



Richard Burt

United States Army Air Corps

Staff Sergeant

European Theater

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Interviewer:

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

Rick: Thanks for being with us today, could you explain to me where you were born, where you grew up and how you – what you're thoughts were at the early stages of the war right around Pearl Harbor time.

Richard: Well I grew on a – I was just a simple farm boy, up in Box Elder County, a town called Bear River City. And I have had a love for aviation I guess, I don't even know when it started but my dad used to get mad at me because in my, when I was kid out hoeing beets there was one airliner a day that flew up from Salt Lake to Boise and I could hear it coming and I'd just lean on the hoe and watch that thing fly over and I could just see myself in the cockpit pulling and pushing stuff. That's all I ever wanted to do was fly.

Rick: And how old were you at that time?

Richard: Oh I must have been ten maybe.

Rick: That was in your mind at that time?

Richard: Oh yeah from then I thought that was the only thing to do. But that was the beginning of it, it never really left me. That I just grew up on a farm when I was a – that would have, I was born in 1924 so I was in high school I think as a junior when the war broke out in December.

Rick: And what were your thoughts at that time and after?

Richard: I was just devastated, it was a shock for a little high school up there in Box Elder County, it was just a real real shocker. And so everybody turned to it. You would not believe how patriotism was really high. It was high before but I mean it had the same impact I think even more so than 911 did in this time period. But see 911 just kinda died by the wayside because litigation started in and our memories became very short but *it* didn't – it wasn't short then. It carried on throughout the war but I started my senior year and, but I had joined the Civil Air Patrol as a cadet. The mortician in Brigham City had an airplane – a J3 Cub, 40-horse power, no brakes, little yellow cub that he kept out to the Brigham City airport – the only airplane out there. He had a hanger, it wasn't run, the airport wasn't

operated by anybody. They hired a guard when the war broke out. An old man named Pop Funk and he was the custodian of the airport. But I used to ride a bicycle from my farm about eight miles so I could just look in the hangar window and look at that airplane and I thought “I sure wish I could fly that”. Then the civil air patrol began, came up that time as an auxiliary to the Airforce and there were cadets were just getting involved in the war effort and of course the seniors that had airplanes would be available to fly search missions or anything they needed – courier service or whatever. And the mortician who was a really good friend of my folks decided he wanted to sell his airplane. They wanted to form a flying club and share – break it up into 12 shares and I beat my parents to death for months. I wanted to join the club and they let me, I couldn’t believe it. So I started to learn to fly as a junior in high school.

Rick: Well now tell me when you joined the air corps and a little about that.

Richard: Well that came a little later because the government decided that it was taking too long, this is now after the war had started (I was a senior then) to train pilots because they were losing them about as fast as they were getting trained. So they said ‘*let’s have an experimental program in the high schools*’. They selected 10 high schools as a base and 10 students in each high school and teach them to fly. Put out a contract and teach them and give them enough flight time to get a private pilots license which meant so many hours and a bunch of ground school to pass the written exam. And they picked Box Elder High School which I was a member of and they picked me as one of the students so I learned to fly on that program. So I went to one year of school at the AC after I finished high school and would take a bus down to Salt Lake, took the test to join the AirCorp because I wanted to learn how to fly. I passed the written test and went over to take the physical and they flunked me on the physical. They weren’t going to let me fly. When I was a kid I had pneumonia and that’s why I ended up with only half a lung on this side and I was sick for oh six years I guess. They didn’t think I was going to make it but they decided that was not worth it so I was devastated they weren’t going to let me fly. But I was still in the AirCorp and ended up at Shepard Field for basic training down in Wichita Falls. They had a mechanic school at the other end of the field and I thought well if I can’t fly I’d like to be a mechanic then. That didn’t work either; they sent me to radio school in Sioux Falls South Dakota to be a radio operator. Then we finished radio school, I took a short leave from there and went down to the gunnery school in Yuma Arizona. We used to ride in the back of pickups – you want some fun just sit there and shoot all the shotgun shells you wanted, skeet, you know you’d drive the, they had a race track – you

stood in the back of this pickup and then they had these towers standing over there and they'd throw these birds out and you'd skeet shoot, twelve gauge shotguns.

Rick: While your driving around in a truck?

Richard: Well, you got to understand the rationale for that. If you're just going to stand there and shoot skeet, you know you'd lead it like you'd lead a bird. But if you're going to be a gunner in the airplane you don't stand, you're in an airplane and it's moving. And the other airplane is moving. So that was the theory, you had two moving items and you had to see if you could make them meet.

Rick: Well that's interesting. So you had a lot of fun doing that?

Richard: Oh yeah, a sore shoulder, my shoulder got so sore I couldn't hardly handle it. But part of it was to fly, shooting at a sleeve target. They had B-17's down there and the old Martin B-26, the cigar B-26, you know later on Douglas made a B-26 too that they used in Korea but the old first Martin, it was a coffin. They couldn't hardly use it in combat so they used it to tow sleeves. But the problem is, it was down in Yuma and it was hot and I got sick every time I went up and we just heaved all over the place. Because the acrid smell of the gun powder and I'd been sickened so many times anyway and the air was rough and the idea was if you got sick you'd head for the bomb bay and if you had to throw up, throw up there because it was easier to wash out because you had to clean up your own mess when you got back. And what they did, is they'd, every fifth shell was a tracer and they used to kinda dip the color in paint and then so when they – all the crew had shot different colors then you'd count your score when you got back by the color that you – if you ever hit it.

Rick: And then they had tracer bullets when you were....

Richard: Oh yeah every fifth one was a tracer.

Rick: Well now, when did you get shipped out and tell us about that a little bit, how you got over.

Richard: Okay, we – after the gunnery school we ended up being sent to Hammer Field Fresno California. And that's where the crews were made up. And I was made of a crew of ten people that was sent to Walla Walla Washington for crew training in a B-24. So we was up there about three months

and most of that was just getting to know each other, and the pilot and the co-pilot to improve their proficiency. We didn't do any gunnery up there at all. We would just use the radio to try to get my skills a little better and the Engineer of course would practice also. And so there was ten of us – we had a pilot, a co-pilot, navigator and bombadeer. And then they had six enlisted men and there were three primary callings I guess you'd call it or assignments – one was the Engineer, one was the radio operator, and one was the armorer. The other three was assistant Engineer, assistant radio operator and assistant armorer. Because it took six enlisted men to man the gun positions on the B-24. I understand 17's, some of them had nine.

Rick: That's true, and then later on they had 10 I think. So you were, your main role was in a waste gunner?

Richard: A waste gunner because the radio position was right behind the co-pilot. And you would never really use the radio much except if you were tailing Charlie in formation, you'd send out a strike report and you'd have to be where you could let out the training wire antennae about 300 feet and then send your strike report in.

Rick: So when, did you fly the B-24 overseas when you got your orders finally?

Richard: Well from Walla Walla we each had a 10-day furlough and they sent us to Hamilton Field California and that's just out of San Rafael, just outside of San Francisco – North. And there we were issued, there were 35 crews were put together there and we were each issued a brand new B-24. And it had all the goodies on it and everybody had all their emergency gear. We all had all of our heavy flying gear and we had our B-24's loaded up and we test flew them around there and then we waited and we waited and we waited. We never got shipping orders. Finally some general came through there and we wanted to know what was going on, he said "*well there's some modifications that's got to be done to these birds before they can go over seas...what are these crews still doing here*"? And we said well we're waiting for their airplanes.... "*Well get them outa here*". So they put us on a troop train and sent us five days across country, coast to coast to Hampton Rose Virginia – Camp Patrick Henry, 35 crews. They put us on a Liberty ship into a convoy; we spent 28 days crossing the ocean to go to Bari Italy to get where we were going to be assigned the 15th Airforce. When we got there, our airplanes had already been there and had four missions already. They just couldn't stand to see those crews sitting around.

Rick: Tell us a little bit about life on that 28 day trip on that Liberty Ship, how many men were on there?

Richard: Well there's 35 crews so that's 350 men on this Liberty ship. One of the holds was converted for troops and the bunks were like this you know six high. You just hoped the guy on top didn't get sick. We spent as much time on deck and we used to try to sleep on deck too except in rough weather we couldn't stay down there. And the food was, the Navy fed good but we didn't have much appetite. It was really a slow convoy – 28 days. Columbus made it faster than that.

Rick: And what year – was that 1943?

Richard: That would have been – no by that time it's September of 44 by the time I got through the basic radio school, gunnery school, crew training. I guess I went in in May of 43 so this is September of 44.

Rick: I heard stories on these troop trains that there'd be citizens lining when you go through villages and cities, they'd be lining the things to wave and pass out food and stuff – did that happen to you?

Richard: You bet. The country was that way. It's such a paradox. You wouldn't be caught dead on a street out of uniform. Nowadays you wouldn't be caught dead on the street *in* uniform. Now that's tragic.

Rick: Well you know it's different. What – okay so you're on this troop ship and headed for Europe and you landed where?

Richard: Bari Italy. It was quite a shock to land there and smell the air in Italy and it was pretty bad for a little farm boy. That was quite a shock to what those towns smelled like. They were, they just had an odor of itself. We got on board trucks, of course all 35 crews didn't go to the same group. We were broken up considerably there.

Rick: Tell us about your first mission and missions after that.

Richard: Well it took, we got kinda oriented in and did some practice runs. They had on the, Bari was on the Eastern coast of Italy on the Adriatic side, on the opposite side on the Mediterranean side it was fairly open in some areas there and they set up what we called ‘tufa block targets’. Tufa is a soft sandstone that they build with over there – airplane profiles. And then we would fly over there real low and fire at these and practice our gunnery. And then we started being assigned missions. But we got - the first four times we ever got anywhere just beyond up to the top of the Adriatic because they were fully loaded, we went to altitudes about 27,000 feet but the Alps come across there, the Italian Alps and the thunderheads and the clouds built on that and we couldn’t get over them. Couldn’t climb high enough – we were just too loaded and had to abort and turn around come back – we never did get off. When you came back, you couldn’t land with the bombs you had to salv them in the Adriatic Sea. On our very first turn around our nervous bombadeer came around. I don’t know what he did and I don’t think he ever found out what he did either but he salv’d them right through the bomb bay doors. And they were swinging out there like this when we came back to land. But we at least got rid of them but I thought sure we were dead because I didn’t know we were even turned around, we was sitting back there in the waste waiting, you know to see what was going to happen and all of a sudden there was this big ‘*whoof*’ and the dust kinda flew back toward us in the waste and the plane just obviously went up a little bit and I thought ‘*whoa we’ve been hit*’. We opened the hatch and when I saw the bombadeer sit back there, up there in front just going like this (laughter). He had a tough time, but that’s what we had to do, you had to salv them. So it was sometime later in early November that we finally got our mission off.

Rick: And then tell us about your experience when you, on your last mission I guess when you got shot down.

Richard: Fourth mission. It was assigned to a place called Blecheimer which is actually in Poland. The longest mission, a ten-hour mission. And we got hit with flack over the target. By that time you seldom ever saw any fighters, it was all flack because as the German’s retreated from Italy and Greece of course they brought all their hardware with them and that just doubled all the *ack-ack* all the way up. Because they didn’t have any airplanes to fly anymore, no gas for them, so they had to use, they were strictly using flack. And we got – lost an engine over the target. And so on the way back of course you couldn’t keep up with the squatter and we had to just leave behind and we threw everything over we could. We took the guns out, threw them overboard all the ammo boxes overboard, everything we could spare we threw out. We got down to Yugoslavia and we actually came back toward the Adriatic and the

pilot apparently thought '*well with three, let's stay over land*'. So we kinda slid over to the left over Yugoslavia instead of going down the middle of the Adriatic like we would have normally done. And we got close to Zagria I guess it was and we lost a second engine, but it was on the same side. The 24 doesn't fly well with two engines out and it doesn't fly at all with two engines out on the same side. So it was uncontrollable so he told us all to bail out. We were still about 18,000 feet. And I snapped my chute on and we got the both hurt guys out, got their chutes on and opened that back hatch and I stood back and said "*after you guys*". I couldn't hardly make myself get out of that but there wasn't any option I had to go.

Rick: Had you ever jumped out of a plane before?

Richard: No not even and I thought, "*I hope this sucker works*". So I went out and of course it jerks you pretty good when it opens but you're glad it opens. Anyway when I hit the ground I hit pretty hard because they never taught you how to land because that was a negative thought and they didn't, wanted to make sure you didn't think you was ever going to need it. So they never taught you how to roll or anything so I hit pretty hard. Sprained an ankle. Of course we were wearing these what we called 'bunny suits'. Heated suits like an electric blanket with heated boot inserts and gloves, you'd plug them into the ship, 24 volts supply and your belly button would singe and your feet would still freeze because it's 60 degrees below zero up there.

Rick: With no pressurized cabins or anything.

Richard: Oh no, it just an open waste. So it was pretty cold and so I had these muck-lucks on over the heated boots, heated shoes you know. I had kicked them off and I had tied my GI shoes to the harness and luckily they stayed. A lot of guys lost them. When the chute opened the shoes went with them, but mine stayed on.

Rick: What happened after you landed then?

Richard: Well I put my shoes on, buried the, it was in kind of a forested area. This is November the 17th now and it's pretty cool and I run into the woods and found some shrubbery there. It looked like it had a bit of a depression there and I kinda dug me out a little hole there and covered myself over with leaves the best I could and just laid there. But I could hear them looking for us. And one came within

about ten feet of me but he never saw me. And it's a good thing they didn't have dogs of course with dogs they'd of found me. But they went on past and I just still laid there and I didn't know what to do so I waited and waited. This was about two or three in the afternoon I guess. So I just laid there till about dark as a matter of fact I went to sleep. I woke up about dusk and I thought '*well I gotta do something*' and it was real quiet, apparently they'd either gone on or given up or gone elsewhere so I came out from under and looked around to see what, tried to get my directions strait and I could see high ground off to the North and to the East a little bit. And I thought '*well I better head for that and then see if I could find a rail line or something and go South, see if I could find some friendly country*'. So I waited until it was pitch dark and it was a dark night, really dark and so I started out and I run to kind of a marshy area and there was about two inches or three inches of water, but it was cold and I started walking through that and I'd go splosh splosh, it sounded like a herd of elephants every time I took a step and I walked along a ways and I could, I saw something move up in front of my a ways and I thought '*they're just standing up there waiting for me*'. So I hid behind a tree and thought '*I'll wait 'em out*'. I waited and waited and I could see this movement up there but I, but then it got so cold finally I said I had to do something, I was getting just practically numb so I says '*well I better go find out what it is*'. So I went up there and when I got up close, it was just a piece of cloth in a fence that was moving around in the wind. Of course I had generated all kinds of things for it. Anyway so I got just past that and I hit a small narrow-gage rail line, it was kind of up a ways you know in elevation. I guess it's one, like these mines have these little push cart rails, I guess they used them to come out in the forest for firewood and take them in. So I got up on it and decided – then walked on it because I thought this might end up going where I want to go and hit a rail line. And I got it and head South maybe I'd hit some friendly country. And so I was walking along there and here again it was just pitch black and all of a sudden I could see a light and heard some shouting and I dropped down between these rails and I couldn't imagine what was going on. But apparently a soldier had come out of a hut to relieve himself and they were cussing him for opening the door and it dawned on me I'd stumbled right in the middle of a camp. I just laid there I didn't know what to do. Finally I decided well I can't go back it's nothing but water there. So I just stayed on my belly and kind of worked my way on through the camp and it did end up at a rail line. And I waited there for, oh I don't know how long, but there didn't seem to be any guards there at the perimeter which was a surprise and I thought well if I turn right from here that'll be South. And so I started walking south. And every so often there'd be a kind of a little building out-station so to speak about every half mile. And I waited and waited but they were all empty. So I just kept going and finally I got to one that apparently wasn't empty and I heard somebody shout which I assumed was to stop or halt or who are you and I stopped and he shouted again and I didn't move

because I didn't know what he was saying. And I could hear him throw the bolt on his riffle *click-click* and he fired but he must of thought I was laying down because it hit the rail and ricocheted off and I thought '*well I better make myself known or I'm going to be dead*'. So I yelled, he came over and picked me up and took me inside this hut. There were three or four of them in there and they were wearing Russian Cossack uniforms. The only problem is they had a swastika on them and they were fighting for Germany. I was to find out later there was about 100,000 white Russians that were fighting for Germany that were serving in that area.

Rick: So these were actually Russians fighting for Germany then?

Richard: Yeah. So they had a field phone there and they called their headquarters I guess to figure what to do. Whatever it was they fed me some 'schpick' they called it which is kind of like cold bacon and coffee because I was thirsty, and needed a drink they just don't drink water. The water's so bad most places in Europe they don't drink it, they drink coffee or 'cets' coffee which tastes like postum for anybody in this area anyway. And they just tied me up and set me in a corner. And then the next morning they loaded me in a horse cart and took me up towards Zagreb. I never did see any of the other crew. I thought they were all picked up but apparently I found out much later after the war one evaded, was able to get to the Russians and get back. One shattered his ankle on landing and ended up in the hospital most of the time for the rest of the war. The rest I have no idea. The odd thing was, this wasn't my own crew, that's the part we haven't gotten to yet.

Rick: That mission you were on, you were with a different group than?

Richard: I'll have to back up on that one. The day after our third mission, we were the standby crew and so all the enlisted men said well lets take the duty bus and go to town. So we took the duty deuce-and-a-half and rode into town and looked around Bari because we went right through there when we landed and didn't stop to see anything. So we spent the evening in Bari and stopped at the USO building there. So about 11:30 at night when the duty bus was supposed to go back to the base, we were all waiting there outside the USO waiting for the truck and this USO gal walks out of the USO building there with a GI on each arm, the closer she got I said "*I know her*". And her name was Gail Homegreen, I was at her farewell in the little town of Bear River City just before I went overseas and she had joined the Redcross and that was her farewell to join the Redcross and she ended up there in Barry. I was the most popular guy you ever saw. So on the way back boy buddy, "*if we don't fly*

tomorrow we're coming back to town aren't we Dick" and he said "oh yeah we're definitely going to do that". But that's the day I left. They woke me up at 4:30 in the morning and said "Burt you gotta fly today, the radio man from the 461st didn't get back from Cairo with the rest of his crew and they gotta have a radio operator and you're it cause you're standby".

Rick: That was your final mission. Did your other crew complete all their missions without any incident?

Richard: They completed all their missions and came home without a scratch.

Rick: So that was just by fate you were on that ill-fated mission?

Richard: Yeah

Rick: Alright now lets get back to...you were being held there.

Richard: We were on the way into Zagreb and they were taking me into Zagreb where their next headquarters were I guess and that was in the afternoon and then I saw the B-24's overhead flying south coming back off a mission. I was down there and I look up there and see those guys *"in two hours they'd be home to a warm meal, a warm bed and here I am and I don't have clue where I am or what I'm going to be doing or what's going to happen to me"*. I was a scared kid.

Rick: How old were you then?

Richard: I was let's see that was November of a...I was 20.

Rick: So you were in Zagreb?

Richard: Well what they did, it ended up there were other prisoners there. There was about 4 or 5 others. I don't know where they came from, I don't think they were even air, but they were Americans. I never did understand what the deal was, but what they did is they put us on a train and it was a regular passenger train but we were isolated of course in a car with 2 guards and they were old men. We looked at their machine guns they were carrying and I don't think that thing would ever fire if they had to use it.

So we headed back up into Germany from Zagreb but as you know most of the bridges and stuff are blown and so we'd go for however many miles and stop, get out and walk across a pontoon bridge or a dirt bridge or something to a train on the other side and then get on that train and go for awhile. But they never did go very fast and when the whistle blew real frequently it came to a screaming stop and we all dove out of the...because we were being raided. We were on the Russian side and they were flying Bellaire Cobras which we had given them and they were there striking anything that moved. So we'd just all head for cover out of the train until they'd expended their ammunition and the train was still operable and we'd go some more until we got raided again and this went on for you know a couple of days. Finally we got up into Germany and we were far enough from there, there were no more raids but we went to a place called '*Dulogluft*' and that's the temporary camp for the airmen. '*Luft*' is air '*dulog*' is temporary, '*logger*' is camp. And here was this processing center and it was full of GI's, Americans. And that was where the interrogation was and of course the first thing they do is put you in solitary for a week to ten days. You didn't have any idea what time of day it was, whether it was day or night or whatever and then the interrogation was really minimal because we're in November now in '44 and the war's practically over.

Rick: In solitary you were just in a dark room with no windows whatsoever?

Richard: No nothing. They'd just push a plate you know in a little hole in the door. So we didn't have any idea what it was.

Rick: And what did they feed you?

Richard: Mostly potatoes, barley soup, ersatz coffee (very little of that). You'd get a sixth of a loaf of bread a day. It was small dark bread and it had sawdust in it and it had a chemical in it to help you digest the sawdust. I used to think that was phony but they actually did put sawdust in the bread as kind of an extender so to speak. But the interrogation amounted to really nothing. And then after that we were put on another troop train and this time it was what we called the 40 and 8's, that's the boxcars, and sent north. And going over to '*Stalag Luft 4*' where we would be kept and that was in Poland, not too far from the Baltic. A place called '*Grovstchaitow*'. And that consisted of four loggers, each logger had ten barracks, each barracks had ten rooms and each room had 25 GI's in it, so if you multiply that up that's 10,000 prisoners in that one camp. All allied, mostly American airmen.

Rick: And they were enlisted men? They weren't officers?

Richard: All enlisted. The officers went to 'Barth' which is 'Stalag Luft 1' that's right on the coast practically. 'Barth' is separate.

Rick: And what was the worst experience that you remember while you were in prison there?

Richard: There? I guess mostly fear of not knowing what was going to happen. You couldn't go do anything except walk around the compound, at nighttime you were locked up in the barracks and they turned the dogs loose in the compound.

Rick: Did the guards brutalize you or any prisoners?

Richard: Only one time and they weren't really brutal, they were just cocky. Because when the 'Battle of the Bulge' came at Christmas time, '44 remember, that's when Germany made their last push. And they really thought they were going to break out and go to the coast. The guards got pretty cocky then. They'd come in for an inspection because they figured that we were digging tunnels or something. We'd be out in the cold there standing there waiting for them to get through with their barracks. You'd get back in, everything's torn up. All the straw ticks were torn up and whatever little food we had was scattered all over you know just stuff like that. Harassment more than anything, more than physical damage.

Rick: Now this was towards the end of the war and the Russians were coming down that way. Tell us about what led up to this.

Richard: Well, everybody knew that we were getting close to the end. We never did hear any artillery at this point. Now we're into the first of February now '45 and rumors started flying that we were going to be evacuated. Of course if we didn't have any rumors we invented them so there was no shortage of rumors. But it started, in each compound we had what we called a 'Man of Confidence' and we also had a barracks chief. We were pretty well organized that way within ourselves. The Senior in noncom, (non commissioned officer) rank and time and grade would be the barracks chief in the barracks, but the Senior in oncom rank at time and grade would be the *Man of Confidence* and he was the contact to the outside, the guards, to the Commandant. And they held apparently and the *Man of Confidence* came

back and would get the barracks chiefs together and says “*tomorrow morning the 6th of February we’re leaving camp, moving, we’re going to be walking for about two to three days, then we get some transportation to the West...the Russians are heading this way*” and because of the Geneva Convention, and this is true – part of the Geneva Convention was that if you held the other side’s prisoners, you had to do everything you could to keep them out of harms way because they had no way of defending themselves and you had to keep them away from the front wherever it was. And so that part was logical and that was true and that was why they were moving us, because they didn’t want us to be liberated by the Russians, they didn’t want us to be involved. So we, the first, it was probably the 5th when the first 3,000; most of the sick ones were evacuated by train. They had seven kilometers from the camp to the railroad station called ‘*Keifhidia*’ and that’s the one we came in to. And they got to *Keifhidia* and they moved them and I have no idea where they went or how many made it or what. The rest of us, the morning of the sixth we hit the road, groups of five or six hundred. Various routes across Germany and Poland and they split quite a bit. Each column, of course we had a leader *Man of Confidence* associated with it and the major that would be in charge plus the guards. Here again old men plus the ones at the tail end of each column were what we called the ‘*Hund Masters*’, they were the ones with the dogs.

Rick: Did you have clothing that was equipped for walking in the winter like that?

Richard: I was lucky because I was wearing a, what we called ‘*odese*’ that was the combat uniform which is a wool, olive drab pants and shirt. And of course I had my GI shoes. When we were at the ‘*Dulogluft*’ the Red Cross gave us a little cardboard suitcase. In it was an extra shirt and a jacket, a ‘*blouse*’ we’d call it and it had a scarf and then just a soft hat but we used to call it a ‘*helmet liner*’, just a kind of a wool hat. And when the word came we were being evacuated, I took this extra shirt and the sewing kit that came with that and sewed up the tail and made shoulder straps out of the sleeves so I’d have a pack and then threw in everything in I could. And of course carried my suitcase. When we left that morning it was snowing and sleet, but they gained efforts, we were on the road. By that evening I could tell that I couldn’t carry all this stuff. The next morning why I could just start seeing stuff falling by the wayside. By noon I had given up too and threw my suitcase away. My biggest concern I think at that time, because I was so sick when I was a kid from pneumonia, I knew that if I got pneumonia I wasn’t going to make it. And I prayed that I didn’t get pneumonia because I knew that that would have ended it, I could not have.....

Rick: How many days were you on that march?

Richard: We ended up 86 days.

Rick: 86 days and 525 miles?

Richard: Yeah exactly, that's like walking from here to Cedar City and back in the middle of winter. And you're in the open the whole time. The only time we really had it made is if we had to be stopped within the evening, about dusk where there was a state barn or state farm where they had big barns and they could put us in the barns and lock the barn. But most of the time it was, we each had one blanket, we rolled it and put it over our shoulder to carry and we traveled in twos like missionaries do nowadays, because that way we had body heat in the evening with each other plus the two blankets together. If we were in forest country that would be helpful we could get some pine bows and lay them down on the snow and then be able to put a blanket down then lay down and put the other blanket over us and just hug us each other to death the rest of the night. I never had my clothes off in three months.

Rick: Most of the time you were sleeping outside, you didn't go into barns or anything?

Richard: You wouldn't have barns all that often, whenever we did, they used them. It was more *no-barns* than there were barns.

Rick: And were there many men dying along the way, casualties and how did they handle all that?

Richard: Yeah, we never really knew, I guess we never will know, nobody will ever know because by that time Germany was so chaotic and we're not the only camp on the road, there were others wandering around Germany too and I lost my two combine partners, one got sick, they put him on the sick wagon – that's the last time I ever saw him. I lost another one a little later on, same deal. They'd fall behind and if the *Hund Master* wasn't able to run them forward, the idea was that the *Hund Master* would sick the dog on them and if the guy could get up and run away from the dog, he was not sick enough to ride the sick wagon but if the dog just held him then I guess he was sick enough to ride a sick wagon. The sick wagon always got periodically emptied you know if you go through places.

Rick: I've heard that they actually shot some of those guys. If you got on a sick wagon you were most likely not to make it.

Richard: Yeah we all knew that. Nobody was anxious to get on the sick wagon. We didn't try to play sick. We knew that was a dead end.

Rick: Well now tell us how you were finally rescued and what your thoughts were.

Richard: Well when we got to the west, we approached the West, in fact we weren't quite to a place called '*Volingbasel*' and that's between Hanover and Hamburg so we're pretty well west now and we're around the first of April. And we were on the English side now and now we had English fighters. And the fighters would strafe to the column and of course we'd all run into the woods again. The guards and everybody would head out to the woods. And the English would strafe the column, we'd get back in and lose a few, not many, and we'd get back in column and after about the second day of going through this harassment, because what the English were doing is escorting the bombers and since there weren't any fighters any more then they still had ammo. So on the way back they always had they called '*the free fire zone*', they'd drop down, the bombers didn't need them anymore and whatever was moving they shot. So we finally got together the *Man of Confidence* and the major and said, "*look we're doing this all wrong. What we ought to be doing is standing in the column an wave like crazy*". And we debated that for awhile and decide well it's worth a try but I don't know whether it'll work so the next day we watched for them to come and as soon as we saw them coming we'd hail ranks, turn around (because they were backward to them) turned around to wave like crazy. The guy came down and fired one short burst that was short and stopped. Because they usually start ahead of time so they could rank it. And he stopped and pulled up, went around and came back around and slowed down and says, "*what's going on down here*"? When you recognized what it was and he sighted he knew what it was and he wiggled his wings and took off. Then from then on every day we got a fly by so they knew exactly where this column was.

Rick: And nobody was shooting at you.

Richard: That's right, they stopped shooting. So that was a blessing. Then we got over to the '*Stalag IIB*' and that was the end of the trail, that was the '*Staligvassel*'. And it was already full with allied prisoners. So we got dumped into there, just in tents then which of course was a blessing, but now we're into April see so it's starting to not be quite so cold anyway. But they didn't have any more food than we did. We were there a week and then all of a sudden they said, "*Okay, we're evacuating the camp*"

because the British are coming. Only we couldn't walk back the same way we came. So then we started walking and if the front moved, we moved. If the front didn't move, we didn't move. So they were just bargaining chips by then. Towards the end of March Hitler had put out the order to shoot all the POWs. That was a command order but the communication was such and the attitude of the guards, they were all old men, they weren't going to be that stupid, they knew that it was over and their safety depended on our safety and we knew and they knew we knew it. So that wasn't going to be a problem, and as far as I know it never was. But this one place we stopped and the front didn't move, we were in a bunch of small barns, by that time we were smaller groups and it was by a river and all of a sudden there was a lot of military, German activity outside and we looked out and they had brought in some AckAck guns and this engineer outfit was making a pontoon bridge across this river, of course the bridges were all blown so they were making a pontoon bridge and we were all watching them make the bridge and all of a sudden the sirens went off and everybody started to man the guns and we dove back in the barns and four British Typhoons came over strait from the bombing and when the dust finally settled we got out of the barn and looked under, there the pontoon bridge was floating down the river. So they didn't realize we were there apparently or the Germans banked on that us being there they were safe, it didn't work, so they bombed it. That went on and so we ended up going Northeast, a little bit more north than east and we got to a place called 'Goudeau' or near *Goudeau* it was on a farm actually just outside of the town Warrenton was the name of the town we were close to I guess at this point and we didn't move. We didn't move for three days, and we could see the Germans and our *Man of Confidence* talking all the time so we knew something was up. The other thing that was a clue; this was a dairy farm and the milk didn't go to town that day so we're thinking something's going to happen and so pretty soon the guard, the Major and the *Man of Confidence* tied a white t-shirt or undershirt on a pole and started walking to town which is about two kilometers. And so we just knew. It got real quiet. We milled around everything but nobody said anything. Finally one guy got up to the top of the barn and he was scouting the town and we waited and waited for about two hours and then all of a sudden we saw a British Lorry and a British Deuce Man coming out of town with our Guard and the *Man of Confidence* heading our way and they pulled into the compound and the Major handed over his weapon and the rest of us took the other weapons of which I have one of.

Rick: So the German Guard was coming back with the British?

Richard: Yeah he went in to surrender. So the first thing we did of course is drink all the milk and got sicker than dogs. So the British said "*now we're busy still fighting the war so head back, they're*

expecting you back about two kilometers over toward Mudau and they've got a shower point set up and a kitchen, they'll feed you and give you a good shower". Like I said we hadn't been able to take our clothes off. I had an extra pair of socks so I was able to alternate socks every other day but a lot didn't. Our blisters had long since gone to calluses way back – that didn't even matter anymore. We got back there and the British, as soon as they saw us coming they says *"okay yikes take off your clothes, all of them, put them in that pile over there"* and they took a stick with them like this and put them in a fire. We were full of lice and fleas.

Rick: You had these clothes for how long at that time?

Richard: Well it was three months, for three months I didn't have my clothes off. So they put us in the shower and we scrubbed each other raw with GI soap and brushes for at least a half hour. It was a nice hot shower. I couldn't believe it and then they issued us nice brand new British woolen uniforms and oh boy did they itch. And they fed us until we were just about to bust. By that time I was really sick. I had dysentery so bad I was just all bloated up, I couldn't button my pants I had to get a piece of string and tie the belt hoops over my shoulder. I looked like I was about eight months pregnant. And so they sent us back from there and we ended up at an air field and I was getting sicker every day and I thought you know at the time *(silence and tears)* *'that I'd gone through all of that and I still might not make it'*. That would have been the real irony. But anyway we were, we went to this town of Goudeau and found that there was a cheese factory there. So we went to a farm and stole a couple of horses and had the farmer harness them and hook them on a wagon, we went back to the cheese factory and put all these great big cheese rounds on the wagon and drove up and down the columns wandering up to the rear and cut off great big pieces of cheese and share them with the buddies. That was the only highlight really. But I ended up; they flew us that were sick into a hospital north of Paris. I was there about two weeks until I was well enough to travel and wound up at Camp Lucky Strike over in L'harve. There were just hundreds of thousands of GI's there waiting for ships to go either home or to the east, to the pacific field.

Rick: Where were you when VE day occurred?

Richard: VE? We were at that airfield on the 8th. **Rick:** In L'harve? **Richard:** No, no we were at the airfield not too far from Goudeau. We weren't even with our own people yet when the word came. So

at the airfield we found some buried pistols you know and some shells and we celebrated with the buried pistols, every color they had.

Rick: Were you destined to – they were sending you back to the states before VJ day I guess.

Richard: Yeah, well the first thing they did is to when we hit the states there was a special train, probably several and everybody that was on the boat were ex-POWs. I they had chalked ex-POW's on the side of the railroad cars and they were dropping people off all the way across when they reached their home. And every stop of course, the donut dollies were there to fatten you up and it was quite an emotional trip. We were issued some back pay, given 60-day leave. Of course by the time I got home see it was the middle of June. So while I was on leave the VJ day came. Oh by the end of October I was mustered out.

Rick: So if VJ day hadn't occurred you may have had to stay in then?

Richard: I may have had to get in to another crew. Probably B29's by then.

Rick: Well that's interesting. What, have you been back there in recent years? Tell us a little about that.

Richard: I went back twice. We had some friends in our ward up here that were missionaries in Switzerland in '85-87 and they invited us to come over, they were just finishing their mission. They talked to their mission president and they had an apartment there in Basel, which is just across the border from Lorec, which is Germany, and so we went over for ten days. Actually two weeks and they toured us around a little bit there and then they helped us rent a car in Lorec in Germany because I wanted to drive up to – but see the wall was still up at that time so you couldn't go east of the Elbe but I could go as far as Volingbassel. So we rented a car and white knuckled it on the autobahn to Volingbassel. When we got there we went in a rat house and finally found somebody I could talk to and she told me there weren't any POW camps in Volingbassel and I thought *'I'm sure that's where they were'* and she said *"the camps were about three kilometers over here at a place called 'Erbca'"* and she said *"there's a guy over there that's been a supervisor (a county commission we call them) at this Ausferheide Berzerk (which is the county) and he's trying to put together a story on what happened there during the war and he's interested in talking* (because I told her what I was, what I wanted) *talking*

to ex-POW's". So we drove over there and it was the afternoon and he was gone but they were just closing the office and two guys came out and they could speak a little English and I told them what we wanted and they said "well, he's not here but he'll be here tomorrow". So we came back and he was so excited to talk to an ex-POW! He'd never talked to an American POW before. He'd talked to Russians, British, nearly every other denomination that had been in those – there were three camps there – Stalag 11B, 357 which is the Russian camp I told you about where the 30,000 died due to malnutrition and disease and there was one other, it was an allied camp, a smaller one. And he shared a picture with me and we stayed in contact with each other. I told him I'd give him some help because he wanted more for his story because there wasn't a lot of – he'd written our Government and they'd ignored him so I was in contact with the guy that had written a couple of books from New Jersey was a POW and gave him his name and then I had a book and I sent one to him, so we've been in contact with him. That was one time. Most recently is two years ago, let's see – last year. One of our granddaughters was serving a mission in Leipzig Germany and before she went on her mission she said "grandpa, I want you and grandma to come over when I finish my mission and then lets drive over to the ?????? where you were held and then drive the route that you walked". I didn't know whether I wanted to do that or not but – ah what can you do to a granddaughter?

Rick: If you, as you reflect upon the war and the future is there any comment that you'd like to make to younger generations about the war and about your experiences?

Richard: I think, I think the generation we have now has no concept of the magnitude of that conflict. Every night on channel seven, I think its channel seven at the end of the Lehrer news hour they have this silent thing for the GI's that lost their lives in Iraq and that's important. But there's a few here and a few there and they've got a total of how many have been killed now since – a little over 1,000 and yet nobody even thinks about the 1,000 sailors that are at the bottom of Pearl Harbor in the Arizona that went down like that. They don't think of – they had seven POW's that were released and that was great, the little gal that was wounded and the press had a feeding frenzy for weeks on it. How would they have handled if somebody said "hey they just turned 10,000 guys from the east walking to the west for three months"?

Reverse Tape

You just don't know how hungry *hungry* can get. But I have to share one thing on this last trip with my family. I had my wife and our daughter and her husband and missionary of course and her little brother and her sister and her husband so there was eight of us. I'd been in contact with the German and he met us at Grovstchaitow and made a reservation at the hotel and he took us to where the camp was the next day and it was the – this was February which he was released. We went to the railroad station then he drove us over to where the camp was and of course it's all trees. But there was the foundation of the mess hall for Stalag Luft 4 where the Lager A was and it had a fire pit there where we had a fire to use so where the water was. So I walked over to about where I thought barracks three was (*tears*) and it ended up that that was the sixth of February 2003. To the exact day that I walked out of there 58 years ago.