



Gale “Pat” Patterson

United States Army Air Corps

2nd Lieutenant

European Theater

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Rick: We're interviewing today Gayle Pat Patterson who has some very interesting stories about his experiences in World War Two. Gayle we're glad to have you with us today, could you briefly tell us where you grew up and what your early life was like?

Pat: I grew up in Norwood Colorado, the southeast part of the state and I was basically on a farm in the early years. We had the usual amount of farm animals including about 20 or 25 milk cows depending on any given time how many there were. So we ran sort of a dairy operation and my father was also a beekeeper. So we were deeply into honey. We produced almost two tons of honey a year out of say fifteen or eighteen hundred hives scattered throughout the valley. So I grew up as a farm boy and enjoyed a good life. We didn't have much money but we had plenty to eat. Everything was pretty much on hold as far as entertainment and all that. It was the days before radio, before electricity. I was fifteen before I moved into the first house in Telluride Colorado that had electricity, running water and flushable toilets. So it was, but we got along fine and enjoyed life. My dad later became county assessor and I continued to help my brother with the bees until he got voted out of office the second year because he raised a bill that taxation a little too high.

Rick: Can you remember when you first heard about World War Two and the experiences of Germany and Japan?

Pat: We, as teenagers and later as early as the 1920's, in our twenties and so forth didn't really pay too much attention to what was going on. We weren't politically minded at that age like most young kids but so Pearl Harbor was a real shock. I was out driving with some friends of mine listening to Glen Miller on the radio in the San Fernando Valley when we got the announcement Sunday afternoon that the Jap's had bombed Pearl Harbor. And I said "*this is a wake up call, I'm 21, I'm ripe, I'm goin to get pulled into the Army, Air force* (it was the Army Aircorp in those days), *so I want to do it my way and I want to get into the flying, I want to be a pilot*". In the early days my brothers had sponsored me to have trip by plane in our hometown and about twenty minutes around town I was hooked. I decided that day I wanted to be a pilot. But there was no way that I could ever plan on being a pilot with the depression years and all

that. But suddenly here was an opportunity that opened up. Maybe Uncle Sam would foot the bill for me to become a pilot, and eventually they did.

Rick: So you joined, you were 21 at the time of Pearl Harbor? **Pat:** Just past my 21st birthday.

Rick: And then you enlisted in the Aircorp?

Pat: Well I tried and it takes quite a little effort to get in the Army Aircorp, which was what it was called before the days of the Air force. We had to take test that took about six and a half hours, pass a very rigid physical, answer a lot of questions, go before the board and get hammered with questions one-after-another to see if we could take the discipline, whether we could hold our heads under fire so to speak and I had done all that and everything was fine except I had a little infection in my outer canal in my ear and they said '*get that taken care of and come back*'. Well it took longer than I thought, about three months to get that cleared up. So by the time I got back I had to take the tests all over again starting with the written test and right on through and then I did meet the board and got passed and they told me I would be given a notice when to be sworn in. So sure enough I got the notice and two days later came greetings from the President which you don't ignore. That means you are going to be selected for the Army, US Army. So I quickly made arrangements to let everybody know I was cleared for the Air force, the Army Aircorp and eventually I did get there.

Rick: So you got your draft notice just a few days after you'd already enlisted in the Aircorp?

Pat: I hadn't actually been sworn in. That was the one thing that was, the only thing that was waiting to be done. But in a way it was a good thing because some of those that were sworn in early and they had to wait for a spot in the Air force training program to open up before they could actually get into it. I was fortunate in that respect because I was taken in within 45 days I was down at Santa Anna, but before that we went to the Presidio in Monterey for our first service and while I was there they brought in Max Bear who had been a Heavyweight Champion in 1934-35 as the World Heavyweight boxer and he came in with his brother Buddy who was even bigger than Max. Anyway, we were all happy to seen them and in that was another incident that was very interesting. I have a size 12B shoe, foot and the Army of course wanted us to put on a

13B. I didn't want that but it's what the Army says it's not what a private thinks. So I was sitting down, they finally had a 13C shoes for me so I went down to the supply desk and they couldn't find them. They thought they were there somewhere but they couldn't find them – go back to the sergeant. I go back to the sergeant and report in and he said, *“Oh they just called, they found them – come on back and get ‘em”*. So as I go back, I found out that Buddy Bear had gotten the shoes that I was supposed to get. He had size 13C shoes. So a fella that knew the circumstances rushed up to tell Max when he came out from the tailor shop where they were being measured for their special uniforms that here's a guy that wears a size 13 shoes but Buddy got them ahead of me. He said *“my God, I gotta shake hands with the guy that's got as big a foot as Buddy”*. It was shortly after that that I ended up going down to Santa Anna Airbase and in that there's another story. My mother was supposed to come out to California, probably about the 23rd of December and I was stuck in Monterey on the 19th which was a Saturday. Well somehow she got a premonition that she needed to get out of there and get to California where my two bothers were there early. And she prayed about it, she was a very religious woman and she kept getting that message that she should go so she was never one to question prayers too much so she got ready and went. And she got into Los Angeles Saturday night about 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock, went down to my brothers and that next night, Saturday night, the 19th I was told suddenly to get on a troop ship (sorry) troop train going to Texas and to get off at the Union station and take myself down to Santa Anna and do not delay, you're expected there, you will be punished if you don't go quickly. Well it turns out that I went through the Union station just a little over 12 hours after my mother had gone through but instead of going to Santa Anna, I knew California, I'd been there for two years and so I jumped on the street car and went in the opposite direction. Went down to my brothers and I said *“is my mother here, I have the feeling that she's here”*. *“No she's not expected for another couple of more days”*. I said, *“Well I just got this feeling that she must be here”*. He said, *“Well if she is she's over at the other brothers – Layton's house”*. So over we went. He said, *“just in case she's there, you hide around the corner and I'll go in and check”*. So sure enough she was there. They were just up having breakfast. So he said, *“I've got your Christmas present outside but you have to come outside to see it, it's too big to bring in the house”*. So she goes out and I come around the corner and we embraced and that was a, one of the finest Christmases I've had.

Rick: And you had of missed her had she not left early and ...

Pat: It was just divine intervention is the only way I can explain it Rick, there was no other way for all those events to happen. I never did get my size 13C shoe. They finally said, "*Go with the shoes you've got*". And I got a 12B in Santa Anna that fit properly and everything was fine.

Rick: Well tell us about going over seas and how did you eventually become a pilot?

Pat: Well, I did get into pilot training and the courses were pretty tough and rigorous. We studied meteorology, navigation and everything including Morse code. And Morse code was the one thing that got me. I simply somehow could not master code. So I was back a class to class 43K, that was the one that graduated in December of '43. So in that training we started to fly in May of '43 at King City California in primary flight and then Chico California for basic and Stockton California for the advanced course where we finally graduated. But along the way we lost over fifty percent of the students that washed out for various reasons – uncoordinated or they couldn't take the discipline. There were various reasons. I think a lot of them, given extra time would have made the flight training all right but the government had no time for anybody who couldn't grasp it quickly and move on.

Rick: Did they train you in B17's?

Pat: This was a build up for the training and we graduated as a Second Lieutenant pilot as an Officer and from there I went to B17 training in Hobbs New Mexico. I was there for six, seven weeks learning to fly the B17. The first time I saw it I thought '*that's the biggest thing I've ever seen*'. Nineteen feet high, 104-foot wingspan, about 84 feet long, a ten-man crew, four engines. It just all seemed like it was a lot to handle but eventually you stick with it and you do get the job done. One of the things I used to enjoy was going on cross-countries after I was an upper classman, we would fly out, this was in the wintertime, out across Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and so forth; we'd look down and the moonlight had all these lights below us and listening to Glen Miller on the broadband radio. We had graduated to that point where we could do that and we would fly into places like St. Louis and stay over night just on a rare occasion and this

taught us how to land in foreign fields. And those were great days as I told Elizabeth early today – the sentimental journey airplane brought back a lot of those memories and when I was flying that plane I that was exactly where I wanted to be. I knew that combat was in the future, not knowing what that would mean but that could wait. I was enjoying thoroughly being a pilot – the thing I really loved.

Rick: How did you get notified that you were going to be shipped overseas and tell us about that.

Pat: Oh we knew the routine, it was pretty standard. You finished your B17 training and we were sent here to Salt Lake City to which was the 18th replacement depot for crews to meet up. We had a four man crew which were the Officers – the pilot, co-pilot, navigator and bombadeer, of that the pilot and co-pilot were here in Salt Lake. The other six men were out of Kearns at the replacement depot there. And they had just finished gunnery training but they were late getting there so I stayed longer than usual and in the mean time I went to First Presbyt Church and met my future wife there at a greeting, that place where they greeted the servicemen and had dinners and so forth, no dancing was allowed but other things that were interesting. And eventually we shipped out with a five-man crew and the two officers. We picked up the navigator in Dalehart Texas and the bombadeer shortly thereafter.

Rick: You flew a B17, the one you were going to have over there – you flew it over to....

Pat: Yeah, we trained then in Mississippi so we would get the over water training for the navigator and all of us. Then we transferred to Langley Field Virginia for a final phase and that phase was to train the navigators in the new radar systems that they had developed. This would allow them to find the target under cloudy skies which otherwise we had to wait for clear weather to find a target. So the radar allowed them to see through the clouds and it was one of the new innovations that we came about in World War Two. It was in 1944 that this came about and became practical, so we flew the bombadeers and navigators around for that period of time. Then as I told Elizabeth I went to have a short leave and I went to New York City. The first thing I wanted to do was go up in the Empire State Building. So I had been in town three hours and I was up there on the 86th floor looking out around the city – that was one of my fascinations.

And I went to the Statue of Liberty and eventually met a girl there that worked on Wall Street and we dated the rest of the time I was there. She had to admit, she'd never been to any of those places. She was a local, I was the out-of-town boy, I had to see it all. I rode the subway and went over to Flatbush Avenue and Brooklyn, all the things I'd heard about on the movies and otherwise. I really had a wonderful time in New York. Then we got back, finished our training and got a brand new B17 loaded with 6,000 pounds of mail, spare parts and other items and we started to fly. We went to Manchester New Hampshire, Ganderfield Newfoundland where we were weathered in for seven days. From there we went on to the Azores islands and that was kind of scary because we left at 3:30 in the morning and once you leave the runway where your lights are on the runway, there's nothing except the instruments in front of you. We were strictly on instruments. We said '*well it'll be daylight fairly soon*', this was August '*when we are, we'll be able to see the ocean*'. Come daylight we can still see the wingtips, that was it. We were still in the fog bank one of the worst I've ever seen. I thought San Francisco and some of those places had fog but nothing like that in Newfoundland.

Rick: In those days did they have radar so that you could see another plane approaching or any other thing in the air?

Pat: They didn't have it for our systems. We had a radio beacon; also we had a good navigator which gave us the headings we needed to head across that ocean. Something like 8 and a half hours later we landed at the Azores islands. Boy were we ever glad to see land again. Even though the plane is working perfectly, there's always a nervous tension when you're flying over water. If something happens, what do you do? So we made it and then the next day Marakesh North Africa, then Tunis and finally landed in Italy. And the next day the co-pilot and I we happened to be born the same day, the same year, celebrated our 24th birthdays. We got a shave and a haircut for 25 cents from an Italian barber and a few days later we were assigned to the 463 bomb group. But then we started flying combat then.

Rick: Tell us about your first experiences in combat (and what you were thinking).

Pat: Scary. We didn't know what to expect and we were given a pilot from another crew and I flew as his co-pilot on that first mission. So we would get the feel of what combat was like and we flew up to Northern Italy and bombed a place up there which they kind of said was a milk run but it still had a lot of flack and I saw the shaft (which is shredded aluminum) coming out of the plane and I said "*is that flack*"? And he said "*no, no that's just aluminum stuff they get down there to blanket below the planes to screw up their radar – the Germans radar, so that they can't see how high we are*". They can see us visually but they couldn't tell the height. They had to guess at that so they shot some high, some low and some in between. If you were lucky none of them hit you but almost every trip you had at least some flack in the airplanes. And, like I say it was pretty scary but we got back fine and began to get just a little bit braver as a second, third, fourth mission and finally I had my whole crew back again with my co-pilot who had flown for the other guy while we ran his.

Rick: Let me ask you one thing. You'd get up early in the morning for these missions and go to a ready room. Is that correct? And then your commanding officer would then explain what your mission was for that day...

Pat: We would get up around 4 o'clock, go eat breakfast and then go to the briefing – the pilot and I and the navigator, bombadeer and we would all go over and find out what our target was, what the weather was going to be and all these other things and then we would go to our plane and the CO (commanding officer) would brief us at the last minute for our particular squadron. And that was so we could all take off about daylight. We had to be all ready to take off at daylight and that was so we could see the planes as we went in formation. The lead plane would take off on this side of the runway; the next plane would take off on this side to avoid a lot of the prop wash and then the next plane back here. And they alternated on sides of the runway and he would go up and start to make a turn and we would turn inside that and gradually form the squadron. And he would make this turn and then we would start and head towards our target.

Rick: Would they inform you of where the heavy flack was going to be and what to look out for so you knew pretty well at what part of the mission that you were going to be bombarded with these flack bombs.

Pat: Well we knew it was heaviest around their oil refineries, their gasoline oil. They really defended those the heaviest because that was their lifeblood. And you may have heard of all the raids on Ploesti Romania – that was one of the biggest oil producing fields that the Germans had taken over and it was one of the toughest. They lost, if I recall 2,200 men; something like 100 airplanes both British and American that flew those raids because it was so dangerous. And the first raids they came in just over tree-top level and they were disoriented – if you’ve ever seen the Utah Man, Walt Stuart narrates that – he was one of the first to fly out of North Africa in his B24 and fly into Romania into Ploesti Romania oil fields and it was mighty scary – you just – he made it back and as he landed the engines quit running because they were out of gas.

Rick: Unbelievable, well there were so many pilots and airmen that lost their lives and many taken prisoner and so tell us your experiences, I know this happened to you. What mission was it and tell us how that occurred and what happened.

Pat: We were on our 16th mission and had gone to Vienna which was an oil refinery so we knew that was going to be one of our tough targets and as we flew in there we saw a plane off to the side at our height out of the range of the guns and they radioed down to the gunners below what our altitude was. And that was when it really got tough. If you saw the plane off to the side, you knew you were going to get hit bad and we did. But just before we got in our planes, the squadron commander told Kirby and I who was the lead ship, we had – Kirby flew on number two position, we’d fly number three on the right wing and just before we got in our planes he said “*Patterson you and Kirby trade sides today*”. No reason whatsoever was given so we traded – so we’re over here, over the target and Kirby gets a direct hit – four guys jump out the back end and the plane explodes – six men died. That would have been our plane had we not changed sides. So I have another definition for that divine intervention. That’s just; to this day I can still see that plane explode in my minds eye. I guess it’ll always be there; it just – not only because it would have been us but because of the tension we were under and we were getting hit at the same time. They knocked two engines out, gas was flowing in the bomb bay doors – a spark could have blown us up. We were getting spared all that. But the formation left and we were out there all alone, crippled airplane, one-and-a-half engines so we held the altitude as

much as we could and headed towards the Yugoslav mountains where the partisans were. If you could get in with the partisan group which were the Tito and his bunch. They were against the Germans and they would go down and have raids in the valleys and that rack up in the mountains. We supplied them with food stuff and armaments and so forth out of Italy. If we could only get there we might be taken care of and might get back to the base in Italy. But we didn't make it. In fact I wrote poem about my last mission and what happened. And maybe this would be a time to.

Rick: Well you could – let me ask you – you were quite young at the time and you were responsible for ten men on board that ship.

Pat: That was another thing that you take very seriously. You're in charge of ten men, responsible for them, whatever decisions you make effects not only you but all the other nine guys and of course they're taught to take orders so whatever the airplane commander in this case they call the pilot does is what they all do, they all have to obey. But it was, it was pretty (hold on a minute).

Rick: We need to – I ought to have you tell us how old you were and because that is such an unusual thing to have such a young guy – you doing okay?

Pat: Yeah I'm fine I just got a little dry.

Rick: Do you want to do this poem before we go through the POW stuff?

Pat: Well I turned 24 the day after we hit Italy, so did my co-pilot, we were the same age. Same day, same year. He was I guy I knew in training so it was all the much better that I had met him downtown Salt Lake City and I said "*Phillip what are you doing here?*" "*Oh I'm going to be somebody's co-pilot,*" he said "*I washed down to B-24 school.*" So a week later here came the order Patterson pilot, Rudolph co-pilot; and we had known each other in the final phase of our trainings right before we graduated.

Pat: What was the average age of your crew?

Rick: One was 20, one 21 and I was 24 at the time we got into combat, the oldest was about 25 so we were all fairly young and around the same age.

Pat: You've written this poem here about when you were shot down and maybe

*** Tape pause***

Pat: You were telling us that the Commander had shifted you from one side of the formation to the other and your crew watched as the position that was being taken up by the other plane had a direct hit and 6 of those young guys lost their lives, I guess the other 4 bailed out. Take us from there as to how you finished that mission, you had 2 motors gone and you were headed for the mountains of Yugoslavia.

Rick: In 1968 I had to write a poem for a speech contest and to this I day I don't know how it happened, but I wrote it in 3 hours for 5 minutes. I reduced it recently to a much shorter version but it still has most of the events. It's called

In Retrospect:

Sit down my friend and I will tell of my 16th Mission, I remember it well. On Friday October 13^h in '44 we rose from our beds at a quarter to 4, the targets in Europe pass through my brain like leaves from the trees in the cold Autumn dawn, one after another they formed then were gone. We gathered for a briefing the CO came last, we jumped to attention at ease as he passed. What was our target, how far would we go? We all said a prayer but we still didn't know. A refinery in Austria, Vienna by name, that was our target a tough one to tame. The flack there was heavy and fear gripped the heart, even the strong were paled by the thought. The number two spot we were soon in formation, flying left on lead ship for these operations. Our V-17's were stable and big, but speed and fast climb they just didn't dig. Out after hour we groaned on toward the city as we climbed slowly upward I became Walter

May (?). My mind wandered back to the training I'd had, the planes I'd flown, the times good and bad. I remembered some girls so lovely and pretty, some quiet, some shy, and some rather witty. With a tug on the wheel it's my turn it seems and formation flying leaves no time for dreams. We've reached altitude and also IP at 29,000 we turn a wide 'V'. Our plane rocks and jumps as the flack makes us sway, the bomb bays are open, the bombs now away. We have been hit two engines are lost, as gas siphons out by flack we are tossed. On opposite wing Kirby's in trouble, his wing burst in flames as he holds with a struggle. We see parachutes but count only 4, the plane then explodes we see it no more. The formation is gone as we cripple along, we check out the damage and find it no song. Two engines are out and a third is half shot, we lose altitude fast and it flies like a rock. We struggle through Hungary as lower we seek, at 3,000 feet we really must think. The co-pilot and I confer on the chances of riding it in, or a parachute and some branches. We make up our minds so as pilot I yell, "Go back and jump out when I ring the bell!" The others are ready but some need assistance, a boot on each rear overcomes the resistance. The tension runs high, the brain races madly, I know I must jump but courage lacks sadly. At last I do jump, nerves edgy and raw, I count to ten ever faster the ring I draw. It opens with a jolt, the hardest I've felt, my tension is gone the chute took it out. As I floated toward the ground at a moment serene, I know God's in his heaven his beauty supreme. The moment's race by as I drink in the beauty, too soon here's the ground and some farmers on duty. Ignore them I must so I ride for the bushes, in hopes of eluting the local militia. But fright has decreed a dim result as over my shoulder they shout, "HALT! HALT!" With arms overhead I stood and waited, as the German's took charge and a capture I hated. And then also later during months of interment, one phrase was used the German endearment. Off came the saying growing common as Rover, "Now for you, the war is over."

Rick: Tell us about what happened when you got down.

Pat: Well as I hit the ground, I'll tell you the parachute was the most wonderful thing I've ever done. It didn't last long because we were too close to the ground; my only regret was that I hadn't jumped out higher to enjoy it. We had never actually jumped before but they had a big cable where it simulated a jump from a high deck right down across with a pulley and a parachute. But had never jumped before or since. Anyway, I hit the ground in a plowed field and there were some farmers/peasants on the side but they didn't know what to think so they stayed out of my way. I jerked my parachute off since I was already seen, I didn't bother to pick it up. I headed for the first bushes I could see and I had gone about 200 feet when I heard, "HALT! HALT!" So I turned around and here's a guy with a rifle aimed at me, another one with a pistol in the air hollering "HALT!" so naturally I halted. My arms went up and they came. It was really a funny scene when, before the soldiers got there the peasants saw my flying suit with all my zipper pockets and I had extra socks, candy bars, different things I might need in case we ever got shot down and I put it in an escape kit, which was a device a little bigger than a deck of cards. It had maps and some American dollars in it to help us escape if we had that chance. Well the minute I stopped with my hands in the air, here they come and start zipping my pockets open and grabbing all my stuff. In any other condition it would have been funny.

Rick: The German's just let them do that?

Pat: No they came up there mad, they said, "*You put everything back.*" I couldn't understand the words but there was no question about what they meant. So they came back and started stuffing stuff back in my pockets. But I totally put my hands behind my back and they had a chain with a padlock, that was my handcuffs. So I was the first one caught, all the other 10 had bailed out ahead of me and so the captain got my dog tags and called his headquarters to decide what to do with us, he knew the others had jumped out because he could see them and they had a truck out picking them up. So I just stood there and while I was standing there, here was a bowl of what I would call Hungarian Goulash soup stew ready at 11:30 in the morning. I thought it sure smelled good; we hadn't had breakfast since about 5 a.m., so we hoped they would give of us some of that but when it came time to feed us they didn't, we didn't get anything. The soldiers came and filled their little muskets and took off and we just stood there. Then a

Hungarian woman came up and starting giving me this right in the face and jabbering in Hungarian which I had no idea what she meant, but the message was fairly clear that she hated us; we're Americans bombing their country, tearing things up. So I just stood there and finally I smiled, she whapped me a couple of times across the face and turned and left. There was no way I understood what she was saying. Then we were transported to a room on the other side of town and finally given chairs to sit in, and we sat there all night. We asked for food, they did give us water but no food. It was 2 the next afternoon before we got anything to eat event though the Geneva Convention says you're supposed to feed your prisoner as well as your own self. That night we were put on a train and headed towards Budapest where they had an interrogation center, that was the 14th of October. We arrived in Budapest the next morning, the 15th of October. We were put in a streetcar and they moved all the people out of one end of the streetcar so they could put us in. We went to the end of the line and then marched into the old prison, it was an old stone prison, it looked like it had 3' thick walls. Everything was made out of heavy timber it was in days before much steel; I couldn't guess how old it was 300-400 years maybe. We were put in solitary cells. On the 2nd day I was taken down to an interrogation officer and I reported and told him my name, rank, and serial number; so he turns around and pulls out a 5x7 card and hands it to me. Here it says, "*Gayle H. Patterson; Hometown: Norwood, CO; Bases in King City, Chico*" In Budapest, Hungary here I am with all the stats in front of me. There were a couple of minor errors, but the basic information was there.

Rick: That was in the day before computers, so how did they get that information?

Pat: Well I got thinking later, the hometown papers always printed up what the service men were doing and they were very proud of it. I graduated as a second lieutenant and I don't think they kept track of the enlisted men, but any of the officers they seemed to track. There were different things in each hometown paper, so I assume that they just gathered it all and shipped to somewhere to the Gestapo headquarters and sent it out to wherever was needed. It may have come from Berlin down through dispatch, or it may have been there all the time waiting for us. But here was our whole information.

Rick: Your interrogator, could he speak real good English?

Pat: Very good English.

Rick: Was he trained in America?

Pat: I don't know, I never found that out but he certainly was able to speak everything in perfect English; many of the Germans did. As you probably know, in Europe they have English as a required second language and unfortunately we don't do enough with our own country with foreign languages. We do take Latin and Spanish and some of those but in this case what we needed was German, Italian, so forth. Any rate, I was taken back to my room and left there and I was taken down a 2nd time and of course I didn't know anything particular outside of the outfit I was in. So finally they had put all the other men in a big room together so that's where I ended up. Then on about the 28th of October we were put on a boxcar, the guards on one end and we officers on the other end and the enlisted men went to different camps in Poland. We were shipped up from Budapest up through Czechoslovakia into Germany, we ended up just about 90 miles southeast of Berlin on the Polish border. We arrived there oddly enough on Halloween Eve 60 years ago this year. That's kind of ironic, the next morning was November 1st and we moved into our quarters which was a 15 men room with 3 decker beds made out of 2x4's and slats of wood, they were pretty rough with very little insulation and it was cold – man it was cold. We never had enough fuel, never had enough to eat, so the weight started dropping off – if I could get on one of those diets today I'd lose quite a bit. It was just a gradual decline.

Rick: Were there all officers just in that prison camp?

Pat: That was strictly for officers. We did have a few orderly men who were enlisted men and they brought the food and went out in the fields and gathered the various things we had to eat in the fall like potatoes and whatnot. And we kind of envied them, we'd like to have gotten outside of the prison walls but we were not able to. I was in the west compound and beside that, through several layers of fence and razor wire and whatnot was the English compound and that was the compound where the Great Escape occurred. It had occurred on March 24, 1944. They'd been digging since May '43 on three tunnels called '*Tom*', '*Dick*', and '*Harry*'. You may have heard

about all that. It was made into the movie ‘*The Great Escape*’ starring James Garner and Steve McQueen and a number of other good actors.

Rick: So that was right next to your compound?

Pat: We could see them and occasionally we talked. We had to throw things really high, usually you put a stone under it or something to get it over the fence. But we traded items back and forth – cigarettes and I ended up with a Battle Jacket from the British that had a black diamond on the left sleeve in memorance of the people that were massacred because of the great escape. The story was that they broke out – they’d hoped to get out as many as 100 maybe more men and they did all the basic work of getting the forms ready. The Germans had a habit of strike-overs and bad, you know they had all sorts of different Yeomen doing the basic work of typewriting and they were lousy. So they’d leave words out, they’d go out and put the letter up above it and different things, so they made these forms with a lot of those same strike-overs. They cut the heel off of a boot to make the Nazi swastika and they had one guy that got a hold of uniforms and by various dyes they made a long coat out of it – an overcoat, or they made different clothes. It was just absolutely ingenious, the whole thing was unbelievable. And they had all these people ready to go. So on the night of March 24th, 1944 the fellow in charge of that says, “*This is the night we go*”. So they filled in the dates of everything so it would be current. They had everything done except the dates on the documents they needed and some were supposed to be business men. They had briefcases made out of who knows what and they escaped, but only three of them to our knowledge ever got all the way back.

Rick: Were there escape plans in your prison section, were you guys thinking about escaping?

Pat: There were but it was all coordinated under one headquarters. We were told to do nothing on our own. Everything was – they didn’t want us going off half-cocked and trying to get out of there. And a few of them pulled the things like scooting under the wire when all the Germans were busy and they usually caught them and dragged them back in pretty quick, or they’d have a – one fellow was dressed up in a German uniform and he march about six of the prisoners (our guys) out the gate as if he was in charge of a detail going somewhere. Well they probably got

about 100 feet and somebody figured out what it was – they pulled ‘em back in. So there were different, always something going on.

Rick: What were your two worst experiences that you can remember while you were a prisoner of war?

Pat: Well the worst was the forced march in January. We were told ahead of time that the Russians were coming in from the southeast. They had taken over Romania already and were driving towards Berlin rather fast, so we were given khaki shirts and told to fix a pack out of them. So we took the shoulders, the sleeves and sewed them to the bottom; sewed the top up, turned them upside down, closed in the collar part and that was to take everything that we owned when we got ready to march. So we were prepared and also we went and walked around the perimeter, we also walked quite a bit and when we were told we might be marching out, we were told to march even more – get more ready to march out. So that’s what we did and on the night on the 27th of January we marched out and into the cold. It was snowing and it was, according to the reports I got – subzero. And the book I had just got called ‘*The Last Escape*’ details a lot of those days in Europe in the last two years of the war, about the various prisoner of war camps and what was happening. What happened to all of us by all the interviews and various things that they had gone threw.

Rick: How long was that march Pat?

Pat: We left at midnight and our particular group, mind you there were 10,000, over 10,000 people there, they were strung out for miles and hours. Different groups went different hours and some of them even went in a different direction. We marched until daylight, came to a little town, stomped our feet and finally found the place where they’d take us in for a couple of cigarettes and we could get warm for about an hour and then we were called out. The dogs went through the town to see if they had everybody and they counted us. The high and dry (??) and we lined up in rows of five deep and we started the march and it got dark. We marched all that second night and about six, seven o’clock the next morning we came into a little town called ‘Moscow’ and we stomped our feet there for probably 45 minutes while they decided what to do

with us. Finally they found a pottery factory that would let us in, so we went there and that was the nearest thing to heaven we could ever see. We went into this warm hearth where the furnaces were going, laid down on the flagstone and just exhausted. We took our shoes off, couldn't get 'em back on for two more days. We had everything we owned on our back until we got to Nuremberg. They fed us one meal at Spremberg, that was it. The rest of it we had Red Cross parcels and I can't say enough good about the Red Cross and all the things they did through the International Red Cross. We were saved, literally our health was saved I believe by the fact that the Red Cross sent in all these food parcels with concentrated foods.

Rick: Then how did you get back to American lines? Give us the ending of this thing here.

Pat: We were put in a boxcar and went to Nuremberg and that was even worse than Zagon because we got three bowls of dehydrated soup a day, it was very thin, and the weight really dropped off. We got a bath every month there whether we needed it or not. We on, finally we were told that in April that the Americans were coming in so we were going to be moved south. So we marched the 100 miles from Nuremberg to the Mooseburg area and they took us in circuitous routes. We always avoided the big cities because they figured if we ever got in a city we could scatter and get lost, so we always went through the smallest villages and stayed. So by the circuitous route we went further than we would have normally. So we got there about the 8th of April and there I found my navigator, he'd been put on a different ship and shot down a month later. He had a grandmother in Italy – he said “*I'm going to go try to see my grandmother before I go back home*” – an Italian kid from Boston. We were there when Patton's army came through, the 14th army division and they crashed through the gate and the Germans had been given notice or they knew we were coming, they could hear the artillery coming. So they had all left and left the camp in charge of a few sergeants. Then within 24 hours they started to make plans to fly us out and we went to...

Rick: So Patton's army came and broke through the camp and rescued you?

Pat: They fought all around us; we could actually see the tanks go up over the hill off to the side in the fields past the town of Mooseburg.

Rick: They brought food with them and...

Pat: No they didn't do anything for us, they were on their own mission.

Rick: Well what were you're thoughts when you first saw American soldiers again?

Pat: Oh what a wonderful – we knew that we were near the end but when we heard the fighting two or three days ahead of time, we could hear all the artillery and we knew that we were about to be rescued so we were very jubilant by this time. And of course when it actually happened it was almost just anticlimactic, it was wonderful.

Rick: How long were you there then before you were flying home?

Pat: The second day, I think we were there – well that was the 29th of April and it was the 2nd of May so it was actually about four days.

Rick: Four days, and then you flew to New York?

Pat: We flew to L'Harve France and there we were put on a troop ship and as we got on the troop ship the wheels, the bells and whistles went off and all this noise; we found out it was VE Day. It was the 8th of May and everything; all hell broke loose as far as the noise. And we went to South Hampton across the Canal – the Channel and picked up a bunch of British war brides. A lot of them with children who had married American servicemen and they were being taken back and we landed at Boston, was taken to Camp Miles Standish and prepared to go in our various directions to go home. And I went home through Fort Carson – got my final orders and went on to Western Colorado.

Rick: Well have you got any thoughts after all these years about your experiences and have any advice for maybe younger generations that are just coming up and are about 14 and 15 years old right now?

Pat: Stay out of war. I've had a lot of thoughts on how things were and I would not wish anybody else to go through those although it was something I went through and I was a changed person, in many ways the better. After I saw refugees along the road with things piled on their wagon and old women and mothers with kids and old men struggling along some – and this is in the cold weather most of it – they were being displaced. They were scared to death of the Russians. I don't blame them, the Russians were pretty rough. The Germans had a 'scorched earth' policy as they moved in towards Moscow and this was payback time.

Rick: But this march was basically to get away from the Russians wasn't it? That march from your original prison camp over to ... Well thanks very much Pat that was very interesting. You did a great job.

Elizabeth: I want you to describe when your plane got hit.

Rick: Okay – give us the exact experience of when your plane was actually hit with flack and your engines were going out.

Pat: As we fly into the, toward the target, they have what they called the IP or the 'Initial Point' and this is where the whole formation moves toward the left and you straighten out – you have to fly strait and level for about 5 minutes and that's when the flack is heavy. If there were fighters, they stay out of the way. There weren't any fighters but we had terribly heavy flack as I mentioned, we had this plane off to the side, anytime we saw that we knew we were in trouble and the flack – we could see the bursts all around us – a big black smoke and you know that every burst had shrapnel going in all directions, you know if they came very close it would jump, make the plane jump just like you were on a rough road. Naturally everything is – you're getting ready to drop the bombs and you have to hold this straight and level and your heart's in your throat and you just sort of in an animated, sort of animation when you go over the target.

Rick: So that was your 16th mission and you're still nervous every time?

Pat: We were getting hit worse that time than any other and yeah it was and then we saw the number one engine get hit and knocked out. Number three got knocked out; number two ended up with half power and number four was the only one that was pretty

End of Tape