

James Munn

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Question: Let me do the same thing with you. Just start out with your name, first and last, and the correct spelling so I have it on tape.

Answer: My name is James Munn, M-U-N-N.

Question: And you, let's see, you were Army Air Corps, is that correct?

Question: Now you grew up, where, California?

Answer: California

Answer:

Question: And where were you when Pearl Harbor happened?

Answer: When Pearl Harbor happened, I was visiting, on a weekend visit to Los Angeles, at Claremont, I was attending a prom at the Scripps College. And I was staying at the dormitory at Caltech. And woke up on Sunday morning and learned that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

Question: So you were what, 20? Nineteen, 20?

Answer: I would have been 19, I believe.

Question: Pretty young kid. Did you realize what this meant?

Answer: Well, I think so. I realized that we had been attacked on that day on the Sunday of December 7th, '41. I was, as I said, staying at the dormitory at Caltech, in Pasadena

Answer: And I spent the largest part of that day taking various Reserve Naval officers from Caltech, who were students there, to San Pedro where they were put on board ships. And so I got a very quick introduction into the whole enterprise. And the young woman that I was visiting who was a lifetime friend of mine, and I'd gone to Scripps at her invitation, her father lived in -- in Hawaii at Hilo. And of course we had no contact at all. So the fact that this uncertainty as to his safety was something that consumed us for the better part of a week until we learned that he was safe. And so I was kind of introduced to it rather swiftly.

Question: So you had much more of a real -- cause a lot of people, I mean, Pearl Harbor, they didn't even have the faintest idea where it was or anything. Some of the young kids.

Answer: Oh, I knew where it was and I knew that it was the base of our Pacific Fleet. I had, of course, as a youngster, gone on board the various Naval vessels that would visit San Francisco Harbor from time to time and so I fully understood what that was. Of course I didn't have any comprehension of the devastation that had been visited on our assets at that time. But I understood what was -- what was happening, and I -- I wanted to -- to enlist in the Service right away. And went home and informed my mother that I had decided to enlist in the Marine Corps. And at that time, it required that the parent give the permission for the enlistment. And she refused. She wouldn't allow me to do it. She was determined that I would complete my university education before I was able to do anything like this. And so when I couldn't enlist in the Marine Corps, I tried to enlist in the Navy. That didn't work, and finally after a month of this, I wore her down and enlisted in the Army.

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Question: Now how come you changed to the Army? Just because you'd tried everywhere else?

Answer: Yeah, I just -- I was getting frustrated and I was reporting to whatever recruiting station I could report to and it just happened that the Army was where it was when she said okay, I quit, you can go. Under one condition, and that is that when I was finished, I would come back and finish my university education. Well, that seemed small price to pay for allowing me to do what I wanted to do.

Question: And you were pretty gung-ho among, with all the other people your age that was ready to go do your duty -- is that --

Answer: Well, I don't know. I don't know how much I was influenced by my peers. I don't think very much. I -- I was, of course, aware that some of these older men that I knew in the university who were at that time juniors and seniors were well advanced in the ROTC program and so they were called to duty right away. But I don't think that I -- knew of or was really relating to my peers who were trying to enlist. That was just something that I wanted to do. And just about every male member of my family ended up in the Service, one way or another.

Question: So once you enlisted, what happened at that point? Once you signed on the dotted line?

Answer: Well, at that time, when you enlisted in the Army, that's what you did. You enlisted in the Army. And your assignment was entirely at the initiative of the Army. And I had been enrolled in a horse -- not had been enrolled in a field artillery ROTC unit at Santa Clara where I was attending the university at the time. And this was the last time it ever happened to me but the Army looked at that and said field artillery, we'll assign him to Monterey-Presidio. That's where there's field artillery. And I reported to Monterey-Presidio and when I got there, I discovered that it was a horse-drawn field artillery. And this was the last horse-drawn field artillery in the Army. And you know what a raw recruit in horse drawn field artillery does. His duty assignments are not very exciting. So I wanted out of that, but I had really wanted to fly anyway. And that -- that was my whole object. I had determined that I would at some point become what was then called an aviation student. At that time you could not be a commissioned officer and pilot if you were below the age of 21 when you graduated from flight school. So the prospects of my becoming an aviation cadet and becoming a flying officer was beyond me. But I could be an aviation student, and as an aviation student, I would have been commissioned or I would receive a ward as a staff sergeant. And my expectation was that I would become a staff sergeant pilot. So I made application for that program. But I was transferred from the horse-drawn field artillery into the Army Air Corps and when I did that I went to Wichita Falls, Texas where I was assigned to a school for radio operators and mechanics. And that's where I went in my initial training, to Scotfield, Illinois where I was trained as a radio operator and mechanic. And it was from that then that I -- this -- this application for flight training caught up with me and I was assigned to flight school. That's how I started my participation in aviation.

Question: And you had to zig and zag your way to get there, a little bit.

Answer: Well, I had -- I had wanted to fly. My mother, my mother was -- she raised me as a single mother. They -- my father had passed away when I was ten years old. And she raised my brother and I as a single person. And one of our great pleasures when we were young was to go out to Alameda and we would watch the Pan American Clippers take off and fly off into the Orient. And I had all kinds of romantic notions about all of this. And on one

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occasion, this was in 1937, I think, might have been '38 -- no, it was '37. In 1937 we were there watching the -- the Clippers take off for the Orient, and this was just before they had moved to Treasure Island as -- which was the site of the fair, the San Francisco fair. So they were still at Alameda

Answer: We were watching this and a fellow came by and wanted to know if my mother would like to take myself and my brother for an airplane ride. And she asked us if we'd like to go for an air ride. Well, it didn't take much persuasion to get us into that airplane. And so we went for that little flight around San Francisco Bay, and of course I was hooked right then and there that that's what I wanted to do. And so that's -- I ended up in flight school then in '42 and --

Question: So you had done -- when you were in college you were doing a little -- you were doing ROTC to begin with?

Answer: ROTC.

Question: Now was that common? Were most of the people --

Answer: Oh, I think so. I think that most of the universities had a ROTC program. Was either an Army ROTC program or a Navy ROTC program. I don't remember any Marine ROTC program and of course there was no Air Force at the time. So you were either involved in Reserve Officer Training as -- that is the university offered that program. This was something you had to volunteer for, of course.

Question: So was it more -- I mean, like today we have it, but you know, if I went to -- to a college class, I could look and probably count on one hand how many ROTC people. In your classes, was it more common?

Answer: Well, I think in Santa Clara it was. I don't know whether, for example, the University of California would have had a program of comparable size. But Santa Clara was a pretty small school, and it was all male. There was no -- no coeds at Santa Clara

Answer: It was -- I used to joke with my mother that she had sent me to a Jesuit reformatory. (laughs) And it was pretty strict discipline type of atmosphere in which I was going to school.

Question: Huh. Just good training for the military.

Answer: Well, I guess so. I think it's probably -- I reflect on it and I think it's pretty good training, just for living. But --

Question: Huh.

Question: So where did you -- so then you went through -- you went through the artillery and then radio operator and now you're ready to train to be a pilot. Where are you --

Answer: I think it's kind of interesting as to how I got out of that artillery unit. My uncle, who had served in World War I and had been wounded, he'd been gassed and been rather seriously disabled as a result of that, he had served in the artillery in World War I. I was in this unit for about oh, maybe two or three weeks, just introduced into it, and my uncle and my -- who's my mother's brother, came to visit. And he visited with me and I took them to lunch at the -- at the mess hall. And in those -- at that time the -- it was a company mess and so

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the enlisted personnel such as myself were in one part of the mess hall. And then the noncommissioned officers were in the middle, and the commander and their staff was in -- at the other end. And of course at this lunch, my uncle got up and he saw an individual at the other end that -- whom he apparently recognized. He rushes to the center, and at that same time, my commander saw him and came to the center, the two of them embraced in the middle of this room, and from there on out, I discovered that this commander and my uncle had served together in France in the same artillery unit. And as a result, the commander called me in on Monday and said what do you want? And that's how I got out. I was -- had the right connection.

Question: Thank you, Uncle.

Answer: Yeah, you bet.

So anyway, after I got into flight school, because I was then a noncommissioned officer, I was a buck sergeant, I was allowed to skip preflight training, and so as a result I went into an accelerated program. And I was going to be trained as an aviation student and I would, upon the completion of my training, would have become a noncommissioned officer pilot. And then they converted the program at that time and they lowered the commissioning age to 18. When they did that, they allowed all of these individuals to be converted to cadets, and those who were going to go through as aviation students, as cadets would have graduated and become what they called flight officers. And that was a kind of a warrant officer designation between noncommissioned and commissioned officers. And that was my expectation. And for reasons that were never really quite apparent to me, 20% of that graduating class was commissioned and I ended up in that 20%. And so when I graduated, I was -- graduated from single engine flight training, I wanted to be a fighter pilot, that was my -- my main objective. And I was able to -- to achieve that.

Question: At a very young age.

Answer: Well, as it turned out, I was the youngest graduate in my flight school class. I was the tallest and the youngest, whatever that says.

Question: So you were what -- you were 20?

Answer: Twenty. Just 20. I had just turned 20.

Question: So for kids today, that would be second year of college, and here you are trained and ready to ship overseas.

Answer: True, true. And I -- well, I quite -- I wasn't -- I was assigned first to a gunnery school and from that gunnery school I was then assigned to a fighter bomber -- a fighter bomber or dive bomber unit. And this was the -- this unit was equipped with A-36s. And the A-36 was the initial version of what became the P-51 Mustang. And when I walked out there and saw that A-36 and I just thought I had died and gone to heaven. I thought, here I was going to have on my hands, or in my hands, the hottest airplane in the whole inventory. And I was one excited guy. And that lasted, oh, just long enough to complete my -- my fighter training. And then I was assigned to go to North Africa, had received all my shots and everything else. But the 8th Air Force had sustained such heavy casualties that they needed replacement pilots, and so the whole unit was withdrawn from that and we were sent to Spokane and trained to fly B-17s. So that's how I went from -- from becoming the hottest fighter Ace that the world had ever seen to driving B-17 bombers. It was a different story.

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Question: Now when you're excited looking at this plane, this fighter plane, would it be an excitement like a kid today looking at a hot car? Or, I mean, or -- it's not a military issue with you at that point, is it?

Answer: Well, of course I -- I was anxious to get my hands on a weapon system that was the most impressive weapons -- that would go faster, farther, do all of the things that one wanted to do. That's what you wanted to do as a pilot. And as a fighter pilot, you wanted the -- the hottest machine you could get your hands on. And when I saw this A-36 and realized what it was, this compared then to the P-40 or the P-39, the P-38. It had attributes that were -- it had attributes that in combination made it the -- the highest performing fighter in our inventory. And I knew that you were -- we were going to go up against ME 109s and Focke-Wulf 190s and ME 110s and things of that order. Or the Zero in -- in Japan. And so this was pretty exciting stuff.

Question: Now are you getting, at this time, enough news footage that you're really understanding what those fighter pilots are facing, once they leave the States?

Answer: Oh, sure. And I received a good deal of that in my training because in the Southeast Training Command, where I trained, most of the instructor pilots there were RAF pilots who had come back from the Battle of Britain so they were kind of on an R & R in the United States, having completed their work in the Battle of Britain, and of course they were teaching me, as a student, what I was going to encounter when I had to go up against an advanced German fighter aircraft. So I had no illusions about what -- well, I say no illusions, but I was introduced into the reality of it. Sure.

Question: So now they take you from the fighter plane over to a slower, bomber plane.

Answer: Yes.

Question: Which -- B-17?

Answer: B-17.

Question: And were you going to be a pilot on the B-17 or were they going to put you somewhere else?

Answer: Oh, I went there with the expectation that I would become, eventually, a pilot, a qualified pilot on the B-17. And I entered into the program and as part of this program I became a -- what really -- not an instructor pilot, I was, what do you call it, an inspection pilot. I -- I went along and monitored the crew performances to ensure that the crew would -- Marjory, can I have a little water? Monitor that the crew was performing as the standards required. And as a result, I was not part of a crew. And I performed this function, both out of Spokane and -- and Pendleton, Oregon. And, but I was always looking for an opportunity to get myself onto a combat crew. And it so happened that one of the crews that I had passed through to -- or that had gone through and that I'd had some contact with at Grand Island, Nebraska reported back that one of their pilots had been disabled and was in the hospital. And so I immediately went into the commander and informed the commander that I would like to go down and fill that vacancy. And he said okay. So I went down and joined that crew in Grand Island. And then went overseas with them.

Question: So where were you -- where was that crew headed to -- were you headed over to --

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Answer: To England. They were heading to England. We went from Grand Island, Nebraska to New Jersey, boarded the Queen Mary, I believe, and on the Queen Mary we went to England and arrived in Scotland, and from there were introduced into the 8th Air Force.

Question: So you were -- you picked your plane up over there then. You weren't one of the ones that had to --

Answer: No, we didn't fly it over. We picked it up over there. It was -- it was a -- well, I don't remember how we got it. It was -- but it was available there.

Question: And it was a B -17?

Answer: B-17F. And that was the -- the last generation of the B-17 before the introduction of what they called the chin turret. Which was a turret that was below the nose and had two 50 caliber machine gun bullets -- machine guns in it, which could fire -- be fired by the bombardier in his position. The "F" was before that.

Question: Huh. But you had the ball turrets, right?

Answer: Had the ball turret --

Question: Now is the 17 the retractable or not the retractable, I can never remember --

Answer: No, it does not have a retractable turret.

Question: Oh, okay.

Answer: It rotates, as a ball would rotate on gears, but it doesn't retract at all.

Question: So how old are you now roughly, still --

Answer: I'm 20.

Question: Twenty.

Answer: Yeah, I'm 20.

Question: So now we're sent over there and you have a good idea of what's going on on the warfront.

Answer: Well, I didn't really. I --

Question: Oh, you didn't?

Answer: I had a general idea what was going on on the warfront, and it's -- I arrived in -- in Europe, in England, and was assigned first to the Hundredth Bombardment Group. And the Hundredth Bombardment Group had just gone through a series of raids in Germany that had devastated the group. And as a result, there wasn't enough of a cadre in the Hundredth that could be filled by simple introduction of replacement pilots. So while I was assigned to the Hundredth, within a day or two I was reassigned from there to the 95th Group which had not sustained quite as many casualties. And so I had -- I then started flying with the 95th Bombardment Group.

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That's kind of interesting because I -- at one time sent some -- a little donation to Hundredth Bombardment Group Memorial Association. And they started searching their records and some fellow called me and said we can see here where you were assigned to the Hundredth but we can't see where you ever flew a mission with the Hundredth. And you said -- I said you're exactly right. I didn't and this was why. And I told him that I didn't really belong to the Hundredth Bombardment Group Association, but I felt a kind of a kinship there and that was why I had sent the money for their memorial. And the commander who was not the commander of the group but who was command of the -- the memorial association, called me back. And he says, you're a member, once a member of the Hundredth, always a member of the Hundredth. (laughs) But at any rate I ended up in the 95th Bombardment Group, and that's where I flew my missions.

Question: So do you remember your very first mission with the 95th? I mean, or does it all become a blur after awhile?

Answer: Well, I'd have to research it some. I don't remember what was the first mission, but I flew -- I think I flew all of my missions against targets -- pretty deep targets in Germany. They were dark targets at Hamburg and Kiel and Ludwigshafen and Frankfurt, and I flew some in the Rohr Valley and on the corridor going toward Berlin, but I never did fly anything quite as deep as Berlin. The first Berlin raid, daylight raid, occurred about a month after I was shot down.

Question: Now did you ever come back from a flight that your plane didn't have some form of damage to it?

Answer: I think there might have been one or two times when we didn't sustain any significant battle damage, but as far as I can remember, just about every trip we were on, we sustained some battle damage. And I remarked earlier that I wasn't fully appreciative of what I was getting into. I can remember when I got there, I was told that the attrition rate was about 5%. So I figured that factored that out and I thought, well, 5%, if you sustain 5% losses, and I was thinking over a period of 25 missions, that didn't look too bad. And then all at once, I guess overnight, it all penetrated my head that it meant 5% per raid. And you multiplied that by 25, that was 125%, and then I get a pretty good realistic idea of what I was getting into.

Question: This is before you even got off the ground and were on that you started to --

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah, I -- you know, you were introduced into it. And I went up and flew with the formations and like and formed up, probably a week's orientation before I went out on the first mission.

Question: So when do you remember being in battle and thinking -- I mean there -- now you've got a mathematical reality set in, but the reality of what you were really facing --

Answer: Well, you know, you -- once you realize that you were in a very hostile environment and that you were there to do one thing. And that was to carry your load of bombs to the target and deliver them on the target. And that was your only mission. You had no mission out there to shoot down fighters or do anything else. The object here was to get through and get that job done. And that then became the focus of your entire attention and all of the things that -- all of the energies that you're going to bring to bear on this to do that. And surely, I mean we were all frightened, there's no doubt about it. Probably terrified on occasion. But the other part of it is, of course, you were -- you were there providing mutual support for those other individuals that are ganged similarly as it were, and the whole idea of

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the -- the cohesiveness of the unit and you're wanting to do the very best job you could. And of course if you could destroy a target the first time out, you didn't have to go back there again. And that was a very big incentive to make sure that whatever you did, you did it well. There was an immense amount of heroism, if I can use that term, among the various crew members as to how they performed under very heavy, demanding circumstances. But it was not unusual. I mean, this was -- this was what people did. And of course there was this -- this wonderful camaraderie that existed. And the sense of -- of camaraderie with the other Allied air forces that were operating as well. The RAF and RCAF and the various other -- the French and the Poles and the Czechs were all flying there, of course mostly under RAF auspices, but there was -- it was a -- I wouldn't say a fraternity but there was certainly a lot of camaraderie about it.

Question: You had a -- an unspoken bond between --

Answer: Oh, there's no doubt about it. I mean that you -- I think -- I think the fact that we were flying daylight missions as opposed to night time missions gave us a certain degree of credibility. So that we were not in there taking on missions that were somewhat diminished from the kinds of rolls that the RAF had performed so valiantly from the beginning of the war. I mean this -- I mean the RAF had, of course fought the Battle of Britain with immense courage and had done marvelous work in -- in stemming the tide. But now we were there and we were flying these daylight raids and I think that gave us a certain amount of credibility in their eyes that allowed us to function with this kind of association.

Question: Now you -- you got shot down? Is that right?

Answer: Yes.

Question: How did that -- or where did that happen? And what was it like?

Answer: I was on a raid to Frankfurt, and this was the first large raid against Frankfurt. Frankfurt was a -- a key target are

Answer: It, in association with another town called Ludwigshafen, was the location of chemical plants and a variety of other critical items, plus it was a large marshalling yard and railroad station, presence and the like. So that there was a core communications coming out of Frankfurt as well as the manufacturing and the heavy manufacturing that occurred there. That was the location of the IG Farben Headquarters and the like. So it was a significant target. And this was the first raid on Frankfurt. We had started one before but it was aborted for some reason, I can't remember why. And so now -- now we were there. And it was very heavily defended and it was a deep penetration, having to go all the way across Belgium and into Germany and then come back over the route. There was a lot of -- of German fighter aircraft stationed along the route and in the periphery. And there was a heavy amount of anti-aircraft fire that was generated in and around the vicinity of that target are

Answer: So we went down there and on our way to the target, we were struck by fighters and as a result of that, we lost one engine so we had three engines remaining on -- on our way to the target. And then we were under a heavy fighter attack. And then over the target area, between the initial point and -- and the target release point, we were under severe anti-aircraft fire in which the anti-aircraft blew out the forward wind screen and put a big hole in the bottom of the airplane. And we were pretty well crippled at that point. And lost another engine. So we're down now to two. So when we left the target area on our way back, we were -- we were unable to maintain our air speed or our altitude, and we began gradual descent. And of course in most circumstances, the -- the Luftwaffe would pick on you.

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And because they -- you know, you're a cripple and now they wanted to get you out of there. And so we -- it continued. And that continued until finally the aircraft just simply stopped flying after the last assault, little bit south of Brussels. That's where I got out. And it was very troubling to me because I thought -- when I got out of the airplane, I thought I was the only survivor. I didn't think anybody else had survived. And for the better part of a year, I had no other knowledge that any other person in that airplane had survived. And for a pilot to leave an airplane without knowing what the circumstances of the crew were, that weighed pretty heavily on me. But in December of '44, a group of prisoners who had been moved from camps in Poland came to our camp in Pomerania and there among those prisoners was my radio operator. And I learned from him that I -- I had lost all communication with the back end of the airplane over the target, so I was unable to communicate with anybody back there. And while I had signaled that they should abandon the aircraft, I had no idea whether or not this had -- affect. Well, it turned out that the waist gunner -- one waist gunner, had been severely injured and they threw him out of the airplane, pulled his ripcord and threw him out. And he ultimately was picked up. And then he was repatriated back to the United States on the Swedish liner Gripsholm which was a big -- a prisoner exchange. And he did in fact survive, and he had very severe stomach and chest wounds. The other waist gunner, the radio operator and the ball turret gunner and the tail gunner all got out of the airplane over Luxembourg. Which would have been about an hour and a half before I abandoned the airplane. So it was kind of reassuring to me later on to realize that I hadn't left everybody up there. The -- everybody in the forward part of the airplane had been killed. And so anyway, that's how I got blown out of the sky.

Question: So you then had to parachute down?

Answer: Yes, I did. I -- I think so. (laughs) And the reason I say I think so is I have really no recollection of that at all. I left the -- the pilot compartment, a ME109 had been beating up on us and this fellow came from the rear and he put some shells in the outer tanks and blew off part of the wing. And so the airplane just wasn't flying anymore. And I got out of the airplane but the last thing I can remember is I was down below 1500 feet and as far as I can tell, somehow the canopy opened and I ended up hanging in some trees and there I was on the ground. So I don't have any recollection of that descent. I've tried to think about it.

Question: Boy, that's low.

Answer: I even had all kinds of thoughts about people saying things to me in the cockpit or as I was leaving the airplane, but that was impossible. Because here I had no -- no wind screen in the front of the airplane, the air coming through there and the noise of the airplane and the like. I couldn't have heard anything even if it had been talking right in my ear. But you have all of these illusions, you know, and that's what you -- where it is.

Question: So you got, then, hung up in trees. Is that where you ended up when you --

Answer: Well, I did not have my parachute fully -- fully fastened, so I had, I think only one leg strap fastened and I had a chest pack chute. And I think the airplane got hung up in the trees and I just kind of rolled out of the harness onto the ground. Next thing I knew, I was on the ground. And I was out of the parachute. I didn't have anything there. I was just -- I was just laying there on the ground.

Question: Enemy territory.

Answer: Yeah, it was in -- in Belgium. And from there I had started to try to move away from the location where I had come down because we had been taught through escape and

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invasion training that we should move on. And so I did. I had packets of -- of evasion kits and the like, part of which had morphine syrettes in it and I was able to use the morphine to kind of dull the pain of some of the wounds that I had sustained. And I got out of there. And I guess I was loose, probably, for oh, couple hours. And I had come up against a farm yard and there was a young girl out in the back of the farm yard who was obviously Belgian, and she was feeding some farm animals. So I -- I was feeling pretty punk by then. And so I signaled to her and then she came and she could see who I was. So she went in and got her grandmother to come out. Her grandmother took me into the house and sat me -- put a -- she got a big sheet and put it over the chair to keep all the mud and grime and everything else that I was carrying. And then she began to see what she could do for me. And I remember that she poured me a nice big glass of cognac. And you can imagine, with cognac and morphine and everything else that I was in -- I was feeling no pain at this point. So then they decided they would do something with me and they took me into a local hospital. And at the hospital they proceeded to try to address some of the wounds I had sustained and the -- the problems I had. And when I -- they put me under ether and when I came up out of the ether, the German guard was there. And I think what they did was they decided that I was too badly beaten up that they couldn't do anything with me so they just turned me over to the local Gestapo. That's what happened. And now I was a prisoner.

Question: So did they -- did they read you your rights to become a prisoner or --

Answer: (laughs) No. No, there was no Miranda warning or anything like that. You were a prisoner. And as a prisoner, they -- they were your captors. I don't remember at that point that I sustained any -- any abuse. The person that -- that -- in whose custody I was delivered was the local head of the Gestapo in that village, which I learned. And I had -- I had some fluency in German, so I was able to follow their conversations, although I didn't engage them in conversation and reveal to them that I had any fluency in German. I had enough good sense not to do that, I thought. But they -- they were not abusive to me at all. And they transferred me from there to a local Catholic hospital run by some nuns who -- I really don't remember the Order that they were, but in this hospital were not only -- there were a couple prisoners like myself, but there were a number of injured Luftwaffe pilots as well. Oh, and -- and the Luftwaffe pilot, the last one that shot me up, showed up at the local village headquarters. It turned out that his aircraft also crashed. He had to bail out of his airplane and crashed. And he wanted my pilot's wings -- that was his whole idea, his trophy was going to be my pilot wings. And I guess I -- I surrendered those to him. I don't remember just exactly how that happened. But I was in this Luftwaffe hospital for a brief period of time. And I don't remember, yeah, I was there for a brief period of time. Then I was transferred to a prisoner -- prisoner of war camp which was inhabited by French, Polish and some Russians. And I don't remember that there were any other Americans or RAF personnel there. Just myself and these guys. And there was a typhus epidemic under way in that camp. And that typhus epidemic was -- was claiming oh, probably a dozen prisoners a day. I mean every night, when you got up in the morning, there would be another 10, 12 dead prisoners. And boy, if there was anything that ever taught me about the efficacy of vaccinations and inoculations, that was it. Because I was bitten by fleas and all the rest of the things that were there which would have infected me but for the vaccinations and inoculations that I had received. And then I was transported from there to Frankfurt, which was the interrogation center. That was where I went to be interrogated. And at Frankfurt I was interrogated actively for, I think about two weeks. And then after that, I was transferred to Stalag Luft One which was a camp located on the Baltic, north of Berlin. At a little town called Barth which is northwest of Stateen. Penemunde -- right in that area, right on the coast.

Question: And what was that camp like?

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Answer: Well, it was -- it was Air Force camp. It was Stalag Luft, and Luft characterized, or every prison camp, Stalag, carrying the term Luft, was an Air Force or German Air Corps camp. So that's where airmen were -- were incarcerated. And when I arrived at Stalag Luft One, this was the main location of Allied air personnel with the - along with Stalag Luft Three, which was in the southeastern part of Germany down by Silesia

Answer: And those two camps were where the Allied military -- Allied air personnel were located. And the camp I went - went into was mostly an RAF camp. But there was now a gradual introduction of more and more American personnel. And it, by the end of the war, most of the prisoners of the camp were Americans rather than RAF. But when I got there, most of them were still RAF. And the -- the camp was organized in a number of compounds, called lagers. And these compounds contained a limited number of prisoners. You'd have so many prisoners in this compound, then they'd construct another compound. And then when that filled up, then they'd construct another. And the -- when I -- when I got there, it was the first time that they had decided that they would organize a central mess and feed the prisoners out of a central kitchen. Up to that time the prisoners were pretty much on their own to prepare their own food, utilizing the space heaters that existed within their cell blocks. So I went into what was called the first -- the first north compound. All the rest of them were now old south compounds, this was the first north compound. And at that time, one had an opportunity to volunteer for duty and I did and I volunteered to work in the kitchen. And that's where I did -- I worked in and out of the kitchen and the management and distribution of rations and things of that order. For the rest of the time as a prisoner. And I, incidentally, I'd spent my 21st birthday in solitary confinement at the interrogation center in Frankfurt. So now I was an adult. (laughs)

Question: So when they were interrogating you, what -- what information did they want? Did they want to know what sites you were bombing, to know --

Answer: Yeah, they -- they wanted to know -- they wanted to know what raids you had participated in. They wanted to know what kind of equipment you were flying cause they were always curious about the variations in the equipment that you were piloting. They -- they wanted to know just general historic information about where you came from, how you got into the Service, what you were doing, they wanted to know who your commanders were, who your squadron commanders, group commanders, wing commanders were. Those kinds of things. And of course, being a second lieutenant pilot, there wasn't a whole lot of information that I could give them because I was pretty down -- I mean, that wasn't in my pay grade. They seemed to know quite a bit about me. Their -- it wasn't -- I mean the amount of information that they had about us on each of us was fairly extensive and detailed. I mean they -- they knew who my parents were, they knew where I came from. They knew all of these kinds of things so that as they would interrogate you, they would repeatedly reveal some little piece of information that kind of told you -- and that was all calculated to get you to be reassured that they knew it all anyway, so why wouldn't you tell them. And I suppose that -- well, uniformly, I think that they did not meet with any significant success among the American prisoners. They were pretty well trained and schooled and did not give much cooperation to the captors.

Question: Hm.

Answer: They used the usual techniques, you know, of leaving the lights on in your cell for 36 hours or 48 hours at a crack, or turning the heat way down or putting the heat all the way up and you had rather Spartan surroundings and you never knew when you were going to get out of there and they would interrupt you -- do all -- but I did not, aside being just shoved around a little bit, didn't have any physical abuse. Some -- some prisoners did. I had a very

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dear friend by the name of Hartwell. And he was -- he was an extraordinary individual cause he was 23 years old and he was a lieutenant colonel. And that's kind of unusual. And they worked him over pretty well. And I saw him just before he was released to go to the camp. And he exhibited a good deal of bruising and punishment. But I didn't sustain any of that.

Question: That was because of his rank? Probably --

Answer: He was a curiosity, you know. Why was a person carrying the rank of Lieutenant colonel who was 23 years old? And he looked like he was 17. I mean, this guy was -- he looked like a child. And I think it was just a curiosity. It was something -- they wanted to know what his connections were or something, you know. But, and I suppose that every now and then there was somebody who was of specific interest to them that they abused and they were perfectly capable of doing that.

In the camp itself, our treatment was -- when the Luftwaffe was in charge, okay, it was -- it was correct. When the Wehrmacht, the Army was in charge, it was still correct but Spartan. When the SS was in charge, the Gestapo was in charge, it -- it got mean. And it largely depended upon who was in charge of the camp that you were there. That determined the kind of treatment you got. The -- I would say that the uniformly, the officer, the senior officers who commanded us in that camp, were men of immense courage. And strength. And imparted that to the prisoners there so that we maintained a unified coherent camp attitude and morale. It was -- it was never any doubt in our mind that we were going to prevail and this thing was going to end in our favor and we were going to leave and leave a destroyed Germany behind. It wasn't a question, just when.

Question: So what was a -- did -- what was an average day like then? Did life in prison camp become --

Answer: Well, in the main, for the biggest body of prisoners, who were just -- just that, regular prisoners, it was a matter of getting up in the morning, bathing, having a little bit of breakfast, rations were -- toward the end as the war went on, became a bit more meager. And they would entertain themselves by reading books, engaging in athletic contests, softball games or play catch or, you know, whatever you could do to keep yourself physically active. And some were determined to remain physically fit and others became a bit more lethargic. Insofar as I was concerned, it was a day filled with activity entirely because as part of the camp activity which I was associated, I would be -- the German guard would come and arouse me and get me up before anybody else did. So I would be up and working, probably an hour before anybody was up and around and the camp barracks had been opened. Because one of the things I did was to bank all the fires in all of the boilers and begin to heat the water that was going to be dispensed for the various prisoners during the course of the day to -- for bathing and for making of coffee and all of the rest of the things. We had water that was distributed in big, tall metal pitchers. You got one pitcher per eight prisoners per day. That sort of thing. And I worked at that all day long. And I also had -- was in charge of organizing rations, receiving loaves of bread and various other kinds of supplemental rations as well as the -- the Red Cross parcels that were delivered to us, intermittently but occasionally, and that was a part of my activities, and as a result, I would work the whole day and then when the barracks would be locked up at night, I would still have about an hours' work to do in banking all the fires for the next day and being sure that they would all be ready to begin the next day, fill the boilers and the like. And that -- one of the big perks was every day that I was in that camp, I had a hot bath. And the reason I did is, of course, I could -- I was the last one to empty the boilers and when I was banking the fires and emptying the boilers, I'd take the boiler and put it into one of these big tubs and the last thing I'd do is take a bath and then I could go to bed.

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Question: Huh. Let me switch tapes here.