



**Dr. Ray T. Matheny**

United States Army Air Corps

Tech Sergeant

European Theater

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Interviewer:

Rick Randle

**THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY**

**Rick:** We're very happy to have with us today Dr. Ray Matheny who is a WWII veteran and was a Flight Engineer on a B17 flying out of England. Where were you based in England Ray?

**Ray:** Well there was a little town nearby called '*Kimbleton*' and its about 85 miles north of London and Bedford being a larger town nearby.

**Rick:** And you were flying missions over Germany?

**Ray:** Oh yes, well all of the occupied territory by the Germans you know and that included south France almost clear down to the border of Spain and so deep into Germany several times.

**Rick:** So tell us about what it's like when you were going on those missions, how early you had to get up and what the routine was.

**Ray:** Well the routine was grueling to say the least. A mission call at the time that I was there was about two o'clock in the morning and you had about thirty minutes to wash up and you had to shave everyday because you wore oxygen masks and you couldn't have a bristly face with an oxygen mask, that would drive you crazy. So we had to look neat and appear like real soldiers all of the time, so nothing would pass in a relaxed state. We'd have to go down to the flight line and start preparing our aircraft. Ground crews took care of the airplanes very very well but when you're flying the airplane then you have certain responsibility to make sure that everything is up and up because errors can occur. So we were down there taking our guns out of hot oil storage. The removable parts of the guns, you know like the driving rods, receiver blocks and so forth were all soaked in hot oil and then we'd wipe these down and assemble our guns in positions; in my position for example was the top turret as Flight Engineer. And attend to all of the little details; we had to check the quantity of fuel. Even though the ground crews did all of this we had to go around and secure every fuel cap and make sure the little chain was not hooked underneath the cap and we had to check all of the oxygen systems to make sure every oxygen station was up and the armor, you know we had to go around and check all the spare ammunition. We carried about 1500 rounds of spare ammunition in wooden boxes stashed

strategically throughout the airplane and the pilots and navigator and bombardier, they had to attend to their duties too and get the right instruments and everything they needed for the flight. And then of course that took quite a bit of time and about five o'clock in the morning we would go to breakfast and there'd be a long line of ground personnel waiting to eat but they would shuffle us in past the ground personnel.

**Rick:** How many crews, how many planes would be on each mission?

**Ray:** Well our mission was to put up 36 airplanes at a time but rarely were 36 airplanes available because of various repairs that were needed from combat damage and other mechanical failures too had to be taken care of. So anyway in the chunnel line we'd be shuffled right up there and we'd get fresh eggs for our breakfast, which is really quite wonderful, and the poor ground crews had to have the powdered eggs you know. So anyway that preparation was going on and then after breakfast, getting close to the flight time at six o'clock in the morning or so we would go to briefing and there were several briefings. My briefing was with the pilots and the navigators and bombardiers and they would reveal what the target was for that day and we had no knowledge of any of this before of course and wanted to keep it secret right to the last moment. And then after that briefing, which is quite extensive at times, but we would go out to the airplane and get our parachute harnesses on. Each man had a harness that was tailored to his body and then we'd have chest-pack parachutes and we would assemble all of our heavy flying gear; our heavy sheep lined coats you know and heavy boots and we wore silk liner gloves and then wool gloves and then a hard leather glove over that and so you were ensconced with all kinds of gear you know and it's very necessary. You know the environment up there in the wintertime especially over Germany was very very severe, just terribly cold. So anyway we would wait on the flight line in our airplanes waiting for a signal to start engines and usually that was done by a flare that was fired from the control tower. There was no radio communication; there was radio silence all over so the Germans would not know about anything about an activity that was taking place. Surprise is the necessary approach to war. So we sat on the flight line and then finally we'd get the signal to start engines and then we would start the engines and then another signal would give us the clearance for takeoff.

**Rick:** Did they have electronic starters on those engines?

**Ray:** Oh yes, they had what was called '*initial starters*'. There's an electric motor starter that runs a flywheel for kinetic energy and a flywheel builds up high RPM's and then when you want to start the engine you engage that flywheel and it spins that engine over quite rapidly. It's a very large engine you know it's a 1,820 cubic engine; it's a pretty good size. A big radial engine, 1200 horsepower and that spins the engine over quite well and it starts up right on.

**Rick:** And so those missions started about seven o'clock in the morning?

**Ray:** Well it was, you know London; around England is 50 degrees north latitude so seven o'clock during that winter would be dark so we would have to take off in the dark. And taking off in the dark is a real difficulty because each group has to assemble on its own airplanes so they'll have combat formation. So when you take off you take off staggered; you have a series of runways on every airfield but one runway was 6,000 feet and that was the preferred runway because you had a 60-ton bomber you had to get off the ground and it was not very wide but we'd stagger the airplanes. Each one would pull into position like this staggered left and right on the runway and then this one would take off and then 20 to 30 seconds later this one would roll down the runway and then another and another and another until we'd get all 30 some odd airplanes up in the air. But then in the dark and often the weather was pretty severe, overcast the radio operators would tap out the code "K" and that would flash in a white light on the tail so as you took off you'd see flash, flash, flash, K, K, K and that's the airplane you'd try to follow and then form up at a higher altitude. And there were great difficulties because there were so many airfields that were close by for example Molesworth 303 group was just a short distance away from us and it was easy to mix up airplanes which was pretty severe.

**Rick:** With complete radio silence and no radar?

**Ray:** Oh no. No radar to guide us or anything like that, no control towers saying you know '*maintain at a certain altitude*'.

**Rick:** Well how do you get 38 planes in formation in the dark in bad weather?

**Ray:** Well it's really difficult because you have to climb above the weather if you're really going to form and we've had experiences where we would takeoff following the little flashing light and it would just simply disappear and our instructions were to climb out, turn right, maintain 500 feet a minute for so many minutes and climb in a spiral up out and then poke up above the overcast. And I can remember quite a memorable sight for me is coming out of the overcast up there and then watch B17's just poke up all over right out of the overcast.

**Rick:** Were there any midair collisions occurring?

**Ray:** Well unfortunately this is part of the danger too and in fact as the day that we were shot down that occurred; there was about a 1200 foot ceiling and so we took off and we were following our lead airplane and Molesworth also right nearby was under the same circumstances and under certain wind conditions the patterns of our airfields overlapped one another but for some reason or another one airplane from Kimble and one airplane from Molesworth I watched them, they had their running lights on and I could just see those lights like this and they come together and 'Boom' there was a big ball of fire and then both pieces of wreckage fell down and there were explosions and more fire and everything – and there were 20 men gone just like that and it was a bad way to start a mission. And what's more that same day, I didn't realize this until just a couple of years ago, another airplane from our group taking off had some difficulty, we don't know what it was, probably an engine problem and he couldn't make it and he crashed on takeoff and killed ten more people. There were 30 men gone before the mission hardly got off the ground.

**Rick:** How long on average were those missions? If you got up at 2:30 in the morning, by the time you got back how many hours would have elapsed?

**Ray:** It was a long time and of course it varied according to the target. Some targets are a long distance away and others are shorter. If you're going to France to bomb a rail station or something then that's not much of a flight, but we were gone six, eight hours, ten hours

sometimes and the trip down to the Noirtaise River in south France almost to Spain there, that was a long flight. I don't remember exactly how many hours but it was more than eight hours anyway. The real problem with that is you can't eat or drink once you take off and go on your mission and you're careful, a lot of men drank coffee in the morning well I never drank coffee I never liked the smell of it for one thing, all of my life. And men soon learned not to drink in the morning so you went all day without anything because it's very hard to relieve yourself in those airplanes and we've had a couple of bad experiences with men – parts of their anatomy got stuck to the frozen facilities there. And the oxygen that you breathe is not the oxygen you have in the hospital which is moisturized because your lungs need that moisture. This is dried oxygen so the moisture won't freeze up in the system so you're breathing that dry cold oxygen all those hours and usually at 10,000 feet the rule is you put on your oxygen mask and you start taking demand oxygen which means that the system automatically regulates the flow of oxygen according the barometric pressure. As you rise and you get up to around 20,000 feet and it's full 100 percent oxygen so you need this to be really alert and functioning as a combat person at higher altitudes, you need to take the oxygen early and then when you're coming back down we usually leave the oxygen on until you know ten or twelve thousand feet. But sometimes you can't stand it anymore you know your face is just burning, your head's under all that tension with the straps and everything and you just rip it off and take a breath of cold dry air anyway but less oxygen and then freezing up the system sometimes because as you exhale there's moisture coming out of your body and this often freezes up and you have to work your oxygen mask and break up the ice crystals so it doesn't get clogged up you know.

**Rick:** Well when you got back what would your throat feel like?

**Ray:** We were dehydrated to say the least. For some reason or other you know the American standard was if you were a man you want a whiskey or scotch or something when you come back and that's supposed to calm you down and you know feel good about life. Well nuts, I wanted water you know I didn't want alcohol for heavens sakes, I wanted water you know and it's just stupid little things like that worked against you really.

**Rick:** So you had to go the entire mission without food or water?

**Ray:** Well they gave us a candy bar and you had a selection, I would choose the Mars Bars, that was the best but in that cold temperature during the winter of '43 it just turned to a brick and you couldn't eat it. You couldn't bite it at all and you can't eat with the oxygen mask on anyway you see. So I don't know what the candy bar was for we brought them back and they were just hard rocks and you could carry no drinks you know the movies you know like "*The Memphis Belle*" they have a thermos there and the guy has tomato soup and all and '*oh come on*'. [**Rick:** that's not accurate then?] No you couldn't have a thermos there I mean if some ordinance hit your thermos bottle it's a vacuum the darn thing would blow up you know. You don't need that.

**Rick:** Well did you have fighter escort's part of the way over?

**Ray:** Well yes. We did have some Spitfire escorts but Spitfires were designed as defensive airplanes and I don't know – an hour and twenty minutes and something was about the limit for a Spitfire. So they would only take us over maybe to France if we went that way. A couple of times we had P47's that went up the coast of Holland and went inland a little bit but they were so short of fuel you know they had very large engines. They had that R2800 Pratt and Whitney 2000 horsepower engine and that darn thing drinks up fuel and we just have to synchronize our flight with their flights and to get all this synchronized is very very tough. I remember in one briefing he says "*well now here you're going to meet the P47's and their going to escort you in and they will be with you anywhere from five to fifteen minutes depending on your coordination*". Well that's no help because they just simply had to turn back for the lack of range and of course the Germans they knew this too, they'd be just waiting over here someplace you know.

**Rick:** And the fighters left?

**Ray:** Yeah when the P47's go '*High*' they'd dive right in on you.

**Rick:** And so you had German fighters that were attacking you as well as flack bombs?

**Ray:** Well yeah, the flack is something else. You can't describe it adequately to someone else. It's an experience and it's very frightening. There's nothing you could do about it, we did some evasive maneuvering at times because we could see the German flack gunners would send up bursts '*boom, boom, boom*' usually three bursts right in a row and that's their ranging bursts you see and we're flying along. Well we'd take a little evasive action and move off but you know they're smart too, they would compensate for that and once they get your range then they start sending up a real barrage of this stuff and those flack guns – there's some places so heavily defended you couldn't hardly imagine like Bremen. I remember reading a British Intelligence Report and it had all these flack towers which are thirty meters high around 100 feet high, concrete and steel construction and on top they had a series of anti-aircraft guns, a minimum of two of those guns and sometimes more and if they had 88mm guns which were very versatile anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns the Germans had developed, they fire shells up to 34,000 feet and they diminish in accuracy as you go higher and that shell travels about 3,000 feet per second and it has fuses that are set by machine so they have radar that's getting your range and that radar information feeds into a machine. They set their shells down and the machine goes '*click, click*' and sets the proximity fuse to that altitude for the timing of how long it takes that shell to get up all calculated in advance. They could fire twenty one rounds per barrel every minute at you and well you can imagine a whole bunch of those flack towers guarding a city when you approach at least 20 kilometers out you start getting flack and it gets worse and worse and worse and you have to fly through that and your target's down here and you can't evade once you get a bum run you see where the bombardier actually takes over the flight of the airplane through his bombsight it's an ordinal bombsight. It's linked up through the Sperry autopilot of the airplane so we get that last minute, minute and a half of the bomb run, the pilot says, "*all right*" to the bombardier "*it's your airplane*". And so he guides the airplane and he's looking right through his telescope and crosshairs and he's guiding that airplane right on the target and the whole formation's going there and that flack is intense, you have no control over anything you just have to go through it. And that flack, you know they were big shells and sometimes they had 120mm guns and even larger but mostly that 88 and I can remember one day we were flying over Bremen, it was one of our unfavorable targets because of that heavy defense – I was looking out the right wing and '*boom*', boy there was a big explosion and it lifted our airplane right up in the air and I could see

a big piece of metal skin just come up like that. And that day we had 53 major flack holes out there and that right wing had to be changed, it was just not salvageable.

**Rick:** That flack would rip right through the metal of an aircraft?

**Ray:** Well the metal of the aircraft we have 032 that's 32 thousandths and 64 thousandths skin on that airplane and that's aluminum and that flack are shards of steel – hot ragged steel and it's going some velocity and when it explodes you know boy that stuff comes right through. I remember one day we had one of these big flack bursts you know and it was very close you know we have this rating of flack called '*the pucker factor*' and when you see that, those black bursts out there you know, that alerts everybody you know and their little adrenaline goes up – if you had a gauge it would go up a little bit. But you know it's not too bothersome because you know everything's expended out there. Then when you get close enough where you can see the red flash then the pucker factor goes up several notches; maybe go up to about an eight. And then you cannot only see the flash but you hear it go off, it goes to a nine. But then when it goes off you can look and see it, you can hear it and then it lifts your airplane up in the air and the pieces come shredding through your airplane that's a ten and a ten plus – if there is a ten plus.

**Rick:** And you were nineteen years old about at the time [**Ray:** no I was eighteen] eighteen and the average age of those flight crews was right around eighteen to twenty I guess.

**Ray:** I was the youngest and not many under eighteen.

**Rick:** After the war, what was the percentage that didn't return home from bombing raids?

**Ray:** It really depended on when you were there. When I was there in '43 the attrition rate was quite high, that's why I became a Master Sergeant. When I got there in October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1943 they had just undergone their second Schweinfurt raid and the mission duty then was 25 missions so we asked "*well how many men in our 379<sup>th</sup> bomb group at Kimble had completed 25 missions and were going to go home?*" They said "*one man*" and they'd been flying since May. Well those odds were pretty bad were they not? That's because Luftwaffe is up there shooting us

down all the time you see and we didn't have adequate fire cover. We couldn't make any really deep penetrations with any assurance of decent success you see.

**Rick:** I've always wondered, these young men in these ready rooms learning about their missions and realizing the hazards, many of them had to be scared to death and realizing that this may be their last...

**Ray:** Well anybody that wasn't scared is just denying that condition.

**Rick:** So it was a really a hard thing I would guess on these missions that it could have very well been your last?

**Ray:** Well absolutely but you don't allow yourself to think in those terms you know each person has an ego and is determined to beat the odds you know and so *'it's not my time'*. Well although there were people who had strong premonitions if that's what you want to call them or whatever who knew that something very serious was going to happen. And we experienced that with Bob Lamereaux our tail gunner. We went on this flight to bomb a blockade runner, it was the last blockade runner the Germans attempt of WWII to Europe and there were three ships that came from Southeast Asia – one of them at least I know of was carrying raw rubber from Southeast Asia, the Germans were desperate for rubber. The British Navy sank two of these blockade-runners way up the coast by Brest; they were trying to make the port there. The third one was run south and they tried to make the mouth of the Jerome River and then go up to the main docking facilities up the river and the British Navy ran it aground. So they Navy didn't want to get in any closer to the coast because the coast was defended so the British Navy backed off and called the Air Force and said *"go down there and bomb that ship, we want to prevent the rubber from getting into Germany"*. So we took off in a flight of thirteen airplanes that day and we were going to fly in trail all the way down there – it's a very long flight. As we were flying along Bob Lamereaux our tail gunner called up and said *"hey Ray will you change places with me?"* I checked with the aircraft commander pilot Tom Eaton and he said *"yeah, that's okay, there's no danger out here we're flying off the Bay of Biscay (out there in the distance you could see it) and no German's going to be out there anyway"*. So we traded places and you know I

enjoy the tail back there, there's a good view and everything I could see the other airplanes. So Bob didn't like the top turret and I guess maybe didn't quite understand how to work it or whatever, so we traded back and a little bit later he called up the co-pilot and said "*Lieutenant Haneline can I trade places with you?*" Well Haneline always wanted to fly in the tail to see what it was like. So he went back there and Bob was very comfortable in the co-pilot's seat, good view and comfortable. But Haneline didn't realize that the tail gun position doesn't have a seat. It has a little bicycle like seat and you have to kneel down and then you have to pick the guns up and they each weigh 64 pounds a piece you know and they're somewhat balanced but you have to hold them up and he found that was very uncomfortable, he didn't like it so he traded back with Bob. So Bob was back in the tail again and then he called up the bombardier and said "*hey would you like to trade places with me?*" "*Okay*", so the bombardier went back there and he was comfortable and Bob really enjoyed being up in the nose section with that clear plastic around and it's just a wonderful view up there and its quiet up there – all the engine noises are behind you. And then we got close to the target and the navigator called up Robert Dodi and said "*the ship's in sight you gotta get back here*" to the bombardier so they had to trade places and well we were on the bomb run and we lowered down to a very low altitude so we'd make a good hit and just blow that ship to pieces. We could see little loaders that were taking the cargo off the ship onto the shore and we were about maybe a minute or so from the bomb drop and a big fog bank just mysteriously rose right out of the sea and came right over that ship and obscured it and we couldn't see anything. So we had to abort that mission and pick a secondary target, so we flew all the way back the coast of France and our secondary target was Abbeville and Abbeville happened to be the home base of Herman Goering's personal fighter squadron which we called the '*Yellow Jacket Boys*' because the cowlings of their airplanes on the engines were all painted yellow and it was a top-notch squadron so that was a good secondary target. So we lined up in formation, thirteen airplanes and we were flying now at 12000 feet above the capability of the airfield defense flack. They had light guns, they didn't have the heavy high altitude guns so that was our ideal altitude so we were on the bomb run, there were no fighters. We couldn't see any fighters up there at all you know I thought '*hey this is great*'. So we're on the bomb run and there's no opposition anywhere from the ground, in the air...so I had a German 35mm camera and I stepped in the bomb bay and the doors were open and I'm going to take pictures of bombs dropping on Herman Goering's airfield. Well all of a

sudden there's 'boom, pow, vroom', all kinds of ordinances hitting the airplane and it's so unmistakable when ordinance hits the airplane and the airplane's lurching up and starting to vibrate and I jump up in my turret and coming directly at us, I mean head-on was a Focke-wulf 190 with it's wings lit up shooting it's cannons at us and the nose section shooting it's machine guns and I thought we were on a collision course, it was that close. And at the last second, we were in formation, thirteen airplanes – at the last second this German pilot does a wingover like that and slides right by our right wing in between the other airplanes and cut right through our formation. Man – what a nervy thing to do, but that's not all. On his tail were two American P47's diving right after this guy and they did the same thing. And they dove down and chased that German into a cloud and I never saw him again...

**Rick:** So a German aircraft went through the formation.

**Ray:** The Focke-wulf 190 passed through our right wing on a wing up like that and broke through our formation. Now our closing speed, I have no idea exactly what it was but he was probably going 350 miles an hour anyway and we're going you know 250 perhaps at that altitude, maybe not that much but we were only going about 200 perhaps at that altitude. So the closing rate was very great and he was able to maneuver right through the airplane and what's more, those two P47's were right on his tail doing the same thing and they chased that German down through a cloud and we never saw him again. But my comment is – neither pilot- the German or the Americans could have been over 19 years of age to pull that off you know that's a young man's outrageously daring stunt you know. Nobody in their right mind would do something like that you know that's WAR, you know there's a driveness in war that things like that occur. So the airplane shot up all of a sudden here and I have to attend to the engine. That's my responsibility as Flight Engineer is the power and fuel consumption and all that and the right engine's really vibrating out there, you can see it and the manifold pressure on number three engine went down to atmospheric and so I looked everything over and '*okay, we can fly with these engines. Just leave the controls alone*'. So I've got to go back and check what's happening because the waste-gunner Arnold Enils called up and said "*we're hit*" and a few seconds later Bob Lamereaux calls up very weakly on the intercom and says "*I'm hit*" and so I

run back there and we've aborted our bomb run on the airfield and we're headed now towards the shore out to sea because we're low on fuel and we can't make a second run on this airfield. So I get back there and Arnold Enils was just sitting down next to his gun and he's holding his elbow like this and you can't talk in those darn airplanes you know you just have to lift your helmet loose and just shout at each other you know and he said that he was looking out the window where his gun station was and had his elbow on the windowsill and a bullet came along and hit him on the elbow and creased his jacket. You know it just hurt like sin and he was still hurting but the other waste-gunner was unconscious on the floor and in a few seconds he came to and later on we learned that another bullet had grazed his head. It hardly left a mark on his leather helmet but it put a little split in his skull and it knocked him out but they were obviously okay so I went back to Bob Lamereaux in the tail and his gun station's all blown to pieces there, a 20mm cannon shell hit right there in his left hand ammunition can which holds about 600 rounds of 50-calibre machine gun bullets and it just blew that thing up and Bob was lying there you know blood was oozing out of his clothes and so I dragged him back past the tail wheel in the aft section of the fuselage. The odd story here is that morning when we took off, just before we took off I should say Bob brought two GI blankets onboard and I was the last one on the airplane and I said, "*Bob what are you doing with those blankets. We can't have those...*" just wrapped up you know just folded blankets loose with open waste wind with all that rush of air coming in would inflate those blankets and it would cause a big trouble. We carried emergency gear that was secured but this was just folded up off his bed you know. I said "*we can't have those in there*" and he got really grumpy and he's not normally a grumpy person and he said "*you never can tell when you need these things we gotta have them today*". So we were about ready to start engines so I just tucked them on the right side of the tail wheel in there, it's a retractable tail wheel and stowed them away the best I could and rushed up and so when I hauled Bob out I had to open his flight suit and everything and the blood was welling up and I got the first aid kit and I had to take the gauze pads and I had to stuff his wounds because that blood was just flowing out and I tried my best to stop that flow of blood. And I got that under control and he had at least two places, one on his backside – his gluteus maximus you know he lost a big piece of it really and he had another hole right here and it turned out later on I just learned a few years ago he had a bullet right through his bladder. Anyway I hauled him out and attended him the best I could and then I took those two blankets and wrapped him up in them. Now you see,

he didn't want to be in that tail position all that flight and finally reconciled himself to it and he put those blankets on and those blankets gave him the saving comfort.

**Rick:** So he didn't die?

**Ray:** No, that was a premonition you see. So Bob then was taken to the hospital. I fired some flares in the landing pattern and we landed and we had no brakes and we had no tail wheel and you know the airplane was disabled some and we landed on the grass and then hauled Bob out and he was just as white you know and he looked like he was gone so we tried to visit him the next few days and he was unconscious.

**Rick:** Let me ask you about those flares. You fire those if there's a wounded onboard to alert the hospital?

**Ray:** That's right, you have to make an emergency landing and you have wounded aboard, right. And so anyway that was December 31<sup>st</sup> 1943 and then January 5<sup>th</sup> we were shot down. Bob was unconscious all during this time so when he woke up he woke up ten days later – ten days unconscious total and he said “*where's my crew?*” “*They're gone, they're all dead*” you know what a shock to him. So he thought we were all dead now I gave a talk at the Miami Museum of Science in 1997 and the sister of the navigator on my airplane who got killed learned about me being there and she made contact with Bob Lamereaux and I thought he was dead and we got together.

**Rick:** So all those years...

**Ray:** Fifty-five years later we came back together. It was very emotional. So back to the day we got shot down – this is January 5<sup>th</sup> 1944 so my mission was Kiel Germany that's up on the Baltic Sea, it's a major submarine base and shipyard right there. So our flight that day was (I told you about the take off and the three airplanes that crashed to begin with) so we flew several hours gaining altitude very slowly and those airplanes are so heavily loaded and didn't have the jet power that we have today and so you know it took about three hours just to get up to altitude.

We went out over past Denmark and then over the landmass to the Baltic Sea and we flew over the Baltic Sea and then we made a run back down towards the docks in the submarine facilities there and that way we made an approach without flack. And then the flack started as we neared the submarine facilities there, so we made a successful bomb run and our altitude was 25,000 feet that day and it was 56 degrees below zero Centigrade which is about 70 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. It was a very chilly day and it was so cold and it was mean, just mean that day. It's a frostbite day for the waste-gunners; we have the open windows and so forth. So we made our run and had a lot of flack and it was very worrisome to say the least and then all of a sudden a green flack burst comes up "*pshhhooo*" and that's the signal for the German fighters who are up there circling around waiting for the flack barrage to be over with. The green burst of flack comes up which is a signal for the German fighters to come down and engage us because the flack barrage is over and they wouldn't want to fly in their own flack barrage. So at that point our airplanes tighten up our formation – we see the green bursts so the airplanes just slide together as close as we can manage and that means...every airplane has thirteen 50-calibre guns on it so that means there's a bristling mass of guns out there and these fighter planes have to you know engage the enemy no matter what. That flack burst went off and we were ready and I remember Messerschmitt 109 often called a '*BF109*' came diving in on us and he was diving in on us a beam and so I have a gun sight that's a flat piece of glass with a light reticule that's horizontal and then one bar is up and one bar is down and these bars move back and forth according to little bicycle controls I have on my turret and I can frame a sight but first I have to crank in the dimension of the target. So the fuselage length on that airplane is 29 feet six inches and so I cranked that in and I was tracking this fighter plane now...we're going one way and he's coming the same way so the closure isn't too bad. So I'm tracking and '*brrpppdd, brrpppdd, brrpppdd*' I get about six rounds off of shot as I track and you really can't get anymore than that with any accuracy and then as I swung around all of a sudden I saw the tail guns fly up in the air like that. Now the tail guns remember I told you they were 64 pounds apiece and they're balanced but when you let go of the breaches the barrels go up like that. So here we're under fighter attack and the tail gunner let's go of his guns. Well that only means one thing – that he's hit and I then become aware that in the same line of fire the radio operator dropped his gun and his gun went straight up. Well I'm next in that same line of fire so those two boys probably got hit and sure enough there was a Messerschmitt 109 on our tail. Now that day being as cold as it

was, our engines produce these huge contrails, not these little streaky things that you see jets producing here but here we had I think it was about 32 airplanes that day and each engine was producing these huge contrails and they were just lining the sky – no wind up there and you could see them for 300 miles you know they were just there and all of us leaving those. So this Messerschmitt 109 pilot was down in our contrail, snuck up behind us and let go a burst and then I could see him dive down in the contrail. I said “*hey I’m going to be ready for that guy*”, so I swung around my turret and then set my wind direction of the 109 – thirty two feet nine inches right there. I set that right there and then I tried to judge the distance that he would be because he was very close and sure enough I could see his propeller chopping through the contrails and his nose came up and he was coming up too high and so I bared down and tried to adjust on his wingtips for range and that means my turret guns would be accurate to 25 percent which is very very good for a mechanical analog computer in those days. And so he leveled off and by the time he started firing, I started firing. So we were both firing at each other in a duel right at the same time but he was still high and I could see his 20mm cannon shells, his wings just lit up blasts, flashes you know and I could actually see those 20mm cannon shells stringing over the top of my turret and I just held down the trigger boy just blasting. My right gun quit firing and I think it’s an interrupter cam on the outside of my turret track so you won’t blow your own vertical fin off but the left gun just kept firing away and the first thing you know I could see he was getting very, very close. It was frighteningly close and his propeller just ground to a halt and pieces of cowling started to fly off the engine and I yelled into the intercom at that moment to “*jump it*”. That’s an evasive action because we’ve had experiences before where the fighter pilot has been killed and his airplane’s still alive and it comes and crashes into you and I thought maybe it was possible I could have killed the pilot and here’s a live airplane still going much faster than us and it could collide with us so I yelled “*jump it*”. So the pilots have a big yoke there and you know this is a 60 ton airplane and we burned off a lot of that weight already but they have to haul back all their strength because there are no boost controls on B17’s, just cables and lever horns you know they operate and so that means that we would go up like this and let the airplane pass under us. So at that moment we undergo a terrific G-force because we’re inducing that G-force and you’re massed down like that but we’re...tail end Charlie ‘*purple heart corner*’ is the favorite saying there and we’re stacked up twelve twelve and whatever – ten there, we didn’t have a full compliment. And so we go up but we can only go up for a second

you know and then they have to slam the yoke down and we have to go through weightlessness. So I felt the G-force you know we're going up so I threw both of my arms over the ammunition cans inside of my turret because I knew when we were going through weightlessness to get back down anything that's not tied down in an airplane will just stay there and the airplane will go around it. Now that sounds weird but combat airplanes are built for high-high stresses and that maneuver is very necessary and all that ammunition in my ammo cans would just stay there and the airplane would go there and the ammunition would go right through the top of my turret – right through the plexiglass out into space. So I was all braced like this and then there was just a big explosion and it threw me out of the turret right on the bottom of the cockpit and you know if you're going to be a survivor in any combat – flying, you have to be mentally set to take instant action or else you'll die and we witnessed it many times. You have three maybe five seconds to take positive action and if you don't there's a good chance you'll not make it. So I knew from the impact of the explosion and everything that that airplane was not going to fly anymore. And our airplane went up like this – it turned out the right outer panel of the wing was blown off. It's about twenty feet long, it was full of 130-octane fuel, it weighed about a ton, so all of a sudden all that was gone from the airplane. The left wing is still flying and so it raised us up in the air like this and eyewitnesses say that here we have these airplanes stacked like this three stories of airplanes – our airplane did a roll up as high as the high echelon and came around and then entered into a flat spin. Well I grabbed my parachute which was...I wore the harness but I safety wired my chest pack (because I couldn't wear it in the turret – there's no room) to langleans which is bare metal inside of the airplane, part of the structure with breakaway safety wire – it's 15000 soft copper and that's its purpose and I ripped off my parachute and by that time I'm being mashed down into the floor of the airplane and I pick up my parachute and I hook on to the right hook, I reached and tried to pick up the parachute and pull it up to the left hook but I can't lift the parachute – it weighs too much. We're in a spin and the centrifugal force has induced these forces on them and it makes everything weigh so much more than it normally is. I couldn't pick it up to hook it on the left hook and I just kept being mashed and mashed down. The peculiar thing here is that in my turret I have this little small oxygen hose that hooks up to my oxygen mask and the supply and as I moved around the cockpit it was short I would pull it loose and the first thing you know I would be out of oxygen. So a day or two or the next day or the day before, I don't remember and airplane crashed on our airfield taking off one of the short

runways and it tipped over and burned up and the tail assembly did not burn up with the rest of the airplane. So I went in there and I took the tail gunners oxygen hose which is a great big long thing – I took that off, threw mine away (the little short one) and put the long one on. So now I'm in this spin and I'm exerting myself at 25000 feet and I have good flow of oxygen and as I'm rolling forward there is a crawl way, there's a pilot and co-pilot here, instrument panel and controls right there and then this crawl way gives you access to the nose section. Also down at the bottom of the crawl way on the left behind number two propeller is an escape hatch about so big. My goal was to get to that escape hatch. I could see the co-pilot and the pilots. They were supposed to have backpack parachutes but they ran out of them so they issued chest pack parachutes. Well these men were big enough where they couldn't wear a chest pack and work the controls so I had safety wired their parachutes on the backs of their seats. And I remember the co-pilot, I could see his left hand reaching back trying to get to his parachute but it was just hopeless, he couldn't even raise his arm and the pilot you know he's twenty years old now and his duty you know is a different duty from everybody else's and I could see him working the yoke, the controls trying to right the airplane so everybody can bail out. But there's no chance – a totally uncontrollable airplane at this point and the last I saw of them both of them were leaning over like this and being scrunched down into their seats and I know what was happening to them. This spin was very different from a normal spin because when over a ton of your airplane's gone you have a new center of gravity for the airplane. Normally the cockpit is the center of gravity so when you're in a spin the forces are minimal but now the cockpit is no longer the center of gravity and so it's swinging around like you're on a skating rink, the whip. So the forces are terrible and the blood is draining out of their brains and they're just going into oblivion unable to help themselves or do anything but I crawled forward head down into this crawlway. What a fortunate thing! I have oxygen; I have blood in my brain. So I crawled down and the control cables are being drawn out of the pulley's and two sets of them are like this and I have to crawl through those or just past them like that and I can remember black smoke just coming in like this and in front of me is the navigator Lieutenant Dodi and he has a steel helmet on, he has flack suit and he's the only crew member that has a steel helmet and a flack suit and he had this awful premonition and talked about it too much. He knew he was going to die and so he tried to get this protection; but he was on his back like a turtle. He had a backpack parachute and he was on his back and his arm was out trying to get to the escape hatch but there's no way he could do

anything. He couldn't even turn over and I could not help him that's for sure and there's no way anybody can help anybody else in those moments so I crawled up to the escape hatch to the forward part; there is a red D-handle and on the D-handle are two little cables that go to the hinge pins. Now this is the leading edge of the escape hatch so I pull that and pull the hinge pins out. The escape hatch is supposed to fly off into space but because the airplane's under this terrible stress from the spin it locks the door in place. So by that time I am flat on the floor. My whole body is just mashed down on the floor the last memory I have – I propped my arm up like this, my elbow on the floor and I reach up and grab the handle and it's at the aft end of the door (a normal bullet shaped handle) and I pull it down and it stays down and the last thing I remember I was beating my fist on the door trying to force it open. My next consciousness is – I'm free falling feet-first the parachute's on the right hook and it's beating me in the forehead like this and you know who's thinking about anything, who's rational or anything at this moment. I know I've got to get that parachute open you know, I've gone through this in my mind ten thousand times what I've got to do to get out of that airplane and get that parachute open. And I just reached up and clawed open or clawed at the D-ring, it's another red one right there on my parachute and ripped it open and out came this beautiful white silk it "*sshhoopp*" and then it popped open really hard and it pulled up on this right hook and that's all that was needed. But the force was so great it displaced these left ribs and those darn ribs never went back. I still can't lay on my stomach today because they stick out there.

**Rick:** So your left side was completely unhooked and you only had this right hook?

**Ray:** Yeah only had the right hook. So anyway I have no idea of all the sequence of next events and everything but I know what happened. I remember seeing what was left of my airplane. It was just a big ball of fire, it had no wings, and the tail was gone and it was "*rrrhhrrrhhrrrh*" making this awful noise going down and you know my epiphany came right then.

**Rick:** Did that door eventually open or did the escape hatch open?

**Ray:** Well, I...the airplane blew up [**Rick:** and that's what freed you?] and ejected me right out of that airplane. So you know that was my first serious call to God.

**Rick:** Did anybody else get out of that plane?

**Ray:** Yeah. Anyway, let me finish this. As I was coming down on the parachute the debris field of my airplane swept past me and it was shaped like a Christmas tree. It was little pieces, thousands of little pieces of airplane coming down and it was coming down like that. And these pieces would come and hit the canopy of my airplane [parachute] the piece would sink into the canopy and then they would float off on the side like that. And that scared the heck out of me as big pieces were flying through the air now I could hear big pieces flying through the air and fortunately that debris field passed and that was the most surreal experience I've ever had in my life you know of my own airplane coming all around me. Anyway that passed and I felt a great sense of relief after that. Anyway I came down lower and I could see a parachute down below me, several thousand feet, way down there and he's drifting off in an air current that was different from mine. I looked at my watch which I wore on the inside of my wrist to keep it from banging around on the cockpit and I tried to judge my altitude and nearest I could calculate that I must have been unconscious and freefalling for about a mile – about two miles and then got into denser air and I became revived with the denser air because the oxygen mask, helmet and gloves and all that were gone. Then I remember a piece of burning wing, it was flipping hand over hand going down and as I got closer to the ground a Messerschmitt 110 night fighter came – it had the primitive radar antennae out on the nose and it was you know painted white on the bottom so search lights wouldn't pick up night fighters and a mottled blue on top and as I was coming down I have a 24 foot canopy parachute and it drops about 1,000 feet a minute below 10,000 feet. So I was drifting down and here's this fighter pilot came and he kept circling me and he kept waving at me you know and oh man I didn't know what to do. I was scared to death. So I just hung limp on one hook you know and I didn't respond to him and finally he left and later on I realized that he was radioing the ground crews that there was another parachute coming down that somebody could pick up. So I got closer and closer to the ground and there was a piece of burning wing with a parachute wrapped in it and a man's body lying in the snow, so there's another crew member and then we came to (I came) very close to these power lines – high tension power lines and I saw that parachute was drifting right towards it so I tried to control the parachute, I wasn't very successful because we'd only gotten a few minutes parachute instruction

and the favorite saying was “*well, when the time comes, you’ll know what to do*”. Well, that didn’t help because I had to guide the parachute past these power lines and I was just going to drift right into them so I just climbed up the risers and collapsed the parachute and fell straight down and I let go of the risers and just as the parachute started to inflate...

...water. So I just crawled up on the ice and you just can’t hardly imagine what it felt like. I was alive you know and I just laid there and there was no wind on the ground and then I was only there a short time...

\*\*\*Tape Interrupt\*\*\*

Ray: ...So my fee for cutting the bread was to slice off each of those sides of a slice with a knife and collect the crumbs in this clay milk can which is quite a large can and I got to do such a good job I built a reputation in cutting so I’d cut other people’s rations of bread too and I’d collect more and more of this and this gave me extra food. In fact February 15<sup>th</sup> 1944 was my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday in camp so I took the breadcrumbs and mixed some whole powdered milk and some jam or something I don’t remember exactly all what but I made myself a birthday cake and then the next year on my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday I was still there and I made another cake and I also made ice cream on that second birthday.

Rick: So you were there on your 20<sup>th</sup> birthday and that was in 1945?

Ray: That’s right. So life in camp was not fun. It was full of anxiety all the time, there were guards out there with machine guns and search lights and sometimes guards were shooting and bringing their mean dogs in after curfew and just lots of anxiety and one man got shot as he lay in his bunk. A guard shot at something or another and a bullet came through the barracks and so there were incidents like this all the time. There were a few events that were really memorable, one was that a Red Cross representative came – International Red Cross from Geneva Switzerland to inspect the camp and we had gotten word that this man really was not what he claimed to be, he was really a German spy. He came to gather information about escape parties or something, I don’t know what. So he rode his bicycle in and he stopped at our barracks and

our barracks was right next to the wire and that would be the logical one to try to tunnel out you see. He got in the barracks and men started to talk with him and they engaged him very well because he lost track of time and everything and he didn't think about his bicycle and outside other men took his bicycle and passed it from barracks to barracks and got it across the company street and there's a gate there and they got it across there, clear across the camp to a large cesspool and they threw it in the cesspool and it's still there. By hand signals they got the word back to the men who were engaging in conversation with this phony Red Cross representative and as soon as the guys got the signals they all got up and walked away and he's sitting there in the middle of a conversation and everybody's gone. Ah Oh, he knows he's been had so he walks outside and his bicycle isn't there and oh he's infuriated – "Vous es mine ferat?" "Vous es mine ferate?" he kept shouting you know and he went up to the camp commander which was Colonel Khun, a German Wehrmacht officer and he was the head of the camp and Colonel Igul, Mayer Igul was the Luftwaffe camp commander and Khun really had it over by rank and he complained and complained and our camp commander which was a Staff Sergeant named Kirk Kirtenbach and it turns out he was an OS Agent. We had no idea of this until just two years ago and he somehow got smuggled into Germany and into the camp system and became our camp commander. He was a Staff Sergeant and the complaint went to Kirtenbach and everybody said, "we never saw a bicycle...there's no bicycle...he didn't come on a bicycle" you know. And the Colonel really got mad and then finally others, I don't know who it was revealed that this man was a German spy and not a Red Cross representative and it all blew up and finally the Colonel went off.

Rick: How did they know he was a German spy?

Ray: I don't know. The word got out. Kirtenbach, this OS Officer who was a Staff Sergeant, he had communications. He had marvelous communications, there was one time that the Gestapo came to our camp looking for an escaped airman who had been brought in by accident by the local police and this man had escaped two other times from German jail and from a work gang he had been put with earlier and the Gestapo was infuriated that here was a war prisoner who had escaped twice already from the German authorities and the police had accidentally put him in our camp and so the Gestapo came up to our camp looking for him. Well Kirtenbach got him hid and the rumor was anyway that he was hidden in a latrine so that one of these big latrines, they

were 77 hole latrines and there's a shelf underneath. That was the rumor flying around and the Gestapo for three days searched the camp and kept us out without shelter in April when it was cold and rainy and everything and they finally had to give up. They wrecked our camp, they stole all of our cigarettes and everything else and they stomped off the camp and boy we let out a yell you could hear clear to Krems "the Gestapo was gone!" Anyway we had smuggled in radios too and we got the news – President Roosevelt made a public announcement that he had sent a communiqué to the high German command on the mistreatment of prisoners at Stalag 17B. So how did he know that so fast? So Kirtenbach really had connections, it was very fascinating. Also British agents were involved, there was this M9 or M1 or something like British Intelligence and they smuggled radio parts into our camp no less. So there were a lot of things going on.

Rick: Were there escape attempts being done?

Ray: Oh there were escape attempts. The only one that worked was for this airman that I talked about, he disappeared and then there was a Sergeant Gray who escaped but he was picked up again and brought back to camp so other than that there were no...

Rick: Were there tunnels being dug?

Ray: Oh there were tunnels being dug all over the place. In the spring of '45 the ground was sagging down where tunnels were. We don't have time to really talk about prison life very much here but let me get right to the end. It was April 8<sup>th</sup> that we were moved out of camp because the Russians had surrounded Vienna and their tanks had preceded the ground troops and they stopped out on the plain out there below the hill at Krems. We were being assembled to go out and one of the guards came in and he was crying. That is weird, a German guard was crying. But we knew this German guard and he had been conscripted and thrown into the German army and we said, "what's wrong?" and he said "well the SS troops just slaughtered civilians down in Krems that night" because they refused to stay there and fight the Russians. There were women and children and elderly men there and we were just stunned, we didn't know whether to believe this or not so we got marched out through town and we didn't see anything and we marched out

up some hills and one of the guards died of a heart attack while we marched up the hill. It was hard on us and we had a lot of men start to fall out because we had been rather inactive and poorly fed and had no medical attention whatsoever.

Rick: And this is in April of '45?

Ray: Yes, April 8<sup>th</sup>. We marched on that first day about 10 kilometers and the next day more men dropped out and about 150 men dropped out and walked back to the camp.

Rick: These were prisoners of war?

Ray: Yeah, they just couldn't make it.

Rick: Did they tell you that you were heading for the western lines?

Ray: We knew the direction was west and that was good enough for us and we were on the eastern front because the Russians were coming so we were going west.

Rick: How did they feed you?

Ray: Well that was one of the problems. They gave us a food parcel which helped the first few days and then the Germans fed us every other day and we didn't always meet the rendezvous on time and I remember once we came to a little town and we could smell this awful smell, you know it was just terrible and "yeah that's our food". We didn't make it the day before so we were a whole night late you know, 12 hours late getting there so the towns folks had poured white wine into this big kebal of soup. They had barley soup prepared for us and it had some horsemeat in it and it all spoiled. It didn't make any difference we ate it anyway and then I remember one night there was no food at all and we were supposed to be fed every other day but then we missed it and you know we were just really starving and I had kept a handful of raisins in my pocket. That was the last of my food and almost anybody else's so that evening I went around and I cut the new shoots of dandelions coming up and I put them in a can of water and I

boiled them on the fire and you know dandelions are toxic – it's a milkweed so I had to pour off that first boiling and on the second boiling I put my raisins in there and I had boiled raisins and dandelions and I had something to eat and almost no one else had food to eat. But my metabolism is such that I need to eat. So anyway we marched on and then we came to Machausen and this is a 'killing camp' and it's not just a concentration camp, as I understand it. It's a place of torture and killing and some of our men got thrown in the camp accidentally and fortunately they got out. It's a fortress of a camp, it's made out of cut stone and barbed wire and supposed 60,000 volts of electricity on all of the wires around the camp and just next to the camp is a rock quarry and we walked right by that rock quarry and I still have that scene in my mind. The rock quarry is down below the bluff and to get up and down the Germans had cut 163 steps into the stone but these steps are not regular risers like you would have everyone the same, they were different heights so it was very difficult to climb up and down. They made the prisoners down there quarry the stone and then they had to carry the stones on their backs and then have to hike up those 163 irregular steps up to the top. Well you can make one trip and you're done and maybe some exceptional people could make a few trips and then the stories are and I didn't see them doing this but after a trip or two people would join hands up at the top and jump off and kill themselves. Well I saw the quarry and I saw the people climbing up the steps with the rocks on their back and then about three kilometers beyond (it was very early in the morning) and we ran across a group of about 3500 we judged Hungarian Jews. They all had their long coats on and they were carrying suitcases, we had Hungarian speakers with us. A good American group has all kinds of speakers in it and there were dead people – dead men and boys lying along the road and the suitcases were open of those that had died and others had rifled their suitcases from whatever they could get and inside were photographs of their families and articles of clothing. Out in the field (it was early in the morning) and people had just died in the night out there in the field and there's that awful scene that never leaves my memory – there were men and boys on their hands and knees with their faces down to the ground eating the new shoots of grass that were coming up and one man looked up to me as though he was an animal, a sheep or something and he had green grass hanging from his lips and you know that really touched me. We learned from them that they had been on the road for two weeks, they had come from Hungary and the Germans had not fed them anything. They were in very very bad shape and we told them where they were going and trying to hurry this story along I didn't tell you that as we were passing

through the little settlement of Mathausen there people ran out of their houses and told us about Mathausen, they told us about the camp. They told us that it was a killing camp and that they gassed and killed people there and burned them there and you know we just didn't know what to think about this, you know it was a shock and we thought "what is it" but when we met these Jews outside of the camp we knew. So we told them they were being taken to mathausen – a killing camp and they passed the word real fast and they started going crazy and the Germans started to shoot them. They started to shoot them with small arms and as we were marching on they engaged a heavy machine gun, we could hear it rattling away.

Rick: They just massacred them all?

Ray: I don't know, we were marching on and we could hear that machine gun for a long time as we marched away from that scene. It's one of those nightmares.

Rick: Whatever happened to those guys that dropped out? Did they survive?

Ray: They went back. Kirtenbach stayed in camp and he rescued all of them. They were okay and the American army – Patton's Third Army sent a contingent over to the camp to rescue those men and they did because the Russians were there and they were occupying the camp and you couldn't trust what the Russians were going to do to you. Anyway we marched past Mathausen and came to Lintz, we passed the bridge there over the Danube and went through Lintz and then we marched down to Braunel Bavaria and that's the birthplace of Hitler and they had no camp for us so three kilometers outside of braunel is a wooded area so the Germans cut a perimeter of trees all around quite a large piece there and it's right along the En River and the perimeter was cut from river bank to river bank around like that and they put us in the woods so right in here we had no food, they had no food, they had nothing to give us and we just had to stay in the woods there while the German's guarded us. It was raining and it was April, there was sleet and you know it was cold and miserable and I had a knife that I had trades some cigarettes to a Russian prisoner with and it was a homemade knife and I still have that knife, I should have brought it to you. But I used that knife to build a little shelter out there in the woods and we had our blankets and all the things that we owned which were almost nothing and one day – April

26<sup>th</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> a jeep comes into camp driven by an American captain. He drove right up close to where my friends and I were and he got out and jumped on top of the hood and he says, “Come around here”. He says, “Alright you guys you’re free”. That was the liberation, it was such a letdown! One guy.

Rick: Were the German guards gone?

Ray: No the German guards had all come too and they had grabbed their rifles by the barrels and were dragging their butts in the ground and they all came over and the captain said “alright tell those guards to come over here” and you know we could all speak German (not all of us, I took German lessons while I was in camp) and he got them out and he said “all right you tell those guards to go back and stand guard duty over you one more night and I’ll be back tomorrow to pick them up”. So here we were liberated but this captain tells the German guards that they’ve got to go back on duty to guard us. It was very logical, now their prisoners, now they have to have obedience to the authorities see so “yes sir” and they went right back on duty and the next day this guy comes back with three or four 6x trucks and American GI’s and they rounded up all the guards and hauled them away.

Rick: Did they bring any food to you?

Ray: No, no.

Rick: You were still existing on nothing?

Ray: On nothing, yeah. But what I did and two other friends of mine – man we bolted out of camp and ran across the farm and there was one rooster. That was the only animal left on that farm and we were throwing everything at it and I had a German bayonet at that point and I finally threw that bayonet and I hit that rooster broadside like that and it just knocked the wind right out of it and I ran right over there and I wrung it’s neck and we went down to the En River and we started to pluck it but it wouldn’t pluck so we skinned that thing up and we built a little fire and we ate that thing when it got war. We were hungry! Then we went to town, we went

into Braunel and I found a Model C Ford, you know they had Model A, B and C and the Model C was '32 and it was the old four cylinder and it was quite a deluxe automobile and I hotwired it and fired it up and we started to drive it but it just ran out of gas.

Rick: Were there a lot of American troops in town?

Ray: Well when we got to town there was a field kitchen. Man we bummed some food real fast and before that though this captain came to us and he said that he just had orders that he had to take his men and go after the Germans in Czechoslovakia because that's where the last of the battles occurred and he said "alright you men are in charge", he said "you go out and round up all the German stragglers you can find (men in uniform) and also stack arms". So we found a farm wagon, quite a large one and it had a single horse on it and we started picking up arms and the German army had just evacuated one of their armies and they just threw away everything. I mean there was just all kinds of personal stuff and arms and lots of munitions and guns and everything. We had this whole wagon loaded with guns where the horse couldn't pull it anymore and I had a German Mauser by then and I saw a white flag shaking behind a barn so I shouted over to him "Come en se ere" and out came this guy holding a flag on a stick and out came another and another and another and about 30 men came out and I was really surprised. So we made them all prisoners and had them put their hands up and we got them all lined up there and they had no guns, they had thrown away everything. Some of the guys there made them take off their boots and the reason was that the Russians in our camp had been marched out ahead of us and they had been put in another section of the woods right nearby but they had no boots. They had worn their boots out long before and they never ratified the Geneva Convention so the Germans didn't give them anything, they didn't have to. So we took their boots and gave them to the Russians.

\*\*\* Tape Interrupt \*\*\*

Ray: Well when I was in camp, it was February 14<sup>th</sup> of '43 and letters and telegrams came to my mother and father in Los Angeles with notification that people in the east coast had received

radio broadcast from Germany giving my name and my serial number and giving their names (my parents names) and address that I was safe and a prisoner of war.

Rick: So your parents would never have known had that information not been given.

Ray: Not until the following September. That meant a lot to my parents.

Rick: So how long did you remain there before you were on board back to the states?

Ray: Well they put us in an aluminum factory as a billet with a roof on it and everything but we went crazy and wrecked the factory and there was a pile of smoke coming out of it. It was a brand new factory, never turned a billet and a major came this time and he was just fuming and he says “we were saving that factory for the German reconstruction program”.

Rick: And you guys ripped it up?

Ray: We ripped it up. But it turns out (I didn't learn this until 1995) that it was Alcoa – American Aluminum Factory, so that's why we didn't bomb it. But anyway then they took us to Pocking Field where there was a Hungarian Air Force Field flying German fighters against our bombers and then we really went crazy. I got into a Misimit 109 fighter plane and it's tied down and I got a hand crank and turned up the initial starter and I read all the British Intelligence reports and I knew how to operate that airplane but I had no intentions of trying to fly it of course but I fired up that engine and I was having fun running that. Here was in the cockpit of a 109 “Rrrrrhhh”. It ran out of fuel. So we did a number of things and then there was real effort to get us out of there as we were wrecking things and just the most interesting thing happened here right at the end. We found the control tower with flare guns and flare ammunition you know berry pistols and we started firing this late in the afternoon into the evening and finally a C47 turned on its landing lights and landed at Pocking Field. And what on earth is anybody doing with landing lights on while the war was on but they taxied up and out came a colonel and an entourage of other officers and they came over to us and they started shaking our hands and they started talking to us but we couldn't hear anything because we had fired these guns right next to

our ears and finally we got to understand what they were saying, they said “the war is over”. “oh wonderful the war is over! The war is over!” he said “yeah you’re giving the signal that the war is over and we’re your officers” and that was a week before the war was over and we were celebrating the war being ended and we didn’t know so we just sort of melted into the crowd and disappeared. They flew us out the next day in C47’s to France and we ended up at Camp Lucky Strike in LaHarve France.

Rick: And then from there by ship back to the US?

Ray: Yeah, well we stayed there for three weeks and they fattened us up and after three weeks and five meals a day – ice cream and everything you could think of, I checked in at 113 pounds – after three weeks.

Rick: After three weeks. What did you weigh before that?

Ray: I don’t know. While I was there at a kiosk, I’ll never forget this either, Dwight Eisenhower came up and he had his Ike Coat, you know it was cut short off the bottom and the only thing I can remember that he said was “thank you”.

Rick: That was it but you did get to see him?

Ray: Yeah, “thank you for your sacrifices” I think he said. Then we got on a ship and five days later we were in New York and there was the Statue of Liberty.

Rick: Yeah you saw that Statue of Liberty coming in and I guess it’s indescribable seeing that.

Ray: That’s right.

Rick: Well Ray thanks so much for your efforts and the detail and your expertise you lend to this.

