

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Question: Get that on tape.

Answer: My name is Elsworth Kenyon. More commonly known as Ken.

Question: ok. Now, you weren't from Washington State originally, isn't that right?

Answer: I was born and raised in Wisconsin.

Question: That's right. And were you in Wisconsin right before you joined the war?

Answer: Well, I graduated from high school in 1940, and I went to Chicago to go to work, and I was working in Chicago on December 7. December 8 I quit, went home, spent the holidays, and enlisted in the Army Air Corps on January 2, 1942.

Question: And where was your hometown?

Answer: Phillips, Wisconsin. It's a little town of 1500 people.

Question: So do you remember December 7? Do you remember that pretty clearly?

Answer: Very well.

Question: Do you remember how you heard about it?

Answer: Yes. I was in Chicago and I drove into a gas station to get gas and nobody came out to pump gas. So I went inside to see what was going on, and everybody was around the radio. That's how I heard about it.

Question: Pretty hard to understand, wasn't it? I suppose you knew where Pearl Harbor was?

Answer: Oh, yes. Yes, I knew where it was.

Question: So did you expect something like that to happen?

Answer: No. kinda changed your whole life.

Question: Did they, in your hometown, were you one of the first to volunteer?

Answer: Two of us, same day, volunteered. He went his way and I went my way, he went in the Navy. I went in the Army Air Corps. I went to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, for Basic Training, and I wanted to fly, but I didn't have two years of college, so I took an examination, equivalent exam, and passed it, and was called into flying school and was going to be part of what the Flying Sergeants. They flew fighter planes, P-38s.

Question: So did you get pretty advanced in your fighter training?

Answer: We got through primary in Evan, California, where incidentally, I met my wife to become later. We've been married 57 years, and then I went to Basic

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Training in Bakersfield, California, and that's where they changed you from fighter pilot to bomber pilot, and we went to ? Mexico, and trained in twin engines, training planes.

Question: So did you marry before you...

Answer: No. We didn't get married until 1945, after I got out of prison camp.

Question: You must have made a pretty big impact on her, though, if she hung around that long, huh?

Answer: Well, we kept in touch.

Question: A lot of v-mail.

Answer: No v-mail, but mail. Yep.

Question: So when you transitioned to bombers, did, where did you do your final training in bombers, 'cause wasn't final training more

Answer: Well, it was in Roswell, New Mexico, we graduated and got our wings, and they couldn't have a sergeant flying as a co-pilot on a B-17 because all the navigator, bomber, the other pilot were all commissioned officers, so they made a new act called Flight Officer's Act, and they, instead of graduating as a staff sergeant, I graduated as a flight officer, which was equivalent to warrant officer at that time. And we went to Salt Lake City, and picked up our crew, and then we got training in Pocatello, Idaho, and Salina, Kansas. Then we went overseas in February of '43.

Question: Did you fly a new aircraft over?

Answer: Yes. And we couldn't go over, because of the time of the year we couldn't go into the North Atlantic, so we went through Puerto Rico, South America, Ascension Island, Marrakech, Africa, and then into England. Quite a long haul. We in Belem Brazil, and we were there 7 days because the tanker that was supposed to supply us with fuel was torpedoed, and we had to wait for another ship. That was quite an experience.

Question: The first time you'd been out of the United States, I bet.

Answer: Yes. It was that.

Question: so what was Brazil like?

Answer: It was a lot of heat, and a lot of humidity. It wasn't very pleasant, really. We were all anxious and ready to go, and we had to wait and wait and wait.

Question: So when you were flying over there, your position was co-pilot.

Answer: Yes.

Question: So what did you think about B-17s when you first got on board one for a flight?

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: When you got into a cockpit of a B-17, you went under the turret, top turret, and you got on your hands and knees, and then when you stood up, all you saw were clocks (instruments). That instrument panel was scary. Each engine has their own separate bunch of instruments, so that made 4 sets. It was scary.

Question: And then when you flew, you were flying to England I take it...

Answer: Yes.

Question: And what bomb group were you flying to, did you know?

Answer: 305th. There were 4 bomb groups in England at the time, and we were sent to the 305th as a replacement crew for what they'd lost.

Question: So that must have been one of the very first. You must have part of the very first American bombing missions there.

Answer: Yes. They did some bombing in '42, the latter part of '42, but the real bombing started in April, May '43. Then we had fighter cover to the coast of France, and they didn't have anymore fuel capacity, so they had to turn around and go home, and we'd go on in without any escort.

Question: Do you remember that first day when you got up and you were going on your first combat mission? Do you remember what that felt like?

Answer: Well, I learned one thing right off the bat that day was when you had a combat mission, you got fresh eggs and bacon and ham for breakfast that morning. Otherwise, it was green powdered eggs. But every mission we had fresh eggs. And my first mission was to Kiel Germany. And as co-pilot, you didn't have anything to do. The pilot was doing the flying and we were calling out fighter attacks and it was scary because you couldn't do anything.

Question: Except just maintain formation?

Answer: That's right. But they found out one thing the first trip. My pilot couldn't fly formation. So from then on we were always flying on the left wing of the lead ship because that's where the co-pilot could see and I did all the flying. I did all the formation flying. They finally transferred him out of the squadron and put him with another squadron that was flying leaflet raids at night, with no formation.

Question: so did, when your first combat mission was Kiel did you, what was it like when you finally crossed the coast of Europe?

Answer: Well, the best part was coming back, when we saw the White Cliffs of Dover.

Question: Did you have any idea what to expect?

Answer: No idea. None whatsoever.

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Question: I talked to one guy, Karl and I interviewed a man, and he was a ball turret gunner, and he said he loved it. He said until he got across the coast and they started shootin' at him, he said he never thought people would shoot at him.

Answer: You never thought there were so many. Those Germans were good pilots.

Question: So you had lots of fighter...

Answer: Yes. Lot of fighters. Lot of flack over the target. One thing when you had one you didn't have the other, because when you got over the target, the fighters would go away, and then the flack would, anti-aircraft guns would, they would never fly into that, so you didn't have both at the same time.

Question: When the, when you, we talked to quite a few people, B-17 crews and that. When you got across the Channel and you said you'd called out fighter attacks and things, what goes on in a B-17. What do you hear? Can you hear anything, smell anything? What...

Answer: Oh, all you can hear, people calling out fighters like 3 o'clock low, or 5 o'clock high, wherever. Most of the time they would come in out of the sun, so depending on where the sun was, that was where most of the action was.

Question: So everybody's talking, all 10 crew members.

Answer: Yes.

Question: So was the pilot, does he sort of run everything?

Answer: He's the boss. He runs everything. If it gets too chattery, he'll tell you. But they pretty much pay attention to what the job was. We had a fantastic crew, just fantastic. 23 missions, we lost 1 man. And this wasn't the only time we went down we. My first mission as the first pilot, we were into Stuttgart, and we ran out of gas, and we went down in the English Channel, and we got everybody out of the airplane and the Germans were coming from one side, and the British Air/Sea Rescue was coming from the other way, and luckily, we had a couple of spitfires discourage the Germans and they went back to France, and we were picked up by the British Air/Sea Rescue.

Question: So what was that like? I've talked to crewmembers who've gone down in the Channel, but they got out before it actually got in the water. You flew the plane down into the water.

Answer: Right into the water, yeah. Well, they taught us, when you land with out wheels, you want to hit tail first, 'cause that kind of slows you down. And you can't tell what the surface of the water is like until you get right to it. And I didn't know that there were 30-foot waves, and when we hit tail first, we hit the top of a wave, that threw the nose down, and we went right into, head-on into the next wave. And water is just like ground. It's very, very hard, and the airplane broke in half and the ball turret. The tail sank, but the buoyancy of the wings with all those empty tanks of gas, floated and it allowed us to get out and get into the dinghies and wait for the air/sea rescue to come and get us.

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Question: Pretty fortunate, huh?

Answer: Oh, yeah. The only one that was injured was one fellow; you're supposed to hold your head back tight up against the bulkhead. And when we hit the first time, he thought that was it. That's when the tail hit, and his head came forward, and when we hit the second time, it went back, and he had a big gash in his head, but he was alright.

Question: And that was right at the start of your mission.

Answer: No, that was about the 16th. I flew. I think we had 5 or 6 missions with our first pilot, the original one, and then I probably had 8 or 9 with the operations officer who was checking me out. My first mission was my 16th, when we went down in the Channel.

Question: Did, what was the worst mission you'd been on? What was the hardest?

Answer: The last one. We didn't even get, hardly within the coast of Germany. We were going to Schweinfurt, to bomb the ball bearing plant, and then the 14th of October, and we got right over the city of Aachen and we were hit by fighters, and my group, the 305th, had put up 18 ships that morning, two of them were aborted, there were 16 left, and we were in the low group and I was leading the low squadron, and within 2 passes, the only one left in my squadron was me and they got me on the next one. We lost 14 airplanes that day out of 16. Two went back. There's a memorial the air force academy to the 305th. They call it Black Thursday, because of the losses we had. There were fighters, lots of them. Didn't have a chance. We were firing 50 caliber and they were firing 20 millimeter, but there's a lot of difference in the two. And the day we shot down we lost our radio operator. He was just at the door ready to go out and he happened to think that he hadn't pushed the button to blow up the radio equipment, so he went back to push the button. He did, right after that, 20 millimeter came down the catwalk and got him. So, but he was the only one in the two times that we went down that we lost. We had 1700 gallons of gas, 12 500-pound bombs that were gonna go up. I never knew why did that, because the radio wasn't going to be any good anyway, but, he chose to do that. That's the way it goes.

Question: That was Schweinfurt, then?

Answer: The second Schweinfurt raid. I was on the first Schweinfurt raid also. I got back from that one. The second one was the bad one.

Question: Yeah, I heard the Germans.. that it was some of the heaviest fighter coverage the Germans had got in the air.

Answer: There's an excellent book written by Herman Cole, who was a pilot in the 305th, came in later, and he did a lot of research, and he wrote a tremendous book, called *Wrong Place, Wrong Time*, where he chronicles the whole thing. It's kind of interesting to read a book and find your name in it.

Question: So you were the pilot then at that point?

Answer: Yes.

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Question: Now when you, being the pilot in, going in a raid like that, tell me about, now how far away were you from Schweinfurt when you were in Aachen?

Answer: About 3 ½ hours. Just got going.

Question: Oh, really. So you hadn't even got close to the bomb run.

Answer: mmmm, hmmm.

Question: So what was a bomb run like when you did successfully go on a bomb run? What

Answer: Well, all depends on where it was. If you went to St. Lazare, France, they had a bunch of gunners down there that were like deer hunters. They could handle those anti-aircraft, it was tremendous. It was very accurate. Always had your altitude, and then Bremen wasn't too bad. Brussels, Belgium, was a milk run. But you had to initial point.. the IP, and you flew to the IP, and that was where you bomb run started. And as soon as you were straight and level off of the IP, you turned the airplane over to the bombardier. And he flew the airplane by the Norton bombsight, and you just sat there and watched the flack coming up on you and hope you didn't get hit, 'cause there was no evasive action, it was straight and level right to where the bomb release was. Soon as those bombs were away he gave it back to me.

Question: You kept the formation when you exited, too.

Answer: Oh, yeah. Formation was the only real defense you had.

Question: Was there was a box of 4 planes?

Answer: No, there were two elements of 3 planes each, stacked, your leader, high and low, and that was.. A stack would be into the sun, so that all your gun power was where they were coming at you from, and then you had a second element, which was down below with one on the right, one on the left, and one on the right, and you were pretty tight formations. 5, 6, 8 10 feet.

Question: So you were a pretty good pilot, huh?

Answer: Everybody who's in true formation were good pilots. Had to be. That was the only defense you had, was to get your guns to where they can do the most good.

Question: So did. You talked about the different cities and what they were like flying in. Did you still remember to this day remember the peccadilloes, or what's Frankfurt was like and Bremen was like and

Answer: Not individually. I remember some of the briefings we had about what to expect in the way of flying, but I couldn't that was a long time ago.

Question: But having been there you have, from what you experienced is something you probably. Each mission, they don't run together...

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: No. Oh, no. Milk runs were separate from the other ones.

Question: Now the crew on your plane, there was nine people besides you?

Answer: Yes.

Question: And what type of rapport did you have with your crew? Did you bunk together, play together?

Answer: Well, I guess I could answer that by my engineer and waist gunner, right waist gunner, now lives in Seattle, and we get together every month for lunch. I guess that tells you what kind of rapport we had with our crew. You didn't really want to get acquainted with any other crews because you didn't know whether they were going to be there. You know, you'd be flying along and the guy'd get shot off your wing, and you'd say Tough luck, buddy, better you than me. That's a lousy attitude, but it's the only attitude you have. But I had good rapport with my crew. They were super bunch of guys.

Question: Lifelong friends?

Answer: Yes.

Question: so is that a, since then have you ever developed a rapport like that that you had with these people?

Answer: I don't.

Question: I mean that type of friendship, 10 people going through all that training and what you went through. That type of friendship, have you ever experienced that again since then, or is that a real special type...

Answer: I think it's real special. Of the 6 enlisted men, there were only 3 that were with me all the way. The other 3, well, we flew, when we were settin' down they needed a waist gunner, they'd take from another crew and put them on another ship, and he might get shot down. So there were only 3. The ball turret operator, the radio operator, and Dick Lewis, who was my engineer and waist gunner. Those were the only 3 that were with us all the time. And officers, I didn't have officers the day that I was shot down that went overseas with me.

Question: Did the, you said, did you sort of stay away from becoming friendly with other crews? Is that, did you purposely do that?

Answer: I don't think it was purpose. I think it was just one of those things that you did.

Question: So was that awful hard to see when you're flying formation and depending on where you were, you could see a lot of the formation. Is that hard to see when something like that happens or like you said, Better you than me.

Answer: I think we got hardened to it. It wasn't pleasant going back to the barracks that night and finding some people going through all the foot lockers and stuff getting their stuff ready to send home. That always hits you. Other than that, I, it was just tough luck, buddy. I don't think any of us really thought we were going

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

to get shot down. Although the, when I got shot down, I had more missions than anybody in the group. I was on my 23rd, and I had two to go and I could come home. You had to have 25. So I don't believe there was anybody in the group had more missions than I did. Bit lucky, until I got unlucky (laughs)...

Question: Did the, this was the Schweinfurt mission, right, that you went down?

Answer: That's right.

Question: And did, um, can't think of the question here. Tell me about, because I interrupted you, go ahead and tell me about when you got over Aachen And what happened to you at that point.

Answer: Well, we were 22,000 feet, and they set 3 engines on fire. I gave the order to bail out, and then I stood on the catwalk, kept the airplane straight and level till everybody was out, and then I went out. And I've had a lot of people say, Oh, I could never jump out of an airplane. Well, if you've got 1700 gallons of gas, 12 500-pound bombs, and they're on fire, there's no decision to be made. You just go. And I free fell for a long way, 'cause I knew oxygen up there was pretty thin, so then I pulled the chute and it opened and right up at the top, there was a circle about, oh maybe 18 inches around that had mildewed. You're supposed to have your 'chute packed over in England every 6 weeks. I never had mine repacked, and I sweat out that mildewed part holding until I got to the ground. But because I was in the squadron, I had all the battle orders and I tore up all of those and threw away on the way down, so they weren't on me when I got caught. And I landed in the middle of the town of Düren Germany, which is a suburb of Aachen, very small town, right in the middle of it. And within 2 hours I was on the back of a truck with the rest of my crew, except for Russ (inaudible) and we went, they put us in a basement of a church in Köln to spend the night. And then the next day they took us to Frankfurt, Germany, by train. We were there for 10 days for interrogation. Take you in and ask you questions and you gave your name, rank, and serial number, and this went on for 7 or 8 days, and finally this German Hauptman said Well, Lieutenant, if you won't tell us about you, I'll tell you. He opened up this book, there was my picture. All of my group. More information, where I graduated from high school, where I had training. He had more information on.. I don't know where they got it. But we'd had a new commanding officer the week before and they even had the new one in there as the commanding officer of the 305th. Their intelligence was outstanding, and you know, as you thumb through this thing, they look at your face to see if you were recognized, or. They even knew the number of my airplane. Where I was flying in the formation. How come I didn't have any battle orders on me when I landed?

Question: Sort of unsettling?

Answer: Oh, man it was scary.

Question: Did you know what was going to happen to you?

Answer: Oh, I had no idea. No idea. They put us on a train and took us to Sagan Germany (Poland now), which was Stalag Luft III, and when I got to the gate, I went all the way through flying school with a man by the name of Ben Hopkins, and he was waiting for me at the gate. He said, Come on, Ken, I knew you weren't lucky enough to finish. I went down and went into this barracks and there was a bunk

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

with my name on it. He got shot down on his first mission in April. I'm still in contact with him. He lives in Texas. We talk about every month.

Question: Did the small village that you landed in, what happened when you came down there?

Answer: Oh, they just surrounded me, and pretty soon here comes a policeman, and ...

Question: so the villagers surrounded you?

Answer: He looked at me and said, Lieutenant, for you the war is over.

Question: So did you worry about your safety when you

Answer: Well, I really didn't know I was in Germany. I had a pair of fleece-like gloves that I took off and gave to a little kid, thinking I might get into the Underground in France. Found out I was in Germany, and I'd given away some gloves that I really could have used later. No, I didn't really have any. They were friendly. They didn't. 'Course; if it had been in Schweinfurt, I'm sure it would have been different. Or Bremen or Wilhelmshaven or some of the other places that had been bombed. But Aachen I know had never been bombed.

Question: Some people talked to us about they had problems with civilians and they were lucky when the military showed up and interceded, because this was

Answer: Well, after the military showed up, there was one guy come running with a shotgun, and he wanted me to.. he wanted to take care of me. And this policeman took the gun away from him and uh, come to find out our airplane had hit his root cellar, and all of his food for the winter was gone, so he was unhappy. But that's the way it goes.

They put us in the back of a truck. I'll never forget that. It had a burner, like a hot water tank, oh, maybe 18 inches around with a door in the top, and they'd stop and throw chunks of wood in there, and this burning wood generated the gas that ran the engine in this truck. I'd never seen that before. Never have seen it since.

Question: And that was when they took you to the, was it a dulag, is that what the interrogation center's called?

Answer: Yeah. I think it was.

Question: The time you spent there, was it a fearful time?

Answer: Didn't really know, 'cause it was all solitary. Didn't give you any books or anything, you just on a concrete bed. You just, I think a lot of it is you're 21 years old and, you know, nothing can happen to me. What the heck. I'd react a little different today, I'm sure.

Question: So when you're put on the truck to Luft Stalag III was your crew with you at that time?

Answer: No. They separated the enlisted men and the officers. I didn't see any of my enlisted men until after the war.

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Question: Did your, now you had been writing your sweetheart back and forth, whom you eventually were going to marry. Were you serious enough with her that she was worried about where you were?

Answer: Oh, sure. Strange thing happened. The morning after the Stratford? Raid, she worked for Lockheed in the office. And one of her things, she picked up the paper for her boss every morning, and headlines were 60 B-17's lost, and she woke up the night before seeing me parachute and a German shoot at me. And she told her roommate Marge, she said, you know I just know he went down last night. And when she saw those headlines, she knew. When my Mom and sister were notified they knew about her already so they told her that I was in prison camp. So we continued corresponding. She sent me packages, cigarettes and we were allowed one package a month from home.

Question: What was Luft Stalag III like, What was your first impressions of that?

Answer: Oh, it was out in the middle of nowhere and there were 6 to a room, 3 bunks, tiered bunks 3 high. Then later there were 9, they put another bunk in there they had so many. It was. The first 15 months I've got to say were, except for harassing, getting us up in the middle of the night for roll call or waiting for a cold rainy day and a half for a picture parade where they would match your face with the picture they had in their records to make sure everybody was who they were. That would take 12, 15 hours, and you'd stand out... Except for that type of thing, it wasn't bad. We got Red Cross parcels every week. And they gave us barley, watery barley soup once a day, and we had baseball teams, we had a band. The YMCA furnished sporting equipment and musical instruments. And we had a building that we used for a theater. And the Germans gave us all of the empty cartons that the Red Cross parcels came in. They were wood, and we used those and made all the seats for the theater, and we put on shows. It was. It wasn't what you really wanted, but it was all right.

Then on December 28, 1945, we got word at 10 o'clock at night that we were leaving. We had an hour to pack, and it was 7 below zero, driving blizzard, and we walked all that night and all the next day. And the second night they found a place for us in a glass factory, and it was warm, and we slept on concrete floors, and they served us watery barley soup again. And then we left there and we walked another day and got on a train and we were in boxcars. There were so many in a boxcar you couldn't sit down, everybody couldn't sit down, and we were on it for 3 days, going to Moosburg which is just outside of Munich. The Russians were coming. That's why they moved us. We could hear the guns from the front lines. When they fire over hear at Ft. Lewis, that's what it sounded like. So they didn't want the Russians to come in and liberate us, so they decided to move us, and it was really strange because you'd see most of the guards at this time, all the young men were gone, so they were older men, and you'd see a prisoner of war with his arm around this German guard, carrying the guard's handgun in one hand and carrying the German guard in the other. It was survival then for everybody.

Answer: So did people die in that march?

Question: Oh, yeah. And the word went around if you dropped out, they had orders to shoot you. And so nobody dropped out. Oh, first night nobody dropped out. Everybody was tired. The next morning one guy said, the hell with it. I'm gonna quit, and we didn't know, but bringing up the rear of this they had two teams

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

of horses with two big wagons, and they put him in the wagon and brought him on. So...

Question: So the Russians, when you heard those guns booming, was that a hopeful thing for you?

Answer: You bet. Come on, Ruskies, let's go! We wanted to get out of there!

Question: Stalag III, wasn't that when the great escape occurred?

Answer: Yes, I was too late for that. It happened.. there were 5 compounds. In north compound were all British, and they had the Americans in with the British until I think in June or July of that year, and then they finished this other compound and they took the Americans out, but a lot of the Americans that I knew in prison camp had dug on that tunnel, and, but it was out of the north compound. But they shot fifty of 'em, murdered 'em.

Question: Did you know, had they rounded everybody up before you got there, I mean, had they escaped and been caught and

Answer: They didn't come back, fifty of them didn't come back. They said they were attempting to escape. Well nobody who has been a prisoner of war for 3 years, and most of those guys had already been in there 3 years, is going to run when somebody's got a gun. That's stupid, they murdered them.

Question: You knew people that actually were involved in it.

Answer: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

Question: Would you have dug a tunnel to get out of there?

Answer: I helped. 'Cause we had tunnels going all the time.

Question: What was that like, to be?

Answer: I was on the "X" committee. I wasn't on the digging committee. I was on the dispersal. We had sacks about 3, 4 inches around, and they would fill the sacks with dirt, and we'd hang them around our neck and down our pants leg and go out and walk and trickle that dirt around. That's how we got rid of the dirt.

Question: You're not claustrophobic or anything, I take it?

Answer: No. Thank God.

Question: So did they, when you got to the camp, did they screen you to make sure that they knew who you really were?

Answer: No. No, you were taken pretty much at face value, and everybody who came in had somebody already in there who they knew, so they didn't have to screen anybody. Somebody there knew who you were.

Question: So were you hungry all the time?

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Not the first 15 months. We did very well. The last 5 months were very, very bad. I went from 206 pounds to 128. That's what I weighed when we were liberated. We were liberated on April 29, 1945 by General Patton and the 3rd Army, 99th Infantry. Sunday morning.

Question: Never forget that day, huh?

Answer: Never! When I was a drinking man that used to be a drinking holiday in our family!(laughs)

Question: So in those last 5 months, what did you think about during the day? Were you homesick or hungry or...?

Answer: Well, there wasn't anything to do. You didn't have anything to eat. And I think you just thought about food most of the time. Pretty hard to remember, you know, what you thought about. I think you thought about getting out of there more than anything.

But I had an interesting experience later in life. We were in Munich, Germany, and we rented a car and a driver and we drove up to Moosburg. To see where I was, and we were, the driver found out where it was and we drove down this street and there was a VW parked there with a man sat alongside it, and he was kissing his gal good-bye. She was going to go to work, we found out. And he came back with our driver and he introduced us to him, and he said there's a museum here.. over where the prison camp was. So they took us to the museum, but it was a Saturday and it was closed, so this fellow that we picked up, he knew who the curator was. So they took us over and put us in an old church that was there, 800 years old, and we were sitting there enjoying this beautiful church, and the organist started to play. The man was practicing for a wedding we found out. Pretty soon here they come back with this elderly gentleman, and he was the officer of the guard the day I was liberated. We talked, he couldn't speak English, I couldn't speak German, but these two were translating, and we must have spent an hour together. And they had this wonderful museum. Several people in there that I knew from prison camp. It was a very emotional experience. One I'll never forget.

Question: What did you think about having met the officer of the guards, what was your feeling toward him at that time?

Answer: Found out who he was, I gave him a big hug. It was great. The fellow that we picked up had been our.. his mother and father were refugees. After they war, the turned this prison camp into a place for refugees. And he was born in one of the barracks, so he knew all about the camp. So we were kind of lucky to find him.

Question: so you don't have. When you were flying and in prison, what did you think of the Germans? Did you identify them personally as enemies?

Answer: Not really, because you didn't see if, you know if you're on the ground, that's different. We were up there 25,000 feet and we went home to a clean barracks, and away from the war. It was a lot different doing what I was doing than doing what others were doing on the ground. I was glad I was where I was. I have no animosity toward Germany. They, we built a home in Sunnyvale California, and a sergeant from March Air Force Base, which was located right there, he and his wife moved in next door. Her name was Ella, and I got talking to her one day, and she

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

was a German bride. She had worked in Goebel's Propaganda Department, and was in Stuttgart on duty, the day I bombed it. She turned out to be our neighbor and babysitter for youngest sons. And a tremendous friend. So I have no animosity toward anybody.

Question: so that must have been....

Answer: We had a job to do, we did it.

Question: So that must have been interesting then to meet someone that was on the ground when you were up in the air.

Answer: Yes, it was. And a strange thing, she wouldn't talk about the war with Rosemary, but Ella and I could talk about it by the hour. She wouldn't share with anybody.

Question: So years later meeting this woman, did that change your thoughts about the war, and being a bomber pilot?

Answer: No. Like I say, we had a job to do, and we did it, and were lucky enough to come out of it alive, and healthy, so. A lot of them weren't so lucky.

Question: Did you get, do you remember when you, how your mother and father found out that you were alive in camp?

Answer: They got a telegram from a ham radio operator in New Jersey who had heard my name on a list. I said telegram, it was a postcard. And he sent postcards to all of the people that he heard. That's how they found out. That was about, I was shot down October 14th, I think it was just before Christmas before they found out.

Question: So they had no idea of if you were KIA.

Answer: I was MIA for that time. Missing in action.

Question: Must have been awful hard for your Mom.

Answer: Oh, it was terrible. I was the baby of the family. There were 7 in our family, and I was the youngest one. The only one in the service. Very tough, on both my Mom and Dad.

Question: When was the last time you saw your Mom before you went overseas?

Answer: Well, I was there for Christmas, and then we went overseas. That was January '42, and we went overseas February '43.

Question: So she knew, when she saw you off at the train, she knew she wouldn't be seeing you again for a while.

Answer: Yes.

Question: Your Mom and Dad take you down to the train?

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Well, I think so. I can't really remember. I'm sure they did. I can't remember.

Question: Yeah. It's funny, some people do, some people don't, and some people their mothers didn't want to go see them off, 'cause it was too hard.

Answer: Strange thing happened. When I got out of prison camp, I blocked that whole thing out of my mind. I've heard of people doing that before. I didn't think it was possible, but it is possible. I didn't talk about it for 20, 25 years, and what I remember now are things that come back when I talk to Lewis or Reed. I've read several books. So.. and mores coming back every day. In fact, I woke up this morning at 5 o'clock and I couldn't go back to sleep and I was thinking about this interview, thinking about things I remembered, and some things came back this morning, so it's still coming back.

Question: What did you think about this morning?

Answer: About the walk. The glass factory where we got warm, and how cold it was. We stopped 10 minutes every hour to rest. Yeah, I went all through that walk.

Question: It was just like it was a new memory?

Answer: Yep. Some of it was.

Question: Must be sort of emotionally unsettling to all of a sudden recall, bring back a memory from years ago.

Answer: yeah, it is. It's different. Very different.

Question: Does your... Now you're still married to the same woman I take it, right?

Answer: 57 years.

Question: Does when you wake up at 2 o'clock in the morning, doesn't she sort of think. Did she notice a difference?

Answer: Not anymore. For the first couple of years, I had nightmares and she used to wake me up and get me to stop dreaming and...first couple years were pretty rough on her, but that's all gone. I don't have any problems. I'm 80 years old, got a bad heart and lousy legs, but other than that, I'm fine. And very proud to be 80.

Question: You're doing pretty good for 80.

Answer: Yeah, I think so.

Question: Back then when you had nightmares, what would a nightmare be about?

Answer: Gosh, that was the worst thing.

Question: So that really was, I mean the way you tell it, and the way a lot of pilots tell it, it's very point blank. The plane got shot down, I bailed out, I got on the

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

ground, and usually it's maybe at the most a 3 minute story. I had a man that we interviewed in Seattle, and it was a very simple story, and the only thing he was worried about was if his crew had gotten out, and after the interview was done and I was talking to him, it wasn't a simple story. The 3 minutes he talked about was 2 ½ hours of Germans attacking him. Everybody was dead in the cockpit except for him. There were no windows, but when he told the story, it was.. We got hit, we broke formation, the Germans came after us, I finally lost my wing, and I bailed out. That was it.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So it is actually, the thing of nightmares. You listen to this you think, especially pilots are so logical. I think they have to be, you know. You're logical and you're very system oriented, but in reality, it's not, you're not as cool and collected as...

Answer: I'm sure that's true. People react differently under the circumstances, but I can still see those fighters coming in. 4 and 5 abreast. But it doesn't bother me. It did for the first couple of years, but not anymore.

Question: Does the, I was told that you feel bullets striking the aircraft. Is that true?

Answer: Oh, sure. You bet.

Question: He even said you could smell the gunpowder in the air.

Answer: I never did that. I know our top turret on one mission, I don't remember which one it was, jammed, and he bent down to do something to get the turret going again, and just as he bent down, a shell came through the Plexiglas on the turret, bounced around in there, and fell at his feet.

I was in prison camp with a guy who bailed out at 20,000 feet and his 'chute didn't open, and he landed in a bunch of snow in the mountains and he had two broken ankles. Bill Lakey. Never forget. So when your time comes, you're gonna go. I thoroughly believe that. I'm not gonna go lay down in front of car and see if my time's here, but I think with normal, careful living, when your time comes, you're gonna go.

Question: 'cause it's something you learned right away in bombing missions that...

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So you. I suppose there are some people that never learned that, that every day they got up and they just feared every second of the day.

Answer: Oh, yeah. I'm sure there were. But I just knew that I wasn't gonna get shot down. I'd been there 22 times. I only had 3 to go. Weren't gonna get me.

Question: Was there always some sort of fear in these missions, or did you really think that you were invincible?

Answer: I was thoroughly convinced they were never going to shoot me down.

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Question: Did you know who it was that shot you down? Did you ever find out? You have a name of a pilot or ...

Answer: It was an FW190. I don't believe one airplane did it, 'cause there were four or five coming in, one right after the other. There must have been 150 airplanes in the air that day. Fighters. Just... man they were like bees.

Question: Did you turn away from, when you got, did you really get hit badly to start with or did you get hit bad enough that you had to break formation?

Answer: No, as I say, we were leading the squadron. I lost my right wingman about third pass, and then I was trying to get back up into formation on the rest of the group when I got hit. That's when we bailed out.

Question: It was that fast, huh?

Answer: It wasn't long. They guy on my right wing. He peeled off and headed for Switzerland 'cause we weren't too far away, and he ended up in Switzerland for the rest of the war. I learned that after I read this book Wrong Place Wrong Time.

Question: Did you think it was wrong place, wrong time? You think that's a good title?

Answer: Oh, yeah. We were in the wrong place at the wrong time. That's for sure.

Question: But it wasn't the fault of the planner, it was just chance that the Germans.

Answer: No, it was. That's a long story. The group leader that day screwed up. We took off in the fog, and we had to climb 8,000 feet before we got out of the fog, and there were airplanes all over and you couldn't find your group and you couldn't find this? And we were late every point we were supposed to be on time. He should have aborted and taken the whole group back, but he tried to catch up. Then he mistook one group for another. This all comes out in this book.

Question: It just all built up to be a major...

Answer: He came in prison camp later. Nobody in the Schweinfurt Raid that I knew of would talk to him.

Question: So the, when you went to Moosburg, then you were, that was where, you were there until Patton came?

Answer: Yes. We were there from I think probably about the 5th or 6th of February until the 29th of April. There was 100,000 prisoners there of all nationalities.

Hitler gave the word to kill all American prisoners of war, gave it to Himmler, and Himmler didn't pass it on. But we didn't know what was going on because about 2 weeks before the war ended we had four or five Red Cross officials from Switzerland come and live with us. Couldn't figure out what they were doing. Supposedly they were there to protect us. They couldn't have done anything.

E. H. "Ken" Kenyon

Tape 1 of 2

Question: So did, when the Third Army got there, what was that like?

Answer: Well, we woke up to the sound of airplanes, low airplanes, and we went out in the yard and there were four or five P-51s flying all around camp, tipping their wings back and forth, and we knew that it was pretty well over. And pretty soon a tank rolled up and knocked down the gate. Found out all the Germans had left during the night, so then they replaced the German guards with American guards 'cause they didn't want us out roaming around 'cause there were still pockets of Germans out there, so except for food, they brought in food right away, there was no change. We couldn't get out of camp, and about 5 days later they flew us out of there to Camp Lucky Strike in Le Havre France. And we came home on a converted German luxury liner that they had commandeered in South America. Beautiful ship. Took 5 days, but we had good food, but that was the only thing we were thinking about then.

Question: Had you spoken to your, telegraphed your mother?

Answer: No, not until we got back to the States.

Question: So she had no idea if you were back or not?

Answer: Not until I called her from Ft. Dix, New Jersey.

Question: Do you remember calling her?

Answer: No. I couldn't call her. She didn't have a telephone. We lived out on a farm. I called my sister. She took word out to her I was ok.

Question: So did it take a second for it to register with your sister who it was?

Answer: I don't remember that. I think they were expecting it. The war was almost over. 'Course it was in all the newspapers that they were running over a lot of POW camps and concentration camps, what they were finding, and, it was all in the papers.

Question: Did the guards in the prison, did you ever have any relations with them, or were the guards, they pretty much stayed separate?

Answer: We weren't allowed to fraternize with them. There were four or five in our compound. We weren't allowed to talk to them, and for the purpose of trading, . For instance, we traded enough material to build a radio, so we had BBC, and there were prisoners who could speak German fluently, so we had an extra man in there work escapes, but we didn't have any?

Question: I'm going to interrupt you just for a minute here.