

Interviewee: Sam Slavko Nenadich

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 12 June 2003

Location: dining room of Nenadich home, Chisholm, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, December 2003

Editing by: Thomas Saylor, completed June 2004

Sam Nenadich was born on 18 October 1923 in Chisholm, a mining town on Minnesota's Iron Range. One of five children of Serbian immigrant parents, he attended local schools, graduating from Chisholm High School in 1942. Sam worked during 1942-43 on the track gang and as a drill operator at the Sherman mine (US Steel), then entered the Army in May 1943 after being drafted.

Sam completed Basic Training and Air Corps gunnery school, and was made a top turret gunner and chief armorer on B-24 Liberator heavy bombers. He was posted overseas in July 1944, joining the 831st Bomb Squadron, 485th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force, in Italy; he flew his first mission in mid-July. Over the next five weeks Sam completed seventeen missions; on his eighteenth mission, on 24 August 1944, his B-24 was shot down over Czechoslovakia. Luckily, all ten crew members escaped the burning plane.

Sam was sent to Stalag IV-B, in Grosstychow, northern Germany, where he remained until 6 February 1945. As the Soviet Red Army approached from the east, prisoners were evacuated by the Germans, and force marched. Sam and the other Stalag IV-B POWs endured two and a half months of marching before being liberated by American forces near Magdeburg, in central Germany, on 26 April 1945. Sam then spent time in several medical facilities, first in France, later in the United States, before being discharged in October 1945 with the rank of staff sergeant.

Again a civilian, Sam returned to Chisholm, Minnesota, was reunited with his wife Florence (married July 1944) and raised a family, and worked for US Steel in various capacities; he retired in 1983. In retirement Sam and Florence (d. 1999) remained in their Chisholm home, where this interview took place in June 2003. Sam died on 26 December 2006.

Documentation available, Missing Aircraft Report (MACR), at National Archives:
Aircraft number 42-78501 -- 485th BG, MACR #8394, 24 Aug 1944

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

S = Sam Nenadich

[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: This is an interview for the POW Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today is Thursday, June 12, 2003, and this is an interview with Sam Slavko Nenadich of Chisholm, Minnesota. First, Mr. Nenadich, on the record, thanks very much for taking time this evening to speak with me.

S: It's a pleasure.

T: As we've talked here before going on the record, I've learned that you were born here in Chisholm, Minnesota on the Iron Range on 18 October 1923. You were one of five children. The middle child I think you said and both of your parents were immigrants to this country from the former Yugoslavia, from Serbia. You attended local schools here in Chisholm. Graduated from Chisholm High School 1942.

You then worked at the Sherman Mine, that's a US Steel mine, here on the Iron Range from mid-1942 until you were drafted into the US Army May of 1943. You worked on track gang and then as a drill operator. And I'll ask you about that in a little bit. In the US Army you went to a number of stations in the Air Corps until you were posted overseas in July 1944, and specifically you were a top turret gunner and chief armorer on a B-24 Liberator Heavy Bomber. You flew with the 15th Air Force, 485th Bomb Group, 831st Bomb Squadron, and that's from Italy, right?

S: Yes.

T: Where were you stationed? What airfield did you fly out of in Italy?

S: We flew out of the southern part of Italy. If I recall the airbase was in Foggia. And then we moved up later on to Spinazola, or something like that. That would be up in the northern part.

T: So you flew out of two airfields during the time you were there.

S: Yes.

T: And that's interesting, because as we were talking before you weren't actually in Italy very long.

S: No.

T: From July 1944 until 24 August 1944, when on your eighteenth mission—

S: Yes.

T: —you were shot down over Germany. You spent the time until 1945 at Grosstychow Camp 4B in the north of Germany, what's present day Poland 6 February 1945 until your liberation on 26 April 1945. You were forced marched—so almost three months of forced march through Germany until being liberated by, by Americans or Russians?

S: Americans. 104th Timberwolf outfit.

T: That was near the Elbe River in central Germany, so knowing a little bit about the geography of Germany you walked quite a long distance.

S: Yes.

T: You were back to the States, discharged in October of 1945 and returned to Chisholm. In fact you're a life-long resident of Chisholm. Worked for US Steel in a number of different capacities, mine worker and finally in a diesel locomotive repair shop. You retired in 1983. You were married on 10 June 1944, just a month before you went overseas, or close to it.

S: Yes.

T: Wife's name was Flossie, and you have two daughters. Both live in the state of Minnesota. Let me ask to start, you were a high school student, in fact a high school senior, when the US got involved in the war. And specifically the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor which was 7 December 1941. I'm wondering if you remember what you were doing when you first heard that news?

(1, A, 75)

S: I think I was listening to the radio. We didn't have television at that time.

T: Right. So you heard this news come over the radio.

S: Right.

T: Do you remember, were you sitting in your folk's home or someone else's home?

S: I was sitting on the living room couch at my parent's house and we had one of those big floor model radios.

T: Now how did you react when you really made sense of what was happening?

S: Oh, I just... I swore and I said, "Let's go get 'em" and stuff like that.

T: So you were one of those who was ready to lash out, to strike back.

S: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: Were you the oldest boy in your family?

S: No. My brother Joe was older than me.

T: Were you the first one into the service?

S: No. My brother Joe was the first one in the service.

T: Was he in by this time, at Pearl Harbor, or only after?

S: No. After. He was in the Merchant Marines.

T: Did he volunteer for the Merchant Marine or was...

S: Yes.

T: How did your folks react to that news? They had two young boys; you had three brothers and a sister. There were four boys that could potentially be in the service. How did your folks react to that news?

S: They were horrified actually. She said, "I don't want you to go. I don't want you to go." She told that to all of us kids. We told her the draft is up and if we get drafted we have to go.

T: Was your dad's response different from than your mom's or about the same?

S: About the same. About the same. We were a close knit family. Real close.

T: I heard you say earlier off the record that a lot of the Iron Range families were pretty close knit groups.

S: Yes.

T: So for your folks it was anxious moments I think I hear you saying about what was going to happen.

S: Yes. Right

T: You got your greetings in the mail about a year after you finished high school. In the meantime after high school in '42 to when you got drafted in May of '43 you worked for...

S: US Steel.

T: That was the Sherman Mine, I think you said.

(1, A, 111)

S: At the Sherman Mine. Yes.

T: The job you did there, was that an easy job to get in 1942 when you finished high school?

S: Oh, sure. Because they were hauling a lot of ore. It was on drive gang. I was hiding dirt under ties.

T: That's what you did. Describe that. Was that difficult physical work?

S: Say this was a tie...

T: Like a railroad tie.

S: Like a railroad tie, and you had a number two shovel. You would jack it up because the tracks would get all...

T: So you jack the railroad tie up?

S: Yes. The section and then we sit there and tamp dirt. The foreman would look, or your boss would look, and he [said], "Okay. Drop the jack," and it was pretty level so you go to the next place that had a low spot in it.

T: So you kind of visually sized up the track there to see if it was level or not...

S: Yes.

T: And if it wasn't you had to fill in underneath.

S: Yes. Under the ties.

T: Is that hard physical work or not?

S: Not really. No.

T: Now this was a starting job for you. This is the first job. Is this a job that was not particularly well paid at that time?

S: No. It was the lowest paid job. I think we were making... I don't remember the hourly rate, but I do remember if you brought home a check for seventy-nine dollars for two weeks work, that's eighty hours of work, that was a good check.

T: Now were you living with your folks at this time?

S: Yes.

T: So in a sense, your money might have gone a little further, because you weren't paying rent and this kind of stuff.

S: Oh, sure. I was paying my parents board and room. I felt that as long as I'm making money I should give them something.

T: At the mine there, was that a mine that employed a lot of guys?

S: Quite a few.

T: Did you notice turnover? Guys coming and going or guys leaving to go to the service from the mine? Was there a turnover?

S: Oh, sure. There was a turnover. That's why it was so easy to get a job. This guy got drafted. That guy got drafted. You come to work sometimes on a Monday and look and half the guys you worked with last Saturday or last Friday, they're not at work anymore.

T: So there was definitely a turnover.

S: Oh, sure.

T: Now did the people who were being hired to replace them, young guys like yourself, were there also women being hired to take certain jobs at the mine that you recall?

(1, A, 151)

S: Not particularly at that time when it first started, but later on they got different units to work in.

T: I suppose there are some jobs that are more suited for women than others.

S: Oh, sure.

T: Because of how hard the physical labor might be.

S: Yes. They got jobs like a sampler. They'd jump from one ore car to the next and they'd take so many scoops here, so many down the middle and so many on this end and throw it into a sack. Then I guess they'd mark the whole train.

T: That's to sample the quality of the ore that's being thrown in there.

S: The quality of the ore. Yes.

T: Now this was all piecework for the most part, right?

S: Yes.

T: It was all how much good quality ore that the guys managed to bring up.

S: Yes.

T: By the time that you left in mid-[19]43 had you begun to see women around the mine operations?

S: A few. Not too many.

T: So your recollection is some but not too many.

S: Yes.

T: The year you spent living at home, were you involved with doing any of the shopping? Things that you might have noticed rationing of certain things or shortages of other things.

S: There was rationing. Sure. Gas. You had to have gas stamps to get gas. I forget how many gallons you were allowed per week. You had to get shoe stamps. To buy shoes you had to have a stamp. To buy shoes.

T: Now did the gas ration, did that impact you? Were you driving a car at this time?

S: I was driving to and from work. It didn't bother me too much. I had enough gas as far as I was concerned because I wasn't traveling along the Range.

T: You said your work was real close to Chisholm here.

S: Yes.

T: Now was that your dad's car you were driving or was it yours?

S: That was mine.

T: So you had earned enough money, I guess, to put together to get a car by this time.

S: I bought a used car. Yes.

T: Now when you went to work were you taking other guys with you or driving by yourself?

S: I took the older guys. I had three old guys riding with me. None of the younger guys wanted to bother with them. And Joe lived up the street here. Walter lived on the corner over there. And about a block from that corner over that way was Waldo Rachoni. They were all old guys. And what the heck. Thank God for Joe. A lot of times he'd knock on the window to wake me up so I wouldn't be late for work.

T: So this favor worked both ways, didn't it?

(1, A, 188)

S: Sure.

T: He got you up and you gave him a ride to work. Now did these guys give you a little money for gas or you did it for free?

S: I did it for free. I had to go to work so what's the difference a couple of blocks here or there?

T: Right. Right. I imagine the winter it's pretty nice having some way to get to work and not walking.

S: Sure. I remember my dad walking.

T: Really? How far was it to the mine if you had to walk? Couple miles?

S: Oh, yes. About two and a quarter miles I would say.

T: That's forty-five minutes probably unless you're really hustling.

S: Yes.

T: Did it occur to you at that time to go out and enlist in the service, or were you content to wait to be drafted?

S: I was content to be drafted. Wait to be drafted really.

T: How come? I mean, in a sense there was kind of... some guys who were anxious to get in the service and you said yourself that you were angry after Pearl Harbor...

S: Well, sure, but my parents never were that well off, and as long as I had a job I figured, well, I'll stay until I get drafted and this way I can help them financially.

T: That's right, because you were bringing home an extra paycheck.

S: Yes.

T: By the time you left in May of '43, how many of your brothers were still at home?

S: One.

T: So two were gone in the service?

S: Yes.

T: Did all four of you go to the service or just three?

S: My step-brother didn't go in the service.

T So three brothers total.

S: Three brothers.

T: You and two others.

S: Yes.

T: By the way, what branches of service, one was Merchant Marine you said?

S: One was Merchant Marine, one was Navy, and I was in the Air Force.

T: The Merchant Marine volunteered you said, and the Navy brother, did he volunteer or was he drafted?

S: I think he was drafted.

T: Let's move to when you got drafted and went off to Basic Training. Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Now Missouri is a long way from the Iron Range.

S: Yes.

T: Is that the first time that you had been that far from home?

S: Right.

(1, A, 217)

T: What kind of an adjustment was that?

S: It was a little hard. There wasn't anybody from the Range at Jefferson Barracks. That was one thing.

T: That's a big change in your life then, from being surrounded by Rangers to this.

S: Sure. We got drafted. We took a bus in Chisholm here. It was parked where Rupp's Furniture Store was. Across the street and up about two buildings there was George's Liquor Store, and every time a busload went down to Fort Snelling that got drafted he brought a case of booze there.

T: Onto the bus?

S: Old George. Yes.

T: Do you remember that bus ride going down to Fort Snelling?

S: Yes. And when we got there you know what they said? St. Louis seven. Bunch of drunks came in, because all the windows were knocked out of the bus.

T: So you guys trashed the bus on the way down there?

S: Not me. I wasn't much of a drinker.

T: But it sounds like you had some real drinkers on there.

S: Oh, some of them guys. I tell you!

T: Were most of these guys about the same age as you that you remember?

S: Yes.

T: Because you were just about nineteen by this time.

S: Yes. There were a few older ones, but not many.

T: So get the guys out of high school and off they go.

S: Yes.

T: What did you make of Basic Training? What was that all about?

S: I learned how to make a bed (*laughing*). You may think it's funny, but the corporal would come in or the sergeant and you had your bed made and sometimes he'd drop a quarter on it.

T: You always hear these stories about them dropping the coins. They really did it?

S: And that quarter had better bounce. In other words, that sheet and that blanket had better be tucked tight. Square corners. Shoes had to be shined. Under the bed in a certain position.

T: So was it all about getting in physical shape or was it all about something else?

(1, A, 245)

S: It was all about something else. Learning how to take orders. That's basically what it was. Oh, yes. Then you put on that rubber gas mask. After breakfast you put it on. Go out on the drill field and drill until dinnertime. Go into the barracks. Eat dinner. Take the mask off. When your dinner was through put that mask back on and go and drill.

T: Gas masks?

S: That was every Thursday.

T: So you practiced with a gas mask. What was that like with that thing on your face?

S: Uhh! Like a sauna actually.

T: It was harder to breathe too?

S: Oh, yes. It was harder to breathe because of the heat. Jefferson Barracks.

T: In the summer you were there, too, weren't you?

S: Yes.

T: That gets hot down there.

S: Yes. As I said, the drill field was white crushed rock (*laughs*). That didn't help.

T: You survived Basic Training, and by this time did you know you were going to the Air Corps?

S: No.

T: When did you find that out?

S: When I got through with Basic Training they said, "You're going to go to Colorado." I said, "What's there?" "That's an Air Force school." So I thought oh, am I going to fly a ship? Am I going to be a mechanic or what?

T: So you didn't really know you were going there and even when you learned you were going you didn't know what you were going there for?

S: Right.

T: So Lowry Field, and that's outside of Denver, isn't it?

S: Yes.

T: What did you do there exactly?

S: We learned how to dismantle guns.

T: So you were going to be a gunner. You knew that.

S: Yes.

T: How did that sit with you? You knew you were going to fly. Was that something you looked forward to, you dreaded or you didn't really care?

(1, A, 268)

S: It didn't really make much difference to me. No. We had practice gunnery in an open cockpit plane. And another open cockpit plane would have a big tow target. Made out of nylon. A sleeve. Then I had red bullets. My bullets were pinkish red. Another guy blue bullets. And then we'd go. And the tow target would be taken, and we'd be shooting at it. And every now and then we had a tracer shell in there so you could see if you were high or low. Then we would come down. Got so many reds and so many blues.

T: So they could really test how accurate you were when you put that into practice.

S: Right.

T: Was that something that you found easy or hard?

S: No. I liked it.

T: Had you done some hunting when you were a kid?

S: Yes.

T: So shooting a gun was not necessarily new for you?

S: No.

T: Were you good at being a gunner? Was it something you got good marks at?

S: Oh, I got good marks at it. And another thing. You've heard of skeet and trap shooting?

T: Yes.

S: That's what we did.

T: So you might have been actually a fairly easy transition into gunnery.

S: Yes.

T: When was it you learned you were going to be flying on a B-24 Liberator? About the same time?

S: Just about the same time.

T: Now at Lowry that was just general gunnery. You weren't flying in a B-24 yet.

S: No. No.

T: Where did that take place?

S: Casper, Wyoming.

T: So you went to Casper and actually trained in a B-24 at that point?

S: They made up a crew then. Pilot, copilot and navigator and bombardier and waste gunners and tail gunner.

T: Crew of, was it ten on a Liberator?

(1, A, 290)

S: Ten.

T: Now is that the same crew that you went overseas with then?

S: Yes. Same plane too.

T: Talk about this crew. What kind of people were they and how well did they mesh together?

S: We meshed good, as far as that goes. But they were from all different parts. New York, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Florida, Massachusetts. I'm trying to think of where else. From all over the country.

T: The people in the front of the plane were basically officers, right?

S: Right.

T: Pilot, copilot, bombardier...

S: And navigator.

T: And then six enlisted.

S: Yes.

T: Of the officers and the enlisted, how well did they get along with each other?

S: Good. Our crew did. I don't know about the other crews, but we got along good.

T: Was there a person on the crew that you were especially good friends with? Someone that you really hit it off with?

S: I don't want to brag, but as far as the officers and the men I hit it off good with all of them. I got along easy. With everyone. Still do.

T: Now, and just as an aside, when your crew was shot down, how many people survived?

S: All of them.

T: Everybody survived. Have you been in contact with these guys since the war then?

S: Yes. I've got their telephone numbers up there.

T: So these are people you've been in contact with for almost sixty years.

S: One of them I know of has died. The rest of the crew, they're all living.

T: It seems in a sense that's against all the odds. First of all when the plane goes down you all survive, and then most of you are still alive now.

S: Yes.

T: How much training did you do in the States? Did you do a lot of flying with this crew?

S: Yes. I'm trying to think of how long. I don't think it was that long. With the crew when we got together. I don't think it was over three months. I may be wrong but I'm just guessing now.

(1, A, 315)

T: I'm just looking at some of these dates [on your papers]. You were inducted in May of '43 and by July of '44, just fourteen months later, you are already in Italy with this crew. That's not a lot of time.

S: Right.

T: So they were pushing things along.

S: Oh, sure.

T: Let's move up to going over to Italy. That was in July of 1944. You mentioned earlier you flew the plane, your actual plane across. What do you remember about that? This is a lot of ocean you're flying across.

S: A lot of ocean. Yes.

T: Talk about that trip if you can. What do you remember?

S: It was nights and we hit a lot of rough spots. I mean, that's the first time I hit rough air pockets and that. Down in the States you don't hit them that much, but going overseas and over the water and all that. I mean your plane goes... like the bottom drops out. But after a few of those bumps you get used to it.

T: As a top turret gunner when the plane is flying on a long distance like that where do you sit? Can you sit up in your turret?

S: Oh, yes.

T: Is it comfortable there?

S: Sure.

T: In a sense that's your workspace up there, isn't it?

S: Oh, yes. You've got a piece of armor about this big and about that... that sits right in front of where your stomach is. It's thick steel.

T: So that sort of protects you hopefully.

S: Yes. Gut shot.

T: Since you're on the top of this plane—I'm trying to envision—you have a Plexiglas... does that swivel all the way around?

S: Yes.

T: So you could see the top of the plane in a way and the wings when you look around.

S: Yes.

T: And you had two .50-caliber guns? Is that right?

S: Two .50-caliber. And it's funny how your guns are so well synchronized that when you're shooting and the propellers were turning they would not hit the propeller and they would not hit the tail.

T: Even though they were certainly right in the line of that.

S: Yes.

T: So you didn't have to worry about stopping.

S: Nothing. Nothing. Just the (***)

T: So this long flight across the ocean. That's a lot of hours. Could you just sit up in your turret fairly comfortably and sort of...

S: Sure. I could come down to the waist and BS with the guys. It was comfortable up there.

T: When you flew across the Atlantic did you have to keep high altitude and therefore on oxygen or not?

(1, A, 341)

S: We were on oxygen part of the time.

T: That means it was cold too.

S: Oh, yes. We had heated flight suits.

T: So they kept you fairly warm?

S: Yes.

T: Feet and hands too?

S: No.

T: So what did you wear on your feet and your hands?

S: We had those boots that they gave us. Flight boots. They're pretty warm. We were young at that time. We had good circulation. If I had the flight boots on now and we were flying, I'd have cold feet (*laughs*).

T: So youth makes a difference?

S: Right.

T: And how about on your hands, because fingers get cold too.

S: We had a nice set of gloves. I'm trying to think of what they were made of. They were a white glove. Thin. And then you had a leather glove that went over it. Nice soft leather glove. And it kept your hands warm. Then again I say, our circulation was a lot better.

T: You made a couple of refueling stops, but eventually got to Italy in July '44. Italy is again a world away from a lot of things. When you got to Italy there, and you were again there approximately five weeks only, but did you have opportunity to see anything off the base or have contact with local people?

S: Not too much.

T: Was your base a distance from the civilians or was it just there wasn't much contact?

S: There wasn't too much contact. No. No. There wasn't too much contact. And they kept you pretty busy.

T: You flew eighteen missions in a little over five weeks. I'm just doing some math—you were flying at least every other day or so I guess.

S: Yes.

T: Thirty-five days. You flew about every other day. You're here with the same crew and you flew the same plane every time, is that right?

S: Yes.

T: Did your plane have a name?

(1, A, 364)

S: Flak Shak. Flak Shak the Third, because the other two got shot down *(laughs)*.

T: Great. When you flew your plane over, is that the plane you flew or did you get another plane once you got there?

S: Oh, no. That's the plane we kept. When we got there I said to the crew chief, I want Jim's jokers painted on that ship. Because us guys were a bunch of jokers anyhow. He says I'm the crew chief. This is Flak Shak Number Three. I said, how come number three? He said, because the other two got shot down.

T: That's encouraging.

S: Yes. Isn't it?

T: You had your idea for a name, but the crew chief said you're going to be something else.

S: That's right. Yes.

T: That's what you became.

S: Oh, yes.

T: Of the missions that you flew, those eighteen, did you always have the same people or did occasionally you have somebody else?

S: The first mission that we flew they broke up our crew and we went with an experienced crew. I went with this crew and Jim went with another crew. Just to give us the feel. And the first mission was to the northern part of Italy and this was referred to as a milk run. Go there. Drop your bombs. Come home. Nobody's going to be in your way.

T: That's reassuring.

S: Yes. Until I asked my pilot. I said, Jim, what the hell is that black stuff puffing below us? He said that's anti-aircraft.

T: That's the first time you had seen that.

S: Right.

T: So for a milk run, it wasn't a milk run.

S: It wasn't a milk run. No.

T: Talk about what you remember about that first mission that you were flying.

S: Scared. Really scared. I mean, they're shooting at you from the bottom and then you gotta wait. There's probably fighters gonna attack you later on. On that first trip we didn't have any fighters but there was a lot of black smoke around the engines.

T: So you were flying as the top turret gunner with another crew, an experienced crew.

S: Right.

T: It was a scary thing to see the flak; what does flak do to a plane when you're going through a flak attack?

S: Actually what it is it's a shell that will burst and chunks of metal will—

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 386.

T: So the flak, the explosion, sends out pieces of metal.

S: Yes. They rupture your oil lines, fuel lines, anything. It can wound the guy that's flying also.

T: So it could come through your Plexiglas turret as well or the side of the plane.

S: Yes.

T: Does it jostle the plane around at all?

S: It does. Sure, you get a little shifting there.

T: What goes through you mind? There were flak attacks more than once I guess on missions you were on.

S: Every mission. You know I think, probably the only thing that went through my mind was God, I hope I get through with this so I can get back home to my wife. That's the basic. And the old expression, ah, shit, flak again.

T: It seems like such a powerless position too, because you can't shoot back at the flak and—

S: And you can't divert your direction because you're flying in formation.

T: So you just have to sit and hope.

S: Ruptured duck.

T: It's almost chance then, isn't it? Maybe it will hit and maybe it won't.

S: Right.

T: That would be hard I think.

S: Yes. But I'll say this, we had a good fighter escort. P-51s. It was all colored pilots.

T: The 332nd Fighter Group.

S: Oh, boy! I'll tell you! Were they hot! When we saw them we thought the angels were guarding us.

T: The guy we talked to, he said his job was to escort Liberator bombers up over the northern Italy and Germany. Did you know they were blacks when you were flying then?

S: No.

T: When did you find that out? That they were actually all black pilots?

S: After a couple of missions we went to interrogation and they... in fact, right after the first mission. We go in for briefing. What did you see and where did the bombs hit and stuff like that. Somebody said, "Who was the fighter group that was escorting us?" They told us it was a colored fighter group. Boy were they hot! Good!

T: So they gave you good protection.

S: Hey! When you're flying formation and that son of a gun can come sneaking between you and a neighbor, you know he's good pilot. Oh! They were hot! I'll tell you!

T: Did you ever wish you could be a pilot, or were you content not to fly the plane?

S: No. I would have loved to be a fighter pilot.

T: As it turns out, you were in a bomber group for five weeks. So flak was something that you became familiar with and I guess had to learn to live with.

(1, B, 443)

S: Oh, sure.

T: What about German fighter planes? Did you see them?

S: Oh, sure.

T: Would you say regularly, sometimes, or how often would you expect to see them?

S: I would say out of our eighteen missions I must have seen them nine, ten times.

T: So about half the missions you saw German planes.

S: Yes.

T: Talk about that a bit. As a gunner your job was to get them and their job was to get you.

S: Yes.

T: Talk about being a gunner and dealing with German planes.

S: I'm going to get you before you get me.

T: Is it that simple?

S: Yes.

T: You know it sounds like hitting these things must be fairly difficult.

S: Oh, sure. They're moving fast, but you've got your guns. As I stated before, you have a tracer bullet so when they're coming at you or on the side, say twelve o'clock, three o'clock, six o'clock. They give you time position. Then you know that's where the fighter is coming so you swing around and head for that direction. It's tough. They come in fast. Then they peel off.

T: Then they're gone. So it sounds like you have what, a split second to hit them or something?

S: Oh, yes.

T: If you can, as an example, talk about a time when you used your guns on a specific mission.

S: I used my guns every time there was fighters around. As I said, there were fighters on either nine or ten of our missions. You knew you were going to kill somebody or somebody was going to kill you. So it's either me or you. I had no qualms about shooting at the guy. But as I said, you don't have much chance. They come in there and then they peel off. Your guns aren't fast enough to...

T: You have to move them I guess...

S: Right.

T: As fast as the plane is moving. You can't do that.

S: Yes. It's all on your guns. Your movement. Sideways.

T: The whole thing swivels then, right?

S: Yes. It's all done by electrical power.

(1, B, 491)

T: So you squeeze and the turret moves.

S: Right.

T: So it could move pretty fast.

S: Oh, yes.

T: Was it easy to tell or tough to tell whether you actually hit something?

S: It was tough really. I contend I only hit one—not hit, I hit more than one probably, but one that went down.

T: Did you have cameras on your guns that watched that kind of stuff?

S: Not at that time.

T: So you sort of gave your best estimate? Maybe I hit something and maybe I didn't.

S: Yes.

T: Was your plane ever hit by enemy fire?

S: Oh, yes. Yes. We came in one time with only one engine finally. We had four engines. Two of them were knocked out and as we were coming back home on final approach making our turn to land, the third engine went out and we missed the runway and I gave my pilot hell. I didn't know the other engine went out. I said, "Jim, what the hell's the matter with you? You missed the runway!" He said, "Yes. I only had one engine when I landed."

T: Was that your closest call?

S: Yes.

T: Was that from flak or from gunfire that your plane was damaged?

S: That was flak.

T: It sounds like, I hear you saying that, you mentioned flak more than enemy fighters as the real threat to your plane.

S: Yes. As I said, we had fighters I would say nine to ten of the missions. I think the flak was doing us more damage.

T: Is that what shot your plane down, flak? Or was it fighters?

S: A fighter shot us down.

T: So flak may have been more of a problem, but the fighters got you on the last mission.

S: Yes.

T: Other than the last mission you flew, what was the most difficult mission from your perspective that you flew of the first seventeen?

S: Ploesti oil fields.

T: Those missions I know from some reading. Talk about that mission if you can.

S: Yes. I mean they were prepared for us. They were guarding their oil fields. When you went in there it was black. It might have been a sunny day, but you didn't see the sun because there was so much anti-aircraft and fighters. I flew that twice. The second time when they said you're going to Ploesti, I got the chills.

T: Really. Because you'd been there the first time.

S: Oh, yes.

T: Was that a high altitude or a low altitude mission?

(1, B, 533)

S: We came in low.

T: When you say low, how low is that?

S: I would say probably about five thousand feet, maybe three thousand.

T: So you're definitely visible from the ground.

S: Oh, yes.

T: So the flak could just... they could just point right up there, couldn't they?

S: Yes.

T: Talk about that mission, the approach and the bombing run, from your perspective.

S: I gotta figure this out now. Our pilot would call us on the radio, or our navigator would call us on the radio and tell us: Okay, we're on our final approach. We'll be flying at such and such an altitude and then he'd give us the run down as to what to expect.

T: So you knew what the mission was going to look like.

S: Right. Right. Yes. So he'd give us the run down. This is going to be a tough one. You expect fighters. You expect flak. So he prepared us for it. Then we went in and did it and prayed all the way along.

T: As you make the approach there comes a time when you have to stay in formation, right?

S: Yes.

T: I'm trying to think what goes through your mind then when you can't even take evasive action. You have to stay...

S: You stay right in formation.

T: From your vantage point you could also see other planes, I suppose.

S: Yes.

T: Getting hit and getting...

S: Oh, sure.

T: Is that difficult? I mean to watch the plane next to you or one flight over getting—

S: Oh, sure. Yes. That was hard on us. Because you probably knew one or two of the guys that was on the next plane. You could tell the planes because of their insignia. Ours was Flak Shak Three and this guy was Queen Mary or whatever names they had on them.

T: So you could see whose plane was where.

S: Oh, sure.

T: And you probably knew some of the guys.

S: Yes.

T: When a plane was hit were you supposed to write down what you saw so you could report later?

S: We didn't have to write it down. When we went for briefing then they would ask us what we saw. Then we'd tell them what happened.

T: You flew in the space of about five weeks, and that's not even forty days, eighteen missions.

S: Yes.

T: I'm wondering how much of a problem fatigue was when you're flying that much.

(1, B, 570)

S: It was a lot. It was tough. And when you had a day off, man you just sacked in.

T: No wonder you didn't see the local civilians. You're asleep in bed! You flew too many missions.

S: That's for sure!

T: So you flew the missions. Your quarters. Were you in a tent or in a barracks or—

S: Tent.

T: How many guys in a tent with you?

S: The whole crew except for the officers. So six.

T: So your enlisted guys were in the same tent with you.

S: Six of us.

T: What did you talk about when you were not flying? When you were on the ground with the guys. What did you talk about?

S: We talked about everything but the war.

T: So that was something that you wanted to put aside when you were there.

S: Put aside. Yes.

T: What kind of things came up? What do guys talk about?

S: About things that happened at home or what you did when you were in school or what you did after you got out of school. What your town was like.

T: Because you were from an area that no one else was from.

S: Right.

T: A lot of general BSing going on.

S: Oh, sure. Sure.

T: Did you get mail from home at all?

S: Yes. When I was a prisoner of war.

T: Did you get any while you were here in Italy?

S: No! In fact I'll tell you. My wife sent me a care package with a salami and different stuff. The salami was dipped in wax, wrapped with a cloth, dipped in wax again, wrapped with cloth. It had about four layers of cloth and wax on it. When I got liberated and I was home, the package came back to me.

T: Over a year later! Was the salami still good?

S: Oh, absolutely! Absolutely! And then she had chocolate bars in there. I said to her, "Oh, my God! If I had these chocolate bars when I was a prisoner of war I could have bought first class passage from Germany right to the United States!"

T: They would have been worth their weight in gold.

S: Oh! And how! Boy!

(1, B, 600)

T: You were married June of '44, and you shipped out the next month. How did you deal with being away from your wife?

S: It was hard. Tough. I guess all I did was write her letters any chance I got.

T: So when you weren't flying or sleeping which was a little bit of the time anyway, you wrote. When you wrote to her, what kind of things could you tell her or did you want to tell her?

S: I told her about the countryside basically. I told her I'll be back. Don't worry. Whatever you hear, I'll be back. And my parents the same thing. I gave them basically the same kind of information to my parents that I gave my wife.

T: Were you a regular letter writer, Sam?

S: I wrote a lot of letters. Yes.

T: Could you also write when you were in prison camp?

S: Yes.

T: Was that a fixed number or could you write as much as you wanted really?

S: No. No. That was a fixed number.

T: Sam, I want to move next to ask you about your eighteenth and final mission which was the one you shot down on. That was 24 August 1944. Walk us through that mission if you can and tell us what finally happened to your plane.

S: As I recall that last mission we were going to Friedrichshafen, in Germany. It was a manufacturing area. [Likely another location—War Department telegram sent to Mrs. Nenadich states plane was lost over Czechoslovakia.]

T: Friedrichshafen, that's in the south I think, actually. Yes. On Lake Constance maybe. Anyway, that was the target.

S: I didn't have time to look. We were going there. We were the last group. We were the last... how would I put it? You had so many formations going. And we were the last plane of the last formation.

T: You were the last plane in the whole shooting match.

S: We were referred to as Tail End Charlie. By the time you get there they had all their guns synchronized. We got shot down. Fighters actually got us. We got hit a couple of times from the ground. Had a fire in the bomb bay. I put out the fire in the bomb bay twice. That's kind of risky because your bomb bay doors are open and you're walking on a catwalk about ten inches wide.

T: You had been hit and something was on fire in the bomb bay. The bombs were released already?

S: Yes.

T: How scary was that walking on that catwalk with the bomb bays open?

S: Very scary (*laughs*). Very scary. Because you couldn't have your parachute on when you're walking through there.

T: It's too narrow.

S: Too narrow because you have your bomb racks right there. You walk there without a parachute. Yes.

T: The fighters attacked your plane because it was damaged?

(1, B, 641)

S: Yes.

T: Was your plane lagging behind or had slipped away from the formation?

S: We were a little bit behind.

T: Now from your perspective, were you up in the turret when the fighters are shooting or were you doing something else inside the plane?

S: No. No. I was up in the turret shooting at them. Yes. We were going to Friedrichshafen, if I remember correctly. I think that was about a five thousand-foot mission. Altitude. Because I know I didn't have my oxygen mask on. So it had to be below ten. Everything seemed to be going good. You look ahead and you see the fighters, planes up ahead, and you didn't see too many getting hit. But like I said, we were Tail End Charlie. By the time we got there everything was synchronized.

That's how we got it.

T: What actually happened? When the plane was hit by fighters what happened until you bailed out of the plane? What transpired there?

S: We were on our way back when we got hit. We were on our way back when we got hit. The people in the waist, the tail gunner and the ball gunner had already bailed out. Because they knew there was a fire. But I went out in the bomb bay and I put the fire out. So Jim and I and the officers in the front end—bombardier, navigator, copilot—Jim said, "What are we going to do, Sam?" I said, "Head this SOB to Switzerland!"

T: Because you were close to Switzerland, you think, weren't you?

S: Yes. Yes. I said, head this thing to Switzerland. I said, we're going to have it good. But then all of a sudden we changed our position heading toward Switzerland and boom! We got it. Fighters. We were lone ducks out there. They nailed us. My bombardier got by the bomb bay doors and he looked out. He froze right there. Couldn't jump. Got scared. So I hooked on the static line, gave him a kick in the butt and away he went.

T: The plane was still flying level at this time. What made the decision to bail out then if the plane was still flying? Was it losing altitude?

S: It was losing altitude. We only had two engines at the time. So we got orders to bail out.

T: So the pilot had decided the plane was not going to make it back?

S: Right. Right.

T: You had to get out. But because the plane was still flying level you all had a chance to get out.

S: Oh, sure. I mean, if it was going down in a spin you wouldn't be bailing out. You couldn't. But anyway, as we bailed out I saw the airplane make a complete turnaround. Nobody's in there. Everybody's out of there. Complete turnaround and it went into a barn. You see these barns on the farm. Red with this kind of a roof. Right smack! You'd swear to God somebody was piloting. It went right into the doorway. Boom! Everything went to hell!

T: So you were close enough to the ground of course to see all of this.

S: Yes.

(1, B, 663)

T: Now on the way, as you're coming down in a parachute, is this your first parachute jump?

S: Yes.

T: And your last, I take it?

S: Yes.

T: What goes through your mind as you're out of the plane now?

S: You know what goes through your mind? Did you ever hear angels sing?

T: No.

S: What was the most quietest moment of your life? Ah! So peaceful up there I swore I could have stayed there. No sensation of falling. Absolutely none.

T: Did you see other guys around you from your crew?

S: Yes. I swear to God I wasn't going to hit ground. Because there was not sensation of falling. But boy that last thousand feet, (*smacking sound*) just like that! I got shot coming down you know.

T: I was going to ask you. Tell me about that.

S: The young guys in the German army, what the heck were they? Hitler Youth. They're the ones that shot me when I was coming down.

T: With a rifle or pistol?

S: A rifle. Yes. Shot up in here (*points to right thigh*).

T: Your right thigh. Could you see them shooting up at you or not?

S: I could see the rifles pointed at me when I got closer.

T: How close to the ground were you when they got you?

S: Probably one hundred twenty-five feet. Not far at all.

T: Luckily they didn't hit you any worse than that, I suppose.

S: Yes.

T: Let me ask you. You hit the ground. What happened then?

S: I was a prisoner right then and there. The guys that were shooting me were right there.

T: They didn't shoot you though. They shot at you coming down, but once you were on the ground they didn't shoot you?

S: They didn't shoot me. No.

T: What at that moment was in your mind? I mean, they'd already shot at you. Were you scared? Thought they were going to shoot you again or what?

S: Sure. I was afraid. You just couldn't picture what they were going to do. You heard of different things, but... just imagined. No medical treatment.

(1, B, 708)

T: Did the bullet pass all the way through your thigh so it was not lodged in—

S: It grazed the bone. Destroyed five groups of muscles.

T: Were you able to walk at all once they picked you up off the ground?

S: I could. They helped me get into the horse wagon. Put me into solitary confinement.

T: When they first captured you, were you with other members of your crew there?

S: No.

T: So there was nobody around you that you knew anymore?

S: No. Nobody around. My leg started to swell and fester. It got infected, and they would do nothing about it. Being a good old Bohunk, I started swearing in Bohunk. And this guard stopped and he said to me, "Do you speak Slavic?" I said yes. So we BSed.

T: He could speak Slavic too?

S: Yes. After a while, a couple of days later, I said [to the Slavic-speaking guard], "What are they going to do with my leg?" He said, "They're talking about amputating because it's so infected." I said, "Oh, boy! I know I can have my leg saved." He said, "Yes, but this doctor is just a mean doctor. He'd just as soon cut it off than try to heal you." Strict Nazi. He said, "He hates Americans." So they took me on a gurney into the surgical room—

T: How long after being shot down was this, Sam?

S: Probably ten, twelve days. And they took me into the surgery room and the anesthesiologist was going to put the mask on me. I said, "Ein moment." That's about all I knew in German. Although I did take German in school for two weeks. Then I quit. Just to break the conversation, a friend of mine that I played hockey with and bummed around with when we were school chums, came in the prison camp and he saw me there and I had tried to heal my wound myself. He came up behind me. I didn't know him you know. He stood behind me and he says, "Now aren't you sorry you quit German class?" I turned around and I said, "George, you SOB!"

T: Here's a guy that picked you out of the crowd there.

S: Yes. He was a prisoner. He was in the barracks with the English though. They were across the way. He and I went to school together, played hockey together. Real buddies.

T: Now your leg, to finish up on that, this German doctor, you think he is going to amputate your leg.

S: Yes. That's what this guard was telling me that I spoke Slavic with. He said he was a strict Nazi.

T: So what happened to your leg? Here's this anesthesiologist... You didn't lose your leg obviously.

S: No. No. But it got an infection on it.

T: Did they help? What did they do? What did this doctor do then?

S: He wanted to amputate, so they hauled me in on a gurney and they were going to put the mask on me, and I said, "Ein moment." I didn't know much more than that in German. Then I started singing, "God Bless America." The doctor, pow! Cold cocked me. The next thing, I woke up. I was in solitary confinement again. That happened twice. Twice. They didn't attempt to cut it off the third time.

(1, B, 746)

T: Did your leg slowly heal?

S: It slowly healed, but I was infected. There was a German guard that I got to know pretty good. He got the plantain leaves for me. I would crush them and make them into a poultice. I put them on. It drew out the infection. That's that old leaf you see around in the lawn and you say, God darn it!

T: Now by the time you left the camp in February on the forced march, what condition was your leg in?

S: It wasn't in much better condition, but you had friends there. I had Phil Vaat and Bill Wersner. We kind of stuck together and when my leg got [to the point] that I couldn't handle myself, they picked me up and helped me walk along.

T: So you were able to get along but your leg was still bothering you.

S: Oh, yes. It hurt.

T: When you were first picked up by the Germans was there an initial interrogation of you?

S: Yes. I'm trying to recall. Yes. They did interrogate me. They seemed to know pretty much about me.

T: Really? Before you told them anything.

S: Yes. I guess they had somebody giving them information on who was flying out of so and so and then somebody else would give them the information. They knew pretty much about me. They knew I was from Minnesota.

T: Did they really? So they somehow had information—whether you gave it to them or not—they already had it. Were you physically threatened or struck at all during those interrogations?

S: No.

T: So they asked you questions and that was about it.

S: Name, rank and serial number.

T: Now the camp that you spent your time at after this initial solitary confinement, and that went on for several weeks you said. This initial place [Dulag Luft].

S: Yes.

T: Was at Grosstychow.

S: That's my regular camp.

T: Yes. The camp you actually were interned at Camp 4-B.

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

T: Let me ask you about the trip there. It's a long trip from where you were shot down to this camp. How did they transport you there?

S: You heard of the forty and eight?

T: The little boxcars.

S: Yes. We traveled in them for quite a ways. Then the last I would say probably the last--I'm just guessing now—from the train station to the camp probably, I would say between eight to ten miles. We had to walk that.

T: Now on the train going up there, you weren't alone on that train.

S: No. The boxcars were loaded.

T: Did people get added to it as the train went along? Is that how that was? Or did you all get on at once?

S: Well, they loaded this boxcar up. They closed the door and that was it. They had other boxcars on it, and as we stopped I imagine they picked up other prisoners too.

T: I see. So there were more boxcars, but once it was full it was full.

S: Yes.

T: Talk about the time on that boxcar. What were those conditions like?

S: It was tight quarters. Tight quarters. All you did was talk. What the hell is going to happen now and stuff like that.

T: Were you given food and water in the car?

S: No. The trip wasn't that long. We weren't given anything. We got there, they gave us potato soup. In a bowl the size of a one pound coffee can. About that high. Potato soup. I looked at it and saw these white maggots. Pushed the bowl aside. The guys that were in camp reached for it. "Sam, in a couple of days you'll be eating them. You won't even worry about it." Sure enough. After a few days of hunger just put the spoon in there. I've got the spoon. It was an aluminum spoon. Good size spoon, and it has a swastika on the handle. And you could see the end... I've got it here someplace. One part is worn flat because you're scraping that bowl so clean. Because you wanted to eat everything there was.

T: So you did eat the soup after a few days.

S: Oh, absolutely.

T: You mentioned soup. What was the daily diet? What were you fed there?

S: Soup and bread.

T: Now when did you get the soup? Was that a midday meal or an evening meal?

S: Midday meal, if I remember. Yes.

T: And the bread was then evening?

S: Yes.

T: Now the soup. Usually potato soup or different kinds of soup?

S: Potato soup. Basically.

T: And then bread, some portion of bread for supper.

S: Yes. About sixty percent sawdust. That's why I have ulcers.

T: Now the amount of food that you got... Was there anything for breakfast by the way?

(2, A, 69)

S: I don't recall.

T: So it sounds like soup, bread. And that every day the same?

S: Yes. Then we got a Red Cross parcel every now and then.

T: So you did get them sometimes.

S: Yes. If I remember, it was a twelve pound container that had six ounces of powdered coffee, eight to ten ounces of powdered milk, small can of jam, some crackers, cigarettes.

T: Was this package a personal thing, or did you split it with some other guys?

S: No. Most of the time it was personal. Red Cross, if they had enough packages they would give you each a package. Then sometimes you had to split it between four men.

T: How often do you remember those packages arriving?

S: I don't think we got them once a month.

T: So you might have gotten maybe six all together when you were there?

S: Six or seven.

T: Infrequently.

S: Yes.

T: Food, the amount of food that you're getting, was that enough food to satisfy hunger? I mean what the Germans gave you?

S: It kept you going. That's about it.

T: You weren't going to get fat, it sounds like.

S: Definitely not.

T: What was your weight when you were shot down? Do you remember how much you weighed?

S: I weighed one hundred seventy-eight pounds.

T: How about when you were liberated?

S: I weighed one hundred twenty-some pounds.

T: So you lost fifty pounds during the time you were a prisoner.

S: Yes.

T: That's about a year. Less than a year. The conditions there at Grosstychow, that's Camp 4-B, what were the conditions like? To start with, maybe the barracks you were in and the sleeping accommodations.

S: The barracks were made out of wood. They had one little pot belly stove in the corner of the building. I'm thinking twenty-four people slept in that one room. And there was, I would say about, eight rooms per barracks.

T: These barracks hold a lot of guys.

S: Yes.

T: Did they have bunks, bunk beds, or what kind of sleeping facilities?

S: Bunk beds. They gave you a, how can I explain, they give you a bag. It had a little stretch to it. They'd give you straw to put in there. On your bed you had three slats. On your bunk. One, two, three. So you put one by your head someplace. The other one where your butt is and one that will hold your feet up. So you were sleeping...

T: You had to balance yourself it sounds like on the bed.

(2, A, 125)

S: Yes.

T: Each guy had their own bunk, and a blanket.

S: Yes.

T: How about the other guys you were there with? All Americans?

S: Yes.

T: And all Air Force guys?

S: No. I would say about half Air Force and half were infantry.

T: So you had a mix of guys here.

S: Oh, yes. But they were all Americans.

T: And no officers in the particular compound that you were in.

S: No.

T: The actual campgrounds, the area that you had access to, describe that from your perspective.

S: It was a nice. It had a track where you could walk around. A walking area. Barbed wire fence ten, twelve feet high with guard towers posted every so often. It wasn't a bad area as far as the grounds go. Once in a while we would get a baseball out there or basketball or something just to kick around. Some things to do.

T: That was my next question, about activities. You mentioned baseball or softball. Were things provided to keep guys busy?

S: I think the Red Cross provided them.

T: Were there things like books or musical instruments at all?

S: There were books. There was musical instruments because I remember this guy Paul Mano. He played the violin in our barracks.

T: So you remember having musical instruments. So during the day, the daily routine could have included a certain amount of activities if you wanted.

S: Oh, sure. And you had your roll call in the morning. Roll call sometime in noon. Evening roll call for sure.

T: So you had roll call several times a day.

S: Oh. Sometimes in the early morning, say two, three o'clock in the morning.

T: Still dark for sure. They'd get you up and out there. They were worried about guys escaping?

S: Right.

T: Did guys talk about escape, or try to escape?

S: Oh, sure. One was hanging on the fence one morning when we got up. They shot him. In the barbed wire. They left him there for a day. So all the prisoners would see.

(2, A, 161)

T: How did you feel about this concept of escape? Is that something that you thought about or didn't think about?

S: We started digging a tunnel. Because we were so close to the Russian compound. If we could have got that tunnel dug and get under the fence of the Russian compound I know damn well somehow they would have protected us and fed us. It never materialized. Too many German police dogs around.

T: Did the Germans put a plant of people among the prisoners, do you think, as spies?

S: Not really. I really don't think so.

T: But they had guards and dogs.

S: Oh, sure.

T: So escape is something you thought about but it never came to fruition.

S: Never came. No.

T: What about during the day? How did you kill your time? You had a lot of time between meals and roll calls.

S: A lot of my time was just spent sitting on the grass trying to get that poultice to take the infection out of my leg and that. Then after a while we'd walk a little bit around the compound. And you sit in the barracks and just BS. I'd tell them about my town. They'd tell me about their town.

T: Did you meet anybody from your aircrew in this camp?

S: No... oh, yes. I had one. Bob Rechter. He was about two rooms down the hallway. He was our flight engineer.

T: Did you meet anybody in the prison camp that you kept in contact with after the war?

S: I kept in contact with this guy from Eveleth, Joe Tankqua. I knew of his wife before the war. I didn't know him.

T: That's right. Anybody else that you met there or befriended in camp that you kept in contact with after the war?

S: I kept in contact with all of my crew.

T: People from the prison camp let's say.

S: I used to keep in contact with Bill Wersner, Phil Vaat. But they passed away.

(2, A, 197)

T: So you made some connections there too that were maintained afterwards.

S: Yes.

T: Let me ask you about the Germans. What did you feel towards the Germans?

S: I thought they were A-holes.

T: What kind of people were the German guards in your own camp?

S: Well, a few of them were pretty decent, but most of them were strict Nazi.

T: How did they treat the prisoners? I mean on a day to day basis.

S: They treated us as human beings, but, you know, they had to follow the Geneva Convention.

T: I hear you saying that they didn't mistreat prisoners, in other words.

S: No. But they'd call you up in the middle of the night for roll call and stuff like that. Just nerve-wracking, you know.

T: So not quite enough food and not quite enough sleep.

S: Yes. Then you add that little pot belly stove and they give you a couple of briquettes to fire up with.

T: Not enough to stay warm?

S: No.

T: You were there over the winter too.

S: There was enough body heat, so the hell with the briquettes. We could have ate them.

T: This daily routine at the camp, the way you describe it, what was the most—you were at this camp, as in interjection, from it looks like about September maybe? You were shot down in August. Were you at camp by September [1944]?

S: Yes.

T: Until February [1945] when you were marched out.

S: Yes.

T: About six months. What was the most difficult thing for you, Sam, on a day to day basis?

S: That's a long time ago. And you forgive and you forget. I think I... it's been a long time. You figure they had a job to do. Some of them did it nicely, and some of them were rotten.

T: Does that mean that when you came back from Europe in 1945 were you angry or bitter about the Germans at that time?

S: A little bit. Yes.

(2, A, 229)

T: Has that feeling changed over time?

S: Oh, sure. You have a job so what are you going to do? And when you're in the service, you know darn well you gotta do that job.

T: So you've kind of softened on the Germans.

S: Yes.

T: Have you been back to Germany since the war?

S: No. I could have gone a couple times. A friend of mine, my tail gunner from Florida and a couple of the other members went back a couple of times, but I didn't want to go.

T: How come?

S: I was married. I had a good family. I [was] just content.

T: Was that something that you felt, a trip back to Germany, would you say that's something you didn't need or something you didn't want?

S: I really didn't want it. I figured I spent enough time there.

T: As you faced the POW experience, what did you find the most difficult?

S: I really can't say. Just trying to keep your piece of mind, I think.

T: Was that hard sometimes?

S: Oh, yes. Sometimes you figure, well, I'm going to escape. I don't give a damn if I get shot or not. And then you stop and you think about it and you say, well, I got family at home. I've got a wife at home.

T: As you were in camp there, how much news or awareness did you have with what was going on with the war?

S: The only news would be a letter from home, or they had a big bulletin board. As big as that glass, that whole window there.

T: That's six, eight feet by four feet.

S: Yes. Every now and then there would be a portion of a letter attached to it. Evidently, like I remember this guy from England wrote to his wife and asked for an eraser. The note that she said back to him, "John, don't you know that there's a war

on?" Here the poor SOB is in camp, and she tells him, don't you know there's a war on.

T: Were you able to follow the military situation when you were in camp?

S: No. We'd get rumors [about] what was going on, but you didn't know if it was truthful or not.

T: I see. So a lot of rumors?

S: Yes. This is happening. That's happening. It's a wait and see. Wishful thinking.

(2, A, 268)

T: At the beginning of February—February 6, 1945, specifically, your camp was evacuated. The Russians were advancing from the east.

S: Right.

T: Your camp is in the north of Germany, northeast of Berlin. How much advance warning did you have that the camp was going to be evacuated?

S: There was a rumor a couple of days before that.

T: This one turned out to be true.

S: Right. Yes. That we were going to move on. And as we left camp we each got a Red Cross parcel. Everybody didn't want to carry the box. They were stuffing them inside their shirts and you know. The funny thing they did. There's a strip about this wide (*holds fingers several inches apart*)—

T: Couple of inches.

S: They had seven orange pills in there.

T: The Germans gave you this or the Red Cross?

S: The Red Cross package. Had six or seven pills in there. And everybody was throwing them to the side.

T: What were they?

S: Vitamin C.

T: And guys didn't know what they were?

S: I knew what they were. If they were in that Red Cross parcel they were supposed to do some good.

T: Sure. Did you pick them up?

S: Every goddamn one of them. Never had a cold in Germany on that forced march. Sleeping in a ditch along the road, sometimes in a barn or sometimes up against the barn. I took one a day. And I shared them with my two buddies, Phil and Bill.

T: So you knew what they were and guys were tossing them out.

S: I didn't really know what they were—

T: But you figured they were good for you.

S: Yes. The Red Cross isn't going to put any crappy stuff in there.

T: That's true. So on the evacuation, you don't remember much advance warning. What actually happened? As prisoners, were you literally just told to pick up your blanket and out the front door?

S: Yes. There was the rumor a couple of days before that so we kind of figured up well, I gotta make sure I got this and take your belongings with you.

T: This was a lot of guys they marched. Was everybody together when you marched out the front door? Did they break you up into different groups?

(2, A, 296)

S: There was 1200 in our group.

T: Was that all the American enlisted?

S: Yes.

T: This was a big camp, wasn't it?

S: Right. We had one officer with our group. I think his name was Colonel Paulsen. He was kind of our envoy.

T: How did he get put with your group?

S: I don't know. I guess the Germans just said that you have to have one officer with the enlisted men on this march.

T: How hard was this for you with your leg being in the condition you were?

S: It was tough. Yes.

T: Were you worried that you might not be able to make it?

S: Oh, yes. There were times when I figured I wasn't going to make it but, like I said, the group, everybody helped everybody. Whether you knew them or not. You see somebody that wasn't doing too good, you'd help them out.

T: Did you have a couple of guys or a number of guys that you really stuck together with on this march?

S: Yes.

T: Were those guys that you had been, had known in the camp already? Or were these guys that you sort of met on the march?

S: No. No. I knew them in the camp. Yes.

T: How important for a prisoner on this walk in general do you think was it to have a set of friends or a set of buddies?

S: Very necessary I think.

T: Really? That's a pretty strong word.

S: Oh, yes.

T: What could you do for each other really?

S: You could encourage one another. It was moral support. You get to the point where you say, "I'm shit. This is it. I don't care." "Come on now. Things will get better." Hell, I escaped... (*chuckles*). The German woods are the most beautiful woods around. If you cut down a tree in Germany what remains, what you're not taking, you cut up into little short lengths and you put it at the base of the next tree. So when I tried to escape, the guard hollered, "Halt!" What the heck! The trees— there was no brush in the woods. There were just trees. Like trees on a golf course. When he said halt, you stopped.

T: So you tried to get away.

S: Oh, sure. Twice. One time I hid behind a tombstone in the cemetery.

T: Now, when you thought about it, escaping from the group, what would you have done if you had got away from the group?

S: I don't know. I don't know.

(2, A, 326)

T: But you tried anyway.

S: Right. One of my buddies, he didn't get captured when he hit the ground, and he found a bike. Stole a bike actually. And he's riding this bike.

T: With his American military uniform on?

S: No. He didn't have his American uniform on. He robbed some clothes someplace off a clothesline and he was riding this bike and he's going and he says, "You know, Sam, I think I could have made it, but my problem was I was always looking over my shoulder."

T: That's a dead giveaway.

S: Yes.

T: So they caught him?

S: Yes.

T: What did you do for food on this march?

S: We got that Red Cross parcel. Then when the German farmers wagon would go by with a load of potatoes to bring to the German camp, we would hope and pray the wagon would hit a bump and then you'd see (*smacks hands together*) everybody diving for the potatoes that fell off. And you didn't save them for the next day. You ate them right there. You put them under your armpit so they'd warm up a little bit. Scraped off what was loose and stick them back underneath the armpit. Potatoes and salt (*chuckles*).

T: So what did the Germans do to provide food for you? I mean, you walked for, gosh, over two months.

S: They'd stop us off at some farm shack and get us... potatoes were their basic. Or bread.

T: So all 1200 of you stayed together this whole time?

S: Yes.

T: Did everybody make it? There's a lot of guys walking.

S: I couldn't say. I remember one time I was the last guy out of 1200 people. I had the runs. I had the runs. And the German guard, with the [rifle] butt, he was giving me in my butt you know. I turned around and I told him in plain English, you can shut it off if you want to. I told him, "You quit horsing around because I'm going to stick that rifle right up your ass." He must have understood me or he looked at my eyes and knew what I meant. He never bothered me. I'm not the type of guy to be at the end of the group. I'm the guy that wants to be up front.

(2, A, 354)

T: Was it your leg?

S: Yes. I had the runs.

T: So you were stopping.

S: Yes.

T: This daily walk, did you know where you were going?

S: No. Just walking.

T: The Germans, you mentioned guards a couple times. Were there guards closely watching you guys?

S: Yes. With dogs.

T: So they were keeping you on a certain track.

S: Yes. In fact, certain areas you'd find machine guns mounted alongside the road.

T: So they were serious about keeping you marching.

S: Oh, yes.

T: Did the attention the Germans paid to you as prisoners decrease as it got closer and closer to the end of the war?

S: Yes. By the Elbe River. Just before the Elbe River.

T: That's where you were liberated, too. Right about there.

S: Yes. I would say probably about fifteen miles before we hit the Elbe River we saw a Piper Cub flying low, so we knew the end was coming someplace. So we crossed the Elbe. We were liberated by the [US Army] 104th Timberwolf outfit. Couple guys from Minneapolis. "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from Minnesota." "Oh, you

come with us." They absconded a house there. So they brought me in there and they fed me and I had a shower. They gave me some clean clothes.

T: Did they get a doctor for your leg pretty soon or not?

S: Yes. The doctor for their group. And then they gave me this shower. Come out of the shower. You know the first song I heard? "Don't Fence Me In." *(laughs)*

T: Talking about this walk, you mentioned that food was sporadic, but soup you remember.

S: Yes.

T: The sleeping conditions were just wherever?

S: Wherever. In a barn. If you couldn't get everybody in the barn you slept up tight, up against the barn.

T: You were out marching in February, March, and April so it was still cold as well.

S: Yes.

T: Other men. You said that other men were extremely important to keep you going.

S: Oh, sure. Moral support.

T: When you walked through little towns or villages, was there any interface or contact with the Germans there, civilians?

S: Yes. I especially remember going through Berlin. Walking through Berlin. The morning after the English bombed it. So we were walking through Berlin and the people on the street were throwing bottles and bricks and rocks and anything you can imagine.

T: What was going through your mind then?

S: Hey, they're going to kill me. I figured they were going to really get at us. The German guards... Sammy was walking with them like he was the best buddy. I knew goddamn well they weren't going to throw rocks at him.

T: Sure. So you stayed next to the German guards.

S: Absolutely. There's a method to my madness, you know.

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

T: Did those German guards egg the people on or hold them back or not do anything?

S: No. I guess they informed the people that were in front. Just informed the people to stay back, because they probably told them that they may cause a riot or something. Twelve hundred prisoners and a few guards and some civilians. Things could have happened.

T: So they threw stuff at you, but nobody was killed.

S: No.

T: What kind of picture did Berlin paint for you as you walked through it?

S: Didn't paint a pretty picture because they bombed the hell out of it. But I did see a pretty girl (*chuckles*). The song "Lillie Marlene" reminds me of this gal. She was standing right on a corner, by a light post. At that time she was good looking. I really can't recall, but she looked like... (*trails off*)

T: Did you go through other little towns and villages too?

S: Yes.

T: If you try to characterize the civilians, were they generally unfriendly, or passive, or...

S: They were passive.

T: Just sort of watched you go by?

S: Yes.

T: Was it possible to get food from these people? To beg for stuff?

S: Yes.

T: Was that successful?

S: Yes.

T: What do you remember about that?

(2, B, 416)

S: I remember we were sleeping by a barn. I didn't get to get inside, but I was sleeping by the barn. And this young girl came by and she had her apron tucked up like that. Gave me a couple of sandwiches that were wrapped up.

T: So she knew who you were and was befriending you as a POW.

S: Yes. She was a Polish girl who was a servant or a prisoner of the Germans at that time.

T: That's very interesting. Did guys beg from civilians in town or try to get things from them as you passed by?

S: Oh, sure.

T: Did that work?

S: Very seldom.

T: You didn't have much to trade, did you?

S: "Geben Sie Essen." Give me something to eat.

T: So you remember a few choice words.

S: Yes.

T: Did you get anything from these people?

S: No. But what the heck. You tried.

T: Sure. Nothing else to do. When you were walking along there for hours a day, what do you talk about with other guys?

S: I guess you just reminisce about your hometown and what you're going to do when you get back. That's about all really.

T: Kind of daily chatter.

S: Yes.

T: Kind of like from what you described in the camp too.

S: Yes. Just gossip. Killing time.

T: Are you good at that?

S: Yes. Very good (*laughs*).

T: For you, Sam, what was the most difficult thing on this march that lasted from February 6 to April 26 [1945]?

S: I would say keeping my composure.

T: In what way? I mean, from blowing off, from getting really angry or breaking down psychologically or what?

S: Blowing up. Just getting antsy and probably go at the guard that's there or something, and you knew damn well it wasn't going to do any good.

T: The time you walked, and you were walking mostly in eastern and in central Germany, was your column of prisoners ever strafed or bombed by Allied planes?

S: No.

(2, B, 462)

T: You mentioned a Piper Cub you saw. Was that the only plane that you saw?

S: That's the only plane I saw, and that's when we got liberated. About sixteen miles from Elbe River.

T: So Allied fliers and fighter planes wasn't something that you saw at all.

S: No.

T: Let me ask about your thoughts and your feelings that moment you were liberated. When you realized this whole thing was over.

S: Thank God! I can get home to my family.

T: So your thoughts went immediately to your family.

S: Right. Absolutely. That's the first thing.

T: And again, for the record, as we're talking here with the machine off, your forced march from the camp which is in northeast Germany went through Stettin, through Berlin and then ended near Magdeburg, on the Elbe River in central Germany.

S: I think the mileage was six hundred, I'm thinking six hundred twenty-five miles.

T: And this march wasn't in a straight line. You were marching in different directions...

S: Oh, yes. Sure.

T: You marched for two and half months. Luckily your leg didn't bother you so much.

S: No.

T: Let me move at this point to the kind of post-POW experience. I know from talking to you earlier you spent time at Camp Lucky Strike, at Le Havre, France.

S: Yes.

T: How did you get from where you were liberated to Camp Lucky Strike?

S: They flew us from Herman Goering Airfield. Herman Goering Airfield was near Halle and that's relatively close to Magdeburg. Halle is down in this area here.

T: So you were flown to Camp Lucky Strike in France. Let me ask about the care that you got once you were in Allied hands again. What did they do for you, for your physical and psychological problems?

S: Yes. They gave me a physical. A check up on my leg. Gave me some more antibiotics. Other than that nothing else, but they fed us good.

T: How did you adjust to getting regular food again and much more of it?

(2, B, 509)

S: It was hard. I probably was a little smarter than the rest of them. Not that I'm that much of a brainstorm but, I figured, well, I'm going to be eating richer food. Maybe I should just take my time with it. I did end up with ulcers, but that was because I was in prison camp. But I just babied myself into that food rather than, hey, man, I got a big jug of ice cream here. I'm going to eat it all.

T: And you saw guys doing that?

S: Yes.

T: Were you given advice by the people in the hospitals to do it that way, or just figure it out yourself?

S: Yes. We were told take it easy with the food, because you're not accustomed to this type of living.

T: That must have been hard I imagine, resisting, because here's all the food you want right now.

S: Right. Yes.

T: Golly! I can imagine some guys didn't follow those directions very well.

S: Oh, yes. Right. Yes.

T: You were back in the States by July 1, is that right, Sam, around then?

S: Yes.

T: How soon before you saw your wife, Flossy?

S: It was a while.

T: Did you come up here to see her or did she come to see you?

S: She came to Minneapolis. I met her in Minneapolis. I was in Florida before that.

T: That was a number of months before you saw her then, wasn't it?

S: Yes.

T: Had you been in contact by letter or by phone with her?

S: Yes.

T: So you talked to her already?

S: Yes.

T: When you got on the phone with her, what did she say to you and what did you say to her? The first time you talked to her.

S: I dialed her and she said hello and all I said was, "I love you." She said, "Daddy, I love you too! When are you coming home?"

T: And that's the first she'd heard from you, isn't it? She hadn't got any of your letters or anything.

S: No.

T: It sounds like they took care of you with food, and they took care of you with a phone call, and they took care of you with your leg. What kind of counseling was there provided by the military for the kind of psychological aspects of being a POW?

S: Nothing really.

T: They didn't provide anything for you?

S: Nothing that I recall.

(2, B, 546)

T: You stayed in the service until October. Was that time all spent in hospitals or rest and recreation and recuperation facilities, or did you go back on active duty somewhere?

S: No. I just came home. I was in... trying to figure out where I got discharged from.

T: Well, let's see. So you were discharged, according to your discharge papers, from San Antonio, Texas, October 1945.

S: Right.

T: You came right back to Chisholm at that point.

S: Yes.

T: What was your initial reaction, Sam, to being out of the military? You'd been in the service for over two years now.

S: What was my reaction? Thank God! (*laughs*) I don't have these strict rules and regulations to follow.

T: So I take it you weren't a guy who considered a career in the military.

S: No.

T: It took you one-half second to answer that one (*both laugh*). Now you had left the job at the Sherman Mine, US Steel, here in the Chisholm area. You didn't go back to work right away.

S: No. Because I knew we were going to go on strike. I didn't want to go because I was getting this twenty-one dollars a week. But I had to go before ninety days to keep my seniority so I went back on the eighty-ninth day.

T: So you really waited till the very last.

S: Yes. Right. Because I figured if the strike comes before then, I've got protection there.

T: Was it winter by that time?

S: Yes. October.

T: It was almost the end of 1946.

S: Yes. So I just waited. Had to go to work and then we went on strike right after that.

T: So you didn't work very long, I think you said.

S: No.

T: When you think about life as an ex-POW, which is what you've been since April of 1945, when you got back here and saw your folks and your wife, how much did they ask you about your POW experience in Germany?

S: Not very much.

T: They didn't ask you very much?

S: No.

T: Why not? It seems like they'd be curious to know what you'd been through.

S: They asked some simple questions. What kind of food you got and stuff like that but that's about it.

T: Were you anxious to tell them more than that or not?

S: Not really. My kids don't even know much about my POW days.

(2, B, 586)

T: I mean at that time a lot of kids had dads in the service. They knew you'd been in the Air Corps. What did they know about you during the war? Your kids, when they were growing up.

S: Not too much.

T: Over the years did you tell your wife more? Did she ask you more?

S: I think she and I would be sitting here and going through that book (*points to scrapbook of service years*).

T: That scrapbook that Sam's referring to is extremely extensive and well organized. So she had a lot of stuff.

S: Oh, yes. And we'd go through it and we'd talk about different things, but she never pumped me really for anything.

T: You worked for US Steel for a lot of years—

S: Forty-one years, six months, seventeen days.

T: How much did your co-workers know about your time in the service, your POW experience?

S: Not much.

T: You must have worked with a lot of other vets.

S: Oh, yes.

T: What I did during the war, was that a break room or a lunch or office conversation?

S: Oh, yes. On occasion. Yes.

T: How did you move in and out of those conversations? I mean, in a sense this is being discussed and did guys ask you, hey, Sam, what did you do?

S: I would talk about what happened here in the States. I didn't talk too much about prison camp. That was a sore spot with me so I didn't [want to] get a relapse and start getting nervous and shaky all over again.

T: Is that a problem you had after the war?

S: Yes.

T: Talk about that a little bit. What kind of effects did you have?

S: I was on the edge, you know. Somebody would say something and boom! I had enough of that in prison camp where they told me where to shit and where to eat and when to eat. But I got over it.

T: Is that something that happened at work or at home or pretty much anywhere?

S: Pretty much anywhere.

T: So your wife noticed a difference from the person she knew before you went to war and the person that came home?

S: Yes.

T: But you also said a moment ago that with time that gradually dissipated?

S: Oh, sure. Sure. Oh, yes. The first year after I got out of the service was kind of rough for us. We weren't cat and dog, but it was rough in general. Sometimes I'd flare up but really now that I think of it at my age I had no reason to flare up but just one of those things. Typical reaction from being a prisoner.

(2, B, 624)

T: How do you think that your POW experience affected your wife?

S: It affected her pretty much. Yes. She really, really outdid herself trying to cater to me.

T: When you got back.

S: Yes.

T: In what way?

S: I'd be sitting here reading the newspaper, and she'd come and put her arms around me and stuff like that.

T: Did that help in a way or not, Sam?

S: Oh, yes. It helped.

T: So she in a sense, she had to adjust, try to adjust to the person that you were now and you had to sort of adjust to...

S: Yes.

T: A moment ago you used the term that this thing, this whole experience was a sore spot with you. What do you mean by that? What kind of a sore spot was it?

S: I don't know. I think I should have been repatriated because of my wound, to start with. I mean, if the doctor was going to cut my leg off, why didn't he just say, "Okay, we'll send him back home?"

T: They did repatriate wounded prisoners.

S: Oh, yes. My tail gunner was repatriated. He got his foot shot off at the ankle. More severely [wounded than me]. There's no question about that.

T: But they did repatriate him.

S: Yes.

T: So with your wound, which made it rough for you, they wouldn't send you back.

S: No.

T: Did your POW experience cause for you any feelings of guilt that you'd been captured, for example?

S: I imagine it did to a degree. I really couldn't say. I had nothing to do with it really. Get shot out of the sky and you have to go. You gotta go.

T: That's right. When you were out of prison camp, how much did you notice dreams or images that recurred in your mind in the first years after the war?

S: Quite often. I would say basically nightly.

T: What kind of things came in your dreams?

S: Being shot down. Being captured. Being shot in the leg and basically no real treatment. Forced march.

T: So what happened on those things kept recurring.

S: Yes.

(2, B, 660)

T: The way you described the whole period is that the most traumatic parts for you were the very beginning. Being shot down and the capture, and then the forced march at the end. The prison camp part sounds, if we can use the word, almost the easiest part of it all.

S: Yes. I would say so. Yes. Except for the food and the treatment. Like I said, why did you have to call us out at two o'clock in the morning for roll call? And it was cold.

T: In a sense it sounds like you feared for your life at the very beginning when you were shot down—

S: Right.

T: And the casualties among the men marching sounds like they were higher than the guys in the camp.

S: Yes.

T: That's interesting. The camp was, in a sense, not the most difficult part of this.

S: No.

T: The dreams that you had, Sam, did those gradually dissipate with time?

S: Yes.

T: How often do you have these now, sixty years later?

S: Don't.

T: So this is something that has gone away. Why do you think they went away? Did you get help from, for example, the VA or in talking to somebody else help you with this or [it] just went away?

S: I did get help from the VA. I saw a shrink.

T: Was that pretty soon after the war ended?

S: No. Probably a couple years after the war ended.

T: So this is in the 1950s sometime?

S: Yes. It was down at the Superior VA. Psychologist.

T: How did he help you?

S: We talked about it. Dr. Arnold was the first guy I saw. We just talked about it. He said, "Things will pass over." He said, "Don't be afraid to talk about it." Things worked like that. Now I see Janet Merrill probably once every six months. Just checking up.

T: Also in Superior?

S: Yes.

T: So this is something you don't do as often, but you keep up with. You still talk.

S: Yes.

T: How do you think you've benefited by talking to a psychologist? Do you really think that talking about it helped you?

S: Oh, I'm positive it helped me.

T: What prompted you to take that step, to go talk to someone in the first place?

(2, B, 690)

S: My wife said to me, "You need help."

T: So she noticed something to the point where...

S: Yes. Because she came down there with me and Dr. Arnold said, "What did you want?" She said, "I want my husband back. I don't want Sam. I want my husband."

T: So she definitely noticed a different person.

S: Yes.

T: So she encouraged you to go. How tough was it for you to take the step to go?

S: It wasn't hard really. Because I figured, well, I'm going to be going down to the vets. Who in the hell in this neighborhood's going to know that I went down to see a shrink.

T: So it's not something that you wanted to broadcast to your neighborhood.

S: No. No.

T: Those treatments that Dr. Arnold, was that something that went on for a while or was that something he could help you with pretty quickly you think?

S: No. They went on for a while. I still see a shrink every six months or so.

T: And it's a woman now you said, right?

S: Yes.

T: How does she help you? Is it a different kind of help that you think you get now?

S: Yes. I think it's just a friendly chat. How are you doing? Last time you were here you said this. How are things going with that?

T: It's a one on one thing.

S: One on one.

T: Have you ever been part of a group of ex-POWs that sit down and talk about things?

S: No.

T: So a one on one thing yes, but a group of ex-POWs, no.

S: Yes.

T: One of the last questions I have. Talking about your POW experience, in a sense I've learned an awful lot from you tonight. I'm wondering over the years have you always been open, as open as this, in talking about what you went through?

S: To personal friends, yes.

T: So one on one situations.

S: Yes. Well, the newspaper called me one time and had a big article on it. If they have a parade I'm the only POW left in this town.

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T: Are you the only one left?

S: Yes. I don't march because my leg hurts me. They put me in a Jeep.

T: So people know that you're an ex-POW now.

S: Sure.

T: Theoretically, if I had come to you let's say twenty years ago, the year you retired, and I'd have asked you for the same interview, what might you have said to me?

S: Probably the same thing I said now. You know, one thing I found out—if lie and then somebody asks you the same questions again, you're out of luck. I was a municipal judge you know. And these guys would come to court and they'd tell me this, and they'd tell me that, and I says, yes, but I'm going to let you go. And they come in probably three or four weeks later and I remember this older fellow. I said, "Were you ever in court before?" "Judge, never! I was never in court."

T: And it was you he had seen four weeks ago.

S: I'm trying to think of the guy's name. I said to him, "Don't you remember me?" "I've seen you on the street." I said, "Don't you remember being here?" "No." I said, "Well, you were here." "Oh, I forgot one."

T: The last question I wanted to ask you, Sam, is this. In a positive way, what's the most important way that your POW experience changed your life?

S: Well, I always was caring, but I'm more caring and giving now. I give a lot. I donate for this. I donate for that. I helped start the daycare center in Chisholm. We had one room and I was picking up scrap iron. Every day after work and selling it. Superintendent of the Snyder Mining Company, Ted Barker, was the treasurer and he called me up. He said, "Sam, we gotta have some money to pay the teacher." So I would call the junk man and I said take one hundred or two hundred dollars of junk and send the check to our secretary and that's how it was.

T: So you feel that your POW experience helped you become more giving and more caring. In a not positive way, what do you think is the most important way that your POW experience changed you?

S: I don't think there is anything. It just made a better man out of me, I think.

T: From the experience itself.

S: Yes.

T: That's the last question I had. Let me ask if there's something that you wanted to add. Gosh knows there's things I forgot to cover, I'm sure.

S: Now that I'm home and safe and eighty years old almost, it wasn't that bad *(laughs)*.

T: Time does really heal, doesn't it?

S: Absolutely.

T: Well, on the record, Sam, let me thank you very much.

S: My pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW