

THE WWII
ESCAPADES
OF
MIKE PETRICH

IT WAS BAD,
BUT HE MADE IT BACK ALRIGHT
AND WE'RE GLAD!

As Told by Michael R. Petrich
2084 Junipero ~~96555~~
Signal Hill, CA ~~90556~~ U.S.A.
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Typed by Susan Petrich

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Michael R. Petrich 2084

FOREWORD

I, Michael R. Petrich, was a B-26 Pilot in World War II.

After graduation from Cadet Flight Training in June, 1943, Class 43-F, I was assigned to B-26 Transition Training at Dodge City, Kansas. Upon completion of this training, I was reassigned to Avon Park, Florida; then to McDill Field, Florida; then to Lake Charles, Louisiana; to Hunter Field, Savannah, Georgia. From there I was assigned a B-26 to fly to England.

From Hunter Field, we went to Homestead Field, Florida. I and my two man crew left Homestead on Christmas Day, 1943, to fly to Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico. We flew on the southern route through South America, Ascension Island, Gold Coast of North Africa, Marachech, and on to England in January, 1944, not without some escapades.

After landing in England, I continued on to Northern Ireland for more training. In early March, 1944, I was assigned to the 391st Bomb Group, 575th Squadron, as their first replacement crew. I flew my first combat mission, as a Co-Pilot, to the harbor of Le Havre, France. Then the rest of my missions were as Pilot — eventually leading to Flight Leader.

The following is a transcript of audiotape cassettes in reply to an audiocassette from Lt. Jim Clark, a hut mate of mine in England. On his tape, I heard him expressing the statement that "of course, Mike Petrich was killed," and then, many years later, he found out that indeed, I am still alive! Jim Clark made me aware of the 391st Bomb Group Association and from that I have renewed many old acquaintances from that time.

TAPE begins. . . .

[JIM talking: Mike Patrich lived in a hut with me and he was shot down two days before I was, July 6, 1944. He sent me a 2-1/2 hr tape and I'm trying to cut it down to 90 minutes. So I'll get off and let him tell it like it was.]

MIKE PETRICH starts: It was my 42nd mission. I thought we were, I remember we were hitting a gun emplacement. I read someplace in history, that I can't find now, that we were hitting an ammunition depot in a place called DREUX, about 40-50 miles SW of Paris. So mission progressed, we got off our initial bomb run, my recollection is that we were making a left turn into our bomb run, I looked up and I saw Tommy Tucker who was flying my right wing, I saw he and his crew looking down at my airplane, and I was wondering what in the hell was going on, when the next thing I knew my plane fell out of the sky.

My co-pilot, Robert Sullivan, and I had reached a strategy, that in the event we ever got hit, the first thing we'd do, in the event an engine got hit, is haul back on the throttle. He'd reach over and grab my hand on the throttle, and pull off the power so that we wouldn't fly up into another airplane, which was a common occurrence. As we started falling out of the sky, his hand came over on mine, he saw I'd already pulled back the throttle, so the next thing I knew, he opened up the top hatch. I was trying all my controls, I thought I had no control of the airplane, and then as much as the hatch was already open ...and nothing predetermined, it was just fate, but the airplane was spinning jerkily, I could feel my heart heavy, and I went sailing out of the airplane. My first sensation was of going straight out into a jerky spin, going straight out and then down.

And Jim, as Iyou, in your story, the first thing you do is pull that rip cord. Well, I pulled that rip cord, was pulling it, pulling it, pulling it...I never had a sensation that the parachute opened up, but I looked up and the parachute was open. I looked down on the ground and I saw that part of the airplane that I had been in, the main part of the airplane, was already on the ground and burning, and not more than 2-300 yards away from it was the tail section and it was just floating onto the ground, with a parachute floating up above it.

Again, Jim, not to contradict you, but your parachuting instructions,

somehow or someplace, I'd gotten instructions that when you're going down you can guide your parachute by pulling the shrouds, and I saw I was going down —

[Jim: I'm butting in here just for the hell of it, I did pull the shrouds and I hit the tree anyway]

...the two plane parts were going down into a clearing, but I was going down into a forest surrounding the clearing. Well, I started to pull the shrouds but to no avail, because by that time I was coming down in the trees. The second thing is, they also tell you to cross your legs, to protect your vitals, as you're going down into the trees. Well, I started to do that, but before I even could do that I was down into the trees and just late, Jim, I can appreciate what happened to you, but I sailed backwards into this tree and settled down right up against the main trunk and on a branch, sitting (facing) out, with my legs straddling the branch.

After I found out I was ok, as we were instructed, I started to pull the parachute down through the trees. I found out I couldn't do that so I just unharnessed myself and I shimmed down the tree, got down to the bottom, took off my Mae West. I didn't hear you [Jim] say anything about your .45, but I took off my .45 as I didn't feel like I was going to combat the German army with that .45 that bounced six inches in the air every time I'd shot it! Oh, I just found a pile of leaves at the base of the tree, so I buried my Mae West and my .45 in the leaves at the bottom of the tree. Having accomplished those rituals, and also hearing motor transportation someplace in the area, I stayed in the perimeter of the forest and I started walking. Eventually I heard something that sounded like someone cutting wood. So I walked to the sound and I found a very elderly gentleman cutting wood on the edge of the forest. He had a horsedrawn cart sitting along side the perimeter of the forest. I walked up to him and I gave him the password, "J'suis Americaine," (I am an American). He looked up and he motioned for me to stay there. He got in his cart and he took off lickety split.

For some reason, I did not trust this man so I followed him, and within a short distance, several hundred yards, I saw him go into a clearing where there was a farmhouse. There were all kinds of German soldiers walking around the farmhouse. So I circled this farmhouse and went on out to the highway where I had heard these vehicles, crossed the highway, walked

over into the forest until I came to what we call a fire break in the forest and I started walking down this fire break. Walking north, all the time, waking home...back to England. Anyway, I walked on this fire break for it seemed like an awful long while, and pretty soon I started seeing things at the end of the fire break, like vehicles moving, and pretty soon, personnel moving, so I moved into the forest. Then I saw evidence of recent occupancy in the forest, like unruined tin cans and where people had gone to the bathroom, and so on. I had walked to the edge of the forest and I saw a gun emplacement and I assumed that these were the guns that had shot me down, so I immediately turned around and started walking the opposite direction, and I walked, oh, for maybe another hour or two. *[Oh, incidentally, I think I was shot down about 10:00-10:30 in the morning.]* About 1:00-1:30 in the afternoon, walking in the opposite direction, I came to a clearing, which was a farm area and I saw somebody walking in the fields, a gentleman. By that time, I was a little disgusted with myself for having been shot down and the war in general and all that, so I threw caution to the wind and I walked right out to him, and again, I identified myself "J'suis Americaine." He immediately looked around in all directions and told me to get down on the ground, and eventually he told me to follow him. So I followed him for another 300 yards, where we went to an area which was his working area, a tool shack, and he told me to stay there. Oh, first, he says, "You wait here."

As it turned out, this was not a Frenchman, he was a Portuguese married to a Frenchwoman, but he was a farmer. I had taken several years of Spanish in high school and college, and I thought I could communicate with him, but I didn't make any better communication with him than I did with the Frenchman. Anyway, we got along all right. I knew what he was saying, he told me to stay there. First of all, I was only wearing a flight jacket and coveralls with my name across my left breast. He took a knife and he cut that off. And he rubbed some dirt into it to show that it hadn't just been done. Then he told me to sit there. So I sat there. I trusted him.

In a short while, within an hour, he came back and he had two or three Frenchmen with him and bikes. And he says "Come." So I got on one of the bicycles that they had brought, and I went back to their farmhouse, they took me back to their farmhouse. When we got to the farmhouse, there were other families there, and the women came running out and they were excitedly gesturing to the farmer and asking him questions. He turned to me and asked me where the parachute was. I told him I had left it in the

tree. He made a motion by gesturing to the party area, that the women all liked the parachutes because they made nice panties for them, and I guess, other undergarments. Anyway, they put me up again and Jim, you said you went into a loft of the barn, well they had a loft above their house, and they put me in this loft above their main quarters, their house, and gave me food. Then, later on that evening, about 6:00-7:00 in the evening, he came up and got me and said it would be too dangerous to leave me there, that they were going to take me over to another farmhouse where my comrades were. I assumed these to be the people who were on my airplane. We got on the bicycles and we went several miles over to another farmhouse. When we got there, well, I met a Lt. Joe ~~Phillips~~^{Phillips}, who was a bombardier on a B-24 that had been shot down the night before by the same guns that had shot me down. And two of his B-24 crew members. As the evening progressed, the Frenchman told me that from my crew, that Lt. Sullivan, who was my co-pilot, and had gotten out of the airplane before me, that he had gotten down on the ground, parachuted down, but the props had hit his legs and almost severed them. The Germans said he was too wounded, and they shot him on the ground.

To go back to my experience, when I was shot down, the bombardier, who was a tech sgt., Ed Insley, he was in the nose, and there was no chance in the world that he ever got out of there. My calculation is that from the time we were hit until the time I was on the ground, I first had said 30 seconds, but it may have been a minute, but it wasn't any more. God rest his soul, Insley, he never had a chance to get out of the nose, he just never had a chance to get out of the airplane. The waist gunner, Tech Sgt Ernest Martel, no, he was the turret gunner, he and the waist gunner, Brian Ambrose, Staff Sgt. they were both blown up when the airplane got hit. The chute that I saw going down with the tail section, which at first I had assumed was one of the gunner's chutes that got caught on to a piece of the airplane, and opened voluntarily, turned out to be the tail gunner, who was Staff Sgt. Robert Read. He had shrapnel wounds all up his back and through his neck and the Germans took him to a hospital. We later found out, he stayed in a German hospital all during the rest of the war. Sgt Bob Read and I still correspond. He now lives in Brisbane, Australia. But we were the only two to get out of the airplane alive, well, we were the only two that survived. Lt. Sullivan got out of the plane but the Germans killed him off on the ground.

To go back to the farmhouse where they took us secondly, Jim, you relate

to the gourmet food they served you. Well, they didn't exactly serve us gourmet food, but they gave us food. The first thing they did was give us a couple of rabbits. I'm not much for rabbits, but after a couple of days, we cooked those rabbits, and, I tell you, they were pretty delicious! We stayed out there at this farmhouse, well, first we were there a couple of days, and they came to us every evening. There was always another group that came over there along with whoever our sponsor was. I have his name someplace, because he later wrote me, after they were liberated and wished me well and that I got home and all this.

After a couple of days out there in this second farmhouse, they told us that the route of escape, which we had known from intelligence reports, was that a DC-3 would fly in at night, into an open field, and they would take whomever they had. So it sounded real good, I figured I was to be out of there in a couple of days and be back home in the United States within a couple of weeks and the war was over. This didn't turn out to be so because it started to rain, and I think, Jim, you related this too, in your story, it started to rain and it rained for three or four days, and then they said the fields were too wet and the DC-3 couldn't come in there and land and take-off.

The second escape route was through Spain, so they were going to have somebody pick us up and take us down to Spain. So another two or three days pass, and, Jim, you said that six of you were in the back end of a Renault, well I think we were, four of us, there were four, two Frenchman, and two Frenchwomen, in front, of, I think it was a Saab, because it was an odd-looking car, it was a French car, and there was the four of us in the back seat. So, we started off to Paris. They were going to take us to Paris, then from there they were going to take us down to Spain, to get back home. Well, the four of us got into the back of this car, and we weren't too comfortable, but we weren't complaining, and we drove quite a few miles, and all of a sudden, we came to a German guardpost...oh shit, here we got it, excuse the language, but I thought, oh we got it. We had to be in good company, because these four people in the front seat, they were just nervous as all get out, but anyway, we got through the checkpoint.

of this

We go on and we no more get into the outskirts, than we have a flat tire, the right rear tire. They tell us to stay in the car. There are German soldiers walking all up and down the street, but they are GIs and they aren't worrying about us or, we didn't know that at the time, but in

recollection, they weren't worried about us. Anyway, the French people get out there and they try to change this fire and they're not making any headway at all. So we climb out of the car and we tell them to stand back and we virtually lifted, the four of us virtually lifted up the car to change that fire so we can get on our way.

So then we get into Paris, and they deposit us into a hotel in Paris. It wasn't the Charles V, or whatever one of the big hotels that are there, but it was a hotel. You had to go down the hallway to go potty and all this kind of stuff. They bring us food and we stayed there for several days, but, in the meantime, we're turned over to a different group.

One of the guys in this group had gone to CalTech, he was a Spaniard, not a Mexican, but from Spain, he'd gone to CalTech in Pasadena, California, and he and I established a relationship because I was from California. His name was Jacques. Jacques came by every day and brought us food. He took me and a couple others of us for tours around Paris, even though Paris was occupied by the Germans. We stayed in the car all the time, while he took us around Paris. Then, after four or five or six days that we were there, he says, you're all set, we've got the truck to drive you down to Spain. So we'll be by and pick you up tomorrow morning.

So, tomorrow morning they came by and picked us up and put us in the car and we're driving through the central part of Paris, everybody's tooting their horns, all that stuff that you see in the movies. Then we pull up in front of a building that has iron rails all around it. We pull up to an entrance, and there are German soldiers walking in front of it with rifles. Jacques says, you have to wait for the truck here. I said, "Gee, we're not going to do this, right in front of whatever this is, this uh, German building?" So we pull around in back of the building, which I think was about a square mile around the back. We went into a beautiful residential area which had divided streets, landscaped. We had no more than parked the car and here comes the truck. Several other cars came and all kinds of people came scrambling out of these cars: they are ~~French~~ ^{British} boys with hats, all different kinds of costumes and whatnot, and they all climb into the truck.

For some reason, I sat in the back end of the truck, the truck was a panel truck, canvas covered, and I sat in the back end of it. Jacques is back there and says, "Ok, have a nice journey back," and he says to me, "See you

in California," and says to everybody, "Give me all of your money, identification," so everybody is passing along their watches, and their money from their escape kits, and their rings, and all this.

Again, relating your story, Jim, about Col. Stalhaker sewing his ring, watch, etc., well, anyway, being sentimental about my watch, I had my class ring, and I had a signet ring, so, while I was in Paris, I had sewed these into the seams of my pants.

The money I had already given to the French people, so I didn't have anything to give to him. Again he says to me, "See you back in California," and I said "Yeah, great." I thought everything was all fine and that I was going to see him back in California. Anyway, there were seventeen of us in this truck, and we pull out. [Oh, he says, "We have a car in front with an escort, and if you are stopped, you are all Polish workers going down to Southern France to work," he said, "You won't have any trouble."]

So we take off and pretty soon we're right back in the middle of the streets of Paris and everybody's honking their horns and our truck is honking its horn and the people in front of us are honking their horns. All of a sudden we go around sort of a curve, and I lift the canvas on the back of the truck and I see we're going through an iron gate and there's German soldiers. All of a sudden, the back end of the canvas flips up and there are two German soldiers back there with machine guns yelling "Hands Up" — we'd had it!

It turned out, we were in Gestapo headquarters in Paris, France. They got us out of the truck. They held the guns on us and they said "March" and when they said "March" they meant German march, goose step, so we goosestepped around that compound for 10 or 15 minutes. Then they took us into the building, put us in a hallway, and they told us to strip. We're all in civilian clothes, standing in the middle of the hallway, and we all stripped.

In a few minutes, a real Hollywood character comes walking along, he had on a brown checkered sport coat, brown slacks, brown & white shoes, a felt hat, and he says "Saboteurs — two days," and makes a motion across his throat, "Two days and you're dead." They had us believing it. He comes up to me and again, he says "Saboteur" and I haven't said anything yet. We still, all of us had our dog tags, so I held out my dog tags, and I showed

him, "Dog Tags" and he says, "Saboteur" and he slapped my hands down with my dog tags, and says "Saboteur." He says, "What do you think you are? A box fighter?" I must have looked like a fighter or something, because I had my hands held up. I became naturally meek and mild; I dropped my hands down.

They kept us out in the hallway for several hours, standing there stark naked, then they told us to put our clothes back on. They marched us out of the building and put us in the trucks that had individual compartments, that you stood up in. They transported us. After a while, they took us out and put us in cells — we didn't know where we were — they put us in cells and they left us. The next day, they started interrogating us and we all said we were military.

Really, the unfortunate part of this was that we were with one fellow there whose name escapes me right now, but he was a B-17 pilot who had been shot down in ~~Germany~~^{France}. You don't get out of ~~Germany~~^{France} without passports, railway tickets, everything else, but this guy had made it back thru Germany all the way to France, then got picked up by this phony underground. The poor guy was about to commit sideways, no, he held up well, he did well, you have to give him credit, for his American ingenuity, etc. He had been shot down several months before, and made his way back.

Anyway, they interrogated us and kept calling us saboteurs and saying "Two days—off comes your head." After a couple of days and no food (but nobody was really anxious to eat anything), they put us in a cell. It turned out this was Prison Fresnes, in Paris. I'm in a cell for, well this is probably around the first of August, 1944, and I'm in a cell and they're passing food through a porthole, like cheese and bread. I look at the cheese and I smell it, and I throw it down the toilet. Well, after several days, I took a bite of that cheese and I found out it wasn't too bad, so I almost went digging down into the toilet to retrieve all of that cheese I'd thrown down there.

After two or three weeks that I had been in this prison in Paris, one evening I hear them calling out names and they are American names. All of a sudden I hear them calling out "William Aldridge," well, I knew Bill before he was shot down. [I guess primarily because he was from California and I'm from California, and we'd gotten together, so anyway I know Bill very well.] I hear Bill's name being called out and I'm standing

in this porthole out of my cell and I'm yelling, "Bill Aldridge, Bill Aldridge, this is Mike Petrich! I'm here! I'm here!" I guess he didn't hear. I guess they had decided that Bill had served his penance, perhaps, had been shot down and escaped for a while, been caught in civilian clothes, and they sent him off to a prisoner of war camp.

So, another week or two passes, I guess specifically about the 25th of August, 1944, they march us all out of our cells and take us by transport over to a railway station in Paris. While we're there, I'm looking around and I see that I could probably walk off, but, for some reason, I have the philosophy to stick with the crowd, and I'll make out. They loaded us up, along with all the French civilians and whoever else they had in this prison in Paris. It turned out that there were three to four thousand people, males, females, etc. They loaded us up in boxcars (40 and 8's) and they were taking us to Germany, along with all the German prizes of war that they had collected in Paris.

Late in the afternoon, about the 25th, I'm pretty sure it was August 25, 1944, this train pulls out and we go through the night. The first thing the next morning, all of a sudden we go into a tunnel — it's dark, and we're there for quite a while. Then we back out of this tunnel. It happens that the Allies knew that this movement was afoot, to move out all these people, and they had blown up the other end of the tunnel so that the train couldn't get through there.

The Germans are very ingenious, so they unload the train, they make us carry all of these possessions, art collections, everything that they had picked up in Paris. There were treasures...footlockers, I have no idea what was in those, anyway they make us carry them around this tunnel to the other end. While we're doing all of this, we're walking through a couple of little towns, where all the French people are standing in doorways, and I was thinking how easy it would be to just drop my load and go stand in one of these doorways, because I didn't look too much different from any one of these Frenchmen.

Incidentally, Jim, you mentioned about the clothes they gave you: when I was shot down, I had just my flight jacket and a pair of coveralls, but I had on the English high-kickers, boots. And they were very comfortable. Anyway, they had given me, out there in the farm country, they had given me a pair of pants that didn't fit too well, they gave me a shirt and a

jacket that didn't fit too well. The worst part of it all was they gave me a pair of hobnail boots that were about a size and a half too short. And I had a devil of a time going in those boots. And I kept thinking, I wanted my English hightops back!

Anyway, going back to it, I felt like I could have stood in one of those doorways and let that whole flotsam and jetsam pass me and nobody would have known the difference. But again, I thought, well, I'll stick with the crowd and I'll be all right. Well, I was wrong at the time, but as it turned out, it's all right, I got back.

We go to the other end of the tunnel and they have another train backed up over there, and boy, I tell you, they had hauled cement in it, they had hauled coal, and everything else, and they put these women, they put in the Frenchmen. Luckily, we got a car that only had a little straw in the bottom of it, and not too much manure. They put us in the car and they transported us.

Well, on the second night out, no, the third night out, I think, we got into Germany. The first night was in the, uh, what used to be the people who were in between French and German people, they were [Alsace—Lorraine??] On the second night out, before we ever hit Germany, in the boxcar we're in, these Frenchmen, they had pried some of the floorboards off. The train wasn't moving too fast, and they had dropped out of the train onto the railway tracks and they had escaped. The next morning the Germans discovered this, and they came into our car with their guns at ready and we thought they were going to shoot us all. It turned out that they took all of our clothes away from us. We had one five-gallon milk can that we went potty in. Anyway, they took our clothes and we went the rest of the way into Germany with no clothes.

We got into Germany and we're in the railway station in Frankfurt and that Frankfurt railway station was a disaster. All the girders and overhead beams were all bent and bombed many times. They were all twisted and quite shot up, bombed up. Some of the Frenchmen got up to one of the windows of this 40 and 8 and they put their hands out and as soon as they did, the Germans shot them through the hands. Then they came and opened up the door and said, "Where's the wounded?" Well, I'll tell you, all of us were on one side of the car and, a 40 and 8 is not too big and there were about 80 of us in there, but all eighty of us were stacked up in about a five

foot section, stacked and laying on top of each other, but anyway, they hauled out the Frenchmen that they had shot and they shot them alongside of the railway tracks and then they closed the door again and we went on further into Germany.

Eventually we came to...we didn't know where we were, but we came to what was Buchenwald concentration camp. We got out, we don't have any clothes on, the Germans are out there with their rifles and guard dogs and what not, just yelling, and you don't move or they sic the dogs on you. Eventually we found out that this was Buchenwald concentration camp. It turned out that there were one hundred eighty some English and American prisoners of war, all fliers, who had been picked up in civilian clothes. We were among the several thousand French and whoever else they were transporting to Germany for occupational labor.

So, having arrived in Buchenwald and still not knowing what it was, except that it wasn't a nice place to be, they ushered us all into a building where they sheared us, I mean sheared us, head to foot. When they finished shearing us, they took a dauber and painted us with turpentine around all the private areas, to get rid of all the lice that we'd got in Paris, which we did not have, but I'm sure some people had. Very uncomfortable! I don't want to go through that again. Anyway, then they gave us clothes, like striped clothes, a pair of pants, a jacket and a hat. That officially made us residents of Buchenwald concentration camp.

Going back into history, Buchenwald in 1938 or 1939, when Hitler came into power, 1938, Hitler took all of his political enemies and put them into a concentration camp. And these were the people who eventually, when the war was over, those that were still alive, they became the rulers of Germany. Not many of them were still alive, but there were some who survived.

Anyway, at Buchenwald, we learned, nobody gave a damn whether you lived or died. They threw us loaves of bread on the ground, they gave us something they called kohlrabi soup about every third day. Anyway, we survived that.

On the second day we were there, some B-24's came over and bombed the place. They didn't bomb Buchenwald itself, they bombed the headquarters, the surrounding support areas. And immediately, the Germans [Buchenwald

was controlled by the SS — outside controlled by the SS, but inside controlled by all the criminals, criminal prisoners of Germany.] Boy, these were mean sons of a gun. Anyway, the SS came in after the bombing and they rounded up all one hundred eighty of us. They recognized us then as military; they didn't before. They said, "Komm!" and they marched us out and made us go out there and fight the fire. That wasn't too bad, because when we were out there fighting the fire, we were all outfitting ourselves in clothes. When they brought us back in, we looked like real dudes. The *EffectaKommen*, which was clothing, was one of the areas that had been bombed, and it was on fire.

Oh, one thing I have to relay, is that on one of the first days we were in Buchenwald, they marched out several hundred Jewish prisoners, ~~men~~, civilians, and they took them out to mine work. Well, six weeks later, they marched these same people back in and you've never seen such emaciated people in all your life. Anyway, they put them in boxcars and cans of gas in there and exterminated them.

But, what I started to say was, all the time we were in Buchenwald, they interrogated us (the military) and they wanted to know our civilian occupations so they could send us out to work as occupational workers for Germany. And we all steadfastly said that we were military. Which they had to recognize — they didn't push too hard, but they kept trying.

In our group, we had a Hollander, a Dutchman. He was flying with the RAF and this fellow knew the Germans pretty well and he resisted every effort that they made to make us go out and work. They had bombed some city, uh, Buchenwald was about central in Germany near some city, and they tried to get us to go out. Well, they just told us to get out of the boxcars and clean up the bomb damage. And what happened when you went out to clean the bomb damage, ordinarily the English came over at night, they bombed it the first time, the Germans sent out people to clean it up, and the English always came back the second and third nights. The English are not too concerned about hitting any specific target, they do blanket bombing. Many occupational workers (prisoners) were killed in the boxcars.

I don't want to pass too lightly over the events of Buchenwald. As we knew when we got there, Buchenwald wasn't too nice a place to be. As it turned out, it wasn't as notorious as Auschwitz or Dachau, but it was one

of the bad places — the concentration camps of Germany. There were, besides the French and us, there were Italians, Czechs, you name it, anybody that the Germans had brought to Germany and used as occupational workers.

Probably one of the most rewarding experiences while we were there was when they had brought in the, not rewarding, but more understanding experiences when we were there, was when they had brought in the Copenhagen police force, the whole Copenhagen, Denmark, police force. These people would not bow down to the Germans in occupation and consequently, they brought them to Germany. But while they were there they got a little better treatment than most people and they did receive some packages from home. They were very friendly towards the Americans and the English that were there and we consequently got some good food from these people. Not that we solicited, but they offered it to us.

Secondly, I would suggest that the Belgians were the next best people we met there. I became very friendly with the Danish people, some of the Belgians, and also some Russians. The Russians that were in there were military, there were a few of them. But one very fine gentleman and I became friendly. He was fair-skinned, blondish, and he happened to have in his possession the book, *Tom Sawyer*. And he wanted to learn English. [I should say, the Germans, because of circumstances and what happened, treated the Russians very badly in the prison camp.] But, this one Russian that I became acquainted with, he wanted me to teach him English through the use of the book, *Tom Sawyer*. Well, that's pretty difficult, because there's a lot of colloquialisms in there, and all that. Anyway, we became very friendly.

Another thing, there was a doctor in there, as I said, some of our people became sickly. There was a doctor, a German, and he had taught at Harvard University, but before Hitler got on the bandwagon, he was going to come back to Germany and, I guess, get into politics, but anyway, he was picked up and sent to Buchenwald, and he befriended us. There were many good doctors in Buchenwald, but they didn't have anything to practice with.

This doctor, our friend, later on when I came home, I saw in the newsreels, I saw where this doctor had been picked up and was being persecuted for war crimes. It turned out he was one of the people that

they had brought into Germany that had tattoos. He had stripped their skin and made lampshades out of them, or he contributed to this. When I saw this, I contacted someone in government, I forget who, FBI or OSS or something, and I had acknowledged that this man had helped us when we were in Buchenwald concentration camp. One morning about 7:00, when I was home, somebody comes rapping at my door and identifies himself as being from the government intelligence and they had my letter and they interrogated me and asked if I would be willing to return to Germany to testify. I said "Certainly, this man befriended us." As it turned out, he was probably worse than he was good. This is an aside to the story.

Again, I don't want to pass lightly over the events that happened at Buchenwald. They did outfit us in prison clothes. That identified us with everyone else that was there. I guess, at the peak, Buchenwald had twenty five to thirty thousand people there. So, when we fought the fire and we had the chance to get other clothes, this is what we did. The reason for that is, that we didn't want to be identified as one of the occupational residents of Buchenwald. We wanted our separate identity as military. When we first got to Buchenwald, we stayed out in the open. At that time, the weather wasn't too bad because it was in late August, early September. We slept outside. Whatever food we got, we got all outside. We stayed in one area, all of us English and American military prisoners.

I guess one of the worst parts of the experiences there was that every evening they lined you up for what they called *Appel*, roll call. And this was started in the middle of the afternoon and sometimes we would stand there for six or seven hours, in a formation, while they counted us and counted us and counted us. Then they would go over and count all the dead. They never would get rid of the dead until the day's count was over, so they could count everybody. There were a lot of people in Buchenwald who were very sickly, and they couldn't stand in formation and they'd start to wander off to go to the bathroom or do something. As I said, Buchenwald internally was controlled by the criminal element, and these were mean sons of a gun, and they'd come whaling into the formations with clubs as big as two by fours and they'd just start whacking people right and left. As a consequence, there was a lot of broken arms, heads, etc. These people eventually were exterminated, because they were of no use to the Germans.

After a few months in Buchwald, probably during the latter part of

October, 1944, one day the SS came in and marched us all out of the Camp to a building which was a large hall. After telling us to sit down, several German Luftwaffe officers came in and sat at the head table. The ranking officer, a Major, tells us that since we claim to be military, we have to prove it, or we would stay in Buchenwald.

They passed out printed, in English, questionnaires, which asked, besides name, rank and serial numbers, organizations, stations, commanding officers names, hometowns, next of kin, religion, etc. They wanted it all. At first, we all rebelled against giving this information, but he made it very clear that it was necessary for us to prove to them that we were military. Inasmuch as most of us had been shot down many months before, and that the war was progressing, I said to the group that most of our outfits had probably moved to the continent by now, and that we better give them the information that they wanted. We filled out the questionnaires, they were picked up, and we were marched back to camp.

Ten to twelve days later, the SS marched us out of camp to the same building. Inside there are many Luftwaffe personnel. Besides the same officers, the perimeter of the hall is lined with enlisted personnel with rifles.

The Major starts to call out names. After calling twelve to fifteen names, he stops. He tells these men to stand up. They did and were marched under guard and placed in barracks. It was later determined that these men did not fill out the questionnaires to satisfy the Luftwaffe that they were military. *[An aside, it was later found out from records that there were many prisoners in Buchenwald who claimed to be Military and also there were some espionage (alleged) agents in Buchenwald who did not want their identity known for survival reasons.]* Anyway, of the above that were separated, their fate was not known.

After that event, the rest of us were told that we were being transferred to Prisoner of War camps. Officers and Enlisted were to be separated, which they did. Then we were immediately marched to waiting box cars and moved out.

One of my saddest experiences at Buchenwald was having to leave one of my best friends in the camp — Lt. L.C. Beck, a P-47 Pilot, whom I had met while sitting in the box car on the way from Paris. Lt. Beck was from

Huntington Park, California. We determined that we had gone to the same beach in Long Beach, California, had played volleyball against each other, swam together, etc. Also, another coincidence, he had stayed at the same French farmhouse that I had, before being turned over by those lousy so and so's.

We established a very close relationship in Buchenwald. After the time of filling out the questionnaires, and two days before we were liberated from Buchenwald, L.C. developed pneumonia. We tried to get help for him from our German Doctor friend, but he had no medicine and said that L.C. needed to be treated in a hospital. L.C. died in that hospital on 29 October 1944.

To continue the story of Lt. L.C. Beck, his parents had received a letter from the War Department in November, 1944, that he was a prisoner of war. My parents received one at approximately the same time, like Thanksgiving Day. After I had gotten to Stalag Luft III, I had written my parents and mentioned L.C. Beck, his hometown, having had to leave him at Buchenwald, etc. The parents got together. The worst part of this story, L.C.'s and mine, and our parents, was when I returned home in June, 1945. I had to meet with L.C.'s parents and tell them that he had died in Buchenwald. They hadn't known! What a traumatic experience.

A further episode of the L.C. Beck/Mike Petrich experience — L.C. Beck, while free in the hands of the real French patriots, wrote a manuscript (diary) of his saga as a P-47 pilot and of his experiences while waiting to be returned to England. This was later, after the war, forwarded to his parents. This manuscript was published in a book titled *Fighter Pilot*. Inasmuch as his tragic ending was not known, I contributed to its completion, filling in what happened after his manuscript ended. Another most traumatic [difficult] experience.

Before leaving the saga of Buchenwald, I have to report one more story. We left one military officer there who was ill. It was later found out he had a mastoid operation without the use of any anesthetics. This meant they cracked his skull. But this person survived, he ended up in a prisoner of war camp with us. Which is just another one of the miraculous stories of the war.

I'll take a break in the great escapade of Mike Petrich. I want to say that what anyone else would say in a few thousand words, either written or spoken, it takes me several thousand [more], so this is going on and on.

Going back to my personal experience, having arrived at Stalag III, having made contact with Bill Aldridge, and being quartered in a room in his barracks, things had sort of settled down to normal. We had a good relationship, we had a good life there, certainly different from Buchenwald.

Being in the north compound, which was primarily English, we had a little better break because the English people who had been shot down for such a long while, they had started to receive packages from home. And because England was an impoverished country anyway, they couldn't receive any food, but they did receive a lot of clothes, cigarettes, and personal effects. One of the first things in outfitting us, all they gave us was a pair of pants and a shirt. It wasn't the English, it was the Germans, that was whatever clothing that they gave us. It became quite cool and the English people in the barracks gave me warmer clothing — sweaters, topcoat, whatnot. I didn't smoke cigarettes, I was a pipe-smoker, but, anyway, I got a pipe and I got tobacco. There were cartons and cartons and cartons of cigarettes sitting on top of the lockers outside of the rooms.

As things progressed in Stalag III, and as a consequence of my previous experiences, I contracted boils. First they showed up on my arms and legs, and they would take me into the hospital and lance them. It was really a condition resulting from, as they said, bad diet at Buchenwald, bad blood, bad diet. One of the final outcomes was, I had a boil on my penis. So for that, they had to hospitalize me. They put me in the hospital which was just outside of the compound. When I found out what had happened, I implored them to keep the swelling but get rid of the pain! Well, modern medicine wasn't that good.

While I was in there, I had a good experience. I had a friend who I had grown up with here in Long Beach. I knew he'd been shot down. He was a navigator on a B-17, even before I'd ever gone overseas. I'd inquired about him and found out he was in the south compound. Through an intermediary, he was brought to the hospital and brought me a handful of cigars and pictures that he had received from his wife, and we had a very good visit. Then we made a pact that in as much as we couldn't visit, but between the

compounds there was a separation of thirty to forty feet, guardhouses, barbed wire, all this, but we could walk along the perimeter of this. Anyway, Gus Bachtel, who was my friend from Long Beach, and I made a pact that every Saturday afternoon we'd meet along this perimeter and we would talk and walk along the perimeter. This is an aside, because later on it gets better.

Anyway, this is about November, 1944, in Stalag III, and except for a few incidences, we still have the *Appels*, the roll calls, go out and stand in the snow while they count. While we were doing this, the ferrets were going through our rooms, under the barracks and what not. I say "ferrets," these are the German undercover guards. I'm sure you have seen the television program with Bob Crane, "Hogan's Heroes." Well, that wasn't too farfetched. A lot of the incidents that happened there, happened in Stalag III. Just not too long ago, before Bob Crane met his demise, I talked to him, I'd seen one of his plays and afterwards he sat out there and I identified myself as being a prisoner of war and that I enjoyed his program and that a lot of things that had gone on there had really happened to us in POW camp. He said he had heard that many times.

We lived in Stalag III through the Battle of the Bulge. We got the news reports: We got the German reports, which were always several days late, but the English and the Americans that were in there were ingenious and they had rigged up radios. We got the daily BBC broadcasts, not directly, but through an individual who came to the barracks every night and would relate them. Naturally, the Battle of the Bulge was very discouraging to us at that time, but everything turned out alright.

In the latter part of January, sometime then, it's 1945, the Germans came through the barracks and they said "Rous! Rous!" We were moving out. Fortunately, our compound was one of the last to move out, so again, with the ingenuity of the Americans, from hidden and improvised tools, we made sleds, we took extra clothing, we took all the cigarettes we could put in these sleds. By the time we marched out, we were in pretty good shape.

As we marched out, we passed by the warehouse where they kept all the Red Cross parcels, which were our sustenance, along with what the Germans fed us, which was mostly bread and, every once in a while, a few cheeses and, they still gave us the *kohlrabi*. [Which later we found out is

what they feed the cattle — very gaseous, from the cabbage family.) As we marched out, we were the last ones to go through the Red Cross warehouse, so we got to take ...[The first groups that marched through, they got one Red Cross parcel between every two prisoners], then when we went, we got to help ourselves, because they had so much in the warehouse. A lot of the people were throwing out the cans of margarine, things they didn't think were worth carrying. But inasmuch as we had made those sleds, we put everything on that we could, which turned out to be not too bad later on.

They marched us out in the middle of the night, snow on the ground, probably, I'll exaggerate and say 10-15 degrees below zero, anyway, it wasn't very warm! And we marched all that night, all the next day, into the next evening. [The reason for the march was: the Russians were coming.] The Germans also have a mania for moving people, whoever they are. We marched and marched under guard, and we came out in the middle of a prairie, there's NOTHING. And they leave us standing there — probably one of the most miserable times I've ever had in all my life. At that time I probably was more discouraged than anytime since being shot down. But it all turned out alright.

Finally, they marched us on into a little farm community and they moved us into a barn, oh, there were thousands of us, but they moved us into shelter, so consequently we were comfortable. But after two or three days of this type of march (very cold conditions, but every night we did get shelter), we hit some town where they put us into boxcars again and moved us to Nuremberg, Germany. Then, in Nuremberg, they put us into an area, which later, we found out was a barracks area, it turned out it was the 1936 Olympic village. While we were there, the Red Cross parcels stood us in good stead, because we did not get too much food from the Germans. While we were there, the English came over and bombed the place at night and the first night, we didn't get anything from the English bombs, but we got quite a bit of the shrapnel from the German anti-gunfire. The ~~light~~ ^{flares} they'd shot up came down and dropped through the barracks. So the second day, we got an order to get out and dig slit trenches. So we're out digging slit trenches (I think that's an Army term) and all of a sudden the German hierarchy comes marching in there in their greatcoats and whatnot, and behind them came the soldiers with the machine guns and they say, "STOP, STOP!" From out of nowhere, comes an American officer and he walks up to these German officers and he starts

giving them whatfor. He says, this is for the protection of our prisoners, if we're going to dig the slit trenches, we have to protect ourselves. It turned out, this was a Colonel Alchair, who had been an air attache to Berlin in 1937. He had known the Germans. As the story goes on, he had been parachuted, he had been on a mission, and purposely parachuted out to protect prisoners on the march — the prisoners of war on the march. This is only one incident, but it turned out we dug our slit trenches, we took our bedboards from our beds, and we covered them. That was only to protect us from the bombing. The next night the English came over again, and, as I said before, they don't pinpoint bomb, they saturate bomb, and, if they get within the target area and start getting some ~~back~~^{back}, they drop their bombs and turnaround and run. I don't blame them for it, but that's what they did.

We spent a couple of months in Nuremberg, and pretty soon, the Americans started getting close. So again, the Germans, with their mania for moving people, moved us again. This last movement was probably about March, 1945. We started marching, but immediately it was determined that this was a different kind of a march. Like we would walk for two hours and we'd stop and rest for half an hour. As the march progressed, the first day, there were trucks that had Red Cross parcels, and as we passed by the trucks, they passed out the parcels to us, which was food. Every night, every afternoon, we stopped off someplace where there was a farm community, and we all had shelter, and we stayed in the farm areas.

My experience in the first farmhouse that we stopped at, was I had a Red Cross parcel, and I had cigarettes, I had chocolate...I went into the farmhouse and there was a big bowl of eggs sitting on the dining room table and I offered the people cigarettes and chocolate for the eggs. They would have given me the whole bowl of eggs, but I only took a few. Then we found out that bartering [trading] was very good — the Germans appreciated it.

As we moved further on in our march, we found out that the English had gone through before us and then had not even attempted to barter, they killed the farm animals (chickens, pigs, etc. for food) and thought nothing of it. When we came through, the Germans appreciated the fact that we bartered rather than took from them. At this time, we were down in southern Germany. Southern Germany is different from the rest of Germany. They have crucifixes in the field, which looked like they were

religious people. They were not the Hitler-type people and they were deathly scared of the Russians coming in there, so they welcomed the Americans. From the time we left Nuremberg, we felt that it was a controlled march. The Germans knew the war was ending, and the conditions were entirely different. So, after several days, we reached another camp where they put us. That was Mooseberg, Germany, which is about 30-40 miles north of Munich. Very, very much southern Germany.

Now, I have to go back. On the march, one day we had walked quite a bit and it started raining. I mean it rained pretty bad. We got to a town and we stopped. Word came down the line that they won't let us into the town. So our friend, Col Alchier, marches to the front of the line and wants to know what is the problem. The Germans are standing there with their machine guns and are saying, "No pass, no pass, can't go through." And Col Alchier, he was very adamant and persuasive. It ended up, we go into the town and we are all quartered in private homes, whatever shelter we can find. It so happened that I got into a private home, with a very nice German family. I gave them cigarettes and chocolate and they took me in like one of their own, fed me breakfast. There's an order to move out from the Germans, "March!" So we go out and there's Col. Alchier out there again and he says, "No march!" He says we've marched for two days, or whatever it was, through the rain and all this, and he says we're not marching. The Germans say, "March or get shot!" Col. Alchier says, "We don't march." Anyway, we didn't march. We stayed there for two days.

I have to go back about this Col. Alchier. He probably was a colonel in 1937, he was a colonel in 1944. The reason for that was, he was a maverick. But he knew what he was doing and he knew the Germans and he could call their bluff.

After another few days, we get down to this camp in Mooseberg. And I'll go back to my story about my friend, Bus Bachel. I ran into him there and he arrived in different circumstances, but I arrived there with a box about the size of a shoebox full of eggs. And Bus, having been shot down for a long while, hadn't eaten an egg for a long time. I hadn't either. Well, I'd eaten some on the road, marching down. Anyway, I told Bus we were going to have some eggs. So we make arrangements that the next morning we are going to have eggs.

This story happened just in between us arriving in Mooseberg and eating

the eggs. We were marching down the highway one day and some P-51's come flying over, medium altitude, and they're circling. This was an indication of how the war was going at that time. They were circling up at medium altitude, then all of a sudden they peeled off and they came down like they were going to strafe the highway, which is where we were walking. Well, naturally, we all got off the road and into the forest, but all they did was fly over. All of the sudden, there's a big jabbering in the middle of the forest, and out comes a guard and he's hoisted on the shoulders of a couple of us prisoners, somebody's got his pack, somebody's got his gun, and they stand him out in the middle of the road and they just give him whatfor. And he says, "Well, you gotta be shot, you're trying to escape," and they say, "No, no, the airplanes were flying over," etc. Anyway, they set him out in the middle of the road and they give him back his pack and his gun and told him, "No more!" This is another indication of how the war was going at that time.

The next day, we were walking down the highway, this same guard is shaking his head and he says, "Roosevelt est mort." He had heard that President Roosevelt had died. In relating it, he was as sad as we were to hear it.

Back to the story of Bus and I cooking the eggs. This happened to be on a Sunday morning. I have no idea of the date, sometime in latter part of March, 1945. We started to cook the eggs in the barracks and all of a sudden there's gunfire outside. So the only place that had any protection was the latrine. We go into the latrine because it had cement block walls and we finished cooking our eggs. While we're cooking and eating our eggs, we find out we're liberated! Patton's forces had come through, the German guards outside, behind the gate and around the perimeter, and thrown down their guns and joined us. They didn't want any part of the war. So, after the shock of being liberated, we're all staying in the camp, or most of us. That afternoon, some of the liberators, who were part of Patton's forces, they came into the camp. It happened that Bill Aldridge and I had made a *Kriege* cake, made out of powdered milk, chocolate from the Red Cross parcels, I don't know what else...I think it had some margarine in it. To us, it was a delicacy. But as a tribute to the liberators, we gave them a taste of our *Kriege* cake. They took a taste and said, "My God, is this what the Germans made you eat?" We thought it was great, but they didn't think it was that good.

After a couple of days, we get word that we're all going to stay there and that within two or three days transportation would be provided for us to go down to an airfield that was someplace between Mooseberg and Munich, and we'd be flown out of there back to a repatriation area, then to home. So we wait around there for a couple of days, some of the guys had taken the rifles that the Germans had thrown in when they'd climbed the fence, and they went out in the hills and shot some deer and brought them back in for food.

I'd met a young fellow named Junior Smith, that was his name. Junior Smith was a P-38 pilot who'd been shot down on his first mission someplace over Italy. He made his way back. But since it was his first mission, it was too early for him to go home, so they sent them to the island of Crete for a couple of weeks of repatriation and rest. Then they sent him on a second mission, over the Rumanian oil fields, and he got shot down again and becomes a prisoner of war.

After two or three days of sitting around the camp after we were liberated, Junior and I decided we were going to take off. We took off on a bicycle that somebody had left around the camp there. I was pedalling and Junior was on the handlebars. And we haven't gone too far before I decide ... well, all we're gonna do is go down to this airfield to see what's going on...and Junior's not as slight as his name implies. He was a pretty good-sized boy. Anyway, we decide that this isn't gonna make it.

By that time, we'd come to an area where there's some American vehicles, and somebody is running around in a field in what looks like about a 1936 Ford. So we pedal up to it and we stop them and ask who they are and what they're doing and we tell them where we want to go. So the guy climbed out of this...Ford and says, take this, so we say "Great." But, he says, first, let's fix it up. So we spray on the side of it "CAP" (confiscated allied property). There's only one problem, he says, we don't have any gas. We say, "That's alright," and Junior and I drop our bicycle, we trade our bicycle for this Ford — it would have to have been a German-built Ford, but still it was a nice replica of a 1936 Ford.

So we take off down the highway and not too far, we run into a lot of GI vehicles, and we tell them we have a problem: we don't have any gas. So they ask us where we're going and we tell them, and it agreed with them so they fill up our tank and give us a couple extra 5-gallon cans of

gasoline. We went to the airfield first of all. There's all kind of people sitting around there and they haven't seen an airplane and nobody knows when an airplane is coming in. So Junior and I take off and go on into Munich. When we get into Munich, we find out the war is still going on down there, so we turn around and we go back. As far as he and I are concerned, we're going to drive this Ford back to Paris. So as we're going down the highway, the brakes become a little questionable. We run into a motor pool or a GI outfit. We tell them where we're going and they adjust the brakes and they give us more gas and rations; they gave us cognac that they had confiscated in their travels and we take off again. We get into the outskirts of Regensburg and as we're going in, the MP's stop us, and say, "What in the hell are you doing and where in the hell are you going?" and we tell them who the hell we are and where we thought we were going.

TAPE 3

This is day number six! I've been rattling on. Jim, you realize now why it's taken me so long to make this tape. Besides, I'm an amateur at doing this.

Going back to when we were stopped by MP's at Regensburg: they told us we were not going anywhere, that they had orders to stop anything that was moving on the highway, even bicycles, that Patton was coming through that day, the war was still going on. They were going to take our car away from us but we finally talked them into letting us drive the car into town under escort. They took us to their headquarters and we tried to explain. But, no soap, they said *NO*, they'd take us out to the airfield, and we'd fly out from the airfield there. There were other repatriated prisoners of war out there, and we could fly out from the airfield. So we took some of our rations and our cognac and they drove us out to the airfield. We got there and this airfield was just covered with *English* repatriated POW's, mostly fliers. But, fortunately for us, the airfield was controlled by the Americans. So we went into what they had set up as the operations office, told them who we were and they said to hang around, there'd be a plane in and and they would get us out of there. So we dropped our possessions, our rations and our cognac, and started waiting around.

It wasn't too long, I heard an airplane starting up and Junior comes running to get me, says, "C'mon Mike, we're going to fly to Paris." I go with him and he's got a German plane fired up. It's a two-seater, must have been a

training plane, it had the swatkas on it and the whole bit. He said, "We're going back to France in this." I say, "Junior, you dumb shit, there's a war still going on, we'd get up in the air and they'd shoot us down." He says, "Oh so, c'mon, we'll make it." Well, I think Junior probably would have gone on by himself, except for the fact that a DC-3 landed about that time. So, we shut that plane off and we went over to this DC-3.

By the time we get there, well, the English had it surrounded. They hadn't even opened up the back door, the hatch, yet. When they finally did, we had gotten up pretty close to the cargo door area, and they opened the door and the pilot sticks his head out. The English immediately started asking, "How many? How many are you going to take?" He looked at them and said, "I'm not going to take any — this is a press plane, a war correspondent plane and we're filled up." I was standing down below the door and I said, "How about a couple of Americans?" He looked down at Junior and me — we were pretty bedraggled — we had khakis on, but we'd been in them for several weeks — pretty dirty! Nothing else, no insignia, no nothing — and he says, "Where in hell did you guys come from?" So, we told him, and he said, "Get in the plane." We told him we had some things we had to get and he says "OK," that he'd be there for a little while. We got our gear and we put it in the plane and pretty soon the plane took off. It turned out it was going to Versailles.

As we're sitting in the airplane, we started to converse with the correspondents. They all asked us our stories and we started telling them — they get out their pencils and pads and start writing. So I thought these were pretty nice guys and we ought to do something for them, so we dug out our cognac and shared it with them. It started going around the plane and pretty soon, they dig in their duffel bags and they're hauling out bourbon, scotch, what have you. After a while of this, and inasmuch as I had not had anything to drink for quite some time [many months!], I decided I'd had enough, so I climbed into the back end of the airplane, on top of the duffel bags, and went to sleep. It wasn't too long a flight, we got to Versailles and landed, opened up the cargo door and there was a jeep with a trailer backed up to take out the duffel bags for these war correspondents. It turned out they laid quite a few of these guys right down in the trailer and they hauled them off. They had gone on drinking and had a little bit too much to drink.

Next thing, I hear a bunch of sirens and I look around and here's several MP

cars converging on a P-38 on the airfield. All of a sudden, here comes Junior scrambling out of that P-38! Well, Junior had been a P-38 pilot, and first thing he did when we got out of that transport plane, was run over and fired one up. Well, they were about ready to arrest him until they got his story and everything. They just slapped his hands and told him to be a good boy and sent him on his way.

They took us to a hotel in Versailles. Apparently, it was a headquarters building of some sort. And they gave us a room — assigned Junior and I to a room — and told us dinner would be at such&such a time. *BUT* that we would have to dress for dinner! We said, "Well, this is what we came with and it's all we have. But they scrounged us up some clothes and we went down to dinner. It was quite eventful inasmuch as we were the first ex-POW's to come through there with the rank that was there. We had an eventful evening and a very nice dinner. The next day they took us into Paris. In Paris, the wheels had already been set in motion to accept all the ex-POW's that were coming through there. A repatriation center had been set up. They took Junior and I to this. We were interrogated, established our identity, they gave us clothes befitting our status and sent us on into a bank in Paris where we received a partial payment — \$75.00! We were rich! We spent a few days in Paris. By that time, I had lost all my yen for tourist travel. I did go in the underground a couple of times and had some eventful episodes take place there. As far as I was concerned, I couldn't wait to get out of Paris and get on my way.

Our next stop, they put us (the ex-POW's they had collected) in a train and took us up to what were the embarkation camps on the coast of France — the camps, Lucky Strike, Camel, all those camps that had been set up. We stayed there for a couple of days, and finally they assigned us to a ship to go home. We loaded onto this ship; we thought we were on our way. We went across the harbor to England, I don't remember the port. We stayed there for the afternoon and that night and took off the next morning. What eventually happened was, we got into the last convey going the opposite way (going back to the U.S.). We were on a Liberty ship. It seemed like we were going about 5 knots an hour — I guess it ended up we averaged about 10. It took us about five days to get back to the United States. As a matter of fact, I guess it was the last night out, they decided that even though the war had ended by this time, the Germans must have all known about it. We weren't in any danger, so they told the ship captains all to take off on their own. We ended up in, I guess it was Ft. Dix, New Jersey.

And they kept us there for a few days until they could get trains routed our various areas in the States.

They got one train loaded up for California, which I was put on. It was better than a 40 and 8, but it sure wasn't a first class Pullman! We spent four or five days getting across the United States to Camp Beale, which is north of Sacramento, California. There, we spent another couple of days being processed. Finally, we were released to go home. While there, I had run into a friend from Long Beach, California, who had transportation, not his own but with an other officer who lived in North Hollywood or someplace in the area. So he arranged for me to ride with them. I rode home with them and got home on a Saturday night, June 9, 1945, about midnight. Needless to say, it was quite a surprise to my family, my parents, when I walked in the door unannounced! They knew I was back someplace in the United States, but they didn't know where I was.

So, that's almost the end of my story. There are a few highlights that I'd like to go back over...

One of the things I'd like to go back to, Jim, was my stay in the 391st Bomb Group. As in all events taking place in the service, no matter if you're in boot camp (or whatever they called it then) and at each succeeding destination, you always meet a great bunch of people and make good friends. The worst part of it is, you all separate and go other ways. The same was true in the 391st — the time we had there and the friends I made. Especially those in our little hut: you, Bill Kirschke, Bass, Don Wolfe, Lt. Butcher (who wasn't a flying officer, but he had the use of a jeep, which came in handy many, many times!). A couple other fellows there, whose names I can't remember...but, speaking of Bill Kirschke...Bill was from Redlands, California, and he and I struck up a very good friendship. We used to go out on our bicycles into the English countryside a couple of times a week and pick up eggs and honey. Of course, we had the Helms man who came a couple times a week and dropped off bread. Then we found, right outside of the rear gate, alongside of the road, we found a mound of earth. Investigating what that was, we found potatoes that had been buried, so we hauled in a sack of potatoes. We were pretty self-contained in our own hut. [As you well know] Anytime at breakfast time, when they said they had powdered eggs or something we didn't want, we fixed our own breakfast. We even had Bass's dog, Piddler, which made it more homey.

As I say, my experience with the 391st, although short-lived, was very rewarding. I still see Bill Kirschke. In fact, I played golf with him here several months ago. Bill still lives in Redlands, California. He retired from his job, but was, even while he was working, and is now, building houses — custom-built houses. He builds them and sells them. He's in the process now of building another one. And, of course, Bill Aldridge and I see each other — we have NOT seen each other for the last couple of years, but we've talked on the telephone many times. We had a group get -together when we first came home. I think Bill probably mentioned this is his recording, and Chuck Clark, Dan Haggarty, and there were others. We used to get together at least once a year, with our wives, and have dinner and reminisce. Coincidentally, I talked to Bill a couple of weeks ago. We're going down to visit him next Saturday night, October 3 or 4th. Bill has retired also, and moved down to a seaside community. Bill says we'll go take a ride on my boat, my little boat — I'm sure it's going to be something more than a little boat. We're looking forward to seeing Bill and Sarah Aldridge.

Another thing I'd like to say, is that the experience that I had, still while in a flying status, and after being shot down, the things that happened, and reflecting back on those — I sure wouldn't want to go through them again, but I got home! I made out all right. I'm waving the flag. But I think I individually found out what the heck the war was all about, or why the United States was in the war. When you see the things that went on over in Europe, the atrocities the Germans, and too, mankind committed, it makes the war a little more understandable...at least the part that we played in it.

Another thing I'd like to relate, about the Spaniard, Jacques, who turned us over and as intelligence reports came out later, Jacques was responsible for turning over many, many Americans and English. But he didn't get to reap the rewards. He was reported — the Americans picked him up. As the tale goes, Jacques and his friends were executed for the part they played in turning over the American and English fliers.

If I haven't mentioned it before, just during the past year when I learned there was such a thing as the 391st Bomb Group Alumni Association, and I joined that. Since, I have gotten the roster and the history and have made contact with several friends: you, being one of the first. Very enjoyable,

being reacquainted with you, Jim.

Just last week, I got a letter from the B-26 File, Historical Research, from England. It came to me here, at my home address. It says, "Dear Sir, in 1944, your B-26 was hit by ~~flak~~ in the fuselage, just behind the wing. The plane broke into two pieces and eyewitnesses saw no parachutes. What happened?" It's signed by somebody, Trevor J. Allen. It's most interesting. I will answer it, not to any great length, such as this has become.

I never realized that I could talk so long. This is day eight, I think. But I'm finalizing this now, Jim. It's going to get mailed off to you today and that's why I'm doing it. So, it has been kind of fun. And I look forward, sometime in the future, to seeing you, Jim, and others. I hope there's a reunion, that the next reunion is someplace where we can all get together again. If not, we'll have to arrange one of our own. So, with that, I'm going to sign off and get this off to you in the mail. Oh, one favor, I'd like to ask you, Jim. Inasmuch as it's taken me so long to do this, I don't know that I can make copies of it, so I'd appreciate it if you would take the time to make me a copy of my tapes and send them back to me. I sure would appreciate it. In the meantime, it's been nice talking to you and with you. Keep in touch!

DAD — I think you need to add something about Jim --

Postscript: Jim Clark died in month, year. He didn't get to read my story in final form. I'm still in touch with his daughter, First, Last Name, who has supplied me with copies of his tapes and stories, as well. Maybe add more?