

## Lauren Schwisow

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**Question:** First off, could you just give me your name.

**Answer:** Ok. All right. First name, L-A-U-R-E-N, Lauren. Last name is S-C-H-W-I-S-O-W, Schwisow.

**Question:** Schwisow.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** So I did butcher it..

**Answer:** Well, --

**Question:** I added the "Schw"

**Question:** (laughs) Now what branch of the service were you in and how did you get in?

**Answer:** (laughs) The-- the Army Air Corp. It was my junior year of college in Nebraska Wesleyan and Army and Navy recruiters came by and I took a look at both of them and decided that fixed base might be a little better than perhaps a moveable landing field, so I went with the Army Air Corp. That was 1942 and I was inducted, I guess, you know, in December of '42 and went to Jefferson Barracks which was the, my boot camp, Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, in '-43, February of '43. So that begins the story.

**Question:** What was boot camp like? Now, how, so you're college age. You're 19, 20? How old are you?

**Answer:** I am, what, about 20, I guess. Off camera female voice. No, you were -- you were 19 -- you were 20 when you were commissioned, 13 months later, so you were 18 when you enlisted.

**Question:** So you were just a kid. Off camera female voice. Well, yeah.

**Answer:** I'd say so, yeah. (Laughs) Yes, I was. So I was 19, I think, must have been. Yeah, I think that's right. Off camera female voice. Yeah, you were 20 when you (inaudible) commissioned.

**Answer:** Yeah, okay.

**Question:** Single or married?

**Answer:** I was single. I was a college student and of course the bombing of Pearl Harbor had taken place and so everyone was going to be involved in the service one way or the other so I enlisted then.

**Answer:** And the boot camp was just a typical boot camp, very very cold in February in Missouri. And so I got through that all right. And then I went to Alabaster College in St. Paul, Minnesota

**Answer:** College kind of a brush up on ... on math and science and things of that nature. And after that period of time I went to the West Coast where I actually went through my pre-flight training and my flight training graduating from Douglas, Arizona in 1944, Class of '44 C. In -- that Douglas is a twin engine base, so I graduated in twin engine airplanes hoping at that

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time to go into B-25's. However, our losses in Europe were very great; we were involved in daylight bombing, and fighter protection was still in its infancy in terms of long-range fighter protection. And so the raids on -- in Europe, either from the 8th Air Force or the 15th -- the casualties were quite large and so it was necessary for there to be replacements. And so I ended up a replacement. I ended up on B-24 bombers as a co-pilot.

**Question:** As a co-pilot.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** So ok, you know the war is going on now.

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Looking back you know you were a replacement. Did you know at that time you were a replacement? I mean, what's going on in your head? Here's this young -- pretty young kid --

**Answer:** Well, you go through your -- you finish your flight training and you're assigned -- I was assigned to B-24's. Prior to actually going on a B-24 you had a crew assignment because you had to have a bombardier, you had to have a first pilot, you had to have gunners and so forth. And all this was done in Lincoln, Nebraska where this crew was put together. And then the crew -- then we were sent to Boise, Idaho where the actual B-24 training began. And it was at -- at Boise that I got married also so two things, two eventful things happened there.

**Question:** Ah-hah. So is this a college sweetheart or a sweetheart that you met in your travels or a hometown sweetheart?

**Answer:** It would have to be the latter because we really don't know when we first met. We both are from the farm and our farms are not adjoining but very close by. Went to the same high school and so we've known each -- and our mothers worked together in the local grocery store. So we had been thrown together, known each other, you know, from the very beginning, and so there isn't any -- any time when the light just suddenly flashed. But we became interested while we were in college. Reta also went to Nebraska Wesleyan and so that's when we -- that could be the beginning of our courtship, and romance and eventual ... wedding. And let's see, we've been together for 57 years. Off camera female. Not quite

**Answer:** What? Off camera female. Not quite.

**Answer:** Not quite.

**Question:** Almost.

**Answer:** 56 years, edit that out. (laughs)

**Question:** (laughs) So you're - Ok. See, now this is what I don't understand. So here you are, early 20's --

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** You're training to go to a war -- and we'll get to that in a second, what's going on in your head. Now you get married. Did you -- was there no fear of going into this war? I

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mean getting married and going to war, leaving your wife back home 'cause you know you're going to go over there and serve --what were you thinking? (laughs)

**Answer:** Well, we had talked about that. And we'd made the decision to get married. So then it became a -- the second decision was, you know, when. Do you wait until the war is over? And that's indefinite. You really don't know at that time because you're in the service for as long as the war is on plus six months, and so had -- and early -- in the '40's, well we were talking about '43. In '44 it's difficult to see when the war was going to end at that stage in the game. But we decided to go ahead. Thinking about the alternatives and so forth we decided ok, we'll get married before we -- before the -- before I go overseas. So we did. May the 8th, 1944.

**Question:** Hmm. Did he get the date right? May 8?

**Answer:** Absolutely.

**Question:** Good man, good man.

**Answer:** Good man, I tell you, I wouldn't miss that. (laughs)

**Question:** So now you go through the training; you get your flight training. Now, is there a sense of fear in your mind at all at this point of where you're headed?

**Answer:** For me, no, and I think -- I would guess that probably the same for most of the guys going through the training. You're young. You know, you're really -- you don't think that anything's going to happen, or can happen to you. And so no, there wasn't -- there wasn't any fear. We knew what we were trying to do and that was to become acquainted with a four engine bomber and become proficient in that and we had people who were trained in various aspects or various stations aboard the bomber and so we were working together as a unit and I think our concerns were as much about that -- becoming proficient and doing a good job as -- we didn't think about the consequences. Obviously they were there. Because we were aware of people getting killed and the Gold Star Mothers. I don't know whether you're familiar with that -- where you had -- if somebody had a death in the family, the home usually had a gold star in the window or something of that nature. So we were aware of those. But you never think that's going to happen to you. You just don't worry about the future.

**Question:** It ... so knowledge of the war front. 'Cause it sounds like you got two things going on. Very busy learning the bomber --

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** So that's taking your time up right there. You're a newlywed, so that's part of your time --

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** - what images are you seeing from the war front, or is that kind of separate at this point? Newsreels and things of that sort?

**Answer:** Well, I probably -- third priority all right. Probably separate from this point. Then again it would be newsreels and newspapers, knowing full well that the ... the Allies have been successful in certain engagements. At this time we were also speculating on when D-Day would begin. When the invasion of Europe would begin Because you see this -- this was

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May, essentially 1944 and invasion of Europe came in early June. So that hadn't happened yet and there was always that speculation of when are we going to invade and what is that going to bring. Those are all unknowns and so it's kind of a third priority; priorities as you mentioned them a minute ago. Learning the bomber, and getting married and the D-Day. The front and the invasion of Europe. Probably, you know, third in priority. Attention to it; we knew it had to happen. But, you know, it's a little hard to project what part an individual's going to play in the whole picture. So I wouldn't say there was any fear or any real dread of the future at that time. It was an unknown and it was something that we were being trained for and hopefully we'd get through.

**Question:** So a question just popped into my mind -- I haven't asked anybody before. What was your history knowledge like prior to this? All of a sudden there's these countries that we're talking about, and some big and some small areas and things like that. Did you have the faintest idea, really where any of this was or --

**Answer:** Well I've always been interested in history. And in the high school I was in, even though it was a very, very small high school, in the late 1930's when Hitler was, you know, on his rampage and making speeches, we used to have an assembly of all the kids -- we were small enough so we could -- and we listened to Hitler's speeches. And so we were -- because of that, we had to know something about the land he was talking about. So we were getting a history lesson along with that. Learning about the invasion, where he was going to invade and what part of the country or where this country was and so forth. So we -- I at least had a knowledge of -- of the events. And I also have an interest in history and so I probably absorbed more perhaps than someone else who wasn't that interested. So I felt I had a pretty good background as far as where these countries were and perhaps what the -- what the overall scheme was which was to invade Europe and eventually be triumphal over Hitler. And where the axis powers of Japan also, later on.

**Question:** So once you got done with your training and everything -- where were you first sent for active duty? For combat duty?

**Answer:** Okay. I finished my training in Boise, Idaho and had a few days leave before going to Topeka, Kansas to pick up a new B-24. And just so happened that 4th of July came about -- this was the last of June and early July and so I spent the 4th at -- in Nebraska and celebrated at my wife's home. We had fried chicken and we had ice cream and we had all of the things that you would expect for a traditional 4th of July celebration. And then went to -- right after that we had to go to Topeka to pick up our airplane. And left the States on the 10th of July 1944 in a brand new bomber, flying across the country and eventually left from Gander, Newfoundland which was the base there, and landed on the Azores which is a little island in the middle of the Atlantic, and went from the Azores over to Marrakech, Morocco and eventually worked our way into southern Italy where our base was. And that was in -- that was in mid-July. And on the 25th of July I was shot down. So in 21 days I went from feast to fasting.

**Question:** Boy, let me -- before I get to the being shut down part, now here's this new kid who's got a brand new plane that you're flying in -- now, are you flying squadron at this time?

**Answer:** No, we're flying singly. No.

**Question:** No kidding. So you go to Topeka, you pick up this plane --

**Answer:** That's right, and --

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**Question:** -- and they said "here are your directions --"

**Answer:** That's right. You go to -- you fly to Massachusetts first, and then you're flying to Gander, Newfoundland and then you fly to the Azores and then Morocco and skirt the coast along the Mediterranean but on the African side and eventually you get far enough you go across the Mediterranean and fly into southern Italy.

**Question:** So -- I mean, is this exciting at this point?

**Answer:** Well, it's -- yes, although you don't think of it as exciting, it's all new. And you've never been there before. So you know, every experience is a new experience. Exciting, perhaps to some extent, but also kind of mind boggling and -- for a kid just off the farm, this is part of the world I had never seen before. So you know you have thoughts like that too. Getting into a new environment, and a new country, and so forth. Brand new to this guy.

**Question:** Wow. I just imagine your mind has just got to be going up and down, I mean there's the war but look at this new country, I'm flying, and I got a plane and -- you know --

**Answer:** That's right. And we depend now on our navigator. We find out how good the training is because if he's not on the ball we're going -- we're not going to make the Azores which is a very little -- very small spot in the Atlantic to begin with, and then of course the various places along the way. And really you don't want to get lost in a situation like that.

**Question:** Yeah, that wouldn't be a good one.

**Answer:** Yeah. And so you have that, you know that's kind of woven into it, too. Some tension because, you know, it's all new, and there's not a map before you that is -- you know what you're supposed to do and hopefully you're going to do it.

**Question:** Now you had to leave your wife back home.

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** What was that like? Is it like the movies or is there a different reality to it?

**Answer:** It's like the movies all right. Yeah, it's - you come to the realization when you do that, when you leave, at least in a way the situation which we found ourselves, that I might not be back. I don't think we ever talked about it specifically, but I think we were both -- we had to be aware of the fact I was leaving. And I might not come back. And on the other hand it's ... it's just like so many thousands, well hundreds of thousands of other guys did. If they didn't leave their wives they certainly left their families, their mothers and fathers and siblings and so forth, best friends. It's that going away, not knowing whether you're going to come back, but everybody thinks they are, obviously, and ... no, it's a serious time, stressful time.

**Question:** Boy, that had to be hard. I mean, I again, I can't, you know, I think it's just a hard situation, just leaving somebody even knowing you're coming back, but yet to have that unspoken relationship there.

**Answer:** Well, you can ask my wife if you talk to her. What her feelings are, were about that.

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**Question:** So now you fly over, you have your assignment and we've done a number of missions before we get shot down or mission number one or what happens here?

**Answer:** Well I was shot down on mission number one. (laughs) The very first mission. My crew had been up the day before; they had -- there was a senior pilot who flew in my seat with my first pilot just, you know, for orientation purposes and things of that nature. And so they had -- they were on their second mission but for me it was the mission number one and it took me 293 days to complete it.

**Question:** So what was your mission -- you were flying a bombing mission, right?

**Answer:** Yes. We're based in southern Italy, a little place called Torretta but it's close to Bari, Italy Cerignola

**Answer:** There are a whole number of air bases in this are

**Answer:** And we're flying to Lintz, Austria which is almost straight north. It's, you know, up across the Adriatic and into as I say, Austria

**Answer:** Lintz was the second largest city in Austria

**Answer:** And we were to bomb the Hermann-Göring Tank Factory. So that was our mission. Still remember at the briefing we were in this briefing room and the officer of the day comes in and walks up to the front and we come to attention and then a few preliminary remarks about the mission itself. And then he unveiled the map which shows where you are in relation to where the mission is. I can still remember a large map on a wall and our base is way down here and there's a red string that goes way up to the top of the map. Oh my. This is going to be a long ride. And we went through the preflight and, you know, all the intelligence reports and so forth. And it sounded like it was going to be a relatively easy mission. Although I don't know why it should be because Lintz was the second largest city in Austria and it was a heavily industrialized place. And when you stop and think there was no way in the world that it's not going to be defended. And anyway we went blithely on our way and flew and flew till ten minutes after 11, 19 -- July 25th, 1944. We were bounced by a number of fighters and in reading the official report -- that is the report that's written up after the mission and these are from the official records, I find out there were 25 twin engine fighters and 125 single engine fighters that attacked our group. We had 21 airplanes and -- in our group, 461st, and 11 of 'em were shot down over or around the target by -- and they were shot down by fighters. Four of them crashed on their way home, never made it to the base. And six of them eventually got back to the air base. So, ... they singled us out, for whatever reason, and just, you know devastated us. Really really took care of our group. So that was what happened in that -- over the target.

**Question:** Had you released your bombs or you still had --

**Answer:** We were in trouble. We were set afire by a fighter -- it was a FW190 Focke-Wulf 190, one of the very best that the Germans had. And the plane come up from underneath, came up from underneath. And I saw the fighter pilot. He went right by my window. I was flying in the right seat and he came up and he was just right to the -- I just looked out and saw him. I mean, there he was. And set us afire and so we were -- we had lots of flames all around us, I guess, and smoke all over. And knocked out two engines. It was an airplane that was definitely in serious trouble, and particularly with the fire. It became evident that the only course that made real good sense was to leave that airplane, and so at 20-some thousand feet, I jumped out. Prior to leaving, however, we salvo' d our bombs,

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which means that we just -- we have a lever that just gets rid of all the bombs at one time. And so we just pulled that lever and all the bombs dropped out. So the bomb bay door was open and ... I jumped. I jumped and I landed in a meadow. And I landed hard in the meadow. And after I took a minute or two to clear my head, I stood up. And over to my right I heard a -- well, someone yelled, and I looked over there, and there was a member of the Home Guard with a rifle pointed at me and he took a shot at me. Didn't hit me either by design or because he was -- couldn't hold the rifle steady enough. But we weren't too far away, so I guess he probably intentionally missed. And so I took a quick look at my situation. Now there was a tree line off to the left but that was about 50 yards away. There was about 15, oh, about 12 to 15 inches of cover in the meadow. Well, that would just barely, you know, cover me. There was a guy over to the right with a gun who wanted to defend his homeland in the worst way. So I decided I guess that's it. And so I surrendered at that point.

**Answer:** I was taken to Search Light Battery which was closed by, or housed in part of the complex and was there for a little while and another enlisted man from another crew came and so the two of us eventually were loaded in the back of a pickup truck or a truck that -- an open air truck, let's put it that way. And slowly we went around the countryside. We went through villages and we went through the countryside and the people were -- were quite -- well, many of them were very agitated. Many of them were very angry. Some of them were curious. And that's -- those were the emotions that they displayed as we went by. And we were just kind of taken through as a -- as an example of, you know, what the Home Guard -- what they were able -- what the military was able to do in defending the homeland. Anyway, we were happy that we were under the Home Guard that there was some, you know, military control, because we had known also at that time that some of the guys that were shot down were killed by the civilians and there was always the question of whether you should be armed or should be unarmed. I happened to be unarmed that particular day, so really had no way of defending myself anyway. But a number of individuals who were shot down were -- were killed. In my case I was picked up, you know, right by the military right away, and taken through the countryside. And we ended up before a very large stone ... building, or ... oh, building, yeah, I guess that's right. Institution of some sort. Heavy, big, bulky, large institution. And I was helped through the front gates of this place by a swift kick in the rear. That was my entrance into this camp. And it was a concentration camp, at least I thought it was a concentration camp, and I based that on the clothing that the individuals were wearing, the type of individuals -- there was a whole range. They were not military. They were -- there were men, and women and young people. And at the time I had seen enough newsreels to know there -- something about concentration camps. So I guessed, well this is a concentration camp that I'm in. And so this other enlisted man and myself -- we were in this concentration camp, stood along the wall, we were objects of interest from the inmates, and it was a large camp. There were many people. And the guards kept the inmates away, but they were very curious. There were a couple barracks of women, we could see that. And then we just stood by ourselves and eventually the gate would open and some more Allied flyers would come in. Guys that had been shot down over the raid on Lintz until late in the afternoon I suppose we collected about 35 or 40. That evening and the next couple of evenings we were -- well, along the way, six of my crew eventually ended up in the same camp, in this concentration camp. And that evening all seven of us were put in a very small cell. And we spent a couple of nights and days in this camp, heard screams at night. Didn't help our sleeping too much. Didn't know -- didn't know where we were or what the situation was except that here we were as prisoners in this large camp.

**Question:** Nobody ... it's kind of chaotic in the fact that nobody's saying here's where you are or here's what happening -- they're just --

**Answer:** It's pretty chaotic, that's right, yeah.

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**Question:** What's going through -- can you remember what's going through your head at this time? Because I can't imagine being taken out of an environment and put -- I assume that there's a language barrier --

**Answer:** That's right

**Question:** -- you're facing, you've got all this going around; you've got some of your crew back together. But can you remember what your -- are you thinking of escape, are you just, you know, say "Yes, sir" or "No, sir" and go along, or is it just so overwhelming that you can't even describe the thought process.

**Answer:** Well, you have all kinds of emotions when you first get down. When I first land you're thankful you're down. You're fearful. I mean, after all, this wasn't supposed to happen. You're angry because it did. Whole series of emotions that first hits you, you know, when you're down. One of the first things that go back just a minute -- one of the first things you notice after you've parachuted is the quiet. It is so quiet -- you've been in this airplane which is a very noisy airplane and guns firing and things of that nature. And then all of a sudden you're out in -- with you and your parachute, and it's so very quiet. All you hear is a little drone chute which is a little chute that you have on the top that -- that goes out first, flapping on your parachute. And so that's one emotion. That's one feeling you have. Gee, this is so quiet. Well, eventually, as I say, the landing, you're overwhelmed. What comes next -- this isn't supposed to happen. What do I do? No one's here to tell me. Have all the things -- all kinds of thoughts like that going through your head. And of course in the concentration camp, now I'm with six of my other crewmen so we have this -- there was a group of us that are together, and so that gives you some feelings of some stability, anyway, or cohesiveness. I'll just -- I'll finish up on this concentration camp because there's another story that goes with it.

**Answer:** That is -- I didn't -- as I say I didn't know the name of the camp. And it wasn't until 1988 I went to -- my wife and I went to Jerusalem with a tour group and in Jerusalem we went to the Mount -- the Holocaust Museum. And in the Holocaust Museum I spotted the concentration camp that was closest to Lintz, Austria

**Answer:** So I found out the name. It's called Mauthausen. And in 1990 I visited and just this last summer I visited it again. It's still there. It's a museum. It's -- I saw the place where I was -- spent the first couple of nights. It also housed the crematorium, and so that's probably one reason why -- one reason for the screams that we heard at night. The ... the camp was a very active camp. It started in 1938. So that was our first -- our first days as prisoners.

**Answer:** We were still under the jurisdiction -- one of the things I need to mention. We were under the jurisdiction of the German Air Force. We were captured by the Home Guard but it was a military group that captured us. And the concentration camp, Mauthausen of course was run by the SS, the Gestapo. And because we had -- we were under the military, we were able to -- they housed us and then they took us out of there. We would not have been such a -- the whole scenario would have been a little different if, you know, if we had been in that concentration camp for a long time, because it was a very brutal one. And, but, just as I say, we were there a couple days, couple nights. And then they started us along the normal channel of -- we went to Frankfurt, the main interrogation center was outside of Frankfurt, Germany, and we went through that. I was put in solitary confinement in this interrogation center. Expected to spend quite a little time or at least several days there because I looked on the wall and somebody along the way had scratched four marks and then

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a slash through, and then another mark and it looked like that had happened several times, and so I thought, well it might be that this is going to be my home for awhile. And ... but as it turned out, when I met with the interrogator, I gave my name, rank and serial number and he told me a lot of things about -- about my life. About where I graduated from Douglas, Arizona, from flight school.

**Answer:** ... I think he mentioned -- well, he did mention I was from Nebraska, and gave my mother's maiden name, and so he had quite an extensive background on me. He also knew enough about my group and you know, when we had come and so he knew he had a second lieutenant on the first mission who really didn't know very much, and so I didn't spend much time in solitary. I mean, it wasn't -- there really wasn't any point in spending time in interrogating this guy. And, you know, losses were pretty heavy, so there were a number of people to interrogate. So they shoved me along the line very quickly.

**Question:** And they gave you all the information, basically said we know who you are.

**Answer:** Essentially right.

**Question:** Was that a fear tactic? Is -- I mean, what are they doing to your head at that point?

**Answer:** Well, all -- obviously, even though they have a great background of information about you and a number of -- well, many, many people, there's always some bits of information that they don't have. And so as, you know, good interrogators -- what they're trying to do is saying, well, we have all this information on you and you know, then they slip in a question, you know, how about this or that, and hopefully, you know, since they already have all this information, then one more little bit of information, obviously, isn't going to make that much difference. That's the individual's perspective. But as far as the interrogator is concerned, there's a little piece over here that's missing that fits into a broader piece, and so that's what they're searching for, I'm sure. But in my case it became quite obvious there really wasn't anything that I could offer them. I mean, what the heck. I didn't -- I barely knew the name of my base, let alone, you know, I didn't have any military secrets.

**Question:** Was it a casual event or I mean, is it again like the movies, the one light shining on you or -- did they come in and they were kind of your buddy or --

**Answer:** Well, I'd say -- it wasn't quite like the movies where you were under a spotlight -- more of a casual situation. I remembered that the individual interrogator spoke very good English. He, you know, it's -- kind of a professional approach. I mean -- although there were no threats -- at least I wasn't -- there weren't any threats to me. Here you are and this is what we want to know. Here are -- you're asked some questions and you say what you can say, and ... but in my case they knew so much about me and the fact that I didn't have much to offer and so I didn't spend a long time in solitary or before the interrogator. But it wasn't, you know, it wasn't quite like the movies in as much as you had a whole a bunch of guys standing around. Probably in certain situations I'm sure that's true. It probably happened. If you, you know, if you happened to be a squadron commander or a group commander or someone that really had some information, why obviously they -- the Germans would do their very best to get the information out of you. Anyway, that was my --

**Question:** So to this point they've been, I mean, relatively nice to you it sounds like?

**Answer:** At this point, yes. We hadn't -- you know, we were -- we were prisoners. We were always under guard and the guards had guns. And we were always warned not to try to

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escape because we would be shot and things of that nature. But, you know, that probably ... routine. Or that's what was to be expected.

**Question:** So where do you -- after this venture where do you --

**Answer:** The next stop is kind of a collection point where a number of prisoners are brought in, probably from the same interrogation center and maybe from others. And it's at this point that we get Red Cross parcels. And we get -- we're given a parcel that includes underwear and shirts and toothpaste and toothbrushes and a whole series of things that are -- that are important to ... well, I'm just trying to look and see if -- oh, yeah, it's called a "Capture Parcel". And it's from the Red Cross and includes the basics such as a shirt, trousers, underwear, overcoat, wool cap, socks, toothbrush and things of that nature. And we also get a good meal in this place. And, I don't know, we were here a couple of days, or at least, probably a day or two. And when they have sufficient number of prisoners to start the trek to the permanent camp, why then we wait there until that number is -- whatever the Germans want, and then we're on our way. In my case I went to Stalag Luft Number One which is near Barth, Germany, it's up on the Baltic, it's a little fishing village. And it was an Air Force camp. And when I went into camp my prisoner number is 5155 and by the time that the camp was liberated the following May we had over 10,000 prisoners. So it turned out to be a very large camp. The other large Allied Air Force Camp was of course Stalag Three and that became famous because of the great escape that was carried out by the British -- not by the Americans, but by the Brits, and that was Stalag Three. But we were in One in Barth Germany.

**Question:** So, okay. So, they put you on a truck and haul you out there or --?

**Answer:** We went by train.

**Question:** Oh, by train, okay.

**Answer:** Yeah, in my case I went in a ... not a cattle car. Some of the guys were transported in -- in the old -- in the old cattle cars, I guess, that's probably the way to say it. But in my case I was in the passenger type of vehicle and I really don't remember very much about the ride to Barth, Germany. I remember sleeping in the baggage rack at various times. I remember being crowded and I remember we were always worried about being bombed whenever we were in a marshalling yard or wherever a large concentration of railroad cars and tracks. We were always worried about being strafed when we were out on the railroad during the day. But other than that, I guess I was able to get through it all right and I certainly don't remember much of those four days. I think it took four days or five, but I'm really pretty hazy about remembering the details. And ... I thought many times why I can't recall what happened.

**Question:** I think that's understandable.

**Answer:** (laughs)

**Question:** Did you know by this time -- I mean, now you've kind of been through their system. Did you have a pretty good idea that now we are headed to "the camp"?

**Answer:** Yes, yes, I think probably we were told that also. Quite specifically. Now you are going to go to a permanent camp. And so that's what we were about.

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**Question:** Do you remember arriving? You don't remember the transport, do you remember --

**Answer:** Remember arriving, yes, I remember. We arrived, I imagine, well, early morning. I remember that. And took us off of the car that we were on or the train that we were on and marched us for a couple miles to this permanent camp. Stalag Number One. I remember that, yes.

**Answer:** There I spent my, or the -- the first couple of weeks in Barth I spent in a tent. They had tents attached to barracks and so that we could go through or walk through a window or crawl through a window and use the latrine in the barracks part. But we were in tents. And after a couple of weeks they opened another section of camp. They were in the process of building, adding on to this camp. And 13 of the prisoners who just happened to be in the tents together over the couple of weeks had gotten -- become very well acquainted. We managed to get in the same room in the new section of camp. And all through our months of captivity, even though we changed rooms several different times, the 13 of us stayed together. And so we bonded. And we became a family. Eventually that expanded to 24, and we have meetings every other year of our roommates -- of these roommates so we -- we really bonded together very well as a family. Which helped us immensely in the time we spent in camp.

**Answer:** One of the things that we did -- we pooled all of our food. So anyone that, you know, had any food, or if we got Red Cross boxes or something, we just put 'em in a common pantry and then we had cooks, and so we just operated as our own individual unit. Which didn't happen in other rooms. Individuals paired off or something of that nature. And it proved, I think, to be a very important move as I look back because we depended on each other. We became -- we, as I mentioned before, we were bonded, and that just helped us during the long winter evenings and so forth.

**Question:** What are the -- what's your day like. I mean, what -- what do you do while you're in camp? What do they --

**Answer:** Well, you walk. That's one thing you do. You walk and you walk and you walk inside the wire. Around and around and around the camp. If you go to a zoo and you see animals that are in -- in a cage or, you know, in an enclosure and you see them walk constantly back and forth and so forth -- that's ... a good representation of what prisoners did. They were, a, for the most part, in very good physical shape and they had to get rid of some of the energy. And so, and they also had to do something about the time. They had to get -- so they walked around, they talked to individuals and, you know, around and around the camp we would go. So that's part of the day.

**Answer:** We also -- food preparation and food was always -- excuse me. A high priority, and it became a higher priority as -- as time went on, as we became -- as Red Cross parcels became further divided. At one time when we first went into camp, if you had a Red Cross parcel per person per week, you had no, you know, no real problems with hunger or anything such as that. Because that was adequate. About 7-1/2 pounds of food and ... oh, good variety, and so, you know, you could work out some very good meals. And really that wasn't so bad.

**Question:** Favorite meal?

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**Answer:** Well, used to make cake -- I know that's dessert, but make cake out of powdered milk and sugar and graham crackers, and let's see, we had, probably chocolate pudding. So put that all together, we made a cake.

**Question:** So did each little unit have their own kitchen or -- I mean, where you were baking this cake?

**Answer:** Well, we just had a large room. Well, not a large room, but a room about this size probably. And we had a little stove in one end of it. And it was on that little stove that we did all of our baking and whatever else. But we did to -- to do the baking, of course, we had to build an oven. So we -- and we also had to build all of our utensils, which we did. And we used the -- the metal out of the dried milk cans and we used the solder out of -- well, we used the -- all the metal that we had in the corned beef cans and Spam cans and the dried milk cans and so forth. And then that became our raw materials and from there we made all the -- all the cooking things that we needed. And so we had -- eventually we built an oven. And in this oven then we did, you know, we baked our -- if we had cake we baked our cake. On top of the stove, of course. And it wasn't quite like Mom made, but it was pretty good. And so that was, you know, always the food preparation and the food. And as our stay in prison camp became -- went on and as the food source was cut down, the food aspect became much more important. I mean, we were constantly talking and thinking about food.

**Answer:** But you asked about the day. The YMCA also -- the YMCA brought in or sent in sports equipment. And so when the weather was all right, and we played -- we played ball and volley ball and in some cases there was football, I guess. So we had some sporting activities. And we even had leagues in camp, particularly in softball -- I can remember. Another thing we did -- I think it was from the YMCA, we received a number of books and so we had a library of sorts. And so obviously we'd read.

**Question:** Did -- are you still being treated fairly now? I mean -- who -- the guards --

**Answer:** Well, we're in -- we're in a big camp and there are guard towers, there's a warning wire, and there are guards constantly there and you know very well that if you go near the warning wire you're -- you're in danger of being shot. At night the barracks are buckled up, dogs are turned loose, and so they run through the camp and discourage any -- any tunneling or attempts to escape and things of that nature. And so that's -- you're aware. You know very well you're a prisoner. If for no other reason that when you're walking inside that wire looking out and seeing the barbed wire and the fence and the guard towers -- you're very much aware that you're not free by any means.

**Question:** Did -- did they have jobs for you to do? Did they -- I know that in some of the Japanese prison camps, I mean the amount of work that they had to do --

**Answer:** Well, yes. No, the Geneva Conventions forbids the officers from working. They're not permitted to work. The enlisted men on my crew, I learned later they, yes, they were out on farms and they were working, but in this particular camp, which was all Allied flyers, all officers, there was no work.

**Question:** So they -- they obeyed by the Geneva Convention rules.

**Answer:** Yeah, I would say generally -- make the general statement that the Germans had signed on to the Geneva Convention, and up to a point you could say that they certainly followed the Conventions. It's always difficult, you know, in -- to stand back and look at the situation. You know very well that the Germans were having a difficult time and you can

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understand, at least I can anyway, that to give superior treatment to prisoners or treatment or conditions, food and so forth that were a lot better than they were experiencing or they had an opportunity to be a part of, I can understand that, you know, they -- there could be some - - some areas where they didn't meet the full expectations of the Geneva Conventions. However, the mere fact that they had signed on -- there certainly were great differences between the prisoners of the Germans and the Japanese -- the American prisoners of the Germans and Japanese. Anyway, you know, you -- you walk. Of course one of the problems you have in prison camp is the fact that it's pretty difficult to get away, to be by yourself. You don't have to -- I mean there are times when you like not to be a part of hundreds of guys. And when you're in a room that's not very large and you have from 15 to 25 guys in this room, there are people around all the time. And so one of the things that's always difficult is to find a moment to be by yourself and so that's -- that's part of the camp life also. So you -- you try to, and of course, although there is lots -- there is an advantage in having people around because there's lots of opportunities for learning new stories and talking about them. And as we were in camp we also set up a school. And so we had courses taught by people who were very proficient in certain areas. I remember taking a couple classes in navigation -- celestial navigation. Not that I was going to be a navigator, but very interesting to see how these guys operated and how they were able to tell where, you know, where we were. We were flying and they used their instruments and tell us pretty much exactly where we were.

**Question:** Let me hold that thought for a second; I've got to switch a tape here.