

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview With
Robert H. Gayle
429 B.S. 2nd B.G. 15th A.F. B-17
Shot down 2/7/45
P.O.W. Liberated 4-29-45**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer. Today is December 10, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Robert H. Gayle at the First Baptist Church at Alice. His mailing address is P.O. Box 116 Beeville, Texas 78104. His phone number is (361) 358-5143. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. Bob, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today.

Mr. Gayle

Thank you. I'm glad to do it.

Mr. Misenhimer

And thank you for your service to this country in World War II. My first question is what's your birth date?

Mr. Gayle

11-15-23.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Gayle

In Beeville.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Gayle

My father was a lawyer and later he became a district judge.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Gayle

I had 1 brother and 2 sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your brother in the Service also?

Mr. Gayle

He was in the Merchant Marines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he come home?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, yes, he came home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is he still living?

Mr. Gayle

No, I'm the last one living of my family.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Gayle

There in Beeville.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Gayle

In 1940.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then when did you go into the Service?

Mr. Gayle

I went into the Service in nineteen forty... wait a minute. I'll get my discharge. I first enlisted on 12th of December 1942, and I went into actual duty the 12th of May 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do from the time in '42 until '43? You were just waiting to be called in?

Mr. Gayle

I was going to school down there at A&I.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up. December 7, '41 as you well remember, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

Do you recall where you were when you heard about it?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, I was up at Shriner Institute up in Kerrville. I was going to school up there and I got 2 years there and then I went down to A&I the 3rd year.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you feel that was going to affect you when you heard about that?

Mr. Gayle

Well, certainly didn't know. I knew I'd probably be in it somewhere and I volunteered by the way. I volunteered. That was when most of us from A&I went to San Antonio to volunteer and they gave us a physical and all that sort of thing. And then they told us to go on back and when they needed us, they would call us.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you volunteered, it was for the Army?

Mr. Gayle

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it for the Air Corps at that time?

Mr. Gayle

No, it was not in Air Corps at that time. And then we went in and then when we got in in May, I was up there in Fort Sam Houston. And then from Fort Sam Houston, they sent us (in fact all of us in my group there from A&I) up to Fort Knox in Kentucky where I was in a tank outfit. And I got my basic training there with that group there at Fort Knox.

Mr. Misenhimer

At Fort Sam, what all did you do at Fort Sam?

Mr. Gayle

At Fort Sam, we just waited around to be sent mostly.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get your uniforms there at all?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, we got our uniforms and everything there at Fort Sam.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any shots or anything like that there?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, we probably did. We probably got shots there and then I got some more there at Fort Knox.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel from San Antonio?

Mr. Gayle

On the train.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, it was long and arduous. Everywhere we went on the train, it was arduous.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now did you have a sleeper or just sit up in a chair car?

Mr. Gayle

No, we didn't have any sleepers. We just sat up in a chair car.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got up to Fort Knox, you say you were in a tank company.

Mr. Gayle

Well, we were in a tank outfit. And it was one where there was an old Colonel Smith I think his name was. I don't remember much about him, but I do know that we did our training there, basic training -- climbing over various hills, Agony Hill, and they had them all named various things. And we had long marches. We had a 30-mile march one afternoon and night, and got in off of the truck walking all night.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you do any type of Infantry training with this or what?

Mr. Gayle

Well, it was mostly...the basic part of that is mostly infantry and you had also obstacle courses to go through and things like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you crawl under the machine gun with the live ammunition?

Mr. Gayle

That's right, live ammunition machine guns.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that?

Mr. Gayle

Well, it was kind of thrilling cause you always wondered about...I stayed close to the ground, I guarantee you. They told us about how high it would be and everything, but you never could count on that. Yeah, we had that.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was kind of exciting, wasn't it?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, yeah. And then of course, climbing the wall and all that sort of stuff, obstacle courses of all kinds.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all weapons did you train on?

Mr. Gayle

The Sherman Tank, the light tank. I don't know what they called it.

Mr. Misenhimer

There was an M-3 Stuart. I'm not sure if that was it or not.

Mr. Gayle

It was one that had a Chrysler engine in it. I know that. I remember that about it. And then we had the big trucks that we learned to drive, and jeeps. And we learned how to drive, all together qualified to drive in all those vehicles.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was in basic training, or was this later?

Mr. Gayle

No, this is part of your basic training, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have rifle training?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, we went out on the rifle range. That's right, that's there at Fort Knox.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time in basic?

Mr. Gayle

Nothing except it wasn't easy. It wasn't an easy basic. It was very hard. They got you in pretty good shape. You'd get out and run so much in the morning and come back and have breakfast and then go out and do more exercise and everything, all kinds of exercises. And of course, they would have a schedule you would follow every day. You had different things. You didn't always know what you were gonna be doing from one minute to the next though.

Mr. Misenhimer

About what time did they get you up in the morning?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, I'd say about 4:30 or 5.

Mr. Misenhimer

What time did you get done in the evening?

Mr. Gayle

Usually about 5 or 6.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had a long day.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, it was a long day. It was a long day. And then of course, we had to clean our barracks every day. We had to scrub the floors and all that sort of thing, and that's tedious and troublesome.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Gayle

Just a bed and a small mattress and some sheets. We did have sheets.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these double-deck bunks?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, there was some of them in there that were double-deck. I don't remember that I was in the double-deck, but there were some of them that were.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this was in a barracks, is that right?

Mr. Gayle

In a barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there?

Mr. Gayle

It was very good. We had an old sergeant, mess sergeant, that was very conscientious about giving us good food, and he loved to stand there and watch them come in there and eat. He was one of those kinds of people. I remember his name. His name was Williams. He enjoyed seeing people eat. I also did KP there. Had a lot of KP, but it wasn't done for punishment. That was done just because they needed somebody to clean all the food utensils and everything like that. But they had good food. He wanted to make sure his food was good, and he wanted to make sure his pots were clean.

Mr. Misenhimer

One of the worst jobs is scrubbing the garbage cans.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, scrubbing the GI cans. That was a bad job. I had that sometimes. Sometimes it was peeling potatoes like you see all the time. Different things like that, washing dishes... washing trays. That's what we over here used, trays. We put them in a china clipper they called it. They called it the china clipper, and you put it in there and it had water that would spray on them. It was almost like a dishwasher today, but similar. It was longer. It had a thing that went from here I guess to the wall.

Mr. Misenhimer

About 4 or 5 feet over there.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, hot water. Made sure everything was sterile and clean. And they checked them.

He checked everything. He was a good... he wanted to make sure that his kitchen was the best. I remember the pride he took in it, in doing his job. Good to have people like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was your basic training?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, I was there for about I guess 3 months. 3 months there and then when I was getting ready, they were gonna send us down to Fort Campbell down in Arkansas and I didn't much like the idea of going down there. And I saw a bulletin up on the bulletin board that said they would take men into the Air Force if you passed the 64 and you passed the mental test that they had for getting in, you'd be a cadet and you could possibly get in there and be a pilot or a navigator or something like that... bombardier. And so I applied and I was accepted into that and then I went through, I took the test, mental test, and then they had the physical test, a 64. I passed all that and then they sent us up to Jefferson Barracks up near St. Louis. And by this time, it was wintertime, and it was cold up there and snow and ice and then they burned a lot of coal up there and you a lot of coal dust, too. And I had a sergeant that did senseless things I thought, a drill sergeant. He made us get out in the snow and take off our shirts and undershirts and do exercise. Well, I caught pneumonia and I was put in the hospital there, and I was pretty close to dying because they moved me out of the ward where they had the men that had ordinary illnesses and they moved me into a little special room that they had in the beginning of this ward. They had about 3 or 4 little rooms, 2 on each side as I recall, or something like that. And

then you went into the general ward. They moved me into one of those rooms cause they weren't quite sure. I was unconscious I know or at least I was in kind of a stupor because they only woke me up to give me some kind of medicine or something like that and then I'd be right back off to sleep again. They didn't bother me and they would give me lots of liquids, though, and stuff like that, all kinds of fruit juices and things of that nature. I finally made it out. There were some of them that went in there, though, that didn't. I had some good nurses, I can say that. They were very, very good. Most of the women there were excellent people and they were caring people, too. They really did. You weren't just a number to them, and that was nice, too. It was a nice situation there at Fort Knox... that was Jefferson Barracks there. And then after Jefferson Barracks, they gave us a basic training there, too -- an Air Force basic is what they called it. Only Air Force basic.

Mr. Misenhimer

How is that different from the other basic?

Mr. Gayle

It wasn't quite as rough, but we had to go out and Bivouac out in tents in stuff like that, and we did some marching and wasn't nearly as intense as the basic training I had gotten at Fort Knox. And then they got an order, they gave us a bunch of stuff and everything, then they got an order that we were to go out to Las Vegas. Well, I didn't know it but they were gonna put us in gunnery training. They just said they didn't need any more pilots. They didn't need any more, that was what they claimed, but they did. They let some of them go to that, too. The majority of us went all the way out to Las Vegas. And then at Las Vegas, of course, we had gunnery training with 50-caliber machine guns

particularly. And we had on the ranges and stuff like that and we used, of course, a shotgun, too. We used a shotgun for skeet shooting and learning to lead and stuff like that in Las Vegas. And Las Vegas, at that time, wasn't anything like it is today. It was a little small town at that time and it did have some gambling places along the side, but they were all made out of wood. They weren't the rock and cement and all the fine stuff that they have today and all the lights either. I don't remember for sure whether the streets were even paved at that time, just a little old country town out there in the middle of nowhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it McCarran Field where you trained there. That's the airport now I think it may have been.

Mr. Gayle

I don't know the name of that field. I just knew that it was a training base that we used for gunnery. And then from there, we were sent back to Ardmore, Oklahoma where we picked up (for the first time) other members of the crew before they put us in crews.

Mr. Misenhimer

Lets go back to Las Vegas for a little bit here. Did you actually fly in a plane there?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, I think we did get some flying out there. In fact, I remember we went down through the lowest place...

Mr. Misenhimer

In Death Valley there?

Mr. Gayle

Death Valley, the lowest place. I don't know how many feet below sea level that you were, but we flew down through that from target practice. We'd shoot down from those old B17 bombers.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were in B17s.

Mr. Gayle

A B17.

Mr. Misenhimer

What position did you have?

Mr. Gayle

I, at that time, I was put into the ball turret because of my size. I wasn't very tall. I wasn't very big, so I could fit down into the ball turret. That's the turret that's down at the bottom of the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was it in that turret?

Mr. Gayle

Well, it was cramped for one thing. You were pretty cramped and you had to stay in there for hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could you get out when you were flying or you had to stay in there the whole time?

Mr. Gayle

Well, yes, you could get out if you had to but it took a lot of time. You had to unbuckle yourself and everything like that because you're strapped in. And if you're at altitude,

you had to get off of your oxygen and all the other attachments that you had to get out into the main part of the ship. If your turret is damaged in any way where it won't work properly, you're probably stuck down there and that's a bad place to be.

Mr. Misenhimer

It had to be lined up just right for you to get in and out. Is that right?

Mr. Gayle

Most of the time, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get in there before takeoff, or when did you...?

Mr. Gayle

No, we would get up to about 10,000 feet or so then we would get in out positions. Then after that, we stayed in there until your mission was over. Well, until we got ready to land and then you came out. So a lot of times, if you had anything wrong with your landing gear or if you had been shot or been blasted out, if you were down in that. And there were one or two fellows that...well I don't know how many were caught down there. And of course, they were just smeared.

Mr. Misenhimer

It did happen a few times.

Mr. Gayle

Oh, yeah, it happened. There were so many things you can't even imagine that can go wrong. If your oxygen goes wrong at 30,000 feet, well, you'll live for about a minute and a half, two minutes and that's it, especially if you breathe in any of that rarified air. And too, if you lost your heat, your heating suit if the electrical system or something went

wrong, you wouldn't live very long without being in the heated suit because we'd go up there at better than 30,000 feet. And the temperature would be sixty below, and our eyelashes would frost over and we would look at each other and say, 'I know what you're gonna look like when you get old.' (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Gray eyebrows, huh?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, yeah, just white, white eyebrows.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about his heated suit. What was it like?

Mr. Gayle

It was an electrical suit and you put it on before you put on your outside suit. And the heated suit plugged into a plug that was in your position in the plane as well as your oxygen, your oxygen tube. When you get above 10,000 feet, that's when you put the oxygen on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this heated suit, this heat your whole body or just part of it?

Mr. Gayle

No, it heated your whole body: your feet, your...well, except for your hands. Your hands, you had a little silk glove and then you had your other flight glove. Your flight gloves, now, the gloves that they had did have snaps that snapped on that you could get heat, too from your heated suit. It came down to little snaps and they snapped together.

Mr. Misenhimer

So could it keep you pretty warm then?

Mr. Gayle

It could keep you from freezing to death because that wouldn't be hard to do at 60 below.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back to Las Vegas, now you were a turret gunner there again. Did you do quite a bit of flying and shooting, then there?

Mr. Gayle

Well, we went on quite a few little missions like that. Oh, yes, they had a plane that drug a...

Mr. Misenhimer

A pull target behind it, a sleeve.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, a sleeve target behind it and they let you shoot at those, too and then you would count shells you were carrying and the color on them. They were all different on each plane so they could go through and when your gun, you hit those targets anytime they could count. They could count how many times you hit it because the colors, it would leave a color on the sleeve.

Mr. Misenhimer

The bullet, each one was painted different colors.

Mr. Gayle

Yes, bullets were different colors and some of that paint would come off when it went through the sleeve, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from Las Vegas?

Mr. Gayle

We went to town a few times, but there wasn't much there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Gayle

I think I probably was still a private at that time. And then when we went on into training, a bunch of us were sent down to Ardmore. You were just sent to different places. A bunch of us were sent down to Ardmore, Oklahoma, and it was there that we picked up our regular crew, who you were gonna be training with and who you were gonna be doing more training with. And that you would probably be going on missions with later on when you went overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this still B17s?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, still B17s, and the crew that I got on there is one that I meet with today. It wasn't the crew I flew most of my missions with though. The crew that I meet with today, we have reunions with every year somewhere. This last year, we had it there in Savannah. That was the crew that I went overseas with, too. We trained together and we went on bombing missions down to Galveston Island from Ardmore. Ardmore is not too far from the border of Texas up there. But we went from Ardmore down to Galveston and did some bombing, practice bombing, out there off of Galveston Island. Had a range down there and everything. I had kind of a thrilling moment coming back on a night practice

mission because the navigator gave the pilot such a good heading and everything that he passed over the field and didn't even see it. And we went on for about 15 or 20 minutes later, and the engines, the lights that tell you how much fuel you have left all started to turn red. That's a good warning, you see. And we flew over Tinker Field, which is there around Oklahoma City, and the pilot didn't want to land. He didn't want to land there. He wanted to go back to where he... he did get a heading from them on that to go back and the lights were going off and all kinds of warnings. We finally got back. We hit the ground and it just sputtered and that was it. We were completely out of gas. That was a thrilling moment.

Mr. Misenhimer

Pretty close call.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, we thought we were gonna have to jump. He didn't want us to jump. He didn't want us to do. That was his way. He was commander you see. He's a good old fellow. I meet with him every year.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would have been kind of a black mark on his record though if y'all would have had to jump out.

Mr. Gayle

Oh, gosh yeah. If he'd have had to land at another base, I think that was another thing you see, because... not only that, but they would have given our navigator, which was a good old navigator, a good fellow, he's older than I am if you can believe that and he's still alive. He gave such good directions it took him right over the field and the pilot

couldn't see the lights on the landing. I don't know. Everybody else saw them but he didn't. And he was running the course right there in the guiding of the plane. Anyway, it gave us quite a thrill there in that training. They gave us orders to go to Nebraska. I think it was there in Lincoln, and at Lincoln we picked up a plane, a brand new plane, brand new B17. And we flew that up to Bangor, Maine and we spent a night there at Bangor, Maine (maybe 2 nights). And then we took our flight to Europe. We flew the plane, we flew the plane all the way.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where all did you stop?

Mr. Gayle

We stopped in Iceland, that was the first stop, then we stopped where we landed the plane. We landed it there in Scotland...no, well in Wales. It was in Wales, Valley Wales.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went all the way from Iceland to Wales without stopping?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

You just made one stop on the way over then.

Mr. Gayle

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you by yourself or were other planes with you.

Mr. Gayle

Lets see now, wait a minute. After we left Bangor, Maine, we went to Goose Bay.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, okay, Labrador.

Mr. Gayle

Labrador, and then from Labrador to Iceland, and then from Iceland to Valley Wales.

That's where we went.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there other planes with you or just yourself?

Mr. Gayle

No, we were just more or less flying by ourselves. I don't remember seeing any other planes that were flying with us, but they might've been behind us or something like that, but they all went that route. That was a northern route. Now there was a southern route that went down across...I don't know where they left the United States, but they left at I think from Florida probably and went down across the Azores. That was the southern route, but we took the northern route.

Mr. Misenhimer

And about when was that you went overseas there?

Mr. Gayle

Well, we landed there in Valley Wales on July the 4th. That was in '44 right after the D-Day invasion. This was July the 4th and I can recall that because I remember we saw some English girls, some effies and some WAFs and they were saying, 'Oh, we're gonna go to the 'yonks' birthday party'. (laughing) And we'll see them there you know. Like

on July the 4th you see, and they call that the 'yonks'. A few more training trips while we were there in England. We did them around an area that was called Deopham Green and the Wash. And then they got orders that they were only supposed to have 9 men and we had 10 men on the crew. They got orders that 9 men were gonna be going on a crew and the tenth man, he could volunteer to leave that crew and go on and join another crew in the 15th Air Force. I was in the 8th Air Force. And I had to go down and join the 15th Air Force.

Mr. Misenhimer

The 15th was in Italy, was it?

Mr. Gayle

In Italy. To get down there, though, we had to go on an old...the name of the ship was Arendel Castle, part of the Castle lines that they'd changed into a troop ship. And we went down through the English Channel and then on down to pass the Bay of Biscay, and then on into the Mediterranean by way of Gibraltar. And at Gibraltar, they watch everything that goes through there very carefully because they had these small blimps and they had a bomb on them or something there and anything that would go through that channel at Gibraltar there, which isn't very wide, they had ships go in one way and then back out the other way. You see, they do this all day.

Mr. Misenhimer

Patrolling through there.

Mr. Gayle

Patrolling, and if they'd see a ship or a submarine, they'd let them have it. They'd call in the Air Force, too, and dropped a few bombs on them and that usually ended that expedition there.

Mr. Misenhimer

One of the big concerns was submarines coming into the Mediterranean through there.

Mr. Gayle

One of our big concerns going down on that troop ship there in that Arendel Castle was we had to do a number of drills. It did have maybe 1 or 2 big guns on it but that was it that they put on, and they weren't very heavily armed. And we had to do these drills every day.

Mr. Misenhimer

Abandon ship drills.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, that's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you escorted at all?

Mr. Gayle

No. Well, I don't recall any other ships that were with us going down there.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many men would have been on it? Any idea?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, I'd say at least a thousand or more.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it pretty crowded?

Mr. Gayle

Pretty crowded. Pretty crowded. And some of them, too, would get sick, get out on the water and get sick. They had these big GI cans that they could go and throw up in, or if you could make it up to the deck from down below, you could spill your contents there out into the ocean.

Mr. Misenhimer

Feed the fish they'd say.

Mr. Gayle

Feed the fish.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long did that take to go down there?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, I know it took at least a week or so, a week or two.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in Wales or England? How long were you there?

Mr. Gayle

I was there from July 4th until right around the 1st or 2nd of September.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fly any missions out of there?

Mr. Gayle

No, I did not fly any missions with my regular crew. They hadn't started their missions yet but they were getting ready to start them and we got this thing and I volunteered to

leave the crew. I didn't like it but I did. I volunteered to leave. I didn't know what was ahead. But I did know I was gonna be going to the 15th Air Force from the 8th down in Italy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in Wales the whole time or were you in England?

Mr. Gayle

No, we were there at what they called the Wash. It was a place called Beopham Green. The Wash was not too far from there and not too far from Norwich because I remember going to Norwich. And too, while I was there, beings that I was gonna be off that crew, I said, well, I've got to have a lot of time to fool around and I heard that Glenn Miller was gonna be down there in a town not too far from there called Bedford, and I went, I hitchhiked down there to Bedford. That's the only way you had of getting around was hitchhiking, and if you were lucky you got a good ride. Like one of the rides I got was in a... what do you call those cars?

Mr. Misenhimer

One of those London taxis or what?

Mr. Gayle

No, no. It's a name.

Mr. Misenhimer

A British car?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, they had the MG or they had the...

Mr. Gayle

Rolls Royce.

Mr. Misenhimer

Rolls Royce you got in.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, a Rolls Royce. They had the Rolls Royce and I got to ride in one of those one time, some official. He just saw me out there on the road and picked me up and took me.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Gayle

Staff Sergeant. They made us all staff sergeants when we went overseas. They did that for a number of reasons. One, it was a dangerous place to be up in the air, and two, that if you did have to bail out and have to land in enemy territory that you would be treated better than an ordinary person – a private or a corporal or something like that. You'd be a noncommissioned officer.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that the Germans treated the noncoms altogether different than the enlisted men.

Mr. Gayle

Well, they had to treat them differently because the rules of war say that they do. They can't make you work and all that sort of thing. All the things that some of the other fellows would have to do, if you were a noncommissioned officer, and that was another

reason that they made all of the crew except...well, some of the other crewmen had a step up like the engineer. He would probably be maybe a first sergeant or a...

Mr. Misenhimer

Master sergeant or something?

Mr. Gayle

Master sergeant, yeah, and the rest of us would be just staff sergeants.

Mr. Misenhimer

There were what, 4 officers aboard right?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, 4 officers: pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, and navigator.

Mr. Misenhimer

And the rest were enlisted men.

Mr. Gayle

And the rest of them were enlisted men.

Mr. Misenhimer

And the enlisted men would all be a sergeant.

Mr. Gayle

Yes, all the rest of the planes, all the men on there would be staff sergeants.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in England, did you get a chance to meet any of the local people?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, yes! In fact, I met an old friend of mine that was a friend of our family because he was teaching at that time down there in Cambridge, and Cambridge wasn't too far from

where I was, too. And so I went down to Cambridge and I went down there a number of times. Like I said, I had some time on my hands there for a short period of time, and I went down there to Cambridge to visit him and that was J. Frank Dobie. He was teaching down there at Emmanuel School down there in Cambridge. Cambridge is made up of about 23 different schools, and they're all over the place. It's not like our universities that usually have 1 campus and that's it. They're spread out all over town in different places. He took me on a tour of Cambridge and took me down by the bridge that Cambridge got his name. He said, "That's the Cam River and this is the bridge." I had a nice visit there with him. There was an old professor there at Emmanuel College. He had frock coats, the real thing. And you know, Frank was in Army ODs, and he was different (laughing). This old fellow came up to him cause he would see Frank out there with a few crumbs of bread or something feeding the swans. And he would go out to feed the swans and they wouldn't come up to him. He said, "Well, what can you do to help me do this so that I can feed the swans?" He said, "I don't have any trouble with my little dog. My little dog when I come in, I sit down on the floor and he comes jumping up and he licks me and I give him some food or something and he loves that." And he says, "But I've been trying to feed these swans and they won't come up to me." He said, "Well, why don't you do like you do that little dog. Go out there and sit in the water and maybe they'll come up there and they'll take the feed out of your hand." (laughing) He didn't much go for that too good.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was having his leg pulled by Frank wasn't he?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, he was pulling his leg. And he showed me, too, an old tree there, a big old oak there. It went down to a, it was a pretty campus down there, it went, open grass area and a few little oaks and then they had that river that went down and that's where the swans would usually be, down on the river. And he pointed out, see that old oak there that was supposed to have been over 2,000 years old. He said, "It was there at the time of Christ." And that was good measure, and I remember seeing that and it was a beautiful oak that was kind of partially overhung the river. Big, too, big around. Almost as big as that big oak down there at Goose Island. About that big, and I don't know how old that one is. What do they estimate the age on that?

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm not sure either.

Mr. Gayle

But anyway, this one may have been there for 2,000 years he claimed at that time. And then I had to leave. I had to get back to my place.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the local English people, did you meet any of them?

Mr. Gayle

I met a few.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were they?

Mr. Gayle

Most of them were very cordial and everything except that you knew what they were thinking – that the yonks were overfed, overpaid, and over here.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard them say oversexed also.

Mr. Gayle

Oversexed, yeah, that's right. They did say that, too. Overpaid, oversexed and over here...overfed, too. Yeah, they didn't have everything, and we did compared to them. We did because they were really having a hard time, but they were glad to see any American that came because they knew that that was somebody there helping them fight.

Mr. Misenhimer

You left there about the 2nd of September for Italy.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, we left there sometime in September and I got to Italy in September, too. I remember that. It was the last part of September. And then from there, I was put on another crew.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you land in Italy?

Mr. Gayle

We landed at Naples. We had also stopped off there at Malta, and we didn't get to get off the ship, though. They didn't let us off the ship, but they had these Maltese fellows that would come up there in little boats and try to trade some wine or something for some money or whatever you had. We got off there at Naples though. And then we went on up to a place called Foggia. Foggia, Italy, and I was assigned to the 2nd Bomb Group there. In England, I was with the 452nd.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bomb Group?

Mr. Gayle

Bomb Group, and now I was with the 2nd Bomb Group.

Mr. Misenhimer

You lived in tents there you say.

Mr. Gayle

Yes, we lived in tents, and I can't remember when I started on...I probably did some of my first missions out of there in maybe the first part of November. And your first 2 or 3 missions, you would have to go with other people.

Mr. Misenhimer

An experienced crew.

Mr. Gayle

An experienced crew. They didn't let you go with your own crew. They called them bastard crews where you might be made up maybe 2 or 3 different crews there. But they'd get the more experience people to help you get used to flying missions which you're supposed to do. And it was on my second mission it was with one of those kinds of crews, and the pilot, great fellow, didn't want to take his plane up in the first place and because he said there was a magneto or something that was not working properly and he knew it. But they had a ground engineer that came on board and he said, 'Oh, this is all right. Take it off.' Well, we got off and went on our missions, we rendezvoused and took off our mission, which was around Munich somewhere. And we made the mission all right, but coming back we started losing some engines. One engine went out. We flew on for a while and another one went out, and by this time we were flying over

Switzerland. After the 3rd and then the 4th engine went out. We were gliding, and the Adriatic was out there in front of us. We had just gotten over the Alps, too. By the way, coming through the Alps, the Swiss I think took a shot at us, too. We weren't supposed to be going through there but we had to get back all right. And we'd have to go down through some of those Alps flying that way and then finally, our last engine went out. We were heading, and I guess we might be a mile or so off of a Bay and he started, kept it up there as good as he could. He was a good pilot, and when we got out over the Adriatic over there about maybe a mile or a half a mile and came down and ditched it. Well, ditching operation, it was a whole different thing, too when you get down in those planes because it was a good thing we were in a 17, but sometimes with trying to ditch those B24s, I was glad I was in a 17 because in ditching those B24s, they'll break apart. It's just the way they're engineered, and this old 17 stayed up there on top of the water long enough for us to get out and get in our dingies, rubber dingies that we had on the plane. After we landed in the water, water comes rushing in and it was up to here.

Mr. Misenhimer

Up to your chin, huh?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, it's coming like a big whirlpool in there and I started to climb out and a fellow behind me got panicky and he pulled me down, and I thought, 'all right, I'll let him go. I'm not gonna add to the panic.' And he got out all right, and I did. I finally got out. I took my time. I didn't try to push anybody aside or anything cause you just had a small opening up at the top.

Mr. Misenhimer

At the top of the plane.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, if you jettisoned that off. And then pull some levers and the dingies would come out one on each side. They would self-inflate. And we got out there on the water and we were floating in the dingies and we noticed a boat coming our way from land. We could see the land from there by the way, and it was some Germans that came out and tried to rescue us. About that time, though, some (at that time they called them beaufighters), I don't know whether they were beaufighters or Spitfires for sure, but they were a different plane, and this was part of the air sea rescue. You see, after you ditch and you get in you dingy, you have in that dingy what they call a Gibson Girl. It's shaped, it has a flag on top and it comes down and it's like this and it goes down like this. And you put it between your legs to hold it firm, and that's why they call it a Gibson Girl – because of the shape.

Mr. Misenhimer

The curves it has there.

Mr. Gayle

The curves in the Gibson Girl. And then we have a tube about this long and you take off the end of it and stick it in water and it causes that balloon to go up with a wire on it as an aerial. And then on this Gibson Girl is a key and the radio operator usually gives out the mayday as best he can, the location if he can. Well we weren't very far from Venice, I know that, when we landed out there in the Adriatic. These beaufighters came by though, and they didn't want the Germans to rescue us. They wanted to do it, and they came down and put a spray across their bow to strafe them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Machine gun bullets.

Mr. Gayle

Machine gun, they open up their guns and they come down, strafe across the bow. They don't do it to hit them the first time, but if they don't turn around and leave, then they will the next time. It's just a warning because they don't want to kill rescue vehicle you see, but they want to warn them, 'get away.' And shortly after that happened, two older planes came. They would call them Walruses. They were pusher type engine planes. That means that the engine was on the back of the wing instead of in front. I think they had been in existence since '23, but they weren't new. But they used them for the air sea rescue, and they took part of us in one and part of us in another one.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were amphibians. They could land on the water.

Mr. Gayle

Yes, they could land on the water, amphibians and they landed on there and we got our dingies into these. They helped us in there. And they discovered when they were maneuvering around, one of them accidentally hit the other one's horizontal stabilizer on the back of the thing and it was damaged. But that pilot took off with it damaged like that, and that had to be the one I was on. So the only way he could get us out of there was to taxi on the water, and he taxied out there on the water and we had these spotlights coming down across the water, you know, looking for us. They knew we were out there somewhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was the Germans looking for you.

Mr. Gayle

The Germans looking, yeah, the Germans looking for us. When they would be fairly close or anything like that, we'd kill all engines and just sit. It's cold. It's November, not too far from Thanksgiving, and we were freezing because we were all wet from getting in the water in the first place to get into those dingies. And I remember how cold it was. You didn't want to move. Once you sat down, you get the water warm around you and if you moved around, you'd change the situation in your flight suit and you'd be sitting there shaking. Anyway, they gave us a drink. They called it splicing the main brace. It had some kind of brandy in it. It had a very warming effect. They gave us that. That splicing the main brace was part of the regular thing that British had. Every day at a certain time, they would give them a shot, just one shot but that was it. That was their ration for the day. It was at a special time, about 3 or 4 o'clock in the evening. That was the usual thing. Anyway, we finally taxied all night and we could see that there was a battle going on, artillery battle, on land. We could see it, you know, from where we were out there on the water, and we had to also watch out for mines out there. They had a fellow out sitting on the bow of this thing, of this ship, boat.

Mr. Misenhimer

Airplane.

Mr. Gayle

Airplane, Walrus they call it. Sitting out there on the bow, and he would direct the pilot, which if he saw anything out there, he'd...

Mr. Misenhimer

Give hand signals.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, hand signals. He could see you. It was pitch dark practically, but you could see a mine in the water if you had to. Anyway, we went on that way until about morning and then another British air sea rescue...I was gonna tell you it had an artillery battle going on. This is around an area called Ravenna on the mainland. The sky was lit all the time. You should have seen that artillery battle. I'll tell you, it was something to see.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would be, yes.

Mr. Gayle

And pretty exciting along with what was going on around us. Anyway, we were picked up by a regular kind of a PT boat later on that took us on into Leghorn I think it was. And then from there, they flew us down to Bari and I remember on that flight, I had to fly down in a B24. So I was sitting there and these boys that were the regular crew of the B24, they said, "Look out there." They said, "Look out that wing." Almost ALL of the wings go up and down like this almost like a bird. They'd go up and down, and golee, I said, "Those wings might fall off of there you know. I got excited and tell them, "Where is the parachute?" I was gonna jump. Anyway, it was their way of joking around. They got us down to a hospital down there in Bari, Italy and it was there that they interviewed us, too. They had a fellow that came over there from headquarters and he interviewed us and everything. And then the other Walrus that was carrying part of our crew that was with us there (I've got pictures of that group anyway if you want to see them)...

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure.

Mr. Gayle

They had quite an exciting thing because as they were leaving that area, a couple of Messerschmidts I think came and as they were landing, they tried to strafe them when landing. Some other planes came along and ran them off, but they were determined if they couldn't get us, nobody's gonna have us. They'd have been waiting for us they knew we were out there and everything. That bunch had a pretty exciting thing on coming back and landing, and the story when they guys came all together, headquarters thought it was so good, they gave it to *The Stars and Stripes*. I've got a copy of that old *Stars and Stripes* that tells about it. And it also made their history, the 15th Air Force history thing. That was my 2nd mission by the way. I got really introduced, didn't I?

Mr. Misenhimer

You sure did.

Mr. Gayle

And then on about 3rd or 4th mission, we were climbing to altitude and the pilot, we were now going to be heading toward the target and the lead pilot went into a cloud and he turned. This plane over here on this side. My pilot couldn't see him turn. This pilot over here on this side could see it turn and he started coming in on us and he hit, his vertical stabilizer in back there was bent down like this. He hit our wing and ripped it pretty well and to where it was dangerous. And we were quite excited then I remember because the tail gunner saw it coming, and he started yelling. And when he did that, the co-pilot looked over on his side (see the pilot's on the right hand side and the co-pilot...). The co-pilot saw it, too, and he pulled the ship up to let the thing go underneath us but we had

that much of a collision already. It didn't take much. So I was scared. I didn't hear it. I heard the tail gunner yelling – "He's gonna hit!" (whiney voice) He was desperate. I never will forget that. And they too, they had a hearing on that particular thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to turn back?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, we jettisoned our bombs out there in the Adriatic, because that's where we had just rendezvoused and we were heading to the target, and we had to jettison our bombs and then try to make it back.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the other plane?

Mr. Gayle

The other plane did the same thing. It jettisoned their bombs and it landed at the same airfield, I don't know where it was but it wasn't our regular airfield, they landed. Of course, we wanted one real close the closest one we could find. They took pictures of it and everything and I'd like to have a picture of that because it was one of these things that happen so fast that you don't have a chance to do anything but...but we jettisoned everything we had, too, to make the ship lighter because that wing was damaged. It's a wonder it didn't hit the engines. It missed those engines just probably by inches. That tail, and he landed and he landed over there. I can remember seeing the ship over there and they took pictures of that, too because they had a hearing. You're gonna see that they always look around to blame somebody you know. I don't know if they still do. I don't know, some of the people delight in trying to do something like that to some of

these poor boys that were just trying to survive. Anyway, we landed and my pilot had to have his hearing and if it wasn't for one of those fellows that was with him there in the same place that took up for him, because he said, "I know Willy's position because I almost had that same sort of thing happen to me." So they gave him a clean thing and he wasn't blamed for the thing because he didn't see the lead ship turn in this cloud, which nobody could if you was looking right straight ahead.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the plane that hit him? Did they do anything to that pilot?

Mr. Gayle

No. He had seen it from his position, he could see it. Now you don't always see everything from the same position, different positions, and that was about my 4th mission I think it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Boy, you're off to a good start!

Mr. Gayle

Oh, yeah, sure was. And then things went fairly well except that I remember when we would have to do 2 or 3 missions all in a row. In other words, you wouldn't have any rest time, but I'd be so tired coming back that you felt like that if you fell down, you'd just stay there. (laughing) That's the way you felt. Anyway, after we had that situation for a number of missions, I think it was my 14th mission then, we were going to be flying I think over Vienna bombing something there in Vienna – a marshaling yard probably or something like that or it was a chemical plant or something. Anyway, on that mission, we could see the flak was awfully heavy and you could see it off to your right before you

ever approached it. You could see what you're gonna be getting into. That's another thing. That bothers you. You'd see that flak was out there awfully heavy before going in. You got up and you make a right turn and then you come back across the target. You see, that's the usual procedure. And then you had an awful wind from the north at that time of year. This is February. You had a wind from the north, and that helps you get across the target a little bit faster, builds your air speed. Anyway, that was the method they used to bomb a target. And as we got over the target, we dropped our bombs, shortly after that. It was a great 'whomf!' And the flak shells had gone off and knocked out both the engines, I think it was on the right side, and the co-pilot and everything helped the pilot. We trimmed the ship so it wouldn't go into a flat spin. You got to be pretty quick. If you get into a flat spin, you're lost. You lose all that power on the right, tends to pull your plane around into a circle like that and that circular motion, people inside are trapped by centrifugal force. And you can't get out. We got through that all right but we were losing altitude pretty quick, and finally we got down to about, I imagine, about 5,000 feet something like that. And the pilot decided that we couldn't go on much longer that way so he gave the signal, which is ring a bell, he told us on the intercom though that he was gonna be doing it. And when he rang the bell, he wanted us to jump. He asked the navigator, "Where? Where?" And the navigator said he didn't know because he had to throw out his instruments...when we get in a situation like that, you start throwing out stuff to lighten ship. See old town Papa? It was right outside of Papa when we bailed out. After I bailed out, you know they gave us the signal to bail out and everything, well we had a big fellow that was a tail gunner. Usually they aren't that big but he was about your size. And he got out and they gave a signal to bail out, you

pull a handle and the door flies off. So if we open that door it starts cycling, going back and forth. It just flies off. And he jettisoned the door. Well, he got into the doorway there and he looked down and when he did, I thought, 'Oh, he's not jumping', and he looked around at me. I was behind him and his color was just an ash and gray. It looked like all the blood had left his face, and I said, "Jump!" And he wasn't responding so I gave him a kick cause he was blocking the door, big fellow blocking the doorway and I gave him a kick and he tumbled out like this you know. (laughing) and I followed right behind him because I didn't want to think about it, about jumping. Anyway, when we landed, we landed in a snowfield, kind of a snowfield but it had some trees not very far from us. We weren't anywhere close to each other, different distances. I didn't know where he was and he didn't know where I was or any of the others that jumped behind us. One of the fellows behind us...when I went to pull my chute, I pulled it and nothing was happening.

Mr. Misenhimer

The rip chord.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, rip chord, I could see it out there. I'm upside down but I wasn't looking that way. When that plane, that prop wash catches you, it tumbles you. It will tumble you and then if you didn't have your head up or in some way responding to it, you wouldn't be ready to pull the chute. Well, I jumped with my hand there on the thing so when I undid it and tumbled and everything, it pulled my helmet off and everything. But I pulled it. I could see the rip chord out there and nothing was happening. Well, I knew I had the chest pack, and it had some zeuse fasteners, what they call zeuse. It had buttons on it where

you can pull it this way and it opens up, so I put my hand in there and pulled it out and I saw that little pilot chute come out and it catches and then it pulls the rest of the chute out. And it finally did pull out. And then I was floating down and it's the most peaceful time cause you don't hear any ground noises. By this time, the plane was out of... I don't even hear the plane, maybe vaguely just a little bit of noise. The tail was out of sight there too. It went out of sight fast. And I'm floating down and then I looked down. It's a big snowfield and I could see when I was going in this direction. Well I was going really in this direction, backward. And I reached up to twist my strands around, my parachute strands.

Mr. Misenhimer

Shroud lines?

Mr. Gayle

Uh, huh. I was gonna turn to face it. Well I just about got that far and then I hit. And I hit backwards and so I just tumbled backwards in the snow to ease my fall. Of course, you don't try to ease your fall, you'll break a leg easy if you don't tumble. We never had any training on parachutes. That was it. You did emergency jump, that was it. I got down and of course, I didn't know where I was because our navigator didn't know where we were either because he'd thrown out all his stuff, he jettisoned everything. Well I went over and sat – there was a big old log, kind of an oak tree it looked to be – big old log about this big around.

Mr. Misenhimer

6 or 7 feet in diameter, huh?

Mr. Gayle

It had fallen and it was laying out there. I got behind that and I started trying to find my maps. I hadn't escaped yet. That's what they called it. In an escape, they had a little kit, a needle with a sewing thread in it and it has 3 pills that will keep you awake for 3 days. But they don't give you anything more than that because it would kill you if you had to stay awake any longer. You've got to rest. Anyway, these 3 pills and maybe I don't know if there was a D-bar in there or not and some maps, nice pretty, silk maps. They're made out of silk material. I thought well, I don't know why I thought I could ever find them myself on a map cause I didn't know where I was. But then I heard some shooting and it was coming out of this woods area and I got down behind this log and just sat there. and they weren't any further than from me to that wall there.

Mr. Misenhimer

10, 12 feet, huh?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, these guys, they had these guns and everything and I just stood up. Well it just shocked the hell out of them (laughing) cause they didn't see me at all. I had seen them coming up. Of course, they reacted by pulling their guns out you know and they gave me the motion to hold up my hands and I did. Then they came up and started looking me over and checking me and they found my 45 pistol that I carried in a shoulder holster. Everybody has one of those. That's another thing, and they pulled that pistol out and looked at that bore on that 45 and they said, "Golee!" that was a cannon compared to what they carry. Then they started, they wanted to know where I was from. I told them I was originally from Texas. "Texas? Oh!" They'd seen cowboy movies and stuff like

that. They loved to see all those things. They weren't bad at all. And then they started marching me toward this little town, Papa.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now were these German soldiers or were these Hungarians?

Mr. Gayle

Hungarians.

Mr. Misenhimer

Civilians?

Mr. Gayle

No, Hungarian soldiers. They dressed in uniform. They never did show us pictures of their uniforms, they'd shown the Germans and some of the others but I don't remember them ever showing us what a Hungarian uniform looked like. It wasn't much different. It was kind of an o.d. color. Anyway, we marched about a mile I guess to this village and they took me into this village and then into kind of a waiting room. Besides, by the way, when I was out in that snowfield, the first person I saw was way across this field over there and he had a dog and he had a gun and he was motioning to me to come over there. They had already warned us about civilians and don't go toward any civilians. They'd always tell you not to go to a civilian cause if you do, they're liable to just take you into their basement and shoot you and that will be the last you'll be heard of. They won't know whatever happened to you. The civilians, they didn't have any rules or regulations. Anyway, they took me into this big hall kind of like a big dance hall. In fact, I think it was in this little town of Papa. And when we went in there and everything, this guy, he

wore a pistol and he was kind of military, kind of halfway military and halfway civilian, started to question me.

Mr. Misenhimer

They spoke English?

Mr. Gayle

He could speak English, yes. He could speak English, and he started to question me. He asked me what my name was and I told him and then I told him what rank I had and what my serial number was. And then he started asking me, "What bomb group you from?" And I wouldn't tell him and so he says, "You'd better tell me." And he put his fist up like this you know like he was gonna be swinging at any minute and hitting me. And I said, "No, you won't." I was very cocky, and it was something I should've known better but didn't. You know when you're young, you do crazy things. And I told him, I said, "I'm not gonna answer any more of your questions like that, military questions." He said, "Oh, you will, too." And he pulled out his pistol. He said, "I'll shoot you." As luck would have it, there was a Hungarian officer coming in and he saw what was taking place and he saw how he had the gun out on me and he told him, "You put that up." he told him to put it up. He said, "We don't shoot American prisoners." And that saved my life right there because I don't know whether he would have shot me or not. I was scared the rest of my crew was already in there. They were sitting up in some seats across the way over there, some chairs across the room from him. And when he was asking me, they were pressuring me, "Tell him! Tell him! Tell him anything!" You know, and I was made up my mind I wasn't gonna tell him anything. You know how you get bull-headed?

Mr. Misenhimer

(laughing) 21 years old, huh?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, about 19, 20, and he finally had to put the gun away and everything and this officer told me, "We don't do things like that. We don't kill prisoners or anything." But this guy, I don't know if he was civilian or what he was, but he had only a partial type uniform on. Most of it wasn't, but he had a pistol. And anyway then they took us into another place, kind of a station like I guess they had there that was a Hungarian Army barracks and they kept us there for a day or so. Then they told us they were gonna, they put us on a train and this train was the first time I got any kind of good something to eat and then they gave us this rye. It was rye grain that was made into a soup and it was nice and warm. And of course, we didn't have a very warm place or anything like that because it was cold outside. That was done by the Hungarian Red Cross, they gave us that. And then they took us on into Austria and that's where they turned us over to the Germans. And then from there, we took trains, boxcars, whatever they had. The trains we were on, the other trains, were regular passenger cars that the Hungarians had us on. I think I could have done alright if I could have stayed with those Hungarians, but these others, they were just flat Germans. They were just flat mean. They took us on into Vienna there and we knew it had been bombed. We had bombed any number of times you know, and they took us into it and put us in jail. We sat there for a day or two then they came and got us and told us we were gonna be going out of there. They don't ever tell you where you're going. They just tell you you're gonna be going. Of course, we didn't have anything to carry anyway, just the same old clothes, same old thing every

day. They took us on this train, they put us in these box cars, and traveled all the way up to Frankfort on the Main. Going up there a number of times, we were pretty scared because in these boxcars you know, they aren't marked in any way, and they were always targets for fight planes. We knew that. Anyway, we went down there on Frankfort on the Main and they marched us down through the streets there and the civilian population, when they saw us and they found out we were fliers – if you're a flier, they want to shoot you or kill you or do something – so they had stones and everything else. They threw those things at us, spit on us and everything. The guards said, "If you make any kind of response, we're not gonna protect you in any way. You'll just be on your own." Then they took us on in Frankfort there and they put us in individual little cells. Each one of us was in a separate cell, and they'd leave you there for a couple days in hopes that when they do come to talk to you that you'd be ready to talk, interrogate you. And they might even use stationery on their desk that looks like Red Cross, have red crosses on them like that. That's just fake. They'd do all kinds of tricky stuff. They were full of tricks. Anyway, they did finally interrogate us and I didn't tell them anything and they didn't get anything out of me. I saw one old boy later on that was very terribly mistreated. He did something that touched them off good because they beat him up. Anyway, after we had been marched through Frankfort on the Main and everything, they put us on another train and took us to a place called Wetzlar. It's a little place that they make the Leica cameras and they make the Leica engines and stuff like that. Those mino cameras, too come from Wetzlar. We stayed there for possibly a month longer because it was a transitional place. It was called Stalag LU9, which is an Air Force, it was where only Air Force

prisoners are taken. And then they'd shuttle you out to various other camps around. Lets see if I can show you.

Mr. Misenhimer

You've got a map here of where the camp was.

Mr. Gayle

I got this in a book up in Savannah. It's called *We'll be Home by Christmas*, and I haven't been able to find the book again. I went back up there this last time and they didn't have it. I don't know what ever happened to that book. But it was about a fellow that had made this same thing from Nuremburg later on. They marched us from Nuremburg to Moosburg. But anyway...

Mr. Misenhimer

What day were you captured?

Mr. Gayle

February 7th, '45. Started my missions in '44.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your entire crew survived, right?

Mr. Gayle

No. There was a fellow that was on, the other gunner there, and he was a waist gunner and he didn't make it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you still belly gunner at that point?

Mr. Gayle

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

The person you pushed out of the airplane, did he make it down okay?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, he did and he told me, he said, "If you hadn't done that..." This is just another map of Hungary. This is the *Stars and Stripes* I told you about that had that story in it. It tells you at the top, I didn't write that on there. That was written on there by a lady that sent this paper to my mother. She worked there at Bari. She was a nurse, and she was from Beeville. And she saw it and she lived, that's an old *Stars and Stripes* from my Mediterranean edition of *Stars and Stripes*.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is that time when you had lost the 4 engines.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah. That was this story. They put it in there. It made that thing in there.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'll look at it after while. The other gunner's chute didn't open, right?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, the other fellow's chute didn't open, the fellow that jumped after me. This came out of their official papers. I have this friend, his name is Chuck Natalie, he lives up in Oklahoma, and he knows how to get records and stuff like that. And he wanted to get the record of my crew and my plane and my number and all that, and he found out everything you could possibly think that he might find out. This is in National Archives because they brought these German records and that was probably made in Wetzlar, I don't know. They were up there in Wetzlar. They already knew, the people on my ship, these are the

people that were on my ship, they already knew and this is the fellow right here that his chute didn't open. You see that little cross by him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Matula, M-a-t-u-l-a.

Mr. Gayle

It was Matula, M-a. They misspelled a few names. They got mine right, but they didn't get this fellow here, this fellow. His name was Young, Dwayne James Young, Y-o-u-n-g. See, they didn't an N, they did a B. You see what I mean? They made a lot of typo errors, but generally everything they had on there was the truth, see. Look at here. This is where I went down, Papa. This is what got me, flak. This is one of the places that we flew close out of, Foggia. Out of Italy. I was from the 429 Group, 2nd Bomb Group. You see in here? And B17, what kind of plane. We didn't tell them any of this. They knew it. When they wanted to interrogate us was just to verify.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were in the 429th Bomb Squadron, is that right?

Mr. Gayle

In the 429th, I was in the 2nd Bomb Group.

Mr. Misenhimer

429th Bomb Squadron.

Mr. Gayle

Um, hm.

Mr. Misenhimer

And the 5th Wing?

Mr. Gayle

15th Air Force.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, the wing here it says 5th.

Mr. Gayle

It was the 5th. They had everything right.

Mr. Misenhimer

A couple miss typos.

Mr. Gayle

Miss typos, but...

Mr. Misenhimer

The planned course is listed as July 2nd, but actually it's February 7th.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, February 7th, that's it, yeah. February 7th, that's the way they write it. That's the way they write it on their thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, they put the month first and then the date.

Mr. Gayle

He told them what he wanted up there in the National Archives and then they sent him a copy. See this is Dulag-Luft Wetzlar, see? That's where they stamped it, confirmed it.

Mr. Misenhimer

W-e-t-z-l-a-r, Wetzlar.

Mr. Gayle

Wetzlar, uh, huh.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've had people tell me that (somebody just the other day on the B17) they landed someplace and Axis Sally came on that night with all their names and welcomed them.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, they knew. They knew all these crews, they knew where you came from. We didn't tell them that. They had that information already. That was baffling. How they would get all that stuff... It would be so accurate except in the spelling.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, well somebody typed there.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, and he did pretty well otherwise. They got everything all right, got my name right. By the way, when that fellow I told you about, my tail gunner, his name was Berger. And when they saw that Berger, 'ooo', they straightened up and just said, "Why aren't you fighting for the fatherland? A German fighting against... you fight us!" Anyway, when I was there at, I think I was there at Wetzlar, I wanted to tell you this story, too. There was a German colonel and he just took a few of us in at a time, maybe 2 or 3 or 4 people in a room and he started talking. And he'd say, "I don't know why you're fighting us at this time. This war is gonna be over pretty soon." He says, and he says that you're gonna win the war cause everything in Germany will be kaput. But then you'll have to do something to help us put us back on our feet. You'll have to give us gold from Fort Knox. I thought to myself, "well, now how does he know that you're gonna have to do that?" He says, "Because everything in Germany is gonna be kaput.

That means that our money is not gonna be worth anything nor anything else is gonna be worth anything without gold from Fort Knox.” He didn’t tell us that what Hitler had stowed away in Switzerland and places like that and then Germany in caves. I’m seeing this on the History Channel today. Anyway, he didn’t know about that apparently or any of that. And he says, “You’re gonna have to give us gold from Fort Knox to be able for us to get our money back in circulation and everything.” And he says, “Anyway, you’re gonna be fighting the Russians and we’re gonna be with you.” That was his prediction. It almost came true.

Mr. Misenhimer

That’s right, almost.

Mr. Gayle

Almost came. All what he said was just all right down the line. He was trying to win us over anyway cause he knew that Germany was gonna be getting it pretty soon. But it amazed me how accurate he was because they did give them gold from Fort Knox. But later on they found all this other gold that Hitler had. I don’t know what they did with that except to...I don’t know what ever happened to all that.

Mr. Misenhimer

I don’t either.

Mr. Gayle

After I went there at Wetzlar, they sent us down (by boxcar of course) to Nuremburg. In Nuremburg they had a big camp there, and it was partially made up of where they had the Olympics cause we passed by that Olympic field and you could see that big Swastika on top. You’ve probably seen pictures since then where they blasted that Swastika.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've seen that many times.

Mr. Gayle

Well, that was done by the Americans later when they came through. But it was a barracks. The barracks there had been used by the Olympians in 1936 I think it was. Wasn't that when Jessie Owens and all that bunch...

Mr. Misenhimer

Jessie Owens won the track whatever it was.

Mr. Gayle

100 yard, I don't know what else he won. He won a bunch of things and Hitler refused to give him the gold medal, cause he'd been giving all the gold medals to everybody else but he wouldn't give it to Jessie. Anyway, they had an open field. It was next to this place, and it was there that they started bringing in prisoners from Russia. And I can tell you, there were just lines and lines of them, and they marched them into this open area. It was marked off by barbed wire, but there wasn't any tents, any anything. And they made those Russians sit out there in that, this is cold. This is February, March. It snowed there on the first of May. We could see those poor fellows over there trying to keep warm sitting out there in an open, wide open field, no trees, no nothing to hide behind to keep the winds and everything. I'm sure that some of them died out there. it was a terrible thing to watch. And you can see why some of the Russians took it out on them so much after they had won and we had, too and everything. Anyway, at Nuremburg there, I ran into one of the fellows there that I had gone to school with at Schreiner, Jimmy Clayton. I got to visit with him a short period of time because he had to go on. We were going to a

mess hall. You never know when you see somebody that you know. Never know.

Anyway, in this camp, we had a little bit of a, I guess you would say, some bad things to happen, too, because it was there that we had selected the people that were supposed to come in and bring the German rations – soup. We had soup twice a day, potato peeling soup, Rutabaga soup, cow pea soup, some kind of soup. No salt. No salt. They didn't put any salt in any of our food. And you'll lose weight on that kind of thing. I got to be almost like skin and bones. You just don't know what keeps you going but you do. You have a determination. There at this camp when they brought this soup over to them, we had these guys that were supposed to receive it you know, and they were gonna dish it out to us in our little tin cans. We didn't have any bowls or anything. And you were lucky if you had a spoon. I traded an old German for a spoon. I had a cigarette, an American cigarette. I didn't smoke but that's the reason I had them, and I traded them for that. And in these Red Cross rations, there was a little cigarette thing and I saved those. And some soap, too, Swan Soap. And they didn't have any soap. They were short on soap over there and they were ready to trade for those things very well – cigarettes and soap. I got up one night and we had kind of a meeting and everything and I told them what I thought. I thought that there were some of those fellows that were doing that sort of work that they were getting more than their share of food. And I hit a tender note I guess cause one Major jumped up and said, "You're accusing some of our people of doing things? Am I right?" And I said, "Yes, I am." And he said, "I'm gonna have you Court Martialed." I said, "That'll be all right with me." It was just so happened the next day, they got us out and they told us we were gonna have to march and we were gonna have to march from there to Moosburg, from Nuremburg there to Moosburg. We

left the Nuremburg camp, and down to Moosburg it was about 100 miles. I think they had Nuremburg on that. I don't know. Anyway, when we were marching, it was cold, rain, sleet, snow, and they didn't stop at darkness. We just marched all through the night, and these guards, too, some of them had dogs. And they told us, "If you try to get away and you get out, we're gonna turn the dogs loose." Which they did do cause they started counting them and there was 2 or 3 of them missing so they turned those dogs loose and we don't know what ever happened to those fellows that had done that. They tried to get away I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

Why were they marching you from Nuremburg to Moosburg?

Mr. Gayle

Mainly because they didn't have any way of...their transportation was held up by this time. This was toward the end of the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

Why were they moving you?

Mr. Gayle

Because they wanted to keep us as long as they could as a kind of a Trump card I guess you would say.

Mr. Misenhimer

Because the Russians or someone...

Mr. Gayle

I guess as kind of a hostage situation. The Americans were advancing on the thing. And you see, in March and in April, they made a big push, the Americans did, and we weren't

too far from them. In fact, they were on the way. And they were taking ground. They moved us out instead of leaving us there, they wanted to have us, like I said, kind of a Trump card I guess you say or trade or try to do something with us.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were trying to keep you from being rescued.

Mr. Gayle

Liberated.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many were there on this march?

Mr. Gayle

I can't tell you.

Mr. Misenhimer

A large number?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, I'd say it would run into a thousand or more, maybe more. I don't know how many. I couldn't tell you. I was just with my group and that was it. And I remember the first day out, these people that I had been talking about, they noticed that they could walk up and down the line and all that sort of thing and walk back and all that kind of stuff, and they had more energy than everybody else. I had them come up to me and say, "You were right! What you said was right last night." And anyway, I said, "Well, just remember when they go to Court Martial me." Anyway, we were going under this underpass, a little town called Furth right outside of Nuremburg, south, going south now. And these 2 planes appeared above us. They were fighter planes.

Mr. Misenhimer

American?

Mr. Gayle

American. And one American pilot, he looked up there and he watched them and he said, "Boys, I hate to tell you this but they're gonna be coming down here." And boy, he no more than got that down and they started coming down toward us like that. We all hit the ground as much as we could and I don't think they were really trying to get us. There was some V2 rockets behind us on parallel to the road on the railhead, and it was about from here, oh, I don't know. I can't see out there, a good distance away from where we were.

Mr. Misenhimer

A block or so?

Mr. Gayle

Maybe half a block. They were on a railhead parallel to the road. Do you understand?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah.

Mr. Gayle

And we came under this underpass and he saw this guy, he was a fighter pilot, he said he knew by their motions. He said they were gonna come down on us, and right as he gave us that warning, that was just for us, some of those others, they didn't hear it. Anyway, when we looked out there, here they came. They were with all their guns and everything else. Boy, we hit the ground and everything and dirt and everything just flying this way, noise, just everything. And they passed, they just made one pass because they must've

seen us. But they had already committed themselves. When you commit, you commit. No matter what's in the way. It killed 2 or 3 of them there. One of the boys was about from here to that wall from me, Canadian boy. I remember that, and he had a shrapnel or something hit his head and just like a buzz saw, just sawed off the top and didn't realize it. But when I got up, I finally was able to stand up because my knees were knocking, I was so scared and malnourished, too. And some other fellows in back of me said, "What's that on your back?" I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." He reached over there and he pulled off some gray matter. It was this old boy's brains... all around, and it was on 2 or 3 others around there, too. Then they took us back on the road, we got back on there and as we were going through the countryside, we ran into some of those old German farmers. And I remember one place we were at, we stopped off there for a little while at his place and he had water and he had some potatoes. And he had some potatoes in a big pot and he had a fire under this pot and it was on swivels. And then when he thought it was boiled enough, he would have shunt. He'd tilt the pot, into this thing and it would go over to a pigpen. He had an inside pigpen. Well when I saw him do that, I jumped in that pigpen and started trying to get some of those potatoes for myself, fighting those pigs. The pigs were trying to get them, too. He got a big laugh out of that. I finally had some soaps, swan soaps that he wanted that I had gotten from the Red Cross parcel. They had these parcels, they seldom ever gave you a whole parcel. It was supposed to be a man per parcel, but they seldom ever do that. The least I had was had to deal with another man. One time, one day we had to have 21 different men to one parcel. And you can imagine it took all day to try to divide that up. What was in that parcel took all day.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would be in a typical parcel?

Mr. Gayle

Powdered eggs, klim milk (milk that's a powdered milk), a D-bar (maybe 2), some cigarettes, and that's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how big would a package be?

Mr. Gayle

A pack's about this big.

Mr. Misenhimer

A foot long, 8 inches high, something like that.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, about this high.

Mr. Misenhimer

About 6 inches.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, about 6 inches high, and it had it all packed in there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that for one meal or more than one meal?

Mr. Gayle

It was supposed to have been for one man for a week. Supposed to have been, but...

Mr. Misenhimer

There was quite a bit of stuff in there then.

Mr. Gayle

Well, it was very limited. It was very limited for what we had but it was something. It was something. It was better than what we were getting – just soup twice a day. And this here sops, bread. This bread that was made from potato flour and sawdust, and it was heavy. Oh, it was heavy! It was like a brick! Hard as all get out! And we had maybe a slice or so a day and some soup like I said. We used those klim cans that had the milk in them to eat out of for the soup. If you didn't have a can, you didn't get any soup.

Mr. Misenhimer

How often would you get a Red Cross package?

Mr. Gayle

You were supposed to get them one man to one package a week, but we never got that. I never got a package by myself. It was always with at least 2 or 4 or 6 or 7.

Mr. Misenhimer

Would you get them once a week, or?

Mr. Gayle

Once a week.

Mr. Misenhimer

You would get them once a week but not enough.

Mr. Gayle

Not really. It got pretty close like toward the end of it, they didn't even give us anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you jumped into this pigpen, did the guards try to stop you or anything?

Mr. Gayle

No, no they were all somewhere else. We were kind of on our own right then. Yeah, but this old fellow laughed and everything. I traded him later on for some wheat. And not only that but he said, "Aw, Hitler's gonna save us. He's gonna save us with a secret weapon." He had a secret weapon. Well, he did have one. I found out since then that they did have a secret weapon that was on the way. And we saw the first jets, too, because they flew over our camp. And I'll never forget. First when I saw it, I thought, 'what in the world was that?' They warned us the night before I went down that we might see because some other fellows that day had seen them and they had gone through there for a mission. They say they'll go through you so fast, you don't even have a chance to shoot them down. You won't even get a close look. You'll know something went through you, or past you, but you won't be able to hit them. No use you try to shoot them. That scared a lot of them right then. If you were gonna shoot at something, you got a chance to shoot at, but you haven't got the chance to shoot at it, it makes it pretty hard to think about. He told us about that and sure enough, they showed up and every now and then they flew over this camp there at Wetzlar.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you mentioned the V2 rockets were sitting back there. Did you ever see any of those fired or anything?

Mr. Gayle

No, never got to see them fired, but I saw them covered. They were covered over with a canvas tarp of some kind.

Mr. Misenhimer

Camouflaged or something?

Mr. Gayle

I guess they were camouflaged or something. We looked over there and we could see it looked like the shape of something like a V2 rocket or something like that on a rail head you see. It was a joining road. The distance from the road to the railroad was probably less than 50 yards.

Mr. Misenhimer

These 2 planes that strafed you, do you think they thought you all were Germans or what do you think?

Mr. Gayle

I don't think they knew that we were even down there. They saw those rockets on that rail head and I think they were gonna attack and that they were gonna come down and try to hit them. But luckily they didn't hit the rockets or we would have all been killed, got blown up. But they hit us and like I said, one old boy, too, had a big hole in his side at that thing. And he lived for maybe five minutes and he died. And then there was a German guard that a piece of shrapnel or something had come along and it had took his ear off, just like a knife had done it. And he was running around trying to find his ear cause he wanted, I guess they would sew it back on or something. But he was looking for it and never could find it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did the shrapnel come from?

Mr. Gayle

Some of those shells and everything that was being fired and possibly they might've dropped a bomb, a small bomb or something out there. It's hard to tell. All that

confusion and all that loud stuff coming in on you, you're not gonna look down the barrel of it (laughing) to find out. You're gonna get down on the ground as close as you could. But I remember I was covered in mud from the shells and I looked for my little packet. I had a few little things that I kept from the Red Cross and everything and it was gone. I figured that either a shell hit it or something and it just vaporized it you know. So I picked up that dead boy's stuff. He had one and I picked his up and I used his. It was either that or nothing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, sure, yeah. Was this on the first or second day of your march? About what day of your march?

Mr. Gayle

That was the first day.

Mr. Misenhimer

First day of the march.

Mr. Gayle

First day. It sleeted and snowed on that thing and we had some of these... we were down there in Bavaria, that area, and hills, mountains, had to climb those things you know. It wasn't easy. It was hard. And at night, sometimes, one time we slept in an old castle on straw of course. They put straw in the hallways or something on stone or rock, hard.

They put a little straw down and we slept on that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did you march? How many days?

Mr. Gayle

I was trying to think. I know it was the better part of a week. It had been about 100 miles and they couldn't move us too fast. We just couldn't move. That was all there was to it. We did what we could. Staying up was hard enough as it was. Anyway, they moved us down to Masedary and everything. One morning, I got up, I had gotten this wheat from this farmer and I had it in an old sock. And I was making myself breakfast, trying to. We were getting some shavings, wood shavings, and start a little fire. I had ground up some of this wheat in an old coffee grinder that one of the boys had traded somewhere along the line. He let me use it to grind my wheat better, and it tasted pretty good. Better than what I had been getting. And I was kneeling down trying to get this thing started and everything and I heard this 'Zing! Zing! Zing! Zing!' And I thought, "Oh, my gosh! They're shooting at us or something." And I looked around and here came an American jeep had come through a camp there and met a little bit of resistance or something at the gate. And they came in and they looked us over and oh, about 5 or 10 minutes later, here comes the command car and it was Patton. It was part of Patton's 3rd Army bunch. And he went on down and he went down to another place that there had been occupied past these tents and everything, a place that had a barracks. See because they moved us in there, they didn't have anything else but these tents and maybe a little bit of straw. And if you didn't have a blanket or something, you just fell.

Mr. Gayle's Son

What place was it that you were that everybody had diarrhea and there wasn't any...?

Mr. Gayle

That was on this march, too. There were 2 or 3 days like that. On this march, when we got on there to the road passing by some of these old fields, German fields out there, and

somebody noticed that there was a potato field. When we stopped, the guy said, "Dig up some of these potatoes." Well, I didn't know it at the time the way they... a lot of times, they fertilized their fields with human fertilizer. And we got some of those potatoes and they weren't clean and we didn't have any way of cleaning them but we ate some of them – not cooked and boy you talk about dysentery. We had dysentery, and that night, they took us into this place. I don't know where it was, kind of a barrack place and they only had a certain number of toilets in there and everybody was sick. And we couldn't go outside so they would go to a window and put the tail out the window. It was miserable. You can imagine. Terrible things happened.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did that last?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, it lasted with me for 2 or 3 days. Some of them got so sick. My pilot, he was with a group in back of me, he got so sick that he contracted pneumonia and yellow jaundice, and he almost died. Americans came just in time to save him. I didn't know all of that until about 50 years later when I got to meet him again and talk to him about it. And he said, "I almost died over there on that marsh."

Mr. Misenhimer

Dale Gold.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, Dale Gold was my pilot. He was from South Dakota, Milbank. That is right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were the officers separated from you all?

Mr. Gayle

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were all together?

Mr. Gayle

All together. No, they didn't separate us. The only separation was done by choice because they had you in a certain group, they might want to keep you there so they can keep count on you.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day were you liberated then?

Mr. Gayle

It was on April 29th. That was the day, too, that Hitler I think had committed suicide.

Mr. Misenhimer

Something like that. I'm not sure of the exact date.

Mr. Gayle

Right in that time, and I remember that one of the things he had told them to do was to kill all prisoners of war. That was one of his last orders. They didn't do it because they were afraid of what the consequences would have been had they done it. So they didn't carry out his order. He was like giving empty orders.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were a prisoner for about two and a half months then. Two months and 22 days.

Mr. Gayle

It was about 3 months, wasn't it? I hadn't figured it. It was closer to 3 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

Almost 3 months, yeah.

Mr. Gayle

Almost 3 months, but that was long enough. I was skin and bones.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you weigh when you were liberated?

Mr. Gayle

I don't know. I don't know what I weighed because I don't remember them weighing us, but I remember by the time I got home, which was about a month later, that my mother just couldn't believe. She could see ever vein in my body. And when I went to take a bath, she just started crying.

Mr. Misenhimer

About what did you weigh when you got captured?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, I imagine I weighed about 150 pounds or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What do you think you lost? 25, 30, 40 pounds?

Mr. Gayle

At least, at least 40 pounds.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were right close to 100 when you were...

Mr. Gayle

Maybe 100. We were all in that shape. There was just nothing to eat. The Germans were short on rations anyway about this time in the war but that wasn't any excuse. They had some but they wouldn't share it with you.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened when you got liberated that day? What happened next?

Mr. Gayle

Well, after they liberated us and everything, we were just free to do whatever we wanted.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean in that camp, did they bring in food for you and did they give you...?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, there was. There was a fellow that came in. He saw the condition we were in and what we had. And he said, "I'm gonna go out and I'll get you some stuff." And he had a jeep or a command car or something and he went out and he raided a German cheese factory and got some blue cheese I think they called it. And he also had gone by and got some bread. And he had packed his jeep up just full with this bread and stuff and came back in and gave it to us. These fellows were nice to us you know what I mean? But what we'd been through, it was good to see it. And I remember tasting that first piece of white bread again. It's like angel food cake you know. You just don't realize how badly things can get until they get bad.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did you stay in that camp before they moved you out?

Mr. Gayle

I was free for about a week I guess, and I went to... I walked. I was walking (I shouldn't have done it by myself particularly), I left by myself and I went, I started walking down this little old country road and I ran into this German couple on a wagon. And when I got even with them, those old Germans wanted to spit on me. Boy, I was so mad I was gonna jump up on that wagon. I controlled myself and that kept me from doing it, but I went on and I finally went into this little town called Lambshut I think it's spelled. And in that town, there was a bunch of tank boys from, I guess, the 3rd Army. Tank boys were in this thing and what they would do is just go into town there and some people in a house there, they'd just tell them, 'Get out. We're gonna take over.' And that's what they did and I went up to one of these tank boys and he saw me and I told him that I was from this camp. They treated me like royalty. They took me in and fed me and gave me a bed in the house and everything you know. It was real good at that time. Then after that, I walked all the way back to this camp. That was a dangerous thing to do by yourself because there were still some of them Germans running around out there that were ready to fight with anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when they liberated you, they didn't bring in a group to take care of you or didn't do anything like that?

Mr. Gayle

No, not right away.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just left you on your own.

Mr. Gayle

Until they got things organized then they took us from there, they flew us out of the field or something close by there, a German field, and they flew us out of there to France. We flew to Reims, France. That was where they had signed that peace treaty. And then from there, they took us down to a camp on a channel. It was either Cherbourg or anywhere along there. They have these camps that they named cigarettes – Phillip Morris, Lucky Strike, stuff like that. I think I was at Lucky Strike as I recall. And I got this phone call and it was from a fellow that was from my hometown. He had seen my name on this list. He had a brother too, he was looking for. And he had been a prisoner of war as well, and he came down there and took me for a ride around town there for a little bit and everything.

John

That fellow was an attorney, wasn't he?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, he was an attorney, Joe Wade.

John

He became a district judge here.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, after my father died.

John

But he was over there handling some sort of war crime things. What was it?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, he was handling, he was part of the Judge Advocate bunch.

Mr. Misenhimer

Getting ready for the war criminals and stuff.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, he was doing some work toward that. And he asked me about some things and I told him just like it was. And then the day that we were down there at Camp Lucky Strike I guess for maybe a week or so, and this plane came out on kind of like this parade ground. It wasn't a parade ground. It was an area that landed a small plane. It landed and I was gonna go to lunch and I was over there by this lunch tent and we saw him come in and we saw them marching over there toward us and everything. And I didn't pay much attention and then they came into the mess tent there. And he came about like from you to me. He came in put his hand on this fellow's shoulder. And he turned around and he saw he had the 5...

Mr. Misenhimer

5 Stars?

Mr. Gayle

Guess who?

Mr. Misenhimer

Eisenhower?

Mr. Gayle

Right. He said, "I just wanted to come by and see how you fellows are doing and is there anything else we can do for you? Can we help you? Are you getting plenty to eat?" He said, "I wanted to see what kind of food you're getting and see that you're treated right." We told him we were just fine and he says, "I want y'all to gather round me out here." And he got out there on his open area and we all gathered around him and he says, "How

do you want to go home? Now there's 2 ways we can do this. We can put you on a ship pretty quick if you don't want to be comfortable. We'll put as many as we can on that ship or we can take just a few of you at a time on the ship. How do you want it?" And of course everybody said, "Get us out of here as quick as you can." The next day, they said, "Get your pack and lets go." That's exactly what we did. We headed for the ship and we were off.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ship were you on, do you recall?

Mr. Gayle

I think it was called the Robin.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of ship was it?

John

Finish with the fact that you're in transport. I'm sorry.

Mr. Gayle

On this transport, they thought we would get sick. These were all old POWs.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were all ex- POWs.

Mr. Gayle

Ex-POWs, that's right, and they had these trash cans like I told you down in the hold. I already had the experience before so I knew what it was gonna be like. Some of them didn't. They had a hard time making it. They got some of them got so sick, they were ready to give it all up. Too, shortly after we were liberated and everything, some of them

went out and got some wine, stuff like that. And especially when we were in France, and I remember one old boy drank a bottle of wine and he died. They told him not to do that. They told him to eat, but eat moderately. Don't stuff yourself. You stuff yourself, you might be killing yourself, and I guess he did. They just didn't believe them and drank this bottle of wine and he was dead the next day.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your system had been so deprived for so long.

Mr. Gayle

So deprived, right. It would take you time to get things back that you could eat, eat a full meal. We had to eat just a little bit at a time. And I remember during that period of time, it was at Wetzlar and at Nuremburg, I remember our stomachs would just rumble all the time for something to eat. That's how bad it...of course, all of them telling us they were gonna take us out and shoot us and stuff like that, I didn't suffer any of those times. I remember one time, and they took us here shortly after I had been captured, and I don't remember what time. It might've been there at Papa, I don't know, but this officer came in and he had his dog with him. And they were talking to me and kind of interrogating me there, trying to talk to me, and this guy let that dog...kicked him right close to get me. I looked around and saw all those teeth and I jumped back and I was scared of him. "Ha! Ha! Ha!" They got a big laugh out of that. And then, too, I remember one time when my engineer on the roster right there. You can see his name on there. It's Kasar. And he loved to smoke and these Germans would smoke the cigarette down to about the ash on the end like that you know. Then they'd throw them down. He would reach down to pick one up, stomped his hand and everything else. Mean! Just mean stuff!

John

One tried taking your ring, didn't they?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, well one of them, too, tried to take my class ring I had. I still have it somewhere, and I put an objection to it and like I said, another officer like I said came toward me. "We don't take things from prisoners." You know. You had some of them with some, like as you say, with some sense, and others that didn't. Some of them would go over by the book and other's wouldn't. I had this McKay, this fellow on here, he was a character. He had married an Italian girl. Right here. He had married an Italian girl and he wanted to get back to Italy. He wasn't gonna go leave that place without going back and getting his wife. He got out there one day with an MP bunch and they were bringing in these German prisoners and they gave him an MP thing to put on his arm and he got up in the trucks there and he did a, called German brief case. If a German was anybody at all, he had a brief case. All had brief cases, all had papers in them, and he got one of these brief cases and went around and got all rings and stuff like he had lost his, you know. And they took him. One of them had gotten his stuff, so he got watches and stuff and he got a brief case full of them. And he got down and he saw a motorcycle, some old boy had it. He just took the motorcycle. He says, "I'm taking your motorcycle." That's just the spoils of the war. Today, you tell people this and they say, "Oh, he should have been prosecuted" and all that kind of crap. They didn't think about, nobody thought about that sort of thing. You do what you wanted to. And they're so resentful about some of these people. I don't doubt that some GIs found some of that gold and took it home. I don't doubt that at all. I think that's a human thing that they would have done. But anyway, he

got this motorcycle and he headed for Italy. He had these watches and stuff so he could trade for whatever he needed. I think he finally got back over here. I didn't get to talk to him. I don't know this fellow Chuck Manley did. He tried to call all these fellows and talk to them and tell them, and some of them he could find and some of them had died in the meanwhile.

John Gayle

Chuck Manley was a friend of Dale Gold's. He was a lot younger than these fellows. I would say that he was 50. And he knew Dale Gold's kids.

Mr. Gayle

He knew Dale Gold real well because he played golf with him. As a young fellow, Dale would take him out and do things with him as he did his own son, you know, and treated him like that. And so he had a fondness for Dale and he wanted to do something for him when he got back you know, and he was so interested anyway in the war. He's just that kind of a fellow. He was interested in everything – what happened and how it happened and all that sort of thing. He went to the trouble of getting most of all this information that I have. I have stuff here that shows you the bomb runs that we made and where we made and how many bombs were dropped and all that kind of stuff, all that kind of technical information. He had gotten that, gotten that for us. He got that I think from Maxwell Air Force Base down there in... isn't that Mississippi?

Mr. Misenhimer

I believe it is, yeah. Alabama is where they had most of those records. I think Maxwell is in Alabama. That's where most of the records are stored.

Mr. Gayle

They were in Alabama, okay. It's either Alabama or Mississippi. I don't know which it is, but one of those places. I had gotten all this information from there and also from the, like I told you, the Archives. We got this from the Archives up in Washington.

Mr. Misenhimer

National Archives, right. On the ship coming back, how long did it take you?

Mr. Gayle

I would say at least a week and a half.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you land?

Mr. Gayle

We landed up there in New York. We saw, we actually landed I think in New Jersey.

They're all so close together right there that I think it was New Jersey where we actually came to shore.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then what did you do when you got there?

Mr. Gayle

They put us on a train and we headed down for Fort Sam Houston... again. And on the train, we couldn't get off or anything. We weren't supposed to get off but some of them did and there were a couple of old boys that had been rangers on there, on this train.

They had been POWs, too. And they had had a hard time, and they got to drinking and they like to tore that place up, that railroad car. I got out of there, but boy they got mad at each other and everything. Everything, you know? Get off! Got drunk, got some liquor

somewhere in New Jersey or somewhere up there. Just went to pieces. I remember they tore that car up good. The old conductor was shaking his head. That's all he could do.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this a troop train or a regular train?

Mr. Gayle

It was a POW, troop train.

Mr. Misenhimer

It wasn't a civilian train. It was strictly troops.

Mr. Gayle

No, no, strictly troops. There weren't anybody but troops.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got to Fort Sam...

Mr. Gayle

We went out to San Antonio and there was the first time I had a chance to really call my parents. They didn't know whether I was living or dead.

Mr. Misenhimer

They didn't know, huh?

Mr. Gayle

No, they hadn't told them. The only thing they knew was that I was missing, and when they heard my voice, they just like to had a fit. And I was up in San Antonio and I had an aunt up there and she came out and picked me up and then I called them from her house.

They came down and met me there at a place that they called...

John

You said it was Hilltop or something. you told me about it.

Mr. Gayle

Hilltop! That's south of San Antonio there you know. And they met us there at Hilltop. My aunt took me out there to Hilltop and that's where I met them. Of course, it was a joyous reunion because they didn't know if I was still alive or not. I had sent them some postcards from Germany when I was in the camp. They gave us, every now and then, they gave us a little postcard but they had never gotten any of those. I didn't get them until I had been over here about 3 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then they came in, huh?

Mr. Gayle

Then they came in.

John

You beat them all.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, beat them all. It was like that at that time. Just like trying to buy a new shirt. We couldn't find any shirts. I'll never forget, I was going to stay up there in Allison for a while and this girl was wearing these boys' shirts. And I thought, "Good Gosh! We can't even buy a shirt and there she's got 2 or 3 shirts on. Why is she gonna be?" that was old Sissy Dartey. You probably heard of her over here at...

John

In Corpus.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, okay.

Mr. Gayle

She was Tarpen, Dudley Tarpen Dartey's. Dudley Tarpen was her mother. Her name was Tarpen. But she was kin to Mrs. Dartey, Mrs. James Dartey... was a Tarpen. She was up there at the school at that time and I thought she was wearing all these boy shirts and we couldn't even get them. We were kind of jealous of her. The outfit got a COI and I got to see Patton. And it was a pretty exciting moment.

John Gayle

Did Patton say anything to you when he went through that camp?

Mr. Gayle

No, uh uh. No, he was just driving by. He was not much further from here to the wall from me.

Mr. Misenhimer

About 18, 20 feet, something like that.

John

You didn't see his pearl handled pistol?

Mr. Gayle

No, I didn't see that. I didn't get a chance to. He just came by and that was it. He went into one of those barracks that had some permanent parties there that was there. I mean, fellows that had been there for a little while. And he walked in and they said that nobody did anything. Nobody jumped up or anything like that and he finally just said, "Oh, fellows. Just that's alright." And turned and walked out. At least I'd have had one

experience, but they didn't know who they were or anything else you know and he just surprised them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, I had some, I've lost a bunch, I used to have pieces of shrapnel that came out of my plane I kept for a long time. It was in my belongings when they sent them in. I lost a lot of stuff, though, because some of those fellows, they just come by your place and strip it when they know you're gone. I lost a lot of those cameos. I had bought a lot of cameos over there in Italy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Locketts, yeah.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, and they're made out of shell that pearl stuff. And they had little pictures on them and different things. This is my POW Medal. I finally got after about 30 or 40 years.

Does it have a date on it? 12 of '87, I guess. I guess that's what the day it. They had a ceremony up there for us in that field up there in San Antonio.

Mr. Misenhimer

Randolph or Brooks?

Mr. Gayle

Not Brooks, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Lackland?

Mr. Gayle

Lackland! They had this ceremony for, oh, maybe a half a dozen of us that were still there and still alive.

Mr. Misenhimer

What other medals did you get besides that?

Mr. Gayle

I got the...here's an old thing I got home with. These shoes, I've got two of them wooden shoes. This is what they would use out there in the...it had a string or something. It held them together you see. I got that, I found those in an old warehouse after I was liberated there in Moosburg, but the men that worked out on the farm all wore those wooden shoes out into their barnyards. And they'd take them off at the door, which they had a little felt slipper was on their foot.

Mr. Misenhimer

Inside of this like a sock really.

Mr. Gayle

They didn't stay inside. The felt slipper stayed on their foot all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

They wore them inside this?

Mr. Gayle

They wore them inside that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Like a sock but it was...

Mr. Gayle

Like a sock but it was really felt, a thicker felt. Another thing I found over there in one of those places I got.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is a piece of cloth with the German Eagle.

Mr. Gayle

This is the things they had on their uniforms.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, and this is similar, but it's a felt patch or a patch I should say.

Mr. Gayle

I used to have some shrapnel like I said and some other things, too. Oh, I had an old beer mug, too that I brought back that a looted out of this house that I stayed in with those tankers. Had the old boy's name on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now what was this used for?

Mr. Gayle

They had it on their uniform somewhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, I see. This large...

Mr. Gayle

Probably on a shirt or something.

Mr. Misenhimer

This looks like it's about 8 inches long by about 4 or 5 inches wide, piece of cloth with this on it. that's interesting.

Mr. Gayle

You see it's old. I did have a big swastika flag. I don't know where it is now, but it was partially torn up because I had a cousin and she had these, her friend, one of her friends that she had known – a boy – had this thing and he gave it to her. Then she read in the paper about somebody getting caught up there in San Antonio (she lived up there in San Antonio), being caught up there in San Antonio with a bunch of Nazi paraphernalia you know and stuff like that and she got scared and started trying to tear this stuff up. But somebody stopped her. She didn't get it all torn but she got it partially torn. She was gonna tear that swastika off of that, it was big long. It was a flag that would reach from up there to the floor.

Mr. Misenhimer

About 8 feet.

John Gayle

He taught history for 38 years, so he'd tell the history classes about his service. Or is that a false memory of mine?

Mr. Gayle

I don't remember that. I don't know. I might have. I had more stuff than this at one time, but I lost it from time to time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now on your medals, did you get an Air Medal?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, I got an Air Medal. I'm gonna show it to you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a certain number of Oak Leaf Clusters with it?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, it had on that thing there what I had I think, the discharge paper. This was the pilot. His name was Hale, and he was really a good old boy. He was from I think South Carolina. This fellow right here was a bombardier and he was killed, oh about a week or so after I had gone down. He was killed...

Mr. Misenhimer

On a raid?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah. Well, flak hit him. He was up there at the front and he was the lead bombardier on that flight. You see, I have these records that this guy found. You know, I told you. It tells about his thing.

John Gayle

Here is a picture of my dad.

Mr. Gayle

Here's a picture of my pilot. Now that, you see that bunch there was that bastard crew.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was a mixed crew there.

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, when I ditched.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did they do to the engineer that told them that the magnetos were okay when you lost the engines?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, they didn't do anything. As far as I know, he's still alive. Here is the crew that I went overseas with.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you, did you ride the same plane all the time or different planes?

Mr. Gayle

Most of the time, we flew the same plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it have a name?

Mr. Gayle

In my case, we'd lose planes like the one we ditched, stuff like that. Of course, that wasn't our plane anyway and when we had the air collision in that plane and we didn't see it again.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got in that mid air collision there.

John Gayle

Did that plane have a name?

Mr. Gayle

Yeah, it had one, yeah. It was called the...

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm looking at his DD214 that he got the EAME, European African Middle Eastern.

Mr. Gayle

Some of my crew went back to that.

Mr. Misenhimer

With one Silver Star on it. It does mention the Air Medal, but did you get an Air Medal?

Do you know?

Mr. Gayle

Didn't I show it to you?

Mr. Misenhimer

There is an Air Medal, yeah. It is listed on your DD214 there. I didn't see it.

Mr. Gayle

I know the Prisoner of War isn't on there because I didn't get that until about 30 years later, 30 or 40 years later.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you finally discharged?

Mr. Gayle

Does it say on there?

Mr. Misenhimer

It says here 'date of separation October 28, 1945.

Mr. Gayle

That's when they finally let me out, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any health problems because of your being captured?

Mr. Gayle

No, not that I know of. I've got diabetes and stuff like that now.

Mr. Misenhimer

But as far as any problems because of that.

Mr. Gayle

I don't think I did. I had anything that resulted from that.

John

It's hard to say. He has a kidney condition that the doctors say is due to so many things.

There's different things that when you get to be 81...

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO Shows anywhere?

Mr. Gayle

That one, I guess that was a USO Show. I had seen one where they had Glenn Miller at, but I don't know if that was USO or I don't know what they called it. It was just a thing, he was going around the country entertaining the troops. And over there in England, it was shortly after that that he died.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Axis Sally anytime?

Mr. Gayle

I don't recall hearing her but I've heard some recordings since then.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got home, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Gayle

Other than the fact that when I'd hear a siren, I'd want to get up or something.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill?

Mr. Gayle

Yes, I used it for my education, part of my education and then I used it to buy a home.

That was the only thing I used.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had some pretty hairy experiences. Which one of those would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Gayle

When I was scaredest was when we got strafed that time by our own planes from the fire I guess you'd call it. That was a scary moment because I got up and my knees was just knocking. And I remembered, too, when I was a little old kid. I was only about 5 or 6 years old maybe and I was running across the street in my hometown there, and my cousin was, too. But I got hit. I got hit by a car and I was knocked down and my feet got kind of tangled up in the wheel and everything. And this woman, she got out and she took a look at me and her knees were knocking. And I thought, "Oh, my goodness." It took me back because I remember seeing her knees knocking, I knew how scared she must've been.

Mr. Misenhimer

Earlier you were telling me that when you were over there as a prisoner, your knees got sore and hurt so bad.

Mr. Gayle

Oh, yeah!

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Gayle

Well, your bones just ache from the cold. You don't have any warmth. We didn't have any fires or anything like that and your feet would just ache. I mean, you knees would just ache. I just remember how cold it was and how it bothered me. I don't like cold because it brings me back to those times I had it so bad that it wasn't even funny.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned the mid air collision they had over there. Was there any type of accident in any of your training here? Did you lose any planes from accidents or anything like that in training?

Mr. Gayle

No, not that I can recall. I don't remember any planes that had been lost in training. I'm sure some of them had had them, but we didn't have any. No. I lost 2 planes over there, but one that's probably out there still off of Venice somewhere and then that one that I bailed out of. I don't know what ever happened to that one that had the mid air collision.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall?

Mr. Gayle

Not right off.

John Gayle

To this day, he hoards soap. Me and my mom saying he's getting that soap in case we need to trade it for something because that soap kept him alive.

Mr. Gayle

It did.

John Gayle

We have a whole hamper full of bars of soap at the house. We thought well, he was ready to do some bargaining.

Mr. Gayle

I don't know what I was thinking.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they reduced your crew from 10 to 9, what position did it do away with?

Mr. Gayle

They just asked for a volunteer.

Mr. Misenhimer

No I mean if you were only gonna have 9 people on the plane instead of 10, what would that other person have been doing?

Mr. Gayle

Oh, just whatever they...

Mr. Misenhimer

Your being a ball turret gunner, I'm sure they put somebody else in that ball turret.

Mr. Gayle

Yes, they did. They put one of the other boys. He said he wanted to try it, so he did and he flew a mission in the ball turret. He was an old boy from California. He was crazy.

Mr. Misenhimer

On your missions, did you have escorts by fighter planes?

Mr. Gayle

No, we didn't have escorts on all of them, but a good portion of them were and they were at that bunch from Tuskegee.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have the Tuskegee Airmen for escorts with the red tails in the P51s?

Mr. Gayle

Red tails, that's right. Some of those old boys, a few years we retelling this story. They were listening on the radio. They were monitoring their radios and one of these old boys called up and said, "He wanted to ask permission to abort." And the leader said, "Oh, no, no. You just go on a little bit more." "But my oil pressure!" and all that kind of stuff. He said, "No, you just come on with us. Just come on with us." Later on, he tried to do it again you know, and he says, "Oh, no. The only thing wrong with your plane now is that you just a scared nigger." (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

They say those Tuskegee Airmen were really good escorts.

Mr. Gayle

Oh, yeah. They did fine. I don't know. We'd see them out there. We always knew where they were because they had the red tails on their plane. We were always aware with that.

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