

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN SCOCOS
Bombardier, Army Air Corps, World War II.

2001

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Scocos, John G., Sr., (1918-2004). Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 70 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John G. Scocos, a Fond du Lac, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service in the Army Air Corps as a bombardier aboard a B-24 and his internment at Stalag Luft III as a German prisoner of war. Scocos touches on being drafted, clerical school at Fort Logan (Colorado), running a PX at Houlton Army Air Base (Maine), applying for officers training, and bombardier school at Big Spring (Texas). He speaks of being assigned to a B-24 squadron at Clovis (New Mexico) and doing anti-submarine patrols along the Atlantic coast. After flying to Europe, Scocos speaks of arriving in Italy where he was assigned to the 723rd Squadron and began flying missions into Austria, Yugoslavia, and the Balkans. He describes his crew's equipment, the reason German pilots targeted his unit, and missions to bomb the Ploesti oil fields. Scocos details the mission to Vienna where his plane was shot down: the plane's being hit by enemy aircraft, the ball turret gunner's getting left behind in the burning plane, bailing out over the Alps, finding his pilot, fashioning a litter out of a parachute to carry a wounded crewman, and being taken to a hunter's cabin by an Austrian civilian. Scocos reflects on not knowing whether the Austrian civilians were helping or capturing them and, after hiking through the mountains, discovering he was a prisoner. He comments on having personal possessions taken and later returned. Interrogated by Germans, Scocos reflects on how much information they already seemed to have on the prisoners. Sent to Stalag Luft III in Sagan (Germany, later part of Poland), he portrays the overcrowded conditions of his barracks. Scocos provides a sketch of life in a POW camp including inadequate food, recreational activities like baseball and basketball, a library where prisoners could check out books, religious services led by captured chaplains, receiving Red Cross packages, and using a clandestine radio. Scocos recalls escape equipment being smuggled into camp in baseball gloves and some methods the Germans used to prevent escape attempts and food caches. He touches upon trading food parcels with the British because the British Red Cross packages included jam. He describes marching west in sub-zero weather as the Russian army approached the camp, being taken to Moosburg by boxcar, having elderly German guards with no ammunition, and liberation by the 3rd Army. Scocos tells of the retreating German SS treating the elderly German prison guards roughly and shares an anecdote about Patton demanding better food for the freed prisoners. He talks about a pilot who stood up for the American ex-prisoners when the British officers in charge were flying out all the British ex-prisoners first. Scocos talks about passing through Belgium and Camp Lucky Strike (France), the boat ride home, readjusting to American food, receiving retrospective pay and discharge at Fort Sheridan, and return to his pre-war job in Fond du Lac. He addresses having reunions with his

plane crew and his membership in veterans' organizations. Scocos characterizes a Greek prisoner he acted as translator for in Moosburg.

Biographical Sketch:

Scocos (1918-2004) served in the Air Corps from 1942 to 1945 as a bombardier in the 723rd Squadron, 450th Bomb Group and achieved the rank of 1st lieutenant. After the war he worked at Sears stores in Fond du Lac (Wisconsin), Madison (Wisconsin), Rochester (Minnesota), and Owatonna (Minnesota). He retired in 1988 and settled in Madison.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001
Transcribed by Katherine Stone, 2010
Checked and corrected by Channing Welch, 2011
Corrections typed in by Katheryn Mente, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Interview Transcript:

Jim: All right. Here we're talking to John Scocos, and the date is the 17th of March, 2001. Where were you born, sir?

John: Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Jim: Born in Fond du Lac, and what year was that?

John: 1918, October 18th, 1918.

Jim: 10/18, okay. And what were you doing before the Second World War?

John: I was employed at Sears Roebuck. I was managing a men's furnishing department.

Jim: Uh huh. Then when the war came you were eligible to be drafted—did you volunteer for something, or did you wait to be drafted?

John: I was drafted.

Jim: Uh huh, okay. All right, and where did they send you?

John: I went to Fort Sheridan. Fort Sheridan, yes, and from Fort Sheridan I went on to Jefferson Barracks [Lemay, Missouri]-- in the Army Air Force.

Jim: Oh, you went to the Air Force?

John: Army Air Force, yeah, Air Corps.

Jim: Is that by choice, or did they just tell you you're just going to the Air Force?

John: Well, no, they told me -- we took tests at Sheridan and—

Jim: That's what they made to determine --

John: I was sent to the Army Air Corps.

Jim: And that was at what month of what year was that?

John: January of '40, '42.

Jim: 1/42, US Air Force. And what was your specialty in the Air Force?

- John: I was the [laughs] cook, and when I got drafted, and I was put into the clerical school at Fort Denver, at Denver—at, uh, Fort Logan. And from there I went on to Houlton, Maine and the Air Force base there. And [laughs] I ran the PX [Post Exchange, Army base retail store], the ol' PX [laughs]. I ran the PX for several months, and then I went to headquarters; I was working in headquarters—
- Jim: In Maine?
- John: In Maine, yeah, Houlton, Maine, Air Force Base. And then I had decided to get into the flying part. I applied for officers training and I went to, down to San Antonio, Ellington Field, and I took this series of tests, and I went into Bombardier School at Big, Big, [coughs] excuse me, at Big Spring, Texas, and I completed the course there in June of 1943. After graduating from Bombardier School I went to Denver. I was supposed to be in the B-29 armament, uh, officer--
- Jim: Uh huh.
- John: And they cancelled that group, and I went on down to Clovis, New Mexico. I was in the Air Force, and I was assigned to a bombing crew at Clovis. And from Clovis after completing our training there we all went on to Langley Field, and we were flying anti-sub—
- Jim: Oh!
- John: Work in up along the coast, Atlantic coast --
- Jim: In B-24s?
- John: In B-24s.
- Jim: Uh huh. Okay, and B-24 anti-sub missions[??], uh huh.
- John: Yeah. From then we went into a crew, went to Mitchel Field in New York, and we picked up an airplane, and we flew to South America and across over into Africa.
- Jim: When was that then, John?
- John: Ah, let's see, '40, '43. It was in December. We picked the plane up in December, and in January we were in Africa.
- Jim: Was that '43 or '44?
- John: '43 – '44.

Jim: Yeah, that's what I thought.

John: '44.

Jim: If you were doin' that sub-duty you'd have to—

John: Yeah, '44.

Jim: Okay. Now, we got it. 1/'44 to Europe.

John: To Europe, and we flew across--we picked up our aircraft, and we went down to South America, and we flew across to Africa and—

Jim: Did you stay in Africa, or did they move you from there?

John: No, we -- well, we stayed in Africa for about two weeks. Actually we were -- we grew -- weathered in there and then we flew in, going across Tunisia over into Italy.

Jim: Mm hmm. Is that your main base?

John: Base, Italy.

Jim: Yeah. Now, what --tell was your group then?

John: I was in the 723rd Squadron of the 450th Bomb Group.

Jim: 723rd Squadron --

John: Squadron, 450th Bomb Group.

Jim: 4 - 50, 4-5-0.

John: Yes.

Jim: Bomb Group, okay.

John: We were flying out of Manduria, Italy. The whole area in Foggia—

Jim: Southern Italy.

John: Was, yeah, around Foggia was all B-24 bombing squadrons. And from there I flew, uh—we flew over into Austria, into Yugoslavia -- the Balkans, Romania. I flew on the first Ploesti raid after that low level job. We were the first ones in there, our group was.

Jim: The second round.

John: Second, yeah.

Jim: Uh huh.

John: And—

Jim: How was it being a bombardier? Was that hard to learn?

John: No. No, it was pretty good—it was very--

Jim: That Norden bombsight – was that easy to use?

John: Norden bombsight.

Jim: You could use that easily?

John: Yes, very good to use.

Jim: Did it seem to be accurate to you?

John: Ah—

Jim: Because a lot people have questioned how accurate that really was.

John: Yes, there is a lot of, uh—a lot of times I think our missions when we missed our target--with the accuracy, uh, I think we--there is so many factors enter into the area—air conditions and winds and everything else that would —but as a whole, I think that at least they saturated the area pretty heavy so—

Jim: Sure. Tell me about the mission. What level did you usually fly on?

John: We generally would go between 26,000-32,000.

Jim: Boy, that's pretty high.

John: Yeah, you're really up there.

Jim: Really up there, right.

John: 'Course, you know, you're flying over Austria mostly, and you're in the mountainous area so you were up—

Jim: Right, just to get over the mountains.

John: Yeah, yeah. So, it, uh—

Jim: You were on oxygen then when you got up that high.

John: Yeah. We had —

Jim: That's pretty cold up there.

John: It was cold. It was very cold. We were dressed fairly warm, but—

Jim: Had the electric suits, did you?

John: No, we didn't have any. The boys out of England did have electric equipment. A lot had suits, but we didn't have them. We used just normal, and we dressed pretty warm, we dressed pretty warm. Luckily.

Jim: What gun were you assigned to besides the radio?

John: Pardon?

Jim: What gun were you assigned to? You must have been assigned to a gun in addition to your radio. Or bombardier, I mean, did you have another gun to use?

John: Well, we were—

Jim: No, huh?

John: Assisted in case somebody got hurt or something you had to take over the—

Jim: But they didn't give you any training in gunnery?

John: Not really. I didn't have no training in gunnery, no. And I flew -- well, I flew -- in fact, I was on my thirty-second mission, and we got shot down. Ah, we got shot down by fighters. We got hit by German 109s [Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter planes].

Jim: Had you been attacked by fighters very much?

John: Yes, you know, we'd [laughs] -- very much. I was in a "bastard" group.

Jim: Oh, really.

- John: In fact, our colonel was from Monroe, Wisconsin.
- Jim: Oh, my.
- John: Miller, Colonel Miller. Uh, we had —our group was flying north of Steyr, Austria on one of our missions, and [clears throat] we got hit pretty heavy. And on the way back one of our group was a stray. He was flying, he was hurt, and he was lagging behind, and the Germans came over. They had a code of ethics, and they would circle the airplane, and they — to escort it down with him. And the -- this crew, the [laughs] the officer in charge said, “When they come over we’ll give ‘em hell.” So they come over, a couple of ‘em would circle them, and they took off, and they shot ‘em both down.
- Jim: Oh, my.
- John: From then on the Germans tagged us - 450th Bomb Group- you were a target.
- Jim: Shoot everyone down.
- John: In fact, we used to have white, we were called the “Cottontail Group,” and we used to have our tailfins painted. So we got back to the colonel -- said “From now on” -- they took and had ‘em all painted the thing so they could see it. And they really were attacking us. When we went to Ploești, the first time Hitler -- the Germans had had their finest squadron was protecting the Ploești airfield, and they came at us. And our group was flying, we were flying a beautiful formation that day. We were real tight, and they hit our, our wing. And they took -- in our group they took seven planes out that were flying.
- Jim: Staggered.
- John: The whole top element, they took it all off--the first pass the Germans made they eliminated the whole top of the—that’s the first, the only time I actually seen in flying [unintelligible] was, “Well, boys, this is it, I think.” They just wiped that whole thing out. And we were flying perfect. The rest of the wing was all over the sky. They were hit by flak and that, but the Germans had it in for our group, and they took—we were lucky. We survived. Half of us—we lost, I think, twelve planes that day in our group.
- Jim: I see. Tell me about the anti-aircraft fire. That was more of a problem than the fighters? Or was it about even?
- John: The fighters actually were more of a – ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire], you got used to it, I mean, the—

- Jim: The German planes could fly up to that height that you were flying?
- John: Oh, they were very good. Yeah, the 109s really come in, and they would be up, and they would try to catch us. The day got shot down we were just got to our IP [intercept point] point or, you know, the point where we go in to the target, and they would – ‘cause then they generally would be at your altitude you were in, and your planes would be leveling off and—
- Jim: On the bomb run—
- John: On the run.
- Jim: You couldn’t move—
- John: No, and they would be up there, and we didn’t have, we didn’t have any fighter escort that day. They came after we got hit. The P-47s came over in a group that was supposedly supposed to be escortin’ our wing—
- Jim: Mm hmm.
- John: And in fact when I – after I bailed out --
- Jim: Now, how was your wound -- your aircraft wounded. Tell me about that.
- John: ‘Got hit by aircraft, by enemy, by 109s in the waist, and we were on fire.
- Jim: Oh!
- John: We were on fire--
- Jim: That put everybody out.
- John: Yeah, and they hit us, and we lost all our intercom ‘cause we got hit after we got hit—
- Jim: Did everybody get out?
- John: No. One boy didn’t get out, one little—that was the poor guy who was in the ball turret.
- Jim: He couldn’t get out fast enough?
- John: Well, we had a—it was really a—we had a system where the boys in the waist had a—supposedly— I don’t know because you put that guy in there, you lock him in.

Jim: Right.

John: And they were supposed to take care—that individual that was supposed to take care of him didn't fly with us that day. He was sick and we had a substitute flyer with gunner that--and they didn't unlatch it. They let the poor guy burn. He went down with the plane.

Jim: The fellow in the ball turret couldn't get out himself?

John: No.

Jim: I mean, you always had to have someone else—

John: That latched a—

Jim: That latched you in—

John: Pull 'em up, yeah. That was a —

Jim: Well, that's too bad.

John: And we, I didn't know at that time, I and the pilot were the last two guys out of our aircraft. We had—lucky in the airplanes, they had an escape buzzer that could work, and everybody got out, and then I and the pilot were the last two guys out, and after we got out I didn't see it happening 'cause I was flying then, but some of the planes that were flying next to us took pictures -- plane blew up.

Jim: Before it hit?

John: Before it hit, it blew up in the air it. It blew—

Jim: Oh, my, my.

John: And, uh, but we were lucky. We got out, and so we—

Jim: How was your parachute ride down?

John: Oh, [laughs] it was really fun. Quiet, real quiet but you don't realize how fast you're travelling 'cause we were -- down below was, till you got down, the ground just came up to meet yeah. I landed in the Alps. We were flying, we were going to Vienna—Wiener Neustadt is a air—and we were gonna bomb the airfields outside of Vienna, and I landed in -- actually I didn't land for -- and I came down, and I came into an opening

about this, as wide as this, and my chute caught on a tree, and I went down, and—

Jim: How far off the ground?

John: Oh, about four—I'd say 'bout four feet—

Jim: Oh, oh, I see. You weren't dangling up there—

John: We were almost down, yeah.

Jim: Oh.

John: But I was going down before our boys flying 47s flew around me -- as did the German -- because he got [the P-47 pilot] onto one of the 109s and he was going like and they were waving to me, uh—

Jim: Did everybody else get down except that one fellow?

John: That's the only one, yeah.

Jim: The others okay?—

John: Nine of us got out, and one of 'em didn't.

Jim: Nine got out, though.

John: Yeah.

Jim: Yeah. Okay.

John: And we -- I was—

Jim: So you were in Austria?

John: Yes, I was there.

Jim: In Austria when you—

John: First lieutenant, yes.

Jim: I know, but you were in Austria when you hit the ground?

John: Pardon?

Jim: Where you landed was in Austria?

- John: Yeah, in Austria, in the—
- Jim: Not in Italy or—
- John: No, and my—pilot, pilot, he—I started walking, and I ran into him, and we were -- ‘cause we had gotten down put, and he says to me, “Jeez, John,” he said, “we got a wounded boy over here.” So we went, and one of the fellows from our group in a different squadron, and he didn’t have his chute on properly, and he ruptured himself. He couldn’t walk. He was—so, I says, “Well, we’ll take you. We’ll take your chute and we’ll make a litter.”
- Jim: Sure.
- John: So we got him up to the road as [unintelligible]. He and I figured we were gonna go to Switzerland. We had a compass, and we, we headed for a south, the direction toward—and we got that boy up, the gunner up to the road. Just as we had gotten out an Austrian came, an elderly gentleman.
- Jim: A civilian.
- John: Civilian—
- Jim: Mm hmm.
- John: He came, and he had, he had a gun, and he was shakin’ his gun, and we were going “Nein!” I think he was more scared than we were, and he -- anyway, he took us—he took I and my, the pilot and the other boy, guy, we got him up on the road there so that someone could pick him up and take him for medical help. And he took us to a little cabin ‘cause we were in the Alps, and it was a hunter’s cabin, I guess. It was like a -- and he was telling us to stay put, and—
- Jim: What month was this?
- John: That was in, uh, May of ‘44.
- Jim: May. That was your thirty-what mission, thirty-ninth mission?
- John: Thirty-second.
- Jim: Thirty-second. Okay. And what did you do in the cabin? You just wait there ‘till somebody—

- John: Yeah, we were waiting. It was more than a half hour or so. He came back, and he brought a big thermos jug full of tea and—
- Jim: Oh!
- John: And some bread.
- Jim: Well, that was nice.
- John: Oh, we -- neither one of us had eaten for breakfast 'cause I used to -- if I would eat it I would have problems in the plane. So I didn't, as a rule, didn't eat—
- Jim: Eat till after yeah got back.
- John: Eat, yeah, eat when we got back. And he mentioned to us just to sit tight. So he and I and the [unintelligible] -- well, maybe we got in the underground. Maybe this guy's gonna get us outta here. And by nightfall, I'd say about three or four hours later, we were sitting in there and in comes two great big Austrians, huge guys, big giants.
- Jim: You mean civilians or—
- John: Civilians.
- Jim: Okay.
- John: And they told us to come. So we go with 'em, we see once, we thought, "Well, maybe these guys are gonna get us out." It was dark, it was nightfall, and we mentioned about the fella being hurt, and so we picked him up behind the cabin. We carried him for—it was almost nine hours. We climbed up and down through the mountains. We came to an opening which was [laughs] -- the first thing I seen was Hitler's picture. I said, "Well,[laughs] Dick, this is no place. We've had it." So, there was a railroad crossing, and they took us into the station, and there was another, I'd say, another twenty or thirty fellows already picked up that were in there. And the fellow that was hurt, they took him, and they got him to a ho—medical attention, and we stayed over. We fell asleep where we was layin', and all— the next day they took us into a -- into town, and they took all our dog tags and took a lot of our clothes away from us, took some of 'em – their rings, watches, all your valuables, and they put your name and everything, and I got everything back.
- Jim: Oh, really?
- John: They took my watch, my ring—

- Jim: You got it back?
- John: Yeah, when we got—
- Jim: I've never heard of that.
- John: Yeah, we got to -- for Vienna, we went to Frankfurt to interrogate—Dulag Luft [the abbreviated name given to POW transit camps for Air Force prisoners] which is the interrogation center. And there they had the—they had our—they had a little envelope with our name on it and—
- Jim: Mm hmm.
- John: And, uh—
- Jim: And your stuff in the envelope?
- John: In a separate envelope and I got my ring and my watch—
- Jim: I'll be darned.
- John: And my dog tags, of course. I got that all back there. They took all our flying clothes. They had taken all that. At Dulag Luft they interrogated yeah. They said I was in a room, a cubicle. Well, it couldn't of been more than two of these table lengths and a cot, and they got—an officer came in, a German officer who could speak very fluent English—clear, and he wanted to interrogate yeah, and he says, “Name, rank, and serial number,” and they had it on a chart. They had it all down on the thing. So he said, “What did yeah [unintelligible]?” And he put me at attention. My old knees were shaking like a -- and he said, “What were you flying? What aircraft was yeah in?” And I said, “Do you have my name, rank and serial number?” So, anyway we sit there for about fifteen minutes. He kept tryin' to ask me questions, and I would refuse to. I refused to answer anything. Well, finally he got mad. “Yeah,” he says, “you're some of those rich, goddamn 'Mericans”, he said—
- Jim: [laughs]
- John: And out he went, I never seen him again. But they did interrogate some of the fellows. Some of the fellows talked. They took 'em in, and—the one guy was tellin' me, he says, “Jeez, he took me in there, and I hadn't smoked” – he was a heavy smoker -- “I hadn't smoked”—this is probably almost a week from after we were shot down. We finally got up there, and this captain sat behind the desk, and they opened the -- they had the book opened up and right there they had where he was, where he flew from,

what group he was in. They had all the information on the guy, and he had cigarettes lined up there, and they were smokin' he says. He—finally, he said, the guy, he says, “Yeah, I’ll take one.” But they asked him questions, and some of those guys talked they said.

Jim: I can’t imagine what information they had that the Germans already didn’t have.

John: That’s right. They knew what the school you graduated from. They had everything—

Jim: That’s how they knew!

John: In fact, they even told this one guy—his group flew across, they flew the northern part, and when they were in Greenland they had some problems with their “putt-putt” [plane] and their thing, and they knew that. They even knew the number of the aircraft they flew. So they had all that information, yeah. And from there they took us to the interroga—after the guy got through—the next day they took us out, and, uh, to an area, and the, Red Cross had sent a lot of old—a lot of American clothes, pants and shirts, and, ‘cause they had taken most of our clothes away from us for flying. So they gave us that, and then they put us on a train. We were on a train—took us to eastern Germany. We went to Stalag Luft III [Luftwaffe run prisoner-of-war camp for airmen].

Jim: Three?

John: Three which is—

Jim: Luft III.

John: It was in, uh, Sagan, [now Zagan] Germany which is now a part of Poland, Silesia, where we were and, took us -- and then we were there—I happened to be in—our group happened to be put into [laughs] the new barracks. See, they were expanding this field. This, this—Stalag Luft was expanded so much because they had so many, so many of us had got shot down that they were— and then we were assigned [coughs] to the barracks. There was twelve of us to a room at first. And, uh, as the war progressed they ended up with – we ended up with fifteen, almost sixteen, guys to a room. We double-decked some of them, and, uh—

Jim: How many in Luft III were, were there about?

John: I’m—I’m not—

Jim: How many guys would you say? How many thousands?

- John: I'd say about, uh, five.
- Jim: Five thousand?
- John: Maybe more. It could be—this was an old camp. The British were there from—in fact that camp is where they had the “Great Escape” from. [The escape of seventy-six prisoners in March of 1944. Only three were successful. The escape was the basis for *The Great Escape* book and movie.]. The British were there first, and they had – see, a lot of wounds in the east. They had five or four compounds, and, uh, in fact they were opening a new one when we had to leave. They had a new one open uh, the uh, we were all Americans in where we were in—
- Jim: In your camp, that, your immediate camp, was all Americans?
- John: All Americans.
- Jim: And mostly Air Force?
- John: All Air Force.
- Jim: All Air Force!
- John: All Air Force, all Air Force.
- Jim: Most POWs were Air Force—
- John: Ah, excuse me, there was a couple of ministers that were—
- Jim: [unintelligible] [laughs]
- John: No. One was. One was English.
- Jim: Oh.
- John: A paratrooper. He got picked up in battle, uh, when they landed in June—
- Jim: Oh, uh huh.
- John: And the other two were fam -- in Africa. They were American ministers—
- Jim: Oh.
- John: From, uh—so we had three, Protestant and then, the – the Englishman was actually an Irishman, Father McVey[?]. He was an Irish-Catholic

chaplain. So they conducted services, church services, in German to allow [unintelligible], and he would, he would go from one camp to another. I know that McVey[??] did, and the Protestants, too. So they—the, uh—you know, we were—the fact that their officers – it was so amazing what talent there was in that, in that camp. We had one guy who played with the Green Bay Packers. I forget his name now. He was in our camp. **[End of Tape One, Side A]**

Jim: And you were officers only?

John: Yes. And they had some enlisted men who they used as orderlies, uh, some of them, but they were all airmen.

Jim: But all officers?

John: All officers, yeah.

Jim: Right. Do you think you got better treatment than the enlisted men?

John: Oh, yeah, most of the enlisted men they had, they put them on work details.

Jim: You didn't have to work?

John: No.

Jim: Well, that's quite a bit different.

John: It was a big difference. In fact, the, uh, the fellows that were there earlier, they had made arrangements with the University of, uh, London, I think it was London, and where they had set it up so some of those fellows could study. He had a library—

Jim: Oh, really.

John: Ah, quite a few books. Particularly the English, you know, they were there from 1939, '40.

Jim: You mean there was a city with a library in it nearby the camp, and they would—

John: No, no, inside the camp they had it.

Jim: Oh, they set up the library.

John: Set it up, set it up.

Jim: So you had access to this?

John: Yes.

Jim: That was nice.

John: The, uh—

Jim: And when you were fed, and when you were at, at meals, somebody brought you the food?

John: [laughs] Well, no. We had the Germans, uh, we had a cook shanty. They had—and they would—each, each barracks and each room did, did their own—

Jim: Oh.

John: In each room you would delegate a fella—

Jim: To get the food?

John: To go -- they had soup. They would -- and they had bread, German bread; they allocated it. But we had American Red Cross parcels, British parcels, which were God-sent. Those, uh, saved—I weighed about 205, 206 pounds when I got shot down, and I weighed 130 when I got out.

Jim: Mm hmm.

John: The, uh—that was the—food was a problem for them, for them as well as us for ‘em, I’m sure, and they, they would have potatoes once in a while. You’d eat potatoes they’d cook—

Jim: Did they have soup? What was the soup like?

John: Well, it was water!

Jim: It was water really[??].

John: Yeah, water, and, uh, rutabeggies. Rutabeggies they had, and supposedly sauerkraut would be – some cabbage that was cooked in—

Jim: You got that once a day?

John: Yes.

- Jim: And plus some bread.
- John: And we'd be allocated so much bread. It was—you had to learn to hide—actually it was sawdust. The Germans had Ersatz—[*Ersatzbrot*, German replacement bread made of lowest grade flour, potato starch, and extenders such as sawdust].
- Jim: Ersatz bread?
- John: Bread. You know they made it out of sawdust, and I don't know what else it was—in fact, I tried to save it, some of it to bring back to the States, and I couldn't [laughs]. I just didn't. I had to throw it away.
- Jim: Yeah.
- John: Yeah. Yeah, food was a problem, uh, and we —
- Jim: So what did you do all day?
- John: Well, you'd walk —we'd do a lot of walking around—
- Jim: Around?
- John: Around the perimeter of the camp. We had basketball, guys could play basketball in, we had baseball, uh, and --
- Jim: Did the Red Cross bring a baseball bat and gloves there?
- John: Well, through the Red Cross into the, uh, going through the agencies, and they got the equivalent and uh, basketballs we had uh, we uh, in fact they uh, for a while they got baseballs [sighs] — America -- some of the Americans, I don't know who they were, but, anyway, they were sending escape equipment and have it concealed in baseballs gloves—
- Jim: Oh?
- John: There was maps, and there was compasses, and, I think it was[??] – and the Germans caught some of it, and they started to get rough with some, some of that equipment, but it's amazing, like I say, it was amazing what a group of fellas could do. We had a radio. They had clandestined --
- Jim: How did you get that in there?
- John: Through that way – they got through tubes in through parts—
- Jim: In pieces?

- John: In pieces. They were put together. They were assembled, they assembled it, and they—we had one radio would be to an aerial, and they would hide it—
- Jim: Sure.
- John: And they would move it every -- every day they'd listen to BBC [British Broadcasting Company] news, to see what was happening—
- Jim: Where'd yeah hide the radio?
- John: The—they would hide it in the barracks. They'd take it and conceal it—
- Jim: Well, I know that, but where in the barracks would they hide it?
- John: Any, any imaginable place you could think of where they wouldn't be lookin', in the stove, uh, in the latrines, any place they could so the Germans couldn't find it.
- Jim: Did they have a stand-down frequently in the barracks so the Germans could go through everything?
- John: Oh, yeah. They would, some they had, we had two or three times when I was there. They would pull everybody out into the—
- Jim: Right.
- John: Field, and they would—
- Jim: They were lookin' for escape buddies[??].
- John: They went through lookin' -- and they would, and the Germans— after the Great Escape, Germans had the barracks were bailed[??] up in, and they took all the woodwork, everything out underneath it, so they could see what was happening under -- on the ground. And they would check -- periodically they would go in through—
- Jim: Lookin' for tunnels.
- John: Yeah, the guys would call 'em ferrets. They would be out there diggin', tryin' to see if they could -- if there was any escape equipment or everything being utilized.
- Jim: So that Luft III was where the people from "The Great Escape" is where they escaped from?

- John: Right. Yeah.
- Jim: That's the basis of the book.
- John: See, we, I went there, I went, I was, the week after they escaped I was -- I went into that camp.
- Jim: Oh, you got there just after the escape?
- John: After the escape, yeah.
- Jim: Of course they caught 'em all, except for a couple.
- John: They shot 'em all. Some got away, couple of 'em got away, and the rest of them—a few of those guys were in the camp from 1940. The British were die-hards. They were escape artists as they would constantly think of some means of getting out of the place.
- Jim: You didn't have any contact with them?
- John: No.
- Jim: The British?
- John: No, the Americans didn't. Our officers did. We had, we had a system set up. The commanding officer, the highest ranking officer, would be the officer of your area.
- Jim: Mm hmm.
- John: In fact, uh, before the war ended, we were still in—I was still in eastern Germany before we were moved. An American general bailed out over Berlin and became commanding officer of our area, a general, uh, and he had been an attaché in Berlin, and he could speak German fluently, and he was the commanding officer. But they were very -- the officers, they tried to, they had committees where you had escape committees and security committees. It's just amazing what—the Germans finally were start punching the holes that the fellows that led the escape had saved a lot of this food for -- that they were getting through the Red Cross and that and then had built up a reserve, and—
- Jim: A cache, you're right.

- John: They used it for the escape. The Germans would punch – they'd take canned goods, and they would punch holes in the top on everything so that you had to utilize it before --
- Jim: They wouldn't let you save anything.
- John: No. But that food was, uh, we had -- I tried to bring it. I was gonna bring it. I had saved the -- our menu for Christmas of '44, what we had, but I misplaced it. I couldn't find it.
- Jim: So they gave you something special to eat on that day?
- John: No, we had saved, we had saved, we would save a tin[??] so we would have, uh—
- Jim: You mean Red Cross stuff?
- John: Red Cross and the British Red Cross. The British had a lot of their British jams and stuff and that which Americans didn't and we'd supplement it.
- Jim: Oh.
- John: And we would make things that we would utilize with—the British used to have a big cracker, and we would use it as a pancake. We would put it on the stove and heat it, and—
- Jim: I thought the British were separate from you.
- John: They were. They had a separate camp, but they would distribute the Red Cross parcels all went to one, to our, to the locker[??] of one area.
- Jim: Oh.
- John: And the -- would be distributed by the committee. It was the soldiers, and sometimes you'd get Red Cross parcels, sometimes you'd get American parcels; it all depended. Near the end of the war, they were getting rough. You weren't able to get things through, and—So, anyway, we was at that camp, and I was there until January 29th, I think it was 29th of January. The Russians had started that big push in the east, and they moved us. And, uh, we were [laughs], we left—the Red Cross—as we left each guy was handed a Red Cross parcel by the Americans. We went and we were -- they had raided the warehouse. Everything was in the warehouse, and as we left they handed us our Red Cross parcel. And we, I walked from there for about four days. We hiked our, our barracks, our group—
- Jim: Started walkin' west!

- John: We went westward.
- Jim: Where was this camp? In Poland?
- John: Yes, and, well, actually it was in Lower Silesia. It was, it was Żagań [spelled Sagan in German and French] part of Germany at that time, but that area's been turned over to the Polish. Now it's part of Poland.
- Jim: Okay. So, anyway, you started walking west.
- John: We went west, and we walked to a Spremberg, I think it was. The name of the town of Spremberg which was the tank facility for the Germans. And we got, we walked to there, and they put us in "Forty and Eight" boxcars [From WWI: French boxcars had a capacity of 40 men and 8 horses], and we went from there to Munich, down to Moosburg.
- Jim: Moosburg?
- John: Moosburg.
- Jim: M-E-U-S? [incorrect; M-O-O-S]
- John: Yeah. It's outside of Munich. That was in February; February we were there, and then we, we were there from—and that was at—that camp was a -- that prison camp was, it was for all -- in there we had all the nations. Everything was there that the Germans had—prisoners of war – French [unintelligible]. And we were there until April 29th. We were liberated by Patton's army, 3rd Army.
- Jim: All right. Now, when you were out walking were you mixed with the enlisted men then?
- John: No, we were all -- the whole group was all officers—
- Jim: Just officers?
- John: Our whole area was -- that whole compound was in the [clears throat] they marched everywhere with ya -- like I say we had -- we was in the east camp 'cause the west, the center there was— like I say it must of been a—
- Jim: You must have been strung out for miles.
- John: About six and a half thousand men were out hot hoofing it.
- Jim: [laughs]

John: And—

Jim: Did they feed you on the march, or no?

John: Yeah—yes, once. They -- we got to, uh, in fact, we stayed overnight in, it was in—on the second, second, the third day of our walkin' we ended up in a factory. I'll never forget what our group did. It was an old pottery factory, but it was heated, and it was blizzard, and we had blizzard. It was sub-zero weather. It was all—it was below zero all the way through. And the day before that they fed us. We stopped at a -- that night we stopped at a Ukrainian or Russian camp.

Jim: Mm hmm.

John: The Germans had. It was—and we -- they bedded us out there, and they had some soup. We ate some soup. The -- and the Russian natives were the people who gave us some food, too. They were -- had some. They had access to some of it. And then from there we went to St. Polten[??] and then finally ended up in the spring and they put us in the “Forty and Eight” cars, and we ended up down in Moosburg. And that, that place was bad. There was, uh, the food—the French were in charge of the kitchen there, French prisoners of war, and they robbed everything. They were—

Jim: [laughs]

John: They were stealing everything, and so it wasn't much of anything left. So then the Americans took over, and things got better. We had -- at least we got soup, and we were close to Switzerland, and Red Cross brought some parcels in.

Jim: Now, tell me about finding out the war was over. How'd that, did that come as a surprise to yeah?

John: Ah, no, we were expecting it. You could tell.

Jim: Your radio was still working and you could sorta—

John: Yeah.

Jim: Hear what was going on?

John: We had the radios, and we knew what was going on. We knew that it was getting near the end. In fact, at that camp in Moosburg the guards that we had were all elderly gentlemen.

- Jim: [laughs]
- John: They didn't even have any bullets in the things. The guys—
- Jim: No bullets?
- John: No, they just showed, the guys would show their weapon, and we weren't goin' no place—
- Jim: Right, and they weren't—
- John: [coughs] And, uh, the couple of fellows escaped from there, from – we were close to— and the Red Cross would bring in some trucks. The food—
- Jim: They'd sneak into the trucks goin' back.
- John: Yeah, they would take, like I say, the enlisted men would go out on work details, and they would send two enlisted men that resembled two of the officers and **[approx. 10 sec. pause in recording]** one of 'em was from Milwaukee. We found out that they got through, they got through okay, -- but then we had -- they would took and they started, got us all out in the [unintelligible] they had a picture. They had the -- I got it at home, the picture of our [unintelligible] and you're [unintelligible] down, and they would go through, and they'd line you up. They were tryin' to find out who was missing 'cause they knew that there was --the counts were too short.
- Jim: Sure.
- John: And they were tryin' -- so they went through, and through a picture—
- Jim: Tryin' to find out who was who.
- John: Yeah, and they never found out 'cause these other two guys acted in their place, and they were able to get though.
- Jim: [laughs] Lucky.
- John: They were lucky, yeah.
- Jim: They sure were.
- John: And the, uh—
- Jim: So all of a sudden one day the guards disappeared, and then the—

- John: Well, we knew they were coming. The United States sending -- there was a full colonel was saying to our camp, 'cause he knew we were all prisoners in this area—
- Jim: Right.
- John: [clears throat] And they said, they come in, "Don't try to escape! Stay put or—we're, we're almost here now!" and, uh, the—so, the next day Patton 3rd Army spearheaded through, and a big tank come through and busted the camp. But the Germans, the old, like I say, it was all the old guards, and the Germans were retreating, and they were all SS boys, and they killed three or four of the guards 'cause the guards wouldn't go over. They wanted the guards to go with 'em, and they refused, just, hell, them ol' guys, they—
- Jim: Right.
- John: They, they knew the war was over with and they were waitin' to get—and they killed them, and they—
- Jim: The SS killed these—
- John: Yes, killed their own guys. They took -- they retreated back down below the —
- Jim: Sure.
- John: 'Cause they came in through shootin'. The Americans came through shooting. And, uh, the -- they were shooting -- I'll never forget the ol' bullets were hittin' the barracks, and, nobody got hurt or anything 'cause they—and, uh, but they did -- They were rough with, the SS boys were, to their own people they were bad.
- Jim: Did you get fed right away?
- John: No. No, and yes. Uh, the day we that we got liberated, the next morning Patton came in with his officers and everything. Jeez you'll never forget him. You'd see the ol' pistols—
- Jim: Right.
- John: Slickin' in[??]. And couple of the fellas were cooking some food. We used to cook a little food, and he was makin' what they call it -- we called, it was a pie we had. And he had made it. So when Patton stopped and he asked the boys, "What are yeah doin'?" and so on. He says "May I try it?"

So the fella gave him -- and I'll never forget, Patton says, "Pist!" spits it. He says, "Is this shit even fit for pigs?"

Jim: Right!

John: He turned around to this colonel; he says, "I wanna see twenty trucks filled with bread brought into this place here, and I wanna see twenty trucks loaded gettin' these kids outta here." And the guy says, "Well, sir, we're--" he says, "You son of a bitch, this is how you—did you hear me?"

Jim: [laughs] Right.

John: And they were there. And that bread looked -- it taste like angel food cake the first time we, we had bread. They brought bread in. And we stayed there two days, I was gone. They took and they—

Jim: Put ya in trucks?

John: Yeah. Took us to an airfield. We went to an air strip—

Jim: In the "Six Bys" [six wheel drive trucks]?

John: Pardon?

Jim: "Six By" trucks?

John: Yeah.

Jim: Right.

John: They took us to the airfield, and they were bringing C-46s and 47s coming in to take the fellas out and fly 'em to Belgium.

Jim: Belgium?

John: To Belgium, yeah.

Jim: That's where you went?

John: That's where we went. From there we went to Belgium. It was really a rare, a rare experience, too. We got there to the airstrip, the British were there before us, the POWs, and these C-46s were loading these guys out, and all our officers left. I mean, we were all there, we were all a bunch of second lieutenants and first lieutenants left, but all our -- colonel and they all took off. So the British were in charge. So the planes came in, and the British took care of all of their boys, and the Americans, we weren't

flying. So finally a flight officer came in with those C-46s. He says, "This plane is not leavin'." He says, "I'm not flying any more English outta this place." And all the Americans, we were all spread out. In fact they were gonna court-martial the guy. He said, "You can do whatever you want, but this plane is not leaving." Eisenhower came. And he says, "Fellas, you don't pace 'em." He says, "We're unfortunate, but from now on", he says, "there's gonna be two flights of Americans going out of here, one flight of the British." And they did. It was really funny. A little flight officer was -- and he held the whole thing up.

Jim: Good.

John: They flew us to Belgium to and they took deloused us and fed us and gave us a complete set of clothes—

Jim: Used clothes, right.

John: Clothes –

Jim: Did you still have your personal items, your rings and watches?

John: No. I had gotten them, I had them—

Jim: Right.

John: I had 'em.

Jim: You still had 'em with you?

John: Yeah. I had my watch and my ring, and a lot of the guys brought things with them, too, they picked up along the way, and this German airfield we left, they'd look and they raided everything. Had beautiful china and ski, ski planes, skis. The British were there first, and they really liquidated the place.

Jim: [laughs]

John: Yeah. They went in -- we stayed in Belgium two days. Then we went on down to France. We went to -- called Camp Lucky Strike.

Jim: At Le Havre.

John: Up by Le Havre. And they got on a boat and—

Jim: Came back on a ship.

John: Came back on a ship. Came back on a ship and New York—

Jim: How'd yeah tolerate that American food again?

John: Oh, delicious! Here was --

Jim: It didn't make you sick?

John: No—ah, we were, we were forewarned—

Jim: Not to eat too much?

John: Take, yeah, and, in fact, I'll never forget, one of the boys was from La Grange [Wisconsin] out here, and he said, "By God, I'm gonna die—

Jim: [laughs]

John: "If I'm gonna die, I'm gonna." And he would go in front of that ship, and he'd open that canteen up, and he'd be taking a full bucket of ice cream.

Jim: Eat the whole thing.

John: And he put on weight. I'll never forget him – the last I seen him his face was as puffed up like a balloon I don't know how he—I hope he made it! But they told us to eat—

Jim: Sure.

John: And we were lucky -- our group was the first group to hit, to get on this ship. And then we got into the cabins. There was two of us to a cabin, and then the next bunch came in, part of a division that was being transported to Japan, were going to the—and they got down below in the—

Jim: Right.

John: Yeah, the —

Jim: So you had better quarters than they did.

John: Oh, we slept on beds, the first bed that we'd slept on in a year!

Jim: I was gonna say, first bed in a long time.

John: And then we come back, and then we hit New York, and—

Jim: Could you eat all you wanted on the ship?

- John: Yes, if you wanted to. They served the food —
- Jim: All twenty-four hours a day, they served all the time?
- John: No—no, ‘cause they were feeding the troops down below, too. They had the time schedule—
- Jim: I see.
- John: The, uh, and we got, hit New York. The Red Cross and then they had big gallons of milk on the -- as you’d get off the ship. And they give, yeah, food and that. Yeah, that was -- most of us, it brought tears to your eyes when you seen the ol’ Statue of Liberty, you came in. And then they took us to [Camp] Kilmer [New Jersey, a staging area for the Port of New York] and we stayed overnight in Kilmer, and then they dispersed us. I went—
- Jim: By train, you came home by train?
- John: By train. And then I went to, back to Fort Sheridan. Sheridan and then they took and they checked our records, and we didn’t have any records!
- Jim: Right.
- John: And they think we – during the – for pay and that--
- Jim: Yeah, you had a lot of pay comin’!
- John: Oh, a full year!
- Jim: How much was a bombardier making in those days?
- John: Jeez, I forget how we were—flying. We were gettin’ about a—I don’t know, we got \$20. We got, you got flying time, too, you know.
- Jim: Yeah, you were getting officer’s pay and flying time besides.
- John: I don’t know if we were getting a hundred some – a thousand some dollars—
- Jim: [unintelligible]
- John: But I got that check for the —
- Jim: For your year.

John: For a full year—

Jim: What was that check?

John: Pardon?

Jim: How much?

John: It was five, it was around—

Jim: Five thousand?

John: Yeah, five-something. I remember.

Jim: Five thousand.

John: Yeah.

Jim: Yeah. Well, how exciting.

John: Yeah. So we went home just like that[??]. From there I went on home, went to Fond du Lac on a big train.

Jim: Okay. Did you use your GI Bill?

John: No.

Jim: You didn't?

John: No.

Jim: What did you go do when you got out of the service?

John: I, uh, went back to Sears, and I stayed there for—

Jim: In Fond du Lac?

John: In Fond du Lac. They – wanted back in my old --

Jim: And your Sears [unintelligible]. They give you your job back?

John: My old job back, I was managing the plumbing and heating department. And then I decided to go into business with another fellow. We bought a drugstore out.

Jim: Oh!

John: And —

Jim: That's exciting.

John: I stayed there for two years, three years, and then I decided, "Well, this is not for me. I'm going to—" I came to Madison, and I went back to Sears, and I—

Jim: In Madison?

John: In Madison, and --

Jim: Oh. Well, you were an old hand by then.

John: Yeah, on State Street, the old Sears store on State Street.

Jim: Oh, yes, I know.

John: And I stayed there two[??] years, and then I got transferred to Minnesota.

Jim: Oh, why?

John: At their Rochester, Minnesota. And then I was given a store in Minnesota, Owatonna, Minnesota. I managed a Sears store for —'til 1970. I left there, I bought a hardware store again in Delavan, Wisconsin. And I stayed there for five years. Then I came back to Madison.

Jim: And retired here?

John: Well, not necessarily yet. I went to work for the State. I worked in personnel, the Division --

Jim: I see.

John: I stayed there 'til 1978. So, let's see, once—I was more than that. Ten years I was there. Til 1980—'85—'88.

Jim: '88?

John: '88. And then I retired.

Jim: Were you married when you were overseas?

John: No. Got married after I returned.

- Jim: And have you kept track of the other people in your plane?
- John: Ah, the officers. I kept track of the officers **[End of Tape One, Side B]** and one, one of the enlisted men. I kept track of all of 'em at first, but they all, they all dispersed. And one boy, one man I kept track, in fact I still write to him—He's in bad shape. He's in a veterans hospital in New York. Our crew was—practically all of 'em were from Long Island [New York].
- Jim: Oh.
- John: One, one boy, one man was from Kansas -- Missouri. He was from Independence, Missouri.
- Jim: Oh.
- John: And the officers, one of 'em was from Ohio, one was from Texas, and the other boy was from Long Island, and myself was from Wisconsin. But the officers, we stayed together. We bailed out, after we bailed out, we stayed together in that prison camp. We were together all the time.
- Jim: Well, that was nice.
- John: And so we—and the enlisted men mostly stayed together too, in prison camp.
- Jim: But you didn't see them 'til after the war, though.
- John: That's true, I didn't see them until after the war, and then after the war, I -- we had a get-together—
- Jim: A reunion?
- John: Reunion—
- Jim: Of the squadron?
- John: Of the squadron, and then we left—no, not of the squadron, of my men—
- Jim: Oh, just your plane—
- John: Of just our group, yes. And now the, uh, pilot is still living, and he's in Austin, Texas. In fact, he stayed in the service, and he retired as a full colonel.
- Jim: Oh.

- John: And the other two boys passed away. And, uh, that one that's alive, one -- I know of the boys died, but one of 'em was alive. The other two guys, I don't know what happened to them. One of 'em was supposed to be in Florida, down in Miami, Florida, but I—we've lost track. We've tried to contact them. I and the pilot, we were going through, trying to through the internet trying to contact them, but we hadn't been able to make contact.
- Jim: Did you join any veterans organizations?
- John: Yes. I belong to, right now—I belonged to all of 'em at one time, belonged to the AMVETS, and VFW, I belonged to right now.
- Jim: The AMVETS?
- John: Yeah. I don't belong to AMVETS.
- Jim: No, I couldn't imagine, no.
- John: No. Ah, VFW, DAV, and Prisoners of War, we got a POW group.
- Jim: Do you go to any of the reunion meetings of any of those groups?
- John: No.
- Jim: No.
- John: I went to out here at the Veterans Hospital, they have the VFW –
- Jim: VFW has it?
- John: The P.O.W. –
- Jim: Oh, P.O.W –
- John: Ceremony on -- in fact I got a letter yesterday with a certain -- in April they're gonna have a another ceremony—
- Jim: Oh.
- John: The P.O.W. But, uh, I belonged to the American Legion, but I don't belong now. But otherwise I belong to the VFW and DAV, both of those. I have never attended any of the meetings, but —
- Jim: I've never belonged to them. I just give 'em that money when they send me the stickers, and I send the money back.

- John: Yeah. That's all I [laughs] do about it.
- Jim: That seems to come every week. I seem to get something from either the VFW or the DAV things coming every week, Jesus. [laughs].
- John: And also the P.O.W.s.
- Jim: Couple letters. They're not so --
- John: Their organization is, uh, I wouldn't say it's dying, but its membership is—
- Jim: Well, the membership is dying—
- John: You're -- losing a thousand veterans die a month—
- Jim: From World War II, yeah.
- John: So that—I try to help them best I can, but I'm, like I say, I'm not active in the—
- Jim: Did the camp guards speak good English or not?
- John: No. The, uh, some of the officers did. Some of the officers could speak very fluent English.
- Jim: You mean some of the German officers.
- John: Yeah.
- Jim: But you didn't encounter them very much, did you?
- John: No. They -- this was the camp personnel. You know, the—in fact some of the-- it was really funny. The boys tell me that when I, we got shot down outside of Vienna and part of our crew got out before I and the pilot did, and they went to a different part, and they got picked up in a different area.
- Jim: Oh.
- John: And they went into this one—Germans picked them up, and some of the boys came back. They went to an air, they took 'em to an airfield. And this one guy said, "Gee," he comes, he did, and he says, "Fellas!" He was an officer, one of the fliers, German fliers, he says, "Fellas! Have yeah got any gum?" And they guy looked at him, "What the hell?" He says, "Yay!"

The guy says, “What are you doing here?” He says, “Long story,” he says, “I was a young lad”, he said, “and I’m from New York,” and he was from New York. “I was ten years old and my parents decided to go back to Germany. So, here I am flying,” he says. He says “How’s the Yankees doing? How’s—” he was askin’ questions, you know—

Jim: [laughs]

John: But uh, the guy said, “I feel sorry for him,” ‘cause they were just as -- worse off than we. They were losing planes, and, uh,—but—yeah, it’s just like a dream now. You don’t think of it—.

Jim: Did you ever think that you were not gonna survive? Or you assumed you would?

John: Well, we were a very cocky bunch of fellas —

Jim: Right.

John: At least our crew was. We were -- you used to -- I forget after so many mission they would send you to Piarco?? [Trinidad], and we were supposed to go to Cairo, Egypt for a week of—

Jim: R & R?

John: Yeah. And we said -- we all got together, “No, we’re not gonna go. Let somebody else go. We’re gonna stay. We’ll fly.” And we were, we were hot, and we’re gonna get our fifty missions in and go home. And we swapped with another crew, another group—

Jim: So you could fly more.

John: So we kept going. We didn’t make it.

Jim: No.

John: The, uh, you know, we did -- now I’ve been reading a book by a couple of ‘em. One was on the complete war of that theater. One is by Gayheart who flies in the —I forget the name of the authors.

Jim: Sure.

John: And the, he tells how the, the rate of loss of the American pilots, the bombing groups was so heavy, which we realized. That’s what the Germans never could realize. They shot down ten planes today, and there’d be ten planes already on the way over and taking their spots.

- Jim: Okay. Is there anything you forgot to tell me?
- John: Pardon?
- Jim: Is there anything you forgot—
- John: No, no, no.
- Jim: That happened?
- John: No. Well, I had one other rare experience.
- Jim: Good, tell me about it.
- John: In the camp that we were at in Moosburg, that the Germans had accumulated all the nationalities that were there. And there was a Greek doctor who was a prisoner of war who couldn't speak German although [unintelligible] but he couldn't speak English. And the Germans came, and they said, "Is there any—do you have any Americans that could speak Greek?" So there was four of us. So he came, and he unintelligible[??]. So we volunteered to serve. We'd be glad to if we can -- he was an ear, eye, nose specialist, the doctor was. So, they let him in, and he says, "Okay, fellas," he says, "What do you guys want?" he says, "You know," he says, "the Germans will leave me out in the afternoon out for a couple hours. [clears throat] I get free time." So we said, "Doc, you're getting bread. It's food." "Okay, fellas," he said. He did, he went out, and I don't know how he did it. He'd come back in. He would have some bread, and he distributed it to us.
- Jim: Oh, that was nice.
- John: Yeah. He really --
- Jim: Speaking of Greek, did your folks at home that were immigrants, are they still fluent?
- John: Yes.
- Jim: Greek, and so in your home then you learned to speak—
- John: Right.
- Jim: Greek as well as English then.
- John: Yeah, yeah.

- Jim: When you grew up it was automatic--
- John: Yeah, that's right.
- Jim: You could speak both languages.
- John: Right, yeah.
- John: I assumed that, yeah.
- John: Yeah it's—that's what I told the German officer, I said, "I'm not a linguist. I have none, I can speak it, I'm not, but – yeah, Johnny's probably waitin' to go."
- Jim: Yeah, he's waitin'. We're just about done.
- John: Yeah.
- Jim: Good. All right, thank you.
- John: Okay, you're very welcome.
- Jim: It was, it was a good interview. I will, I take these home, and then I put 'em on a regular video tape, and I'll make a copy for you.
- John: Okay, fine, thank you.
- Jim: Sure, you'll enjoy it.
- John: Very good.
- Jim: Seein' yourself.
- John: Okay.
- Jim: Here don't get away 'til we unhitch yeah—
- John: Oh! Excuse me [both laugh]. Okay.
- John: Thanks for having us[??].
- Jim: My--

[End of Interview]