RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT C. KING

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and
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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Robert C. King in Villanova, Pennsylvania on November 30, 1994 with Kurt Piehler and ...

Grant Dietrich: Grant Dietrich

KP: And I guess I'd like to begin asking a few questions about your parents. Your father was from Pennsylvania originally.

Robert King: Born in Sunbury.

KP: Sunbury.

RK: Yes.

KP: And he worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad?

RK: That's true.

KP: Did he work all his life for the railroad?

RK: Yes he did.

KP: And was he from a railroading family?

RK: He was an orphan so it starts with him. I can't go back any further than that, Kurt. My father was an orphan. My mother was from Williamsport, Pennsylvania. But he worked for Pennsylvania Railroad all his life until he was taken with cancer ... while I was in pilot training in Texas in '43, September of '43.

KP: Did he grow up in an orphanage?

RK: He lived with a family by the name of Carothers and that's where I got my middle name, Carothers. And I don't know them.

KP: You do not know his family?

RK: Nope.

KP: How did your father feel growing up as an orphan? How do you think it affected him?

RK: I don't really know. I can't answer that, Kurt, I don't know. We have these cousins that live up in Watchung and he's 80 and she's 83 and if anybody would know anything about it, we were very very close and still are. And oftentimes, I've asked him about it and he really can't help me out either. So that's the short story on him.

KP: Your father and mother, how did they meet?

RK: I have no idea. I have no idea. I know that when my mother died, when I was in grade school, like sixth grade, and my father had housekeepers for a few years. It didn't work out very well. So he remarried, a girl, a women from Renovo, Pennsylvania, way up in a corner by Lake Erie, at whose wedding he had been best man, like 40 years before. And she had lost her husband and he had lost mom so they ... got married and that's the only one my wife knows was Blanche, my stepmother who was a dear sweet thing.

KP: So you got along, you liked your stepmother?

RK: Oh God I loved her, yeah, really.

KP: Did you have any other brothers or sisters?

RK: I had a brother, yes. He died at the unlikely age of 42 with a coronary thrombosis.

KP: Your father, did he serve in World War I?

RK: No, he did not.

KP: He worked for the railroad.

RK: Yes, he did. He was superintendent of train control for the eastern division of the Pennsylvania Railroad and he worked out of Williamsport and Sunbury and then was transferred down to 30th Street in Philadelphia and that's where he wound up.

KP: Was he in charge of the actual steering cars to make sure they're on the right track or was it more determining the route structure.

RK: Well actually I think it was the ... lights that would warn the train and all, and what else really I don't know Kurt, but apparently he had [a] pretty decent job with them, because he was with them 40-some years.

KP: Did he, during the Depression work any reduced hours?

RK: Yes he did and reduced pay. Yes, I can still remember in the early '30s, I guess whenever the peak of that thing was or the bottom of it was, that he would come home and put--I don't even think we had much of a tax at that time--he would put his pay on the kitchen table. It was 200 dollars a month and at that time ... he did okay. It's hard to believe, but he did.

[INTERRUPTION]
KP: So you remember the Depression. Your father stayed employed, but on reduced pay.

RK: Yes, he did stay employed, yes. I can remember ads at the same time and I told you he brought back 200 dollars a month. I can remember seeing ads in the paper and magazines, retire in comfort or something. Guaranteed 200 dollars a month income. That was a pretty good deal in the '30s.

KP: Where did you grow up during the 1930s?

RK: Well, I lived in Williamsport till I was six, and then I moved to Lansdowne, Pennsylvania which is about 20 minutes from here. But I spent a lot of my time in the summer, all my summers, down the eastern shore of Maryland: Oxford, Cambridge, and St. Michael's down that way. But I went through school at Lansdowne.

KP: What kind of community was Lansdowne when you were growing up?

RK: It's almost the same now. It's a very heavily ... Quaker orientated little town. A matter of fact one of our daughters lives over there now, about a block away from where I was raised. A very nice town. Very, very nice, quiet. You could walk the streets at night and that sort of stuff. Just an ideal place to grow up in.

KP: Were most of your friends Quakers?

RK: No, no, no, no. I was Presbyterian, and, you know, it really didn't matter a heck of a lot what they were, whether Catholic or Jewish or whatever. It didn't really matter. But I had a lot of friends who were Presbyterians from Sunday school and that sort of stuff. But it was a nice town, still is. Unusual, but it is.

KP: Where did most of the community work? Were they professional, were they railroad workers?

RK: Well a lot of them were railroad. ... I guess it was sort of a potpourri, ... you know, a general mix, most of them work in the city in Philadelphia. But I don't think it was predominantly--it wasn't like living in a paper mill town or something like that. It was just a regular mix, I think. ... On our street, which was only one block long, the chief of police and the mayor and the principal of one of the high schools. And you know just a general mix of nice people.

KP: When did you know you were going to college or when did you think you would be going to college?

RK: Well, there was a gentleman by the name of (Coop? Goldschmidt?), ... who was a friend of my father's, and I was pretty active at sports and I was supposed to get a scholarship to play baseball over here, but it didn't work out because I got a hernia and all that such. But anyway, he's the reason that I went to Rutgers. I remember going up there with dad and (Coop?) was apparently, he was also a Zate [Zeta Psi]. So he took my father and myself and a guy by the

name of Warren (Lasher?) who turned out to be my roommate at Zate, we went to the Roger Smith. Remember the Roger Smith Hotel? It was downtown across on Livingston Avenue.

KP: Oh, yeah. It's still there.

RK: Is it there? Is it called the Roger Smith isn't it?

KP: No, it is called something else, but it is a tall hotel.

RK: ... Yeah on the V there right across from the theater. So we went there and had lunch or dinner, I don't remember what it was. And then Warren (Lasher?)--called him Nifty--took me back to the fraternity house and showed me around the frat house and all, so I never lived in a dorm or anything. I started out on 18 College Avenue.

KP: In the fraternity house?

RK: Yeah.

KP: Had you applied to any other schools?

RK: No. That was it. That was my only venture into that. I have no regrets obviously.

KP: How did your father and stepmother view college? Did they want you to go to college?

RK: Yes, yes they did. Yeah, he paid my way, yeah.

KP: So your father was able to pay your way.

RK: Yes, that's why I'm saying 200 dollars a month. He put my brother through Penn, Wharton School and me through Rutgers, you know, fraternity house and all that stuff. So he must have been doing pretty good.

KP: So college was pretty important to him, the fact that you could go.

RK: Yes, yes, because he did not go to college, I can tell you that.

KP: Did he ever regret not having that opportunity?

RK: I'm sure that he did.

KP: Yeah, but he never said getting a degree is something he wish he could have done.

RK: No, no, no.

KP: You came to Rutgers and most people from Rutgers came from New Jersey.

RK: I know. There were only about eight or ten of us from out of state. Well, sports was the main reason.

KP: The main reason.

RK: Yeah. Yeah! It's, you know, I guess it still is a state college, isn't it? Yeah, there were only--I counted one time. You could almost count them on the two fingers at that time, because the enrollment isn't near what it is now. What is the enrollment right now?

KP: It is about 25,000 in the entire New Brunswick campus. For Rutgers College, I think it is about 10,000.

RK: Gee whiz. Well I've got the yearbook and I'm sure it can't be more than a thousand, I guess. ...

KP: When you came to college what did you think you would major in and what did you think you would do as a career? Did you have any thoughts?

RK: I haven't figured that out yet, Kurt! (laughter) I majored in business administration and minored in psychology. I love psych, but I got a bachelor--a degree in bachelor of science in business administration. Which meant when I went to a personnel office and the guy--the personnel manager says, what are you qualified to do, you sit there with your mouth open [and say] I'm not really qualified. You know what I mean. All it showed was that I had the capacity to learn, that's all. But, to tell you the truth, at that time when the guys in the fraternity house and all the people I knew on the campus a guy who knew what he wanted to do, we envied him.

KP: Really.

RK: Really. I'm serious. Yes. If he knew he wanted to be in history like you or whatever. If he knew ... what his goal was, oh boy you're a lucky man. I have no idea what I want to do. Of course, then Adolf Hitler took it out of my hands. But you know what I'm saying.

KP: Yes, you did not have a set that you were going into business.

RK: No, no, not at all.

KP: You originally came to play baseball.

RK: Yes.

KP: But the hernia in a sense ended your playing days.

RK: The hernia, yes and then some other problems developed. So ... it didn't materialize. But I was active, I mean in other things. Do we still have the Scarlet Key Society, do you know? Do they still have that there?

KP: I'm not familiar with it.

RK: Well it was sort of a junior class honorary society. You got so many points for doing this and ... I was the editor of the Targum. Do they still have the Targum?

KP: Yes, yes.

RK: I was circulation editor. ... We used to work in, what the heck was the name of that little building next to the Zeta Psi ... it was Zeta Psi and then it was this little building, and then the street and then Kappa Sig was on the other corner. Well anyway that, that was our office. And then I was a chapel usher, manager of football, I don't know, a lot of stuff.

KP: You were very active in campus. What was your favorite campus activity?

RK: I don't know Kurt. I don't mean to be smart answers. I just liked everything. Even a chapel usher which is no big deal. But I just, you know Frankie Patten and I--you didn't by chance interview Jim (Weinmier?) did you?

KP: No, no.

RK: Well he was a ... fraternity brother of mine, General (Weinmier?), yeah. No, I just liked it all, I liked the whole schmear.

KP: So chapel and the various social events.

RK: Whatever, I just loved it all.

KP: Who was your favorite professor?

RK: Well, I remember Doctor Hayes I had for geology, and Hans Heymen ... for insurance and I can't think of the ... psychology professors that I had, but I took about five or six courses in psych and that tells a lot for my pneumonic devices, I can't remember what their names were, you know. Like the guy says, "My memory is very good, it's just very short." (laughter) And (Bierschmitt?) for German, I had him for a couple of years, and Bagley for one of the economic courses, these names are, you know, all dinosaurs. But anyway ...

KP: Almost everyone has had two stories: one about Dean Metzger. Do you have any?

RK: I remember Dean Metzger. Not very well, but I certainly do remember the name, yes.

KP: Did you have any direct experiences with him?

RK: No, no I did not.

KP: The other name that always comes up is Vinny Utz.

RK: Well Vinny and I were pretty good friends ... when Vinny lost a leg or arm? Which was it, ... in the service.

GD: It was an arm.

RK: Yeah, an arm. Well he was on the football team and quite well. And we had a guy on the football team that was All-American our first, my first year, Bill Tranavitch. And Harvey Harman who was the coach of football at Penn started at Rutgers the day we opened the new stadium then, ... in the bowl. He was the football coach the year that I started as freshman football manager. Yeah. And that was the year we beat Princeton 20 to 18 for the first time in 65 years or whatever it was. Yeah. Memories.

KP: How did you get the job as freshman manager?

RK: I guess I just walked in and I was an available body. But it was a real time-consuming job, I'll tell you that because, you know, you'd spend as much time as the football players do. Every day and you stayed for training table and all that stuff. And it really put a little bit of pressure on your studies, yeah.

KP: I have interviewed John Melrose.

RK: Yes, Johnny Melrose, sure!

KP: And he said that he was given a lot of responsibility as manager including depositing the cash receipts.

RK: That's right. Arranging the buses, and the dinners and ... hotel-restaurants wherever we stayed. Sure, yeah, Johnny Melrose, yeah I remember the name.

KP: Yeah, and I was surprised at how much responsibility given to him. I think at one point he was given 2000 dollars cash and sent up to upstate New York to make arrangements for one of the away games.

RK: Exactly, yeah right, yeah! We'd go to Lafayette and Lehigh, and you'd have to get the buses and all the equipment and all that ... stuff and make arrangements at a restaurant, you know, which was ... it was a little time consuming.

KP: Did you find those experiences very helpful later in life?

RK: Oh, extremely helpful. I'll tell you the truth, ... I learned more with that kind of stuff and being in a fraternity house and being involved with the other activities than I did in the classroom, really, to prepare me for whatever. To learn how to get along with people, and to be able to talk. Yes.

KP: You were also very active in the Targum. How did that involvement come?

RK: I don't know. I don't remember how it started out. I guess I started out as a freshman and just, you know, stayed with it. And ... I still remember making those deliveries around to the different, you know, till eleven o'clock or midnight, delivering around to the different halls, even that--is that religious school still up on that hill there?

KP: Yes, the seminary is still there.

RK: ... Yeah! I can still remember dropping the prescribed number of Targums off at the ... in the lobby there up on the ... pathway that goes up. Yeah, it just was a completely delightful experience, really. The whole schmear.

KP: In your fraternity, you lived there your entire four years.

RK: Yes, yes.

KP: What were your fraternity brothers like?

RK: Oh, great guys, really great guys. Bill Poston, Jimmy (Wagmeir?), Fred Hoppe, well a whole bunch. Yeah, great.

KP: It sounds like you stayed in touch with them.

RK: ... I did, but I haven't. Well you know how it goes. You know, there is a lot of attrition involved here, Kurt. And so no, I haven't talked to any of them lately.

KP: Your fraternity, how many members owned cars?

RK: I would say maybe two, maybe three. Bill Koar, Bill Jensen. They were both from New York. And Frank Flynn. They were all from New York. They had the car. They had the car. That was it.

KP: I sort of ask people both who lived in fraternity houses and those who lived in dorms and then those who commuted; how did you see the campus and any divisions within the class or within the student body?

RK: Whether we called them commuters and that stuff?

KP: Yes, was there a sharp division between commuters and campus residents?

RK: No. no. There was a division, but it was very minor. As a matter of fact, ... it didn't really didn't matter if I'm talking to Grant or something, I don't care whether he got off the train or lived [away]. It really didn't make a difference. Of course, you were very close with your fraternity brothers and maybe some of the other fraternities, but it really didn't matter. No big deal.

GD: Do you think it was very important to be involved at school?

RK: Yes I do, very much so.

GD: How? In what respect do you think it was important?

RK: Well, ... Grant it broadens your life. ... I'm not trying to be paradoxical about this thing, but I wouldn't want to leave my house and get off a train and go to three or four classes and get on the train and go back home again. I don't think that's ... I don't think that's really going to college as far as I'm concerned. I think to go to college you have to go to college and be involved as much or little as you want to. But get involved somehow, ... fraternities or sports, or whatever.

GD: Do you think that was a general feeling throughout everybody in your class?

RK: No, no I don't think so.

GD: No, it wasn't that important to be involved?

RK: Well it was to me, and it was to a lot of my friends, but it wasn't [an] overpowering thing, no. I just felt that everything that I did, kind of broadened me and I still feel that way.

GD: Did you associate with any other people besides the fraternity and other clubs? How about other fraternities, other people?

RK: You mean social activities? No, no. No, we had our own ... well that Scarlet Key Society, I think maybe that was a society for fraternity presidents. I've forgotten what it was, but it was some sort of "honorary" thing, you know. I still have the Scarlet Key and all that great stuff. But as far as together having social events together with whatever, other fraternities, the Raritan Club, is the Raritan Club still there? Ronny Jarvis, I'll never forget Ronny Jarvis. He and I were very, very close at that time and he was, I believe was the president of the Raritan Club and I was at Zeta Psi. And we used to sit out on bank there overlooking the Raritan. I remember ... doing homework together, and you know, solving the problems of the world. ... I thought he was one of the sharpest guys I ever met and he was a hell of a basketball player, too. But no, to answer your question, our social activities were ... confined primarily to the ... [fraternity].

GD: What about spirits? Were the students high spirited? Was there school spirit?

RK: Oh yeah, you mean for football games, and that sort of thing?

GD: Yeah, yeah ...

RK: Oh yeah, Oh my God yes. That hasn't changed I don't think. I hope it hasn't changed.

GD: No, not quite yet.

KP: You were involved in a lot of different activities and have probably a good sense of your classmates. How did you think your classmates feel about the approach of war? Both in 1939 and then 1940 after the fall of France? Did you notice any changes?

RK: Not really, Kurt. I'll tell you when it struck me. I can still remember. I was in the ... dining room of the fraternity house having breakfast on that Sunday morning when they announced it on the radio of, you know, Pearl Harbor. And I don't think up until that time ... we didn't talk about it. It was just something, "Well that can't happen to me." But ... then my roommate Harold Johnston--Harold (Parkinson?) Johnston, gee, what a nice guy. He just looked like Tyrone Powers, a good looking guy. He enlisted, he was a year ahead of me and he enlisted in the Air Corps. And he was killed in training. And that's why I enlisted in the Air Corps, just to serve. ... You understand what I'm saying. So, but I don't think it really became a talking point until Pearl Harbor.

KP: Really, you do not remember any conversations about the war before Pearl Harbor.

RK: No, no. ....

KP: A lot of people were very busy and did not have time to read the newspaper. Did your fraternity house have a newspaper? Did you subscribe to one?

RK: Not that I recall. No.

KP: No, you're not alone. I remember one classmate prided himself in saying that he used to read the newspaper every day, but many of my classmates never had the chance to.

RK: You mean having like the Newark Star Ledger or something delivered?

KP: Yes. Or the New York Times.

RK: No. Times or the Ledger, no. No, ... it wasn't delivered because, ... being involved in the frat house as I was, and I really was ... no, no we didn't have a paper delivered. That's strange I never even thought of that. If we wanted a paper we went over to the ... drug store right through our parking lot on Easton Road I guess. At that time it was a super nice drug store.

KP: It is still there, but probably under new ownership.

RK: I'm sure it has. Or go down to the train station and get a paper.

GD: I wanted to ask you one question. Right now I live off campus, not in a fraternity or anything. But I live with a lot of friends and I know how noisy its gets, last night I was kept up to four in the morning. How did you manage to study while living in the fraternity house for four years?

RK: Well, you know Grant it really wasn't that much of a problem. We had, I won't say strict rules, but ... we kept rowdyism and all that--there was no booze or beer or anything ever in that frat house. And no girls unless we had a special weekend type thing. And you had doors on your rooms. You know, there was two of you in a room in the frat house. And if you closed that door, I don't ever remember having a problem with that. Ever!

GD: How did you like going to a men's school? Do you think it is different?

RK: Well there was the Coop across the road there, New Jersey College for Women. And it didn't bother me, you know. There was plenty of social activities going on if you wanted them, you know.

GD: Do you think it helped you?

RK: It probably did, actually it probably did, yes. As far as concentrating on whatever, yes it probably did. Yeah. But New Jersey College for Women, I assume it's still there, isn't it?

GD: Yes, it's Douglass now.

RK: Is it now mixed together?

GD: No, but it's called Douglass College.

RK: Douglass College. Okay. ...

GD: Do you have any memories of going over to Coop?

RK: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

GD: Any special ones?

RK: No. No. ... But there was no real problem with that. ...

KP: I guess the only other question in terms of your fraternity is do you remember your initiation at all?

RK: Very well.

KP: How was it? Because I've heard it varied.

RK: It was fantastic. I'll tell you, here's something that'll surprise. ... We had a lot of silly stuff to do. Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, Theta, Iota, Kappa, Lambda, Mu, Nu, Xi, Omnicron, Pi, Rho, Sigma, Tau, Upsilon, Chi, Phi, Psi, and Omega. I had to learn that alphabet for the initiation. Funny how these stupid things stay with you. I can still remember today! But the paddles. Oh I got a paddle, you don't want to see it. I've got a paddle with Zeta Psi, '42, and my nickname Slip down in the basement. And it was nothing really violent. They would take you out and drop you off somewhere and, you know, make your way home and that sort of stuff.

KP: How far from campus did they drop you off?

RK: I never found out. But there's always some clown in every group who likes the sadistic pleasure of beating up on somebody and we just kind of had that. They put holes in the end of the paddles to raise welts and all that stuff. So you just had to kinda monitor it. And then you stayed awake for--oh, that was another thing. You had to stay awake for like two days or three days or whatever the hell it was. And you had the regular routine about how you dressed. You had to stop and salute the upperclassmen in the fraternity house. That's all part of growing up I think. ...

KP: What about the differences between classes? One of the things that struck me about the yearbook is the demarcation between classes. Between freshman and seniors, particularly.

RK: ... I didn't have a problem with that. Well, you know maybe I just went in there with the idea if this man's a senior I've got to respect them, but you know, I never really had a problem with it simply, because I didn't come on too strong in the beginning. But that was never a problem. As a matter of fact, you know, I still remember a lot of the guys who were seniors when I was a freshman. I hold them all ... with affection. ...

KP: Pearl Harbor changed Rutgers quite a bit very quickly.

RK: I bet it did. ...

KP: Your class, for example, was speeded up quite a bit. Do you have any memories of the last semester you were at college? Any that stick out?

RK: Nothing particular, no, Kurt. No, nothing except that I knew, well sort of sad, that this was the end of a life and ... the beginning of a very uncertain scary future, you know. If you had any brains at all you have to think of that. ... It was sort of sad. I was sad to see the senior year go.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed your college years.

RK: Extremely! Extremely! Yes I did. ...

KP: How do you think the experience of going away, because you very much went away to college. Although you were relatively close, you were some distance from college. It was not down the road.

RK: ... At that time particularly it was no easy--I had to get on the train, well you know how far it is to drive. And, of course, the speed limits weren't what they are now and the roads weren't what they are now and all. ... If I came home, I'd come home maybe every other weekend or once a month, or something for a weekend. I liked it. I thought it was very important to my education to get away. And we had some grandchildren. Matter of fact, well a lot of grandchildren--and I have a great grandson now whose twelve or thirteen and he's talking about going to college. And I was talking to one of our granddaughters, well you know, if you have a choice of going away or staying home if you can afford it, send them away. ... As I said earlier to you, Kurt that I learned more off the campus and in the frat house and in the activities that I did than in the classroom. I can't remember who wrote Hayden's Surprise Symphony and all that kind of stuff from the classroom.

KP: Everyone was in ROTC.

RK: Two years.

KP: Two years. What did you think of your ROTC experiences?

RK: I couldn't wait to get out of it to tell you the truth.

KP: So you had no interest in applying for the advanced course.

RK: None. None. I was down ... in the athletic ... what was the name of that building way down on College Avenue near Buccleuch Park. Is that right? And it was ... I'm trying to think of that guys' name ... Little was the athletic director something, and his office was upstairs. No, ... I couldn't wait to get out of it.

KP: Why do say that?

RK: Oh I don't know. I ... just wanted to do other things than that. I remember Dick Lunger who ate it up. And he went the whole four and ... I guess he went into the regular army, didn't he, from four years of ROTC. But that did not interest me. Of course, that was before, you know, before we talked about Pearl Harbor or anything.

KP: What about your other fraternity brothers? How many were in advanced ROTC?

RK: Very few.

KP: Very few.

RK: Very few. Matter of fact that was the only one I can recall. There may be more, but I can't recall any others. No.

KP: Before leaving Rutgers, you told us before we started the interview about your brush with fame before graduating.

RK: Oh that thing I showed you.

KP: Yeah.

RK: Is not that wild!

KP: Yeah. How did that ad in the Saturday Evening Post come? If you put it on tape if you do not mind.

RK: Well, I had ... gone down to Washington as I told you, I guess probably February, and they paid me the money and they paid Francis the money. And I go, I got a carton of cigarettes a week for six months, and you know I had cigarettes stacked up in the closet. And I had no idea when this was going to appear. I can remember sitting on my front porch in Landsdowne waiting to be called into the service. I forget the date of that. June, I think it is. June 13th of '42. So around that time the neighbor, of this nice street I was telling you about, Mr. (Bowers?) came by the house and I'm sitting up on the porch kind of down the street. "Hey Bob. I see your picture's in the Saturday Evening Post." Well that was the first time I knew about it so that's all I can tell you. And then it appeared in Life and Collier's and Look I think, four magazines.

KP: You didn't smoke cigarettes.

RK: Yes I did. Yes I did. Yeah, but I didn't smoke Old Golds before, but I did afterwards! (laughter)

KP: And you mentioned earlier that this came about because the President of Jay Walter Thompson was a Zate.

RK: Well I don't think he was the president. He was the gentleman in charge of their advertising of Old Gold cigarettes. And he was a Zate somewhere else in the country that escapes me now. So he thought from New York, he'd come down to Rutgers and just see who the president of Zeta Psi was at that time, and he'd offer him this thing to tie in with their ad and it happened to be goofy here. So that's how it worked out.

... My wife got me a tape of ... don't panic, I'm not going to run it or anything, but this was the plane, the B-24, and Ploesti was the oil fields in Romania, and this is fascinating to me because it shows, you know, the planes and we were shot out and how bad it was. But that's kind of interesting. Ordered that through the mail.

KP: You mentioned that you enlisted in part in memory of a fraternity brother. And he graduated the year before.

RK: Exactly. That's true.

KP: And he was killed in training.

RK: That's right.

KP: When did you enlist and how did that experience go? Because a lot of the people did not get the branch that they wanted.

RK: Well I enlisted, I don't remember the date, Kurt. I remember the day I went into the service. I got on a train to go to Nashville, Tennessee. ... The Aviation Cadets is what it was called at the time. That was November 11, Armistice Day, which was a great day to go into the army. ... So I went on the train from B & O station in Philadelphia down to Nashville, Tennessee. And there they have what they call a classifications center where they give you all these kinds of tests to see whether you're qualified to be whatever, a pilot, or a navigator, a bombardier, or none of the above. And I qualified so they sent me home in the first year in '42. I was home for Christmas. Like ten days leave or something to get on a train to go to Santa Anna, California for preflight. So that was ... four days and three nights on a train. And we played a little bit of poker, just a little bit.

GD: How did you feel about becoming a pilot?

RK: Oh, ... I was tickled to death. But you know about that Grant, ... you go ... from preflight where you don't see a plane. That's about ten weeks. Identification, physical, ... and all this kind of stuff. And then you go to advanced. And that's ten weeks. I mean then you go to primary, that's ten weeks. And out of every--I would say out of every 100 that get to primary, probably nine out of ten will wash out. So the ten out of the 100 then go to basic which is a bigger plane and that's ten weeks. And probably out of that ten that have gone to basic, maybe two more wash out. And then you go to advanced and from there you're assigned--when I graduated from advanced they send a circular out, "What would you like to do, you know, what do you want to fly?" All of us that I can remember put down ATC--that's the no combat. That was C-47s flying supplies. Well, that didn't mean a thing, because they put you wherever that wanted you. And I went to multi-engine advanced so that meant I was going into bombers. So that's where [I ended up.] ...

KP: So the training was very rigorous.

RK: ... It was almost a year. ...

KP: And you said in preflight, how would people be washed out?

RK: No, not washed out of preflight. Out of primary.

KP: Out of primary.

RK: The reason most of them washed out was we only had eleven hours to solo and if you didn't solo in eleven hours ... you know what I mean. If your instructor says, "Well he can't solo." Then ... you're washed out. And I was the only guy left with my instructor, Mr. Hamilton. A dear sweet gentleman, out in California. And that was the case with a lot of guys. Instructors lost all. They had five. Each instructor had five students. And so I said like nine out of ten washed out. You'd wash out, because you couldn't solo, which was the prime thing, or you became air sick, which was another thing. Or ... I guess that's the bulk of it, but I'm sure there are other reasons.

KP: But those were the two primary reasons. You would not be able to solo or they learned that you were very air sick.

RK: Right, right. But the prime thing was that you either soloed or you didn't solo. And you had such a short time, because they were trying to rush us through to get, you know, the war was going on. So that was that. And then I graduated from Marfa, Texas ... for advanced and then I went to Nebraska--Fairmount, Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska to become acquainted with a B-24--which I don't know whether you know--it's a big four-motored bomber with a twin tail on it. And then to Salt Lake City to get the crew together. Because, you know, when you're in a crew of a B-24 it's like your own little family ... it's imperative that you get along. So then from there we went to after like a couple of months to (Waller?) Field, Trinidad, Belem and Fort (Alaza?), Brazil. And then flew across the ocean to Dakar, Africa at low level at night. My navigator, Ray Baleerzak from Buffalo, New York. He had graduated from navigation school the same time I graduated from pilot school so we were green as grass. And he we are low level over the ocean going across to Africa at night, and he's up there in the dome sighting the stars and I say, "Boy Ray ..." because you don't have a heck of a lot of gas left, that's a long flight. Well obviously he did very well. The sun came up, there was the coast. ... It was an angina time. And from there I went up into Marrakech and then to Tunis. And then as the Allies started taking over part of Italy, we moved into Italy and I flew out of southern Italy and that's where I was flying from towns called Cerignola and (Spinazola?) near Bari, Foggia, Italy and that's where I was flying when I got shot down.

GD: When you got through the various training courses, were you treated with any honorary respect or anything like that, or were you moving so fast that they would send you to another school?

RK: Well you were a commissioned officer, Grant. You know, I was a lieutenant and no more than anybody else. You know, you're really--like you said you're really moving. ... No, no more than anybody else. ... After graduation, you'd only stay in a place for a couple of weeks and you'd move on to do some other phase, the phases. And you're among your own group so ... do you mean from other service people or civilians or what?

GD: Well, just from your superiors maybe, because you got through the one of the ten?

RK: No, no, no. No, I don't think so.

KP: Although you were in the Air Force which becomes a separate service, you were in the Army. I interviewed Bill Bauer, there was a real different philosophy between the Army and the Air Corps, even in the way they treated their enlisted personnel and even the way they dressed and what was important and what was not. Do you have any sense of that from your training?

RK: No. No, I don't think I probably ran into anyone else, you know other than our own groups, Kurt. Which was I think called the ... what the heck were we called ... the Army Air Corps ... well anyway it was the aviation cadets which is like a ... non-com. No, I didn't notice any difference. I know what you're talking about. You mean the regular Army and the Air Corps?

KP: Yes, for example in the sense that enlisted men, Bauer remembers once encountering this guy. I believe this was in Okinawa. And he had made sure that his enlisted men had comfortable berths--were well taken care of. They had comfortable dry beds. He counted some Army troops who had his men camped in a low area. And basically their pup tents were being flooded and the Army officer said to Bauer, "Well, it's to toughen the men up."

RK: Well no, because of the reason I was saying to Grant a while ago that, you know, there's the ten of you. And you are all depending on one another up there, whether they're 50 caliber guns shooting planes down or whatever they're doing. You are all working together as a team and you sure as hell don't want to alienate anybody or get anybody upset with you, any more than is normal. But no, there wasn't that--in the Air Corps, that wasn't, I don't think a factor, Kurt, for that reason.

KP: Are there any other memorable aspects about the training. For example, had you flown the plane before?

RK: No.

KP: What was your experience flying, not only being in a plane, but flying it?

RK: I was scared to death! ... Speaking of that, I had a ... nice thing happened to me in advanced. Marfa, Texas in advanced. I had come home the month before, and the Red Cross had got me home to say good-bye to my father. And they got me a leave and I hitch-hiked on service planes from Texas up to Dayton and then to Philadelphia. Not hitch-hiked, you know what I mean, free loaded. And when I went back down I was a month later I was a class--I was 43-I instead of 43 ... it was designated by month. 43-A would graduate in January. ... So on graduation day, they have a big production of--the parents are there and they put on a show with all the graduating pilots to form a group, ... you know. ...

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE----------

KP: You were saying about the ceremony.

RK: Well, yeah and I don't mean to blow this up, but you did ask me. ... I lead the formation. I was the first one to take off and then they all formed on my lead and we had a proscribed pattern.

It was quite an honor, if you can understand what I mean. ... But I was telling you about taking, dismantling a group to land or to take off. When we would come back from a mission, let's say there was 200 planes in our group and there were thousands, the sky was black with them. You wouldn't believe it. Just to dismantle our group back to our field in (Spinazola?), it took like a half an hour--well twenty minutes or so. 'Cause everybody had to go off at a certain time. You can't land in somebody's airstream ... or you'll flip over and all. So it was quite a production. At one time I was coming back from a mission and I'd run out of gas, just about, and there was an air silence. You weren't supposed to speak, because the Germans ... unless it was a real emergency. I was back maybe a 100 miles from the base and I told them I was out of gas. So to eliminate this half hour dismantling of a group which I couldn't have stayed up for, they cleared the runway. So, you get the picture, because I could have never stayed up there. And when we got down to the ground, my crew chief came over and I said, "I think I'm out of gas, Ralph." And he looked, he said, "Boy, you are out of gas." ... That's true.

And another time, I don't remember where we were, but the bombardier would release the bombs and you could feel when the bombs would go. The plane would rise, because the weight was gone. ... You'd say "Bombs away" and the plane would go up. So it was a sequence about like this. Bombs away, Kavoom! And I look out at my number three engine and it has a hole in it big enough to put your head through. So I had to feather it obviously and we got back to the base and I went through interrogation. And Lieutenant (Tyre?), who was behind me, said "I think I know what happened." I said, "Would you please tell me!" What had happened, I think, was that the bombs are not armed until they were jettisoned. And as they jettisoned the bombs, as I understand it, that arms them. So a down riding bomb was hit by upcoming flak, maybe, you know, a few hundred feet below the plane or whatever. And it exploded at some point through my number three engine. So I figured, you know, I'm lucky to be here really. So you hear all types of stories in the prison camp about guys who rode the tail of the plane down, and it worked as a glider, you know. And he landed in the snowbanks in Switzerland or something. You hear all these kinds and I believe a lot of them, because it's possible. It worked like an air foil, you know you rode it down.

KP: In many way the Air Corps had a very glamorous image.

RK: Well the white scarf and all that.

KP: Had you seen any movies about the Air Force before the war?

RK: No, no.

KP: What about Billy Mitchell?

RK: Billy Mitchell? General Mitchell? With his B-25's going to Tokyo. No. That was all after me.

KP: After the war that you served in.

RK: You see ... I got shot down ... D-Day, you know, even before D-Day. So I've missed a lot of that good stuff. But the Germans kept feeding us all this stuff over the loud speaker. They made a big deal about John L. Lewis. You probably never heard of John L. Lewis. Well maybe you've had, but he was [with] coal mines. And he was a rabble rousing union head. And so the Germans made a big deal out of telling us, "Well this is how much they think of you back home, that John L. Lewis has called the coal miners out on strike. They don't care about you people." ... And then they made a big deal when Roosevelt died, you know, which was devastating. And they separated all members of the crew so nobody was together, you know. Whatever they could do. They put them in different camps or whatever.

KP: So after you were shot down you did not see your crew.

RK: No, not until about ten years after the war we had a get together. Let me see. One quick thing guys. You might find this kind of interesting. ... One was a mailman in Kansas City, Rex Smalley. Earl (Issacson?) was in California, he worked in real estate. They were from all over. Pat (Kearny?) never got married, he ... I think he also worked in the postal office, postal department somewhere. Ray (Balzersack?) was the navigator from Buffalo, New York. I don't know what he did, I've forgotten. Bob Peterson works for Agway up in Jamestown, New York. Doc Savage drank himself to death, he was the bombardier. And ...

KP: How many had gone to college before the war?

RK: ... In the crew?

KP: In the crew. Had any of the members of the crew had college experience? Were you the only one who had been to college?

RK: That's true. Yes.

KP: How many of them went to college after the war?

RK: ... I don't think any of them did. ... I'm sure they didn't. No, they didn't. No, you know, ... if you hadn't gone, you've all heard of the Bill of Rights. Not the Bill of Rights ...

KP: The G.I. Bill of Rights.

RK: The G.I. Bill helped you go to school and all that stuff. But, you know, when you get a family and all that stuff you've got other priorities. So if they hadn't gone by then, they didn't go. I was just ... lucky that I graduated. I just made it in time. Yeah.

KP: Going back to your crew experiences in Italy. You were very much part of an elite group, because you were starting off with people to get into training. My understanding of aviation training cadet, you need to have a college degree and meet certain physical requirements.

RK: ... You had to meet physical requirements and don't misunderstand [me], I.Q. requirements, too. ... That was the problem with a lot of them. That classification center down in Nashville that I was talking about.

KP: So a lot of people reported there and took the test and did not make it.

RK: The majority did not go to pilot school. Yes, yes.

KP: What was the I.Q. test? Was it a standard written test?

RK: I have no idea. I don't remember.

KP: Oh okay, yes.

RK: I'm lucky to remember where I live. No, I don't remember, but I know it was in there somewhere, yeah.

KP: You were sent all around the country for training. Had you traveled much before the war?

RK: No, not really. No.

KP: You mentioned that you went to the Eastern Shore for the summers.

RK: Yeah, ... well I lived there with people we knew down the Eastern Shore. But you know, ... my mother died as I said in grade school and then we had the housekeepers. And no, we really didn't do any traveling as a family. None. No.

KP: Even with your father working for the railroad. I know some railroad families took vacations because of the railroad benefits.

RK: Never took advantage of it.

KP: Never took the passes.

RK: Never. Not once. No.

KP: What did you think about this experience traveling all around the country?

RK: I thought it was terrific, terrific! Yes, we really did. We went to Nashville and then Santa Anna, California; (Vicillia?), California; Bakersfield, California; Martha, Texas; and then, you know, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas. Yeah, all those places.

KP: What did you think of the various places you got to? Most of them you had never seen before.

RK: Never seen any of them before. ... You know, I thought they were great. I loved it. This is a beautiful country we're in.

KP: What was you favorite posting during your training sequence? In terms of either the particular post itself or the surrounding community?

RK: I think probably--well it wasn't Marfa, Texas, I'll tell you that.

KP: Why?

RK: Well when we had a weekend pass to go out in Marfa, Texas we went out one time. I'm talking about we, you know a little cadre of guys. We never went out again. Because there was nothing there, but sagebrush and cattle and sand. So ... that was real dismal. Out by El Paso, down that way. I think probably the nicest place was probably was Visalia, California which is right in the San Joaquin Valley, near Sequoia National Park. And a pretty little town and friendly people. And after having soloed, a 50 pound load is off your back. You know, so you could enjoy yourself for the next few weeks you were there.

KP: So the solo in preflight training was really the big turning point.

RK: In primary.

KP: Primary, excuse me, primary was really what you were worried about.

RK: Absolutely everybody was. Yes.

KP: When did you know that would be the big thing? Did you know it in preflight?

RK: No, no. Not really. But you learned it real quick when you got to primary. And what happened to those guys that washed out of primary either ... go to navigation school or bombardier school, or gunnery school. I mean they weren't washed out of the service, they were just washed out as pilots. So they wound up somewhere else.

KP: From the people you went through training, those who were washed out and those who continued on, how many did you stay in touch with over the course of your service? Did you run into any of them in Italy?

RK: No because, Kurt, see we were a tight little group in (Spinazola?) of Italy and you never got off the post. I mean you didn't know whether you were going to fly the next day or you weren't going to fly the next day until they told you at four o'clock in the morning. You went down to the briefing room and you ran that red tape across to wherever you were gonna go to. So, I mean there was no socializing. There was no place to socialize. And then, of course, I went to prison camp and very little ... socializing there. And that was about the end of it. So no, to answer your question, I never did.

GD: That crew you showed us in the picture, that was the crew you started out with from the very beginning.

RK: Yes it was.

GD: And you went all the way through the war with them.

RK: ... Yes, ... till we got shot down. Right.

GD: I want to ask you one question. You were president of Zeta.
RK: Yes.

GD: How did you think that helped you being the pilot of the plane, being in charge, and their leader?

RK: I think it helped me a lot. To ... conduct, to be able to--if I had, unfortunately my son, we have four daughters and a son. My son, unfortunately is in Haverford State Hospital. It's just a wire. Something's not there, so he's been in special schools all his life. Schizophrenia ... But assuming he were normal. If I had the ability to teach him, or give him, bequest upon him any one thing, I think it would be, to be able to stand up in front of people on your feet and talk and think on your feet. I think that's one of the most difficult things and I feel if a man can stand up in front of a group and not only talk, but think and carry questions and ad lib and all, I think he's got a big head start on something. So to answer your question, being president of the fraternity, to conduct meetings and all this sort of stuff. I think it was an invaluable help to me. Yes, definitely.

KP: As a pilot, a lot of the responsibility rests on you. And it is even different in some sense from an infantry officer, because infantry officers are commanded not to spend their time shooting, and to really observe and direct. Where as a pilot you are both in a sense directing the crew, but you're also flying the airplane.

RK: Yes and you know, ... what most people probably don't think of is, that when you're on a twelve hour mission to go to Ploesti or Berlin or Hamburg or wherever it is, you're flying formation. It wasn't like the British. The British flew one at a time like a few seconds apart and they flew at night, so they did not have formation flying and they just did random scatter bombing. Whereas ... with us with the Norden bombsight, we flew in groups and the bombardier dropped bombs ... on the sign of lead bombardiers so we all dropped together. But my point is we're flying formation for twelve hours or even in isolated cases, more than that. And that's a very very trying thing to do. I mean to stay, to keep your plane in formation with the planes for twelve hours is very ... trying thing.

KP: Why was it so difficult?

RK: I mean you have to keep it right up against the other plane. You've got to make sure you don't get in the jet stream of the guy up here and there--it's very very tiring.

KP: If you were not careful what could happen?

RK: Well, you could collide with another plane.

KP: Did you ever see that?

RK: No, I never did. ... Or you could get into--you know, it was little clusters of four, and you could get in the jet stream of--not jet stream, prop ... in those days. Can you believe that? And it would flip you, you know, it would flip you. So you had to be careful that you stayed in the right area, and it was a constant drain on your eyes, your feet, your arms, and your coordination. And we even flew at night formation. Once and that's murder, because, you know, you're flying off the lights of the wings and the top. And it kind of mesmerizes you and you have to be very careful. So I guess I got off on a tangent. I'm sorry.

KP: No, no. That was a great tangent. In terms of being a pilot, one is the sheer endurance. Are there any other any other aspects of being a pilot that are striking? I have looked into cockpits of World War II planes and you really had to fly the thing. It was not like modern jet liner.

RK: No way. ... You had to fly it. Yeah, yeah. We had automatic pilots, ... and we had the link trainers which you train in for instruments, but ... [there was no] way you could hit a button and all this would happen. ... You had to fly it, and you had to synchronize the ... revolutions of the ... you had two engines out here, two props rotating out of here and you had two props rotating out of here and if they were out of sync, you had a shadow going around and you had to toggle those until they were completely in sync, otherwise you get a lot of vibration. And yeah, ... it was a full-time job. It really was.

KP: You also had to direct a crew, and how did that go?

RK: That went fine. That went fine. We get along very well. There wasn't that much direction to do, Kurt, really. ... When we were on a mission, we would have a lot of flak coming up from the ground. ... We used to sit on our ... flak jackets, because we were worried about it coming up from the bottom. And then the fighters would attack you and when I was shot down, the day I was shot down, we had lost one engine and then we lost two engines and when you're by yourself, you don't have all the firepower from all the rest of the crew. ... You're a sitting duck, and that's when the fighters really pick on you. But in a normal mission everybody is pretty busy. You know, everybody's got their own station. There's ten 50 caliber machine guns, and so you've got the guy on the top with two and the guy in the nose with two, and the tail with two, and the ball with two, and one at each waist and they're all busy. There's much directions to give them unless, you know, somebody at eleven o'clock or two o'clock or something like that.

KP: In your crew, you did not have a problem with that in a sense. You never had to assert your authority and say you are not doing your job?

RK: No, never, never.

KP: It was just assumed that people know what they were doing.

RK: Yes, yes and they did. Yes they did.

GD: Do you think part of that was, because it was like a family?

RK: Exactly.

GD: Yeah. Everybody honored each other.

RK: Everybody's watching everybody else's backside. Yes, that's right. ... These things, I'm sorry ...

KP: No, no, no, please do.

RK: Coming back from a mission the Red Cross would meet us. And they would have coffee and donuts and a shot of whiskey for each man on the crew. There were only three of us that ever drank whiskey and it doesn't matter who they were, there were only three of us. So after the first mission, I said to the rest of the guys, "Listen, when you get there, take the shot whether you drink it or not," you know. So we'd pass it around so the three of us had ten shots of whiskey. (laughs) No, big deal. Just a little aside that I thought was pretty funny. And I can remember going into Bari, Italy for example, which was a nice--a pretty good size city, and the Red Cross, God bless the Red Cross. I'm telling you, I've heard wonderful things about the Salvation Army, but the Red Cross saved my life many times. They're the ones that told me--told my parents--I have newspaper clippings where I was missing in action and the Red Cross informed my parents, about six weeks later. They got us a blanket, because the Germans took my flying jacket, everything. They got us a Red Cross parcel a week per man and on a Red Cross parcel a week per man you could subsist. But then the transportation got shot up and we were cut down to two, to four, to eight, down to 64 men a parcel a week and then the last couple of months we didn't have any parcels. But the Red Cross did a wonderful job as far as I was concerned.

KP: Did the international Red Cross ever inspect your camp?

RK: No, not to my knowledge.

KP: Not to your knowledge.

RK: No, not to my knowledge. ... The problem with the reduced number of parcels was at the end there the transportation got shot up so bad that they couldn't get the parcels in. The railroads were all shot up, you know. You couldn't get them over the train tracks. But then we were on what we called the death march, you'd see these Germans riding around on bicycles with Red Cross parcels strapped on the back. Which made us real happy, you know.

GD: You said before you were with the same crew all the way through the war, what about the plane? Did you stay with the same plane?

RK: Same plane.

GD: I have one important question, every plane had their own name?

RK: I was afraid you were going to ask me that. You know the strange thing about this, Grant, is that when we got down to Kentucky where this get together was held, we're sitting around. [It was] a very emotional time, I mean, you know, we haven't seen each other for ten or twelve years. And one guy says, "What the hell was the name of our plane?" Nobody could remember it. To this day, I couldn't tell you what it was. But you're right. They all had names, you know. Hotfire or whatever. Yeah, I was afraid you were going to ask me that. (laughts) I have no idea what it was.

KP: You mentioned that you had quite a flight to get over to Africa and Europe. You flew all the way down the coast to Brazil and then across to Africa. On this mission, how many days did it take you to get to North Africa?

RK: Overnight. You mean from West Palm Beach?

KP: Yes.

RK: ... We stayed one night in Belem, Brazil and another in Fortaleza, Brazil or vice versa or ... whichever way it was. And then from that point, we left like ... at night, like maybe ten o'clock at night, and flew across and got there the next morning.

KP: You literally did not have a chance to do more than sleep. You did not get a chance to go into town.

RK: Oh, no. The only place I went into town was, I went into Tunis a couple of nights. We went into the Casbah and that's a real thrill. Yeah, unbelievable. That's where I got initiated with, it's a drink called (Odivee?). You ever hear of it? (Odivee?) means the water of life in French, I guess. And man, it looks like water and tastes like Prestone. And they said, "Whatever you do, don't go into the Casbah." That was off limits. Well, that was all they had to say. (laughs) So we're all wondering what's this Casbah and these people and their sheets and they had to walk around in these sheets, defecating in the sheet. Just squatting down. It was, oh, it was terrible. Marakesh, the mosquitoes were so bad you couldn't get out from underneath the mosquito netting. It was just one night, thank god. And then up into Italy into Bari, I guess I was in Bari twice. That was about it.

KP: Compared to people in other branches, you got off base very little.

RK: Very, very little. Because, you never knew, as I said earlier, Kurt, you never knew whether you were going to fly depending on the weather or whether you had a mission tomorrow or not. You know, depending on a lot of things. ... So, no. We were a captive audience.

KP: On your flight across the Atlantic, did you fly as an individual plane or in a squandron?

RK: All by yourself. At about a hundred feet off the ocean.

KP: Let's say you crashed?

RK: That's a very good question.

KP: What would happen?

RK: I have no idea. I have no idea. That's a stupid answer, but I don't know what to tell you, because we were going over at night to stay low, below the radar and that's it. That's the way it was done. So we land--as I said the sun was just coming up and we could see Dakar, Africa you know on the coast. And that's the way they did it.

GD: What did you and your crew do on the way over?

RK: We prayed a lot! Well I was busy, you know, obviously you're flying low level and at night. ... So you don't see too well. You don't want to ditch the thing in the water. The rest, I guess they slept. I don't know. Probably slept. I know I would have if I'd been them, because they had absolutely nothing to do. They had nothing to do. ... There were three people that had something to do, was the pilot, the copilot, and the navigator and other than that. We had no bombs so the bombardier didn't have anything to do. It's a good thing we didn't have any bombs, because if we had bombs we probably couldn't have made that flight with the gasoline. It takes up so much more gasoline. That weight.

KP: Your plane finally reached Italy and you were assigned to a group.

RK: That's right.

KP: How many planes were in your group?

RK: I'm trying to think of that, Kurt. It was 485th Bomb Group. I don't know. I'm guessing. I don't remember now. I do remember this, by the time that I was shot down, there were only two of the original groups, crews left. That's how bad the attrition was over there. We lost planes. So this guy ... I can't think of his name now, he and I flipped a coin to see who would--you were supposed to get a rest after 25 missions in Italy. You go to the Isle of Capri. So it was a toss up, he flipped a coin. He won the toss, so he and his crew went to the Isle of Capri. I stayed and we flew two more missions I think, two or three and we were shot down. But we all survived that. He came back and you know what happened.

KP: He did not make it.

RK: They were wiped out, yes, as were most. ... The number of planes that started out and finished their missions is infinitesimal. Well you remember ... I just saw it. ... It doesn't matter. A famous plane in England that made those missions.

GD: Memphis Belle.

RK: Thank you. You've got it. So it was so unique that they made a big deal of it, you know.

KP: When you enlisted, did you know of the dangers you would face in the Air Corps? Did you know that the chances of survival were so low?

RK: ... Well, I knew it was dangerous, but ... I'd rather be up there than sloshing around in the mud.

KP: So you were still glad you were Air Corps.

RK: Oh, yes. ... It's dangerous, but I don't know how many people we killed, but it's impersonal. You don't see them, you know what I mean. Your 25-22,000 feet above them and you don't see 'em. ... You know, there's pros and cons on everything. But I'd thought I'd rather be up there than I would be on the ground.

KP: The impression I have from watching too many World War II films, while it was incredibly dangerous in the air, when you were on ground and not on a mission was actually more comfortable than let's say being in infantry. That it was as comfortable as it could get at war times. In other words you had three square meals a day, a shower, and the rest. You had a cot or a bed and that, you know, had time on your hands then.

RK: That's right. No, that's true. We were never sloshing around in the mud. Is that what you're saying?

KP: Yeah.

RK: That's true, I have a picture in there of--you might get a kick out of it. It's just one little snapshot, of a tent we operated out of ... in Italy. I've got a monkey on my arm. A (capuchin?) monkey. I had to point to everybody which one's me. But's that the point you're talking about. When we weren't flying, ... we were in tents in Italy. And we were ... on cots and the food was, you know, I still eat Spam. I love Spam till this day. And no, I have no complaints.

GD: How did you manage to keep up your morale every time going up?

RK: Well, I'll tell you, Grant, it was ... well you really didn't have a choice. I can remember the time they'd show us. They put this red ribbon across to--I can't think of the name of it. ... Maybe

it was Breslau. I know we all sat around. The pilots and all were sitting. We can't go that far. ... So when they started to unravel that red ribbon in ...

KP: Briefing.

RK: ... Briefing. Yes, man, you just died a thousand deaths. And when they came to Ploesti, which one I was on three times, man you died. You just died, but there's nothing you could do. So you go. You do it. You do it. You just do it! That's all, you had no choice.

GD: Did you ever have a crew member have a breakdown from the stress?

RK: No, no. No, we didn't.

KP: You knew your crew very well.

RK: At that time I did, yeah.

KP: What about other pilots and other crews? How well did you know them?

RK: Not very well. Not really very well. It sounds strange, doesn't it, but we really didn't know. ... You're a little knit group of yourselves, the crew. And they were dying and disappearing and new ones were coming all the time. You didn't really get a chance to know anybody. Can you understand what I'm saying? And no. The only ones we knew were the ten of us in the crew and maybe the couple of guys on the ground, that serviced our plane. But other than that, no.

KP: What about the group who serviced your plane, because you were very dependent on them.

RK: Very, very dependent on them.

KP: What was the relationship between the ground crew and the air crew?

RK: Well I think there was almost love. And I'm not trying to be smart. ... It was a lot of affection and a lot of respect. Us for them and them for us. And you're right, very dependent on those guys and they appreciated what we were going through. So, you know, it was a two-edged sword.

KP: In a sense, unless your base came under attack, your ground crew did not face the same dangers.

RK: Oh, yeah. And our base was never attacked. Nobody ever attacked anybody down there to my knowledge. Hey, I will tell you one thing. I'm sorry guys, but this is unusual. Every group has its own markings on the tail. We had this B-24 with ... big round tails. Back here. See, the big twin tails like that. Can you see the plane? [Points to a picture of a plane] I'm sorry I'm trying to get out ...

GD: Oh, yes.

RK: ... Every plane, ... every group had its own marking. ... And it was an unwritten, not a rule but an unwritten whatever, between the Luftwaffe and the U.S. Air Force that if a plane were in trouble, even though it's over Germany or Romania or Hungary or wherever. And it's really in trouble and it can not get back to its base. If it will reduce its speed and lower its wheels, the German fighters will no longer attack it, but they will escort it and make sure it doesn't get out. And they'd escort it down to a field. Which I thought was a gentlemen's way to do it. ... Well, in the group down below us, ... on the boot of Italy, was this guy who thought, he's a hot shot. He thought, "Well we'll lower the wheels and when German fighters come in, you're way ahead of me, we'll shoot them down." Which he did. And he got back. But I'll tell you, from that mission on, they had to disband that group. Because from that mission on the Luftwaffe targeted that group and annihilated it. And I think, I'm sorry, I think they had every right to do it. But isn't that stupid.

GD: I just wrote a research paper on bomber planes and I came across that story.

RK: Is that right? Is that a fact? Did you really?

GD: So it is a true story.

RK: I know it's a true story.

GD: They could not confirm it in the book.

RK: ... It happened right below me on the boot. Yeah, yeah, so they finally had to disband the group. They even changed the markings on the tail a couple of times. That didn't work ... See we were flying out of Italy in these fields ... and the German espionage, ... I'm having trouble with words today. But knowledge of ... our operations were so good, that as soon as anything like that happened, they knew what the new markings on the tail were, so that was ... an exercise in futility.

KP: The Germans only targeted that one squadron.

RK: Well they targeted them all, but they made sure that they annihilated ... [that group].

KP: In a sense, had that incident forever broken that rule over an injured plane giving up?

RK: That was over with. To my knowledge it was over with. Yes, that was the end of it.

KP: But before that, it actually worked. Do you know how the rule came about?

RK: No, I have no idea, but Goering was involved, I guess. And I don't know who else was involved. Hap Arnold. I don't know who was involved. But I thought that was a, you know,

very unusual, but gentlemenly way. If your going to have a war, you know, like the white flag and all that stuff.

KP: Was there a reciprocal understanding with German fighters?

RK: I'm not sure I understand you.

KP: In terms of let's say you shot down a German fighter over Allied air space.

RK: During a battle?

KP: During a battle or after.

RK: No, no. It's just the way it is. But this was uncalled for I thought. That's interesting that you saw that article.

KP: Your group leader, who was he? Do you remember his name?

RK: I remember the guy who was in charge in the prison camps, General (Vanaman?). As a matter of fact his name is on one of those tapes that my wife got me. But our group in Italy, it escapes me. I have no idea. I don't have a clue. Which is not unusual for me.

KP: Do you remember anything about the leadership in the group?

RK: No, because we really didn't have any touch. The only time we would have contact with him was when we're flying in a mission and we wouldn't have any contact. He's up there in the lead plane, with a lead bombardier, and a lead navigator, and us peons back here wouldn't have any reason ... I can't even think what rank he was to tell you the truth. Probably a colonel I guess, I don't know.

KP: What about your ground leadership?

RK: ... No, I wouldn't know any of them if they came and sat down here. No, the only time we would see those guys would be at four o'clock in the morning when they were giving you, "I've got news for you gentleman, today you're going to fly over Hamburg." And thought, "That's nice, that's nice."

GD: Did you have any animosity towards the leadership?

RK: No, no. They're just doing their jobs. No, not really, honestly, no.

GD: What about in failed missions? Was there ever anyone specifically blamed?

RK: Well, the only thing I can remember along that line, Grant, is that one time. There was a screw up, and I can't remember ... what the target was. But we were supposed to go in at like

22,000 feet and somehow we went in like at 19,000 feet. And I forget the circumstances, but I know it was murder. Murder. And see when ... our officers or our ground whatever would announce where we were going to go, let's say we were going to Ploesti, the Germans would know it as soon as we knew it, from their underground. Believe me, they knew as soon as we knew it. Maybe before we knew it. And so all this flak that they had on flatcars, on railroad cars, they would take upwind, because we always flew downwind over a target at about 20-21,000 feet. So if we're going to bomb this target, all they have to do is find out where the wind is blowing from. If it's blowing in this direction, they'd put all this flak upwind and this is exactly what they did. And they just set up a black wall and you'd fly through it. ... Not like the fighters who could go around, the bomber, that's it. Once you're on the track, you're on the track. But you'd fly downwind at the same altitudes almost every time and so it was a piece of cake. They'd just set this stuff up and let you fly into it. And that's what we did. So now with the stuff, I guess they go to 50-60,000 feet. I don't know how high they go anymore.

GD: I wanted to ask you, when you went up, you said that the crew and the ground crew had a special relationship. Besides that, I have also read the Liberator out of any bombers had a lot of problems when they were in flight, with their landing gears coming down improperly.

RK: No.

GD: With air tanks or what not working. Did you have any problems?

RK: No. We were told along that line by whoever that the B-24, ... the Liberator, which is what I flew, would not fly as high or as far or as fast or carry as many bombs as a B-17. But since that time I've come to question that. They were, you know, both four motor bombers. They looked different, but they were both four motor bombers ... and to my knowledge, Grant, I don't remember any problems, ... other than being shot so that it wouldn't ... like the hydraulic system was shot up. ... Then nothing is going to land with the hydraulic system shot up. But you just mean normal operations?

GD: Yes.

RK: No, no. ...

GD: On your long flights across to Romania or Berlin, I have read that sometimes you flew sometimes 50 feet off the ground to avoid RADAR.

RK: The only one to my knowledge that was like that was one of the Ploesti raids. They did that. The first Ploesti raid was low flying. ... But other than that, no. We always flew as I said 20-22,000 feet or something like that.

GD: So, you never saw any responses from any of the villagers or the farmers when you were going over?

RK: Only when they captured me and took me down the road. No, no. ... To answer you. I'm sorry. No, I never did, no. And as I say, Grant, the pilot's not really looking down. He's looking at the adjacent wing that he is flying off of. So the pilot and the copilot are really not very observing as far as ground or bomb targeting or whatever. No, and a lot of times it would be overcast. You couldn't see, anyway.

KP: You in a sense are very busy in flying a plane. What were some of your scariest experiences in combat or just in general flight?

RK: Well the one I told you about where the bomb came up through ... and blew out. And another time when I ran out of gas. Well, I'll tell you, you know the Ploesti raids, I keep coming back to that. That was just worse than the others. They were all nasty, but Berlin was bad. But Ploesti, they must have had a lot of flak cars or something they could put in there, because it was like absolutely flying into a black wall. And as I remember the flak used to come in ... puffs of three or four. I forget. Three I think it was. And I can remember one time you'd see the puff. (Pong?), two, and you felt the third puff would be, you know. One. Two and the third was going to, well it obviously didn't. But I've taken a plane back lots of times with lots of holes in it, through the bottom. As I said, we sat on our flak vests. It was all pretty hairy, to tell you the truth.

KP: What was your reaction to your first mission? Where was your first mission to?

RK: I think the first mission I had, fortunately was to one of the submarine docks in Toulon, France, I think. So I got my feet wet, you know, with a relatively, what we used to call a milk run.

KP: Why was that viewed as the milk run?

RK: Well there is little enemy activity, flak, or fighters. But when you got deep into Germany or you got in Romania, that's where it got hairy.

KP: You flew your first mission in 1943?

RK: ... No. ... I would guess, probably January of 1944, yeah.

KP: How long were you able to stay flying? When were you captured?

RK: I'm not sure I understand you.

KP: When were you shot down and captured by the Germans?

RK: You mean, ... oh what month? May.

KP: May of '44.

RK: '44, yeah.

KP: And at that point, in those several months almost the entire original squadron had been shot down, killed, or captured.

RK: That's true, that's true.

KP: Which is not a long period of time.

RK: No, it [was] four months, maybe, yeah. So yeah, I was shot down in May and released in April, so it was eleven, you know, eleven months in the camp.

KP: You were flying in these large formations. How much discretion did you have?

RK: You had none, you had none. ... On days that we weren't flying, maybe you had two missions or something in a row or whatever, you weren't scheduled to fly. But other guys were and you'd be sitting there on the base of your tent. I was going to show you that picture. That tent and you'd watch these planes go over and I'm not exaggerating. The sky would be black. Thousands. I don't know if you [know] more about it that I do, Grant, because you've read a lot of this stuff. I would guess a couple thousand planes at least. Massive formations. They would come all the way up from down the bottom of the boot and pick up groups as they came up, you know. Add more on to them. It was awesome is what it was, awesome.

KP: But what happened if your plane broke formation, because your plane was shot up? What would happen? In a sense you are part of a large formation and if your plane is crippled.

RK: In the time that happened where the bomb came up through my plane. We had just dropped the bombs and so we ... were heading back towards Italy. Well ... in a B-24, you can't really stay in formation and maintain altitude with three engines. It's very tough on the remaining three. So, I cut across the hypotenuse or whatever you call it, to try and meet the group going back. And ... that's what I did. You know you just have to do the best you can to get back by yourself, because you're probably going to have a problem staying with the group, depending on how bad the damage is obviously.

KP: What did you learn over your the course of your missions? Did you learn things they didn't teach you in school, in terms of flying these long missions?

RK: Oh yeah! ...

KP: What skills did you learn? How crucial were they to survival?

RK: Well, you know, first of all, to fly a plane that big, because the planes we used in training were just pipers or cessnas or (valtese?) or whatever. And to fly in formation. And to have the responsibility of nine other guys under you. And try to maintain ... your behavior so that they respect you and will listen to you if push comes to shove which is fortunately ... the way it turned

out. Far as any other basic skills, no, because you really learn, I think, you learn more skills in flying, in training than you do. Because when you are flying a bomber, big, at that time, big--a 110 feet across and 66 feet long. You're flying a plane that big, ... it's almost like driving a truck. You can't go over like a 30 degree bank and you obviously can't do (emelmens?) and spins and stalls and all that, which you can do--which is the fun of flying ... in a small plane. So there's really not much to learn up there. You just plod through. That's what you do. You're a truck driver off the ground.

KP: What about in terms of releasing your bombs?

RK: I had nothing to do with that.

KP: Did your bombardier ever release them early?

RK: No, he didn't. I don't think so, Kurt, for the reason that, this is the guy who I told you drank himself to death. The lead bombardier with the group commander and the lead navigator and all the brasses up--a lot of the brasses up there.

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO----------
KP: This continues the interview with Mr. Robert C. King in Villanova, Pennsylvania on November 30, 1994 with Kurt Piehler and

GD: Grant Dietrich.

KP: Before the side cut off, I was asking you about why you could not drop your bombs early.

RK: Thank you. ... The lead bombardier in the lead plane when he dropped his bombs he also dropped a flare which was a signal to the rest to drop your bombs at the same time, because at that point we're going over an industrial complex of some sorts. So that's the way that worked. ... Our individual bombardier did not really use the bomb site and drop his bombs from his reading. He dropped it on the key from the lead plane. Always!

KP: So your plane did not have a Norden bomb site?

RK: Yes it did. Every plane had one.

KP: But how much did you know?

RK: I knew nothing. I still do. Nothing. I wouldn't know a Norden bomb site if it was ... Nothing.

KP: How much would you know about your mission and targets exactly?

RK: Very, very little. We wouldn't know anything until, I told you, that briefing at four o'clock in the morning and they'd say we're going to fly to. All they would tell us would be, as I recall,

that you're going to fly, for example, to ... Wiener Neustadt. Wiener Neustadt was the Messerschmidt factories. ... Well if we're going to Wiener Neustadt, we knew that that's what we were going to be bombing the Messerschmidt factories. But all we in essence would really know is we're going to Wiener Neustadt or Ploesti or Hamburg or Berlin or whatever. That's all. We didn't know, if they were making tires, if that's what you're saying, isn't it?

KP: Yes.

RK: No, no. ... All we would know is the name of the city.

KP: And in a sense you would not even determine where you dropped your bombs.

RK: That's true.

KP: It was the group and group leader.

RK: That's right.

KP: On any of your missions did your group leader's plane got shot down?

RK: Not to my knowledge. Surprising isn't it. Not to my knowledge.

KP: Because it sounds like if the group leader was shot down then it would cause a real problem.

RK: Then it's hodge-podge. Yes. No, no, strange. Not to my knowledge. Unless, excuse me, ... unless that was what happened on that mission I told you we went in at like 2000 below what we were supposed to go in. Now maybe conceivably. That news wouldn't filter back to us. Another group. I'm sorry, Kurt.

KP: No, that's fine. When would you encounter flak? When would you encounter enemy fighters? Would you only encounter them when you actually got over the city?

RK: No, no, no. The longer the war lasted, of course, I wasn't there for the last year, but at that point, in those four months, the longer we went into those four months, the less opposition you had, because we were gradually ... establishing air superiority. And then we'd have fighters, P-47s, P-38s, P-51s, escort us as far as they could. And then at a ... certain point they couldn't because of gasoline. They'd have to peal and come back. And that's when the fighters would come at us, obviously. But the flak, we wouldn't run into flak all the time. It would be as I told you. Upwind from the designated targets. But it was fierce, yeah, it was fierce. But, you know, I mean you wouldn't see flak all the way across France or Yugoslavia or something like that. You'd see it when you got to the target. But the fighters, that was a different thing.

KP: What was worse, flak or enemy fighters?

RK: It's like asking a guy, "You want to be hung or shot?" It doesn't make a heck of a lot of difference. (laughs)

KP: Both were just as feared?

RK: Really. Well you see, ... even today. I mean we were flying at like, it sounds archaic, well it was. We're flying at probably 240 miles an hour. And the fighters were maybe going 400 miles, but we're going in different directions. I mean at that time, if you saw a dot, you know, and shwosh and he's black. I can't imagine what it's like today with the speeds they're going at. But the speeds were, you know, when your going in opposite directions were unbelievable. ... Our cruising speed was about 240. We'd land at 120. And stall out about 110, 120.

KP: You did have some weaponry to deal with fighters, at least.

RK: Yes, we had ten 50 caliber machine guns.

KP: Did your crew ever shoot down an enemy fighter?

RK: Not to my knowledge. I hope they did, but you know again. ... I think if they had they would have screamed and hollered. No, I don't think they ever did. I really don't think they did. Which is not uncommon. I [am] sure that most of them never did, because to get a hit and get a kill is, you know, it's something to rave about. I don't think those guys ever did. They tried like hell, but I don't think they did.

KP: You mentioned that your bombardier, on your crew, drank himself to death.

RK: Yes, unfortunately.

KP: Do you know why? Do you think it was anything related to the war?

RK: No, I don't think it was anything to do with the war. ... It had nothing to do with that.

KP: During the break just recently you showed a picture of the tent you lived in and just to sort of get this on the record. You mentioned that while you were very close to the crew, there were some differences between officers and the enlisted. And one was you lived in different places.

RK: That's true.

KP: Were there any other differences? Did you eat separately?

RK: ... Yes, and I'll tell you another thing which worked to our disadvantage, was that when I was in the prison camp ... it was the second one, ... in Moosburg. See by the Geneva Conference, ... the officers are not allowed to work, .. unfortunately. ... The enlisted men are allowed to work. So near the end, ... in March-April of '45, when things are really bad and we're really starving. We're down to nothing much. The enlisted men were allowed to go out in the fields and dig

potatoes. So you know, if I was out there digging potatoes, I might eat one now and then, you know? But we were not allowed to do that and I'm not saying, "God bless them," but we were not allowed by the Geneva Conference to do that.
And so when we were liberated on April 29, as I said and they came in to start making arrangements for us to get out of there, to send us home, they had no idea how many there were of us. There were, I believe, there's no way for me to count, I would believe there were over 100,000 of us in this camp. Because we had been filtered down from camps that had been overrun, like the one I was in at Sagan. So this was a melting pot. The Australians were in one, the Indians in another, an so on. ... And I was taken out of the camp for five days, before they could get around to us. So those five days, you know, we're digging around for potatoes and whatever to survive. And from there they took us to Reims, France for delousing.

And then I went to Camp Lucky Strike in France for the rehabilitation. ... The first few guys that went in there, I was told and I believe this, they felt so sorry for us, you know we were hungry, and skinny, and all that good stuff, that they let them eat. You know ... "Here, come on and have some." ... Well they tell me a lot of people died from that. So by the time I got there, which was like a week or ten days later, we were not allowed to have any white bread, we were not allowed to have any salt on our food, nor were we allowed to have any seconds and that was for our own protection. So from there I got on a ship and went to Southampton and came back to New York. ... I guess our stomach just wasn't ready for that stuff, you know.

KP: One thing that struck me is that when you flew over to Africa, you flew solo and if you crashed you really did not have much guidance regarding what to do.

RK: That's right, yeah.

KP: What were the instructions given to you in case you were shot down?

RK: I don't want to seem stupid, but I don't remember. I don't think there were any. You're just going to take off, you know, you get behind this plane on the taxi strip and when he takes off, then 60 seconds later you take off. I'm sure the navigator must've had ... some bearings and sightings and all that stuff to go on. I'm sure he did. He did, but I didn't. All I had to do was to fly at 100 feet off the water at a certain direction and then if the navigator said, "Boss, let's go--change it five degrees this way," then I would do it, you know. But, ... I didn't have a clue.

KP: Well the reason I asked about the instructions you received regarding the possibility of being shot down, I believe it was British pilots had in sense a survival pack.

RK: In what sense?

KP: Did you have a similar pack with currency?

RK: Yes, right, yes.

KP: But you were never given any instructions?

RK: No, just like the parachute. Just like the parachute.

KP: Actually in fact maybe you should recount that story, because we did not have that one on tape. Earlier before we started the interview you mentioned everyone was issued a parachute, but there was no instruction.

RK: None. The only instructions were don't ... open the chute until you figure [you're around] 5000 feet off the ground, because it's cold up there, you guys know that, subfreezing cold. Bitter, bitter cold up at twenty some thousand feet. There's very little oxygen. We used to put our oxygen masks on at 10,000 feet so you could imagine what it's like at 22,000. So for the cold, for the lack of oxygen, and the German fighters. They'd said the German fighters if you're swinging down on a parachute like a target in a shooting gallery. So for that reason, you don't pull your chute until about 5000 feet. And we had these chest packs that the ring you pull out and as I said, I thought there'd be nylon cords or something to release the parachute. Well it was nothing. So I'm looking at this ring and I'm figuring, "Well this is interesting, isn't it?" And so, obviously, it grabbed and when it grabbed, you know, you felt a pretty good pull, because you've been falling. I know you reach a terminal velocity, but nevertheless, it gave you a pretty good jolt. And so that was the story about the parachute.

KP: You had been involved in a mission to Vienna.

RK: That's true. We had dropped the bombs and were on the way home.

KP: And you were shot down over what is now Austria?

RK: That's right. Right outside of Vienna. Yeah.

KP: And you had mentioned earlier that in the Air Corps the war was very different. Unlike the infantry, you really did not see the enemy.

RK: Very impersonal. It was very personal then. Yes.

KP: What was going through your mind? Do you have any sense of what would happen?

RK: Well, you know, ... I was afraid, obviously and I could see as I'm floating down, I could see these people coming out from town following the flight of my chute. And, as I said, I tried to get the chute off and jump to one side or another, because I saw this ME-109 coming at me directly and then he came to me and went straight up in the air and I thought he was going to shoot me, but he was obviously just marking me for the people who were coming out from town. So I ran through the wheat field to try get away and that was when the electric flying ... shoes came off and I'm running through this wheat field with my bare feet, you know, scared to death. So I did what Little Orphan Annie did. I back tracked four or five steps and then jumped off my path and decided to curl up in a little ball and I was there--oh a long time--maybe five minutes. (laughs) And they got me and that is when it all started.

KP: Was your plane shoot down by fighters or flak?

RK: It was shot down primarily, because of flak. They caught one engine and I had to ... feather it. And then as I tell you with one engine out you have trouble staying, so I fell back. And then the fighters got the second engine. And with two engines out and the plane--the wing's on fire and that's what scared me. Because I have seen on occasions where a plane off in the distance would be on fire and all of a sudden there would be an explosion and would be like you vaporize. You know, ... hardly any pieces left. So I figured that's the time. Let's take this big step. ... So I put it on automatic pilot and gave orders to the crew to start getting the ball turret gunner out, you know, "Hey pass to Ken, we've got a problem." And get everybody in and so we all jumped out and then I jumped out.

KP: So you put your plane on automatic pilot.

RK: As I was falling, you know free falling, I could see that going off in the distance. It was still flying when I saw it last.
KP: Do you think it had much life, the plane.

RK: No, no. ... I'm sure it exploded. Because it was only a matter of time until the flames got to the gas tanks.

KP: Okay. In a sense you were very lucky.

RK: Oh, baby. Really. Extremely lucky.

KP: It's been a long time ago, but it must have run through your mind. As you said, a lot of different planes go down.

RK: Yes, yes it does. You don't forget it, yeah.

KP: How scary was it?

RK: Very scary, very scary. ... But like I was saying to you guys, you know, you'd do the same thing were you in that position. You'd be surprised what you do when you have to do it. Like you know, seeing all those bombay doors and looking out at four miles down there and you just do it. That's all, you just do it. So you do what you have to do.

KP: You were not armed when you landed in Austria either?

RK: No.

KP: And you do not have your shoes.

RK: That's right. I've got plenty of nothing.

KP: And you had said you were trying to remember some of the German you had learned at Rutgers.

RK: That's right. In Rutgers, Professor Bierschmitt. ... I said, "Ich weiss nicht was alles bedeuteh dass ich so traurig bin." "I don't understand why I'm so sad" or something. ... And "I'm your friend" and you know "Help me" and "I'll come back and." Well, you know, it was an exercise in futility that was.

KP: You said that the civilians from town were harsh to you.

RK: Yeah, and I don't blame them, really. I mean, the Burgermeister puts a gun in my back and says, "March." And we go down this country road to the little town where that outhouse was that I told you I was in. And the people are lined on each side of this [road], well not lined like a parade, but there's people on each side of this little country road. And you know, they're calling me names and throwing rocks and spitting at me and you know I'm thinking to myself, even then I'm thinking to myself, you know, I might have killed their brother or father or who knows what. I can understand that. So it wasn't anything personal. Obviously that's what I said, a very impersonal war up there.

KP: You mentioned you were put in isolation in this latrine, this concrete structure with just tiny slits.

RK: That's right.

KP: But you did also encounter someone who passed you some cigarettes.

RK: Yeah, they passed me three cigarettes and a pack of matches through this slot in the door over my eye, higher than my head. Yeah, I often wondered about that.

KP: Who was guarding you when you were in the town? You mentioned the Burgermeister was the one who brought you in?

RK: Oh well then ... the Luftwaffe and the Gestapo, I don't know, maybe the Gestapo too. There were a lot of German soldiers around. ... And they threw me on the back of this ... open truck with a wood burning stove, and ... with people, I didn't know. ...

KP: Other pilots?

RK: I don't have any idea who's on that truck, because I never saw them again after I got off that truck.

KP: Did they speak English?

RK: They were all ...

KP: Americans.

RK: Yeah, they were fish like me. ...

KP: You said you were headed towards East Germany.

RK: Right, Sagan, yeah. Well, before I got there though, they put me in ... solitary. And I had a feeling and I'm trying to recall what city that was. ... You see we really didn't have a tour. I really don't know where the hell I was most of the time. But, I was in there for about eight, nine days. And as I'd told you, they told me who my father and mother were and all that stuff. It was scary is what it was.

KP: What did you think when they told you all this information?

RK: ... Yeah, they'd say it like this. "Well look, Kurt, we know that you mother's name is Anna, your father's name is John, your copilot is Bob Peterson and all this and you graduated from Rutgers in 1942 and your parked on Hardstand number 46, at Spinazola, Italy. All we want to know some questions about the Norden bomb site." Well I didn't know anything anyway.

KP: Which must of frustrated them even more.

RK: Well, I think it did. I'll say this, they threatened me, but they never did any violence to me.

KP: What would they threaten you with?

RK: Oh, nice stuff, like, hell, with a gun. Deprivation, food, and whatever. All kinds of nice stuff. But they never did.

KP: It was always just a threat.

RK: That's all it was. Because the guy would be talking just like we're talking, with all the idioms and everything else. I mean he spoke English as well as we do, which made it kind of scary. Really, it made it scary. When this guy, sitting here in his Luftwaffe outfit, is talking to me ... like your talking. But they had a tremendous espionage system. They really did. But they were hung up. Because that's when the Norden bomb site was just first started.

KP: I've read that it was chained to the bombardier's arm.

RK: Could be. I don't know. ...

GD: When did you finally meet up with your crew? Did you meet up with them while you were in captivity at all?

RK: Never, never! We didn't meet up ... together until I showed you that picture we had down in Kentucky, that was like fifteen years. We would correspond. ... Well I have a problem, my wife, she is handicapped. And it was tough for me to get away. I was away enough with J & J. I was doing a lot of traveling. So this guy got together and did all the leg work. God bless him. And he made arrangements at, reservations at this lovely hotel down ... in Louisville and just for our crew, just for the ten of us. ... No big deal, because I didn't know anybody in the group. ... Just our crew and when I got off the plane in Louisville, there was a limo there to take me to this motel in Louisville and on the sign, you know they have along the high way "Welcome to crew 38 of the ... 485th Bomb Group." Well I thought "Isn't that nice." There was only eight of us who made it. "Isn't that nice." And they sent a crew over from Louisville, a television crew for the nightly news and they interviewed us around the pool. And we were on the news that night for, you know, for 30 seconds or so which I thought "Yeah, isn't that nice?"

GD: So that was the first time you saw your crew since you jumped out of the plane.

RK: That's true. Except that two of them had stopped in here on trips. Bob Peterson came down from Jamestown and Ray Balcerzak came down from Buffalo. But not as a group. No.

GD: Were you worried about what had happened to them while you were in captivity?

RK: Yeah, sure. Oh, sure.

KP: Well, you didn't even know if they were alive.

RK: No, I had no idea. That was a thing that the Germans made a point of to the best of their ability. They would separate you. Just anything to put a zinger in there, you know. So, no.

KP: Did you know about the Geneva Convention?

RK: Not that much. Really, not that much. I didn't know much of anything at that time. (laughs)

KP: But it sounds like the Geneva Convention was something you start to learn when you become a prisoner.

RK: That's exactly right. Because you're now involved with it. Your involved with the Red Cross parcel a week. The Red Cross parcel had Canadian biscuits. It had Spam. It had klim, which is powered milk, that's milk spelled backwards, that was their trade name. And it had D-bars, chocolate bars, a bar rather. And I think it had oatmeal or some sort of cereal. And it had, I think it had some fruit, canned fruit. And the way it was set up, whatever it was, it was supposed to maintain, sustain a person for a week. And then the Germans would give us (collarabe?), which is like a cabbage, once in a while and a little soup. And I found a mouse in my soup. I found a horse's ... tooth in my soup. But I'll tell you, you'd eat anything. We had congealed blood in a casing they gave us. We ate that, because we were starving to death. And then the parcels got cut as I told you, because of the transportation. ... Down to ... gradually 64 men to a parcel a week, which is ridiculous. And then to no parcels for the last few months, because the

transportation. The rail lines were all shot up and ... the Red Cross couldn't get them in. It wasn't their fault. So that was that.

KP: What was your first prison camp like? You were transported there from solitary. How big was it roughly?

RK: Oh, it was probably the size of a football field, with the barbed wire and the sentry boxes. I have a guy who drew some pictures if you'd like to see them.

KP: Oh yeah. You mention that you once had a letter or you can't find a letter. They came to the camp.

RK: They distributed through the barracks, our barracks. Giving one to every flying officer in there, American flying officer. And in essence ... what the letter said, it wasn't necessarily a letter, it was like a bulletin. It said what they wanted us to do was to ... join the Luftwaffe, to fight our common enemy from the East ... in exchange for amnesty. ... But nobody did. But that's how bad it was. Well, then we got another thing ... these things are coming back to me now, where Hitler had ordered the Wehrmacht to get rid of all prisoners of war, because it was a tremendous drag, you could imagine, of manpower just to watch us. But the Wehrmacht was not as crazy. He was nuts at this time. This is like March, I guess, of '45. And he was nuts. And so Wehrmacht wouldn't do it. But he had issued an order for them to exterminate all prisoners of war, because of the tremendous drain on their resources. Not food, because they weren't giving us any food, but manpower. But they didn't do it. Thank God!

KP: When you say they did this order, how threatened did you feel as a prisoner?

RK: Very threatened, because ... they would shoot you if you straggled ... on that "death march." If you were a straggler--they'd shoot the stragglers. And we slept in the ice and the snow in the fields. And guys were starving and freezing. And we were strafed once by our own planes, which was not their fault that they saw a formation in Germany. And so we were strafed. And it was a bad scene. It was a bad scene.

KP: We hear a lot about the Bataan Death March and the brutality. I have only read one or two accounts about this long march of American P.O.W.s in Germany. How many P.O.W.s did not make it?

RK: I wouldn't have any idea Kurt because, you know. A lot.

KP: You would say stragglers would get shot.

RK: Stragglers would get shot. And you know we were freezing to death and we didn't have any clothes really. And we had no food, except what they would [give us]. Again we were sleeping out in fields in snow up to your hips. It's a ... wonder that as many made it as did make it. It's a real miracle.

KP: And where did the march begin and where did it end?

RK: Well it began at ... Sagan. It didn't go all the way to Moosburg. ... We were on the road for about a week and where we picked up these 14-8 boxcars, I don't know. But, they put us on these 14-8 boxcars and they took us down to Moosburg. So that was like three days, two or three days, three days I guess. So I don't know how far we walked or where we walked to, but it was at least a week. And then we got on these boxcars and wound up at Moosburg.

KP: What month?

RK: I would say February, probably. Yeah. ... It's funny, you know that stuff, it gets kind of confused after awhile.

KP: Going back, I want to talk a bit more about the march when you got to Moosburg. Going back to you first camp, in size wise it was not very large. In the terms of the number of men, how many men were in the entire camp roughly and how many men were in your barracks, just ballpark figures.

RK: Well probably in the barracks, 60. And there were probably, maybe twenty barracks.

KP: So it's a fairly large group.

RK: Yeah, yeah. With a walking area that you walked around in and we were ... digging a tunnel and we had a radio ... that was being made miraculously by somebody who's a lot smarter than I was. But the Germans, they had tunnels under all the barracks and they would crawl under the barracks and listen, you know, listen. So we had spies out all over. Whenever this guy brought out his little homemade crystal set or whatever it was, to listen to the BBC news at whatever time it was, I can't remember eight o'clock or what. We would have spies out or sentries out to make sure we knew where every one of their sentries was. Because if they would have caught this, you know, there would have been all kinds of repercussions. But just like every other group, there's good guys and there's bad guys. There was some nice ... German guard, ... we called him ... Popeye. And you know, he couldn't have been nicer. But most of them were sadistic and then at end at Moosburg, where we were finally liberated from, we were in the center of a woods, a clearing. And all around us in the woods were the Gestapo and they were fanatical just to the very end. When the tanks came in to liberate us, there were two guys that were killed, two American prisoners of war. They were killed as we were liberated, because of crossfire from the Gestapo and the tanks. So that morning, General Vanaman had told us ... he must have known somehow. Probably, well, it was getting obvious because the guns were getting closer ... "that we may be liberated today. I don't want anybody to get up off the floor. Stay on the floor. Stay on the floor." Well, you know, guys had been in there a long time and they start to lose their little of bit of balance and when the tank, I can still see that tank coming through that gate, just like something like King Kong coming through the wall. You know, vroom! Guys were running out of barracks. Jumping on the tanks to ride it, you know. It's tragic that they go through all this, and be killed on the day that we were liberated. Yeah, but it happened.

KP: The Gestapo fought to the end.

RK: They fought to the very end. They were fanatical.

KP: Which is surprising, because it's very late. When you were liberated the war was practically over.

RK: Hitler killed himself the next day. 30th, April 30th. But those guys were fanatics, you know. So that's right, it was very late. I think, May 7 wasn't it, May 7, yeah.

KP: In your first camp, who was the commandant?

RK: I had no [idea] ... I'll tell you something.

KP: And the senior P.O.W.?

RK: I think it was General Vanaman.

KP: In your first camp.

RK: I guess so. ... I'm guessing that. I don't know.

KP: Yes.

RK: We had an escape. An attempted escape. Captain (Atkinson?) was in with me. In my little quadrangle of eight ... bunks. And the bugs and stuff would eat you alive. ... And whatever you had to put over your hands and neck and your head, because the bugs would eat you alive. And these ticks that we had. Well he tried to escape in a honey wagon. Did you ever hear of a honey wagon? A honey wagon is when you have an outhouse. And a honey wagon is the wagon that comes by and sucks all this excreta into the tank and then hauls it away. He tried to ride out in this tank up to here. And I don't know one guy in the whole time I was here who escaped successfully. None, none, none. So, I've lost my train of thought ...

KP: Did he make it though?

RK: No, nobody.

KP: What happened to him?

RK: ... They caught him. They got him going out the gate. ... They were smart, man. You know, you've got to give them credit. They're smart. They didn't miss a trick. No, they opened ... the lid. It has a cap on the top that you open up to put the hose and stuff in. And there he was, you know, he's trying to keep his head above the excretion. ...

KP: What happened to him?

RK: That's the last we saw of him. I don't think they killed him. I don't know. I never heard. What I was going to tell you, we had the camp next to us. There were 60 British escaped. I think the movie was the Great Escape and they caught them. And they brought them all back. And they brought us out. And they brought Heinrich Himmler down from Berlin. I'll never forget this. They brought Heinrich Himmler down. Now we were pretty weak. We had about enough strength ... to stand up and be counted twice a day. And they'd come by with their guns and dogs, and they'd count us. But this day they took the 60 guys that had escaped, tried to escape. They got them all again, they got them all. And he lined them all up against a wall in front of us and shot every other one. They shot 30 of the guys right in front of us. As an obvious deterrent for further attempts to escape. And I'll tell you, it was very effective. I laugh at it now, but it was tragic.

KP: You saw a mass execution.

RK: Oh yeah, yeah. Himmler ... and his black leather coat.

GD: Did you personally see Himmler?

RK: Yeah, yeah. I sure did. We all did.

KP: What time of year was this? Was it wintertime?

RK: Yes it was wintertime. I don't know what month it was, Kurt.

GD: What kind of feeling did you get when you saw Himmler?

RK: Anger, just complete anger. He and Goebbels, Goering, and Himmler and Hitler, von Ribbentrop and all those. They're nothing, but hatred, absolute hatred.

KP: Your guards were Wehrmacht.

RK: That's correct. That's right. And at the end it was the old Volksstrum, the old folks. When they didn't have enough they got the conscripted civilians.

KP: But you saw them after the Gestapo and SS and in a sense they were feared by ...

RK: The Wehrmacht?

KP: No, the SS and the Gestapo.

RK: Well they were feared by the Wehrmacht too. They were afraid to death of them. Yes, but they were fanatical. ...

KP: From your first camp, you mentioned you did not work.

RK: Never did. We never did till we were liberated.

KP: Was your first camp, was it simply American P.O.W.s or were there others?

RK: Yes, that's all. That was all the way through, that's all it was. If there were other nationalities, they were in a barbed wired compound adjacent to ours.

KP: Did you have any Jewish P.O.W.s in your camp?

RK: Yes, yes.

KP: What was their treatment?

RK: Well their treatment was not that good, because ... well one of them, A.B. (Goldstein?) from New York. He was a bombardier, unfortunately and they were trying to find out the Norden bomb site and Arnie (Goldstein?), being a bombardier, he had a tough time. He barely survived ... that time ... I told you I was in solitary.

KP: He was put in solitary for much longer time.

RK: Everybody was to my knowledge, including myself. ... And he had a tough time. He survived it.

KP: But he was beaten up.

RK: He was beaten up, yes he was beaten up.

KP: In the camp itself, after interrogation, how much brutality? Would people be roughed up?

RK: Not really. No. But if you stood at a window during an air raid, we had these wooden shutters, ... they were afraid we were going to signal with a mirror. ... For crying out loud. Come on, give me a break. But if you stood in front of a window, they'd shoot you during an air raid. I've seen that. And we also had a light at the end of the barracks. A red bulb. Theoretically if someone was really sick, you'd turn that red bulb on and medical care would be [there]. But it never was. The guy died of emphysema or lung disease, whatever it was right there in the barracks. Nobody ever came. ... Well the water and the light. This is at Moosburg at the end. Where it was really getting crappy. You had maybe have two spigots of water for a couple of hundred guys, you know. And outhouses. Well nobody had to move your bowels much, because ... you weren't eating. If you went once a week, ... that was something. But yeah, these things are coming back to me.

GD: Did you make any special acquaintances or any memorable acquaintances while you were there?

RK: Not really, Grant, no. You mean lasting ones to this day?

GD: No, not lasting but where ...

KP: Did you have a comrade?

RK: Yes, yes, yes, Eddie Gorman. I went up to see him in Syracuse. I've got to tell you. This isn't really that bad. We all had dysentery. And at the end of that march, I told you they put in these 48 boxcars. Well we've all got dysentery. If you want to delete this. Well let me tell you what it is and then you can tell me, "We probably don't need that."

KP: Yes ... I've had enough. At the first camp, since you were not working what would you do all day?

RK: You'd walk.

KP: There's not a lot of room to walk around.

RK: No, you'd walk around the perimeter. You'd walk around the perimeter. And there were smokes in that parcel too, I told you about. We'd smoke. And actually it wasn't too bad food wise, nutrition wise there, because we were getting a parcel a week. ... A parcel ... per person per week. But boredom, my God, the mighty boredom! It'll drive you crazy. And then we'd listen to that news, that secret news, every night. There wasn't a hell of a lot going on.

KP: Did you have anything to read?

RK: No, no, nothing to read. Well, we had no light either, you know. But even in the daylight, no, we had nothing to read.

KP: What about cards?

RK: No, we didn't have anything. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Neatta.

KP: So you spent a lot of time walking and talking.

RK: Walking and talking, right, right. Yeah, and trying to stay warm.

KP: It sounds also striking that during you missions you had this constant activity in a sense. You were really at your fullest in terms of using all your senses.

RK: That's true.

KP: What was it like to just spend all that time sitting around?

RK: It was like someone cut your legs out from under you. You know, it was like everything stopped. Well you know, we're all scared for one thing. You know, scared. And we're hungry and we're scared. And so what are we going to do. We walked just like they do in prisons. Walk or like the lions do in the cage, walk and you walk and you walk. And you talk. And so that's about all there was. There were no books. There were no cards.

KP: Were there any enlisted men in your prison?

RK: No, no.

KP: So you were all strictly officers.

RK: ... Flying officers only in that group in that camp, yes.

KP: You must at times have talked about various missions or close calls. Are any of those stories memorable?

RK: Well, they all run together. I'll tell what we spent a lot a of time doing. I did have a ... I said we didn't have anything to write. I had a card that I made up. You know, you think that Freud tells you that sex is the prime mover. It's not true. It really is not. And we commented on this. And we'd lay there in the barracks at night and talk, talk, talk. After the first week or so, you didn't hear talk about girls or anything. All we talked about is food. I made a list and I have it somewhere. I'm not going to bore you with trying to find it. I have a list there of, you know, like a hundred things. Peanut butter milkshake. Tasty Cakes. You know, all this good stuff. And that's all we talked about was food. ... And where we were going to eat when we got out of here, if we ever got out. And sex. Really surprised the hell out of me. It became ... a low second.

KP: What about religious services? Did you go during the war both before you were shot down and afterwards?

RK: No.

KP: Even on base?

RK: No, I'm ashamed to tell you, I didn't. And I'll tell you attendance wasn't very good either.

KP: Even in prison camp where you had time.

RK: We didn't have any.

KP: You didn't have any chapel or chaplains?

RK: Oh no, no. ... I mean we're talking about bleak nothing.

KP: You had access to information in many ways you were fortunate to have better information than many of the Germans.

RK: From the BBC?

KP: From the BBC and how the war was actually going.

RK: Well I shouldn't have said early, because I only remember that, like from the last three months or so. When things really started getting interesting. Like General Zhukhov is now at whatever he is, and Patton is so and so, and Montgomery is here. And you could just picture how they were closing in and in. And it was really exciting, because the Germans wouldn't tell you any of that stuff, obviously. Maybe they didn't even know it. Unless they'd have BBC on.

KP: What were your thoughts about, the war was ending, but in many ways your conditions were getting worse.

RK: Oh, there's no question they were deteriorating completely.

KP: And when would you notice the deterioration? Would the food stop first?

RK: Well the food was our prime concern. And, you know, the guards never left. I mean you'd think they sneak off in the middle of the night when the ... end was so ... imminent. But they never did. They stayed there 'till the bitter end.

KP: What about the turnover in guards? Did you have different types of guards?

RK: You mean ...

KP: The actual personnel. Did they become older?

RK: No, no, no. I see what you're saying. No, they didn't change that much. No. ... Other than the Gestapo, they seemed to get a lot more pleasant though around the last month because, you know. ... Although there was nothing they could do for us, but at least they weren't that arrogant, arrogant, arrogant thing they were in the beginning. Oh, my God were they arrogant. Arrogant is the word, I think.

KP: Is there anything from your first camp that you remember, in terms of the guards. It seems that food was the major concern.

RK: Oh food. Well yeah, food was the primal.

KP: That Red Cross package was crucial.

RK: ... Yeah, and when I told you about the (collarabe?) we'd get once and a while. And we'd get a little bowl of porridge once in a while and some soup. That's were I saw the horse's tooth

and the mouse. But, that was about all they supplied us. The rest came from the Red Cross. And then when the Red Cross stopped, you know, ... we were in deep trouble.

----------END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE----------

KP: When you were told to leave your first prison camp in March, what did you think of this? It sounds like a simple question, but where did you think you might be going?

RK: We had no idea. It's dark. It's like two o'clock in the morning. We have no clothes. ... Things wrapped around our feet to keep us warm. And off we go, you know, just down through the snow, down this path. ... And we don't know where we're going.

KP: How many people died in your camp?

RK: No, I wouldn't say a lot. No.

KP: How was the medical care?

RK: Practically non-existent. As far as I'm concerned it was non- existent. And dental care. (laughs) Don't bother me, you know. Really I'm serious.

KP: Yes. If you were all pilots you would not have any doctors with you.

RK: No, no.

KP: Doctors taken prisoners.

RK: Flight surgeons, no. ... They never flew on a mission to my knowledge. They shouldn't have anyway. I don't think.

KP: Whereas in the army there is a possibility that some medical people would be prisoners.

RK: Right, medical corpsmen, yeah. ...

KP: And you go on this long march, did you encounter any German civilians during this long march.

RK: Yeah, it was sort of a hands off ... Indifferent. ... Even in the factories. We'd go in there at night to sleep. And that was so welcome. I remember two factories. So welcome, because it was so cold and we got into this factory, one that had big boilers. My God we laid there. It just felt like heaven. We had nothing, but it felt so good, you know the heat. But no. I mean, did I run into any more real violent animosity from civilians? No, no, no. ... They kept them away from us to tell you the truth, I really do.
KP: In many ways your march, you are very focused on keeping up with the group.

RK: You bet you are.

KP: Is there anything you observed about the areas you marched? Any destruction?

RK: No, nothing. ... I know what you're saying. No, nothing, nothing. We were just going through country, country, country. We'd come to a factory or a church or something. No, I didn't notice anything.

KP: At one point you were strafed by American fighters?

RK: That's true.

KP: Who thought you were the enemy column.

RK: That's right, right. I'll tell you another thing that was a shocker to us. Near the end of the war down in Moosburg, we're walking as [we] did all the time ... and the Germans had their jet. We didn't even know what a jet was. Never heard of a jet plane. ... And they're just kind of going like this to us in the prison camp, but we're all flying up. And they get this jet fighter to come over the camp and go up. ... And we stood around with our mouths hanging open. Nobody had ever seen a plane that could do that. There wasn't any plane that could do that. And then the tremendous speed and the power. And we're thinking, "Well you know what that was for, for demoralization." We're thinking, "Oh my god. If they've got these planes, we have a problem here."

GD: Did it work?

RK: Well they didn't have any fuel. That was the problem.

GD: No. I don't mean the jet, but to demoralize you.

RK: Oh yes, it really got our attention. I'll tell you that Grant, it got our attention, but good. ... Going back to Ploesti again. That was where they got I think, at least 50 percent of their oil. And if we hadn't, over the weeks and weeks, destroyed that, we may have had a problem, because Hitler had some stuff. Well you remember the V-2 rockets that went up and ... the jet planes and, you know, he had a lot of good stuff going for him. And Werner Von Braun over there doing that stuff. So it's fortunate that he ran out of fuel.

KP: In Moosburg, it is a huge camp.

RK: Yeah, this was bigger.

KP: Now was this only Americans?

RK: This was in our compound, yes. It was broken off by barbed wire.

KP: So there is no interaction between other countries.

RK: None, absolutely none. None!

KP: But were you simply fliers or all types of Americans?

RK: Well it's hard for me to tell, because it became such a hodge-podge at the last. ... Because every day--well not every day--but every week there'd be more, because the Allies would overrun another camp and they brought these people in. Well the Germans didn't care. They weren't feeding us anyway. But it just became a hodge-podge, a maelstrom of humanity.

KP: Did it ever seem odd at the time why the Germans were taking such care?

RK: We worried about that. I told you about that letter. We worried about that constantly. You know, how much longer are they gonna, you know, devote men to guarding us when they could just shoot us and theoretically, well we didn't know, theoretically nobody would ever know. Yeah, we thought about that a lot, yeah.

KP: You remember your senior P.O.W. officer very well. Do you have any contact with him?

RK: Not really, no. No, not really. Except he was a real gentleman. A class gentleman. I wouldn't have, no I didn't have any reaction with him.

KP: You were in the barracks again in Moosburg.

RK: Yes.

KP: And were they fliers too in the barracks.

RK: Yes, yes.

KP: The same group from the earlier camp.

RK: Yeah, well we tried to keep together as much as we could. The guys knew each other. Comfortable with each other.

KP: Had anyone from your original barrack died along the march?

RK: ... No, not that I know of. A friend of mine, you mean?

KP: Yes, a friend or someone in the barracks.

RK: ... No, no.

KP: But you know people who did.

RK: Oh definitely, definitely. ... It's a miracle there weren't lots of them, because the weather was unbelievable and it was cold and we were all beaten down.

[INTERUPTION]

KP: Did you get any letters from home when you were in either prisoner of war camp?

RK: Very few. It wasn't their fault. They just didn't come through. I have a couple upstairs in the attic, but you don't want to see them. ... But they were on a (kriegsgefangen?) ... We were allowed to write, I think, a letter a month. Something like that. Hey Dorothy, did you ever get a letter from me from the prison camp? I know I've asked you before.

Dorothy King: Oh yes, I did. Funny looking things.

RK: Yeah, right. Okay. ... Yeah, but it was very rare.

KP: But it most of been very welcome.

RK: Oh boy. I'll say. ...

KP: You mentioned before that the Red Cross played a crucial role in getting word back to your family.

RK: That's true.

KP: You mentioned that you married your wife shortly after coming back.

RK: That's right. June 16.

KP: What was your relationship before leaving?

RK: We were engaged.

KP: You were engaged. So when did you become engaged?

RK: We became engaged when I came back from graduating from pilot school.

KP: How had you met?

RK: ... She worked in the Suburban Station in Philadelphia behind the counter of a newsstand. And I was home for my father's funeral. And you know it's one of those things, I saw her and thought that's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. And so I went up and introduced myself and asked her if she'd like to go down to have dinner and have a couple of drinks with me that night. And she said she would, foolishly. So I met her around seven o'clock that night back in

the train station. We had no other place to meet. So I went home and she went home and we met back at the train station that night, that evening. And we went out for dinner and had a few drinks. And that was the beginning of that. The best move I ever made.

KP: And you exchanged correspondence overseas.

RK: Oh yeah. Oh God, yeah!

GD: Was she one of the things that kept you going?

RK: Damn right. Yes sir, you're right. Absolutely. That's right Grant.

KP: Did you write to your stepmother too?

RK: Oh yes. Yes, I sent her money every month too. You know you were allowed to send her 50 bucks a month or something out of your [pay]. I had automatically sent to her.

KP: So she was getting an allotment when you were a prisoner too.

RK: Yes, yes. ... She was a sweetheart. ...

KP: When you were liberated you mentioned earlier that there were two P.O.W.s killed.

RK: On the tank.

RK: What were your thoughts on liberation?

RK: You know, ... it was ecstatic. A year coming. And you couldn't believe it. ... It happened. And it was just delirium. Just delirium, yeah. Hugging and kissing, screaming and carrying on. If we had anything to drink, we'd have drunk it.

KP: You mentioned that you were taken to Reims for delousing and then Camp Lucky Strike.

RK: That's right.

KP: You mentioned that they actually regulated how much food you could take in, because they were concerned you would eat yourself to death.

RK: That's true.

KP: Was there anything else? When did you get your first drink? Was it at Camp Lucky Strike?

RK: No, no I'm sure it was not at Camp Lucky Strike. I don't think I had a drink until I got back into New York. I don't think we had anything to drink on the troop ship or whatever the heck that boat was, that we came back on. I'll tell you what sticks in my mind is Reims. When we

went to get deloused, I can remember how filthy I was and the clothes you know. You've been in them so long. You got so used to them, you know just like an old shoe. You mean, I was wearing this stuff.

KP: So basically you had only one outfit in prison.

RK: That's it. That's right

KP: What about your shoes, because you had parachuted without shoes?

RK: That's right. Somehow I got a pair of shoes. I guess probably the Red Cross. I tell you. They gave us a blanket. They gave every man a blanket. And if it hadn't been for that, ... you know. They gave us the blanket, the Red Cross parcels, they told my parents about that I was not dead, I was a prisoner. They got me the transportation. The emergency furlough to come up. And we used to go into Bari, they had the Red Cross had little a ....

KP: Canteen.

RK: Thank you. And we used to go in there. And I still remember Coke and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I mean ... this is manna from heaven, you know. ... And the pleasantries. Little girls waiting on you. It was just ... a reminder of home. The good stuff. Like Grant says, that's the stuff that kept you going. Yep.

KP: You came back on a troop ship which is a lot different experience from flying over.

RK: I came back. ...

KP: What was that like?

RK: ... Well the food was fantastic. Man those guys eat, those sailors. We had three hammocks, I think three or four. I think it was three. You know, one above the other and we slept in the hammocks. And I was worried to the death I was going to be seasick. And so someone says, "Well you don't get airsick. You're a pilot." I said, "No, but I've been seasick." And I didn't get seasick on that for once. But that was, what is it? I forget how long it was, four days, five days. I don't know, something like that. I remember the food was unbelievable, because that's where we first got the carte blanche to go ahead and eat.

KP: Eat whatever you want.

RK: Really. And the cleanliness of everything on those ships.

KP: Any regrets that you didn't join the Navy?

RK: None, none. (laughter) ...

KP: Did you ever encounter anyone from Rutgers when you were over in the service? A lot of people have encountered fellow Rutgers alumni. In fact, there was a Rutgers club in Hawaii.

RK: No. Nothing. You see, ... I was always on the fringes of something. You know, we were either moving here or going there. No, nothing, no.

KP: Had you ever thought about making the military a career at all?

RK: No. Well if I did, when I got out of prison camp, that killed it for me. And then, of course, I married mother right away and everybody says you should get into sales, because you've got a big mouth. So I did.

KP: So you were advised to go into sales.

RK: I was, yes. ... I think it was competitor who advises me. Anyway, so I did. ... And I'll tell you I had a job offered to me as a flying salesman for helicopters. While I was home and before I was discharged, like in June, I got home early June. And I had a guy from Keller Aircraft asked me. He said, he had a job for me as a flying salesman for helicopters. Was I interested? And I said, "Yes, I was interested." And he said, "You need two things. You need your civilian pilot's license and you need your discharge paper." Well, I said; "They're sending me down to Miami Beach for a couple of months I think it was for rehabilitation, to build us up, and then they're going to discharge us. And when I've get my discharge paper, I'll come back and we'll take it from there. I am interested."

So I got back ... And it's a place over here, (Wingsfield?) in Ambler, PA. You can't get there on public transportation. You have to have a car. I didn't have a car. I had no money. I had a wife and I adopted three kids when I married her. So we had three kids, no car. So he took me out in his car to (Wingsfield?) to get my civilian pilot's license. And I ran into a guy on the flight line who, ... well it started out by this fellow who was taking me over said to this sergeant on the flight line, "This man would like to get his civilian pilot's license." So the sergeant turns to me and he says, "Well buddy ..." I loved it, I just loved it. "Well buddy, how long has it been since you've flown?" I said, "Well it's probably been about 18 months since I've flown. I've been in prison camp for a year and then rehabilitation and all this and that and the other." He says, "Well buddy." I loved that. "You're going to have to start all over again." Because if you hadn't flown in the last twelve months you have to take your written test, your flight time, and every thing all over again. Well I said I can't do that. I'm married. I have no car. And well anyway, that fell through. So you never know. ... I heard later that the guy who got the job was killed. I don't know whether that's true or not. ... I wouldn't like to think so. But it's possible, because that was the beginning of helicopters. And man, they're unbelievable.

KP: So you've never flown again after the Air Force?

RK: Only as a passenger. I'd love to fly a little plane again, yeah. Again, a couple of times when we had conventions from Johnson & Johnson, I'd go up in the flight deck and just look at the instrument panel and all the doodads. And I said, "No, I think ... you'd better stay back in

your dinosaur cave." And now. I could shudder to think what it must be like now with the instruments and everything.

KP: You had a very harsh time in the German P.O.W. camp. What did you think of the Germans when you got done?

RK: I'll tell you the truth. I had respect for them. I really do for the most part. You know, there's those idiots. But they're clean. They're industrious. They're fair. I'm thinking about the wheels down on the plane and all that stuff. They're fanatical. It's too bad that Adolf Hitler came along at that time when they were so vulnerable. But another thing about them being the German people. They're so neat. And the forests are immaculate. You could go into a forest and look for a hundred yards. There's no underbrush. Nothing. It's just tree trunks. And I guess that was for another purpose too, because whenever a prisoner escaped or tried to escape, ... every German civilian had a certain spot that they were supposed to go to right away. You know, for obvious reasons. But everything was so pristine.

KP: Have you ever been back to Germany? Or Italy?

RK: No. We went to Copenhagen a few years ago ... as tourists. No, I've never been back to either one.

KP: Or Austria for that matter.

RK: No.

GD: Would you like to go back?

RK: Well I can't now. One of my sons-in-law went back with one of our daughters about three years ago. And he was going to Germany, Austria, that area. And I said, "Hey Joe, while you're there look up Moosburg. See what's going on." ... And when he got back, he said, "They don't even admit that it was there." It's like Dachau and Buchenwald. You know, people don't want to even admit that such a thing happened. So, he said, "I found it and I found somebody who'd show me where the camp was, but it was hard to do and there's nothing there." I mean there's no markers, no fence, no nothing. So, I guess there would be no reason for me to go back anyway now.

KP: Did you ever join any veteran's organizations?

RK: No, I thought about it, but I haven't. No, I haven't.

KP: Did you ever have bad dreams about being in a prisoner of war camp?

RK: No. You mean like flashbacks?

KP: Yes. Did you ever wake up and still think you are back in the camps?

RK: No, I never reached that point. No, I've been very fortunate. ... I guess it's my, you know, limited mentality that doesn't bother me. ... Seriously.

KP: The more natural thing would have been to be bothered by it.

RK: Yeah.

KP: It sounds like you had a dreadful experience.

RK: Yeah, it wasn't really too good. I'll tell you it served one purpose though. You know, I told we've had this problem ... with my wife and I have a problem with my son. And there are times when things aren't going right and I think back to myself, ... "What's a matter with you? Don't you remember where you were at such and such a time? You're lucky to be alive for many reasons. And you know, stop bitching and go on with your life." And it's taught me not to worry about ... not getting enough to eat or ... not to be hungry. We've never reached the point ever that we don't have enough to eat. But if you get hungry, "What do you mean you're hungry?" You're one of the few guys who know what it's like to be hungry. So you know as Howard Cosel used to say, "Let's put this in perspective here."

KP: Your first job after the Air Force, where was it? Because you mentioned that this job as a traveling salesman.

RK: You want to hear something funny. I'll get her to tell you. I got a job as an expediter for General Electric Company, who were building circuit breakers. And my job was to get the parts together in time to make the assembly. And I keep saying I was making 35 dollars a week. And I was making 35 dollars a week at General Electric.

SK: Right.

RK: You mean I got it right this time.

SK: Well for you, ... it was 35.

RK: [laughter] I told you. So I did that for about three months and I got involved in a strike. That was the ... United Electric Workers which, I thought, was a very radical communistic type organization. They went out on strike and people started to say to me, "Why don't you get out of this thing and get into sales?" So I did, and I got a job with a little company called Stevens Wiley Company that sells and manufactured detergent products to the home service trade. Like Cook Coffee Company, Jewel Tea Company, Grand Union, Great American, and that stuff. So, I covered probably three quarters of the United States for four years with them. Used to drive a 120,000 miles a year. Can you believe that?

KP: Which was a lot, especially give the way cars were like.

RK: Exactly, and what roads were like. So I did that and then the guy who owned the company was going to get rid of it. So I went down to an employment agency and I answered an ad for Johnson & Johnson. That was in '49 and I started with them in '49. Next to my marrying Dorothy, it was the best thing I'd ever did. What a super outfit.

KP: So you really enjoyed Johnson & Johnson.

RK: Oh, class, class. Still is. ...

KP: How long did you remain with Johnson & Johnson?

RK: From 1950 until 1982, I retired and they asked me to stay on as a consultant. Which I did for six and a half years. And then retired again in--what's that--'89. ...

KP: So you have had a long relation with Johnson & Johnson.

RK: Yeah, yeah, they've been very good to me.

KP: Before going to Johnson & Johnson, you mentioned you had left this job as an expediter. Were you in the union when they went on strike?

RK: No, I wouldn't go in the union. I disliked unions extremely. And I would go to these union meetings not as a member. See I'd only been there like a month or something. And I'd go to these union meetings and I'd see these rabble rousers with the big mouths and pot bellies and ranting and raving about, "We want this." If I was holding up a big multi-thousand dollar circuit breaker because of one lug nut that I had to take from sand blast to paint to get it to complete the assembly. ... I couldn't hand carry that 50 feet from sand blasting to paint, because the union wouldn't let me do that. And I'm thinking, "This is no way to run a railroad." I thought, "This is terrible." So you know, I had my belly full so I quit. I think that's terrible.

KP: And then you got your first sales job.

RK: Yeah. Oh, I loved those people. Jimmy Wright who was my boss. We both loved him. He and his wife. Yeah. ... It was a small company. I was the only salesman and that's why I had this tremendous territory. And it was just like a little family. ... You know, 50 dollars a week I was getting.

KP: But it also sounds like you had great experience.

RK: Yes, I did, because I traveled all over the country. Monday, Altoona. Tuesday, Johnstown. Wednesday, Cleveland. Thursday, Detroit. The weekend in Chicago. Monday, Milwaukee. Tuesday, Oshkosh. Wednesday, Iron Mountain, Michigan. Thursday, Duluth. Next weekend, in Minneapolis and St. Paul. And down to Dubuque, Iowa and then come home. That would be one trip. Another would be south. Another would be New England.

KP: It also sounded like you did not get much time to see much of your wife.

RK: You got that right. That's why she liked it. (laughter)

KP: You stayed with Johnson & Johnson a long time. Were you in sales the entire time?

RK: Yeah. ...

KP: What was your region? How big was your region?

RK: Well it ... varied, Kurt. I don't know how to answer you that. It varied. ... Then I would travel around and make speeches for graduating classes at PCP and Temple, pharmacy schools. I would help to train new salesmen. A trouble shooter sort of thing. So they didn't know what else to do with me. ... But they were real good to me.

KP: What impressed you about Johnson & Johnson? You stayed there a long time and salesmen can often get jobs at another company if they're good.

RK: Yeah.

KP: What impressed you about Johnson & Johnson?

RK: Well, like I said, ... it's class. ... The pension plan. The stock plan. ... The personnel that I was surrounded by. And I just thought, you can't do a whole heck better than this. And the far fields are always the greener until you get up close and you see all the crap in the grass. So I thought, well, you know. And I'm not one to jump, because I had all, as I said, I adopted three kids when I married her. So, you know, I had a full plate. And I can't afford to be, you know, like a bachelor jumping around.

KP: Why did you adopt your kids all at once?

RK: I adopted three kids. She had three children before I married her.

KP: Oh, okay.

RK: And then we had twins of our own. So we had five.

KP: So you had a big family.

RK: Yeah, yeah when I married her I adopted three kids.

KP: Oh, okay, I was just confused.

RK: Yeah.

KP: That was a big family to adopt.

RK: That's right, on ... 35 dollars a week. (laughs) Yeah. ... We were living in a one bedroom apartment over in Lansdowne and had a Murphy bed. And a bedroom and a sofa. The Murphy bed. ... It's a little room where you pull the bed down and you could put it up. So here we are with three kids. The two oldest girls slept in the bedroom and the youngest, little girl slept in the Murphy bed and mother and I had to open a sofa up every night and had to sleep in it. And then we found out she's pregnant with twins. Well if we hadn't moved out, they'd have thrown us out. (laughs)

KP: Thinking back to what you said about the letter you could get in the Luftwaffe in the camp to fight the Russians. Did that ever seem, I do not know if odd is the right term, but we end up opposing the Soviet Union, locked in this Cold War. Do you ever reflect on that?

RK: I have may times. Yes, our common enemy, I think was the words they used. Our common foe, that's what it was. Would you join the Luftwaffe and we can fight against our common foe from the East? Something to that effect. Yes, I thought that was kind of ironic. It would turn out the way it did. Against and not for. Against and not for, again.

GD: Looking back at Rutgers, do you see any changes? Obviously going co-ed and things like that. Do you think that the education today has changed?

RK: I'm not qualified to comment, I'm really not, Grant. ... I'd like to make some profound statement, but I can't. I don't really know. I don't have a clue.

KP: You had indicated on your survey that you were a Republican in 1942. And most people were Democrats at the time. Did you feel you were in a minority?

RK: Well you know, I think a lot of that's how you're brought up. You know, and I voted for Kennedy. ... I'd like to think I vote for the ... better man, however ... I give the Republican a bigger look. ... You know what I'm saying. Usually, we vote Republican. Although I voted for a Democratic commissioner for this area. Bill Spingler. But for the most part Republican.

KP: In 1940, were you for Wendell Wilkie or FDR? If you can remember.

RK: In 1940?

KP: It was a long time ago.

RK: Jesus, yeah, I was a sophomore at Rutgers.

KP: And, of course, you could not vote until you are 21.

RK: I don't know. I remember the vote. I don't know. ...

KP: Wendell Wilkie came to Rutgers. People have told me.

RK: To do what?

KP: To give a talk.

RK: Boy, you know, I was right there during that time. No way. ... He did?

KP: Richard Marlow was saying he was very impressed with Wilkie's talk.

RK: Well I missed it. I remember Ozzie Nelson ... do you remember Ozzie Nelson?

KP: Yes.

RK: Ozzie and Harriet. Paul Robeson. ... Wendell Wilkie, ... I had no idea he was there.

KP: You only have one son.

RK: Yes, we had the three girls that I adopted and we had twins, a boy and a girl.

KP: How would you have felt if your son had served in Vietnam? Would you have wanted him to go?

RK: I don't know. That's a good question. I don't know. That was a different ball game I think. Even, you know, Korea wasn't so bad. Vietnam. I don't know. I think I'd have been proud of him to tell you the truth. Yeah, I'd think I'd have been proud of him.

GD: While the war was going on there was a war going on in Japan. How much did you know what was going on over there?

RK: Very, very little, except what we happened to hear in dribs and drabs on that BBC thing. But really they're throwing names around, Grant, that didn't mean anything to me. You know, all we were interested in was what was going on in the European Theater. I really didn't get locked into the Japanese thing until, you know, that was until August, I think. Ours was over in May and ... V-J Day was August, wasn't it or something like that. So you had a couple of months to get locked in. I was worried about being sent anywhere. I mean like some of the guys who were, you know, not prisoners or something. I guess they had the concern that they might be sent over there. And they were, some of them.

GD: How did you feel about the bomb being dropped?

RK: I think it saved a lot of lives, to tell you the truth. It's probably cold, but I agree with Harry Truman on that one. I think that Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ... if he hadn't dropped the bomb on those two cities, the war would have dragged on for God knows how long and how many more. ... I know it saved a lot of American lives, I know it cost a lot of Japanese lives, but I think it

saved thousands of American lives and months of duration of the war. It was about that time they dropped the second bomb ..., Hirohito, you know, threw up the white flag and he wouldn't have done that if ... [Truman] hadn't dropped the bomb. That's the way I feel anyway.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you about?

RK: ... No, I can't think of a thing. You guys really drained me dry.

KP: It was Patton that liberated your camp.

RK: That's right.

KP: And you saw Patton stride in.

RK: I saw him stride in with the entourage. With his silver ... revolvers on ... his hip. That's true. He did have them. ...

KP: I guess one concluding question is, although historians have been actually slow to really write about the air war, except on some of the strategic issues, there have been a lot of movies on the air war. Do you ever watch any of the movies?

RK: Oh yes. Yes I do.

KP: What do you think is the most accurate?

RK: Oh, ... I really don't know the answer to that one.

KP: Is there any that stick in your mind that you can relate?

RK: ... No, there isn't any that stick out. The thing that I get a kick out of those things that I showed you. Like you know, they bring it right to home with the B-24s and Ploesti and all that. I can't think of any Hollywood movies.

KP: Like Memphis Belle. Have you seen Memphis Belle?

RK: Yes I have.

KP: Do you think that was very realistic?

RK: I thought that was well done. ...

KP: Are there any movies where you see where you think, "This is completely way off base."

RK: I'll tell you that TV show, Hogan's Heroes. I'll tell you, this is a standing joke with me at my retirement dinner, that they gave a roast. Johnson & Johnson gave me a roast. And one of

the guys says, what we're getting him is all the tapes from Hogan's Heroes. ... That makes me mad when I see that, because it looks like a country club. ... Yeah.

KP: Were you surprised that you could make a P.O.W. camp into a comedy show?

RK: I don't watch it. Robert Culp, isn't it or something. ... If I see it on, I turn it off or walk out of the room. I don't like it. No, I don't think that it's in good taste, to tell you the truth. Of course, I'm in a very small minority. ... A lot of people enjoyed it. It stayed on for a long time.

KP: Well thank you very much.

RK: I appreciate you guys coming down.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

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