

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Richard Radlinger
U. S. Army Air Corps, World War II

2005

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Radlinger, Richard, (1923-), Oral History Interview, 2005

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 53 min.),

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 53 min.),

ABSTRACT

Richard Radlinger, a Park Falls, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service in the United States Army Air Corps as an engineer, and his experience as a German prisoner of war.

Radlinger talks of spending his summers at Fort Snelling (Minnesota) in the Citizens Military Training Camp before actually entering the service in January of 1943. Radlinger explains that he and his four brothers were all drafted into the service, and after basic training he was sent overseas to North Africa with the 15th Air Force as an engineer flying B-17's. Radlinger discusses his participation in the invasion of Southern France, particularly the bombing of Marseilles. In September 1943, Radlinger relates his assignment to the 2nd Bomb Group and participation in a mission to bring back POWs from Romania. He details receiving multiple injuries during a bombing mission in Bulgaria where his plane lost two of its engines, crash-landed, and killed two people. Radlinger explains that during another mission his plane was bombed, he parachuted, and noticed his left leg was missing as he was coming down.

Hospitalized as a German prisoner of war, he talks of the winter of 1944-1945 as being the coldest on record, watching the thousands of English and French planes on the 27th of December during the Battle of the Bulge, and that the hospital was almost hit during the bombings.

Radlinger relates he was sent to Camp Minnegan where others who were severely injured return for the United States. He talks of taking the Swedish ship *Gripsholm* back to the States.

Radlinger speaks highly of the surgery on his leg stump he received under German care, but was ordered, under threat of court martial, to have another operation once in America. The operation was unsuccessful, which led to another and yet another operation finally involving another year stay Percy Jones Hospital in Michigan. Radlinger talks in more detail about the various types of aircraft and navigator suits, as well as some of the machinery used by the Germans at this time.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.

Transcript edited by Brooke E. Perry Hoesli, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 2007.

Interview Transcript

John: This is John Driscoll, and I am with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives. And today is May 5, 2005. And this is an oral history interview with Richard Radlinger at home in Park Falls, Wisconsin. And Richard is a veteran of the United States Army Air Corps, is that right?

Richard: Un- huh.

John: Okay. And thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?

Richard: I was born right here in Park Falls. It was a lot smaller then than it is now. I was born in 1923 in a family of twelve.

John: Oh. Okay.

Richard: And lived on a farm. And, of course, my early life in school was really boring. I was a notorious scalper, you know. And so when Pearl Harbor came, a tragic thing to think of.

John: Oh, yes.

Richard: Anyway, I had been in training two years before that over in Fort Snelling. It was called the Citizens Military Training Camp. If you went there four summers, then you were, if something would happen, you would be put into another training camp for officers. As long as you pass.

John: Okay. I never heard of that.

Richard: There was another one similar to it and, I always like to correct it, there is the CCC. I know you have heard of that.

John: Oh, yes.

Richard: That was for poor people, but we were poor, but we never got in. I spent those two summers over in Fort Snelling. I was very interested in the service and then about that time, I started to where I was needed at home instead of going over there. So I didn't finish it out. And, like I say, there was ten kids and as long as you are sitting here right close to me, here is a picture.

John: Oh, isn't that great! Oh, man.

- Richard: And there is one right on the back side the same way. It is a different picture, though. Do you take some pictures along?
- John: Oh, yea.
- Richard: That is mother and dad, there. They were in their eighties at that time.
- John: Oh, boy.
- Richard: So far, we have been lucky. We are sort of a family, we all hope to get over eighty. My father and mother came from La Crosse and they came from a long-life family. And so far, I have lost two of these brothers. They were in service. There were five of us. We were drafted within two years time. Is there anything else that you would like me to go on to?
- John: No. What were you doing on Pearl Harbor Day? Do you remember?
- Richard: I don't remember. That was in December. I was probably up at the hunting shack. Them days, they had half of the season was in December, so it was very possible I was up there. It was a surprising thing, though, hunh?
- John: Oh, yea. That was terrible. How did you get into the Air Corps, then? Drafted?
- Richard: Oh, yes. All five of us were drafted. I had, I was teed off that none of us boys were taken into the CCC camp, because we were a poor family.
- John: Sure.
- Richard: Sometimes they were all, as they got to that age, they were taken in. And, of course, here, we didn't. But it was a political deal, so I have forgotten it. And then, well, I had two brothers went in before me. And then I went in in January of '43. At that time, things were going pretty rough for the Allies. I got finished with my, all those different schools you had to go to. It took about a year. And then we were sent overseas. We ended up in North Africa, in the 15th Air Force. And then as things...
- John: What training did you go through in the States?
- Richard: Well, armament training. Engineering training. And, of course, we had, of course, our first three months was what you get when you go into the Army.
- John: Yes. Basic.

Richard: And then, well, I'll just continue on. After we got overseas, I started flying. I think it was the first of July I started flying. And then...

John: Were you a pilot?

Richard: No, I was the engineer.

John: Engineer. Okay, I got you.

Richard: But things were getting pretty rough. We were hitting some pretty hard targets. I am always surprised that the 15th is never in on any of this hero stuff. Because it is always the 8th Air Force. And we had just as hard targets to bomb as they had. We took care of the Ploesti oil fields, and that was really rough.

John: You were flying B-24s?

Richard: B-17s. Very fortunate that I got into 17s. Other than the B-24s, they had lots of ack-ack to contend with. We were always ten thousand feet higher than they were. Although I got to give them credit. They could carry a big load. And the first incident I had that was interesting was in southern France, the invasion of southern France. We had gone up there. Our group had gone up there a couple of times to help the Navy soften things up and actually the day of the hit, there wasn't a German around. Now that surprised me because your intelligence, you know. They were all north of there, up in a good safe place in the woods. So the Navy was out there and they was lobbing in shells and, of course, we were bombing. And never did I realize that after that I would go through Marseilles once more. This was Marseilles that was hit. Then after that, on September 1, I was in 2nd Bomb, which was quite a bomb group. That was already formed in the First World War. Their headquarters was in Langley Field, Virginia. And we were asked to go into Romania and bring back a bunch of POWs that the Germans had left behind.

John: Okay.

Richard: They couldn't handle their own dead, and so forth. So they planked the bomb bays with planks and took off the guns. We flew at ten thousand feet so we didn't need any oxygen. We picked them up at Romania. These were fellows that were all shot down over the Ploesti fields. And they had been there, perhaps, for close to a year. So they were some pretty happy fellows when we came in and picked them up. And nobody had a parachute because we, all of sudden, we didn't know where we were going to get these additional hundreds of parachutes. So they didn't tell us until we were pretty well into the bomb bay and the waist section. And we flew skeleton crew then. We only had five men. Nobody needed oxygen. We had no

problems. The Germans knew where we were and we knew where they were. At that time, the German fighter planes were pretty busy all the time. And I don't remember if the rest of the squadrons in our group had a mission that day, or not. In fact, I think that all twenty-eight planes were on this one. On this particular mission. And they were pretty happy boys. And when we got back, we went right to Naples, Italy. I think the reason why we were picked, we were probably the closest group to haul them back. That was quite an experience. They were happy boys. A few of the boys didn't come back with us. We don't know what happened to them afterwards. They, perhaps, had a girl friend there, you know.

John: Could be.

Richard: I often thought of that. I wonder what happened to them boys when the Russians came? They weren't far behind. Although, the Russians usually by-passed the big cities. Because they had plenty of time afterwards to come back and move out everything from the factories.

John: Yea. They just...

Richard: That was all moved to Russia, to a place where the Germans never could reach in there. Mongolia and Manchuria.

John: Okay. Way, way over.

Richard: So they never lost anything there. I mean, everything that was manufactured. Everything was over there. So when they came, and by that time the Germans were pretty well in retreat. I often wondered what them fellows done.

John: Yea. Sure.

Richard: What was interesting was how many, how much brand-new equipment that was setting there, that the Germans had to leave behind because of the fuel. Brand new ME-109s and Tiger tanks. Every, well, I guess, everywhere the Germans retreated, in Africa and everywhere else, there was so much machinery that they left behind that it is unbelievable that all this stuff could have been manufactured there. You know, during the war. I imagine Rommel would have been pretty happy to have those big Tiger tanks and ME-109s down in Africa.

John: Sure.

Richard: Well, after that, then, the next thing, we went to bomb some lots over in Bulgaria. And, I don't know, this particular day, probably there was a thousand airplanes up. And we missed the lots. See, when you are flying over thirty thousand feet, you

got clouds between you, and everything. It is pretty hard, you know, to say that you are going to be as accurate as the plane that could drop a bomb in a smokestack. Of course, that isn't true. Well, anyway, we were in trouble. We had two engines went out, and so we were going to go back. And, fortunately, a P-38 followed us. In order to follow us, of course, he'd be stalling around, you know. And we got in there, and I was working on the tail wheel, trying to get the tail wheel down, and all of a sudden, we hit, and the airplane nosed up, and I was up in the air in the tail. And, of course, I went flying up, hitting just about every rib there was, you know. Along that whole skin. And I didn't realize it at the time but when the airplane went up, we hadn't had the orders to go to the radio room. That is about the safest place. So the bombardier and the navigator, they were in the nose, and the nose got smashed right into the pilot's compartment. They were both killed. The other fellows, they all got out of the plane. I got hurt, after hitting all those ribs. And I was laying there, and I was bleeding, and, all of a sudden, one of the crew that was out there waiting for possibly the plane to catch fire. That happens. So they came in and they got me back out. And we landed in a grape field. So they went right at eating grapes. And they brought me a handful every once in a while. So after a couple days, we got back to that air base. That airplane was all finished. We got back to the base. And then we had just ordinary missions to fly. And, by that time, Germany was practically out of oil. And they invented synthetic oil.

John: Yea, I've heard about that.

Richard: And they were, I don't know how many of them factories they had, but they were real rough targets. They had no more fighter planes but their ack-ack was unbelievable. And the ship above us, well, she had, I heard this over the mike, and one of the guys said, "She's going to hit us!" See, we were pretty close when we were over a target. Really too close for safety. The reason for that was the fire power that we had. Every B-17 had fifty calibers.

John: Oh, sure. So you could cover each other.

Richard: Yea. So, the next thing I went for, with another fellow, to try to get the ball turret turned up so he could get out. That took a little time because he had bomb sights in there, and he had two fifty calibers. So, and then, one of the fellows said, "He's going to hit us!" And the next thing, there was a terrible noise, and I woke up, I was in a parachute. I didn't jump. At the time, I already was taking my chest pack off. One side was still hooked up. And I was hanging sort of funny, then, because of that one strap holding me, and I was sort of bent over, and I was trying to straighten myself by getting my two legs together. And I missed. And I looked down, and here the left leg was gone.

John: Oh, my God.

Richard: And I was bleeding very heavily. I had no pain at all. And, of course, when you come down in a parachute, you are going about nineteen feet per second. The parachute is thirty, thirty-some feet when it's open. And I got through the clouds. There was very heavy cloud cover at around thirty-thousand feet, and I got through there, and then I could see, you know, the ground. You couldn't distinguish anything. And, of course, the other crews, it takes about an hour for fifteen hundred airplanes to go over. That is what we had up there that day. They were spaced, you know. Well, I could hear the bombs going off and I could hear the airplanes, and so possibly the propeller could have done this to me, or I was pinched in the airplane and the leg, they had to cut that off. So, the ground was coming right up at me. That's what we see. And I passed out, and when I come to, there was five old fellows there, and they were coming towards me. And one of them was a little bit leery because, in Yugoslavia, there, one of the fellows there pinned a red star on my suit, my flying suit. And, of course, he knew there was something wrong. And I heard him say, "Rooskie! Rooskie!" Well, that meant he thought I was Russian. Well, then they took care of me. And we just waited there, they put a tourniquet on. And we just waited there. And then somebody came from a field hospital and they took me in there and gave me some shots. And the raids were still going on. So we waited about fifteen, twenty minutes after that, they took me to the hospital. It was a Catholic sisters hospital.

John: Oh, okay.

Richard: I was so surprised. Then the bombing raid was coming to an end and they were bringing in German soldiers from the front. The front was only about thirty miles from there. But they took care of me right away. The doctor took care of me. I got two transfusions. Somebody told me one of the guys was English and one was German. So it didn't make much difference. It all mixed. The right timing. There was thirteen other guys in the ward, Americans that had to bail out at different times. And I was sort of waiting for some of our crew to come in. But nobody showed up. I really, after I heard what happened, the English fellow, there was an English prisoner of war camp for a year. And then told us that the plane come down and everything was gone up as far as the waist section, and everything plowed about three foot deep into the ground. Of course, the fellows that were in the plane then, they were dead before it hit the ground. And that's all he told me about it, so I was sort of waiting for the tail gunner. If he was in the tail section yet, he would have more or less, he wouldn't have come down straight. He would have fluttered. Every once in a while, that happens. You know. But he never came in. So, these other fellows, they had been there already two months, and they were getting around the place. I didn't know why we hadn't been sent to a regular interrogation center. But they stayed there, whatever, the Germans had a reason

for it. And I was beginning to, you know, feel better. The doctor had fixed up my stump real nice. He took all the muscles and folded it up underneath, and sewed it up. And I was getting along pretty good. And then winter set in. And it was unreal. That was the winter of '44-'45.

John: That was the coldest on record.

Richard: It was terrible. There was five feet of snow. And so they took us to the train with a team or horses. And there was a hay rack on with a bunch of straw. And got us there. And that happened on the seventeenth. So, on the seventeenth of December, they got us into the train then. And they took us all over to Frankfurt. That is where the interrogation center was. That was called *Gulag Luft*. In German, that means *Luft* is air, you know, and *Gulag*, that sort of means prison.

John: Okay.

Richard: Well, anyway, there was so much activity before we got there, we didn't know what to think. And then what actually happened to them, the Battle of the Bulge was going on.

John: Okay. Yea. Right around Christmas.

Richard: Yea. It was then. We were half-way through that. We stayed in the interrogation center two or three days and then I was sent into a hospital. And there wasn't any bombing done, or anything. We were pretty close to where the Germans had been pushed. But everything was overcast, terrible. Nobody could fly. So Christmas Day, of course, the nuns gave us some cookies and something to drink. I think it was some kind of wine. And then on the twenty-seventh of December, the skies cleared. You wouldn't believe it, there were thousands of planes from England, from France, it was unbelievable, and they were bombing, anything and everything. And, of course, two bombs, I suppose they were hung up in the bomb bay, came down and just missed the hospital.

John: Oh, wow. Oh, man.

Richard: The windows, you know, they smashed in. This and that and every other thing. So I had got injured there, too. From there, then, I was sent down to a camp called Minnegan. And I was there a very short while. This was a camp where they got all the fellows that were going to be sent back to the States. They were getting them all set there to go. Two thousand of them. And from there we were put on a train and we went down to Friedrichshafen, which was the border of France and Germany. And there then we got on a Swiss train. There were some obviously a couple of hundred Jewish people on there. And Canadian boys, and American

boys. There was something wrong with all of us. Either you had a leg off, or an arm off, or you were blind and stuff like that. And they took us to Marseilles. That is where I mentioned before. Little did I know that I would be going to Marseilles again. And Marseilles was practically bombed off the map. Before the invasion of the south of France. And I told you the Germans weren't there. And there you had a bunch of small hospital ships. They were taking the people from the land out to this great big passenger ship, that was a Swedish ship. I think it was called *Gripsholm*. It was enormous. All these people got onto that ship, but they had to take us out in the smaller ships close to a mile. Because close to shore there were ships that were rolled over, from the invasion. There were the Air Corps and the Navy, a lot of damage. And then we were going to come over by the Atlantic route but the weather was so bad by then, and they were afraid with all these people on board that were sick and crippled, they took the southern route, down as far as the Azores. Then from the Azores, we went over and came in south of Florida.

John: Okay. Let me flip this tape over, Richard.

[End of Side A of Tape 1]

John: We've got all the time you want to take. Go ahead.

Richard: Well, then when we got back to the States, up in New York, everybody unloaded. The Jewish people, they went off first. I don't know where they went. Then the Canadians. There were about eight hundred and fifty of them. And then, of course, us. It was a huge ship. For them days. And we were all pretty well all scared. Every once in a while you would get on a swell and you would see lights and then you wouldn't see nothing for a few minutes. But the Swedish sailors said to us, "Don't worry, we take this trip many, many times." Not particularly the same trip, from Sweden over, and it was quite an experience. We stayed in rooms, you know, four to a room. And the food was terrific, compared to what we'd been eating. And then, I was surprised at the time, because there was a big hospital there at Washington, DC. Why the fellows that were already healed up were taken there and fitted with artificial legs. But, for some reason, I didn't find this out until later, that hospital was only for the higher-ups.

John: Okay. Okay. Sure.

Richard: Then, some of the fellows, they were dropped off in Chicago, and then a bunch of us were dropped off over in Michigan, Percy Jones Hospital. It belonged to Kellogg. The Kellogg estate. And so, it really was a big deal to start there. They didn't have a large compliment of doctors there. So they put us out to Fort Custer. And that is where we stayed until we were ready to go into the hospital to take our

exams. And I was surprised when I got there because, after I was there a while, they said they got to upgrade this. The stump. So, I said, "I'm satisfied with the stump. I am all healed up nice." Which I was already before by the Germans. Us American boys healed up much faster than the Germans. They had been in the war so long, I suppose. Well, they left me, and then they come back again, and they said, "No, we're going to." "No," I says, "I'm fine the way it is" "Well," they says, "you know, the Army can court-martial you." I had never known this before. For not taking an operation. I felt just okay. Well, when I come out of the first operation, because that court-martial kind of scared me. When I came out of the operation, I noticed for the first time when I tried to walk on the prosthesis, the bone come right through. It was sharp.

John: Oh, man.

Richard: Well, a baby doctor operated on me. 'You know,' he said to me, "I don't know anything about stumps. I am a baby doctor. I am very sorry. You're going to have to have another operation."

John: Oh, man.

Richard: I said, "I'm not going to do it." And I guess I couldn't blame him. I mean, a baby doctor, there could have been other things he could have done instead of trying to fix a stump. Well, then, between the two operations, I lost about three inches in the stump. I had a comfortable area where I didn't have any problems until I walked on it about half an hour. That rubbed it raw. Well, being the second operation, the doctor said, "Well, I shaped your stump as best I could. Your muscles will be your protection." Well, that left me in sort of bad situation. They give me a furlough and I came back home. And that, of course, was the last part of February. The weather was colder than hell. But I went back to Chicago and I took the Sioux Line train home. And I was home about fifteen days and I couldn't get up from my chair but I could see where I was in pain, so I told my ma, I said, "I'm going to go back and have something done with this stump." So I went back over to Percy Jones, and I was there over a year. And then I got discharged.

John: Richard, let me ask a question. When you left Germany, was the war still on?

Richard: Oh, yea.

John: The Germans sent you over?

Richard: Oh, yea.

John: Okay.

- Richard: This was all done, taking us from the camps, they took us down to Marseilles by train. A German train, until we got to Switzerland. And then the Swiss train took us all the way to Marseilles. Yea, it was interesting. I wish I could have made a trip like that, and also on the ship, when I in good shape. Because I liked it in the south of France. It was warm there, compared to up in Germany. Us guys who couldn't do anything. Many people that had any kind of worth, you know, they were held. I remember taking a three-wheel vehicle and it burned pine knots and stuff. That was its power. We went along, I was surprised, we went about twenty-five miles an hour. I never seen that again, but when I come back, that was going on all over in Europe. They used to use these three-wheeler, we called them carts, for a lot of things.
- John: I'll be darned.
- Richard: It's like a bicycle. Europe moved around on a bicycle. That is sixty years ago. Well, then, the war was still on and it must have been getting terrible because I told you I got this book, *Armageddon*. And that is over five hundred pages. Mark Hastings. He wrote three or four story books about the war up until the German surrender. I have no idea how many he was selling and I have no idea how much this book costs. I would say well into the twenties. And I got the book, and the book was sent to me by a fellow from Ohio an comes to Park Falls. His name was Schmidt. And he worked around the area where all the airplane museums are. And he was in on some inventions in World War II. At that time they were already working on the bomb that the Japanese were hit by. And he was doing something on that, too. I guess there was hundreds of people there working on that because eventually when the bombs were dropped...
- John: Nagasaki and Hiroshima.
- Richard: Yea. I was very surprised when I got this book and, of course, he wrote a letter and it turned out to be a boy about ten years younger than I was, but he was in school, probably kindergarten or first grade. His name was Schmidt.
- John: Let me just say, the book that Richard is referring to is titled *Armageddon, The Battle for Germany, 1944-1945*, and it is by Max Hastings, and it is published by Knopf. And Richard is mentioned in the book. In fact, what page is that, Richard?
- Richard: 330.
- John: Let me just read this, okay. On page 330, "The gun crews cheered uproariously when they saw a plane suddenly bleed black smoke and plunge downwards. Once an American flyer fell beside their battery on his parachute. He had lost a leg, but

remained conscious. The boys crowded curiously around him and were amazed to hear him address them in fluent German. His name was Richard Radlinger. 'Why do you come here attacking us?' the gunners demanded, and the airman replied easily, 'We'll all have a beer after the war is over.' And he was taken away to a military hospital.: That's great.

Richard: Getting back to that book, it mentions fluent German. That wasn't true. My folks both came from Austria, and theirs was entirely different. I don't know what it was called and I heard a lot of people right here in Park Falls years ago use that. They were people that were, they come from a place in Czechoslovakia which at one time belonged to Germany. And they had their own dialect.

John: Okay.

Richard: So, anyway, whoever got in contact with the author, that was one point that didn't make sense, that wasn't true. I can understand it enough to know what is happening and that is what you would call Bavarian [indecipherable] but this was high German. That didn't make any difference. I couldn't put two and two together when I got this book, because that was sixty years after. And who would have been alive yet to get this information to the author? So, Mr. Schmidt told me that he can find out. He will get ahold of Hastings. Hastings comes from England.

John: Okay.

Richard: And he knows Hastings pretty well, and he would even know who it was. So, not only this here book. A wonderful thing what he done. But I said, "How much is that book?" And he says, "That's on me."

John: Oh, that's great.

Richard: And we kept in close touch, and I am sure some other things he, now, that book, for sure, must have cost at least fifty dollars. That's all about B-17s. And as you go through it, you can see what beautiful ships they are. They brought a lot of fellows back home, I tell you.

John: That's what I understand. They were rugged.

Richard: That's where, between the 17s and the 24s, there is where the difference was. B-17 could take a hell of a pounding and the 24, although they hauled a bigger load than us, and they were faster than a B-17, but you can see.

John: That is tremendous art. Great pictures in there.

Richard: And it is all on that beautiful soft green color. I bet there is a lot of info. But, he got that at the museum. And he is going to stop and see me. I think what I am going to do, if you are interested, I will send a few pictures along.

John: I will be glad to take them down, and they can copy them and send them back.

Richard: Well, it's up to them. Family pictures, that for sure I would want to have back. And the picture of just the children.

John: Well, the family picture. They probably wouldn't want that. Why don't I leave that here? Because that is important to you, but do you have anything from the time when you were in the service you would like them to take a look at?

Richard: You mean pictures?

John: Pictures, documents, anything that you would be willing to let them take a look at.

Richard: I've got a lot of pictures here that you can pick out.

John: I am going to shut this off for a minute. This is a remarkable story. I'll get these back to you. If I can take them. Will you be here for a week or so? At least?

Richard: Oh, you can mail them. You are going fishing now?

John: Yea. We'll fish through Tuesday.

Richard: Just think. Those are all first cousins.

John: Oh, isn't that great. Wow. That is a great family. How many?

Richard: There's about eighty-seven of us.

John: Wow. That is tremendous.

Richard: Isn't that something? You know, the old time families, they had that farm. They wanted to...

John: They wanted willing hands. I need, we'll both sign this. I'll fill out the other stuff. Did you, when you got out, you had the GI Bill. Did you ever use the GI Bill for anything?

Richard: I was not in the best of shape then. I started to school, and then I had to have some more surgeries done. So, I just dropped out. I guess I had about eight months.

And, you know, it's too bad because, as a disabled person, the government, our state, allowed two years of schooling and the government allowed everybody four years. So I was quiet interested in becoming a veterinarian. I come from a farm and, of course, the fellow here at the Legion post said, "You can't do that hard work." Well, of course, today, you know, your work is mostly catching dogs. So that is too bad that I wasn't able to.

John: Can I get a signature from you? This is the release.

Richard: Are you still taping?

John: Yes, I am still taping?

Richard: Because I want to explain about some of these here.

John: Okay.

Richard: You know, it's nice you remember local Wisconsin. A lot of these fellows that are writing books are telling a lot of stories, and that is what a lot of them are. They are stories. Because the Legion went to and they made a bunch, in fact, I got one of them books. It's called "Memories."

John: Okay.

Richard: And we were given three hundred words. And that ain't very many words. It took me quite a while to put my short story down.

John: To get it down there.

Richard: And then come to find out, afterwards, that one of the fellows was given his whole experiences. Which took about eight pages, typed. So, the book itself didn't go over very well. The Legion could have made two million dollars from that. When the fellows looked at it, and they seen that, well, they didn't go along with the three hundred. Now, here, I got a bunch of pictures of B-17s. I am quite a guy for them. But, they are nice. Most of them had crash landed. And they are landing, of course, in England, and they had some very nice landing fields in England. And they had lots of them. That is where the Americans made all their flights, from England. See, I was in the, like I told you before, I was in the 96th Bomb Squadron. Squadron was eight ships, and it takes four squadrons to make a group. And I was in the 2nd Bomb Group, which, as I mentioned earlier, was formed in World War I. And their headquarters was Langley Field, Virginia. All the other, and after World War II, also, after the war, a lot of them sent some of the stuff back to the States and a lot of them, hell, after they got out on the ship, they just

rolled some of the stuff off. And I think some hadn't seen all of this. Well, of course, naturally, the B-17s flew back. When I went overseas, we took a brand new ship with us. When we got to Africa, of course, they took the ship away from us. We didn't deserve that, yet. Whoever got it, went through hell.

John: They had one in Madison a couple of years ago.

Richard: They tell me, now, over at Oshkosh, they have one.

John: Beautiful ships.

Richard: I haven't been near one. I just, you know, when they have their time down in Oshkosh, there is thousands of people.

John: Thousands of airplanes.

Richard: And you have a lot of walking. So I never went down. There was one in LaCrosse. The next time they are anything close by, I think I will try to get there. You know, there is a lot of memories. A lot of fellows. You know how many of those ships they made?

John: No.

Richard: Fourteen thousand.

John: Oh, my God.

Richard: It says so, in here.

John: In that book. I'll be darned. That is a lot of airplanes.

Richard: Probably lost half of them. And then they would repair them, if they were repairable. And they would be back again, flying. And now, there's probably fifteen left in the whole United States. And most of them are bought up by people that go around and show them off. I think most of them, they are considerably wealthy people.

John: You'd have to be well-to-do to fly a B-17.

Richard: I didn't realize that ship cost well over a hundred and fifty thousand bucks.

John: And that was fifty years ago.

- Richard: That was sixty years ago. In fact, they first started making these in 1939. That doesn't sound like much when you see how many fighter planes we turned out. Germany, they turned out over forty-five thousand ME-109s. Of course, when they lost them, and on some missions, they lost as high as thirty or forty, that mounted up. And I imagine your P-38s and your 51, your 47s, they were all manufactured by high amounts. Tell me that Japan lost over forty thousand of their MIGs [*sic*]. That is over a four year period. And, of course, we Americans, we thought so much of life, we stayed careful, but the Japanese, that was pretty rough duty for them. I guess it was tragic to get those two bombs dropped there but, if they hadn't given up, it probably would have been quite a few thousand American boys lost there.
- John: I've talked to several guys who were training and planning to invade Japan. They didn't have to. They said they expected almost a million casualties. They would have been fighting grandmas and little girls.
- Richard: There was a program on television the other night that showed when the B-29s, the B-29s were three times bigger than the B-17, but they were having a lot of problems with their take-off and landing. They pushed that into the war pretty fast. First of all, they wanted the B-29 to drop the first two nuclear bombs. And I am sure they were well up at forty-five thousand feet. And I didn't know this, but they were also, they didn't have to wear masks.
- John: Yea, they were pressurized.
- Richard: Right.
- John: And heated.
- Richard: And they were heated. I tell you, in the B-17s, as, I am sure, in the B-24s, at first we had heavy wool clothes, and after that we had electric suits. And they were light. But they shorted out so often. Yea, the day I went down, it was very cold. The only place it was warm was up in the pilot's compartment, and, I suppose, the nose, too. We had how many bombardiers and navigators? When they came into a crash site, in England, I'm talking about, I have a lot of pictures of the nose section, the plastic, and that is where the bombardier and navigator were, were crushed into the tundra. Some of them were hit in the nose section, and that possibly killed both of those fellows, and the rest of them lived through.
- John: Wow. Well, this is a remarkable story. This is really something.
- Richard: Well, you know, it has been a long time. You know, you can't talk about something that happened overseas.

John: Yes, I know. Well, listen, what they will do. I will take this back and they will type it up, and they will send you a copy of it. And they will keep it at the museum there. I will take these pictures that you gave me, and I will send them back to you. And, I am going to shut this off.

[End of Interview]