Don Frederick was born 1 January 1923 in Albert Lea, Minnesota; he spent his youth there before his family relocated to the Twin Cities when he was fifteen. Don enlisted in the National Guard in August 1939, during high school. This National Guard was federalized into the US Army in 1941, prior to the US entering the war, and was part of the Army’s 34th Infantry Division. Don served as a platoon leader.

In the aftermath of the 1943 Allied invasion of Italy, Don was taken prisoner on 4 November 1943 near the small town of Venafro. After transport to Germany in a boxcar, Don spent the next seventeen months at several camps: III-A Luckenwalde; Oflag 64; and XIII-C Hammelburg. He was actually liberated from XIII-C during a US Army action known as the Hamelburg Raid, but the Raid failed and Don was among those POW’s recaptured by the Germans. He was then sent to VII-A Moosburg, in Bavaria, where he was liberated on 29 April 1945. Don was returned to the United States and discharged in late 1945.

Again a civilian, Don was married in 1946 (wife Carolyn) and raised three children. He had a career in the hardware business in Minnesota and Iowa, as a salesman and a hardware store owner.
Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is 24 March 2005. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I'm speaking with Mr. Don Frederick, at his home here in Richfield, Minnesota. First, Mr. Frederick, on the record this time, thanks very much for taking time to participate in this project.

D: Yes, you are welcome.

T: Let's get the background information on the tape here. You were born on 1 January 1923, in Albert Lea, Minnesota.

D: Right.

T: And your family moved to the Twin Cities when you were about fifteen years of age. You enlisted in the National Guard August of 1939, during high school, which was possible in those days.

D: I was only sixteen, I guess.

T: Your National Guard unit was federalized in 1941, and you were then part of active duty military. In 1943 you were serving overseas with the 34th Infantry Division, 151st Field Artillery, Battery F. That was a gun section, you said. Let me go back to November of 1943. You received a battlefield commission in October, I think you said.

D: That's right. October 15 it was.

T: So you were a second lieutenant by now.

D: Yes. I got a battlefield commission at Sorrento, Italy.

T: You had the commission just in time, apparently, to be captured. A couple of weeks, it looks like.

D: I was a platoon leader. They were the first to go. There was more casualties on platoon leaders than anything else, I can tell you.

T: Did you know that when you got that promotion?
D: I could see it coming. In Tunisia and Sicily and Italy. We were losing these platoon leaders all the time.

T: Second lieutenants.

D: Yes. And there was other ranks too, of course. As a platoon leader in the 4th Ranger Battalion, we were a very small unit to start with. We only had about five hundred men in a battalion. Six line companies and the headquarters company. But we had sixty-eight men and officers per company. Very small. Consisted of two platoons. About twenty-five, twenty-six men in each platoon.

T: So as a second lieutenant platoon leader, you were responsible for about twenty-five guys.

D: That’s right.

T: What happened on 4 November 1943? In other words, how was it that you became a prisoner of war?

D: We were at Sorrento. We left Sorrento on November 3. We got orders to get ready to pack out. We had a mission. We didn’t know what it was yet. I’d been in bed there in Sorrento a good ten days or more and I should have stayed there. Dr. Hardenbrooke, he was our battalion medical officer, very good man, and he came up to see me there. I was staying at a hotel there at Sorrento. He says, “Don, we’ve got a mission and I don’t want you to go.” I said, “Well, Doc, they tell me that this will only last about twenty-four hours and I’d like to try and go.” I saw too many guys leave the outfit that could never get back to it. I said I’d try. But he says, “You don’t have to go. I’d rather send you over to Naples in the hospital because I know how lousy you’re feeling.” I had yellow jaundice or something. Then there was a lot of malaria at that time too, which I didn’t have. But I had this yellow jaundice and boy, that hit a lot of people. Just weakens you. There’s nothing they can do for it. He says, “Well, if we had some white bread and some candy.” I said, “Yes, but you don’t have that. I don’t know what that’s got to do with my condition. But you’re talking about something that I can’t get or have.”

(1, A, 40)

T: So on this mission you didn’t have to go, but you chose to go.

D: I didn’t have to go, no. He seriously made a special trip up to see me when I was in bed. He says, “I know how you’re feeling. You don’t have to go. I’d rather send you over to Naples in the hospital.” Until you recover.” So I broke all rules and went. So we left on the afternoon, late afternoon on the 3 November and we got up to...I think it was the Volturno River [correct]. We had to cross that. We waded across there. The river wasn’t running too fast and it was shallow enough that we could
wade across it. But if they’d had a lot of water coming down there we could have never done that. We’d have had to have a bridge or something. So late in the afternoon, toward evening, it was getting dusky and cloudy and we crossed this river. We had about twelve miles to go to get to our objective.

T: Just your platoon now, right?

D: No. Our battalion. This whole [Ranger] battalion. We had a couple different missions. Our mission as a battalion was to get up to this hairpin turn—I think it was northwest of Venafro. There’s a big hairpin turn. Block that hairpin turn so the German infantry and armor cannot get beyond that point. For this reason. We were to have three divisions behind us cross the river on the fourth. Cross the river. After they got across they were to make an envelopment on us. You know what I mean? They made a big envelopment. They were supposed to relieve us. I have found out since they didn’t even get across the river. The Germans held the high ground in front of us. They could see for miles. They had all those crossings pinpointed with artillery, mortars. As a result, we got over the river there without any casualties because it was night. It was dark. It was mountainous. Anyway, we walked all night long. Single file. Lo and behold, you did not want to lose the buddy in front of you. If you took the wrong turn you loused up the whole operation. So we worked our way up to the objective. We found a depression there just as it was getting daylight. I don’t know, it could have been six, seven o’clock in the morning, on the fourth.

Before that however, Captain Murray, or Major Murray, was in charge of the 4th Ranger Battalion. The battalion split up. He took three companies, A, B and C, and I went with D, E and F Company. I was in F Company, 4th Rangers. We split up. Murray had an objective and I went with Captain Nye. We had our objective on cutting that hairpin turn. We got into this depression. We told the guys, you better have your snack or whatever you’re planning to eat, which was no more than a can of C rations, and have a smoke if you want. I no sooner sat down and I was going to have something to drink or something and Captain Nye came over to me and he says, “Don, you and I are going forward.” Now you tell me. He said, “Yes, we have to move.” I said, “Okay.”

So he and I and a radio operator—our radio amounted to a walkie-talkie, which was worthless up in the mountains. Because those signals don’t go through the mountains. They don’t go over like that either. I said, “Okay, Captain. You’re the boss here.” So we took off to get up to the top of this one hill overlooking San Pietro and that hairpin turn on Highway 6 down there to the left of Venafro. I could see what our objective was. That hairpin. It was a bad turn. So we got up there and we were looking it over with our glasses. All of a sudden I saw around the bend down below us maybe four or five hundred yards away, quarter mile, I saw a company of German troops coming toward us. I might add, right before we saw these troops, Captain Nye and I came across OP wires that came right in front of us up a little knoll. Right behind us.

T: What are OP wires?

Oral History Project: World War II Years, 1941-1946 - Don Frederick
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D: Observation post. So that spelled no good. If it was occupied, and I think it was, Captain Nye and I didn’t know if there was a machine gun in there, and there could have been four or five Jerries [Germans] in there, also. We ignored it. But what we did do, we cut these OP wires and wrapped up about a hundred yards of it hoping to put them out of commission. I think we did. By that time I think the OP people that were there probably had seen him and I and the radio operator and warned of our existence there. Then all of a sudden I saw this German infantry coming up toward us. Single file. Captain Nye said, “Well, they’re about 150 yards from us now.” I said, “That’s too close.” Just the three of us. I said, “Get on that radio!” And the radio didn’t work worth a hoot up in the mountains. You might as well chuck it.

T: He was an enlisted man, right, the radio operator?

D: Yes. Yes. He might have been a sergeant, but that doesn’t make any difference. So Captain Nye says, “Don, I’m going to stand up. I’m going to make motions for them to surrender.” I said, “Are you crazy?!” “You cover me,” he said. “You cover me.” So I did—I covered him. Pretty soon this German company—I don’t know if there was one hundred in there or what. Pretty close to it. They stopped and they looked and they couldn’t believe that we were there. We were on their ground. Under their terms. After they saw us and came to a stop he stood up and made motions for them to throw up their hands. They stopped and pretty soon they started running into firing positions right and left. I said, “Okay, Captain, what do you want to do now?” He said, “Let’s get the heck out of here.” So over the ridge we went.

We dropped back maybe one hundred yards. We had pretty fair cover there. Pretty good cover. A lot better than the Germans had coming up that hill. And that was just as flat as this. Coming up the hill it was just rocks, but they had no cover, real good cover. But we dropped back and he says, “I think we better bring up a platoon.” I said, “I think you better bring up a company.” We sent the runner back. I said, “Bring back F Company.” Captain Nye says, “You send one platoon over and join me.” He took the left flank and I took the right flank. I said okay. The runner got back and brought up one company, F Company. I took one platoon and sent the next platoon to the left flank where Nye was. So we all waited in position to see what the next move was. The Germans came up over the hill. They came up over the hill just like this. They were just coming up toward us.

When they got out there about 100, 150 yards I told my platoon this is close enough. We’re outnumbered ten to one the way it is. I said, “This is close enough.” I told them to take action and get the firepower moving. We did. The Germans were real surprised. They didn’t know how many there were of us. They saw three of us. But they didn’t realize we had a company there, which was small. Sixty-eight men and officers. So we took them under fire. They were surprised. Shocked. And they ran off. They took down that mountain like a ton of bricks. They left their casualties behind. I didn’t think that they would return, but lo and behold, within fifteen minutes here they come again. Coming up the hill like that toward us. Same thing all over again. They ran off the second time. I couldn’t believe it. They did fall back.
It took them a little longer to come back the third time. Which they did. They came back the third time. Same thing all over again. They dropped back. With casualties.

In the meantime, down on Highway 6, that hairpin turn, it started getting loaded up with German tanks, infantry, armored cars and all that stuff. There was a mile long there of that junk. Tiger tanks and all that stuff. Pretty soon they took us under fire. They started lobbing 88s [artillery shells] and everything in our positions up there. We still had fairly good cover. I didn’t take any casualties at that point. But, oh, I wish we would have had some backup like artillery behind us or something, which we didn’t have. We could have wiped out that whole column, and I mean we could have if we would have had support. Either air or artillery.

T: But you didn’t have it.

D: Twelve miles from us, yes, they had it. But not where we were. It was a very poorly planned operation, I think, on the 5th Army. But anyway, I had one squad and we weren’t up to full strength either. One squad, maybe we had six, seven men. They ran out on a point ahead of me. There was a pretty good point there that you could overlook everything. And there was four or five of the guys that got out there and they started firing at the Germans. We didn’t know they had prepared positions on the next hill, but they did. We didn’t know that. So there they were out there. Five, six guys took them under fire.

By that time I had a couple men down. Down in a little gully to my right. Things quieted down. I ran down there and two of my guys were hit pretty bad. I tried to give each one a shot of morphine which I carried. The little morphine styrette. I got down there and they were hit bad. To this day I can’t tell you their name or if they survived. Because during the war we had so many replacements coming in. You might know or meet the guy the day he comes in. Tomorrow he might be gone. And that was the case here. We had replacements. I didn’t even know their names.

But anyway, I went down there and I did what I could, which wasn’t very much. I had no business running down there all alone in the wide open where they could see me and do what I did, I guess, but anyway I went down there and did what I could. I just suddenly turned around and looked up the hill and here comes Ryan and Lodge. That was a couple of the guys there. They had their hands up. I can’t believe it. They actually had them pinned down over there and ran them off that hill three times. But anyway, I talked to my guys after the war that were there and got captured about what happened. When I saw these guys with their hands up behind me up on the hill, there was eight Germans coming toward me. About eight. Well, I was just outgunned and there was nothing I could do. I wanted to stay with these two guys down as long as I could. I don’t know how much good I could have done.

(1, A, 194)

T: You wanted to stay with them there. Your guys.
D: I wanted to stay with them and see that they got some aid. But anyway, that one little squad got captured and so did I.

T: Now let me ask you at this point, before this time, before that particular day, how much thought had you given to the fact that you might become a POW during the war?

D: It never entered my mind for once that I would be a POW.

T: Why not?

D: It probably should have, after I joined this unit. But it didn’t. It didn’t appear to me that it would happen.

T: Had the Army done anything to talk about to you as an...

D: All I can tell you was name, rank and serial number. That was all.

T: And you knew that’s what you were supposed to say.

D: Yes. I heard that once when I was in the service. Just once.

T: In an official capacity. If you’re captured...

D: Yes. According to the Geneva Convention. If anybody lives up to it. Which they didn’t.

T: So you weren’t prepared necessarily for...

D: No. Nobody was. Just like the guys taken at Corregidor or Bataan and all those places. They weren’t prepared for it. I know that.

T: You’re now a prisoner of the Germans. You’ve been fighting the Germans in Italy for a while. Let me ask you what it was like to suddenly have the enemy face to face there, and really for them to be in the power position.

D: That wasn’t the first time we faced them. We were at them in Tunisia, North Africa, and Sicily.

T: Yes, but now you’ve got them now face to face and you don’t have a weapon. Let’s put it that way. Suddenly they’re in the power position.

D: Yes.

T: That’s a different situation.
D: Oh, it is. But what are you going to do about it? If you're overpowered there's only one thing you can do.

T: What was going through your mind at that moment? I mean here...the realization pretty quickly I guess, from the way you describe it, you're a POW. You're captured. What's going through your mind then?

D: It's pretty hard to describe, I guess, when you think about it. I said, "How am I going to get out of this now?" I might add that, late in the day, for the record, after I got held. They brought me back to Venafro. There was a German lieutenant that spoke perfect English. He came down. He heard that they had captured an officer, and evidently one of my men that were captured told them who I was. He came up to me and said, "Are you Lieutenant Frederick?" He put his hand out and shook hands. He was very sincere. He said, "There's one thing I have to ask you. Why were so many of my men shot through the head?" And that didn't spell good. I said, "Well, I ran you off that hill three times." He said, "Yes." "And you fell back to prepared positions on the opposite hill I didn't know you had. You had prepared positions. That's the only target my men had." They were in foxholes or something. He said, "I'll buy that." So we talked a little while and he brought me back into Venafro.

(1, A, 244)

T: What kind of things did he want to know from you as he was talking to you?

D: He really didn't want to know anything too much about me. He was very pleasant. He was a guy just like you and I.

T: A combat soldier like yourself.

D: Yes. He was just interested in that part of the battle, I guess.

T: In his men it sounds like.

D: And he says, "You know, Don," that's what he called me, Don. He says, "I might be in your position tomorrow." And I said, "Yes. You might be." Could very well have been.

T: There was kind of a respect back and forth between you there.

D: Do you know what he did then? He says, "You and I are going up and see my battalion commander." Here we got in his vehicle and went up into the mountains there. It was about eight, nine o'clock at night.

T: Just the two of you, right?
D: Just me. He wanted to introduce me to his battalion commander. The battalion commander, all he could speak was German, so we had an interrogator with this officer. He asked me about different things. Where I was from and all that, but he didn’t ask me about my unit or what my unit consisted of or...

T: Did that surprise you?

D: Yes, it did. In other words, it wasn’t an interrogation.

T: Which you might have been expecting.

D: I would have expected it, but two days later I was brought back to interrogation.

T: This was in Venafro there? Or was that in Frosinone?

D: Frosinone. They had an interrogation center. That’s where they brought me to then. They got my name, rank and serial number. They didn’t have anything on my unit. They didn’t know anything about my unit. Which they should have had a little. We lost a few men on the Dieppe raid. We lost a few men in Sicily, North Africa, Tunisia. But they didn’t have any information on us because we didn’t have any captured. We had three men taken at the Dieppe raid, but they were all killed. They couldn’t get any information.

T: When you were interrogated, what kind of questions were they hoping you would answer?

D: They were just basic questions. My name, rank and serial number. The outfit that I was in and where I came from. That’s about all. I told them again, I said, “Well, according to the Geneva Convention name, rank and serial number should be all I can give you.” They slammed the door on me. They said, “We’re going to fly you back to Berlin.” Which I didn’t want to do. We had air supremacy in Italy all the way up. They were just bombing and strafing everything that moved up there. I didn’t want to be caught in an old airplane and get shot down, by our own people. But not only that...and the only thing that saved me was the lousy weather. Rain, sleet and snow. This is November.

T: Yes. So they didn’t fly you after all.

(1, A, 295)

D: They didn’t fly me. So I waited around Frosinone a couple days. They put me up in an old barn. Second floor in this barn. Pretty soon the day came and I was joined by about seven British officers that got captured on the Isle of Rhodes. It’s in the Mediterranean.

T: No other Americans are with you though.
D: No. So they put us on this lousy boxcar. I hadn’t seen much in food. But this first German officer that I had fought against, when he took me back to where I was being held, he says, “Give this officer anything he wants that we have. Food or…” I said, “My God, I could use a razor and a comb or something.” They provided it. He shook my hand.

T: Very interesting exchange, it sounds like.

D: I appreciated his visit very much. He didn’t threaten me or anything. Because when I was first taken, boy they had a Luger [German pistol] on my head right up here (points index finger at back of head). They had that Luger, back of my head, and marched me all the way into Venafro. I was only a mile or two from Venafro then. I said, boy, I’ll tell you…not only that…I didn’t tell you, but before I got to Venafro after my battle, the guys that took me, the German troops that took me—

T: These were just combat troops, right?

D: Yes. Yes, they were combat troops. I think it was the 15th Herman Goering Division, I think it was, that we were fighting against. They led me down to a building. It looked like a Quonset type building. They led me down there. All alone. This cotton picking Luger in the back of my head. They opened the door and they said, “Look!” Well, I looked. The floor was just littered with German troops. There had to be fifty of them in there.

T: Corpses?

D: No. Some probably were, but a lot of them were still living. They brought them in there and laid them down. There had to be close to fifty. They didn’t like that. That’s why they showed it to me. I thought, well, they’re going to finish me right here.

T: Really? Was that your thought there? That really...

D: Yes. They probably had every right to. We had a battle against them that day. I guess they could do anything they want to do. In Venafro they put me into a little building there and locked me up. The next day they brought me back to Frosinone there. I was interrogated by some German officers. They said, “We’re going to fly you back to Berlin.” But that didn’t happen. They put me on boxcars with about seven British officers. We got moving up the old boot [of Italy].

T: It’s a long trip up to Germany.

D: Yes. I didn’t know it, but one of the British officers had a knife and one had kind of a small version of an axe. The idea was to get a hole through this boxcar, which
was lined a little bit with some straw or something. This is November now. It’s getting cold.

T: And you’re going north, so it’s going to be cold.

D: We were going north. They agreed that when the boxcars were moving we would start working on this opening in the bottom of this boxcar to get out. If we got it big enough. And we got a hole through it. It wasn’t big enough yet to get through. And lo and behold, the train stopped at just about every little burg they came to. The Germans evidently heard something going on in the boxcar. (tapping noises) Like digging a hole through their boxcar. So they came in and they took everything out. Took our belts off and everything out. They found it. So that ended our escape plans. We thought once the train got moving along the Adriatic Sea we could get out. We could. If we could have had a hole big enough in that boxcar. We could have got out.

(1, A, 376)

T: The next question is, you get out of the train in a place where you don’t speak the language. What would you do?

D: First place, I’d like to know where am I at. Is there a village nearby? Is there a farm nearby? The first thing you’re going to have to do is somewhat find your location. You’re going to have to find something to eat.

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 385.

D: —is one thought. Which is feasible. Possibly. You try anything.

T: Did you feel maybe you were safer or better off in the train? I mean, the Germans hadn’t treated you badly, after all.

D: Not so far, that’s right. Not so far. So I don’t know if I was any better off in that train or not because we weren’t...we didn’t have any heat. No winter clothes.

T: You mentioned you weren’t really dressed for cold weather.

D: No. We weren’t given anything hot to have. They had some ersatz coffee. You’ve heard about that. It was nothing more than colored water.

T: What happened when you got to Berlin there? Did you stay there or were you quickly moved on?

D: I got to Berlin fairly late in the morning. I don’t know what date it was. They made up another train and I got sent down toward [the prison camp at]
Luckenwalde. They must have switched trains or something and sent me south down to Luckenwalde.

T: Yes, that's south of Berlin. That's Camp III-A.

D: I got down there about two, three o'clock in the morning. Got out of this train.

T: Still with the British officers? You're all together still?

D: They split us up. I was all alone now. It was cold, damp, windy, rainy. Two o'clock in the morning. I didn't know where I was going. They didn't tell me. I didn't know what to expect. We got down to Luckenwalde and they threw me in a cell down there. It wasn't very big, by the way.

T: How big was it?

D: That cell? I think if that thing was six foot by ten foot, that was probably it.

T: So pretty cramped quarters.

D: Oh, man, yes. They had one little stool in there or chair. And one little table. Very small table. They had a little window to the outside. I couldn't...I had nothing...go up and look. But they had one little window. Not very big. That was barred of course. I didn't know what to expect.

T: And nobody's telling you any more.

(1, B, 410)

D: Nobody told me a thing.

T: By your estimate, how long did you stay at this camp?

D: At Luckenwalde I was there, according to my diary, parts of my diary, I was there about a month.

T: And always in the same cell location?

D: Yes.

T: Were you taken out and questioned while you were there?

D: Several times.

T: Talk about those questioning sessions.
D: I was questioned the first time about two o’clock in the morning. They did it at inconvenient times. You couldn’t sleep anyway. I mean, all you slept on was a bunch of straw. They were all full of lice. Fleas and lice. All that crap. Two o’clock one morning...they had a little light up here in my cell, above me. It wasn’t very bright. Just dim. Little light. That was on night and day. Anyway, a couple guards came down about two o’clock in the morning and took me out. Led me down the hall into an interrogation room. There was the first time I met Captain Williams.

T: Captain Williams?

D: Captain Williams. He introduced me. Wanted to know if I wanted a cigarette, and I said no.

T: He was in uniform, this Captain Williams?

D: Yes. Then he shook hands. I said well, this is the start of this interrogation evidently.

T: He told you his name, I take it.

D: Not only that. He’d been in the States prior to the war.

T: So his English was pretty good.

D: His English was very good. He’d been in law enforcement either in the States or in Canada, he told me. I forget now. He got called back to Germany prior to the war. They put him in interrogation. Because he spoke good English. I thought, well, he’s a captain. I said, “Captain, all I can tell you is my name, rank and serial number.” Boy, the old door opened and two guards hauled me back to my cell and threw me in there.

T: That fast.

D: (finger snap) That quick. You’re out of there. So they hauled me in there another week. Same thing all over again.

T: Same Captain Williams?

D: Yes. Same thing all over again. They brought me back to my cell probably two or three times.

T: You’re spending a lot of time by yourself in this cell.

D: Yes. I’m all alone.

T: What are you thinking about? What’s going through your mind?
D: I can’t answer that too well. I got nothing to read. All I can do is look in that light bulb up there. The brick walls.

(1, B, 438)

T: As you think of your own situation, I mean, you can kind of see where you’re at and what’s going on, how are you thinking about yourself and what your situation is?

D: I’m just wondering about the next move. What’s going to happen now?

T: It’s kind of like a chess game, isn’t it?

D: Yes. I guess Captain Williams finally gave up on me. I had a couple of these guys I showed you the picture of. They were held there also. I didn’t know that. I kind of think that maybe a couple of these guys broke down, told them a little about me and my unit. That’s all he wanted to know about. The organization. How many men and all that stuff.

T: And you only figured this out after the war, after the fact.

D: Yes. After the war. That’s what I feel like happened.

T: So you had enlisted men from your unit who were also here. These guys you were captured with maybe.

D: Yes, they were. These guys I showed you were captured with me.

T: And they went to the same place.

D: Yes. And I didn’t know that.

T: Because they didn’t travel with you, did they?

D: They didn’t travel with me. They came up separately.

T: And you found out later they were in the same place.

D: Yes. In fact, while we were in cells there I found out that those guys were there. I could holler loud enough and I could call Lodge, and talk to him, and Ryan. I didn’t smoke at that time, but I had cigarettes I’d bargained for. Lodge liked to smoke. I said, next time I go down—I had to knock on the door every time I had to go to the latrine. The guard would come down and get me. Bring me over to the latrine. I told Lodge, the next time I do that, I’ll leave you these cigarettes. You can get them in the latrine. And he did. He thanked me after the war.
T: So you knew these guys were in there. What you didn’t know is what they were maybe telling them.

D: That’s correct. Absolutely.

T: So you saw Williams, from your memory, you saw him a number of times and the conversations as you remember were pretty short and pretty simple.

D: Yes. They were.

T: Did he ever threaten you?

D: Yes. In a way.

T: What do you mean?

D: When I didn’t tell him anything about my unit. He says, “I’m going to tell you something. You’re a prisoner of this government. You’re listed as missing in action.” Which was true. I’ve got the telegram here where I was missing in action. Of course that’s one strike against me. I wasn’t reported as a prisoner of war yet.

T: So your folks didn’t know anything.

D: My folks didn’t know anything. The War Department didn’t even know anything. So they could have done with me whatever they wanted to do.

T: Yes. They could have.

D: They could have put me down [killed me]. He threatened me in that motion. I said, well, that’s war. But that’s the only threat that he made.

T: Kind of a veiled threat, it sounds like. Not a direct, we’re going to do this, but sort of gives you the pieces and lets you draw the conclusion.

(1, B, 472)

D: That’s right. Absolutely. To this day if I saw that guy I’d shoot him.

T: Why?

D: Why? I just have that feeling, a funny feeling. If I had a gun at that point I would have shot him right there. He was a traitor. If he was a citizen of this country, he was a traitor.

T: If he was a citizen, he sure was. Yes. He was in uniform you said, right?
D: He had no business being over here if he wasn’t a citizen of some kind.

T: He was in uniform, right?

D: Yes. A German uniform. Yes. Anyway, after the war when I came home, I think it was the FBI that interviewed me about him. And to this day I’d like to know what happened to that guy. I think the Russians overran Luckenwalde, and I’ve often wondered about this Captain Williams. Whatever happened to him.

T: Let me pick up the thread about the FBI coming to you after the war.

D: They called me. I had to go downtown to the federal office, in Minneapolis here. Telling them about what I told you.

T: So they were asking about this guy? About Williams.

D: Yes. I told them who he was. They wanted to know a little about him. To this day I’d like to know what happened to that guy.

T: So they apparently were on his trail after the fact. They knew who he was.

D: I don’t know if the Russians took him or he escaped. I don’t know. Maybe the guy is living two blocks from here. I don’t know.

T: I wonder if that was his name really. Do you know what I mean?

D: Well, yes. I think it was.

T: Williams. A German in uniform named Captain Williams is strange enough...

D: It is strange enough. He got called back to Germany before the war. And they put him in uniform.

T: Don, how much advance warning did you have there at Luckenwalde that you were going to be moved out?

D: I had no advance warning.

T: So they basically came in and said, let’s go.

D: We’re going. I had no idea where we were going.

T: They didn’t tell you.

D: So then I got on this train. I got up to Berlin. It was a regular passenger train.
T: Were you traveling by yourself again?

D: Yes. All alone.

T: With a guard?

D: I had four guards with me. Had this passenger train. I was sitting amongst the passengers. Boy, they looked at me!

T: How did that make you feel on a passenger train with all these German civilians?

D: Didn’t feel very good, because Berlin was bombed night and day and they didn’t like what they saw, what they heard. I’m lucky I had four guards with me, I’ll tell you, kid.

So we got up to Berlin. I got on another passenger train that was going to go east. I didn’t know where I was going to go. I ended up in Oflag 64. But in Berlin there that was the marshalling yards. I saw train after train of prisoners. Not prisoners, but people going to concentration camps. All Jewish. It was, they were putting their hands through the boxcars and—

T: Boxcars full of people.

D: Yes. They couldn’t get any more in there. You should have seen. The guys were waving, the women were waving at me. I said, what the hell is all this? I didn’t hear anything about concentration camps when I was over there. Or the Jewish problem.

T: After the war you could put it together though, couldn’t you?

D: Oh, absolutely. The passenger train got up to Oflag 64. We got up to that town there. Schubin it was. That little town of Schubin.

T: How far from the train station to the camp?

D: I would say it had to be a couple miles at least. Maybe a little less.

T: Did you go by yourself then? There were no other prisoners with you?

D: No. I was still all alone. And I walked there. I only had about two guards at that point. I think the other two left. So we got into camp and...I got into camp and the first guy I saw, or he saw me, was Colonel Waters.

T: Let me ask, of the camp itself, relatively small camp?
D: It was not big, no.

T: As you walked into the camp, Don, describe kind of the layout of the camp and the buildings as you remember them.

D: They looked very much like your pictures here [of Oflag 64, taken in 1945 after the end of the war]. They weren't fancy. They weren't winterized. They had about one spigot or one faucet in each section of the building.

T: Were you housed in a barracks building?

D: You can call it what you want. It was more or less a barracks, but they weren’t very built. They tell me that it was a girls school or something before the war. I don’t know.

T: It was a college, yes.

(1, B, 534)

D: But they weren’t very well built. They had one spigot of water for a couple hundred men. That’s not good either.

T: Now when you got there, was the camp only Americans that you remember or different nationalities?

D: It was only Americans there. There was about, not quite 250 of us. There weren’t many.

T: And you were all officers here, right, at this camp?

D: Yes. And the first ones that were taken there were from North Africa, Tunisia. That was the first ones that entered there, and that’s where Colonel Waters was taken.

T: Colonel Waters. He’s the one related to [US General George] Patton, I think we mentioned off the tape.

D: Yes.

T: Let me ask. As an officer now, of course, there’s no work details for you. You’ve got a lot of time to pass during the day for the year or so that you’re there. How do you pass your time?

D: Well, that’s a good question. Wondering what you’re going to have for dinner tonight. I got accustomed to it rather quick like. When I interviewed with Colonel Waters, he wanted to know something about me too.
T: So Colonel Waters...he was sort of questioning you as you came into camp here.

D: Absolutely. He was the interrogator there too.

T: Where did you come from, that kind of stuff?

D: Yes. And they didn’t want anybody that didn’t belong in camp. They wanted to make sure you were who you were. And he says, “Don, who is your commanding officer?” I said, “Well, his name is Bill Darby.” He says, “I want to tell you something, Don. He was at West Point with me.” That’s where he met him. So I got in like Flynn of course then. *(shows photo)* Here’s Bill Darby right here.


D: If that guy had been living today or twenty years ago, I’m going to tell you very truthfully, he would have been a four star general.

T: What happened to Darby?

D: He got killed in Italy, four days before the war ended. Just think of it, four days before the war ended. I was down to Fort Smith [Arkansas]. That’s where he was born and raised. I went down to his home. They turned it into kind of a museum like thing. He’s got all his West Point stuff there and uniforms. Very interesting.

T: So when you get to camp you’re interviewed, and you have this link with Colonel Waters. You know Darby. He was satisfied, I guess, with who you were.

D: Absolutely.

T: In the barracks there, what kind of accommodations were provided? How big of a building, sleeping quarters, etc.?

D: They consisted of two beds in each bunk. Top and a bottom. And I think there was probably about eight in a little section. About eight of us.

T: Like in a room almost?

*(1, B, 571)*

D: Yes. We made the bunks like a little room.

T: Were roll calls part of the daily routine?

D: Sometimes two or three times a day.
T: Oh, goodness. Talk about what those were like.

D: Called it *Appell* [German: roll call]. We’d have to go up by the big house. There was a place by the big house, or the white house, whatever you want to call it. Out front here.

T: In front of the big house.

D: We had to line up. They’d count us. They’d count us to make sure everybody was there. And that could happen any time of day. At night. Any time.

T: But it was regular, so you knew to expect at least a couple every day.

D: We didn’t know ahead of time when it was going to happen.

T: But it always happened every day. It happened every day that you remember.

D: Oh, absolutely.

T: Let me ask about the food at the camp. How often did the Germans provide food, and what did you get?

D: They didn't provide much. In the morning we had this lousy ersatz coffee. It was just colored water, in my book. You would receive a bread ration. Maybe once, twice a week you’d get part of a loaf of bread. The loaf of bread was about that long *(holds hands about a foot apart)*. The base of that bread was a half inch of sawdust. I’ve got the makeup of that loaf of bread in all of my information that I got. The whole loaf was about that, and they would, at noon there, there was eight at my table, we’d cut that loaf of bread into eight equal pieces and give each guy one. You might have a little spoon of so-called jelly. That was it for breakfast. Then at noon we went down about noon every day and we had some soup. They called it soup. It was water. Thin.

T: Was it brought to your room or did you go eat it somewhere else?

D: No. We had to go up in the big house and eat it. There wasn’t that many of us at that point. They had a little dining room up in that white house. That’s the only two meals that we really ate. Then the parcels, Red Cross parcels, started coming in.

T: Yes. Let me ask about those, because there’s different evidence about how many, how often you got them. How often do you remember getting them?

D: For a while we would get one a week, if we were lucky.

T: One per guy?
D: Yes. And I have a list of what they consisted of, too, if you don’t have it.

T: Thanks, I do. Yes.

D: So what we sometimes did, if there was anything that they could put in one pot that would serve all of us, like meat or something or make soup out of it, we’d put it in one big bowl in the big house up there and they would warm this up and we’d each get a little bowlful each noon. Evenly.

T: So you spread the stuff out a little bit.

D: That’s right. Absolutely.

(1, B, 613)

T: Did you get the packages regularly?

D: It was off and on. Those packages had come a long, long ways. They had to be either trucked in or railed in. I don’t know how ours were brought up, if it was railed or what. It probably was. I don’t know. But when we got them, thankfully, that’s what we survived on. There wasn’t anything the Germans gave us.

T: So you remember the parcels being very important for satisfying your daily food needs.

D: Absolutely. Because the Germans failed to give us anything in fruit. Couldn’t even get an apple, much more or less a potato. Sometimes you could bribe maybe one of the guards with a few cigarettes or something and they might bring you a couple eggs.

T: So the guards…you could communicate with these guards.

D: Some of them. Not all of them. Some of them.

T: How did you know which ones?

D: That just...to me, I think some of those guards could see the handwriting on the wall eventually as the war progressed. I really do. We were in Poland. The Germans had overrun Poland. The Russians were coming. We kept telling them, boy, you wait until these Ruskies get here (laughs).

T: Because that’s right. You were there through the end of...until January of 1945. Towards the end of that period it was clear that the Germans were losing the war.

D: They were done.
T: Did you notice the guards’ treatment getting better as things went on then?

D: I didn’t have much to do with the guards, but I know that they could be bribed. They weren’t any better off in what they had than we were. They didn’t have anything to smoke or drink. There might have been a few things they had we didn’t have.

T: So eggs, for example, you mentioned if you were going to swap you would get eggs from them.

D: That’s right. Yes. They stole them. From the Polish people.

T: So eggs come in.

D: We never got any meat. Never got any meat at all.

T: Now cigarettes. Were you a smoker at the time?

D: No.

T: So when you got your package, your parcels, there were cigarettes in there. Those were things you could trade.

D: I could trade like for bread or whatever I liked that wasn’t in the parcel. That’s what I did.

T: What were cigarettes worth? I mean, did you know what you could expect if you trading one, two or five?

D: A lot of times you might get a loaf of bread for a pack of cigarettes. You could exist on that for a week.

T: So smokers were at a disadvantage, it sounds like.

D: Oh, yes, they were.

T: They were buyers.

(1, B, 652)

D: Yes. They were. Then there was a little candy in there. Some guys liked candy. Everybody had their likes and dislikes, I guess. Anyway, I’m glad we had what we had.

T: The parcels sound like they were very important is the bottom line.
D: Oh, absolutely.

T: What kind of activities do you remember from the camp? Any kind of cards, books, sports, anything to pass—

D: We played a lot of cards. To this day I don’t like cards.

T: You don’t like cards.

D: I do not like cards.

T: Why is that?

D: Because that’s all I looked at for a year and a half in prison. I had a lot of friends there in my cubicle that would play cards. Mostly cribbage. Cribbage all the time. Night and day. Cribbage, cribbage, cribbage, cribbage.

T: Sounds like you played enough cribbage to last your whole lifetime.

D: Oh, did I ever! That was my card playing. Outside activities when we could. They played a little ball. Had a few ball games. Baseball.

T: So you had balls, gloves and that stuff supplied.

D: And you walked around the perimeter for exercise. I’d walk around the outside there. That’s the only exercise you’d really get unless you got exercise playing ball or something.

T: That camp isn’t really all that big.

D: No. It was very small. You could shoot a few basketballs once in a while if you wanted to. I didn’t but…

T: These things were supplied from somewhere to your camp.

D: The YMCA, the Red Cross, provided some of those materials.

T: Thank goodness they did, it sounds like.

D: Everybody had a job. I ended up…I started making escape maps. They put me over in the big house, on the third floor. I think it had three floors in that thing. I got way up in the top there. I was making escape maps in a little room all by myself.

T: Now escape. Let me ask about that. It’s one of those things that’s part of many POW accounts. How much did you actively think about escaping yourself?
D: Always thought about it. There again, I’m in Poland. Where am I in Poland? You didn’t know. But I did find out, of course, because I had a map.

T: So you could figure out where you were.

D: Yes. I didn’t know if I escaped if I should go north up to the Baltic Sea or if I should go back to Germany or should I head toward Russia? Nobody really knew what to do. You were isolated out there in this little burg.

T: It was out in the country.

D: Yes. It just…flat like this. All they raised out there I think was potatoes.

(1, B, 698)

T: So the thought of escaping was, I might be able to get out of the camp, but then what?

D: Yes. Where do I go now? Yes. There were a few people that got out. They were soon picked up. Within a few days. It wasn’t natural during the war over there to be out in the country with one or two guys all alone. Suspicion. Everybody that made a move. You were stopped.

T: Of course. And if you don’t speak Polish or German, you’re in trouble.

D: That’s right. Should we try and get on a train out of here? You’ve got to do something. I didn’t have any escape plans myself, but I did make some escape maps. For the guys that wanted to get out.

T: So there were some who talked more actively about it than others.

D: Yes. And some of the guys, there were two or three of them there, that made two or three attempts to escape. They got out all right, but they didn’t last out there more than a few days. They were picked up.

T: In the camp there, Don, were you a kind of person who was kind of optimistic and stayed upbeat about things or did being a POW get you down?

D: No, it didn’t. It really didn’t. Because I knew how the war seemed to be going.

T: How did you know that? How did you know or get your news about how the war was going?

D: We knew this because we had a radio. Maybe more than one. We got BBC twice a day.
T: Where was the radio?

D: You want me to tell you where it was hidden?

T: Now did you know where the radio was, or did you just know it existed?

D: I knew it existed. I later found out where it was hidden.

T: So while you were in camp you didn’t know where it was.

D: No. Nobody did.

T: Did you know who had the radio?

D: No. You see, that was part of the security. The people. We had our own security people.

T: What was their job?

D: They oversaw everybody coming into camp.

T: Like, they checked you out?

D: Checked me out. I’m sure I was watched for a while to see how I operated. Security people had all our guards under observation. All the time. We had people out all the time checking on the guards, watching the German guards. Even when I was up there making maps we had guards down below and watching the front gate when they came through. We were all notified to shut down and...

(1, B, 751)

T: That’s cool. The Germans were watching you, and you guys were watching them.

D: Absolutely. And it was good. We had a good security system, I think. It was very, very good.

T: Were you ever suspicious of any of the people in the camp with you there?

D: No, I really wasn’t. I think our people did a very good job. We had every kind of a fellow there you’d want to meet. We had doctors, lawyers. We had everybody. From different walks of life.

T: And you’re all officers too. That’s right.

D: Yes. And they were all very interesting. They were all very, very interesting.
T: Did you get to know some people better than others? Did you make close friends in that camp?

D: Oh, yes.

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

T: —your cubicle. Did you get to be good friends with them?

D: Yes. Absolutely. You played cards with them every day. I’d walk around the area with each of those guys. So I knew them like...I practically knew those guys better than my own brother.

T: You were with them day in day out, all the time.

D: Yes, you were. You ate with them. You slept with them and all that stuff. Walked with them. We’d eat with each other. A lot of times we’d take one of our parcels and we would share a meal with each other. We’ll have something together today. Enough for two guys. So that’s the way it came. I had some good friends there.

T: Who became your best friends in camp?

D: There was a fellow here by the name of Lieutenant [Ed] Sager. He died here a few years ago. He was the first one I probably really met that was from Minnesota. Lived in Minneapolis, on Lake Street. He came down one Christmas Day and he had an old Polish pipe he wanted to give me. He gave it to me. That’s how I got to know Ed. I made a lot of good friends there. I hear from some of them even nowadays.

T: Is Sager someone you stayed in contact with after the war?

D: Yes. Yes, I did. In fact he and I went back into the Guards after the war. He came out a major. When I came out, I joined the Guards. I was in the Guards here for about a year in ’46. Then my job brought me down to Iowa, so I resigned my commission at that point to go to Iowa and work. But then I got recalled.

T: During Korea, that’s right you told me before we started taping. That’s another story.

D: That’s the way it was. But, yes, I made a lot of good friends there.

T: I’m curious. Guys living in close quarters and, let’s face it, not really enough food. It’s cold. Did that lead to any kind of tensions between the men?

D: If it did I couldn’t see it. In each barracks there were a couple fireplaces. You called it a fireplace. It wasn’t really a fireplace. But what they were heating those barracks with, or tried to, was blocks of peat. Looked like loaves of bread. This peat,
they’d cut that peat into blocks. They’d put it in there and burn something like that. It didn’t throw very much heat, I’ll tell you. The guys would back their backs up against that brick wall and try to get what heat they could. Because those barracks were cold.

(2, A, 28)

T: Yes. You spent two winters there. That’s right.

D: Yes. I tell you, we didn’t have the clothes. We didn’t have the heat. We didn’t have anything. Only the clothes on our back, I guess.

T: You didn’t walk in that camp with anything, did you?

D: No. I had my combat jacket and that’s about all. My boots. Even if I’d had my winter clothing they might have taken that from me. I don’t know.

T: You mentioned friends. How would you describe the importance of having friends in a situation like that?

D: Very important. Well, the first people I knew. I liked to know all the people I could from Minnesota.

T: Did you go looking for them? Sort of asking, who’s from Minnesota?

D: No. But I heard about them. Here and there. The word got around. He’s from Minnesota. He’s from Minneapolis. I’ve got a lot of guys here in Minnesota that ended up there.

T: So you’re from the same place, that’s a start.

D: That’s right. I met a lot of guys there from Minnesota. I had a friend over in St. Paul, Jack Klepper. He ended up as a lieutenant colonel. I got him in the Guards after the war.

T: And you met him in the camp there?

D: Yes. I met him on the walkout January 21, where we left Schubin. We walked out. Dead of winter. We got into this one barn about... not too far from camp the first day out. We got put up in a barn. Jack was above me up in the hay.

T: You didn’t know him before this?

D: No, I didn’t. He got captured near the Battle of the Bulge [in December 1944], so he was one of the late ones came in. I overheard him talking about Minneapolis or St. Paul. We got together. From that day on we were very good friends. They’re
both gone. His wife and him are both gone now. Jack Klepper. But he was a very good man. He was in the 34th [Infantry] Division. And after the war for over forty years, he and his family would come down to see us in Iowa. I would come up to see him. We camped together frequently every weekend. We’d take our kids and we’d go camping together. I’d meet him someplace. But we were very, very good friends.

T: So these friendships that you made were not just your typical friendships. They were deep lasting friendships.

D: They were deep lasting. That’s the kind of friends I like. I’ve got guys that call me sometimes once a week, once a month, long distance to see how I’m doing. I had a guy last week call me from California. The guy that wrote this book.

(2, A, 58)

T: The Darby’s Rangers book.

D: Yes. Jim Altieri. He called me up. I could hardly understand Jim. He was a screenwriter out there in Hollywood or some darned thing, after the war.

T: Was he a POW as well?

D: No.

T: But he was a member of the 4th Ranger Battalion.

D: That is correct. He called me up here about a week ago. He said, “Don, I had to call you. If I had to go into battle today I would want you on my side.” That’s what he told me. Very sincerely. He’s a very, very sincere person.

T: That’s a good friend to have.

D: Yes. He put out a beautiful book here. We’ve got the complete roster of everybody. All our battles. Some of the guys came home that were lucky. They came back home.

T: Leaving Oflag 64 now: January 21, 1945, the camp is evacuated. How much advance warning did you have that this camp was going to be evacuated?

D: On the twentieth. The day before we had a warning that we were going to move, and just, get ready. Pack your belongings.

T: Had there been rumors before then that something might happen? You could probably hear the war coming, couldn’t you?
D: Well, yes. We got the BBC twice a day. Nine o’clock [in the morning] and nine o’clock at night. So we knew pretty much what was going on. We weren’t losing the war either. But we knew what was coming. The Americans were coming. They had landed in June [in France, D-Day invasion]. The Russians were coming. They were putting the squeeze on Germany. So we knew what was going to happen. We didn’t know when. But on the twentieth they told us to get ready to pack out. We were going back into Germany.

T: Now how did you take that news? You’ve been in this camp for a year. It might not be the best, but it’s at least a kind of a safe location.

D: Yes.

T: How were you thinking about this evacuation?

D: We didn’t know. Yes, we were walking out. We had no vehicles. No trains or anything. We were strictly on our two feet, walking out in the dead of winter. No overshoes. No gloves. No hat.

T: And no indication how far you’re going.

D: We didn’t know how far we were going each day. I suppose they kind of plotted it out. They had an advance party, I believe. Someplace ahead of us that would pick out a barn or something. You’re going to stay here tonight. Maybe ten, twelve kilometers away. Same way the next day, until we got back into Germany.

T: Now the march ends up lasting forty-five days, until 6 March, until you get to Camp XIII-C Hammelburg. Let me ask you about your memories of that march. Talk about the daily events. You’re walking sometimes over twenty kilometers a day.

(2, A, 90)

D: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Well, you just plain walked. You didn’t have much conversation with anybody. What’s there to talk about? You’re walking. You’re tired. You’re hungry. You don’t feel good. There was one day I didn’t feel good. I had an old shirt. Something like this here [that I have on].

T: A flannel shirt.

D: I made a backpack out of it. All I had in there was probably a little bread and maybe a can or two of this and that. I had an old sock. I had that filled with pipe tobacco.

T: An old sock in your shirt backpack.
D: Yes. I had that filled with pipe tobacco that had been sent to me. So I hung onto it for trading. I think it was the second or third night out, we were staying at a barn. Right before it got dark we were at this farm. There was a house there and there was this big farm building there. I went over by the gate or the fence. There was a fence there. There was a young girl. I don’t know, she could have been fifteen. She ran out to some building not too far from her house. I said, “Come over here.” You know what I did? I gave her one of my D bars. Do you know what a D bar is?

T: Yes.

D: Chocolate. I gave that to that girl.

T: Why did you do that?

D: To this day I don’t know if she was Polish or German. I don’t know. I just figured well, you probably haven’t seen a piece of chocolate since day one. I gave it to her. She made a motion. Wait here. Wait here. I didn’t know what to expect. In those days they had dresses all the way down to their shoes. She ran into the house and a few seconds later she came running out of the house. She lifted up her dress. She had a loaf of bread, honest to God, it was that big. (arms rounded, hands together outstretched) Like a washtub. I’m not kidding you. They were round. She gave it to me. I accepted it of course. Just because of that D bar. All right. I took it back and I split it between five guys that I knew real well. We lived on that cookie [slang here for bread] for a week. To this day, if I knew who that girl was I’d give her a thousand dollars. I would!

T: Just a chance meeting along the way.

D: Isn’t that something? Because I wasn’t getting anything to eat along the route.

T: What were the Germans providing that you remember?

D: Once in a while you might see a little piece of bread. At the end of the day they might have a thing of soup. Watered down soup. No meat or anything in it. Maybe a little...I forget what you call it now. But it was nothing. There was nothing in there that...

T: So it wasn’t really enough to keep you going.

D: You know, we were using up a lot of energy walking all that time. Fighting that snow and the cold.

T: On balance, do you remember spending more nights inside or outside?

(2, A, 129)
D: We tried to spend every night someplace inside if we could. You wouldn’t survive long outside. Some nights we’d stay in some of these churches. Polish churches. They’re small. Nice little church. We’d lay out on the pews and sleep.

T: At least it was inside, right?

D: Yes. At least it was inside. Get out of that wind. But most often it was in a barn. You find a place in the barn where it had a little hay.

T: Was the whole group marching or staying together or was it broken up into smaller groups that you remember?

D: No. Generally on the road we had a group on each side of the road marching. Single file, one behind another.

T: That must have stretched out for quite a ways.

D: Oh, yes.

T: Now one of the accounts prepared after the war by the American military says that some guys ran away from or escaped from this column.

D: Yes. We had several people. In fact, every day we had guys take off.

T: So it was possible to get away from the column.

D: I had a chance to get away. I think it was the second or third night out. Fourth night out. I don’t know. The guards left us. They abandoned us. We were on our own. A lot of our guys took off. Toward the Russian front. Colonel Waters thought it would be better if we would stay together as a group.

T: What did you think?

D: I thought it was feasible. I didn’t want to be caught out there in no man’s land all alone. The Russians could shoot you or somebody could shoot you. You have no business out there all alone.

T: So I hear you saying, maybe it was safer to stay with the group.

D: That’s what Colonel Waters said. I think he was right. But anyway, we had guys that left. Every night. I have a lot of them in my book here that left that group.

T: It makes you wonder whether they made it or not.

D: Most of them did. Ed Sager made it. He made it. He got down to Odessa. The Russians got him down there. They got...some of them even got back into Russia.
T: So he’s one of those who made the decision to leave the column, to go. And you thought about it and listened to those who said, maybe it’s safer to stay.

D: I think so.

T: As you think back on it, was that the right thing to do?

D: Yes I do. Because I had a chance to leave the column probably quite often at night when we’d get into a barn or something someplace. The guards were getting a little edgy. The Russians were coming. The Americans were coming.

T: The guards. Were these the guards you had had in camp?

D: Yes, they were. But then we picked up a company of SS troops, about a week or two after we left Oflag 64. They were rough and tough. Different kind of guards.

T: What did you notice that was different?

D: They were more stern. You couldn’t talk to them or anything at all. So we just ignored them. But after we got into Germany they left us. We got some German troops then that took over.

T: Younger guys or older guys?

D: They were all older. The young guys were getting shot down up there in Russia, I guess. They didn’t have many young guys left to do anything with.

T: No kidding. Now did you see any Red Cross parcels on that march that you remember?

D: No, I didn’t. Only the few items that I took with me.

T: The stuff that you had taken in your backpack.

D: Yes. And I didn’t see anything like that until we got down to Hammelburg. Then we got a few down there.

T: What kind of physical shape were you in by the time you got to Hammelburg on March 9?

D: I thought I was in pretty good shape. I probably lost a few pounds, but I was in good shape when I was captured. Outside of...had that sickness there for a while. I thought I was in probably better shape than some of them.
T: That walking. I mean, just looking at the record of twenty-some kilometers a day sometimes. How did you handle all that marching? You hadn’t been doing that kind of marching for a long time.

D: No, that’s right. (pauses three seconds) I just did it. Gut feeling, you did it or you have to stay behind, and you don’t know what’s behind you either. I saw a lot of people evidently been ahead of us before. The snow was all filled up in the ditches along that old gravel road and you’d see a leg sticking out of the snowdrift. Or an arm. A lot of Germans were in Poland when they took that over. Had moved into Poland and into the farms. They were backing out of there as fast as they could get out. And all they had was maybe an old cow or a horse or something to pull that old cart.

T: Did you pass German civilians while you were walking?

D: Oh, yes. We got mixed up with those. That slowed us down sometimes.

T: So you were seeing all kinds of things and people on the road, weren’t you?

D: Oh, yes. You saw it all.

T: The civilians pulling carts of stuff?

(2, A, 198)

D: Yes. They were pulling their personal belongings, I suppose, what little they had. We did get down to Hammelburg. We stopped at a submarine base up there at [the Baltic coast town of] Swinemünde [now Świnoujście, in Poland]. There was a submarine base up there, on the Baltic. We were way up there and we crossed over and I lost the heel off one of my shoes, or my boot. The heel came off and I tell you, you don’t walk too well when you have a heel missing. Luckily coming through this one little town up there I thought I saw a shoe shop and I ran in there. I left the column. I just left it.

T: You’re kidding!

D: This Polish guy, or whatever he was, he nailed that back on for me.

T: You had the heel.

D: Yes. I had it and he nailed it back on my boot.

T: He fixed your shoe for you.

D: I was lucky, because you can’t walk very good without a heel.
T: No. Particularly with one heel on and one heel off. As you passed through cities or towns, Don, how often did you come into contact with civilians?

D: Coming out of Poland we went through a lot of little towns. They weren’t big.

T: North Germany has a lot of little towns, too.

D: And a lot of times the Polish people are wonderful. To this day, they were the best. A lot of towns we would come into, if the guards weren’t looking, and we didn’t have really too many guards, and I think a lot of times they had their eyes closed...the civilians would [call us in]: “Come on in here. Come in the door. Come in here.” They would have some hot milk for you. They might have a cheese sandwich already made up. And they’d give you—

T: So you remember being specifically given food by civilians sometimes as you were walking.

D: No. I never had anything like that happen when we were walking. They preferred to have us come in their little house along these narrow streets coming through these villages.

T: So they would see you coming and know who you were.

D: Yes. And then when we were done with our sandwich, or we took it with us, they’d go out and see if it was clear to leave and get us out in the outside again. But they were very helpful people.

T: Particularly as you mentioned not getting a lot of food from the Germans. So any kind of food from these people was welcome.

D: Absolutely.

T: You mentioned you were in okay shape by the time you got to Hammelburg.

D: Yes.

T: That was again, by the [published historical] record, March 9, 1945. This is the second camp you’ve been in, and you weren’t there long, but as you came in this place, how was it different from the place you had spent the last year?

D: They tell me Hammelburg was a school. Something like Fort Benning [Georgia, a US Army training camp]. It was a military area for training divisions for the German army. They had a lot of barracks there. In fact, the barracks had been there since 1918, I think, or longer than that.
T: So when you walk in the camp you see barracks. Bigger camp than the one you’d come from?

D: Oh, yes. It was big. It was right on the outskirts of [the town of] Hammelburg. A few miles.

T: Now you spent a couple of weeks there, so suddenly this camp has hundreds of men added to it. How did they find quarters for you? Where did you end up bunking?

D: I slept in the barracks there in Hammelburg. They had barracks for us and we had bunk beds again. I think we got a few Red Cross parcels there. I was lucky to get in there in one piece, I guess. A lot of air activity at that point. We had planes from our side coming over frequently.

T: Over the camp, or over your column while you were walking?

D: Over the camp.

T: While you were marching was your column ever strafed or bombed?

D: Coming down from [the town of] Parchim, up in northern Germany, yes. Before we got to Hammelburg. Yes. I was on a boxcar coming down to Hammelburg. Our train got strafed and put the locomotive out of commission.

T: So this is a couple days before you got to Hammelburg. You were on the train.

D: So they had to provide other means for us. They got another train in action or something. That old engine just exploded. The fighter aircraft just blew it all up.

T: You were in boxcars when this happened?

D: Yes. Boy, when we saw that happening we got out of those damn boxcars as fast as we could. They didn’t lock us in there, by the way, at that point.

T: Thank goodness they didn’t.

D: Yes. That’s right.

T: I can’t imagine what that must be like having a plane strafe a train like that.

D: Well, you just want to get out. Get away from it. You’ve certainly seen enough newsreels and films on strafing. They weren’t using very small bullets either.
T: Let’s move to Hammelburg.

D: Here I’m at Hammelburg. A German training center.

T: A couple of weeks you spent there.

D: Yes.

T: Things get organized, and then a couple weeks later comes this attempt to free the camp, I guess that’s what it was. Because this Lieutenant Colonel Waters was with you, and the story goes, now he’s Patton’s son-in-law. And there’s a mission sent to try to free him.

D: Yes.

T: There’s a lot of things been written about that. But let’s get your perspective. How does that play out through your eyes, this whole Hammelburg raid thing?

D: I didn’t know it was going to happen, of course, until I think it was...I forget what day it was. I think I’ve got it in my diary.

(2, A, 280)

T: It was 27 March [1945].

D: I wrote in my diary here that I kept. But it was...I thought it was as Sunday afternoon. I could be wrong. But late in the day, four or five o’clock, I was outside of the barracks and I heard this gunfire which was coming in from kind of the west of us, west of camp. West of Hammelburg. It sounded like American tanks. They were taken under fire by the Germans. Pretty soon I headed back to the barracks. They were slinging shells all around there. Haystacks outside of camp were burning and everything was burning. The water tower got hit. So things cooled down a little bit and we had a few of Captain [Abraham] Baum’s [American] tanks break through the front gate.

T: So you could see this from the barracks where you were?

D: Yes. A couple of his tanks came through.

T: So here you are in the barracks, and you literally see American tanks coming through the gate.

D: Yes. We thought we had it made. We didn’t know it was a raid to liberate us. I mean for good. I thought it was. We found out later it wasn’t.
T: So your first thought might have been oh, okay, the front’s come up. This is the end of it for me.

D: Yes. But it certainly wasn’t. Colonel Waters got two or three people with him and they took a white flag and went out to meet our troops. He didn’t want to be shot at either. Lo and behold, there was one German that shot him.

T: He was shot, that’s right.

D: Shot him. Very bad. So they took him over to the Serbs. The Serbs had been there [in the camp at Hammelburg, in a different compound] a long time. They had a lot of Serbian prisoners. There happened to be a doctor in there.

T: They fixed Waters up. They saved his life, in any case.

D: Actually that doctor wasn’t a doctor—he was a dentist they tell me. What I read. He was a dentist. Whatever he did, he saved Colonel Waters’ life.

T: What happened from your eyes watching this? What happens when Waters gets shot because things sort of get a little hectic then I think?

D: Yes, they do. The guards in the camp there were run off or shot. Our troops came in, what was left of them. There weren’t too many left. He came in, because when they started out they had one tank company and one armored infantry company. A little over two hundred men. I don’t think there were one hundred left that got to us. They lost a lot of men and vehicles.

T: How soon before you learned that this was not the front, but rather was a kind of a raid to free someone?

D: About as soon as the guys broke in. We started talking to the tankers. So we knew then that were to liberate us and get us out of there. But they didn’t realize there was that many of us in there. They thought it was just a handful. Well! The Battle of the Bulge had been going on and a lot of POWs being taken. They moved them in there with us. Anyway, Captain Baum says, “Well, I can’t take all of you out.” Got half of his vehicles left. “I don’t have enough gas left.”

T: So he’s telling you…you heard this.

D: And he told me that—he’s been here three times. He and I put on three programs at [the World War II History Roundtable event at Fort] Snelling.

T: What did you hear on March 27, 1945? Was he talking to people, or did you kind of pick this up through the conversations or—
D: Both. He was busy. After they broke through they were trying to see what they had left in vehicles and tanks and Jeeps. They were short on gas. They started switching gas from this unit to that unit. That was a fiasco. Took up too much time.

(2, A, 356)

T: How optimistic were you that this was going to be the liberation, or were you convinced this was not going to work?

D: I knew at that point that I was a long ways from our front lines. I knew we were forty, fifty miles. So I said, I’m going to get out of here, and I elected to go with the tankers. Out. I could make better time going with a tank out of here than I can walking.

T: So you had to make a decision. Stay or go.

D: That’s right. Absolutely. So I elected to go out. I got on the second tank from the lead. There was one tank in front of me, and I was on the second one.

T: It occurs to me now on the march you decided, you kind of made the conservative decision—stay with the column. It was safer. Now you’re making a decision that’s kind of the riskier one.

D: I thought we had a better chance probably to reach our own lines. Forty, fifty miles. At least I wasn’t in the middle of Germany or anything. Or Poland.

T: So you could have stayed in the camp. Other guys did. And you made the call to go.

D: I made the call to go. If it had worked out, it would have been fine. Captain Baum said, “Well, I can’t take you all. The best thing to do is take off in twos and threes and head out. That’s all I can tell you.”

T: So you went with the second tanker. On the second tank—

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 385.

D: We left the column and left Hammelburg probably around midnight, one o’clock. Took them forever to get going. But like I said, they were transferring gas.

T: Was it pretty chaotic there? This whole situation.

D: I think so. Somewhat, yes. Not as bad as it could have been. They did the best they could, I guess. Baum says, I can’t take you all out. Take off, whatever you want to do. Stay here. Take off. I elected to go out with the tanks. Maybe I can get a few miles behind me and take off on foot then and run into American troops. But that
little town of Holrich—we got up there and it was kind of a moonlit night. It was very bright out there with that moon. Pretty soon the lead tank came up and the streets over there are very narrow. The lead tank came up to a roadblock, and that roadblock was telephone poles across the road. You couldn’t get through it. The lead tank came up to it and stopped. Our tank pulled right up behind it. I looked over at one of the buildings there and I saw a flash and I knew what it was—one of those Panzerfaust [German one-shot bazooka weapon].

It hit my tank. There was probably ten, twelve guys on my tank. I was here, Jack was here, then Lieutenant Christianson, and that shell hit right in between and killed Christianson. Jack, my friend, got about twenty-seven pieces of shrapnel in him. It just blew us off the tank into a ditch. Lucky that there was a ditch there. We got blown off and into the ditch. They started raking us with machine gun fire. I got a hold of Jack down there. He was kind of blinded. There was so much smoking. Everything. I got a hold of him and we crawled back toward the rear of the column and I said, “Jack, I’ll try and get you on the first half-track I can.” We had a few of them left. I finally got him onto a half-track and the whole column started backing up. The column reversed. They went back four or five kilometers or something like that. That was just about the end of the mission there. We could hear that the Germans were coming from all directions. You could just probably smell them.

T: How long before you were actually recaptured? Did morning come or was it still at night then?

D: It was early in the morning, yes. Probably six, seven o’clock in the morning.

T: And for you, you’re one of the few people that can actually say they were captured twice.

D: Yes.

T: Was the second time any easier or different than the first?

(2, B, 414)

D: Well, it could have been more disastrous this time.

T: How so?

D: Well, when you get blown off a tank.

T: You weren’t physically hurt the first time you were captured, were you?

D: No. No, not really. Well, a little bit, but nothing serious. I had a little concussion from some grenades, I guess it was. But I didn’t get touched on this Hammelburg thing at all. But my friend Jack got twenty-seven pieces in him. And that was quite interesting. When we were in Hammelburg there was a German ration truck that
came in with bread and butter. I hadn't had butter since I left the States. Anyway, this truck pulled in. Pulled in right...and we saw what was in there. So Jack took some butter and I took some bread. I took four or five loaves of bread. That's the thing to do, isn't it? We got blown off that tank with bread and butter. Jack and I got separated.

T: You had your bread.

D: We took that with us. Jack had the butter.

T: Yes, but you had the bread (both laugh).

D: So they took Jack back to Hammelburg and got him repaired. Nothing too serious. But he had twenty-seven pieces of shrapnel in him. Could have been different.

T: Did they take you just back to the camp again?

D: Yes. Yes, they did. The next day he says, we're moving out. We're going to Moosburg now.

T: So you got back to camp and didn't stay there at all.

D: No. Not really.

T: How did you travel to Moosburg, boxcars or march?

D: Boxcar.

T: All the way there, or did you march part of the way?

D: Well, the boxcars I don't think got us right into Moosburg. We had to walk a little bit. It was boxcar down there.

T: But more boxcar than march, as far as getting to Moosburg.

D: Yes.

T: You spent the last month of the war approximately there at Moosburg. That's where you were liberated from.

D: Yes.

T: What kind of impression did Moosburg make on you?

D: Of course it was really disorganized. There were so many people there. So many people coming in from all different fronts. They were all mixed up. There was
British and there was everybody there. And it wasn't very well organized. It was just utter confusion. The end of the war was right around the corner.

(2, B, 444)

T: And you could sense that I take it.

D: Oh, yes. In fact, the day we got liberated at Moosburg—

T: Yes. Talk about the day of liberation, April 29, 1945.

D: We could hear gunfire in the distance, and it sounded again like American tanks.

T: Kind of déjà vu. You've heard this before.

D: Yes. And they come smashing through the front gate.

T: I think you've seen that before too! (both laugh)

D: Yes, I saw that before too. Right after the breakthrough General Patton came in, in his Jeep. I've seen him a few times before too. He stood up in his Jeep.

T: You could see him standing there.

D: Necktie on and well-dressed like he's going to a parade or something. He looked around camp. "By God, I'll have you guys out of here in forty-eight hours." That's what he said. Those words. And true to his word, we got out of there. I had never seen so many C-47s come in to that Landshut airport in my life.

T: So you were evacuated out by air from there.

D: Yes. And before that, right before we were evacuated out, there was a German aircraft. I got a camera and I got a picture of it. Two or three pictures of that airplane. There were about three German pilots in that—I don't know if it was a [Messerschmitt] 109 [single engine fighter plane] or what it was. It came down, and they came off the Russian front. They were looking to come down, and the war was over more or less. They wanted to surrender to the Americans. But they came down and they were lucky they got down in one piece. I thought they were going to get shot down there.

T: You could see them coming in there.

D: Oh, I could see them coming in, yes. There were guys running for their guns. Anyway, they lucked out. They were taken prisoner.

T: So you were flown out of there. From there, where were you flown to?
D: I was flown to Le Havre.

T: Camp Lucky Strike was there.

D: Yes. I think the first stop we made was at Rheims. Rheims, France. We stopped there briefly.

T: When you got to Camp Lucky Strike or even before, were you questioned or debriefed at all about your POW experience?

D: Not really, no.

T: So no one’s asking you any questions like, Frederick, where have you been? How were you treated?

D: That didn’t happen until I got back home.

T: That’s months later then.

D: Yes.

T: How long did you stay at Camp Lucky Strike?

D: Not very long. Maybe a week or less. They were getting us out on anything coming back to the States. I met up with Jack again. My friend. I found him at Moosburg. Luckily. He and I came home on the same ship. There was only twelve of us that came home on that big ship. Alone! It was all right. We weren’t crowded. We had all our dinners there with the captain of the ship. We ate well. So we got home. Got home to Boston.

(2, B, 480)

T: When you got back to the States there, to Boston, how long before you got back to Minnesota and had a chance to see your folks?

D: Well, I called from Boston, and my mother wasn’t home. Then I called back and I finally got her and told her what to expect. I suppose we…it was two, three days before I got home from Boston. My dad picked me up out here at Fort Snelling. The train pulled in there. My dad picked me up.

T: You hadn’t seen your folks for a couple years now.

D: Yes. That’s right. Well, since I left in ’41, really.
T: When you first saw your folks, you’ve been a combat soldier and you’ve been a POW. For our purposes, how much did your folks ask you about your POW experience?

D: Hardly anything.

T: Did they ask you about your combat experience at all?

D: No.

T: So neither one of those. Because here you are, you’re back, and this has been your experience for several years. How were those subjects avoided really?

D: Well, maybe they didn’t want to bring it up. I don’t know. In fact, I didn’t really get too much mail from home.

T: When you were a POW.

D: Yes. And I was allowed to send I think two postcards or one letter once a month, something like that. My mother on occasion would send me a parcel. My dad only wrote a couple letters. My brother wrote nothing. He was fighting in Belgium, and got wounded. So I wasn’t in too much contact with anybody.

T: Was that kind of upsetting for you to not get much contact from home?

D: No. Not really. No. Because the mail took so damn long. It took a good three months. If you got any at all. Some guys got nothing.

T: That would be hard.

D: Some guys, the wife had left them.

T: Your folks, with this not being talked about, was it more that they didn’t really ask the questions or that you didn’t really answer them?

D: No. (pauses three seconds) Well, I answered them, but they didn’t question me about what happened.

T: Did that change over the years, Don?

D: No, not really. It’s kind of... just part of life, and they dropped it. They never heard much about my experience after I got home.

T: And your folks, were they living in the Twin Cities?

D: Yes.
(2, B, 510)

T: Your folks have passed away?

D: Yes. My dad died at fifty-six. That’s pretty young. He had a resort up north here. Had a resort for many years. I lived in Iowa where I was working and I went up there. I fished with my dad all week. All week long. We made some repairs around there. I went fishing every night with him. We left on a Sunday. Noon. I got down to Albert Lea and stopped in to see my uncle, and they came out the back door and I knew something was wrong. They said, “We have some bad news for you. Your dad just passed away an hour after you left.” (pauses three seconds) That’s the way it went.

T: And you weren’t that old by that time, were you?

D: No.

T: So it never really came up in conversation then in your house?

D: No. It seemed like nobody wanted to talk about it. Even my kid brother. He got wounded badly in Belgium. He didn’t even want to talk too much about what happened.

T: The two of you were combat soldiers. Both of you, so it was...

D: Yes.

T: A new line of questioning here. You and Carolyn, your wife, were married what year?

D: 1946.

T: Had you known her before?

D: No.

T: So you met her after you got back. When you two got married, did she know you had been a POW?

D: Yes.

T: Was that something that came up in conversation between the two of you? I mean, any more than your folks for example?
D: No, not really. I came back in ’45, and ’46 in September we got married. I met her a couple months after I got home. Took off from there I guess.

T: So when you got married she knew you had been a POW.

D: Oh, yes.

T: How much did she know? And how much did you tell her?

D: Well, actually she was living with my mother. She worked for General Mills. Downtown Minneapolis. She worked for General Mills. Bookkeeping department. She was rooming. This was wartime. She was rooming with my mother. That’s where I met her. So I don’t know. I don’t think my mother talked too much about it to anybody.

T: How has she found out over the years about your POW experience? Did she know pretty much all at first, or was it something that she learned in chapters, so to speak?

D: To this day I don’t think she knows a lot of what happened. I never discussed it much with her.

T: If she asks you a question, would you answer it?

D: No, I wouldn’t. I would say, “I’ll tell you about it tomorrow.” When tomorrow came, I just dropped it and wouldn’t talk about it.

(2, B, 543)

T: Just didn’t come up, it sounds like.

D: It came up, I just ignored it.

T: Do you have kids?

D: Yes. I have a son and I have two daughters. One daughter lives in Ramsey, up north here. She’s a nurse. I have a daughter in Boston. And my son down in Missouri. I also have four grandsons and one great-granddaughter.

T: How much did they know growing up as kids about your POW experience?

D: Hardly anything.

T: They knew you had been in the service.

D: Yes.
T: Did they know more about your combat experiences than your POW experiences?

D: They know more now than they did way back. Yes. They have been to several of our reunions. They've heard a lot of stuff at our reunions that they didn't know about. I ordered a book like this for each one of them. I have so much information on my unit. I could talk about it all day long, in fact.

T: But you feel they know more now than they did when they were junior high or high school.

D: Oh, yes. Today in high school, how much do they know about World War II?

T: Precious little I'm afraid.

D: Hardly anything. They don't even know what World War II was all about. (irritated) Because I put on programs where I was asked to talk, and they ask questions that were unbelievable. They absolutely know nothing or are being taught about it. Actually I've always been interested in different kinds of wars. From the day I joined this outfit, the Rangers. That's all volunteers. You had to be a volunteer. That started way back when we were fighting the British. They had the first Rangers. They were organized when we were fighting the British. Against the French-Indian wars.

T: Back in the 1760s.

D: Yes. I've got history all the way back there. It's interesting.

T: It's certainly a long tradition. That's for sure.

D: It is.

T: Let me ask you, sort of picking up on the talking about it piece, how often after you were released, after you were not a POW anymore, did you have dreams that were specifically about your POW experience? Not as a combat soldier.

D: No, I really didn't. It didn't seem to bother me.

T: The POW piece of it.

D: Yes. It didn't seem to bother me a bit.

T: So you didn't have any images from the camp or the march that came back to you.

D: No. I can remember all that, but I don't think it hurt me in any way. I mean...I don't think so.
T: To contrast that, did you have dreams about any parts of your combat experience?

D: Well, some battles, yes.

T: I won’t ask specifics, but we’re trying to contrast the two pieces.

D: When I think about the landings we made. My unit made about five different landings. Started at Dieppe [1942], and we lost people there. The first Americans to land [in the European Theater] was at Dieppe. And then it was North Africa [1942]. Then it was Sicily [1943]. Then at Salerno [1943]. And last at Anzio [1943]. I still can think about some of those landings. I was lucky. Like the poor guys that landed in Normandy, some of them didn’t even get out of the boat to land.

T: Yes. So if things came back to you, it was more the combat stuff than the POW experience.

D: Oh, yes.

T: Good. Then that’s where we’ll leave that piece. Now, the interview we’re having today is...you’ve been very open and very honest with anything I’ve asked you. Is this an interview we could have had, for example, in 1955 or 1965?

D: Probably not.

T: So it’s not something that you...have you found it easier to talk about as time goes by?

D: Well, I kind of think this will be my last interview.

T: Why do you say that?

D: At my age. I don’t know. I just have a feeling. At eighty-two years old. I don’t know.

T: You just turned eighty-two, didn’t you? Last January.

D: I think I’m at the end of my line and I’ve been asked and asked for, at different organizations, to talk and I don’t want to do it anymore. So you’re...I think it will be my last interview.

T: I appreciate your time today then.
D: I spent a lot of time at [Fort] Snelling there on three [History Roundtable] programs with Captain Baum.

T: At the History Roundtable.

D: And we put on three programs. In fact, they wanted me this spring. This spring coming up they have a program or something on Italy.

T: Yes, they do.

D: He asked me last time he came over to my house. He’s coming back one day.

T: Don Patton this is.

D: Yes. I’d love to go back to Italy with him.

T: Let me ask about that, going back. That’s something that we talked about before the taping. Why would you want to go back? What would you be looking for?

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D: To see what I missed. Where I was. I’d like to go back to like Maori where we landed. The beach was a very narrow beach. I’ve got pictures of it. Probably eight, nine hundred feet long. And another thing—we found a cache in one of the caves to the left of the beach full of mines. The German engineers were going to plant them on that beach the next day. And we landed the day before. How lucky can you be?

T: No kidding. So you’d like to go back and see those places again.

D: Yes. I’d like to go back down to Sorrento and see the hotel I stayed in. That’s where they gave me my commission [as a second lieutenant]. I’d like to go back down there and see that little circle in town there. In fact, the day I got in there I went in there with my platoon and everybody needed a haircut, of course. I found a barber there and I told my platoon if anything happens just meet at the town circle or square here. I hadn’t got in that barber chair five minutes and ba-ba-boom I heard all the shooting out at my roadblock.

T: Going back to Italy...let me ask about going back to Germany. Any interest to go back to the places where you were a POW?

D: Not really. I’d rather go on back to Poland and see the camp, Oflag 64. I’ve talked to guys that have been back there. Don Patton’s been over to Hammelburg. I talked to him about that. He’s going back to Italy. He wants to ask me about where he should go down there. Tell him a few places I would like to go to. From Sorrento I could look across the Bay of Naples right into Naples and Mt. Vesuvius right behind it. I looked at that cookie for a month. It would be interesting. Then I went out to
the Isle of Capri. That’s offshore about twenty-some miles. That was interesting. Things like that. I’d like to get on Highway 6 and go up to where I had my last battle. I think I could find it easy. I’d like to go into Venafro and see if there’s anything left. I’d like to go up to [Monte] Casino. There wasn’t anything left there at wartime.

T: No. It was pretty much laid to waste, I think.

D: And that’s about as far as I would want to go.

T: The last question I have is this. How do you think your POW experience, that experience, changed you as a person?

D: Oh, I don’t know if it changed me very much. I just call myself a survivor, I think. Because making a lot of those landings like we did, the action that we saw in the raids and all that stuff, I just feel like I’m a survivor. And that’s the truth. We had, after the war, after the Anzio deal, there was about ninety-nine guys that came home out of the unit. That’s all.

T: Mr. Frederick, I very much appreciate your time here today. Thanks a lot.

END OF INTERVIEW