

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

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

**Interview with  
Orlyn "Jo" Master  
June 4, 2001  
Second Lieutenant  
POW at Stalag I, Barth Germany**

My name is Richard Misenhimer; today is June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001. I am interviewing Oryln Master also known as "Jo". At their home at 306 N CR 500 W in Fulton County near Rochester, Indiana. This is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific Wars Center of Pacific War studies for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Mr. Master, where were you born?

**Mr. Master:**

I was born about 4 miles south of here, southeast, in Fulton County.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What year was that?

**Mr. Master:**

It was a long time ago 1920. April 20, 1920.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What were your parent's names?

**Mr. Master:**

My dads name was Oscar and my mother is Fern.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Where were they born?

**Mr. Master:**

I don't rightly know the exact location, but they were born in Indiana.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

**Mr. Master:**

I did have one sister but she passed away in 1996. August 16<sup>th</sup> of 1996.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Where did you go to school?

**Mr. Master:**

I started out in Richland Center then I went to Kewanna. I spent three years in Richland Center and graduated from Kewanna High School in 1938.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What did you do after that?

**Mr. Master:**

Well, I had to farm. We lived on a farm and I guess you could say I was slave labor for my folks because they never gave me any money. For spending money, I worked for someone else such as driving gravel truck and substitute driving a milk route.. I worked this way until World War II came along.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

When did you go to the military?

**Mr. Master:**

Sometime in 1941 I obtained an application from the Kewanna Post Office for Flying Cadet Training. I completed this application and mailed it to the address on the application. Some time later I received a notice to report to Bear Field near Fort Wayne to take a physical examination on December the 8<sup>th</sup> of 1941. Although I had worn glasses most of my life I knew that pilots had to have perfect eyesight. So when it came to the eye exam I memorized the lines on the chart while the person ahead of me was being examined. When it came my turn I rattled off the lines. I was surprised that I could read the lines without my glasses. So I passed the physical. Another requirement was a cadet had to have two years of college or pass a mental exam. Of course I did not have the college so I had to pass this mental exam. About two weeks after the physical exam I received notice to again report to Bear Field for the mental exam. This exam was not only a test of knowledge but also of endurance. It lasted an entire day. I passed this exam while many of the college fellows did not. A couple of weeks later I was sent a notice to report back to Bear Field for swearing in. At this ceremony I was sworn in as a Private with pay of \$21.00 a day one day a month and put on furlough. Some time during May of 1942 I received

orders to report back to Bear Field to be shipped to Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

All of that was after Pearl Harbor and is that why you enlisted at that point?

**Mr. Master:**

No, it was just coincidence. I was ordered to take the Cadet physical exam on December 8 , 1941 and the draft physical exam on Friday of the same week

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So you volunteered for the Army Air Corp as a Flying Cadet?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. I guess one could say that.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Is there any particular reason why you chose that area?

**Mr. Master:**

I just wanted to fly an airplane.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Where did you take your training?

**Mr. Master:**

I was sent to Kelly Field, San Antonio for basic military training. Then I took my pre-flight at Ellington Field, which is close to Houston, Texas. My flight training to becoming a navigator was taken at Hondo, Texas where I was commissioned as a second lieutenant on 11 March 1943. I did not pass the physical examination for pilot training. The examiner told me that he would give me a prescription for glasses and if I would get it filled and would promise to wear them, he would approve me for navigation school. Of course I gave him my promise. A couple years later the navigation school published a book containing photographs of students who graduated from the school. I am the only cadet who was wearing glasses.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Any particular memories you have in your training time or anything?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. In between preflight and flight training I was sent in a group to gunnery school at Tyndall Field, Florida. There I saw Clark Gable for the first time. He was in training to get qualified for flight status. I did not talk to him at this time but just saw him across the room in the mess hall.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Any particular friends you had there at the time?

**Mr. Master:**

Close friends were those that one lived with. My close friends were Stanley Marcus, Isreal Milner, and Emory Mittuct. I lost contact with them after leaving Navigation School.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Anything humorous happened to you? Any incidents along the way?

**Mr. Master:**

The only thing that I can think of is that of seeing Clark Gable in the mess hall.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So you were a navigator then? On what type of plane?

**Mr. Master:**

I was the navigator on a B-17. Well, after commission at Hondo, Texas I was sent to the Salt Lake City staging area. From there I was sent to Boise, Idaho to join a crew on a B-17. I stayed there only two days, because I was ordered to join a crew at Casper, Wyoming. This crew had finished all of their combat training and was ready to go overseas. I have forgotten the exact dates but I did fly two training flights with this crew. After these two flights we were given a 5-day delay in route and ordered to go to Salina, Kansas. At this Base I was given orders to prepare a flight to Preswick, Scotland with refueling stops in Detroit, Michigan; Presque Isle, Maine; Goosebay, Labrador; BW-1, Greenland; Meeks Field, Iceland; and then into Preswick, Scotland. At Salina we were assigned a new B-17 just flown from the factory. The flight to Detroit was uneventful, but I spent almost the entire night calibrating the various navigating

instruments. At Presque Isle I was asked by some individual, if I would navigate for a group of fighter planes. The plan was for the planes to take off one hour after we did and they would home inbound on us and then out bound on us after passing. By this time they could home on their destination. The same procedure was to be used on Goose Bay, BW-1, Meeks Field, and then Preswick. On leaving Meeks Field, we lost an engine and had to turn back. The fighters apparently flew on as I did not hear or see any of them on the flight. We spent eleven days in Iceland before we got a new engine flown in from the states and installed on our airplane. Scotland looked like a garden compared to the previous fields.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Who actually mounted the engine? Was there a crew that actually did that sort of thing?

**Mr. Master:**

Meeks Field was an airfield with crews that repaired all types of airplanes that developed problems flying over from the States.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now on this flight how many B-17's were there?

**Mr. Master:**

There were other B-17's that came and went and also many other types of planes such as C-54, DC-3, etc.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

You were the only ones?

**Mr. Master:**

There was other B-17s that came and went on to England. The field had trouble with one B-17 from our provisional group in getting it into the field. I found out from the navigator that he had copied my flight plan in BW-1 and had forgotten to allow for compass deviation, so they were way off course, heading for Norway. The tower finally was able to get them turned toward Meeks Field.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

How do you spell the name of that field in Iceland?

**Mr. Master:**

Meeks. M.E.E.K.S.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

I'm doing that for the typist. When did you arrive in Scotland?

**Mr. Master:**

I don't know the exact date. It was probably the last of April or first of May.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

In 1943.

**Mr. Master:**

Yes in 1943. After our stay in Iceland we flew into Preswick, Scotland and then flew on into Bovington, which is a short distance from London. We left our plane there. We were assigned to go to Polebrook to join the 351<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group. We traveled by train to Peterbourg and then by bus to Polebrook.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So you were with the 351<sup>st</sup> bomb group? Which squadron do you recall?

**Mr. Master:**

We were assigned to the 511<sup>th</sup> Squadron. I flew my first mission on June 11, 1943 with another crew. The purpose of this was to get experience navigating in Europe and England..

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Where did that mission go to?

**Mr. Master:**

It was to Wilhelmshaven, Germany.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

How did that mission go?

**Mr. Master:**

It didn't go well at all. We had to come back on two engines and we landed in Northern England at a French base. But this mission was not with my crew that I came over with. I was assigned to fly with an

experienced crew. I really got a little too much experience.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did you lose the engines because of enemy action?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Was it fighters or anti aircraft?

**Mr. Master:**

I really don't know. I just remember looking out the window and seeing the two engines' propellers stopped.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

On which side?

**Mr. Master:**

They were the two outboard engines, number one and number four.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now how long a flight was it to get to this target?

**Mr. Master:**

I think it was about 3 hours. The trip was just across the North Sea as I was heading for the closest air Field.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did you lose the engines on the return?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, on the return.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So how long did you have to fly on the two engines?

**Mr. Master:**



We flew about two hours.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Any particular problems or incidents getting back that way?

**Mr. Master:**

No, it was just real slow. The plane was flying just barely above stall speed, but a B-17 could maintain altitude on any two engines.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So you were losing altitude?

**Mr. Master:**

Well yes, we were losing altitude but it was planned loss. We didn't lose altitude because of the two engines not functioning.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So you could maintain altitude on the two engines?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, a B-17 could maintain altitude on two engines, any two engines. It doesn't make any difference which two engines. The next day a recovery crew from Polebrook came to this base, unloaded the plane of turrets and all other removable items and took it off on the two engines and flew it back to Polebrook. I saw the plane come in with only two inboard engines running.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Being the two outboard made it easier?

**Mr. Master:**

I don't know It probably did. As the navigator on this crippled bomber, I gave the pilots a course to the nearest airfield in England. After landing we found it to be operated by the free French.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

French base, but this was in France then?

**Mr. Master:**

No. It was in England.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

In England, Okay.

**Mr. Master:**

Most of the European Countries were occupied by the Germans.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

This was prior to the D-Day landing?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, it was about a year before D-Day.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

But was this your first mission then?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, it was my first mission over occupied Europe.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

It was kind of an exciting break in. Then what happened?

**Mr. Master:**

Well, I flew other missions. I flew a total of 20 missions.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

20?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, including the one we went down on.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now did you fly with the same crew all the time?

**Mr. Master:**

No. There were about two or three times I did not fly with my own crew. I think it was three times.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So most of the time you flew with your own crew?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Was it always in the same airplane or not?

**Mr. Master:**

Not necessarily. We were assigned an airplane by the name "Screwball" 25824. I hope that I remember the break down of the tail number of 25824. The 2 means that the ship was built in 1942. The 5 represents the number of batches that the Vega Company had built. The 8 means that this ship was the 8<sup>th</sup> airplane in a batch of 24. When we were assigned a different ship we usually developed or had problems, such as losing an engine, getting shot up and or plane problems. We never had problems when flying Screwball. This ship was still flying at the end of the war. I read, several years later that it was being used as a tanker fighting forest fires in France.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So that's what that number tells you?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. I think that is the meaning of the tail numbers.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Well that interesting. Anything about the other flights you would like to share with us?

**Mr. Master:**

Well, whenever we flew in a different ship other than this one, we usually encountered problems.

On one mission we flew a ship called Gremlin Delight to Paris, France. On this mission we lost number four engine due to flack. Out of formation we were sprayed by a ME-109. A P-47 took care of him shortly there after. The damage done by the 109 included puncturing the oxygen system on the

left side of the ship and the ball turret's system. I always carried extra oxygen bottles in the nose. These were one low pressure bottle which would last one crew member for one hour, one high pressure bottle that would last one hour and then several five minute low pressure bottles. With this load I trudged back through the plane including using the six inch wide bomb bay cat-walk to the radio room. There I plugged the radio operator into the oxygen system on the right side of the ship. The operator revived immediately. Then in the back fuselage I plugged the left waste gunner into the one hour low pressure bottle. He too revived shortly. Then I cranked the ball turret to where I could open the door to the turret. I put the high pressure bottle between his legs with the mask over his face. He too revived shortly and cranked himself into operating position. With everybody back on oxygen I retraced my trip back to the nose. My five minute bottles lasted just long enough for me to plug myself into the ship's remaining operating system. After all of the problems solved we flew about 200 miles and landed back in England with a full load of bombs (we couldn't drop bombs in France unless we could see a target) a flat tire and one engine not running. The mission that we went down on was again Wilhelmshaven. We were flying a different ship call Fireball as we were having all four engines changed on our own ship. While turning to make the bomb run we were in a collision with another B-17 from another group. This ship went down immediately but we flew on for quite some time. I think that it was around 45 minutes and then our ship just blew up. Six of us survived and landed on the island, which was about 35 miles out in the North Sea. There was about 3 acres above the water at high tide. We were picked up immediately by the Germans. I found out later that the name of the island was Mellum.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

This was on the return from your bombing mission?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. I landed on the beach, which felt like cement because it was so hard and I injured my knee. I could barely walk because it hurt so bad. A German soldier came out and looked at me threw a round in the chamber of his gun, cocked it, and pointed at me. The barrel looked to be at least 6 inches in diameter.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

He's indicating at least a couple of feet.

**Mr. Master:**

He said something like gun. I said no gun. So he put his gun down and I made the motion like my knee was hurting. He said something else, then he took my hand and put it on his shoulder and lifted me up. Then rolled up my parachute and he helped me walk up to the shed. That's where they stored potatoes. The people on this island were Kreigs Marines. They were the crews on a flak gun battery. That night they took us to a town of Javer in Germany. That's where we stayed overnight. The next day they took us by truck to the train station for the train ride to Frankfurt. This was the Interrogation Center.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What caused you plane to blow up?

**Mr. Master:**

I have no idea what caused the plane to blow up. The right wing from number four engine was bent up a couple of feet. The aileron was gone. I don't remember bailing out. I do remember falling toward the right side of the ship and the next thing I was falling in air and everything was quiet. I reached up to pull my chest chute down to hook the other hook, I had only one of the two hooks fastened, but I pulled the ripcord. The chute opened and I swung once or twice and hit the ground. Later in talking with the other crew members, they said that the ship broke apart behind the wing.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

You plane suffered quite a bit of damage earlier?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

From fighters and anti-aircraft?

**Mr. Master:**

No, just from the mid-air collision. I don't think that we had damage from flak or fighters. I did not hear

any shells hitting the plane however, they could have hit the ship and not made any internal noise.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Oh, you had a mid-air collision.

**Mr. Master:**

As far as I know we were not hit with a fighter or an anti-aircraft. It was just a blunder.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So, two of your planes ran together then?

**Mr. Master:**

There were only two planes lost that day from our wing, our plane and the one that ran into us.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Do you know what happened to the other plane?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, there were no survivors from that ship.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

How many survived from your plane?

**Mr. Master:**

**There were six members of the crew that survived.** The Pilot, co-pilot, engineer, and ball turret gunner were killed.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

They did not get out of the plane then? Is that it?

**Mr. Master:**

That I do not know. The interrogator in Frankfurt said that they had found their bodies.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Prior to being shot down were there any other missions that were interesting?

**Mr. Master:**

Well the most interesting mission was the bombing of Heroya, Norway. This was the plant that was

making heavy water for Hitler to make his atomic bomb. For some reason our bomb group was picked for the mission. This plant was at the beginning of a fjord on the southern coast of Norway. . The plan was to go crossways of the fjord where the plant was located as there were lots of houses along the fjord. The plan was that the planes would string out and then all the planes would drop their bombs when the lead plane dropped its bombs. There are two methods for a bomber to drop bombs. There is a small toggle switch which when pushed forward would release the bombs. If this didn't work there was a mechanical lever when pushed forward would salvo the bombs. That is all bombs would go out in a bunch. Well after the lead ship had dropped its bombs all other ships in the formation dropped their bombs. The engineer called up and said over the intercom that our bombs were still in the ship. It was one of his tasks to check the bomb bay to make sure all the bombs did go out. After this call the bombardier shoved the salvo lever forward. On this bomb run I was watching the bombs explode when hitting the ground before the fjord. Then all at once the building housing the plane utterly exploded in a large puff of smoke. We reported this event during the interrogation session for the mission.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So if they would have dropped normally they would have missed the factory?

**Mr. Master:**

I think that this would have been the case. The mechanics checked the bomb switch on the ground after we got back. It functioned perfectly then and on missions afterwards.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Some fate caused it to happen that way.

**Mr. Master:**

Well , call it what you like.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

How many individual bombs were there? Did you know at that point?

**Mr. Master:**

No. I don't remember how many there were but I think that there were five five-hundred pound..

When you toggle them out they go out one at a time and there's about a tenth a second between each bomb. When you salvo they go out in a bunch, they all go right down through the target. The first bomb blow the roof off, second bomb hit the second story and took it out, and the third bomb goes to the next floor down. Well, it worked something like that.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What were some of the other experiences?

**Mr. Master:**

Well, they were just routine. We had fighters for most of our trip. As soon as they would leave we'd have German fighters come in at us. The German fighters were Me 109s, FW 190 and some times we would have twin engine planes. These were ME 210 and JU 88 which would lob rockets at us. On one mission we brought back a piece of a rocket that was about two feet long and about 2 inches wide. It was lodged in the right wing just beyond the number three engine. Then we had Clark Gable in our group. He was really a nice fellow to know. He was just one of the boys. He flew five missions.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Was he a pilot?

**Mr. Master:**

He was a waist gunner. He said he was too old to go to pilot school. He got his flying status by going to gunnery school. He was a Major then. That's about it.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So Clark Gable did he fly, but not in your plane though?

**Mr. Master:**

No. He flew in the 507th Squadron.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

In you group?

**Mr. Master:**



Yes. I saw him as the left waist gunner in a plane in the low squadron on one mission.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did he get any plane? Do you know?

**Mr. Master:**

I have no idea. I don't think so. I learned that afterwards Hitler had a bounty out on him. He was to give certain privileges to a fighter pilot who shot down the plane he was in, but they didn't make it.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did he fly on some pretty rough missions?

**Mr. Master:**

He did. He went to Ruhr Valley, which was flack alley.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now this one to Norway was that a very long one?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. The one that went to Norway we were in the air for about ten or eleven hours. We took a bomb bay tank of fuel and had only one row of bombs. We dumped the tank before going into Norway.

Now the fellows that had bad experiences such as those that were prisoners for a long period of time do not like to talk about their experiences. Just like me here right now talking about my experiences, which weren't bad, but I am quivering and nervous as I can be.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

We'll cut it off anytime.

**Mr. Master:**

It's just human nature I guess.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now once you were captured you went to Frankfurt?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What happened then?

**Mr. Master:**

Well, I spent four days in solitary confinement. If you want somebody to talk you put this person in a room with one light bulb burning all the time, no windows, no doors or one door, but no glass in it. The only thing in the room was cot with no blankets. The guards would take you out to go to the bathroom. You didn't know if it was day, night or mid-day. They take you out for interrogation and if you didn't answer their questions they would take you back to the room. For me four days was because I wouldn't give them my birthday. They knew all the other information about me, where I was lived, where I went to school, high school, where I lived on a farm, and when I joined the military and where I had my military training. They had all that information.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

How did they know all that?

**Mr. Master:**

I asked the fellow, the fellow who interrogated me gave me a long story. The important information in the story that he gave me was that he was flying for Pan Am and he got back from one trip they put him in Luftwaffe. Of course they all have similar stories. When talking with him I shyed away from the military life. He said that he joined the Pan Am Company, got his pilots license through the Pan Am Flying School and he was getting into the routine in flying for Pan Am. when they put in the military. He further said that they get most of their information through newspapers and that they take every newspaper. Anybody with any military achievements were written up in newspapers.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So they subscribed to the U.S. newspapers?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, so this interrogator said

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

I wonder how they got them in their office. Do you know?

**Mr. Master:**

I don't know their methods. After we got through talking he told me that it took them four hours to get information from England as to where the bombers were going on a mission. They got the information through informants so this interrogator said..

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Through spies and such?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. I guess.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did most of the Germans speak pretty good English?

**Mr. Master:**

The Germans handling us could or did speak perfect English

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

The one that captured you on the island, did he speak any English?

**Mr. Master:**

No he did not. My previous answer was in regard to the Germans that we had contact with.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

He was a Kriegs Marine, you say?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, he was a Kriegs Marine. On the island there were no officers or I didn't see any German officers. At the Luftwaffe base where they took us on the mainland was in the town of Javer. These individuals could talk English. Out guard at night did talk perfect English.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now on your trip to Frankfurt, were you mistreated at all?

**Mr. Master:**

No. We received good treatment except we had to sit on wooden bench seats. I think that we traveled in the low class section of this train.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Were you given food?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. Not adequate that is, not food we were used to. We were given a slice of bread and jelly, potatoes, rice, and stuff like that.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

But they did feed you?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, they did feed us.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Then when you were taken to Frankfurt you were put in confinement for four days?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. There you would get a bowl of soup and sometimes there would be a slice of bread and some jelly. It wasn't very tasty jelly. Sometime later you'd get another bowl of soup and maybe it seemed like five minutes later you'd get a slice of bread. Then it seemed like days you'd get another bowl of soup.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now what month and year did you go down?

**Mr. Master:**

November. 3, 1943.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

1943?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. It was 1943.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now when they interrogated you, was there any torture or anything?

**Mr. Master:**

No. When they interrogated me it was like you and I sitting here talking. It was real nice.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What rank were you at the time?

**Mr. Master:**

I was a Second Lieutenant. I was actually a First Lieutenant but I didn't know it. I had been promoted but had not received the orders.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

After the four days, then what happened?

**Mr. Master:**

Well, they sent me to a camp in the Frankfurt area which was a staging area. When they got so many prisoners in this area they would ship a train load to various P.O.W. camps.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Were they called Stalags?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, Stalags 1, 7, 9 and so on.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Do you remember which one you were in?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. I was in Stalag One.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Sorry.

**Mr. Master:**

Stalag Luft 1 was at Barth, Germany which was on the Baltic Sea. My wife and I visited the site of this camp twice during our working tour in Germany. The first visit was, well we went across the border four days after the gates were opened. We found the camp had been completely demolished. There is a small factory in one location where the camp use to be. There was also a small memorial built by the Russians in memory of the Russian who died in the camp. The people in the town would not give us any information about the camp. We found out from one lady with whom we stayed that the people of Barth want to forget about the camp. She said that all people do not want to remember it.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What happened to you there?

**Mr. Master:**

Well, I was treated just like all the other POWs. One of the interesting things that happen there happened on Aug. 20, 1943. A group of Group German Officers, led by Captain Staffenburg attempted to assassinate Hitler by placing a bomb under the table where he would sit.. He, Hitler, survived the blast and blamed the act on the Americans and British. As a retaliatory act he ordered our camp, which was made up of British and American POWs, to be sent to Auschwitz in Poland to be gassed with the Jews. Eva Braum, Hitler's lady friend, intercepted Hitler's orders or she influenced Hitler to give the orders to a General Gunther, who she knew would not carry out the order. Because of this event and other orders the Red Cross and the German Quartermaster stopped all food shipments into the camp. Also the existence of our camp was removed from all other records. From this time on we live on the foods that the local German farmers would haul in. These items were potatoes, cabbages, turnips, barley and occasionally a part of a butchered ox. Well the Germans called it that. Also the Germans ran a kitchen and they cooked the ox, barley and boiled the potatoes. Then they would dish the cooked food out to us in small amounts. The first Russians arrived in the camp early March, the part of the camp that I was in was next to the headquarters and the entrance gate. We saw the first two Russians that came into our camp. They were

Siberian Mongolians and they were riding horses and had machine guns strapped across their backs. These two were a man and a woman and they looked like the small hefty people and were not in uniform. I got up close to the man he was quite large and well over six feet tall. The woman never got off her horse. Several days later the main Russian Army arrived and a Russian Major came into the camp. He could talk English. He was surprised that there were so many of us. He said that he had no knowledge of a prison camp in the vicinity. One of his first questions was "What do you need?" We told him that we needed food and transportation to England. He said that he would have food tomorrow but transportation to England would have to wait. The next day the Russian Army drove in a bunch of cows and told us to butcher them. We did and got really ill from eating such rich food. As a note here, I understand that General Gunther was the only German General set free in the Nuernburg Trials.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Eating too much?

**Mr. Master:**

Too much rich food. In a large group of individuals there would be some of them that could do a needed job. Of course there were several butchers. They are the ones that prepared the beef for us. In addition to the butchers we had a British I believe he was a Wing Commander, that built a radio out of tinfoil and other materials collected from Cigarette packages and from other Red Cross food shipments. He would assemble the radio after lock-up time and listen to BBC. Then he would circulate the current news the next day. The Germans new that the radio existed but they couldn't find it. The method used was to disassemble the thing giving the parts to several other Kreggies. Then at night after lockup he would assemble it and listen to the news.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

They'd get the news everyday then?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. We had complete coverage.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So the Russians liberated you?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. We were liberated by the Russians and lived with them for over six weeks.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

When did they arrive?

**Mr. Master:**

The first batch arrived in March.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Of 1945?

**Mr. Master:**

Then it was later perhaps it was a week or two later the main army came in. The Germans had taken off about two weeks before. We understand, through the grapevine, that they went to Weismar and surrendered to the British.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So for about two weeks there were no guards?

**Mr. Master:**

That's right. After the Germans left there were no guards. Then the Camp Commander, an English Wing Commander, organized a guard detail of American and English to man the guard towers. He wanted all to stay within the camp because he thought that the Russian soldiers would not know that there were Americans and British military personnel in the area and they would shoot them

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

You all just stayed in the camp?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, we stayed in the camp..

**Mr. Misenhimer:**



Did anyone leave?

**Mr. Master:**

As far as I know nobody left. But after the main Russian Army came in they made us tear down the fences, fill in the holes and told those of us who wanted to leave to go. Of course very few did go.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now where was this camp in Germany?

**Mr. Master:**

Barth, Germany. It is in north Germany on the Baltic Sea. Rosstock, Weismar, oh, I forget the other Towns or villages that were in the vicinity.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What was the weather like there?

**Mr. Master:**

The first winter it didn't freeze. The second winter we had two days that were sub zero. Then we had sub freezing weather for about 4 or 5 weeks. Surprising that far North it was rather mild.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Any snow?

**Mr. Master:**

I don't remember the snow.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did the Germans force you to work labor or anything?

**Mr. Master:**

No. In the Luftwaffe we were treated like the officers. But they changed the guard force to the Wehrmark, the peoples army, after the attempted assassination of Hitler. These guards would have shot us all if they could find an excuse. They did shoot one individual. They had a curfew that when the bombers would fly over we would have to stay in the barracks. This one fellow didn't know that the air raid was going on. He stepped out on the porch. Well it wasn't a porch but it was just a small slab of

cement. He stepped out, saw that air raid was on, turned around and walked back into the barracks. The guard shot him through the door. That's the only fellow we lost in that entire camp.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

That's good. About how many were in the camp?

**Mr. Master:**

It ended up around 9,000. There were around 7,000 Americans and 2,000 British.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

He was the only one to get lost in the entire group?

**Mr. Master:**

He was the only one that died in the entire group and during that period.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Amazing.

**Mr. Master:**

I don't know, we weren't lucky we were just ....well we took showers that were cold, in a cold building and well just kept ourselves clean and healthy.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What did you weigh when you got out or how much did you lose while you were in there?

**Mr. Master:**

I lost 30 pounds.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

30 pounds.

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. It was around thirty pounds. Now that doesn't take in consideration the fact that all we could think of during this period was good food

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

That was rather typical then?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now you said he was going to send you all to Auschwitz because of the attempted bombing on him?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

An attempt on his life. Do you know if any other groups may have done that?

**Mr. Master:**

No. As far as I remember or was aware of, this was the only attempt on his life. There probably were others but I was not made aware of them.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So during the war they did not know you were there?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, nobody except the local German farmer knew that we were there. That's the period from the last part of August, 1944 through March of 1945.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Was this the only camp you were in?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So the U.S. Air force flew in and flew you all out?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. First ship to arrive at the Airfield in Barth was a C-47, a twin engine. That was a beautiful airplane. It was used for or as a control tower for the incoming planes. Then the next day, I forgot the time, B-17's

started arriving. They arrived in groups of 21. The first group arrived, landed and taxied around to the first batch of kreggies. As each plane loaded 20 Kreggies, then it took off. When the last B-17 of that group was loaded it took off and was followed by the first B-17 of the second group of B-17's. This procedure. was followed through out the day. I forgot the time that the planes started arriving the next day.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did the B-17's fly 21 in a group?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. Well they were in batches. They didn't fly formations. I guess you could say they flew single file.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Would they taxi around?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. They would taxi around to the loading area and load up. When the last ship of that batch landed the one landed first would be loaded and ready to take off. When the last one of this batch was loaded and took off, the first ship of the second batch would be on final. I was in the fourth group to go out.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

How many people would they put in a B-17?

**Mr. Master:**

Twenty Kreggies in addition to the crew and usually they had four in a crew.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Twenty

**Mr. Master**

**Twenty in addition to a crew of four.**

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So the first day you were taken out?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. We were flown to Reims, France. We were put on a hospital train that went to Saint Vallery, France.

This was our first encounter with white sheets. It was an overnight train ride to Reims, France or Saint Vallery, France. We were there I forget how long but General Eisenhower came in. He made a little speech telling us that he was glad that we survived the war. I had the chance to shake hands with him. We were there about two weeks. They took us down to St. Nazaire and put us on a troop transport, the S.S. Buckner. It was the first ship that across the Atlantic unescorted. The trip took seven days.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

And what month would this have been? June?

**Mr. Master:**

June, right. We arrived in Newport News, Virginia on June 20<sup>th</sup> of 1945.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

The Russians came in what month did you say?

**Mr. Master:**

March of 1945.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

March of 1945. So it was June before you got back?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Where were you on V.E. Day, when the war got over?

**Mr. Master:**

We were still in prison, I think.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

That was in May.

**Mr. Master:**

No, we were out in May. I don't know.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

You don't have any recollection of that day?

**Mr. Master:**

No.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So you didn't have any celebration or anything?

**Mr. Master:**

That is correct.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So after you got back to the U.S. Newport News, then what happened?

**Mr. Master:**

Well, we had to stay there overnight. The next morning they put us on a train. This train stopped only to switch crew or to take on water. It was a steam engine at that time, and they sent me in a group to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Then they bussed us to a bus station in Indianapolis. My sister met me there. I was given a sixty day furlough to report to Miami, Florida. When I arrived in Miami, Florida, they said they were going to close the installation and they flew us to San Antonio in C-47's. That was in September and I spent, well I was in the hospital for observation. Then in November they gave me a thirty-day furlough. I arrived back on Christmas Day of 1945. I told them I had to get out of the army, so I could start college at Indiana University on January on the 20<sup>th</sup>. They did.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Were you married or single at the time?

**Mr. Master:**

I was single at the time.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Were your parents still living?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, they were still living..

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

When did you first have contact after you got out of the prison camp? When did you have contact with some of your family?

**Mr. Master:**

At Newport News, we could call but apparently they were not at home. My folks didn't have a telephone then. I tried to call my sister in Indianapolis. My mother and dad didn't know that I was out till my sister took me up there.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So when you got out in March or April, the Army didn't notify your parents that you had been rescued?

**Mr. Master:**

Oh yes, they were notified by the post office that I was freed, but I didn't make personal contact with them until a day or two later.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

When you were in prison could you get any mail?

**Mr. Master:**

I got four letters from my mom and I got a couple from other places. Tilly Smith, a good friend in Kewanna and a lady friend in England wrote a few letters. I guess that was it.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Could you write letters from there?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes. These were a double post card size and then doubled together so that they were post card size.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did they receive the ones you wrote?

**Mr. Master:**

I don't know if they received all of them. In fact, I received one after I got home.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Your letter got sent back to you?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, it was sent to my address at home in Kewanna. The letters went through Switzerland Red Cross.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

You said that you were in the hospital in San Antonio, but this was a long time after you had been released, was this the result of you being in prison?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

But you haven't been in a hospital prior to that?

**Mr. Master:**

No.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What in particular were you suffering from there?

**Mr. Master:**

Well just malnutrition and then when I got too overly fatigued I would run a high fever. Then they'd put me in the hospital and try to find out why.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So this was sometime after you were released that you went to the hospital then, is that correct?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, in October and November of 1945.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**



Then were you discharged in San Antonio?

**Mr. Master:**

I wasn't discharged, I was ordered to inactive status because I was commissioned in the reserves. I did keep my reserve status until I had fifteen years in and if I would have stayed five more years I could have retired from the Air Force Reserves. My civilian job prevented my keeping the reserve status.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now you said you wanted out so you could go to college, where did you go?

**Mr. Master:**

I went to Indiana University.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What did you study there?

**Mr. Master:**

I started in Arts and Science and ended up in business. I got bachelors, A.B. at that time, in business administration.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

So that was in 1946.

**Mr. Master:**

Yes I entered I U in 1946 and graduated in 1949.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What was your career?

**Mr. Master:**

It was in business. I met my wife there, she was a student. We got our degree at the same commencement. I wanted a degree in engineering so we went to Texas Tech for one year. My G.I. bill ran out. I had to go to work and I never went back. I regret it.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Anything else happen in your time of service you'd like to talk about?

**Mr. Master:**

This high temperature bit that I was plagued with in while trying to get out of service continued. As a student at Indiana University I continued to have them. One summer I was taking a course in statistics and the fever started during the first part of the course. I went over to the University Hospital to get some medication that would work in reducing fever. Dr. Schuman took my temperature which was 105 degrees. She said "You are not going anywhere but to bed here". So she put me on the ward and started a round of penicillin. This was taking shots every four hours. Prior to this event I had met a medical student a couple of weeks prior. I think that we had spent a couple or three meetings before this and we had a planned meeting for the next evening. I called her to cancel the meeting because of my circumstances. I don't think that I had the phone on the hook when she walked in the hospital. She had covered the mile from Memorial Hall, where she was living to the hospital in nothing flat. I remember Dr. Schuman telling her that I was an extremely ill individual, but I was responding to the penicillin shots. She further stated that I would need lots of care. Well, this lady said that she would take good care of me. Well she later became my wife for 41 years. Then she developed renal cell carcinoma and left for ever. She did leave me with four outstanding children.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What was the name of your pilot, do you recall?

**Mr. Master:**

Elmer Nardi. He was an outstanding pilot. Too bad that he was flying an unfamiliar ship on November 3, 1943.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

How do you spell the last name?

**Mr. Master:**

N.A.R.D.I. The co-pilot was Burgman. Harold Burgman.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Okay, how about some of the other crew?

**Mr. Master:**

**The status of the crew is as follows:** Engineer, Frank Swika and ball turret gunner Harlen Burton; both perished in the crash. One waist gunner, Donald Happold, died in 1956 of an heart attack, the other waist gunner, John Yarush, still living in Springfield, OR; the Radio Operator, Ganusheau Wade died in 1976; Bradley Squires, the bombardier, died of brain tumor in 1981.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Tail gunner?

**Mr. Master:**

Tail gunner was Henry Gates, he's still living. He lives in Farmersville Louisiana.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Now the six of you that survived the crash were all in the same prison?

**Mr. Master:**

No, Bradley Squires, the bombardiers and I were officers and we went to Stalag Luft I located two miles out of Barth, Germany, and the four enlisted men went to Kreems, Austria.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did you see any of them after the war?

**Mr. Master:**

Yes, I saw them in Saint Valerie, France, just as they were leaving. They got out of prison camp ahead of us. Then I have visited the tail gunner several times. The other waist gunner that's still living, came and visited with me at Las Cruces, New Mexico. My wife of 41 years passed away June 26, 1995 and I met a lady that I knew in Grade School. Anyway we were married in Israel November 2, 1999.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

You don't remember your anniversary, you're in trouble.

**Mr. Master:**

See it's real close, November the 2<sup>nd</sup> is our wedding, November 3<sup>rd</sup> was when we were shot down. Went

down, I don't want to say shot down because we weren't. We were just unfortunate.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Has you crew had a reunion?

**Mr. Master:**

No, well see, there's only two others left. No we didn't have one before.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

How about your bomb group or your squadron?

**Mr. Master:**

The bomb group has a reunion every year. The year 2000 it was in England. While there we went to Polebrook. The English people couldn't do enough for us. We have gone to each reunion since the one in 1997.. The next one is in Reno. We will be there.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

And it's going to be where?

**Mr. Master:**

Reno. NV

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

It's the 351<sup>st</sup> bomb group? How about your squadron, is it the same?

**Mr. Master:**

All four squadrons are in the 351<sup>st</sup> bomb group. The reunions are for the bomb group.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

All right, anything else?

**Mr. Master:**

**Well Elsie and I live on her farm in Indiana during the summers and in the past we have been living in Las Cruces, NM in the winter. We hope that we can find an apartment in Texas, around Houston, TX for this winter. We will live there starting around December 1.**

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Well, thank you for your time and we appreciate everything your generation did for ours. We really do honor you all.

**End of Tape.**

**Transcribed by Kevin Kennedy.**

**Typed by Melinda Clinger with corrections and additions from Orlyn Master.**