Floyd Dahl was born on 21 March 1923 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, one of three boys. He grew up there, and graduated from Minneapolis South High School in 1941. In March 1943, Floyd was inducted into the US Army.

By the end of 1944, Floyd was serving in Belgium with Battery C of the 590th Field Artillery, 106th Infantry Division. German forces launched a large scale offensive in the region on 16 December, and thousands of American forces were taken prisoner. On 19 December, Floyd became one of these prisoners.

The Germans marched Floyd and many other POWs to Stalag IV-B Muhlberg; Floyd remained here, enduring poor conditions and a lack of food, until advancing Soviet Red Army forces liberated the camp on 23 April 1945. With no transportation to American lines, which were approximately one hundred miles to the west, Floyd and several others remained in the area. He was in the city of Leipzig when the war against Germany ended on 8 May 1945. Floyd was repatriated to US forces and then transported back to the United States. He was discharged later in 1945.

By his own account, Floyd spent decades recovering from his ordeal as a POW. He and his first wife, Irene, were divorced within a short time, and he suffered physical and psychological effects of his months in prison camp. This interview took place in June 2004 at Floyd’s residence in Minnetonka, Minnesota.
F: A lot of artillery shells. Coming and going. We were shooting and they were shooting. We never knew if or what we hit or what was going on. Almost immediately the communications were cut. The wires were cut between our forward observers, the radio contact. It was a real confused time. Nobody knew what was really going on. To this day I’ve always wondered. There was a Jeep came up in front of us in the middle of the night and wanted to know where something was. I talked to them and told them that I didn’t know. After I found out that the Germans were imitating American soldiers, I’ve often wondered if that was a German patrol looking for information. And to this day I don’t know. Outside of the artillery we had no rifle fire at all from the infantry. But when we were ordered to pull out—our positions were very insecure because they were formerly German
positions. So the defense was wrong for our gun emplacement. Our forward was open. Our back was closed.

T: Sure.

F: Whereas when the Germans were using it, they had the front closed and they could get out the back. So we had a difficult time when the orders came to hook up the howitzers and move back or move wherever they were going to go. It was a lot of work getting the trucks in position, getting the guns connected. We left sometime in the middle of the night. What time I have no idea, but it must have been long after dark. Of course dark over there is like five o’clock.

T: It was almost the shortest day of the year or close to it.

F: Yes. (loud sigh) We evacuated that position. It must have been on the eighteenth, as near as I can figure out. Because we got in a convoy and were heading to St. Vith. Somewhere along they must have taken a shortcut, anyhow we got bogged down in like a swamp or a creek or something. There must have been—I have no idea. Forty trucks and guns and trailers and so forth stuck in there. And when daylight came, then we were told that the colonel had surrendered us as a unit to avoid further casualties.

The artillery shells came in quite often there for a short while in the morning but then they quit. I wanted to let the gas out of the trucks and set them on fire rather than have them captured. An officer, whether American or German I don’t know, came and says, “If you do I’ll shoot you right now or we’ll court-martial you later. Because you can’t destroy government equipment.” Me and the rest of our crew left that area. Sometime later in the afternoon, probably three, four o’clock, we were told to head to the west. Nobody had a compass. The sun wasn’t out. We didn’t know where west was. So we wandered around through the woods there.

(1, A, 65)

T: How many of you?

F: There was the whole gun crew. There was eight, six or eight. Eight. I suppose there was six at that time, because some of them went the other direction. We were walking down this woods and it was kind of a long hill. All of a sudden there was a—I called him a kid then. I was like twenty. This guy looked like he was about fifteen. But his gun looked about as big as our cannons. So we all threw up our hands and we were marched down into the...

T: So you encountered a—it seems like rather suddenly—a German. A younger-looking German soldier with a gun.

F: Yes. Yes. We were walking through the woods. Right behind him, not very far, was a whole group of German soldiers. But he was the first one we encountered.
T: What went through your mind at that moment when it was, this whole notion of being a prisoner, was suddenly very real?

F: First was destroy my carbine. Take the bolt out and smash it against a tree. The second thing was, “Oh, my God, I’ve got this new fuse that goes in the artillery shells. I can’t let them have that. It’s a new secret weapon.” Anyhow I had that in my pocket. It was a device, oh, probably a little bigger than a hand grenade or about that size.

T: Was there fear for yourself?

F: Oh, very great fear. Great fear for all of us. We were all shaking in our boots. I remember Sergeant Denoski says, every time a shell came in I said, “Every time a shell comes in I gotta take a pee.” He says, “You’re lucky. I gotta take a crap.” (chuckles)

T: Now was this German soldier standing there in front of you—you are a prisoner at that moment. Was there fear of that situation at that time or...

F: No. Because he looked like he was, like I say, fifteen or sixteen. But that machine pistol that they have, that burp gun, that’s capable, I don’t know, of shooting many rounds, many shells right away. When you hear it, it sounds like a burp. Brrrpt! And I didn’t want him shooting. So we all threw up our hands. I told the other guys, “Throw up your hands and let’s just surrender.”

T: Had you thought, up to that point, of what it would be like to be a POW?

F: No.

T: Even on the verge of being captured in a sense...

F: We didn’t know...

T: Thinking that through hadn’t been something you’d done.

F: We thought we were still walking towards the American lines and retreating.

T: So I get from you a sense of surprise when this actually occurred and suddenly this German stood right in front of you.

F: Oh, yes. Yes. We weren’t surprised because of all the shooting, but when all of a sudden this guy appears—we thought we were heading back west. What we thought was west. I have no idea what direction we were going.

T: The wrong way it sounds like.
F: We were surrounded anyhow, so I guess it didn’t make too much difference which way we went.

T: Were you, face to face there with the enemy, were you frisked or searched?

(1, A, 102)

F: No. No.

T: Were you asked any questions by that first group of Germans that you were...

F: No. No. Somewhere in between there, before that, I had assisted carrying a litter to the hospital tent, medical tent. I don’t know how I got involved with that but I did get involved with it. And the fellow, he was obviously shot or bleeding from the stomach. He had a K bar on top of his jacket and he didn’t want anybody to take his chocolate bar from him because he wanted to have that to eat. And I thought at the time that he’ll never get to eat that. But we took him to this hospital tent. There was both Americans and Germans in there.

T: This is a German or American hospital tent?

F: American. Then I don’t remember how we got back to the crossroads. But when I got to that crossroads I suppose we were under control by that time.

T: Once you were in German control there, did they move you pretty quickly to a collection point?

F: A collection point.

T: Other American POWs?

F: Yes. I said, it was a crossroad. In the crossroad was a building. And I can remember frozen bodies stacked in front and around that building like for an extra layer of protection or something. There was hundreds of them. Maybe fifty, I don’t know. But it seemed like hundreds. One of the fellows in our Battery C was a Jewish fellow by the name of Goldberg. They had him standing on a pile of snow, dirt, I don’t remember now. Snow. There was all snow. He had to have two canisters of .50 caliber machine gun bullets, one in each hand. And they wouldn’t let him move. I said, “Can I take one of those?” He said, “Stay away from me, Floyd. Otherwise they’ll shoot us both.” We had to watch him stand there holding that thing. Then I don’t remember, we started walking.

T: Did Goldberg walk with you when you left?
F: I don't know. I don't know. Yes. I know now. But I didn't know then. Yes. He was in the line walking. We were marched—usually from well before daybreak. I would think four, five o'clock in the morning. And they would walk us until eleven, twelve o'clock at night. They had no food for us. In the twelve days that it took me to get from the nineteenth to the Camp IV-B, which was on New Year’s Eve, I had one-third of a loaf of military bread. You've probably heard about them. Half sawdust and half whatever.

T: Yes.

F: There was some flour in there I'm sure. But it seemed to me like it wasn't baked or it wasn't baked enough, and I just could not get it down. But on one of those days, I think it was Christmas Eve or Christmas, it wasn't Christmas Day. It must have been before Christmas. They gave us a third of a loaf of bread and a spoonful of molasses. A spoonful of molasses, and I remember the temperature was probably freezing or below. I spread that on the bread as much as I could. Then I could gnaw a little piece of bread with the sweetness of it. The rest of the bread I gave away. That was the only food we had in the twelve days.

T: What do you remember about that walk? Were you walking with people that you knew from your own battery?

F: Some of them. Yes. But there was a lot of other people also. I mean there was ten thousand. About ten thousand of us I think.

T: So you remember a very large group moving on the road to IV-B.

F: Yes. Yes. As far as you could see in the front and as far behind. And you didn’t want to fall behind, because they said they had trucks that would pick you up if you couldn’t walk any more. But from the rifle shots from the rear you knew what they were picking up. Whenever you heard that the line started moving a lot faster. A lot faster. Even though you were dead tired. We slept in the ditches or in the fields for several of those nights. Drank water out of the side of the road. The cattle would be on the other side of the fence. Everybody got diarrhea, dysentery, or whatever they were. But we had the GIs.

(1, A, 170)

T: The Germans that were marching with you, what do you remember about them? The guards with the column as you moved.

F: The guards. Yes. All the time. But they'd change. You'd seldom saw the same guards the same day when marching. I think that they were old people. Probably in their fifties.

T: Young men, right?
F: They'd walk part of the distance and then they'd change. So I don't remember any one of them ever being civil to us. And a few of them would kick you if you didn't get up in the morning. One night we were in a slate factory for the slate that they make for blackboards. There was no heat or anything. The only place to lay down was on the piles of slate or rocks or whatever. But we were inside. And other time we were in a brick factory that made bricks. There again the same thing. There was no heat or anything. But we were inside. That's the only two—oh, one night was in a barn also. I don't know how we got in the barn, but we did. And that's the only three nights that I can remember. The rest of them were all spent in snow banks or on the side of the road. Ignacio Lopez and I—he was a cook in our outfit. We teamed up and we slept together and we marched together and helped each other.

T: Had you known him prior to being captured?

F: Oh, yes. Yes. He was a cook in our outfit.

T: What do you talk about when you have days and days of marching like this? Or do you talk at all?

F: No. Very little. I don't remember ever talking.

T: Just kind of shuffling along.

F: Shuffling along. Yes. Then we were all put in boxcars for a train ride.

T: This marching, the twelve days of marching there...

F: Marching and riding in trains.

T: It wasn't just a march and then trains. It was like one and then the other? March, train a little bit, march some more...

F: And another train. The reason for that was that when we were finally put in boxcars, everybody couldn't sit down so we kind of took turns. A fellow sat between your legs. There was no facilities on there, so you had to pee or crap in a helmet and then dump it out the window. One of the days that we were there a P-38 strafed us, and the fellow sitting between my legs had his head blown off and I had the residue on my pants from then on until I got into camp. It was a very hard time. A lot of us got out of there and made a POW sign by bodies standing and the plane came around again and was going to strafe and then he saw all the people standing there and he just wiggled his wings and flew off.

T: Being in a car like that sounds difficult enough, but then to have a plane which you know is your own plane over top come by sounds almost difficult to take.
F: It was, but we couldn't fault him because he had no way of knowing. They didn't identify the trains as being Red Cross or anything like that or POW. They were just like any other train. It was just boxcars. I’m sure he radioed and told them that (loud sigh) what had happened or don’t shoot at this train anymore. But we refused to get back into that train. I think I remember the train taking off and we started walking again. On Christmas Day, that would be the…yes, Christmas Day the twenty-fifth, the clouds disappeared and the B-17s, bombers and fighters, started flying. The ack ack was shooting at the planes and the planes were going somewhere on a bombing mission I’m sure. I mean they were miles up. You could just see the vapor trails really until you followed them up to see the plane. But for hours, hours afterwards, this tin foil would float down that they used for radar deflecting.

T: Right.

(1, A, 243)

F: It was relatively pretty.

T: Kind of just floating down from those many miles up there.

F: Yes. And supposedly deflect the radar so they could…but we cheered when those bombers went over. The Germans didn’t like it. So then we walked again. How many days we spent walking and how many in the trains I have no idea.

T: Can you recall how many different times you actually were in a train?

F: Twice for sure. Because the first time we didn’t go back on, but the second time we were eager to get back in because we couldn’t hardly put one foot in front of the other. Oh! I had no shoes. I was wearing overshoes.

T: What happened to your shoes?

F: Well, because our trucks got stuck in this mud. It was in the middle of the night. I must have been dozing or sleeping. So when we were told to get out I slipped on my overshoes figuring I was just going to get us up out of the snow and the crick and we’d be back in the trucks again. Didn’t work that way. So the first thing the Germans wanted to do was take your shoes. I put up a hell of an argument about it. You ain’t taking mine, because I ain’t got no shoes.

T: So somebody wanted your overshoes.

F: They wanted my shoes. They wanted my shoes. But all I had was overshoes so I put up a hell of an argument and finally somebody that must have spoken German or a German spoke English and they understood what I was talking about so they let me go. But there I was shuffling…my feet would slide every time I took a step.
T: Inside these overshoes.

F: Inside the overshoes. So I had blisters on top of blisters.

T: Those don’t provide much warmth either, do they?

F: No. When I got to camp my feet were as black as, almost as black as that [microphone].

T: That microphone is pretty black too.

F: Pretty black.

T: What kind of physical condition were you in? Feet aside. When you got to Camp IV-B?

F: Exhausted. Exhausted is all I can remember. We were happy to get into camp because we got there on New Year’s Eve night. Really, yes. New Year’s Eve. The English people, the prisoners that were already in the camp, they had streamers up. Just like kids with chains...

T: Paper chains.

F: Yes. Paper chains. And they were all sitting at the table there and looked like they were having a feast or a meal. It turned out that they had been saving their Red Cross parcels and things for weeks. They’d cut the labels off the cans and they’d paste them together with flour. I don’t know where they got the flour, I guess out of the Red Cross parcels. Yes. It looked like, oh, this is going to be pretty good.

T: For the first time it sounds like at least it’s a destination that you’re going to as opposed to this continual…

F: Continual walking. Yes. It was a relief to not be walking anymore.

T: While you were walking did you pass through any cities or towns and come into contact with civilians?

(1, A, 304)

F: Yes.

T: What do you remember about that?

F: One fellow tried to get a drink out of a bird bath and this German soldier came out on the balcony of that house and shot him for drinking out of a birdbath. Other
times people were shouting out the windows at us. I don’t know what they were shouting. I don’t speak German. But they would throw their night jars out. Contents out at us. So we knew we weren’t very welcome there. I guess where this happened, somebody said that a day or two before they had been bombed. I have no idea whether it’s true or not. I didn’t see any bombing there but it could have been the next street over or something.

T: Any stones or things thrown at you that you remember?

F: Snowballs.

T: Snowballs? Contents of chamber pots it sounds like.

F: Yes. Yes.

T: So any Germans, any of the civilians, ever offer food or water to you as you passed by?

F: No. No.

T: So you remember certainly some anger directed at you but not deadly force or anger.

F: No. There was just too many of us.

T: When you got to Camp IV-B, and by your recollection it was the 31 December or 1 January.

F: Right. Right.

T: Mühlberg is in central Germany there, south of Berlin. When you got into the camp and it was daylight, describe what you saw from your memory. In other words, what kind of a place was this?

F: Two rows of barbed wire. Fences. Two rows. I guess they were about twelve feet apart so that if you cut through, if anybody tried to escape and cut through one they would have to cut through two. Guard towers of course. The barracks were crowded before we got there. And after we got there all the prisoners had to double up. The bunks were four high. The bunks were a little short, but they must have been six foot. Because I wasn’t six foot, and I didn’t have any trouble with my feet sticking out or sticking over. They had a thin, straw-filled mattress. Probably an inch or two inches high maybe. The bed boards were about three inches wide. And there were six of them in the six feet. So you went like this with your...

T: So they weren’t flush against each other. There were spaces between the bed boards.
F: Yes. There was only about six boards and that went for the six feet. So there must have been about a foot apart or ten inches or eight inches or something. Your mattress, this thick, (holds forefinger and thumb two inches apart) would pull down...

T: Sure it would.

F: Nash, Ignacio Lopez [Nash is nickname for Ignacio Lopez]...we slept together and we shared. I don’t think we had blankets, but we had our overcoats that we used. We put one under us and the other one over us.

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

T: You mentioned Ignacio Lopez. Is this the person that you kept together with throughout your POW experience?

F: Yes. Yes. We walked out together even.

T: Would you call him your closest friend or companion there during your POW experience?

F: Yes. He was the only one.

T: How can friends, or how did you as friends, help each other on a day to day basis?

F: He smoked and I didn’t, so the few occasions when we got part of a Red Cross parcel I would always share my cigarettes with him. And the other cigarettes I would trade for bread and I would share the bread with him (brief chuckle). And one time we were real hungry for something more solid than the bread, so they had—a group of Russians were in the camp also. We met a couple of Russians that had a can of Spam. So I talked Nash into trading some of his cigarettes along with some of mine and we’d buy a can of Spam. We were so happy when we got this bargain. Bargained this down to where we could buy it. Then we hurried back to our bunk. The Army had a can opener that was only about this big, but it was so efficient, it was great. I wish they'd still make them. We opened up this can of Spam and it was potato peelings.

T: You had been rooked.

F: We had been taken. Hook, line and sinker.

T: How did they get that in there?

F: They put the top of one can in the bottom of another can and they stuffed it full of potato peelings. So it was the right weight and everything. We never knew it until
we opened it with a can opener. Oh!! Did we take off to see if we couldn't find those guys. Never did find them.

T: Was your emotion of the moment more anger or more frustration or...

F: Anger. Oh!! Angry. All those cigarettes that Nash couldn't smoke. All those bread—not all those bread—but we could have bought a couple three loaves of bread. We didn't have that and he didn't have his smoking...we were angry.

T: Was food a prime consideration here? For you as a prisoner?

F: The only consideration. [Food] was the only consideration. Morning, noon and night. Nash would talk about his Christmases where he had roasted a goat on a spit. Of course I had never eaten goat. But how they roasted it on a spit and tortillas and...I don't know what all he mentioned that they would have.

T: Where was Lopez from?

F: Los Angeles.

T: So very different experience than yours growing up.

F: Oh, yes. Because all I was talking about was futtebuns and Yulecake and the sweetbreads and turkey or ham.

T: And yet the two of you made a close friendship regardless of these different backgrounds that you had.

F: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: On the food subject. What were the Germans supplying daily for food that you remember?

F: In the morning we’d get a cup of ersatz coffee. At that time I didn't drink coffee. I mean, I didn't smoke and I didn't drink coffee. But it was the only thing to have. But the only way I could drink it was if I put some sugar in it. And sugar was a very scarce commodity. When I ran out of sugar I didn’t drink it. Use it for shaving, I guess. I don’t know what I did with it. Probably gave it to Nash.

T: Was it the only thing that you recall being served in the morning? The ersatz coffee.

F: Yes. Yes. Sometimes we’d have a slice of this military loaf again. I could eat that then. If we put it on the heating stove and burned it. Almost, not quite charcoal, but it was like chewing hardtack.
T: You mentioned earlier it often tasted undercooked or something.

F: That was the first time. Yes. Yes. Well, I think that was all the time. That it tasted to me undercooked. That’s why when we had fire in there I put it on there and dry it up. Then we had that with the coffee in the morning. Then at noon was...we didn’t get soup twice a day.

(1, B, 435)

T: You do recall some kind of soup though being served.

F: Yes. And a lot of times we thought it was residue from a sugar beet factory where they cooked the sugar out and then they had...and they used to feed that to the cattle. But I think that was part of our soup. I just read within the last week that there was a sugar factory near Torgau [on the Elbe River] or Muhlberg. There was one. There was a sugar factory.

T: That very well might have been what you were getting.

F: Yes. But I just read that a week or two ago.

T: Did you get soup regularly? On a daily basis?

F: Yes. If you could call it soup. It was usually potatoes or the sugar beets or rutabagas sometimes. Only once, when the donkey that pulled the Scheissenkart, he died. Two days later we had meat in our soup. Coincidence? I don’t know, but I strongly...

T: You can do the math on that one. Yes.

F: I can strongly suspect it. One mule for—a mule is a big animal. A donkey is a small one. This was a mule. But there was, oh, like ten thousand American and English prisoners and there must have been five thousand Russians and thousands of French and thousands of Italians and some Danes. So that one mule went a long ways around between all those people.

T: Yes.

F: So what we had was little shreds of meat in the soup that one day.

T: Other than that you don’t recall meat in the soup or substance beyond potatoes or rutabagas or sugar beet residue.

F: Yes.

T: Two meals a day that you recall or two times the food was served?
F: Yes. There was something served at noon too, but I can’t remember what it was. It wasn’t a soup or anything. Whether it was another cup of coffee...my memory fails me I guess. Maybe it will come to me after I start thinking a while.

T: You mentioned Red Cross packages. Once. Did you get those regularly that you recall?

F: Oh, yes. Real regular. I think the first one we got was when we were marching.

T: Actually to Camp IV-B.

F: Before we got there. It was split one package among thirty-six people. So what they did was put everything that was food in a helmet. Stirred it all together. It was coffee and sugar and probably a can of Spam of some kind or other. There was some crackers. I'm reasonably sure there was some crackers. Then there were cigarettes in the package. Everything but the cigarettes got thrown in the helmet and mixed up and everybody got a spoonful.

T: That sounds pretty gross. I'll have to say.

F: We all had the same helmet and the same spoon *(laughs)*.

T: And you're hungry I guess.

F: Didn't pay any attention.

T: Did you see Red Cross packages while you were at the camp?

F: Parts of them.

T: So being split among a number of men.

*(1, B, 474)*

F: Yes. Usually eight or ten. I think it only happened probably four, maybe five times when we were in camp in the five months or six months that we were there. Five months we were there.

T: What kind of a difference did that make then with splitting a package and not seeing it very often?

F: Well, it was such a treat and you needed it. You needed it. When I went in I was about 170 pounds. When I got back to the American lines, which the nearest I can remember or verify is May 15...I got liberated on the twenty-third by the Russians. We walked to the American lines. We got weighed then and I was 105 pounds.
T: Holy cow!

F: But that was almost three weeks after we got liberated.

T: So you probably gained weight since you’d been liberated.

F: I have no idea. Probably. We scrounged some stuff. We had to. On the walk.

T: Food as a focus. During the day, how was your time passed?

F: (sighs) Oh, walking around the compound some if the weather was sufficient. Oh! Making a stove that you could heat your coffee in or heat water in or whatever. Some of the Englishmen that had been there for a couple years, they had blowers that they had made out of tin cans with cranks on them, with pulleys, string pulleys on them. They were very ingenious. So they could create like a forge.

T: That would heat pretty efficiently I suppose.

F: Pretty fast. Well, the plain ones, like Nash and I had, we just had the one between us, was about so big and you could put a...

T: Four or five inches across. Six inches across maybe.

F: Yes. And you could put a cup in there and pieces of paper. Where’d we get paper from? German newspapers I guess. Pieces of cardboard. Take things off the wall. Tear paper off the wall. Because I know we got German papers that some people could read. But usually that went for toilet paper. Twigs too. I got a related episode about that. But anyhow, these made real efficient...you just fan them a little bit and you’d get your coffee boiling in just a few minutes.

T: You want to relate a story about twigs or wood?

F: Yes. Shortly after I got to camp, of course, we probably were in better shape than most people that had been there for years. But the people that had been there for years now, they had usually received regular Red Cross parcels. Maybe one a week or every two weeks and it would be one per person. But near the end of the war the Red Cross parcels just evaporated. But anyhow, they wanted volunteers to go out and get wood for the stoves because, I think the allocation was coal—was about six or seven blocks.

T: The briquettes. The little coal briquettes.

F: They weren't little.
T: It was a brick size almost.

F: Yes. And I think there were six or seven of them allotted per room. Well, it wouldn’t heat the room. So I was sent, or volunteered, to go out and get wood. Get trees. So we went to an artillery range where all the trees were dead, and a lot of them had been blasted out of the ground. They were rotting...they were able to shake them loose out of the ground. Everybody would take as many as they thought they could carry, and take them back to camp for cooking. I felt pretty good and I thought well, if I take the whole tree rather than just the heavy part I could use the twigs for our little stoves. So I had two or three or four trees on my shoulder and we were walking back to camp with them. The ends of mine were dragging behind me.

We got a break. Rest break. So I just shrugged my shoulder and they dropped off. Pretty soon I had a German soldier there pointing his gun at me and hollering and shouting and I’m standing there like, huh? He got serious. He pulled the bolt back on his rifle and put a bullet in the chamber, and one of the Englishmen says, “Hey, Yank! You’re destroying their grain crop over there. Your branches are leaning out over their grain field.” The grass was about this high (holds thumb and index finger two inches apart).

T: Two inches. Yes.

(1, B, 546)

F: That was scary. That was scary.

T: Was scary the gun or that you didn’t know what he was saying to you?

F: Both. I didn’t know what he wanted.

T: You couldn’t even fix whatever the problem was.

F: Whatever he wanted. I had no idea what he wanted. All I knew was I wanted to rest.

T: And when you moved the tree did he go away?

F: Yes. He unloaded his gun and walked away. That was the end of it. But that Englishman. I can still see him. “Hey, Yank! You’re destroying their grain fields.”

T: Thank goodness for him.

F: Thank goodness for him. Yes.

T: Speaking of the Germans. How much contact as a prisoner, how much did you have with them on a daily basis?
F: Very little. Very little. I was lucky.

T: They were clearly there at the camp.

F: Oh, yes. And they’d come through. Inspections every morning and they’d go through—they’d suspect that there was a radio and they’d come and run through it...what do you call it? Ferrets. Some guys would crawl around underneath you at night to listen to what you were talking about or saying.

T: So you could hear them. Crawling around.

F: No. They were silent. But the English had been there long enough that they knew that this was happening.

T: They could have been there for years by this time, right? By 1945.

F: Some of them were captured in Africa.

T: Years.

F: ‘43.

T: You mentioned collecting wood. Any other work details that you remember at the camp?

F: Once to go out and get potatoes.

T: Volunteer for that? Did you?

F: Yes. And the potatoes were out in the open field. But they had piled straw on top of the potatoes and then they shoveled dirt on top of that for about six inches to keep them from freezing and protect them from whatever. So you had a big iron bar that you chipped away the dirt into about four or five six foot sections. Then you took a chain and a bunch of guys would pull it back and expose the potatoes.

T: Just once you did this?

F: Just once. We filled their baskets, I guess. I don’t remember what we put them in, but we put them in something. Then they put them in larger containers. But I enjoyed that because I had my overshoes on and I could put some potatoes down in my overshoes.

(1, B, 579)

T: So having the overshoes that were too big paid off for a change.
F: Paid off for a change. Yes. And Nash and I, we enjoyed those. Even if they were stinking feet *(laughs)*.

T: Amazing what you get used to.

F: What you get used to.

T: On those overshoes—did you leave camp with those overshoes? Is that what you had on the whole time?

F: Yes. All the time. Yes. They never had shoes for me. I didn't have shoes until I got back to the American lines.

T: Months and months then after you were captured.

F: Yes.

T: You know, a couple work details, other than that, what did you did as POWs during the day?

F: Not much. Talk. There were some books to read. You read everything that was in there. Talk, talk, talk, talk. Preparing menus. Once in a while a guy would come around after the soup at night and they would discuss what they had done in civilian life and experiences that they had. So you learned a little bit. One of them had been a chef at one of the famous hotels in London. He was talking about how—what I remember about it was that he was in a carving section out in the dining room. He was carving a leg of lamb and it slipped off and fell on the floor. He was hoping nobody would see him reach down and pick it up and start carving it. Then he said, “Okay, everybody get your pencils and paper out now. I’m going to give you a recipe for making a chocolate cake that you can make right here in camp. It’s delicious.” So he started out, you take your loaf of bread or your parcel of bread and you crumble it up. Then you take so much sugar out of your Red Cross parcels. By the time he got done he had you using flour and eggs and sugar and stuff we hadn’t seen for six months. That’s how you made your chocolate cake.

T: It sounds like it was a way, at least a diversion from the boredom.

F: It was a diversion. And another diversion they had one time was...I thought it was wonderful. I thought they had a bunch of girls come into camp and they put a play on.

T: Into camp?

F: Yes.

T: The Germans?
F: The camp commander was there. Everybody was hooting and hollering and whistling.

T: German girls?

F: Yes. No. They were American or English prisoners. Dressed as (laughs)...dressed in drag.

T: I see. I see.

F: But it took a long time to realize. Because I’d never seen them before.

T: Sure.

F: I’d never seen anything like that before. I wondered where did these girls come from? Then it turned out they were all prisoners (laughs).

T: Was boredom an issue?

F: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. You could sit and think and think and think. Nothing to do but go lay down on the cot. Maybe all day or half a day and then try to sleep at night. Wonder what’s happening at home. What’s happening out in the field. We’d get radio reports every night. Somebody had a radio in camp that the Germans never found. We’d get the British Broadcasting Company. A guy would come around every barrack. I don’t know how he got around to them because there was a curfew. So it was closed. But he’d get around—I don’t know if every camp or every barrack—but he’d get around to some of them. Read the British news for the day. But you weren't supposed to mention that to anybody or talk to anybody outside because if the German guards overheard you talking about something that wasn’t in the German radio then they knew that somebody was listening to the British broadcasting.

T: Got it.

F: So you didn't dare talk about anything outside.

T: So you could have information but almost not share it outside.

F: No. Just in your barracks.

(1, B, 646)

T: You mentioned time to think and wondering about at home. What did you think about there? Were you concerned about the family, loved ones back home?
F: Oh, sure. Sure. Were they working? Are they alive? Are they ill? How did they spend Christmas? How did they...yes. They were in just about everything that could possibly happen. Especially recently married. I wondered how my wife was getting along. When I left she was staying with my folks.

T: In Minneapolis.

F: Yes. At the store here.

T: Your first wife, Irene, was she also from Minneapolis?

F: Yes.

T: Did you hear from anybody while you were in camp? Get any...

F: Not at all. Not a thing. In fact, I didn't get a thing from the time we left the American shores. I didn't get anything. I didn't get anything in England. Didn't get anything when we got to the front lines. And I understand that the Christmas packages had arrived and they were saving them for Christmas. So we'd all have a big Christmas celebration.

T: Right. So you missed it by about a week. Getting those packages.

F: Yes. The sixteenth. Missed it by nine days.

T: As a POW not getting enough food, bored it sounds like, were you to consider yourself a fairly optimistic person as far as your condition there in the camp or did you suffer from this condition?

F: Resigned I think would best describe it. You can't do anything about it, but you worried every time a guard came through with a gun because you never knew what his mood was. We understood that a guard could shoot you and he wouldn't suffer any consequences of it. That was the end of it. He wouldn't be punished or have to explain. That's what we understood. Now whether it's true or not I have no idea. I didn't want to get involved with any guards in any way.

T: Sure.

F: But some of them made—the English people. I don't think any Americans did. I might be wrong, because I don't know. But some of them had to have made friends of some of the German guards via cigarettes or something because once in a while a German guard would bring in a loaf of bread or bring in something that was not a military loaf of bread. Like cake! I never saw any of it, but I understood that's what happened.

T: Did you ever observe German guards mistreating or abusing prisoners?
F: Yes. They'd haul off and kick you every once in a while. They might hit you with a rifle butt. That would happen. Mostly on the march in. After we got in camp I don't recall any incidents like that. It might have happened. It's a large camp.

T: Didn't happen to you.

F: Didn't happen to me.

T: Were you mistreated on the march at all that you recall?

(1, B, 706)

F: Yes. I got kicked a couple times. Get up and go! But that was the extent of it. After that it was put one foot in front of the other.

T: Until you got there. There was some news you mentioned. Rumors as well of things that were happening or going to happen or did happen?

F: Oh, yes. Because of the radio you mean?

T: Sometimes if there isn't hard news, people will fill it with rumors.

F: Oh, yes. There was rumors. Constantly, I think. That the Russians are so far away. The Americans are so...the Allies are so far away on the eastern front and the western front. One time there was a lot of excitement in camp because a plane came over and strafed a train right outside of camp. Not right outside. It must have been a half mile away I suppose. All of a sudden the boxcars just started exploding. I'm going to say ten minutes. It might have been twenty minutes. All of a sudden matches started falling into the...

T: Match sticks?

F: Match sticks. Yes. That's what had exploded out there. The boxcars must have been full of matches. So there was a bunch of matchsticks fell into camp. But when it happened we were all out there cheering. Hurray! Hurray!

T: Could you see the planes? American or Soviet? Could you tell what they were?


T: American planes that you saw.

F: Yes.
T: The Soviets, the ones that liberated IV-B, what kind of advance notice or warning or rumor did you have that somebody was getting close to the camp?

F: When the German guard came in and put his rifle up against the wall and wanted to buy watches.

T: Really? He came into the barracks and...

F: He came into the barracks.

T: What do you remember about that incident? It sounds very interesting.

F: It was so unusual that everybody stood around and both arms were just full of watches. He wanted to buy watches or money or cigarettes or anything like that. I don't know what he had to trade but he was willing to trade anything. I think he would have traded his rifle. The next day the Russians were there.

T: They arrived 23 April 1945.

F: Some time during the night or morning.

T: When you think about your time at Camp IV-B, January, February, March, April, almost four months you were in that camp, what would you consider to be the most difficult aspect of your life in the camp during those months?

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

T: Mr. Dahl, you were talking about the arrival of the Soviet forces on the 23 April. Describe from your perspective how that actually occurred.

F: I'm going to backtrack just a little bit. When I first got to camp, first got to IV-B, the next day we were all taken into a shower and our clothes were cleaned and deloused and we were deloused. When I got there a guy said, “You better give me your watch. Otherwise the Germans will take it from you before you get out of here.” So he just asked my name and what barracks I was in. I barely remember, but when we got cleaned up and back in our clothes and went back to our barracks within a couple hours my watch was back on my wrist. It wasn't all taken. When the Russians came the gates were open and the way I understand it they said, Germany is yours. Take what you want.

T: Were the German guards gone by this time?

F: Yes. They were all gone. There wasn’t anybody there that I knew of. But now I'm a peon back in...

T: Did Soviet forces actually come into the camp? Foot soldiers or...
F: No. I never saw them in camp. They might have been at the office up there but I never saw them in camp. But they did say that they had no food for us. So Germany is yours. Take what you want. I was asked to go on another detail to pick up some bodies. The German guard we called Popeye, he was a mean one, and he must have been meaner to the Russians because when we picked up his body...

T: So one of the bodies was him and you recognized him.

F: He had been dragged behind a horse and kicked to death; he was hardly recognizable. They must have beat him up terrible and then they put him behind a horse and just dragged him around. And another house we went into. We were looking for food and we went down in the basement. There was this old German couple sitting in chairs. They had been killed. They were just sitting in chairs in the basement. The Russians were not very sympathetic to any German, soldier or civilian.

T: How close was your camp to the town of Muhlberg?

F: I never got there. I don't know. I would think within a mile or two.

T: When you mention looking for food and the house, is that a house close to your camp?

F: Farming. Yes. Farm house. Yes. We were scrounging for food and couldn't find any and some Frenchmen had killed a hog. They were going to use that for themselves. They didn't give us any. Wouldn't offer us any. So I guess we were still relying on the food that was in the kitchen when the Russians came.

T: How long did you stay in the camp? I mean at this point the Russians have in a sense thrown the doors of the camp open but there's no indication...

F: The war is still going on.

T: The war is still going on. Right. There's no indication how or when you're going to be leaving this camp.

F: Right. An American Jeep came. I can remember the Jeep pulling up to the gates and from then on it's all rumors what you heard. Supposedly the American said, "We'll send trucks for you to pick up all the Americans." And the Russians said, "No. You won't. No, you won't."

T: The camp was behind the Russian lines.

F: Yes. We were in the Russian territory. Yes. They said no, you won't send trucks over here to pick up the Americans. We'll take care of them...or words to that effect.
T: What’s going through your mind here? In a sense the camp’s been liberated, but you’re not free to go.

F: Right. You are free to go, but you don’t know where to go.

T: I see.

F: You don’t know what to do, where to go.

T: How did you make up your mind then?

F: Because it must have been three, four, five days and nothing changed really. I said to Nash, “Let’s get out of camp and walk to Leipzig.” We started walking and at one place a Russian came by with a motorcycle with a sidecar, and Nash and I got in the sidecar and he drove us some distance. I don’t know just how far but he had to stop for gas somewhere and he went into this alley and he went into the garage and he wanted some gasoline. The German said he didn’t have any. The Russian found some benzene. I don’t think he heard the guy but he swore at him a lot. Put the benzene in his motorcycle and away we went. But we didn’t go very far. I don’t remember how we got out or where he dropped us off or whether he was turning somewhere else. Then we were walking. Bright sunny day and all of a sudden we smelled something real funny. Couldn’t figure out what it was. We kept walking. Finally we came to a little prison camp. I mean it probably didn’t cover a block. There was the bodies laying outside this prison camp. That’s what we had been smelling. I don’t know if it was a… I’m sure the Russians… they must have been Germans in there. Of course the Russians were as cruel to their own soldiers because they considered them deserters. They weren’t prisoners. They were deserters.

(2, A, 72)

T: Right.

F: And they were not very kind to their… I think I heard or read afterwards that they were given guns if they wanted to continue to be Russians. If they didn’t, why they were dispatched with, I guess. I don’t know if that’s true.

T: How long were you underway walking with Ignacio Lopez?

F: I don’t know. Like I say, the furthest I can remember is getting back to the American lines on 15 May. I know we were in Leipzig for the end of the war. May 8. And before that group, this Russian convoy came through and when they went around the corner—Nash and I were standing on a corner. When you turn a corner you have to kind of stop the tanks especially…or half-tracks. This Russian in a half-track, he hollered at us and we said, “We’re Americanos.” He hit the side of the half-
track and he was pointing out bullet holes that were in there, that were marked in there that didn’t go through. He said, “Americans good.”

T: You saw these Russians and interacted with them even...

F: Just that much on the street corner.

T: You’re walking toward Leipzig, which is to the west from Muhlberg. How did you feed yourself? Where did you spend nights?

F: We went to, I think it was a military barracks. It could have been a hospital that was abandoned, but I think it was a military barracks. There was cans of food in there. No labels on them. No labels. Every can we opened was peas.

T: The first couple spoonfuls might have been good.

F: The first can was good, but after that... *(chuckles)*. Actually I don’t remember. I don’t remember anybody giving us any food. We must have eaten someplace, somewhere, somehow. But anyhow, when we got to the Elbe River there, the Russian guard there, he wouldn’t put up the drawbridge. The log. They’d open it up and let people or trucks through. We kept telling him we were Americans. Of course we couldn’t talk to him and he couldn’t talk to us. He just said no, no, no. Then we saw the Americans on the other side. We hollered at them to come and get us or get us out of here. They hollered back at us that they couldn’t do anything. That that was Russian territory. They couldn’t do anything. I don’t know if they told us that or hollered at us. They let us know that they couldn’t come and get us, so we kept talking to that guard, talking to that guard. Finally he lifted the bar and [let us through].

T: It took some convincing though it sounds like.

F: Oh, yes. It wasn’t anything that happened. Yes, I’m an American. Let me through.

T: Yes.

F: Because at that point they didn’t know whether Americans, or Germans, or Germans in American clothes, or Americans in German clothes, or what.

*(2, A, 112)*

T: Sure.

F: Nash and I got through.

T: As you were walking did you encounter German civilians at all?
F: Mostly refugees. I think they were heading back to Russia or Czechoslovakia or wherever they were going. And they usually had baby buggies, wagons, kid’s wagons, bigger wagons. Some might have been used on the farm. Like hayracks. Not quite that big, but similar to that. A couple of them had a horse. We stopped and looked at these guys. They were milking a horse. I’d never seen a horse being milked before. That’s what they were going to drink. Of course we couldn’t talk to them and they couldn’t talk to us. We just stood there and watched them. But all of the goods that they had with them. Piled on that thing. I’m sure it was stuff that they just took out of the German houses and that.

T: Household goods. Things like this.

F: Household. It was all household goods. Yes.

T: Mostly women and children?

F: Women and children and men. So many of them, women and children, had been working as slave laborers. I can always remember them, they had straw boots. Instead of shoes they had straw boots in the wintertime there. To keep feet warm. But there was women working on the railroad tracks or in the railroad yards, streets, digging tank traps.

T: The men were gone.

F: The men, some of the men were there too. But a lot of it was women and...I don’t remember children. But men and women. They were treated equally I guess. Nondiscriminatory.

T: What’s the first thing that happened to you when you did get back to American lines there?

F: We were taken to someplace—we must have rode. I don’t remember walking. We got in someplace where they took our clothes away and showered us and cleaned us up and gave us new clothes. I can remember, I suppose it was French girls standing outside the wires there. Come on! Come on! (chuckles) Hooting and hollering when we were walking around naked there.

T: When you actually got back to American lines, did you feel in a sense relieved, or that some kind of chapter or adventure was over?

F: Oh! Yes. We’re free. We don’t have to worry about—in camp you always worried about what could happen. Not what did happen, but what could happen. I mean, we always heard rumors. Now of course we remember that the pilots, they had to walk back and forth, forth and back. They were taken out of their camp. We heard rumors of stuff like that happening. Some of the guys that went to IV-B with our unit were taken out of camp and sent to work details. Some of them went to Leipzig.
I talked to one fellow that was sent to Leipzig and he worked on fixing the railroad tracks there. After bombing. Some working on farms.

T: And none of that ever happened to you.

F: No. No.

T: Your work.

F: I was a sergeant and considered unemployable I guess.

T: It was the privates and PFCs.

F: Privates and PFCs that were sent out.

T: Right. From Americans lines. Did you spend time in France at Camp Lucky Strike or one of those?

F: A few days.

(2, A, 165)

T: Then were you shipped or flown back to the States?


T: That's generally the one that shipped most people.

F: Rough. Not a rough crossing, but...they served us chicken one day and it just didn’t stay with you. It went over the side. I can still see those sailors up there laughing at us. One guy, on that ship, had a stack of twenty dollar American gold pieces. He had a bunch of them. How many I don't know but he had a bunch of them. I don’t know whether he got them out of a bank or out of a vault or out of...what he got them out of but he had to find them someplace.

T: What a strange thing to have with you.

F: What a strange thing to have but he knew the value of a twenty dollar gold piece. It was going to be worth a lot more than twenty dollars.

T: Sure. Sure.

F: I can remember seeing them. I don’t remember how many but there was a pile. Twenty. Maybe more.

T: That’s a lot of money in those days.
F: Yes. Then several guys had German pistols. I had nothing. I wanted nothing out of Germany.

T: Really? So you consciously took nothing with you.

F: I consciously took nothing. If I had the opportunity to take something I don’t think I would have.

T: On that subject, have you ever been back to Germany since the war?

F: Yes.

T: When did you go back?

F: When my son was in England teaching school. We went over to see him and then we went to Germany at the same time. Denmark. My daughter had been to school in Denmark. So we went to see her other parents. Then we went up through Belgium and into Germany. We tried to go through where I was in St. Vith, but I didn’t recognize anything. The buildings...they didn’t have any holes in them. They didn’t have any damage to them.

T: Right. How about Muhlberg? Did you go back there?

F: No. That was Russian. You couldn’t go there.

T: That was East Germany. So this was before 1989.

F: Yes.

T: So the locales where you were you couldn’t have gone to anyway without much difficulty.

F: No.

T: Would that have been something that, or even today, something that would interest you? Going back to where you were held as a POW?

F: I’ve thought about it several times but no real strong desire to see it. My granddaughter asked me one time...we were riding in a bus together. Her and I were together. She said, “Grandpa.” She wanted me to talk a little bit. I said, “I can talk a little bit but I can’t talk very much.” So I was telling her some of the things. She said, “Well, Grandpa, do you remember any of the Germans being nice to you or good to you or kind to you?” I sat there for a few minutes. I said, “Tammy, I can’t recall one incident where a German did anything good for me. I just can’t recall that at all.”
T: What was it like then being back in Germany when you visited?

F: Just like a tourist. It was all right.

T: Did you feel comfortable or more ill at ease would you say?

(2, A, 215)

F: No. I was comfortable. I was comfortable. I still couldn't understand what they were talking about. One amusing incident was—well, we had a couple. One was in Luxembourg where we stopped—I want to say a bed and breakfast, but it was a hotel. We ordered dinner and I recognized fish so I knew what I was getting. The others didn't know what they were getting but they thought they were getting beef and pork. I got my fish. They got a plate of sausage. They each got a plate of sausage. Summer sausage or whatever (chuckles). So we got a big laugh about that. We still didn't know how to order so that's what they had for their dinner. I was eating fish and they were eating sausage.

T: Did you pick up any German words while you were a POW?

F: Raus!

T: Roll call probably. Let me move back to the United States here. You got back to the States. You mentioned before we started taping that the telegram announcing you were coming back to Minneapolis didn't arrive before you did.

F: Right.

T: And so you got back to Fort Snelling and actually you mentioned literally walked in on your folks.

F: Yes.

T: Talk about that. I mean it sounds like a moment that you remember still.

F: The train took us into Fort Snelling, and I wanted to get off because that was a couple miles away and we crossed within two blocks of my home. The train went within two blocks of my home, and I wanted to get off in the worst way right there. But we had to stay on the train anyhow.

So we got to Fort Snelling and I went in the commissary there wondering what I could buy. I had some money from somewhere and I remembered my uncle smoked cigars. So I bought a box of cigars for him and went out and caught the bus or the streetcar. Streetcar that day. Took that right back to the corner that we'd crossed just an hour or two before and got out there and walked home and walked into the store, and my mother thought I was a customer coming in and when she
came out of the backroom, ahhh!!! She just couldn’t say anything for a minute or so. Then, oh my God, she started crying and crying and crying. Hugging and hugging and hugging. It was emotional.

T: Was your dad there as well?

F: No. He worked nights and sometimes he’d leave at three o’clock and then work four until midnight I suppose. Three to eleven or something on that order. So, no, he was not home when I got there.

T: So in addition to having the store he was working a job outside there as well?

F: Yes. He never worked in the store at all. No. That was my mother’s operation. That was during the Depression. The fellow who owned the store before, they had a dairy farm across the street from us that I used to go to when I was a kid. Play with their dogs and help. Tried to think I was helping them out in the barn. Catching rats or shoveling manure.

T: Got it.

F: But I was less than ten years old then. This Fritz, he had been gassed in World War I, and was a real nice guy. They separated—his brother and him that were running that dairy farm. They bought this grocery store. From a fellow that—his mother had owned it and he had a machine shop in the back in the garage. When his mother passed away he wanted a bigger machine shop, so he sold the store to Fritz and then Fritz had a drinking problem. He had too many friends that came over and would bring him something to drink and then they’d steal the butter or steal whatever they could and take it down and trade it for more booze. So Fritz was in pretty bad shape there for a while.

T: And your mom or your folks bought the store from him?

(2, A, 285)

F: Yes. My brother went over there and tried to help him run the store and get those hangers-on out of there. So Fritz says, “Why don’t you buy the store? Why don’t you buy the store?”

T: That’s how your folks got into it then?

F: Yes. So they took Fritz home and sobered him up for a week or so. Then they started talking about whether he wanted to sell it or not.

T: You were married at the time. You were married in 1944, I think you said. You saw your wife at the same time when you got back here?
F: Shortly thereafter. Yes. She wasn’t living at that place, with my folks at that time. When I left she was living there, but when I got back she wasn’t. She also had not saved any of the allotment checks or any of her money or anything. It was gone.

T: Were you expecting to have some money when you got back there?

F: Yes.

T: For our interest, for this project, the interest is about your POW experience, and at this point how, with your folks or with your wife Irene at that time, asking about how the POW experience was discussed. Start with your folks. What did they want to know about your time as a POW in Germany?

F: They wanted to know everything, but I couldn’t tell them anything because when I started to tell them something it was like...ahhh!!! That didn’t happen. That couldn’t happen.

T: Would you say you got the impression they didn’t believe you or did they say they didn’t believe you?

F: I got the impression... Not that they didn’t believe me, but that they couldn’t understand. They couldn’t comprehend. They couldn’t understand what no food was like. What no nothing was like. No clean clothes. Stay in your underwear almost the time you got there until you went to the camp and then got deloused and got my underwear back. I don’t remember the next time we got deloused or washed or clothes cleaned or anything like that. It was months. So you’re always in the same—they couldn’t understand that.

T: Did you get the feeling they thought you were exaggerating at all? What you’d been through?

F: I never thought of it that way. Might have. No. I think they tried to understand but I got the impression that they just didn’t understand.

T: Does that mean that conversations were short or infrequent about this?

F: Infrequent. I didn’t want to talk about it. Didn’t talk about it. This is more talking than I’ve done about it in...I think if you added the whole years in between that we’ve talked longer than I have in total.

T: You were married at the time. Conversations with your first wife about your POW experience?

F: Not much. It was more about what we’re going to do, how we’re going to do it. I got discharged right after Thanksgiving. I was working by the first of December at Witt’s Market so I didn’t have vacation in between. It had to be very difficult for my
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wife because I was moody. I was angry quite a bit of the time. I didn’t drink. I didn’t smoke. But I wasn’t very good company. I wanted to do what I wanted to do and that was it. Like I was a dictator again.

T: She noticed, in a sense, that the Floyd Dahl who came back from Germany was not the same one that went over there?

F: I’m quite sure she did. Yes. I’m quite sure she did. We had a child then. We bought a house. Paid less than three thousand dollars for it. Didn’t know how we were going to pay for that. Anyhow, between working on trying to fix the wreck that I bought and trying to get some more money and she took in some students and that didn’t work out. So we separated then and...

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 381.

T: You separated fairly soon after you were discharged from the service. Is that correct?

F: After we had our son. Let’s see. That was ’45. Richard was born in ’46. I suppose we separated in ’48.

T: And from the way you’ve described it, the experience of being a POW was part of what changed you as a person it sounds like.

F: I can remember one night when we got in an argument over some little thing. I don’t remember what it was. But I got so angry I ran out of the house and I ran for several miles. This was eleven, twelve o’clock at night. I wasn’t very stable and she wasn’t very stable either. She got involved with the students and I just couldn’t take that. I just couldn’t take that. So I filed for a divorce.

T: Was she about the same age as you?

F: Yes.

T: We often hear of how people managed in the postwar era, and some things worked out, and in your case it sounds like the stress of the returning serviceman was one of the things that contributed to...


T: That’s one other thing I wanted to ask. I ask everyone this. If images from your POW experience stayed with you as far as dreams or nightmares at night.

F: They’re still with me. They’re still with me. Not as frequent. Not as frequent. Probably will tonight.
T: From talking about it today?

F: Yes.

T: Are there specific images or memories that recur for you?

F: No. It could be anything. It could be very violent. Could be thinking about hunger. Thinking about food. Could be almost anything. Could be the shooting. Could be the cannons, artillery. Could be down in the swamp there with the (loud sigh) trucks all bogged down. That kid with the big gun.

T: You still see him.

F: Yes.

T: So it’s numerous images that come back to you.

F: Yes. But there might be days between. In might be weeks between. Lately now I’ll say it’s more like several months between. But an occasion like this when we’re talking about it, I can rest assured, I mean, I’m almost positive that tonight is going to be a bad night. Maybe for a couple days.

T: I’ll apologize for...

F: You don’t have to apologize. It’s not your fault.

T: When you took a job, you were working as a meat cutter there for a while and later as a salesman. How much did your coworkers know? Did they know you had been a POW?

F: Yes. Yes.

T: Both as a meat cutter and when you were a salesman? Both of those?

F: As a salesman, no. Then you were out talking to other people and I never mentioned it unless...I never mentioned it I don’t think. I’ll say never, but I could be wrong.

T: And in those years you worked as a meat cutter there, people knew you had been a prisoner of war?

(2, B, 417)

F: Yes. Yes. In fact, this kid here, he was a prisoner of war too.
T: I’m looking at a picture of your coworkers at the market here. The meat department. There’s six guys in the picture.

F: Yes. Lenny there. He was a prisoner of war too.

T: So here’s a guy you worked closely with? You and Lenny?

F: We worked together at the meat market there for I suppose a year.

T: And each of you knew the other had been a prisoner of war?

F: Yes. Yes. I don’t know how we got to…but we got to talking about it one day.

T: Was it easy or easier to talk to someone like him about being a POW?

F: Yes. Yes.

T: Was he in Europe as well?

F: Yes. He was talking about the [time] he got an abscessed tooth and there wasn’t anybody to pull it or do anything for it, but he scrounged up aspirin and he kept the aspirin on the abscessed tooth until it rotted away.

T: You he had a very specific memory as well of that.

F: Oh, yes. He moved to Florida though. When we were still working together he moved to Florida. I suppose I knew him about a year. I suppose it was several months before I knew he was a POW. Because it isn’t very many people that, POWs that I know, that talk about it.

T: Have you been or are you a member of the American ex-POWs?

F: Oh, yes.

T: When did you join that organization?

F: Oh, I don’t know. A long time ago.

T: Not within the last couple of years. It’s been a while.

F: Oh, no. No, no. Ten or fifteen I suppose. I don’t remember. And then I belong to the 106th Division. Two thirds of our division were captured.

T: Right.
F: They have their 106th organization of which quite a few, well, Russ and another guy... have you interviewed John Kline?

T: Yes. He was one of my first interviewees.

F: Yes. He remembers all this stuff. I think he wrote some things down or had a diary or something.

T: Did you keep a diary yourself?

F: No. No. Well, you see my handwriting. I can't write worth a tinker's damn, or I couldn’t spell.

T: When you, thinking about memories, you have a son by your first marriage and two children by your second wife, how much did your kids know growing up that you'd been a prisoner of war?

F: Nothing.

T: Did they know...

F: Yes. They knew. They knew. But they never asked a question and I never talked to them about it.

T: Thinking about that, is it do you think they knew not to ask or how did that, in a sense, did you put up a wall around yourself?

F: I'm sure. I'm sure. I'm sure I put up a wall, I'm sure of it. Yes. It's been...

(2, B, 450)

T: Have they been curious as they get older?

F: My granddaughter was. She was the one that was asking me about this when we were on the bus there. She said, “Why don't you talk about that?” I said, “Tammy, it hurts too much to talk.”

T: How is it that you come to an interview situation like this then and are able to do this?

F: Because Ray asked me to.

T: Ray Makepeace.

F: Yes.
T: Would it have occurred to you to reach out to me?

F: No. No. Because I think there’s been a couple people that have asked. When we were at a POW meeting or something. Don’t you want to talk about your experience? No. No. I don’t want to be interviewed.

T: Let me ask then. How has this experience been where I have asked you fairly specific questions about things and asked you to relive things?

F: It’s a little uncomfortable but I knew it was coming so it’s all right. You ask what you want and I’ll try and answer to the best of my ability.

T: Right. Has it been with your wife Arlene, has she been one who’s heard a lot of your POW...

F: No. No. No.

T: And you’ve been married for fifty-one years.

F: Yes. Thank God for that. She put up with a lot for the first few years we were married too. Dreams. Getting smacked once in a while. In my sleep, not...I never touched her.

T: Right. And that was in the mid-1950s by that time. So this is something that very definitely sounds like it stayed with you in a very real way.

F: Yes. Yes. Oh, yes. And sometimes you’re thrashing around and you don’t even know it. But she knows it.

T: Sure. Has the Veteran’s Administration offered or provided any assistance to you as far as counseling over the years?

F: They’ve offered but I’ve never gone.

T: So you know they have programs and...

F: Yes.

T: I’m curious. How would you explain your decision to not take them up on that?

F: I guess I didn’t want to talk about it. It’s over and done with. I remarked to somebody not too long ago that my God, I’m still thinking about things that happened sixty years ago. Why? Why? Why can’t I get rid of it? I don’t know why.

T: When you talk to other POWs, Ray Makepeace, a POW of the Japanese, is that easier to do than to talk someone who...
F: Oh, sure. Sure. Yes. Yes. A friend of mine was a pilot and he was shot down. A POW. We talk every once in a while. He can talk about it. Especially the march. You know...when they...back and forth. Eating frozen cabbage and...

T: And he can talk about that.

F: Yes. And the walk. He has some amusing incidents too that he talks about.

T: He lives around here?

F: Yes. He lived in Minnetonka. He just moved to Hopkins a couple years ago. The same time we moved here.

T: What’s his name?

F: Frank Linc.

T: Whatever happened, Mr. Dahl, whatever happened to Ignacio Lopez?

F: We corresponded for—or my wife with Christmas cards—it got down to where it was just Christmas cards and then I don’t know what happened to him. I don’t know. I tried to reach him when I was out in California. When I went in business for myself here. We had a printing company in California also. There was thirteen of us fellows that got together and formed the National Business Association and we sold bookkeeping systems. And because we had to do printing and needed printing we opened a print company in California because that’s where the majority of the fellows were located.

T: Right.

F: So when I was out there I knew he was in Anaheim...where’s Disney?

T: Anaheim.

F: Anaheim. And I looked in the phone book and I just couldn’t find him in there. Of course that Los Angeles phone book...

T: It’s a tome.

F: So I never did find him after we quit sending postcards to each other. So I don’t know what happened. I knew he was a plumber. He became a plumber. I knew that.

T: If you were to see him, talk to him again, what’s one thing you’d ask him?
F: What his life was like after he got back. Because we knew what it was before so there’s no use asking that. How’s things going for you today?

T: Interesting. The last thing I want to ask you is this. When you think about your POW experience, how would you describe the most important way that that experience changed you as a person?

F: How do I know how it changed me? I don’t know it changed. But I suppose I’m more secretive. I don’t care to hear German names. Anybody speaks German I shudder.

T: Even today?

F: Yes. Yes. I guess I still hate them. I won't buy a German product if I know it and I won’t buy a Japanese product if I know it.

T: The Japanese product is interesting because you were a veteran of Europe.

F: Yes. Just the fact of Ray and what he went through and they were our enemies. Every company that moves over there or ships their business over there...

T: This is something that you have...kept parts of this in you for sixty years.

F: Yes. I know it is. It’s still there.

T: At this point is there anything you’d like to add? I’ve done most of the asking up until now, so if there’s something important you want to add to the record this is a good place to do it.

F: I haven’t talked to anybody except another prisoner of war that could understand what we went through. Do you understand what we went through?

T: I’m being asked a question. That’s interesting. That’s turning the tables.

F: Or do you think you know what...

T: I’ve interviewed about five dozen POWs.

F: That’s quite a few.

T: Two thirds of them from Europe. POWs of the Germans. Of course, as someone born in 1958, I’ve never been in the military. I’ve never been a prisoner of war obviously. I can only in a sense understand the experience through research and through conversations. I think that said, I like to think I can understand it as much as I can given the restraints of my experience which—I haven’t done that. I will add at this point that I lived in Germany for many years and I do speak German fluently.
My daughter was born in Germany. I’m wondering if knowing that about me changes the way that you see me?

F: Yes. Right away.

T: I didn’t mention that to you earlier.

F: I’m glad you didn’t. But it shouldn’t make a damn bit of difference. We’re both Americans. So were the Japanese Americans. I guess it goes back to what my granddaughter asked me. No, I can’t remember a single kind...not necessarily kind...

T: Humane?

F: Humane incident that has happened to me when I was in Germany. When we went back there, yes. I had no problem then.

T: We’re all human beings and we do feel things and sometimes there’s the rational part of us that says—shouldn’t—but there’s also the human side of us that...it does. We’re not all rational creatures or we wouldn’t have a lot of the problems that we have in the world right now. But that’s a bigger question I guess. On the record let me thank you very much for the interview today.

F: I’m glad I went through this.

T: I’m glad you took time to speak with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW