testing iron ore samples. I got bored as hell staying home, so I started to earn a paycheck.

T: Even while you were still in the service officially.

W: And I got my service check. Big deal—thirty bucks a month.

T: That’s right. A little spending money I suppose.

W: Of course paratroopers got fifty bucks extra. I don’t recall if they kept that up or not.

T: And you were a paratrooper, that’s right. Airborne. When you got back here to Grand Rapids, folks around, how much did your POW experience come up as a topic of conversation?

W: Not too much, as I recall. I mean they knew it, and so be it.

T: Was it a case of your folks asked questions and you were reluctant to answer, or do you feel they were reluctant to ask?

W: Which way it was, I don’t know. I may have just poured my soul out to them as to what happened. I don’t remember.

T: You don’t remember specifically, so we’ll leave that one. Let me shift that forward a generation. When your own kids were growing up, how much did they know about their dad’s POW experience?

W: Oh, they didn’t ask much. I remember my grandson, he had to write something about me and he came and sat right where you are and asked me questions about my military career and such.

T: Your grandson did it.

W: Yes.
T: How about your own kids? What did they ask you growing up?

W: My own kids. Keith and my sisters—there was no special curiosity. They knew I was a prisoner, and so be it. I got out of it okay, and that’s it.

T: If your kids, as they were growing up, asked you questions, did you feel comfortable answering them?

W: No. I felt, you know, it was the natural thing.

T: So if your son or one of your daughters asked you about what life was like at Bad Orb, could you tell them?

W: Just about what I’ve been telling you. It isn’t a heck of a lot, because of memory.

T: Back to after the war. After you were released as a POW, how often did images or memories of your POW experience come back to you in dreams or even nightmares?

W: No. I know some fellows, ex-GIs, had nightmares and stuff, but I think I weathered that pretty good.

(1, B, 642)

T: How did you manage to put Limburg and Bad Orb and all the stuff behind you?

W: Put it behind me?

T: I mean, it wasn’t part of your active [daily life], talking to your kids much or your family. It was something that you didn’t focus on and so what did happen to it?

W: Well, I think just feeling fortunate and lucky to be liberated, be in friendly hands and white, clean sheets. That there wasn’t anything to worry about.

T: You mentioned a couple times that you did worry as a POW.

W: Yes. Yes.

T: Now you’re a member of American ex-POWs, the organization?

W: I guess I am.

T: That’s where I got your name, so it’s kind of a leading question.

W: That little book.

T: How long have you been a member of that organization?
W: I don’t know. Maybe a couple years. Not very long I don’t think.

T: Here’s the final question for you. When you think about your POW experience, those months you were in Limburg, Bad Orb, what do you think is the most important way that experience changed you or changed your life?

W: I guess your question is, what would I have done differently if I hadn’t gone through it.

T: Yes, it kind of is.

W: I don’t know, I guess, it’s hard to answer that one.

T: Or how was Warren Anderson a different person when he came back to the States? I mean, in a sense your folks saw a young man go off to service. The young man that came back in 1945, what did they notice that was different about him?

W: At that age you’re still maturing and they could tell that probably. I guess I was mainly concerned about getting an education and earning a living.

T: Getting on with your life, in a way?

W: Yes. I guess that’s the better way to put it. In a positive way. Instead of shooting at somebody, get an education and thank goodness for the GI Bill of Rights.

T: You know some veterans, POWs, I’ve talked to over the years have spent decades, really, remembering or keeping active in their minds their military experience. Others haven’t.

W: Yes.

T: Where are you on that?

W: Those who haven’t. Some guys in the local VFW, American Legion, Disabled Vets—I was a poor joiner when it came to them. I’d just as soon forget that stuff. It was something to be proud of, you know, to make a sacrifice that way. Like the [POW BUSuem exhibit] they had at the local library [last week]. There’s very few old timers there going through the bus. But I felt, I’ve seen this stuff. I’m going home.

T: Let me ask you then—why did you go?

(1, B, 706)

W: Why did I go?
T: Yes.

W: I was just kind of back in my mind hoping I’d see a little something of the prison camp. Somebody was to set Bad Orb up here in that field, I’d like to see it. But just see it once, and forget it.

T: Is there a curiosity in a sense, even now, like for you at age eighty, about that past? About your own past?

W: There is a curiosity; I would like to go to Germany and maybe trace my path. Although it would be pretty hard to do it. Those two towns where I dug the gun emplacements. They’re probably pretty much the way they were sixty years ago, but it’s a long time.

T: Yes. Some guys are content never to go back. They don’t want to, and yet you would in the right circumstances.

W: Yes. Yes. Just curiosity. In other words, I went through an unpleasant experience there, but I’d still be curious as to what it looked like.

T: So it’s not something you want to totally banish from your memory, but you want to have it, just a little bit of peeking at it almost.

W: Curious. Yes.

T: That’s the last question I had, Mr. Anderson. On the record I’ll thank you very much for your time this evening.

W: You’re welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW