Clinton Sather was born 12 November 1920, on the family farm near Ulen, Minnesota, near Moorhead. One of nine children, Clinton attended country school, then worked on the farm before entering the Army Air Corps in August 1942.

Clinton joined the US Army Air Corps in August 1942. He was trained as a ball turret gunner on B-17 Flying Fortress four-engine heavy bombers, and by early 1944 was flying missions with the 452nd Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, from a base in eastern England.

On 5 February 1944, Clinton’s plane was downed over southern Germany, while on a mission to the city of Regensburg. As a POW, Clinton spent time at Stalag Luft IV Gross Tychow and Stalag Luft I Barth. The latter camp was liberated by Red Army troops on 30 April 1945.

Clinton and other captured Americans were evacuated to France, then to the United States. He spent several months recovering from his time as a POW, and was discharged in January 1946.

Again a civilian, Clinton attended Dakota Business School in Fargo, North Dakota, and remained in the Moorhead area.
Today is 27 May 2004, and this is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I'm interviewing Mr. Clinton Sather of Moorhead, Minnesota. Thanks for taking time to speak with me this evening, Mr Sather.

C: You're welcome.

T: Mr Sather, for the record, you were born on 12 November 1920, on a farm near Ulen, Minnesota, which is by Moorhead. You had six brothers and two sisters. You attended country school, then worked on the farm before entering the Army Air Corps in August 1942. During World War II you served with the Army Air Corps, in Europe. You were with the 8th Air Force, the 452nd Bomb Group, stationed in England. Specifically, you were a ball turret gunner on a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber. On 5 February, 1944, your plane was downed over Southern Germany, while on a mission to Regensburg, on the way to the target. If we think back to 5 February 1944, which was your fifth mission, were you flying with the same crew you normally flew with?

C: Yes. But we were with a different [Bomb] Group, and flew in one of their planes.

T: So your crew was together, but you were not in your normal plane.

C: No. Ours had gotten damaged on a previous mission, on a flight before that, and so we had to fly one of their planes.

T: Was that other B-17 in any way different than your normal plane?

C: (laughs) Well, when we went over there to that Group, I took one look at that plane, and I said to myself, we're not coming back from this mission. That plane was covered with oil, and looked terrible. It didn't look right to me. Because of the condition of that plane, I felt we wouldn't make it in it.

T: On the mission itself, what brought your plane down?

C: Oh, at first we lost one of our engines, one of our engines conked out, and then we dropped out of formation. We didn't have the power to stay in formation. The
engine, it was a mechanical failure. And then the [German] fighters moved in, and started kind of peppering at us.

T: Was it German aircraft then that brought your plane down?

C: Yes, I would say so.

T: As the ball turret gunner, how did you experience the plane being shot down? What happened from your perspective?

C: Well, after we were shot at we lost our power. Then our pilot said that we were at so many feet, and he said, I think we better get out of here. He kind of ordered us to bail out.

T: Were you aware up to that point that the plane was in bad shape?

C: Well, not really. But after I got out of my turret and got into the fuselage with the other crew members I realized something was going on there.

T: From a technical point, did you have to get out of the turret to get your parachute and put it on?

C: Oh yes. It didn’t take very long, you get used to it, just stepping in and out.

T: Could you let yourself out of the turret, or did someone outside have to do it?

C: No, I could do it from inside. Turn it to the right position, and then just kind of crank that top open. Then I crawled out and got my parachute on.

T: How long was it from the time you got out of your ball turret until you left the aircraft?

C: Oh, gosh. (pauses three seconds) It didn’t seem very long, but I couldn’t say for sure.

T: Were you wounded in any way by the time you left the aircraft?

C: No.

(A, 50)

T: And did everyone get out of the plane, to your knowledge?

C: As far as I know.

T: Was this your first parachute jump?
C: My first. And my last. *(both laugh)*

T: Describe what it’s like to jump out of a plane.

C: It’s quite a sensation. Well, you travel at a high rate of speed to start with. Now, when I pulled my ripcord, nothing happened. So I looked down, we had chest packs for parachutes, the parachute was in a chest pack. I looked down, and I saw this white stuff in there, and I thought, uh-oh. So I starting grabbing, and I pulled it out, got it all out of there, and then I came to a sudden stop.

T: Is there a jerking up feeling when it opens?

C: Oh, yes. It’s quite a sudden stop. I came to a complete stop, at least to me.

T: Did you lose your shoes or boots when the chute opened?

C: Yes, come to think of it, yes, I had an extra pair of shoes, and I took and grabbed them before I left the plane, and I lost them on the way down.

T: You’re coming down over Germany. What were you thinking as you’re getting close to the ground?

C: Well now, you’re wondering, but it wasn’t too long a time. I looked down, and there was these two civilians waiting for me, they’d seen me coming. I had a sore butt for a while, because I landed on my butt *(laughs)*. I landed pretty close to where these two civilians were standing. They grabbed me and kind of, kind of took over *(laughs)*.

T: Were you frightened there?

C: No. It was a relief really, not to go down with the plane.

T: Did they strike you or hit you?

C: No, not really, they just kind of, well, they wouldn’t let me go anyway *(laughs)*. They took us to a little town, to a room in the village there. When they took me to the place in the village there, I met up with, I think it was three other crew members.

T: Do you know the name of that village where you were taken?

C: No, I don’t.

T: Were you questioned there, or just held there?
C: No, they interrogated us. One thing I'll always remember, one little cocky guy there, I don't know what his rank was, but he said, "The only thing I like about you Americans is your music." In English he said that.

T: What about the interrogation? Was it Germans in uniform, military?

C: Well, yes.

T: What did they want to know?

C: Oh, just about where I came from, and so forth. They asked a lot of questions, but they didn't get physical or anything.

T: Did they threaten you at all?

C: No.

(A, 104)

T: The next subject we agreed to speak about was Stalag Luft IV. Let me ask first about the transport from where you were captured to Stalag Luft IV. What can you recall about that?

C: I don't remember all the details, but we went in a freight train. I can't really remember.

T: Then let's move on to Stalag Luft IV, which was located at Gross Tychow, near the Baltic coast in what is now Poland. What do you remember about the camp, when you arrived?

C: I remember the gate, and a bunch of barracks. The gate I remember was big, and heavy. There was wire in it. The barracks were made out of wood. When we arrived we were assigned to a barracks. Inside it wasn't very big, and there were bunks along the outside wall. Two bunks high, I'd say. But just one to a bunk.

From my crew a couple of us were together in the same barracks. Now the enlisted men in my crew were Melvin Simmons, engineer; right waist gunner was Carl W Jones; tail gunner was Johnny Lupton; left waist gunner was John Daley. And I was the ball turret gunner. And I think it was Jones that was in the barracks with me.

Some of my crew evaded capture. Pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, four of them evaded capture. And that's in the record here.

(A, 175)
T: Interesting. Clinton, let me ask about food in the camp at Luft IV.

C: In the morning they’d bring in some of that famous dark bread, you know. It was alive (laughs). And ersatz coffee. They’d bring us some soup one meal during the day. With some potatoes, sometimes some other vegetables, and sometimes some meat in there. We didn’t know what kind of meat it was (laughs). We had to take turns going and getting it from them, from the kitchen there, whatever they called it, and we’d bring the soup in a tub. We didn’t go to a mess hall to eat. In the barracks, the prisoners dished the food out.

T: In your opinion, Clinton, did you get enough food?

C: Oh, I think we got enough, but sometimes if the Red Cross parcels didn’t come through it got kind of nip and tuck there. And the food the Germans provided wasn’t edible, you know, just that dry bread and not much else.

T: How often did you see Red Cross packages, that you recall?

C: Well, they were pretty regular. We had more at first than later on. I don’t know if the Germans took them or what. They were sparse there for a while. They had a lot of good things in there, in those packages. We looked forward to the powdered milk that was in there.

T: Did each man get his own package?

C: No, we had to split them up, and it all depended on how many packages we got. The more packages we got, the more we had.
T: What did you do with the cigarettes in there?

C: I wasn't a smoker, so I'd just give them to the other guys.

T: Give them or trade them?

C: Trade them. For candy, or whatever else.

T: Clinton, did you have work details there at Luft IV that you recall?

C: No, we didn't have any work details.

T: So how did you spend your time during the day?

C: Oh, played some cards, and walked around the compound if the weather was nice. Got a lot of exercise that way. We could go outside and walk around, so long as we didn't try to crawl the fence (laughs). And we had some books that came in by way of the Red Cross or something. I liked to read.

T: When you think about your time there, did you stay upbeat, optimistic?

C: I think I stayed pretty good. I didn't seem to worry too much about what was going to happen. Some of them were kind of grouchy, seemed more grouchy than some others.

T: Could you get any news about how the war was going outside your camp?

C: No, it was pretty hard to keep track of it. I don't remember getting much news about how the war was going, very little.

T: Did you ever think about escape?

C: Oh, I thought about it, but I didn't take a chance. I wasn't taking a chance on the guards getting trigger-happy. We had one incident there, where a guy, he was from a different barracks—see our latrine, our toilets were in a separate building—and one morning this kid got up and he started running for the latrine and he got shot. I suppose they figured he was trying to escape.  

[NOTE: Camp records show a POW Audrey Teague shot 21 June 1944]

T: What about the German guards at the camp?

C: We didn't have much contact with them. They were strict, but if you obeyed them they didn't get rough with you. They never got rough with me, not that I can recall.

T: So strict, but not unfair, in your opinion?
C: Right.

T: Let me ask about your health there at Luft IV. How was it?

C: Oh, pretty good.

T: Did you have any problem with dysentery, for example, or other illnesses?

C: No. The only thing is, I had an appendectomy when I was in prison camp. I don't remember which camp it was.

T: The last thing I want to ask about is the evacuation of Luft IV, which took place in February 1945. What do you remember about that?

C: Well, they took and hauled us up to that other camp, to Luft I [at Barth, Germany].

T: All in all, what was the most difficult thing for you as a POW there, from February 1944 to May 1945?

C: The waiting, and the boredom. Waiting, and wondering what was going to happen.

T: Were you a worrier by nature?

C: Not really worried, but you wondered, you know, when things were going to happen, if they were going to happen. It was not knowing what was coming next.

**End of Side A. Side B begins.**

T: When you got back to the States and were discharged, did you go back to the farm?

C: Well, I went back to the town. My mother had moved into town, the town of Ulen, and my brother was still on the farm. My dad had passed away before I went in the service.

T: Did your mother and your brothers and sisters ask you questions about your POW experience?

C: Oh, they were kind of curious.

T: Did they ask questions?

C: They asked how we were treated, and so forth, you know.
T: Did you answer them openly and honestly, do you feel?

C: Oh, I think so. I don’t find it too difficult [to talk about my POW experience].

T: So if I had asked for this interview ten years ago, twenty years ago, what might you have said?

C: I suppose I would have tried to answer you.

T: But you would have said yes to an interview.

C: Yes.

T: Did you have dreams that had images or experiences from your POW time?

C: No.

T: No images that came back later?

C: Not that I can recall anyway.

T: Any dreams from when you were a ball turret gunner?

C: No.

T: That’s the last question, Mr. Sather, so let me thank you for your time this evening.

END OF INTERVIEW