

TRANSCRIPT – ROBERT DUNBAR

Interviewee: ROBERT DUNBAR

Interviewer: MATTHEW WILLIAMSON

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MATTHEW WILLIAMSON: Mr. Dunbar, it's good to see you today. Glad you're able to make it out alright. And [let's] go ahead and get started. I want to start from the beginning [to] get an idea of what your life growing up to that point where you joined the army was like, so you do you have any memories of your early life like, your childhood up to—

ROBERT DUNBAR: Yeah, well, I was born in 1920, and I was a child of the Great Depression. I can remember things very, very tough in the family. I was raised by my grandparents; we did manage to survive. And I can remember working through high school, at 25-cent-an-hour various jobs, and I was the first one in my family to graduate from high school, by the way. And this was in '40 'cause Pearl Harbor was in '41. Two months after that I enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: I enlisted as an aviation cadet and I finished training successfully and became a pilot in the Air Force. The Army Air Force.

MW: What made you want to join the Army? Was it Pearl Harbor itself or—

RB: We didn't have a choice. I either enlisted, or I was gonna get drafted.

MW: Yes, sir.

RB: That was the beginning of World War II.

MW: Yes, sir. From—What were some of your early experiences with the Air Corps when you first enlisted?

RD: First place they sent me was a classification center in Nashville, Tennessee, where we had a check out eye and hand coordination-type exercises, and most of my friends there were Yankees. And I talk like a—people from the Gullahs, from the islands—[which was] very, very bad [in this] group. The Yankees would get in a circle around me and make me talk and laugh like hell (Laughs.) 'cause they never heard anybody talk like these Southerners. Wasn't long after that I tried my damndest to talk like a Yankee.

MW: (Laughs.)

RD: Never Succeeded. But when I finished that program, I started aviation cadet programs: pre-flight, primary, basic, advanced, four-engines.

MW: After your training, where did they send you, sir?

RD: After cadet training?

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: I was sent to a base in Florida for four-engine transition: Hendricks Field, Fort Sebring, Florida. Four-engine transition. I flew there for a couple hundred hours. Then I was sent to a four-engine base in Rapid City, South Dakota. And I was assigned crews at that time for

combat training, you know, dropping practice bombs, gunnery, navigation. And I guess I was there for a couple hundred hours down there, too. Then I was sent to a base in Nebraska—I hesitate when I talk because I try to never say “um,” “uh,” and “duh” and “der,” and I have to think—so the base in Lincoln, Nebraska, and the crew was issued a brand new B-17. and they said, “Take it to Scotland,” and we did. We flew from Lincoln, Nebraska, to Northern Maine, Goosebay, Labrador, Reykjavik, Iceland, Scotland. The plane was taken from us, and we were transferred to the 96th bomb group.

And this was in late May of ‘44. Of course D-Day was the 6th of June ‘44. So in my first mission I had to fly as co-pilot for combat indoctrination—I believe I told you this story—the target that on the 4th of June was the Marshland Yards at Paris, France. See, the purpose was to screw up transportation so the Germans couldn’t [get] all them resupplies. And that’s the day I was flying right underneath another B-17. He got a direct burst right in his right [side] between the two gunners, and I knew that they died instantly. And the nose went down, and the tail all went down. (Spiraling motion with hands) And that was my indoctrination to being shot at.

You know, being shot at is a horrible experience. Like I said, I could talk to you for a month trying to explain it to you, but you wouldn’t understand it, never, till you were shot at yourself. Horrible experience. And at times it lasted for hours, flying, fighters coming. And that was my first mission.

My second mission was the 6th of June, D-Day, and I dropped bombs on Normandy. From there on for a couple of months, every third, fourth, fifth day we flew a mission, weather permitting.

I think right after Normandy we had two or three targets in France, then we started back on Germany again. Aircraft factories primarily at the time. That was our primary mission, we had to destroy the Luftwaffe before D-Day or Normandy wouldn't have succeeded. It would have been very disruptive.

MW: Those were the attacks that you said, the raids on ball bearing factories and—

RD: Yeah.

MW: Other necessary parts for the airplanes—

RD: Anything pertaining to airplanes at the time: ball bearings, sheet metal, fuel, airplanes, airplane engines. What else could I tell you about that? I got a little drawing in this [book] that shows you the targets I hit if I can find it. (Flips through journal) This is a little book that we were given when I got to Prisoner of War—a diary-type thing—anything to keep us occupied mainly by the Germans. Didn't work. (Both Laugh.) I can't find it. When, let me see—Aww, I gotta find it, gotta show it to you—are we taking too much time?

MW: Oh, no sir.

RD: There's all my missions listed. There's a picture, 'cause we didn't go direct now. All major targets.

MW: A lot of the places on here are places that I've heard about through history classes. I see Berlin, Sagan, Stuttgart—

RD: Sagan, that wasn't a target.

MW: Wasn't a target?

RD: It was a Prisoner of War Camp. That's where the movie "The Great Escape" was taped about. Sagan's great escape three tunnels: Tom, Dick and Harry, remember that?

MW: Yes, sir. I remember you telling me that story how they took the planks out of their beds and used them to buttress up the tunnels on their way out so that by the time that—

RD: When you finish that go to page 60, 70—72.

MW: 72, sir? It's blank.

RD: Go to 62. I gotta refresh my memory now. After the Great Escape, after the tunnels were detected, the Germans let us only have six slats per bunk. Our mattress was a paper bag filled with wood excelsior, so no support at all on them six slats. Read it out loud if you can.

MW: "My Six Slated Sack."

Each night before I go to bed

I fix a pillow for my head

Now I lay my blankets neat

On which I hope to get some sleep

I lay down easy on my sack

The boards aren't right to fit my back

Up out of bed I slowly go

To move those slats to and fro

I get back in with a sigh

My head is low, my feet are high

So up out of bed again I go

To move those slats to and fro

This time I'm madder than before

So I grab my sack and sleep on the floor

RD: It's true: a miserable way to sleep. (Both laugh.)

MW: A poet and you didn't know it did you, sir?

RD: No. (Laughs.) Oh God. Gotta keep a sense of humor or go crazy.

MW: I just can't imagine how something this funny can come out of that. Now when we were talking before, sir, you said that 25 was the last mission you would fly as a pilot before you got out of the bomb group, sir.

RD: When I was flying, yeah.

MW: So what number were you shot down on, sir?

RD: Twenty-one, of course Jimmy Doolittle was 8th Air Force Commander; he increased missions to 30 to 35. When I was flying, we had a 25% chance of finishing 25 missions. Think about the odds there: a 75% chance that you're not going to finish.

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: He increased it to 35 and the odds dropped down to 80 to 20 that you would not complete missions. That's terrible odds. But the job we done, we did, we had to do, it had to be done before D-Day and right after D-Day. Course a whole year before I got—the whole mission of the 8th Air Force was to destroy German support where they couldn't resist invasion. And we died, but we did the job. And it was some odd-ball mission.

I think I told you that on the so called "Cadillac" series we went into South-Central France and dropped down to a 500-foot altitude, which is not much higher than this these tall pine trees there, and dropped canisters of guns and ammo, French Maquis. One mission we killed about a squadron of Army troops, remember that story?

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: Want that for the record?

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: This was two or three weeks after D-Day. We were bogged down in the so called "hedgerows" and the ground troops couldn't move—I guess them German tanks, Panzer Tanks with eighty-eight mm guns—And Eisenhower, was it Eisenhower? Ike? He made a decision that we'd use strategic Air Forces in a tactical mission. We would bomb the Germans ahead of our troops, and the only way we could pick out a target was for the Americans to fire smoke shells over the German forces. And I remember that our assigned target was red smoke. Well, this would have been a good program, a good mission, except the red smoke drifted back over our troops. And we bombed short and killed a whole squadron of Americans. You don't hear about that in books and magazines and papers, not in any detail anyways.

Anyway, after that, troops moved. I know there was two armies that went into Normandy on D-Day. This is history; you probably know all this: First and Second Army. And Patton and his Third Army went in about a week, two weeks later. And each one of those three armies had what amounted to a fighter Air Force assigned to them. Three fighter Air Forces; it wasn't a complete Air Force, it was a huge amount of planes and each one was under the command of a General. And a General with the Air Force worked hand-in-glove with a General from the Army. Not under him, not for him, not under his supervision, but as equals. The Army General would brief the Air Force, "Tomorrow is our mission." He would point at things on the map where he was going to try to go, what he going to try to do, and that's all he had to tell the Air Force. Nothing moved the next day except US Army. (Laughs.)

One day, one day Patton told his counterpart, he said, "Tomorrow morning I'm going to make a flanking movement to the left and then we are going to try to close that valet where most of the Germans troops were." He said, "I won't be able to protect my flank." He didn't have to tell the Air Force nothing else, nothing, nothing moved. At that time, a woman could be pushing a baby carriage down the street and she would die. Anything that moved other than American Army died. Was by the P-47's mostly. Terrific ground support aircraft. Yeah, next?

MW: Um, I don't like to say "um" either, so I'm trying to gather my thoughts, too. I was reading about a mission in your story in here sir and it said that the day your life was saved by the P-51 Mustang. Could you tell us that story, sir?

RD: Well, let's go back a little further than that. When we first started flying with just one or two groups, our only fighter support was the British Spitfires. And our target was just along the French, Dutch, and Belgian coast. We couldn't go any further than that; we didn't have

the experience or the airplanes couldn't get much further than that. And then later on we started going on to deep missions like the real bad one for Swinefert. We went all the way to Swinefert without fighter support. And we lost six—60 bombers—that's 600 men. Most of them died. And then we got the P-47s and P-38s, and the P-47s could take it just barely into Germany, but then you'd have to turn around and come back. Even when they went and installed the extra fuel tanks, they still couldn't go much further than that. And the P-47 boys would brag about they could take us to Berlin and back, but they didn't have enough fuel left to dogfight if they had too.

And then the P-51 was developed. Oh, the P-51 was developed for the Brits, by the way. They were in real dire straits when they got permission to deal with an American company. And North America just happened to have a P-51 on the drawing board, and they accepted the contract and I think they built a dozen P-51s. And that model had the Allison engine, the same engine used in the P-40s flying tiger-type aircraft. And it was marginal, one of the biggest disappointments of the war.

And the Brits at one time decided to make a modified fuselage and make a full recon plane out of it. And about that time some bright boy, probably a Brit engineer, got a bright idea of changing a—modifying the fuselage, removing the Allison engine and installing the Merlin, the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine. Same engine that was in the Spitfire, Hurricane, the big Lancaster bomber—outstanding engine. Well, they did, they modified it and installed it, that Merlin engine, and it was a miracle, miracle! Most outstanding airplane of World War II. And they put wing tanks on it and that airplane could take us to any target the B-17 could hit. The P-51 could go with 'em, if it had the external tanks to there.

And I think you read my story about the six 109s right ahead of me, within a hair on the head of a tack. That was their favorite method of attack initially, and that was the reason the chin turret was developed, installed on later models of the B-17. Anyway, this was late in the war and we had done so much damage to factories and ball-bearings and engines that they were really strapped for training aircraft. They were strapped for fuel to train young pilots, and I think what was looking down at me that day was a bunch of newcomers. Maybe was one or two old heads in the group. But they made that final turn they were six abreast, and I had to die because I had the Norden Bombsight. I think that at that time the lead and his deputy had the Norden Bombsight, and I had the lead bombardier, who steadied to target; the lead Navigator was the only one in the whole formation who knew where the hell we were, where we were going. So we had to die. And that's when the two P-51s came down.

Those six Germans wanted nothing to do with 'em. Some Germans died that day.

MW: They didn't want to get in a dogfight with them.

RD: Not with a P-51, not with their lack of experience and with experiences pilots in the 51 Mustang. Wonderful airplane. In fact, that was the first airplane we used in Korea; [it] was the P-51, until they invented that first jet fighter. I forget the name of it now.

MW: The Koreans used a version I believe called the "Mig" didn't they, or was that later?

RD: They used one or two versions of the "Mig," yeah. We had a single-engine jet fighter, [but I] can't think of the name of it now. But our airplane and our pilot were a little superior to the "Mig." Well, most of the first "Migs" were flown by Russians; you didn't know that did you?

MW: No, sir.

RD: Yeah, they were better pilots than the Koreans, and we had a higher kill ratio than the Koreans did. I was on a Korean base one day—I'm thinking, I have to talk slow when I think—we had put out the word that we would give \$100,000 to any pilot who brought a "Mig" into our country, or to South Korea. And one pilot took us up on that, and he landed, I think it was in Seoul Airport, right outside of Seoul. And it was top secret, no pictures, no nothin'. Don't even admit that you'd seen it. But I had my camera and I popped up and I took a couple pictures of it and I popped back down. And I still have the pictures at home. (Laughs.) That was the Korean War though, we were talking about World War II.

Yeah, well, I hit most of those major targets oil and aircraft factories, ball-bearings and anything related to aircraft protection. And that last target—Oh, my last seven leads, my last seven missions, I was a group leader. And I wasn't selected because of my flying abilities; it was because of my navigator who took a meticulous flight log, take-off and landing, and everything that was in between including sighting of flack, enemy fighters, anything, everything was recorded, and operations got a hold to that, and one day I got the word that take a skeleton crew up and drop some practice bombs—what they were doing was testing them. He could work the Norden Bombsight, and it was just the next day or two, and I was flying group lead. 'Til my seventh one, target that day was the I. G. Farbenindustrie, [which was] before the war the largest chemical plant in the world.

I think that about the time I hit it, it was making—I wanna use Ersatz gasoline, Ersatz fuel, but that's not the word. Fake fuel—what would be the word? Well, it worked, whatever it was, it worked and we hit some of those factories, too. But that day, their radar was working

perfectly, they were directing fire of four gun batteries, four guns in each battery, they had me perfectly boxed in all the way down that bomb run. Just perfect square (Laughs.) It didn't change; it didn't veer, ever, the whole bomb run. Of course, the rest of the formation moved out of the way of that flack and I couldn't—I couldn't turn, I couldn't evade. As soon as the bombardier said, "Bombs away!" I racked that thing over right into one of those batteries. The damage made me beyond repair; I had to drop out of formation and we went from—we went from 27,000 feet down to 9,000 feet. One of the engines caught on fire, so I told my crew to bail out. This was down in southern part of Germany, Saarbrücken area. And I remember I stood up and took that parachute off and said, "Thank God, Thank God I don't have to be shot at anymore." And about that time a bullet went over my head. (Laughs.)

There happened to be one airman—I think he was AWOL but he had a gun—he saw me come down, and I like to think he was firing a warning shot rather than at me. Anyway I stood up and I was caught with most of my other crew at the same time. We were sent to an interrogation center, and that was an experience, too. They put you in a small room just big enough to move around in and a wooden bunk. You could be there for a couple days, and I remember the first meal they give me was a bowl about that size of yellow pea, little peas. And I looked at it and it look like each one of those peas had a maggot in it. It was all cooked but it was still maggots, and I refused to eat it 'cause Americans don't eat that kind of crap. Second day I got the same bowl of soup, so I sat there and tried to pick out the peas that had the maggots and ate the rest. Third day I was so hungry I ate the whole damn thing. Hungry, starving to death. Anyway they interrogated me and sent me to a couple of hospitals because I had a badly beat up leg from the parachute jump.

And then I went to Stalag Luft III, Sagan, the big camp. That camp originally was built for the British because you know they'd been flying for I think three or four years longer than we were. And there were hundreds, there were thousands of 'em. They were scattered in camps all over Germany and they were always trying to escape, real irritating. Irritating as hell for the Germans. They were always looking for another place to build a camp, they selected a place near Sagan because of its soil: it had to be shored up or it would collapse. That's where my bed boards went, shoring up that tunnel. I lost my train of thought—And that's where I ended up with my six, six-slatted sack. Anyway, that camp was built for the British, and then they started getting Americans, and they built a second and a third and a fourth, and I think there was five camps altogether. Must have been well over 30,000 prisoners then, allied prisoners.

And I ended up in the British camp with a lot of other Americans. Food was petty scarce. German food, mostly a piece of block bread every day—I say block bread because it was about 25% saw dust—beets and other trash, but we ate it with gusto [along with] other not very good food. What kept us alive was Red Cross food packages we would receive periodically. We were supposed to get one a week; we were lucky to get two a month. I've got the contents of that in this book some place if you'd like to see it.

MW: Yes, sir. I was reading actually in the book that you gave me, sir, that when they gave out those packs it had cheese and other stuff like that in them, and one of the commodities it had was five packs of cigarettes in it and that when the soldiers would get into camps they would use them as trades items to bargain with the Germans for—

RD: Sometimes. Every camp had a radio, they'd trade a can of spam for a vacuum tube or something to build a radio. So we knew what was going on. We were really a happy bunch of

people when Patton got into Germany cause we knew the war would be over with by Christmas.

(Laughs.) You know anything about the Battle of the Bulge?

MW: Briefly, from what I studied in school, but not in the detail that—

RD: Yeah.

MW: —You'd probably be able to share, sir.

RD: There was six, four German armies in that attack. Two of the armies were all Panzer armies and they started off with the fuel they had on board; they didn't have any back up fuel. So one of their first missions was to capture our fuel dumps. After that they wanted to capture Brussels, retake Brussels, and capture the main seaport and you'll have to help me, I forget the name of it.

MW: The main seaport in Germany, sir?

RD: No, it's either Holland or Belgium. Anyway, that was our main supply place right there at that seaport. They had to cut that or capture that. But they had to—before any of this could happen, you had to split our two army groups, which were stationed in that part of the country. Two army groups which consisted of three or four armies in each group. (Laughs.) That was quite a force. But they almost got it: if they could have got to the fuel dumps, I think they would have succeeded. But eventually they would have lost, but the Battle of the Bulge was the biggest battlefront in World War II. A lot of men died. The 8th Air Force and the 15th Air Force combined we had uh, about 26,000, 27,000 men killed. That's in just two years of flying. In the Middle East now we've had less than 10,000 in six years, I believe, of fighting.

MW: Those numbers are unimaginable.

RD: That's right; that's why I tell you. We had another 25,000 in Prisoner of War Camps, over 50,000 casualties. It was tough. Where was I now? What's the next thing I can hit?

MW: You were talking about when Patton was coming, Battle of the Bulge and Patton coming in.

RD: When he reached Germany is when the Battle of the Bulge started. And Ike sent word down saying, "Can you help out at the Bulge?" And he was far to the right of the major force. (Laughs.) He said, "Hell yeah," and he went right into the middle of the damn battle. He'd take no crap off of nobody. Yeah, he was very instrumental in stopping that battle. And I mentioned that sea port in Belgium, our supplies, our logistics came from Cherbourg, in France.

The Germans, when they retreated, tore up all the port facilities on the west coast of France including this one, Cherbourg, except they didn't completely destroy it. There were some docks still intact, and that's what we used. And we had to haul supplies from Cherbourg up to Germany, up to Holland, Belgium. And they used one major highway all the way across France and absolutely no traffic, no traffic at all could use that highway except the supply trucks. It was nicknamed the "Red Ball Express," driven mostly by Blacks because it was still separated in that time. Back and Forth and Patton ran ahead of him; he ran out of supplies—he ran out of fuel and fuel, which reminds me of something else.

I think an Army of tanks needs something like 6,000 gallons a day to keep moving—6,000 gallons an hour. That sound about right for an army? 6,000 gallons per hour I think that's the figure that I read. That's something you can check on. The logistics, Patton had to sit there for several days waiting on fuel to come; he was fuming. That was the Army; that wasn't me. What else do you want to know? What more questions you have?

MW: Now you, I was reading the other article when you first gave it to me about the 8th Air Force, what else can you tell me? It was talking about the formation of the 8th Air Force.

RD: Well, you wanna go back to the beginning?

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: You know, the Royal Air Force—when Hitler, one of his bomber pilots, dropped bombs on London, because England and Germany had a gentleman's agreement that would not bomb each other's capitol. And this weenie, I think, he missed his target and he was coming home and he just picked out a target of opportunity and just dropped, off-loaded his bombs, which happened to be London. Well, Britain tried to reciprocate by bombing German targets and they tried to do it in the day time with mostly canvas-covered, twin-engine bombers. And they were devastated. Oh man, they had a higher loss rate than we ever had, and, in order to survive, you were forced to fly at night. And when they started to fly at night, they couldn't pinpoint targets, so they hit cities. Early on, they completely wiped out Hamburg. I think mostly fire bombs; they hit it two or three nights in a row. And I think 40,000—over 40,000—civilians died in that raid. Hamburg was just devastated, just completely wiped out.

The 8th Air Force got involved when we were just one of two groups at the beginning, because that's all we had. They tried to convince us that we couldn't fly in the day time, we couldn't precision bomb. We had to fly at night like they do if we want to survive, and our leaders wouldn't do it. They were bound and determined to use that Norden Bombsight and precision bomb, and we did and lost airplanes, like 60 over Swinefert. Of course we hit Berlin one time and lost 100 bombers. I haven't told you about that one.

MW: No, sir.

RD: Yeah, yeah 100 bombers. What is that? That's 10,000 men.

MW: Yes sir.

RD: And then I told you we were using British Spitfires for early support. Then we got some P-47's and P-38's—would take you a little farther, but not far enough. I think we had the 47's when we hit Swinefert, but they couldn't take us in, and it wasn't 'til we got the P-51's that we could go any place in Germany fully covered. Now what was the question?

MW: The early start of the 8th Air Force.

RD: Well, we kept building up and building up and building up, and our Chief of Staff back in the States, Hap Arnold, was on General Spaatz every damn day to get the job done. See, we had to destroy the Air Force before D-Day, and we had two years to do it and the Generals were just giving us a fit. Hap Arnold back in this—in the Pentagon—see I get to talking and lose my train of thought; that happens when you're over 90—but we kept building up and building up and building until, towards the last few months of the War, we were sending up 1,500 bombers over Germany per day, per mission.

MW: Wow.

RD: That's a lot of bombers.

MW: And you were telling me outside, when we were looking at the map outside, that over 900 launched from your area in England at one time.

RD: Well yeah, yeah, when I was flying. But later on there was 1,500 out of that same area. I think we had 200 air bases, which included fighters, and the depots and supply places. But

uh, the 8th Air Force as I recall had, oh, about 40 bases and they were all pretty close to the English Coast.

MW: Now you were talking about the bomb group. How many airplanes comprised a bomb group, sir?

RD: It was six, twelve, eighteen. Eighteen. Normally eighteen bombers, yeah. Six 1st squadron; we had three squadrons in a group. Just same as today, except a group is called a “Wing” today. Eighteen, and sometimes that bomb group went in with two airplanes by the time they got to the target. Yeah, sixteen of ‘em shot down. Would you like to read a story of what it’s like to be in or very near an air raid?

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: I copied this out a book I was reading. Well, let’s wait a minute. It was during the Battle of the Bulge. It was, I think, recorded as the coldest winter in the history of Germany. And it wasn’t 32; it was around below zero. It was below zero where I was in the prison camp and one night we could hear the artillery duel between the Germans and the Russians up there to the North, and they marched us out at one o’clock that night, in the morning. I’m trying to think, I had something I—I got the routes and times in that book. They marched us to a town called Spremberg, put us on box-cars, small European type box-cars. They were built I understand for eight horses or 40 men.

MW: Yes sir, that was talking about that in there, the “forty and eight cars.” (Points to book.)

RD: “Forty and eights.” There were 45 men in my car that night. And they took us to— to Nuremberg. And Nuremberg the prison camp was less than two miles from the Marshland Yards, an American primary target. The city was a British primary target. It seemed like they hit it every damn day, but it wasn’t every day. The Brits hit it several times at night, and the Americans I remember watching ‘em. Bombing it two or three times in the day time. And I remember one group—I guess the group commander didn’t like what he was seeing, so he made ‘em do a 360, and that’s murder. Made ‘em do a 360 and go back before they dropped. And he was pinpointing a target, the city itself. Anyway, them Brits used to carry four 6,000-pounders. (Laughs.) Big bombs. Oh God, that will wake you up at night.

MW: They were hoping to do some damage.

RD: Yeah. (Laughs.) And they were under tremendous pressure, too, from flack at night, fighters with radar detectors, directed guns. Anyway, that’s the story right there. (Hands MW sheets.) Read a couple of pages; this is at Nuremberg Prison Camp.

MW: “When the prisoners arrive at the destinations after the march, the conditions all around them were deplorable. As might be expected, the camps were exceedingly crowded, and more prisoners were arriving every day. In spite of the Germans’ best efforts, latrines overflowed and garbage accumulated faster than it could be carried away. The danger of epidemics arose again, only this time the prisoners could do little to help themselves. Inadequate rations throughout the march and during weeks before the emergency supplies arrived sapped the men’s health and strength. Many had become ill and prostrate by the time the first parcels were delivered. The prisoners at Nuremberg found it necessary to send a long list of complaints to the protecting power on March 13, 1945. The most serious charge was that the Germans had violated

the Geneva Convention by placing the prisoners within three kilometers of a major military target, the Marshland Yard. During the three weeks before the submission of the report, the target had been bombed repeatedly and many bombs had fallen near the camp.

George (Swiner?) found the bombing raids horrible and fascinating. The first attack of the heavies came only a few nights after his arrival at Nuremberg. At first, only distant air raid sirens [were] wailing in the night. He was to instantly wake from this when nearby sirens sounded a more urgent cry. He'd open the windows so less glass would be shattered when the bombs landed. Re-creating the scene he said, 'soon the drone of high-flying Merlin engines became perceptible, and as the throb grew inexorably in volume, it seemed to chant, 'You've had it, chum. Here we come, rum, rum. You've had it, chum. Here we come, rum, rum,' over and over again. Our nervousness increased with the aerial armada's approach. We mulled about in the dark, and the pail in the corner never lacked patients.

Some raids, especially those conducted by the fast newly single mosquito aircraft, were short and sharp. With the Lancaster and Halifaxes, however, it was like watching a play. Following the imminent attack siren wail,' (Swiner?) continued, 'the sharp crack of hundreds of flack guns ushered in the next act with ear-splitting dun. The red and green marker-flares cascaded from the depths of the night sky. Someone shouted, "Markers are down!" There's no doubt now their target for the night. I watched fascinated as the brilliant markers seemed to be drifting right to my open mouth. His eyes remained glued to the scene. Suddenly two walls of flame erupted in front of us as the sound of exploding bombs deafened us. I could feel the heat on my face. The bombs were close and the barracks seemed increasingly frail. There were slit trenches, but the guards had been instructed to shoot anyone who ventured outside during an air raid. Before long, however, hundreds of prisoners dove out of the windows and raced for the

trenches. No shots were fired. The guards were too busy looking out for themselves. The scene before us was one that had to be seen to be believed, he later recalled. It was the most beautiful maze of light and color that hid the stench of death”—

RD: Oh, God.

MW: “Powerful blue and white search lights made an ever changing lattice of colors and died. Every few seconds a particularly large blossom would go streaking downwards followed by an orange trail of light, as another bomber and crew were written off. At the—at the base of this huge lattice work were countless tongues of flames growing in size and number. Their dance pausing frequently, it merged with dull red glows as two-ton bombs exploded.” It’s hard to read, sir. I can’t imagine what it would have been like being there.

RD: I think you missed one paragraph, with the bomber coming down.

MW: It said— (Pause)

RD: Did you read the third page? Might be right there.

MW: “The tortured metal of a blazing Lancaster screamed overhead,”—

RD: Yeah , yeah.

MW: —“barely missing our hut and escaping its tormentors, plunges to its death in the trees just outside the wire.”

RD: See, that just wasn’t one night.

MW: That was pretty much every night, wasn’t it, sir?

RD: Well, it wasn't quite every night, but you see, the Lancaster's flying at night—he came in one at a time. And about the flares, the flares were dropped, well the name will come in a minute. But the lead bomber would drop four flares around a city and they would drop a big chandelier flare in the right between the—in the middle of all of this—real slow coming down. And then a ringmaster would fly above 'em and call in the bombers one at a time to drop on the flare on the city below. The one, I'll tell you—one night a bomber came in and dropped four flares around our prison camp. What's that tell ya?

MW: That they were planning on bombing it.

RD: How would you feel?

MW: I'd be wanting to run, sir.

RD: Well, yeah. I shake up just thinking about it after 70 years. But come to find out later that they had marked us as a Prisoner of War camp, but we didn't know that that night. Anyway, we didn't get bombed. But I thought that—I cried the first time I read that because I experienced—I remember that Lancaster coming down but I remember the rest of it.

MW: Now this, this was exactly around the time you were there, wasn't it, sir?

RD: That was who?

MW: This was written—Was this story written around the time you were in that camp, sir? The events that happened?

RD: Not at the time it was written. That's a relatively new book, [written a] couple of months ago.

MW: Now when Patton came in, and, I remember you told me Patton's army, the 3rd Army, was the one that liberated you, sir. Around what time was that, sir?

RD: Oh, gee. It will come to me. Let's talk about something else first. We marched out. Oh!—from Nuremberg we got word that the U.S. Army was approaching, getting there, so they marched us out again. They marched us to a narrow town called Moosburg. And that first march, when the temp was so low, we marched out on ice not asphalt or dirt, we marched out on ice from freezing rain. They were horrible, horrible marches. Anyway, we marched out of Nuremberg; it was spring, and the weather was pleasant, and they marched us pretty fast. There happened to be a Red Cross official from Switzerland traveling in that part of the country at the time. And he talked to the German commander and said you're marching us too far and too fast, and he slowed down after that. Tell you the truth it was right pleasant. That's when we liberated that cart. (Laughs.) And liberated that chicken. We didn't steal it now, we liberated it. (Laughs.)

MW: Yes, sir. (Laughs.)

RD: Understand that. (Laughs.)

MW: Liberated.

RD: Yeah, of course the station manager caught us and took it back. He was fit to be tied. Anyway, I can remember another incident that same march. I told you, I think. One of the guards, who we thought was an old man, must have been about 110, 120 pounds—he was carrying his rifle and his backpack and he just couldn't hardly make it because he was an old man. And one man took his rifle and another man took his backpack and helped him down the road. That's how compassionate Americans are. And not another German said a word to us about that, not a word. And it was about that time we got buzzed by a P-51. He was by himself or we

didn't see another one. And as soon as uh, well he came down to get a good look and after he made that pass, oh, maybe about 50, 60 POWs ran out in a flat field right beside the road and spelled out P-O-W, with arrow pointing towards the direction we were traveling. And he came back and waved and went on about his business—beautiful sight. That was the only time we saw an American plane that long in that part of the country.

Anyway, we got to Moosburg; it was ten times worse than Nuremberg. There were so many prisoners from so many camps moved in. And that's when the Americans started approaching Moosburg. 'Bout that time some SS Troops were retreating; they tried to get the Luftwaffe, the Air Force guards to help resist, and most of them refused. So the SS rounded 'em up, put 'em in a barracks and threw a couple of hand grenades in there and killed a bunch of 'em and the guards took off. And there was a brief artillery duel over the camp, Germans and Americans, then the Germans finally left and an American Sherman Tank came through the double barbed-wire fence. Soon as he got inside, he disappeared cause he was—must have been over a thousand Americans all over that tank. Tried to drag the troops out to hug 'em and kiss 'em and thank 'em for liberating 'em.

Wait a minute, I went to three different—two different—hospitals cause I was injured. I got to Sagan in 13 October 44, evacuated in January 28th in the deep of winter, and arrived in Nuremberg on 4 February. How many days would that be four or five? February had twenty-eight days right?

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: Took us four days to get there: two days marching and one or two days travel by train. We walked twelve—(Looks in book.) No, that's not right; that's not what I'm looking for.

Well I can't find it right now; [it] tells how far we walked in both walks. It was just a day or two after—Oh, a train came through and I think it was the same day a Red Cross coffee wagon came in, of course that coffee didn't last long, and it was an hour or two after that Sherman came through in his tank—not tank, his jeep. Standing with his pearl-handled pistols, stars all over him, looked like a galaxy. Anyway, he waved and took off. And it was just a day or two after that, a lot of P-47's, C-47's came in, probably same ones we used to drop the parachutists on D-Day. Packed us up and took us to a place in France, a little place called Camp Lucky Strike. That was the identification card the Germans used. (Hands MW a card.) All of us had one like that.

MW: This is the original one?

RD: Yup, we got the originals after we got to Camp Lucky Strike in the heart of France, yeah. Germans kept a written record of everything. I even have a receipt of my GI watch that they took from me.

MW: This is unreal; this is in my hands right now. Like I said, I just can't wrap my head around it somehow. They even have Charleston, South Carolina on here.

RD: I hope I'm not boring you.

MW: Oh, no, sir, just in awe.

RD: So much happened in World War II.

MW: Don't think you're boring me; this is wonderful. I don't know if I told you, but through high school and even now, even though I'm an English major, I have always been a history buff. So learning anything new—I'll go back home and bore my parents to death with all

I tell ‘em. My little sister hates history, and so when I’m home she has history projects to do she’s like, “Help me do this; I don’t wanna do it.”

RD: I’m a poor history student myself, but God I love it to death.

MW: (Looking at picture on card.) I like the moustache particularly, sir.

RD: (Laughs.) Oh, it was way out here. (He motions towards his cheeks.) By the time we left, I could sit there and twirl it by the hour. And then we got a bird colonel in a prison camp one day. He said, “[your] moustache will be trimmed to military length.” So no longer than the crack of your mouth. So I just shaved the whole thing off. And my roommate came in and said, “Who the hell are you? You’re sittin’ in Bob Dunbar’s chair.” (Laughs.)

MW: September 13th was the day that this was recorded, sir, wasn’t it?

RD: September 13th, 1944 was the day I was shot down.

MW: And when Patton and the 3rd Army came in, and the 3rd Army liberated you, how many days was that after you had originally been captured sir?

RD: I think I was a Prisoner of War for nine months. (Coughs.)

MW: Now, after you were liberated, it says you were sent to France, and then they sent you home. When you got to France, what was the reception like?

RD: Oh it was great—medical examination, a hot bath—ooh, that was a luxury, ooh jeez. (Laughs.) Hot bath and new uniforms, anything we needed—money, passage home. We got back on a Liberty ship, sound familiar, Liberty ship?

MW: Yes sir, it does.

RD: I forget the name of the industry that developed it, but major parts were built in different places then assembled together like a jigsaw puzzle. Fantastic construction, so fast. They weren't very fast, but they built them by the millions, seems like. Anyway, put on one of those things, and I remember the first meal I got; I'll forget what it was, but I remember the bread, white, freshly-baked bread, still warm, white bread. And I took a bite of that and put it aside, finished my meal, and then I ate the bread because I saved it for dessert it was so good. So good: first piece of white bread, American-type bread, in nine or ten months. You can't imagine how good that bread was, oh God.

MW: I bet it was a great change from what you had experienced.

RD: Oh God, oh jeez, decent food. Unheard of, decent food. Oh we were so hungry, too. And the cooks were so good. Well, it was a slow boat, but we got home. I landed at Boston, we were put on trains to Military Camp some place, and the train went quite a long distance between housings, and every house had women and children hanging out the window, waving to us (Makes waving motion.) all the way down, every one of 'em. What a reception we got there. Then after that I was given a 90-day leave, recuperation leave, they call it. Memories.

MW: Now, when I first talked to you, I saw all the ribbons on your hat. Now, when you got back, what were some of the awards you received, sir?

RD: What was the last part of the question?

MW: What were some of the distinguished commendations and awards you received when you got back?

RD: Well, I got the medals flying combat: three Air Medals, a Purple Heart, and three Commendation Medals. The rest of them was area medals, end of war medals, doesn't amount to much but looks pretty on your uniform. I like the Purple Heart and the three Air Medals, four medals away from a Distinguished Flying Cross, four missions away from it.

MW: I notice you still wear the Purple Heart on your lapel.

RD: People know I was in combat; about 10% of us went to combat. Another 90% was supporting us. And I was in the Korean War. I didn't, I wasn't, I was stationed in Japan during the Korean War but I was at an aircraft maintenance organization, and I had to make a monthly trip to South Korea and hit every base over there. Consultation with aircraft maintenance people. Put into Thailand in the Vietnam War, I was stationed in a Air Force Fighter Base, F-105 fighter base with the SAC, Strategic Air Command Tanker Detachment. We had fifteen tankers; we got one a day from Okinawa, one came in and one went back every day. And while they were there, every time a fighter or fighter/bomber took off in 'Nam or Thailand a tanker was there to go up and pump 'em because he couldn't get to target area and back without being refueled. So that was a good duty that time.

MW: How many of those type missions did you fly sir, while you were there?

RD: In Thailand, not many. I wasn't on flying status, but I did get to fly a few of 'em. I got out of war; I got out of the service in '45 or '46 for a year, and then the Korean War started and they recalled me to active duty not on status. That's the way the order read, not on status, which meant flying status, and it tickled me to death because I did not want to be shot at again. You don't—you can't—understand why I'm saying that. I could have applied and probably been

called back and flown B-29s, but I didn't wanna fly anymore. I'm not the hero type, a little cowardly, I think.

MW: Sir from everything you've told me, your story, you're nothing near a coward, sir. 'Cause I can't—my nineteen year old mind—I can't wrap my mind around the concept of getting shot at, just thinking about, it just—

RD: You could fly miles and miles of flack, that's artillery shells they're shooting at you now. Like when General (unintelligible) years ago said that, "Artillery is the queen of battle." You've been told that, I'm sure, in class.

MW: I've never heard that one, no sir.

RD: Artillery is the queen of battle, and those were what they were shooting at us, mostly 88 mm—88 mm's not a big shell, about like that, little more than three inches, but it had a good casing behind it, pushing that shell. Yeah, they used to shoot at us. Well, I flew at 27,000 feet, and it was right up there with me. And until I started flying the lead, I never saw much combat because I always tried to fly a tight formation. I didn't wanna be tail end Charlie and get my butt shot off, and I tried to steer as close to this man's wing tip as I could. Right at him. So I was flying the airplane, I was working everything, the throttles, I worked my butt off.

And I think I told you about debriefing afterwards. Soon as we landed, we were taken—well, of course I'd have to go to debriefing—and one of the things they give us was a shot of whiskey, bourbon; every man got a shot. And half my crew didn't drink, three or four of 'em give me their shots. God, I needed that whiskey, 'cause I was so taut—too tight and nervous. And then we were turned loose.

I remember one time I was fortunate enough to get a three-day pass. I was in London, and early one morning I saw the B-17s and B-24s coming, flying South on the West side of London. I thought that trail would never end, just on and on must have been well over a thousand bombers coming, going to Germany. You'd never see anything like that again, never see it again. We can send one B-52 up now, and he can stay 100, 200, 300 miles and shoot those uh, those uh. What is it? Missiles?

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: What is it? I can't think of the name of it.

MW: Ballistic?

RD: No, wasn't ballistic—Cruise Missiles.

MW: Cruise Missiles, yes, sir

RD: Yeah, and never see land. I mean those Cruise Missiles are perfect. Where do we stand?

MW: Well, we've covered a lot of stuff. Is there anything before we wrap up, any other remarks you'd like to make? Any other stories you'd like to tell?

RD: Not today, but I'll think of 'em tomorrow, sure as hell. (Laughs.) No, I think I pretty well covered everything I can remember. Gotta love that P-51. There's something else that Jimmy Doolittle did. Now, you recognize that name, don't you?

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: He led the Tokyo Raid. He was 8th Air Force Commander. Well, after Tokyo Raid he was promoted from Lt. Col. to Brig. General—he skipped the Bird Col.—and it was a few months after that he got his second star then his third star, in less than two years. He was an outstanding man, I think I told you about his background.

MW: Yes, sir.

RD: Doctorate—one of the things he did beside increasing the mission requirements, he wanted the fighters to hit the deck coming back and strafe anything they could find: air fields and they destroyed lots and lots of airplanes by that which accomplished quite a bit for our mission, to destroy the Luftwaffe. And one of our aces—I wanna say Grobetsky—I think he was a Bird Col., commander at the time. He was on the deck with his P-47 and he was an ace several times over, kills in the 20s, close to 30. Anyway, he was on the ground strafing and he got so damn low that his props hit the ground and wiped him out. (Laughs.) He ended up in Prisoner of War camp, same camp I was at, Stalag Luft III. That was pure stupidity to get that damn low; 500 feet was stupid, too, I thought at the time. You got any more questions?

MW: No, sir. It was great getting to talk to you today, and I appreciate everything that you've done for us sir.

RD: Didn't I leave another piece of paper in there, other than that? What was it? Yeah that! Did you read that?

MW: Um, I read it the day you came in, sir.

RD: Gives you a good feeling about the 40 air bases, 1,000, 1,500 bombers taking off at the same time in that small area.

MW: I don't know if I read all of it, I remember reading the very first of it.

RD: Yeah. (Pause.)

MW: It's been an honor sir getting to know you better, and I hope to keep in touch after all this is over, get to hear a few more stories afterwards.

RD: I think I hit all the high points. I had distances and times and days there of our two forced marches, but I can't find it.

MW: I remember in the—I think one was—75 kilometers, sir, was one of them.

RD: Total distance might have been 75 kilometers.

MW: Yes sir, I think that was one of them.

RD: I remember the first night we marched out of Sagan the temperature was below zero.

MW: I think that's everything.

RD: There was a little black strap around this. The first time we marched out, we stopped at—you could call it a village with three or four different farm houses in a group. Of course the farmers lived in a group like that, and I fell in a wagon in the yard full of hay, and I climbed into that and covered up in hay and that gave me enough insulation to—I survived that night [when] the temperature was below zero. I don't know how I got past that night. Must be something else I can tell ya? How can that just disappear, just a little black cord I had that tied in?

MW: Yes, sir, I remember it.

RD: Well, the sweeper will get it, it won't be lost. In Stalag Luft III we had a theatre, we had a library; I got a list of all the books I read as a prisoner of war. We had a library, athletic equipment, we had a field big enough where they could play English-style football; we had a walking area inside the perimeter fence. The Germans did everything they could possibly do to keep us occupied, to keep thoughts off our escaping. I never thought about trying to escape, because I thought the war would be over before I'd get involved in something like that. Yeah, after Tom, Dick, and Harry, there were no more attempts that I'm aware of. That was the three tunnels that the British dug. If you ever hear about that movie "The Great Escape"? I recommend you go see it; it's how they dug the tunnel. And the Germans rounded 'em all up except two and murdered, murdered 50 of 'em. When I got to the camp, everybody's wearing the black arm band. Yeah, we flew a lot of missions with our fighter escort, and they killed us. (Pause.) We finished?

MW: Yes, sir, I don't have any more questions. I appreciate it.

END OF TRANSCRIPT