

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Michael J. Natt
Guthrie, OK
July 25, 2009
Waist gunner B-17
8/25/44 Shot down on First Raid
Stalag Luft III
Three months march to stay ahead of Russians**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is July 25, 2009. I am interviewing Michael J. Natt by telephone. His telephone number is 405-260-0324. His address is 4800 E. Forrest Hills Rd., Guthrie, Oklahoma, 73044. His Daughter, Sharon Watts, is assisting in this interview. 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.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mike, I want to thank you for taking time today to do this interview today and I want to thank you for service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Natt

Ok.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birthdate?

Mr. Natt

September 18, 1920.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Natt

In Swoyersville, PA.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Natt

Yes, I have 3 brothers and 1 sister.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of them in World War II?

Mr. Natt

Yes, my older brother was in the Navy in World War II and my younger brother was in the Air Force, I was in the 95th Bomb Group and he was in 100th. The one that was in the Navy, he was shot down and he was in the water for nine days in a dingy, whatever you call it, and rescued.

Mr. Misenhimer

All three of you were flyers then?

Mr. Natt

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did both your brothers come home from the war?

Mr. Natt

Yes, they did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Are either of them living?

Mr. Natt

No, all my family is gone. I am the only one that's left. My sister died two years ago in June 28th and she was 91.

Mr. Misenhimer

If your brother's were still living I liked to interview them, but of course that's not going to be possible.

Mr. Natt

No, they are both gone.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, you grew up during the depression, how did the depression affect you and your family.

Mr. Natt

Oh, very, very, very bad. We were on a farm and we had food to eat but we sort of had a dairy farm where we sold milk and we were selling milk for a penny a quart. We had carry it about 2 miles so that they would pick it up and a 40 quart can of milk was 40cents. We had potatoes and stuff like that, tomatoes and so there were a lot of canning on the farm and we done pretty good on the farm.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you milk these cows by hand?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many were there?

Mr. Natt

We had about 10 or 12.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of cows were they?

Mr. Natt

We did mostly all Holsteins, we had a couple of Guernsey's and 2 Jersey's.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Natt

I didn't finish high school. I went for a short period of time in KTHS, Kingston Township High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your last year there?

Mr. Natt

Oh, lets see, about 1939 or 1938.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you left high school?

Mr. Natt

I was just on the farm and I went into the service when I was 20 years old. I went into the service on April 18, 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which branch did you go into?

Mr. Natt

I went into the Army Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were a volunteer?

Mr. Natt

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a choice of which branch you went into?

Mr. Natt

Yes. I opted Air Force, and of course when I first went in they put me in transportation, motor pool for two years before I could get on the line.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Air Corps?

Mr. Natt

I don't know, I just decided that I wanted to fly and I wanted to take flying lessons although I was never able to.

Mr. Misenhimer

Everybody wanted to be a pilot.

Mr. Natt

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

When I was growing up I couldn't wait to get in and be a pilot, but it didn't work out that way. Where did you actually go in at?

Mr. Natt

You mean where I signed up? I went in at Wilkes-Barre, PA

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you take your basic training?

Mr. Natt

In Tallahassee, FL.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel down there?

Mr. Natt

By train from Wilkes-Barre, PA to the big station in New York, Grand Central station.

Then I rode the Silver Meteor train all the way down to FL to the coast, what is Jacksonville, FL. Then we took a cattle train across to Tallahassee, FL.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip down there?

Mr. Natt

It was nice going down. I had a compartment, a sleeper and all that. First class I was going.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you been that far away from home before?

Mr. Natt

No, that's the first time I had been anywhere away from home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back in those days people didn't do a lot of traveling.

Mr. Natt

No, they didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got down there what did you do?

Mr. Natt

Well, I got on the base and I was in a barracks for five days before they knew we were

there because our squadron was coming up from Tampa, FL and they came in and one day a full-bird Colonel walked in the barracks there and there was about eight of us in there and this Colonel said "How long have you been here?" and I said "We've been here five days." And said "and no one has been here yet?" and I said "no." Then some other kid came up and said "I know who you are" and he said "you do? How do you know?" And the kid said "You're the mess sergeant". "Why do you say that I'm a mess sergeant?" and the kid said "Because of the chicken on your shoulder." It was funny. Then in about a 15 minute span, everybody comes in and put clothing and shoes and everything else on us and everything was too big for me that they were giving me. I got them all transferred, changed later on.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you traveled down there, you were in civilian clothes?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were in civilian clothes for those first five days then?

Mr. Natt

Right. We had the whole barracks to ourselves there, the water was there. We had a little ways to get to the mess hall and we go down there and eat.

Mr. Misenhimer

They would let you in with your civilian clothes?

Mr. Natt

Oh Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Natt

Well, when other people came around I met some people from Tennessee that were in this squadron and it was the 53rd pursuit group. It was not fighter, it was pursuit. And we had P-39 airplanes and in fact our squadron was half Tennesseans, and half Pennsylvanians. And they would always get into arguments, we were called underground farmers and they were called ridge runners.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this during your basic training?

Mr. Natt

Yes, yes. I only took basic training for eight days and about the fourth day the instructor had me drilling people, helping them out.

Mr. Misenhimer

Counting cadence and marching them and things?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then you went into this pursuit squadron?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, you didn't get a lot of basic training then?

Mr. Natt

Oh no, like I said only 8 to 9 days and that's all.

Mr. Misenhimer

During that 8 or 9 days did you do a lot of marching or what?

Mr. Natt

Oh yeah, we did a lot of marching, cadence and whatever you call it and back and forth.

Mr. Misenhimer

Physical training and that sort of thing?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

But nothing actually as far as weapons and anything like that?

Mr. Natt

No, I didn't have anything like that. But later on we had to go through a gas chamber and all that stuff. Because our squadron wasn't quite, everything was lax, you know, there wasn't anything going on. We only had one airplane at the time when I first came in.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was a P-39 you said?

Mr. Natt

No, this was a P-35. Our first airplane, when our new airplanes came in they were P-39's.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was this outfit again?

Mr. Natt

51st Pursuit Group, and we had 3 squadrons. It was the 13th squadron, the 14th and the 15th and they also had headquarters squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which squadron were you in?

Mr. Natt

I was in the headquarters squadron. They put me in the motor pool, the first day I went out for role call and they said "who can drive?" and I put my hand up so I was stuck in the motor pool for two years.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were lucky because sometimes when you volunteered they gave you a shovel or something. (laughing)

Mr. Natt

(laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go straight to the motor pool then?

Mr. Natt

Yes. Well, in the motor pool they all during that time I was in Tallahassee and then the war broke out; I mean then Pearl Harbor was bombed the 7th of December and I was in the hospital then because I had my tonsils taken out. And everything started to get crazy, you know, they got people confirmed for overseas. And on the 19th of that month I was on a ship going down to Panama to the Canal Zone. We were scheduled to go to Hawaii, while we in the Panama Canal up by Gatun Lake; going from one lock to the other lock

up there. They changed our orders and we stayed in Panama for a year. We were guarding the Panama Canal. I was stationed at Howard Field right there in the canal zone for awhile and then they transferred me up to Sharera, it was a field that was about twenty miles north of Panama City and it was on the Pan-American highway which was a very bad road at the time and I think about 20 miles or 25 miles north. And we had another squadron that was up at Shamea, and that was another 20-30 miles further north.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where you still in the 51st Pursuit Squadron at this point?

Mr. Natt

Yes. I was still a truck driver.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said you were guarding the canal, were you acting like infantry and have rifles and things?

Mr. Natt

No, no. Our whole squadron was the airplanes were guarding the canal. If bombers come in they were ready

Mr. Misenhimer

You had the P-39's down there?

Mr. Natt

Yes. Have you ever seen a P-39?

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh yes.

Mr. Natt

Those 37 Millimeter cannon that shot right through the nose, right through the prop.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was a nice looking airplane back in those days; it turned out that it wasn't too good of a plane but it really looked good.

Mr. Natt

It sure looked good, it just like riding in a Cadillac. The engine was behind the pilot, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

The drive shaft went between his legs up there.

Mr. Natt

Uh-huh. 13 ½ feet long and 5 inches that drive shaft was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever get ride in one?

Mr. Natt

No. I had a pilot come down and try to shoot me; aiming straight at me but the pilot didn't fire or anything, just practicing dive bombing.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were still in the motor pool down there?

Mr. Natt

Yes. I did get hit by a propeller on that P-39, when I went got out of the motor pool and start working on a flight line. I had an airplane that had a leaky clover leaf valve in the

carburetor and you know when you pull post flight you have to check it over and turn the prop over to see if there are any nicks in it and wipe it down with oil.

That is the last thing I would do on my airplane. I wanted to change the carburetor but they wouldn't let me because it was too good of an airplane and flew real good. The pilot when he came down he couldn't turn it off, so I had to go up there to turn the engine off.

This one day I had an assistant that was working with me and I was doing the prop checking as the last item and I thought as I was pushing it I felt the engine start and the first thing I did was push this kid out of the way, and the second blade caught me and flew me like 15 feet and put me in the hospital for like two weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it break any bones?

Mr. Natt

Didn't break anything, just my hip turned like a rainbow; every color under the sun, black, blue, green and sore.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, it didn't break any skin either?

Mr. Natt

No, it didn't. I guess my clothing got most of it; sort of a nick in my hip bone they said with the x-rays.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that a two bladed or three bladed prop on the 39?

Mr. Natt

Three blades.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's the trouble with planes sometimes they will fire like that and flip that prop around.

Mr. Natt

Yes. Allison engine, V-12 Allison engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Water cooled as I recall.

Mr. Natt

Yes. Anti freeze.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Natt

Well, that is about it while I was in Panama because we were at Sherera, the airplanes they are light and on the grass runway and one day a pilot got his nose gear stuck in a hole and he revved up the engine and broke the nose gear and then the commanding officer, every time they went on a sort of alert why he would make him go out there and fly a kite.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up and ask you, on December 7, 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you recall where you were when you heard about that?

Mr. Natt

Yeah, I was in the hospital and had my tonsils taken out. The same day. They were taking out, I wasn't suppose to go into the hospital but one of my friends had asked me to go to sick bay with him and I happened to be in line there and they put me in the hospital.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think when you heard about Pearl Harbor? How did you think it would affect you?

Mr. Natt

Well, I didn't know. I was too young to even think about what was happening. I knew that war was starting but everything was going crazy and I noticed that we preparing the field and all of that and we were getting ready to move, so we the whole squadron, trucks and everything drove from Tallahassee, FL, to the east coast. I can't remember the name of the shipyard there in South Carolina, and we were shipping down to the canal there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall what ship you were on?

Mr. Natt

No I don't. I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that trip down to Panama?

Mr. Natt

For me, very sickening; I got sick before we left the dock. I knew I was going to get sick and I got sick.

Mr. Misenhimer

A lot of seasickness?

Mr. Natt

Yes, there was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in a convoy at all, or just by yourself?

Mr. Natt

Just by ourselves but later on when I went over seas next time, I was going to England, we were in a convoy and I was sick again then. I knew the name of that ship was, it was the USS Monticello. It was a captured Italian ship. It was suppose to be a luxury liner, it had a swimming pool and all of that, but this had troops down inside. And this convoy it had ships going over and all around us were ships just around us. I could see a ship that was sort of a tanker and I watched a guy walking on a deck there he go into the water and the ship would go down and under the water and he would hang onto the ropes and it made me sick just looking at him.

Mr. Misenhimer

We will get back to that a little later, what else happened there in Panama?

Mr. Natt

Well, there was nothing else. Our tour ended and we went back up, went by ship to New York harbor. When we got to New York Harbor they put us on a troop train and rode the troop train all the way back to Tallahassee, FL. And we stayed in Tallahassee for a very short period of time. Then we went by trucks and what have you to Tampa, FL. We were at McDill field for a short period of time. And we stayed there for about a month and then we were transferred to Drew Field, which is also in Tampa, FL and stayed there for another month and then transferred to Page Field, which is in Ft. Meyers, FL. We

stayed there for about 6 months and then we transferred from there to Georgia, Thomasville, GA. And we still had the P-39's and then I was working on them and that was 1943 and that is when I volunteered to go to gunnery school. I went to gunnery school in Tyndall field, Panama City, FL.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you start gunnery school?

Mr. Natt

It was Christmas Day, because I remember eating Christmas dinner out there with mess kits in the rain.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year would that have been?

Mr. Natt

1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went to work on the planes, did you get any training on that?

Mr. Natt

Oh, yes. All different kinds of school, I went to 5 or 6 different kinds of school. They did have them right there on base and we had classes there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to gunnery school?

Mr. Natt

In Tyndall field, Panama City, FL. It was about 2 ½ months, I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there then?

Mr. Natt

Well we dissemble a 50 caliber machine gun blindfolded and identify aircraft and what have you.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of gunnery training did you get?

Mr. Natt

Well, we'd fly and we get to fire the gun at a B-25 or B-26 pulling a target. And, on the ground, we also shot a lot of shotgun shells and a lot of rifles and machine guns and what have you.

Mr. Misenhimer

On the ground, did you shoot your shotguns when you were riding in the back of the pick-up or something like that?

Mr. Natt

Yes, yes. Sort of made a round cage there and you'd see a house, there was a high house and a low house, and you didn't know whether the clay pigeon was come up from the bottom or the top. I also shot a clay pigeon from a turret, sitting in a turret and out of 100 clay pigeons I got 98. But shooting the shotgun, just holding it; I had never fired shotguns too much, but my shoulder was sure sore.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were flying and shooting, what kind of plane were you in?

Mr. Natt

We had B-17's, I flew it one time and a B-24.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fire from the waist or from where?

Mr. Natt

Waist, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did more than one of you fire at the same target?

Mr. Natt

No, we fired one at a time. You had the bullets had coated noses, you know the red paint and blue paint, and they could tell who hit it. We had one crazy guy shot at the tow plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

They didn't like that, did they?

Mr. Natt

No, I think he failed out, I don't know. I think he wanted to fail.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened in gunnery school?

Mr. Natt

Everything I did, I done very good you know. One day this guy was the instructor, he was calling the other students and calling them names and what not. And I said "you shouldn't be doing that, calling these people names. Everybody can't be as perfect at this gun or what have you." And he started talking back to me and how good he was and all of that. So, I told him "Maybe there is someone in this classroom that would be better

then you.” And he said “oh, yeah?” so he run around and got about 6 or 8 of the other instructors and they came in there and they were talking to me and said “who is going to challenge me?” and I looked around and said “anybody here want to challenge?” and no one said anything. So I said “well you can’t find anyone, I’ll challenge you.” So, I challenged him at blindfolded and I had the instructions and I said “everybody has to be quiet in here, if you finish before me just raise your hand but don’t make no noise.” I told my men, I mean the class members, I said “you watch these instructors and the instructors will watch the other guy” So, we started working and I was going along very, very good and when I finished I put my hand up and then I was able to take off my blindfold and look over there and I see the instructor still working. And 2 minutes and 33 seconds he finished after I did.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was putting the gun back together?

Mr. Natt

Yes. Taking it apart and putting it back together blindfolded. And then he looks at me and I said “you see what I mean? Maybe there is somebody who is here that is even better than me.” So, he changed his tone.

I also had another guy on aircraft identification, I would name the plane they would flash it up on the screen at one-one hundredth of a second and you would have to identify it. So, I would identify all of them and he would say “ok wise guy, just shut up and don’t say anything more. You’re cheating some way.” And I said “I am not cheating.” And so I just shut up and he flashed up another airplane on the screen, this happen to be a P-39, and he asked everybody in the crowd there and some of them this or that and then he said

to ask me “what was it wise guy?” and I said “P-39” and he said “God dang, how did you even know?” Why, I had to instruct him on how I did it. I said “What I do is that I look at the screen up there, I blink my eyes 3 or 4 times and then I open them and do not blink”; if you blink you wipe the image away right after.

Take the airplane and fly it around the room so the entire class learned something. And that was about it. When we graduated, why there was 50 crews. I was crew number 26 and it happened that the B-17 company; lets see, who makes them?

Mr. Misenhimer

Boeing makes the B-17.

Mr. Natt

Boeing, yeah; Boeing got 25 new airplanes to fly so 25 crews, crew 1 through 25 went to Washington; I guess that is where the place is at. And they flew newer planes over there to the war and we had to wait, we waited there in Tampa, FL, we were under some bleachers of some stadium where they had a kitchen and all of that and we would cook and what have you. And we were waiting for a ship to come in, we were there for about a week, I guess. And in the meantime a carnival came in and we went to the carnival. I know I was in my 20’s, my early 20’s, but I looked like I was about 14 years old and all the guys would kid me and what have you. And we went to the carnival and I got the double Ferris wheel and I was on that Ferris wheel for about an hour and half, everybody paid to keep me up there flying, you know, I couldn’t get off. And then after we were getting ready to come back to go back to the bleachers we found a lady that was a hand reader, what do you call them, you know she read your hand? Well, we got to go in here and I went in there and the lady said “ohhh, long lifeline! You will live to a ripe old age.”

And I said “how old? 96?” she said “maybe longer.” And this 96 stuck in my brain and I kept it with me all the time. In fact I got it in my medical forms at the VA from when I was in the prison camp. We were on a 90 day march and everybody thought we were going to be killed and shot but a lot of them died, I know, along the way. Because we only had 2 potatoes to eat a day, at night, that is all we got to eat. Two potatoes the size of a gulf ball and a dipper of water and nothing else; nothing for breakfast, nothing for lunch. And then they say “oh, we are going to get killed here” and I would say “no, no, we are going to make it” and they say “how do you know?” I said “look, I am in my early 20’s and I am going to live to be 96! That is 70 years from now.” And I said “this war is not going to last that long.” It perked the guys up, they started walking; it helped them out.

Mr. Misenhimer

We will cover more of that later. Now, when you finish gunnery school, what rank did you have?

Mr. Natt

I was a buck sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your pay when you first went in?

Mr. Natt

\$21 a day, once a month. I didn’t get paid anything for April and I got paid at the end of May and I got \$19. It was a month and 12 days but I was able to get coupons for the PX and theater tickets were 10cents and you go to the PX and buy donuts and stuff like that with the other coupons. But, I made out good because when I was in Panama I wouldn’t

drink anything but, well the water was bad, I just drank Coco-cola and it put me in the hospital;

the coke did. It put me in the hospital for about a week.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did that do to you?

Mr. Natt

Well, they found out I had gonorrhoea. But, it wasn't anything; it was the coke that did it.

But then I got off the coca-cola. Back in those days that coke was good, it was little 6 ounce bottles and it tasted good.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished gunnery school, where did you go to?

Mr. Natt

After I graduated from gunnery school, we went to the field over in Tampa, FL; underneath the bleachers. And then we went from there to the ship, the *USS Monticello* and then directly overseas. We landed in England, where the Beatles were from. Where did the Beatles come from, what city? I'm trying to think of the city.

Mr. Misenhimer

It wasn't Birmingham, was it?

Mr. Natt

No, no. Well, anyway, we landed there at the docks, the floating docks you know, the kind that goes up and I got off and I had a one pound note and I asked an Englishman about the currency, one started talking to me and then about 6 others came in there and everybody started to telling me about the money.

But, I moved from there and went to a field at Stradbroke Horham Air Base, 5th bomb group and I think General LeMay, he wasn't a General then but LeMay was there for one of them. And I think, the coach of the Dallas Cowboys? Landry? Happened to go it was the 24th of August and I met some little girl there riding a bus, I paid her so much for the fare and when she paid me back my change she gave me back more than my change and I told her and she said "no, I like you" and she wanted to talk to me some more and I liked her she said "Oh, my aching back" sort of like an Englishman, person would say. And I went to see her one night and we went to a dance and on the 24th, I said "I better go back" and I left her there about 11:30 and I went back to the base. I was riding a bicycle and she said "when you get shot down, will you will me this raincoat?" I had a raincoat with me all the time. When I got back to the barracks I looked on the bulletin board I see my name up there that I was flying the next morning.

So, I slept about 2 ½ hours and they woke me up about 2:30 and we went down for briefing and went to this church and went to have confession and what have you before you go. Breakfast was steak and eggs, then we took our guns and stuff and went up to the airplane and they told us about where we were going and told us it was going to be a milk run. It was my first mission and we did have Tokyo tanks on the airplanes which was a long flight over. We left there about 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning and it wasn't until 2 o'clock in the afternoon that we dropped our bombs. And we dropped our bombs, but we were blowing up pretty bad. The number 2 engine was shot right off the airplane, off the wing of the airplane. Number 3, it lost power because, I saw the projectile that came right up through the wing, took the supercharger out and I told the pilot that maybe he should turn the engine off because there could be a fuel leak in there. And he said

“check for leaks!” and I said “I know its leaking because it went right through the fuel tank”. There was no fuel coming out but 20 minutes later we caught fire and blew up. So, we bailed out.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you lost all 4 engines? How many engines did you loose?

Mr. Natt

We had 2 engines left; the number one and number four. But, while we were training there in Florida, we would fly on one engine. This airplane would fly on one engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was the B-17?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What unit were you in there?

Mr. Natt

95th bomb group.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which bomb squadron?

Mr. Natt

I really don't know. I couldn't tell you.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you arrive in England?

Mr. Natt

Oh, sometime in August.

Mr. Misenhimer

August of 1944, right?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What gunnery position did you have on the plane?

Mr. Natt

I was waist gunner.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day were you shot down?

Mr. Natt

The 25th of August, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

You took off, where were you going?

Mr. Natt

To Ploesti oilfield, I don't say it right; it's in Romania. I thought I was going to the Baltic Seas, but it was the black sea that was near There.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this the first Ploesti raid, do you know?

Mr. Natt

Ploesti?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, they had 3 raids to Ploesti, to the Romanian Oil Fields there and they lost a lot of planes on every one of those raids.

Mr. Natt

Oh they did, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What got you, anti-aircraft or enemy fighters?

Mr. Natt

Anti-aircraft, yeah; down there the one that got us the bullet, the shell, went through the fuel tank and it took out the supercharger and the fire started right there behind the engine #3.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you jumped out. Now did the plane blow up?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just after you all bailed out?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how high were you when you bailed out?

Mr. Natt

24,000.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you bailed out?

Mr. Natt

Yeah. The ball turret gunner, he wouldn't jump. He was started off to the back door there, and he come back in and said "jump?" and I said "yep" and the third time I went with him, I took him with me and I took him out. I put my arms around him and we made one loop and I pulled his rip cord and pushed him away from me and then I fell about 3 or 4 miles, just freefall and I was feeling good sitting there in that well there and I see a chute coming and I thought I made a mistake and I see him coming down.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know in your write up you mentioned something about a shell coming through, almost hitting you.

Mr. Natt

Oh yeah. It sounded like you were in a 55 gallon metal drum and someone was throwing gravel at you. Just all different directions, and I look down and I seen my chute there and for some reason I bent down and moved the chute and I moved my foot over about 6 inches, my right leg about 6 inches in, and just as I did the shell came up right along side of me. Burnt my jacket a little bit and it went up through the top and I followed it and saw smoke behind it. It blew up at 28,000 feet.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would have gotten you if you hadn't of moved, right?

Mr. Natt

Yeah, only half of me would have been home. I would have lost my whole right leg and

body.

Mr. Misenhimer

You did drop your bombs, right?

Mr. Natt

Yes, we did. I could see the results because the target was all covered with smoke but you could see black smoke and I could see flames through the white cover of smoke. We had 8500 pounds of incendiary bombs on our plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were dropping incendiaries?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, the write up says you lost all 4 engines?

Mr. Natt

No, well we lost the whole airplane. Number 1 was doing good, number 4 was doing good. We lost number 2 and number 3. Three was still running but no power. I had told the pilot that he should turn it off because it was no good now but when we got down to lower level why it would be good.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like falling down on that parachute?

Mr. Natt

Well, it was like traveling 145 miles an hour. I did the right thing though, I wasn't suppose to open the chute way up there at that altitude. You had to go down where you

got oxygen and every now and then I would just turn my head and it seem liked my foot was leading the way, I wasn't twisting or anything. I would turn to the left, to the right and take a sample of air to see how cold it was. When it felt sort of warm, you know what month it was in, and when it felt sort of warm why I pulled my rip cord. That was about a mile, I guess, maybe not even that when my chute opened. And for a moment there I thought it didn't open fast enough and I started to look down and when I did my head jerked back and it opened. Then I had a pair of escape shoes that I had tied on to one of, we didn't wear them, we just broke them in when we were in the barracks and what have you. I had the laces tied back and forth 4 times and it just broke those laces when the chute open and one shoe fell straight down the other floating down like a ski towards the left there. I was trying to see I could find them because I had no shoes, just boots that you wore in the airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the whole crew land fairly close together?

Mr. Natt

No, no. Like I said the radio operator, he landed in the black sea. He was unconscious.

We talked to him about a month or two ago; George C. Sulick, he is from, oh I cant think of the place now. But we talked to him and he was pretty good, but he said when he hit the water why he woke up. He was on the loose for nine days and then they caught him and brought him into the same prison camp where I was.

The navigator, he was killed. I got a call from the pentagon sometime later on to find out about him. I guessed they called everybody else and he was a Jewish person and this last words before he bailed out were "What do the Germans do the Jews, where are the

Germans?" that was all that he could say. When he bailed out, instead of opening the door to the escape hatch, well he just slid out and you could see just his fingers beneath the fuselage, so I figured when he turned loose his body stopped and the airplane flew over him. The ball turret is hanging down 2 or 3 feet, and then the guns also down; he must have been run over by one of them and it knocked him out and he fell. But, he was sure scared to death when he was leaving that airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the rest of the crew make it to the ground ok?

Mr. Natt

As far as I know, yes. I got to talk to the pilot, he was there. He was captured with me and the co-pilot, he was right there too. He was the one who smoked a cigarette while we were captured. He and I were together. Then the ball-turret gunner we found him when he sprained his ankle. But the radio operator, he landed in the black sea and the tail gunner, we also got him. But the engineer, I don't know where he landed and the bombardier, I don't know where he landed either.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you hit the ground what happened?

Mr. Natt

Well, when I hit the ground; we never made any parachute jumps but we were told what to do, that you just keep you knees bent and stuff like that. When I hit the ground I fell to my knees, my feet went down. That's how hard you hit. I went down on my all fours and the chute did not spill and the Germans were coming up on me and they were calling "Halt!" So, I was frozen there and a gust of wind would come in and drag me 10-15 feet

and they would holler “Halt!” again. And I was still frozen because that guy was pointing that gun at me, the rifle. It was like shooting at me before I cut my last cord. And the second time it did the same thing and they said halt and I wouldn’t do anything. Well, maybe they shoot twice and so I am just going to jump up and run to fill the chute. I decided to jump up and run and they hollered halt again and the chute spilled and when they came up to me I was pulling the chute up and trying like I was getting to repack it again. Then they started after us and that is when the 2 men and the rifle, the 2 prong pitch fork and the lady, she walks up to me and in German and English, she said “You all American schweinhund, you bomb the women and children”. It was about 6 or 8 inches, her face was from me. And I said “you old hag, I didn’t start this war. You did” And she slapped me.

Mr. Misenhimer

You spoke German?

Mr. Natt

Yes. I learned German in grade school. A buddy of mine, Freddy Schultz, he was a German. We would go talk in German and stuff like that. I learned to speak German. I could speak Slovakian. I spoke Polish and Russian. But I forget most of it. This happened 64 years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer

It says here that you grew up in an Austrian immigrant’s home. Was you father and Austrian immigrant?

Mr. Natt

Yes, we spoke Slovak in the house, my mom and dad and all that. I went to Catholic

school speaking Slovakian.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now Slovakian, is that Czechoslovakian or what?

Mr. Natt

Yes. I went to the blind school, you see I am legally blind, I'm blind in my right eye from malnutrition they say. And my left eye is just very, very weak. I was going to the blind school there in Augusta, GA and I met a girl there that was from Slovakia and I tried talking to her. She was married to one of the G.I.'s that was that in the school there with me and I said "do you speak Slovakian?" and she said "no" I said "you can't speak it at all?" and she said "no, she spoke English." She came from Czechoslovakia. So I don't think it's not Czechoslovakia anymore, I think it is the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Mr. Misenhimer

You weren't legally blind when you went into the service, were you?

Mr. Natt

Oh, no, when I went in my eyes were 20/15.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you lose your eyesight?

Mr. Natt

It started after the POW camp. We were on a forced march for ninety days, and all we got to eat is two little potatoes and dipper of water for the evening meal. That's all we got for ninety days. I went from 185 pounds down to 97.

Mr. Misenhimer

They think that malnutrition is what hurt your eyesight then?

Mr. Natt

Because I went to fourteen different doctors and that is what they finally came out with.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you actually become blind?

Mr. Natt

Well, I was still in the service when I could see a little bit, I was retired in February of 1974 but I was wearing glasses and I had to have my glasses changed every year. My eyes getting worse all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you spent about 32 or 33 years in the service, then?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok, lets go back, they captured you here and then what happened? When the lady and two men caught you, did the Army come up and get you or who came up and got you then?

Mr. Natt

Oh no, the Volkstrum Army, they took me into town somewhere and we, the pilot and co-pilot and all of the rest of us that was captured at that time, I think there was 5 of us and they put us underneath the house of some kind and I could see out this little door and a screen, I think it was a basement. I could see chickens running around.

We didn't get nothing to eat all that day and all that night, but we were locked up that night and then they come around and they kept moving us. I don't think we ate for about four days, we got nothing to eat.

Mr. Misenhimer

What country were you in?

Mr. Natt

In Germany.

Mr. Misenhimer

The people that had you in this house, these were the German Soldiers?

Mr. Natt

Yes, they kept us there until the military came and got us. There we traveled by wagons, trucks and what have you. I rode a train before I went to prison camp, aboard the train, which was a compartment for the five of us. And we rode the train right along the Rhine River for three or four or five days, we were in that car for I don't know how long. So, I think it was a complete week and then off to another rail, I guess. A boxcar, forty men or 8 horses, and we were in that thing for I don't know how many days. And we were always right behind those engines, our airplanes would come down and shoot at the engine, the steam engine while they were expecting us to get hit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you strafed when you were in the train? By American planes?

Mr. Natt

No, no. There was one time on our march, though, when the planes come down and shot up a bunch of people and then they found out that we were POW's, they waved their

wings and took off.

Mr. Misenhimer

But on the train you were not?

Mr. Natt

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did they take you to on the train?

Mr. Natt

I don't know exactly where we were going. I guess we were going just to this prison camp, or this prison camp. They didn't know where to send us. I guess, that is what I am figuring but I don't know. No one told us. I don't know exactly where we were at. We were in a boxcar; you can't see where you are at or anything. And we traveled mostly by night.

Mr. Misenhimer

What camp did you wind up in?

Mr. Natt

Stalag Luft III.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you questioned anytime?

Mr. Natt

I was questioned about 15 times and what they were trying to find out is; you see I told them everything that I was suppose to tell them, like my name, rank and serial number. But they wanted to know more. What they were doing, and I found out because I was

understanding their German language, they thought that the United States was drafting teenagers. Like I said, I looked like I was 14 or 15 years old and they kept trying to get something out of me. And I wore a dog tag, I shouldn't have worn it, it had my fathers name on it, it had my whole address on it and everything else. One of them old type dog tags, they took one and I still got one of them. I think my youngest daughter has it now. But, what they would do is that every now and then they take me in for interrogation and then they would ask me all kind of questions and I wouldn't tell them that I could speak German or any of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

They didn't know that you could understand German, right?

Mr. Natt

That's right. But, I figured out that what they were trying to find out why I was in the service. While I was in prison camp one day I had a buddy, we were suppose to get a Red Cross parcel every week but they wouldn't give it to us. We would get a parcel and it would be for maybe two of us or 4 of us and this one fellow, most of the time it was just two of us, and we were in this prison camp and one room had 24 men in this one room with triple deck bunks.

And this, Andy Panos was his name, he was a Greek from California and he and I were splitting all our parcels and one day I said to him "what do you say we just don't shave?" and he said "ok." And he had a blue beard, and one day his beard is out there and about 3 days later, he didn't know what he was doing because he was really shook up, and about 3 days later he said "I believe your shaving!" and I said "no, I'm not shaving." Come up about a week and he had long beard on him and he said "now, you have to be not

shaving!” and I said “No, I haven’t started shaving yet.” (laughing) I didn’t start shaving until I about 28 or 29.

I tell you what, here is another story I want to tell you. After I was liberated, they sent me home on a 60 day rehabilitation leave and while I was home, about a week before I was ready to come back, I was suppose to be sent back to the base there in Kentucky, and then they changed it and gave me nineteen more days and said to report back to Hotel President Madison at Miami Beach, FL. And while I was coming back down in the train coming back down to Florida and I stopped in Atlanta and there was a young kid that was running away from home and so I talked him into going back home. So, we went into the station there and I learned to drink beer when I was home, so I ordered a beer and a coke and the girl looked at me and she said “I can’t sell you no beer, I’ll sell one to him”, so I said “give him the beer and me the coke”, so she gave him a beer and he was about 14 or 15 years old and I was in my twenties. (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me what all you did there in the prison camp? What was it like being in a prison camp?

Mr. Natt

What we did was in the morning you would get up and you go get a pitcher of ersatz coffee, it was just burnt wheat. They burnt wheat and the water was sort of a dark color and the only thing good about it was that it was warm. Then at noon time we would get kohlrabi stew, the beet that they fed to the cows. Every now and then in the prison camp when you come in, when a person would come in and they would be carrying a big half of a beef, I think they brought the beef in the daytime and took it back out because I

never seen a piece of meat in the stew while I was eating it. And at night we get steamed potatoes and that was it. The rest of the day we would just walk around, walk and walk.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to have a formation in the morning and they counted everybody and that sort of thing?

Mr. Natt

In the morning, yes. In the morning you come out winter and summer and February the 6th in 1945 we had to move out. We went on this march. They told us that we were going to be marching for maybe a week of ten days and it ended up being 3 months we marched. They allowed us to go in, before we left the camp, they allowed us to go in to the fore lager; it's an area where all the food stuff comes in. And all the guys were picking up big cans of dried milk and what have you. What I was picking up was whole bunch of sugar cubes and vitamin pills and what have you. And I took three cartons of cigarettes, I don't smoke but I just took it for my buddy. And the week turned into months and then 90 days later we were liberated.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well let's go back to the prison camp, did anybody ever try to escape?

Mr. Natt

Well you know the 'Great Escape'? It happened up there in the Stalag Luft 3.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that while you were there?

Mr. Natt

I didn't know anything about it but I could see right in the middle of our prison camp we

had five guards on one side and five guards on the other side and we had all these barb wire fences, warning lines and all that. And there was a place in the center, and I thought that they were digging a swimming pool or something like that, and these guys were walking around there and what they do is dig this dirt out to make the tunnel and put it in their pants to go and tie at the bottom and the dirt was on the inside and they walk around this place there and the dirt was falling out of their pants. I didn't know anything about them digging out but that is where they dug out from the barracks right there, close there to the trees, they had pine trees you know. They dig under the fence and I guess they dug a tunnel about 50 feet or 100 feet long.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, that happened while you were there?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they bring the people back in that they caught while you were there?

Mr. Natt

They killed them all.

Mr. Misenhimer

They didn't bring them back in?

Mr. Natt

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What other things happened there?

Mr. Natt

Well, that's about all that I know of. But all that we would do everyday is, we didn't have to work or anything, we just get up and have roll call and just kept walking. There was always a line of people. Like I said, there were 10 rooms in each barracks and each room had 24 men in it, so 240 men in the barracks. And you take 10 barracks and that is a lot of men. And we walked around the barracks and the warning line, you know you had 2 big barbed wire fences which are about 12 feet high, and then between those 2 barbwire fences is all tangled wires and razor wires, then they had a warning line which is like a little clothesline about 8 inches off the ground. You weren't allowed to go across that even if you were playing, say football, we would play imitation football, and if you went across that wire you wouldn't dare go get it. But anyway, one of the guys happened to go across that line and he was shot. They had those big guard towers up there with machine guns and there were about 6 of those towers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were the guards pretty rough on you all?

Mr. Natt

Towards the end, no. After we went on this march, since I was able to speak German I was talking to the Germans and they would see an American airplane fly over and they would say "Das is gut" and then they would see a German airplane fly over and they would say "Nicht gut", which meant no good, no good.

Mr. Misenhimer

The reason you went on the march was to keep ahead of the Russians, is that right?

Mr. Natt

Yes, we left Stalag Luft III and we started marching and we crossed the Elbe River, we crossed the bridge it was all shot up, just holes all through it where the bombs went down through it. And we had, like route step, he couldn't march in cadence. You had to watch the holes so you wouldn't fall through. We marched for about, I don't know, 20-30 days going west and then all of the sudden we turned around and we started back and we went across the Elbe River again going east and then we got too close to the Russian line again. The first time we got too close to the American lines, the second time we came back and it's too close to the Russian line. And we started turn around and went back and crossed the Elbe River for a third time and we got too close to the English lines. And the last 5 days we stayed in one spot; the one place we couldn't move anywhere.

Every night, I don't know why when it got dark, man-o-live that mortar and stuff like that and we were inside of a barn and I made a friend with a young girl, a German girl that was just about eight years old and she stayed with us and I talked with her and one of the guy had stole some wheat and I had her take it down to her mom and she made us a loaf of bread.

And that night, those bombs start going up and the roof on the barn was tile and that tile started breaking and some of those things that fall down were sharp, I tell you. I never got hit by any of them but come close.

And then on May the 5th, yes May the 5th, two British Tommy's come in and they took over the camp. They made all the Germans give up their guns and had one German, an enlisted man, come to me talking to me, and he was drunk and he was telling me that he didn't want me to kill him and I said "I'm not going to kill you" and he kept begging me

not to kill him and finally I seen this German officer over there, he had a pair of binoculars that were yellow and very beautiful, and I said "if you want to do something for me, go over to the officer there and tell him that I want those binoculars." And he said "you can't do that." I said "just you go over there and tell him that I want them." So he walks over there and tells the German officer and the officer looks at me and I shook my head yes and the officer took them off and gave them to me. I had those binoculars for about three minutes and one of the other POW's said "let me see those." And I gave them to him and I didn't see the guy anymore, he disappeared on me.

Everybody was going crazy. The next morning I got up and I started looking around and an old lady came up to the prison lot, and this was sort of a dairy farm that had a lot of milk, a lot of milk cans and she came up with one of these little two quart cans and asked me for some milk. I looked at that poor little lady and gave her the whole can; about 20 quarts and said "take that." Later on a man come up there and he had a bucket and he was wanting some grain for his animals and I took a big bag and put it on his back and he just stumbled from there. I was giving everything away. I was looking for those binoculars but I never did find them.

Then they told us that we had to make our way back to camp Lucky Strike, Le Havre, France and that was about 50-80 miles from that. So I went out into the street and talked to an MP and he commandeered a big plush car, it was a Mercedes convertible sedan and in the car, it was a beautiful car, it had the top down and 2 people in the front and a lady in the back with a baby and the baby was sick and the baby was crying and he was taking those people out of the car and I was going to drive that. I said "no, no, no stop! This lady here has a baby that is sick." And he said "are you crazy?" and I said "No, the baby

is sick and the baby counts” and I said “let them go.” So, he let them go and then he stopped a big truck, it was a great big covered truck and I said “oh boy, I can haul a lot of POW’s in that!” I brought it back to camp to where the POW’s were and I opened the back door and there was a complete machine shop in there. There must have been \$5,000 worth of equipment in there, oh boy! It had lathes and everything you could think of. And I drove that thing about 40 miles down the street going toward camp in Le Havre, France and parked it. They had a station set for us for food and when I came back to the truck it was all torn apart so I started looking for another vehicle and I found another one, another Mercedes, and it was one of those air cooled and I don’t know how, but I got it working and I drove it all the way back to camp in Le Havre, France and when I got to camp while the guys at the gate said “what are you going to do with the car?” I said “what do you have to give me?” And one said “I’ve got a scooter.” I said “ok”, and I traded the scooter for the car; he took the car and I took the scooter. When I was getting ready to leave Camp Lucky Strike, why I traded the scooter for a gun and then I sold the gun for \$8.

But, everyday we had a complete medical examination and we would, all those three weeks we were eating steak and eggs every morning and there was always a doctor walking around. One morning I walked in there and the steak and eggs and I seen the salt and pepper shakers and I put my hands on it and said “oh boy”, the salt and pepper and I wanted the salt, you know. As my hand went on the salt and pepper shaker another hand covered the top of mine and he said “No son, you can not have that.” I looked at him and he said “you can not have those spices.” and I said “ok” and I just ate the steak and eggs without any salt on them. But, we had one guy that died there in the camp. We eat a

very good breakfast and I was gaining a pound a day. I only weighed 97 pounds when I got there, and I gained a pound a day eating that steak and eggs and then from breakfast to lunch we were drinking eggnog and stuff like that. And they had donuts and what have you and this one guy took too many donuts and died from eating the donuts.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you liberated at?

Mr. Natt

I don't even know exactly where, but it was in Germany somewhere. I guess, I say, maybe 90 or 100 miles east of Le Havre, France.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, it wasn't that far from Le Havre where you were liberated then?

Mr. Natt

Right, like I said I just drove for 2 days with the truck and then the car. When I got to Camp Lucky Strike I never seen a place, there must have been 50 acres of tents, oh gosh they looked so beautiful up there. Each tent held, I think, 12 men. But, you talk about piling up people, oh all those POW's and stuff like that and we got orders to go to the ship we went to the town and we had a brand new liberty ship and we boarded that thing and as we were going back to, we were about four days out going towards New York, and someone came out and said that the Queen Mary was going into Camp Lucky Strike in Le Havre, France to pick up prisoners. Anyway, we didn't see the Queen Mary coming in but when we pulled into the docks in New York and what pulled in along side of us? The Queen Mary, and we looked like a little row boat compared to it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up here, in this write up it says something about SS Soldiers, did you see the SS troops?

Mr. Natt

Oh God yes we were on a march and this is February the 13th, it was a very, very cold day and all of our troops were marching and they were talking to some of us and we start walking past some of these SS troops and I was the first guide, the right guide in the front of the line and we still had a lot of energy and these SS troops walked out of there and when they walked out there and to look at them its scary. It would scare you to death; you could hear a pin drop! Not a GI said anything at all. They were just looking at you. You see they dressed up in black and they had tight rubber bands around their wrists and their legs, their ankles, and emblem on their uniform, this cross bone and skull. Poison, you know, like an iodine bottle.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was this at?

Mr. Natt

Swinemunde; it's a fortified Island. They had all the ranks of service up there, all kinds of the Navy, the Army, the SS. And the SS troops, I don't know if you know anything about them, but they were hand picked. You see, they couldn't be, they had to be between 5 foot 11 and 6 foot 1; they couldn't be shorter or couldn't be taller. And they were so trained that if there were two brothers in there, one brother said something about Adolf, the other brother is suppose to kill them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you jumped out of the plane you just had your flight boots, right?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was it when you were marching, how was that with those?

Mr. Natt

We got some kind of shoes later on that you took a pair of, I don't know, you know how they make a rug? Like a woven material, it was cloth, it was sewn together to create a shoe. It was sort of like swatch, during this march, you know the weather was so cold, everybody was getting frostbitten toes and stuff like that. I guess they lost their fingers and what have you. But this one day it was so cold, I tell you, and I found this cement bag and we were parked out in all ice and snow and over there in Germany they cultivate their trees, you know, I mean they grow their pine trees and when they cut them, they cut them all down. We were in there where all the stumps were and I found this cement bag that was made up of 6 or 8 layers of paper and I put my feet in there to keep my feet from freezing off. But, I got some frostbitten fingers and what have you.

When you don't have anything to eat, you don't have any energy and it is so cold.

Mr. Misenhimer

A lot of people dropped out on this march?

Mr. Natt

Oh yeah! When we first started out I could look back and I could see for a mile back there but then when I was liberated there weren't more than 40 people there. Now, they

split up maybe with some of the other camps or that, I don't know what happened to them. But, I know as I was walking I seen a lot of guys fall off and lay down alongside the road there. Whatever they did with them, I couldn't tell you. They let them go or picked them back up and put them in the march, or whatever. But like I said I was the first person and it was lucky that I was the first person too because sometimes the women would come out with water and I would get a dipper of water and drink it but back the second or third guy, no. One time a lady brought milk out and we got milk and then the guards would take it over.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was May 6th, 1945 when you were liberated, is that right?

Mr. Natt

May 5th, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then on May the 8th Germany surrendered, did you hear about that?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any kind of celebration when you heard about that?

Mr. Natt

No, I think I was on my way back to Camp Lucky Strike, France.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had to go back on you own, nobody got you there or anything?

Mr. Natt

Nobody, nowhere, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have the same uniform that you had there in prison camp, or what did you have at that point?

Mr. Natt

Yes, same thing. I had when I started out from prison camp, loaded up with clothes and vitamin pills, gum, sugar cubes and I had like some 6 pairs of pants on me and I was taking them off as I was going along and it was getting warmer, you know. I had a big overcoat, too, and at first I cut, I had a knife, a little knife; I still have it today, and that knife was checked by the Germans about 60 times and they would measure it and I would just put it back in my pocket. I cut that coat, the core out because I had one of those big winter coats and I threw the coat away and then I started pulling clothes off as it was getting warmer. Just like I said we started February 6th and marched until May the 5th. Those last five days I was talking to that little girl, you know, the German girl that would take the wheat down and make bread for us. We traveled in sort of a pack and there were seven of us in one crew. Like I was the head guy, I would find a place to sleep and some guy would find a place to maybe try to steal some food.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got back to the states what did you do?

Mr. Natt

I went to the San Antonio Air Depot, and there must have been a half million people on there and they were discharging us like flies. I tried to re-enlist but I couldn't. I had to

stay out of the service for a short period of time. But, then I was sent home on a sixty day leave and I tried to get a train, and I tried to get a bus and I tried to fly and nothing. Everything was filled. So, I said “we’ll try hitchhiking.” And I started hitchhiking and I had the best luck, you know when they see a GI along the road they would stop and pick me up. And I hitchhiked from Texas to White Pine, TN. And I made it in about a day and a half.

And there was one place over there in Arkansas, Little Rock, AR, I was walking there and stopping there waiting for a ride and this guy stopped and asked “can you drive?” and I said “yes.” He said “I brought a car up here and I wondered if you could drive it for me?” So, we went back to the place that he bought the car and I drove that car about 60-80 miles following him and then I got out where he had stopped and then I got back on the road to hitchhiking and what comes next? A guy with a brand new Chrysler car near Nashville, TN, uh no, Memphis and it was getting sort of dark and he stopped there and he said “can you drive?” and in said “yes.” And he said “get on the other side and drive” and he slid over to the right side and it was on a little hill downgrade and the car started running down the hill and I ran after it. It was a good thing that door was unlocked. Before I jumped in, he was sound asleep on the other side of that car. I drove it all the way from Memphis to Knoxville, TN. I woke him up in the morning at 5 o’clock and told him where we were at and he was all surprised and he took off. I told him what highway he was on and that is where I wanted to stop, right there in Knoxville. Not Knoxville, oh, it was another town?

Mr. Misenhimer

Nashville? Which way from Knoxville, east of Knoxville or west?

Mr. Natt

No, going east.

Mr. Misenhimer

I don't know what is next over there.

Mr. Natt

Morristown! Yeah, Morristown. That is where I got off and I had 6 or 8 more miles to go to White Pine that is where my sister was; she married a fellow from TN.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were driving in these cars, how about gas? Gas was still rationed, wasn't it?

Mr. Natt

I don't know if it was rationed or not. I didn't have to stop at the gas station for fuel.

Mr. Misenhimer

In 1945 or 1946? When was this?

Mr. Natt

This was 1945. I drove that brand new Chrysler and it was sure nice driving that thing. I drove right through Nashville and I seen the Grand Ole Opry and all that and the street was so narrow. I couldn't say anything to him because he was snoring; he was sleeping up a storm. He must have been awake for a few days.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was after you were discharged, right?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date were you discharged?

Mr. Natt

October the 18th, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok, so this was in October of 45 that you were doing this?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you went back into the service?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When was that?

Mr. Natt

I went back in August 2nd.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of what year?

Mr. Natt

1948.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were out almost 3 years?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do during that three years?

Mr. Natt

I went back to Albany, GA; Turner Air Force base, Albany, GA.

Mr. Misenhimer

And did what?

Mr. Natt

Went into the, I was suppose to be on airplanes but they put me in the Air Police. I had one day of patrol the town and the next day I was on the post watching the cars go in and out and the third day I was a desk sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was after you went back in in 1948?

Mr. Natt

Yeah, after I went back in. I didn't stay there very long and then I went into the airplane place.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do in those three years from 45 to 48?

Mr. Natt

Nothing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Didn't work anywhere?

Mr. Natt

No, I didn't work anywhere. I started to work at a factory place but this guy was working on a big Packard car and working on a hydraulic lift valve and he was a pretty old man and I was just a young kid, don't shave yet and I made the mistake and said "he was putting that valve lifter back together wrong" and he looks at me and said "Oh yeah" and he got rid of me. He didn't know that I worked on big Allison engines.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went back into the Air Force, right?

Mr. Natt

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you wind up doing there for all those years?

Mr. Natt

Well, I was always on the flight line, flight chief, line chief and what have you. We were in an outfit that was always going overseas. I was overseas eighteen times. If something would happen, if someone would scratch their toenail off we would go. We were always on alert and going to Italy, Turkey or something like that. I held the highest clearance that any man could hold. I've held atomic bombs in my hand. What a pretty looking thing that thing is, that atomic bomb is. I wore rubber gloves to hold it, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

How big was it?

Mr. Natt

It was about the size of a honeydew melon.

Mr. Misenhimer

Small, then.

Mr. Natt

Yeah, but it had a lot of power inside of it. And the way they exploded, its inside another compartment that puts pressure on it, even pressure all away around it to cause it to explode.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever get to fly?

Mr. Natt

Fly airplanes? No, not as a pilot but I did fly airplanes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You never got to be a pilot though?

Mr. Natt

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of airplanes did you work on?

Mr. Natt

I worked on mostly all fighters after that; P-51's, and the P-39's and F-100's and F-104's.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get overseas to Korea or anything?

Mr. Natt

Oh yeah. I didn't go into Korea but when the Korean War was going on while we were flying into either Japan or the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer

And do what?

Mr. Natt

Just all the airplanes would fly there, you know, the F-4's and stuff like that, and we were stationed in Bangkok, Thailand and the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer

From World War II, did you come home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Natt

I come home with a German rifle and P38 pistol.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you still have those?

Mr. Natt

No, I sold the German rifle and gave my brother-in-law the P38 pistol. It was beautiful!

I hated guns.

Mr. Misenhimer

During World War II did you see any USO shows?

Mr. Natt

Yes. There in 66 in the Philippines. What's that guy from England? Bob Hope! Bob Hope, he was there and I didn't go see him but I could hear him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross during World War II?

Mr. Natt

Oh yeah. Red Cross would always meet you when you were going overseas and give you

a packet and this and that. But, the Red Cross was pretty nice.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Axis Sallie on the radio?

Mr. Natt

Who?

Mr. Misenhimer

Axis Sallie the propaganda girl?

Mr. Natt

I heard the one in Japan and; whatever her name was, Tokyo Rose.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you hear her if you were in Europe?

Mr. Natt

I just listen over the radio. She tell stories and she would call off certain names and certain squadrons to go on home and this and that, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

On April the 12th of 1945, President Roosevelt died, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Natt

I believe so.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were all on your march then.

Mr. Natt

Oh, no, I guess not; I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions since you have been out?

Mr. Natt

They call me and stuff but no, I never went. But one time, in South Carolina I went to a VA hospital that was the first time I got together with some of the POW's. I never went to any. Even now I still get letters for the POW thing, I don't think I would know anybody that I had seen before, you know what I mean.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Natt

No. Uh, yeah, yeah I guess so, I went to college on, not that I learned anything but I went to school on the GI.

Mr. Misenhimer

When was that?

Mr. Natt

That was in 1974 or 75 or 76.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you got out of the service then?

Mr. Natt

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank you got to during World War II?

Mr. Natt

Master Sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was during World War II?

Mr. Natt

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then how about after you went back in and retired, what rank were you then?

Mr. Natt

No, no wait. During World War II, I was a Staff Sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer

You made Master Sergeant when you retired?

Mr. Natt

Yes. My records were messed up and after I retired I found out that they were carrying me as Five level instead of a nine.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Natt

I got the Purple Heart and I got all that other stuff to go with it down below another level.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Purple Heart was for what?

Mr. Natt

For being a POW and for being wounded.

Mr. Misenhimer

Something else I need to do is that I need to read to you this agreement with the museum. I should have done it at the first, but I didn't. When I do this in person, I let the man read it and sign it but by phone let me read it to you to see if it is ok. 'Agreement read.' Is that ok with you?

Mr. Natt

Yes it is.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you remember from your time in World War II?

Mr. Natt

No, that is about it.

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