



Bob McGregor

United States Army Air Corps

2nd Lieutenant

European Theater

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Interviewer:

Rick Randle

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Rick: [Second Lieutenant Bob McGregor served in the 15th Air Force, flying with the 450th heavy bombardment group, the “Cottontails” in Europe.]

Bob thanks for talking with us today. Can you briefly describe your early years in Salt Lake up to hearing about the beginning of the war?

Bob: Okay. I was born here in Salt Lake City. I went to Stuart Training School from kindergarten clear through. I started there when I was 4 ½ years old and I left there and went to East High School and graduated in 1939 and I felt I was too young so I went back an additional year before accepting the sheep skin – a third year. Then I went up to the University of Utah for a couple of years just as the war hit and I took off for Uncle Sam’s service shortly thereafter.

Rick: Tell us about when you first heard of Pearl Harbor.

Bob: I think everyone was totally aware of the possibility of war breaking out. It was on Pearl Harbor day about noon or just after noon a couple of guys went down after church. [The United States was drawn into World War II when the Japanese Imperial Navy attacked Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii on December 7, 1941.]

We didn’t go to church but the girls and the guys were out of church and we went over to visit with them and all of a sudden it came over the radio so we knew then that we were involved.

Rick: How old were you at that time of Pearl Harbor? **[Bob: 19]** Did you enlist immediately?

Bob: That was on December 7th and about February or March of the next year I wanted to go into flight school as a pilot. I made an application for pilot training and after due course and they gave us tests and this, that and the other and accepted maybe 30% of us and then we enlisted as Aviation Cadets for pilot training.

Rick: Were there any special physical tests required?

Bob: No the physical wasn't more rigid than it would be for a navigator or bombardier but your eyes had to be pretty good and I had pretty fair eyesight at the time and I was in good physical shape. I weighed about 175 pounds and I only weigh 182 now so that isn't too bad.

Rick: When you joined was it because you wanted to fly or was it because you felt patriotic and wanted to defend your country?

Bob: First and foremost you want to get in there and defend your country. But our feeling was we wanted to go as pilots if possible. We had our heart set on it and all of us had done a little flying beforehand before the war. So when we were accepted for flight training – we weren't called up for several months however.

Rick: Had you obtained a private pilot's license before entering the service?

Bob: I'd wanted one for years and years. I couldn't afford to take the training.

Rick: Bob tell us after you signed up just what happened to you and then a little about basic training.

Bob: Well I was able to finish the winter and spring quarter at the "U" before I initially signed up, before I was called up. So I did get through those first two quarters in '42 and in '43. '43 is when we actually went in and were called up in '42 and then we went into flight training in '42 and graduated as pilots in August of '43.

Rick: Where were you at that time?

Bob: We'd been in Texas all the time. First we reported in at Randolph Field and they sent us off to pre-flight school for about two months and then we went to Uvalde Texas for primary training – Cookfellow Field in (I can't remember the town in Texas) and then advanced was at Lubbock Texas and we graduated at Lubbock.

Rick: Is that where you trained in bombers?

Bob: Multi-engine, so we were ready as multi-engine pilots and then we were sent from there. I got married the day I got my pilots wings. My lady friend came down and we got married the day I got my wings and then we were given ten days leave and then reported into Clovis New Mexico. So we both went down to Clovis for six or eight weeks then we went to Alamogordo New Mexico – the white sands where the atomic bomb was dropped over there – the first part of it. We went through all the tactical and combat training in Alamogordo and from there on overseas.

Rick: Did you fly over in a B24?

Bob: Right, we went first to Harrington Kansas. From Harrington over into some field in Florida, from there to Brinkman Field in Puerto Rico right on down through Balem South America, across the ocean to Dakar up to Marrakesh and Casablanca and from there over to Château Don Du Ramel which is over on the edge of Libya, its over in that area, and from there on into Italy. We left the states I believe the day after Thanksgiving of 1943 and were over at our base in Manduria Italy on I believe the 19th of December of '43.

Rick: So you landed in Italy in December of '43- what happened after that?

Bob: It started to rain. It rained for weeks and weeks and weeks. The mud was, oh, 15 to 18 inches deep. The Italian winter you've heard about it and all the storms and we finally did flying all around all the area over towards Greece and up through the Balkans and the friendly country. And then we went to tactical...our first mission was January 9th of '44, Mostar Yugoslavia.

Rick: Tell us a little about that first mission.

Bob: Well it was kind of a learning experience for everybody. We were a brand new group, this was our first mission in the Airforce – the 15th Airforce and all the bombardiers had been trained to drop individually. This ship would drop and that ship and that ship and that ship according to

their bomb sights. Well if they weren't synchronized and all of them on the same target we hit four or five different places. So the first target we were not synchronized, they all dropped separately and we managed to scatter bombs all over about a square city block instead of one concentrated area. After that they decided to drop on the lead ship and we got pretty good.

Rick: So the lead ship would drop first, and then?

Bob: Everybody would drop one. It evolved down to actually later on that there'd be a lead navigator would lead the formation in. All the group and squadron navigators had to follow of course and know exactly where they were at all times and the bombardiers the same way but they didn't say when the bombs were dropped, it was all dropped by the lead ship.

Rick: In '44 did you have much flack coming your way?

Bob: When we first got in there everyone said (they'd been flying a number of missions) '*you don't have to worry about flack, just worry about fighters*'. Okay so we thought well we'll just worry about the fighters we won't worry about the flack. So your chest packed parachute you keep down behind the seat because when your flying your arms are both busy, no room for the parachute in front, it's big and bulky. So the first burst of flack hit the ship next to me and the flack was intense and accurate what there was of it and when we got back we counted over 200 holes in our aircraft that we flew, and I wasn't sure of the number but I was flying the co-pilot and I got a letter here just months ago last Christmas time from Bob Clay back east, he's in Alabama. He stayed in as a colonel and he was a flight officer at the time and he said the same thing – they'd counted over 200 holes in the ship the first day. Well we had our tin cats [flack helmets] – the helmets in back of the seat too so the minute the first burst of flack hit we tried to put the helmet on. Well we forgot that. The earphones were here and the helmets just pivoted like this, you couldn't see it was a joke for a minute but it was a pretty serious joke. Off came the helmet and after that we learned how to do it properly.

Rick: Did you see many fighters during your missions?

Bob: Lots of ‘em. That’s when I found out.... they always said, “*Worry about fighters and don’t worry about flack*” and I say worry about both of ‘em. We’d been hit by a number of flack batteries and quite a number of fighter attacks.

Rick: Are there any missions after that first one that stand out?

Bob: I can’t remember..... The weather was awful cold it was about 50 to 55 below zero that day and we were going in in pretty good formation all the way in all stacked in there and way out in front of us we could see these little black specks and somebody called ‘*fighters*’. They had 11:30 high and by the time you could visualize them they were right in close. They flipped upside down like this and came right through our formation just between this six ships and this and right through – upside down, you could look out and see that guy and his helmet and his flight scarf and the yellow or the white nose (black airplanes with white noses) firing and then they called a split S out and come back on top of you – work you over and then come back again. That’s just one of them going in.

Rick: Did anything else happen on other missions?

Bob: Well a humorous one is – we went in in February they called it ‘*the big week*’. That was the big week for the Air Force, between the 8th and 15th Air Force, where they tried to break the backbone of the Luftwaffe and they flew missions everyday. The weather had been bad but we from the 15th went up into Germany, to Regensburg, Germany and as we went in (our group happened to be the lead group going in) and the squadron leader got shot down so our ship moved in to the main ship on the lead ship and we looked way out here and here comes the 8th Air Force in...about 700 or 800 of them and we had 300 or 400 and we just went over the target like this and went back on to Italy and back to France. But coming back from that we got fighter interception going in and coming out and we thought we were all through coming out, picked up our own P38 interceptors...the P38’s could only take us to the Alps then they’d have to leave us – no fuel range...and we’d go over the top of the Alps into the targets and then if you didn’t get shot up or shot down you’d return and they would pick you up on the far side of the Alps and take you back to Italy. Well anyway, we were coming back from Regensburg and it had been a

good air battle going in and coming out both and we thought it was all over with and we're down on the Italian side of the Alps and we were jumped by a whole bunch of 109 fighters and some 190's and we looked out here and here comes a 109 in a power dive right in front of us and the P38...at first it was the P38 in the power dive and the 109 right on his tail like this and right, hell, 50 feet in front of us. So over the VHF comes out and they say "*Smitty, Smitty, there's a 109 on your tail*" and he said "*roger, look to Lockheed for leadership*" and down he went because the P38 had kind of reciprocating props, so he went down and he could pull out hard to the right and the 109 couldn't and he just '*pvvfft*' took him into the ground. We got home- that was fun. That was a fart we could chuckle over.

Rick: I guess so. Well tell us about your last mission.

Bob: Just briefly, it takes too long, but the target was Steyr Austria and we went up on the Adriatic side of the Italian peninsula, over the Alps on the Italian side of the Alps and over in towards Steyr that was our primary target and it was socked in solid with overcast so they took a secondary target. It was Graz Austria. So I had mechanical failure at about that point and started losing my superchargers. And the engines would still run but they ran at reduced power and we both tried to figure out everything in the books what it was but they freeze up (the superchargers) you'd have to exercise them every so often you'd have to run 'em up, run 'em down. Well anyway, it was supercharger trouble so we kept falling behind, falling behind and falling behind. Finally the group, our group here dropped their bombs. We could see the bombs drop; so I was about a mile behind them by then and so I waited the distance until I got over about the same target and I dropped my bombs so it would hit the same target. And then I couldn't keep up with them so I kept falling lower, and lower and lower. Well I'm '*duck soup*' for the fighters then, so I just started to go into the cloud layer down below and there were seven German 109 fighters jumped us. And I couldn't get into the clouds, I had to stay high, I couldn't go down through the clouds or we'd never get back up over the top of the Alps to get over the top. I was at...I think we were at about 23,000 then, on oxygen, so I was just on the top of the cloud deck, these seven fighters picked us up and they gave us some frontal attacks and the side and the rear. About ten minutes and about six passes; and I'd already one wing tip due to flack and they took the other engine – number three and number were feathered, and about a six foot tip of the right wing was

off and the right top half of the right rudder was shut off. So by then I had the yoke cranked clear over to the left and both feet on the rudder – on the left rudder, trim clear in and the other pilot was flying. He was holding on, we were both holding; the aircraft would no longer fly. I had him check to see if everybody was all right and he came back with *'two of them are dead, we can't do anything for them'*, so I gave the crew the order *'prepare to bail out'*. So by then we're still going, trying to hold the right wing up and going on two engines with no tip, no rudder and finally I told the other pilot *"bail the crew out"*. So I gave them the orders to bail out. Well they all got out the back and then the other pilot went out and by then these seven fighters queued around for a frontal attack. They came in on me directly in front firing as they came and I could just feel it was going to hit me in the stomach so I pulled back on the yoke, both feet, both hands, just enough that they took the whole nose tore off the front of the bomber and everything out under my feet. Well everybody was out by then so the second I let go of the wheel it started to spin and I was going to try to get out and went over in a great big barrel roll and then went into a flat spin. I had two engines with full power, and no engines here. I just went into a flat spin. Well the centrifugal force was terrific. You can't, it's just something terrible. You just can't move till you finally pull yourself out just on the carpet or any way you can get out so I went out through the bomb bay and then I jumped. I had the seat-pack parachute instead of the chest pack because I knew it would be with me if the ship blew up. Well I pulled the rip cord with one hand and nothing happened and I thought *"oh shit"* (excuse me) so I got it with both hands and popped it clear out to here and then it opened and the harness was a little loose but I cleared the plane a ways and the harness came up and hit me in the jaw and knocked me out for about oh maybe 30 seconds. Then I came to and looked out and I was floating down, everything was so nice and quiet and you could hear this bomber winding up below these *'put-put-put-put'*, the fighters all around. They queued up for another frontal attack and *'no, no, they're not goin to shoot at that'* but they were. There were seven of them that made a frontal attack, firing machine guns in short bursts; short I guess maybe 1200 rounds and they missed me but they hit the parachute but I was crawling this shroud line and crawling that to get an oscillating swing and try to get at a various ascent and they missed me. So I had holes in the parachute so I hit awful hard when I hit the ground.

Rick: Had you ever jumped out of a plane in practice or drills or anything? (no, no) What kind of training did you have?

Bob: Oh great, they train you how to fall and how to land and flex so you wouldn't get hurt but if you're shot up or wounded that's tough. There's no practice jumps.

Rick: You were knocked out, not knowing whether your parachute was going to open (and it opened) and then it opened (and the harness came up and hit me in the oxygen mask and down I went). All right well what happened after you landed?

Bob: Well as you look down it's like looking at a great big wagon wheel, hub in the center and the spokes going out. Well I'm headed for the hub and the spokes are the incoming people coming to capture me. So in the meantime I looked down and here's a railroad train and I'm heading right straight for this electric railroad tracks, the power overhead like our traxx lines here. And I thought *'oh boy I can't....'*, so I spilled the chute on this side because you can spill a chute so it'll start you to oscillate and swing you and that missed the railroad tracks and put me in the bar pit right next to it. But with the holes in the parachute I hit awful hard and twisted up the right ankle. And by then there's an Austrian soldier and a bunch of civilians and one British prisoner of war. He'd been captured at Dunkirk. He was the Royal Air Force and he was doing forced farm work there in Austria. So he convinced me he was legitimate, he had his uniform on and he was from New Zealand so he said, *"why don't you tell me your name and address and I'll contact your folks and let 'em know you're alive"*. He says, *"they won't hear for another month"*. So I did and sure enough he did, my folks had heard I was alive by then. But he sent them a letter through normal channels that said *"saw Bob yesterday, he looks great"*. So that was....nobody know what he's talking about but at least later they knew I was alive. So then they took me on a bicycle, I couldn't walk and they wheeled me into town on a bicycle.... (**Rick:** these were the Austrian Peasants?) Peasants, yeah. We got into town, it was a little town with the cobble rock roads and all of that like you've seen in the pictures of the European villages; and by then the civilians were just a little irritated and you can't blame them (we'd bombed their towns many times before) so they took me away from the Austrian military, threw a rope around

my neck and up over a pole and were just starting to pull it up, and the German *'Wehrmacht'* came along in a battle wagon with about eight or ten German infantry soldiers.

Rick: Now when they put that rope around your neck, what that a big surprise to you or?

Bob: Oh yeah, well, yeah I could tell what was going to happen.

Rick: And then you thought your life was over?

Bob: Oh I tell you it was all over. And there was a cute little gal about my same age there, I winked at her as I walked by and she spit right in my face and they'd throw stones and rocks at you and sticks and just slap you with everything they could.

Rick: So they had the rope around your neck and tossed it up over a thing and ready to lift you up and hang you?

Bob: Yeah, just then the Germans came by and saved me. To that day I don't like a barbershop with a towel around my neck.

Rick: What happened? The Germans just with their guns....

Bob: Took me away from the Austrians. Put me in the battle wagon, took me to the local garrison and put me up on the top floor of the belfry or whatever it was, where they ring the bells and all that stuff. Spent two days and two nights up there, colder than....March and it was cold, snow on parts of the ground, and no food. I think we got one meal in two days.

Rick: Who was up there with you? (Nobody) You were up there alone in the top of a (I called it a belfry) a church? (Yeah like a church or community building) And it's just a room with a locked door and you were there alone, the bell ringing periodically?

Bob: Yeah, it didn't ring, but it was that type of a...so then

Rick: No food or water?

Bob: Oh they gave me some 'gruel' I called it, it was probably barley and water soup, a piece of black bread and that was it. No john or anything like that.

Rick: And you were there for two days?

Bob: Two days and nights.

Rick: And then what happened?

Bob: Then they came over from Graz Austria, a military, the Luftwaffe came over in another big armored car and a van, a whole crusade of them and put me out...by then there was one other fellow in another building there in Austria, in Graz...so they brought us in to the military vehicle, and they had us walk through, there were about six something machine guns here and six here...the muzzles look about that big around when you're looking at one right that far from your head – about the size of a silver dollar. So you don't try to get away, just go where you're supposed to go. So they put us in the battlewagon in convoy a truck took us over to the air base at Graz for another five days and nights there and they'd interrogate us. Then they trucked us from there to Dulog Luft 1 over by Frankfurt Germany. And we were there for six or seven days and it was quite an experience over there.

Rick: Did they interview you; do they have English speaking interviews?

Bob: There was a German Major and he could speak just as good as English as you or I could and we talked at some length and he said "*oh, you're from Salt Lake City*" I hadn't told him anything but name, rank and serial number. Well it seems they keep you there for about five days it takes to get their intelligence records, so they're all brought in, then they've got everything right there, they tell you '*your name is McGregor, you went to East High School*', in fact he showed me a copy of this picture out of the Tribune with my picture in it; that I went to

Stuart School, East High School and University of Utah and my picture. And I come to find out later they had their intelligence agents all over the United States and every graduation during the war they put a cadets picture in the paper, a little bitty blurb '*so and so graduated from Navy School or Army or whatever*' and they had all of that and then to crown it all off he said "*I don't need to ask you any questions, I know all about you*". So he opened up one paper and it was a duplicate copy of the extract orders that were cut by the Army/Air Force in Florida. When we left the states from Florida heading for Puerto Rico they gave us the orders that told us where we were going but they couldn't be opened until 30 minutes after takeoff. Thirty minutes after takeoff we opened up the orders and read where we were going. Chateau Du Ramel in Africa. Well he showed me, that German Major, the exact photocopy of that order. Now how the intelligence got that I'll never, never know. But they had it.

Rick: That is amazing, so they had your confidential orders.

Bob: Everything, everything. He says, "*Oh, Salt Lake City, I've been through there*". He say's "*Alexander Shriner...temple, musical*". So that just...it baffled me. Then they put us on a freight cars about four freight car loads they called forty-and-eight WWI vintage – forty horses and eight men and they filled us about 35 to 40 men in it. There was straw on the bottom; it was cold in March, real cold and no heating, no food, no nothing. And they gave us a little piece of bread, oh a couple of spots to have food maybe once a day. We were on that train for another five days going up to Barth Germany as Stalag Luft 1 and that's where they marched us from there on in to Stalag Luft 1 and that's where we spent the rest of the war.

Rick: Well now was your treatment prior to that, getting on the train, was it pretty humane and (oh it was fairly humane, yes) except for food they didn't beat you or anything like that (no, um, um). Well now give us a detail of what Stalag Luft 1 was like and your experiences there.

Bob: Well it was a group that was next to a military '*flack*' school where they...right up to date modern flack school for the artillery boys in the Luffhof for shooting their flack guns and it was about a mile and a half from the airfield at the flack school. They originally set up this old prison for the Royal Air Force and the early Air Force crews that went down in 42, 43 and along

the very early part of the war. Well it grew and grew and grew, that was called the south compound. Then they build a north compound, by then they'd filled the south and filled the north and built a north 2 and north 3 addition to that. By the time they got them all filled there was just under 9,000 air crew from the Royal Air Force and our Air Force; 9,000 men, South African Spowls, all kinds of them.

Rick: What was prison life like?

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Rick: Okay, you were just about to tell us a little more detail of the day-to-day prison life, how they feed you, how they treat you and...

Bob: Okay, when we first went in there there was a little snow on the ground and it was cold and there were maybe oh 30 or 40 of us went in in that group and we were assigned to the various barracks. Everything then become back under military control so the Senior Officer would be in charge of the camp and he was a full colonel. So then they'd have a bunch of light colonels and majors and on around and they'd assign this for flight commander and this group commander. Same breakdown as in the Army/Air Force. And then as you come in they would assign you the different barracks's and you were given a duty, a duty roster, and mine was partly on the '*rations officer*' for the barracks and the '*art and reading officer*'. They would obtain the Red Cross parcel reading and art supplies that came later with the Red Cross parcels. So everybody knew exactly what they had to do and was accountable and you called the captain "*sir*" and the major "*sir*" and it was just another military base. And you did calisthenics twice a day for at least 30 minutes each time. At first you thought it was foolish but now you see it was very intelligent thing to do because you didn't have proper food. But they had a role-call in the morning and a role-call in the afternoon.

Rick: And the role-call was not the German Officers it was the....

Bob: Well the German Officers would ask the military way so the....

Rick: The ranking officers would do it.

Bob: Yeah and he'd turn and salute this guy and salute that guy and all accounted for and then he'd turn around and say '*all accounted for*' and if one was missing, you'd stay there until they found that one. So a few times there was attempted escapes in the '*middle hoff*', so they'd have a role-call and we'd played around as long as we could and just screwed up real good so they couldn't get an accurate role-call. So finally the SS Troopers came in with about five machine gun tripods and set up five 50-caliber machine guns, I think four or five. And the Colonel says, "*okay boys, this is it, you do as you're told now*". And we did, so we gave them the count and there were so many missing or so many.... So they kept track of us that way.

Rick: Did these guys that escaped, did they get caught?

Bob: Somebody was in the '*clink*' in solitary confinement all the time. They attempted to escape – when you first went in you were told "*you can't attempt at this time, no one is to make an attempt at escape without clearing first with the escape committee*". So you had to clear first but later on I didn't get involved in '*digging*' tunnels but I got involved in getting rid of the dirt. So actually the way we dug the tunnels, they had dogs underneath the barracks every night, all night they'd turn these dogs loose. And we called them "*ferrets*", the little short German soldiers, so they'd get underneath the barracks, crawl all around underneath there. If we knew the dogs were there we'd try to pour boiling water down through it and pour it on them but we never could catch 'em, you'd hear a dog yell now and then. But anyway to dig a tunnel, there's a little stove over in the corner and you'd have to take the stove off to one side, it had a foundation from there down to the ground to support the weight of the brick chimney and the stove. So here's this cement pad and then this little stove over the top and the vent goes up through a brick chimney on up through the roof. So you remove the stove and they'd cut a hole down through the floor in the cabin there; in the room, we were in about, about the size of this room right here and there would be 16 of us lived there. And you'd move the stove and have lookouts to, so you knew no one was coming. You'd go down through this hole and then they'd dig and you had to get rid of their dirt. It was only 5 foot down to the water level; the Baltic Sea was 5 foot lower.

So they had to get rid of the dirt so we'd all fill our pockets of our overcoats and our pants pockets full of dirt and we'd walk around and around the perimeter of the outskirts of the buildings, the barracks, all the way round dripping all this dirt out of our pockets as we'd walked. Well pretty quick the ground built up about 5 inches high all the way around the whole camp from this dirt going out. The Germans knew something was on so they'd find the tunnel or collapse it and then we'd start another one. So they started putting it up in the attic and they'd put dirt up in the attic and finally the ceilings caved in in a couple of rooms.

Rick: Well did they punish anybody?

Bob: Oh, whoever they'd catch they'd put them in the '*cooler*', solitary confinement.

Rick: But they wouldn't torture them or anything like that? (no, no) Now the Officers (we were all Officers), the enlisted men were in a different camp.

Bob: We were all Officers, we were trying to make it, to keep yourself sane you'd kind a make a joke of this, a joke of that and go along with the punch. But, the ceilings caved in so we started putting it down the toilets and flush it down. Well that plugged up the toilets so they just shut the water off on us. So we had to dig our own cisterns – a hole in the ground so deep – five feet deep and let the water filter into it and take it out by bucket and boil it before you could drink it or cook. But it was interesting.

Rick: How long were you in that prison camp?

Bob: Just under 14 months.

Rick: 14 months, and tell us about your rescue.

Bob: Well I brought in my paperwork here; a lot I'd forgotten about. We knew the Germans...we had a radio in camp and we had pretty good contact, secret stuff. From Britain we heard the BBC broadcast, nightly somebody did. And later on when the Russians were

coming in they had some '*stool-pigeons*' here and there and we don't know how or can't tell if we...we knew the Russians were getting close and all of a sudden the Tom, Dick and Harry in the camp...the wheels knew how close it was but we didn't. We could hear the shooting and that getting real close to us. So all of a sudden this night, the Germans were gone the next morning, we got up and looked out and here's the American flag waving instead of the German flag. Well we knew they were close, so that was a thrilling moment.

Rick: So the Germans had just all gone, all your guards had left and there was an American flag flying.

Bob: Yeah. Now our wheels – the Colonels and the Full Colonel and the Colonels and the Group Captains and all the Royal Air Force had their heads all in it and they knew all about it beforehand and they had it all figured out and they developed Military Police – they didn't have any guns but they stole a few guns from the Germans as they left and so they were under....all the (tars?) were operated that morning by POW's. And we all woke up and boy bedlam, everyone crazy. And some of them, we were there almost two weeks under Russian control and you did pretty much as you were told.

Rick: Well now the Russians, in other words, did they just open the gates at one point and the Russians came in?

Bob: Yeah, well there's a pretty good sized camp...we're on a peninsula like this and these three camps were in the center of the peninsula – anybody, they'd just throw a cordon across the base right here and you're totally isolated, nobody can go out into the Baltic because it's just one degree above freezing. It's only about 33 degrees the temperature of the water. So they'd just throw a cordon across there, those Russians came across there and they opened the gates and by then our wheels had sent out our '*advanced groups*' this way and that way and that way to meet the Russians and tell them we were all prisoners, don't come in and shoot them all. So we didn't know all the plans that they had made and they were going to ship us all back through Odessa, through Russia - 9,000 of us on trains. Boxcars and trains to....the Russians were going to take us clear back to Odessa and repatriate us back there but the Royal Air Force and the Army/Air

Force held out against them and got people into England and into France and made arrangements for our Air Force to come in and fly us out. So there's a whole story in there about how the 'wheels' and they knew what was coming and the arrangement they'd made and how the airplanes were arranged for but anyway after ten days, ten days or better with the Russians, we were all hungry too. We'd lost about 50 – 55 pounds all of us and I was down to about 120 pounds, I weigh 175 and lost about 50 – 55 pounds, everybody was hungry. So the Russians saw that and then they went out and they confiscated all the sheep and the pigs and the beef that they could find or cows around there, chickens and herded them all into camp – *'here, here's your food'*. It didn't take long to find out we had a few ex-butchers that knew how to handle the knives and all that so they started cutting up the meat and for a week we ate. We ate more than we could eat, more than we could hold – our bodies wasn't used.....we'd all get sick. You eat too much when your stomach's all shrunk up you get sick. So we finally got wise and just ate a little bit, a little bit and started to get fattened up. By then they'd made arrangements and the 8th Air Force flew in B17's and C46 transports.

Rick: Was there an airstrip close by?

Bob: It was just a mile and a half away over by the flack school. They had a few training ships over there and a couple of Focke-wulf 190's) fighters but they made a quarter... the Russians made a quarter, I can't remember, ten miles wide for entry coming in through their area, ten miles wide to get out – and anybody strayed out of that, you were shot down. So they brought the 17's and 46's in and they took just under 9,000 of us out in 3 days and 3 nights they flew us out. The B17's they just took all the floorboards out took all the guns and bombsites and the bombs and everything else and just put plywood floors down and we'd load about every three minutes...we'd, they'd put I think 35 of us per B17 you'd load up and you were gone. Only three minutes loading and three minutes taxiing and off you went. This went on day and night, day and night for three days and nights – they flew us all out.

Rick: Where did you fly to after that?

Bob: Okay, they took 99 percent of us to Reims France and the other one percent were the 'wheels', they were out last. They took them on to 'wheels' headquarters and where they were with the 'uppers' all the way around and then the 95 percent of us were sent to what was called "Camp Lucky Strike" which was the POW base there for all POW's in Europe to meet there so that they could issue clothes and they issued us all new...we didn't have but rags...all new clothes and first aid kits and Red Cross stuff and all that, all new ration of clothes and boots and all. So we spent about...I spent 30 days there before I got a trip out and then we came home on 'Liberty' ships. In fact Victor Mature was the Mess Sergeant on one Liberty Ship – the Hollywood actor. Yeah he was the Mess Sergeant and he just mingled with the boys and everybody made friends with him...an interesting trip.

Rick: Was he famous at the time?

Bob: Yeah, yeah.

Rick: So everybody knew that he was there (a Merchant Marine) then you went back to New York or?

Bob: Well we thought we'd have a...a few of us that liked to drink, quite a few of us in the crowd hadn't had a drink for over a year or so, so we'd get a bottle of French Cognac and take it with us and enjoy the trip home but the waters were so rough and the waves were 40 feet high, nobody had much of that until the day we got into Boston. And everybody finished their Cognac and we arrived in pretty good shape down the gangplanks in Boston and then trained us for all different parts in the United States.

Rick: And you took a train back to Utah I guess.

Bob: Troop trains.

Rick: Well that was great, you did a great job. Is there anything you'd like to say to any young person that may be watching this?

Bob: Well the military is still a *great* experience for any young man to go through and I think it should be a must that every young man serves at least six months in some kind of supervised authoritative unit where they learn discipline. It makes men out of boys.

Rick: It would be a great thing wouldn't it? You had to grow up pretty fast, at 21 you were (you grow up awful fast) grow up very fast. Well that was great....

Elizabeth: Can you describe the emotion you had when you came into Boston Harbor? Did you see – it's not like coming into New York where you see the Statue of Liberty...

Bob: Well it was a dirty old harbor and planks and that, a filthy harbor and everything else. But it's just about everybody got down and kissed the ground when we got off that gangplank.

Rick: Where were you when VE day was declared?

Bob: Still in Germany.

Rick: You were still, you were free but you had been....

Bob: Under Russian control at that time.

Rick: And how about VJ day?

Bob: VJ Day I was here in Salt Lake City. I was still in the Air Force, still in the Army/Air Force and in the reserve they wanted us – they needed a bunch of pilots to go to South America and they found out anybody that had some Spanish, three years of Spanish in school – they wanted to volunteer and I'd had three years of Spanish, I could speak a little of it, he's says *"we'll guarantee ya two jumps in rank right now on the spot and guarantee you'll come out of*

South America as Majors three years from today". Well that sounded pretty good to a bunch of us and my wife said, "*go right ahead honey but I won't be here when you get back*". So that settled that, we didn't go.

Elizabeth: Do you remember the celebration? Were you in Salt Lake at the time?

Bob: Salt Lake there wasn't too much, no I was (on VJ Day) VJ Day, yeah I certainly was, I was right in the middle of it.

Rick: Tell me about Salt Lake on VJ Day.

Bob: Oh it was like every New Years Day parade you've seen where the streets are just packed filled. Music and horns and confetti and all kinds of stuff, dancing and music. Everybody kissed somebody else and hugged. Oh it was a real celebration.

Elizabeth: I'd like him to describe the spokes when those Austrians closed in on him.

Bob: Okay, you're coming down on a parachute and it's as if you were to look down at the ground and there's a great big wheel there, a wagon wheel and the hub is where you were going to land and the spokes were these incoming people running to be at the center to catch you when you hit the ground. So the minute you hit there you've got 50 people that came from all different directions and they'd get there all at once and they've got you. If you wanted to you couldn't run 15 feet if you could have.

Rick: So why was it like spokes? Were there paths or trails?

Bob: No it was kind of out in a farming community out through plowed fields. And they just came from every isthmus of the compass. They told us *'for you, the war is over'*.

Rick: Did you ever have any of the Germans interrogate you to try to find any information or?

Bob: At first they did and you'd just give them your name, rank and serial number and they'd ask you a dozen different times – '*who was the pilot*' and '*what's your mission*', '*what kind of bombs*'.

Elizabeth: Describe the B24

Bob: Well the fuselage is maybe six feet wide across from left to right and the center console is the controls and what have you. There's a yoke here and a yoke here and the center's all controls for operating and the instrument panel out in front. And each pilot has a – called a '*yoke*' in front of you and then you – to get out you have to go to the center, to get out as pilots and then you have, in front of you you have the nose turret which has a Nose Gunner in it and out in front would be the Bombadeer and the Navigator then behind you and down kind of a half a deck lower; I guess the height of the fuselage is about the height of this room from the ceiling to the ground here and you're sitting up high as the pilots and the bombs are in the bay behind you. And then up in the top of the bay there's a Waste Gunner on the right and a Waste Gunner on the left and a Tail Gunner in the rear and a '*belly turret*' in the bottom. Now the belly turret (it was 24) could be raised up or lowered, lowered up and down and retracted so when you're landing or takeoff you pull it up in. On B17 they're not retractable and there's more than one guy got scraped as he went into the turret. But there'd be ten men, ten crewmen and the aircraft was (I can't remember) 67 feet long and the wingspan was 110 feet and it was 18, 19 feet tall. Hard to fly, they're not...you just muscle them. They're fun to fly but they're....there's no sitting and relaxing, its all work.

Rick: And no pressurization at all so you get up there in the air in those high altitudes and....

Bob: You get to 10,000 feet you go on oxygen. It was 55 below zero for a good many missions and the gunners all had what we called '*bunny suits*' – blue underwear with heated wires all through them – electrical. They had electrical gloves and electrical boots – the '*bunny suits*' and they'd get fairly warm. But they're open face here between your helmet, if they stuck their head out the waste window they (clap), frostbite would nail them that quick. See it's 275 or 250 mile

an hour slip stream, 50 degrees below zero it's awful, awful cold – just a split second you're frostbitten.

Rick: There were seven other crewmembers that landed, they took the enlisted, your co-pilot was an Officer I guess and was he in the same prison camp as you?

Bob: No, I never did see him, he went to Stalag 3. The only one that went with me was the Bombadeer. See it was the original crew that came from the States and I was supposed to fly them a couple of trips and make sure they were – certify them that they were okay to go on their own. And the first trip I flew them and they weren't – he was very poor on formation so then we went the second trip and that's the trip we all got it. So this was a brand-new crew.