

Ray, Frank M. Recollections 9-91

[Speaker 2]

Technical Sergeant Charles B. Sewell, who resided in the Baltimore, Maryland area, was a member of a B-17 crew flying out of England in World War II. On his 14th mission, a raid on Berlin, his bomber was shot down on May 24, 1944.

He was taken prisoner at once, and 11 months later was released by General Patton's tank divisions on April 29, 1945. Sergeant Sewell died on February 26, 1991. His wife, Mae Y.

Sewell, had copies made of a journal Sergeant Sewell kept during his period as a prisoner of war. She distributed a copy to any of his fellow airmen or fellow prisoners whom she could locate. Sergeant Sewell's closest POW companion was Staff Sergeant Frank M.

Ray of Albany, New York. Sergeant Ray flew out of southern Italy with the 97th Bomber Group. His bomber was shot down over Yugoslavia on his 20th mission after a raid on Hungary.

Parachuting into a German bivouac area, he too was immediately captured. In reply to Mrs. Sewell's sending him a copy of her husband's POW journal, Sergeant Ray prepared and sent to Mrs. Sewell the following recorded message recounting the two men's mutual experiences as prisoners of war in Germany. The next voice you hear will be that of Staff Sergeant Frank M.

Ray.

[Speaker 1]

I was shot down May 20th on my 20th mission. Four of us were captured, the other six managed to get out. I had a dozen little jails across Yugoslavia or across Germany.

A camp had just opened and we were in the first 200 there. That's where I first met Chuck Sewell. We had bunk beds.

Chuck and I shared. I forget who was on the top bunk bed or who was on the bottom. We became a combine and shared everything throughout our POWs in Germany.

First thing, shortly after we got there, burlap bags for a mattress. Kind of got some blood powder red. We set out and did the trick because we had plenty of time.

A bowl of soup a day, German bread, bacon, white, maggots. Cut out the bad parts and that was it. The bad parts too.

Then we started to get bread crust parcels, a box of raisins or prunes. For a period of time, walk around the compound. We used to do that plenty of hours.

The compound was about the size. In the summer, we'd be out walking. We found out they didn't use the soap as such.

They ate it. They lined us up outside the barracks in column five. Counted us every day.

Invariably, they miscounted us. We did have a big rig in February at some time. We started to evacuate.

They brought us down at that time, but it turned the marshalling yard of Berlin. Every night, we were bombed. We stayed there for two nights.

Nothing came real close to us, but we just erupted in the area all around us. Finally, we left there. It must have been a couple days later.

We were probably on the road five or six nights. Bricks all over were German teak, pieces of black brick. But all of a sudden, they got one shipment after another of bug powder.

Each one of us had about ten cans of bug powder. We could make soup out of it or do anything with it. They did give us some cheese one day.

Distributed it. Later that day, they came back and said it had been exposed to ammonia and to have everybody turn it in. Nobody turned it in.

We all ate it. Then I called you, May, on the phone. We boarded some bullion cubes, Chuck and I, and we carried it.

It was a truly capable threat. We made their first run. They realized who we were.

They did like this the first night in the woods. We were carrying everything we owned. We could hear our guns, so everybody was trying to stall.

We drifted out three or four at a time. As they got ten of us together, they started us down the road. By the third day, we were scattered all over Germany.

We didn't know where the guards were. They were only old men anyway. Able-bodied German was in the front line.

But we'd come to a crossroad. We wouldn't know which way to go. We'd have to knock on someone's door.

We did this all across Germany. There were ample times the escape walked away with us. We had one sergeant that was ahead of us, Heidemann, his name was.

He was a well-educated German who spoke fluent English. He told us to stay with the column. There were going to be three men in another week or two.

Try to get away. You're liable to get shot by our own forces or fought innocent Germans that know they're defeated and don't care what happens. So we did.

We kept plugging along towards Nuremberg. This walk from Nuremberg, they had little prisoners, the horror camps, young prisoners. They had the gate locked.

They wouldn't let us in. At that time, I guess some had arrived earlier. We kept shaking the gate, telling them to open it up.

We had to come in. We had no place to go. Finally, they did open the gate.

And they found, so after that, that Patton's army liberated the camp. They didn't even know the camp had stumbled on it. Patton came in, and I didn't see him, but they said he'd floored the camp.

He had six guns on his belt, went into the town of Mooseburg. I think Chuck was with us. Real bitter.

They, at that time, thought that they'd given you a hard time. They'd shoot him. You know, we wouldn't.

We got back to camp. Car with my picture on it. I don't know if Chuck did or not, and after four or five days, they transferred us to some airport near there, and we had some of our C-47s come in, and they flew us back to France, put us in camps that were named after cigarettes, Camp Lucky Strike, Camp Chesterfield, Camp Cannon, and these were all receiving camps for P.W. and they'd process us for our trip home. We eluded this, and if we wanted to hitchhike to Paris, and a few of us went to Paris, but we spent a few days. They had ramps there, and this ramp, R.A.M.P., covered Allied military personnel, and you could draw a partial pay as some of the money that you owed. And we spent the three days or so in Paris and then got back to Camp Lucky Strike.

Not too long after that, a day or two, we took a train to Lahore, and there we boarded a transport, the Admiral Benson. It was a big, not the size of the Queen Mary, but a big cruise ship that they had converted, and Chuck and I were together all the way back through that. We got back in five days, pulled into New York, Harvard, where there was thousands of us.

That was the last, maybe, ten years, and I drifted over to tell Chuck, I said,