

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
SYDNEY M. WOOD
C-47 Pilot, Air Force, World War II.

2000

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Wood, Sydney M., (1923-2003). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 105 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 105 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 105 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Sydney Wood, a New Jersey native, talks about his World War II service as a pilot with the Army Air Corps in Europe. Wood discusses enlisting with a friend who was turned down by the military for being colorblind, basic training at Brady (Texas) in a PT-19, and having no choice in his assignment to multi-engine transport planes. He touches on coming down with the flu when he was supposed to be getting his assignment. Stationed at Heston Air Force Base (London, England), he discusses flying C-47s loaded with fuel to troops stationed in France and a secretive transfer to Sweden. Wood describes military life in Sweden including not being allowed to tell his family where he was stationed, transporting supplies to Kirkenes (Norway) for the Norwegian underground, the poor rations the Swedish Army provided, getting under-the-table alcohol at Swedish restaurants, and difficulties receiving mail. He emphasizes the engine problems caused by the cold, and he estimates they usually only had two airplanes working out of ten. He recalls his impression of efforts Bernt Balchen made to supply Scandinavian allies. Wood touches upon interactions with Swedish and Norwegian personnel, living conditions in the barracks, flying low to avoid German observers, and celebrating the war's end in Stockholm (Sweden). He reads some excerpts from letters he wrote home about life in Sweden and the V-E Day celebrations. After his discharge, he touches on having difficulty settling on a field of study at the University of Illinois. Wood states he does not have fond memories of his experience and expresses some bitterness.

Biographical Sketch:

Wood (1923-2003) served with the Air Corps in Sweden flying supplies into Norway. After the war, he attended the University of Illinois--Champaign-Urbana and moved to Madison (Wisconsin) to pursue a career with Allstate Insurance.

Note: Some memory issues arise due to Wood's struggle with Alzheimer's disease.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.

Transcribed by Noreen Warren, 2010.

Corrected by Channing Welch, 2010.

Corrections typed in by Erin Dix, 2010.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

Syd: Full name?

Jim: I don't care as long as we get that "Wood" in there. That's all I care about.

Syd: Want me to put the date in here too?

Jim: Nope.

Syd: Oh, I see, State of Wisconsin.

Jim: Right.

Jane Wood: Did you get your name down here?

Syd: What's that?

Jane Wood: Oh, good.

Syd: Yeah, think we pretty well covered it.

Jim: Good. Thank you. Now we're off and runnin'. That's goin'.

Syd: And the fact that most people don't give a damn [laughs].

Jim: About what? Anything?

Syd: [laughs] Put parenthetical expression.

Jim: All right, now you're ready to do it?

Syd: Mm-hmm.

Jim: Okay, when where you born, Syd?

Syd: October 25th, 1923.

Jim: October, '23, right?

Syd: '25.

Jim: Oh.

Jane Wood: October 25th, 1923.

Jim: It is the 25th, 1923

Syd: Right.

Jim: So you're just a month after me.

Jane Wood: Really?

Syd: Is that right!

Jim: I was born in September '23.

Syd: I'll be darned.

Jim: 10-23. Where were you born?

Syd: West New York, New Jersey.

Jim: New Jersey. Okay, and what year did you enter military service?

Syd: Let's see, it must have been—ah, when was that have been, 1941?

Jane Wood: Mm-hmm.

Syd: Yeah, Pearl Harbor.

Jane Wood: After Pearl Harbor.

Syd: Pearl Harbor I would think.

Jim: Right after Pearl Harbor?

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: Did you enlist?

Syd: Yes. Went down to Chicago with this friend of mine, and he was gung ho to get in the Marines. He was really--I'll tell you about it, but he was afraid that he was not going to make it. And he was just hoping that the authorities would be just loose enough--enough so that he could get in and go to war that way. He thought that was probably a more reasonable approach to it than running around in the streets and screaming [Laughs] out of the windows and so forth. So, he was really heartbroken when it turned out that he was rejected, one after the other. I would hold the papers for him while he did the test, and I could see the handwriting on the wall. The trouble was colorblind. And he was just hoping against hope that he could get in anyhow, but of course he got

bounced every time. And he was-- went to pieces over that because he was so enamored about the Navy and volunteering for rights, from battleship or whatever, aircraft carrier and a battleship [Laughs]. Ah-- Aircraft carrier yeah, that would be it.

So, that was the way it all began.

Jim: How about you getting in service?

Syd: I got into the service without any problem at all. I made a parallel approach towards each of these three services with the understanding as far as I was concerned, it didn't matter which I went with, the Air Force or the Marines or the Navy. So I was actually applying for consideration in each of those individually, according to what my friend did. For his sake I thought it would be nice if we could go into the service together, but [Laughs] it didn't matter what -- they wanted me but not him.

Jim: Who wanted you?

Syd: The a—the three—

Jane Wood: Air Force?

Syd: Yeah, the three--the big three. The Air Force, the Navy--

Jim: Right, but who wanted you?

Syd: Oh, I see, alright, the Air Force.

Jim: Okay. Where did they send you?

Syd: Up to—gosh, I was just looking at in my notes here.

Jim: Well--

Jane Wood: Texas? Did you go to Brady Texas, first? Or San Antonio?

Syd: Oh, yeah. That's probably what you'd be most interested in.

Jim: You got your basic in San Antonio?

Syd: Yeah, that's right. That's right it was in--I was one of those lucky ones that went from Brady, Texas. And [Laughs] Brady was just bad news, as far as--

Jim: What did you train in?

Syd: We trained in a PT-19. And I was all worried up about hitting a airplane--landing lights [Laughs]. That's the most involvement I got into as far as, during training is concerned. And we had a rather different kinda of set up because of the fact that while we were in the, what we call the primary training, we were with this one particular school in Brady and then the service flipped around so it went from a basic—it went from a primary school to a basic. So that was kind of weird experience for us but it seemed to be— [laughs] the way things were going to work out.

So, ah, let's see what else--

Jim: Well what did you train in? When did you go into the two engine planes? Right away?

Syd: No, no.

Jim: They gauged you--you had your choice to go from single or to multi-engine or what?

Syd: That's right. We--we were given a choice of a single engine or a multiple engine. And we discovered later that this was different, differentiation, from one to the other, simply because of the fact that this was whatever the service wanted at the time.

Jim: Whatever they needed at the time?

Syd: That's right. That's it.

Jim: So they put you in multi-engine right off the bat then?

Syd: That's right.

Jim: Okay.

Syd: That's right.

Jim: And you--

Syd: [Laughs] We were kind of annoyed by that because it was more or less like a rocking chair airplane.

Jim: Well I'm sure all the hot pilots wanted single engine.

Syd: That's right, that's right.

- Jim: So you were considered second rate right off the bat. Yeah, I know how that goes. [Laughs]
- Syd: [Laughs] Right.
- Jim: Okay. Did they send you to another school for that?
- Syd: Um--[long pause] I'm sorry to be so tardy in answering, because I have thought, have NOT thought of these things very much at all during this period of time.
- Jim: Well it's not vital. If you knew it that would be nice, if not--
- Syd: Yeah, yeah.
- Jim: So when was your first experience with a C-47?
- Syd: That was what we—the way it turned out--we were hoping for a more accept--more acceptable type of aircraft.
- Jim: A bomber? A four engine? Or maybe--
- Syd: Or at worst maybe a two engine ship. And there was much cursing [Laughs] and complaining in so far as the assignments were concerned because we felt very much in the background when we got these assignments, depending on the whim of the Air Force at the time.
- Jim: You mean, you were looking for a bomber, and they gave you a transport? Is that what we're talking here?
- Syd: That's about the long and short of it. Right, right.
- Jim: Okay. Now, did they-- where did they send you from there? You must have progressed from Texas into another school somewhere down South I'm sure.
- Syd: That's right. We went to—let's see--that would have been--that would have been the time that we were actually assigned according to what the military description was. In other words they--the company issued orders for—“blankety-blank-blank-blank-blank.” [Laughs] and we'd go to the teletype machines and hopefully look for our name. But, they did in many cases, as with me – we found our name all right but, it wasn't where we wanted it or would have been preferred, if I can make myself clear on that point. That's pretty much – we got --we were feeling that we were discriminated against because all the posters were saying, “Join up, plenty of [laughs] assignments available” blah, blah, blah. Well, what it turned out was they didn't mention in the advertisements, the big posters you know, blah, blah, blah walls and

everything. They didn't mention the fact that we were being considered for multiple engine instead of single. And as I remember it, the basic complaint was that we were being discriminated against by being passed up--

Jim: So where'd you go?

Syd: From there, we went on to Fort Wayne, Indiana. Is that where it is? [laughs] That's the only connection I have ever had with Indiana and that was where we went in for the next stage of training, and—it's kinda of a hodge-podge in my memory. What--do you remember what--

Jim: What type of airplane? Were you in a C-47 then or something else?

Syd: No, no it was not a C-47. The C-47 was sort of – we took as, “Well, all right. Believe that want us to these things, we'll fly it then.” [laughs] and what everybody else was, was uptight about that.

Jim: I'm interested in when you got into that airplane.

Syd: Yeah that would have been class of 19—it changed, because I came down with a case of flu, and I got switched from 44C to--I started it with in 1944—and because of this my excess of ambition to get into a favorable spot I literally wore myself out for the identifying military officer in charge. He said, “Well, you're the only one that's going to be here so we'll have just excess time for you. We'll simply have to wait till the clock goes around one more time to get into the next consecutive assignment going from 44C to 44D.” And the—well, I don't know if you need to put the romance at it.

Jim: No, just tell me where you got that airplane. I keep trying to find that out now.

Syd: Yeah, as far as I can recall it was the multi-engine school that existed at –boy, I didn't think you would be interested in all this stuff, and [Laughs] I could have dug it up.

Jim: When did you go overseas?

Syd: That must have been in 1944.

Jim: Okay. Where did you go?

Syd: She's my statistician.

Jim: Where did you go?

Syd: Ha! Went right over to London. We thought that was a pretty nice assignment.

Jim: Where was your base? North of London? Or south? Do you remember that?

Syd: Ah, yeah, it was —

Jane Wood: Heston.

Syd: Heston Air Force Base.

Jim: Yeah, I've been there. Okay. And what was your assignment at that time?

Syd: Our assignment at that time was -- it must have been -- it was certainly not single engine. It was multiple engine, and we kinda looked down our nose at this particular assignment because we thought it was secondary as far as the military was concerned, and as for the girls back home were concerned it definitely wasn't nearly as romantic [Laughs] as the other, but of course we had no, no control over that at all. [Laughs]

Jim: What was your assignment?

Syd: Ah—

Jim: Where did you fly from?

Syd: Attachment to Army Air Force, and our location was Heston, and that would have involved—at that particular time I got stuck into the secondary, the less desired airplane, the C-47. That's when it reared its--not its ugly head, it was [Laughs] it would have been—

Jim: Where did you fly it, Sydney?

Syd: We flown--we started off flying from London, Heston Air Force Base—flew on the detachment that was mainly interested in getting gasoline over to the Continent.

Jim: This was after D-Day then? Or no?

Syd: Yes, yes that's right.

Jim: The Americans were already in Europe?

Syd: That's right, that's right.

Jim: So you flew from England to France?

Syd: That's right.

Jim: Mainly gasoline? Or all kinds of supplies?

Syd: Ah--later just about all supplies, but THEN the gasoline was the big prime interest.

Jim: Sure, sure.

Syd: So, everything revolved around that.

Jim: How many missions did you have, do you recall?

Syd: [pause] As I recall—it was probably a great number because it was gotten to that stage in the war where there was a surplus instead of a shortage. Nobody really cared a hoot [Laughs] whether we were in 47's or 54's or whatever.

Jim: Did you fly 54's, too?

Syd: No, no.

Jim: I didn't think so.

Syd: The only airplane that I ever had any experience in was the C-47.

Jim: How big was your crew?

Syd: Ah—until we went over onto the Continent, when our crew number was increased automatically—as far as the experience is concerned they put instead of four people on the airplane there were five.

Jim: You, the co-pilot, and who else? What was the other duties they had?

Syd: Take care of the glove compartment [Laughs]. Take care of the maps, study the courses and things like this.

Jim: You had a navigator then?

Syd: That's right. But this is--

Jim: Okay. A radio operator?

Syd: Radio operator.

Jim: That's four.

Syd: Right.

- Jim: And the fifth guy he is—watch the loading and unloading or something of that nature?
- Syd: Yeah, that--I should try and think now what the fifth was [pause]. Well, it was kind of, kind of too bad--not a very good assignment sort of arrangement because it wasn't one which would build up an accrued number of hours behind the wheel. This was what the older pilots were bonded to get, almost all across.
- Jim: Okay. So you had several missions, but then when did they change you and move you over to Sweden?
- Syd: That was supposed to be a super secret. We got laughable to everybody. Everybody knew, the Germans probably best of all, that we were leaving the UK and going on this hardship case where the Swedish were really hard put for protectionist concerns. Of course they were non-combatant at the time, and that was the emphasized very much by our people, the flight commanders. There was not supposed to be any mention made of the fact that we were there to help the Swedes out. This was something that was just not to be talked about.
- Jim: Who would you talk to? I mean, you're in Sweden there, you weren't in England then.
- Syd: [Laughs] We weren't able to talk to the penguins or the aircraft members.
- Jim: How many planes flew over there? Ten?
- Syd: Ten, ten planes.
- Jim: Okay.
- Syd: With each airplane had this assignment of five people.
- Jim: OK, that's fifty.
- Syd: Right, right.
- Jim: The article said there were some more people than that over there. They had 68 listed. Were the others-- they form a sort of a headquarters company or something like that?
- Syd: Ah--that was something that just wasn't talked about [Laughs]. And they, the Air Force people emphasized to us that this is a secret mission, and it would get the--get the "powers-that-be" very upset if it turned out that this information leaked out. But, it was the sort of thing that was practically

impossible to hold back. Our instructions were from the, from the group that we were assigned to was to just not talk to or even mention in letters written home. It was just a no-no as far--

Jim: What did you carry over to Sweden from England? Any supplies, or not?

Syd: Enough clothing to last about two weeks.

Jim: That's what you told you? The mission would just be a two week mission?

Syd: That's right.

Jim: I see. And actually how long were you there?

Syd: Six months.

Jim: Didn't quite work out the way they planned.

Syd: That's right.

Jim: And when you got over there what did they tell you that you were to do?

Syd: [pause] Ah—maintain the Air Force and the airplanes the best we could because they were very subject to—

Jim: Yeah, but I mean, you had a mission—what was your mission?

Syd: Mission was—you'll have to help us describe the material we were given.

Jane Wood: [reading] "To aid the Norwegians in Norway's plight. Supplies into Kirkenes--"

Syd: That's right, that's right. It was very definitely laid out.

Jim: To do what?

Syd: To supply the armed force people in the country of Sweden and a--

Jim: You mean the Norwegians? You were there to help the Norwegians weren't you?

Syd: That's right, that's right. Norwegians and also incidentally the Swedish because they were supposed to be under the table, and they didn't like being illustrated or described as anti-war or cowardly or anything like that [Laughs].

Jim: But were they?

Syd: Ah, yes.

Jim: Mm. I have no sympathy for them. Okay, so when you landed in this--what was the base that you landed in in Sweden?

Syd: Ah, Luleå.

Jim: Okay.

Syd: It's a little town on the Arctic Circle.

Jim: Right. Pretty cold there?

Syd: Ah, awful. [laughs]

Jim: Didn't that bother your airplanes?

Syd: Yes, it just about—as far [laughs] as flying is concerned it just stopped. We couldn't even start the engines most of the time.

Jim: How did you get the engines started?

Syd: With what the Army described as “engine heaters.” Which was [laughs] a all catch-all phrase for any broken down material that you could get together to heat the underside side of the engine area so that we could get the engine—

Jim: You mean you heated them directly, not attached an electric cord to them or anything like that?

Syd: That's right, heating directly.

Jim: With what?

Syd: Combustible material which was supplied--

Jim: You didn't put a fire under those engines?

Syd: No, it wasn't quite that desperate. No, [laughs] but dangerous.

Woman: Charcoal?

Syd: Yeah, I'm trying--I guess that would have been it. The preferred fuel and--

Jim: What was that—in what type of container was that in?

- Syd: It was I think all the cowling around the engine.
- Jim: You wrapped it around the cowling?
- Syd: Yeah. To--I don't remember in much detail what exactly the contact would have been, but--
- Jim: How long would that have to be applied before you could start the engine?
- Syd: Well, this was one of the things that was ridiculous because the equipment came with notations that the engine should not be heated for a period in excess of thirty minutes, forty minutes or something like that. And this was ridiculous because it was nothing that would begin to get the engine hot enough in that length of time. They were just stone cold dead in the market so to speak.
- Jim: So how long did you heat them then?
- Syd: Well, we tried a number of things. And we were [Laughs] always had our fingers crossed as to how long it would probably take to get [**End of Tape One, Side A**] the engine going. Sometimes one crew chief would have good luck, probably some skill that wasn't obvious to the Air Force as such. He had better luck in getting it going, so maybe that was plane number seven or whatever it was that got started that day.
- Jim: How long did that take?
- Syd: Oh, it would take probably in the area of--I don't remember it. It was just a big joke because it was so inefficient and so out of control. I was, I was—my memory serves me for a period of *at least* three or four hours.
- Jim: Before you could start that engine?
- Syd: Yeah, that's right. And sometimes--
- Jim: Boy, that's a long time.
- Syd: That's right.
- Jim: It really must have been cold.
- Syd: Ah, yeah, well, it was—seems to me I wrote home that what--do you remember what that was?
- Jane Wood: 30 below zero?

- Syd: Something like that, yeah. Ridiculous-- everybody that came across that figure said, "Why, that's crazy." And it was crazy, but that's the reality of it all. They were very, very inexperienced.
- Jim: Did the Swedes help you there at that base? Did they help you load the airplane, or did they just bring it up and you load it?
- Jim: Ah, it seems to me we had to take care of the loading.
- Syd: And generally, what kind of things did you fly? I mean what supplies?
- Jim: All almost A to Z. Just anything that they were short of, and they were short of just about everything. [Laughs]
- Jim: Right. Was it mostly arms and that sort of thing or food too?
- Syd: No, we weren't sharing any--that was too provocative as far as the Nazis were concerned. So, no armament was allowed.
- Jim: Did you see any Nazis hanging around your plane?
- Syd: We were always afraid of that.
- Jim: But they never came there?
- Syd: Well, we were told after the war. I guess the story is that they were not mentioned, but they were there. It was a—Stockholm, for example, was just an open, open sore—
- Jim: Oh, I understand, but your planes weren't in Stockholm.
- Syd: No, that's right [Laughs] But, it started out--started out into the [Laughs] other situations, and it was kind of touch and go for a while. Actually as far as armament was concerned, as I remember there was one .45 allocated per plane. Anything more than that was "no, no," and it had to be left in the hold or at least left at the Air Force base instead of taking off out the door.
- Jim: Did you fly every day?
- Syd: No, we couldn't fly every day because the physical conditions were just impossible.
- Jim: When you flew, did you fly as a group or just one or two planes at a time?
- Syd: We flew as many—put as many airplanes in the air as we could.

Jim: Well, that was a maximum of ten. You only had ten.

Syd: That's right. [Laughs] But the joke was that maybe instead of ten there were two.

Jim: That were flyable you mean?

Syd: Yeah, right, that were flyable. Right.

Jim: You must have had a crew there beside the flying people who maintained the airplanes. Weren't they Air Force?

Syd: That's right, that's right.

Jim: That's the extra people. You must have taken them over from England when you came.

Syd: Right, right, that's correct.

Jim: What about food?

Syd: Ah--

Jim: Who supplied that?

Syd: It seems to me, the—it was either the Norwegians or a—

Jane Wood: Swedish. Air Force?

Syd: Yeah, right—Army--Swedish Army.

Jim: Oh, really, the Swedish Army?

Syd: Mm hmm.

Jim: Well, that was nice.

Syd: Yeah--

Jim: So you got hot meals?

Syd: We got cold, cold boiled potatoes, un-skinned, and an appalling diet. They, the officers explained to our bunch that the Swedish and Norwegians all look at the food as what we would call "D-rations." In other words, an undesirable diet. Not sure of capable of sustaining much more than a certain number of days.

Jim: They didn't cook food for you? Was it all cold or not?

Syd: It was, they cooked on the Swedish--on the Swedish—oh, what is that now? It was served--served to us by the Swedish people, and it was a joke because the diet was almost completely fluid. You'd have cold milk, cold cereal, a type of rye crisp, that sort of thing, and that was an unhappy time. We were spoiled [laughs], and their approach to the feeding was what we would call "D Rations."

Jim: Did they give you any fish?

Syd: Yeah—

Jim: I would think so.

Syd: Most of us wouldn't eat it.

Jim: That's fish country. Oh, you wouldn't eat it?

Syd: I wouldn't because I was just not that, not that it was nothing wrong. I just didn't like it. I never [laughs]--

Jim: Okay. All right. Did you get any food from the Air Force? The American Air Force, did they send any food in to you?

Syd: I think they probably must have. They must have.

Jim: That would just be C-Rations then.

Jim: That's right. Exactly, I forgot about C-Rations.

Syd: At least you had some candy then.

Syd: Yeah, chocolate. [Laughs]

Jim: Right, so that helped balance the junk that the Swedes--

Syd: That's right. That was a happy time to open those C-Rations. [Laughs]

Jim: So, did you get any beer? Or anything stronger?

Syd: No.

Jim: No Aquavit?

Syd: Aq—Aquavit? Is that [laughs] Norwegian beer?

Jim: No, no, no, it's liquor.

Syd: Oh.

Jim: It's ice cold, clear. It's really made in Denmark.

Syd: Yeah, yeah. We had--

Jim: But they all drink it.

Syd: We had a—we had that very under the table a lot because the waiters were told not to, not to, let, allow the Americans to have any of that.

Jim: Of what--any liquor?

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: So, you bought it anyway.

Syd: As best we could. Yeah, we went to a restaurant.

Jim: Where?

Syd: Once we—once we—in Luleå .

Jim: Oh, that's where the base was.

Syd: That's right.

Jim: You couldn't go beyond that?

Syd: That's right.

Jim: Right?

Syd: That's right.

Jim: You couldn't go anywhere else?

Syd: That's right.

Jim: Okay.

Syd: We—as the war went on they liberated us—I wrote that down—or else we would stock up in things like roast beef and—

Jim: Where did you get that?

Syd: And something that they called schnapps, which was --

Jim: [Laughs] Peppermint.

Syd: Ah, yeah. The Swedish total allowed was by the restaurant--by the people in control with the--with the rations. They were set for--on the basis of a centiliter allowance, and that was for the Americans more than--we winked at. But as far as the authorities were concerned, we were not supposed to be served more than this fifteen centiliters, total. That would be schnapps, something like that.

Jim: You ate in that town that's next to the base?

Syd: Ah--

Jim: In the Swedish restaurants?

Syd: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: How did those ladies who took care of the restaurant there take to treat you? They treat you all right?

Syd: Yes, very nice, very appreciative. They were really tickled pink that the Americans were--

Jim: Helping.

Syd: Right.

Jim: Did they speak English?

Syd: [pause] Depending--on what school they went to and what sort of a social--worth they were or what.

Jim: What about--could you go in that town at night and go to a tavern?

Syd: No, no.

Jim: None of that.

Syd: That was definitely--

Jim: So you didn't have a chance to meet any of the young girls then?

Syd: That's right, that's right.

Jim: Well, that's too bad.

Syd: Yeah, we were--we were very mad about that. [Laughs]

Jim: I'm sure.

Syd: [Laughs]

Jim: Six months is a long time.

Syd: You bet, you bet.

Jim: Did they have any hospital facilities? What would you do about that? If somebody got injured?

Syd: They had facilities I'm sure, but they were modest.

Jim: Where? On the base or in that town?

Syd: It would have to be —

Jim: Really, on that base.

Syd: By the Swedish – no, Norwegian facilities, not anything on the, on the--

Jim: The base.

Syd: Base, yeah.

Jim: So you would have to fly anybody who was injured, you would have to fly them out?

Syd: Right.

Jim: Would you fly them somewhere in Norway or would you fly them to England?

Syd: Depending on what time of—what sort of progress of the war was at the time. At the very beginning I'm sure that they would be taken on a very strict basis. I mean an allotment for--

Jim: Allotment? I mean, talkin' about injured people, people who need medical care.

Syd: Right, right.

Jim: You didn't have a doctor then that you saw at the base. They didn't have a doctor there?

Syd: They must have, but I don't remember that.

Jim: Okay. And so where did you get the supplies? How did the supplies get to your planes that you took over to Norway? Did the Swedish bring them in by truck or how?

Syd: No, [laughs] the Swedish wouldn't touch those with a ten-foot pole. [Laughs] That was the hot spot. You can't take American supplies and use them to outfit Swedish or Norwegian people. It was on a very, very limited basis. I remember writing back to Bernt Balchen. I mentioned that, and, wow, we weren't supposed to say anything about this operation at all, even to our parents. And you just cut, cut the mail off, and it was subject to censor, and if we did that, violated the censor rules too much, why we would throughout regret it. And then [laughs] they didn't give us any details for what was usually done, but it was the black--black pen most of the time.

Jim: So you didn't get much mail?

Syd: No, no, we didn't get--

Jim: Could you write out? Did you send letters home?

Syd: Ah, yeah, on a limited basis just as long as we didn't include any war information.

Jim: Oh, yeah, that was standard. What was your rank then?

Syd: Ah, second lieutenant.

Jim: Now you took supplies, that's what you carried, was is, food supplies mainly? Food? Or clothing, that sort of thing?

Syd: Just about anything and everything.

Jim: Where did that come from?

Syd: It came from Bernt Balchen scratching around until he got some satisfaction between the American authorities and the Norwegians because the Bernt

Balchen was very humane and very much wanted to do the best thing he could for the—

Jim: Where would those supplies come from?

Syd: They come out of stockpiles that were set aside.

Jim: Right. In England? In America, in Sweden, where?

Syd: As far as we knew they were in England. There were shipped further from England by undisclosed air service which of course would be coming from us, really.

Jim: Yeah, but I'm confused as to how you got these supplies that you were supposed to carry. Did planes bring them in? Or how--did people come in by trucks or how? You had a lot of supplies to carry. They must have come from somewhere.

Syd: That's right. That's right. There was a dropping in the dark as far as that was concerned because obviously they couldn't snap their fingers and provide much in the way of material. And it was all--as I recall it was all censored, and very closely, very closely looked after.

Jim: Who looked after it?

Syd: Ah, the American Air Force.

Jim: Well, you were the American Air Force.

Syd: Yet still, we were not supposed, not supposed to put anything in our letters.

Jim: How did you get your supplies?

Syd: Ah--they were, they were supplied by arrangement through the Norwegians.

Jim: How would they get them to you?

Syd: [pause] Nah, I can't remember. There was a lot of joking about that sort of thing because according to our guys our arrangements were sorta, yeah Bernt Balchen would send us over there to that--into that forest tract and drop all the supplies that a—he was always after, Bernt Balchen was always after the American Air Force to pitch in, and he was their—I'm trying to think of a good-- I know he was mentioned every letter that I wrote, that—in fact the newspapers sooner than later acknowledged the fact that we were there, and we were flying C-47s and that ten of us [pause] in a total. Yeah, I can't remember what the detail on what that was.

Jim: Did any of the planes crash?

Syd: No.

Jim: They all worked okay?

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: In spite of the weather?

Syd: No, they didn't work [laughs] in spite of the weather, they worked *in spite* of the weather.

Jim: What kind of facilities did you live in?

Syd: We lived in—Norwegian air base facilities. It was actually one of the arrangements was that the Swedish Air Force or Norwegian Air Force would subsidize the use of the barracks which were—

Jane Wood: Wasn't it the Swedish army base?

Jim: Well, anyway, what did you live in?

Syd: A barracks.

Jim: How many men in the barracks?

Syd: Oh, it must have been twenty or thirty.

Jim: So most of you are in one barracks? Or two?

Syd: Yeah, something like that. And—

Jim: How was that heated?

Syd: Those were heated with space heaters as far as I can recall.

Jim: Wood?

Syd: Yeah, something like that.

Jim: That's what I assume, yeah. Did you have plenty of clothing to keep warm?

Syd: Minimal.

- Jim: Was frostbite a problem?
- Syd: Yeah, if you were pretty stupid in the act of exposing yourself without gloves or whatever.
- Jim: How cold was it in the airplane?
- Syd: Oh, maybe about—I'd say maybe 10 or 15 degrees higher than—warmer than it was outside.
- Jim: The outside?
- Syd: Mm-hmm.
- Jim: Did you have any warm gloves or any—you didn't have any electric gloves or anything like that?
- Syd: No. All of this came about with practically no preparation on our part in so far as going into the service with the people in the Air Force was concerned. That was just all standard. And it was supplied to us, and we didn't ask questions.
- Jim: How much contact did you have with the Swedish Army?
- Syd: Minimal. The Swedish were very, I mean the Norwegians were very jealous of—the care that the Air Force—that we—they felt that we were being taken care of, of them, as well as their—the every day-to-day supplies and things like that. And in a lot of cases the Norwegians would be able to set the table, and it was what was served would be maybe warm milk, lukewarm, and just sort of a gruel type of thing. It was minimal as far [laughs] as we were concerned, and as I mentioned before, I think, the Army Air Force, *our* Army Air Force, figured, as it was explained to us anyway, that what we were fed was “A Rations,” the best the country had to supply. And, all the people that were in the war effort on the other side, the Finnish and Swedish and so forth, they would be supplied with much less.
- Jim: You said Norwegians. What Norwegians were at your base?
- Syd: The ones that were—that had escaped from the [unintelligible] that were set up by the Norwegian Army.
- Jim: They had a camp there for them?
- Syd: Yes, and they didn't tell us where it was. [Laughs] But—
- Jim: Did you have much contact with them?

- Syd: As we could—we—they were very friendly to the—our people and dependent on our language situation. There weren't very many people that was speaking Japanese up there [laughs], and there weren't very many people that were speaking Swedish, too, or Norwegian, because they just didn't get that in school.
- Jim: Yeah, The Norwegians, they didn't have any duty there, when they were at your base, did they?
- Syd: No that's right. They were--
- Jim: They were just in camp there. They just escaped from Norway, that's just about the only thing they accomplished.
- Syd: Yeah, that's right, they were put in a closet [laughs] as soon as they got--
- Jim: How many of those were there of them, do you know?
- Syd: It would be a guess as far as my recollection.
- Jim: I mean, a thousand, or two thousand?
- Syd: Oh, no, no, no, nothing like that, maybe two or three hundred at the very most.
- Jim: You didn't eat with them?
- Syd: I don't remember.
- Jim: Okay, and the Swedish people then, there was very few of them around too, if you sorta ran your own base, or not?
- Syd: That's right. There were very few of them around. There were--well, you know how it goes as far as the contributions are concerned--
- Jim: Did they have an armed guard around your camp, your base?
- Syd: No.
- Jim: That they maintained?
- Syd: No, nothing that—I'm sure it must have been, but we didn't--we didn't want to be provocative so we just--
- Jim: You didn't test that perimeter?

Syd: [Laughs] Yeah, that's right. That's a no, no, so let's talk about something else.
[Laughs]

[pause] I wish I could remember more detail for you--after all it was over fifty years ago. [Laughs]

Jim: Then tell me about a typical mission. When would you take—

[Approximately 10-second pause in recording]

Syd: [unintelligible] possible time that we knew from experience that we were gonna have a lot of trouble because the weather was so darn cold. And it would get to be a joke after a while tryin' to start these engines that were already impossible as far as conditions were concerned. And indeed the Norwegians had the same trouble, too.

Jim: So how long did it—when did you generally start a mission then? In the morning?

Syd: As soon as it was possible because of—

Jim: I mean, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00? What?

Syd: Yeah, yeah, something like that. We would start tryin' to get the engines started something like 8:30, 9 o'clock.

Jim: Where would you go usually? Where did you go to?

Syd: The standard base that we were aiming for was Kirkenes?

Jim: I'm sorry.

Syd: Kirkenes.

Jim: With a "K?"

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: Okay. I'll figure it out.

Syd: I didn't know—geography wasn't my strong point.

Jim: So that was in northern Norway?

Syd: That's right.

- Jim: But it was in Norway that you were going, not Sweden?
- Syd: Yeah, I think that's a fair statement. That's right.
- Jim: Well, if you're bringing supplies, you know, then I mean Norway was occupied, so it was a question of whether you could fly into Norway without gettin' shot down by a German plane.
- Syd: That's right. That's very—we were just—we just were told to just be darn careful and to be quiet about the fact [laughs] that we were there and just hope for the best because there was no diplomatic maneuvering—
- Jim: Right. Did you have any Germans--see any German planes when you were in the air?
- Syd: Ah I think we saw some—[**End of Tape 1, Side B**] on one particular flight and it was way off in the distance. That was during the time that the war started to wind down. And the Nazis were a thing of the past, and we didn't see any of them. We just counted on our blessings.
- Jim: So you'd fly to this base and then you'd land? Empty the airplane and would you bring anything back?
- Syd: About the only landing place that we could land was supplied by the City of Kirkenes, and it was all at that time governed by—controlled by the Russians. We were reminded of that almost everyday, the fact that we were there as the guests of the Russians.
- Jim: Was that in Finland?
- Syd: Ah, no, Kirkenes was not in Finland. It was definitely in Norway as I remember.
- Jim: How did the Russians get over to Norway?
- Syd: I don't know. They were quiet about it. [Laughs]
- Jim: Okay. So you had a flight—but when you took a mission like this you didn't fly out and dump and come fly back but you flew over and landed at this place and then re-loaded on something and came back?
- Syd: That's right, that's right.
- Jim: What did you generally bring back?
- Syd: Ah, hay for the horses. [Laughs]

Jim: What horses?

Syd: That standard's a joke.

Jim: Yeah, I know.

Syd: [Laughs]

Jim: Did you mean you literally brought hay back to your home base?

Syd: No--

Jim: I didn't think so.

Syd: I don't think so either. [Laughs]

Jim: Maybe you brought food back?

Syd: That's much more likely.

Jim: Right.

Syd: Because they were short of everything.

Jim: So, you didn't fly back with very much stuff though. Your main--

Syd: No, there was only this sorta—

Jim: You were going one way primarily with the supplies.

Syd: Right. But as far as shortage was concerned almost everything was a shortage as far as they were concerned.

Jim: So how long did it take you to get to that base in Kirkenes?

Syd: Ah—if we had good luck and didn't have any balky engines or something like that, it might be a couple hours.

Jim: Two hours?

Syd: Yeah, something like that. That would have had very tight restrictions as far as flight-time is concerned because the time, the winter time is very minimal, as you know, as far any kind of daylight.

Jim: They didn't have much light.

Syd: No.

Jim: Any they didn't want you flying at night.

Syd: That's right.

Jim: Nor did you.

Syd: That's right. We were [laughs] rather happy to stay warm and snug in the--on the ground. But—

Jim: You flew at what level generally, do you recall?

Syd: Ah, pretty much tree--treetop.

Jim: Treetop? Treetop level?

Syd: Mm-hmm.

Jim: Why so low?

Syd: You didn't want to be seen by the German observers. Where's that—where's that?

Jane: [unintelligible] At 200 feet?

Syd: Yeah, I'm referring now to--

Jim: There's no room for loops at 200 feet.

Syd: For what?

Jim: For loops--one small mistake, and you're in the turf.

Syd: That's right, that's right.

Jim: Yeah.

Syd: And if we were forced, forced landing—land we were told that we'll try to get you if we can, but--

Jim: They wanted you to commit suicide probably.

Syd: [Both laugh] Right. Just don't be foolish about--

Jim: Yeah, what were you supposed to say if they captured you? Did they tell you?

Syd: No, minimal. The amount of instruction we got for--from our own people was minimal. Probably a lot of this will be denied, but [laughs] it's by the newspaper [unintelligible].

Jim: Okay. If a—did the supplies change, or did you always have the same supplies that you took over or not? It was--did that change much? You said they flew most anything.

Syd: That's right, that's right. It was almost a joke because at the end of the list was hay for the horses. [Laughs]

Jim: You took, you brought hay from Sweden?

Syd: Not from Sweden, no. It would be—Norway, it would have to be.

Jim: And you were bringing this back to your home base? I don't understand.

Syd: Ah, the situation as it was described to Balchen—was simply that. They need everything. They're short of food, they're short of munitions, and short of air mattresses. [Laughs] No, cross that out. But that's--

Jim: But if you're taking hay it must have been for horses.

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: Where were the horses?

Syd: They were hidden in the bushes. [Laughs]

Jim: In Sweden? Or Norway?

Syd: In, in Norway.

Jim: Okay, so the hay was going west then? You picked up bales of hay in Sweden and took them over to Norway? Right?

Syd: Right, right.

Jim: Okay. How did the hay, the bales of hay get to you?

Syd: Ah, remember what--what the formula was?

Jim: Formula?

- Syd: Well, it was almost a formula because it was such a constant need. They would read off to us what [cough] excuse me, I had a dry mouth. Could I get the water?
- Jane Wood: [unintelligible]
- Syd: I was just looking at some of my notes here. I suppose you were pretty well--
- Jim: Have you kept in contact with any of the people that were in your airplane?
- Syd: Yes, ah—one of the--one of the fellows was the crew chief at the post assigned to our airplane, and he was more ambitious than I as far as the languages were concerned, and he—he was—the last time we saw him he was pretty much joking with us—the fact that he would say that we would send him hay for horses and actually what they really wanted was tobacco for their pipes. [Laughs]
- Jim: So, after—when did you come out of Sweden back to the United States?
- Syd: It was—it wasn't very long. For logistic problem and it was--I'm sure it was handed by as traffic would--
- Jim: Right, as you were rotated home—when was that?
- Syd: It would have been 19—
- Jim: That's okay. Don't worry about that. What?
- Syd: That would be about 19—
- Jim: Right after the war or were you there in Europe for awhile?
- Syd: We were there for quite a time because of the fact the Air Force was not prepared to ship home as we would have liked. They admitted they were way behind, and they had to, had to stock us in—let's see—oh, France—whatever—whatever means were best.
- Jim: So they wouldn't bring you back home then right away?
- Syd: No.
- Jim: But when the war was over did you--then there was no reason for any secrecy.
- Syd: That's right, that's right.
- Jim: They let you go to Stockholm then?

Syd: That's right.

Jim: They did? So, tell me about that experience.

Syd: Well--

Jane: V-E Day.

Syd: Did you read the part—

Jim: I want to hear what you say. I can read it anywhere.

Syd: Yeah, [laughs] I would have to quote myself because that's the only source I had, maybe except for friendships that developed between, [audible yawn] between some of the other crew members as ourselves. Because that got the— [laughs] a lot of the people would check back with this and how--how's the job going and so forth. And there was a big—a big surfeit of military people, and we were not—not nearly as well equipped as we should have been to take care of the end of the war congestion because it was just pandemonium.

Jim: Did you go to Stockholm?

Syd: Ah, that they were—they were—the American authorities were anxious to— well, they had what they called reasonable approach, [laughs] but that would be one like the jumping—the jumping in Norwegians, and, well, not so much the Swedish, they just sorta rode along on the way because there was a certain lot of hard feeling between the American Air Force and the Swedes.

Jim: Why was that?

Syd: Well, because of the fact that they—they did it to us. It seemed that they were rather short in so far as participation is concerned. They seemed to be most generally interested in protecting themselves rather than taking care of other people.

Jim: So you didn't have any contact with these folks, or did you?

Syd: Not, not that--not that they were interested in starting--

Jim: Now, I mean, you personally, did you meet any of these Swedes?

Syd: I think I must have.

Jim: Oh, obviously it—nothing memorable happened then.

Syd: That's right, except of the mass demonstrations in the streets and like that.

Jim: Well, did you see that?

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: Where was that?

Syd: This must have been in Stockholm at the—no other place that we were rendezvousing. So, yeah, I remember writing home about that.

[reading] "German spies everywhere, planes were not disguised, Swedish government must have been aware of our presence."

That's the letter home.

[reading] "A few days later we flew up to Luleå, a small town of five- six- seven hundred people on the Arctic Circle at the top of the Bay of Bothnia."

[pages turning]

Jim: You have two pieces there.

Syd: Yes, I got over that part that I read before.

[reading] "The temperature at Kirkenes was 30-40 below zero with high winds. We couldn't start airplanes, very often couldn't fly because it was so cold. We were equipped only with charcoal heaters."

This is all after—[pages turning] [laughs]

Jim: Tell me more—

Syd: Well, where should I start?

Jim: The beginning, always start at the beginning.

Syd: That's the logical place. It sounds like a—

Jim: Well, just start—start up here.

Syd: Okay, this part here:

[reading] "I was in Stockholm when the wonderful news came last Tuesday, and I have never seen such huge crowds in all my life. It took 30 minutes to walk one block, and then it could hardly call it walking. Gosh, what a

celebration those people were having. For them the war was all over since they all managed to keep their blood from being spilt.” [Laughs] And we better not – you better not use that. It’ll stir things up. [Laughs]

Jim: I don’t mind stirring things up. Don’t worry about that.

Syd: Okay. [Both laugh.]

Jim: I mean it’s fairly safe now, don’t—

Syd: Yeah, right. I don’t think they’re going to –

Jim: I don’t think they’re going to come after you.

Syd: Eyebrows, that’s all [Laughs]

[reading] “What a celebration these people have. For them the war’s all over since they managed to keep their blood from being spilt.” [Laughs] Obviously we were a little irked about that, their non-participation. Ah— [resumes reading] “And they have been making money from being in the middle. I suppose they were doubly happy. But my uniform was on and I got spotted as being an American. And they, all Swedes,” it says, “all started shouting and singing. What a wonderful big fuss.” Ah, and I have the Swedes bracketed, though. It must have been some inference there. “People started throwing and [laughs] singing and invoking a big fuss. People started throwing me up in the air--”

Jim: Throwing you up in the air?

Syd: Mm-hmm. Yeah, this was—I was there to report. “This is me speaking--”

Jim; Yes, I understand.

Syd: Not for the—I—not necessarily for a microphone.

[resumes reading] “People made me a big fuss, people started throwing me up in the air and carrying me around on their shoulders. Grim,” and this in quoting myself— “Grim shadows of the fight with Japan still left. Some Americans here before we came, but they haven’t been doing the same kind of work. We were allowed to send by mail. By being up in Sweden I had missed out on the opportunity of getting an airplane of my own, getting a promotion along with the Americans that went through the channels. With a months leave wanted to stay with the 86th.” That was the squadron number. “Our quarters are far better than any provided by the US Army except for The Edwards and the people in London that were our billet. Food was terrible, 98% potatoes, pickled fish. [Laughs] My only hint of meat, that we got once

in a while in a week was salt pork. Perhaps we should return to the house—to the base we left last December. I doubt it. But our own complement is different, and many have already departed for their more important jobs and mourn our [Laughs] bitterness. Still darkness and we shall pitch up as well and follow their footsteps across the sky.”

That is a bonafide word, [laughs] expression if I may--

Jim: This is another page here--

Syd: Yeah, this—that explains in too much detail I’m sure.

[reading] “The papers each day featured long articles about our work here along with our personnel and our planes but still we must keep quiet. Parents didn’t hear from their people from it’d be thirteen weeks. People touring my base. People shook my hand until it ached and started American, English songs. Up in the air and carried me around [laughs] on their shoulders. That made a big impression on me.” [Laughs] Now--

Jim: So how did you get out of the service? They flew you back, take a ship back, how?

Syd: We took a troop ship. The worst, slowest, surface ship available. Had it been the case of flying into the war we would have gone by plane. That was the much—much easier way for the Air Force, a less expensive way, but I can remember being—we were all upset by the way things turned around. The important people go home first.

Jim: So you finally came home and you’re discharged in New Jersey?

Syd: Ah, yes.

Jim: Did they give your group any special recognition?

Syd: No.

Jim: No unit citation?

Syd: Oh, that was—that was very modest. It might have been something that we got, and remember?

Jim: You must have got an Air Medal.

Jane: You got an Air Medal.

Jim: Sure, you got—

Jane: And a Norwegian Cross.

Jim: Sure, An Air Medal

Syd: And the Norwegian Cross, but--

Jim: The Norwegian Cross.

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: Nothing from Sweden?

Syd: What's that?

Jim: Nothing from Sweden?

Syd: [Syd and Jane laugh] No.

Jane: They gave you a banquet. [unintelligible]

Syd: Yeah. They gave us a meal.

Jane: You sat next to—

Syd: I sat next to ah--Thor Hyerdahl [Norwegian marine biologist, explorer, 1947 Kon-Tiki Expedition] that was the big thrill for me. Of course I didn't know at that time—

Jim: Well, he wasn't famous then.

Syd: That's right. That's right. Someone cranked up [laughs] the machines that give us an award at the time—

Jim: So after you got out of the service what did you do?

Syd: Immediately after the service I went back to school. At the University of Wisconsin--?

Jane: Illinois.

Syd: Illinois, that's right.

Jane: Champaign-Urbana.

Jim: And what did you learn there?

- Syd: Unfortunately, I pursued the wrong—the wrong field. I was most anxious to continue in aviation, but I—there weren't any schools that were substantially endorsing that sort of thing because everybody wanted to get into aviation that they possibly could. But already it was horrendously crowded.
- Jim: So you didn't keep up with your flying after you got out of the Service
- Syd: That's right.
- Jim: Not at all?
- Syd: Not at all. I think I flew once or twice in the—not in C-47's but in Morey Airport single engine—"flivvers" we called them, and they frightened us because they were—[Laughs]
- Jim: Underpowered.
- Syd: Yeah, yeah.
- Jim: You were spoiled with two engines, you see.
- Syd: That's right, right.
- Jim: Okay, so what did you end up doing?
- Syd: I went back to--not back to Wisconsin because I couldn't get into Wisconsin to pursue the career I would like to follow, because the State of Wisconsin required a foreign language. I didn't have a foreign language, and no appeal to me so I went back to University of Illinois. And took kind of a mish mash. I didn't have any vocational guidance at all.
- Jim: So what kind of work did you end up in?
- Syd: I was flying the bar. I found whatever I could do, that wasn't actually suitable. Ah—whatever. Some of them I can remember were pretty gruesome because they were so undesirable: working in the water softener factory for example. And temporary jobs and employment were—employment opportunities were pretty scant.
- Jim: So how did you get to Wisconsin then?
- Syd: [pause] I can't remember.
- Jane: You became an agent for Allstate Insurance.

Syd: Oh, yeah.

Jim: Oh, an insurance agent.

Jane: And worked for--

Jim: Oh, you went into insurance business?

Syd: Yeah.

Jane: 30 years.

Jim: 30 years, okay. Then they moved you up here?

Syd: They were up here already. They were interested in building their income of course, and they were interested in training us to produce the maximum response. I didn't like it at all. It seemed a very facetious sort of an occupation.

Jim: When did you move to Madison?

Syd: We moved—when was that Jane?

Jane: '49.

Jim: '49.

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: Had you married then?

Jane: Yes.

Syd: Yes.

Jane: We married in '47.

Jim: Where did he find you?

Jane: Ah down in Lake, Lake—Highland Park, Illinois. [Syd laughs]

Jim: You were attending Illinois? Is there where he ran into you—at school?

Syd: No.

Jane: No, I was working at Abbott Laboratories. **[End of Tape Two, Side A]**

- Jim: Oh, all right, okay. Did you join any veterans organizations?
- Syd: I can't recall. I don't think so. Ah, I was—I couldn't, at the time. I was kinda bitter about the whole experience [laughs].
- Jim: Oh, really?
- Syd: And wanted to get far from it as I could.
- Jim: What embittered you?
- Syd: Well, it started with the--
- Jim: Other than the fact that they dumped you in the middle of nowhere and wouldn't let you talk to anybody. Other than that, right? [Both laugh]
- Syd: [Laughs] It wasn't cake and ice cream all of the—all of the time, no. Ah, no, I don't have fond memories of life out of the service. I was very, very thrilled by the opportunity of being in the Air Force. And I knew it was just a hopeless job of trying to find an opening, you know. Everybody wanted to—
- Jim: Sure. There were a lot of pilots.
- Syd: Right, they were a dime a dozen.
- Jim: But you enjoyed flying?
- Syd: Oh, yeah, I loved it, yeah. I really enjoyed it. I even enjoyed the different stages of training.
- Jim: Oh, sure.
- Syd: We went through it with some logic there, and logic in the insurance business? No, no, forget it [laughs].
- Jim: Yeah, okay.
- Syd: Well, what else can I say? [Laughs]
- Jim: Well, then your experience with the Air Force then is that you felt that they weren't—they put you in a bad spot, was this where they sent you that bothers you or what? Did they give you a promotion?
- Syd: No, well, I was bitter about that because [laughs] they didn't give us promotion except they happened to be in line. In other words, they stepped

out of line by going to Sweden to help out there, that precluded, again as I pointed out rather bitterly, but it would—

[reading] “Big security trip. No idea of where we were going. Mail was held up for six weeks before. We were told we’d be gone for a week to ten days. Actually it was five to six months.”

Well, thanks for being interested in it.

Jim: Your parents still alive? They never heard from you during that time?

Syd: Oh, yes, they were as soon as the war was over we—

Jim: Oh, yeah, but not while you were in Sweden?

Syd: Oh, no, no.

Jim: You never sent anything out?

Syd: Ah, you mean information? Oh, yes, the Air Force was very liberal as far as information was concerned. They were concerned with war time, but they just couldn’t care less as far morale was concerned.

Jim: How did they send your mail out?

Syd: [pause] My folks sent a package of letters that I wrote mainly on the troop ship on the way back telling how thrilled we were to be in the hold there.

Jim: But while you were in Sweden how did you send mail out?

Syd: That was all stashed on shelves in bags or someplace and left until we could put it into the mail. And everything had the black line on it.

Jim: Well, that’s the mail coming into you was in packets, but how about your mail going home? How would you get a letter home from there?

Syd: We would--we would get V-mail. They wrote very faithfully, and I was sorry that I couldn’t respond to what they put in their letters.

Jim: Right, but did you ever send them any letters?

Syd: Oh yes, sure. I tried to be faithful about that because I knew that that was their very tight morale.

Jim: How did you mail the letter to them?

Syd: Standard procedure but it was just stopped. It was all frozen, there was no mail allowed back to the States.

Jim: So then you didn't write your parents in that six months that you were in Sweden?

Syd: I wrote to them, but I couldn't mail it.

Jim: Right, so they didn't hear from you then for the—

Syd: That's right.

Jim: Okay, fine, we finally got it.

Jane: They didn't hear for six weeks as I understand it.

Jim: Well, I still don't know how the mail got out of there. You see, where it would go? You could take it with the bundles of hay, but you had—somebody would have to take it after you dumped the hay. Unless the Norwegians sent it home. That's what I'm working on--

Jane: The Swedes might have taken--

Jim: Well, I don't know, but he said the contact with the Swedes was limited.

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: You had to assume any mail that went through Sweden would be monitored by the Germans, you see. So I doubt that they would allow that.

Syd: Yeah, that's why we stopped.

Jim: So, I understand. That's why I assumed there would be no mail out of there because it would be too risky. I mean, just having a postmark or anything that would suggest where it came from would indicate that there were soldiers in the wrong place.

Jane: That's right.

Jim: Yeah.

Syd: Yeah, right.

Jim: Okay.

Syd: And they would black-line the information.

Jim: Oh, yeah. Everybody got black-lined. I know about that. Okay, so no more of that, no more of this, no more of that. I don't know of anything that we forgot. Do you remember anything that I didn't ask ya?

Syd: [reading] "Parents didn't hear from us--"

Jim: There it is—

Syd: "--for three weeks."

Jane: Six weeks.

Jim: It must have been longer than three weeks. Unless you know something that you haven't said.

Syd: They— I think they were a lot more liberal after the war progressed to a certain extent. There--

Jim: Who?

Syd: The attitude that they had towards combatants.

Jim: But, I don't know who you're speaking of.

Syd: Ah, Germans who were—

Jim: Well, they're not going to be tolerant if they didn't, you know, they aren't going to allow you to be in Sweden if they could get you out.

Syd: That's right, they--since they winked at it and didn't make a--didn't make a fuss about it because they just couldn't do anything about it anyway. They were still--

Jim: Not without upsetting the relationship—

Syd: Apple cart.

Jim: --with Sweden who was busy shipping them iron ore so they could make weapons to kill all the American with, yes, right, I know about the Swedes.

Syd: Yeah.

Jim: Well, that's pretty good. Thank you.

[End of Interview]