

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
FREDERICK M. WALD
Aerial Gunner, Air Force, World War II and Career.

1996

OH
252

OH
252

Wald, Frederick M., (1921-2008). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Frederick M. Wald, a Marinette, Wisconsin native, discusses his career in the Air Force, including being held as a German prisoner of War during World War II. Wald talks about enlisting in the Air Corps in 1941 and being based at Tyndall Field (Florida) when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred. He mentions being rejected for pilot and glider training, graduating from gunnery school and aerial gunners' armament school, and having repeated complications with outdated medical records. In Boise (Idaho), Wald discusses forming a flight crew, flying a B-24 to Europe, and assignment to the 392nd Bomb Group, 578th Bomb Squadron, 8th Air Force based in Wendling (England). He details being shot down on his second mission: losing three of four engines, the failure of the bailout alarm, and having no memory of his jump. After regaining consciousness in a French farmhouse, he talks about being sheltered by the French resistance for two weeks before being captured by the Gestapo. Wald talks being moved from the jail in Rouen to Luftwaffe headquarters in Paris, staying in the Rennes prison, and being held in solitary confinement in Frankfurt (Germany). He portrays being interrogated, including hearing he was a traitor, being scared by witnessing dummy executions, having beard hairs yanked out, and getting beaten with rubber hoses. Wald reports on the clothes he was issued, having good food at the interrogation camps, and being shipped to Stalag Luft VI (Heydekrug, East Prussia) in an overcrowded boxcar. He portrays the compound and states the British and Canadian prisoners shared their Red Cross packages with the Americans, who didn't have their own. Wald details the insufficient food rations and his resultant weight loss. After hearing the approach of the Russians, he tells of being evacuated by overcrowded ship to Swinemünde. Sent to Stalag Luft IV (Tychowo, Poland), Wald talks about being evacuated several months later to Stalag 13D (Nuremberg, Germany), where the prisoners were vulnerable to shrapnel from frequent Allied bombings. He talks about finding other prisoners in the camps who were from Marinette (Wisconsin). Evacuated again, to Moosberg, he comments on being liberated by the 14th Armored Division, getting sick from eating rich food, and being flown to Le Havre (France). Wald touches on being interrogated, having to drink a canteen of eggnog every day, receiving money, and returning to the United States. After the war, he speaks of reenlisting in the Air Force, assignment to Andrews Field (Washington, D.C), and transfer to Salina (Kansas). Wald speaks of flying B-29s until an airplane malfunction gave him a fear of flying. He describes volunteering for duty in Japan, duty loading airplane ordnance, and being frustrated by the lack of promotion opportunities. Scheduled for discharge a week before the Korean War started, Wald states he reenlisted

for a bonus since he would have been involuntarily extended anyway. Assigned to Nellis Air Force Base (Las Vegas), he states that the activation of National Guardsmen flooded the promotion slots. He discusses his assignments to and housing in Kaufbeuren and Hahn Air Base (Germany). Wald talks about having troubles with superior officers who wanted to court martial him. He mentions graduating from aircraft mechanic school and flying C-1 Constellations in Massachusetts. He discusses joining veterans' groups and the importance of the actions of the DAV and Ex-POW organization to secure veterans' benefits. Wald reflects on the long-term health effects from his time as a prisoner of war, including knee problems, frostbite, and gastrointestinal issues.

Biographical Sketch:

Wald (1921-2008) served in the Air Force for twenty-one years between 1941 and 1965. He was a German prisoner of war during World War II, and he also served overseas in Germany and Japan. Wald worked for the Ohio Medical Product until retirement in 1983 and settled in Madison (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996
Transcribed by WDVA staff & Leah Schultz, 2011
Checked and corrected by Channing Welch, 2011
Corrections typed in by Mary Claire Kussart, 2012

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Transcribed Interview:

- Mark: It is April 25, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Fredrick Wald, presently of Madison, Wisconsin, a veteran of the U.S. Air Force in World War II through the 1960s; a career military person. Good morning, thanks for coming in. I appreciate it.
- Wald: Thank you.
- Mark: Um, perhaps we should start at the top, as they say. Why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, 1941?
- Wald: I was born and raised and graduated from Marinette High School in 1941. [Coughs], excuse me, and very little employment opportunities up at that period of time. And, ah, I tried to reenlist, I mean enlist, in the U.S. Navy, but I was rejected.
- Mark: On what basis?
- Wald: That was June of '41.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Wald: And then I went over to the U.S. Army recruiter, and the recruiter said he had recruited three of my friends. So, um, I had a younger uncle about a year older than I was, and he got drafted into the infantry about 1940, which is something I didn't want to do, so I enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps, 1 July '41. We were sent to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri for our recruit training, and then we had picked Tyndall Field, Panama City, Florida for our home base, but because of the base was being built we were sent to Eglin Field.
- Mark: In Florida also.
- Wald: Also for what in them days I think they called them provisional squadrons or groups. About all we did was do guard duty. We did a little flight line work. And then I guess it was, ah, about ten days to a week before Pearl Harbor they sent us to Tyndall Field, and we were living in tents in the city park when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. And a day or so after that they moved us, actually, back out to the base. Even though the base wasn't completed, the

barracks was more or less livable. And then, I guess it was around the summer of 1942, they allowed people to apply for pilot training, of which I did.

Mark: Now, before that, what was your MOS? I mean what was your military specialty supposed to be, as a young enlisted man in the Air Force?

Wald: I don't know what it was.

Mark: I see.

Wald: But after I went through Tech School and Gunnery School, then I got one. So then, um, I was rejected for pilot training because I guess I couldn't pass a couple of the medical tests like the spin test and stuff like that. Prior to Pearl Harbor a person had to have two years of college in order to apply for pilot trainings. So then, a month went by, and I applied for glider training, and prior to that I had a nose condition. I had some growth on my nose that I had to have surgery to remove it. But it never got updated on my medical records so I was rejected again. So then I applied for aerial gunnery school, which I was accepted. I got my medical records updated a little bit and completed the course. I graduated in, I don't know, November of 1942, and then I was shipped to Salt Lake City to go to aerial gunners armament school which is about three months long, and then graduated from there and was promoted to staff sergeant. And then I was supposed to be shipped to the Davis-Monthan [Air Force Base], Tucson, Arizona. And again, I was on a train, and I got yanked off the train because somebody found my medical records weren't updated because of my surgery. They yanked me off that shipment, and I wound up going to Boise, Idaho. I met a guy on the train, and his name was John Rickey, and we became real good friends. And, um, we went down to fly in operations, and we met a pilot, and we formed our own air crew down at that Boise, Idaho, at Gowen Field. Our first phase of training we flew B-17s, and then we switched over to B-24s, and then we completed two phases at Boise. And our last phase was at Wendover, Utah – or Nevada, as it straddles those two state lines, and we completed our bombing phase there. You know that [??] a real quick assignment came in to go to England. We took a short leave, we came home, went back to Wendover, and from there we took a train to Herington, Kansas, and we picked up a B-24D airplane. And we flew that from Kansas to Detroit, Detroit to Presque Isle, Maine, Presque Isle, Maine to Newfoundland, to Greenland, Iceland, and Ireland, and then we

took a ferry to England. And we were supposed to go to one base, and we wound up in another base.

Mark: So where'd you end up at?

Wald: Wendling, the 392nd Bomb Group, 578th Bomb Squadron.

Mark: Is this 8th Air Force?

Wald: Yes. And we always, you know, trained and flew as a crew. But once you got into combat there were standard operating procedures. If your crew wasn't supposed to fly that day they would pick you out, and they would call you a spare, and you would fill in for another crew for their missing people. So, I made many training missions, and then the first mission was in Bremen [Germany], and then the second mission I was flying with this other crew as right waist aerial gunner, and this was their first mission and my second, and we got shot down on that mission. Over-- we lost an engine just prior to the bomb drop, and we dropped the bombs and made a right turn to go home, and we lost another engine. And we made it back as far as the Rouen, France, area when the oil cooler in the number two engine blew up, and, gee, a B-24 don't fly very good on four engines, let alone one. So, about that time I noticed the bomb bay doors opening up, and three guys were bailing out -- "What the hell's going on?" So the others left, the waist gunner went up to the flight deck to see what's going on. He says, "Get out", you know, because the bailout alarm didn't go off, and I guess our intercom was all shot up. About that time, the bomb bay [laughs] doors closed, so we couldn't get out of there, and we were always told never to try to go out the windows, for fear of hitting the --

Mark: Propeller.

Wald: No, the stabilizers in back of the props. And then, the only way to get out was through that rear camera hatch, and of course we were flying at 29,000 feet, and we had all these heavy sheepskin clothing on, and a chest-type parachute, and I didn't think I could get out that little hatch.

Mark: You're kind of a big guy.

Wald: [Laughs] So, uh, some guy went up ahead of me, and that's the last thing I remember. I don't remember leaving the airplane, I don't remember pulling the ripcord, I don't remember hitting the ground.

I woke up three-four hours later that night in a French farmhouse. And at that time France was occupied. The French resistance underground had picked us up and kept us from the Germans. We were there with them for two weeks, and then the day we were supposed to catch the train to go to Paris and then down into the Pyrenees into Spain, the Gestapo and the SS [Schutzstaffel] and other military units had a big search of the area. They encircled this old lady's farmhouse, and there was nothing to do except to surrender. But in the meantime, when I came to, the French must have taken all my heavy leather sheepskin flying clothes off of me including my helmet headset, canvas helmet, and then I guess, uh, about all I had on was what we called our electric flying suit which we called the "Blue Bunny Suit". You know, it was something like an electric blanket I guess, but it was tailored. You had a jacket, a pair of pants, and you had the slippers, but even then it was cold, you know. This old lady had us up on the third floor of her farmhouse and of course everything was blacked out. In the meantime, we could go downstairs to go to the bathroom which was an outhouse. It was in the nighttime hours. She fed us real good; oh, she was a wonderful cook. So, we were free for fourteen days. And then, when the Gestapo picked us up they took us to what must have been a village jail. We stayed there overnight, and then we went, I am only assuming, we went to the city of Rouen jail, and we were there for three days and three nights. Then they took us to Paris. The German air force was named the Luftwaffe. And then, we went underneath the Arc de Triomphe and down the other side of the avenue, and we went up to the Luftwaffe headquarters up on the fourth floor, and they interrogated us. And we gave them our name, rank, and serial, and nothing ever happened, and then later that afternoon they shipped us to the infamous Rennes prison. The one thing about this prison was that you couldn't enter the prison from the outside; you had to go through a tunnel and then take steps up in the cellblocks. And I guess it was ten, fifteen of us in the same room, other POWs that they had captured.

Mark: Were there some who were your crewmembers, or were they all strangers to you?

Wald: Well, technically speaking, even my crewmembers at that time were more or less strangers, you know. I had only met 'em the day before. So, I guess we were there a week or ten days, and then they shipped us to Frankfurt, Germany, and they put us in a Gestapo prison. We were up on the fifth floor in solitary confinement. I guess it was about maybe four feet by eight feet; a little window,

maybe a three-by-eight-inch window, way up near the ceiling, you know. And I could hear the 8th Air Force. They bombed Frankfurt about six times while we were in that prison. You could hear the “whamp” of the bombs falling. And they must have had some anti-aircraft guns real close, too. And you could hear the explosions of those big 88 mm guns they used to have. So then, we were there for, I can’t remember, it must have been another week or two weeks. And we were interrogated twice because we were in civilian clothes that the French had given us. We were – we were really given some psychological mistreatment.

Mark: Like what?

Wald: Well, because I had a German name they were pretty rough on me on that, telling me I was a traitor to the fatherland. And then, outside the interrogation room, in a courtyard, they would have a four- to six- member firing squad, and they would practice dummy executions. And if you don’t think that’s enough to scare you, boy, that is. And then, oh heck, we hadn’t shaved for a month whatever it was. And we all had – I don’t have much of a beard, but they had a fondness of pulling whiskers out of your chin with their fingernails. And they beat us up with rubber hoses, hit you behind, uh, your knees and in the elbows and things like that.

Mark: And what sort of information were they looking for? I assume they were looking for something fairly specific.

Wald: Well, they wanted your squadron and group, they wanted the ID insignia on the tails of your airplane, where you were stationed, what the target was for that day. So, after the Gestapo released us to the Luftwaffe, they sent us to a place called Dulag Luft [POW transit camps for air force prisoners] which was in the heart of the marshalling yards in the city of Frankfurt. We later learned that our air force bombed the hell out of it, so they moved it outside the city limits. But at that camp, they again had us in solitary confinement, and they investigated and interrogated us. Ah, I guess we were there six, seven days. And then, we were given a complete uniform: OD [olive drab] "Ike" jacket, a pair of pants, pair of shoes, pair of socks, one pair of underwear, and an overcoat, and a flight cap. And they were really serving us good food in this little interrogation camp. We were always saying, “If POW life is gonna be like this, you probably could get by,” you know? So, then they released us, and they put us on a boxcar – about fifty, sixty people to a boxcar, and you couldn’t sit down, and you couldn’t stand up. We were on the rails for seven days,

and we wound up at a camp on the border of Lithuania and East Prussia in them days. I guess it was so far north up in the Baltic Sea that nobody even knew we were up there. But there was-- one compound was full of RAF [Royal Air Force] airmen. Some of them must have been there for four years, you know. 1939, they got shot down. This was 1943.

Mark: '44 by now--'43.

Wald: '43-- well, no, '44, yeah. And then the inner compound was made up of French, I mean, excuse me, was made up of Canadians, and the other, our compound was made up of Americans, you know, gunners. And because the German air force considered their air force the top branch of service, we never had to work. The Army NCOs had to work. So, our buildings looked like they could have been where they took the harvest products and stored them in these narrow rooms. In-between each room there was a firewall of I imagine it was stone, some kind of stone. So, I guess there was 1,500 to 2,500 Americans there, plus the Canadians. And, um, a couple weeks before we were evacuated early in the morning you could hear the Russian big guns booming. So, they evacuated Stalag Luft 6 [then Heydekrug, East Prussia, Germany; now Silute, Lithuania], and they put us on two wooden coal boats and put us out to sea for three days and three nights. And that's another story on how horrific it was.

Mark: Why was that?

Wald: Well, again, they must have had so many people in the hold of those ships that if you wanted to sit down you had to sit down underneath another guy's legs; there was no way to stretch out. And, uh, we landed at a port called Swinemünde [seaport on Baltic Sea in N.W. Poland]. We didn't know it at the time, but that's where the Germans had their V-rocket assembly points. Then we were moved by boxcar again to Stettin [then Germany; now Poland], and then from there we were moved to Stalag Luft 4 [Tychowo, Poland]. This was more or less a fairly new camp, because there was people there when we arrived. So, what happened was, um, I'm going a little bit too far ahead of myself -- normally, we were supposed to be given one American International Red Cross parcel for foodstuffs up in Stalag Luft 6. But they didn't have any, so out of the kindness of the heart of the British and the Canadian[s] they gave us one box for two men. We were supposed to have that once a week, you know. But even having two to a box is better than nothing, because, you know, the

only thing the Germans gave for food was, we would have a slice of what we called black bread and then maybe a little cup of barley soup, maybe a small potato per day.

Mark: And did this food get worse as the war went on, or did it stay that bad?

Wald: The availability got worse.

Mark: Yeah, that's what I mean.

Wald: And then, when I was up in that Gestapo prison in Frankfurt in solitary confinement they gave us a piece of black bread and a bunch of what looked like pickled minnows to eat. I mean, after going three or four days without eating you had to eat it. As horrible as it was, if you didn't eat it you starved to death, you know. So then we were at-- we got there late July, 1944, and we were there at Stalag Luft 4 until the 1st of February, which was my birthday. And my compound was the first to move out again. We were in B compound, and he took us to, uh, Nuremberg, which was the site of Hitler's stadium [Frankenstadion], where they had all them big rallies. And they had all these little tarpaper shacks, so we got to live in those, and also Stalag Luft 3 [Sagan, Germany; now Zagan, Poland-- The camp was the setting for *The Great Escape* book and film.], which was an officers' camp. They were evacuated, and they joined us at Nuremberg. And then, the reason we left Stalag [Luft] 6, I mean 4, was because the Russians had gotten too close to us again. The other three compounds, the guys were put on an eighty-seven day march through Germany. So we were lucky that we got to go to Nuremberg. And, uh, I guess we were at Nuremberg only a couple months when General Patton's armies got too close to us, and they moved us to Moosburg, Germany, which is about thirty kilometers from Munich -- northeast of Munich, I guess. And then we-- oh, while we were at Nuremberg the RAF would come over just about every hour of the night and bomb the targets around Nuremberg. I guess we were underneath an antiaircraft battery, and, lord, the shrapnel would [laughs] would rain down on us. So, they had the Russians' POWs build slit trenches for us in the middle of the streets. So at any time if an air raid siren would sound off we'd drag our tables -- one table we had in the barracks -- and head for the slit trenches and hope to heck that the table would save us from the shrapnel. Because shrapnel could, you know, **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** cut ya pretty bad, coming down on ya. I had picked up four or five pieces, but I can't find 'em anymore. And then, when General Patton got

too close to us they moved us to Munich. And at Munich they must have had 150,000 POWs there from all the nations in the Balkans, and Poland, Russian, English, Canadians. And then, the 29th of April, we were liberated by the 14th Armored Division. And the night before we were liberated the Germans just disappeared. Most of the German guards were in those days were fifty, sixty years old. Most of them were here in America, and they went back to Germany, I guess, maybe on vacation. Then they got stuck over there and couldn't get back, and they went into the military, you know. So, uh, General Patton comes in the next day with riding boots, and he had one of those big renowned pistols on his hip, aimed for the tougher guard, and that's what the Germans had--because he hit one [??] Oh, 500 yards away, it was the front lines. There was a river flowing through the edge of the forest. He never wanted POWs trying to cross the front lines and get back into military control, you know? Some guys took off, we never heard from 'em again. Then, uh, you know where Marinette is, right?

Mark: Yeah.

Wald: It was unusual – there was seven of us from Marinette in the same POW camp.

Mark: Mm. How'd you all find each other?

Wald: Well, in the first camp we found there was three of us. Then we moved to [Stalag] Luft 4, and then we picked up another one. And then we went to Nuremberg, and we picked up one or two more, then we went to uh, Moosburg, and there was another guy. I had known five of the other six.

Mark: Like from school or something?

Wald: From school, yeah, and we were all aerial gunners. I think one of the biggest hardships in POW life was, uh, there was never enough food to eat. I could tell you a lot of side stories, you know. The night that we got liberated, outside of Munich, the army always gave us you know, American bread. It wasn't sliced, but it was white bread. It was just like cake to us, you know? Not only that, after we ate it, people got pretty sick too, because of the richness of

the food. And then they took all the officers out first, and then each section of the camp was taken out. We were trucked to some airfield some place, don't know where it was, and we flew to a camp outside [laughs] Le Havre, France. Excuse me, I'm a little bit too far in advance. Ahead we were taken to a camp near Reims [or Rheims] France, where we were interrogated and given a new uniform, given a few dollars in change – **[approx. 10 sec. pause in recording; tape resumes by repeating the previous sentence beginning with "Excuse"]**

Mark: And some food, I would imagine.

Wald: Yeah. And one of the things that was mandatory was we had four roll calls, and we had to drink a canteen of eggnog every day, probably to build up our weight or something, 'cause I had lost seventy-eight pounds. And then we were trucked to Le Havre and put on a transport ship, and we went-- we sailed into Boston. From Boston we went to-- they gave us another hundred dollars, and then we were put on a train to Fort Sheridan. Then we were given another hundred dollars [laughs], and then we were given sixty days free leave, and then we were ordered to go to Miami Beach for more interrogation. And then I was allowed to transfer back here up to Truax Field for discharge, and then I was discharged on the 30th of September, 1945.

Mark: But you didn't stay discharged. Now, I would imagine that that would be enough military experience in one man's life, but you reenlisted in the Air Force, so I'm interested in why you reenlisted, for what reasons, and how'd you go about doing it.

Wald: Well, my wife, my future wife, wanted to go to the University of Wisconsin so I came down here. I looked around Marinette, but there was still no employment, jobs. So I come down here, and I got myself a printing apprenticeship, and I felt that I wasn't being trained to what I wanted to do. We had work that one Saturday morning, got off at noon. Those were the days before TV, you know. I walked around the square, and I came across a recruiting office. Just for the hell of it, I went in there, and they offered me the same rank back, told me I could get back in flying status if I wanted. I guess I did want to, and, uh, I got transferred to Andrews Field in Washington, D.C.

Mark: Now, how'd your -- how'd your wife take this news that you were re-enlisting?

Wald: She didn't have a choice! [laughs] Anyway, uh, she wanted to travel a little bit I guess. She never was fond of Wisconsin, really. So we got to Washington D.C., and there was a fighter outfit, but they didn't have no need for me in there. I was still flying [unintelligible]. There was no-- so one Friday, I guess it was in 1947, they used to have the Cleveland Air Races from, I think, Long Beach, California to Cleveland. And they wanted volunteers on the weekend who would fly out to Kansas and do the refueling on the P-80s, and I didn't have nothing to do so I volunteered, and it was a B-29 base. And, um, I got to meet the base commander. We were waiting around, and I said "Gee, I'm over here at Andrews, and they don't need me, and I was a bomber man, can you get me a transfer to Kansas?" And within three weeks, I'm on my way to Kansas. So, they convinced me to start flying again. And, uh, at Salina we had a runway about 12,000 feet long and about 500 feet wide. It could take two B-29s off on the same runway, same time. I didn't know it at the time, but B-29s have a, what they call "stop and go".

Mark: What's that?

Wald: That means, uh, you can touch down, and the pilot pushes the throttles forward, and takes off again. Well, nobody ever told me about it, so I unhooked my seat belt and got ready to put everything away, and here we are picking up speed, the tail's coming off, you know? So we took off again and made another landing and called it quits. But, uh, B-29s had a big problem of getting air speed on take-off. After lifting off, B-29s used to have to fly about five miles about 500 feet [laughs] off the ground to pick up air speed, and then climb up. Well, I had gone on a lot of hairy missions in the B-29. We were always ferrying airplanes to Tinker Field, Oklahoma City, or Hill Field, Utah. We'd turn one in and get a later, modified one from the depot. And then, we were flying one day, and we just got off the ground, and the airplane just started shaking to beat hell, snapped all our radio antenna wires. We were about 500 feet off the ground, and the pilot made a 180-degree turn and landed downwind on the same runway, ya know. He said, "Get out of the airplane, and run away from it." He didn't know whether

it was gonna blow up or not. So, uh, that's when I got scared of flying.

Mark: And that was it for you, huh?

Wald: [Laughs] So I volunteered for Japan and got it, but I didn't fly for eight, ten years.

Mark: What did you do in Japan? 'Cause you were there during – you know, that's about the time when the Korean War broke out.

Wald: Well, I originally got assigned to a B-29 map-making organization. They would fly over Japan, Korea, you know, make maps for all the terrain. And then they folded, and they went back to the States, and because I was just a new arrival, I didn't get to go back to the States. And then they put me in a light bomber outfit, a B-26 outfit. I got off of flying status, but I was still into armament. So we used to load the airplanes with bombs and ammunition, rockets, and all that kind of stuff. And then, about a month or a month and a half before the Korean War started, gee, there were no promotions. Everything was frozen as usual, so I elected to get discharged again. And I got sent-- we took the boat back to Seattle, and Seattle back to Marinette, and then I was supposed to report into Chanute Field, Illinois. And they told me then, you know, just that I was gonna get discharged, and a week before I was supposed to get discharged the Korean War started, and they said well, you either, re-enlist with a six hundred dollar bonus, or you're involuntary extended. So, I took the six hundred dollars. And I got sent to, uh, Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas. We were training pilots for a gunnery, and we had a whole bunch of different airports. And no promotions, ya know? As soon as the promotions opened up they recalled the whole darn Colorado National Guard and sent 'em down there, and they just flooded all our slots for promotion because in the old days, they had--they used to have an organizational slot to get promoted, you know. So I got out again, and a couple weeks after [laughs] I got out, the war stopped, you know. So I went to work for 'em Milwaukee. I get a job and work for 'em for a month or so, and I get laid off. They lost all their government contracts. So I had to re-enlist in 1954, and then I went in for twenty-one years, I mean, almost twenty-one, and I retired from the Air Force in 1965.

- Mark: Mm. Now that's a while in the Air Force. Did you get overseas again, did you go back to Europe for example?
- Wald: Yeah, I went back to Germany twice.
- Mark: Where were you in Germany?
- Wald: A place called, uh, Kaufbeuren. It was down near a place called Garmisch, you ever hear of that?
- Mark: Yeah, I've been to Garmisch – ski resort.
- Wald: Mm-hmm. And then, our last assignment was a place called Hahn, which is —
- Mark: It's in the Hunsrück.
- Wald: Huh?
- Mark: It's in the Hunsrück region. I was in Germany when I was in the Air Force myself, so I'm kind of familiar with it. Was it odd for you to be in Germany? I mean, after having been a prisoner there and everything, and now they're supposedly on our side, and for someone who had been imprisoned like that, I'm wondering if you had any sort of lingering animosity.
- Wald: In 1956, when I went to Kaufbeuren Air Base, there was no housing in that area, so we had to live in Augsburg, which was forty miles away. And they were catering to some of the civilian workers, more than what the U.S. Air Force workers – I mean the G.I.s.
- Mark: I suppose the civilians had more money [laughs].

Wald: Yeah, and that kinda irritated us. And then they gave the base back to Germany, and I got transferred to Etain [-Rouvres] Air Base in France – that was near Verdun. And I said, "That's enough of that." Again I wound up in a fighter outfit. And then my enlistment was up, so I thought, "Well, I'll go home." So I get back to, uh, McGuire Air Force Base, [Trenton, New Jersey] and they said, "You can't re-enlist." I said, "How come?" They said, "Well, your AFSA [Air Force Sergeants Assoc.] is on a list that they're not gonna re-enlist anybody. So you gotta retrain." So they sent me all the way down to Lackland Air Base [San Antonio, Texas] for interviewing, counseling. And then they sent me back to Chanute Field to go to Aircraft Mechanic School. I graduated from that, and then I went down to Otis Air Force base in Massachusetts. We were flying the airborne early warning aircraft, C-1 Constellations, with the radomes [radar domes] on 'em. And I got in a little trouble with the second lieutenant, and he said you better re-enlist for -- might get court-martialed so I re-enlisted and went, back [laughs] to Germany. And that's when I went back to Hahn. I went back there during the Cuban crisis. Damn it to hell, there's no promotions again, huh? I've always been at the wrong place at the wrong time. So I got my twenty and a half in and had a little problem with the wing commander. He was trying to court-martial me and everything else, and I beat him to the punch and went down and put in for my retirement and then they couldn't touch me. One Christmas Eve, must have been 1963, the wing commander comes out. He wants to fly his airplane, said he had to go to Ramstein [Air Base, Germany]. Well, the guy was about half-drunk, y'know. That day, I was NCOIC [Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge] of the shop [??]. They said during our morning briefings that we got nothing scheduled, today all hours[??]. Inspections are [??], I'm the only guy livin' on the base. My little airmen were living in a little towns scattered around. So I gave, about 10:00 o'clock that morning, I gave all my airmen the day off. The next day was Christmas, and they were supposed to come back the day after Christmas. But what happened was this colonel comes out and wants to fly this airplane. Well, earlier that morning I got a call from maintenance control and says, "Remove this pilot's oxygen regulator in the cockpit. It's inoperative." Well, they didn't have any in stock, so they grounded the airplane. Well, the guy that grounds the airplane can't un-ground it – another supervisor has to do it. We still didn't have the part, so he was up there, just about drunk. I said, "Sir, you can't fly the airplane without no oxygen regulator," because, you know, pilots gotta wear their mask, even if they're in a pressurized cockpit. About that time, there was a hundred people on the flight line. Just before that, I guess it may

have been a hundred guys – single NCOs and guys that didn't have their wives with them – the NCO club put on a big Christmas party and dinner for us. And about 10:00 o'clock that night I get the call to report to the flight line. What in the hell's coming off at 10:00 o'clock at night? So we round up about, must have been about a hundred guys out on the flight line, everybody arguing with me to help? you know. I says, "I can't un-ground that airplane. Somebody else is gonna have to do it." Nobody wanted to do it. Cause the oxygen regulator was still not installed. But still, some people are hard to get along with. So, in March of '64 I got my retirement orders and went to Rhein-Main [Air Base near Frankfurt, Germany], and caught an airplane to McGuire Air Force base and was at McGuire for about a week, and we got our retirement ceremony, and took off for Marinette.

Mark: And the rest is history, as they say. Um, there's just a little bit of tape left on here, and so I'm interested briefly if after you got out of the service, if you joined any veterans groups.

Wald: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Like, the [American] Legion or something like that. Which ones did you join, and for what reasons?

Wald: Well, I joined the, I think it was American Legion first, because one of my co-workers was high into the Legion.

Mark: And he talked ya into it.

Wald: Yeah, he talked me into it. And then I joined the VFW. And then the government passed a lot of new laws for --get the POWs, where they POWs would have to document the problems that they had with their injuries, and I joined what they call the American Ex-POW Organization, which has really helped us.

Mark: Mm-hmm. And in these organizations, I mean, are you active, like, do you hold commander's posts or something like that?

- Wald: No, no.
- Mark: Or are you just --
- Wald: No, just-- I go to the chapter meetings for our ex-POW chapter, but very seldom. I finally quit the American Legion – they weren't doing nothing, you know? But somebody convinced me to join the VFW as a life member, and then I joined the DAV. I think between the American Ex-POW and the DAV, they really helped us more than anybody.
- Mark: You mean in terms of getting the services that veterans sometimes need.
- Wald: Right. But because I'm a POW, and rated over fifty percent disabled, the VA has got to take care of me, you know.
- Mark: Yeah. What sort of problems did you have as a result of your POW experience?
- Wald: Well, I don't think – coming out of POW camp was, with the weight loss, that was the biggest thing. And then, as you get older, I've always had a lot of stomach problems.
- Mark: Mm-hmm – which you think might have been caused by imprisonment.
- Wald: Not eating. When you lose 70-80 pounds, that has some kind of effect on you. And then, um, I mean in them days I wasn't fat like I am now, you know, I probably weighed 180-190 pounds, and I get out, I weighed 110. So um, I guess the biggest problem was -- and then when I was unconscious, when I hit the ground, probably-- you know, I had a lot of problems with my knee – they wanted to put an artificial knee in, but then they found I'd come down with diabetes. I'd had diabetes about four or five years ago, and now they don't wanna have surgery on that because of that.

- Mark: And you think the DAV and the Ex-POWs have been the best organizations for getting satisfaction, I guess you'd say.
- Wald: Right, benefits. And then, I only owned one pair of socks to my name for seventeen months, and some of these doctors, when you tell 'em things, they don't believe it, you know? They give me ten percent disability for my frostbite. Well, when I came out of the POW camp, **[End of Tape 1, Side B]** gee, my feet felt like they were cold all the time, you know. I always used to wear my socks to bed, and then I'd get that little tingling in my feet. Well, after I had re-enlisted, you can't go on sick call and complain a lot 'cause they'd bump you out of the service, you know? Now that I'm getting older and older, it's getting worse and worse, and the VA don't wanna recognize that. They don't wanna give the veteran five dollars, you know. But they can give all these foreign countries billions and billions, and for us guys that really served the country, they don't want nothing to do with ya. Just lately I got put-- I get called to the VA. There are different clinics every six months to a year. This last clinic, I went to see urology. They said, "There's nothing wrong with you." When there is something wrong, then they dismiss you, and you can't do nothin' about it. And the same with my internal problems. They'll give me all the tests and everything that's necessary, but gee, their final decision leaves much to be desired. Well, ever since I came out of POW camp, I always had a feeling like I had appendicitis, or I had trouble with my bowel movements and trouble with my stomach – thought I had ulcers or something. It was a [unintelligible]. They took all these tests, and they put that scope up your rear end and check all your intestines out, and they found out that one of my big intestines, I got a big kink in it, you know. And, God almighty, they told me I was born like that. That's hard to believe, you know? Because when you don't eat like that for almost seventeen months, there has to be some kind of effect on you.
- Mark: Yeah. You would think, anyway.
- Wald: You know, nowadays, when people go to the VA and they have their compensation hearing, you can be rated two hundred percent and only draw maybe sixty-seventy percent of the pay, because – **[tape ends abruptly, followed by music, approx. 3 min. later]**

[End of Interview]

