

# Malcolm MacGregor

*Arlington, Va., Oct. 1, 2005*

*©2005 Aaron Elson*

**Aaron Elson:** Where did you grow up, Malcolm?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** I grew up in Delhi, New York. It's in the Catskill Mountains, about 70-some miles from Kingston and Albany and Binghamton, so it's right in the middle of nowhere, 36 miles away from Cooperstown.

**Aaron Elson:** Isn't it interesting how they call it Del-High but in India it's Deli.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yes it is. But it was always Del-High. They tell a story about how the town was named, and when the originators were getting together, there was an important fellow named Foote that was in the town, so they were debating over the name, and somebody, I guess it was Foote that was pushing for Delhi, and somebody said, "Del-hi, Hell-hi, why not call it Foote-hi?" So anyway, it ended up in Del-hi. And my ancestors had been there since 1802.

**Aaron Elson:** Really!

**Malcolm MacGregor:** The MacGregors, on my mother's side, they'd been around that area even longer. It's dairy country.

**Aaron Elson:** And where were they from, were they from Ireland?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No, the MacGregors were from Scotland. Whether they went through Ireland I wouldn't know. The MacGregors are a rather notorious Scotch clan. There are many people that changed their names because they didn't want to be known as a MacGregor, so I have lots of relatives I don't even know about and I don't recognize them by their name. And my mother's side, I guess they came over before the Revolution. Because she was in the, and so was my grandmother, they were in the Daughters of the American Revolution. So they were just early colonists that settled and wandered around in upstate New York. And they were farmers, of course everybody was in those days, that was the name of the game, everybody was a farmer, subsistence primarily and then they tried to figure out something they could sell for some salt money or something. And my group, the MacGregors, happened to get into dairy farming, they're still

doing it. My sister actually was the last one that ran the farm as a dairy farmer, it was up in the same hollow where my 1802 ancestor came over. And he was so mad at people in Scotland giving him a hard time about his name that when he had his first son he named him Gregor MacGregor. And he had another son, James, and James went to New York City. Gregor stayed up there, actually my grandson is the direct descendent and the only one, only male, from that whole thing. The MacGregors didn't get married very young, they were usually in their forties or fifties when they got married, so there's not very many of us around.

**Aaron Elson:** Now, when did you leave Delhi?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, that's when I left to go to college. I went to Troy, New York, to go to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1941.

**Aaron Elson:** And what were you studying? **Malcolm MacGregor:** I started out as an aeronautical engineer, and I was seriously, I think, I don't know if I ever really changed or not, but I wanted to get into industrial engineering instead of aeronautical, I decided would be a better match for me. But I was drafted out of RPI in January of 1943, so I'd been there about a year and a half, and I was drafted and they put me in the combat engineers. I tried to get in the Air Force in November of 1942 because I could see the handwriting on the wall that I was going to be drafted, and at that point in time the Air Force was too full, we had a pretty good idea about trench warfare and all the young guys were trying to figure out some way not to be in the trench warfare, they probably figured it was inevitable we'd be in the military, but we didn't want to be in that. And then I got in the combat engineers which was probably even worse than trench warfare.

**Aaron Elson:** Which engineer outfit was it?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** The 82nd Combat Engineers. It was a battalion, and I think they even split that up later on. It had three companies in it. I think one company went to Panama or something, one went somewhere else, and one of them actually went into France shortly after D-Day. I don't think they went in on the first wave. But they fought through France. I have some information about them, because I knew about them, so they sent me a book. They said I was still considered an alumni of the 82nd even though I was only there a couple months.

**Aaron Elson:** Well, you were one of them. There was a combat engineer outfit from upstate New York, the Buffalo, Skaneateles, Schenectady, that area, and

they went in on D-Day. Two companies went to Omaha Beach and one company went to Utah Beach, and they were basically written off. I mean plans were, they were supposed to be nonexistent after that, but many of them did survive. (The 299th Combat Engineer Battalion)

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, when you're in front of the front line it's a pretty hazardous occupation so I was glad I got out of it. But this outfit didn't have heavy casualties. They lost some, and a few were taken prisoner. Our group was put together, some of us from upstate New York, the Catskill Mountains, and about the other half of the battalion were from New York City. A lot of them had been construction workers and pipefitters and stuff like that, they worked with their hands and doing things, so that's how they decided they'd be combat engineers.

**Aaron Elson:** So how did you switch from the engineers to the Air Corps?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** When I got in, we went into Long Island, what's the name of the, where they brought us all in to? Anyway, it was the Long Island gathering center, and they tested us for a lot of various things, and asked us what we wanted to do and so forth. Part of the thing, I said that I would like to be in the Air Force at that time, because I still had a good idea that that was maybe at least a more comfortable if not safer place to be than in the ground forces. They kept a record of that apparently because they hunted me up in Texas. I went with a combat engineers outfit. We gathered together outside of Austin, Texas, Camp Swift I think it was called. So I was coming back from an early morning hike, and we were pretty tired, it was about four or five miles yet back to the base, and a jeep came down the road, and a guy called my name, and he said, "Come on, boy, you're goin' to the Air Corps." So I got in the jeep and off I went and by the time the rest of them got back to the base I had all my stuff packed, I was checked out waiting for my truck to go to San Antonio. So that's where I got in the ... actually the experience helped me in the service, because I always wondered until just recently why some of us graduated from bombardier school with a lieutenant's bars, and some graduated as, air, what was it, flight officers. And I found out that they took into account two things: if you'd had some college experience before, and if you'd been in the military, and I'd done both of those, so I ...

**Aaron Elson:** You became a flight officer?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No, I became a first lieutena...I mean second lieutenant.

**Aaron Elson:** Oh, that was higher than a flight officer?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yeah. A flight officer is one of these grades that's halfway between an enlisted man and an officer, it had a little bar with a little blue on it and some gold on it, that was a flight officer. Probably about 15 to 20 percent of the graduates were flight officers and the rest were lieutenants, so if they were young and inexperienced but had done okay and still got to be bombardiers they made them flight officers. So that's how I got in the Air Force.

**Aaron Elson:** When did you hook up with your crew?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** They put the crew together, I graduated on November 13, 1942...43...and sent us to Salt Lake City where they were gathering lots of people, and so they assigned me from there to go to Boise, Idaho, and I've forgotten whether our crew was actually assembled in Salt Lake City or whether we actually assembled ourselves in Boise, but Boise is where I first remember the crew and that's where we trained, at a replacement training unit.

**Aaron Elson:** Now who was in your crew?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, the captain was named Lawless, Captain Lawless. He had been a flight instructor and that's why he'd gotten to be a captain, and I guess he was going overseas. He was a very tall guy, very scrawny, so he wasn't really very strong but he was an excellent pilot, and they gave him a co-pilot named Byers, he had red hair so we all called him Pinky. Pinky Byers was an ex-football player who was very strong, so he'd get on the controls and follow the pilot, so what he was doing was providing the muscle. Now, as it came closer to the time for us to leave for combat, the captain seemed to get even slimmer, and his wife got pregnant, so they gave him a physical exam and they told him they weren't gonna certify him for combat, so they took him off the crew and we got a new pilot only a couple of weeks before we actually headed for overseas, and his name was Williams, Bud Williams, Arthur H., Arthur H. Williams. So it was Arthur H. Williams, Pinky Byers, myself and Bob Peterson, and Bob Peterson was the navigator. And then there were six enlisted men, and I honestly don't remember their names at this point in time. You didn't socialize that much with them. So they shipped us, after they thought we were sufficiently trained, off we went to Topeka.

**Aaron Elson:** During the training, you had been in the combat engineers, you knew a little bit what life was like for an infantry, or somebody on the ground, did anybody come through who had been in aerial combat and talk to the trainees, and tell them what it was like, or did you hear stories?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** There were more rumors, there was no official attempt to indoctrinate us ahead of time as to what it was like. I don't think I met anybody there that had been in combat. There were several that had been, well, there was one guy there who was a very good pilot, and he'd been a sergeant pilot, which was before they started making officers out of people just for being fliers, and he had lots of hours, and he was such a good pilot that they made him a command pilot, but still with his flight officer's on his shoulder, and, yeah, they did upgrade him to flight officer so technically he wasn't still an officer, and if I remember correctly, his co-pilot that they gave him for the crew was a major, and I think the navigator was a lieutenant colonel, and the bombardier was a captain or something. They were all big brass except for him. I suppose if they went to the officers' club, he couldn't get into the senior officers' club part, and the lieutenant colonel and the major could. But that was funny, he was a very fine pilot, no question about that, so I'm sure he rose rapidly through the ranks. I never heard what happened to him, that's the group they had up in Boise. No, we didn't get any particular briefing, I mean just what everybody, civilians found out, you know, we all knew kind of what was going on in the war. We didn't have any specifics about what was going on in the Air Force. But we knew that it would be different than being on the ground. And it was, I mean, in between combat missions we were in a reasonably sensible situation, we had decent beds, they weren't perfect but they were very comfortable. And we had good toilet facilities and good food, and stuff like that. So it was, you know, it was the right place to be as far as being comfortable. It turns out, and I didn't know it at the time and I don't think they knew it, it turns out that we actually, the fliers, a higher percentage of fliers were killed than were Marines, so we weren't really in a safe organization.

**Aaron Elson:** Okay. From Boise where did you go?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Topeka, Kansas. We went in by train to Topeka, picked up a new B-24 and flew it from there to Grenier Field I think it was in New Hampshire, and from Grenier Field in New Hampshire we flew to Goose Bay, Labrador, and then we flew to Iceland, Reykjavik, and from there we flew it to Prestwick, Scotland, which is the very northern chunk of it. And there they took the plane.

Coincidentally, it happened to end up in the 445th , but that was just coincidence, that's all. It wasn't working quite right. There was one engine that wouldn't pull any power over, cruising power, so we were always short of power when we took off, which made us a little nervous because they'd loaded the plane up with everything. But, uh, that's where it was, we called it, I don't know who put the name on it but it was called the Heavenly Body, and there were several Heavenly Bodies, there was a movie I guess named that or something.

**Aaron Elson:** And what was the nose art like?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** It was a good looking black haired girl, what the heck was...

**Aaron Elson:** Jane Russell?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No, it was, uh, oh dear, it escapes me now. She played in this movie "The Heavenly Body." I can't remember now. Sometimes I remember and sometimes I don't. [editor's note: Hedy Lamarr].

**Aaron Elson:** That's quite all right. Was that the plane that flew on the Kassel Mission, or no?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** It took off for the Kassel Mission, but it aborted. The plane I was, I flew with six different crews in combat, and the one that I ended up flying with, I flew 12 missions with Carl Sollien's crew, and we flew, now let's see, we flew, what the heck was the Texas name. It's amazing how I can't remember that one.

**Aaron Elson:** The Sweetest Rose of Texas?



**Malcolm MacGregor:** No, that wasn't it. There was one named that, but that wasn't the one we were flying. If I had my records, I could look it up.

**Aaron Elson:** That's quite all right. I could look it up just as well. Don't worry about that. Go back now to before, a little further back, was there any discussion among the crew, or among your fellow officers, as to whether you would go to the Pacific or to Europe, or did anyone have a preference?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** I don't remember much talk about it, though, and I would guess, you know, we probably would have preferred to go where we went, which was to Europe, because of the conditions. We knew that the guys that went to the Pacific a lot of times were living in tents and all kinds of bad bugs and various things, and we thought probably England was a more civilized place.

**Aaron Elson:** Even with the warm beer?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** (laughs) Yeah. Even with warm beer. Of course they didn't have any cold beer in the Pacific either unless, you could, they used to cool it of course by putting it in an airplane and fly it up to 20,000 feet or whatever, the beer came down and it was really cold. That's the way they cooled the beer. Their main problem was to keep it from freezing.

**Aaron Elson:** Okay, so, what was your first mission?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** D-Day.

**Aaron Elson:** D-Day!

**Malcolm MacGregor:** D-Day.

**Aaron Elson:** So, what was that like? Were there a lot of planes?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Oh yeah.

**Aaron Elson:** Did you see the ships?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** I didn't really see a lot of ships, no, we came across the beach, let's see, what, the first waves hit the beach, what, 6 o'clock?

**Aaron Elson:** Yes [actually I think it was 7].

**Malcolm MacGregor:** We came across about a quarter of 6 or something. They hadn't started the landings yet when we came across the beach, and so I don't remember, I was in the nose turret, and I could see the shoreline as we came out, I think we went in over Omaha, and we could see the shoreline and everything, and I could see some explosions, I figured this out later, from looking down and you see these circles that were all dark, they were brown, a different color than the rest of the ocean, I don't know what they were but since then I've decided that that was the result of explosions, now whether it was shells going in or more probably even it was underwater explosive stuff that the Germans had put there and the seabees and the combat engineers were blowing up the stuff, that's probably what was going on, but I saw no activity on the beach. There was nobody shooting at anybody, and the cloud cover was about probably not more than a hundred yards from the water's edge. Then I couldn't see anything, so I didn't see the land, we were just in the clouds. We didn't drop our bombs because we never had a good enough view to drop them with safety that they weren't gonna hit some of our own troops or hit the wrong people, the French people, and so we actually brought them home. We didn't drop our bombs.

**Aaron Elson:** And you couldn't drop them in the channel because ...

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No, you couldn't drop them in the Channel because it was full of ships. You had to bring them home, so I had to go back and put the cotter keys back in the bombs.

**Aaron Elson:** Was that a difficult maneuver, walking around in the bomb bay?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** It was very crowded. And of course the catwalk in the bomb bay was only about that wide ... You'd go in and it was actually felt safer when the bombs were in there when they weren't.

**Aaron Elson:** And "that wide" is what, about six inches, eight inches?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yeah, about like that.

**Aaron Elson:** About a foot.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Eight or ten, probably ten inches or something.

**Aaron Elson:** What would happen if you were walking on the catwalk and you slipped?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, the bomb bay doors were closed and hopefully you didn't hit them hard enough to force them open. And ours went up the outside, so the odds of going through a bomb bay, just a person, were not very great. You know, now on a 17 I don't know because their doors went like this, so it's possible I suppose if you hit them hard enough you'd go out, but a 24 I never knew of anybody who ... but when you were working in there and the doors were open it was kind of scary. I was there once, we had a bomb hang up, and by hanging up, the bombs had two different catches that held them in the bomb bay, so when you dropped the bombs, both of them were supposed to go and sometimes one of them wouldn't go, so the bomb would go down, be hanging there, and usually when it went down, the wire, there was a wire in the front of a bomb and a hole in the front of the bomb, you put cotter keys in the hole and that kept it from getting armed. When you dropped the bomb, the wire pulled out and stayed in the plane and that armed the front of the bomb so then when it hit something it would go off. And if it's hanging up there, you were in serious concern that the wire was gonna come out and then you'd have a live bomb sitting there in the bomb bays, so the one that I had was a fairly big one, I think it was a, I know it was more than a 100-pound, it was at least a 250-pound bomb, maybe 500, and I went down and I kicked on it, and it finally came out and went out and that was over France somewhere, so I hoped it didn't hit any Frenchmen but I wanted to get it out of the bomb bay. But that only happened to me once.

**Aaron Elson:** You had to kick it while standing on the catwalk?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** M-hm.

**Aaron Elson:** With one foot standing on the catwalk and the other kicking the bomb?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yeah. But you had a, you did have a rack, a bomb rack, you had something to hang onto. So you hang onto the bomb rack and then you kick the bomb and it gets it out. And they did tell us that, that that's what we were supposed to do if we ever had one that hung up, but I only had that one.

**Aaron Elson:** Now tell me about that seventh mission of yours.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Okay. The seventh mission. Now I'd just gotten my first Air Medal, and I had been very, uh, kind of apprehensive as to combat because I wasn't, I still didn't have enough experience to know what was really going on, and most of it had been over D-Day and right after D-Day so they were fairly short missions. And the seventh mission was a long mission, it went all the way in to Steteen, or Stetin, however you want to pronounce it, but it, Politz, it was a town outside of Stetin...

**Aaron Elson:** Wasn't that near Stalag Luft 1?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** It was about 90 miles, yeah, from Stalag Luft 1, to the east of it. And it had, let's see, we were going after, it had a synthetic oil refinery, and that day the 8th Air Force was going after all the synthetic oil refiners they could find, and so it was a long haul. We got there by flying over the Baltic Sea. So we flew down along the Baltic, and then when you got there, why, you had to turn. But on the way down the Baltic to the target was the first casualty situation I saw in the Air Force, and what I saw was the tail of a B-24 that was spinning down kind of slowly, and you know, as I thought about it, I was in the nose turret at the time, as I thought about it later, I realized what happened was two planes had hit together, and it broke the tail off of one of the B-24s and that was spinning kind of nice and slow down, and all of a sudden here this guy out of the tail of the airplane and he was running right out into the air like a, like one of these cartoon character things, and then I, I'm pretty sure he must have pulled his ripcord, I don't remember seeing the parachute, but he was going to go down right in the middle of the Baltic Sea, and it was pretty cold even in the summertime, of course

it was fairly early in the summer. But the Germans had a lot of speedboats down there, like, kind of like our U-boats, not our U-boats, our, whatever it was John Kennedy drove.

**Aaron Elson:** E-boats.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** E-boats, okay. Well, anyway, they would go out and pick up the guys, and if they got them within a half hour they were usually all right, so hopefully that's what happened to the guy, otherwise he just got hypothermia. So anyway, that got my attention, and I was not in quite as alert a condition as I usually was because I'd stayed too long at the officers' club the night before, but that woke me up. I was very alert at that point. Then I started looking ahead as we got close to the target, and I could see these things kind of fluttering down, and I wondered, What the heck are they? Then I'd see them hit the ground and blow up. So I figured, "Those are airplanes going down," spinning down and then they'd hit the ground and explode. And so I saw several of those things happen as we got in, and then we got to the IP, the initial point for the bomb run, and just before the IP there was a, another B-24 that had different kind of markings on than we had, it actually had the old markings on it, and it didn't occur to me and I guess to anybody else that it really was probably a B-24 that had crashed and the Germans had fixed it up and got it going, so they were up flying it and then of course they were flying right with us, so they could communicate the altitude and the speed and everything else, so just before we got to where the flak would start coming up, he all of a sudden peeled off and I thought, "Well, he's going to Sweden," but it later occurred to me that it was probably a German plane that was checking us out and giving the accurate, because the flak was just amazing and there was one that exploded, I was just sitting in the nose turret, and I was nervous enough so that I figured the fighters weren't gonna come after us while we're in heavy flak, so I opened the doors of the nose turret, I don't know if I asked the navigator to help me or not, I don't remember that, so I opened the doors and sat back about halfway out so that if I wanted to get out I could get out, because that was your fear in the nose turret, if it went around and you were shooting and stuff and you were cocked at an angle and something shot out your control system for your, you'd be stuck and you wouldn't be able to get out because you couldn't get any way out of the nose turret. And of course I think the tail turret and the belly turret probably had the same problem, but that was my fear always, I was always more afraid that I wasn't gonna be able to get out of the airplane than I was that I was gonna get hit with flak, so I never wore a flak suit. I had my flak helmet on. But

anyway, the one flak burst exploded very close between me and the Number 1 engine and the shrapnel came through the plane, and there was some that went right through the doors and missed the back of my head by about two inches. So we dropped our bombs, completed the mission, and went on home. As we went home, you could look down across Germany and it was just black with these towers of smoke that were coming up from the oil refineries, probably smoke was coming up close to where we were flying at 20-some thousand feet, but of course we weren't flying through any of them. And I got home and I looked at the doors to see, and I realized how close I'd come to getting hit, and then something happened and I don't know whether I decided that hey, whatever's gonna happen's gonna happen, so why worry about it, but I was less apprehensive after that with all the rest of my missions. Even the one where we had the 88 that went through the center of the airplane, went right through the center of the catwalk and out through the bulkhead, the rear bulkhead, and out the side. And it left a hole about that long and about that high, it was an 88.

**Aaron Elson:** ...long and about six inches high?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, yeah, whatever 88 millimeters is. Obviously they'd gotten a direct hit on us. It was a, I think we were over a railway gun, because we had flak for the longest time. But anyway, that was, those were two of the close calls.

**Aaron Elson:** Do you know which mission that was?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** I think I was flying – I flew with six different crews – and that mission I'm pretty sure I was flying with Bernstein. Bernstein was an excellent pilot, and his crew was always right on their toes because he was always making sure that they were watching and looking and aware of what was going on, much more so than any of the other pilots I flew with. A lot of them were, you know, concerned with flying the airplane, that's what they were worried about but Bernstein was concerned that we'd get sneaked up on by something that we didn't realize was coming, so he was an interesting guy. I liked him. But anyway, we were going down, and we started to get flak, and oftentimes I'd watch it and I knew if I counted about 17 seconds is how long it took for an 88 millimeter to get up to 22,000 feet, so I'd kind of count that and I was kind of counting away, and I told him, I was counting on the intercom I think that day, and one of the guys said, "For Christ sakes, will you stop counting and telling us when the flak's gonna

go off?" I thought it was useful for the guys to know when it was gonna happen. So I quit doing that, and then shortly after that I think is when a guy called up and said, "MacGregor, you ought to see the size of this damn flak hole back here." That was the one, I told him, "For Christ sakes, you get a flak hole the size of a 50-cent piece and go all to pieces." But on the ground after we got back, I went out and looked at it and saw this thing that long coming out the side, I knew something happened. But that gunner hit us smack in the center, it was in the center of the catwalk, in the center of the airplane, so he'd hit us as dead center as you could possibly hit anybody with an 88-millimeter.

**Aaron Elson:** Going back to the seventh mission, you were in the nose turret, weren't you the bombardier, didn't you have to drop the bombs?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No, you had, by that point in time, I was the bombardier, but they called us, let's see, bombardier/navigators or something, they gave us a map and we were trained in observation, bombardiers were of course because you had to be able to pick up things on the ground so you could make sure you had the target, so we all were taught map reading and then how to convert the landscaping of the map to make sure you knew where you were, so they would put the bombardiers in the nose turret, and each squadron had a lead bomber, they had a bombardier and a nose turret guy, and they also had a deputy lead, and so you had a nose turret and a bombardier in that one, so I flew 17 missions as a nose turret navigator and then I flew 17 missions as a deputy lead bombardier. So as a deputy lead bombardier I did everything the bombardier would do, I'd get up and set up my bomb sight and pick up the target and follow it, and that was interesting because you had a little magnification in your optics, and you know, the flak is exploding, and it was magnifying it, so you're looking out this, so after I got used to that it didn't, but the first time I ever, I got on the bomb sight and saw that it was kind of impressive. But then I'd watch, and I'd watch the bombs drop and everything and then I could report in briefing my view of how accurate we were, where they fell and all that stuff. So actually, and I don't know if I mentioned this to you last night, I actually was an observer in the whole war. When I flew in the nose turret I was just looking at everything. I never shot my guns in anger. I had to clear them a couple of times, and I think once when we were going over in Germany going back home alone because one of our engines had blown one of the cylinders, so we had to feather it, so we pulled out, we couldn't keep up in formation so we pulled out and went home alone, and on the way home I did, just for the hell of it I shot my guns a couple of times just at the

ground, I'm sure I didn't hit anything, but the pilot wasn't very happy if I was gonna keep on doing that. So no, if you had a maximum B-24 group you'd have 48 planes in the air. You'd have four squadrons with 12 planes each, which gave you 48 planes, so you had, well, two for each, well, you'd have eight bombardiers that were actually involved with the bomb sight, and the only time the lead plane got shot down that I was flying with was on the Kassel Mission, and I wasn't setting up that day anyway because they were bombing by radar. And obviously somebody didn't read the radar right. But I think that in all combat situations there's a lot of mistakes made. You don't hear about it back in the papers because they don't want to admit that we're anything but perfect and strong and all that stuff. But those things happen.

**Aaron Elson:** Thirty-four missions between June 6, July, August, September, most of September...had you had any contact, you said you didn't fire a gun in anger ... all these missions you were never attacked by fighters before Kassel?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No. First time.

**Aaron Elson:** And to what do you attribute that?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, it was kind of like a school of fish. I mean, there's the 8th Air Force, which could put up, well, maximum effort they put up somewhere around 1,300 to 1,500 bombers, and then they'd put up maybe close to 1,000 fighters. And so here you had a sky full and it was kind of the luck of the draw I think, and all you had to do was make a little mistake, which is what our group made, and they picked us out and said, "Hey, they're straggling, they're out from under their fighter cover," so most of the summer of 1944 we considered that we had air supremacy over Germany. I think, I just found this out, you know, a long time after we got back, that in August about, the Germans started to put together these Stormgruppen, and they started to modify the FW-190s by putting these cannons on them which were very effective against the bombers, and so that all contributed, and they were trying to make a comeback. The Germans were very innovative and very good at what they did. And they decided they could, and so, we weren't the only group, I don't think the other one they hit had quite as heavy, I'm sure they didn't have as heavy casualties, but they could get a significant number of planes with these Stormgruppen. And if I remember what I'm talking about now, they had, like in our situation, oh, probably about 100 FW-190s and probably 50 ME-109s, and the ME-109s were to try to give some cover

to the FW, because the FW-190s had been so heavily armored, and had these big cannons in them, that it slowed them down significantly, they wouldn't have very much luck tangling one-on-one with our P-51s or 38s or 47s. So that's what I think happened. And it was all undercast and somebody didn't read the radar right. But why we let the whole rest of the 8th Air Force go one way, we went another one, it seems to me now that what happened was McKoy made the decision that we're gonna go to the secondary target. That's what they tried to do.

**Aaron Elson:** What do you think contributed to him making that decision?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Oh, it was probably, he had two choices at that point. They'd strayed outside the bomber stream, and I guess you couldn't just go back and tuck a whole group back into the bomber stream once you got out of it without causing a lot of trouble and getting a lot of people upset, so his choices I think were to either turn, make a nice big loop with the group and come back in and tag in to the back end, to the tail of the bomber group, our division which, as I understand, we had about 300 planes that were, so he could have gone that way, but that would have taken a lot of extra time, and I guess his other option was to decide well, I'll go hit the alternative target. So he decided to do the alternate target. Probably, you asked me what I think, I think probably he wasn't terribly concerned about fighters because we'd flown all summer, we'd never been hit by fighters. I don't even think the group had been hit by fighters in all that time, I don't remember ever hearing about it. Yeah, there were quite a lot of casualties, they were hit with planes crashing together at various times, and shrapnel, you know, if you blow the wing off a plane, you can't control it, and you're in formation, the plane rolls over like that, it's gonna hit another plane and those things happened, but I don't think we'd ever been hit by fighters from D-Day until September 27th. Part of it, again, is just the concept there were so many of us that they couldn't hit all the groups and we just didn't happen to get in the right place at the right time, and then we did. So, I can't really criticize the guy but I do think he was, I don't think he, I think he was as surprised as anybody else when we were hit by fighters.



Photo Credit: Tom Shafer

**Aaron Elson:** What do you think contributed to the initial mistake of the plane flying off course?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Oh, I think it was the radar, and, uh, radar in those days of course was still fairly primitive, and radar operators even today, you know, you look at the screen to me, it's kind of like looking at your lungs when they take an X-ray of it, I can't tell anything but the doctors know things, and I think in those days the trained radar operators knew what they were looking and where they were, but I think they just misread it, I think there were a couple of them that misread it. Now whether, I think there were a lot of pilots that thought the decision was wrong to decide to not stay with the bomber stream, or stay closer, because we actually pulled out, we were about 14 miles out from under our fighter cover, so, I guess the fighters got there but by the time they got there we were essentially all shot down.

**Aaron Elson:** What, you initially were supposed to fly 25 missions and then you'd go home. When did you learn that it had been raised from 25 to 30?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** That was fairly early in my career. It was shortly after D-Day. I don't know exactly when but it was somewhere, let's see, June 6 was D-Day, I would say it was the end of June, and I had very few missions at that point.

**Aaron Elson:** So you didn't learn on your 24th mission...

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No.

**Aaron Elson:** And how about from 30 to 35?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, let's see. I probably had, I think I had over 25 at that time. I think I was pushing 30 when they boosted it up another five.

**Aaron Elson:** In those first thirty-some odd missions, a lot of men who flew that many missions were beginning to crack up mentally. Did you experience any anxieties, or shaking, or any symptoms that might have caused you to question yourself?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Nope. Not until, from that seventh mission, after that I was able to steady right down, and I didn't seem to worry about anything and was not concerned, and I'd come home, I'd be tired and stuff. Until I got to my 30th mission, and then I could see, at that point it seemed like they probably wouldn't raise it again, so I could see the possibility of my finishing my missions, particularly as I had 31, 32, 33 ... so I became more apprehensive, but I was not afraid, I didn't have the shakes, I didn't come unglued, and I've often thought about that. It's probably egotistical, but Scotchmen, you know, Scotch ancestry, and them fighting as mercenaries and all kinds of other things for hundreds of years and so I thought maybe there was a little bit of that that's in my Scotch blood. I don't know. I don't know why it became, but I, people talk about fear, and they talk about, you know, when you get real afraid you lose control of your bowels and this, that and the other thing. I never knew anybody that did that. That's something that Hollywood dreamed up, I think.

**Aaron Elson:** No, no. It happened a lot in the infantry. I've encountered several people who have admitted to that having happened. But it was more, I think more a ground phenomenon.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No, I never knew, I didn't know anybody that had that kind of trouble. You had your procedure, you went out and had your breakfast and all that stuff, and then you had your briefing, and it was a couple of hours from the time you'd gotten up.

**Aaron Elson:** Speaking of that, I mean, you know, a commercial plane now has little toilets in the back, when you're in the air for six, seven hours, even though fear might not make you have a bowel movement or pee in your pants, how did you relieve yourself?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, before your mission it was a couple hours from the time you'd had any coffee or anything to drink, so, the last thing you did before

you went on a mission is you went to the bathroom, relieved yourself, got rid of everything, and we were pretty careful not to drink any stuff in that period of time because we didn't want to get uncomfortable, for one thing if you've got a station, a battle station, uhh, you don't want to be leaving it to go find some way to relieve yourself. That would not please the pilot at all. So we pretty much, you know, we sweated it out, and sometimes it was eight and a half hours on a real long mission, and I think the 17s were even longer because they didn't go quite as fast. But I never heard of anybody having those kind of problems.

**Aaron Elson:** Tell me about Sollien's crew.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Okay. I went with Sollien's crew, I had about...

**Aaron Elson:** Was he your pilot on the Kassel Mission?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yes. I was with Sollien's crew for at least 12 missions, and it was my 34th, so I went with him, Carl had probably 15 at that time. It was his 26th mission when he went down, and my 34th, so I had eight missions ahead of him. I had been, as I said I flew with six different crews. I flew with, one of, there's one crew I don't remember at all, which amazes me, I remember Bernstein, I remember Bernstein's crew, and I remember one crew that I flew with only a couple of missions. The pilot was 19 years old and he was a fine pilot, but, uh, he was a lead pilot already so you know he had a lot of ability, but we came back once and I was flying with him, and he missed seeing where the, where our landing base was, Tibenham, he missed the airport coming back, we flew right over it. I thought he knew exactly where we were, so he peeled off like he didn't realize he'd gone over the airport. So I remember that guy. But there was some guy named Witte, W-I-T-T-E I think it was, I apparently flew six or seven missions with him, I don't remember any of them. And I think I might have been a lead crew on many of those missions, too, I might have been flying as a bombardier, but I'm not sure. I flew most of my missions as a bombardier with Carl, because he was a lead crew, and so I'd gotten on the lead crew.

**Aaron Elson:** What was he like in the officers' club? I know nothing about him.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Carl loved to play the piano. Before the war he had been a sign painter. And he had a wife, and several kids, and I think his wife and the next door neighbor got a romantic entanglement and from that it caused Carl's marriage to break up, so he was divorced, and the funny part, after the war he

went back and remarried his wife. But he was a nice guy, I really enjoyed him, we had a, I think, kind of a bonding, it happened quickly, it always happens quickly, you go into a barracks and heck, within a day or two you're bonding with two or three of the guys that you like and you go out and you're with them. I enjoyed Carl, I liked him, and we actually went on leave together once in London. That was fun. But typically I wasn't with him. But he was a good piano player. That's why Jimmy Stewart came over and hung out with us sometimes in the officers club.

**Aaron Elson:** Go on, really ?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yeah. He was from the 445th, and I think he was the squadron commander originally of the 700th or the 701st. We were the 702nd. But anyway, nobody thought about squadrons. I probably didn't know much about it, in the back of my mind I guess I knew I was in the 702nd, but it didn't mean much as far as I was concerned. But Carl loved to play the piano, and he was a good pilot. He had a little bit of that artistic temperament. He could fly a B-24 and instead of being a throttle jockey which most of them were, they were pushing the throttles forward and back to stay in formation, Carl would anticipate and he'd change the speed of the airplane by changing the superchargers, so he'd turn them up or turn them down a little bit, so he used a lot less gas. So we came home from missions, we'd have, you know, a reasonable amount of gas in the gas tank when some of the other planes were actually cutting out on the runways because they were running out of gas. So he was an intriguing pilot. And the co-pilot was very quiet. He was killed on the mission. So I never really got to know him.

**Aaron Elson:** Do you remember his name?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** I usually do. William Koenig, K-O-E-N-I-G I think it is. William Koenig. But he was very quiet. I don't even remember ever having a conversation with him. I'm sure I did, but I don't know what he was like. In my case, I never got to really know very many people well at all, because they moved me around. A lot of crews, you'll find, are very close, pilot, co-pilot, the whole thing. The pilot kind of feels like he's the poppa daddy of the whole group. And I was always the orphan child. I'd come from somewhere else, I hadn't trained with them, I didn't know any of the gunners or any of the other guys, and so I'd show up.

**Aaron Elson:** Wasn't Graham, Charles Graham, on that crew?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Chuck. Yeah.

**Aaron Elson:** He remembered the enlisted men very well. He said there was an Ammi Miller...

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Ammi Miller. Ammi got to be a minister. Have you interviewed Chuck?

**Aaron Elson:** I interviewed Chuck. And he e-mails me regularly.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Always sending me e-mails. Yeah, Chuck I didn't know at all, and I don't remember ever talking to him, but we got together after, I forgot when I got together with him, but anyway, he visited me in Utah and I visited him down in Florida when I took a trip to Florida with my wife, so I know him now, not well, but I've been with him a couple times. He's an interesting guy. He's older.

**Aaron Elson:** What a voice he's got, he was a radio disc jockey.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** I didn't know that.

**Aaron Elson:** But what a speaking voice.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** But in general, and I only found this out recently, in general there were a lot more people that get out of a bomber towards the center of the bomber than the ones that are either in the tail or in the nose. I think the gunners took the worst beating.

**Aaron Elson:** A couple of them were killed on the mission?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Oh, ours, yeah, three of them.

**Aaron Elson:** Now would you like a drink of water, we've been going for a while?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yeah.

**Aaron Elson:** I wanted to take a little break, because now ... Now let's get into the Kassel Mission itself. What had you done the day before the mission, had you flown another mission?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** I don't think so. I'd have to look in my records. I don't remember. No, I don't think I'd flown another mission. To me, it was just another mission. Of course, they got you up an hour earlier when you were a lead crew, so they got us up around midnight or something like that, one o'clock. Something like that. They'd get you up, and then you'd go and eat, then you'd have to go to a lead crew briefing. And then you'd go to the general briefing. So we had to have that extra period in there for lead crews to get, so we all got up about an hour earlier than all the others.

**Aaron Elson:** Were you the lead, or the deputy lead?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Deputy. I was always deputy lead on all of the missions that I was a lead bombardier. Seventeen.

**Aaron Elson:** Okay now, you went to the briefing. Was there anything unusual?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No. Nothing unusual. I'd never heard of Kassel. I didn't have any negative [feeling] like when I went in and they said we're going to Berlin, of course that got my attention, because that was a famous one. I went to Saarbrücken a lot, but that's because it was on the border and it had a marshaling yard, it was always a secondary target if you couldn't get your main one. I remember going to Saarbrücken and Hamm, but I'd never heard of Kassel. I didn't know anything about it. I wasn't afraid of it. I'd had no reason to think it would be any worse than any of the others we had. And the bombardier was fairly new. I don't know if this was his first or second, I'm talking about the nose turret navigator/bombardier, Jack Dent. I remember him saying, "You guys don't have anything to worry about. This is my fifth mission. I've never had any trouble." (Laughs). That's kind of interesting, but I didn't say anything. I just listened, and he went off to his nose turret, and ... this thing, I don't know, maybe you want to hear about this later, but anyway, when we got shot down, Wes Huddleston was the navigator for Carl, and Wes unplugged all his stuff and tried to get the nose wheel door to open because that's how they were supposed to bail out of the front of the plane, and he told me, he said, "I remember I got Jack out of the nose turret." He said, "I remember Jack as being out of the nose turret and waiting for me to get the door open, and the door was locked." I don't know, it was probably frozen or something, but anyway, it didn't come easily, so Wes was jumping up and down on it, he wasn't a big guy, he was probably 150 pounds at most, and he was jumping up and down and finally it broke loose but it didn't break loose till

about 5,000 feet, he said, before he got out of the plane. So he was in the plane when it was going down from about 23,000 down to about 5,000 before he got out. And Jack never got out of the plane, he was still in the nose. You know, you can speculate, but it could be, there he was, he didn't have anything to do, nothing to occupy his mind, just watch this guy trying get the, and the thoughts going through his mind. I think both of us kind of thought that he froze and just couldn't get himself going to get out of the plane. He'd have had enough time ... but who knows, and he could have been hit, he could have been shot, we didn't know the ... But anyway, he never got his sixth mission.



**Aaron Elson:** Did you know that the group was off course?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No. I was, as we approached the IP, Carl, I'm sure he talked to me through the headset, and he said, "Mac," he says, "There's just no sense in your going to set it up up front because it's totally undercast." At that time from where we were it was ten tenths. I mean, I've heard Ira say that it broke up a little, but I never saw that and neither did Carl, and Carl said, "Don't even bother

to set up your bomb sight, because we don't have any radar and you're never going to be able to see anything to do anything with your bomb sight." And that plane that we were on had a little, about the size of this couch, right behind the pilot.

**Aaron Elson:** A couch?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yeah. That's where I was. It was about that thick. It didn't have any arms or stuff.

**Aaron Elson:** About two inches thick?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yeah, about two inches. It was nice and comfortable. And I was up there behind the pilot. I had left my parachute, my chest pack, down in the front of the bomb bay. There was a tunnel that went on our plane, and I think it did on all the J's and H's, a tunnel that went up beside the nose wheel so you could get up comfortably and get into the front of the plane. So I'd left my parachute right there because my expectation was that when it came time to go set up, I'd go through there and I'd pick up my parachute as I went and I'd have it up front in case something happened. So I was up on the flight deck without my parachute. And then things started to happen. The first thing, I was kind of lying down [on the couch], so we dropped our bombs. I didn't realize we were off course at all. But the bombs were dropped and everything, so there was nothing for me to worry about. And all of a sudden the top turret gunner started firing. That was Ammi, Ammi Miller. He started firing his gun. He shouldn't have been up there. He was a gunner, and he was supposed to be a waist gunner, but the engineer, who was supposed to be up there because that makes him closer to the controls, he got claustrophobic being in the top turret, so that cost him his life, because he was also a gunner but he was in the back of the plane, and so, all those guys were blown to pieces back there, all three of them.

**Aaron Elson:** What was his name?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** His name was Stevens.

**Aaron Elson:** Okay, so, Ammi Miller started firing from the top ...

**Malcolm MacGregor:** From the top turret.

**Aaron Elson:** And is that the first thing you heard?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** First thing I heard, first thing I realized was ... well, the first thing that went through my mind, I said, "What the hell's wrong with Ammi? Why is he clearing his guns up there," we were at 23,000 feet, and I said he's up there clearing his guns, and then I realized that well, whoops, maybe he's got a reason. So I looked out, there's a little window that goes right above the top of this couch, so I looked out the window, and here was an FW-190, beautiful plane, all painted red, as far as I could tell, all the bottom of it anyway was red, it was just split-assing over the left wing. He'd got through shooting and gone over the left wing. And I swear, at that time, after I got home I swear I thought I saw bullets bouncing off the bottom of it. I think they heavily armored those planes so that they could stand a lot, so it wouldn't get shot down. But he didn't have any trouble, he just kept on going. And so then I said, oops, I'm up here and my parachute's down there, I'd better go get my parachute. So I jumped up and unplugged myself from my oxygen, headset and all that stuff, and jumped down in front of the bomb bays and got my parachute, and I'm a little confused as to what actually happened at that point, but at about this time I started seeing exploding shells coming up through bomb bays, and the last one went off three or four feet from the right side of me. And I picked up about a little more than a dozen pieces of shrapnel in each, in my legs. The worst one is about halfway through my calf right here, about halfway through, and that one has bothered me ever since, but the rest of them, you know, they're somewhere but they're not bothering me, the Germans told me if they took them out they'd do more damage than leaving them in, that they'd be all right in there. And in general they were right. The only one's bothered me is this one. And that went halfway through, maybe it would have loused my leg up so bad that I'd never have been able to use it, or be very good with it.

But anyway, so then I put my parachute on, now whether it was before the shells went off or was it during, I have a feeling I was putting it on as the shells came up. And then I looked at Carl, and he was kind of standing up looking over the back of his seat, and his eyes, he had big eyes anyway, and his eyes were about twice as big as usual, and he was pointing like that, of course I had no intercom, I knew what it meant. So I turned around and went and opened the bomb bays, and the right bomb bay, which is where the shells were coming through, apparently had crimped it because it didn't go up at all. The left bomb bay came up about halfway, and I don't know whether the back bomb bay came up at all, but the left

front bomb bay came up about halfway, and as soon as it came up about halfway, I dove for it, and as I ... I ... Carl, I don't know, remember, I don't think he remembers much of what happened to the plane because it was, because all the controls were shot out, and that's why he had to get us out of there, because he knew he couldn't control the plane, and it spun under me and I landed on the half of the, on the, upper half of the left bomb bay and there was gas and fuel and all that stuff running out, so I got soaked, but I was on [something] nice and flat, I just rolled out. And so I rolled out of the bomb bay and the one thing I remembered that they told me is, Don't, well, they did say, give you this count to ten stuff but that isn't really what you ought to do, I did what you should do which is make damn sure you're out from under the airplane, and that's what I did. I waited until the airplane cleared away from me, and I opened my parachute, and I do not remember the jerk or anything, but of course I was running on adrenaline and I hadn't had oxygen for quite a while, I'd been off the oxygen, so whether or not I have a big memory of anything then, but I can distinctly remember the plane going away from over the top of me and I pulled my chute, and I don't remember any sudden stop or anything but both my boots went off and the shoes that I'd tied onto my parachute, they broke loose and went off, so it must have been a pretty good [jolt], but I didn't hurt or anything and then all of a sudden the air battle was gone. Unlike, I guess it was Collar who said he went down a lot of, there was nobody else in the air. There wasn't another parachute. The planes were all gone. And there I was, all alone, in the middle of Germany. At that point in time, probably about 18, 20,000 feet above the ground and going down at a very slow rate. It seemed to me. Of course I actually went down pretty, I think it probably took me 15 or 20 minutes in the air to get down.

**Aaron Elson:** It probably did. I talked to a fellow who bailed out over Berlin, and he was in the air for half an hour. As you went down, can you recall what you thought about?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Oh, it was, yeah. I was terribly lonely. I thought, what went through my mind is, here I am, all my buddies and all the rest of the military they're gone, and I'm all alone and I'm in the middle of Germany, and I can't speak German, and they're probably kind of mad at me anyway. So I remember I wasn't, I wouldn't call it fear, but it was extreme loneliness. I remember that. And I was about, oh, probably a little more than halfway down when two fighter planes came towards me, and what crossed my mind then was, oh, Jeez, that's the Germans and they're gonna shoot me in the chute. Fortunately they were P-

51s, of course they couldn't do anything for me, so they just went around me and went on, they were looking for German fighters. And then, the next thing I remember is here was the cloud layer, and so I went into the cloud layer and I had no idea how thick it was or where you come out. If I had it to do over again I still wouldn't have wanted to delay until I got through the cloud cover because the cloud cover was not that high above the ground. I don't think my chute would have opened in time. So anyway, I came out the other side and I looked over along the edge of this plowed field, which was quite a big one, and here was a little car coming down the road, and I looked up at my chute for some reason, and while I looked up at the chute I hit the ground. I was going down much faster than I thought I was, and I understand that you hit the ground with those, they're called survival chutes, and you hit the ground about like you jumped off a 20-foot ... so that's a couple of stories, and if you jump a couple of stories you can hurt yourself. And I sprained my ankle very badly, I didn't know whether it was broken or what. So I was still lying there on the field and the Germans, two guys got out, Wehrmacht, and one of them had a little pistol, he waved it at me. I waved back at him to show that I wasn't about to start a war in the middle of Germany. And they came over and helped me out of my parachute, and helped me walk over to the car, and they put me in the back seat. It was a two-door car. And they got in the front seat and drove me down the road a ways until they came to a field that had a bunch of prisoners in it. Then they took me out and put me in with the rest of the prisoners. So that's got me into Germany.

**Aaron Elson:** What made you think as you were coming down that your crew would be mad at you?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Only because, I didn't think they'd be mad at me, but I think, I thought I was the only one. I thought that I might have been the only one that got out of the plane. I did exactly what I should have done. As the bombardier, I had nothing else to do, the main thing we needed to do was get the bomb bays open and I got the bomb bays open, and that made a space for Carl to get out and Ammi and Chuck, so I'm happy with the role I played. I did exactly what I should have done.

**Aaron Elson:** And which door was it that Dent should have gone through?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** The nose turret. The nose wheel doors. The nose wheel that goes up and down, that door is supposed to open when you pull a pin or

something, I never paid much attention to it but there's a pin you pull and that's supposed to drop the door down even though you haven't given it the signal to put the nose wheel door down. So that's where Dent should have gone out, along with Huddleston. And the three guys in the tail were all dead, so they couldn't go anywhere.

**Aaron Elson:** Now, the Wehrmacht, were they officers or enlisted men?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** The two in the car I think were enlisted men.

**Aaron Elson:** And they brought you to this little ...

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Field.

**Aaron Elson:** Prison?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, it wasn't a prison, it was just a field. It had some soldiers around, but ...

**Aaron Elson:** Other fliers from the mission were there?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** M-hm.

**Aaron Elson:** Can you recall who was in there, did you know any of them?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** I don't remember anybody, and I didn't ... I didn't know anybody, even in the 445th. I was joshing a little bit with Ira last night, I told him, I said, "I don't think you were there. I don't remember you in the 445th, I don't remember you in prison camp (laughs)." There was a lot of that, but, I think, I think the military, uhh, well, they didn't stop you from making friends. It wasn't like the Civil War where they'd take a whole company from one little town and put them together, then the dummies would take them somewhere, run them up into, and get them all killed. And so, in our case, yeah, there were people got killed from the little town I was in, but none of us were ever in the same outfit.

**Aaron Elson:** Now, what was your interrogation like?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Okay. That night they got us, on the way to Eisenach I did walk down, I had a couple of soldiers that were with me because I couldn't walk very well, so I was going much slower than the rest of the guys that were going

down the road, and we went down, there was a little field, and there was a German brownshirt with the red swastika, he had the swastika thing on his arm, and he motioned me over and there were three or four Luftwaffe officers there and a couple of cars, and he started hitting me. I think you saw that in the movie [Pride of the Nation]. He started hitting me with the back of his hand, and that's when I fell down on the fender, and that's in the movie. Then he kicked me, and then I got up and went on down the road with the two guys taking me, I wasn't badly hurt or anything, I was, you know, it wasn't a good idea, but I got down the road a ways and out of a little house came a very short German old guy with white hair all around the fringe like I guess I am now, and he came out and kicked me in the fanny. He had rubber boots. It would have been kind of funny except I had a piece of shrapnel back in here near that, and that aggravated it a little.

Then I went to Eisenach, and we were put in a long barnlike building with a shelf, and I spent the night there. Got up the next morning and saw the 8th Air Force going over. The sky was just black with bombers. I don't know how the Germans ever put up with it.

Okay. From there we went to Oberrussel, and that was their interrogation center, and they put me in solitary confinement, where I stayed for I think it was three days, and you got a little ersatz coffee in the morning and a piece of bread and then a little soup in the afternoon, and about, in my case I think it was about 11 o'clock both mornings, I was interrogated at least twice, that may have been all, and they took me into an interrogation room, and a very nice gentleman talked to me. He told me all about the mission. He knew more about it than I did, and of course I just told him my name, rank and serial number. But he knew how many planes there were, how many guys there were. There were some that still hadn't been caught, so, I think Ammi was still evading, I think Ammi evaded for a couple or three days. And, you know, we just chatted awhile. There's nothing particularly one way or the other, they certainly weren't, they didn't blindfold me or handcuff my hands behind my back or do any of the stupid stuff we're doing today that people that are ... prisoners of war are the most helpless people in the world. They aren't usually individually, you know, violent people anyway. They're there because they're soldiers and that's their job. So you know you're not going to have a lot of trouble with them. And the Germans never had a lot of trouble with any of us. I suppose there was an occasional guy that tried to cause trouble, but in general, you just want to get on with what the next thing's gonna be. So, interrogation was very gentle. And I really didn't know anything that he didn't

know. He figured that out pretty quick, so I stayed there three days and then I went to Metzlach, and that's the Dulag Luft, and that was overseen by the International Red Cross. I don't think Oberrussel was. But I didn't see any signs of anybody being tortured. Solitary is a terrible thing. You probably have never been in solitary.

**Aaron Elson:** No. Talk about it a little.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Well, the room was probably seven or eight feet wide and maybe ten feet long. And it was totally white. The inside of it was painted totally white. It had shutters on the window. They were all totally white. And a little slot in the door that they could put food in and stuff. And you had nothing to do. Nobody to talk to. Nothing to read. Nothing to watch. No scenery to look at. Just white walls. And so, you know, you can only think your own thoughts for about so long and then you wonder what am I doing here and stuff. It's, it made me be very appreciative of freedom. Even a lot more so than any other part of my prison experience. I mean, it wasn't great the rest of it, but, you know, I was in a compound that probably had 1,500 other guys in it, so you know, you could play bridge and talk, and you had somebody to talk to. But when you're in solitary it's just you. And I don't know what happens when you're in solitary for a long period of time, but something's got to shut down. But with me, it was just a very unpleasant thing. They never, they weren't mean to me or anything. So that was my experience with solitary.

**Aaron Elson:** Did you encounter in the transit, did you see any of the British and Polish paratroopers who were captured at Arnhem.

Malcolm MacGregor. M-hm. Saw a Britisher. And he was a, he said, he told me that we landed, and there were three or four, a few of them, that got in this little house, and it was night time, and so they stayed there overnight I guess to see whatever was going to happen and get some signal what to do next. And in the morning, they heard a, you know, ch-ch-ch-ch, and they looked out the window, and here came a Tiger tank up over the brow of the hill in front of them, and it lowered the gun down and aimed at them. And they said "We surrender" right then. So that was his experience. And he's the only one I saw. But I did, I saw him, I talked to him, and when and where I talked to him, it was somewhere, it was in Oberrussel I think that I talked to him.

**Aaron Elson:** When you got to Stalag Luft 1, was it you yesterday who was talking about your first experience there, where you got into the barracks and ...

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yes. "Tell us your horror story," is what they said.

**Aaron Elson:** How did that come about? You got into a barracks...

**Malcolm MacGregor:** I got in the barracks. I put what little stuff I had in the barracks that was assigned, and I turned around, and the guys gathered around and they said, "Okay. Sit down. Tell us your horror story." So I told them what I just told you, about the specifics of the shutdown. The thing that impressed them the most was the 20 and 30-millimeter cannons exploding in the bomb bays when I was right in the front of the bomb bay. They thought that was pretty neat.

**Aaron Elson:** And what were their stories?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Oh, golly. There was one guy that was, I think he was a co-pilot, and his, no, he couldn't have been, it was a chest pack, so he must have been a navigator or a bombardier. Anyway, the plane blew up and he didn't have any chute or anything, he was just out in the air. He wasn't hurt particularly. And all of a sudden a chute came by, and he reached out and grabbed it, hooked it onto his chest pack, and that's how he got there.

**Aaron Elson:** Did you say he hooked it wrong?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No, he didn't. He hooked his right. This is somebody else that had that story. There was one guy there that was, I think, he was either the pilot or co-pilot, I think he was a B-17, they had a top hatch on a B-17, and the plane was all shot up and going down and it was over the Zuider Zee or whatever, somewhere in Holland. Anyway, it crash landed itself as he was climbing out of the top hatch, it crash landed itself and hurt his hip, I don't think it broke it or anything, but I thought that's pretty amazing. There was a P-38 pilot and he was shooting up an airport, and his indicator was 350 miles an hour, his indicator as he's going down shooting this place up. And the ground fire shot his controls out. So here he was, right on the deck at 350 miles an hour in a P-38 with no controls, and the plane crash-landed, went up and did a snap roll he said, and came back down, then skidded to a stop, and he jumped out of the airplane, he was able to get out. He said he jumped out and ran about 50, I think it was 50 feet or a hundred feet or something, then he collapsed. And his back was broken, right in

the middle. It's amazing he even got out. And they put him in a German hospital with a German fighter pilot that was also in the hospital, he was there, I don't know, two or three months, they were getting him straightened up, and you could run your finger down his back, and there was a U in his backbone, you could feel it. But he seemed to be doing all right. I'm sure he's had some discomfort with it later, whether they could ever do anything about it I don't know. But that was pretty amazing, to crash at that speed and walk away from it.

**Aaron Elson:** But didn't one of them talk about seeing two sort of hotshot pilots trying to touch each other's wings?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Oh no, that wasn't me. I don't remember saying that. That could be, that certainly, probably, almost anything happened, when you think of the number, the sheer number of planes that were shot down and the number of people that were there in the camp. There was a guy who was very badly burned, quite an intelligent guy and I'm sure he would have been pretty if he hadn't had all of those scars all over him. And he was very nice and he was a natural born kind of leader, and so we treated him with respect and we lovingly called him the Lizard. (Laughs) I guess what soldiers do. But it didn't mean we didn't like him. And I'm sure when he got home that the plastic surgeons fixed him up, because he hadn't lost, I think, any of his basic, I'm sure it was third degree burns, or second or third degree burns all over him, and his hands too. He was a fighter pilot.

**Aaron Elson:** Now, the Kassel Mission Memorial Association was formed, you got involved...

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Somehow...

**Aaron Elson:** When did you first learn about Ernst Schroeder?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Oh, that was in Germany, when I went to the, when they put the monuments up in 1990, that's the first time I had ever heard about Schroeder. And Schroeder was talking to Gunther, who was translating, but who was the leader of our squadron, the 702nd...Miner. He was talking to Reg Miner, and he pointed out which planes he shot down and he pointed right in the formation because Reg was describing the formation to him, and he said, "Oh yah, these are the planes" he shot down, and ours was one of them. That's how I knew about him. That's when he said, yeah, he saw the blood running out of the

back of the airplane. So, he was aware of it. When you shoot people all to pieces, I guess it must have been really bad back there. The mother of the tail gunner, Bobby, oh dear, I can't remember the last name right now, anyway, Bobby's mother wrote my mother after and she knew her son was dead, she knew I was a prisoner, and she said, "I hope he didn't suffer." And I'm sure he didn't suffer very long, as it was all over in a matter of a minute or two, there was nothing left of those guys. That was probably pretty hard on Carl, too, picking up those guys and getting them out of there. I think Carl had a very traumatic situation, he never wanted to visit it again, he never wanted to get involved in the Kassel Mission, he said he didn't want to relive it. And I can see why. I would think he had a much harder time than I did.

**Aaron Elson:** He's not alive still, is he?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** No, he died.

**Aaron Elson:** He had been a photographer was it? A sign painter, you said.

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Originally he was a sign painter, and he was back, just picking up his life, remarrying his wife, getting a business going again, and they called him back in for the Korean War. And so, his life had been so fractured at that point he said the hell with it, so he stayed in the military. He was a good pilot, and he would be able to teach some guys things that they wouldn't hear from other people. Of course he had the experience, so he stayed in, retired as a lieutenant colonel.

**Aaron Elson:** Now when you realized that Schroeder was the pilot who had shot your plane down, what went through your mind? Were you angry?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** M-mm. You don't get angry at people that are trying to do the same thing you're trying to do. Otherwise you'd end up being nothing but angry, because that's what soldiers do is kill each other, and he was doing what he was supposed to do. And he didn't do anything bad. He just shot a plane down.

**Aaron Elson:** Did you shake hands with him?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Oh yeah, sure. I shook hands with him, and he shook hands with us. He was a professional soldier and I guess at that time I was, you know, thinking back to the time when I was a professional soldier. It isn't the soldiers

normally that are mad at each other, I mean Hitler had some, a few nuts that were trying to be personal about it, but in general, they were military guys, they were good military guys and they knew what they were doing. They did their job, and that's what we did. It still bothers me when I hear the president say "we." "We're gonna do this." What you mean, "we"? He ain't going anywhere. He's gonna sit on his duff in Washington and somebody else is, the other half of the "we" is going to go get killed. And I think that our presidents were a little more, well I knew, we knew Roosevelt didn't come with us but he had four of his boys who did. All four of them. And James was I think quite badly hurt. He was the Marine. And there was one of them was a general, ended up a general, he was a colonel of the fighter, P-38 fighter, he flew fighters. He was right in it. So that's a little different.

**Aaron Elson:** Now you had said that Jimmy Stewart would come hang out with Sollien because he played the piano. Do you have any recollections of encounters with Stewart?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yeah, the first time I met him, he asked me, he was just being friendly to a second lieutenant and he asked me how many missions I had, and I said I had five. And I said, "How many do you have, Sir?" And he said, "I have 13." Then we each went our own way, and then the next time we met was in September, he was back at the officers' club, and he said, "How many missions do you have now?" And I said, "I've got 30." I said, "How many you got?" He said, "I've got 18." He said, "Those sons of bitches don't let me fly anything but a desk up here." And then he said to me, he said, "Lieutenant, do you like bourbon?" And I said, "Oh yeah, but I can't get any at the bar here." And so he said, "Well, come with me." So he took me back in the part of the officers' club that was the senior officers' club, that's where the Red Cross girls were and the majors and colonels and all that stuff, and he had a bottle, I guess, back there, and so he gave me a drink of bourbon. And we sat there and talked a little bit, and then I went back. But he was very down to earth, extremely friendly. In a reserved, friendly way he was, you know, he wasn't, like you think of wild entertainer kind of things, no that wasn't his personality. He was just a very nice man, and doing a job, and I met somebody on the bus the other day who was with Jimmy up at wing, I think his name was James, it's a Mc, James McMillan or something like that, and he was a navigator, one of the wing navigators way up there, and he knew Jimmy well and he said he was a great guy, and he said he always tried to beat Jimmy to breakfast in the morning and never succeeded. He said Stewart really worked

hard at his job, and he wanted to fly and he wanted to be a combat pilot. And his comment was that Stewart had no reason to do any of that because he could have easily gotten out, and he said he was the oldest guy at wing headquarters and I was the youngest at the time. So that's my Jimmy Stewart story.

**Aaron Elson:** What was the roughest thing about prison camp life?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Lack of food.

**Aaron Elson:** Did you have a diary that you kept?

**Malcolm MacGregor:** Yeah, I've got one. Not a diary. About 20 years ago or 25 years ago I started writing my memories. Now of course, 20 years had gone by or more, so you know, a lot of it's, how much of it's true and how much of it's imagination, who knows?