Marcus “Mark” Hertz was born 26 Jul 1922 in St. Paul, one of five children of parents of Russian Jewish heritage. He grew up in St. Paul, and graduated from high school in 1941.

Mark enlisted in the US Army Air Corps in February 1942, and was trained as a bombardier/navigator on B-17 Flying Fortress four-engine heavy bombers. He graduated from cadet school in December 1943. Mark was assigned to the 350th Bomb Squadron, 100th Bomb Group, and posted to England. Before his departure he was married, in March 1944 (Lorraine).

Mark completed twelve bombing missions over Europe. On his thirteenth mission, on 28 July 1944 to the German city of Merseburg, his B-17 was shot down.

As a POW, Mark spent time at the interrogation facility Dulag Luft, then Luft III Sagan (Aug 1944 – Jan 1945). Luft III was evacuated with Soviet troops closing in; Mark and other POWs were marched for nearly three months, finally ending at VII-A Moosburg in Bavaria in early April. This overcrowded camp was liberated by US forces on 29 April 1945.

Mark arrived back in the United States in August 1945, and was discharged in September. Again a civilian, Mark spent his life in St. Paul, working in the furniture business at Cardoso’s.
Information on Marcus Hertz crew

Sources:


2. Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) #7880, Micro-fiche #2890, at National Archives

DATE: 28 July 1944
350th Bomb Squadron
Aircraft #42-97555 PATHFINDER "Island F for Fox" on loan from 95th BG
MISSION: Merseburg
MACR#7880, Micro-fiche #2890

Capt Floyd H. Mason (349th Ops Officer) Command Pilot POW
1st Lt James B. Noble Pilot POW
2nd Lt Robert P. Lipps Co-Pilot POW
1st Lt Edmund J. "Ned" Kauffman Radio/Navigator POW
1st Lt Robert W. Barry Navigator POW
2nd Lt Marcus M. Hertz Bombardier POW
T/Sgt Frank Cruz,Jr. Top turret gunner POW
T/Sgt Russell F. Ellis Gunner POW
S/Sgt Arthur L. Roberts Waist gunner KIA
S/Sgt William P. McNally Waist gunner KIA
S/Sgt Frederick F. Swartz Tailgunner POW
Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is 16 February 2005. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. This evening I’m speaking with Mr. Marcus Hertz. We’re at the kitchen table at his home on Cleveland Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota. First, on the record, Mr. Hertz, thanks very much for taking time this chilly evening to sit and talk with me.

M: My pleasure. Great pleasure. I’ve been thinking about you and this visit for a couple of days already.

T: As you were thinking, what kind of things...how were you thinking about it?

M: About what you’d ask me and that you would be interested in the story that I’m going to tell you. Because living my adult life out in St. Paul, Minnesota, there have been very, very few people that would ever say, “You were a prisoner of war?” or, “You were in combat in World War II? What was it like?” I haven’t heard that yet. Not in St. Paul, Minnesota. Not from my family or my relatives. My family has got one line for this type of thing that we’re going through which is, “There goes Daddy with the music again.” Or out in social company they don’t want to hear that any more. They’re tired of it.

T: Then you’ve found the right audience tonight. That’s why I walked a mile from Ford Parkway to your home (both laugh).

T: For the record, I have this information about you. You were born on 26 July 1922, right here in St. Paul, Minnesota. As a matter of fact, you’ve lived your entire life on South Cleveland Avenue in St. Paul.

M: Exactly. I was born one of five children when they had a four bed hospital at Prior and Cleveland, and I am told that my mother walked across Marion Park with my father at two o’clock in the morning, got our doctor, Dr. William Ginzburg, and a hospital bed, and I arrived the following day. Just three blocks from where our family home was. My father—we lived at Carroll and Cleveland—and my father and his brother built the two houses that are at the corner of Carroll and Cleveland. Being in the cattle business, somebody had to get up at two o’clock in the morning, weather or no weather, to water the cattle.
T: And some times of the year that can be pretty nasty weather. You grew up here in St. Paul on South Cleveland, and enlisted in the service February of 1942.

M: Exactly.

T: To complete that, you were discharged September of 1945. You were a bombardier-navigator on a B-17 Flying Fortress [four engine heavy bomber].

M: There’s two ratings. In large aircraft crews there’s two ratings. One’s a 1036 and one’s a 1037. The 1036 is a visual bombardier and the 1037 is a machine trained bombardier with a partial introduction to navigation.

T: Which did you have?

M: Bombardier-navigator.

T: So you were 1037.

M: Yes. You must enter into your records and into your frame of mind, because in all the years that you will live and transfer your residence or your destination by air, you have to remember the pilot can’t see the ground below him.

T: That’s right.

(1, A, 33)

M: So in combat the bombardier, who was in a glass cage, was the eyes of the crew. Didn’t know that?

T: I can imagine, having sat in a bomber myself, that you can’t see the ground.

M: No. No. The pilot...we’re about thirty feet above the edge of the runway and will be over the edge of the runway by the count of ten. The pilot, he could see the other end of the runway, but he couldn’t see where the wheels would touch down.

T: In the glass nose you could see that.

M: Sure.

T: Now you flew missions on B-17 aircraft in 1944.

M: Yes.

T: Let me start with this question. Do you remember the first combat mission you flew?
M: Yes.

T: Talk about that.

M: It’s terrifying. It's a terrifying thing to know that somebody is shooting at you.

T: What was that first mission? The first mission you flew.

M: You mean the destination?

T: Yes.

M: I can’t remember. I've got a list of the targets on the missions that I flew, because I was a lead bombardier, but they’re buried somewhere in the attic of the house. I would have to hunt for them.

T: You remember a sense of terror, or of fear.

M: Yes.

T: And how would you describe the kind of fear that that is?

M: Because I was oriented all the time I was in cadet school and in phase training with, “Are you crazy? You're Jewish. You're going to go to Germany in combat? They'll cut you in slices.”

T: Did you hear that when you were in training?

M: Oh, yes.

T: How did you internalize that?

M: I want to go. If I get my commission and graduate in the bombing and navigation courses and get my commission, I don’t want to go to the Pacific Theater. I don’t want to be a teacher. I don’t, I don’t, I don’t. But I want to go to the European Theater and get into combat. I wasn’t the only one.

T: Did you consciously feel yourself that you'd rather go fight the Germans than the Japanese?

M: Yes.

T: What did that have to do with you being Jewish?

M: Well, listen. All the time in the 1930s, every time we went to the synagogue, they would say another eight thousand Jews were killed in Hamburg or Leipzig or
someplace that they were. What was I, nineteen or twenty years old? You think I’m not impressionable? I’m just as impressionable as you.

T: So for you it was a sense of here was a chance to get involved.

(1, A, 61)

M: Yes. If anybody was going to get their picture on the front page of the St. Paul paper it would be a St. Paulite. Successful in hitting the target at Leipzig or Berlin or Warsaw or someplace that was strategic.

T: When you lived at home with your folks before you left for service—

M: My mother died when I was ten years old. So we just had elderly grandparents.

T: So you lived with your dad and—

M: Yes.

T: Did your family go to synagogue every week?

M: No.

T: When you went to synagogue, was the war and what was happening in Germany part of what people were talking about?

M: Not enough, but some. If you are of a certain temperament, you’re going to actually feel the pain that’s being inflicted on somebody else. You, yourself, are going to feel it at some point in your life. Maybe in your family or your friendship or meetings like this. You will experience what I’m saying, which is I feel I can do something about that.

T: At the same time, being one person, one man in one aircrew in one large bomb group in one huge air force, really, what could you do?

M: Be a lead bombardier.

T: As a bombardier you dropped the bombs, right? And they dropped on your lead.

M: Or if the fighter planes were coming at you out of the sun dead on, you had the best chance of hitting them.

T: That’s right. You had a gun at your position.

M: Yes. Twin fifties [.50 caliber machine guns]. Every station on a B-17 or a B-24 had twin .50 caliber turrets.
T: From that first mission—that you described as something unique and different and scary—did the missions get easier? I mean, easier for you to take.

M: I don’t know. I slept okay. I don’t know how to answer that, because once you get into the rhythm of combat everybody’s got the same thing on their mind. I’ll have all my missions in by...you name a date. July 26. Then I get to go home. I was married.

T: That’s right, you were married in March ‘44.

M: Yes.

T: Were you one of those guys who counted your missions and knew—

M: Oh, yes.

T: So you could begin to project and say, okay, it might be only until such and such a date.

M: Yes.

T: Now, being a Jewish officer, flying over Nazi Germany, how much thought did you give to my goodness, what’s going to happen to me if the plane is shot down?

M: Lots of thought.

T: And what kind of thoughts were those?

M: I’m not going to run away from captivity and start running across fields and through towns and get caught, because the “H” that you see on that dog tag, that’s understandable all over the world.

(T, A, 94)

T: Did you think to yourself, if I’m shot down what I’ll do is... Did you complete that sentence for yourself?

M: Yes. You want me to complete the sentence?

T: Yes.

M: We had information. If a combat flyer wanted it, there was information available about where to go and what not to do in various parts of the target area or the route. Incidentally, I just got a medal in February, which is six or seven months ago, that I’m a flyer that jumped at thirty thousand feet and survived. They’ve only found
seven in the whole United States. We had a change of operational type after I got into combat. I got there about the end of April 1944. Along about June, the United States Air Force decided that they were going to change our bombing altitude to thirty thousand feet. Now nobody that I know of in our crew or other crews in our group in the 100th Bomb Group had ever even flown at thirty thousand. But they found—the motors were made by Curtiss-Wright—and they found that the manufacturer could change the fuel-air ratio coming into the motors to fly and keep the plane in flight at thirty thousand feet.

There was a colonel, we happened to have a commanding officer—not Spivey—I can’t think of his name. I’ve got it someplace. Anyhow, it was announced, we’re going to have to have some serious training sessions in the next couple weeks because you’re going in a thirty thousand. So the bomb sites had to be changed. The carburetors on the motors had to be changed. The fuel-air ratio mixture type volatility had to be changed. So during those months of June and July of 1944 there were just masses of mechanics that came in that would do a whole airplane. Change it to thirty thousand feet. Your airspeed and with the thickness of the air, which is sort of an Army phrase, the air is thinner at thirty thousand feet than it is at twenty-four.

T: Right.

M: So will the plane go faster or slower? Will it behave differently? It was just maddening. The commanding officer that addressed us, the officers of the 100th Bomb Group, came and explained how intensive our training was going to have to be in the next couple weeks because we’re changing to thirty thousand feet. The conflict among the members of the group...I was a lead bombardier. So I’m in on everything. But the leaders had a lot of... Pilots would argue. Navigators would argue. Statisticians would argue. But we were losing a lot of planes, and the thing that there’s no argument about was: at least they’ll have a harder time hitting us with anti-aircraft at thirty thousand, if they could hit us at all. The United States Air Force honestly believed that the ground guns couldn’t have any success at thirty thousand feet. We were losing a lot of planes.

T: Was your plane flying at that altitude on 28 July [1944] when you were shot down?

M: Yes. It certainly was.

T: What happened on that day, 28 July?

M: We usually took off at five thirty or six in the morning. We’d circle until we all got formed. You know how the formations were created. Then, on that particular day, July 28, it was to be our entire group, the 100th Bomb Group. The entire group was going fly. Everything we could get into the air. Because we were going to go to Merseburg for the second time. That’s an oil field out in the very, very eastern part of Poland. Oil refinery. You’d get up into the air and you’d have to circle at an
assigned altitude and they would furnish what’s called Very guns. Do you know what a Very gun is?

T: A flare gun.

M: Yes. When you shoot it, it would shoot different colored balls. It would sputter. But they made a color. So to form the formation—this is all part of the answer. You’d form a formation. You’d fly in a circle, and let’s say we were yellow green that day. Every time we saw a yellow green or they saw a yellow green we would start to make our formation. There were ninety planes.

T: From your group.

M: There were ninety planes in the formation when we started eastward toward the target.

(1, A, 155)

T: Your plane was shot down that day.

M: Eight twenty-five in the morning.

T: What happened?

M: The FWs, Focke-Wulfs [German single engine fighter plane], came out of the sun and attacked us. There must have been five hundred. Our plane was hit and partially crippled, and in a matter of three or four minutes the reserve tank for oxygen, which was the crew’s source of oxygen, exploded and the plane broke apart.

T: You’re in the nose of the plane now, right?

M: Yes.

T: How does this, the explosion of the tanks and the plane breaking up, how did that play out from your perspective in the front of the plane?

M: It’s no different than while you’re sitting in that chair if I go down the basement and get a board and hit you on the head. That’s it.

T: Were you knocked unconscious from the explosion?

M: I don’t think so. All the Plexiglas was cracked and splintered and missing.

T: Did you, as the bombardier in the front, did you have your parachute on?
M: No, but I had the straps...I wore the straps all the time. All I had to do was reach over, get the chute, and hook it up.

T: When those tanks blew up, did the order come to bail out of the aircraft?

M: Yes.

T: Almost right way?

M: No. A matter of maybe five minutes.

T: So the pilot kept the plane in the air somehow.

M: No. No. We dropped away from the formation. We were in the air, but we were not in combat position. And screaming and crying and asking and trying...the pilot and copilot tried desperately to maintain flight and found they couldn't do it.

T: What was going through your mind at that time?

M: (sighs) I don't remember. I had rehearsed a situation, but I don't know what was going through my mind at that... (trails off) Survival. Yes, I've got an answer: survival. I'm going to survive. I don't know how, but I'm going to.

T: When the order came to bail out of the aircraft, how did you exit the aircraft? Where did you go out?

M: The Plexiglas blew out of the nose. I went out through the nose.

T: You could just literally go out the front.

M: Yes.

T: So when you went out the front you went underneath and the plane went on top of you?

M: In a way, yes.

T: How many men got out of the aircraft alive?

M: Seven.

(1, A, 186)

T: Seven of ten.

M: Yes.
T: Who didn’t make it out? What positions in the aircraft?

M: I can’t remember. One was a waist gunner, one was a turret gunner. See we didn’t have one of those ball turrets on the underside of the plane, because the plane was equipped with radar. There was a bubble there, but it was the radarscope inside, not a gunner.

T: Right. So seven men of ten exited the aircraft alive. As you got out of the plane with your parachute…was this your first parachute jump?

M: Well, no. When the Air Force announced that we were going to change our bombing level to thirty thousand feet we had to take more practice sessions in parachute jumping. You know, where you climb up the long tower until you’re about three hundred feet in the air and then jump off with the chute. We had to do that several times.

T: Had you ever jumped out of an airplane before?

M: Never.

T: So this was your first actual parachute jump.

M: Yes. And only.

T: So one jump was enough. Describe that feeling of coming down in the parachute.

M: First of all, you have to be trained for it. You’re not supposed to take a breath of air at anything over ten thousand feet. In each flight suit in each knee was sewn a little package of oxygen and what you were supposed to do is, when you were ready to leave, the chute’s on, the straps are ready, the cord is ready to pull. You’ve got to reach down in your knee, take out the tube, bite off the end and just breathe what’s in those tubes. Don’t breathe any air. First of all, it’s sixty-five below zero.

T: That sounds all well and good and easy, but is it possible under the circumstances you’re in to say, okay, chute on, reach down to my knee. Did you manage to do all that?

M: You’re missing a very important facet in your question. The facet you’re missing is, what you do to survive an emergency is not something you can discuss at a kitchen table. You become a different person. If you’re determined to do everything that you learned in practice, if you are determined that you’re going to survive by following rules that are proven, you don’t have to ask somebody what goes through your mind. The minute that plane was hit, the instant it was hit…the bomb bay doors were open. We reported some casualties of the crew. We’re screaming and we’re jabbering. One of the introductions to the answer to your question is, a
person adapts. In a situation like that, a person, a crew member, an experienced flier, goes to the rule book and follows the rules. What they’ve told you not to do, don’t try it.

T: So what you know to do is what they’ve told you to do.

M: Right. But we had some practice jumps at a high altitude. Before the day finally came when they said we were going to go in at thirty thousand feet. That was big stuff for us. Big. A lot of training. A lot of education. Lot of judgment. The plane flies differently at thirty thousand feet. When you take a commercial air flight...like tomorrow morning you were going to go to Chicago or Dallas or Los Angeles or something. The world around you when a plane reaches flying level, is completely different than life on the ground.

T: And being in pressurized little cabins, we don’t often recognize that.

(1, A, 242)

M: Right.

T: You’re out of the plane. You’re parachuting towards the ground.

M: No. When you’re out of the plane you’re just flying. When your body is turning over like this, sometimes you look up and see the ground. You’re upside down.

T: And so your parachute must have opened, or you wouldn’t be here talking to me.

M: The rule was that you opened the parachute when you can see treetops and roofs of houses and the difference between a road and a field.

T: If you’re tumbling over and over, how easy is that to do?

M: It’s very easy. You’re turning all the time, but you soon become acclimated after you’ve turned over three or four times. You learn the difference between heaven and the ground.

T: The chute must have opened. You hit the ground, and what goes through your mind when you hit the ground? I mean, you’ve thought about what might happen. Suddenly you’re on the ground and you’re in Germany.

M: I’ve relived that thousands of times. I gotta get out of here. Now, I was always very much aware of where I would go if this had happened to me. And here it was happening. Sometime at your leisure look up 1930s map...you know that Germany didn’t become Germany until about thirty years before this time. It was Prussia before that.
T: Germany unified in 1871. Right.

M: Okay. I bailed out at Leipzig. So at some time when the piece of real estate that became the country of Germany... There’s a state in southern Germany that never became part of the German Empire. It was a very resistant colony of people that didn’t want to belong to the sovereign state of Germany. We were told that if you could, go to that state and approach a citizen or a farmer, and that’s where the trains started out where you could get a trip back through France to your base in England.

T: Once you hit the ground, what do you do? I mean, you have an idea of what you might do or what the best idea is.

M: I had it drilled in my mind. I did it exactly according to the book.

T: You ended up a POW of the Germans anyway.

M: Yes.

T: What happened?

M: I was on the loose for five days. I got caught.

T: How did they catch you?

M: I slept in trees. I usually would sleep most of the morning or most of the day. Climb up in a tree and then do my traveling at night. To get to the railroad of the area that I wanted—I had a map. In my flight suit. Had a silk map. When you opened it up it was three feet by three feet. Showed every town and village. Like a state map that you get in a service station today. Shows even the remote rural roads.

T: So you knew, in theory, where you wanted to go.

M: Knew where I was. I knew how to get there.

T: And you were by yourself. No other member of your crew were with you.

(1, A, 303)

M: Yes. It bothered me just terribly because I couldn’t know how other people in the crew fared. As it turned out, the fellow that left out through what we called the office window in the front of the plane, Bob Barry, the bomb bay doors were open and when he bailed out [and] he got hit by the door that was open. Suffered a broken back.

T: Because he hit the bomb bay door that was hanging open.
M: Yes.

T: Five days. How did the Germans catch you?

M: I was in a tree. They had a dog.

T: Guys in uniform, or were they civilians?

M: Civilians.

T: Was that more worrisome for you at first glance, being caught by a civilian, or was it better than being caught by a person in uniform?

M: No. It was worse. Much worse. Much worse. I don’t speak German, but I can tell you that when they prodded me into the town and into the house where they kept me, they had an expression...do you understand German?

T: I speak German.

M: *Americanischer Terrorflieger.* [German: literally, American terror flyer] *Terrorflieger.* There was no doubt who I was.

T: How would you describe your emotions at that time? Are you confident you’ll be okay? Are you scared to death? What were you?

M: Both.

T: Talk about that. Explain that. I mean, how can you be both of those at the same time?

M: Your mood is temporarily influenced by getting a bayonet in the cheek of your ass. I don’t understand German. Never have. Not interested. But if somebody screams something at me...and I didn’t know it was an order to turn to the left or go right, or I don’t like the way you’re standing, or what’s your middle name, or something like that. I don’t know what he’s talking about. When you get a jab in the ass with a bayonet, you learn pretty fast.

T: That’s one instance. Were you mistreated in any other way when you were first captured?

M: No.

T: Were you questioned at all by anybody in uniform when you were first captured?

M: Questioned by everybody.
T: In English?

M: No. In German.

T: Wasn’t much of a conversation if you were speaking English and they were speaking German. Were you interrogated or questioned by anybody in uniform in English?

M: Yes. Broken, crude English. Who are you? Where were you going? They were getting information, in that little town that I was captured, they were getting information by the minute from the town where the base was located where those Focke-Wulfs that attacked us flew from. This was the fifth day, and by the fifth day everybody that had been on that mission, in the fighter group, the American fighter group, had already been interviewed and it became public news.

T: In a sense, the mission was known.

M: Yes.

(1, A, 358)

T: How long were you kept at that first location?

M: About a week.

T: So this is a small...just by yourself now. There were no other...

M: It was in a basement of a house. On the sixth day or seventh day a couple of German soldiers in full uniform came down, handcuffed me, got me up the top of the stairs and walked me to the railroad station.

T: Was that the first Germans you’d seen in uniform up close?

M: Yes.

T: You were really held by civilians then for...

M: Yes. Definitely. I was in somebody’s house. I could hear them talking at the breakfast table.

T: Did they have you tied up or handcuffed at this time, or...

M: No.

T: Just in the basement.
M: Not then. Just in the basement.

T: Did they feed you while you were there?

M: Yes. Something. It wasn’t much that I remember. But it was something.

T: It’s interesting. You stayed there for a number of days.

M: Five days.

T: Did you have interactions with these people? You were locked down and they were up?

M: Yes.

T: What did you find yourself thinking of when you were there in that basement?

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 381.

T: Do you remember yourself being fairly confident that, I’ll find a way out of this, or do you remember yourself being—

M: You got it right the first time.

T: Confident.

M: Yes. I’ll figure something out.

T: How much did the fact that you were Jewish and had the “H” on your dog tags sit on your mind?

M: It didn’t have any reaction, because the people whose house I was in wouldn’t have known the difference between a dog tag and a dog collar.

T: Civilians. But then the military comes.

M: That’s different. And I don’t understand German. So, yes, when they check my dog tags and they’re jabbering to each other, laughing, screaming…a little jab in the ass to me for something I said, or they wanted me to move from point A to point B, or stand up or sit down, or do something. I didn’t understand a word of it.

I know, and it belongs on that tape, I know that my best friends in our 100th Bomb Group and in the 13th Bomber Wing and in that week before D Day, June 6 or 7, where we were assigned very critical targets, not combat flights, but paving the way for the American foot soldiers to land at Normandy—all of our bomb groups had a lot to do with that. There were ammunition dumps and gasoline dumps three
miles in, thirteen miles in. A highway, a railroad...all of those things that the Air
Force wanted destroyed before an American foot landed on Normandy Beach.
Those months of April and May 1944 were on the file, subject of the invasion.

T: There was a lot of preparatory bombing and your group was part of that.

(1, B, 401)

M: Yes.

T: From the railway station were you taken directly to Luft III or were you taken
somewhere else first.

M: Oh, no. I had to go to the Dulag [Luft interrogation facility].

T: Talk about your experience at the Dulag. The Dulag is by Frankfurt [Main], at
Wetzlar. The Dulag Luft facility.

M: This Dulag that I went to was a terrible, terrible place. The building that the
Dulag was centered in, in Frankfurt, had been bombed. So I was on a train to get
there. Also with a bayonet in the rear end frequently. So we were taken to a castle.
I never saw one other American GI in all...I was there eighteen days. These were the
first, like the first eighteen days of August 1944. But there was a prison in the
basement of that castle. In the prison there was no furniture. There were no beds.
There were a lot of rats and bugs and no daylight and no fresh air. The part of the
prison that I was in, nobody else spoke English. I've talked to a lot of men that were
in prison cells there. They must have had twenty or thirty prison cells in the
basement of that castle.

T: And you were there for eighteen days you figure.

M: Yes. I was.

T: How many times were you questioned or interrogated?

M: Every day.

T: Every day. What did they want to know from you?

M: Everything. Everything. What was your bomb load? What was your destination?
What was your target? What was your air speed? We see that you’re from St. Paul,
Minnesota. Do you know anything about the mayor or the mayor’s family? They
mentioned the name. I don’t remember the name. They knew the name, rank, and
serial number, and hometown, and hometown residence. Every one. As POWs, we
went over this a thousand times. Their intelligence service on combat fliers was
unsurpassed. Unsurpassed information in World War II.
T: Did it surprise you, how much they knew about you?

M: Yes. Shocking! Shocking! Are you Marcus Hertz? Was your home residence in St. Paul, Minnesota? Did your father vote for so and so? For mayor in 1936. I didn’t know. I was in high school. I didn’t pay any attention to that. I didn’t know a lot of the answers. But a lot of them I did know, and the United States Army...when our POW bunch was reclassified after the war was just about over, or going to be over, I was asked some questions like that, about what did you tell them? What did you not tell them? Where were you? Was the officer’s name Simplot or Jacklow or something like that? I didn’t know. Asked a lot of questions. I suppose I gave some foolish answers. But this is an interview where you ask the questions and I give the answers, and sometimes I don’t have an exact answer. I was there eighteen days. In that castle. That was a miserable, miserable...you go to sleep at night and there would be a mouse at your ear, nibbling. The prisoner next to you defecated and nobody to clean up the mess. Smelled terrible and looked terrible.

(1, B, 447)

T: In the cell you were in at Dulag Luft. Were you in the cell alone or were other men in there?

M: Alone. And the bed was on the floor. Just some kind of a straw pad of some kind. Every day we’d have to go up to the interrogation center. Every day we got those interviews and the interrogating officer...they were sharp. Boy! Their intelligence was so far superior to ours. In an American GI camp you could be next door to a guy, in bed side by side, and not know his mother or father’s name.

T: They knew a lot about you, though.

M: Yes.

T: That means you got to [Stalag] Luft III sometime the end of August, beginning of September [1944]?

M: Yes. I think it was about the first of September.

T: When you got to that camp, did you arrive with other Americans?

M: Yes. We were on a train.

T: From Frankfurt to there?

M: Yes. Have you got the physical location of those two places in your mind?

T: Exactly.
M: There is a river that runs—like the Mississippi River—that after the war in the Potsdam Conference, that river was made the boundary between East Germany and Poland.

T: Correct. The Oder-Neisse Line. When you got to Luft III and got into the camp there, describe the camp as you remember it.

M: It was beautiful to me, because everybody spoke English. When I first got to Stalag Luft III, in the first hour that I was there, I was informed that this is a prison camp for combat airmen. So you're in good company.

T: Did you see other members of your own crew there?

M: No. Never saw one in all these years.

T: So once you left the plane, that's the last time you saw them.

M: Yes.

T: What did this camp look like, physically, from your perspective?

M: Oh, it wasn't a bad looking camp. The barracks were all uniform and all built on what I would call stumps of telephone poles.

T: So off the ground.

M: Yes. In no way were those barracks buildings, in no way were they offensive as a place to be. Just like you and I are sitting in a kitchen at a kitchen table. They had a center aisle, and on both sides of the aisle were multiple story bunks.

T: Two high or three high?

M: The first one I was in was three high, and the second one I was in was four high.

(1, B, 479)

T: So you were in two separate barracks at Luft III.

M: Yes. At Stalag Luft III. Yes, I was.

T: Were you assigned to your first barracks or did you just take an open spot?

M: Oh, no. I was led there. It was assigned. Before I ever even got to the front gate.

T: So they knew where you were going to be when you got in the front gate.
M: Yes. Yes. I suppose there was communication between the Dulag and the camp management.

T: When you got inside your barracks there, the one you were assigned to, describe that room.

M: It was a building about fifty feet long with a wide center aisle, and then little alcoves of bunks.

T: And were you assigned a bunk or did you just pick one once you were in the barracks?

M: No. We were assigned a bunk.

T: So you had literally down to the exact spot you were going to be in.

M: Yes.

T: In the barracks there, how did you...you didn’t know any of those men in the barracks when you got there.

M: It doesn’t take long.

T: How do you sort of break the ice and make friends with people in a barracks like that?

M: My name is Hertz. I’m from the 100th Bomb Group. My name is Swanson, and I’m from the 38th Bomb Group. Oh, where were you shot down? Dresden. Oh, I know Dresden. We bombed Dresden on 18 June, or something like that. There’s a lot of introductory...openings.

T: In a sense, you have something in common. You mentioned earlier you were all shot down airmen.

M: Right.

T: So you have something immediately to talk about.

M: Yes. We didn’t know that at the time. We didn’t know that everybody in the whole section of the camp we were in were captured airmen. You learn.

T: When, if at all, did your being Jewish come into making a difference at that camp –

M: Every damn day I was there. Every day I was a POW.
T: In what way specifically?

M: Are they treating you okay? If it was an American, or what we call an SAO, which was a Senior American Officer, they would want to know if anybody was being abused in our section. Who they were and why, and who were the plants. There were certain POWs that were really German information seekers.

T: Was that the rumor that you knew some people were, but you just didn’t know who?

M: Yes.

T: Do you feel you were ever singled out by the Germans for separate or different treatment because you were Jewish?

(1, B, 508)

M: Yes. Threatened. But none of the threats were ever followed through.

T: What threats did you hear?

M: You’ll never make it out of here. There’s no such thing as stray Jews in Germany.

T: Was this from the guards or from—

M: Yes. From the guards. That was our only communication, was either each other or the guards.

T: So the people who ran the camp were at a distance, and you interacted with the German guards.

M: There was an office building where we first came in the camp.

T: Is it when you got to the camp that you got your POW dog tag?

M: I can’t remember. I just can’t remember. I presume it was. Because that’s where most of the interrogation was. And the clothing that was issued. Like if a crew was shot down, the senior American officer had a place for the shoes, the shoelaces, the underwear, the blankets.

T: In the camp there, as an officer, you were not required to work by the Geneva Convention.

M: That’s right.

T: How did you pass your time? You were there for months and months.
M: Oh, reading mostly. Walking. They had a nice walk that went completely around inside the fence. Visiting. Laying out my life in the future as I would want it.

T: Did you give thought to the future of Marcus Hertz when you got out of camp?

M: Sure.

T: How did you envision your life?

M: I was newly married. Lorraine and I got married just before I went overseas. The kind of a husband I would be, and the kind of a worker I would be. There was nothing that I knew of in life outside of being a cattle buyer. Going around buying cattle. I had lived with it all the time us kids were growing up.

T: Sure. It was in your blood, so to speak.

M: Never occurred to me that I would have any other kind of work.

T: But importantly, for our purposes, you didn’t find yourself living day to day. You were focused on the future, after this POW experience.

M: It’s called survival. Very simple. If I survived. Every sentence starts with it. Every prayer starts with it.

T: But I heard you say you believed you would survive. It wasn’t a question of if I will, it was—

M: I will.

T: And, importantly, you were living for more than just sundown today, survive today. You thought about the long term future.

M: When I got home.

T: You’ve got something to live for.

M: If my wife, if, if, why, why, why, if my wife likes it, if my wife can stand it, if my wife loves it, or if my wife will be true to me and if, if—day after day. Month after month. Yes.

(1, B, 542)

T: You had a lot of time to think about things, didn’t you?
M: Yes. And a lot of reading. We had books. Maybe not the best books and we didn’t have a current library, but we had books. The thing that I did a lot of that’s hard to explain is, I have never played a game of cards since I got back on American soil. I just grew to... We played cards. We played bridge. We had bridge tournaments that you couldn’t put all the scores on a roll of toilet paper. They went on for days.

T: Had you been a card player before that?

M: No.

T: So you learned to play cards and played them to death in the service and camp and then no more.

M: Yes. Every day. Every day. One or two o’clock the game would start in our barracks.

T: Did you hang out pretty much with the same people every day?

M: Yes.

T: Who were those people?

M: The best friend that I made was a fellow from Preston, Minnesota, and his name was Bob Keene, and we stayed weekend friends those first couple years that we were home out of service. There were twelve men to what we called a combine. Combine would be the three or four triple or quadruple height bunks. So one would take a turn cooking, and one would take a turn washing dishes, and one would take a turn washing the sheets or the blankets or whatever.

T: It became a small community in a way.

M: Yes.

T: Did you get along with those people pretty well?

M: Yes. Had to.

T: Small space, and under those circumstances...

M: Yes.

T: Having lots of time on your hands, a blessing or curse?

M: My answer is that it was neither a blessing nor a curse. It was the accomplishment in thought of, how am I going to get out of this mess. I pictured
myself as a guy like Steve McQueen and roaring around a farmyard on a motorcycle. But I was told, and I believed it from the stories that we heard, don’t try to escape. A Jewish flier identified by the Germans has no chance of survival. Don’t do it. I never did.

T: Does that mean you—

M: I was frightened.

T: With some justification.

M: Yes. But I asked to go to Germany because of the publicity we had received here in St. Paul, Minnesota, on what was happening to the Jewish people in Germany and Poland. I’m thinking to myself, the sign is hanging out there, enlist in the Air Force and all of this stuff, and I’m here and they’re being slaughtered by the trainload. That’s where I want to go.

T: And do I hear you saying when it comes to escape, the safest place for you, really, as a Jew in Germany, might have been in that camp?

M: You bet. You can say that and believe it over and over.

T: And you knew that at the time, didn’t you?

M: I learned it pretty damn fast.

T: So the people talking about escape could go on without you.

(1, B, 588)

M: And some tried. Some did try. We walked the march you know from Sagan, where the Stalag Luft III was, to Moosburg, where VII-A was, and on that march there was a lot of fellows that ran away. There is no definite answer to...if you were to ask what became of them or how many survived, we wouldn’t know. Some of them we never saw again.

T: When you were at Luft III, how much news did you get about how the war was going outside your little world?

M: We got news every night.

T: How did you get news every night?

M: BBC.

T: Where was the radio?
M: One of our men built it.

T: In your barracks?

M: Yes. Ours wasn’t the only one either. There’s a place that just went out of business recently [in St. Paul] at Prior and University, called Knox Lumber. The fellow that started Knox Lumber was very famous in our compound, because a fellow had built a radio and we didn’t have any way of receiving it because we couldn’t get any sound out of it. I’m not a radioman, but this guy was, and he built the radio.

The guy that was from St. Paul, Minnesota, that became one of my best friends in POW camp was a fellow named Lawrence Platt. He became a lumber salesman after the war. He lived down on Portland and Western [in St. Paul]. His family lived at 405, or 415, or something like that Portland for three generations. After I had been a POW for about four months, December or January, somewhere in there, the Germans came up to the camp gate with a captured American combat flier and what was hanging from his knee? Earphones. Our radio was walking in the fence.

T: Because you need speakers, don’t you? Something to hear it.

M: Right. And he became very famous, because after months of not having any war information or combat information which we thrived on, a guy named Lawrence Platt walked in with a pair of earphones and he didn’t own them ten seconds after he was in American hands, because we grabbed them.

T: Did he know they were there?

M: No. He didn’t know the first thing about it. He was scared. He was a fighter pilot. Got shot down. I don’t know where he was shot down, but somehow he got to the Dulag.

T: At Luft III as you got news apparently of how the war was going.

M: Every night.

T: Increasingly better for the Allies and worse for the Germans. Were you concerned about what might happen to the camp, to the prisoners, if the Germans did lose?

M: You bet we were.

T: What did guys talk about?
M: What would we do? We can’t fight. We’re POWs. We have nothing to fight with. It was terrifying. Being a prisoner in a prison where the prison was in a prison. As you now know from your studies and your work, there were three camps of American airmen.

T: There was more than one, sure. That’s right. Yours was not the only one.

(1, B, 638)

M: Stalag Luft I up at Barth and Stalag Luft II that was just a little west of us and Stalag Luft III, which was east of the Oder River. The town on the map, should you ever look it up, is called Zagan. But in German maps it’s called Sagan.

T: With an “S.” Right. From your perspective, speaking about Luft III, how well did prisoners get along with each other?

M: Very well. We had no conflict. We were in the part of the camp where the tunnels were being dug. There were three tunnels. The ones that are famous.

T: From the film Great Escape.

M: Yes. From the Great Escape.

T: That means there were never disagreements or arguments among prisoners or—

M: Not to amount to anything.

T: Was theft a problem?

M: Theft? No.

T: So you could leave your stuff laying out there and nobody would bother it.

M: Sure. Men would leave...the answer to your question is pretty logical if asked this way, did you worry about any of your possessions when you were on a combat mission? Because then, we would be gone...we’d get up at one o’clock in the morning and we wouldn’t get back home sometimes until seven o’clock that night.

T: Did you worry about your stuff then?

M: Oh, yes. But the answer to your question is, would anybody steal your suitcase or your possessions while you were on a mission, and the answer is no. And the reason the answer would always stay no is, we were all American officers. We were leading enlisted men in combat. We didn’t steal from each other.
T: The season turns to winter, and we do have the evacuation of the camp to deal with. How much advance warning do you remember having that the camp was going to be evacuated?

M: From four o’clock in the afternoon until we were actually outside the fence. That was about midnight.

T: So you had eight hours, maybe, to pack everything you owned.

M: Oh, and it was snowing.

T: Talk about that, about getting the news that you were going to be leaving. How did you and the men around you kind of deal with that?

M: I don’t know that we dealt with it. It was inevitable. I don’t have an opinion that I know of. Again, because I’m Jewish, I was pretty well off to sit out the war in a POW camp if I had to be on the ground.

T: Sure.

(1, B, 684)

M: The answer to the question is, I was not overcome with the confinement because I had no alternative. Guys were trying to escape all the time. If I tried to escape and I was identified as a Jew in that part of Germany, I’m dead.

T: Yes. And yet, now the camp is going to be evacuated and you don’t know where you’re going.

M: We didn’t know that we were going. No. We didn’t know where we were going. Can you imagine, 1800 men lined up on some roads alongside the camp, and it’s snowing and two o’clock in the morning.

T: It was cold too, wasn’t it?


T: What did you have with you? What did you take?

M: Everything that I could that I thought would keep me warm. And the best friend that I made had never seen a snowflake in his life. You know how we survived? At night when we didn’t have any place to stay, and there’s 1800 men in this column plus maybe one hundred German guards and somebody’s got to feed them and house them. We would just go off in the snow alongside the road.

When I was twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old and a Boy Scout, I remember very clear to this day and I’m eighty-two, but one of the expeditions we had was to
go to Forest Lake on a bus. Our scout troop. Stay out overnight. So I learned to sleep in the snow. And the fellow that I marched with—we were practically holding hands we were such good friends. I liked him, and he became my best friend because he was a thief and he got stuff for us to eat that other guys didn’t have.

T: This is a guy you knew in camp as well, right?

M: No. I hardly knew him in camp.

T: So he’s somebody new for you?

M: Right.

T: What’s his name?

M: He died recently. His name is Renato Enselmo Recucci, a Catholic Italian kid from San Francisco. He taught me a lot.

T: How did you end up walking with him? Here’s a guy you didn’t really know before.

M: Because I learned to love him. That kid, Ray Recucci, could steal anything imaginable. We got fed through his ability to steal.

T: He stealing, stealing from whom?

M: I’ll tell you. The second day we were out, and we’d had nothing to eat and didn’t know where we were going and we didn’t understand German and the guards are screaming and the sirens and the guns and the bayonets and no direction. We walked by a farm and at the front of the farmyard at the end of the sidewalk was a farmer and a woman, obviously his wife, and a little girl. They were just…we weren’t in formation. I’m talking about a column that takes four or five hours to pass by a farm gate. So anyhow, we got to the end of the farm. He opened his jacket. He had a chicken. Reached in and stole a chicken. Choked it and killed it and put it in his jacket and nobody saw him.

T: He was a good friend to have, in other words, in a situation like this.

M: I met a guy at a reunion in Houston from Albuquerque. Kelly. We killed the chicken and eventually cooked it. When everybody else was asleep. And he looked at me and he said, “Now I know you! You’re the guy that dropped the feathers on the march!”

T: From the chicken.

M: Yes.
T: But you didn't share what you had.

(1, B, 762)

M: Between the two of us we did.

T: But not with other people.

M: No.

T: How come?

M: We were starving to death.

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

T: So in a sense, it was every man for himself?


T: You mean the Germans never supplied anything for you?

M: Nothing. Not a bowl of grout. Nothing. Some of the guys became pretty desperate. Pretty desperate. But not Recucci and I. We were well fed. We just went along for the ride.

T: So you managed to scrounge food on a daily basis from somewhere.

M: Recucci could. We could go through a town and maybe walk by a food warehouse and we’d get to the end, and he’d open his jacket and he’d have four potatoes. I don’t know how he did it. He was just a born thief.

T: When you walked through these towns, did you come into contact with German civilians?

M: No, but we don’t understand German so we didn’t know if their screaming or crying was out of pathetic feeling or antagonism. This column of men is like four or five hours long from beginning to end. Of course, the people in the towns and the villages and the farms and whatever else, they were terrified.

T: You didn’t get an impression one way or the other that they were—

M: We don’t understand the language.
T: Sometimes body language can tell you something. Whether someone’s angry at you or—

M: I can’t remember. Just people would stand by their doorway or their place of business or by the side of the road, and the German guards would placate them in some way that I don’t understand.

T: On this march did you march every day?

M: Every day.

T: Most days?

M: All day, every day.

T: Always the same number of hours, or was it just a few hours...

M: Always different.

T: So a couple hours one day, a lot of hours the next day.

M: Depends on the weather, the temperature, and the road, and the guards and, and, and...I could never retrace it on a map. I don’t know.

T: A lot of it was winding, I think. Did the guards change or did you have the same guards the whole time?

M: There were so many guards that they would appear as being assigned to a certain part of the march that we knew nothing about.

T: So you didn’t communicate with those guards at all.

M: We couldn’t understand each other anyhow.

T: As you’re walking there, what do you talk about when you’re marching?

(2, A, 26)

M: How can they do this to us? How can a military force take a bunch of POWs and point them in a direction that they don’t even know where they’re going? No discipline. No cut orders. Not what we were used to. Once you get in the military and an order is cut, you obey it.

T: Here it sounds more chaotic, the way you’re describing it.

M: Yes.
T: Was the column, that you recall, ever strafed by Allied aircraft?

M: No. We saw Allied aircraft. And prayed both ways. If we hit the ditch we could avoid it. I think the same question could be answered of fighter pilots. We made a flag, an American flag. But that doesn’t mean anybody’s going to believe it, because it’s got stars and stripes.

T: Or that they could see it from where they are anyway. In a sense it sounds like a lot of…a pretty mundane time of kind of plodding along to who knows where and wondering what the next day’s going to bring.

M: Yes.

T: Now the weather improved, got a little warmer as the days went past?

M: Sure. It was January 29 the night we got turned out. It’s only a matter of a couple of weeks until the end of February. By that time everything was thawing. Although we didn’t have a thermometer. The days would be tolerably warm. First of all, they don’t have very severe...if you’re from Minnesota, they don’t have very severe weather there at all. My buddy Recucci, the first night we were out, he thought we would all choke to death from the snow and it really wasn’t a major snow.

T: You’re right, the winters aren’t, generally, as cold over there, in central Germany, as they are here in Minnesota

M: But there was a lot of snow that night. January 29.

T: It was a snowy cold winter that winter of ‘45.

M: Yes.

T: Marching along there, as you marched day after day, it could happen and some guys did, run away from the column. Try to escape.

M: They did.

T: Yes. Again, is that something that you thought about or again, was the safest place for you...

M: Everybody thought about it. I was warned and told if you do, there’s no American to cover for you.

T: So was the safest place again for you with the group?

M: With the column. Or with the barracks. Or with the Americans.
T: It sounds like something you knew from the beginning and kept in your mind that the safest place was with the group.

M: I can’t remember when I learned it, but I learned it pretty good and I lived it.

T: You got to VII-A Moosburg, in southern Germany. After eighty-six days or something like that. Marching.

M: We’re not sure. It’s either eighty-six, eighty-seven, or eighty-eight.

T: That’s almost three months in any case.

M: Yes.

(2, A, 57)

T: When you got to VII-A Moosburg, in April, Germany’s imploding, to put it politely. What conditions greeted you at that camp at VII-A when you got there?


T: Tents or buildings?

M: Buildings.

T: So you had barracks. How would you compare the conditions at VII-A to what you had at Luft III?

M: No comparison. Stalag Luft III was a paradise of prison camps. Aside from discipline and congestion and antagonisms and differences. Outside of those things, it was a paradise because VII-A was a nightmare. Do you realize there was 110,000 men in that stockade?

T: It was packed to overflowing, it’s true.

M: And they were from all over the world. From India, from Africa, the United States, Canada. Anybody that was even hostile or at war with Germany.

T: So you saw people of all makes and models, as it were.

M: Yes. There was a bunch of Indian Sikhs in our building that were kind of interesting. They spoke English. They were conscripted Indians at some point in World War II. It was really fun being with them. They were the ones that they never had their hair cut their whole life. One man would be standing at point A and one at point B and he’d make a little knot and he had this long cloth and he would turn
around and walk like this and the other guy would cover his head with that circular
cloth around and around. And then they prayed very devotedly, which was unusual
for us. We don’t see people drop down to their knees and cry and avail themselves
to religious destiny like those Sikhs did. I don’t know of anybody that was on the
march that would even understand. They were captured someplace, I don’t know.
Eastern Poland or eastern Romania. They were conscripted by the English
government for combat and how they got in, I don’t know.

T: They were in your barracks. For a kid from St. Paul, Minnesota, this is something
brand new, isn’t it?

M: Yes.

T: Seeing people that just...like nothing you grew up with.

M: Right.

T: How did you experience the liberation of VII-A?

M: Happiest day of my life, I guess.

T: What happened on that day?

M: We knew the Americans were coming. There was 110,000 men in that
compound and not all of us were in buildings. There were times when they turned
us out of the building and we had to stay outside. I know one time that we were
there we stayed outside three or four days. Never got into a bed.

T: So it was packed to overflowing.

M: Yes. And they had come in, or something, faster than they could be recorded who
they were. We didn’t know. But what we did know was...word of mouth had it that
[American General George] Patton just crossed from France into Germany and
Patton, and the Third Army and...Battle of the Bulge...

T: So the rumors were around about Americans in the area.

M: Yes. One night, one Saturday night, we heard small arms fire and those of us that
were—not us, those GIs, this was not an Air Force camp.

T: It was an everything camp.

(2, A, 100)

M: They said, “What’s the matter with you guys! That’s small arms fire. Somebody’s
shooting pistols at each other and a lot of them.” So we went to sleep about ten or
eleven o'clock and the following morning the word went, for those of us that spoke English, the word went fast. They're Americans, and they're close, and they're coming. And the next thing you know, about ten o'clock in the morning, through the barbed wire fence came a tank.

T: Literally.

M: Actually. A GI gray-green tank with a white star on it and a guy standing up out of the turret said, “Any Americans in here? Any Americans?” Boy, did we find him fast!

T: Was your response one of, do you remember, being one of jubilation or...

M: Oh, jubilation. I'm telling you, we had been on the road since January 29. This was the first week of April. We had been on the road since January 29. Hadn't slept in a bed. Hadn't had a cooked meal. Hadn't had a toilet. And here comes an American through the fence. “Any Americans here?” Boy, they climbed on that tank just like bugs.

T: And there were, of course, a lot of guys in the camp as you mentioned. Now with the Germans gone, how was order kept in the camp?

M: It wasn't. The minute that tank came through we never saw a German guard again.

T: The Germans were gone. What happened in the camp then? You've got tens of thousands of men and no food supplies and—

M: Well, to some of the POWs it was very strange but it wasn't to us. About two or three o'clock in the afternoon a Red Cross support wagon came through the hole in the fence. Every American knows what a Red Cross truck is. But some of them, like the Romanians and the Hungarians and the Austrians and Russians, they didn't know what the Red Cross was. It might be another fake invasion of our peace and quiet. They didn't know. So we had the Red Cross pretty much to ourselves that first day. And then the following day the Red Cross truck came in with women.

T: How did that go over at the camp?

M: Oh, that was wild (laughs). They were lucky they got out of there alive.

T: How long did you end up staying at the camp before you were finally evacuated?

M: I would kind of think that that Sunday that I'm describing, I would say from the time we first were made aware that the Americans were coming and were at hand would have been about the last week of April. And we were officially liberated by
Patton, General George S. Patton, about 16 or 17 April [Records indicate that VII-A Moosburg was liberated by American forces on 29 April 1945].

T: After the liberation you stayed a couple of weeks, living in VII-A there.

M: Yes. But well fed. Food trucks coming in twenty-four hours a day. Some of them...one time there was a truck came in that had some fresh fruits and vegetables on it, and I don’t think he got one hundred feet inside the gate and the POWs just peeled off everything that was in that truck.

T: You’ve been a POW for a lot of months. How did your system handle suddenly getting lots of food again?

M: I don’t know. Get it as fast as you can steal it.

T: When you finally did leave the camp, when did you first have a chance to send word to your wife and to your dad that you were okay?

M: The process was that each country came into Stalag VII-A to get its own POWs. England came in. Poland came, and Romania. Hungary, Russia. Sent troops from somewhere. Because they would call out. They’d get up on a pedestal and they’d call out. Like the Americans would call, “Any American GIs here?” And they would call out something and then the next thing you know a thousand men would rush toward that hard stand.

(2, A, 159)

T: Were you flown out of Moosburg from a nearby base?

M: They built an airfield right alongside of VII-A. American engineers came in and with that netting, that metal mesh. They made a runway, and I think about nine or ten days after that liberation a DC-3 flew in and said they were going to start taking men back to American hospitals.

T: Did you go to a hospital in France?

M: Yes. Camp Lucky Strike.

T: And from there you took a ship back to the States?

M: I got assigned to a hospital ship.

T: What kind of shape were you in physically by this time?
M: Bad. I was in bad shape. I only weighed sixty pounds. The picture you’ve got of a couple of American GIs sitting on a bench is about the way I looked. I had nothing covering my ribs. And very weak.

T: You would be from walking all that distance. My goodness.

M: Yes. And not having had anything cooked. From 29 January to sometime in the middle of April. That’s a long time to go hungry.

T: Yes, that’s for sure. To jump ahead, when you first got back to Minnesota, did you see your wife and your dad too when you got back here?

M: Yes.

T: How much did they want to know about your POW experience?

M: Nobody asked me any questions.

T: Nothing at all?

M: I had been sending Lorraine [wife] *Stars and Stripes* papers about the release of this prison camp and Moosburg.

T: So in a sense, they were prepared for you. They knew the background. Did they ask you about any details? How was it for you personally? Anything like that?

M: Oh, yes. Everything.

T: Asked everything. And did you answer their questions?

M: Sure.

T: Did you give them details, or did you hold back a little bit?

M: We all had to hold back a little bit. Because we had no way of knowing how far into the United States the publicity had gotten about how Jews had been treated for the last seven or eight years. Most people didn’t know.

T: Yes. When you got back did you spend any time in a rest and relaxation camp in the States?

(2, A, 190)

M: Oh, yes. I got back I think about the end of May or maybe the first week of June. I can’t remember. But the people that lived across the alley from Lorraine’s home in South St. Paul owned a resort in northern Wisconsin. The man that owned the
resort, Sam Eddinger, said to Lorraine, "When your husband gets home, you're going to be my guests and you'll come up to Webster, Wisconsin, and you can stay there at our expense as long as you want to stay there." So we did. We were there six weeks, and plenty to eat. I put on weight fast and I could go to the doctor and have him tell me I was going to survive. I was going to live. Listen, I only weighed sixty pounds when I got home.

T: When you got out of the service in September [1945], did you go to work right away? When you got out of the service?

M: Yes, I did. Got a job in a furniture store.

T: Here in St. Paul?

M: Seventh and Minnesota in St. Paul. Cardozo's Furniture. Ralph Cardozo, the son of the owner, was a fellow I had known at Central High and we were good friends.

T: Did you work for them for a while?

M: Several years.

T: So this is the first job that you had after the service then. Working at Cardozo's.

M: Yes. It certainly was. I couldn't work outside. I thought about it. I went down into the yards for a couple of days during the wintertime and my feet had been frozen.

T: From the march?

M: Yes. I had to work inside.

T: And you knew that pretty quickly, it sounds like.

M: Oh, yes.

T: Did your feet bother you permanently?

M: Yes. Still do.

T: So in a sense, here's a change for you. No more working outside. You've got to find a job inside. It's a new way of life, really.

M: Yes. I had a physical last January or February. Not the last one, but a year before. I had a doctor at the VA, Dr. Bananow, and I told him the story about having my feet frozen on the march. I said, "I don't know if they were actually frozen hard, but they were pretty damn cold and solid as a rock." So he took one look at them and
massaged it a little bit and took a couple little flesh samples off there and the next thing you know I get a letter from the Veterans Administration. “You’ve suffered a ten percent skin and flesh loss in your feet and we’re going to put you on the list for a survivor benefit.” And I’ve had the advantage of that ever since. That was a year ago January or February.

T: After you were released from VII-A, so from that time forward, how often did you have or do you still have dreams or nightmares about your POW experience?

(2, A, 231)

M: I had nightmares for the first couple of months, but it didn’t last long.

T: Was it, from your memory, more about being a flier or more about being a POW?

M: More about being a POW. Because people to this day live all around us. Your neighbors, your students, my neighbors, my children. They can’t associate anything I’m saying with a guy freezing to death or starving to death. It isn’t in their world. I gave a talk. I gave several of them. I gave a talk after I’d been home a couple of weeks. An organization said, we’d like to have you come and talk to our members. I told the people there in my talk of the antagonism that Americans felt about the Germans because of the way they had conducted themselves during the war and—incidentally, when I get through telling you this, I’ll make another statement that’s been instrumental in my life. But I heard a little short man after the speech that I gave. A little short little guy said, “And that son of a bitch is standing up on the stage and telling us about how they killed all the Jews!” He didn’t believe it then, and the war was over.

T: This was right after the war ended, you said.

M: Yes.

T: Have you always found it easy to talk about your POW experience?

M: The reason that I welcome this interview so much is, I have nobody to tell.

T: You’ve had, as a counterpoint, you’ve had coworkers. You’ve had a wife. You’ve had kids, neighbors.

M: Listen, when I first started at Cardozo’s and Ralph Cardozo, the son of the owner and a very good childhood friend of mine, lifetime friend of mine, mentioned to the men that worked there that I had been a prisoner of war and one guy, a fellow named Raude said, “He’s one of those sons of bitches that got all our cigarettes.”

T: That was his first response?
M: Yes, it was. And that’s true. That’s real. My own children, I don’t think, know what I mean when I say, like at the Battle of the Bulge or something that’s been recent in our life that’s been really devastating, my own children, I don’t think would understand what a prisoner of war is. One side might be forced to capitulate before another side.

T: Were they curious growing up to hear about what you’d gone through?

M: No. And the reason [is] that their teachers in the grade school absolutely discouraged any talk of war. And I’m not talking about one of our kids, I’m talking about all three of them. Somebody brought up that they had a relative that was a prisoner of war or something like that, and the teacher excused them from the class and told them not to do that anymore.

T: So your kids didn’t really ask you questions as they were growing up?

M: No.

T: Do you have any grandchildren?

M: Oh, yes.

T: Has it been different with them? Do they ask you?

M: To a greater extent, yes, but not much greater. Again, they’re in a different world. Opportunities are different. Training is different. My wife was a school teacher and she’s never stopped going to school. So all three of our kids, they all have post-graduate degrees. All three of them do.

(2, A, 297)

T: But there hasn’t been an interest, on their part, in your experiences.

M: This military stuff, no.

T: One last question: if you think about yourself before you were a POW, and you think of yourself after that experience was over, how would you say that Mark Hertz had changed as a person? Or had he?

M: That’s a darned good question. And I’m going to answer it this way. I’m not trying to evade the answer, but I’m simply going to say that in my life as it has progressed in these years since…it’s going to be an approach to the answer to your question. My very favorite subject is not politics and it’s not religion and it’s not social acceptance—my real love and my real study is military logic. Now go back to your question. You know about how it’s affected me. My very favorite subject is military logic. If I had to, in this room at this time, if I had to tell one of our children,
or one of your children, about life, what I thought life was like now or would be in the future, my answer would be: get acquainted with the military logic because you're going to be living with it the rest of your life. I mean the countries in Europe, every one of them, would go to war in five seconds for some reason. You can take it from there and that's a different subject. Every country in the Middle East has either a greater amount of religion that won't tolerate peace among people or understanding. Just the opposite. If they don't pray the way I pray, we'll kill the son of a bitches. Am I making my point?

T: That's interesting. That's the last question I had, so let me thank you again for your time this evening, Mr. Hertz. I'll turn the machine off.

END OF INTERVIEW