Rodney Shogren was born 14 October 1921 in Taylors Falls, Minnesota; he grew up in the neighboring town, smaller town, of Shafer, Minnesota. Rodney attended local schools and graduated from Lindstrom High School in 1940. In August 1942, he was inducted in the US Army Air Corps.

In the Air Corps, Rodney served as waist gunner on B-17 Flying Fortress four-engine heavy bombers. By late 1943, he was in England, with 410th Bomb Squadron, 94th Bomb Group, part of the 8th Air Force. He flew his first mission in December 1943. By March 1944, Rodney had completed fifteen combat missions.

During a mission to Berlin on 8 March 1944, though, Rodney's B-17 was shot down over Germany. He parachuted out safely, and was captured when he landed. Rodney spent the remainder of the war as a POW.

As a prisoner, Rodney first was interrogated at the central Dulag Luft facility. He then spent time at Stalag Luft VI Heydekrug (until July 1944) and Stalag Luft IV Gross Tychow. When the Germans evacuated this latter camp on 6 February 1945, some eight thousand men were marched westward, in small groups, towards central Germany. Rodney was in a group of POWs that marched until 26 April 1945, some eighty-nine days, until liberated by advancing US forces.

American forces evacuated freed US troops to France, then to the US. Rodney remained some time in hospitals recovering from his ordeal as a POW, then was discharged in October 1945.

Again a civilian, Rodney got married in 1946 (wife Eleanor) and helped to raise six children. He worked several years as a carpenter (1946-51), the spent until 1980 with the US Postal Service in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Rodney Shogren died 12 April 2015, at age ninety-three.
Interview Key:
T = Thomas Saylor
R = Rodney Shogren
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(***) = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is Friday, 17 September 2004. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I’m speaking with Mr. Rodney Shogren at his home here in Chisago City, Minnesota. First, on the record, Mr. Shogren, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today.

Information for the record: you were born on the 14 October 1921 in Taylors Falls, Minnesota, and you grew up in the neighboring town, smaller town, of Shafer, Minnesota. You attended local schools and graduated from Lindstrom High School, class of 1940. You were in the Army Air Corps, inducted into service August 1942. On the other end of that, you were discharged from service October 1945. In the Army Air Corps you served as a waist gunner on B-17 Flying Fortress aircraft. In England you served with the 8th Air Force, 94th Bomb Group, 410th Bomb Squadron.

Mr. Shogren, I want to go back to when you arrived in England and ask you if you remember the first combat mission that you flew? That was in December 1943 I think we said, right?

R: Yes.

T: What do you remember about the first combat mission that you flew?

R: I don’t even remember the name of the town we went to, but I know it was a ball bearing factory that we were bombing. We had a lot of flak, I remember that. I got my initial mission—and I had a lot of fighters at the time too. But we dropped our bombs and made it back safe on the first mission.

T: What was going through your mind? I mean, you’d been through a lot of training. You had practice missions. When you finally get over enemy territory and you feel flak or you see fighters for the first time, what was going through your mind?

R: I believe the first flak started—it was like fireworks going up alongside you. But when it got closer and it shook the plane, it was scary.

T: Did you use your guns on that first mission?

R: I believe I did, yes. I think we were attacked by fighters and I used my guns the first mission we were on.
T: What was the difference between training with that .50 caliber gun, you’d trained a lot, and actually having fighter planes out there that you were shooting at and they were shooting at you?

R: Things moved pretty fast. You don’t get much time to shoot at a plane. They come through, you get off two, three bursts, and they were gone.

T: So did it seem faster than you had imagined it would be as far as the time you’d had?

R: I believe so, yes. The planes, the fighter planes—I think the German pilots were pretty good pilots. They would go right through our formation. If you didn’t fly tight enough—that was one of the objects, to keep your formation as tight together. These planes would come right through our formations. If you get two, three bursts off at them, that was about as much as you saw of them.

T: That first mission, in fact your first three missions I think you said, you were not flying with your standard crew. How difficult was that, flying with guys that you didn’t know?

R: I think it was more of a problem for the people I was flying with not knowing me.

T: What do you mean by that?

(1, A, 42)

R: They didn’t know how I would react to being in combat. They already had missions in. I don’t know how many missions these people or crews had that I flew with because I never did ask them. I was just put in there to take somebody’s position.

T: Did you talk to them, or they talk to you, or did you feel like an outsider?

R: Oh, no. We talked. Have to try to get to know each other. Know how much combat I had. I didn’t have very much to start with.

T: Yes. Did you feel nervous about being able to live up to, in a sense, their expectations for you? Being a rookie.

R: I don’t know. I probably did. I was nervous of going into combat too. That’s scary no matter what you, when you leave the coast of England and you hit the coast of France, you were in combat territory.

T: That’s right. By early 1944, that’s right, France was still held by the Germans.

R: Yes. The minute we got over the Channel we were in enemy territory.
T: You flew a number of missions. Your crew got there. The mission, not including the one you were shot down, but you flew fifteen missions up to the one your plane went down. Of those missions, which one was most remarkable or most memorable for you, of the fifteen you had before that time?

R: I got hit in the leg on my fifth mission by a piece of flak.

T: Talk about that. Flak becomes pretty real when it hits you in the leg, I imagine.

R: But that was the only piece of flak to hit us that day. One piece came through the waist and hit me on the leg.

T: How badly were you injured?

R: Not too bad. Took a chunk of meat off my shinbone. But it went right up by my head, so it could have killed me right there.

T: Did you think about it that way, that had it come through another couple inches one way or the other it could have killed you?

R: After that, I put my flak suit under me and I stood on it.

T: So that was some protection from something coming up from the bottom, right?

R: Yes.

T: From your perspective, what was more of a threat, the flak or the fighter planes?

R: I think probably the flak was because you’ve got a lot of flak. Sometimes, well, every time you went through to your target you were going into a wall of flak. You looked and everything was black in front of you and then they were exploding all around you. Are we going to get through this? It only takes about two, three minutes that the bombardier took over the plane and you kept the plane at an even level before the pilot would take over again and got your bombs dropped. That was probably the scariest part of it. You look ahead and you’re going to drop your bombs and you’re looking at a wall of flak in front of you. Wondering how any plane is going to get through there.

T: What do you think about when you’re in a situation like that? I mean, it sounds like you’re kind of powerless.

R: You are powerless but...I don’t know. You just...I think you try to make your mind blank.

T: How did you do that? Could you do that?
R: Well, I don’t know. I amazed myself. I mean, the day I got shot down I helped my ball turret man out of that thing. I had so many things to do I wasn’t thinking about myself at all I think. I had to crank him out of there and get a chute on him and get him bailed out because he was injured. Then my tail gunner was hit. His guns were knocked out and he bailed out too. I didn’t know what happened to him. I tried to get back to him. I wasn’t even thinking of myself. I just... *(trails off)*

T: This is the mission of 8 March 1944.

R: Yes.

T: What brought your plane down? It was on a mission to Berlin that day, you said. You hadn’t quite reached the target, right?

R: No. We hadn’t reached the target when we fell out. They got our engine. One conked out and then the other engine caught on fire. The pilot got that out. So we still had three engines. But right after the ball turret man bailed out and my tail gunner bailed out, my other waist gunner bailed out—there was three of them that bailed out. Then we went into a dive. Went from about twenty-eight thousand feet down to about three thousand feet. You were just frozen to the plane. You couldn’t move in there with all that pressure on you.

T: Was this dive intentional to get plane...

R: I think it was intentional. They put it into a dive. But then you wondered if it was going to come out of that dive. My first engineer, his top turret man stands right behind the pilot and he said it wouldn’t have been...the copilot was about a two hundred pound man. He pulled back on the stick. We’d probably would have gone right straight into the ground. When I was in that dive you thought you were going to go right on through. You were glued to the floor.

T: How scared were you at that point, where that plane is diving, that that was the end of your life?

R: I thought it was the end of life *(chuckles)*. I don’t know if I was scared or not. Really. I thought we were done for. When we got hit, or when we lost the engine.

T: So when the engine went out you already were thinking, this is not good.

R: Yes. Your plane gets out by itself, you’re surrounded by—at that time the enemy had a lot of fighters yet too, so your chances were pretty slim.

T: At what altitude did you actually bail out of the plane?
R: I didn’t bail out. We crash landed.

T: Talk about the crash landing.

R: We hedge-hopped for about...well, all the way from back to Quakenbrück, Germany. I don’t know if it’s on the map there. That’s on the border of Holland and Belgium.

T: So you rode this plane...

R: We went all the way—I don’t know where Berlin is—right in there someplace.

T: There’s Berlin (pointing to map of Europe, on the table). We’re looking at a map right now of Germany. We see Berlin, and you’re heading back towards the Netherlands which is due west, and so you rode this plane an awful long distance even though it was damaged.

R: Oh, yes. We went a long ways.

T: This plane was alone? Just your plane.

R: Yes. Just our plane. We hedge-hopped all the way back to...I don’t know where—it must have been up in this area someplace (motions to area on map).

(1, A, 125)

T: On the Dutch-German border somewhere, in northwest Germany.

R: Yes.

T: And at that point did your pilot crash land the plane intentionally, or was it, it simply wouldn’t go any further?

R: No. We went over one of these towns and I don’t remember which one it was, but I could read the smokestack, the name of the town there, Hannover.

T: So you went by Hannover.

R: We got hit. I was hooking up the intercom to my radioman so I could talk to him. You know, [you couldn’t talk because there was] too much noise in the plane. I was going to say goodbye to him. Then a 20 millimeter exploded right between us.

T: A shot from the ground?
R: It came from the ground, yes. He got hit pretty good. I just got one piece of my arm of that 20 millimeter, but I can still see the explosion about that big, right in...

T: So several feet across it looks like.

R: Yes. I was hooking up the intercom to him, to his helmet there. That exploded right between us. The next thing [I knew], I was on the ground or on the floor of the plane and he was on the floor of the plane. But he got the whole thing. His legs were...he couldn’t walk. I carried him out of the plane after we crash landed.

T: So you flew this plane quite a while after the engine conked out.

R: Oh, yes. Probably an hour.

T: What’s going through your mind the whole time? Are you the kind of person who’s optimistic that we’re going to get out of this, or are you more of a pessimist that thinks this is all just going to end badly?

R: I thought it was the end. I was going to say goodbye to my radioman because I thought we were done for. But when we landed, we [crash] landed in a marshy area.

T: That landing now. Here’s this enormous bomber coming down, talk me through that. Describe what that’s like from your perspective.

R: You can fly with two engines, but the last engine went out and it was just going down. Wondering how the pilot was going to make that crash landing. When we did touch the ground the dirt flew and the brush and everything else. It seemed like it came right through the bomb bay and up through there. So there was dirt flying all over in the plane. We landed probably eighty, ninety miles an hour I suppose. But the pilot made a good landing. I talked to him after. He said it was the best landing he ever made. I agreed with him, because the plane split in half afterward.

T: In the middle really.

R: Yes. When the plane stopped there the tail was up this way.

T: So sticking up in the air.

R: Yes.

T: So how did you exit the plane?

R: Through the escape hatch. That’s a door in the side of the plane.

T: So that was still accessible. Had the bombs been jettisoned?
R: Oh, yes. We dropped our bombs before we even made that dive. We dropped our bombs before we got into the target.

**(1, A, 163)**

T: When the plane crash landed was everyone able to walk away from it?

R: No. My radioman, I carried him out. My pilot and the copilot and engineer, they were the only ones in the front end.

T: Was the bombardier there too?

R: The bombardier and the navigator and the pilot and copilot and my engineer. They didn’t get any damage up in the front end of the plane. We got it all in the back end. From the radioman on back. It was all damaged there. But they came through the back and went out the same door I did.

T: You had your tail gunner, one waist gunner and your ball turret who had already bailed out.

R: Yes.

T: And your radioman you were carrying, and you had the other five. That would be ten, wouldn’t it?

R: Yes. I had a hard time carrying him. That was dead weight.

T: Was he conscious?

R: Yes. He was still conscious. But he was like in shock. I mean he couldn’t walk. I got him on my shoulder and his arms around my neck and I dragged him out. I couldn’t carry him. But I dragged him out. My engineer came running by me. I hollered at him to help me, to get him so we...well, we probably got him about two hundred, three hundred feet from the plane because we thought maybe it would catch fire. But it didn’t.

T: So the plane never caught fire or exploded?

R: Never caught fire at all. That was my big concern. That it was going to catch fire. Had to get him far enough away in case of it. We were fortunate it didn’t. I covered him. I opened a chute, and covered him. I figured he was going to get help. It was just like my ball turret man that bailed out. He got help right away when got to the ground. They were both in the hospital for about a month. From their injuries.

T: Once the plane crash lands, I guess the next step is clear, that you’re going to become a prisoner.
R: Yes.

T: At this point what I want to ask is, now that that's clear, I mean, even by default you're going to be a prisoner. How much thought had you given before that day, March 8, to what it would be like to be a prisoner?

R: I don't know. I never thought about it, I guess. You didn't want to think of that.

T: The negatives, you mean. You didn't want to...

R: Yes.

T: Did the Army Air Corps give any kind of information about what to expect if you did become a prisoner?

R: Oh, yes. I think we had a briefing on that too. What we should do in case we were shot down. We were briefed on that too. But when you can't speak the language and you're dressed with clothes that are Air Corps clothes...fortunately we were shot down at Quakenbrück, which was a small place, small area. The people were more friendly there. The first thing that happened, I tried to get away. I was out probably half an hour before the Wehrmacht caught me.

(1, A, 208)

T: This is my question: when you all got out of that plane, here's six or seven of you, seven of you I guess, one injured, what was the plan? Did you make a plan of what to do as a group or was it every man for himself?

R: Every man for himself. They all left me. I mean...

T: They left you there?

R: Yes. I helped to get Mike covered over and gave him a shot of morphine, because he was injured pretty bad I thought. I don't know, really yet today, how bad he really was injured. I know he couldn't walk and he was bleeding all over.

T: Did he survive the war?

R: Yes. He survived. He died about four years ago, five years ago. Had heart surgery and didn't make it through it. But I visited him. I mean, him and his wife. They lived in Greenville, Texas.

T: So at the crash site, instead of a unified plan, we're going to do this or do that, it's just people just sort of scattered.
R: Yes. That's what they did.

T: Did that surprise you? I mean, that your pilot or copilot didn’t give orders for what to do or...

R: No. I don't know if I ever even thought of it.

T: What was going through your mind? Here you’ve got a wounded colleague, your plane is laying there. How did you decide what to do?

R: I thought, “I gotta get out of here.” Because I knew they [Germans] saw the plane come down. But where we got shot down was swamps and dikes, so you had to stay on the dike or you were down in water. It was just like you were out in the middle of an open field. Anybody could see you. Nowhere to hide.

T: In addition, you’re also wearing Army Air Corps clothing.

R: Yes.

T: So you probably stood out like a sore thumb.

R: Yes. I don’t know where the pilot got picked up. He got away. I mean, for a while too. But by, oh, I suppose it was [close to] dark when I got picked up. I was probably loose for about an hour before they picked me up. A Wehrmacht [German Army] guy. Had a gun with a rifle and a shotgun—one on top of the other. When he told me to halt, I halted.

T: What were you doing when they found you? I mean, were you walking or hiding or what were you doing?

R: I was walking.

T: How did you decide where to walk?

R: I didn’t have any choice. I was on a dike.

T: Did you know which way to go or what to do or were you kind of just...

R: I had no idea which way to go. Didn’t know my directions at all. I thought I was going west, but I’m not sure.

T: Was it one German that caught you or was it more than one of them?

(1, A, 251)

R: No. It was one Wehrmacht. Land army.
T: Talk about that.

R: He brought me back to, like a house with a hotel room in it. There was a lobby. But it looked like just a plain ordinary house. It wasn’t very large. But one at a time they brought us in. Somebody brought my pilot in.

T: So more than just you showed up there.

R: Yes. We [the remaining crewmembers] all ended up in the same place, because we were in a small community.

T: Right. So the scattering didn’t do any good.

R: No. We all ended up in the same place.

T: How about the radioman that was injured? Did you see him again?

R: I didn’t see him until he came to prison camp.

T: You saw him in prison camp?

R: Yes. He came to the same camp as we were. He was in hospital for about a month. So was my ball turret man. He went down close to Berlin. That’s where he bailed out. But he was taken to the same camp. I think he went to Dulag Luft too, from the hospital.

T: So in a roundabout way, you all ended up...

R: We all ended up in...well, our pilots, they didn’t go in the same camp as we were. The officers were in a separate camp.

T: Right. Right. At this first location, were you questioned at all?

R: Oh, yes. Not much there. We weren’t questioned much by the people that...I think we were like strangers to them. I mean, we were like from Mars or something to them. I had a flight suit on and I had a pocket on my leg there and I had a roll of toilet paper. When they searched me and brought that toilet paper that was a big deal. They thought it was funny.

T: They were laughing.

R: Yes.

T: So they searched you.
R: Yes, they searched me. Yes. They searched us to make sure we weren’t carrying any guns or any knives or stuff like that.

T: Right. Anyone speak English to you?

R: No.

T: Any of your crew speak German?

R: No. None of our crew. I could understand some of their words through the Swedish language. It’s similar. I could understand some of it.

T: But as far as communication, it was difficult if not impossible.

R: No communication. But they were just ordinary people, like in a farm community. But everybody had to come. There were strangers, you know. They were very inquisitive to see who we were.

T: It’s almost like, come and check them out.

R: Yes.

(1, A, 294)

T: Did you feel scared by these people or did they not make you feel scared?

R: No. I wasn’t really scared, I don’t think. They took us that same day and they put us in a prison in town there. That was probably a four by six room with just a steel door. That was their city prison, I suppose. Then there was one slab of concrete with a chain coming down. That was the bed.

T: So it was obviously not meant for five or six guys. It was meant for one.

R: No. No. Just one person in each one of those cells. That was more scary than anything.

T: In what way?

R: Well, being locked in. They locked the door behind you and you were just...there wasn’t even a blanket in there. You slept in your clothes. Nothing to eat. I had some malted milk pills and stuff that I had from the escape kit in my pocket. But I didn’t get anything to eat that day. Until the next morning. They came and got us out of there again.

T: Did they take you away from this location when they came to get you?
R: I was in that place two days, I think it was. They took away my shoes. I had those boots, my flight boots. They took them. I never got them back either. I had my electric suit boots. I had to wear that. That's all I had for shoes.

T: That's not really meant for walking distances.

R: No, they weren't meant for walking. I had them until I got down to Dulag Luft.

T: Did they do any questioning of you those first couple days?

R: No. They just took everything off me. I lost my ring. They took that there. I never got it back. And my watch.

T: So things were removed, but there was no questioning. Were you or any of the men you were with physically abused at all? Hit or knocked around by these Germans?

R: No. No. They didn't shove us around or anything. They put us on a train and brought us down to Frankfurt to Dulag Luft. When we got off the train down there [in Frankfurt], there were people that were vicious at us there. I mean they were...

T: Talk about that. You've got a new setting here now.

R: Yes. They were spitting on us. Threw sticks at us. At the train station.

T: Civilians?

R: Yes. So they started to walk us that way, but they hurried up and put us on a streetcar. But the guards had to hold these people back when they did that.

T: So in a sense, the German guards were protecting you.

R: Yes. The German guards protected us, or the civilian people would have killed us I think.

T: What did you make of that, Mr. Shogren?

R: Well, they called us baby killers. We dropped bombs on their people. I don't blame them for being vicious at us. That was our job anyway.

(1, A, 348)

T: So I hear you saying you were kind of, you could understand their anger, in a way.

R: Yes. I could understand their anger. If I was a civilian and been bombed by them, I'd probably have the same feeling.
T: Yes. On that subject, did it ever bother you when you bombed targets, [thinking about what] you were bombing down there?

R: Well, yes. I think so. I thought that bombs—they don’t hit their targets all the time. Everybody drops their bombs on the lead bombardier, so those bombs could go a long ways. Then we carried incendiary bombs sometimes. They would explode about five hundred feet above the ground and spread out. So I mean, well, that’s not humane at all.

T: Did that bother you then, thinking of kind of what you were part of?

R: Well, yes, I think it did. Yes. But you had a job to do and your job was what you were doing on the plane.

T: So how did you, for yourself, how did you sort of come to terms with that? That sense that, okay this bombing is maybe not always hitting military targets, or using incendiary bombs.

R: Well, you know that you’re hurting somebody by doing it, but you had a job to do and didn’t have much to say about it.

T: I guess that’s the way you think about it, isn’t it?

R: Yes.

_end of tape 1, side A. Side B begins at counter 384._

T: Let me ask you about Frankfurt. When you get off at the train station you’ve got, perhaps, a very new situation for you. You’ve got very angry civilians [that are] very threatening to you and the guys that you’re traveling with here. Did they take you right to the Dulag Luft facility from the train station?

R: Yes, they did.

T: How many guys were you with now? Just your crew still?

R: Yes, just our crew. _pauses three seconds_ I think there was another crew with us too. I think we must have been ten or twelve when they brought us on that part of town there from that town that we were shot down at. When we got to Frankfurt, they put us on a streetcar, the guards did. Took us over to the Dulag Luft. I don’t really remember much about that, but I know we... _trails off_ After we got in there we were given something to eat and we got some clothes.
T: You still had only your flight boots on now, you said.

R: Yes. I just had, I didn’t have more than my flight suit on.

T: What was the questioning you had at Dulag Luft? Talk about that.

R: Well, each one [of us was] individually brought into an interrogator. I think he told us more about ourselves than we could answer.

(1, B, 401)

T: He had more answers than you realized.

R: Yes. I didn’t know how he knew all about us.

T: What kind of things did they know about you?

R: They knew where I came from. I was from Minnesota. Knew I went to school at Lindstrom, Minnesota.

T: They knew that?

R: Yes. How did they know that? The fellow that was interrogating me spoke very good English. Told me he had been bellhop in the city of New York in a hotel there.

T: What kind of things did they want to know from you? I mean, they seemed to know a lot already.

R: The only thing we were supposed to say is our name, rank, and serial number, and that’s what I answered him. He finally gave up on me and told me that was enough. He would sit there telling me where I was at and welcomed us to Germany. When he asked you a question you said your name, rank, and serial number.

T: How many interrogation sessions do you remember?

R: For about half an hour.

T: Just one time though?

R: Yes.

T: So you didn’t get repeat sessions or...

R: No. No. They probably did that to the officers more than enlisted men.
T: It’s sort of tempting to think that you were just a waist gunner.

R: Yes.

T: And as an enlisted man you weren’t going to know a lot.

R: That’s right. That’s what I figured anyway.

T: Were you threatened at all there? If you don’t talk, we’ll do this or that?

R: No, they didn’t. They just talked to me. He kind of got disturbed because I didn’t give him any answers.

T: But that was it, and they basically moved you out.

R: Yes.

T: From there you went to Luft VI, which is way in East Prussia, at a place called Heydekrug. How did you get from Dulag Luft to Dulag VI?

R: They put us in a train. We were about twenty-five in a car. A boxcar. We had half the boxcar and two guards on each boxcar.

(1, B, 423)

T: So the guards were on one half and you twenty-five on the other half.

R: Yes. We were crowded in there. There wasn’t any room to allow you to lay down. You couldn’t have a spot. You were laying side by side when we got in there.

T: And between the guards and you, was there some kind of barrier?

R: No, there was no barrier. They were in one end of it. They slept in that part, and we were on that boxcar about two days and two nights.

T: What do you remember about that boxcar ride?

R: I know it was miserable, but I don’t remember too much about it.

T: Was your train strafed or attacked, that you remember?

R: No. We were fortunate there. We worried about it, though. I mean...

T: Were you?
R: Yes, you were. This was before D-Day, so there wasn’t anybody fighting over there.

T: So you were concerned about it, but it didn't happen.

R: No.

T: The train ride was, it sounds like, uncomfortable.

R: When the train stopped they let us get off, and we could eliminate if we had to. A lot of people were walking back and forth in the train depots where they stopped.

T: So civilians there as well.

R: Sure. (pauses three seconds) But they didn’t, they didn’t notice us there, I don’t think. They ignored us.

T: So not like the civilians at Frankfurt that had noticed you.

R: Yes.

T: These people, so once again a completely different experience.

R: Yes, it was. We were in different parts of the country then. I was up through [what is today] Poland.

T: Luft VI is way up in the northeast of Germany, or what was Germany then

R: Yes. It’s way up in the corner up here (points on map of prison camps in Germany).

T: When you got off the train, did you march to the camp then, right from where you got off the train?

R: I believe we did. We got off the train. We were marched to—it wasn’t very far there. We got off at Heydekrug.

T: And the camp was there.

R: And that was an established camp. There was probably about 2500 Canadians and English people in one compound. We weren’t in the same compound. But there was already Americans up there too. We weren’t the first ones there.

T: Let me ask you about the camp. You got there sometime mid-March 1944, it sounds like.
R: Yes. It must be. We got shot down \((thinking)\), I think we were probably two weeks afterwards when we got up there. Maybe about the twentieth or so.

**(1, B, 452)**

T: And that camp was evacuated in the summer of 1944, so you were there about...

R: July of ’44 we were moved from Stalag Luft VI down to Stalag Luft IV.

T: So you spent a number of months at Luft VI there before it was evacuated.

R: Yes.

T: Let me ask you about the camp. You’ve gone through a number of exhausting days, it sounds like. The crash landing, Dulag Luft, and the boxcar ride. When you got to the camp, here you are at a real camp now, what impression did that camp make on you? What did it look like to your eyes?

R: It looked like some big barns, is what it was. They were brick or masonry buildings. We were put in different rooms, about forty or fifty in a room.

T: So fairly good sized rooms.

R: It was big rooms. Then there was a row of these...I don’t know—there’s a picture of them someplace, but I don’t know right off hand where it’s at. But they were like old barns. That camp had been there for years. There were two rows of them, and then the bathrooms were on the end of the camp.

T: In separate buildings?

R: That was in a separate building. There was a shower room back there, and the bathrooms. The bathrooms were all like outdoor biffies, at the end of the compound. So you had to walk from here, probably up to that street \((motions out the window)\).

T: So a couple hundred feet, it looks like.

R: Yes, from where our barracks were. They locked us in at six o’clock at night and didn’t unlock the door until six in the morning.

T: So you had twelve hours of secure lock in.

R: Yes.

T: The sleeping situation in these barracks, were there bunks?
R: Yes. There were bunks in there, and then you had a gunnysack with excelsior in them for your mattress. There were boards that went across that bunk. Slats across there. Five or six slats. They weren't very comfortable to sleep in.

T: It sounds like there was space between the slats?

R: There was space between slats.

T: That doesn’t sound like it’s very comfortable.

R: No, it wasn't very comfortable. But you slept on it anyway. I had an upper bunk, and there was two to a bunk.

T: And how many bunks high?

R: Just two.

T: Two high, and in your sleeping platform, was there just you sleeping there or two guys?

(1, B, 482)

R: No. Just one.

T: Two bunks high. One person to a bunk.

R: Yes.

T: What about the food in this place? How were you fed?

R: It wasn’t too bad to start with. We got two meals a day there, I think, if I remember right. And sometimes it was barley soup and dehydrated soup, and mostly it was some kind of soup. Then we got one or two slices of bread at the first camp we were at, at Luft VI there. Black bread. Made out of molasses and sawdust, I guess.

T: So a dense kind of bread.

R: Yes. It was real hard bread. Heavy.

T: Do you remember getting food regularly at that camp?

R: We didn’t, we never had any, like meat or anything. The meat was included in the soup.

T: But you got regular meals.
R: Yes. There was a kitchen. Cooking kitchen. They would bring it to us.

T: So the food was cooked at one location and then brought in.

R: Brought into our barracks. To our bunk.

T: Now before we started, you talked about eating partners, groups of six guys. Is that here or later?

R: We always had that. When we got a food parcel, which we didn’t get very many of, we’d get one parcel for two people. So that’s how we got to be eating partners. We’d share.

T: Just split the parcels up.

R: Yes. There was, I don’t know, some place it tells what was in there. There was bully beef and Spam and probably one can of margarine.

T: So you had to split this with a number of other guys.

R: Yes. We had one parcel for two people.

T: And how often do you remember getting those?

R: It was about a month before we got the first one. Probably got about three in the time we were at Heydekrug. Three parcels. Not very often. They always said the Americans bombed their trains, so that’s why you didn’t get any.

T: I’ve heard that before from a bunch of other guys in different camps. Were there work details at Luft VI when you were there?

R: No, we didn’t work. [We were] noncommissioned officers. The Geneva Convention, you know. You didn’t have to work.

T: And they stuck by that. You didn’t work.

R: No. We didn’t work.

(1, B, 514)

T: So what did you do during the day?

R: We had ballgames and—

T: Baseball?
R: Yes. Softball.

T: So you had an area large enough to play softball.

R: Oh, yes. The compounds were quite large. Forty acres or so in each compound.

T: Who supplied the balls and gloves and stuff?

R: The Red Cross. They were brought in by the Red Cross. The English—I don’t know what they call theirs. Same thing with the Red Cross.

T: And the Germans didn’t mind if you played baseball or softball?

R: No. No. The first camp was, it was already established when we got there. A lot of the stuff was there. We did a lot of walking. We used to walk all day long, around the compound there.

T: Were you a person that liked to walk by yourself or with someone else?

R: I walked with someone else. We [my first engineer and I] always walked together. Someone to talk with. My first engineer, he just got married before we left the States and his wife was pregnant, so he was pretty upset. Worrying about her. I used to walk [with] him to keep him going so he wasn’t going to do anything foolish.

T: So he seemed to not be handling it as well as you, for example.

R: No. No, he had a hard time handling it. He didn’t hear until…well, we were shot down in March. We got our first letters probably in June.

T: Three months later.

R: Yes. So, I mean, he didn’t hear from his wife. Didn’t know how she was doing. I think their baby was born in May.

T: Here you are a young man of not quite twenty-three years old. How’s Rodney Shogren handling the situation?

R: I think I handled it as well as anyone.

T: What made it easier for you?

R: I don’t know [why]. Different temperaments, I guess.

T: How would you describe your temperament? What made you able to handle something like this better than other guys?
R: I really don’t know. I couldn’t tell you that. Probably being born in a Depression Era and never having anything at home.

T: So you think having hard times as you were growing up made it easier to handle something like this?

R: Easier to handle that. Yes, I think so.

T: How about your temperament? Are you by nature a fairly easy going guy?

R: I’m easy going, yes.

T: From your perspective, what kind of guys had a tougher time with POW existence?

R: I think the fellows that were married and had a family worried about their family.

T: And you were still single by this time.

R: I was single.

T: Did you have a steady girl either?

R: No.

T: Now your folks were still alive, right?

R: Yes. I was concerned about them [my folks], of course.

T: Yes, of course. Were you able to write to them at all?

R: Yes. I wrote. They gave us a postcard to send home when we were first shot down at Dulag Luft, but there wasn’t much you could write on it. About six or seven words is about all you could put on there.

T: It was a standard form too, wasn’t it, check this box or something like that.

R: Yes. I’ve got some of them.

T: So your folks did learn, I guess, that you were a POW.

R: Yes.
T: Back to the activities. You had things to keep you busy. You could walk, you could play ball. Did you have decks of cards or books to read?

R: Yes. We had books to read there. I read books every day, I think. Played cards.

T: So there were things to do.

R: Yes. You were always talking, anyway. There were forty, fifty people in there. We all seemed to get along. Every once in a while you get somebody, somebody would get upset and get mad and get fighting.

T: How often did that happen? I mean, I'm thinking a lot of guys in small quarters without much food. You'd think tempers would flare. How often was that a problem, from your perspective?

R: It wasn't too much. I mean, it maybe happened half a dozen times probably the length of time we were there. Always fighting with Southern people. Civil War. That was the thing they did.

T: You're kidding me?

R: No. That was one thing that…guys from down South and their Civil War stuff.

T: It was only like eighty years before that.

R: Yes. That always got settled.

T: For you, it sounds like this POW experience could have been a lot worse, this first camp.

R: Yes. I didn't think…prison camp wasn't that bad. But it was in between the prison camps it wasn't good. That boat trip there, that was bad.

T: It sounds almost like, and we talked about it before we started taping a little bit, that for you the best part was at the beginning, and then it went downhill from there.

R: Yes, it did. And of course, you're in pretty good shape when you first got shot down.

T: You had only an injury to your arm?

R: Yes.

(1, B, 583)
T: And did that heal by itself?

R: Yes.

T: So you’re, physically, you’re doing okay.

R: Yes. Physically I was fine. We had a lot of fellows that were in there, some of them had gotten burned pretty bad. But they did get repatriated. But they were there probably a couple months before they got repatriated. Had one fellow, his eyelids had burned off.

T: They repatriated guys like that.

R: Yes.

T: In a sense you were, it sounds like, you’d been fortunate that your plane crash landed and you got away with barely a scratch.

R: Yes, right. I was fortunate all the way through.

T: How much advance warning did you have, you guys at Luft VI, that that camp was going to be evacuated?

R: Oh, we didn’t know that until they came and told us we were moving.

T: So it was almost at the time it happened that they told you.

R: Yes. I don’t know if we had one or two days. The camp commander told us that we were moving out. We had a good camp commander there. He was from, I think, from Pennsylvania. He was a GI. The camp commander for the Americans. He was the go-between between the camp commander of the Germans.

T: I see. The German camp commander, he gave the news to this guy who then disseminated it to you.

R: He was our arbitrator.

T: That’s what they’re called. So he gives you the news you’re going to be moving out. Did he have the news as well, that you were going to be moving by ship?

R: No. We found that out when we got on the ship.

T: So you didn’t know that either.

R: No.
T: When you got the news you were leaving camp, did they tell you to pack your stuff or take what you could?

R: Yes. We must have had a few days. I don’t really remember when we got that news. They told us to take what—we made gunnysacks so we could pack our stuff. Sewed them.

T: So you could take the little bit that you had.

R: Yes. We had to pack up all our groceries that we had accumulated.

T: Now instead of stockpiling it, you have to carry it.

R: Yes. We had to carry it. We made like duffel bags, each one of us. We didn’t know they were going to dump them about forty feet down into a hold in a boat. Some of them probably fell apart. Mine held out. The one I made was okay. I had the foodstuff.

T: And when you got off the ship, did you get it back?

(1, B, 623)

R: We got it back again. I don’t know how they ever did that, because 250 bags dumped down in the bottom of the boat... But we found them and got them back.

T: That’s amazing you got it back.

R: But then when we got off the ship, then...

T: Let’s go back to getting on the ship first. I’m curious about that, because this is a journey from northern part of East Prussia, really, across to central Germany by the city of Stettin [present day Szczeczin, in Poland]. What do you remember about the ship when you got on there? What kind of ship was that?

R: I thought it was an ore boat or grain boat. The first thing you did was look down in the big hole. We had to go down there. We went down a ladder. I don’t remember if it was thirty, forty feet down. Went down the ladder to the bottom of it, and then there was a great big—where the prop goes through. The prop shaft there was great big, probably six feet wide and about ten feet high where the driving part of the boat...

T: Could be the keel as well was in there. So this is the bottom.

R: The bottom. It came like this (motions with hands, making a rounded hump shape). That big hump like that. They just threw our bags down in that hold. Dropped them down thirty, forty feet. Down there.
And then we went down. You had to go down that long ladder. Walk across this here, and in the back there were a couple level spots in the back of the boat. Which would hold maybe about twenty people on each side. But they kept putting everybody down in the same place.

T: How big was this hold? It sounds pretty big.

R: It [the hold] was big.

T: And all the men went in the same hold? There weren't two separate holds or something? You all went in one place.

R: Yes, as far as I know. Where I went down, we were in the back end of the boat. I don't know if there was another compartment. You never saw part of it. I suppose the boat must have been eight, nine hundred feet long. It was a big long boat.

T: Big, big ship. Describe the conditions inside that hold from where you were sitting or standing. What was that like?

R: There was lights in there so you could see, but it was not very good lights. There was no place to stand because the side of the hull.

T: Because it's not flat.

R: No. First ones that got down there got to the end of the boat. Some of them. But when it got so many in there, there was no room to sit down even. They were just packed in there.

T: So it was packed in there, and you had, basically it sounds like, not even enough room to sit or lay down for sure.

R: No. And we were there for two days and two nights.

T: Did the ship move right away when you were all loaded on?

R: When we were loaded they moved it out, yes. We had no way of, no facilities for bathroom and we didn't get any water. They sent a bucket down.

T: A bucket?

R: Yes. Pass the bucket back.

T: How well did that work? I mean, there's a lot of guys using one bucket.

(1, B, 675)
R: You didn't have anything to eat and nothing to drink so... *(trails off)*

T: I guess that’s right. So food and water wasn’t provided.

R: No. Our food was in the bags that were dropped down there, and we couldn’t get at them so we didn’t get anything to eat for two days. We did get some water. They sent down water. Didn't know if that came down in the same bucket as the one we threw up.

T: This sounds like it could lead to some tensions between people. I mean, from what you observed, was that the case?

R: No. Everybody...well, everybody was *grouchy*, but no problem because you were in the same boat and you couldn’t do anything. We had one fellow jump off the boat.

T: How did he get off?

R: He went up the ladder and went up. Jumped off. We heard the machine guns go. They shot him. He must have gone berserk to do that, because that water is about thirty degrees.

T: Yes, the Baltic Sea is cold.

R: He would have froze to death, died of hypothermia, if he hadn’t... *(trails off)*

T: Going across the Baltic like that, were you or the guys around you concerned about being attacked by planes or submarines?

R: No. But we were concerned about hitting mines.

T: So that was the concern, that the ship would hit something. Boy, if it went down...

R: We would have been going down too. That was a big concern. We didn’t know how long we were going to be on there. We didn’t know where we were going.

T: They didn’t tell you any of that stuff.

R: No. It was a relief when we landed.

T: Do you remember the name of the place you got off? What city it was?

R: Stettin.

T: When you got off the ship there, you ended up at Luft IV, which is some miles away from where you landed. How did you get from Stettin to Luft IV?
R: They lined us up after we got off the boat, [there is a short rail journey here] and then they tied our hands together. Two men, legs together, and we had to walk.

T: So ankles tied and wrists tied.

R: Yes.

T: So you had to walk in unison with each other. You surely couldn't run away.

R: Yes. Like a two way race, you know.

T: And they did this with the whole group of guys.

R: Yes. Then they marched us, well, we marched about two, three miles I think. But then they made it double time that way. Of course, carrying stuff on your back—we had our parcels. I finally had to drop mine. I got such a pain in my gut from carrying it. I dropped mine. A lot of them dropped them. Then you were stepping over the bags that they had dropped first. Trying to walk. They finally unhooked, took the belt off our legs, my partner and I. He carried his all the way and he made it. But I just couldn't make it anymore, so I dropped mine. I didn't drop it until we were almost to our destination. I didn't know where our destination was.

T: They didn't tell you, again.

R: No. They had dogs behind us. A lot of guys got their hind end punched with bayonets. One guy had about twenty-five punches in his hind end from the bayonet because he couldn't run fast enough. That was about the most miserable thing...

T: Were you scared at that time? I mean, here's another time when it seems like you got real violence directed against you. Like back at Frankfurt.

R: We were all scared that time. They were lined up with machine guns along the path there with us. I think they wanted us to run and try to escape. But nobody did.

T: So you ran, or were marched or ran, that last distance all the way to the camp, to Luft IV.

R: Yes.

T: By this time it's July, August of 1944, and for Germany things are starting to go downhill increasingly fast.

R: Yes.
T: At Luft IV, when you got there, you now have a really, almost a basis for comparison. You've been in one camp that had certain conditions, certain things to do. How does Luft IV compare to the first camp you were in?

R: When we moved into Luft IV we didn’t have bunks or anything there. That was just a building. There were new buildings put in there.

T: So they were just putting this camp together.

R: Yes. They were—

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

T: Luft IV, when you arrived there in July or August, early August 1944, how does that camp compare? You've got barracks that are, it sounds like, just getting put together.

R: Yes. [The] barracks were practically new, and there were no beds in there. So the first couple days we were there we slept on the floor. We had to put our bunks together. These bunks, there were sixteen men to a room. The bunks were three high and one stove in each barrack.

T: So you get smaller rooms, in comparison to the last camp.

R: These were real small rooms. I had a description of them someplace. I don’t know if I can find it.

T: Don’t worry about it. I have descriptions of it. Now here, was the food better, worse, or about the same as Luft VI?

R: Well, I think it was about the same here. We got about the same food.

T: Same kind of stuff and same amounts?

(2, A, 14)

R: Same amounts. Yes.

T: Would you say at both camps, did you get enough food?

R: We got enough food to survive, but of course, they got food parcels from home once in a while and that would help us. When we did get a food parcel, that was a big help.

T: The Red Cross parcels, you mean.
R: Yes.

T: How often do you remember getting mail or parcels from home, yourself?

R: I probably had two or three mail deliveries in the months up at Stalag Luft VI, and then of course, it took a while after we got moved. I think I got maybe about four parcels from home. With stuff, cookies and stuff like that, that the folks sent me. Clothing. They sent me letters.

T: So your folks did know pretty soon that you were still alive and where you were.

R: I think it took about two months before they—I have the telegrams that were sent to them. It was a couple months before they knew that I was okay.

T: So they had some worry.

R: Yes.

T: At Luft IV, you remember the food being about the same in quantity and quality.

R: Yes. There wasn’t much difference there.

T: Were there activities, same kind of things to do with your free time?

R: Yes. We had card playing. We used to play bridge between barracks. I mean, between rooms there. We had books there to read too.

T: So things to do.

R: Yes. It took a little while after we got moved in there. Probably a month or two before we got the books and stuff in there. A lot of that stuff was moved down from Stalag Luft VI too, I guess.

T: Because that camp was closed, because of the war.

R: Yes. The Russians were coming there.

T: Any work details at Luft IV? I mean, I know what the Geneva Convention says, that you shouldn’t be working. Were they still holding to that?

R: Yes. We didn’t ever do any work over there.

T: So you had plenty of free time on your hands.

(2, A, 38)
R: Yes. That was all we had, free time.

T: Was that a good thing or a bad thing?

R: Well, you had to keep yourself occupied. Reading or doing something. You had to find something to do. I did a lot of reading. That I did.

T: Were you a reader before you went in the service too?

R: Yes, I think I was. I'm not anymore though. After I got home from service...I can't read a book. I can't get through the first four pages. I lose my concentration.

T: So that changed for you.

R: Yes.

T: How about reading, like the newspaper?

R: I read the newspaper and I read magazines, but I can't pick up a book because I have to find something that's got some interest in it right away or I can't...I think I read maybe two or three books since I got back.

T: That's the darndest thing, because I hear you saying, in prison camp you read books all the time.

R: Yes. And I read every book that was possible to read in there.

T: What do you make of that?

R: I don't know. I just...my concentration isn't there.

T: Thinking of both the camps you were in, or even later when you were marching, a couple things I wanted to ask. Did you make or have friends, close friends, among the POWs? People who you hung out with very closely.

R: Oh, yes. We were all real good friends there. We never had any problems with any of the people that were in the room either. We were sixteen in a room. The room was smaller than this.

T: This room is maybe twelve by fourteen, or something like that.

R: Yes.

T: Are there guys that you were with at Luft VI and Luft IV and on the march, guys, friends that you stayed with?
R: Yes. We were together. I mean, even up at Heydekrug, when we moved down to IV, we were the same bunch together there. Anyway, we were a lot more in the rooms at Heydekrug.

T: Yes.

R: So we got down to sixteen. But then probably the others were in the other rooms.

T: So you knew where your friends, where your particular friends, were.

R: Yes.

T: Who were your friends? You mentioned these eating partners, group of six guys. Who were those guys for you?

R: The names of them? There was Johnny Leeburg and Hatcher, Roy Hatcher and—I should remember them all.

T: Were these guys, were any of them from your crew?

(2, A, 66)

R: Yes. Roy Hatcher and Leeburg were both my crew. Leeburg joined us. He was an extra the day we got shot down. We got to be friends. He wasn’t on my crew originally. Roy Hatcher was. And Mike Rivera. They were on my crew.

T: So these are guys that you had been up in the same camp, and you sort of followed each other.

R: Yes. Yes. We all went to the same camp. Like Billy B. Ivy. He was my man in the ball turret.

T: The one that was hurt.

R: Yes. He was at Luft VI, and he was down at Luft IV too.

T: From your experience, what’s the importance of having friends in a POW camp situation like this?

R: Oh, you needed them. You needed friends. Yes.

T: What for?

R: To keep your mind going. Someone to talk to and somebody to discuss your problems and listen to their problems.
T: Kind of a mutual counseling service almost.

R: Yes. That’s right.

T: What do guys talk about? You had lots of time to talk. What did you find yourself talking about?

R: *(laughs)* I think you talked about everything that was possible to think about.

T: You had time, that’s for sure.

R: Yes.

T: What subjects came up?

R: You talked about your home life and what you did as a—stupid things you’d done and good things you’d done. You relived things. Learned of their problems. How they lived.

T: Did you talk much about what you were going to do when this was all over?

R: Oh, yes. You did that too. Had ideas of what you planned to do, if you ever got out of there. You didn’t know how many years you were going to be in there, or how long it was going to last.

T: Now on that subject, I mean, your camp, Luft VI, was evacuated because the Soviet troops were advancing.

R: Yes.

T: So in a sense, could you read that as good news?

R: Well, we did. That the war was getting closer to an end. But it didn’t sound very good. I mean, even the trouble...we got moved out of camp there and we started walking.

T: Was it possible at either of the camps you were at, VI or IV, to get news about what was happening with the war?

*(2, A, 93)*

R: We had news coming in. I mean, there was a radio in the camp that we got our news from, but that was, of course...nobody ever knew where it was.

T: You didn’t know where it was?
R: I didn’t know where it was.

T: You just heard stuff that came over that.

R: Yes. They would come by...mouth to mouth.

T: So it would get passed from...and you wouldn't ever know where it came from originally.

R: Yes. That's right. Well, the ferrets would come through. Every couple of weeks they’d come through. The ferrets.

T: The Germans.

R: Yes. The Gestapo. Come through the barracks. About once a month they’d come in and they'd tear up everything for you. Tear your bed apart. I don't know why they did it, because they should have known we didn't have anything in there. But they did that anyway, just to annoy you.

T: On the subject of the Germans. What kind of people were they, these camp guards that you had, or the guards on the march?

R: The guards when we were on the march and in our camp were probably veterans of World War I.

T: Older guys?

R: Yes. And they were pretty decent, most of them. I mean, we had some that weren't—a guy we called Big Stoop. We had names for those that were, those that you watched out for.

T: But it sounds like that they were the exception and not the rule.

R: They were the exception. We got along with the different guards.

T: Could you talk to them or trade with them at all?

R: Yes, we did. We could talk to them. Some of them didn’t speak any English, but you learned enough German. You could understand what they were trying to tell you. They were Austrian, a couple of them. From different countries around Germany.

T: But they weren't people that, by and large, you needed to be afraid of.

R: No. No.
T: Did you receive or witness any kind of abuse of prisoners while you were a POW?

R: No. I didn’t. We had a couple shot in camp. One fellow, he got out of his barracks at six o’clock in the morning and tried to go to the bathroom. That was too early in the morning. So he got shot and killed. That was at [Luft] VI. And then there were a couple of guys that jumped the forewarning fence.

T: Again breaking the rules though. Both of them.

R: Yes.

(2, A, 122)

T: But it wasn’t the kind of unpredictable violence where you might just be walking through the camp and you might get beat up or something.

R: No. The fellow got out before six in the morning. He should have known better. But he didn’t know what time it was.

T: So the rules were strict on that.

R: Yes, they were very strict. You just lay your hand on that warning fence. That was a fence that was ten feet in from the main fence. Space between there. They had their machine guns set on that line there.

T: Right. And everybody knew that, right?

R: Everybody knew that, yes. But sometimes, you know, somebody would jump over the fence there. They’d lose their cool.

T: Did people lose their cool fairly regularly at the camps you were at?

R: Not too regular. I think there was two guys shot there in VI and one that was shot going to the bathroom that time. I don’t remember any others.

T: So it really was fairly decent treatment, it sounds like.

R: If somebody...well, a couple guys escaped in VI there and we stood in formation for near the whole day that day. But we created the problem that way because they knew there were two guys gone but they lined us up and would go *ein, zwei, drei, vier* [German: one, two, three, four] down the line counting us. We’d keep moving our feet over to confuse them.

T: On the subject of escape, how much was that something that people thought about? That *you* thought about.
R: You always talked about escape.

T: **Seriously** talked about it, or just **talked** about it?

R: No. We were digging a tunnel. I was involved. I was never in the tunnel, but I used to carry, we used to put the dirt in our pockets. We had ten gallon cans that they used for the bathroom in the night. Carry and empty it out and put sand in there.

T: Did you really think through what would happen if you actually escaped? I mean, what would you do if you really got outside the camp?

R: I never did think about it, because I didn't think I would ever get a chance to do it.

T: So you knew that they were digging, but it probably would never come to something?

R: If you were German, if you could speak German, that would be one advantage. If you couldn't speak German, you were befuddled right away.

T: So it sounds like guys talked about it, but I'm hearing that it wasn't a realistic thing to think about.

R: No. They had one tunnel dug and the guard fell through it before it got to the fence.

T: Some people in these camps were thinking about it, were digging.

R: Oh, yes. You were supposed to do that too.

T: Did you take that seriously yourself? About what you were supposed to do as far as escape?

R: Well, if they'd ever got a tunnel that you could escape on, I probably would have.

T: But they never did.

R: No. Not at our camp they didn’t. A couple guys that did escape went out with a, I don't know, a wagon that went out of there. They got some way or other. Got in.

**{(2, A, 164)}**

T: It sounds like the escapes, or attempted escapes, were few and far between.
R: There wasn’t very many tried. No chances of doing it. The camp at [Luft] IV, it was woods all the way around it there. But there was enough space over to the woods. And enough guards to, those guards were always in the towers.

T: Right. It would have taken a really brave person to try it, I think.

R: Yes.

T: To really get out there. Because if you tried to escape over the fence they would shoot, right?

R: Yes. You were going to get shot if you got outside the fence.

T: That’s a pretty big price to pay, a pretty big risk.

R: Yes.

T: The next thing I want to ask about is in when Luft IV was evacuated. The Soviets were advancing again. In February 1945, right?

R: Yes.

T: Again, how much advance warning did you have that this camp was going to be evacuated?

R: I don’t really remember. I think we were one of the last ones to get evacuated, compound C. A and B had already been moved.

T: Some guys had already been moved.

R: Yes. Some of them were moved to other camps.

T: Yes. So you didn’t know, but you could expect maybe...

R: Like LeRoy Shaw. I think he was moved to another camp. He was in C too, but he got moved to another camp.

T: So not everyone in your compound went on this march that you were on.

R: No. There was about 250 or so in each group that went out of there. There were about 2500 in each compound.

T: So the compound was broken into groups, and the groups—

R: —moved out at different times.
T: And maybe they went here, and maybe they went there.

R: Yes.

T: I see. LeRoy Shaw went to a different camp. Rodney Shogren marched.

R: I marched. Yes. I marched eighty-six days or eighty-seven.

(2, A, 191)

T: Let me ask you about that. How are your memories of that particular experience? That’s a long time to march. When you left you didn’t know it was going to be an endless march, did you?

R: I didn’t know where we were going or how long we were going to be. We were just hoping the war would end. Every day we were hoping.

T: So you had a sense, again, that the war was going well for the Allies if your camp was being evacuated.

R: We knew that it was going, we knew the Germans were in trouble. The Germans knew that too.

T: I’m going to describe the map here, because on the map [of Germany] you have indicated marching from Luft IV west to the city of Stargard, up past Stettin north, and then down through Neubrandenburg. It looks like south of Rostock through Wismar, east of Hamburg, back across, then back east, then across the Elbe River to it looks like a stop at Stalag XI-B. Is that right?

R: Yes. I don’t know. We were never, we were in a camp for about two weeks with a bunch of Gurkhas and Afghans.

T: Really? So guys from a very different part of the world.

R: Yes. We were in a great big tent. They put us in there. About 250 in this tent. The Gurkhas and Afghans were in another tent in the same area. We were in the same compound. I don’t know if that was a camp that was there or not.

T: But you didn’t stay there. It was not a permanent thing.

R: We were there about two weeks. And then we moved on again. That was towards the end of the war. That was about probably a month before. Then we moved down, we were down as far as Frankfurt.

T: We’ve got you east, moving east from around Stalag XI-B past Braunschweig, back east across the Elbe River through Altengrabow, XI-A near Buchenwald at Dessau,
Annaburg, Torgau, Muhlberg, and then Colberg. By your memory it was at Bitterfeld, near Halle, that you ended the war then.

R: Yes, Bitterfeld is where we ended. In fact, we were close. We had Patton’s army on one side of us one night. We were right in the middle of the firing there. They were firing right over our heads.

T: At the very end there.

R: Towards the end. Yes. We thought we were going to get liberated that night, but they moved us out about two o’clock in the morning and went back up towards Berlin.

T: I see. So the marching...even looking at the map, it looks very, just a hectic march. It’s just moving, it seems like, as opposed to moving to a destination.

R: Yes. We kept moving back and forth between them.

T: You estimate about 250 guys moved out on this march. Is it the same group that stayed together during the whole march then?

R: Yes. I think we were pretty much together. A lot of them fell out. Got sick and moved out. I don’t know how many we were when we ended the march. We were all pretty sick when we ended. I think a couple more weeks and none of us would have lived through it.

(2, A, 236)

T: Did some guys die along this march?

R: Well, we don’t know. They’d take them out on a wagon. Take the sick—and whether they went to a hospital or whether they died, we don’t know.

T: So people who couldn’t keep up anymore were taken away, and you don’t know where they took them.

R: We don’t know where they went to.

T: Along the way, how did the Germans handle things like food or sleeping accommodations?

R: Well, they sometimes put us in a barn if there was one available. And sometimes they would put us in a sheep shed if it was available.

T: Kind of ad hoc solutions, it sounds like, whatever it happened to be.
R: Wherever you happened to be. If there was a place available. I don't think they made any preliminary plans on that. I think it was just wherever we were if there was something available. Otherwise we had to sleep on the ground. I slept on the ground a lot of times.

T: Just out in the open.

R: Yes.

T: Did you walk every day that you remember, or were there days when you didn't march?

R: Except for that two weeks that we were in that big tent, we walked every day.

T: Same distance or did that change too?

R: No. That changed. Sometimes we walked for four hours, five hours. Sometimes we walked for ten hours.

T: That's a lot of walking for guys in not very good physical condition.

R: Terrible.

T: Your POW experiences really have gotten progressively worse, or more difficult.

R: Oh, yes. That's what I said. Being in a camp wasn't bad at all. But that boat ride, and then the three months of walking, that was really rough on you. We had dysentery so bad.

T: Did your health decline too during that march?

R: Oh, yes. Like I say, we were all pretty sick when we ended up. When we got liberated, those that were the worst got sent back to England to the hospital. I was still capable of walking. My buddy Cockerel, R. L. Cockerel and I, we were together. We both were pretty sick too, but we didn't get sent back.

T: Where did you know Cockerel from?

R: Cockerel I met in prison camp. He was on a B-24 [Liberator bomber].

T: So somebody that you didn't know, not from your own crew.

R: No.

(2, A, 274)
T: While you’re marching there, did you march through little villages, little towns?

R: Every one of them.

T: Did you come into contact with German civilians at all?

R: Yes. Polish people too. Traded off our clothes with them. For food. Loaves of bread and jam, and fish paste we used to call it. Smelled like cod liver oil. Tasted like cod liver oil, but it was something to put on your bread anyway.

T: The civilians you came across, I mean, you’ve had a bad civilian experience like at Frankfurt, and you had where you were captured which really was not so bad. What kind of experiences with the people that you encountered while you were marching?

R: They were willing to help us, I think. They weren’t hostile. They were in bad shape, most of those people. The last few days that we marched there was people walking as far as you could see in all directions. Getting out away from the Russians. They had everything on their back that they owned, or they were pushing a wheel barrow with everything they owned, or they were pulling a four-wheel buggy with everything they owned. They were pulling them by hand. A lot of these people were ancient people. They were up in age. I mean sixty, sixty-five. They appeared to be anyway. Because they’d had a pretty rough life. I felt sorry for those people. We were sick and in bad shape too, but these were old people. They were civilians that were leaving everything they owned.

T: So even though they were German civilians, it was possible to sympathize for them.

R: Yes. I don’t know if they were Germans or if they were Polish, but they were all getting out of the way for the Russians.

T: It sounds like the situation on the roads was chaotic.

R: It was, that last two, three weeks. There were dead animals along the road that had been shot or died.

T: And yet they kept you marching.

R: Yes. We marched up to the last day there. We walked on that road. All of a sudden the guard threw his gun in the ditch. Then we knew that something was going on.

T: That was the clue. Now, the guards that you had on the march, you mentioned earlier they were older guys.
R: Yes.

T: They weren't the guards from the camp?

R: No. They were at camp too.

T: So these guys stayed with you.

R: The same ones. They stayed with us. So we got to know them. We could talk to them and they were civil with us.

T: So again, the guards that you had, really at different levels of your camp experience, were not bad guys so to speak.

(2, A, 323)

R: No. The only bad ones we really had was on that boat trip when we got off of there.

T: The ones that kind of hustled you into camp.

R: Yes. But that was the exception. They were terrible. They were the guys that punched holes with the bayonet and they had a guy, a red-faced fellow that rode his horse. He was the one that instigated all that stuff. And I think probably they had intentions of probably getting rid of us. I don't know.

T: The way you describe it, that sounds like one of the more frightening situations you had as a POW.

R: It was. That's what I said. The boat ride and that last march that we had there, that was worse than anything else we had. Of course that march itself, being starved and dysentery, why...

T: How did the dysentery affect you?

R: Well, stomach flu is mild compared to dysentery. You just...everything just went right through you. The diarrhea. And if you went to bed and went to sleep, it didn't let, you know, the diarrhea. You had to get up, clean up.

T: So you could just be constantly running, even if you didn't notice it.

R: Yes. You didn't have anything to eat, so your stools were bloody and... (trails off).

T: So your health had declined by the time this march was over. Not all the guys had made it. The conditions for eating and sleeping were, it sounds like, ad hoc solutions on a daily basis, but the guards weren't bad or weren't cruel.
R: No, they weren’t. The guards that ended up with us, they were okay. Guards in
the camp were okay. It was that one boat trip that we had.

T: Now while you were marching all those days, was your column ever strafed by
Allied planes?

R: Yes. We got strafed and we got bombed.

T: Talk about those things.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 391.

T: That sounds like a frightening thing.

R: Yes. We got bombed. I don’t remember where we were, what the location was.
Got bombed once. I remember getting under machinery on the road. Because you
didn’t know where the bombs were coming from.

T: You couldn’t see the planes?

R: Could see the planes, but you didn’t know where the bombs were going. And the
one time we got strafed we were in a metal building. Went right down the middle of
that building. I don’t know whether that was our own planes or not.

T: So the shells came through the ceiling then?

R: Yes. The building.

T: Was that the closest call you had?

R: We were bombed when we were in Frankfurt too, but there they put us in a
shelter. When we were at Dulag Luft.

T: Dulag Luft got bombed, or around there.

R: Yes. They bombed Frankfurt, and they put us down in a bomb shelter. That was
pretty close, because the dirt was flowing down on us down in that bomb shelter
there too. The ground just shook.

T: As a bomber crewman, I mean, up until that point you had been on the one end of
the bombing process. What was it like being on the other end?

R: Not very good. I was bombed a couple times in London. I was in London when
they bombed London one time. It wasn’t the bombing that was bad then. I was
taking a girlfriend home. Got off the subway and they were bombing and we stayed
underneath that shelter there and the flak was coming down from the top. You had to stay there until it quit coming down. It was like it was raining.

T: The pieces of flak. Of course, once it exploded it would come to the ground.

R: Yes.

T: Right. So you had a couple different experiences of being bombed.

R: Yes. I had a couple times in London and a couple times, three times, in Germany.

T: Once at Dulag Luft and then on the road there.

R: Yes.

T: Was any of those more frightening for you than any others?

R: It was all frightening. It’s something you’ve got to take, I guess, when you’re in the Army.

T: Let me ask about being liberated. You’d marched. You’d seen more of the German countryside than you might have liked for close to three months. Talk about the day you were liberated.

R: The day we were liberated? We marched into this camp for the [US Army’s] 104th Division and the guards just threw their guns on the side of the road and we walked across a bridge and over to there. I had an English uniform on, so they shifted us off as we came in there and I had to prove I was American. I had the dog tags to prove it. But I got put aside because I had a blue English uniform.

But then that first night there we had to sleep outside. They had no facilities. Because they had a camp there too, the 104th. There was no buildings for us to be in. But somebody found a bunch of spaghetti, a roll of spaghetti. It was about six feet long. We got a whole kettle to cook spaghetti in and we ate spaghetti. I was sick as a dog for two days.

T: After eating it?

R: Yes. Well, your stomach was so small.

T: The temptation must have been to eat though, because you were hungry.

(2, B, 432)

R: You just stuffed yourself. That spaghetti. I thought that would never hurt anybody, but I blew up like a balloon. Then the first thing they did was they gave us vitamin pills and egg nog. I mean, like chocolate malts. I drank a whole glass worth
of that and that was bad news. I was sick for two weeks afterwards. In fact, my legs gave out. I couldn't even walk for two weeks.

T: The temptation is to think that once you started eating you'd feel better, and you didn't.

R: No, I felt worse. My legs gave out and my stomach blew up. So I couldn't eat afterwards. I learned to just take a small cupful of that milk and vitamin pills.

T: So you had to start slow.

R: I weighed under one hundred pounds when I got out.

T: When you got shot down what did you weigh?

R: About 150.

T: So you lost about all you could lose.

R: Yes.

T: Where did they keep you there? I know you were in Bitterfeld, but did they move you out of there pretty quickly?

R: Yes. I suppose probably about a week we were in a tent there, and then they moved us down to [the city of] Halle.

T: A much bigger city.

R: Yes. When we got to Halle, then they deloused us. Deloused us and gave us clothing. I had so many lice on me that I had a sweatshirt on that when they deloused me was pretty near an inch deep. As big around as the sweatshirt was.

T: That's pretty gross. Those lice, had they been a problem for a while?

R: Oh! I was fortunate. I had them for about three, four weeks there. It was on the march we got them.

T: You didn’t have them before that though.

R: No. They kept it pretty good in the camps. There was, at Stalag IV we got some lice. Some of the fellows had gotten lice. Probably picked them up before they came into the camp. But when we got on the march we picked up those lice. That was terrible. You lay at night and pick them, catch them.

T: Thinking about where you were sleeping at night it’s not surprising you got them.
R: No. Sleeping in barns and sheep sheds. And you didn’t shave, didn’t wash, for three months. Never took your clothes off. Took your clothes off when you had diarrhea. I remember taking my clothes off in forty degree weather and rain. I washed them off in the puddles of water.

(2, B, 463)

T: It’s a wonder that you didn’t get sicker than you did really, in those conditions.

R: Yes. It was so cold that you shook like...you couldn't stand still.

T: It was February when they moved you out of that camp.

R: February 14, 1945. I'll never forget that. It was drizzling all night and it was about forty degrees.

T: That’s nasty weather.

R: And every time we got a fire going, the bombers would go over our head. That was the English Army. They bombed at night. We had to douse our fires. About four times that night we had to get up there and blow on the fire to get it going again.

T: So it sounds like the conditions on the march made it even more miserable.

R: Oh, it was really miserable.

T: I want to move ahead here. When you moved from Bitterfeld to Halle, from there did they fly you out?

R: From Halle they flew us back to Camp Lucky Strike [in France].

T: That was the main collection center. And were you flown or shipped back to the US?

R: Came back by boat.

T: While you were at either Bitterfeld or Halle or Camp Lucky Strike, three places, was there any kind of debriefing by military officials, about your POW experience?


T: So they did the physical stuff, but they didn't do any kind of sit down and let’s talk about where you were and…
R: No. No.

T: I mean, after missions you were debriefed, right? After you flew a mission.

R: Yes. That we always, we’d have to report back.

T: But no kind of debriefing here after this POW experience.

R: No. No.

T: Not at Camp Lucky Strike either. It was more taking care of your physical side.

R: Yes. Camp Lucky Strike was just the embarkation center. They just got us ready to get on a boat to go home.

T: When did you arrive back in the States?

R: I think about 11 June.

(2, B, 488)

T: So a good six, seven weeks after you were liberated.

R: Yes.

T: How soon were you able to see your folks after you got back?

R: I think I got back on 15 June to the Twin Cities.

T: That’s pretty fast after you landed. You got a train back pretty fast.

R: Yes. We were at Fort Dix [New Jersey] for just a few days and they shipped us out.

T: When you got back, did your folks know you were coming?

R: Yes. Oh, yes, I called them and let them know I was back in the States. But when I got back to the Twin Cities the first night, I didn’t know if I was afraid to go home, but I didn’t go home right away. I and a buddy from Minnesota, we stayed in a motel or hotel for the first night there.

T: That’s interesting that you say that. What do you make of that?

R: I’d been gone from September of ’43 until June of ’45. Been gone a long time. I don’t know why I was afraid to go home, but I had mixed feelings when I got back.
T: Can you describe that mixed feelings? What do you mean by that?

R: I don’t know. It’s hard to explain. (pauses three seconds) I just, like I was afraid to go home.

T: The next day you did go home to see your folks, though.

R: Yes.

T: And your brother was not home?

R: No. No, he was still in Germany. He didn’t get back until after...I don’t know when he got back. He must have come back in August, I think.

T: So at home there it was you and your folks. When you first saw them, how much did they want to know about your POW experience?

R: Well, I don’t remember that. I think they were glad to see me come home, and I wasn’t prepared to talk about it, I guess.

T: Does that mean that they didn’t ask you questions or—

R: Oh, no. They asked me questions.

T: They did ask you questions.

R: Oh, yes.

T: Pretty detailed ones?

R: Well, I don’t remember. They were interested in what I had done and that, but I wasn’t really prepared to tell too much about it. I wanted to forget it more than talk about it.

T: Did you find it easier to talk about your experience as a bomber crewman than as a POW?

R: No, not necessarily.

T: Can we say that both parts of that were things you didn’t really want to talk about with your folks?

R: Yes, I would say that. Yes.
T: How did they take that? I mean, here they’re asking you questions. They haven’t seen you for almost two years, and from what I hear you saying you were kind of—

(2, B, 524)

R: I don’t know. I think they were happy to see me come home. And what I had done, why, they didn't probe me about it.

T: Was your dad a World War I veteran?

R: Yes.

T: So he had his own military experiences.

R: Yes. But his experience was considerably different. He was never overseas or anything. He went in the end of World War I. He never left the States. He was only in for, I suppose, about ninety days or something like that.

T: So your experience was much more involved than his.

R: Yes.

T: Did you have other relatives around the Shafer or Taylor’s Falls [Minnesota] area in those days?

R: Oh, yes. My grandparents were still living, and uncles and aunts.

T: Did those people, once you got home, did they ask you questions about your POW experience?

R: Oh, I think they asked me too. I think they realized I didn't want to really talk about it.

T: The next point is really, well, here we are sitting today and you’re speaking with me as openly as anything.

R: I think it’s more than I’ve ever said.

T: What happened then between then and now to get you to a point where you can sit and talk comfortably about this?

R: Probably it’s sixty years.

T: So the passage of time has made a difference.

R: Yes.
T: Are there parts of it even now that you find easier to talk about than others?

R: Oh, yes.

T: For example?

R: Well, it’s easier to talk to some people than others.

T: Is it easier to talk to people who aren’t family members sometimes?

R: I think so.

T: So the fact that we had never met might be a good thing today?

R: Yes, that’s right.

T: Let’s return to your story. You got back in June, you were discharged in October, and went back to working with your dad as a carpenter.

R: Yes.

T: So you saw each other on a daily basis. Did your war experience both as a gunner and as a POW just sort of become something that was put on the shelf and left there?

R: Yes, I think so. I hope so.

(2, B, 550)

T: So if you were working with your dad it wasn’t something that just came up in conversation?

R: No.

T: Also after the war, after you were liberated and forward, how often did you have dreams or even nightmares about your POW experience?

R: I fought that war one hundred thousand times.

T: Have you?

R: Yes. It comes back. Every once in a while.

T: And for our project’s purposes, is it more experiences as a gunner in a plane, or is it more the things that you remember from being a POW?
R: Oh, I think it’s more the experiences in the plane.

T: So the plane, the experiences you had there, are the ones that you recall.

R: Yes.

T: From the POW dreams or nightmares you have, which images are the ones that...what came back to you from your POW time?

R: Well, the boat trip and the marching.

T: The two worst parts that you mentioned earlier.

R: Yes.

T: Was it specific incidents that you remember, that you relive, or was it more abstract things?

R: Abstract things, I think. I don’t, not the individual days or anything. It’s just the life we had to lead through there.

T: So when it comes to the march, do you see certain German faces or do you see certain dogs in your dreams?

R: No, I don’t think so. Just the life we lived.

T: So the general, as opposed specific people or things.

R: Yes.

T: Did the dreams, your dreams, did you have them starting right after the war there or did they come only later?

R: No, I’ve had them ever since I came back.

T: And about the same amount, or have they increased or decreased in frequency?

R: Oh, probably something stirs you up, I mean something...maybe watch something on television or something like that. Brings it back.

T: Have you had help from your Veterans Administration?

R: Yes.

T: And what have they done for you as far as dealing with...
R: I've never gone to the psychologist. I know Jim Turello up at [the VA in] St. Cloud.

T: You know of him, but he's not someone you've talked to about this.

(2, B, 583)

R: Yes, I have talked to him some about...I know he has the meetings up there and he's asked me to join, but it's seventy-five miles to go for his meetings.

T: Is it the distance from St. Cloud that keeps you away?

R: Probably, yes. I would probably go to his meetings if I was closer. Jim's a good friend of mine.

T: So the St. Cloud VA, you're aware of those meetings they have but you haven't participated.

R: Yes.

T: When you were married in 1946, is Eleanor someone you had known before you went overseas?

R: No. I met her at her sister's—her sister got married to my good friend back here. I was at the wedding shower they had for them and I met her there.

T: And you were married not many months after that, you said.

R: Yes. That was in August and I got married in February the next year, 1946.

T: How much did your wife know about your POW experience?

R: Oh, she knew a lot about it.

T: When did she learn? Did she learn while you were dating, or when you were first married, or only later?

R: First married, I'd say. Yes. I didn't talk about it too much when I got first home.

T: And when you were first married, was it you that volunteered information or did she ask the questions?

R: I think I probably volunteered it.

T: So she was someone you felt you could talk to.

R: Yes.
T: More easily than your folks, it sounds like.

R: Yes. Right.

T: Your kids—you have six children. As your kids were growing up, how much did they ask and how much did you tell them?

R: They probably, they know quite a bit about my experiences.

T: Sometimes kids, they'll just ask you questions. Did they ask as they were growing up, or did they wait for you to tell them?

R: Well, they’ve asked too. I also volunteered some of it. I have twin grandsons and they were going to write a thesis on the POWs, but they never got it done this year. Maybe next year they’ll get it. I gave them information I have here.

T: When your grandsons ask you stuff, you’ll give them information.

R: Yes. I try to give them information about it.

(2, B, 619)

T: You also worked for the Postal Service in Shafer, Minnesota, beginning in 1951. Did your coworkers know that you were an ex-POW?

R: Oh, yes.

T: Was it easy to talk to them about things or were they curious?

R: No. We probably talked about it sometimes, but if they’d ask me something about it I would answer them.

T: You didn’t deny that you were a POW, or say you don’t want to talk about it or anything like that.

R: No. No.

T: Did you know any other ex-POWs back in those days in the ’40s and ’50s? Around here who you had contact with.

R: I belong to the [American ex-POWs] organization, so I know quite a few POWs.

T: And how long have you been a member of American ex-POWs?
R: Oh, golly, I don’t know. When it first started, I guess. I knew about it. I called Ken Porwall in Minneapolis at one time. That was when I first knew about the organization, but I don’t remember what year that was. I never did join the Minneapolis one because he wasn’t, it didn’t seem like he was interested in me joining.

T: So which branch do you belong to?

R: I belong to St. Cloud chapter, and I’m a charter member there.

T: How has American ex-POWs been a helpful organization for you?

R: I think they’ve really helped us. Just to talk to them even helps.

T: To talk to other guys you mean?

R: Talk to other guys that were POWs. I think we help those that can’t help themselves. That’s the idea of the organization.

T: Do you feel that you’ve learned about additional benefits or things that you are entitled to through the organization?

R: Yes, I do. They always, anything that’s new, we get the information out.

T: In the magazine that comes out.

R: Yes.

T: Rodney, what percent disability do you have now?

R: One hundred.

T: And how long have you had one hundred?

R: About three years.

T: And before that, how much did you have?

R: I came out with twenty percent. That was dropped to ten percent.

T: They cut you down?

R: Yes. Then they got me up to thirty percent. Then it was up to fifty percent, and then now I think I get seventy percent and then thirty percent for unemployable.

T: But it took a number of steps, a number of years to get that.
R: Yes. It took, well, fifty years.

T: Do you feel that the VA was helpful in the years right after the war? The 1940s and 1950s?

(2, B, 660)

R: No. They weren’t. The first time I went down there, I think I went there because I was having trouble with my nose. I couldn’t breathe. I didn’t get a bit of help there, and I never went back there for years.

T: So they were not very helpful.

R: They weren’t very helpful at the first. No.

T: Then you had your benefits cut down to ten percent too.

R: Yes.

T: Really looking at the questions, the last thing I want to ask you is, when you think about your POW experience, and it was fourteen, fifteen months or so, what do you think is a way, or more than one way, that that experience changed you as a person?

R: Oh, I think it did, all right.

T: It did change you, you think?

R: Yes.

T: How do you think Rodney Shogren at the end of the POW experience was different than the person who was shot down on March 8, 1944?

R: I think I lived day by day when I was fighting in combat. You didn’t know if you were going—each time you got on a plane for a mission possibly was your last time.

T: Did that go through your mind every time you went on a mission?

R: Oh, I think so. You saw other planes going down alongside you too, every time you went out of there.

T: So it was a real possibility that something could happen to you.

R: Yes. Your chances were pretty slim there, making it through.

T: Yes. I imagine if you think about that too much you could drive yourself nuts.
R: You didn't think about it much. You just lived day by day. I probably drank more than I should have.

T: When you got back?

R: No, after I got back I couldn't drink anything. My stomach was so bad.

T: And when you were flying missions, was drinking a way of kind just keeping things out of your mind?

R: I think so. We went to the pub every chance we had.

T: And when you got back from being a POW, did you drink then too? Was that something, a way of trying to forget the whole thing?

R: Well, I did drink but it didn't, I couldn't handle it.

T: How long did it take your stomach to get back to normal?

R: Oh, years. I had dysentery it seemed like, it seemed like it would never leave me. Whenever I went out anyplace I looked for where the bathroom was the closest. You ate, and lots of times you had to go to the bathroom right away.

(2, B, 708)

T: So this is something that stuck with you long after you were released.

R: Oh, yes. Long afterwards. The same with my buddy R.L. Even up until when he passed away he was having that trouble. He'd eat, and get through eating and right away he'd run to the bathroom.

T: How long would you estimate that you had those kind of problems?

R: I had that many years. I don't know.

T: So in a way, because of the problems you were having, doing a lot of drinking wouldn't have been possible.

R: No.

T: Do you think your personality changed after your POW experience? Were you a different type of person?

R: Yes, I think so. Probably. I grew up.
T: In what way?

R: I was more mature. I mean, more...I don't know how to really explain that.

T: Is it safe to say you were an old twenty-four year old when you got back to the States and were discharged?

R: That's right, I was.

T: Kind of sounds like a life experience thing that made you feel like an older man.

R: Yes.

T: That's the last question I had, so let me ask what if anything you'd like to add. Something I didn’t ask you or something you want to make part of this.

R: I think we talked a long time here.

T: We did. On the record, I’ll thank you very much again, Rodney Shogren, for your time here today.

R: You’re welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW