

## Alex Melovidoff

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**Question:** Now just so I get it on tape your first and last name and the spelling?

**Answer:** Melovidoff.

**Question:** And I'll bet that gets butchered often?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** You can tell when the tele-marketers are calling?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Let's go this way, if they ever ask for Mr. I know it's a tele-marketer calling. What nationality is that?

**Answer:** Russian, yes.

**Question:** So, where did you grow up?

**Answer:** Here in Tacoma.

**Question:** Oh really.

**Answer:** Has your family or parents been around quite awhile?

**Question:** Well, I have to go back a little ways. My great great-great-grandfather came over from Moscow and settled in Alaska in 1815 and as a result there is a large Melovidoff family in Alaska half of whom now are half Aleut because of the fur seals. My grandfather was born in Sitka and my great grandfather was born in Sitka and my father was born in St. Paul Island in the Pribilof In 1895. My grandfather was born the same day the American flag was raised in Alaska and automatically became a citizen although the other Russians up there prior to 1865 were Russian citizens and so my father and my grandfather brought the family down from St. Paul Island in 1912 and settled in Sebastipol, California, no Petaluma, if you know where Petaluma is?

**Question:** I've heard the name before.

**Answer:** It's north of San Francisco.

**Question:** Ok, yeah.

**Answer:** In the apple country there.

**Question:** A little change of pace for Alaska.

**Answer:** Very much so yes and my father was a professional musician and was on the old Orpheum circuit and vaudeville days and also played in the movies at Hollywood at one time and he became a music teacher and settled in Tacoma where he was teaching. We moved up from Oregon from there into Tacoma and I went to junior high school and high school in Tacoma.

**Question:** Which high school?

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**Answer:** I went to Stadium High School.

**Question:** That is what I assumed. That is a beautiful old school.

**Answer:** They plan to close it down next year and refurbish it and it will take two years to redo the interior. Preservation society I think along with some government help but it is a fine old school and it would be tragic to have them tear it down because the architecture is very unique.

**Question:** And it is such a part of Tacoma.

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** And if you don't know one thing about Tacoma, Stadium High School with its beautiful architecture and the history that goes behind it, everybody's different theory on how it came to be. So what class did you graduate in?

**Answer:** 1942.

**Question:** So you were at Stadium High when Pearl Harbor occurred?

**Answer:** That's right. Yes.

**Question:** What was that like?

**Answer:** We were home for Sunday having family dinner. My sister and my brother-in-law who were in the navy at the time were down from Seattle and we were all around the dining room table when the news came. We'd been following the news and there was a report from the newscast that all military personnel were to return to their bases so my brother in law who was in the navy said he had to leave and he and my sister went back to Seattle and he rejoined his unit in Seattle with the navy.

**Question:** That's interesting because a lot of people who were in high school knew something bad had happened but other than they didn't know that much but your brother in law in the navy understood the severity.

**Answer:** Yes, he left immediately after hearing all military personnel were to return.

**Question:** Did you enlist or were you drafted?

**Answer:** I enlisted.

**Question:** Did you make the decision right away or?

**Answer:** At the time I was seventeen and in order to enlist they wouldn't take us until we were eighteen. So it wasn't until a year later a month and a half after my eighteenth birthday I enlisted in the US Army Air Corp in December of 1943 and had to wait around because they were unable to take all the enlistees at the time. I think I enlisted on December 15<sup>th</sup> of '42 because it was right after my eighteenth birthday. I started my progress of enlistment in November but due to having to take various tests from the Air Corp, physical exams and what not it wasn't until December 15<sup>th</sup> I actually raised my hand and enlisted.

**Question:** Where did you do that at?

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**Answer:** In Seattle.

**Question:** Was it a group thing?

**Answer:** It was a group. Four of us went there to enlist together, but I was the only one that made it through all of the tests and physicals.

**Question:** Is it like the stereo type of the military where they start feeding these guys through in a line and start poling and prodding you.

**Answer:** That came later, but at enlistment time there were just a few people there and the ordeal wasn't that bad. They just wanted to see if you were alive. The other physicals came later which were quite extensive.

**Question:** Which kind of test do they want to see if you can qualify?

**Answer:** You had to take an intelligence test for your math and English and prior to, by enlisting the requirements to enter the air Corp you had to have two year's of college. But things were getting to the point where they were not getting the number of enlistees they wanted so they lowered the requirements so in lieu of two years of college they gave you a test. Of course I was attending UPS or CPS, College of Puget Sound at the time so I'd had a little bit of college, and their tests including all types of intellectual type tests.

**Question:** Looking back do you think it was a very tough test or had they.. they needed fliers and let's make it easy to get in or was it tough.

**Answer:** I thought it was fairly tough. I didn't think I'd passed because my math wasn't exactly the best so I was keeping my fingers crossed but I wasn't called to active duty until February of 1943. It was sent to Lincoln Army Air Base in Lincoln, Nebraska, in February 43 for basic training.

**Question:** Now when you enlisted did you have a pretty good idea, I mean had you see enough news reels and things to know that we really are at war and what was your mindset, here was a seventeen eighteen year old kid. What are you thinking of enlisting?

**Answer:** Well, I had wanted to fly ever since I was quite small and so I had a particular interest in aviation but as I said before I couldn't enlist prior to my eighteenth birthday. I tried when I was seventeen but they wouldn't take me. Now in the Marine Corp you could enlist at seventeen with your parents permission but the army had no set provision especially in the Air Corp you had to be at least eighteen so after my eighteenth birthday in 1942 which was in October I started processing my enlistment.

**Question:** Now you had a sister, because she was married. Brothers?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** You were the only boy?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** What did mom think or mom and dad think about you signing up?

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**Answer:** Of course my father had been in the navy in World War I, and I had an uncle in the navy in World War I, so it was almost taken for granted that I would join the navy but I had no desire to be in the navy because I couldn't swim very well.

**Answer:** Good choice.

**Question:** So what was Lincoln, Nebraska like?

**Answer:** Cold. It was February of 1943, and Nebraska is very flat and the wind blows across the prairie and the barracks was heated by a small coal stove and there were quite a number of people who were there all from the West Coast. I had taken the train from Seattle where we had been directed to go and on the way back to Nebraska we stopped at various places along the way and picked up another contingent of enlistees. So by the time we reached Lincoln Nebraska at the airfield there was a trainload of Air Corp enlistees from California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho and all the way across. And some of the Californians were in typical California dress and they were suffering because they did not have the proper clothes and they had so many there they had run out of uniforms. So we were doing close order drill and the poor Californians were out there in their summer clothes and light shoes tramping around in the snow, fortunately I was able to get a uniform and a large army over coat.

**Question:** Now as you're getting on the train and collecting these enlistees as you go along is it just one big party at this point, is everybody jacked up about what is going on?

**Answer:** Yes, but I wouldn't say there was much of a party going on. Most of them were pretty serious.

**Question:** Do you remember conversations, what people talked about on the train?

**Answer:** No I really don't.

**Question:** There were just a lot of guys in uniforms?

**Answer:** They were all in civilian clothes.

**Question:** Still civilian clothes.

**Answer:** Yea, not until we got to Lincoln were we issued a uniform and our basic training was not very long because all of the enlistees who were sent to Lincoln were then transferred to the various colleges. College trainee detachments throughout the middle west. I was assigned to Ohio State Teacher's College at Cedar Falls Iowa. Others were sent to Co college in another part of Iowa, others were in Nebraska. At that time the Air Corp was stockpiling enrollees for the Air Corp. They couldn't take all of them because of the training requirements, and they didn't want the rest of the army to get a hold of these enlistees. So they set up these college training detachments where you were sent to various small colleges throughout the middle west where we were actually given college courses such as physics, math, meteorology, geography, anything that enabled us to get a little advantage where education was concerned besides physical education.

**Question:** But no hands on flight training at this time.

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**Answer:** No we were introduced to flying at the local airport with about five hours of in a piper cub and that was our only experience flying at that time. We didn't take any flying until later on.

**Question:** Now are the guys getting frustrated because you went there to fly and now they got you in college.

**Answer:** Oh yes, everyone was quite eager to continue and advance.

**Question:** So how long did you stay at the Iowa State Teachers College?

**Answer:** Maybe a month and a half, two months.

**Question:** That's not bad.

**Answer:** No it wasn't, in fact it was very delightful. It was like being in college only in uniform and we were all sent to Santa Anna in California for classification. This is where the physical exams became much more stringent. The other exams were not only physical but mental. You had to visit with a psychiatrist, you were given all kinds of tests. Eye tests, hearing tests. You had to make sure you were not color blind and this is where they determine whether you were going to be a pilot or bombardier or a navigator and so this was a classification system the Air Corp set up at the time, and besides all of these tests we were given close order drill, calisthenics, a lot of physical tests you had to go through. That was kind of tough on a lot of guys. You had to do so many sit ups, you had to do so many other physical activities in order to pass.

**Question:** What was your classification?

**Answer:** I was finally classified as a pilot. The brainy ones were made navigators.

**Question:** That must have been exciting?

**Answer:** It was and pretty stringent and this is where we got military activity, the typical drill Sergeant etc. that type of training. We were also having to take tests in the swimming pool to see whether you could swim. You were put in a closure like an airplane cockpit sent down into the pool strapped in this make shift cockpit you had to get out take your pants off and make a I guess you'd call it a life saving device. You took your pants tied up the ends filled it with air and used it as a life saving thing. You had to do that drill. You were taken out to the rifle range to see if you could shoot a rifle, pistol range and they exposed you to shooting clay pigeons so it was quite an experience.

**Question:** How did you do in the water part cause you said you're not a good swimmer.

**Answer:** I just barely made it. I passed the minimum and after we finished all of classifications most of us were sent off to the various flight schools, bombardier school, navigator school, and I was sent to Oxnard, California, for primary flight training.

**Question:** What point did they start you on? Were you still flying small ones at that time?

**Answer:** I was flying a Stearman Which was basically a Boeing product a single engine double wing and I went to what they called the Mira Loma Flight Academy which was at the time prior to the war a private flight school and they had turned it into military. I had a civilian instructor in fact all of the instructors were civilians and we started to fly on the

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Stearman and I soloed in ten hours, which was average. It was an exciting day when we went up. The instructor went back to the air field, parked the plane, got out, left it running, and said ok now you're it. And I was given an opportunity to show my first training and flying alone taking it up and bringing it down on a landing by myself which was rather exciting but after that most of our training was with an instructor until later on flying by ourselves.

**Question:** Did they lose many pilots in training?

**Answer:** They lost a few, yes. Some of the boys in flight training were just not coordinated enough to be able to handle it. It wasn't they weren't smart enough, but it takes a certain amount of coordination and it was up to the instructor whether an individual would finally be able to and this happened all the way through the training period. When we left Oxnard our class was sent to Chico, California, which is up in northern San Joaquin Valley north of Sacramento. We trained in BT-13 which is a low winged, monoplane, bigger engine, had radios in them, and we started to train in those. Here again we were given this was an actual army installation and had army instructors.

**Question:** Single person plane?

**Answer:** A twin person, that's where we learned radio procedures and we began to fly in formation, cross country flights, and night flying, that was an interesting experience. Going up at night with an instructor and after that having to go up by yourself. You had to make sure you oriented yourself because it gets pretty dark.

**Question:** Ever get lost?

**Answer:** No that came later. We finished our training in Chico and the weather was so bad they split the class up and sent half of them to Victorville in California, which was down in the desert country. I stayed in Chico and we actually finished our training before those who went to Victorville because they ran into some difficulty with weather down there and they didn't quite finish at the same time we did. We graduated from there and went to Stockton, California, for twin engine training. We flew one normally called if I can remember now the Bamboo Bomber. It was twin engine, fabric covered wings and the body was also fabric covered but this was a side by side twin engine airplane. We went with an instructor first and after that you always flew with another cadet because you both had to fly both the left hand and right hand seats to prepare you for multi engine flying. And when we finished training there I got my wings and it was the largest class at that time to go through Stockton. From there we were all assigned to various bases throughout. I was assigned to Los Vegas army airfield to fly a B-17. I was taking co-pilot training in a B-17 and Los Vegas if you can imagine assigning a young nineteen-year-old to that den of inequity, I learned quite a bit there, and I lost quite a bit of money there too. I learned that you don't gamble anymore and then part of our training was to go out on the dessert. Our training was basically to train aerial gunners. But while they were training co-pilots they were also training aerial gunners so we would go out into the desert and go up to several thousand feet and there would be a tow plane towing a target and the gunners would have the experience of trying to hit this target that was towed by another airplane. They could tell they had colored the ammunition, blue, red or green, they dipped them in paint so when they brought the target in, it was a cloth target about 6-8 feet long, they could tell who was doing the shooting because of the color of bullet holes in the target.

**Question:** Now, I've heard people talk about it before, is this towed way behind? Because I'm thinking I don't want to be a pilot towing a target with some amateur gunners up there firing.

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**Answer:** Nobody did. And so. It was the airplane towing the target was quite a ways away and the student gunners were told very very definitely they were not to shoot at the airplane they were to shoot at the target and I don't think while I was there anybody actually hit the planes that were towing the targets.

**Question:** So at this point how many hours roughly did you have on a plane of flight time?

**Answer:** Oh I should remember.

**Question:** I mean are they pumping you up?

**Answer:** Yea. We spent basically six weeks at each phase flying mostly every day four hours of course you had ground school at the same time. You'd fly every morning you had ground school in the afternoon. Then the rest of the class when you are in ground school would be flying, so you took ground school on engines, aircraft assembly, and structures. You had to take radio work, the da dah dit type of things and basically so you had and also advanced training in a lake trainer which was to help you navigate by radio. So time was taken up either by flying or going to ground school. All of this took up a good portion of your day

**Question:** You have a lot of information.

**Answer:** Yes. And at night in the barracks you had to take your books and do some studying. So when I finished advanced training and went to Los Vegas after there I went up to LaMoure California, which was in the Sacramento Valley for an assignment to a combat crew and we were sent to Walla Walla Air Force Base to fly a B-24 and I had never seen a B-24 up to that point. Here I had over 35 hours of flight training in the 17 and knew all about the 17, all of the instruments, all of the settings on the engines and the various parts of the aircraft and they put me down in Walla Walla. And I looked out on the airfield and said what's that? The B-24 was the one with twin tails and ten men crew and I was assigned to a combat crew at Walla Walla. We went through combat training at that time with the crew, which was bomb runs, high altitude flying, navigation, night training is where we got lost. I went up with the pilot, an instructor from the base for night training. There were just three of us. There was the engineer, I was the co-pilot, our pilot and an instructor from the base and we were flying around out of Walla Walla up through the north around Spokane, Grand Coulee, and we got lost. So we had to hurry to the base and ask them to give a reading on the transmission from the radio and gave us directions to get back to the base, which was very embarrassing.

**Question:** I would assume you took a little bit of razzing for that.

**Answer:** Yes, we did. As I said we had a ten man crew.

**Question:** Was there a certain way of picking that crew or were you just assigned a crew?

**Answer:** You were assigned a crew. Yes.

**Question:** So they didn't look , they just counted off?

**Answer:** More or less the way it worked.

**Question:** Was this the crew you went with?

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**Answer:** Yes this was the crew we went over seas with.

**Question:** So who were some of the people who were in your crew?

**Answer:** The pilot was from Oklahoma. He was twenty-four, the oldest member of our crew was the nose gunner. He was 27. And there was only one younger person than myself and that was the navigator. He was four months younger than I was but he and I were the youngest of the crew. All the rest of them, the turret gunner, the tail gunner, the radio operator, the engineer who was the top turret gunner and the bombardier and the two waist gunners were all fellows older than the navigator or myself. So we felt rather, you know, here we were nineteen year old second lieutenant as co-pilot I was second in command even though there were older people there.

**Question:** Now do the crew bunk together?

**Answer:** Only the officers and the enlisted men bunk together yes, but they were not in the same barracks. We were in officers quarters with other crews. Our navigator was from Madison, Wisconsin, our bombardier was from Worcester, Mass., our waist gunner was from Springfield, Vermont, our radio operator was from Superior, Wisconsin, our tail gunner was from East St. Louis, Illinois, and our tail gunner was from Texas. So we had quite a spread of people and I was the only west coaster, from the west coast, on the crew. The others were from the Midwest or three of them were from the New England states.

**Question:** Was it a brand new plane?

**Answer:** No, it wasn't. They had been at Walla Walla for some time, several months, and so they were not brand new.

**Question:** Now was this the plane you would take with you or was this still the plane just used for training.

**Answer:** Just for training. After our combat troop training was completed we. I might digress a little bit, we did bomb runs over the Boardman Bomb Range, west of, in Oregon, the Boardman Bombing Range along the Columbia River, high altitude, low altitude, all types of training in that respect, navigational exercises. Exercises in how to bail out, exercises on what to do in a crash landing, all of that was included in our combat troop training. After we finished that we were transferred to Hamilton Air Force Base in California which was a gathering point for combat troops going overseas. Now of the group we finished with in Walla Walla there were only two crews that went to Europe. All the rest were assigned to the South Pacific. We picked up a brand new airplane at Hamilton field which was north of San Francisco. You know where San Quentin is, Hamilton Field is just north of San Quentin, and it was an old field prior to World War II. The other bases were usually newly formed bases that were put together during the war. (Chico, Stockton, Walla Walla) were all relatively new army air bases, but Hamilton field was something like Fort Lewis with brick structures and what not. So we picked up a brand new airplane there to go to Italy.

**Question:** What plane?

**Answer:** It was a B-24.

**Question:** Another 24?

**Answer:** Another 24.



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**Question:** I always feel a lot of guys have names of their planes and all that, you know they have their paintings on them and all that.

**Answer:** All we were doing was ferry. Ferry this airplane to Italy.

**Question:** And our route was from Hamilton field, California, to Amarillo, Texas, Amarillo, Texas, to Syracuse, New York, New York to Great Airfield New Hampshire, New Hampshire to Goose bay, Labrador. Flew overseas to the Azores, landing there we hit it right on the button and from the Azores to Marrakech In North Africa, from there to Tunisia, and from there hopped over to deliver our airplane to a base in Italy. From there we were assigned to a permanent combat group in Italy.

**Question:** Did the group of ten stay together?

**Answer:** Yes, we were all together.

**Question:** We were still a crew.

**Answer:** We were still a crew.

**Question:** Ok and at this point now you get an airplane?

**Answer:** No, that isn't how it worked for us. We would get on the base and after a briefing would be assigned to an airplane. Now the first mission I was left on the ground because they sent an experienced pilot with the crew on their first mission, so I was left on the ground. The crew's second mission, which was my first, we bombed a railroad bridge in northern Italy, which we didn't do very well. It was still intact after got through. We were in our own group. Our second mission we were assigned to Munich, Germany, to bomb the "marshalling yards" which were basically the train yards in Munich where they were gathering all the trains for distribution throughout. At that time the German's were still in northern Italy, and the second mission is where I was shot down.

**Question:** How did that happen and what was that like for a person that has never been?

**Answer:** Well we actually were hit by flack, anti-aircraft fire going in on what they call the target. We were able to drop our bombs and then turn with the group to head back to Italy. But because one engine was acting up and going out we lost altitude, we lost formation or fell behind the formation and gradually were losing altitude. At that time our crew, we were told we ought to get rid of all the weight we could so we were throwing ammunition out, we were throwing guns out of the airplane, we were taking our flack suits off which was silly, throwing those out, doing everything we could to lighten the aircraft so we could at least. We told the navigator to head us for Yugoslavia because the partisans there would had assisted a number of downed airmen who had reached Yugoslavia but we couldn't make it.

**Question:** Is there a state of panic at this point, or are you so well trained that its methodical still in what you are doing?

**Answer:** Well, I don't know about the rest of them but I didn't consider myself panicked particularly because you know we were trained. This was what we were trained to do and we were getting to the area of the Austrian Alps and the pilot asked the navigator how high are the mountains in that area and he said well they are any where from ten to twelve thousand feet. We don't have accurate maps to tell this actually and by that time we were getting down

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into the overcast to the point where we couldn't see the ground and flying over the Alps as we were we knew. We discussed it back and forth between the pilot and myself since we didn't know and couldn't see the tops of the mountains and we were getting down to eleven thousand feet. We said well maybe we'd better bail out so he, Chet, our pilot gave the order to bail and everybody bailed out. Chet was the last one to go. I started to leave through the bomb bay and the flight engineer refused to go. I tried to push him out but he wouldn't go and finally he said he was going to wait for Chet so I said fine. I knew Chet would send him out, so I jumped, and he followed shortly afterward, in fact, I think he really wanted to see someone else do it cause the rest of the crew, the nose gunner, bombardier, navigator, all bailed out through the nose wheel door. The rest of the crew went out through the back so there were only three of us on the flight deck which was the pilot, copilot, and the flight engineer so he didn't see anybody else leave so I think this kind of.

**Question:** You had only been taught theory to this point.

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Now the reality comes.

**Answer:** Yes, yes.

**Question:** So now you weren't being pursued at this point?

**Answer:** No, no we weren't. At that point we weren't fallen by any enemy aircraft.

**Question:** So you had to leave this beautiful airplane go its way and you went your way.

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Was that your first real jump?

**Answer:** That was my first and only jump. The first one is the easiest because you don't know what is coming.

But I jumped out feet first, got caught in the air slip and watched the airplane pass over me and I counted to three and pulled the rip cord on the parachute and it went over my face and you get quite a jolt when that thing opens. I no more got out of the clouds when I could see the ground. Now remember this is in the middle of November, snow covered mountains and I wasn't in the air very long, I would say maybe I wasn't floating down more than five or eight or ten minutes before I hit the ground. And I lit on a mountainside and in this little mountain village in this little valley, houses from just along one side of the road and I lit on this side of the mountain that overlooked the road. My parachute draped over a tree and I lit in this heavy snow and I was lucky because I didn't really land very hard. It was a hard landing but not like landing on hard ground and I could see all the people below me that had come out onto the street and I could see people coming up from the bottom. And I turned around and behind me there was a person by me aiming at me with a rifle, so I knew I couldn't escape. Besides the mountain side was too steep for me to run so I stayed where I was and the local police came up and gathered me up and undid my parachute, took me down to the road where the local people were all gathered. And they all stared of course. They hadn't seen much of the war really because they were in the Austrian Alps, and the only thing they knew about the war was the airplanes going over. I lit south of Salzburg if you're familiar with Austria, which is not too far from Berchtesgaden. And I was fortunate that the civilians picked me up because there in the mountains if I had lit anywhere else I'm sure I would have froze to death. The Alps are pretty rugged. They're pretty much like our Cascades here only I would

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say a lot more rugged. As we reached the road to head into the little village someone brushed past me and said I'm from Seattle and by the time I turned around he was gone and I had no idea who he was or why he said that. It struck me as rather odd.

**Question:** Like a citizen?

**Answer:** Yeah, he was a citizen but I never heard anything more out of that.

**Question:** It had to be one of those coincidences that you were an American so it wasn't that they knew you were from this area they just, wow.

**Answer:** Yeah. I was taken to the local police station, which was a combination of police station and city hall etc. I was ordered to strip. They take all of my clothes. They went through first of all they patted me first time they reached me they patted under my arm cause I had left my pistol at the base but I had two clips in my flight suit knee pockets. And of course they found that and they wanted to know where the gun was. I couldn't tell them anything.

**Question:** Did anyone speak English?

**Answer:** No. They inspect my flight suit checking all of the seams because there were times they were putting in wire in the seams for saw blades. We didn't have any but that's what they thought we had so they went through all of the seams through all of my pockets. They found my escape kit. We were each given an escape kit that had a little bit of food, a silk map, money, matches, all of the things you would need for an escape. They found that, confiscated it and took my watch and by this time my flight engineer showed up. They brought him in because he had dropped shortly after I did and he lit not too far from where I had fallen and they found him, brought him in and they went through the same procedure with him. Fortunately I had taken a pair of shoes with me because we flew with flight boots that were sheepskin lined because our target that day we were flying at twenty eight thousand feet so it gets pretty cold. But I had put my shoes in a duffel bag behind my seat in the plane along with my parachute, so when I grabbed my parachute I grabbed that duffel bag and I'm glad I did because they took my flight boots away from me. A lot of prisoners at that time lost their flight boots because of the jerking of the parachute they would fly off and fortunately mine stayed on. And those who lost their boots, their flight boots, didn't have shoes to wear and they had to walk around in their stocking feet in the snow and the rough ground and I was lucky that I kept my shoes so I could at least walk.

**Question:** Now what is going through your mind at this time? Are you still in control of the situation I mean its ok I lived through the parachute jump and the plane went down or are you more in the mode of what's going to happen?

**Answer:** It didn't really hit me until there were a couple of German soldiers. They had got them on the phone and called somewhere but within an hour two German soldiers showed up and when they went heil Hitler. I knew where I was and that's when it really struck me as I was amongst the enemy. However I must say the civilians in this little town didn't do anything to harm either me or the flight engineer.

**Question:** Just the two of you?

**Answer:** Only just the two of us.

**Question:** Everyone else ended up?

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**Answer:** You string out. When the airplane is going along a couple of hundred miles an hour and you drop out. You're spread out miles actually when you go out one at a time.

**Question:** Yeah very quickly.

**Answer:** Usually parachute jumps when even the airborne troops fall you know they are spaced apart. Well in time the two soldiers took control and we took a little bus down the mountain side like this to a railroad station and we were put aboard the railroad car. This train they must have known the schedule because we hadn't been in the station very long when the train came. Soldiers escorted us on the train and we were taken to Salzburg, which was the closest large city where there was a large contingent of military into the middle of the town to their headquarters actually. And by this time it was nighttime because our target was at noon but all of this activity by the time we got to Salzburg it was dark and we were taken to a little shed in what they call the "hof". A lot of German buildings are built around a square in the center is what they call a "hof", which is an open space. You go, you enter through basically two entrances but there was a small building in the hof where we met. Three, four other airmen who had been taken prisoner that same day and there was a pile of rugs there and we were told more or less this is where you are going to sleep so we settled in for the night. I was taken before an elderly German officer and he started asking me questions and according to my instructions, name, rank and serial number is all we gave. But the typical phrase and I heard this many times from other prisoners, this elderly German officer told me he said, for you de "var" is over. And I heard that from many other prisoners who had received the same message. We were in Salzburg several days while they were gathering other prisoners until they could get enough to transport us to other places. During the period of time that we were there we went through a bombing raid. The 58<sup>th</sup> air force was bombing Salzburg that day and some of the bombs went astray and hit in the streets and various houses around. We were taken to a civilian air force shelter prior to the raid. By this time there were about six of us. The civilians didn't want us in that air raid shelter at all. The guards in charge of us didn't want to stand outside either because they'd been through some raids before and they knew just exactly what would happen. So they were torn between their own safety and taking the wrath of the civilians by bringing us inside the shelter. We wound up standing basically in the entrance of the shelter going through the raid. And after the raid we were being marched back to headquarters and we ran into a bunch of civilians and that's where we got scared because they began throwing rocks at us. I recall a little old lady spitting at us and there was a German army work crew nearby all lined up in order to start cleaning up the streets because there was rubble all over the streets. There was one soldier he was standing there he had a pick in his hand resting on the ground and this civilian woman went over to him and tried to take it away from him. She was going to hit us with that pick but he wouldn't let go. Later on we learned from the guards because they moved us out pretty fast then, we learned later on the civilians were looking for some rope. They were going to hang us. So the guards took us out of there very quickly and took us back to the army headquarters so that was an experience also.

**Question:** I never thought about that aspect of it. I always hear stories of once they get to the prison camp but we just flew over and blown up their city again. There is the enemy you so the civilians actually created more fear than the guards or the military that were watching.

**Answer:** Yes, yes. We had there was a German sergeant in charge of the detail guarding us and there were four guards plus the sergeant. He'd been wounded on the Russian front and walked with quite a limp but was still able to. He was the one who moved us out of there quickly and we got back to the headquarters of the Boche Army and by that time they had

## **Alex Melovidoff**

Tape 1 of 2

picked up several other prisoners around the area from a couple of raids and we were on our way to Dulag luft which was the interrogation center. That is up in Frankfurt so we were taken by bus into Munich with a stopover in a small airfield where the Luftwaffe had a training base and they were teaching young men how to fly. And of course they were very interested in us curious. We were in the basement and they came down and took a look at us but they were in flight training. We went from there to downtown Munich to the main railroad station. It was a big structure with a big glass dome, which was typical of many railroad stations in Europe.