Richard Carroll was born on 19 October 1920 on a farm near Rosemount, Minnesota, the youngest of eight children. He went to local schools, graduating from Rosemount High School on 1937. Dick briefly attended a business college, then worked on the family farm before enlisting in 1942 in the Army Air Corps. He earned his wings in January 1944, and was assigned to B-24 Liberator heavy bombers as a co-pilot.

Along with the rest of the B-24’s ten-man crew, Dick arrived in Italy in July 1944 and was posted to the 459th Heavy Bomb Group, 15th Air Force. On 2 July 1944, on a mission to Budapest, Hungary, Dick and the rest of the crew were forced to bail out when their plane developed engine trouble. Shot by Hungarian civilians when he landed, Dick spent July – December 1944 at a military hospital in Budapest recovering from a serious wound. When in December 1944 the hospital was evacuated due to the advancing Red Army, the Germans took Dick and other POWs from this facility to Dulag-Luft, a processing facility near Frankfurt/Main.

After a brief stay Dick was transferred to Stalag Luft I, located in Barth, northern Germany; he remained here until the camp was overrun in the first days of May 1945 by advancing Soviet troops. Dick then spent several months recovering from his POW ordeal, and was finally discharged in late 1945 with the rank of captain.

Again a civilian, Dick returned to Rosemount. He got married (1945, wife Martha), and helped raise a family. Dick worked many years for the VA and other federal agencies, including the Air Force Reserve; he retired in 1978. At the time of this interview (March 2004) Dick lived in Eagan, Minnesota.
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 22 March 2004, and this is our interview with Mr. Dick Carroll, at my office here at Concordia University, St. Paul. First, on the record Dick, thanks very much for taking time to come to Concordia and speak with me today.

D: You’re welcome.

T: For the record, and please correct me if there are any errors, you were born on 19 October 1920 on a farm in Rosemount, Minnesota. You were the youngest child of eight, attended country school, and then graduated from Rosemount High School 1937. You mentioned you attended business college for a while, worked on some farms, and in September of 1942 you enlisted in the US Army Air Corps. You took pilot training, graduated, got your wings January 1944 and by May of 1944 you were a second lieutenant in Europe flying as a copilot of a B-24 Liberator bomber with the 459th Heavy Bomb Group, stationed at Carignola in Italy.

D: Yes.

T: You completed fifteen missions before you and the crew bailed out on a bombing mission to Budapest, Hungary, on 2 July 1944. Let me pick up the story there. As the copilot of a bomber stationed in Europe do you remember the first mission that you flew?

D: Yes. We flew to Niscolts (sp?). First of all, the first five missions that we flew we had to be flying with other crews. They wanted to train us. To let us understand how combat missions are actually flown. They wanted to make sure that we understood this before they put us all together with our own crew. So the first five missions were flown with strangers.

T: So you came over with a crew, but then actually flew missions with different crews to sort of gain experience.

D: For five missions. Our first mission was to Niscolts, a little railroad center northeast of Budapest and the flak was rather light and we didn’t have any enemy aircraft on that particular mission. Our bombing target that day was a large railroad marshalling yard. That was part of our function as a bomber group, was to interrupt the transportation system of the Nazis.
T: I see. Was that the first mission you flew together with the crew you came over with or the first one you were on yourself?

D: First one I was on myself. With strangers.

T: What do you remember about that first mission?

D: I was impressed with, first of all, the silence. There was absolutely no chatter on the radio. There was no communication, because they warned everyone that any conversation going out over the radio would allow the Germans to pick up our exact location through zeroing in on—I forget what they call it. But anyway, they can actually find out precisely your direction.

T: By monitoring radio communications.

D: Right. From different points, that they could verify. So there was complete silence. So you just did your job and flying formation, we were accustomed to that, because we had quite a bit of training in flying formations with our bomber. But then of course that was our first exposure to flak. Fortunately none of it was within more than one hundred yards of our aircraft. So none of it seemed to reach our aircraft. So I felt rather safe.

But I was impressed that the Germans had the flak exploding at our altitude. So they knew our altitude obviously. I was impressed with that. And of course, flak is like, almost like fireworks on the Fourth of July in that it's beautiful from the standpoint of the going out like a flower, however, it's, the very core of it has this dirty, black, dark red and black core center where the explosion actually occurs, and you could see that that was pretty deadly and pretty hot.

(1, A, 45)

T: Were there times on other missions that the flak, to stay with that theme, was closer or more intense than the first mission you were on?

D: Oh, much more. Our two toughest targets that we were dealing with were Ploesti, Romania, where Hitler got all of his oil originally to take care of his army, navy and air force, and it was our job, the 15th Air Force, to eliminate that and it took many, many missions to do because the city of Ploesti was surrounded with I think it was thirty-two separate oilfields. All of these were interconnected with underground pipelines, so that if we knocked out three or four they could bypass them with their valves and ship this oil to the refineries that were interspersed between. So it was a never-ending job. Plus the Germans had a lot of slave labor that were right there constantly putting it back into shape again. So we'd have to go back and redo it.

T: How many missions did you fly to Ploesti yourself?
D: Two missions. And both times—it takes a long time to make the turn once you’ve dropped your bombs and you make a turn back towards home. With a large formation you make a very small amount of the curve, so it takes a long time and both times that we went to Ploesti it took twenty-seven minutes of flak plus the German Air Force was getting very, very aggressive. They would come through trying to shoot us down prior to getting to the flak, and then after we got out of the flak then they’d come back and hit us again with some other fighter craft because they could only stay up so long. They’d have to go down and refuel. So there was a second group that would come up after the flak.

T: What was more serious for you, from your perspective in the copilot’s seat, was it the flak or the fighters? Which was worse?

D: We had flak on every mission, and of course some was worse than others but it was more consistent being flak all the time whereas the fighters it was passes that didn’t last too long and they were interrupted in between. And they never flew through the flak with us so we knew when we were over the target that we wouldn’t be bothered. It was before and afterward. Generally speaking when you’re flying close formation it was sort of an even game and they were not always real aggressive in hitting us except that they were at Ploesti because the Germans held that as great in importance for their war effort. So that was a tougher target.

But the worst target for flak was Vienna, Austria. They had 1200 flak guns at Vienna, Austria. They had these large silos two hundred feet in diameter and they had multiple anti-aircraft weapons on the top of them. Then Axis Sally of course would come on the radio about an hour or so after we formed our formations and started on our way to the target and long before, like two to two and half hours, before we got to the target Axis Sally would tell us the target that we were going to that day which was rather discouraging. She was right one hundred percent of the time. It’s very discouraging to know that the enemy knows long before you get there where your target is for the day. I still never did find out how they were able to get that information, but they got it. And she informed us also, of course she always gave us propaganda that our wives and girlfriends were out cheating on us, going with these 4-Fers that were still back home, and then she said today, in addition to the 1200 anti-aircraft guns that we have in place in Vienna we’re bringing in another four hundred. So we’ll have 1600 anti-aircraft guns to welcome you to the city.

Then as you approached the city they had a double jeopardy I called it. You’d see this black cloud ahead of you about a half a mile wide and a half a mile deep and many, many miles long over the target depending on the length of the target. So that barrage flak continued as you moved towards it and it looked so dark that you looked like you’d never be able to fly through it. Then they’d pick you up with tracking flak that was controlled by radar so they had your altitude down pat. So they’d walk you through the barrage flak with the tracking flak.

Let me tell you, the first mission that we went there I was still with the crew that I didn’t know. It was one of the first five missions. A B-24 just several hundred yards ahead of us got a direct hit. The artillery shell exploded right within the
aircraft. And of course you know that when you have about five thousand pounds of one hundred octane fuel, six thousand pounds of bombs, we still hadn’t gotten to drop our bombs. And then several high pressure oxygen tanks, that makes quite a spectacular explosion. The largest piece of the aircraft or its crew was a piece of the tail about a foot square.

(1, A, 110)

T: The plane basically disintegrated.

D: Disintegrated completely. That’s the best example I can give you of missing in action. All of these little torn shreds and mostly burnt pieces of human flesh. Is the enemy soldier going to go out and pick up these little shreds? Or do they care? Or are civilians going to go out? If we’re still flying over farmland before we get to the city they’re hating us because all of this clutter is falling on their farm which means that they have to pick up the metal to get it out of there before they can harvest the grain. Right?

T: Yes. What’s that like for you to see that, really not that far away from you, and to realize you have to continue to fly through that? How does that affect you?

D: You wonder, when is it your turn? And when you first see it, you have the thought that you’re glad that it isn’t you. That it’s somebody else. But then you stop and think how cruel that is because somebody behind our airplane may have the same experience the next day and that would be totally unfair if somebody else were thinking it’s glad that it’s Carroll’s turn to die and not theirs.

T: Did you find yourself gaining a sense of numbness to all that? Of the losses? Because crews were going down on all the missions you were on.

D: Definitely. Almost every mission crews were going down. Yes.

T: Do you gain a sense of just becoming numb to that or does it work on your psyche?

D: It works on your psyche. I finally got to the point where I resolved that I had to be ready for death and then if death occurred that was my lot. So every day when I went on a mission I would say a prayer and say to God, I don’t want to die today but if it is my turn, then I’m ready to die. And when I accepted the fact that I may die, then it seemed easier. That it didn’t bother me as much. It was easier to live through it. But you had to accept the fact that you had to be ready to accept it because it was so common.

T: The crew of a B-24, ten people?
D: We went as a crew with ten but most of our missions were flown just with nine because we used just a navigator or bombardier, Singleton, that did both functions. Because most of the bombardiers would only toggle anyway because the lead aircraft, and the alternate lead, were the only ones that used their bombsites. Unless we dropped on the lead.

T: So you really didn't need...

D: Didn't need a bombardier. So we used that combination.

T: What about the crew that you went over with? You flew fifteen missions. How many of the men that you went over with ended up flying those missions with you?

D: We ended up all flying together until our last mission.

T: You didn't lose any crew members then along the way.

D: Not until the day we went down.

(1, A, 146)

T: Well, talk about that mission. That was your fifteenth?

D: Fifteenth.

T: You were more than halfway to twenty-five missions by that time.

D: We were supposed to fly fifty missions at the time that we were there. However, they gave us credit for two sorties with one mission if we go beyond a certain latitude, a longer flight. So if we were on, for example, southern France took us about eleven hours of time we pulled the chocks until we got back into our hard stand back home. Eleven hours, that's a long, long time.

T: Yes, it is. That would credit you for two for that one?

D: Yes.

T: I see. So it wasn’t fifty missions per se.

D: No, it wasn’t fifty missions per se. Right. But there weren’t too many—you know, after the war was over they finally came out with the statistics, and seventy percent of the aircrew that were assigned to the 15th Air Force either were killed in action or prisoners of war.

T: Seventy percent?
D: Seventy percent. You don’t want to go to a casino, I don’t think, with those odds.

T: Not unless they were in my favor.

D: Right (both laugh).

T: How much did seeing crews go down and missing people all the time—and you were there for a couple of months so you must have seen people come and go.

D: Come and go. Yes. And you come back to the tent that you were living in and the mattresses would be folded over and everything that, all the personal items that were there were gone. Taken away. They moved that stuff very quickly.

T: Did that inhibit you, for example, from making closer friendships with people? Knowing they might be gone the next day, or you might be?

D: Oh, absolutely. I didn’t understand that at all at first, because we had two pilots in our tent. We had a tent of twelve men in the tent and they were all mixed. I wasn’t with any of our aircrew. They made sure that you were all separated so that if the crew went down you didn’t have a large number out of one tent. Psychological.

T: It is. You’re right.

D: We had two pilots that had over forty-five missions and they were really on pins and needles. They wanted to not have anything to do with anybody else. They just wanted to be by themselves and they really, really sweated out the missions. They’d go over and see what was posted on the board and you could see that if it was a major target they’d really have problems sleeping. Then right next to me I had a navigator from another crew that married his sweetheart just three weeks before he came overseas. He became convinced that he was never going to get back to see his wife of three weeks.

(1, A, 188)

T: How did that work on his psyche?

D: Every time that he was scheduled to fly the next day, the night before he would sit on his bed and he wouldn’t even go to bed. He’d sit on his bed and smoke one cigarette after another. And of course blowing it right towards me. I couldn’t sleep. So I’d get up and talk with him and try to convince him that you’ve got to have hope and faith that you’re going to make it. Even if you go down, if you’re able to parachute out, you might live and it will be tough being a prisoner of war but you’re alive. You’ve got to have that hope.
T: So there were some guys that you noticed struggled mentally with what could possibly happen.

D: Right. And when I came back from the mission, walked in, and his mattress was folded up. He was scheduled the next day to fly a mission. He took out his .45 [caliber pistol] and shot his left knee out. You know when you fire a forty-five at close range it really makes a mess. And so he was taken to a hospital in Varing, which is about thirty miles south of us.

T: So he did physical injury to himself to stay out of the plane.

D: Stay out of it. Right. He just couldn’t face another mission. He was just totally out of it. Nobody in the tent wanted to talk. They didn’t want to tell me what happened. I knew that it had to have been something very, very serious. I kept asking and finally they told me that he’d shot himself.

T: Was something like that, some kind of serious emotional response, was that an out of the way exception or were there other people who also couldn’t handle it?

D: That was the only one that I was aware of. I hope that’s the only one in our squadron. I don’t know. But another example. We went to Vienna twice. On the second mission we had a plane that was a little further ahead of us. Sometimes you couldn’t see it because of the exploding flak between us. But finally that happened also. A hit. But it wasn’t direct hit. It wasn’t within the aircraft. But it didn’t break up as badly. But there was one of the aircrew that was blown out to the right.

The explosion was on the left side of the aircraft and this man was blown out of the aircraft to the right and it was obvious that he was alive because of his body movements. But he was unfortunately on fire on his back, you know, the part that explosion blew him out. And we were hoping that he’d get the fire out before he’d open his chute. However the chute opened almost automatically and it could have been the explosion had blown open the canopy that holds it in the packed position. Unfortunately when it opened, all around the perimeter of the canopy was on fire and as we passed over him as he was falling our ball turret and tail turret gunners reported that it had already had burnt the canopy completely and that he was falling just with the shrouds dangling over his head. That stayed with me forever. I can still picture him today just as clearly as can be. Because it only takes two minutes to get to mother earth when you don’t have a good chute.

T: That’s a long time to think about it on the way down.

D: He had the privilege of knowing when he was going to die. Most of us don’t have that privilege, but how would you spend those two minutes? Knowing that that’s the only two minutes you’ve got to live, and you’re going to have a violent collision with mother earth, because terminal velocity of the human body is about 120 miles an hour.
T: Were you forced to really numb yourself to those things because it sounds like if you, if one thinks about those things you could drive yourself nuts pretty quickly?

D: You could really get yourself to the point where you pull out the gun. Yes. Very definitely.

T: How much was, from your observations, alcohol or abuse of alcohol, a way out for people?

D: We got a double shot of rye whiskey when we came back from a mission. We had two men on our crew that didn't drink alcohol, period. One of them gave me his share, so I had four shots and I'd sit on the sunny side of the tent and sip and think about the mission and think about how I was going to survive this war.

T: Did you find yourself thinking about the next mission and starting to worry about it even as you got back from the previous one?

D: Absolutely. Absolutely. You couldn't avoid it. That was your function. You knew that you had to face it. But I still think that you have to have faith in God and then resign yourself to the fact that you may violently end up with death and go from there.

T: You're a twenty-four year old young man, twenty-three by this time.

D: I was twenty-three.

T: That's something when we get older, that kind of a more nuanced understanding of life and fatality and all this, but for a young man of twenty-three, how did you do that? I mean, it seems like it's a pretty complex understanding of life and how short it can be.

D: We had some that were nineteen and we had a number of pilots that were only twenty. So I was a little more mature.

T: At twenty-three?

D: Sure (chuckles).

T: Did you notice an age difference? I mean you're right. Because nineteen and twenty is younger.

D: That's right. I'm convinced. And of course, I think, again, living through the Depression on a farm we always had food to eat but we lived without money.
Everything was so, so hard to get. Money. Everything was cheap, but you couldn’t afford anything.

T: How did growing up during the Depression help you during your military experience?

D: We learned to get along without things. Today we have such a plethora of plentitude that we don’t ever appreciate it. For example, when I went down, ended up with a country doctor coming to see me, he apologized because he didn’t have an aspirin tablet to give me. The German Army had taken everything that he had except his stethoscope.

T: Even his aspirin tablets.

D: He didn’t have a single one. He said there isn’t any in our little town.

T: Well, let me move next to the mission that you went down on. That was on 2 July 1944. Was there anything that, on the surface, distinguished that mission to Budapest from other missions that you were scheduled to fly?

(1, A, 298)

D: No. Just another mission.

T: This time you were an experienced crew, so this was something you weren’t necessarily dreading for any reason.

D: No. Not any more than the normal.

T: Well, walk us through what led to you and the whole crew being forced to bail out over Hungary.

D: Yes. Well, just as we got into the flak getting prepared to get our bombs released our number one engine ran away. In other words, overspeeded. It runs at a very rapid RPM.

T: As the pilot or copilot you couldn’t control this?

D: No. So then we had to pull out of the formation, because when you feather a propeller that slows the airplane down and you don’t want to be forcing other planes to have to move out of positions so you move out of position.

T: For clarification, feathering a prop means to cut the power to that particular engine?
D: No. Feathering causes the prop blades to come to facing towards the front so that the pressure against the propellers stops that engine from running.

T: So it changes the tilt of...

D: Right. It changes the tilt of the prop blades. See, we had three blades on each propeller. It takes a great deal of pressure, oil pressure, to do that because you’re really working against a tremendous force. We don’t know what caused the engine to overspeed, but it went way out of control.

T: Now this is a plane that you’ve flown for every mission or is it a different plane?

D: No. No. As a beginning crew you got whatever plane was available.

T: Was this a plane you had flown in before or not?

D: One other mission. But anyway, we pulled out and we tried to feather the engine but it got partway, then it didn’t go all the way. So we then had to pull away from the formation. Then we diverted to the point where we get over country rather than over the city to drop our bombs. Over an open field and the bombardier lined that up and we tried to get the engine feathered in the meantime. Finally the engine started to wobble which is a sign that it’s getting so far out of control that it may actually pull the engine off of the wing. And of course if it touches the propeller of the engine next to it, then of course these blades then come flying through.

T: They could cut right through the skin of the plane, couldn't they?

D: They go right straight through the fuselage. So our first pilot, Ken, ordered us to bail out.

T: Was there much discussion about that or was that simply his call to make?

D: No. That’s his call to make.

T: What was going through your mind as the copilot here?

**End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 375.**

D: It’s actually the two of us were so busy trying to get it feathered that we didn’t have too much time to really think about other things. We were very busy. I’m sure others were very concerned about this being their very last mission and what would happen, because none of us ever had experience at bailing out. Our training didn’t include that.

T: You’d never even practiced jumping.
D: Oh, no. Never. Never. The only thing that we were taught was to keep our harness tight. Don't leave it loose to make it more comfortable. Make it tight. Because the shock will really injure you. When you pull the ripcord, pull it all the way out. That was the training for it.

T: I'm afraid I wouldn't feel very comfortable with that. No kidding.

D: But when you're about to save your life, the decision is quite easy. You have to trust. I remember thinking as I was walking back to jump out, I wish that I had been a friend with the man who packed my parachute. Here I am trusting my life to him. I hoped he did a good job.

T: Did everyone get out of the plane safely?

D: No. Our nose gunner didn't make it out. Still to this day we can't find out what happened to him.

T: Because it sounds like you were all walking to the hatch to jump. What is your conjecture on that?

D: It takes a while to line up a turret. He was the nose turret gunner. You have to get the turret lined up perfectly in alignment with the aircraft before the doors will open that are behind you. We had a bombardier with us that day that was flying his first mission and, I don't know. He was supposed to help the nose turret gunner get out of the turret before he jumped. So I don't know what happened in that. We rang the buzzer, the bail out buzzer, for a long time, but in some parts of the airplane you don't hear it too well. One of those things.

T: Right. Where was your normal bombardier?

D: He was picked to be a lead bombardier because he was a real, real effective bombardier. In fact, in our training at Colorado Springs where we took our combat troop training, he got a shack from six thousand feet. Bombing. The shack that you were aiming at was a six foot square building and he actually hit it with his bomb. And so he was a very effective bombardier.

T: So because of his success in a sense, you had a new person with your crew.

D: Yes.

T: Talk about jumping and going down and landing, because this was also an experience, apparently.

D: Yes. When you dive out of the bomb bay, suddenly you're in this air that's being all roiled behind these engines that are all turning over, and these propellers that are twelve foot in diameter that really stir up the air, and you just flail in the air. I
think I turned over three or four times. Really flopping, before I got out of the slipstream and got into clear air. But then as the plane moved away it was the quietest place on earth. You’re all by yourself.

T: Could you see other members of your crew around you?

D: As they bailed out, yes. Yes. But then I freefell for about 1000 to 1500 feet.

T: And you were how high when you jumped? Do you know?

D: Four miles upstairs. About twenty thousand feet. Almost four miles. And I was falling feet first, but as I continued falling I started to spin and corkscrew and I got my left arm and leg out trying to stop the spin but it didn’t seem to have any effect. I was still starting to turn faster. So I thought, this is not a good place to become disoriented and so I pulled the ripcord, and when that chute opened it really gave a jar. Like as if you were going thirty miles an hour and you suddenly stopped.

(1, B, 437)

T: Really. That much of a shock.

D: And you could feel everything stretching when it opened. But then I had a beautiful chute and everything was fine. Then of course you immediately—I was still holding this ring and this long piece of steel. I was wondering what I was keeping that for. I remembered that they said that the Irving Airchute Company that made most of the parachutes, if you sent your parachute ring in that you had jumped with that you could join the caterpillar club, because you saved your life by jumping in a parachute.

T: And you remembered this on the way down?!!

D: On the way down (laughs). I thought, you know, this is stupid. Here I am over Hungary. I don’t know what’s below me other than enemies and so I dropped it and watched it fall away and it disappeared quite quickly. Fell much faster than I did.

T: When did your thoughts turn to what might be on the ground awaiting you?

D: Oh, all the way down. Literally. But you run through all this and you do a lot of praying, because you just have no idea what’s going to be there for you.

T: When were you able to know what was waiting for you? Could you see people below or...

D: Oh, yes. Yes. When you get down to about four thousand feet. It takes forever, it seems, to get down to the lower altitudes, but then the closer you get to earth then the more you see the earth coming up to meet you much more quickly than you
expected. From about four thousand feet on you see people coming out from the little farming villages, and this was on a Sunday morning so many of them were dressed up in their Sunday best. But they all carried some sort of weapon with them. A shovel or rake. Some with guns. And they were coming out from the little farming villages. They don’t live on farms in Europe. They live in farming villages.

T: When you hit the ground were people waiting for you there?

D: No. They weren’t there yet. They weren’t too far away, but when you hit the ground you’re very busy because you hit very hard, and if you land stiff-legged you break a leg. You have to be limp. Then I rolled over on my shoulder and fortunately there wasn’t much of a breeze, so the parachute came down right next to me. So I gathered up the chute. I wanted to see how far—they weren’t that far away from me, but there was no way to hide the chute or to run or whatever.

T: So what goes through your mind when you realize there’s not much you can do?

D: You know that you have to accept whatever comes. You hope that it’s not too severe.

T: Would you say you were afraid or how would you describe your feelings at that point?

D: Sure you’re afraid. And you’ve just gone through a traumatic experience of bailing out of a safe airplane that you were in, and here you are with an enemy and how are they going to treat you? You have no way of knowing. And within a minute I was shot.

T: Talk about that. Talk about from landing to being shot. How soon did these people come up to you? What did they do when they got there?

D: They were coming in sort of a semi-circle actually, and walking toward me.

T: How many of them, Dick?

D: Oh, there must have been thirty.

(1, B, 479)

T: That’s a lot of people.

D: Yes. A lot of people. And like I say, they all had some sort of weapon in their hand. So you know you weren’t expecting a good time. For sure.

T: Did you have a weapon on you?
D: Oh, no. No. We were recommended that we not take our weapon with us, because normally it would cause you more troubles than it would provide for you. And one weapon against thirty people, some of which have rifles, is not very good odds.

T: Sure. The people that came up to you, talk about what you saw as they came at you.

D: They, like I say, some were dressed in their Sunday best, and some others had their farm clothes on. They were angry and they were shouting to one another in loud voices. None of which I understood. And when I was shot the first thing, when you're shot, is the shock of the bullet hitting you.

T: Was there any indication that they were going to shoot, or was it just rather, they came up to you and shot...

D: Well, they were still like maybe seventy, eighty feet away.

T: They were not close to you.

D: Oh, no. No. No. The shock of the bullet hitting you, if you don't brace yourself immediately it will literally knock you to the ground. But something that's even more obvious is, you're on fire and you can't do a thing about it, because when you're shot through the torso there's no way to cool it. Like if you're burnt on the hand, you can blow on it or put it in water, whatever. But when you're on fire deep within your chest there's just nothing you can do about it.

T: Is that the sensation you had, of being, of burning, literally?

D: Oh, yes indeed. And I thought, you know, if it's that hot, maybe if it didn't hit any major blood vessel that it may have cauterized and maybe I won't bleed to death.

T: Did you lose consciousness at all?

D: No. Two men came up and held me by the elbows, because I was getting sort of wobbly and then a farmer came in front of me. He was about five foot two, but he was just obviously not an ounce of fat on him. He was just muscle. He had a long-handled shovel and a lot of hate in his eyes and he was screaming at me. The only two words that I heard that sounded at all like I might understand was, "cheek haga gog sol," which translates into Chicago gangster. And he walked around to my right and I knew what was coming but I couldn't do anything about it, because I was being held up. He hit me in the back of the head with his shovel. You haven't been here back when the Twins played out in Bloomington, that outdoor stadium?

T: No.
D: That noise of that homerun being hit by a homerun hitter. You know, that solid smack of the ball. That's what it sounded like. You don't pass out immediately. You go through stages of seeing gray, getting darker and darker. When it gets towards the black then you go unconscious, and I felt my knees turn to butter and I was unconscious. But I remember distinctly that solid noise of the impact of the shovel hitting me on the back of the head.

T: So you could literally hear that before you passed out.

D: Before I passed out. And I remember going into the gray colors and the darker gray to the black and then unconscious. That may have only been a fraction of a second but I can still recall that clearly, yes.

T: Were other members of your crew within eyesight of you?

(1, B, 527)

D: No. We were scattered quite a ways. You'd be surprised how far a plane travels between each one jumping out.

T: So they were not anywhere close to you.

D: It took some time. I was unconscious for a long time. Eventually, sometime later, they were all together. We were all together except for our nose turret gunner.

T: Did you find out later, did he go down with the plane?

D: We're not sure whether he did bail out late or what. We don't know.

T: He remained missing in action?

D: See every time we asked the Germans they said well, you don't answer our questions, why should we answer your questions.

T: So you made inquiries about him?

D: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: Picking up your story. When you came to from being unconscious, Dick, where were you?

D: I was propped up against a farm tank that they watered the horses out in the middle of their fields and I was gasping for air. I was obviously running a very high fever. My throat was so dry and my heart actually was going extremely fast.
T: So you could sense that.

D: Oh, yes.

T: Where did the bullet hit you?

D: [The bullet hit me in] the right lung.

T: Right lung. Left side is the heart. Did it pierce your lung at all?

D: Oh, yes, it went right through the lung. So then I asked for water and nothing happened. Then I thought, well, somebody might speak German so I said, “Wasser” and immediately one of the farmers took his cap off that he had worn in the fields a long time and put in into [a horse] tank. Do you know what a horse tank looks like?

T: No.

D: You know. Horses that drink the water, it’s a big concrete tank. A big tank. Horses that drink water in the field always have been chewing on some grass or something so bits of grass fall into the tank and with the sun acting on it, it grows great chlorophyll, green. Then of course the water is the same temperature as the air and this was on July 2, a nice warm day. But he brought this capful of water and I put my head in it and of course I didn’t have much control. Somebody had grabbed the back of my head—I had hair then—and held my head so I didn’t drown. But that was the best drink of water I’ve ever had in my life. Bar none.

T: Any indication how long you were unconscious? Could you tell?

D: No. No idea. It must have been quite a while, because all of the crew members that came down in their chutes were there.

T: So you were all collected there.

D: Yes.

(1, B, 563)

T: So eight of you at this point, would it be?

D: Yes. Right.

T: Well, then, these Hungarian civilians who captured you, how long were you in their control before you were turned over to German military authorities?

D: Oh, the Germans didn’t take over. We were left under Hungarian control. These Hungarian Home Guard came finally. In a truck. They loaded up all the parachutes
and they loaded up the crew on the back of the truck and they laid me on the parachutes. Our ball turret gunner had a broken arm. He had a triangle break on his left arm. The farmers took that arm and turned it 360 degrees to make him hurt a little bit. Two others had big cuts across their forehead from gun butts that they mashed them with their gun butts.

T: This maltreatment was not just of you, but a number of people.

D: Yes. So a couple of others had no problems. They got along okay. That’s part of war. So the local guard, the Home Guard, came and got us all in the truck and drove us to this farming village where the Guard headquarters was and they had to carry me in on a litter of course. I wasn’t able to walk. The townspeople were there again with shovels and rakes and hoes wanting to get at us.

T: Was this in Budapest or was in the outlying –

D: No. No, this was a little farming village. A very small little village. And the guards actually had to hold off these civilians with their guns and they put their sabers on their guns. Believe it or not. So they had to protect us from the civilians.

So they got us all into their little headquarters and they got me into a cot and they called the local doctor, and he came and he’s the one that says, “Obviously you’re in pain. I’m sorry I don’t even have an aspirin table to give you.”

T: Did he speak English to you?

D: He spoke very good English. Right. He had somewhat of an accent, but the English was very good. His instructions apparently to the soldiers [that were there] was that they had to pump water. I could hear them pumping the hand pump outside. They brought in this washtub with water in it, and they took a bed sheet and soaked it in this cold water, rinsed it, twisted it to get most of the water out, and folded it so it would be wrapped around me. They took off my shirt and they wrapped this around my body, and of course as soon as it touched my body I passed out from the shock of the cold, because I was burning up with fever.

The doctor, he said, “Do you have any last wishes?” — which is rather discouraging. And I said, “Yes. I’m a Catholic. I would like a Catholic priest if there is one.” He says, “Yes. We’ll get him right away.” And he came and he gave me the last rites of our church, which back then was called extreme unction. The last rites of the Catholic church.

T: What’s going through your head now, Dick? It’s gone from bad to worse. You’ve bailed out of the plane, had a frightening encounter with Hungarian civilians, and now are being given last rites by a Hungarian priest. What thoughts went through your mind at that time?

D: That I better be prepared for death. So I prayed some more. The priest said they didn’t have very much to give me, and of course the doctor explained that he had
nothing other than that. No medication. Would I like some vino. Wine. I shook my head no. I said, “I’d like a glass of milk.” They got a glass of milk for me. And of course raised on a dairy farm I drank milk all my life. I thought, you know, if there’s anything that would help some decent liquid other than just water because I needed lots of water with the high temperature, because I really was sweating.

After about up to ten to fifteen minutes then the steam would start to rise from under the bed sheet that was wrapped around me through my face, you know. Then of course the soldiers had to change it. And this, apparently their instruction was to do this every fifteen minutes. And this went on all day and night.

Then that evening all the others [from my bomber crew] were taken away. They were hauled to a nearby city, where there was a train station to take them up to Budapest to the prison. And of course our ball turret gunner, Tommy O’Connor, ended up at this hospital at Budapest because of his broken arm. They had to set that. So I was left behind.

(1, B, 640)

T: In this small—was it a police station or a Home Guard station?

D: Just a Home Guard station. It was very much like our National Guard, only it was just this little contingent in this small little farming village. I was left on this little cot. It was a very narrow little cot. I drank water profusely, and of course it went right out with sweat, you know. And every fifteen minutes, day and night, they’d come and change the sheet and put it back on. You can imagine when you faint, you fall into a lump you know. How they were able to get that around me and hold me up at the same time, I don’t know. But it worked.

T: How long did you stay at that particular location?

D: Four days. At the end of the fourth day, that evening, the doctor—each evening the doctor and the priest came. The doctor would come first and the priest behind him. The doctor was sort of amazed that I was still alive. He says finally on that fourth evening, he said, “We have to get you to a hospital,” and, “You have to get to Budapest. The fact now that your temperature has dropped to 102.3. You’re still far from being well, but I think you’ll be able to survive the trip by train.” And I said that was fine. Thank you.

So the next morning I was carried out and lifted into a four-wheel buggy with a beautiful team of bay horses, and this camp commander and the sergeant got in the buggy with me and the driver started out. They were on the cobblestone street, and of course the roughness of the ride I started to pass out. You learn pretty quickly to get your head down between your knees to try to hold off, keeping conscious as long as you can. So the camp commander ordered the driver to pull off to the side and they got onto the grass and I got along pretty well.

Got over to the train station. Of course with all this lifting and trying to move I passed out again, and they had to carry me into the station and laid me on the slatted bench until the train came. Then they had to again carry me out to the train
and got me on and then into a compartment which I was—I really didn’t feel like I should be in a compartment, you know, that had plush cushions and everything.

T: Regular seats. A regular seating compartment.

D: Very first class, which POWs—you know, as a POW I didn’t feel very comfortable, because that belongs to people that pay extra money. I would be happy to be laying on the floor out on the passenger area. And sure enough, after we got settled in there, a high ranking officer and his aide, another officer, stopped and opened the door and came in and sat right opposite. The high ranking officer sat right opposite me. And he immediately started questioning...

T: These were still Hungarians, weren’t they? Not Germans.

D: Yes. These are Hungarian Army officers. He was questioning this commander that had me and it got louder and more angry as the conversation went on, and I wanted to get down on my knees, hands and knees, and crawl out. Because I knew that he was angry that I was in this compartment. As a POW I had no business being in there. And I pointed to the door and the commander shook his head no. Again I was having trouble staying conscious and I put my head down between my knees. I felt more uncomfortable with this very angry officer across the way from me. And unfortunately when we got just got near the city of Budapest, we got to this area right next to the city, the south edge of the city. A big marshalling yard.

T: The kind of things you used to bomb.

D: That we bombed, yes. And our mission was in the island of the Danube. Right across the east branch of the Danube was a huge, big munitions plant that we bombed. That was our target. But another group had the job of dropping their bombs on this railroad yard and there were like a string of three boxcars laid over the next door ones that were actually—you could see the havoc was real severe. I looked and I tried to look away real quick so that he wouldn't catch me, but he saw that I saw it. He was so angry that he reached over himself and slammed the curtain down. I knew that he was really, really angry that I had seen what we had done. Our bombing was successful there.

So when we got to the station the camp commander motioned for me to stay sitting. Not to leave. They got up and went with the high ranking officer and his aide and went off and I sat and sat and sat. Finally a woman came. I don’t know whether she was Red Cross or what. She had a long dress on. She motioned for me to come, and of course I couldn’t stand up. I got down on my hands and knees and went towards the door and turned around and backed down the steps to get down. Then hanging onto the rail next to the door I was able to stand, but I was very wobbly. She was sort of reluctant to touch me. She didn’t really want to have that closeness to me.

T: Did you sense that?
D: Oh, sure. You could see by her body movements and I didn't blame here. It was war. So finally she had to grab a hold of me. I had an awful time stepping over—I had to get over two railroad tracks to get to the station. But that little bit of extra height I had trouble getting. So she literally had to drag me to get over. I finally got in and she brought me to a chair that was in front of the desk where they had a Hungarian officer, a different one. He was real, real plump. To the point where the buttons on his shirt were really being pressed. It looked like any moment one of them would come flying out at me.

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

T: Dick, pick up the story. This is the first time you've seen this plump, shall we say, Hungarian, and he was in uniform.

D: And he spoke English.

T: And what did he want to know from you?

D: His job was to get me to a hospital, because obviously I needed to be hospitalized. But he wasn't very happy about having to do that for me.

T: He told you this?

D: Oh, yes. Yes. In no uncertain terms. He started out by a long string of oaths and I learned some new combinations of swear words. He used the F word in conjunction with the female hog, and that's what I was. I had never heard that expression before, even coming from a farm. So I understood how he felt toward me. But then he had a phone that sat over on the left side of his desk, and it was one of those that it had a round pedestal. It stood up about this high (holds hand about fifteen inches off table). You'd have a receiver that you could put the earpiece down on it.

T: You had to talk into the piece that stood up.

D: Right. He brings that over to him and he dials a number and he waits and then he gets mad and so he slams the phone on the desk and I was waiting for it to break up. He, of course, understand that when you bomb cities that you play ruckus with their utility systems, the electricity, the phones, and the water and sewer and all that. Big problems, you know. But he tried and tried and he'd swear over the phone in English and obviously talking to a Hungarian. I couldn't quite figure that out. The people of the other end of the line must have been confused. But he was really angry.

T: And his job was to get you into a military hospital. Or a hospital.

(2, A, 23)
D: A hospital, because finally he put the receiver, put the phone, down. He spoke to
this woman that was standing some several feet away from me that obviously she
motioned to me to come with her. So I was dismissed. When she got me up, he
obviously was an officer, and I was a most junior officer being a second lieutenant,
so I saluted him. His face, his jaw dropped open. But finally he returned the salute
halfway and so then I went off with her struggling along. Got outside, and this
woman seemed to become more and more excited and concerned and tried to get
me to go faster and it was impossible. I just couldn’t do it. Finally I saw over to
my—she was on my left-hand side and my head was somewhat down anyway and I
saw this group of men coming with clubs, running towards us. Finally this man at
the back of the ambulance, this soldier, ran over and grabbed me and literally
dragged me over and threw me into the back of the ambulance. It was an old-
fashioned ambulance. Slammed the door shut and just as soon as the door shut
these clubs were pounding on the door. It had the little glass, at the back of the
doors. They had wire running through them. I was real happy that there was wire
running through them that might help that it wouldn’t break and they didn’t break.
Fortunately.

T: So once again there were civilians...

D: They wanted to get at me. They hated bombers that were, well, we killed
civilians. Let’s face it. But how would you react if you had relatives that were killed?
So off we went in the ambulance, and of course, I was stuck in the back part of it in a
small little area. I had to get down with my head quite often, but I tried to figure out
where we were going, what direction. You know, you could see the sun shining in so
I know whether we’re going south or west. I knew we were on the east side of the
Danube, so eventually they went across a bridge and I knew we were traveling west
so I knew we were going the other side of the Danube.

After a bit then they finally pulled up in front of the hospital and the man
came around and got me out and they had to help me get up on the curb because
that was like four inches, and I was hanging onto the edge of the ambulance and the
guard then poked me to move toward the hospital. But I looked up and I saw the
name of the saint on the hospital over way up at the top. And I thought, that can’t be
a military hospital. Why are they bringing me here? But they made me get up and
then there were, I think, two steps. Yes, two steps getting into the hospital. I had to
get down on my hands and knees to get over them. So I stayed on my hands and
knees because I was less apt to faint or pass out from it. Got inside and on the left-
hand side was this big, wide stairway going up to the second floor. But this first
floor must have been almost two stories high. The ceilings were really high. So
there were about thirty steps instead of the usual twelve to fourteen steps.

The soldier told me to—he didn’t tell me, but he motioned for me to stay.
Like you would with a dog, you know. And he went down and talked to somebody in
an office. Came back and he motioned up the stairs. I was supposed to go up these
thirty steps. I get up one, maybe once in a while make a second one, and I’d pass out.
And every time I’d pass out my head would be on the step and the wood was cool so
that helped me. But then I’d feel the rifle butt prodding me in the legs and buttocks so I’d move up another one. This took a long, long time to get to the top and my heart actually was really, really way out of control. I was really in bad shape. So when I got up finally I just laid on the floor. I was really gone.

T: Were you still wearing the clothes you were shot down in?

D: Yes. Yes.

T: This is a civilian hospital. This is not a military facility.

D: No. No. So again he walked down to an office and came back, but behind him were two young doctors. They both spoke perfect English and they said, “Luftenant, you must understand this is a Catholic hospital. We can’t accept you because, you understand, you are a prisoner of war.” I said, “Yes I know. I should be in a military hospital.” And they said, “You are right. And we will take you there. Don’t worry. We will get you there.” And I said thank you. They wouldn’t let me get up. They picked me up and carried me. Took me down, and the soldier followed behind. In front of the ambulance was a 1937 Ford, four door black sedan. They put me in the back of that, and the soldier protested mightily and they overruled him one way or another and they both got in the front seat and they drove off with me.

(2, A, 89)

T: The soldier in the back with you?

D: Oh, no. The soldier then went back, but he was very unhappy.

T: So just the two civilian doctors and you in the back seat.

D: Me in the back seat. I wasn’t going anywhere. They hit a chuckhole real quick after they started and of course right away I winced and put my head between my knees so they slowed down immediately and drove very carefully. They didn’t talk too much to me, but they were very, very helpful and solicitous of my care.

T: Much more than you might have expected?

D: Oh, much more. Couldn’t believe it. Yes. So they got to this military hospital Number 11, Tiesenedge (sp?). They said, stay there, which I had no problem. They both went up and talked to the doctors upstairs. Two American POWs came down with a stretcher and pulled me out and got me on the stretcher, carried me up, and of course, they don’t have elevators in Hungary. These hospitals, there’s just steps. So they carried me up to the second floor and got me into a bed.

T: Who was running the hospital, Hungarians or Germans?
D: Hungarians. This was a Hungarian hospital. The very next day when the doctor examined me and said that I am bedridden, I’d have to stay in bed, and I agreed and they gave me lots of water and they tried to put cold towels on my head and so forth trying to cool me down. My heart actually was really racing. The next morning a German officer came.

T: This is the first German you've seen?

D: Yes. To interrogate me. I was still, my heart action was still running much too fast.

T: You're in a bed now.

D: Yes. He had the prisoners move my bed over to a far corner of the room so he could talk to me individually. Not in front of the others.

T: Did this German speak English?

D: Yes. With a German accent, but he spoke English. He says, “For you the war is over.” I thought, not while I’m still in enemy territory the war isn’t over. But you don’t argue. So then he wanted to know my name and I told him my name. My serial number, and I told him my serial number. Then he wanted to know more information. Who were all my crew members? And I said, “Sir, according to the Geneva Convention I only have to tell you my name, rank and serial number and I’ve already told you all three.” But nevertheless he went right on with more questions. He wanted to know about family, where I was from, where I took my training. All of these questions. And I answered my name, rank and serial number.

T: How long did this interrogation go on?

D: About an hour. Almost an hour. And finally he gave up and quit. So they moved me back over again, and that was the last that I saw a German until we were evacuated from the city five months later.

T: So you saw a German one time until December of 1944.

D: Yes.

T: Let me ask you about the time you spent there in Hungary at the military hospital. Did you spend your time at this one location?

D: Yes. Yes.

(2, A, 133)
T: Were there other Americans in this facility too, or were there different nationalities?

D: There were about twenty American POWs with me there in the hospital. And this varied from week to week. We’d get new ones in and then some of them would be able to be transferred out to prison camp.

T: I see. So if the medical condition was okay they’d be moved out.

D: Right. Yes. With their broken arm they might be there for a month or six weeks and then they were gone. So we had turnover constantly. But it kept getting larger. Normally we would have from twenty men on up to thirty then forty. We almost got to fifty at one point and then it went back down again. We had six that were sort of permanent party that were not in good condition. The doctors were concerned. They wanted to keep them there, and I was one of the six.

T: So you saw people come and go over the time you were there.

D: Come and go. Yes.

T: Were these only Americans kept here or did you meet people of other nationalities as well?

D: Then we had other nationalities. We had Russian prisoners of war. The closer they came to Budapest the more that were shot down. These were all flight crew, both enlisted and officers.

T: I see. So only Air Corps or Air Corps equivalent in this one facility.

D: Right. Because the Army was advancing. Of course there weren’t prisoners that were taken by the Germans at that point, because the Germans were retreating.

T: Correct. What was the daily routine like in this place? Your condition, I assume, improved gradually as you were here?

D: Yes. Gradually it [my condition] got better. After a couple of weeks I was allowed to get up and walk around a little bit. A few more weeks able to pull duty of going over KP to get the food for lunch. So we’d go over to another building where they served the food and we were served food, the same food that the enlisted men of the Hungarian Army had to eat, which was fairly good treatment for a POW. Much better than the Germans did for us, of course.

T: Yes. What did you get on a daily basis food-wise?

D: We got a bun to eat for bread, and then later on you could get a loaf of bread that was cut and they’d give you several slices of that. The bread was different from the
German bread. It was more like our American bread. We got a cup of coffee in the morning.

At noon we'd go over and get the food and bring it back. Almost every day we got a bowl of like a thick soup, only it was quite thick. Once in a while there would be a little piece of sausage that would be in the center of it that would stay on the top of it. It was almost like it was ground grass. We could never find out what it was. We asked several times. But it was ground up real fine and then probably added flour to it to thicken it so that it was—you actually could eat it almost like a solid. But the little tiny piece of sausage was either horsemeat or oxen meat.

They had oxen that they used. They only killed those that were no longer able to work and they were extremely thin. They were just skin and bones. Moved awfully slow. So anything that we got—once in a while there would be a globule of, it looked like it was some sort of connective tissue which you could chew on all day long and your jaw would get tired and sore from it and you still couldn’t break it up. But we’d eventually always swallow it, because hopefully there may some food value in it.

T: How many meals per day?

D: Three meals, but they were very small meals. But we got along all right.

T: Did you gain weight, lose weight, or stay about the same?

(2, A, 189)

D: Oh, I lost weight.

T: In Hungary?

D: Yes. Because I was bleeding. My right lung collapsed, so the doctors had to take blood out. They’d have this kidney-shaped vessel. They’d sit in front of you and they’d run this needle in between your ribs. Two fifty ccs. They’d fill it and they’d unscrew it to leave the needle in and as they unscrewed it of course the needle end would waver back and forth and you’d feel it scratching your—so then they’d eventually fill up this one liter pan. That was enough then. They did that six times. And of course you can figure out that I was bleeding to death. And of course you figure that if they left it in the pressure would help to slow down the bleeding, right? But if they left it in too long then of course you get pneumonia, and the pneumonia would kill you real quick. So you’re glad that they’re taking it out, but every time they do that you feel the needle. Every time they fill it, you know, they’d screw it back in and then unscrew it when they filled it. So that was a lot of needles moving back and forth against your lung.

T: Sure. So your lung continued to bleed.

D: Continued to bleed. Yes.
T: For how long?

D: Oh, that must have been six weeks at least or more. Then also I woke up one morning and my left leg was really hot and it was red colored. I couldn’t move my knee. It was pretty much locked in place. So the doctor said that a blood clot had to have come from the lung, went through the heart, down the aorta and when it got to the left leg it was too big. So it stopped there and stopped the flow of blood. They said they had no medication for it whatsoever because, again, the German Army had taken all their medication. They didn’t even have an aspirin tablet. The only solution was—they didn’t have blood thinner like you expect today. So the only solution was to put hot packs on it. On a leg that was already red-hot and burning. It was too hot to put your hand on almost. It was just burning. Really hot. So that went on for about a week and a half before that gradually moved down with this extra heat that they put on and it eventually got down to the ankle and there apparently it spread around enough so that I got a big area of brown. Dried blood that’s on the...

T: You still have that?

D: Yes. Yes. And of course this leg tends to swell, so all my life since then, since World War II, I’ve worn elastic stockings. But you know that’s a small price to pay, right?

T: You accept this pretty well.

D: Life is full of change. You know if you can’t adjust to change then you better quit.

T: How did you find yourself adjusting to the daily routine of being in this POW location?

D: I thought how fortunate we were, because the doctors spoke perfect English and the nurses, none of them spoke English but they were very decent except for one who really, really hated us. She, for example, when those that were badly burned you know, almost every day they’d remove whatever skin had—film that formed over the burn and she would not just take it off, but she would rip it off. So that she’d take the little bit of good skin along with it. She was really very bitter about us. She may have had relatives that were killed or what, I don’t know. And of course as prisoners of war, do you complain? Or do you accept?

T: What I’m hearing is that she was the exception to generally good treatment from other people.

(2, A, 247)
D: Yes, most of them were quite decent. Yes. Yes. There was another woman over in this, where they did the cooking in this other building, and one of the trips I made over there she went on rattling on and on and I didn’t, of course, know what she was saying, because it was Hungarian. I’m normally a rather friendly person. I don’t get angry or all of that. I keep myself under pretty good control. And I smiled at her not knowing what she said and whop! She caught me with the back of her hand right across the face and knocked me right to the floor. Here she was using—I knew the usual words for bombazzle and those that relate to our bombing, but she used different words that I have no idea what she was talking about and she didn’t seem to be real angry. She just seemed to be saying things at a real rapid pace, but she was accusing me of bombing women and children. Of course that was the German propaganda. We were Chicago gangsters being paid one thousand dollars a mission. Fly fifty missions and we’d go back to Chicago, free men. Which gives you an example about a famous gangster from Chicago.

T: How did you find out that this is the propaganda that they were spreading?

D: The doctors showed us the paper. There was only one daily paper throughout Hungary the doctors told us. Instead of the St. Paul Pioneer Press headline on the top it was Deutschland Propaganda written across the bottom in big caps. And of course propaganda is a good word until Hitler’s army misused it badly. Became a pack of lies and spoiled the word for everybody’s use. But in there they’d have a picture on the front page of an American plane strafing through a park or towards a hospital and you have to understand that our fighter aircraft, the fighter pilots had a rough time bailing out. Because if you were going to fast they’d hit the tail assembly and break legs and arms. Very common. We had lots of them come through the hospital.

T: Fighter pilots?

D: Yes. So if they weren’t on fire they tended to go downstairs and bleed off their excess airspeed and crash land. And the Germans of course fixed them right up. Went up and flew them and of course we know that they did this because there were cameras on every one of our fighter aircraft which started before the bullets starting leaving the guns and continued afterward. If anybody misused their firing the cameras would prove it.

T: So the Germans could use this for propaganda purposes by using actual aircraft.

D: Well, no. What I’m saying is that the Americans controlled the proper use of their weapons by cameras. We did the same thing with our bombing. We took pictures of the bombing and if we didn’t get all our bombs within that thousand mile or thousand yard circle we did a lousy job and we were reprimanded for it. Verbally.

T: How did the Germans misuse this then?
D: They’d fix up the aircraft, go upstairs and fly them around and take pictures of
them with their American insignias on them showing that they were...

T: Got it. Okay. So therefore, in a sense they had almost like borrowed the planes
and could have them do all sorts of things. Take pictures of them.

D: Doing the bad things. So. And we knew that that had to be propaganda. You can
see why some Hungarians didn’t like us very well. They believed that. And if you
didn’t have much education, you know, it seems obvious that everybody couldn’t
have come from Chicago. We had to come from throughout the country.

(2, A, 318)

T: Sure.

D: But when you’re hating somebody real badly you don’t think about that, do you?

T: Yes. Let me ask about the daily routine at a place like this. It’s different than
other prison camp experiences I’ve asked people about. You were here for four, five
months.

D: Five months.

T: What did you do here every day?

D: We got up and made our beds. Had our cup of coffee for the morning. Get our
food at noon. Have our food. Do a lot of talking among each other.

T: Could you meet and move around fairly easily?

D: Oh, yes. Right. Yes. Once I became ambulatory. Then, fine. Then of course you
have new people coming in, so you’re always getting new people to talk with. Of
course we didn’t have anything. We didn’t have pencils and paper.

T: Any kind of library or musical instruments or other things? Other POWs have
mentioned things like that.

D: I know. I know. But that’s in a regular camp where that was furnished by
Americans. But at this hospital, Hungarian hospital, the Americans didn’t even know
that this military hospital Number 11 existed. They didn’t even know. So we got
nothing. The doctors brought in a deck of cards which we used for those five
months, and the deck became about two inches deep you know because the cards
were shuffled so much. It took longer to deal and to shuffle but that was no
problem. We had lots of time.

T: So you had lots of time it sounds like.
D: Lots of time. Right. Yes.

T: You mentioned one nurse, or one of the female staff, standing out for poor treatment but for the most part receiving decent treatment from...

D: Decent treatment.

T: From the Hungarians. A sufficient if not overly abundant amount of food.

D: No. No.

T: Did you ever feel unsafe in this location? That your health or safety or life was in danger?

D: Absolutely. Especially the last six weeks, as the Russian Army came closer. The bombing of the city became more frequent and towards the last couple of weeks it was every night. They bombed at night, the Russians. They flew at various altitudes. I stayed with two POWs that had full length leg casts and they had the cord from the cast going over the foot of the bed with the little pulley with a pail of concrete at the foot of the bed. So they couldn’t be moved. But all the rest had to go to the air raid shelter. They were very decent about that. That was a directive that we had to go. I asked permission to –

**End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 377.**

T: Again, you asked permission to stay with these people?

D: Yes. Because the guard, when the bombers would come over the city, the guard would disappear. We were on the second floor and he’d go down. He didn’t want to stay up there. And of course he knew that these POWs with the leg casts couldn’t get out of bed anyhow. So I asked the doctor for permission to stay there with them because if the building were hit, who’s going to help them? It would be a big problem if you had several people to help you out. But at least to have somebody to be with. To leave them all alone was a horrible, horrible thing.

T: What’s that like? Being on the receiving end of a bombing raid?

D: You get to understand war better, because you’re only doing one particular thing when you’re in an airplane. Four miles above earth. It’s very remote. You don’t see the results closely. All you see is the pictures. So it’s very remote. But this way it gets very personal, because there is no light in the hospital of course. You get accustomed to the darkness. You could see a few feet. I opened the deep, dark shades enough so that I could watch the planes and see if they were coming towards the hospital. If they were then I’d go back next to the two POWs that were there. Then it was amazing but when they’d start to drop bombs, after the second and
third one you could tell whether they were on an angle off from you, and so I’d always call that out to give them encouragement that they’re actually falling to our right several hundred yards and so forth.

T: Was the hospital ever hit by bombs?

D: No. They had an anti-aircraft gun about a half a block away so that was chattering away all the time. All of the spent flak would fall down on the—these hospitals had tile roofs.

T: So you could hear it hitting, couldn’t you?

D: Oh!! It’s like big hail. Great big hail. And of course they’re red hot, you know. You wouldn’t want to be outside during that time, because if one hit you in the head it would go right straight through.

T: I never thought of the flak coming down again.

D: You bettcha. It comes fast. Yes.

T: Dick, what kind of news about the war did you get? I mean in a sense, there’s the power of deduction which says increasing bombing raids...

D: The Russians are coming! The Russians are coming!

T: Did you know that or just was this a rumor?

D: Oh! You’ll hear artillery seventy miles away. It’s like elephants calling to one another.

T: So you could hear the war coming.

D: Yes. And then of course with each raid becoming more often, the air raids, what’s the odds of their hitting the hospital? Increasing each time. But you just keep hoping that... Finally they didn’t move us out until the Russians actually had come in and occupied the eastern part of the city. Pest. We were in Buda. They were then getting ready to build their bridges to come across the river when the Germans came in and took us out and put us on the train and off we went. West.

T: Was the removal from this hospital rather sudden or were you given advance warning?

D: Oh, no. It was quite sudden. Quite sudden. Which is no surprise.

T: At that point was it the Germans that came in to get you?
D: Yes.

T: So at this point the care you’re getting changes immediately, from Hungarians to Germans. German military.

(2, B, 417)

T: Was everybody moved from the hospital? All nationalities?

D: All—I don’t know about the Russians, whether they were put on that train or not. I didn’t see them again. And the two that were bedridden and actually had these full-leg casts, they were put on a different car so we never saw them again.

T: They were Russians or Americans?

D: These were Americans. Yes. The rest of the Americans were all loaded onto this car, and we were put into compartments that held six people, three on either side facing each other and you had the luggage racks above.

T: Right. Regular railroad cars, it sounds like.

D: Yes. Regular railroad cars. As opposed [boxcars]; you know most POWs had to get into forty and eight boxcars.

T: That’s right. Here you’re being moved by normal trains.

D: See, we’re normal train, because we came from a hospital. That made a difference apparently. But instead of six, we had to put twelve in.

T: In a compartment made for six?

D: Yes. So we could get eight in each seat, because by that time we were getting pretty skinny. And then the two smallest we put on the luggage racks above. And then two skinny ones underneath the seats. Now that accounts for twelve.

T: From your information you went to Dulag Luft in Wetzlar, which is near Frankfurt.

D: That’s a long way from Budapest. First we went up to Györ, Hungary, which is the last city in Hungary before you get into Austria. That’s right along the Danube River. See, you follow, on the railroad, you follow right along the south side of the Danube going towards Vienna. We stayed at Györ for five days there, with Germans controlling us, German military. We were upstairs in the building right in the heart of the city right across from the marshalling yard, which had been bombed about five days before. Somehow they figured it out. One of our POWs that spoke German found out that it was five days before that it was bombed, and the sewer and the
water was completely destroyed so that we had a big problem with sewer and water.

The food: they brought a kettle and they put water in it and they had this bone that I swear laid out on the prairie for years and years. It was pure white. You know, a fresh bone has got yellow to it, it’s got some color and something good. But this sucker was just as white as a ghost. It was in there and after boiling the water it eventually got a little gray scum on top like real dirty dishwater. That was our soup. Then we got this German bread. Real sour rye bread. Very heavy. And for every six of us we got one loaf. That was our daily ration of bread and we had this one cup of what we called ersatz coffee that was made from a weed mostly but they put a little chicory into it apparently. But at least it was hot.

(2, B, 455)

T: Yes. Because by now it’s November, December?

D: November. Late November. It’s cold. Yes.

T: How’s your health by now?

D: I could walk, but I couldn’t go very far. I had to be careful because my heart action would get going again a little too fast. So I just had to be... But during this travel when we went from after Gyor and started on again. When we got to Vienna we had to get off at the East Station and get on a streetcar and ride that across the city to the West Station and then reload on the train again. I told you that the German Army took most everything from the Hungarians?

T: Yes.

D: One of our men that had the 20mm shell go through his left leg. They had to amputate it. They only had two inches of his left leg. He got along fine with crutches. He could really get handy with them, but he had to leave the crutches behind. They needed them at the hospital because they were so short on them. So we six that were permanent party there became what we called the “Bloody Brothers of Budapest,” because we all left some of our blood on Hungarian soil. One of our wags came up with that name. So we felt obligated that Hank and I, Hank was from New York City, P-51 pilot, he and I took turns carrying Vic because that’s the only way he could travel. But you know when you have somebody that you carry on your back they can wrap their legs around you which helps you to carry them, you know? But he’s only got the one leg, right? So you have to put your hands behind under his fanny to hold him.

T: That gets tiring very quickly.

D: Not only that, but then your face isn’t protected and each time we got off the train there was always people that saw us and recognized that with German guards that
we were POWs. We didn’t look too fancy by that time you know. Wearing the same clothes for five months. They’d pick up broken pieces of cobblestone and throw at us.

T: This happened to you in Gyor in Hungary or...

D: No. No. In Vienna. Both getting off and then getting back on. At both ends of it. Then we had two other stops in southern Germany where we had the same treatment again.

T: From civilians.

D: Civilians. Always civilians. The guards, all they tried to keep away from us. They didn’t try to do anything about their throwing things at us. Several times guys on bikes would come along and take their hand away from the edge of the handlebar and run into us with it. Even though you are carrying a one-legged man. They didn’t like us.

T: What kind of thoughts went through your head when you encountered these civilians? Because you’ve met angry civilians once before in Hungary.

D: Only too well.

T: Yes. Now what’s going through your mind when you see these people?

(2, B, 480)

D: You hope that your guard is brave enough to stand up to protect you. That’s the big thing.

T: How many of you were traveling together by this time? Americans?

D: We had, I think it was twenty-eight. Not a large group.

T: So you’ve got these civilians. They could easily have...

D: They could... They were small groups but they all carried stuff with them. They’d pick up whatever they could. But then when we got finally to Frankfurt on the Main, that’s Dulag Luft, where they have the interrogation center for all air crew personnel.

T: So this is a number of days this journey has taken you to get there.

D: Oh, yes. Yes. Days and nights. Right. So finally we get there, but the British had bombed the night before and one bomb came right through the heart of the station where there were thirteen tracks leading into the station where the trains would
back in and offload. They couldn’t do that at all because almost all the thirteen were wrecked with that one big bomb. You know they dropped two thousand pounders, which sort of gets your attention. Anyway, we had to walk in from some distance out from the station and we were standing out there waiting. There was apparently, right next to it, the station, was this place that you get on the trolley to go out to Oberursal, the interrogation center. So we were waiting with our guard, and fortunately we had this older guard, Wehrmacht guard. He must have been like sixty years old, which is pretty old when you are in the twenties. Looking at that man.

But thankfully we had him, because there was another group of six American airmen that were in a group with a young German guard, and he brought them over about thirty feet from us and made them stay there. Then he motioned to our guard that he wanted to talk to him. So they were between our two groups and watching for civilians that were ready to attack. They were waiting for a chance. We had Paul Bertram from Brooklyn Center that was one of our twenty-eight men, and he was raised in a family that spoke German. So he learned German before he learned English. So he was relaying to me the conversation. And this young guard was trying to convince our older guard to walk with him, to walk away from us, to leave all these prisoners so that the civilians could get at them. Thankfully our old guard said, “My job is to take these prisoners of war to Oberursal and mein Gott, I’m going to take them there.”

T: What I’m hearing is that these guards were there not really to guard you, but to protect you.

D: You bet. Yes. They were officially our guards too, to make sure we didn’t escape. But you know our chance—would you want to escape from the guard that’s protecting you? (chuckles)

T: I think I’d want to stay right next to him, quite honestly.

D: Real close. Real close. Right.

T: These times, was there a sense of fear among you? This sounds like lynch justice is a couple moments away.

D: Life is very precious. Very fragile. Very fragile. Just that one action there, for example. If they had both walked away I would have been dead that very morning.

T: Do you think so?

D: Oh, absolutely! Yes. They were angry because just the night before their city was bombed, and every time a city is bombed there are people that are incidentals and get killed. Right?

(2, B, 535)
T: Yes. And they had no idea of knowing. For their purposes you were part of the fliers that were there last night.

D: We were all part of those fliers. Exactly. *Terrorflieger* [terror flyers]. So, out we go to Oberursal and we get to this interrogation center and we get inside of the building and this little old guard again, like our guard that brought us there, he had a little old lantern and he takes us down these steep steps, down into the basement and locks us into pens. Six by eight basically. Built out of planks and a little place that's made for a bed. Just a few boards and some sort of mattress that was made out of burlap. Locked the door behind. No conversation. He didn't speak English apparently and we weren't in the mood to be talking with him. So here we are and that was in the morning, must have been about nine o'clock in the morning. At noon the guard comes down again with a little lantern. I mean it's real dark. There's no windows, no nothing. It's completely dark. You can see about three, four feet.

T: These are individual cells.

D: Yes. And you have no idea who's next to you. And you don't want to start talking, because you're sure that they're has to be a German somewhere waiting to hear what you have to say. So you don't know who's around you. You don't talk and at night you hear snores and coughing. But you have no idea, American or German. So it's dead quiet other than those other noises.

T: How long did they keep you in this facility?

D: Four days and nights. The fifth morning—every morning after breakfast, which was a cup of ersatz coffee and one slice of German bread with a little bit of make-believe jelly spread on it, which is artificial taste. Then about an hour later this German guard would come down again with his little lantern, unlock your door, take you upstairs. Two officers that spoke very good English. One claimed to have lived in New York City for some years before the war. Pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes on the table. "Have a cigarette?" "No, thank you."

T: Were you a smoker?

D: No. I was before, yes. But after being shot [it was] not too wise to smoke. But I didn't tell them that. You don't want to do anything... Obviously they're trying to get you into a talking mood.

T: Two of them, and you.

D: Yes. And we're dead fish; we're cold. Five months since we were down. What fresh intelligence are they going to get from a routine copilot? But they had this system. Every airman had to be interviewed. Had to go through the system.

T: Would you call that more of an interview or an interrogation?
D: Interrogation. They call it interview, but it’s clearly an interrogation. Finally after name, rank and serial number for four days in a row...

T: How many times did you see them?

D: Once every day. Four times [in all]. So the fifth day they bring me up and one of them says, “Lt. Carroll, let us bring you up to date.” They had a three by five card basically. German penciled. “Your father’s name is William D. Carroll. Your mother’s name is Mary Carroll. You were born and raised on a farm near Rosemount, Minnesota.” They told me the date that I graduated as a pilot. They told me the date that I graduated as a pilot. They told me the date that I graduated as a pilot. They told me the date that our aircrew arrived at the 459th bomb Group at Carignola. “Now since you’ve been down your squadron commander who was a lieutenant colonel at the time is now the group commander, and is a full colonel. The mess hall that was being built while you were eating and living in the tent now your compatriots back there are having a nice meal in a chow hall.” Brought me all up to date. And then they started to question me again. And, you know, I had to bite my tongue. Here in the middle of Germany I’m being told all this information. Think of the people hours that went into this process of getting the information from the United States out of the newspapers etc. You know, it’s all for free. Passing it on and recording all of this.

(2, B, 603)

T: Sure.

D: In case that you become a prisoner of war so that they’ll have something to goad you on into talking.

T: How much did they pressure you, and did they ever physically accost you?

D: Never physically, but they explained that it’s a shame that you have to go back down to that terrible cell downstairs and that all you have to do is talk and we can give you good food, American cigarettes and you can live a much better life. Gentle persuasion.

T: I see. In a sense, you’re right—having been shot down so many months ago or been down that you couldn’t tell them much that they probably didn’t already know. They seemed to know more than you did.

D: Even if you were freshly down they knew more than, or almost as much as you did. It would be different if you were a lead bombardier using the latest technique and all of that. That’s one thing. But just a routine aircrew, they wasted so much time. Just a little example of the terrible waste of war.
T: Yes. You were just kind of a fish in a pond. A second lieutenant flying one of a thousand bombers.


T: And they had to have known that.

D: Oh, sure. Absolutely. But they were doing their job.

T: Dulag Luft was the point through every aircrew member was funneled. And for you, that funneling process then led to Luft Stalag I in Barth, in far northern Germany.

D: But we stopped at another Dulag and got a Red Cross little parcel.

T: A Red Cross parcel?

D: Not a parcel. But this had, believe it or not, I had a hand knit sweater. Blue. That was from the Red Cross at River Falls, Wisconsin.

T: It was labeled?

D: Yes. And it had a set of underwear and a set of socks, two socks. Two pair of socks rather and a winter shirt and winter slacks. Wool.

T: So you could change your clothes?

D: Because I was in khakis in this cold weather. The same ones that we were shot down in.

T: The same ones you were shot down in, right?

(2, B, 635)

T: So you could change your clothes finally?

D: Yes, right. Warmth. You know, that’s important.

T: That’s right. It’s December now, isn’t it?

D: Right. And there we had lots of food because they had Red Cross parcels and their chowhound was run by Americans.

T: Where was this?
D: This is at Wetzlar. It’s only about thirty miles from Frankfurt on the Main. But there again, that was a processing place where from there you went off and I couldn’t get an overcoat because I was going to a good camp, Luft I. Whereas some of the enlisted men were going to camps that were less desirable, you know. The Germans had been ranking and they segregated everybody. And I still had my—you see when I was knocked out back near Budapest the Hungarians, one of them took my shoes. I wore Texas jodhpurs because I did most of the flying of the airplane. Ken was a smaller person and was happy to have a stronger man doing the flying, and he’d do the radio work and all of that. I wore these Texas jodhpurs and they were a nice pair of shoes. So some Hungarian civilian got a real good pair of shoes. They then outfitted me with the electric liner that you put in a boot to keep your feet warm if you’re in back of the ship where it was really freezing. So that’s what I had to wear and I didn’t want to wear them out, and I couldn’t talk them into a pair of GI shoes.

T: So you had no shoes for how long?

D: All that five months and then going on from there, eleven months without a pair of shoes. So I had to be careful how much I walked.

T: You had no shoes.

D: No. Just those compressed wool liners.

T: That’s not good for many miles.

D: No. No. It wears out real quick.

T: Yes. In the hospital that probably wasn’t as big a concern as being outside.

D: Not a big deal. Not a big deal at all. Yes.

T: When you left Dulag Luft, Dick, did you leave with the same people you came with? The Americans.

D: No. Because we had a mixture from the hospital. We had a mixture of officers and NCOs. And all the NCOs went off to NCO camps and the officers, some were sent to a different officer camp. I don’t know why. There’s only one other officer that went with me to Luft I and that was my old buddy from New York City. He was the one that took turns carrying Vic. The amputee.

T: For a benchmark here, where did you spend Christmas 1944?

D: I spent Christmas in 1944 in Luft I.

T: So you had arrived by that time.
D: On December 6 we were traveling from the second Dulag up to Berlin and the rail line went through Leipzig at nine o’clock that night. The Brits were bombing both sides of the railroad station and big industrial complex. Huge, big brick buildings. And the Brits were dropping two thousand pounders. They knocked out all the windows with the overpressure. You know the thick windows in a regular rail car?

T: Yes. They got blown out by the pressure?

D: By the overpressures. And actually the train would rock back and forth on the rails. Come down, slam down hard. And these shards of glass—we all got down on the floor and put our hands over our neck and heads trying to protect ourselves. These shards would come dropping down on top of us. Still, you know the German penchant for on time? You know if the train is due at nine oh five, by God it better be there at nine oh five, right? That’s the way they operate. So we finally got out of there but again, with the twelve men to a six man compartment, we had the two little ones up on the top...

T: That’s traveling the same way on the way to Dulag Luft. You did the same...

D: Yes. The same number of people to a compartment.

T: But you’re not in boxcars again.

D: No, not in boxcars. Apparently because we came from hospitals. I don’t know.

T: So you never got in a boxcar.

D: Never got in the boxcar, no. Thank goodness. Anyhow, it was a pretty cold ride that night about fifty miles an hour between Leipzig and Berlin—no windows. But as the train started ahead it jerked and this little one that we had up on the luggage rack in the front of us, he rolled out and as he fell he screamed. He actually was asleep and when he fell he thought that he was falling out of his plane. In that fraction of a second it takes to fall just a few feet he had that horrible, horrible feeling that he had dropped out of his airplane. He was just really all upset. He wasn’t too eager to get back up there.

T: And it only was three feet from there down.

D: Yes. Right. And all that happened that quick. How the human mind can work that fast, it’s pretty fascinating, isn’t it? Anyhow, we got to Berlin and we sat all day long from early in the morning until five in the evening. Of course, Berlin is way north. Compared to Minneapolis-St. Paul. That’s equivalent to Milan, Italy.
T: That’s right.

D: So the days are shorter, right? It was already getting very dark at five in the afternoon.

T: December the days are very short.

D: Very short. So that was December 7. Thank God we moved out, because every night the [British] Mosquitoes bombed Berlin. As a nuisance factor they dropped bombs. December 7 we were concerned all day that being an anniversary date that they would be visiting in daylight, but they never came.

T: So you got through Berlin without any –

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

T: Dick, what about your introduction to the camp at Barth, Stalag Luft I? What kind of an impression did that make on you when you arrived? This is your first real prison camp.

D: Right. We arrived about one thirty in the morning. [The town of] Barth is a half a mile from the prison camp. So with our little Red Cross parcels we walked the half a mile to the camp and we could see all of the fencing, circumference fencing around the camp with the double fencing about twelve feet apart. With operators on it. All with barbed wire. Then in between the two fences was concertina wire in rolls. If you got down there you get tangled up on it and you have an awful time trying to get back out again.

And these low-slung barracks. One story: obviously it was just a place. Didn’t look very fancy. They brought us in for processing. They made up our POW cards, which was a big orange colored heavy paper. They took our picture and put that picture, pasted the picture onto the card, and of course this was all type written in German. I don’t recall all the information, but they had quite a bit of information they had to type on. This was all done in the early morning hours. About three o’clock in the morning we finally then were marched from there. Oh, during that time they said, here is a little message card that you can fill out that we have people that have shortwave radio and they will send. If you will fill out a Christmas message to your family they’ll know that you’re alive. So it’s up to you whether you want to fill it out. And I thought, of course, they told me all my history back at Frankfurt so what’s wrong with sending a Christmas message to my parents? So I filled it out and didn’t think too much about it because I didn’t trust them as to whether it was truthful or not. But taking the chance it might work.

Then we were marched down, or up north, to the North 3 Lager and brought in through the gate and into a barracks. There they gave us our mattress, which was a burlap bag about six foot two long. But they only allowed us to take a handful, not an armful, just a handful of wood excelsior. That wouldn’t even make half a pillow. So basically you slept on boards. Of course the boards were crosswise across the
end of the room, and there were six inch spaces between each board. The boards were about eight inches wide. It was a flat surface, but there was just air on parts of it. Eight inches of board and then six inches of space and eight inches of board. So when you laid on this with your German blanket, the one German blanket—it was kind of prickly, not real good wool—you soon were feeling the edges of the boards on your skinny bones, because your bones were pretty close to your skin.

Then we were into this room where twenty-four men were housed, but you couldn’t all stand at one time. It was that small. So that either you had to, some had to stay in their bunks or go out into the hallway, because there wasn’t room for everybody to stand within the room. It gives you an idea of the space.

T: Small space, the way you describe it.

D: Yes. So we had three tiers high on the end. We had eighteen men, six abreast on each row of three. Then over in the opposite corner there was double bunks, for two men. Three high. So eighteen and six made the twenty-four. In the opposite corner was a little round-bellied stove. Each day they gave each six, they fed us and supplied us always on the basis of something for every six POWs. Of course, then we formed our group of six POWs that were compatible.

T: Now were these formed pretty much by yourself? As you got in there you sort of found five other people you’d be –

D: Right. Yes. Right.

T: How did you make that selection?

D: Well, first of all Hank was still with me, and so we got together real quick like. That was obvious. There was a man from Nebraska that was born on a farm, and he was a real, sort of a happy go lucky man. Good fit. Then we had several others that were B-17 crew. Pilot, copilot and a bombardier—no, I’m sorry, a navigator. So those three and our three then made the six. Of course being B-17 crews we immediately started this banter back and forth about the superiority of one versus the other.

(3, A, 58)

T: Because you flew B-24s.

D: 24s. Yes. So that went on forever.

T: Friendly banter?

D: Yes. Friendly banter. Yes. Lots of fun.

T: Dick, what was the importance of friends for you on a daily basis?
D: Very. Very important.

T: In what ways?

D: This is all you had. This was living life very close, because you needed the warmth of the bodies next to each other to keep warm at night. So Hank was on one side of me and Wayne, the man from Nebraska, was on the other side. We were all six foot. Wayne was about six foot three. I was six foot one and Hank was six foot. So we were all tall guys, and we got along real well. Actually you’re so close that when one turned almost everybody else had to turn at the same time to fit. So we got along real well, and it was amazing during all of that time how well twenty-four men that had to be literally shoulder to shoulder at all times managed to adjust to that living without getting angry at one another.

T: Does that mean that people didn’t get angry at each other or that –

D: There were two men that would flare out every so often, and you’ve got to expect it. You could predict that they would, and others, well, they would also aggravate some of the other POWs too, but most of the other POWs would just ignore them. They didn’t bother to communicate and so it wasn’t a problem. Just a fact of life. It’s pretty hard to expect you’d get twenty-four men that would adapt to everything impersonally and be adaptable and all of that. But again, you have to understand that these were all officers.

T: All Americans too, or not?

D: All American officers, yes. So that we came with generally more education than the average, and we should have a little more common sense in being able to adjust to one another. And of course, Hank and I, having had that five months of being in the hospital down at Budapest, had that additional. They were all very interested in finding out about our experience at Budapest and comparing it to how we were getting along in Germany.

T: That was probably an experience that so few people had that it was something new to hear about.

D: Yes.

T: And to talk about, I suppose.

D: Yes. Yes. So that took up quite a bit of the conversation. When I finally got to bed that night I was again running a fever and my heart action was a little bit higher than it should be. A guy that was sort of a Red Cross type man that had some experience with medication, the medicine field, I don’t recall what it was, but anyhow he was given a thermometer in case somebody was sick that he could take their
temperature. When I got in bed they called this guy from another room and he came and took my temperature and I was 104.7. Quite warm. And of course he wanted me to go to the hospital the next morning. I said I’d prefer to stay here. Let’s wait until morning. We’ll discuss it then. So I really prayed that night that I’d get better by morning and fortunately, when I got up in the morning, I think it was only 101. He said, “Okay. Hang on.” Because I was afraid. Here I was with Hank all this time and in this room I had one night experience. If I go to the hospital and I get out a week later, is that spot going to be filled? And I’ll be put in with other people that I don’t know at all.

(3, A, 105)

T: So when we talk about the importance of friends and acquaintances it was extremely important to you.

D: Extremely important. Right.

T: Thinking about that, how as friends, how could you help each other on a daily basis? What was important about that bond?

D: It was important because you had trust and reliance. You knew the individual. You knew what to expect of them, and you knew that you could get along real well with them. It was almost like having this little blanket that a little kid runs around with because he likes the feel of the blanket. It’s that same security that you’re looking for. I think all people need that. That’s why the people that reacted not good—I think they were missing that security and they were having troubles.

T: In your own camp situation, these were loners in a sense?

D: Yes. Right. We had one man that didn’t react angrily, he just wouldn’t talk to you very much. Still, we know where he lives. Still today he won’t ever come to a reunion of our roommates.

T: He won’t talk at all?

D: Absolutely. He doesn’t want to have, be reminded of any part of prison camp.

T: And here he is, probably eighty years or more, and he’s just shut that out for fifty years.

D: I don’t know for the last two years, because we haven’t—we gave up on him. There is no point, because he refused so many times to come.

T: So he just prefers to blot it out from his mind.

D: Blot it out. Right.
T: As he did, it sounds like.

D: Which is impossible to do. Because you’re reminded. There’s so many things that will cause you to recall an incident because of something that relates to it.

T: Dick, on a new subject, what was the daily routine like at Barth?

D: We had this deck of cards again.

T: The same deck?

D: No. A different deck. But it was fairly thick already, and by the time of another six months till May of ’45 that was the same big thickness. Our friend from Nebraska had two years of college, and he had played bridge a great deal at college. So he taught us how to play bridge. So that occupied a lot of time.

T: Were there any kind of work details in or outside the camp?

D: No. One of the men in our room got onto a detail of opening up the food packages and getting the food delivered. That break out of supply work. He volunteered for that and got onto that. Fortunately he’d bring a couple of extra potatoes with him once in a while and share. So that was a big break.

(3, A, 138)

T: Was food an issue here?

D: Oh, food was a big issue. Big issue. If it weren’t for Red Cross parcels we would have starved to death.

T: So you noticed a distinct difference between the Hungarian food supply and here in Germany.

D: Very definitely.

T: What did you get at Barth as far as daily meals?

D: We had this cup of ersatz coffee in the morning that came around in a big container. By that time usually it had cooled down. It was lukewarm. Then at noon we had this cup of, small bowl of almost just like a cup. It was just a little bit bigger. They called it a bowl. And this was our soup for the day and it was mostly water with a few shreds of cabbage usually. Maybe once in a while a couple of pieces of turnip or rutabaga. Then at night we’d get our ration of bread. This one loaf for six. I was the official cutter.
T: Did you cut every day?

D: I cut every day. I volunteered for it. And of course they accepted that real quick, because they took this big deck of cards. They took and they’d go from one to five, because I always took the last piece. So this was a big ritual. They’d watch me when I cut it in half and then they’d watch me very carefully getting it into six pieces. Then whoever had the ace would get the first choice and they’d study it for a long time and they’d take...

T: They would look carefully.

D: Oh, yes. Yes. This was the ritual. It used up time. And it was fun. It got to be fun.

T: There wasn’t much to break up the monotony, it sounds like.

D: That’s right. Yes. You had to create things.

T: So the bread slicing and selection became a real event.

D: Yes. And of course I was very careful to make a very tough decision for them, you know. And I always took the last one, so they knew that I wasn’t going to be cheating on them. So it was very fair. But this was a ritual that went on every evening. Now you could eat that bread right then if you wanted. If you’re wise, of course, you keep some for the next day.

T: Did you worry at all about theft, which I’ve heard from other POWs?

D: No. We were very, very fortunate in our room. I don’t ever recall anything ever being missed.

T: So you could keep your bread with you and not worry it would be pinched before morning.

D: Right. Yes.

T: Do you feel that the conditions in your little group of twenty-four were any better or worse than other groups around you? In other barracks?

D: I think basically it pretty well worked out the same all the way through. Yes. I don’t think we were unique at all.

T: As far as how, generally, how well you got along or...

D: Yes.
T: You mentioned faith and religion a couple times. How important was religion, your own faith to you at that time?

(3, A, 176)

D: Oh, let me give you an example. After I became able to walk at Budapest we were allowed to go to Mass. The other than Catholic didn’t have any availability of religious service. Hungary was basically mostly a Catholic country. Now I don’t know what it is, because after forty years of Russian control, you know.

So an extra guard would come. Take us down and he’d have this great big old pre-World War I, big old rifle. It must have weighed sixteen, twenty pounds. You’d hear it clunking on the floor. The stone floor. We would go up in the front seat on the left hand side of the church and we’d sit there and he’d be right behind us. In the pew behind us. After all the Hungarians went to communion then we would go up to communion. Always careful not to be in front of anybody. Be out of their way and not to interfere with anybody that was going to communion. We’d go up and receive communion and come back to our pew. The Hungarian chaplain that said the Mass most of the time came up to visit us one time. Up in our room. We were all one big room. In the hospital. He spoke, I think it was seven languages and he spoke. We had a man that spoke Italian, one that spoke German and one that spoke French. And he would go back and forth from English to French to German to Italian talking for a short time. It was just amazing to listen to him. In late October on a Sunday, there were several times during the sermon—back then everything was in Latin, if you recall.

T: Right. That was pre Vatican II.

D: Except for the sermon, which was always the Gospel, and the sermon was always in the native language. So you didn’t understand that. Especially with religious terms. They got pretty long. Anyhow, several times during his sermon he would point over to us like this so we knew that he was saying something that related to us and that bothered us. What was going on. And the people seemed, all through the church there was a tenseness. Here he apparently, the Gospel was about love thy enemy. And he was giving them the example. Here is your enemy. Jesus says that you are to love your enemy.

T: Did he tell you this when he visited you then?

D: No. No. This visit was before. Because there was always some nurses that [would] come with us and sit away from us but go to Mass. And when they got back upstairs and we came back up, the nurses were all huddled together and they were really, really concerned. There was a lot of fast discussion. And we were wondering—and they speak Hungarian. We didn’t. So we couldn’t find out until the doctor came. And he came later that morning. On Sunday. He was there every day almost. He says, did you know that the chaplain spoke about you this morning? We said he made these motions to us and we were concerned. He says he was telling
the audience that they are to love their enemy and here’s their example. That Jesus says that you are to love your enemy. If you’re stricken on the left side of the face you turn the other side, right? That was his sermon. That afternoon, right after lunch, the doctor told us, the Germans came—they told us the next morning—the Germans came and arrested him. The priest. Took him to jail. And on Monday morning as the sun came over the horizon he was standing alongside of a grave. He didn’t have to dig because he was a priest outside of the city limits. He couldn’t be buried inside because he was a traitor. He was shot and fell in and they buried him. I guess that’s an example of faith.

T: Yes. Did you have opportunities for sharing of faith or for worship at Barth?

D: Yes. We had two Catholic chaplains and we had one Protestant chaplain. These two Catholic chaplains that we had at Barth, one came in that volunteered from England. He was a British chaplain, and he volunteered and came in through Switzerland and came to Luft I.

(3, A, 251)

T: He wasn’t a POW? He volunteered to come?

D: He wasn’t a POW. He volunteered to come. He was a Brit. The other one was an American that was from 8th Air Force, and he wanted to see what his boys were going through.

T: He volunteered as well?

D: He volunteered to go on a mission. He picked the wrong airplane. He was shot down in a plane and was a POW. Very interesting. So we had Catholic chaplains.

T: Did you have services, so to speak, as well?

D: Yes. They said come around the front. You know, the old style was the priest had his back to you as he said Mass. There at Barth we just had the makeshift table that he used. And he said come around the front and see from all angles. We’ll be a group together. Don’t have to be looking at my back all the time.

T: That was something new.

D: Now that was... Came back home and then years later this became the thing to do. I told our priest, I said, “You know this is not new. We did this in Germany long years ago.” (chuckles)

T: Was your faith important to you personally through Hungary and Germany?

T: In what ways?

D: For example being alive, staying alive. I gave thanks every day. I still do every day. Standard procedure.

T: Did your faith provide you with an inner strength, so to speak, of a...

D: Yes. Yes. Very definitely. And I still feel the same. That if it’s my turn to go I’m okay. I’m so fortunate. Yes.

T: That’s a pretty optimistic outlook on life.

D: Yes.

T: Speaking of optimism, were you able to stay optimistic or upbeat through the different steps or circumstances you had?

D: Yes. I never, ever gave up. That, to me, would be a severe, severe problem. Just for example back at Budapest there was a young navigator. Twenty-one years old. Perfect health. Parachuted down and, of course, he had just a crack, lateral crack, in the bone just below the knee. About two inches below the knee. Just a lateral crack. No displacement at all. No sign of any bleeding. There was no purple anywhere all the way around. But he was so traumatized that he was convinced that he would never, ever see his family again. And he didn’t even want to talk. I spent about a half an hour with him trying to get him—I was pointing out different POWs that were here in the hospital that were so much worse off and that they were getting along and you have to have faith in order to get back home. You have to have faith that you’re going to make it, even though the odds don’t look good. Don’t give up. But I couldn’t convince him. And you know, the next morning when I got up I looked over and he didn’t look right. I walked over and he had already started to stiffen and his arm was cold.

(3, A, 309)

T: Holy cow! And this for you, was the power of giving up versus positive thinking.

D: I don’t know. The doctor was mystified. He said there’s no evidence whatsoever of any bleeding or anything. You know, if it’s a deep internal bleed you could get a clot and it could go to the lung. You’d be dead. But I had a clot from the lung go through the heart and down the aorta and to this leg. So I was aware of this kind of stuff, but I don’t know why he died. He had given up so completely. I’ve never seen a person that had so convinced himself that he wouldn’t make it.

T: Did you meet other people like that? For example at Barth.
D: Not to that degree. All of various degrees. Yes.

T: So some who kept a sense of optimism, other who were...

D: Some [men] had a hard time keeping it [sense of optimism]. They would have to be rejuvenated every so often. My friend from Nebraska was real good on that. He’d take them for a walk around the circumference of the lager and talk to them and encourage them to have faith that they’ll make it. He was real good. Yes.

T: Speaking of the Germans, how much contact did you have with Germans at Barth?

D: Not very much. The Germans would come... Incidentally, they’d lock the doors at night you know, of your barracks. Every barracks within the Lager had to be locked. Then you had to close the shutters as it got dark, and no light could get out. Then they turned two dogs loose. Two German dogs that were trained to really get at you.

T: But since your doors and shutters were supposed to be closed it wouldn't be a problem.

D: That’s right. Except that you’d be sitting there like at nine o’clock at night still talking about something, and then somebody would sneeze because you know, twenty-four men in a room, where you can’t all stand, and only once a week would you get this broom that was made out of twigs. The twig broom. And you’d sweep up the dust. And it would get into the air and then it would settle again and this movement would set the dust around again. Great place for dust you know. It’s not good housekeeping. Anyway...

T: Germs too probably in such close quarters also made the rounds.

D: Absolutely. So somebody would sneeze and many, many times you’d hear two dogs growling right under you.

T: The dogs were around or under your building.

D: Because we were talking. They knew that there were these bad guys up in this room above them so they would camp there. If you were talking and making noise. But when you have that sneeze, that would scare them and then they’d growl. Just that one little layer of wood between you and those growls, knowing that they’re there and you don’t know whether they’re there or not, is not a very pleasant thought.

T: Probably safer to be inside, isn’t it?

D: It’s much safer to be inside but you know that suddenness of knowing that they’re there when you can’t --
End of Tape 3, Side A. Side B begins at counter 375.

T: What would you say was the most difficult aspect of the four or five months you spent at Barth?

D: The most difficult was that each month as the weather went on into the winter and towards spring, the potatoes and the rutabagas and the turnips that we received a little bit of became more and more subject to rot. So that didn’t make any difference. You got your, usually two little potatoes for the six men, and if they were one third rotten, you had to learn real quick that the hard rot was okay. You certainly could stand it. But if it got to the soft mushy stuff, that you had to cut that out. Reluctantly. Because [if you ate] that, not only would you upchuck that, but you’d also upchuck whatever else you might have had for your dinner.

T: This has come up again and again with Barth – food was the issue.

D: Yes. Absolutely. Yes.

T: Did you notice it as far as your own body weight in the four or five months you were there?

D: Oh, yes. I went down. When I got back to France, even with the two weeks that it took when the Russians overran our camp, it took two weeks of negotiation to get us transportation out of there. It was a rare privilege to let 8th Air Force come in and fly us out. We had lots of food during those two weeks, but we had to be careful not to eat too much. Because your stomach is not accustomed to it. Your stomach shrinks.

T: What did you weigh, approximately, when the POW time ended?

D: When I got back to France two weeks later, I weighed 120 pounds. When I went down I weighed 175.

T: So you lost a minimum of fifty-five pounds, probably more.

D: Fifty-five pounds, yes. So it was more than fifty-five because that two weeks I gained some weight back. Yes.

T: Didn’t have much contact with Germans. Barth, the last number of months, gained prisoners, didn’t it, as far as the number of people coming into that camp.

D: Every month brought in more. Right.

T: Did you notice a sense of overcrowding in your own compound or more people being added?
D: Yes. More people being added and most of the influx in the winter of ’44-’45 was the NCO camps that were in Poland.

T: Right. Being cleared out.

D: They had to be cleared out and closed. Those that had ailments that they figured they wouldn’t be able to survive the walk, they shipped them to us. So we had a mix for the first time then. There was a mix of officers and NCOs. Two of our crew were in the barracks next to us. And they just couldn’t believe that I was alive. They thought I had died long before.

(3, B, 403)

T: They’d seen you get shot and saw the condition you were in.

D: Right. Yes. Just were amazed.

T: As an aside, did all members of your crew that went down survive the war?

D: Yes.

T: So all eight of those who parachuted out survived.

D: Yes. Right. Except now I only know of two that are still alive. The rest must have died.

T: Do you have contact with them?

D: All except for three that we never have been able to track down.

T: So you never really found them again after the war?

D: They never joined American ex-POWs or any organization like that. So we couldn’t run them down. We tried every contact.

T: Right. Let me ask about the war. We know that by early May, of course, your compound was going to be overrun by the Russians. How much news did you have of how the war was going before May? I mean between December 1944 and May 1945.

D: We had a radio down in one of the other compounds that was put together piece by piece. Some that came through with Red Cross food parcels that the Germans never picked up on and some by guards that were coerced into it by giving them things like food.

T: Bribing the German guards?
D: Bribing the German guards. They would bring in certain crystals and so forth for radios. Very basic radios. And they were able to get BBC.

T: Which would provide a link.

D: Right. And they would type up—they had a little old typewriter. See these other ones had been in camp there for like a year and a half or so and the British were there for two and a half years.

T: They had been there a while, hadn’t they?

D: So they had lots of time to do all of this stuff. So they were well organized. They dug a lot of trenches for example. Whereas we couldn’t do that at all being two feet above the ground. So they’d type up this little bit of news with their little old typewriter and then they had to be careful passing it through the fence. We just had a single fence between the compounds.

T: Between British and American compounds.

D: Or between the North 3, 2, and 1 [compounds]. So they’d have to do this very carefully so the guards wouldn’t see them passing it on. It would be wrapped up very tightly. So we’d all get a chance. It would maybe be four days old but that’s...

T: That’s not old news in those days.

D: That’s brand new, to us. So we knew that the Americans were progressing. We knew the Russians were coming and we knew they were much closer because like I say, seventy miles away you’ll hear artillery.

T: Could you ultimately hear the war there at Barth like you heard it coming at Budapest as well?

D: Yes. And also when we were at Frankfurt. The Americans were only about thirty miles from Frankfurt when we went through there. Believe it or not.

T: What kind of discussions went on among the men about what was going to happen? Who was going to get there first? What were the Germans going to do?

D: I lost money betting.

T: What did you bet on?

D: Bet on when the war would end. I was optimistic again. It took longer than I figured. Because I figured with the Russians coming to Budapest and the Americans
being close to Frankfurt and then we heard the artillery, you know, up in Barth. I figured that it would come quicker.

T: You thought the Americans would arrive before the Russians would?

D: Well, the British were the ones that were the closest because they were in the north.

T: So you thought that the Western Allies would arrive.

D: Yes.

T: Was there any concern in your mind or in those in your barracks for example about what would happen if the Russians did arrive first?

D: Oh, absolutely. I never said that the Russians liberated us.

T: In fact in our conversation on the phone, you said the Russians overran your camp.

D: Overran the camp. They didn’t liberate us because the Russian flag went up. The hammer and sickle went up in lieu of the German. And it flew every day while we were there.

T: Can you recall the day that the Russians arrived?

D: Yes.

T: Talk about that.

D: The Russians moved through during the night and bypassed the camp. I found out later that the commander sent out an officer that spoke Russian with a driver. I don’t know where they commandeered this vehicle but they had a vehicle. They went out looking for some Russian soldiers to talk with them to explain that we had all these American and British POWs at this camp. They wanted to get protection and to get organized. It took, I don’t know how many hours that morning finally before...

T: The morning of—what day was it?

D: Oh, I don’t even recall now.

T: So from your perspective, what did you see from inside the camp? I mean obviously you couldn’t follow the discussions going on outside the wire.

D: No.
T: What did you...where did your eyes...

D: Well, first of all, when we got up that morning you'd look out and there was no guards on the towers. The Germans were gone. No Germans at the gate. And of course, then, food then just didn't arrive. Because it took a while for the Americans to get organized. So it was obvious that the Russians had overrun.

T: When did you see your first Russian?

D: The second day.

T: They came in the camp?

D: Yes. The next day. We wandered around, up and down between the *Lagers* of the camp. We didn't leave the camp area. Stayed within. Of course the order came out that we were all to remain. Regardless, some took off on foot headed for the British. Seventy miles away.

T: Were you ever tempted to do that?

D: No. Remember I had no shoes.

T: You still have no shoes?

D: Still just the liners. And besides, if I spoke Polish which then you could understand some Russian, they could understand, it might be okay. But if you can’t speak the language, I knew only too well that you just can’t deal. You’re in very dangerous ground. Because the Russians would love to take singletons. That would be no problem. And take them east. They needed workers.

T: So you felt even then you were much safer staying in the camp.

D: Oh! Absolutely!!! Yes.

T: I know also about the camp, that it was a number of weeks before you left. How did you experience those couple weeks of limbo?

D: We had some Russian POWs that were workers that came in and had to empty out our toilets and they did all of that dirty work. Russians did it. They would talk with our Polish-Americans that spoke Polish and they would, not only that but I would see them pointing to the east and shake their head no and draw their hand across their throat to indicate that they didn’t want to go back home because they knew that they would be killed. That was against orders to surrender to the enemy. What a horrible, horrible way to live.
T: As an American though, for you and the people around you, what kind of information did you receive or what kind of rumors did you have about when you were leaving or what was going to happen to you? I mean in a sense the war’s over but it’s not over.

(3, B, 490)

D: Every day that it went on without any news of what was happening made us less secure. We were more concerned that we’d be taken east.

T: So this was a spoken concern among the people around you that the Russians were going to ship the POWs east.

D: That was their proposal. That information came down.

T: You were told this.

D: Officially we were told that. Because they wanted to put us on railroad cars and send us through Poland. East. And then eventually to the Black Sea to go home that way.

T: That’s a long way. That’s...

D: Way out of the way. So that in itself was not logical. Therefore would we disappear into Russia.

T: How was the decision made that you, that the group of prisoners was not going anywhere? Because you did stay at the camp, and ultimately did leave from there.

D: Yes. Because there were so many that were in such bad shape that there was no proposal to walk us over to the British lines. It was seventy miles. And of course the Russians didn’t want American planes flying in over Russian area that they controlled. So that was the battle that went on and on.

T: It was about two weeks wasn’t it?

D: Two weeks. Yes.

T: And how were you fed during that time?

D: Oh, the Americans took over the food system and we found that there were lots of American Red Cross parcels. So immediately we all got a parcel apiece.

T: That’s still was a pretty good amount of stuff, isn’t it?
D: Fourteen pounds. That was no problem. On top of that leave it to our group in the room. By that time they knew about our background. That our man from Nebraska and myself came from farms, and we must have had butchering experience. The Russians drove in a herd of Holstein cattle. Cows, bulls, heifers, calves.

T: Right into the camp?

D: Right into the camp. Then they went into the pasture which was next to us. The cows hadn’t been milked for days and days, the poor things, and their udders were all hardened up and all that so you couldn’t get fresh milk. That was not a choice.

T: You’ve got these cows and...I’m trying to picture this.

(3, B, 519)

D: You understand that in the Army Air Corps you do things by the system. You know, first of all you have this herd of cattle, all this potential beef. But you have to find out who has experience. So they took a survey, which took a day and a half. You’ve got to survey to find out who’s qualified. You’ve got to get tools. A lot of planning here to feed all these troops. In the meantime, these characters in our room, picking on Nebraska and Minnesota, farm boys, they must have had experience. Why don’t we go down there at night and pick out a nice young critter and butcher it. You guys know how to do it. And we’ll all help. We’ll all help, of course. City boys.

T: People like me, a city boy, saying, “We’ll help you, Dick.”

D: Yes. We’ll help. Yes (chuckles). So it was agreed upon and of course by then you’re getting into May and the days are getting longer. So we couldn’t go until after eleven. It was still bright. Off we go and I have a piece of metal about a foot long, twelve, thirteen inches long and square about, oh, less than an inch square. That was the tool to knock out the critter. We couldn’t find a rock. I was looking for a bigger rock to do it. We had a couple of knives that we purloined. I don’t recall where they got them but they were dull as could be. All you had was little pieces of stone to try to sharpen them. Away we go down to the pasture and we remember there’s bulls in here.

T: This is bizarre already. Yes.

D: So I pick out this six hundred pound heifer. That’s a nice size to handle and mature enough so that it’s good, solid meat. Not veal but real beef. So we get around her and corral her and grab her. So she’s under control. Then I start to pound on her head.

T: I’m trying to imagine this.
D: They thought I was pretty cruel because I hit that sucker many times. You cross on the front of the face and hit between the horn and the opposite eye. Right where the two lines cross is the point that you hit. Finally, after about thirty blows suddenly she collapsed. So I quickly cut the jugular vein in the neck, the bleeder. By that time there were two bulls that were becoming very interested in what was going on. So I had the guys drag the heifer out over under the fence. We pulled the fence up and got her under the fence a ways. But then the bulls were right there with their nose over the fence snorting and not too happy about what we were doing. But anyway, there was a fence between. Then we had to skin the animal.

T: This is all at night still?

D: This is all at night. But you can see at night. It’s never totally dark. And these dull knives. These guys that had never skinned before. I was trying to teach them how to do it, to hold and stretch it and keep working it.

T: So you did kind of know what you were doing here.

D: Oh, I had butchering experience. Sure. But they wanted me just to do that because I knew how. But then they would take over and do it. So I’d let them do it and then they’d start chopping holes. But we said, what the heck, go ahead and chop holes in the hide because we’re going to leave the hide out here in the pasture anyhow. We’re going to be wasteful tonight. Because what are we going to do with a hide? How are you going to soak it to get all the stuff off of it, salt it and all that stuff. Impossible. So we had to waste it which I didn’t like. But that’s a fact of life. From the knee down or the hock down, that part of the leg is no good so you hack it off at the joint, right? That was a fun experience too because they found a little axe but that, too, was very, very dull. So we had big problems with tools.

T: Did you actually end up taking chunks of beef away from this experience? Is that what...

D: Oh, absolutely. Not chunks, but quarters. We got this down to where we got the hide off. Then the next step is to get the animal up on its hind legs. Some guys go for branches that they broke off and then you cut into the hock, above the hock where there’s space to get in with the branch, and then we had a little piece of rope that we got. I don’t know where they found it. To pull it up on the tree so that they could get the animal up, hung up. Then you start cutting the animal down through the belly. You have to hold certain parts up because if they...if you let them fall they drain which you don’t want. You understand. Urine and feces.

T: Yes.

D: They didn’t like that too much but I said this is what you have to learn. So they did it and held it up as I got it. So we got all the entrails out and I said, “You want to
keep the heart and the liver, don’t you?” Yes. So we got them cut off. Got all of this out. Cut off the head of course. So then we had it so we could split it in half, right?

T: Yes.

D: You have to go right down in the middle of the spine. And of course I started down and about the third strike one of the guys from Alabama says, “Let me do that. I can do that.” I think on the third chop he was off of the spine completely. So I had a heck of a time with that dull thing getting it back on there again. So I finished chopping it all the way down. By that time I was getting pretty worn out. I was running...

T: You only weighed—you’d lost fifty-some pounds at least.

D: Yes. Well, I was still having problems with my heart. Too much exercise. It was pounding like that.

Anyway we got it halved. Then I taught them you go to the third rib and cut in to the spine. That’s how you quarter it. So they learned that process. They brought mattress bags. So we put each quarter into a mattress bag and they carried it over their shoulders. Of course I didn’t have to carry anything because I was the expert.

T: You were the brains of the outfit.

D: Yes. Right. So we brought this back. By that time of course, it was about four o’clock in the morning. I went right to bed because I was pretty whooped with the exercise. Hank came in about half an hour later. They had started the fire outside of our lager and they had already cut up the hindquarters into the good part of the—I showed them where each part of the meat is. The round, the lower round, is not as good as the upper round. Then you get up onto the back and you get into the T-bones and the tenderloins and all of that. So I showed them basically, but I said you can’t be too fussy because we can’t really cut through bones and all of that. We don’t have any saw. Just cube it. It’s easier to cook that way. Hank came in, my buddy from New York, and says, “Dick, you’ve got to come out right now.” This is five o’clock in the morning. It was already bright. I had to have the first pieces of meat. This well-aged beef (laughs).


D: One hour. Yes (laughs).

T: It’s amazing you didn’t attract any attention from other people doing this. Or did you?

(3, B, 628)
D: Of course they were late sleepers. Their schedule was very relaxed, so most guys just laid around the sack. But they smelled the beef cooking. So out they came and they came in huge numbers. But I took three pieces, three pieces of the beef and I ate them slowly, one by one. Then all the rest got, from our room, the butchering gang. They all got fed. And the other guys that didn’t go with us, that stayed back, they didn’t want to go. Then we gave away pieces of meat.

T: Well, you couldn’t really keep it, could you?

D: Because you can’t keep it. It would rot. Sure.

T: That’s a once in a lifetime story. And I think as a city person that would have just been bizarre.

D: Yes.

T: Let me ask you, when the Americans arrived at the camp –

D: No. No.

T: Right, they didn’t arrive at the camp itself. But they took you out by plane?

D: Oh, the Americans flew in. They were just flight crews that flew in. And they flew us out. And of course we were the last prisoners that arrived at the camp, so we were the last to leave. They took the oldest guys first. Fair. And the English all went out early because they were the oldest.

T: They had been there for years.

D: Yes. All the war long. Eventually, on the third afternoon, we finally flew out. In the meantime we went around the camp. Right next door was a work camp where they had mostly Slavic and Russian POWs and a few Jews. There was one woman that had her gold star on and she lay on the, literally, on the floor which was just dirt.

T: Was this connect to the POW compound or adjacent to...

D: No. Adjacent to. I think it was about three blocks away. She was...there was nothing...she was literally bare but there was nothing sexual about a woman that was so starved. She must have weighed maybe eighty pounds. Her ribs stuck out and bones on her legs. And her eyes were sunk way back in her head and her skin was gray. She was just...seemed like barely alive.

T: Made you seem healthy in a sense, seeing that.
D: Hank and I went back and heated up some soup, Red Cross soup, and brought it back over. We made it very watery because she couldn’t handle thicker soup. We literally fed her with a spoon to help her along and she seemed to be gratified it. At least it was warm so it would help her that way. And we brought a number of blankets because we knew we wouldn’t need them anymore. And covered her. But I still to this day wonder how long she lasted. Did we prolong her life and make it more miserable or did she...

(3, B, 680)

T: She seemed that she wasn’t going to make it. To your eyes.

D: No. No way that she could. So you know when you see it firsthand that way how you can treat human beings, be so utterly cruel, to starve them to death. Work them until they’re almost nothing and then let them die. What a horrible way for human beings to look at another human being.

T: Did experiences like your own, or that, leave you with a lasting bitterness against the Germans?

D: At first I hated them. But I soon found out that that was really not helping me at all. I then began to hate the system that would provide that sort of treatment. But as far as the people are concerned, do you condemn them all?

T: That’s the question.

D: How guilty is this one versus this one versus this one? We know the SS were completely, real bad, right? But then how about the Wehrmacht? Some of them treated us very decently. They protected us. Kept us from being killed.

T: Literally, from your account. A couple times.

D: Literally. Yes.

T: That more nuanced understanding, does that only come with time?

D: Yes. Right. Each day the hatred dies down. You realize that it’s wasteful to hate. And that it’s more constructive to do something about it. But you can hate the system that provides for that sort of treatment. For example, I don’t hate the Germans or the Japanese, because I know the Japanese treated us worse as POWs than the Germans did. But I know that if I were a Russian, the Germans would have treated me quite different than the way they treated me. So, you know, you have all these relationships and that’s why I say, before you get into hatred, my attitude is no, I don’t hate them. But would I buy a German or a Japanese car? Why should I? Why shouldn’t I help American business and not help some other country when we already have been very bad imbalance of trade.
T: That’s interesting how you say it moved from hatred to an understanding that the system was responsible, to still maintaining a distance in a sense against those two. Even at your age now.

D: Because, did the Germans or the Japanese ever apologize for their treatment of POWs? I haven’t heard it.

T: Let me bring you back and I’m going to –

**End of Tape 3. Tape 4, Side A begins at counter 000**

T: Dick, I want to spend the last couple minutes talking about your time as an ex-POW. When you went overseas you were not married. You were married pretty soon after you got back home.

D: Yes.

T: Your wife’s name is Martha.

D: Yes.

T: Had you known Martha before you went overseas?

D: Yes. We were engaged.

T: And were your folks still alive when you got back?

D: Yes. They were.

T: Do you remember the initial contact you had with your family and loved ones when you got back from overseas?

D: Very much so.

T: Can you talk about that a bit?

D: We came home on a troopship to Newport News, Virginia, and a couple of days later we were put on a military train that stopped at all sidings to let higher freight go through. We finally arrived at Fort Snelling. We backed into Fort Snelling from Minneapolis, south Minneapolis, on the train and were offloaded. This was in the early morning and we were allowed to make a telephone call to our folks. So I called my folks and told them that I should be able to come home if they’d come up and pick me up at Fort Snelling at three o’clock in the afternoon. That’s what they said it should be through processing. So that was a very happy day for me. I had never
received a letter in the eleven months that I was a POW. So I had no idea what was going on with my folks or with my fiancé.

T: What did they know? Had they been notified?

D: Yes. They knew and they got rather bad news from the Red Cross. Because you see, when I then was finally processed after I came home and we had a sixty day leave and then I reported. Martha and I were married and reported to the Army Air Corps down in Florida. Then there was a hurricane, so they sent us up to Georgia. From there they said that I had to go before a retirement board to determine what should be done with me because of my disabilities. So they sent me to Mayo General Hospital in Galesburg, Illinois. There they recommended that I be retired and that I could no longer be on flying status with the Army Air Corps. That lasted for a few months and then I was notified by headquarters, the Army Air Corps at Washington, D.C., that I had to be recalled to active duty to go before another retirement board at Fitzsimmons General Hospital. Finally, after two months and a half there, the retirement board recommended again that I be retired, and I’ll read to you why I can no longer fly Army Air Corps aircraft.

T: This is in 1946 now, right?

D: 1946. In June 1946. (reading from 1946 document) And the reason is “foreign body, metallic, anterior wall, right ventricle of the heart, incurred 2 July 1944 when shot by enemy after bailing out over enemy territory in Hungary.”

T: That’s the military descriptive version of what happened to you.

D: Why I can no longer be flying a military aircraft. So I have accepted that and made another adjustment in my life and changed occupations.

T: Does that suggest you had thought of making the military a career?

D: Yes. I wanted to be—whether military or civilian—either an airline pilot or a military. Either one.

T: And that put an end to that.

D: Complete end. Because I used to say, before prison, that I would rather fly than eat. I loved flying that much. But when I got into prison camp I had to rearrange my priorities of life. There were things more important than flying. Like food and water and warmth when you’re cold, etc. So life is full of adjustments.

T: It sounds like you, at a relatively young age, had to make some big ones. How, in a longer term sense, how has your POW experience, do you think, and those adjustments you had to make, impacted Dick Carroll who is now more than eighty?
D: Yes. Eighty-three in fact. How fortunate, first of all, to be alive. You know each day is a gift. Of course, thinking back to Martha marrying me, knowing that I had a bullet lodged in my heart...

T: Could of scared her off, couldn’t it?

D: That’s pretty brave I would say. How fortunate again. I’ve lived a “normal” life. Because, how sure are you of having a regular long life? Martha bore three daughters that we raised and they, in turn, have—we have five grandchildren. A very normal life generally.

(4, A, 62)

T: Yes.

T: Do you find yourself being consciously thankful and recognizing that that is a gift that you have?

D: Every day. When I wake up in the morning, thankfulness to God. Yes.

T: What I hear you saying is that your experience really made you conscious of the little things, important things, in life that you might not have noticed before.

D: How important life is, basically. Yes. Just to be alive. And if you don’t take advantage of it, you waste it. Use your life. Make it worthwhile.

T: Is that a sentiment you can identify in yourself really since 1945?

D: Oh, yes.

T: You’ve made your life count, in a sense.

D: In fact, I’m always amazed that I’m to where I am because there’s so many of my buddies that have been dead for years. Yes. Each year makes me more thankful. Believe it or not.

T: You’ve betrayed an optimistic, upbeat personality since we’ve begun to talk here. When you got back, thinking of your wife or your fiancé, then your wife and your folks, how much did they want to know about your POW experience?

D: They never asked and I never told them.

T: They never asked you questions?

D: My father and mother died without ever hearing my story.
T: Did they not want to ask or did you not want to tell?

D: First of all, most prisoners of war will tell you that they were sort of ashamed of being a prisoner of war. There was something about it that you gave in to the enemy. That you surrendered which wasn’t really a pleasant thing. You didn’t want to talk about it because there were so many that died in combat whereas you were alive but you lived through that and you lived with the enemy.

T: Did you feel the same thing?

D: Yes. Yes. And back then people, unless you were, like we were in prison camp where we were all under the same situation, you became so close and you talked about it freely with one another. But when you came back to civilization you wanted to put that all behind. Being married you wanted to get a job and you wanted to get on with your life, and you tried to push that in the background.

T: Did you do that consciously?

D: Yes. Besides my father and mother were quite old. I was the eighth child.

T: That’s right. And you were a younger eighth child, I mean they were much older, weren’t they?

D: They were much older. (pauses three seconds) How would they feel if I told them what I told you today?

T: In other words you consciously wondered how your folks would handle that news.

(4, A, 90)

D: That’s right. Because would that cause them so much heartache that it would be harmful to them. I didn’t want to do it.

T: So you held it in?

D: Yes.

T: How about your wife? Did you feel a similar situation with her? Not wanting to tell her?

D: She picked up little bits of this when we were called to active duty, recalled down to Florida. I met up again with Hank, who I was with all those eleven months. So she’d hear us talking and recalling things. So she’d pick up little bits and she never, I never told her the whole story.
T: Did you not want to tell her as well, or did you feel that she didn’t want to know?

D: So much of it was rather gory. It would make her feel sad. Did she really need to know? Back in those days we didn’t talk so freely. Living on the farm, my dad was not a great conversationalist.

T: Yes. You mentioned he was kind of a quiet type.

D: Quiet type, yes. He was a great example as far as doing work and you’re very work oriented life on the farm. Early in the morning til late at night.

T: But talking or open displays of emotion?

D: Oh no. No, no, no. No emotion shown. None at all. No.

T: How about in the jobs you had for the VA or different federal agencies? How about your coworkers? Did they know you were an ex-POW?

D: Eventually. Because you get acquainted again and then working together on problems and then interviewing veterans that come in to apply for disability. One thing relates to another and you recall and so you do get into that expression because it has a way of recalling events of prison camp. Yes.

T: On recalling events, how much of an issue for you were recurring dreams or nightmares after the war?

D: Remember I talked about these dogs that suddenly would growl under the floor? With all my experience, the only nightmares I have are of a pack of dogs chasing me.

T: So it was the sound of those dogs is the image that stuck with you.

D: And I can’t do anything about it because they catch up and they drag me down.

T: They do catch you in the dream?

D: Yes. And then you try to cover your face and your throat so they don’t get you there, which would be fatal. And so then the only defense you have is your feet. So you kick, and you kick your wife. Not very pleasant. The last one I had was the second week of February [this year, 2004].

T: So it’s an image that continues to recur.

D: Yes. And of course, you know, you’re convinced that you can overcome, you say that you will yourself to wake before the dogs drag you down. But it doesn’t work. So then you stay up late at night. You can do homework and spend less time
sleeping so you sleep more soundly. And it did help a little bit. It seemed to expand the time element between the bad dreams but you never... *(voice trails off)*.

T: Has it decreased in frequency over the years or...

D: *(speaking more softly now, with emotion)* Yes. Maybe every other month. *(pauses three seconds)* That’s about the way it is.

T: What kind of assistance has the Veterans Administration offered over the years in dealing with, what we might call, the psychological aftermath of your POW experience?

D: The psychologists want you to come in. I went through one session with a group session where you talk about your experiences, and that seemed to help a little bit. They offered to come through and do it on a continuing basis but my time element is such that I just don't find the time to go every week to spend like three, four hours. I've always kept myself so busy. I've been involved with volunteer work.

T: You mentioned you’ve kept yourself active really all the time.

D: Yes.

T: How much of that is a way of keeping bad thoughts out of your mind? Just keeping yourself busy.

D: That’s part of it. And then also you maintain your health, mental and physical health, because the people that I know that retired and sat down and watched television are all dead. Only those that are active seem to stay alive. I still desire to stay alive. When God wants me, okay, go ahead. I’m ready.

T: You've been close a couple times already.

D: But in the meantime I’m happy to stay alive. It’s a privilege.

T: And you said more than once how you value life and use your time constructively. I mean consciously constructive.

D: And doing it. Helping others gives you a sense of gratification because there’s so many POWs that don’t understand the health system that the VA provides, and that I act as an avenue of telling them. Then also helping with their claims, their disability compensation. I’ve been doing that for years and years.

T: During the interview we’re having now you’ve been very frank and very honest about anything we’ve talked about. Is this an interview that you would have given me at any time after 1945?
D: No.

T: When, in a sense, did that change for you, and can you identify what might have prompted you to go from saying no to saying yes?

D: The VA. The VA psychiatrist. Very definitely. They explained that the more that you're able to talk about the experience, the better you will feel. Mentally it will help you. They suggested even going out to schools to talk to the school children.

T: No kidding. They really encouraged you to get out there?

D: Yes.

T: When did you start hearing this advice for the first time?

D: This was back after I had retired from work.


D: Yes. And it wasn’t right away. It took into the 1980s before I really got into talking before school children.

T: Is that something that got easier the more you did it?

D: Yes. Yes. Although it brings back you know, very vivid memories. I have a little trouble emotionally talking about dealing with having a bullet lodged in my heart.

T: The fact that you’re able to speak about it at all and volunteered your time I think says a lot for you. Dick, those are the last couple things I wanted to ask about the postwar experience. Let me ask if there’s anything that you want to add at this point. This is a good time to do it.

D: No. I think you got all the essential parts of the history. It’s a long one. It would probably bore most people.

T: Well, you’re smiling and that indicates that I've hopefully done something good today.

D: Yes. Yes, you have.

T: So on the record, I'll thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW