

Bailey, Jack L. Interview 11-22-96

[Speaker 2]

Testing, 1, 2, 3, testing. This is an interview with Mr. Jack Bailey. Mr. Bailey, I guess the first thing I want to ask you is what kind of plane did you fly in?

Oh, it was a Boeing 737 bomber. When were you shot down?

[Speaker 1]

On February the 10th, 1944. We were in Germany and we got hit on the IP. We just turned on the IP and got hit.

We had to salvage our bombs. We got out of formation and then the fighters jumped on us. Flak had hit us first and knocked a couple of engines out, but we couldn't keep up, so we got out of formation.

[Speaker 2]

So where did you bail out?

[Speaker 1]

Well, it was a little town by the name of Volks in Germany, close to Hanover. They captured, while we were retaining all the crew, they captured a lady who was a Marine pilot. All he did was wait for her, froze his feet, and he had to give himself up.

The pilot got killed.

[Speaker 2]

Did they capture you immediately?

[Speaker 1]

They were standing on the ground waiting for me, and a guy came out and saluted me and shook my hand. He thought I was a German. When I came down, he found out I looked like a Dutchman.

Then he said, follow me, and he took me in the house. He took me in the house and took off a clothes rack in the hall of the house. He took his coat off and had a big swastika on me.

I knew I'd had it right there. You don't know how long it is or where you were. I thought maybe we'd gotten back over to Belgium or someplace else.

We were in Germany, and they finally put a gun on us. They kept asking me if I had a Pistol and asked me if I had Lucky Strike cigarettes. That's all they'd heard of.

They wanted to know where we were flying from. They thought we were flying from Chicago or something. This was in a place that they didn't know what the war was.

They hadn't been bombed. This was on the Italian side, huh? They thought we had been invaded at that time, so the war wasn't in Germany.

They didn't know where we were coming from or anything. They called us moose gangsters. Terrorist leaders is what they called us, but that meant moose gangsters.

They rounded us all up and put us in jail that night. The next couple of days, they shipped us to Frankfurt, Germany for interrogation. We stayed there a few days.

A few odd days? A few odd days.

[Speaker 2]

How long were you there?

[Speaker 1]

I'd say two or three days. I don't really remember. The people weren't too happy with us when they marched us through there.

[Speaker 2]

What did they do to you?

[Speaker 1]

They didn't do anything to us, but they threatened us and everything because we bombed them about a week before that. We bombed Frankfurt, I think, on the 4th or the 6th of February. They marched us back through there about a week or so afterwards.

They weren't very happy with us. It was a torn-up place.

[Speaker 2]

What was it like? Do you live, like, or sell or whatever?

[Speaker 1]

Well, that's where they interrogate you. I remember they tried to offer me cigarettes and all that stuff. All the interrogators had the same story, that they could speak perfect English.

This guy that interviewed me, he gave the same story all of them do, that Hitler had invited them over. Then when they got over there, they couldn't get back out of Germany, and he just made different interrogators and ones that could speak good English. This guy was from Philadelphia.

But he knew all about the ball games and everything else. He knew all the trick questions.

[Speaker 2]

Did he try to trick you into giving away any information?

[Speaker 1]

No. No? No.

No, not really. He kept asking me who my CO was and things like that. You know, he just told me to name, rank, and serial number, and that's it.

[Speaker 2]

He didn't threaten you?

[Speaker 1]

He didn't threaten me or anything else after that. The only thing they did, they put me in a cell without any blanket or anything. It was just a hard wooden bed.

They'd turn the heat up, and then they'd turn it down. Turn it up, turn it down. Of course, it was right in the middle of a bad winter.

So it'd get pretty cold. Then they'd heat it up. You didn't have any covers on you or anything like that.

No pillow.

[Speaker 2]

Did they feed you? Yeah, they fed us. What kind of food did they feed you while you were there?

[Speaker 1]

The first kind of food I was in, I guess it was in France, you know, in Panama, in the jail area. They gave me a bowl of some kind of soup or something without any spoon or anything like that. But that night in jail, it was an old-timey jail.

You can look at the place under the door, you know, where all the wear had been. It looked like it'd been wearing more than that for hundreds of years. It didn't have bars on the cell or anything.

It had a little peephole. Every once in a while, you'd see that thing coming up because they were checking us to see if we were still in there. They gave me some old kind of raw sausage.

I don't know, some kind of a spread. I think they spread it out on the bread, but it's almost like a lard. Like a raw sausage is what it looked like.

Well, I couldn't eat that stuff. Of course, I got some. I could eat anything later.

They gave me some bloodwurst, too, and I didn't know what it was, and I ate it. After I found out what it was, I wish I hadn't. It's congealed blood, so it is.

It got really self-convenient. How did that taste?

[Speaker 2]

Pretty good. All right.

[Speaker 1]

That's how it did it.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah?

[Speaker 4]

That's how it did it.

[Speaker 2]

What kind of questions did your interrogator ask you?

[Speaker 1]

He wanted to know where we were flying from, what our group was, and all that stuff. Of course, they could get the number off of your plane and tell what group you were on because each student group had a big number on their table. They'd be like, we had square Ds on ours.

We had triangle As and everything else, but they could tell where you were from. They asked my co-pilot who the CO was and said, is he Major Bennett? He said, hell no.

He said, he's Lieutenant Colonel Bennett. He'd just gotten promoted a couple of weeks before we got shot. But they asked me for the call letters on the plane and things like that, and I didn't know because I wasn't a radio operator.

[Speaker 2]

They seemed to know a lot of information that you were surprised that they didn't know?

[Speaker 1]

Not really because they didn't ask me that much, just what the call letters on the plane were and what we were flying from.

[Speaker 2]

What was your trip? Actually, I guess the first thing I should ask, which camp were you sent to? Your permanent POW camp?

[Speaker 1]

Stalag Luft 6. It was in the eastern part of Poland. Prussia or whatever you want to call it.

Right on this way of the border, real close to the Baltic Sea.

[Speaker 2]

What was your trip like there?

[Speaker 1]

Well, what was that movie they made that was so cold and had boxcars and prisoners in it and everything? It was about like that. I forgot what the name of the movie was.

They put us in those boxcars and were real crowded and, you know, feed you once in a while. You don't remember how many days it was or anything else.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, you don't remember how long it took.

[Speaker 1]

No, I don't remember how long it took.

[Speaker 2]

Did you stop in any towns? Did they ever let you out?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, no, they never let you out at all.

[Speaker 2]

Just kept you there the whole time?

[Speaker 1]

Just the whole time until we got to camp. Of course, any time you went to a new camp, have you ever been to military? No.

Every time you go to a new camp, there will be a new guy or a bunch of guys standing along the road or something and say, you'll be sorry, you know, if you came here. They even started hollering that at the POW camp when we walked in there. The guys lined the road, you know, they're always lying there to see if they know anybody coming in there.

They usually did. But they said, you'll be sorry, you'll be sorry. I thought that was kind of funny that they did that.

[Speaker 2]

When you got to the camp, did the Germans give you a speech on the rules and procedures of the camp?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I think the interrogator probably did that, you know, if you tried to escape. When they first captured me, the guy told us, so if you tried to escape, you know what would happen to you.

[Speaker 2]

I didn't. They made a file on you, I assume.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I'm sure they had a file on me, but I don't know. You know, they sign you a POW number and all that.

[Speaker 2]

Were you given a chance to clean up when you got there?

[Speaker 1]

In the duel on the left, we were given a chance. Then when we got to the camp, they had a shower and things, and you could take a shower twice a week. They had a Johnny that had 52 holes in it.

You've heard of the outside Johnnies. That's the largest one I've ever been in. It had 52 holes in it.

Well, you talk about stinking.

[Speaker 2]

Stuck up the whole camp, huh? When you got there, were there a group of POWs that gave you any kind of rundown of the rules and what not to do and what to do?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, you know, everybody discusses things like this. When we got to the camp, they assign you to a room, and you go in there with guys that have been there for a while. They always tell you what the rules are, because they lock you up at daylight and let you out.

Lock you up when it starts to get dark and let you out at daylight and you get out roaming around in the camp. At night, when they'd shoot you, it happened a couple of times. They didn't lock the door or something.

A guy would get up and go to the tree or something. He'd be walking down through the camp, and they'd shoot him from a tower.

[Speaker 2]

Did you ever see anyone that was shot before?

[Speaker 1]

No, I didn't see him shooting, but we had one in our camp.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, we heard about it.

[Speaker 1]

Around the fences, they had a warning fence that was about, I'd say, 18 inches high and probably 25 feet from the fence. That was no man's land. You couldn't even go in there.

If you'd throw a ball over there or anything else, you couldn't go in there. Somebody would shoot you. That's to keep you away from the fence.

[Speaker 2]

Did you know the POWs, any kind of organizations, such as escape committees and groups to collect escape materials?

[Speaker 1]

They did ask you if you got through with anything, but I didn't get through with anything. The only thing I had was my wedding band that they didn't take. They took my watch, and the only thing they left with me was my ring.

The only thing I heard about news and things like that, they said that they had shipped a softball in with a radio in it, and that's the way we got the news. I never did see it because somebody from our barracks would go and listen to somebody read off the news, make notes, and then they'd come back and go through our barracks and be true and tell them what was going on, when the invasion happened and all that. I never did get in on any escape plans or anything like that, but they had tunnel committees and all this.

[Speaker 2]

Everything was kept pretty quiet, I'm sure. How did the Germans treat you, the guards? Were they pretty friendly?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Of course, they weren't armed or anything else, because they wouldn't have done much good if somebody wanted to take a gun away from them. A lot of them had a gun and got themselves shot.

They just walked around. Most of them had a big long pole that they kept sticking in the ground when they walked to see if they could get a tunnel or something like that. They had these German shepherd dogs that they'd lead around.

They were out in the compound all night long, and they'd just walk around and see if anybody was out or anything like that. But as far as being mean in the camp, no.

[Speaker 2]

No, they were pretty civil to you, huh?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

How did you treat the Germans? Did you ever talk to any of them?

[Speaker 1]

I couldn't speak German, but you'd be sitting around playing games, checkers or cards or something, and they'd always be around convicts and stuff like that. They knew the game, too. But I never did trade with them or anything else.

I never got in with anybody.

[Speaker 2]

How was the discipline by the Germans? Did you see them discipline anybody for any infractions of the rules of the camp?

[Speaker 1]

The only thing, I'm getting ahead of myself, when they moved us from Stalag Luft 6 to 4, they'd beat the guys with rifle butts and stuff them with manhats and stuff like this. And one time when we were on the march, a German came in and had a bale of straw on his back and threw it down because there was a wet spot there where everybody was going to walk and they were going to spread it out. He backed up and then asked him, he made the most of it as long as he wouldn't do it.

Well, he got mad at him and I guess he was cussing or whatever. He didn't do anything to us.

[Speaker 2]

I know I've read there was a cooler they used to put people in.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I heard that when I first got there. You never did see anybody in there? Yeah, I never got in the cooler.

[Speaker 2]

Was there any kind of discipline among the other POWs or anybody within the camp itself?

[Speaker 1]

We didn't have.

[Speaker 2]

Or rules?

[Speaker 1]

No, we had a few fights and things like that, but as far as having a trainer or anything like that, I never heard of that.

[Speaker 2]

I just thought maybe someone was talking too much to the Germans or more than they should have.

[Speaker 1]

No, never ran into that.

[Speaker 2]

What was your compound like? Was it crowded?

[Speaker 1]

The first one wasn't too bad. In Stalag Luft 6 it wasn't too bad. In Stalag Luft 4, we started out with 16 men in a room.

They almost doubled.

[Speaker 2]

As the war progressed on.

[Speaker 1]

They didn't have room to put people in. We had double bunks. First thing you knew, we had triple bunks and people sleeping on the table at night and things like that.

So it got pretty crowded.

[Speaker 2]

What kind of things did you have in your compound as far as furniture went?

[Speaker 1]

You had a bed. You had a bed and it had about six wooden slats on it. They counted those all the time because if you'd build a tunnel or something, you needed those to shore up the tunnel.

So they'd come along and count your slats every day or whenever and see that they were all there and none of them missing. And all the food that they would give you, if they gave you a can of meat in it or something, they'd always put holes in it. When they brought other supplies in, you had to trade those cans in.

[Speaker 2]

To make sure, I guess, you didn't save it up.

[Speaker 1]

So you couldn't save it up for escape purposes or you couldn't use a can to dig with. You had to turn a can in to get a can of meat. So you couldn't dig with it.

[Speaker 2]

Were you issued any kinds of personal items like a toothbrush or a razor or anything like that?

[Speaker 1]

Well, when we were in the Dulau group, they interrogated us and when they shipped us out, they gave us a paper suitcase. I don't remember what all it had, but it had all the toilet supplies in it.

[Speaker 2]

What was the sanitation like in your compounds and latrines? Was it pretty good?

[Speaker 1]

Like I said, we had a 52 hole in it. They had sinks and urinals that were made out of tar paper and tar. It wasn't first class or anything.

[Speaker 2]

But they kept it fairly clean? A bottle of lice or fleas or things like that?

[Speaker 1]

Not in camp. They got lousy as heck on the march. They were like a monkey picking off lice and things like that.

But not in a camp. They discouraged people from growing beards and things like that for sanitary reasons.

[Speaker 2]

What was the medical treatment like there? Was that adequate? No.

[Speaker 1]

I know I got sick one time. I probably had rheumatic fever at that time, but I got sick and no medical attention at all. They had some.

You know, if a guy had a real emergency or something. Mine was just like the flu. Since then they say I've had rheumatic fever and heartburn and all that stuff.

[Speaker 2]

Were you issued Red Cross parcels?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. They came in during the war. You couldn't get them all.

You never did get a full parcel. You were supposed to get one a week or one a month or whatever. But it had chocolate and cigarettes and spam and all that stuff in it.

But they'd ration out what they could. And then they'd give you that old German bread every day. And Ersatz coffee, which I think was made out of burned barley.

[Speaker 2]

Tastes pretty bad, huh?

[Speaker 1]

You got a pretty good slice of bread to pay it every day. Bread, I think it weighed two kilos a loaf or something like that. Pretty heavy bread.

You take a loaf of bread like that and it weighs four pounds. That's pretty heavy bread.

[Speaker 2]

What else did they give you?

[Speaker 1]

Everything was boiled. I guess it was a good healthy diet. But you just didn't get enough of it.

They'd give you boiled potatoes and soup. I guess they had turnips and cabbage and a lot of cabbage and stuff like that.

[Speaker 2]

How many times a day did you eat?

[Speaker 1]

Did they have meals? I couldn't tell you. They gave you coffee in the morning and I guess we'd get two other meals.

Everything just faded away.

[Speaker 2]

Did you lose much weight while you were there?

[Speaker 1]

Quite a bit on the march. I'd say I probably went down to 125 pounds. At that time, I probably weighed 170.

But when they liberated us and we got to eating American food, I bet in two weeks' time, you couldn't tell some of the guys that you knew real well. They were real skinny and then they just got bloated up. They ate so much.

I'd go through the chow line four, five, six times at one time to eat. They wouldn't give you a whole lot. I'd go back and take my coat off and go back through it.

Then I'd put something else on so they wouldn't recognize it. I just kept eating and eating and eating.

[Speaker 2]

Do you think you got sick maybe from the lack of food? Did you have digestive problems?

[Speaker 1]
Everything had diarrhea.

[Speaker 2]
Dysentery?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, just everything. It was everything. Everybody was running.

[Speaker 2]
As the war progressed, did you get less food or a lower quality of food?

[Speaker 1]
At the last part, we got less and lower quality. Of course, they didn't have anything either.

[Speaker 2]
Oh, really? Were you ever issued any kind of clothing or blankets or anything like that?

[Speaker 1]
We had one blanket on the march. Of course, you couldn't carry everything. On the march, you couldn't carry everything you wanted to take.

When we left that camp, you could have probably had two or three food parts if you wanted, but you couldn't carry them. We had our blankets and our cigarettes and things like that in your toilet articles.

[Speaker 2]
Was there a kind of a barter system there?

[Speaker 1]
Oh, yeah. Cigarettes and chocolates. Of course, like I say, I never did get to trade with the Germans or anything.

If the guys wanted to smoke more, they could trade their chocolate for cigarettes. If the little guy wanted to eat more chocolate, he'd trade his cigarettes for chocolate. My friend and I pulled our cigarettes and we started playing poker.

We had a suitcase full of cigarettes, but they wouldn't last too long either because every time they gave you a pack of cigarettes, they'd slit down the back with a razor blade and pull it open to make sure there wasn't anything in the package besides cigarettes. You couldn't store them too long.

[Speaker 2]
What was the most irritating aspect of being at camp?

[Speaker 1]
Not knowing how long you were going to be there. If you go to jail, you have a sentence on how long you were going to have to go. But the uncertainty of being there and what was going to happen to you the next day.

You heard all these damn rumors they were going to make a lampshade out of you and castrate you and all this. Of course, I guess old Hitler did say that he wanted all the airmen killed and everything, and then Gordy wouldn't carry out the order. You don't find out a lot of that stuff.

[Speaker 2]

What about when you were like Luke, what were you worried about the most then?

[Speaker 1]

Worried about my wife and baby, I guess, because she was pregnant. Not knowing where I was. I knew where I was, but she didn't.

I knew it would be a big shock to her. I could just imagine everything, just the board and everything else. Everything went fine.

[Speaker 2]

How did you just cope with your, I guess, that feeling of not knowing?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I guess I was lucky because the guys used to get mad at me. I could stay in the bunk for 20 hours a day. The others would get up and walk around and walk around all the camp and walk like a caged animal for me.

I was able to sleep. They'd get so damn mad at me, they'd roll me out of the bunk and there they go. We played a lot of cards and things like that.

A lot of poker for cigarettes.

[Speaker 2]

Did you notice if any of the prisoners had any kind of psychological problems?

[Speaker 1]

I didn't know any. I'd heard of some of them having psychological problems, but I didn't personally know any of them.

[Speaker 2]

What else did you do to pass the time when they decided to play cards?

[Speaker 1]

I'd walk a little, not much.

[Speaker 2]

Sleep, I guess.

[Speaker 1]

Sleep, that's right. You'd do a lot of talking and everything. You'd look for guys that you knew.

They had a barber shop there. A guy would cut hair and everything. They had a little book in there.

Every time somebody'd go in there, they'd say, what state are you from? They'd sign them up for that state. You'd look in there and see how many people were from your state.

Anybody you knew. The only one I knew or got to know pretty good was a guy that lived about 6 or 8 miles from me. His name was Bailey too, but no Ken or anything like that.

We got to know each other there.

[Speaker 2]

What kind of things did you talk about?

[Speaker 1]

Most of them were war stories. We had one infantry guy. He was a mousy character.

He got so, after about 6 months, he heard so much air talk and everything, he'd start out his stories just like everybody else did when I got shot down. He was an infantry guy.

[Speaker 4]

Can I get you all a Coke?

[Speaker 1]

I'm fine. I'd like to have one. I'm hearty dry.

Wouldn't you drink a Coke? Sure. It's a diet Coke.

Oh, that's fine. Get him a can, Rick. That Pepsi's not much good.

[Speaker 2]

Did you tell war stories?

[Speaker 1]

War stories and, I guess, things that you did before the war. Everybody talks about the ladies. You talked about food a lot.

When you get hungry, that's what you talk about.

[Speaker 2]

I bet. Did you ever do any kind of work in the camp or outside the camp? No.

[Speaker 1]

Well, that was in the Geneva Convention. Non-commissioned officers weren't supposed to work. They could put you in charge of the detail, but they couldn't make you work.

You could volunteer, though. That's why I say you could volunteer to be a leader or something like that, but they still didn't let you do that.

[Speaker 2]

Were you ever supplied with books to read or instruments to play or things that were out of paint?

[Speaker 1]

You could get any of that. They had musical instruments, and they even had a little band in there. They had boxing gloves.

They had boxing tournaments.

[Speaker 2]

They had athletic games, football and baseball.

[Speaker 1]

They had softballs, everything like that. They had ice skates. People went ice skating.

What they'd do right out in a flat field like that, they'd take their bed board and scrape the snow back and make a very big flat field there, and they'd flood it, and you'd get heat right there most of the wintertime. They skated. I never did skate.

They did that. Did you ever pick up any kind of hobby while you were there? No, no.

There wasn't too many hobby crafts, you know, what you could pick up. I learned to play a lot of grids and clean up on poker and stuff like that.

[Speaker 2]

What about, did they have plays or shows there?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, they had plays that they would put on, and they'd let so many go see it at night. These guys would dress up like gals, and some of them even looked pretty good after being there that long. They'd put on these real skimpy clothes.

[Speaker 2]

Did you or any others in Chinatown play tricks on the Germans?

[Speaker 1]

I didn't, no.

[Speaker 2]

I don't know. You didn't see anybody messing up roll call or anything like that? Did you receive any kind of mail?

[Speaker 1]

From home? Yeah. That's what I say.

I was there. I got shot down February the 10th, and it was August sometime before I got any mail. The first mail I got, I got 22 letters at one time.

Then it sprung out after that. You know, you get one or two every day. Back to food parcels and cigarette parcels.

Of course, half of them would be gone by the time you got them. You'd try to send stuff like a blanket or civilian shirts and things like that. Of course, the Americans would take them

out before they got over there because it wasn't legal to send anything that wasn't G.I. issued.

[Speaker 2]

Did you get to celebrate holidays, what do you mean?

[Speaker 1]

Like Christmas and things like that. They had a record player in the barracks, and you'd put it out in the hall. You didn't have any food or anything else.

You'd just make your own out of your own milk and chocolate and things like that. We had a way of making a pie out of graham cracker crust and everything and put it in a little box and then fill it up with chocolate and that clam milk. You'd make a pretty good little pie at the time.

[Speaker 2]

Did G.I. get to have any kind of religious services? They had those, yes.

[Speaker 1]

I wasn't religious at that time, but they did have anything you wanted. My friend was Catholic, and he was the most religious guy I've ever seen in my life. We stayed in contact to this day, but he always attended service and everything.

[Speaker 2]

Did you ever receive any kind of propaganda from the Germans while you were there?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, they'd tell us stuff every once in a while, but as far as trying to make us read something or something, they'd give you some newspapers once in a while, and you'd tear them up and use them for toilet paper. That's the only thing, you know, because we didn't read anything. Use the papers for toilet paper.

They'd tear them up in little squares and issue it out as toilet paper.

[Speaker 2]

Did they ever have any kind of classes, like language classes or anything?

[Speaker 1]

Anyone learn to speak German or something like that?

[Speaker 2]

Somebody there to do it, teach it?

[Speaker 1]

You could find anything you wanted to in there. Somebody would do something.

[Speaker 2]

Really? When was the evacuation of your camp? Thank you.

[Speaker 1]

It was February the 6th, 1945, when the Russians got close to us. They marched us out, and then we stayed on the march until April 26th, when we got liberated. So how many days?

It was 83 days, something like that. Before we had to march out of there, they had a bunch of Russian prisoners. They would march through our camp and everything.

Those poor guys, see, the Russians never would sign the Geneva Convention, you know, on treatment for prisoners. Those guys would come through there, and they looked like George Washington's troops with their feet bleeding and rags around them and all that stuff. Any time we had a spare pair of shoes or anything, we'd throw it to them, you know.

And they would march too, keep them out of the Russians' hands. And the first thing we knew, we started marching too. We didn't know what was happening at that time.

They were a forerunner to our march, you know, when they came through our camp.

[Speaker 2]

How did they treat you on the march?

[Speaker 1]

It wasn't bad. We all got lousy. We couldn't take a bath.

There was just no sanitation at all. At night on the march, they'd put you up in a barn and sleep out in the field or anything like that. If you stayed in barns with guards outside, if you had to go to the bathroom or something, as soon as you got out the door, they'd motion down like that.

Of course, everybody in the camp had diarrhea and everything. It was just a bloody, stinky mess all around. It didn't smell like hell.

And the food parcels didn't get through at that time either. They gave us boiled potatoes and kohlrabi and stuff like that. We stole what we could at those community farms.

They'd have these big long rows where they'd bury their vegetables. And if we were around the camp, you know, in a farm like that, you could steal a few potatoes and things like that at night. Not many, but you could get some out of there.

[Speaker 2]

But the Germans, they didn't beat you or any of the men around you? Not on that march.

[Speaker 1]

The only time that they were real mean to us was when they moved us from Stalag Luft 6 to 4 and they put a ship to move us out on the Baltic Sea into Stepton Harbor. You know, you worry about being torpedoed or whatever if you're out in a ship like that. And they put us down in that damn ship and they locked off the hole.

You couldn't get any air in it. And if you had to use a johnny, they'd put a five-gallon bucket down in there and pass it around and they'd just slosh stuff over everybody. You didn't have about enough room to sit like this.

If you'd doze off to sleep, you'd find six pairs of leggings on you. You'd feel hot. Oh God, it was right in July, you know, and down in the hole with the ship.

Hotter than anything I've ever had. And then they got us off of that and put us on trains and they handcuffed us together. Took our belts and our shoes because you can't run if you don't have your belts and trying to hold up your pants, you know, and you don't have any shoes on.

So they took all those and put us in boxcars and they built a barrier between us and the guards. The guards were on half of the car and we were on the other side. We didn't have any matches to light our cigarettes or anything.

Every time you wanted to light a cigarette or anything, the guards would light a cigarette for you and stuff like that. So you couldn't set the place on fire or whatever.

[Speaker 2]

That was on your way to Stollt?

[Speaker 1]

Stollt, yeah, 4. The water situation wasn't very good. They didn't give you enough water or anything.

I remember how dry we were. And then when they got us off the train, they lined us up with our old guards. We had a bunch of old men as guards at that time.

And the first thing we knew, they went over and sat down in the grass. I guess they called them prigs in there. It means about like sailors.

They came up all along us and just stationed themselves all along us. Every one of them had a fixed bayonet and a German shepherd dog. And then, of course, we didn't know what was happening or anything.

First thing, they started hollering, that means to run. And they started pecking at guys with those bayonets. I never did get hit.

My buddy and I were in good shape. We kept right in the middle of the column instead of on the outer edge where the dogs and the bayonets were. We just thought they were going to run us till we dropped.

But they were running us to that camp. I don't know how far it was, a couple of miles.

[Speaker 3]

Did they run you by some civilians? Do what? Did they run you by some civilians?

[Speaker 1]

I guess they did.

[Speaker 3]

I didn't notice it.

[Speaker 1]

But I know where that march was. We'd march through towns and everything else and civilians would come out and line the streets. They weren't mean.

Most of them, they didn't know what a war was at that time. They hadn't had any fronts or anything going through there. Maybe they lived in a big city and lived in bombs.

But out in the country, they didn't know what a war was. Yeah. A lot of people got sick, I assume.

Oh, yeah. We lost... I don't know how many people.

I heard that we started out with 6,500 people and it was 1,800 of us ended up. But, you know, they dropped out. I know one guy that dropped out.

I've seen him since the war, so I guess they took care of the rest of them. I don't think they killed...

[Speaker 2]

So when did they evacuate you from Stalag Luft IV?

[Speaker 1]

That was on February the 6th, 1945.

[Speaker 2]

And where did they march you to from there?

[Speaker 1]

We just kept moving south. We ended up at a little town named Bittertown. It's close to Halleck, Germany.

They moved the front back four miles on each side and declared it a neutral zone. I guess they had contacted our group and everybody, and they knew, you know, the Americans knew we were in there. They negotiated to get us out at that time.

That's when they declared that a neutral zone. When we started marching out, you saw white flags along the windows and everything. Got to a center point, a German MP on one side and an American MP on the other side.

In fact, that's when we were freed, isn't it? Who liberated you? The Third Army.

The American Third Army.

[Speaker 2]

How far do you think that you marched?

[Speaker 1]

I've heard everything from 600 to 900 miles somewhere. But, you know, maybe marching 10 or 12 miles one way out. I think the longest march we had was 22 miles.

But you'd get so darn sore, you'd swear the next day you couldn't make another step. You'd get pretty swell up. Oh, yeah, and you were so sore you couldn't move.

And after you'd get up and shake your kinks out, well, you'd go again. Of course, you didn't have the proper clothing. I still don't know how we made it.

That's the clothing that we had, and it was one of the worst winters they ever had. I guess keeping on the move all the time kept us from freezing to death.

[Speaker 2]

How were you taken care of once you were liberated? What did the Third Army do with you? Were they send you?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, God. The first thing they did was got us to a building. They made us strip off one end, run through, and squirt us with BDD powder to get rid of all the lice we had.

Made us shower, and then came down on the other end, you had new clothes. So you didn't have anything of value anyway. If you had a hard object or something, no clothing you could keep or anything, so you wouldn't have any lice.

But they de-losed us the first time. I guess we stayed around there a week or so. I don't know how long it was in Halley, Germany, but it was good food.

We were sure glad to be liberated and get new clothes back in the swing of things. Then they flew us out of there to Reims, France. We were at Reims, France when the war ended.

That's where they finally had all the negotiations for the closing of the war. Then they flew us out of there until we had lucky strike France, at Le Havre, France. We stayed around there, I don't know how many days.

Then they shipped us home on ships. I came home on a little old liberty ship, USS Jonathan Worth. But those things were just out in the middle of the ocean, and a big wave would come along, and a screw would come out of the back end of the ship.

You'd take a bomb and hit yourself. The whole damn ship. It wasn't a very good experience.

It took two weeks to come back. We went over on the Queen Mary. It took less than four days to get over there on the Queen Mary.

But that little old liberty ship, boy, it was rough. Everybody got sick on that baby.

[Speaker 2]

So you think overall the Germans did the best they could to take care of you, what they had, considering the conditions?

[Speaker 1]

Most of the time I was lucky. I didn't get into any of those real mean people and things like that. The food situation was the worst thing.

Just not having a proper diet, and the force marches, and sleeping out in the snow, and things like that. I think it's damaged my health. Not having proper food would damage your teeth.

I don't know what else it's done to me.

[Speaker 2]

Did you have any doctors with you that looked after some of the men while we were on the march?

[Speaker 1]

They had a doctor there, but I never did come in contact with one. I didn't have anything that serious, I guess. I had that one sickness.

I still think it's when I had rheumatic fever. I had no medical attention whatsoever.

[Speaker 2]

Is there anything in your mind that sticks out you'd like to add?

[Speaker 1]

No. I don't know. That's it.

I don't know about... I don't know what I've missed or anything like that.