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# An Interview with W. Dean Whitaker

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

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The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas



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## List of Illustrations

### Following Pages

The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of Dr. Harold Boyer. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank the university for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

Claytee D. White, Project Director  
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## Preface

William Dean Whitaker was born in 1925 and raised in a suburb of Los Angeles, California. Dean, as he is known, talks briefly about his parents and his brothers, for his youth quickly ended when he joined the Air Force and became an aviation cadet once he had turned 18 years old. The year was 1943 and World War II was raging. He became a member of the 398<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and flew twenty missions before being captured by the Germans.

In this oral history, Dean talks with vivid recollection of the day he was captured and details of being a POW in Germany. Among his anecdotes are those of his mother's unwavering belief that he would return home, the humanity of a German soldier, and of meeting Gen. George Patton.

Included are photos and excerpts from his personal history of his life during the war. Dean and his wife Lucille moved to Las Vegas in 1990.



ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project



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DEAN WHITAKER

Name of Interviewer:

CLAYTEE D. WHITE

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W. D. Whitaker

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Date

Claytee D. White 4/5/2010

Signature of Interviewer

Date



**This is Claytee White. I'm with Dean Whitaker in his home in Las Vegas today. And it is April 5th, 2010.**

**So how are you this morning?**

I'm doing great.

**Wonderful. So can you tell me a little bit about your childhood, where you grew up and what your family was like?**

I grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles, a little town called Maywood. I grew up with four brothers and one sister. My father was in construction. He was a head superintendent on some large projects in Los Angeles including Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios where I got to visit when I was young and met movie stars because he was the superintendent of building the stage. Then he worked in Las Vegas when I was going to high school in 1940. I joined the carpenters union and worked on the air base in Las Vegas for that summer. My father passed away that year because he had diverticulitis. It was a disease that wasn't known then and they couldn't treat it. He passed away in the hospital here in 1942.

Shortly after that, when I graduated from high school in Alhambra, I had taken college prep and I was fairly able to take the entrance exam for the Navy. I went to the Pacific Electric Building in Los Angeles with four of my classmates to join the Navy because we liked their uniforms and thought that was really great. When we joined I was the only one that made the aviation cadet program because I had taken college prep.

**Tell me more about Maywood. Tell me more about your brothers and sisters.**

Okay, I was the second oldest. We grew up as a family. We were members of the LDS Church and had quite a church background because my mother and father were from Utah. We had a nice house that we lived in. Actually, when we started there it was a one-bedroom house. When my mother and father had all these boys, my father being in construction added a huge bedroom on the back of it. So the four of us boys were raised in this one huge bedroom. We had a large lot. My father bought a lot and a half. And we had a huge front lawn, which was the playground for everybody in the neighborhood. We enjoyed outdoors quite a bit. At that age everything was done outdoors. We didn't have anything to do inside.

**Which year were you born?**



1925.

**Tell me about your mother also.**

Okay. When my father passed away, my mother had these four children to raise -- actually five, wasn't it? Yeah. And so she went to work. She worked at the General Hospital in Los Angeles as a telephone operator. She went to work on the streetcar, which at that time in Los Angeles was really good transportation. We had the Pacific Electric Railroad. The red car ran from Maywood. It was only a block away from my house. We would catch that red car and go to Los Angeles for 15 cents. So I made many trips to Los Angeles just to see things. But my mother worked many jobs.

When I went in the service, I was the first one in the family to go. I went right after high school. I think I graduated in February and I had my 18th birthday in March. As soon as I had my 18th birthday, I went into the Navy as an aviation cadet. At the time my mother was working for Cole of California, sewing, making bathing suits. And then when the war started, they reverted to making parachutes. I often wondered—I bet she made the parachute I jumped out of that plane with. When she was working for them -- this was after I was shot down (and) my awards -- she was so certain that I was all right. She received a letter from the War Department that I was missing in action. And when she received that, she said, well, I know Dean's all right.

**Good.**

So they were going to present her with an air medal that I had received. She told them to keep the medal and to give it to me when I came home.

**Wow. That's wonderful. Now, tell me about your basic training.**

Basic training. I started out at Santa Ana at classification and I was classified just about anything that I wanted. I had a good classification because I was very well-coordinated, apparently. So the bombardier training only took I think it was six weeks at the time and you're out a second lieutenant. I thought, boy, that's great. So I signed up. At that time they changed over to a bombardier navigator. Okay. They got to the R's and the school was full at Victorville. So they sent me to Kingman, Arizona to await the next class.

At Kingman, Arizona I went through gunnery school. And I did real well. In fact, I was the head of my class because I had always gone shooting with my father. He was quite a hunter. And I had my first .22 rifle I think when I was 14 years old, Sears and Roebuck. So I did well when it came



to gunnery school. Went to a gunnery meet in Las Vegas because I was the head of the class. It was a national gunnery meet. I came in first in stripping the 50-caliber machine gun and putting it back together. I took first place.

So after the gunnery school we were sent to Victorville Army Air Base for bombardier navigator training. When I got to Victorville, all the fellows that I was at Santa Ana with were graduating as bombardiers because it was a short school. So I was right at home with them and I went to Victorville for the bombardier navigation school. It took 18 weeks then. I spent a lot of trips from Victorville back to Los Angeles, my home in Maywood. And I always had a few aviation cadets come ride with me.

A little story about one time when we were coming home. I had a car then because I worked as a carpenter and earned money and then I worked in a gas station. When the war started I was working in this gas station and so I had a car. It wasn't a new car. It was an old Ford something. I was coming home in it. We forgot to put water in it when we left Victorville. And we got out on the desert there and it heated up. Well, we didn't know what to do. There was an old abandoned farm there. We went over there and found a barrel of water. Put the water in the car and we were on our way. Pretty soon we notice this terrible smell. The water we put in the car was rancid. And it was really rotten. So we stopped as soon as we could and changed the water and went on our way. That was one of our trips. But I did hitchhike a few times.

### **From Victorville to Maywood?**

To Maywood. A lot of people were very generous. They would pick us up because we had our cadet uniforms on and everything.

Then I graduated from Victorville, became a second lieutenant. By then I had my gunner's wings because I earned them at Victorville. So then when I graduated I got my bombardier navigator wings.

### **Did you earn those at Kingman or Victorville?**

I earned the gunner's wings at Kingman and the other wings at Victorville.

### **So after Victorville after that training was over, what happened?**

After the Victorville training was over, they sent us to Rapid City to meet our crew, to get a crew together. It was there in Rapid City was the first time I had really been out of California and



Nevada. So we took the train trip to South Dakota, Rapid City, and joined our crew. The B-17 was the plane we trained in there. I had flown in a B-17 once at Victorville, but we had a lot of experience in Rapid City. We met all the crew there, became acquainted with all the guys. We had our first tragedy at Rapid City when one of our members of another crew that we knew had a terrible accident and everyone was killed in it.

So after that we went to New Jersey to embark overseas. We were there just a short time. Then we got on a troop transport ship to go to England.

**Okay. So you're on the way to England in which year?**

1943.

**So I want to go back to Pearl Harbor. I want to know what you were doing on that day when you heard about Pearl Harbor.**

That is very interesting. I was working in the gas station early in the morning. I hadn't heard anything about Pearl Harbor. People would come in and say did you know what happened? I says, no, what happened? Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. I says, Oh golly, that's a foolish thing; we'll wipe them out in a month or so. Well, little did I know how they had prepared for war. I had no idea that I was going to go. I thought it would be over. I worked there my senior year of high school after working as a carpenter in Las Vegas. When I graduated, then, just a few weeks after that, I joined the Navy.

**How long were you in Las Vegas?**

I worked in Las Vegas a whole summer.

**So that was the summer after your senior year?**

It was the summer of '43? No. Let's see. Forty-two. Oh, no. It was well before that. I graduated in '43. It was in '42. I worked in the gas station all during my senior year in high school. Then I went to Las Vegas and worked in the summer.

**So after high school?**

After high school. I had no experience except I wanted in the Navy. I graduated in February and went in the Navy in March 1943.

**Because in 1943 you're on your way to England.**

Yes, '43 is when I went into the service. I was 18 in '43. Then in '43 I took all the training and was



in there -- oh, no. I went over to England in '43, yeah.

**So tell me about what kinds of things did you hear in the country? After Pearl Harbor and we declare war, what was it like? What were people saying?**

People were really undetermined. They didn't know what's going to happen. And in Los Angeles where I lived in Los Angeles, Maywood was fairly close to the ocean. We used to ride our bicycles there. Well, we had an air raid when a Japanese sub I guess was coming into the coast. They were sending parachute bombs over the West Coast and we had an air raid. And it scared the heck out of everybody. We didn't know what was going on. They didn't get close to us with any bombs or anything, but it did change people's idea that there is a war going and that we were exposed to it. Actually, it gave a lot of boys the incentive to join the service, protect their own people.

**And your mother felt that was the right thing to do as well?**

Yes. When I joined I was the first one. She didn't want me to join the Navy. She says, Why don't you join the Navy or something? I says, no, I've got to join the Navy. So like I said I was the first one. Then my older brother joined the Marines.

**Now, what is his name?**

David, David Owen. We called him Owen. He joined the Marines and was put aboard a troop transport ship, the General Bliss, and he crossed the ocean, Pacific and Atlantic, many times. But he survived everything. So it ended up that the four boys -- I was in the Navy. He was in the Marines. My next brother was regular Army.

**His name?**

Kaye Whitaker joined the Army and was stationed in California for a while. He never did go overseas. My youngest brother joined the Navy. He was a sailor. So my mother experienced all four of us in different branches of the service.

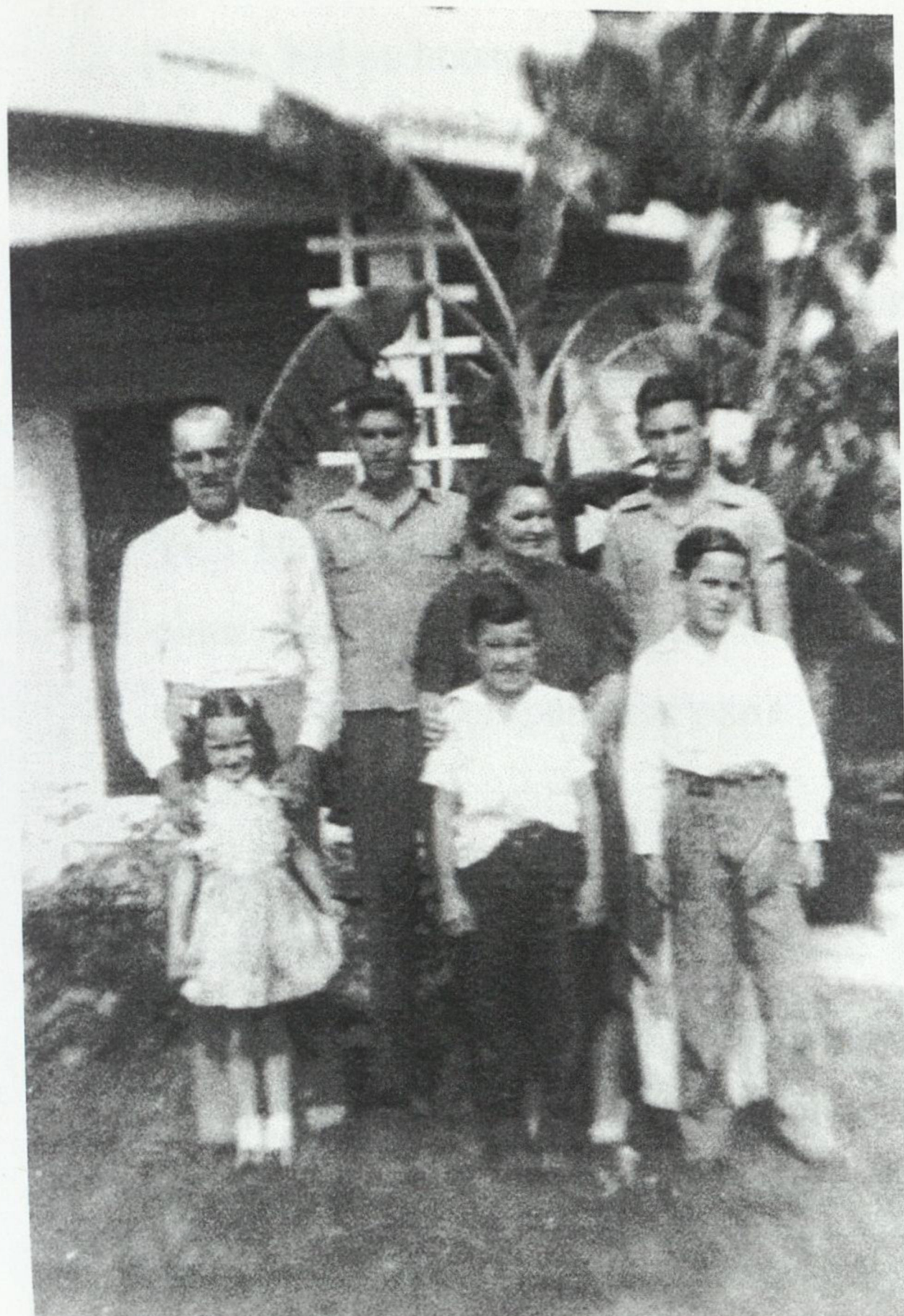
**Wow. Oh, that's something. And give me your youngest brother's name.**

My youngest brother was Alan.

**Give me your parents' names as well.**

My father was known as Dave, Dave Whitaker. My mother was Dora Whitaker. They were very well liked by everybody. Now, my father was very generous. During the Depression I had some experiences with school boy friends that lived near the Los Angeles River. They were very poor





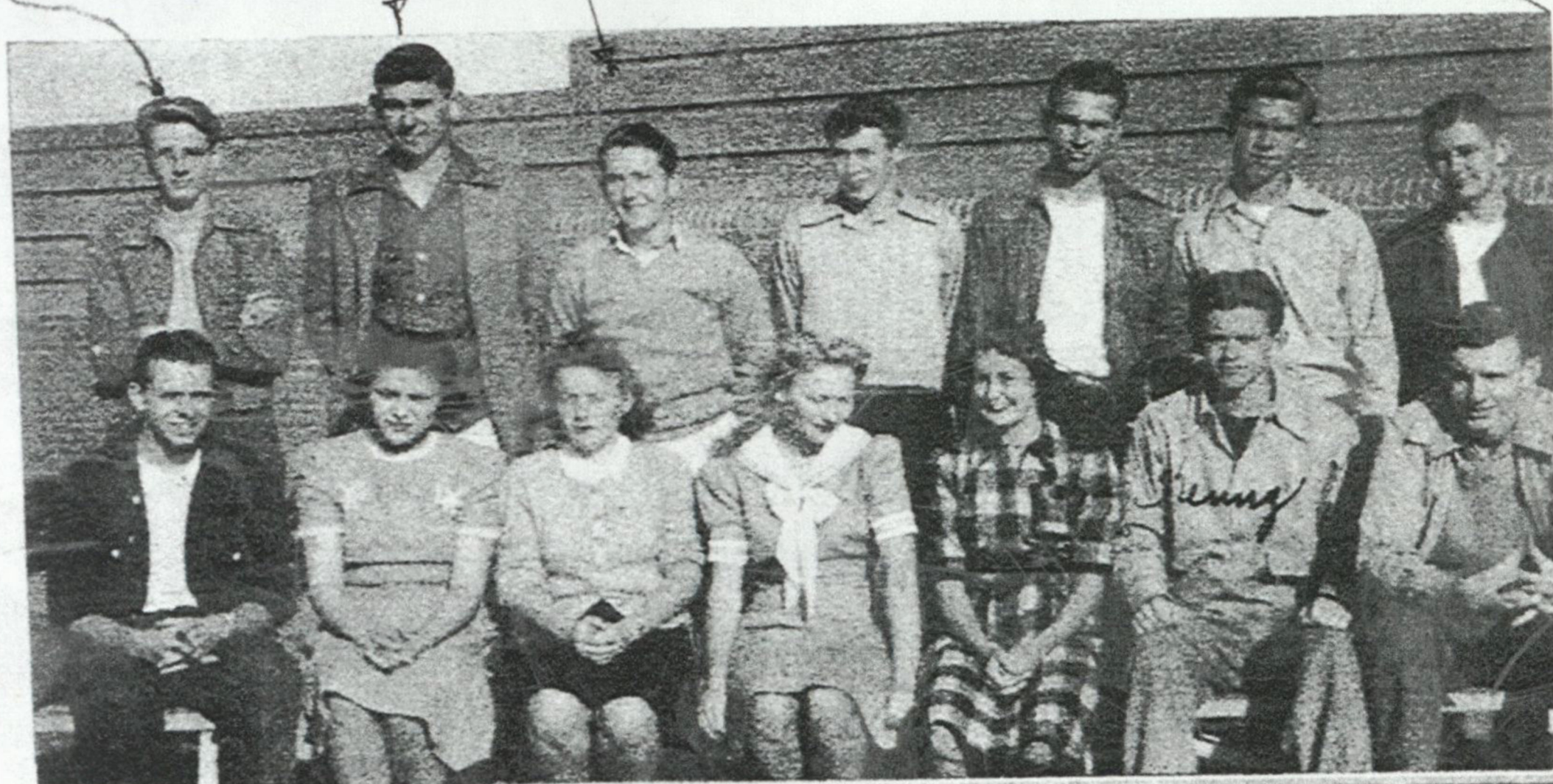
Whitaker Family 1938 (Maywood, CA): Dean standing between his father and mother in the back row.

Photo below: High school photo: Dean notes that Thompson and Wilson were among those killed in the war.

Row I—Wilson, Valencia, Wall, Thomas, Tasker, William, Whiteman.  
Row II—Yancey, Whitaker, Willson, Thomson, Doran, Troxel, Taylor, Thompson

## GROUP 2

Row I—Bybee, Dick, Doerbecker, Seeds, Merrill, Cowling, Morel.





people, had no house. They lived in tents. I would go home with them once in a while. Their living conditions were terrible. But my father would hire someone to work for maybe one job and get them some money. He had, oh, two or three of my neighbors were working for this construction company that he worked for. And he did all the hiring because he was a general superintendent. But he was very thoughtful. He tried to give everybody a job that he could.

**And your father was able to work all through the Depression, all through the 1930s?**

Yes. He had a good job because he was very intelligent in construction. He would read a set of plans and he would retain it in his mind. He knew exactly what that building was going to be. He worked for this company for years. They were one of the large companies in Los Angeles, Myers Brothers.

**So when he came to Las Vegas to work in construction for that short time, was it also with Myers Brothers?**

Yes. It happened this way. His brother, my Uncle Lors, left Utah and got a job with Myers Brothers in Los Angeles as an estimator. And he had that trade, too, of reading a set of plans and knowing the figures and everything that's going into it. So he became the head estimator for Myers Brothers. My mother and dad were married in Nevada here, Wells, Nevada. He wrote my dad after they were married and said, Come to Los Angeles; I've got a job for you. So Mom and Dad dropped everything, and he started working for Myers Brothers right away. He worked for them for years. He did many big jobs.

He worked in the L.A. Harbor building a huge derrick for a German machine that they had bought before the war. Like I said the studios. He worked for Warner Brothers, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and all the big studios. He built their sound stages. I got to go see Sonja Henie skate once. In the summertime he'd take me to work to check on a job. And she was skating for a picture, practicing. I got to go watch her skate. It was quite an honor. I met quite a few movie actors at the time.

**Great. So now, we're on the way to England, 1943.**

Yes. We had very good accommodations there. It was a French liner. The waiters waited on us. We were officers and so we had the stateroom. We had three or four of us in a stateroom, but we had good service. We'd go down and visit our good gunners who were enlisted down in the hold of this



ship and it was terrible. It was a nice trip. We dodged a few submarines. But we always had a Navy ship escorting alongside of us. And I'd see these Navy destroyers. They were small ships. They'd come alongside of us and they would bounce up and down so much. I thought, man, I'm glad I'm not on that ship. But they really had duty. So we arrived in England. It was probably about, I don't know, a five-day trip. We were met by our 398th Bomb Group truck that took us to our base.

**What was England like at the time?**

England at the time was -- we didn't go to London right away. We went through little towns. We got to our base, which was just south of London. I was very surprised at London because it was so old. The farms had old houses with that thatched roofs and nothing like we were building in Los Angeles. We were building tracts in Los Angeles with all these houses and they were just a lot of farms. On the way to our base we stopped at a railroad station. A lot of these fliers were going to London on pass that had been there for months flying missions over England. And these guys had all their ribbons on and really looked great. I thought, man, I hope we live to do that. And sure enough, we had many trips to London and enjoyed it. Our base was --

**Was London being bombed at the time?**

Yes.

**So what were the average Londoners like? I mean how were they feeling about all of this?**

They were glad to have us. They were very friendly. They didn't have anything to give us. We'd go to town for dinner. It was always fish. They didn't have much. And we did have what we called the Rainbow Club where all the servicemen went in London. They would serve us Cokes and waffles.

**Why the Rainbow Club? Why that name?**

I don't know why they called it that. Well, there was a Rainbow Division I think in World War I. And I think they picked up the Rainbow Division from World War I. So we did spend a few times in London. At the time they had buzz bombs. And our base was on the direct path from Germany to London. And we had a few buzz bombs fly over us.

**Explain to me what that is.**

A buzz bomb is non-guided. It just goes and had a huge bomb ahead of it. And it had a jet motor that was preset to go to London and bomb. And they were very noisy. They had a distinct buzz as they were going over, a jet engine. As soon as the engine cut out, they went down and bombed. I



was always glad to hear them keep going. If you heard one stop, that was bad. And so that's what was bombing London at the time. No planes were bombing at this stage of the war.

**So tell me what your missions were like from that base?**

Okay. Our missions there were mostly long -- see, we got there right before D-Day. Our first mission was supporting General Patton's troops on low-level bombing missions. So the GI's were pinned down. They couldn't make much advancement because of the strong German forces there. So we went and bombed this one town ahead of the troops. We ran into low attitude.

**And you were in Great Britain?**

Yes. We went from Great Britain to France.

**So you were going to France?**

Yes, the bomb would. We got to France and it was low-level. I could see the German guns shooting at us, the flashes on the ground. We were getting hit pretty good. In fact, the plane next to us got hit and it just exploded. We lost all men in that crew. Our plane got shot up pretty bad. We came back on two and a half engines. It's a four-engine bomber. And the one engine was out completely and the other engine had low oil pressure and we couldn't hardly maintain altitude. We threw everything out of the plane and were ready to ditch in a channel. And I was injured a little bit then. Our nose was shot out in the plane. It's a Plexiglas nose and my eyes were full of this Plexiglas and I couldn't see anything. I was flying bombardier then. And the navigator with us -- the German shell had struck a hydraulic line that was full of red fluid. He had this red fluid all over and he thought he was shot. And he wasn't. But when I got back when we landed, I had to go to the hospital and have the Plexiglas removed from my eyes. One eye was swollen shut. I was off flying duty for about two weeks. I did receive a Purple Heart for that.

**But your eyes healed well enough that you could go back to flying?**

Yes. That was our first mission, too.

**Oh, that was the first one.**

I had to fly 20 missions after that.

**So you flew 20 missions into France?**

Yes. Germany, mostly Germany.

**So you were flying into France and into Germany?**



Right. France was just before D-Day. And I got a medal for that from France, too.

**Oh, good.**

Yeah, France gave us a D-Day medal.

**So do you have the medal?**

Yeah. It was just given to me just recently by our congressman; John Porter it was.

**Oh, okay.**

Oh, this is the little medal that France sent me.

**This is wonderful, it says, "Efficiency, Honor and Fidelity." Oh, so this is how they're made.**

**They just have the Velcro on the back so that you can put them on your uniform. Oh, that's how they're done. And this one is light blue with a red, white and blue stripe.**

Yeah. Here's the Purple Heart.

**Oh, and the Purple Heart is beautiful.**

Yeah. It is purple.

**So it's actually purple with a heart. And is that Thomas Jefferson? Who is that?**

No. George Washington.

**George Washington. That would make sense I guess.**

Yes, he established the award. So that was my first mission.

**So when you're flying from the base near London and you fly to Germany and back, how many miles is that?**

Well, we went by hours. Some of the missions were eight hours.

**Where did you refuel?**

We didn't. B-17 can fly for -- we'd go clear to Berlin and back. Some of them were eight-hour missions. Mostly they were six hours depending on what we were bombing. But the B-17s were a very versatile plane. We used three of them. The first one was scrap because of the --

**Your crew? When you say "we," you're talking about your crew?**

Yes, our crew used three B-17s. We had one accident on takeoff before we started flying. We were flying practice missions. We were taking off. It's a short runway that they didn't use much there.

We didn't have enough air speed to get off the ground enough. There just happened to be a farmer plowing at the end of the runway and our wheel hit this tractor. And we hit, went down, hit, went



through a grove of trees. And I being in the nose, the trees were flying through the nose. It broke the Plexiglas nose out. We finally came to a stop. The navigator was with me. I was the bombardier then. And we went right out of the nose because there was no nose. The plane was on fire. It was burning. We could smell it. The plane broke in half. One of the gunners, the waist gunner was thrown out. And he was burned very bad and spent the rest of the war in the hospital. I visit him even now today. I know him. He didn't fly any missions with us because he was too badly burned. But he was a mailman in Boston.

**Tell me how many men are there in a crew?**

Nine men make up a crew. Actually, we started out with ten. But then we didn't need the nose gunner. Most of our attacks were from the rear. Germans attacked us from the rear.

**So can you explain the nine jobs to me?**

Yes. The nine jobs were the pilot and copilot. That's two. The engineer was a man. He manned the top turret gun. And then there was the navigator and a nose gunner with him. Then there was the ball turret gunner, which was in the ball turret at the bottom of the plane. It was kind of a bubble like thing. It was run by motors and it changed all positions and that. Then there was a waist gunner and then a tail gunner.

**And you were which position?**

I was the navigator. Well, actually I was split. I was the bombardier for eight missions and then the navigator for 12.

**And the bombardier actually drops some of the bombs?**

Yes, we drop the bombs. And then after I started navigating I had a desk with all the navigation stuff on it.

**Okay. So tell me about the mission where you got shot down.**

Our mission number 20 was a real vital mission. It was to a synthetic oil plant in Merseburg, Germany. Synthetic oil was made out of coal. That's the only oil they had. It was very critical because November 2nd, when we were flying this mission, they had hardly any oil and the tanks couldn't run without oil. Everything was diesel. And so they were protecting this. They moved all the guns from Berlin to Merseburg. When we saw the first sign of Merseburg, it was just black. The sky was just black with this gunfire. Eighty-eight-millimeter shells would explode and just throw



steel all over the sky. When we went there we saw all this flak, what we called, 88-millimeter gun shells.

**Coming from other planes?**

No. From the ground. They had what they called the 88-millimeter cannon, which was one of their best tools. That was the one that destroyed a lot of tanks on the ground, too.

**So those were Americans on the ground firing --**

No. Those were the Germans that were shooting at us from the ground.

**Okay. They're trying to shoot the planes down.**

Yes, trying to shoot the planes down. The fighters wouldn't attack until you got out of all of this. They didn't want to get, the German fighters didn't want -- we were never attacked before by German fighters. This was the first time in 20 missions because they weren't using their planes. They didn't have hardly any airplanes left. They were using them all on Merseburg. That's the only thing they had. So we got through the flak. Somebody called fighters in the area. And sure enough, you could feel it when the tail gunner started shooting our guns. He was shooting at these planes that were coming up on us. Apparently he hit one. Somebody said there's one going down. I don't know if he got credit for that or not because he was killed innocently shortly after that.

They were attacking the airplanes. The German planes were attacking us from the rear because they had 20-millimeter cannons that were a little stronger than our 50-caliber machine guns. They had a bit of range. And so the first pass of the planes we did okay. The second pass they hit our tail. They shot the tail. The pilot said I can't control it; everybody bail out. Before that he told the waist gunner to go back and check on the tail gunner and see if he was okay. He went back there and said no, he's dead. So then the next pass we didn't have a tail gunner and they shot our tail off. So the pilot gave an order to bail out.

We were then at about 27,000 feet, which is pretty high, and so I was ready to bail out. I had what they call a flak suit on. It was a protection of heavy metal vest and it had an emergency release on it. So I pulled the emergency release and it wouldn't release. I kept trying it and I said, well, I've got to jump; I can't wait. With a flak suit you can only put your parachute buckle on one side. You have a buckle on each side. And so I only had it buckled on one side because the flak suit was still around me. When I jumped out of the plane, hit the slipstream, it tore the flak suit off. All the way



down I was trying to fasten the parachute on the other side. But at 27,000 feet you're ready to pass out. You don't have any strength. And I couldn't remember if I had fastened it or not. So I fell for quite a while.

And then when I entered a little cloudbank, which I knew was at 3,000 feet, I said, boy, it's time to pull this ripcord. So I pulled it and started floating down. Then I heard this gunfire. Bullets were whizzing by me. So then I was floating down and I heard this cheering. I just about landed in an English prisoner of war camp that the Germans had that held English prisoners and they were cheering me on. So I landed really near this camp, luckily, because as soon as I did this German soldier come running out of the camp and told the civilians that were shooting at me -- they had their rifles ready to shoot me --

**Civilians were shooting you?**

The civilians, yes, were shooting, the farmers and that. So he made them stop shooting. He says pick up your chute and come with me. I picked my chute up and went to the prison camp.

**What happened with the other men in the crew?**

Right behind me was the nose gunner. He was with me in the nose. I jumped out before he did. I was right behind the escape hatch. I pulled the escape hatch and went out. He followed me. And then right behind him was the copilot and engineer. They were closest to this one escape hatch. The pilot doesn't bail out until everybody's out.

**Right.**

Okay. So the four of us landed fairly close together. We were all okay. This German soldier told all the German civilians to stop shooting. Now, the rest of them jumped out later and landed too far away. He had nothing to do. He couldn't save them. These Germans that were down the road shot them and clubbed them to death, four of them -- no. Five of them. Excuse me. Five of them. But the thing about that is there were two Czechoslovakian people that saw what happened. When the GIs came through here, they told the GIs about it, the American troops. They rounded up the guys that did it. And the story is in there. They put them on trial, the GIs did, and made them pay for their crimes. They killed two of them. So that was justice I guess.

But anyway, we were taken that day into the English prison camp that I had just about landed in. We were taken into there temporarily. The nose gunner that was with me had an injured foot.



We had our flight boots on. He took his flight boot off and it was full of blood because this flak breaks up into minute pieces and it's very sharp. Our plane had a lot of that, of course. So we fixed him up, took his boot off and the Englishmen treated his wound. They gave us some tea and crackers. We thought that was great. They were probably giving us what was very scarce. We were there for a while. The other five members of the crew never showed up -- well, the four members because the tail gunner was already dead. We knew that. The other four didn't show up. We wondered what happened to them. We didn't learn until after the war what had happened.

After that we were put in a bus, which happened to be an old Volkswagen bus, and taken to a schoolhouse where German soldiers were going to hold us until they took us to the main prison camp. It was quite an air battle that day. There were two other planes shot down. Some of them that were captured went to the schoolhouse with us. There were two of them that were injured pretty bad. The Germans wouldn't give them any immediate treatment.

But a funny thing happened here. They took us to this schoolhouse. It had been hours before we had water or anything. We were sitting there in the evening. And the German guard, somebody brought him his lunch. So he was sitting at a desk and all of us were sitting on benches type in this schoolroom. So somebody brought him his lunch and he went out to get a drink of water and left his lunch there. He comes back and his lunch had disappeared. He was kind of mad about that.

We were there until night and then they took us to another camp that was for newly arrived prisoners. We were there for two days. We received some clothing other than what we had because some of it was expensive stuff and the Germans wanted it -- fur-lined coats and our pants. They wanted all that. I had a ring on my finger and they wanted that. And it wouldn't come off, but they took it off. Left some skin. And then we were there for about a week.

Then we were transferred to our current camp, which was Stalag Luft III, which was the same camp that was in the Great Escape. It was a pretty well-established camp by the time we got in. We went through our own interrogation there. They wanted to be sure that we were Americans and not put in by Germans for spy work.

**Can you describe the camp?**

Yes. It was a camp for officers. Luckily, I was a 19-year-old officer. The officers didn't do any work. The Germans stuck to their code pretty well. The Luftwaffe took care of us, their German



Navy. They stuck to that pretty well. Enlisted men would go out and clean up after the bombs hit. They'd work in cities and that. But they did have the advantage of trading with the civilians. They'd take cigarettes. Cigarettes were money, which we received from the Red Cross. So they would come in with eggs sometimes. And it was quite good. Our diet was very limited, of course. After we got acquainted in camp, things went pretty good.

**So can you describe how you were kept, what the conditions were like?**

Yeah. The conditions were fairly good. There was a bed, a cot, bunk thing that held three prisoners. In our room there were nine. It was just a small room, but there were nine of us in it. We did have a stove that we could heat up water for tea. Now, our food was supplied mostly by the Red Cross that was sent in from Switzerland.

**So how did that work?**

The Germans agreed to this in what they called the Geneva Convention. In the Geneva Convention they were to supply prisoners with food. Well, we were on what they called half parcels. You're supposed to get a parcel a week and we had a parcel every two weeks. The parcel contained various foods that would keep like mashed potatoes. We had powdered potatoes and we had coffee. And they had cigarettes. I wasn't a smoker, and so I used mine as money. It was like money. So we lived on these Red Cross parcels.

**So do you remember what other food was in there other than the potatoes? Some kind of meat in cans?**

Yes, Spam was in there and margarine and what they called a D bar, concentrated chocolate bar.

**So any kind of bread?**

No. What we would grind up -- Germans supplied bread. That was one of their main supplies was bread, black bread. It had sawdust in it. The bottom of it where they'd bake you'd see the sawdust called "tree flour". But we valued it. It was sliced about a quarter inch thick. As thin as you could get it they sliced it. We were supposed to get a half loaf of bread a day. The Germans supplied us with lunch, soup. And the soup was so bad. I mean it was boiled garbage. What they'd have left over they'd boil it up and serve it to us as soup.

**So any fruit and vegetables?**

No. No. We did get what they called rutabagas. It was like a beet. We got those once in a while.



That was about it as far as food. I got down to 160 pounds. But we were lucky to get anything I guess.

**That's right. So tell me about the activities. What is a day like in captivity?**

Okay. The day was spent mostly you'd exercise. They'd let you walk around. The Red Cross had supplied us with a library. Yeah. I read every one of Zane Grey's books. That was my favorite. They did have a band. They supplied musical instruments to some of the guys that could play. And we had an orchestra you wouldn't believe. Some of these guys had played in big bands. One guy played with Tommy Dorsey—so we did have some good band concerts on weekends. But during the week when the summer came, they supplied them with ice skates. Being from Southern California I knew nothing about ice-skating. But reading was mostly that.

Now, they did supply me with pencil and paper. I have always been interested in architecture, being a builder, a carpenter. So I designed a few houses and drew house plans. Some of the guys in my room really got interested and said, hey, would you design me a house? So I did design a few houses on this paper and pencil that the Red Cross supplied me. That got me started. All these paintings here are my work.

**I want to look at those. So were those the paintings that you made in prison?**

No. That got me started. The only thing I had in prison was pencil and paper. And I did some of those. But I couldn't bring any home because we were very limited because of what happened in prison camp, which I'll explain to you now if you'd like.

**Yes.**

When the Russians got close, we could hear the Russians' guns coming. And they had this big river to cross in Germany, the Oder or one of the big rivers. I think it was the Oder River or maybe it was the Danube. The Russians had to cross. So they stopped before coming across. But we could hear their guns, the big guns, and we knew that they were coming. Oh, we're going to get loose. Well, the Germans had different ideas. They moved us out of that camp right after Christmas. They wanted to take us into southern Germany near where Hitler had his retreat at Berchtesgarden and hold us as hostages, 2500 American officers. And so we got the orders to pack up and move out.

**Now, before you tell me that, earlier you started to tell me about how you were questioned when you first got there. Finish that story.**





Newman Crew 398<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group 8<sup>th</sup> Army Air Corps

Bottom row (l to r): Sgt. Money (survived), Sgt. Kucharski (KIA), Lt. Newman (KIA), Lt. Deninger (survived).

Top row (l to r): Sgt. Cohn (KIA), Sgt. Perry (KIA), Lt. Dean Whitaker (survived), Sgt. Harrington (survived, Sgt. Jones (KIA).



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# WESTERN UNION

1202

A. N. WILLIAMS  
PRESIDENT

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NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
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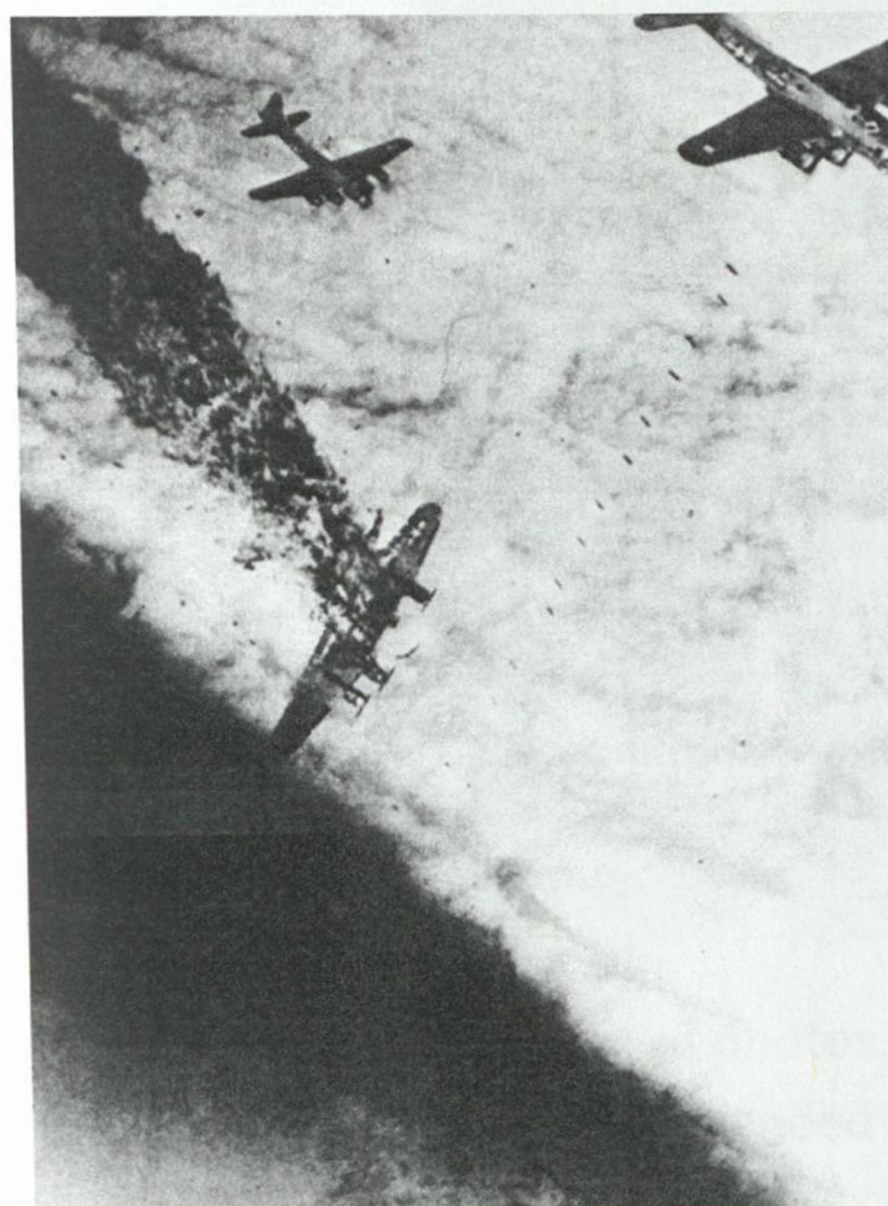
Dated *Nov 17* *2:03 pm*

To *Mrs Anna Cedina Whitaker*  
*5107 E 61 St.*

*The secretary of war desires me to express his deep regret that your son Second Lieutenant William S. Whitaker has been reported missing in action since two November over Germany if further details or other information are received you will be promptly notified.*

*Dunlop Acting the Adjutant General*

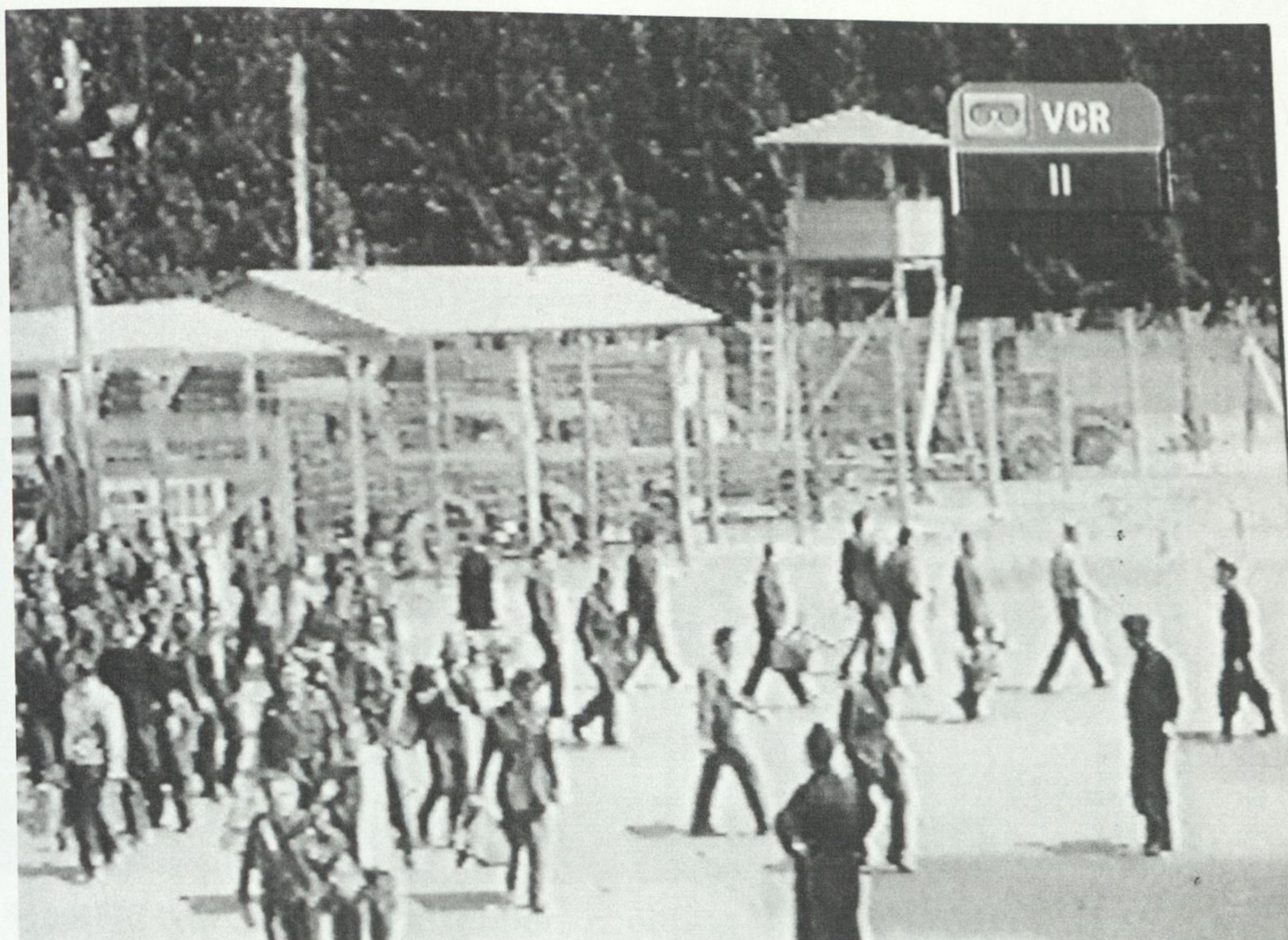
THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE



Above: Telegram received by Dean's mother who never lost hope of her son's safe return.

Left: Dean's photo of plane with tail shot off and low clouds where he released his rip cord to release parachute.





From Dean's collection of photos showing Stalag Luft III, Goon Towers and double lined fence. Pine trees in the background surrounded the prison camp. Truck in bottom photo is filled with arriving POWs.



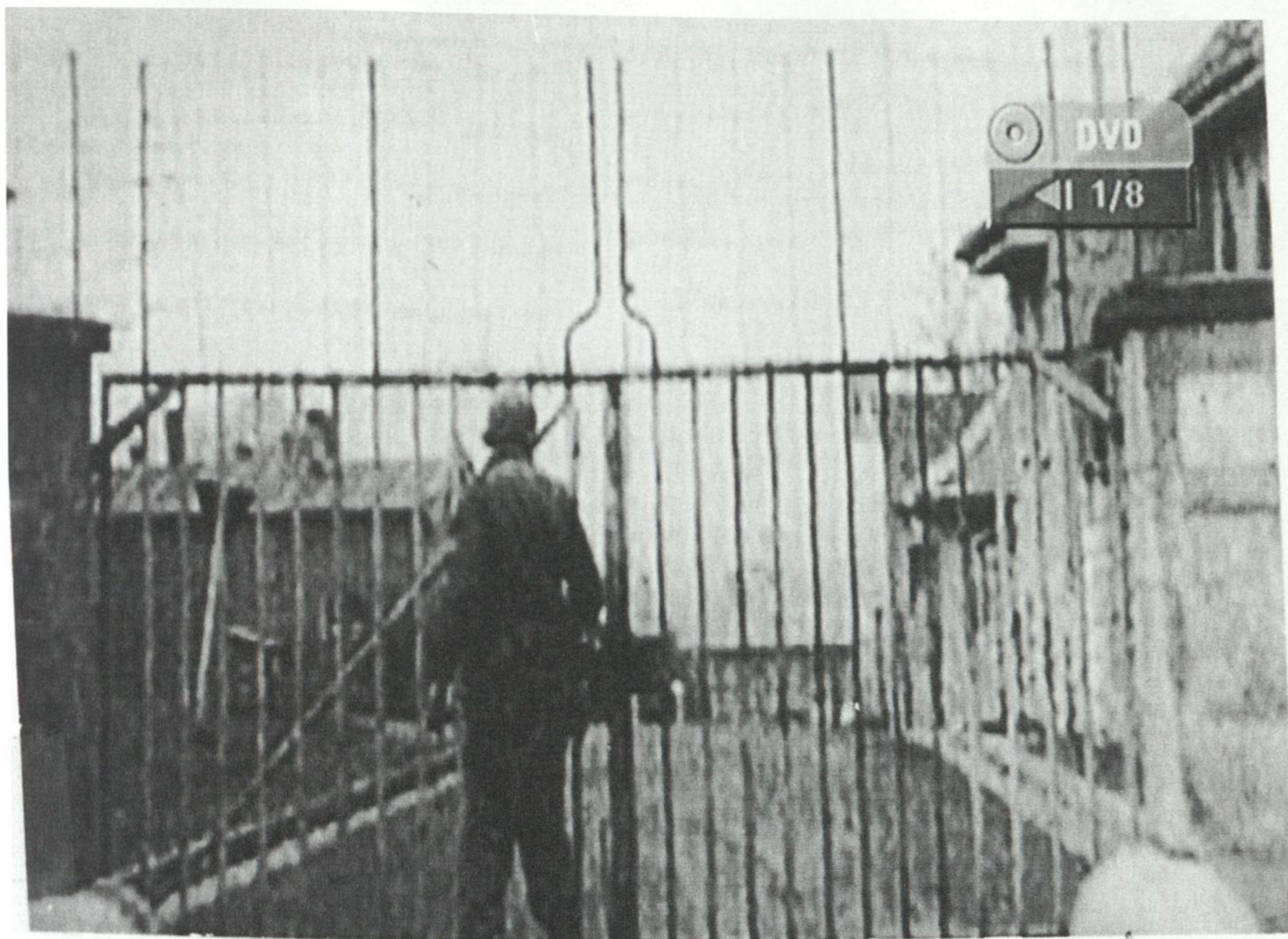


Photo of one of Patton's soldiers shooting the lock off the Gate of the P.O.W. camp.

This was the main entrance into the camp. The barracks I was in Is first on left, Most of the P.O.W s were not outside because the shooting Had just stopped.



Page from Dean's personal book recalling his POW experiences.





*Exclusive in The Post*

## Coming Home

In this photo received yesterday by The Post from the U. S. Coast Guard are shown (left) Second Lieut. Robert Morton, 4877 East 60th st., and Second Lieut. William Whitaker, 5107 East 61st st., Maywood, aboard a manned troop transport in the Atlantic headed back toward home after



Okay. This one camp was an interrogation camp. Dulag Luft was the name of it. It was an interrogation camp where all the American prisoners were taken. They were so busy because this air raid was so huge that we didn't stay there long. But they threatened to keep us there until we told them what they wanted to know. And we knew all you had to tell them was your name, rank and serial number. And I told them that. They said, well, what were you bombing? I said, I don't know. They said, well, you're going to stay here. Then I was taken out of my clothes. I was naked in this one cell by myself. They had an air raid on Frankfurt, which was close by. And I saw the planes bombing and everything out of my window. But I didn't tell them anything. So I was just held overnight like that. And they knew me. I was just a young kid, second lieutenant, and I didn't know any secrets. So they let me go. They put me on the next bus out to Stalag Luft III. That was the end of my interrogation. I was threatened.

**So how long were you at Stalag?**

We were at Stalag from November to right after Christmas, say just two months.

**And then you were taken to southern Germany, which you were getting ready to tell.**

Yeah. That's another story.

**So what was that like?**

That was terrible. We were put out walking in the middle of winter. And me being a Southern California boy, I had never been in the snow before, hardly. I was out there. But luckily I had gotten some heavy clothes. I had a GI overcoat, which was a lifesaver. We marched the first day. We would stay in a German farm. The first day we stayed in the hayloft of this farm. They did let us have water. Bread and water we were living on then. When we left you had to carry everything with you. So what I chose was a box of prunes. And we had all these supplies because the guys had been getting stuff from home. Some guys had been in for two years and they were getting these articles from home.

**Could you write home?**

Yes, I wrote home. My mother never received it until, oh, months later. I never heard from home all the time I was in prison. But these guys had received things from home for a couple of years and they had to leave it behind. So I had my choice of what I could carry. Prunes I always liked and they are very good for you.



**Yes. Medicinal.**

And other food and some cheese. I took a box of cigars because they were lightweight and worth their weight in gold for trading. So I had this backpack on. I survived with water and bread mainly. Some of the guys were in pretty bad shape. Luckily I was a 19-year-old kid that was in top condition. I had played football in high school and was in top shape.

**How many days did you have to walk?**

We walked for about seven days. We were staying in farmhouses and that until we got to this one town where they put us in a railroad car. We were in this railroad car going to southern Germany. We were in this railroad car for two days. And we were packed in there so tight you could not sit down. You had to stand up. Some of the guys that were pretty weak -- they were in bad shape -- we let sit down and squeezed them in. This was right after Christmas. Touching thing there was that somebody started singing "Silent Night." They heard it in all the cars. So we were all trying to sing then.

**So were you all Americans on this train?**

Yeah, we were all Americans from Stalag III. We were let out once. Luckily when I left Stalag Luft III, I took a bottle of vitamins, which I thought would be good. And so water was the precious item in the train. When we stopped and they let us out of the train once for bodily functions, I found some clean snow. I filled the bottle full of snow, so I had some water to sip on. I put the vitamins in my pocket. So I used this snow and got a little sip of water once in a while. Being 19 years old got me through everything fine.

We arrived at this one camp and it was raining. It was really miserable. We got to the permanent camp, which was in Moosburg, Germany. They called it Stalag 17-A. Got there on a rainy day. They put us in a barn that leaked like crazy. We had a heck of a time finding a spot that you didn't get dripped on. So we got into Stalag 17 and for two days or three days we had no place to sleep except these barns.

So the third or fourth day they found -- I don't know if they built it or what -- a tent. And this tent was just packed with men. We were sleeping on the floor. I had a heck of a time because I had eaten too many prunes. I had to get up at night. And I was in the middle of the room. I had to step over all these guys. I think I had to get up three or four times that night.



So luckily, though, the next day they put me in the infirmary or it was kind of a place where guys were sick went into. And we had a fellow there that was a premed student. And he took care of us. We didn't have medicine, but he knew what we could eat to be careful. So on the third or fourth day I went into this hut with the premed student. This premed student happened to be Patton's son-in-law. We were in this premed hut for a while until I got better. I was in this building when Patton came in.

When Patton came in we could hear him coming, the cannons. Actually first an airplane flew over, a spotter plane. We knew Patton was close. We could hear him.

**Okay, I want you to stop right there. Whew, this is exciting. Tell me, on the walk did the Germans walk also?**

Yes. Oh, yes. Guards were alongside of us. But there was no place to escape. The snow was four-foot high on each side of the road.

**I was just wondering if they walked with you or they had some kind of transportation.**

Yes, the funny part is these guards were older men. They had a hell of a time carrying their gun walking. And we noticed this one guard was walking and dragging his gun. This American POW walked up to him and said let me carry your gun for you. So he did. This American carried his rifle because this old man could hardly walk. But there was no place to escape. So that's what happened.

**What kind of incidents did you see of humanity from the Germans?**

The Germans wouldn't take care of us. My copilot froze his foot. He had a frozen foot. I helped him walk for about the last two days, supported him. The only relief we got was on one of these nights they put us in a glass factory that made glass and they had this furnace going. Man, that felt so good to get in this heated room. Paul, the copilot, took his boots off and we gave him an extra sock and tried to help him as much as we could. But to this day he still has trouble with that foot. And so that was the only incident. Otherwise, the Germans left us pretty well alone.

One incident that was interesting was we stopped for water once in a German camp. It was a tank training camp and held some Germans youths that were learning how to operate a tank. They had to tanks in there. They had a make-believe tank. But these German students' tanks were -- we told them, you know, well, I think the Americans are going to beat you. No, Americans aren't going to beat us. They were still hoping to win the war. And they were kind of negative. We didn't have



much contact with them. Other than that, we had no contact on the road. The civilian farmers kept away from us. We were pretty much left by ourselves.

**When you were flying bomber raids, did you have airplanes just there to protect you?**

Yes. When we started flying missions, we had very little protection because we had no airplanes that could fly that far. See, we could fly four hours into central Germany. Well, they could go two hours and they'd have to turn around and go back. That was a B-47, big engine, good airplane, but couldn't go very far. Then we got the P-51, which had a range that could go all the way with us to Berlin. I mean our losses at first were very bad. When the B-51s started flying it cut in half. So we were always glad to see P-51 buses come into camp.

**Did you ever have any contact with the Tuskegee Airmen?**

Yes. They wouldn't let us know who it was, but their group flew with us on -- they're P-51s -- on many occasions. When we got back to the base, we found out that it was the Tuskegee Airmen. And we were so glad. We wondered, you know, train more of them. They're great people, good fliers. Well, we were glad to see that P-51.

**So any of the crews flying out of where you flew, were any of them integrated?**

No. None of our crew was integrated. I don't know why.

**Well, because military was not integrated at that time.**

No, it wasn't.

**It just was not. So that's why I asked you about the Tuskegee Airmen.**

Yes. Well, one thing, though, when we were flying we did experience the first German jet fighter. That came through our formation. We were flying up at 25,000 feet once and one of these planes flew through us. I mean he was gone just like that. We wondered what the heck is that? We had no knowledge they had jets until we got back and we explained it to whoever was in charge of leading us on what happened. This plane that flew over us didn't have a propeller or anything. It was so fast you wouldn't believe it. He said that's one of their jets. So that was kind of an incident.

**Now, you were telling me about Patton being on his way. You heard him coming.**

That was a very exciting day when he come into camp. We heard him coming. See, the Germans guarding us were Luftwaffe soldiers. The Germans had Luftwaffe, the ground soldiers, and then the SS, which were the bad guys. Well, the Luftwaffe guys were coming into our camp for protection.



They knew Patton was getting close. There was a tower. I think it was a cheese factory right outside our camp. And the road into our camp was exposed from them. While these guys were coming into our camp for protection, the German SS were shooting them. Yeah, there were a couple of them lying in the road, German soldiers. The SS considered them deserters and they were shooting them. They were shooting into our camp.

Well, we had built slit trenches for air raids. These were lined with reeds from the local forest there. So me being in this one hospital barracks, it was right in front. It was the first one. The bullets were coming at us. So we jumped in these trenches.

**How deep were the trenches?**

They were about five-feet, six-feet deep, about to my head. I was in one. I escaped a shot by that far. It hit the reeds alongside of my head.

And I wondered, boy, I'm going to sit down now; I'm not going to stand up. But the damn thing there was that I had dysentery.

**Oh, no. No.**

Well, I had to get up and go to the bathroom and I didn't want to.

**Of course not.**

No. So I stayed in camp. But I managed to hold it.

**Good, good.**

Yeah.

**So about how many Americans were in that camp?**

Oh, golly, there were 5,000.

**Wow.**

Oh, yeah, they came from all over to this camp.

**So now, during the day what kind of freedom did you have in this big camp?**

Well, it's strange you mention that. It had a walk around the camp for exercise. That's about the only thing we did was walk and walk. I was walking one day around getting my exercise and I noticed this fellow walking next to me. I thought, gee, he looks familiar. So I stopped him and looked at him. And it was a kid I had grown up with in high school. He lived two blocks from me in Maywood. Bob Morton was his name. I said, gee, is that you Bob? He says, yeah, Dean, what are



you doing here? I told him, well, I got shot down in a B-17. He got shot down in a B-51. He was a fighter pilot. He got shot down by flak that hit the airplane. So he told me about it. He says the problem was he was using the commander's plane that day he got shot down. And so we walked around. We came home together on the boat. I have pictures of him and I coming on the boat. Yeah, he lived two blocks from me. He was in my class in high school.

**Oh, that's wonderful.**

Isn't that something?

Yes.

But that was our exercise was walking in the camp. Okay. Now, when Patton --

**And so when you weren't walking, did you have to stay locked in an area?**

Yes. In an area, yeah. We had barbwire with guards around it, of course. They wouldn't let us escape. So we stayed in camp.

**So how many men were in that barbwire area?**

Everybody. Five thousand.

**Okay. I see. So you had the freedom of moving with other men?**

Yes. Right. Everybody was free.

**And then at night how did you sleep?**

On the floor. We didn't have beds. There were so many of us in this camp. Actually in the medical facility I was in you had kind of a cot, a straw mat. It was very comfortable for what we did have. But after being on the road, we thought that was great. So we got along pretty good.

**So how long were you there before the day you heard Patton coming in?**

We were in that camp -- let's see. From winter. December, January, February, March. We got there in March I think it was and we were liberated in April. So it wasn't very long.

**So tell me about Patton.**

All right. Now, Patton's really a story. When he came into camp that -- when his troops came in, like I say the lock got shot off. This GI took his gun and shot the lock off the gate. We didn't know whether we were supposed to go out or not. And so the troops came in first. When they came in we thought, well, you know, we're free. This was in the afternoon. The next morning -- some of the guys left camp that day. We were advised not to go out because they're still snipers in the area.



**What happened to the guards?**

I don't know. The ones that tried to get in the camp were killed. But the GIs took them. When they came in they took all the Germans as prisoners of war. They were in another area.

So that afternoon we had a big celebration. One of the fellows in the camp, his brother was a captain in the infantry in Patton's Army that came in and rescued us. He knew his brother was in this camp. And as soon as he came in he looked up at his brother and they had quite a reunion. His brother took him out of the camp, shot a deer, brought the deer back in the camp to eat. Everybody got sick. That was too rich. We're not used to it. We're on hospital rations.

I didn't eat anything because I was still too sick. But the next day was something else. The next morning a Red Cross truck come in with coffee and doughnuts. It was amazing. They didn't have any coffee and doughnuts. I mean they had maybe a few. But the guys surrounded this truck. And we wondered how come coffee and doughnuts? Red Cross girls in it. One of the girls' husband was in the camp. They had quite a reunion.

**Oh, I can imagine.**

Of course they left right away. The doughnut truck did too. They had no doughnuts. But she did her purpose. Then shortly after that Patton came into the camp in his car. We were in this camp -- oh, his son-in-law had gotten shot with these bullets that were coming into the --

**Yes.**

Actually they went through the side of our building and it was pretty well spent. He got shot in the stomach, but it wasn't a bad wound. So that morning they took him out before Patton got there. But I was at the doorway of our hut.

Then Patton came in this doorway and asked me how you doing, son? And I said fine now that you're here.

**Wow. Wonderful.**

So I got to meet him personally. He had his gun and he was shined up, his boots. And, oh, I was really impressed.

**So did everybody know who Patton was?**

Yes, everybody knew Patton and that he was there. He didn't stay there very long. He examined the camp, took his son-in-law out, greeted us and got in his car and took off.



**So how did you guys get out, the rest of you?**

We were kept in the camp for a few days. They gave us white bread and some kind of a soup that they made. They had C-rations, but they didn't want to give us anything because we were too emaciated to eat anything. But we were so glad for anything. So it was a few days.

They took us to an airport. And on the road to this airport -- we were in a bus -- alongside the road close to our camp was a displaced persons camp, a Jewish camp. And all these Jewish guys were out with their striped uniform and that. Didn't know where to go. You know, the first few days we had nothing to take them anyplace. They were on their own. But we saw them and knew that they had no place to go. We felt sorry for them, of course. And we were taken to this German airfield waiting to fly out in a C-46 or 47 plane. We got there in the afternoon and we waited all afternoon. We explored this airport for some kind of a souvenir or something. I found a reel of eight-millimeter film that showed their supply lines. It wasn't worth anything.

**But still.**

But some of the guys found some wine and stuff. I was only a 19-year-old kid. I didn't want anything like that.

So a German plane came in to escape. They all wanted to be taken by the Americans. They didn't want to join the Russians. So this German plane came in and landed, the fighter plane. The guy got out and helped this girl out. He had his wife in the plane with him to be taken prisoners by the Americans. So the GIs took him and his wife out and treated them with a lot of respect, of course. There was a lot of respect between the American fliers and the Luftwaffe, the German fighters. They recognized each other for what they did.

But we were there for overnight. The next day they flew us to Camp Lucky Strike in France, which was hospital rehabilitation for us, all these 5,000 or so American prisoners of war, all the officers. Most of them were taken to a special camp and flown out. So we waited for a ship to take us home. And while we were at Camp Lucky Strike -- we were there for three or four days to get on a ship home -- we had walked out and looked over the bay and saw all these derelict ships that had gotten -- D-Day or something. I forget the name of the beach. But it was very impressive. The French countryside was really green. It was surprising with what they had gone through. And so we got on the boat to come home. What a ride. What a joy.



**Yes. It had to be.**

Then we got to New York and had a reception, you know, the fire boats were shooting. It was quite an experience. Saw the Statue of Liberty and knew we were free.

We got to New York and we were on hospital rations still. But we did have a steak. Oh. They wouldn't give us much, probably a little bit of steak. They wanted to break us in gradually. **That's right.**

And we were there for a week. But at that time I got to call home. First time I had heard how everybody was at home. My brothers were all okay.

**And were they at home already?**

No. The brother younger than me is five years younger. He had just joined the Army. And my other brother hadn't joined the Navy yet. But my older brother, the Marine, he was fine. But he wasn't in New York. He was in the Pacific at the time. But my mother was very glad to see us.

**Now, how many sisters?**

One. She was just a young kid.

**So she was a kid still.**

Yeah. She's ten years younger than I.

So we got on a train to go home. It was quite a trip, nice food and everything. Our train was headed for Los Angeles. Pasadena was the stop for the train to get off. I had two uncles that worked in L.A. They were there to greet me with my mother and my sister. Quite a reunion.

**Oh, it had to be. Wonderful.**

Yep. Well, my brothers were still home, too. Yes, they were there. The whole family.

**Oh, that's great. Wow. So you had things to tell them.**

Yeah.

**That's amazing. So tell me once you got out of the military, tell me about what happened then, what kind of work you did. How long did you stay in the military after that?**

I stayed, well, not very long. They wanted me to stay in the service. They wanted me to be a pilot. I had navigator's wings, gunner's wings, three sets of wings. They said, why don't you go and get pilot's wings? They were going to ship me off to Texas. And I said, no, I want to go to school. See, I was 20 years old.



**That's right.**

So they said okay, it's your choice. I had enough points, of course, to get out. The ex-prisoners of war had priority. So I got out of service. I went to school, signed up to go to USC. Went to USC to architectural school for a year. I got married. My wife was working. She had a good job. She was a secretary for the president of some oil well companies. We were getting along fine. And then I had a chance to go in -- in the meantime, when I was going to school with architecture, I was doing fine. And I said, well, I'm going to lay off a year and go to work as a carpenter and earn some money to buy a house as a married couple. We found a house. We wanted to buy that. It was called a California Vet Loan. We were paying \$42 a month.

**Couldn't you have gotten the GI Bill for the house?**

Yes. It was California State GI Bill. And \$42 a month included the insurance.

I was making good money as a carpenter. And then I had a chance to go on the fire department where we bought this house in Lynwood, California. So I joined the fire department. Took the test and come out on top. The reason I went on the fire department was you worked 24 hours a day and then you were off 24 hours. Well, you know, I could build houses in the 24 hours that I was off, which I did. I worked eight hours every other day besides being on the fire department. And I was doing pretty well.

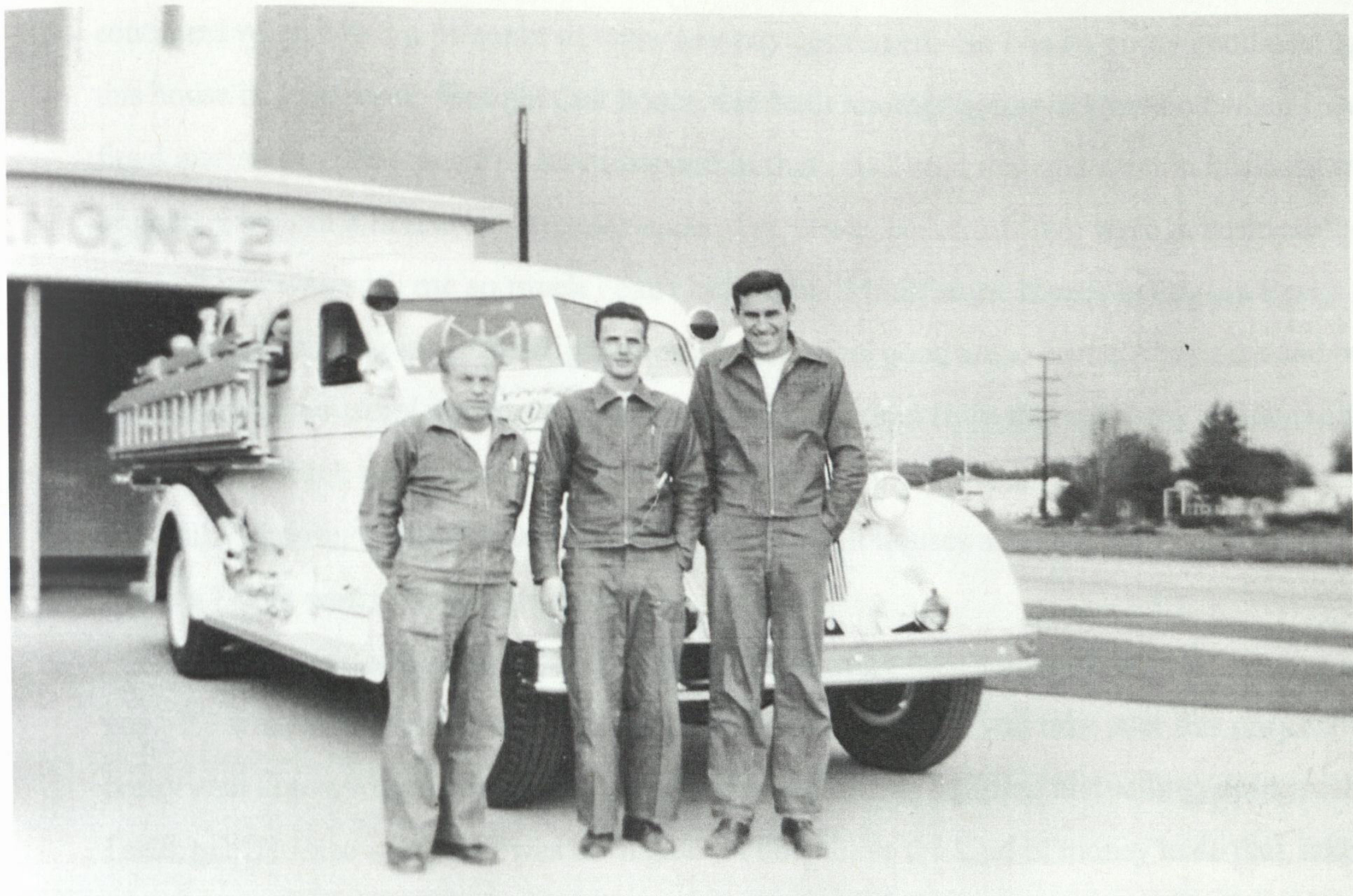
**Oh, you had to.**

Yes, but I was paying a lot of money in taxes. So I says, you know, I'm going to go into business for myself. So I was on the fire department for a few years. I was an engineer, drove the fire truck. But I was doing so well building houses on my time. I built my own house two blocks from the fire station. After I built that my brother, who was in contracting in Capistrano Beach, California, says, Dean, why don't you come down and go in business with me? There's good money there. And I had done a lot of building. So I said, yeah, we could do that. So I quit the fire department and quit everything and moved to the beach.

**Capistrano, that's such a beautiful place. And we're talking about south of Los Angeles going towards San Diego?**

Right. Okay. We rented there in Capistrano Beach for a year. And I had saved my money from this house that I had sold. Well, I had some money coming when I got out of the service. My pay





Fire Station #2 Crew – Lynwood, California 1956. (Dean is far right.)



continued when I was a prisoner of war. My pay continued. So I had a pretty good nest egg to buy this house in Lynwood. Bought that house and built another house in Lynwood when I was on the fire department. I had good money invested in that. So I sold that and went in business with my brother. I bought a house in Laguna Beach. Oh, it was beautiful. We were in business then.

Luck was with me so much I can't believe it. I built some homes in Laguna Beach for a few years. I was building in an area right above town, a real good area. I would buy a lot and build what we call a spec house. I was doing real good. I bought lots from this company, Sunny Hills Investment, which was quite a development in Fullerton, California. So I would buy a lot from them and build a house. I bought two lots from them. Built houses and sold them before I had finished. So then I said, well, I'm going to buy three lots.

The owner of Sunny Hills Investment was sitting here selling these lots. He was an older guy. He wanted to go play golf. So he says, Dean, why don't you take over this project? I was pretty well known then around town as a contractor. I was building and selling, doing real well. So I said, gee, Horace -- Horace was his name -- I don't have the kind of money to do that, take over this track of 50 homes, vacant lots. Then I was buying the lots and selling them. He says you don't have to invest any money. He says we'll sell them to you and you pay for them as you sell the houses. I said, well, that sounds great. If I don't have to put anything in it, I can do it. He says it's all set. And it was all set. He had the loans all set up. He had the engineering done. He had a lumber company all set. He knew everybody. He knew the county planning commission, Laguna Beach Council.

And so I went into business of building this track of homes and did real well. Of course, then homes weren't selling for what they are now. We were selling these houses from \$30,000 to \$40,000. They were nice homes. Today they are selling for \$500,000 to \$800,000.

### **How many bedrooms?**

Three- and four-bedroom homes, pretty good size. I was there for quite a few years in Laguna Beach. I run out of lots to sell. So I went down south in Solana Beach and areas like that and was building.

We'd go to Las Vegas once in a while. We had a boat out on the lake. And so we were living in Solana Beach at the time. And it was cloudy a lot right there on the beach. And we'd come to Las Vegas and it was sunny. I says, you know, let's think about moving to Las Vegas. So we did. We



sold everything in California and moved to Las Vegas. Bought a couple of houses, which we're now renting. We didn't do any building here. You could buy a built house about as cheap as you could build. I mean we bought our first house for \$95,000.

**Where was your first house here in Las Vegas?**

It was over in Henderson in Whitney Ranch. It was an upstairs house. When we retired we didn't want an upstairs house. So we sold that and bought this place. We looked for a long time to buy this house because of the situation it is. We have a pool and everything.

**Oh, good. This is a nice house.**

This is nice for retirement, not much to keep up and everything.

**Good. I see that you're working on your yard, though.**

Yeah. I've got men to do that. My wife won't let me do that anymore.

**So now, when did you get married?**

We got married in Arizona in 1946. We just turned 20 or 21, young kids. We had known each other in high school.

**Oh, good. So when you moved to the beach, did she continue to work?**

No. She worked for me when I was building houses. Oh, she's part of it. She was the secretary. She got her real estate license. I had my real estate license. She was a big help. Kept books. I had a bookkeeper for a while and then I found out, you know, she's capable of doing it. So she did it.

**That's wonderful.**

So we were partners in business. Yes, it worked out great.

**So now, which year did you move to Las Vegas?**

1990.

**Did you ever regret not going back to school at USC?**

Yes, I did. Later on I thought, gee, I was really doing well. I would have been a great architect. But I was making money. Oh, I was telling you about the houses in Laguna that we sold from 30 to \$40,000?

That was in 1946, '45. Years later those same houses were selling for \$800,000. We had sold a house. There was a couple that sold real estate for us up there. They bought one. These houses had ocean views, all of them on the hill right above. And they were good-size lots. They



weren't these Pulte-size lots. Their house today is worth one and a half million dollars. They bought that house for \$40,000.

I sold to a lot of my friends. These houses, we didn't sell them overnight. I mean it took us a year to sell these houses. But I didn't rent any, which was a mistake. I probably should have rented them and kept about three of them. You know, that would have been money in the bank.

**That's right.**

But you don't know. You do what you have to do at the time.

**So in 1990, did you retire when you came to Las Vegas?**

Yes. I retired. I was 65. I retired and we came to Las Vegas.

I had gone to a 398th reunion in Pennsylvania, which our bomb group has once a year. And one of the fellows was an ex-prisoner of war. He was telling me about what advantages he was getting from the government. I didn't know anything about it. So I come back here and applied at the VA. And this lady at the VA is such a help, Jan. She says, well, Dean, you're eligible for a pension.

So I applied for this pension, went through the psychiatrist here and all the doctors. That's where I went to the doctor here. And he asked me if I had ever been injured during the war. So I told him about the first mission, the eye problem. He says did you receive the Purple Heart for that? I said no, our base commander was killed on a mission and there wasn't anybody around to do that. He says we're going to get you the Purple Heart. So he gave me the paper. Jan fixed it up, gave me the papers. I signed them and filed them out. And I still had two crew members that experienced this with me sign that I had to go to the hospital and was out of flying for a couple of weeks. And so I got the Purple Heart out at the base. Quite a ceremony.

**Oh, that's great.**

Yeah. I got articles on it. This is another article.

**Now, last year I went when they gave a recognition ceremony to POWs out at the base and they had the flyover and everything.**

Yeah.

**I was there. Did you go to that one?**

Well, that's when they presented me with the Purple Heart. Is that when they presented somebody?



**Yes.**

Yeah, that was me.

**Oh, okay. Oh, that's great. That's exciting.**

There's pictures of it here I'm going to give you.

**Good.**

Yeah, that was me.

**So is there anything else that you'd like to add?**

Let's see. No. But you asked me if I ever regretted not going to (school)--

**Yes.**

That was mainly it. But I am really into -- oil painting now is my hobby. And I'm satisfied with doing something constructive like that now.

Well, yeah, I should tell you about getting the retirement, early thing from the --

**The veterans.**

Yes, from the Veterans Administration. I went through their process and went to the psychiatrist. Everybody has been affected by posttraumatic stress. He asked me if I was affected by that? I says yeah. The wife put up with it for a few years, me kicking her out of bed because I was trying to escape, you know, or things like that.

So we moved up here and we had twin beds because I still suffered from posttraumatic stress thinking about and dreaming about jumping out of an airplane and that. So I got a hundred percent disability. And that really helped me.

Then a few years ago my wife had a heart attack. She had an obstruction in her artery and had a replacement artery thing. She was in the hospital for 70 days. But the VA had something that I read about. When I took her to the hospital, I get this prisoner-of-war paper. And it told about what they called CHAMP VA where the VA takes care of the wives of veterans. CHAMP VA took care of her hospital bill. Today they take care of all her doctor and medicine.

**Wow.**

Isn't that lucky to read about that and know that?

**Yes. Oh, that's wonderful.**

The VA takes such good care of me.



**That's wonderful.**

Isn't that nice?

**So how do you feel when you read these articles about -- I guess two or three years ago we read about the men who are now in military service and coming home and how poorly they have been treated at Walter Reed and other hospitals?**

Yeah. That's I think an area of conflict, whatever area. And the area here has taken such good care of me I'm not going to complain about anything.

**Okay. I see.**

The VA here is very helpful.

**So where is the VA Hospital located?**

It's right below the big hospital -- oh, golly. It's on La Canada off --

**So near St. Rose?**

No. I can use any hospital I want now.

**Oh, I see.**

I had a knee replacement here a few years ago and I went to the hospital out on the base to do that. I had two shoulders replaced, one at a time of course, and went to the St. Rose here for that. So you can go to any hospital. But they're building the new VA Hospital out here.

**I heard that.**

We're waiting to see that. I have a doctor here at the VA that I see all the time, very good doctor. I go there about once every two months. They call me in for checkups. They take good care of me.

**I appreciate this so much. This is such good information.**

However you can use it is great.

**Yes. And if you let me make a copy of that...**

Yeah, you can have this. Like I say I'd like every student to read this.

**That would be great.**

And I'd be glad to appear. I have spoken at high schools here and in Utah. My niece had me speak at her high school in Utah. And here I've spoken too. Any presentation, if they want to present one of these and have me speak, whatever, I would be glad to because I think that the kids should hear about this.



**Oh, yes, definitely. Definitely. Well, thank you so much.**

Oh, you're welcome. I'm glad to get it out. I'm going to present you with that. This is a story the local press had. It tells about my crew. And there's pictures in here of everything. This is interesting.

**Now, do you know the date of this article?**

Oh, golly. Yeah. It's in here I think.

**Okay, good.**

I think it's in here. If you don't find anything -- that's the German soldier that saved my life and the four crewmembers.

**So he's the one that stopped the farmers from shooting?**

Right. It's funny how I learned about this, too. I think it's in here. You can read about that. There was a German correspondent here covering a fight. A German fighter was fighting here in Vegas. And the German sportswriter was here. And that article came out the same time.

**This article here about "State of Missing Now Resolved?"**

Yes. He read that article in the local paper, the Las Vegas Review-Journal, and came over and interviewed me. And I told him about the German soldier. And he's from this town. He says I'm going to look this soldier up for you if I can. And so they looked it up in Germany. They had a front page of the German paper they sent me about that story. It got around.

**That's great.**

Yeah. Okay. Well, how you doing? You want some more water?

**No. I'm just fine.**

**You just showed me a picture of General Patton coming into camp. There was a question I wanted to ask you. There was a TV show that kind of made light of the prisoner-of-war camps. How did you feel about those kinds of TV shows?**

They're very misleading. They're for Hollywood, you know, sensational purposes. That's not how it was. I mean these were desperate times. I mean these soldiers had gone through some pretty bad battles and to say something disparaging about it is not very nice.

I remember after the gunnery meet was over, the Air Corps treated all of the participants to a dinner at the best hotel in Las Vegas, the El Rancho, which was the only hotel located on the "Strip"



at the time. No drinks were served to the underage cadets, but the chorus girls joined us after the dinner for conversation. The girl at our table was from Glendale High School, a California school that was in my high school football league. We had an interesting conversation. After the dinner we were loaded in the trucks and returned to our base in Kingman, Arizona. To this day I still remember that dinner at such a fancy hotel.

**So thank you so much for sharing your story, Dean.**



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Training at Victorville was very exciting for me. We flew in A.T. 11's which is a twin engine trainer type plane. The Pilots of these planes were older men that were a little over flying combat missions age. However, they were still the dare-devil type and loved to catch an unaware farmer driving down the lonely desert road. More than one farmer had the experience of an AT-11 plane bussing them at ninety miles per hour.

One of our mission's we simulated a bomb run on the Douglas aircraft plant in Long Beach, Calif. The plant was covered with camouflage that made it look like an orange grove. Other missions involved targets set out on the Mojave Desert.

Most of the fun came when bombing low level targets and scaring up jack rabbits and coyotes. Pilots loved to do this and sometimes would return to base with telltale signs of notches in the propellers from clipping telephone or electric lines.

Graduating from Victorville I received my wings as a Bombardier-Navigator and became a second Lt. in the Army Air Corps



DEAN WHITAKER

Loading practice bombs in an  
AT-11 plane at Victorville  
Army Air Base, Calif.



A Follow Up:

## German Guard With A Limp And Warm Smile



HERMANN BOHN

The story was about "a German guard with a limp and a warm smile."

It appeared in Vol. 10 No. 3 of FLAK NEWS — a "side-bar" that went with Bill Frankhouser's pursuit for the truth as to "what happened to my comrades?"

The Herb Newman crew went down on November 2, 1944, on a mission to Eiseburg. He and four of his men were killed; four survived.

One of the survivors, W. Dean Whitaker, credited this young German guard with saving his life. He induced German civilians to stop shooting at Whitaker as he parachuted to earth. He even gave him tea and cookies.

"He handed me my life, and for that I would like to thank him," the story read.

Last year Whitaker received an e-mail from Halle, Germany, written by a reporter who researched the event.

The German soldier's name was Hermann Bohn, and he died four years ago." The headline for the story he wrote for his newspaper read —

"Human Gesture When Hate Was Raging."

All made possible by "a German guard with a limp and a warm smile."



Herman Bohn cpl. German Army

Cpl. Bohn was the guard that stopped the German civilians from shooting me and the three other crew members. Was



# **Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben**

**Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager:**

Bestätigung der Identifizierung:

Nr. \_\_\_\_\_

Lager: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Vorname: \_\_\_\_\_

Geburtsort und -ort: \_\_\_\_\_

Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

Vorname des Vaters: \_\_\_\_\_

Familienname der Mutter: \_\_\_\_\_

Staatsangehörigkeit: \_\_\_\_\_

Dienstgrad: \_\_\_\_\_

Truppenteil: \_\_\_\_\_

Komp. usw.: \_\_\_\_\_

Zivilberuf: \_\_\_\_\_

Berufs-Gr.: \_\_\_\_\_

Matrikel Nr. (Stammrolle des Heimatstaates): \_\_\_\_\_

Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): \_\_\_\_\_

Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert: \_\_\_\_\_

Des Kriegsgefangenen

Lichtbild



Nähere Personalbeschreibung

Größe

Haarfarbe

Besondere Kennzeichen:

Fingerabdruck  
des rechten (!) Zeigefingers



Name und Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person in der  
Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen

Wenden!

## **Personal-Beschreibung:**

Figur: \_\_\_\_\_

Größe: \_\_\_\_\_

Alter: \_\_\_\_\_

Gefichtsform: \_\_\_\_\_

Gefichtsfarbe: \_\_\_\_\_

Schädelform: \_\_\_\_\_

Augen: \_\_\_\_\_

Nase: \_\_\_\_\_

Haare: \_\_\_\_\_

Bart: \_\_\_\_\_

Gebiß: \_\_\_\_\_

Besondere Merkmale: \_\_\_\_\_

Deutsche Sprachkenntnisse: \_\_\_\_\_

Bemerkungen:

German identification papers retrieved from the office of the German C.O. at the POW camp a few days after the surrender of the Germans.