

Eugene George
San Antonio, Aug. 29, 2001

Aaron Elson: How old were you when you went into the service?

Eugene George: I was called to active duty in February of '43. I'd been on standby reserve before that. In February of '43 I would have been 19 or 20.

Aaron Elson: Had been you been to the university yet?

Eugene George: Yes, I'd gone to the university about two years.

Aaron Elson: Of Texas?

Eugene George: Yes.

Aaron Elson: Were you called into the Army?

Eugene George: No, no. I joined the Air Force to go into cadet pilot training and was on standby for that.

Aaron Elson: So you were in the Army Air Force?

Eugene George: Yes.

Aaron Elson: And what position did you wind up in?

Eugene George: I ended up in pilot training. There were three groups, a pilot, navigator and bombardier.

Aaron Elson: You were a copilot or a navigator?

Eugene George: I was a co-pilot, but my wings were a pilot, I mean I graduated as a pilot. I flew with Brent as a co-pilot but I qualified as a pilot and logged pilot time in addition to co-pilot time.

Aaron Elson: How many missions did you fly?

Eugene George: I flew 17 missions and aborted one mission. We had an engine shot out, so that one didn't count.

Aaron Elson: That's terrible.

Eugene George: Actually, I=d have flown 18 missions, but only got credit for 17.

Aaron Elson: So the Kassel was your 18th mission?

Eugene George: 17th.

Aaron Elson: So you already had quite a bit of flying under your belt.

Eugene George: Yes.

Aaron Elson: Which missions were your most memorable?

Eugene George: Well, I=d have to go back and look at my logbook and identify these things. My first mission was to Paris. We bombed Orly Airport, and I knew we were bombing, the Germans were using it as a backup field for the Normandy thing, and there were some dirigible hangars, very famous ones built in 1918, and I really hated to bomb these. But the thing that was most amazing was you couldn=t see the ground because of such low fog in Paris, but the Eiffel Tower just stuck straight out of that fog. You=d have known anywhere in the world you would have known exactly where you were. And we were onto our target, and as Bill Dewey may have told you, we got a group citation for bombing accuracy.

Aaron Elson: Yes, I heard about that.

Eugene George: Another one was Nancy, we bombed a fuel dump there, and they bombed, I think they bombed pathfinder or radar there, and there=s a historic building, a group of historic buildings, I was very concerned about, and as we left the target, the tail gunner called me and said, ALieutenant, you=ve gotta see this.@ I got up in the top turret and looked back and there was a big, it was an oil, fuel dump we were bombing, and this big black smoke came up through the clouds and I knew we were right on target. I remember those. I remember, we would go into Germany, one took us over the island of Helgoland, and the, I never knew why they routed us over Helgoland because the reputation was that that=s where they retired the best flak gunners in the German artillery. And we were, I was flying, but I was on the wing of the lead airplane, but I was flying in the co-pilot=s position and I was in the right seat, and I saw a flak burst,

(unintelligible) flak came up and burst (unintelligible). It was 88 millimeter flak, you could tell the different between that and 105, and there were two that bracketed right on that lead aircraft, and I saw the two bursts and I knew the third burst would get him, and the fourth burst would get us, so I racked(?) Out of formation, and the fourth burst, the third burst got him and the fourth burst missed us. We got flakked up a little bit by that, of course you remember these things. Then we took up the lead position and went on in on the target, on down the line.

Aaron Elson: And there was nothing the lead plane could do?

Eugene George: No, he was ... Well, you see, if you can see two, you know where the others are going, you know you can get an alignment.

There was, the mission that we aborted, we brought our bombs home. We could have dropped them in Germany, we could have dropped them in the North Sea, and that was fine most of the time, but we were all flaked out, and got on the ground, the ground crew of course was looking for souvenirs, pieces of flak, and the crew chief was out there with them, (unintelligible), we had the right inboard engine, I had shut it down, we'd come home on three engines. We were losing altitude all the way, and we came home all by ourselves, without any help. The crew chief, I mean, there was one fragment of something in that engine, and the crew chief said "Don't touch that thing!" And it was a nose fuse. We'd had a direct hit on that engine, and the nose fuse was still active. It hadn't exploded. The shell had broken off before it exploded. So that was, you remember things like that.

Aaron Elson: Did you have casualties on your earlier missions?

Eugene George: You mean in our crew? No. We would come back flaked up, but we hadn't had any casualties. Of course the pilot and co-pilot were very well protected. We had a steel helmet, we had these coffin(?) Seats, and we had these flak suit, pads, in front of us. We had occasions of flak in the cockpit, but we never had any casualties.

Aaron Elson: Had you had any encounters with fighter planes?

Eugene George: We had seen them, we recognized them, we even saw the German jets, and they were very, the amazing thing was that they were so fast, you know, they were ... you could identify them by their speed.

Aaron Elson: What did people remark when you saw the jets?

Eugene George: I don't recall any remarks. I was generally listening on the command radio, I was listening to the lead pilot, and one thing I will say is that the radio chatter was excessive, and it was undisciplined, and any German listening in could tell exactly what was going on within our group.

Aaron Elson: Was that in general, or just when the jets were seen?

Eugene George: Oh no, that was in general.

Aaron Elson: So there was no radio silence?

Eugene George: We were supposed to be, but they didn't monitor that very much.

Aaron Elson: So you flew some missions as a pilot?

Eugene George: I flew a combination. I was always flying in the co-pilot's seat, but I was logging pilot's time. After my seventh mission, I took some check rides with the CO because the idea was, or I thought was, that when Brent's missions were up I would take over the crew. So I

was being primed for this possibility, and I took rides with the CO and checked out and went through procedures on pilot, and after that, after my seventh mission, then after that I could log both pilot and co-pilot time. But Brent, the pilot, would arrange so that in the formation I was doing the flying. People have probably talked to you about the characteristics of the airplane, which, loaded with bombs, it was, had its problems.

Aaron Elson: What sort of problems would it have? Because people haven't talked to me that much about the ...

Eugene George: First of all, as I understand it, well, they took the belly turret out, which threw it out of balance. And I know that they also added fuel possibilities when this happened, which further put it out of balance. But the reaction time on the airplane, see, I flew a B-17 a little bit, but the B-17 was an aileron airplane, the B-24 was a rudder airplane, but you would move the controls and it wouldn't react immediately, it would take a little time. You knew how it was going to react and you had already moved the controls to overcome that reaction before it reacted, so you were about two steps ahead of the airplane. You were flying in close formation, and so, and particularly if you were in an area where you got any prop wash, that was kind of dangerous. And you tried to fly in as close as you could. But I always felt you had to stay two steps ahead of the airplane, and if we would get, we were at times not too far above starting speed, you'd get on the inside of a turn in formation and you were throttling back, to stay off the wing of this person you were apt to stall out, you were just right at the margin.

Aaron Elson: Which group were you in?

Eugene George: I was in the 445th Bomb Group.

Aaron Elson: I mean Squadron?

Eugene George: The 702nd.

Aaron Elson: You had mentioned taking some check flights with your CO? Who was that? Was that McKoy?

Eugene George: I don't remember his name.

Aaron Elson: Or Graham?

Eugene George: It probably was McKoy. I don't remember.

Aaron Elson: Was he the CO of the squadron?

Eugene George: I thought he was the group ... I'm fairly sure he was the group.

Aaron Elson: What happened the morning of the Kassel mission?

Eugene George: Well, we had a briefing of course. One was awakened, oh, as early as 3 a.m., and we went in for breakfast. I was, we had a flying officer's mess and we had a ground

officer=s mess and we had an enlisted men=s mess, and the flying officers= mess was considered the worst of the three, and the ground officers= mess was the best. We would take our wings off and go in there at times, and the food was better. This upset us somewhat, but on that mission, the food was so bad that morning. They did have some canned peaches, and that=s all I ate for breakfast. I had not started drinking coffee yet. I learned to drink ersatz coffee when I was imprisoned in Germany because that was the hot beverage during the cold winter.

We went into the briefing, and there would be a chart on the wall, and the target would be located. There would be possible areas of flak listed, and as I recall where our IP would be located, there=d be some possible alternatives. We would get a weather report, and what to expect. We would be told about fighter protection, if it was English or American and what it would be. Our fighter protection was, on the long missions we would link up with P-38s which were of course very easily identified, and the Mustang was, with that big cowling was easy, it was easily identified, and we could identify German aircraft. But generally we would then get our parachutes and check out an escape kit, and go out and wait under the airplane until the control tower fired a flare, then start up the engines and start, we had a pre-plan(?), we would then assemble and you realize that, and you know all about this of course, but the men in groups were forming up for missions during the day and we would be given, no, always we were, lots of times we would depart, we couldn=t see the end of the runway but we knew the fog would be gone when we got back, the meteorologist assured us of that.

As soon as we got off the ground, we picked up a compass heading and each group was assigned a different compass heading which would generally be east, and we would be on instruments just ascending, in the clouds to get above the clouds. When we broke out of the clouds, we would look for an airplane, another B-24 or maybe a B-17, that was grotesquely painted, and it would be our assembly plane, we=d start forming up our formation then and start joining other groups, but we knew where we were going. We would slowly, this was probably around 18,000 feet over the North Sea, then we would start a rising ascension, very slowly moving up to our target altitude.

As I recall the run to Kassel was 23,500, and that was fairly common, 23 to 24,000. We would, where we were expecting flak as plotted, we would throw out chaff, and other aircraft in front of us had thrown out chaff and we often could see the artillery projectiles bursting below us into chaff, which was encouraging.

We could sometimes see other groups on the bombing run. We were on one mission one time that was close to Berlin but not Berlin, and another group had [been] bombing Berlin, and we could see a lot of flak, we could see parachutes, we could see burning airplanes, things like that. So we had a grandstand seat, and I don=t know which mission we were on then.

Aaron Elson: Now, you formed up at 23,500 feet in order to go to Kassel. What happened next?

Eugene George: Well, I=ve forgotten whether it was the Kassel mission or not. (Unintelligible) an aircraft, they would be over us just sort of fussing, the big problem was when they would run out of fuel in their belly tank they would drop it, and we=d see this tumbling gasoline tank that had been jettisoned. Of course we were not, relative to Kassel, I was not aware of any mishap in navigation until I heard a discussion over the intercom among the navigators. What upset me was that they were discussing over the radio that we were off course, and of course the Germans could hear this. You know, we were telling the Germans about our concern

for navigation. Now, I felt that this was distinctly a navigational error and we were pulled out of the bomber stream, and of course it's dangerous to try to re-enter that.

Aaron Elson: This is the first I've heard this particular response to the chatter among the navigators. I've heard many people talk about the navigators talking about being off course. Did you feel, at the time, before the attack, did the thought occur to you that the Germans could hear?

Eugene George: Oh, sure. That always occurred to me, that the Germans could hear. That's why I thought we needed to maintain very proper radio discipline, but we didn't have any. Now, I say the navigators, I think this was two navigators that were discussing over the lead navigator. And I did hear the, as part of this discussion I heard the lead pilot say "Stay in close and follow me." I remember that.

We also knew we were without fighter protection, we'd left our cover, and there was some communication to try to get to our fighters, of course we were telling the Germans at the same time we were without.

Aaron Elson: What can you remember about the bomb run itself?

Eugene George: Well, it seemed like we were going to go for Goettingen, the lens place, and I wasn't worried about the bomb run, I was just worried about getting rid of the bombs, and so we flew and finally we, but I didn't know where we were. I've heard that yes, we bombed there, and yes, our bombs fell in a field somewhere and not on any kind of target. But I was relieved that we were rid of our bombs.

Aaron Elson: That way it would count as a mission?

Eugene George: No, that way the airplane was more maneuverable. Not that it would count. You have more, better control over the airplane. I never worried about counting missions.

I knew we were, there was communication trying to get some fighters in close to us, and I also remember our tail gunner saying "There are fighters coming in from the rear."

And I said, "Oh, well that's great."

And he said, "They're not ours." FW-190s.

So I knew they were approaching from the rear. Of course I didn't see any of this.

Aaron Elson: When he said they were FW-190s was there a sense of panic?

Eugene George: Oh no. I'd never encountered any panic, except I heard about one, this airplane I told you about that was shot down over Helgoland, he was able to ditch and was picked up by a German rescue, air-sea rescue, and I talked to some of the crew in prison and they told me the story, and that one of their officers just went berserk. That's the only time I've ever heard of that. I'm sure that there was some, but I never knew of any.

Aaron Elson: So when did the firing begin, right after the ...

Eugene George: Well, it was a little while after this. I was very much aware of the fact that

we were under fire, and what made me aware of it was our own guns started firing. And also it was sort of, the German artillery was sort of like patters of rain in the cockpit, you know you could hear that, but then our own guns were making much more noise than they were, but my concentration was right on that wing, you know, I was totally locked in to keeping the aircraft in formation. My first, I knew we were being hit, but the first, see I was flying the airplane and I was aware that we were dangerously hit when one of the engines started, I was watching engine instruments and I was, thought the engine was burning, which it was, and I could see, you know, the engine right next to me was burning, and I didn't know if I should put the fire extinguisher or not. I didn't, and Brent was still just sitting there. He sat, you know, through the whole mission and yet he wouldn't fly(?), but we were losing power, and so he did that, and I pushed the bailout button, or the emergency button, and I did what we, I gave the crew time enough where I thought they would bail out and go through the procedures that we had learned when leaving the aircraft.

I knew, I did try to raise the rear of the airplane and the front of the airplane on intercom, and I couldn't get anything from either direction. I didn't know whether, I knew we'd been hit, I didn't know whether something had happened to them. I could see flak coming on the nose of the airplane because it was in front of me, and the Germans were approaching from the rear, coming up, rolling over and split us and down, coming out. I saw one of them do this when I was getting the top turret gunner out.

After I gave him enough time to get out, I could see(?) In our, in the cockpit area, the radio operator and the engineer, the top turret gunner, were supposed to leave on the sound of the alarm, open the bomb bays, and we would keep on flying the airplane until they got clear, then we would go out. I went out and the top turret gunner was, whose name incidentally was Constant S. Malaszewski, he was from East Tonawanda, New York, and the radio operator was named Sam Winer, who was from the Los Angeles area. But the, uh, he was still in his turret, and I had to crawl up there and jerk him by the seat of the pants. Winer was, didn't even have his parachute harness on. So I jerked Malaszewski out of the turret, but in doing that I saw the German plane turning and splitting S(?) After having made his run, a beautiful airplane, very very close, as close as to the other end of the, half, well, three-quarters of the way to the other end of the room. And the, I got Winer's harness and shoved it at him, and opened the bomb bay door, I mean I opened the door into the bomb bay, and it was just a mass of flame. The fuel gauges which were on the left, they were spitting like blowtorches, and the bomb bay doors of course were closed and we would have been trapped if they had remained closed. And they operated hydraulically. There was, there were fires all over the place in the bomb bay. It's amazing, I'd see areas of flame chasing up pipes and pipework, things like that. And I thought, and the switch, or the, to open the bomb bay doors was right between those two blowtorches which were the fuel gauges. I thought I could hit that switch if we had hydraulic power, I could open the bomb bay doors. If we didn't, I'd have to wind it, and I didn't think I could survive in the flames. But I could jump through all of this flame on the catwalk to get there, and I hit the switch on the way over to it, and I jumped through and got there. And the bomb bay doors opened.

But I still had the responsibility of these two enlisted men. So I went back through those blowtorches and started getting, Malaszewski was just sort of standing there in a daze, I started snapping Winer's harness on him, everybody had chest packs, I had a back pack. I didn't, I'd been off oxygen for a while to do all of this, and I didn't know but what my parachute was burned when I walked through the fire, you see. So I walked through the fire and I walked back

through the fire.

So while I was over, standing over Winer and getting him put back together, Brent came by and told Winer to hurry up and he went ahead and bailed out. And he went ahead and went through the door into the flaming area. I never knew whether he went back to check on people in the waist or whether he went on out or what happened. Or whether he was injured in going out, because the fall(fire?) obstructed vision, you know, I was concerned about that. But he went on out. I still, I got Winer (Wiener?) Put together, ready to go, and and Galaszewski(Malaszewki?), and they were behind me, so I went on out. And they went on out too, as the aircraft broke up. It broke up. They told me later.

But the three of us were the only ones who survived of the crew.

Aaron Elson: Brent didn't survive?

Eugene George: Brent didn't survive. I never knew what happened to him. The, during the reunion at Bad Hersfeld, I heard what the Germans did and things like that, but the Brent story is another story which I'll fill you in on down the line. Now, do you want the account of my fall, of my jump?

Aaron Elson: Oh yes! I'm spellbound.

Eugene George: I came out of the airplane, I used to swim a lot, and I came out, I was afraid I would hit some obstruction and my safest bet would be to get into a cannonball position. I didn't know whether I had a parachute or not, you know, by that time. And the, there were two things, three things. One, I'd been off of oxygen for quite a while, and I was concerned about this. I wanted to get lower. Two was, I knew there were a lot of German fighters in the area and chances are they wouldn't shoot someone in a parachute, but I was afraid of even getting rammed, or run into, by a fighter. We had been briefed on the fact that the Polish fighters in the RAF would have no hesitation shooting a German in a parachute, and that we knew when this had happened and the Germans would retaliate even, that's what we'd been told, I don't know if there's anything to that or not, but, the other thing was, in training films, we had a Navy character named Dilbert, did you ever hear of Dilbert?

Aaron Elson: Just the cartoon.

Eugene George: He was a cartoon. He was a cadet, or a pilot, who goofed every possible way. One of these cartoons showed Dilbert in a parachute with a target painted on his chest and a duck sitting on his head and a Japanese aircraft lining up his sights, and I had that vision, of Dilbert. Those three things. And, uh, I was tumbling, and I thought, in the cannonball position, I thought I'd better get out of that, and I didn't know quite how to do that, and I stretched out into a swan dive. And I reached for my ripcord to see if everything was still there, and I started spinning, so I got back in the swan dive.

There was a solid cloud cover underneath us. I thought when I get into those clouds, I will pull my ripcord.

I went right through the clouds, and I could see the ground. But I was still in a freefall situation, and then I thought, well, if people would see me from the ground I (unintelligible) altitude, this was somewhere between 750 and 1,200 feet depending on the aircraft he was

flying(?) And I could judge, I didn't need an altimeter to judge heights at that low altitude, so, and I was curious as to whether I had a parachute or not of course, but actually, the swan dive situation, it's almost exhilarating. It was fun!

So I fell most of the 23,000 feet, and I pulled my ripcord, and I was jerked up into the proper parachute position. My parachute worked. That was the great news. And I was coming down on some trees, which I later found were beech trees, and my canopy, I was coming down in a wooded area, and my canopy covered the top of a tree, and I was swinging in the tree.

I was kind of reconnoitering, even then of course, I could hear an air raid siren, and I could hear impacts of aircraft crashing. And as part of this I could hear a lot of small explosions which I think were ammunition on the aircraft.

I was able to swing over to the trunk of the tree and I discovered that my boots had snapped off when the parachute opened.

Side 2

Aaron Elson: It happened to George Collar. Probably five or six people I've interviewed had their boots snap off from the jerk of the parachute opening. And I've seen that in many individual instances, that people who had never really jumped out of a plane before, that's one of the things that happened to them.

Eugene George: Now I don't know what sort of a religious person you are, but in the tree, I got over to the trunk and could climb up so I could reduce my parachute, which I left in the tree, and while I was in the tree I looked down and there were two foxes, and they were (unintelligible) groomed, they were beautiful, you know. Red foxes with white tips on their tails. And they were obviously frightened by all of this activity. I thought, they would know where to hide, I mean they would go to a dense place. And so I watched their direction, I never saw them again, but I headed, I got on the ground and headed in that direction, and I did get into a very dense undergrowth. I could see the sky but I was pretty well concealed, and sort of took stock of things.

I opened my escape kit, and it had been rifled. The stuff that mostly (unintelligible) hard candies, some halizone tablets for water purification, someone had been through it and turned it in, and the map was not there, which was really the one thing I wanted.

Waitress: Coffee?

Eugene George: Yes. I would like a cup of decaf, black.

Aaron Elson: Regular.

Eugene George: I had a little pocket Bible, and with it a New Testament with psalms, and I just opened it up, it was about ten o'clock in the morning, and it fell open to the 91st Psalm.

Aaron Elson: Is that A May ten thousand fall to your left...@?

Eugene George: Yes, that's the one. So, that was very reassuring. That was a miracle. I mean, the foxes and the psalm. I waited for quite a while. I did see three, they could not see me

but ME-109s flying low over, they were in formation, probably returning to base. Also, there was a path not too far away and I heard some people talking, there were three men, all senior citizens of sorts and they had a little fox terrier dog with them, and I was really worried about that. But I was downwind from them. I was enough of a Boy Scout to know about this sort of thing, and the dog never caught me, but they were sort of talking to the dog, the dog was looking up at them, they went right on by. But my plan was to walk all day, head for Switzerland, walk all day, I mean walk all night and sleep all day, and I would find before the sun came up I would find a place to dig in.

I ran into Corman Bean, and we were together on that first night, or maybe the second night, I don't remember. It was the 27th of September it was snowing(?), the 28th it was pretty chilly, and he slept all morning and he kept talking in his sleep about Millie, his wife, he would talk about her and it was quite a touching encounter. And then somehow, he decided to take off and we got separated and I don't know, I don't know how it happened.

Aaron Elson: The next day he decided to take off?

Eugene George: I think we would have been together for a day or so, or more even. And we tried, we didn't have any food. He didn't seem to have an escape kit. We did have, well, he must have because we both had these little plastic water bottles that folded up and we purified our water, we had plenty of water. We tried eating raw potatoes. He or I, I don't know whether we were separate, you'd go into a little farm stand, it was the fall and there was fruit on the trees, but the German (unintelligible) dogs were really friendly, but the were (unintelligible) they would start barking, you know, and we didn't want to risk that. So we didn't eat.

But there were two things, now Corman's stories may match up here some, but I think most of what I'm going to tell you now was solo on my part. Somehow we got separated. We didn't dare make a fire, or even if we had I don't think we had any matches or anything to make it with, but the raw potatoes were just not possible, but at any rate, I found myself alone, still headed south. I was, uh, out about six days before I was picked up. I lost count. I knew it was into October some.

The, uh, then there were about three or four encounters that would be interesting. One is that, it's amazing how your senses sharpen up under these circumstances, and I realized walking in the dark that I was not alone, and, the, you freeze. And I had made shoes for myself out of part of my heated flying suit, I had a very sharp pocket knife and I used the wires in the heated suit to tie them, tie my shoes together, so I could move very quietly, so I just froze and there was two lovers, and I was very close to them. They never knew I was, they were focused on each other.

Another time, and I found an autobahn, the main autobahn south, and headed toward Switzerland, and of course everything was blacked out but you get, when you know a large, concentrated area, you get a feeling, you know, even though it's blacked out, you get a feeling for the place. I could hear a railroad train (unintelligible) up the autobahn. I was very concerned about bridges, because I didn't want to get caught in the middle of a bridge, and, there was practically no traffic, and any traffic there was would have been military traffic, but I would often instead of walking the bridge I'd go down and try to cross over the creek or something like that, not to get caught on the bridge. So I would walk all night and hide out all day. And there was one time when I encountered a railroad going the same way as the autobahn, and the train, and I knew it's moving very slowly and I thought, well if I can get onto this train I can hitch a

ride for a while if it's going in the right direction. It was going north. And so it was coming, I was in timber, and I was on the edge of this forest by the railroad track, and I was secure behind a tree, it's pretty dark, but I could make out, it was hauling something, and I could see cigarettes on the, these flat cars, and it was a, an armored division, and it had tanks on this train and the crews were riding on the flatcars, now this was in the dark of night, so I thought, it was going in the wrong direction so I didn't take that train. But those were two of the situations that I ran into, there was a third one, I can't quite fill it out right now.

One thing, the German forests of course were planted, and the trees were not at random. You could look down rows and rows of trees, and I think they could see you, you know, if you weren't, so you really had to be cautious. But I was doing this at night.

About the sixth day, I ran out of cover, and what happened was I was down in a valley, there were no trees, an agricultural area, and there was bridge, and I thought if I could get under that bridge I could stay there all day. And so I did get under the bridge in some high stuff, but what I didn't, I didn't reconnoiter at all, there was a path under the bridge also on the other side of the stream, and the Germans went to bed fairly early but they got up very early, and there were agricultural workers walking on this path. I knew they'd see me. I knew I was burned about the face and looked horrible, but I didn't have a mirror, I didn't know what I looked like, so I thought, well, my best plan is to just get up on the road act boldly, and if I can find a bunch of bushes somewhere I'll go in there, but surely they've seen me, and I think they were so-called slave labor, I don't know that they would have said anything, they were strange looking people. But I got up on the road and walked. A couple of cars, military cars, went by, didn't stop. And I was getting into central Germany, I'd been walking like crazy, and, the, I put myself down as four miles per hour, because I was used to that pace, I conditioned myself to that pace. But I ran into a, an overseer of these laborers, and he saw me and he looked very stern and said
AEnglishman!@

I said, ANein, nein, Amerikanische.@ I was pretty hungry and tired by this time. My eye, my right eye was really hurting and I was afraid I might lose it from the burn. I could feel my face, and part of my oxygen mask had melted on my face, and, uh, you know, he looked at me and looked horror stricken.

And we had been told that the SS were dangerous, to never give up to them, that the Hitlerjugend were kids and they were dangerous, but to give up to the Wehrmacht. So I asked if he could take me to the Wehrmacht. He said yes, he would. He took me into this little town, I don't know where it was, or what it was, I really would like to know the name of that town. He took me into what would be the equivalent of the administrative office, and I had an o.d. uniform with insignia and stuff under my flying suit which had been burned in places. I took off my flying suit to show that I was in uniform. They rustled(?) Around in German and finally they sent for someone who spoke English. So he came up and he said, AAre you from Chicago?@

And I said, ANo, I've never been to Chicago.@ And I told him I had walked for six days without food, did he have anything to eat?

He said, AOh, you'll get food.@ They never did.

I said, when he asked this question about Chicago I thought he was thinking about gangsters, American flyers were gangsters. So I told him, name rank and serial number, that I was a student, an architectural student, and he was, they were amazed at how old I was, they thought I would have been much older. And I was from Texas. Now these, you're just supposed to tell name, rank and serial number, but, uh, he said, AWell, I lived in Chicago.@

And I said, "Well, you must not have liked it because you're here in Germany."

He said, "Oh yes," he said, "I'm going to go back there as fast as I can when this war is over."

So they put me in their hoosegow, which was the top of their church, a little room in the top, the belfry of their church. And I was so exhausted. And they sent for a Wehrmacht guard and a truck to take me to the railroad station.

And, that little room was so filthy I slept, in the church, I slept on the floor. But I was dead to the world, you know, after, I was so tired. So I got on the train in the baggage car headed for Frankfurt. I didn't know where it was going. And they had a guard in the baggage compartment, it had bicycles and baggage and things, and he was a Wehrmacht (unintelligible). Do you remember the Milton Caniff cartoons? You remember that he was very accurate in his drawings, and he would show Germans with Mauser rifles and actually in training, his drawings of Japanese landing craft were so accurate that those were used as training aids, they used a lot of Japanese training aids from Milton Caniff cartoons. But one of the things he was very accurate with was his weapons, and the Mauser, the German Mauser, was one of them. And this guard was a young guy, I looked at him, he was very curious about me, and I think they had, the word had gotten through to him that I was from Texas and that I had been without food for six days and had walked all this distance. I did ask him how far I was from Switzerland. He said about 50 kilometers. And I went back and checked that distance after from Bad Hersfeld to see if it was possible, and it was plausible at a four mile per hour pace. Now I, I don't know whether I'm exaggerating or not exaggerating, but at any rate, that's what I believe I heard him say. Another two nights I could have done it. And Switzerland wasn't blacked out, you knew when you were over the border.

Aaron Elson: Wouldn't you have to climb a mountain to get over the border?

Eugene George: No, no. I was in, my plan was to get a boat and go to Lake Constance and go across there, if I could get a sailboat. See, I was a sailor, I used to sail sailboats and I was thinking to do that. That was my plan, if I had hit the lake. Now, I didn't know what sort of patrols they would have but I didn't think they would be very severe because that was not a war zone. But anyway, I saw his rifle and I said, "Mauser?" And I looked at it, not trying to get too close, and he handed it to me. And I looked out the window, and I lifted his rifle and very carefully handed it back to him, and he realized what he had done, and then he was a little uptight. I was whistling which I think just passed the time, and I was whistling the Marseillaise. He asked me not to do it. He didn't speak English, and he asked me not to do that, so I tried Lili Marlene and asked him to sing Lili Marlene. So we got into Frankfurt eventually. I still hadn't eaten.

Aaron Elson: You must have been starved.

Eugene George: Well, actually with water you can last a long time. But those peaches I had back several days before had to last a long time. At any rate, I was taken into where there were a lot of German enlisted men, and they had all known that I had walked this distance and had been without food, and that I was from Texas. And being from Texas was a, uh, it really turned them on. One or two of them spoke English, of course, and they said, "Did your father fight Indians?"

And I said, "No, my great-grandfather did. Not my father." And that I grew up on horseback,

and with cows and oil wells. So they got, we talked about things like that. The big question on their minds, AWhen is the war going to be over?@

And I said, AWe think it=ll be done by Christmas.@ And they were overjoyed at that. Everyone was sick and tired of war. And one who could speak English, one of them said, AHow could you do what you did?@

I said, AWell, I=m an American,@ and that, from what I=ve heard (unintelligible) Marine said when they were being brainwashed. At any rate, that just came out. And they seemed to be satisfied with that answer.

I was taken into the hospital for my burns, and I watched the German officers how they behaved, I didn=t see many German officers, but how they looked at enlisted men, their bearing, that sort of thing, and I decided I would do exactly the same thing, and I did that. And they responded to that.

The doctor, I had very good medical care. I asked the doctor if he went to school in Heidelberg. He said he did, and he said, When is the war going to be over?

And I said, Well, that=s one of the best medical schools in the world. I said, ASome of our best physicians went there before the war.@

And always, I think, because I was in a hospital bed, and because I behaved like an officer, these orderlies would come in, I did get some potato soup finally, and they would salute before they would ask a question or anything, and I think this really paid off.

So, we went to a place called Dulag Luft, which you=ve heard about. I was there a couple of weeks and put on a train with one other person, an Australian radio operator in a Lancaster, and we headed for Stetin.

Aaron Elson: At Dulag Luft, were you interrogated?

Eugene George: Not much. You see, I looked like Frankenstein. I was all bandaged up. I was not much interrogated.

Aaron Elson: Okay, so you were put on a train to ...

Eugene George: Stetin. I didn=t know where it was going.

Aaron Elson: And there was an Australian.

Eugene George: An Australian. We were locked up in a compartment of a passenger car. We went through Berlin on the way, and we were locked in the car and there was an air raid on Berlin, and the German officer said that the Geneva Convention says I=m supposed to warn you that I will shoot you if you try to escape and I=m now warning you, and he went to the bomb shelter. We stayed locked up in the train, and the bombs didn=t fall near us. We thought they would (unintelligible) in the marshaling yard and we were afraid they would, but uh, we could see out the window and see the German countryside, go through towns. We had a box of prunes which lasted us almost, in that compartment, about a week. We had toilet facilities, of course.

But, uh, I looked him up in Australia when I went there later on, his name is Johnny Murray and he went to the College of England after the war, he studied dentistry, and we had a little correspondence.

We would go through places and there would be F-51s or P-51s in the area, they would stop

the train, they'd leave, running, and all the passengers would go to the woods or something, we would stay locked up, and we eventually got to Barth. Stetin, then to Barth, and we did do some walking with a large group of prisoners. There were very vicious dogs and guards, and we got into Stalag Luft 1 near Barth.

Aaron Elson: How did you learn what happened to Brent?

Eugene George: I never knew really what happened to Brent. To me, he was MIA, and I thought probably he was killed in the jump or he got caught by civilians who shot him and killed him on the spot or something. I never knew. He was just straight MIA.

I had an inquiry from a, it may have been a telephone call, and he asked if, he said he was from Oregon and he asked if I was Walter E. George who had been a pilot in the Air Force. And I said yes. And he said, AWell, did you fly with Donald E. Brent?@

And I said, AOh yes, he was my pilot.@

And he said, AWell, I'm his great-nephew.@

And I said, AWell, if you want to know what happened to him I don't know. I saw him, I think I was the last one to see him alive, he went out of the airplane before I did, but I don't know what happened to him after that.@

He said, AWell, he was killed and he was buried in Germany and reburied in an American cemetery.@ And he said, AI really would like to talk with you. My family would like to talk ... my grandmother would like to talk with you.@

And I said, AWell, I'd like to talk with you.@

So I've always wanted to see Oregon, so I said, AI'll come to Oregon.@ So my wife and I went, now Brent was, I was not sure where he was from, I knew he was associated with Eugene, Oregon, and he had a wife in Bellevue, Washington, I believe. So, we went to Eugene. Now I'd never been in either, I'd been in most of the states but never Washington or Oregon, and I wanted to see the trees and other things. So it was like going to a funeral. All the relatives, two of them military, high up, colonels, who came from the Washington, D.C., area. There was another retired Air Force person. There was the family, his former wife, of course, was remarried, his sister, the grandmother of this nephew, and her daughter, and these people really rolled out the carpet but I told them all I could.

Brent was a good pilot. He was well-coordinated. He thought ahead of the airplane, and he was interested in railroads. He wanted to be a railroad engineer and he'd worked on the railroads for a while, and he was mechanically inclined.

We were in harmony as a team, as pilots. I knew what he was thinking before he said, and he knew what I was thinking, and the way we worked, reacting on the airplane. But he was a good pilot, and I've flown with pilots who are dangerous. In fact, I refused to fly with two pilots because they, they just weren't with it. And they were trying to be macho.

So we had a good visit. I gave Brent's, well, I gave his sister's daughter the Bible that I'd had in my pocket when I bailed out, and she broke into tears. I said, AThis rode next to Brent on 17 missions.@

So that's about it. I stayed in the Reserve. I flew B-25s, I never flew a B-24 again. When we were evacuated from prison, for a lot of prisoners, B-17s came in and picked us up, and I was up near the pilot and I said, ACan I fly your airplane?@

He said, ASure.@

So I flew back to an airfield in France at very low altitude in Germany, the low altitude being, oh, 1,500 feet, just looking at the countryside.

Aaron Elson: What was it like in Stalag Luft 1?

Eugene George: Well, it varied. I kept my officer=s stance with the Germans, and this was the way to go. We had, we were very crowded, we had 16 to 20 men in a room. We were stacked up in berths that were too short or worked well for Italians. We had Italian blankets which were too short. And remember, this was wintertime in Germany. We had two or three briquets of coal and a little heater, but actually our best, our warmth was from the fact that we had 20 people and we had body heat. But we had Red Cross parcels, and we were fairly well, we didn=t have a lot to eat, we were on very small rations but we weren=t making them, but when we got off Red Cross parcels it was pretty rough. We lost a lot of weight. I really got angry with these television programs about Air Force prisoners, all of these healthy guys who obviously ...

Aaron Elson: Hogan=s Heroes?

Eugene George: Hogan=s Heroes. To me this is the biggest farce I ever saw. It=s ridiculing the situation. I mean, these people, for what they did they would have been shot. And we had a fellow shot for chasing a baseball under the warning wire, and another fellow shot when he opened a window during an air raid. The German guards varied greatly. We had cigarettes in the Red Cross parcels and these were trade goods, and as I told you, I have photographs, because we got, I traded for goods to make photographs of the prison. I thought the stalag, the channel, the web site that covered that prison would like to see ...

Aaron Elson: Did you have any contact with a guard Henry the Butcher?

Eugene George: No, I don=t know about him. That name doesn=t ring a bell. Sometimes a horse would get killed and we would get horsemeat.. I think we were all quite congenial. We were all Air Force officers and I think we behaved ourselves pretty well.

Aaron Elson: Did you keep a diary?

Eugene George: No. I didn=t have anything to write with. Some did and kept a diary, and they probably traded to the Germans for cigarettes. But I didn=t keep one. When people are gonna write books, and things like that.

(Unintelligible) France. One thing that had happened, we were so out of shape if you got a scratch, it took so long healing. And then we walked around kind of bent over. In Hogan=s Heroes, you know, these people straight and doing things, it wasn=t like that. The Germans kept their civilian group late in the war pretty well informed about where the Russians were. We knew the Russians were coming, but we didn=t know what form this would take. And we didn=t know what the Germans would do. There was a lot of ideas and there was a lot of digging, the Germans started, and we would hear explosions and the Germans were blowing up motorcycles and things like this they didn=t want to fall into Russian hands. And we knew there was an airport nearby, there was an airport very close to us, and I think our prison was put close to that airport to protect the airport. And we, as pilots, we were watching these Germans fly, they were

flying JU-88s mostly, and they were so uncoordinated. And we thought they were throwing (unintelligible) into hot airplanes with very very low flying time, and they=ll kill themselves in these planes let alone do anything to the Russians.

But the Germans pulled out, grabbed a lot of Red Cross parcels, pulled out, they were headed we heard for the English lines, and the German civilian population was very agitated. And the first Russians I believe we had was a boy and a girl on horseback just sort of scouting out the territory, and they came into the area and left. And we knew the Russians were coming. And the Russians came in the form of a lot of drunk Mongolians and Orientals, I don=t know where they were from but some of them were driving very skinny horses and pulling a cart full of loot, they were dressed in parts of German uniforms and they all had German machine pistols, and they were drunk. And they terrified the whole, not us, I mean they were, and mostly they came in wearing black armbands and we said, AWhy are you wearing black armbands?@

And they said, AWhy aren=t you wearing black armbands? Roosevelt is dead.@ The Russian army was wearing black armbands to honor Roosevelt. And so they got us some black cloth and that was our identification.

Aaron Elson: Had you not heard about Roosevelt?

Eugene George: We had not heard about Roosevelt being dead. But at any rate, we had numerous incidents in the camp. One of them was there were prisoners, I suppose they were officers but they were painting a stripe down the street, have you heard this story?

Aaron Elson: No.

Eugene George: And they painted right on up to the guard opening, they painted their own way out. They painted as long as their paint would last, and they were out of prison. But the Orientals just had a reign of terror. And they were very fond of German children, and you=d see one with a little blond kid on his lap and just as happy as could be, they treasured these children. And you=d see children holding onto the harness of a trained German shepherd dog. Then there were civilian suicides in places, and the Russians didn=t bury anything. This was a problem. But finally, more regular, disciplined troops came in behind them.

Aaron Elson: Did they do anything to the children?

Eugene George: Oh no, they didn=t harm the children at all. The parents I=m sure were terrified. I don=t know that they would have harmed the parents if they were the parents of the children. The German children were extremely well fed, they were healthy. The, uh, they drove in, and we told them we hadn=t had beef for quite a while. And their ration was alcohol and they had little tins of sardines. They lived off the land. And we told them we hadn=t had beef, and they drove in a very fine herd of Holstein cattle, and you know, to get a cow from a cow to a steak takes some in-between work, and that was attempted but it didn=t work, and we were trying to get the cows back to the owners. But their troops came in and they were a crack outfit. And we had seen their reconnaissance planes, which were like 1930s biplanes coming over. Their vehicles were all worn out, their land vehicles, on the units we saw. They encountered SS and the SS had a unit somewhere around there, they went down to a little town called Zingst and made a last stand and I think the Russians killed them all. The Russians were fishing with hand

grenades and things like that, they were kind of dangerous to be around. They came in, when the first ones came in they were line troops and they wanted us to tear down our barbed wire enclosures and things like that. We didn't have any techniques to do this, and we didn't have any tools to do it with. They sent a lot of them over with, I don't know how, maybe a hundred vehicles, and they wanted us to demonstrate things. And they sat in squads or patrols and a lot of individual cars. I was worried about their fires because I was thinking any German reconnaissance would pick them up, but they were doing their dances and they had their little squeeze box, they were very musical, and they wanted us to join in, and they wanted us to join with them and go on and keep chasing the Germans.

But it was, they also brought in a USO, the equivalent of a USO show, and they brought in a lot of banners commemorating dead soldiers, you know, large photographic banners. They said, we heard they said 'We'll take you out to the Ukraine or Georgia, and we said, 'We'll stay right here, our people will come and get us.' They couldn't believe that uh...

Aaron Elson: If you had gone with them you never would have been heard of.

Eugene George: Probably. At any rate, we waited there on the ground for I don't know, two or three weeks, and things got settled down and B-17s came into this little airport. It had been mined. We had gone over there, I got, went out, I was curious about the time I got shot at, I learned that you hear the whine of the bullet before you hear the report. You know, and things like that, and so I went back in and stayed pretty much put. There were corpses, things like that, which was very unpleasant.

Aaron Elson: Not in the streets?

Eugene George: No, we were in an agricultural area. And there was a smell that was pretty bad.

Aaron Elson: Were you married at the time?

Eugene George: Yes I was married. I was married for about two years. I was married before I, just before I went in. When I got my wings I got married. She was about the equivalent of Hedy Lamarr in appearance, if you ever knew what she was like, she was a beautiful young woman. She was a graduate student in nutrition. To be an architect with a lot of time in front of me, our marriage just wasn't in place. I finished up at Texas and then later got my graduate degree at (unintelligible)

Aaron Elson: And then you got divorced?

Eugene George: No, I got divorced early on, while I was a student at Texas. And I didn't get married again for quite a while. My current wife is my third wife, and we've been married for 21 years.

The question of flying in the military and all of that never goes away. When we met these Germans, we were right at home. I mean, there's a lot of camaraderie and a fraternity, nationality is of no consequence.

Aaron Elson: Even though the two sides, you were trying to kill each other?

Eugene George: And I=ve read, of course I=ve read a lot about aviation and aviation history, I=ve read that during World War I the French pilots and the German pilots used to be at air shows together before they were enemies, and developed great friendship during this time.

Aaron Elson: It=s a very strong bond.

Eugene George: And I don=t think as a pilot you can describe flying, the feeling of flying, to a non-pilot, and I=ve flown B-25, C-47, AT-6s, I=ve flown several different aircraft. I like the B-25. I never wanted to fly four-engine bombers.

Aaron Elson: You never flew a B-29?

Eugene George: No.

Aaron Elson: Those were huge.

Eugene George: That was a huge airplane. It had a lot of creature comforts too, like pressurized cabins.

Aaron Elson: When you were flying the C-47 did you fly overseas?

Eugene George: No, no no. I just flew just putting in time in the Reserve.

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