

Interviewee: Richard Cartier

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 27 May 2004

Location: dining room, Cartier residence, White Bear Lake, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, July 2004

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, October 2004

Richard Cartier was born 20 May 1923 in St. Paul, Minnesota. At age eight he moved with his family to a farm in Hugo, Minnesota, where he attended school. Richard graduated from high school in 1942 in nearby Forest Lake, Minnesota, as there was no high school in Hugo. He had a farm deferment for some time after graduation, but in March 1944 was drafted into the US Army.

By the end of 1944, Richard was serving in Belgium as a rifleman with Company K, 424th Regiment, 106th Infantry Division. On 16 December 1944, the first day of a large German offensive, Richard was taken prisoner. He was wounded in action prior to capture, so spent several days in a German first aid post. Richard then spent time in two German POW camps: Stalag XI-B, Fallingbostal (for approximately five weeks), then Stalag II-A, Neubrandenburg.

This camp was liberated on 28 April 1945 by advancing Soviet Red Army units. After some days in camp under Russian control, Richard and others were taken by truck to the city of Hamburg, in northern Germany, and subsequently transported back to the United States. Richard spent several months recovering from his ordeal as a POW, before being discharged in November 1945. Again a civilian, Richard returned to the family farm.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

R = Richard Cartier

[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 27 May 2004 and this is the interview for the POW Oral History Project with Mr. Richard Cartier of White Bear Lake, Minnesota. My name is Thomas Saylor. First, on the record, Dick, thanks very much for taking time today to speak with me.

R: You're welcome. Glad you could come.

T: For the record, you were born on 20 May 1923 in St. Paul. About age eight you moved with your family to a farm in Hugo, and that's where you finished your childhood and graduated from high school in 1942. Which school?

R: Forest Lake High School. Hugo didn't have anything.

T: How large was your graduating class?

R: There were 106 to start and I think about sixty-two of us graduated.

T: You had a farm deferment for a while and then in March 1944 were drafted into the US Army. By the end of 1944 you were serving with the 106th Infantry Division, 424th Regiment, Company K, and you were a rifleman. We pick up the story with the beginning of the German offensive, December 16, 1944, and it's on that day, the first day of the offensive, that you were captured. How did that come about that you were captured?

R: I explained that to you. We were in this farmhouse just BSing, and it was about one thirty in the afternoon. There were three of us in this one room that was any good. The only room left in the house, I should say. We heard a noise in the hallway and we opened the door and here's a German soldier standing on the other side.

T: Could you see this guy at the doorway?

R: Sure.

T: At that moment, Dick, what's going through your mind?

R: What do we do now? (*chuckles*)

T: Was it a fear situation or what happened exactly?

R: It was a gravity situation, because we knew we had a problem then. So we got him out of the house.

T: The German?

R: Yes.

T: How did you get him out?

R: With hand grenades. In fact, the sergeant on the first grenade took two of them to go off and he didn't leave the house. So he pulled the pin on another one and let the handle fly in the room and he had his hand on the doorknob to open the door to throw it out. But you only have from three to five seconds once you pull that, let the handle fly. He's holding the hand grenade up here like this in his left hand and it's sizzling and I finally said, "Throw the darned thing!" It didn't go ten feet down the hallway and it went off. The German soldier jumped in another room or another part of the house. It was a stone house by the way. Inside and out. So he was safe there.

Then we opened the door and looked and there was no more soldiers in the house. So I went across the hallway and up the stairs and there was no roof on the house but there was a stairway yet. I went up to where the—we were on an observation post for the artillery and they had their instruments set up, up there. I peeked over the edge and here the rest of our squad was with the German squad. Just milling about. So there wasn't a thing we could do to shoot them and throw hand grenades. I suppose we could have picked them off at one time, but the one of the Germans had one of those Schmeisser machine pistols. He was really shooting that thing. Wow! Scared the hell out of me. So I went down and told the sergeant what I saw and the sergeant says, "Let's go to the back of the house." It was across the hallway and the back of the house consisted of from where we were at, a barn and a garage. So he says, "Dick, you take the garage." I didn't care about doing that because there was no door on it. It was a sixteen foot opening seven foot high approximately. Like ours. He gave the corporal to take the window in the barn and he took the back hallway leading to where the Germans were at. So it wasn't long I looked down along the house and here's a German creeping down along the house on the back of the house. Stooped over. I motioned to the corporal to drop a hand grenade out the window. I couldn't tell him because I knew the German would hear him. So he dropped a hand grenade out of the house and the German soldier never made it to my position, which was about twenty feet further. And if he hadn't gotten him I would have gotten him. But he didn't come any further, so that was it.

(1, A, 43)

T: There were other Germans around though, is that right?

R: Oh, yes. The rest of the squad was on the outside of the house really shooting it up. But it was a stone house, so we were safe. But I thought it would be just my luck if there would be a bad spot in the mortar and a bullet would come through and get me, but it didn't.

T: Yes. Did you make it? Did you escape this house situation or was that where you were actually captured?

R: No. We stayed in there until—it was getting dark. In fact a German soldier, he wasn't too smart. It was about four thirty. He came running out past the end of the house where the garage quit and the road was right up against the house. He started running across the road. So he scared me because I couldn't believe that any German soldier would do that. So I had to shoot him, but to shoot him, I shot from the hip because I couldn't, I wasn't taking any time to get the rifle to my shoulder. Anyway, he went down and I didn't know if I'd hit him or not. So I took two hand grenades. The first one I threw it where I figured he landed. I still didn't get any action out of him but I still didn't feel safe, so I took another one and pulled the pin and let the handle fly and rolled it across the road. There was a little drop-off there on the edge of the road, and the woods were right up close too. The brush.

We waited about another half hour and we knew things weren't going to get any better. It was dark. So we talked it over and decided to surrender. So the sergeant says, "Dick, you've got the lowest rank. You'll have to walk out first." I probably could have gotten court-martialled for what I said, but I said, "Sergeant, as far as I'm concerned there's no rank left. No way in hell am I walking out of this house." I thought sure they would shoot us.

T: So you were really concerned that if you walked out there and showed yourself they were going to shoot.

R: Yes. Because the guy with the machine gun was standing on the other side of the wall. About the same place on the other side of the wall. Just about five feet back from the opening.

T: So the Germans...you knew they were out there and they knew you were in the house.

R: Oh, absolutely!

T: Yes.

R: They tried their darndest by shooting up the house to get us out. So anyway, the sergeant set his rifle down and walked out. But I don't blame him for being scared, because he was Jewish.

T: Did they shoot?

R: No. They didn't shoot him. Then the corporal followed him. Then I followed the corporal. And the guy with the machine gun, I just got around the corner of the garage and he put that in my face, and I can still feel the heat from that barrel.

T: Literally. It was warm.

R: Oh! Warm? It was hot. Because as soon as I got out there he grabbed the hand grenades off my shirt. We all carried four of them. But I only had two left.

T: What is that like at that moment having the Germans right up there on you? Because suddenly you've got the enemy as close as you and I are.

(1, A, 73)

R: Yes. Well, the only thing, you don't want to die. You want to live. So we surrendered. I would never have walked out of the house first. I mean it. I wouldn't have walked out.

T: How did you feel in that moment when the Germans actually were up on you like that? When that guy had that gun right in your face? How did you feel at that moment?

R: (*chuckles*) Scared the hell out of me. Because right after I got by him they took me back with the rest of the squad. To the front of the house. He knelt down. He dropped back too. He knelt down and opened up the side of the gun, the barrel slid out in the snow and just sizzled. Reached in his pack over his shoulder, pulled out another barrel, put it in the gun, slammed the side of the gun closed and he was back in business. That gun would shoot eleven hundred rounds a minute. That was something else. Scarier than hell.

T: What happened to you in those first moments? Did they physically assault you at all? Or frisk you or anything?

R: No. No. There was an officer with them. Of course they took everything off of us that they wanted. The money and wristwatches and stuff like that. We had to give up. But they didn't take the ammo off me. I must have had 250 rounds of ammo on me. They never took it off. Then they took us to the side of the house and lined us up. The officer told two of the men to take us back.

T: How many were you all together? Americans. Just the three of you or were there others?

R: There was the rest of our squad. About another I suppose eight, nine men. They lined us up, and we had a minefield right at the end of the house. It snowed, and I supposed these guys forgot where the minefield was because they were away from our position. They never knew about it. But we did because we were going back

and forth all the time. We knew where to walk, and we had a track that we followed through the snow. So we weren't in the minefield. Anyway, the Germans started, the lead German, the guard, there was one on the front of the line and one on the back. I was right on the back, next to the guard. I hollered to the guys. I said, "Hey, stop fellows! You're in our minefield. Back up in the tracks you walked in on, and we have to take a different route out of here." So the guard next to me was wondering what the hell was going on, and I tried to explain it to him. That it was a minefield there. He wouldn't listen. So they just poked guns in our ribs and said march. So we started marching. I bet we didn't take two steps. Somebody stepped on a mine. The two guys, one of them was a sergeant, he got killed and another guy I took Basic Training with, he got killed.

T: Two guys were killed by the mine that exploded. Were you injured?

R: Yes. I got hit in the head and knocked out. When I came to my buddy in the squad said, "Gee, Dick, I thought you were dead."

T: Did you have your helmet on still?

R: Yes. I don't know what happened to it. I still have four pieces [of shrapnel] in my head up here.

T: You were lucky it sounds like. Others weren't.

R: Yes. I was real lucky. In fact, after I left the first aid station in the Siegfried Line I found myself in a barn that night with a bunch of German wounded.

T: Were you with other guys that you were captured with or you were separated from them?

R: No. I was all by myself. All by myself, and don't ask me how I got there or what I was doing there. The doctor came around with his helper with a flashlight. He could speak real good English. I said, "How come you can speak such good English?" He said, "I took my doctor's training in the States." I could understand him perfect. He said, "You're lucky to be alive. A half inch higher and you'd be dead."

(1, A, 116)

T: Wow.

R: I said, "Thanks, Doc." He said, "You ain't that bad." So he just put the bandage down over my head. Just one of those first aid bandages. Put that back and went on to the next wounded. Because the barn was full of really seriously wounded Germans.

T: Were you the only American that you could see?

R: I was the only American there.

T: What was that situation like? To be in really a German world there.

R: You know, I never even thought about that at that time because I was wounded and I wasn't feeling good. Of course I was hungry. It never dawned on me. In fact, I did get something to eat in the first aid station. At noon the next day. I looked over from my bunk and two of the medics—there were two medics in there. They were having a can of meat and a loaf of bread. I got up [from my bunk] and walked over, and they were really surprised that I was even walking. I asked, I said, "Essen." So they got a little saucer and fork and gave me a piece of bread and some meat. I thought it was pretty darn nice of them.

T: Yes. So here you have a pretty positive experience with people, with Germans, who the day before were trying to kill you. Did that help change your opinion of Germans at all?

R: No. Because you're all soldiers, and you don't think as a civilian. You think as a soldier.

T: What does that mean?

R: Staying alive. Especially the situation we were in. We were alive to that point. I had a bandage on my head but it didn't hurt. Never even got a headache from it.

T: Do you mean there's a sense of camaraderie, soldier to soldier, regardless of nationality?

R: Well, there was a sense of respect as a soldier. Even the officer who was with us. He was really barking orders. Outside of taking the stuff off of us, they were real good.

T: You didn't receive or even witness any abuse of the prisoners by the Germans.

R: No. Not that time.

T: You stayed at the first aid station there a day or two you said, right?

R: It was a night. I got back there the next morning. It was daylight. Probably seven, eight o'clock in the morning. We were down in the pillbox in the German line. We were all sitting on the floor. I remember being colder than hell. In fact, I chattered my teeth to sleep.

T: Was this before the first aid station or after?

R: This was before.

T: And how long were you at this pillbox location?

R: Just overnight. Anyway, this [German] medic brought me to the first aid station and gave me a bunk. It was a canvas bunk with pipe, pipe canvas bunk. It was warm and lights. How nice can you have it?

T: It sounds like they treated you okay.

R: Yes. The medics didn't bother me. I was surprised. Didn't even bother seeing how I was. If I was alive or nothing. That I remember. Maybe they did when I was sleeping. I slept that night and all the next day and all the next night.

T: So you were catching up on rest you hadn't had it sounds like.

R: Oh, yes. We didn't have any sleep for—we'd been up there only a week but you had very little sleep. The three of us were in the house. We stood a hell of a lot of guard duty. And at night you stood it alone. Even in the daytime all alone. We didn't stand guard duty in daylight because we figured the rest of the squad was standing guard duty. But that was a mistake we made because I don't think they were.

(1, A, 159)

T: It sounds like they weren't. It sounds like you were surprised to see a German outside your room. You went by train to Stalag XI-B at Fallingbostal. Anything about the train journey that sticks in your mind?

R: Just that one night. I was on two trains. One was a civilian train for a while.

T: Passenger car.

R: Yes. With some German civilians on it. And I was all by myself.

T: Was there a German guard with you or...

R: No. No. Everybody was speaking German. I couldn't understand any of that. I started walking through the train and I ran into an American officer and I still had two bandoleers of ammunition on me. And he says, "What are you doing with that?" I said, "Nothing. They didn't bother taking it off of me." He said, "Go in the can and throw it out the window." Which was a good idea. I was wondering how in the hell to get rid of it too.

T: What was the American officer doing on the train? Same as you?

R: Yes. He was a prisoner. But he was all by himself too. I couldn't figure that out. In fact, I had to use the biffy and the train stopped someplace and everybody got off of it. I was sitting there by myself and I thought gee, I have to find a place to go. I had to go pee so bad. So I walked into the station and there were two doors. One was marked his and the other one her. My German was a little mixed up and I thought which one is the male and which one is the female. So I finally said the hell with it. I gotta go.

T: Did you pick the right one?

R: Yes (*chuckles*).

T: Did anybody take notice of you as this American in uniform?

R: No. Not even the Germans. They looked a little down on you. They kept their distance.

T: But that was it.

R: Yes.

T: You were on a second train as well.

R: Yes. And don't ask me how we got from one train to another. But we did. In fact I was on two civilian trains. Another one. There were six of us in the compartment. We were all Americans. And all wounded. This one guy got shot through the face and he was all bandaged up. We stopped for soup and, of course, we hadn't eaten for probably two, three, four days. We were probably getting used to it by that time. Somebody said they have a soup kitchen here and they're handing out soup. There were six of us in that compartment. We said what are we going to put it in? We were lucky. One guy had his steel helmet. So they wiped it out with his pant leg or old dirty handkerchief I suppose. We didn't give a damn by that time. He went out and got that helmet about half full of soup. Vegetable soup. It was really good. I remember that. So we just passed it around.

T: Was there a German guard with you here?

R: No.

T: So once again you're riding a civilian train, passenger train, with essentially no guard.

(1, A, 196)

R: No.

T: How interesting. When you were with other POWs like the six of you in the compartment, what do you remember talking about?

R: We didn't talk much. I don't remember. I felt sorry for this one guy sitting across from me because he was shot through the face. He couldn't eat. We were passing this around and he motioned to bring it past him. He was in bad shape.

T: Did you see any of these guys then at Fallingbostel? Are these people that you...

R: No. No.

T: Just somehow...

R: I don't know how I got from that onto this other train for Fallingbostel. I remember one thing about that ride.

T: Was that a boxcar or passenger ride?

R: No. It was a boxcar.

T: Going to Fallingbostel.

R: Yes. They parked a car in some small town someplace. Some town on the railroad. Of course on the railroad tracks. They started bombing the town sometime during the night. I had been machine gunned. I had been shelled. Everything. But I never was bombed until that night. That's the scariest thing there is. Because you can hear a bomb coming down. You have no idea where it's going to land. It so happened so it landed close enough it shook the car. But that was all.

T: How many of you were in this boxcar?

R: Too many. They packed you in so about two thirds of you could sit down and the other third had to stand up.

T: When the bombing was going on, what was the mood in the car that you remember? How were people handling this?

R: It was just plain quiet.

T: So you don't remember any kind of panic as opposed...

R: No. There was no panic. No. No. Wasn't room for panic (*chuckles*).

T: How did you manage a situation like that? You can't get out and you can hear what's going on.

R: I really didn't; the only thing that scared me was when the bomb went off. But then after it had gone off we knew we were safe so that was it.

T: Was there any strafing or after...

R: No. No. The next morning they pulled, we pulled out of town. I suppose that's when we were headed for Fallingbostal.

T: Any memory of how long you were in the boxcar?

R: Yes. Some of those rides were pretty long. I think two nights and three days.

T: Going to Fallingbostal.

R: Yes.

T: That's not a two night and three day trip, so you were doing some sitting.

R: Oh, a lot of sitting. Yes.

T: So the train moved slowly. Any food or water while you were on the train that you recall?

R: No. No food and no water.

(1, A, 232)

T: Closed doors and that's about it. At Fallingbostal, now as of this time, has Christmas gone by yet?

R: No. Because I got there [to Fallingbostal] two days before Christmas.

T: To Fallingbostal.

R: Or the day before. And I thought, what a Christmas present this is! (*chuckles*)

T: Had you been questioned at all by the Germans?

R: No.

T: Did that happen at Fallingbostal or not?

R: No. The only questioning we got is when we were captured. And there wasn't much to that.

T: Really at the house where you were captured.

R: Yes. That was real short.

T: So no kind of sit down and answer questions interrogation ever.

R: No. Not in the infantry.

T: When you got to Fallingbostal and walked into the camp, describe really what it looked like, what impression it made on you.

R: I don't remember a thing about that. The first thing I remember about Fallingbostal is, it must have been late at night or sometime at night we got there and came into camp. The next morning we got a cup of hot coffee. We called it ersatz coffee. It was just black water. Hot water. They gave us a little pan to eat out of, about that big around and about that deep.

T: So about an inch deep and about six, eight inches across.

R: Oh, it wasn't over six.

T: Six inches across.

R: And a spoon and a cup. What the cup was I don't remember that either. But I know the pan was metal, and of course a metal spoon.

T: These were issued to all the guys that were coming in?

R: They must have been, because everybody had one. They were all the same. Then we also got issued a half of a German blanket, army blanket. What was left of one that they wouldn't issue to the troops. It was a nice blanket at one time, but there was no way you could keep warm at night. All you would keep warm was your body but your feet froze.

T: How much of your winter clothing did you have left? Had they taken any clothing from you?

R: As far as I know, no. They didn't take anything from us. One night, it was the first night. No. Not the first night. One night I was in a schoolhouse. Also for one day.

T: When you were first captured.

R: Yes. There was a prisoner with no shoes. Just stocking feet. I said, "What the hell are you doing barefoot?" He said, "They took my shoes." I said, "You can't go barefoot." So I had a pair of overshoes and army boots on. So I said, "You take these. At least you've got your feet covered." There was another prisoner. It was the day

before that or the day after. He didn't have any jacket on. Just a shirt and a pair of pants.

T: And this is December.

R: Yes. It was cold.

T: It was cold.

(1, A, 275)

R: I said, "Where in the hell are your clothes?" He said, "They took them." I said, "You're kidding." I had an overcoat plus my jacket.

T: When you arrived were you put into a barracks? Did you have assigned space?

R: Yes.

T: How big was that barracks from your memory?

R: I don't know. I never even investigated. I just wasn't interested. I just remember there was a washroom and water that we had I think until eight or ten o'clock in the morning. Cold water.

T: How many men were in the room where you stayed?

R: Generally the German barracks, the beds made a unit. They put them probably two here, two here, two here and two here. And there was one space you could get in and out of. Probably three feet wide. Three men to a bunk.

T: Three men to a bunk. And in the room how many men were in the room where you were staying would you say?

R: If there was two, four, six, eight. Probably twenty or twenty-four.

T: Were those designed for three men, the bunks, or were they just putting three men in them?

R: No. There were three bunks. Bottom, middle and the top.

T: So three high and a total of twenty or twenty-four people in the room.

R: Yes.

T: Was there a stove in the room for warmth?

R: No. There was one brick oven right close to where we were at that you could warm stuff on if you had some wood to warm it with.

T: Which you did or didn't have?

R: We didn't have there.

T: The daily routine at Fallingbostel while you were there. Was there a roll call first thing in the morning?

R: Lots of roll calls. I remember at least three a day. And I remember many a day we spent over an hour roll call because the Americans are getting a little pissed off at all the roll call.

T: How did the roll call work? Did they come and chase you out of the barracks?

R: Yes. They'd come in and "Heraus." Everybody had to get out. They didn't care if you were wounded or sick or anything. Everybody had to leave. In fact they check the barracks to make sure that everybody left. So they'd get the same count. But many a time the GIs—there would be about twenty-five men long and five deep so they could multiply it by five.

T: Right.

R: But usually when the guard would get down to about zwanzig [twenty]—do you understand, you must understand that.

T: Yes.

R: Somebody in the back row or two or three guys would jump around and he would lose his count and get madder than hell and get everybody lined up and start all over again. So many a time we spent an hour, hour and a half.

(1, A, 318)

T: If it was cold, why would you do that? I mean, wouldn't you want to get back inside?

R: No. Because it didn't do us any good. At eight o'clock in the morning when they chased us out of that camp they went in, and the windows were all about four feet square. They were on hinges. They'd open up every window in the barracks, and you had to stay out until ten o'clock.

T: So you had to stay out anyway. That's why you might as well mess around with the Germans. So hurrying for the roll call wouldn't have brought you back in any faster.

R: No.

T: You remember more than one roll call a day you say.

R: Yes. Three. We had three roll calls a day there. Morning, noon and night.

T: It sounds like that was the main activity.

R: Yes.

T: This is winter. Days are relatively short as far as the amount of sunshine.

R: And it was cold up at Fallingbostel.

T: Yes. It's north Germany.

R: Yes.

T: What else did you do during the day? I mean, you're awake. How did you spend your time?

R: Just talk with somebody or something. There was nothing to do.

T: No work details?

R: No. Oh, I shouldn't say that. Because they did have work details. Also after roll call in the morning, after you went back in and finished your coffee and had a bite to eat, they would chase everybody out of the barracks again. We knew it was work detail, so me and my buddy, we were both wounded. He had part of his arm shot away. We'd get to the door and we'd say, "Ich krank." I'm sick. So the guard would say okay. So you didn't have to leave the barracks. The barracks were pretty quiet during the daytime.

T: So there were work details. You just weren't...

R: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: Other guys on work details. What were they doing if you remember?

R: I don't remember. I think they were down working on the railroads. Most of them. They'd get bombed out, you know.

T: So you were one of the few people staying in the barracks during the day. Let's talk about food. Roll calls one thing during the day. When was food supplied and what did they supply for you at Fallingbostel?

R: In the morning you got your cup of coffee and a slice of bread. Guaranteed twenty-five percent sawdust, but we didn't know it at the time.

T: So it sticks to your ribs in other words.

R: Yes. And it was a big slice of bread. It was big bread. Probably about like that. It was heavy.

T: Four, six inches across. Round?

R: Well, it was higher than it was wide, but not too much difference. I'd say about five inches wide and six inches high.

T: Brown bread or white bread?

R: Black.

T: Black bread. So heavy, heavy bread. Did the Germans deliver a loaf to your barracks?

R: No. Not there they didn't. It was all sliced.

T: So you got the bread sliced.

R: Yes.

T: And with that came some ersatz coffee.

R: Yes.

T: Was there a noontime meal or just a—

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 377.

T: Talking about food. Was there a noontime or just an evening meal?

R: Yes. At noon is when we got the soup. We got a bowl of soup. A ladle of soup I should say.

T: And did you eat this...

R: In that little pan we had.

T: That doesn't hold very much it sounds like?

R: Well, it holds a ladle full

T: A ladle full of soup.

R: Yes.

T: And you had a spoon.

R: Yes. And I remember the first day. It must have been the day before Christmas because I thought what a hell of a Christmas present this is! And they ladled the soup out. It was a ladle full of water and about seven, eight strings of grass. I said to myself, "Who is supposed to eat this?" The guy in back of me, he said, "Why? What's the matter?" I said, "It doesn't even smell good." He said, "Yes, but it's warm. You going to eat it?" So I tasted it. I said, "No. I can't eat this." So he said, "Can I have it?" I said, "Sure." So I gave it to him.

T: How long was it before you were eating that soup?

R: The next day (*chuckles*).

T: Hunger does amazing things.

R: Yes.

T: What was the soup? It sounds like it was pretty watery.

R: It was. All there was, was those string of grass in it. I compare it to quack grass. After it gets a little higher. About like that. The strings were eight, ten inches long. I couldn't believe it.

T: Was there an evening meal?

R: Yes. At evening we got a spud. A small spud. If they were too small you got two of them. If they were two little ones they would probably be an inch and a quarter at most in diameter. We didn't get anything to drink then. We got the coffee in the morning.

T: So they're keeping prisoners busy with little meal times, a little bit of food, not very much and roll calls and little work details it sounds like.

R: Yes.

T: Did they provide, from your memory at Fallingbostel, any kind of recreational stuff? Books, cards, sports...

R: No. No. No. No.

T: Nothing.

(1, B, 398)

R: No.

T: What about the Germans here at this camp? The guards. What do you remember about them?

R: They were too strict and too German militaristic. In other words, they stuck to the German code, which was real strict. And you better tow the line when an order is given. Outside of that I never made any acquaintance with any of them or talked to any or tried talking to any of them either.

T: Did they ever physically assault you?

R: No.

T: Or any other prisoners that you saw?

R: No.

T: They were strict, but they weren't abusive.

R: Yes.

T: The five weeks you spent there, you spent Christmas, New Year's there as well. Was there any holiday celebrations that you recall among the prisoners?

R: No. No. One day was just another day. Even Christmas.

T: The days kind of all just the same.

R: Of course we wished each other a merry Christmas (*laughs*).

T: Were you able to write any kind of postcard or letter to say to your folks that you were okay?

R: Yes. I think it was during the first week we were there we were issued a postcard. In fact I've still got it.

T: Back at Fallingbostel, the five weeks you were there a lot of monotony the way you described it. One day running into the next...

R: Yes. But you didn't worry about days. You didn't count the days or anything. The only thing we looked forward was the end of the war.

T: Now asking about that. At Fallingbostel, or even if you think about II-A at Neubrandenburg, how were you able to follow the progress of the war or were you?

R: We didn't. Until the last three weeks of the war. The camp commander gave us a daily rundown on things that were happening.

T: At Neubrandenburg. He talked to the prisoners.

R: Yes. It was a mouth to mouth deal. More or less. But we got the news every day. Where the armies were at, and we were really cussing Americans when they stopped on the Elbe River because they were a hundred miles from us.

T: That's right. So you had some indication. Did you trust the information you were getting?

R: Oh, yes. Definitely.

T: So you felt you were getting the straight scoop on what was going on.

R: Yes. Because the camp commander we had there was really a nice German soldier we thought.

T: Did he talk to the whole group or how was he passing that news on?

(1, B, 423)

R: I don't know. We got it by word of mouth. Somebody picked it up someplace. And passed it on.

T: In the absence of hard news at Fallingbostel, was the rumor mill busy?

R: It might have been busy, but it was really selective or we never heard much. Never heard much of anything. In fact we never knew what the outcome of the Battle of the Bulge was.

T: You really weren't getting any kind of news then.

R: No.

T: Did you have somebody or more than one person at Fallingbostel or Neubrandenburg that you sort of were close friends with?

R: Yes. The first thing we did when we got to Fallingbostel, the guy in the bunk under me...we walked in together.

T: Did you know him?

R: No. But we got acquainted real fast. He said, "I'm taking the middle bunk." He was just in front of me and the top bunk was still empty. I said, "Well, good. I'll take the top bunk." No. Wait a minute. This was at Neubrandenburg. At Fallingbostel...that was a different deal. I had a bunk of my own.

T: At Fallingbostel?

R: Yes. It was so cold that, there was another little guy. Believe it or not he got shot through both cheeks of the butt.

T: So sitting down was a problem then.

R: Yes. We used to laugh at him. He'd yelp. The first three, four weeks he was a little tender. Anyway, he was small and I wasn't that heavy myself at that time. I was probably down to 160 pounds or 150. So I said why don't we sleep together [in the same bunk]? He said, "Fine. That's a good idea." The bunks were just plain wood bunks. There was no mattress or anything. Forget about a pillow. So we slept together. We put one blanket underneath us on the boards and we covered with the other one. But when two of you are sleeping together you had to sleep on your sides and you had to sleep right close together. Your arms, your shoulders and hips would get so sore you'd have to turn over every so often.

T: The wood's hard. Right?

R: Yes. So during the night we were turning over about every hour.

T: And you each have to turn the same time.

R: Oh, yes. You had to.

T: Did that help provide extra warmth and make it easier to sleep?

R: Oh, heck yes. Yes. Because the other guys were complaining so much about being cold. I said, at least we're sleeping a little bit warm. I don't think the barracks ever got over fifty, sixty degrees at the most.

T: Is that a person that you'd say you became friends with and sort of were closer friends with this person than someone else?

R: Yes. Yes. You more or less buddied up.

T: As friends, what can you do for each other in a situation like this?

R: Just talk with them and associate. Of course you're going to associate with them because you're close together all day.

(1, B, 454)

T: Sure. And this is not a person that you knew from before you went to Fallingbostel.

R: No. And I didn't keep track of him, because when I left Fallingbostel he stayed. I don't know why I got pulled out of Fallingbostel. I suppose because I was wounded.

T: What was his name?

R: I don't remember that either.

T: American?

R: Yes.

T: So in a sense you spent five weeks of your life with this person, and that was the end of it. But for that five weeks you depended on each other.

R: Oh, yes.

T: That's very interesting.

R: Yes.

T: What was the cause of leaving Fallingbostel? Were all the prisoners removed or just some?

R: No. Just some. And I think darned few. Like I told you. I think I got pulled out because I was wounded.

T: Yes. Looking at your picture from Neubrandenburg, you still have the head bandage on. So you were still...

R: That head bandage was never changed at Fallingbostel. Nothing was. That was at least five or six weeks old. That was the original.

T: You didn't get to II-A until about the end of January sometime?

R: Yes.

T: Did you volunteer to be moved or were you selected?

R: No. Just selected.

T: How did that go? Did they come in and tell you basically, Cartier get your stuff together?

R: I don't remember. They just came in and said, you're leaving.

T: The transportation now from Fallingbostel to Camp II-A is a good stretch.

R: That was another two night and three day trip.

T: On the trains again? Boxcars or passenger cars?

R: Boxcars. You never rode passengers. That's why I was surprised to find myself on those passenger cars.

T: Yes. Me too. What can you remember about the train ride from Fallingbostel to Neubrandenburg?

R: Only one thing that stands out the most. Before we got to Neubrandenburg, it was in the morning, the train had pulled out and stopped in the countryside someplace and the engineers, a couple of guys could see out through the cracks in the boards, everybody was running away from the train.

T: Not a good sign.

R: No. The first thing we know here's two P-38s come down, and you could just hear them dive. Then the guns opened up and they strafed the train. They made two passes at it and they left. We thanked the good Lord when they left and that they were poor shots. They never hit our car and as far as I know they never hit the train because it moved when they left. But they kicked up the stones. The bullets. You could hear that.

T: If you compare that to the being bombed experience you had, which was more frightening?

(1, B, 482)

R: The bomb. That was frightening too though.

T: The being strafed.

R: Yes.

T: Were people panicked in your car?

R: No. No. Never panicked.

T: So much like you remember the bombing experience. The people didn't panic.

R: No.

T: At either one of those.

R: No. Not that I remember.

T: Were you with anybody that you knew in this boxcar going to Neubrandenburg?

R: No.

T: So a bunch of new guys. All Americans though?

R: Yes.

T: Any kind of food or water supplied?

R: I can't remember a thing we got that trip.

T: So basically in, closed the doors, and...

R: Yes.

T: Sanitary facilities inside the car?

R: They had a bucket in the corner for the guys that had to go to the can, but if you wanted to pee you just peed out through the side of the car.

T: Got it. By this time, end of January, how would you describe your own health?

R: It was good. Fairly good I guess. I never got a headache from getting hit or anything. Never anything. But I sure fooled the Germans (*chuckles*).

T: So having that head injury was an advantage in some ways? Because it really wasn't bothering you so much.



R: Like you see there was a bandage up top the whole time, until I was liberated practically. I told the medic...at Neubrandenburg you could go in I think every two weeks and get your bandage changed. One day I went in and he said, you don't need a bandage any longer. I said, "Put it on. I ain't working for them Krauts."

T: So you knew that having the bandage would keep you off of work details for example? Well, when you got to Stalag II-A, again, as you go into the camp, describe what you saw. What kind of a place was this?

R: I don't remember it that well, but I remember it was a hell of a cold day and a northwest wind about twenty miles an hour blowing. We stood outside of this one building I'll bet for two and a half hours. The whole long line of us. That's where that picture was taken. They took that picture. When they got through taking the picture and interrogating you a little bit you went on and got a shower.

T: So they took you and looking at this picture that has your POW number, 161197...

R: 197.

T: And Stalag II-A. Like a mug shot with your upper body on the picture.

(1, B, 510)

R: Yes. I show that to people and I say you don't know you're talking to a criminal, do you? *(chuckles)*

T: Now they took your picture. Did they question you at all here?

R: A little bit. Very little.

T: What kind of things did they ask you?

R: They didn't go into any details. Just your army serial number and date of birth and a few little odd things like that. Because we wouldn't tell them anything. We didn't have to. We were well versed on that.

T: And it had been over a month since you'd been captured and you were an enlisted man. I guess maybe they figured they weren't going to learn a whole lot anyway.

R: No. And they separated any officers. Even the sergeants and corporals from the enlisted men. The enlisted men were on their own.

T: Were you a private?

R: PFC.

T: PFC. So you're in a camp with other enlisted men.

R: Yes.

T: In II-A. How about the barracks here? Is this a step up from Fallingbostel?

R: They were approximately the same. Very little difference in them. They were just studs with some boards on the outside. And they weren't very tight. But we had this deal there anyway. In Neubrandenburg they never opened the windows. I don't remember many work details there either. But they probably had some.

T: You don't remember being on them yourself though?

R: No. I never worked a day for them.

T: In the sleeping, in the bunks, how many men to a bunk?

R: One man. There we had straw mattresses, which made a difference.

T: More comfortable.

R: Yes. Oh, yes.

T: How about bugs?

R: Well, I'll tell you a little story about that. It was six weeks or about a month I suppose before we were liberated. My buddy pokes me in the ribs one day. Joe did. He's laughing. He said, "Dick, look at that guy scratching." I said, "Don't laugh, Joe. Our turn's coming." Two weeks later we showed up with lice. So we only had them a short time.

T: So for the most time, maybe the cold weather was beneficial in that respect. You didn't have bugs for any long...

R: Yes.

T: Those lice. How do those affect you? I mean, describe what it's like to have lice.

R: It made you itch and you could feel them crawling. But every morning I took off my wool GI shirt and I went through the seams of it and scraped all the eggs and bugs out of it and put it on. But the next morning was the same thing. It was all over again.

T: You had to do it repeatedly.

R: Every day.

(1, B, 540)

T: Did having those lice make it hard to sleep?

R: Somewhat but not much. Not much. I probably slept better then than I do now (*chuckles*).

T: How do you explain that?

R: You were warm and you had a safe place to stay. You knew you were safe.

T: That's true.

R: Yes.

T: Did you have a person here at Neubrandenburg who was a person you'd call a friend or a close companion?

R: Yes. Joe and I. Like I said, he took the center bunk and I took the top bunk. Joe had been going to college under that bill for Officer's Candidate School and stuff. When they got short of men they transferred him from that into the infantry. Into the 99th Division. He got wounded. When he got captured him and his buddy, he figured he fired twenty-nine thousand rounds out of one of those heavy water-cooled machine guns that morning. He said, "We peed in it and we put snow in it. We did everything to keep it cool. But it finally quit on us." And he said, "We even had trouble keeping the empty casings away from the bottom of the machine gun because they were really piling up." He said, "Dick, you wouldn't believe it, those dumb Krauts just kept coming at us." He said, "There was a tree in the way. Probably about eight inches in diameter." Out in front of their machine gun. The

Krauts were creeping up in back of that. He said, "I fixed them. I cut it down." With the machine gun (*chuckles*).

T: Did you know this guy before you were at II-A?

R: No. No.

T: So here's a person that you meet. As friends in a POW camp, what can friends do for each other? I mean, extra food or what do you do?

R: We did a lot of good there. We really got close. He was a hell of a poker player, and we got Red Cross parcels, I think, three times. You split them. You split it in half.

T: You didn't get a parcel for one guy.

R: No.

T: It was split by two.

R: But he [Joe] trusted me and I trusted him. So he had half and, well, we split it up. I took my half too, or as close as we could. And the stuff we couldn't, then we'd just tell each other or eat at the same time or something. Anyway, the cigarettes I kept myself. There was a carton of cigarettes. Five packs [for each of us]. I didn't smoke. I got acquainted with a guard, and I would trade the cigarettes for bread. For a loaf of civilian bread. It cost thirty cigarettes. For a loaf.

And Joe was a hell of a good poker player, so they'd play poker until one, two o'clock in the morning. Some mornings he'd come back to the bunk and he'd be happier than hell. He said, "Well, Dick, look at all the cigarettes I won tonight." He was lucky. Some nights it was a different story.

T: Things like that balance out, don't they?

R: Anyway, in the end we ended up with thirty packs of cigarettes. But you were only allowed five. So if they pulled a quick search, you were done.

T: You were going to lose them.

R: So he said, "Dick, what are we going to do?" I said, "I don't know." But [my bunk] was pretty close to the ceiling. My top bunk. There was this wainscoting, like you use in the kitchen. One by three [lumber]. I was able, over a couple nights, after it was real dark and everybody was sleeping, to work one piece out. Don't ask me how I did it. I don't remember today. But I worked it out. It was only about a foot long. I worked it out and took all the cigarettes and put them up there. When he'd want some, I'd get him some at night.

(1, B, 586)

T: So you stashed them there for safekeeping.

R: Yes. We had thirty packs when we were liberated by the Russians. I said, "Joe, all the cigarettes are yours. You can have damn things." (*chuckles*)

T: Now you mentioned trading those for bread to a guard. Does that mean you could approach these guards and talk to them?

R: This guard would come around to the barracks after dark. He would have trading stock. He would tell the guy next to the door. So he would come and get me.

T: So he knew what he was doing too. The guard.

R: Yes. Oh, yes. One night he had a pound coffee can full of Farina. And I paid thirty cigarettes for that. I said, "Joe, look what I did tonight. I got a pound coffee can full of Farina. Boy, we're really—cream of wheat."

T: Yes. Right.

R: I said, "We're going to really eat for a while." He said, "I don't like it. I don't want it." I said, "What do you mean you don't want it?" He said, "No. I don't. You'll have to eat it yourself." So every morning for, it must have lasted me a month, I made cream of wheat. How I was able to do that—we had this little brick oven. Every week I would go out in the woods with the guard. He would take as many guys as wanted to go and as much dry branches you could wrap around your belt. You could tie it up and bring it back. So that was the way I was able to heat it up and cook it.

T: So you had a stove for warmth there or for cooking and the detail was you had to go out and collect the kindling or wood yourself.

R: Yes. There was no warmth in the barracks. The only time that went is when I lit it up to cook the cream of wheat.

T: The food the Germans supplied you. You mentioned trading for food. Bread. Cream of wheat. What were the Germans supplying for food?

R: Real good there. The same menu for breakfast, but the dinner menu was rutabaga soup. A nice ladle full of that every day (*chuckles*). Don't feed me rutabagas today.

T: But for you, for comparison, being at Fallingbostel made Neubrandenburg seem like a step up.

R: A step up? It was a terrific step up. The barracks was warmer. In fact they were fairly comfortable. There was enough men in the barracks that kept the heat fairly decent.

T: Better food?

R: Yes.

T: So warmer barracks. Guards about the same? You haven't mentioned abusive guards at all up until now.

R: The guards didn't bother us at all. Very little. In fact I don't think any roll call that I remember at Neubrandenburg. Maybe once a day at the most.

T: And the only work you've mentioned doing is going out and getting wood for the stove.

R: That I did. I think they took work details out there too.

T: But that was your only work detail.

R: Yes.

(1, B, 623)

T: And it wasn't really—was it a work detail?

R: No. No.

T: It was voluntary.

R: That was a voluntary detail.

T: And you mentioned having cards. At least one deck of cards that people could play.

R: Oh, yes. We had plenty of cards. I think they came in the Red Cross parcels.

T: How often do you remember getting those?

R: Three times that I remember. It wasn't very often.

T: You were there three months before the Russians came so maybe once a month.

R: At least that. Yes.

T: So a number of different ways this is a better POW camp experience than Fallingbostel.

R: Oh, no comparison. No comparison.

T: These Germans. How did you strike up the initial conversation with the German that you were trading with?

R: That's a good question, but I remember the guy coming and telling me—because nobody had the cigarettes and he knew I had them. Because I didn't smoke. He'd come and get me, and I'd go and talk to the German as much as I could and he'd tell me what he had and how much he wanted for it.

T: In English or German?

R: In German. I knew the German counting deal. I learned that. And if he told me thirty-five cigarettes, I'd say *zu viel* [German: too much].

T: Too much. Right.

R: Yes. Sometimes we dickered, and sometimes he wouldn't dicker. He'd keep his price. So then I paid it.

T: So there was a barter system really.

R: Yes.

T: With cigarettes as currency. Could you acquire things other than bread?

R: No. Just the cream of wheat and the bread was all he ever brought.

T: But from your perspective, that's not a bad thing to get.

R: You ain't a kiddin'. And was that bread ever good. We kind of conserved that. One piece a day of that.

T: That was not the sawdust bread here. This is real bread.

R: No.

T: Were you a fairly optimistic person who sort of handled the POW experience fairly well in your opinion?

R: I think so. I never really had a problem with it. But we had plenty of guys that did.

T: Can you talk about that? Guys who did.

R: We had one especially. I remember. He was from Chicago. I think his name was Nukio. The day before we were liberated, maybe it was a week before. There was a dogfight. A couple of airplanes. The Germans had given us shovels to dig a trench alongside the barracks to jump in because they figured the Russians would be shelling the compound. We had that dug and we even tore the doors off the barracks or anything we could find and covered a lot of the trench over with wood and dirt. Which was a good deal. It left an opening right outside that window where we could jump out the window and jump down into the trench. He sat there in the corner of the barracks I remember for at least two days. I talked to him several times. I think his name was Phil. I said, "Phil," and I was a fairly decent friend of his I thought. I said, "Come on. Things ain't that bad. It's safe. There's nothing going on." It was just a dogfight. It only lasted about fifteen seconds. But he stayed down in the trench too, for two days. Then two more days. And when he did he just sat there in the corner of the barracks. He had a problem. But generally most of the guys—didn't bother them. They'd been through it all so they knew what the hell was happening.

T: As a former combat soldier, in a sense did you feel yourself safer in the camp than out of it? I mean...

R: Oh, we never made any attempts to think about it or even talk about it.

T: Escape you mean. My question really was: as a combat soldier on the front lines you're in a certain amount of danger, and in the camp I guess you weren't in that much danger.

R: No. No. No.

T: Did that knowledge that you were safe in the camp impact your thinking about escape? I mean you started to talk about that.

R: No. But to escape I figured, personally, I don't know the language. I don't know where we're at. I don't know where I'm going. What would I do if I escaped? All the Germans were looking for anyway, and we knew this, was an excuse to shoot you because they had way too many prisoners. They didn't know what to do with them all. They didn't have room for the prisoners. Period.

T: Was Neubrandenburg overcrowded in your opinion?

R: It was crowded and a couple times we got prisoners in from other camps that had been marching on the road. But that was just overnight that they would leave them in there.

T: And then off they'd go.

R: Yes. They had to come in and sleep on the floor.

T: I see. So escape isn't something you ever considered.

R: Yes. It is. Because there was a high tension tower right out on the corner of the camp. I thought to myself many times I wish I had a hacksaw and a blade. I'd sure like to cut one leg off of that thing.

T: But you never really thought of escaping.

R: No.

T: Was that something that you heard other people talking about or was it...

R: No.

T: It wasn't a topic?

R: No.

T: You mentioned getting some news here towards the end at Neubrandenburg about how the war was going. And the news was that it wasn't going very well for the Germans.

R: No. We knew it wasn't. That they were really walking through Germany.

T: Did it make you nervous at all wondering what the Germans were going to do to the prisoners if things collapsed?

(1, B, 711)

R: Yes. Because we got the word that Hitler had issued the order to shoot all the prisoners.

T: So this was a rumor making the way around camp.

R: Yes.

T: How did that impact you on a daily basis? Knowing that.

R: We more or less just waited to see if it was going to happen. It never did. There's nothing you could have done about it.

T: With the wrong kind of person it could really sit on your mind though.

R: Oh, yes. That's why some guys had a problem I imagine. But I never did. I thought: see what happens. We were lucky.

T: And you mentioned other guys took the whole POW thing a little harder.

R: Yes. This one guy especially did.

T: Whatever happened to him? Did he stay until the end?

R: Yes. But I don't know what happened to him. Because the morning that the Russians came into the camp and said get on the trucks, we just all jumped on them.

T: Before the Russians arrived was there any indication that something was about to happen?

R: Oh, we knew that because they'd given us the shovels to dig that trench.

T: And you'd only do that if there was shelling and that means the Russians were really close.

R: Yes. They figured that they were going to shell the camp because they had shelled the rest of them coming in through Poland and so forth.

T: Talk about that. Here you've got the Russians coming, the Americans coming. Walk through the liberation of the camp. How did you experience that?

R: The first thing we were unhappy about was about a week before we got liberated the Americans were really moving across Germany and we thought in a couple days we're going to be liberated by the Americans. No dice. They got up to the Elbe and they stopped cold turkey.

T: Did it matter to you who was going to liberate you? Did you care?

R: Oh, sure.

T: Why?

R: Because nobody had any love for the Russians.

T: Why not? They were our allies.

R: I know. But personally I didn't trust them. In the first place they wanted to take us back to Odessa. Was the first offer we got.

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

T: So while you were still in II-A, do you remember prisoners saying I'm worried about the Russians, or I don't want the Russians to get here first?

R: We were all more or less concerned about them. When we did get liberated we knew they were close because the day before we could hear the rifle fire and we knew they weren't too far. We could hear the shelling past us and on either side of us. What the Germans were doing. But they didn't shell the camp. Why they didn't shell it...the commanding officer that liberated us told the officer we had in camp—an American officer. We had an American priest from the 101st Airborne, and we had an American medical officer. They were told that they didn't shell the camp because they saw the prisoners were all still in camp.

T: You were fortunate in that respect.

R: Yes.

T: What happened the day the Russians arrived? Talk about their arrival.

R: The Russians arrived during the night sometime. We slept—at least I did and I think most of the other guys did too. We knew about it in the morning. The Russians were there.

T: When you got up there they were?

R: They were there. Before that though I should say that it was a day or two before that. No; it was the morning before that that they came into camp. The Germans got up and took their machine gun down from the tower and our barracks was in the corner of the camp right next to the tower. Dumb Americans. About ten of us outside kidding the German guards that tomorrow you're going to be inside and we're going to be outside. And we're all laughing and joking. Even the Germans a little bit. But they didn't feel good. Anyway, then we were liberated. That night the Russians came into the camp.

T: Were the German guards still there or had they left?

R: They had left. They had left. And in the morning there was quite a bit of activity around camp. Me and my buddy, he said, "Dick, let's go see what's going on." So we walked out the west side of camp. That was where the Russians were headed for. There was a hill there, a slight slope. Pretty soon there's a whole bunch of machine gun fire coming over the hill. And the dumb Russians walking right over the top of the hill with that machine gun fire coming over. I couldn't believe it. I said, "Joe, let's get the heck out of here. We want no part of this."

T: You could see this from the camp.

R: We couldn't see it. You could hear it. It's like popcorn going over your head. So we hightailed it back to camp.

T: So you had left the camp.

R: Yes. Well, it was only about a block or so out of camp. Yes.

T: So that between the Russians arriving, the Russians had already arrived, they were in the camp, but also there was still some fighting go on outside that you could hear.

R: Oh, yes. Yes. They hadn't got past the camp with the infantry.

T: When the Russians arrived how did things change in the camp?

R: Now that's a good question. I don't remember what we did for food or a thing for the next three weeks.

T: You were there until the...

R: It was just short of three weeks.

T: The eighteenth [of May]. You're not a POW anymore, but are you free to go?

R: Oh, yes.

T: So you can come and go as you please.

R: Yes. We could have walked. But it was a hundred miles and we had no map. We had no idea where to go. So we were just...well, what happened. I'll tell you another deal. The two American officers—the second day we were liberated I think, second or third day, an American Jeep drove into camp. With an officer and a driver. And the two officers got on and left and they said we're going to send a bunch of trucks to get you guys out of here. We waited and waited and waited. And no trucks ever came.

T: It sounded like you were waiting to leave pretty quickly after but...you waited. Did all the guys stay, all the POWs stay in the camp or did some people leave?

R: I think some of them did. Now how many I don't know. But you could go into town because Joe was going into town all the time. In fact he got a whole gunnysack full of German marks. They blew the bank up. He said there was money all over the place.

(2, A, 42)

T: Did you leave camp? Go to town?

R: No.

T: Why not?

R: Because the Germans...the Russians all carried Al Capone machine guns and most of them were drunk most of the time. We did leave camp though. I think the second morning. Five of us left camp and went out walking around away from town. Just outside of town a ways. We ran into a bakery and the baker was baking bread. We smelled it from a distance away. Naturally we were hungry so we headed for the bakery. We had to wait for him to get a loaf of bread out of the oven so we could have it. But he had a German daughter. I would say she was fifteen, sixteen. She was a smart little ship and she was always wising off. She could speak a little English. Her dad kept hushing her up. He was scared. So finally when the loaf of bread came out of the oven nice and warm, we grabbed one and left and just tore it apart and ate it (*chuckles*). Sure was good.

T: Not an unfriendly exchange though between you and the baker.

R: He was scared. He didn't know any English and we didn't have anybody that could speak any German. But his daughter could speak some. He kept hushing her up.

T: He knew you were Americans, not Russians.

R: Yes.

T: Did you see Russians out in the street when you were outside the camp at all?

R: Yes. There were Russians around. But they were scattered. In fact, that same morning we ran into a Russian tank that had the back end open on it. One of their T-34s. There was something wrong with it. We had a chance to look at the inside and outside both. There were two big radial motors; there was a radial motor on each side like an airplane motor. That drove each track. I thought, boy, what a good idea.

T: Could you talk to these Russians at all?

R: No. No. But they knew we were Americans.

T: Didn't bother you at all?

R: No. No.

T: So you made at least one excursion outside of camp. Did you go to town? Actually to the town of Neubrandenburg?

R: Downtown? No. Because downtown Neubrandenburg was an old Roman fortress town with a big wall around it. Thick. Inside the town I guess was all demolished, Joe said. I don't know. Joe said, "Come on in, Dick. Look around." I said, "No. Baloney. Some drunken Russian's going to shoot you."

T: So you felt safer in camp than out of camp.

R: Oh, yes.

T: Were the Russians running the camp so to speak for who was left?

R: No.

T: Who ran the camp?

(2, A, 70)

R: Nobody.

T: It sounds like anarchy.

R: Yes. We could come and go when we wanted to. In fact, there was a German officer's barracks not too far away. We all moved into that.

T: This is inside or outside the camp?

R: Outside the camp.

T: But close. Next to...

R: Yes.

T: So you left your barracks where you had been staying and moved into this—just sort of squatted? Took up a spot?

R: Yes. We all moved into there. All the Americans.

T: Now how about food? I mean the Germans had been supplying something. Where did you get food now?

R: You know, that's the sixty-four dollar question. I don't remember.

T: You were eating though.

R: What we ate...I don't remember that either. Or how we got food after we were liberated, I don't remember.

T: Interesting. So the quarters you moved into were more comfortable than the ones you moved out of?

R: Oh, yes. Oh, they were nice quarters. German officer's quarters.

T: Did you get new clothes or anything like this or still the same ones?

R: Come on. Where do you think we were (*laughing*).

T: You took their quarters. I thought you took their clothes too. I don't know.

R: We didn't find any. I didn't even find any keepsakes. Anything that you might want to take home. Souvenirs or something.

T: You were there until 18 May. So just about three weeks you spent kind of—almost in limbo it sounds like. Not a prisoner but not going anywhere.

R: Yes.

T: Describe leaving. Now the Americans didn't send trucks in to get you. It was the Russians that took you out.

R: Yes. They came into camp one morning [18 May 1945], about seven o'clock. A bunch of trucks. They gave us fifteen minutes to get on them. We only needed five. (*chuckles*)

T: Didn't have much to pack, did you?

R: No.

T: What was the mood among the men? Was there a sense of being anxious to leave...

R: You ain't kidding. Oh! And what a ride across northern Germany. Northern Germany was all demolished. There were tanks and guns and war crap all over the place.

T: So from Neubrandenburg you went to Hamburg, which is—that's a stretch across the north. And you could see outside the remnants of the battles that had gone on.

R: Oh, yes. Because the Russians...when we got to the English camp, and that was about four o'clock in the afternoon. We left early in the morning. They stopped. A river ran through there [probably the Elbe River]. They stopped on the east side of

the bridge and they had to get permission to drop us off at the English camp. So that took about an hour or hour and a half. We were kind of excited because we wanted to get the hell off the trucks and get into British hands anyway.

(2, A, 97)

T: How many trucks were there?

R: I don't know. There must have been quite a few.

T: So all the POWs, Americans, who were left in the camp on the trucks and out of there. So they didn't take you out in stages. It was all at one time.

R: All at one time.

T: But you remember being morning, and by afternoon anyway you were in the British camp.

R: Yes.

T: Do you remember arriving there? What happened when you got there?

R: Oh, heck yes.

T: Talk about that.

R: We got off the truck outside of the gate, the British gate. We got inside the gate and the British had their soldiers there with DDT guns.

T: So it's not a bouquet of flowers they're giving you when you roll in.

R: We had orders to strip. Down to the skin. All the way. Everything.

T: So all the bug-infested stuff.

R: Throw it in a pile.

T: Your head bandage too?

R: No. That was gone. That was off by that time.

T: But all the clothes that you'd been wearing for months are gone. Did they provide you with new stuff?

R: They provided us with a pair of shoes, underwear, pants, and shirt.

T: British issue stuff or what was it?

R: Yes. Then the next morning the Americans came along with the C-47s, and they loaded twenty-five of us at a time on that and it only took ten minutes to load at the most.

T: So you stayed just overnight in this British compound and then to an airport on American C-47 transports and they flew you to Brussels, I think you said.

R: I should say that that night in the British camp I was up resting on the bunk. We had a nice clean place to sleep. Sheets and everything else. One of my buddies from the section I was in he said, "Come on down to the kitchen, Dick. You should see what we found. A twenty-in-one ration. We must have three, four pounds of bacon. All we're doing is frying up the bacon and putting it on bread."

T: What kind of ration was that?

R: Twenty-in-one ration. I had a ten-in-one. I never heard of a twenty-in-one until that night. So we went down there and we ate bacon and bread until we were full.

T: Now, since the Russians arrived, had you been getting more calories per day do you think? You start to put weight back on in other words.

R: Not from the Russians. No. I don't remember anything of that three weeks what we did for food. And today I still have a question of, what did we use for toilet paper? In or out of the camp. I don't remember that. Did anybody every say anything about that?

(2, A, 124)

T: I never asked. I mean there was latrine facilities but they weren't supplying toilet paper, were they?

R: Yes. But when we had diarrhea and stuff. There was a lot of that.

T: Did you suffer from dysentery or diarrhea?

R: Yes. One time I thought I wasn't going to make it. In Fallingbostal.

T: Talk about that. That was a rough camp there.

R: That lasted about three days and I was getting so weak I could hardly walk. You had to go from the building we were in over to the latrine.

T: How far was that?

R: I'd say a half a block or so. And all the latrine was, was a gutter that you bent over. Backward of course. There was water flowing through the gutter. You had to go that way. Of course when you have diarrhea and you can't get away from it and you can't get up. You get pretty tired after a while.

T: There's no seat to sit on.

R: No. Nothing. And you keep getting weaker. I remember I got pretty concerned. But it finally quit the third day.

T: Did you have some kind of treatment or it just passed?

R: There was nothing. Absolutely nothing at Fallingbostel.

T: Medical care. Nothing at all.

R: Nothing. Zero.

T: I can see why you thought II-A was a step up.

R: Oh, yes.

T: Was that the lowest point for you of your POW time? When you were sick there at Fallingbostel?

R: Yes. Yes. That had to be. Yes. I was afraid I wasn't going to make it.

T: Were you really concerned that you weren't going to make it?

R: Yes. Sure was. But when it quit. Then I knew I had it beat.

T: That's a terrible feeling. Not being able to get up from—not even on the toilet. But you can't get up or leave the spot.

R: Yes. I didn't even want to go because I had trouble—I was getting pretty weak and just bending over was all I could do.

T: Yes. So II-A was better and it sounds like it's getting even better. You're back in American hands by 19 May it sounds like.

R: Yes. Yes. Because 18 May we got to the British. The nineteenth we flew over all the windmills in Holland and got into Brussels.

T: And your birthday is 20 May. Where were you for that?

R: I was in Brussels or Liege.

T: In Belgium.

R: Yes.

T: Did you stay in Liege very long or was that...

R: No. Just long enough to get our clothes and stuff. I think we got on a train there. I think it was a train or trucks.

T: Then it was Camp Lucky Strike.

R: Yes.

(2, A, 153)

T: How long were you at Camp Lucky Strike before you got the SS American back to the States?

R: Three weeks. It was 21 June when we boarded the...no wait a minute. 21 June when we hit Boston. So it must have been about the seventeenth or the sixteenth of June when we boarded that.

T: So you spent four, between three and four weeks at Camp Lucky Strike.

R: Yes. About a full three weeks. We could take trips into Paris or any place we wanted to go. Because we had money and they'd give you a pass any place you wanted to go. But if you weren't there when your name was called you'd miss the ship home.

T: Oh!

R: So I never left camp.

T: I see. So it was a gamble.

R: Yes.

T: You want to go see places. So you were free to go but you didn't.

R: Yes.

T: How did you pass those three to four weeks at Camp Lucky Strike?

R: I don't know. It wasn't hard. We had real good food and we could go walking around as much as we wanted to. Nobody ever checked you in or anything. You

were treated royally. Man, they couldn't do enough for you. That was unusual for the US Army.

T: Did you get medical examinations or things like this?

R: No. I never got any medical examination that I can remember until I think I was home a year or two.

T: So you were out of the service. Did you spend any kind of R and R time in the States anyplace?

R: Oh, yes. I spent—don't tell me why. I spent six weeks down at the hotel down in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

T: Hot Springs, Arkansas. A lot of other POWs there too.

R: Oh, yes. It was full.

T: Did they provide any kind of medical care for you there?

R: I imagine they did, but I never went for any medical care.

T: Your head was okay by now?

R: Oh, yes.

T: Did the Army ever debrief you about your POW experience? Sit down and ask you questions about where you'd been or conditions?

R: No.

T: Never. It sounds like they checked for a pulse, gave you some food, and sent you on your way.

R: Yes. If you were walking that's all that mattered.

T: When you got out of the service and got back to the States, did you visit the VA at all for any kind of debriefing or...

R: No. Because my first experience with the VA was probably a year after I got home. They sent me a letter saying I had to report to the hospital.

T: Here in Minneapolis?

(2, A, 182)

R: Yes. Because I had amoebic dysentery. What they called it. So I spent a week in the VA hospital and they sent me home with three hundred pills to take.

T: That was your VA experience.

R: That was my first one.

T: Were you any percent disabled by this time?

R: Not physically.

T: I mean from the VA. Their disabled. They give disability to POWs.

R: Oh, yes. When I got discharged I got a ten percent for my scar on my forehead. Is all I got.

T: Did you get anything else over the years?

R: But I went through at whatchamacallit...I went through with the psychologist or psychiatrist—quite an interrogation.

T: When was that?

R: That was in the fall, when I was down at the R and R.

T: At Hot Springs.

R: Yes.

T: And what kind of questions did they ask you there?

R: A million of them. A million of them. I must have had at least, I'd say ten hours of interrogation.

T: By the same person? Or team of people?

R: Yes. No, he took a whole history.

T: A history of your POW experience?

R: Yes. Everything.

T: I see. And what kind of questions were these? Was it a man?

R: Yes.

T: What was he keen to know from you? What did he want to know?

R: Oh, the same thing we're going through today. How I reacted and so forth.

T: So from your memory it was a lot of asking you for the details of your POW experience and sort of inquiring how you reacted to certain situations. Much like today in other words.

R: Yes.

T: And I'm not a psychologist. You got back to the States. Spent some time in an R and R facility in Arkansas and were discharged in November of '45. You came back to Hugo. Back to the farm or where did you come back to?

R: I came back to the farm.

T: And who was on the farm still?

R: Dad was.

T: Your dad. And some of your brothers and sisters too?

R: No. No. Just me.

T: Were they older than you?

R: Oh, yes. I'm even younger than my twin by twenty minutes, and he tried to put that over on me all the time but I took care of that.

T: Were you the youngest?

R: Youngest twin. Then I had a younger brother. He was in the Navy.

(2, A, 213)

T: So when you got back it was just you and your dad in the house.

R: Yes.

T: When you got back and saw your dad, how curious was he to know about your POW experience?

R: You know, nobody asked me a thing?

T: Not even your dad?

R: Not that I recall. He probably asked me if they treated me mean or something, but no details.

T: Did he ask about any combat experience you had?

R: I really don't remember. But I probably told him how we got captured. More than likely. Because most people would say, I don't want to hear about it.

T: About your POW time? So do you remember people saying that to you? I mean if you would talk about it, saying oh, come on...

R: I don't remember other people. I remember my wife particularly, because it kind of hurt.

T: You were married in '49.

R: Yes.

T: Your wife at that time, Joyce, when you were married, did she know about your POW experience?

R: Oh, sure.

T: And was she curious to know or didn't care?

R: No. She still ain't. She doesn't know any details.

T: Is that because she didn't ask or you didn't tell?

R: Well, if I did try to say something she'd say be quiet. I don't want to hear it.

T: Really? So who did you share that with? Anybody?

R: Nobody.

T: And you had six kids. As they were growing up were they curious to know?

R: No.

T: Did they know you had been a POW?

R: Sure.

T: But they didn't want to really know anything about it?

R: No. They still don't.

T: So even today.

R: I shouldn't say that. They do now. More.

T: But it's only been recent?

R: Yes. More recently. Especially since this last war's started. They'll listen a little bit more.

T: But for decades your family, your wife and kids, didn't want to hear about it even though they knew you had been a POW?

R: Yes. You know, that was the overwhelming point in my life. And you've got to say something about it. But the only one you can say something about it is another prisoner. That is why I really, really was happy when I found out about the ex-Prisoners of War. I didn't find out about that organization here in the Twin Cities until 1990.

(2, A, 246)

T: So you went forty years, Dick, without really having someone to listen to you?

R: Yes.

T: Would you say that's something that ate at you or sat on you?

R: No, but when they would say be quiet. I don't want to hear it. That would really hurt.

T: So you tried to talk about it sometimes.

R: Yes. But I didn't want to say something and impress them that I was a prisoner of war and what we'd gone through. I just wanted to make a statement.

T: Another thing I wanted to ask. When you got back from overseas before you got out of the service or afterwards, what kind of dreams or memories, dreams that you'd have about your POW experience?

R: Getting captured didn't wear off very fast.

T: What do you mean by that?

R: Anything that would happen, it would come back to you. In fact, last year on the Fourth of July...no it wasn't the Fourth of July. It was after that. About a week after

that. My neighbors across the street here had some real big firecrackers. They were loud. They set them off about two o'clock in the morning. Oh!

T: You were sleeping?

R: I was unhappy about that.

T: Did that bring back images in your mind of the time when you were captured?

R: Yes. That was all part of it.

T: So even all these years later it can still come back to you.

R: You don't forget it. You don't forget it.

T: Did you or do you have dreams or nightmares about when you were a prisoner of war?

R: No. Not too much. No. That faded out pretty fast.

T: Is it something that you noticed immediately after?

R: Yes. Because anybody you met or saw or anything, you always tried to protect yourself.

T: What do you mean?

R: Well, cover up and not say anything.

T: About having been a POW? Why is that?

R: Because when I had tried to say something about it they would—I got shut up too many times.

T: Is that something that you could talk about with coworkers for example on jobs you had over the years?

R: No. No, I never did. The only ones I could ever talk to sensibly, you know, is ex-POWs.

T: And you mentioned it was 1990 when you found out about and joined the American ex-POWs.

R: Yes.

T: How did you find out about the organization?

(2, A, 286)

R: I was down at the VA getting my shot for influenza and you had to sit and wait on the bench there fifteen minutes afterwards. I went and sat down and it so happened that the guy and his wife were sitting there on the bench waiting too. And somehow or other it came up. Don't ask me how. Maybe something they saw and Herb told me about it. He said, "Why don't you join, Dick?"

T: Herb?

R: A fellow POW that I know.

T: What's his last name?

R: Herb Kohnke.

T: I saw him yesterday.

R: You did? That old guy?

T: Yes.

R: What a guy he is! Him and his wife. I stop and see him once in a while.

T: Good deal. So it was him that you saw just by chance and he talked to you about the organization?

R: Yes.

T: Was it an easy decision for you to join?

R: Oh, after I got acquainted with it? The best.

T: How would you describe what the American ex-POWs has been able to do for you as an organization?

R: The ex-POWs [are] just like a big family. We, like the VFW or the Legion or any of that, because the wives are included in on it.

T: Right.

R: And it's just like a family. In fact we've got a picnic coming up next week. On the fourth. You coming?

T: I wasn't invited.

R: You are now. It'll cost you seven bucks though.

T: Sounds like a good deal.

R: If you want to come. It's down at...

(slight pause in tape)

T: Was being in the boxcar, being bombed or strafed in the boxcar, something that came up in your dreams?

R: Yes. Because you know you're locked in and you're crowded and there is plenty of confusion in the boxcar. Plenty of concern.

T: I bet.

R: Yes.

T: How did those boxcar times come back in your dreams? What parts of it came back?

R: The longevity of them. I think both of them were two nights and three day trips. Oh! You were stopped so much. And you wonder where in the hell are they taking you to now? And why is it taking so long?

T: Sure. When you got back, out of the service, out of uniform, you're back with your dad on that farm there in Hugo, did you have difficulties adjusting to being out of uniform, out of prison camp and back on the farm in Hugo, Minnesota?

(2, A, 325)

R: I don't know but I did a lot of drinking.

T: Had you been someone who drank before you went in the service?

R: No.

T: What were you drinking? That's something that was new for you then, right?

R: Well, it wasn't brand new. But I never did much drinking in the service either. I didn't smoke. I did get drunk on my birthday, my twenty-first birthday. I remember that. Me and another guy. But...I don't know...Dad didn't have anything to do because it was winter. I got discharged on 24 November.

T: Right.

R: And there was no work on the farm. All he was doing was tilling at that time. So about three nights a week I would go to the bar in Hugo. I can remember him saying, "Going out again tonight?" "Yes. Can I use the car?"

T: With somebody you knew or by yourself?

R: Oh, I'd meet a lot of people at the bar I knew.

T: Small town you would.

R: Yes.

T: Sure.

R: Sure.

T: They knew you. Did they know, the people you met there at the bar, did they know who you were and where you'd been?

R: As a prisoner?

T: Yes.

R: No.

T: They knew you were just a returning veteran.

R: Yes. I never said anything either. We were just having a good time.

T: Were these ex-servicemen too or civilians?

R: Most of them were.

T: Most of them were.

R: In fact one of them was a serviceman yet. He was in the Navy. He said "Dick, let's have a little contest to see who can drink the most beer." Hell, I couldn't even hold a candle to him.

T: So you lost that one.

R: I went through about seven bottles and he was still going strong.

T: How long did this last? This period of what you described as drinking a lot.

R: Probably two or three months. But then dad got some work in the spring and I found myself working. He worked my butt off.

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

R: ...the contracts we had to do.

T: You were working for your dad pretty much here.

R: Yes.

T: You stayed on the farm more or less for three, four years, didn't you?

R: Yes. It was a couple years. Yes.

T: Was your dad older by this time?

R: Yes. Dad must have been sixty-five or seventy.

T: Just the two of you living at home the whole time here?

R: Yes.

T: And as you mentioned earlier, I think I heard you say, the subject of being a POW never really came up.

R: No. No.

T: It almost seems like it would be hard to avoid it.

R: It came up real fast when I got home. But then it all blew over.

T: Did you find yourself thinking much about that time? When you were living back there on the farm?

R: No. Because I was back to my old happy hunting grounds. Because I said to myself when we got up on the line that week, that first day I think or the second day, Dick, you damn fool. What the hell you doing up here? You could be home on the farm taking it easy.

T: Once you got home on the farm did you find yourself trying to put your military service, your POW time behind you?

R: Yes. You did. At least I did. I just wanted to forget it.

T: Was that possible to do that?

R: No. No.

T: And as you mentioned once you got married you didn't find a receptive ear then either to do...what you'd gone through.

R: No. No.

T: Which makes it even more amazing how the American ex-POWs must have been like just an amazing thing for you when you found that organization.

R: Oh, you ain't kidding. I've been quite active in the organization. I took care of the Bingo game for three years at Hastings. And when there was some work to come up I volunteered for it.

T: Are you still an active part of the organization?

R: Oh, yes.

T: So you've been in it fourteen years now.

R: Yes. So if you get to the picnic early, I'll be down there sweeping the place out and cleaning up.

T: I see. The Minneapolis VA and a number of other VAs, they have groups of POWs that meet from time to time.

R: Yes. Dr. Engdahl.

T: Have you been part of that group?

R: I was for a while. Then one guy made me pretty mad because several times when I got there, there was only maybe a few empty chairs. The room wasn't big enough to accommodate us all really. Around a big table. Conference table. He'd come up and, "Dick, you've got my chair again." Your chair, hell. I don't see no name on it. So I finally got tired of it and said the hell with it.

T: How long did you go to those meetings?

R: A couple years.

(2, B, 422)

T: Was that something that you found helpful or not so much?

R: I enjoyed them because of the camaraderie. You'd hear a lot of tales. I was to dinner with Porwoll here, oh, it must have been six months ago.

T: Ken Porwoll, right.

R: Yes. He said, "Dick"—he told Bill and I. You met Bill? The guy that—Bill Hall.

T: Bill Hall. Sure did.

R: He says, "You wouldn't believe it but all we had to live on one time was grasshoppers for three months." And he says, "They sure got to be good." (*laughing*)

T: Ken Porwoll was a fine guy with a good sense of humor too.

R: Quite a guy. What a family he's got. Nine kids too, you know.

T: Yes. I know. When you get together with ex-POWs of the Japanese, do you find it easy to relate to their experiences?

R: No. But for the simple reason they had it so damn tough. I'm glad to hear about something like what he told us there. Who the hell would believe something like that? But from what you've heard and seen and stuff like guys—especially on the march...the Filipinos mostly get their heads cut off. They'd just call somebody out of line and whack their head off for nothing.

T: So you hear these Japanese experiences, does it put your own experience in perspective then?

R: Oh, sure. How easy we had it alongside they had it. The only thing we didn't have was the comforts and the food.

T: It was certainly...

R: Sure.

T: Completely different thing then?

R: Yes. We lost weight. But I only got down to about I think about 125, 130. The most I dropped.

T: What did you go into the service at? How much were you when you were captured? Can you estimate?

R: I suppose about 160.

T: So you lost weight but not to a dangerous level.

R: No.

T: You know, sitting having this conversation today, it's been very easy back and forth. Almost like a conversation. Is this an interview that you could have done at any time after the war do you think—had I asked you?

R: No. Because I've had several other ones before.

T: Have you really?

R: Oh, yes. I've given one for the museum and I gave two of them this winter to the school kids here in White Bear. In fact one of them I gave an interview to, won second place in the State on the essay contest.

T: No kidding.

R: I had to give one for the high...

T: Have you found doing interviews and talking to school groups easy or easier over time?

R: Yes. Both of them. In fact, all three of them I've given in the last two years, were easy. Because they were a little like you. They were to the point and you ask a question and you answer it.

T: Yes. Is this something that you could have done twenty years ago with me?

(2, B, 452)

R: I probably would have reserved myself. Given you part and held some of it back. I would never have told you about shooting the guy, and don't make that too much public if you can help it.

T: To conclude, the last thing I want to ask you is when you think about your POW experience there in 1944 and '45, how would you describe the most important way that that changed you as a person or changed your life? What changed you as a person?

R: You sure learn about the longevity of life and the afterlife. I'm Catholic you know, and we believe in heaven and hell. So I'm pretty well aware of that and I don't know if I'd consider myself religious, but I don't miss Mass. I'm real careful about that.

T: Are you saying that your POW experience made more intense or more serious your faith?

R: Yes. It tends that you realize what can happen to you so fast and unexpectedly.

T: And that's something you hadn't considered or hadn't thought that way before really?

R: Oh, no. No. Because I was a little bit wild in my younger days.

T: Age twenty we sometimes think we're going to live forever, don't we?

R: Yes *(both laugh)*.

T: So is it safe to say it made you a more serious or reflective person in the long run?

R: Both. Yes. That's probably one of the reasons I'm divorced, too.

T: That's the final question. Thanks again.

R: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW