

**Interviewee:** Clelland “Kelly” Martinson

**Interviewer:** Thomas Saylor

**Date of interview:** 6 November 2004

**Location:** kitchen table at Martinson residence in Fridley, MN

**Transcribed by:** Linda Gerber, January 2005

**Edited by:** Thomas Saylor, January 2005

Clelland “Kelly” Martinson was born 7 March 1924 in Annandale, Minnesota. From age eleven Kelly lived in Minneapolis with his sister and mother; he graduated from Minneapolis Vocational High School in 1942.

Kelly enlisted in the US Army Air Corps in November 1942. He was trained as a gunner on B-17 Flying Fortress four-engine heavy bombers. In early 1944, Kelly joined a B-17 crew which was sent to England and assigned to 366<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, 305<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. By late March Kelly had completed fifteen combat missions, operating as the plane’s tail gunner.

But on 24 March 1944, while on a mission to Frankfurt, Germany, Kelly’s B-17 was shot down. Captured by the Germans after bailing out, Kelly spent the remainder of the war as a POW. His time as a prisoner was spent at these camps: Luft VI Heydekrug; Luft IV Grosstychow; XIII-D Nuremberg; and finally VII-A Moosburg. This final camp, which Kelly arrived at in early April 1945, was liberated by advancing American troops on 29 April 1945.

Following evacuation from Moosburg, Kelly was transported back to the United States. He spent some time recovering from his time as a POW, then was discharged in October 1945.

Again a civilian, Kelly got married in 1945 (wife Joyce) and helped to raise three children. He worked many years as a factory representative in the machine tool industry, self-employed as the Kelly Company.

Kelly Martinson died April 2006, at age eighty-two.



**Interview Key:**

**T = Thomas Saylor**

**K = Clelland "Kelly" Martinson**

**Joyce = Joyce Martinson (wife)**

**[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation**

**(\*\*\*) = words or phrase unclear**

**NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity**

**Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.**

T: Today is Saturday, 6 November 2004. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I'm speaking with Mr. Clelland Martinson, at his home in Fridley, Minnesota. That's the last time I'll call you Clelland on this tape (*both laugh*), Kelly after this. First, on the record, Kelly Martinson, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today.

K: You're welcome.

T: For the record: You were born on 7 March 1924, in Annandale, Minnesota. Your folks moved to Minneapolis, and you went to Minneapolis Vocational High School.

K: My parents separated when I was eleven [thus c. 1935], and a year later [1936] my sister and I were sent to Minneapolis to live with my mother.

T: Okay. You enlisted in the US Army Air Corps in November of 1942. On the other end of that you were discharged from service October 1945. While in service you were a tail gunner on a B-17 Flying Fortress aircraft, and you served in England with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 305<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 366<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron. You are credited with flying sixteen combat missions. And I want to start there, Kelly, and ask you if you remember the first combat mission that you flew on a B-17 aircraft?

K: Yes. Pretty well.

T: What do you remember about that mission?

K: Well, it was a mission to Kiel, Germany, and it was extremely cold. The thermometer up in the cockpit would go up to seventy degrees, and the needle hit the pin. It wouldn't go any farther than seventy.

T: Seventy below zero Fahrenheit?

K: Seventy below zero. So it was seventy below zero or more. I know flying altitude was twenty to twenty-five thousand feet. That particular day, probably the reason it was so cold is we had to go over some clouds, and we got up to thirty-two thousand feet. And that's the only time we were ever flying that high that I recall. And it was extremely cold. My heated suit quit working. I had to pound my fingers against the

armor plate by my tail gun position and had to beat my feet on the floor, trying to keep them from freezing. I guess I wasn't successful, because I'm paying for it today.

T: You still have effects from cold?

K: Oh, yes. Yes, both feet. I have very little feeling in my toes and close to the toes, the balls of my feet.

T: If the heated suit stopped working, you were in trouble then.

K: Right. Right. And several other crewmembers too. Our navigator, he was in the hospital the next day for frozen toes, and both of our waist gunners. We were flying in an older plane with open waist windows.

T: That's right. So the wind just came right in.

K: The wind just came right in. They both had frostbite. I don't remember if they were hospitalized or not, but they both had frostbite.

T: What was your tail gunner compartment, what kind of space was that? Large, small?

K: It was compact. I had plenty of room. At the time, I was 185 pounds and about six foot one and a half. I understand that the tallest tail gunner that ever flew in the European theater was six foot six, so that will give you some idea.

T: They must have packed him in there.

K: He must have hit his head quite a bit, because mine was right at the top, it seemed like.

T: Over the target at Kiel, eventful or uneventful that day?

K: I think we lost one plane over the target that day. We had trouble getting rid of our bombs. So we had to release those bombs one at a time out over the Baltic after we left the target.

**(1, A, 49)**

T: On that or successive missions, how often did you actually use your guns?

K: Oh, boy! *(pause)* In my position not as often as you might think. Because at that time during the war, all the enemy planes came in from the front. They had previously come in from the tail, but all the time I was flying I never had a fighter come in from the tail.

T: So if you saw them, they were already moving away from you.

K: They were going past me. So I didn't have much time to shoot. Of course, I did shoot. But, you know, you just got a second or two.

T: If they're moving away from you, of course they're moving away the same speed you're moving forward, so...

K: We were going 150 miles an hour and they're going probably four hundred.

T: So they're gone within a snap of a finger.

K: Yes. Right.

T: How do even hope to hit something in a position like that? Or don't you?

K: You just hope (*chuckles*). You point in the direction and try to shoot in the right direction is all.

T: In early 1944 when you were flying, was flak a bigger danger to your plane than fighters?

K: Boy, that's difficult. Flak was a big danger. Fighters were a danger if you got knocked out of formation and were by yourself. Then the big danger was fighters. But of course, there were times when there was a couple hundred fighters out there too. So it's hard to say. I'd say fifty-fifty.

T: On the mission where you were shot down 24 March [1944], can you describe that? I mean, you left on a mission and your plane didn't make it that time. What happened that day?

K: Well, we got up at the target. Our target, we were told, was Schweinfurt, Germany, and I found out about thirty years later that that was changed during the flight and we hit Frankfurt, Germany. I think that was the third or fourth time our crew hit Frankfurt. We were leading the squadron. When we were over the target we lost one engine. Of course, we had to drop out and let somebody else take over. And we were by ourselves. Immediately after we left the target, the second engine failed.

T: So losing one engine's bad enough, but losing two is...

K: Losing two is a little bit worse. So we were all by ourselves. We headed back for England. We kept losing altitude. We got back to, as far as Belgium, and we went through the clouds and there were five Folk-Wulf 190s waiting for us. Just waiting for us. By that time, to lighten the plane we had thrown out all of our guns, all of our ammunition. We'd even gotten to the point where we were trying to unscrew the

armor plate on the waist window to lighten the plane so we could get back to England. I had been up in front helping the guys, seeing if I could give any help to the navigator and the bombardier up front. Of course, we were down below ten thousand feet, so I didn't have to worry about oxygen by that time.

And while I was up there the other guys dropped the ball turret. They had a tough time doing it. They had to beat it. They had to beat a nut on the turret to get it loose and drop the ball. So I came back through the radio room. The ball turret is immediately behind. It's about a four foot diameter. So I had to jump over that open space to get back to the rest of the crew in the waist. That's when I got a big lesson. My ball turret gunner, Pete Wolak, he was—I think I was nineteen at the time, or I had just turned twenty at the time—he was twenty-four years old. Just enough older that he had a lot more sense than I did. He says, "Where's your parachute?" I said, "It's back in the tail." I don't remember what kind of language he used, but he was not the type to use bad language but he said, "Get your butt back there and get that parachute!" Which I did right away. It wasn't two minutes later that these five fighters hit us. Once they found out we had no guns, they just came in and put the flaps down and just pumped us.

I don't remember how many passes they took, but all of us in the tail end of the plane there in the waist of the plane laid down flat. And of course, that saved us, I think. Now they killed the navigator and they shot the foot off of my top turret gunner. But the rest of us survived.

**(1, A, 123)**

T: It's almost amazing you did survive.

K: Yes. We all did survive except the one, the navigator. He got a 20 millimeter, I understand, right in the head. Never knew what hit him.

T: So nine of ten guys left the plane.

K: Right.

T: Did the plane crash land, or did you all bail out?

K: We all bailed out. The plane crashed.

T: You're bailing out of the plane. Is this your first parachute jump?

K: Oh, yes.

T: First and last?

K: Yes. You never trained for something like that.

T: So in a sense, you have it on and you're on your own?



K: Yes. You're on your own.

T: Talk about that. Talk about jumping out of an airplane.

K: Well, that's a kind of funny story, as far as we were concerned. There was five of us back there in the waist and we had the one door to bail out of. I had a door in the tail, but it was too hard to get back there. I had to crawl beside the tail wheel. So we all bailed out of the waist. We lined up and I was fourth in line and my radioman, who was the crew jokester, he was behind me (*chuckles*). And he was trying to go around me. I said, "Get back you son of a gun and take your turn!" Evidently whoever was first—I don't think I ever did find out who was first—we either had to push out or kick out or something because we bailed out at eight hundred feet.

T: That's pretty low.

K: Our pilot and copilot and our engineer who had his foot shot off didn't get out until four hundred feet.

T: That's barely enough time to have the chute open.

K: Just barely. Yes.

T: You came down in German-occupied Belgium.

K: Right.

T: As you're heading for the ground there, was it clear to you at that time that you could likely become a prisoner of war?

**(1, A, 145)**

K: I don't think we even thought of it.

T: Even as you're heading for the ground?

K: Yes.

T: Had you given any thought to that possibility before March 24? Like, gee, I could end up a prisoner of war.

K: I don't think so. You just try not to think of those things. You just hope you're going to make it and get back.

T: And the same with being shot down. I mean, you're losing planes. So you didn't think about that really? Kind of consciously pushed...

K: Well, you knew it was there but, you know, you didn't think... You thought, that's not going to happen to me.

T: Maybe that's one of the things that comes with being twenty years old too.

K: I think so.

T: Had the Air Corps done anything to prepare guys? Here's what you can expect if you're a prisoner of war, or here's what you should do if you're shot down?

K: Yes. I think they did, but in my case when I left gunnery school and I was shipped to Washington, to Moses Lake, Washington, to be picked for a crew, about three days later they came in the barracks and said, Martinson and another name close to mine, you're to report to Geiger Field, Washington. No reason. Just report. Just like the Army. You never know what's going to happen.

So I reported to Geiger Field, Washington, and my crew was through their training and had their furloughs and were ready to go overseas. So they had three months of training, and I'm sure during that three months they got a lot of training about what to do in case this happens or that happens and so forth. But I missed all of that.

T: You came just before they were ready to leave.

K: Just before they left. They left maybe a few days after I got there. I had not had a furlough, so I went and talked to my pilot and he talked to the major and the major was a real nice guy. He gave me a delay enroute. Now they were going to Nebraska. The whole group. So he gave me a seven day delay enroute. So I had about four days at home. Then I met my crew in Nebraska.

T: And you guys then flew over from there.

K: Well, no. We went to New Brunswick, New Jersey, and eventually to the *Queen Mary*.

T: So you didn't fly a plane across.

K: We didn't fly across. We went over on the *Queen Mary*. That was quite an experience too.

T: That's a pretty nice ship I think, isn't it?

K: Oh, it's a nice ship, but of course, we unfortunately were in the bottom of the ship. The waterline was eighteen feet up and the engine room was right below us. You just had to go through a trap door to get to the engine room.



T: So you could hear that all the time.

K: Well, we were in hammocks and they were stacked one against the other so they wouldn't even swing. There was so many of us.

T: They had you packed in there.

K: Yes. I guess they carried about fourteen thousand troops per trip. Something like that. It was between a three and a four day trip. The seas were rough. We were with a convoy for a while, but the *Queen Mary* was a faster ship, so we left the convoy and went by ourselves after a while.

**(1, A, 197)**

T: That's a pretty fast crossing of the Atlantic.

K: Yes it is. Yes. I had remembered that it took four days and eighteen hours, but my other crew members said it was three days and something. So I don't know.

T: That's still pretty fast, regardless of who got it right.

K: Yes, it's fast.

T: So what it means is that you didn't have a whole lot of the training, any of the training, about what to do or what might happen or...

K: I'd only been in a B-17 once or twice when I went overseas.

T: Is that right? So you weren't a trained B-17 tail gunner.

K: No. Well, plus the fact I was an engineer. I had gone to aircraft mechanic school. I was supposed to be an assistant engineer, but they already had an engineer. I was supposed to be the assistant, and the assistant engineer normally manned a waist gun. The whole crew was filled except for me. They said the only thing left was the tail. So I said, "I guess I'm a tail gunner."

T: Process of elimination.

K: Right.

T: Now, as you were heading for the ground there, when you hit the ground, how soon was it before you were captured?

K: We were away for about two days.

T: How many of you? All of you?

K: No. Three of us landed one hundred yards apart. Maybe not even. I'm not sure. It wasn't even one hundred yards. It was less than one hundred yards.

T: You could see each other though.

K: Oh, yes. Yes. It was probably closer to one hundred feet when you stop to think about it. So we were alone. We bailed out. We landed in a plowed field, and I landed real hard on my tailbone as the chute was swinging like this (*back and forth motion with hand*). I hit at an angle and went down, and hit my tailbone. But of course, when you're that age those things don't bother you as much, and your instructions are to run away from the aircraft as fast as you can and for as long as you can. So they can't find you.

So there was a woods nearby, and we all three ran into the woods. Logan, our one waist gunner, he landed like here and I landed in the middle between him and Bob Sage, who was our radioman. We all started out running different directions, which we were supposed to do. You know, when you're running, you don't know where you're going. Sage and I wound up together after a few minutes. Logan, the waist gunner, he found a haystack, was contacted by the underground, and never got taken prisoner.

T: So he got away.

K: Yes. So I was one hundred feet from getting away.

T: That's how life is, isn't it sometimes?

K: Right (*both laugh*). Then Sage and I ran, I would say, for forty-five minutes or so.

T: Did you know where you were running?

K: No. You didn't. You didn't know where you were running. At one point we were running...we were near Ghent, Belgium. G-E-N-T or G-H-E-N-T. Spelled two different ways. So there were a few houses. We were on the edge of Ghent so there were a few houses here and there, and we were running through a backyard and a guy stopped us. A Belgian stopped us, and he gave us each a raw egg and a bottle of beer. We broke the egg and swallowed it, and drank the beer. I didn't have any shoes. My boots came off when I bailed out, when I pulled the ripcord.

**(1, A, 256)**

T: It took your shoes off.

K: Took my shoes off. Didn't have enough sense to have my other shoes with me. So I was running around in the inside of my heated boots, which were very thin and not much protection. He went and got me a pair of shoes. The people over there are,

generally speaking, a little bit shorter than we were. I wore at the time a size twelve shoe. These that he got me were, I think, size eight. So we finally stopped where I could try and put them on, and I had to cut the front of them off. From about the ball of the foot forward I had to cut off so my feet were sticking out over the edge. I don't remember how long it was, but it was quite some time before I got a pair of shoes from the Germans.

T: You've made contact with a Belgian civilian. How did the Germans finally find you and catch you?

K: We were in this haystack, and we were there for two days. So in the second evening we decided we hadn't had any contact from anybody. We better start walking and try and get in contact with the underground some way or other. We started out walking, and it was dark. Of course, there was blackouts. There were a few lights. We tried to get around the town of Ghent. There was a series of canals and I think open sewers, and things like that were always in the way. It was so dark that we'd take turns leading each other. One time it was Sage's turn to go over a wall, cement wall. He went over and I think he went in the sewer. Because he smelled like that for several days.

We kept going and we tried to get around the city. We got in this one street and we couldn't get out of it. There were no exits. We had to keep walking, and the only way to keep walking was towards lights. We got maybe a block or so up in this area and we saw two policemen. About half a block or so away. So we had no place to hide except we ducked into a doorway. They came walking down and found us. They were Belgian police. We thought, man, we've got it made; these guys are going to take care of us. Give us a nice apartment and give us food, clothing. They took us to the police station, and I opened my escape kit which had chocolate, gum, and so forth in it. I was giving them some gum and candy, and one of them got on the phone and I could tell by the conversation that he was talking to the Germans. I was a dumb young kid. They had a stove. I used to call them an airtight stove. It had a cover on it like this. A vertical stove. I threw my escape kit in there so nobody could get anything more. About ten minutes later the Germans came and got us, and they took us to Brussels, and put us in jail in Brussels. I can't remember the name of the jail. I've got it and I've got pictures somewhere downstairs, but I don't know where they are.

T: What was it like now to have gone from thinking you might be safe to seeing the Germans face to face and realizing you're a prisoner?

K: Well, it wasn't good, of course. You just...that's the breaks of the game, you know. You just had the wrong turn. They treated us fine.

T: The Germans.

K: Yes. But they threw us in this jail up in Brussels and they separated us. Each in our own cell. We found out later some of the other crewmembers were there too.

They interrogated us every day. Of course, all we would tell them was our name, rank, and serial number. About a week later they took Sage and I, my radioman, Sage and I, put us on a train with a guard and shipped us to Frankfurt where they had this big camp where all prisoners went through.

**(1, A, 360)**

T: Dulag Luft.

K: Yes. Now, I found out since then that there were three of those camps around Frankfurt. I don't know which one I was in. But there again, we got thrown into solitary confinement and were in a room about four feet by ten feet. Just room for a cot and able to...the guards could walk by us. They came in every day to interrogate us.

T: During interrogations, either in Brussels or there by Frankfurt, were you ever physically threatened or physically abused at all?

K: No. Never was. Never was. I found out later we were supposed to salute these guys, because they were officers above us when they came in but I never did. I just laid on my bunk.

**End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.**

T: What did the German interrogators want to know from you, an enlisted man?

K: Well, what group you were from, and what squadron, and what day you got shot down, and the name of your crewmembers. The name of your commanding officer. They had all kinds of questions.

T: So it's stuff that...did you feel scared that you wanted to tell them, or did you feel confident that you could say no and not answer them?

K: I felt confident I wouldn't have to tell them. I found out later that they knew more than we did. About us. They even knew the name of some of the guys' girlfriends at home. Knew what school they went to.

T: So they had more information that they were going to ask you about.

K: Oh, absolutely. They had more information than we had ourselves, almost. What our hometown was. So on and so forth. I never experienced that personally, myself, but I've heard it from other prisoners. They knew what group you were from and what squadron and everything else. How many planes got shot down.

T: So in a sense, maybe they were looking just to confirm what they already knew.

K: Right.

T: All right. They weren't going to find out anything new from you.

K: No. Not from me anyway (*chuckles*). I didn't know much.

T: And they had to have known that. I mean, enlisted gunners, they don't tell you any, the Americans don't tell you anything.

K: No. No.

T: And maybe that's the reason why.

K: We had separate briefings from the officers, because we didn't know until we were on the way where we were going.

T: So the officers knew in the plane, but you didn't know until you were underway.

K: We were told that at the briefing [prior to the mission].

T: Speaking of being underway, the Germans did move you to Luft VI at Heydekrug. That's the first permanent camp you were in.

**(1, B, 402)**

K: Yes. After we were in Frankfurt for about a week.

T: Did you go by train then to Heydekrug?

K: By train. Right.

T: That's a long way.

K: Oh, it's a terrible long way, yes.

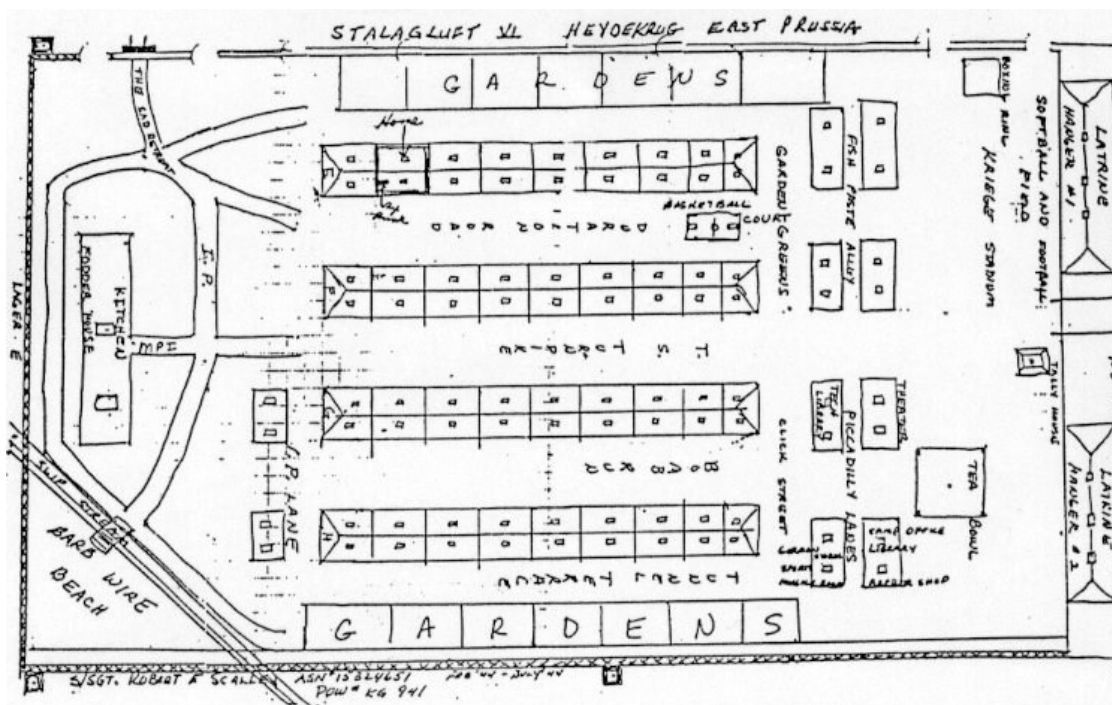
T: Was it a boxcar or passenger car?

K: As I remember that was a passenger car. I'm quite sure that was a passenger car, yes.

T: And the thing with Luft VI is—by the time you got there it had to have been April sometime, late April?

K: Probably. I got shot down 24 March. So we were a week in Brussels and a week in Frankfurt, so it had to be, yes, about the middle of April.

K: Yes. Yes. And it was just a kind of dreary place. The latrine was new. They had a big latrine in the compound I was in, and that was new.



14

T: So there were different compounds. In the American compound, did you see other members of your crew there?

K: Yes. I saw Sage.

T: Who you had been with at several points.

K: Yes. I was with him almost all the way, up through [Stalag Luft] IV. He stayed at Number IV. I don't know how he did it, but he did. Wolak, our ball turret gunner, was also there.

T: So you lost each other there.

K: Yes.

T: At Luft VI, the barracks you were in, how do you remember those?

K: Well, the barracks were made in rows. And there was, in each row there was two barracks connected. But you couldn't go from one to the other. You had to go outside. But there was two barracks connected like that. They were right against the fence to the Canadians and English. There was a long row of those, and then there was a couple more rows. I don't know how many people were in the camp but...

T: How many were in your particular barracks? That structure?

K: I would say twenty.

T: And all Americans. Enlisted men.

**(1, B, 434)**

K: Yes. All enlisted men.

T: Were there work details there at Luft VI?

K: No. We were never worked, because we were all sergeants or above. According to the Geneva Convention they couldn't work us.

T: So you had time to fill during the day.

K: Yes.

T: You mentioned softball on one occasion. What other things did people have to do there?



K: We eventually got some books from the YMCA, and we got this softball equipment from the YMCA. Somebody started a theater group, and somebody else started a boxing match group.

T: So in the couple months you were there, there were a number of different activities that you remember.

K: Oh, yes. Yes. I played softball all the time. Softball and football. That's all I did.

T: So you had something to at least occupy your time.

K: Yes.

T: It sounds like boredom would be just the worst enemy there.

K: It is. Yes. You just, you spent time just walking around the compound. You'd take a friend with you and just walk around and talk about home and stuff.

T: Is Luft VI where you met Jack Ringgenberg?

K: You know, I'm not sure. I remember Jack at Number IV, but I know he was at Number VI also.

T: But you consciously remember him at Luft IV.

K: Yes. Right. I always admired him because he had all his clothes. He had his boots, and he had his pants fluffed up and tucked in the boots like they [paratroopers] do.

T: He didn't have to bail out of a plane though, did he?

K: Right. He got captured in Italy [Jack Ringgenberg was a paratrooper].

T: When you were friends with him, what was it that...how come you two hit it off? Because here's a paratrooper and an Air Corps guy.

K: Well, we were both from Minnesota.

T: Was that the link that brought you together, you think?

K: I think so. You know, you start talking to somebody and you find out where they're from. I think that was the link.

T: In a situation being a POW, what can friends do for each other on a daily basis?

K: Oh, morale for one thing. You trade rations with different people. Of course, they don't have to be your good friend to do that, but...you just become good friends. You just become like brothers.

T: And you and Jack have been friends for sixty years now.

K: Yes.

T: Is that a friendship that you kept intact really right from when you got back?

**(1, B, 467)**

K: Well, I tried for years to locate Jack, because I knew he was from Rochester [Minnesota]. I'd had his name and everything. There was a lot of Ringgenbergs down there. I used to travel down there, selling. I'd go down there maybe once a month. And I spent a lot of time on the phone trying to track him down.

T: Calling the Ringgenbergs.

K: Yes. Calling all these other Ringgenbergs. There was a bunch of them. No relation to Jack at all. All this time he was going to college, or if he was through college then he was on a job. Out of Rochester completely. In fact, at one time he lived in Bloomington and I lived in Richfield. We were probably ten miles apart. But we didn't know it.

T: So how long was it before you really found him again?

K: I'm trying to remember how we got in contact. My memory fails me.

T: Had it been a number of years since the war ended though?

K: Oh, yes. Yes. *(to wife, in next room)* Remember when it was, Joyce?

*(answer unclear)*

T: So it wasn't until the 1980s that you really found him again.

K: Yes.

T: When you saw each other again after a number of decades, was it a friendship you could kind of pick up from where you left off?

K: Oh, yes *(with emphasis)*. Very definitely, yes.

T: When you see each other now, is your POW experience something that comes up as you talk, or is it just in the background?

K: Oh, yes, it comes up. Yes. And we're...I would say we are very good friends.

T: How often do you get to see each other these days?

K: Well, I haven't seen Jack now... I think the last time I saw him was out at the Vets Hospital here about three, four years ago. We got together for a game of golf a few years ago.

Joyce (*now in kitchen*): And they came up to our place at the lake.

K: Then they came up to our place at the lake. When was that?

Joyce: I'd say three years ago.

K: Three years ago now. They were invited last year too, but we kind of goofed that up somehow.

T: So you talk on the phone from time to time.

K: Oh, yes. Yes.

Joyce: Quite often.

T: Back to camp: was food or the amount of food you had at Luft VI regular, enough, or not quite enough from your memory?

K: Well, it was better at VI than it was later on. We used to get a Red Cross parcel a week.

T: That's more often than I've heard from fellows who were in a couple of other camps.

**(1, B, 498)**

K: Yes. And I don't know if it was every week or not, but that was the schedule. As I remember we used to get one a week.

T: Was that something that, each guy got one or were you sharing those?

K: At VI each guy got one.

T: That's a pretty good amount of stuff then.

K: Yes.

T: And later you remember having to share them? At other camps?

K: Yes. You bet. At [Luft] IV. Yes, it got to the point where you were sharing maybe with six or eight guys every three weeks, or something like that.

T: A substantial difference then.

K: Oh, yes.

T: The German guards there at VI or even later at the other camps, what kind of people were they?

K: Old. Old soldiers.

T: People you saw, as a twenty year old, as older guys.

K: Yes. Oh, yes. Some of them I'm sure were in their fifties and sixties.

T: No kidding. These were older guys.

K: Oh, yes. Right. I'm sure there were a lot of them that were in their forties.

T: What kind of treatment did you get from the German guards?

K: I never had any problems with the German guards until we moved from VI to IV.

T: And there the treatment changed?

K: Well, we were put in a train and taken from Number VI to the city of Memel [seaport on the Baltic], in [the far north of what was then] East Prussia. [Currently Klaipeda, in Lithuania]

T: That's a pretty short distance.

K: Then we got on the ship, *Masuren* or something like that. [The ship's name was the *Insterburg*]

T: Yes. A lot of guys were on that ship.

K: Yes. Right. And that was quite a trip too.

T: Let me ask you about that. This is a lot of guys getting onto this ship. Down into the hold.

K: Right.

T: From your remembering, what were the conditions in that hold like?

K: Well, we had to go down a stairway on the side of the ship. Metal rungs to go down. We were right on the bottom of the ship, I think. We were packed in there so tight we had to be leaning on each other or laying on each other. It was bad. Really. They used to send down a bucket of water, and then we'd use it to relieve ourselves and send it back up. Then they'd, I suppose, wash it out and send it back down again.

T: So you were packed into this, really, just too many men in too small a space.

**(1, B, 532)**

K: Yes. It was a space, as I remember, probably forty by fifty feet or something like that.

T: So you can get a lot of people in there, apparently.

K: Yes. Oh, yes. We had a lot of people in there.

T: Food and water was supplied. How long was the journey that you remember?

K: It was two days, I think. I've got it written down someplace. *(refers to written notes of POW time)* Let's see...oh, here it is. "*Masuren*. Two days in hold."

T: Two days in the hold. [Total time on the ship was about sixty hours]

K: Yes.

T: Was there fear among you or the men around you that the ship could be attacked or sunk by planes or submarines?

K: Oh, yes. Yes, absolutely. Yes. We were in a bad spot if they started shooting at us.

T: Below the waterline, you said.

K: Yes.

T: How does that brief experience on the ship compare with some of the other POW experiences you had? A couple of camps, etc., as far as being better or worse than other places you were. I mean, it is a brief time, but was this a bad experience from your remembering?

K: Yes. It was a bad experience. It *(pause)* it was just plain bad. We were just packed in there. And of course, we didn't know how long we were going to be there.

T: That's right. They didn't tell you.

K: No. So that makes it a little bit worse.

T: Not knowing, you mean.

K: Yes.

T: Did some people, some guys, seem to handle that difficult situation better than others?

K: I don't recall any problems like that. Of anybody going wild or anything like that.

T: So although it was tense, it sounds like from what you remember, people were at least able to stay together.

K: You kind of resigned to: that's what's going to happen and that's it. There's nothing you can do about it.

T: Right. When you got off that ship it was at the port city of Swinemünde, near Stettin [present day Szczecin, in Poland]?

K: Yes.

T: And were you marched or by train then to Luft IV?

K: I can't remember. Let's see, *(refers to written notes of POW time)* I don't have any notes on it. I don't remember.

T: Luft IV at Grosstychow was the second permanent camp you were at. A camp that was also destined later to be evacuated.

K: Yes.

T: From your perspective, were conditions at that second camp better, worse, or about the same as the first one?

K: Before we get to that, we should tell you about getting from the train near Camp IV to Camp IV.

**(1, B, 570)**

T: Okay. So there was a train as part of the journey in getting to that camp.

K: Yes. They had a...well, let me see here *(refers to written notes of POW time)*.

T: So how did you experience that from the train station to the camp?

K: I remember they lined us up and took our names. Had roll call. There by the train. I remember there was one guy in our group. His name was Krueger. He says, "Krueger! You're on the wrong side!"

T: Because of his name.

K: Because of his name, yes. But then they shackled us together. Our arms, two of us, like your left arm and your left ankle were shackled to the next guy.

T: So your right arm, his left arm.

K: Right. Right. And they started marching us to the camp. Pretty soon we saw some soldiers ahead. Young soldiers. Young. I mean, fifteen.

T: So younger than you even.

K: Yes. Ahead of us. They had their guns and they had their bayonets mounted. Then this red-headed captain came running along and started getting those guys to go after us with the bayonets. I told the guy that was...we were running down a...you've seen a track in a meadow where there's just two tracks where the hayrack goes down?

T: Yes.

K: That's like this road was. There was space in the middle about like this between the tracks. Maybe three feet. I told this guy next to us, I said, "Stay in the middle. Stay in the middle!" And neither of us got hurt. But there were several people that got bayoneted. Rumors that three guys got killed. I don't know. Another rumor where one guy had fifty-seven bayonet wounds.

T: So you could see these kids right there though.

K: Oh, yes. They were there. They were running right after us.

T: How many of them were there?

K: I don't know. There had to be a mess of them, because they just kept coming. We just kept running.

T: How many of you were there? Any estimate? All the guys off the ship?

K: All the guys off the ship, yes.

T: That's a substantial amount of guys.



K: Yes.

T: Earlier you described Luft VI as being not a bad location, really, to be a POW.

K: Right.

T: And this sounds like the opposite end of the spectrum suddenly. The ship and now this.

K: Yes. Right. Yes.

**(1, B, 613)**

T: You got to Luft IV in one piece, as it were.

K: Right. That was the only really bad treatment that I can recall I had.

T: In all the time you were a POW?

K: Yes.

T: It seems so out of whack, almost, with the other treatment you got which was...you were a POW, but it was at least decent.

K: Yes, it was. It was a surprise to us.

T: At the camp itself, again, is Luft IV better, the same, or worse than the last place you were at?

K: Oh, much better.

T: Luft IV was better?

K: Much better. It had new barracks, and to this day I can't recall for sure what compound I was in, but I think it was D. That's always been a question mark. I've never been able to track down. I've tried and tried and tried.

T: Which compound you were in.

K: Which one I was in. And other guys had the same trouble. They can't remember which one they were in.

T: Now this is a camp where you were from July 1944 until it was evacuated in February of 1945.

K: Right.

T: So you were there for six, seven months.

K: Yes.

T: During that time, the war continued to go badly for the Germans. Continually bad. How possible was it for you to get news of how the war was going outside of the camp you were in?

K: Well, we had news come in almost daily, I think. Somebody would come in and read the news. That they got from the English, I understand, who had made radios and were listening to the news. Then they would write it out and then pass it from barracks to barracks.

T: So you remember someone reading the news so you were getting updates on what was going on outside.

K: Oh, yes.

T: At these camps, as you kind of hear things are going better for the Allies, did that cause any concern for you that as the Germans were losing, what might happen to you as a prisoner?

K: Well, yes. You never know what's going to happen, because the first thing we noticed was that the food parcels started dwindling. We didn't get as good food parcels as we had before.

T: You said earlier, about one a week, and now you're getting fewer?

K: Yes. Now you're getting—and it was kind of gradual. You'd get maybe one parcel for two weeks, then one parcel for four weeks, and then pretty soon it was one parcel for several men for a couple weeks. Of course, we didn't think anything really bad was going to happen to us. We didn't know that Hitler had ordered all prisoners to be killed.

T: Which was luckily never carried out.

**(1, B, 657)**

K: Yes. But we never knew that, of course.

T: Did the food that was provided by the Germans change, increase or decrease in amount?

K: Oh, yes. After Camp IV the food was really bad. At XIII-D. And at IV there was some bad food, but it wasn't as bad as it was at XIII-D.

T: What did the Germans provide, say at Camp IV, the camp that you spent the longest time at? What did they provide on a daily basis for the prisoners to eat?

K: Well, as I remember we got hot water in the morning to make coffee. We had our own coffee in the parcels.

T: They supplied the hot water or you could make it in your barracks.

K: We made it in our barracks.

T: Did they give breakfast food as well?

K: I don't think they did. I think we had just two meals a day. Lunch and then supper.

T: What was the lunch that was supplied?

K: I can't remember. Just kohlrabi...soup.

T: Some kind of soup though.

K: Yes. Some kind of soup usually.

T: Did they provide bread for you as well?

T: Yes. Bread. In fact, going back to VI, they had their own bakery, I think, at the camp. There were so many prisoners there that they hadn't expected, that they served the bread and we'd slice it up. We'd cut the cards to see who sliced the bread (*chuckles*). Because you wanted to get the thick slice. The bread was so uncooked that the center was wet. So what we would do was lay it on the window sill and let the sun dry it until we could eat it.

T: You didn't want to get rid of it obviously.

K: Heavens no.

T: What was the dinner then supplied? You had some kind of soup. What was the other meal?

K: The same thing usually.

T: So a variation on...it sounds like a lot of repetition with things.

K: Yes. It was a lot of repetition.

T: Was hunger something that became a problem or an issue for you?

K: On your mind all the time. Food. All the time. Well, you're nineteen, twenty years old. You're hungry all the time. You used to have three helpings of everything when you were home.

T: And now you're getting a small helping. Not very much.

K: One thirtieth of that.

T: So do you remember being hungry on a regular basis?

K: Oh, yes, absolutely. Yes. That was probably the worst thing. Hunger.

**(1, B, 706)**

T: It seems, you know you talk about nineteen, twenty year old guys, it would seem like what people would have on their mind would be girls, and you're saying it was food.

K: Absolutely. Absolutely.

T: When you sat around and talked with people, what did you talk about? You had a lot of time to kill here.

K: Home. You'd talk about what you were going to do when you got out, what your big plans were.

T: Do you remember talking more about what you had done when you were at home, or what you planned to do when you got back there? The past or the future?

K: Oh, I think by far more what you planned to do when you got back. But of course, you did talk about what you have done, too.

T: What did Kelly Martinson say he was going to do when he got back?

K: Go home and get married and raise a family.

T: So that was on your mind to go home and start a family.

K: Yes.

T: Did you think about the kind of work you wanted to do, or school you wanted to attend, or...

K: I had been a machinist and I went right back to that when I got back. You might say that's all I knew.

T: So you really thought about going back to what you knew, what you'd done before.

K: Right.

T: But you remember looking forward. It suggests a kind of an optimism that you knew you were going to get out of this and get back home eventually.

K: Oh, yes. Yes. You were always optimistic.

T: Do you think, from your memory, were most guys convinced they were going to make it?

K: Oh, sure. Yes. Yes, I think the percentage would be like ninety-nine plus. Figured they were going to make it.

T: Among the prisoners...one thing in short supply now is food. The parcels are dwindling. Was theft a problem? If you had something of value, did you have to worry about it?

K: Yes. Theft was a problem. It was not a large problem. The only time it was a problem in my experience was in XIII-D, at Nürnberg.

T: So at VI and at IV you could be fairly confident your stuff was going to stay your own.

K: Yes.

T: How do you explain that? I mean, you've got POWs, Americans, same locations. What changed at XIII-D?

K: Well, I don't know. I suppose because the food was so damn bad. We called it "Green Death." It was really bad. I had dysentery for a month straight.

T: Yes. So that was one of my next questions, about your health. Up until that point, up until XIII-D, was your health pretty decent?

K: Yes. Right.

T: About Luft IV, that camp was evacuated in February—

**End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.**

T: What do you remember about the evacuation of Luft IV, in February 1945?

K: We took the train from Luft IV, on January 31 we left IV by train and we arrived at Nürnberg on February 8.

T: So you left by train. You didn't do any kind of marching between the two.

K: No.

T: But you sat in that train an awful long time.

K: Yes. I had always thought that we went on the march from there, but I was mixed up. We went on the march later. From XIII to VII.

T: So it was by train from Luft IV down to XIII-D.

K: Yes. January 31. Yes.

T: Was that boxcars or passenger cars?

K: That was boxcars.

T: What do you remember about being in those boxcars, because you were in there for a number of days, it sounds like.

K: Yes. I remember they parked us in Berlin overnight. The English were bombing. We made it all right. Nobody got hurt, I guess.

T: How close were the bombs falling to the train? You could hear them.

K: I really don't know. You could hear them. Yes.

T: What were the conditions like inside those boxcars? Yours specifically.

K: They were just bare boards. You had no place to look out. Once in a while you could find a hole to look out. But there was no way of escape. No other doors. Just the one or the two big doors where they locked them up.

T: Right. Any German guards in the car with you?

K: Oh, no. No. Just prisoners. We were packed so tight we were sitting on each other. If you could find a place to sit down, you were lucky.

T: And you were in there a number of days it sounds like too.

K: Yes.

T: Did they supply, do you remember stopping to supply food and water, occasionally?

K: Yes. Once in a while they would stop and give us some water, as I remember. But it wasn't too often. I wish my memory was better.

T: It sounds like one of those things that maybe you don't want to remember too much, the train.

K: That's possible.

T: Now you've described declining conditions. XIII-D was again, another rung down on the ladder as far as conditions.

**(2, A, 31)**

K: Yes.

T: When you got there, what impression did that camp make as you walked in there? What was this place like?

K: It was worse than Number VI. It was the worst of the three.

T: What kind of barracks here at XIII-D?

K: They had some old barracks there too, that must have been from World War I.

T: You got there and it's winter. I mean, it's going to be cold in the south.

K: Yes, it was cold. I guess the thing I remember mostly about there, besides the food, is the lice.

T: Is this the first time you've experienced that?

K: Yes. We had lice and they were...at night you could feel them jumping one leg to the other. We spent all day, every day, picking lice out of our blankets. That's what we did for...

T: So no more softball.

K: No more softball. No *(both laugh)*. We didn't have anything to do. No equipment at all.



T: So no kind of stuff was supplied for you to pass your time.

K: No.

T: Let me ask you, for someone who's never picked lice out of something. How do you do that?

K: *(chuckles)* Well, you just find them and pick them and get rid of them. Snap them in your fingers and kill them.

T: Do they break or crush or...

K: Oh, yes. They'll snap. You can hear them snap. That became kind of an everyday thing.

T: They come back as fast as you get rid of them?

K: Yes. We never really got rid of them. That, and we also dug trenches. For air raids. At XIII-D. Because we were quite close to a town, and there were raids all the time. Not all the time, but you know. Regularly.

T: Did the raids ever come close enough that your camp was bombed?

K: No. The camp never got hit that I know of. But I found out later that the day after we left they demolished the camp. The Americans. With a bombing raid.

T: So apparently you got out just in time.

K: Yes.

T: Speaking of getting out. One thing that hasn't come up, really, is thinking about escape. You were in four different camps, a POW over a year. Is that something that ever crossed your mind?

**(2, A, 58)**

K: Oh, sure. You thought about it and you heard rumors about people trying to plan an escape. You were never in on "the know."

T: So it was always somebody else?

K: It was always somebody else. Yes.

T: Mysterious escape committee.

K: Yes. Of course, they were looking for guys that could speak German or Polish or something like that. Once they got out they could have half a chance. Or was it IV? Yes. I think it was Number VI where they had dug a tunnel. I think from the latrine out past the fence, and one day it rained. Rained pretty hard for a couple days and the guard went to open the big fence, swung way back and fell in the tunnel. It was discovered. That's what I heard. I didn't see it.

T: Yes. Is escape something that, really, the idea appealed to you, or were you content to sit it out?

K: Well, you didn't have much chance to escape really. Until we were on the march. Then we could have escaped any time.

T: Yes. And guys, most guys, didn't.

K: No. Like when we were on the march from Nürnberg to Moosburg. We could have escaped any time, because they had so few guards.

T: What kept you from doing it?

K: Well, you knew the war was almost over.

T: Is it the safer place to be was with the group as opposed to trying to escape?

K: Yes. Right. There was guys that tried to escape. Some of them did, I'm sure. But I think it was kind of a foolish thing at that time.

T: With the end being pretty much noticeable.

K: Yes. But we used to march every day. Almost every day. I split rations with another guy, Pinkie Falleson. He died just last year. We'd find a barn for the night, or woods, or whatever we were going to do. Usually [it] was close to a town. I'd keep going. The guards never stopped me. I'd keep going and I'd knock on doors and try and beg food. In the little towns. Or trade [for] food.

T: How receptive were these German civilians to you, as a POW, knocking on their door?

K: Well, I had one experience where I went to this little house, little tiny house and a girl, she must have been about thirty-five, answered the door. I told her who I was, and she had me come in. She fixed me some eggs. I would have liked to stay there, but I knew that if the SS ever caught me...you'd get shot.

T: So there was this little bit of freedom. You could kind of get away...

K: Yes. You could march ahead.

T: But you better get back.

K: Yes. And I had one other experience where I walked in this house. There was a long hallway. Had to be like thirty-five feet long. I went in the door and I walked down to the end of that hallway and knocked on the door. There were Germans, of course, there. I wanted to trade chocolate or something or a cigarette, something for food. And they pointed like this. And they were bombing to beat hell over a ways. I just turned around and walked out. Get out while the getting was good.

**(2, A, 107)**

T: The woman who cooked you the eggs, did she speak English or you speak German?

K: No.

T: So there was this kind of...

K: I was hungry and I said (*using hands, as if eating motion*). So she fixed me those eggs. She fixed it. As I remember, she gave me a couple to take back to my friend too.

T: Very interesting. So a very positive response.

K: Yes. Right.

T: As you walked through those towns, and from Nürnberg to Moosburg is almost the length of Bavaria there...

K: It's about one hundred miles. Something like that.

T: So it's a chunk of walking, especially back and forth...

K: Yes. Yes.

T: Ever any negative experiences? Were any people in the towns ever not happy to see the Americans walking through?

K: Oh, yes. They had these young German kids that were put in the Army. What did they call them again? Hitler Youth. I got a friend here locally that was in that. You'd hear, geez, you'd hear somebody marching and singing and you would think it must be one thousand guys. And here comes maybe fifty kids. Training. Marching and singing. Fourteen, fifteen years old. And they used to spit at us and stuff like that. But nothing else.

T: So you never really felt threatened for your life at all on the march there.

K: No.

T: And for the record, do you have data that shows when you started and when you stopped that march? What day was it that you left Nürnberg there according to your records?

K: I'll have to refer to mine now *(shares personal records with interviewer)*.

T: By the records here it's on April 4, 1945, at twelve noon that you left Nürnberg. How many men left in the group that you were marching with? Was it the whole camp or just some guys?

K: It was the whole camp, as far as I know.

T: So it's a pretty long line of guys.

K: Oh! A long line. Yes.

T: The first day the records indicate you marched twenty-six kilometers and slept in some barns at Polling. It also says that you were strafed by American planes.

K: Right.

**(2, A, 135)**

T: Do you remember that incident?

K: Oh, absolutely. John said it was two P-47s, but I thought it was three P-47s. It was a sunny day and we were marching and you could see the column going, twisting around a mile ahead of you. All of a sudden we saw these planes, and they just peeled off and came right down the group. We all hit the ditch. I hit the ditch right by a German guard and picked up his gun and gave it back to him and got back in the column again.

T: So in a sense, you're both jumping away, jumping out of the way of the same thing.

K: Right.

T: Were the planes on you, really, before you knew it, or was it...

K: Yes. All of a sudden they were there and we didn't have any identification, of course. We should have had some POW flags or something, but we didn't that I

know of. They just came right down the column. I understand that they killed three guys, but I don't know.

T: It wasn't around you, anyway.

K: No.

T: Were there other occasions on the twelve days of that march that you were strafed by American planes?

K: No. That was the only time.

T: During the days, some days it looks like you marched beginning earlier in the morning, sometimes later in the day, sometimes you didn't march at all.

K: Right.

T: While you were marching there, were the German guards right with you?

K: Oh, yes. But there weren't many of them. I mean, you could, like I said before, you could have escaped probably any time.

T: So the guards, what were they there for if you could have escaped at any time? What were the guards doing?

K: (*chuckles*) Good question. I guess, because their bosses told them they had to do it.

T: But they weren't certainly any kind of threatening presence.

K: No. No. Here again, they're older guys. You kind of felt sorry for them in some cases, because here they are up in age and have to be in the Army. Some of our oldest guys were in their upper thirties. If you were twenty-five or thirty years old, you were pop.

T: These guys were grandpa, it seems like.

K: Yes. Right. And then some.

T: So they were almost figures you could feel sorry for.

K: Yes. If you could have talked their language you could have talked to them. I'm sure there were some guys that spoke German that did talk to them.

**(2, A, 165)**

T: They certainly weren't people that you felt threatened by.

K: No.

T: How was your health on this twelve day march, Kelly?

K: On the march my health was pretty good, because we ate better. Because I was trading food. Trading rations and trading Red Cross stuff.

T: So you had some stuff to barter with...

K: Yes.

T: You mentioned at least one time that you were able to get food from people in town.

K: Yes. Used cigarettes or chocolate or something like that.

T: Was trading as you went through towns kind of part of what you did or tried to?

K: Every time we stopped. Yes. If there was a town nearby, I'd go and try and trade material.

T: What did you have that the German civilians might want?

K: Cigarettes. And chocolate. That's the two main things.

T: So you could trade to them things they didn't have and they could provide, particularly in the small towns I guess, food.

K: Yes.

T: Where did you spend the nights?

K: Some nights it was in the forest.

T: Really? Just stop about wherever you were and take cover.

K: One night there, we were sleeping out on the ground where we stopped. It rained all night long

T: Oh, yes. Here's the entry for April 5: "Camped in forest for the night, and it poured all night."

K: Yes.

T: So you were wet the next day.

K: Wet the next day. I remember I didn't go to sleep until probably five, six o'clock in the morning. What woke me up is, they were firing machine guns over us. To get us up. Because we overslept from the rest of the gang. We finally went to sleep, you know, and you'd sleep real sound. We didn't hear them. So there was about maybe ten, twelve of us that were in a certain area. They just fired right over us. When they quit firing we got up.

T: That would wake you up, I guess. Was the weather a problem? I mean, it's early April, and it's...

K: Oh, yes. It was cold. However, we were better off than some of the guys, because we were in southern Germany. So it was warmer down there.

T: So you felt it could have been worse.

K: It could have been worse. Oh, absolutely.

**(2, A, 198)**

T: When you had days of rest, and there's a number, April 11, April 12, April 14, April 15 where the entry says: "Didn't do anything." Did you stay in one location?

K: Yes. Just talked.

T: It sounds like this march was kind of an ad hoc on the side of the Germans too. That they kind of were moving guys, but...

K: Yes. I think most of the marches were. They didn't know what to do.

T: And you ended up at VII-A, Moosburg, which itself was a collecting pot for all kinds of guys.

K: Yes. That was an old camp.

T: It had been around for, yes, since the beginning of the war, I think.

K: Right.

T: Yes. For the record, the information that Kelly Martinson has, this march from Nürnberg to Moosburg reads like this: (*reads excerpt*)  
"April 4, 1945. Twelve noon, left Nürnberg, Germany. March twenty-six kilometers. Slept in barns at Polling. Strafed by two P-47s. Three men killed.  
April 5. Polling to Neumarkt. Camped in forest for the night and it poured all night. Ten kilometers for the day. Rested two hours during all out raid on Nürnberg.



April 6. Started marching at three a.m. Marched to Berching. (\*\*\*) Marched to Paulshofen. Slept in barns. Marched twenty-eight and a half kilometers for the day. April 7. Day of rest. Ate up a storm." *(end of reading)*

We'll stop there. Let me ask you, what does it mean to "eat up a storm"?

K: *(chuckles)* Evidently we had some Red Cross parcels or something. I don't know.

T: So it was more than usual, though.

K: Yes.

T: *(reading)* "April 8. Marched from Paulshofen to Middlestetten so Siegenburg then to Neudumersdorf. Slept in barns for the night.

April 9. Day of rest.

April 10. Received one-seventh of extra something." *(end of reading)*

K: Red Cross parcel.

T: So that was not always, but sometimes.

K: Yes. Seven men to a parcel.

T: So one-seventh means you had split it.

K: Yes.

T: *(reading)* "Slept in barns the night of April 10." *(end of reading)* When you split something, I can see splitting a loaf of bread seven ways. You slice it. But how do you split a Red Cross parcel seven ways?

K: Well, you got coffee. You got crackers. You might have seven crackers in there. So you got one cracker each. You got canned goods and you more or less barter for that. Pick a number or something like that, or cut the cards. The winner gets the choice. Then the next choice.

T: I got it. So there was a way, there had to be a way of splitting things you couldn't really split.

K: Oh, yes. Yes. We used cards a lot.

T: Did you pick the guys you were splitting with? Did you know these guys or was it just a blind draw for who you were splitting the parcel with?

**(2, A, 243)**

K: Well, in that case it would have been a blind draw.

T: I'd much rather split with my friends, I think.

K: Yes. Right. But see, it's just how you went into the barn is where you were. So you weren't with your normal friends.

T: So whoever was around, you became the other six guys of the group.

K: Yes.

T: Got it. *(reading)* "April 11 and April 12. Days of rest. April 13. Holtzhausen to Grimmelsdorf. Stood taps for President Roosevelt." *(end of reading)*

K: Yes.

T: He died the day before.

K: Yes.

T: Do you remember that?

K: Oh, absolutely. I'll never forget it.

T: The Germans passed on the news to you.

K: Yes. I'll never forget it, because we were in this long, long column and I could see this column ahead of us going around the hill. Then they disappeared and I saw them up again farther. Then they stopped. They had a guy, one of the Americans with a trumpet or something, go up and blow taps. They announced that President Roosevelt had died.

T: How did that news hit you as a young man?

K: Kind of a shock, because the war was on and we didn't know what was going on half the time. Here all of a sudden we lose our president. What's going to happen? So it was really a shock to us.

T: Enough that it ends up in the record here. *(reading)*

"April 13. Marched twelve kilometers for the day. Received half of a French Red Cross package. Slept in a barn.

April 14. April 15. Days of rest.

April 16. Marched ten and a half kilometers to Moosburg. Arrived at Stalag VII-A one p.m." *(end of reading)* End of the record.

So you arrived at Moosburg, one p.m. on April 16. It was only two weeks later that camp was liberated. What do you remember about your time at VII-A Moosburg?

K: Well, the thing I remember, we were in a huge tent. To me it seemed like it was at least one hundred foot long and maybe fifty, seventy-five feet wide. It was a huge tent.

T: Almost as big as a circus tent, it sounds like, but long.

K: Yes.

T: So in there were just a whole bunch of guys.

K: Americans. But then they had some regular wooden buildings, too, in that compound. There was all nationalities you could think of. Anybody that was the enemy of the Germans were in there. I remember I went into this one—I was kind of an adventurer. I'd go around camp. I'd look for this and look for that. But I got in this one big barracks and I couldn't believe it. There were some Turks in there. They looked like they were about seven feet tall. Big long black beards. I got the hell out of there. I was scared (*chuckles*). Because they were looking at me and I was walking through. All of a sudden I realized what was going on.

**(2, A, 299)**

T: So the clientele, in a way, of Moosburg is much different than what you've seen in other camps.

K: Oh, yes. You're right. Other camps they had separate compounds where they had Poles or other people like English and...

T: But Europeans or North Americans.

K: Yes.

T: But these are people from other parts of the world now.

K: Right. Yes.

T: Was Moosburg a place where you could kind of wander around at your leisure?

K: Yes. You could wander around. In the whole area.

T: Inside the tent there, orderly or kind of chaotic?

K: It was orderly. It was orderly.

T: So you had a little spot that was yours?

K: Well, yes. You'd have a spot where you'd have seven or eight guys together. But there was seven or eight next to you too.

T: So the tent must have held a whole lot of guys.

K: Oh, it held a lot. A lot of guys.

T: Now were the Germans still supplying some kind of food the couple weeks you were there?

K: I'm sure they were. I don't remember much about it. But I'm sure they were.

T: What is your clearest impression of VII-A Moosburg? What was that place all about for you? Because you weren't there very long.

K: Well, I remember it was large. It was big. It had some pretty good barracks in it. I don't remember much about it.

T: Did they have roll calls there like you had at the other camps?

K: Yes. I'm sure we did, but my memory kind of fails me. I do remember very vividly the day before we got liberated and the day we got liberated.

T: That was my next question, so let's move to that. What about the liberation of Moosburg, [which] was April 29. That's my recollection, anyway.

K: Yes. April 29.

T: Talk about that. You say you remember the day before and the day itself.

K: The night before, the Americans were firing over our camp into the town of Moosburg. *(makes whistling noise)* Could hear it go over us. It was just one by one. *(whistles)* Just whistling. All night long. Over the camp. Then the next day we saw thirteen or fourteen tanks come over the hills in different places. I think it was right about noon the P-51s came over our camp, and one guy did the slow roll. So close you could see him. Just like I can see you.

T: They were that close to you.

K: Yes. I'd say he was within a couple hundred feet if not closer. *(chuckles)* That was beautiful. I wrote something about that.

**(2, A, 360)**

T: Just think about when the Americans did arrive at your camp. Did they come literally right into camp?

K: They came into the gate, which was away from where I was. The German guards, before they got there, they threw their guns and took off.

T: So the German guards were gone.

K: Yes. The ones that were left just gave up. But it's just something that you, so vivid in my memory, those airplanes came over and I saw the tanks all around.

**End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 380.**

T: What was going through your mind? You've been a POW for fourteen months now just about. What's going through your mind when it's pretty apparent that the POW experience is over?

K: Well, home.

T: You started to think forward already.

K: Getting home. Yes. Not knowing what's going to happen next.

T: Was it some time before you actually left the camp?

K: Yes. We left the camp on May 8.

T: So you were there eight, nine days before you really left.

K: Right. Yes.

T: During those days, did the Americans supply food or were you kind of on your own, or...?

K: The Americans must have supplied some food. I really don't remember. I'll tell you one thing I do remember. A lot of the guys, not a lot of guys, but some of the guys, went to town. They were looting and stealing stuff. I looked for the nearest GI truck and I went down the line, "Anybody from Minnesota?" I finally came to a truck and the guy says, "Yes, from St. Paul." I wish I had gotten his name but I didn't. But he gave me a bunch of pork chops. Pork chops. And I took those back to camp and divided them amongst, I don't know, there were eight or ten of us there. And I got sick as a dog. In fact, I was sick the day we left by truck to go to Regensburg to fly home.

T: After all that you're sick when you leave.

K: Can you imagine? Your stomach is in such bad shape you eat a pork chop that—I suppose I ate the fat and everything.

T: It probably tasted delicious.

K: Yes. Oh, God, I got sick. In fact, a guy by the name of Klinger was in charge of our group and he said, "Kelly, you take these thirty guys and go to plane so and so." Hell, I followed them. They didn't follow me.

T: So you were in rough shape by the time you left, it sounds like.

K: I was in rough shape. Yes.

T: Did they fly you to Camp Lucky Strike in France?

**(2, B, 407)**

K: They were supposed to but...Jack [Ringgenberg] probably told you this, our plane got lost and we ended up in England.

T: So you never stopped in France.

K: No. And they threw us in the hospital for three weeks. In England. In fact, I wrote down someplace here the—I don't have the name of the hospital but I had some numbers. *(looks through personal papers)* Oh, here it is. *(reading)* "Took a C-47"—I think it was a DC-3, same thing—"from Regensburg, Germany to England, May 7. The USA hospital plant number 4211, ward 50." And on 27 May they shipped us to London. We stayed at the Red Cross.

T: So you were in a hospital for...twenty days they kept you in there.

K: Yes. For malnutrition.

T: To get back to the States were you on a ship?

K: Went over and came home on the *Queen Mary*.

T: Same ship both ways.

K: Yes.

T: When you were in London there, were you with anybody that you knew?

K: Yes. I was with a guy from California. Jack was with us at...

T: Jack Ringgenberg was in London too.

K: Yes. Right. He was in the hospital too. And someplace I even got the shipping list of the guys. The names of the guys.

T: Anything memorable about the time you were in England? I mean, unlike the majority of POWs you didn't end up at one of those huge camps like Lucky Strike.

K: No. We stayed at the Red Cross.

T: After 27 May there.

K: Yes. I don't know, I don't even have the date we left there on the *Queen Mary*. I think it was around June 21 or something like that when we got back to the States. We had to wait to get on the *Queen Mary*. They were talking about putting us on some of those Liberty ships. I heard about those breaking up. I was ready to go AWOL. I really was.

T: Rather than get on one of those.

K: Yes.

T: Now when you got back to the States, your mom had died 1941 or 1942, right?

K: '42.

T: Your dad was still alive?

K: Yes.

**(2, B, 434)**

T: And you had brothers and sisters?

K: One sister, yes.

T: How soon before you saw your dad and your sister when you got back to the States?

K: My folks had separated when I was younger, so I didn't see my dad for quite a while. My sister lived on 29<sup>th</sup> in Bloomington, and I went over there and there was nobody home, so I broke in so I could take a bath. Cold water (*chuckles*).

T: So no great homecoming. You had to break into the house.

K: Yes.

T: Was she older or younger than you?

K: She was three years older.

T: But that was your relative to come back to in Minneapolis there?

K: Yes. Right.

T: When you saw her, how much did she ask you about your POW experience?

K: Not too much, as far as I remember.

T: She knew you had been a prisoner for all those months.

K: Oh yes, sure. She knew it. Because we had corresponded.

T: So you don't remember her asking you a whole lot about it though.

K: I don't remember, to tell you the truth. Don't remember.

T: You were married in 1945. By the time you got married, how much did your wife, Joyce, know about your POW experience? When you first got married.

K: Well, she knew a lot about it, I think.

T: So that was someone you could share it with as opposed to your sister.

K: Yes.

Joyce (*back in kitchen again*): I might add, though, that he didn't want to talk about it too much.

T: I'll ask you then, since the recorder is on, what do you remember? When you met him, when he came back, how much did you know? How much did he tell you?

Joyce: Well, like I say, he didn't want to talk about it too much. He'd say a few words and then he'd go off in the other room or something.

T: Was that something that you gradually learned over the years then?

Joyce: Yes.

T: Was it more you asking questions or him telling you things?

Joyce: Him telling. He wasn't too talkative about it. In fact, according to all the other wives, or the crew that we got together with, it was a long time before any of them...who were the same as Kelly. Didn't want to talk about it. And we didn't start



talking about it until we started going to the reunions. Then the guys, when they finally got together, really talked about it then.

T: Is that where you...do you feel you learned something from those reunions too, when you got together?

**(2, B, 462)**

Joyce: Yes. We learned a lot from those reunions.

K: The first one was in 1977, wasn't it?

Joyce: '77. Because those guys were too busy trying to make a living and keeping the family going. We didn't spend much time doing it until when we'd go to the reunions. We really found out everything there.

T: So much more than you had known before.

Joyce: Yes.

T: As your kids were born and growing up, I mean, kids sometimes just ask things without being diplomatic about it. Either one of you: do you remember the kids asking as they were growing up?

K: Not really.

Joyce: No. No.

T: Not for school projects or just curiosity...

Joyce: Oh, yes. Our oldest daughter, no, our youngest daughter, when she was in high school, asked a lot about it because she was making a project, and she'd ask a lot about it. But Kellie Ann and Jim, no. I don't think so. Nobody wanted to know too much about World War II. It wasn't...it was something past.

K: I had customers that I called on and became good friends with and stuff like that. We never talked about the war.

T: Guys who had been veterans as well, probably.

K: Yes. And here twenty years later I find out this guy was in the service. He was in the Air Force, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force or something like that. I never even knew he was in the Army.

Joyce: *(to Kelly)* In fact, you didn't even know Bob Coleman had been a prisoner of war until about twenty years ago, thirty years ago maybe.

K: Well, I didn't know him though.

T: So there were customers that you had, that really, your war experiences were not even part of what you...even when you got to know them pretty well...

K: Yes. It just seemed...never talked about it.

T: If one of your customers might have asked you, what did you do during the war, would you be able to tell them, I was a prisoner of war?

K: Oh, yes. Yes. If they asked.

T: So if people asked you questions, you might have answered them, but that might not have been information you volunteered yourself.

K: Right. I don't remember very many people asking me.

T: That's interesting too. That really it wasn't something that regularly came up.

K: No.

T: As far as the after war stuff too, I'm wondering—and you were married in 1945, so pretty soon after you got back...

K: Yes.

T: How often did you have, initially, dreams or nightmares about any part of your POW experience?

K: Oh, I don't know. I didn't have too many. I had some. But I don't remember much about them.

**(2, B, 496)**

T: The dreams you had, was it more about your combat experience as a tail gunner or more about the specific things relating to being a POW?

K: I think it was more about being in an airplane.

T: So those things, certain specific things there, may have come back.

K: Yes.

T: Sometimes people wake up at night when they dream or they have images that come back more than one time. Is that the case with you?

K: No, I don't think so. I've been, I think, relatively free of that compared to probably a lot of people. I had a few but I don't remember much about them.

T: Nothing that you remember happening repeatedly, or really being an issue for you.

K: Yes. Right.

Joyce: You had more than you probably realize, but you didn't have a lot. Not like some people we've heard.

T: So from your memory, it wasn't something that you remember him waking up at night or...

Joyce: Yes, he did. But like I said, I don't think he remembers. But he did more than he wants to say. When we first were married.

T: That was the same year that you got back from being a POW, so it was a very immediate experience.

Joyce: Yes.

T: So you remember him waking up sometimes, but not all the time.

Joyce: Not all the time, no. Not every night. But he did more than he wants to remember.

K: You forget those things, you know.

Joyce: Especially when they weren't the same thing over and over again.

K: You have a tendency to remember the good things and forget the bad things.

Joyce: Which is good, isn't it?

T: And then you get somebody like me comes along and wants you to remember the good and the bad. In talking about your POW experience, have you ever talked to school groups or other groups about what you went through?

K: No, I haven't. I'm not good at that sort of thing. I know there's guys that do that, and I admire them. I wish I could do it too, but I'm just not good at that sort of thing.

T: Here's a guy, you had a career in sales too.

K: Yes.

T: So talking to people is your business.

K: Yes. But talking to maybe one to five guys or something like that is fine, but to a group, that's not my meat.

T: Is me asking you about the interview, is this something you could have said yes to twenty years ago?

K: I don't know. I don't think I can answer that. Nobody was asking the questions then.

**(2, B, 535)**

T: Well, about this interview. What prompted you to say yes to this?

K: I guess it was Jack.

T: Did Jack talk to you?

K: Oh, yes. Yes, he called me. He said that the interview went very well, and he said you followed up with a hard copy of it and he said, "I think you should do it."

T: That's Jack's way.

K: Yes.

T: So you knew for sure what he thought. The last question I have for you is this. If you think about Kelly Martinson before he was a POW, and as he came home afterwards, how had that person changed?

K: Well, I don't know that I had changed that much, to tell you the truth. I was *(pause)* probably looked at things a little bit different. Probably took longer to make decisions and stuff like that. I think I was young enough that it didn't really change me. I don't think.

T: People who had known you before and people who knew you when you got back, what do you think they may have noticed about Kelly Martinson?

K: Darned if I know *(chuckles)*. I don't know. *(motions to Joyce)* Ask her.

T: I'll ask you then. Did you know him before he went overseas?

Joyce: Oh, yes.

T: In what ways was he a different person when you saw him again?

Joyce: He had gone through war. And he...his thinking was older, and more decisive.

T: Was he a different person?

Joyce: No. No. He was the same.

T: You were twenty-one years old when you got back and yet you felt that you were, you could almost say, here's an older person, really, than twenty-one.

K: Yes. Yes. I had gone through a lot of experiences in that three years.

T: For you, if you think about your time as a gunner on an airplane and your time as a POW, which was more difficult for you to get through?

K: I'm sure it was the POW.

T: How was that more difficult? If you could describe it. It's a longer period of time and a different kind of stress.

K: Because I was hungry all the time.

T: You've mentioned that more than once, that the lack of food was the issue.

K: You know when you're that age, you eat like a horse. And all of a sudden there's nothing there to eat. Or not much.

T: After a mission when you came back you could eat as much as you liked, I suppose.

K: Oh, yes. Yes. Plus we used to raid the mess hall and bring it back to the barracks.

T: So food was not a problem at all.

K: No.

**(2, B, 575)**

T: And suddenly it was.

K: Yes. Yes. That was, like you say, suddenly. All of a sudden your whole world changed

T: Did you get any communication, letters from home, while you were there?

K: Yes. Yes, I got a lot of mail.

T: Who wrote to you?

K: Joyce wrote. A lot of letters.

Joyce: Every day.

K: Every day. I'd get batches of letters. Fifteen, twenty at a time. And I even got some parcels. A couple parcels.

Joyce: Yes. We could send a parcel every month.

K: Cigarettes and candy and stuff. I got that at Number IV.

T: The place you were the longest.

K: That was the only place. Yes, that was the only place I got anything.

T: Joyce, let me ask you. Do you remember getting the news that Kelly was missing in action or a prisoner?

Joyce: Missing in action, for what, three months?

K: No. It was only a couple months, I think.

Joyce: Only two months?

K: Yes.

Joyce: And then his sister got it and let me know.

T: Where were you living then? In Minneapolis?

Joyce: In Minneapolis. South Minneapolis.

T: How did the news, I mean, it was one thing to have a—were you guys engaged?

Joyce: No.

T: You knew him.

Joyce: We had been going...

T: Yes. It's one thing to know he's flying missions, but how did you deal with the news that he was missing in action, for example?

Joyce: It was very hard. Because you kept thinking of things. And you didn't know that they had bailed out, and so it was very rough. Yes. I would say those two months were harder than anything. Missing in action.

T: Did your mind create scenarios of what could have happened to him?

Joyce: Maybe the plane was blown up or maybe they all got killed or...yes. You think of it all the time.

T: Did his sister also give you the news then that he had been confirmed a POW and was alive?

Joyce: Yes.

T: Do you remember getting that news?

Joyce: I don't remember it, no. I remember my dad coming. Anita called my folks, and my dad came over to Northwestern Hospital and told me that he was missing in action. But I don't remember what happened. I guess Anita called me and said that he was prisoner of war. But I don't remember that.

**(2, B, 609)**

K: I've got copies of telegrams and stuff.

T: And you wrote to him.

Joyce: Oh, yes.

T: How did you decide what to write?

Joyce: I'd just tell him what I did every day. What else? You couldn't give him any war news, because that would be blacked out. What we did every day and talked about, reminisce about the past. It was only a sheet this long (*hands, indicating approximately eight inches*).

T: There wasn't much space and you had to print everything, right?

Joyce: Yes. Why, no. We could write. I don't think we had to print it.

T: But you didn't have much space, in any case.

Joyce: No.

T: Did you intentionally keep the news kind of upbeat for him?

Joyce: I tried to. But, like I say, you couldn't write much.

T: Did you get letters from him as well, or any kind of communication?

Joyce: Oh, yes. I don't know how many. They're all downstairs.

K: Yes.

T: Kelly, do you remember writing a lot to people? From camps.

K: Yes. I wrote quite a bit.

T: But you couldn't write a lot of information either, right?

K: No. No. (\*\*\*) letters that I sent to Joyce. Dumb letters.

Joyce: They weren't dumb when I got them.

T: Do you remember checking the mail every day for stuff from Kelly?

Joyce: Oh, yes (*with emphasis*). Oh, yes.

T: I'm wondering too, if having someone who was directly involved in the war now, did you remember paying closer attention to what was going on in Europe in the war because of that?

Joyce: Yes. But the thing is, you know, when you're that young and trying to do something with your life, you don't spend a lot of time. Outside of the radio—we didn't have television of course, and I don't remember scanning newspapers, because I just didn't have time. I had the radio on all the time listening.

T: In April, the camp is liberated. How soon did you know that he was on his way home?

Joyce: He called from England when he was in the hospital, but I don't think we got any notification that he was freed.

T: So it was more that luckily you were able to call them to tell them, because the telegrams...

**(2, B, 648)**

Joyce: I don't remember Anita getting anything that said that he was released.

K: Yes. She got a telegram.



Joyce: Did she get a telegram?

K: Yes. I've got them all downstairs.

T: Well, thanks for that. That's interesting to hear two peoples' perspectives on how you got the news and what you said. That's the last question I had, and I'll ask at this point if there's anything that you want to add that we didn't get to or you think is important.

K: Not that I can think of. Probably think of something after you leave. That will be normal.

T: Yes, it's often that way. Then on the record I'll thank you very much for your time today.

K: You bet. You're welcome.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

**For the record, the information in Kelly Martinson's diary of April 1945**

April 4, 1945 twelve noon, left Nürnberg, Germany. Marched twenty-six kilometers. Slept in barns at Polling. Strafed by two P-47s. Three men killed.

April 5. Polling to Neumarkt. Camped in forest for the night and it poured all night. Ten kilometers for the day. Rested two hours during all out raid on Nürnberg.

April 6. Started marching at three a.m. Marched to Berching. (*unintelligible*) Marched to Paulshofen. Slept in barns. Marched twenty-eight and a half kilometers for the day.

April 7. Day of rest. Ate up a storm.

April 8. Marched from Paulshofen to Middlestetten so Siegenburg then to Neudumersdorf. Slept in barns for the night.

April 9. Day of rest.

April 10. Received one-seventh of extra something. Slept in barns the night of April 10.

April 11 and April 12. Days of rest.

April 13. Holtzhausen to Grimmelsdorf. Stood taps for President Roosevelt. Marched twelve kilometers for the day. Received half of a French Red Cross package. Slept in a barn.

April 14. April 15. Days of rest.

April 16. Marched ten and a half kilometers to Moosburg. Arrived at Stalag VII-A one p.m.

**End of the record.**