

Interviewee: William Price

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 8 March 2004

Location: by telephone to Mr. Price's residence in Marietta, GA

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, May 2004

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, June 2004

William Price was born 24 December 1924 in Dearborn, Michigan; he attended local schools, graduating from Dearborn High School in 1943. Soon thereafter he volunteered for the US Army Air Corps, and after Basic Training was sent to gunnery school, then assigned to the crew of a B-29 Superfortress 4-engine bomber. In March 1945 his crew was posted to North Field, Guam, a main base for bombing missions against mainland Japan. Over the next weeks the crew completed six missions, but on their seventh, on 7 April 1945, their plane was downed over Nagoya, Japan; Bill was one of only three crew members to survive the downing of the plane. All three became prisoners of the Japanese.

Bill remembers that he was held briefly at a Nagoya location before being transported to Camp Omori, a POW facility on the outskirts of Tokyo. At Nagoya and Omori, Bill and other captured B-29 crewmembers were kept separate from other POW's, for the Japanese did not consider them normal military prisoners but rather, because of the nature of their missions against civilian targets, war criminals. Bill endured solitary confinement, interrogations, and a near-starvation diet. Only in mid-August 1945, and the end of the Pacific War, were Bill and the other B-29 men released to the regular Omori facility, which soon thereafter was liberated by American forces. Bill spent many months in hospitals recovering from his ordeal before being discharged in March 1946.

After the military Bill returned to Dearborn. He got married in 1948 (wife Maxine), and spent a career working with the Ford Motor Company. Following his retirement in 1985, Bill and Maxine relocated to Marietta, Georgia, where Bill was interviewed in March 2004.

Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor

B = Bill Price

Maxine Price = Bill Price's wife

[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, and today, March 8, 2004, I'm speaking with Mr. Bill Price of Marietta, Georgia. On the record, Bill Price, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today. Bill, you and I have talked a little bit before we began taping, and I'd like to start by sort of asking you, just going back to before you were actually captured. When you got over to North Field on Guam, what were the conditions like there and what was it like really to be part of this bombing campaign in this brand new airplane?

B: Well they had just finished the North Field runway there and there was no other one there. Of course that was Nimitz's headquarters there too. But we lived in tents and it was very primitive, you know. Right at the edge of the field, of course, the jungle was there and of course we had to carry our side arms all the time wherever we went because there were still Japanese around. Although they didn't seem to give us any trouble. We started building our Quonset huts when I was captured. The shower and so forth consisted of some gasoline tanks filled with water and things like that. It was very primitive. It was very nice. It was beautiful. Very beautiful island.

T: When did you arrive at Guam?

B: I don't remember the exact date, but it was the middle of February. We had to pick up a brand new B-29 and flew it over there. Then the next day we had to give it up and fly it to Saipan, I think it was, because there were more crews than there were planes, and we had to give up our plane and then come back to Guam and crew up with another, or take turns with another crew that had their own plane. But before that happened we did get our own plane. That turned out all right.

T: How long were you at Guam before you flew your first mission?

B: We missed that big first mission because of the fact that it wasn't our plane. Of course they took that on the first mission. That infamous raid on Tokyo in—that was the last part of March?

T: March 10. The incendiary, the big incendiary raid?

B: Yes.

T: Yes. March 10.

B: Yes. We were there for a couple weeks before we pulled my—I think my first mission was... well, the first two missions were incendiary missions. One on Nagoya and the other on Kobe I think it was. Kobe or Omura. It's been so dogged long I should have brought up all the memorabilia I have here, but like I say, the first two missions were incendiary missions and it was quite unique because of the conditions that we had to fly in. It was so much different than it was in those that flew in Europe because the daylight missions were all high explosive. In formation and we flew between twelve thousand and twenty thousand feet in formation. And the reason that we used to fly at around twenty-five, thirty, thirty-two thousand feet [was] the winds were so great above Japan that the bombsite wouldn't compensate if we were going with the wind, because the winds were up to two hundred fifty miles an hour at that altitude at times. So General [Curtis] LeMay, when he took over, he said from now on we'll fly between twelve thousand and twenty thousand feet in daytime. He said at nighttime... I should say that they [had] two hundred fifty rounds of ammunition per gun, which was about a ten-second burst. At that time we didn't have any fighter protection from Iwo. That came later. But night missions were flown between four thousand and eight thousand feet with no ammunition. They took out the armor plating so we could a couple more five hundred-pound incendiaries in there.

T: Now flying as a gunner during a daylight mission and flying as a gunner on a nighttime mission, that's an entirely different thing, isn't it?

B: It most certainly is. You probably wonder why, since we had no guns or ammunition at nighttime, how come we had a full crew?

T: Yes. That's my next question.

(1, A, 45)

B: We were supposed to fit in thirty-five missions before we came back, and believe you me, when that plane took off I don't care if we had ammunition or not, I'm going to get that mission in so I can get back sooner.

T: I see. So it's a matter of basically putting another notch in your belt as it were.

B: That's true.

T: But on a more banal level, what do you do if there's nothing for you to do?

B: Well, we just acted as observers. Of course, like I say, we flew at nighttime and between four thousand and eight thousand feet. No lights. You'd have the primary plane would be over there and he would drop his bombs, his incendiaries, and then

we would just pick out a spot there in the vicinity that was not burning and drop ours. Actually it was safer to fly at night than it was in the daytime because you were in and out. You were at low altitude, you know, and not in formation, and it worked out real well that way.

T: What could you observe on those incendiary raids? The altitude is not very high relatively speaking. What could you observe out of your blister there when you were going over those cities?

B: A lot of flames. Intense heat which made the plane bounce around quite a bit. Like I say, a lot of smoke and just a lot of flame. You couldn't really tell much on the ground at nighttime. Even with all the flames. But like I say, those flames you could see for one hundred fifty miles or so away and they would burn for two, three days because the houses, or course, were very flimsy.

T: Mostly wood construction I think.

B: That is correct. The reason for that was because the houses themselves, the people themselves would make parts for the service, war parts, and then when they finished there, they'd take it to a central location and have it assembled. But in our own defense, we dropped leaflets previous to that, a couple weeks previous to that, saying that we're going to bomb your city or not yours particularly, we're going to start bombing your cities and we want you to get out. So that's what we did, but like I say, they stayed and we bombed.

T: As a crew, when you passed over a place like this that was burning, did it ever occur to you about the people that were on the ground or was that something that never crossed your mind?

B: It did, but I feel I more or less passed, I can't say passed it off, but I knew there were people down there and they were going to get hurt but it had to be done. That's war. I mean sure, we were criticized for killing well, like any war, even now. We're killing public citizens and so forth and it can't be helped. Really. It's a sad part of being in a war.

T: All in all, for the record, how many missions were you on?

B: That was number seven, I believe.

T: That your plane was downed?

B: Yes.

T: How many of those were daylight missions for you where you actually had guns at your disposal, as it were?

B: All of them except the two, first two, incendiary missions.

T: On those five daylight missions, how many opportunities did you have to actually use the guns that you were trained to use?

B: Just about every one of them. Of course, like I say, we only fired on them when they were coming in and we more or less squeezed them off in very short bursts. In fact, I have a tape recording of one of my missions which was, I think it was on April 1, and during that period of time in the States, a radio station would, on a Sunday, would play a real recording made from some part of the war, whether it would be Naval or Marines or Army or Air Force. They were actual battle conditions. And I managed to get a hold of that.

(1, A, 89)

T: What did they tape? The entire hours long mission or just parts of it?

B: Just parts of it. They put up the recorder along and up forward there just behind the pilot alongside of the engineer, Smokey's place, by the upper and lower forward turrets. This, I forget, Sergeant something or other from the Air Force, he would narrate it and he would cut in and out because he started long before we got to Japan and he would interrupt. He'd come in now and then and explain what was going on and all the way through the mission. He'd cut in and out. That particular time. You couldn't hear the intercom. You could hear some shouting of course. You could hear the guns go off. That particular time I think we got credit for one plane and for half of another one. Let's put it that way.

T: When you listen to that tape now, what kind of memories come back to you?

B: I played it over so many times. When I got it, it came on a twelve-inch aluminum center unbreakable record and it was played from the inside out. We each got it. I mean each got a record. The other two crew members too. And we played them so much. Finally between Siegel's and mine I had it put on cassette tape. Like you say, I remember what was going on. It's just a memory. It doesn't affect me one way or another. I just reminisce, that's all.

T: Talk about your job as a gunner. I mean in a sense, when there are other aircraft around, enemy aircraft around, how did you do your job?

B: Mostly, like I said before, you'd call it a scanner or an observer. I should say everybody on that airplane, on the B-29, the crew, is trained for another position. I was trained to be an engineer and I had to go through school too [so that] anything in that engineer's position I could operate blindfolded. I would help preflight the plane before the mission and then my job after that is during takeoff we had to clear everything with the pilot when he asked. The flaps and so forth. Wheels going up and things like that. Be more or less an observer. From then on we got into the

combat zone, of course it was our responsibility to shoot at the incoming fighter planes. Nothing we could do about anti-aircraft which scared the devil out me all the time. But we had so much training and with the guns and so forth that actually shooting at airplanes, fighter planes coming in really didn't bother me that much. I don't know. It may seem strange but that's the way it was. But the anti-aircraft just... I mean it scared me. It really did.

T: Talk about what that's like. Being in a plane with anti-aircraft around you.

B: (*chuckles*) That was like flying or going in a car with four flat tires over a rough road. You bounced around so much you absolutely had to use your safety belts in order to stay in your position.

T: Really, it would jolt you out of your seat?

B: It would jolt you. You would rock. It would bounce you all around. Oh, yes.

T: How about the kind of mental dealing with the explosions going on outside the plane. How does that impact you?

B: Like I say, it scared us. It really scared us. And we were hoping to get in and get out because, you know, on the bomb run which lasted, oh, I'd say three to five minutes, something like that. Maybe a little bit more. You had to fly a straight and level course. That was when the bombardier actually flew the plane. You were just cold turkey to the anti-aircraft, because they were not very good marksmen.

On the bomb runs there was always a fighter plane, a Japanese fighter plane, off to the side radioing down our altitude and our speed and so forth which made it easier for them to set up a pattern. When they set up a pattern, you're talking about forty or fifty guns in a pattern, and you have to fly through this. So, yes, it was our main worry. Fighter planes that came in, like I say, even though we had a lack of ammunition, a sufficient amount of ammunition, was that the gunsights on a B-29 were computers. We never touched a gun after we got in the air. We fired turrets as far as forty feet away from us.

(1, A, 146)

T: Yes. And how was that for you? I mean compared to the B-17 for example where one actually fired the gun by pulling the trigger, you looked through a site, didn't you?

B: That is correct. And everything was automatically computed for us. We didn't have to allow for deflection or ballistics or anything and the beautiful thing about a B-29 is if one of the other crew members got hurt, that turret was still operable because I could fire from my position one, two or three turrets, different turrets, all at the same time and have everything computed for me. So, like I say, it was beautiful.

T: It's strange to hear you say you had so few rounds per gun.

B: Yes. At that particular time, if I remember correctly, a .50 caliber air-cooled gun fired at the rate of eight hundred fifty rounds a minute at that time. Like I say, the two hundred fifty rounds per gun, you could figure out how we really had to conserve our shooting.

T: So it would just be very, very short bursts or you'd run out of ammunition.

B: That is true. And like I say, we didn't have any fighter protection. Actually we [had] very little fighter protection even when they started flying P-51s off of Iwo. We would navigate for them all the way up there and then primarily they would go down and shoot up what they wanted depending upon the fighters in the vicinity. They were cautioned that if they got hit or hurt they were to fly in our formation and we'd protect them. Believe it or not. But they said be careful when you go into that formation that you don't point your nose towards the B-29 or you too will be shot down. Which it turned out very well though.

T: Of the missions, with the exception of your last mission when your plane was downed, what would you say was the most difficult mission for you? From your perspective.

B: I think any of the daylight missions because of the anti-aircraft guns during the daytime, like I said before, I think that was my major concern, was flying through that anti-aircraft pattern. You see, the fighters would usually come after you before you hit your bomb run, and then they would peel off, and after the bomb run they would come back again. During the bomb run was the worst part of the missions. I can understand why, after a few missions... You never did get used to it because, well, let's face it, it was something that you had no control over. You couldn't fight against. And with something like that you feel awfully helpless.

T: It almost seems to suggest a matter of just chance.

B: That's true. That's very true.

T: Did going through it once or twice make it, in a sense, easier or more difficult to go through again?

B: Well, I think it makes it more difficult each time. To be truthful. Because actually you always believe that, even though the planes go down, are knocked down by anti-aircraft or by one reason or another, that it always happens to somebody else. Not to you. But there's always that thought in the back of your mind. So, like I say, it gets worse as it goes along. And that's why you have after so many missions that you have a couple week rest period where they flew us back to Iwo. Of course I

never made it that far. Because you had to put on about twelve, fifteen missions before they'd do that and then come back and finish until you had thirty-five.

T: And you, as it turned out, flew only seven.

B: That was number seven. Yes.

T: Number seven. Now it seems to me that people might handle the stress of the long missions and the anti-aircraft fire better than others. Did you notice that among your own crew? Were some people better equipped, as it were, to deal with stressful mission situations than others?

B: I didn't notice that. Like I say, there probably was, but it was something that was never really brought up or ever asked each other about that. We just figured that we were a crew, and like I say, a crew is closer than a family. I mean these guys on my crew, they were closer than brothers. Believe it or not. I knew everything about them that was possible and...

(1, A, 204)

T: Had you trained together in the States? All of you?

B: Oh, yes. Definitely. We started training in August of 1944 until we finished our training and went over in the middle of February. You know, I mean, like I say, we were closer than brothers.

T: And what does that mean? Do you depend on each other for certain things, or do you conversationally share certain things, get things off your chest with each other?

B: Oh, yes. Yes. Definitely. Of course, like I say, there might have been some things that you didn't bring out as far as that you were, well, they knew you were scared and so forth. Not in training, but I mean in combat. But those things were just not spoken about, you know. We just hung together and did our things.

T: Was it, from that comment, was it difficult to talk about being scared? I mean to each other.

B: I guess it would have been. Yes. Because, you know, we were grown men. Grown men anywhere from nineteen to twenty-six and we just depended on each other and put our lives in each other's hands so to speak.

T: And on the missions you were on, was it always the same crew?

B: Always the same crew. Right.

T: Okay. So all the same. Ten or eleven?

B: Eleven.

T: Eleven.

B: You see that particular mission that we went down on, we loaded our ammunition and so forth in the guns. And during that time I strained my back lifting a couple boxes of .50 caliber ammunition, which was kind of showing off to each other to pass the time one way or another, and they told me, well, go to first aid. I said no. I said I'm going on this mission if I have to crawl in there. So that's the way it was. Really. You were with your buddies and you wouldn't let them down. You wouldn't want a stranger to take your place.

T: And in that particular situation, you not going because you hurt your back, would have perhaps suggested to them that you weren't up to it.

B: I don't know whether it would or not. I don't think so but I say two reasons. Like I say, I would not let anybody take my place as long as I could help it, and also for the other reason was I wanted to get that mission in because I was coming home that much sooner.

T: Yes. Now, you've mentioned a couple times about the thirty-five. Were people counting missions? Before they could come home?

B: Not at the first. They probably were later on. Especially probably towards the end. They probably were. No. I didn't find myself really counting any of the missions. I just wanted to get them there and get them over with. Those missions were long. My shortest mission I think was fourteen hours and twenty minutes air time.

T: Yes.

B: And they would stretch up to sixteen, seventeen hours.

T: You've preempted my next question once again, and that's to say that you mentioned the bomb run and moments of fear, or actual terror it sounds like sometimes, with aircraft.

B: Yes. It was.

T: But that means a lot of long, dead hours in the air. How do you pass time? All those hours in the air like that.

(1, A, 250)

B: A B-29 was such a beautiful plane because you could pressurize that thing when you got up to a certain altitude. Ten thousand feet or so. But we used to fly right on the deck, so to speak, up to Japan to conserve fuel because we used to carry about a good eight thousand gallons of gas. I think the gas weighed more than the bombs did. Although we carried twenty-two five hundred pounders all the time. And that was another reason for taking out the armor plating and not loading up the turrets with a thousand rounds per gun, so they could carry a couple more bombs and still have enough fuel to get there and back.

We used to fly, like I say, just a few thousand, a couple thousand feet off the ocean to conserve fuel until we got in the vicinity of Japan where we'd get up to the altitude that we were going to go in at. And another thing was the B-29... when I was captured, believe it or not, I was wearing a summer flying suit with no undershirt and summer socks. I mean it was comfortable. It wasn't like the B-17s that I trained in where they had to wear electrical heated suits or sheepskin lined heavy jackets and things like that because of the cold. Because you get up there, well, you lose three degrees about every thousand feet that you go up there and if you're flying at say twenty thousand feet, you're going sixty degrees less than what it was on the ground.

T: Had you trained on those planes first?

B: I went to gunnery school down in Panama City, Florida, in June of 1944 and got my gunnery wings down there. And yes, we trained on B-17s. Old B-17s there in the Gulf.

T: Did you volunteer for the B-29 program or were you selected for it?

B: (*chuckling*) No, I didn't. I was very disappointed. Like I say, I had my Basic Training in Air Corps Cadets down in Miami Beach, Florida, and then went up to Syracuse, New York, for my CTV training and I had just finished there and I was going to reclassification when they cut back on the cadet program. A hundred thousand or so. I happened to be one of the unlucky ones that they cut out of the cadet program. But they said, oh, you're going to like this. You're going to fly on a special plane, the B-29. Well, what's a B-29? Yes. We trained on B-17s for gunnery and then we came back and then when we went down to Pratt, Kansas, where I had my OTU training, that was in August of 1944 and we trained in [B-]29s from then on.

T: That was the first time then that you had actually been in a B-29 was when you...

B: Down there. And the first time I got in that thing and I went from the front to the back and crawled through that tunnel I thought I'd never get through.

T: Yes. That tunnel is quite long, isn't it?

B: It's over the two bomb bays in the center wing section. Yes.

T: Yes. So you took your crew and the crew flew a new plane over there which you then were relieved of on Guam and you flew....shared a plane and got your own plane.

B: We didn't have a chance to go on a mission with another plane because they got those other planes over there in a hurry. So we did get our own plane which we named the Crow's Nest. And on one side there was a crow in a nest with some young ones with their beaks up there because our pilot's name was Crowcroft. But because of selling bonds and so forth, we had to name the plane after a city which ours was, the city of Muncie, Indiana, because our pilot was from Muncie.

T: That was another one of my questions. I wondered what the connection to Muncie, Indiana, was. But Crowcroft was from Muncie.

B: That is correct.

T: Okay.

B: That's where he's buried at.

T: Was that name painted on the front of the plane as was so often the case?

(1, A, 318)

B: Yes. It was right on the copilot—we called him a pilot [in a] B-29 they said the pilot was the plane commander and the copilot was the pilot. So on the right hand side. Right seat is the side of the plane where they had the city of Muncie. And that was a map of the United States with the city of Muncie and an arrow or a slash going towards where Muncie, Indiana is.

T: Did they make it clear to you as the crew members that they wanted that city name on there because of the bond drive?

B: Yes. Yes. Definitely.

T: And was it up to you then to select a city, or did they say we'd like you to do Muncie?

B: No. It was up to us to select a city and they thought well, since the plane commander, he was the top guy, we'll have him name it after what he wants. And of course he named it for Muncie, Indiana.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 378.

B: It was absolutely fabulous.

T: Move to 7 April 1945 which was your seventh mission. The one where your plane was downed. Was there anything different about that particular mission, let's say, before the actual downing of the plane? Anything that had gone out of the ordinary so to speak?

B: No. Everything was normal. We rendezvoused and we went up in our formation, which was a high element. We knew our position and so forth and everything was going real great and making our bomb run. Like I say, we could see the anti-aircraft going off there ahead of us. The planes that were flying around. But as far as any attack, I can't remember that we had any planes attack us before the bomb run.

T: So you hadn't had a lot of other Japanese planes around you?

B: They were around. In fact, he was one of three that was coming in head-on. In fact, we made our bomb run and bombs away and closed the bomb bay doors. I don't know whether he had time to close the bomb bay doors or not, but I heard over the intercom fighters coming in at twelve o'clock level. There were three of them.

T: So you couldn't see them from your position.

B: My position I could not. The only ones who could see it was up front, and probably the CFC or central gunner could see them too, because he was sitting in his what we called a barber chair which he could see out his blister on top. I heard over the intercom fighters coming in at twelve o'clock level and nothing happened. No guns went off and then I heard fighters coming at twelve o'clock level and blam! Just a brilliant flash and a jar, not much of a jar because we outweighed them ten to one, and then some you know. But this big flash and I knew exactly what had happened. I jumped up and took off my flak helmet, suit and the whole bit in just one big sweep.

T: So you knew...

B: I knew I had to get out.

T: You knew immediately that the plane had been hit.

B: That's true because we were on fire from the center wing section on back.

T: From the moment the Japanese plane rammed your aircraft, sort of from your perspective, go through the events of the next couple of minutes.

B: I didn't see where he hit us. The left gunner, Siegel, said he hit us on the left side. Took off the wing and number one engine. The outboard engine on the left side. I jumped up and I started towards the back figuring that hey, I can get out through the

rear exit, and I just stepped into the passageway between my gunnery station and the radar room.

T: That's to the back of you, right?

(1, B, 409)

B: That's true. I noticed the radar operator. He was half turned in his seat with a kind of a puzzled look on his face. But he didn't say a word and I can't get out that way. By that time the plane had rolled over on its back and went into an inverted spin and the centrifugal force was so great that I couldn't move. So like I say, when my knees started buckling I thought well, this is it and I thought well, kind of like I always say when I give a talk and I don't remember whether I said it out loud or whether I didn't. But the only thing I remember thinking or saying was, "Mom's going to give me hell for this." It may seem comical but that's what ran through my mind. So I just let myself go then. I thought to myself well, if this is it, I might as well sort of let myself go and get knocked out or something. And what happened was, the left gunner, Siegel, told me, I was bare-headed. My hair was maybe only about a quarter or half-inch long. And he said, "You went head-first through that Plexiglas blister and took everything out with your head. And the gunsight went with you too, from your shoulder." He said, "You left one little sliver there." Then he said, "I caught my hip on and tore it open." He said, "You went out that blister and took the whole thing with it." Of course when I came to, the parachute was open and I had to pull the ripcord myself. It was gone.

T: It sounds like, am I hearing right, you were almost thrown out of that blister or...?

B: The centrifugal force was so great that it threw me right through that blister head first.

T: Wow! Now Siegel also got out.

B: Yes. He got out after I went through. He had his leg tied to his station there because we had heard previous to that that occasionally these blisters... well one guy, one of the B-29 guys, was blown out that blister when it went out. So he was just newly married and he says that's not going to happen to me. So he tied himself to that blister.

T: Holy cow!

B: And when it got rammed, I guess it jarred him and he was in between the aisle stand, the ring gunner's aisle stand, and the switch box, and he was helpless there. And a quick change in pressure and so forth pulled him out and he said he was sitting half in and half out of my blister after I went out. And he just gave himself a backward shove and took a freefall. In the meantime up front, Greene, it knocked him out of his seat and he crawled back up there and tried to get out. Took his

escape hatch out and when I went out it threw him out again and he crawled back up there and he went out with all his equipment on.

Now this is a six footer and he went out that small opening and those props were still turning full RPM at that time. He went out there and on the way out, gas from the tank had been drained on him and he caught his arm on fire. So he went out and he missed those props, missed the fuselage by less than a foot. And he missed them. And on the way down he had trouble getting his flak suit off and he beat out the flames on his arm which was burned from shoulder to fingertip and he opened his chute then. So the three of us managed to get out.

T: Wow!

B: The only other one to get out—I didn't see anything of the plane when I came to. But later on Siegel told me that the plane exploded on the way down and when he hit the ground he landed near the navigator. The nineteen year old navigator, Smitty. He said Smitty was laying on his back. He had superficial cuts on him but he said his eyes were opened. They were glazed and he didn't say anything. And he said he died within a few minutes. So apparently he was blown out of the plane when it exploded and he opened his chute too late.

T: And no one else got out of the plane.

B: Just the three of us.

T: You sort of came to after you were out of the blister?

B: That's true. I came to. I don't know how far I was. When we got hit, probably I went out someplace around, oh, we were flying at twenty thousand feet, the highest we ever flew when we got hit. And probably I went out, I'm going to say roughly between fifteen and eighteen thousand feet. That's just a guess. When I came to I was probably around eight thousand feet or so and there was a lot of fighters flying around. When a [B-]29 went over me, I could hear the anti-aircraft going by and I just pulled the chute down more or less in my lap to let myself have a freefall until I got closer to the ground which I did. I should say before that happened it was a beautiful sun shiny day. Kind of hazy. When I came to looking down naturally and I thought, "God, this is beautiful!" Hadn't realized what had happened until I looked up and saw the parachute. And then I realized what had happened, and I said this can't be happening to me. That's what I was thinking. Then of course when the [B-]29s flew over me and the fighters were around, is when I spilled the chute and got down to a lower altitude so I wouldn't be shot at.

T: So it took you some time really to come to your senses?

B: That's true because, like I say, I had a concussion. My head down the back stood out like... you take a half a baseball and then set it on top of your head. I mean it was really swelled up.

T: Now as you're coming down in this parachute, when did it occur to you on the way down, what might happen when you hit the ground?

B: I was scared. I was scared like I've never been scared in my life. I hope I never have to go through something like that again, because when I'm near the ground I was drifting to the northeast part of the city and out in the country and I noticed [as I] got close to the ground [that] a mob of people were coming after me. And they looked to be, I couldn't say how many, but I'd say as a guess, a hundred fifty, two hundred. Somewhere around there. Looked like the whole damn city at first.

T: So they saw you coming.

B: They saw me coming, and they were coming after me. So when I hit the ground I spilled my chute and I got out, and they were about three hundred yards or so away from me. I was on the opposite side of a hill, a little knoll, and they couldn't see me. Instinctively, don't ask me how or why, but I pulled out my .45 which was a shoulder holster and racked a round in the chamber and then I stopped dead still. I said to myself I couldn't do anything with this thing because these were civilians with bamboo poles. These were soldiers with rifles and policemen with their pistols and swords and stuff. That many, no way. So I threw the pistol in a ditch full of water there and I walked towards them with my hands up. That's when I had a pretty rough time.

T: I ask everybody, every POW I interview, about what we call the capture moment, and from two perspectives: number one, what was going through your mind when you were actually captured? And then also, what happened as far as the events? So why don't we start with the events first. What happened as these Japanese are coming towards you and when they got to you what happened?

B: Like I say, it was the most helpless feeling I've ever had in my life. I really didn't know what was going to happen. I thought I was going to be killed. Really. Seriously. I walked towards them with my hands up and the first one to get to me was a civilian with a bamboo pole, and he hit me alongside the head with it and knocked me off my feet. Didn't knock me out. I more or less rolled with it. I started to get up and I hear this yell and here's this soldier making a bayonet charge to me. I jumped sideways and that bayonet went right through my flying suit and it tore it from the bottom to the top. I was laying on the ground.

He was going to finish the job right there, when one of the policemen or one of the officers stopped him. So at that time, then they beat me with everything they could get. Rifle butts, bamboo poles, kicking me. I ended up with a broken collarbone and three broken ribs and they took everything I had. I mean, they took everything. I had my class ring on from my high school and a soldier saw that and he wanted it. Well, I crooked my finger so he couldn't get it off. So when he pulled out his bayonet I thought now is the time to get rid of the ring. So I took it off and I handed it to him and that satisfied him. When they got through with my beating and

so forth, they took and they tied a rope around my elbows and around the back and they handcuffed me in front and they blindfolded me.

T: Did you lose consciousness at all, Bill?

B: Not that time. Then we started walking and when a formation of [B-]29s went over—the raid was still going on—we got into a bunker and I got another beating there. After they had gone then we walked some more. We walked to a railroad station and they set me on a bunker, and they roped off an area of about, I'm going to guess, it's probably twenty yards in diameter, and inside that roped off area they had half a dozen soldiers or so. Maybe four, five, six soldiers. The reason for that is, they kept the crowd from getting to me. Then for about an hour or an hour and a half or whatever it was, I don't remember, but it was a long, long time, the crowd just threw stones at me. Pebbles from the ground. And I got cut up pretty bad there.

Then after that session they took me to a 1937 tan Ford V-8. The reason I know what that was because my mother's youngest brother, my uncle, had one before he went into the service. And what they did, they put me in the back seat with a Japanese guard on each side of me and they had a driver and another Japanese soldier in the front and they tried to start the car. They ground it and ground it and ground it and it wouldn't start. So I said, I think you're out of gas, and I got another beating for that. So that's where I learned to keep my mouth shut. So we drove into town then and we stopped at a building.

And this blindfold, the way they had it on I could see below it. Tilt my head back. I could see quite a bit. We stopped in front of this gray building and we went in and we went up a series of stairs. I don't remember how many. But at that particular time I had this guard on each side of me because I couldn't walk very well after that because what I went through. Got to the top. I remember one of the Japanese guards was counting off in English and pretty proud of himself I guess. You know these enlisted men, Japanese enlisted men, they weren't educated very much. But the officers, they were, a lot of them, an awful lot of them, were college graduates from the United States.

T: Yes.

(1, B, 542)

B: Anyhow, we got to the top of the stairs and like I say, these two were holding me up and this fellow came up to me and he says, "What is your name?" And I said "William E. Price." And he said, "What's your rank?" And I said, "Sergeant." He said, "What is your rank?" And I said, "Sergeant." Well, apparently he didn't like the way I said it or anything. I remember he hit me twice and that's all I remember because when I came to I was almost downstairs, being dragged downstairs.

Then they took me over to, I think it was Nagoya Castle Prison, and they took my shoes away then and they threw me in a cell. Nothing in that cell except me and a bucket in the corner to relieve myself. By that time, like I say, I was quite a mess.

T: Is this, from the best of your recollection, still the same day?

B: This is the same day. Yes.

T: With the events there, what's going through your mind? Let's start with the moment of the capture there. You mentioned you thought you were going to die. I mean, how did your thoughts progress as you were going through all these...?

B: Like I say, at first I thought this couldn't be happening to me. Then I thought well, if this is it, I hope I didn't have to be tortured or anything. Because we were told that they were starting to take B-29 prisoners. Although previous to that most of them were killed. In fact, I learned later on that only five percent of the B-29 fliers got back alive. Only five percent. Although close to forty percent of the Japanese, the prisoners of war of the Japanese, only forty percent of them died. So that was a lot more than what was in the European campaign.

T: A lot more. You're right.

B: I guess because the Japanese, they were brought up that you weren't supposed to be taken prisoner. It was a dishonor and like that.

T: Yes.

B: Anyhow. Want me to continue on with my story?

T: Yes. Well, here you are in this...

B: In this cell.

T: At what point, were you actually, for the first time, questioned or to use the word, interrogated?

B: That was the next day. They took me out. Of course, they tied me with a rope and handcuffed me and blindfolded me again. And we walked to another section and entered this room. They set me down on a stool and took off my blindfold. What I observed was an elongated table with maybe, oh, I don't know, eight or ten, twelve officers with their swords laying on the table and some people there, men that were interrogators.

(1, B, 580)

T: And you're the only American in the room.

B: That's true. And this room had two doors, and on each side of the door was a Japanese soldier with a rifle and fixed bayonet. The reason I'm saying this was because all during the interrogation, which lasted I don't know how long, hour or so,

hour and a half, two hours, I had a pistol pressed against the back of my head. I often thought after it was all over, what they thought I was going to do being tied and so forth. Maybe it was to intimidate me. I don't know. But I feel that I got through this interrogation pretty well. I didn't get any beatings or anything. Not even slapped around. That came later.

T: What kind of things did this panel of interrogators want to know from you?

B: Everything. I got by mostly by saying I'm an enlisted man. I wasn't privileged to know some of these things you're asking me. I did answer a few of them. Approximately. For instance, I definitely remember they asked me how long the runways were on Guam, and I told them eight thousand feet. Well, actually they were 8500 feet. I didn't think it made any difference. And they didn't believe me. They said impossible. Because when they controlled the island, they had a base there too. But most of the time—and I should say, and some of the questions that they asked me that I said I didn't know—they told me the answers and they were right on the button. I mean they knew everything. I wondered why they should ask me things. I got through that pretty well.

T: They knew more than you did in some respects.

B: They certainly did.

T: So the questions they were asking you were technical questions or...?

B: Some of them, yes.

T: About the plane or about Guam or...?

B: About the plane and about the base itself and things like that.

T: And really having worked for the Air Force as an enlisted person, you only know so much.

B: Well, we were pretty well trained. I mean, of course, you know, living together with the officers, not living together but associating with, the officers you knew a lot more than what you would think you knew. I mean, they thought you knew. But it was the old thing though, the enlisted men didn't know that much. So it helped me out.

T: So when you said you didn't know, they were likely to believe you on some things.

B: That's true. A lot of it I didn't know. But I was going to say that there were some that I did know and I told them I didn't know, and a few cases I gave them an approximate answer. Just more or less to keep them off base. I mean it may seem strange. I mean, in my position that I'd do something like that. It seemed the right

thing to do. I mean from our talks with the CO and General [Curtis] LeMay and so forth. And it worked out pretty good.

T: What kind of impression did these Japanese at Nagoya make on you? The guards or even the people in this interrogation board so to speak. What kind of people were they in your mind?

B: They were, should I call them fanatics? For lack of another word. The officers, as I said before, and the interrogators, they spoke better English than I did. And finding out later, talking to some of them at the prison camp, why, they had gone to college in L.A. and in the States. But the enlisted men, of course, they were something else. They were just people. They knew nothing. And the little bit of English that they did learn was from the religious people that would be there.

(1, B, 635)

T: Like missionaries or something.

B: Missionaries. Yes. I couldn't think of that word.

T: How long were you at Nagoya Castle there? From your recollection.

B: Seven days. I should say six days, and I subsisted on one rice ball a day a little bigger than a golf ball and one cup of water. No medical treatment or anything like that whatsoever. On the sixth day, seventh day, something like the sixth day, an interpreter came in and I sat on the floor with him and he had a clipboard with three sheets of rice paper on it. It was all in Japanese with the exception... well, let's say he had... mine was the middle page. The only thing in English was my name. Talking to this interpreter and he says, "You're going to Tokyo tomorrow." And I asked him, "May I ask what for?" And he says, "Yes. You're going to be executed." So after talking to him for a while there he seemed like a decent guy. I mean, he didn't beat me or anything or hit me. I don't know how I got up the nerve or anything, but I reached over and I took the clipboard out of his hand and I flipped it over to the last page and I saw Siegel's name on there. He grabbed it back and he flipped it all over, and I saw Greene's name on there. So I knew three of us were alive, which I didn't know at that time.

T: Is that the first time you had news of your other crew members?

B: That's true. I didn't know what condition they were in or anything about them. Just that they were alive. Period. So then the next day they came in and they did the same thing. They tied me and they handcuffed me and they blindfolded me and we went to a railroad station. Got on a train. I think I had just about the whole train car to myself. I don't know. But I sat in this seat, and there was a Japanese guard alongside me and two in front of me. We went to Tokyo. In that time I could see

under the blindfold, and the scenery was beautiful. Japan was mountainous and it was beautiful. They didn't beat me or anything.

We got to Tokyo and got off and we got on a streetcar I believe it was. Yes. And that worried me because of these people there. It was a good thing I had a number of guards around me, because I knew what would happen if they didn't. Because I got there and it couldn't have been too long after a B-29 raid, a daylight raid. Anyhow, we went for a while. We got out of there and we got onto a truck, an open truck. One of these charcoal burners, and we drove out to Omori. Camp Omori. Which was a headquarter camp in the Tokyo area. A camp for incorrigibles. We got off. I'm going to say ten, twelve miles south of Tokyo. Right on the bay. It's about—well, you've seen pictures of it. It's about a couple city blocks long and one wide. It looked like a sandbar. And they just reclaimed it and they put... We had to walk across a bridge from the mainland to this sandbar, to the camp. It took up about half of the—I'll call it an island. Or an atoll.

Like I say, we walked in there, and this camp was made up of, I think, five hundred sixteen POWs. The majority of them were Americans taken at Corregidor and Bataan. The English from Singapore and Hong Kong and the Marines from Wake and from the Philippines and a few Dutch merchant marines.

T: Now before you got to Omori, were you questioned any more than that one time there at Nagoya?

B: No. Just that one.

T: One time. The rest of your time there, that's six days, was it spent just in that cell by yourself?

B: Just by myself. Nobody to see. Nobody to talk to. It had one small window at the top that I could see some tree branches and that's all. And the only other thing I would see was eyes looking through at me through the steel door. The opening little slot in the steel door.

T: Did anybody talk to you during the time you were there?

B: They just opened that little slot in the back and they'd roll a rice ball in to me and set this cup of water on the floor and that was it.

T: That gave you plenty of time to think as it's just you in the cell. What were you thinking about in the cell? You hadn't been executed. You hadn't been killed by the mob and yet here you were. How did you face that?

B: Like I say, when they told me I was going to be executed, of course that was a shock. But after he left I kind of thought, well, you know, this doesn't really make sense, because why should they take me to Tokyo to execute me when they could do it right here? So that gave me a little bit of—what should I say? Hope? Not much,

but I'd say, hey, I'm around for another day or two or whatever. I mean, I didn't panic at any time. But to me, I'm too young to die. I mean, I haven't lived yet.

(1, B, 725)

T: Now what kind of physical condition were you in? You mentioned a couple of injuries from the downing of the plane.

B: Well, before that I weighed about one hundred fifty pounds, and I was in not too bad a shape. But after they got through with me I was pretty well torn up. I mean, like I say, my suit was torn. It was bloody. It was messed up by bowel movement, and no medical treatment whatsoever. Nobody came in to look to see how I was and what condition. So I was just there. That's all.

That went on even after I got to Omori. Four months and ten days without a bath, a shave or a haircut. Not even wash my hands. You can imagine what condition I was in. I was down to one hundred four pounds with my clothes on. For what they were worth.

Getting back to who was in that camp. Most of them were regular prisoners. Like I told you. Then they had two groups of special prisoners in one barracks. It was divided in half and one was naval prisoners taken after the middle of the war. Because Pappy Boyington, Major Boyington, was their spokesman. And the other half were B-29 prisoners and their spokesman was a Colonel Carmichael who flew out of China on the first raid on Japan itself. He, I think, if I remember correctly, was downed by air to air bombing from fighter planes dropping bombs on his plane. It was on the Yawata Steel Works...

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

T: The first time, at Omori here, is that the first [you have] seen other people except for Japanese?

B: I didn't see anybody because when they took me and got me to Omori, I didn't even know if my crew mates were with me either. I was by myself. So what they did, getting back to... this group I found out later were special prisoners. They got half rations. No medical treatment or anything.

And myself, and I learned later, my two other crew members, were in separate cells in the Japanese guardhouse where the Japanese ate and slept up front. We were put in solitary confinement in the Japanese guardhouse and we were rated as "special, special" prisoners. What reason, I don't know. But we got quarter rations. That was my home then almost four months, in the roughest part, the four months of solitary confinement. Nobody to talk to. Nobody to see.

T: So you were in the same cell there at Omori the whole time you were there?

B: Yes. With the exception of the last two weeks, when the war was over.

T: Right. From mid-April to mid-August you were in the same physical location, the same cell there at Omori.

B: With the exception of the last week or so when they brought in another guy; they put Siegel in with me. First time I got to see him or talk to him since we were captured, and before that the only time I got out of that cell would be taken to another part of that barracks or building to... they tried to get me to make propaganda tapes which I wouldn't. I'd get a beating for not cooperating. During the daytime I was not allowed to lay down. I either had to sit or stand, and I got caught laying down one time and I got a beating for that.

T: How large was the physical space in this cell? How large was it?

B: Oh, I'm going to guess and I'm going to say probably about eight by eight. Something like that. Nine by nine. Somewhere in that vicinity. And there was nothing in that room. Nothing except me and a hole cut in the corner to relieve myself. The prisoners, the regular prisoners, emptied it from the outside once a week.

T: So you had no face to face contact with any other Allied prisoners while you were there.

B: No. None whatsoever. I could see. They had a window on one side there where I could see the sky and so forth. I saw a B-29 come down one time, which was kind of sad. It got hit by anti-aircraft and I saw some guys bail out and one of the guys that bailed out, he opened his chute and his chute went up in flames. I thought, you poor son of a gun. You managed to get out and get the chute open, and then it went out in flames. It kind of shook me a little bit.

(2, A, 30)

T: Sure.

B: But I had made up my mind. During that time, I was lousy; and to pass the time I would delouse myself every afternoon and kill one hundred fifty, two hundred lice. Believe it or not. Every day. From my flying suit and my body. During that time, of course, I had dysentery so bad I had lost control of my bowels there for a while and passed out a few times. And I had pellagra there at the end, before I was taken out that cell. My tongue would swell up. I had difficulty swallowing. And one small bowl of water a day. There was very little food value in it at all. That's what happened.

T: Did you get any rice during the day?

B: The only time I got rice was the time that I was in Nagoya Castle.

T: So you didn't get rice balls either at Omori.

B: No. None whatsoever. Not one grain of rice.

T: So you just had this soup-like...

B: Wild grain. It was, like my wife says, cattle feed or something. I had made up my mind at that time. During that particular time, like I say, the beatings I could take, the lack of food, but the worst part of the whole thing was solitary confinement because after a while your mind starts playing tricks on you.

T: What do you mean by that? How did it impact you?

B: You go through different moods. You find yourself crying sometimes. You find yourself doing strange things. You find yourself sometimes beating your head against the wall. Your fist or something. You're losing your marbles so to speak. Or mind, if you want to put plainly. There's nobody to talk to, nobody to see. Day after day after day. Week after week. And incidentally, it never leaves you your entire life. You manage to live with it. You get moody sometimes, but thanks to treatment and to an understanding wife, bless her and she's listening, but without her I don't think I'd be alive today. Truthfully.

T: Did you devise any strategies for yourself in the cell at Omori to kind of manage the time in the situation?

B: The only thing I did was once a day I would take my fingernail and I would make a mark on the wall trying to keep track of the days. And I lost three days someplace in that particular time.

T: Were you able to keep fairly decent track of what day it was then?

B: No. I just made the mark on the wall. It was just one more day. Like I say, I knew nothing from then on. I didn't know Roosevelt had died. I didn't know how the war was going. The only thing is, towards the end there before I was liberated, there was a Marine that was taken from the Philippines and a guy by the name of Sprowles, and thank God for him. Once a week he would come around and he'd police the area. In other words, clean up the area outside my cell wall and the outer perimeter of the gate. He would always have a Japanese guard with him. Almost all the time. Now and then, being that the guards, they had Japanese guards up front, and of course one would stop momentarily for a minute or two or whatever and shoot the breeze with his buddies, well, Sprowles would go on cleaning up the area on the way and he would get to me. If he didn't have a Japanese guard at that particular time, he would whistle the song "Amapola." I don't know whether you know the song or not?

T: No.

B: But it was popular back before the war. During the first part of the war. Anyhow, if he did not have a Japanese guard he would whistle the song "Amapola." Don't ask me how we come to do this but it happened for a few times before we were liberated. Anyhow, then he would wait for me to talk to him through the wall because I could hear anybody coming down the passageway. It was only a sentence or two. But, you know, I do remember, and I will to my dying day, the last thing that he said to me. The guy died in the nineties incidentally. But the last thing I remember him saying, "Hang in there, son," he says. "You'll be home for Christmas." And that sounded good to me. I didn't believe him at the time, but it sounded good to me.

(2, A, 73)

T: So certain things brought a more optimistic mood for you, or a more positive mood.

B: True. Yes.

T: You mentioned moods swinging back and forth sometimes.

B: Yes. Absolutely. That's what happens to a person that's in solitary. Every time I meet a prisoner of war from different wars and so forth, even up to and including the Iraq War, well, Kuwait, that area there. I mean they had a few of them that were in there for twenty days or something. Or the lady pilot that was captured at that time. [I ask them:] What was the worst part of being a prisoner of war? And would you believe that almost one hundred percent would say solitary confinement? I mean, the beatings you can take and everything else. Lack of food. But being alone with nobody to see, nobody to talk to it affects you, mister, it sure does. Yes.

T: How often were you interrogated or questioned by the Japanese there at Omori?

B: After I got to Omori, I was not interrogated for what I knew. It was them trying to get me to make a propaganda tape, which was a wire recorder at that time. And this happened several times. When I refused, I remember he asked me, "Why won't you?" I said—the only thing I could think of was—I said, my commanding officer said I shouldn't. And boy! I'd get it then.

T: How did they pitch that to you in a sense about the propaganda. They made the pitch in English obviously.

B: Oh, yes. Definitely.

T: How did they ask you about that?

B: Well, they wanted me to tell them how things were going so great, and being a prisoner of war wasn't that bad at all and so forth. But I just refused.

T: Did they literally just ask you and say, hey, Price, will you make these tapes for us?

B: No. They said, you will. And I said no, I won't. And I didn't. I took the beatings for it. I could have been killed I guess. But young and stubborn or whatever. Defiant. I just didn't, and I wouldn't. But one thing, I made up my mind that I was not going to die of my own accord. That if I didn't make it back, they were going to have to kill me. But, thank God, the good Lord was there looking after me. August 15 was when I finally got out a cell and finally got to wash my hands in the bay. Take a bath and so forth. With the other special prisoners.

T: Almost four months exactly then.

B: Four months and ten days.

T: In solitary confinement. As far as dealing with solitary confinement, would you have considered yourself a particularly religious person at that time?

B: No. Not especially. Sure I was brought up a Lutheran and so forth, but like I say, sure, I believed in God and the Bible and so forth. I wasn't a fanatic by any means. I'm in your hands, Lord. I said, I hope I can make it back. But your will is it.

T: From that comment then, did you find yourself relying on faith or looking for divine help in your own situation then or not really?

B: Not really. I was just looking for peace of mind. My life was in his hands. But I made up my mind that I wasn't going to die on my own accord. But if it had been probably much longer I probably would have, because of the pellagra. When I got out, I weighed myself. With my clothes on it was one hundred four pounds, which was not all that bad considering what some of the other ones were.

(2, A, 120)

T: But you lost that weight all in a little over four months.

B: That's true.

T: The thing about the amount of food you got. Being hungry all the time...

B: *(laughing then vehement)* Yes! You always think about what you had when you were back home. The hot fudge sundaes and things like that, and mom's cooking certain dishes. Oh, yes!

T: Was that something that was just on your mind all the time? Kind of being hungry.

B: Just about. Just about. Like I say, what else was there actually to think about? Well, some of the other things that used to be...but it always came back to food, because you were hungry.

T: But you have to, in a sense, spend your time thinking about things, I mean sort of mentally engaging yourself?

B: That's true. Yes.

T: Or did you find your mind just kind of drawing a blank after a while?

B: No. Not really. I had my faculties. My mind was clear yet. Like I say, I went all that time with no medical treatment whatsoever and things like that. I mean, unless you've been there and done that, why, like I say, I could take the beatings. I could take the lack of food. I could take the lack of medical treatment. But I suffer from claustrophobia to this day. I cannot be... well, I can't say left alone, because there are times when I get moody and so forth that I just want to think, but I know things around me are normal, but I can't stand being in a crowd either where I can't move. It's impossible for me.

T: So that's one of the things you would definitely link to your experience as a POW.

B: Absolutely. I spent months and months at the Veterans Hospital. In fact, when I got back I was in the hospital from when I got back in the middle of October until three days before I was discharged.

T: And when were you discharged?

B: March 28 I think it was, of 1946. I was in the hospital from the time I got back until three days before I got discharged from Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

T: Let me ask you. It's not chronologically correct here, but since you're talking about that, let me ask you about the treatment you got when were back in the States. When did you arrive actually back Stateside?

B: Okay. Let's see. We were... I gotta back up... getting out of a cell on August 15.

T: No problem. We can do that too.

B: Put this in chronologic line, if it's all right with you.

T: Let's go back to August 15. Was your removal from that cell rather sudden or did you sort of sense something changing?

B: No. They took us out and I remember they sat us down outside the building and I just sat there in the sun wondering what's going on, because things were different. In the meantime they'd taken out all the sadistic guards and just left the token guards around there. As I say, I didn't know what was going on but I got my first bath, shave and a haircut. And put in a cell and with the special prison in the barracks. The special prisoners for a few days, because we still weren't allowed to converse with anybody in the camp. But after about the third day or so we were allowed to mingle throughout the camp and talk to everybody. So we knew the war was over and...

T: Did you get any kind of an announcement saying to you individually or others that the war was over or did you just kind of learn it?

(2, A, 168)

B: We just kind of learned it. The regular prisoners there, they kept track of things. They had built a radio. A little crystal set or something. So they knew fairly much what was going on. When I got out, of course, the word was spread around like that. We knew that the war was over. Will you excuse me for about a minute or two?

T: Absolutely. So Lieutenant Greene had a military career and a military family.

B: That's true. Yes.

T: What kind of condition was Siegel in physically when you saw him? About the same as you? Better or worse?

B: Siegel was in a little bit better condition. Of course he, like I say, he tore open his hip on that piece of blister that I left in there. But outside of that and the beatings he got, why, he was in not too bad a shape. And I think of the three of us he was in better shape. He played football in college in Schenectady before going into the service. So he was in pretty good shape and, of course, they kept you in real good shape in cadets in the service.

T: Now how long was it from the time you were removed from your cell there until you actually left Omori?

B: About two weeks. Got out of the cell on August 15 and after a few days we got to mingle with everybody else. The regular prisoners. Those taken on Corregidor and Bataan. And in the meantime they had some carriers off the coast of Japan and the fighter pilots, they would take up candy bars and cigarettes and stuff like that and come over and drop them in the camp. Because as you notice on the picture you saw, that we put a sign on our roofs what this camp was and the number of prisoners and also Pappy Boyington was here.

T: Right.

B: Okay?

T: So the Americans knew this camp was here and knew that you people were in it.

B: Up until that time when we were bombing Japan, we didn't know where not a single prison camp was. They didn't mark them. So like I say, they dropped cigarettes and candy bars to us. Then about a week after that the B-29s came over and they just dropped platforms full of clothes and food and things like that to us. Then on August 29, well I should say 28, we noticed in the bay there that you could almost walk from one end to the other without getting your feet wet with the number of ships out there. The next day, the twenty-ninth, three Higgins boats came in and I think Harold Stassen was the leader of that group.

T: Stassen from Minnesota. Yes.

B: And came in and liberated us and I noticed these sailors, they all had .45's strapped to them and a Thompson submachine gun cradled in their arms. And they came in and the Japanese colonel in charge of it said, "It's getting kind of late. Let them stay here for another night." And Stassen said, "You better get yourself out of the way before you get hurt because these guys are going. They're going out to the hospital ship." The *Benevolence*. Which was new at that particular time. This is what happened.

T: Did you leave at that point then? That same day?

B: We left that same day. Went out to the hospital ship *Benevolence*, where we got a shower and clean clothes and so forth, and we had something to eat too. Stood in line for a quick physical. I remember too, you know, it may seem trivial, but it was a lot. Standing in line there in these wards with their clean sheets on the beds and nice fluffy pillows with white pillowcases. I, and I found other POWs doing the same thing, punching our fingers into the pillow and stuff like that and feeling it. But not one person would lay down and mess up the bed. Not one person would lay down or sit down on the edge of the bed. Even though they said go ahead. No way. We got our physical and so forth and something to eat.

(2, A, 222)

T: What about those beds? What was it that held you back? Because it sounds like after months of laying on concrete or wooden floors that might be pretty nice.

B: I felt it was too good for me. It was so clean and so neat that I couldn't disturb it. So we didn't. I didn't. Like I say, I did not see one person lay down. Anyhow, after I got through... The bad cases were kept there and flown out of there then. Down to Guam I think it was. Other guys that weren't in that bad of shape because you know,

we had two weeks to more or less recuperate and get a little bit of stuff in our stomachs and so forth. I was taken off of there and I was put on the LST *Monitor* which carried tanks. I was overnight on that and then I was transferred over to the DE *Gosland*, destroyer escort. Incidentally that was built in Michigan. For two days we docked at Yokohama and we got on a—what do they call it, a six by six?

T: A truck. Yes.

B: Truck. And we flew back to Tokyo, which was not that far actually. Yokohama is not that far from Tokyo to Atsugi air base. There's where they had the Red Cross and I saw the first American woman there after all these months, and she looked pretty sweet to me. We had coffee and donuts and got on a plane and flew down to Okinawa. I was there for three days at Okinawa and they flew me down to Manila. I was there for two weeks and that's when I got to send a telegram back home. Then I got on board a boat. Now I call it a boat. You call it a ship. It used to ferry people between Boston and New York City. We came back to the States. We had to stop at Eniwetok in the Marshalls to refuel, and I think it was something like twenty-one days, I think it took us, to get back to San Francisco.

T: This makes it, what, the end of September, beginning of October?

B: Yes. It was in October when I got back. Middle of October.

T: Were both of your parents alive at this time?

B: Yes. Up until that time they didn't know I was alive. But I carry in my wallet a clipping from the defunct Detroit *Times*. The passage they had in there that told my mother that I was alive and a prisoner of war being liberated.

T: So she went a number a months without knowing anything?

B: All that time until after the war was over. The Japanese did not notify our government that we were alive.

T: Were you able to send any kind of a telegram or a message when you were liberated to your folks?

B Yes. I sent a telegram from Manila. I got back to the Presidio in Frisco and I got a three minute telephone call that I could call home. I got back there and that was quite a thing. We got back to Presidio and I got in this unit, barracks, whatever it is, and threw my stuff down and I was back in the States and walked up to the lieutenant who was in charge of the ward, and I said, "Lieutenant, where can I get a pass to go to town?" I mean I just got there. And he said, "Well, have you had your physical yet?" And I said, "No, sir." He says, "Then you can't have a pass." I said, "Lieutenant, what time do you want me back in?" And he said, "Try to get back here in order to stand physical and go through your physical". So me and another fellow,

we took off and we had one great time that night. We got back in time to not get any sleep but to stand in formation. I've got a picture of me, and I look like I was just about able to stand I guess it was. I won't tell you what I did.

T: I can use my imagination. I've talked to a lot of guys.

B: That was when they pinned the medal, the Purple Heart medal on me. The first one (*chuckles*).

T: Do you recall the phone call back to your folks and what transpired in the three minutes you had on the phone?

B: Well, my good mother, she wanted to know if I had all my arms and legs and I said, "Yes mom." I said, "I'm in good shape. Don't worry about it." In three minutes you can't say really too much. But it was peace of mind for her because when they gave her the telegram that I was missing in action, that had an effect on my dad. He had a mild stroke because I guess what went through his mind. I was daddy's boy. I'll admit it. But I did have one sister that died in 1934 at the age of thirteen. She was the oldest. Died of TB and of course now here I was just turned twenty and they thought I was dead. Of course Dad was beginning to wonder if he could raise a family to adulthood.

T: So your being a POW was very hard on your folks it sounds like.

B: But they didn't know I was a POW.

T: Being missing rather. I'm sorry.

B: Missing in action. That's true.

T: Did you have any other brothers who were in service?

B: Yes. I had two brothers. My next brother was born in 1924. He was in the paratroopers, and he fought in Korea. He made two jumps there. He died last year. Yes, he did pretty good.

T: In World War II were you the only one in your family in service?

B: The only one in my family because at that time... I went in at eighteen, and I was born in '28 and my other brother, the next one, was born in '31. So that made him...

T: He was too young, wasn't he?

B: Too young to go.

T: Yes. Yes. When's the first time you actually saw your folks again after you got back?

B: I spent a couple weeks in the Presidio there. Then they flew me to Vaughn General Hospital in Hines, Illinois, just outside Chicago. After I was there a while I managed to get a pass home. Didn't tell my folks. I took a train home and got off the train and I got on a streetcar which I always loved to ride and rode to the city limits there in Dearborn, Detroit, and I took a taxi home from there. The folks didn't know I was coming home. So. And this was in the evening. I walked in the back door and my folks were always sitting in the living room in the evening like that. My mother saw me. My dad didn't. When I came in the back door. And she jumped up and she yelled, "Bill!" well, my dad's name was Bill. Although it was Edward, but they called him Bill. And the way she said it, he thought she was having a stroke or something you know. Until he saw me. Then of course there were all kinds of tears and hugs and stuff. But that was quite a reunion. Quite a reunion.

T: And you came unannounced as well so your poor folks had no time to prepare themselves.

B: They did not. No. But they knew I was alive but they had never seen me or anything, and just knew what I told them you know, that I was all right and like that.

T: How much time did you spend at home there on that pass?

B: I had a thirty day leave there and then went back. Then, I guess after a while I got another leave and went home and when I went back I was there for a while. Then, like I say, in March, I was discharged from there to go to Fort Sheridan which was an induction and separation center. The third day I was there I was discharged.

T: When you were home with your folks, let's say that first thirty days or even later, how much were they curious to know about the specifics of your prisoner experience?

B: I'm sure they were very curious and so forth, but they didn't press me. They didn't ask me and I didn't offer. At that particular time. That was one of the things that I got over sometime. I'd say the bad part about a former prisoner of war, and some of them hold it in them until the day they die, they never bring it out. And consequently it plays on their mind and it really affects them. Like I say, I spent months and months in psychiatric and the first time I got in front of a psychiatrist, a beautiful lady, wonderful woman, and I asked her two questions. I said, "What in the hell am I doing here?" She says we're going to find out. I said "Well, what am I going to learn?" She says you're not going to learn a thing. She says I am going to learn from you. Which was true. That's what I found out. But she helped me greatly. I mean I don't know what I would have done without her because she was wonderful.

(2, A, 377)

T: And when did you first –

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 378.

B: – whatever it took to get over this. Just to be with somebody like him. A guy. You know, we're a special breed. These POWs. More than anything else. Because when you talk to somebody, especially a POW or former POW, ex-POW, you know that he's been through, what you've been through, and he believes what you are saying. Which meant a heck of a lot. Because sometimes you get the feeling that, hey, what am I telling somebody else for? They don't believe me.

T: Did you ever have that impression, Bill, that you told somebody about your POW experience and they didn't believe you?

B: Oh, more than once. For years. For years and years. That's why, you know, the only people that really knew what I went through was my wife and a few close friends. But even that was a blessing because some of them don't even talk about it until the day they die. Believe me, they suffer mentally. Mentally they do.

T: How about with your folks? You said initially there was a reluctance on both sides really to ask or to tell. How did that change over the years?

B: I really don't know. I guess just little by little they learned to accept it and of course, little by little I came out with what had happened. Because I felt that they would understand. But still in all, like I say, for a long, long time that the only ones that really I felt comfortable with was another former POW. And that's why when I retired I devoted my life more or less to helping veterans in some ways, and especially the POW group.

T: It sounds like you had a real turn around then, from being someone who didn't talk about it or almost neglected that part of your experience to someone who then really worked to deal with it and also to help others.

B: That's true. There were times in the past that I used to give a lot of talks of my experiences to school children, to senior citizens, to other veteran's groups too. One of the hardest ones at first was a fellow that was with Merrill's Marauders. Asked me if I would be their guest speaker. You know, those guys were years behind in Burma there, behind the Japanese, and they went through hell. So my first thing, question was just, what can I tell you that you haven't been through already? And he says, oh, you'll find something. I did give the talk and it went over great really. Great bunch of guys.

T: When were you able to start, or when you ready to start, making talks or sharing your own experiences? Did it take a number of years?

B: Oh, definitely. I never gave talks even after I got down there for a while. Like the wife says, after I joined the POW organization and got talking with these guys too, where you could really come out with it. I remember the first time I did give a talk was to a POW who was a P-51 fighter pilot in England and his granddaughter was in the fourth or fifth grade in elementary school and he asked me if I would give a talk with him and another POW to their class. Since I had never done it before but I felt, hey, I'm with two other guys to help me through. After that time, why, after a few times of giving talks with another person, another POW, that I could do it on my own then. It worked pretty good, because every time I gave a talk it was really welcomed. And it perpetuated history too.

T: Yes. That's absolutely right.

B: Since that time I've been in various things like, believe it or not, here in 1996 down in Americus, I was in a stage play. I had never been in a stage play or anything like that in my life and was finally talked into it and what it amounted to was this stage play went on for several years. I only did it for the first time, first session. It was a Civil War POW drama and there was myself and a Korean POW that at certain times during the play we would be on stage in the wing and when the spotlight came to us we would give a short talk for about a minute or so of part of our experience which coincided with what was going on in the play. Being a prisoner of war was still pretty much the same. Throughout the years. It went over real well. It was at the Southwestern College there—university. Southwestern Georgia.

(2, B, 432)

T: In the years you've been talking more openly about your own experiences, how has that helped you individually do you think?

B: Great. But I'm ready to retire now. If I can learn to say no. See, I'm in my second year as the State Commander for the POWs for Georgia. I didn't know how to say no to somebody and consequently, I'm involved in so many things here that there's not enough time. I'm not doing the things that I thought I was going to do when I retired. I other words, do traveling and this and that because I don't have any time to. It's one thing right after another. One appointment. It's like what I'm doing now.

T: Right. Talking to me on the phone.

B: Right. I mean that's just one minor part of it. But I'm a trustee for the Andersonville Fund.

T: Now you were married in '48, and your wife's name is Maxine. When you were dating or first married, how much did Maxine know about your POW experience?

B: That's odd. How I come to marry her, because I knew her when she was a little snout-nosed kid, to put it crudely. But her brother was my best friend. I went to school with him from the third grade on. Graduated with him. When I got in the service, of course, I'd come home and I'd pal around with him and got to talking to her and so forth. Then when I went overseas I couldn't tell anybody where I was going. I knew it was in the Marianas because that's where the B-29s were.

T: Right.

B: I would write to her brother, but her brother wouldn't write to me. But she would write to me. Okay? So, getting back to, it was just before I went overseas. I said, I'm going overseas and I don't know where I'm going, but it will be one of the three islands, the Marianas, Guam, Saipan or Tinian. So, I says, I'll let you know where it is by—she only had one brother by the name of Bob—I said, if I go to Saipan, I'll ask you how your brother Sam is. If I go to Tinian, I'll ask you how your brother Tom is. If I go to Guam, I'll ask you how your brother George is. So when you find out, I said, you can tell my mother and my dad. So of course it was Guam, and I asked her how her brother George was and that's how she knew first where I was. Before my parents knew. When I came back she was grown up and beautiful and we started going together and in 1948, April 24 we got married.

T: Here's a person that knew you before you were a POW.

B: That's true.

T: Did she ask a lot of questions of you when you got back, or did you volunteer a lot of information? How did those conversations go?

B: It got around both ways I guess. I guess she knew more about me than anybody else at the time. My experiences. Of course, because I'm married to her. It's a trust. A living trust. She helped me tremendously in my comeback or my moods and stuff like that. Really.

T: Did you find it easier to talk to your wife than you did to your folks?

B: Oh, yes. Definitely. Definitely. Because it's just one of those things. I mean you're married to her. You're together. I mean, you're one.

T: Yes. When did your folks pass away, Bill?

B: My dad passed away in 1968 of prostate cancer, and my mother lasted about three years longer. 1971. Actually when my dad died she just gave up I guess. Even though she was five blocks away from me and it was more or less I took care of her, she would not move in with us or she had her own home and being old fashioned she was going to live there. Of course, I had my brother there yet and so forth. Even when she was by herself I would run over there. Even before my dad died. When

my dad was going, the last month or so, I'd run over there when she called me no matter time of day or night. But took care of her the best we could. It finally got to a point where we had to put her into a nursing home.

(2, B, 481)

T: Before they both died, how much did your folks ultimately know about your POW experience?

B: I think before they died they knew pretty much what I went through and so forth. Just let it go at that then.

T: So in a sense happy or content to know up to a certain point.

B: That I was well, I was okay, and I was all in one piece. That's all that mattered.

T: You mentioned, back to your wife, that she's helped you over the years. I wonder if you could be more specific in the ways that you've felt that she's been able to help you.

B: These moods and so forth that would come back. You find yourself, oh, how should you put it? It's kind of hard to say. But what she put up with and helped me along just by being there mostly. Talking to me. Knew when to approach me and when not to approach me. At certain times. To me that meant everything in the world because I knew I could count on her. She was my crutch.

T: You mentioned about the effects of the solitary confinement. Did you notice almost a personality switch in yourself? Is that what it was?

B: I would have to admit that whether I realized it or not, there was. Definitely. At the time. Hopefully I became a better man when I came out. Sure. When I came out I tried to make up at first, before I was married, I tried to make up for things that I thought had been taken away from me by being in the service and as a prisoner of war. I really burned the candle at both ends and in the middle too, I think there, for a short time. I worked. I had a motorcycle. I'd go flying. I was really living and doing a lot of drinking. With a lot of other people. Thank God when I ran out of money I ran out of friends and I stopped drinking.

T: Were you drinking more heavily than before you went in the service?

B: Oh, yes. There were times there, and I haven't told too many people this, but there were times there I don't know when I got home. I can say I was usually with somebody and I gave the keys to them. My car keys. This was before I got rid of the car. Like I say, the restaurant that we used to stop in on the way home, I walked in there one time and the manager came over to me and he said, "Bill, one more

outburst like that," he said, "That you pulled last night. Don't even bother coming near this place." And I don't remember that. I don't remember that.

T: So this period between '46 when you were discharged and '48 when you were married you were making up for lost time in a sense.

B: Not that long. Let's see. Give me credit... '46 and there for about less than a year. Maybe a half a year. Maybe a little over. Something like that. I had a little bit of money accumulated, because my pay accumulated while I was a prisoner of war and they gave me one lump sum. In fact, they gave me two hundred dollars there in the Philippines before I came home. What the hell did they give me that for, because the only way I could spend it is on the boat. There's no place on the boat to spend it. So when I got back, then I got discharged. I got the full amount. I went through it. I found out who my true friends were when I ran out of money.

T: Did you live at home with your folks when you first got out of the service?

B: Oh, yes. Yes, I did. I lived home until the day I got married.

T: And that was April 1948.

B: April 24 of '48. Yes.

T: When you got really back from Japan, or before you were discharged, you were at Hines Hospital, right?

B: That is correct.

(2, B, 528)

T: And then...

B: The General Hospital in Hines. That's at the university there. I don't think it's there anymore. That hospital.

T: It doesn't ring a bell. How much did you have of dreams or nightmares about your POW experience?

B: Yes. Many. Many. In fact, that's where I first... incidentally, I was in the hospital there being treated. That's the first time I come down with malaria too. I never had it when I was overseas, thank God. But when I got back, I used to get malaria quite bad. It used to paralyze me. For a while.

T: How long did the malaria last? I mean because it comes and goes I know.

B: The way it started out, when it first hit me was, it was pretty bad. I could feel it coming on. A matter of just a couple days. It'd be like you were coming down with the flu. Then I remember the first time it really hit me was, I was working midnights I think it was. At a factory. I got real sick. I could feel this paralysis coming out on me. It would start with my fingertips and my toes and it would work its way. Everything would go to sleep. And work its way up my arms, up my legs. I remember my boss there says, "What, were you out on a drunk or something?" I said, "I haven't had a drink." So they took me to the doctor's and while I was there my muscles, when they would paralyze they would freeze. And I remember I had my thumb in my fist and the paralysis, the first paralysis went up as far as my mouth. I thought I was going to go all the way up but it didn't. Actually the supervisor, the superintendent, I said, "Take my thumb out. I'm breaking it." And this is a man, a two hundred pounder, a young fellow and you know, he could not undo my fingers. They were frozen so much. And the paralysis would be there for a while and then all of a sudden it would break and the sweat would just roll off me like I was under a shower or something. And the paralysis would go away. And each time I would get this it would be less and less severe, until finally after a couple years or so it been more or less just a tingling and I haven't had anything like that for many years. I don't miss it. I'll tell you that.

T: That sounds terrible. Dream or nightmares. Did those start right away after you were released?

B: Pretty much so. Yes. Pretty much so. Oh, I don't know. Just like the psychiatrist said when I asked her when am I going to get over this, and she said you never will. But she said you will learn to live with it, and I have. Really. As far as dreams, the bad dreams I don't have. The severe bad dreams. Everybody has nightmares. Something like that. But nothing compared to the way it first started out.

T: So it's decreased over time in frequency and intensity?

B: Oh, yes. Definitely.

T: Were there certain images that recurred time and time again or was it different things for you?

B: Different things. Some of it really didn't make sense. My big problem, even today, is staying away from crowds and so forth. For instance, the last bad experience I had was several years ago at a fair at the fairgrounds here. Maxine and I went and this Vietnam veteran lady, she asked me if I wanted to go to the—who was playing there at that time? Bruce Springsteen type. She said they were going—this is in nighttime, too—the fair. He was going to, at the end of his program, he was going to bring out the POW flag. And she said she would like me to be there when it happened. I said, well, fine.

This was a shoulder to shoulder deal. I mean it was crowded. So we wound our way up near the front and everything was going great. I was ill at ease of course

and was all right until they started playing—you know how these bands are. These modern bands. Bang! Bang! type, you know. When they brought on the strobe lights and flashing them and they started the smoke going up in the air, this is when I lost control more or less, almost. Because I had to get out of there. I think if I would have fainted it was so crowded I wouldn't have fallen over. All I could say was, "Get me out of here!" And to this day I've never been back to another one.

T: What did that prompt for you? The noise and the smoke.

(2, B, 594)

B: Air raids in a prison cell where you couldn't go anyplace except crawl in a corner and hope to hell that you didn't get bombed or killed.

T: So the helplessness of being unable to escape the falling bombs.

B: Not being able to do anything about it. The helplessness, is right. Yes.

T: You know, it's curious how being in a solitary confinement situation which is horrible the way you describe it, that it's a crowd situation that prompted some kind of a reaction from you.

B: The point was there that I had no control over what was going to happen and with this noise and these strobe lights, these flashing lights like bomb bursts, and the smoke coming up too and things like that. I couldn't, there's nothing I could do about it.

T: Yes.

B: And it brought back memories. A nightmare.

T: Sure. Now you also mentioned that the VA has been helpful for you since you've been visiting them.

B: Very. Especially this one psychiatrist. She's no longer there. She left there and she went with her husband. He was also a psychiatrist. When I had to have my protocol I was lucky enough to get her because she understood it.

T: Did you not approach the VA after the war or did they not approach you? Because you didn't have contact for decades.

B: No. I wanted to forget about it. I wanted to put everything associated with my experience away from me. I wanted no help whatsoever and even though I had problems, it wasn't until after I got down here.

T: That means the thirty years you worked at Ford that the people you worked with didn't know much about your experiences?

B: No. No. Not really. I mean sure, they knew I was a POW but they didn't press me and I didn't offer anything. It's the past. One of those things that you want to forget about. Thank God I had a lot of help, an awful lot of help. Up until that time that I started going there, there was my wife and friends.

T: I didn't ask if you had any children of your own.

B: Yes. I have one daughter, born in 1951. That makes her, what fifty-two, fifty-three?

T: Yes.

B: And two grandchildren. A grandson and a granddaughter. And the granddaughter I think is twenty-five and the grandson is—the granddaughter was born on our thirtieth wedding anniversary.

T: Hey, that's a nice irony.

B: And the grandson was born the day after our thirty-second anniversary.

T: Gosh. So that's back in 1980.

B: Right.

T: How much did your daughter know growing up, or how much did she ask?

B: She didn't press it I don't think. Of course, like you say, she was our pride and joy and we tried to give her everything that we didn't get when we were growing up, and thank God she managed to keep her nose clean, and got married, had two kids, and got rid of a worthless husband, and was a single mother there for, how many years? Ten, twelve. She got married a second time. Wife says when she was in history class. See my mind doesn't really... I never gave a talk to her class or anything.

T: That would have been before the time you were ready to do that by your own.

(2, B, 648)

B: Right.

T: She'd be in high school in the late 1960s.

B: That's correct. She graduated in '69.

T: And that was before the time you said you were able or willing to talk about things.

B: 1986, I think, or '87 is when I gave my first talk. Something like that.

T: Was it hard for you to say yes to that first talk?

B: In a way, yes, but after mulling it over in my mind, I'm with a very good friend, two very good friends, that have been through the same thing I have more or less, and it helped me along. Really it did. And it went over real good. In fact this P-51 pilot whose granddaughter was in there, he was the one who talked me into it and he was quite a character. Loved the guy. He was down to earth, brash, and talked like it. It surprised me. The way he talked. He didn't cuss or anything like he normally does when he got into the class. In front of these kids. And it went over real great.

T: Now the trying to forget stuff. You had only two other members of your crew that survived. You mentioned being close like a family. How much contact did you have with them over the years?

B: Still do.

T: Both of them?

B: Siegel. We tape back and forth. On a cassette tape. At least once a month. In fact I haven't seen him actually for a couple years. I think it was about three years ago when we had our biannual 29th Bomb Group Reunion just west of Boston, and he lives in Schenectady, and his wife in the meantime had a stroke and he couldn't come to that one. Normally they did. When she had this stroke, that laid her up quite a bit. When we left the reunion there, we went over and visited him for a few days and came home. As far as Smokey, I haven't seen him in years. We did go out there one time and visit him, but we do Christmas cards and a phone call now and then. We still keep in contact. Yes. The odd thing that happened here was we lost contact with all the wives and mothers of the crew...

T: That was the next question actually. The couple of widows you had, right?

B: Oh, yes. Yes. My mother used to keep contact with the navigator's mother and after he was killed she was remarried a second time. Her and her husband they started traveling the United States and they wound up here in Alabama and they bought a mansion. They saw a mansion they fell in love with and they bought it. They put it back in repair to the way it used to be during the Civil War, including the safe that they had. When she died [we] lost contact with everybody with [one] exception; we went to a reunion down in Tucson, [and] I got a phone call previous to

that from the daughter of the pilot who, after he died, her mother, after a while, remarried and didn't tell her a thing about her dad until she was a teenager.

T: Holy cow!

B: She knew that he was a B-29 pilot killed in World War II. At a fair or something in California where she lives, an air show, she happened to bump into a fellow that was in our group. In fact our squadron I think it was, wasn't it? Yes. She was talking to him at this air show and she said, "My daddy was a pilot of B-29s in World War II." And he asked her who and she said, "Frank Crowcroft." He said, "I know him, and I know the crew and everything. Three of them got out alive." She said, "Is that right?" So he gave her my name and phone number as well as the other two and she called me.

This was when we started getting together and then we went to the reunion down in Tucson. She came with her husband, and we had a great time down there. That's when all three of us were there. I think the last time that Smokey was at a reunion. There was Smokey, Siegel and I and, of course, Crowcroft. And the sad part of it then was that the next reunion, two years after that, we put on a reunion here for the group in Marietta, and she was intending to come, but she had talked her mother into coming, and believe it was just a couple weeks before the reunion, her mother died of a heart attack. So we never did get to see her.

(2, B, 735)

T: One wonders if those two events are connected.

B: How about that?

T: When you got together with the daughter, what kind of things was she curious to know?

B: She wanted to know everybody. She got in contact quite a bit then with Smokey, because Smokey lived more or less closer to us than she was. She lived just north of Sacramento. The Wolfe, the tail gunner, was an artist and he sketched each one of us. And she wound up with this book and that's when she gave me the picture that Wolfe had made of me. I've got it hanging on the wall. This is how she really got interested in it then. -

End of Tape 2. Tape 3, Side A, begins at counter 000.

Maxine Price: - including her mother.

B: Including her mother. Yes.

Maxine Price: And that's how she found out that the man she thought was her father was not. She found this in her closet.

B: Do you hear that?

T: Yes.

Maxine Price: She found this book and took it to her mother and wanted to know why that name for her was different than the rest of the family. And she went to a parade before that and she was real little and had asked her mother what is a veteran? And her mother explained it to her. And then when she found this book, her mother broke down and told her the whole story that she was born while her daddy was in the service and in prison camp.

T: So she didn't know anything about her own dad until that point?

B: That's true.

Maxine Price: Her mother had kept that all a secret. So when this girl came to Tucson, she came loaded with a whole lot of questions; and this is a lady who was a police officer and a school teacher and she really knew the question to [ask]. After that time, she went to visit a whole new family that she never knew she had. The pilot, Crowcroft, had a brother that looked exactly like him. The resemblance was so close that when she went to visit the family she saw the picture there and she thought it was her father.

T: Holy cow!

Maxine Price: It was really quite some story.

T: Yes. It sounds like it. So her mother had, once he was killed, had remarried and essentially had just pushed that out of her life.

Maxine Price: Absolutely. Either because the new father didn't want her to talk about it or something. I don't know why the reason was. She probably doesn't know either, but that was her first enlightenment that that was not her father. There was a whole new light there.

T: When was that Tucson get together?

B: It's gotta be five, six years ago.

Maxine Price: Eight years ago.

B: Eight years ago.

T: So you mean until eight years ago she really didn't know?

Maxine Price: No. She did not know.

T: She was well into her fifties?!

(3, A, 23)

Maxine Price: Oh, yes.

T: Or her forties anyway?

Maxine Price: In fact, on this tape recording that he was telling you about, of one of his missions...

T: Yes.

Maxine Price: They played it on a Sunday morning and I think it used to be called the Sunday Morning Army Hour or something. It was put on radio and everybody listened to that during the war. And they interviewed Siegel's wife and Crowcroft's wife and they spoke to each other across the country on the program, and that is on this tape recording. The commentator asked her, he said, did you have any questions for Mrs. Crowcroft, and Mrs. Siegel said—they called her Mac. Her nickname was Mac. She said, "Hi, Mac! How's the baby?" Well, the baby had been born while he was in prison.

T: And the baby was this girl?

B: Yes. Susan. Yes.

Maxine Price: That was Susan. Yes. She was the oldest, first baby.

T: The last question I had for you actually, is when you think about your own POW experience, if you can identify the ways that it has changed you personally, or changed your life really.

B: I hope it was for the good. I think it was for the good. I try to look at the other person's outlook and so forth and I try not to argue. I try to be as hospitable, and yet when I know I'm right, my wife has taught me this, stick by your guns (*chuckles*). But do it.

T: Are you less argumentative than, let's say before you were a POW? I mean did it change the way you approach people and situations you think?

(connection lost—re-dial)

B: Yes.

T: I'm sorry. I interrupted your sentence as well. Sort of talking about how if you feel that your personality is different in a way. In the way you approach people or situations.

B: Yes. How did I put that though? I think I'm a better person for it. I approach every person as an individual and try to get the good things out of them and overlook the adverse things. And my wife added something here. What was it you said?

Maxine Price: I don't know where he got cut off.

B: It was in the midst of what I was doing. He didn't hear you at all.

Maxine Price: Oh, okay. Well, after we retired and came down here and became associated with the POW organization, we got into volunteer work and just about one hundred percent of our outside activity is helping other people.

B: Yes.

T: Let me ask you, ma'am, how have you noticed or experienced a change in Bill really since the mid-1980s?

Maxine Price: I think he's a lot more patient. And a lot less restless. Not so quick to anger because I think he understands why. He can't sit still and he does something about it. He sort of knows now how to handle it better. And I do too. Because we came to this education more or less together. We didn't know there was a POW organization until shortly before we retired and moved down here.

T: Holy cow! So for...

Maxine Price: Know what it was all about.

(3, A, 56)

T: Yes.

Maxine Price: And the VA doesn't go out of their way to make you aware of the fact that you're entitled to anything, help, money or anything else.

T: So it fell on your shoulders for a number of decades, in other words.

Maxine Price: Well, more or less. And everything that happened, we just figured, okay. Whatever this is we're going to have to find out what it is. We're going to have to stick together and handle it. The best way we could.

T: Yes.

Maxine Price: I remember his first attack. After we were shortly married. Of malaria. I had no idea what was happening to him or how to handle it. But you learn.

T: Malaria is not something we grow up with in the north central part of the country.

Maxine Price: No. It was not just like a runny nose *(laughs)*.

T: Yes. So all those aftermath issues are things you had to sort of grow into or grow accustomed to?

Maxine Price: Every single one of them with no help at all except each other. But years ago times were different. People did stay together and work things out. You just didn't pick up and run. There wasn't any place to run. That was not what marriage was about.

B: It took me fifty-six years to train her the way she wants me.

T: And it sounds like you're both pretty happy with each other and your situation in life right now.

B: Well, after this many years you know, wouldn't want to change for anything.

Maxine Price: If you look at the average age at any of our reunions. The B-29 group reunion, POWs are even... Not so much the other veterans organizations because I'm fully involved in the one, and I do my best at that one and I don't join or take an office in any of the rest. But if you look at the couples, I would say from fifty percent to maybe seventy-five percent of them are couples who have stayed together that many years. Fifty year marriages. Sixty year marriages.

T: There's something to be said for that, isn't there?

Maxine Price: Yes. When you stop and think that over, that's a pretty heavy thought.

T: Yes, it is. *(gap in tape)* On the record, that's the last question I had for you, so I will say with the tape running, thank you very much for your participation and I'm glad we had this conversation today.

B: Well, if I helped you out I'm pleased. I can say. There's only one thing that I ask when I first talk to a person, is this is for free and is it for free for everybody.

T: Absolutely. Let me ask you... the solitary confinement piece that you discussed is unique among the POWs that I've talked to. It's slightly more than forty now. About half of whom are POWs of the Japanese. Bob Michelsen, another B-29 crewman, gave me your name. He was in a Kempeitai cell with some others, but all the other

POWs had close contact with people on a daily basis. And so your experience is entirely unique in that respect.

B: Mine was nothing in comparison to some of these guys like McCain and those guys in Vietnam that went through years of it.

T: Yes.

B: I mean, my God, I don't see how they have kept their sanity at all. Really.

T: It was years for a lot of those guys.

B: Yes.

(3, A, 93)

B: And the only ones that didn't make it, and there were many, that just gave up, and when you give up, mister, you can be in good health, and if you give up you're not going to make it.

T: Do you consciously remember yourself sort of saying I'm not going to give up?

B: I do. I definitely do. Yes. As bad as it was and, like I say, we did not even get a Band-Aid, a sympathy or even a look at by a doctor. I take that back. The doctor came in one time and looked. That's all. He just looked and turned around and walked back out again. I guess he was curious more than anything. But as far as medical treatment, none whatsoever. We got nothing.

T: So you were, when you left the cell at Omori there, you were in the same ripped, dirty flying suit that you were shot down in.

B: Four months and ten days with just me the way; the only thing that went overseas and came back with me was the talon on my flying suit. I've got that framed.

T: Everything else was lost there.

B: Right.

T: I wouldn't imagine you want the uniform back after the way you've described it.

B: No. I couldn't stand myself. I wish I could have had a picture of myself. Four months and ten... I didn't shave. Just twenty years old. I didn't have much of a beard. I had elongated sideburns which I pulled and they stuck out as horns. My chin whiskers curled up and looked like Uncle Sam or something I guess, only they were black. And my moustache, I had a good moustache and I used to bite the end of

it and twist it out and have a handlebar moustache. I didn't have much of a beard at all.

T: You would have looked like Methuselah, it sounds like, if you had a real beard there.

B: Then, of course, going that long without a haircut and it was matted and dirty and whatever. Oh, God. It's a good thing I couldn't smell myself.

T: Yes. You pretty much become immune to that after a while too, huh?

B: Because, like I say, I had dysentery there. There are times that I passed out. I had no control over my bowels whatsoever, so you can imagine the condition my suit was in, and me.

T: Boy. The dysentery is something you struggled with too then.

B: Oh, definitely. In fact I passed out a couple times there from... In fact, I remember that one time, and this was towards the end. This was right after Siegel was put in with me and these two came to the cell door and they opened it and, of course, you had to stand at attention. He and I stood at attention and the next thing I knew I had fallen over and I was struggling to get back on me feet and I had to get back up and stand at attention again. And I guess Siegel helped me. He told me later on, "I was so damned mad," he said, "But there wasn't anything I could do about it."

T: Did the Japanese come to your cell regularly there at Omori?

B: More or less just appeared through the door and that's all. I mean as far as anything else, there was only a few times that they came in and one was when they caught me lying on the floor. They came in a booted me again. My sore ribs and body.

T: Other than that they just basically ignored you, it sounds like.

B: Except to bring the food and all they do is pass the food through the opening in the steel door, a little door in the door. The bowl of food and water.

T: From your physical condition, I wonder how much longer you might have existed the way they were feeding you.

B: I don't think it would have been too much longer. Another thing too I found out. I don't know whether I mentioned it to you before. But I found out reading later on, that due to the impending invasion of Japan by the American forces in November, all prisoners of war in Japan were to be executed on August 29. That was the day I was liberated. So twice I was scheduled to be executed and twice I escaped it.

T: There's some mental strain right there with that on your mind.

B: At that particular time I didn't know.

T: But the first one you knew. They told you.

B: The first one they told me and, of course, it was a shock, but after he had left and he didn't beat me or didn't slap me or... He was civil to me. And after he left, I thought, well, hey, you know, they don't have to take me to Tokyo to do this. They could do it right here. So that more or less eased it somewhat if you can say. Of course you never know what they're going to do.

T: True. Mr. Price, thank you for your time today.

END OF INTERVIEW