

Interview with Victor Stein
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Interviewed by Lois Gaetz

Gaetz: It's 1990. This is Lois Gaetz. I'm interviewing Victor Stein. First thing I want you to do is tell me when you went into the service.

Stein: November of 1942, early November. I don't remember the exact date offhand.

Gaetz: Okay. And where did you go when you went in?

Stein: Fort Snelling.

Gaetz: Were you drafted?

Stein: Drafted.

Gaetz: Okay.

Stein: I tried to enlist in the Air Corps, and I passed everything except the physical. I have tachycardia. My pulse is always too fast, so they wouldn't take me.

Gaetz: Okay, so was that right before this?

Stein: That was about six to eight months before this.

Gaetz: Okay. So, then you just waited, and then they drafted you.

Stein: Then I tried to get in the Signal Corps. I passed all the tests and everything, but I was drafted before everything came through so then I was drafted.

Gaetz: Okay, so you ended up in the Army.

Stein: Yeah.

Gaetz: Okay. Where did you go from Fort Snelling?

Stein: I got in the Signal Corps.

Gaetz: [laughs] They put you where you wanted to be.

Stein: I went to Sacramento, California. I forget the name of the camp. I don't know. We only stayed there about a month for basic training. Then we went to Newark, New Jersey, radio school, radio repair. We were there thirteen weeks. From there, we went to Camp Murphy, Florida, where we studied radar, airborne radar. That was another thirteen weeks about. Then, I was supposed to get a fourteen day leave en route to the next place, but they canceled them. Right when my class graduated they cancelled that, so we had no leaves. So, we went to the beach every day for fourteen days, they didn't know where to put us.

Gaetz: That was probably about the middle of 1943, the summer?

Stein: Summer of 1943 when I graduated from there, yes. About June, then I stayed there until July sometime.

Gaetz: You went to Italy in July?

Stein: No, we went to North Africa first.

Gaetz: North Africa.

Stein: Yes, in July.

Gaetz: Did you fly across?

Stein: We went in a convoy.

Gaetz: Convoy.

Stein: They said it was the biggest convoy up to that time. I don't know if it was or not, but there were ships as far as you could see in every direction.

Gaetz: Where did you land in North Africa?

Stein: Bizerte.

Gaetz: Wherever that is. [laughs]

Stein: Dirty Gertie from Bizerte. [both laugh] It's not too far from Tunis. Everything was pretty well shot up there when we got there. On the way over, the Merchant Marines were on the ships, and they were always hoping that they'd get a submarine attack or something because they got double pay if they did. They said it was a practice measure, that's what they told us. But I guess it was an attack because they dropped depth charges right along our ship and everything. So, they were real happy about that. We weren't exactly happy. [laughs]

Gaetz: No, not exactly happy yourself. [laughs] What kind of ship did you go across in?

Stein: It was the sister ship to the *Morro Castle*.

Gaetz: Was it a big one?

Stein: The *Morro Castle* was a fair sized ship, there were five thousand people on board. We had fire drills, and the whole thing looked like it was all steel. So, why have fire drills? So, they told us, in fact that plate on it said it was the sister ship to the *Morro Castle*. That, of course burned, and several hundred people were killed in the fire some months before that or a couple years before that I guess.

Gaetz: So, was that a converted passenger ship?

Stein: It was a converted passenger ship that was used for a troop transport. We were way down in the hold where the baggage would ordinarily be just on bunks.

Gaetz: How'd you like going across? Big ship, there wasn't too much of a crowd.

Stein: It was quite calm, I got a little seasick once or twice. It took us about two weeks to cross. For the last four or five days I had my sea legs, and those waves were going up and down, and it didn't bother me at all no more.

Gaetz: How long did it take you to go across?

Stein: About two weeks.

Gaetz: Two weeks.

Stein: Yeah.

Gaetz: Back to basic training—not even your basic training but you school training—what were your days like when you were in school?

Stein: Well, we lived right in a hotel, and we ate at the Y. That was the Newark Hotel, I think. We had very little supervision as far as the Army goes. We just went to this school that was run

pretty much by the same people that ran it as a civilian school before that, our radio repair school. There were a couple of Army people there, but it was mainly run by these same teachers that were there before the Army ever got in there. That was a thirteen week course. And then, we'd maybe have one day a week where we'd do drilling for a half hour or something like that so you knew you were in the Army yet. While I was going to school there my sister, Phil [Philomene], and her husband, Frank DiGiacomo, were on Governors Island, and Frank was major at that time. And he was in charge of assigning the graduates from this school to the next place which I didn't know that at the time, but I was there about six weeks. I went to their place almost every Sunday, and one day Frank asked me where I wanted to go, and I said, "I don't know, wherever they send me." He said that could be regulated. [laughs] So, I said, "Well, where do you think a person should be going?" He told me that he was in charge of this. He said, "Well, there was something they call radar. I don't know what it is, but it's supposed to be the top thing in radio." I'd never heard the word before. In fact, he said it was marked top secret then, but he told me that much about it. I said, "That sounds good." So, that's how I ended up in Camp Murphy, Florida.

Gaetz: Okay. What was that like?

Stein: Well, that was a regular Army camp and run pretty much by Army personnel, but they had some teachers that were from M.I.T. and thing like that. They had students there that were M.I.T. graduates, people that had been in radio for a number of years, and some rookies like myself.

Gaetz: So, what did they teach you there, at the radar school?

Stein: How to repair these sets. We had sets there, and you'd have to draw out the diagram, diagram the whole sets. Test equipment, you'd find it wasn't working. Was there something wrong over here or over here? I wasn't an operator, just keep this stuff running.

Gaetz: Right, technicians and that.

Stein: Yes.

Gaetz: Okay. When you got to North Africa, how long were you there?

Stein: We got there about August 1, I would guess, something like that. We left just before Christmas. We went to Italy then. Landed at Naples, and that night we drove to—we landed in the day time—but we drove to Foggia. We had to go in convoy too. And it was a dark night and every second truck would have a light on, so that went pretty slow. Heck, one with the light on got ran off the road. So, we were right behind that one, so we were held up for a while and the captain or somebody came. “Just keep going,” he said. “We'll let them sit there. We aren't going to stop for them.” Because wasn't too far. It was maybe about a hundred miles from the front lines, and planes could have come in or something. I suppose that's what they were afraid of. I don't know

Gaetz: So, you were stationed at Foggia then?

Stein: No, I really wasn't stationed there. We stayed there a couple days, and then we went to Cerignola, C-E-R-I-G-N-O-L-A. I think it was about 25,000 population at the time. Foggia was just about completely bombed out. Cerignola hadn't been hit too hard because it hadn't been used that much by the military, but Foggia was where the Italians had all their airplane pilot

training and that and the Germans, of course, had used those fields for their own use. The Italians had already surrendered by then. They had nothing to do with the war anymore.

Gaetz: So, what was it like when you got to Cerignola? What were your duties?

Stein: Well, there we lived in an Army barracks there and had absolutely nothing to do. [laughs] Absolutely nothing. We had a shop, a repair shop. And we fixed that up with stands to work from, but we had nothing to work on. That got rather tiring before too long. So, I asked the first sergeant if there wasn't something that we could do, if we could go to the bomb groups. We did a little of that in North Africa already. We had nothing to do in Africa either by where our encampment was, but then myself and about three or four other guys were assigned to a bomb group. And then, we worked on these planes, the radar on these planes. When they'd come back, there was some work to be done on them. Then in Italy, we sat and had nothing to do again. Sit and hurry up and wait, you know. So finally, I got assigned to a bomb group, and I stayed with them most of the time I was over there.

Gaetz: Was that still at Cerignola then?

Stein: Yes. Well, not Cerignola all the time. We went to Gioia del Colle afterwards. That's where eleven of us went to a new signal company there. I forget what the number was. All the planes that came to Italy landed there first. On a lot of these, the radar had to be modified to run wires from there down to the bombardier and different things we'd install there. A lot of the radar didn't work when it came in. We had to fix it before it went out to the bomb group. We were kept pretty busy there while we were there.

Gaetz: Okay. So, originally, were you supposed to be working on airplane radar?

Stein: Well, that's where we got assigned to.

Gaetz: That's where it all is.

Stein: Yes. See the radio that we were, it was a signal company, and most of our people were stringing telephone wires and teletype and things like this. They were operating teletype, telephones. They were operating telephones. But I was in radar and radio repair, and we didn't have anything to do there. We didn't even have a shop in Africa in our company. Until I got out with these bomb groups, then we started working with the fellows that were there. A lot of them hadn't seen any of this radar before because it was fairly new. We could at least tell them what it was and how it was supposed to operate.

Gaetz: So you were kind of training some of the people on the planes a little bit?

Stein: After a while we did. We ended up training a lot of people. At Gioia, our company ran a school. I was never in the teaching end of it, but some the guys we were teaching other bomb group people how these things were run so they could fix some things. When I was at Cerignola, I finally got called. "Get ready in a half hour," and I was supposed to leave for this one bomb group. I couldn't wait to get there, so I ran into the shop and got my tools together. We had a tool kit, you know. I was just coming out and here a guy comes in with a little something for the airplanes, a turbo charger. There were two tubes in there, and he asked us if we could fix that. And I said, "Well, what was wrong." Well, this tube was burned out. I said, "Well, I suppose we got..."—we had all kinds of tubes there. I said, "I imagine we got a tube." So, I went and looked quick, and "Nope, we don't have a tube back there." Well, he said, "There ain't any in Italy." He said, "We've been all over and there's no tubes in Italy, and that plane can't fly unless we get that fixed." A four-engine plane was sitting there, and he said, "We've got three or four in our

squadron, and every squadron over here has got some sitting there.” And I said, “Well, let me see once.” And took out my tube book. That’s a book that says this tube can be replaced this one by changing this wire to this prong or something. They usually had to change one prong underneath, just unsolder it and hook it up to a different prong because all those prongs aren’t always used when it’s tubes like that. And all this one needed was one wire switched, and they could use a tube that we had millions of. And I said, “Well, that’s all you go to do.” And he said, “Well, can you do it?” And I said, “I got to get out of here.” There was another guy by the name of Cortell. I said, “Cortell, come over here,” and I showed him what they wanted. “Oh,” he said, “I’ll do that.” I think by the time we left, he had it fixed. There was just nothing to it. then, about a month or two, I came back. Two months later, maybe, I came back, he had been a corporal and here he was a tech sergeant. “Geez, Corteel,” I said, “What happened?” He said that fixing that turbo charger put about a hundred planes in the air. He said he got a Distinguished Service Cross and three jumps in grade. [both laugh] I should have stopped and fixed it.

Gaetz: Yes, should have fixed it, huh? [both laugh]

Stein: The same when we were in Camp Murphy. When you graduated there, they made so many masters sergeants, so many tech sergeants, so many staff sergeants, and the lowest grade was sergeant. We went in as corporals. Well, this stuff was really easy for me because I’d built radios before and stuff like that. It was just up my alley, you know. My grades were always on the top of the role. Even the M.I.T. guys, I still got higher grades than they did. So, I thought, “Well, sure, I’m going to get master sergeant” because that was the highest grade. When we graduated, they took this two weeks leave, and they said, “We got too many ranks out ahead of us already, so we can’t give any more ranks out.” They were way over staffed in rank. So, there we sat with our corporal rating, and every place we went there were all kinds ahead of you.

Maybe some of them didn't know anything, but they had gotten that rank from that school. Most of them went to Camp Murphy. The radar men went to Camp Murphy, the school there. So, it didn't make much difference, but as far as getting a higher grade there was no room for a grade in these companies. They had way too many already, staff sergeants and tech sergeants and master sergeants. In our shop in Gioia, we had a master sergeant. Well, he didn't do anything. We'd tell him what we'd need, and, "Well, go ahead and do it." Then we'd do it, but if you'd need something he would order it, every time we'd need something then he would try to get it or something. But he didn't know how to fix any of these sets at all. But he was one of the these guys who was fairly good in the school, so he got the top grade and that's what you just kept unless of course you'd just flunk completely. When I was in Italy, then DiGiacomo came there too. He was in Bari, Italy. I found out where he was and went up and met him there, and later on when we got into Rome, he was in military government. He was the military governor of Rome. I went up there and visited him there too. I just kept following him around, or he followed me. I don't know which way it was. [both laugh] The day we landed in North Africa, the Germans sent some planes over, and the harbor was just loaded with ships. Like I said, when we came over, we had ships as far as you could see. Some of them had already dropped off at other ports along the way, but still a lot of them came to Bizerte. "Well," they said, "they're just reconnaissance planes." Way up high, they were. And they said, "They'll be back tonight." I don't know if any planes came back but, man, was there a racket from all these ships had guns, everyone was shooting up there. There is no thunder or anything that could match that for noise, and the whole sky lit up. But I don't think they shot any planes down that I know of.

Gaetz: One guy described it as just an umbrella of fire from the ships.

Stein: Yes. There weren't that many ships. I mean, guns were on the shore, although there was one machine gun that sounded like it was from here to the door away from us. The next morning, we went around and could not find that thing. That one you could hear so much louder than the others. It must have been something on shore. And we were about a mile in from the harbor at that time.

Gaetz: What did you think of officers, your officers and officers in general? Did you think that they were qualified?

Stein: Well, some were, and some weren't. In the states, I never got hardly any contact with officers because we had morning reveille and a little exercise and then you go to school again and things. But over in North Africa, I didn't have much to do with any of them either. Just sat around there until I finally got with the bomb group. And I wasn't really a part of that outfit, so nobody to tell me what to do. And I didn't have much contact with them. Afterwards we had an officer. Well, we had him in North Africa already, but in Italy he was going with a nurse. And she was a captain, and he was a lieutenant only. He was bucking to get to captain, and he got real ornery. This was in Gioia, in Italy, they had a speed limit they put on the base, ten miles an hour, and third gear, the highest gear you could go. I hadn't heard of an accident, but that's what the base commander had put out and our c.o. said—that's the one that was bucking—he said we can't go faster than five miles per hour and in second gear. He was going to make it that much better so he was better than that guy. Everything to make him look better than the others. And also, I think it was they had thirty miles on the road and I had to go back with a van and had to go get gas. I pulled out of the corner and went about 50 feet or something and here he had his jeep souped up to 60 miles an hour because he had to go Tunis all the time to visit this nurse, you know, and that was 60 miles away or something. He pulled alongside and motioned that I should

get over or pull over to the side. I pulled over, and he says, "You're speeding." He says, "I want to see you in the orderly room as soon as you get back." I went along and there was a guy sitting here, and he says, "You weren't even going 20 miles an hour." I said, "I know that." Because I couldn't because they had a governor on it to control it, so you couldn't get 20. And then I pulled out. He didn't know I'd just pulled out. He had come around the corner. He had just pulled out on that road, but he thought I was ahead of him and I could have been doing 30 miles an hour. So, I came in the orderly room there, and he says, "Well, you were going over 30 miles an hour." He says, "You either have to get a court martial or"—article 101, I think is what they called it and that would be a week's extra duty, digging a hole and closing it up or something like that. That's what guy had to do, he dug a hole and then he had to close it the next day. He said, "Well you know a court martial will be on your record and you know you don't want that." "No," I said. "I'll take the court martial." He looked at me, and he says, "No, you wouldn't want to do that." He thought at least if he would turn in enough of these the upper ones would say, "Well he's really strict with his men. He's a good man." "No," I said, "I'm doing that. I'll take the court martial, but I'm going to demand right now that you get the MPs to take that truck, pull out from that driveway and see if they can get that up to 30 miles an hour. You stopped me." "Well," he says, "you don't want a court martial." He says, "You don't want that." I said, "No. I'll take that. I'm not going to go and take a week's extra duty, absolutely." Finally, "Well," he says, "I'll tell you what. We'll drop it right now." And you know, that guy, he couldn't be nicer to me the rest of the time I was there. He almost bend over backwards. He was so afraid I was going to report him. His name was Captain Grace. In the supply room somebody had put down something like "Captain Grace, son of Jesus Christ" or something like this. [Gaetz laughs] He saw that, and, oh, did he get mad. [laughs]

Gaetz: So, he wasn't exactly your favorite officer.

Stein: Well, he was actually a nice enough fellow but he had just gotten it into his head he had to buck for captain, and that was the whole thing that was wrong with him. Otherwise, I had no problem with him. Then we were in Cerignola. We weren't there very long, but we got there just before Christmas. We were just in an olive grove where we had out tents. For a latrine they just had a slit trench. Somebody instead of going in the hole went on the side, and you're supposed to always cover it up too. Here the captain came, and he stepped on it. Oh, did he get mad. [laughs] He says nobody could leave the base, nobody could get a leave for any reason. The next day was Christmas and they had a big midnight mass scheduled at the church in Cerignola, so I told the first lieutenant. I said, "I'd like to go to mass there." "No," he said. "You can't go." So I said, "Well, I'm going to write the chaplain if I can." "Well, you can't do that." And I said, "Sure I can." So he said, "Well, go to church." So, we went to church, but then I wrote the chaplain and said that he wouldn't let us go to church and I gave the reason why and everything. I said I had nothing to do with it and I could see where they could punish the whole outfit if they wanted to but it didn't seem right to me. And our mail all got censored, you know, and this lieutenant took the thing and censored it. He said, "You can't send that through." And I said, "Well, you censor it, but I'm sending it through and you can't stop it." So, he sent it through. I think the chaplain was in Foggia, and about a week later we had a new captain. Nothing was said, nothing, but we had a new captain. Then, about two weeks later, like I said, we had nothing to do at Cerignola until we went to the bomb group. Some of the truckers were going to go to Bari to get some supplies and things, and I said, "I'll go with you." And so, I went along with them, and here our captain—I don't remember his name at all, that was a different captain there—but he was in

there, and he saw me. “Hi, Stein! Nice to see you!” [laughs] I didn’t think he know my name, you know.

Gaetz: This the one you had written a letter about?

Stein: Yes. So, I don’t know if he got moved on account of that or what. Maybe he did, and maybe he liked this better, too.

Gaetz: What did you think of the equipment that you had? Did you think that it was good enough equipment? Did you have enough supplies to fix things and be well-equipped that way?

Stein: Yes. We had everything we needed. Didn’t need that much to fix these, tubes mainly. You had to have 24 volt current to test them because that’s what the planes had. We had four cylinder generator there, and that gave us all the current we needed. To clean them, we finally got an air compressor to blow the dust off of them. Otherwise, it doesn’t take much. A screwdriver, a pliers and a soldering iron is about all it takes to fix something. The testing equipment too we had to have.

Gaetz: You’d mentioned the tubes where all you needed to do was change one things. Did you notice in other areas? That almost sounds like a little bit of a snafu that they didn’t understand that they could change that tube.

Stein: Well see, these people weren’t trained in repairing these things. The ones in the bomb groups, they weren’t trained in repairing those things. If it didn’t work, you just put in two new tubes and it usually worked then. Only two tubes in it, but there was one tube they couldn’t get anymore. They said that everyone was trying to requisition them and there just aren’t any there.

Gaetz: So, that was just a matter of not having any.

Stein: And then, RCA had a tube book about this [two or three inches] thick, and this tube you can replace with this tube by changing these wires. The prongs were all numbered—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, whatever they are—changing wire one to wire three, whatever it might be. Sometimes you had to change more than one, but this one you only had to change one wire on it. It was the filament that would heat up the tube, changed to a different prong.

Gaetz: So, it was worth a couple grades. [laughs]

Stein: Yes. Otherwise, I always felt that our planes were pretty good. Although like in North Africa, we had a lot of German planes that were shot down and their wire and stuff like that had this plastic covering on it, whereas ours still had wrapped cotton covering and theirs much more pliable than ours. Ours would bend a few times and break, and theirs could just keep bending. It would never break. I saw one of their airplane engines. I never really looked in ours, but the cylinder walls inside looked polished, just like a chrome lining in there, just so smooth. Like in car, you'd never see them that smooth. When we were in the olive grove there, a German plane flew right over. I didn't see it. I was gone, but when I came back they said it flew right over the olive trees, real low, just an observation plane. It didn't try to shoot anything. They got kind of excited about that.

Gaetz: Did you end up with any enemy contact other than that kind of thing?

Stein: Well, when we were in the Mediterranean, they dropped a few bombs while we were coming through there, but there weren't many planes and I don't know if any of them even came close to ours. That's why the Merchant Marine, they had an air raid and a submarine raid, so they were pretty happy. Of course, then when we were in North Africa, the day we landed, the next

night they came and made bombing runs. I'd say the biggest danger there was from the flak from our own shells.

Gaetz: I've heard that before too.

Stein: But, nobody got hurt in our company. One guy was put on guard duty that night, and he had a hole in his tent about this big. It was just a pup tent, so it about almost would have had to hit him, so he was lucky he wasn't in it. They told us to take our barracks bag. It was just about a solid rock—well, not solid rock, some it was granite you could hammer at, chisel at it, and it would break loose. That was the ground was like where we were. After the raid, somebody—I don't know where he got a hold of it—one of the guys got a pick and all night long he was picking away trying to make a hole right about that deep. [both laugh] The next morning, first thing we did was move out.

Gaetz: Did you have much contact with civilians in Italy?

Stein: Yes. We went in and ate sometimes, talked to people. They could speak some English, and we could speak a little Italian. We had our little translation books. You could always communicate, kind of.

Gaetz: Did you live on a base all the time? I've heard of people who had built themselves practically houses and everything like that.

Stein: We went back to Foggia once for a while, and there we lived in a tent. It was six man tent, I guess. This field was used for an emergency landing field mainly, but the British had about two or three bombers there and they would take off at night and do night bombing. One would take off, half an hour later the next one, and half an hour later the next one. One time, the lead plane

blew up right on the runway. We had a door on our tent instead of just a flap, we put a door on it, we had plastic sheeting over the door instead of anything else, so we could see out. It was like a window almost. That threw that door open and tore the plastic right off the door. Well, we thought sure it was a bomb, so we ran. We had trenches right on the side. I ran in there and I can't believe this to this day, but I jumped in there and there was a guy in there already with his helmet on too. [laughs] And I was by the door, and he was over behind me. Some guys were at the theatre that night, and that was right on the base too. Pretty well bombed out building, windows and everything were out of it, and when that bomb went off a bunch of them jumped right out of the windows, but it was only five feet from the ground. But it wasn't actually an enemy raid, it was that plane going up.

Gaetz: I suppose if it was blowing up on the way out--

Stein: Yes. Well, it should've been armed by then, I guess. Why it blew up, nobody knew. Then, the plane behind it caught fire too, but the bombs didn't blow. I guess they got it out before that. If planes were shot up that was on field where they would come in if they were shot up. A plane came in there, and one guy went up, they had flares up and everything, and one guy said, "I'm going to see once what's out there." And he came out there, and here all of a sudden they threw a fellow's leg out of the plane, the doctor had amputated the leg right on the plane. That was enough for him.

Gaetz: Okay. Do you want to get that? [phone ringing, recording paused] Okay. One of the questions we asked is knowing what you know now, would you do this again? I mean, you were drafted, but if you had the opportunity not to, would you go back in?

Stein: I never regretted it, no. I didn't see any of the real war you might say. When we were in Foggia and Cerignola we could hear the guns on the Monte Cassino. It took them all winter to try to cross that river, and all winter every night these guns would go off. You could see the flashes and everything, but we never had any, we were never in danger where we were actually.

Gaetz: Okay. When did you come back to the states? Did you get back quickly?

Stein: In July of '45.

Gaetz: And did you get out right away then?

Stein: Well, from Italy, we had shipped all our equipment over to somewhere in the east, I imagine Okinawa, I don't know where it was supposed to go. I don't know. Then we had a 30 day leave when we came home, and then it got to where we had dropped the bomb on Hiroshima there. And then, I got notice that I had another seven days leave. Then, during that period, the war ended in August. It was yesterday or the day before. I don't know. Then, we went to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. That was where we were supposed to go, and from there we would have gone out to the Pacific. They just couldn't discharge them fast enough. That camp was set up for 25,000 people and there were over 50,000 there. You were discharged on a point basis. Well, being with these bomb groups, we got points for like the Ploesti raid and a lots of these raids we got points, so I thought "I'll be one of the first ones out of here." A week or two went by, and nothing happened. All these guys with less points were getting out, so finally I went somewhere and they said no my name hadn't come yet. So, I went and checked some more headquarters and stuff, and finally he, "You're AWOL." He said, "You've been AWOL all the time." I said, "Well, I had been there all the time." And I was in J Company, I guess or something, and I

should have been in K Company—I don't know what it was. So then, they got that straightened out, and the next day I got processed and discharged.

Gaetz: You had to have, was it 105 points? Was that what it is? That's what another guy--

Stein: I don't know how many points you had to have.

Gaetz: He had 155 thus far, and they weren't going to let him out either.

Stein: I know I should have had enough to get out with the first ones because the time that we were overseas two years and all. We didn't actually participate in the raids but we got credit for them. When we were in Italy, that was at Gioia, the Italians came in and said there was a plane crashed in the mountains. They don't really have high mountains there, but they called them the mountains. They said where it was and everything. They sent some people over up there, and there was no bodies there, none whatsoever. About a week or maybe three weeks later, they found out that everybody had bailed out, and most of them survived over in Germany. They put the plane on automatic pilot, and it came within 58 miles of the airfield, and then it hit the mountain. When we were in Italy, all these planes came in, and here a plane came in, it was a B-24 made by Ford Motor Company. That was the five thousandth plane that Ford made of that type, and everybody with lipstick or something wrote their name on that plane. It was silver, and every little corner was names. They had cameras there and everything else. They wanted to try and keep that plane flying all the time, but I think the second mission it got shot down. [laughs]

Gaetz: Did a lot of planes go down? I don't know if you'd know that or not, but I've talked to some pilots and flight crews and one guy said he lost five planes.

Stein: Yes. A lot of them shot down.

Gaetz: And he had to fill out papers, and he said, “I had to sign off \$350 million every time I lost a plane. [laughs]

Stein: Well, they didn’t cost that much.

Gaetz: Well, maybe that wasn’t quite the figure.

Stein: They said a plane like that cost a million dollars at the time—a B-17 or B-24—and they said if fifteen planes go out and even if they all come back it costs a million dollars, figuring that was the average or something, I don’t know. On a radar plane that was shot down, there was some stuff that they was supposed to explode on these radar ones, but I think the Germans had all the radar we had. We had a crash landing field on the Adriatic near Yugoslavia. That was further north, so if they couldn’t get back all the way they could get there maybe. This one plane went down there, so we had to send a man up there to take the radar off of it. I didn’t crash. They just landed there, but it was so shot up they weren’t going to use the plane again, so they said we’ll take the radar off of it. So, they sent a guy up there, and the captain was there. And the captain said, “Where are you from?” “From Gioia.” He looked at him, “That’s where they stole all my liquor.” [laughs] And what happened was, I worked on that plane. He had a case of Canadian Club, and we asked him how much he wanted a bottle. It was three dollars or something at that time, and we offered him eight dollars. “No,” he says, “You guys get first chance at all this stuff. I’m going to wait until I get to the bomb group. They’re going to pay more than that.” He left the plane, and one after another these bottles were going out of there so fast. Here, I was working on this radar, and a guy was reaching in and hitting me on the leg from below. I said, “What do you want?” He says, “Where’s that liquor?” I reached in, and, “That’s the last one,” I said. [laughs] Then, the next day, the captain went to the base commander there at

Gioia and he said that he wanted to report some stolen stuff. The base commander had heard about it, in fact, he had gotten a bottle himself. He says, "Well what did you have stolen?" "Well, different things," he says. "Well, in order to report it, we have to know what you had." And he says, "Well mainly," he says, "a case of liquor." "What?!" he says. "You brought liquor on a plane? That's a court martial offense." [laughs] He had got some of the liquor himself, but he made it sound like the captain was the crook. Some of those pilots were crazy though. When we were in North Africa, you'd see them going down the road and underneath the power lines back and forth in a P-38 or P-51. Whenever you went to get supplies, you had to have somebody go with to sit in back because the Arabs would jump on the truck if you slowed down someplace, they'd start throwing stuff off and either jump off themselves or others would come along and pick it up. So, you always had to have somebody to watch. In fact, we had two fellows back there that time. All of a sudden, this P-38, if we had been three feet higher I bet you we'd have had our heads knocked off, just skinned over our thing. When they said about writing home, the guy said, "All you people are writing about these planes coming so close to hitting your trucks and stuff. We're censoring all that because that's information the Germans would want to know." He said what they were doing was training for, in Italy they want to cut their supply lines and they were just practicing on these trucks or trains, whatever it would be. They didn't shoot or anything, but they were practicing for that. I didn't see it coming or anything but all of a sudden [makes a whoosh sound] came from behind, you know.

Gaetz: I suppose, they didn't want you to know they were doing that, but might've been nice to know it was practice.

Stein: We landed in New York when we landed, came back on a troop ship again with a lot of people on it. Got in New York harbor, and we all ran to one side of the ship and that thing started

leaning. I suppose it was the ship's captain, he was screaming, "Get back on the other side! All your captains get your men in their own areas. Get your men in your own areas. He hollered at his men, "Kill the port holes." [laughs] Water was coming in. That was the day when we came in that an airplane ran into the Empire State building. The pilot was killed, didn't do any damage though. It was just a small plane. Didn't do any damage much.

Gaetz: Okay. One question we ask a lot of veterans is—you were in Italy—after the war, the United States was involved in a lot of recovery programs for what had-- [side of tape ends, cutting off rest of question]

Stein: Some of these people had nothing, you know. It's hard to say.

Gaetz: I've had some people who felt that, you know, it was the right thing to do, and others said—I had one man who fought in the European theater, but he very bitter about the Japanese. He had much harder feelings towards the Japanese than he did towards the Germans or the Italians. And I had a number of them who felt that way. They thought that we rebuilt the Japanese, you know, more than we should have and things like that.

Stein: I would feel that way, if anything, too because the Japanese at least they had just outright attacked us whereas Hitler and them had a war with us, but at least they didn't first attack us and then declare war.

Gaetz: Yeah. I think that's bothered people. One question towards the end here, we ask about the Vietnam conflict. How did you feel about that in general, and about the men who chose not to serve who either went to Canada or served time here or just evaded the draft?

Stein: Well, if they just were drafted, the really conscientious objectors, I don't argue with that too much. "You could hit me as much as you want. I won't hit you." You know. But I don't think many of them were. I think it was just a protest, and personally I don't think we should have gone in there. But when we went in, I think we should have gone in with a number of them. And they didn't do that. We got a letter from Dave. He had said, "We were chasing these Viet Cong, Vietnamese, there. And after three days, we finally caught up to them, and then we pulled back and left," he said. He said, "No, we aren't going to have no shootout there or anything." If you're going to have a war, you got to have a war, and if you aren't then don't go there.

Gaetz: That's a really strong feeling. I think a lot of people feel that the Vietnam conflict didn't have an ending or a beginning that people felt comfortable with.

Stein: Yes. It was just a lot of mush, is it was, I think. My dad always felt the same way. He says, "If they want communism, let them have it." He says, "If they don't like it, they'll get rid of it." Fifty years ahead of '40, now, that's what's happening. Everybody's getting rid of communism. [laughs] They don't like it. And I always thought communism was going to be stopped that way, but I didn't think we should go in and try to stop it.

Gaetz: Well, I don't have a lot more to ask you. I think we covered most of the things that we going to ask.