

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
MELVIN RICKARD  
Army, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, World War II  
1999

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**Rickard, Melvin**, (1922-). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 3 sound cassette (ca. 132 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 3 sound cassette (ca. 132 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 132 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Melvin Rickard, a Linden, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service with the glider unit of the 81st Anti Aircraft Battalion, 101st Airborne Division; he focuses his discussion on the D-Day landing, Operation Market Garden, and his experiences as a prisoner of war. Rickard talks about basic training at Fort Bragg (North Carolina), assignment to a glider unit, the differences between American and English gliders, and training in England in preparation for the invasion of Normandy. He describes the D-Day invasion including Utah Beach landing, taking cover from German aircraft fire, moving inland to take the town of Carentan (France), protecting a bridge under heavy artillery fire, and a close call when a friend was killed. After a furlough in Cornwall (England), Rickard details Operation Market Garden in Holland, including hearing German soldiers talking in the woods, guard duty at night, lack of food because supplies were intercepted by the Germans, hearing the German attack approach, and being unable to communicate with other American and British troops. He tells of surrendering with other American troops, staying with other POWs at a Dutch farm, a visit by German propaganda broadcaster Axis Sally (Mildred Gillars), the packed boxcar ride to Stalag 2B, and interrogation. Rickard touches upon his stay in a German prison including receiving Red Cross packages, exchanging cigarettes for bread and vegetables with the prison guards, having yellow jaundice and an ulcerated tooth, and marching through a blizzard with inadequate shoes as the Russian troops approached. Marching for two and a half months, Rickard recalls the cold, sleeping in barns, becoming familiar with some German civilians, stealing potatoes, and suffering from a bad back and frozen feet. He highlights the importance of Colonel Wallace, a fellow prisoner of war who kept him going. He mentions arriving at Stalag 2A a week before the Russians arrived and the prisoners' decision to stay behind. After liberation, he talks about leaving the camp, scavenging for food and alcohol, and having two Russian soldiers rob him of his wristwatch. After delousing, Rickard remembers being shipped to Camp Lucky Strike (France) and having lunch with General Eisenhower. He mentions playing ping pong at an Army hospital in Macon (Georgia), waiting for enough points to be discharged, and joining the American Legion and Disabled American Veterans. Rickard describes a couple coincidences from his service time, his career afterwards, and his efforts trying to get in touch with his prisoner of war friend.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Rickard (b. 1922) served with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division in the European theater of World War II. He was taken prisoner October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1944 and held until the end of the war in Europe. Rickard eventually settled in Dodgeville, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999.

Transcribed by Nathan King and Patrick F. Gould, 2003 ; 2009.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2009.

**Interview Transcript:**

James: Alright. Now we're talking to Mel Rickard. This is the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, 1999. Mel was with the – part of 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne.145

Rickard: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

James: You entered – where were you born, now?

Rickard: I was born at Belmont, Wisconsin.

James: And you grew up there?

Rickard: Well, I moved to Linden when I was about 12 years old, and I graduated from Linden High School.

James: I see. And you went into the military service in Wisconsin?

Rickard: Yeah, yeah. I – OK after high school, I went to vocational school, and I got – I graduated from Madison Vocational School. But the draft was catching up to me, so I volunteered, and I went in – let's see it was the 8<sup>th</sup> of November –

James: November of '42?

Rickard: Yeah, it was in November '42.

James: Where did you go? Where'd they send you?

Rickard: Well it was at Fort Sheridan. From there I went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. That's where I joined the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne.

James: At Fort Bragg?

Rickard: I took my basic with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, yeah.

James: Training was hard?

Rickard: Yeah, a lot of double-time.

James: Pretty strenuous training wasn't it?

Rickard: Yeah, 101<sup>st</sup> was great for double-time.

James: Walking was sort of forgotten.

Rickard: Yeah. That's for sure.

James: And a lot of climbing on the ropes and stuff?

Rickard: Yeah, yeah.

James: So when did you take your first practice jump?

Rickard: Well, I was in the gliders.

James: Oh, you were in gliders?

Rickard: Yeah so I was – I trained in the gliders, which flew behind C-47s.

James: Right.

Rickard: So –

James: Tell me how many men were in that glider.

Rickard: Let's see, the American gliders – what was there? They carried – I don't know if they could carry more than six or not. Maybe it was ten. But the Horsa glider – we trained some in Horsa gliders, and they were – I think they were like 30 some, I think.

James: Those are British?

Rickard: Yeah, British gliders. Yeah.

James: So you trained how long in the United States before they moved you?

Rickard: Well, until – well, OK. When I – OK, I took my basic with the 327<sup>th</sup> of the 101<sup>st</sup>, then I – after basic training, I was sent to the signal company. And just before we were to go overseas, they were over strength and the anti-aircraft battalion – 81<sup>st</sup> Anti-Aircraft Battalion was understrength, so they transferred me to the 81<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. And there I was in .50 caliber machine guns, for anti-aircraft protection. So then we left – OK. On the first part of September, we went to New York to embark for overseas.

James: That was in '43?

Rickard: Yeah, '43, yeah. Yeah, so then, September 5<sup>th</sup>, we left New York, and arrived in England the 15<sup>th</sup>. The 15<sup>th</sup> of September. So then we were located near Reading. It was Basilton Park, was where our training took

place. And so we trained there until a short time before – I don't know how long it was before D-Day. They decided they needed our .50 caliber machine guns on the beachhead. So then they trained us for amphibious landing.

James: Forget the gliders.

Rickard: Yeah, forget the gliders [laughs]. So anyway – so we trained at Weston-super-Mare for amphibious landing. Then we went back to our headquarters. And there we went from southern England to go into France.

James: So you went to France in a glider, or?

Rickard: No. So then we went by boat. We landed in – we were in D-Day.

James: Which beach?

Rickard: Utah Beach, thank God, huh? Yeah. It was bad enough. I looked up the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, some of the history of it, and it said we were – our battery, Battery D, went in at H-Hour plus 15 minutes. And it was a lot of – what I noticed mostly was machine gun fire more than anything. It said there that there was a lot of artillery, but I was thinking more about those machine guns, I guess. So, but it was kind of a – kind of humorous to think about what I did. When they opened, and you heard the guns, and you heard the bullets, I started – I hit the sand – I started digging by hand [laughs]. And I don't know – we decided – they saw that wall up there, and decided we better head for that wall. So that's what we did – headed for the wall. But one thing I found out – so we got our machine guns set up, but we did have some enemy aircraft come in the first – right away. And then we were ready. Then we – secondly then, there were airplanes coming down, strafing. It was the second day, I went to take out my raincoat out of my pack, and I opened up my raincoat, and there was all kinds of holes in it. It was folded, so it – and so I think it was when I come up the beach, when I was in prone position, I think is when a bullet went through my pack. So that was kind of a close one there [laughs].

James: You haven't had a machine gun. You were set up to position to counteract the airplanes.

Rickard: Airplanes, yeah, that's why they – yeah that was our purpose, yeah.

James: That was your purpose. Shoot any?

Rickard: Yeah.

James: Oh, good.

Rickard: I know there was other machine gun fire, but I know my tracers were going right into the plane. I know that.

James: You saw him go down?

Rickard: Yeah, mm-hmm.

James: Good.

Rickard: So, but the bad thing was that there were some people – I don't know, it wasn't our guns – but some other guns – there was a halftrack and some other machine guns, even .30 calibers, didn't know the difference between the American planes and German planes. And there was two different times that the American planes were coming back in, and they were looking for the – to see where they were, they were coming down in our area, and guns opened up on 'em. And I always thought I was good at identification, and I was yelling at some of those other guys to stop shootin'. And –

James: Pretty exciting.

Rickard: Yeah, and so they were planes that were disabled, I think, and they were coming in just – or else they would have headed back across the channel. But anyway, I couldn't believe that some of those people were shootin' at those friendly planes. So we stayed on the beach there for – oh, I think it was four or five days. Then they were moving in - the troops were – the infantry and, I think some of the 101<sup>st</sup> outfit was moving in to Carentan, so we went in with them, but they were ahead of us going into Carentan. And but there was a lot of our guys killed taking Carentan – that town.

James: Was your .50 caliber mounted on a halftrack, or?

Rickard: No, we were ground – with pedestal.

James: So when you moved you put it in a [unintelligible]?

Rickard: Yes, well, it was on the ground and a pedestal, you know.

James: But when you had to move it, would you carry it?

Rickard: Just carry it by hand.

James: Oh. But you had to travel - you couldn't walk all that with a .50 caliber machine gun.

- Rickard: No. But, well, break it down, you know, so. But anyway going into Carentan was pretty rough, but the guys ahead of us were really taking a beating. And I remember there was – I couldn't believe that what would be the ordnance department or what would it be that picked up bodies.
- James: Oh. Burial detail.
- Rickard: They were right in behind us as they were going in, picking up bodies. I couldn't believe that. They worked so fast. I saw them putting them on two ton trucks.
- James: How big was your battery? How many people?
- Rickard: You know, there are some of those things that I – I wish I had that book with me. How many squads was there? Oh boy.
- James: Well a battery was what – two or three batteries?
- Rickard: Well, see, in the squad – our squad for the machine guns – there was six of us in a squad.
- James: And what, two guns?
- Rickard: No, for each gun.
- James: Six for each gun?
- Rickard: Yeah, mm-hmm. So you could take turns. Yeah, and I'm trying to think of how many guns there was in the battery.
- James: That's not important. That's not so important.
- Rickard: Yeah.
- James: What happened to you is what's important.
- Rickard: Yeah so when we got to Carentan, they – after the troops had taken the city, then the engineers come in to build a bridge that was knocked out. And so we were set up there. We were sent to protect this bridge from aircraft. So we were right next to this bridge the engineers were building. There's kind of a low area there, and what was kind of bad for digging because you'd get into water if we were digging a gun emplacement. And so I dug my foxhole up where it was a little dryer. Anyway, so we were there for – oh, gee, I don't remember, either. But we were getting a lot of



artillery fire. They were trying to knock out the bridge, so we were right close to the –

James: As fast as they tried to build it, they tried to destroy it.

Rickard: Yeah, mm-hmm. But there was one time that we noticed when we first got there, building high building back a little ways away, we could see reflection – mirror reflections. So we reported it and it wasn't long that it was gone. Somebody signaling the German artillery, I think it must have been. But anyway, they kept on coming – the artillery shells kept on coming in. And so we were in there a few days and we were really getting pounded, and it was pretty strenuous on us that we weren't getting any planes to shoot down, you know. But anyway, so they decided to have one of the other squads come in to relieve us because we were in a bad spot there. So another squad come in there. That's where I had another close call. We went and switched positions with this other squad, and so a good buddy of mine was – Alexander – he was in the other squad and they said a half hour after we left that station, he was in my foxhole, and got a direct hit, and was killed. And I always felt bad about that, because I thought if I'd dug that foxhole in a different place, he'd still be living. That's always bothered me. So that was a close call, there. I said it was about a half hour after we left there.

I'll tell you another thing about that, when we were at that location. I saw – there was a colonel in a jeep going across this bridge – pontoon bridge – and they got a direct hit in the jeep. So, anyway, fifty years later, a couple – see, how long's it been since D-Day?

James: Fifty-plus years.

Rickard: Yeah, anyway, three or four years ago, I was riding in the car with my brother Bob, and I said to Bob, I said, "We've never talked about the war, you know." And I said, "When did you go into France?" And he said, "Well, it was – I think it was six or seven days after D-Day." And so I said, "Well, where'd you go then?" And he said, "We stayed in an area of Carentan." Well, I says, "Carentan?" I said, "I was there by that bridge there where the engineers were building a bridge." He says, "I saw a colonel get killed on that bridge one day." So he was on the other side – he probably wasn't more than 500 yards, or more than 300 yards from where I was, and we didn't know about it until 50-some years later.

James: [unintelligible]

Rickard: So that was kind of a coincidence there. So then after we finished our mission there, then, we were sent back to England. See, when was that?

That was probably about the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, or somewhere in there? Maybe it was later than that.

James: Probably June or July.

Rickard: It might have been into July too, because – anyway. So then we went back to England and had furlough. Then we visited my aunt and uncle in St. Austell, Cornwall – my cousins and aunts.

James: I didn't know that you had relatives over there.

Rickard: Yeah, well, see, I had two aunts, an uncle – my dad's two sisters and his brother.

James: Lived in Cornwall?

Rickard: Yeah, mm-hmm.

James: So you visited them?

Rickard: I visited them, yeah. I'd had a furlough there before D-Day, too, and I went there after D-Day. So that was kind of nice. So then we went back to training at our camp, same camp. And so then in September, we went in on the invasion of Holland. So there again –

James: Is this with the gliders?

Rickard: No. So I suppose because we hadn't been in the gliders for a while, they figured we wouldn't know how to ride in 'em [laughs]. So we went by boat again, across the channel. And we arrived up in Holland shortly after the airborne had gone in. There was gliders all over the place. So then it was a pretty narrow spearhead up through Holland there, because the Americans would get cut off quite often because they got in too deep.

James: That's what happened at Arnheim Bridge.

Rickard: Yeah, mm-hmm. But anyway, sometimes the Germans were behind us and in front of us. So we set up for anti-aircraft and ground troops there. Because right to our left, I know we were – well, most of the time we could hear Germans. We were that close to them. In the night –

James: Across the river?

Rickard: No, right in the woods. And so we stayed there. At night there would be German patrols. You could hear them around. I never saw night so dark as it was over there. It was so dark. It was scary. It was just so scary. I

remember one night, I was on guard duty – standing guard duty that night while the rest of them were sleeping. And I heard footsteps. I said, “Halt!” And I heard something drop. I heard somebody take off. I couldn’t believe it. The next morning, there was a German rifle on the ground. I scared him so bad that he dropped his gun! I couldn’t believe that.

James: See, there’s somebody that was more scared than you were.

Rickard: Yeah. So then –

James: What’d you do with the gun?

Rickard: I don’t know what we did with it. I don’t really remember. But anyway, that same night, there was a ditch there, and I was crawling up through that ditch there, and I come up to a – we had our bayonets fixed on our guns. I was crawling through this ditch, and there was a parachute that was rolled up there, and well, I guess I had my bayonet out in front of me. I stuck that, and I thought it was a German. Oh, was that scary that night. That was terrible.

James: What was it?

Rickard: It was a parachute [laughs] –

James: Oh.

Rickard: In this ditch there. Anyway, it was awful. I never saw nights as dark as it was over there. So then when we left there, we –

James: You never had contact with the fighting there?

Rickard: Nope. We never – no planes strafing or anything. So then, they said to pack up. They said if there’s anything you want to send home, send it home. So I picked up a German helmet, and I sent a parachute home – the reserve chute, a white one – and I sent that home. And I sent home some other stuff. So then they said we were moving up front. And I thought we was at the front the whole time, but anyway [laughs]. So anyway, they said there was a British outfit that needs some relief up there, so we goes up there.

Oh, in the meantime, I was going to tell you something that was happening. We were in bad shape for food. The planes – American planes had come in, parachuting the food in, and the parachutes would drift off and the Germans would get the food. So we ended up – they got

us some British rations. But it was terrible stuff. The ox tail soup [laughs] in a can.

So, anyway, we were sent up to relieve this British outfit. They said, well, it's just a holding situation. They didn't think there would be anything too bad up there, because. Anyway, they sent us up, right up – I can't even think of the name of this little town now. And so they put our machine – they set us up right the furthest out in the front there. Right on the road, highway. And it was the last building in this town. So we dug our machine gun right in front of this. There was a house and a bakery there, I think it was. But we dug in right in front of the house with our machine gun. And so we were there. OK, they left us there without any communications, you know. But they said, well, they didn't think the Germans would be attacking. But, well, they were wrong. So we were there – I'm trying to think – probably three days or two days, and at night, you could hear Germans talking. And I knew we were right close to them. So, this one night, I could hear vehicles, and I could hear like they were moving up. And so, the machine gun was out in front of that one house there, and we were in back of the house right next to it. There was a – in the back of the houses over there, they had animals. And this was the back third of the house, was a pen where there was an old sow in there – a four-hundred pound sow. And in the other pen there was a goat. And we were in the other pen. So, OK, and the gun was over here. So that night, the 5<sup>th</sup> of October – OK, it was a quite a bit after midnight. Well, it had to be quite a bit after – maybe it was more toward morning. But it was a lot of artillery coming in. And, oh, for it seemed like hours. And the artillery was landing behind us, in back of us. So you know we were right up to the front. And so this artillery just kept on coming. We knew there was something coming. We wished we had communications with the rest of the outfit, but they left us up there. There was a .30 caliber machine gun in the orchard - there was an orchard right next to us there. There was a .30 caliber machine gun there. And the 506<sup>th</sup>, I think it was, one of the infantry outfits of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne were more to our right and in back of us there. So anyway, so this artillery started coming in. And then it was before daylight, we could hear troops coming down the highway. We could hear them marching.

James: Front or back?

Rickard: Up ahead of us, were coming at us. And so, following the artillery, you know, they thought they had everything cleaned out. And Glaus and Coxon – not Coxon – Glaus, and Donald Huffer from Indiana – Glaus is from Alabama – they were on the gun at that time.

James: The .30?

Rickard: The .50 caliber, on the .50 caliber machine gun. And so, we heard the – and it sounded like they were making a lot of noise, just like they weren't sneaking in, four abreast down this highway, coming into town. And they got – I don't know how close it was, and Huffer opened up the machine gun, the .50 caliber machine gun. And, oh, what a terrible thing that was. You know, you could hear the German soldiers screaming for their m – I heard one of their hollering "Momma." Just like the Americans – sounded like Americans. And so, it wasn't long, they scattered – started scattering. And it wasn't long – they must have had flanks out. Their grenades started coming in. I don't know – one of them must have been a phosphorus grenade or something. That railing – there was an iron railing between the house, and that was just like a welding torch. I couldn't believe it, how it melted that. Anyway, so, OK. They got – they come back, and all of a sudden, three of them started coming up towards where we were, **[End of tape 1, side A]** and one of the other paratroopers had somehow or other got in with them, there. And they all come back into where we were, and they were all wounded from grenades, you know, because they threw grenades in on them. And so they got back into where we were, and I remember Huffer, he sat down in the back of this, and I think he was in shock, and this paratrooper, I think he was too. And Wallace, he was – hit by the shrapnel.

So but then it was starting – well it was starting to get light – it was light enough where you could see, but it wasn't so bright yet when the Germans come in. So, anyway, so then as it started getting lighter. OK, there was a door in the back of that that was boarded up, in the back of this. And one of the guys wanted to – said, "Well, let's knock down this door and get out of here." Because by then, there was Germans out in front, by the front door, because the door was partway open there. Anyway, and I can't believe how quick they got in there, around us. And so, we had those three wounded guys, and you didn't want to start being too aggressive there. So, anyway, and Coxon, he got upstairs there, and he – there was a sort of a ladder going up there, and we got up there, and he said, "The orchard's full of Germans." He said, "Don't try to get out that back at all. They're all around us." And out front, you could see them all over the place. But anyway –

James: The people that were in the house – they were gone?

Rickard: Yeah, they were gone. But, you know, that night, we should have known or something, because we heard wooden shoes going, running down the street.

James: They were getting out.

Rickard: They were getting out. So anyway, OK. So, they had us surrounded, and I said – well, we were expecting to hear this machine gun on our left firing, but they were gone. And they might have had radio communication with the rest of the outfit, because with that artillery hitting behind us, the rest of them withdrew out of it. Anyway, so then I – OK, where was I?

James: Surrounded with Germans in the orchard.

Rickard: Yeah, they were all around us, out in front, and everything, and so. All of a sudden, a German stuck his gun in, and swung the door open, and I saw him – I shot, and so did Drake, with our rifle. OK. Then I realized, maybe we shouldn't have, because then they did know we were in there [laughs]. So, OK, the door was wide open. Here was Huffer, sitting back there like he didn't know what was going on, bleeding. And Wallace, I forget where he was. He was in pretty bad shape. And then this paratrooper – he was wounded, and I don't think he knew what was going on, because none of those guys had their guns. Their guns were out where their machine gun was, so they never had no guns. And so there was – here was – let's see – Coxon, he was upstairs. And Drake and I and Adam Novak – we still had guns. And with that door open, Adam was right over in plain sight. And Adam, I saw him pull his gun up like that, and all of a sudden, I heard a shot and he was hit in the head and killed.

So, anyway, so I'm going to get out for sure, then. And I don't know how it was – why it was that I had a white – I don't remember whether it was shorts or an undershirt, but I had a white in my pack. See, they shoot us khaki stuff you know. I don't remember that I had it in there for a situation like this. I don't think I did. I never even thought about that. And I had that out, and I said, "There's no way we're going to get killed." So I looked out there, and a German pulled a pin out of a grenade, and I started to go out with this, with my white underwear. And this paratrooper – he – I don't know if he didn't know what was going on – he grabbed my gun like he was going to start shooting or what. So I hesitated a minute, and then I thought, "Why, he's going to throw that grenade." And then there was another guy – German – there was a bunch of them out there, looked like he was going to – and so I takes off out the door with the white flag. I haven't – this is something I've never really told – nobody's really asked me or ever – I don't know if I've ever told my brother about that. But anyway, when I went out the doorway, there was a German with a burp gun. I don't know if you know what that was – that was – at that time, that was the fastest machine gun in the world. Anyway, he opened up on me. He wasn't over – I don't think he was over 20, 25 feet away from me. Opened up on me with that gun, and I thought I was hit. I was hit, but there was cement – looked like cement on the doorway of the building, or rock or something I think it was, and the bullets were hitting the doorway, and I was getting the shrapnel and stuff off from his bullets.

But I never got a bullet. I can't believe how that guy missed me. I just – and so all I got was some – I don't know – it was cement and bullet fragments in different places on me. And so anyway, I remember hearing somebody yell at this guy that was shooting, you know, to stop shooting. I guess that's what they were saying.

So then they – I motioned for the guys to come out, you know. And one of the other guys went back, and Huffer, he didn't look like he knew what was going on – got him out. And Wallace come out – he was able to come out OK. So they took us over behind this building that the machine gun was in. So this guy was a – he had the pin out of a grenade, so he threw it in through this window in this building there. I don't know if he thought maybe there was some guys in there or whether he just wanted to get rid of it. When he done that, why, the damn piece of glass come back and hit me out of the window. But anyway, so then they took us out to the street there, where the troops had come down the street, the road, and there was dead Germans there. This – so they made Wallace – all he had was shrapnel in his arms and stuff like that, so he wasn't in too bad of shape. So they had him and I – so they picked up one of these wounded Germans in the street there, put on a stretcher, and had us carry it to the first aid station, which was – I don't know if it was a mile or not. But we had to go across a field there, and the Germans were afraid there might be some Americans in the woods there, or in those buildings and woods – there were sort of woods there, too. They wanted – so they – there were Germans on the other sides with guns on us to make sure that we didn't make a break for it. There was an open area there. So we got across there, and then the other Germans took us back to with this wounded guy, and I tell you, he was getting pretty heavy by the time we got back there. [sighs]. Anyway, so we gets to the first aid tent they had set up there, and we got there, and they checked him and he was dead.

James: Who was dead?

Rickard: This German.

James: Oh, the one you were carrying.

Rickard: Yeah. So, that was kind of scary because they – I don't know. I'm surprised they even took us when we were the machine gunners that done the damage. But anyway, and they grabbed us, and I thought they were going to shoot us when they saw that this guy was dead. Then they took us back to – I don't know how far we walked. I don't remember just how far it was, but they took us back to a farm.

James: Just the two of you?

Rickard: Yeah, well there was some others – other guys, you know. Drake and Huffer – I don't know if they took Huffer to that first aid station or what, but Huffer and Coxon and Drake, they went a different way. But Wallace and I, we were taken back to that. I don't think any of our other squad, of those guys were there in this barn. And it was like a – I don't know. It was more like a corn crib. But anyway, they had us locked in there. And there was guys – and I don't know – I'm just trying to think of how many there were. There was probably six of us there. Anyway, so we stayed there for – I don't know – two or three days. So there was a couple German, or Dutch girls – two girls and a boy this family had – and these girls would sneak food in to us. And there was a German guarding us there. But anyway, they were teenage girls. So while we were there, I couldn't believe it. A German command car pulled up there, SS. And Axis Sally was there. You remember hearing about Axis Sally? They used to broadcast music. And anyway, so she wanted a message – wanted to send a message home to your parents that you're a prisoner and you're OK. And I thought, "Well, sure." And the one guy said, "Don't. It's just propaganda. Don't do it." But I thought, "I want them to know where I am – that I'm OK." And so I said my name and that I was OK. And so, I don't know if all of 'em did it or not. But anyway, so this little boy and his family – he wanted to – anyway, she told us that he'd broadcast this message. So anyway, this little boy, the last day we was there, he was trying to get up front there to give our names, you know, back to our outfit.

But anyway, so then from there we were taken to – I don't know how far they took us, but then they boarded us on a train, and we were on this train for seven days. Seven days on this train in a boxcar. I don't know how big of a boxcar it was. They were smaller than American boxcars, but they had 50 of us in there. And we could not lay down. All we could do was sit there and draw our legs up and sit there in that position because it was so crowded. And we sat there like that for a long time. They brought us in some coffee that was terrible. And I'm trying to think what – oh that black bread. That's all we got on that train was that black bread. Anyway, they had a 5-gallon bucket in about the middle of the boxcar to do your – both jobs. And we were strafed by American planes. They would – planes would start strafing them and they'd stop the train and the Germans would head for the ditches, you know. And then they'd start the train up, and how we're jerking and the stuff in the 5-gallon bucket was splashing all over. They tried – I don't know if they dumped it once a day or not. I don't remember. Anyway, so one night, I was on that train – in that boxcar – a guy – the guys broke out. There was a little window up there, and it had boards across it. That was the only light in the place, and that was mostly boarded. And he pulled those boards off and crawled out. He pried those boards off and crawled out one night when the train stopped. We heard shots. They probably shot him. And he used to – at



night he'd sit in there and he'd sing – he was from the south and he'd sing that “Jimmy crack corn, I don't care. Jimmy crack corn.” Oh, we got so tired of hearing him sing that. And so, OK. So but that position we had to sleep in was – you know, we couldn't lay down or anything. And what a stinking mess it was.

So, OK, then after 7 days and 7 nights in that train, they took us for interrogation. And so right away they interrogated us. Name, rank, and serial number was all we'd give. And so I was there for I think it was 8 days, and I think I went in three times, I think it was, they took me in. But, see, we were in solitary confinement there, a little bit of cell with a bed that didn't have anything on it. And they'd come in – I don't know if they'd come in more than once a day – they'd take you to the bathroom, and then – but I never saw another GI all that time I was there. And the fleas were terrible. Bedbugs and fleas and fleas – think they had done that on purpose to get you. Anyway, so I was in this cell for 8 days, and then so they called the last time I went in – they started putting pressure on me. You know they'd say every time they'd tell you they were going to turn us over to the gestapo, and then we'd be killed as spies, you know. And so the last day -

James: They spoke good English?

Rickard: Yeah, mm-hmm. This old colonel or whatever he was, he said, “I don't need your information.” He said, “You are with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.” He told me about my outfit. He told me how many machine guns we had. Everything. And I thought, “What the heck? Did one of the other guys spill the beans or what?” You know. And so then, but I don't know whether to tell this part now or later, but – I think I'll wait till later. But anyway, so then we went – they sent us to Stalag. We done some more marching but then it seemed like they – did we get on a train again? No, we marched. Boy, that area is still kind of a blank. But anyway, we ended up in Stalag 2B.

James: Where was that?

Rickard: That was in Hammerstein. That was up by Danzig, Poland. And so, we got some good news there. Red Cross parcels.

James: First time?

Rickard: Yeah. So, OK. Right away, we got a Red Cross parcel. Then we got a blanket. The Red Cross parcel had – I think there was some Spam in there, if I remember right. What all was there in there? But anyway, was there cans of vegetables? But we got a blanket and what else? And cigarettes. And so I started smoking cigarettes in the service. Oh, and by

the way, I don't think the Germans after we was captured, I don't know if the Germans were having trouble getting cigarettes or what, but I lit up a cigarette after – this was the day I was captured – and this German hit me across the side of the face, and knocked the cigarette out of my mouth. I think he was jealous maybe because I was smoking and maybe he couldn't get 'em, I don't know.

James: Did he pick up the cigarette?

Rickard: Yeah. But anyway [laughs], when we got to 2B, we could send a message home. We could send a card. And so I think it must have been – it was probably late in December. It might have been November when we got there. I know it was about a month in transit there, trying to get there. Anyway, I was getting pretty thin by then, so those Red Cross parcels really kind of saved the day for me. So while we were there, they had some – a church service, you know, the Americans had. There was a bathroom – well, the latrine was sort of crude, but there was a bathroom that I don't remember taking more than one bath while I was there. But the one day that I was at the bathroom where they showered – no, I was going to shave. That was it. I was going to shave, and I was standing there looking in the mirror, and they had those stainless steel mirrors, not glass, you know. And there was somebody that looked familiar behind me, and it was Howard Johnson. I had enlisted with him, and when we were at Fort Bragg, he went somewhere else, and I went to 101<sup>st</sup>. And he'd wrote me a letter from down south somewhere when I was still at Fort Bragg because I was still waiting for some shoes to fit me – I had a narrow foot. And I got a letter from him before I left Fort Bragg and then I never heard any more from him, and there he was in Stalag 2B. So I never got to talk to him after that one day. I don't know whatever happened to him.

But anyway, so we stayed there, and we had Christmas there. And I made a Christmas cake out of something – I don't know what it was that we got in the Red Cross parcels, and I made it look like a cake. I remember I put some stuff on it. Anyway, so the Christmas was kind of bad to be away from home, but it was a lot better than what we'd had before that. But anyway, the cold was terrible. I mean, it was so cold, and we had hardly any heat in the barracks there. And your bed was – there was a little, thin straw mattress. It wasn't over an inch and a half thick, I don't think.

James: [unintelligible]

Rickard: No. They took away our stuff that we had, and they issued us some stuff that might have been German.

James: You had summer when you got captured?

Rickard: No, no, it was October.

James: Oh.

Rickard: But that blanket that the Red Cross sent us was good. And, so, OK, they issued us an old, heavy coat, a heck of a lookin' thing. And so, OK, when we – while we were there, we had soup along with the Red Cross parcels, we had soup. But then the Red Cross parcels – sometimes we wouldn't get 'em. The soup was – they'd bring it in in a big old tub. And sometimes there would be some meat in it, and they were great for dehydrated turnips over there, for making soup out of the dehydrated turnips. And one day, there was meat in it, and one of the guys when they were dipping it out, there was a jaw bone with teeth. And there was one guy in the camp there, that was a butcher by trade, and he said, "That's no farm animal. It's not a calf or a pig." He said, "They have different teeth and jaws than that." He figured it must have been a dog. We did miss some dogs – there was always dogs there on the camp. But anyway, so he figured it must have been a dog that they cooked up. So anyway, so OK. All of a sudden, this must have been – I wish I had some dates. I wish I'd talked to – there's one guy in California – this Wallace, he moved to California. I finally found him after many years. And I'd like to have got some information from him, but he's had a lot of problems, including one spell of mental problems, so I've never got together with him, but I'd like to have got some dates straight. But I think it must have been when the Russians started closing in on the camp. It must have been in January – the latter part of January, probably, that we got orders to move out of the camp. So, we thought, well, we'd try to stockpile a little bit of food. I had some cans and stuff from the Red Cross, and made a pack of some kind. I don't know what I made the pack out of, fit the stuff in, put it over my shoulders. And we had cigarettes – kept, made sure we had cigarettes. And so everybody tried to take some food with them. And the day we left that camp was the worst blizzard that – such a blizzard. So they took us cross-country, and you'd see the rolling hills there, and you'd see – oh – just maybe a mile away, you'd see the prisoners ahead of you, you know, and walking through this deep snow. And cold, it was really cold.

So the first day, I don't know if we walked 20 miles. Some say we walked 20 miles, but I don't know. But we were all wet, and – oh, when I left camp, I had yellow jaundice. I was so yellow that I, and an ulcerated tooth. I had one jaw that was all swelled up. But I was really yellow. And so we got to a barn the first night, stayed in this barn. And didn't have any dry socks to put on. Oh, but the first day, it was so hard walking that – [indecipherable] we couldn't tell ya.

**[End of Tape 1, Side B]**

Rickard: So the food, we threw the cans of food we had in our packs—heavy. Everybody was throwing food away. It was just different. And so, we kept cigarettes. So anyway, the next day we left that barn and I think my feet were froze the first day. If I'd had my jump boots, all the 101<sup>st</sup> were issued combat, ahh regular paratrooper boots. But they took them away from us. Gave us some other old shoes. Anyway, so, then the second day we took off and from then on it seemed like drove past any Germans, they'd have bread. And they'd want cigarettes. And so, at first, you'd get a loaf of bread for two cigarettes. Well then, I'll give you five and I'll give you ten and first thing you know it, it took a pack to get a loaf of bread. And then, so our cigarette supplies went pretty fast. Anyway, so then I think it was about the third day I thought sure I had pneumonia. I don't know to this day whether I had pneumonia or not. But I sure thought I did. And then with that ulcerated tooth, ugh, that thing was giving me so much trouble. And, you know, yellow jaundice? So then, it got hard marching with the feet, because my feet were so bad. They never got purple like some. Some of the guys got purple, black, but mine were real red. The bad ones got white. But anyway, so we marched with frozen feet and we marched for two and a half months.

James: Months?

Rickard: Yes. Ah, and sometimes we'd get to a barn. They didn't know where they were taking us. They were listening for Russian [indecipherable]. And at one time we went through the same town twice. They didn't know where they were, what they were doing.

James: And they fed you?

Rickard: At the end of the day, you'd get, well, I had a little can, like a can of peas would come in. Not can a beef [indecipherable] and at the end of the day, you'd get in line and get a can of soup. And sometimes in the morning you would get a little bread and sometimes you wouldn't. But, so, like I said, sometimes you'd get to a barn and other times you'd stretch out in the cold. I remember one night, it was a cold night, we couldn't get to no barn, and we, lucky we had our Red Cross blanket. And so, Wallace and I; we would, you know, sleep together with blankets, share blankets so we'd have two blankets. But that one night, I remember, it was more than one night that we done this, but, one would stay awake while the other one slept. In case you started to freeze to death. We told each other, better keep each other awake, you know. So we, I remember one morning when I woke up, I couldn't open my eyes. They were frozen. And so, then we takes off marching again and I think the next night we found a barn. Well what was wrong with the barns, some of the guys got cigarettes for themselves and get up in that hay mound, and they'd light up cigarettes.

And I was afraid, I thought that was scary. But, I always tried to find a place where I could get out of the door.

So anyway, I remember this one night why, by then we were getting in with civilians. German civilians, marching and in covered wagons, getting away from the rations. One night, I saw that there was a horse barn that was a German, had some German civilians had their horses in. And I thought, I'm not going up in the hay now, so I didn't talk German or anything, but made motions and all this and I had my blanket and wanted to sleep down there with them, the German civilians. So they said, ya, and they had a daughter, about a sixteen year old daughter, and so she had a blanket and I had a blanket and so we crawled under the blanket together. And the old man-- there was a bull in the horse barn. And so he, his wife would go inside the house with the woman. And the daughter stayed out there so they would take turns seeing that the bull didn't attack the horses in the horse barn. So we went under the blanket and I slept pretty good. I woke up in the morning and looked and there he was in bed with me, under the blankets with me, her father. She was out watching the horses. Anyway, that morning when we got ready to leave, we got all lined up to march. As we were going out, the father and the daughter were waiting there, and the mother was there by them, and they were waiting to get into their procession. And I remember the girl waving to me. She was a cute little girl. That night I couldn't sleep. (laughs) But anyway, that was kind of an experience. We were marching alongside them and sometimes you would go by them. The horses, it was hard on the horses. I don't know if they couldn't feed them or what, but dead horses along the way. It was too much for them. I saw them shoot a horse one day. And one day there was a horse that must have been three quarters gone, I don't know if, I imagine the civilians, they took them to eat along the way. It was horsemeat. So, it was rough on them too. They had hardships.

So anyway, we finally after all this marching and all of this time, oh, I want to tell you about one time we stopped for five, oh, we must have spent close to a week at this one barn. By then we were kind of separated from the main bunch. There was about 109, I think in the group, that we ended up with in this barn. Anyway, so they said, we're going to stay there for awhile as the Russians got close. So the first day, we got there, there was a sow having pigs in this pen there and we were just standing around. So anyway, I don't know, we kinda of had the run of the place [indecipherable] the guards were all around there, but. So, someone said, "What's going on over there?" And I said, "A sow's having pigs." (laughs) I got a bang out of some of the city guys that were prisoners. They couldn't get over that, a sow having those pigs so fast. Anyway, so okay they had, she had this kettle there with this pot of potatoes. The whole times the guys would try to sneak in there, but guards were

watching us. Steal them potatoes she was cooking for the pig. So then, maybe, I don't know, do you want me to cut this short?

James: No.

Rickard: Anyway, one day, we discovered those mounds out in back where they had potatoes dug. They'd dig a hole, maybe six or eight foot across and put, I don't know how far down they'd dig, but then they'd put straw and then dirt and then straw and then dirt and build up about so they wouldn't freeze, you know. And so, the ground was all froze on top. And so someone come out and we didn't know what was in them mounds so when we got the idea to get a hold of the straw and dig a hole and then get down to those potatoes. So, anyway, we had this one mound of potatoes there we were reaching down into to get the potatoes into our pockets and go back into the barn and eat raw potatoes. So when the guys got into that, the potatoes went down pretty fast. And we had to dig different holes covered up with straw so they wouldn't see it. Anyway, so I finally got where I could reach around to try to find the potatoes. It was all hollow underneath and you had to be careful because you didn't want to get up on top, it'd cave in and they'd see what was going on. So one morning, the sun was out, it wasn't too bad weather that day and this German guard, he walked up on top of that mound and down he went. He started yelling and run up and told the woman who had to find her husband who was in the army, the German army. So she was up on the farm, but they come back and they told us if we done that again, they would shoot us. But we had something to eat for a while. We was wishin' we could cook them. But anyway, I think it was before that, I remember one day we met a German wagon coming down the road with a load of turnips in it, farmer with a load of turnips. And so, as he went by I reached out and grabbed a turnip and he cracked the whip at me. And I ate two days on that turnip. So I wouldn't have to stand in line to get that can of soup. So I lived two days on that turnip. So by then, before we got to Stalag 2A, I was getting awful weak, with all of my problems and everything, my frozen feet.

James: Did anyone else have the turnips?

Rickard: No, not that I know of. Anyway, so with bad feet and my back was so bad, it was just terrible. I don't know if my crash landing in England hurt my back and I don't know whether it was from then or not, but my lower back was so bad that I-- Okay, the smallest from Alabama, Colonel Wallace, he was captured with me. We went together. He was, okay, he was real religious and because before he was kind of a rough talker and he started reading the Bible. I had a Bible that the Red Cross sent one too, a little pocket Bible. And we'd read from the Bible. And on Sunday mornings, why, he'd read verses from the Bible and he made me [think?]. He always used to cuss about. But after that, he said that he was never going

to use the Lord's name in vain again. And so, I said I wouldn't either. And, so when I finally located him, that was one of the first things he asked me. He said, "Have you ever used the Lord's name in vain?" I said, "No." He said, "I haven't either." Anyway--

James: [indecipherable]

Rickard: Yeah, I finally found it. Okay, so, he was stronger than I was. He was a bigger boned guy and that. And he didn't have the problems that I had like yellow jaundice. He still had frozen feet though. But there was some days he was walking alongside me, holding me up. And I wanted to just go off to the side and quit. He kept-- (long pause). (Unsteady voice) So I just kept going up the hill until we finally got to Stalag 2A. We got in there.

James: Where was that?

Rickard: It was, oh what was the name of it? I should have had my map of the prison camp. Brandenburg. I think it was Brandenburg. I can't believe when I look on the map how we walked for that long, someone was figuring we, I don't know how many miles we went. (blows nose) I don't know how many miles we went, how many hundreds of miles we went, but anyway. We must have been going around in circles trying to keep us away from Russians. So anyway, when we got to Stalag 2B--

James: 2A--

Rickard: 2A, they, well we were getting some soup there. And we were only there about a week, probably, and we could hear the Germans, their guns in the distance—artillery—so we knew that they were coming so we wondered what they were going to do. So, okay, they had an American, or from Holland, [indecipherable]. Anyway, there was one guy from Holland that was in charge of the camp it seemed like, for the prisoners. And there was American [indecipherable] man. But anyway, I forget which one got up, they got up all together and the Russians were coming and they want us to leave. And ah, leave the camp. And they said, you guys, they knew what we'd been through, we were strafed by our own people while marching down the road. We were strafed by our own planes, a couple of times. But anyway, he said, you guys know [indecipherable] on the road. He says, what do you want to do? Do you want to, do you think we should move out? They said [indecipherable] and all that. But, I don't think they got time to be, so stay or should we hit the road? And take our chance on being shot up by our own planes? And, I said we should stay, you know, in camp [indecipherable] and take a chance with the Russians. So, I looked around me to see who was standing behind me and there was Bob Bryles

[??] from Linden [??]. Bob and I used to walk home from school together. We used live near each other on the farm.

James: And you hadn't seen him before?

Rickard: No, I knew when I was home on furlough before I went overseas he was in South Africa, ah, North Africa. And so, there he was. And, I was happy to see somebody like that. So, anyway, so we stayed. And that night---

James: How many of you were in the group by yourselves?

Rickard: Well, there was a lot of prisoners.

James: Hundreds?

Rickard: Hundreds. Yeah. There was, I think there was even some Russian prisoners. There was ah, I know there was prisoners from Holland and, ah, different ones there. Anyway so we decided to stay. And they said there was trenches coming in the camp there. And we could go and get in those trenches or we could stay in the barracks whatever you want to do. So I went out in the trenches.

James: On your own?

Rickard: By then the Germans, they took off.

James: But, you were left on your own?

Rickard: We were left on our own. So, I thought, the Germans were coming. I thought, I going to get in the trench. But Bob Bryles [??], he said he wanted to stay in the barracks. And ahh, so that night I heard them coming.

James: Tanks?

Rickerd: Tanks. Men. And it sounded like a bunch of Indians coming. (James laughs) Half of them were drunk.

James: Really?

Rickard: Well they sure acted like it. Anyway, so they come through there and I thought, boy are they going through the barracks or something, but I guess they knew what they were doing because they didn't shoot us up or anything. And the next morning the Russians were all over the place. There was quite a few of them. Anyway, so, I don't know why-- I mean you got freedom like that when you're penned up you want. I lit out of the



camp, I think it was the next day. We went to see what was going on. I don't know why I did that, but there was one, someone had lost a wagon right outside of camp. Covered wagon. And somebody said, "Two people, two civilians are dead and their daughter." Anyway, so by the time I got out there, ah, somebody was coming back, but anyway by the time we got there somebody picked up the body. But there was-- they shot those people and wounded the dog. The dog was wounded. Somebody shot the dog. The Russians did. But anyway, went back to, I went back into the camp and this was right out off the edge of the camp. So, ah, then I didn't know enough, the following day I went to-- through a little town and ah, so. [indecipherable] I went inside a house to find something to eat. I remember we found some pancake flour. But we didn't have anything to cook it, to make pancakes. I remember that. But a Russian officer, I didn't know he was an officer all of the sudden started bawling me out for not saluting him. Like this. So then I saluted him. And I had an American flag, I know I must have gotten from the Red Cross. When I got there I sewed that, I put it on my shoulder. And so, anyway, so then this was so dumb. I get back to camp there and a guy had a, a British one of the other prisoners, had a bottle of vodka. A whole boxcar filled with it was through the woods there. And, so another guy says, "Let's go down and see what's going on." So, okay, I'd gone over the hill through the woods there and ah, found there some other GIs there and some, I don't know who all, but some guy on the boxcar handing out, I don't know. There's some wine and there's some vodka. So, I thought I might as well get some to take back. I think I had a couple bottles of wine and a couple bottles of vodka. So going back, in the meantime the guy I went with, I got separated from him and I thought, I'll go across, take a short cut. Oh, made a mistake. Ran into two drunk Russians. And, soldiers, and so, they wanted to give me booze for my wristwatch, the wristwatch that I put into my boot the day before I was interrogated and kept hidden from the Germans all the time. He wanted my wristwatch. And he wanted to give me a bottle of booze for it. I don't want that. I got some. I showed him I got some. And so, he started to take it off and so, I jumped back and the other Russian stuck a gun to my ribs. And ah, so then, I held out my hand and starting pulling back and he just tore it right off. He caught my wrist here. So I get back up to the camp [gap in tape] Okay, that was bad. Anyway, so when we got back to American lines, the first thing they done was delouse us. And then, I don't know if it was after we got back to Brussels? Two times we were deloused. I remember that. So then, they took us by plane from Hamburg to Brussels. Then from Brussels, they took us by train to Camp Lucky Strike in France to catch a boat for home. And so they gave us the opportunity to, you could go to Paris, they'd give you leave to go to Paris if you want it or you could stay. But if you were in Paris and you was scheduled to dock, you would miss out and have to wait for for the next docking. So, I didn't want to let that go, but Bob Byle [??], he went to

Paris, I didn't. So, then they, we were at Camp Lucky Strike, Eisenhower-

James: That was at Hamburg?

Rickard: No, that was in France.

James: Oh, I'm sorry.

Rickard: I don't know where it was. It was somewhere where they had ships.

James: Cherbourg?

Rickard: Could have been. So, they called it Camp Lucky Strike. And when we got there, General Eisenhower come to greet us. So I had lunch in the same tent with him that day.

James: With how many people?

Rickard: Oh, there was--

**[End of tape 2, side A]**

Rickard: probably two or three hundred people there. It was all I could get, I don't remember, it was a big tent there. So, he gave us a nice talk. I'd seen him before in England when we, before we went for D-Day. Him and Churchill come to visit us when we had ahh, I forget was going on, but anyway, him and Churchill come to review the troops. And they come to our gun position and asked us about it. Asked us questions about it. Then, I remember, Churchill got up on the hood of a jeep and give us a talk. This was probably just before we went to--

James: Embarkation?

Rickard: Yeah. So I got to see Eisenhower two different times.

James: What was your rank, by the way?

Rickard: I was a private all of the time. I never got, the day I, they handed me my discharge, they handed me my promotion. PFC. So, that was in Fort Washington.

James: You took the ship though, from Hamburg back to the United States.

Rickard: Yeah, we took the ship back. I can't think of the name. I got a call. You remember, Victor Mature? The movie actor. I keep telling my wife we

got to call him and find out the name of the ship. He was on the ship. He was one of the crew, on the ship we come home on.

James: He was a crewman?

Rickard: Yeah, he worked in the kitchen.

James: Did you talk with him?

Rickard: Yeah, I talked with him. Yeah. When we had meals, he was always standing there. So, that was a good thing to [indecipherable] with him.

James: Did you have trouble eating decent food when you first stepped back into civilization?

Rickard: Yeah, but it was good. When you was in prison camp, all you thought about was what you was going to eat when you got home. And what you was going to cook. Think about, you know, you was going to cook things up yourself. And when I got home I sure thought about what I wanted to eat, but I never cooked them like I thought I was going to. I was going to come up with some of the best recipes that ever was, but I never did it. But anyway, so when I got home, got back to the states, I ended up back in Ft. Sheridan. They sent us home on sixty days, no, thirty days furlough.

James: And that was the end of it.

Rickard: Yeah, and then they took, after the furlough, then they sent us to Miami Beach for rest, recuperation.

James: Did you have any medical check-ups?

Rickard: Oh yeah, we had medical check-ups.

James: They didn't find anything permanently damaging in side you?

Rickard: No

James: Everything had healed?

Rickard: Yeah.

James: Feet were never so bad---

Rickard: No, I was surprised it bothered me all of the time. I still can't, when we built our first house we had linoleum in that kitchen and we ended up

putting carpeting because it was, it bothered my feet. I couldn't walk in stocking feet, I couldn't walk in anything.

James: But you have no permanent disability then from your service experience?

Rickard: Well, yeah, I had 10% for years and then two years ago I went in and applied for more because I had a heart condition. And I, you know why, I thought that they were giving me 10% I was getting, I thought that was because I had yellow jaundice. But come to find out, that that wasn't on the record. But you know, when I got out, you know, you don't, okay they done a lot of questioning down in Florida, when we got down there. They done a lot more of the examinations and that. They done teeth work and stuff like that. And, they interrogated you. You know, they wanted to know how Russians good the Russians treated us. And you know, I never told them about that incident.

James: The wristwatch?

Rickard: Nope, I had thought, I was glad we got liberated and but over the years, since then, I wish I had said something. I know what is going to happen down in Kosovo and them coming in, you know. And I said, that sounds like---

James: [indecipherable]

Rickard: But anyway, as far as the Russians, some of them, we probably spent a week or so with them. Some of them, you know---

James: Were okay?

Rickard: Were okay, and others, I don't know, they didn't [indecipherable] So then, the only thing our government did, when I left, we got through with our stay at Miami Beach, I thought I'd have enough points you know, but I was a little short of the points. So, okay, but Bob Byle [??], I think he had enough, so they sent him back to Ft. Bragg or somewhere and he got discharged before I did because he went in before I did. Okay, they were giving out orders of where some people were going and where others were going and I didn't have enough points to get out, so I was destined for Ft. Lewis, Washington. Can you imagine? Right kitty corner to the United States. To be stationed there until I got enough points. Okay, on the way, you got Macon, Georgia. I got sick. Had a headache. So I got out and they stopped anybody that was sick or anything. There was medics there. And so, I just, I gotta get out and get some air, fresh air. I got out and a nurse stuck a thermometer in my mouth. And said; "You've got an awful fever. You're staying here." And I said, well I'll get, all my stuff's on. Well, I couldn't even get my stuff out. [indecipherable] hospital, that army

hospital in George, Macon, Georgia. They took me by ambulance to the hospital. I was there for two weeks. And they said, we got wait for orders to send me out, because I was okay the next day. I thought I was, so I stayed there, even [indecipherable] I played ping pong a lot. And two weeks, what a boring thing when you want to get out of the army. So finally, they got their orders to ship me to Ft. Lewis. And, so I went, the only good part about it was, I went by first class, instead of the troop train. But, that was the good part. So I gets out in Ft. Lewis and they, by the time I got there I figured I had enough points, but I stayed there for oh, I don't know how many weeks I was out there, two or three weeks. And then I was ready to be discharged, but that was kind of a waste of money to send me way out there. So then I got a discharge and let's see, how'd I do that? I took the money and got a cheaper rate, transportation money to stop in Montana to see my uncle and my aunt so I could, but anyway, so I, that was the end of my---

James: And you came back to Wisconsin. What did you do?

Rickard: I was going to go into the body, auto body business and I signed up for the GI Bill. In the meantime I was looking for, I was going to be trained at a body shop in Dodgeville in on-the-job training. Well then I was looking for a car, so I, my brother took me around looking for cars. So, there was none available. There was a new truck at the Ford dealership in Platteville. So, I, he said, I could sell you that. He said, I got all kinds of people on the list ahead of you, but he said, beings you're a veteran, he said, "I'd sell it to you." He [brother] said, why don't you buy it? If you don't want it, I'll take it. So I bought it. And so I was using that for a car [indecipherable]. And so, one day I was spotted by a livestock dealer and he said, "put a box on that and I'll put you to work." So, all of the sudden, I was in the trucking business. Did that for five years and then I got out of it.

James: Did you join any veterans organizations?

Rickard: Yeah, I joined the American Legion. Later I joined the ex POWs. Oh, and the Disabled American Veterans.

James: DAV

Rickard: DAV, yeah.

James: [indecipherable] labels.

Rickard: Isn't that something.

James: The VFW? Did you join the VFW?

Rickard: No I didn't. I didn't join them. There was something I was going to go back to.

James: Something in Prison Camp? Something about Food? Weather?

Rickard: I know they said it was the coldest weather they had had in German for years. But there was something on that. (pause) I was going to go back to it, but then I decided to go on. Can't remember what it was. There was one humorous thing. I was in Stalag 2B. Some of the guys, I was always wishing I could get on a farm detail, you know where you'd get better food, but I never did. But there was one guy in Stalag 2B there that had been out on the farm. And he come back in the camp there. He said they were digging potatoes. This was in, this happened in maybe, October or something. Before, this was something that happened before, maybe a month before he told me. He said that, he was out digging potatoes and they were picking up potatoes and putting them in baskets. And so this, German guard started on them to get to work faster, you know, to get more done. So, this one prisoner says "You son-of-a-bitch" to this guard. So, he goes, the guard goes over to another prisoner, that so happened, the other prisoner heard what he said. And he says, "Was ist 'son-of-a-bitch?'" And the prisoner said, "[indecipherable] potatoes." And so, oh, ha, ha. And so, the German guard picked up a small potatoes and says, "[Kleinga??] sons-a-bitches, [Kleinga??] sons-a-bitches." (laughs). That was kinda, that was a cute one. I never did get out on, oh, there was one time I did get, oh this is humorous, this is funny. I was on the road for three or four days. That was when they, that was about the time they separated us into smaller groups. So, me and some of the guys was put on this detail cutting wood. And, this was before I was in real bad shape. They had a one cylinder tractor and a wagon. And so, we ended up in a little, this only lasted for about three or four days I think. So we had, we did have a barracks site that we were going to. But we had no, nothing on [indecipherable] plywood laid on. But anyway, so, we thought we were going to get a little food, but we didn't get much, soup. But, the funny part of it was, was how backward they were. This tractor was a wood burner. Burnt wood, instead of gas or diesel. So what they would do was start it on diesel fuel and then we'd throw wood chips into the fire place. But, to start it, they'd take a blow torch and stump of wood. And put the blow torch and stump of wood right onto the head and the spark plug to get it hot. Then he'd take the steering wheel off. Turn the steering wheel, take it off and throw it alongside the flywheel and put, put, put, put. Then they'd turn it off of diesel and onto wood. So then on, we'd throw wood into it.

James: Did everybody have job to work in the camp? Have a job, you said some were in the field?

Rickard: No, that was it. We thought if we could get out and do something maybe we would get better food. But, one other time we was at the barn, you know I was telling you about. A woman, they took another guy up to this woman's house and they said, if we'd help her cut wood, then we would get, so then we'd end up getting some apples and potatoes cooked together. They cooked apples and potatoes cooked together. Okay, what we done, he was on one side and I was on another sawing wood for this woman. We weren't in very good shape for that. But that was just one day.

James: [indecipherable] the German maybe? Did you talk to her at all?

Rickard: No. I never picked up much German at all. But anyway, I thought I'd tell you about those potatoes, I thought that was, so. But anyway, this, Rob Wallace stuck by me and kept me going. I didn't think I would have made it if it wasn't for him encouraging me. And after the war, you know get back from [indecipherable] and forget about things and so, I did get one letter from him. And he, he was, at that time, I think he was going to get married or something and I had been in Alabama. Anyway, so I always thought I wanted to get in touch with him so, maybe fifteen years later we went to Florida, and I stopped in the towns that he talked about and nobody knew him. And then, so then I'd get on the phone maybe in the next fifteen, twenty years I'd get on the phone and call, Rob, his name was Robert Wallace. And tried to get a hold of anybody that knew of him. I called every Wallace in [indecipherable] Never could get a hold of him. So then, finally, about five years ago, I went to the service officer in Dodgeville and he said there was somebody in Milwaukee that works with him. He said there wasn't-- the Army wouldn't give you information on anybody because of the privacy act, you know. So, but they said there was somebody that's doing this now. Working with, and they said, being as you were disabled, and they said, "Is he disabled?" And I said, yeah. And they said maybe they could find him. So one day I got a call from the Veterans Service Officer and they said they located him. He's in California. So, then I had to; what did I have to do? I had to have him, they had, I had to go through them to contact him to see if he wanted to talk to me. So, one night I got a phone call from him. So he's out in California. So he, I was gonna go see him and go to Vegas. I'd go in a car. And so, I'd call him one time and he didn't want me to come. So, he'd been having heart trouble. So then I called again and I talked with his wife and she acted kind of strange and he come up and get on the phone and I didn't think he was normal, you know. So then, I thought, well, I won't look him up then. So, then later, in the last year or so, I called out and, oh I know, I was, the veterans office, wanted him to send a letter about my frozen feet. And, so then I talked to him about a year ago, and he says; no it was less than a year ago. And he told me, he said he was sorry about what had happened in the past. I was going through a, I don't know, a nervous breakdown or something. And he, he even, they thought he had

Alzheimer's. And, they put him in the hospital and they, but there was no Alzheimer's and he got over it. But he said, he didn't even know where he was. He said they had to watch him because he would end up near his house and they didn't know what was wrong. And, so anyway, now, the last time I talked to him, he was apologizing for not sending a letter to the, and I said, well I appreciate his intentions anyway. So, so then, but he sounded like he was [indecipherable] but in the mean time I did talk to his wife once and she said that he had a rough time. So I haven't gotten to talk to him, but I'd like to talk to him and I wonder if he remembered---

James: You went way out there for him.

Rickard: Yeah, but, you know.

James: Have you contacted anybody else? Anyone else from Linden?

Rickard: Oh yeah, we were, we were living in Cobb. Ended up in the automobile business in Cobb.

James: Oh, so you saw him a lot. That was nice.

Rickard: Auto sales in Cobb. But then he died. He smoked, kept smoking. He died of lung, fifteen, about fifteen years ago. And then, I quit smoking in '40, in '50, about '59, before that probably. Anyway, doctor told me to quit smoking or it would kill me and I quit. I don't know what's wrong with these people that don't. So, anyway, yeah, I was in the trucking business for awhile and then I went into the service station business for five years. Then I went into---

James: You never used any of the GI benefits then?

Rickard: No, I didn't. Then I was in the livestock business. Buying livestock and I ended up in the automobile business. Because automobiles were always my, so I had twenty five years of auto sales.

James: Tell me about that glider. How many landings did you make in a glider?

Rickard: Oh, there was a lot of flights in North Carolina and South Carolina, and Tennessee maneuvering.

James: The smaller glider?

Rickard: Yeah, the Waco glider.

James: That was pretty hairy?



Rickard: Yeah, it was. We'd get up behind the tow plane and if you got in its prop blast you were. I remember one day I got so sick I vomited in my helmet.

James: Did they have bigger gliders in England?

Rickard: They weren't quite as bad, but I saw it one day, it was rough in North Carolina. Except when we got down, the pilot was standing alongside the plane throwing up. After we got loose from the plane, then it was just wind noise. It was just so quiet. And one time in England, that a [indecipherable] glider, we, this pilot, one of the pilots, either one of the pilots, there was two pilots, you know, and they had never flew nothing but American pilots before. They didn't take any training. It was the first trip they had ever flown in the big one. And they come down, that had a wheel in front, and you come down and hit with that front wheel and the mechanism come right up through, right beside me. I was toward the front there. And, when it hit it shot in there again and the next time it came back is hard to remember. They had rails on, just wouldn't, rails on the back of the seat. One was up higher and one was down lower. And my lower vertebrae found one of them. Boy I suffered. But I didn't have it tight enough, I don't think. But anyway, I wonder, sometimes. The other day when the chiropractor was looking at x-ray—I've been to a lot of chiropractors—he looked at this x-ray and says, "Your vertebrae is about the worst I've ever seen." He said, "Did you get injured?" I said, "My back's been bothering me a lot, but I had that crashed landing one time." And he said he wouldn't be surprised if that is what caused it. Anyway, so I've always had a bad back.

James: Any other stories that can think of or is that about it? [indecipherable]

Rickard: There is a coincidence that happened.

James: You mentioned two of them.

Rickard: Yeah, my brother and that [dial??] but there was, I was in England one day. It was when I was on furlough before D-Day. So I was in a pub in England, in Cornwall. And there was this GI sitting alongside me. And he says, where you from? And I said, Wisconsin. And where you? And I said, well, Madison, even though I was fifty miles from there, but I used to say Madison you know. I said, I guess I said my hometown is west of Madison [indecipherable]. He said, well, I'm from Rockford, but I've got a girlfriend in Madison [??]. And ah, so he said--

**[End of tape 2, side B]**

Rickard: 232 East Washing, ah East Dayton in Madison. And I said, East Dayton? Well, I said, I have a girlfriend that lives at that address. And so he looked

his address up and mine was the same address. But, it wasn't the same girl.

James: Good. [laughs]

Rickard: It was, it was, okay my brother ended up marrying this woman. But anyway, she was staying with, boarding with her aunt. And then this girl, other girl from Dodgeville, she was her friend so she was boarding there too, see. So, but you know, of all the troops [indecipherable] had girlfriends with the same address. So, and after the war I got a phone call, I got home one day, this is just before I was married. I got married shortly after I got home. And my mother says, [indecipherable] called, this girl, and so, she says you are supposed to meet her at the country club. And I, [Benny's??] country club. And it's out by Ridgeway. So I, I wonder what, I knew she was the one that he had that address of. So I wonder what she wants? So I went up there and she was there. She wanted to ask me about meeting him and how much I knew about him. And she said, he was killed during the D-Day invasion.

James: Oh, was he?

Rickard: And they were supposed to be getting married after the war. Anyway, she wanted to know what he had to say, and you know.

James: And you really didn't have that much.

Rickard: And I just talked to him that one night. And so, that was kind of a coincidence. But there seemed like there was another coincidence. Oh, I know, when I got in England, we got landed in Liverpool and they loaded us on a train to take us out to [indecipherable] Park and we got there about midnight. And so, I don't know, the next morning they got us up for breakfast. So we lined up for the mess hall and I saw this GI there with a 5<sup>th</sup> Division emblem on. My brother was in the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. And I said to him, "I thought you guys were in Iceland?" And he said, "No, we've been here for about a month." And I said, "I got a brother in the 5<sup>th</sup> Division." And he says, "You have? What outfit?" I said, "Company C of something." He said, gee, that's what I'm in. He said, "What's his name?" I said, "Bob Rickard." "Oh geez, well he's my buddy." He said, "He's in the upper bunk and I'm in the lower bunk." And, there I didn't know.

James: Couldn't get a hold of him?

Rickard: So then, okay, what happened then, the weekend was coming up so I said, well I'm going to see if I can get a pass. All they would give me was a 24 hour pass. So, this guy, we were sent on a detail to get the camp set up for you guys. And he said, Bob didn't come. And, so he said, I'll tell Bob. So,

I got a 24 hour pass and I got to Redding and I couldn't get connections to go to where his camp was. And so, the next weekend, I got a, I think a 48 hour pass. And so I got to his camp and he'd got as far as Redding that weekend before and couldn't get connections to my camp. We spent the night in Redding and didn't know it.

James: Didn't know he was right there.

Rickard: So anyway, the next weekend I got to meet him. Oh, I know what I got to tell you. Oh, it come to me now.

James: Oh, good.

Rickard: This about, the interrogation. This is very something. Okay, I kept thinking all the time that somebody, some GI in the 101<sup>st</sup> spilt the beans. So we was at a reunion. A 101<sup>st</sup> airborne reunion, and so, so one day, why, there was one of these guys at the reunion who says, you remember that, I think it was the colonel saying that, or was it Captain Joe? Remember that, [Basildon??] Park, that rock house by the gate and the guy that lived there? The Englishman that lived there? And I said, "Yeah, he used to entertain the officers." And he was the one, I said he was the one who sent my bicycle down to my cousin. And he didn't, he wouldn't even take pay for shipping it down there. And he said, well, he was a German spy. And he told us, he was a writer. He wrote stories.

James: This was in England?

Rickard: Yeah, in England, in Basildon Park. And he said, I knew him, and I knew all the officers used to go over there and play cards and he'd entertain them with drinks.

James: You didn't know his name?

Rickard: No. Anyway, it turned out he was a German spy. So, I don't know what they did, prosecute him, or what they did. But anyway, so that's how they knew.

James: I don't know if [indecipherable]. The British turned practically every spy that was sent over there. Turned them and made spies for England. Became double.

Rickard: But he, but they said he was a spy for Germany.

James: Right, but that may be a cover.

Rickard: But anyway, but he, I figured that's probably the reason he knew how many guns we had and he got all that information from the officers when he used to entertain them.

James: Alright sir, that's it.

**[End of Interview]**