

Interviewee: Paul Peterson

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 30 September 2002

Location: common room at the Peterson apartment complex, Minneapolis

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, October 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, January 2003

Paul Peterson was born 1 June 1924 in Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota. The oldest child of parents of Swedish and Norwegian ancestry, Paul grew up in Minneapolis and graduated from Central High School in 1942. Following high school Paul attended the University of Minnesota before being drafted into the US Army in May 1943.

After Basic Training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, Paul had additional schooling at the University of Alabama until early 1944; he then was assigned as a scout/observer to the 422nd Regiment, 106th Infantry Division, and in September 1944 shipped out to Europe. Sent to the line near St. Vith, Belgium, Paul's unit was overrun by the German offensive in December 1944, and with hundreds of other he was captured by the Germans on 21 December 1944.

Paul spent the next four months as a POW in Germany, at camps IV-B (Mühlberg), VIII-A (Görlitz) and, after a thirty-two-day march, XI-B (Fallingbostel). Conditions steadily worsened, and hunger and disease claimed the lives of many. Paul was finally liberated when advancing British troops overran Camp XI-B on 16 April 1945. Paul was evacuated to hospital, first in England and then to the United States; he spent the time until his discharge in March 1946 in various medical facilities. During this time Paul was married (wife Florence) and made plans for life after the military.

Again a civilian, Paul returned to Minneapolis, graduated from the University (class of '51), and remained ten years as an instructor in Speech and Theatre Arts. He switched careers in the mid-1960s, becoming a Lutheran minister, first in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and after 1978 in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Paul retired in 1991.

Unit: 422nd Regiment, 106th Infantry Division

POW experience is on pages 19 – 41

Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor

P = Paul Peterson

(*) = word or phrase unclear**

[text] = added by editor

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 30 September 2002, and this is an interview with Reverend Paul Peterson of Minneapolis. First, on the record Paul, thanks very much for taking time today to speak with me.

P: Glad to do it.

T: In speaking with you briefly before we began recording I know that you were born 1 June 1924 right here in Minneapolis, and you that come from Swedish and Norwegian ancestry although neither one of your parents are immigrants. They were both born in the States.

P: Yes.

T: You were raised in Minneapolis, and attended Minneapolis Central High School, which is no longer there.

P: Right. Graduated in 1942.

T: You did attend the University of Minnesota part of the next school year, 1942-43, before you were drafted into the US Army in May of 1943. You did Basic Training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia. Ultimately, after a long path, you were discharged from service in March of 1946 and returned back to Minneapolis, ultimately graduating from the University of Minnesota in 1951. You worked at the [University of Minnesota] for about ten years, until 1961. After several more years you did a rather major career change.

P: One of many.

T: You went to the seminary and became a minister. You initially were in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and switched in the late 1970s to the ELCA. When did you retire?

P: In 1989.

T: Since then you've lived in Minneapolis?

P: Yes.

T: The first question I wanted to ask you, when the US entered the war at the end of 1941, you were a senior in high school.

P: Yes, that's right.

T: The US entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7. I'm wondering if you remember what you were doing when you first heard that news?

P: Oh, yes. That's one of those dates, as President Roosevelt said, "a date to live in infamy." I was at home. It was a Sunday. We had come home from church and the word came over the radio. We didn't hear it. Somebody else did, and telephoned our house to let us know. It wasn't long after that incidentally, it's something that's long since faded into history, that we heard the newsboys on the street hawking the "Extra! Extra! Read all about it!"

T: On Sunday?

P: On Sunday. They published a separate edition. An extra edition of the paper with the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was very interesting because it was, being a senior in high school, I was pretty self-absorbed and wasn't paying much attention to what was going on in the world, but it certainly was a shock. I think to everyone.

T: Where were you living in Minneapolis?

P: We lived in south Minneapolis, not far from Powderhorn Park.

(1, A, 60)

T: So you remember the newspapers being hawked on the streets.

P: Yes.

T: What was your reaction as a high school senior, who had perhaps been rather self-absorbed, to the news that the US was now involved in the war?

P: I think we realized, being 1941, I was seventeen years old, that what this meant in terms of potential military service. I had a brother who was five years older. My parents were very, very concerned, obviously, that he would be ultimately drafted or that he would wind up in the service somewhere.

T: Did he indeed?

P: He did, yes. As I did obviously.

T: Did your folks express this kind of concern to you about what this was possibly mean?

P: Absolutely. The first thing out of my mother's mouth I think was that her sons were going to wind up in service. For them, you have to realize, in 1941, that wasn't that many years after the end of World War I, which they remembered and remembered very well. Although my father never served in World War I.

T: So for them that was an active memory that they could now see.

P: Oh, yes.

T: And your father was not a veteran?

P: No, he wasn't.

T: Your older brother, was he drafted or did he volunteer?

P: He was drafted initially and was declared 4-F, which was really very interesting because they claimed he had a heart murmur. I think he has probably always had a heart murmur. He's eighty-two years old now and still has a heart murmur.

T: They declared him 4-F. They changed their mind later?

P: Yes, they did. He was called up again some years later and he wound up an infantry officer.

T: No kidding? So from 4-F to an infantry officer.

P: That's right. He served in the Pacific. He didn't ship out until the war ended, but he wound up in Manila and he said his major job while in Manila was trying traffic cases as a judge in the city of Manila.

T: Had the war not ended he quite likely would have been involved in the invasion of Japan.

P: Oh, yes.

T: Thank goodness he missed that. You were drafted after some time at the University of Minnesota. Once we were at war and you graduated from high school, did you consider volunteering and not waiting to be drafted?

P: No. Everyone talked about it. I had classmates, high school classmates who obviously did volunteer. My brother-in-law volunteered as a Marine because his

dad was a Marine. My father-in-law. I talked about it, thought about it, but I decided I was going to wait to be drafted.

T: And it didn't take even a year after you were out of high school before that happened.

P: It was no surprise when it came.

(1, A, 111)

T: How difficult was it go to school and to concentrate on being a student when this really impending, this being drafted, was really hanging right over your head?

P: You really couldn't. You couldn't concentrate. In the first place, I think coming right out of high school into college, in many ways you are pretty immature and you really don't know where you're going or what you want. And that was all exacerbated by the fact that you knew that your time was limited. You were going to be drafted. There wasn't any question about that.

T: The year you were at college. It was just about a full academic year.

P: Just about.

T: How was it clear around campus that we were at war? What kind of things did you notice?

P: We had military men on campus. The Navy V-12 Program had a contingent of cadets on the campus. I got myself involved in the ROTC while there, figuring I'm going to end up in the Army anyway. I better have a little bit of first hand information before I go. I registered for the ROTC and learned how to do close order drill at least, prior to that. So you were aware. You were aware. Of course people were being picked off. Every once in a while somebody was being drafted and having to leave school.

T: Right. When you were drafted, do you remember getting the letter that told you it was time to report?

P: Yes. It was no shock because we all knew it was coming. It was a question of the date. My letter came and said I was to report at Fort Snelling [in Minneapolis] on April 15, or May 15, 1943.

T: Paul, how did your folks take that news? They knew it was coming, too.

P: Oh, they knew it was coming.

T: But how did they respond?

P: Not very well. My dad was not particularly well. He had had a stroke in 1942 and was somewhat crippled by that. So it was hard on them, I think. Hard on my mother. I have a younger brother who was still home and my older brother, Carl, at that time I think was living with an aunt and uncle in Arkansas. I think it was tough. It was very tough on my mother because I was her firstborn. My older brother was really my half-brother. His mother died in childbirth years before, when he was born. So it was tough. They saw me off from the St. Paul station along with my girlfriend, whom they liked.

(1, A, 152)

T: Your future wife?

P: Yes. Yes. They all saw me off and I was heading off to a wholly new adventure. I had never spent a day away from home.

T: No kidding. What was the mood at the station the day you left?

P: I think it was a lot of anxiety on the part of my folks. Myself, not knowing what on earth was going to be ahead of us. So, there were a lot of tears. Long goodbyes.

T: And you went not just away, you went far away—all the way to Georgia.

P: That's right. Camp Wheeler.

T: You said you hadn't been away from home, so obviously Georgia was a new part of the country for you?

P: I had never been there before.

T: Describe Georgia from your perspective.

P: They always say about Army infantry camps, you know. The red clay of Georgia is just something you can't forget. It's hard as concrete, and we were expected, of course, to dig foxholes and that sort of thing. And the pine trees, the Georgia pine trees, are very fragrant. The countryside is not ugly. It's not beautiful in Minnesota terms, but it's certainly not ugly. But we found out one of the standard jokes I think of all Army bases is that when you were going on a march, you march going out of camp uphill and you come back marching uphill.

T: That was true of Camp Wheeler, too?

P: That was true of Camp Wheeler (*both laugh*).

T: Amazing how that works. Paul, what can you say about Basic Training? What was that all about?

P: Basic Training for us was interesting because our battalion in Basic Training which was, I'm trying to think how many people that would be. Probably six to eight hundred people. We were all college students, ex-college students who had all taken the Army Specialized Training Program tests before we came into the service and obviously had passed them. We knew that we were going from Basic Training back to college. We knew that going in. As a result we became a somewhat feistier group than I think most of the usual cadremen who run these training camps knew how to deal with. We were not easy to deal with, but I think the experience was very good for us. Certainly from my standpoint. I was never what you would call a great physical specimen when I went into the service. But I certainly, by the time I finished thirteen weeks of Basic, I was certainly in much better condition physically than I had been before I got there.

(1, A, 190)

T: How would you describe what it was that the Army wanted you to get from Basic Training?

P: They want you to become absolutely paralyzed so that you will obey orders without question. The important thing is to break your spirit. Make sure that when they say jump, you ask how high on the way up. That's what they tried to do, and they had a difficult time with this bunch of college kids.

T: Do you think you realized at the time that it was really all about that?

P: Oh, yes. They didn't fool us for a minute. We were gutsy enough to say, "You'll never break us." The last great exercise that we had to go through was the twenty-mile hike. We made it a point that everyone of us was going to get through that twenty-mile hike. They were not going to be able to point fingers at us and say you were a bunch of weaklings, college kids. We showed them. They finally had to admit that we turned out to be pretty good soldiers.

T: So a sense of determination almost to spite the Army, in a way.

P: That's right. That's right.

T: How did you handle yourself being away, so far away from home for the first time?

P: I guess I really didn't have any problems with it. I wrote my share of letters home and stuff like that, but I don't recall making any long distance phone call. Of course things were different in those days. You didn't have access to... I couldn't send e-mails to anybody.

T: Right (*both laugh*).

P: And you developed friends. I don't think in Basic I developed any really very close friends, but we all got along. It's interesting, because there were guys from all these different colleges. We learned all the fight songs and all the raunchy songs from every college.

T: Guys from all over the country?

P: Yes, sure.

T: Did people from all over the country get along well?

P: I think so. We had a common enemy—the Army.

T: How about people from the North, people from the South? Any differences between those people that you noticed?

P: I didn't notice it there. Where I noticed the North-South difference was when we finally left there and went to the University of Alabama, where I was stationed and taking classes. I took a course in history taught by a southern teacher. He was not a very good teacher. We learned the Civil War from the perspective of the South.

T: And what is that? How did that differ from what we teach up here?

P: I don't think anyone of us who were northerners, and I don't recall any southerners in our group particularly, but I don't think any of us realized some of the issues that were significant for the South in terms of maintaining some sort of economic viability during the war and stuff like that. The kind of deprecating view of the North and particularly of President Lincoln from the instructor that we had at the time. It was a very different experience. We clearly, it was the "War Between the States." It wasn't the Civil War.

T: So even the name was important?

P: Oh, yes.

(1, A, 236)

T: Did young men from the North and South, themselves, get along fairly well in your mind?

P: I think so, yes. I think there's always an individual here and there, but I think by and large we were all in it together and we all, as I say, we all, none of us really like the Army very much.

T: That makes this group of recruits and group of new soldiers a bit different than the average groups the Army was running through their boot camps in training programs.

P: That's exactly right. It was very different. And of course, once the college program was broken up and we were sent back to line outfits, all of us, we went into outfits that were much more across-the-board kind of people. They weren't all a bunch of college kids.

T: So the group you were with in Alabama was splintered up and put a couple people here, a couple people there.

P: Yes. A dozen here, a dozen there. Whatever. Even a large contingent of us went to the 106th Division. They had been raided for replacements before we got there, so they were looking for replacements to come in. When we got there to the 106th we were fed into line outfits. [This unit] had been in existence for some time. Filling a place here and a place there.

T: Did you join the 106th here stateside?

P: In Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

T: How long did you remain there in Indiana?

P: Oh, wow. Let's see... We got there in the spring of 1944, and we were there until we moved overseas in the fall. Through the summer. Training. A lot of training. Never done.

T: You shipped overseas. Do you remember the voyage across the Atlantic?

P: Yes. We sailed, unlike most troops that went overseas, we did not go in a convoy. We sailed on the *Acquitania* which is the sister ship of another *-tania*, the *Luisitania*, which went down [during World War I]. So we were stacked into that boat like sardines in a can. And we traveled solo across the Atlantic. We felt there would be little danger connected with that because the *Acquitania* could outrun any submarine. It was an ocean liner. So we crossed in about five days instead of, you know, weeks for these people that went in convoys.

T: Those were sometimes very slow.

P: Yes, that's right. So we went right across. I think there was one scare while we were making the crossing. We didn't, no announcement was made or anything like that, but we were allowed to be up on deck during the daytime hours and we could see from the rear of the boat, from the fantail, you could see how that path of the ship had, they were obviously doing evasive kinds of maneuvers and going at a

terrific rate of speed considering what we had been previously. So I think there maybe was a scare there, but there was nothing of any consequence.

T: Nothing ever announced?

P: No. Nobody ever said a word. The boat was run by the British. The food was not very good.

T: I was going to ask you about the conditions. What can you say about the food?

P: Porridge. It was awful. It was awful. And none of it was good. But fortunately there was a PX on board, so we were able to buy a few things. I got seasick, which I'm not surprised. I still get seasick on the water. I got seasick for the first couple days out but, from then on I was okay. It was uncomfortable. I was on G Deck. You start with A and you go down. I was on G Deck, and we were in slings, not hammocks exactly, but they were webbed kind of slings that were about four high.

(1, A, 287)

T: Not a lot of headroom there.

P: No. I was on the bottom. Not a good place to be when people are seasick.

T: Gravity says that...

P: Yes (*smiles*).

T: Was it hot in these quarters?

P: Yes, it was hot. And we were below the screws. The screws went over our head. You had to be in there at night. They didn't allow anybody on deck at night because of the blackout stuff. Of course somebody would light a cigarette or something.

T: It must have been difficult.

P: It was not easy.

T: Were you able to sleep?

P: I guess I must have. I don't recall.

T: Thank goodness it only lasted five days.

P: That's right.

T: You landed in Scotland. Did you spend any time in Great Britain?

P: We were there about a month. We were stationed on the estate of some wealthy land owner whose name was Leigh. The manor house was really quite elegant. We were in Quonset huts. The officers were in the manor house, but we peons were in Quonset huts on the property. That was reasonably comfortable. We were okay there.

T: The Allied invasion of France had already taken place by this time.

P: Oh, yes.

T: Were you able to keep up with or to get news on what was going on in Europe?

(1, A, 303)

P: Yes. Armed Forces Radio was very good about providing information. We were kept up to date on what was going on.

T: Did you know at this time what it was that you were going to be doing, or when you were to be headed across to the continent?

P: We obviously didn't know when. We knew that ultimately that was the plan, that we were going to go across.

T: And as an infantry division it was going to be into the line as replacements.

P: We had an idea of what we were heading for.

T: What kind of feelings were going through your head at this point? The war is getting closer and closer now.

P: I didn't think a lot about it. I must have felt as if we were prepared to do. There was a lot of apprehension about what it really was going to be like, but I think we felt that we had been prepared to do what needed to be done, and I think probably among us there were people who were ready to... I would just as soon have stayed in England, but I think some of those guys were ready to go.

T: Would you describe yourself as impatient, or apprehensive, what kind of adjectives would best describe the way you felt?

P: I think there was a certain amount of apprehension. Anxiety. There's no question that people were getting shot up over there. An awful lot of casualties. But you were part of a machine, and there wasn't any way you were going to be able to stop it or control it. You were being controlled at that point. We were pretty anxious. I was pretty anxious.

T: That suggests a feeling of almost powerlessness.

P: Oh, yes. You didn't have anything to say about anything, really.

T: Is that a good thing in a sense that everything is being controlled, or did you find that disturbing?

P: Under the circumstances it was probably a good thing that it was beyond individual's control. We'd have had anarchy. We knew what we were there for, and we were ready to go ahead and do it.

T: During your time in England did you have the opportunity to have contact with local civilians?

P: Just a bit here and there. The closest town that had a pub was Stowe on the Wold, which is a beautiful little city. We used to gravitate over there whenever we had a pass and were able to get out. We'd go out marching through the territory. This was a great thing for the Army. They'd line you up and march you, no matter where you are, and that's okay because it's exercise, but there was an orphanage not far. I think it was an orphanage. It might be just a place where they were housing urban kids that had been moved to the countryside to escape the London scene. Of course they were after us all the time for candy and gum and stuff like that. I knew it was a big kick to be able to interact with them a little bit and with the people in the pubs.

I got one leave, a pass for a day, to go into Oxford, which was not far away. A friend of mine and I went into Oxford and looked around the town and did what I consider now a foolish thing. We went and ate at a restaurant at the Royal Oxford Hotel, which we shouldn't have done because they don't have enough, they didn't have enough food there to feed their own population. Why should they have to feed the Yanks? I had sausage, bangers. Bangers and mash in this place. The waiter said something about the fact that the sausage didn't have very much meat in it. He said, "You can't expect both ends meat, Yank."

T: How would you describe the way the people were towards American soldiers? Towards yourself in particular.

P: I think there was a reluctant acceptance of the American presence. We were a boorish bunch of clods over there, there wasn't any question about that. They were reluctantly willing to acknowledge this attitude for our saving their bacon, but they weren't real happy with our presence there. I'm sure they were glad to see us go.

T: By this time it was clear you were going to be part of the war effort against Germany. What kind of images of the Germans had been introduced to you as a soldier?

P: I don't think that, there was no effort that I can recall of trying to paint the Germans as demonic. I think there was a lot of anti-Hitler sentiment because of his

obvious grabbing off of territory here and there. And the need for recognition that needed to be dealt with. And it fell to us to be part of that, part of the solution to that.

T: To the larger political picture?

P: Yes. The Japs now were demonized, I think, by the Americans. But that was probably because of their attack on Pearl Harbor. Germany never attacked Pearl Harbor. We were in this probably to do more to protect and save England than we were to try to get rid of Hitler.

T: So the demonizing that you recall was about Hitler and not about the German people.

P: Not about the German people, no. I think the idea of the German soldier that we had was that they were probably inflexible and bound by rules, and maybe my opinions are being colored by Stalag 13. But it was in a way true that we were in a position during the time I was a prisoner that we could play to that.

T: Really?

P: We got bawled out one time in one of the camps I was in by a corporal, a German corporal. So we went and got an American sergeant to tell the German corporal to get out of there and leave us alone. He went and got his *Überfeldwebel*, and came back at us. Rank. Rank counts.

T: So rank counts for everything, it seems. After about a month in England, Paul, you were shipped over to France, landing at Le Havre in late October 1944.

P: Yes.

T: At this point, did the war become --

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 382.

T: At this point, when you got to France, did the war become any more real than it had been before?

P: Oh, yes. There was a strict blackout enforcement. The fact that Le Havre harbor was unusable. It had been bombed to smithereens, so we had to be taken off our little boat from [the English port of] Southampton onto a landing craft in the middle of the [English] Channel, not in the safety of the harbor. So clearly, we were getting closer to the scene of the action. There's a greater intensity to that whole feeling there.

T: Did you feel this yourself too, personally?

P: Sure. Oh, yes. We all did.

T: How far off of shore did the ship actually stop? How much distance are we talking here?

P: Between a quarter and a half a mile I would guess.

T: Pretty substantial. What kind of boats were used to do that final leg of the transporting?

P: Landing craft. We jumped across these things and they pulled up to the shore and dropped it. The front of the thing landed on the shore, so we probably went through maybe six inches of water, wading through six inches of water to get to land and then onto trucks. In the dark. And then moved east.

T: So enough water to get your socks wet, I take it.

P: Oh, yes.

(1, B, 412)

T: Was it cold?

P: Yes, it was chilly.

T: What happened once you got on those trucks? Where did you move exactly and how far?

P: Not far. We didn't really go very far. We moved out of the immediate area probably ten miles, twenty miles. Then it was the middle of the night. We were offloaded from the trucks and told to go out and pitch our tents in the field that was supposed to be out there to the left somewhere. So we did. It was raining and it was miserable.

The next day we were back on the trucks moving again further east. We went through the [French] city of Amiens and I remember being on the back of the truck, they take the canvas top off the trucks so that you, in case of an enemy air raid or something, you can get out of the trucks quickly. You could see the cathedral in Amiens. The stained glass had all been removed to be preserved, and the front of the church was sandbagged. You had an idea you were getting close to a war zone.

T: Sure. Did you immediately replace another division in the front lines?

P: We replaced the 2nd Division. Veteran troops. Man for man. We located, I was a part of the I and R squad of the Headquarters Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 422nd Infantry. We went and found the I and R squad of the 2nd Battalion, and we

took over their huts. They had built huts because this was really a holding position. If you've read anything of the history of the Bulge, the Battle of the Bulge, this holding position we moved into was a front position. On a front that covered twenty-eight miles. That twenty-eight mile front was covered by our three divisional regiments on line. This is very unusual.

Standard deployment is two regiments on line, one regiment at reserve. But because it was a holding position, we were all spread out so that when the attack came on the night of December 15 and the morning of December 16, [the Germans] came through us like a hot knife through butter. No backup at all.

T: Before the German attack began in mid-December, you spent what looks like about six weeks in this holding pattern?

P: Yes. I remember having Thanksgiving dinner.

T: That would be late November.

P: Sure.

T: What can you say about life here? What was the daily routine like for you, and did the war appear to be getting farther away or as close as ever?

P: I think it was getting closer. We had one incident that I can remember of an enemy patrol approaching our sector, and one of the members of that patrol tripped a booby trap in our defenses and he lost a leg as a result of that. He was captured of course. I was called for because I could speak a little German. So I went and spoke with this young man. He was even younger than I was I think. He was just a boy. I was about twenty at the time. He must have been maybe seventeen. He was Dutch, he wasn't German at all. He had been conscripted from the Dutch and he wasn't happy at all with the fact that he was in the German Army, and less than happy with the fact that he was obviously bleeding badly. I tried to find out critical information of name, rank, serial number, what his outfit was and so on. I got all that information and gave it to the officer in charge, and they transported him immediately. I hope he survived. I don't know whether he did or not. I hope he did.

(1, B, 485)

T: So it was clear that the Germans were on the other side, so to speak.

P: They weren't that far away. You could hear them. They'd send over a little forget me not every once in a while. Of course the V-1 rockets, they called them the buzz bombs, they went right over us. We'd stand out there and shoot at them every once in a while. It didn't have much chance of hitting them but those things were just a drone plane. A very, very crude kind of instrument with a bomb attached. A concussion grenade. Nobody every shot one down that I know of. It wasn't until later, during the time I was a prisoner, that we saw the V-2 rocket—which was a

deadly, deadly thing. That was the beginning of the development of space technology.

T: It really was, you're right. Paul, what was your job exactly in this position, at this time?

P: I was a scout-observer. That was the MOS, military occupation specialty. There was a squad of six of us and a sergeant whose job really was, you're supposed to lead the battalion out there in the front. That's when we finally engaged in the battle itself on the day of [December] 16, and they moved us out from this rather comfortable place where we had been in the holding pattern. We retreated, probably a good fifteen miles or so, and then organized ourselves as a battalion in motion, and we were out in the front. It turned out that our sergeant who was the head of our squad was lost immediately. I think what happened was that he was acting as the point of the battalion, and I think he simply walked away from us and walked into enemy hands. The result was that we were kind of mired down then because it turned out that we didn't know where we were.

T: Literally?

P: Literally. On the map, we didn't know where we were. Our battalion commander, Colonel Scales, and his staff clustered around. "Where the hell are we?" on this big map that they had. They finally, it was at that point that he asked me to take a patrol, gather a patrol, and head in one direction on this paved road, and another guy to take a patrol and head the other direction until we could find the closest town. Then we could locate ourselves on the map. Which I did. I drew a wonderful patrol—I had the company mail clerk, the bugler, one of the cooks, and two guys from the anti-tank platoon.

T: That's just a real potpourri.

P: It was a pretty good mix. We headed down and found the closest town. At that time I had a GI overcoat that was just cumbersome. Terrible. I had pockets filled with D bars, chocolate bars. I left that, unfortunately, with a buddy and said, "I'll come back and get it." By the time we found the nearest town and came back the way we were going, the battalion had moved on. *(pauses three seconds)* Never did get my coat back.

T: Do you remember the morning the Germans attacked?

P: Yes. What I remember was the artillery going overhead, going well beyond us, and the hullabaloo of getting us organized and getting us out of there. We didn't see any enemy troops.

T: Really?

P: No. All we heard was that they had gone on either side of us. I found out later that north of us, along the line, there had been an anti-tank company that had filled a spot in the line, and they had moved out a couple days before. So there was absolutely nobody there, and they went through there like nothing standing in the way. I remember that part. Then moving back and digging in. Trying to find a place where we could regroup. I'm sure that our battalion headquarters was in touch with division headquarters in [the Belgian town of] St. Vith. And it wasn't long after that when we wound up in this little pocket of woods, and that's another long story, but the nearest friendly line we found out was forty miles away.

T: So it sounds as if it got rather chaotic very quickly.

P: Absolutely.

T: How did this impact you personally as far as the way you perceived things around you and perceived your own position?

P: You were protecting yourself, of course. I had taken this patrol, and then we came under fire as a patrol from German 88s. Those are the most deadly weapon in the war, I think, in Europe. They fired those things just like you fire a rifle, an anti-personnel weapon. Deadly accuracy. So we all hit a bunch of foxholes and ditches that were nearby. After we had been there, it couldn't have been more than twenty minutes, we saw G Company from our battalion and its commander, Captain Kielmeyer, running from a pocket of woods over there. Running across the road where we were, and heading to a pocket of woods on the other side. My illustrious patrol guys said, "The hell with you, Peterson, we're going with Kielmeyer." And we all got up and ran with G Company, and [the Germans] picked those guys out (*sounds: bang! bang! bang!*) with these 88s.

(1, B, 572)

T: The guys with the captain?

P: Yes. And the Germans were firing from up the hill. This road went up a hill, and they were right at the top of that hill firing and just knocking off these guys helter skelter. We just ran for the woods and we wound up spending the remaining time before our capture in that pocket of woods. About three days.

T: The time you were there, were you aware of where the Germans were or where the American lines were?

P: We had heard that the nearest friendly line was forty miles away, so there was no thought of our trying to get out of there. We had a couple of guys who did say, "Hell with you. We're going to go there. We're going to try to get out of this." And they left. Whether they made it or not, I don't know.

T: So at that point were you accepting of the fact that eventually you were going to be captured?

P: Or liberated. Or they were going to come and rescue us.

T: In other words, sit tight. Things are going to roll back this way and either they will find us or they won't.

P: That's right. Or it will go the other way.

T: How was that? There were a couple of guys with you now, right?

P: Yes. There were two. My best buddy in that whole exercise is the only guy I've kept in touch with since the war. His name is Bob Pilkington. He lives in Louisville. He and I have stayed in touch over the years. He's the only one that I've maintained any connection with. We were in a foxhole together. It was interesting that there were three of us in the foxhole. Neither Bob nor I can remember the name of the third guy.

T: Is that right? And you were there with him for a couple days?

P: Yes.

T: It was a three man hole. They had taken a .50 caliber machine gun off of one of the six by trucks in the area and mounted it on a tripod in front of our hole. We were right on the point of this woods looking up a hill, or a slope I should say. We had this .50 caliber machine gun in front of us. Neither of us had ever fired one. It was one of those things. We had no idea. We knew what to do, how to load it and so on. It was the same as a .30 caliber machine gun except you got rounds that are six inches long. We never fired it. We never fired it, but we had it up there. We struggled there for a while. We had some wounded guys in the area and Bob Pilkington, this buddy of mine, volunteered to go get water for them from a spring that was... he had to expose himself to potential enemy fire to get the water, but he did it. And came back with it. Then of course we got hungry, and were looking around for food and I did a little browsing around. Remember, I had lost my overcoat, so I didn't have those wonderful D bars, but I found a trailer and in the back of the trailer there was an officer's B4 bag. I opened that up and in there was an officer's overcoat. I pulled that out. It was for a guy about five foot six, but I put it on. It fit this way (*motions side to side*).

(1, B, 609)

T: You're much bigger than five foot six.

P: Yes, I am. Quite a bit. But it fit. Then I went scrounging for food and I found another truck that had supplies in it. I got a number ten can of processed cheese and

another number ten can of strawberry jam. So we got those back to the foxholes and we opened them up with our bayonets and we made sandwiches. A slice of cheese about this big around (*with hands: pie plate size*) and about that thick (*with fingers: one inch*), strawberry jam, and another slice of cheese. That was it. It tasted real good. There was no way that there were any kitchen facilities.

T: So in a sense you just waited to see who would come first, Germans or Americans.

P: That's right. It turned out that the surrender of our group—and there were probably 1200 of us in this group in this pocket of woods—was negotiated with the Germans. They had a sound truck come up on the side. We had already destroyed one of those with a mortar, but they brought a sound truck up and asked for the ranking officer to appear under a white flag. A major, our battalion executive officer, went out under a white flag and met with the Germans and terms were negotiated that we were to come out the next morning at daybreak with our hands over our heads. Leave all our equipment as is, all our arms, ammunition, trucks. We were right in this area, this wooded area was the motor pool where all our trucks were. We were not to destroy anything and blah, blah, blah. Which we did. We did everything we could to booby trap everything. One thing you struggle with as an infantryman is to keep your rifle clean. And I had the delicious joy of urinating down the barrel of my rifle.

T: To try and make it unusable.

P: Yes. Sure. There were efforts made to booby trap all the trucks. As many as they could. Clever devices hooking grenades to the choke so that when that driver wanted to start the truck and pulled the choke they pulled the pin out of the grenade and blew up the engine. Stuff like that.

T: So it was clear to you some hours before the actual surrender took place what was going to happen.

P: Yes.

T: How were people around you dealing with the news that you were going to be surrendered?

P: There was no alternative at that point. Two guys that I knew pulled out and tried to make back to friendly lines, the only two that I know of that made any effort to try to get away from all of this. We knew how far they had to go. They had to cover a forty mile stretch of occupied territory. I don't know. We knew we were going. We had no idea what life was going to be like as a prisoner. If we had known the indignities we would suffer as prisoners, they never would have captured us so easily.

T: Think so?

P: Oh, absolutely. We had no clue. We had been told that we would be prisoners. We were protected by the Geneva Convention, blah, blah, blah, blah. Name, rank and serial number and all the stuff. But if we had known what was going to happen to us, you know the German soldiers coming past us heading toward the front and we're going back after we were captured there. They were saying, "Für Sie ist der Krieg aus," [German for] 'for you the war is over.' We thought that was true. We were going to wind up sitting by a swimming pool in a prison camp somewhere for the rest of the war.

T: Describe the actual marching out of the woods, if you will, and the movements after that.

(1, B, 662)

P: We marched out. It must have been a column of fours, I would guess. We came out onto the road surface, lined up on the road surface. We were all searched by the SS. They stole everything that we had that was of any value. I had a beautiful ring that my girlfriend had given me, and it was taken away from me. A very good fountain pen that I had was taken away from me. That sort of stuff. Other guys also. We had learned, had been advised, long before not to carry any souvenirs that we might have liberated from the Germans, because there were guys who did who were shot.

T: So people were maltreated or were killed for that?

P: Yes.

T: Was this stuff that you observed or heard about later?

P: Heard about. I saw people get shot while we were prisoners. I had friends that were shot.

T: In one of the camps?

P: On the road, while we were walking. It was just senseless. We had been warned, if you're going to go to the bathroom be sure you face the road when you take your trousers down, because the captain doesn't want to see your rear end. This friend of mine, we practically all had dysentery, everybody. He stripped his pants down and was going to the bathroom, and this guard came up behind him and shot him in the back of the head.

T: Going to the bathroom at the side of the road?

P: Yes. No warning. Nothing. But it was a clear message to the rest of us—these guys are playing for keeps.

T: Was that the first instance like that that you had witnessed personally?

P: That's not the first instance of cruelty, no. I think another memorable instance happened in one of the prison camps I was in, Stalag VIII-A [Görlitz]. This was the second camp that I was in. We were moved there, told that it was an American noncommissioned officers camp. We were the first Americans in that camp. It was a concentration camp actually. When we got there, when we occupied this barracks that they had, and next to us was another barracks that had been occupied by Serbs. Those people prepared food for us and brought it over to our barracks for us. It was a kind of rice and powdered milk and water. Very nourishing and very tasty. We were hungry and we were grateful for it, but it turned out that two of our guys, while the Serbs were over serving us, were over looting the Serb barracks.

T: Two of the American prisoners?

P: Yes. I'm talking about our own guys. The Serbs caught them. There's no system of justice here. You're in an enemy prison camp.

T: They were prisoners too, these Serbs?

P: Yes. They [the Serbs] were prisoners. So they brought them to us and said, "This is what happened. This is what your guys did." It was up to us to meet out justice. And the guys who were leading our group decided that we would hook these guys up with a belt on each wrist, announce to the barracks that these were the guys that ripped off the Serbs while they were over here feeding us. And it's your chance to come out and take a shot at them. These two guys were beaten to death.

T: By Americans?

P: By Americans.

(1, B, 704)

T: What kind of impression did that make on you?

P: Frightening. There was no real alternative. These people needed some severe punishment for what they had done. I certainly felt that. I don't think anybody expected it would be quite as bitter as it was.

T: Where were the Germans when all this was going on? You were in one of their camps.

P: Blissfully unconcerned. "It's your problem."

T: Paul, for the record, how many camps all together were you in?

P: Three. First camp was IV-B. We went there right...

T: The number, IV-B, was the way it was identified.

P: VIII-A was the second and XI-B was the last. IV-B, when we got to IV-B... Did you see the film *Schindler's List*?

T: Yes.

P: When the train pulled into the camp through the gate into the camp, that's exactly what happened when our train got to IV-B. When I saw that in *Schindler's List*, I almost had to get up and leave the theater. That was on New Year's Day, 1945. That was terrible.

T: Was this in Germany, this camp?

P: Mühlberg, south of Berlin. We were assigned barracks, and there were British in that camp. The British had this camp organized to a "fare thee well." All the stuff that you read about organized prison camps, like that [American] TV series, *Hogan's Heroes*. That's what this camp was like. These guys had this thing organized. Every morning at... We were only there ten days—I was only there ten days. Every morning after roll call you go back to your barracks, and the tea is made and you have your little skilly that you made or bought or whatever, and had to have your tea, and a guy comes in with a sheet of onionskin and reads the news from BBC.

T: This was the routine. This camp had been here a while then, right?

P: Oh, yes. These guys had been there a while. And what they did, they had a radio, but the Germans did everything to try and find that radio. They'd tear the barracks to pieces, I was told. This never happened while we were there, but the way they solved this was that radio was made up of components, and a different guy had a component. They would carry the component around in their pocket, and when they got to the point when they needed to connect to broadcast, it was all organized. They met at a certain place, wherever it was, put the damn thing together, and this guy would take down the news broadcast. Then they'd take the radio apart.

T: So there was never any radio, per se, to find.

P: No. It was always just pieces. This guy, the guy that had the onionskin, worked for the Germans in the office doing typing. He'd type up the news report. But that was the only camp that I was in where there was that kind of organization. The other two camps were chaotic.

T: And yet in this first camp you mentioned you were only there for ten days.

P: We were only there for ten days.

T: So on 11 January I guess you were moved out of there.

P: Yes. On the eleventh or tenth of January. Moved to VIII-A. We were sorted out. The noncoms, noncommissioned officers, were separated from the privates and PFCs. I had lied and said that I was a sergeant. I tore up my pay record, which is the only record I had of rank. So I was sent with the guys to VIII-A.

T: Which was located where?

(1, B, 741)

P: [In the city of] Görlitz [about 150 miles southeast of Berlin, on the Neisse River]. We were told that it was going to be an American noncommissioned officers camp. And, as I said, they had never seen an American before when we got there.

T: New facility, or just an existing facility now to be used for POWs?

P: It was a concentration camp, I'm sure. We were housed for the most part there on planking. Stacked four high. *Schindler's List* is a perfect picture of that. That's the kind of setup we were housed in. It was awful. And we were there until Valentine's Day, February 14, 1945.

T: By that time the Russians were getting closer.

P: The Russians were coming up through Breslau [in former German Silesia, southeast of Görlitz]. We could hear the artillery, so we knew they were close. But for the convenience of the Germans, at that point they said, "We can't keep you in combat territory. We have to move you." So they marched us out on February 14 and we marched until 16 March.

T: Over a month?

P: Yes. Thirty two days. And aimless walking, just aimless. Trying to keep us from being recaptured. We moved west, of course, and we got through some of the most beautiful cities, like Leipzig and Weimar.

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

T: Moving from Görlitz as far as Leipzig and Weimar, that's quite a long walk.

P: It was interesting looking back on this now. I went through Gotha, Erfurt, Eisenach. In Gotha the town bank had been bombed. There were [German] Mark notes everywhere. They didn't do you any good. You had to have a ration book if you're going to have anything.

It happened, one of the incidents that happened, we formed up little groups as prisoners.

T: Were you all Americans marching here?

P: There were two hundred British who had nothing to do with us because they had food. They had been storing it up all this time.

T: So there was some distance among the prisoners, too?

P: Oh, yes. We lost six hundred guys on that march. There were about 1200 of us when we started.

T: Half of you didn't make it.

P: Yes. Didn't make it. They died along the road.

But in order to protect ourselves, there was a group of seven of us. There were a lot of groups like this that worked together. Within the group you had a job. We had two guys whose job it was to trade stuff. I had an identification bracelet. It wasn't worth a damn. It didn't even have my name on it, but the idea was to get to a guard and try to get that guy to give you a couple cigarettes for it. Cigarettes were currency—that's what you used for money. You'd finally badger him enough and they'll give in. We had two guys who did nothing but try to get off the road and grab stuff to eat and get back in before they let the dogs loose at the end of the column. And there were two guys whose job it was to divide the spoils among the members of the group. I was the seventh guy, I was the *Dolmetscher* [German: interpreter]. I could speak a little German and I could get enough so that if we really needed something I could say enough to the noncoms that were with us to get across the idea. And of course the idea was that when they wanted something, I didn't understand.

T: That's where you used the language as need be. What can you say about the Germans here? Were there a lot of Germans sort of monitoring and marching with...

P: We had the *Volksturm* [German: home guard], they were our guards. Old guys, hobbling along, and they were all, "Ich habe eine Schwester in Hoboken." [German: I have a sister in Hoboken]

T: So they were not unfriendly for the most part?

P: No. They weren't your buddy, but they were willing to talk. If you got along. "Wenn der Krieg ist aus, dann will ich nach Amerika." [German: When the war is over, I want to go to America] Well, I always said, Yeah, over my dead body (*laughs*).

But in one instance we were walking along in a town, dangerous stuff. You know how the small towns are in Germany. We were targets for the slop jars being dumped off the window ledges.

T: People would throw stuff at you?

P: Yes, sure. We were the relatives that bombed the town.

In this one place we were going along, there was a little narrow sidewalk and we were in the street. We had told our people in the group how to beg for stuff. "Brot, Brot, Brot. Bitte, bitte, Brot." [German: Bread, please, bread] This guy was walking along and this little old lady was hobbling. She had been to the market with her bag that she was carrying. He went into this "Brot, Brot, Brot" business, and he looked down and in that bag was a loaf of bread. I mean a big round loaf of bread. Not the kind of stuff we'd been eating. He looked and said, "Bitte, bitte, Brot." She looked around to see where the guards were. And she opened the bag. And he put his hand in and grabbed that loaf and pulled it up, and between his thumb and the bread was her ration book. And he looked at us, the rest of us, "What am I going to do here?"

T: Because he could have taken the ration book.

P: He could have taken it. He let go. He let it go back in there. She would have been in trouble if he had taken it. But he kept the bread. And we divided it in seven parts, complaining bitterly about the eyesight of the guys who were supposed to be dividing it up.

Red Cross was supposed to provide you with food, you know, as a prisoner. One parcel per man per week. That never happened.

T: You never saw any of those parcels?

P: We saw one parcel for twenty men. Maybe. We got some parcels while we were on the road, and it was one for twenty. So you divide up the stuff inside there, you know, and one of the things that our group got was some Swan Soap, which is a real joke because we never had an opportunity to wash. Never had an opportunity to bathe. Never had an opportunity to wash any clothing.

T: You wore the same stuff you were captured in.

P: You put your socks on from either end by the time you get to the end of the line. And of course we were covered with lice. We had this bar of soap, which was really a joke, because we wouldn't have any chance to use it. But you know the German population didn't have any real soap. They had ersatz stuff. Worse than Lava Soap. So I got one of these trader guys to go rap on the windows in the towns. Head into town, rap on the windows, Hausfrau comes, you wave the soap and say, "Seife, Seife für Brot." [German: soap, soap for bread] So she'd run and get you a hunk of bread, and the idea was to grab the bread, keep the soap, and get back in line.

T: It sounds like there was loose control over these lines.

(2, A, 118)

P: The line was too long and there were not that many guards. That worked about three times with the "Seife," grab the bread, keep the soap, get back in line. The last time "Seife, Seife für Brot," she grabbed the soap and closed the window. That was the end of that one. Well, it worked for a while.

T: How did you deal with the fact that people didn't make it? That people were dying.

P: Just: it's never going to be me. It's never going to be me.

T: Did you have that feeling?

P: Oh, sure. We were in Duderstadt. After we'd gone as far as Eisenach, pretty far west, they turned us back to Erfurt and then north to a little town called Duderstadt. There's a brick factory there. We were housed in this brick factory. They were trying to decide what to do with us, I'm sure. By that time my guy that I was walking with was Bert Doane, from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I had liberated a blanket somewhere. It was just an awful German ersatz blanket. Made with wood chips, I think. We slept in that. We stayed on the main deck in this brick factory because it was close to the latrine. Neither of us were in very good condition by that time, toward the end of the march. One morning I woke up, and Bert didn't.

T: He had died right next to you?

P: You know, everyone was sick. Nobody knew how sick, because we all looked the same. Everybody had lost weight. He just didn't make it. He's buried in a mass grave. They took his clothes, boots. He was finally dead. Long afterwards they found that mass grave, opened it up, and he was reburied in a military cemetery. Sad story.

I went to see his folks years later. I was working at that time, in 1949. I was working for Capitol Records, on the road as a salesman, and I spent a night in Sioux Falls. Just on a whim I called his folks' house and said I'd like to talk to them. I said that I had been with Bert the night he died. So I went out to their place to see them, and his mother wouldn't believe that he was dead. She was in denial. Absolute denial.

T: Convinced somehow that he was still alive?

P: Convinced that he had escaped and was up in the Swiss Alps, and didn't know that the war was over. They had another son, a brother who was younger than Bert, who went into the service and found Bert's grave and took a picture of it and brought it back home, and she still was in denial.

T: How did that hit you when you were confronted with her in that situation years afterwards?

(2, A, 160)

P: Unbelievable. I realized I probably had made a mistake even trying to enter into that situation at all. His dad walked me to my car and said, he just shook his head, and said, "I don't know what to do with her. She just won't believe that Bert is gone."

T: He had accepted the fact?

P: Yes. The father had. But not the mother. I don't know if she ever did. He died. *(pauses three seconds)* This is stuff I haven't thought about for a while.

T: That's a way that the war never really goes away, I guess. There's four years after you were back, and there was a very direct link to that. Paul, after marching for thirty two days, it makes it about the middle of March sometime. Did you stop and stay in Duderstadt for a while?

P: We were there for a little while. Then we were transported by train from there to Stalag XI-B, which is in Fallingbostal, northwest of Hannover. In 1990, when we were in Europe, we were in Fallingbostal. Here's a coincidence for you: my wife's maiden name anglicized is Zumber, but it's Zum Berge [in German] and the Zum Berge family roots are in Fallingbostal, Germany. I only found that out some years ago, and so when we got to Fallingbostal we looked up the family name and, sure enough, Zum Berge, and we found that the name is still there. We went out and found the site of the prison camp, which is right across the road from a large military installation occupied [in 1990] by the British Army of Occupation, which was stationed there. But the camp, the prison camp, is gone except for the main gate, which is still there.

T: Were there barracks at this facility?

P: There were at the time. Not now. They were all taken away.

T: How large was this last place, XI-B?

P: Huge camp. Our compound was the American and British compound. There was a French compound. There was a Russian compound. I don't know how many others there were. It had been there a while. There were a lot of Russian prisoners. A lot of Russian prisoners died in that camp. It was just warehouses of corpses.

T: By mid-March of 1945 things were closing down fast for the Germans.

P: Right.

T: How would you describe the conditions in this camp, and how does it compare to what you had seen up until now?

P: We were fortunate. I should say I was fortunate, or among a group of fortunate people, because the barracks that I was assigned to [at Fallingbostel] was in the *Lazarett*, which was kind of the hospital. The medics who were caring for that were British, the British troops who were captured at Arnhem [in the Netherlands]. Remember the *A Bridge Too Far* story?

T: Sure, it was in late 1944.

P: Yes. And those guys, I had a British sergeant I'm sure that probably saved my life in terms of caring for me in every conceivable way. I was, oh, I was sick. I was so sick. I had jaundice and I was just so debilitated. When I got back, finally got back to England after being liberated, I stepped on a scale in England and I only weighed one hundred twenty-eight pounds. And I weighed two hundred seventeen when I went overseas.

T: Two [hundred] seventeen down to one [hundred] twenty-eight! You lost ninety pounds.

P: Yes. I could not have lasted much longer, I'm pretty sure. But this guy very faithfully took care of me. So from that standpoint we didn't get anything to eat that amounted to anything. We didn't get a chance to wash. They ran us through a shower, no soap and no hot water, but just to get wet. And gave us typhoid shots. [The British] were scared to death of typhoid. The British. They give you a shot in the breast. But then you get into this barracks and they had this cruddy blanket and you pull the blanket back and the lice are there.

T: The same clothes that you took off before the shower?

P: The same clothes. So that when we finally did get rid of our clothes, [when we got back to England, they wouldn't even let us in the building at the hospital with the clothes on. "Put them all right there and we'll burn them. Boots and all."]

T: You were liberated on 16 April. How did you pass the time that month or so that you were in that last camp?

P: Just being sick. There were eight of us in this room, in the *Lazarett*. Guys from all different situations. The fellow across in the next bunk, only in the upper, had been captured on Crete in 1939. He was a Scotsman. So there were all different kinds that came. You could do nothing. I was pretty much confined to bed.

T: And your condition, it doesn't sound like, was a whole lot different than many other folks.

P: No, we were all the same. We were all the same. I remember running into a guy that I had known several months before on the road in the hall in this barracks, and it was Dick Heiser. I said, "Man, you've lost a lot of weight!" He said, "So have you!" You had no way of knowing. Because everybody around you was in the same condition.

T: Emaciated?

P: Yes.

T: Was there food of any sort here?

P: Very little if any. The German military loaf of bread, which is made out of sawdust and potatoes I think. Just terrible stuff. Not very good for you. Occasionally a cup of their thin soup. We used to call it whispering grass. Mostly water, and it had a profound effect on your internal system (*laughs*).

T: I see. Was dysentery and diarrhea still a major problem?

P: Everywhere. Everywhere. And that's, I think, the cause of death for a lot of these guys who didn't make it. Just absolutely rotted out.

T: From the inside. What can you say about the Germans in this camp?

P: Didn't have much contact with the Germans in that camp. They kept to themselves pretty much. I was pretty much confined to my bed. They [Germans] sure scrambled when the chips came down.

The morning of 16 April [1945] I woke up and, from my bunk, when I sat up in my bunk, I could see the main gate of the camp. There was a clock there, in the tower. And it was nine o'clock, and sitting right in front was a [British] Sherman tank with a 75mm cannon pointing at one guard standing there with his hands up. Every guard had fled.

T: So the liberation came unexpectedly.

P: No, we knew it was coming. There was a French compound in this camp and they had a radio. We always thought the French were collaborationists. They probably were. They had a radio and they could let us know. They'd let us know. We could hear the small arms fire. That small arms fire, not that far away. And when they finally did liberate us...

T: Americans liberated you?

P: The British. British 2nd and 7th Armored, the Desert Rats. They were the ones that liberated us. They went streaming by. Our room was at the end of this long

barracks and there was a door outside. I got outside into the prison yard as these trucks went streaming by with British troops in there. And they were throwing stuff over the fence for us.

T: They were outside the camp?

P: Sure. They were still involved. They knew what they were doing. That night a British sergeant came into the room with a big tub with baked beans and a couple of loaves of bread, and this Scotsman guy in the next bunk broke down and cried. It was the first white bread he had seen in six years. *(pauses three seconds)* We all ate, and I got terribly sick.

T: From eating?

P: Oh, yes.

T: I've heard a lot of stories like that. Your body just isn't ready for food.

P: No.

T: Did you eat too much, or was it just that you had decent food?

(2, A, 277)

P: It was just baked beans, and the kind of condition I was in, I threw it all up. But it tasted good going down.

T: Describe if you could your reaction on the day of liberation, when you knew there was an end to this.

P: "Get me out of here! Get me out of here!" Well, they couldn't, you know. This was the sixteenth. I think we finally got back to some kind of holding area on about April 21 or 22.

T: So for a number of days, you were in this place.

P: We were still there. They didn't have time—they were busy fighting the war. They finally got us back there, and then I remember spending the night on a concrete floor in a hangar of an airfield. The next day we were flown out on an American C-46. A junky old plane, but it was great. It was great. They flew us. We landed in Brussels and refueled, and then went on and landed in the Midlands, in England, where the 192nd General Hospital was located.

T: Were there any Germans, you mentioned one German, but were there any Germans who were captured in the camp when you were liberated?

P: No, just one. They were all gone. We got back to England and got off the plane, stripped off all our clothes, showered, with soap and in hot water. Stand there and just let it go.

*[when we got back to England, they wouldn't even let us in the building at the hospital with the clothes on. "Put them all right there and we'll burn them. Boots and all.]"—*from p. 29

We went right to the latrine when we got off the plane—that was the first stop after being deloused. Then it was for a shower. They let us into the ward, which is a Quonset hut, and there must have been fifty beds. All white. White blankets. White sheets. *(pauses three seconds)* Then it hit us. We were home.

The next morning in came the German prisoners to clean the floor.

T: No kidding?

P: *(laughs)* The few ambulatory guys in our ward ran them out of there. And I found out later that they had had prisoners there for some time, German prisoners, to use. They had to have a perimeter guard around the hospital. But now since the American prisoners were back, they had to have a guard with every group of German prisoners. They didn't trust us.

T: What about yourself? How did you feel when you saw the German prisoners come in there too?

P: I'm sure that for a time I carried a lot of bitterness and resentment about the German people, although I certainly got over that. Because this wasn't the people—the German people are wonderful people. I've been back to Germany five or six times since the war and I bear no grudge or anything toward the German people. I don't think they knew what was going on, to a large extent. This is not meaning I think that they didn't understand that the Holocaust was going on. I think that in many places they did. There was a lot of denial from a lot of German people. We visited [the town of] Dachau several times when we've been back there, and there are people that have denied, who lived in the community, who denied that they had any awareness of [the camp that was in the town], but I don't believe that.

(2, A, 320)

T: I've been to Dachau as well, and its location, where it's located in the city, it's difficult to accept that someone didn't know the camp was there.

P: I think one of the most beautiful architectural statements I have ever seen is in Dachau. The Protestant Chapel in Dachau.

T: There's a couple chapels there, aren't there?

P: Yes. Subterranean chapel. And on that big huge door, that steel door, scratched into it is the words to the 130th Psalm, "Aus tiefer Not schreie ich zu dir..." You can just hear the lament of the prisoners who had lived in that place.

T: Although you weren't in that particular camp, is visiting a place like Dachau difficult for you? Or do you feel a certain emotional link to other prisoners when you go?

P: I think so, yes. There is an experience there that can never be adequately shared with anyone else. You have to know what it was like. Yes, you feel that.

T: Paul, how long did you remain in England before you were transported back to the States?

P: About a month.

T: In the same facility?

P: Yes. The 192nd General Hospital. I was not diagnosed wisely. I told you I weighed one hundred twenty-eight when I got there? When I left there I weighed one hundred thirty-two. They had misunderstood my problems. I told you I had jaundice. But you know, if you have complete bed rest the color leaves you, the yellow leaves you. So I was told that I had a nervous stomach, and that's what they treated. They didn't treat the infection of the liver at all until I got back to the States.

T: Then they diagnosed it correctly?

P: Yes.

T: How many facilities were you in here in the States? Hospital facilities.

P: We landed at Mitchell Field, Long Island. I came back in a hospital plane, a C-54. From Prestwick [Scotland] to Reykjavik [Iceland] to Newfoundland to Long Island. From there we had some degree of choice as to where we wanted to be hospitalized, and in talking with the person who was interviewing, he suggested I go to Chicago rather than Clinton, Iowa. Those were the two. He said, "Your parents and your girlfriend are going to have an easier time to get from Minneapolis to Chicago than they are from Minneapolis to Clinton, Iowa." So I settled on Chicago, and I came to the Gardner General Hospital in Chicago, which is the old Chicago Beach Hotel. It's now a dormitory for the University of Chicago. I was there. That's where I spent my time until I was discharged.

T: That's a lot of months.

P: Yes. I was there from 1 June [1945]. I got my furlough at the end of August. Came home, got married on 7 September. Went back to the hospital and finally got out...

I'm not sure how long I was in the hospital after getting married. I don't remember. I remember getting pneumonia. It was at least another month or so before I came home, and then I went on to Fort Sam [Houston] for discharge in 1946.

T: When you were a prisoner of the Germans was it possible for you to send or to receive any kind of mail from home?

P: Yes. I got a chance to write a note on a card. I might even have a picture of that. This is to my then girlfriend, from the prisoner of war camp.

T: *(looking at card sent by Paul)* It says you sent here, the date is 10 January 1945, and your notation here says that it was received by your, what was then not quite your wife—although you were engaged. And it wasn't received until early April of 1945, so it took a number of months before there was any word.

P: They didn't know. My mother had gotten a telegram. *(picks up a document from the table)* Which one is this? This is the one that says I've been returned to military control, after I was a prisoner. I'm trying to see the date on this. Here it is: "May 8, 1945, 10:30 a.m."

T: So only then did your folks receive word that you were actually...

P: That I was back in friendly hands. She got a wire saying that I was missing in action, yes. *(picks up another document from the table)* This is the missing in action one. It's dated January 11, 1945.

T: Did you talk to your mom later about how she felt with the uncertainty about you?

P: I'm sure she worried tremendously about that. Through that whole thing. When they found out that I was a prisoner, it was just a couple days before I was liberated. They tried to find out something about the prison camp and all that stuff. No. There was really not that much to do about it. But one of the real heroes in this was Florence [who became my wife]. She knew no more than my mother did, only that I was missing in action, but she wrote a letter every day while I was missing in action. She couldn't send it to anybody, but she wrote it. So when I got home I got all those letters. One a day.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 382.

P: ...than anything else you know. She really hung in there.

T: How did she deal with the uncertainty?

P: I think it was tough. It was tough for all of them. My dad and my mother and for her.

T: When did you see them for the first time then after you got back here to the States?

P: I saw Florence first. I got back to Chicago. One of the neat things about this experience, when I got back to the States, to Mitchell Field, there was a kind of an aid station there where they gave us all a bed and waiting until we could be transported to wherever. But on every bed was a phone, and on the phone was a sign that said: "Call anywhere. Courtesy of the New York Times."

T: Were you able to call right away?

P: Yes. I picked it up and I called Florence at work. I remembered her number of course. Called my mother and said, "I'm going to Chicago." When I got the Chicago I had a buddy in the service in my company. We had been separated all along, but I had often, when we were at Camp Atterbury, we'd come up to Chicago to do our soldierly carousing in south Chicago, and we'd stay at his folks' apartment on the south side. So when I got back to Chicago I called Cherub Grover, my buddy Jack's mother, and told her and Ralph that I was in Chicago, at Gardner General Hospital. She immediately said, "Be sure to tell your folks and Florence that they're welcome to come and stay with us," which was great. It was interesting. That night when I called Cherub—Jack called her Cherub—her husband, Ralph, about ten thirty that night I had an MP come down to my room at the hospital. He said, "I got a guy here that wants to talk to you."

T: On the phone?

P: No, in person—Ralph. He wanted me to get him a carton of cigarettes (*laughs*). Well the PX was closed at that hour of night but I got him a carton the next day. He couldn't buy cigarettes. I was his link to supply. But anyway, Florence did come down the first weekend then, and spent, stayed with Cherub, and she came to see me. She went home and reported to my mother that I looked great.

T: Because your mom was still in Minneapolis.

P: She was still in Minneapolis. Here I was this skinny thing. The next weekend my brother and my dad and my mom came down. My brother drove and mother walked into the room and she was shocked. She said, "Florence said you looked great. You look terrible!" And I did. Although by that time I was beginning to put weight back on again.

T: They were lucky they hadn't seen you when you were first liberated, or they would have been really shocked. When the war ended against Germany on May 8, 1945, where were you?

P: I was in the hospital in England, the 192nd General Hospital. There was a window in this Quonset hut right behind my bed. It was open and it was a beautiful spring day and you could hear the bells ringing in the churches in the nearby town. People were going crazy. Of course Armed Forces Radio was blaring the news. It was exciting. It was exciting.

T: Was there an impromptu or planned celebration in the unit where you were?

(2, B, 458)

P: No. Nothing planned. Everybody was happy and all the rest of that, but there was no celebration planned. On V-J Day [14 August 1945] I was in Chicago and there was a big blowout there. And then somebody was shooting off fireworks down at Soldier Field, which wasn't all that far away, and that really did not do a lot for the veterans who were in that hospital. All that noise.

T: Before V-J Day, after the war in Europe was ended, were you at all thinking about the fact that you might be redeployed to the Pacific?

P: No. I wasn't well. I knew that. Obviously there were guys who were in danger of that, but I was so sick that I would not be any good to anybody. I was concentrating wholly on getting well. The war was over for me in real terms.

T: You spent a number of months there at Chicago healing up physically, gaining weight. Did you begin at this time to process the whole POW experience, and try to figure out what that all meant for you?

P: Yes. I think that's when that happened. I had a chance to really reflect on what the experience was. And talking with Ralph and Jack Grover, who was also a prisoner and had a very different experience of the war in prison camp than I did. Working through some of that stuff. Bob Pilkington, my foxhole buddy, was also from Chicago. So I spent some time with him and with his folks, and he was sent back to active duty. He didn't go back to the Far East, but he went back into the military to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland and was assigned there for probably a couple months until Congress finally passed legislation that made prisoners of war be discharged.

T: Really?

P: Yes. So he got out. I spent some time with him and with his folks. I spent time talking about the experience there.

T: How did talking about things help for you?

P: I think talking about things helped me to maintain a relatively healthy perspective on what was going on. The options are, you don't talk about it to anybody, shut up,

and I never felt that was a good thing. I felt that the story needs to be told. It needs to be told for my sake, and it needs to be told for the sake of the German people. It needs to be told for the sake of the horrors of war. This is the kind of thing that happens to people.

T: How did telling the story or talking about it help you, do you think?

P: It's pretty hard to tell, isn't it? I think I certainly have come to terms. I did, when I first got out I had some dreams, but I don't dream anymore. That's very rare. I dream about a lot of things these days, but I don't dream about the war.

T: If I can ask, when you did dream about the war right after, what kind of images or things recurred?

(2, B, 515)

P: The prison facilities. The sickness. Constant itching, from the lice. Knowing that you weren't clean. Then seeing the faces of people that, you know, are long since forgotten. The guards. Some of those guys must have been eighty years old.

T: Those guards.

P: Yes.

T: You had guards that were different types of people. You met different types of Germans. It sounds like the first Germans, when you were first captured, were professional soldiers.

P: Oh, yes. Those were SS. Very ruthless. No respect for anybody. I got searched. It must have been when we got to 8-A. I got searched by, not by a SS guy, but by a regular German soldier. And they were patting me down. And I finally said, "Kein Maschinengewehr." [German: no machine gun] And he looked up at me and he caught the humor of that—I didn't have a machine gun tucked away.

T: Already a difference between that soldier and the SS troopers that captured you.

P: Oh, yes, absolutely. You could tell immediately.

T: And the ones at the end were these...

P: Older folks. The *Volksturm* guys that were on the road. Once we got to 11-B that was different again. Then you had regular troops again. But on the road that was all *Volksturm* guys.

T: And the ones at the end were the ones who disappeared rather quickly.

Paul, you were discharged in March of 1946. What was your initial reaction to being out of the military?

P: I was eased out because of that long on one hundred seven day furlough. So it was a gradual process. But when I finally got out and back from Fort Sam Houston, Florence was in the hospital. She'd had an appendectomy. She'd had the appendix attack when we were in Chicago and she finally had her appendix out when I was in Texas.

My first thought was to go back to school, and I did. I registered for summer session and took two summer sessions. But after the second summer session, this was 1946, I couldn't hack it anymore. Too nervous. I was walking across the campus one day and some clown in a little light plane buzzed the campus, and that just scared the hell out of me. So it was not good for me to be back in school yet. So I got a job and worked for three years before I went back.

T: And when you did go back, were you ready to go back at that time?

P: Yes. And I was a good student. If I hadn't blown that first couple of quarters before the war I would have graduated with honors.

T: You were a good twenty-five years old when you actually went back with a purpose.

P: And I got a TA, teaching assistantship. They don't hand those out to just anybody.

(2, B, 568)

T: Back at school, actually, what would you say was the hardest thing for you readjusting to civilian life?

P: *(pauses three seconds)* It was a change because we got married while I was still in the service. So I came back, not to my parents' home, but to establish our own home.

T: Did you look for a place to live then?

P: We had to have a place to live and we did. We found a funny little house that we lived in for the first few months after I got home, and then we got an apartment, and then we moved to a duplex. It was establishing our own life together, apart from leaving the compass of your parent's home all together.

T: So you came back to a very different existence. You were single and lived with your folks before you went into the service, and now you're married and you're really making a household your own. Was it hard finding affordable housing?

P: Yes. That's where you really need the network. Somebody knows somebody who knows somebody. We got this house that we moved into. It was on the back of a lot

behind a duplex out by Lake Harriet [in Minneapolis], and it was kind of a tumbledown place, but it was adequate. Cold. No insulation in that place. The lady who lived there had gone to California for the winter, so we rented it from her for thirty-five dollars a month. We were there for a couple of months and then we found, through another friend we found an apartment that we could move into that was part of a house in south Minneapolis not far from [the intersection of] Hennepin and Lake. I got a job working in that area. Florence was working for Pillsbury. Our first child was born in 1947 and then Carol came along in 1949 and about that time we moved to a duplex in north Minneapolis that her grandparents owned. And that was great. That was the time I was at the U [University of Minnesota, Twin Cities], until I went on the staff at the U. That was where we lived. Forty five dollars a month. Heated.

T: In your opinion, was that rent very reasonable?

P: Oh, yes, it was reasonable. They weren't giving it to us, but it was probably on the low end of being comparable to similar rents around. We had a lot of room for that kind of money. We had a garage. Sometimes we had a car.

T: And you didn't have to look for the place.

P: That's right.

T: After the war, your wife worked and you worked. Were certain things, do you recall, difficult to find or difficult to come by?

P: A lot of things were hard to come by in those years immediately after the war. Because there just weren't things. When we got married in 1945 we had a big wedding. It was a tribute to my mother-in-law who organized and orchestrated this whole thing. Amazing the way she did that, because we had two weeks from the time we decided to get married to the day of the wedding.

T: Two weeks?

P: Two weeks. She made all the bridesmaid's dresses. Further than that, they couldn't find the colors they wanted because that stuff wasn't available. She made the dresses and dyed them.

T: Wow! And all of this in two weeks.

P: All of this in two weeks. She gathered the ration stamps of friends and neighbors and so on in order to provide the food for the reception and the gas for our honeymoon. Stuff wasn't available. When it came to wedding presents, we wound up with a complete sterling silver set of flatware for twelve people, because there wasn't much you could buy. There wasn't stuff available. You couldn't buy a toaster, or you couldn't buy these kinds of things. They were not ready yet on the market.

When it came to buying civilian clothes, I had two suits tailored because you couldn't buy clothes off the rack.

T: So there were some shortages that you noticed every day.

P: Yes.

T: When you think back about the war and your experience in it, Paul, what did it mean for you at the time?

P: It was a big block of time taken out of my life. In some ways I suppose the experience enriched me, but in other ways I was robbed.

T: You were in the service three years.

P: Yes. I had started when I was seventeen, my dad was a musician. He saw to it that I got voice lessons, and I probably would have pursued a career, but the war took that away. By the time I got back and regained my strength, I got out of the hospital, but talk about regaining strength, that is a different story. That was no longer in the cards for me. I had a family.

T: The kids were born in 1947 and in 1949?

P: In 1947, 1949, 1951. Then we got a television set, so Tom didn't come along until 1954. Nancy came in 1957 and John in 1960.

T: When you look back on it now, a lot of years have gone by. How do you reflect on that time from the perspective of today?

P: I think you sure learn to appreciate some things out of an experience like that. To have an appreciation for food. What a tremendous gift it is, just to have enough to eat, and not have to worry about where it's going to come from. I think you learn to treasure people. My buddy Bob Pilkington and I, we don't get together very often, I think we've gotten together maybe four or five times since the war, but he is probably one of the best friends that I have. We exchange Christmas cards. Big deal. That's about it. But there is a common experience that we had that nobody else can duplicate.

T: What's the most important way that you think the war changed your life?

P: I think I have a deeper appreciation for life and a more profound trust in God, something that carried me through that experience. People ask me about that in terms of my calling as a clergy person. Does this have an effect, and is this why you went into ministry? No, I can't say that it is. But it certainly is formative in terms of helping you understand that, no matter how desperate life becomes, a person of faith can survive with the awareness that you're not alone.

T: How important was that inner strength while you were in captivity?

P: During the long walk after we were captured, they moved us back out of harm's way, so to speak, to the little town of Permen in Germany. We walked at night. And it was snow. Trees overarching the roads. The roads were very narrow, very small. But I felt—I've never said this to very many people because I don't know if people really understand it and I'm not sure I understand it—but I had the feeling that I was being carried on that march. It was more than my strength that was getting me through that. And when we got to the town where they housed us, the group that I was with, we were housed in a bombed out convent. The roof had been blown off and we were on the second floor open to the stars. Some of the guys in the outfit took their boots off—to their great chagrin, because the next morning they couldn't get them back on again because their feet were swollen. My feet weren't swollen. I was comfortable. Maybe that was because I was in good physical condition. If you want to leave it at that kind of plebian mundane level, okay. *(pauses three seconds)* I don't think so. I think that I had then, and have had in that experience, a sense of being accompanied. The Greek word for the Holy Spirit is *parakletos*, and a *paraklete*, or a *parakletos*, is someone who is called to be alongside. That's the experience that I had pretty much through that whole thing. Not consciously. I'm not an arm waving Holy Roller or anything of the kind. But I have a deep and abiding trust that I was not alone.

T: Paul, that's a good note on which to conclude. Let me thank you very much for what you have shared here today. It's an interesting story and you tell it honestly and very well. Thank you very much.

P: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW