Milton Koshiol was born 11 September 1924 in St. Cloud, Minnesota, one of five children; he grew up there and graduated from Cathedral High School in 1942.

In January 1944, Milt was drafted into the US Army, and trained as an infantryman. He arrived in England in July 1944, and by December of that year was in Europe serving with Company A, 10th Armored Infantry Battalion, 4th Armored Division.

On 28 March 1945, just six weeks before the end of the war, elements of the 4th Armored, some three hundred men, were ordered on a mission to free American POWs held at Stalag XIII-C Hammelburg, some fifty miles behind German lines. The raid failed miserably; more than thirty soldiers were killed and most of the others were taken prisoner – Milt Koshiol was one of them.

Milt spent thirty-two days as a POW. With Germany collapsing, his stays at camps were brief: XIII-C Hammelburg, then XIII-D Nuremberg, then a march south to VII-A Moosburg. This overcrowded camp was liberated by US forces on 29 April 1945.

After evacuation and return to the United States, Milt spent several months in hospital, then was discharged in April 1946. Again a civilian, he got married in 1947 (wife Rosemary) and helped to raise six children at the family home in Paynesville. Milt spent forty years as owner and operator of Zapf Leather and Western Wear in Paynesville.

Milton Koshiol died 28 March 2011, aged 86.
T: Today is 21 May 2004 and this is the POW Project interview with Mr. Milt Koshiol in Paynesville, Minnesota. First, Mr. Koshiol, on the record, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today.

M: You’re welcome.

T: Let me put some information in the record and correct me if you hear any mistakes. You were born on 11 September 1924 in St. Cloud, Minnesota. One of five children. You went to school in St. Cloud and graduated there from Cathedral High School 1942. You were drafted into the US Army. Entered service in January 1944. You arrived in England, according to your discharge papers, in July 1944, and by December of that year were in Europe serving with Company A, 10th Armored Infantry Battalion, 4th Armored Division, of the US Army.

You were involved in the Hammelburg Raid at the end of March 1945, the attempt by some of General Patton’s troops to free some prisoners from Stalag XIII-C at Hammelburg. It’s that raid and its failure that led to your capture by the Germans, and that’s where I want to pick the story up. This team of soldiers was assembled to go on this raid; was any indication given to you about the likely success or failure of this particular mission or what you were really doing?

M: We knew we were going in there to liberate a prison camp. Because my squad leader, his name was Nick Carrellas, he pulled me to the sidelines and he said, “Our company has just volunteered to go in and liberate a prison camp six miles inside enemy lines. What do you think of that?” I said, “Well, if that’s what we gotta do, we gotta do it.” He said, “It’s George Patton’s son-in-law that’s in there.” But George Patton let anybody know that he knew. He said he didn’t know his son-in-law was in there, but me, a little old private, knew. The general sure had to know that his son-in-law was in there.

T: So you knew even before this raid got under way.

M: I knew before we pulled out. Yes.

T: And if you knew, it probably means all the other enlisted men knew too.
M: I don’t know about the rest of them. I don’t think Nick would talk to anybody. He talked to me quite a bit where a lot of other guys, most of them, were replacements that had just come in. So he didn’t say much to them. And I was a replacement when I first went in there too. Coming from England. First I was a replacement in the 82\textsuperscript{nd} Airborne. I went up in a glider. Two different times I was up in gliders and that was about when they had a lot of casualties in Holland with the paratroopers and so forth. So I was in the 82\textsuperscript{nd} Airborne for two months. Then he says you gotta go to Europe. So I went across the English Channel to France, and then from France we went up to Belgium to the Battle of the Bulge. I was a replacement. I was a replacement when they needed me in the 82\textsuperscript{nd} Airborne, but that passed because they really needed help in the Battle of the Bulge.

T: Right.

M: So that’s how I got there.

T: So by March as replacements were coming in then, you’re one of the more experienced men in the company.

M: Yes. I got two, three months in there anyway. It makes a difference.

T: Did you see yourself as more experienced at that time than these replacements coming in that you had, in a sense you had something you could...

M: The only thing is, you could tell sometimes when a gun was shooting at you. It’s louder or something. There’s a certain tone that you pick out of there. You could tell them that. I told that to the new ones coming in, and the same thing with the incoming artillery shells. I mean they’re diving for cover all the time. I said, well, that one you don’t have to worry about. That’s way over our heads. Tell them that they don’t have to hit the dirt every time.

(1, A, 42)

T: So after some months at this you do pick up and sort of internalize what’s dangerous and what isn’t.

M: Yes. You do.

T: On the raid to Stalag XIII-C at Hammelburg, when did it become...now, you got to the camp, didn’t you?

M: To the prison camp?

T: Yes. You got to Stalag XIII-C.
M: We got there but we had a little trouble going in there, driving in that sixty miles or whatever it was. Because I know a guy was shot off the back of a tank right ahead of the vehicle I was in. It was a half-track and he was on the tank. Then a captain came by and he hollered at me, “Hey, Soldier! Get up on this tank here. Some guy just got hurt out there.” I got up there and the comforter was full of blood. I threw the comforter off because I didn’t want to be sitting up there in somebody’s blood. That was between Lohr and Germunden when that happened, and it was really anti-aircraft. It sounded like anti-aircraft gun coming from…I wondered how there would be an anti-aircraft gun, but then later I found out there was a railroad tracks down below there. These railroad tracks had flatbeds on them and they had a lot of artillery for shooting airplanes and so forth. That’s what they were shooting up at the column. But they couldn’t see anything for all the trees.

We got to the village of Germunden in the afternoon after we passed a number of towns. Before Germunden, we got to Lohr where there was a roadblock. We lost some time.

T: Do you remember when you actually arrived at the prison camp? What was that like to actually get there, and what impression did that camp make on you as you got there?

M: At Germunden we ran into a situation there where we had to cross a bridge. Nick, my leader, he hollered for two guys to take the lead here and go across the bridge. I was back farther in the line. So these two guys went and the column started moving that way. Well, when these two guys were right on the middle of the bridge, they blew it up. The Germans did. So those two guys were really nailed.

T: They went down with the bridge.

M: We had to turn and come back and go around a different way. This all took time. That’s what—Abe Baum, that’s what our leader’s name is—he wanted us to get there when it was still dark out or something and get out of there before it was all daylight. It took us a long time to get out there. When we first got started we had a big, there was I think they called it bazooka, Panzer...

T: Panzerfaust.

M: At Schweinheim. Either Schweinheim or Aschaffenburg. They’re side by side. This is where we started out. Some terrible shells came in on us. They blew up the first tank they had and Abe Baum said, “We can’t be losing this stuff here going out there now.” So he got a different company to come in and open up a path so we could get through. But that took four hours probably. So we’re getting started that long, four hours late.

T: It’s hard. Time mattered on this particular mission.
M: Well, it would have been more a surprise. They wouldn’t know what’s going on. They didn’t know what was going on anyway. The Germans.

T: When you got to the prison camp, how intact was the group that started out? Were most of you still...

M: Oh, yes. They had a few casualties but not anything big there that way. I just was shooting down there. Some shells were coming, but my bullets couldn’t be doing nothing because you couldn’t see anything. It’s all leaves.

T: Right.

M: That’s where, before you got to Germunden...Germunden must have been in a pretty big area. I mean they had...they were unloading the trains with SS troopers and they were all out of the cars or cabs already. We got by there and boy, we had all kinds of trouble.

(1, A, 87)

T: When you got to the camp, talk about what you saw when you got to this prison camp.

M: First got the tank...coming up a hill. The prison camp was on kind of on a hill. It was hilly country. We came up from the bottom and that area had...they always had somebody shooting at you. I could see the camp. I said, “There’s the camp. Where do we go?” We kept going up there and all of a sudden, boom! I’m flying through the air. The tank got hit by a bazooka and my squad leader got his legs all shot full of shrapnel and I had...I don’t know what I had. I had either a bullet or shrapnel went across my knuckle and a hole through the pocket of my jacket, but I didn’t get hurt really. I was luckier than heck. Squad leader Nick Kuralis got his legs all shot up with shrapnel. When the bazooka came up somebody hollered, “Let’s get them suckers out of there!” The Germans were right up there. We killed two Germans there and about that time the tanker stopped. This was right outside of the camp. He got out and said, “Them sons of bitches killed my gunner in here.” He ran down there with his pistol to make sure they were dead. He shot ahead of him down there in the foxhole they had there. The Panzerfaust...you really got hit hard on that one.

T: Could you see the prisoners inside the fence? Could they see you?

M: I don’t think they could. I didn’t get into the camp at all. That was on one side of us. It went off this way and we were coming up on the side here. We were getting enemy fire from this end here and that was the back of the camp. It was mostly gunfire. Like rifles. It wasn’t machine guns. It was rifles. I was right behind a light tank. This was after the other tank got blown up. I was behind a light tank and the light tank was shooting over at the...I think it was a guardhouse of some sort. It was just a tower of some sort. We were getting this fire from there. I’m shooting over
there at that tower and all of a sudden the tank is gone. I was standing out there all alone. The bullets come whistling by, you know how fast they can really go. I zigzagged out of there and got behind a haystack and about then I think is when the camp surrendered. When the camp surrendered, all the prisoners were out there and started walking in the woods. They thought that the war was over, that this is our troops here now. We didn’t tell them that. They didn’t have any idea what the deal was there. They just thought our line was up there.

T: How chaotic was the situation? You’ve got prisoners coming out of this camp and...

M: Yes. See that was a mixed up deal. Now these guys started walking up there and I think they told them where to go. That they had a long way to go. That they have to go fifty miles. We can only take so many guys with us. And we were kind of rigged up for 150 prisoners. We were supposed to come. When they opened up the gates and found out how many there was, instead of 150 there was 1500.

T: There’s no way you could take them with you.

M: No way in the world could you bring them with. So some of them, they told the guys, some of them that want to fight, you can come with us but most of you better stay put. So the ones that went way out there, they walked for three or four hours and they’d come back to their camp.

T: How long did you and the men you were with, how long did you stay at the camp before you started to go back again?

M: Well, there was kind of a lapse in time right then, and I think that’s when they were trying to figure out what to do with all these guys they had there. They went out walking towards the woods and I never saw them again after that. But we stayed out there and just kind of protected the area as much as we could there. Then it was just starting to get dark out and then about the time it got dark we had to be there a good two to three hours.

T: Sort of milling around the outside of the camp there.

M: Some of them were probably outside the camp. I don’t know. There were other prisoners in there too. Serbs and different bunches in there.

(1, A, 137)

T: That’s right. Did you start back towards American lines then? Or in that direction?

M: We just started going to get out of there. I didn’t see a map or anything. I wouldn’t know which way to go. I didn’t know which way was north or whatever.
We just went out there and didn’t know where we were going. That was up to the squad leader, Abe Baum. We started going and it just got dark. Then I was maybe back four or five vehicles. You heard a big explosion up ahead and pretty soon someone's coming back and says, gotta turn around and go back. The road's blocked up there. Well, they had a roadblock set up there, and bazookas. They always knocked out the front vehicle. Every trail we went to get out of there was blocked. We couldn’t get out of there.

So all night we’re trying to get out of there. And the next morning, just starting to get light and that’s when the squad leader says, “We’re in a hopeless situation. Everybody for himself. Head for Hanau-on-the-Main.” We never had compasses or anything. We wouldn't know which way to go to get out of there. Some guys started walking that way but shells started coming in. Heard an explosion and bingo! A shell right over our heads and this and that. And they started shooting. I looked out there and I could see tank, tank, tank, tank, tank...about eight or ten tanks.

T: Their tanks.

M: German tanks. And they’re all just the barrels coming over this hill and they started shooting and they never stopped shooting. They were the best organized drive anybody could ever have.

T: How soon after this were you captured?

M: After that? Oh, probably an hour or an hour and a half.

T: Talk if you will about actually being captured there. I mean, in a sense you’ve got the Germans face to face with you. Probably much closer than you had them before.

M: Of course when the tanks come they had infantry behind them. There was a tank on the left side of the building. One of our tanks. I went over there and peaked around the corner of the building to see what I could see coming. I could see these tanks coming. I could see the few infantry guys out there. All of a sudden a tank shot a shot off, and when they shoot a shot off they back out so that the enemy don’t know where exactly it comes from. I was standing right there and I bet that thing was no more than an inch, two inches away from running over me. That tank. I thought, boy, I better not get too close to a tank. Don’t know which way they’re going to go. But he backed up and we kept firing and they shot us and the building was blown all the heck. Found out later the building was...they had put a bunch of our wounded in there. They painted a red cross on the front of it. But they blasted the heck out of that building. I don’t know how many guys were killed in that thing or not. If any were. There was no door out there in the back where we were. There was just me and this Bob Thompson and another guy out there.

T: Talk about the moment of...was there a decision made among the three of you to surrender or how did the actual...
M: There were a bunch of guys that were going in there with their hands up on top of their head. We stayed behind the building there quite a while. There was a lot of them went down there, and they were loading half-tracks and all that. Their infantry, they came right up by us, and there was a guy down below that had been checking guys coming in there for firearms and so forth. That’s when I went down there. There were already a couple pickups full of guys that had surrendered already, because nobody just hollered we’re surrendering or anything like that.

T: It was more piecemeal it sounds like. A few at a time.

M: Yes.

T: How did you make the decision to surrender?

M: For me to surrender...I couldn’t go anyplace else. Didn’t have any choice. Behind me there was a hill there. I see two guys going up there and bingo, a shell comes sailing over the head. Blew those two guys....were flying through the air and another guy right behind us had his arm shot off. Bob Thompson says, “Gee, did you see that? The guy’s arm just flew off of him.” That was right behind us. So we didn’t have any choice to go anywhere.

(1, A, 195)

T: You have your hands on your head and you’re walking toward the Germans.

M: You’ve got your hands on your head, and leave your firearm sitting down there and you walk down there. That’s where the guys frisk you. He opened up my jacket and he looked and he saw that I had that badge, that German combat badge [picked up as a souvenir]. The badge had a German grenade and a rifle bayonet crisscrossed on the badge. This guy saw that pinned on the inside of my jacket, and he looked at me for a long time. Eyes right on me. Geez, I forgot to throw that dang badge away. Because I had picked that up in Bastogne. I thought I would be killed by this guy, I really thought I would be shot. After, I don’t know, it seemed like quite a while, maybe it was not such a long time, instead he closed up my jacket and he pushed me to one of our half-tracks. Boy, was I thankful for that. He could have killed me. I owe that guy. If it hadn’t been that close to the war’s end, I’m sure I would have been shot. He looked at my eyes for quite a while. I owe him forever.

T: What was that like to be face to face with a German, with the enemy now, suddenly?

M: I can still see those two guys that we killed before coming up to the prison camp. Their faces. More so than I could see anybody’s faces down here.
T: Really? Those two guys that were killed, Germans that were killed, are more clear to you than for example the guy who frisked your coat?

M: Oh, yes.

T: Why do you think that is?

M: They had just shot our tank and killed a guy in the tank. Somebody hollered out, “Let’s get them sons of bitches!” We all go out there shooting. Sure as hell, killed them. Then the tank guy comes out there, and he shot them again with his pistol. Emptied his pistol in them. But down here by this building on hill 427...you just went down there and they had the two half-tracks full of prisoners. The one guy in the one I was in, one tank left already. One truck. Half-track. One guy in there was just going hysterical. “They’re going to kill us! They’re going to kill us! Don’t let them kill us!” I got over there and I said, “Hey, shut up. You’re going to put ideas in their head.” I still remembered, like in Belgium when they had the Malmedy [massacre], these guys had surrendered and the Germans got them all on one side and they backed in there with their trucks with machine guns on them and they killed, I don’t know, one hundred of them. One hundred Americans. That were surrendered.

T: Was that in your mind as you were sitting there?

M: That’s kind of what I thought of. I said, that’s what’s going to happen here if you’re going to tell them to shoot. Didn’t want that to happen like it happened to these guys.

T: Were the Germans talking to you or interacting with you at all at this point?

M: Never heard them. Talked to themselves. Never knew what they were saying.

T: They weren’t talking to the prisoners or having any kind of interaction...

M: They’d make motions. There was one old guy. He had an army uniform on. He had something to do with the army I’m sure. He was just hysterical. The Americans are such and such and screaming, “How do you like it now!” He could talk kind of English, you know. Nobody ever answered him.

T: How scared were you sitting there?

M: In the tank?

T: Yes. You’re captured...

M: When I was behind the building I thought...
T: No. When you’re captured now. You’re sitting there in this truck or this half-track or whatever it was.

(1, A, 242)

M: I wasn’t worried about nothing then. I mean, I didn’t really think about it I guess. They were going to take us over to Hammelburg and put us in the prison camp. But nobody said anything about that. But that’s where we went.

T: How long was it before they...the first place they took you was back to Hammelburg? To the prison camp?

M: Yes.

T: Were you questioned at all by someone or we might say interrogated by someone?

M: Not at Hammelburg. And not Nürnberg. But I was at Moosburg.

T: Not until you got to Moosburg.

M: Yes.

T: When you got back to Hammelburg, or even on the way, you’re sitting in this half-track with a number of other Americans.

M: Yes.

T: Were you talking among yourselves about what’s going to happen?

M: Oh, I’m sure everybody was talking to everybody else. Little tight group there. Maybe fifteen guys in the back of the wagon there like that. You could talk to them. Wonder what they’re going to do with us now. Nobody knew.

T: So there was a sense of the unknown. Where are we going now?

M: Yes.

T: But as it turns out you went to Hammelburg, where you, ironically, had just been.

M: Yes. Right. We got put in the prison camp that we liberated.

T: What happened when you got there? Take us from when you arrive at the camp and get off the half-track. What happens then?

M: When we got into the prison camp?
T: Yes.

M: We just got put into kind of a big open building. Building. It was not open, but there were no beds or bunks or anything like that in there. The Serbs were there, and the Serbs came over and gave us some of their food.

T: So the first prisoners you encounter are Serbs as opposed to Americans.

M: Yes. Of course, these guys must have been prisoners too. The Serbians. One of the guys there talked with him pretty good. Could talk a little English. We got that food from him. Got some Serbian money and a wooden shoe from the Serb. Very nice fellow. Gave him some US invasion money. I still have the shoe and the money.

T: How long were you kept there at Hammelburg, Mr. Koshiol?

M: Just overnight.

T: Any interaction with the Germans there, or pretty much a stop and then move out the next day?

M: Never saw much of Germans. Never saw much of anybody except some, a few of us guys that were there. Now I don’t know how many guys were killed and wounded. It sounded to me like there were about twenty-five guys killed and maybe forty-five, fifty wounded.

T: That’s a good...

M: But we started out with close to three hundred.

T: Going into this mission.

M: Guys going on that mission. Yes. So we got clobbered pretty hard. How many guys died with those tanks coming in, I don’t know, but I know there were bodies flying through the air.

T: That’s an image you still have in your mind.

M: I think of that every once in a while. I can picture them coming over at us with the gun barrels. Looking at you. Shooting. They didn’t let up until they were right on top of us.

T: Now you’re at Hammelburg only until the next day, apparently.

M: Yes. We were only there one day. Then we went to Nürnberg.
T: Were you moved out on the train to Nürnberg with the people you were captured with or were there others on this train too?

M: Well, there were other prisoners too. The regular prisoners were in there. They all moved over to this other prison. Especially if they were tied in with the Americans in any way.

T: I see.

M: I think all of them were Americans that came with us. There were a lot of officers, because it was a prison camp for officers.

T: That's right. Were you moved in passenger cars or boxcars?

M: Boxcar. Forty and eight I think they call them.

T: Yes. What do you remember about that train ride?

M: I remember the first thing when we first got started. Our own airplanes came and strafed the trains. They didn’t have any idea we were there. I never got hit or never heard any bullets hit, so I just assumed they were shooting at the train.

T: You could hear the planes though.

M: Oh, yes. You could hear the planes. That was when we were getting ready to go to Nürnberg.

T: What’s that like to be in a boxcar, locked in a boxcar, and hearing a strafing plane overhead?

M: When you've got the plane over your head?

T: Yes.

M: You wonder what’s going to drop out of his airplane or going to shoot at you or what they’re going to do. When we left Nürnberg going up...walking down to Moosburg. We got strafed and bombed by our own airplanes there, too. When we walked from the train to the prison camp, we saw the whole area was really bombed by our airplanes. All the buildings were blown apart.

T: Good. I’ll ask you about that. You got to XIII-D, Camp XIII-D at Nürnberg. How long did you remain at that camp?

(1, A, 318)

M: Nürnberg. We were just there overnight.
T: So you really made a couple of very brief stops.

M: Yes. That was really just a short stop, because I remember that when we first got there they gave us a bowl of soup.

T: This is the first food you've had from the Germans now?

M: Yes. We got some food from the Serbs there in Hammelburg. When we got over there to Nürnberg, we had this bowl of soup. It looked like bean soup. Some kind of a black bean in there. I picked one up and looked at it, the sucker had legs on it. A whole bunch of legs on it. So I threw all them out. He said, “Don’t throw them out. That’s your protein.”

T: Did you eat your protein?

M: I didn’t. I threw them away and I drank the broth. That was good enough for me.

T: You say you weren’t questioned here at Nürnberg either by anybody.

M: Nürnberg was a prison camp that was full of aircraft people.

T: Yes.

M: Mostly. Of course, different groups like us came in probably from other areas, but we just tied in with those guys. Never really stuck with your own group. I didn’t really know anybody excepting the guys that were in my immediate squad. But I never even saw them again after...even before we got captured.

T: You’re kind of on your own here in a sense.

M: Yes. Pretty much so.

T: At Nürnberg did you stay overnight? Do you remember?

M: Stayed overnight. The next day we start walking. Maybe walk for an hour or two. I saw two P-47s come out of the clouds up there. Looked up at the sky as we were walking down the trail. Saw these airplanes coming down there and they (machine gun sounds) shot their machine guns off the plane. Then pretty soon I see a bomb falling right off the bottom of one of our airplanes. “Hit the woods, guys!” And everybody runs over there to lay down in the woods. The shell hit right in front of us. Then we started walking again after the planes left, and they didn’t come back and strafe anymore. It was just that one bomb they had. They dropped it. We found out why they dropped it. We were right beside a railroad yard, and in the railroad yard they had a bunch of flatbeds with anti-aircraft guns and things on them, and
I'm sure that's what they were shooting for. Only they hit our column. Three Canadians got killed.

T: So it was close.

M: I think the thing was no more than a block away. Where it landed. I saw that bomb coming off the bottom of that airplane. That's something that always sticks in my mind. I mean, anybody could have gotten nailed there.

T: Including you.

M: Oh, yes. Yes. If it would have been just a little bit earlier we could have got it.

T: As you're walking—you spent a number of days walking to Moosburg—did you find yourself walking with another guy or...

M: Oh, yes. You make friends and you talk to...

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 378.

T: Let's talk about the march, because this is one of the longest periods of your POW experience.

M: Yes. It took exactly two weeks.

T: Let's talk about the Germans you encountered. There are guards walking along here?

M: There are guards walking with you. They were friendly enough. They'd talk to you and they'd talk to farmers and get potatoes for us. That's about the only thing we had to eat. Didn't have anything else to get to eat. For that whole two weeks. I can't remember ever getting a big meal of any kind or anything like that. Tried to catch a fish. It was by a creek, and you could see a fish. Made a piece of wire, tin wire, and made a loop out of it. They weren't big fish. They were trout. A couple guys ahead of me there got some, but I couldn't get one on, so I never got a fish.

T: What was your health like at this time? Were you wounded?

M: No. My health was good. The only thing I had was my knuckles, where a bullet had gotten me across the knuckle, and the hole in my pocket. Other than that...

As far as food goes, there wasn't any. The Germans never had any. So they gave us potatoes to eat. That's what we ate.

T: Scrouning for food it sounds like.
M: Yes. Take it where you can get it. We never had a chance to get it from anybody else. We never went through any other towns that I can remember.

T: So you were walking mostly country roads around the towns it sounds like.

M: It had to be. Yes.

T: When you were hungry, was it possible for you...could you go get food anywhere?

M: See I wasn't...getting hungry didn't bother me. Hell, I only weighed 110 pounds about that time. I didn't weigh much. So I didn't eat much. But I know my feet bothered me a lot. And that, I think, comes from, more than anything, the Battle of the Bulge. It was so cold in the Battle of the Bulge. It was unreal. We never had any overshoes. I was lucky that I had a pair of paratrooper boots that I got when...I told you about the 82nd Airborne?

T: Right.

M: That was over in England. I got those boots, and they helped keep your feet warm and dry. But before long I had the front end...holding it up by the campfire or whatever, which you didn’t dare start fires too often because then the Germans would see the flames. In fact, you wouldn't even smoke a cigarette and get a flame where you could get shot. But that was over in the Battle of the Bulge. But I had the whole tip of those boots of mine burned off. Trying to warm my feet up. It was so danged cold.

T: And your feet were still bothering you here in April.

M: Yes. They bothered me when we got over to America again. I told one of the guys who were checking us over coming out of there that...could I get a pair of low-cut shoes? My feet are killing me in these boots here. The toes were all burned off and they didn’t have anything to give me. That was at Fort Devons, Massachusetts.

T: The Germans. You mentioned them a moment ago as being not abusive of the prisoners, from your perspective, on this march.

M: We never got pushed around by any Germans. No. And most of the guards were older guards, older people. Not real young. But the real young ones, the Germans would put them all in the front lines.

T: What you got to guard you was...

M: I think the Home Front you might have called them, or whatever. Yes. They were older guys. You could kind of make motions and they'd know what you were talking about. I never had any trouble with any German guards really. I don’t know anybody that had any trouble with them at that stage of the game.
T: How about the overnights? You’re not checking into hotels. Where did you spend the nights?

M: On the ground.

T: The decision was made to stop, and that’s where you spent it?

M: Yes. You’d find a place and that’s where you stayed. Didn’t have any blankets or anything. Just had to get by. That’s the way you got by. A lot of guys that were walking couldn’t make the walk like that. They had blisters on their feet. Air Force guys especially. In the army you had to go on five mile hikes and things like that. Training. But the guys from the aircraft and all this and that, they didn’t...they fly their airplanes and that don't have to stay in shape like we did.

T: Some of them may have been prisoners longer than you as well, too.

M: Prisoners? Oh, yes. I’m sure. Some of those guys were prisoners for a long time.

T: In the search for food, because you must have got hungry as you walked along there, did you find yourself getting together with other guys to try to acquire food or to share food?

M: Tried to acquire a Red Cross parcel it was called. We did end up with one Red Cross parcel for four guys. Enough there. Kind of split up what was in there with us four guys. Then you had to take a little bit at a time, because you never knew when the next meal was going to come. When we were walking.

T: How did you get together with these three other guys? Did you know and of them?

M: Not really. They weren’t guys from the squad I was in at all. Didn’t know any of them. Just guys just like you, just walking with you and talking with you and that’s it. I had the name of a number of them and I had them all on a dollar bill or something, but I don’t know what I ever did with that.

T: You’re walking along. How did you spend your time walking along? I mean you’re walking but you have time to kill?

M: It’s like I do now, I guess. You look at the territory where you’re walking through, and you’re seeing something new all the time really. When you’re hiking. That’s why I did a lot of hiking in my life. Always same feeling. Look at the land. You can kind of...everything is just something different all the time.
Oh, and then marching down this...walking down the road going from Nürnberg to Moosburg, there was a P-51 Mustang airplane that must have known that the aircraft boys were in that line with us. They came flying over and he wiggled his wings. Friendly enough to let us all know they know we're here. That happened every day. That airplane came over.

T: Kind of keeping tabs on the column.

M: I think mostly because it was Air Force guys primarily in there. They had to know that. I'm sure that they had to know that. Otherwise they wouldn't be wobbling their wings. Just for us infantry.

T: How many of you were walking in this group you were with?

M: Oh! Hundreds of them. I don't know how many would be...with all the...the whole prison camp was full of Americans. Most of them were Air Force. Our group, how many were there, I don't know. Some of them never even went to Moosburg. I don't know where they went. Maybe different prison camp.

T: Did you make little notes for yourself as you were walking there?

M: No.

T: Any kind of a diary?

M: No.

T: So you filed away memories but you didn’t write them down.

M: Yes. I had no pencil or tablet to write anything on. I didn’t write anything.

T: What kind of shape were you in when you got to Moosburg after all those days of walking?

**{1, B, 458}**

M: I was really in pretty good shape except was hungry. Everybody was that way.

T: Right.

M: But when we got to Moosburg they fed us. I remember one of the first things we got was sauerkraut, and the stuff was real dark brown, and I’m not used to sauerkraut like that. I couldn’t eat it. So I didn’t eat it. Everybody else seemed to eat theirs. But I didn’t eat it. I can’t remember what we even had to eat other days.

T: Were you assigned to a barracks or to a tent there?
M: There, too, we were in a big tent. Everybody slept on the ground. There were no bunks to put you in. There were so many prisoners there. So we slept right on the ground. I think they gave us a blanket. You wrapped that blanket on you on the ground and that was it. Double your jacket up for a pillow.

T: There you go.

M: That was as good as you could do.

T: Now you did get POW dog tags there.

M: Yes.

T: Does that mean that you were really kind of questioned by the Germans or officially...

M: I think we all...everybody got a set of dog tags. Because you all had to go in and get deloused. For one thing.

T: When you arrived.

M: Yes. They checked you over and gave you a physical kind of. I remember you get this dust of some sort they put on you to kill the bugs.

T: Did it work?

M: Evidently. I didn’t know I had any.

T: Did you pick up any bugs, lice, fleas, anything like that, while you were in Moosburg?

M: Not that I know of. No.

T: You were fortunate then.

M: Yes. A lot of people have trouble with that?

T: Oh, yes. Lice and fleas especially. Yes.

M: Well, see I was in the prison camp for two weeks. That’s about it. Two weeks of walking and two weeks there, and that was about it.

T: That tent. Paint a picture of that. How big and what’s it like inside?
M: It was long. It was a long tent. It was wide. All canvas. How many feet? Maybe one hundred feet long. I’m sure there were different ones. You just go down there and snuggle up to the ground.

T: Full of guys inside?

M: Yes. The whole thing was full.

T: And mostly Americans in with you?

M: That I couldn’t say for sure. I would think they would probably keep the Americans separated.

(1, B, 486)

T: From your recollection you’re not sure though.

M: I don’t think so. I don’t think there was anybody else there. Just Americans.

T: How was the food distributed there at Moosburg? And cooked?

M: That’s the touchy part of that camp. Remembering nothing about the food. I don’t have in my mind anything about the food. I don’t know what we had to eat.

T: So you’re not sure whether the Germans distributed food or whether there was just sort of...

M: Had to get something. Had to get something, but I don’t remember what it looked like or what it tasted like (chuckles).

T: You either didn’t eat or didn’t like what they had maybe.

M: It isn’t that I was hungry to eat all the time, because I was lightweight. I didn’t need to eat much. I never did eat much.

T: When you got the POW dog tags, to back up a moment, the Germans registered you. You were given a number on your tags. What kind of questions did they ask you when they registered you there at the camp?

M: Oh, boy. I can’t remember what they’d ask about. Your name and address and about your relatives at home and that was about it. They didn’t throw a lot of questions at you. At that stage of the game it was near the end of the war. They weren’t too fussy. The Germans.
T: You mentioned the end of the war, which of course, happens within weeks of your arrival there. How aware were you, or what kind of rumors were you getting about how close the end of the war was?

M: Well, we kind of knew that. That Eisenhower was coming. Had picked up some news. Some of the guys knew that...not Eisenhower, but Patton was coming. I remember the day when he came there. Pulled right up to the fence and he had his silver helmet...I don't know if it was silver or white helmet liner on. He had two pistols. Like ivory. Pearl handled or whatever. Riding boots. Came up to his knees almost.

T: Cut quite a figure, didn't he?

M: Yes. He kept himself looking pretty good. I was standing from this wall to that wall away from him.

T: Fifteen feet maybe.

M: Real close. He says, you guys, we'll see that you get right home. Everybody from the Hammelburg Raid. How they knew we were on the Hammelburg Raid...I can't remember telling him. Maybe the guys must have known that. Because we came from Hammelburg. It was kind of odd. We got that airplane to get out of there just two days after we got liberated. We were among the first, and at that time they had a system where the longer you were in there you got so many points. And if you were in Africa or anything like that you got different points for different battles and so forth and so on. We didn't get any points and we were shipped out right away, because we were on the Hammelburg deal.

T: What do you make of that?

M: Well, I just kind of think Patton wanted to get us out of there so that we wouldn't be shooting off to the press or anything about the bad trip we were on.

T: The couple weeks you spent there. How did you spend your daytime, waking hours? What did you do?

M: Worked on that shoe.

T: So you carved a wooden shoe.

M: Yes.

T: Hang around with other guys or mostly by yourself?
M: Oh, some guys. I knew some guys pretty well. You can always associate with somebody. They all signed this piece of money I had. I don't know what I did with it. It's around someplace.

(1, B, 532)

T: Collecting names of who was there.

M: Yes. Well, just so...yes. The ones who were close to you.

T: Did you find yourself during the day hanging out with guys that you had known before you were in Moosburg?

M: I can't say that I knew any of them.

T: Just people you made their acquaintance there.

M: Yes.

T: Now, would you say the guys were pretty much aware that the war was going to be ending any time or...

M: Yes. Kind of knew that.

T: Were you concerned at all that if the Germans knew they were going to lose that they might do something to you as a prisoner?

M: Never thought that. Never thought there was any danger there for us. It would have happened right away when you got captured. That's when I thought they maybe could have got something. But on the hike like this to the prison camp with all these people...wouldn't do it. There was a deal where the guys were all talking about...Big Stoop they called him. All the prisoners hated him.

T: A German guard.

M: Yes. What he did, I don't know. To make them hate him.

T: Did you see this guy?

M: I never saw him. Just that I heard the guys talking about him. Then when the camp was liberated, the first thing I heard was where Big Stoop, they found him in the city that was close by. Moosburg I suppose. They beheaded him. I don't know if it's true or anything, but that's what they said. Big Stoop was dead, I guess.

T: You mentioned being vulnerable and the time you felt the most vulnerable, that something might happen to you, was when you first surrendered. Is that right?
M: Yes. That's what I...yes. Right away. Catch you out there in their land there and they're knocking the heck out of you. That's when you could get nailed.

T: When you first surrendered. That first moment of capture that you thought if anything might happen, if they're going to kill you after you surrendered, it would be then as opposed to some other time.

M: Yes. I would think. Right there when they first captured you. That's about the time you could...to me you never know what they're going to do. Never know what anybody's going to do then. But see, going through the Bulge there, I was thrown through the air by different shells three different times. I never got hurt. And I mean, the explosions that were really close. I still think about that kind of stuff. It's on my mind. That wasn't associated with the Hammelburg deal. Only the one was there because that one tank we were right by and the squad leader got his legs all shot up.

T: The time that you felt that you were closest to something happening to you was not when you were a prisoner of war but the times you were in the combat situations.

M: Combat situations more. Yes. Of course...and you never knew what the heck was going to happen coming up to that prison camp. Nobody knew that. All you can remember is that it seemed like it took a long time for us to get moving again. I think the reason was old Abe Baum never knew what the hell to do with all these prisoners. There were a lot more there than what they had anticipated.

T: Just thinking about that. The only thing you could do is leave them behind. You couldn’t take them with you.

(1, B, 574)

M: No. That's what we did. Most of them walked back to camp because they just knew they didn't have a chance of walking back out. So they walked back to camp. I didn't see them come back in, but when somebody mentioned it I said, “You mean we come back here to liberated a prison camp and then they gotta not let them run home?”

T: Go back to Moosburg. You're in a camp there with tens of thousands of guys. Some of them prisoners for a very long time.

M: Yes.

T: What kind of impression did those guys make on you? I mean, there’s all kinds of groups of men around. As you looked around, paint a picture of what you saw inside of Moosburg.
M: I don’t remember talking to hardly anybody. I mean they had…our own little group you talked to, but other than that you just didn’t talk to anybody else.

T: Kind of coexisted but...different groups. You stayed with your own little group. Is that what you’re saying?


T: Did you see people of different nationalities there?

M: Wouldn’t know what they were.

T: The Americans arrived, as you talked about a few moments ago, and you ended up at...did you go to Camp Lucky Strike, in France?

M: Yes.

T: What kind of debriefing was there by the Americans there about your POW experience?

M: They never talked too much about it really. You stopped there. You had a physical before you got there and that was about the only time you saw anybody. Never had anybody ask you a bunch of questions or anything like that.

T: So nobody ever sat down and said, Koshiol we want to know what happened to you as a POW?

M: No. They never did that. No.

T: Did that happen in the States at all when you got back here to the States?

M: Oh, they wanted to know a little bit about it, and every time you said something about Hammelburg, boy, he puts you on top of the list.

T: Really?

M: (chuckles)

T: So being a part of that raid you sensed put you in a different category as far as how you were treated.

M: I think they treated us maybe a little...I don’t know...everybody is treated pretty much the same, but I think that if anything they treated you a little better. But they wouldn’t know what Hammelburg even was. Most of them wouldn’t even know what it was.
T: Particularly back in the States here, right?

M: Yes. Well, they didn’t ask a whole lot of questions and everything. They did have some questions they asked you.

T: Let’s pick up the story here. You got back to the States in May 1945 and one of the things you were asked was to sign a document. I wonder if you can talk about the document you were asked to sign and what you remember about the circumstances surrounding that.

(1, B, 612)

M: Well, it was a certificate or whatever it was. *(papers rustling)* Certificate here. Says: *I certify that I have read and fully understand all the provisions of War Department Letter. Subject: publicity in connection with the escaped, liberated or repatriated prisoners of war to include evaders of capture in enemy or enemy occupied territory and internees in neutral counties and will at all times hereafter comply fully with them. I understand that disclosure to unauthorized persons will make me liable to disciplinary action for failure to safeguard military information. I realize that it is my duty during my military service and later as a civilian to take all possible precautions to prevent disclosure by word or mouth or otherwise of military information of this nature.* And I signed it. But it never, ever said anything about the raid.

T: Was any explanation given to you, Mr. Koshiol, about why you were being asked to sign this?

M: No. I just thought that’s the way it’s supposed to be. Of course you never probably...you talked to anything like this here?

T: I’ve heard of one of these. I’ve not seen one before. So you were, in a sense, instructed not to talk about your POW experience?

M: No. It was mostly the Hammelburg deal.

T: The actual raid itself.

M: The actual raid itself. Nothing to do with the POW experience.

T: After the war, after you were discharged, did you not talk about the raid or your POW experience? Was that the effect of that?

M: Just in later years now. Start talking about it. More so than ever.
T: Let me ask you. When you got out of the service, or actually, you had a rest and recuperation leave as well. Did you come back to St. Cloud and see your folks?

M: Yes.

T: Were your folks, your brothers and sisters, friends even, relatives, how much were they curious to know about your POW experience?

M: They never really asked much about it. Because I never, ever talked about it. So they never, ever... I never talked about it.

T: This is the chicken and the egg. Now was it that they didn’t ask or did you not tell?

Wife: They asked but he just wouldn’t talk. Everybody was...always wanted to know about it. He would never talk. His kids got him to talk.

T: So when you first got back you were reluctant to talk about it?

M: I thought if I signed the slip I wasn’t supposed to divulge any of this stuff here for the protection of other people.

T: I see.

M: So that’s why I wouldn’t...

Wife: When he came back he was interviewed at St. Cloud on the radio and my sister happened to catch it on her car radio. There were two guys. One guy who had been in another part of the war and then there was Milt. And he just didn’t say much. And Elaine said it sounded so stupid because he just didn’t...he wouldn’t talk. He wouldn’t say much.

T: When was this interview on the radio?

Wife: Right after he came home.

T: So 1945.

M: Yes.

Wife: ‘46. No, ‘45. Yes, ‘45. When he was home those two months. And he wouldn’t talk about it. And so it sounded like he was pretty dumb. But he signed that paper. He was not going to talk. Then we got married in ’47. We lived in St. Cloud two years. We moved here to a little house. We didn’t get a newspaper. We didn’t have a TV because people didn’t have TVs then. He would just sit in his chair. Just stare
into space. Thinking about the war. So he had time to think it over. He’s a thinker. He doesn’t talk much. To get him to talk like this is...

M: Like I read that. It kind of makes you think that it’s kind of serious stuff.

T: Yes.

M: Which it isn’t now. It’s too far away. But I didn’t know.

(1, B, 674)

T: Back in the States, even before you were discharged or after from the VA, did you have any kind of debriefing or counseling offered to you about your POW experience?


Wife: Compensation.

M: Because of my feet.

T: But that’s combat related as opposed to POW related.

M: Yes. Well, POW related. Didn’t have anything there to make me sick.

T: Were you asked about that or did you inquire about what might be available to you as an ex-POW?

M: Well, I suppose...I mentioned it.

Wife: He would go to his service officer and they’re the ones that help try to push this. Really. They’ll say...

M: You gotta almost go to the national service officer.

Wife: Yes. And you should get something for being a POW. You should get something for your feet. You should get something for your nightmares and stuff. He’s gone at least three times and talked to different people and he finally got ten percent.

T: What level are you at now? Are you ten percent or...

M: I don’t know how much it is.

Wife: That’s what’s on the thing. Said he was ten percent. That’s what your latest doctor—he was just at the VA. Said you’re getting ten percent. That’s 150 a month.
T: Okay.

Wife: And the ones that get one hundred percent get two thousand a month or something like that. But he wasn’t a prisoner very long.

M: You had to have battle scars or whatever.

Wife: I said I sleep with him. I know he has nightmares. I know he moves in his sleep and he talks in his sleep. But they...but that’s all right. You know. We don’t think the government owes us a living. We just felt he should get something. Now, they did say he doesn’t have to pay for something with their meds.

M: The ex-POWs magazine says that every POW should get one hundred percent disability.

T: Are you a member of the American ex-POWs?

M: Yes.

T: That’s exactly what they say.

(1, B, 706)

M: Yes.

T: Let me ask you this. I mean, guys who were POWs, you were a POW. How do you see yourself in relation to other POWs? I mean you were a POW for a month.

M: I don’t know any other POWs except Hub.

T: There’s other POWs. There’s thousands of guys in this organization.

Wife: You know some other POWs. But they all died now. He used to go to the meetings.

M: They’re all dead.

T: But are you as much an ex-POW as anybody else?

Wife: He always felt so humble because he was only a prisoner of war for a month. So he doesn’t feel that he should get whatever the boys did that were in for two and half years.

T: Is that the way you feel, Mr. Koshiol?
M: I applied a couple times to different ones. Terry McGee up here. But he never did anything really.

Wife: But that’s the way he feels. He’s always said that. He doesn’t feel that he deserves anything more. And you know he never got a tooth fixed. He never went to...all those years. Until about three years ago. Because he felt the government never owed him anything. He never had...like I say, we’ve been paying for dentist bills, paying for glasses. He finally now got glasses from them. Saved two hundred dollars or whatever it was. Three hundred dollars. And now he’s going, but they don't really give him a real good physical. Right now he’s supposed to have pneumonia. He’s just been on antibiotics. He should really go get a follow up. Well, he’s supposed to go back in three months. Three months. That’s a lot of time. So, anyway, they really don’t do a real...there’s so many Gls.

M: I don’t feel that bad.

Wife: No. He doesn’t feel that bad. But it’s there.

M: It was a woman doctor.

T: Do you think that other POWs who were a POW for a longer time, had you been a POW for a longer period of time would you feel more comfortable asking for benefits?

M: I imagine.

T: So it’s the amount of time you were a POW that kind of makes you feel...

M: Well, yes. I was only a POW for thirty-two days, thirty-three days. If you were under thirty days you wouldn’t be entitled to anything.

Wife: Yes. That’s the cutoff. Thirty.

M: That’s the cutoff. But I got three days, only three days is not much.

Wife: He felt so sorry for Hub Schwan dt who was a prisoner for two and half years and was from Africa, and all through Germany and hid in haystacks and...

M: I don’t know how much disability he got.

Wife: I don’t know either. He always was such a hum...

**End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A, begins at counter 000.**
T: So in a sense, do you feel, is it safe to say, Mr. Koshiol, that you feel a little guilty for getting any benefits at all because you were a POW only a few days past the cutoff?

M: No. I just figure that the way the government spends money they should pay the POWs something. But where do you draw the line? That I don't know. I don't want to lie to you. You know, when they get you out there and they ask you a bunch of questions, I don't want to lie just to get some money out of them. Not if you don't have something basic to fall back on.

Wife: They ask you how do you get along with your...

T: One of the things I wanted to ask about was dreams or images that you've kept with you?

M: I don't dream of the war.

T: You don't dream about the war?

M: Not much.

Wife: Not that he knows of.

M: Not that I know of.

T: Have you had dreams over the years, again, because my focus is your POW experience, have you had dreams that deal at all with your POW experience? Being captured, on the march to Moosburg, anything like that?

M: You think about that stuff, yes. But not a big factor. I didn't think.

Wife: When he said he thinks about the war every day but he doesn't worry about it or he doesn't...I don't think he dreams about it. He doesn't know. He's never been a dreamer. He doesn't dream much. Where I'm dreaming all the time.

T: So you don't consciously know you've had dreams about your POW experience at all?

M: No. Not really.

T: About being captured or marching or being in any of the camps?

M: Not a whole lot.

Wife: He's not a very excitable person and he's easy...
T: You moved here to Paynesville in 1949 after you got married. How much did people around town, this is a small town of under three thousand people, how much did people around town know about you as an ex-POW?

M: I don’t think any of them.

T: They didn't know anything at all?

M: I don’t think any of them did excepting immediate family.

T: Is it something you would have felt comfortable talking about in those days? Let’s say the ’40s or ’50s, or not really.

M: Not really. I never talked about the war too much.

T: As a POW or as a combat soldier?

M: Either way.

T: You had another POW in town who just recently passed away. That was who?

M: Hubert SchwanDt.

T: Did you know each other? Did you know of each other? That you were both ex-POWs?

M: Yes. I knew about him right away.

T: Did you know him?

M: Yes. I knew him real well. Small town like this. You know everybody.

T: Yes. When you two would get together, how often would being a POW come up in conversation?

M: Never.

T: Never?

(2, A, 27)

M: No.

T: Although you knew that about each other.
M: Yes. Yes. But I never would talk to him about it. If he wants to say something, he can. I would listen to him but...he never did say anything. But he did his last couple years. Yes. He did. But other than that, never got a word from him. Ever. I knew he was a prisoner though.

T: And he knew you were one.

M: Yes.

T: But you never talked about it.

M: Never talked about it.

T: Very interesting. How do you explain that? In a sense, here you are the only two guys in town to share a common experience.

M: I always figured...he spent a couple years as a prisoner. He’s got something to talk about. I was only there for a couple of weeks or three, four weeks and I don’t talk about it.

T: Have you ever, Mr. Koshiol, been back to Germany since the end of the war?

M: I haven’t. The wife has gone over. You were there once or twice, Rosemary?

Wife: What?

M: Germany.

Wife: I was only there once.

M: Once. To retrace my steps.

T: You didn’t go with them?

M: I didn’t go with them. No.

T: Why not?

M: Well, I got out of there once without getting hurt. I didn’t want to go back there and let them finish the job. Which it wouldn’t do, but...

T: You're smiling as you say that.

M: I say that because maybe there’s a different reason why I didn’t go. She was with her sister for one thing.
T: Were you or are you curious to go back to the places you were held prisoner?

M: I don’t. I noticed by reading the ex-POW magazine and different army magazines that a lot of them do go back. Back to trace some of the steps that they took. Especially Bastogne.

T: Would going back to retrace your combat steps interest you more than going back to retrace your POW steps?

M: I wouldn’t think about going in the POW steps but the combat steps, it seems like they were a lot more severe than what the POW step was.

T: So you couldn’t imagine going back to retrace the POW steps.

M: Well, she did. She did that for me. I would have gone. I didn’t want to go to Bastogne and Luxembourg. That’s when I first got in the war. See, I got in the war about 23 December and the Battle of the Bulge started on 16 December. So it was on already. The Battle of the Bulge was on already for a whole week before I got there. But then it lasted for another two or three weeks after that. I had my share.

(2, A, 53)

T: As an ex-combat soldier and an ex-POW, in a sense, you could belong to a number of different organizations. Do you keep in touch with anybody that you were a combat soldier with during the war? With any of the unit associations?

M: Just with the 4th Armored. We went to stuff there.

Wife: Louisville a couple times and Gettysburg.

M: Yes. We went to...that’s our Company A...wasn’t the 4th Armored Division. I’ve never gone to the Division, believe it or not, because I always felt like I was out of place there. These guys all had been in there ever since the start. Before the war even.

T: Right.

M: And I didn’t get in there until later years.

T: How about the American ex-POWs? Are you a member of that organization?

M: I never really had a whole lot to do with them.

T: You’re a member though.

M: Yes. I get things in the mail to go to some of the meetings and whatever.
Wife: He doesn’t even go to the one in St. Cloud.

M: My idea was I didn’t want to get tied in with...

T: When did you join American ex-POWs.

M: American ex-POWs…oh, it had to be maybe four or five years ago.

T: Not until then though.

M: No.

T: What prompted you to finally join that organization after not for so many decades?

M: Why did I join it? I think just because I was a part of it, I guess.

T: But you didn’t join for a lot of decades.

M: No.

T: And I’m wondering what finally pushed you to...

M: The whole start of it?

T: Yes.

M: How come I never joined it then? Maybe I never saw any literature on it.

Wife: He was so busy. He was so busy. And I think the kids are the ones that really got him going on any of this stuff really. But you know when you come here, first he got home and those two years he was truck driving. We moved here and we had to really work to get caught up. Worked six days a week, bookwork on the seventh day. Raising a family. He volunteered for everything there was. He really was too busy. He didn’t have time to think. And that’s what they say with this post-war syndrome. Now you’ve raised your family. You’re retired and now you have time to think. That’s what they said. Really. Now you have time to think about the war and that’s really how it happened.

T: So is it safe to say that you joined the American ex-POWs because you finally had time to do it? Is that the reason?

(2, A, 78)
M: Well, I think it’s because I was entitled to be a partner in it or whatever. Associated with it. I think that was why I joined it. Because I’m an ex-POW. I might as well get in and read it, read the magazine. I might find something that will benefit me.

T: Is that the case when you read there? Do you find stuff that can help you?

M: I read just about everything.

T: Do you attend any meetings of your chapter or state?

M: Never. Never have.

Wife: Well, he’s gone...yes, you have. To the...

M: Not ex-POWs.

Wife: Not ex-POWs but what do you call your other one? Your Hammelburg bunch. He has gone to that one.

M: Well, that’s...the Hammelburg bunch though...but it wasn’t called that. This is A Company.

Wife: A Company. That’s the only one he’s ever...two or three times he’s gone to Louisville and once we went out east...

M: But there too, now, Bill Macon is the only...

Wife: He’s the only one alive.

M: He’s the only one alive.

Wife: All the other guys died. Because they were older.

T: But you don’t attend any—because the focus here is the POW stuff—you don’t attend any chapter meetings of American ex-POWs here in Minnesota.

M: Never have.

T: Is that something you’d feel comfortable doing? Going to a meeting? Or going to meet other...

M: You know, the only guy I really knew on there was Hub, and he didn’t go to any meetings until the last year or something like that and that was it. Otherwise he never, ever gone to one. And they don’t ever come around and ask you how come you don’t join or anything like that.
Wife: Keep sending him postcards though.

T: So what is your local chapter? Central? Are you St. Cloud Chapter?


T: You mentioned belonging. You feel comfortable talking with a group about the Hammelburg Raid or something.

M: Yes.

T: This is a conjecture, but if they were to put together something about ex-POWs from Moosburg, Stalag VII-A, would you feel comfortable in a group like that?

M: The guys that were all on that thing are all dead and gone.

T: There’s a lot of guys from Moosburg alive. Thousands of them. Would you feel comfortable talking on a panel about what it was like to be a POW at Moosburg?

M: I wasn’t in there long enough to warrant...being able to talk about it. Because I was only there for two weeks.

T: To push that a little bit. What’s long enough?

(2, A, 102)

M: If you were in there for six months maybe, or four or five months at least. A little longer than...I just made the borderline of being called a prisoner of war. Some of them...it seems to me Joe Kimitz, a couple of those guys, didn’t get recognized as being a POW.

Wife: You know why they didn’t? Because they’re...two of the guys tried to escape that day and they went to a house and they rapped on the door and a woman came and gave them food, but in the living room she was entertaining her boyfriend who was an SS trooper and they were captured. But their three days or two days that they hid during the day and traveled at night is not on the record so they weren’t a prisoner of war for more than thirty days so they didn’t get anything. You have to be a prisoner of war thirty days. It’s just that we’ve had to drag everything out of him and he’s never felt that he should have anything coming or that he should join all these things or whatever. I think now it’s interesting for him to read about other guys. It really is.

T: Let me ask you. Just in concluding here. When you got married, 1947, wife Rosemary, how much was Rosemary curious to know about your POW experience?
M: Oh, I don’t think she ever brought up the subject. Did you?

T: You don’t remember her bringing the subject up.

Wife: No. I guess we were just happy to have him home. He says he told me a little bit.

T: Because you asked or because he told?

Wife: No. I had to ask.

T: You had to ask.

Wife: Yes. Yes. He just didn’t talk much. And we were just so in love. Came home. He’s safe. We’re going to get married. I still was a nurse. I had to finish training. He quickly got a job. We were just having fun. I mean, the guys all came home and it was fun. I mean, you can imagine. Because there were no boys around. St. Cloud State had seven boys. Seven men in St. Cloud State. Which has thousands of young men now. Seven men that were there were 4-Fers. They either had ear problems or whatever. There were no men around. We would have dances at our college. I remember going with my cousin home on leave. Nobody around. So you can imagine when you’ve got a man home, you dated. You went to the movies. Whatever.

M: You had Lenny.

Wife: Yes. He had perforated eardrum.

T: When you got married, do you remember conversations about being a combat soldier or a POW? You knew he was in service but...

Wife: It’s over with now. We’re just glad he’s alive. We’re going to get married. This is what happened in the late ’40s. The guys all came home from the service. You got married and you had kids. And the women didn’t work. You just were going to raise those kids and just be a good wife. And you didn’t even talk about it. Sure you had this all back in your mind, but it wasn’t a domineering subject at all.

T: Right. Right.

Wife: We were just glad it was over with. The war is over. We’re going to start rebuilding and whatever. I mean we were poor as church mice. Rented a place first for two years. Then we came and bought a little house for five thousand dollars. Our first house was five thousand dollars. 5500. Our first house. We lived there ten years. I mean, so we were just struggling. And of course, you kept having kids and I worked part time. He was trying to build up a business. There was no time for all these other things.
M: You know for me now what happens is I, talking to you, I don't forget nothing...but I could talk to you and pretty soon bingo I get it blanked out in my head. I completely forget what I was even talking about.

Wife: You did real well today though.

M: Skipping words. Past years it seems like it’s getting worse. Sometimes you just had a block there. With the kids there once in school.

(2, A, 145)

Wife: Yes. He talked at school. He talked to middle school.

T: About being a soldier or a POW?

Wife: Both.

M: About being a soldier. Giving them their freedom.

Wife: And one of our grandsons was in the crowd. He was so proud.

T: When your own kids were growing up, Milt, how much did they ask or know? Did you tell them about being a prisoner of war?

M: Never talked special about it. But they didn't want to bring anything up either.

Wife: Not until he was older.

M: Margaret was the only one that...she studied into it pretty good.

Wife: It's this book. She's the one. She's fifty-four though. Almost fifty-five.

T: But as your kids, let's say when they were under eighteen, growing up, did they...is being a POW something you talked about with them?

M: No. Never, I don’t think.

Wife: No. Never.

T: From what I hear from you is that whether it's with your spouse or your kids or people in town, that being a POW kind of gradually just drifted into the background of your life.

M: Oh, yes.
T: Did you find yourself thinking about it much?

M: I think about it I suppose quite a bit. I was thinking if I’ve got some benefits coming then maybe I should ask for them. But I didn’t.

Wife: That’s only the last years though.

M: Yes. That’s in the last years.

T: When you owned your business and worked all those years, how often did you find yourself thinking about what it was like to be a POW? What it was like to be captured or marched to Moosburg...

M: Never think of that stuff then.

T: Never thought of it.

M: Think about going camping.

T: So your focus was on everyday life as opposed to what was.

M: Yes. We tried to go every weekend up north or something with the kids. Some of the kids. Took different trips with the kids. Kids were the big part of our lives really. That’s...

T: You had six of them.

Wife: Yes. That’s our family picture right there. Three girls and three boys.

T: That’s good balance too. That’s the last question I had. I wondered if there’s anything else you wanted to add about how you’ve lived with being an ex-POW over the years?

M: Well, the only thing is, I get a little concerned about maybe hitting her sometime and I don’t know how bad that’s going to be.

T: When you’re sleeping and stuff.

M: Yes.

Wife: Yes. Only when we’re sleeping. Only when he’s sleeping (laughing). He’s a very gentle man.

T: The dreams that you have, again, what you’ve mentioned is that you can’t recall the dreams when you wake up, so you can’t tell whether they’re POW experience related or not.
M: No.

Wife: He told me once. Something about...something that was war related. Something about flying through the air or something. After he woke up he told me. But otherwise...one time it was that you thought you were having a fight at Nash Finch where you were working. A fist fight. That was when he was yelling. I think that's the very first one. Because then I really questioned him. We were in Phoenix at the time, at our daughter's, and my gosh, he started yelling and I didn't know what was happening. Then right away, still in the night, he told me. He said something about there was a fight at the Nash Finch, at the warehouse. We were going to go outside and fight. But that's the only time he's ever told me. So that was clear in his mind. But he said he just can't remember. He'll wake up or I won't probably tell about them until morning, and say man, did you move around and did you ever yell. Of course, by then it's too late. And I never could tell what he's saying. I'm hard of hearing now too. I've got hearing aids. That makes it easier for me now. I don't hear him quite...

T: A blessing in disguise.

Wife: A blessing in disguise. Yes.

T: On the record then, Mr. Koshiol, I will thank you very much for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW