

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With:

**James H. Keefe, Jr.
December 14, 2010
Bellevue, Washington**

**566th Bomb Squadron
389th Bomb Group
Stalag Luft III**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is December 14, 2010. I am interviewing James H. Keeffe, Jr. by telephone. His address is: 444 140th Avenue NE, Bellevue, Washington, 98005. His phone number is 425-747-4444. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Jim, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Now the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Nimitz Museum. "Agreement read." Is that okay with you?

Mr. Keeffe

That's all right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the next thing I would like to do is get an alternative contact. We have found out that sometimes several years down the road we try to get back in contact with a veteran and he has moved or something. Do you have a son or daughter or someone we could contact if we needed to find you?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes, James H. Keeffe, III.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have his address and phone number?

Mr. Keeffe

His phone number is 206-391-2742.

Mr. Misenhimer

What town does he live in?

Mr. Keeffe

He lives in Fall City, Washington. It's near where I live.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Keeffe

March 12, 1923.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Keeffe

Sioux City, Iowa.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Keeffe

There were three boys and three girls. I was one of the boys. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

How many of you boys were in World War II?

Mr. Keeffe

Two of us.

Mr. Misenhimer

You and Robert?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

I interviewed Robert back in August.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Keeffe

It was murder for my father and mother. We kids didn't suffer that much.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Keeffe

My father was a civil engineer. He had been building bridges for the states of Nebraska and Iowa but he decided to go into business for himself. He wound up with J. H. Keeffe Construction Company. He also started a brick-making factory. He invented a trussless arch. And he had a large workforce and he made the mistake of hanging on to those people for two, three, four years until finally he couldn't keep paying them. He had to let them go. My father should have gone into bankruptcy, but he didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was pretty rough times, then?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes. We had a lot of tube steak. (Laugh).

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Keeffe

I went to one high school in Salt Lake City. I finished at a high school in Seattle, Washington.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you graduate from high school?

Mr. Keeffe

I graduated in 1939.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do after you graduated from high school?

Mr. Keefe

Post graduate for one year. I don't know why but I was skipped two years. My parents apparently decided that I was too young to go out in the world. Anyhow, I PG'd for one year and then I went to Seattle University.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did you go there?

Mr. Keefe

Two years.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were you studying there?

Mr. Keefe

I was studying chemical engineering.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Keefe

Yes, I was up skiing at Mt. Rainier. Subsequently the slopes were becoming cleared of people and they were all huddled around their automobiles. I skied over to one of these cars with people and asked them, "What's going on." They responded that Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese. I asked them, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" (Laugh). And of course they said Hawaii.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think was the question that everyone asked at that time.

Mr. Keefe

Where's Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right. When you heard that, how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Keeffe

I went back to skiing. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Keeffe

I started in Salt Lake City in 1939 by joining the National Guard. Shortly after, in the beginning of the summer I joined the National Guard. At the end of the summer my dad was transferred to Seattle, Washington and of course, the family went too. I was lonely in my last year of high school. Two houses away from our house there was a guy who came out in a uniform. I asked him and he told me that he was in the National Guard. He was a Supply Sergeant. I asked him if I could join up and ride with him to go to the meetings. He said sure. So, I joined the National Guard in Seattle. That continued until I became an Aviation Cadet.

Mr. Misenhimer

How old were you when you joined the National Guard?

Mr. Keeffe

14 in Salt Lake City.

Mr. Misenhimer

And they would take you at that age?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes, the decision would be made up in Seattle because of the passage of time. In 1940, October, November, and into December, the National Guard was going to be activated, so they called those of whose that were still younger than 18 in for an interview with one of the officers. The upshot was that they could not take us without parental consent. So I spoke with my parents and decided to discontinue service in the National Guard. Effective December 10, 1940, I was discharged from the Seattle National Guard. They went off for a year's training and exercises. They were due to be home

just before Christmas of 1941. And of course they were here in the area when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Then all National Guards were federalized.

Mr. Misenhimer

What National Guard Unit was that?

Mr. Keeffe

I don't remember the numbers. It was a field artillery outfit. We were the headquarters battery.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then what happened after that?

Mr. Keeffe

In 1941, while the Seattle National Guard was up for this year long training, I continued with University until the end of 1942. In the summer of 1941 I took CPT, Civilian Pilot Training. I got a private pilot's license. Then in the summer of 1942 my dad got me a job with a construction company here in Seattle, E. W. Elliott Construction Company. That outfit was building the base camp for the rapid construction of the Al-Can Highway. I went with a group of other fellows on a chartered yacht from Seattle to Skagway up in Alaska and then by train up the mountain over to White Horse in the Yukon Territory. Outside of the town, up on the plateau was an airfield and almost every day there were airplanes coming in for refueling in decent navigational weather. I finally couldn't stand it and I quit and came back to Seattle to my parent's home and decided to join the service and become an Aviation Cadet. The week before the 4th of July, I took all the Navy tests but there was one thing I didn't like at all. I didn't like the way the officers treated the sailors. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday I went through the Navy program and then on Wednesday I had a meeting. I was all finished with the tests and I was interviewed by Commander Blimp. Commander Blimp talked down to me, which I didn't appreciate. So I went home and spent the evening comparing airplanes. Army airplanes and Navy planes. Then I spoke with my father and my mother and told them that I didn't like the way the Navy treated their sailors. They are not slaves, they are

not nothings. So I went down on Thursday to the Army recruiting place. I should have told you that on the Wednesday when I was finished with Commander Blimp, he told me to come down to the Federal Building on Saturday for a mass swearing in ceremony. Of course, I knew all about swearing in because I had been in two National Guards. So, I went through the Army's program. I took all their tests and passed them. Then I was interviewed by a Captain with no necktie, neck open, sleeves rolled up; my kind of people. (Laugh) I spoke with this Captain and told him that I had gone through the Navy testing program but I had not been sworn in. He said, "Well, you're a lucky young man because you have a choice. You can either go Navy or go Army and you're just what the Army wants." So, on Friday I was sworn in as a Staff Sergeant awaiting Aviation Cadet status. (Laugh) Commander Blimp called on Saturday morning after his big swearing in ceremony and wanted to talk to Mr. Keeffe. And my mother said, "Do you want Jim Sr. or Jim Jr.?" He allowed as how it was Jim, Jr. Anyhow, I was in bed because I had been out with my buddies on Friday night. I came down. My mother woke me up and told me, "There is a Navy officer on the phone downstairs and he doesn't sound very happy, Jim." I identified myself and Commander Blimp said, "Where the hell were you this morning for your swearing-in ceremony?" I said, "You don't need to worry about me anymore, Commander. I joined the Army Air Corps yesterday." (Laugh) He slammed the phone down and that was the end of my Navy career. (Laugh)

Then, I don't remember exactly, but about two or three weeks later I received a letter ordering me to go to California to Santa Ana to the Army Air Force training situation. To make a long story short, there was a rhubarb about where we were going and when we were going. All of us CPT guys had to go back a class because they were going to send us home. They said, "You CPT guys are not supposed to be here. This class is Flying Sergeants only and you are slated to become officers, so I'm going to send you home." We told him, a group of us organized, and went to the Commander and told him that we didn't want to go home. "We came here to learn to fly and to fight." So they held us back one class and then we formed the next class, which was 43-F. The 43 is

the year of graduation and F was the place in the training calendar. They had a new class, 42-F and then 43 F and then 44 F every nine weeks. We were called 43-F. We started as a training unit and went through the whole program, which took from September 1942 until June 1943. We went through four phases. The first phase was non-flying. It was testing and ground school. Then we went into primary training in Tulare, California at the Tex Rankin Aeronautical School of Aviation, a civilian outfit, training cadets.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in the school to be a Sergeant or to be an officer?

Mr. Keefe

To be an officer. But I might add that they pulled a dirty deal on us. We signed you to become officers in the Army Reserve. And just before graduation in June 1943, Advanced Flying Training, they told us that we were going to be in a new category, which would be Army of the United States. There is a significant difference between U S Army and Army of the Unites States. It had to do with rank. I, and all the guys around me in 43-F, had been signed up to become officer pilots in the United States Army and they arbitrarily our status to Army of the United States which meant that after termination of hostilities we would not be in the Army Reserves, we would be dropped out. Some of the classes around the country of 43-F they were going to quit totally if they forced this status on them, but our class was not as well organized as some of the other similar classes in the country and so we wound up with commission in the Army of the United States.

Flying training consisted of four phases. Phase one was at Santa Ana, testing classes on military requirements of becoming officers. Then Primary was to learn how to fly at the Tex Rankin Aeronautical School of Aviation, a very nice place. We had primary there for 9 weeks. Then we went up the valley to Lemoore, California for Basic. At Tulare everything was civilian. The administration, the instructors, the whole shebang was civilian. The administration, the instructors,

the whole shebang was civilian. The outfit at Lemoore, California was all military. Then advanced was all military. Advanced was conducted at Yuma, Arizona. We graduated June 21, 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you some questions. How much different was it with the civilian instructors as compared to the military instructors?

Mr. Keeffe

That's a good question. The military instructors were younger. Most of the civilian instructors were middle-aged men. That was one big difference.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which ones were rougher on you?

Mr. Keeffe

That varied with the individual. We had a couple of instructors in Basic and a couple of instructors in Advanced that were not very nice people. I was lucky all the way through and had very good instructors.

Mr. Misenhimer

The fact that you had a pilot's license and CPT, did that help you very much?

Mr. Keeffe

Not much. The flying training people took a close look at us. For instance, I think usually in Primary, regular cadets would solo at 8 or 9 hours. Those of us who were in CPT, in my case I soloed at 6 hours. But the people that had been in the military before, like I was in the National Guard, normally the Cadet organization was organized on military lines. Therefore, Cadet Officers and Cadet Sergeants, normally these were guys that had been CPT or who had been National Guards.

Mr. Misenhimer

What plane did you fly in Primary?

Mr. Keeffe

In Primary we flew a bi-plane made by the Boeing Company. It was the Stearman Kadet. It was a wonderful airplane for acrobatics. It was called the PT-13 and PT-17. The only difference in the PT-17 was a different engine. It was a wonderful airplane. You could do anything, almost.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that the only plane you flew in Primary?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes. Realize in Primary we had no retractable landing gear. We had fixed pitch prop and AI, things like that. At each successive stage more requirements were put upon the trainee. Like at Basic we had a two-position propeller. Still we had no retractable landing gear. That came in advanced training. In Primary and Basic we had very simple radios. The radios became better as we progressed to Advanced.

Mr. Misenhimer

What plane did you fly in Basic?

Mr. Keeffe

In Primary we flew that bi-plane, the PT-17 or the PT-13, and PT is primary trainer. At Lemoore we flew the BT-13 and BT-15. They were the same airplane but to save metal the BT-15, the aft fuselage section was plywood rather than metal. On the snap rolls, they eventually had trouble with that airplane because it was out there in a bind and twist.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who manufactured that plane? There was one they called the Vultee Vibrator, how about that one?

Mr. Keeffe

That's the airplane, the Basic airplane. The all-metal Basic trainer, the BT-13 was a good airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did these have open cockpits or closed cockpits?

Mr. Keeffe

In Primary, the bi-plane was an open-air cockpit. The basic had sliding canopies. In advanced we flew three types of airplanes. The primary airplane we flew in advanced was the Cessna Bobcat. It wasn't much of an airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that the one they called the Bamboo Bomber?

Mr. Keeffe

I don't remember. Each training group had their own names, like the PT Vibrator. In advanced we flew the T-6, which was a single-engine low-winged airplane flown to prepare the pilot for flying the pursuit airplane, fighter planes. So we had training in the T-6 for gunnery. We had an airplane the AT-9, made by Curtis. So we had the AT-17, which was the Bamboo Bomber. We had the AT-9, which was an all-metal, two-engine, retractable landing gear airplane. I really enjoyed that airplane and loved flying it. Many of the Cadets were scared of that plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the number of that plane?

Mr. Keeffe

The AT-9.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that a Beechcraft?

Mr. Keeffe

It was a Curtis. I'm quite sure of that. Then we graduated and as usual in the military, I received an assignment to go to a training field in New Mexico where they trained bombardiers and navigators, and of course, they had to have pilots to fly the airplanes. So, that was to be my assignment upon graduation. Following advanced training graduation we were given 10 days leave. While I was home on leave they sent me another set of orders and changed my assignment to B-24 transition. At that

time they were beginning to experience heavy losses in four-engine bombers in Europe. So they accelerated the heavy bomber training. Instead of where I had been assigned to go to, I went to Davis Monthan Air Force Base. I became sick for about a week and couldn't fly. Then they came in with a draft requirement of an "x" number of pilots to be assigned immediately as copilots. That's what happened to me. I was not at all happy. Because in primary training and in basic training, the only person that you flew with was your instructor. In advanced training we flew two-engine airplanes and therefore, two pilots. I learned very quickly that some of these hot-dogs that I thought were good pilots, were not good pilots. This carried through to that assignment too. Blythe, California. Blythe was a rat hole. (Laugh). Tar paper shacks. Anyhow, I was assigned, after I became well, after that session of whatever it was, the flu or something, 400 of us were pulled out of four engine training and were assigned to crews. As the crew was being put together, the last person to join the crew was the copilot because they had a pilot. At Blythe, California I was immediately assigned to a guy named Jimmy McArthur as his copilot.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was his name again?

Mr. Keeffe

James B. McArthur.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you, when you graduated were you commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes, on the 21st of June, 1943, we came together at the base theater and that is where the graduation ceremony was held. We were given our 2nd Lieutenant's bars and our wings.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to buy your own uniform?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, go ahead. You were assigned to this crew and your pilot.

Mr. Keeffe

Fortunately, Jimmy McArthur was a good pilot. So that took care of some of my personal wrath. We had some people, crewmembers, who were not very good and eventually we had trouble. We trained at Blythe, California for a month, maybe a month and a half. Then we were ordered to Topeka, Kansas to be outfitted for transfer to combat in the European theater. Then the crew size was ten individuals; four officers and six Sergeants. The reason they made all of these guys Sergeants during World War II was because the Geneva Convention, which both sides had signed, stated that officers would not be put to work upon being captured and Sergeants, the several grades of Sergeants, would not be required to do manual labor. That's how these guys were very quickly promoted up to Staff Sergeant. At Topeka, Kansas we got all of our winter clothing and .45 caliber side arms. Then we went overseas. The way we went to England and the way they did that was, in our case, the crew of ten was divided into two crews. So there were two officers and three Sergeants under my control during the movement overseas and two officers and three Sergeants assigned to McArthur. But on the way over McArthur lost his navigator, one of the officers, to VD. Mac lost Steven, the navigator. They pulled him off and put him in the hospital. I think in Presque Isle, Maine. And he lost two of his three Sergeants, and I don't remember why. My little group of five us, we lost nobody. Each group of five was assigned a B-17 replacement airplane being ferried over to England, so we didn't see the other guys until we came together in England. The ferry crew in our case made a mistake and instead of landing in Scotland, they landed in Ireland. So we had to take a ferryboat to England and then a truck picked us up and took us to the personnel replacement pool at Stone, England. Subsequently we

came together as a full crew, minus three people, and went to Chedington to go through UK transition to become familiar with the bad weather and the radio situation in England.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date did you leave to go overseas?

Mr. Keeffe

The B-17's that were being ferried, they picked us up in Topeka, Kansas. We didn't fly formation with the other airplanes. We went our own way and were separated until we came together in England. The ferry crew had control of the airplane and we were just passengers in a cold airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date did you leave to go overseas?

Mr. Keeffe

We flew to New York. The ferry crew wanted to go to New York. We overnighted in New York and then the next day we flew up to a base in Maine. I think it was Presque Isle and then the next day we flew to Goose Bay, Labrador. A day or two later we flew from that base to what was supposed to be Scotland, but in our case they made a mistake and landed at Nutts Corner, Ireland.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date did you get together as a crew then?

Mr. Keeffe

At Stone at the Replacement Depot.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date would that have been?

Mr. Keeffe

Topeka, Kansas was the end of October, the beginning of November. We arrived after the Thanksgiving dinner and everything in the kitchen had been cleaned up, so we had sandwiches for Thanksgiving dinner in 1943. We went through Chedington up into about January for UK transition.

Then in January, 1944 we were assigned to the 389th Bombardment Group in the 566th Squadron. I don't know if you know how a group was organized, but a group occupied one airbase. The group was made up of four combat squadrons. So on a mission a squadron was made up of 9 airplanes, so on a mission you had 36 airplanes. You just kept climbing the ladder, that's how you formed up your group of 36 airplanes. We went to our combat base in January, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

What base was this? Where was it?

Mr. Keefe

It had an English connotation. They called it Station 114. There was a small village just outside the base. The name of that little village was Hethel. We were about 7 miles south of Norwich, England. Norwich was located in East Anglia. We went through indoctrination and some training at the onset. Some of the senior pilots and other crew, like navigator and bombardier, went through training for their position, which they occupied on the airplane. The first mission of our crew I didn't go on because the check pilot flew in the right seat, in the copilot's seat, to check out the pilot and the crew. Then we flew four more missions and on the fourth mission for me, the fifth mission for the rest of the crew, we wound up with five combat missions, and on the 8th of March, 1944, my fourth mission, over Berlin on the bomb run, we lost number 3 engine and you can't keep up with the group on three engines without burning a lot of fuel so we dropped our bombs on a target of opportunity. We rejoined the group, we cut a corner and rejoined the group for a couple of hours until two fighters showed up and shot us up. We lost number 2 engine. So now the fuel consumption really went up and essentially we ran out of gas. There was quite a bit of excitement in our crew because several things had happened. One gunner had lost a hand. I never did find his hand. Another gunner was shot through both legs from the fighter attack. I opened the first aid kit to get some morphine styrettes and they had a small stone in the little paper container. Had we gotten back to base from that mission, I would have brought charges against the navigator for cowardice in the face of the enemy in combat. I

would have brought charges against the hospital because the first aid kits were sealed. You had to break open, or cut the wires securing these things. There was one other thing. Anyhow, Mac and I discussed what we should do and we decided that one thing that we did not want to do was to go down in the North Sea. So we went through four or five alternatives and chose one. By now we were over Holland and over the Zeider Zee. We decided we could not make a crash landing because the fields in Holland were very small, farm fields. They had little canals in a lot of the places and crash landing a B-24 would have caused it to break up. So we decided to bail out and jump over land, put the airplane in a tight circle and get together on the ground. That was a big joke. It never happened. We bailed out. I told Mac that I would get them going in the front and the back and signal to him when the last man went out of the back of the airplane. By the way, the intercom was shot out in the attack. The navigator had come up to the cockpit just as we turned from the I.P. to initiate the bomb run. He came up to me and McArthur was flying the airplane because he was in a formation of three airplanes. He was number two in that flight of three. Anyhow, the navigator came up and poked me and started talking, even before the bomb run, "Don't bother me." Finally we got shot up by the fighters and the intercom was no longer working. I signaled to him to come up to me. He had told me, "I can't function. I can't navigate anymore." I told him to stay down there and don't bother us. With us being shot up by the two fighters, and no intercom, I signaled him to come to me and he did. I told him to go to the back and find out what is going on back there and make sure that they are still at their gun position. He left and he didn't come back. So then the engineer Sergeant was out of his turret and checking our fuel consumption and I called him and told him, "Bill, when you are finished transferring fuel, go to the back and see what is going on there." He said okay and then he left and he didn't come back. So I told McArthur after about 10 or 15 minutes, I said, "I'll go back and find out what's going on in the rear. I promise you I'll be back." So I dropped down out of the cockpit into the bomb bay and I found Sergeant Hughes lying on the bomb bay door, the front left bomb bay door. He was lucky because he had his parachute harness on but he had no pack canopy. That had to

be snapped on to heavy steel clips. You never put weight on those bomb bay doors because it would cause them to bow and pull the wheels of the individual pieces of the tracks and then the bomb bay doors would tear off. Hughes had passed out from lack of oxygen and fell on to the front left bomb bay door. He was very lucky. He should have wound up with the door falling off the airplane and him going out unconscious and with no parachute. I pulled him back on to the keel of the airplane. I slapped his face a little bit to bring him around. I also got an oxygen bottle and had him suck on the hose and he came around. I asked him, "Bill, did you get to the back end?" "Lieutenant, I don't know." So I told him, "Get back in your turret and stay on oxygen." He was a good man. Anyhow, I went to the back end and lots of problems. I've already mentioned the two seriously wounded men. One of them, Kenneth Miller, who lost a hand, eventually died. When he died I don't know for sure, but when it came time to bail out I left him in the airplane. We headed south over the Zeider Zee. While were discussing what to do and what the situation was, we decided to bail the crew out and signal to the pilot after everyone had cleared the front and cleared the back. So I started them going out in the front and told the bombardier to keep them jumping. I had trouble with Steven, that's the navigator. He went out on the keel, turned around and started back and said, "I'm not going." I said, "Oh yes you are." He and I wound up on the 10-inch keel of the airplane. I'm trying to get him out of the airplane and he's trying to hang on to the bomb rack. But I finally put a foot up and got his hands loose and out he went screaming. I told the bombardier to keep the rest of the guys going in front and I was going in back. I went to the back. The gunner that I had given the morphine to was conscious but unable to function because I gave him not one; I gave him two ampoules of morphine. We towed him to the camera hatch and I tied the cable around his D-ring for opening the parachute. I tied the other end of it to a gun mount and patted him on the cheek and wished him well and shoved him out of the airplane. Then there was the tail turret and the ball turret gunners and they started with "You go first," "No, you go first." I said, "We don't have time for that nonsense." Here is the rudder cable and the last one of you that goes out, pull on this cable two or three times to let McArthur know that

you are on your way out. I'll show you how to do it." So I spread myself over the camera hatch, which was open and said a little prayer and jumped out of the airplane. I had schooled myself that if I had to bail out I would make a delayed opening of my parachute to preclude being shot at, which was beginning to happen. The German ground troops would shoot low flying airplanes and the people in parachutes when they jumped out. I delayed. I bailed out at about 5,000 feet and I delayed opening my parachute almost too long. Paratroopers have told me that I was below 300 feet when I finally opened my parachute. I never saw the parachute in the air because I swung one time above the horizon and I was over a great big river and I swung back across the river and the parachute prolonged the flight and I crashed into an apple tree. There were no leaves or apples on the tree. The back of the house was at the end of the lot and the front of the lot with a house on it was about 40 –50 feet across, then it was about 250-300 feet deep. I got out of my parachute. It was spread over the tree. There was no way I could get that thing out of the tree quickly, so I left it draped over the apple tree. A guy came out, a man in an overcoat. There I was, expecting me to be an American and I spoke to him, I said, "Are you a Dutchman?" He thought I said I was a German. I reached into my pocket where I had put my .45 and I took it out of my pocket and took the clip out of it and handed it to this guy. When I took out the gun and said, "I am a German", his hands shot up over his head. He thought I was going to shoot him, but I handed him the gun. He held it by the muzzle with just two fingers. I could tell this guy had never handled a gun. There was a small group of people between two of the houses. I ran up to them and said, "Does anybody speak English?" Jabber, jabber, jabber. They begin pointing to my face. I had suffered from flak. I don't think from the fighters. I had a cut over my left eye and I guess just had that out a couple of years ago because previously I didn't want people fooling around right there over my eye. Nobody could speak English, so I took my gun back, put the clip back in it, and put it in my pocket. Each of these yards were of strange connection and had 2-meter high wooden fences. I started going over these fences running away from these people, old men, ladies, and children. As I started going over the fences, it finally, I said to myself, "You've

got to hide somewhere.” The next fence I approached, I took my gun out. There was a rabbit hutch up against the fence. So I put the .45 up against the fence next to the rabbit hutch. I went over one more fence and there was what appeared to be a shed built up against the back of this house. I went into that shed and there were two small tables in this shed. I had hoped that there would be a door into the basement. But there was no door. It was a three-sided shed up against the back wall of the house. So I wound up climbing under one of the tables, both of which had rabbit hutches on them. I covered myself with potato sacks. Then I wished I had my .45 but it was gone, out of my hand. I still had a Boy Scout knife. I took out the Boy Scout knife and cut up the few papers that I had in my flight suit and waited. I could tell when they stopped shooting at the airplane because the heavy machine guns and large caliber weapons were firing for a while but they stopped when the airplane went out of sight. Eventually I could hear a search coming and you have to realize that the Germans were very brutal with the occupied people. Finally, well, when I went into that shed and found there were no doors to the basement. I decided that I couldn’t keep going over those fences. So I decided to stay in that shed. When I went into the place and made the decision to stay there, I took a handful of garden tools, rakes, hoes, shovels, things like that. I pushed the door open and reached outside with these tools and leaned them against the door outside and pulled my arms back inside. That probably saved me because I heard the search coming and then finally I heard bumping around in the house; that had to be Germans looking for me. Very shortly thereafter the tools were swept away from the door and the door was opened and in came a policeman in green pants. He had on riding style green trousers and black boots. He had the pistol in his hand and the lanyard off the gun on his shoulder. I could only see him from the waist down. I couldn’t see from the location that I was in, I couldn’t see him completely. He turned around two or three times. His buddy shouted to him and he shouted back and shortly he left and the search continued on down the road. Finally it became quiet. By now, we parachuted about 4:45 in the daytime and it was just about getting dark. By the time very shortly after the guy searched the shed and didn’t find me, it became darker and finally I heard “clomp, clomp,

clomp". I had my Boy Scout knife ready to fight with if necessary. I heard the door open. It was dark outside. In came a man very modestly dressed, tattered old pants, and old wooden shoes. They called them klompen from the sound they made. He had a big plate with two or three carrots for his rabbits. He had a lantern, a gas lantern and he put that lantern on one of the tables and opened one of the rabbit hutches. I reached out from under one of these tables and pulled the back of his jacket. As he turned I started to come out from the table and from the potato sacks. He just about had a hemorrhage when he saw me. He pointed at my face. I told you previously that I had received a piece of flak above my eye and it had bled for a while and then coagulated. When I came through the apple tree, totally out of control, I went face first into the brush. So here was the owner of the house looking at me and he pointed at my face. I signaled to him, "Forget about my face, can you speak English?" "Jabber, jabber, jabber." I reached across him. He had laid the plate of carrots down. I picked up one of his carrots, it was about a foot long, and I started to eat it. I hadn't had anything to eat for two days. You don't eat very much before a mission. The morning of our mission we could tell how bad the mission was going to be by the time they woke us up. If they woke us up, around 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning, it was going to be a short mission. If they woke us up at 2:00 or 1:30 during the night, which they had done, you were probably going to go a long distance before dropping your bombs. Anyway, I was hungry and I ate the carrot. The Dutch don't eat big carrots; they eat only the little ones. The big ones they call wortel and the little ones they call penjes. Eventually, I took that nail from somewhere and there was a vertical post in the middle of this shed holding up the roof. I scratched on that sucker post. I scratched 20. I asked him if he spoke English. "Jabber, jabber." "Spretchenzy Dutch?" "Jabber, jabber." I scratched 20 on the post and pointed to it and finally I saw a light go on in his head, in his eyes. He took the nail and he scratched 5 3 and he pointed to it and then pointed to himself and said, "Ich." I had my first word in Dutch, "Ich." Eventually he signaled, he had a wristwatch on, and he signaled that he would be back in half an hour and he left. Very shortly he came back with shoes on. He indicated again that he would be back in half an hour. He

went to the village doctor and told the doctor the American was in his shed. The doctor already knew that I was in the shed. There were underground people there with him who had seen me go into the shed and seen the three policemen go into the shed and come out without me. They were trying to figure out what to do and the man who owned the piece of land and the shed. He told the doctor, "The American is in my shed. What do I do?" He said, "Go home, close the shutters outside, and go upstairs and go to bed and forget the American. You never saw an American. You never spoke to an American." Which he eventually did. He came back and came in one more time and he had a small plate with two or three pieces of candy, small pieces of candy. There was another piece of something; I think it was a half piece of bread with some jam on it. Anyhow, he gave me those and indicated that he was going to go to sleep. He got to his house and into bed rather quickly and I could hear whispering outside the door. The door opened and I could see about four or five men and one of them, which happened to be the doctor, said, "We help you." They had prepared a rowboat across the road and they had brought a change of clothing, an old suit, which was big and a pair of shoes. The shoes were so big that after I tied them, I stepped right out of them. So I took the laces out completely and I tied them around my foot to keep them from coming loose. We went on to the dike road and a very short distance 100 to 200 feet. We went over a fence, climbing it. This was the boatyard where they had the boat and it was right on the edge of this river. The rower and another fellow and I went into the rowboat and they rowed up to Dordrecht, which is about an hour in the dark. At the landing in Dordrecht one chap climbed up out with me and the other one stayed in the rowboat. The young man's name was Marinos Veth. He took me to a safehouse where I stayed for two days. Then two young men came with three bicycles and we bicycled up to Rotterdam. I stayed in Rotterdam about 4 ½ months. I had a very good time. I learned a lot. I would equate it to the equivalency of three years, the first three years at a university. I kept telling the Dutch people that I had to go back. They tried two or three times, one time disastrously, to get me back to England. What I wanted to do was go south through Belgium into France and meet up with the American troops.

Following D Day, I was in Holland on D-Day. Finally through the Catholic Church there in Rotterdam, I was taken there and met two or three men. One of them eventually told me that he had located a safe way out of the country into Belgium and that he could guarantee the people on the Holland side. It turns out that this organization, which called itself "KLM Line", was actually the German counterintelligence that had set up this little line. In such a situation you have to put your total faith and trust in these people. You don't know them from Adam and they don't know you from Adam and you must follow any instructions that they give you. The German counterintelligence had set up the pilot line and my understanding is that 1 in every 15 air crew members that came into their hands they let go on to be captured somewhere else, maybe down in France. At the Dutch-Belgium border, the Dutch border police brought an English Sergeant John Jenkins to the British. He had not been down very long. Whereas I could stumble along in the Dutch language, he didn't know any. We got to Antwerp with a young lady escorting us on a country train streetcars. We stayed two nights with a family. Then we were taken in the evening of the third day. We were taken to an apartment and there we had a very nice dinner. There were a lot of American and British air crew who had gone through previously and they had lots of alcohol. In retrospect, the reason for all the alcohol I suppose was to loosen our lips and hopefully answer their questions. After the dinner, I believe at 10:00 or thereabouts, the doorbell rang and in came two men. One of them spoke English as well as I do and the other one's English was rather poor. He spent his time talking to the English kid. The big guy spent his time with me. The little guy was a German, a military engineer. I presume he was interested in the British bombs and the radio systems they used in bombing. The big guy asked me some basic questions. I rather cleverly avoided his questions. They walked us to a building in the heart of downtown Antwerp. I presume this was a police building, which the Germans had taken over. They took us, the big guy and the little guy, where they took us turned out to be the police station for the Green Police. We walked to this building and passed a German soldier who was armed. They took us upstairs into a very small office and informed us that they were the German Secret Police and that we

were now their captives. It sort of shocked me. Then they took us to the local bastille, a huge prison. They kept us in the prison for about ten days and then by truck they took about 20 of us to Brussels. That was Begitnen Straat, the name of the prison and the street. In Brussels we were handed over to the Luftwaffe West. From that time on we were in the normal downed flyers situation.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened to you next?

Mr. Keeffe

In my case, at Brussels or possibly at the interrogation camp, we were just like any of the shot down individuals.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in one of the Stalags?

Mr. Keeffe

We were separated. The English kid went off to a Sergeant's camp. I was in Stalag Luft III at Sagan.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened to you there?

Mr. Keeffe

Stalag Luft III, the Germans eventually had two officer camps. There was Stalag Luft III at Sagan and there was Stalag Luft I up on the Baltic. There were about 9,000 – 10,000 officers, Allied flying officers at Barth at Stalag Luft I. And about 12, 500 airmen, air officers at Stalag Luft III. Stalag Luft III was really a very nice camp. It had been built in 1942. It was made out of wooden single storied buildings. The administration was rather interesting because upon arrival, individuals had their pictures taken for ID cards and dog tags were stamped out for the individual, German dog tags. Those who were wearing uniforms were able to retain them, keep them. In my case I was wearing civilian clothing all the way through this time. When I got to the camp I had to give them all of the civilian clothing that I had except for the underwear. This was replaced by giving me uniform pieces

of clothing supplies, American, English, and French. When they opened the gate for us to go on in to the camp itself, they then closed the door and our own people took over for orientation, and you are in the dumps.

Mr. Misenhimer

The fact that you were wearing civilian clothes, did they hold this against you or anything?

Mr. Keeffe

No. No one said anything. A civilian at a tram stop, a civilian with a cane was going to, he was angry, he was walking around, circling us, and working himself up in to a lather, calling us names. Then several of the guys were lying down on the grass. They pulled the suit jacket over my arms. The civilian, about middle age, circled us, worked himself up into a lather. He stopped in front of me and I just stared at him. He shouted and screamed. Then he moved his head backwards and then forwards and he spit in my face. I immediately went into a boxing stance and I was ready to cold-cock this guy. But out of the corner of my eye I could see that we had two or three Luftwaffe guards guarding us while we were being transported to camp. Out of the corner of my eye I saw this guy spit his cigarette out and grab the burp-gun that he had hanging on a strap around his neck and he came running. I said to myself, "Jim if you hit this guy, you're dead." So I didn't hit him, I just stood there quivering. My hands wanted to smash into his face but I didn't do it. The guard with the burp gun ran past me and jabbed his machine gun into the chest of this man with the cane. The language in the world that is the best in the world for screaming, believe me, is German. No one can outdo a German when it comes to screaming. Anyhow, the guard kept jabbing the civilian, backing him out of this little tiny park. A street car was going to come in and go back out. He backed him all the way into the street and the guy fell backwards off of some very high curbing and the guard relaxed his hold on his burp gun rather quickly and then walked back past me to his buddies and winked at me. Then he continued talking to his buddies.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in Stalag Luft III did you have to go on that long march that the prisoners went on in the winter?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes. The reason for that, Hitler, on this day, which was Saturday, the 27th of January, 1945, at his situation briefing that morning, the Russians were now moving across Poland and were on their way into German. In the path that the Russians were taking, they were going to come to the POW camp where about 12,000 airmen were. The possibility of being liberated by the Russians, Hitler blew up and screamed, "Get them out of there today, now! Take their boots and take their trousers. Get them far away today." The order came to the Commandant of the camp and he put the order into operation and everybody started at night. One of the Germans that came to our compound. At Stalag III there were East, North, South, and West. In Stalag Luft III it was made up of five compounds. Each compound held approximately 2,000 or so officer prisoners. So they passed the word around the compound to be ready to leave in half an hour. It wasn't half an hour. For us it was in the middle of the night. Our compound was marched out at about 3:00 in the morning and into a blizzard. We were in a blizzard for about three days, three or four days. They marched us about close to 100 kilometers. I think it was maybe 60 kilometers. Then they put us into these horrible little boxcars, 50 officer prisoners and two guards into these 40 & 8's, two axles, four wheeled boxcars. They were filthy inside. We were in those boxcars for about four days. It was really bad.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Keeffe

They took us to southern Germany to Munich and then out a short distance to Moosburg. Moosburg was a huge German Army POW camp, not for officers. It was for other ranks. It was determined that we were liberated on Sunday, April 29, 1945. It was determined that there were in the neighborhood

of 130,000 of us in and around. Several small camps were marched almost in circles trying to scrounge for food. Moosburg was really bad. The conditions in the camp were bad. For instance we had one water faucet for 2,000 officers. The latrines were filled up. The methane gas generated by the stinking mess flowed all over the floor of the latrines and out and down into the compound. It was really, really very bad. I've already mentioned Patton's Third Army. That was a happy day. Then we were ordered to stay in the camp because after World War I when the Germans finally quit all these camps, the guards just walked away and went home. A lot of guys got killed before they were able to get out of Germany. Anyhow, if an order makes sense I will obey it. If it doesn't make sense, I'll do something else. So five of us decided to take off. One guy turned around and went back to the camp. Then the four of us split up into two pairs. I spent the first night in a German farmer's master bedroom. The next night we spent on the floor at Erlangen. That was rather interesting. The next day we went to the base operations and being a pilot I knew how air bases functioned. I was going to the operations office. There were military police here and there in the town of Erlangen and anytime we encountered them they would tell us that we were supposed to go to the stadium and gather the ex-POW's there. We would see the military policeman and ignore him. We finally got out to the base after dark and they finally let us in at the gate. We stumbled around and saw a little light coming out of one building. So I opened the door and went in and it was a GI barracks. They asked us the usual question, "What the hell are you?" The next day, well, the GI's told us that there was a stack of mattresses. I asked them where the officer's BOQ was and they said that they had no idea. We asked, "Can we stay here with you guys tonight?" And they said, "Sure." We pulled two mattresses off the pile and covered ourselves up with towels. The next morning we wound up in the operations section of the air base at Erlangen. We got in there by jeep. This guy picked us up in his jeep and dropped us off in Erlangen. We went out to the base and it was messed up pretty well. They had it operational but just barely. For the operations function they had two prepared vans, which could be towed and set up to run a flying operation. Andy and I went into this one trailer and there

was a Major in there, the operations officer. I saluted him and he asked the usual question, "What the hell are you guys?" We told him we were ex-POW's. He said, "Damn it, you're not supposed to be here. You are supposed to be in town at the stadium. Go away and leave us alone." We went back out to another part of the base and we ran into another POW from Stalag Luft III in the air base and two or three of his friends. They were going out to the operations trailer as well. I told them, "You can forget about going, there is a Major who has just come over from the States because the only ribbon he is wearing is the spam ribbon and the ETO ribbon. He is just going to scream at you and do nothing to help you." So we went to the little PX store and promoted Jimmy Blackstock from 2nd Lieutenant to Colonel. You do what you have to do. We briefed him. I borrowed a telephone and called the motor pool and told them to please send a staff car out for Colonel Blackstock and party. You couldn't tell how old Jimmy Blackstock was. He could pass for 45 or 50 or a year or two younger than he was. Anyhow, we rode out to the operations trailer and he went in first and he backed this Major up against the wall and read him the riot act. There were two pilots just clearing for a flight and they said, "We're going up to Wiesbaden if you would like to go." I said, "Where the hell is Wiesbaden?" "It's to the left of Frankfurt, that's west." That was good. There the operations area was getting ready to fly to France and there were two Brigadier Generals there, single stars. They said, "Excuse me, but what the hell are you?" You have to realize that I had a Polish jacket, a French beret, GI pants, and a shirt of some kind. We hadn't had a bath in three or four months and we were pretty scruffy looking. We had no razor. These two Generals asked what outfit we were in. We told them we were ex-POW's and that we had been liberated and we were trying to get to France. They asked if we had had lunch yet and we responded, "No sir." They said, "Be our guests at lunch." They had a jeep and a driver waiting outside for them. The superstructure, the winterization of the jeep was no longer in force. They had the side curtains and a canvas top; they were not on the jeep. The driver and one General were in the front seat and the other general and Andy and I were in the back. Jimmy Blackstock had gone off with his friends. They took us into the town of Wiesbaden to

the General Officer's hotel and restaurant and hosted us at lunch and then drove us back out to the airport and located the operations officer and said, "Put these two officers on the first plane going into northern France." We wound up going up in a Norseman, which is a high-wing, single-wing, single-engine Canadian bush airplane that the Air Force had a number of. It was a young Captain flying the plane. It could take about four or five passengers. He said, "I'm going there. I'll take you and I know where you need to go, Camp Lucky Strike." So we climbed aboard the airplane. He cranked it up and flew us from Wiesbaden to Y-80, which was the airfield in northern France servicing this big tent camp. Andy and I finally split up. He had a girlfriend in England and he wanted to go back and locate her. I wanted to go to Holland to find out what happened to all the people that I had known. But the Captain that interviewed me told me that I couldn't do that. I couldn't go there. Those people were starving. The Germans had flooded a bunch of Holland. I finally said okay, to heck with it, I will go home. In one or two days I was assigned a position on a boat and I think the name of the ship was *USS Marine Panther*. It was a ship especially built to carry artillery outfits, personnel, and equipment. It was, I couldn't believe the North Atlantic, it was calm the whole way across. We started out as a convoy but a day or two later they permitted the faster ships to go on ahead. We were in a convoy for one or maybe two days and then permission was given to this ship to go at a faster pace and so the trip was faster. I don't remember how many days that we were aboard, I think five or six days. One day the Captain came on the squawk box and said, "You are the whitest guys I have ever seen and there are no women on this ship. So you can get some sunshine for yourselves anywhere on the ship except at mealtime. So we were able to strip off our clothes, some of the guys totally. I was just in my underwear. We sunbathed all the way across. We were greeted at the entrance to New York. We landed in New Jersey and were taken to, I think it was Fort Dix. There we were out processed. One of the major items was bringing us up current with respect to the money owed to us. The Army had special train cars for moving troops. They were really well laid out. They had about four to six bunk areas and one, they called it a day room. It was

located in the corner of each of these cars for reading magazines, writing, and so on and so forth. We were hooked up to trains headed west. That was not Fort Dix; it was Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. There was a very good-looking nurse there. Anyhow, these cars were hooked up in sequence so they could be dropped off here and there as we headed west across the United States. That was about five or six days going across the United States, terminating at Fort Lewis in Tacoma, Washington. We were out processed within an hour. In my case, I was given a bus ticket and driven into town to the Greyhound Bus Depot in Tacoma. I boarded a bus for Seattle. We arrived at the Greyhound Station on Stewart Street and I had two barracks bags full of stuff, presents and things I had accrued. For instance, after we were flown into the north to Y80 and were taken into Camp Lucky Strike. At Y80 at the airfield, they had huge big flatbed trucks with benches and they operated between the airfield and Camp Lucky Strike itself. The trucks were there because there were airplanes flying in with POW's. We were from all over the place. These big flatbed trucks had a group of tents. Large tents they called hospital tents. We were told to strip naked and throw all our unwanted things in one pile and anything we wanted to keep in another pile, which we did. Then they deloused us. They sprayed bug killer on us. Then they told us to go into the first tent. We went into the first tent and were each handed a bar of soap and a washcloth. Then we went into the shower tent. The tents were all hooked together. In the shower tent we were given a towel and then we were given underwear. We went through these series of tents. We were given a barracks bag. "What size shirt do you wear? What size pants do you wear? What size jacket do you wear?" The GI's handed all this stuff to us. "Shebang" we ended up with a barracks bag full of clothes. Outside they had some cleared areas where we dressed. I looked at Andy and he looked at me and I said, "Andy, you're a good-looking ex-POW." He said, "Jim, you're the same." I said, "You know what Andy, let's do it again." (Laugh) So we took our barracks bags with all this clothing they had just given us and we pushed them under the floorboards of the last tent and went back and got deloused again and had all this stuff issued to us. So when I got to Seattle I had been in a few PX's and I had presents for the family. At the bus depot I

went outside to catch a taxi and one came up and asked where I was going. I said, "Out to Hunter Boulevard." A fellow came up alongside me he asked where he was going. "I'm going to the railroad station to catch a train." He said, "Climb in." So this happened two or three times and I finally got the message. These cab drivers didn't want anything like a long run. They wanted short runs into the downtown area. So the next cab that came up, I just opened up the back door, threw my two bags in and climbed in. Then he said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Hunter Boulevard." And he said, "I'm sorry but I'm just making short runs." I said, "Today you are going to Hunter Boulevard and if you want to fight about it, let's get at it." Two or three other guys spoke to him and he put them in the car with me. He dropped them off at the station and took me out to Hunter Boulevard. While I was paying him off, this little brother came out and asked, "Are you my brother Jim?" I said, "Yes, and you are my brother John." He turned around and ran into the house shouting, "Mom, Jim is home." My mother was taking a bath. That was the shortest bath that she ever took. Anyhow, there I was at home.

Later, I was able to find out what happened to some of the Dutch people who had helped me. In Rotterdam I stayed with a doctor and his wife and his two kids, teenagers and five Jews. A little family, father and mother, and little girl, 8 years old, and two sisters of a comrade of the doctor's. These Jews had been in this vertical house for four years without being outside even once. Eventually, on the 5th of December, 1944, the SD, which is Security Service Police, hit the house and picked up everybody I just described to you. Eventually, the doctor was taken out as a member of the reprisal group. Just south of Rotterdam, he and nine other people were shot down. There was quite a bit of that. My good friend was caught and he was put in a concentration camp north of Berlin and barely survived the war. Dutch Order Policemen who brought the English kid to join me to supposedly go to France, they were both shot.

Mr. Misenhimer

When the people in Holland turned you over to the others, did they know they were German Secret Police?

Mr. Keeffe

No they didn't know. In fact it was a Dutch girl who picked us up from the two Border Policemen. She had sold out to the Germans. After the war she and a compatriot, a Belgium girl, one of them hung herself in prison and the other one was hung.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you been back over there since the war?

Mr. Keeffe

Many times. I have retraced my steps.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you found some of those people?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes. Several of them did not survive concentration camp. Several of them were shot.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Keeffe

In Rotterdam, I stayed with about four different family situations. It became too much of a burden. Everything was rationed. You had to have ration cards for everything. There were several different Dutch organizations. The Dutch hid over 100,000 students. They needed food cards, clothing cards, all of these things. The Germans even went to the expense of, in Holland they would go house to house, asking what fruit trees do you have? Pears, apples, different kinds of apples. These German experts, whatever you want to call them, would estimate the production of each tree and then they would be assigned a number of say apples, they would estimate the production of this tree would be x

number at so much weight, and “You will give us the first 25 or 30 or 40 or 50%, and you may have the rest.” But the first 30% you will bring to us. Almost everything. The automobiles. They collected bicycles from the people and gave them worthless pieces of paper listing what they had taken.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you discharged?

Mr. Keeffe

I was given leave when I first got home. Shortly later they extended that leave to 60 days but I missed out on that. After I spent 30 days at home in Seattle, I had orders to go to a hotel in Los Angeles. Processing there was, “Do you want to stay in the service? Or do you want to get out? Have you had a belly full of them?” I told them, “Well, I want to be a fighter pilot.” Which is what I wanted to be in the first place. They said okay and they assigned me to Luke Field in Arizona to go through P-51 transition and become a fighter pilot. Before you fly the P-51, you fly the AT-6. It’s a two-step process. I had flown two or three times in the AT-6, ready for checking out in the P-51, when suddenly they stopped all flying training for Americans. They continued with the Chinese, but they stopped all flying for Americans to save money. Eventually, two or three weeks later, I was interviewed by a personnel type and he wanted to know if I wanted to stay in or get out. I said, “If I can be a fighter pilot, I’ll stay in.” He said, “No promises. Do you want to stay in or get out?” I said, “To hell with it, I’ll get out.” And I joined the Army Air Force Reserves. I then became a pilot for United Airlines and eventually the Interview Board offered me a regular commission. I left United Airlines and went back into the Air Force and made it a career.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you retire from the Air Force?

Mr. Keeffe

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year?

Mr. Keeffe

October 1, 1966.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you retire at?

Mr. Keeffe

Lieutenant Colonel.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go back to flying with the airlines after that?

Mr. Keeffe

No. I went to talk with them once and they said, "We would take you back as a monitor pilot."

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions with your Army outfit?

Mr. Keeffe

The POW Camp, Stalag Luft III Center Compound. We were there in the dead of winter, number one. Number two, we hardly got to know anybody, and vice versa. The last was 10 or 15 years ago. I don't know if the 389th had any reunions.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get from World War II?

Mr. Keeffe

The Air Medal. I got a Purple Heart, EAME, and the POW Medal.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alright, Jim this has been very interesting. I have enjoyed your story. What happened to the rest of your crew? Did they all make it, or what?

Mr. Keeffe

We had an eleven-man crew the day we went down. I left one man in the airplane, which left us with ten. All ten of us survived the war. The navigator broke one leg landing by parachute. The bombardier broke both legs. It was a very wind day, clear and windy. The nose turret gunner either broke his back or damaged it significantly. The three of them were put in the German Luftwaffe hospital until they were healed sufficiently and they could be transferred to POW Camp. There are only two of us still alive.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened to the pilot when he bailed out? Did he get hurt?

Mr. Keeffe

He came down in the water and got back to the bank, the shore of that big river. There was a group of military called Pioneers. It was the equivalent of our Naval Engineers. When he came back up, staring him in the face was a rifle and so he got all wet and was lucky to not be shot.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think that is all the questions I have for you. Thanks again for your time today, and thanks again for your service to our country.

Mr. Keeffe

You're very welcome.

Transcribed by:

Lesle Dial
Beeville, Texas
April 9, 2011

Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer
P.O. Box 3453
Alice, Texas 78333
Home: (361) 664-4071
Cell: (361) 701-5848