Raynold Carlson was born 31 May 1919 in the mining community of Pool Location, near the city of Hibbing, on Minnesota’s Iron Range. He grew up here, and attended school. Raynold was inducted into the US Army in April 1942, and trained as a mortar crew member.

By summer 1943 was serving with the 143rd Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division. That division was involved with the invasion of Salerno, Italy, which began on 3 September 1943. Following an engagement several days after the invasion, Raynold was taken prisoner by German forces.

As a POW, Raynold spent time at several camps: Stalag II-B Hammerstein, and Stalag VII-A Moosburg. He also spent time on work details. Reynold was liberated when advancing American forces reached Moosburg on 29 April 1945.

Reynold spent some months recovering from his time as a POW. He was discharged from service in October 1945. Again a civilian, Reynold returned to Hibbing, then spent many years working for the railroad. He was interviewed at his home in Hibbing in April 2005.
Interview key:
T = Thomas Saylor
R = Raynold Carlson
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(***) = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A.  Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is 15 April 2005.  This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project; my name is Thomas Saylor.  Today I’m speaking with Mr. Raynold Carlson at his home here in Hibbing, Minnesota.  First, Mr. Carlson, on the record now, thanks very much for taking time to be part of this project today.  It’s appreciated.

R: (nods head)

T: Let’s put the information we have on the record here.  You were born on 31 May 1919 in the little community of Pool Location, and that’s here in Hibbing.  You were inducted into service April 1942, and the other end of that, you were discharged from service October of 1945.  By 1943 you were overseas serving with Company M, that’s a heavy weapons mortar company, of the 143rd Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division.  That division was involved with the invasion of Salerno, and that was on 9 September 1943.

I want to pick up the story right after that, after the invasion.  It was several days after that actually, at the little town of Altavilla, that our story begins really, because it was there that you became a prisoner of war.  Let me ask you to go back to the day that you were captured, Mr. Carlson, and to describe as clearly as you can how it was that you were captured.

R: We were trying to filter through, and we got down to the bottom of the mountain there.  There was one of these dry creeks running from an artisan well.  There was a stone fence about seven feet high with cactus sticking up over.  In the position I was in, I was about half-ways up that wall and they opened up with machine guns just above our heads and giving the order to give up.

So what the heck could a person do?

T: How many of you were there?

R: We were supposed to go by company.  But coming down the mountain, as we were coming down, more and more gathered.  There must have been at least twenty.  Those idiots, they were making so damn much noise.  We were at the head of the column.  So there was nothing to do.  The sergeant, he was at the head of the column.  What do we do?  He said, “Well…” After this, it was still on the dark side, so they frisked us and what have you.  Anyway, come to find out that the sergeant was able to get around that stone fence.  I can still see that stone fence.  Then from there on it was... (deep sigh).
T: Let me ask you. Before that day, how much thought had you given to the fact that you might be a prisoner during the war? Did that ever occur to you?

R: Never. Never had any idea of that. Never. No. It was just one of those things. I can thank God that I’m here.

T: So in a way, was it easier to imagine you could be injured or even killed than it was to image you’d be a prisoner of war? I mean, it’s dangerous business being in an infantry company.

R: The thing is, being in heavy weapons you weren’t really in the front. You were usually in the back of the column. But everything got all so doggoned mixed up. In fact, I forgot the number of guns we had, but we got one on top of that mountain where Capua was. What we did, we’d go up so far, drop. We’d walk to the next one. Where they would drop you you’d pick that up and you walk so far. Then you dropped it and then you walked so far and picked up and it just rotated so everything was moving up like a caterpillar. It was a good idea, the way it worked. But we only got one gun up in the company.

T: When your group was captured, was anybody injured? At that point anybody wounded, or was everybody in one piece?

R: When we were captured, no. Everybody was in one piece, but coming down there was one of them still alive. They wouldn’t let us do anything with that guy. He was still alive. It was down one of these washes. Most of that water was coming from the artisan well, see there? That water was just like ice. But it was good to drink, too. But the thing is, we didn’t have any water. The way these guys were laying there, we drank water that there was blood in it. We didn’t know it at the time. It was good water.

(1, A, 68)

T: The Germans had been the enemy all along here. How was it different to now have the Germans really right in front of you?

R: Now?

T: Yes. Suddenly you’re their captive. How did that make you feel to have the Germans really right there in front of you now?

R: You just kept your mouth shut. When we got to this one area [we were] questioned.

T: How soon did that happen? Was that the same day?
R: No. No. See, we went back over that same route that we were where these GIs were laying in that...seeing things there that...you take the web belt this one guy had on. That web belt was just cut right through. By then those flies had already taken up, so they were swelling like a balloon. The heat and that. We went up and we went down and crossed the river. That's where, I think, one of the other battles that they had over that river. We were stopped and we were talked to. Questioned.

T: Was the questioning done individually or as a group?

R: Individually.

T: What do you remember about that questioning?

R: They got a big bang out of it. At that time you don't tell them anything but—I said I was in an ice cream mixer (chuckles).

T: You told them that?

R: Oh yes. I did. Yes. I made ice cream. Nine hundred gallons at a crack. The first batch I made was the best. I added cream when I was supposed to add skim milk. I forget what the percentage was. Fourteen point five it was supposed to be. It ran up there around twenty (chuckles).

T: It sure did. Now the Germans didn't really want to know about ice cream.

R: But the thing is, then he had to tell these other officers what I was. They were talking away. I got just an inkling of what they were saying.

T: Did you feel scared or intimidated being in this questioning at all?

R: No. They weren't mean or anything. Let's put it that way.

T: They didn't threaten you or anything.

R: No. No. Just wanted to know your serial number. 37270743.

T: You still know it.

R: Zwei und zwanzig sieben (continues number in German).

T: You still know that too, your German POW tag number.

R: Oh, yes.

T: Now the Germans held you briefly there at Capua, right?
R: Not at Capua, no. No. See, where we were captured there was a house, one of your combination barns and houses is what it amounted to. In the dark there. There were prisoners in there already. There was a bunch of us in there.

T: All Americans?

R: Yes. As far as I know. Then from there, that is when we went up over the mountain and then down across that river. It was a little ways from the river. Then I was one of the unlucky ones. Had to go back and get a German. He was wounded. So four of us, we went back across the river and they had him on a stretcher. We got in the middle of the river, in water about waist deep, get in the middle of the river and what does that guy do? I was on his legs, so I grabbed his leg and the other guy did the same thing, because if he’d have fallen into the drink you know what would have happened to us. Anyway, I grabbed him and carried him across, and he was dead.

Then from then on, then they marched us. From there I don’t know how many days it was. No food. There were grapes there. They come near enough so you could grab a bunch of grapes, and that was it. But then you got diarrhea from that. I don’t know how many days we walked. There was a sports stadium, some small one, where they had—it was for bullfighting or some doggoned thing.

(1, A, 128)

T: So a round arena or something.

R: There’s where I saw the American doctors. What they did to this one GI—we saw his legs. They put blowflies on him. It was infected. The maggots ate the infected flesh. The flesh. Yes. I saw them. When they got to [Stalag] II-B, I asked him, I saw him at II-B and I asked, "Are you the one?" [He said,] yes.

T: So you were in Italy a number of days before they shipped you Germany.

R: Yes. It took us two days up to that post. It would be kind of southeast of Salerno. Not much. But you could see Salerno from there. It was kind of a long…and we were there for several days. Maybe two, three days. Then we went to Capua.

T: As this goes from day to day, how worried were you about what’s going to happen to you?

R: There? You really didn’t know. As far as the people were concerned, I would say those on the front treated you better than when you got into Germany.

T: So these front line soldiers didn’t treat you poorly.

R: No. In fact, the way I understood, these people were from the Russian front. I know they were well experienced. And then they walked us—this wasn’t too far.
You had to cross this river. The bridge had been bombed, so we had to walk on the railings. The guards were set up, so we had to go across. Then there was a town on the other side. That’s where we got into these forty and eight boxcars.

T: That was my next question, was to ask about the transport to VI-A Moosburg.

(1, A, 174)

R: They shipped us in boxcars. We stopped several times. The trains were being bombed. I know we stopped on one mountain there. You could see through—you had barbed wire over the windows.

T: Small little windows, up high?

R: Yes. They had barbed wire on those so that the staples were on the outside. Then they had those bars on there. But they had barbed wire too.

T: But you could see a little bit outside.

R: Yes. I remember when, I think it was going through Rome, I saw the top of the, I think it was St. Peter’s.

T: From your recollection, how long did that trip in the boxcars take?

R: Oh! I know one time they let us get out. I’d been holding it right along. I couldn’t go down. I was going to squat and I couldn’t. It went that way and squirted out.

T: So you had diarrhea or something.

R: I had diarrhea then. One of the guards: (shakes head from side to side) That’s what he did. He just shook his head. It squirted. Once you don’t have any more water, you don’t go. There was a couple of holes. We just went over the hole. Then they had a pail by the door, but we were back beyond. This guy I was with, I forget who he was now, he turned over and urinated in the hole.

T: Was diarrhea or dysentery something that bothered you the whole time you were a prisoner of war?

R: Not all the time, no. This was from, I think, eating all those grapes. On an empty stomach. (stands up) You could stand like this, like this, and not touch.

T: So for the tape here, you could put your legs together and still get your hand through your thighs—

R: Without touching. Knees were all black and blue. My elbows. Wrists.
T: What was your healthy weight when you were in the service? What would you normally weigh?

R: I must have been at least 165, 170, something like that.

T: And can you estimate what you weighed at the end of your POW time?

R: I was skin and bone, let’s put it that way. All I remember, when I came home, my mother said in Swedish, it would be in English now, I could make it, “Boy! Boy! How skinny!”

T: So it must have struck your mom right away too.

(1, A, 227)

R: Yes. But by then I had put on some weight. We were in New Jersey. It was a really rough...that long march there.

T: Let’s not lose the thread of our interview, your story. You’re on the boxcars here going to Moosburg. Was that train ever strafed that you remember?

R: No, never was. But the track ahead had been bombed. So then we waited for them to do it over. To take and repair the rail. It was really fortunate, as far as I was concerned.

T: That’s more than once that you’ve mentioned that you were fortunate.

R: Yes. On that long march there. The whole camp, all Americans were together. Then they broke them all up. So we were in different groups. The groups, they must have had maybe fifty to one hundred, that bunch I was in with.

T: Let’s go to VII-A Moosburg. Can you estimate you were kept at Moosburg?

R: It wasn’t too long. It wasn’t too long.

T: Did you get assigned a barracks and everything there, or was it more a train stop?

R: I don’t know if there was even bunks. I can’t remember if there were bunks there. But at II-B [Hammerstein] there were bunks.

T: Of the camps, between VI-A and II-B, you spent more time at II-B, right?

R: Yes. All told. See, when I came back and had the surgery...the Germans had taken this master sergeant, his identification. So he was out on this farm. All those guys did milking, but finally that got that through Switzerland or what the heck that he got
his rank back and they sent him back to the camp. He got to be the American commander or whatever it amounted to for that camp. He was the one that helped me so that I didn’t have to go back to that farm.

T: Once you went back to II-B.

R: Yes.

T: II-B is way up north, in Germany.

R: Yes. It’s in Pomerania.

T: Yes. What do you remember about that camp? Let me ask you to do this: if you sort of go into the camp and describe the way the camp looked to you.

R: Well, to begin with, we understood that was part of a training camp. So they had showers there and the hospital was out of the camp. Then that was fenced in, if I remember right.

(1, A, 287)

T: The barracks themselves, the buildings, was it a large building or...

R: Oh, yes. They were long. They were double—your bunks. Then in the middle, what they had, there’s all cement. For washing. All it was, was cold water. When it was cold there was ice. But it didn’t freeze that solid. Then they had in the center of the camp, it more or less had been like a restaurant or something. Like they have at fairs and that. That was in the middle of the camp grounds. In this particular area was...that was there and then there were these camps here and then they had barns for horses and ... (unclear references)

T: Now were there different compounds here that you recall?

R: Where I was they had a high fence, but there was knotholes. They had a training camp there. German training camp.

T: So you could see the Germans training.

R: Oh, yes. They were with you. They had this one kid there, he was crying like crazy and he had to duck walk. Duck walk with his pack and his rifle. I don’t know how heavy that pack was. But he was duck walking. And he was crying. Young kid.

T: So you could see these Germans still training there. That’s interesting.

R: Yes. Oh, yes. Wondered what all those piles were. What they call meters. I don’t know how high they are. Found out what they were. They were mass graves. These
were prisoners from Poland and they were from France. These were civilians too. He saw all of this and he was from—he spoke fluent English. He was telling me about what...

T: He told you this in the camp.

R: One of those...when they made roll call. This joker—you know what a kiester-shaped wagon is? It was like this and they got the poles on the bottom. They’d fill that thing with corpses that he shot. But anyhow, those were graves. There were some by the hospital. I forget how many there were there. But I found where you could see across the fence there was a road and they used to go by. Marching and ridiculing across there. That’s where the graves were.

T: You could see those from your compound there.

R: Oh, yes. They were shaped like the potato meter that we had to make.

T: Your barracks, Mr. Carlson. How many men were in the barracks? Your particular barracks.

R: They had bunks there. If I remember, at least four high. I managed to get on the top. In the warmest place.

T: That’s the warmest place, that’s right. And how many men slept in a bunk, one or two?

R: One usually. But you get into some of those places, all it was, was a pile of hay. You were lucky if it was straw. Then full of fleas.

T: I was going to ask you about that. How much of a problem did you have with fleas, lice, that kind of stuff?

R: Fleas I had a lot. I don’t think I had lice.

T: Did you get the fleas at II-B?

R: Well, every place in Germany has got fleas.

T: So those were something no matter where you went you had them.

R: *laughing* Especially in Italy.

T: Fleas there too?

(1, A, 369)
R: Oh, yes. At Capua. And you could see them jumping.

T: For someone who hasn’t had fleas, how do they feel or how do they bother you?

R: They bite. What they’ll do is, they’ll get underneath your belt and under your arms. You scratch. You don’t kill them. The only thing is to strip. You can lay on the ground and take and look and you can see them jumping. But looking... --

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

T: How often did you have roll calls there at II-B?

R: Every morning for sure. I think it was twice a day. You go out and the guards would count you.

T: Did that take a long time or was it pretty quick usually?

R: It all depends on how they felt, I think. You’d be standing there. Like a nuisance.

T: How was the treatment by the guards in general? You mentioned one bad egg here, but how about the rest of the guards at this camp?

R: This first farm I was on, I had a bad experience with him. He had us in this barn with bundles of oats, and you’re passing them one to the other. I guess he didn’t like the way I was—anyhow, he tried for my legs but he got that wonderful coat that I had. A hole in it.

T: Shot at your legs?

R: No, he didn’t shoot. He just [used his] bayonet. But that same guy, he committed suicide.

T: While he was at the farm there?

(1, B, 411)

R: No. I heard about it after. That he had... He was a mental case, [that’s] what it amounted to.

T: What did you notice about his behavior at the farm when you were with him?

R: Just that. But right after that I was shanghaied to this other farm.

T: You were or he was?
R: No. I and another guy. Then when we got to that farm, the first thing in the morning we are put on this manure pile, level it out. So we start doing it. Then this Fritz Boteen and (*** Pomerania told this guard, and he was a Polish...we called him “One Lamp Louie” because he had one eye gone, that’s when he said, shoot one and the other one will work. He said in Plattdeutsch. He said, “Schutzen ein und der oder will wollen Sie arbeit.” So what the heck. So I told this guy with me, I forgot his name, what they said. I said, “Let’s work ourselves nearer so if he shoots me you kill him. If he shoots you, I’ll kill him.” With pitchforks. But it ended up old One Lamp Louie [said], “Nein, nein. Ist verboten.”

T: In general, on a daily basis, how did the guards treat you? Let’s talk about at II-B. How did the guards treat you there?

R: The thing is you avoided them as much as you can. But then when I came back in and had that surgery...

T: So you were out of the camp and then back to the camp.

R: Back to the camp. Yes. I was supposed to go back but then this sergeant that was at this place, he’s the one that got it so I became a tailor. Putting patches on old clothes.

T: He protected you.

R: Yes. Another thing is what happened to him. On that long march, there was a floating bridge there up near the Baltic. It’s a long one. I don’t know how long it was, but it was long. We got across it and they followed. And English Spitfire came over and strafed and he got killed.

T: By the strafing plane.

R: Yes. Yes. He was getting mail and I wasn’t getting any and he let me read his sister’s letters to him (chuckles).

T: At the camp there, at II-B, what kind of food did the Germans supply?

R: At II-B it was mostly soups. It wasn’t the best. At least you had something hot anyway. Once in a great while we got ersatz coffee. Otherwise, hot water. And black bread.

T: Was that regular, the heavy black bread?

R: They used sawdust as leavening. On the outside. They rolled it in sawdust and then they baked it. So that’s where the people were getting appendicitis.

T: Is that right?
R: Yes. You cut that stuff off and then it was okay.

T: Did you get Red Cross packages there at II-B?

*(1, B, 454)*

R: Got it there and I think I got one or two on one of those farms.

T: So you got them but they were sporadic it sounds like.

R: This is something I have to say too. One of the guys I was with was from Chicago. His mother worked packaging those parcels. Did you know there was two Red Cross; there’s American and the National. One was the government. Had to be.

T: She was one of the people helping to pack those things.

R: Yes.

T: That you got but not very often.

R: Yes. You were supposed to get them every so often, but I didn’t get too many.

T: So you had to rely pretty much on what the Germans supplied.

R: When you were out on that farm, yes.

T: Let me ask about the farms. As an *Arbeitskommando*, did you volunteer for that or were you picked?

R: No. No. Just go.

T: How many of you were picked for that first farm you went to?

R: There must have been at least eight, ten of us. The second farm was—well, when you planted potatoes you start in the morning, and this is the way I carried it. They tied rags around the neck and made a pouch. Here you’d have one of those big sacks full of potatoes. This is the way you had to carry them. Bend like this (*like carrying bag on shoulder*). So then you only had—there was one [German] bitch that, she thought she was everything, but she was a real hag. Then you had to take—like with what she did, every one of those potatoes you had to pick that up and put that sack back on your shoulders. I got wise to it. I always tried to ignore her.

T: Were you in these fields working with German civilians too?
R: There was a couple of Polish girls and then there was at least a half a dozen Russian girls.

T: So a real mixed group at this farm.

R: Yes. Oh, yes. We were in what used to be a pig pen. They had built the crap around the outside.

T: So you slept at the farm too.

R: Oh, yes. When I first came there all they had was a plank there full of hay. That’s what we slept on. But the prisoners that were there before, they had—I slept underneath that damn picture on our wall of Hitler. A great big one. A picture of him. That really bothered the hell out of me. Should we take that down or shouldn't we? Better not. The beautiful thing, the wife of the owner of the place, Hermann Blumenthal, his wife was from New York City (laughing). So then after that they started putting bunks in.

(1, B, 497)

T: Now the farm was pretty close to II-B? The farm you were working at.

R: It was some distance there. You went on the Toonerville Trolley anyhow. One of those deals. It was a small locomotive with one car.

T: What kind of treatment did you get working at the farm there?

R: At that one, that’s where they had this—he was supposedly one of these big shots when they invaded Poland. The chef is the boss. What saved me was one of the guards, he was from Luxembourg, and the Russians treated him just as bad as they treated... When he took me to his company or the regimental doctor to get a physical there. He saved my life.

T: Let’s try talking about the march. Well, before you marched you mentioned one farm. You were at two different farms.

R: Two different farms, yes.

T: Basically the same kind of work?

R: Yes, it was. Threshing, planting potatoes in the spring. Sorting. You had these regular sorters, potato sorters. Then we made these, what they were, they sorted the potatoes. You put straw on the ground, put the potatoes on top, and then straw on top and then about eight inches of dirt. You had to put that on top and on each side as we went. But then we used to smile when we saw the crops. Everybody was
the same way. These doggoned pigs, would come and they’d go right across the top eating off the top. They would open it up and the potatoes would freeze *(laughs).*

*(1, B, 556)*

T: Was there a desire to kind of sabotage the work when you were doing it?

R: The animals were sabotaging, but you didn’t dare. You did your work and that was it.

T: You went through several seasons on the farm. You’ve talked about harvesting, and also planting.

R: Oh, yes. See right after that is when I—I think it had a lot to do with that, lifting those sacks.

T: For reference, did you spend a Christmas at either of the farms?

R: I must have. Must have. Yes. Because I planted potatoes. It was in the fall. That’s when we were threshing and leveling out manure piles.

T: Threshing and planting would be in the fall. And potatoes, you plant in spring and harvest in the fall.

R: Yes. We sorted the potatoes at one place. I was having—it must have been the arthritis already bothering me. This shoulder was aching. But you had to keep going. So I’d switch hands. The bastard [German guard] started bellowing. We just switched. Just so that we could turn [around]. My shoulder was aching.

T: Did you have guards at both of these camps? German guards?

*(1, B, 611)*

R: All Germans except that fellow from Luxembourg, and that Pollack, One Lamp Louie. I’ll tell you a little deal about this other one. He came in—it had gotten so that we could use a radio. [This guard from Luxembourg,] he went and sneaked the radio that they had in where they were. Where the guards were. So he had brought that in there. The thing is, you know, we got Stockholm, Sweden. Anyhow, *(chuckles)* we just got that thing on before it got good sound, and I heard this announcer say, now we’re going to have news.

T: How much news did you have about how the war was going outside the farm?

R: Not any. Not any that amounted to anything. You had an idea. Just what was taking place.
T: One often hears that prisoners, some prisoners, think about escaping. Here you are at a couple locations. Did escaping ever cross your mind?

R: Oh, yes, but where were you going to go? Where? You’re in the middle of nowhere. You don’t know anybody.

T: So you weren’t sure exactly where you were.

T: Before we get to the march I want to ask about your appendix. You talked about your appendix. What did you notice, what kind of feelings did you have? This is on the farm now, right?

R: Yes. I vomited. Then the continual pain.

T: So what did the Germans do with you? Here’s a medical situation they can’t handle.

R: The thing is, the medic came. A German medic came. I was on the bunk there, at that farm. He went over and my stomach looked like a balloon. What it amounted to, [they said] to the clinic he is going to go. So the next morning this guard from Luxembourg took me. He had to have a physical or something.

T: So just the two of you went to... Were you in bad physical shape by now?

(1, B, 682)

R: That pain was there continually. Then there were some other [prisoners] from some other places. There were three of us and that guard. When we went to that clinic, or whatever it was, we had to strip.

T: What did the Germans do for you? Take your appendix out?

R: It wasn’t the Germans that did it.

T: It was in their clinic though.

R: It was in the prison camp [at II-B]. They had this Polish surgeon that was the head of the University of Warsaw or Poland or what it was. His name was Jasowiski.

T: So this doctor, so back at the clinic at the prison camp, you’re operated on and you get your appendix out.

R: Yes. I was sent then from there to the camp.

T: So the clinic was a German military clinic.
R: Yes. It was military.

T: They sent you back to the camp then. No more farm work for you; now you’re back in the camp.

R: No. That’s when I made off I was a tailor (laughs).

T: How did you get that job? You’re not a tailor.

R: No. You had these treadle sewing machines. I remember how my mother did, and I wish she would have taught me more. Every time a guy comes around that was in charge there—he was a guard. He had a pistol on him. So every time he came by I was rethreading. I had to learn that myself. How to rethread without taking and breaking the thread.

T: How long did you do that job?

R: I don’t know. It must have been—make it a month or so. Whatever it was. No, it would be more than that, because we left the camp the first week in December.

(1, B, 753)

T: The first week in December is when II-B was evacuated.

R: Yes. The whole camp. Everybody. And the further north we went the more snow we got into. Then we started going east...or west.

T: Let me ask you about the –

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

T: Let me ask you about the march. The first week of December 1944 the camp is to be evacuated. How much advance warning did you have this was going to happen?

R: I don’t know. A matter of days, I guess. I really can’t say.

T: But fairly sudden the way you recall.

R: The thing is, this friend of mine—I never knew what his first name was. His last name was Gargamar, and he was from Binghamton, New York. I’ve been trying to find him to see if he’s alive and thank him for saving my feet.

T: How did he save your feet on the march?

R: He gave me something. When we got locked up. It was really good when we got into haymows.
T: Where were you locked up?

R: In these barns. For the night. Boy those cows really must like that. Just turn over. What you did, you made a hole.

T: This was a pretty cold winter. How was the weather impacting you as you were marching?

R: What was worst was, when they first started out from the camp. The snow. But as luck would have it, again, we were in the end of the column.

T: Why is that lucky?

R: While we were walking the head of the column was breaking trail.

T: So who came behind was marching over stuff that had been stomped down.

R: Yes.

T: Were you marching by yourself or did you have a friend or friends that you stayed with all the time?

R: I was with this guy from Binghamton, New York. We were together all the time. We shared and shared alike.

T: Did you know him before the march started?

R: I got to know him in the tailor shop. They had a shoemaker shop there. He was a shoemaker by trade. I always wanted that pair of shoes that he was going to make, and there would be no nails in it. He told me how to stand in these buckets and you make the regular form. You’d stand on your two feet and you’d have that poured.

(2, A, 30)

T: Now how can friends help each other on a march like that? What can you do for each other?

R: You shared and shared alike.

T: Like what? Give me an example.

R: You gave each other body heat. You always laid with your back to back.

T: So you always had someone else to keep you a little warmer.
R: Back to back. Yes. In that way, and in the brush piles, it would be the same way. There would be several of them. We’d say turn and everybody would turn over.

T: Did the Germans supply any food for you on that march or did you kind of have to scrounge?

R: No. They had that pot—it’s a big pot. They made soup in it. Sometimes there was nothing. Others it was terrible. There was a lot of sand in it. The worst we had—this was at where we were liberated. We all vomited. Dehydrated sugar beet soup. You get that down and boy, did you vomit.

T: How did your health hold up on the march?

R: I started getting boils. I quit counting at one hundred.

T: So all over your body you had boils.

R: Yes. Mostly around my [eyes and face].

T: Around your eyes and face.

R: I was lucky I’m not blind. All over. My legs. When I was in France, if I wanted to I could have convinced the doctor that looked, that gave me that physical or supposedly physical—he thought they were bullet holes.

T: He did?

R: Oh, yes. He just came from the States. So I could have had him put in for me for a Purple Heart. But I told him the truth. I wouldn’t want it when I didn’t earn it.

T: Did you come into contact all those days marching with German civilians at all? On the road.

R: They didn’t dare talk to us.

T: So you saw them, but you didn’t talk to them.

R: No. No. Some of those places, like the bigger cities, they marched us through at night. That was so we wouldn’t see anything.

(unrelated discussion)

R: At the end of the march we were in a small compound. Then when some of those Allied fighters would come over, then they would wiggle their wings.

T: Because they could see the POW [on the roof].
R: So then we knew. Then wherever they were, when the fighters came they were, just about every one of them that would come over us would... *(extends arms, moves them up and down)*

T: Wiggle their wings.

R: That’s when we knew that things were getting pretty good.

T: Yes. Talk about your liberation. How did that happen?

R: They locked us up. At night. In this place all there was, was straw. A dozen of us or more. See, they broke us into smaller groups. Anyhow, I imagine that’s what they wanted in that area. Anyhow, got up and everything was real quiet. The door was open on the barracks. Go out. The gates were locked. They had one of those corridors in between and two gates. Then the cording on the top. You son of a gun. All of a sudden look across there and here we see this GI coming.

T: Just one?

R: Yes. Attached to the English 8th [Army]. An American. He said he was on the point from the time they left the coast. We hollered to him to come. He was still leery, and I don’t blame him. Being on point that long. He takes and counts and then each one of us said where you were from. One of the guys was from the town he was in. He described where this is and that and stuff like that. So then he shot the locks off.

*(2, A, 110)*

T: What kind of condition were you in at this point?

R: After that march I was in... I’ll say that was the first shower we took...they gave us...that was the first bath I had. So we stripped and there was a door with glass from the top to the bottom. It was black on the other side. Then we were looking at each other. Boy! We’re a hell of a mess, you know. I said, “Look at those guys over there!” Stand up and walk towards it. I was looking at myself.

T: So you didn’t even recognize yourself really.

R: No. Not until I got close. It was a mirror, and what the heck.

T: You hadn’t had a mirror either for a while, had you?

R: No. No. That’s when my knees and my elbows and my wrists were black and blue. Then you know where the belt is? That was all black and blue. I don’t know how much longer we would have lasted...how we were existing on...
T: Did some guys die along the way when you were marching?

R: The thing is, like when we were marching, the first few days are your fall outs. All you do, you listen. Didn’t hear any shots. So I don’t think anyone was shot.

T: So you listened to hear what they were doing.

R: Oh, yes.

T: But the guys didn’t come back either.

R: No. You kept going. You had guards on both sides. The way we figured it out, each area has their regiment of that area. You got to that area, new guards. You kept going. New guards. They were always different.

T: I see. So depending on where you were geographically those were the guards you got.

R: Yes. You never had the same ones.

T: After liberation, were you taken to France to one of the camps?

R: We were taken from there by truck to another town, and I can’t remember what it is. This was an airport. I don’t know how many hours by truck. We were riding, is what it amounted to.

T: Which camp did you end up at in France?

R: We went to [Camp] Lucky Strike. Oh, I meant to tell you, when we got there supposedly the Red Cross, they were giving those sinkers [slang: doughnuts]. There was a planeload ahead of us. These guys took, there was several of them, I guess, they dropped dead.

T: From eating doughnuts!?

R: Either too rich or some damn thing. But the thing is, that’s what we were told. We got one. I ate half.

(2, A, 163)

T: How was your stomach handling food?

R: Oh, geez! It was like—have you vomited from being sick?

T: Sure.
R: Same thing. You vomit. I don’t know how many died. I can’t remember. So they gave us one, and I ate half of it.

T: Did you stay there in France a while before you got a ship back to the States?

R: Yes. From Le Havre. From France to England they put us on KP. The captain found out about who we were, so he put those people on. Then from there we picked up these—those that had had a vacation up in Iceland. They went through our bags. They were in the hold in the bunks around us. Any souvenirs that you had, they stole. I had a civilian cleaning kit. Metal case. Everything in there. Brand new. We were liberated at that airport. There was a room on the corner with P-38 pistols. The hell with that. I took that cleaning kit and I got a sight. I’ve still got it.

T: When you got back to the States, Mr. Carlson, how soon was it before you got home to see your family? Your folks here in Hibbing.

R: We went to Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. Landed on the opposite side of the pier—on the same pier that I went overseas on.

T: So it was actually a round trip. Did they keep you there or were you able to get back to Minnesota pretty quickly?

R: They made up a train. Whatever amount. Anyhow, we could go and clean up. Get a haircut. In fact, it was an Italian that cut my hair. He was giving me a European. I told him I wanted more like a human being. Whatever it amounted to in those days. Not that long stuff like they had in Europe. He got teed off. Didn’t make any difference. These converted boxcars that we...

T: Boxcars?

R: Converted. They had windows on there and they had bunks in them.

T: Move guys in a hurry.

R: Anyhow the bunks there. That boxcar we were in had a flat spot on one wheel. Ca-chunk, ca-chunk, ca-chunk. Nearer, nearer. It didn’t bother. Nearer, nearer.

T: So you were anxious to get home.

R: Oh, yes (with emphasis).

T: When you saw your folks, did you take the train there to Hibbing? From Fort Snelling?

R: No. I took the bus from Minneapolis. From St. Paul.
T: From St. Paul to Hibbing.

R: Yes.

T: When you first saw your folks, how much did they ask you about your POW experience?

R: Nothing, that I can remember.

(2, A, 223)

T: Did they ask you about being a combat soldier, anything like that?

R: Nothing.

T: So they didn’t ask anything about your service experience?

R: No. Nothing. They were glad I was home. That’s it.

T: It’s amazing that you were really gone for a couple of years. There’s a period of your life and nobody talked about it?

R: No. As far as this now, this is the most I’ve ever talked. Other than to a GI.

T: I see. Your two older brothers, were they in service?

R: The older one, no. The middle one, he was in Germany. It was occupation [duty after the war]. That’s all. They didn’t see any action or anything.

T: So you two had very different experiences.

R: Oh, yes (with emphasis). Yes.

T: Is your POW experience something that you talk to him about as another vet, after all he was in the service.

R: Not very much. Not very much. All I did was I talked German to him. But he didn’t know what I was talking about.

T: Now you worked for the railroad when you got out of the service. Is that right?

R: Yes. Went to that quick school in Minneapolis. On Lake Street. It was upstairs. It was the railroad. They had school. Short school.

T: And then you worked for the railroad.
R: Yes.

T: When you worked for the railroad, did any of your coworkers know you had been a POW?

R: That I don't know.

T: You don’t recall talking about your POW experience with...

R: No. But see, like most of those, most of those people didn’t go. So what’s the sense of talking to them?

(conversation unrelated to interview)

END OF INTERVIEW